VISION

In Praise of Place

Wirra Willa Pavilion
Somersby, NSW

Open House

Ecoville Community Centre
Tarneit, Victoria

Viridian™
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In Praise of Place

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Matthew Woodward recalls long hot summers swimming in the cool, spring-fed, lake at his family's beloved Wirra Willa. He could hardly have anticipated how, just a few decades later, he would make his own special mark at the 125-acre property on the NSW central-coast. His design for a lakeside pavilion for his father as client simply splices into the landscape.

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Open House

Hachem Architects' design for a community centre at Ecoville in Tarneit, re-defines the potential for suburbia to be much more than wall-to-wall congestion. Ribbons of steel and high performance Viridian glazing deliver an unusually clear-sighted design solution.

TETHERED TO SHORE AT
ONE END AND SPRUNG LIKE
A DIVING-BOARD AT THE OTHER,
THE RESULT IS ONE OF EXQUISITE
COUNTER-BALANCE.

Wirra Willa Pavilion
Somersby, NSW

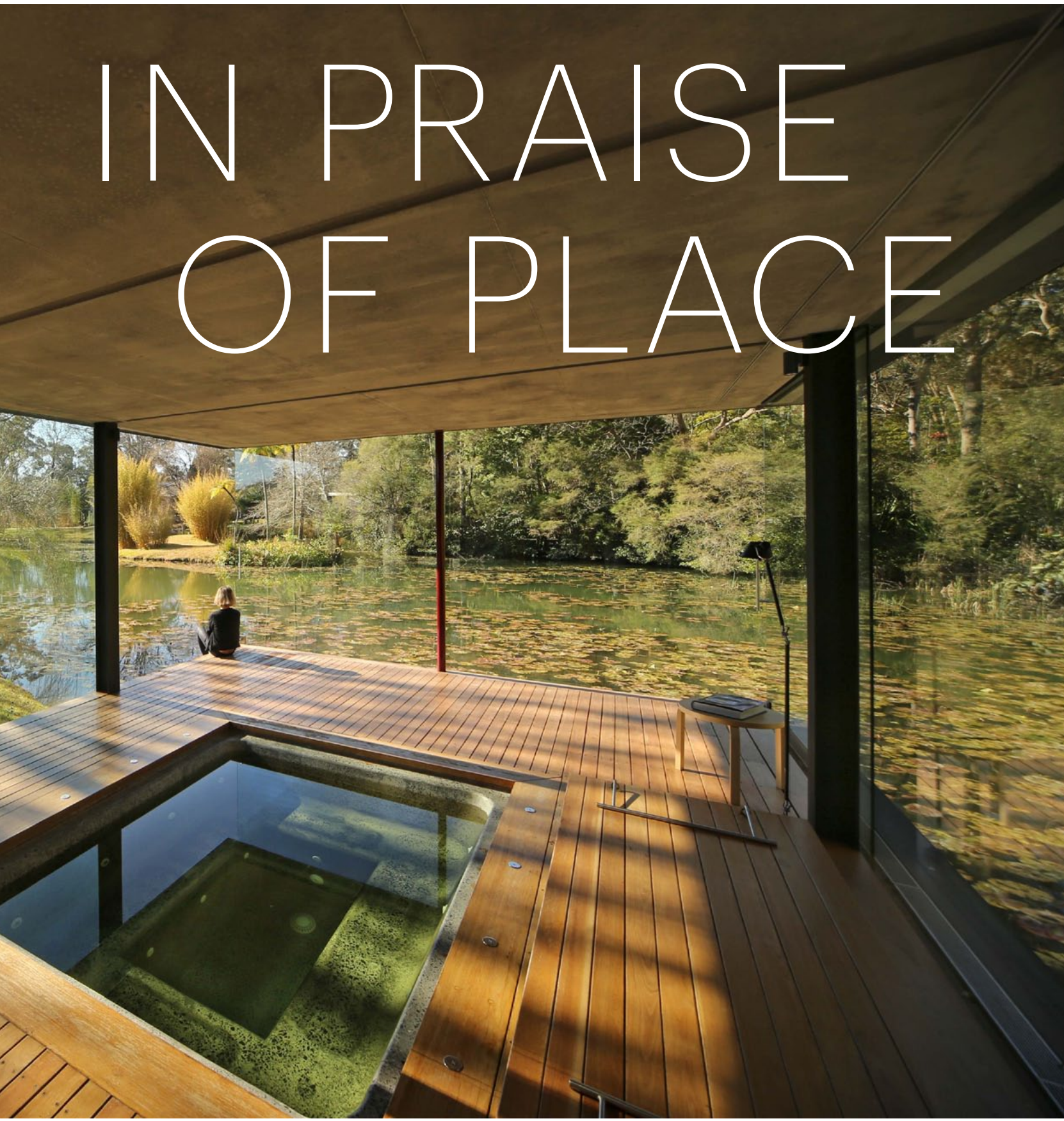
Principal glazing resource:
Viridian VTough™ Clear

