



Can you design emotional intelligence into a workplace? The trail-blazing EY Centre in Sydney gives it a red hot go, with a human-focused approach to both the development and design of the building.

High EQ

Mirvac headquarters at EY Centre, Sydney by Davenport Campbell
Words *Paul McGillick* Photography *Various*

EY Centre's appeal proved irresistible for Mirvac which, half-way through the development process, decided to locate its headquarters across six floors of the building.



The key word here is 'integration' because the development process was so fully integrated that the design of Mirvac's own workplace over six vertically connected levels of the building was always going to be an extension of the building fabric itself.

Mirvac owns the land and was both developer and builder. They are also 50 per cent owners of the building as well as managing it and being its own tenant. From the beginning, the whole development process was highly integrated and client-responsive. The project also represented a major shift in commercial building development: from designing buildings to designing for the people who would work in those buildings, prioritising the needs of individuals over the companies who employ them. It was this process which influenced Mirvac to move its own headquarters into the building. Mirvac itself – as designer, builder and developer – is a highly integrated organisation in which all parts of the company need to work together and it was this model that was applied to the development of what was to become the commercial tower known as the EY (Ernst & Young) Centre, designed by architects, fjmt. It was a highly consultative process involving all the stakeholders, including both employees and future tenants. This was particularly the case with Mirvac's own tenancy, with Mirvac employees consulted throughout the process, which enabled the design team to develop a thoroughly customised workplace.

A Humanised Workplace

This was an approach which aligned perfectly with Davenport Campbell (the designers of the Mirvac interiors) because, in recent years, the practice has honed a strategy aimed at producing bespoke

environments tuned to the specific needs of each individual business. For example, Davenport Campbell has come up with Seven Principles of Human Design Thinking for Workplace Design, consisting of: Not everyone works in the same way; humans work to a natural cycle; create place, not space; help people do their best; everything effects emotions; make people feel safe to work differently; and use technology to enable people to interact. Consistent with this approach, Davenport Campbell set up the Living Lab for Mirvac, a pilot space which gave Mirvac employees the opportunity to 'test drive' the new workspace while giving the designers the opportunity to evaluate feedback and modify designs as necessary.

The floorplates are designed to allow teams to connect not just horizontally, but also vertically, making the building inherently disposed to promote flexible work practices. This is supported by the fact that the EY Centre is a 'smart' building where technology constantly monitors air quality, sunlight, power and water usage, while automatically adjusting the internal environment for the optimum comfort of its users. This begins with the innovative closed cavity façade with its golden internal timber louvres, which optimise natural light and connection to the outside without compromising internal comfort. A 'smart tenancy' app and interactive display screens help both visitors and employees make the best use of facilities, providing guidance through the building and updates on room availability, among other features. Similarly, data management has taken a 'human-centred' approach, which enables Mirvac to analyse, assess movement, collaboration and workspace utilisation to optimise overall use.

While vertical connection is commonplace these days, the Mirvac workspace has made the connecting staircases – which provides

Page 92 & above: Floorplates are designed to connect teams horizontally & vertically, Photos: Katherine Lu. Page 95-96: The golden sheen on EY Centre's closed cavity façade is owing to its light-optimising timber louvres, Photos: Gareth Hayman & Brett Boardman, courtesy of fjmt. Page 98-99: The striking lobby artwork by Judy Watson, Photo: Brett Boardman, courtesy of fjmt. Page 100: The building's modelled form & use of natural materials blends into its urban context, Photo: Demas Rusli, courtesy of fjmt.

