

NZ CENTRE FOR CONSERVATION MEDICINE AT AUCKLAND ZOO

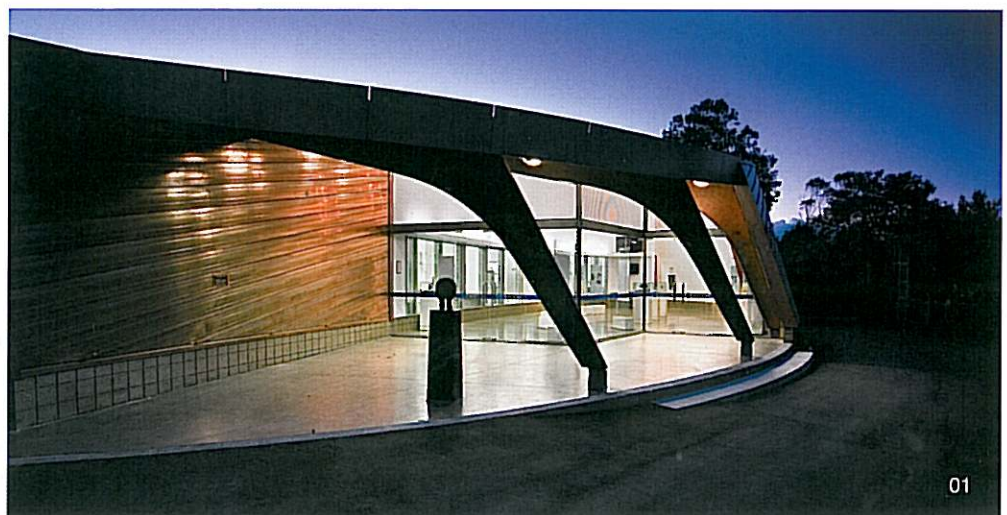
With rising public awareness of the destruction of many animals' native habitats and growing numbers of animals facing extinction, zoos must no longer simply entertain their patrons, but must increasingly act as agents of conservation and education. This changing role of the modern zoo is made admirably explicit at the Auckland Zoo's New Zealand Centre for Conservation Medicine (NZCCM). The NZCCM, the first centre of its kind in the world, is unique in that it incorporates animal treatment, research, conservation and education in one building. Also unique is the way that the Centre allows the public to view activities traditionally performed behind closed doors, such as research and diagnostics, animal treatment, and animal surgery.

In designing the NZCCM, ASC Architects utilised the basic parti of dividing the building into two components: the public gallery and the animal medical centre. In plan, the public gallery is the only non-orthogonal shape in the building. According to the architects, its leaf-like shape references the irregularity of natural form. The medical centre, on the other hand, is laid out

on a grid and divided into three zones. The 'clean zone' consists of offices, staff spaces, library and lecture theatre. The 'medical zone' consists of the animal treatment and research area, and the 'dirty zone' consists of the animal holding areas.

The architects claim that a good flow between the spaces is essential for the efficient operation of the Centre, and it is indeed difficult to distinguish between the zones. This is partially due to strong visual connections between many of the spaces. For example, large windows in the office area allow veterinarians working at their desk to keep an eye on animals in the Intensive Care Unit. Employees in the lunchroom have a clear view to the animal reception area, and those working in the lab have views into the lecture room and the library. Circulation between the zones is straightforward and largely unimpeded, consisting of two long corridors that run parallel to each other for almost the entire length of the building.

In the medical centre, ASC Architects have focused on designing spaces that function efficiently. Fortunately, this has not resulted in uninviting spaces. Two landscaped courtyards that penetrate the southern end of the building provide usable outdoor spaces for employees, and allow natural light and



