



THE ROCKS CENTRE ACCESS UPGRADES NEW ENTRY STRUCTURE TO PENRHYN HOUSE ON PLAYFAIR STREET

for Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority

DESIGN STATMENT



*Prepared by Welsh + Major Architects
Revision A May 2017*

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN STATEMENT May 2017

Summary

This statement has been prepared by Welsh + Major Architects on behalf of Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority (SHFA) to accompany the State Significant Development Application the development application for access upgrades incorporating a new entry structure to The Rocks Centre at 22-26 Playfair Street, The Rocks NSW.

The Rocks Centre is a retail arcade consisting of two interconnecting buildings, Penrhyn House and Scarborough House. The proposed new entry structure is located adjacent to the connection between the two buildings on Playfair Street and provides access directly into Penrhyn House. Penrhyn House located on the corner of Argyle Street and Playfair Street was constructed in 1924 and is listed on the State Heritage Register. Scarborough House is a contemporary building constructed in the 1970s and significantly modified in the 1990s when the current contemporary entry structure on Playfair Street was also built.

Welsh + Major Architects were commissioned by Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority in September 2015 to review equitable access options for a proposed new restaurant tenancy on the first floor of The Rocks Centre. The brief was to provide lift access to the first floor of The Rocks Centre for the public within the current circulation zone of the building, specifically addressing access from Playfair Street.

A Concept Options Study was undertaken that resulted in 4 options being identified and analyzed in detail. Three options looked at a lift located internally within Penrhyn House, however the negative heritage, circulation and services impacts of these options were considered too great. The fourth option reviewed a lift location outside Penrhyn House in the location of the existing 1994 entry structure. The current entry structure did not provide the required circulation clearances and was assessed and not easily able to be modified. As a result Welsh + Major were requested by SHFA to design a new entry structure to Penrhyn House incorporating a lift to provide access directly to the first floor.

The entry proposal comprises:

- a steel framed glazed entry enclosure;
- a double sided lift from the Playfair Street level to the first floor of Penrhyn House via an access walkway;
- the widening of the existing opening in the wall of Penrhyn House to provide clearance for the walkway;
- associated internal paving and adjustments to the paving levels in the immediate vicinity of the new entry structure;

The new entry structure has been designed to balance the need for dignified and equitable access with the need to minimise adverse impacts on the existing heritage context and the adjacent heritage listed building of Penrhyn House. In doing so the design also seeks to improve the presentation of the entry to Penrhyn House and enhance the experience for visitors to the area and the building.

The siting of the entry structure was determined by the position of the existing opening into Penrhyn House and the existing major circulation paths. In addition, the siting also to mediate the step in the alignment of Playfair Street created between Penrhyn House and Scarborough House.

The entry structure itself is inspired by the old gas street lanterns of The Rocks area, with transparency and subtle luminosity key aspects of the design. The steel and glass structure is detailed to visually create an indistinct edge while at the same time achieving a screening of the lift structure within. The glass lift is screened in a metal mesh lift shaft to allow movement to be read and to reference the buildings industrial past.

The entry structure is also designed to be visually distinct from Penrhyn House, allowing the adjacent heritage structure to read as the principal and dominant building form. The siting massing, detailing and material selection of the new entry structure are all designed to minimise the visual impact of the structure in its context, allowing it to sit quietly adjacent to Penrhyn House.

Options Analysis

Concept Options Study 2015-2016

The design for accessible access to the first floor of The Rocks Centre (Penrhyn House) from Playfair Street has been developed through a process of investigation, analysis and consultation. This responsive design process commenced with the preparation of an initial Concept Options Study completed in November 2015 for SHFA.

