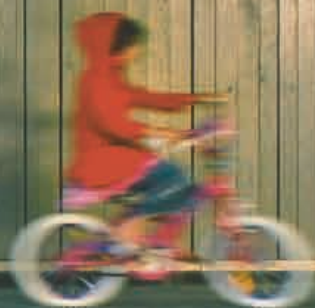


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Architectural Review Australia



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commonwealth place kiosks



architects

Ferriro

photography

Brett Boardman

text

Leon van Schaik



01

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architect's statement

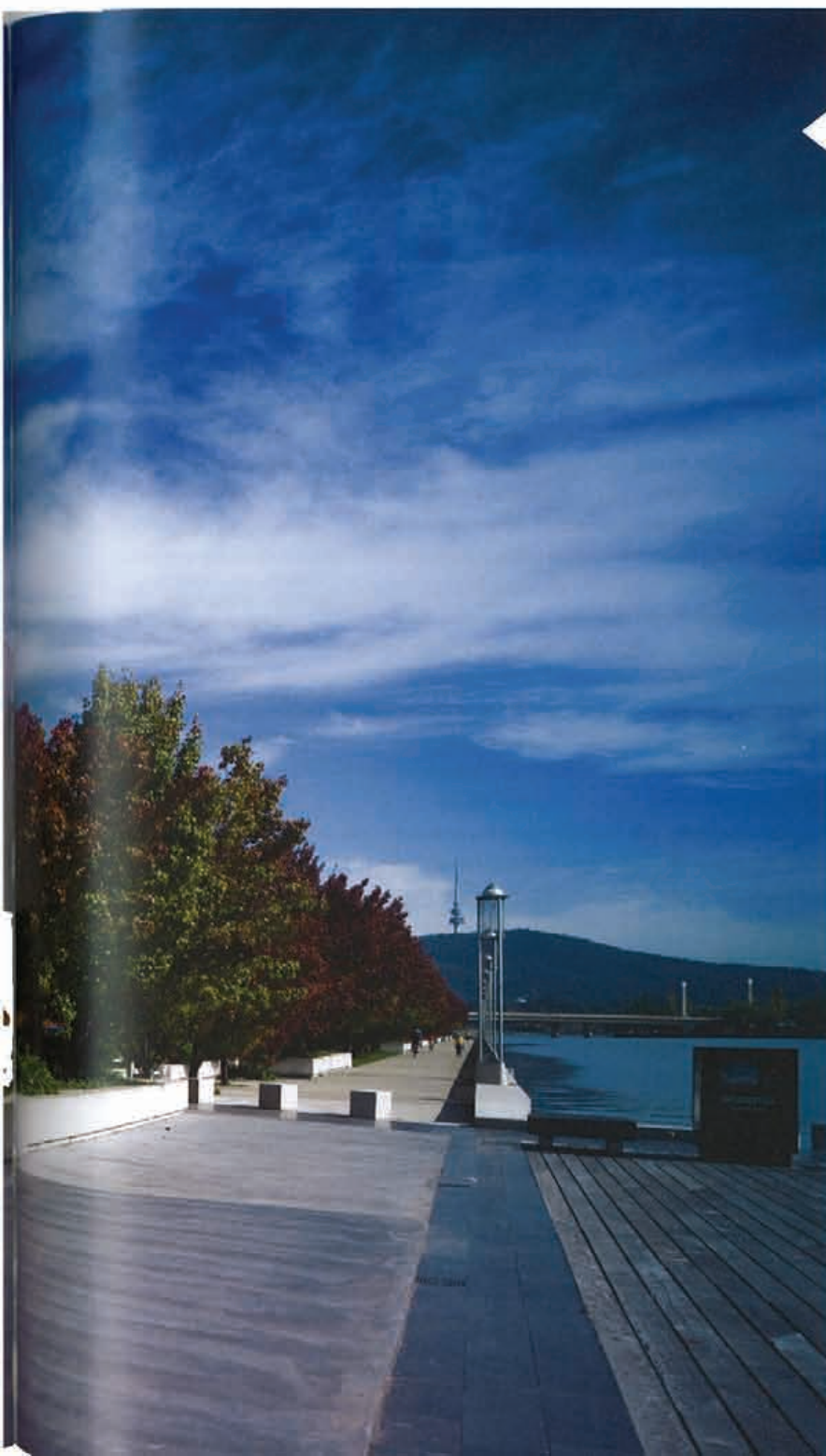
Canberra is distinctive in international terms as a planned city and seat of government. At the centre of the planning geometry sits Parliament House, the foreground of which consists of a range of buildings containing Australia's major public institutions – a sort of 'architectural zoo' including masterworks such as the High Court and National Gallery. The conceptual framework for the kiosks was generated from questions we asked in response to this context. How does one install a toilet and kiosk just metres from the central axis connecting our Parliament and lake? What is an appropriate form for an ice-cream stand seen at a distance with Parliament looming on the horizon? These questions explored the tensions that existed within the brief and provided an engine that drove siting, planning and detail solutions.

