PAINTING **A NEW** PEDAGOGY

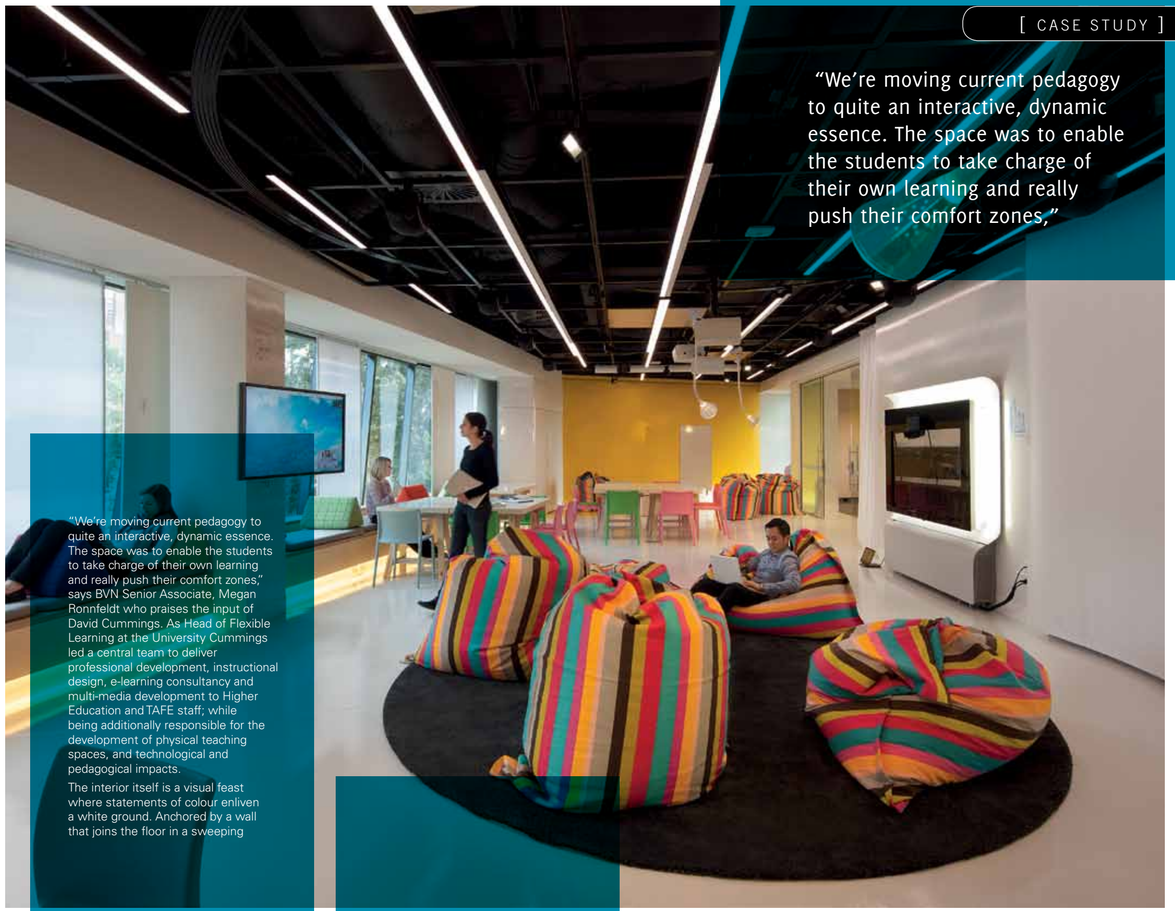
Victoria University Learning Space of the Future

DESIGNER **BVN Architecture**
PRODUCTS **IdeaPaint**
SUPPLIER **Baresque**

When Victoria University set out to create a Learning Space of the Future it turned to BVN Architecture. In turn, BVN turned to IdeaPaint to provide a means for experiential learning well beyond the classroom.

There is always something dynamic about a BVN Architecture designed interior and never more so than with this latest project for Victoria University. Charged with creating an interactive learning environment that encouraged both teachers and students to rethink learning paradigms, BVN set out to explore possibilities for using high-tech solutions within an intrinsically experiential and flexible environment. Enter the striped bean-bags, bright yellow wall, hidden technology and floors and walls that can be written on!

