

Media Release

Church and pub win Mid-West building awards

Embargoed until 11pm, 13 October 2018

- Top award goes to a project involving the hunt for a bishop's tomb under a historic cathedral
- Judge applauds the metamorphosis of Wiluna's last hotel into community hub
- Bayside house wins Best Home in Master Builders-Bankwest Building Excellence Awards

The restoration of Geraldton's unique St Francis Xavier Cathedral and the spectacular remodelling of a crumbling outback pub have won building awards in the Mid-West region.

A stately church and the ramshackle Club Hotel in Wiluna may seem to have little in common but regional awards judge Kevin Sale said both were cherished by their communities.

Both projects won renovation prizes in the 2018 Master Builders-Bankwest Building Excellence Awards, presented at Geraldton Grammar School on October 13. The cathedral also won Crothers Construction the Best Regional Project title.

Restoration work on the cathedral included a search for the grave of Geraldton's first bishop, William Bernard Kelly, who was buried under the floor in 1921 although the exact location had been long forgotten.

Once the tomb was uncovered, a chamber was built around the coffin and a glazed viewing panel set into the new, polished concrete floor to allow visitors to view the burial site.

Restoration of the cathedral's interior and the creation of the Mid-West Garden were also included in the project, completing a revamp which began in 2015.

"The cathedral is a striking building and a Geraldton landmark which has been restored to its original glory. Better in fact, because of the use of modern materials and more sophisticated paints," Mr Sale said.

"The high-quality paintwork improves the dramatic colour striping inside the cathedral and the reinstated Latin writing in the dome.

"The incorporation of a modern audio-visual system, including an organ which is now portable and has Bluetooth, into a 100-year-old heritage-listed structure was very challenging.

"The beautifully restored cathedral and its grounds will be a tourist attraction for the city, like the cathedrals of Europe."

Mr Sale had to fly across the desert in a small plane to judge another meticulously restored iconic building with a wilder history.

The rundown, shutdown Club Hotel was bought by the Shire of Wiluna last year and transformed into the council's new headquarters and a community function centre.

When Geraldton Building Services and Cabinets took on the job they found the hotel, built during the gold rush in 1933, had rotting timbers, cracking walls and rising damp.

Plaster had to be painstakingly chipped away, asbestos carefully removed, crude repairs pulled out and matching timbers sourced from demolition yards as far away as Perth.

Many workers lived on site in the remote community and worked long hours, seven days a week through extreme summer heat and cyclonic rains to complete the renovation.

"It's a brilliant bit of workmanship in a challenging location," said Mr Sale.

"As much of the original fabric of the building as possible has been retained and materials which couldn't be restored were reproduced to exact details.

"The renovation has honoured the heritage of the building while bringing it into the 21st century by adding modern communications and facilities.

"It's fantastic to see excellent building projects achieved in far flung parts of the state."

The major award of Best Country Home went to WA Country Builders for an elegant two-storey residence overlooking the ocean in Forrest Street, Geraldton.

"It's a beautiful house which got high marks for the exceptional standard of its cabinetry, tiling and painting," Mr Sale said.

"WA Country Builders excelled in the quality of their workmanship."

Master Builders Mid-West manager Paul Kerr said tough economic times had not weakened the enthusiasm of regional builders for producing top quality work.

"The award entries were impressive. They showed an innovative approach to using different materials and the vision to produce outstanding results.

"The builders proved their ability to listen to clients and turn dream projects into reality while staying within budget."

All the winners will be considered for the 2019 state-wide awards.

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