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Queensland Architectural Excellence Highlights Local Innovation, Community Vision

July 23, 2025

– Categories: Real Estate



Queensland’s architectural scene is once again taking the spotlight, with several standout projects named finalists in the 2025 National Architecture Awards, hosted by the Australian Institute of Architects (AIA). From sustainable modular housing to a multi-million-dollar university hub, these shortlisted designs reflect the state’s growing influence in shaping Australia’s built environment, balancing technical brilliance with cultural connection and environmental awareness.

The AIA National Awards have long served as the gold standard for architectural recognition across the country, honouring designs that go beyond aesthetics and address long-term community, climate, and cultural needs. This year's Queensland finalists reflect that mission across six diverse projects, each demonstrating how good design can uplift both space and society without bending to unnecessary bureaucracy or government overreach.

Among the top contenders is Mapleton House, an elegant new residence perched in the Sunshine Coast Hinterland. Designed by Atelier Chen Hung, the home blends modern architectural form with natural surroundings. The structure makes visual reference to nearby landmarks like Mount Ninderry and Mount Coolum, while offering a sense of openness with strategic viewpoints accessible to passersby, an understated reminder that architecture can serve both residents and the broader public.

Another major highlight is the James Cook University Engineering & Innovation Place, which was shortlisted in both the educational and interior architecture categories. Designed by KIRK, along with i4 Architecture and Charles Wright Architects, this facility showcases the university's commitment to hands-on learning and modern industry alignment. At \$93.5 million, it's a significant investment in Queensland's regional education sector, one that's helping to equip future engineers and innovators without leaning on flashy urban development schemes that often overlook real community needs.

The awards also recognised the **Block** Three Sisters project, a modular housing initiative on the Queensland coast designed for three sisters who grew up vacationing on the land. The result, a collaboration between Blok Modular and Vokes & Peters, captures both familial legacy and modern design principles. It proves that residential architecture doesn't need to sacrifice tradition or warmth in pursuit of sustainability and cost-efficiency. Projects like this contrast sharply with the high-rise, short-sighted developments being favoured under current urban policies.

In urban design, the Kangaroo Point Bridge, developed through a partnership between Blight Rayner Architecture, Dissing + Weitling, and Brisbane City Council, was recognised for its unique integration of infrastructure into everyday public use. It offers functional connectivity across the Brisbane River while providing pedestrians and cyclists with new ways to interact with the city, without succumbing to the usual red tape that slows down vital civic development.

Smaller yet no less significant projects also made the shortlist, such as Niwa House by John Ellway, which was nominated for its innovative alterations and additions, and Four Dwellings on 800m² by Clare Design, offering a compact, community-focused housing model with long-term livability in mind.

AIA Jury Chair Jane Cassidy emphasised the awards' goal of recognising architecture that is “impactful, innovative, inclusive”, and embedded in the narratives of country and climate. Yet, these concepts don't mean blindly conforming to ideological trends. The standout projects from Queensland show that architectural excellence is still best achieved through practicality, community input, and environmental stewardship, rather than simply checking boxes for political correctness or government grants.

In total, 62 projects across Australia made the 2025 shortlist, competing in 14 categories including residential, commercial, and urban design. The winners will be announced on November 6, 2025.

At a time when Australia's built environment is often at risk of becoming politicised or over-regulated, it's refreshing to see real design merit honoured through a program that still values integrity, innovation, and long-term vision.