

---

# SOFT LANDING

TRANSPORT COMPANY LINFOX HAS FOUND A SENSE OF SYMMETRY AT ESSENDON AIRPORT



Gary Whittle of designphase has been working with Linfox for 20 years on their corporate interiors. “This building is really a culmination of the business,” he says. A large number of disparate offices that constitute the bulk of the Linfox Group have been consolidated into two floors of open-plan workstations at ‘Essendon Fields’, a new industrial site at Essendon Airport. Even Executive Chairman, Peter Fox and CEO, Michael Byrne, have open workstations. “Lindsay Fox started the business with one truck, and now he has a corporate head office,” says Whittle. And that first truck is parked on site.

An airport, by necessity, is flat, and so part of the architectural design by Edgard Pirrotta Architects involved manipulating the land itself. Hills were formed – a public park was created adjacent to heritage-listed buildings across the road. A height restriction created by the sight lines from the control tower limited the construction to two storeys plus underground car park, and meant large floor plates. “It is such a big building,” says Edgard Pirrotta, “I wanted to break it down to a light skin and strong corners.” The deep plates are made to feel generous and airy by higher-than-standard ceiling heights of three metres. The carpark is submerged below ground, and an earth berm meets it,

allowing ventilation and light. The base building has a 5-star Green Star design rating, and toilet facilities and gardens use rainwater drawn from the very large roof. Double-glazing deals with heat loads and noise control issues associated with its airport context.

The flying cantilevered eaves (Pirrotta calls them ‘aerofoils’) make sense on the north façade, and this is the design challenge of symmetry – what sense is there in repeating these overhangs on the south? “The clients are big on symmetry,” explains Whittle. Deep, aluminium-clad window frames, and an extruded grid with giant-sized framing, create east and west shading. Some of the exterior design decisions directly impact the interior. The windowsill heights are tall in the break-out kitchen lounges to create the massive effect of the pylon corner stones. This also creates an introspective feel through a view of sky when sitting down, and opens up to a view of the surrounding basalt plains when standing.

A central access core contains the stair and lift (and after all, within the constraints of symmetry the entry could only have been central). The atrium, located at the entry, is relatively small in relation to the large floor plates and performs primarily as an entry statement, rather than a source of visual

**WORDS TOBY HORROCKS**  
**PHOTOGRAPHY TONY MILLER**

**ARCHITECT EDGARD PIRROTTA**  
**INTERIOR DESIGN DESIGNPHASE**  
**AUSTRALIA**  
**LOCATION MELBOURNE | AUS**  
**CLIENT LINFOX**

**BELOW** South façade with the Main Building entry





*“Pirrotta’s preliminary design remained virtually unchanged throughout the process”*

TOBY HORROCKS



**ABOVE** Main Reception and Entry Lobby with glass lifts at rear

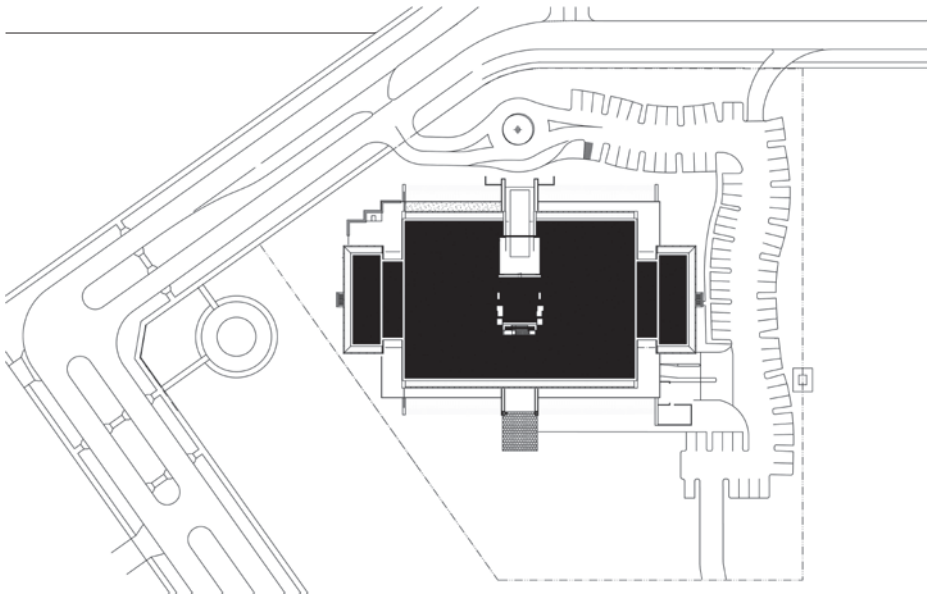
**RIGHT** The Boardroom looks to the Ante Room and has views of the city skyline

