

That's architect with an AAA

Award-winner Glenn Murcutt says this new professional group isn't a challenge to the RAIA.



Photo: Penelope Seidler

Another layer of debate: from left, Wendy Lewin, Annette Dearing, James Grose, Glenn Murcutt, Harry Seidler, Alex Popov, Stella de Vulder, David Bare, Ed Lippmann, Manu Siltonen and Ian Moore.

TWO of Australia's most acclaimed architects have started a breakaway group to the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA) but everyone is being very nice about it.

Glenn Murcutt, Australia's only winner of architecture's international "Oscar", the Pritzker Prize, and Harry Seidler head a committee of leading architects who have formed the Australian Architecture Association (AAA). The other members include Ed Lippmann, Ian Moore, Alex Popov, Richard Johnson, James Grose and Wendy Lewin.

The declared intention of the AAA is to raise

public awareness of contemporary architecture and good design, and to work "in parallel" with the RAIA. There will be a central media office, a think tank, international speakers and architectural tours.

The implicit proposition is that the RAIA has not done enough to elevate architectural and urban design issues among the public and media.

RAIA's national and state public relations officers, Stella de Vulder and Annette Dearing, have departed the institute' august offices at Tusculum in Potts Point to administer the new body.

The AAA's website is also uncomfortably close to

that of the RAIA – www.architecture.org.au instead of www.architecture.com.au

The NSW president of the RAIA, Caroline Pidcock, says the institute is more than happy to see "another layer of debate" on design issues but hastens to point out that the institute is active in bringing out international speakers and promoting architecture to the general community.

Will there be any duplication of functions by the two bodies? "We aim to have that not happen but it is not possible to say it will never happen," Pidcock says.

The AAA is modelled on overseas bodies such as the Architecture Foundation in the UK, the Canadian Centre for Architecture and the Chicago Architecture Foundation which, de Vulder says, runs 65,000 tours a year.

De Vulder also talks of "another layer of debate" and says the AAA is about the community "feeling, touching and touring" as a way to develop their interest in architecture in the same way they would with art, music and literature.

Murcutt, the AAA's founding president, denies the group is "splitting" from the RAIA but does say it will cover some of the same ground, such as the issue of "untrained" council planners making decisions on aesthetics. "The more groups that tackle the Government, the more powerful it becomes," he says. "We are not replacing the Institute but we will be lighter on our feet." Murcutt hopes to get two international speakers a year to visit Australia and is already talking to such "names" as Frank Gehry, Renzo Piano and Peter Zumthor. There are also plans for an education program in schools.