

**A  
PHENOMENOLOGY  
OF  
AUSTRALIAN  
PUBLIC SPACES**

What is left from Robin Boyd's *Australian Ugliness*





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PHENOMENOLOGY  
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PUBLIC SPACES**

*In the book cover: a re-interpreted early sketch of the Opera House by Jørn Utzon.*





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# ABSTRACT

*La seguente tesi mostra una ricerca sulla fenomenologia degli spazi pubblici australiani contemporanei. Il background storico e culturale del paese rappresenterebbe infatti un territorio fertile di sperimentazioni.*

*Inoltre, la nascita e lo sviluppo veloce di questi spazi, ha particolarmente stimolato il mio interesse, che mi ha portata alla ricerca di due obiettivi fondamentali.*

*Il primo è quello di delineare le caratteristiche degli spazi pubblici nelle metropoli australiane in modo tale da definire una serie di principi che li contraddistinguono.*

*Per raggiungere tale scopo, è stato introdotto uno studio sulle varie vicende storiche, che hanno coinvolto lo sviluppo delle città australiane, e sullo sprawl urbano. Inoltre, le influenze inglesi sull'architettura australiana sono presentate e descritte brevemente.*

*Successivamente, una più profonda analisi di alcuni esempi di maggiore successo di spazio pubblico (Federation square, le laneways di Melbourne, la Sydney Opera House, Darling Harbour, Parklands) è stata condotta in modo tale da stabilire alcune linee guida nella descrizione delle caratteristiche di questi spazi.*

*Il secondo obiettivo è quello di cercare invece i punti critici, rispondendo a due domande principali: se è rimasto qualcosa dell'Australian Ugliness di cui parlò Robin Boyd e cosa manca per potersene liberare.*

*Per raggiungere lo scopo, ho sviluppato un progetto critico, che è costituito da un'appendice con alcune proposte progettuali. L'appendice si sviluppa in una parte che mostra la situazione attuale di sette temi di spazio pubblico selezionati (la piazza ferroviaria, la riqualificazione della riva del fiume, la penisola museale, il centro delle arti e dello spettacolo, la riqualificazione del porto, la community hub e il centro civico) e presenta cosa invece sarebbe dovuto essere stato fatto, secondo la mia opinione.*

*Infatti, quello che si può concludere è che una più accurata relazione al contesto, attraverso una differente composizione architettonica, avrebbe potuto senz'altro migliorare il rapporto con il paesaggio e di conseguenza, anche l'impatto sociale di questi progetti per raggiungere un'ordinata e chiaramente coordinata complessità'-seguendo le parole di Boyd.*

The present dissertation shows the research about phenomenology of Australian contemporary public spaces. The country's historical and cultural background might be compared to a fertile territory for experimentations.

What is more, those spaces born and evolved very quickly what particularly arouse my interest. That quick development is a kind of phenomenon that proved me to set two main goals.

The first one is to outline the features of public spaces in Australian metropolises in order to find a set of design principles which is distinguishing them.

To reach this goal, a study of historical background and urban sprawl issues are made. What is more, British influences on Australian architecture is presented and described briefly. Moreover, a deeper analysis of some popular examples (Federation square, Melbourne laneways, Sydney Opera House, Darling Harbour, Parklands) is made in order to establish the guidelines in describing their features.

The second aim is to find the critical issues. The most vital ones are answers to two main questions of the present thesis, namely: if anything has left from Robin Boyd's '*Australian Ugliness*' and what is missing to get rid of it. To reach the second aim I developed a critical project which is an appendix made of design proposals. It shows the current situation of seven chosen topics (the square on railroad tracks, the river shore redevelopment, the museum peninsula, the performing arts centre, the harbour redevelopment, the community hub, the civic centre) and presents what instead it should have been done, in my opinion.

What can be easily concluded is that a more accurate relationship with the context, through a different architectural composition, could have definitely improved the relationship with the landscape and consequently, also the social impact of these projects, in order to reach an 'ordered and clearly directed complexity'- following Boyd's words.





# INTRODUCTION

The present dissertation shows the research about phenomenology of Australian public spaces. During these years of studies, I have developed a particular interest in this kind of spaces as I believe they can unimaginably improve, not only the perceived 'image' of our metropolises, but especially their citizens quality of life. It is not surprising that this topic has become so popular among architects and scholars as more and more books are focused on that subject. An example is represented by one of the books which I used as a reference '*Architectural Positions: Architecture, Modernity and the Public Sphere*' and which is a collection of papers written by various architects -such as Toyo Ito, Peter Eisenmann, Steven Holl, Aldo Rossi and many others- wondering about the future of public spaces.<sup>1</sup>

The term '*phenomenology*' means the way we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience. My intention is to emphasize this aspect by asking the following questions. What exactly is the meaning of public spaces in Australian context? What can we say about public realm after the 1970s and 1980s big interventions? What point have they reached? I try to answer to these questions, employing my experience I gained at the University of Queensland, and also studying about historical background and analyzing the Australian public spaces.

The first chapter retraces the urban development of Australian cities, where the book '*Urban Nation: Australia's Planning Heritage*' by Robert Freestone represented an important source. It explains indeed the evolution of Australian cities from towns designed upon colonial grids to real metropolitan areas which have a central administrative body and a careful consideration for environmental sustainability. It is presented how rapidly cities grew without paying attention to leisure time spaces for the community.

However, it was '*Australian Ugliness*' by Robin Boyd, that introduced the right critical insight on that urban environment, composed by a strong urban sprawl. He wrote indeed that Australia: '*is the country of many colorful, patterned, plastic veneers, of brick-veneer villas, and the White Australia Policy*' and where '*Abstract art, prefabrication, mass-production*

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1 *Architectural Positions: Architecture, Modernity and the Public Sphere* edited by Tom Avermaete, Klaske Havik, Hans Teerds, SUN publishers, Amsterdam, 2009

*and perverted Functionalist ethics provide the moulds that shape things in Australia, as they do wherever English-speaking people build communities?*<sup>2</sup> The ugliness comes from the 'urban mess' and it is also a unique ugliness, completely different from the American one.

The second chapter is a brief investigation to find out how massive zoning and urban sprawl influenced the perception of cities.

Firstly, it is presented that Australian architects seemed to forget to design '*the space between buildings*' what resulted in reduced possibilities of having valuable public spaces close to residential areas. Next, it is described how a lack of desirable conditions for outdoor activities was changed thanks to some international events, such as Olympics games in 1980 in Sydney or the World Expo in 1988 in Brisbane. It is explained how the big urban interventions were made and how the first leisure time spaces appeared.

The third chapter wants to find Australian public spaces recurrent features through an analysis of different project typologies, which are internationally renowned, in order to understand if it's possible to define a model of contemporary Australian public space. The projects that are going to be taken into consideration are : Federation square, Melbourne laneways, Sydney Opera House, Darling Harbour and Parklands in Brisbane, where in many respects, the Sydney Opera House seems to be the forerunner of new qualities related to the public space. All the historical events surrounding those projects are described carefullt starting with competition notices and all involved people.

The last chapter is instead a critical project which wants to answer practically to some critical issues found in the previous analysis and more specifically to the question: '*What's left from Australian Ugliness?*'

This part of the thesis has to be considered as an appendix of the previous part presenting some design proposals, which might have some inaccuracies because of the impossibility of visiting physically some of the different site plans.

I chose seven different topics of public spaces, namely: the square on railroad tracks, the river shore redevelopment, the museum peninsula, the performing arts centre, the harbour redevelopment, the community hub, the civic centre. The project will show the drawings of the current situation and emphasizes what instead should have been done to pursue an '*ordered an clearly directed complexity*' and not only a '*visual simplicity*'.

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2 R.Boyd, The Australian Ugliness(1960), Text Classics, Melbourne, 2012, introduction

The design will introduce new ways to improve, not simply the perception, but also the possible social impact of these projects.

Last but not least is conclusion, where I will try to present if or what exactly is left from Boyd's Australian Ugliness. It will be also presented whether the posed questions are proved by the project. The main summary of the thesis will be made and final results will be introduced.

Nevertheless, the ultimate aim of this thesis is also to underline the importance of experiencing, as architects, our contemporary urban metropolises in order to find new critical tools to read it, and at the same time new ways to deal with urban landscapes.

# STRUCTURE

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## 1. What is an Australian public space?

**Historical background** regarding the development of Australian urban landscape and how it was perceived by architects, such as Robin Boyd.



The issue of **IMPORT/EXPORT** of European and American models of public space is introduced.

The role of zoning and urban sprawl is faced to understand how it influenced the public spaces' design and use.

Quality design of public spaces seems a very recent phenomenon that sounds almost as a discovery.

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## 2. What are the features of public spaces in the metropolises?

**Analysis** of major examples of public space



Bringing out some **guide lines** in the definition of Australian public spaces

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**3. Towards a critical project**  
**What is left from *Australian Ugliness*?**



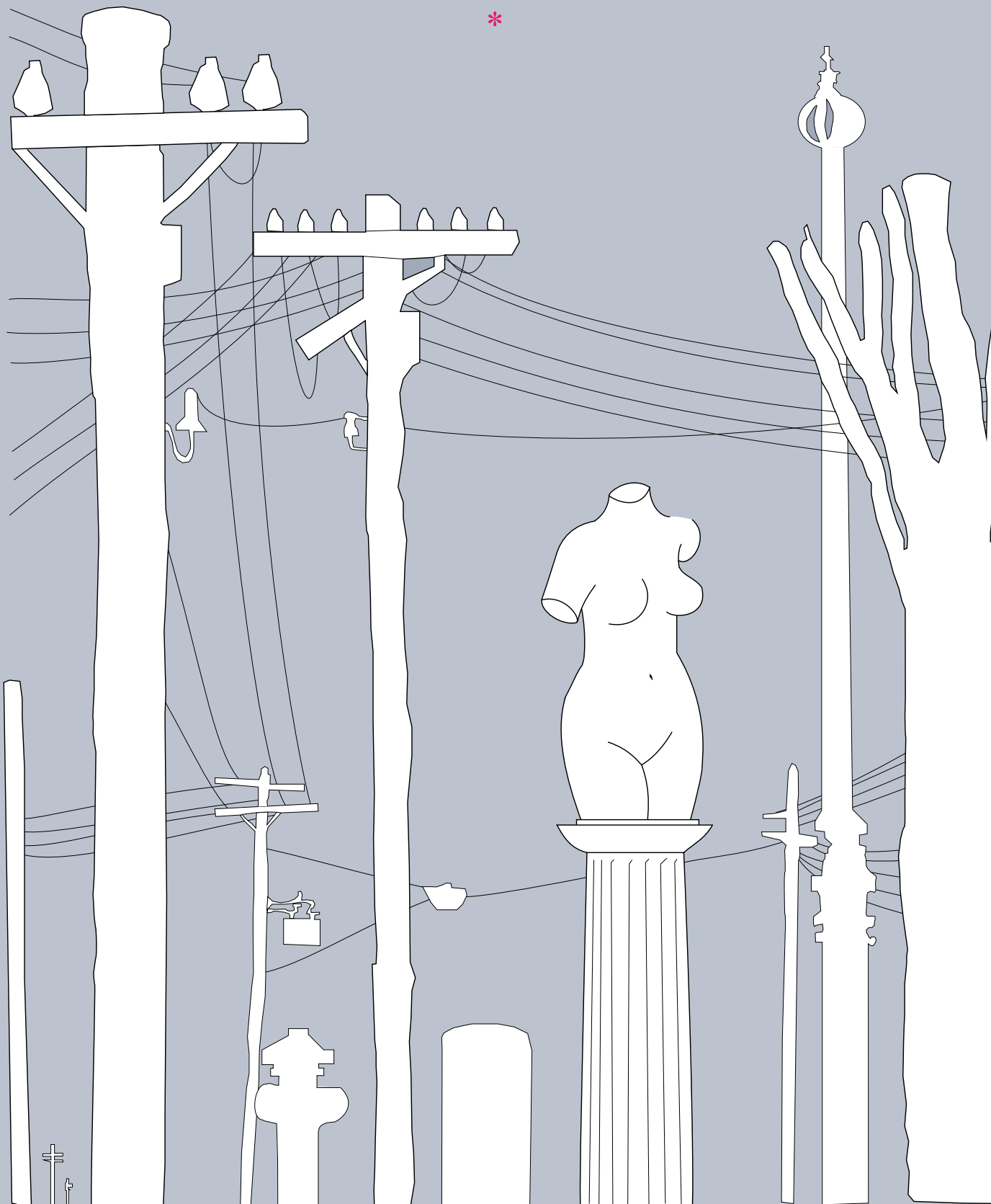
The previous considerations outlined the features of Australian public spaces , but also some critical points.



**Appendix of design proposals** showing how seven different topics of public space could have been designed differently to respond to those critical issues.

*The image on the right is a reworked sketch by R.Boyd and it was used as the book cover for his book "Australian Ugliness" in 1968.*

# 1. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND







*'It is taken for granted that Australia is ugly'*

Anthony Trollope, *Australia and New Zealand* (1873), vol.1, Cambridge Library Collection, 2013.

## **FROM AUSTRALIAN 'UGLINESS' TO THE ACTUAL CONFIGURATION OF ARCHITECTURAL STYLE AND URBAN PLANNING STRATEGIES**

Before one begins to analyze the different case studies, it is important to understand the architectural context in which these projects are located. In fact, 'planning consciousness' has grown after many years of architectural confusion and spread of 'Featurism'.<sup>1</sup>

By the time of early pioneers a general architectural chaos was established within a lack of a truly comprehensive metropolitan strategy.

Robin Boyd was the architect, who coined the term '**Featurism**' in his book *Australian Ugliness*.

He said that Sigfried Giedion recognized 'two distinct trends' in *Space, Time and Architecture*: '*Since the beginning of civilization there have been cities planned according to regular schemes and cities which have grown up organically like trees. The ancient Greeks put their mathematically proportioned temples on the top of rocky acropolises, outlined their southern skies.*'

For instance Frank Lloyd Wright sometimes designed his houses in a way '*that they seem to grow into nature and out of it*'. Featurism '*is the third and the most common approach to nature, which Giedion did not mention, because it is seldom adopted by respectable architects. It is neither sympathetic nor challenging, but evasive, a nervous architectural chattering avoiding any mention of the landscape.*'<sup>2</sup>

Featurism is, in other words, the art of camouflaging and imitating, a 'carnival of symbolism'.

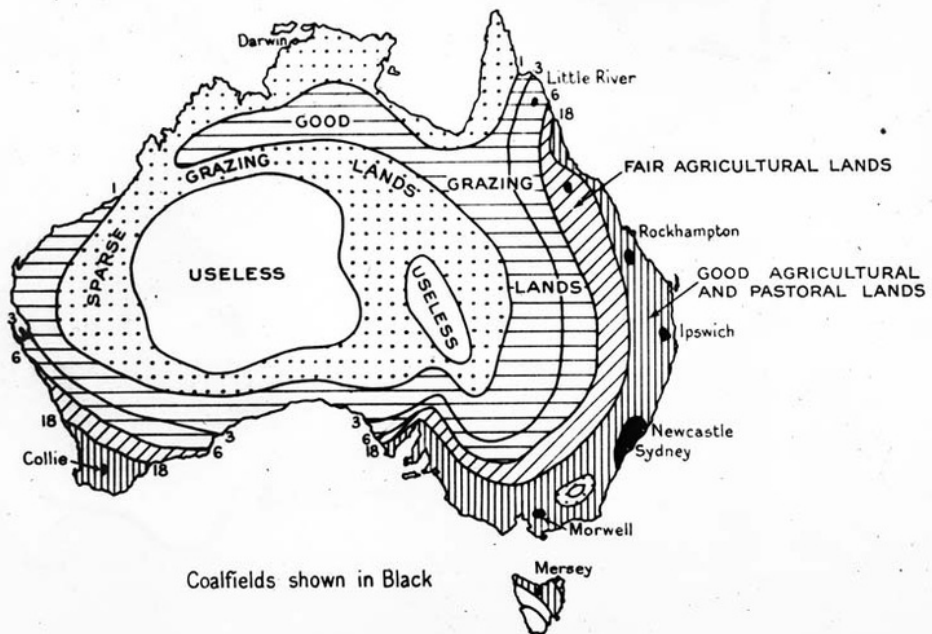
There is a need for consideration of the history of that cultural background to better understand contemporary projects, as they have changed Australian past radically. Where in Europe contemporary projects are quite often seen as 'disorientating' in comparison to the historical scenery, in Australia the situation is opposite. Contemporary architects are trying to 're-orientate' and to give a different Australian character (or 'feature?') to architectural environment.

1 R.Boyd, *The Australian Ugliness*(1960), Text Classics, Melbourne, 2012, p.47.

2 R.Boyd, *ibidem*, p.20.

# HABITABILITY MAP OF AUSTRALIA

After T. Griffith Taylor in "Limits of Land Settlement"



N.B. The boundaries between regions represent lines of population density.



In nineteenth century Australian metropolises were developed upon colonial grids with a subsequent temperament of the colonial plan and the arrangement of parklands surrounding the city core.

The result was ambiguous and it was not enough for the ideology of civic beautification: *'The aesthetic ethos, which helped catalyze modern planning consciousness in Australia, was a rather eclectic one, with both elite and utilitarian connotations, and drawing on American and English influences.'*<sup>3</sup>

Afterwards, the garden city principles were applied on Australian metropolises: *'Although the garden city idea made negligible impact at the metropolitan level, it did noticeably affect the layout of suburbs and subdivisions in metropolitan areas as well as regional and rural towns. Through its influence the allocation of extensive urban open space as a way of creating a rus in urbe became a mandatory part of the planning process.'*<sup>4</sup>

During the inter-war years town planning was seen as a comprehensive tool. Planning strategies would be expressed through schemes and implemented through zoning by-laws, that is, a parallel to the North American 'general plan' system.

After those years, the metropolitan planning movement raised: *'Probably the greatest challenge was resolving the tensions between the 'centre' and local government. Debate about their respective roles pervaded the national conferences. It was local government, a metropolitan wide authority or a combination of both, a workable balance between it and local government was rarely struck during the period, except perhaps in Brisbane. There again, it is still a challenge that remains today in most parts of the nation.'*<sup>5</sup>

The Post-War reconstruction saw a new optimism and faith in technology and the plans emphasized the importance of the traditional central business district (CBD) with the promotion of redevelopment. But beyond the CBD's, the metropolitan land used plans of the 1950s supporting the controlled expansion of suburban industrial areas and retail centers.<sup>6</sup>

The 1970s were a period of big changes: social problems such as poverty and inequalities were called into question. Then, there were some notable improvements in terms of environmental awareness, responsiveness to issues of equity and participation, as well as attempts to deal with the problems of fringe land development.

3 S.Hamnet and R. Freestone, *The Australian Metropolis: A Planning History*, E & FN Spon, London, 2000, p.44.

4 S.Hamnet and R.Freestone, *ibidem*, p.60.

5 S.Hamnet and R. Freestone, *ibidem*, p.78.

6 S.Hamnet and R. Freestone, *ibidem*, p.111.

But, in the end, one of the lessons of the 1970s is that *'the technique of strategic planning, while an undoubted advance, was inadequate in itself as a device to produce equitable urban outcomes.'*<sup>7</sup>

During the 1990s more 'compact' cities were desired and the balance of investment attraction and 'quality of life' issues were vital.

This sits uneasily, however, with *'current government preferences for urban outcomes which are determined by market and individual choices, with the trend towards simplified planning legislation intended to facilitate investment, and, in some places, with the dismantling of the arrangements which have delivered integrated planning in the past.'*<sup>8</sup>

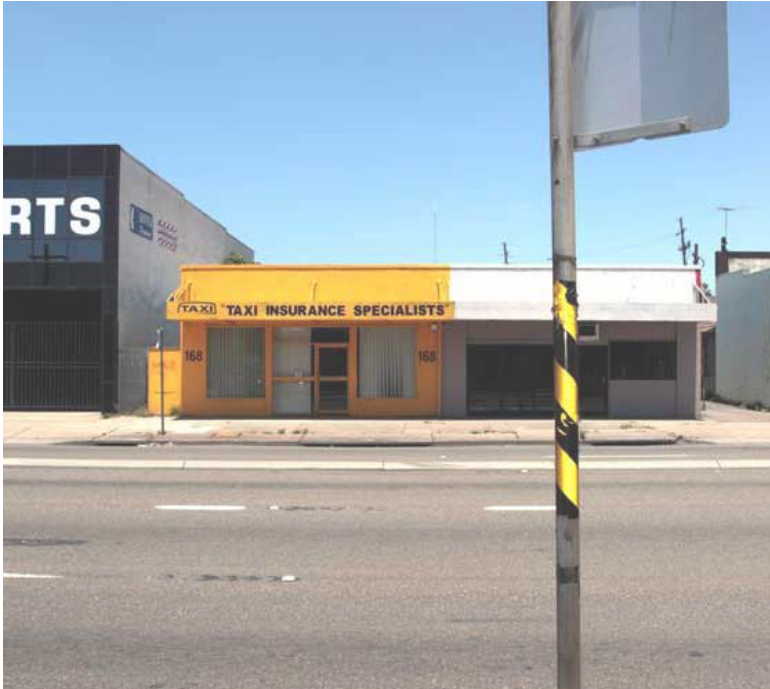
Moreover, there was a stronger awareness for environmental sustainability. In 1999 the Burra Charter, an heritage document concerning con-

7 S.Hamnet and R. Freestone, *ibidem*, p.149.

8 S.Hamnet and R. Freestone, *ibidem*, p.170.



 Robyn Stacey, *West Queensland*, 1982.



*Martin Hopkins, St Peters, NSW, Australia, 2009.*

servation issues, was written. In this document, for the first time, also landscapes and nature are seen as a big resource for conservation.

To sum up, we can say that Australia went from an initial architectural chaos, or from an initial 'visual delinquency' to a 'pursuit of pleasingness', following Robin Boyd's words.

Of course this background has influenced the urban design in so many facets, involving also the public one. If in Europe and US there was a strong debate about the public space and its public sphere, in Australia this crisis was unknown (or perhaps it was totally different) and for the first time people started questioning how to design quality spaces for community. This means not necessarily to pursue a visual simplicity but an ordered and clearly directed complexity.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> R. Boyd, *The Australian Ugliness* (1968), Text Classics, Melbourne, 2012, p.196.

## HOW DID AUSTRALIAN CITIES EVOLVE?



**1850**

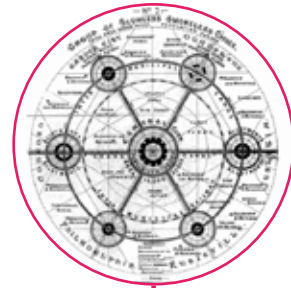
### THE COLONIAL GRID

In this period Australian cities grew up upon colonial grid for their plans, mostly with parklands surrounding the city core.

The 'long boom' of the 1870s and 1880s was followed by an economic depression, which hit the commercial life of the cities.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the regularity of the streets and town blocks was criticized; new ideas from Britain and Europe were in the air.

Ideas for healthy suburban life as a model were discussed against the urban congestion. A new town planning consciousness was emerging.



**1910-1940s**

### THE GARDEN CITY MODEL

Debates in the 1910s were focused on both the physical and organizational reform of the metropolis.

A state-based town planning movement was established. The main goals were about decentralisation: cities of limited size, satellite communities, agricultural and green belts.

By the way the garden city idea didn't develop on a metropolitan scale. It was applied mainly in the residential areas of the suburbs.

Later, in the era of new and satellite towns, the garden city idea emerged as a significant influence on post-World War Two planning thought.



**1950s**

#### **POST-WAR RECONSTRUCTION**

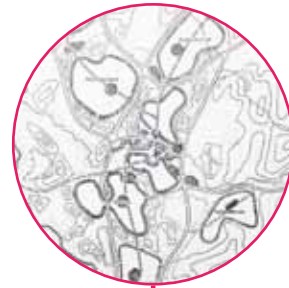
These were years of great development for Australian cities. Plans were drawn up under the influence of international movements such as modernism and British planning ideas played an important part.

The cities were filled up with values of patriarchy and consumerism.

Incoming families became more car dependent as they were resettled in newer suburban developments.

Highways were built into the plans.

1950s was a decade in which planning virtually institutionalised the suburban mosaic, which spread out in the subsequent years.



**1970s 'til nowadays**

#### **METROPOLITAN PLANNING**

Deregulation and globalisation of the Australian economy had an impact on the style of metropolitan planning. Anyway there was a growing significance of central city development with some notable improvements in terms of environmental awareness.

It was a period of tensions between centralised control, again in the name of collective goals and the power-plays involved in changing organisational structures in order to implement policies. The planning strategies of the early 1990s brought to 'community shared visions' with an integrated vision of metropolitan development.

## 1.1 SETTLEMENT OR INVASION? A BRIEF ABORIGINAL HISTORY



Google Art Project, Walter Baldwin and Francis J. Gillen seated with Arrernte elders, Alice Springs, Central Australia, 1896.

In order to outline the Australian features in the world of architecture, it is significant to think of **Aboriginal culture** and what was exactly persisted over the times.

In **1770**, an English explorer, Captain James Cook claimed the eastern part of Australia in the name of king George III. It is believed that at least 750.000 Aboriginal people were living in Australia at the time.

Archaeological studies suggests that ancestors of the modern Indigenous people of Australia migrated to the continent more than 50 000 years ago. They lived isolated from the external influences and they developed they own way of living in accordance with their religious and spiritual beliefs of the Dreamtime (Indigenous time of Creation).<sup>1</sup>

Even if the British government knew about the existence of these peoples, the British considered Australian continent to be a *terra nullius* under the English law. On 26th of January **1788**, the First Fleet, led by Captain Arthur Phillip, arrived in Sydney Cove.

Not long after tha, colonial governments started to grant, lease and sell land to the white settlers.

Thanks to flourishing of the colonial wool industry, more settlers arri-

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1 Impact of European Settlement on Indigenous People, [www.skirwk.com](http://www.skirwk.com)

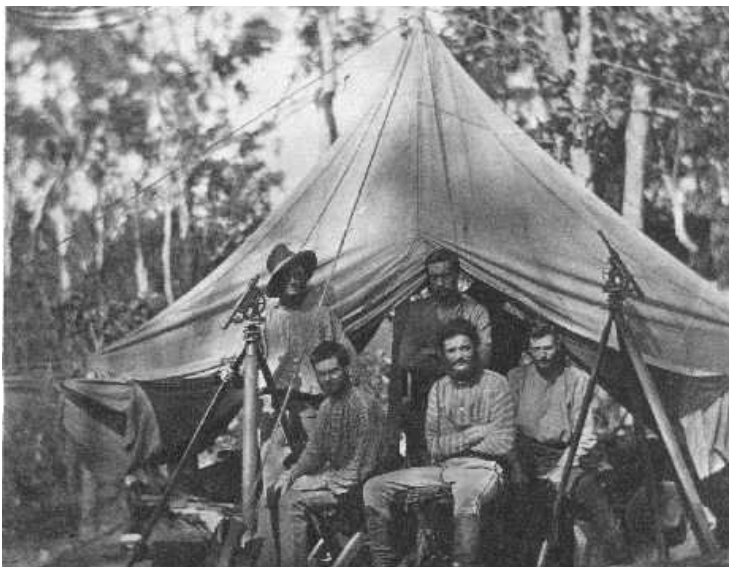


ved to stake their claims on grazing lands, which would allow them to accumulate their own fortunes. The diminishing availability of suitable plots resulted in a number of expeditions to search for more fertile ones. Therefore, the settlers started to occupy properties outside the boundaries established by the the Governor Darling and they encroached on Indigenous sacred sites, hunting grounds and food sources.

