

TRANSPORT



'Public Bar - Now Open' announces the lettering above the door at recently-opened Transport in Melbourne's Federation Square, indicating to would-be barflies that this seemingly space-aged structure is indeed a watering-hole. Karyn Markwell makes herself comfortable
Photography by Rhiannon Slatter.

located on one of Melbourne's most desirable commercial properties, Transport was designed for a 21st century clientele. Constructed from timber, stainless steel and concrete, Transport is the epitome of solidity and durability. However, the flexibility of its design, lighting and audiovisual systems mean that patrons nonetheless can — and do — adapt the versatile venue to their specific needs.

Solid timber and polished concrete benches, both low and bar-height, in a varying range of lengths and widths, break up the huge public space. Transport's patrons fluently adapt these built-in structures to their own needs: some sit, some lean, some lie on them. Several vibrant Asian-style cushions are amongst the very few trimmings found at Transport, adding an occasional contrast of colour, and are adopted by patrons as mats, pillows, or just to hug while chatting within a group.

Elements common to all bars, but which are usually disguised or hidden away altogether, are turned into features at Transport. Garage-style roller doors — obviously installed to permit large deliveries — nestle into the public areas, adding to the urban atmosphere of the venue. A series of impressive stainless steel pipes feed from beer barrels encased behind glass on the second floor, to the taps in the bars below: they clearly have a direct — and, according to most bar-bound Aussies, crucial — purpose, but at Transport they are also a visual highlight. Slightly less impressive, but still the result of thought and application, are the upended bottles of spirits artfully suspended in stainless-steel strips above the bar — they are both aesthetically stimulating, as well as purposeful.

The banks of built-in LCD screens at Transport are reminiscent of the train timetables displayed on terminals over the road at Flinders Street Station, thereby connecting with the strong transport theme of the bar. Indeed, many elements at Transport indicate that it is more than just a pub: that it is actually a social scene, an information source, and a venue willing and able to adapt to the needs of each of its patrons. To learn more about how the design, audiovisual and lighting achieves flexibility for its 21st century clientele, Venue Magazine chatted with three members of the team that helped to create Transport.

The Architecture - Drew Carling, Maddison Architects

Venue: Am I right in saying that when you began designing the interior, Transport was an existing structure?

Drew Carling: Yes, it was an existing shell. We got on board the project quite early on, before the building was finished, so we had input into the base building works before they were complete, basically so that we could achieve the design that we wanted. Our fit-out is quite reverential to what we were given. We really tried to promote the main body of space — the structure, the columns, the concrete

beams - which we left exposed, making a highlight of them. It was all about working with Lab (+ Bates Smart Architects, the builders of Federation Square) to get the best result.

Venue: Transport looks amazing, but in the end, it's all about people coming in for a drink, isn't it?

Drew Carling: Sure. And we set out to design a contemporary pub, which was a huge responsibility, given the location. Just across the road is Young and Jackson's, which is an institution — it pretty much



embodies what we know about old pubs — so we knew we were going to be thrown into the limelight by doing a new pub. We had to consider 'what is a new pub?'

Venue: What conclusions did you come to?

Drew Carling: We felt that people didn't want a space that was restrictive, but instead offered options and alternatives. So, for starters, we threw away furniture and lighting catalogues: all of that stuff that was at our fingertips in terms of what was new and what was fashionable, we threw away. We approached Transport in an entirely different manner.

Instead of offering patrons a conventional environment to socialise – buy a drink here, sit over there – we've offered alternatives. We haven't divided up the space; we haven't partitioned it off with walls and made it smaller, there's just a *notion* of separation, without being cut off. We have areas where people can be on parade, or where they can chill out and not be on show. I love the idea of actually giving people an environment to extend their own social thoughts a little bit: the environment enables people to be just a bit more playful about how they enjoy themselves. People sit up here (indicating a bar-height bench) and face the 'wrong' way; all that sort of stuff. It's great to see: when it's working, when people just sort of lie over stuff, it's terrific.

Venue: What sort of lighting did you have installed here at Transport?

Drew Carling: Apart from the natural light from the floor to ceiling windows, most of the artificial light in Transport is via LED fixtures, which are built-in and custom made. There is no feature lighting as such, no big-ticket items like that, instead all of the lighting bounces off surfaces. It's all about cracks and crevices; I love all that.

