

Self-Guided Tour

Welcome to Melbourne Recital Centre.

This self-guided tour will take you on a journey through our wonderful performance venues and public spaces, revealing all the intricate design details that make Melbourne Recital Centre one of the best music venues in the world.

A little history...

The site of Melbourne Recital Centre was formerly owned by the University of Melbourne, who proposed to give it to the government in exchange for building a theatre.

The Melbourne Theatre Company is the theatre which adjoins our building. Both the Melbourne Recital Centre and the MTC were designed by the same architect.

It was first announced in 2002 by the Victorian Government, that Melbourne Recital Centre would be built and the hall would be named after Victoria's most generous and longest-serving philanthropist, Dame Elisabeth Murdoch.

The building was designed by Melbourne-based architectural firm Ashton Raggatt McDougall (ARM) Architects in consultation with Arup Acoustics.

It took just over 2 years to start building in 2006, and the Hall was completed in 2009, on time and on budget, thanks largely to the decision to raise the main hall off the ground. This meant that the construction team didn't have to dig into the ground, similar to Hamer Hall for instance, which was built many levels underground.

Begin your tour in the Ground Floor Foyer

One of the most striking elements of the Ground Floor Foyer is the red floors and ceiling. The interior of this space was designed to resemble the inside of a violin case, with its velvet lining. The pattern of the carpet is also very distinctive and reoccurs throughout the building. In particular you will notice this same pattern in the pine carvings featured in the Elisabeth Murdoch Hall.

In the Foyer, you'll notice our MRC Box Office which is open Monday to Friday 11am-5pm, and two hours prior to every performance. Next to the Box Office is the Cloak Room, where you can leave large items during a performance.

Further along this wall you'll notice our Main Bar which is open before all performances in the Elisabeth Murdoch Hall and during interval. You can purchase a great selection of sweet treats, craft beers, and Australian wines.

On either side of the Main Bar and Box Office are corridors that lead to bathrooms (men on the left and women on the right). Both sides include an ambulant toilet, an accessible bathroom, and baby-changing facilities. All gender bathrooms are located on Level 1.

The Foyer also hosts a number of brochure stands featuring the many artists appearing on our stages or community music program to join. You are welcome to collect as many as you wish.

Head inside the Primrose Potter Salon

This smaller space was originally designed as a recording studio but soon became a very popular performance venue. It can seat up to 150 people, but it also used for music workshops, rehearsals and functions. Every genre of music has been played in the Primrose Potter Salon, from renaissance pieces through to psychedelic rock.

The wall panels are a combination of architecture and acoustics. To enhance acoustic quality, the designers needed to 'scatter' the sound, hence the shaping and positioning of the panels. They are made from the same timber as in the main hall, which is hoop pine with a lime-wash, including absorption positioned behind each section. The design also circulates fresh air throughout the space.

The walls of the Primrose Potter Salon are engraved with a representation of the Australia composer, Percy Grainger's Free Music No. 2 graphic score, written in 1937. Percy Grainger was born in Brighton and is highly respected in Australia for his musical innovations.

Still occasionally used for recordings, there is a booth/production control room located behind the south wall of the Salon.

It's time to head back to the Foyer.

Move towards the Grand Staircase

This staircase leads to Level 1 and features a view through the northern windows of Melbourne's vibrant Arts Precinct. Directly across Southbank Boulevard you can peer into the gardens of the National Gallery of Victoria, or monitor the exciting construction of The Fox: NGV Contemporary. The staircase itself is made from bamboo flooring with plastic composite. Bamboo is a fantastic material to use as it is highly sustainable and considerate of the environment.

Note: if you are unable to use stairs, we have a lift located on the Ground Floor between the main door and the entrance to the Primrose Potter Salon.

While you're on Level 1...

Pop into the Williams Room. This meeting and function space was named after the artist Fred Williams and contains a number of his prints, kindly donated by his wife Lyn Williams AM. Fred Williams (1927-82) was born in Richmond, Victoria and is recognised as one of the most significant Australian painters and graphic artists of the twentieth century for his figurative and landscape works. He was at the forefront of the Australian modern art movement. Williams is considered to be a largely self-taught artist, however he received his initial art training from the age of sixteen, studying at the National Gallery of Victoria Art School (which later became our neighbours the Victorian College of the Arts) where he was taught the fundamentals of painting.

Head towards Doors 2 and 3

Move into the 1000-seat Elisabeth Murdoch Hall and the first thing you'll notice is the beautiful wooden panelling of this venue. The room is lined with routed ply-wood panels to create the grain, like wooden ivy over the walls. Ian McDougall, one of the architects from Melbourne-based architectural firm ARM, states that the walls were inspired by the wood grain of the back of a beautiful instrument.

