

Tabcorp Menangle Park

Case Study

masonry.
style and
function

Case Study

Tabcorp

Menangle Park NSW

Project: Tabcorp

Location: Menangle Park NSW

Function: Harness and Trotting Track Facilities

Owner: NSW Harness Racing Club

Architect: DTB Architects

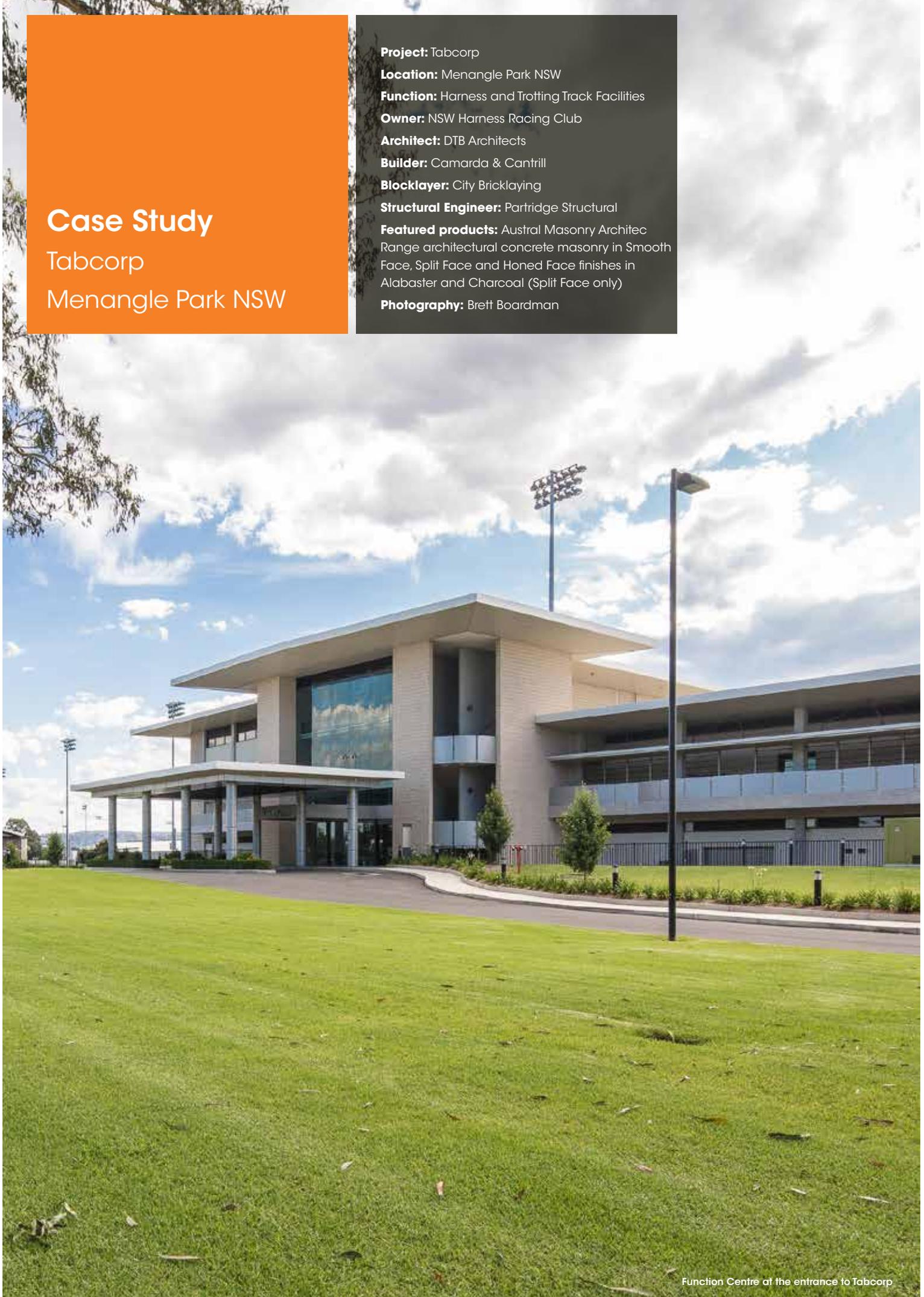
Builder: Camarda & Cantrill

Blocklayer: City Bricklaying

Structural Engineer: Partridge Structural

Featured products: Austral Masonry Architectural concrete masonry in Smooth Face, Split Face and Honed Face finishes in Alabaster and Charcoal (Split Face only)

Photography: Brett Boardman



Function Centre of the entrance to Tabcorp



Administration building which houses the NSW Harness Racing Club and the venue's management and operations team

When it comes to choosing a cladding material, you don't gamble on the outcome.

Many architects have an area of special interest. Chris Dunkerley's is more unusual than most: from the mid-1980s his special interest has been designing thoroughbred and harness racing facilities, initially for Robertson & Marks, and since 1996, under his own banner as DTB Architects.

