

ISSUE

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STUDENT ACCOMMODATION
DESIGN FOR UNIVERSITIES,
COLLEGES AND THE
DEVELOPMENT SECTOR

Living & Learning



“We developed the living & learning model to remind us that student accommodation should give equal weight in all considerations to the integration of supported learning, as well as the traditional benefits of creating life long social friendships.”

Hamilton Wilson,
Wilson Architects



cover & above: King's College Wensley Wing connects interior spaces to the landscape

“In the last decade a substantial body of research has affirmed that it is the ‘whole experience’ that counts for student learning & development, not just what happens in a formal instructional context.” Coates & Edwards, 2009¹.

These days, students are paying more for their education, and expecting more from their overall university experience. Combined with increased competition in the tertiary sector, this puts pressure on universities and colleges to provide a better experience that will attract the best students and support them through their study careers.

Quality residential learning communities are the foundation of that experience.

Well-designed student accommodation that combines ‘living and learning’ sits at the heart of strong university communities — meeting the needs of students, and becoming a vibrant hub for the campus, as well as positively contributing to the bottom line.

This e-bite outlines how universities and colleges, and the development sector can achieve successful residential learning communities.

¹ Coates, Hamish and Edwards, Daniel ‘Engaging College Communities: The impact of residential colleges in Australian higher education’, AUSSE Research Briefings, v.4 June 2009

What is living & learning?

Education Specialist and Architect,
Hamilton Wilson shares his insights.

What is the living and learning model of student accommodation?

The living and learning model is student accommodation specifically designed to incorporate formal and informal teaching and learning opportunities. The model encourages a diverse range of students and staff to live, eat, study, work, socialise and take part in extra-curricular activities together through a comprehensively resourced, student affairs/academic affairs collaboration. There is a whole range of living and learning programs — an exemplar program can average 200 - 400 students having access to a wide variety of resources and co-curricular activities including dedicated course offerings and affiliated faculty.

What benefits does the living and learning model provide to students and the university?

Until now in Australia, the focus of student accommodation has been on the 'living' – the practical requirements of providing a home for students. However, recent research shows that living and learning programs add substantial value to the university experience and student outcomes. Living and learning participants perform better in academic results and course completion. Engagement indicators, peer and faculty interaction and enrolment in co-curricular and enrichment activities are all increased. Students' abilities to cope with coursework demands also increases.



Adolescence can last a long time in young men, particularly when they are living together. Rather than seeking to tame the exuberance, the building lives and breathes with its occupants. King's College.

Why is it important to invest in the living and learning model?

Just as we know that providing accommodation is more than just a bed, learning is also more than just a desk - they are part of a total process. It is driven by the needs of today's students for the reality of student life now and into the future.

"For those who say they cannot afford educationally oriented housing, the fact of the matter is that they cannot afford not to have it on the future residential campus."²

² Harold C. Riker, College Housing as Teaming Centers

What are the benefits of integrating landscape into the design of the living and learning model?

Integrating landscape into student accommodation allows residents to positively engage with the ground plane rather than having an isolated, elevated living experience.

Collocating highly visible common spaces at the ground levels reinforces the learning community in highly engaging places to meet, study and recreate. By creating a range of types of landscapes, students can find a break from the intensity of study.

Can ageing building stock become part of the living and learning model?

There are a lot of university colleges with ageing building stock that can be re-designed to become a core part of the campus environment. The buildings don't exist in isolation - planning for the future use and development of these areas can make your accommodation project relevant far into the future.

In the first instance, we examine how we can overlay a higher range of learning opportunities into colleges.

Students on university campuses already have access to diverse ways they can study in contemporary formats. A similar approach can be applied to colleges.

We can work with the building fabric to create group study spaces that augment the individual learning areas already found within students rooms. Having dedicated staff to support student learning adds significant value. To also have spaces where they can meet for tutorials for small to large groups, dramatically improves potential academic results.

