

Hepburn Mineral Springs Bathhouse Refurbishment



RESTORING AN ICONIC TOURISM AND COMMUNITY ASSET

Minister's introduction

Famous for its pampering services, the Hepburn Mineral Springs Bathhouse has itself been in need of some TLC for many years.

Recognised as one of regional Victoria's most popular tourist attractions, the historic bathhouse is a key element of a local tourism sector supporting 2,200 jobs and worth more than \$262 million annually.

However, in recent years the bathhouse has been unable to accommodate the level of demand for its services and its outdated décor and facilities were not meeting 21st century expectations of a spa experience.

A stunning \$10.6 million refurbishment has transformed the bathhouse into a world-class day spa, while retaining the heritage features of the iconic Edwardian building.

The renovation includes a new wing to house state-of-the-art mineral pools and spas, building on the mineral water tradition of the bathhouse and reserve that is so closely entwined with the region's history and development.

The Victorian Government, in partnership with Hepburn Shire Council, recognised the need to invest in the redevelopment of the historic bathhouse to build on the tourism opportunities associated with the rise of the spa industry.

The project was funded with \$8 million through the Victorian Government's *Regional Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF)*, which supports capital works that build the competitive capacity of regional and rural communities. The Government recognises that quality infrastructure is a means of generating economic prosperity, driving investment, jobs and population growth, and supporting community well-being.

Since its establishment in 1999, the RIDF has provided \$421 million for 201 major capital works projects, with an estimated value to regional and rural communities of \$1.26 billion.

The newly restored bathhouse will once more be central to the local tourism industry, and will help position the Daylesford and Macedon Ranges region as the spa capital of Australia.

It is expected to generate 60 to 70 new jobs over the next two years, not to mention the flow-on investment and jobs that will be created through continued tourism growth.

The remaining \$2.6 million for the project was contributed by Hepburn Shire Council, the Department of Sustainability and Environment, the Victorian Mineral Water Committee, Sustainability Victoria and the Australian Government.

I would like to thank Cox Architects and Planners, local construction contractor A.W. Nicholson, and Major Projects Victoria who managed the construction phase.

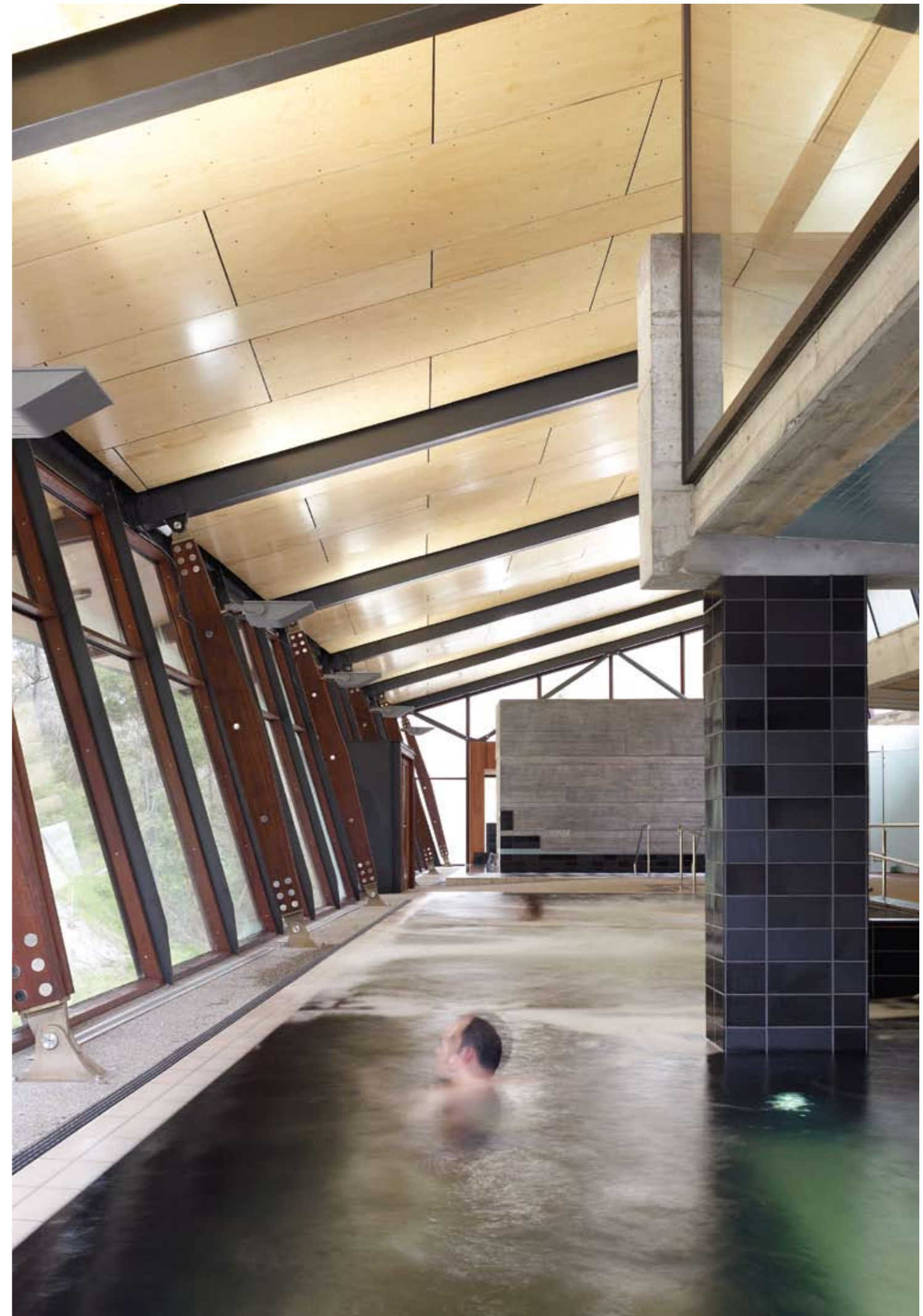
I also wish the new operator, Belgravia Health and Leisure Group, every success as they embark on an exciting new phase for the bathhouse.

