

# VISION

ISSUE 34

## DIRECT TRANSMISSION

Mazda Australian Headquarters, Mulgrave, Victoria

## LESSONS IN LIGHT

St. Michael's Grammar School, Melbourne

**Viridian**  
we ♥ glass

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## 06

### DIRECT TRANSMISSION

Wellington Road, Mulgrave

Mazda Australia's new Melbourne headquarters reprises Le Corbusier's songline of the house as a machine for living. Often pilloried for his frosted aesthetic, Corb's poetic insight that 'architecture is the masterly, correct and magnificent play of masses brought together in light' remains a quintessential truth.

Cox Architects has its own deep design lineage and history evident in projects such as at Mazda. Over the decades Cox has rejoiced in the reduction of 'stuff' preferring thoughtful, structurally poetic, solutions.





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## LESSONS IN LIGHT

St Michael's Grammar, St Kilda, Melbourne

St Michael's Grammar in Melbourne's bayside St Kilda, has recently landed a glittering, almost other-worldly, learning centre. Named after its principal of 16 and a half years – the very much alive and energised Simon Gipson – the school's brand new Commons building happens to be uncommonly good. It proves what a real vision can achieve instead of squandered opportunity.



CLICK TO VISIT  
ST MICHAEL'S GRAMMAR

University



ma

DIRECT  
TRANSMI



A corporate headquarters as showroom and workplace rolled into one. An inclined wall reduces reflections and boosts clarity. A broad staircase to upstairs work spaces helps keep staff connected.

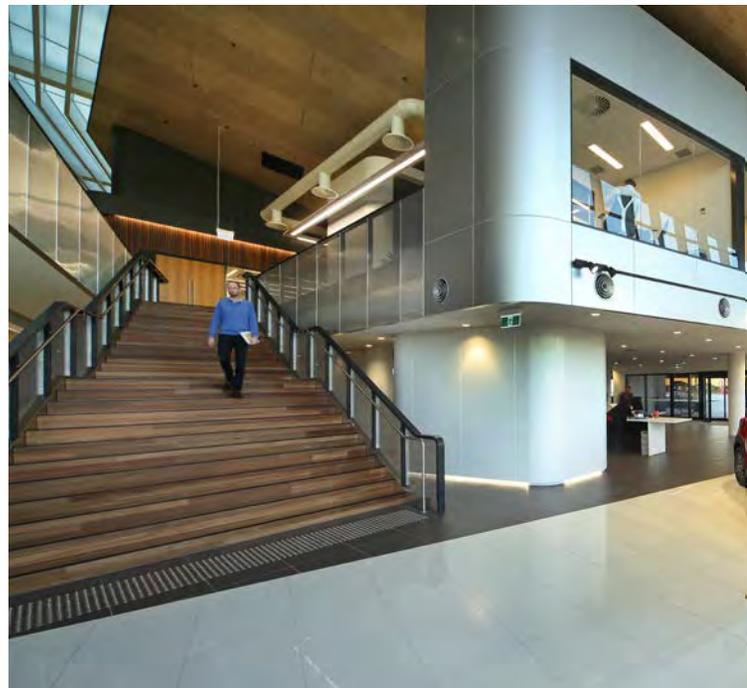
SSION

Advances in automotive design are unspooling at turbo-charged speed. Electric and hydrogen powered vehicles, driverless, flying and amphibious cars are all here – or just around the corner. Architecture for the automotive industry has struggled to keep up, more often resembling malls and casinos. Every so often an exception makes its mark amid the baseline experience of leaden, energy deficient constructions.



Cox Architecture has its own deep design lineage and history evident in projects such as at Mazda. Over the decades Cox has rejoiced in the reduction of ‘stuff’ preferring thoughtful, structurally poetic solutions. To this end Mazda and Cox resist the temptation for the superficial, that might blunt function or compromise a direct design language better aligned with sharp automotive design.

Helping to partner the architecture, Viridian supplied and installed super-sized sheets of Viridian ComfortPlus™ Clear as heroic, inclined windscreen. This now enables Mazda’s new base to finally embrace the metaphor of workplace as light-filled, streamlined machine.





A Viridian manufactured and installed  
12 metre tall 'windscreen'



**PROJECT**  
Mazda Australia Headquarters,  
Wellington Road, Mulgrave

**ARCHITECT**  
Cox Architecture, Melbourne

**BUILDER**  
Frasers Pty Ltd

**PRINCIPAL GLAZING**  
Viridian ComfortPlus™ Clear

**TEXT, IMAGES & FILM**  
Peter & Jenny Hyatt



CLICK TO VISIT THE  
MAZDA HEADQUARTERS



Situated on a high-visibility site on busy Wellington Road, Mulgrave, Mazda's home is a grand, hard-working storefront as prism to a whole new workplace culture. Cox Architecture's Melbourne principal Patrick Ness met with Vision's Peter Hyatt to discuss the project as an automotive sentinel:

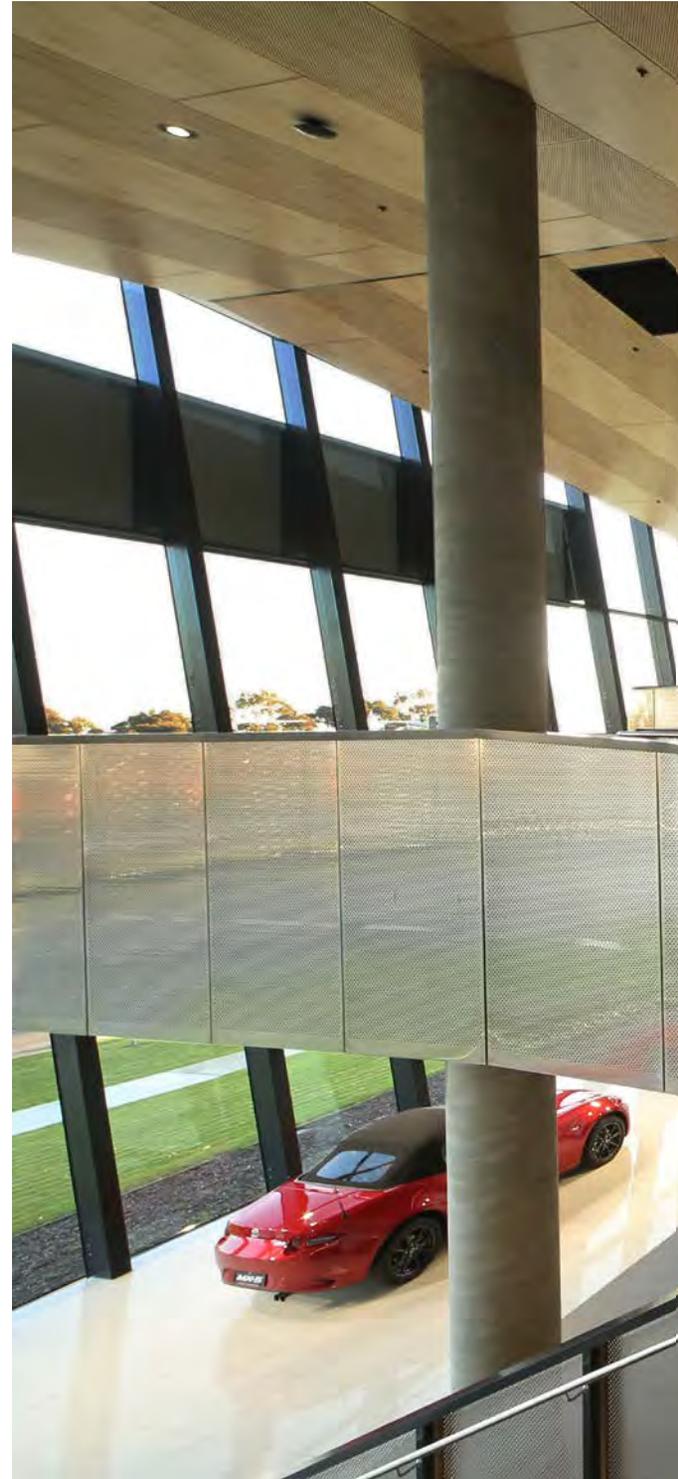
**What does sitting on the edge of often fast-moving highway traffic demand of this design?**

It's partly about passing traffic and making sure people are aware of the Mazda brand. It's also about making sure we represented Mazda in their building. There are two ambitions in this project. The basic one was to relocate out of sub-standard premises, of which they were on different floors and weren't one organisation. They were many different groups. The second ambition was an idea of one Mazda being able to bring together their various departments into a complete environment.

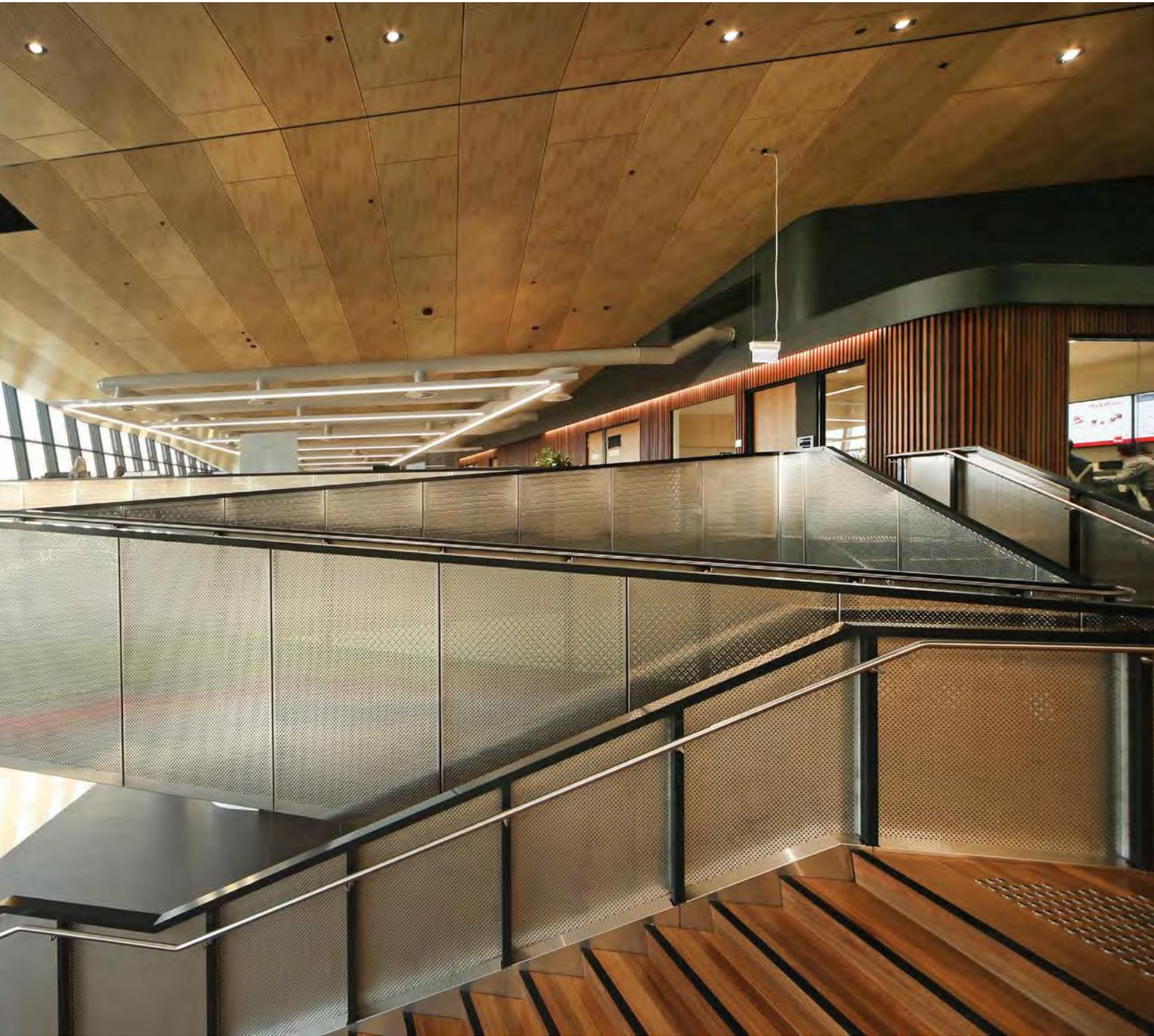
**And what about the iconography of architecture as a way to be viewed and recalled?**

