

Workers' club bowls up green approach

Robert Harley

The Shellharbour Workers Club, on the NSW South Coast, emerged yesterday from a \$3 million facelift which will make it one of the most environmentally sensitive club and tourist venues in Australia.

The traditional workers' club – the sealed dark box with the stale smoke smell – has been opened to the outside with a huge sculptural steel verandah.

Photovoltaic cells for solar power are saving electricity; substantial spaces have natural ventilation, huge rainwater tanks have drastically reduced water consumption and a large worm farm is cutting back on waste disposal.

Gavin Gilchrist, the managing director of environmental project management company Big Switch, said the building represented a "mainstreaming" of sustainable design principles.

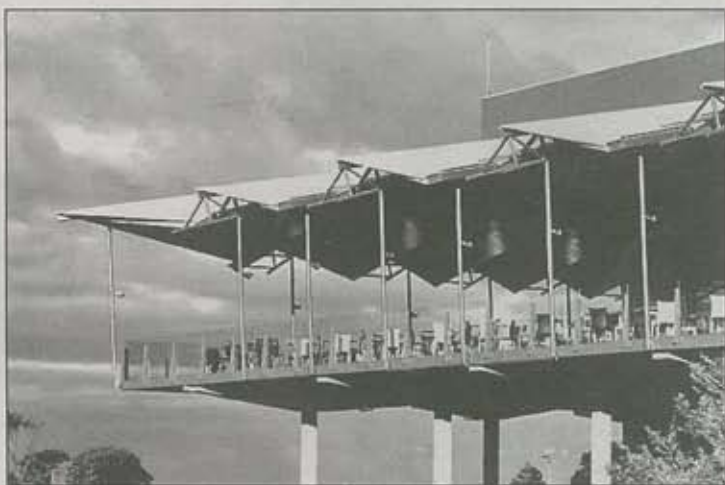
"There are a growing number of green boutique office buildings, and there is an explosion in new green houses, but this is the first to take sustainable principles into a mainstream part of the construction industry – club building."

Big Switch said its use of a design competition and not the traditional "design and construct" procurement, was "a paradigm shift in the way registered clubs in NSW design and build".

Architect Caroline Pidcock, who worked on the project in association with Richard Goodwin, said the new work was "a visually exciting demonstration that great architecture is happening outside Sydney's eastern suburbs – and being appreciated by the locals".

Many of the 1500 clubs in NSW would face similar imperatives. Because of the looming restrictions on smoking, all will soon need outdoor spaces – areas which can help wean the clubs away from the dependence on gambling and generate increased revenue from food, beverage and functions.

The key in the Shellharbour



The key to the Shellharbour project is a huge verandah.

Photo: ANTHONY BROWELL

project is a huge verandah on two sides, about 1700 sq m in all. The photovoltaics have been included as part of the building to generate some of the power and create perhaps the world's first solar-assisted poker machines.

The electricity generated is not enough to power the club's 237 pokies but with the new verandah, and a \$500,000 energy-efficiency upgrade to the airconditioning, the power required by the club should drop by around 10 per cent.

Six tanks, with a capacity of 160,000 litres, now harvest water

"The world's first solar-assisted poker machines."

off the roof. It is being used only to flush toilets and supply the cooling tower, but in the first month of operation, the mains water demand has dropped by 20 per cent.

The club has also installed one of the largest worm farms in Australia. The worms eat about 600 kilograms of scrap meat, bone and vegetables in a week and generate worm castings and liquid manure for the grounds or on-sale.

Ms Pidcock said the sculptural steel roof acted as a mediator

between the building and the landscape – "and with the steel works just up the coast it is structurally appropriate".

But the function drove the shape. She said the key factors in determining the roof solution were ventilation louvres to ensure hot air escaped, the need for light but not direct sunlight, and the need to orient part of the roof to the north.

She said it showed that sustainable ideas could be creatively approached.

"Some people thought the only solution was to demolish the building."

The general manager of the Shellharbour Workers Club, David Whyte, said the project had grown out of the renewal of the airconditioning and the eventual need to meet smoking regulations.

"There will be a time when the club will need to be smoke free."

"We saw the opportunity to explore the alternative, to save the environment and the club some money," he said.

"Photovoltaics have a very long, 20-year payback. But the tanks have saved 20 per cent of water usage in the first month."

Clearly the 17,000 members are on-side. They have even banned plastic bags. The traditional meat raffle now comes in a calico bag.