The report considered analysis of the existing conditions, opportunities and constraints and identified key issues, opportunities and constraints including:

- Existing stairs width of approximately 1.4m are considered reasonable for public access and allow people to pass easily on the stairs.
- An original timber floor beam of significant heritage value running along eastern edge of the stair void on first floor should not be negatively impacted.
- An existing original brick wall on north side of the stair void is of high heritage significance and should not be negatively impacted.
- The existing stair void serves to promote visual access between building levels and should be maintained as far as possible.
- Major building services cupboards are located on ground floor along southern side of the stair void with access doors along length of wall.
- Primary building circulation paths and view lines on ground floor run along main central spine and across building in existing stair location.

The preparation of initial options was informed by the following key issues:

- The need to provide dignified and equitable access for visitors to the first floor of Penrhyn House to the main entry on Playfair Street as the primary entry point for a new first floor tenancy.
- The desire to also connect any lift to the ground floor level of Penrhyn House.
- The heritage significance of the building generally and in particular the significant building elements noted above.
- Visual and spatial impacts from within and outside the building.
- Impacts on primary circulation zones within the building.
- Impact on existing building services.
- Compliance of fire egress from the first floor.
- Other BCA compliance issues.

Initially a number of access options contained within the existing internal fabric of the building were explored so as to allow for access to all three levels (ground floor, first floor and Playfair Street level) and to avoid any changes to the existing entry structure on Playfair Street. Four preliminary options (Options 1 - 4) were prepared and reviewed by SHFA project management and heritage staff as well as Environet Consultancy in respect of BCA compliance. In addition other options were put also forward by a possible tenant for the first floor area.

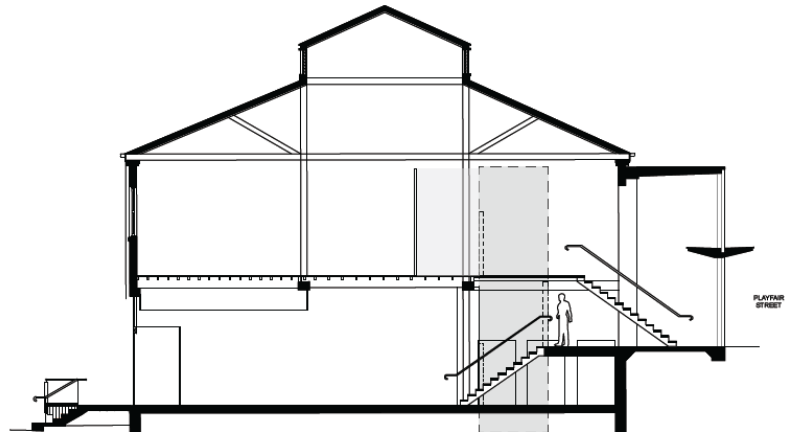
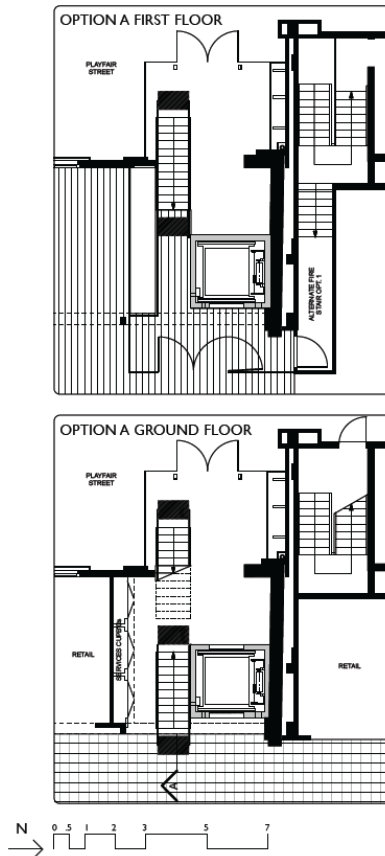
Feedback and further detailed analysis of these resulted in three potentially feasible concept options being identified (Options A, B + C). The analysis of these further options reinforced that due to the limited area within which a lift and stair could be accommodated within the existing original building, they would result in significant negative spatial impacts, adverse impacts on the heritage significance of the existing structure, and significant buildability issues and flow on impacts due to existing service runs and tenancy alignments. As a result SHFA requested that a further option (Option D) be considered that would locate the lift in the area of the contemporary Playfair Street Entry outside the existing Penrhyn House footprint and provide equitable access only from Playfair Street to the First Floor of Penrhyn House.

