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Murray Pines Cemetery – Community Mausoleum

Contributed by Philip Harmer,
Harmer Architecture

The Mildura Cemetery Trust in north west Victoria instigated the development of a new cemetery in 1999, as their existing Nichols Point Cemetery was nearing capacity. The Murray Pines Cemetery on the corner of Deakin Avenue and Nineteenth Street was officially opened by the Hon. Rob Knowles in July 1999. The vision of the Trust at that time has now come to fruition with the development of a world-class community mausoleum for the people of Mildura.

Soon after opening the new Cemetery, the Mildura Cemetery Trust, commissioned Malcolm Tucker & Associates to carry out a feasibility study to research the demand from the Italian community for a community type mausoleum.

As a result of the study, the Trust called for expressions of interest for a Master Plan and staged implementation of a mausoleum development of up to 500 casket spaces to be developed in stages. Harmer Architecture was successful in their bid and appointed as architects in December 1999.

Design and documentation was completed in December 2000 and construction tendering was delayed by funding and approvals until late 2001. Milne Construction Australia in association with Keith Miller & Sons was the successful tenderer.

Construction commenced in early 2002, administered by the project architect Andrew Briant from Harmer Architecture and site supervisor Gerald Chretien of Miller/Milne.

The building was opened on 21 November 2002 by Trust members – Councillors' Brian Grogan, Brian Cox and Ross Douglas. The key player in the design and construction process was Mr David Clarke, council Manager and Secretary to the Cemetery Trust.

The Stage 1 mausoleum is the first significant building in the new cemetery and therefore fulfills the significant demand from the Italian community, in Mildura and the surrounding region, for mausoleum interment.

The cemetery is characterised by its indigenous landscape of mixed mallee eucalypts and native perennial grasses. Much of the cemetery, including the area beside the mausoleum, is protected by landscape overlays delineated by the Department of Environment & Sustainability. The landscape was therefore the key element in the design generated by Harmer Architecture. The Master Plan arranges up to five x 100 space mausoleums randomly within the landscape, each building shaped in the form of a leaf.

The Stage 1 mausoleum, now completed, comprises four in-situ reinforced concrete crypt blocks of 25 casket spaces each. The crypt blocks are inclined to form a large gathering space which is capped by the leafed shaped roof providing the shade necessary in Mildura's hot climate. The crypt blocks face north so that the memorial walls of Verde Issore green marble are also in shade. The open spaces between the crypt blocks provide framed views of the natural mallee landscape and are fitted with steel grille work and gold anodised flower vases.



Astrilamp vase / vigil lamps

The main design feature of the mausoleum is the curved steel screen formed from Galvanised flat steel bars that are bent to allude to the pattern of tree branches. The grille work casts a beautiful shadow pattern on the stone floor in the afternoon and provides necessary security. The stone floor is random patterned Indian sandstone, some pieces of which have fossiled leaf imprints, thereby providing a strong link to the surrounding landscape.

Special design features in the interior include a slatted Murray Pine seat, which extends the full length of the building between the two entry gates, oak stained plywood ceiling panels and gold anodised vase/vigil lamps designed by Harmer Architecture. The vase/vigil lamps are fabricated from aluminium, stainless steel and sandblasted glass for long life and easy maintenance.

Below: The mausoleum entry at night



The mausoleum provides the first sheltered public space in the new cemetery and forms a major landmark in the landscape, especially on approach or departure from the Mildura's main airport.

The guiding philosophy in the design of all public buildings by Harmer Architecture is that architecture is for people and should express the nature of the community and the environment in which it is located. Harmer Architecture have completed mausoleums at Fawkner Crematorium and Memorial Park (FCMP) and Keilor Cemetery. Current projects include Stage 3 of the Holy Angels Mausoleum at FCMP as well as two projects for the Trustees of the Necropolis Springvale at Melbourne General Cemetery and at the Necropolis in Springvale.

The Mildura Cemetery Trust currently comprises Councillors Brian Grogan, Damien Heintze, Eddie Warhurst and the Secretary is Mrs Christine Knight. ■

People involved:

Client	Mr David Clarke, Secretary, Mildura Cemetery Trust
Architects	Philip Harmer, Andrew Briant, Grant Dixon Harmer Architecture Pty Ltd
Builder	Gerald Chretien, Ian Miller, Anita Jain (USA) Milne Construction Australia Pty Ltd In association with Keith Miller and Sons Builders Pty Ltd
Design Engineers	Steven Edward GHD Engineering
Inspecting Engineers	Danny Grzan Inland Consultants, Mildura
Building Surveying	Wayne L Wilkie at Mildura Rural City Council



The mausoleum at sunrise



Philip Harmer, left, with David Clarke, Trust Secretary at the official opening



The mausoleum interior

Below: Landscape conservation zone

