



MELBOURNE · CULTURE · EDUCATION

THE CAPITOL THEATRE.

A contemporary furniture layer inside one of Australia's most extraordinary surviving picture palaces.

The venue in context.

The Capitol is not a neutral room. Designed by Marion Mahony Griffin and Walter Burley Griffin and opened in 1924, it is one of Melbourne's defining architectural interiors. Its crystalline ceiling, geometric plasterwork and dramatic lighting were conceived to transform cinema-going into a total spatial experience.

RMIT acquired the theatre in 1999. After the building closed in 2014 because of the scale of required works, an extensive restoration led by Six Degrees Architects reopened it in 2019. RMIT describes the renewed venue as a destination for culture, education and innovation, with contemporary projection, sound, broadcasting and event capability integrated into the heritage fabric.

This dual identity—historic picture palace and working twenty-first-century venue—creates a demanding furnishing brief. Furniture must support screenings, teaching, festivals, performances, talks and public events while remaining visually disciplined inside a room that already has an unforgettable architectural voice.

A short history of a long-lived place.

1924

The Capitol opens as a grand commercial cinema.

2,000+

Its original auditorium accommodated more than two thousand people.

2019

The restored venue reopens as a cultural and educational hub.

\$18–19M

Published records place the restoration at approximately this value.



A century-old spectacle made useful for a new century.

The restoration reconnected foyer areas, improved accessibility and introduced the systems required for modern cinema, education and performance. RMIT records 4K laser projection, 7.1 Dolby sound, an extended stage and links to its media precinct. These are functional changes, but the success of the project depends on their ability to coexist with the original Griffins' design.

Six Degrees approached the project as both conservation and adaptation. Original plasterwork, carpets and luminous ceiling effects were repaired or reinterpreted while contemporary interventions remained legible. The result allows the building to operate intensively without turning its heritage into a static display.

Furniture in the foyers, landings and gathering areas plays a quieter version of the same role. It creates places to wait, converse, work and pause between events. Its scale and colour need to hold their own at human level while allowing the extraordinary volume and geometry of the building to remain dominant.



The Yellow Design furniture response.



Yellow Design supplied furniture for The Capitol's restored public areas, including long upholstered benches, compact tables, loose seating and associated pieces set against patterned carpet, dark wall linings and luminous geometric architecture.

The long green seating elements are especially instructive. They provide a calm horizontal datum against an interior dominated by strong verticals, stepped forms and overhead light. Their restrained shape supports many users without introducing unnecessary visual competition.

The completed furniture layer gives visitors practical places to arrive, wait, meet and pause while preserving the theatre's sense of spectacle. RMIT is the client and custodian, with the restoration led by Six Degrees Architects and the wider consultant and construction team.

The collection, seen throughout the venue.



Five principles visible in the project.

- | | | |
|----|---------------------------|---|
| 01 | ARCHITECTURE FIRST | Furniture remains visually calm so the Griffins' ceiling, geometry and heritage material remain the primary experience. |
| 02 | PUBLIC COMFORT | Generous, clearly located seating supports arrival, waiting, intervals, conversation and accessible use. |
| 03 | MULTI-USE SUPPORT | Loose tables and seating accommodate education, cinema, festivals, talks and event-day changes. |
| 04 | COLOUR DISCIPLINE | Deep green upholstery and dark detailing relate to the restored palette without copying decorative motifs. |
| 05 | LONG HORIZONS | Materials and construction must suit an institution expected to serve public life for decades. |



HOW THE FURNITURE SHAPES EXPERIENCE

Furniture is a form of wayfinding.

Arrival at The Capitol is ceremonial. Visitors move from Swanston Street through the arcade and into increasingly dramatic internal spaces. Furniture provides moments of human scale within that sequence. A bench at the edge of a foyer offers an intuitive place to wait without interrupting the centre of movement.

During intervals, public furniture becomes infrastructure. Many people leave the auditorium at once, meet companions, check phones, discuss the program or wait for facilities. Seating must be visible, robust and easy to approach while exits and major paths remain completely clear.

Outside event peaks, the same settings support students, staff, tours and smaller gatherings. This is where restraint becomes commercially useful: simple, durable pieces can serve changing programs without tying the room to one event type.

What an operator and specifier must resolve.