The settlers completely ignored the deep spiritual connection of Aboriginal people with the land.

The **dispossession** of Aboriginal people from their land gave rise to a drastic decline in their population. This situation was caused by two main reasons: violence and malnourishment, as they couldn't access clean water and food supplies anymore. Some of them died also during pacific conditions, because the European settlers brought with them epidemic diseases, such as chickenpox, smallpox, typhoid, measles and influenza. Initially, they were forced into government reserves or church missions. Those proceedings were under the name of "**protection policy**", but eventually, rather than protecting, they destroyed Indigenous people and culture. Children were torn from their families and educated in special facilities in a Western way of living. Those children are known as the '**Stolen Generation**'.

However, around mid 1950s, many reserves were closed due to overcrowding. Aboriginal people were forced to move into cities and towns where they were had no other option but to live in the periphery, or in



*Government surveying party, Palmerston (later Darwin), 1869. SLSA B11603  
Town planning in the bush: Surveyors at work on the layout of Palmerston (later Darwin).*

public housing (funded by State governments).<sup>2</sup>

Violence against Aboriginal people continued until the third decade of the twentieth century. It has been estimated that between 1788 and 1900 the Indigenous population declined by around 90 percent.

What about Aboriginal architecture?

Aboriginal architecture could be considered the antithesis of introduced Western styles. That consolidated over two centuries into the habit of highly Euro-Centric approach ignoring the Australian differences, such as climate.<sup>3</sup>

The architecture representing Aboriginal people is definitely the **shelter**, it was minimal. It was focused on symbolism, social status, or conspicuous displays of wealth. Aborigines, indeed, were unconcerned by size, power or monuments. It can be said that they discovered their monuments and cathedrals in the landscape itself. Despite of its apparent variety, Indigenous architecture explored a very limited number of shelter types: the **windbreak**, **shade structure** and the **enclosure**.

Their architecture was genuinely different from other architectural regional styles. For instance, the shelters were built with local materials.

Certain forms, such as *'the three-eighth dome and the half-dome, were repeated for their economy and were magnificently adapted to their geographical location'*.<sup>4</sup>

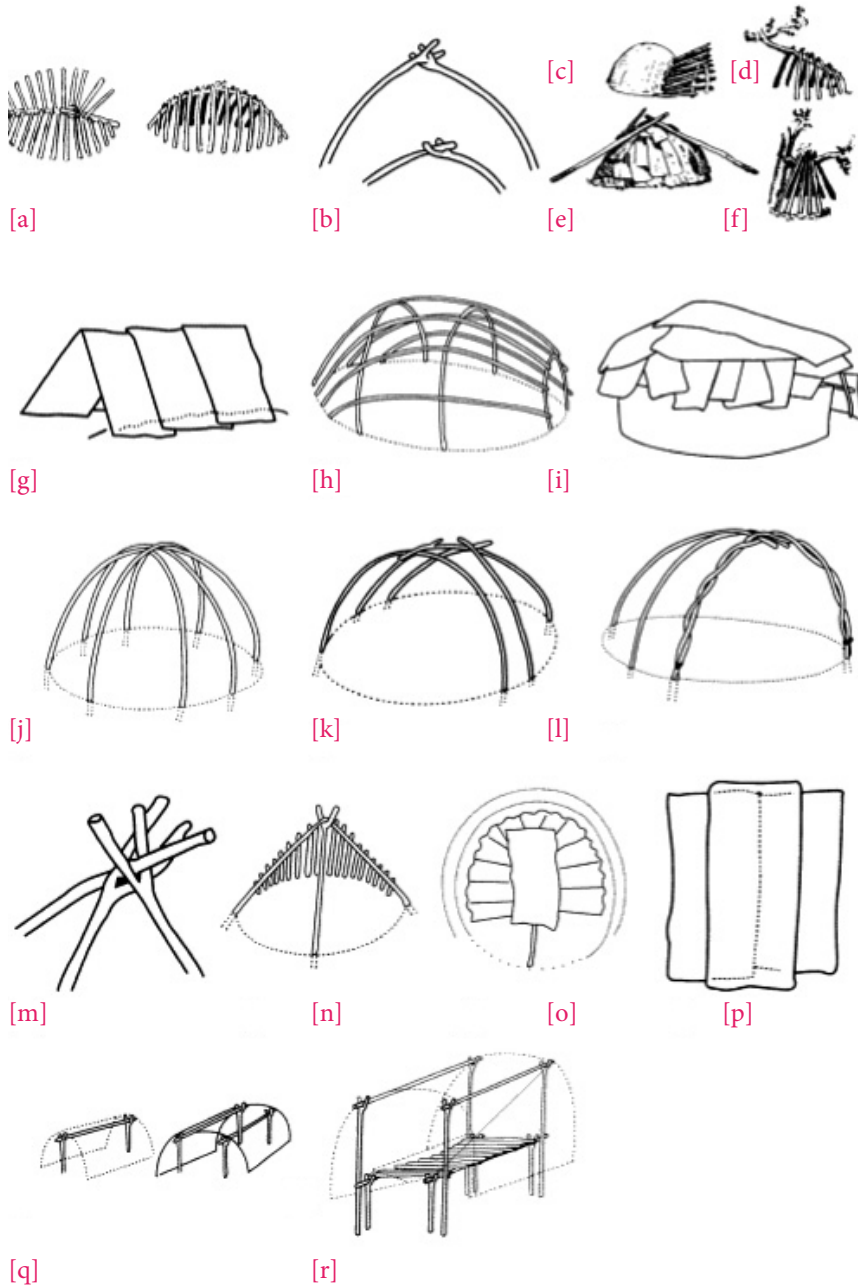
There are the bi-domes of the north-east Queensland rainforest, the grass-clad domes of the southern Gulf of Carpentaria, the warm and weatherproof half-domes, clad with grass thatches in pockets of relatively high rainfall in western Tasmania. What is more, the beehive stone-walled Gunditjmara village houses of western Victoria, and, the spinifex houses of the Western Desert can be noticed as well. Nowadays, Aboriginal architecture is still a matter of investigation and we can see its influences in **contemporary Australian architecture**. One example could be by the Wilcannia Health Service hospital designed by Merrima Design in NSW and Paul Pholeros's work (image in the next page). These piece of architecture responds properly to climate conditions by using local materials. The **Wilcannia Health Service** is located in the homonymous city (973

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2 *Ibidem*

3 P.Memmott, Gonyah, Goondie & Wurley: The Aboriginal Architecture Of Australia, University Of Queensland Press, 2008, p.15

4 P. Drew, The myth of a Country Devoid of Indigenous Architecture - "Architecture Nullius" - Has Long Persisted, December 14 2007, [www.smh.com.au](http://www.smh.com.au)



Walter Roth, *illustrations of Queensland Aboriginal ethno-architecture*, 1897.



Wilcannia Health Service, Merrima Design, 2002.  
Image source: [www.phaidonatlas.com](http://www.phaidonatlas.com)

kilometers north-west of Sydney).

The hospital is listed by the National Trust and it is an example of a Cottage Hospital. The administration and other facilities were located along an axis or spine forming two halves of the building which was divided into two wards, one for females the other one for males. The laundry and kitchen were located well away from the living area in separate buildings. Toilets were also isolated on the perimeter of the building with partial external access. Cross ventilation was achieved by locating windows located between each bed in opposite walls with dormer windows above. The siting of the hospital is consistent with late 19th century philosophy of health care. The building was made of white quartzite sandstone quarried locally. Additions and alterations to the building began in the 1950's and prior redevelopment ideas, no longer met the health service needs of the community. An interesting aspect is that the Aboriginal community wanted to keep the original hospital, as it hosted many generations over the times and it was then looked at with affection. The other interesting thing is that the redevelopment addresses the Darling River, which has spiritual and cultural significance for the Barkanji people. The building design was developed from an idea that could belong and contribute to the story of a river landscape or further that it was 'something' which evolved from the river.

**Merrima Design redevelopment was significant:** *'The first move was to clear the hospital building of ad-hoc extensions, and retrieve the original Blacket structure. The internal fit-out carefully left intact several original features, which could not be restored and incorporated – such as coffered corrugated metal and timber ceilings in the female and male wards, masonry flues, and dormer window surrounds. These now remain concealed behind plasterboard ceilings, in case of more substantial future restoration. The restoration, including work done by the community under traineeship programs, focused on stone walls and re-pointing, reroofing and plumbing, painting and landscaping. This has returned the building and grounds to something of their original aspect.'*<sup>5</sup> The project by Merrima reorganises hospital functions between the National Trust-listed Blacket building, a new linear wing facing the Barka, and a reception area between the two. Circulation is located in the central spine, with plenty of daylight, controlled solar access and cross ventilation.

To sum up, the historical background of Aboriginal people had (and still has) significant influences on the current Australian landscape.

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5 M.Tawa, Wilcannia Health Service, Architecture Australia, July 2002 (vol 91 n.4)

“ Glaciation, *lava flow*, reef, mountain, range, rainforest, mallee, **DESERT**, river and lake, mangrove swamp.

Coastal wallum, **WILDLIFE HABITAT**, ancient cremation site, rock engraving, mimi figure, wandjina, *quinkan*, dreaming track, scarred tree, fish trap, landing point, contact site, **PRIMITIVE COTTAGE**, barrack, penal settlement, church, cu-

stom house, **BANK BUILDING**, pop-  
pet head, miner's hovel, gold  
town, homestead, woolshed,  
*shepherd's hut*, log goal, silo, ma-  
chine shop, bottle kiln, pup,  
public urinal, Parliament, **OPE-  
RA HOUSE**, government domain,  
housing estate, company  
town, civic centre, **PUBLIC SQUA-  
RE**, parkway, regional park, *re-  
development project*, new town ”  
*David Yencken, 1981*

## 1.2 BEYOND MODELS OF 'IMPORT/EXPORT'

Considering very young Australian history, it is significant to draw attention on what exactly was imported from the European architectural style and what indeed was contributed to the **Australian one**.

However, before these considerations, it is worth reminding that Australia is a **planned urban nation**, as it was born from colonial foundations.

One of the Australian planning pioneers, Charles Reade, said, in an historical lecture by the twentieth century, that from 1800s in Sydney, Hobart and other towns in Tasmania :

*'Numerous reserves for town sites, together with sites for public and ecclesiastic purposes, had been made. Leading towns had been equipped with squares, crescents and park areas, under the influence of British ideas and possibly early developments in the American colonies and other possessions. The laying down of important streets from 60 to 99 ft in width in place of earlier standards, based on 40 and 50 ft, had also been accomplished.'*<sup>1</sup>

These 'parkland towns' systematically demarcated urban, suburban and parkland areas: *'Formation of roads, provision of basic infrastructure, building construction and landscaping tended to be discontinuous actions by independent actors responding to particular circumstances-often the representation of long-suffering communities'*.<sup>2</sup>

The early visitors were almost without exception British.

Therefore, Australia experienced different styles of European nature when it comes to architecture. At the time of the first settlement, **Georgian type** was the vernacular architecture style in Britain. Craftsmen, including carpenters and plasterers, were trained in the classic proportions of the **Palladian style**, fashionable across Europe.

Afterwards, Victorian design spread out assuming different aspects, which can be considered as characteristically Australian one. A perfect example might be the **Queenslander**, which is a timber residential house typical for Queensland, which is still built nowadays. It has verandas and it is raised off the ground for better ventilation and to protect the main structure from termite and other pests attack.

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1 R.Freestone, Urban Nation: Australia's Planning Heritage. Melbourne: CSIRO Publishing, 2010,p.11

2 *Ibidem*



Nevertheless, from urban planning point of view, crucial decisions lacked in 'path-dependency' for the future form and structure of cities. State and local government took responsibility for remained fragmented parts/buildings/areas, set in complex regulations.

Even overseas models of urban renewal were taken into consideration. For instance Paris boulevards, public health reforms, park systems and international expositions. In 1901, in Melbourne, there was a '*Congress of Engineers, Architects, Surveyors, and Members of Allied Professions, to discuss questions relating to the laying out and building of the Federal Capital, and matters of professional interest generally coincide with the opening of the first federal parliament.*'<sup>3</sup>

### **The Public Realm**

A brief analysis of different architectural and urban planning influences Australia received from Europe has been made above.

But what about public spaces? How were they conceived in an urban planning design which was often complex because of many regulations?

The public square has been recognized in history as a microcosm of urban life, bearer of aesthetic, cultural, as well as economic values to urban places. But it has not always been a centerpiece of Australian urban planning.

Indeed, one of the five features of Australian cities recognized by the architectural historian J.M. Freeland along with their low density, suburbanism, Victorian heritage and uniformity is precisely their '*lack of focus*' in terms of civic spaces. The author elaborated this issue in these terms:

*'As a legacy from the nineteenth-century belief in unfettered private enterprise, every possible square inch of land with economic potential was made available to private ownership. The handful of attempts that were made to preserve central areas for the public use nearly all foundered on the rocks of avarice. With the exception of Adelaide there are no gathering places for people, no public squares, no central parks, no specific points at which the corporate energy of the town or city reaches a climax. There is no centre to Australian town.'*<sup>4</sup>

Luckily the trend described by Freeland changed.

In fact, reservations of large tracks of open space for commons, public domains, botanic gardens, and government farms have been made.

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p.13

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, pp.240-241



*Elizabeth Bay House designed by John Verge,  
Sydney, 1839.  
Image source: [www.collection.hht.net.au](http://www.collection.hht.net.au)*



\*

*Traditional Queenslander home.  
Image source: [www.homeandinteriors.tumblr.com](http://www.homeandinteriors.tumblr.com)*

The creation of 'domains' appears to be a distinctly Australasian concept. Large amount of open space was under government control; others were assembled incrementally, but central city parks and public gardens have made crucial gestures to define the actual character of all central cities.

Parks became testing and proving grounds for design ideas in microcosm that could be later adapted into suburban designs.<sup>5</sup>

In the early planned colonial space, what was really common, were the so called 'green squares'.

These were created increasingly through the conversion of a regular city blocks into parks with floral and botanical displays. That was made in simple, compact, regular arrangements, which can host a fountain, war memorial and statues.<sup>6</sup>

An example of this kind of public space is shown on the subsequent pages: two squares in the neighborhood of **Carlton** in Melbourne, which were realized on a city block under the inspiration of British squares (e.g the so called 'green or garden squares' in London).

In Melbourne, indeed, there was a strong reaction against the 'conservative planning' approach of **Darling regulations**.<sup>7</sup>

In the laying out of Carlton, a series of small squares, all less than 15.000 m<sup>2</sup>, were introduced in 1850s. These were Argyle, Lincoln, University, Curtain, Murchison, and Macarthur squares.

Freestone described those squares in his book *Urban Nation: Australia's Planning Heritage* stating that : *'Their inspiration lay in the residential squares of Georgian London but they lacked the same grandeur and were typically treated as grass and formal tree plantings with a hodgepodge of surroundings buildings. Similar squares were included in East Melbourne- Powlett and Darling. These small spaces took a long time to evolve their present character. In the late nineteenth century the Carlton squares were closed to the public for years at a time because of vandalism'*.

The crucial point, which is highly underlined in Freestone's book as well, 5 R.Freestone, *Urban Nation: Australia's Planning Heritage*. Melbourne: CSIRO Publishing, 2010,p.246

6 *Ibidem*, p. 248

7 The Darling regulations of 1829 prescribed 10 square blocks containing each 20 half- acre allotments. There were no lanes and each allotment (except the ones at the corners), had a single street frontage. The principal streets were 30 m wide and the secondary streets at right angles were 25 m wide. These were the assumptions underlying Hoddle's outline layout, and it is probable that the corners were pegged out on the ground. (It is possible to find more informations on [www.emelbourne.net.au](http://www.emelbourne.net.au))

is to understand that architecture and public spaces, which were definitely realized under a British influence, have an Australian character anyway and that they deserve to be preserved.

The heritage issue is quite delicate though, also because the landscapes of urban planning are under-represented in Australia's heritage system.

In fact, British imported components have a completely opposite meaning in Australia, which is a totally different context, made of those elements listed in the quotation by David Yencken.

Elevation to heritage status demands, indeed, specific actions like establishing the importance of the site in terms of nature, type and degree of its significance.

However, when referring to contemporary Australian architecture, it is alike investigating a different world. In fact, if the past civic identity was centered on public squares (which was closer to an European tradition), nowadays public space is experienced through **large public infrastructure projects**, which often contemplate multiple uses.

Another feature (starting from the Sydney Opera House) is the use of new materials and technology, that creates a different model of public space and urban living based on innovation. Nevertheless, there is still the will of having quality gathering spaces, like the traditional European 'piazza'-what is going to be precisely investigated in the next paragraph.



*Harry's park in Sydney. The park is named in honour of the celebrated Australian architect Harry Siedler.*

*Image source: [www.australian-designreview.com](http://www.australian-designreview.com)*

# THE GARDEN SQUARE

*Lincoln Square*



The square is located in **Melbourne**, in the suburb of **Carlton**. The neighborhood is plenty of **British** inspired squares, designed after **1850s**. The Bali memorial located in this park became a popular meeting point for Melbournian skaters. It commemorates the victims of the 2002 Bali bombings.

*Image source: [www.skatespots.com.au](http://www.skatespots.com.au)*

# THE GARDEN SQUARE

*Macarthur Square*



The square is located in **Melbourne**, in the suburb of **Carlton**. Macarthur, like nearby Murchison Square was designed to be like the 'greens' of **London**, with rows of houses overlooking a park to give them a country feel, and were prestigious places to live.

*Image source: [www.yelp.com.au](http://www.yelp.com.au)*



### 1.3 THE DISCOVERY OF PUBLIC SPACES: THE CRISIS OF PUBLIC SPACES IS UNKNOWN

This paragraph is going to be a brief excursus of how different the perception of public spaces in Australia is in comparison with Europe and other countries. In fact, if in Europe and US architects, philosophers and sociologists were (and still are) talking about the loss of public dimension, 'the fall of public man' (to use the title of Richard Sennett's book), in Australia nothing similar has happened.

Postmodern writers, such as David Harvey, started talking about the 'collapse of time': *'I want to suggest that we have been experiencing, these two last decades, an intense phase of time-space compression that has had a disorienting and disruptive impact upon political-economic practice, the balance of class power, as well as upon cultural and social life.'*<sup>1</sup> Cities have become place of movement instead of static occupation. These days public spaces have to face a new concept of time: *'What matters is not the design, nor the beauty of the dimensions, materials, and colors, but the sensation of a detached culture, which the city-dweller creates.'*<sup>2</sup> Adriaan Geuze also reasonably states that the square concept has changed over the time. The experience of the space is a conscious step. The square provokes the city dweller and demands an active attitude, what gives back its own identity to the city dwellers and transforms them from spectators into actors.

In Europe we had the conflict between the historical urban fabric and the historical public spaces as well as between new modern architectures and urban designs. In the past, public spaces were almost like theatrical areas, where social cohesion was strong.

Walter Benjamin is suggesting the idea when describing the streets of Naples: *'Buildings are used as a popular stage. They are all divided into innumerable, simultaneously animated theatres. Balcony, courtyard, window, gateway, staircase, roof are at the same time stage and boxes.'*<sup>3</sup>

The new economy of Naples was reflected progressively in architecture and the result was quite different. The era of 'Junkspace' has arrived, using Koolhaas' words.

Australia did not compare itself with any historical fabric, 'just' with colonial grids, where zoning and 'Featurism' were dominating. If in Europe there was always a clear distinction between private and public space, or

1 D.Harvey, The Condition of Post-Modernity, Cambridge, Mass., 1992, p.284

2 A.Geuze, Accelerating Darwin in Architectural Positions, SUN Publishers, Amsterdam, 2009, p. 108

3 W.Benjamin, Naples in Reflections, 1978, p.167



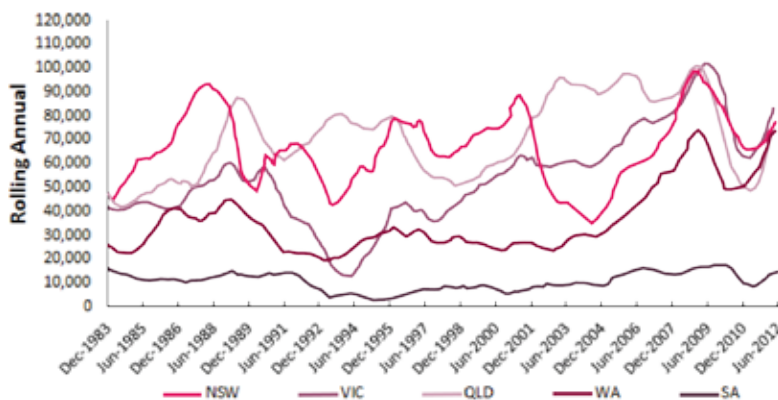
between space for leisure and space for work, in Australia this distinction was mostly clear thanks to the zoning and not thanks to any qualifying project. What is more, requests for leisure time spaces and also spaces which could give an ability to rediscover public picture of the city raised up. A difficult task it was to design spaces that could orientate and give a new 'image of the city'. Nevertheless, a big challenge is given to those cities which are expanding enormously in these years, especially in younger countries, and are requiring a different scale of visual comprehension in public spaces. Australian cities are part of this category.

Let us take Sydney and Melbourne as an example. Each of them grew by almost 1.7 million people between 1973 and 2013, although the overall growth for Melbourne was higher (62 percent increase compared to 54 per cent). If current trends prevail, Melbourne is projected to overtake Sydney to become Australia's largest capital city by 2053.<sup>4</sup>

At this point, many questions arised. Is it going to be the future trends of urban developments? What about the continuous urban sprawl which is affecting Australian cities? How is it going to influence living of public spaces? Is it going to involve building of infrastructure in order to reach them? To get an idea of this aspect a comparison of city borders between an Australian city (Brisbane) and an European one (Milan) is going to be made on the next page. Data are showing urban density and the surface occupied by the city.

It is clear that we're dealing with two different realities and that the issues require different responses. **Brisbane** is 33 times bigger than **Milan** with a surface of 5 904,8 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 2 004 262 (2009)<sup>5</sup>. Milan has a surface of 181,67 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 1 331 715 (2014)<sup>6</sup>.

### Australian Population Change



4 Regional Population Growth, Australia 2014: [www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)

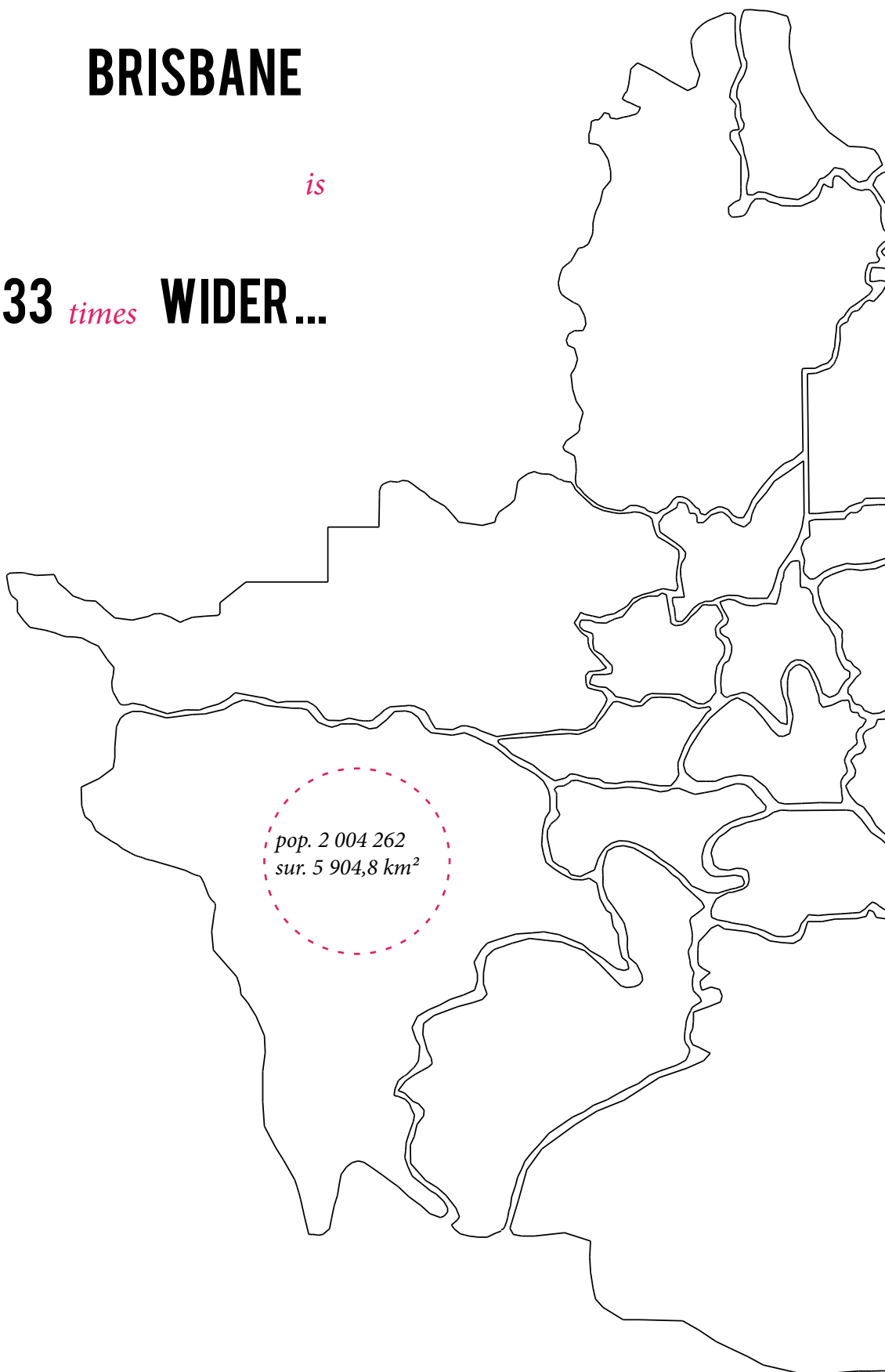
5 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1216.0 - Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC), Jul 2009, Queensland

6 Popolazione settore anagrafe comune di Milano - Resident Population in July 2014

# BRISBANE

*is*

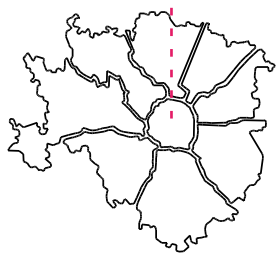
**33** *times* **WIDER...**



*pop. 2 004 262*  
*sur. 5 904,8 km<sup>2</sup>*



*pop. 1 331 715*  
*sur. 181,67 km<sup>2</sup>*



*than*

**MILAN!**

## 1.4 AUSTRALIA IN COMPARISON TO EUROPE: THE LARGE EXTENSION OF THE SUBURBS

The perception and the living of the public space also depends on the perception of the city itself and consequently of its urban fabric.

