

PADUA COLLEGE, MORNINGTON PENINSULA

A vibrant Brick Inlay podium of Blanco brick tiles delivers a solid foundation



The Whyte Senior Learning Centre at Padua College is a standout on the Mornington Peninsula.

The first of two buildings realised in the school's 2016 Master Plan by Baldasso Cortese architects, this dedicated facility for students in Years 10 – 12 spans three levels. Set on a steep slope, it's cleverly cut into the ground, reading as two storeys on the western side and three on the east.

A well-considered design has transformed what was a dispersed campus into a contemporary facility, accommodating 18 classrooms and breakout spaces for self-directed or collaborative study. It also includes a 270 seat auditorium for assemblies and workshops, flexible learning spaces, seminar and meeting rooms, social and ancillary spaces, common rooms, staff work areas, as well as outdoor courtyards and learning spaces.

What makes this building a standout is not just its innovative, highly aesthetic design, but the strength of the building's narrative that's evident throughout the design and material choice.

From the base, the Centre is given a solid grounding with a Brick Inlay façade of Blanco brick tiles; the Brick Inlay system offering speed and efficiency in construction, and the brick tiles beautifully referencing Mornington's residential architecture.

"Consideration of the environment was important to the school, so low maintenance materials were chosen. We love the brickwork because it ties in with the residential architecture that you see in the area, and we like the fact that it brings a smaller scale to the cladding. And because it's a natural material, it doesn't need painting, it's nice and hardwearing, so it can easily take any knocks it may receive," explains Steven Cortese, Design Director, Baldasso Cortese.

"I love clay, and the Blanco brickwork at the lower level gives us the podium, which the building cantilevers over. The building is also cut into its site, and the brick tiles are a natural clay product, so they not only create a nice solid base to the building but also a strong connection to the earth. It's also a lovely contrast to the darker first and second floors," continues Steven.



The upper façade design is spectacular, creating a beautiful narrative that speaks to Padua in Italy – the curves and arches referencing its bridges that traverse the Bacchiglione River. As a Senior Learning Centre, Steven's design reflects the idea of a journey, of the senior students crossing a bridge from secondary school into their future destination, essentially transitioning out of school into tertiary or alternative pathways.

It's a beautiful, personalised narrative.

From a practical point of view, the upper façade has a dual skin of dark charcoal Cemental—a highly durable pressed fibre cement—and vertical fins of anodised aluminium, which are aesthetically stunning and act as operable louvers, providing much-needed protection to the building's glazing. This dual-skinned façade enabled greater flexibility in positioning of windows because the eye is taken away from their location. This meant higher sills, allowing furniture to be pushed up against them, and sliding windows, encouraging natural ventilation into the classrooms.

A highlight of the Centre is its atrium, which encourages an abundance of natural light into the building, as well as natural ventilation, creating a thermal chimney effect through its middle. Below the atrium, tiered seating encourages formal and informal student gatherings just like an old agora.

Of course, the true measure of success for a project like this is in the feedback from its key users: staff and students. Not surprisingly, they both overwhelmingly love the Senior Learning Centre, particularly the abundance of natural light that flows through the atrium, and the delightful interaction that its well-considered design encourages. And for that alone, Baldasso Cortese is to be congratulated.

Architect: Baldasso Cortese Architects
 Product: Brick Inlay using Blanco brick tiles
 Builder: Devco Project & Construction Management
 Precaster: Melbourne Precast
 Photographer: Peter Clark