Architect:
Matthew Woodward Architecture

Photography:
Peter & Jennifer Hyatt

Text:
Peter Hyatt

IN PRAISE OF PLACE



A WAFER THIN, GRAPHITE ETCHED STEEL FRAME AS PLATFORM AND BARELY VISIBLE WALLS, DELIVER AN UNCANNILY POWERFUL, YET LIGHTWEIGHT IMPACT.

Matthew Woodward recalls long, hot summers swimming in the cool, spring-fed lake at his family's beloved Wirra Willa. He could hardly have anticipated how, just a few decades later, he would make his own special mark at the 125-acre property on the NSW central-coast. His design for a lakeside pavilion for his father as client, simply splices into the landscape.

Perhaps even more astonishing, it is 27 year-old Woodward's debut project straight from his master's course at architecture school. His sleek structure defined by its glass veil, submits to its setting and rises like few others in the process.

The theory goes, architects must attain a certain age and experience before being trusted, or their work taken seriously. Accepted wisdom says most architects don't peak until middle age, or later. It's a view Matthew Woodward doesn't necessarily hold. There's nothing even remotely precocious about this young practitioner with such a perceptive eye for landscape, rather than grand design posture. Tethered to shore at one end and sprung like a diving-board at the other, the result is one of exquisite counter-balance. A wafer thin, graphite etched, steel frame as platform and barely visible walls, deliver an uncannily powerful, yet lightweight impact.

A sleek transparency achieved with oversized Viridian glass walls allows a moveable feast of sensory experience. Sliding walls edge the landscape and water to allow cooling breezes, birdsong and bush scents to effortlessly fill the interior. Framed by towering native trees, verdant sub-tropical bush and perfumed orange grove, the pavilion sits quietly some 200 metres from the main residence.

AS A PLACE OF QUIET REFLECTION AND CONTEMPLATION, IT'S HARD TO SURPASS.

Matthew Woodward
Architect

Top
View towards the services core that includes kitchen, shower and bathroom. Retractable flooring reveals spa-bath.

Opp
Outdoor shower with orange grove beyond.

Small, skylit kitchen between bedroom and deck.

Woodward's influences are varied. He singles out Richard Neutra whose mid-20th century Case Study houses in Los Angeles caused such a sensation. While the DNA from Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson is there, it would be wrong to see this as a rustic knock-off. Woodward's pavilion is masterpiece of sinewy subtraction that emulates the lithe, powerful dancer.

The pavilion's relationship in the landscape is significant. A large statement building on the lake's edge would have wrecked the genius of place. Woodward's enthusiasm for a diamond transparency creates a special continuum between old and new. As a place of quiet reflection and contemplation, it's hard to surpass.

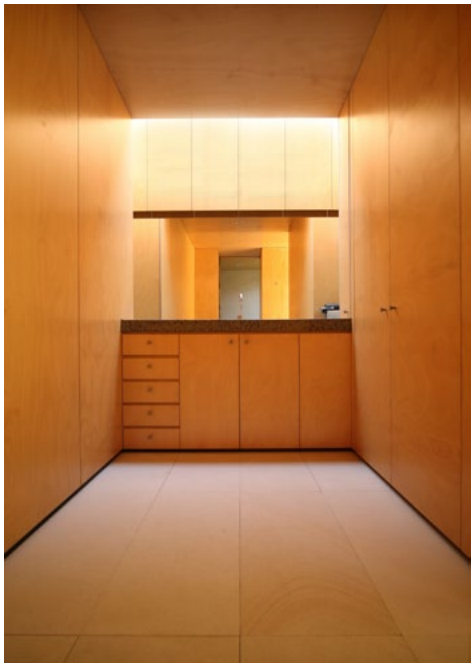
Matthew Woodward speaks with Peter Hyatt about a project that held a strong emotional attachment – and with plenty riding on the outcome:

Not everyone would invest such trust in an inexperienced architect. You bust some popular myths about what is possible.
There is an innocence of youth I suppose. It allows for a fuller exploration of ideas and innovation without preconceptions of what is, or isn't possible. With so much red tape and legislation, architects often rule out solutions that push the limits of what is considered the norm. From a conceptual viewpoint, it's important to be 'on the edge' and maintain the conceptual design intent.