Ashton Raggatt McDougall from the same design firm provides further details about the project:

"The design challenge was both aesthetic and technical... Our first task was to decide on the typological shape of the [Elisabeth Murdoch] Hall ... At the beginning of the project, recital venues such as Wigmore Hall (London, 1900, Collcutt), Musikvereinsaal (Vienna, Austria, 1870, Hansen) and Concertgebouw (Amsterdam, 1883, van Gendt), were nominated as the benchmarks for Melbourne's new hall. These are the great centres of music performance in the world – and are all 19th century buildings. We began with the shoe-box - the shape that the experts say guarantees/predicts acoustic perfection".

Elisabeth Murdoch Hall is a modified shoebox shaped hall with a raked stalls level, a single rear circle and unique, split level side circle wings. There is no proscenium, just a stage. The performers are in the same place as the audience. The space is symmetrical like the old European halls and could be mistaken for a basic room, but it is in reality, a complex space.

Productions, recording & broadcast booths are located above the stage, accessible via a secret door in the wings. A further production booth is located above the Circle and houses the lighting controls & follow spots.

The stage is a total area of 135m² and is made of compressed bamboo. The area can be extended by removing the first 3 rows of seats and raising the floor to stage level. This same area can be lowered further into the ground to create an orchestra pit.

The Hall is equipped with an assistive hearing system called an Ampetronic Induction Loop Amplifier. This technology allows those who wear hearing aids to enjoy performances from the Stalls.

Now head back out of Doors 2 or 3...

Take the Red Staircase up to Level 2

Here you'll find a large tapestry which is a replica of a painting called *Dulka Warngiid*. This collaborative work by seven women artists from Bentinck Island held by the National Gallery of Victoria, is a painting that represents the individual country of each woman.

The artists say: "We each painted our country area which was special for us. Our painting is all of our country. That's what the title [Djulka Warngiid] means – country, place, and land – land of all. We really enjoyed doing it as a group. We are very proud of our big painting."

In 2007, the Hugh Williamson Foundation commissioned the magnificent tapestry *Dulka Warngiid (Land of All)*, for Melbourne Recital Centre and the Victorian community. The commission realised the expressed wish of Dame Elisabeth Murdoch AC DBE, our Patron, for a major work to bring together two of her great passions: tapestry and music.

Woven by Amy Cornall, Rebecca Moulton and Cheryl Thornton of the Australian Tapestry Workshop during 2008 and 2009. It faithfully reflects the joyful exuberance of the painting, with richness added through its interpretation by the Workshop's weavers, who are all trained artists.

The tapestry was unveiled as the Centre opened in February 2009.

Turn around to find a giant spring

When designing Melbourne Recital Centre, acoustic isolation was incredibly important. The building site is located adjacent to a busy intersection and tramway. To reduce low-frequency noise, the auditorium is completely isolated from the ground and the surrounding building structure. The Hall is completely encased in a 250mm thick concrete box (thus weighing 550 tonnes), which is mounted on 54 large steel spring bearing units.

The spring in front of you is what allows the Hall to 'float' and be isolated from vibrations and the noise of the outside world.

Head into the Circle of Elisabeth Murdoch Hall

Moving through Doors 5 & 6 you'll find yourself in the Circle of the Hall, a balcony level of seats.

From here you'll have a great view of the unique chandeliers. They are offcuts from the timber panels used throughout the Hall but have been built in the same style and sound dispersion design.

The seats in the Hall are also designed acoustically – they resemble the approximate shape of a body so the sound will not change dramatically between an occupied and unoccupied seat/hall.

A middle aisle was considered but disregarded as it would mean the loss of the best acoustic seats.

Make your way back to the Ground Floor Foyer

As you travel back down the Grand Staircase, you'll notice the honeycomb windows along the front of the building. Project architect Ian McDougall stated that the windows & white bulbous facade of MRC was meant to resemble bubble wrap, a protective wrapping for the large bluestone box that houses and protects the Elisabeth Murdoch Hall – especially the music and art contained within it. He said "The building is a gift, wrapped and then gradually unwrapped".

Melbourne Recital Centre has won multiple awards for its architectural design, including the Victorian Architecture Medal, the prize for Urban Design - Interior Architecture and Public Architecture at the 2009 Victorian Architecture Awards; and the National Award for Public Buildings – 2009 Property Council of Australia 'Rider Levett Bucknall' Awards for Innovation and Excellence.

Thank you for visiting us today and why not take advantage of our Open House Melbourne membership special which is only \$15. Visit our Box Office to find out more.