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As humans, we  
naturally crave  
connection, we  
come together for  
all sorts of reasons,  
drawn to places that  
foster belonging.

# Harrows®

CRAFTED FOR CONNECTION

[HARROWS.CO.NZ](https://harrows.co.nz)



Life is built on the interaction of people.



# Contents

7	Our Fundamental Need for Connection
10	Biological Imperatives: Why are we wired for social interaction?
14	The Neuroscience Behind Belonging + Engagement
18	Changing the World: One Social Space at a Time
21	Shaping Human Interaction
26	Intentional Moments + Chance Encounters
30	Clarity + Connection
34	The New Priority: It's about belonging.
44	Guiding Movement, Softening Boundaries
52	First Impressions: Designing Spaces That Welcome and Reassure
58	Workplace: Is the coffee machine at the heart of connection and productivity?
64	Universal Design in Health + Wellness
70	Case Study: A haven of hospitality + design in Wellington.
79	Harrows: Empowering Designers through Furniture





# Our Fundamental Need for Connection

Human connection is biologically ingrained, shaped by millions of years and reinforced through complex neural networks.

From the synchronisation of brain activity in social situations to the physiological necessity of communal bonding, connection is foundational to both individual survival and collective advancement. It is a fundamental requirement for wellbeing, deeply embedded in the way our minds and bodies function.

Understanding the fundamental mechanisms of connection allows us to create spaces that authentically support human engagement.









# Biological Imperatives: Why are we wired for social interaction?

From the way our nervous system responds to social bonds to the evolutionary advantages of communal living, human interaction underpins health, productivity, and collective progress.

Without meaningful connection, psychological and physiological deterioration accelerates, disrupting cognitive stability and reducing emotional resilience. Understanding the fundamental mechanisms of connection allows us to create spaces that authentically support human engagement.

Connection is not just emotionally fulfilling — it is physiologically protective.

Scientific studies show that isolation triggers stress responses similar to physical threats, while sustained social bonds regulate cortisol and promote neurochemical balance. When deprived of social connection, the brain’s reward system becomes dysregulated, leading to heightened anxiety and reduced motivation.

Loneliness has been linked to increased inflammation, cognitive decline, and higher mortality rates.

Social bonding also shapes neural development. The prefrontal cortex reaches full maturity through sustained interpersonal interactions. Similarly, mirror neurons, which enable empathy and shared understanding, strengthen through face-to-face connection, fostering collaboration and social cohesion.

These neurological structures facilitate cooperation and social learning, reinforcing the idea that human intelligence is inherently communal rather than individualistic.

Human societies have always relied on collective interdependence. Anthropologists studying early civilizations note that group bonding increased survival rates, promoting resource sharing and communal defense. Early hunter-gatherer communities thrived not because of individual strength,

but because of sophisticated cooperative strategies, where social hierarchies and collective roles optimised survival outcomes.

Even today, studies on cooperative behavior demonstrate that trust and reciprocity are reinforced through sustained interaction, whether in workplaces, public spaces, or residential communities. Social capital - the strength of an individual’s communal network - is consistently linked to psychological well-being, economic stability, and societal resilience.

Human connection drives innovation.

Collective knowledge-sharing has been fundamental to cultural and technological evolution, from the formation of ancient cities to modern interdisciplinary collaboration. Without environments that encourage engagement, creativity and progress stagnate.







# The Neuroscience Behind Belonging + Engagement

Belonging is fundamental to human well-being, deeply embedded in our brain’s architecture.

Our brains are wired for social connection, and belonging is as essential to survival as food and shelter. The default mode network, active when we reflect on ourselves and others, helps process relationships and navigate social dynamics. The anterior cingulate cortex and ventral striatum reinforce feelings of inclusion when we experience acceptance. This neurological response explains why strong social bonds foster emotional stability, resilience, and motivation.

Oxytocin, often called the “bonding hormone,” plays a crucial role in trust and connection. When individuals engage in meaningful relationships, oxytocin levels rise, promoting empathy and cooperation.

