



PRETTY PICTURE: CINEMA COMPLEX AT DISTRICT DOCKLANDS

FAR FROM A BORING, BLOCKY CINEMA BUILDING, TAKEN TO SAVING ITS ACTION FOR THE SCREEN, THIS EYE-CATCHING PROJECT BY NH ARCHITECTURE MAKES A SPRITELY STATEMENT WITH FLASHES OF CLADDING MADE FROM COLORBOND® STEEL – MOST NOTABLY IN ARM ROLLFORMING'S CUSTOM-MADE MEGARIB® PROFILE, IN THE CUSTOM COLOUR MONIKA RED™.

*WORDS PETER HYATT ;
PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL BRADSHAW
AND NICK HUBICKI*

At its heart, architecture needs a sharp eye and a hard head. It's welcome, then, that the definitive design for this new cinema entertainment complex at District Docklands cuts like a scythe.

Working from 'warehouse' origins might appear misguided for achieving the uplifting, yet this is precisely what has occurred in this project's instance. Streamlined and striking, the cinema stands well-apart from the common typology: the rabbit warren-like brutalist cinema megaplex.

Steel wall cladding, made from COLORBOND® steel, wraps around the building like a curtain and provides the project's vivid design motif. Particularly striking is the western facade's triangular-shaped cladding profile, from ARM Rollforming, called MegaRib® – which acts as a rainscreen. This is custom-made from COLORBOND® steel which is folded into 210mm by 305mm angles and repeated in series.



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Interestingly, one of the project’s biggest sticking points was colour. Hubicki tells how the client had to be persuaded by the team’s proposal. Convincing the client to remain open to change demanded imagination and effort. His experience is a reminder that design of consequence invariably owes much less to the ‘brilliant flash’ than perseverance.

“Colour might not normally be such a preoccupation, but in this context and setting it was pivotal,” says Hubicki of the custom colour Monika Red™.

Colour can divide client and architect as easily as unify. “It’s a vibrant red,” he says. “You see it from the freeway and travelling along Footscray Road. It provides this tremendous visibility and feels incredibly ‘right’ given its function and role.”

“As soon as we saw the prototype in the factory we said: ‘This is it!’. And that was what ultimately won over the client. Until then, he was unconvinced about the red, but when he saw the

prototype he had no doubts. He loved it! That was the game-changer.”

Almost thwarted from the outset, the site is less one of pristine possibilities than cautionary tale. The architect describes the site as one created from the space left over between the Melbourne Star Observation Wheel and Costco warehouse. “It was extraordinarily difficult,” he says.

“There were so many competing forces. It’s a reminder that architecture is the act of dogged problem-solving and lateral creativity.”

NH Architecture helped heal Docklands’ reputation for mediocre buildings with its 2009 design for Costco, resulting in a steel beacon that suddenly activated the site’s northern edge. With rare kinetic energy, it turbo-charged a resurgence in betterscaled, bespoke structures.

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Painted in the custom colour Monika Red™, the cladding provides a daring signature that project architect, Nick Hubicki of NH Architecture, describes, “As a kind of pleated house curtain, reiterating the building’s function while reconnecting it to a former cinematic experience: an anticipation of the screening and illusion.”

Hubicki extols the virtues of the building envelope that dazzles, not with glare, but in its visual impact. Forget neon, or sugar-dusted graphics. This taut design narrative is vividly inviting and utterly fitting for a house of fantasy.

The customised triangular cladding made from COLORBOND® steel in the custom colour, Monika Red™, is complemented by a more traditional cladding in the same colour: LYSAGHT LONGLINE 305® profile. Other contrasting colours for the wall cladding include the same LYSAGHT LONGLINE 305® profile in the COLORBOND® steel colours Thredbo White® and Monument®.





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Costco provided Hubicki with déjà vu, when embarking on the cinema complex. “Its language and dynamism provided a momentum for what was possible, second time around. There is a symbiosis,” he enthuses, “between the earlier building made from COLORBOND® steel in the colours Shale Grey™, Monument® and the custom colour O’Hara Red, and its recently delivered sibling.”

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Hubicki says the project’s daring is exemplified by the intensive steel customisation and testing. “The building is a minor essay in how large-scale customisation can be efficiently achieved through collaboration not merely of architect and client, but builder and manufacturer.”

