

CH₂ Setting a new world standard in green building design

Design snap shot 13: Interface with Street

Summary

Introduction

This snap shot discusses the street interface of CH₂ (Council House Two). It outlines the way in which the street interface was planned, the costs and benefits and the final outcome. It also illustrates the importance of the urban design elements.

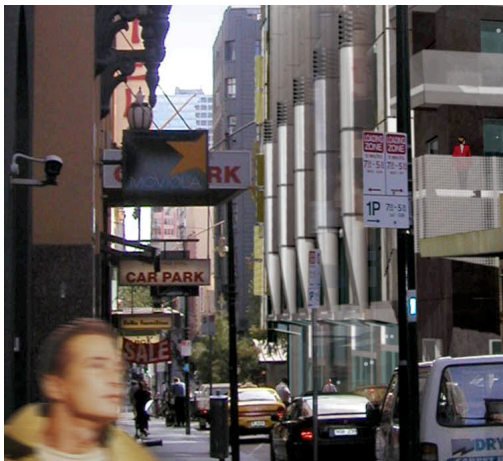


Figure 1. Image of the future street interface CH₂

Drivers and objectives

As an organisation that serves the Melbourne constituency, it is important for the Council to have a building that the public can respond to positively. The building must also satisfy the Council's long term commitment to quality urban design.

Benefits

- A landmark example of urban design
- Demonstration environmental building
- A visible example of a commercial development that improves the quality of the public realm, through continuous active frontages, through-block links and detailed well articulated facades.
- Boost for Council staff morale

Outcomes

- A ground floor that has an almost continuous active frontage and through-block links to Tivoli arcade and Swanston Street.
- Façades that respond to Melbourne's vertical rhythm and are responsive to environmental conditions.
- Encourage a feeling of interconnection with the street and environment.
- Integrated areas for staff access to the open air through semi-enclosed stairs, balconies and a rooftop garden.
- Artwork conveys a sense of the building and contributes to the culture of the area.
- Educational material will be available in the entrance.

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Figure 2. Image of the future façade CH2

Lessons

The interface with the public begins with the appearance of the building. Many ESD initiatives are hidden, and outward demonstration elements are a good way of catching the public's attention to illustrate the blending of sustainability and contemporary urban design.

The street interface is critical since 80% of a city's public realm is made up of streets. It follows that city buildings must contribute positively to the street experience.

Urban design

Since 1985, the City of Melbourne has placed strong emphasis on the improvement of the urban experience in Melbourne. A concerted strategy that was put in place through development controls, improved infrastructure and a co-ordinated design and works program, has seen Melbourne enter the 21st century as one of the world's most liveable cities. CH2 illustrates how buildings can be designed to provide active frontages. Through-block links and well articulated facades enhance the overall quality of the adjacent street and precinct. A city is only ever as good as the quality of its public realm. Since 80% of a city's public realm is constructed by its street spaces it follows that well designed and interesting streets will lead to a well designed and interesting city. CH2 has over 90% active frontage, and links to Tivoli Arcade and Swanston Street. CH2 serves as a good example of how buildings can and should respond to opportunities through the creation of a positive street interface.

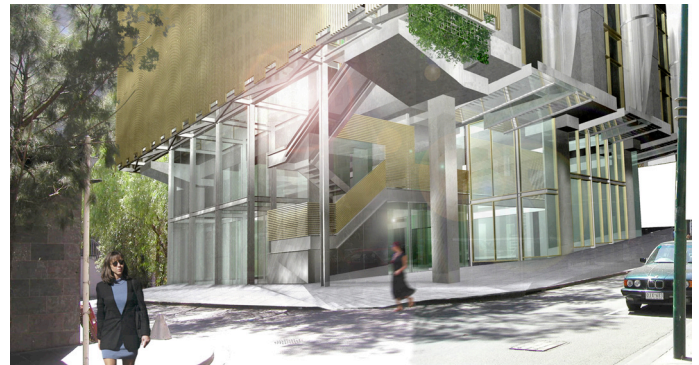


Figure 3. South-west corner looking up from Swanston Street (artist impression)

The interface with the street

The building is intended to educate and interact with the community and enhance the amenity of the precinct. Several strategies have been put in place to achieve these aims. The first is to have active connectivity with Bourke Street through the Tivoli shopping mall and with Little Collins Street and to a lesser extent Swanston Street, by opening its main doors to the south on the west corner. The second is to clearly articulate the building's green credentials at street level, for example, through the cascading shower towers to the south, the use of recycled timbers and environmentally responsible materials, and educational materials in the foyer. Finally, there will be a vibrant café in the foyer to allow people to meet, greet and refresh themselves in an attractive social environment.

