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Filling the void at  
Customs House



MakMax and the architects from LAVA have transformed the atrium at Sydney Customs House into a striking Green Void.

Combining the heritage of a restored building with the technology of the present is never an easy task, but a collaboration between MakMax and Chris Bosse of LAVA has brought Sydney Customs House to the forefront of ultra-modern design.

Using the latest digital design, fabrication and engineering techniques, over 40kg of lightweight material has been suspended throughout the space, spanning almost 20 vertical metres and five storeys.

Constructed with specially treated high-tech nylon, attached to aluminium track profiles, the sweeping installation is suspended from the top café and covers an amazing surface area of 300m<sup>2</sup>, enclosing 3000 cubic metres of space.

LAVA's Asia Pacific director, Chris Bosse, explains that the installation was inspired by the relationship between man, nature and technology, and custom-built for the heritage space to encompass its varying uses.

Using the concept of Minimal Surface, made popular in the 1970s, the designers took a "form finding" approach to the design.

## Touching the VOID

Text by Collette Swindells

"It is essentially a mathematical formula," Bosse explains, "whereby the computer calculates the minimum surface needed to keep it suspended, and the minimum amount of material needed to connect the three-dimensional points in space. It is very much about sustainable design."

"As architects we are constantly trying to learn from nature, to create architecture that is more efficient."

At night an animation of lava is projected onto the material, with coloured spotlighting and a soundscape reverberating around the void during the day.

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