

MAPPING ENVIRONMENTAL ENGAGEMENT AND PRACTICE IN AUSTRALIAN LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE: A REVIEW OF THE NATIONAL AWARDS PROGRAM

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1 ABSTRACT

The Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA), founded in 1966, was borne out of environmental concerns, particularly the perceived widespread visual and environmental degradation of the Australian landscape. While similar concerns were being expressed in other countries, Australia was experiencing an influx of population, which triggered rapid and widespread urban expansion and the attendant fragmentation and/or outright loss of habitat throughout metropolitan areas. Simultaneously, a heightened appreciation and articulation of an Australian identity arose in the built environment professions. Previous research in Australia has traced the landscape profession's response to these issues by examining national AILA conferences. (Saniga, 2006) This paper takes another angle on reading the development and growth of the profession by analyzing the national awards program. We focus on changes in the award categories—as well as the winning projects—as the categories are manifestations of contemporary ideals and/or formative debates occurring within the profession, revealing thematic patterns of professional concerns over time.

The analysis was developed by reviewing the AILA National Awards programs from their commencement in 1986, through to the 2012 awards, focusing on categories related to “environment” and/or “infrastructure.” When considered in the context of key environmental projects in Australia, this analysis illuminates the degree to which the national awards program has served the promotion of the landscape architecture profession's standing in relation to environmental issues and values. From this desktop survey, a picture emerges of a profession whose engagement with environmental issues could be better served by the awards program of the institute.

1.1 Keywords

Australian landscape architecture, professional awards programs, environmental practice

2 INTRODUCTION

Amidst the current and diverse efforts to reposition landscape architecture in relation to mitigating the effects of climate change, and the imperatives of working toward sustainability and urban resilience, it is instructive to give thought to how, where and to whom the profession of landscape architecture develops and advocates its professional knowledge, expertise and capacity. Because the professional journals, conferences, and awards programs are important vehicles for communicating and advancing knowledge within and beyond the profession, each provides a useful lens for examining the values and priorities of the profession. For example, recent critical reviews of the mission and content of both *Landscape Journal* and *Landscape and Urban Planning* reflect the value of journals as spaces for both assessing and recalibrating the priorities and scope of the profession (Gobster, Nassauer, Nadanecik, 2010; Gobster and Xiang, 2012).

Conferences feature issues and projects of concern to the contemporary ideals and/or formative debates for the profession. They are an important means of testing, advancing and confirming knowledge to the group, and their themes and content indicate priorities, the range of and depth of engagement in specific issues (Bull, 2010, p.26). Critical reviews of conference agendas, themes and papers are a means of tracking and revealing internal challenges for professional bodies. For example, Andrew Saniga's 2006 study of the first two national conferences (1969 and 1971) of the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) revealed that Australian landscape architects were positioned, both philosophically and in terms of employment opportunities, outside the mainstream environmental movement and advanced a 'cosmetic' environmental agenda (Saniga, 2006, p.146-147). Likewise, in her 2008 manifesto, Elizabeth K Meyer noted that the 2006 and 2007 ASLA conference themes reflected a weak alignment with the contemporary ecological concepts of resiliency and adaptability. (Meyer, 2008) Both reviews warn that the profession of landscape architecture was neither well prepared nor well positioned with regard to the environmental agenda it was espousing.

This paper presents the results of a pilot study which investigated how effectively the national awards program of the AILA has aligned with and advocated a position on environmental/ecological issues and values. We focus on changes in the award categories—and the winning projects—as indicators of contemporary ideals and/or debates occurring within the profession, revealing thematic patterns of professional concerns over time. Shifts in the institutional perspective on the value of the awards program are discussed briefly, alongside the criteria used to assess the nominated projects. To contextualise the study, a selection of the awarded projects is compared to recent studies of the canon of Australian landscape architecture. An understanding of what is meant by exemplary engagement with environment emerges alongside a picture of how the profession has collectively conceptualized and championed its capacity to engage effectively in “environment”, or “ecological design” or “design for sustainability” over the last 26 years. We conclude with thoughts on how the awards program can more rigorously advocate the strengths and success of landscape architects' engagement in environmental concerns in Australia.

