

Cowes Primary School Gymnasium by Project 12

Cowes, Victoria, Australia

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Scientia Terrace at Monte Sant' Angelo Mercy College by Hayball

North Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

Words by Peter Bain • Photography by Martin Mischkulnig

Situated on a sweep of native bushland on Bunurong Country, Phillip Island, the gymnasium at Cowes Primary School is a colossal, nature-oriented light box that takes a leaf from its surroundings. Designed by Melbourne-based architecture firm Project 12, the space echoes the landscape it inhabits by way of a minimalist expression and thoughtfully framed views.

The lodestar for the design was clear from the outset, with the previously under-utilised bushland being the starting point. In an effort to coalesce the space with the surroundings, Project 12 principals Aimee Goodwin and Louis Gadd pared the palette down to a bare minimum through the use of neutral, translucent materials. The result holds a mirror to the sylvan environs while affording a humidity-resistant shell that is low on maintenance yet high on impact.

The architecture is underpinned by a simple rationale. A single-storey volume, housing a kitchen, entry and changing rooms, stands to the north, and nearby, in the music room, a raised platform provides

a stage for performing arts, presentations, assemblies and school events. The pool serves as an interlude between nature and the built form, acting as a placid antidote to the expansive double-height court flanking the bushland. Completing the indoor-outdoor experience is an external teaching space that lets students interact with each other and the landscape in a natural, unfettered milieu.

The structure distinguishes itself on either side of the threshold. Across the interior, multiple windows present carefully edited panoramas that hark to the outdoors, while the exterior, emblazoned in Danpalon glazing, serves as a beacon from afar.

The completion of the gymnasium has galvanised the community on the island. Prior to its construction, there was just one other public basketball court, but now, by way of local alliances, member groups are encouraged to convene and use the facility outside of school hours. This is a place where learning isn't limited to an age or space. Everybody is equally welcome.

Unveiled in May 2023, the Scientia Terrace at Monte Sant' Angelo Mercy College is at the forefront of educational design. Developed by renowned architect Hayball, this six-level structure located in Sydney's north is a state-of-the-art sports, innovation, science, social justice and enterprise hub. Its opening has marked a pivotal moment in the transformation of the Monte campus, ushering in a new era of enriched learning and boundless inspiration for current and future students.

Beyond its physical structure, Scientia Terrace embodies the convergence of innovation, social responsibility and educational excellence. Woven into a meticulous 50-year master plan created by Hayball, the facility seamlessly integrates cutting-edge learning technologies with a deep respect for the site's heritage and the enduring legacy of the Sisters of Mercy.

This multifaceted hub encompasses specialised laboratories, a distinguished Scientist-in-Residence program, a dedicated social enterprise and innovation hub and versatile learning and outdoor

spaces. Going beyond the confines of traditional educational spaces, Scientia Terrace cultivates an environment that encourages exploration, creativity and interdisciplinary collaboration.

At its heart lies the Social Enterprise Centre, a hub of innovation and ethical commitment. Housing an innovation workshop, pitch space, 'Fab lab' and a Fair Trade cafe, the centre epitomises the fusion of creativity, commerce and global awareness. It serves as a platform where students actively design, test and manufacture goods with ethical considerations, with the Fair Trade cafe acting as both a showcase and a means to raise awareness of global equal working conditions.

As Hayball principal and NSW studio lead Dave Tordoff explains, "when a site can offer a seamless experience of mixed-use design, it enriches a user's experience physically, emotionally and socially." Scientia Terrace goes beyond a typical education facility – it represents the transformative power of architectural innovation in education, creating spaces that inspire, connect and foster a sense of belonging.