It is also important to work with the existing architectural language of the university or college – recognising its past, while creating spaces that reflect contemporary 21st Century living and learning.

"The benefits to students of living on campus, with included social and academic activities, are something that will place this style of living in high demand."

Michael Lucas,
UQ Student Union President



The creation of a shaded terrace connects the existing dining hall to the landscape. King's College.

CASE STUDY

KING'S COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND

**What does living &
learning look like?**



King's College, within the University of Queensland, is an award-winning residential college for men built in the early 1950s. Wilson Architects was commissioned to develop the ten year Masterplan and design subsequent accommodation buildings; Centenary Building (2011) and Wensley Wing (2016) for the College.

The projects reset the benchmark for student accommodation, while improving the campus and amenity for existing students and increasing the overall numbers of students living at King's. Wilson Architects conducted extensive workshops with staff and students to better understand the current drivers of the project including place, living, learning and community — the result is now one of the most sought after Colleges on the UQ campus.

Living - Home for the semester

Great student accommodation feels like a home and adapts to the many parts of student life — the routine of classes, the parties, the all-nighters before exams. It is comfortable and flexible. A range of different layouts from self-contained studios to six bedroom apartments will suit different living styles and budgets.

The Centenary Building houses 39 individual living units and their associated communal and support spaces. Although the accommodation units are very compact, full height windows give the illusion of space and the sense that the whole room is a balcony to the river views.

Pivoting shutters control light at the same time animating the facade by the occupant's response to the time and condition of the day.

Similarly, the new Wensley Wing provides students with privacy while visually connecting the occupant to the rest of the College. The quality finishes ensure the rooms continue to look good and work well over time.

Each of the 38 living units have access to common study space, communal lounge area and basic kitchenette, with communal bathroom facilities and laundry available on each floor.



The Wensley Wing bookends the Chapel and existing student accommodation building to create a central landscaped garden for the Chapel and its neighbouring buildings.



A busy social hub for Kingsmen, the gymnasium is centrally located to the undercroft of the Centenary Building.

Creating a community

Today's students want to feel like they're part of a community — great design can provide the sense of identity that is so highly prized in well-known universities. Students are looking for shared amenities such as games rooms, gyms, secure bike store and communal kitchens. Cleverly designed, these elements encourage students to interact and build strong relationships.

The King's College campus pool was reincorporated into the broader King's community by relocating the existing gym and social spaces adjacent to the pool, creating a recreational hub.

Learning Places

A variety of learning spaces throughout the College is essential to meet the needs of 21st Century students. Social learning spaces and more formal study and teaching areas allow students to study whenever and wherever they want. It also encourages students to form new friendships and improves overall learning outcomes.



Smaller learning support spaces are located within the new accommodation buildings which belong to these living communities.

There is also a larger curated Learning Centre centrally located off the main spine of the College which reinforces learning within the King's community.



Similarly, the Brisbane Boys' College Boarding House includes a Learning Centre, supporting students across various year levels of the boarding cohort.

Connecting student accommodation with the campus

The original dining room looked over a service yard and car park before seeing the river in the distance. The design opened and connected the dining hall to the river with a shaded terrace that also connects the other buildings to the King's College community. This has reinvigorated the area and increased the value of the property.

The new accommodation wing has allowed a significant reconfiguration of the front entry, using landscape design to define a new entry pathway and pedestrian forecourt. This provides increased security and ease of access previously absent to the residents of the College.



The latest addition to King's College provides significant reconfiguration to the front entry and gives new emphasis to their foundation Chapel. New furniture and technology has increased the Chapel's flexible use.



CASE STUDY

STUDENT RESIDENCES PROJECT, UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND

**Wilson Architects + Partners Hill
Architects in Association**

The Student Residences Project is a new \$250m facility that will deliver quality, affordable, self-catered accommodation for students on the University of Queensland campus. Accommodation will include single rooms in eight-to-twelve bedroom cluster apartments, and self-contained studio apartments. In addition, there will be shared laundry, social and recreation areas, academic support space, bicycle storage and limited car parking. The exemplar project is the first of its kind in Australia, and focuses on human values and creating a sense of community.