How helpful is it to have a parent as patron, or benefactor to get your career going?
There are plenty of ups and downs throughout the whole process. Every month you have the same disputes over claims and things as any building site. It's just like any other job but there are a different set of issues. There are more personal ones and they all need to be worked through.

Were you apprehensive about your design measuring up and keeping the faith?
Always. On a project like this I was very concerned throughout the whole process. When you're given that level of responsibility and dealing with large amounts of money you want to make sure that every step is the right one and to minimize the risk associated with the building.

How long did it take to arrive at the essential design?
About six to eight months – from concept to planning approval submission. Dealing with council took another six-months. Documentation phase was relatively shorter, we allocated 3 months prior to the project commencing on-site.



You mention Los Angeles' mid-20th century Case Study houses – especially the work of Richard Neutra. What is it about those projects you find irresistible?
They're remarkable houses. A lot of Neutra's work creates strong horizontal planes and lines that have a wonderful proportion and human scale. I wanted to try and re-create that scale where you feel as though the building isn't overwhelming, or overbearing.

Industrial rather than residential or rural vernacular delivers a structure of supremely refined edges.

Floor beams mirror roof beams in lake cantilever.

Your materials are very similar to Neutra's. Perhaps the most obvious difference is the technological advances in glass.
They are, yes. You can still see the finesse in Neutra's work and the other Case Study houses. They were very much ahead of their time. The seamless connections between internal and external spaces are visually evident. They minimized thicknesses everywhere to see where they could push the limits to reduce mass and size.

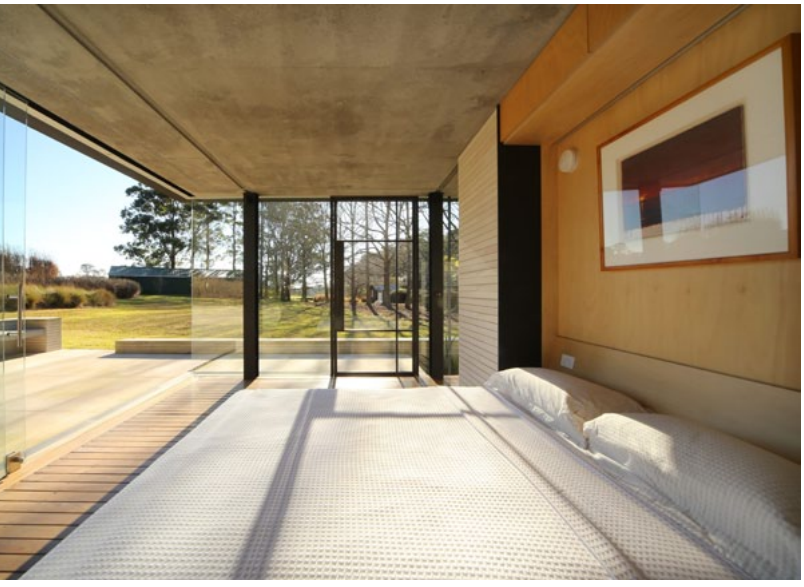
Your use of concrete and steel provide an anchor, or armature, for the veil of glass that falls around that whole edge. That's just a really, really wonderful counter-balance of materials.
Thank you. We cantilevered out over the dam and grounded the rear of the pavilion where it cuts slightly into the natural topography. It does have that anchor. Again, it comes back to balance, where you have one part floating and protruding over water and another part deeply rooted into the topography and landscape.

What was the most challenging design issue?
We built within a flood plane and needed to raise the building twice during council negotiations. It needed to be 500mls above the one-in-100 year flood level. Conceptually, we always wanted the pavilion to float as low as possible over the water. The idea was that when you walked out over the water itself, it was as though you float too. We always wanted to try and keep the floor level as close to the water as possible.

Deliberately stitched into the landscape, the pavilion allows its high transparency to become one with the setting.