The Concept Options report dated 12 November 2015 that documents these options and the analysis is attached in Appendix A. A summary of the final four Options A to D that were reviewed is outlined below:

Concept Option A

New stairs to be located in line facing in opposite directions with a switchback travel path. Stair width reduced to 1m clear between handrails. Double entry lift serving 3 levels located adjacent to the existing heritage brick wall.

Circulation clearances are at a minimum and paths of travel are not clearly discernable. The lift location has a negative visual impact on the heritage brick wall and obstructs sightlines through the void space. Little impact on existing building services.



OPTION A SECTION A

Preliminary Analysis

- Lift**
 - Services all 3 levels (opposite double entry lift).
 - Position allows services to remain in place with clear access.
 - Upper floor lift landing at edge of void but some visual impact on brickwork wall.
- Lower Stair**
 - Minor encroachment of facies into primary Rocks Centre circulation on Ground Floor.
 - Head clearance at top of stair under upper stair landing at minimum required.
- Upper Stair**
 - Only minimum distance from existing glazed entry doors.
 - Upper return clashes with upper floor structure (steel beam) and possibly services cupboard.

Option A is considered feasible for the following reasons:

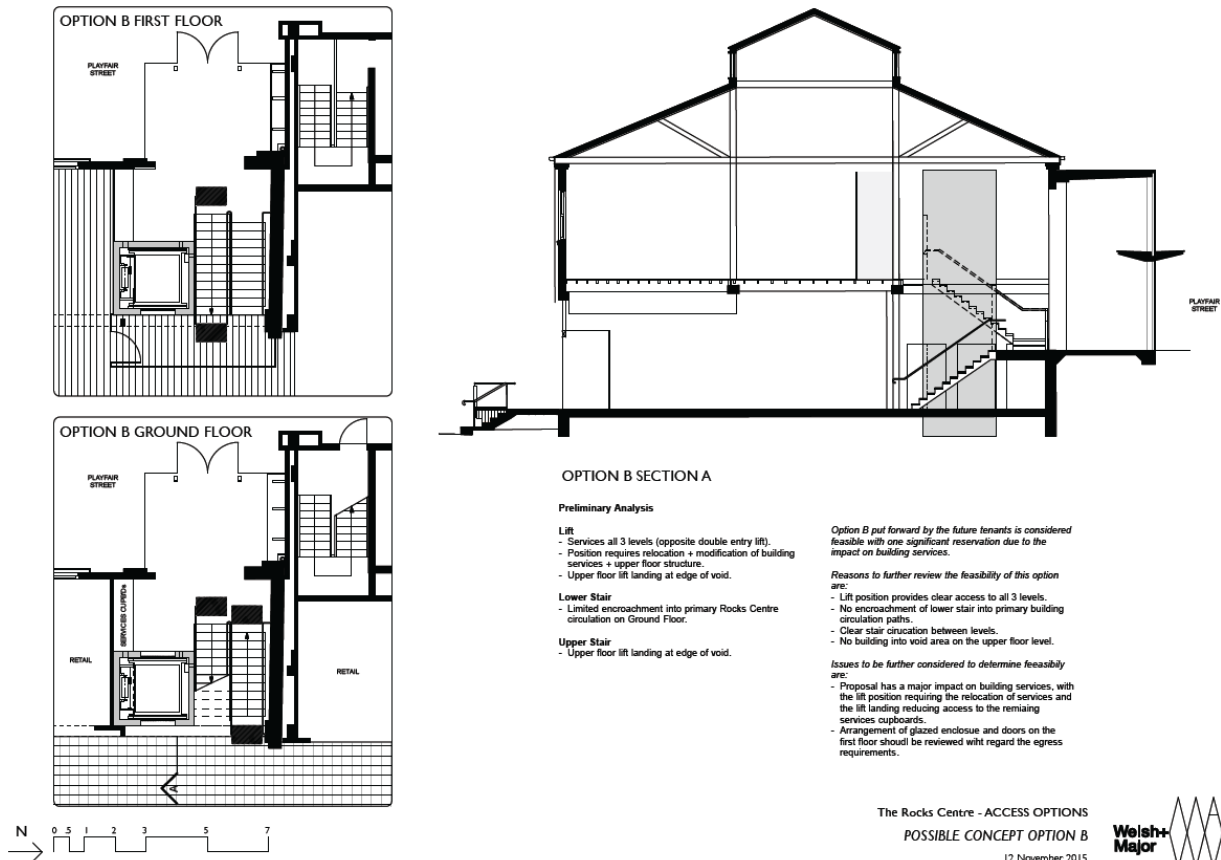
- Proposal has no impact on the existing building services cupboards including maintaining access.
 - Lift position provides clear access to all 3 levels.
 - Limited encroachment of lower stair into primary building circulation paths.
- Issues to be further considered are:
- Bulk of lift may detract from existing brickwork, however this could be ameliorated by the use of the glass lift car and shaft.
 - Detail of upper stair should be designed to allow for maximum sightlines through stair and to maximise head clearance under landing.
 - Building out of upper floor over existing void to be mitigated by detail design.

