

MONUMENT

NIDA'S OPENING NIGHT
SULMAN AWARD WINNER

50



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**MONUMENT CELEBRATES 50 ISSUES WITH HASSELL
DURBACH BLOCK • ZAHA HADID • GLENN MURCUTT
CARUSO ST JOHN • DROST + VAN VEEN • SEAN GODSELL**



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Photography by Patrick Bingham-Hall

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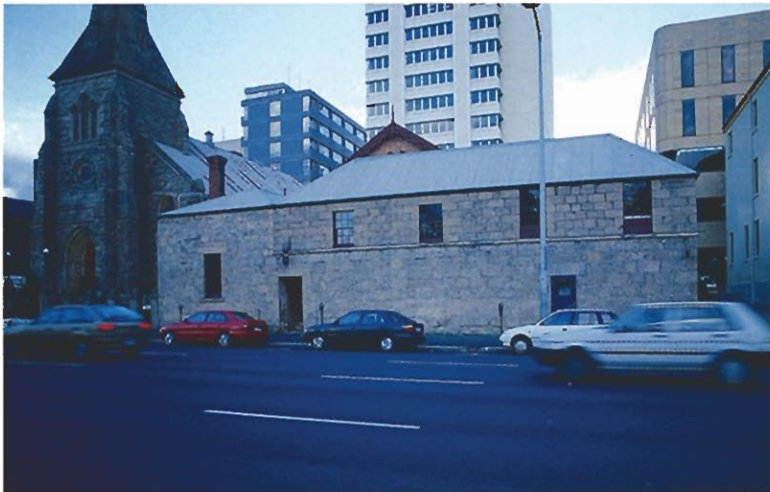
ROYAL CONNECTIONS

LIKE MANY AN ARCHAIC INSTITUTION, THE HOME OF ROYAL TENNIS IN HOBART WANTED TO UPDATE ITS IMAGE WHILE PRESERVING ITS ESSENCE. H2O ARCHITECTS CAME TO THE RESCUE WITH A SERIES OF ELEGANT SPATIAL MANIPULATIONS THAT PROVIDE A NEW VANTAGE POINT ON THE ACTION.

Text **Richard Blythe** Photography **Trevor Mein**





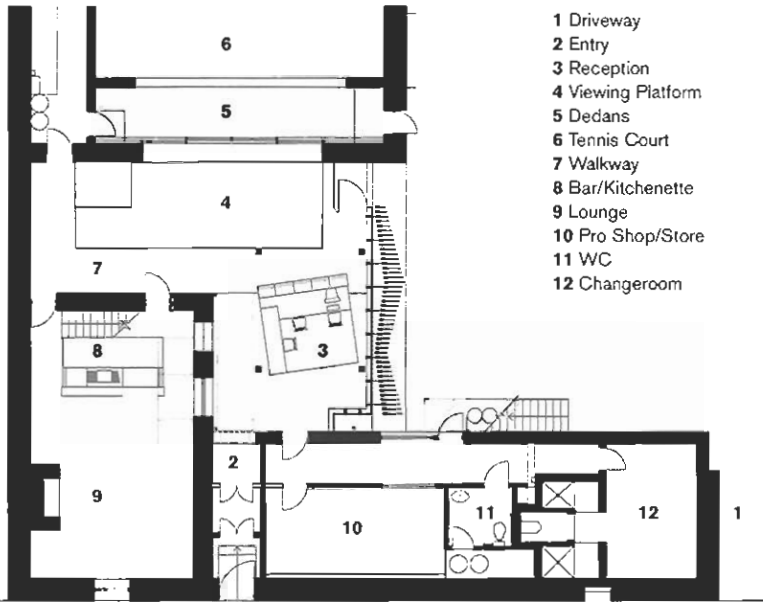


REAL (PREVIOUSLY ROYAL) TENNIS is a mysterious game and one that has defied contemporary internationalising trends. It is the origin of contemporary lawn tennis but played on indoor courts that, unlike their modern standardised progeny, share similar general characteristics but vary in detail and material. The balls, for instance, are handmade by the pro of each court – imagine that on the pro tennis circuit! Then there are the rules. Usually, as in tennis, you would return a “good” ball to win the point, but not always. It’s possible to have points frozen, and you get a free point if you hit “the grille” (at Hobart a picture of a monk) or a number of other strategically placed targets (not

unlike world cup cricket these days). *Real Tennis* is a game of negotiations and strategies rather than one of simple winners. The courts themselves look more like the inside of a Masonic temple with secret signs and symbols, mysterious floor markings and strange, oddly shaped ash racquets lying about. These characteristics give the sport a wonderfully medieval air in our age of hi-tech sports gear, commercially packaged and manufactured in carbon fibres, titanium and lightweight alloys. The new entry to the Hobart Real Tennis Club by H2O architects provides a contemporary proscenium to this medieval spectacle. One in which even the novice feels an itch to pick up a racket and have a swing at the monk.

The court in Hobart was first constructed as a private tennis court in the backyard of Samuel Smith Travers in 1875. It was passed on to a group of interested friends several years later and the Hobart Real Tennis Club was born. Two years ago the club created a strategic plan to help modernise the facility and to bring the game into the 21st century. As a key component of that plan, they engaged ex-member and real tennis player Tim Hurburgh from the Melbourne based H2O Architects to create a new front entry and reception for the club. At the same time they wanted to improve visibility of the court itself so that on-court activity became an integral experience of the building. This was no easy task.