Conversely, social exclusion activates the dorsal anterior cingulate cortex, the same brain region involved in processing physical pain. Studies show that prolonged loneliness leads to increased cortisol production, weakening the immune system and accelerating cognitive decline.

Social isolation, far from being just an emotional challenge, is a physiological stressor that can shorten lifespan.



Engagement stimulates dopamine, enhancing motivation, learning, and creativity. Workplaces, communities, and public spaces that foster collaboration and interaction reinforce this neurological cycle, driving higher productivity and community well-being.

Environments designed for connection, whether through thoughtful design or inclusive culture, align with our brain’s intrinsic need for social bonds.

Understanding these mechanisms allows us to build spaces that support human flourishing, ensuring that belonging and engagement remain central to individual and collective success.









# Changing the World: One Social Space at a Time

Design is a tangible, undeniable power that shapes how people move, interact and exist. It is not neutral. It either strengthens connection or diminishes it.

As designers, we are not simply creating furniture, spaces or environments - we are shaping the fabric of human existence.

By designing with intention, we can reduce isolation, support accessibility, and enhance emotional well-being. We have the opportunity to create environments that don't just serve a purpose but actively strengthen human connection.

One social space at a time, we can change the world.







Unite Seating  
Lincoln University



# Shaping Human Interaction

Spaces shape human interaction by influencing movement, conversation, and connection. Thoughtful layouts encourage engagement, making interactions effortless. Open environments foster collaboration, while intimate seating arrangements create opportunities for deeper conversations.

Biophilic elements - natural light, greenery, and organic materials - enhance well-being and make social exchanges more natural. Balanced acoustics and lighting set the tone, supporting focus or interaction.

When design prioritises human connection, spaces become catalysts for meaningful engagement.

Every detail, from furniture placement to sensory elements, signals how people should interact.

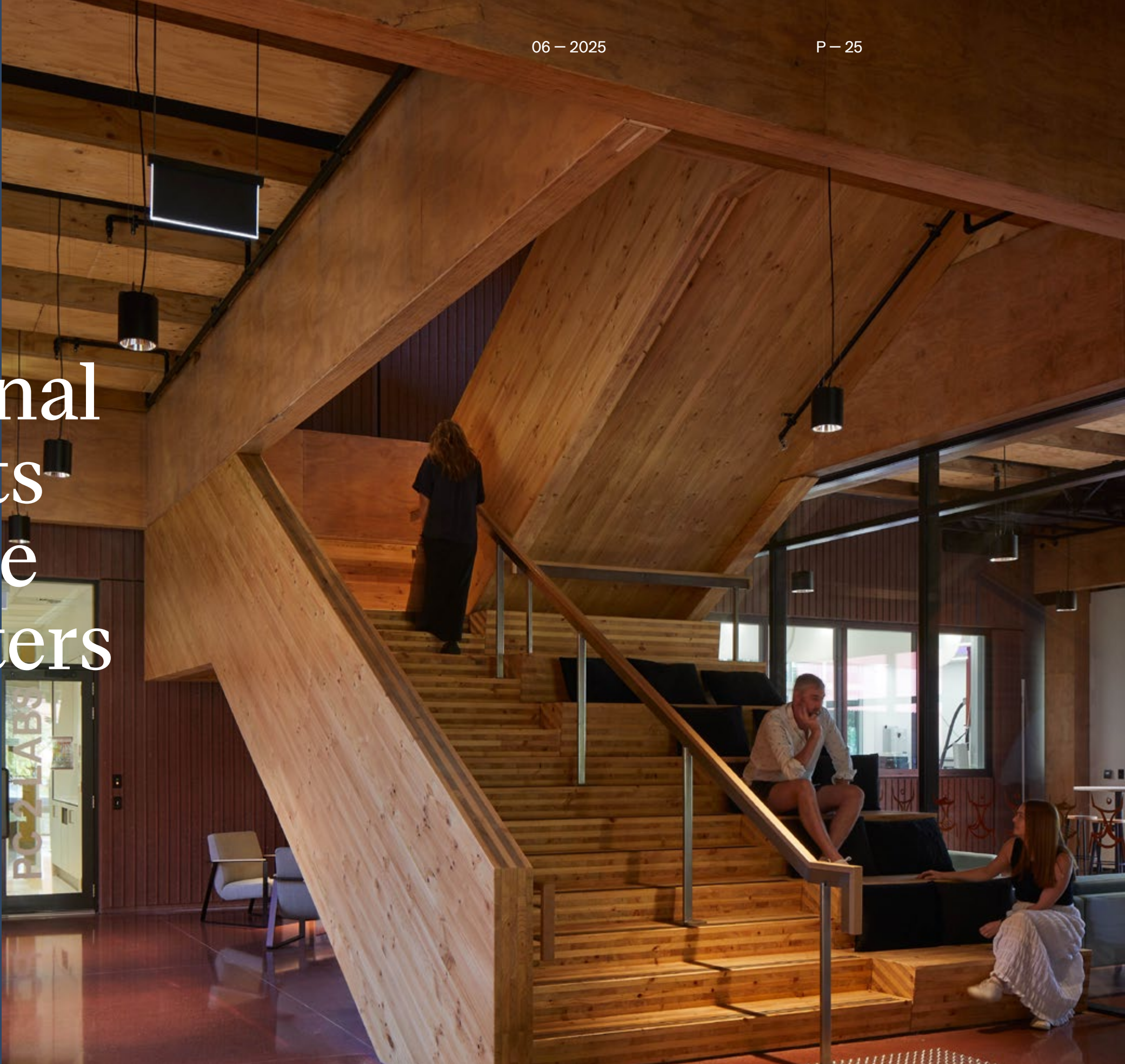
Human-centered design strengthens relationships, sparks creativity, and fosters a sense of belonging. The way a space is designed directly affects how people connect, influencing energy, engagement, and shared experiences.







