

Media Release



Inspirational architecture

Lifting the spirits of people with spinal injuries

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Architecture can make the heart soar, and the creators of the new *Sargood on Collaroy* resort on Sydney's Northern Beaches believe it can also help heal the body and mind.

This world-class, purpose-built facility settles lightly on an elevated 4,000 square metre site at the southern end of magnificent Collaroy Beach, providing resort-style health and wellness care for those trying to adapt to a life that's been thrown into disarray by accident, illness or fate.

Designed by WMK Architecture, project managed and delivered by Sandrick Project Directions, and built by Novati Constructions, *Sargood on Collaroy* sets a global benchmark in helping those with spinal injuries best manage their life, deal with the scars they face in society, and re-connect into the community.

Here residents gain much-needed sensory experiences; watching the cobalt waves rolling in; hearing them crashing onto the sandy shore; breathing in the invigorating salt air; feeling the warming rays of the sun on their face and the cooling coastal breeze blowing their hair. Adding to their joy is the happy sound of children's laughter from the nearby Council playground and family picnic area.

The innovative architectural approach of *Sargood on Collaroy* is as far from a traditional institutional facility as imaginable.

*"The built environment has a profound psychological impact on quality of life.
If it looked like a hospital, felt like a hospital,
or smelt like a hospital we would have failed in our job."*

Greg Barnett

Managing Director, WMK Architecture

The external architecture does not try to dominate the landscape; rather it complements the surging surf with a series of individual linear roofs that mimic the crest of a wave, building into a crescendo to the tallest roof which signals the entry to the facility. The sophisticated dark charcoal colour of the roofs contrast pleasingly with the pale-colour masonry base, and the commercial grade materials used will ensure minimal maintenance.

A wheelchair-friendly 600-metre pathway has been built by the local council connecting *Sargood on Collaroy* to Long Reef Golf Course, one of the most picturesque in Sydney, which also houses a specially designed golf cart called a Paragolfer to enable people with spinal injuries to play the sport.

The 17 individual villas look like a series of pavilions and feel like five-star hotel suites, with advanced technology making life for guests as easy as possible. Each is around 50-60 square

metres and has furniture that is both fashionable and practical, being able to be adjusted to different heights in order to meet the custom requirements of each user.

Strategically-placed windows allow guests to gaze at the stars from their king size bed. A large-screen television mounted on one wall can be viewed from the lounge as well as the bedroom. The kitchenette includes a mechanically-adjustable benchtop with an integrated sink and cooktop, plus a microwave, refrigerator and ample storage.

Doors are extra wide, windows are linear and at wheelchair height, and the bathroom is luxurious and well appointed – the antithesis of that found in a hospital or rehab unit.

Each suite also has a timber deck which allows guests to sit outside and engage with people walking to and from the beach.

Following a specific brief, not only did WMK have to create an environment that would accommodate guests in wheelchairs it also had to consider carers, family members and staff. To discover the disparate needs, WMK and project managers Sandrick in conjunction with the Sargood Foundation conducted focus groups and workshops with all user groups to understand the unique challenges.

“We followed no rule book, gaining much of our inspiration from listening to, and interacting with, end-users,” said Mr Barnett. “Even when there was an Australian standard we challenged it, knowing that this facility would set the tone for lifestyle care in all genres.”

Sargood on Collaroy contains a contemporary lobby and reception area, a communal lounge, gymnasium, rooms for administration, seminars, rehabilitation and training purposes, and a basement for car parking and ambulance access. One highlight is the restaurant-quality kitchen where guests will be able to eat if they desire, while celebrity chefs will be invited to give classes on food preparation and nutrition.

A lushly-landscaped central courtyard offers a feeling of serenity, and an expansive north-facing terrace provides views of the beach and children’s playground – a panoramic vista normally the domain of society’s most fortunate.

History of Sargood

In 1916 Sir Frederick George Sargood purchased a beachfront home with a superb northerly aspect on Collaroy Beach. In 1920 Sargood donated his land and home to the War Chest, which was initially used as a place for injured soldiers returning from the war to recuperate. It was then transferred to the Royal Alexandria Children’s Hospital and used for children suffering from Tuberculous and Polio. In later years it was used as a mental health facility. Over the years the facility became run down and it was demolished in 2004.

Although the government had plans to sell the land, the community – assisted by patrons Alan Jones AO, Wendy Harmer and Rod Macqueen – banded together with a private benefactor to purchase the site. The community recognised the need to uphold Sargood’s original vision for the land to be used as a place of healing and that its best use would be as a resort-style health and wellness facility for people with spinal injuries.

On December 2, 2016 *Sargood on Collaroy* was officially opened by the Premier of NSW Michael Baird, and Sargood Foundation ambassador Heidi Haydon.

About people with spinal injury

Many are young who have been involved in an accident. Typically they are in hospital for at least three months then go home if they have the means to convert their property. If not they have no alternative than to live in an aged care facility which can be an awful experience for a young person.

The Sargood Foundation wanted to create a world-class facility that showed Australia and the world how a holistic approach to health and wellness could help people with spinal injuries to become more independent, re-engage with their communities and live full and rewarding lives. The underlying idea is to provide a pathway to independence and improve their quality of life.

An individual may spend up to four weeks at *Sargood on Collaroy* to take advantage of the specially-designed programs on offer to learn new skills, explore new vocational opportunities or brush up on the latest technologies and treatments for managing their health. They also benefit from peer-to-peer mentoring and instructions, with a supportive and welcoming local community.

It's about getting people back into the community to be a part of society and make a meaningful contribution rather than being caught in the health system.

