

INSPIRATIONAL. INNOVATIVE. ICONIC.

THE NEW GEELONG LIBRARY & HERITAGE CENTRE

From all the main roads leading into Geelong, the dome shape of the new multilevel Geelong Library & Heritage Centre dominates the landscape. **TINEKE BARRY** tells us about the new library.

As you come closer to Geelong's cultural precinct, a trick of the eye causes Geelong Library & Heritage Centre to nestle almost inconspicuously among the other cultural buildings and historic Johnstone Park. But one enters into a soaring space dominated by a six-metre-high wall of books spanning the ground and mezzanine levels. Already you know that you have entered a great building where the iconic domed exterior is only the beginning; inside there is a fittingly bold interior and much to discover.

What does innovation mean in this new space?

Technology-rich, the building is well resourced with large-screen technology throughout, from a 9-screen video wall on the ground floor to a 95-inch large screen TV in the youth area. The events space boasts high-end audiovisual technology and large-scale, dual-projector screens, more commonly seen in a conference facility than a public library. Information kiosks with touchscreens greet visitors on every level. Self-check-out stations are a given. What is not a given is the amazingly fast internet service. In a coup for a public library, ISP AARNET (Australian Academic and Research Network) is delivering download

speeds of 800 megabits per second and upload speeds of 500 megabits. Download speeds on wireless networks, both for staff and customers, is around 200 megabits. Technology makerspaces, which can pop up anywhere across the five library and heritage levels, include cruiser tables, Oculus Rift virtual reality and 3D printing. Programs and activities are ever evolving including LEGO MINDSTORMS EV3 robotics, basic programming, digital stories, OSMO, Makey Makeys, Little Bits electronics and Squishy Circuits.

But we all know that innovation in public libraries is about so much more than technology, and the new Geelong Library & Heritage Centre has tackled the full gamut of experiences that a contemporary world-class public library offers.

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For the collection, innovation means quality, depth and breadth in its non-fiction books, which have a focus on art and culture, reflecting the library's location in the city's cultural heart and status as the central library of the Geelong region.

For the history and heritage of Geelong it means housing together – for the first time – the full collection, in a repository of 520 square metres with 4.2 km of mobile shelving, allowing same-day retrieval and a Heritage Reading Room that's decorated in sumptuous shades of red, which makes all who enter feel like VIPs.

Children and youth get a dedicated level of the building, a colourful, noisy and fun space with an activities area and family room. Looking out from within, there is a feeling of being amid the treetops of the park, and on the outside a sensory garden is planted on terraced outcrops.


Literary events are held on a top-floor space, where the ceiling echoes the dome structure in stunning ochre-coloured panels. A balcony offers panoramic views of Geelong's cityscape, Corio Bay and beyond to the hills of the You Yangs.

For our sense of connectedness to our local Aboriginal culture, we have named our five publicly accessible levels in consultation with the Wadawurrung people:

- Gathering place – Ki-kirri-ngitj – *We talk together*
- Reading nest – Ngawirring ngiyt – *Learn together* and Cave – Kanyul karrung – *Youth space*
- Inspiration space – Nyaal – *Open your eyes*
- The vault – Kim barne thaliyu – *Here yesterday*
- The high ground – Wurdi Youang – *Big hill in the middle of the plains*

A culture of innovation needs many supporters. For the Geelong Library & Heritage Centre this meant financial support from federal, state and local governments. It was a bold, ambitious plan that could be manifested only by bold designers – namely ARM Architecture. We also had a great project team led by the City of Greater Geelong, a supportive board led by Councillor Andy Richards and a visionary CEO, Patti Manolis.

Geelong residents almost can't believe that this beautiful building is here in their city. A visitor commented: 'If I had found this amazing building overseas I would have asked why we don't have something like this in Geelong. But now we do!'

During its opening weekend in November last year over 10,000 people walked through the doors and over 7,000 books were borrowed. The response was overwhelming; visitors were impressed by the spectacular and ambitious design, the vibrant colours, the engineering that went into the five-star environmentally sustainable design rating and the integration of the building with the park through its balconies and decks. One person referred to it as the 'People's Learning Palace'. We think that says it all. 

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INNOVATION IN A CLOSED OFFICE




Being part of the public service has its limitations.
JACINTA ANDERSON

shares her thoughts on what her library at the ATO can do to assist staff with their own innovation.

I work in a sector that is crying out for innovative ideas that can be grown within a limited framework. Here's an idea – why not provide the resources to innovate the person rather than trying to change their job? What can a library offer workers to assist them in developing their skills?

Increasingly staff are looking for something to help them improve their everyday work situation. But a 3D printer, for example, isn't going to have much impact on their work, even if it's currently an exciting development with great potential. What they need is a space in which to work, and we can provide something that their cubicle can't. Libraries can give workers a space that lets ideas grow – along with the time and tools to relax their minds and allow them to reach their potential.

One of the main reasons staff come into our library is to find an alternate workspace. But this is the one option we cannot easily offer because of restrictions on where they can access a computer and log in. The idea that we can provide an alternative space for staff to work in, away from their cubicle and colleagues, has preoccupied library staff and management for years. What is our role as a library? Are we here to just to provide text, or are we here to cater to other needs of our staff? By providing them with a change of environment, we can help them to work more effectively. Having room to spread out and access to scanners and printers can allow them to give their work the attention that it needs to be done to a higher level.

This is not a new idea. Google's offices are known for providing staff with work areas that inspire thought and creativity. Who doesn't feel re-energised when they move to a different environment? Not because the work they do there is necessarily different, but because a new vibe and energy in the new environment can help them to rethink the way that everyday tasks are performed. 

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