

AASA REFEREED DESIGN SCHEME 1999 - 2000



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AASA Categories A+C

THE MASONIC CLUB OF TASMANIA

Refurbishment: Boutique Hotel

Drawing together past and present in a single space...

This project involved the refurbishment of an 1847 English Gothic private school building of national heritage significance. The practice was approached by the Masonic Club of Tasmania, seeking ideas for the commercial development of the largely disused upper level of their building. Feasibility studies were prepared for a number of options, with the preferred option of a boutique hotel approved for implementation in early 1999.

While the hotel option was the most feasible commercially, the quality of the existing space was also most suited to this new use, with small attic areas - containing significant original fabric that could not be removed or destroyed - happily converting into small hotel suites, continuing the viability of the building into the new century. An architectural strategy verging on the sculptural, placing installations in each of the existing rooms, enabled the transformation of the existing spaces into fully appointed hotel suites. A new contraption containing a robe and kitchenette formed the centrepiece of each new installation, which also included the bed and side tables, connected by a single steel armature.



A number of challenges were presented by the project, not least of which was the budget available to convert a tired, one hundred and fifty year-old stone building into nine sparkling, fully appointed hotel rooms, a new stair, lift, a new roof and assorted repairs to the original fabric. On a positive note, the support given by the client to a young practice keen to test inventive architectural strategies must be noted, as it smoothed the path for the realisation of a design which far exceeded the clients original expectations.

RELATIONSHIP OF THE PROJECT TO ITS SITE AND CONTEXT

As the new work was internal, the relationship of the new work to the 'site' focused on the social history, memory, previous uses and architectural details of the original building, as opposed to any contextual issues outside the site.

The re-use of dormitory rooms as accommodation recalls their original purpose. The new work, while contemporary in nature, goes further than a simple old versus new dichotomy. An architectural language that encompasses and accommodates aspects of the original spaces and details, and re-presents these as part of the new work, emerges in the form of a series of contraptions, or sculptures that are installed into the existing spaces. The recovery of original wallpaper, forgotten stone finishes and pressed metal ceilings are all drawn into the composition and framed by it. Thus, a richer reading is possible than if a strategy of simple contrast had been adopted.

The architects use of the *contraption* as an architectural element saw a rejection of a more typical hotel room fitout in favour of a sculptural strategy that saw each room as an installation. The requirements of a modern hotel room - kitchen, storage, bathroom, shelving and bed - are brought together as a single sculpture that inhabits the space. A prototype sculpture - developed from the two main suites - was modified and adjusted to various permutations to suit each of six different room sizes and types.

Formally, the new work investigates a space between the particular formal language and strategies being developed by the practice and the particular circumstances of the spaces and details that form the site. Cupboards and beds are seen as sculptures, located where the materials and finishes of the *old school* were tested against both the programmatic and formal requirements of each sculptural element, the layout of the spaces, any extant historic fabric of note and the design for the steel armatures that support each sculpture.

COST EFFECTIVENESS

The project saw a speculative development driven by a modest organisation in Australia's slowest economy. This is to say that cost issues formed a central part of the design criteria at every stage of the project. Despite the severe cost constraints the architects have achieved a custom designed solution that is perhaps unusual in Tasmania due to the economic and budgetary restrictions. All the new components are custom designed by the architects, with the exception of bathroom fixtures.

The main strategy - inserting sculptural elements into the rooms - released the architect from the requirements of *making good* much of the historic fabric, allowing the decay to continue around the new installations. Design of the individual elements also saw cost as a central issue. The cupboards are constructed from off the shelf veneered MDF with edge strips and handles deleted to save costs, instead painting all edges and making slots in the face of cupboards to allow them to open. Basins were selected on the basis of the cheapest that fitted with the design intention, with money saved allowing taps to be finished in chrome.

