



Light as a narrative force in Public Space

Parramatta Square Sydney: How light follows an architectural vision and high sustainability standards

Project data:

Project:
Parramatta Square, Sydney, Australia

Architecture:
JPW, Sydney

Developer:
Walker Corporation, Sydney

Lighting Design:
Light Studio MG, Sydney, Leichhardt

Specifier:
LCI Consultants (3PSQ), AECOM (4PSQ), WSP (6-8PSQ), Sydney

Channel Partner:
Jadecross, Sydney

Photography:
Jackie Chan

Parramatta Square, developed by Walker Corporation, is one of Australia's most ambitious urban renewal projects, transforming Western Sydney's largest urban centre into a vibrant commercial, cultural and civic hub. Located in the geographic centre of Greater Sydney, this \$3.2 billion redevelopment encompasses around 300,000 square meters of commercial, retail and civic space. The project spans six hectares and includes commercial towers, public spaces and civic buildings.

In 2013, Sydney-based architectural practice JPW won an international design competition for the first stage of development of the precinct. Over the next decade, JPW's Project Director, Mathew Howard, would lead the firm's engagement with the City of Parramatta Council and Walker Corporation to refine and deliver the precinct masterplan; integrating public transport infrastructure, public spaces, civic buildings and workplaces to redefine the civic heart of Greater Sydney.

Key to the realisation of the architectural vision was the implementation of a lighting concept that did more than just illuminate – it helped define the identity of the precinct. Michel Goupy, Principal of Light-

StudioMG, explained that his company's task went beyond functional lighting. It was about translating the architectural narrative into a language of light with formulating an appropriate design:

"Effective both day and night, illumination needed to create visual hierarchy, vertical illuminance, the perception of brightness and accentuation of public art."

The goal wasn't purely technical. The lighting design was conceived as a tool for crafting atmosphere – guiding people through the expansive precinct while reinforcing its character and making the complex layout intuitively legible.

Glowing from within: the "lantern effect"

4, 6 & 8 Parramatta Square are the primary office towers that define the southern edge of the Parramatta Square public domain. They comprise a total of more than 200,000 square metres of premium office space above a series of civic scaled foyers and third spaces that connect and engage with the public realm. The lighting design for each of these spaces was planned to meet base-level illuminance, with enhanced lux levels in lift lobbies and on art, furniture and reception areas to create points of focus and provide visual impact.

Each foyer features soaring travertine walls. Travertine is a natural limestone formed by mineral deposits from hot springs, known for its warm tones and porous texture. It has been used in architecture since ancient times and lends a sense of timeless elegance and material authenticity to contemporary spaces.

This material quality provided the opportunity to showcase a so-called „lantern“ effect from the public domain. The effect refers to the visual impression of the interior walls softly glowing from within, much like a lantern. When illuminated, the light interacts with the pale, textured travertine to create a gentle, upward radiance that is visible from outside. This conveys warmth and presence, transforming the lobbies into welcoming beacons within the precinct.

"Our approach to effectively illuminate the 15-metre-high walls was to consistently light the top half of the wall with wall-washers and support this with supplementary aimable luminaires to infill the bottom half," explains Goupy.

The result is striking.

Framing art with light: creating landmarks and identity in space

Accentuating elements within each space helps orientation and creates visual landmarks. Significant artworks have been placed in each lobby, from wall-hung paintings and tapestries to a replica of the "Rose Hill Packet", the first European boat built in Australia, suspended in the foyer of 6 Parramatta Square. This gives the spaces an identity. Lighting large artworks in large spaces presents unique challenges: ensuring the light is spread evenly, using shadow where it is needed, and minimising glare for people passing in different directions within the space.

"An elevated level of light on artworks allows them to stand out from the background illuminance," explains Goupy.

This was achieved using luminaires from the ERCO [Quintessence](#) and [Atrium](#) product families (downlights and wallwashers) as well as [Parscan](#) spotlights.

