

Words —
Marcus Baumgart

Photography —
Derek Swalwell

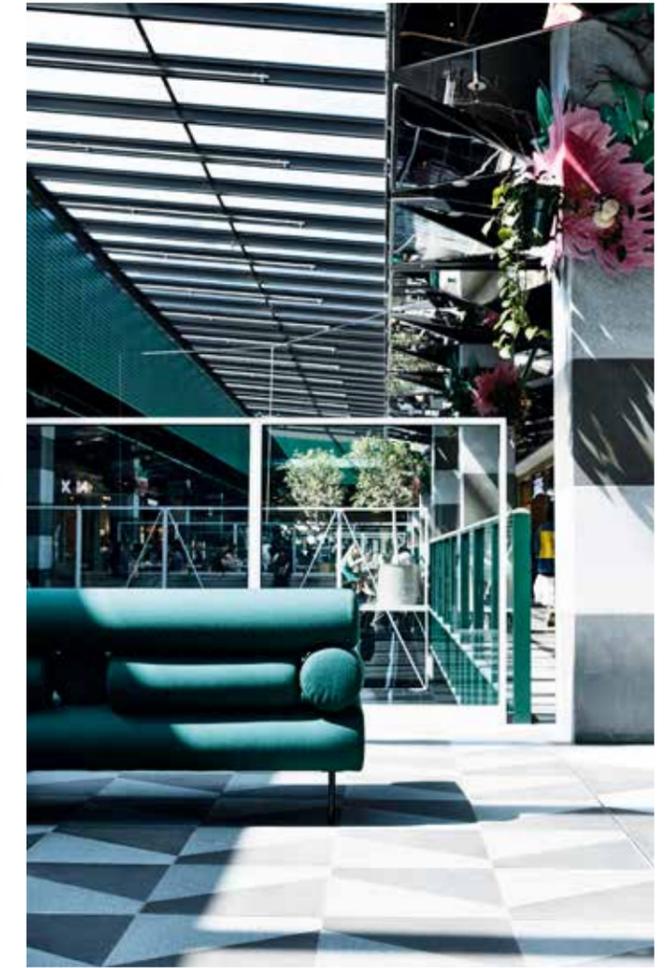
Melbourne Central

Melbourne architecture practice Kennedy Nolan has revitalized the public arcades of Melbourne Central, strengthening the centre's character and heightening the user experience.

Arcade

Right — Kennedy Nolan has created a visual environment that eschews the architectural language of the conventional shopping centre.





How do you draw complexity from a twenty-millimetre thickness of skin, with little recourse to three dimensions? This is the question that Rachel Nolan, principal at Kennedy Nolan, posed on our visit to Melbourne Central. It was one of the challenges faced by the practice in its design response to the vibrant shopping hub's arcades, the lower levels of which it had previously worked on.

The site itself supports enormous streams of pedestrians, and the masses of people walking through it bring vibrancy and life. The flow is constant; the centre is anchored at one end by a busy railway station deep in the basement, and at the other by the elevated and ground-level links to another shopping hub, Emporium Melbourne. From that point, pedestrians can continue south down the retail "golden mile," via department stores Myer or David Jones, to Bourke Street Mall and beyond.

Following on from the earlier work by ARM Architecture, Kennedy Nolan was to redesign and revitalize the public arcades of Melbourne Central, an important link in a chain of retail density and shopper movement. It also needed to achieve this with little physical intervention or change, hence the quip about the twenty-millimetre skin, which refers to all surfaces – on floors, columns,

walls and ceilings. Kennedy Nolan has succeeded in "activating," to use a tired phrase, or perhaps more correctly "visually animating," the interior spaces of the mall's southern extension and the links to Emporium Melbourne. This has been achieved primarily through the clever application of a new skin, one that employs repeated pattern, mirrored reflections of horizontal and vertical surfaces, and the judicious application of the calming colour green.

In the Kennedy Nolan scheme, pattern is king. For Melbourne Central, the repetition of geometric shapes is a key technique that has been used on the flooring to mark the high-traffic thoroughfares on each level, without introducing unnecessary physical barriers. A different pattern in the natural stone flooring occurs on each level, giving each an individual character; the result is almost Byzantine in appearance. Pattern has been applied so that its appearance varies depending on the viewpoint: the view across the zigzag stripes of the upper level is distinctly different to the view from the balconies, where the geometry coalesces into a more seamless whole.

Pattern, and the aforementioned reflection, occurs in the ceiling plane as well. Fixed to the ceiling of one promenade,

a sequence of triangular mirrors alternates with a series of convex, round mirrors. The tableau reflects the movement of shoppers from multiple levels below and brings a visually ephemeral dynamic to the ceiling plane.

The two-level bridge link that connects Melbourne Central and Emporium Melbourne has been converted into an informal working hub on one level and a green space on the other. In addition to the use of pattern and reflection, the decision to convert the lower level of the bridge link into a relaxed co-working and study space brings animation to the volume. Previously a sterile, empty passageway, with a shiny tile floor, the co-working hub now provides low tables, desks and robust task chairs arranged around columns, with power points for charging laptops and mobile phones. Indeed, at least two casual meetings were being held in the hub when I visited on a Wednesday morning, complete with laptops and open briefcases. It's a scene not typically encouraged in shopping centres, where any opportunity for profit and trading space is sought.