Selected for the project through a formal tender process, BVN demonstrated affinity with the project, supported by excellent calibre: "Their conceptual vision at that stage pertinent to the learning space project was in line with what we envisioned. Furthermore, their portfolio of work was very impressive across various industry sectors," says Nizar Makdesi, Senior Program Manager – Learning Space of the Future, Victoria University. Essentially, the Learning Space of the Future needed to be just that, a space that challenged orthodox pedagogies with a layout, furniture and technologies that allowed people to explore the way thinking is generated and teaching performed:



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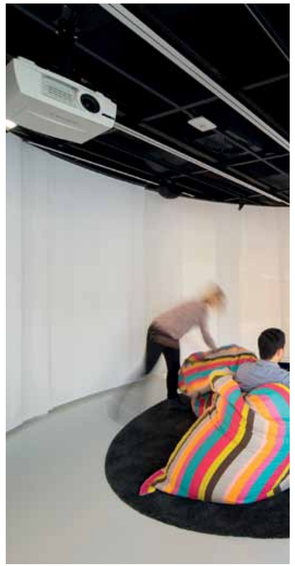
"We're moving current pedagogy to quite an interactive, dynamic essence. The space was to enable the students to take charge of their own learning and really push their comfort zones," says BVN Senior Associate, Megan Ronnfeldt who praises the input of David Cummings. As Head of Flexible Learning at the University Cummings led a central team to deliver professional development, instructional design, e-learning consultancy and multi-media development to Higher Education and TAFE staff; while being additionally responsible for the development of physical teaching spaces, and technological and pedagogical impacts.

The interior itself is a visual feast where statements of colour enliven a white ground. Anchored by a wall that joins the floor in a sweeping



curve of bright yellow at one end and the practical considerations of a kitchen at the other, the space is a far-cry from the solemn grey-on-beige of traditional learning spaces. Furniture, too, is anything but traditional with a stack of brightly coloured beanbags at centre, padded banquets along the windows and pink, green, orange and blue Air Chairs by Jasper Morrison for Magis, adding just a dash more colour. Tables in marine ply topped with writable, magnetic surfaces are of the trestle variety. This allows them to be moved as needs dictate or lifted from horizontal to vertical and slotted into the groove atop bespoke plinths that otherwise function as stools: "We've tried to keep it as open and flexible as we can – chairs, beanbags and tables are easily picked up and moved around so students aren't confined to where they are working," says Ronnfeldt in accord with her colleague David Ho, who adds: "We've

used technology to break orthodoxy, so a person can pick up an iPad and walk around or sit on a beanbag." Essentially, this allows the space to be open to interpretation where collaborative or autonomous learning can be explored without a prescribed approach dictating individuals or the group.

Intrinsic to this approach was the use of materials and technology to push the limits of how learning is achieved. Fundamental to how BVN envisioned the room's experiential role was IdeaPaint, a whiteboard application that can be used on any paintable surface on which people can write or draw. As Ronnfeldt explains: "The ability to challenge the way people think – that you could actually put it on the floor, people could sit on the floor, they could write on the walls, they could write on the tables. By doing that people start thinking differently because it's not something you're normally allowed to do – as a child you're taught not to write on walls. This encourages people to do things differently and IdeaPaint enables those things to be pushed a little bit more."

To increase effective collaboration and communication within the learning spaces, the paint itself has been applied to floor, walls, columns, window screens and alcove interiors thereby allowing students and teachers to write on any surface at hand. Augmented by writeable surfaces on cabinetry and tables, the interior is a giant drawing pad. This, coupled with extensive high tech communications devices, allows ideas to expand from a doodle on the floor to a projected image, to an interactive communication with another campus or learning pod via the space's high tech communications. Ronnfeldt elaborates: "Through the use of technologies such as Telepresence we were able to turn any space into a virtual classroom and IdeaPaint was an effective and clever medium in enabling us to do so."

Student response to IdeaPaint, while not prescribed, was explored prior to application through workshopped scenarios designed by Fiona Young from BVN Sydney (Chair of the NSW Chapter of the Council for Educational Facilities Planners International) who worked closely with Cummings during the development stage. Effectively, Young was instrumental in the concept for the learning space and it was through her ongoing work with pedagogy and workshops that scenarios were fleshed out to form the basis of the space. That said, the use of IdeaPaint has instigated an exponential learning curve in its own right, as Makdesi explains: "It has been a gradual process in maximising adoption, but we found that once users were familiar with IdeaPaint, it was just a matter of 'context' based use on the surface. Students have been quite clever at finding various uses of IdeaPaint irrespective of where it is applied." Moreover, while initial interactions were tentative it has now been absorbed as interactive tool with "excellent" student response: "It has evolved from initial inquisitiveness and fascination to a real sense of this being a real powerful tool in aiding teaching and learning" says Makdesi.

