

Library Wins Sulman Prize

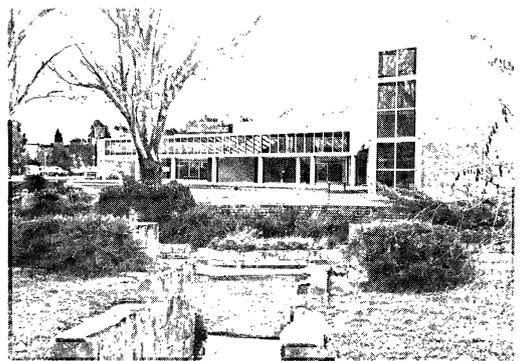
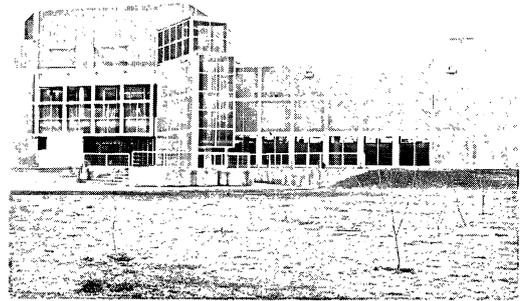
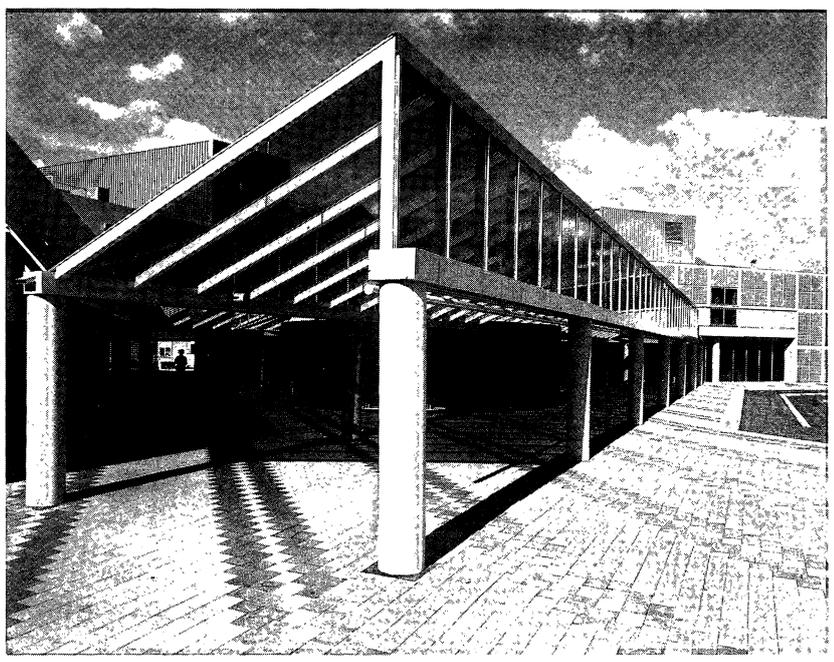
You, like me, are probably pleased when your library gets a small mention in the local rag, but imagine the thrill of turning to a two-page full colour spread on your 'local' in an up-market glossy magazine. Residents of Orange have experienced this thrill recently as their 'haute architecture' hi-tech library has won the coveted Sulman Architecture Medal and been feted in *Vogue Living* with some stunning photography and an article by Betsy Brennan...

It's not quite what one expects of a regional art gallery and library. The 1986 winner of the Sir John Sulman Medal, given by the NSW chapter of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects, is neither a neo-classical monument on main street nor a recycled barn on the out-skirts of town. Architect Colin Still's building rambles diagonally across a small site just a step from the city centre of Orange. Its scale is almost domestic, its imagery is drawn from the region around it.

This low, walled building's tartan grid of shimmering tiles is the gentle pink of apple blossoms, its steel-meshed sunscreens the yellow of wattle in bloom.

'I was very conscious of generating a human scale with this new building,' says Still, a senior architect with the government architects branch, NSW Public Works Department. Orange is planned on a square grid with streets lined with deciduous trees. This low, walled building's tartan grid of shimmering tiles is the gentle pink of apple blossoms, its steel-meshed sunscreens the yellow of wattle in bloom. Still is an architect who uses colour to reinforce architectural form. A glass and steel entrance canopy highlights the vast country sky and relates quietly to an industrial area nearby. Walkways reinforce the agricultural imagery with a pattern that looks like roads through wheat fields, or a tractor's tyre marks. Walls swing and pivot at the corners to catch a view, or bring in natural light; they act as a backdrop for an amphitheatre of terraced grass on one side, and on the other form a suntrap courtyard 'like a quarry', that overlooks a park planted with rows of crab-apples and flowering cherries, evoking the orchards for which the region is famous. 'It's a regional landscape design as well as a regional building,' Still comments. More-

Photos: covered glass and steel entrance court; below: two views of the exterior; bottom: inside the library



over, its open-arm design embraces the civic centre, with its council rooms, exhibition space and 500-seat theatre, and a visitors' centre nearby. By its foresight in identifying the block for a cluster of civic buildings, the Orange City Council has given itself a fine cultural centre.

The prefabricated method of building was ideal for such a project. The Orange gallery and library is the first building since the Sydney Opera House to use tiles cast in place on a large scale. Pre-cast panelling was cast in modules, the tiles laid face down and concrete poured over them. 'This region is high and subject to atmospheric changes,' says Still. 'Conditions change with such speed these facades often gleam with different lighting effects.'



In public spaces, the carpeted floors, the soft-sell approach to entrances, the library's casual shopfront appearance, the gallery's brilliantly flexible exhibition space with its superbly controlled lighting, proclaim the centre a flagship for regional design.

The award-winning regional library and art gallery is a buoyantly successful flagship for future design

In its own way the building itself, one suspects, will be a benchmark by which future regional design will be measured. The people of Orange obviously agree — their attendance over the first six months broke all expectations several times over. Even before the Sulman, they knew they had a winner. □

Article by Betsy Brennan is reproduced (with permission) from the June/July issue of *Vogue Living* pages 68, 69.

Next Issue — The H.C.L. Anderson Award winners; Helen Price writes on fire proofing and the Maroubra Public Library fire; and Katie Blake's 'Undercurrents' takes a look into the future of the book.