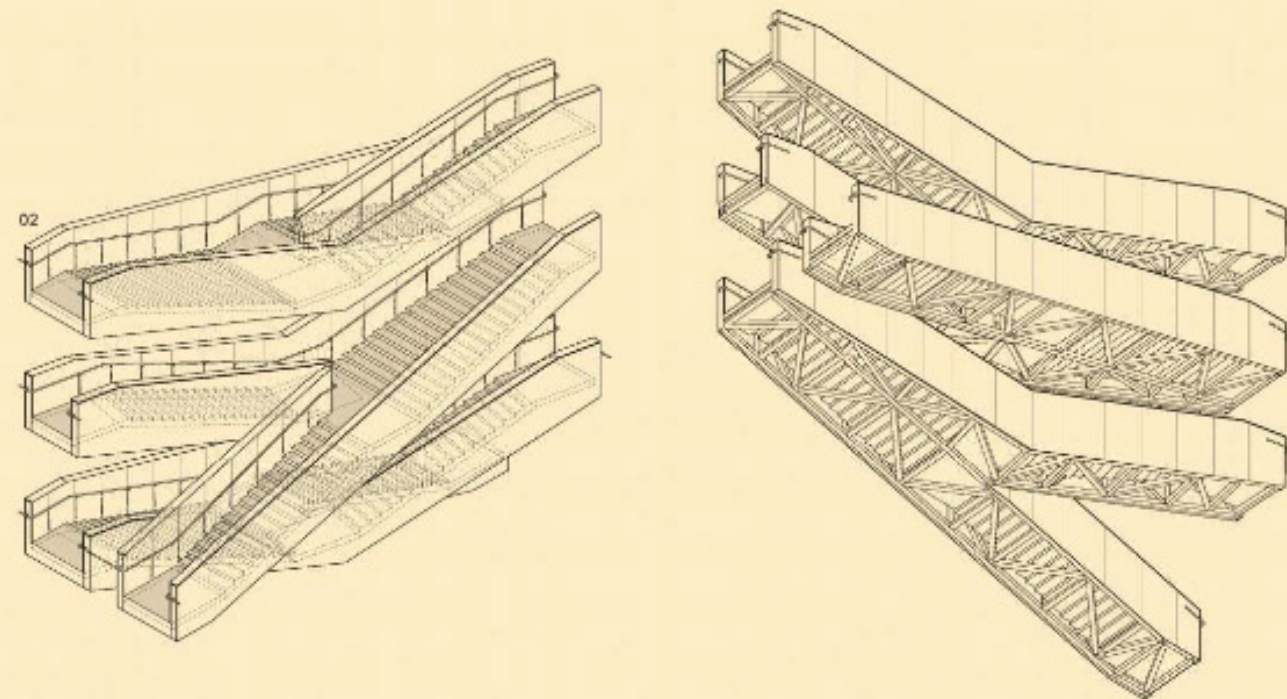


01



02

FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE, BUILDING AND PLANNING, UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

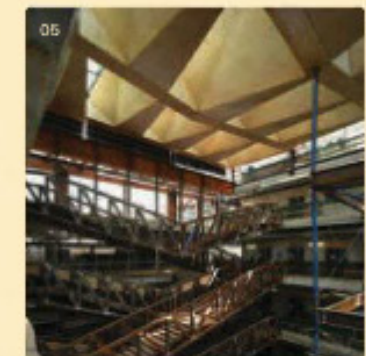
JOHN WARDLE ARCHITECTS AND NADAAA

The new Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning (FABP), a joint venture between John Wardle Architects and NADAAA, displays an uncanny familiarity to the sequence within the former building. The entry is via a laneway-like ground floor, leading down into lecture theatres or up into a large atrium lined with studio spaces. However, unlike the old faculty, there is far greater legibility of the activity beyond these 'public' areas. Workshops on the ground floor open onto a north-facing courtyard; a series of exhibition spaces hug the western entrance; a faculty library opens up to a landscape berm on the southern edge; and the studio spaces lining the atrium offer views in, and beyond, to the established treetops of the heritage campus. It is this legibility of program, infrastructure and methods of construction that is at the heart of the Wardle/NADAAA design, a concept that will enable the building to act as a teaching tool for its students and as a means of communication with visitors to the faculty.