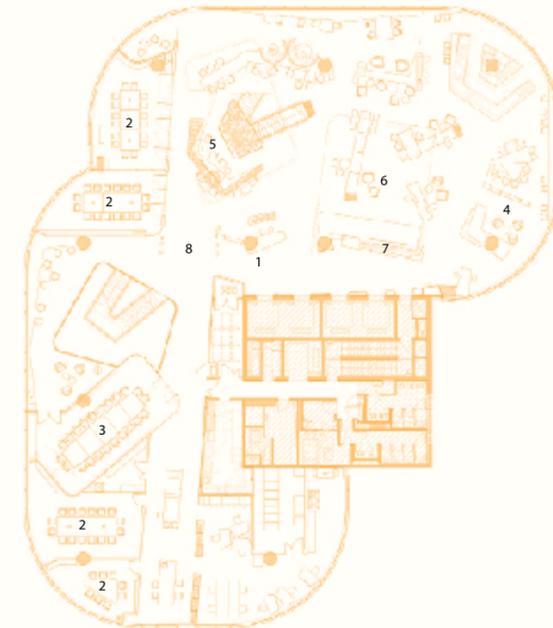


Magic Windows

The building's closed cavity façade provides enormous thermal, aesthetic and acoustic benefits. This is the first time the system has been used in Australia and the first time in the world that a closed cavity façade has used timber louvres. From the streetside, the window system contributes to the building's unique soft golden glow. Together with its gentle organic form and use of timber mullions and folded timber planes of the ground plane awning, this inviting palette makes the building appealing within an otherwise harsh cityscape. The louvres automatically adjust to changing conditions outside, controlling heat and light transfer into the building.

Mirvac headquarters,
Level 28 Floor Plan

- 1 Arrival & welcome
- 2 Meeting rooms
- 3 Boardroom
- 4 Lounge & café
- 5 The contemplation garden
- 6 Gallery
- 7 Insights wall
- 8 Main street



both a physical and visual connection between all six levels – pivot around each of the floor functions. Activity points around the staircases include presentation spaces, encouraging interaction, spontaneous informal meetings and a sense of constant, productive activity. Effectively, it is Mirvac's own version of activity-based working and uses a now common urban planning model for the overall organisation of the workspace. However, this is a much less gridded version of the town model usually seen, one informed by the rounded end forms of the floorplates. Hence, while there is a central, common area with associated multifunctional spaces and a 'main street' connecting all the 'neighbourhoods', there are also minor streets which lead off to intriguingly configured networks of work spaces.

The hub of each floor is the Town Hall, a communal space with cafés, designed to bring employees together informally. Then there are the 'neighbourhoods' which consist of meeting rooms and offices clustered around a 'main street' and offering sit-to-stand and drafting-height desks, conventional workstations, quiet spaces, synergy points and collaboration pods. The detailing, which includes everyday decorative objects housed in bespoke shelved joinery, is warm and natural and aims to promote a home-away-from-home atmosphere.

Mirvac's aim was for a high performance workplace customised to suit the diverse but integrated activities of the company. Mirvac was also aiming to engender gradual behavioural change, a cultural transformation to match the emergent integrated model the company is driving.