Teachers have also been impressed, particularly in the freedom of collaboration and discussion IdeaPaint facilitates, away from the static, and often messy, use of butcher's paper. Makdesi continues: "The floors required a little more creativity, but we found that after a little hand holding, teachers were setting up the new learning spaces in a manner to make effective use of the floors and the walls. Furthermore, we have noticed that teachers are modifying their teaching material to facilitate the positive outcomes that IdeaPaint provides."

While technological solutions are fast becoming de riguer to the learning environment it is only through a paradigmatic shift in pedagogic approach that the learning experience will truly evolve. BVN's environment for Victoria University allows such a shift to occur with an experiential platform that facilitates individual learning and collaborative expansion of ideas. Moreover, the space is a visual delight that stimulates without over-riding purpose and should be applauded on all counts.

Written by Gillian Serisier
Photography by Gollings Photography
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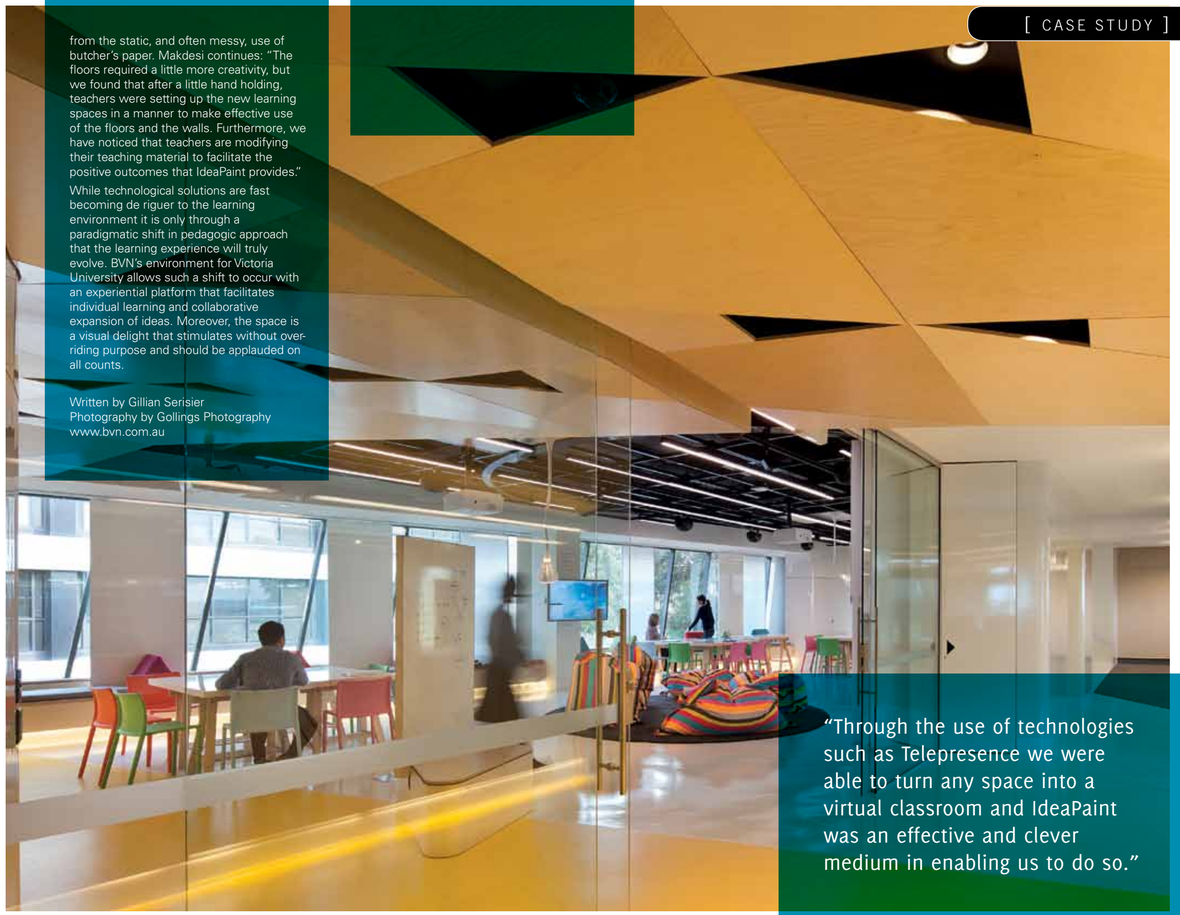
[CASE STUDY]



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