THAT'S A CHALLENGE WITH EVERY JOB. HOW DO YOU CONVINCE SOMEBODY THEY DON'T ACTUALLY NEED SO MUCH 'STUFF' AND TO APPRECIATE SOMETHING FOR WHAT IT IS AS A SPACE. IT'S REALLY AN APPEAL FOR SIMPLICITY.

Left and below A pull-down bed provides guest accommodation and the versatility of an extra entertaining space. Sliding frameless Viridian glazing makes a brilliant site relationship.



In a more built up urban setting many elements of your pavilion wouldn't be entirely practical. Isn't the point that many of these elements might be transferable to other, more typical settings that you work in?
Every site has a unique set of characteristics and attributes and it's about taking advantage of the opportunities each site has to offer and responding to a different array of issues. It's looking at constraints and opportunities and really understanding the best solution from an experiential point of view.

That partly answers my next question which is, is it all about the view or is it about something else, that other intangible quality that exists in quite timeless architecture?
I guess it's a search for the human experience. I don't think it's all about the view. It's more the holistic idea. We're providing a space or an opportunity for another experience that may not be initially apparent. From an existential point of view, it's about that human experience of contemplation and a place to dream.

What do you think distinguishes good design and architecture from standard practice?
That's a good question. It's a tough question. I think good design needs to respond to scale, the human scale and height of the human body, where the touch and feel of surfaces is important, Good design also offers flexibility.

There is an obvious lack of 'stuff', of gadgets that is quite Zen-like. You really pare everything back. It's forgetting about the plasma television and the clutter with which we fill our lives.
Absolutely. That's a challenge with every job. How do you convince somebody they don't actually need so much 'stuff' and to appreciate something for what it is as a space. It's really an appeal for simplicity.

There were some anomalies with safety regulations concerning the spa and sliding walls to the lake.
The sliding glass panels were okay because they were lockable. They're essentially sliding glass walls. A balustrade was deemed unnecessary because the entire space could be locked so a child couldn't actually enter into the space from the outside. When it came to the spa covers – each weighing 20 kgs. – these needed to be lockable to stop a child from falling in. It was a little bit bizarre when the whole dam has no fence either.

How are the pavilion's thermal qualities?
It's a very pleasant space to be in – especially in the winter time. Having the orientation to the north, the concrete roof slab warms up and contributes to a relatively constant internal temperature. With the low winter sun streaming straight in you have a beautiful temperature. In summer all you need to do is slide the glass panels and you have the northeast prevailing breezes coming straight off the water and through the pavilion. Cross-ventilation just draws cool air through. It's beautiful. If it's hot, you open up those panels and it cools down instantly.

Was there a particular appeal about Viridian glass?
Yes, VTough toughened safety glass works beautifully here. At the time, bush-fire regulations demanded we achieve a level 2 to 3 construction rating. It's an incredibly clear product. It's the clearest glass we could find. Its high performing visible light transmittance was the main reason we went with Viridian. It's bright and gives us fantastic reflections. There's no color and has a terrific transparency.

Sliding gently into the shoreline, the pavilion continues on until it reads as a seamless entity with the native grass and orange grove.

That jewel-like glimmer of glass is often underestimated. How critical is the right glass to such a project.
Absolutely critical. There are so many different glass types with subtle variations in color. Clear toughened was incredibly important because it has to wrap the entire building and allow the eye to see through, rather than simply at, say a wall. It was critica l to choose the right product for appearance and performance.

Glass is much more than an inert object here that fills a space. You give it this flexibility where walls slide like traditional rice paper Japanese *shoji* screens. There's that moveable feast element to these glass walls, isn't there?
Because the structure is set in from the glass and the glass is external, you don't actually read the structure. All you see is the floor plan, roof bed, steel roof and steel floor. Glass wraps the middle. During the day with the right quality of light in reflection you don't see any structure. It is quite a surreal thing to witness, to see two floating planes in the landscape with glass reflecting in between.

The pavilion is a radical departure from the existing family residence. It's not entirely sympathetic with the architecture your father commissioned what was it, 15 years ago?
That's a farm-style cottage appropriate for that point in time. No, he was happy to do something entirely different. This was an opportunity to integrate a more modern piece of architecture, a free-standing piece of architecture, in the landscape which had a different purpose. It wasn't about a family home for five people, it was more about a private, remote retreat which could be used to allow a place for solitude and contemplation.

Right Influenced by California's Case Study houses, Woodward's design is ultimately a celebration of landscape.

