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Innovation and Light Shine on RIA Awards Finalist

Sydney, 11 April, 2007

A highly inventive sports centre on the north coast of NSW has emerged a finalist in the prestigious Sulman Award for Public Architecture. Coordinated by the NSW Chapter of the RIAA, the award will see Lake Ainsworth Multi-Recreation Hall and five other finalists visited by the jury during May.

Commissioned by the Properties Division of the NSW Department of Sport and Recreation, Allen Jack+Cottier perceived the modest budget as an opportunity to break with conventional rhetoric on sports centres. Guided by the principles of Environmentally Sustainable Design, the design team focused on creating a groundbreaking building that would simultaneously achieve energy and environmental efficiency, respect for the site, and inspiration for its users.

Exhaustive on-site and environmental research, coupled with a lateral approach to materials selection, proved to be the key to the design. Detailed modelling showed that a transparent, insulating UV-resistant material could be used over a steel frame in combination with central ventilation for fresh air-cooling. This new approach subsequently used less materials, weight and steel to promote natural illumination and natural ventilation.

The final outcome, according to project director, Michael Heenan, is a building composed of light. "The building is a chameleon in appearance, absorbing and manipulating morning and evening light, as well as the surrounding bushland. It's almost as if the building itself does not exist."

The Director of Allen Jack+Cottier also describes the building as an immediate response to the environment, "generating less greenhouse gas and ozone depletion, now and for the whole life of the building."

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