The Rocks Centre - Access Study
POSSIBLE CONCEPT OPTION A
12 November 2015

Concept Option B (tenant proposed)

New stairs to be located parallel with a switchback travel path adjacent to the existing heritage brick wall. Stair width reduced to 1m clear between handrails. Double entry lift serving 3 levels located partially within existing services cupboard with significant services relocations required.

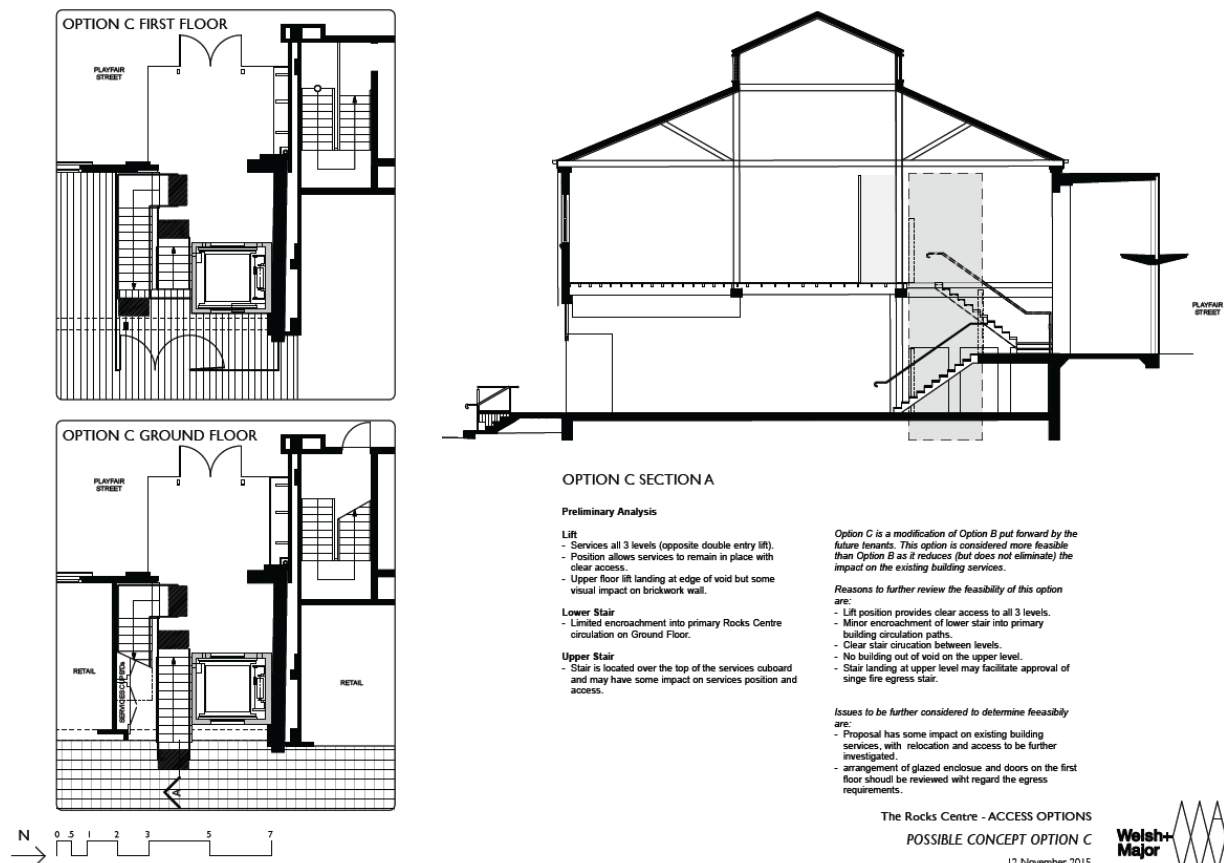
Circulation paths are clear and visual access is maintained through the void space, however there is a significant impact on the existing building services with flow on impacts to the building likely if these are relocated.



