

## Carriageworks

**Former Eveleigh Carriage Workshops. 245 Wilson Street, Eveleigh, NSW**

Carriageworks is a contemporary performing arts centre for theatre, experimental dance and acrobatic theatre housed in the former Eveleigh Carriage Workshops, adjacent to Sydney's main rail corridor. It was developed by ArtsNSW and the Staterail Authority with a brief for "an engaging centre for professional, emerging and aspiring contemporary artists, a profitable base for the arts industry and its commercial partners, a dynamic neighbourhood venue for locals and an exciting and unique arts space for visitors."

A series of freestanding, acoustically isolated, concrete containers are inserted into the vast interior of the workshops, leaving the majority of the building envelope and spatial structure intact.

The project was staged to accommodate the limited budget and the desire for the new facility to grow organically over time. Bays 16-20 were fitted out as the performing arts centre, Bay 21 has been redeveloped as a major art gallery, and the remaining four bays are expected to be completed within ten years.

### Site history and heritage

The Carriage Workshops are part of the Eveleigh Railway Complex, which is highly significant as a large, intact, high quality workshop site from Australia's steam era. The workshops are also historically significant for their contribution to the development of surrounding suburbs and their seminal role in many major industrial strikes.

Built in early 1880s to a design by Chief Engineer George Cowdry, the complex provided a government-owned maintenance facility for the rapidly growing state rail network.

Carriages moved through the building along tracks from Bay 16 to Bay 25. Each bay had a different function – from fundamental structural repairs in Bay 16 to final trimming and upholstery works in Bay 25. Long vistas could be had in both directions throughout the working life of the building.

The workshops closed in 1988. When the adaptive reuse project was initiated in 2004 the building was mostly intact, but it was run down, covered in graffiti and in desperate need of maintenance. Ancillary machinery, such as the line shafting that powered machinery, rails and cranes, remained.

The Carriage Workshops are listed on the NSW Heritage Register.

### Opportunities

The enormous, cathedral-like spaces of workshop had few dividing walls and plenty of natural light. Beyond the fabric – ornate brickwork, elegant cast-iron

columns and slender steel trusses – the architects saw great potential in the workshop's spatial qualities, which they saw as echoing a bygone era and the building's past uses.

### Challenges

The workshop building was covered in dust with a high lead content, painted surfaces contained lead and some of the fill below ground was contaminated.

The building was very noisy and vibrated as the trains sped past.

### Approach and outcome

New spaces were inserted into the vast workshops in a manner that kept the spatial qualities, structure and experience of the original building. The historic building was maintained and stabilised, keeping traces of previous uses and activities.

The original building was barely touched, apart from removing and raising part of the iron and steel roof to accommodate the height required for the main theatre. Historic machinery, including overhead cranes and line shafting, was retained and painted signs and patina were left, indicating the building's age and former use.

Parts of the historic fabric that were removed have been relocated and reused. For example, roof trusses removed to accommodate the height of the large theatre now form an entry structure on the Wilson Street entrance.

The new theatre and rehearsal spaces are housed in rectilinear, acoustically isolated, insitu concrete containers.

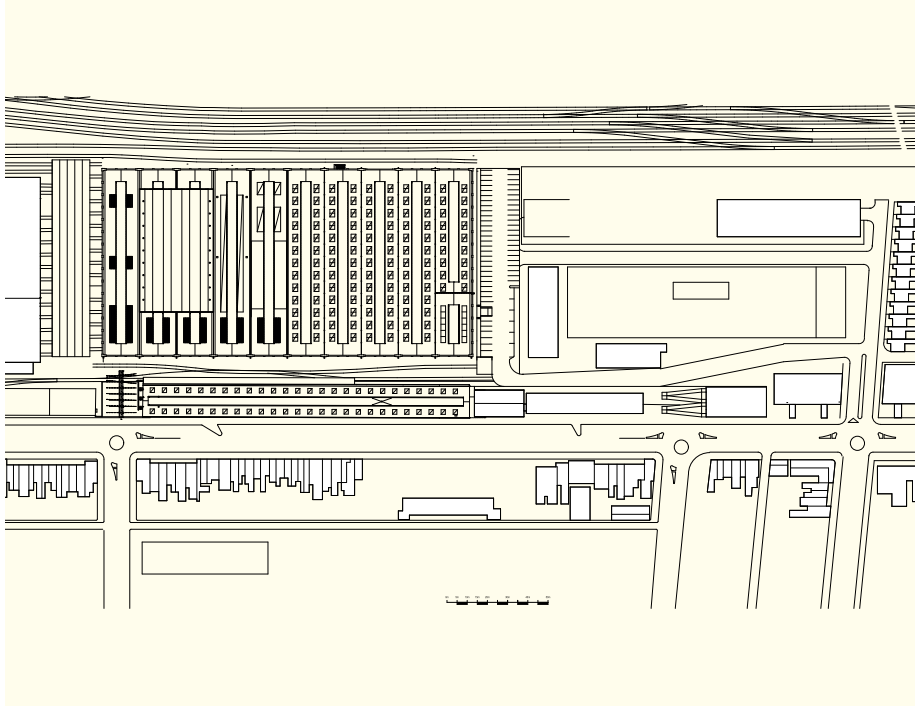


## Project team

**Architect:** Tonkin Zulaikha Greer. **Client:** Arts NSW and StateRail. **Heritage architects:** Otto Cserhalmi and Partners. **Project manager:** Root Projects. **Quantity surveyor:** Currie and Brown. **Structural engineer:** Simpson Design. **Services engineer:** Bassett Consulting Engineers. **Hydraulics engineer:** Warren Smith and Partners. **Acoustics engineer:** Arup Acoustics. **BCA advisor:** City Plan Services. **Fire engineer:** Defire. **PCA:** Advance Building Approvals. **Access:** Accessibility Solutions. **Theatre and lighting consultant:** Bluebottle. **Graphic designer:** Jelly Design. **Community consultation:** Australia Street Company.

## Photography credits

1. Courtesy State Rail Archives, State Records NSW.
- 2-5. Michael Nicholson.
6. Prue Upton Courtesy CarraigeWorks.



These pale grey boxes are sited to respond to the workshop's original planning and use. Placed parallel to the existing structural grid, they float free of the heritage structure (except at the bounding walls where they are clearly articulated). Reconstructed historic skylights have been carefully located to cast shadows on the pale grey concrete walls of these new theatre boxes.

The planning strategy works with an idea of non-hierarchical space – this meets the performers' desire to avoid the hierarchical structure of traditional theatre, while also maintaining the unimpeded vistas through the building.

A new foyer runs along the length of the building and theatre entries are designed

to recall the carriages that once passed through the space.

The adaptive reuse includes upgrades to protect the heritage values of the buildings and to make them compliant with the Building Code of Australia.

Necessary conservation and repairs included works to the roof, brick and stone walls, windows and doors. The cast and wrought iron roof columns and trusses were treated to prevent further rust. All services needed replacing. Where elements were deemed of high or exceptional significance they were faithfully reconstructed based on physical evidence and historic drawings.

## Lessons

- The project has achieved the conservation of a large scale but run down public asset.
- The spaces and social history of the place were understood as being as important as the building fabric.
- Striking new elements are inserted in a way that responds to the planning and spatial logic and experience of the building, as well as its material qualities.
- Building fabric is stabilized and left intact wherever possible, maintaining its patina and memory.

## References

Industrial Heritage Adaptive Reuse Issues Paper accompanying this case study: [www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/heritage/projects-and-programs](http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/heritage/projects-and-programs)

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