

FEDERATION SQUARE

Melbourne, Australia

Development Team

Owner/Developer

Federation Square Management
Melbourne, Australia
www.fedsq.com

Architects

Lab architecture studio/
Bates Smart Architects
Melbourne, Australia
www.labarchitecture.com

Landscape Architect

Karres en Brands
Hilversum, The Netherlands

Cities around the world are finding that many large sites, such as railyards, that are occupied by hard-to-relocate infrastructure can be roofed over to create new usable space for civic functions. Roofing over is not a new trend, but it is an accelerating one as cities are forced to be more efficient with their most finite asset—land. Millennium Park in Chicago (see page 135) is one such example, and so is Federation Square.

Melbourne has always felt the need for a grand civic square, which was promised—but never delivered—in the 1837 plan for the new town on the River Yarra. Federation Square finally meets this need, creates a new gateway to the heart of the city, and completes the family of welcoming institutions—the Flinders Street train station and St. Paul’s cathedral—that occupy the intersection of Flinders and Swanston Streets. On the southeast corner of this intersection, Federation Square replaces the Jolimont railyard that served Flinders Street station and an offensive eyesore, the “Gas and Fuel” towers—land uses that additionally created a barrier between the center of the city and the Yarra.

The opportunity for creating a civic square on this site came knocking in the 1990s when improved railway technologies made obsolete some of the railyard’s physical plant. Schemes for the development of a civic square above the Jolimont railyard had been discussed since the 1920s, but this time the talk among state and city officials about actually moving ahead—perhaps the ninth such proposal for the site in the 20th century—gained momentum with the completion of an international design and concept competition in 1997 that was won by a team made up of the Lab architecture studio (then based in London) and a local firm, Bates Smart Architects.

There ensued a two-year-long controversy in which alterations were imposed on the winning design. Compromises at best, the changes satisfied neither the public nor the designers. In 1999, when a comprehensive review suggested—to no one’s surprise—that the project, which had not yet begun, was behind schedule and over budget, the state of Victoria established a quasi-public agency, Federation Square Management, to oversee the development of the square and to operate it in perpetuity. A fixed construction budget of AU\$450 million (US\$297 million) was established and the agency was given the authority to leverage private funds with that money.

Opened in 2002, Federation Square completes an institutional and commercial center that celebrates Melbourne’s history and culture. It features an open-air amphitheater that can accommodate as many as 35,000 people, with a stage area that is backed by a giant video screen. The 3.6-hectare (8.9 ac) space is





Project Data

Web Site

www.federationsquare.com.au

Site Area 3.6 hectares (8.9 ac)

Facilities

44,000 square meters (473,600 sf)
total building area

Land Uses civic square, open-air
amphitheater, associated cultural and
retail facilities

Completion Date

October 2002

Jury Statement

Overcoming a controversial planning and implementation history, Federation Square has become a popular and commercially successful civic square for the city of Melbourne and the state of Victoria. This public/private initiative has built over an active railyard a 3.6-hectare (8.9 ac) cultural destination that can accommodate 35,000 people in an open-air amphitheater and provides 44,000 square meters (473,600 sf) of commercial and cultural space.

designed to accommodate a number of simultaneous activities. The entire deck—believed to be the largest railway deck in Australia—sits on vibration-absorbing coils to shield the above-deck facilities from the active rail operations beneath. A large passive cooling system—40 meters long by 40 meters wide and four meters deep (131×131×13 ft)—sits under the plaza and acts as a heat sink for a glazed atrium above the plaza. Its cooling performance is equivalent to that of conventional air conditioning, but it uses only 10 percent of the electricity.

The plaza is surrounded by irregularly shaped buildings, which the plaza designers, referring to the architectonic volumes as well as the surface motifs, call “shards.” (This nomenclature, used both pejoratively and approvingly, has stuck.) The shards—museums, art galleries, performing-arts venues, offices, cinemas, studios, and restaurants—contain 44,000 square meters (473,600 sf) of interior space. Running between the shards is open space totaling 17,500 square meters (188,375 sf) leading to plazas, to adjoining streets, and to the River Yarra walkway.

Federation Square opened too late to celebrate the centenary of Australia’s federation, but it has otherwise met and exceeded projections for use and revenues. Up to 1,000 events attract 7 million visitors annually and generate AU\$100 million (US\$76 million) for institutions and commercial tenants in the area. Most of all, Federation Square has given Melbournians a long-awaited monument to their urbanity.