The upper level of the bridge offers a different kind of respite. It has been converted into green space, with a snaking

bank of plants. The beds of palms and greenery seem at home in the warm, sun-drenched space. In winter and the mid-seasons, it will be an appealing place to rest from the shopping grind. Year round, it will be a great vantage point from which to look out onto Melbourne's busy Lonsdale Street. To this end, fixed binoculars on steel posts, as one might find at a viewing platform, have been positioned on the bridge for a bit of harmless voyeurism.

Shopping centres are changing. Their role as de facto public spaces and piazzas is emphasized when they are populated by masses of commuters, using connecting railway or subway stations, as is the case with Melbourne Central. As retail centres undergo their regular and cyclical renewal, the skin of the space – if not the physical components – has many powerful possibilities, and the interplay of pattern and reflection is a rich vein to explore. Kennedy Nolan has breathed new life into these spaces through the agency of its twenty millimetres of skin. But beyond this we see, as with the inclusion of the co-working hub, the ongoing blurring between consumer and non-consumer, between private and public activity. We'll have to wait to see what's next in the transformation of retail space and the public realm. [A](#)



“In addition to the use of pattern and reflection, the decision to convert the lower level of the bridge link into a relaxed co-working and study space brings animation to the volume.”



Page 110 — Pattern, colour and reflection help to bring a dynamic and ephemeral quality to Melbourne Central Arcade.

Page 111 — Loose and fixed furniture pieces create places for respite, study, conversation and work.

Opposite page — The bridge link that connects Melbourne Central and Emporium Melbourne has been converted into an informal working hub on one level.

This page — The upper level of the bridge has been converted into green space, with snaking beds of plants. Fixed binoculars give visitors the opportunity to look out onto busy Lonsdale Street.



Retail



Left — The robust and expressive use of steel, stone and timber adds to the sense of durability and civic scale and quality.

Project —
Melbourne
Central Arcade
Lonsdale Street
Melbourne Vic
melbournecentral.
com.au

Design practice —
Kennedy Nolan
61 Victoria Street
Fitzroy Vic
+61 3 9415 8971
kennedynolan.com.au

Project team —
Patrick Kennedy,
Rachel Nolan,
Michael Macleod,
Jack Lawrence, Alex
Christos, Hugh Goad

Time schedule —
Design, documentation:
9 months
Construction: 9 months

Builder —
Probuild (arcade),
Otto Construction
Group (bridge)

Structural engineer —
Irwinconsult

Services engineer —
ADP Consulting

Fire engineer —
Norman Disney
and Young

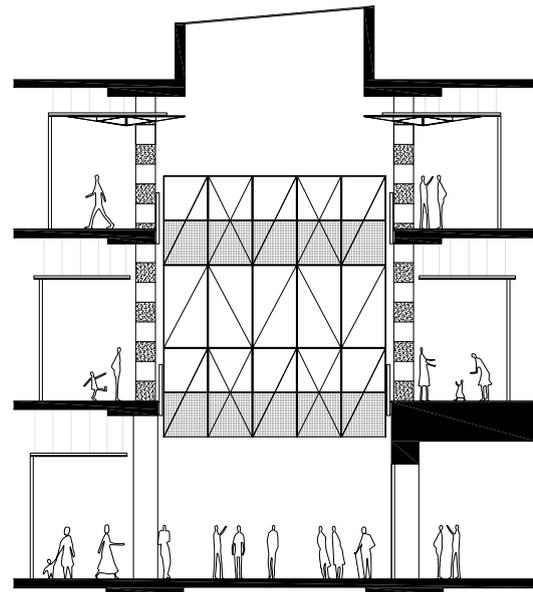
Project manager —
TSA Management

Lighting —
Point of View,
ADP Consulting

Public art consultant —
Openwork and
Sally Smart

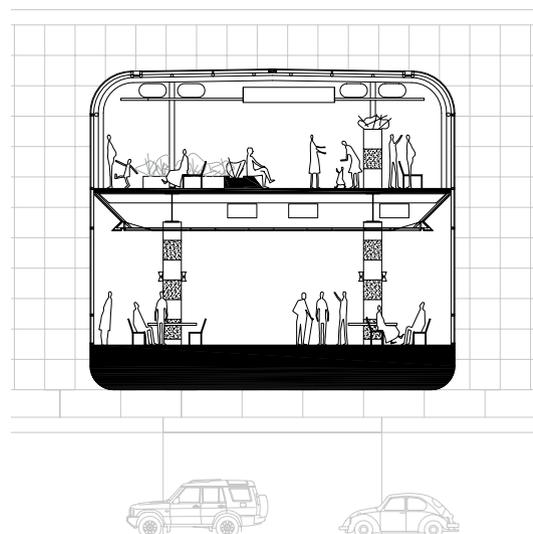
**Construction
documentation
(bridge) —**
I2C

Products —
Flooring: White
and green granite,
and bluestone tiles
in sawn finish. Figura
Epoca Classic carpet
from RC+D.
Ceilings: Aluminium
battens used on arcade
ceiling. Stainless steel
mirror panels used on
bridge level one ceiling.
Cedar battens used on
bridge level two ceiling.
Furniture: Custom
fixed timber tables
by Kithe. Cabin Booth
and Lounge seating
by Design by Them
(in arcade). Pallissade
Lounge Chair and Sofa
by Ronan and Erwan
Bouroullec for Hay
and About a Chair
AAC 26 by Hee Welling
for Hay, all from Cult
(in bridge).
Other: *Emerald Lady*
art collaboration
by Sally Smart
& Openwork.
Balustrades and
steelwork painted in
Dulux 'Norfolk Green.'



Melbourne Central Arcade section 1:250

0 2 4 m



Melbourne Central Arcade bridge section 1:250

0 2 4 m