As Kevin Lynch states : *' It seems that for each city there is one public image, which is made of the superimposition of many individual images. Or maybe there is a series of public images owned by a certain number of citizens. These group images are essential so that the individual can act with success in its own environment and that he can collaborate with the others [...] Every single individual image is unique and it has some contents that can be communicated seldom or maybe never. Nevertheless, it can get closer to the public image, which is more inflexible, more inclusive, in different environments.'*<sup>1</sup>

In Europe there is a strong relationship between buildings, monuments and public squares since classical Greece and Roman Empire. In those areas, a public pattern has been retained for ages by tradition.<sup>2</sup>

These days public squares (Forum, market, etc.) are used not so much for the daily needs that much anymore, but mostly to have a break in everyday race. And this is for sure a good intention, which is not often observed. Most of the time, indeed, the citizen is forced to spend money in order to be able to occupy that space.

In this sense one is not a citizen occupying a public space anymore, but he or she is a customer.

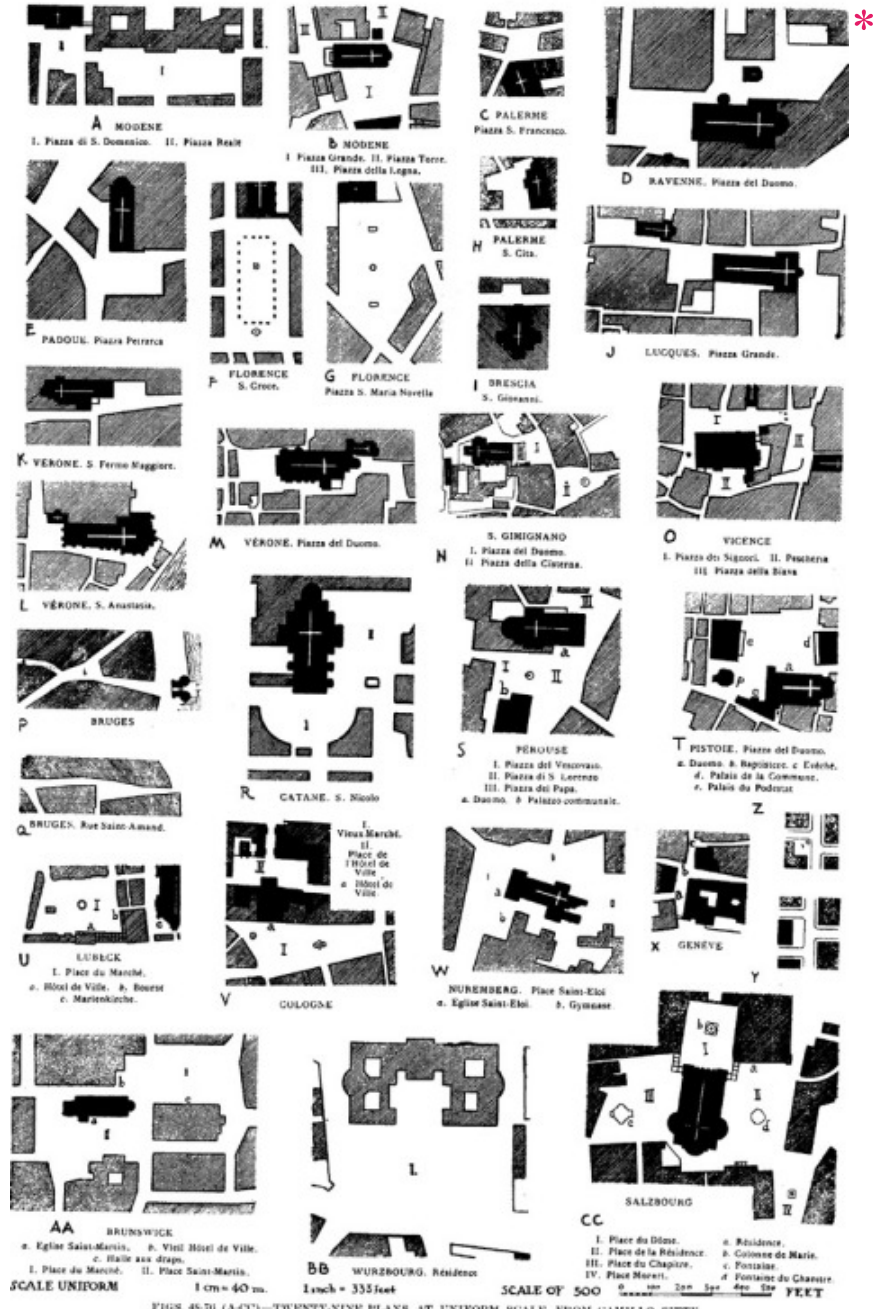
In this regard, it is worth citing Sitte's words that perfectly suit nowadays reality : *'Those who have enough enthusiasm and faith in good causes should be convinced that our own era can create works of beauty and worth. [...] We wish to seek out, as technician and artist, the elements of composition which formerly produced such harmonious effects, and those which today produce only loose and dull results.'*<sup>3</sup>

Surely, European countries with a deeper urban history are supported by tradition and some urban physical circumstances (like the narrowness of the streets and the traditional enclosed character of public squares) to design public spaces. If public customs and a public pattern was born and stayed alive in those countries, what can we say about Australia? Here the urban development has not grown around religious and political center

1 K.Lynch, *L'immagine della città* (1964), biblioteca Marsilio, Venezia, 2006, p. 65.

2 C. Sitte, Author's introduction in *The Art of Building Cities* (1889), p.473, [www.contemporaryurbananthropology.com](http://www.contemporaryurbananthropology.com)

3 C.Sitte, *ibidem*, p.468



FIGS. 45-74 (A-CC)—TWENTY-NINE PLANS, AT UNIFORM SCALE, FROM CAMILLO SITTE

The image is a study, *The Modern Revival Of Civic Art*, of European 'Piazzas' by Camillo Sitte.

(the church and the City Hall) in an inorganic way , but it followed more the urgent demand of having soon space for the incoming working class. This reason brought to the ‘suburbanisation’, or rather heaps of space occupied by houses with backyard able to guarantee a good welfare for everybody, or at least this is what was believed.

The cities’ growth was increasingly absorbed by suburban expansion, much of it casual and speculative.

In 1861, 40 per cent of Sydney’s residents lived in suburbs; by the time of Federation in 1901, the proportion had grown to 70 per cent. Some 70 per cent of Melbourne’s population growth during its boom era of the 1880s was in its expanding suburbs.<sup>4</sup> The English journalist R.E.N. Twopenny, who wrote the book *Town Life in Australia* in 1883, said that the ‘Australian townsman’ had ‘inherited so thoroughly’ the English love of suburban living, and seemed to happily tolerate the consequent daily commuting between home and work. These ‘*were advanced cities, something that pleased the colonials eager to show they had improved on condition back ‘home’. Melbourne and Sydney, for instance, had integrated public water supply systems before London.*’<sup>5</sup>

In short, the goals of Australian settlement were: the expansion of collective welfare through orderly and inclusive suburbanization and also protection of the most vulnerable through a modest public housing sector (e.g. Aboriginal housing).

Australian suburbia were (and probably still are) the envy of the world. Clive Forster, a researcher and geographer of Australian cities, recently wrote : ‘ *Compared with city-dwellers almost anywhere else in the world, most urban Australians live in spacious housing, in healthy surroundings and have good access to jobs, services and facilities. Differences certainly exist between rich and poor suburbs, but the contrast are less than in most countries.*’<sup>6</sup>

However, as Brendan Gleeson observed in his book *Australian Heartlands*, for much of its existence Australian suburbia has been an ‘*heartland embraced physically but denied emotionally*’.

After the phase of the Australian Settlement there was an era of chronic ‘socio-economic uncertainty’ and rapid cultural change. The will was the one of reducing the ‘disorder’ of ordinary suburbia thanks to new islan-

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4 B. Gleeson, *Australian Heartlands*, Allen&Unwin, Crows Nest NSW, 2006, p. 9.

5 B.Gleeson, *ibidem*, p.10


6 Forster, *Australian Cities*, 3rd edn, p. xvi

ds of privilege and conformity. Again, as Gleeson explains in his book: *'Strangely, the new millennium's 'good times' produced not boundless joy in the hearts of suburban publics but a new dysrhythmia that reflected an underlying pessimism about prospects for social solidarity and, ultimately, political democracy.'*<sup>7</sup>

The suburbia has been definitely disliked for safety reason (the segregation between rich and poor has become greater even if it's not comparable at all with US cities). The situation was caused by the lack of facilities and because the residents were made highly car-dependent.

This brief description is to wonder what could be the future role of public spaces in relation to the Australian suburbia. Will it be something different from just large dormitories? Perhaps, only if a principle reorganize the state of art could exist in order to have different public images and perception of the 'Australian heartlands'.



 L.Selo, Paddington suburb in Brisbane, 2013.

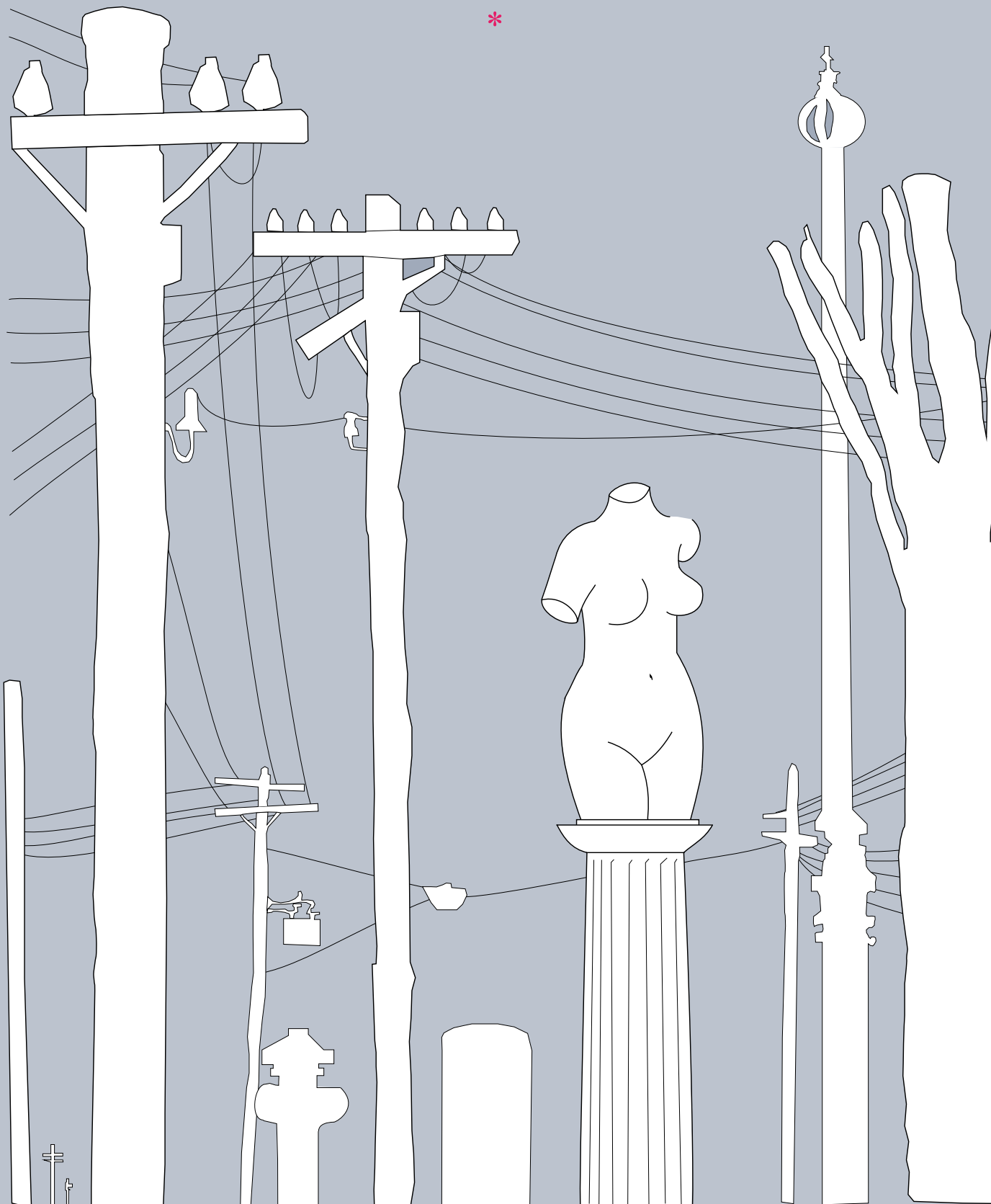
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<sup>7</sup> B. Gleeson, Australian Heartlands, Allen&Unwin, Crows Nest NSW, 2006, p.50.

*The image on the right is a reworked sketch by R.Boyd and it was used as the book cover for his book "Australian Ugliness" in 1968.*



## 2. PUBLIC SPACES VS THE METROPOLIS





*'Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody'*

Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 1961

## **HOW ZONING AND THE EXPANSION OF CITIES INFLUENCE PUBLIC SPACES**

In this part the attention will be paid on how the urban sprawl and **functionalistic planning** reduced a close contact between people, how it influenced the living of the public space.

Moreover, the issue of nowadays **public spaces** representing the key to change this situation will be taken into consideration.

In *The City In History*, Lewis Mumford mentions that Alberti already specified the benefits of living out of the city: *'The great beauties of such a retreat are being near the city, upon an open airy road, and on a pleasant spot of ground. The greatest commendation of itself is its making a cheerful appearance to those who go a little way out of the town to take the air; as if it seemed to invite every beholder(...) Nor should there be any want of pleasant landscapes, flowery mead, open champains, shady groves, or limpid brooks, or streams and lakes for swimming, with all other delights of the same sort. Lastly(...)I would have the front and whole body of the house perfectly well lighted, and that it be open to receive a great deal of light and sun, and a sufficient quantity of wholesome air'*. The whole suburban domestic program was already there.<sup>1</sup>

These were the reasons which were brought to the suburbanization after the Industrial Revolution. Even if it's actually difficult to estimate the date of birth of the suburbia, in fact, Lewis Mumford clarified the evidence of kind of 'primitive suburbs' that have been traced back to the times of Ur. Nevertheless, it always depends on what we mean with the term 'suburb', which should not be confused with 'periphery'. With the second term (which is already controversial as it cannot be exactly established what 'periphery' in the contemporary cityscape mean), there is also intended informal conurbations, whereas suburbia are **planned conurbations**.

The most popular 'planned' suburbia is definitely the American one, that is carefully followed by Australia, which is reflected not only in the urban planning, but also in the lifestyle. That is why Robin Boyd uses, the term 'Austerica' in his book *the Australian Ugliness*, which perfectly emphasizes this concept.

The book ends with these words: *'The universal visual art: the art of sha-*

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1 L.Mumford, *The City in History*, Pelican Book A747, 1961, p. 552



\*  
*The image is an example of American suburbia and it is taken from the Tv show 'Weeds', which is settled in Californian city of Agrestic, today merged into a new development: Majestic.*

*ping the human environment, is an intellectual, ethical, and emotional exercise as well as means of expression. It involves the strange sort of passive love with which people have always regarded their shelters. The Australian Ugliness begins with fear of reality, denial of the need for the everyday environment to reflect the heart of the human problem, satisfaction with veneer and cosmetic effects. It ends in betrayal of the element of love and a chill near the root of national self-respect.<sup>2</sup>*

Australia has definitely rediscovered that root of national self-respect, which leads her to ask new questions that require new answers.

The suburbia and its eventual redevelopment is one of them, considering also the big amount of new immigrants, aspiring to be Australian citizens.

What exactly is the **role of public space** in this urban and anthropological framework?

The spreading out of dwellings provided light and air but it also caused an excessive thinning of people and events. Differentiation in function may have reduced possible advantages of closer contact. Great distances between people characterize the new city areas and this mechanical spatial design of individual building projects has had a dramatic effect on outdoor activities.

Jan Gehl suggested that: *'In these areas the mass media and shopping centers have become virtually the only contact points with the outside world because life between buildings has been phased out.'*<sup>3</sup>

Post-war planning, as seen also in the previous chapter, has drastically influenced public spaces and the way of living them 'naturally', as it was, and still is, in the European cities.

At the time there was the wrong assumption that green spaces and the uniting element in building projects represented a strong point for a rich social life.

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2 R.Boyd, *The Australian Ugliness*(1968), Text Classics, Melbourne, 2012, p.265

3 J.Gehl, *Life Between Buildings* (1971), Island Press, London, 2011, pp. 46-47

In spite of that, there are many examples of how contemporary architecture could enhance the 'publicness' of some spaces in those areas.

Anyway, it is a matter of fact, that even if we can recreate -through new means of communication- new virtual spaces and find the 'lost publicness', something is still missing, as Gehl stated in his book *Life Between Buildings* in 1970s. That 'something' what is missing has been expressed by a new generation of architects and planners in a strong clash with modernism and the sprawling suburbs.<sup>4</sup>

**Family pattern** as well as the workplace are changed and this change involves new social needs. Civic spaces, -from the community center to the main square-, offer possibilities to meet to all these new demands.

Shared areas in the suburbs are used more '*when these spaces have the requisite quality. The public spaces are needed. The need for spaces of all types and sizes is obvious- from the little residential street to the city square.*'<sup>5</sup>

Gehl creates a set of three useful requirements to satisfy basic demands:

- desirable conditions for the necessary outdoor activities
- desirable conditions for the optional, recreational activities and
- desirable conditions for the social activities

Australia needs new directions to reactivate social life in the suburbs, which does

not necessarily mean the reconversion of low density urban fabric into a high rise building; so common trend in most of Australian cities.

New options have to be considered in a view of a slow and sustainable redevelopment. '*The Death and Life*' of Australian cities, quoting the famous title of the book by Jane Jacobs, is a process that has already started. Although, when talking about 'reactivating' the suburbia, it still seems to wander in the darkness without a conscious and clear plan.



Plan of Kresge College, Santa Cruz, California (Architects: Charles Moore and W. Turnbull).

Image source: William Turnbull, Jr./MLTW Collection, 1952-1997.

4 J.Gehl, *ibidem*, p. 49

5 J.Gehl, *ibidem*, p.51

It is not just a matter of reconsidering some qualities for public spaces (such as the quality of domesticity or the relationship to the land, which are not negligible aspects in Australia), but it is a matter of reconsidering 'the vision' of public spaces at a larger scale. Of course it is not an easy issue, especially when dealing with a functionalistic planning structure.

The interrelationship between a small and large scale is important, as also Gehl stated. The situation takes place because in all cases the small scale, the immediate environment, is where the individual person meets and evaluates decisions made at all planning levels.

The perception and the direct visual relation to the space have to be a priority as: *'sight lines are important. If people do not see a space, they will not use it'*, as the American urbanist William H. Whyte said.

However, a challenge for the future is to understand the role of public spaces in the periphery or rather in the city of the near future, as the cities are growing tirelessly and becoming hyper-dense. Public spaces are not only the key for integration, but they will represent the only way out for the collective living and for recreational activities, hopefully far to be enclosed into a virtual world.

Despite of all the new technological methods, which aim to find a universal solution of 'reading' the public space and the public life (e.g. the Space Syntax method developed at the Bartlett University College of London by Bill Hillier), every single case needs different *ad hoc* respond, considering also anthropological and socio-economic issues.<sup>6</sup>

For instance, the project in New York called 'POPS' (Privately Owned Public Spaces) meets very well to the challenge of obtaining available public spaces from private property. POPS are, in particular, an amenity provided and maintained by a developer for public use, in exchange for additional floor area. The design principles behind are aimed at a better accessibility, sense of safety and having places to sit.<sup>7</sup>

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6 J. Gehl & B. Svarre, *How To Study Public Life*, Island Press, London, 2013, p.77

7 [www.nyc.gov/pops](http://www.nyc.gov/pops)

# MITH#1

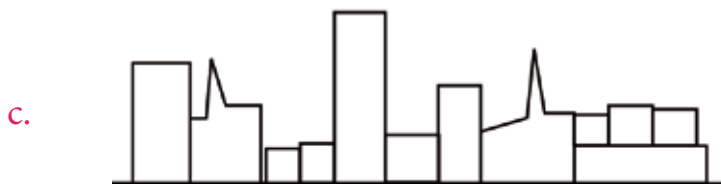
DIVERSITY = UGLY



homogeneity is boring + disorienting



forced diversity is dishonest



real diversity in uses + age **is** the **city** !

*Diagram based on Jane Jacobs' principles written in 'The Death and Life of American Cities' book.*



\*

*Paley Park in Midtown: through zoning incentives, New York's city planners have encouraged private builders to include public spaces in their developments.*

Image source:  
[flickr.com](https://www.flickr.com/photos/14811170@N00/10248111111/)

## 2.1 THE DESIGN PROCESS FOR THE IMAGINARY OF PUBLIC SPACES IN THE METROPOLIS

Different philosophical studies have already proved how imagination can increase the values of the reality.

Gaston Bachelard mentioned, in *The Poetics Of The Space*, how our home can lead us to this point through some various images and *corpus* of images.<sup>1</sup>

The *topoanalysis* (or the analysis of the place) brings intimacy to the hierarchy of the spaces which is basically ruling our home.

The main function of the house is to make us feel 'protected' against the outside world.

The author said that firstly the house is imagined as a 'vertical being', recalling to our consciousness the verticality. Secondly, the house is imagined as a 'concentrated being', recalling the concept of centrality to our consciousness.<sup>2</sup>

So, if the house brings us to some personal *rêveries*, what can we say about the public realm? What exactly are the mental diagrams which we have when we use the public spaces? What are their symbols?

Kevin Lynch and subsequently Jan Gehl gave us some answers.

Kevin Lynch states that we are living more often in a "*functional unit, the metropolitan region, but we have yet to grasp that this unit, too, should have its corresponding image. Suzanne Langer sets the problem in her capsule definition of architecture: 'It is the total environment made visible'.*"<sup>3</sup>

Lynch talks about the importance of having an immediate idea of the ur-

1 G.Bachelard, *La Poetica dello Spazio*, Edizioni Dedalo, Bari, 2011, p.31

2 G.Bachelard, *ibidem*, p.45

3 K.Lynch, *The Image Of The City*, MIT Press and Harvard University, 1960, p.13



ban settlement, as it would be a symbol (*'glimpse of distant silhouette'*) in order to understand its internal logic and its structure.

Basically he studied the phenomenology of the metropolitan area, as Gaston Bachelard did previously with the spaces of the house, in a smaller scale.

Taking into consideration Lynch's words, we should look for a proposal of a structured and complex *imageability*. A series of perceptive informations helps us to identify the framework of observation: *spaces, orientation, middle distance picture, eye level detail, floor, human activity, traffic, noise and smell.*

In fact : “ *Spatial forms are only partly sensed from one viewpoint, and require movement and a succession of views to be fully enjoyed. The fluctuations in the space as you move about, the sight of the same object in different relations, the sensation of the near and the far, closed and open, turning and straight, over and under, are one of the delights. Thus a greater degree of irregularity and variety is tolerable and pleasant (S.Spirito). Transitions from one kind of space to another make strong impressions (Venezia)*”<sup>4</sup>

Lynch believed it seems that for every city there is a public image, which is

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4 K.Lynch, The Travel Journals, in City Sense and City Design: Writings and Projects of Kevin Lynch, edited by Tridib Banerjee and Michael Southworth, MIT Press and Harvard U.P, Cambridge, 1990, p.145



Picture taken from the movie 'Don't Come Knocking' directed by Wim Wenders in 2005.

the result of the superimposition of different individual images. Or probably, there is a series of public images, each owned by a certain number of citizens. These 'group-images' are needful so that an individual can act with success in its own environment and cooperate with the others.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, we can say that if Lynch analyzed the metropolitan region stressing on the need of being able to read its image through its elements (paths, edges, districts, nodes, landmarks), Gehl ,instead, analyzed the new role of public spaces inside this new contemporary cityscape: the net-city.



In their book, *How to Study Public Life*, Jan Gehl and Brigitte Svarre expressed that the solution is not to recreate pre-modern cities (where the role of the public space was clear, as it was easier to read the city), but to develop contemporary tools 'that can be applied analytically to once again forge an alliance between life and space in cities'. The main tools they used are direct observation to understand the needs of the users.<sup>6</sup>

The fact ,indeed, is that the user's behavior is quite unpredictable nowadays, as there are so many hybrid spaces invading our metropolises.

It is significant not only to study and analyze public life by collecting information in our databases, as Gehl and Svarre did, but what is more important is to discover and make visible the images and symbols, which are identifying that particular city through civic areas.

In this sense, the role of these days public spaces is filled of meaning, particularly the areas, which do not have centuries of architectural history behind, such as Australia.

Moreover, shared spaces represent a *caesura* in the frenetic rhythm of the city. They are, paradoxically, a recreational place where users can relax , stop and take a break from their lives. In relation to these considerations,the function of contemporary public spaces are not so distant from the house described by Bachelard.

In fact, public spaces need to provide a shelter against the 'outside world'. It is not longer a talk about specific functions ,such as the market or the *forum* perform, but about spaces that will be used by both individuals and whole community at the same time, with accordance to the new social needs. The social behavior has got a territorial dimension, which means

5 K.Lynch, *L'immagine della città* (1964), biblioteca Marsilio, Venezia, 2006, p. 65.

6 J. Gehl & B. Svarre, *How To Study Public Life*, Island Press, London, 2013, p.3

that it can be defined in terms of space and that it can change from one territory into another. Following Lynch's words, *'territories are defined, protected and controlled, and, consequently, the social behavior reinforces itself'*.<sup>7</sup>

Luckily there is more consciousness about public spaces, especially since the year 2007, when for the first time, more than half of the world population was living in cities rather than in rural areas. This shift makes even more relevant to study how social life and spaces interact in cities.