The question about being noticed in architecture is really about what you are being noticed for. Imagery and icons that don't deliver cultural change and not the relevant apparatus for a new century are just image-making. The purpose of being noticed is about making sure that a new workplace culture, efficiencies, beauty, practicality, daring structure and materials are all linked. They're the reasons architecture should be known for, it's not false icons that are simply images.

It is so different as a workplace of technical excellence to everything else around. When you look at the suburban typology of a workplace, it's essentially decorated with fairly unremarkable buildings really lost in the last century. I think what's so pleasing about this is we've reinvented what it means to work in a location like this, with highly flexible buildings filled with delight and light. It changes the culture of an organisation. That's really for me the key thing that's happened here. The architecture's an enabler of that. It's not the end.



Permeable mesh screens signal the foot traffic ramps connecting first level work spaces hallmarked by soaring volumes.



At Mazda, you give glass an  
almost automotive presence.

PETER HYATT, VISION

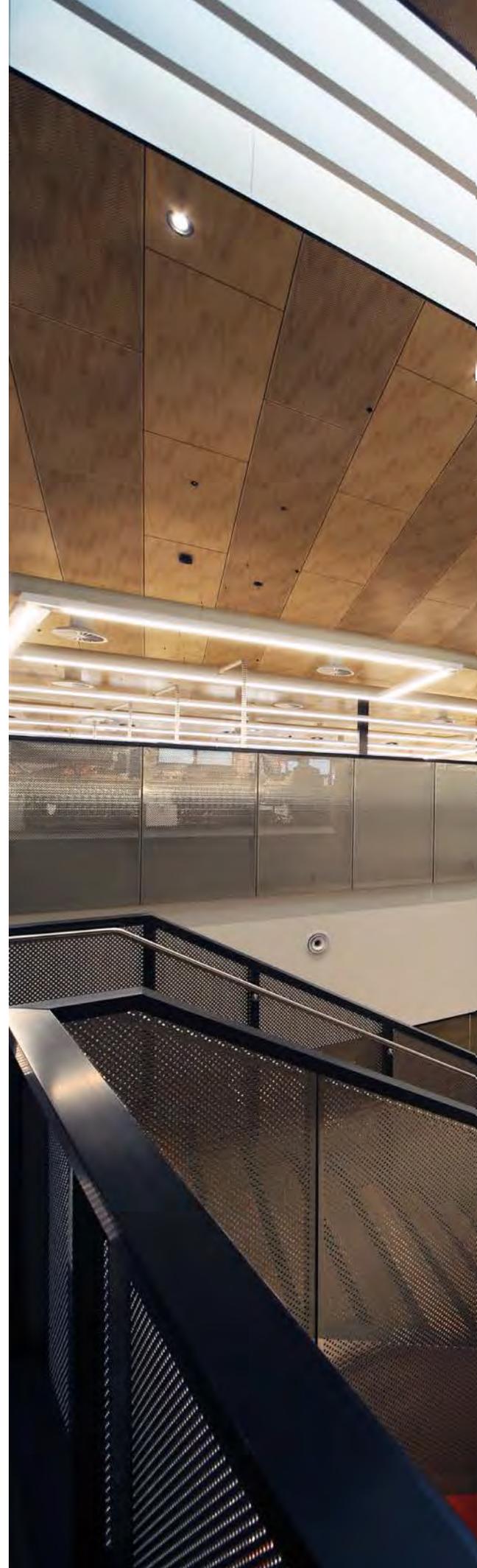
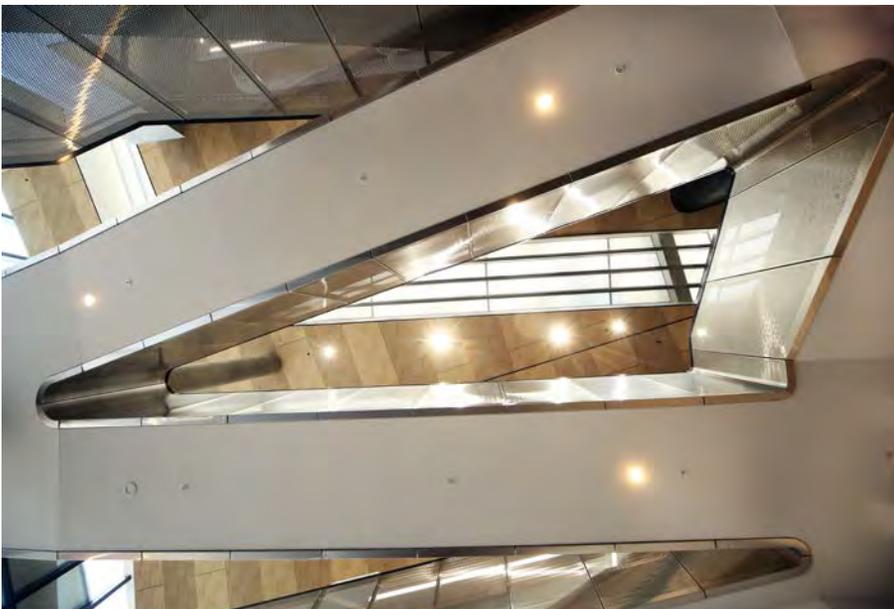