The decision to locate a small public amenity in this context was a positive gesture intended to increase the daily use of the Parliamentary Zone, building on other recent works such as the adjacent jetty. With this brief, however, came a risk that an amenity building would adversely affect this context given its prominent siting. In the context of this risk, we started to understand the amenity building in terms of its potential as a public sculpture (but which could also sell ice-creams). The uncanny nature of the planned city resulted in the realisation of the sculptures as blank timber boxes installed within this largest of sculpture parks.

The sculpture was locked to the stand of trees where they terminate either side of Commonwealth Place, capping an existing piece of landscape infrastructure. By cladding the buildings in timber, we could gather together the adjacent trees into a constructed object. The finish of the timber object in grey stain locates the sculpture between the material quality of the cladding (which is perceived at close range and in relation to the jetty) and the larger responsibility to relate to the adjacent institutions (the concrete forms of which are seen in relation to the kiosks from a distance). This tendency to a singular sculptural response resulted in the consolidation of all program elements (kiosk, toilets and covered area) into a single gesture. The result is a solid timber 'T' – a formal resolution that further distances these objects from the prosaic reality of their use.

While the building is a result of these precise observations, the risk with such an earnest approach is a lack of wit or joy. So, rather than employ formal or detail embellishments from outside the project, we chose to push the logic of the siting and context observations – Griffin's overarching geometry of the city plan is pushed to its limits in the slight geometric perfections that register in the object, while a studious extension of the immediate context resulted in a cluster of tubes located according to geometric rules driven by the adjacent trees. The colours of the tubes filtering and dispersing light are based on the tonal range of the autumn leaves of these trees, connecting object back to its formal landscape context.

02



03



04



05



06



commonwealth place kiosks

Is there a more highly charged public zone in Australia than the Anzac Parade-Federation Mall axis that runs from the Australian War Memorial to the Parliament Houses, old and new? The Parade to the north-north-east of Lake Burley Griffin is slowly accreting monuments to Australian valour, while the Federation Mall has hosted (and probably will again) the Aboriginal Tent Embassy. A considerable architectural twitchiness seems to afflict the National Capital Authority (NCA) where the Mall reaches the lake. The shoreline has been inflected with a long arced edge separating into two an avenue of Acers that are beginning to provide shade to those who cycle or walk along the lake edge. Durbach Block's Commonwealth Place buttresses the intersection of the axis with the water, guiding the virtual line from Old Parliament House through a chasm and releasing it into a grassy catenary curve that holds in its two raised wings a café and an information centre. These seem not to have fulfilled these hoped for functions, perhaps because a road of sorts divides them from the foreshore walk and staging.

Be that as it may, Commonwealth Place holds at bay the High Court of Australia, which looms above it, the National Gallery of Australia and the National Portrait Gallery that can now be seen crowding in on the old ensemble and the axis. The National Science and Technology Centre and the National Library press less heavily from the other side of the axis. Into this field, placid looking but bristling with intent, Terroir has been commissioned to construct two lock-down, lock away, pavilions that house foldout café serveries, a little bicycle storage and some lavatories. Terroir's answer is two 'T' shaped buildings with one arm of the 'T' extended to provide cover – top lit through highly coloured cylinders of varying diameters – for the foldout functions. The buildings are symmetrically placed, wide enough apart not to interfere with the view of Commonwealth Place from the far shore

01. 02.