3 BACKGROUND: THE PROFESSION, ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES AND AWARDS

Founded in 1966, the AILA was borne out of and into environmental concerns. Foremost at the time was a concern for what was perceived widespread visual and environmental degradation of the Australian landscape. (Saniga, 2006, p.146) While many of these same concerns were being expressed in other countries, Australia experienced a high degree of immigration from Europe and the Middle East following World War II, and rapid urban expansion with the attendant fragmentation and/or outright loss of habitat. These conditions simultaneously heightened an appreciation of an Australian aesthetic connected to the country's unique landscape qualities—from which emerged the Sydney School or the Bush School (Buchanan, 2009, p.95-115). The AILA was founded in large part to distinguish the work of landscape architects concerned with promoting this aesthetic from the work of planners, architects, landscape gardeners, and foresters (Saniga, 2012, p.176-182). Dr Catherin Bull's 2002 book, *New Conversation with an Old Landscape*, catalogued the distinctive themes of landscape projects that emerged from this particularly Australian sensitivity to the unique environmental conditions across the continent. (Bull, 2002) In recent years, new directions for professional practice have been established as the AILA has expanded its vision and policy to include stewardship, green infrastructure and the mitigation of the effects of climate change as important areas of professional engagement for Australian landscape architects.

3.1 The AILA as a Profession

Professions deliver distinctive bodies of knowledge in service to society through autonomous, self-regulating processes. In addition to the broad benefits to society at large of this applied expertise, be it health care, legal or design advice, professionalism also provides economic and social rewards to the professional body at large, and to individual professionals through income and prestige (Western *et al* 2006). Monitoring the professional body of knowledge is thus vital to sustaining and improving the benefits to society and to the profession. For landscape architecture as a profession, scholarly documentation and evaluation of projects is increasingly important, to maintain clarity about what landscape architecture is and what landscape architects do, particularly in relation to their capacity to engage in complex environmental and social issues, and especially as the profession moves towards an evidence based approach to design (Brown and Corry, 2011).

In Australia, the profession of landscape architecture is approaching its 50th year, and now counts over 1,000 registered members (and many more unregistered), six accredited educational programs, and a significant body of built work. Landscape architecture in Australia is an entirely self-regulated profession. The AILA manages the processes of registering members and accrediting educational programs, and oversees a mandatory continuing professional development program. The AILA writes its own codes of practice and policies, and documents the work of the profession through the publication of a journal, *Landscape Architecture Australia*, biannual national conferences and a biannual national awards program.

To date, there has been very little scholarly research or reflection on the development of the profession in Australia, its canon or its significance. Important contributions have emerged over the last decade: Catherin Bull's previously cited book, *New Conversations with an Old Landscape* was published in the same year that Philip Goad published a similarly titled essay called "New Land, New Language: Shifting Grounds in Australian attitudes to landscape, architecture, and modernism (Goad, 2002)." In 2010 Richard Aitken, a garden historian, published *Garden of Ideas*, a well researched account of the key influences that have lead to Australia's broad range of distinctive gardening styles. In 2012, Andrew Saniga released his book *Making Landscape Architecture in Australia*, which charts the history of Australian landscape architecture from the late 19th c through to early 21st c.

For its part, by way of raising the profile of the profession and its body of work, the AILA established a List of Significant Sites in 2006. However, the process of nominating and assessing projects for this register lacks objectivity and rigour; for example, criteria include a minimum age of 5 years, with no explanation of the significance of this benchmark, and projects must be "considered outstanding" but there is no indication of how or by whom this quality could be legitimately evaluated (AILA, 2006).

3.2 Awards and Method

Professional organisations and societies use awards to recognize outstanding achievements, as well as to advance values and issues deemed significant at a given time. Thus a review of an awards program, particularly the categories and criteria of assessment, can shed light on the how the profession constructs both its identity and its role in society. In addition, because they classify, catalogue, rank and publicly evaluate significant achievements, awards programs can contribute to the development of the canon of the profession.

