



SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

THIS STRIKING BUILDING IS DESTINED TO BECOME AN ICON FOR THE CITY, WRITES ANNA KOSMANOVSKI

Geelong's landmark new library, the most daring building in our city in decades, is only just beginning to take shape but has already taken out a significant architectural award. With the final touches still being made to the hexagon-patchwork dome and its stalactite glass front, the building has been crowned with this year's State Award for Excellence by the Concrete Institute of Australia.

The award recognises significant contributions to technology and design innovation.

The \$45.5 million building is now in the running for the national awards – the verdict comes next month.

The architects, ARM Architecture, are thrilled with the positive response. "Significant buildings tend to polarise people, and we are very fortunate that even though this building has done just that, it appears to be more widely admired than deplored," says Wayne

Sanderson, technical director at ARM Architecture. The dome comprises more than 300 glass-reinforced concrete (GRC) panels. Wayne says the innovative use of this material was one of the key components in the award submission.

"This award is the first significant step in what we hope will be a range of accolades that reflect the quality of the building's design, construction, sustainability, community benefit and investment made by Geelong on a local, state and federal level," he says.

Geelong mayor Darryn Lyons says the dome-shaped roof is architecturally unique. "It is sure to bring people into the city just to look at the striking design," he says.

"The whole arts precinct in Geelong's CBD is going through a phase of revitalisation and transformation. More people are spending time in the area and there's increased investment into the city."

The library will be unveiled later this year. It stands as a striking symbol of new Geelong and is helping to lead the way in the city's resurgence.

A couple of blocks away is the \$68 million redevelopment of St John of God Geelong Hospital, completed last year. Even closer will be the \$90 million commercial high-rise being built on the Dalgety & Co site. In a few months' time, construction will begin

on the multi-million-dollar refurbishment of Barwon Water's offices, plus there's the proposed Fender Katsalidis-designed building on the site of Kings Funerals in Myers Street.

ARM Architecture has offices in Melbourne and Perth and lists the Arts Centre Melbourne and the Perth Arena as past clients. The concept of the Geelong Library and Heritage Centre, rendered through 3D modelling techniques, was developed and refined and went back to the drawing board many times.

The result is cutting-edge architecture with a high level of functionality set to deliver a new era of library services in Geelong.

Drawing inspiration from the Renaissance concept of the grotto as a place of retreat and reflection, the architects say the glass components make reference to the look of stalactites.

But, technically speaking, the silhouette is more sphere than dome and tips its hat to the significance of domes, such as the one in the State Library of Victoria.

Taking note of heritage-listed structures around the area – such as an Edwardian bandstand and a late-Victorian brass drinking fountain – the architects say that working with the existing surrounds and not against them was the key.

PICTURES | REG RYAN

MAYOR DARRYN LYONS



“IT IS SURE TO BRING PEOPLE INTO THE CITY TO LOOK AT THE STRIKING DESIGN”

- MAYOR DARRYN LYONS

“We cut away part of the dome to extend the park into the building, a reference to ideas of gardens of learning and to the picturesque early Australian tradition of the beautiful ruin,” says Wayne.

If libraries are places of tradition, then this one is in a different category. It will be a celebration of a modern library (the Wi-Fi will blaze at 1GB download speed, there will be 3D printing facilities and patrons will have a free pass to be “noisy” in certain areas) but homage will be paid to the classical library, too.

Inside the mezzanine level is a six-metre-high wall of books, dubbed The Great Wall of Stories, and the colour schemes follow traditional styles. “For example, tiles, coloured in a palette of four muted tones, are graded in a heat-map pattern to accentuate the crest of the dome,” says Wayne. “The colours link the new building with the historic ones around it, so it clearly belongs but is also distinctive and new.”

