



**Media Release**  
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**Lyons design red hot**

With the opening of the new RMIT Swanston Academic Building (SAB) next week, the Melbourne-based architecture firm Lyons confirms its status as one of the nation's most significant design practices.

Lyons has recently completed the Melbourne Brain Centre building in Royal Parade Parkville, and the design for the Australian Institute of Architecture's new headquarters at 41 Exhibition Street, which is currently under construction. Other notable buildings in the Lyons design portfolio include the BHP Billiton Global Headquarters Building in Melbourne, the new Colleges of Science at the Australian National University in Canberra, and the new Queensland Children's Hospital.

Lyons has become known for its commitment to design that champions ideas and engagement.

The standout building for RMIT in Swanston Street combines a striking visual presence with an interior that has been described by early visitors as "like being Alice in Wonderland".

The 11 storey building is RMIT's biggest ever new teaching and learning facility, with a ground floor area of 35,000m<sup>2</sup>, 12 lecture theatres, 64 teaching spaces and 10 specialist learning venues.

The building features a two-storey cantilevered student portal that overhangs Swanston Street, 9 double-height student portals for informal study and "hanging out", landscaped 'sky' gardens and an innovative mix of teaching and office space on all levels of the building to encourage more interaction between staff and students and retail outlets on Swanston, A'Beckett and Stewart Streets.

The multi-coloured exterior features double glazing and sunshadows which contributes to the building's sustainability performance as well as adding to RMIT's unique vision as a design leader in Melbourne.

Lyons director and RMIT alumnus, Adrian Stanic, said SAB has been designed by Lyons to connect to the city with "a sense of openness, transparency and energy".

"The idea of RMIT's pivotal role in the student and research life of central Melbourne has been an overriding theme in the building's design.

"The very centrality of the site to the city became a defining element in the design, shaping the building's footprint and form. And the sightlines from the building at each level played an integral part in the design of its student spaces, which connect the building to its surrounds.

“We saw the site as the focal point and looked at how lines radiate from it to the other landmark buildings that define Melbourne.

“By plotting these radial lines back to the site we created a process that generated the shape of the building footprint, and the form of the walls.

“Then we put a crane on site, and hoisted architectural photographer Dianna Snape up to each level, so she could take shots of the central vistas from each of the 11 levels.

“The key sightlines became the student “portal” points on each storey, which bring the outside in, and connect student activities inside the building with the most important views architecturally.

“In this way we have created a design that not only places the building at the very heart of Melbourne architecturally, but also reflects and embraces the broader architectural legacy of the city,” Mr Stanic said.

The design reflects an extensive consultation process with a wide range of academic staff and students to inform the shaping of the future teaching and learning spaces.

Long known for its architectural work in the educational and healthcare sector, other prominent Lyons design projects include the current redevelopment of the Royal Hobart Hospital and the LaTrobe Institute of Molecular Science.

Lyons’ thoughts on architecture and urban design are detailed in a recently released monograph on the practice’s work over the past 15 years. The 484-page publication, **“More, The Architecture of Lyons, 1996-2011”**, published by Thames & Hudson, presents images, plans, sketches and notes from Lyons’ key projects across the country.

An exhibition on the Lyons practice is currently being held at the Wunderlich Gallery, Architecture Building, University of Melbourne, as part of the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning’s Alumni Retrospective Series. This annual series celebrates the work of faculty graduates and highlights the exceptional contribution they make to Australia’s design culture and built environment.

Titled **IDEA BUILDING**, the exhibition installation creates an imperfect 'not quite right' copy of the Lyons office – the place where the practice's ideas are built and made to work - within the gallery space, located somewhere between the artificial and the real. The exhibition explores the construction of ideas in architecture, through the collaborative work of many people, and the enterprise which persuades the practice that an ongoing exchange between ideas and the making of architecture is neither wasted nor exhausted.

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