



Case Study 14

Comaltech House

Sydney NSW

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brick and paver manufacturers**

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Comaltech House blends the practicality and economy of a modern building with contemporary interpretations of the classical detailing of its heritage neighbours such as the Queen Victoria Building.

Designing for a heritage precinct must be one of the toughest challenges faced by an architect: how do you avoid being imitative while respecting the work of those who have gone before?

That and more challenged Peddle Thorpe Walker at 117 York Street, Sydney, a 420 m² site opposite the revered Queen Victoria Building. With loading from York Street out of the question and limited access via a lane, most loading took place from a rear street. "The manoeuvring of a crane in that small area was a very difficult engineering feat," considers project architect Aaron Ballin.

Not surprisingly, brick was one of the materials nominated by the council. "We were trying to avoid the use of a large palette of brick colours," says Ballin. "We decided at an early stage that we wished to achieve a 3D modelling of the building by recessing and strongly moulding the facade through the use of various geometries, for the sills, spandrel panels and mullion arrangements of the brickwork."

Large bay windows are the building's signature element. "We were very conscious of the relationship of solid to void, in interpretation of the rhythm of the street," says Ballin.



Client:	Toga Group of Companies
Architect:	Peddle Thorp & Walker
Builder:	Kell & Rigby
Bricklayer:	Quick Brick
Building cost:	≈15 million
Photographer:	Anthony Fretwell, Fretwell Photography

A test panel proved invaluable, allowing the designers and builders to study and analyse laying and cleaning procedures, and trial the mortar mix, colour, and joint finish. "It was fantastic, absolutely essential."

The 14 level building with a nett lettable area of about 5460 m² has a reinforced concrete frame clad in Sydney sandstone at ground level with pressed red bricks supported on shelf angles at each level above. The unpigmented 1:1:6 mortar is ironed to compress the surface without creating a dust-collecting ledge.

The work was laid as cleanly as possible. "One of the main things we learnt from it is that it's best to keep the mortar off the brick face in the first place rather than to come back and clean it," Ballin considers.

Over 220,000 bricks were laid, including 20,000 shaped bricks. There were seven different shapes, including an 87 degree corner to compensate for the site's imperfect geometry.

Comaltech House (formerly Toga House) was a winner in the Awards for Excellence in Bricks and Blocks of the NSW Masonry Contractors Association, and the 2000 MBA Excellence in Construction Award for a Commercial Building \$10,000,001–\$50,000,000.



(Above) The brickwork detailing of deep reveals and sloping sills creates the framework for the bay window glazing. A test panel provided invaluable data to the designers and builder.

(Left) The designers chose to modulate the facade using recesses and brickwork geometry in preference to colour or applied mouldings.