Concept Option C (modified Option B)

New stairs to be located partially over the existing services cupboards with a switchback travel path. Stair width reduced to 1m clear between handrails. Double entry lift serving 3 levels located adjacent to the existing heritage brick wall.

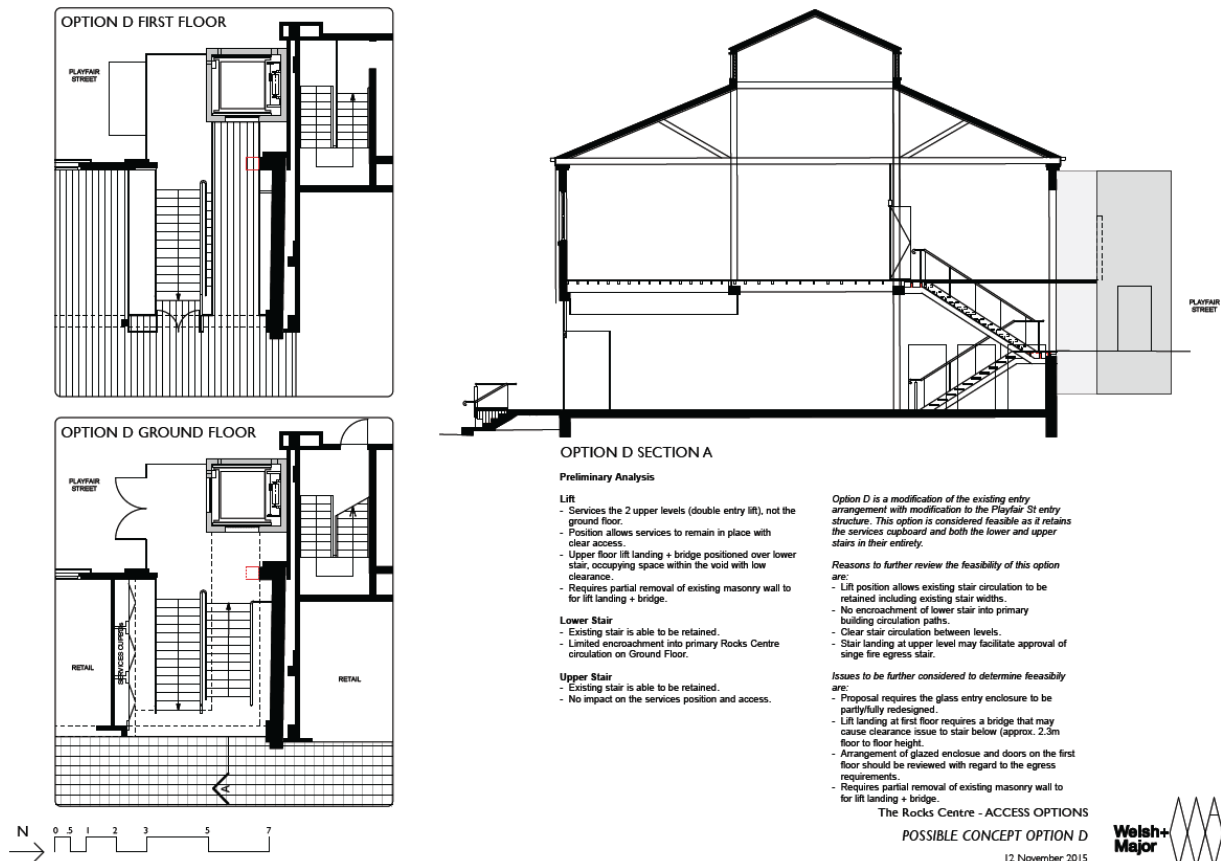
Circulation paths are clear, however there is some impact on the existing building services locations. The lift location has a negative visual impact on the heritage brick wall and obstructs sightlines through the void space.