# Intentional Moments + Chance Encounters







# Intentional Moments + Chance Encounters

When we design for intentional engagement, we are providing environments for structured interactions that foster collaboration and strengthen relationships.

But what about planning for chance encounters?

The unplanned moments that spark creativity and build trust.

How can environments make provision for both? Can we foster a dynamic, connected culture where ideas flow naturally.

Intentional interactions happen in spaces designed for engagement - collaborative seating in libraries, well-placed information hubs in airports, flexible gathering areas in public spaces and thoughtful lounge designs in hotels and offices.

These environments provide a form structure for behaving, connecting and interacting - ensuring people can connect with purpose, whether through planned discussions or shared activities.

But of equal importance are the moments of chance. Those spontaneous exchanges that lead to fresh perspectives, unexpected solutions, and stronger social bonds.

Google’s office design is a prime example of how spaces can facilitate both. Their “casual collisions” approach encourages unplanned interactions through open layouts, shared pathways, and strategically placed communal areas.

The “150 feet from food” rule ensures employees are never far from spaces where conversations naturally unfold, reinforcing connection without forcing engagement. Google’s emphasis on

proximity and movement within its offices demonstrates how spatial design can foster collaboration and innovation.

Research highlights how urban planning influences social cohesion, with well-placed seating, open pathways, and shared amenities fostering interaction. Libraries, for example, integrate communal reading areas alongside quiet study zones, allowing for both focused work and casual conversation. Airports use open circulation and shared lounges to encourage brief but meaningful exchanges between travelers.

Fluid layouts that balance social interaction with personal retreat.

Providing for both structured and spontaneous interaction means designing spaces that invite movement and engagement.

When spaces are designed to foster both, they strengthen relationships, drive innovation, and create a more dynamic, connected environment.





Array Collaborate - Freestanding Seating System



# Clarity + Connection

Finding focus doesn't  
require isolation — it thrives in balance.

Creating intentional boundaries for deep  
work while maintaining moments of connection allows concentration  
without disconnection.

Thoughtful environments, whether quiet  
spaces or collaborative settings, can support engagement while  
preserving clarity.

When focus is framed  
as presence rather than withdrawal,  
productivity and connection can coexist.

