

Ravensthorpe's winning centre

A sustainable timber building on the south coast of WA has wowed the judges at this year's Western Australia Architecture Awards.

ON Wudjari Country, some 500km south-east of Perth and 40km from the coast is Ravensthorpe, a town and local Shire that's responsible for about 2100 people.

There's also the new Ravensthorpe Cultural Precinct, a gleaming set of red-timbered buildings that shine against the grey-greens of their environment. The precinct houses the Shire offices, Council Chambers, the Community Resource Centre and lending library, dining facilities, professional offices and a training room, as well as Seniors services, a creche and a variety of facilities for tourists.

Recently, it won two accolades at the 2024 Western Australia Architecture Awards: the Jeffrey Howlett Award for Public Architecture (WA) and the Wallace Greenham Award for Sustainable Architecture (WA).

In their comments on the Howlett Award, the judges said: 'The building performs the role of a new heart to the town that is inclusive and invites residents, visitors and tourists to participate in passive and active recreation. It forms a new meeting place to support both informal and formal activities while supporting people of all ages and ability.'

'This is a building that is rigorously public, quietly confident and a proudly embraced asset to the community.'

Their reasoning behind the Greenham Award is even more obvious. The Shire of Ravensthorpe specified timber



The gleaming set of buildings has become the heart of the local community.
Photo: Johnathan Trask - courtesy ATO and Peter Hobbs Architecture

early on and for that reason, they reached out to Advanced Timber Concepts Studio (ATC).

'We had just completed another building in 2018/19 for the Shire of Pingelly,' ATC director Patrick Beale told *T&F Enews*. 'At the time this building was the largest timber structure in Western Australia since two RAAF wartime hangars built further north in the Wheatbelt – and still in use

today. It was certainly the largest civic structure to be constructed entirely in timber in the state.

'When the shire received grant funding for the project, I invited Peter Hobbs Architects and Intensive Fields [a trans-disciplinary design practice] to collaborate on the project with ATC.'

Beale had begun ATC in 2012 with the goal to prioritise timber as a material ahead of hybrid or conventional structures.

'There are a number of factors rolled into those aims and intentions,' says Beale. 'The goal is to use materials that are 100% renewable and have the capacity to store carbon and create a very low carbon footprint. We also aim to eliminate wet trades wherever possible so we can minimise the number of trades and finesse the coordination of trades on site: our buildings typically are prefabricated to a very high level of precision and are assembled on site rapidly with a small crew of riggers and carpenters.'

In the case of Ravensthorpe, using light weight timbers had additional benefits. 'Sited on a knap of highly volatile clays, any building that rests on the ground risks 'breaking its back' as the clay moves,' Beale says, pointing to cracks in the majority of masonry buildings in the town. 'Our building is founded on piers that carry down directly to the bedrock between 700 and 1300mm below grade. We have used



Since its opening, the precinct has been warmly embraced by the public. Photo: Dene Bingham - courtesy ATO and Peter Hobbs Architecture

Cont P 17