There is limited scholarly work on the role and effectiveness of awards programs. In 1986 Clare Cooper Marcus and Julie Vischler's paper, "Evaluating the Evaluation", revealed that "good" design is a function of the value and perspective of the evaluator, and that no single perspective was the best predictor of excellent design. The research underscored the importance of including the experience of the end-users (residents, in this case) into the assessment process. A second study, in 1996, compared the evaluative frameworks of six different housing awards programs in England, and revealed the biases inherent in the process (Biddulph, 2006). A recent study of industrial design awards program in Australia found that adding a new category—in this case, to recognise sustainable design—does not necessarily result in either innovation or an increase in sustainable material and/or product (Clune and Ramirez, 2010).

Clearly then, there are limitations to a critical review of an awards program. Any awards program reflects what is submitted, which in turn depends on the resources (time, human, financial) of those making submissions. The evidence provided is limited to authors of projects, and thus can be very subjective. As highlighted in Vischler and Cooper Marcus' research, the interpretation and assessment of

the designs will vary with the composition of the jury. A group of designers reviewing the work of designers will not arrive at the same conclusions as a jury of users or residents reviewing the work of designers. In addition, the judging process typically does not include site visits, and instead relies on material submitted and incidental knowledge of jury members, so there is no direct experience as part of the assessment.

To explore our question of how awards serve to advance the core values and expertise of the profession, we conducted a longitudinal review in three parts:

1. We first examined the overall program of Australian national awards over its 26-year history to extract any significant changes in the nature of the program itself.

2. We then charted the categories of awards in order to discern any shifts in the nature of work and the profession's own definition of landscape architecture and environmentally oriented work.

3. Finally, we reviewed the projects recognized as exemplary, focusing on the highest award for each year and, where possible, those projects which received an award for engagement with environmental issues.

This approach has its own inherent constraints: it does not account for changes in juries from year-to-year, nor does it account for the changes in criteria in any detail. Both of these factors can contribute to a lack of consistency in the evaluation process over time. In addition, as Clune and Ramirez suggest, new categories do not correlate with changes in design outcomes. (Clune and Ramirez, 2010) Furthermore, our data does not determine the degree to which changes in categories reflect client preferences rather than changing professional values.

4 The Australian National Awards Program

4.1 Overview

The National Awards Program was instituted in 1986, 20 years after the establishment of the AILA. The statement setting out the purpose of AILA's national project awards in landscape architecture reflects a profession in the early phases of maturity:

in the twenty years since the profession was established ...it has not sought wide recognition. ...clarify in the public mind what landscape architects do, and what is a good landscape. ... help to establish design, planning and reporting standards... provide an opportunity to critically examine this work in one place and to appraise the direction of landscape architecture in Australia. (Neale, 1986)

According to Ralph Neale, who was also the editor of *Landscape Australia*, the awards were a means of establishing professional identity and improving the quality of work—the same issue, as mentioned above, that catalyzed the formation of the Institute in the 1960s (Saniga, 2012).

Across the 26 years of the awards program, statements by both juries and the AILA National Council concerning the overall purpose of the awards have consistently emphasized the value of the awards program to the development of the profession. Between 1986 and 2008, the juries' comments on the awards program display five themes; namely, that the program

- helps to establish standards, encourage good practice; provide an opportunity to evaluate and critically review peers;
- provides an opportunity to assess direction of practice, and to encourage open, critical assessment;
- recognises engagement in key issues;
- recognizes and rewards innovation;
- promotes skills and achievements to wider audience; applauds excellence in advancement and expansion of role and value of profession; clarifies what landscape architecture is (Beza, 2004; Bull, 1999, 2002; Conrad, 1995; Hart, 2006; Hayter, 1997; Hobbs, 2008; Neale, 1986; Oelrichs, 1988; Pilton, 1990; 1992).

The concern here is primarily with landscape architecture as a profession, rather than with the distinctive values and/or areas of expertise of landscape architects. There are also few references to specific aspects of, or the importance of, landscape architecture to society at large, particularly in the early years of the program. One exception occurred in 2004, when the chair of the jury Beau Beza wrote:

Responsible environmental design and management is central to the relevance of landscape architecture. It is vital that we applaud those practitioners (and clients) who have demonstrated excellence, who have taken both creative and technical leaps in this aspect of their work and, in so doing, have advanced and expanded the role and value of our profession. This is especially important in Australia – the driest and oldest continent on our planet – where good stewardship of our landscape is paramount (Beza, 2004).