WMK's involvement

The client did not want a utilitarian, Australian-standard accessible facility. Instead the Sargood Foundation requested a facility that felt more like a resort than a hospital or rehab centre.

WMK was the perfect fit because of the firm's extensive lifestyle resort and hotel experience.

Challenges

Balancing an iconic world-class facility with budget

A major challenge was exploring not just world's best practice, but *beyond* world's best practice, with things like a completely automated environment – opening windows, temperature control, automated blinds, automated doors – in relation to what could actually be afforded.

Understanding the needs of end users

As this was a world-first facility with no guidelines, it was imperative to understand the needs of the end users. The project involved a lot of trials, tests and reworking to get the best outcome.

Community spirit

The strong community spirit encouraged suppliers, consultants and builders to join the team. WMK, Sandrick and Novati have donated hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of extra time

and services. When combined with people from the Sargood Foundation and a multitude of volunteers, this project is an amazing example of what can be achieved when community spirit and boundless energy are united with the right expertise.

How the project relates to transitional care

This is a facility with a resort underpinning, and should inspire the design of all future transitional care facilities. It's a very humanised building in scale, warmth and texture of finishes. It sets the scene for lifestyle care in any genre because it feels more like a hotel or a home than a care facility.

Using warm textured materials, timbers and a clever sense of proportion, it shows how an environment can function as a hard-core care facility while still feeling warm, friendly, inviting, and aspirational.

"I'd love to have my summer holidays at Sargood on Collaroy,"

Greg Barnett

Managing Director, WMK Architecture

How the facility relates to its environment

To incorporate such an extensive facility into such a delicate seaside urban environment involved a lot of thought and skill. The base is nestled into the hillside and it steps down towards the water. It is relatively low in its height and visual impact, yet the building has enough presence and confidence to have an identity in its own right.

The roof forms have a wave-like, lightweight look using steel, metal cladding and glass. The pale-coloured masonry walls reflect the beach environment.

What WMK brought to the project

Having designed resorts like Coconut Beach Resort in Cape Tribulation – a world heritage environment – and upmarket hotels like the Shangrila Marina Cairns, WMK offered the Sargood Foundation both seaside and resort lifestyle design experience to the project. In addition, WMK brought innovative, out-of-the-box thinking to challenge the norm.

"On top of that, by being not too big and not too small we could give personalised attention yet still have enough resources to provide more capacity for the project."

Greg Barnett

Managing Director, WMK Architecture

Interiors

There are a host of considerations in the interior design. We have windows that are at wheelchair height. We have furniture that is adjustable for people in wheelchairs; furniture that people can transfer into from a wheelchair, and back out.

There's thinking about systems to help people transfer from beds to wheelchairs and bathrooms. There are extra wide doors, clear available spaces and adjustable kitchen benches. A raft of thought was invested into how a person in a wheelchair would be able to utilise, operate and embrace the facility.

Even when there were guidelines, everything was challenged. There was a whole wave of workshopping, interacting, challenging and endless collaboration. Two step forwards, one step back.

Later in the design process the operators came in with a practical view of running a business which meant further refinements had to be made, but they were never permitted to undermine the underlying design vision.

"We really tried to imagine ourselves in the situation faced by end-users."

Garry Slater

WMK Architecture, Director – Interiors

Furniture, fixtures and fittings

A major component to avoiding a clinical look and achieving a resort feel is through the furniture.

WMK discussed at length with users and operators the critical facets of living with spinal injuries and having furniture that aided them throughout the day. WMK was extremely mindful of the initial brief, and that able-bodied people would also utilise the facility. Everything from appropriate seat back and arm heights to aid transitioning, foam densities, upholsteries, adjustability, upper body support, weight and stability, duration and even the formidable 'cushion' had to be considered. This was outside the general styles of furniture type.

The approach was to provide a stylish furniture selection, picking up on the warmth and texture of the internal finishes, to the front of house areas which become increasingly casual as you venture further into the building. The main dining area, which can be viewed from the front of house, is far more playful with an eclectic colour palette.

Within the suites WMK provided a number of colour and finishes palettes, providing a selection of environments to support a variety of tastes, although the furniture selection is consistent.

Sustainability

Environmental

The core sustainability feature is passive solar design. The building faces north with roof overhangs and solar performance glass that captures the sun in winter to generate warmth. In summer the sun is shaded from the glass to keep the heat out.

Sliding openings to the north and rear allow the building to be cross-ventilated. This is supported by supplementary mechanical air conditioning to ensure the environment is sufficiently controlled.

“Many people with a spinal injury don’t actually feel temperature; they might sit in the cold and not realise they are cold. We had to be mindful that the temperature was to be controlled at 28 degrees.”

Greg Barnett

Managing Director, WMK Architecture

Economic

The facility is a not-for-loss facility. How it works and interfaces with government funding is designed so that *Sargood on Collaroy* is economically sustainable.

Social

From a social viewpoint the aim of the design is to assist people with spinal injuries to get back into the community. Equally important, the facility is designed to bring the community in with celebrity cooking classes, community training facilities, and with families coming to stay.

Apart from the transition period that a guest can use *Sargood on Collaroy* after rehabilitation, there is also an opportunity for individuals to return for a holiday, respite or to benefit from the health and wellness programs. That experience is as much for the benefit of the carers and families as it is for the guest with the spinal injury

Outcome

The result: a world-class health and wellness resort that is making a difference for people with spinal injuries.

Ends

More information

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About WMK Architecture

With offices in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, WMK is a multi-award-winning architecture and interior design firm serving a wide spectrum of business and lifestyle clients. WMK has gained a reputation for delivering innovative design, responsive performance and intelligent, results-driven solutions.

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