Mission Accomplished

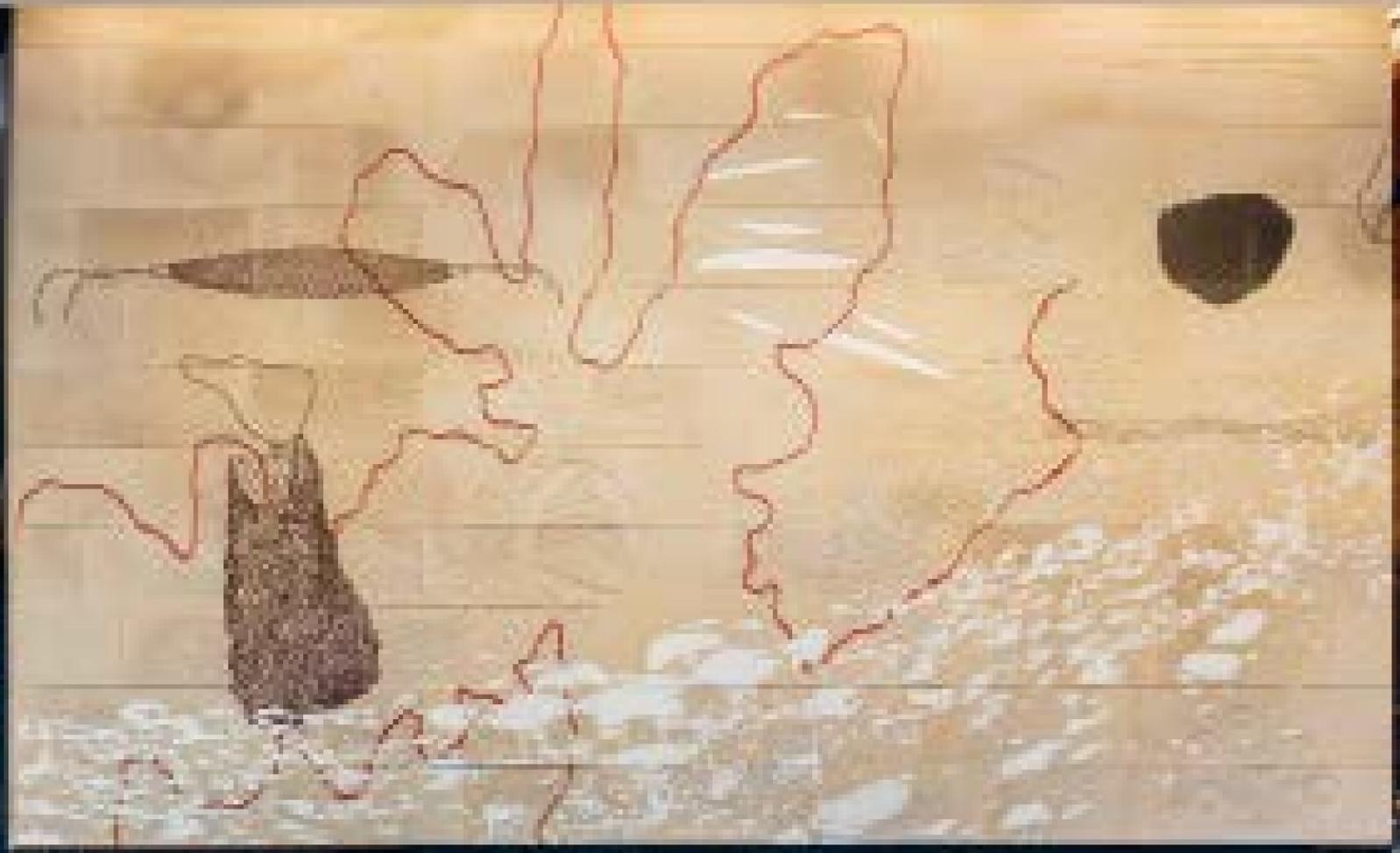
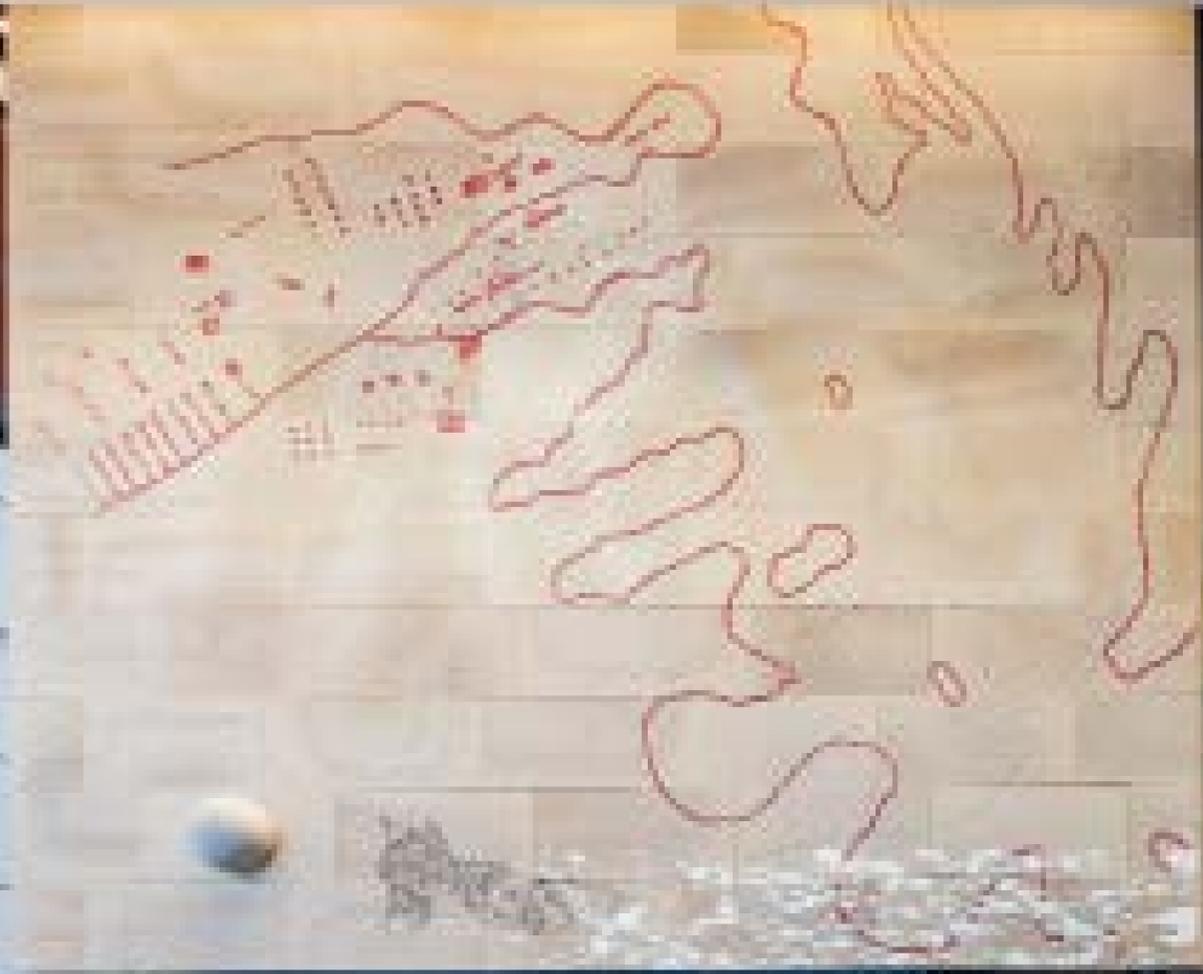
Mirvac's program manager, James Harvey, comments that Mirvac "has become more efficient with space, reduced our carbon footprint,

