

QVB

concept: escalators



The QVB has a long tradition as a lively marketplace and is now a major retail centre and popular tourist attraction for the city of Sydney. Much of its historical significance and social interest is derived from its ongoing operational vitality, an aspect that has necessitated physical changes to the interiors and the internal transportation systems throughout the life of the building.

During the last major refurbishment of the building in 1984, escalators were located at the central grand entrance on George Street between Ground and Level 1, but separated from the upper floor escalators which were located at the far ends of the galleries. However over time, the dislocated escalators have caused an indirect, inefficient and circuitous travel route to the upper levels of the building. This discouraged the majority of shoppers and contributed to the general decline in retail trade and rental yields for tenancies on the upper floors.

The QVB centre operator considered it essential that an efficient, "legible" escalator system be installed adjacent to the ends of the Ground Floor Market

and Drutt Street entrances, to improve access for shoppers to the upper levels. While mindful of current trends in contemporary shopping centre design, the escalator scheme was required to respect the internal space and fabric of the building, so to preserve the QVB's significant heritage value. The escalator scheme, now under construction, developed with significant input from the City of Sydney and NSW Heritage Councils after the careful consideration and investigation of many alternative schemes with the design consultants.

The new escalators have been designed to be seen as a new sculptural element expressed in their own right and to follow the Burra Charter heritage concept that new insertions should be clearly expressed in a contemporary way so that they will be recognised as a later addition. The design is simple yet respectful of the heritage architecture of the building. It is minimalist, modern, and reversible, using an engineered structure that does not overpower the ornate building elements. It is analogous to the heritage steel and glass roof structure –which was technically advanced and modern in its day, yet it



contrasted with the traditional style and ornamentation of the building.

The escalators are suspended from steel bow framed trusses, supported by the existing columns, but specially constructed to allow removal at a later date if required, without damaging the original fabric. Hung in the gallery voids, the escalators open up the view of the long axis of the building, to the glass roof and dome beyond, which were previously obstructed. Each bank of escalators is suspended from rods that fall directly down the centre line of the gallery voids. The suspension rods have been carefully detailed to establish a new language that applies to both the rods and the balustrade uprights at each escalator landing. The escalators are stabilised by "skeletal" light steel framed connections to the edge of the floor structure at the upper galleries. These landing frames also support the glazed walkways at the ends of each escalator to give access directly to the adjoining gallery.

Architecturally, the symmetrical support structure relates to the strong geometry of the building, while the escalators are stepped sideways and set to one side

of the void to reflect the internal structure of the galleries. The sides of the escalators are clad with a lightly tinted, translucent glass which is backlit, while the underside is clad with obscure glass. The reflective appearance of the glass helps to "dematerialise" the bulky form of the escalator structure.

Once complete in early 2009, the new escalators will better facilitate the vertical movement of pedestrians through the building, enable more equitable access, and encourage greater retail activity at the upper floor levels to ensure the economic and social sustainability of the building. Together with the new colour scheme and shopfronts, the escalator refurbishment works will promote a renewed vitality in the QVB and thereby enhance its status as an iconic retail and tourist destination.