

# A new city library for Tamworth

Tamworth is renowned as the country music capital of Australia. Now it boasts a brand-new city library and art gallery, a project that has taken the better part of two years to complete.

After much debate about the merits of building on a green-field site or refurbishment of an existing building, Tamworth City Council resolved to purchase a site in Peel Street, Tamworth's main street, based on the determination that a new structure was more cost-effective than refurbishing an existing building and accommodating both the library and art gallery in temporary premises during the refurbishment.

Council engaged the services of Architectus Brisbane Pty Ltd whose experience included the construction and/or refurbishment of libraries for Brisbane City Council, the Brisbane Powerhouse Performance Space and, more recently, involvement in the proposed Queensland Museum of Modern Art. Following the appointment of Dubbo Terrazzo and Concrete Industries Pty Ltd as contractors for construction, building works commenced in March 2004.

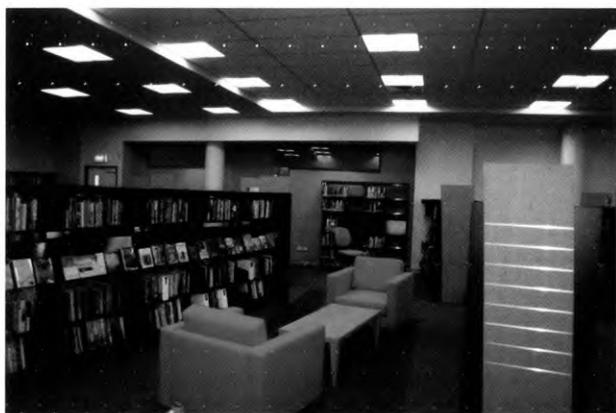
The new site required the demolition of a former motor vehicle garage, and presented a number of design problems. Not only was the site narrow, with a 20-metre frontage, but it was also long and sloping, extending 75 metres into a land-locked car-parking area.

The innovative design allowed the building to be set back from the main street giving a civic address, a gathering space and a (future) public art space. The building follows the 'high street' model of lively shopfront and highly functional service spaces behind.

In keeping with the regional-rural location of Tamworth, the building contains a number of rural design elements. The southern side of the building comprises a 'checkerboard' effect of colourbond sheeting, reminiscent of rural houses with their cast iron roofs. The northern side is clad in timber planking, a reminder of the timber sides of travelling cattle transports.

The building consists of nearly 3000 square metres on two levels, with library and administration on the ground floor, and galleries, community rooms and reception spaces on the upper floor. Access is provided from the rear of the building (public car park) via a covered walkway leading into the upstairs foyer adjacent to the gallery entrance, and from the front of the building into a two-storey naturally lit space with visual links to the upper foyer.

The total project cost of Tamworth's newest cultural building was \$7.95million with a construction cost of \$6million. Funding for development and construction was provided by Tamworth Regional Council, with a contribution of \$145 000 by the state's Ministry for the Arts towards the regional gallery.



One of Tamworth library's 'living rooms'



View of the new Tamworth library from the main street

Donations were also received from the Friends of Tamworth Libraries as well as the Friends of the Gallery.

The library is arranged internally in a series of 'living rooms' and not by the traditional Dewey decimal and alphabetical arrangement. Each 'living room' offers library clients access to resources on a broad subject area in all formats including online technology, with computers connected to subject-appropriate databases and reference resources. Study desks and comfy easy chairs make each 'living room' more like a home environment, and provide users with privacy and comfort.

Following the relocation in December 2004, feedback from users of the new library has shown that people are delighted to find everything on their 'special' subject within easy reach when browsing — some regulars are in fact complaining that they forget the time and spend too long in the library!

Children and young adults now have dedicated areas, at opposite ends of the building. The young adults area is located at the front of the building allowing users a view of the street outside. Soft-drink and coffee vending machines are located nearby, and computers are strategically located for ready access.

For parents, especially those with small children, the proximity of the adult fiction section to the picture book and early readers area has proven to be very popular. Parents are able to supervise while still selecting their own resources, and the children are revelling in having their own area, with child-sized furniture and bright colours. Attendance at pre-school storytime sessions has increased to such an extent that extra sessions have been scheduled to meet demand.

For borrowers, returns are now 'posted' through return chutes adjacent to the front door of the library. A secure after-hours return chute, a first for the City Library service, is being well utilised, especially on weekends.

Even more exciting is the increasing number of people in the lime green foyer first thing in the morning, talking to each other and waiting patiently for the front doors to open. Since the new facility opened, loans and visits have increased, while the library has registered its 1500th new borrower after only five months — not a bad achievement!

Tamworth's new library has become the place to be seen, and library staff will be capitalising on this renewed community interest, with plans for events and activities to capture the imagination of patrons of all ages.

**Meg Larkin, cultural and community services manager, Tamworth Regional Council**