turned into a highly mobile organisation, formalised flexibility into policy, and produced a happier and more engaged workforce... It's also given staff a stronger sense of productivity as line-of-sight management is a thing of the past. Outcome-based roles are now in line with a cultural shift, but they still need to be managed correctly with constant communication."

Supporting Harvey's reflections, The Building Occupants Survey System Australia tool was used to measure Mirvac's employee satisfaction. This showed a 35 per cent improvement for overall health performance, health and productivity (the building includes generous end-of-trip facilities). Noise distraction and privacy scores improved 50 per cent as did spatial comfort scores. Satisfaction with visual aesthetics increased from 30 per cent to 91 per cent and the perception of how workplace positively influences health increased from 33 per cent to 88 per cent compared to the previous offices.

As commercial projects go, they don't come more integrated than Mirvac's headquarters at the EY Centre. Starting with Mirvac itself as a multifaceted property development company, then to the base building which integrates into its contemporary and historical cultural context. From there, Davenport Campbell's fit-out was able to take advantage of an exceptional building fabric to design a high performance workplace, which is nevertheless homely, relaxing and inclusive. Or perhaps this is actually why the space is so efficient: it generates such a sense of physical and emotional well-being, backed up by state-of-the-art technology – so the people working in it are inevitably more productive and creative.

