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Curtin Think Space

Words —
Rachael Bernstone

Photography —
Dion Robeson

In Perth's south, Curtin University's new Think Space by Arcadia Design Studio aims to promote collaboration and the cultivation of new ideas between the university and industry.



Right — Curtin University's Bentley campus was founded in the 1960s. The design for Think Space was inspired by neo-futuristic architecture of the era.

Right — The space consists of three distinct zones, organized by colour. The gold Enterprise zone is used for small group work.

Curtin University is a tertiary institution in Western Australia with a long history punctuated by several major changes: it started life as Perth Technical School in 1900, then moved to Bentley campus in Perth's south in 1966, when it was renamed the Western Australian Institute of Technology. Now, the university's largest campus is undergoing a major redevelopment program to "intensify linkages with industry, business and the broader community."

The refurbishment of a 189-square-metre former office space, located in the university's academic heart, into the futuristic Think Space is a bold statement about the university's outward-facing ambitions. This new research and technology venue aims to support and foster transformative thinking, innovation and industry engagement, with spaces designed to facilitate design-thinking activities such as rapid idea generation and development.

It was conceived by Arcadia Design Studio's directors Amy McDonnell and Sally-Ann Weerts, as a modern interpretation of 1960s-inspired neo-futurism – think Archigram and Superstudio – in keeping with the campus and base building's '60s origins.

"An important part of the brief was that the space should feel very different from anything else on campus, so that stakeholders and industry partners would feel comfortable coming up with new ideas in here," McDonnell says.

"We approached the brief with our own creative thinking about what the future might entail, having identified that early futuristic undertones would work in this interior," Weerts adds. "Once we had those ideas on the page, colours and details derived from that imagery."

Think Space consists of three distinct zones, organized by the use of primary colours, beginning with the red Control Centre, which encourages informal stand-up conversations. It opens to the gold Enterprise zone for small group work and the blue Engine Room space for workshops of up to seventy people. The latter two spaces can be booked separately or together and there is a deliberate permeability between them.

In the larger Engine Room space, blue curtains can be used to create privacy when needed, to divide the room into breakout groups, or to conceal unused furniture and whiteboards, depending on the set-up required. To stretch the budget, Arcadia retained existing ceilings and cabinetry, and judiciously applied paint treatments around the fitout perimeter, tying in with the themed colours of each zone.

Flexibility of use was a key requirement of the brief and Arcadia specified loose furniture, including tables and chairs for the Engine Room, and armchairs, ottomans and side tables for the Enterprise zone, which can be easily reconfigured by users.

And in a marked departure from contemporary trends towards large screens – including touch screens – in meeting rooms, Think Space has a deliberately lo-fi feel to encourage human interaction, to keep the focus on sparking cross-pollination, germination and the advancement of new and exciting ideas.

According to Dianna Ingram, portfolio manager of campus planning at Curtin, one of the benefits of working with a young design practice – whose principals all graduated from Curtin – was the fact that they readily grasped the ethos of the project and the university's broader ambitions, which enabled them to deliver a compelling proposal.

"Arcadia also developed the Think Space room names, branding graphics and signage, which are in keeping with futuristic interior design intent," Ingram says. "They assisted in preparing a user manual that outlines the various ways that people can use these flexible and multi-purpose spaces."

The project has been extremely well received, a testament to the design's broad appeal and response to the brief, Ingram says. "So far [Think Space has] been used for workshops, leadership development and brainstorming sessions, and at the moment it's hard to get a booking," she adds. "Arcadia was very responsive to our brief, budget and the short time frame for this project – we are very pleased with the results." ▲





Left — Loose furniture, including tables, chairs and ottomans, can be easily reconfigured by users, ensuring flexibility within the space.

Bottom left — The interior is intended to have a less formal aesthetic than other venues on campus — a middle ground between playful and corporate.

Right — In the Engine Room, blue curtains can be used to create privacy when needed.





Left — The space's dramatic graphics and visual links help to divide the interior and form a dynamic space within the broader campus.