Rather than stacked or linear meeting rooms, these glazed 'cubes' perch as floating spaces away from the day to day open plan.

I think what's so pleasing about this is we've reinvented what it means to work in a location like this, with highly flexible buildings filled with delight and light.

PATRICK NESS, ARCHITECT





### **Is a standout client voice evident?**

Every great project has great clients. The wonderful thing about this project was Mazda had four or five people that grabbed and owned it and worked with us as partners. Your clients need to be with you believing and helping, because in the end we're doing their biography. These are very committed individuals who aren't dealing with boards and bureaucracies.

### **Is there a response to this project you wish to transfer, to say, your next medical suite, commercial tower – or automotive headquarters?**

Our practice focuses on two things: one is typological evolution. In that sense, whenever we approach a project, we're always thinking about, "How does it match and lead the times that we're in?" The second thing we always do is decide their public life. They're places where we exchange our contracts with each other, regardless of whether it's a workplace or not. That's an ongoing story that we're really pushing. The Mazda project does both of those. It has reinvented the typology of suburban workplace and brought together an organisation culturally where they're engaging with each other.

### **At Mazda, you give glass an almost automotive presence.**

The glass at the front of the building is very deliberate. It's the windscreen to Mazda, for want of a better expression. It performs an environmental function of letting lots of light into workplaces. It also says of the organisation, "We're open, we're transparent. Real people are doing this. They're not some idea of a corporate remove." It's really performing two roles — one is technical and environmental — the other is cultural, in the way they're perceived.

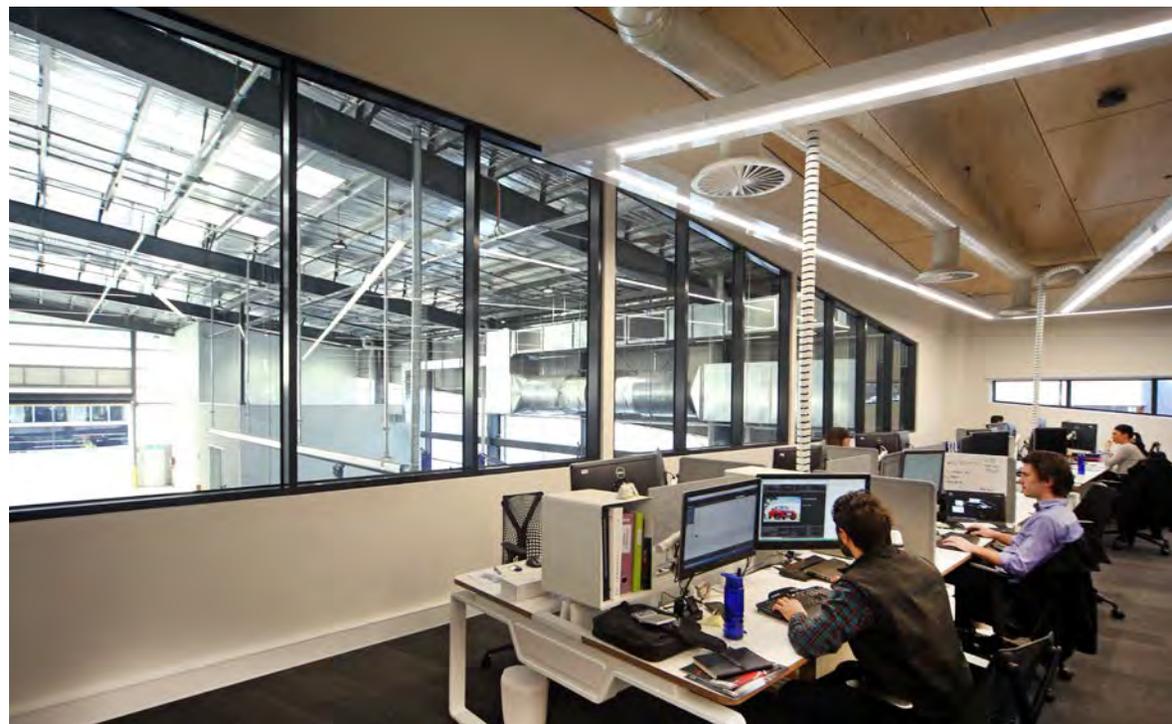
Left: Staircases provide the main 'arterial' connection between workshops, display vehicle areas and administration.