Concept Option D

Existing stair runs and landings to be entirely retained. Proposed lift to be located on Playfair Street within a new entry structure. This option has the least impact on the heritage building and existing building services, however requires that the contemporary entry structure be re-designed and slightly enlarged to accommodate the lift with required clearances.

Design Option D was considered to have the least impact on the heritage fabric of the building, would retain clear sightlines along the important public circulation paths of the building and would provide equitable access to the first floor of the building.



Design Development+ Consultation

Following consultation with SHFA Welsh + Major were asked to further develop the design of Option D. A developed design was submitted to SHFA in June 2016 and further review undertaken by the SHFA team. Following inputs from Urbis Heritage, BCA consultants, lift and services engineers a draft S.60 submission was submitted in August 2016 for comment to SHFA, specifically to obtain detailed feedback from the heritage assessment team. Feedback was provided in September 2016 at a site inspection with the heritage team raising the following issues:

- The design of the new entry structure was to be adjusted to make the structure more recessive in detail and scale;
- The detailing of the steel structure was to be simplified and some columns removed;
- The height of the steel structure was to be reduced; and
- The proposed tinted glass was to be made clear with the provision for subtle colour tones to be provided by adjustable lighting.

S60 Proposal Consultation + Revision 2016-2017

These changes were made to the design and a S.60 application was submitted to SHFA in December 2016. Following further review by the SHFA heritage team further feedback was received on the scale of the steel structure and overall height. Detailed structural design advice was sought and further modification of the design was made to further reduce the overall height and reduce the size of the steel structure with the desired result to further reduce the visual impact and relative dominance of the new entry in relation to the existing Penrhyn House building. A revised S.60 application (the current proposal) was presented and submitted to SHFA in January 2017.

Design Excellence, Built Form + Urban Design

Location + Siting

The Rocks Centre new glass entry structure on Playfair Street is located at the junction of the 1923 Penrhyn House and the 1978 Scarborough House and replaces an existing entry structure constructed in the mid-1990's, designer unknown. The entry structure is sited to connect directly to the existing circulation paths within The Rocks Centre. This is at a step in the Playfair Street alignment where the wall of Scarborough House sits out approximately 4.4m from the alignment of Penrhyn House.