5 Parramatta Square: architecture for community, light for public life

Distinct from the office towers, 5 Parramatta Square (known as PHIVE) serves as the new civic heart of the city. Developed by the City of Parramatta Council, it includes council chambers, a public library and community spaces within a fluid, curving structure. Its white, sinuous facade echoes the nearby Parramatta River and its welcoming, transparent form symbolizes accessibility and civic openness. The building also incorporates a large digital screen embedded in its facade, offering a platform for storytelling, events and civic communication. Lighting within PHIVE is designed for purpose, warm and welcoming, encouraging the different activities that each zone is used for. A clever mixture of [Parscan](#) and [Eclipse](#) spotlights creates the basic illumination, delivering ambient lighting and complemented by accent and zonal lighting.

Timeless and Sustainable: high-performance lighting to match an architectural vision

As public transport connectivity and population density grow, the foresight in developing a site as expansive as Parramatta Square is evident. Similarly, the team's ability to anticipate the sustainability demands of the community and tenants has proven crucial. The office towers boast 6-star Green Star ratings (World Leadership accreditation from the Green Building Council of Australia) and the precinct was acknowledged in 2024 as Australia's most energy efficient commercial development.

The choice of ERCO fittings in the lighting design was part of the overall commitment to the vision for Parramatta Square.

"The research and development ERCO invests in fitting and lens technology translates into products that have very high efficacy and minimal glare," explains Mathew Howard.

High efficacy, translated in high lux per watt, is the result of precise photometric systems developed by ERCO. The crucial factor here is the quantity of light reaching the surface to be illuminated for a given connected load. "This allows us to use fewer fittings to achieve the desired architectural and lighting outcomes and ensure the comfort of occupants of the buildings, and do so in a sustainable and cost-effective way," Howard remarks.

Michel Goupy concurs, "Whilst there is a myriad of choices of lighting equipment in the marketplace, ERCO was chosen for its reliability and high quality. Precision optics, ability to control glare effectively, luminaire efficiency, high-quality light sources and interchangeable lenses meant the ERCO product range solved many of the challenges on Parramatta Square."

Walker Corporation's Parramatta Square sets a new benchmark for integrated, culture-driven urban development in Australia. The success of the precinct lies not just in its world-class architecture or sustainable performance but in its attention to the emotional and cultural life of its spaces. And the lighting design? As respected lighting designer Michel Goupy concludes, the audience should be impressed by space without noticing the lighting.

Grandeur, volume, direction, function. The architectural and lighting outcomes at Parramatta Square truly deliver for the people of Sydney, and will for many years to come.

More on Parramatta Square:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BeGXA4iFSq4>



Luminaires used in the project



Quintessence
recessed luminaires



Atrium recessed
downlights



Parscan spotlights
for track



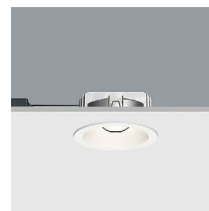
Eclipse InTrack
spotlights



Tesis inground
luminaires



Lightgap
recessed luminaires



Skim recessed
luminaires

About ERCO

ERCO is an international specialist for high-quality and digital architectural lighting. The family-owned company, founded in 1934, operates globally in 55 countries with independent sales organisations and partners.

ERCO understands light as the fourth dimension of architecture – and thus as an integral part of sustainable building. Light is the contribution to making society and architecture better and, at the same time, preserving our environment. ERCO Greenology® – the corporate strategy for sustainable lighting – combines ecological responsibility with technological expertise.

At the light factory in Lüdenscheid, Germany, ERCO develops, designs and manufactures luminaires with a focus on photometric

optics, electronics and sustainable design. The lighting tools are developed in close collaboration with architects, lighting designers and electrical designers. They are used primarily in the following applications: Work and Culture, Community and Public/Outdoor, Contemplation, Living, Shop and Hospitality. ERCO lighting experts support designers worldwide in transforming their projects into reality with highly precise, efficient and sustainable lighting solutions.

If you require any further information on ERCO or image material, please visit us at www.ercos.com/press. We can also provide you with material on projects worldwide for your media coverage.

Copies and links requested.

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