

Case Study

Universities & Education / Research & Development



Food Experience & Sensory Testing Facility Massey University

Completion Date: 2021

Location: Palmerston North

Services: Full Architectural Services



Lab-works Architecture was engaged to design a new Food Experience and Sensory Testing (FEAST) facility for Massey University. Located at their Manawatū campus, FEAST is a hub for food sensory and consumer research, training and consultancy.

Completed in 2021, the new facility includes spaces where sensory testing of food can be undertaken by both individual and group settings, along with focus group discussions. These include an immersive space, a flexible space, a focus group space, cubicles, booths, commercial kitchen, reception area, and storage areas.

The requirements of the facilities, where testing occurs, was to minimise or eliminate distractions as much as practicable in an existing building. This was achieved by constructing walls with a denser construction for sound absorption, and insulating the existing exterior building shell. Spaces have been finished with colours from a neutral palette that do not distract from the senses of the people being tested.



The immersive space can have realistic visual images and video projected onto the walls to replicate a certain environment, along with the ability to introduce sounds and smells to create the desired ambience. These features create the feeling of any type of space in which food sensory testing can be experimented.

The commercial kitchen has hatches that open into individual booths, where food samples can be passed through. These booths eliminate distractions which allows the focus to be solely on the tests. The environment within the booth's space can be controlled, such as the temperature, the humidity, and the lighting, as these can all affect how people perceive food.

The flexible space is for group and individual sensory testing. There is a bench along two sides of the space with folding screens. The screens can be folded out to create individual booths when required, and folded back against the wall when not required.

Other spaces include cubicles for conducting one-to-one interviews, cognitive tests, or virtual-reality type consumer tests, and a focus group room where people discuss food and how to carry out training in food sensory testing.

The resulting facility allows FEAST to conduct food sensory testing for the development of new food products in New Zealand and internationally.

