

"The greenest building is the one already built"

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Building 6 Photographs: Nic Bailey

BUILDING 6 COCKATOO ISLAND

"We uncovered sandstone flagging dating back to the convict era. With careful detail, we were able to integrate that sandstone into the final deck structure. It was a chance discovery that enhanced the outcome."

Katharine Young, project architect.

Cockatoo Island operated as a convict gaol in the mid-nineteenth century and later grew into an important dock and shipbuilding yard. The Mould Loft (Building 6) is a significant early twentieth century building from the island's ship building phase.

In 2006, the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust began working with Allen Jack+Cottier to plan the adaptive re-use of the loft for flexible, low intensity uses. Internal circulation was addressed, electrical and hydraulic services renewed, ventilation and cooling augmented, and accessibility and fire safety issues resolved.

New interventions have been made in an unashamedly contemporary manner whilst detailing respects the original building's pragmatic design and industrial character. Visible scars on the building's fabric were preserved rather than effaced by shiny new materials. The significant loft floor, with its intricate pattern of painted markings describing full size patterns of ships, was protected and interpreted as it provides a physical record of many of the ships built on the island.

Cockatoo Island is listed on the National and Commonwealth Heritage Lists and is being submitted to UNESCO for inclusion in the World Heritage List.



Samantha Taylor

Taylor-made trip

Brisbane office's Samantha Taylor was one of five young talents to be awarded with the 2008 Dulux Study Tour Prize. An initiative of the Australian Institute of Architects' Corporate Partners program and Dulux Australia, the award consisted of a specially-programmed study tour of the United Kingdom, incorporating visits to significant architectural sites and meetings with some of the country's leading industry practitioners.

The five inaugural winners of the prize were selected from a list of 100 employer-nominated entries. A recipient of multiple other awards including the 2003 QUT, RAIA/Brisbane Architectural Graduate Award, Samantha was recently appointed an Associate of Allen Jack+Cottier.

"The tour was hugely inspirational because I was given the opportunity to meet and learn from successful professional peers," says Samantha. "Travel has always been a strong design and ideas catalyst for me."

Wearing dual hats of interior designer and architect, Samantha is currently working on a \$25-million commercial development in Brisbane's city-fringe suburb of South Bank.



Awards

The Village, Balgowlah, a mixed-use development in the northern beaches of Sydney has won the 2008 HIA Greensmart Awards Development Design Concept of the Year. Developed by Stockland and designed in conjunction with AJ+C, The Village locates private residential dwellings within – and above – the suburban shopping village. The Greensmart Award made special mention of the heat exchange system that will utilise waste heat from the retail air-conditioning unit to provide hot water for the apartments.

Campus Living Villages [Kelvin Grove] received a commendation in the Multiple Housing category of the 2008 Australian Institute of Architecture's Queensland Awards. Located on a site adjacent to Queensland University Technology in Brisbane, the 456-bed student housing facility was designed by the Brisbane office for Campus Living Villages. Guided by industry-leading social and environmental objectives, the facility was commended by the jury for presenting a 'robust, economical and lively answer to Brisbane's student housing needs'.

New offices broaden the horizon

AJ+C has opened an office in Perth and acquired an architectural practice in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) Vietnam. The offices will consolidate AJ+C's presence in new regions where 'breakthrough' projects have met with success, says CEO Reg Smith. "We have responded carefully to these markets with a grassroots approach – communicating with many stakeholders, gaining a local perspective on issues, and developing vital relationships. We see a long-term future for AJ+C in Western Australia and Vietnam."

AJ+C is currently planning a new coastal community near Perth, in conjunction with landscape architects, Oculus. Aspiring to become Australia's first 'carbon neutral' community, Alkimos is in development by the State Government's property agency, Landcorp. In Vietnam, the practice is currently designing a number of resort, residential and commercial projects, including a high-rise hotel and luxury apartments in Hanoi, and a commercial tower in HCMC. The HCMC office was founded on the acquisition of local architectural practice, Sea Design. Thien Nguyen, the Australian-raised founder of Sea Design, has designed a number of regional facilities, including the Sheraton Hanoi Hotel and the HCMC Phu Tho Horse Racing Club. Appointed the Director of Vietnam, Thien and his team are coordinating current and potential clients.



Thien Nguyen

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FLOURMILL STUDIOS

'A machine with a building wrapped around it',

is how Allen Jack+Cottier principal Reg Smith describes the former Crago Flour Mill, now Flourmill Studios, which has recently been adapted by AJ+C to contain 47 strata office studio spaces as well as a ground floor cafe.

The former mill is made up of four separate but adjoining buildings with differing floor levels. Key to the efficiency and fire safety of the design was the introduction of a clear entrance, service core and wheelchair accessible circulation path within the complex. The building's bright, glazed foyer is now reached via a spacious entrance courtyard which opens to the street. Internally, an east-west circulation spine connects the separate buildings, structures the internal planning and simplifies internal pedestrian traffic.

One of the most important design aims was to reveal and accentuate the industrial archaeology of the building – its wheels, shafts, hoppers and chutes – not just to highlight the mill's heritage significance but to give the development a distinctive identity which would appeal to its occupants and visitors.

