

Royal Automobile Club of Tasmania (RACT)



Traffic stopper

The new headquarters of the Royal Automobile Club of Tasmania (RACT) is a modern, five storey building that combines strong functional elements with a style that calls for attention.

Built on the site of the Club's previous two storey headquarters on a hill overlooking the Hobart city centre and the Derwent, the new building certainly meets its brief.

Retaining a sense of its origins, the finished project also provides a cost effective and commercially practical base for the Club's operations – including its travel agency and insurance arms, some commercially leased office space, and a large asement car park that includes special bays for vehicle inspections and the fitting of child car restraints.

Certainly when it came to speed and efficiency, precast was the order of the day. Duggans Precast was contracted to supply some 420 precast elements, including retaining walls, columns and façade walls (with some incorporating inbuilt columns).

As well as meeting the practical requirements of the job, use of precast is the key to some of the more distinctive architectural features of the building.

Project Owner

RACT Development

Architect and Project Superintendent

Hefferman, Button, Voss
Fairbrother

Service Engineer

Gandy & Roberts

Precast Manufacturer

Duggans

www.nationalprecast.com.au





One of these is the precast grand central staircase. This is a showcase piece that spans all floors of the building's signature full-height atrium.

Another is the innovative use of precast in window treatments to maximise light throughout the building – an aim of the design from the outset. Even traditionally 'dark' or enclosed areas of a building such as the lift lobbies and bathrooms have been opened up to the light.

"We wanted light throughout the building, not just in the atrium," explains project architect, John Button. "So some precast panels on the lower floors that are overlooked by other buildings have round glass blocks incorporated into them, enabling modesty and privacy while still capturing and disseminating the light due to the shape and diameter of the glass insets.

"Side windows have been made with an Oregon-finished 'window box' and a precast 'hood' for both protection and aesthetics, so the large outer wall is punctuated with smaller windows surrounded by a sort of 'picture frame' that adds a sculptural quality," he says.

Each of these elements combine to give the building its airy open feel, while other inclusions ensure that it speaks with a voice all its own.

These include a rooftop indoor/outdoor cafeteria featuring a louvred, retractable glass wall – already a major hit among staff and a two storey high mural of a colourful humorous caricature of the RACT, by well-known local artist Tom Samek, And, last but not least, in the building's foyer, the walls on either side of the atrium feature a massive four-storey-high rendition of an image of the previous headquarters. This has been achieved by commissioning huge 2,000mm x 600mm techlam tiles coloured to match a giant pixelated photograph of the old RACT building – a dramatic homage to this new building's heritage.