



# ARCHITECTUREAU AWARD FOR SOCIAL IMPACT

Good design  
doing good

## MEDIA RELEASE

### ArchitectureAU Award for Social Impact 2024 revealed

The results of the 2024 ArchitectureAU Award for Social Impact have been revealed. This program continues to reward practice that preferences empathy over aesthetics, extending the spatial possibilities of architecture to advance the discipline and to empower its users. From a shortlist of 32 projects, the jury awarded one winner, with five projects receiving commendations.

The jury was unanimous in its decision to name **Wangaratta District Specialist School** by **Sibling Architecture** the winner of the 2024 award. Catering to students who have clinically diagnosed physical and intellectual disabilities, Wangaratta District Specialist School recalibrates the existing school typology through the lens of its users. This scalable response to a challenging brief provides a model for how design can better respond to diverse user needs, while opening up the possibility of reinventing the educational architecture typology.

The following five projects have received commendations:

**Banksia** by **Wilson Architects**;  
**Punchbowl Mosque** by **Candalepas Associates**;  
**The Alba** by **Fender Katsalidis**;  
**Booboop Narrkwarren Nagarra-jarra-noun** by **Kerstin Thompson Architects** and **BLOXAS**; and  
**Nightingale Marrickville** by **SJB**.

“All these projects demonstrate the profoundly transformative impacts that design can have,” says jury chair and ArchitectureAU editor Linda Cheng. “Design thinking can be as varied, nuanced and individualistic as the people it serves. In the second year of the ArchitectureAU Award for Social Impact, it was encouraging to see the impact of design continuing to be defined in different ways.

“The award was launched in 2023 to promote and celebrate good design for the common good. In 2024, the jury was cognisant of the potential of good design for the *greater* good – projects that demonstrate the potential for widespread, nationally applicable impact, and the transferability of their design strategy across different built environments, beyond their immediate contexts and communities.”

Organised by Architecture Media alongside presenting partner Melbourne School of Design, this program is the only national recognition of this type of work within Australia. The 2024 winning and commended projects (detailed in the pages below) are published on [ArchitectureAU.com](https://www.architectureau.com), and the results will also be included in the July 2024 issue of *Architecture Australia* magazine.

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## WINNER

### Wangaratta District Specialist School by Sibling Architecture

Wangaratta District Specialist School caters to students who have clinically diagnosed physical and intellectual disabilities. The designer's empathy and a rigorous examination of the brief were leveraged to ensure that, through the project's joyous interior and exterior spaces, the students' neurodivergent needs are met, and their independence and enjoyment of learning are enhanced. A variety of clever design moves has created a "building as experience" – with spaces that range from active and engaged to calming and restful, with bespoke lighting and material choices to reduce sensory stimulation.

The formal planning and material articulation is bold and direct, suiting the budgetary constraints while providing a positive, scalable design response. The project provides a model for engagement with a diverse user cohort and expert teaching staff, and an exemplar of spatial and tactile design for numerous learning (or even workplace) environments across the country.

Jury members recognised the formative and substantial impact that the learning environment plays in supporting the next generation, and were impressed by the way that the designers managed to balance delight with the demands of a complex and challenging brief. The jury was unanimous in its decision to name Wangaratta District Specialist School the winner of the 2024 ArchitectureAU Award for Social Impact.



Photography by Derek Swalwell.

## COMMENDATIONS

### Banksia by Wilson Architects



Photography by Douglas Black.

The jury was impressed by the quality of design in this project, which supports First Nations students of St Catherine's College at the University of Western Australia. The living and learning facility creates a welcoming, safe and empowering space for the students of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support program Dandjoo Darbalung, who represent more than twenty First Nations.

The jury particularly noted the proponents' efforts to integrate the facility into the broader college and the natural environment. Supporting cross-cultural exchange, which has proven to be very impactful for students, the project also demonstrates the integral role a supportive built environment can play in the educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. It is an exemplar of diverse and inclusive residential colleges in university settings.

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## COMMENDATIONS

### Punchbowl Mosque by Candalepas Associates

Punchbowl Mosque is a profound demonstration that works of architecture can, and indeed should, foster positive social and cultural relationships and contribute to the ethical formation of a liberal society. The result of a spirited collaboration between the Australian Islamic Mission community and the architectural team at Candalepas Associates, the project offers a radically contemporary and contextual interpretation of traditional building type and its constituent elements – a minaret, a domed interior and a courtyard – within its suburban setting.

Completed in 2017, the project has received critical acclaim for its architectural vigour, tectonic ambition and local sensitivity. It has since served as a dignified cultural, religious and educational centre for the local Muslim population. In the context of this award, the jury further appreciated the project's outreach to wider Western Sydney; it offers a common meeting ground and a place for cross-cultural dialogue and exchange.

In Australia, mosques are rarely designed by architects, with rituals of Islamic life and prayer typically supported within existing buildings, hidden and anonymous. Despite the multicultural composition of Australian cities, the expression of this heterogeneity remains understated. Punchbowl Mosque, commissioned and funded through grassroots campaigns, conveys the significance of built work to cultural belonging. More than a singular display of culture and identity, the project is a powerful expression of trust in the potential of architecture and its social agency.



Photography by Rory Gardiner.

### The Alba by Fender Katsalidis



Photography by Willem Dirk du Toit.

The Alba transforms a 1970s office in South Melbourne into a residential facility, operated by Australian Unity, that provides a range of aged-care suites and assisted-living apartments. The architect adopted Australian Unity's "Better Together" philosophy by taking a "small household" approach, utilising the existing building, and creating open and accessible common areas with adaptable living spaces.

The jury noted the connection to community through the provision of shared cafe and wellness facilities, and the significant reduction in new building materials and embodied carbon. Overall, The Alba demonstrates a valuable alternative use for office buildings and highlights the potential they offer for high-impact residential and support services.

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## COMMENDATIONS

### Booboop Narrkwarren Nagarra-jarra-noun by Kerstin Thompson Architects and BLOXAS

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Photography by Thurston Empsom.

Part of Austin Health, Booboop Narrkwarren Nagarra-jarra-noun (Family Healing Centre) is a mental health recovery and support facility for children who have experienced trauma. Importantly, it also supports their families in a care model that reflects the recommendations of the 2021 Royal Commission into Victoria's mental health system.

The jury commends the design's sensitivity, elegance and fine resolution, which has resulted in a calming, de-institutionalised, home-like environment of independent living units and consulting spaces, encircled by a safe, private, landscaped garden.

This groundbreaking project, developed in close consultation and co-design with clinicians, occupational therapists and youth advisors, is the first of its kind in Australia. Booboop

demonstrates an innovative and transformative approach to the ongoing support and care of affected children and their families. The jury agreed that the approach and its manifestation in this sophisticated design could be a widely adopted template for a profound shift to a more positive model of care.

### Nightingale Marrickville by SJB

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The jury found Nightingale Marrickville to be an architecturally wonderful and appealing project. A collaboration between Fresh Hope Communities and Nightingale Housing, it offers affordable rental accommodation in a highly accessible area of inner-suburban Sydney. It fosters a cohesive community by offering long-term housing security, particularly for priority groups such as key workers, First Nations residents, people living with disabilities, and women over 55.

Exemplifying the kind of development we need more of in Australia, Nightingale Marrickville provides a solution to complex urban problems. The jury also noted the enormous impact of Nightingale Housing as a design-led alternative model of housing delivery.



Photography by Tom Roe.

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