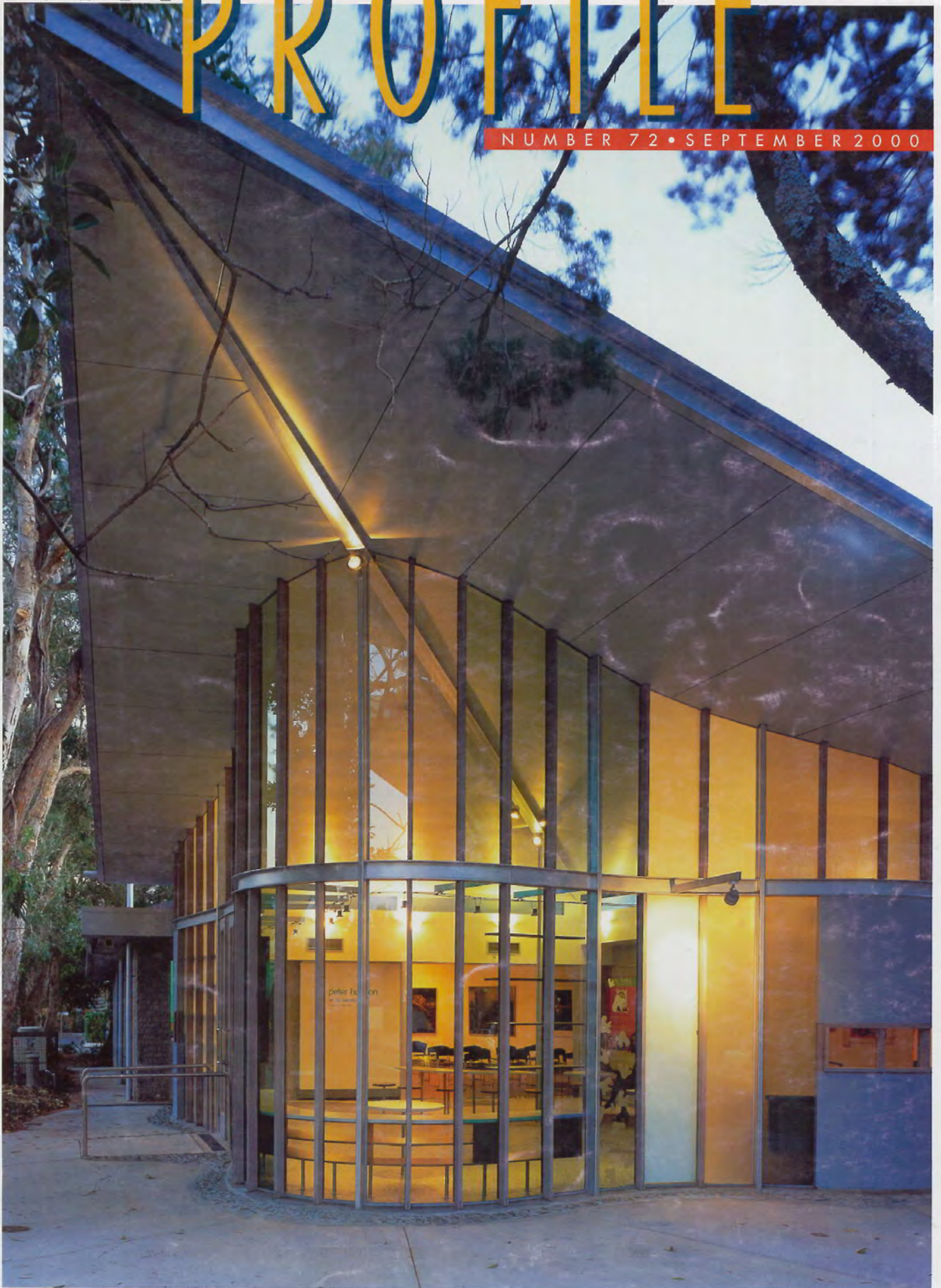


S T E E L

# PROFILE

NUMBER 72 • SEPTEMBER 2000



# STEEL PROFILE

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# ART



Front cover : The sinuous glazed  
entrance and signature roof  
form of Caloundra's new art gallery.

# PRIZE

Art and architecture make a luminous connection at the Caloundra Art Gallery on the Sunshine Coast.