He says that the trailblazing qualities of the envelope demanded intensive problem-solving. “The whole production team was exceptional”. He reels off some of the key suppliers and consultants: “Rollformer, fabricator, builder and BlueScope who helped us connect with pivotal people able to contribute to this result.”

Hubicki says the stellar cast of BlueScope products was pivotal to the project’s success. This included over 200 tonnes of cladding and roofing made from COLORBOND® steel in LYSAGHT LONGLINE 305® profile; 25 tonnes of custom-made triangular cladding made from COLORBOND® steel, welded

beams and columns made from XLERPLATE® steel, as well as purlins and girts made from GALVSPAN® steel.

Roofing is made from COLORBOND® steel in LYSAGHT LONGLINE 305® profile, in the colours Monument® and Surfsmist®, and the project’s signature custom colour, Monika Red™. “The roof is mainly darkly coloured and also has the lighter coloured Surfsmist®,” he says. “The red gives it zing and isolates it from everything else, very quickly. Our office puts a high premium on roofs. They’re never considered wasted, or invisible.”

“The project forms a contextual dialogue between existing structures,” he continues. “The malleable and dynamic properties of the LYSAGHT LONGLINE 305® profile and the triangular sections made from COLORBOND® steel were exploited to allow the building to maximise its volume, given an unusually difficult site boundary.”

“This had to be made from scratch and the full building height had to be achieved seamlessly. Mike Brinkman, BlueScope’s specification account

manager, put us in touch with ARM Rollforming’s Henry Wolfkamp.”

“Mike did us a great favour by introducing Henry because he is remarkable. Henry worked with BlueScope and ourselves to prototype just the right profiles and paint colours.”

Wolfkamp also responded to the architect’s request for the biggest, longest sheets available. “Henry was fantastic,” says Hubicki. “Nothing was too much trouble. He created the sample 220mm profile as well as the super 18m length, rather than the standard 6m variety.”

Wolfkamp describes the whole process between the installers, architects and builders as one of “huge goodwill”.

“We produced the sample profile, had our best operator on the roll-forming job and a team of people to stack and handle the sheets with the care to ensure it all arrived on site in pristine condition,” Wolfkamp says.

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“We were interested in using a material we could ‘push’,” Hubicki remarks of the great spans achieved from a profile that is only 1.2mm thick.

“Without end-lap connections at 1,200mm centres vertically, it is just one length of steel at 18m.”

Now the project is complete, is Hubicki still impressed by his facade of many colours? “We recently took the Australian Institute of Architects team along as part of judging for the Victorian COLORBOND® steel Award for Steel Architecture – which it subsequently won – and the gods were favourable to us. The light was fantastic. The rotated elevation and varied roof gradient revealed a full gamut – from a colour bordering on orange to a deep, deep red and – further along – a fiery red. It was really quite magical.”

So successful has the design and development process for this project been that NH Architecture plans to continue the steel envelope momentum at Melbourne Park’s new media centre. “It was simply a small idea that steel then became the dominant material on. We’ve

learned so much from the entertainment complex that we’re speaking to Henry again and so we’re looking at a similar cladding. In that project’s case, we started with a simple drawing with some nominal dimensions, and we asked how we could ‘push’ the material to provide something jointless and incredibly cost effective.”

A tough site and roadway elevation for The Cinema Complex at District Docklands might have caused Hubicki palpitations but his response to the challenge is the opposite: “Oh no, not at all. I was licking my lips (for the western facade). That is probably my favourite part of the building ,” Hubicki says.

“It’s not very often as architects you get a big, blind wall to design and one really without apertures. It could easily be anonymous and fade away, or it can star. I think that edge of the project definitely stars.”

NH Architecture continues the revival of District Docklands. Far better public engagement through design bravura suggests redemption is at hand.

Above
 Wrapped around a tight site at the base of the Melbourne Star Observation Wheel, the complex generates a strong standalone presence yet dovetails into the precinct’s recent typology.

PROJECT TEAM
CLIENT: Ashe Morgan
ARCHITECT: NH Architecture
BUILDER: Hutchinson Builders
STEEL FABRICATOR AND ROLLFORMER: ARM Rollforming
CLADDING CONTRACTOR: Close Commercial
STRUCTURAL AND CIVIL ENGINEER: 4D Workshop
STEEL MANUFACTURER: BlueScope