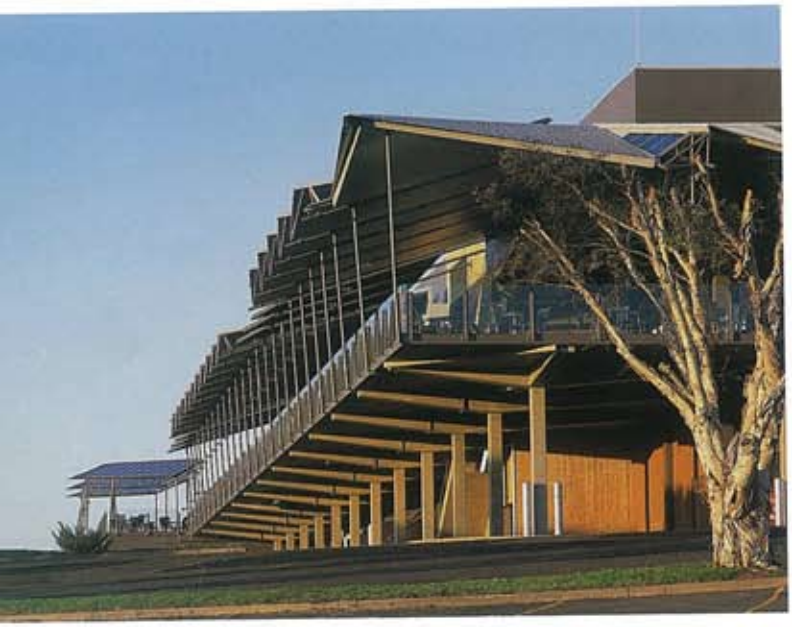
PARASITE AND MACHINE

ADRIAN LAHOUD LOOKS AT THE NEW VERANDAH AT THE SHELLHARBOUR WORKERS' CLUB BY CAROLINE PIDCOCK ARCHITECTS + RICHARD GOODWIN ARCHITECTS.

PHOTOGRAPHY ANTHONY BROWELL



THE NEW ADDITION to the Shellharbour Workers' Club by Caroline Pidcock Architects + Richard Goodwin Architects has accomplished something quite uncommon in bar and club design: it has combined a rigorous commitment to ecologically sustainable development (ESD) with a dramatically sculptural architectural form.

The project managers, Big Switch Projects, and Pidcock's experience with ESD systems lends Goodwin's parasitic reinterpretation of the verandah roof a machinic aspect, with systems for the collection of rainwater and the generation of electricity seamlessly integrating into the architecture.

Bars and clubs have always been presented with the need to reinvent themselves. This addition is the latest in a series of changes that have been made to the venue in order to maintain its viability. The present building was finished in 1982, the same year that the NSW Government introduced random breath testing. As most patrons drove to the SHWC, revenue suffered, leading the club to reposition itself as a live music venue.

The possible introduction of new laws that will prohibit smoking inside venues, and to a lesser extent the NSW Government's new poker machine tax, have the potential to bite heavily into club profits. It should be noted that NSW gamblers lost almost $4.5 billion on poker machines in 2002 alone.

This project was to a large extent initiated in order to provide an outdoor area for smokers and to reduce the reliance on poker machine revenue by re-branding the club's image, although Big Switch were originally brought on board because of a need to upgrade an overstretched air conditioning system. Despite the club and bar refurbishment industry being dominated by design and construct companies, Big Switch convinced the board of the SHWC to run a limited design competition for architects with a focus on ESD.

The ESD principles are simple: to "generate more electricity than it consumes, to capture more water than it needs and to dispose of more waste than it creates". The figures are compelling: two types of solar panels generate 25 megawatt hours a year, while the energy used by the 1600 square metre extension is only 17 megawatt hours a year. That the project generates surplus energy is made more impressive when you consider that a similar air-conditioned extension would consume an additional 375 megawatt hours a year.

Six rainwater tanks are estimated to collect 1.6 megalitres of water a year from the existing building's roof to use in the club's toilets, while an industrial sized worm farm will dispose of much of the club's organic waste and provide fertilizer to use on the grounds.

The roof itself is an extension of the ideas found in Goodwin's Parasite Roof project at the Union Hotel. The parasite, for Goodwin, is an attached structure that can increase porosity between a public outside and private inside. In this previous project the roof (parasite) grows dynamically out of the hotel courtyard to shelter a balcony, exploring in a formal manner the difference between attachment and existing building, what Goodwin has previously referred to as the "itch".

It is fitting then that the context for SHWC development is the edge of the SHWC building. The new verandah and shade structures have created a transition between the sealed air-conditioned interior and the broad landscape outside. The new structure incorporates shading devices and photovoltaic cells in a pleated form that wraps around the existing building's glazing like a skirt. The clothing metaphor is tempting as the cool "high art" abstraction of the roof forms "covers up" the lurid pulse of 230-odd poker machines directly inside, but it is also limited as the ESD systems lend it a machine-like rather than a decorative quality. In a somewhat prosaic nod to context, the rationale for a steel structure is connected to the local Port Kembla steelworks.

The roof is made up of a series of triangulated truss units that are repeated across the edge of the building and warp the existing building's geometry. The warping of each roof unit is a remarkably simple solution to a number of problems. It resolves the horizontal connection of the roof with the diagonal section of the photovoltaic cells and simultaneously opens up a wedge of indirect light for illuminating the space below. This twisting gesture presented a series of technical problems when it came to the documentation of the project. In order for the roof sheeting to follow the curving profile of the section, the sheet extrusions would have to taper in on one side and flare out on the other, while channelling water away from the glazing.

Although these difficulties were eventually resolved, the actual connection of the roof to the existing building seems less considered. The relationship of the existing building edge, particularly the external ceiling, to the roof structure is inelegant. The transition from the bulky rectilinear geometry of the existing building to the baroque geometry of the roof is jarringly direct.

As such the difference between the two elements is overstated, more a tickle than an itch.

Regardless, the robust toughness of the aesthetic is a welcome respite from the overstimulated garishness so common in bar and club design, while the fact that the extension saves more money than it costs and successfully re-brands the club might mean that it becomes a catalyst for rethinking some of the assumptions made about how these buildings should be designed.

ADRIAN LAHOUD IS A SYDNEY-BASED ARCHITECT AND A PREVIOUS EMPLOYEE OF RICHARD GOODWIN'S.

SHELLHARBOUR WORKERS' CLUB
Architects Caroline Pidcock Architects + Richard Goodwin Architects—*design team* Richard Goodwin, Caroline Pidcock; *project team* Caroline Pidcock, Richard Goodwin, Kate Dewhirst, Saskia Van de Put, Carolyn McFarland, Philip Stewart, Tomoko Suga. **Project managers** Big Switch Projects: Craig Roussac and Gavin Glichrist. **Structural engineers** Partridge and Partners. **Hydraulic engineers** Warren Smith & Partners. **Mechanical engineers** Engineered Environments. **Electrical engineers and lighting design** Haron Robson. **Landscape design** Flourish Landscape Architecture. **Builders** Edwards Construction.