This project is an outstanding example of all three levels of government and the private sector working together in provincial Victoria, making it an even better place to visit, live, work and invest.

The result has been the revitalisation of a well-loved community and tourism asset, ensuring it will continue as an icon for future generations.



JACINTA ALLAN
Minister for Regional and Rural Development





HISTORY OF THE BATHHOUSE AND RESERVE

Early days

The Indigenous Australians of the Central Highlands knew of the area's mineral springs long before European settlement, calling them 'special waters' due to their healing qualities. The first Europeans to discover them were the pastoralists who settled in the Daylesford-Hepburn area. The town of Hepburn Springs is named after Captain John Hepburn, a pastoralist who arrived in 1836 and gave his name to one of the springs on his holding. The discovery of gold in 1851 led prospectors to descend on the area and the frenetic mining activity uncovered more springs. Many miners came from Switzerland and Italy, where the culture of mineral water bathing and drinking was well entrenched. They enthusiastically adopted the Hepburn springs.

'Taking the waters'

Dating back to the ancient Greeks and Romans, the European tradition of 'taking the waters' is about more than just drinking or bathing in mineral water. It is a complete experience involving a special atmosphere of fresh air, pleasant natural surroundings, rest and relaxation. At Hepburn, taking the waters for health and social reasons was at the peak of its popularity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but the need to protect the mineral springs from mining was recognised as early as 1865, when a reserve was established. Hepburn Springs water was commercially bottled from the 1860s and later exported to Britain, South Africa, China and Egypt. The first shelter for visitors to the springs was a timber structure erected in the 1870s. This was replaced when construction of the Daylesford railway line in 1880 brought a dramatic increase in tourists, leading to the establishment of a bathhouse in the 1890s.

HISTORY OF THE BATHHOUSE AND RESERVE

The inter-war years

Further buildings were added in the inter-war years, which were the heyday for the bathhouse. Demand for its services grew from 2,215 baths in 1913, to 7,000 baths in 1924.

Visitors could choose from hot mineral baths, hydro-massage, sinusoidal electric baths and radium baths. People believed that mineral water could restore youth, help jaded appetites, act as a tonic for the blood and dispel acute pain.

Aside from their attraction for tourists, the bathhouse and mineral springs reserve became the centre of social life for the people of Daylesford and Hepburn Springs during this period.

There was even a swimming pool built at Spring Creek in the 1920s and twilight dances and social events were held in the nearby pavilion.

Everybody came to Hepburn Springs, for their health, for the annual family holiday and above all for their honeymoons.

However, this changed after World War II when the area's popularity as a health resort declined and more tourists chose the beach over the bush.





“ I have travelled in 45 different countries of the world and seen most of the famous springs, both hot and cold. I unhesitatingly say that Hepburn Springs are superior to most of them, in native beauty, invigorating force and curative power. ”

Dr A McKenzie Meldrum, Washington, USA - 29 October 1927

HISTORY OF THE BATHHOUSE AND RESERVE

Heritage significance

According to Heritage Victoria, the Hepburn Mineral Springs Bathhouse and Reserve are 'of historic, social, aesthetic and scientific significance to the State of Victoria'.