Orbit - Freestanding Focus Pod







Ikon Leaner - Te Ara Atea Library



# The New Priority: It’s about belonging.

Where productivity and efficiency once dominated spatial design, there’s been a notable shift in priorities. It’s no longer just about streamlined layouts and maximising output; now, the focus is on creating a sense of belonging and community among people in every environment. Kirsti Simpson, Principal at Woods Bagot, eloquently sums up this transition: “No one cares about the efficiency of layouts and productivity anymore. It is all about belonging.”

This change is not just theoretical. Studies in workplace, hospitality and civic spaces show that interaction plays a fundamental role in engagement. According to the 2023 Gensler Global Workplace Study, office workers spend a significant portion of their time - 42% - collaborating with others, while only 35% of their time is spent working alone. This data highlights the importance of designing workspaces that encourage interaction and foster a sense of community.

Beyond the office, similar patterns emerge in public spaces, where seating arrangement and open-plan designs influence social engagement and interaction.



“No one cares about the efficiency of layouts and productivity anymore.

It is all about belonging.”

Kirsti Simpson, Principal, Brisbane Studio Chair, Global Sector Lead - Workplace Interiors, Woods Bagot





Belonging isn't a luxury -  
it's the foundation of how  
we gather, innovate and  
build a world that values  
human connection.

When people feel connected to their environment and those around them, it translates into higher engagement, satisfaction and overall wellbeing. Whether in hotels, campuses, or cultural spaces, a well-designed environment fosters connection, making people feel part of something larger than themselves.

Create an environment where people  
feel part of something larger than themselves.

Imagine walking into a space that invokes conversation, creativity, and collaboration. Such a space doesn't just look good - it feels good, too.

In these thoughtfully designed workplaces, the layout is a tool for building relationships and strengthening human experience. Open spaces, comfortable lounges, and versatile meeting areas are becoming the new norms. These elements encourage spontaneous interactions and foster a culture of openness and support. When people feel they belong, they are more likely to be engaged, at ease and inspired, leading to a more dynamic and connected world.

Are you prioritising the cultivation of community?







# Well designed workplaces are 93% more productive\*.

“Office environments that overlay functionality with a great workplace experience ultimately drive better individual, team, and organisation outcomes.”

\*Gensler Global Workplace Survey Comparisons 2023







Taupo Regional Airport



# Guiding Movement, Softening Boundaries

Thoughtful design supports wayfinding and flow, subtly shaping movement without creating barriers.

Strategically placed elements help people navigate intuitively, maintaining a natural rhythm that enhances connection rather than isolating individuals.

Softened boundaries encourage openness while offering gentle separation. Instead of rigid partitions, biophilic elements define spaces in a way that fosters interaction and comfort.

By integrating nature-inspired forms and adaptable structures, environments become more inviting, reinforcing the balance between privacy and connection.







Queenstown Airport



# Staying connected to the comforts of home.









# First Impressions: Designing Spaces That Welcome and Reassure

First impressions matter. It's the moment before the moment. Where anticipation builds, where first impressions take shape.

Where we subconsciously decide how we feel about an experience before it even begins.

The spaces we step into shape our experience long before any interaction takes place. Waiting areas - whether in hospitals, hotels, offices, or transport hubs - carry weight. The way they feel, the way they function, and the way they invite or inhibit connection influence mood, engagement, and perception.







Continued: First Impressions: Designing Spaces That Welcome and Reassure

For too long, waiting spaces have been treated as afterthoughts. Designed for efficiency, structured for movement, rarely considering the emotional experience of waiting itself. Hard seating, rigid layouts, and impersonal environments often make waiting feel like a passive inconvenience.

But waiting, when designed intentionally, can be something else entirely. A moment of ease, a spark of interaction, an invitation to connect.

Thoughtful design transforms waiting into something meaningful.

Seating arrangements shape social dynamics, textures influence emotional states, and spatial layouts encourage engagement rather than isolation. A well-placed lounge becomes a conversation

starter. A softened color palette eases tension. The presence of greenery, natural light, or inviting materials turns a waiting space into a place people want to be rather than just a space they must pass through.

