



Bar for the course

By Deborah Singmaster
Photographs by Simon Yeo

While further-education institutions struggle to cope with ever wider curricula and rising student numbers, provision of social facilities is often neglected or postponed indefinitely, in the hope that one day funding will cease to be a problem, or an unexpected donation may fall from the skies.

Over the past three years, since the appointment of its new principal, Grimsby College has faced this dilemma. It has



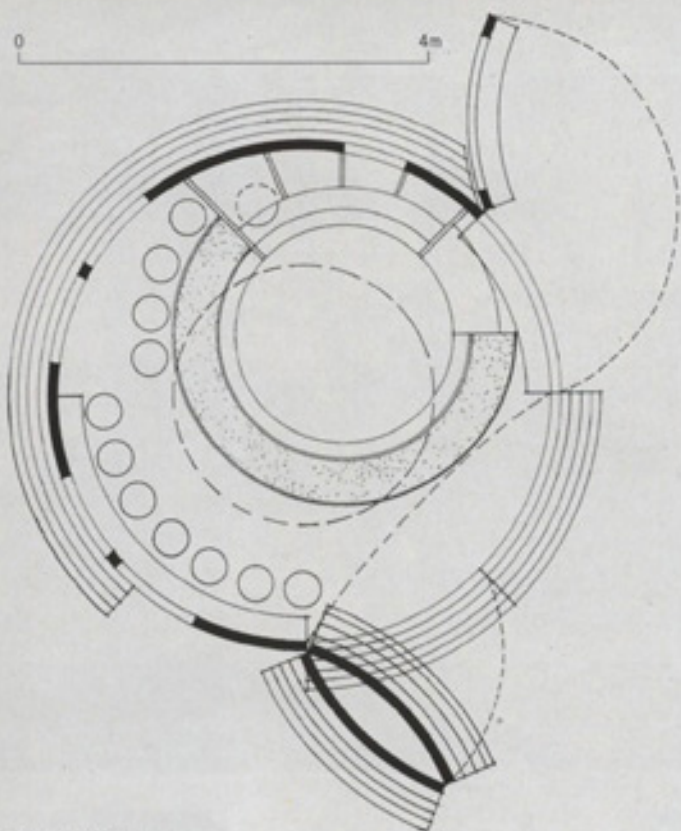
become increasingly community-based, offering a wide range of part-time and full time courses, as well as evening classes. The new common room, by Hodson Design, could not be simply a bar, catering exclusively for after-studies socialising. It had to perform several functions – as a flexible work, study and meeting area – as well as a night-time drinking spot and mingling place that met with the approval of its var-

ied range of customers. The project's working title at Hodson Design, was 'the Mars bar'.

The common room is on the ground floor of a five-storey teaching and administrative block. All existing partitions were stripped out and a suspended ceiling removed to reveal the concrete structural frame with masonry infill and the base of the concrete floor beams overhead. A simple glass-fronted extension on the south elevation created an 'inside outside' area, accessed by lowering the sills of existing windows on the south wall and converting them into full-height openings. End walls to the extension are of timber-framed construction with grey-stained horizontal ply-board cladding outside and inside, and are treated for one-hour spread of flame. Two large windows in the new walls create a



Previous page: exterior and interior. Left: bar doors open. Below left: vista through the common room. Below: closed bar



plan of bar

through vista from a busy external approach route to the main circulation corridor: a visual axis signalling openness and a means of fostering the idea of 'student ownership'.

The internal arrangement of the room is dictated by four fixtures: the drum-shaped bar enclosure, a housing for vending machines and two screens with circular openings which align with the openings in the new end walls.

These built-in features are uniformly 2400mm high, of stressed timber frame construction and faced in ash-veneered ply. The curved bar wall – which encloses a small bar within a bar – can be opened at three points; vertical slots give bar tenders a

full view of activity in the rest of the common room. An integral bench, made from concentric layers of plywood strips, curves around the outer surface of the drum.

The same method of laminating the end grain of plywood strip is used in the bar counter and WC vanity units. The common room tables, designed by the architect in collaboration with a local fabricator, are based on a Buckminster Fuller-inspired 'tensegrity' base made of steel tube and cabling with quick-release Allen key fittings so that they are easily dismantled. Light fittings reflect the common room's multiple uses: pendants throw convivial light clusters on tables tops at night, while low-voltage downlighters, mounted on wire tracks, cre-

ate strong axes of ambient light for general daytime functions.

The budget was restricted to just £150,000. Local labour and craftspeople were employed throughout, making this in every sense a community-based project in keeping with the ethos of Grimsby College.

CREDITS

CLIENT: Grimsby College	illumineering, builder Roger Coultas, roofing Humberlinc, electrical
ARCHITECT: Mark Hodson Design	John Dass, mechanical ventilation Combitech
STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: Michael Heal Associate	(UK), glazing Solaglas, light fittings Ikea and GFC, chairs 'Ronda' by Phoenix, supplied by Niva Contracts
SUBCONTRACTORS AND SUPPLIERS: specialist joinery Simon Yeo, steelwork	