

CRYSTAL HALL ARCHITECTURE

Project Brief

Rachel Neeson said the Crystal Hall needed to meet a range of project objectives required by the Australian Museum.

Architecturally, it should provide maximum transparency (recasting the Museum as an open living room); respect the historic fabric of the Museum; provide an additional new 120 square metre outdoor 'hall'; allow flexible use now and for the future – reception by day, new function centre for Sydney by night; be environmentally intelligent; have capacity for display and projection; and, provide continuity of the William Street curtilage as a landscaped whole.

Functionally, it should: be equally accessible to all; re-orient the building back to William Street; and accommodate visitors queuing comfortably and safely within the AM site.

Internally, it should improve the use of spaces within the existing Museum, including significantly enhancing internal circulation, and allow the reinstatement of the old College Street entrance as a part of 630 square metre gallery.

Architect's Statement

The Australian Museum, founded in 1827, is the first museum in Australia. Sited at the corner of William and College streets, the Museum forms part of the eastern threshold to the city. In its early years entry was via a driveway off College Street. The College Street entrance, originally designed as a secondary access point, became the main entry almost by default as the larger William Street entrance was never realised.

This project re-orientates the Museum back to William Street. It reinforces the ground floor as the primary public reference point, and begins to actively participate in the street life of William Street as its primary frontage.

The Crystal Hall is a new transparent entry pavilion to the Museum that accommodates 'welcome', ticketing and out-of-hours functions. It sits in front of the beautiful blank sandstone façade of the Parkes Farmer Wing, set back 2.5 metres from it for light and breathing space.

The most significant feature of the new entry is its main façade to William Street - a bespoke crystalline screen - that balances the need for transparency (showcase) with environmental management. An abstracted crystal, it hints at what you might find inside the museum itself.

The Museum Walk is a 4.5 metre ramp that provides access to the new entry from the existing College Street gateway. The ramp is set back from the historic sandstone facade and rises as floating pavement of bluestone, similar in size and tone to the city's flamed granite public domain.

The Crystal Hall plugs gently into the museum complex with a connecting bridge that slides into the glazed 'gap' to the Lewis Wing.

The hallway inside the Museum has been streamlined to improve visitor flow and wayfinding. Part of the timber-lined wall is opened to reveal the highly significant sandstone fabric of the historic Lewis Wing, and the new bluestone flooring creates a much needed visual calmness.

MEDIA CONTACT

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The Sheltered Garden is a new 120 square metre 'public outdoor room' created below the Crystal Hall through the removal of the empty substation building.

Key Sustainability Features

Crystal Hall incorporates both passive design features with an active environmental control strategy.

Passive Design features include:

- A state-of-the-art, triple-low-E, double-glazed façade selectively allows daylight in but reflects short wave and infrared heat.
- An internal screen on the northern façade comprising 48 adjustable crystalline blades are used to shade internal spaces from direct solar glare.
- A secondary internal blind system is installed as backup to the north, east and west.
- The crystalline blades also absorb solar radiation (in the same way as external shades would), which is vented through the roof.
- Light fittings are low energy.
- Materials are robust and befitting of a public institution – glass, stainless steel, steel, zinc and bluestone – with as much sourced locally as possible.

Active environmental control strategies include:

- A chilled/heated floor removes solar load as it hits the bluestone, while also providing winter heating, allowing the hall to operate in a naturally ventilated mode for 95 per cent of the year.
- An air-conditioned outdoor supply air system provides spot heating and cooling under peak conditions, or if the space is being used for a function.
- A solar photovoltaic system has been installed on the roof of the main museum to offset the hall's energy use.

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Key Dates

The Australian Museum's Crystal Hall was commissioned and successfully completed in less than 14 months. Tenders were invited in June 2014, with the project completed and officially opened on 9 September 2015.

Project Team

- Client: The Australian Museum - Kim McKay AO Executive Director & CEO
- Government Architects Office: Peter Poulet, Lindsay Turner and Darlene van der Breggen
- AM Project Manager: Michelle Dunn
- Project Manager (construction): Dean Gavrilovic (Signature Project Management)
- Architect: Neeson Murcutt Architects Pty Ltd – Rachel Neeson
- Architect-in-Association: Joseph Grech Architects – Jo Grech
- Building Contractor: Kane Constructions Pty Ltd - Thomas Taylor + Daniel Hjortflod
- Engineers (ESD, electrical, fire, hydraulic, life, mechanical, reflectivity, JV3): ARUP – Haico Schepers
- Engineers (structural/civil): SDA Structures

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