But beyond aesthetics, these elements carry psychological weight.

The way a space is structured dictates behavior.

Whether it invites interaction, encourages relaxation, or subtly signals movement. Seating that faces inward sparks conversation, while secluded nooks offer quiet retreat. The presence of familiar materials, like wood and fabric, evokes warmth and comfort, making waiting feel less transactional

and more personal. The best-designed spaces don't just look good; they feel intuitive, responding to human needs in ways that make waiting an effortless part of the experience.

Welcoming design is about human experience. It's about recognising that waiting is inevitable, but discomfort is optional.

When spaces are crafted with care, they invite interaction, encourage presence, and create a sense of belonging before anything else even begins.

Whether it's a brief pause or an extended stay, waiting spaces should never feel empty or disconnected.

Every detail contributes to the experience—shaping first impressions, fostering connection, and reminding us that even in moments of stillness, design has the power to engage.

When waiting spaces prioritise well-being, they contribute to a more positive experience and a stronger sense of trust.





Banquette Seating, Oceania Healthcare



# Workplace: Is the coffee machine at the heart of connection and productivity?

Beyond being a place to grab a cup of coffee or enjoy a quick lunch break, the staff room should serve as the beating heart of a workplace, nurturing connection, creativity and productivity among employees.

Recent learnings have emphasized the significance of face-to-face connections and interactions as vital stimulators of success. While meeting rooms and collaborative workspaces have their roles in promoting these interactions, the staff room emerges as the superhero when it comes to fostering genuine connections. It is the place that brings the entire team together, regardless of tasks, departments, or hierarchies.



**“The heart is the café – we want people to talk to each other from across the organisation. It’s an opportunity for internal networking and developing career connections that makes us stronger.”**

Kylie Mooney, Former MC Chief Executive and Project Leader.



## Continued: Is the coffee machine at the heart of workplace connection and productivity?

A place where people from all corners of the organisation can talk to each other. It offers opportunities for internal networking and career development, making the workforce stronger as a whole. It is, indeed, a hive of cross-pollination.

### A hive of cross-pollination.

In a dynamic and energetic staff cafeteria, employees from different departments and teams interact, share ideas, and exchange knowledge, metaphorically “cross-pollinating” each other’s thoughts. It becomes a central hub for spontaneous discussions, brainstorming sessions, and informal networking. This cross-pollination of ideas cultivates creativity, stimulates innovative problem-solving, and creates a more collaborative work environment.

### A sanctuary for fostering community and communication.

Moreover, the staff room serves as a sanctuary for fostering community and communication. It is a place where employees can converge, providing a neutral ground for building lasting relationships among team members who do not often cross paths during the regular workday.

The well-designed staff room acts as a conduit for informal communication channels, providing a unique opportunity for managers and colleagues to understand each other on a more personal level. This sense of community and informal communication strengthens the company culture, promoting a cohesive and engaged workforce.

### Optimising staff cafeteria design.

To harness the full potential of the staff cafeteria, optimizing its design is crucial. As an integral part of interior design, a well-designed staff room fosters community, nurtures well-being, encourages collaboration, and promotes productivity among employees. Investing in this seemingly unassuming space is a strategic move that pays dividends in the form of a happier, more connected, and more successful workforce. Do not underestimate the power of the staff room, for it is the beating heart that keeps the workplace alive and thriving.





Karaka Stools



# Universal Design in Health + Wellness

The Universal Design Policy<sup>1</sup> was released in 2021 by the Victorian Health Building Authority (VHBA), and makes provision for seven principals of Universal Design that are referenced in the NZ Health Facility Design Guidance Notes<sup>2</sup>.