Left: High visibility and daylight flow throughout, assisted by light toned materials and glazing that performs as veil to the south. Skylight strips add appreciable luminance.

Bottom: Offices connected to workshop.



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PATRICK NESS, ARCHITECT

**How important were such sizeable panels and minimal framing?**

The major glass panels on the front façade are big. That's one of their heroic qualities. They're greater spans than you normally have and that's technically what we had to solve. The reason for that is trying to keep it as transparent as possible.

**How does the sustainability supply chain influence your work?**

Ideally in sourcing materials. What we do first is to look at who is local, and how we can utilise that and ultimately that's our first decision. From there on it becomes what's the best material for the job, so there's a process we go through. We always start with identifying the local suppliers and what they can bring to the project first. Where we can, we do, but it has to be very carefully done and not dumbed down and administered by the lowest common denominator. What it does is reshuffle the idea of excellence in any environment.





 [CLICK FOR INTERVIEW WITH VIRIDIAN'S IAIN KENNEDY](#)





**It's a project pared back to the essentials. It appears less about applied materials than a certain distillation. In the end it's the transparency and the skeleton of the building that really provides the delight, rather than marble and brass.**

There's certainly no decoration at Mazda. In many ways that is what makes an ideal car – its shape, form, environmental and technical response. There's very little decoration, everything has a reason for being there. It carries no more weight than it needs to and I think it's the same about this building. The palette's reduced, not as an aesthetic, it's because it doesn't need any more than that. It's doing its job well and then we let the people become the delight in it. When you do that, when you focus on timeless points about light penetration and environment and the way people connect, I think you've got a project. In the end it's life span will be much longer than something that's fashionable or decorative.

**Did the international arm of Mazda influence or apply any constraints to the design?**

The Mazda family is throughout Japan and the world and certainly the Australian team here went back and forth with Mazda Japan because the whole group bought into doing this project. Mazda's culture is embedded in the end project because it wasn't just about Australia. They're an international brand. That's one of the reasons that it has been successful because it's a world building, not simply a building for Mazda Australia.

**PROJECT**

Mazda Australia Headquarters,  
Wellington Road, Mulgrave

**CLIENT**

Barangaroo Delivery Authority

**ARCHITECT**

Cox Architecture, Melbourne

**DESIGN TEAM**

Patrick Ness, Pete Sullivan,  
Andrew Tucker, Stuart Murchison,  
Ryan Moroney, Christina  
Prodromou, Cassie Collins

**BUILDER**

Frasers Pty Ltd

**INTERIOR FIT-OUT**

Cox Architecture

**WINDOW INSTALLER/GLAZIER**

Viridian, Clayton

**GLASS SUPPLIER AND SPECIALIST SUPPORT**

Viridian, Melbourne

**PRINCIPAL GLAZING**

Viridian ComfortPlus™ Clear

**PROJECT SIZE**

6900 sq.m.

**BUDGET**

Undisclosed

# LESSONS IN LIGHT

1962 J. PHILIP  
1963 J. WHITWORTH  
1964 P. BAKER  
1965 B. LAVENDER  
1966 A. TURNBULL  
1967 A. TURNBULL (H)  
H. APTED (S)  
J. YEWERS (H)  
M. WALLMAN (S)  
J. POCKLINGTON (H)  
H. APTED (S)

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Tree-like with filleted transparency, conventional 'solidity' is replaced by an envelope of dissolving elevations and embraced opportunity. The result is a school building set for the 21st, rather than the 19th century. The centre's three illuminated levels are dedicated to knowledge, science and food technology.

A heroic, north-facing elevation of Viridian glass and steel as broad blade signals the educational ideals of transparency and permeable spaces on the grand and fine scale.

**PROJECT**

The Gipson Commons,  
St Michael's Grammar, Melbourne

**ARCHITECTS & FIT-OUT**

Architectus Melbourne

**PRINCIPAL GLAZING**

Viridian ComfortPlus™ Clear  
Viridian Double Glazed Units

**TEXT, IMAGES & FILM**

Peter & Jenny Hyatt

The Gipson Commons sets to work immediately by way of invitation to ascend and experience truly collegiate spaces. Despite a boxy plan, little feels or appears boxy at all. Streamlined elevations connect fluently to the sunlight and aspect with interiors that unfurl like freshly turned wood shavings.

Viewed from the adjacent sports fields, or experienced within, it results in thinking outside of the square. Elegant glasswork, a bank of central skylights and crafted transitional spaces contribute a huge sense of release instead of containment. In all, some clever footwork by Architectus Melbourne and school principal Simon Gipson, who is honoured with this building of inventive clarity.