The public space to the centre of the UQ Student Residences Project court is a lively place where events can take place.

Creating a community

There are five different apartment arrangements, which are gathered as if it were a tiny township with eight to twelve students per type. Rooms are close to shared kitchen and living spaces, resembling the distance between these spaces typically found within a house.

This instils a daily reminder to students that they are part of a group of people, and not a single entity.

Diversity

Uniform accommodation and learning spaces lack the flexibility and dynamism needed to interact with the student population. The Student Residences Project has a number of different accommodation types; arcaded, terrace, stacked, academic quad and a low-rise wing. These different sizes and formats allow for different household types, and infuse diversity as a value of the project from the outset.



Small things matter

There is an extensive level of consideration that goes into every detail, whether micro or macro. The most impactful features of a space have nothing to do with shapes, forms, colours or aesthetics. The Student Residences Project involved meticulous space planning to ensure human values were the driving force behind the design.



The Student Residences Project apartments connect with living / kitchen space.

“Australian universities often struggle with instilling a sense of community amongst students on campus. The Student Residences Project challenges the concept of ordinary share house and college-style living.”

Michael Lucas,
UQ Student Union President



The central feature of the building is 'the banksia' that has on its top level a smoking ceremonial space for indigenous students. Eventually, flowering vines will cover the trellis.

CASE STUDY

STUDENT RESIDENCES ST. CATHERINE'S COLLEGE - UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Wilson Architects have designed new accommodation at St Catherine's College, UWA Perth, derived of small neighbourhoods belonging to students, with places that facilitate a variety of learning environments, to create a building rich in cultural understanding. The building is purposefully planned for St Catherine's Dandjoo Darbalung program, which in Nyungar means 'mixing together' and which aims to provide equity of access for Indigenous students. Similarly, part of the building's ambition is to seamlessly integrate itself into the existing campus and enhance the living and learning experience for the entire College, informed by inclusive cultural understanding and sensitivity, and countering any perceptions of segregation.



The main objective of the building is to facilitate the support pillars of the Dandjoo Darbalung program, which is to provide extensive academic support, carefully structured around personal student empowerment, and providing a clear pathway for young Indigenous people to obtain skilled, professional employment after graduation. Early research between the College and Wilson Architects identified that indigenous students in particular, struggle with the dislocation and isolation of living away from their home as first-time university students when confronted with the tradition and institution of University life. For some students, traditional campus living can facilitate reduced social interaction, whereby social contact might occur only in dining halls or passing in the corridors, and these students can quickly become withdrawn and isolated in their rooms, leading to poor personal wellbeing and poor learning outcomes, and poor retention rates. The solution was to reconstruct the College living environment.

University Colleges are known to provide smaller tight-knit communities with pastoral care, creating an environment where students' 'lookout' for each other. Traditionally they provide a single room with a desk, personal or shared bathrooms, group laundry facilities, meals within a dining hall, spaces for social recreation, and more recently some have adapted to provide interactive learning places with support, recognising pedagogical changes at universities. St Catherine's students have traditionally been organised in a structure

Each room has a small screened balcony which is insect proof, reduces glare and provides security at the same time maximising the amount of natural light into the students space.

which is horizontal and European in origin, whereby year groups are co-located, and privilege and personal amenity are determined by how long they have been at College.

Traditional and modern versions all provide various forms of shared communal social spaces, but sometimes little consideration is given to what the purpose of the space is, who the space belongs to, what the ideal group size is and whether the space can support a variety of activities, sometimes simultaneously. Counter-intuitively spaces which are meant to encourage positive interaction can often through a lack of personal accountability, facilitate poor social behaviour. These spaces then require resources and management to regulate.

