



watershed

Adelaide's new State Aquatic Centre is an architectural triumph and its opening marks a key moment in our swimming history

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It seems that the only problem with the new State Aquatic Centre, which opened next to the Marion Shopping Centre this month, is that your swimming stroke could be swept off course due to distraction as you admire the building's impressive form and functionality.

The centre's external structure rolls into your vision as you approach, appearing like a series of giant waves – a shape that impressively communicates its intent. Designed by aquatic design specialists Peddle Thorp Architects, the wave-themed steel roof rises to 15 metres before folding down to a lower roof that ripples at the edges around a grand old

gum tree that was protected throughout the build.

The wave-form roof and cloistral white interior is as striking as it is functional. The centre houses a 10-lane Olympic-class competition pool, 55-metre water polo pool, five springboards, four fixed diving platforms and five training boards. The diving tower and competition pools have been designed to meet the strict international standards of world aquatic sports body FINA, as has the mammoth 3460-seat grandstand – its 34-degree angle (the same as the MCG) ensuring a clear view of the action from every seat.

Construction firm Candetti was given a mere 18 months to turn 26,000 square metres of cleared land

1 The diving area includes a hydraulically adjustable springboard that can be set at heights ranging from one to three metres. Practise boards (seen in foreground) can be removed when competitions are held. Behind the tower is a 600sq m 'dry' training area, with foam-filled pits and trampolines.

2 The children's play area (foreground) includes a 30cm-deep toddlers' pool (watch out for the blue bucket, it intermittently dumps a load of water on swimmers' heads). The leisure pool behind features a small waterslide for young children – and another one of those buckets, bright red this time.

3 The programme pool, intended for use as a swim training area, is a metre deep and is set up with a ramp and rails for easy access by people with a disability. The water in this pool will be kept at 34°C so it can be used for hydrotherapy sessions. A 12-person spa is sited near the far end of the pool.

4 The grandstand is steeply raked – at 32 degrees for the lower rows and 34 degrees for the rest of the seats – to ensure everyone gets a clear view of all 10 lanes. Industrial ceiling fans are positioned above the seats near the top of the grandstand to keep the temperature just right for the spectators.



into a state-of-the-art swimming centre boasting 1000 square metres of water. Matthew Gooding, site project manager for the centre, says the speed at which it was created is unprecedented.

Inside, Peddle Thorp, acknowledged as one of Australia's leading competition swimming pool architecture practices, has integrated a raft of technological features to bring out the best in every swimmer and diver.

"We can assist competitors by designing certain things within the pool that help them to achieve their goals," says project architect Robert Abajas, pointing out the wet deck that edges the pool.

Set at water level, the deck is super efficient at soaking up waves. It allows waves to spill over the edge of the pool and down into large overflow tanks set below ground.

"If you're swimming in a body of water, you're creating a wave," says Abajas, adding that the centre's lane ropes, designed by Queensland firm Anti Wave, also help dissipate waves to ensure a fairer competition and smoother swim. "Otherwise the person next to you could actually ride off that wave."

Like the pool used for the Beijing Olympics, our new competition pool is deeper than most, at three metres, which also makes for a better swimming experience. But the final, and perhaps most important, wave-soaking trick can be found at the ends of the competition pool. "If you hit the wall, turn and come back, you don't want waves to wash

onto the end of the pool and come back and disturb you," says Abajas. To avoid this energy-sapping problem, the ends of the pool feature vented walls, which prevent waves ricocheting.

