



THIRD TIME EXPERTS AT HOBSONS BAY

If building or renovating is one of life's most stressful moments, the staff at Hobsons Bay in Victoria suspect they must be gluttons for punishment. Ten years ago, Hobsons Bay library buildings were below standard. Today, the council is midway through construction of its third major library build within five years.

Altona North Community Library was completed in March 2010 and could well be considered a good looking library. For us, Altona North is all about the customer experience. It has an abundance of natural light, monitored fresh air quality and a retail-style, flexible layout with very efficient use of space. With a small footprint



of land (3,000sq m) the facility boasts 530sq.m of library space, two community meeting rooms, a 16 PC training room and state-of-the-art

facilities for people with a disability. The recent opening of the UCan Café added the aroma of freshly baked muffins and espresso coffee and we knew we had achieved our vision of building the 'community lounge room'. Here's what we learned along the way:

Get involved

Nobody understands your 'business' or your community better than you or your staff. Be a part of developing the design brief, the architect's selection and the Project Control Group (PCG). During the Altona Meadows Library planning in 2004, I initially met resistance in joining the project meetings. But who else would articulate the role and function of the modern library? I was soon sitting beside project engineers and managers, architects and builders, quantity surveyors and hydraulic consultants at the PCG meetings from inception right through until completion. This management structure is now into its third incarnation with the Williamstown Library construction.

For Altona North, the team knew the library of the future had to relate to the retail environment without losing the traditional elements that the community valued. At the design phase, the meetings with the architect outlined that vision clearly. The architect also needed to understand

the functional workings of a busy library. Being involved at these meetings, has meant the rectification of countless potential mistakes or misinterpretations that we would have had to live with for a long time.

Our approach to building planning and construction is a lot of work. But the effort is well worth it for the quality and functionality of the result and value delivered back to the community.

"With an architect who listens, consultation is meaningful." **Listen and interpret**

Choose your architect well. An architect who can listen and interpret is gold. An architect, of course, wants their design to be enduring and to make a statement, but the skill of a really good architect lies in their ability to interpret the aspirations of the community in the design.

With an architect who listens, consultation is meaningful. Consultation at the different levels with staff, the regular users, the irregular users, the Friends, the Advisory committees, Councillors and targeted community groups is such an important part of the process. The architect can hear their concerns and then reflect these in the design. So allow plenty of time in the planning for this to happen.

The manager that is involved can also guide the project team through the Council communication protocols and processes. A good relationship built on trust and communication will ensure that the finished building is one that all stakeholders can be proud of.

To get the best value, get hands on.

The library team did much of the research around determining the look and feel,



including research visiting other libraries and drawing upon our own experiences as shoppers/consumers. With Altona Meadows, we had a limited budget so enlisted the assistance of a space planner for the layout but sourced our furniture and equipment directly from the factory. With Altona North, we researched the self-serve shopping trends, the café culture, and the retail environment. We wanted to achieve a comfortable but smart finish - a finish that would be welcoming. For Altona North, we enlisted the help of a furniture supplier who provided a whole of building solution. Most elements worked very well but we felt constrained by only being able to purchase from one supplier. So with Williamstown, whilst we are working closely with the architects in the overall interior design elements, the library team has maintained the responsibility for the fitout of furniture and equipment.

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