Even if a single and unending method of analyzing civic areas does not exist, the way of collecting data and analyzing people's behavior still seems to be the best solution to design successful public spaces.

The aim should be to gather the visual sequences (composed by Lynch's elements) and to organize them in order to have the best result in terms of social and designing needs as well. Public spaces should be recognizable by people, easy to reach and where it is also easy to orientate.

### Development Of Public Life Since 1885 to 2005

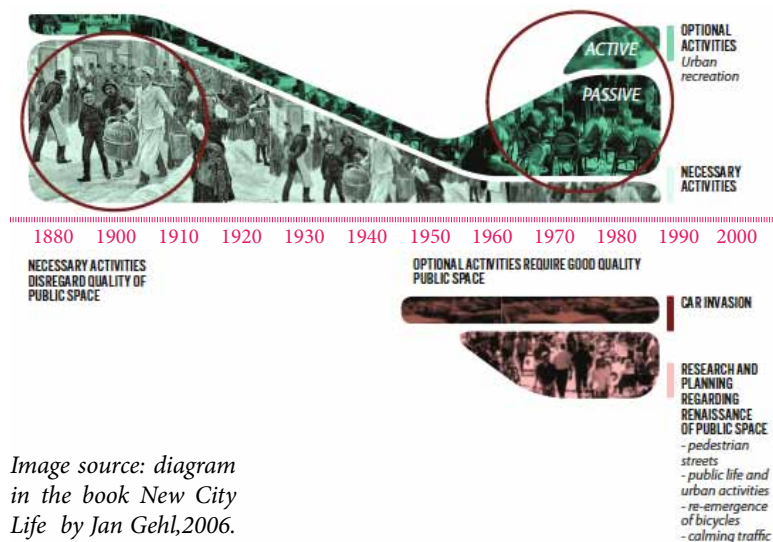
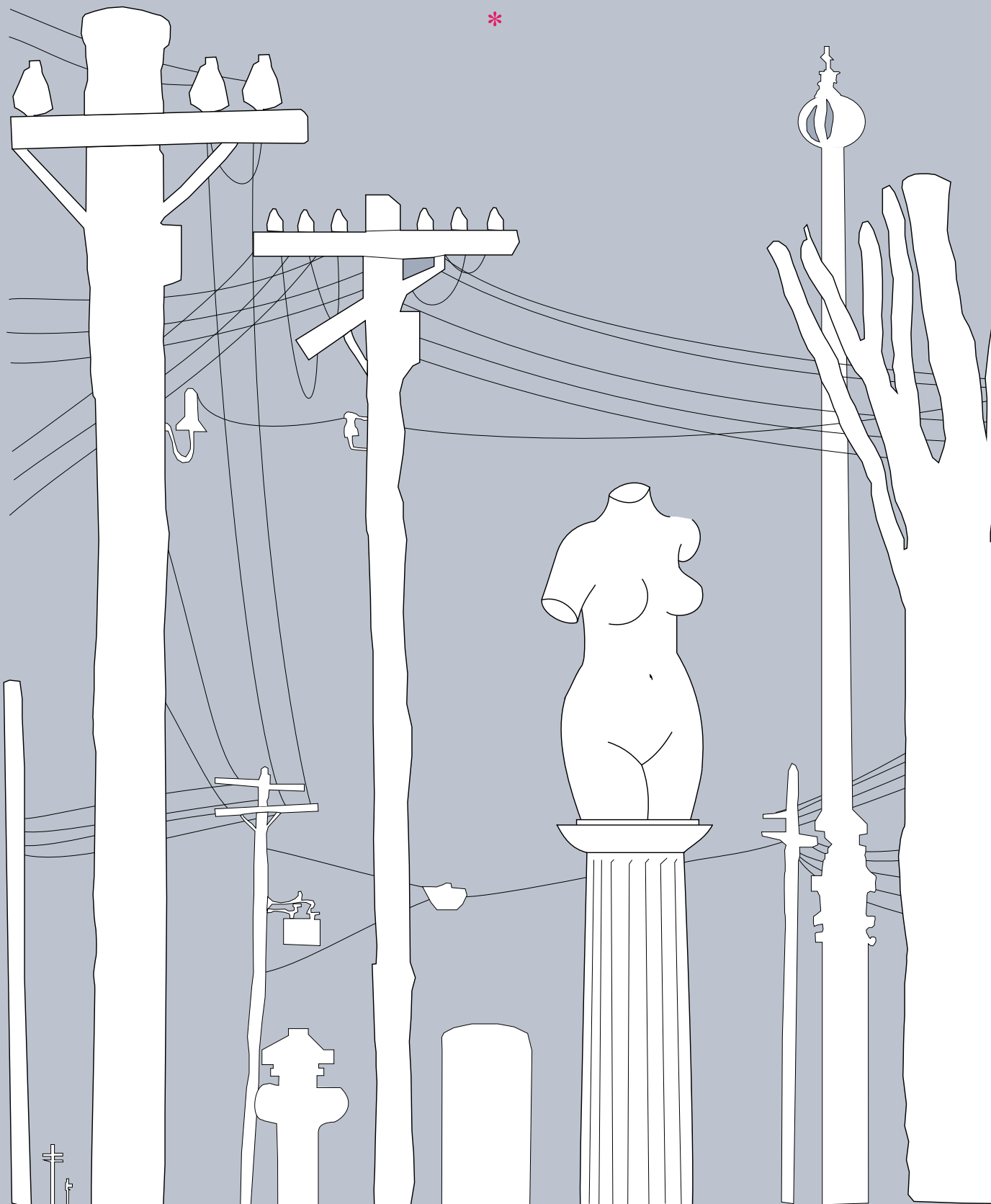


Image source: diagram in the book *New City Life* by Jan Gehl, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> K.Lynch, *Managing the Sense of a Region*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1976; a cura di Maria Parodi, *Il Senso del Territorio*, Il Saggiatore, Milano, 1981, p.42

*The image on the right is a reworked sketch by R.Boyd and it was used as the book cover for his book "Australian Ugliness" in 1968.*

### 3. ANALYSIS OF AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC SPACES





*'In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also an heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there.'*

(M.Foucault, Des Espace Autres, March 1967)

## **REPRESENTATIVE CASE STUDIES FOR UNDERSTANDING HOW PUBLIC SPACES WORK IN AUSTRALIA**

In this chapter an **analysis** about different typologies of contemporary public spaces is presented in order to understand the peculiarities which are characterizing them.

The aim of the analysis is to show which kind of **parameters** are recurrent in order to define what means designing a public space in Australia nowadays. A secondary aim is to understand what is still missing to improve these kind of spaces.

The analysis will pay attention to:

- the historical events
- the people involved
- the scale
- the action of flows
- the materials
- the connection with infrastructures
- the role of landmarks (in order to understand the 'visual sequences', following Kevin Lynch's words)

An eye on a bigger scale of the urban fabric is not denied, since, as seen previously, it is a challenge to design public spaces in 'zoned' cities with a considerable urban sprawl.

Two different typologies of squares are expressed by the examples of: **Federation square** in Melbourne and the square of the **Sydney Opera House**. The park typology is introduced by **Brisbane's Parklands**. The revitalized **Melbourne lane ways** thanks to Gehl architects. And at the end, the newer project for the redevelopment of **Darling Harbour** in Sydney, which is under construction with a new development plan.

The research questions a few ideas. Firstly, if it is possible to define a

**South Australian set of design principles** for contemporary public spaces, which distinguishes urban spaces from the European tradition. Secondly, if it is possible to define a **critical project (which is the last part of this thesis)**, able to give some solutions to what is still missing in these projects.

The analyzed projects are the projects which got major success, starting from the Sydney Opera House which defined a new model of public space. A model with multiple functions which is present mostly in metropolises and which have some guidelines that repeat themselves.

These are Australian examples of mid-scale public urban spaces, where the relationship with the landscape is a strong theme.

In this regard it is worth mentioning, Richard Weller's words : *'The fact that such manicured beauty is being almost routinely commissioned in Australian cities- where only a few decades ago a bit of grass and a couple of swings would have sufficed- signifies major changes in the value Australians now place on the public realm. This shift is a consequence of increasing urban density but it is also due to the fact that toward the end of twentieth century in Australia everyone looked to the ground for clues as to how we could more authentically dwell in this place [...].'*<sup>1</sup>

To sum up, this chapter questions if we are talking about spaces reproducible anywhere else in the world or if they are Australian in their own way and what it is possible to say about the qualities which are distinguishing them. Secondly, what are the positive and the negative aspects: are we sure that those kind of projects rid completely of *Australian Ugliness*?

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<sup>1</sup> R.Weller, Sunburnt Supermodels in *Sunburnt: Landscape Architecture in Australia* by SueAnne Ware and Julian Raxworthy, SUN, Amsterdam, 2011, p. 175






*Darling Quarter in Sydney which was designed by Aspect Studios in 2007.*  
Image source: <http://aspect.net.au/?p=361>

### 3.1 FEDERATION SQUARE

A FRACTAL GEOMETRY OF A CONTEMPORARY ENCLOSURE TO DEFINE THE URBAN SCENE



\*

 *Reworked image from [mapmapmaps.tumblr.com](http://mapmapmaps.tumblr.com)*

Name: Federation Square

Architects: Lab Architecture Studio + Bates Smart + Karres en Brands  
Landscape architects

Location: Corner Swanston St & Flinders St, Melbourne, Victoria, AU

Function: museum + art center + television broadcast studios + tourist  
information center + exhibition space + civic plaza

Surface (site area): 360.000 m<sup>2</sup>

Year: 2002

Federation Square, is a **mix-used development** located in the Central Business District close to the Melbourne's busiest railway station. It is situated between the two major public spaces: St. Paul's Court and the Square (open spaces) and the Atrium (covered space).

Over the last two hundred years, there have been a morgue, a fish market, corporate offices and rail yards.

However, planners were dreaming of linking the CBD to the Yarra river, but the central location of the railway station had always postponed achieving the dream.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, the only public square in Melbourne, the City Square which dates back to 1968, was considered a public failure.

Its redevelopment in 1990s failed to address the flaws in its design as a public space. Consequently, this situation gave the Victorian state government an opportunity to banish the competition for a new square.

## Historical Focus

Melbourne location was determined by Yarra river.

In 1835, a city founder said: *'This is the spot for a village'*. Some Melbournians still call the city 'the village' with its 4 million inhabitants.

The site was surveyed by Robert Russell and a town grid establishing a new '*metric and social order*' was laid down by Robert Hoddle, the colony's oldest surveyor.<sup>2</sup>

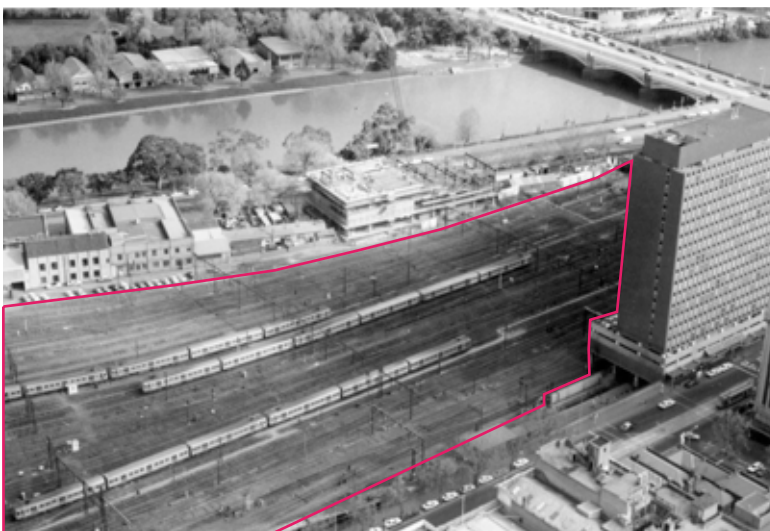
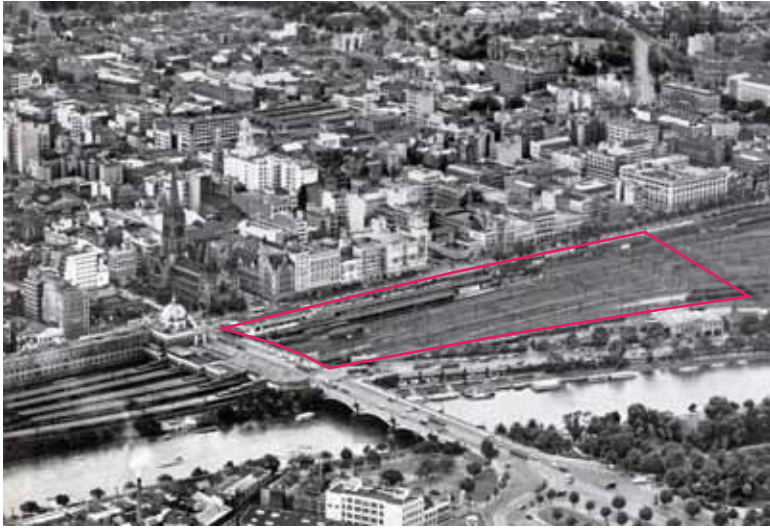
Over the years different architectural events took place. One of the most important ones was connecting the two sides of the city. In 1888 a new Princes Bridge was opened to '*make a truly noble approach*' into the city and by 1990 the site was officially known as the Melbourne's gateway.

The bridge connected north and south lands of the river. Ferries were no longer needed to cross Yarra. Today the Princes Bridge is considered one of the most important 19th century bridges in Australia.

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1 History + Design, [www.fedsquare.com](http://www.fedsquare.com)

2 R. Freestone. *Urban Nation: Australia's Planning Heritage*. Melbourne: CSIRO Publishing, 2010, pp.86-87



*Before The Construction Of Federation Square, The Jolimont Rail Yards (1979).*

Image source: State Library Victoria

By, **1900** the city expanded enormously because of the Gold Rush and excellent port facilities. After, a railway network was built to transport people from the city to their workplace, the spread of suburbs began.

The railway lines ran along Yarra river and cut the city in two parts. By the beginning of 20th century, the riverside railway yard (over 50 lines) became an eyesore, which marked the development of a vibrant metropolis. Many questions arose about the future of this site with the passage of time.<sup>3</sup>

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3 J.Hammer, From Fractal Geometry to Fractured Architecture: The Federation Square of Melbourne, the Mathematical Intelligencer, Volume 28, Issue 4, pp. 44-48



The future area of Federation Square was always designated “sacred” because of the significant buildings it was surrounded by: St Paul’s Cathedral and Young and Jackson’s Hotel.

## The Competition

The architectural design competition was announced by premier Jeff Kennett in 1977 and (177 entries from all over the world were received).<sup>4</sup> The design aims were to improve connections between Flinders Street and Yarra river and to enhance the surrounding heritage buildings, such as St Paul’s cathedral and Flinders Street Station. Among the competitors, there were high profile architectural companies, including Denton Corker Marshall and Ashton Raggatt McDougall. The announced winners were a consortium of **Lab Architecture Studio** directed by Donald Bates and Peter Davidson from London (this was the first construction of their projects), the Dutch company **Karres en Brands Landscape architects** and local architects **Bates Smart**.<sup>5</sup>

The original design (of which the cost was between \$110 and \$128 million) included several five-story ‘shards’. A series of interconnected laneways and stairways would connect Flinders Street to Yarra River and the open square creating a large area for public events.

ACMI (Australian Centre for the Moving Image) and the National Gallery were announced as the major tenants.

## The Construction

Some changes in the project were made in order to not interfere with the so called ‘heritage vista’, represented by the St. Paul cathedral.

Moreover, the cost of the project blew up significantly with the figure of \$ 467 million (over four times the original estimate). What is worth reminding here, is the fact that funding came primarily from the state government and just small contributions from the City of Melbourne. Federation square was open to the public on 26th October 2002.<sup>6</sup>

## The Project

The project is basically made of five components: a Civic Plaza, the Atrium, an Art Gallery Complex, the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, different eateries and shops. All the mentioned elements above are built on a deck of 4 hectares (55.000 square meters) roofing the railway

<sup>4</sup> ‘Federation Square: A Future About Shatter’. Architecture Australia. [www.arch-media.com.au](http://www.arch-media.com.au). November–December 1997. Retrieved 16 March 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Gabriella Coslovich (26 April 2003). ‘The Square’s vicious circle’. The Age (Melbourne: [www.theage.com.au](http://www.theage.com.au)). Retrieved 16 March 2008.

<sup>6</sup> MINISTER FOR MAJOR PROJECTS Media Release. [www.legislation.vic.gov.au](http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au). 18 October 2002. Retrieved 16 March 2008.



*Federation Square aerial view.*  
*Image source: [www.heraldsun.com.au](http://www.heraldsun.com.au)*



\*

*Federation Square close-up overview.  
Image source:urbanfile.org*

yard.

-**The Civic Plaza** can accommodate up to 15.000 people. The design of the square was the key-component in the competition.

-**The Atrium** is a covered public component, which complements the plaza, and it can accommodate about 1.000 people.

-**The Art Gallery Complex** is an extension of the National Gallery of Victoria. It comprises more than 7.000 square metres of exhibition space and it houses 22.000 Australian art objects.

-**The Australian Centre for the Moving Image** includes several cinemas with the latest technology for preservation, exhibition, and education relating to the moving images. There are also theaters and a concert hall for live performances.

-The variety of  **eateries and shops** include also a riverside reception venue and a multi-level car park.

Despite the formal language, which is following the idea of **fragmentation** through the parametric design, the project is solving the urban planning issues very well. In fact, Federation Square is a public space that functions as a **pivot**, which is connecting the CBD with Yarra river.

*'Donald Bates and Peter Davidson have successfully negotiated the transition from a small experimental practice in London to running a sixty person office and managing a highly visible project under tight budget and schedule constraints'.<sup>7</sup>*

Stan Allen correctly detects that they were able to extend their pragmatic and experimental approach to questions of execution.

They have embraced technical constraints, installing engineers and consultants directly in their office , experimenting through unfamiliar geometries.

Moreover, they continued to use the vigorous parametric organization of the original project even when faced with inevitable changes to the program and scale of the project.

### **The Atrium**

The Atrium is a big public structure that is eighteen meters high and twenty meters wide. This glass gallery with a steel structure is a proper extension of the civic plaza and a forecourt to the museum and the commercial spaces. The southern side of the space steps down from its elevated level above the railway to meet the riverside promenade.<sup>8</sup>

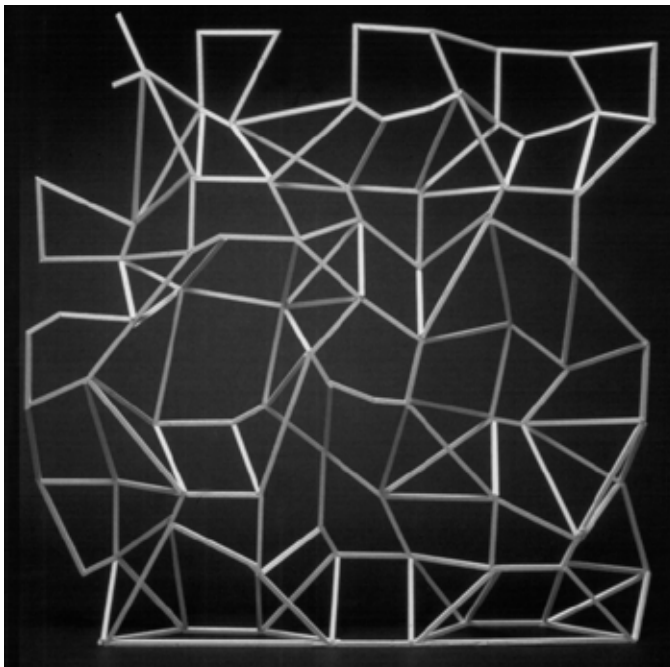
This transitional space can function as a theater with an acoustically tuned interior, which is suitable for small to medium sized music and dra-

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7 S.Allen, *Assemblage*, vol 40, Massachusetts Institute of Technology,1999, pp. 56-67

8 *Ibidem*, pp.56-67





*In the images: the Atrium and the model showing its structure.  
Images sources: Peter Clarke 2003 + Lab Architecture Studio  
(Donald L.Bates and Peter Davidson)*



Image source: [www.openbuildings.com](http://www.openbuildings.com)

matic performances.

The geometry of the facade constructs a three-dimensional framing system that is glazed both inside and outside. The space inside of the framing scheme acts as a big thermal chimney, evacuating the build-up of hot air. The atrium space itself is conditioned by a passive cooling system, using a low-level air displacement techniques.

### **The Façades**

The façade of the three main buildings is a multi-colored composition of tiling design, a *'tectonic aggregation'*, as the designers called it.

The objects appear fragmented and broken, as they were realized through prefabricated industrial techniques, what in fact, was quite demanding for a project of this size. Utilizing new understandings of spatial and surface geometry *'industrialization no longer corresponds to standardization, but rather enables a high degree of material variety and surface figuration.'*<sup>9</sup>

The selection of the triangular pinwheel grid as the modular basis for the façade system allows both cladding and frame shapes to be independent from the grid's smallest component unit, the triangle.

Consequently, the building façades can be treated in a changing and in a visually dynamic way. Façade components (structural, environmental or spatial) cooperate all together, like in a coherent system.

The main buildings are clad in three materials: sandstone, zinc and glass. By varying the panel shapes and relative proportions of each material different surface qualities have been developed not only for each building, but also for the different orientation of the façade.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, pp.56-67

## The Civic Plaza

*'A distribution of meeting places, desire lines, and accumulating memories'*



Image source: [www.sapphirealuminium.com.au](http://www.sapphirealuminium.com.au)

The site functions as a street-like space with different usages.

The architectural forms create kind of 'natural' flows surrounded by a series of varied activities, which encourage public interactions and spontaneous activities.

The deck over the railways is supported by over 3.000 tonnes of steel beams, 1.4 km of concrete 'crash walls' and over 4.000 vibration-absorbing spring coils and rubber padding.

It was designed, indeed, to support specific uses, such as galleries, cinemas, and radio and television studios, which needed to be isolated from vibration and noise.<sup>10</sup>

The plaza consists of 470.000 ochre-colored sandstone blocks from Western Australia. Moreover, the design's geometry allows different configurations and arrangements, from the large scale public gathering (of up to 15.000 people) to intimate spots of contemplation and relaxation.

The differentiation of the paving pattern underlines these function variations.

### **Water Conservation**

Fed Square Pty Ltd has implemented water saving initiatives including **rainwater harvesting projects** and installation of a system to **filter and**

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<sup>10</sup> K.Wimble and J.Lindgren, *Federation Square*, p.5, found on [www.courses.washington.edu](http://www.courses.washington.edu)

recycle water into cooling towers. These measures have reduced Fed Square's water consumption by 14% in 12 months equating to 13-14 million liters.

Given their arid climate, Australian city leaders need to be particularly sensitive about water use and deal with it as with the precious commodity. The designers made some effort to recycle, reuse, and reduce the need for a certain amount of water on the site, which is a good step towards resource self-sufficiency.<sup>11</sup>

### **Federation Square East: New Development**

Federation Square East is a 330.000 m<sup>2</sup> site existing just next to the Federation Square. An expression of interest to develop this site was released on Monday, September 15th 2014.

The Federation Square East site is bounded by Federation Square/Russell Street to the west, Flinders Street to the north, Batman Avenue to the east and Birrarung Marr to the south.

This time, however, the project could not be 'public' anymore, since the ownership of the project belongs to a private sector and was not publicly aired.

In September 2014, the government began soliciting formal design proposals for Federation Square East with the release of an '*expression of interest*' document detailing its broad vision for the site, which should involve a mix of cultural, civic, residential and commercial uses.

'*Federation Square East can become a new jewel in Melbourne's crown*,' as State Development Minister Peter Ryan announced. '*The possibilities for this site are limited only by the imagination.*' The project needed to '*contribute a significant improvement to the existing public realm*' while '*balancing financial returns with public outcomes*,' the government said.<sup>12</sup>

According to reports from The Age, the \$500-million-plus project could be completed over four years and probably include a hotel, offices and retail space.

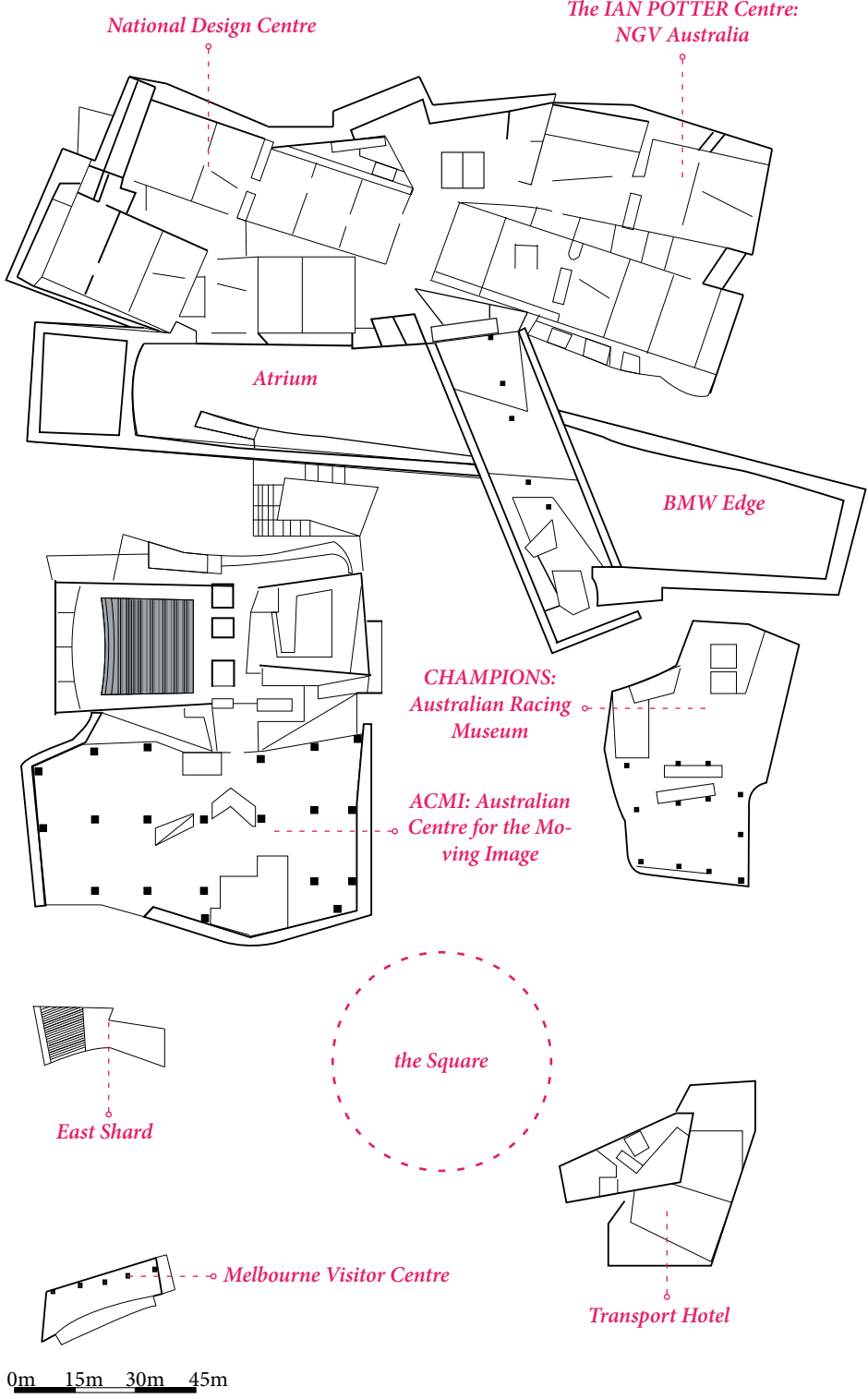
Lab Architecture Studio is behind the Federation Square plan for the proposed \$680 million Federation Square extension.<sup>13</sup>

It's quite difficult to say something specific about the project, as not so many information was released. The main function by the way, is the one of being a hinge and a connective link.

