

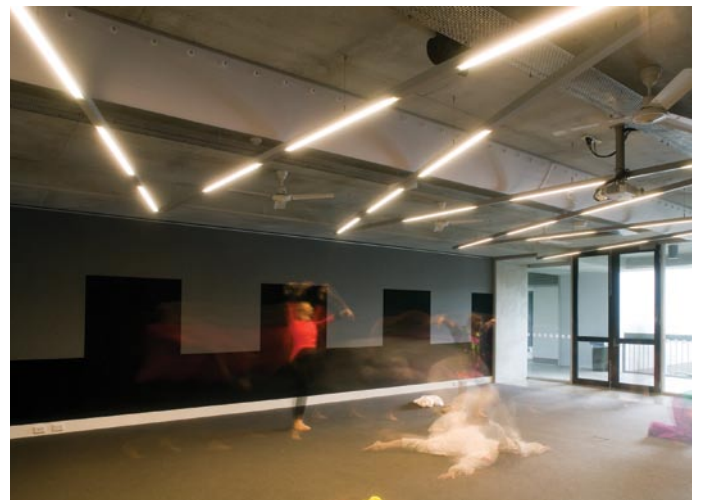
buildings and grounds



A nexus for creative learning. . . foresight, drive, passion and commitment

Brisbane Girls Grammar showcases its \$25 million Cherrell Hirst Creative Learning Centre

Photography Jon Linkens



Clockwise: Principal Ms Amanda Bell; Top right Bands rehearsal and performance room; Bottom right Drama room

Brisbane Girls Grammar School (BGS) has been educating young women for more than a century. During that time the world changed more than most people could ever have imagined.

According to the executive staff at BGS, now more than ever before, the arts and creative thinking and culture are essential components to the vital teaching and learning process.

The fact that the school did not have a unique area dedicated to the creative arts, in spite of the fact that it already boasts dynamic spaces for the sciences, health studies and an enviable library, was therefore an issue which required special attention.

That gap in the school's capabilities was filled in April last year when the \$25 million Cherrell Hirst Creative Learning Centre was officially opened, after 17 months of construction.

Designed by m3architecture, the six-storey building has won the FDG Stanley Award for Public Architecture, received an Interior Architecture recommendation and received the 2008 Brisbane Housing and Construction Award for Education Facilities over \$12 million.

The building – which brought the previously

dispersed disciplines of music, drama and art together under the one roof – contains rehearsal and performance spaces, flexible learning areas catering to group or individual learning scenarios, a 'technology floor' that includes "generous provision for interactive media", a refectory, covered terraces, a café and casual meeting areas.

BGS principal, Ms Amanda Bell, said the building had allowed the creative arts to truly become the nexus for creative learning and was specifically designed to take into account the way young women learn in a collaborative and social fashion.

"Girls frequently use the break-out areas outside the classrooms for group rehearsal and discussions and the large drama spaces are exceptional for exploring movement and whole class productions," she said.

"The Centre's flexible learning spaces also enable teachers to enrich the experience for girls through cross-curricular integration and hybrid performances."

M3architecture was able to hit the nail so squarely on the head thanks to the input of the school's staff and board and their vision about

what the centre should accomplish.

"It was essentially the principal's and the board's vision to build not just a warehouse box with classrooms but to create a well considered investment in the future of quality education for girls at this school," Ms Bell said.

"This building represents a 65% expansion of learning and social spaces and represents the foresight, drive, passion and commitment of a number of key individuals in the school community. The design and completion of this exceptional building is the fruit of a successful partnership between architects, school staff, parents and students."

The centre's success is more astounding still given the respect, which the new centre had to pay to the pre-existing and historically significant school architecture.

The centre's unusual visual form is, in large part, designed to provide a vast number of social spaces to promote interaction between students and to also "preserve sightlines to and from the school's historic foundation buildings".

It is this design philosophy, which really stamps the centre's success as both an architectural and educational, feat. It simultaneously addresses

Science

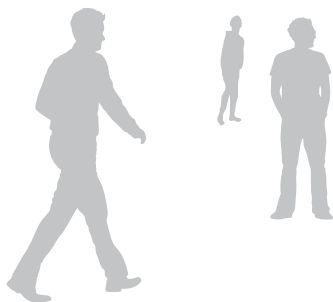
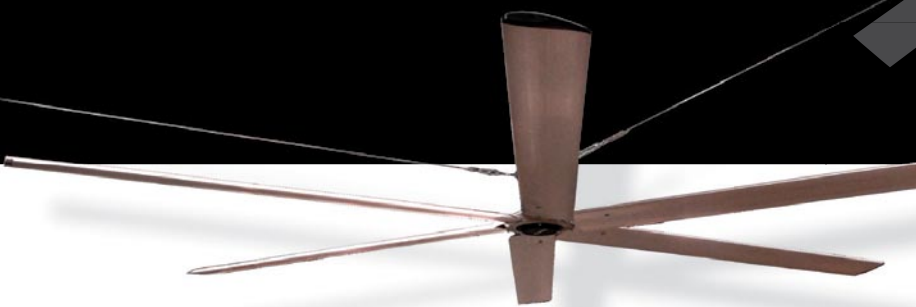
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Top: BGGGS' technology facility is state of the art, right: Students have taken to the new spaces

the requirements of a previously homeless stream of the curriculum, the way adolescent girls learn best and preserves the character of the pre-existing site while successfully bringing the centre into the 21st century.

While architecture awards are welcome, the kudos that was always going to be most important to the school was going to come from the students, who have left no doubt as to the worth of the centre and its place as the school's latest educational centre.

"The centre is amazing!" says 2006's Head Girl, Sarah Cowley said. "It has inspired a new energy among the girls."

And for BGGGS Principal, Ms Amanda Bell, that is what matters most.



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