These principles are:

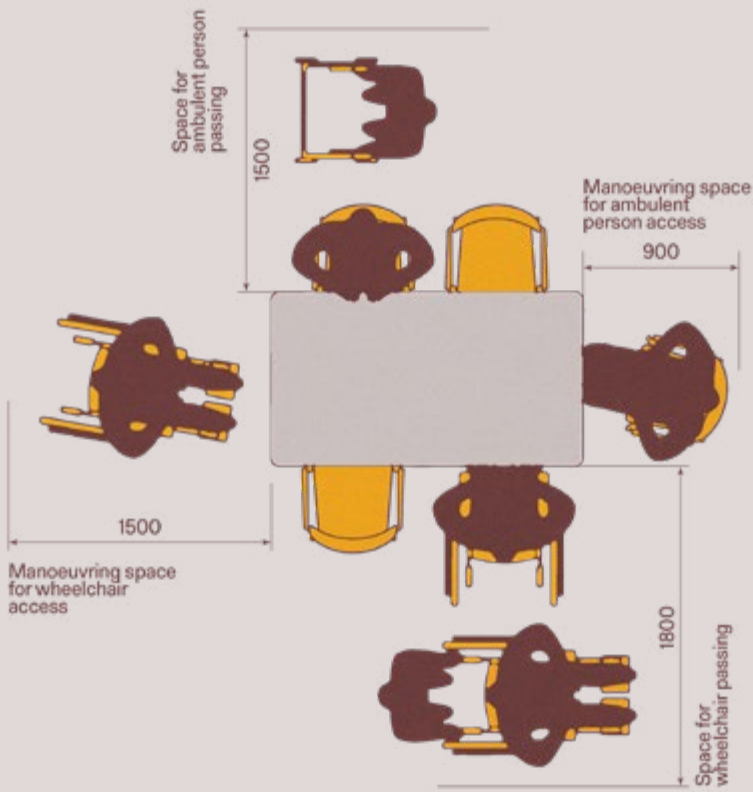
- Equitable Use
- Flexibility in Use
- Simple & Intuitive Use
- Perceptible Information
- Tolerance for Error
- Low Physical Effort
- Size & Space for Approach & Use

Director for Planning and Development of the VHBA, Stefano Scalzo says:

“Let’s face it, as designers, we often generate and evaluate ideas based on what we know. We strive to make experiences that solve needs, work well with the human body, and improve lives.

But here’s the problem: If we use our own abilities as a baseline, we make things that are easy for some people to use, but difficult for everyone else.

There are 7.4 billion people in the world. Our ambition is to create health environments that are physically, cognitively, and emotionally appropriate for each of them. It starts with seeing human diversity as a resource for better designs.”



In practical application, there are some simple considerations that we have collected from our experience and research:

Allow adequate space around chairs and dining tables so that clients using mobility aids and wheelchairs can access the furniture easily.<sup>3</sup> Make sure the access area between the entrance doorway and seating areas is at least 1,500mm wide so that clients and their carers have space to move and pass.<sup>3</sup>

Provide extra space for the temporary storage of equipment, such as walking aids and wheelchairs, while it is not being used.<sup>3</sup> In small rooms where space is at a premium, attach castors to the furniture so that it can be easily moved out of the way during moving and handling tasks.<sup>3</sup> Consider seating with arm rests, high backs and a wide and stable base.

These design choices directly impact mobility, autonomy, and dignity, ensuring that all individuals - regardless of ability - can navigate and use spaces comfortably and safely. When environments account for diverse needs, they promote inclusivity, independence, and overall well-being.

By incorporating these principles and practical considerations, we can create health and wellness environments that are inclusive and accessible to everyone.

Universal Design is not just about meeting standards; it is about shaping environments that actively enhance quality of life for all individuals, regardless of their abilities.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.vhba.vic.gov.au/universal-design-policy>  
<sup>2</sup><https://www.tewhatuora.govt.nz/publications/health-facility-design-guidance-note>  
<sup>3</sup><https://www.acc.co.nz/assets/provider/c579545d34/acc6075-moving-guide-facility.pdf>







Unite Seating - BrainTree Wellness Centre





Karaka Stool - Queens Rooftop





# Case Study: A haven of hospitality + design in Wellington.

In the heart of Cuba Street, Wellington’s vibrant cultural hub, lies a culinary gem that delights with the essence of Middle Eastern hospitality. Kisa, once a modest pop-up venture, has now found its permanent abode in the heritage listed building, earning Wonder Group a Silver Pin for Spatial – Hospitality at the 2023 Best Awards.