11 *Ibidem*, p.6

12 C.Vedelago, Developers likely to be given public land for Federation Square East project, October 26 2014, The Age Victoria, [www.theage.com.au](http://www.theage.com.au)

13 R.Nathan, Federation Square Project, June 13 2014, [www.australianenders.com.au](http://www.australianenders.com.au)





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*In the image the rendering of the project Federation Square East, which is the extension of Federation Square.*

*Image source: extracted from the Media Releases of Premier Denis Napthine and Minister for major projects David Hodgett, <http://www.majorprojects.vic.gov.au> and [http://www.theage.com](http://www.theage.com.au).*

*au.*



However, from the renderings scattered on internet, it can be concluded that the two projects are visibly different. In fact, they are not communicating between each other. It seems almost like they want to show somehow their different nature: a public one and a private one.

The area will be a huge sculptural park, including the two Federation Squares and also the new Station in Flinders street.

**Hassell + Herzog & de Meuron** won the design competition for this project among 119 entries from all over the world. In the image below the renderings of the project are presented. In fact, it has been already criticized by locals by calling it a '*giant cannelloni*'.<sup>14</sup>

This definition is significant if we think that in Melbourne there is one of the largest Italian communities in the world.

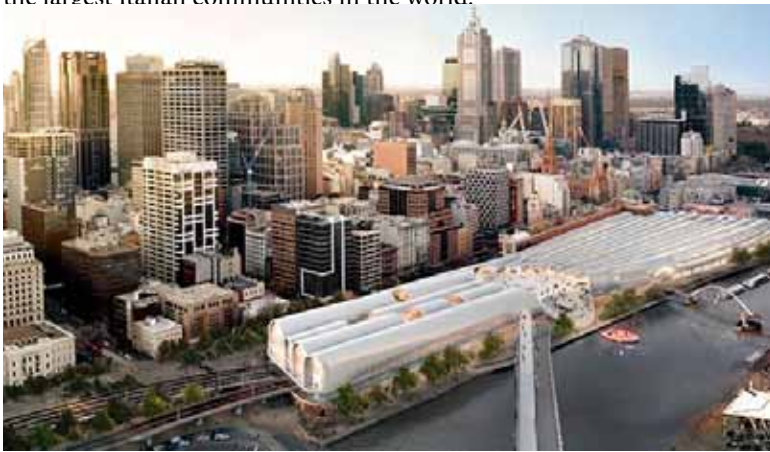


Image source: [www.bdonline.co.uk](http://www.bdonline.co.uk)

The comparison is curious, since the Italian community in Melbourne is one of the biggest in the world.

What is worth mentioning at this point is a catwalk of architectures that will be built from Flinders Street 'till the end of Federation Square East and this will surely change the image of how Federation Square is perceived nowadays. Federation Square will be inside a context of a kind of sculptural architectures, which seem divided by invisible walls.

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14 E. Hopkirk, Herzog & de Meuron's Station Redesign Dismissed as 'Huge Industrial Drain', 22 August 2013, [www.bdonline.co.uk](http://www.bdonline.co.uk)

*'I wasn't surprised when the immediate response was shock, horror and talk of a monstrosity. I think a lot of Melbournians were a bit like that, with initial feelings that it wasn't the Melbourne they knew, moving toward feelings that maybe it was the Melbourne we were becoming'*

**-Kim Dovey, Professor of Architecture at Melbourne University**

*'There's plenty of room, plenty of space between people, and it's easy to see your friends coming. It works.'*

**-Peter Davidson, Chief Architect of Federation Square**

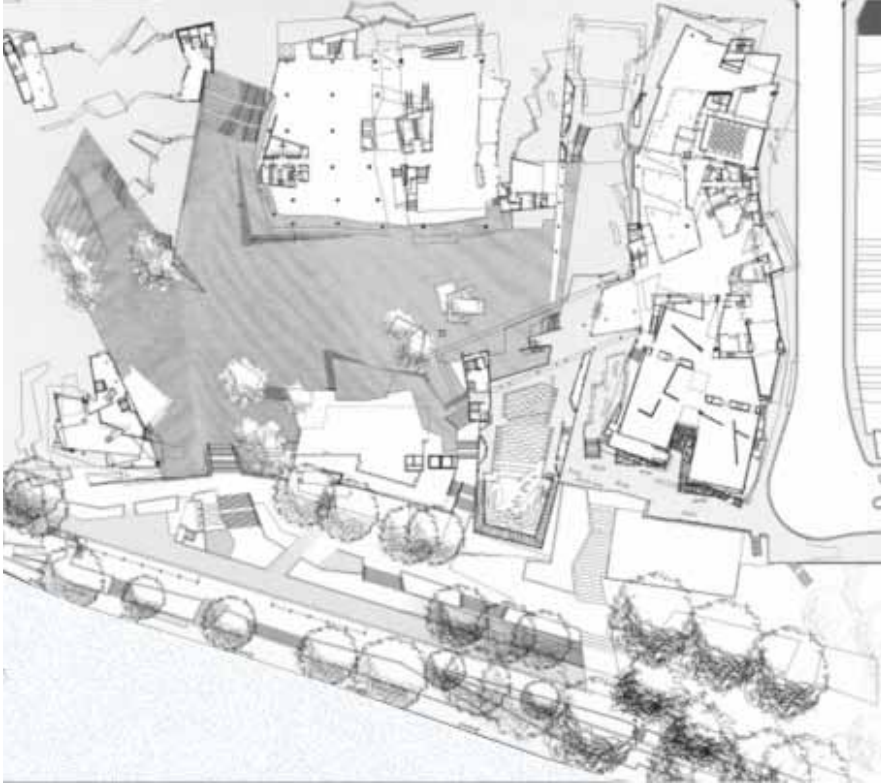


*'Lab's civic space is an intriguing contemporary interpretation of the city square. It inflects towards the river and is differentiated in ways which accommodate the diversity of required activities and is appropriate as a public space for the late 20th century.'*

*-'Fed Square: A Future About Shatters', Architecture Australia*

*'You have to get into Federation Square, physically, to appreciate it. The controversial design - Melbournians either love it or hate it (I fall into the former category).'*

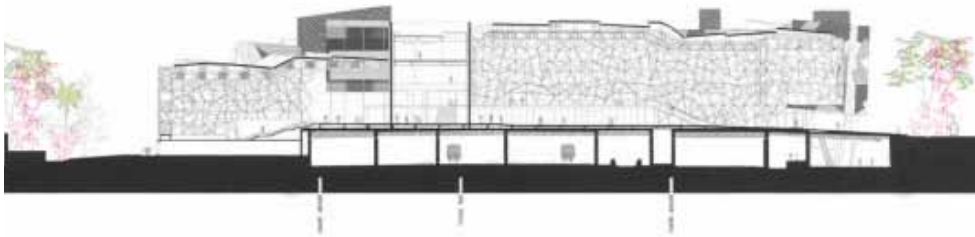
*-Travel Guides, Melbourne, 'The New York Times'*



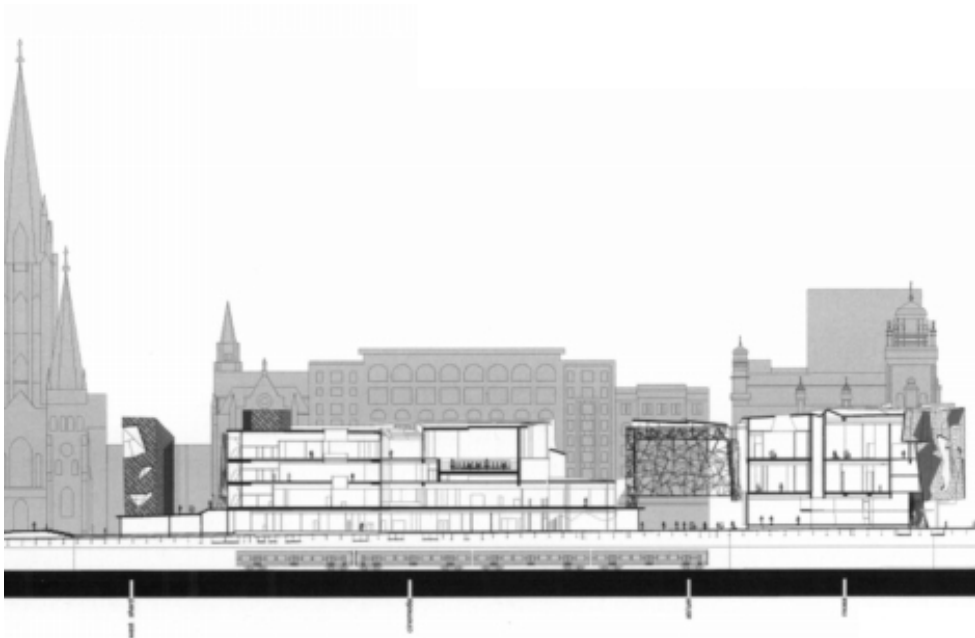
*Ground Floor Plan*



*Circulation Programme*



*North South section through the Atrium.*



*North West section.*



*East elevation of the museum.*

*Images source: Peter Clarke 2003 + Lab Architecture Studio (Donald L.Bates and Peter Davidson)*

## 3.2 MELBOURNE LANEWAYS

AN EUROPEAN URBAN DESIGN RE-ORIENTED TO PEDESTRIANS AND CYCLISTS



\*

Reworked image from [mapmapmaps.tumblr.com](https://www.tumblr.com/mapmapmaps)

Name: Melbourne Laneways (their revitalization)

Architects: Jan Gehl+ Gehl Architects

Location: City Center of Melbourne

Function: recreational; cafés precincts + retail precincts

Surface (site area): 2.430.000 m<sup>2</sup> - it's indeed a spread urban intervention which covers several blocks.

Year: 1994

In 1994 Jan Gehl, first conducted a **public-space study** in the City Center of Melbourne, which was, at the time, mainly occupied by offices and very few residents. This initial study became an important tool through which investigate possible design solutions to redevelop this central area.

A number of initiatives were adopted from 1994 to 2004.

For example, *'narrow passageways through blocks of buildings were converted into attractive places for staying or sauntering. A central square and a new city hall plaza were established. Art projects beautified public space. These and many other initiatives made downtown Melbourne a more attractive place to live and to visit – by day and by night.'*<sup>1</sup>

### **Historical Focus**

The city was originally laid out on a gridiron plan designed by the surveyor Robert Hoddle in 1837. The **Hoddle Grid**, features large, regularly sized blocks divided into parcels that were intended to facilitate the quick sale of land. Main streets in the grid run approximately north-south or east-west and are 30m wide. Street blocks are 200 m<sup>2</sup>, but are divided east-west by smaller 33ft wide streets to provide rear access to the parcels.<sup>2</sup> It was believed, indeed, that large lots and wide streets would have prevented the formation of slums, like those located in London or Sydney.

Samuel Perry, the Deputy Surveyor General of New South Wales at the time, advocated strict adherence to Hoddle's layout and warned that any subdivision of lots or development of unplanned paths would mean that *'the houses will be huddled together, so as to impede a free circulation of air ... and Melbourne will be ruined before it has risen to maturity'*.<sup>3</sup>

However, from the very beginning, property owners recognized that it was in their interests to increase access to all parts of their parcels and a

1 J. Gehl & B. Svarre, How To Study Public Life, Island Press, London, 2013, p.131

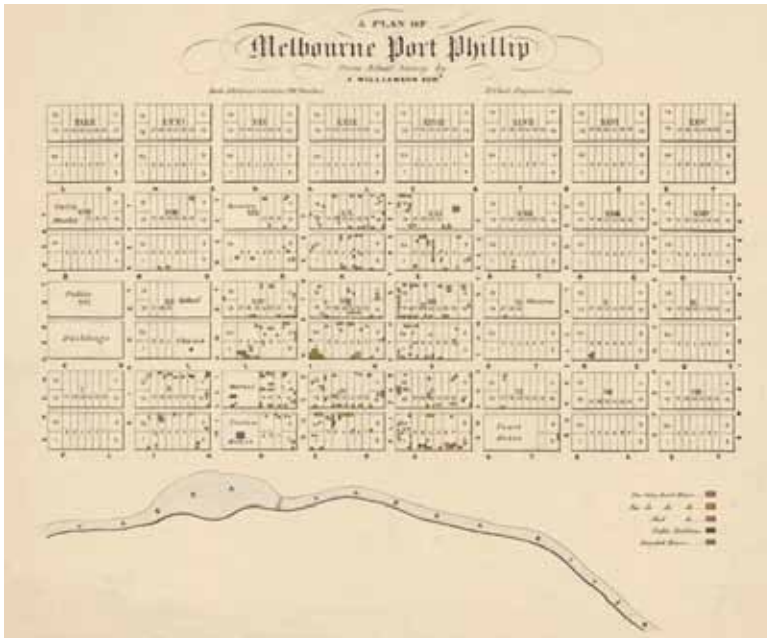
2 G. Wilson, and P. Sands, Building a City: 100 Years of Melbourne Architecture. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1981


3 Furguson, K. (2004). Imagining Early Melbourne. Postcolonial Text, Vol 1, No 1, 9-10. Retrieved October 4, 2008 from [http://eprints.jcu.edu.au/1430/01/Ferguson\\_2004.pdf](http://eprints.jcu.edu.au/1430/01/Ferguson_2004.pdf)

system of smaller, unplanned lanes were inserted into the grid.

By 1895, there were 264 lanes, 158 of them with names and signposts. *'(The) lanes were the product of the colonial land market. Most began as tiny streets giving access to the necessarily small subdivisions within Melbourne's great blocks.'*<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, *'In terms of the social geography of the nineteenth-century city, the little streets and the alleys and lanes which developed off them became associated with a social pathology of deviant behavior.'*<sup>5</sup>



 Hoodle Grid, 1837. Image source: National Gallery Of Victoria Archive.

## The Planning Approach

Despite the neglect conditions of the laneways, they always had been popular and this is the reason why the City Council decided to redevelop them through an urban spread project developed by Gehl Architects.

In fact, life had been largely designed and constructed out of the cities, and people like Jane Jacobs, Jan Gehl, Christopher Alexander and William H. Whyte asked how life could be brought back again (as already mentioned in the first chapter).

Their conclusion was that life had been forgotten in the planning process and would have to be rethought from the beginning.

Since 1994, the city of Melbourne has increased the amount of active and

4 City of Melbourne. Lane History. Retrieved Oct 5, 2008, from City of Melbourne Web site : <http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/info>

5 *Ibidem*

accessible laneways and arcades from 300 m to nearly 3.5 kilometers.<sup>6</sup>

The project provided new functions through the implementations of different city policies, which guaranteed a positive transformation of the previous under used and unwelcoming laneways.

For example, in September 2007, the City Council of Melbourne adopted the planning policy '*Lanes Policy 22.20 within Amendment C105*'.<sup>7</sup>

The policy calls for the preservation or enhancement of **connectivity, 24-hour public access, views, active street frontages, service functions, and pedestrian amenities**. This policy, which applies to all laneways within the central city, states a number of **different aims**:<sup>8</sup>

- To enhance the valued built form and character of laneways through sensitive and innovative design
- To encourage activity, vitality and interaction between public laneways and adjacent private uses at the ground level
- To enhance pedestrian amenity of the laneway
- To reinforce the primary function of laneways as key pedestrian, service and access spaces within the central city

Among the policies listed within the amendment there are also:

- Provide safe, direct, secure, accessible and attractive pedestrian routes
- Encourage diversity at street level
- Maintain and enhance traditional street pattern.

According to Melbourne's Lord Mayor, John So, the program '*has become so popular that these artworks attract thousands of additional people into the darker, quieter areas of the city, making our city even safer*'.<sup>9</sup>

There were many actors involved and the public space-public life study by Jan Gehl and Gehl Architects was a tool to understand the importance of a regeneration project and how and where to intervene.

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6 City of Melbourne, Gehl Architects. (2004). Places for People: Melbourne 2004. Melbourne, Australia: City of Melbourne.

7 City of Melbourne. (2007, March). Planning Scheme Amendments: Amendment C105 - CBD Laneways Review. Retrieved October 4, 2008 from City of Melbourne: <http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/info>

8 *Ibidem*

9 City of Melbourne. (2006, July 20). Laneway Commissions Are Back To Transform City Laneways. Retrieved October 4, 2008, from City of Melbourne-News and Media Centre: <http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au>

The city made a massive effort to invite the city's residents and visitors not only to walk more in the city, but to stay awhile.

The 2004 report documents that the efforts paid off. Pedestrian traffic in the city center in the evening took off by 98%, and in general the number of people who stayed a while almost tripled.<sup>10</sup>

It is possible to perceive these results, looking at the schemes in the next page showing the increasing numbers of housing units and outdoor cafes in central laneways of Melbourne.

Design emphasis of the lanes is placed on the pedestrian experience. Windows, lighting, awnings, and paving provide a rich sensory experience with climatic comfort.

The design strategies concern the activation of frontages, the improvement of connections, the adaptation to a human scale (e.g. setbacks reduce downdraft), an implementation of visible signals, an attention to sustainability (e.g. expanding business without making new roads).

This design process is not a closed circle, but but an open process for the future, which accepts integrations and collaborations with the architects and new actors.

Melbourne now *'takes for granted that you have to have more knowledge about how public space is used and not used in order to make it function well. Ongoing studies are made of city life; staying and other social activities are registered as a matter of course. Prioritizing people and making them visible in planning has become an integrated part of daily planning work'*.<sup>11</sup>

Even if the city maintains a policy to remove illegal (or unpermitted) graffiti and tagging, it has granted permission for hundreds of areas of street art and murals, often contained within the city laneways, and takes an active role in preserving these artworks. Street art is permissible throughout the city, as long as the owner of the wall and local councils grant permission to the artist. In 2007, the City of Melbourne hosted a 'mentoring program' in which young people worked with professional artists to create vast murals along Union Lane.<sup>12</sup>

Melbourne now is popular for its vibrant laneways, which really remind the European ones.

In 1994 Melbourne's major public spaces were Southgate Promenade, Bourke street Mall and the southern half of Swanston street Walk.

Each of these have been improved and nowadays the Laneways are definitely between Melbourne's most popular public spaces.

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10 J. Gehl & B. Svarre, *How To Study Public Life*, Island Press, London, 2013,

p.131

11 *Ibidem*

12 City of Melbourne. (2006, July 20). Laneway Commissions Are Back To Transform City Laneways. Retrieved October 4, 2008, from City of Melbourne-News and Media Centre: <http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/info>





**1982**  
204 housing units + 2 outdoor cafes



**1992**  
736 housing units + 95 outdoor cafes

- Official residence (one dot = five units)
- Apartments (one dot = five units)
- Student housing (one dot = five units)
- Café with outdoor service
- ▲ Under construction




**2002**  
6,958 housing units + 356 outdoor cafes

Images' source: J.Gehl and B.Svarre, *How to Study Public Life*, London, 2013.

# LANEWAYS

The image is showing the new variation of functions in Melbourne laneways.

The image is a rielaboration from a drawing found in **Places for People: Melbourne 2004**. Gehl Architects & The City of Melbourne.

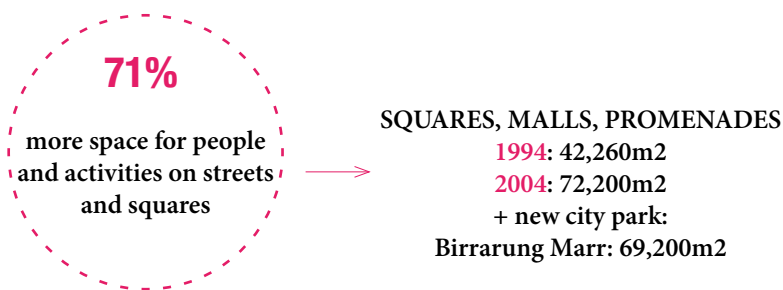
- 
- *Cafe precinct*
  - *Retail precinct or mixed precinct*
  - *Upgraded pedestrian only throughfare*
  - *Services only or shared vehicle /pedestrian*



The role of the city's public spaces is to be a place for animated and recreational activities and this role has become increasingly important as residential uses in the city center extend and diversify. In general, they offer adaptable settings with the flexibility to accommodate diverse activities, almost as an organism growing with the evolution of the society. These public areas have indeed begun to form a network and the future will indicate further dimensions associated with their impact on Melbourne's public life.<sup>13</sup>

Accessible and active laneways in the city centre have been increased from 300m to 3.43km. Of these, 500m are completely new lanes or arcades – these are located within QV, the Melbourne Central, GPO and Southern Cross redevelopments, and future CH2/Lt Collins St Precinct redevelopment. More active facades and varied uses have been introduced into existing laneways, including the Causeway, Block Place, Centre Place, Degraeves Street, George Parade, Bligh Place, Equitable Place, Port Phillip Arcade, Manchester Lane and Driver Lane.<sup>14</sup>

The amount of public bench seating in Melbourne has been almost constant since 1993, reflecting the substantial street furniture installation program undertaken during the mid 1980s to mid 90s. While new squares and parks have been added (eg. Federation Square and Birrarung Marr) public seats have been surrendered in several other locations (eg. Town Hall Plaza and City Square). Instead, widespread secondary seating options such as steps, planter box edges, low bollards and ledges offer opportunities for informal seating and resting.<sup>15</sup>




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13 Gehl Architects with the collaboration of the City of Melbourne, Places for People, Australia, City of Melbourne, 2004, p.24

14 *Ibidem*, p. 30

15 *Ibidem*, p.32





\*  
\*



*Degrave street in 1987 and in 2004.*

*Images source: <http://www.environment.gov.au> + <http://en.wikipedia.org>*



*In the image one of the popular Melbourne laneway  
by Joseph Ip  
Image source: <http://www.reddit.com>*



*In the image one of the popular Melbourne laneway covered with graffiti.  
Image by Samantha Clarkey*



\*

*One brick wall detail.*  
*Image source: <https://postglobalurbanism.wordpress.com>*



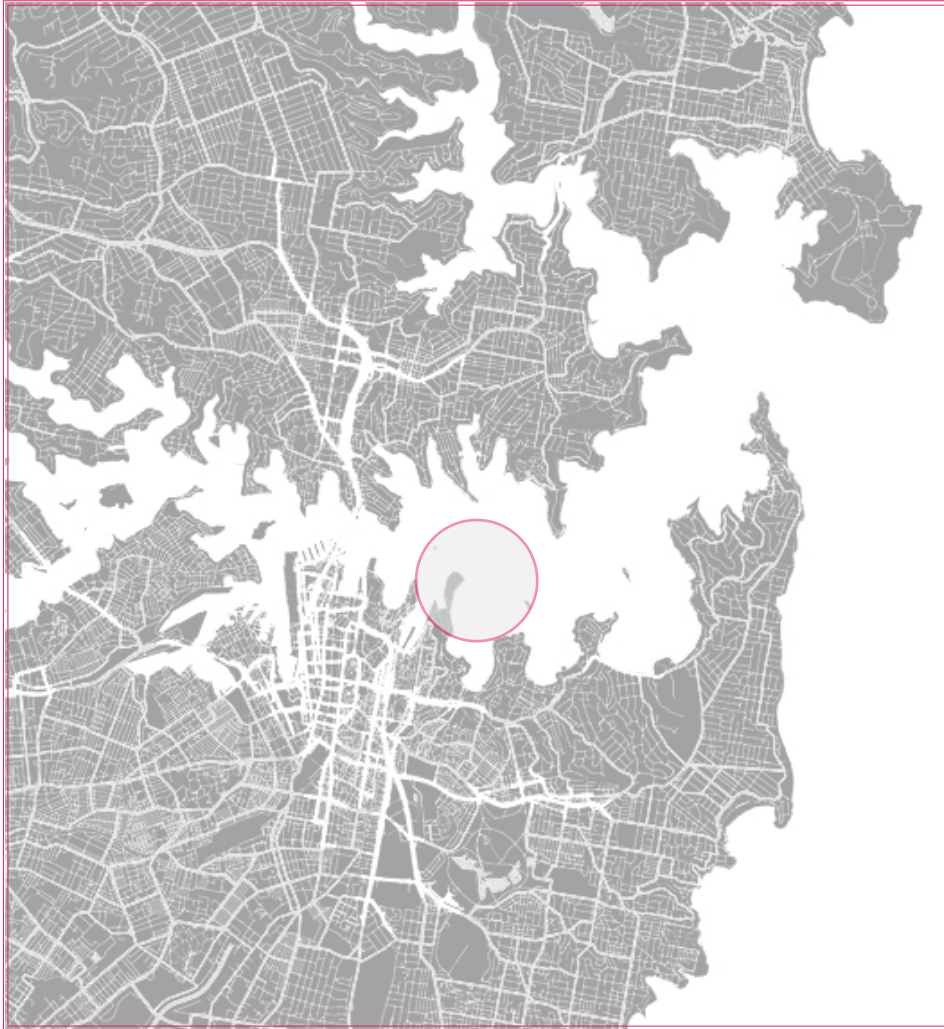


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*The Block Arcade by Tim Mcrae  
Image source: <https://www.flickr.com>*

### 3.3 THE SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE

OPEN PUBLIC SPACE AS A CATALYST FOR A PUBLIC IMAGE  
AND FOR AN ACTIVE ATTITUDE IN LIVING THE BAY



\*

 *Reworked image from [mapmapmaps.tumblr.com](http://mapmapmaps.tumblr.com)*

Name: Sydney Opera House

Architects: Jørn Utzon + Ove Arup & Partners (structural engineer) + Hall Todd & Littlemore (after Utzon resignation)

Location: Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

Function: Concert hall + Drama Theater + Playhouse

Surface: 180.000 m<sup>2</sup>

Year: 1973

The Sydney Opera House (SOH) is a performing arts centre in Sydney. It is located on Bennelong Point in Sydney Harbour, close to the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

It is definitely the most popular piece of Australian architecture, which has become not only an important landmark, but also a first mental reference image, together probably with Ayers Rock, when people are thinking about Australia. More or less it is the same process with the Tour Eiffel in France or the Colosseum in Italy. Architecture is representing the city and the country at the same time, becoming a symbol of those ideas and values which people are attributing to that specific country.

