



# Sydney Opera House

NEW SOUTH WALES

For most observers, the white billowing silhouette of the Opera House, harbour-side location and proximity to the arch of the Sydney Harbour Bridge create an unforgettable panorama.

Today, more than 35 years since it opened to the public, the Sydney Opera House is the nation's most recognisable building and an icon synonymous with Australia's independent cultural spirit.

The story of the construction of this remarkable and improbable building is one of controversy. Escalating costs and complex engineering problems made it a source of constant public debate, which only subsided when the beauty and technical achievement of the finished product placed the Opera House on the world's architectural stage. Today, it is one of the busiest performing arts centres in the world, each year staging more than 2000 events and drawing around two million patrons.

In 1956, the New South Wales Government ran an international competition for the design of a 'National Opera House'. Out of 233 entries from 33 countries the judges chose the drawings of 38-year-old Danish architect, Jørn Utzon, stating:

*"we are convinced that they present a concept of an opera house which is capable of being one of the great buildings of the world".*

The engineering company Ove Arup and Partners accepted the challenge to construct the building. It took 16 years to build and in the process pushed existing architectural and engineering knowledge to its limits. Throughout these years, delays and mounting costs dogged development. A creative solution was found to fund the venture, and the revenue-raising Opera House Lottery was established, collecting some \$101 million from 496 lotteries. This was almost the cost of the Opera House.

The technical challenge of how to construct the sculptural sail-like roof shells took Utzon and Ove Arup and Partners more than four years to solve. When they found the solution, they then had to revisit some of their earlier construction work and rebuild and strengthen the foundations so that they could support the revised structures. Issues such as this fuelled controversy and took their toll on the troubled relationship between the New South Wales Government and the architect. In 1966,



this relationship shattered beyond repair and Jørn Utzon resigned. Architects Todd, Hall and Littlemore completed the job over the next seven years.

The Opera House was built as a performance venue and includes a concert hall, opera and drama theatres, a playhouse and studio. In the years since its opening, by Queen Elizabeth II on 20 October 1973, it has provided a fitting showcase for some of the world's most renowned artists.

The Sydney Opera House is the extraordinary expression of an architect's vision, a government's will, engineering excellence and public hopes. Above all, it is now a vibrant part of the Australian psyche, a reflection of what this nation is and what it aspires to be.

National Heritage List: 12 July 2005

World Heritage List: 2007