Perhaps the key area of cost effectiveness was in the strategy adopted for the introduction of services into the spaces. A heritage requirement of minimising impact to existing fabric led the architects to design a suite of painted timber elements spaced from ceilings and walls, and onto which all power outlets, heaters, sprinklers, light and so on are placed. Thus, penetrations into the existing fabric is minimised while introducing a new architectural element that bridges between the existing detail and the new work. The journey of conduits and so on between these new elements occurs along the main sculptural insertions, which are also self-contained in terms of lights and switching.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY

To build, or not build? This was perhaps the single most significant environmental question asked on this (as in most) refurbishment projects. Should the existing fabric be adjusted to suit new uses and demands or should the building owners sell up and move on? In the case of the Masonic Club of Tasmania the latter solution would also have discontinued an association of over one hundred and fifty years between building and user, seriously compromising local cultural history, an important consideration in any sustainability debate.

From day one Reimuth Blythe Balmforth terroir worked closely with the client, property advisers and cost consultants to create a development proposal that recognised the historic value of the Masonic Club's tenure of the old Hutchins School building and that aligned new uses with these existing spaces, volumes and historical uses. The values (and potential pit falls) of this approach are outlined in Design Strategies Note 11 of the RAlA Environmental Design Guide. In the end, the re-use of existing space with minimum material alteration to the configuration of the existing building both ensured the longevity of an important cultural association and the realisation of a new commercial inner city development at a total energy cost far less than for a new or substantially altered building.

ORGANIZATION OF SPACES AND FUNCTIONS INSIDE AND OUT

The historically significant intactness of the 1847 building, with its variety of room configurations, presented the project with a variety of hotel suite types, to suit the clients desire to offer both deluxe and budget accommodation facilities to their affiliate membership in the nine accommodation rooms. Large loft and chamber rooms allowed a full expression of the inserted contraptions to suit the requirements of a boutique accommodation facility. Smaller rooms provided an opportunity to adapt the *contraption* idea to form bunk-beds and small storage facilities around the room's perimeter for budget travellers.

An existing dumb-waiter shaft presented an opportunity to incorporate a small passenger lift with only minor alterations to the building fabric in door penetrations at each level. This facility allows easy access for an aging membership to the upper floor accommodation level, considering the steep existing stairs prevalent throughout the building.

STRUCTURE, CONSTRUCTION, MATERIALS, SERVICES

The integration of services was undertaken in accordance with the building's 1996 Conservation Management Plan. The services required for a commercial accommodation facility were carefully incorporated within the upper level floor and ceiling by raising floorboards, thereby minimizing damage to original lathe and plaster ceilings. Switching was placed on plates off the walls as wall penetrations were prohibited. Similarly, ceiling plates were utilized to minimize the amount of penetrations in ceilings, especially important in the bunk-rooms pressed metal ceiling.

Although not required, the 1847 building had a full sprinkler service installed to permit future expansion of the accommodation facilities, which would therefore necessitate a full sprinkler serve throughout. The incorporation of a sprinkler service also provides protection to the historic, irreplaceable building fabric. Whilst penetrations and alterations to the existing building were minimized, specialist historical engineering advice was sought to minimize damage to the often deteriorating building. Door penetrations were kept to a minimum, generally to permit access to the passenger lift and stainless steel pins were necessary to stabilize the stone parapet capping when the deteriorated roof was replaced.

SUMMARY OF THE STATEMENT OF CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE, CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT PLAN, 1996.

The original Hutchins School building (101 Macquarie Street) is significant, at a national level, as the earliest purpose built school building in Tasmania. The original Hutchins School is particularly significant considering the degree to which the building is in its original condition.

The Masonic Club complex (181-183 Macquarie Street) is significant, at a national level, for the ability of the complex, as a whole, and the Original Hutchins School in particular, to contribute to the understanding of the inception, growth and conducting of the private church education system in Tasmania, and its ability to inform our understanding of the people and events that contribute to the growth of Tasmania.

The Masonic Club complex (181-183 Macquarie Street) is significant, at a state level, for the rare ability of the original Hutchins School Building and the Christ College Building, together, to demonstrate the development of the Gothic revival styles.

The Masonic Club complex (181-183 Macquarie Street) is significant, at a state level, for the strong cultural and social associations of past Hutchins scholars to both the original Hutchins School Building and the later Christ College building. Amongst this group are many notable members of Colonial Tasmania's ruling patriarchy, both government, elected and unelected, and the clergy. In post-colonial times the Hutchins School had associations with many notable past scholars.

