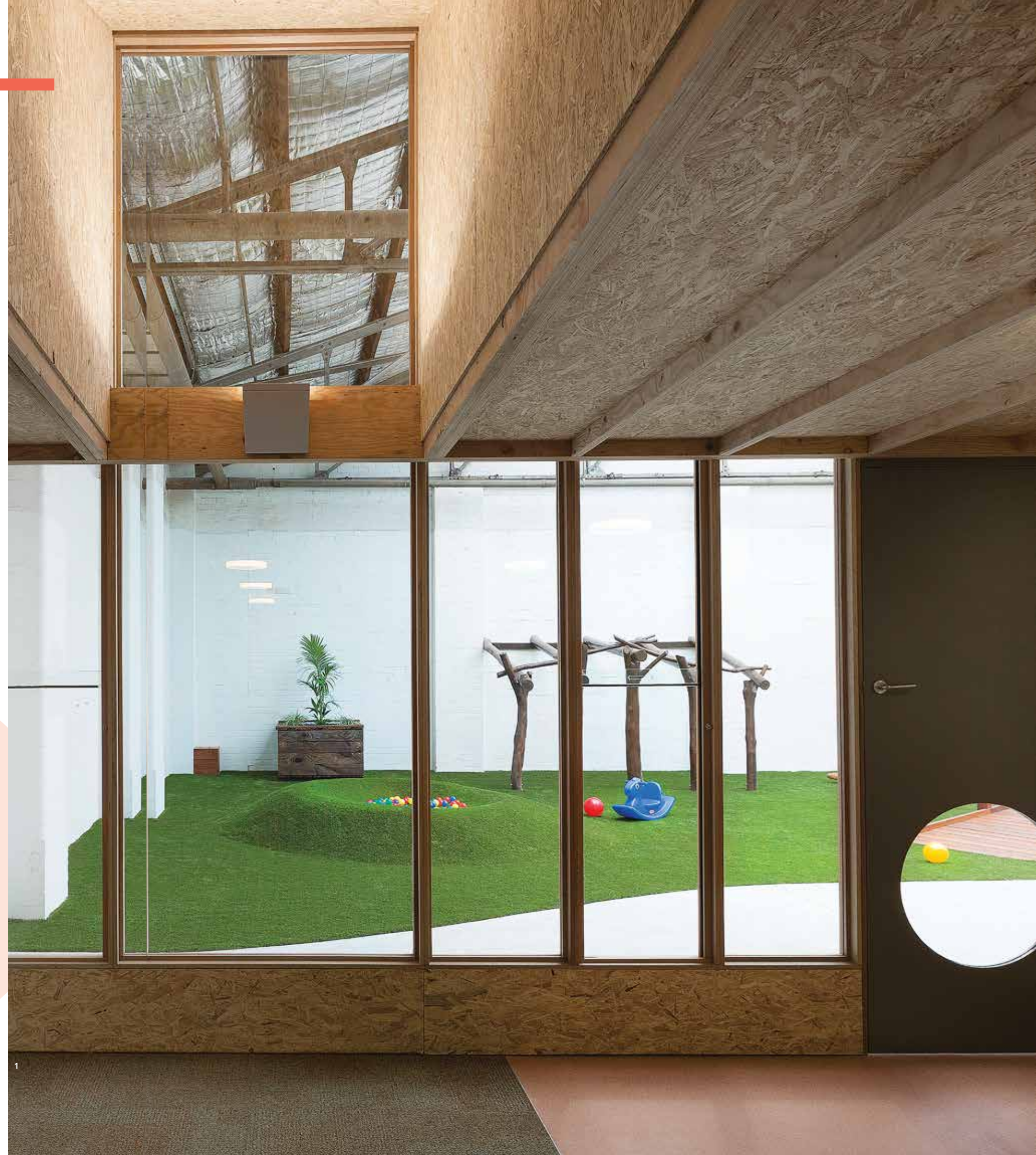


CAMPERDOWN CHILDCARE

This childcare centre in Sydney's inner west is all about learning through play – a philosophy that not only applies to the youngsters using the facility, but which also informed CO-AP's design process.

words SING D'ARCY photography ROSS HONEYSETT



1. EACH PLAYROOM HAS A POP-UP CLERESTORY WINDOW THAT LETS NATURAL LIGHT INTO THE SPACE.

2. AN INDOOR LANDSCAPE UNFOLDS BENEATH THE PITCHED ROOFS AND STEEL TRUSSES OF THE WAREHOUSE.

It is generally accepted that children learn through play. This is not an approach typically followed in architectural design. However, in an attempt to tackle a challenging brief, CO-AP has bucked grown-up design methodology, opening its exploration to the unfamiliar. In doing so, the team has created an innovative and engaging early-learning space in what was previously a nondescript industrial building in Sydney's inner west.