They are an 'intact and authentic expression of 19th and early 20th century nature and health tourism in Victoria'.

Listed on the heritage register are the spa complex buildings that remain today: the bathhouse (1895), the brick extension (1922), brick chimney (1936), the pavilion (1907) and kiosk (1939).

Also listed are around 30 hectares of public (Crown) land; three mineral springs named Soda, Locarno and Sulphur; the ornamental gardens which aimed to evoke the spa resorts of Europe; and a single Sierra Redwood planted in 1901 to commemorate Federation.

The renaissance of health spas

The late 1970s and 80s were the beginning of the current renaissance of health, fitness and natural therapies as important lifestyle values.

Renewed interest in mineral water bathing and spa therapies led to a substantial renovation of the bathhouse in 1986 in an attempt to boost its capacity. Further works in the early 1990s added elongated wings to the north and south of the bathhouse complex.

However, neither of these renovations could prepare the bathhouse for the next decade's demand that would completely outgrow the existing bathhouse structure.

A study commissioned by Hepburn Shire Council, Tourism Victoria and the Victorian Mineral Water Committee in 2001 found that demand had grown by 10 per cent in each of the preceding four years. This study also confirmed that the bathhouse was overwhelmingly a tourist facility, with 95 per cent of patrons coming from outside Daylesford-Hepburn.



REVITALISING THE BATHHOUSE

About the refurbishment project

Aside from the requirement to increase its capacity, the bathhouse was in need of a complete makeover. Its inadequate facilities, outdated decor and noisy, overcrowded environment were not meeting expectations of a spa experience.

There were also urgent structural, plumbing and maintenance issues to be addressed, due to stress from a dysfunctional layout and the poor quality materials used in the 1990s renovation.

The Victorian Government, in partnership with Hepburn Shire Council, recognised the need to invest in the redevelopment of the bathhouse to ensure its sustainability and capitalise on the tourism opportunities presented by the rise of the spa industry.

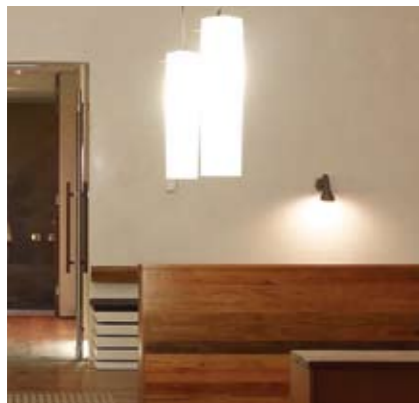
A \$10.6 million refurbishment was planned, with Regional Development Victoria providing \$8 million through its *Regional Infrastructure Development Fund*. The remaining \$2.6 million was contributed by Hepburn Shire Council, the Department of Sustainability and Environment, the Victorian Mineral Water Committee, Sustainability Victoria and the Australian Government.

Any redevelopment needed to consider the heritage elements, physical setting, architectural scale and character of the existing bathhouse complex. Cox Architects and Planners were selected for the project, due to their strong reputation for cultural and environmentally sensitive design. Hepburn Shire Council coordinated the community consultation during the design process.