Beza indicates an ongoing concern that the awards are a means of establishing identity and purpose, but he also signals two important shifts. One was clarity regarding the nature of the profession and its engagement with environmental matters, and the other was his reference to the custodial obligation of landscape architecture. While not a direct result or outcome of Beza's comments, stewardship as an important area of professional practice now has a presence in both AILA policy as well as the awards program. For example, the AILA issued a new mission statement in 2010: 'to advance the profession ... in the service of the public interest and to provide leadership in the creation and stewardship of sustainable cities and settlements (AILA, nd, b).' The story behind the emergence of stewardship as an important dimension of landscape practice in Australia warrants further study.

The current statement of the purpose of the awards reflects a profession less concerned with establishing its relevance and stature. Instead, the awards program now has a broader emphasis on excellence and advocacy:

The AILA's Landscape Architecture Project Awards provide a tangible and high profile expression of the profession's activities and promote and advance the profession of Landscape Architecture by:

- encouraging excellence by members of the landscape architecture profession.
- fostering public awareness and recognition of the work of Australian landscape architects.
- creating local, regional, national and global advocacy for Australian landscape architecture (AILA, 2012).

4.2 Awards Process and Criteria

The National Awards are biannual, while the State Awards are annual. To qualify for a National award, a project must have been submitted to a state program, but need not have won an award at that level. In addition, sites are not visited by the jury, due to cost and time constraints, and thus the onus is on the authors of projects to clearly document and communicate the value of their work.

The four criteria by which projects are assessed currently is deceptively simple: demonstration of excellence; response to the brief; evidence of influence; adherence to the Australian Landscape Principles. (AILA, 2012) How, for example, does a designer demonstrate influence of a project, when it is defined as 'fostering broad support and understanding of landscape architecture (AILA, 2012)?'

The AILA endorsed "The Australian Landscape Principles" in 2009, a public statement—even a manifesto--of a commitment to "strategically direct landscape interventions both in our existing and future built environments towards more sustainable, holistic outcomes (AILA, nd, a)." Subsequently, since the 2010 national awards program, submissions are required to provide evidence of how the nominated project aligns with the principles and achieves and/or exceeds environmental sustainability (AILA, 2012). There are five principles which constitute in effect a sub-set of the awards criteria, as follows:

- Value our landscape
- Protect > Enhance > Regenerate
- Design With Respect
- Design For The Future
- Embrace Responsive Design

The principles are also qualitative in nature, and given that the designers prepare their own statements, there is a high degree of variability in how the principles are interpreted and how extensively the principles are addressed across the submissions.

4.3 Categories of Awards

Since 1986, there have been 13 National Award events. During this time, the awards have been distributed across three main categories: Design, Planning, and Research and Communications, and an award for "overall excellence" has been given every year (except in 2008 when two awards were made).

Beyond this overall main framework, the categories and subcategories of awards have changed frequently. There have been a few short-lived, or 'evaporative' categories:

- Special Awards or Initiatives were recognized from 1986-1994;
- Institutional complexes, in 1986 and 1988;
- Government projects, from 1988-1994

Other categories have also been ephemeral: Landscape Art was featured from 1998-2002, and Infrastructure was acknowledged in 1986, 1992, 1994, 1998, and 2002. These changing categories reflect special initiatives and trends in the types of projects undertaken—landscape art for example flourished in Australia in the lead up to the 2000 Olympics.