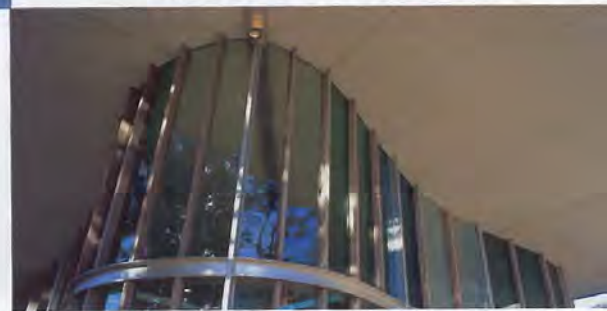


**D**esigned by Lindy Atken and Stephen Guthrie of Bark Design, the gallery is conceived as a sinuous volume with soft, fluid contours. No crazy geometry or skewed lines to suggest artistic insight.

Sitting within the twisted forms and papery skin of several mature Melaleuca trees, the gallery focuses all attention to a new curving, free-form, steel and timber, glazed enclosure. This maintains a sensitive relationship to the landscape through varying degrees of transparency, translucency, shadow, reflection, colour and contrast. At the same time it embraces an iconic quality in its form.

The undulating edge of the glazed skin provides enclosure to a tall entry and transition space that allows visitors to gather in, and move through. The open reception, shop and cafe open into the gallery proper, while presenting the public art gallery as accessible shopfront.

As a sculptural piece, the shopfront's flowing edge to the landscape provides a fluid relationship between inside and out. The



Alvar Aalto's 1937 'Savoy' vase is a timeless inspiration. This organic piece of glass, inspired by the scalloped, silver rimmed shores of the Scandinavian lakes, is virtually miniaturised architecture that continues to stimulate.

Take the Caloundra Art Gallery, 140 kms north of Brisbane. Aalto is embedded in the psyche of many architects and aspects of his work continually surface around the world. On Queensland's Sunshine Coast, it animates and inspires a small community art space.

articulated membrane of glass transforms from a kaleidoscope that enhances the changing light throughout the day to a lantern within the trees at night.

The roof dynamically rises from the existing building towards the north-east, hovering high within the branches of the Melaleucas, imparting their scale to the space below in a gesture of greeting and arrival.

The informal coastal character of Caloundra is expressed through a lightweight material palette of steel, translucent, coloured and clear glass, spotted gum timber studs, plywood, blue quartz-seeded polished concrete, Queensland walnut veneer and white corian.

A modest 1970s building, formerly used as the council library, was chosen to become the new public art gallery for Caloundra City Council. Located within the green civic precinct, it is an additive and adaptive re-use project with a broad intent to create a memorable place and catalyst for visual art appreciation in the region.

The L-shaped plan of the existing building has been reduced to its essential shell and opened to the north east quadrant of the site to address the main pedestrian route from







*Main entrance area features a fan shaped plan that breaks away from the existing box shape structure of the former library.*

the council chambers, civic centre and new library through to the main commercial strip. The additive gesture of the project inhabits this part of the site as a new light filled space that invites the landscape.

Spatially and materially, the approach considers this new space as a precious jewel that sits in contrast to the sculptural, raw quality of the Melaleucas and backdrop of exhibition and work-spaces. This neutral background is aesthetically pared and allows gallery spaces and the artwork to star.

Project architects Lindy Atken and Stephen Guthrie of Bark Design discuss the project with Peter Hyatt:

*Suddenly art galleries are savvy. They are a legitimate way to keep ratepayers happy and demonstrate a sophistication beyond rubbish collections and tree lopping.*

**LA:** It's certainly a recognition that as a city, or municipality, you have 'arrived'.

**SG:** Caloundra received city status only a few years ago so it was consistent with that idea that they extend themselves from sports facilities.

**LA:** I think it says that we don't just patch up roads, we are grown up and that we supply art as well as sport. It was also seen as being accessible and children friendly. The internal footbridge and stepping stones are really whimsical things that appeal to children.

**SG:** About 6 years ago they decided to go beyond sporting arenas and all of the usual things they put money into and provide a showcase for travelling exhibitions.

*Were you pleased with the space you were offered for a gallery?*

**SG:** We felt it represented a good blank canvas opposite the city council chambers and offices. It was a pretty nondescript building. It was the old library and later used by the health department. It was really a dumb concrete box so it could only be improved upon.

**LA:** Nothing was specifically demolished except for the awning and then it was gutted and re-roofed. The split block is all existing. The focus is on the entry, transition space which has the shop, cafe and entry. All the back of house spaces were gutted and re-done. We would never have selected split block. Coated steel would have been our first choice (laughter).

*These sort of galleries are a relatively modern invention.*

**LA:** The most important thing about this particular gallery was to make it accessible. It needed to be an inviting space that was more like a shop-front and that the Arts just became a progression of that. We also wanted to make it inviting and transparent without necessarily going right in. It would have been really nice to open it

right up and have the glazing able to stack right back so that you can have a really flexible space, but you just can't. It's category A because you have such a pristine environment.