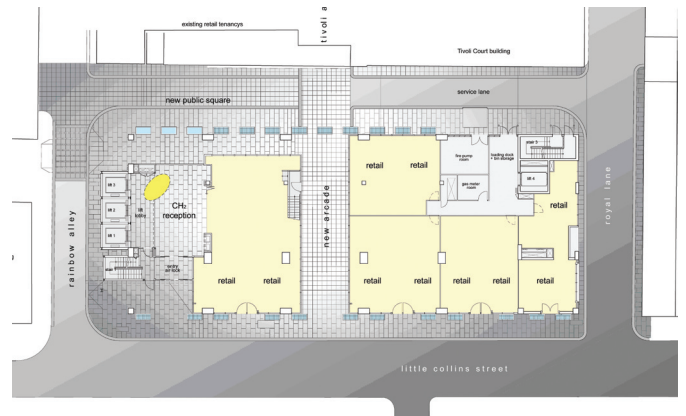


Figure 4. Ground floor plan and showing active frontages and links

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Artwork

As indicated in the snap shot on bio-mimicry (no.11), the artists use examples from nature to create an impressive art landscape. Artwork is being used in the hoardings around the site and will also be integrated into the completed building. This is an important part of conveying the project as a part of the culture of the city meanwhile discouraging graffiti.



Figure 5. Art was used in the charrette process but is also integral to the whole building process. Here, the art is a part of the fencing around the project June 2004 (Cara Jones)

The artwork helps publicise and communicate with the public and is a vital part of the interface with the public and street.

Timber facades

An exciting element of the timber façade is the fact it will run mainly from solar energy generated from the roof top photovoltaics and react to the external environmental conditions managed by a weather station also on the roof. The recycled timber has been sourced from old housing frames and is made up of Jarrah, Ironbark, Red gum and Blackbutt. Each louvre section is created from a different timber, as a living experiment on the natural aging of these timbers. This will be mapped and recorded, so that people from Swanston Street will be able to see the timber age and grey over time.



Figure 6. Timber samples to be used (Nullarbor timber)

The timber is recycled and also joined in a way which allows the use of smaller pieces that would normally go to waste. This illustrates the aesthetic of wise material use.

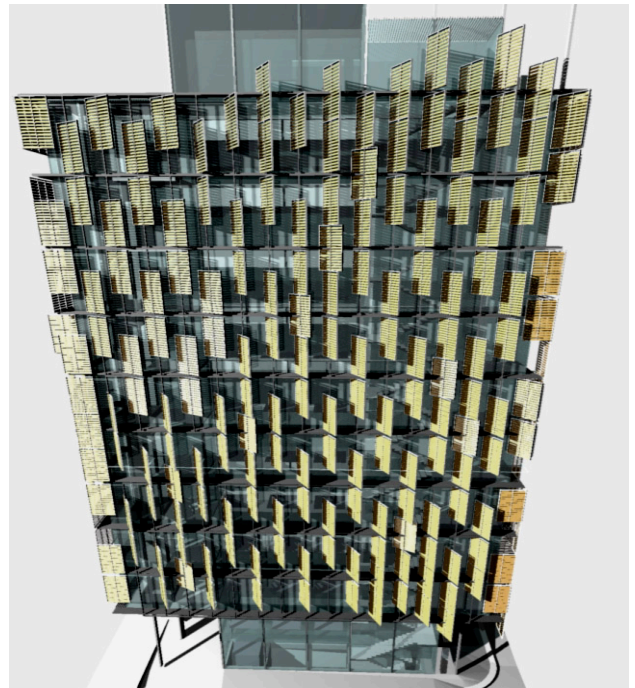


Figure 7. Image of the planned timber louvre façade

When the timber facades were being finalised and ordered it emerged that to make each louvre of one species was likely to compromise the savings created from using the finger jointing method. A discussion was conducted as the project was trying to be as efficient with funds as possible, with each saving highly prized. The conclusion was that the opportunity to have this façade as a clear demonstration of the potential for resource efficient aesthetic and its research potential (as explained above) was too valuable an opportunity to miss.