

schiaavello

CASE STUDY



What it takes to be authentic: ISPT's Brisbane Central Plaza
Brisbane, Australia

Being faithful to a timeless space –

Superannuation fund property investor ISPT has owned the iconic Central Plaza tower on Brisbane's Queen Street for a decade. Home to thousands of office tenants, the building was designed by Japanese architect Dr Kisho Kurokawa in 1988 and features a lobby like no other. Monumental in design but also size, the space boasts a 15m high ceiling. "It's a real old school 'wow' space," says Stephen Cameron of Cameron & Co, the architects behind the foyer's reinvigoration. "You walk in the door and you are struck immediately by the scale of the space, as well as the quality of the finishes. There is a sheer sense of power and authority about it; it's designed to be prestigious."

While the design and aesthetic of the space has remained timeless in the 30 years since its completion, ISPT decided a refresh wouldn't go astray, as part of upgrades throughout the entire building. "The foyer didn't have any kind of softness; there was just a lot of marble and granite and there was nothing to really draw people in to have a coffee or to dwell there," says Nic Spencer, ISPT's development manager.

"The building is a landmark so ISPT really wanted us to hold on to as much of the original design intent as possible," Cameron adds. "Our brief wasn't to make a radical transformation.



Cushioned furniture brings a newfound softness to the foyer's hard material palette.

In fact, it was the complete opposite – it was to be as faithful as possible to the original vision and to make some subtle changes in order to make the space work a lot better and to make it more appealing for tenants."

Trust in Schiavello's bespoke furniture –

ISPT sought to install cushioned furniture to bring a newfound softness and welcoming aesthetic to the foyer's hard material palette. Following in line with ISPT and Cameron & Co.'s 'modern heritage listing' approach, the furniture was to look as though it had been there since the beginning. "And it had to be bespoke," says Spencer. "We didn't want to see the same furniture in any other lobby. We wanted people to walk in and know straight away that this furniture was something that was built specifically for the space."

Cameron turned to Schiavello to manufacture the custom furniture he had designed for the foyer. "To me, there's only one place to go to get bespoke furniture made – and that place is Schiavello," he says. "I can't speak highly enough of Rob Amorosi, the company's QLD State Director, for his valuable contribution to the manufacture of this furniture. He has an incredible attention to detail that I know is representative of Schiavello."



Custom planters complement the original architecture of the building, which is dominated by black, white and mirrors.

Spotlight on honest and unique designs –

Kurokawa's architectural design is monochrome – black, grey and white – and populated by mirrors, so it was essential that the furniture's material palette complemented this. In addition, the flooring is comprised of black and white stone in a grid-like pattern, evocative of the Japanese board game Go. Following the lead set by Kurokawa, every bespoke furniture piece is round, just like Go's playing pieces, forming a kind of mega-scale, interior design version of the game.

Circular armchairs with hugging backrests populate the foyer, all upholstered in luxurious black leather. With detailed stitching and a polished steel frame and legs, the chairs exude sophistication and reflect the building's historical excellence. Round coffee tables accompany the armchairs, topped with pure glass and held up via a polished steel frame. The thin, minimal lines and transparency of the tables bring balance to the room, offsetting the strong, dark curves and thick bodies of the leather chairs.

Bringing greenery to the space, donut-shaped Schiavello-made bench seating, also upholstered in black leather and with expert stitching details, feature custom planters in their middles. "Before, people would usually wait outside the building," reflects Cameron. "But now, people come through from the café next door and sit on these chairs because they're a lot more comfortable than the wooden bar chairs at the café. People will wait on them for appointments or to meet someone. The whole space has become much more lively and warm thanks to the seating."



Bringing greenery to the space, donut-shaped Schiavello-made bench seating, upholstered in black leather, feature custom planters in their middles.



Bespoke armchairs, designed by Cameron and Co. and manufactured by Schiavello, encourage people to spend more time in the space.

The pièce de résistance of the space, however, are the bespoke planters. Being 1500mm in diameter, they hold 4m tall kauri pine trees, which accentuate and humanise the monumental height of the foyer space. "The thing about a space this big is that it's hard for us to properly grasp; you get to a point where things are just big, and you can't really understand beyond that," says Cameron. "So the idea we had was to occupy some of that space with something taller than people, to provide a relative sense of how large the space truly is."

To complement the surrounds, ISPT wanted the planters to be in a mirrored finish, which would usually call for chrome. However, due to the extreme negative impacts that chrome plating has on the environment, Schiavello endeavoured to find another solution. "We said that we would find a way to get that same polished, mirror finish with stainless steel. And through a lot of experimentation, we did," says Schiavello's Rob Amorosi.

The second challenge faced were the issues of light and water. The arborist informed the team that the trees would need to be regularly rotated and moved otherwise they risked the chance of dying. To solve this, Schiavello created the planters with a hinged design – allowing them to be opened, and the inside pot, which sits on castors, to be slid out and moved with minimal effort. When the tree is returned to the planter, the shell closes like a claw over the pot, resulting in a monolithic structure, showing no trace of the hinge or castors.

"There was a lot of complexity and working detail that went on to ensure that what we were developing was viable in the long term," Cameron says.

Australian manufacturing: “We couldn’t be happier” –

“The finished result was exactly what we wanted. It wasn’t just a case of we design something, and you make it... We worked closely with Schiavello throughout the entire design process.”

“I am really proud of the way the furniture has come up; the proportions are just lovely,” Cameron reflects. “If you look at a chair in the scale of that space, the chair is tiny, but when you get up close to them you can really see how beautifully made they are. It’s the absolute highlight.”

And Spencer agrees. “One of ISPT’s key values is excellence and that is very much demonstrated in the quality and design of furniture. Every deal we agree to, every dollar we spend, every decision we make must be for something that is both unique and compelling. If it’s not unique or compelling, we don’t do it, because it means that somebody else is doing it. With our furniture, it was both those things, not only in terms of quality but also price. Originally, we were looking at importing off the shelf product from Europe, but we thought, ‘Why don’t we just design our own bespoke furniture and have a local manufacturer build it?’ So that’s what we did, and we couldn’t be happier.”



Expertly crafted, the Schiavello custom planters feature hinged doors for easy movement and transfer of the 4m tall kauri pine trees that sit inside them.

Interior design by Cameron and Co
Photography by Toby Scott