*You appear to be saying: 'The works of art are inside, but the building is also a work of art; that the envelope to the art can exist as a sculptural piece'.*

**LA:** Yes, as an iconic form. One thing we were really conscious of is that the building, particularly the gallery spaces, as Steve said, are a blank canvas so as not to detract from the paintings. You can have something special in the reception area but the art work needs to take the limelight rather than the architecture. There's no doubt too that Aalto's fabulous vase, worked into our curvilinear glass 'wall', really pays homage to his architectural and design genius.

*It has been said that the best part of art galleries are the windows. Do you share that sentiment?*

**SG:** Yes and no. The main window here is deliberately beautiful and designed to encourage views in and out, but the main gallery space needs another quality, where there is a tranquillity for contemplation of the art.

**LA:** It was important to make sure we get the people through. We're really fortunate in the siting of this building because it is right in the centre of town, yet it sits just off a park and people flow around and into the area all the time.

*The design allows great client and visitor flexibility.*

**LA:** We wanted to make sure that each exhibition could change so the flexibility was very important. Moveable walls allow you to re-position and re-configure for each exhibition or to use the space for workshops or exhibitions. That is working really well. Flexibility for touring shows is achieved with sliding, hinging and pivoting display walls to allow infinite combinations of spatial configurations for the gallery's changing shows.

*What did steel in its various configurations allow you to achieve?*

**SG:** I've worked with steel a lot. I love it as a material. It was really necessary to create a flexible space so we could get the main structure up and this allowed glazing to become the secondary infill to the main steel frame. The rigid connections meant we didn't have to put in as much bracing wall area so that we could have all that glass.



*Any 'Green' drivers in there?*

**LA:** We were aware of being as Green as possible. Council is very interested in that. For a while people thought steel wasn't particularly Green but when I was working with James Grose on the Olympic Visitor's Centre, Tony Fry really opened my eyes to the 'Green-ness' of steel. The trouble is some people associate it with aluminium and see it as just metal, which is of course just so wrong.

*Is this fineness something that Queensland architects are especially sensitive to?*

**SG:** The great thing we found with the slenderness is the contrast between the dumb concrete box and filigree of light members. It's not as easy to create a lightweight facade with any other material. Timber sizes just need to be bigger to achieve the spans. We just couldn't have achieved that curvaceous nature of the skin.

**LA:** The L-shapes dumb box became the backdrop and then something special had to happen on the north-east corner. We could have put in a rectilinear frameless glazed box but we felt the free form and lightweight nature was much more of a contrast and interesting form for people to gravitate towards. At the top of the roof where we have c-sections and UC sections they're just so thin - 150mm that could have provided that slenderness.

**SG:** It was a tiled roof originally, but the Kliplik profile gave us more of an urban scale than say Custom Orb or Trimdek. In a way it just disappears because its texture is larger scale, whereas Custom Orb is finer and more domestic in scale.

*What about the relationship between the structure and the art?*

**LA:** We didn't want to detract from the artworks. It's a very common criticism. There are a number of well known galleries that attract more attention than the artworks. We were very conscious that the exhibition spaces be simple. There was a suspended ceiling in there that we decided to completely remove and all the trusses were painted a light colour. Take away the floor covering, grind back the slab, expose the trusses, bring in some natural light but make sure it's 100 UV rated. One of the lovely things about steel is that it makes a very legible structure. You see how the building is held up. It's not hidden behind plaster board or render.

*Do you think there is a maturity or growing up in creating a work of art that houses works of art?*

**SG:** I don't really think of it as creating a work of art. Hopefully it's a memorable space and there is an artistic quality.

**LA:** Although we wanted to create a form that attracted people we weren't really interested in creating a form for form's sake. Space was more important. What went on inside was more important than how it looked externally. We had a fantastic site in an urban context.




**SG:** Yes, beautiful in that it sticks in people's memory. The sculptural qualities, the curving nature of the facade is really a contrast between the rectilinear nature of the building and the buildings around. It conveys a coastal, organic quality.

*Are art galleries the architect's ultimate fantasy?*

**LA:** It really meets a good mix of artistic and functional demands. The functional ones being that the space must work, the air-conditioning and lighting have got to be right and coordination of services need to be so carefully orchestrated. Architecture provides the opportunity to integrate the practical aspects of building and construction with art.

*Your next project wish?*

**LA:** Another art gallery would be very good. 





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Reinmac P/L  
Steel fabricator: Precision Welding  
Principal steel  
components: Roofing and cladding -  
Lysaght KLIPLOK® profile  
in COLORBOND®  
pre-painted steel finish  
Structure -150 x 150 PFC,  
curved 150 UC  
Cost: \$500,000  
Photography: Peter Hyatt

*The gallery's lantern qualities are revealed at the main entrance where material refinement provides translucence and transparency.*

