

Redecoration of the Senate Room 1938

Through the generosity of Mrs A E Mills, wife of Dr Mills, Deputy Chancellor, the Senate Room at the University of Sydney was remodelled in 1938.

The following report was prepared by Stephenson & Turner, Architects:

"The problem in the first place was one of acoustics. The room is 40' x 35' by 18' high, and the walls, floor and ceiling were of hard reflecting surfaces so that long reverberations made hearing difficult. This problem has been overcome by covering the walls from skirting to ceiling with an acoustic board covered with coarse textured cloth, by covering the entire floor with a thick carpet laid on a heavy underfelt, and by hanging long velvet curtains interlined with flannel. Nor has it been forgotten that a polished table top will reflect sound, and so there is a large blotting pad at each person's place.

To treat these acoustic materials to make a beautiful and harmonious interior was the next problem. To cover acoustic board with a material, and then to paint it was in itself an experiment which has been successful, the finished result being an interesting but not obtrusive texture.

The Senate Room has some fine old paintings, chief and most valuable of which is "The Blue Lady"... This picture was used as the key to the colour scheme of the room. Walls and ceilings are a light French blue, the colour of the lighted tones of her dress, a soft clean colour, which is a foil to the rich and sombre tones of the other paintings. The carpet is a deep indigo colour and curtains are of gold velvet.

The pictures have been re-hung so that The Blue Lady forms the focal point on entering the room; and is specially lit by a strip light recessed in the mantelshelf. The general artificial lighting is provided by three large pendant fittings giving semi-indirect light.

New furniture in keeping with the character of the room has been designed. Table accommodation for 40 people had to be provided, and this has been done by having three main tables arranged in a "U" shape with two additional smaller tables to be added when there is a full meeting of the Senate. The tables are of polished black bean, and the woodwork of the chairs is also of this material. The chairs are upholstered in blue hide, the colour being intermediate between that of the walls and that of the floor. Such minor details as the blotting pads have not been overlooked and the blotting paper and holders are in blues harmonizing with the room.

The finished result, by the careful use of colour and fine materials is a beautiful and dignified room as befits the University.

This work was designed by and carried out under the supervision of Stephenson & Turner, Architects."