SOH was designed by the Danish architect **Jørn Utzon** in 1957, but the construction works were finished just in 1973. The occurred complications will be explained later on in this chapter, but first of all we need to imagine the difficulties created by the distance in 1957.

In fact, it took three days to fly from London Heathrow to Sydney and cost £430 and 4 shillings sterling. The journey included refuelling stops in Zurich, Istanbul, Karachi, Calcutta, Singapore, Jakarta and Darwin.

Communication by telephone was expensive, connections had to be booked in advance and the quality of line was poor.

This is the reason why Utzon visited the site for the first time six months after it was announced that he had won the competition for the new building.

### **The Site**

Utzon had studied the qualities of the promontory from photographs and postcards. When he saw for the first time Bennelong Point he said to a Sydney Morning Herald : *'It's absolutely breathtaking. There's no opera site in the world to compare with it... this site is even more beautiful than in the photographs from which I worked.'*<sup>1</sup>

The selection of **Bennelong Point** for the future Sydney Opera House had

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1 P.Murray, The Saga Of Sydney Opera House: the dramatic story of the design and construction of the icon of modern Australia, Spon Press, New York, 2004, pp.1-3

## IMPORTANT DATES

### 1957

- Jan 29 Competition announced.  
Cost estimate A\$7million.
- Mar 21 Utzon agrees to work with Ove Arup.  
Utzon in Sydney for the first time.

### 1958

- Mar 26 Utzon in Sydney with the Red Book.  
Cost estimate A\$9,624,000.
- Mar 31 Premier Cahilli insists work is started in February 1959.  
Project divided into three phases: Stage 1-platform, Stage 2- roof shells, tiling, Stage 3- walls and interiors.

### 1961

- Sept 20 Cost estimate A\$18,600,000
- Oct Utzon decides to base the geometry of the shells on that of a sphere.

### 1962

- Jan Yellow book submitted.
- Apr Estimated cost: A\$27,500,000
- Dec 26 Boxing Day meeting with Arups at Heathrow, before Utzon and family leave on journey to Australia.

### 1963

- Mar 4 Monday: Utzon flies in to Sydney.
- Mar 25 Hornibrook commence work on Stage 2.
- Apr 5 Arup Engineer Michael Lewis arrives in Sydney on crutches after a bus accident at Tel Aviv.
- Sept Estimated cost A\$29,599,058.

### 1964

- Feb 26 Receivers appointed to Ralph Symonds Ltd.
- Apr 1 Estimated cost: A\$34,400,000



## 1965

- July 12 Estimated cost: A\$49,400,000
- Aug 12 W.W. Wood writes confidential memo to Public Works Minister Davis Hughes in which he outlines measures to withhold Utzon's fees and the establishment of a drafting office.
- Oct 27 Davis Hughes takes over responsibility for payments to Utzon.

## 1966

- Feb 28 Utzon withdraws from the SOH project.
- Apr 19 Utzon's replacements are announced.
- Apr 28 Utzon flies out of Sydney.
- Dec 12 Hall, Todd & Littlemore panel submit Review of Programme report which concludes a dual-purpose hall is unworkable.

## 1967

- Sept 4 Estimated cost: A\$85,000,000.

## 1973

- Oct 20 Official opening of SOH by Queen Elizabeth II.

## 1974

- May Minister for Public Works announces that the final bill for SOH is A\$102,000,000.

## 1978

- June 20 Utzon receives Royal Institute of British Architects' Gold Medal.

## 1979

- May SOH organ completed at cost of A\$1,200,000; original cost estimated at A\$400,000.

## 1995

- Oct 23 Premier Carr asks Utzon to serve as the principal consultant to the Sydney Opera House Trust.

## 2003

- April Utzon awarded Pritzker Prize.

been decided in the early 1940s by the National Theatre Movement of Australia, but it was the support of **Eugene Goossens**, conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra that ensured its selection.

In 1947 he said to the *Sydney Morning Herald* that he would build up one of the six best orchestras in the world with a concert hall with a perfect acoustics and seating for 3,500 people, a home for an opera company and a smaller hall for chamber music.

During one public meeting he said that the auditorium would have to adapt to different needs: it should have been, through simple mechanism, for opera, for drama, and others uses. This point caused some problems to Utzon ten years later.

At the time, the site hosted Sydney's **main tram depot**, which the Department of Transport was not keen to move.

However, the premier of New South Wales Joseph Cahill, announced on 17 May 1955 that the new Opera House would be on Bennelong Point, a perfect place for a *'unique in the world for a building of such monumental character as an opera house'*.<sup>2</sup>

## The Competition

The Sydney Opera House Executive Committee (SOHEC) opted for an international open competition.

Between the judges there were Leslie Martin, chief architect of the London County Council and architect of the Royal Festival Hall in London, and **Eero Saarinen**, architect of a number of major buildings in America including the Kresge Auditorium on the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Campus and the **TWA terminal** at Kennedy Airport. Both these buildings used thin concrete shell roofs.

At the time of SOH Saarinen was working on the design of the TWA building. The other judges were the Australian-born Cobden Parkes, the NSW Government Architect and professor Ashworth. They were looking for a *'sound basic scheme by a competent architect'*.<sup>3</sup>

When the competition closed, there were **217 entries from 27 countries**, including 61 from Australia and 53 from UK. The legend says that Saarinen, who arrived in Australia a couple of days late for the judging, had picked Utzon's entry out of the discard pile and convinced the rest of the jury to choose this project .

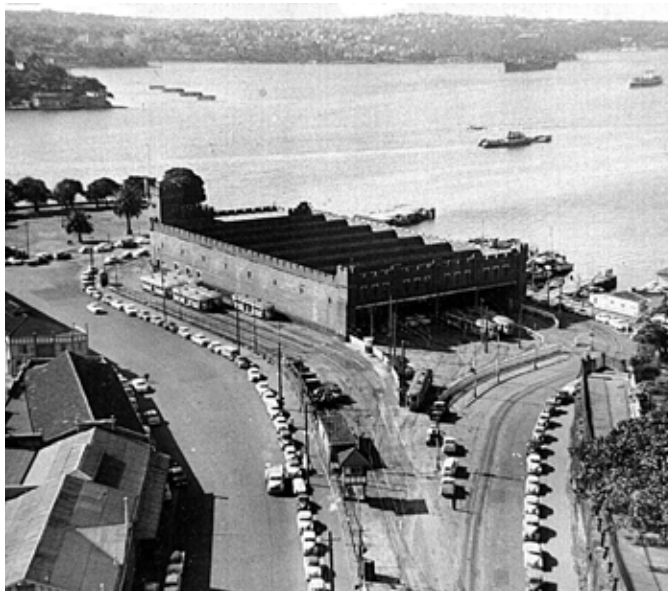
On 29 January at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the Premier, Joe Cahill, announced that Jørn Utzon of Hellebaek, Denmark was the winner.

He focused on the shape of the roofs and later on he found difficulties in

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2 *Ibidem*, p.5

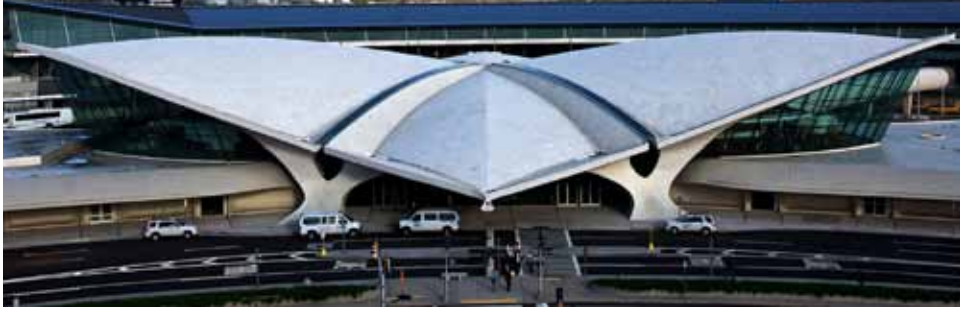
3 *Ibidem*, p.6



*The Sydney Opera House Site (Bennelong Point)  
with tram depot in the 1920s.*

*1st Image source: State records NSW on [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)  
2nd Image source: Trams Downunder Archive on [www.tdu.to](http://www.tdu.to)*





Eero Saarinen's TWA Terminal, 1962.

Image source: Seamus Murray on [www.phaidon.com](http://www.phaidon.com).

accommodating all the facilities, requested by the brief. This is the reason why Hall Todd and Littlemore, the architectural team that took over Utzon resigned, decided to drop opera from the Major Hall.<sup>4</sup>

### The Project

Unlike the other entries, Utzon placed the two theaters, the concert hall and the opera theatre, side by side. In doing this, he ignored the competition rules; the other entries placed the theaters end to end.

This solution guarantee to have each hall accessible from the city side. This facilitated the problem of having an escape in case of fire. This clever solution eliminated the need of escape stairs that would otherwise be required and consequently some space was saved.

The Australian art critic Robert Hughes described the project as '*nothing more than a magnificent doodle*'. A doodle that turned out to be a masterpiece in the history of architecture and an important landmark for the city of Sydney.<sup>5</sup>

The project obtained this judgement because Utzon participated to the competition with some beautiful sketches and drawings, without any perspective view. Moreover, he didn't consult any engineering company to have any advice about the structural form.

At the time, the project was also not appreciated by Frank Lloyd Wright, a major influence on Utzon, who said : '*This circus tent is not architecture*'. In addition to this, when Utzon went to visit Mies van der Rohe in America, he refused to see him.

This is an interesting aspect, since Sigfried Giedion placed Utzon among the '*Third Generation*' of modernist architects. This group had certain recognizable elements that differentiated them from the generation of Mies

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p.7

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p.11



The following site plan shows the property boundary of the Sydney Opera House under the Sydney Opera House Trust Act 1961 (NSW). The same boundaries were considered for the Sydney Opera House inscription in the World Heritage list.

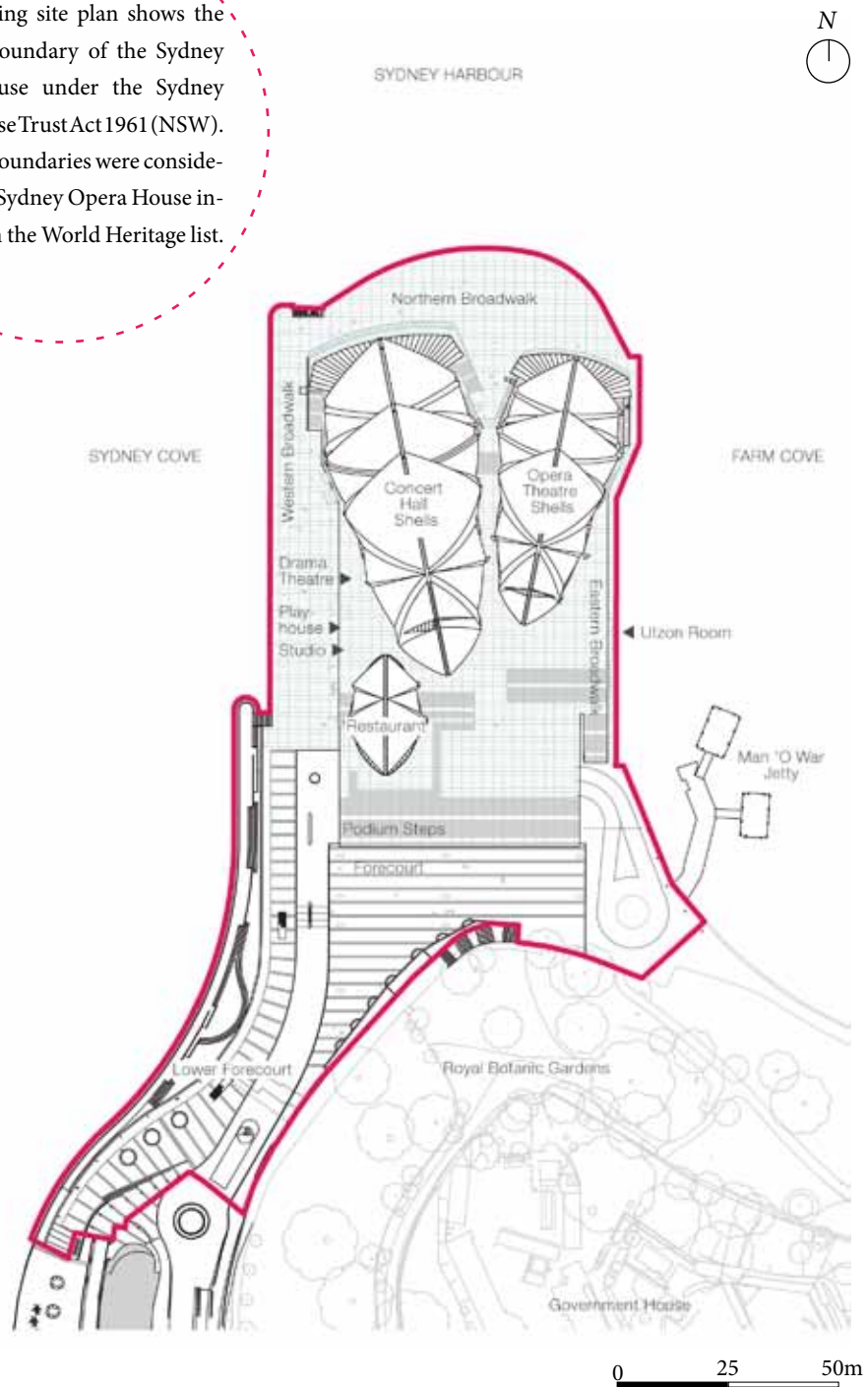
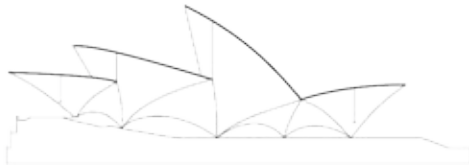


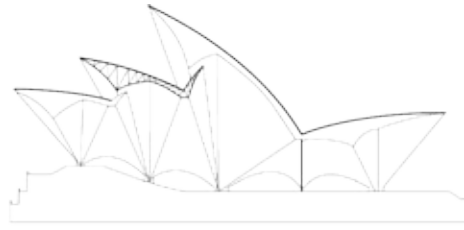
Image source: Sydney Opera House: nomination by the government of Australia for inscription on the World Heritage List 2006.

## DIFFERENT ROOF SOLUTIONS



1957

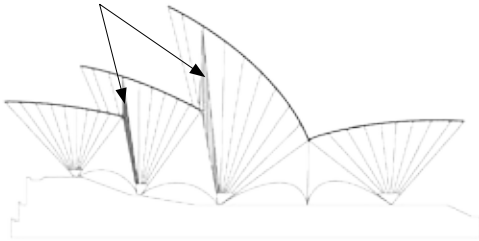
COMPETITION SCHEME



1961

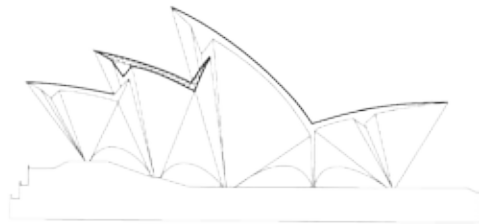
CIRCULAR ARC RIB SCHEME

LOUVRE WALLS



1958

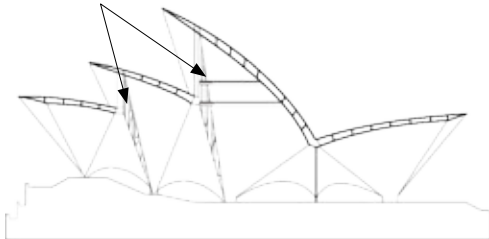
EARLY PARABOLIC SCHEME



1961

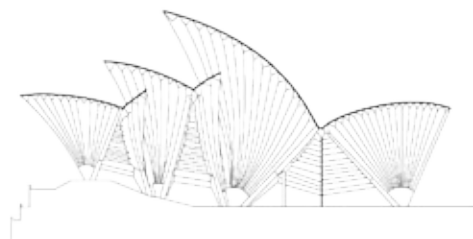
ELLIPSOID SCHEME

LOUVRE WALLS



1959-61

PARABOLIC SCHEME



1962-63

FINAL SPHERICAL SCHEME

*Image source: P.Murray, The Saga Of Sydney Opera House: the dramatic story of the design and construction of the icon of modern Australia, Spon Press, New York, 2004, pp.32-33*

van der Rohe, Gropius and Le Corbusier, of which the most apparent was the '*right of expression above pure function*'.

Utzon did require assistance in the problems of calculating and building the complicated shell vault system, and it was proposed that he should receive technical support from an engineering company, such as **Ove Arup and Partners** based in London.

The shells have a more geometric shape in comparison with the competition entry. Each shell consists of two symmetrical halves meeting in a ridge, the surfaces created by a series of coaxial parabolas (It's possible to see in the scheme in the opposite page the evolution of the shells till the actual configuration). **Rafael Moneo** worked in Utzon office for the SOH as well. He arrived at the office in 1961. He had written to Utzon asking for a job, but received no reply, so he went directly on the doorstep in Hellebæk and was accepted. Much of Moneo's year in Hellebæk was spent working on the spherical solution to the shells. In fact, he was responsible for many of the beautiful presentation drawings that explained the geometry.<sup>6</sup>

## **Acoustics**

**V L Jordan** was the engineer, who was dealing with acoustics.

Jordan set out the basis for his acoustic calculations for the Major Hall, which would hold 2,800 people for symphony concerts and would be converted for grand opera with an audience of 1,800 using **movable platforms**. '*Satisfactory acoustics*', Jordan wrote, '*are based on a number of factors: reverberation time, sound distribution, sound diffusion and the overall dimensions*'.

RT (Reverberation time) is the time it takes for sound to bounce around a room before being absorbed by the materials and air; for concerts, Jordan suggested it should be 1.8-2.0 seconds, while 1.6-1.8 seconds was preferred for grand opera.

To lengthen the RT the air volume must be increased or the power of absorption must be decreased, and vice versa.

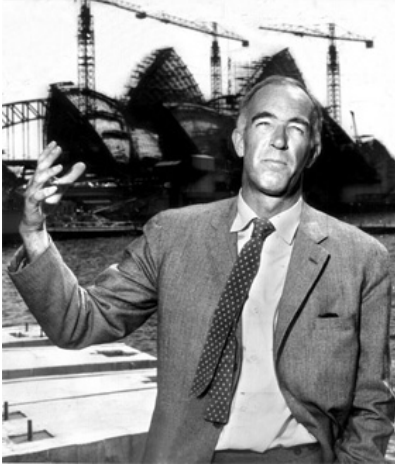
In the late 1950s, acoustic design was still in its infancy and Jordan was one of the early leaders in the field. He tested designs with the use of 1:10 models- the Opera House one was 9m wide and 3.6 m high- using tape recordings of music speeded up in proportion to the scale of the model.<sup>7</sup>

The construction works were divided into three phases: **Stage 1** would be the podium, **Stage 2** the shells and **Stage 3** the interiors and the windows.

Stage 1, the podium, included the foundations and columns that would

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p.24

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p.21



*Jørn Utzon in front of the Sydney Opera House under construction, during his stay in Sydney.*

*He was described by the architect James Thomas, who worked in his studio in Hellebæk, as a 'complex, confident, charming and patrician' man.*

*Image source:*

<http://www.blenheimgang.com>

## The Structure

support the shell roofs above, the 900 rooms that service the halls and the entrance area with pedestrian access above and the car drop off below. At 183m x 95m rising to 25m above sea level, it was, at the time, the largest concrete building in the southern hemisphere. At the south end, there are folded slab beams span of 49m across the atrium. These concrete ribs form a monumental introduction to the Opera House interiors and are an appropriate preface to the ribbed shells the visitor will discover, once he will go ahead inside the building.

Utzon created the **shells geometry** from a single sphere. This solved the problems of repetition of the elements, but it also changed the architecture. It reduced the internal spaces and it reduced the volumes of the halls. Utzon had certainly arrived to this conclusion after several discussions with engineers and this significant shift provided a different interior setting-up in comparison with the smooth concave surface discussed previously.

The Opera House was one of the first large-scale projects to use **computers for structural analysis**; however, it was a science that was still in its early stages.

The only computers available were in university departments or at **Fer-ranti**, the leading UK computer company at the time. Calculations that today can be made in fractions of a second then took a couple of weeks.<sup>8</sup>

The shells were constructed by **Hornibrook Group Pty Ltd**, who also was responsible for the Stage 3. During Stage 2, however, Hornibrook built 2400 precast ribs for the shells as well as 4000 roof panels in an on-site factory.<sup>9</sup>

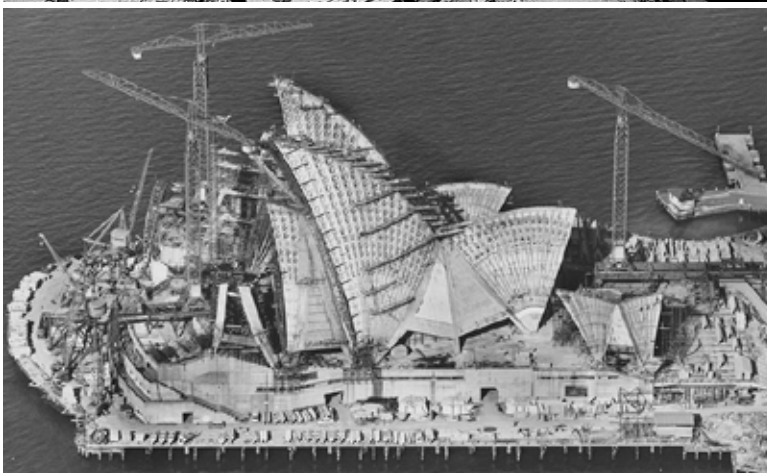
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<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 30-35

<sup>9</sup> Informations found on: <http://njreesencsu.tumblr.com>

Therefore, the roof over each hall is formed by the complex interconnection of numerous surfaces, all of which are based on a sphere of 75m radius. Each roof consists of two types of major components, main shells and side shells. There are three major structural units comprising each roof. A unit is formed by a pair of a major shell and a side shell which encloses the space between the two main shells. The junction between the side and the main shell is formed by large arches which are braced by the beams of the side shell so that the side shell sub-structure becomes a stiff-pyramids.<sup>10</sup>

10 P.Drew, *Building a Masterpiece: The Sydney Opera House*, Powerhouse Publishing, Aldershot, UK, 2006, p.112



*In the first image the construction of the podium (Stage 1). Image source: Michell library, NSW. In the second one it is possible to see the building of shells vault system.*

*Image source: [www.arup.com](http://www.arup.com).*

The shells were designed to take of course the loading from the wind, temperature, weight of cladding and the glass walls. Arup also had taken into account that the 'locked-in' gravity stresses in the ribs would change with time, due to changes in shape of the concrete caused by 'creep'.

Also the system of construction was a system like no other used before. The erection arch comprised a steel lattice truss, curved to the same shape of the roof ribs, which had to be able to telescope and twist, since the ribs were of varying length.

### **Tiled Shells**

It was initially thought that tiles would be applied in situ, but the change to a ribbed structure and the difficulty of achieving high quality results so high in the air led to the adoption of factory-produced tile 'lids' which could be bolted onto the completed structure. Utzon spent three years developing the tiles with Höganäs, a Swedish manufacturer. The standard tiles are 120 mm square by 10mm thick.<sup>11</sup>

Utzon believed, indeed, in a strong collaboration with the manufacturer in order to obtain all the elements, ad hoc, he needed for his project. An example is also the plywood manufacturer Ralph Symonds in Sydney, where the plywood was used for the concrete formwork of the Opera House podium, including the concourse beams. The quality of the plywood and the need for fewer joints helped to ensure the highest possible concrete finishes.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Glass Walls**

Laminated glass was used for the large glass walls. The main issues were weathering and delamination, bending strength of the laminated section, long-term deflection under sustained loading, and fatigue strength, and full-scale testing was undertaken. The french manufacturer, Boussois Souchon Neuvesal, was selected for this aim. The glass consisted of a layer of clear plate or float glass at a 6 mm layer tinted glass separated of 0.76mm of clear polyvinyl butyl, giving a total normal thickness of 18.8 mm or 20.8 mm where the glass spans were larger.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Interiors**

The Stage 3, the last one, concerned the completion of the interiors, which started in 1963. This is when Utzon moved his office to Sydney to oversee the design evolution. Nevertheless, shortly after he moved to Sydney, the project came under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Public Works which led to **Utzon's resignation in 1966.**

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11 *Ibidem*, p.118

12 *Ibidem*, p.139

13 *Ibidem*, p.121

After this, much of the interior design was done by **Peter Hall**.

Therefore, Hall, Todd and Littlemore had a huge duty. They had to complete the entirety of Stage 3, including the interiors of both halls, as well as the glass walls, and all the incompleated supplementary spaces.

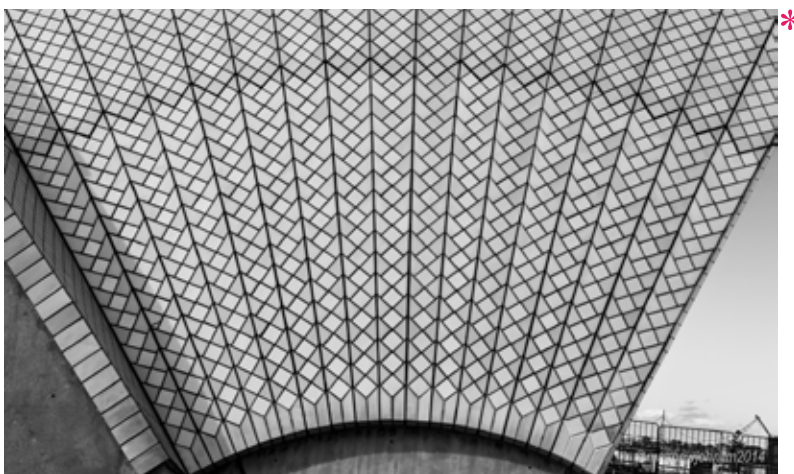
They recommended the main hall be designed purely for concerts and not as it had always been in the original brief a dual-purpose venue. When Hughes, the Minister of Public Works, accepted their approach, Ove Arup wrote to Minister Hughes: *'I understand that your Government has now finally decided to abandon the idea of using the Major Hall for opera. It is a very dramatic almost one might say, tragic decision because it makes a nonsense of the whole form of the shells, which were meant to house the stage tower'*. This change was very significant not just because it alleviated the complexity of having to create a dual-purpose hall with different reverberation times for opera and concerts, but because it also meant that the stage machinery already installed beneath the shell structure would have to be demolished. In a letter, in February 1967, to The Australian newspaper, Jørn Utzon appealed to Davis Hughes to let him finish his work on the opera house. Premier Askin rejected the offer as *'impractical'*.<sup>14</sup>

### **Utzon Withdrawal**


Utzon's resignation happened on 28 February 1966. At the time, there was a strong pressure about the raising costs of the Sydney Opera House. Utzon asked to Hughes fee claims for Stage Technique, which were repeatedly ignored.