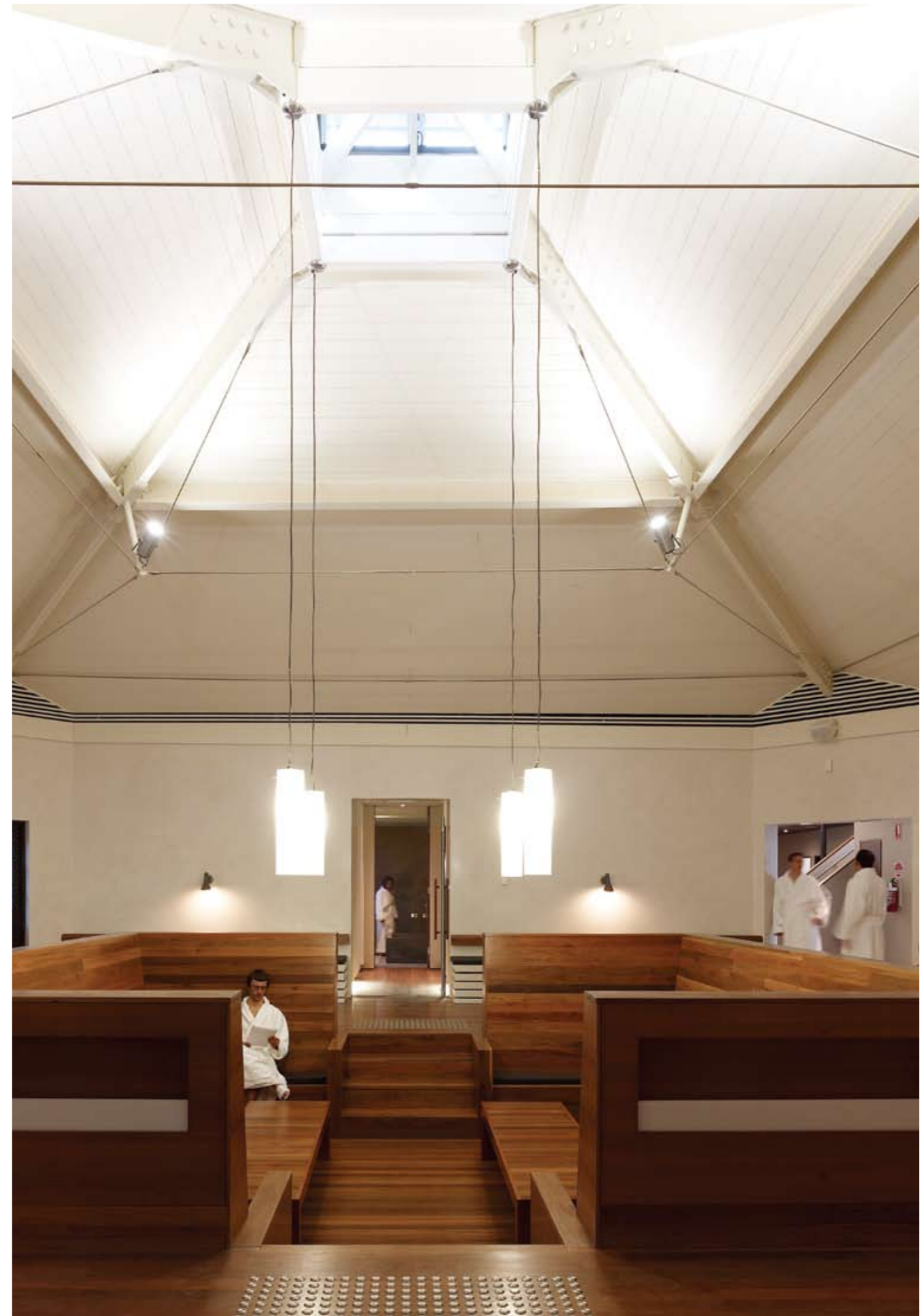
Major Projects Victoria managed the construction project, working closely with Cox Architects and Ballarat-based construction contractor A.W. Nicholson – a fourth-generation family business that has delivered several large-scale projects in provincial Victoria.

Works commenced in October 2006, providing employment for up to 60 local tradespeople at the peak of construction, and were completed in mid-2008.

Concurrently with the redevelopment, the Department of Sustainability and Environment ran a public tender process to appoint the new bathhouse operator. The successful tenderer, Belgravia Health and Leisure Group reopened the bathhouse for business in September 2008.



Balneotherapy. n.
1. The treatment of diseases, injuries and other physical ailments with bathing in natural mineral waters.
Origin: 1880–85. From Latin: balneum, bath.

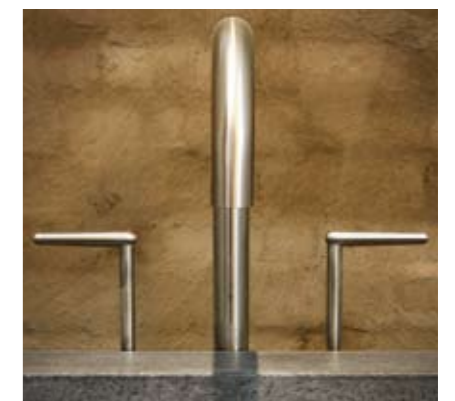
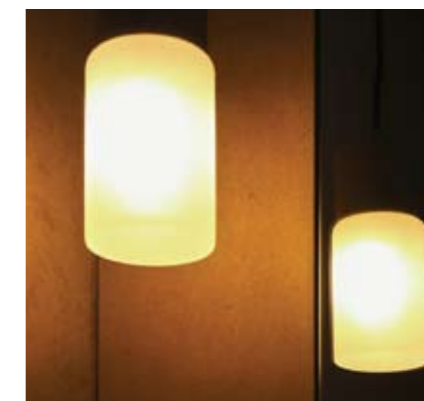