THIS WAS AN OPPORTUNITY TO INTEGRATE A MORE MODERN PIECE OF ARCHITECTURE, A FREE-STANDING PIECE OF ARCHITECTURE, IN THE LANDSCAPE WHICH HAD A DIFFERENT PURPOSE.

The whole glass veil allows the other materials – the sandstone, concrete and steelwork to sing. Is that its great strength?
Yes, and it makes the experience within quite effortless. There are sliding doors, opening doors, sliding walls and they are all easy and effortless. It's what you hope good architecture is going to pay attention to. It makes the experience of the place as effortless as possible. You could easily have large, heavy timber framed glass for example. Here it's just pure, frameless glass.

How large are those panels?
They're 2.7 m. by 2.5 m.

Were they difficult to transport and install?
They were all fed in from the back of the pavilion. They didn't have any issues getting them to site or into position. They were brought in on a trolley with suction clamps and rolled into position.

Did Viridian provide you helpful technical support throughout the process?
They were generous with their sample range and great at providing the information we needed. They were all easily accessible, contactable. That was all really beneficial.

The art-form of landscape can't be underestimated here. Apart from your father, who else is responsible?
Michael Cook has handled the landscape and he's done a fantastic job here for the past 20 years.

Credits

Project
Wirra Willa Pavilion
Somersby, NSW

Architect
Matthew Woodward Architecture

Builder
Cockram Construction

Structural Engineering
Halcrow & Associates

Landscape Design
Michael Cooke Garden Design

Environmental Engineer
Barker Harle Consulting Engineers

Land Surveyor
Stephen Thorne & Associates

Glazier
Gecko Glazing

Principal Glazing
Viridian VTough™ Clear

CORE PRODUCTS ENERGY NOISE CLEAR VISION DECORATIVE BUSHFIRE STRUCTURAL STORM SECURITY

WAY OUT WEST –
30 KILOMETRES TO BE PRECISE
– MELBOURNE IS EXPANDING
AT AN UNPRECEDENTED RATE.
DESPITE THE BRICK BOX SPRAWL,
ARCHITECTS ARE DOING THEIR
BEST TO CREATE EXAMPLES OF
LIGHT-FILLED DIFFERENCE.

Ecoville Community Centre
Tarneit, Victoria

Principal glazing resource:
Bi Fold Doors
Viridian SuperClear™ TC
Skylight Viridian ThermoTech™
E double-glazed units incorporating
EVantage™ SuperGreen

Architect:
Hachem Architects

Photography:
Peter & Jennifer Hyatt

Text:
Peter Hyatt

Facing a wave of traditional tract housing, Hachem Architects has created a flagship project to help anchor the new subdivision of Ecoville in the lightest way possible. Hoping to influence the wider development, the designers were ultimately restricted to this centrepiece project.

It demonstrates the scope to see beyond the square – and standard box. Project principal, Fady Hachem has a reputation for testing convention. Despite his original vision being curtailed, the project offers plenty of ideas for engendering community.

Surrounded by tight allotments and housing stock with small, quaint windows, Hachem heads in the other direction. His answer fuses landscape and structure into an imaginative whole with a gentle blur between inside and out. Entirely unexpected in its setting, Hachem hopes that many of the project's principles will eventually inform new project housing.

He discusses his masterstrokes of light and shade with Peter Hyatt:

What is the centre's key appeal?
A sense of ownership is really, really important. People who bought blocks of land and houses had little ownership of anything else. The strategy here is to give the community ownership. Fundamentally, they own this centre. It has become a real sense of pride.

Did the developers have any apprehension about how your proposal would be accepted within a setting of brick veneers?
The developers had doubts not necessarily about the project, or whether the architecture would succeed. Their doubt concerned funding and the money associated with building something like this.

A structure intensely alive to the ebb and flow of light with multiple apertures and openings.

THE STRATEGY HERE IS TO GIVE THE COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP. FUNDAMENTALLY, THEY OWN THIS CENTRE. IT HAS BECOME A REAL SENSE OF PRIDE.

Fady Hachem
Architect

How well does it live up to its name as a flagship structure for Ecoville?
It delivers substance. That gives it leverage. The local Ecoville Committee is putting in new infrastructure. They're planning a skateboard ramp. There's a basketball court attached and dog exercise area. It will become a real focus.

What are some of its Green qualities?
It has a sustainable edge. There are wind turbines in the structure. Those generate power that feeds the park itself. There's also water capture of 300,000 litres from the street that also feeds the park. Air-conditioning is provided through cooled underground tunnels and circulated throughout the centre on warm days.

