

THE FOCUS OF A GALLERY SHOULD BE ON THE CONTENTS, NOT THE SURROUNDS, SO FOR AN UPDATE TO THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART IN SYDNEY, THE SIMPLE BOX WAS CHOSEN AS A SUITABLE MOTIF

ARCHITECT Architect Marshall & The Government Architect's Office in association with Rebecca Howden
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A series of white boxes was the starting point for the design of the new Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney. Designed by Architect Marshall in association with The Government Architect's Office, the redevelopment of the museum brings together the old and the new, with spacious new galleries and a five-level extension to the existing space.

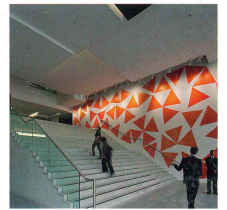
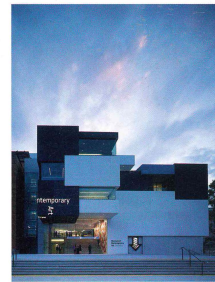
For architect Sam Marshall, there were three core ideas that needed to be considered in the redesign of the museum: the flow of people, the flexibility of spaces and a contemporary look and feel. "The MCA had incredible attendance numbers and the existing building couldn't cope with the number of people that were coming through every day, so the idea was to resolve the circulation to make the building more accessible to everybody," says Marshall. There was also a need to create flexible spaces that could be used for different exhibitions, functions or educational purposes.

The building is located between George St and Circular Quay, which are on different levels, so to create easy access the architects created a wide internal thoroughfare that links the two streets, allowing visitors to enter from either side. "People can flow in with no hindrances, easily find their destination and see the art - because it's all about the art," says Marshall.

Displaying art is of course the core function of the museum, and the existing building used a series of very simple white plasterboard "boxes" as gallery spaces, which the curators can then reconfigure. Marshall embraced this idea and used boxes as a motif throughout the entire building, from the window frames to the reception desk to the corridors.

This idea of boxes was carried through to the ceilings, for example, which were low in the existing building due to the air conditioning system. "Using the central idea of these boxes we could pull the ceiling down in places to accommodate the air conditioning, and where there were no ducts we could push the ceiling up and expose the concrete there."

The air conditioning posed another challenge for the building. A stable temperature and humidity is essential for art conservation at all times of the day and night - which has a considerable financial and environmental impact. Knowing that the air conditioning couldn't simply be turned off at 5pm, Marshall looked for ways to implement a more environmentally friendly system. "One of the key sustainable things we did was to heat and cool the building with a heat exchange system that uses Sydney Harbour as its heat source," Marshall explains. "It pumps water from the harbour into the building, takes the heat or the cool out of it, and pumps the water back out again. That saves roughly 30% on the electricity in the building." ■



TOP: A view from the roof out across Sydney Harbour. LEFT: The entrance demonstrates the way the box motif manifests on the exterior. ABOVE: Visitors ascend the stairs to enter the new wing of the museum. BELOW: The third floor, which houses galleries as well as the National Centre for Creative Learning

