



## SOUTHBANK LIBRARY AT BOYD: HERITAGE AMONG THE HIGH-RISE

Boyd is the City of Melbourne's newest community hub. Opened in July 2012, on the site of the former JH Boyd Girls' High School, it stands out as a beautifully restored heritage-listed building among the high-rise apartments.

Preserving the original character, the design of the building has improved its sustainability and created new spaces to accommodate a range of services for the Southbank community.

The multi-use facility features the Southbank Library, Kerekere cafe, family services, community meeting rooms, and artists' studios.

In establishing the library, our first challenge was the relatively small space. In a building with many uses, how could we offer an attractive, viable library in 250 square metres? We couldn't possibly fit in all the subject areas offered in our other libraries and had to make decisions about what to include — and what to leave out — in a collection of around 15 000 items.

We based our decisions on the demographic information from the most recent census. Southbank's population is characterised by young, savvy, upwardly-mobile professionals – arts and recreation employ 30% of the Southbank workforce – and the most common languages spoken at home are Chinese and Indonesian.

**W**e based our [collection] decisions on the demographic information from the most recent census.

We included fiction, graphic novels, non-fiction, and AV; Chinese fiction, non-fiction, and DVDs; Indonesian books; and Hindi DVDs. We provided

a modest children's collection, with a strong focus on preschoolers, but currently we do not offer junior non-fiction or any young adult collections.

When it came to non-fiction, we took an innovative, fairly radical approach. We could only fit in about 4500 non-fiction books and decided that it was not worth using Dewey. Instead, we used a unique, subject-based system, grouping books into intuitive, book shop-style categories such as Arts and Culture, Home and Lifestyle, Business and IT, Health and Travel. We selected only popular areas to appeal to the Southbank residents and workers. The main areas excluded are books on science and nature.

The layout of the Southbank Library is designed with the reader in mind. Instead of straight rows, the shelving is arranged in cross-shaped clusters with faceout display on each bay-end. This facilitates browsing, tempting our patrons to explore and to borrow a lot more than they intended.

In keeping with the original character of the school, we incorporated purpose-designed graphics at the bay-ends of the shelving. These images evoke memories of geography lessons and music classes.

From the outset, the community fell in love with the library; they express a strong sense of ownership. Locals are delighted to have a library in their neighbourhood. They enjoy the space and the book shop-feel. What has surprised us is the number of workers who use the library during lunchtime. "Love the library," and "We're so lucky," are common exclamations. We have already established a steady group of regulars.

There is a great synergy between the library and the co-located services in the building. Shared resources and facilities enable complementary programming and joint activities. In partnership with family services, we organised a special event on National Playgroup Day in August. Kerekere café has become an extension of the library; we installed a trolley of beautiful folio-sized books for people to enjoy with their coffee.

We continue to receive great feedback about our programs, including Songbirds sessions for babies and story times for preschoolers. For adults, we have established popular monthly reading circles, including one exclusively for the Choir of Hard Knocks. They practice regularly in our meeting room.

In the first six months since we opened, we have had over 41 000 visits and loans exceeding 44 500. At the



Open Day on Saturday, 7 July, 3500 visitors borrowed 1118 items. Clearly, Boyd is just what the community were waiting for; it's really satisfying to meet their expectations.

Shirley Bateman and Bernadine Nolen  
Melbourne Library Service  
Shirley.Bateman@melbourne.vic.gov.au