



Mt Alvernia College: garden settings reflect St Francis' love of all things natural

ET Staff

Twelve months after completion of the Anthony Building and La Foresta Garden in Stage 2 of Mt Alvernia College's development masterplan, the vines are climbing up the trellises, the olive and lemon trees are thriving and the veggies are being harvested day by day for Home Economics classes.

The Catholic girls secondary school in suburban Kedron, Brisbane, has a student enrolment of 800 and was established in 1956 by the Franciscan Sisters, with a single room and ten students.

The relationship between the new buildings and the three surrounding gardens; a community garden, a garden for gathering and a recreation garden, reflects the school's Franciscan history – St Francis' love of the natural world and the importance of the relationship between humankind and nature.

The substantial productive garden forms the front entrance to the school, flanked by administration, the Carceri, lunch area, cafeteria and home economics. It is a place of learning, nourishment, productivity and beauty. Much of the gardening, including looking after the

chooks, is the girls' responsibility, with a garden manager to keep everything on track.

The main social space sits adjacent to the cafeteria, La Cucina, and releases north into the garden. Conceived as an oversized floating picnic rug, it is broken up with a multitude of columns that create spaces within the whole that are popular focus points for groups to gather.

In total, the project includes 20 classrooms, six laboratories, three home economics spaces, commercial kitchen and cafeteria, administration, the Carceri prayer space, a roof terrace, and the community garden. The

buildings and grounds



buildings themselves structure the garden, resulting in a sympathetic relationship between indoor and outdoor spaces.

Counter-intuitively, given Brisbane's heat and humidity, the Anthony Building faces East / West. This catches cool breezes from nearby Moreton Bay with fabric drop down sunshades on both sides to keep off direct sun and many fans throughout the building, which is not airconditioned.

Project architect Michael Banney says: "In keeping with the Franciscan 'close to nature'

philosophy, we have used natural materials wherever feasible; all of the doors and windows are timber.

"The girls are on holiday during the hot December and January weeks and for the rest of the year, the sunscreens and fans keep the sun off and the air moving. In the cooler months, sweaters and blazers are sufficient to keep the girls warm.

"We have a beautiful serene and comfortable environment without the high cost of airconditioning." **ET**

Mt Alvernia Masterplan Invested to date

\$20 million, funded by government grant and Catholic Education

Stage 1 La Verna

Completed in January 2014

Four levels. Total floor area including covered external 2092 sqm

Stage 2 Anthony and La Foresta

Completed in January 2015

Anthony including covered external areas 5444 sqm

La Foresta garden and front landscaping 1972 sqm

Future projects

Redevelop and/or refurbish original buildings when required to cater growth in school population