Of all fields of architecture, education is a stand-out, and mostly for the wrong reasons. Rather than tailored or bespoke, office blocks and institutions have provided the phony, ill-suited reference.

The impulse to stake new territory has given rise to the dull and dreary, rather than bright, nimble solutions.

Generations of school principals, parents committees and their architects, have repeated the mistake of the inward-looking, introspective learning environments.

Scan the horizon of most primary and secondary schools – you can venture to universities too – and the evidence is in: It has taken far too long for academia to grasp the big-picture of place in the daily lives and student memory.

St Michael's effectively realises the North American journalist Sydney J. Harris' observation: "The whole purpose of education is to turn mirrors into windows."

To this end the treatment of clear span double-glazing – incorporating Viridian ComfortPlus™ Clear – along the main internal avenue creates an invitation rarely observed in primary or secondary schools. And the experience within doesn't disappoint with thoughtful elevations at all key compass points. A glazed and projecting veil as Green wall to the south along Redan Street, for instance, connects the upper level along the building's 'science' edge to the streetscape.







That was really the metaphor we gave the architects from the beginning – spaces for possibilities.

SIMON GIPSON, SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

North elevation reveals great pavement and foot-traffic connection with organic study/play areas blurred into the landscape.

Simon Gipson's guiding vision throughout for his 1300 plus students was an educational centre as 'a place of possibilities' where space dissolves into fragmented 'walls' of glass and timber.

Gipson says: "That was really the metaphor we gave the architects from the beginning – spaces for possibilities. There were two other elements that were primary for me. One was connection and relationship and so there had to be a connection between all of the learning spaces and places, that was obvious and deliberate. And there had to be a relationship both in the vertical and horizontal planes, plus extending outside so that this building was seen as part of the whole context of this school. The learning within also had to be completely visible to permit kids as young as three to learn alongside students aged 18 and see them learning and vice-versa."

A stroll through reminds you frequently that this is no ordinary school; no Dickensian hierarchy of space or harsh social order. Students are encouraged towards what Simon Gipson describes as "transformational rather than transactional learning".



Winter Music  
The, Monday 11 Nov 2013  
Barnes Park, Weybridge, Surrey



A sun-filled Dolly's Café enlivens the ground floor level and is invitational to staff, students and parents.



The ground floor, Dolly's Café has a brilliant vibe within an urban context of adjacent apartments, townhouses and individual residences on a busy road. The ground plane opens most visibly through its glazing to provide the easiest of transitions between inside and out.

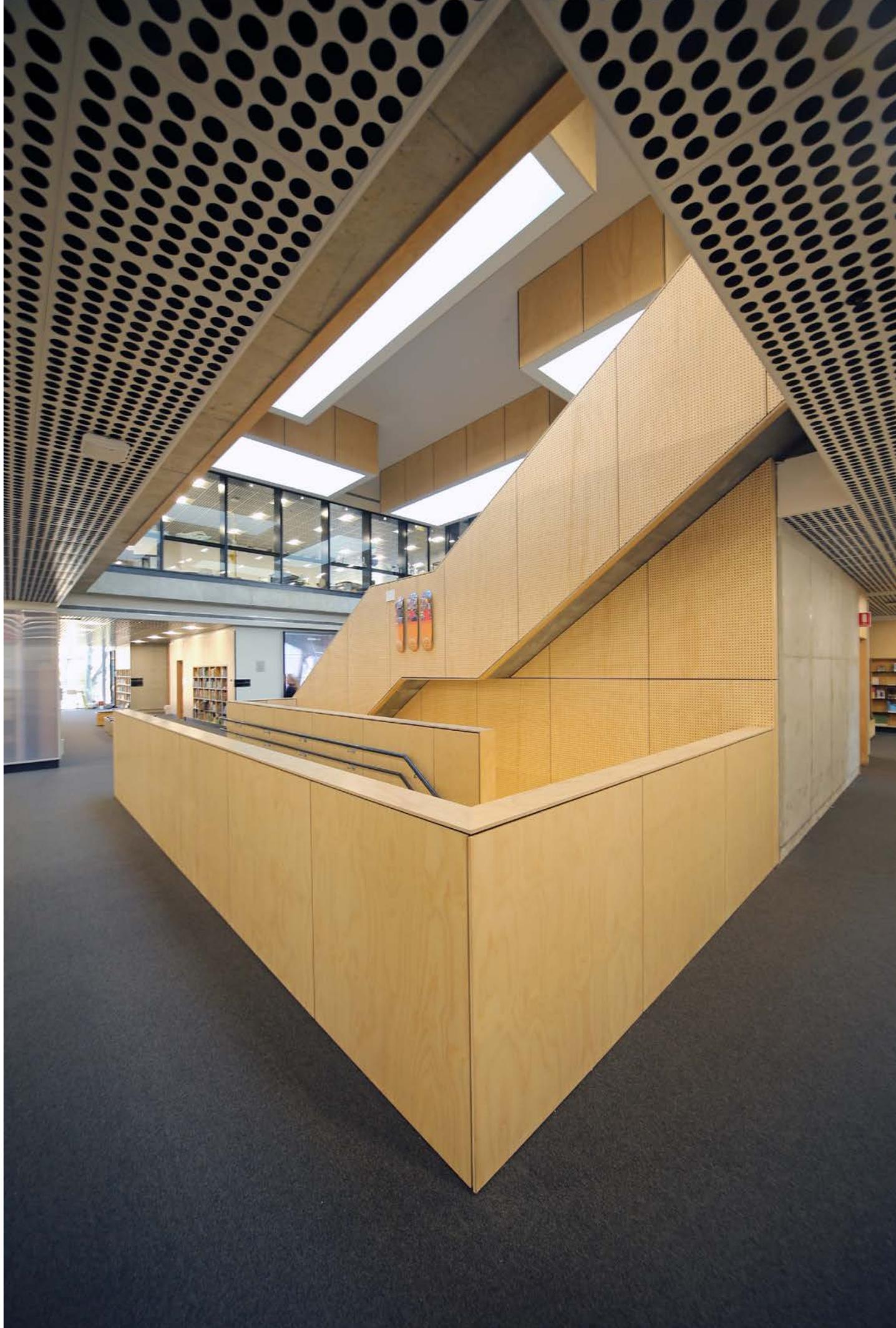
An aesthetic based upon a distilled material palette of steel, glass and timber in their relatively natural states, proves highly effective in the making of a calm, tranquil study environment. No brightly coloured fandangles are required to suggest upbeat learning. Finely scaled mullions are evidence of pared structure that allows Viridian double-glazed units to perform with understated, crystalline elegance.

