

Rare Books Room, Supreme Court Library

Building Name	Rare Books Room
Location	Queensland Supreme Court Library, Queensland Supreme Court building, George Street, Brisbane, Queensland
Building function	Rare Books Archive
Features	A timber, elliptically shaped self-contained room, which contains timber display cases of Jarrah and Hoop Pine
Architects	Planet Design Collaborative (Leigh Shutter), 324 Harcourt Street, Teneriffe, 4005, QLD
Builder and Joiner	E. Chapman & Son Pty Ltd
Joinery Timber	Hoop Pine /Jarrah
Beams	150mm x 50mm F17 hardwood beams
Posts	56mm Plywood blades (2X25mm sheets with 6mm steel connection plates) solid timber edging
Doors	Frameless glass
Glass Craftsman	George Wolf (sandblasted and moulded door panels)

Key Words

Jarrah, Hoop Pine, ribbed timber,

General Intent and Siting

Inside the Queensland Supreme Court Library, which is inside the Queensland Supreme Court building, is odd construction. Although it is called a room, it is a freestanding, pod-like structure, distinct from its surroundings in scale, form, colour and contents. As its name suggests, the Rare Books Room is designed by Planet Design (Leigh Shutter) to hold Queensland Supreme Court Library's collection of rare books and documents, a collection comprising some 950 volumes dating back to the 16th Century. Many are first editions belonging to prominent judges and include works by Bacon, Justinian and Plowden. Rare documents held in this collection include biographical files on Queensland's legal personalities dating back to 1860, unpublished memoirs, manuscripts and conference papers. Although it was important to bring these works into the public domain, it was of equal importance to house them in a secure, humidity-controlled environment that celebrates their ongoing, rather than antiquated, life. This Room offers the prospect of preservation and education and comprises fit-out for storage, viewing and reading, at the ornate Red Cedar lectern.

The Rare Books Room complements the existing Supreme Court Library, located at the same floor in the Courts building. The rare books room is a vestibule, the exclamation point at the end of the long concourse of the second level of the Supreme Court complex, which comprises raw, concrete buildings particular to a certain time and style in Brisbane architecture. The Rare Books Room, in stark contrast to the grey concrete walls, is a compact statement about craftsmanship, history, detail and hand worked timber.

This floor also houses the replica of the 'Smoking Room' of the *QGSY Lucinda*. The Australian Constitution was drafted in the original Smoking Room and this

replica was commissioned to observe the great historical significance of this event and its unusual location. It, too, is beautifully handcrafted using timbers appropriate to the period.

Construction

The strip timber floor has a polyurethane finishing and is stained in a mid-pink tone. The Room is constructed of an MDF sheet board shell, with veneers applied. The gently bowed, ribbed blades of the Room are also structural, rather than purely aesthetic, and serve to break the strict geometry of the Courts building. The ribs and fins 'contain' the shell of the Room in a subtle compression as if the book and display cases were to spring outwards if the ribs were relaxed in any way. In plan the Room is a pointed ellipse; however the timber strips of the flooring run at 90° to the length of the elliptical form, creating a further interesting internal tension. The shell was constructed and veneered in the workshop, disassembled and reassembled *in situ*. Cabinets are MDF with Hoop pine and Jarrah veneer finishes.

The shell contains ventilation/humidity-controlling devices, which are set high, behind inconspicuous grilles, into the 'rear' wall, between the blades. This not only conceals these devices from the general public, but also allows for discreet servicing access. The ceiling of the Room is clad in smooth rotary peeled plywood, surface fixed in an offset pattern. Edges are bevelled and butted; the nailing detail is also carefully considered. The placement of the end joist of the ceiling ribs is designed to meet the vertical ribs.

The display and storage cases (which face either inwards or outwards) are finished with a distinctive horizontal edge strip of a contrasting darker timber, on only one axis end of the veneer. This provides an attractive base for the bronze key plates and handles. The facing timber is book-matched veneer, crown cut (with subtle, but closely matched 'cathedral patterning'). This again refers to a fine tradition of joinery in public service buildings in Queensland, with the once abundant fine softwood timbers of the region. A final touch is the beautifully carved antique Queensland Red Cedar (*Toona ciliata*) lectern at the far end of the Room.

Elements of the past and present co-exist in this room; the general effect is one of care, detail, craftsmanship and knowledge of materials. The modern and linear ceiling panels counterpoise traditional techniques, such as the carving of the gryphons' feet at the base of the lectern. The products of hand and mechanical and skill are on display and can be equally admired. The one common element to which both processes are applied is extremely high quality materials, picked by the craftsmen; the best veneer cuts, the best-matched patterning, the best-grained hoop pine.

Materiality

The interior is largely comprised of two contrasting joinery timbers, Hoop Pine and Jarrah. Hoop Pine (*Araucaria cunninghamii*) is rated soft (it has a Janka

Hardness of 3.4kN for native forest material) in relation to indentation and working with hand tools. From an ethical and sustainable point of view, Hoop Pine is highly favoured as a plantation-grown softwood. Traditionally, Hoop Pine has a long use in Queensland. Its wide (pre-plantation) availability, easy workability, smooth, very uniform, straight grain, and light colour (pale cream to light yellow-brown) meant it had a wide range of applications including, at one extreme, packing cases, house framing, flooring and boat planking to, at the other, fine furniture, joinery and carving.

Conversely, Jarrah (*Eucalyptus marginata*) is very hard (Janka Hardness of 8.5kN), heavy and close-grained, with a mahogany-red colour, and sufficient 'figure' to render it suitable for cabinet-makers' use. It is generally used in the construction of sleepers, panelling, heavy furniture and flooring. Jarrah is a large hardwood grown in the southwest corner of western Australia, and often removed (with Karri, *Eucalyptus diversicolor*) from old growth or so-called 're-growth' forests. It is important to determine Jarrah's source when specifying, as plantation sources are very limited; it is preferable to buy Jarrah second hand or substitute.

References

- Supreme Court Library Committee, (2000), *The Commemorative Booklet*, Brisbane: Supreme Court Library.
- Supreme Court Library Committee, (March 2001), *QGSY Lucinda Smoking Room Replica 2001*, Brisbane: Supreme Court Library.
- Thomson, S. (2001) 'RadarDelight', *Architecture Australia*, July/August, July-Aug., v.90, n.4, p.30. (see also <http://www.archmedia.com.au/>)

On the Internet

- Queensland Courts - Supreme Court Library (Rare Books Room):*
<http://www.courts.qld.gov.au/library/rbr.htm>
- Working with Hoop Pine:*
http://oak.arch.utas.edu.au/tbia/tech_species_info.asp?speciesID=49496
http://www.rainforestinfo.org.au/good_wood/bld_hoop.htm
- Working with Jarrah:*
http://oak.arch.utas.edu.au/tbia/tech_species_info.asp?speciesID=49486
- Janka Hardness:*
<http://www.sizes.com/units/janka.htm>
- The Hunt for Red Cedar:*
<http://www.csiro.au/index.asp?type=mediaRelease&id=TheHuntForRedCedar&stylesheet=mediaRelease>

Glossary

Janka Hardness:

Hardness is a measure of the resistance of wood to indentation. It is not directly related to workability. Hardness of timber is usually measured by the Janka test. This involves pressing a steel ball into the test specimen. The Janka rating is given by the force necessary for the ball to penetrate to half its diameter. Hardness rating may influence the selection of timber species for particular uses, e.g. feature floors that are subject to heavy traffic (see <http://oak.arch.utas.edu.au/>)