While vaguely monumental in form, the kiosks have been built at a human scale.

03. 04. 06.

While the muted tones of the buildings' fascias lend an almost taciturn air, stepping below the generous cantilever, visitors are confronted with a riot of autumnal colour, a playful nod to neighbouring trees.



of the lake. The plan form is aligned with axes taken from the centre of Capital Hill, which makes them imperceptibly rhomboid – a fact that will enliven the tales told by tour guides in years to come. These pavilions clad in grey timber with recessive detailing have a distinctively Scandinavian air about them, or so it seems to me, a critic who has in the past seen signs of Gunnar Asplund's lakeside Stockholm Exposition of 1930 in Commonwealth Place. As a day passes, however, the grey cladding takes on precisely the same hue as the eucalypt forests on the surrounding horizons, and this makes an unexpected visual link to that other remnant of Australian idealism – the dwindling rain forest of the eastern seaboard.

The pavilions are carefully scaled to seem to be natural end-stops to the lakeside avenue, and trees drawn in plan have had a vestigial effect on the design of the tubular top lights that so reverse our experience of these 'cool' stumps by engulfing us unexpectedly in a riot of red and orange when we step into their deeply cantilevered shade. All is not what it seems here in the heart of our not-so-Scandinavian-after-all democracy, and these innocent pavilions are also constructed with national security in mind. The design conceals measures to make them blast proof. In lock-down

mode in the early morning light it is, as you walk towards them, difficult to determine the scale of these asymmetrical 'T's, but their human scale becomes evident as you reach them and slide in under their sheltering arms.

That intimate immensity is I believe appropriate for this site, where everything has a potential significance well beyond its immediate import, merely because it triangulates with the monumental, the institutional and the politic. The temptation to load any designing here with signs of such portent must have been considerable. In the event what Terroir has provided is tactful, recessive at first sight but forceful enough close up and in use to hold its own in this rather humourless terrain. The paradox is that these pavilions are indeed for us, the people, supporting our casual, possibly ineffectual, sticky-beaking around this place of giant ambition. To cycle along the foreshore and experience seasonal change, and buy a drink, or use a lavatory – that is support for us, outside the bastions of power that loom around. Good that the NCA pursues this duality – it is a small shard of what James Weirick has identified (*Transition* Nos 27/28 1989, pp 8-66) as the founding principle of the Mahoney Griffin design that set the city going – even if their libertarian vision proved illusory. **ar**

05.

While newcomers to the outside "sculpture park" of Canberra's Parliamentary Zone, the kiosks are far from precocious, but establish themselves within the solemn surrounds with tact.

Commonwealth place kiosks

principal architect Terroir Pty Ltd **project team** Gerard Reinmuth, Scott Balmforth, Richard Blythe, Tamara Donnellan, Nic Fabrizio, Anita Morandini, Matt Skirving, Moritz von Stuenzner, Emma Trask, Natalie Ward **project facilitators** Steensen Varming [Australia] Pty Ltd **structural engineer** Hughes Trueman **electrical engineer** Steensen Varming [Australia] Pty Ltd **hydraulic engineer** Hughes Trueman **quantity surveyor** Page Kirkland Group and Donald Cant Watts Corke (ACT) Pty Ltd **builder** Manteena **subcontractors** TMC Contracting, Weldcraft Engineering, Custom Plumbing, J&W Electrical, Hawker Roofing, BA Lentfer Building Contractor, Ceramic Dimensions, ANA Painting Services **size** 230m² **time to complete** Construction – 36 weeks **certifier** BCA Solutions **client** National Capital Authority **design software used** AutoCAD **cladding** spotted gum timber **roof** metal profiled roof sheeting, Lysaght Custom Orb with Colorbond Ultra finish; spotted gum timber deck roof glazing **guttering** custom formed box gutter with Colorbond Ultra finish **paint** timber stain: Cabot's Hacienda Grey decking stain; Skylight tubes: Dulux exterior low sheen acrylic **doors** operable wall stacking system, HAWA Variotec II **ceiling** plasterboard **internal walls** plasterboard; tiles Hydrotec surface coated tile by Agrob Buchtal **paint** Dulux interior low sheen acrylic **flooring** concrete.