

Award-winning Taronga Institute blends education and serious research

The Taronga Institute of Science and Learning is the first of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere, bringing together world class conservation science, immersive learning spaces, multi-stage education, design excellence, and a 6 Star Green Star energy rating.

Working with Taronga Zoo throughout the master planning process, NBRS Architecture developed a concept that achieves the vision of a place of global recognition that is also a purpose-built research and education centre.

For the Sydney-based practice, the project was a once in a generation opportunity. “Taronga was a key job for the practice in terms of the values of our organisation. It was a really big parcel of good ideas,” Director James Ward said.

This was endorsed in May this year when the project won the New Construction / New Individual Facility Over \$A8 million in the LEA Awards and an RAIA Award for Education.

At the outset, Cameron Kerr, CEO of the Taronga Conservation Society, explained Taronga as a ‘Generation 3’ zoo ... where a Generation 1 zoo presents ‘exhibits in boxes’, Generation 2 displays the animals in enclosures that resembled a natural environment; and Generation 3 is an immersive environment where visitors can understand the importance of protecting the environment and conserving the animals’ in their habitat.

Ewan Saunders Associate Education



Studio and Andrew Duffin Director of Design managed the project for NBRS Architecture.

“There was lots of research ... working with zoo staff, animal keepers and the scientists with their deep knowledge about animal behaviour and their science work and what they wanted out of the building,” Saunders said.

“The scientists were dispersed in buildings across the zoo and a bit isolated from each other and the educators, so one of the main objectives was to gather everything and everyone together.

“There are a lot of benefits in doing that because the education staff can learn from the scientists and then pass that knowledge on to the next generation of conservationists.

“We studied zoos in Australia and overseas, particularly the Singapore Zoo, which has great immersive facilities.”

The outcome of five years of research, design and construction is a centre for science and learning that is second to none. It is sited at the entrance to the zoo, with spectacular views through the tree canopy from the upper level across the water to the Opera House and the Harbour Bridge, and into a bush setting on the lower level.

There’s a central auditorium space and three habitat classrooms – Desert, Rainforest and Woodlands – that combine cutting edge technology and animal exhibits, to give student groups of up to 30 a unique opportunity to interact with wildlife. In each room, the animals move freely around the space and are conditioned to display natural behaviours, with back of house holding areas to allow the animals to have time out from the general enclosures.

Three seminar rooms for groups of up to 30 senior students are close to the glass-fronted laboratories. On the lower level, there’s a research lecture theatre and a science teaching laboratory adjacent to the research and cryo storage facility. Here, Barrier Reef corals are stored for reef repopulation, should that become necessary at some future point.

NBRS Architecture

NBRS is currently engaged on a number of large education projects, including the new 1500-student Armidale Secondary College.

The practice has recently completed a Junior School at PLC Sydney which incorporates immersive outdoor learning with a vertebrate pond and butterfly enclosure, a state of the art performing arts centre at Knox Grammar School and a modular school for Cairnsfoot Special Needs School in Brighton Le Sands.

In 2019, the NBRS multi-disciplinary design practice, is able to work as one 360° Integrated Education Studio, with

expertise in Education, Heritage, Interior Design, Justice, Landscape Architecture, Life and Culture and Wellness.

The Studio works for both public and private clients across all stages of learning and is NBRS’ largest group. Its approach is underpinned by a commitment to research and innovation which ensures that designs remain at the forefront of education thinking.

The team understand that 21st Century educational facilities should not only encourage learning, but should provide numerous possibilities for flexible learning, conducive to various teaching methods.