davenport-campbell.com.au, mirvac.com



EY Building a better working world

Lobby 10-00

Lobby 10-00

10-0000

Holistic Sustainability

We often forget that sustainability is an ecosystem including environmental, economic, social, emotional and cultural aspects. The EY Centre adopts a holistic approach. It is fully LED-lit, SAMBA sensors monitor air quality, lights are programmed to vary brightness and darkness to maintain optimum circadian rhythms... and the building recycles its own water! The building has extensive end-of-trip facilities, high levels of natural light, high volumes of fresh air intake, improved air quality through a combination of active chilled beams and V.A.V.D. systems and the use of low-VOC materials. As a 'good neighbour' it references the forms and materials of key nearby buildings while its modelled form and use of natural materials ensure it does not impose itself on its urban context. It celebrates its cultural heritage by reproducing the outline of the former foreshore and through a striking lobby artwork by Judy Watson, using sandstone quarried from the site. More than 23,000 archaeological artefacts were recovered prior to construction; a selection is permanently displayed in glass vitrines in steps outside the building, itself an innovation in how to design interpretive displays in commercial buildings. It's no surprise, then, that EY Centre has received a Gold WELL Rating, 6-Star Green Star Rating for Office Design for the Mirvac fit-out, and is targeting 6 Star As-Built Green Star Rating, 5.5 NABERS Energy Rating and 4 Star NABERS Water Rating.

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One way to engender a paradigm shift in organisational culture is to shed one's old skin and seek out new horizons. Pioneers of change, design directors Sandra Furtado and Niall Durney are taking Crone Architects on a journey of transformation that starts with people and place.

Youth-filled Energy

Crone Architects headquarters by Crone Architects
Words Paul McGillick Photography Katherine Lu

Think of Crone Architects and you probably think of high-rise commercial buildings. But Crone has been quietly re-inventing itself, led by young design directors, Sandra Furtado and Niall Durney. Hence, the practice has recently completed small-scale projects like the Orange Regional Museum (winner of the Sulman Medal for Public Architecture 2017), and The Connection – Rhodes Community Centre. Although at 850 square-metres with a 7.2 metre floor-to-ceiling height it is anything but small-scale, Crone's new studio at Sydney's World Square is a stunning metaphor for an architectural practice renewing itself. Its huge space and fully glazed north-facing façade make it unique among architectural offices and it acts as the physical analogue to Crone's cultural shift.

Crone had been in its Kent Street premises for 25 years where the staff were spread over three levels with little connection between the practice and visiting clients. So, they began to search for a new location. "We were keen," says Durney, "to find a space that could speak for itself and we really liked the heritage of Transport House in York Street." But it suddenly became unavailable, prompting them to follow up on a tip to check out the Ernst & Young (EY) commercial tower at World Square, designed in fact by Crone back in 2005.

At the time, Level 18 (just above podium height, but with grand views north down George Street) was being used as EY's mail room. It was dusty and dirty with "giant compactors dotted around the floorplate".

"We came here on a rainy day," recalls Furtado, "and there was this beautiful light. You could see the mist outside and hear the rain hitting the window." They saw the possibilities immediately, especially the potential to be emblematic of the practice's accelerating cultural shift.

"I call this the warehouse in the sky," she says. "It gives you a sense of being in a creative, collaborative space, like an industrial space."

A limited budget probably helped because it led to a very simple design solution, allowing the space to do most of the talking. From the lifts there is no foyer as such and the visitor turns the corner to have the exhilarating double-height, light-filled space reveals itself. A monochrome grey carpet complements otherwise industrial elements, along with the beautifully understated oak detailing as the visitor walks past glazed meeting rooms and the working architects to an expansive end space with a large communal lunch table and the boardroom off to one side.

"We are trying," says Durney, "to design an office which is agile and design-focused. The thing about the fit-out is that everything looks very temporary. It's a light touch within the space." Crucially, everybody gets equal light and the space is flexible to allow for a constantly changing practice.

It is an exciting, yet reassuringly calm and quiet space which successfully communicates the new culture – one which Furtado calls holistic, design-driven but emphasising the need for the architects to be across all aspects of design and buildability. "We ended up," says Durney, "hiring 35 staff in the space of two years. A huge regeneration." It means they have a lot of young staff, including a lot of people from Europe – Durney himself is Irish/French and Furtado Portuguese. This was not by design, but it has contributed to a major shift in the culture of Crone Architects.

crone.com.au

Opposite: The office opens to dramatic views pointing north to the city.
Page 134: Double-height ceilings and exposed detailing contribute to that 'warehouse in the sky' feel.

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