Buster Caldwell, Wonder Group’s Creative Director, reminisces about his first encounter with the site during his days as an industrial design student at Massey University. It was a space that had undergone various incarnations, from a comedy bar to a pop-up thrift market, adorned with moth-eaten curtains and an eclectic mix of textures.

“A proper dive bar, in the most honest sense” says Caldwell.





Driven by the building owner’s commitment to revitalize the space, and spurred from earthquake strengthening requirements, the building underwent extensive renovation and restoration. Wonder Group was entrusted with delivering the interior concept for Kisa, presented with a completely gutted space with concrete block walls. The challenge lay in re-imagining the layout to distance it from the shadows of its past.

The boldest design leap was re-imagining the footprint as a horseshoe that sits inside the interior, making full use of the street frontage, and allowing seating to encircle the perimeter.

Executing this vision posed its own hurdles. How does one seamlessly integrate seating around a curved glass frontage while preserving the vibrant energy of Cuba Street? How do you craft an ambiance that shields diners from the outside hustle and bustle while preserving its essence?

“We made the decision early on to turn all seating to face into the action center of the restaurant, with the kitchen and bar as the centerpiece where every seat can be part of that experience,” explains Caldwell “Every customer had the best seat in the house, either into the kitchen or out onto Cuba Street, without any level of ‘dud’ table.”

At the heart of Kisa’s ambiance lies its meticulously crafted furniture. From the banquette seating to the bespoke table tops, every element was thoughtfully curated to enhance the dining experience. The banquette seating, in particular, underwent a complex and collaborative process between Wonder Group, Harrows, and the client, resulting in a design that seamlessly merged form and function.

The brief required furniture that not only provided ample support and comfort but also exuded a sense of visual lightness and transparency. It needed to wrap the perimeter, offering a superior level of comfort and shelter for the diner, without obscuring the activity of Cuba Street. The result was an adaption of the Harrows freestanding Share Banquette, a design that felt both substantial and inviting, drawing guests to linger and savor every moment.



Tim Suckling of Harrows reflects, “We are honoured to have played a part in Kisa’s story. Our banquette seating has become an integral part of the restaurant’s identity, inviting diners to gather, connect, and create lasting memories.”

Drawing inspiration from Middle Eastern influences, while avoiding clichés, the design exudes authenticity and warmth. In selecting materials, Wonder Group was mindful of the need for durability and longevity. They opted for tobacco-stained timber, a nod to the building’s industrial past, and carefully curated every detail to ensure consistency and cohesiveness throughout the space. Their goal was to create a sense of timelessness, where the furniture would age gracefully alongside the building itself.

The result? A space that invites diners to linger, savoring not only the flavors of the Middle East but also the ambiance of authenticity and warmth. As guests gather around the horseshoe-shaped seating, basking in the glow of the terrazzo-clad facade and the aroma of sizzling grills, they become part of a story—a story of resurrection and renewal, of tradition and innovation, and, of course, of comfortable seating.





Terrazzo tiled tops  
bring an earthy  
tactility.





Unite Seating - Spark







We empower designers and their clients with our unique framework, enabling social connection through furniture.





Social

Places to gather connect and build friendships-nurturing connection, creativity and productivity.



Meet

For more formal collaboration, projects and teamwork



Relax

Welcome spaces for spontaneous connection and informal collaboration



Collaborate

Spaces for collaboration to build community without hierarchy



Retreat

Made for more personal one to one connections and spaces to retreat to without being disconnected - focus work.

Furniture considered for every connection.



# Beautiful, tailored furniture for social interaction.

Life is built on the interaction of people. We design and manufacture functionally clever furniture for social spaces.







If you're not  
going to make  
it beautiful,  
don't bother.

Our design philosophy is  
simple. It must solve a problem. It must endure.  
And it must be beautiful.







Life is built on the interaction of people. We create  
thoughtfully crafted furniture that inspires meaningful interaction.

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