

David Kaunitz, Ka Wai Yeung (Kaunitz Yeung architects)
A socio-health center for the Aboriginal population in Newman

Abstract

This article describes a primary health facility located in Newman, a town with a predominantly Aboriginal population about 1200 km from the city of Perth. The first-of-its-kind facility aims to offer culturally appropriate, community-controlled health services, reducing the need for travel to the capital. Located opposite the regional hospital, the Healthcare Center integrates various medical services and adopts sustainable design principles, such as the use of compressed earth and endemic plants. The inclusive approach, inspired by Critical Regionalism, aims to bridge the health gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, becoming a symbol of accessibility, cultural sensitivity and community pride in Newman.

Keywords

Healthcare Center — Co-design — Inclusion



Fig. 1

David Kaunitz, Ka Wai Yeung, PAMS healthcare center, Newman, Australia.

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This project is dedicated to the first primary healthcare facility built in Newman (10,000 inhabitants), a town 1200 km north of Perth, the main city of the East Pilbara County (15,000 inhabitants), the size of Japan and with a majority Aboriginal population. A facility that serves the entire county with particular attention to the local Martu and Niabali aborigines. For the first time Aboriginal people will have access to community-controlled and culturally appropriate health services in Newman. The building incorporates the headquarters of the client Puntukurnu Aboriginal Medical Service (PAMS) which serves the remote communities of Kunawaraji, Punmu, Parngurr and Jigalong up to 800km from Newman.

The project site is located across the street from the regional hospital and centrally located in the town of Newman. The Center includes general medical, child/maternal health, dental, therapeutic and other allied health service facilities for specialist doctors visiting from Perth. A key aim was to minimize the significant costs and negative mental health impacts of Martu and Niaboli people leaving their country and family for treatment in Perth. Aboriginal-controlled community health services are important to address major health and social issues that disproportionately affect Aboriginal people. The root cause of these problems is discrimination, loss and destruction of culture and sense of community. Added to this is often the poor provision of infrastructure which does not allow adequate services to be provided, limiting meetings and the arrival of new subjects.

This project is an important component of the strategic plan to expand and strengthen PAMS. Places the community at the center of health delivery while providing additional clinical space focused on acute community health issues. A social health plan focused on community and inclusion with the aim of increasing participation and communication rates to improve

Fig. 2-4

David Kaunitz, Ka Wai Yeung, PAMS healthcare center, Newman, Australia. Schizzi e immagine della piazza.

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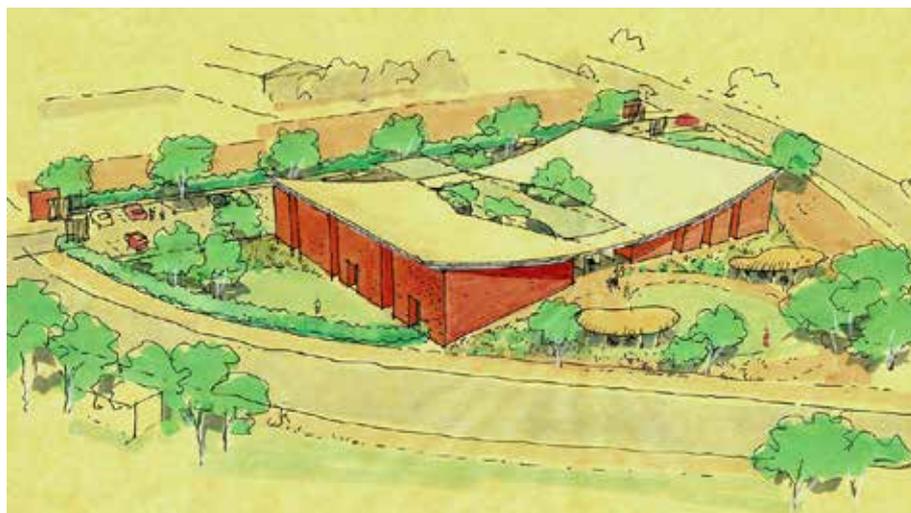




Fig. 5
David Kaunitz, Ka Wai Yeung,
PAMS healthcare center, New-
man, Australia. Location of the
social-health center in an urban
services hub in Newman
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preventive health practices. Ultimately, the increase in the rate of medical information is a key parameter for the success of the project. Expanded services and the ability to be treated without traveling to Perth become key aspects. The architectural result also appears decisive. It is necessary to create a cutting-edge structure that is connected to the people, the country and the local culture. In this way it will support high levels of care whilst being imbued with humanity and therefore embraced by the community. A place that the community can be proud of and welcome. A place that puts wellbeing at the center of the community.

