

justice

design standard **04** for courthouses and justice complexes

The Office of the Government Architect (OGA) has developed a suite of Design Standards for new public building projects improve the performance and value of these facilities. The purpose of the OGA's Justice Design Standard is to formalise a set of objective, minimum provisions for design quality to use in the delivery of all justice projects.



**“We spend a large proportion
of our daily lives engaging
with the built environment.
These places need to be
safe, attractive, functional,
productive, sustainable,
efficient and inspiring”**

HON Colin Barnett MEd MLA
Premier, Minister for State Development
February 2013

The Design of Justice Facilities

Court buildings are the physical expression of the judicial arm of Government and facilitate the enactment of justice in Western Australia. The design of courthouses and justice complexes and the quality of their construction should reflect the importance of the functions performed within them and the value that the community places on the rule of law.

More than any other type of public building, justice facilities have a significant symbolic function. As civic buildings they should demonstrate a community commitment to justice, equality before the law and the authority of the law. In fulfilling this civic dimension, justice facilities should demonstrate a distinguished character and convey a sense of ‘gravitas’ commensurate with the respect for justice in our society. This character should be consistently acknowledged through the facility’s major formal decisions; its relationship to the public realm; the internal spatial sequences and hierarchies – both ceremonial and functional; and the selection and use of materials.

Justice facilities must provide safe, secure and comfortable environments for all users. Courts accommodate a diverse group of people who will have various relationships and roles within the functioning of the court. There are unique patterns of usage – moving, waiting, reflecting and meeting – that the public realm of a court facility must accommodate. This can include groups or individuals; people of diverse cultures; regular and first-time users; and family and friends of differing “sides”¹. It is vital that internal spaces be clearly legible with an evident hierarchy, from the entrance to the courtrooms and service areas, as required by the different users of the court.

Past environmental psychological research has shown that architectural features in the jury environment have a calming effect and can reduce jurors’ anxieties, such as certain ceiling heights, effective use of colour, the presence of trees in the environment and natural light².

The experience of a justice facility can be stressful and emotional for some users, yet well considered spaces with a welcoming presence, good views and day-lighting where possible, can provide relief and respite and mitigate potential hostility. Courtroom spaces that optimise air quality, thermal comfort, day-lighting and visual connections to external areas have been shown to aide relaxation and concentration, contributing to a better experience of courtroom conditions and better trial outcomes.

Complex access, circulation and functional hierarchies make law courts one of the most challenging building types to design and procure, requiring a high level commitment to architectural excellence³. Achieving these functional requirements must not diminish the attention afforded to the quality of the court environment and the dignity of users. A balance should be achieved between the need for security and controlled access, the need to appear open and accessible, and the increasing expectation that courts are there to serve the public⁴.

All justice facilities should be responsive to their context so that they are regionally, climatically and culturally sensitive. In some circumstances justice facilities are collocated with law enforcement and other government services and it is critical that appropriate distinction is made between these facilities both in a functional sense and in their presentation to the public.



Victorian County Court, Melbourne, Victoria -
Daryl Jackson SKM Lyons

Consistent with the State Government’s commitment to good design in justice facilities, design quality criteria are set out below under the three headings of Impact, Functionality and Build Quality.

impact Creating a Sense of Place and Positive Impact on the Community

Character

- Create a distinctive, place-specific facility.
- Respond sensitively to the topography, climate, heritage and ecology of the site.
- Respond to the culture and aspirations of the neighbourhood or community, where possible.
- Utilise an appropriate architectural language that aids in expressing the civic role of the building and conveys a sense of ‘gravitas’ commensurate with the dignity and authority of the Court.
- Provide innovative design solutions that support the efficient delivery of court services.
- Demonstrate a clear design intent across all scales and elements (master planning, built form, internal environment, external environment, materials and furniture).
- Provide well-integrated public art.
- Provide a welcoming, dignified and comfortable facility for all users.

Built Form

- Provide built form and massing that engages positively with the site and surrounding buildings.
- Ensure built form consolidates and supports the master planning strategy.
- Ensure built form supports functional and operational intent.
- Provide built form elements that are well-coordinated and composed.
- Project a coherent built form that clearly communicates the facility’s function and civic role.
- Provide entrances that are well-scaled, welcoming, clearly distinguished and with a clear sense of arrival.
- Integrate service elements seamlessly into the built form, wherever possible.
- Communicate the significance of, and relationships between spaces through the use of scale, proportion, colour and material.
- Facilitate wayfinding and clear movement through the arrangement of form and massing.
- Integrate signage and wayfinding elements.