Here, the form-making and architecture of extroverted character does the heavy lifting rather than a reliance on artificial or cosmetic flourishes to invest optimism usually framed by lifeless spaces. Daylight, the architect seems to be saying, is the great uplifter and daily tonic.

Gipson's enthusiasm for education and its role as a platform for continuing enquiry throughout life, drives his passion for more enlightened learning with the physical environment as pivotal.

Corridors are rendered irrelevant with glass and timber screens providing transitional cues between learning spaces.

PETER HYATT, VISION





Giant light-boxes suffuse interiors with indirect, ambient daylight. Despite its deep plan, informal study and meeting spaces always appear beautifully lit. Timber panelling adds to the design's non-institutional appeal.



"I've always been of the belief that schools of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are still organised along 19<sup>th</sup> century lines. One of the great advantages we have here, is that we have kindergarten to year 12 on one campus. I wanted us to create a learning facility that enabled students to learn right alongside each other." He notes that the project's inclusive qualities are right for "a central space right in the heart of the school for the whole community to gather".

Another of the centre's achievements is the control of noise of which Gipson says there is very little spill despite the open spaces. "If there is a design feature that succeeds in this building then noise attenuation is it."

Classrooms pinwheel from the central staircase and 'amphitheatre' as auditorium. Centrally located as the building's heart and a double-height volume with large rectangular light boxes above, the space feels conversational, never monumental.

The staircase presents as an armature or spindle that branches, treehouse-like, to the various disciplines.

The top floor is primarily library and administration – sunbathed in winter months and shielded in summer by a broad blade eave. Breaking the predictability of the rectangular, the north-east corner cantilevers as a free-form spatial gesture to accentuate the centre's floating, lightweight qualities.

Views from the top floor to the north reach to the CBD. A program of Viridian Double Glazed Unit's imbues a sense of release rather than containment.







Rather than novelty or silo, the school's 1300 students are treated to a building fully integrated into the entire campus fabric.



The ubiquitous café culture has also worked its way into school and provides an easy eating and greeting space for students, parents and staff.

“Dolly’s café has become a community facility that services the needs of the community and has become a gathering point; a focus and locus for the entire community.

It really has created our own community culture and the way in which that mirrors the outside world. You will see groups of parents and staff and students mixing in ways that mirrors the outside world and brings this into St Michael’s and that’s really very exciting.”

Other design keys include vertical timber screens across key elevations and repeated textually within the central learning and story-telling void. Corridors are rendered irrelevant with glass and timber screens providing transitional cues between learning spaces. A further clue to the shared base level experience is that perimeter window spaces are shared and experienced by students rather than the privileged domain of teaching and administrative staff.

**The whole purpose of education is to turn mirrors into windows.**

SYDNEY J. HARRIS, JOURNALIST



Gipson says the new building is designed to create and encourage the transformational learning experience: “The most memorable moment was on the very first day it opened and I came up to the top floor where a group of year 12s were sitting over the cantilever on the top floor. They were all focused on studying and it was as if they had been there for 100 years in a sense, as if they were always meant to be there and at that moment I knew we had achieved what we had set out to.

We wanted to create a sense of connection to the outside environment which is often lacking in classrooms. One of the great design features of this building is the Green wall that faces Redan Street. When that’s fully grown, the ability to sit in the building and look out to the streetscape through this wonderful vine and will provide students with the experience of not being closeted but connected.

Science and domestic science classrooms on the south are notable as exemplars of flowing space and requiring little if any artificial lighting.



Finely scaled mullions are evidence of pared structure that allows Viridian double-glazed units to perform with understated, crystalline elegance.