How long did it take for the basic design to materialize?
I locked myself in a room, researched and came up with a strategy. I did my sketches over a two-week period.

Does the built project vary from the original sketches?
The project has been scaled back. I proposed a butterfly sanctuary. There were tree-houses and a number of other customized elements. The client and council had concern about liability, although I disagreed as measures can be taken to protect users, the project inevitably was curtailed to a more conventional use.

What were your key influences?
In terms of the park itself, I love CERES, a self-sustainable park in Melbourne's inner-city Brunswick. It has a great community drive. It has an organic garden and is really well developed and well run by the community. I wanted some of that same quality of community ownership in the west. If we can provide the same foundations, then we've done our job. That was one of the fundamental inspirations for our park. We have a community organic garden there now.

The slung, hovercraft quality of the design is revealed upon entry and throughout the main observation and café/meeting area.

YOU SEE STRUCTURE BUT IT'S VERY CONNECTED TO THE LANDSCAPE. THE LANDSCAPING AROUND THE PARK WORKS ITS WAY INTO THE BUILDING.

Main entrance reveals the floating roof line.

Opp Landscape and curvilinear structure create a heightened dynamic underscored with high transparency.

IT'S ABOUT GETTING THE STEEL BACK TO ITS THINNEST AND SEEING GLASS WITH THAT BEAUTIFUL EDGE SO THAT THE BUILDING SPEAKS IN AN UNCOMPLICATED, ELEGANT WAY.

What inspired that shape?
We considered various canopies and a number of other solutions that were ultimately quite heavy. I wanted a real openness and airiness. That geometric form within another geometric form of curved element within a rectangle created a real dynamic that is completely surrounded by glass. This helps to accentuate that lineal roof which basically floats in mid air.

It's relatively column-free.
That's why we have frameless glass rising from the ground almost as if it's coming straight out of the earth. And glass runs straight into the roof. The back walls drop short from the ceiling by about 600mm. About every 600mm glass is inset into the wall. When you view the glass it appears almost seamless. There's no frame in the glass anywhere. Between the roof and the wall it's frameless. Outside glass is embedded into the wall.

Could you have achieved that result with another material?
No. The only issue I had with glass was the movement of the roof. The tolerances were complicated because it's a suspended roof without columns. Our glazing contractors basically fine-tuned as we went along. That was crucial because glass is embedded in the roof and just floats, so if it moves what does that mean for the glass? How do we protect that?

How do you avoid the risk of damage?
There's a tolerance in the slab and the connecting joints of the screens. The engineer gave us tolerances of a few centimetres of movement in the worst conditions. The glass tracking within the walls is embedded in the cavity that is quite wide.
The glazing does move slightly and there are no butt-joints. There's a few millimetres gap between each glazing component held in silicone. Glass appears to be 'floating'

How important was it to really absorb that full sense of place into this design?
Absolutely. You see structure but it's very connected to the landscape. The landscaping around the park works its way into the building. It really becomes one with the environment and the park itself.

And the sight lines when you have parents inside, wanting to keep an eye on their children playing outside?
If you stand in the middle of the building you can see right through. Also, the way we've positioned the barbecue areas and the playground they're visible from most angles. You don't have any "dark spots."

Why Viridian glass?
I love the product. I'm very comfortable with it, as a well-known product that has been thoroughly tested. I didn't want to compromise on materials. There were some key elements in there and when I thought glass, Viridian was the way to go. That was a given.

Bravura clerestory comprised of Viridian performance glass and suspended roof, permit a multi-directional flow of natural light.

And the performance glass specifically?
Despite the roof overhangs it faces north and so it receives plenty of strong sunlight. Our choice of glass was about keeping high levels of transparency and to provide the necessary performance to handle the direct and reflected solar loads.

Any anxious moments during glass installation?
The roof was in first and it was a very nervous time for all involved. This meant the glazing needed pinpoint accuracy because all channelling was in the roof and already in the walls and so there was no margin for error. It was tricky, but working with the contractors was a positive experience. It was stressful but in the end, quite an achievement for everyone involved. I think overcoming those obstacles on such a difficult build is the project's greatest merit.