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14 Chapter 20: Stage 3 Hall, Todd, Littlemore and Farmer, The Opera House Project on [theoperahouseproject.com](http://theoperahouseproject.com)



*In the image a detail of the tiles covering the shell structure.*

 *Image source: Mathew J L August 3, 2014.*





# SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE

*Photography by Carlos Silvestre*

*Image source: <https://www.flickr.com>*





Hughes also refused to approve funding for the construction of the all important plywood mock-ups of the theater ceilings – without which Utzon could not further develop his design. In a letter to the Minister Utzon wrote : ‘ (...) I have been forced to set the 15th February, 1966, as the final date for the receipt of this payment, and as you could not, at this date, 28th February, 1966, satisfy me on this, you have forced me to leave the job’.

These news were not accepted in a good way by the population, and there were several demonstrations supporting Utzon at the time.

Moreover, also Peter Hall when obtained the task to go on with the works, had always been seen in a bad light by the population and also by the architects community.

Below, there is a transcription of a cartoon by Martin Sharp, which is giving an idea of the general disappointment about the political changes and the decisions referring to the Sydney Opera House project.<sup>15</sup>

When Utzon designed the Sydney Opera House, he didn't design just an Opera House, but a spatial pivot attracting many people, a space which gave a new image to the whole city.

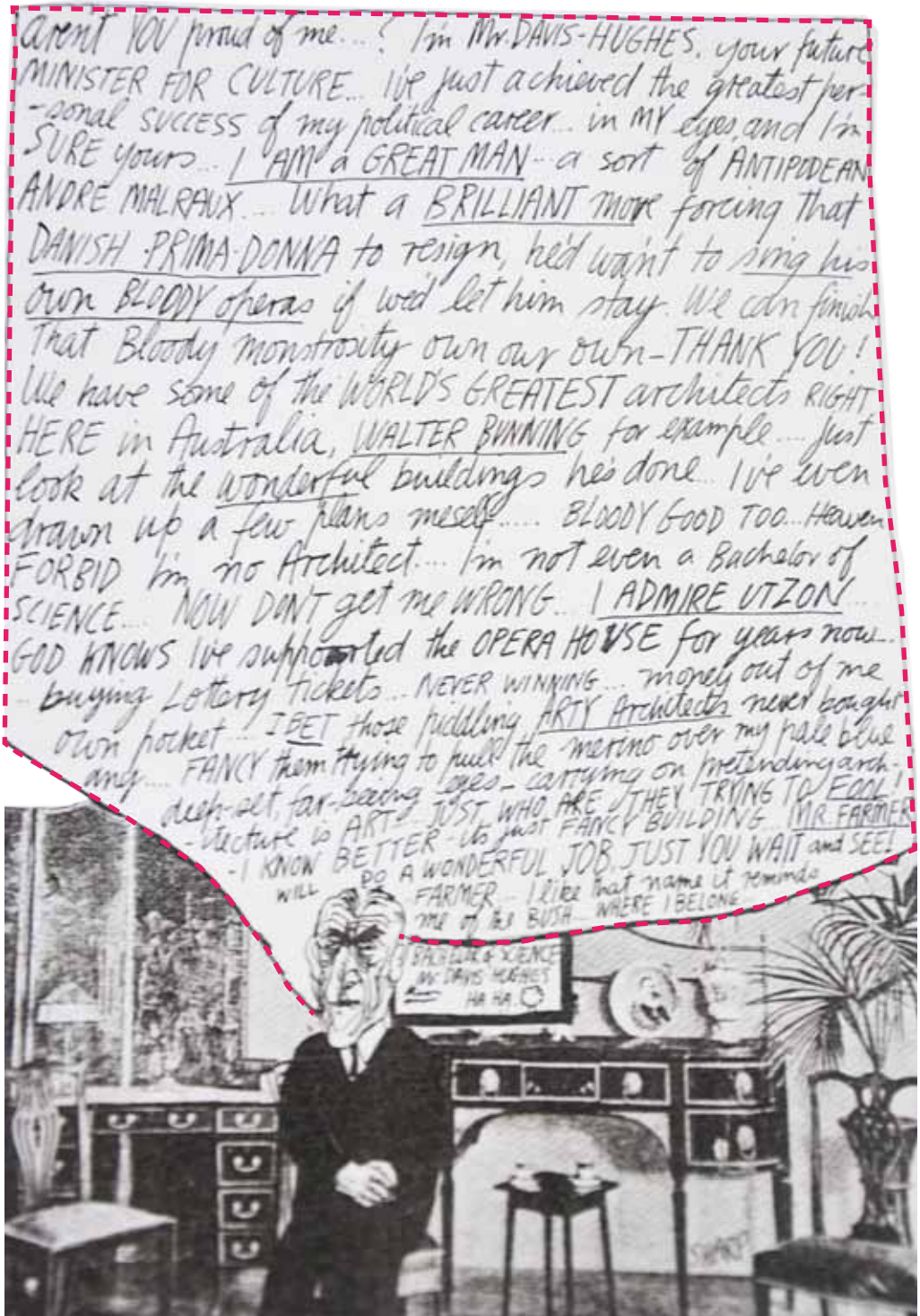
Tourists and locals are playing out across the platform and people are sitting and gazing back to the city or out across the harbour, taking pictures, jogging or wander

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15 P.Drew, Building a Masterpiece: The Sydney Opera House, Powerhouse Publishing, Aldershot, UK, 2006, p.112

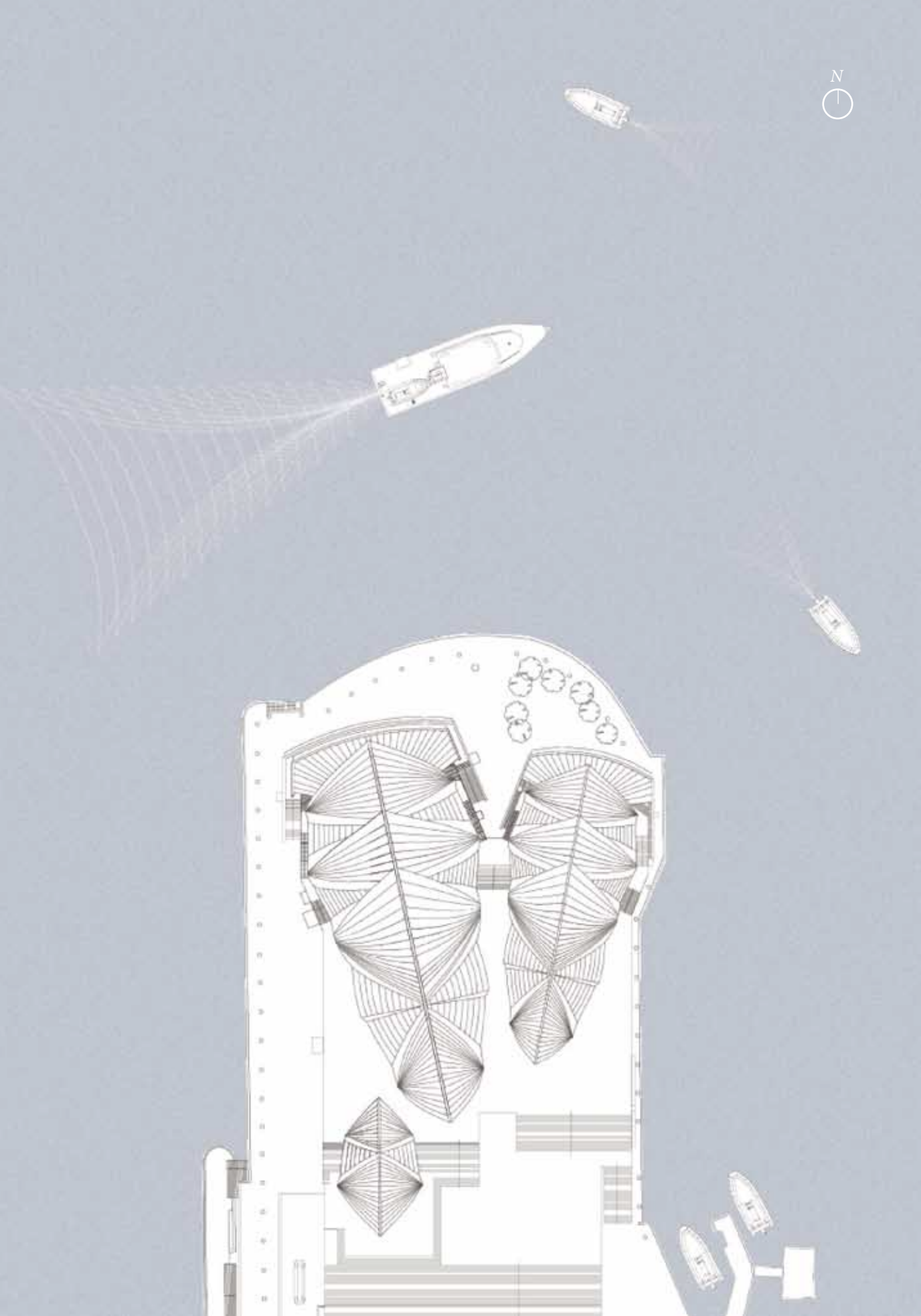
*‘Aren't you proud of me? I'm Mr. Davis-Hughes, you're future Minister for Culture...I've just achieved the greatest personal success of my political career...in my eyes and I'm sure yours...I'm a great man...a sort of antipodean André Malraux...What a brilliant move forcing that Danish Prima Donna to resign, he'd want to sing his own bloody opera if we'd let him stay. We can finish that bloody monstrosity on our own.- THANK YOU! We have some of the world's greatest architects right here in Australia, Walter Bunning for example...just look at the wonderful buildings he's done...I've even drawn up a few plans myself...bloody good too...However forbid I'm no architect...I'm not even a bachelor of science...now didn't get me wrong ...I admire Utzon... God knows I've supported the Opera House for years now... buying lottery tickets...never winning...money out of my own pocket...I bet, those piddling, arty architects never bought any... fancy them trying to pull the merino over my pale blue, far-seeing eyes- carrying on pretending ARCHITECTURE is ART...JUST WHO ARE THEY TRYING TO FOOL! I know better- it's just fancy building...Mr.Farmer will do a wonderful job, just you wait and see! Farmer...I like this name...it reminds me of the bush...where I belong..’*





Cartoon by Martin Sharp for Oz magazine caricaturing Davis Hughes, NSW Minister for Public Works, 1966.





## What's 'Public' exactly in the SOH?

R.Barthes did a comparison between Eiffel's Tower and Utzon's Opera House and he said that the difference between these two masterpieces lies in the impressive contrast between the **simplicity of the dominant media image** and the **rich experience offered to visitors**.

Probably more than the architecture itself, the **platform** is expressing better its publicness: it is *'arguably the only major public space created in the 20th century to rival in aesthetic power and popular appeal the great piazzas of Italy – and, like them, it could happily accommodate a huddle of visitors'*; following always Barthes' words.

The idea of the platform may have come from Utzon's visit to the Mayan temples on the Yucatan peninsula of Mexico, but this treatment of the idea moves it clearly back towards its natural prototype- a rocky promontory.

The platform elevates the building on a different visual level, creating a kind of disjunction between all the 'street services' below (which include for example the cafes and the restaurants) and the square just in front of the monumental building, up to the stairs. The Sydney Opera House rises majestically bringing astonishment and terror at first sight. But after a while, after being led by the flow to the staircase, the visitor establishes a closer connection with the architecture.

This is also possible through the sudden variation and irregularity of the elements of the SOH, which bring the visitor to discover this masterpiece.

Price attributed these two qualities to the value of *'picturesque'*, which despite the modernity of this architecture, could be related to it because of the gradual variation of the shells and of the symbolic meanings they can communicate.<sup>16</sup>

The resulting experience of the architectural promenade is unique: *'Viewed at a distance, the complex, ever-changing interplay of the shells as you move around them on the water, or observe them from different harbor vantage points, is a model of 'changefulness' that Ruskin saw as the essence of both nature and of his beloved Gothic. The transformations of the Opera House's shells as you approach on foot- disappearing from view below the steps, then rearing up, unexpectedly large, as you can close in- is*

16 P.Drew, Building a Masterpiece: The Sydney Opera House, Powerhouse Publishing, Aldershot, UK, 2006, pp.26-34

*In the first image on the right side Jørn Utzon's drawing. Image source: Sydney Opera House Archive. In the second one a picture showing the open public space surrounding the SOH.*



*also extraordinary*<sup>17</sup>

Utzon created a public image for the city of Sydney and one of its most popular open public spaces.

This is why, in the late 1990s, the Sydney Opera House Trust, restored the communication with Utzon in order to obtain a reconciliation and to secure his involvement in future changes of the building.

In 1999, he was appointed as design consultant for future work.

The aesthetic contemplation of the SOH had awakened the imagination of different cartoonists and artists thanks to its iconic power.

Even fashion items manufacturers produced SOH hats, like the one in the next page, worn by the Australian comedian Barry Humphries.


Moreover, the SOH design doesn't stop to inspire also contemporary architects. An example is the Auditorium in Tenerife designed by the architect Santiago Calatrava Valls.

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17 P.Drew, *Building a Masterpiece: The Sydney Opera House*, Powerhouse Publishing, Aldershot, UK, 2006, p.30



*Auditorium in Tenerife by the architect Santiago Calatrava Valls.*

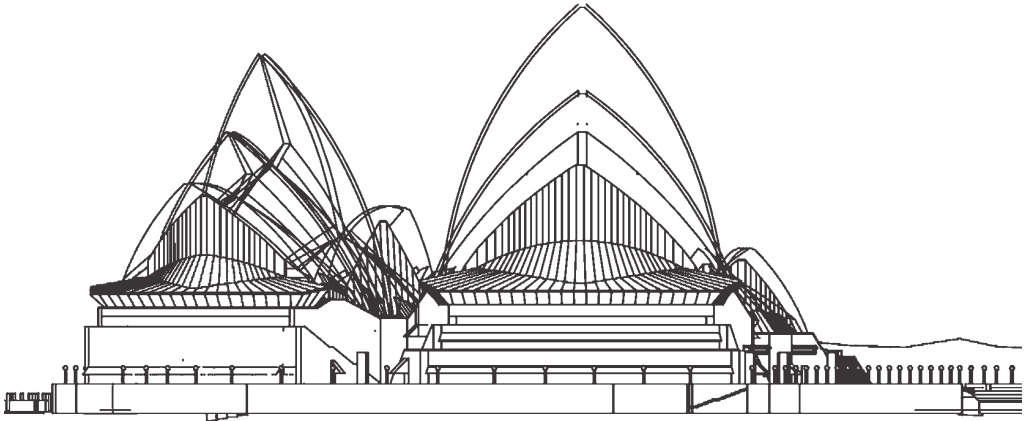
 *Image source: Diego Delso, Wikimedia Commons, License CC-BY-SA 3.0*



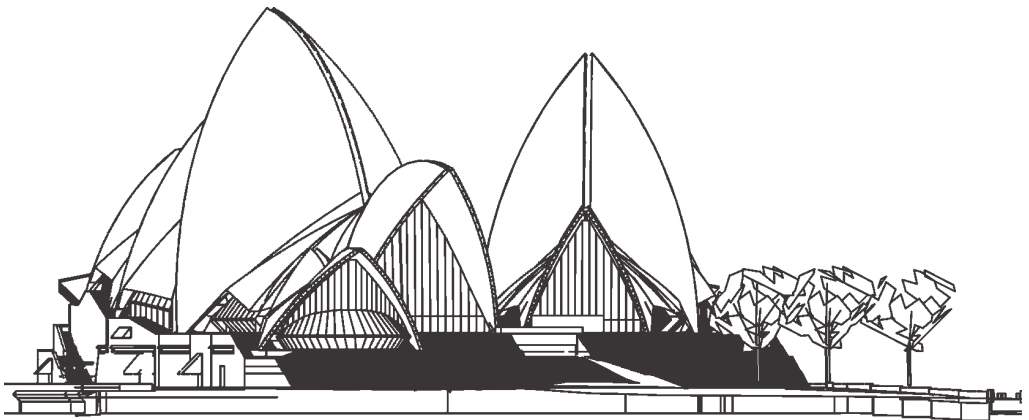
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*Dame Edna Everage (aka comedian Barry Humphries) has worn many Australian icons; here she models a fetching Opera House hat at Arcot, England.*

*Image source: <http://www.wnyc.org>*

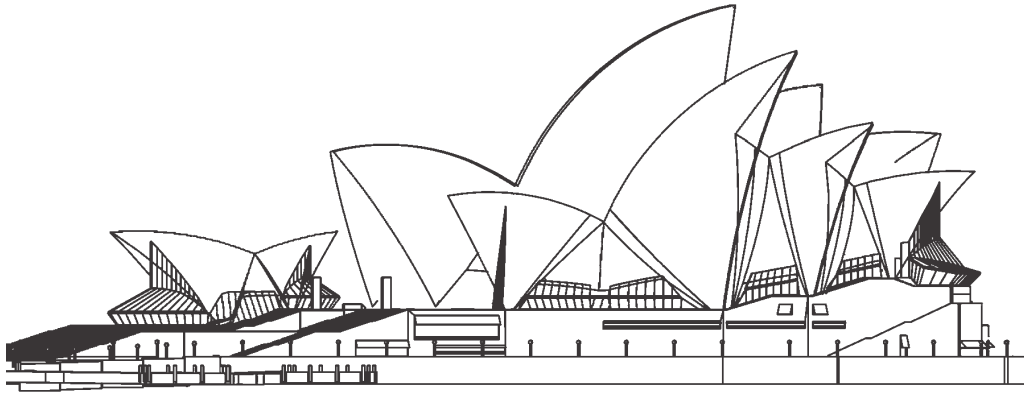


*Northern Elevation*

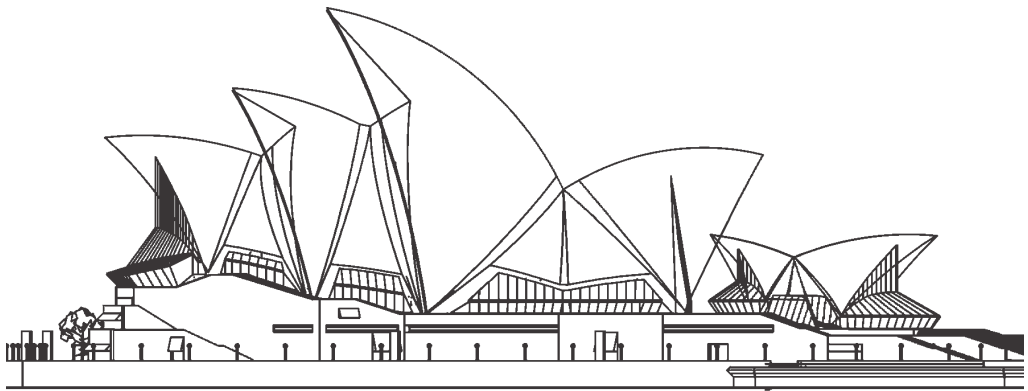


*Southern Elevation*

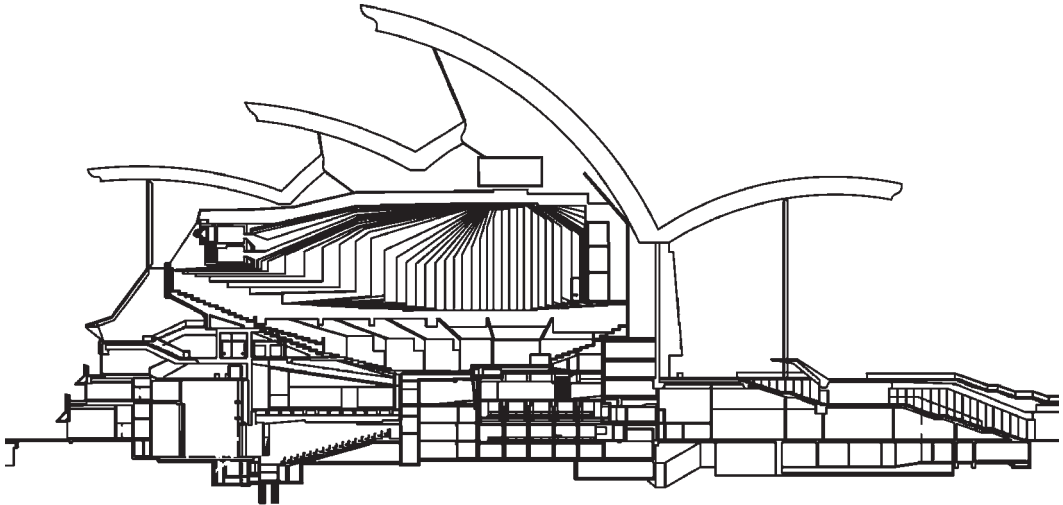




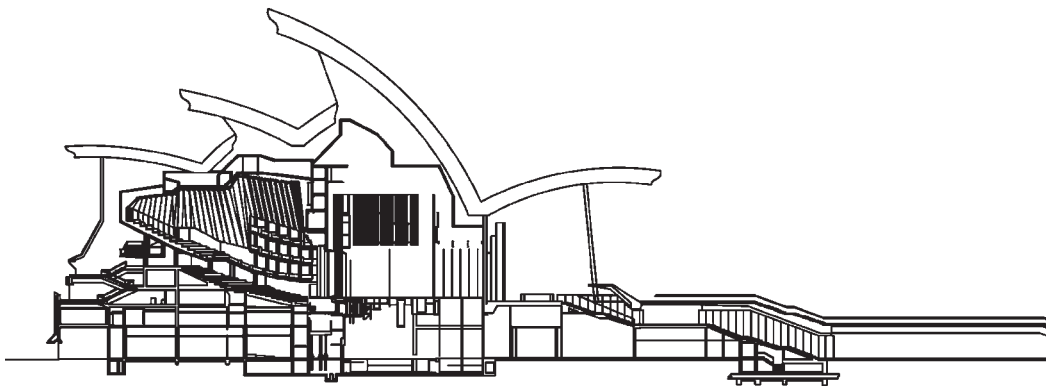
*Eastern Elevation*



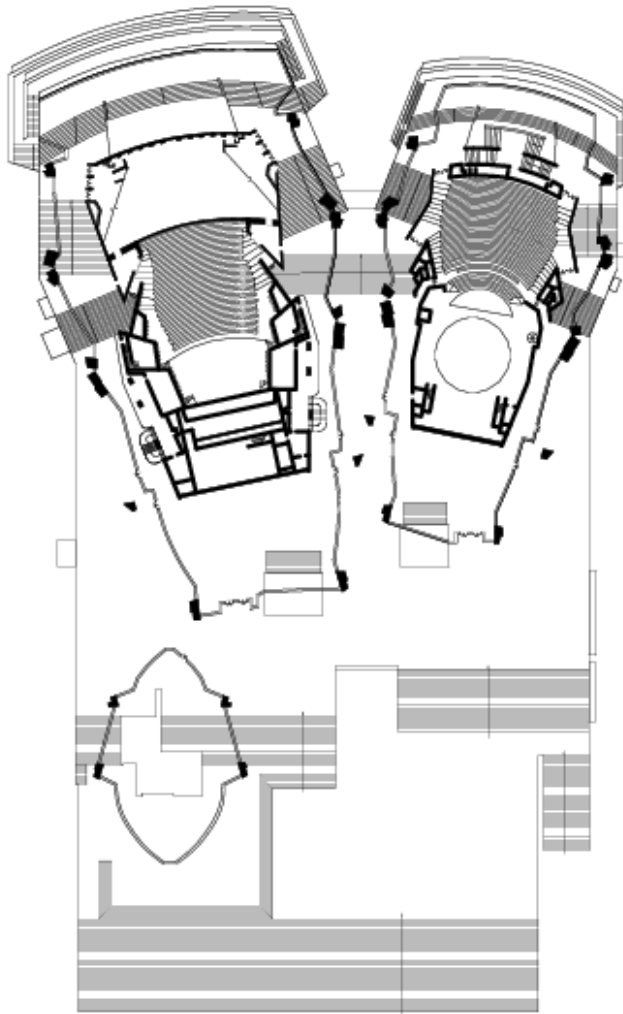
*Western Elevation*



*Concert Hall Axial Section*



*Opera Theatre Axial Section*



*Floor plan 4*

*All the elevations and sections referring to the SOH were found in: Sydney Opera House: nomination by the government of Australia for inscription on the World Heritage List 2006, in the appendix part.*

### 3.4 DARLING HARBOUR

ENVISIONING PUBLIC SPACE FOR A NEW SOCIO-CULTURAL  
CONTEXT TO CLAIM SYDNEY AS A GLOBAL CITY



\*

Reworked image from [mapmapmaps.tumblr.com](http://mapmapmaps.tumblr.com)

Name: Darling Harbour

Architects: Philip Cox and Partners + John Andrews International Pty. Ltd + Ove Arup & Partners (structural engineer) + Ken Wooley AM + Robert Woodward + Mark Willett + Mr Ye Gu Hao

Location: Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

Function: Convention Centre + Exhibition Centre + CBD waterfront activities + restaurants+ national maritime museum + park and entertainment areas + Chinese garden

Surface: 540.000 m<sup>2</sup>

Year: 1988

*'The whole of Darling Harbour was a web, connecting land and sea, hinterland and coast, Sydney and the outside world'*  
(Johnson, p.57)

Darling Harbour is situated on western outskirts of the Sydney central business district. The locality extends northwards from Chinatown, along both sides of Cockle Bay to Darling Harbour wharf on the east, and to the suburb of Pyrmont on the west.

### **Historical Focus**

Darling Harbour was for many years the **working port** of Sydney.

The area hosted many wharves, shipyards, factories and warehouses and the thousands of people who worked there lived in nearby The Rocks and Millers Point, often in crowded and **insanitary slums**. The power of steam engines arrived in the Colony in 1815 and a number of flour mills used this new technology. This brought an increased demand for engineering workshops and Darling Harbour became home to shipbuilding yards, textile industries, galvanising works, gas works, power stations, wool stores and frozen food companies over the decades. In 1855 the first railway was opened in Sydney and it included a single line to Darling Harbour.