The design approach

The architectural identity of the project is imbued with a sense of place, culture and people of the context with the aim of placing wellbeing at the center of the community and physically representing the ethics according to PAMS. This was supported by the co-design process which was an extension of the extensive co-design process conducted by Kaunitz Yeung Architecture during the design of the Punmu & Parnngurr clinics completed in 2018. This was possible due to the fact that the architect has spent a lot of time in communities over the years during projects. Thus facilitating iterative consultation and a true co-design process with the community and specific user groups. Importantly, this allowed for impromptu relationships, under a tree, at the petrol pump or while going shopping and therefore allowing all the voices of a nomadic culture that does not always feel comfortable speaking internally to be heard. of an assembly. The result is a fine-tuning of the architecture that resonates with the community, enriching its characters according to sophisticated forms that correspond to the people, place and culture of the context.

The typology of the courtyard

Courtyard buildings represent a logically based and well-usable architectural type for desert climates. Despite this, this is not a commonly practiced approach in Australia. Courtyards provide a delicate and habitable heart to buildings and this in the most difficult environments. Sheltered from strong winds and sunny spaces, the environment can thrive and people come together. This is fundamental in the conception of this project.

Fig. 6-7

David Kaunitz, Ka Wai Yeung,
PAMS healthcare center, New-
man, Australia. Pianta delle co-
perture e del livello funzionale
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Imagining an Aboriginal-controlled urban space was central to the idea of creating an unfenced public park in front of the building where the local Aboriginal community could feel at ease, determining its evolution as a public space.

The courtyard that serves as an entrance and external waiting area was shaped in response to the climatic conditions of the place and the region. This space constitutes the fulcrum of the project, connecting the car park, the public park, the clinic and the administration. It serves as an outdoor waiting area and provides visibility between clinic and administrative waiting areas to prevent institutional isolation and allow staff to be accessible to the community.

The roof of both built wings slopes towards the courtyard, and is clad in Australian hardwood to minimize the heat sink effect and be comfortable even with bare feet. The downspouts are replaced with spouts that guide the water into the central basin where there is a plantation of mature trees of the *Eucalyptus Vitrix* type, almost as if to imitate the dry river beds so characteristic of the towns of Martu and Niaboli. In the rare rainy events of the year the courtyard is briefly transformed into a pool of water as happens in the surrounding countryside.

**Fig. 8-11**

David Kaunitz, Ka Wai Yeung, PAMS healthcare center, Newman, Australia. Viste.
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Building in rammed earth

Rammed earth is an ancient construction method used throughout much of the world, but best known in places like Mali and Yemen. Earth is an original, abundant, free and sustainable building material. That used for the project came completely from the site, reducing the embodied energy of the building which would otherwise have been clad in prefabricated materials transported from Perth 1,400km away or in concrete.

However, the value of this construction technique goes far beyond that. Rammed earth presupposes a human being in intuitive connection with the place he inhabits. The material is part of the identity of a country. It reflects different light and absorbs rain just like the countryside. This is obvious and immediate for everyone but it is a particularly high and important value for Aboriginal people. Community enthusiasm for the project was palpable once the rammed earth walls were erected well before the project was completed.

This is something Kaunitz Yeung Architecture has learned in previous projects. For the Wanarn Clinic, on the lands of Ngaanyatjarra, a bricklayer from Fremantle worked with the local population in collecting stones to build walls inserted into the landscape and capable of mitigating dust, creating seating and protecting the building from vehicular traffic. The reaction was profound. The combination of the involvement of the inhabitants and the sensitive use of local materials in the project increased the satisfaction with the building among the local population who perceive its connection with the context.

The rammed earth was therefore central to contextualising the project and infusing the architecture with the humanity that resonates with all people, but particularly Aboriginal people.