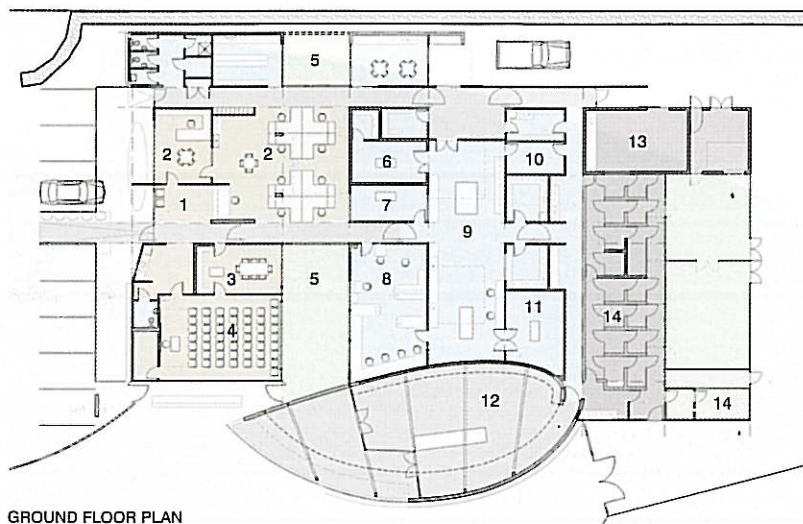
01 Entrance to the public viewing gallery areas
of the NZCCM at Auckland Zoo.

02 Inside the public viewing gallery.

01



02



GROUND FLOOR PLAN



- 01 Entry/ reception
- 02 Office
- 03 Library & meeting
- 04 Lecture room
- 05 Courtyard
- 06 Darkroom
- 07 Intensive care
- 08 Lab
- 09 Treatment room
- 10 Recovery
- 11 Surgery
- 12 Gallery
- 13 Post mortem
- 14 Wards
- 15 Aviary

ventilation into the offices, lunchroom, lecture theatre, library, and laboratory. In the larger rooms, south-facing lantern roofs with louvered windows provide natural light and ventilation, and enhance the feeling of spaciousness. Throughout the building, wooden detailing on doors, walls and built-in furniture adds warmth to rooms that might otherwise seem coldly clinical.

Some of the most interesting rooms in the NZCCM are those designed for non-humans. Because the centre treats animals from the smallest bird up to the size of a zebra (the veterinarians visit larger animals in their zoo habitat), details of the animal holding cells are particularly fascinating. Custom-built cell doors are constructed of wire mesh and sliding plywood panels to prevent animals from escaping and keep them in total darkness if necessary. Small, hinged doors at eye level allow vets to check on the animals without disturbing them. A custom-designed counterweight system opens floor-level steel doors that allow smaller animals into the outdoor yard. Dips and drains in floors allow pools to be created, and all fixtures in the cells are monkey proof.

One disappointing aspect of the building is that the public gallery is not more inviting. From the exterior, the copper cladding and curved, tilting wall of the gallery proclaim it to be the most important part of the building,

yet it lacks the warmth and spaciousness that the other rooms enjoy. ASC Architects explained that they were asked to keep the gallery slightly dark and plain so that images could be projected on the walls. At the time I visited, however, there were no projections and the gallery could have greatly benefited from either improved lighting or a wall treatment that brightened up the space.

Finally, the relationship between the building's two components remains frustratingly underdeveloped. Programmatically, the NZCCM fascinates because it allows zoo visitors a glimpse into behind-the-scenes veterinary practices. One might therefore consider the interface between public and private to be the most important aspect of the building. Any number of details reinforce this: screens that allow the public to view specimens that are under the microscope in the lab, and cameras placed above the surgery table to record procedures for later viewing. Could there not, therefore, be a greater integration of the public and the private at the scale of the building itself? One can easily imagine the laminated timber portals, the main architectural feature of the public gallery, carrying through to the other half of the building to connect the two components with a strong structural gesture. **Krystina Kaza**



03, 04 Exterior of the NZCCM, showing the cylindrical form of the gallery.



NEW ZEALAND CENTRE FOR CONSERVATION MEDICINE AT AUCKLAND ZOO

Client Auckland Zoo Charitable Trust **Architect** ASC Architects **Project team** Graeme Scott, Biba Boban, Viola Schweer, Craig Sheppard, Ryan Cardno, Damien Matthews **Structural engineer** Lewis & Williamson (now Lough Downey) **Services engineer** Connell Wagner **Fire engineer** Design Generation **Project manager** MPM Projects **Quantity surveyor** Mallbys **Main contractor** EP Maddren Construction **Design and documentation** 2004–2005 **Construction period** June 2006–June 2007 **Construction value** \$3.2million
Photographer: Simon Devitt