THE NEW GALLERY SECTION

HISTORY OF THE GEELONG LIBRARY & HERITAGE CENTRE

**AUGUST 1959 **
The Geelong Library built.

**1979 **
Then known as The Geelong Historical Records Centre, the Geelong Heritage Centre first opened to the public.

**2000 **
Lobbying for funding for new library began.

**DECEMBER 2011 **
The tender process for architectural services for the Geelong Library and Heritage Centre began.

**APRIL 2012 **
Architectural design services awarded to ARM Architecture and announced to the public.

**SEPTEMBER 2012 **
Concept for the dome design unveiled.

ARTIST'S
IMPRESSION OF
THE FINISHED
LIBRARY ➤

**APRIL-MAY 2013 **
The Geelong Library and Heritage services relocated to the State Government Offices on Little Malop Street.

**OCTOBER 2013 **
Demolition of the old Geelong Library.

**DECEMBER 2013 **
Construction on the \$45.5 million project began.

**NOVEMBER 2015 **
The Geelong Library and Heritage Centre set to open mid-to-late November.



(SUPPLIED)

At the forefront of innovative libraries around the world, the library and heritage centre is expected to attract those who may not usually frequent libraries.

Change is in the air in this modern library – even the books on level two will be roughly grouped by genre.

“Geelong and the region have actually changed so much and grown so much that the expectations of a contemporary library service have completely changed,” says Patti Manolis, chief executive officer of the Geelong Regional Library Corporation.

Technology will be a huge drawcard, says Patti. “It will include 3D printers and the ability to do editing, e-publishing and sound recording.”

The mayor says he’s confident the library will attract people who wouldn’t have engaged with such a facility in the past. “There’s much more than books. With the latest technology, an on-site café and several meeting spaces, it will be a very positive social space.

“I’d love to see people re-engage with libraries who may have stopped using them as well.”

It’s clear that the building will become a landmark in itself, drawing in tourists, bookworms, CBD locals or those just after a coffee with park views.

“The building will be one of Geelong’s iconic structures,” says the mayor.

“It’s going to be a destination for Geelong,” says Patti.

TAKE A LOOK INSIDE

A concierge, café and a news lounge with comfortable seating (and plenty of it – there’s more than 500 seats in the building) awaits ... newspapers ready for their morning read and screens ready to fire up ... then there’s that soothing screech that coffee lovers recognise as an espresso machine in action.

Step into the Gathering Place, or the ground floor and mezzanine area, and you could be forgiven for thinking you were in a swish hotel lobby. “Visually, it will be

stunning and will be really easy for people to access and follow from,” says Patti.

“The architects devised a really smart way to maximise the wall area for storage of books, so that the ground floor was actually free for people to sit, to meet, to talk.”

Level one is split equally between a youth space (Cave) and an area for younger children and families (The Reading Nest).

“They’ll have access to great books and technology. We’re providing a lot of equipment for experiential learning,” says Patti. There will be resources such as play equipment and keyboards that are customised to little fingers.

“Also in the children’s area is a beautiful piece that’s been commissioned from an artist named Matthew Bird. It is called *Reading Nest*. It’s a large woven piece that children will be able to crawl into and play, and read.”

The exterior won’t disappoint either. “There’ll be a beautiful balcony with plants and a sensory garden.” Patti says this area will have the appearance and the feel of being in the tree canopy because of its height.

Moving on up and the Inspiration Space (level two) has a focus on non-fiction and Patti says there’ll be an emphasis on arts and culture materials.

“You’ll be able to borrow material specialising in visual arts, performing arts, screenplays, that kind of thing,” she says.

Onward and upward to The Vault – aka the home of the Geelong Heritage Centre – where for the first time, all of its collection will be on display and accessible in one building. Featuring a repository and plush reading room decked out in high-end furniture, this will be a quiet place for research and study.

Then, there’s the icing on the cake. From the top floor, the dome (or sphere) shape can be appreciated, as well as the panoramic views out to Corio Bay. This space is expected to be used regularly for events and literary festivals, and it’s also for hire. Already there’s a wedding in the works for next year. ●

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