

**MEDIA RELEASE  
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### **The Australian Ballet's new home takes centre stage for design**

The Australian Ballet is one of the world's leading ballet companies and has delivered sell out performances for over 50 years and, naturally, their home needed to reflect their legacy.

Located in the heart of Melbourne's Arts Precinct, the \$13 million refurbishment by HASSELL set out to expand and renew, and to enable The Australian Ballet facilities to operate at the same level as their performances.

The HASSELL design focuses on five guiding principles; transparent, bold, form, Australian, and layered. These principles allow The Australian Ballet staff and dancers to express their talents on and off the stage, while reflecting the Ballet's disciplined, ambitious, and flexible nature. The diverse, brave and determined attitude of Australia was imperative to the brief, as well as ensuring the space will support the development and long-term needs of The Australian Ballet through a functional yet inspiring environment.

HASSELL Senior Architect, Greta Stoutjesdijk, explains that it was imperative to get this rare project right to ensure the future of Australian Ballet remains of a world-class standard.

"This was such a unique opportunity to not only work with, but contribute to the future of a world leading performing arts institution. These projects don't come along often, so ensuring we successfully delivered the individualised facilities and personality of The Australian Ballet's new home was imperative," Greta said.

The unique needs of the dancers were met by subtle details integrated into the design. The centralised white circular staircase connects the two levels, specifically designed wide enough for two dancers in tutus to pass each other without a costume disruption, while the circular shape mimics the ribbon from a ballet shoe twisting up the ankle.

In a twist of focus, the production staff are no longer hidden behind the scenes; there are plenty of open-plan common areas and workstations visible from public areas. This also allows both staff and dancers to cross paths throughout the working day, while the frosted glass pavilions create silhouettes of movement through layers and openings, heightening the mystery and privacy requirements of the dancers.

HASSELL Senior Interior Designer, Leah Hudson-Smith, explains that HASSELL worked closely with Fibonacci Stone to develop a bespoke terrazzo tile that connected the levels and functional spaces, inspired by the soft pink hues and silk of the ballet shoe.

"The material choices had to be hard wearing, high performing and functional in nature. We used the colour pallet of these materials to soften the space throughout, adopting a minimal frosted white, light grey and salmon hue with the occasional bold accent of deep navy blue," Leah said.

The large rehearsal space can contain the size of the State Theatre stage to ensure fluid correlation between rehearsal and performing. The roof was also raised to ensure plenty of room for lifts, and to signify the company's existence within the family of the Melbourne arts centre.

Functionality and theatre were combined for the pointe shoe store, which demonstrates the cycle of a dancer's tour schedule. Each glass box within the custom unit is home to the shoes of one dancer, who go through a large number of shoes, sometimes up to three per performance. As the productions are rehearsed, and taken on tour, the pointe shoe store depletes and grows throughout the year.

With a variety of different spaces catering for 110 staff members and 79 dancers (with capacity for future expansion) the new space also includes a public boutique café, specialist medical facilities, and a world-class recovery room including above ground ice bath to aid in dancers rehabilitation.

"The Australian Ballet has so much colour and life themselves; we saw the building as a canvas and an opportunity for their personality to take centre stage. We are proud of the result and can't wait to see what magic is produced within the space," Leah said.

**ABOUT HASSELL**

HASSELL is a leading international design practice with studios in Australia, China, South East Asia, the United States of America and the United Kingdom. We judge the success of the buildings and places we design by the way people use and enjoy them - the clients who commission them, the people who inhabit them. Good design is about helping clients meet their needs and objectives. It is also about the way people feel when they experience it, a sense of meaning, connection and belonging.

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