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<https://www.smh.com.au/culture/art-and-design/inside-australia-s-most-beautiful-houses-pools-and-an-otherworldly-tin-shed-20241029-p5kmci.html>

# Inside Australia's most beautiful houses, pools and an 'otherworldly' tin shed



By [Julie Power](#)

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“Otherworldly.” This is not a description usually applied to the warehouses, storage sheds and mega-shops such as Bunnings and Spotlight near the new Powerhouse Castle Hill storage facility in Sydney’s north-west.

Known as “the big tin shed”, the shimmering Powerhouse Castle Hill designed by Sydney’s Lahznimmo Architects was a big winner in the National Architecture Awards 2024, announced on Thursday night. Home to the Powerhouse’s \$347 million collection of 500,000 objects, the new building claimed the Sir Zelman Cowen Award, the highest award for public architecture in Australia.



Powerhouse chief executive Lisa Havilah wanted everything to be on show at the museum’s new Castle Hill storehouse. *CREDIT: NICK MOIR*

Jury member Professor Naomi Stead from RMIT said the building had a “really otherworldly sense because of its milled aluminium finish. It’s like it glimmers in the light.”

The Parramatta Aquatic Centre, by Grimshaw and Andrew Burges Architects with McGregor Coxall, won two major awards: The Walter Burley Griffin Award for Urban Design, the highest award in the category, and the national award for public architecture.

Built into the slope of Parramatta Park, the pool's circular "ring" design aims to blend into the Mays Hill precinct and preserve historic views towards the World Heritage-listed Old Government House.

The jury said Parramatta Aquatic Centre effortlessly integrated pools, a gym, a cafe, change rooms and multipurpose rooms. It was a masterful design that transformed the area, with the provision of facilities creating a community hub for swimmers and other members of the public.

Jury chair Stuart Tanner said the 35 awarded projects showed public buildings with utilitarian purposes need not be perfunctory. "Architects have created unexpectedly beautiful and sophisticated public buildings that transcend their practical purposes such as storage."

Also in Sydney, the Nicholas Murcutt Award for Small Project Architecture, the highest in its category, went to the North Head Viewing Platforms by CHROFI and Bangawarra with National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Stead said this was one of her favourite projects: "It's so subtle and beautiful ... it is so extraordinary, and it is so meaningful."

The judging panel for the Australian Institute of Architects visited every project in every category across the country.

Lahznimmo's Andrew Nimmo and his wife and fellow director, Annabel Lahz, have won a range of major national awards, including the Walter Burley Griffin Award for Sub Base Platypus Renewal.

Earlier this year Nimmo told Branko Miletic, the host of podcast *Talking Architecture & Design*, that most storage sheds were pretty ordinary. But that ordinariness didn't have to be boring. They can be beautiful, too, Nimmo said.

Initially, the architects thought the building was going to be a large storage shed similar to those already on the north-west Sydney site. And it would be a utilitarian piece of architecture, with most of it back of house and not designed for the public.

That was until Powerhouse chief executive Lisa Havilah stepped in. “Lisa very famously said to us very early on, ‘nothing is back of house’,” Nimmo said. “The idea is that even the fire stairs are designed carefully with an attention to detail, attention to material, longevity, all that sort of thing, and consistency and everything has that consistent approach, Her first comment was, nothing was back of house.”

Havilah said the Powerhouse was the only piece of cultural infrastructure in the Hills Shire, and it was designed to serve the local community.

“People just love this building, like they really love this building,” Havilah said. “So we’ve had a lot of response to the architecture, but they’ve also responded to what this piece of architecture does in terms of making our collection visible.”

Tours of the collection had sold out, along with family days. Before the awards were announced, Havilah had no doubt it should win. “Absolutely yes, it should win because it embodies international leading museum practice.”

It was something new, Havilah said.

Stead agreed: “It is a newish building type, it is a museum, with open storage, a bit of a forensic laboratory, it’s got a gallery, and a vault to keep precious things safe. But really it is like the most beautiful storage facility. The objects are laid out, they’re orderly, but they’re not curated. You are seeing a collection, as opposed to an exhibition.”