

DESIGN STUDIO - LOFTY IDEA, Jackie Cleobury

Multi-disciplinary design company Smithgroup recently relocated to new premises at Queens Park Studios in Salt River. Unlike the previous office space which was largely compartmentalised, the new interior is loft-like in character and provided ample opportunity for designer Raymond Smith to integrate the firm's various departments.

The interior comprises three main components, namely an executive mezzanine level, a meeting room, working spaces and a reception area. In order to facilitate a high level of communication and interaction between working groups, much emphasis was placed on creating an open, flexible environment, especially in the working spaces. Here, areas are divided by a system of alternating dry walling and blinds which stretch from floor to ceiling. The sections of blind can be completely raised to create a doorway or partially raised to achieve the desired level of privacy. Opening or closing them results in even further degrees of enclosure or exposure.

The workspace features a number of other innovative solutions. Cardboard sunscreens are rigged to slide across windows and block out harsh sunlight that enters during certain times of the day. The shelving system is supported simply by industrial ladders. Raised reticulation trays carry wiring up and above the working area, keeping it safely out of the way and allowing equipment to be easily moved. Furniture and storage facilities are cleverly improvised in terms of design and available materials. Desking, for example, comprises custom-cut fibreboard supported by steel trestles. The result is a studio space where nothing is permanently fixed, allowing the entire arrangement to be changed at will.

While the operational areas are treated with little more than practicality in mind, the public areas are granted a greater deal of aesthetic attention. The reception area is marked by a striking desk portraying a simplified profile of an antelope. A floor that was previously coated with bitumen has been painstakingly restored to its original, unique parquet of various indigenous woods. And to ensure an inspired clientele, the pathway from the entrance to the meeting room is punctuated with artwork from Smith's forays into this field.