



Australian Institute of Architects – SA Chapter

Sir James Irwin Presidents Medal 2006

Geof Nairn

“Architecture has a responsibility to inspire, comfort and assist its users”

(Geof Nairn, in *building + architecture*, March/April 1988)

The Sir James Irwin RAIA President’s Medal was established in 1992 through the generosity of the Irwin family in memory of Sir James Irwin and recognition of his services to architecture. I would like to acknowledge the support for this award of his son, the late Jamie Irwin MLC. This year’s President’s Medallist is Geof Nairn who, throughout a long and distinguished career, has consistently promoted and produced good architecture.

Commissioning a young architect who is also your son to design your house may be seen as a parental indulgence or an act of faith. The Rose Seidler house has become part of the Seidler legend. Geof Nairn’s Walkerville house for his parents, designed in 1964 while still a graduate, won an SA Award of Merit, the first of many awards in a career spanning forty years. The Nairn house was architecture of its time and is timeless; a contemporary intervention in an historic suburb where it sits comfortably today in its streetscape.

Nairn’s architectural projects have consistently been creative and varied. Each is a unique response to site and brief, always contextual and often inspirational.

Geof Nairn graduated from the University of Adelaide in 1964, and after a brief time working in local practices, went overseas to gain wider experience. He worked for several years in Toronto and Montreal, gaining valuable architectural experience in a range of civic, commercial, educational and redevelopment projects, supplemented by extensive travel.

Soon after returning to Adelaide with his Canadian wife, Daphne, Nairn established his practice in 1976. During the next 25 years, Geof Nairn Architects developed a reputation for producing consistently good architecture, particularly in the design of innovative educational facilities. This led to a number of architectural awards including Nairn’s own office in North Adelaide, new buildings for St Ignatius, St Peter’s and Christian Brothers Colleges, the Centennial Park Chapel Complex and bus shelters for the City of Adelaide. Since 2001, Nairn has been a Director of Designinc, a national practice.

A member of the RAlA since 1964, Geof Nairn was elevated to Fellow in 1976 and was awarded Life Fellowship in 2002. He has made a valuable contribution to the RAlA SA Chapter as a former Councillor and Chair of the Environmental Committee and through his informed opinions on placemaking and urbanity.

Nairn has a strong environmental and social ethic that has had a continuing influence on his architecture. Form, function, materiality and detail are well considered and synthesised into an architectural composition with a strong 'sense of place' In many ways he has been ahead of his time, pushing the boundaries in new technologies and sustainable design.

Geof Nairn has always supported the links between architectural practice and architectural education, teaching at various times in both schools of architecture.

Throughout his career, he has been a passionate advocate for architecture and urban design, particularly during his term as an elected member of the Adelaide City Council. Geof Nairn can be challenging, radical, uncompromising; he is always articulate and has the courage of his convictions.

Geof Nairn's well-mannered and controlled approach to architecture has created exceptional buildings. For me the Centennial Park Chapel Complex is the most outstanding as it has a spiritual quality that both elevates and comforts the bereaved.

It is appropriate to conclude with two quotes. The first from Albert Gillisen (*building+architecture*, November 1986), long time lecturer at the University of Adelaide, 'Geof Nairn is a knowledgeable and intuitively poetic architect.' The second is from Paul Downton, when reviewing Geof Nairn's practice nearly twenty years ago (*building + architecture*, March/April 1988). 'History will record that the activities of Geof Nairn Architects had a vital impact on the growth of architectural expression in South Australia.'

I have much pleasure in awarding the 2006 Sir James Irwin RAlA President's Medal for Exemplary Service to, and Promotion of, the Profession of Architecture to Geof Nairn, LFRAIA.

Carolyn Wigg