

Sydney Opera House

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Inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2007

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Sydney Opera House is a masterpiece of late modern architecture. It is admired internationally, proudly treasured by the people of Australia and created by a young architect who understood and recognised the potential provided by the site against the stunning backdrop of Sydney Harbour. Denmark's Jørn Utzon gave to a young nation a challenging, graceful, piece of urban sculpture in patterned tiles, glistening in the sunlight. Functioning as a world class performing arts centre, it is invitingly aglow at night. By day the effect is likened romantically to white, wind filled billowing sails, soaring above and contrasting with the ever changing restlessness of the sea dark harbour.

It is a rare and outstanding architectural and structural engineering achievement, stretching the boundaries of concepts of space and raising the human spirit. Sydney Opera House has become a symbol of both Sydney and the Australian nation.

Sydney Opera House was inscribed in the World Heritage List in June 2007 because of its outstanding universal cultural heritage values:

- Sydney Opera House is a great architectural work of the 20th century. It represents multiple strands of creativity, both in architectural form and structural design, a great urban sculpture carefully set in a remarkable waterscape and a world famous iconic building.

It is a masterpiece of human creative genius and a daring and visionary experiment that has had an enduring influence on the emergent architecture of the late 20th century. Jørn Utzon's original design is a great artistic monument and an exceptional building composition responding to the Sydney Harbour setting. It comprises three groups of interlocking vaulted 'shells' set upon a vast terraced platform and surrounded by terrace areas that function as pedestrian concourses.

The two main halls are arranged side by side, with their long axes, slightly inclined from each other, generally running north-south. The auditoria face south, away from the harbour with the stages located between the audience and the city. The Forecourt is a vast open space from which people ascend the stairs to the podium. The Monumental Steps, which lead up from the Forecourt to the two main performance venues, are a great ceremonial stairway nearly 100 metres wide.

The vaulted roof shells were designed by Utzon in collaboration with internationally renowned engineers Ove Arup & Partners with the final shape of the shells derived from the surface of a single imagined sphere. Each shell is composed of pre-cast rib segments radiating from a concrete pedestal and rising to a ridge beam. The shells are faced in glazed off-white tiles while the podium is clad in earth-toned, reconstituted granite panels. The glass walls

are a special feature of the building, constructed according to the modified design by Utzon's successor architect, Peter Hall.

The history surrounding the design and construction of the building is as controversial as its design. In 1956 the New South Wales Government called an open-ended international design competition and appointed an independent jury, rather than commissioning a local firm. The competition brief provided broad specifications to attract the best design talent in the world; it did not specify design parameters or set a cost limit. The main requirement of the competition brief was a design for two performance halls, one for opera and one for symphony concerts. Reputedly rescued from a pile of discarded submissions, Jørn Utzon's winning entry created great community interest and the New South Wales Government's decision to commission Utzon as the sole architect was unexpected, bold and visionary. There was scepticism as to whether the structure could be built given Utzon's limited experience, the rudimentary and unique design concept and the absence of engineering advice.

Design and construction were closely intertwined. Utzon's radical approach to the construction of the building fostered an exceptional collaborative and innovative environment. The design solution and construction of the shell structure took eight years to complete and the development of the special ceramic tiles for the shells took over three years. The project was not helped by the changes to the brief. At the behest of the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) the New South Wales Government changed the proposed larger opera hall into the concert hall because at the time, symphony concerts, managed by the ABC, were more popular and drew larger audiences than opera.

Cost overruns contributed to populist criticism and a change of government resulted in 1966 in Utzon's resignation, street demonstrations and professional



controversy. Peter Hall supported by Lionel Todd and David Littlemore in conjunction with the then New South Wales Government Architect, Ted Farmer completed the glass walls and interiors including adding three previously unplanned venues underneath the Concert Hall on the western side. Opened by Queen Elizabeth II in 1973, new works were undertaken between 1986 and 1988 to the land approach and Forecourt under the supervision of the then New South Wales Government Architect, Andrew Andersons, with contributions by Peter Hall.

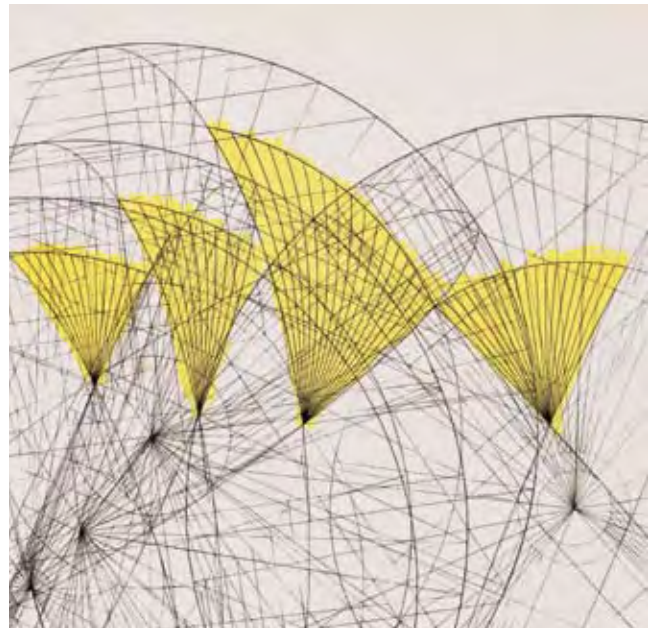
In 1999, Jørn Utzon was re-engaged as Sydney Opera House architect to develop a set of design principles to act as a guide for all future changes to the building. These principles reflect his original vision and help to ensure that the building's architectural integrity is maintained.

Utzon's first major project was the refurbishment of the Reception Hall into a stunning, light filled space which highlights the original concrete 'beams' and a wall-length tapestry designed by Utzon which hangs opposite the harbour outlook. Noted for its excellent acoustics, it is the only authentic Utzon-designed space at Sydney Opera House and was renamed the Utzon Room in his honour in 2004.

This project was followed by the first alteration to the exterior of the building with the addition of a new Colonnade along the western side, which shades nine new large glass openings into the previously solid exterior wall. This Utzon-led project, which was completed in 2006, gave the theatre foyers their first view of Sydney Harbour. The foyers' interiors are now being renovated to Utzon's specifications, to become a coherent attractive space for patrons. The design also incorporates the first public lift and interior escalators to assist less mobile patrons.

Utzon has also been working on designs to renovate the ageing and inadequate Opera Theatre. On all projects, he has worked with his architect son Jan, and Sydney-based architect Richard Johnson of Johnson Pilton Walker.

In 2003 he received the Pritzker Prize, international architecture's highest honour.



title page: Integral to Sydney's identity the iconic Sydney Opera House is the focal point of the city

top strip: Situated at Bennelong Point the Sydney Opera House is adjacent to Circular Quay at the West and is a brilliant response to its maritime setting

top: The glossy tiles create a surface that responds to changing light
above: An extract of the spherical solution to the shell geometry as drawn by Rafael Moneo who worked in Utzon's Hellebaek office

All images: Sydney Opera House