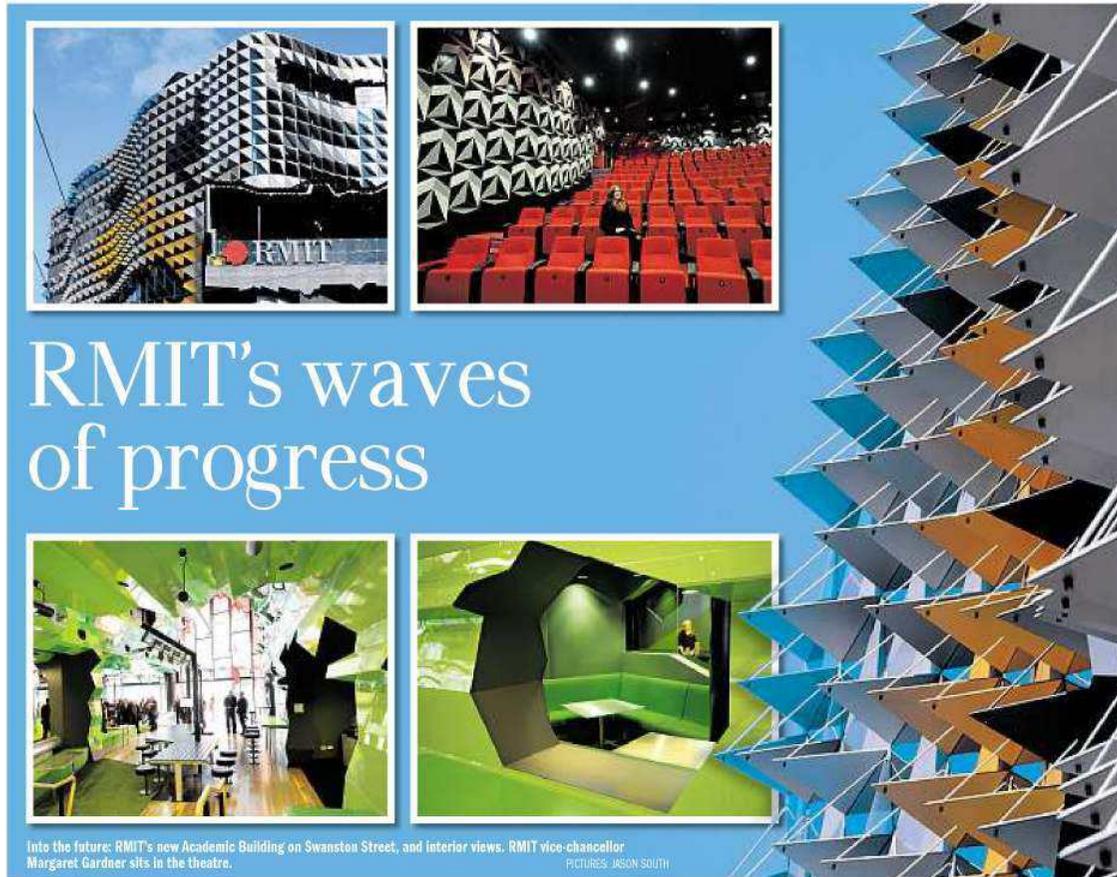




## ARCHITECTURE *'I think this transforms the student experience at RMIT'*



### RMIT's waves of progress

Into the future: RMIT's new Academic Building on Swanston Street, and interior views. RMIT vice-chancellor Margaret Gardner sits in the theatre. PICTURES: JASON SOUTH

#### CAROLYN WEBB

**ITS colourful, wavy Swanston Street facade shimmers like coral in the grey cityscape. Where for decades there was wasteland has risen RMIT's ambitious new Swanston Academic Building.**

The structure, dubbed RMIT'S biggest ever single-building project at a cost of more than \$200 million, opens to students on Monday.

Melbourne architectural firm Lyons aimed to subvert the CBD's common concrete box style in designing the 11-storey building at the corner of Swanston and A'Beckett streets.

Hundreds of brightly coloured triangular sunshades spike out from the wavy exterior that's wrapped around the 19th-century Oxford Scholar pub.

The building's interior is

designed to bring the streetscape inside, with bluestone floors, tactile wall surfaces in concrete, pressed metal and plastic, and on the ground floor, mini-laneways, cafes and restaurants spill to the outside.

In a departure from the institutional greys and browns of universities of old, the building's 12 lecture theatres, sized from 90 to 360 seats, have walls in reds, greens and yellows, often dotted with raised geometric patterns.

Some theatres have windows providing natural light, reversible desks for group work and facilities for film screening and video conferencing.

The building has 10 student lounges, or "portals", each with its own style, from press-studded banquette sofas to rubber outdoor chairs and tables to brick floors.

The double-level portal on the seventh and eight floors has

a cafe, native trees, hardwood decking and a balcony with a stunning view north up Swanston Street.

Balconies on other floors have views west to the Argus Building in Elizabeth Street, Melbourne Central's glass cone and south down Swanston Street.

Lyons director Carey Lyon said his brief was to put students at the forefront.

"The city landscape is so very diverse so you bring that diversity into the building and give the student choices. They might say, 'I like that timber space so I will hang out there!'"

RMIT has kept the site derelict or used it for a car park for decades.

But income from student fees and access to loans has enabled it to move its College of Business here from the Tivoli building in Bourke Street into what it calls the "RMIT Quarter" of the CBD.





Four years in the planning and construction, the building will accommodate 440 staff and 8000 students from areas including business, accounting, economics, IT, design and international studies.

There are 12 retail outlets and 87 teaching spaces including business trading rooms, and IT and advertising training labs.

Five-star environmental features include double-glazed windows, grey-water recycling for toilets and cooling towers, rain-water capture, solar panels for hot water and user-activated air-conditioning and lighting.

Mr Lyon said internally it was a radically new design in terms of “giving over so much informal space to students” and externally “it’s not a regular square city building; it’s got a very dynamic form to it”.

“It does have a sense of independent free form, it doesn’t necessarily conform exactly with the grid of the city.”

RMIT vice-chancellor Margaret Gardner said: “This is the biggest single-building project that RMIT has done in its history.”

It was RMIT’s “biggest ever investment in an academic

building”.

“I’m ecstatic at the way this looks, I think this transforms learning and teaching and the student experience at RMIT,” Professor Gardner said.

“We want students to have great education experiences and outcomes and that only comes by pushing the envelope, by thinking differently about how they learn and by providing the opportunities for them to do so. And I think we’ve put our money where our hopes were.”

**iPad**

► See inside RMIT’s new building