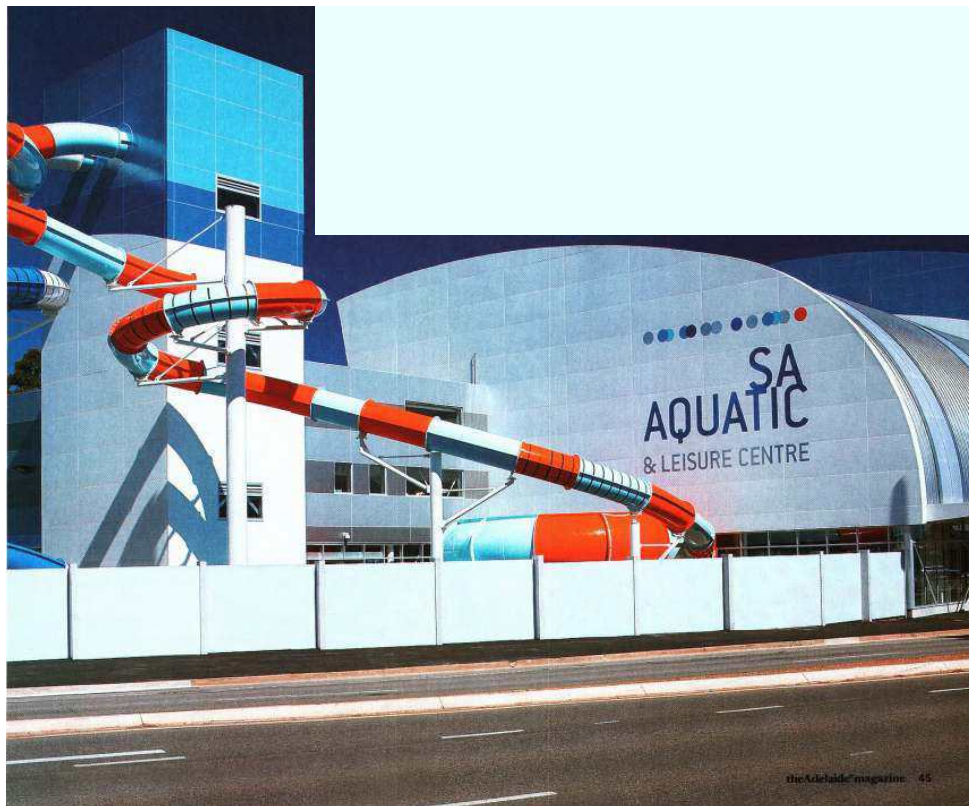
Abajas balks at describing the new pool as 'fast', saying Peddle Thorp's aim is to allow swimmers to achieve their goals by including design elements that make for as smooth a swim as possible. What really makes a fast pool is fast swimmers, he says.

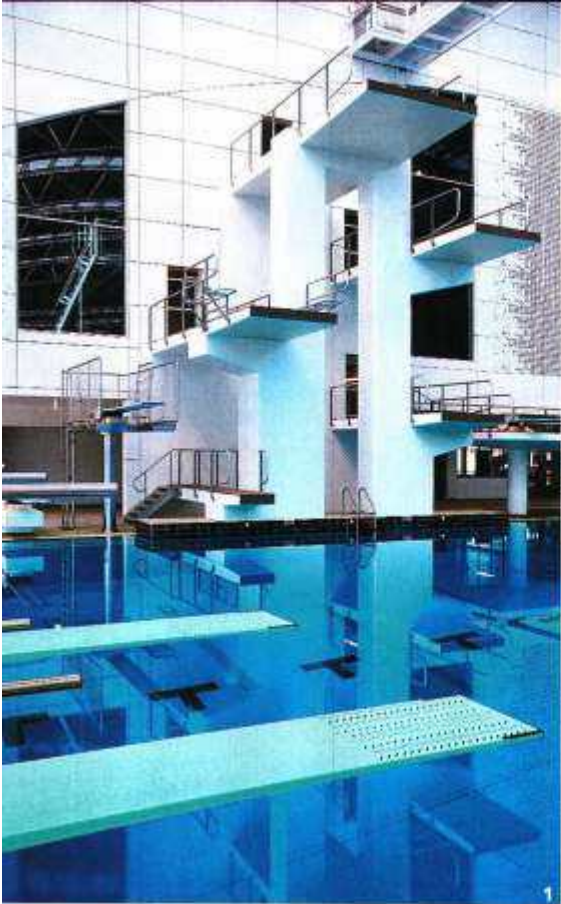
But the centre is not only about assisting elite athletes. The pools and gym are open to the public, and Diving Australia will use the centre to identify kids with talent and develop their skills.

To help young divers overcome the fear and technical difficulties of jumping from a springboard, a board that can be adjusted hydraulically – the only one of its kind in the southern hemisphere – will be used. The board can be slowly raised from one metre to three metres to get divers used to jumping from the full height.

Adjoining the swim and diving hall is a low-roofed space containing a shallow leisure and toddlers' pool, a one-metre-deep learn-to-swim pool, a 12-person spa and a multipurpose pool with full access for people with disabilities.

If you arrive with teenagers, however, they will most likely walk – no running, please! – past all of the pools to the two waterslides outside, including one that features a 'space bowl' at its base. Don't know what a space bowl is? Think human washing









SA AQUATIC CENTRE

machine – it is a fast and churning ride that is definitely not for weak stomachs.

What Adelaide now has is right up there with the best in the country, says Abajas. "You've got the right training facilities, the right-sized gym and good stadiums for patrons."

A few laps of backstroke is all it takes to see that he's right about this new architectural triumph.



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