

COASTAL ECOLOGY LABORATORY

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON



The previous Island Bay laboratory, built in the 1960s, was no longer meeting the needs of Victoria University of Wellington for their students and staff. In 2008, the University commissioned us to design a modern teaching and research facility that would be more durable and attractive, and embody environmentally sustainable design (ESD) principles, while supporting the growing demands of a busy science programme.

The south coast is an iconic environment in Wellington, but is regularly battered by salt-laden southerlies. The new building needed to handle these corrosive conditions and also reflect the natural beauty of its coastal location.

To house all the teaching and research facilities, the new building would be substantially larger than its predecessor. To ensure it wouldn't visually dominate the landscape, we broke the building down into a series of interrelated forms that serve to reduce its apparent volume. A composition of different shapes and materials makes it appear smaller than it actually is.

Material selection had to be sensitive to its location, so we established the idea that the building would feel like a coastal object, with hints that it might have been made from items found on the beach. Corrugated iron over the entry, exposed timber ribs, stone, and metals were chosen for cladding and features, as they are robust, age well, and are generally maintenance free.

Inside, an open central lobby links the floors with walkways and galleries. This creates a flexible and attractive environment suitable for a variety of uses including presentations, casual meetings and circulation. It also assists with sustainability initiatives for the building, allowing natural light to penetrate deep into the floor plan.

The facility is popular with students and staff and is now used to its fullest capacity. The design has become iconic in the area due its sensitivity to the materials and of the coast.

All of the laboratories in the building were designed and documented by our sister company Lab-works Architecture.