Venue: While the gas radiators almost act as lighting in themselves during the winter months.

Drew Carling: Sure. Naturally their prime purpose is to heat the space but they also radiate an inviting red glow — when people walk past outside, and it's cold, they respond to those heaters, because they can see them before they feel the heat. We do have the electric heating panels (built into the walls) as well, but a lot of people don't realise that they are heaters, because they stay black. People respond to the colour, instead.

Venue: What is the palette of materials that you have used in the design at Transport?

Drew Carling: It's very restricted: concrete, timber, and stainless steel. It was a conscious decision to keep it restricted; it helps to unify everything. We wanted to make something here that was presented in a simple way. It's actually very complex, but it's presented simply. The material selection helps that.

Venue: Just to sum up: we've talked about Transport being a 21st century pub, how does Transport attract a 21st century clientele?

Drew Carling: There is nothing in here that is conventional: there is hardly a proprietary item in the place. Everything has been crafted and put together, from the beer line system through to the sound system. In terms of the actual space and what that represents, we've stripped it back to the essentials of what we required, but handed it over to the public: it's an area for them to operate in whichever way they want to operate. All of Transport is treated as one item: we've simplified it right down to the bare essences of what we required. It's very complex, but in the end it's a very simple solution.

“21st century clients want to feel that there is flexibility in today's venues, and this is exactly what Transport provides”



AudioVisual Content – Peter Johns, Butterpaper Architecture & Web

Venue: How did your skills contribute to the design and audiovisual aspects of Transport?

Peter Johns: I was brought in as the architect who new a thing or two about computers, the web, as well as AV. I used those skills at Transport to develop an audiovisual system that tries to take things a step further than normal. As is the case with the rest of Federation Square, we have gone further into the digital realm than anyone else has in Melbourne.

Venue: What have you done to ensure that the systems you have established at Transport are cutting edge?

Peter Johns: At Transport we are trying to create a 21st century pub, and not a pub that has too much of the 'horse races and Bert Newton on the telly'. Here we have installed widescreen LCD 40-inch NEC screens, 1280 x 768 pixels, and we're developing content such as airport feeds, Melbourne water storage feeds, anything that's live and that relates to either 'transport' or Melbourne. We're still negotiating; still trying to get our hands on Melbourne's train and tram real-time feeds. The transport theme is an obvious one for many reasons, not least the fact that it's going on in every direction underneath us (trains, trams, taxis and Yarra river water transport). I guess it's an overlap between being a transport hub and Federation Square being the digital future.

Venue: Can you tell us some more about the variety of content that you can display on the LCD screens?

Peter Johns: Well, it's particularly interesting what we are doing with the internet here at Transport: you don't usually see the internet on the wall of a venue, it's usually on a desktop. But here an LCD screen can be displaying the internet one minute and a music video the next. A lot of people don't really pick up on the fact that the monitors are doing all these things at once; it's a pretty new concept. But we can be playing a DVD at one moment, then Foxtel the next, then we can pick up a live feed from NASA the next moment, and show them all to the same screen. The staff here are still trying to completely get up to speed, to utilise the full potential of the system that we have installed. There is still the instinct to 'turn on the telly', which we are trying to break away from.

AudioVisuals - Shane Cannon, Rutledge Engineering

Venue: What's the backbone of the audiovisual system that you have installed here?

Shane Cannon: There is a wide variety of sources available to the AV system. These include three Foxtel decoders, one music video jukebox, four HDTV set top receivers, a live feed from Federation Square, and four inhouse multimedia channels (such as Internet feeds). All those 'channels' go to a router, which manages the task of getting the selected channels to the various LCD monitors. Then from a Crestron touchscreen, the staff at Transport can designate the content they want for every individual screen – basically they can have any of the sources across any or all of the combined screens in any combination they like.

What's clever about the Transport system is the multimedia scheduler. The scheduler



» **Transport** has eschewed the tradition 'table & chairs' approach for a far more flexible design that allows patrons to sit, stand and congregate in a manner that best suits them. Transport may have inherited the zinc clad structural 'shell' that was part of the Federation Square redevelopment, but virtually everything about the interior fitout was custom made and designed. The beer lines that link the cool room to the taps at the bar are just one striking feature that imbues the interior with a 21st century attitude.

allows us to register content, create playlists, and address each of the four inhouse multimedia channels individually. From the touchscreen we can choose Foxtel to come through, or HDTV, or whatever, using the router to run multiple formats on one set of inputs, as opposed to someone just switching on a button and changing channels. The beauty of this arrangement is that the AV system is all predefined — we can schedule it months in advance.