During the development of the design, an analysis was undertaken to investigate if a lift could be accommodated within the existing entry structure. Due to the size and circulation requirements of an accessible compliant lift it was determined that the existing entry structure would need to be increased in plan and section to accommodate the lift. These modifications to the existing glass structure were considered to be un-feasible, however the location of the existing entry was considered to be appropriate on a number of grounds:

- the step in the Playfair Street alignment creates a corner where the entry structure will not intrude into the general pedestrian circulation along the street.
- The location will provide access through an existing large opening in the brickwork wall of Penrhyn House directly into an established cross circulation path through the building including access to the existing stairs.
- The location is clearly visible from the intersection of Argyle, Playfair and Harrington Streets, allowing pedestrians to easily identify the entry from a distance.
- The sightlines from this intersection, while clear, also set the entry structure against the backdrop of the much larger structure of Scarborough House and beyond the extent of the Penrhyn House western façade, minimising the apparent bulk and scale of the entry in the heritage context.

The new entry structure extends out 3.7mm from Penrhyn House and is setback from the alignment of Scarborough House to the north so as to stagger the transition in the alignment of Playfair Street and also to moderate the impact of large blank brickwork wall on the side on Scarborough House and the impact that this has on the significant heritage structure of Penrhyn House.

Design Concept + Character in its Context

In this location new entry structure has been designed to respond to the surrounding context of heritage buildings, pedestrian streets and walkways. Conceptually conceived as a glass lantern, inspired by the old gas street lanterns of The Rocks area, the entry structure is designed to be clearly read as a new and separate structure to the adjacent Penrhyn House building. This distinction and the detailed relationship between the old and new elements allow Penrhyn House to be read as the principal and dominant building form.

The overall scale, materiality and detailing of the new entry structure have also been carefully considered to ensure the new entry structure reads in the streetscape as recessive in scale and presentation to Penrhyn House.

There are a number of design gestures made in the new entry structure that are support this relationship between the two building structures.

- The transparency of the entry structure is designed to allow the existing buildings beyond to be viewed through the structure. The glazed roof not only allows the sky to be viewed through the new structure but also allows natural daylight to wash the existing Penrhyn House external wall and highlight the separation and difference between the structures.
- Exposed steel columns have been employed to create a lightness and verticality in the new structure while providing public sense of scale with a refined and recessive form. The exposed steel columns have been engineered to be as fine as possible when viewed from the street with a portion of the steel structure internalized within the glazing alignment.
- The steel structural fins extend slightly above the line of the glazed enclosure to create a softer filigree edge that can dissolve into the surrounding context.
- The physical distinction between Penrhyn House and the new entry is clearly articulated through a recessed connection point at the external wall in plan, elevation and section.
- The alignment of the top of the glazed entry walls are positioned under the gutter level to allow the reading of the edge of the existing building to continue above and past the entry structure on Playfair Street, particularly when viewed along the main approach from Argyle Street.

The design of the new entry structure also responds to some of the specific proportions, alignments and architectural features of Penrhyn House. The overall enclosure height of the entry structure is approximately 450mm higher than the existing entry with the metal fins extending a further 400mm, and as noted above the top of the glazed walls are aligned with the level of the gutter on the adjacent Penrhyn House.

The proportion of the glazed facade panels have been designed to reflect the proportion of the existing windows of the warehouse building along Playfair and Argyle St. A fine steel awning around the edges of the new entry aligns with the sill level of the first floor windows on the warehouse building. This awning acts as a rainwater collector, provides weather protection for pedestrian entering the building and protects the entries themselves from driving rain.

Arrangement + Circulation

The plan arrangement of the new entry allows for clear circulation paths within the heritage constraints of the building. It is based on the spatial requirements of a compliant accessible lift, circulation space around it and the adjacent existing stairs.

At ground level the corner column of the structure is removed and corner glazed door openings on each elevation are to be slid back during the day. This is designed to enhance the sense of entry and connection with the public domain, with a larger opening and increased sightlines through to the original warehouse building beyond. As the glass sliding doors will predominately sit in a fully open position, clear access to the entry structure will improve, creating a larger entry point for accessible users and large groups to enter Penrhyn House.