The brick facade of the Camperdown warehouse does not give much away. The only hint that it is a childcare facility is the cluster of prams near the entrance door and once inside, the sound of children's laughter and the occasional teary cry. A double surprise is revealed as an indoor landscape unfolds beneath the pitched roofs and steel trusses. The box-like warehouse provides an expansive floor area for play, allowing the architects to contain the playrooms and services to the perimeter – a simple and effective manoeuvre. The interior landscape takes advantage of the full-height ceiling, while the playrooms, which needed to be self-contained and acoustically isolated, are formed like cubby houses. An interesting dialogue is set up, much like the urban fabric of the neighbourhood, where a continuous street facade of the private realm addresses the communal space of the village green.

One of the aims of the project was to create an environment that felt "less institutional and more residential." Not surprisingly, the gritty inner-west notion of "residential" is far from suburban. Borrowing from the language of the surrounding industrial architecture, each playroom has a pop-up clerestory window that allows natural light in to the spaces, while also creating an interior skyline when viewed from the playground. The industrial feel is continued through the use of oriented strand board and yellow tongue board for the cladding to the playrooms – robust enough to withstand the unpredictable onslaughts of toddlers at play.

The straightforward planning and no-nonsense materials are not left as reductive or rustic. CO-AP has deployed its hallmark precision detailing to elevate what could have easily ended up looking like packing crates into sophisticated and beguiling works of interior architecture. This is even more impressive considering that this project was outside the usual zone of the designers' practice. To inheritors of Sydney's minimalist legacy, CO-AP's portfolio gleams with luxury residential and boutique retail projects. What sets them





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3_ THE CHILDCARE CENTRE IS SET UP LIKE A STREET - THE PLAYROOMS ACT AS PRIVATE ADDRESSES AND THE PLAYGROUND IS THE COMMUNAL VILLAGE GREEN.

4_ WHERE POSSIBLE, THE DESIGNERS RETAINED ELEMENTS OF THE ORIGINAL WAREHOUSE TO TELL A STORY OF THE SITE'S HISTORY.

5_ ORIENTED STRAND BOARD AND YELLOW TONGUE BOARD WERE USED FOR CLADDING IN THE PLAYROOMS.



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apart from many of their colleagues is their eagerness to collaborate with other practitioners and take risks.

CO-AP director and project architect Will Fung describes the studio as “a reactive practice” that likes to “collaborate with others.” For this design, Fung says that dealing with an unfamiliar typology – an old industrial building with children as the primary users – forced them to “go in naive.” While many designers might have shrunk from such a combination, Fung saw this as an opportunity to question the rules and play with assumptions. “We feel stronger with weirder briefs and collaboration,” Fung says. With close working relationships with the client and landscape architect, CO-AP was encouraged to break away from the standard clichés of bland and banal precedents painted in red, yellow and blue. The designers reminisced about the playgrounds of their childhoods and decided to “re-evaluate the overly sanitized” model that presents itself as the industry norm. Rather than bold colours, a more complex and muted palette was used. A splash of fun is introduced with a “nod to Memphis” through the Ettore Sottsass-designed laminate used in the playrooms. Texture is given precedence over colour – children have at arm’s reach myriad different materials to paw. These range from the usual soft finishes one would expect in such a rough-and-tumble environment like carpet tiles and soft-fall rubber, through to more controversial choices such as rusticated sandstone blocks used as playground seating, the strand board of the playrooms, or the original mottled finish left on the warehouse walls.