communication or mixing. The entry is strong and bold, and to Pirrotta this expresses the character of the organisation. “Linfox is a bold company,” he says, “It’s not shy”. The central stair is treated as a distinctive element, and is carefully detailed. It is an essay in lightness versus solidity, and like the exterior, it combines metal and stone. The steel structure is painted yellow, and each tread is cantilevered from a central beam and flexes underfoot. This visual lightness and perceptible movement is contrasted by a partial wrap of solid marble over each tread.

The base building’s column grid was coordinated with the workstation design. Mobile pedestals double as seats for impromptu meetings, and workstations were selected for their modularity and flexibility – the same furniture in the same floor area can be configured to suit two, four or eight people depending on the desired density. Haworth prototyped the workstations ahead of time, for trial with the staff at their old offices. Hierarchy between workstations becomes partly about access to views. Essendon is an elevated plateau, with views of distant mountain ranges and the CBD, and the airfield guarantees the city view will not be built out. To counteract the potential for social stratification, the windows have a corridor next to them, not desks – no desk owns a window.

Linfox is about transport, and transport is about cars, trucks and planes. Glowing light boxes with glass shelving display a large assortment of model vehicles, with their client’s graphics on them, a visual archive of happy customers. The only other reference in the interior to the identity of the business is the use of the logo. The Linfox logo has a similar symmetrical quality to the floorplan of the building. Abstracted logos can be recognised in carpet patterns in the lobby and have





*“Linfox is about transport, and transport is about cars, trucks and planes”*

TOBY HORROCKS

been applied to glass partitions throughout as a safety label. Here they are banded in clusters of black, red and grey – a small moment of asymmetry – and applied in three different levels of opacity, to control privacy. Once again the external design is reflected inside and the angles here echo the slope of the battered pylon walls outside.

“Linfox has a firm opinion of what they want. And a clear direction for the image of Linfox,” says Whittle. This meant that the client was directly involved with furniture and specialised carpet selection in association with designphase. The most direct expression of the ethos of this successful multinational logistics company may be that the project was delivered quickly and efficiently, at a competitive price. It took just 20 months from concept to occupancy. The required construction speed necessitated a steel-framed structure with in situ concrete poured on steel decking. Pirrotta’s preliminary design remained virtually unchanged throughout the process, and if, as Pirrotta believes, the building expresses “the dynamics of transport and the strength and energy of the company”, then Linfox has certainly found a home for the long haul.

*Toby Horrocks is a Melbourne-based architect and designer.*



**LEFT** Site plan  
**RIGHT** The staff entry and open Meeting Rooms on the Ground Floor  
**FAR RIGHT** The office space is open plan with flexible Break-out areas  
**BELOW** The Staff Lunch Room encourages social interaction and has views over the airport  
**NEXT PAGE** North façade with illuminated aerofoils



## LINFOX

**PROJECT AND CONSULTANT COORDINATION**  
designphase australia**ARCHITECT** Edgard Pirrotta Architects**DESIGN TEAM** Edgard Pirrotta (Design Architect),  
Damian Oswald (Architect Project Manager)**INTERIOR DESIGN** designphase australia**INTERIOR DESIGN TEAM** Gary Whittle (Director),  
Enzo Portelli (Director), Lili Grlj (Senior Designer),  
Benson John (CAD), Emma Robertson (Designer)**STRUCTURAL & CIVIL ENGINEERS** Robert Bird Group**SERVICES ENGINEER** JJA Consulting Group**BUILDER** Peninsula Construction Group  
(Steve Kennedy, Mark Griffin)**GLAZING CONTRACTOR** PW Glass**LIFTS** Kone Elevators**EXTERNAL CLADDING CONTRACTOR** Exel Links**LANDSCAPING** Super Gardens**SIGNAGE** Sign Express**BUDGET** \$19.5 million**TIME TO COMPLETE** 14 months**BASEMENT FLOOR AREA** 4,100m<sup>2</sup>**GROUND FLOOR AREA** 3,090m<sup>2</sup>**FIRST FLOOR AREA** 2,930m<sup>2</sup>**EDGARD PIRROTTA ARCHITECTS**