Within the new entry structure the lift itself and the walkway that connects this back into Penrhyn House are designed to be understood as separate circulation elements. The lift shaft itself is designed to be semi-transparent, clad in a metal mesh that allows some visibility of the lift and people movement beyond, and with subtle reference to old mesh lift shaft enclosures seen in buildings of this age.

The location of the lift shaft is set back from the edge of the entry enclosure to reduce the visual impact of the lift through the glass, particularly when viewed from the west at close quarters on Playfair Street. The arrangement of the steel structure of column fins and awning create a further filter to the impact of the lift shaft when viewed from a distance.

Lighting

Internal LED lighting concealed along the awning line will at night wash light across the upper glazing level to create a subtle warm glow, with reference the heritage gas lanterns still seen throughout The Rocks. This is designed as a colour changing LED so that it can be incorporated at SHFA discretion into the annual Vivid festival and other events.

Visual + View Impacts

The visual and view impacts of the proposed new entry structure have been independently assessed by KI Studio who concluded that it will have minimal impact, that the proposal is "consistent with the existing situation and respectful of the visual quality of the streetscape and historic built fabric."

The assessment analysed a number of close, medium and distant views for the site. From some of these viewpoints the increased size of the entry was identified as having potential to create a negative impact, the selections of materials and colours of the new structure was considered to mediate this by having a lesser impact than the existing structure.

Other design measures taken to mitigate any possible adverse impacts on views include:

- the overall transparency of the new structure, allowing the surfaces and buildings beyond to be seen. This include in particular the transparency of the roof which greatly improves views from ground level through to the building and sky beyond;
- the creation of shade on the glazing by the steel fin columns and the awning to reduce reflectivity on the glass surfaces;
- the filtering of views through the transparent structure to the lift enclosure through setbacks and the expressed steel fin structure;
- the visual dissolution of the edges of the entry through the extension of the steel columns and awning through the wall glazing line and above the roof glazing line.

Public Domain + Public Access

The entry structure is sited at a step in the Playfair Street alignment where the wall of Scarborough House to the north steps out from the alignment of Penrhyn House. In this location the entry structure does not intrude into the general path of pedestrian circulation along Playfair Street, but rather sits at a natural pint of transition and reorientation.

The entry structure is designed to be entered from two directions, addressing people approaching from Argyle Street to the south and from the west as people approach along Playfair Street from The Rock Square to the north. The entry forms part of an important cross site public circulation path that crosses through The Rocks Centre from Playfair Street to Kendall Lane to the east.

The new structure is designed to create a permeable open corner on Playfair Street and to encourage circulation into the building. The sense of the entry as a continuation of the public space of Playfair Street is enhanced by the use of bluestone paving in the entry that will match the planned new bluestone paving to be laid in Playfair Street itself.

Some adjustment of levels around the new entry structure is also proposed so as to facilitate access pathways from both the west and the south into the corner of the entry. These level adjustments moderate between the existing level of the entry into Penrhyn House to the existing bluestone channel drain on Playfair Street to the west and to the existing tree on Playfair Street to the south.

Internal LED lighting concealed along the awning line will at night wash light across the upper glazing level to create a subtle warm glow, with reference the heritage gas lanterns still seen throughout The Rocks. Internally lighting is designed predominantly to illuminate the trafficable surfaces to as to emphasise the ground plane and minimize the light spill into adjacent areas.

Externally water running off the roof of the structure is connected to the existing stormwater system through downpipes located at the junction of the old and new structures. Water runoff from adjacent paved surfaces is generally directed away from the building due to the existing falls in the paving in the public domain. Such water that does flow back towards the entry, including from the wall surfaces and awning is channeled through threshold strip drains to connect to the existing stormwater system. An existing stormwater pit adjacent to the new entry is to remain unaltered.