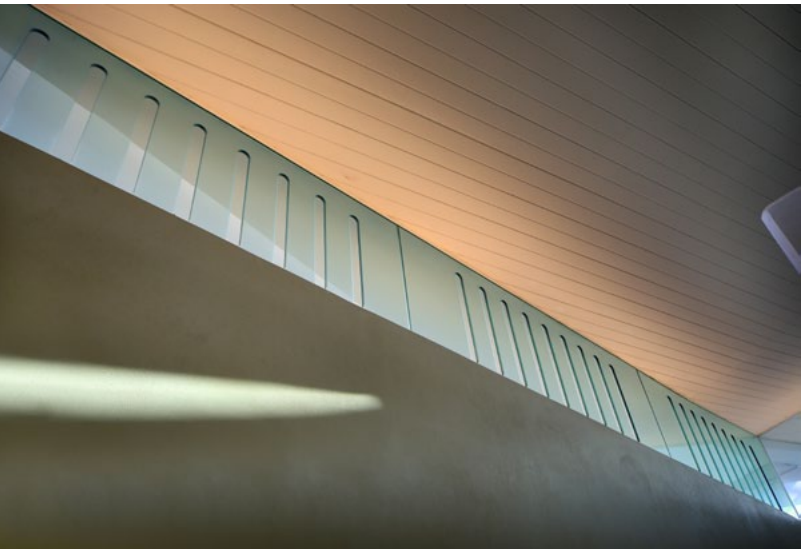
Value management sounds harmless enough. Was that your experience of the design process?
That's a sore point. So much of the industry is decided by project managers who hammer architects over the head about cost, cost, cost. The first thing I try is to fully engineer everything, so that it's not necessarily the architecture under the microscope. Because most value managers really have no idea about architecture, they start slashing. We can get this glass for say, this little. We can save this much money by using cheaper glass. Once you design and build everything like that you're in real trouble. Good materials, good glass and design should be seen as an investment. Luckily we had a good project manager in Trevor Main who managed to help steer the project towards a good outcome.

You could have saved money by losing the skylight.
Well you could, but a big part of the delight of that interior volume is the skylight. It's a part of that offering that the residents don't experience in their own houses. It's really a huge window to the sky and an uplifting treatment. I definitely see it as part of the investment and delight every time you enter the centre.

There has to be a calculated risk with anything that's worthwhile. And you have steered clear of the pedestrian, dull result.
I'd prefer to be known as more of a risk-taker. I'd like people to see the value of the project because I tried to push the result architecturally as far as possible.

Isn't it really about the informed risk?
You have to have intelligence when you approach a project like this. You have to have know-how and a certain experience. It's calculated risk. It's not a luck-risk as some people say.

You've chosen the right materials for the task. Concrete, steel and glass form a very specific vocabulary that conveys an intriguing design and construction story.
A lot of this has to do with telling the story in the thinnest, simplest way possible. It's about getting the steel back to its thinnest and seeing glass with that beautiful edge so that the building speaks in an uncomplicated, elegant way.



Toilet window ventilation slots reinforce the quality and spirit of glass detailing throughout.

LONGEVITY MEANS SUSTAINABILITY. THIS PROJECT DOESN'T FEEL LIKE IT'S GOING TO DIE OR THAT THE MATERIALS WILL FRAY ANY TIME SOON.

Material durability is often overlooked isn't it?
Longevity means sustainability. This project doesn't feel like it's going to die or that the materials will fray any time soon. They're materials that will last and that's part of its sustainability because low maintenance needs to be a long-term issue. We needed steel and glass. Those elements harmonize so well in this project.

What distinguishes good design and architecture from standard practice?
A lot of people take the path of least resistance. In a commercial sense that will make more money because it requires less time, but I don't think that produces really good or enduring architecture. I'm not saying you have to break ground, but you need to produce something worth its place.

That's a key isn't it?
That's true. Too many people are in and out of projects and move on to the next. You have to fight for what you believe in as a designer or architect. That's the lesson here.

Open House

Credits

Project
Ecoville Community Centre
Tarneit, Victoria

Architect
Hachem Architects

Builder
Behmer & Wright

Structural Engineering
Dome Consulting

Landscape Design
Landarche

Environmental Engineer
SBE

Glazier
Tech Glass

Principal Glazing Provider
Viridian

Principal Glazing
Bi Fold Doors
Viridian SuperClear™ TC Skylight
Viridian ThermoTech™
E double glazed units incorporating
EVantage™ SuperGreen

Project Budget
$4.5 million

Left
Main elevation from Pacific Highway

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Morwell (03) 5134 3586

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