Landscape and public space

The landscape aspect is an integral part of the idea of contextualising and

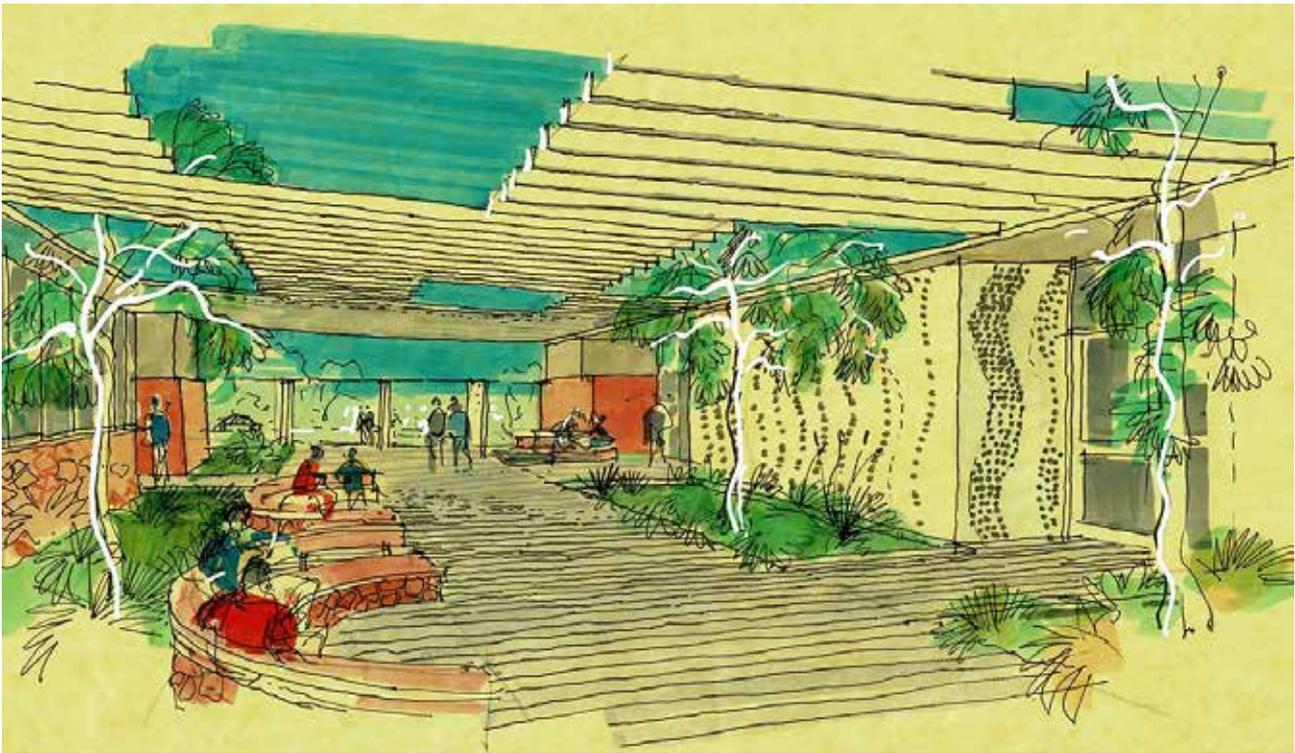


Fig. 12
David Kaunitz, Ka Wai Yeung,
PAMS healthcare center, New-
man, Australia. Schizzo della
piazza.
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connecting the building to the town. Over 2,000 local endemic plants were used to create significant, highly visible and low-maintenance landscape value. *Eucalyptus Vitrix* were already thriving in and around the site without any care and are the tree species used for the 30 mature trees planted. This more than made up for the 2 trees removed for construction.

The most important thing is the new unfenced public park that has formed in front of the building. This allows waiting outdoors, for example for extended families and children, especially since multiple appointments are normally needed for medical visits. For the first time, a public park owned by an Aboriginal organization has been created in Newman. A rare public place where you can feel at ease and feel a sense of belonging. Over time, community input will be leveraged to further personalize the space and continue to develop a sense of community identity across the park and building.

The landscape of the courtyard is an integral part of the experience one has of the building. The roof has a central opening and the mature trees increasingly shade the space, forming a green environment inside the building. This is the kind of containment and use of nature, rather than oppositional construction, that corresponds to indigenous culture.

Conclusions

In the tradition of critical regionalism, this project determines an innovative architectural structure, deeply rooted in the place and permeated with humanity that generates community identity. This is essential to physically represent the PAMS ethos and increase reporting and participation rates in health programs. In achieving this, the project placed wellbeing at the heart of the community, a key element in efforts to bridge the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. This is achieved above all by involving Aboriginal people, empathetically respecting their people, the culture of the place and the country.

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Kaunitz Yeung Architecture is a multi-award winning internationally recognised practice founded by the husband and wife team of David Kaunitz and Ka Wai Yeung. It combines their extensive commercial experience with David's knowledge of living in and working with communities. The result is architecture that places people at its centre and where good architecture does not need to necessarily be a luxury item. Their projects are bespoke solutions that sensitively respond to clients, stakeholders, end user requirements, site context and the budget.