Another objective was to add vibrancy to the streetscape and increase the visual and physical permeability of the building. The removal of insignificant internal and external accretions lets natural light deep into the previously dim interior and allows the building to glow from within at night. 'Wheat' cafe, at the building's

entrance, spills into the publicly accessible courtyard and a new gallery space on Gladstone Street makes use of an old loading bay, now fully glazed, to display paintings right by the footpath.

From the outset, AJ+C and client, Podcorp Holdings, were concerned about the ecological sustainability of the project. The most innovative environmental initiative is the dedicated cyclists' room with 32 secure bicycle lockers and corresponding personal lockers. Four self-contained bathrooms with showers make it easy for cyclists to shower and change when they arrive. A 'Go Get' car share pod has also been set up in the main courtyard.

For this project, the appropriate heritage conservation approach was one of renewal rather than restoration to a cliched 'former glory'. New work was designed to be clearly contemporary in character, and modern materials, bold graphics and bright colours contrast with the patina of original materials deliberately left rough and worn.

After the Crago mill ceased operating in 1984, it became home for many years to sculptors, dancers, painters and musicians. Flourmill Studios continues this creative tradition, with small studios proving attractive to architects, sound technicians, composers, photographers and graphic designers.

"The embodied energy of a site, whether physical, cultural or historical, offers an amazing palate to work with. The latest adaption of Crago has aligned this energy to suit creative studio spaces." PETER SCOTTON



AJ+C's graphic designer, Nic Bailey, designed the interpretive, directional and statutory signage for the project, giving Flourmill Studios a distinctive look.

Photograph: Nic Bailey



Photograph: Nic Bailey

The former goods lift car is now 'parked' in the foyer and showcases a trolley salvaged from the mill during demolition.



Q&A

Kate Mountstephens

Age has its advantages. The Director of Adaptive Re-use explains why retrofitting buildings is so important for the environment, and good business sense too.

Is there more to heritage than restoring old buildings' original details?

Yes! We're equipped for a variety of heritage conservation projects at AJ+C, but clients seem to be focusing more and more on recycling buildings for new uses. So, we develop design solutions that enhance what's inherently valuable about an existing building while also adding a contemporary layer – this combination of new and old gives buildings a new vibrancy and an individual character. I think adaptive re-use of buildings can only grow as environmental considerations become more pressing.

Adaptive re-use is a sustainable solution?

It's inherently green because you're re-using the embodied energy contained in a building's existing structure and materials when you adapt it for a new purpose. Also, if the client is considering trying for a Green Building Council Green Star rating, you start out in front with an existing building because you can receive up to six points for re-use of existing structure and materials.

Is the need for sustainability also changing business expectations?

Numerous issues are beginning to surface for clients who are planning to sell or let a building they have conserved and refurbished. Many companies and tenant groups now have their own green strategies which dictate the level of sustainability their premises must achieve. In addition, banks are beginning to demand ESD on building projects they fund, to protect the value of their investments.

All of this means clients are starting to 'build green' to attract tenants, achieve premium rents and sale prices and to get funding for their projects. On top of this, planning controls are soon going to demand increased and measurable levels of sustainability in building projects – for example, the City of Sydney Council has a draft ESD DCP which prescribes Green Star and ABGR [Australian Building Greenhouse Rating] ratings for commercial buildings with more than 1000 m² net lettable area.

Is the design process for adaptive re-use different from other architecture?

When you are working on an adaptive re-use project, you have to take the time at the start of the design process to understand the building and its history in detail. Each building has an individual history and significance and you have to let this guide your design approach – you can't impose an externally developed design concept. That's what's challenging and enjoyable about adaptive re-use – each building has its intrinsic qualities and these lead you towards a unique solution which enhances the building's original character.

'Interpretation' is often important in an adaptive re-use project. What does it mean?

Interpretation is simply highlighting what's important, or significant, about the building so that its users and visitors gain an understanding of its history. Often it's just a series of historical signs in the foyer, but in the best examples, the interpretation extends right through the building and forms part of the contemporary design layer. For example, with the Flourmill Studios we opened up an enclosed, four-storey internal shaft then glazed the resultant openings and added spotlights so we could reveal the wheels and belts that used to drive the mill's machinery. So when you walk through the building, you can see the guts of the former mill – it really helps you understand and experience the building.

Does working with a heritage listed building mean that you have to design in an 'old fashioned' way?

No, not at all. The best heritage conservation and adaptive re-use projects conserve the original elements of building fabric and then highlight these by designing and detailing new work in the best contemporary manner – we certainly don't design in an historicist way. At the Flourmill Studios, you can see contemporary colours, graphics, lighting and details all through the building. In fact, AJ+C graphic design designed all the signage for the project and AJ+C interior design worked on the finishes and lighting selections – it was great being able to draw on the skills of different parts of the office to get such a consistent design result. And outside, 360 Degrees' landscape design for the funky, industrial courtyards relates really well to our interiors.

Adaptive re-use is not an isolated form of design?

Adaptive re-use is just architecture within and around existing buildings – at AJ+C we're architects first and have adaptive re-use and heritage conservation as specialties. We don't see ourselves as a separate unit – we're integrated with the rest of the office and draw on the skills and talents of AJ+C as a whole.