01

EVENT SURGES

Foyers must absorb large audience movements without loose furniture narrowing primary paths.

02

ACCESSIBILITY

Seating locations, heights and approaches should support a wide range of bodies and mobility needs.

03

INSTITUTIONAL CARE

Replaceable upholstery, repairable construction and clear maintenance records protect long-term value.

04

VISUAL QUIET

Every new object should be tested against the room in wide view, not judged only as an isolated product.

Why the venue matters beyond its walls.

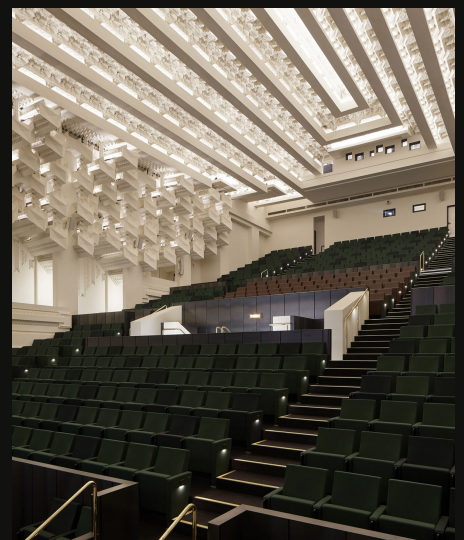
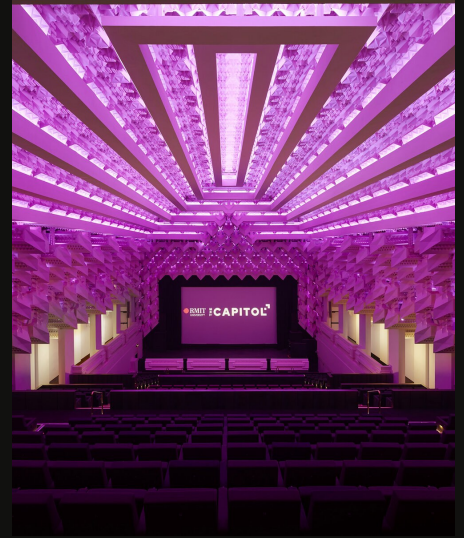
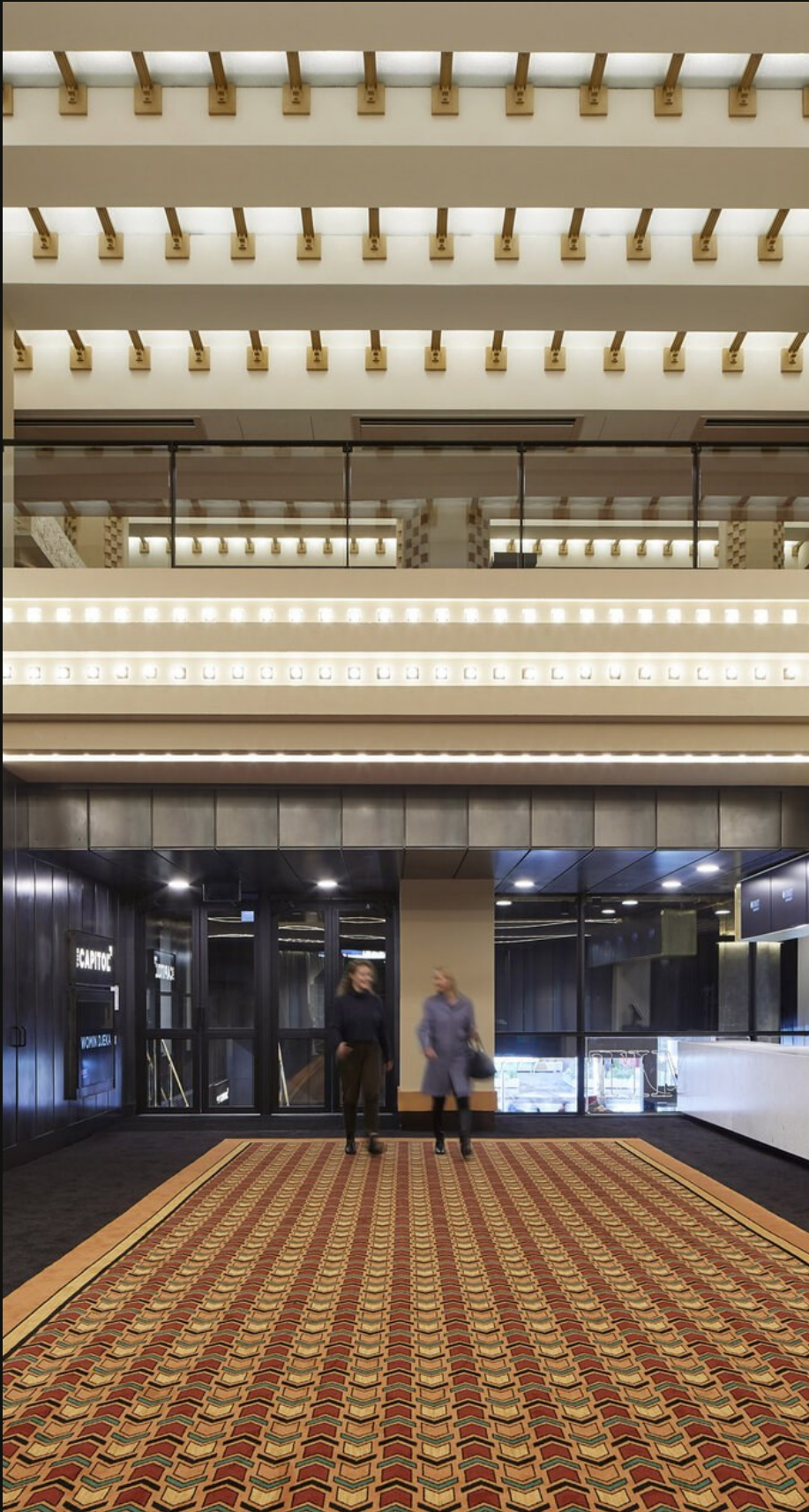
The Capitol's restoration attracted architectural and cultural attention because it returned a celebrated but vulnerable building to public use. Six Degrees records the project as a 3,500-square-metre, seven-level transformation completed in 2019, recognised through Victorian architecture commendations and a GOV Design Award.