REVITALISING THE BATHHOUSE

Features of the revitalised bathhouse

- More than 30 wet and dry treatment rooms, making it one of the largest day spas in Australia.
- The heritage-listed building has been refurbished while retaining its iconic Edwardian features. Known as the South Wing, this section of the bathhouse contains high-quality wet and dry treatment rooms, private change rooms, the individual mineral bath rooms, a relaxation room and office facilities.
- In clearing the development site a small building dating from the 1990s was demolished. The new bathing wing constructed in its place incorporates a mineral water bathing pool, a salt pool, two interconnected spa pools, a relaxation deck and a unisex change room.
- Nestled in the deep creek gully, the new building is connected to the mineral springs carpark at its upper level by a bridge. A lift provides access to the lower level. The reception to both the bathhouse and spa facilities is located at the upper entrance level.
- Unlike the previous layout, which created noise and movement conflicts by mixing wet and dry, public and private areas, the clear separation of the major functions has resulted in extensive tranquil zones and reflective spaces throughout the new bathhouse. It has also reduced stress on the heritage building by containing the major general access areas to the new bathing wing.
- The new building is open, airy and light with skylights and large windows. This serves the dual purpose of allowing potential patrons to see inside and provides open views of the creek and bush setting to increase the tranquillity of the spa experience.
- The creek itself has been revitalised with clearing of the creek bed, new rocks and planting of indigenous vegetation. Other external works have included improvements to the carpark and the creation of a sod roof planted with indigenous grasses.
- Internally, the design is sleek and contemporary throughout both the new wing and heritage building, featuring neutral tones and natural materials such as timber to reflect the local landscape.
- The result is a world-class bathhouse and spa which allows visitors to continue the historic Hepburn tradition of 'taking the waters', but in 21st century luxury.



A TOURISM ICON

Spa capital of Australia

The refurbished bathhouse will again become a major drawcard for the already strong tourism industry in Daylesford and the Macedon Ranges.

Rather than being impacted by the refurbishment of the bathhouse, tourism has continued to grow, demonstrating that the region is a mature tourism destination with a range of quality products and services providing many choices for visitors.

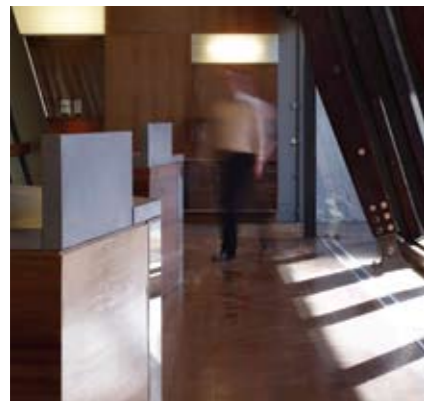
According to the National Visitor Survey there were 1.3 million domestic daytrip visitors to the region in the year ending December 2007, an increase of 12.2 per cent on the previous year. 437,000 inter- and intrastate visitors stayed overnight in the region in 2007, representing growth of 2.3 per cent. They also stayed longer than in previous years — with an average stay of 2.4 nights in 2007, up from 2.1 nights in 2006.

The region has a depth of tourism experiences that are strong attractors for visitors, including many spa and wellness facilities, high quality food and wine, luxury accommodation and a range of natural attractions. The local spa industry has flourished to the point where it now boasts 85 different treatments and is a major attractor for tourists.

The world-class spa facilities, mineral water bathing and historical significance of the revitalised bathhouse will further cement the region's reputation as the State's leading spa destination.

Victoria has around 100 natural mineral springs – more than anywhere in Australia – and the majority and best-known are in the Central Highlands. The bathhouse's direct access to these springs makes it unique in Victoria and Australia, as other facilities have to import mineral water. It also has the distinction of being the only bathhouse in Australia to have operated continuously in the same location since the 1860s.

With this stunning tourism and cultural icon at its heart, the Daylesford and Macedon Ranges region is well-positioned to achieve its aim of being the spa capital of Australia.



Tourism data sources: National Visitor Survey, Tourism Research Australia, 2007. Travel Expenditure by Domestic and International Visitors in Australia's Regions 2005, Tourism Research Australia. Victorian Tourism Employment Atlas 2005, TTF Australia, January 2005.

Historical information sources: Victorian Heritage Register. Victoria's Spa and Wellness Tourism Action Plan 2005-2010. Taking the Waters: Victorian Mineral Water Committee Information Kit.

Project Partners

- Australian Government Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government
 - A.W. Nicholson Pty Ltd
 - Belgravia Health and Leisure Group
 - Cox Architects and Planners
- Department of Sustainability and Environment
 - Hepburn Shire Council
 - Major Projects Victoria
- Regional Development Victoria
 - Sustainability Victoria
 - Tourism Victoria
- Victorian Mineral Water Committee





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