



An artists impression of the new Marion Library which opened on 23 November 2001

A library writ Marion

On 23 November 2001, a new library and cultural centre opened on the doorstep of Australia's second largest retail centre: Westfield Marion in South Australia. It's a building which has an exterior as remarkable as its interior. It is filled with surprise.

The architects, Melbourne's Ashton Raggatt McDougall working in conjunction with Adelaide's Phillips/Pilkington, built their design from the library's stock-in-trade: the letters of the alphabet.

The word 'MARION' is spelt in copper, glass and steel, forming two walls of the building. The letters themselves create a colourful graphic and sculptural impact that is unexpected and memorable. The

David of the cultural centre stands up for its own against the Goliath of Westfield.

The surprise engendered by the exterior continues within. The letter 'A' cantilevers invisibly across the library to become a lean-to wall of a restaurant, the 'R' forms a verandah-like walkway linking the centre's forecourt plaza with the street. The 'I' is a free-standing sculpture eight metres high. Some letters the 'reader' must discover; much as the knowledge on offer by the library must be discovered.

Within, the building contains many possibilities: there is the library, a 100-seat restaurant, a tourist information centre, a multi-purpose hall, meeting rooms, an 'A'-class art gallery and 160-seat auditorium.

The architects deliberately located the library (or knowledge centre, as it is also described) on the higher ground at the eastern end of the building. This separates the library staff and users from the building's through-traffic while still giving them a commanding sense of all that's going on.

The new library has four times the area of its predecessor, an improvement met with a great deal of enthusiasm by library manager Sandy Holmes:

'The additional space allows us to provide more study and informal areas, to stock more books, to put more emphasis on display and to create events and areas to meet the needs of the community and attract new users,' Sandy says.

'For example, we now have a children's area designed to foster kids' learning from an early age, a dedicated teenage area with sofas where they can study and relax as well as nine computers for public use.'

The City of Marion has long been an enthusiastic supporter of community arts and culture. Mayor Felicity-ann Lewis believes the Centre now provides a focal point where the community can socialise and interact to celebrate the cultural diversity of the city.

'As a focus for art and culture in Marion it provides an identity and 'heart' for the Marion community as well as providing a seminar and conference venue for both locals and visitors,' she said.

'The Cultural Centre — from its exciting architectural form to the activities it will host — is a celebration of all that is good about Marion.'



A verandah-like walkway links the centre's forecourt plaza with the street