Materials

- Ensure materials are used in a way that complements the intent of the built form.
- Ensure materials are used in a way that demonstrates their inherent qualities and characteristics.
- Utilise materials with integral or inherent finishes, wherever possible.
- Utilise materials within the building fabric that are appropriate to the distinguished character of a court building.
- Utilise tactile and welcoming materials and finishes, where appropriate.
- Allow materials to be regionally, climatically and culturally responsive, provided the overall character is suitably dignified.
- Utilise high quality materials and finishes that meet the expected standards for civic buildings ensuring:
 - (i) consistency of finish
 - (ii) well-considered use of colour and texture
 - (iii) durability of surface finishes and fixtures
 - (iv) resistance to damage and vandalism
 - (v) minimal recurrent maintenance
 - (vi) good amenity and a positive visual impact.



La Trobe Valley Magistrates Court, Morwell, Victoria
FMSA Architects

Internal Environment

- Create open, inviting and generously-scaled communal spaces.
- Provide welcoming entry spaces.
- Provide circulation areas that are enjoyable to use and facilitate comfortable user interaction.
- Provide good internal connectivity with clear views to important reference points such as entries and exits, administration and circulation areas.
- Utilise materials, furniture, colour and texture to create calm and comfortable spaces.
- Balance the need for security with the need to appear welcoming, accessible and open to court users.
- Enable wayfinding and a clear, intuitive understanding of the functions of the facility.
- Create a variety of internal spatial conditions which offer users opportunities for privacy, intimacy and communal gathering as appropriate.
- Establish a legible hierarchy of internal spaces by exploiting height, volume, materiality and the extent of visual connectivity between spaces.
- Provide calm and dignified internal spaces that mitigate tension and potential hostility amongst court participants and appropriately reflect the demeanour of a court building.
- Ensure public areas, and courtrooms where possible, have good amenity, day-lighting and quality views to external areas to assist with orientation and respite.
- Utilise artwork to create uplifting internal environments and assist wayfinding.
- Acknowledge the extensive studies undertaken on the effects of court environments on Aboriginal people in the planning and design of internal environments.
- Acknowledge the cultural sensitivities and kinship laws of Aboriginal groups and provide appropriate circulation and spatial configurations in public areas and courtrooms, where required.
- Consider the acoustic impact of material specifications and provide acoustic treatments where required to facilitate functionality.

External Environment

- Protect existing environmental features and ecosystems.
- Enhance or regenerate existing natural resources.
- Create a distinctive landscape design that responds sensitively to the site context.
- Provide a landscape environment that is attractive and comfortable for users.
- Provide landscape environments that support privacy, contemplation and mitigate tension for court participants.
- Integrate the landscape design with the architectural design intent of the facility.
- Utilise robust materials, finishes and elements that are easy to maintain.
- Utilise climatically appropriate planting and soft landscaping.
- Demonstrate a clear design intent through well-considered use of materials, colour, textures and landscaping elements.
- Provide a landscape environment that is clearly legible and assists wayfinding.
- Integrate Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD) principles in the landscape.

Urban and Social Factors

- Respond to the anticipated demographic, cultural and socio-economic profile of the community and users within the design and planning of the facility.
- Integrate Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles in the design of facility.
- Provide opportunities for safe walking, cycling and public transport access to and from the facility.
- Ensure appropriate parking and vehicular access strategies that avoid adverse impacts on the amenity of users and the public realm.
- Provide clearly legible site entry points and access routes that are well connected to surrounding transport networks, land uses and activities.
- Plan the facility to respond to the location of nearby strategic centres, infrastructure and other public facilities.
- Ensure a positive impact and good integration with surrounding urban form, through:
 - (i) appropriate building form and scale
 - (ii) well-considered facade design and presentation to the public realm
 - (iii) provision of a high quality streetscape environment
 - (iv) an appropriate arrangement of functions.

functionality Meeting the Needs of Staff and Users

Use

- Promote staff efficiency by minimising distances of travel between frequently used areas.
- Ensure planning supports appropriate and complementary functional adjacencies.
- Locate support zones so that they may be shared by adjacent functional areas.
- Ensure functional arrangements consolidate on master planning and contribute to the structural organisation of the site.
- Ensure the safety and security of all users in the planning and functional arrangement of the facility.
- Provide comfortable, functional and efficient administration offices and staff areas.
- Ensure the planning of public spaces supports a range of uses including meeting, waiting, circulating and quiet individual reflection.

