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## Reinventing the Aussie sports shed – Allen Jack+Cottier receives RAI A Blacket award

Monday, 25 June, 2007

A new take on the traditional Australian sports centre designed by Sydney-based architects Allen Jack+Cottier, has triumphed at the Royal Australian Institute of Architecture (RAIA) NSW Chapter Awards. Lake Ainsworth Recreation Hall won the prestigious Blacket Award for regional architecture outright, with commendations (equal top score) for the categories of Public Architecture and Sustainable Architecture.

Located on the north coast of NSW, the new multipurpose sports and recreation hall was commissioned by the Properties Division of the NSW Department of Sport and Recreation.

Allen Jack+Cottier saw the project and its modest budget, as an opportunity to break with conventional thinking on sports centres. Guided by the principles of Ecologically 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.

The result, according to project director, Michael Heenan, is a unique building composed almost entirely of light, a modern take on the tradition of crystal palaces in an Australian context.

Jury comments for the Blacket reflected Heenan's fascination with light. "But what changes this otherwise utilitarian hall into architecture is the way it plays with light. The carefully considered use of a translucent yet insulating material, specified to allow different amounts of solar penetration on each façade and the roof, creates a chameleon constantly changing with the day's progress."

For the commendation in Public Architecture, jury comments emphasised the success of innovation on a budget. "It demonstrates not only the design skills, but also the 'smarts', that architects can bring to even humble projects. The brief for a simple recreation hall has been transformed, almost by alchemy, into a translucent and reflective light-box that responds to changing weather patterns, seasons and time of day, both inside and out."

According to Heenan, the building was an immediate response to the environment, "generating less greenhouse gas and ozone depletion, now and for the whole life of the building."

Jury comments for the Sustainable Architecture commendation praised the building as a coherent expression of green thinking, rather than a clunky assembly of environmental features. "The result is that the building *is* the environmental technology. While its form, orientation, and choice and performance of materials can be explained by environmental performance, the building transcends simple functionality.

"The particular way the materials have been used to catch light, the curved form of the building, and the large roof overhang that allows a ground level pebble drain in place of gutters, reveals an interest in the poetic revelation of weather phenomena, not simply the mediation of climate."

The Minister for Sport and Recreation, the Honourable Graham West, and Minister for Planning, the Honourable Frank Sartor, both attended the ceremony.

To read full jury comments, see attached file.

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