This legibility also makes visible the position of this building within the lineage of the collaborators' work, within the pedagogy of architecture schools locally, internationally and historically and, within a lineage of architectural technology and ideology. The indicator in this case is also the most visually dominant and, arguably, the most innovative element within the new building. Above the voluminous atrium spans a deep, timber-coffered ceiling from which a large form is thrust below, stopping only a few metres above the floor. Currently under construction, this plywood-lined extrusion acts as a catalyst for diversity within the atrium, →

01. Axonometric drawings show the combination of the ceiling, studio and connecting staircases, together with the existing facade extruded into the interior

02. Staircase detail, above and below
03. Preservation of the existing facade
04. Coffered ceiling in place over the main stair core
05. Erection of the main stair core.



→ enabling spaces of introversion, via a completely internalised working studio inside, and refuge beneath, within the otherwise exposed space.

The suspended studio is formed from the coffered ceiling to create the enclosed space, which, together with the need to alter the form to assist the distribution of sound within the atrium, has resulted in a panelling system comprised of totally unique components, some of which are also perforated to enable acoustic softening. Although the studio and laminated veneer lumber (LVL) beams and coffering are all clad in plywood, a more refined plywood finish was chosen for the studio panels and the underside of the beams.

Similar forms appear in NADAAA's previous explorations, perhaps most notably in two of their Boston projects, Upper Crust (2001) and Bina Osteria/Alimentari (2008), where an undulating surface is used as a suspended ceiling structure. Dynamic ceilings also appear in Wardle's recent works, from stepped profile ceilings within the Urban Workshop on Lonsdale Street, Melbourne (2007), an exploration of the ceiling form for light distribution in the lobby of 500 Bourke Street, Melbourne (2012) and, more recently, it is proposed in the podium of 550 Queen Street, Brisbane, punctured with a protruding workspace.

In these earlier explorations it appears that both firms have aimed to make the ceiling a dynamic element for both aesthetic and functional reasons. This is not dissimilar to historical explorations, where the ceiling is suspended to disguise the structure and services beneath, or it exposes its structural members as a feature, an approach common in the Gothic period. However the FABP marks a conceptual shift, questioning whether a ceiling can be more than just a ceiling, with the proposition that the element itself could become a habitable volume.

This idea is also explored on the only fragment of the old commerce faculty building integrated into the new design – the former Bank of NSW Facade. Here, the vertical surface is pulled back into the building, creating a small tutorial space high above the full-height volume of a formal exhibition space. The thickening of the wall with the crumpled plaster surfaces also hides the steel structure supporting the old facade, while emphasising the thickness of the part-brick, part-stone facade that is up to three metres deep at some points.

These explorations are evidence of the unique joint venture between the offices, an arrangement with genuine creative exchange and enhanced outcomes as a result of the collaborative process. Based in Melbourne and Boston respectively, their '24-hour' desktop sharing operation has also enabled the project to run several months ahead of schedule, with completion expected in October 2014. This will allow substantial settling time for staff and students and, hopefully for AR's readership, plenty of opportunities to explore before the 2015 academic year. **AR**

06-09. Fabrication and testing of components for the ceiling construction

10. Axonometric and worm's eye view of existing facade interior

11. Worm's eye view of hanging studio and ceiling

12. Hanging studio to coffered ceiling detail

a. Steel bracket for lighting suspension
b. Typical LVL beam
c. Stub column support to unitised framing

d. Street LVL composite beam to support hanging studio
e. LVL timber box beam
f. Timber coffer beyond
g. 25mm fire-rated acoustic insulation system
h. Hanging studio perforated plywood wall panelling system
i. Slotted steel fixings
j. Timber veneer panelling to timber coffers
k. Plywood wall panelling system
l. Cold-formed steel frame tie-in to coffered ceiling framing.

