

# A novel approach to university library design

**R**ocking chairs, deckchairs, beanbags, and cushions are all accoutrements you'd expect to find in residential or resort interiors. However, TONIA ZEMEK reports that RMIT University Library's comfy furnishings are right at home in an evolving library environment.



Photos by Petter Bennetts

RMIT's New Academic Street (NAS), located in the heart of Melbourne's CBD, dedicates two floors to library space. A connection to the community is palpable at every level, with the library opening out to multiple balconies on both floors. Naturally, NAS library users can frequently be found catching some fresh air as they study. The design itself is best described as a breath of fresh air but so too are the collections it houses. Image banks, music databases, editing software and digitised archives are among a long list of online resources available to students and staff of RMIT – either for research purposes or for artistic inspiration.

Deirdre Gillespie, the Associate Director of RMIT University Library Services, admits she and her team have long considered their collections as comprising both physical objects and digital resources. 'We're quite accustomed to operating in the digital space, and we think of that as quite normal, but this design has really challenged us to think differently about the look and feel of a library's physical space and that's been a very interesting and rewarding journey.'

At NAS, the library environment is one where students are encouraged to make the space their own. The inclusion of moveable furniture, together with long benches, all provide students the freedom and flexibility to redefine spaces to suit their needs – for either individual study or peer-to-peer learning.

Lyons Architecture developed the design idea and design approach for the NAS library, based on collaboration

with MvS Architects, NMBW Architects, Harrison and White, Maddison Architects and landscape architects Taylor Cullity Leathlen. Lyons Architecture took primary responsibility for the redevelopment of the NAS library and the practice's Director and NAS Project Director, Carey Lyon, was determined to completely refresh the space. 'Internally, we radically transformed the student experience at the library, which is one of the main areas students gravitate towards. We prioritised a significant amount of space primarily for student use – rather than academic or staff use,' Carey said.

Part of that transformation included the addition of the Maker Space, which included input from RMIT Interior Design student Keira Kailun Wu – who won a competition to help design the space. Depending on student requirements and requests, anything from 3D printers and laser cutters, through to hammers and nails, can all be found within these walls. Popular with engineering, architecture and design students, the Maker Space is a dynamic area designed to evolve in line with students' needs and to promote cross-pollination between disciplines.

Academic staff have even deployed the library space as a 'test bed'. A user experience study has already been undertaken within the space, along with an augmented reality project. 🌟

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