

OZANAM HOUSE, MELBOURNE

The façade of Ozanam House creates a gateway to the city of Melbourne



VincentCare's flagship facility—Ozanam House—has been integral to Melbourne's response to homelessness since 1953. Its redevelopment by MGS Architects has transformed it into an integrated, state-of-the-art homeless resource centre and accommodation facility. In an Australian first, it offers flexible accommodation options and health and wellbeing services, all on one site.

Joshua Wheeler, Director, MGS Architects, says, "We're strong advocates for social and community housing, and this project has created a social uplift with a building that is truly forward looking." Clever spatial planning and material articulation by MGS has delivered a balance of welcoming and transparent spaces, as well as areas of high security and opportunities for discretion, solitude and retreat. This outcome demonstrates a focus on improving the well-being of all users in a friendly, accessible and safe environment.

The team's thoughtful design echoes VincentCare's innovative and human-centric care model through its series of connected 'neighbourhoods' inside. The 11-storey tower accommodates 134 apartments on the upper levels, as well as administration spaces, a resource centre, health clinic, gym and library facilities, and a commercial kitchen serving both

the Ozanam House residents and the wider community.

Sitting prominently on Flemington Road, its striking façade makes a significant statement, creating a gateway to the city of Melbourne. Yet, Ozanam House responds sensitively to its context. The bulk of the building is reduced through shifts in form, materiality and transparency, responding to the low scale residential grain of leafy North Melbourne.

A palette of high quality, varied and tactile materials convey robustness without suggesting 'institutional'.

Krause Red Blue bricks anchor the first four levels. "We really like using Krause bricks, they have a lovely warmth to them that's welcoming, and a traditional nature about them that speaks to the residential neighbourhood," Joshua comments.

The podium's brick pattern is original and eye-catching. Custom Red Blues are inverted and reversed creating a repetitive, highly textural scale pattern. It's engaging and speaks to the bronze perforated screens—shaped like dragon scales—on the upper balconies. "They're different materials, but have similar characteristics, pattern and uniqueness to them," Joshua says.

Above the brick scale pattern, every 10th Red Blue brick is a special, producing a softer weave higher up. Inside, Red Blue brick tiles frame the lift well, forming a strong connection to the textured façade. Then, in the central courtyard, Grampian Blue bricks create a strong monolithic form in contrast to the texture of the Red Blues.

Throughout Ozanam House, bold colour and pattern are balanced with natural, earthy materials to imbue a sense of stability and 'home'. Green is a recurring theme: The hooded bronze screens on the balconies invite the green cladding on the upper walls to filter through, while a landscaped courtyard and a three storey vertical garden shelter community lounges on each residential floor. On the lower rooftops, covered succulents and plantings generate a lush green outlook for residents from their windows and a subtle connection to the nearby Royal Park.



MGS Architects is to be congratulated for Ozanam House's innovative design. It creates a real sense of hope for VincentCare's clients and the potential to influence subsequent responses. As Minister Richard Wynne remarked at its opening, "This is really the future of homeless intervention going forward, this is a spectacular building and the residents who will be living here deserve the best."

Architect: MGS Architects
Product: Krause Red Blue bricks and brick tiles; Grampian Blue bricks
Builder: ADCO Constructions
Bricklayer: Caruso Bricklaying
Photographer: Trevor Mein