(61 3) 9419 8099 epa@netspace.net.au

**DESIGNPHASE AUSTRALIA**

(613) 9857 0032 designphaseaustralia.com.au

**FURNITURE** In reception, 'Case' white stone side tables by Stylecraft, and Walter Knoll 'Together' bench from Bureau. In meeting rooms, 'Flat Bar' cantilever chair, black task chairs, lounge chairs by Obodo, 'Duna' chairs by Stylecraft, upholstered in 'Tahiti' from Mokum and 'Valencia' from Contemporary Leathers, 'Kruze' chairs from Gregory Commercial Furniture, upholstered in 'Medici' from Mokum and 'Valencia' from Contemporary Leathers, and 'Rounderlay' table by Temperature Design. In reception, meeting rooms, quiet rooms, and boardroom 'Zody' task chairs by Haworth. In Break-out areas, 'Aqua' and 'Start' armchairs from James Richardson, upholstered in 'Tahiti' by Mokum, 'Case 2' sofas by Stylecraft, upholstered in fabric by Loop, 'Freestyle' sofas from Gregory Commercial Furniture, upholstered in 'Valencia' from Contemporary Leathers, 'Big Betty Boom' and 'Blok' armchairs by Interstudio, upholstered in 'Tahiti' from Mokum, Walter Knoll 'Stay' ottomans and frosted glass 'Ribbon' side tables from Bureau, and 'Case' coffee table from Stylecraft. In staff café, 'Big M' sofa by Interstudio, 'Patty' armchairs, 'Catifa 46' chairs and tables from Stylecraft, red 'Melrose' stools and 'Ice' stools from Home Concepts, 'Gliss' banquette armchairs from James Richardson, and side tables from

Obodo. In Break-out areas and staff café, marble top coffee table with 'Stylus' disc base from Stylecraft. 'Planes' flip flop tables in training room from Haworth. Visitor chairs and chairs in training room are 'Mako' from Chairbiz, covered in 'Nova' vinyl from Warwick Fabrics. In ante room, stools from Schembri Fine Furniture, covered in 'Valencia' from Contemporary Leathers, Walter Knoll 'Ribbon' coffee table from Bureau. In boardroom, 'Carma' timber table base from Stylecraft, timber inlaid top by Sprenger Furniture. In data centre, 'Tomi' drafting stool from Stylecraft, upholstered in 'Metropolis' from Woven Image. Banquette seating throughout by Woodlands Interiors. Lateral filing cabinets by Dexion. Workstations are 'Xone' with 'Freeline' desk base system by Haworth.

**LIGHTING** In staff café, suspended feature lighting is

'Discus Dome', 'Discus Loofa' and 'Noi' by Yellow Goat Design, 'Tsjoeyp' suspended feature light in ante room, recessed fluorescent strip lighting, and Aeon bathroom mirror lights with chrome diffuser all by Inlite. General lighting throughout from Pierlite.

**FINISHES** External Alpolic metal cladding to eaves, entry canopy and walls is 'Pale Copper Metallic', to the east and west stairwells is 'Dark Grey Metallic' from SGI Architectural. Powdercoat finish on window frames and plant platform louvres is 'Precious Pewter Pearl' by Dulux. Evantage 6mm Blue/Green toughened and 6mm clear Synergy double-glazing from Viridian. Tray deck roofing finished in Dulux Colourbond 'Bushland'. Main internal wall paint is Bristol 'Dover', feature walls are Dulux 'Tawny Grey' and doors are Wattyl 'Tivo'. Polished plaster walls Dulux 'Bogart' and

'Bristol' and 'Dover' by Bishop Decorative Finishes. Feature doors by Ambro Doors, door hardware by Pittella Imports and Designer Doorware. Kitchen and vanity benchtops by CaesarStone. Reception desk and bar are CaesarStone and 'Noir Saint Larent' marble, supplied by Amalgamated Marble. Marble on stairs supplied by Classic Ceramics. Floor and wall tiles in lobby, bathrooms and external tiling from Signorino Tile Gallery. Reception and Break-out rugs are from Tsar. Flooring in ante room and boardroom is custom designed by client. Carpet to training room and staff café is a combination of 'Equilibrium', 'Time Warp' and 'Solid Foundation' by InterfaceFLOR. General carpet throughout is 'Tempo' by Godfrey Hirst. Timber wall panelling throughout, boardroom joinery, bar unit and display joinery by Sprenger Furniture. Joinery in kitchen, utilities, training room, reception and hot desks by Michael Schiavello.