Two new awards were introduced over the last 5 years: a Landscape Management Award was introduced in 2008, followed by an Urban Design Award in 2010. The AILA defines Landscape Managers as those who 'use their knowledge of the natural environment and human impact to advise on the long-term care and development of the landscape(AILA, nd, b).' This new category expanded the Australian awards programs to a planning and stewardship perspective, and its proponents clearly intended that it would both improve the impact of practice and loosen the traditional disciplinary boundaries of the profession. For example, on the value of this expansion, the AILA Council President wrote:

If this idea transpires it will allow AILA to recognise and publicise works undertaken outside the traditional realm of landscape architects – that can have a massive positive impact on the function of cities and natural ecologies - think major public transport initiatives, major water management projects, and implemented urban planning changes. The positives for AILA will be an increased profile, and further opportunity to influence decision-making (AILA, 2008).

However, as discussed below, it is not at all clear whether this award represents an accurate reflection of the specific expertise of Australian landscape architects or is simply a case of driving expansion of the profession by claiming new disciplinary ground.

With regard to how well the categories reflect engagement with environment, if at all, it is notable that a stand-alone category for 'environment' was established in 1994, the fifth year of the awards program. The environment category was described as "planning or design that is responsive to environmental and ecological parameters (AILA, 1994, p.2)." Since 1994, two award programs had no distinct environmental category, and in another two, where there was a specific category, no Award of Excellence was made. (See Table 1) So, since 1994, this category has been on one hand "ephemeral," that is, disappearing and re-appearing. On the other hand, it has been highly variable—it has had four different labels, each with slight variations in meaning. Two other categories--rehabilitation and infrastructure and rehabilitation and conservation--had an ecological design emphasis, but flickered on and off the awards program between 1998 and 2002. Clearly then, another issue that arises from this review of categories concerns the stability and meaning of "environment," as a distinct category of professional achievement in Australian landscape architecture.

4.4 The Awarded Projects

In 1994, the first year the awards featured a distinct Environment category, both the Award of Excellence and the Environment Award went to Seven Spirit Wilderness, a remote and exclusive eco-tourist facility in the Northern Territory. (See Table 1) Two merit awards were given; one to another resort project, Laguna Quays resort in Queensland, and the other to a proposal for storm water management.

In 1996, there was no environmental category, and no award, but in 1998, in a revised structure of categories, 'Planning' was broken out into three areas: Master Planning, Environment and Conservation. The main award for 'Planning: Environment' went to "Restoring the Waters", a Sydney project which the jury praised for its use of community participation to catalyse a poetic and innovative landscape ecological reconstruction (AILA, nd, c). Merit awards went to another two plans addressing the integration of drainage systems into public open space, Mitchell Creek Parkland in Queensland and the Torrens Catchment Comprehensive Plan, in Adelaide.

TABLE 1. Environmental categories and awards in the AILA National Awards Program

DATE	CATEGORY	PROJECT	DESIGNERS
1986	Research and Studies	Torrens River Study Adelaide SA	Land Systems
1992	Excellence	Salt Pan Creek Corridor, Sydney NSW	Environmental Systems
	Infrastructure	River Torrens Linear Park Adelaide SA	Land Systems EBC
1994	Award of Excellence and Environment	Seven Spirit Wilderness NT	Ecosystems
1996	Citation for environment, Design Merit	Jawbone Flora and Fauna Reserve, Williamstown VIC	Hassell and CMPS & F
1998	Design: Rehabilitation & Infrastructure	Centennial Park Pond Interpretation Trail NSW Wetland and Effluent Re-use Project NSW	Context Pty Ltd and CPMPT Pittendrigh Shinkfield and Bruce
	Project Award		
	Project Merit Award		
	Planning: Environmental Planning	Restoring the Waters, NSW ; Mitchell Creek Parkland Torrens Catchment Water Management Plan, SA	Barnsley and Schaeffer; Ecosystems Hassell
	Project Award		
	Project Merit Awards		
2000	Design Rehabilitation & Conservation	Hill Road Corridor Wetlands and Landform, Homebush Bay	HASSELL, Peter Walker & Partners, Bruce Mackenzie
	Project Award		
2002	Design Rehabilitation & Conservation	Green & Gold Bell Frog Habitat, Homebush Bay, NSW Bass Highway Westbury By-pass, Tasmania	Pittendrigh Shinkfield and Bruce. Barwick and Associates
	Project Award		
	Merit Award		
	Planning: Environmental Planning	Willoughby Natural Heritage Register, NSW Transgrid EIS Sydney, NSW	Landarc Pty Ltd EDAAW
	PROJECT		
	Merit Award		
2004	Excellence in Environment	None	
	Merit Awards	Eco 1+2;Eastoom City, Hanghou, China;	mcgregor+partners; Kiah,Infranet
	Commendation Awards	The 12 Apostles Visitor's Centre VIC; Victoria Park, NSW Ecovillage – Currumbin; Calder Freeway VIC	Tract Consultants; Hassell ; John Mongard;Vicroads – Landscape Section
2006	Environment		Brisbane City Council
	Merit Awards	Rocks Riverside Park, QLD	Hassell Pty Ltd
	Commendation Awards	Afton Street Conservation Park Master Plan, Victoria Booyeembara Park, Fremantle WA Melaleuca Wetlands, Ferntree Gully, Victoria	Ecoscape GbLA Landscape Architects
2008	National Landscape Award of Excellence & Landscape Management	Kubru River Hippopotamus Exhibit VIC	Urban Initiatives Pty Ltd
2010	Landscape Management: Excellence	Rouse Hill Landscape Restoration, NSW	AECOM
	Landscape Management: Award	Nungatta Station Land Management Program, NSW Lollipop Creek, Victoria	Material Landscape Architecture Fitzgerald Frisby Landscape Architecture
2012	Landscape Management		

