

Fully Integrated

Text
Margie Fraser

Woolloongabba (aka The Gabba to cricket fans) abounds in commercial zones with just the right mix of grunginess and edge to house young artisans alongside old-timer upholsterers and motor mechanics. The inner Brisbane 'burb has none of the forced trendiness and self-conscious chic of some of its gentrified neighbours, and has yet to be invaded by design-touting developers. It was the rawness of the area that first attracted Kelly and Marc Weijers to it as the perfect backdrop for their technology lounge, 5thCorner. The couple deal in smart technologies for the home and board room as C-Bus pointOne accredited integration professionals for Clipsal. This includes music distribution systems, security and surveillance systems, lighting and appliance controls, automation, boardroom audio visuals and home theatres.

"Opening 5thCorner was about adding a face to what we'd been doing for some time from a hole-in-the-wall home office," says Kelly Weijers. "We wanted to display equipment in different ways and to simulate different environments. Integration of the systems is the key to it all."

Weijer's friend and architecture graduate Paul Kelsall drew up the floor plans for the space after shadowing Kelly for a couple of weeks to observe how she dealt with clients. "We didn't want to create a run-of-the-mill showroom," says Kelsall. "It had to be something a bit special, and take on the dual purpose of showcasing the technology while providing an environment that inspired and excited clients."

Within the hollow, unprepossessing shell of a blockwork warehouse, Kelsall developed a number of areas which expose the technology to differing degrees. A lounge 'chill' area boasts fully integrated, seamless technology, while the so-called 'machine room' revels in a visceral exposure of wiring and equipment – "the backbone and nervous system needed to support the visible skin of the technology" – as Kelsall puts it.

The 450m² space tapers into a wedge on the street corner and front entry. The unique shape of the otherwise pedestrian floorplate was a starting point for Kelsall's layout. A curved wall of translucent polycarb divides the bulk of the showroom from the entry foyer and large shopfront windows. Arrival into the main zone behind is manipulated by following the narrow entry route alongside the curve. Once around the end of the wall, the main volume is fully visible. Peripheral spaces to either side and in the overhanging mezzanine are comprehended but not fully legible. A plywood ceiling is suspended over the central space, with long slices punched out to expose the original ceiling above.

Areas each have their trademark style, like the graffiti-embellished machine room with its home-made shelves of bricks wedged between timber slabs. "It's what boys do," explains Weijers. "We wanted people to be able to imagine the systems in their own spaces." Likewise the mezzanine level 'observatory' with its sink-in couches, sound-proofing and push-out wall acting as a voyeuristic lookout. A simulated board room caters for the corporate market, and a fully automated bathroom shows how technology can be applied and made playful in all areas.

"We ensured that each area was never completely segregated from the rest of the warehouse: visually, aurally or tactilely," says Kelsall. "The interface between one area and the next and the way they interact is the key to the design."

Margie Fraser is Indesign's Brisbane Correspondent.

5thCorner
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Concept & Design Paul Kelsall (Architecture Consultant) & Kelly Weijers (5thCorner)
Project management Marc Weijers (5thCorner)
Floor area 450m²

