CASE STUDY

# HIGH STREET, BOWRAL



## Revitalising a historical town centre with a contemporary arcade

**Better for community**
New public space off the main street provides intimate spaces to relax. Image: Gina Umoren.

## QUICK FACTS

**PROJECT TYPE:**
Main street revitalisation; retail arcade

**LOCATION:**
310 Bong Bong Street Bowral, a busy regional town in the Southern Highlands, south of Sydney

**REGION:**
South East and Tablelands

**ABORIGINAL CUSTODIANS OF THIS COUNTRY[1]:**
Gundungurra people
Dharawal people

**CLIENT:**
FHR Holdings (private developer)

**PROJECT SCALE:**
Medium: two-storey building with 21 ground-floor retail tenancies, and commercial tenancies above
SITE AREA 2147 m²
GROSS FLOOR AREA 2150 m²
NET LETTABLE AREA 2068 m²

**PROJECT COST:**
$2.5 million

**YEAR:**
Completed 2007

**PROJECT TEAM:**
ARCHITECTURE
Studio [R] Architecture + Design in association with Perumal Pedavoli Architects
TOWN PLANNING
Cowman Stowdart
CIVIL, STRUCTURAL AND HYDRAULIC ENGINEERING
Woolacotts Consulting Engineers
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
Melissa Wilson Landscape Architect
LIGHTING DESIGN
The Lighting Guild
BUILDING
Goldmaster Homes
GRAPHICS AND MARKETING
Holy Cow!

**PROCUREMENT PROCESS:**
Documentation by design team with advice continuing during construction to ensure design quality. Owner developer, early engagement of architect, and a collaborative design process.

GOVERNMENT ARCHITECT NEW SOUTH WALES

NSW GOVERNMENT

# High Street Bowral expands and improves the quality of Bowral's public realm by creating an active and attractive pedestrian link through the centre of town.

Inspired by studying national and international examples of laneway retail projects, this infill development integrates seamlessly into the existing streetscape and provides a new open-air connection between the main street and the precinct beyond.

## Improving connectivity and walkability

High Street Bowral is a two-storey retail arcade and commercial development that extends the public realm through the whole depth of a town-centre block. Lined with a curated variety of small shops at ground level, the arcade creates an attractive and inviting connection from Bowral's busiest street to a car park and shops located behind the main street buildings.

This link extends further through to a major supermarket on the next block and to the civic precinct on the block beyond. Walkability of the town centre has improved, and the increase in pedestrian traffic is a boost for local business exposure.

## Engaging with the historical streetscape

The project respects the existing character, scale, and built form of Bowral's main street, drawing on the street's existing qualities to reinforce the sense of place and local identity.

Parapet heights are similar to those on neighbouring buildings, creating a good fit with the historical streetscape without mimicking the past. New facades take cues from surrounding buildings and reinterpret proportions and materials using contemporary detailing.

Existing buildings fronting the main street have been retained and reactivated to maintain a continuous and engaging street frontage and reduce new building work.

Although a clear line of sight is possible from the main street through to the car park, the geometry of the line has been offset to create visual interest, increase retail frontage, and produce a range of different spatial experiences.

A small central square featuring a deciduous tree, timber seating, and a lightweight retractable roof for shade, is a focus within the arcade and has become a resting point and destination in its own right, creating a new intimate public space.

**Better fit:**
The development's new facades respond to the scale and character of the main street's historical buildings. Image: Glen Macari.

**Better look and feel:**
Design of details in the hard landscape highlights the identity of the place. Image: Glen Macari.

## Building in flexibility

The ground level houses 21 retail spaces of various sizes. One larger tenancy accommodates an anchor tenant (a chemist) attracting regular patrons and providing a steady income, while smaller tenancies can support newer and smaller local businesses by offering an alternative to main street shops. The shops have been curated over time to create a compelling and eclectic retail precinct.

Great care was taken with the design of the shopfronts, using distinctive customised details. Shops are able to change in size and adapt to new uses, while closely managed but flexible tenancy guidelines allow individual businesses to customise their external appearance and signage.

A large commercial space on the first floor overlooks the activity of the arcade, and can be flexibly subdivided to create a variety of office spaces for local services and professionals.

## Using high-quality materials

Visual unity of the space is achieved through consistency in the treatment of the walls and ground plane. Natural, sustainable materials such as local face brick and Australian granite paving are attractive and weather well in the external environment. Common spaces feature high-quality and durable elements such as brass street drains, bespoke signage, and custom street furniture.

## Creating a sustainable and pleasant environment

Hanging planters and planterboxes above tenancies provide greenery at eye level, visually softening edges and defining spaces. A sophisticated irrigation system collects and distributes rainwater to tend the plants.

Passive environmental features such as adjustable awnings and operable shopfronts allow tenants to control their own light and air, helping to minimise running costs. The open-air design generates significant savings in services, maintenance, and energy consumption for the owner too.

## Using a strong visual identity

The development's branding and graphics are coordinated and cohesive, with place name, logo, signage, marketing materials, and even historical interpretive elements engraved into granite pavers all part of a holistic visual identity.

# Design objectives for NSW

Seven objectives define the key considerations in the design of the built environment.

**Better fit**
contextual, local and of its place

**Better performance**
sustainable, adaptable and durable

**Better for community**
inclusive, connected and diverse

**Better for people**
safe, comfortable and liveable

**Better working**
functional, efficient and fit for purpose

**Better value**
creating and adding value

**Better look and feel**
engaging, inviting and attractive

**Find out more**
ga.nsw.gov.au



**Better for people:**
The public spaces are open to the sky but with retractable awnings so that shade and shelter can be adjusted to suit the season.
Image: Gina Umoren.

## Investing in the long term

This project is a long-term, intergenerational investment for the owner–developer, whose hands-on investment in design quality is evident in the diversity and refined, customised detailing of each tenancy. Higher up-front construction costs will be offset through longer term benefits of better quality building. Durable but "raw" finishes will reduce maintenance and repair as the development ages.

## Good process: taking a collaborative approach

High Street came about through a truly collaborative design process involving the owner–developer, architect, landscape architect, engineers, lighting and graphic designers all working together and sharing knowledge and ideas from early in the project. The owner–developer was inspired and informed by studying successful precedents for retail laneways, and understood the importance of ensuring a high-quality of design from start to finish. Successful retail laneways extend and improve the quality of town centres, generating activity by providing useful, attractive, and welcoming public connections and public spaces.

## Key considerations

Reciprocal public and private benefits are possible when a project looks beyond its immediate site to connect and engage with its history, surroundings, and community.

As well as analysing the site in order to understand the local character and context for this development, the project team can credit the success of this design solution to their thorough research into what makes a good pedestrian shopping arcade, based on reviewing and learning from national and international precedents.

### MORE INFORMATION

**GANSW guides:**

Urban Design for Regional NSW

Integrating Urban Design

Design Guide for Heritage

**GANSW advisory notes:**

How to select design consultants

How to develop a design brief

**This case study has been developed in conjunction with the Urban Design for Regional NSW guide.**

1. Horton D (creator) & AIATSIS (1996), AIATSIS map of Indigenous Australia, Aboriginal Studies Press, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), and Auslig/Sinclair, Knight, Merz.