In 2000, following another revision of categories, the Planning: Environment category was removed. In the most closely aligned category, 'Design: Rehabilitation and Conservation,' the main award went to Hill Road Corridor by Hassell with Peter Walker and Bruce Mackenzie. Hill Road is part of Millenium Parkland, the park that extended the work done for the Sydney Olympics, and is now part of Sydney Olympic Park. Like winning projects in earlier years, Hill Road Corridor focused on water as well as landform, vegetation and circulation. The jury described it as a "successful rehabilitation project in extremely difficult conditions. Sophisticated hydrological design achieved through complex earthworks executed as strident abstract forms. Successfully connects with other major landscape elements in the surrounding park (AILA, nd, d)." It is also worth noting that this was one of seven awards for Hassell (one of Australia's largest multidisciplinary design firms) that year, out of 18 awarded overall.

In 2002, tripartite Planning awards were reintroduced, along with lists of relevant project types. The Planning: Environment category targeted environmental impact statements, visual assessments, environmentally sustainable development, natural resource and landscape analysis, and management plans. Two awards were given in this category, one project award and one merit award; the first was a register of areas and items of natural significance in a local municipality, and the second was for an environmental impact statement done for a large utility company. In the Rehabilitation and Conservation category, a subset of the Design category, two awards were given for built habitat restoration projects, one for the Brick Pit at Sydney Olympic Park (AILA, nd, e).

In 2004 and 2006, Environment was re-established as a stand-alone category. Although six awards were given in this category in 2004 and four in 2006, there was no Award for Excellence in either year—all awards were merits and commendations. The 2004 jury explained that not enough information was submitted to document excellence, and cited in particular the need to clarify the criteria for this category. The jury offered that submissions "should reflect the 'whole of life' aspects ...include statements in regard to the ecological rigour adopted ... during construction and the long term management regime (AILA, nd, f)." The attention to the temporal in this statement foreshadowed the emphasis on stewardship as a benchmark for professional practice in landscape architecture which emerged in 2007.

The merit and commendation awards in the Environment category in 2004 and 2006 recognized a range of project types: a visitors' centre, courtyards for an urban infill multi-family residential complex, an ecovillage, and rehabilitation projects resulting in parklands. All dealt with issues common to professional practice—runoff, pedestrian circulation, remediated soils, etc., but as the jury noted in 2004, the submissions presented little in the way of detailed ecological issues and long term outcomes.

Since 2008, there have been five awards made in the Landscape Management category. Only one of these, the Nungatta Station Landscape Management Program, represented an expanded scope of the discipline in that it was in a rural location, approximately 5,000ha, and a long term implementation program. Further, it was a pioneering effort as it promoted the concept of expanding the commercial agricultural focus of the property to encompass biodiversity outcomes. The degree to which it represents landscape architectural expertise remains undocumented. The other projects—a hippo exhibit at a zoo, a planned residential estate which integrated development with the rehabilitation of vegetation communities, and two ecological regeneration projects— are all more familiar project types for landscape architects.