Opening spread and top: The striking pine screen to the entry provides shading to the north facing glass wall. Middle and bottom: The tennis club is housed by a set of old stables and the original tennis court structure. Opposite top: A new space between the two principal buildings creates the reception and gallery/foyer. Middle: The ‘dedans’ (end viewing gallery) is accessed through the set of glass sliding panels. Bottom: The clubrooms of the old stable now open out to an outdoor deck



Ground Floor Plan

The club is made up of two main buildings: a set of old stables on Davey Street and the court itself. In the tight space between these sat a small external courtyard and a labyrinth of corridors and bathrooms. There was also a difference in floor level to be resolved. The existing buildings are masonry, a mixture of brick and sandstone, and of heritage significance. *H2o's* solution was to clear away the extraneous infill and to insert a new piece between the two principal buildings. This created space for a new reception and gallery/foyer on the ground floor and an outdoor deck on the roof cradled between the second floor of the old stable (now clubrooms) and the high wall of the court. The feeling of the old stable entry was preserved by introducing a glazed skylight that maintained the view to the gable of the court building previously gained from the outdoor courtyard.

Having removed the clutter, the solution, like all good solutions, was a simple and elegant one. A glass box encloses the space with sloping concrete floor, taking up the difference in floor heights. Level timber boxes are placed onto the slope to accommodate the two key functions: reception and foyer/gallery. The architects have been brave in this respect, ignoring contemporary obsessions for eliminating "trip" hazards in what amounts to a myopic dulling down of our built environment. The changes in level between sloping concrete surface and

horizontal timber floor in this project are sensibly aligned with columns and other spatial markers that give strong cues to the level changes undertoot. What lifts this project above the ordinary, however, is a twisting celery top pine screen that provides a striking entry façade and fulfils three functions: shading to the north-facing glass wall; a handrail to the roof terrace; and support for an existing grape vine of historic value to the club.

The most significant alteration to the existing fabric was to create a six metre opening through the wall of the court to visually connect it with the foyer. A set of glass sliding panels allows the *dedans* (end viewing gallery of French origin) to be extended out through the new opening to include the foyer space. When you enter the building now, this opening acts like a proscenium to the court, heightening the sense of theatre and drama associated with the sport.

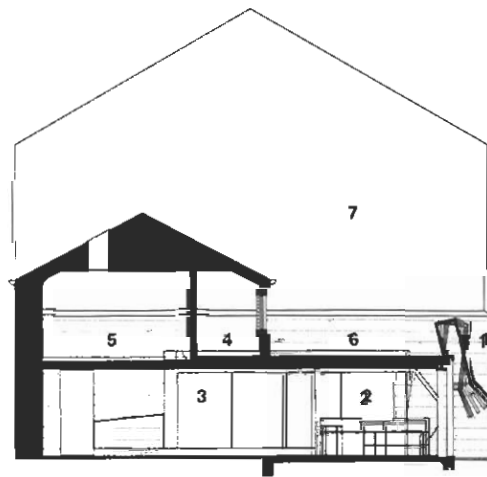
As a series of spatial manipulations, this is an extremely elegant piece of architecture that solves complex issues and creates a delightful new entry to a previously less accessible club. There are some shortcomings in the detail, however, particularly the resolution of the new proscenium opening into the court and timber screen of the entry façade. The concrete structure of the new opening, necessary for carrying the masonry above it, has been rendered as sandstone blocks complete with joints and tooling marks. In fact, at a craftsmanship level it has to be said >>



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Above: The screen provides a visual connection to its heritage surroundings. Middle: The top of the entry screen provides the balcony handrail. Bottom: Detail of the celery top pine screen.



- 1 Celerytop Pine Screen
- 2 Reception
- 3 Viewing Platform
- 4 Shower
- 5 Men's Change
- 6 Roof Terrace
- 7 Existing Tennis Court

Cross Section

>> that this has been done with consummate skill. The problem is that it confuses new with old. To the trained eye, the new opening is nonsensical – masonry just can't span like that – so it fails to achieve the subtlety of other more considered elements. The same problem has been tackled with far more success in other areas: for example where new windows have been installed they are made from clear finished celery top pine to distinguish them from the original painted windows. To be consistent the opening in the court wall might have been rendered as a smooth surface to distinguish it from the surrounding masonry. The front screen elegantly twists through its section to create a dynamic entry screen but there are some additional misalignments that are due to unresolved detailing and

problems with manufacture: these will no doubt disappear under the tendrils of the advancing grape.

This project is exemplary of the Tasmanian architectural problem: surprisingly in-tact heritage buildings that quite often accommodate uses dating back almost as far as the building stock itself. This combined with small budgets and skilled tradesmen who are able to stretch the 'pot', means that delightful results like this one at the *Hobart Real Tennis Club* are achievable. Call in if you are in Hobart, it's worth a look both for the architecture and to get an insight into the mysteries of an engaging sport. See you in the *dedans*. MSO

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(contract administration)*