Such work doesn't come along very often which made his latest project, Tabcorp Park Menangle, a harness racing venue about an hour south of Sydney, all the more important to him.

The Menangle Park track first hosted thoroughbred and harness racing in 1914 but in recent years had become a practice track. Even before the 2010 sale of famous Harold Park Paceway which had previously served in a similar function, the NSW Harness Racing Club had begun work to revitalise the Menangle Park venue to create New South Wales' premier harness racing track.

From 2006 to 2008 three ageing grandstands and the existing open-sided race day stalls were renovated to a serviceable standard to allow the racecourse to operate while major works were undertaken. The racing surface was widened, extended from 832 metres to 1400 metres, and the back straight levelled and elevated above the flood plain by up to eight metres.

Stage one of the new building works, from 2011 to 2012 was to construct a new administration building to house the NSW Harness Racing Club and the venue's management and operations team. A new race day stalls complex, the Smoken Up Race Stalls, named after the legendary pacer, was built to house up to 120 horses and their equipment and handlers, as well as vet facilities, change rooms and lunch rooms. It was opened in February 2012.

The three grandstands were retained. The two large, semi-enclosed stands used different materials and forms and, although linked, were not on the same levels, requiring substantial ground works to the point where they present today as functionally unified.

Perhaps the greatest challenge was to allow the racecourse to function without interruption during the building works. For example, the rebuilding of the two main grandstands proceeded in sections, and at times operations were suspended during race meetings.

The third grandstand, a smaller semi-open facility, underwent a radical overhaul. It was stripped back to its structural bones, substantially re-worked and expanded, and received a new roof structure, together with a sponsors' terrace and amenities. A new media centre overlooking the Parade Ring was also appended to the rear of the building.

The major design challenge however was how to visually link five buildings with very different forms and functions. Chris Dunkerley chose coloured concrete masonry as the primary cladding material for this task. "I made the decision to go with blockwork fairly early in the piece. We wanted robust materials, particularly anywhere the horses were involved. They had to be robust, cleanable and not require lots of maintenance." Self-finished materials such as concrete masonry require minimal maintenance. "You might steam clean the masonry every fifteen years or so if you were keen and it was needed," Dunkerley contends.



Function Centre and Administration building which houses the NSW Harness Racing Club and the venue's management and operations team



'Smoken Up' Race Stalls



The 'Macarthur' Pavilion and 'Rex Horne' stand at Menangle Park



Administration building walls use masonry walls and shade panels



Masonry feature wall in Architec Split Face - Alabaster

Coloured concrete masonry in a range of surface finishes is a key component in a palette of materials chosen for this project for their good looks, versatility, durability and low maintenance.

He chose three surface finishes from Austral Masonry's Architec range: Smooth Face, Split Face and Honed Face. The primary colour chosen was Alabaster, with a relatively small number of Charcoal coloured blocks used in a curved flanking wall that will allow for the future application of "Hall of Fame" style plaques honouring champion horses. The predominant use of the Alabaster colour helps unify and build a visual link between the campus of buildings.

The three surface finishes (Smooth Face, Split Face and Honed Face) were used creatively to provide character and on occasions to give relief to the walling. For example, the perimeter walling of the stalls building is constructed in Split Face units with interspersed columns faced in Honed Face blocks. "This building is large, about 90 metres by 50 metres," says Dunkerley. "It's basically a large portal-framed shed. We needed to break the long external walls into panels

of some sort over that length. So the introduction of engaged piers and changing of their texture relative to the wall surface creates a comfortable rhythm to the facades."

The stalls building is constructed in a single skin of non-loadbearing blockwork infilling the steel frame structure. The inner face of the Split Face blocks is smooth and therefore doesn't present a hazard to the horses in their stalls. The inner stalls are finished with Smooth Face blocks.

A unique innovation is a pair of elevated internal walkways which run the length of the building and allow punters to view the horses without any security or safety risks.

The structural versatility of concrete masonry was a further factor in its selection. "You can build blockwork as a simple or hollow-form non-loadbearing structure," Dunkerley explains. "You can also use the same material structurally for a retaining wall or planter wall, reinforced or core-filled if needed. So the same product has the versatility to be a structural element as well as a simple facing element."

The Menangle Park racecourse has survived many changes throughout its century-plus life. As well as hosting gallops and trots, it was a makeshift army camp used to train troopers in the famous Australian Light Horse in the First World War and occupied by the RAAF in the Second.

As well as conducting about 80 scheduled meetings per year, Tabcorp Menangle Park hosts the Miracle Mile, and in its current rotation, the Inter Dominion final, two of harness racing's most prestigious events. The project culminated in October 2013 with the official opening of the Rex Horne Stand.

Racecourse facility designs such as this may come along once in a decade but they can take much longer than the average commercial building project. Dunkerley spent almost seven years from the original concept discussions through to practical completion.

Luckily he was able to interleave this project with his practice's more conventional work portfolio. However it must be exciting and satisfying to be a key part of such a significant project. We are sure Chris Dunkerley would be keen to get back in harness!

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