RMIT's public storytelling emphasises both wonder and utility. The theatre can host film, new media, creative arts, design, performance and teaching. That breadth is central to the furniture brief: the public areas must feel appropriate before a lecture, a film festival screening or a major cultural event.

The venue's screen identity also continues through its contemporary technology. It is no longer only a place where films are watched; it is connected to media learning, broadcasting and emerging formats. Furniture supports the social spaces around those experiences—the conversations before and after the main event.



Scale, setting and atmosphere.



Five lessons for the next commercial brief.

01 **Begin with hierarchy** Decide what must dominate visually. In a heritage landmark, furniture usually plays a supporting role.

02 **Map audience movement** Study arrival, queuing, intervals, amenities and departure before positioning public seating.

03 **Design for multiple calendars** A cultural venue may host education, festivals, performance and private events in the same week.

04 **Specify for stewardship** Record finishes, suppliers, replacement components and care requirements for future facilities teams.

05 **Judge at room scale** Use wide visualisations and on-site samples so colour and mass are assessed against the full architecture.



COMMERCIAL FURNITURE SHOULD DO MORE THAN COMPLETE THE ROOM.

It should help the whole venue perform.

Yellow Design brings furniture planning, sourcing, custom solutions and project coordination together. The goal is a finished environment that feels true to the design, works for guests and staff, and remains commercially dependable well beyond opening day.

A project shaped by many hands.

Great commercial spaces are collaborative. Yellow Design is proud to have contributed the furniture layer within this project, working alongside the venue, architects, interior designers, builders, consultants, makers and suppliers who brought the wider experience to life. Venue history and project context referenced in this story include:

— RMIT University, About The Capitol

— RMIT University, Explore The Capitol at Open House Melbourne

— Six Degrees Architecture, The Capitol RMIT Theatre

— RMIT Sustainability Annual Report 2019

Furnishing a cultural, education or heritage venue?

Talk to Yellow Design early. We can help develop the furniture brief, review an architect or interior-design schedule, source and customise suitable pieces, coordinate finishes and guide the furniture package through to delivery.