Project —
Curtin Think Space
Curtin University
Kent Street
Bentley WA
curtin.edu.au

Design practice —
Arcadia Design Studio
4/83 South Street
Beaconsfield WA
info@arcadiadesign
studio.com.au
+61 8 9433 1704
arcadiadesignstudio.
com.au

Project team —
Amy McDonnell,
Sally-Ann Weerts,
Anna McVey

Time schedule —
Design, documentation:
3 months
Construction: 1 month

Builder —
Western Projects

Engineer —
Wood and Grieve
Engineers

Project manager —
RPS

Lighting —
Alti Lighting

Quantity surveyor —
Altus Group

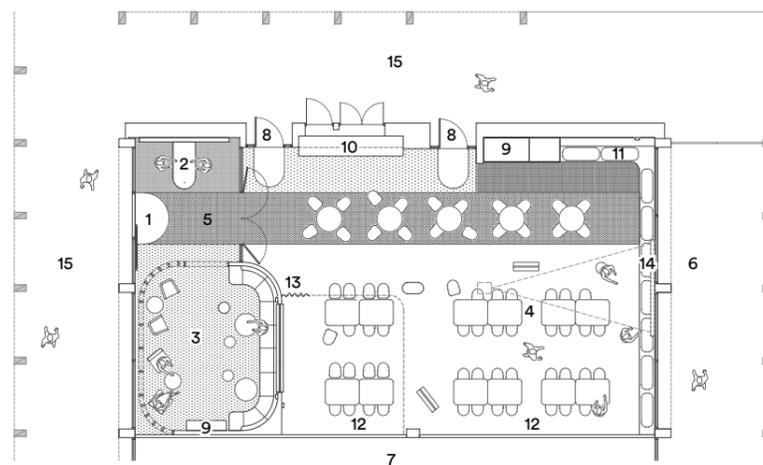
Products —
Walls and ceilings:
Existing and new
walls painted in Dulux
'Vivid White,' 'Black,'
'Fanlight,' 'Fluffy
Duckling,' 'Harvest
Gold,' 'Red Jacks,'
'Spice of Life,' 'Red
Shale,' 'Vanilla Ice'
and 'Quiet Bay.' Entry
arch wall painted in
Dulux Metallic Effect
'Dusty Gold.'

Flooring: Coloured
floors in Forbo Piano
'Sunray,' Concret
'Blue Glow' and
Walton 'Berlin Red.'
Forbo Eternal custom-
printed vinyl used
in Superhighway.
InterFace flor in 'Urban
Retreat Stone' used in
Engine Room. Tretford
carpet in 'Sisal' used in
Enterprise zone. Shaw
Contract Welcome II
carpet tiles in 'Ebony'
used in entry.

Joinery: Control
Centre table made from
Formica 'Memphis Red'
with frame powder-
coated in Dulux 'Manor
Red.' Booth seat uphol-
stered in Instyle Atelier
velvet in 'Admire' and
Maharam Micro vinyl
in 'Brew.' Cabinetry in
birch plywood.

Lighting: Vistosi
Lucciola wall light
from Alti Lighting.
Muuto E27 pendant.
Furniture: Ikon table
by Pio e Tito Toso
for Pedrali from
Innerspace. Velocity
Flip-Top Table from
Equip Office Furniture.
Round laptop table
from UCI. Orlandini
Design Brado Mindy
chair, Mork chair and
Mister low swivel
chair, all from Unitec
Advanced Systems.
Schiavello Active
Whiteboard in 'Sulfur
Yellow.' Rossetto
Annette chair and
upholstered ottomans
from Chair Solutions.
Other: Dividing
curtains in Warwick
'Eclipse Midnight' and
Kvadrat 'Rocket.' Buster
& Punch T-bar brass
cabinet handles. Woven
Image Echo pinboard.

- 1 Main entry
- 2 The Control Centre
- 3 The Enterprise
- 4 The Engine Room
- 5 The Superhighway
- 6 Retail arcade
- 7 Neighbouring tenancy
- 8 Secondary entry/exit
- 9 Storage
- 10 Existing repurposed joinery
- 11 Bench seat
- 12 Whiteboards
- 13 Dividing curtain
- 14 Projector screen
- 15 Undercover walkway



Curtin Think Space floor plan 1:250