The design is progressive in many ways. By abstracting forms, textures and environments, the interior becomes more “suggestive,” a trait that Fung says allows the child to imagine and interpret. Rather than being overly simplistic and proscriptive, the interior becomes part of the children’s play. Similarly, it seems CO-AP has subscribed to this philosophy, allowing its design processes to be open to suggestion, collaboration, imagination and play. In doing so, the practice has produced a refreshing proposition for what is typically considered as an unrewarding design typology. What better place is there to start the visual literacy of a child than in a fascinating interior like this? **A**

project

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design practice

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project team

Will Fung, Patrik Braun,
Tina Engelen

time schedule

Design, documentation:
12 months
Construction: 3 months

landscape architect & playspace consultant

Fiona Robbé Landscape
Architecture, Horticulture
and Playspace Design

builder

Blitz Group

landscape contractor

Jamie Miller Landscapes

structural engineer

Partridge Structural

hydraulics

Glenn Haig & Partners

stormwater

Ecological Design

acoustics

Acoustic Logic

bca

BCA Logic

mechanical consultant

Northrop Consulting
Engineers

mechanical contractor

R & J Air Conditioning Services

products

vinyl
Armstrong Accolade Plus in
‘Carnarvon Red’ in playrooms
and Accolade Safe in ‘White
Spice’ in wet areas.

carpet

Interface Cubic Colours
carpet tile in ‘Sunflower’
in playrooms and Interface
Cubic in ‘Purpose’ in staff
rooms.

joinery

Abet Laminati ‘Seragrafia
1243’ laminate by Ettore
Sottsass in playrooms.
Laminex ‘Fresh Sprout’ in
bathrooms and ‘Sheer
Mesh’ in utility areas.

walls and ceilings

Oriented strand board,
unfinished.

windows & doors

Maple with natural stain.

lighting

Wedge wall light from Masson
For Light. Zara round oyster
light from Domus. Clipsal
Highbay light.

sanitaryware

Caroma Junior toilet suite.
Britex stainless steel
handwash trough and baby
bath. Blanco inset sink and
laundry tub.

tapware

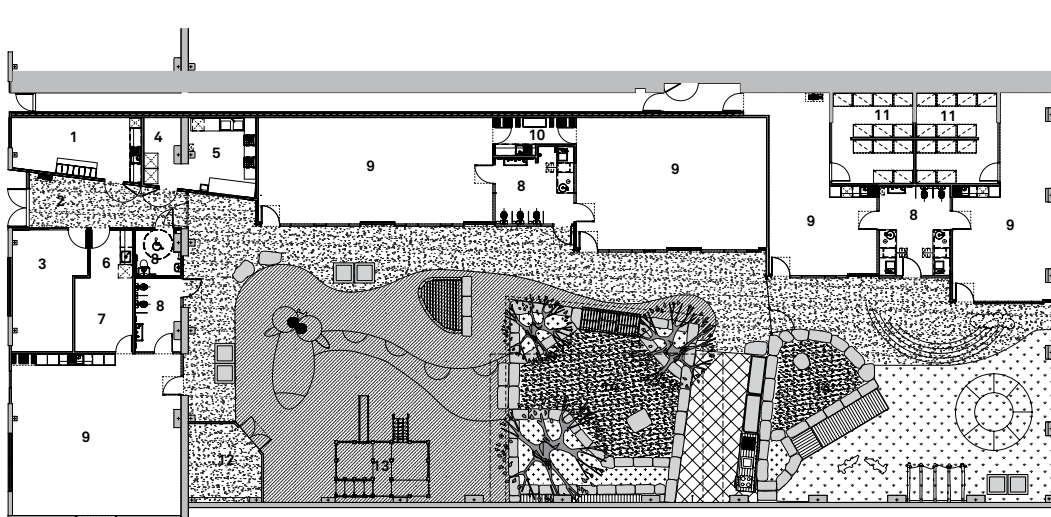
Dorf Flickmixer handbasin
mixer and sink mixer and
Oasis sink mixer. Caroma
Nordic Care accessible
handbasin mixer.

door hardware

Dalco Diablo lever sets.

furniture

Ergerte children’s chair
from MTA. Stockholm Series
birch plywood tables and
bookcases from Modern
Teaching Aids. Playroom
pigeonhole shelving and
outdoor dining set from
Palletable Furniture.



- 1 Staff room
- 2 Lobby
- 3 Office
- 4 Pantry
- 5 Kitchen
- 6 Laundry
- 7 Storage
- 8 Bathroom
- 9 Classroom
- 10 Storage and craft
- 11 Cot room
- 12 Garden shed
- 13 Mezzanine deck
- 14 Sandpit

CAMPERDOWN CHILDCARE FLOOR PLAN 1:400