Access

- Create legible circulation networks with clear hierarchies of movement, especially from entry points and internal public areas for all court users⁵.
- Ensure universal access is provided without compromising legibility, connectivity and quality of experience.
- Ensure that access points and movement networks are appropriately separate as required by different court users.
- Ensure clearly legible points of entry.
- Ensure ready access to key building elements, systems and services for maintenance, replacement and cleaning.
- Provide an integrated wayfinding system to ensure that users, visitors, and staff can easily navigate through the facility.

Spaces

- Organise buildings, servicing and functions so that they relate well to each other.
- Ensure functional and operational needs are supported by spaces that are the right size, shape, proportion and orientation.
- Demonstrate considered and thoughtful planning in relation to the ceremonial and functional hierarchies of the State's justice system.
- Plan to achieve a coherent and well-considered arrangement of spaces.
- Ensure that key functional relationships are clearly legible and supported within site planning and floor layouts.
- Ensure flexibility and adaptability of the facility to accommodate changing court programs, court annexed initiatives and numbers of users.
- Provide appropriate and discrete storage.
- Locate public areas so that they enhance the legibility and clarity of the facility's functional arrangement.
- Ensure the planning of spaces and entrances balances user privacy and amenity with appropriate surveillance and security.
- Satisfy circulation and security requirements without compromising spatial quality and amenity.
- Provide planning that enables daylighting, ventilation and acoustic treatments to achieve comfortable and attractive spaces.



build quality Performance of the Built Fabric over the Full Life Cycle

Performance

- Incorporate initiatives for the improvement of energy and water conservation; and the reduction of waste, embodied energy and emissions.
- Ensure the appropriate level of acoustic comfort relative to the function and use of spaces.
- Utilise robust materials, elements and finishes that are durable and cost-effective to maintain.
- Specify materials, elements and finishes that avoid adverse impacts on health and the environment.
- Utilise materials, finishes, elements and systems that are appropriate for the function and quality requirements of adjacent areas.
- Engage passive environmental design measures that respond to local climate and site conditions including:
 - (i) utilise built form and landscape to create micro-climates that improve comfort
 - (ii) orientate built form to reduce solar gain
 - (iii) organise interior spaces to reduce energy use
 - (iv) exploit thermal mass internally and externally to aid heating and cooling
 - (v) assemble building envelope (structure, facade, roof, windows) to ensure good thermal and moisture control
 - (vi) provide controlled daylighting where appropriate, while mitigating glare and solar gain
 - (vii) provide natural ventilation where possible and appropriate.
- Provide operation and maintenance manuals to enable users to optimise the building's environmental performance.
- Utilise available tools, such as Green Star, to plan and assess sustainability performance.

Construction

- Utilise construction systems that readily enable future horizontal and vertical expansion.
- Utilise construction systems that readily enable internal modification, service upgrades and replacement.
- Utilise adaptive re-use strategies and existing building fabric to avoid unnecessary demolition, where appropriate.
- Ensure staged facility planning and construction does not adversely impact the delivery of court services.
- Ensure ease of access, replacement and maintenance of materials, elements and components.
- Utilise construction systems that are readily available.
- Consider the energy costs of construction and the embodied energy in the selection of building materials and elements.
- Organise structural systems within the built fabric so that they are clearly and logically organised for ease of use, maintenance and future expansion.

Services Design

- Organise engineering systems clearly and logically for ease of use, maintenance and future expansion.
- Utilise innovative design, technologies and analytical tools to optimise energy performance and minimise resource consumption.
- Ensure engineering systems are flexible, efficient and economical to use.
- Integrate engineering systems with passive environmental design measures.
- Provide good indoor air quality utilising both mechanical and passive ventilation systems, where appropriate.
- Provide engineering systems that operate without compromising acoustic comfort.
- Utilise standardised and prefabricated elements in the design of engineering systems, where possible.
- Select systems on the basis of service requirements and local maintenance capacity.
- Ensure users and facility staff can easily operate thermal controls, where appropriate, without compromising overall system performance.
- Ensure appropriate allowance is made for future expansion of services.



Roma Mitchell Commonwealth Law Courts,
Adelaide, South Australia - Hassell

References

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3. 'Better Court Buildings Action Plan', Her Majesty's Court Service, UK, 2002
4. Professor David Tait, Justice Research Group, Australia, 2010
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