**FIXED & FITTED** In bathrooms, toilets from Fowler, urinals from Caroma, partitions from Kyissa, showerheads from Dorf, ensuite basin and mixers from Rogerseller, other basins from Reece, and soap dispensers and hand dryers from JD MacDonald. Other bathroom fixtures from RBA. In

kitchenettes and Break-out areas, sinks from Blanco, fridges from Fisher & Paykel, and microwaves and dishwashers from Smeg. In boardroom kitchen, stove top from Smeg, fridge from Liebherr, rangehood from Qasair, microwave from Kleenmaid, bins from Hafele, and insinkerator from Reece. In boardroom bar, sink mixer from Hansa, wine fridges from Liebherr and Vintec, other fridges from Albany Refrigeration, dishwasher from Fisher & Paykel, and bin from Hettich. Generally throughout, sinks from Clark, coffee machines from Jura, and hydro taps from Zip Industries.



Albany Refrigeration (61 3) 9500 9022 albanyrefrigeration.com.au Amalgamated Marble (61 3) 9338 3370 amalgamatedmarble.com Ambro Doors (61 8) 8380 9544 ambro.com.au Bishop Decorative Finishes (61 3) 9421 3811 bishopdecor.com.au Blanco 1300 739 033 blanco-australia.com Bristol 13 16 86 86 bristol.com.au Bureau (61 3) 9662 2377 bureau.net.au CaesarStone 1300 119 119 caesarstone.com.au Caroma 1300 227 662 caroma.com.au Chairbiz (61 3) 9429 3388 chairbiz.com.au Clark 13 14 16 16 clark.com.au Classic Ceramics (61 2) 9560 6555 classicceramics.com.au Contemporary Leathers (61 3) 9427 9055 contemporaryleathers.com.au Designer Doorware (61 3) 9300 8888 designerdoorware.com.au Dexion (61 2) 9830 5000 dexion.com.au Dorf 13 14 16 16 dorf.com.au Dulux 13 23 77 77 dulux.com.au Fisher & Paykel 1300 650 590 fisherpaykel.com.au Fowler 13 17 74 74 fowler.com.au Godfrey Hirst (61 3) 9368 8100 godfreyhirst.com Gregory Commercial Furniture (61 3) 8317 1915 gregoryaustralia.com.au Hafele (61 3) 9212 2000 hafele.com Hansa hansataps.com Haworth (61 3) 8643 6300 haworth.com Hettich 1800 687 789 hettich.com.au Home Concepts (61 3) 9820 1996 home-concepts.com.au Inlite (61 3) 9429 9828 inlite.com.au InterfaceFLOR 1800 008 101 interfaceflor.com.au Interstudio 1300 785 199 interstudio.com.au James Richardson (61 3) 9428 1621 jamesrichardson.com.au JD MacDonald 1800 023 441 jdmacdonald.com.au Jura 1300 552 883 jura.com Kleenmaid 1300 652 100 kleenmaid.com.au Kyissa (61 3) 9338 7400 kyissa.com.au Liebherr (61 3) 9569 1255 andico.com.au Loop Textiles (61 3) 9811 4100 looptextiles.com Michael Schiavello (61 3) 9338 9411 michaelschiavello.com Mokum (61 3) 9811 4100 mokumtextiles.com Obodo (61 2) 9316 7771 obodo.com.au Pierlite (61 2) 9794 9300 pierlite.com.au Pittella Imports (61 3) 9818 0311 pittella.com.au Qasair 1300 360 563 qasair.com.au RBA 1300 788 778 rba.com.au Reece (61 2) 9274 0000 reece.com.au Rogerseller (61 3) 9429 8888 rogerseller.com.au Schembri Fine Furniture (61 3) 9370 5529 schembrifinefurniture.com.au SGI Architectural 1300 257 654 sgi-architectural.com.au Signorino Tile Gallery (61 3) 9427 9100 signorino.com.au Smeg (61 2) 9384 5678 smegappliances.com.au Sprenger Furniture (61 3) 9560 7621 stylecraft.com.au Stylecraft (61 3) 9666 4300 stylecraft.com.au Temperature Design (61 3) 9419 1447 temperaturedesign.com.au Tsar (61 3) 9525 0488 tsar.com.au Vintec 1800 666 778 vintec.com.au Viridian 1800 810 403 viridianglass.com Warwick Fabrics (61 3) 9419 7544 warwick.com.au Wattyl 13 21 01 wattyl.com.au Woodlands Interiors (61 3) 9386 0442 woodlandsinteriorsptyltd.com Woven Image 1800 888 650 wovenimage.com.au Yellowgoat Design (61 7) 5532 8659 yellowgoat.com.au Zip Industries 1800 638 633 zipindustries.com