



120 Collins Street Hassell

Location Melbourne, Australia

Words Vaishnavi Nayel Talawadekar **Photography** Peter Bennetts



Some things get better with age – though, as Ingrid Bakker, the principal, board director and co-leader of the commercial and workplace sector at Hassell, will attest, they sometimes need a little help along the way. Such was the case with 120 Collins Street, a landmark skyscraper on the storied street in Melbourne’s CBD, originally completed by Hassell in association with architect Daryl Jackson in 1991. The ground floor and entrance had gradually lost their lustre, and to restore the 35-year-old spaces to their former glory, Hassell returned to lead the transformation, creating a revitalised, future-facing experience that pays homage to the original while meeting contemporary expectations.

If there was one thing Hassell was intent on doing differently, it was scaling up the entrance to evoke a sense of grandeur upon arrival – one that would honour the building’s stature while better accommodating the flow of people. This invitation extended skyward, with the studio introducing a series of stainless-steel and glass canopies in the lobby that frame the view above. “It’s my favourite feature,” explains Bakker. “Natural light pours in through the skylight and the reflection of the adjacent church off the stainless-steel canopies creates a unique atmosphere. The views of the church, combined with the way the space draws people in and has become a central gathering place, make it quite special.”

Bringing a softer, more human-centred touch to the architecture, Hassell wove in a rich palette of biophilic features. In addition to abundant greenery, the firm introduced a sunlit sky terrace that sits on top of a glass atrium, framing panoramic

views of Melbourne and providing a distinctive venue for gatherings. Cyclists and other active commuters are thoughtfully accommodated with purpose-built changing rooms and showers discreetly located beneath the lobby. Step outside and the tempo shifts – a peaceful courtyard, shaded by trees and furnished with ample seating, offers a welcome retreat from the city’s bustle. These interventions are complemented by adaptable communal zones, considered hospitality offerings, a balance of formal and informal meeting spaces, and premium end-of-trip facilities, which together create a workplace that gently transitions into the comfort and ease of a home-like environment.

But the remodel was not without its challenges. “One of the obstacles during the design process was discovering the poor condition of the heritage brickwork at the rear of the Professional Chambers building after we removed the cladding,” explains Bakker. Fortunately, this discovery inspired some resourceful solutions, enabling the team to stabilise the original structure while preserving its historical integrity with careful restoration. “We worked closely with the builders to repair and refurbish the original brickwork,” says Bakker. “It’s now a really important element in the main foyer, creating a wonderful sense of warmth in the space.”

Blending contemporary sensibilities with respect for its architectural legacy, the transformation of 120 Collins Street ensures it remains relevant in today’s evolving corporate world. With its mindful design and lived-in ease, the project reflects the comforts and flexibility professionals increasingly seek in a modern work environment.