To address these phenomena the principle planning strategy of the new building was to create a household from a hierarchy of rooms with different amenity placed around a shared common space with multiple purposes, behind a common front door. This created a household with a sense of belonging to the common space and a greater sense of personal responsibility to it and encourages students out of their rooms and into the common space. It also meant a household could be a vertically composed of students with various university experience, creating small communities with a social structure more aligned with the indigenous idea of Kinship.



The amount of natural light gives the rooms a spatial generosity.

Central to building's cultural understanding is the creation of the Banksia form, an open four storey structure centrally located at the confluence of the building and campus networks, veiled in expanded mesh and green vegetation, and creating a counterpoint to the rigidity of the more institutional adjacent buildings. On the ground and first floor the Banksia is a bleacher seat forum, the second level the central external social learning and reflection space, and the top is an externally open but shrouded cultural ceremony space with a fire and smoking pit. The dominant form imposes itself on the College creating a significant landmark that reinforces the cultural importance of the facility.

A key experience of the building is the openness and connection to its surrounds, both in landscape and built form. Interior spaces blur with the outside, acknowledging the importance of indigenous identity through an individual's occupation and sense of belonging, rather than the identity being prescribed through the building. Careful planning focused on maintaining all the existing mature trees, has created human scaled courtyards which is a distinct feature of the St Catherine's campus. Rooftop and elevated terrace gardens provide enhanced amenity for both the occupants and broader campus.



The Indigenous courtyard is bounded by the new accommodation building the Dandjoo Darbalung room which it directly connects with. The Dandjoo Darbalung room is a flexible and managed space specifically for running the program. This space is directly adjacent a complimentary learning centre the reconditioned Prescott Building ground floor which has been re-purposed from accommodation to a campus learning centre, ensure there is no learning facility inequality on campus and raises the profile of learning, which is now on display on the major routes of the campus.



The Dandjoo Darbalung room is the dedicated study support space for the college's indigenous students.

The expressive and character forming nature of the 'banksia', which is the symbolic flower of the college belies the fact that the new facility is an extremely efficient building



Q&A

One of our team visited the famous Tietgenkollegiet in Denmark, to find out what Australian universities and colleges can learn from this world leading student accommodation project.

"It's worth studying just to live here."

Student and resident Tietgenkollegiet

What is Tietgenkollegiet (Tietgen Student Hall)?

Tietgenkollegiet is an exemplar student residence designed by Danish architects Lundgaard & Tranberg. Built in Copenhagen in 2006, the award-winning student residence is known for its highly successful community focus. It houses 360 students in individual ensuited rooms in groups of 12 — each group shares a kitchen, utility and lounge area.

Why is Tietgenkollegiet known as such a social and vibrant place?

The design of Tietgenkollegiet demonstrates a deep understanding of 'living as a learning environment'. Students of all stages, all nationalities and all ages are intermixed. The Tietgenkollegiet experience is renowned as actively social and this combines with its reputation as simply a wonderful place to live. Research indicates that deliberate management of programming is vital to keep the students engaged and the community strong. The students I met recounted the substantial nature of the relationships between residents, not least because the average length of stay is long.