It was exciting for us to create the setup, as it has purpose: the whole transport live feed idea has a reason for being there. Sometimes you can put a screen up and think 'that's great, but it's just a screen', whereas here at Transport there is a reason to have a screen, which is a different way of looking at using a technology.

Venue: Transport is an unusual structure. Were there any unusual challenges related to the audiovisual installation?

Shane Cannon: Basically the first issue we had was with the glass and the hard surfaces: we looked at whether there were going to be big sonic reflections. We went through the process of trying to work out the best way of sympathetically installing the audiovisuals given the available space; we didn't want to impinge on the architects' vision.

In the front area we have a focussed area of sound, effectively like a traditional dance floor: eight JBL speakers, made up of six main boxes (AM4212/64s) and two subwoofers (AL6125s), which delivers 5000 watts in one main spot. All the other areas use a distributed approach (with many more smaller, low powered speakers), so that we can keep the level down to stop the reflections off the glass and steel.

Venue: How are you controlling the sound levels in the various areas of the building?

Shane Cannon: There are four individually controllable zones on the groundfloor level (a total of 12 across the entire building). We use BSS Soundweb and dbxDriverack audio control systems, which are systems that you'd normally only see in larger entertainment venues like clubs or theatres. Both systems are more powerful than a conventional zone mixer as they're DSP (Digital Signal Processor) driven, which means that we can perform more sophisticated routing and EQ'ing of the sound system to fine-tune the sound of the speakers.

Venue: What are some of the key elements that make Transport a 21st century pub in audiovisual terms?

Shane Cannon: Unlike conventional pubs the Transport audiovisuals don't feel like an 'add-on' or an afterthought. The audiovisuals adhere to the same philosophies as the other design aspects – choice and flexibility. By which I mean, the audio isn't blasting patrons' heads off, but you have access to an area of high energy; while the visuals are informative, entertaining, or just mildly diverting, depending on what you're after. At Transport nothing is shoved down anyone's throat, but it's there if they want it. I think 21st century clients want to feel that there is flexibility in today's venues, and this is exactly what Transport provides.«

»**Transport:** Federation Square, Melbourne, (03) 9654 8808

»**Architects:** Maddison Architects (03) 9696 3636

»**AudioVisual content:** Butterpaper Architecture & Web (03) 9690 3822

»**AudioVisual contractor:** Rutledge Engineering (03) 9488 1500

»JBL Control 25

Transport is a potentially problematic space to put speakers into. There is a lot of glass, steel and polished concrete for sound from any speaker to bounce off. When sound bounces around like that it makes music difficult to listen to and makes conversation an exercise in frustration. The way Transport combated this was to dot a large number of low-output speakers around the space — in this case Control 25 speakers from JBL — rather than having a handful of high-output speakers that would 'excite' the space and (thanks to the shiny walls, floors and ceilings) make a racket. The result is a very pleasing ambient sound, where, as a punter, you don't feel as if you're being blasted by one speaker, but, rather, immersed by many. Each Control 25's dimensions are 236mm (H) x 188mm (W) x 148mm (D), they are full bandwidth, can be magnetically shielded (for use near monitors/TVs) and there are a number of mounting brackets available – making it a favourite among audiovisual installers.

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»NEC LCD4000

Transport used NEC's 40-inch LCD4000 as its main means of displaying the innovative multimedia content. The LCD4000 is ideal for applications that require precise readability and clarity from a distance — perfect for Transport's purposes but also why you'll find these NEC displays in airports and stock exchanges. Meanwhile, the monitor's 1280 x 768 (WXGA) resolution optimises on-screen text, images and video with remarkable precision and clarity. In the case of Transport LCD screens were preferable to plasma equivalents as plasma screens are prone to 'burn-in' — where static images/text (as is the case when displaying internet information) tend to remain on (or 'burn' into) the screen when the source has been switched or even when the screen has been turned off.

For more information on NEC displays contact

»**NEC Australia:** 131632 or www.nec.com.au