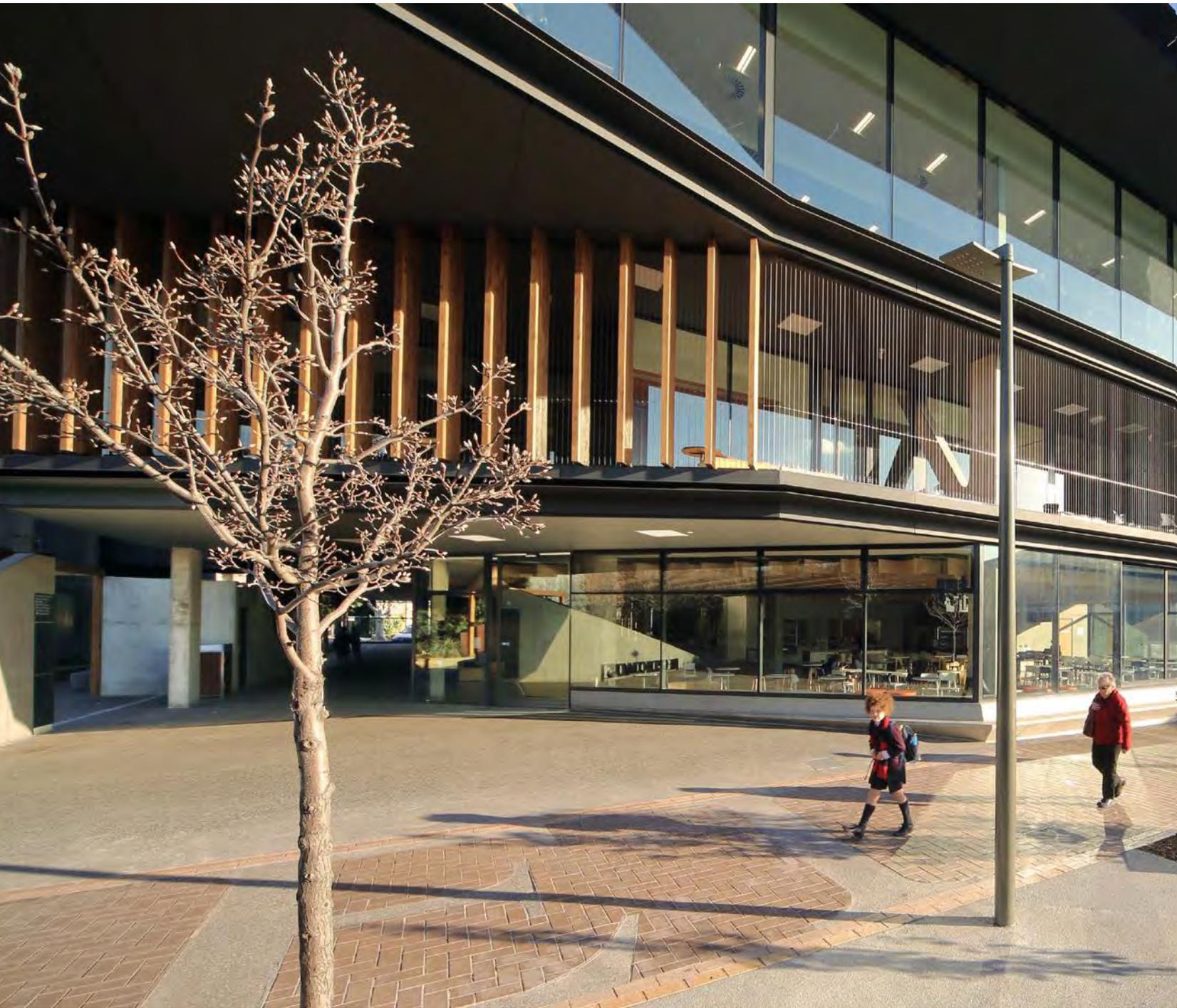
PETER HYATT, VISION





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ST MICHAEL'S GRAMMAR





**PROJECT**

The Gipson Commons,  
St Michael's Grammar, Melbourne

**ARCHITECTS & FIT-OUT**

Architectus Melbourne

**CONTRACTOR**

Contract Control Services

**ENGINEERS**

Cardno Limited (Edison Consulting)

**WINDOW INSTALLER/GLAZIER**

Aluminium Glass Façade Systems  
(AGFS)

**GLASS SUPPLIER & SPECIALIST SUPPORT**

Viridian

**PRINCIPAL GLAZING**

Viridian ComfortPlus™ Clear  
Viridian Double Glazed Units

**PROJECT SIZE**

6000 sqm

**BUDGET**

\$20 million



It has been fantastic and performed so well. It's cool in summer, warm in winter. There's so much light that flows in. It's a beautiful place to study; a beautiful place to learn in.

Something I've always believed in is that if you create beautiful spaces for young people to learn in, it will inspire them. What we tend to do and the factory metaphors that continue to dominate sees buildings as transactional in nature, but learning should be transformational. You have to demonstrate that you value them and I think our Commons building demonstrates that."

Simon Gipson says the experience of the new building named after him was embarrassing and humbling. "The Chair of the Board rang me and said: 'Simon you can't say 'no' to this'. I still struggle walking past that great big sign because it's like it's someone else."

Too often exemplars encourage copycat work performed badly, with results neither true to the original, or any good as replicas. Almost eight years in the planning and another three or so in the hard faceting, The Simon Gipson Commons is the real deal, transporting occupants in time-travel rather than vacuum. Instead of the predigested box, students and staff experience learning as moveable feast.

Previous page: A cantilevered top floor section enhances the faceted qualities of lightweight construction. As a building it invites students and staff to see different possibilities in learning – and building design.

Above: Three varied yet cohesive window/wall treatments reflect a tightly scripted treatment by Architects.

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