

Plants give dose of good health to revamp

Ingeniously tweaking a 1990s warehouse and office has made a world of difference, writes **Stephen Crafti**.

The “mantra” of vitamin company Melrose Health is “being well and staying well is all about a whole-body approach to life”.

But when the company moved to larger premises in Mount Waverley, its values didn’t respond to the 1990s warehouse and office building. While the architecture was bland, the connection to nature was almost non-existent.

A small lawn ran along the northern facade (street) and the atrium, accessed by a side street, was void of plants.

Initially the brief to Bent Architecture was to simply freshen up the interior and bring in a few pieces of furniture. But after the initial assessment, Melrose Health was shown the larger picture of what the premises could offer.

“We could have changed a few surfaces and added a new coat of paint. But that wouldn’t have dramatically altered the way staff would work,” says architect Paul Porjazoski, co-director of the practice, who worked closely with his life and business partner, architect Merran Porjazoski.

“Retaining the original layout would still mean that office and warehouse staff would operate in-

dependently, like two separate businesses,” adds Merran.

One of the most significant changes to the building’s exterior was adding a stronger green presence. Previously, the long narrow slot windows facing the street were void of eaves and single glazed. As well as painting the fibre cement walls black, Bent Architecture added a black chain mesh arbour to allow deciduous plants to climb.

“Plants now reach to the first floor windows even just after a few months,” says Merran, who was the project architect for this job. The sterile entry leading to an atrium was also completely reworked.

The double-height space was reconfigured to allow ground and first-floor views of the light-filled atrium. And indoor plants, including a weeping fig, take “centre stage”. Built-in timber seating, irregular in shape and position, allows the atrium to be used by staff for lunch breaks. It’s also a green enclave for reception.

One of the features of the atrium is to display the Melrose Health products to clients. Each of the products has been arranged on steel shelves (the same as those used in the warehouse) in groups, creating a “quilt-like” effect on the



The new Melrose Health office, designed by Bent Architecture.

double-height wall. The architects broke through the original wall and created glass windows to allow sight lines between the warehouse and offices. “Previously, warehouse staff were out of sight and vice-versa for the office staff,” says Paul.

To further strengthen connectivity within the building, Bent Architecture inserted an organically shaped void, lined with timber, between the ground and first-floor

offices. “It was important to open up spaces and create more of a single identity,” he adds.

The office space on both levels has also been reconfigured. As well as two enclosed offices on each level, framed with glass, there are meeting rooms. And between are the open-plan work areas, now benefiting from a green outlook.

Since the fit-out was completed there has been a significant shift in

how staff use the building and how clients interact with the products.

Previously, clients were ushered into an enclosed showroom, now they arrive at reception and often reach for one of the products displayed on the shelves.

And instead of sitting around a boardroom table, staff and management are just as likely to be seen rubbing their hands with a new lotion at reception.