

Set within general residential zoning on Hoddle Street in Melbourne, McCorkell Brown Group's offices by Ha Architecture achieve a fine balance between appeasing the neighbours and preparing for the next 20 years in business.

# Meet The Neighbours

McCorkell Brown Group offices, Melbourne by Ha Architecture  
Words *Stephen Craft* Photography *Dan Hocking* Styling *Beck Simon*

Hoddle Street is one of Melbourne's busiest thoroughfares, with traffic jams a regular occurrence during peak travel times. However inside the three-level offices of McCorkell Brown Group (situated on Hoddle Street between the main drags of Victoria Street and Wellington Parade), there's a sense of calm, with double-glazing shielding most of the noise.

For Ha Architecture, it wasn't the noise that most challenged the design, but the fact that it was situated within in general residential zoning. This meant they would have to appease the neighbours – including an older couple who were concerned the lemon tree in their back garden would be overshadowed by the development.

"Hence, the form of the building, strategically following the Res Code guidelines," says Ha Architecture principal Nick Harding, who inherited the task of transforming an old distribution warehouse thought to be from the 1940s.

For Harding's clients, moving from a warehouse-style office located close to the new location was paramount. "We wanted our staff (25 in number) not to be inconvenienced by the move. It's also a stone's throw from Bridge Road and the city," says Damien Newton-Brown, a director of the McCorkell Brown Group. "We were also mindful of car parking, given our staff regularly move between the office and building sites," he adds.





121 HODDLE

McCORKELL BROWN GROUP









## Space To Gather

The communal kitchen on the top floor serves as a lunch space, but is also perfect for board meetings and evening events. Filtering the afternoon's west sun are automated perforated external louvres.

---





Aside from the functional brief given to Harding, Newton-Brown and his colleagues were quite loose in their expectation from the design outcome. “We wanted fairly fluid open-plan offices that allowed for collaboration rather than a series of enclosed rooms,” says Newton-Brown, who was also keen to ensure vertical connections throughout the spaces.

Ha Architecture only retained the boundary walls of the former showroom, with the new office inserted within this shell. A large circular window punctured the existing brick wall bordering Hoddle Street, allows for those meeting in the main boardroom to watch the continual stream of traffic pass by. However, in spite of its address, the interior is relatively quiet, with double glazing on all windows. For natural light, as well as external spaces to be enjoyed, Ha Architecture created a ‘slice’ through the building’s core, with protected terraces orientated to the north. To allow for natural light to penetrate this core, Harding included a series of translucent polycarbonate walls. “We wanted to ensure privacy for neighbouring homes, while not making staff feel dislocated from the elements,” he says.

With the brief including expansive horizontal spaces, the floor plates on the top two levels are generous, with unimpeded sight lines and cross-ventilation from east to west. Automated perforated steel awnings framing the western elevation on the top level allow the

kitchen and communal areas to be ‘closed’ down to filter the harsh afternoon sun. “We thought it best to locate the main breakout space on the top level to take advantage of the city views,” says Harding. At the rear of this level are the directors’ offices together with another breakout space.

The middle level is primarily given over to the main work area, with open-plan spaces allowing unimpeded communication – a necessity for team projects. “The location of the central staircase was pivotal to the design, providing for those incidental catch-up meetings or organising ones to occur,” says Newton-Brown, who understands the need for staff to be in continual dialogue, rather than stuck behind closed doors. For Harding, the expression of materials – especially given the group’s specialisation in construction – was also paramount. As a result exposed steel beams placed at intervals of three metres define the various working modules while reinforcing the lightness of the structure.

With 90 years of operation, the McCorkell Brown Group fully understands the need to provide comfortable spaces, whether for educational projects, hospitality projects or in office fit-outs. “The idea wasn’t to maximise all the net letable floor space. It’s a space we intend to occupy for at least the next 20 years,” says Newton-Brown.

[h-a.com.au](http://h-a.com.au)

Page 107: McCorkell Brown Group’s new office, with its fortress-like façade, eliminates noise from passing traffic. Page 108-109: The communal kitchen situated on the top floor.

Above: The breakout spaces include double-height voids framed by translucent polycarbonate walls that diffuse the light as well as create a ‘veil’ to the neighbouring property.

Opposite: The building’s exposed steel structural beams loosely delineate the open-plan office spaces.