5 DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

What do landscape architects do to ensure positive environmental outcomes, and how does the Australian national awards program promote this? The frequent changes in award categories make them an unreliable register of environmental engagement. At this point in this research, the reasons for many of the changes lack clarity. Do they reflect changing emphasis in practice, and/or are they the result of reflections and recommendations by juries? At the same time, the awarded projects reviewed represent an impressive body of work and cumulative body of knowledge. In scrutinising the work, serious engagement with environmental issues and values is evident in many categories, not limited to those with environment in their heading. These categories include restoration, rehabilitation and conservation, and more recently, landscape management. For example, rehabilitation and conservation is where we find an award in 2000 for work on the Hill Road Corridor Wetlands and Landforms at Homebush Bay, in preparation of the 2000 Olympic site. In addition, when considering the entire body of work represented in the AILA National Awards program, projects dealing with wetlands and river corridors emerge as a particular focus. For example, in 1992, Carrum Carrum Wetlands, Melbourne, was recognised in the 'evaporative' Special Initiative category. Also in 1992, work to open the Salt Pan Creek Corridor in

Sydney to recreational pursuits received the overall Award of Excellence, as well as a parks/recreation award. The 1998 award for work on the Torrens River Corridor and Catchment was the third award to this project, making it the most awarded of all projects in the history of the awards to date. (In 1986, it won a Research and Communication award for the original study of the Torrens River; in 1992, an award in the Infrastructure category for the River Torrens Linear Park.)

At the same time, many seminal projects are missing—projects that have been identified by other disciplines, and in other awards programs, for example, as exemplars of “best practice,” upholding sound environmental values and practicing green infrastructure principles. Some are internationally recognized (Beatley, 2009) ‘green’ urbanism projects, such as Christie Walk, Adelaide, and Newington Village, Homebush (Beatley, 2009). There are also projects that have been recognised by scholars as “significant,” those that anticipated the concept of “ecological design,” such as the National Gallery Sculpture Garden, the Sails Resort and the Visitors Centre at Uluru in Central Australia (Bull, 2002). While it is important to remember that awards are only given to projects that have been submitted by practices, it is equally important to note that there may, in fact, be many other worthy projects that represent “best practice.”

To assess the legacy of celebrated projects, it is important to revisit them and examine how they continue to or have been extended to display a sustainable and, hopefully, regenerative approach to urban landscape design. With the increasing demand for evidence-based planning approaches, landscape architects’ work needs to be assessed more rigorously within the awards program. The work needs to be thoroughly documented, discussed and benchmarked against emerging international standards of “best” practice, not just “good” practice. In Australia, we have limited examples of this sort of ongoing rigorous assessment of projects—and not surprisingly the focus has been on the Torrens River Linear Park project, one of a very few projects to have been written about in the scholarly, international literature (Dexter, 1996; Bull, 2002; Mugavin, 2004). The River Park, along with the entire Torrens Catchment Water Management project warrants a re-assessment of all the work implemented since the 1980s onward, as this would highlight its achievements as green infrastructure. We note that a broader approach to acknowledging outstanding work is now underway in Australia with the AILA trialling the Sustainable Sites Initiative assessment tool on select projects, but it is not yet clear how this may align with projects nominated for excellence through the awards program.

Awards programs, like environmental processes, are dynamic and ever-changing. The Australian awards program has been in place now for a generation, and during this time there have been a number of significant moments for built environment professionals, such as the Australian Bicentennial Celebrations and the Sydney Olympics. Today, with the urgency of mitigating the effects of climate change and the opportunities of green infrastructure and ecological urbanism, the traditional expertise of landscape architects is more challenged than ever to the planning, design and management of our cities and towns. It is thus critical that AILA ensure that the awards programs present robust and consistent assessments of achievements, as well as clear and effective communications of the nature of the discipline, not only to its members but also to other built environment professions and the general public.

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