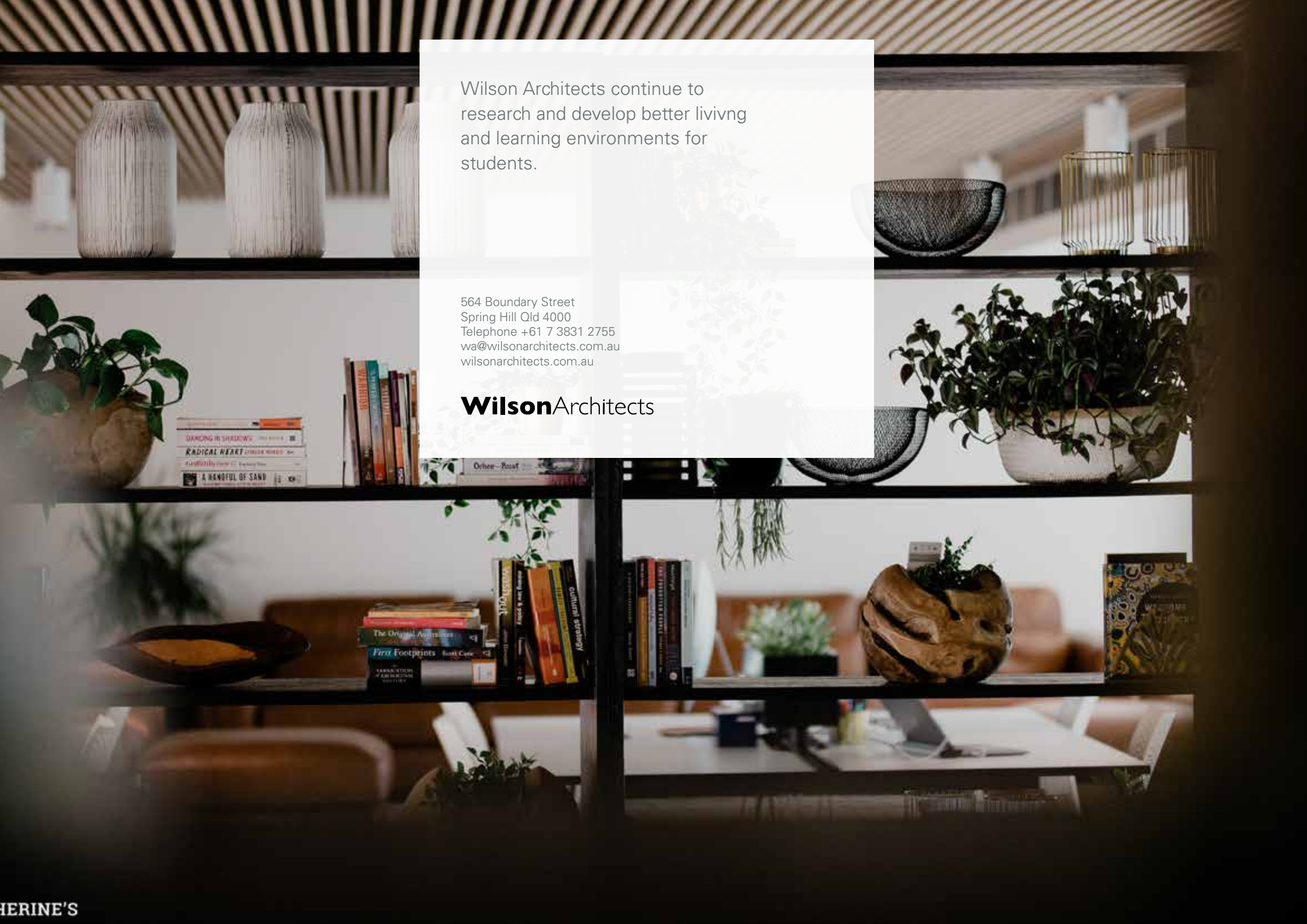
How does the design accommodate and encourage the community?

The plan is stable, with uses of lounge/public rooms changed as cohorts and interest groups change. The ground floor is used to inter-mix study with other collective activities. Any form of function that has collective potential is located, on view, at the ground floor (such as sewing, model making, music, gym, study rooms, meeting rooms, project spaces). In contrast, although virtually adjacent, private spaces are very private.

What other aspects of the design stand-out as useful ideas for the Australian context?

The physical quality of the building and finishes is beyond precedent in Australian terms. Construction detail and material usage are deployed for a 100 year life span, and the aesthetic styling is timeless.

The indoor/outdoor connection exceeds many Australian examples in successfully offering a richness of experience in a medium density development.



Wilson Architects continue to research and develop better living and learning environments for students.

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