

Pokie palace with a view wins top gong

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Property Reporter

When designing a pokie palace, one of the golden rules is that natural light should be minimised. On the South Coast that rule was broken when an ugly box of a building was torn open to expose superb views west to the Illawarra escarpment and east across rolling hills and out to sea.

The rebirth of the Shellharbour Workers Club has won his year's Blacket Award for regional architecture for two firms – Caroline Pidcock Architects and Richard Goodwin Architects.

Inside, the lime green, lipstick pink and electric blue neon lights remain, above a blue and orange carpet embroidered with angel fish, sea shells and seaweed.

Outside, a blank wall has been replaced with a vast veranda seating 500 with a roof like a pleated skirt of glass and steel.

The \$3 million renovations enhanced the environmental friendliness of the building, with solar panels on the roof collecting energy and tanks underneath the



Breaking through ... the Shellharbour Workers' Club. Photo: Jon Reid

verandah collecting rainwater for the club's toilets. "It's a great place to go on a sunny day to have a meal or a drink or whatever," Caroline Pidcock said.

"I think they could see in the future they could rely more on that for their revenue, being a social place where people want to go rather than a gambling venue."

The club was one of several buildings honoured at the awards dinner of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects on Saturday in Sydney.

The jury awarded its two most prestigious accolades to the Aurora Place development, five years after it lamented the decision to demolish the building it replaced – the State Office Block on Macquarie Street.

Designed by Italian architect Renzo Piano and built by Lease, it is the first building to win both the Sulman and Wilkinson awards, which recognise public buildings and residential housing.

Developers had realised that if they did not lift their game they would not be able to sell premium apartments, said the institute's jury chairman, Paul Berkemeier. Five years ago the jury had said that many new apartment buildings were "an affront to the city".

Mr Berkemeier said the quality of public buildings had been exceptional, praising the new Sydney Theatre at The Rocks and the New Asian Galleries at the Art Gallery of NSW.

Jones Bay Wharf was praised with PTW Architects, Bates Smart and Otto Cserhalmi + Partners winning the Greenway Award for conservation for its redevelopment.

A Maroubra apartment block transformed by architect Alec Pappas won the Premier's Award. Herald journalist Geraldine O'Brien won the Adrian Ashton Award for outstanding coverage of architectural subjects.