In 1857 the first Pyrmont Bridge was built as a private enterprise and it connected the burgeoning western suburbs with the City. The decline of Darling Harbour was slow and it was particularly intense in the XX century, when it culminated with the establishment of a contained terminal at Port Botany.

In 1984 the Darling Harbour Authority was established to **plan the redevelopment of the area**. Darling Harbour was '*created as a gift to the people of NSW in celebration of Australia's bicentenary in 1988*'.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Through the Lens: Darling Harbour/ Snapshots of government architecture on <http://gallery.records.nsw.gov.au>



*The first image is a picture of 1870 taken from Pyrmont. The second image is a picture of 1900 showing the railway line going to Darling Harbour.*

*Images source: <http://gallery.records.nsw.gov.au>*

## The Project

The redevelopment of Darling Harbour, the first maritime centre in Australia, was the centerpiece of the NSW Wran Government's programme for the 1988 Bicentenary.

At the time Philip Cox called it '*the most important piece of real estate that's been put together in Sydney in 100 years*'.<sup>2</sup>

The NSW Government invested \$900 million into the project over the following four years. The Premier Neville Wran's vision was to create a permanent part of Sydney's cultural identity. He stated that it was '*absolutely essential*' for Sydney to have exhibition and convention centres as part of the redevelopment.<sup>3</sup>

For the first time, there was for the city public access to the water.

The phenomenon of urban renewal has continued since 1988 and a network of waterfront promenades and parks has continued to make the harbour foreshore accessible.

A Quality Review Committee was set up, the MSJ Group was appointed as the "Project Design Directorate", and, unusually for a government funded scheme, a private firm of contractors Leighton Constructions Pty Ltd, was appointed on 18 December 1984 to provide services in project management, financial and construction programming, administration and supervision.<sup>4</sup>

The Darling Harbour redevelopment hosted three of **Philip Cox's** 1988 steel structures. One of these, was the **Sydney Exhibition Centre**, which was the first major exhibition centre to be built in Australia since the Garden Palace. It was destroyed, indeed, by fire less than 3 years after it was completed leaving Sydney without an international standard exhibition facility for over a century. The other buildings designed by Philip Cox were the Sydney Aquarium and the Australian National Maritime Museum.

## The Sydney Exhibition Centre

The Sydney Exhibition Centre is made of five interconnected halls, each of 5,000 square meters, with an underground 1,000 space car park. The largest physical component of the redevelopment it forms an enclosure along the western edge, with the park dominating the outlook from the centre. The structural solution allowed an 'industrialised' approach to the manufacture of the building elements, early construction of the roof al-

2 Steel Profile' No.17 September 1986

3 ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on 20th Century Heritage. DARLING HARBOUR – A Place for People, 9 May 2013 (revision A), do.co.mo.mo\_ Australia, p.19

4 *Ibidem*, p.20



*Sydney Exhibition Centre by Philip Cox. Image source: Photography by Patrick Bingham-Hall on <http://www.artnewsportal.com>*

lowing work under cover and a systematic approach to the design and commissioning of the essential building services.

A basic hall module size of 60m x 84m, is subdivided in 3m exhibition units. If required, the hall module can be opened to produce one space approximately 300m x 84m. The exhibition space sits on one level (internal height of 12m) with a large scale roof span and is connected to a continuous lobby overlooking Tumbalong Park to the city skyline. The Sydney Exhibition Centre was opened on 16 January 1988 by Wran's successor Premier Barrie Unsworth. Philip Cox received the Australian Institute of Architect's Gold Medal in 1984 and in 1988 he was awarded the Order of Australia for services to architecture.<sup>5</sup> The award winning expressed structure of the Sydney Exhibition Centre is also a very significant work of structural engineering by ARUP.

Sadly, the building was demolished to host a new redevelopment project by OMA, HASSELL and Populous.

There were many objections to this decision, coming from Do.co.mo.mo. Australia, from local inhabitants and from Philip Cox as well, who stated: *'The removal of the Sulman Award winning Sydney Exhibition Centre is an act of vandalism and in fact is quite unnecessary. Early examination of the proposal suggests the building can be retained.'*<sup>6</sup> Sydney lost forever a great testimony of its architectural history.

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem* p.21

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.artnewsportal.com/art-news/save-sydney-exhibition-centre-support-alternative-option-of-extension-and-not-demolition>



## The Convention Centre

The Centre was designed for the 1988 Bicentennial by John Andrews AO of John Andrews International who received Australia's most prestigious architectural award, the Australian Institute of Architect's Gold Medal in 1980. John Andrews AO was the first Australian architect to achieve major success internationally, and this building is regarded as the best surviving example of his work in Sydney.

The Sydney Convention Centre is home to a unique collection of paintings. The majority were commissioned or purchased by the former Darling Harbour Authority as art representative of Australian painting at the time of the Australian Bicentenary in 1988.

Many artists who were commissioned for the 1988 collection accepted only a token fee for their work in recognition that their work would become integral to the Darling Harbour project and a gift to the community.<sup>7</sup> The Convention Centre had around 30 rooms, ranging from small meeting rooms to a 3500 capacity auditorium, as well as foyer areas and other spaces which can be adapted for use as an exhibition space or pre-dinner function venue. The Exhibition Centre consisted of six halls, used primarily for exhibitions, but also for gala dinners and other large-scale events.

The semi-circular plan gives short structural spans and short viewing distances, while allowing easy divisibility of space. The Bayside Auditorium



*The Convention Centre by John Andrews AO.*

*Image source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/540783867725616549/>*

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<sup>7</sup> ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on 20th Century Heritage. DARLING HARBOUR – A Place for People, 9 May 2013 (revision A), do.co.mo.mo\_ Australia, p.6

can be split into three unequal parts and the downstairs Grand Hall potentially into six.

At the time of construction the Sydney Convention Centre was Australia's largest convention centre(27,000 m<sup>2</sup>).<sup>8</sup>

Sadly, it has been demolished as well, to make space for the new urban renewal called '*Darling Harbour Live*'.

Darling Harbour has cultural, social and architectural significance in abundance – the problem is that all this has been generated in the last thirty years. In fact, the age of an architecture is not necessarily decisive to establish if it's heritage or not. Many different factors have to be considered valuable and Do.co.mo.mo. is still going on with this battle.

### **Sydney Aquarium**

The Sydney Aquarium was designed by Philip Cox AO. It is a 15-metre-high, 140-metre-long breaking wave with three elements: the main building and two massive tanks, partially submerged into the harbour, housing the Shark and Harbour Oceanaria which create the illusion of walking on the ocean's surface.<sup>9</sup>

### **Australian National Maritime Museum**

The first national museum built outside the national capital, Canberra, which was also designed by Philip Cox AO and it was the first maritime centre in Australia. It was realized thanks to the Prime Minister Bob Hawke's Commitment and to the decision of the American government to provide significant funds as a gift for the Bicentenary, supplemented by private fund raising in the United States by Washington's Ambassador, Laurence W. Lane.

Built by the manufacturer Allco Steel, the National Maritime Museum is an example of Australia's maritime heritage, including historic charts and instruments, sketches of ships and craft and the ships themselves.

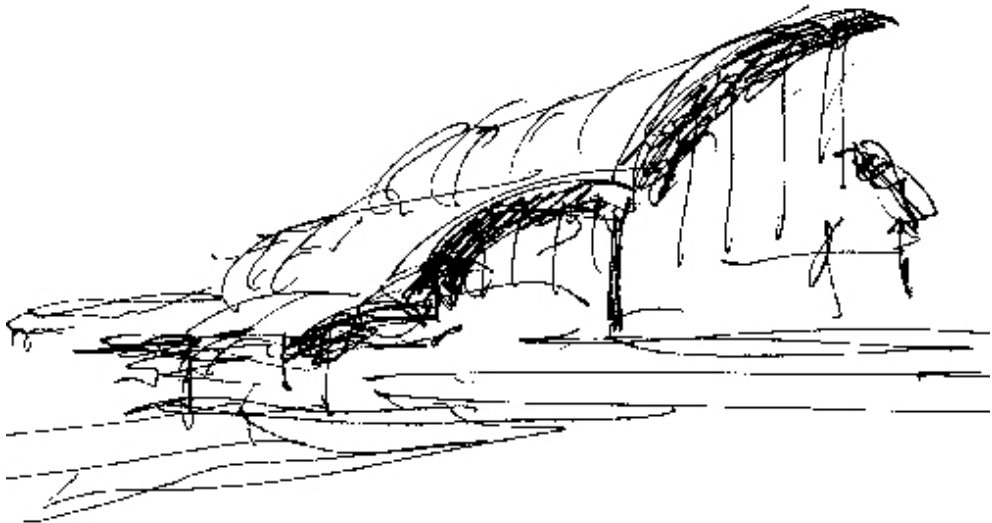
It is reminiscent of tall masts and billowing sails and its exhibition space runs 100 metres end-to-end and is 38 metres high to accommodate tall masts. Historic vessels are moored at two finger wharves close to the museum building.

The Maritime Museum is the only aspect of Darling Harbour's redevelopment which is directly related to the original settlement. The museum and the aquarium represent the gateway to the Darling Harbour, since they are the first two architectures immediately visible when coming clo-

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p.27

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p.11



*The Australian National Maritime Museum by Philip Cox.*

*Image source: <http://www.indesignlive.com/articles/people/philip-cox-a-half-century>*

ser to the harbour by sea.<sup>10</sup>

### **The 'Urban Stream'**

Darling Harbour's "Urban Stream" was designed by MSJ Architect's Mark Willett.

The landscape architect described it in this way: "It sports a diversity of waterplays along its curved section and a dynamic spring of white foam leaping down its straightway. Its shape recalls a shepherd's crook or question mark. A 5 metre wide ribbon of water it runs for a quarter of a mile through the harbour side park within view and reach of all visitors. It begins at a popular entry point and sweeps more than halfway around the central circular lawn of Tumbalong Park.

*A fringe of spotted gumtrees (Eucalyptus maculate) behind the stream shade the path at the water's edge and accentuate the large circular space. The ribbon then folds ninety degrees to point arrowlike to [Cockle] Bay and guide people through a maze of stanchions that support the spaghetti of overhead freeways. The line is strengthened with a row of mature date palms (Phoenix canariensis). There is a progression of interest along the stream. The beginning holds a dynamic spring of white foam leaping from a cluster of geyseraerating nozzles. The disturbance sends waves along a raised platform. Two lower platforms follow the ribbon curve, brimming full of mirror-smooth water.*

*A pathway crosses and the water comes to life again, gurgling from submerged fan jets around a checker pattern of stepping stones. The pattern repeats at each crossing down stream, but with stepping stones diminishing until they disappear, leaving a square of turbulent water. The resultant waves ripple on to dissolve completely in the last segment of the curve' (Robert Woodward, Landscape Architecture (USA) October 1989).<sup>11</sup>*

### **The Chinese Garden of Friendship**

The Chinese Garden of Friendship was designed in China and it was constructed by Chinese artisans under the Chinese supervision of the architect Ye Gu Hao. It is divided into different areas, defined by gates, bridges, winding paths and carp-filled water lily ponds. Two Chinese lions guard the entry pavilion leading to the Hall of Clear Shade and the Courtyard of Welcoming Fragrance. These, together with the Commemorative Pavilion, Hall of Longevity and the Lenient Jade Pavilion, create the first of six scenic areas. The remaining zones are the Pavilion among Bamboo and Rock, the Hill, Creek and Waterfall, the Gurr and the Mountain Peak, the Rock Forest and Wilderness, and the Boat and Tea House. Bricks, tiles,

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p.12

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p.30

granite features and ceramic grilles and reveals were all recovered, manufactured or crafted in China.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, the area is plenty of restaurants ,cafes and shops (e.g Harbourside Festival Marketplace + Cockle Bay Wharf and King Street Wharf.).

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12 *Ibidem*, p.30



*The 'Urban Stream' by MSJ Architect's Mark Willett in the first image. In the second one the Chinese garden under the supervision of Mr Mr Ye Gu Hao.*

*Images sources: <http://daviding.com> + <http://richard-wise.livejournal.com>*





The 'two towers' are the new hotel and the adjacent building is the new Convention + Exhibition Centre by HASSELL, OMA and Populous for 'Darling Harbour Live'. Images source: <http://www.archdaily.com>

## The New Redevelopment : ‘Darling Harbour Live’

The 20-hectare, billion dollar project, which will stretch from Cockle Bay to Haymarket and Ultimo, will include largest Australian exhibition facilities, Sydney’s largest red carpet entertainment venue, a hotel complex with up to 900 rooms, and a new urban neighborhood in Haymarket.<sup>13</sup>

OMA designed the masterplan and the ICC Hotels (the two towers visible on the page on the left).

The new convention centre, instead, was designed by the Australian firm HASSELL and Populous. The Haymarket neighborhood was designed by Denton Corker Marshall, who also contributed to the designing of the masterplan.

The developer, **Lend Lease**, attracted strong criticism from the architectural industry; along with many objections from the existing residents nearby, who say the scale of the project will block views.

*Architectus* says the current design would have ‘significant impacts on the views currently enjoyed by the Novotel Hotel.’<sup>14</sup>

Approximately **70,000 tonnes of concrete and 2,000 tonnes of steel** were demolished and removed from the convention centre site on February 2014. Sydney lost forever important historical sites with identity value for the city to have ‘signature buildings, similar to those now appearing in London.’ These were the words of Grocon’s NSW general manager Chris Carolan.<sup>15</sup>

It’s definitely sad to see how economical reasons had prevailed on the preservation of the Exhibition Centre and the Convention Centre.

However, what remains is the fact that Darling Harbour is going on with its transformation. It is surely an important reference point inside the city and its success after 1988 project marked the importance of this place for the community and the fact that it is unequivocally one of the greatest public spaces in Sydney for local and for tourists from all over the world. Let’s hope that the new projects won’t upset at least the ‘spirit’ of Darling Harbour.

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13 HASSELL, OMA, and Populous To Redevelop Sydney Harbour on <http://www.archdaily.com/305713/hassell-oma-and-populous-to-redevelop-sydney-harbour/>

14 G.Chua and D.Wheelson, Darling Harbour convention centre controversy continues as revitalisation work begins, 11 December 2013, on <http://www.architectureanddesign.com.au>

15 G.Chua, Another Darling Harbour project approved: The Ribbon by Hassell, 18 June 2014, on <http://www.architectureanddesign.com.au>

### 3.5 BRISBANE PARKLANDS

#### THE REDISCOVERED RIVERSIDE AND THE REDISCOVERED TIME OF LEISURE



\*

Reworked image from [mapmapmaps.tumblr.com](http://mapmapmaps.tumblr.com)



Name: Parklands

Architects: DCM (Denton Corker Marshall)

Location: South Bank, Brisbane, Queensland, AU

Function: park + swimming pool

Surface(site area): 150.000 m<sup>2</sup>

Year: 1992

The area is a bit controversial, since it went through different historical layers before arriving to the actual configuration.

What is really interesting about this space is how it radically changed the image of this district becoming an unquestionable attraction point of the city. Moreover, the project had also an important role in 'activating' the riverside, which was not lived previously.

### **Historical Focus**

The area hosted in **1988 the World Exposition** and before this big event it was nothing more than nearderict port with a couple of hotels and industrial buildings, quite disconnected with the rest of the city.

Everything was demolished and a big void, just next to the QPAC was created in order to host the expo.

The city council and the government were very supportive and they had a lot of confidence in this event.

The real potential of the area was understood after the expo '88, since things turned out differently.

That's why in 1989 the South Bank Corporation was born under these important principles: promote, facilitate, carry out and control the development, disposal and management of land and other property within the Corporation area; achieve excellence and innovation in the management of open space and park areas and accommodate public events and entertainment that benefit the general community.

It is evidently clear how the open spaces, such as the riverside, were taken in consideration as a liveable and recreative space necessary for the community. The area and the river were suddenly discovered after the expo and became one of the most enjoyable places in the city.<sup>1</sup>

What is remarkable is that the exhibition was not popular for the exhibition itself or its 'quality'. In this case what was really exhibited in front of the world was the city of Brisbane, which actually demonstrated to be a nice place where to live during the "Leisure In The Age Of Technology". The Expo in Brisbane had a sort of a big "fun fair effect". And also the

<sup>1</sup> All the informations above were found in: Official Guide Of Expo '88 : The Official Souvenir Program,1988; and the site : <http://www.foundationexpo88.org>

monorail, anticipated in the masterplan, contributed to depict this image, almost as one of the “carousels” of this system.

The masterplan was designed by Bligh Maccormick 88 Pty Ltd and it was composed mainly by tensile temporary structures, easy to dismantle. They constituted in a huge network of PVC-coated polyester umbrellas. The translucent tension membranes rise, in some instances, to fifty meters.

Most of the pavilions were of standard design employing steel frames with insulating panel walls and roofs suited to a variety of exhibitors requirements. These and the two monorails stations were also designed by Bligh Maccormick 88 Pty Ltd, Architects and Planners. Information kiosks, made of timber and tin, were designed by Rex Addison Associates, Pty Ltd with Hulme and Webster Pty Ltd, Architects, while the restaurant complex and boardwalk were by Ainsley Bell and Murchison, Architects, Pty Ltd. Rex Addison is an architect, who is working in south-east Queensland and in Papua New Guinea and through his projects he wants to gain good standard house types. Hulme and Webster is an architectural firm, which is active from 1968 and it has provided solutions to a wide variety and scale of building projects. At the end, Ainsley Bell and Murchison architects are today a started up company with a lot of projects realized around in Queensland.

Individually designed pavilions included the Australian pavilion symbolizing Ayers Rock by Ancher Mortlock and Wooley Architects, the Queensland pavilion by Robin Gibson and Partners (the same architect of Queensland Performing Arts Centre). For the Expo were created 9

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precincts and 150.000 temperate and tropical plants were planted, thanks to the landscape architect, Lawrie Smith. For the occasion also 100 works of sculpture were either commissioned, purchased or borrowed for World Expo 88 at a cost of \$25 million. Quite evocative were the geometric sculptures located in the river, which were illuminated during the night.

Moreover, Brisbane had to provide an efficient transport infra-

*Denton Corker Marshall proposal for Canberra, National Archives of Australia,*

A8104,139





Three significant pictures showing the area before, during, and after the World Exposition of 1988.

structure system to meet the heavy demands that will be placed on it in a small concentrated area of the city over a period of six months. To meet this requirement the public transport authorities had developed a strategy, which resulted in: the construction of car parks, a frequent shuttle bus between the central business district and the Expo site, increased bus and train frequency, upgrade of South Brisbane and Vulture street stations, a terminal ferry and of course the two monorails system, which allowed the visitors to move easily inside the site. Also the transportation with Gold Coast and its airport was improved. The transport strategy costed approximately \$9.8 million.

Surely Brisbane grew thanks to the Expo, changing habits and discovering new ways of living the city : *'Brisbane's World Expo '88 changed people's lives, and the memories of Expo '88 are revered more than 20 years on from the event itself. We are very much looking forward to celebrating the anniversary of this special event with the people of Brisbane, and recreating the unique atmosphere and sense of wonder that Expo '88 created in Brisbane'*(Malcolm Snow, South Bank Corporation CEO, in Hoey 2008a).

When I asked Graham Bligh, one of the main architects of Maccormick Bligh 88 Pty Ltd, what the expo gave to Brisbane, he answered: " a sense of maturity". In fact, Brisbane was developing and it was able to confront with other international realities without disappointing and especially enriching itself. Brisbane citizens changed themselves by changing the city. What physically remains after the Expo '88 is just The Nepal Pagoda and the two older pubs, Plough Inn and Ship Inn, which were pre-existing. But most of all, the expo seemed to be the input to start the construction of new infrastructures to connect better South Bank to the City. What is curious in fact, is that Brisbane was a city born just next to the river, without any sort of communication with it. The Expo left all the urban development, which started later, which represented a significative urban evolution for the city.

## **The Project**

*'After Expo '88, demolition of the temporary pavilions including the much loved monorail took nearly a year. During this time the South Bank Corporation was formed to plan and develop the extensive site. A design competition in 1989 was won by Media 5 (Demond Brooks International), but was only partly proceeded with. The swimming lagoons and beaches were part of this plan and remain as popular as ever.'*<sup>2</sup>

After the Expo and after that the idea of creating a theme-park close to ri-

<sup>2</sup> Graham De Gruchy, Architecture and Urban Design in Brisbane, vol.II, The Expo '88 site and its further development, Boolarong Press, 2nd ed.,2002, pag.122

ver was luckily abandoned, a new masterplan for the area was designed by the architecture firm based in Melbourne **Denton Corker Marshall** with the master architect John Simpson. DCM were partly selected because of their previous experience in Canberra in the early 1970s where they had experimented with contemporary reinterpretations of traditional street patterns.

The project is reinforcing the parallel circulation in comparison with the river through **Grey Street** and through the pedestrian and bicycle path just next to the river. The streets, park and river spines were reopened to a neglected 'hinterland' (as Louise Noble wrote in her article on [architectureau.com](http://www.architectureau.com) reminding us a term often used by South Bank Corporation when describing West End area).

Landscape elements are qualifying the public domain almost becoming the protagonist of the scene: *'A seven metre high steel pergola is a contemporary version of a unified street facade which accompanies the planting of low shade trees to the footpath and a median strip of tall Kauri pines'*.<sup>3</sup>

Recreational areas close to a public swimming pool with free access is not something quite common to see and the result is definitely outstanding in terms of being a tangible gathering point in the city. Probably the project is less outstanding for the formal choices, but the curved features, softened by a flourishing tropical vegetation, are directing successfully the pedestrian flows.

The pool system, instead, is composed by three interconnected swimming pools with different depth, which are overhung on the ends of the bigger pool by wooden footbridges.

However, what Louise Noble is underlining in her article and it is important to remark is that Brisbane is not popular for owning exceptional public spaces (as said in the introductory chapters, Australian history with its urban planning was for sure not helpful) and that just from thirty years or a little more it is moving towards the discovery of the spaces for the community and for the collective living.

As Dr. John Macarthur wrote in his essay of 1995: *'South Bank was intended to enact a strategy of the capture by the centre over a populist culture of the periphery'*.

It's true that recreational functions are zoned in this area and the question if this is a 'passive' occupation rather than 'active' is totally legitimate.

Can we consider Parklands as a truly democratic space?

3 L.Noble, South Bank Dreaming, [www.architectureau.com](http://www.architectureau.com)

If the answer is yes, why then is it behaving like an 'enclosed' space working from 7am to 10pm? After this time slot indeed, the area is pretty much dead and not even illumination is provided.

The line between private and public space in Australia is ambiguous and this is because the project was conceived in the age of corporatised infrastructure.

Anyway, it's undeniable that a big step towards the 'collective experience' has been made. Australia is being freed by 'Featurism'.

Parklands represents a landmark, which gave a new public image to the city.

Moreover, it was a nodal point in South Bank redevelopment improving the connectivity with the neighborhood nearby: West End.

The project contributed as well to a new perception of the landscape, creating a new conversation with the waterfront : *'The principal topic of the conversation between landscape architects and these post-industrial sites is support for waterside play at citywide or local scale. Designers have made promenades for strolling, gathering and observation of displays such as fireworks on the water. They have made places for reflection, for watching the quality of light on the water or the world going by.'*<sup>4</sup>

The common mental framework has been changed. A new idea of living the public life, even if it's pretty much different from the European way of thinking, became a reality.

South Bank is reflecting the new identity of the tropical main city of Queensland with its palms, artificial rainforest and pools, which are contrasting with the urban background and creating a great singularity.

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4 C.Bull, *New Conversations With an Old Landscape*, Images Publishing Group, Mulgrave, 2002, p.60





*Actual view of South Bank area with the superimposition of the previous Expo '88 settlement.*

The **Interview** was taken on 06/10/2013 at Mr Graham Bligh's apartment in New Farm, **Brisbane**.



## **EXCERPT FROM THE INTERVIEW TO THE ARCHITECT GRAHAM BLIGH ABOUT EXPO '88**

**How did the city accept the fact to have such a big void so close to the city centre? Since the expo was totally self-funding, what was supposed to be in the area after the expo to convince the population and the city council?**

The expo in Brisbane came out quite quickly.

There are two different kind of expos: one major and one minor and the Brisbane's expo was the minor one, which requires a minimum of one hundred acres. The goal was to include the Performing Arts Centre and the Maritime Museum. The previous expos were those of Vancouver and Tsukaba, but they weren't so successful later within the community.

We've been aware of all the other expos results and the things which happened around too. So from the structure of the expo, from the organizational point of view, it was very supported from the state government. Every one was very supportive. The general manager was Bob Minnikin, who convinced quite easily the authorities in Brisbane. The whole site originally was one of those parts of the city developing and changing and it was a light industrial area. (...) During the days after the expo, there was this competition for the redevelopment of South Bank and the money of the land went to the South Bank Corporation and I think it's fully done at the moment. Probably this expo was one of the most successful in terms of redevelopment after the expo. Anyway what happened afterwards was a separate study. My firm took part of the competition but it was won by another firm of which personally from an urban discipline I didn't like at all. The South Bank Authority now is a different South Bank authority, which run the expo.

**When was the South Bank authority born?**

I'm not sure, but it was before the expo. I think around 1984. Something like that.

Anyway we had the first privately own computer in Queensland and, so we used it for some drawings for the expo.

**Do you know why was South Bank choses as site for the expo instead of Kangaroo point?**

Oh, there was the land available. But I don't recall Kangaroo Point coming out as an option. I think there were no 100 acres, necessary for the expo because of the park. In South Bank we could incorporate the Performing Arts Centre, the Maritime museum and Grey street. The Performing Art



Centre wasn't functioning during the expo, but the land was "sympathetic" to the expo. It was a good spectrum for the expo land, which had a pretty dense development. Moreover, South Bank had two train stations. In Kangaroo Point there is no train station. And you can walk easily from the CBD through Victoria Bridge.

**Could you explain better the team work for the Expo '88?**

From the architectural point of view of planning, I received the commission. Frank Moore worked behind to encourage the government to go ahead and I was encouraged as well by Frank to accept this commission. In the meanwhile there was another architect, James Maccormick, who had much more experience with expos than I had and he's been working for some engineering company. I thought that there was so much work and this amount of work should be done quickly and James had experience in this field, so why we'd don't do it together? So we formed Bligh Maccormick 88 Pty Ltd. Me and Maccormick were full time in the office and there were other people with other tasks. We called some semi-independent architects, for example to build the boardwalk.

**Were the tensile structures built according to the masterplan?**

Yes...this is the difference between a major and a minor expo.

In the major one any country design its own pavilion.

**Where are now the tensile structures?**

They were just demolished.

**What remains on site from the expo '88?**

Some early buildings and the pagoda, some minor stuff, but this was the intention.

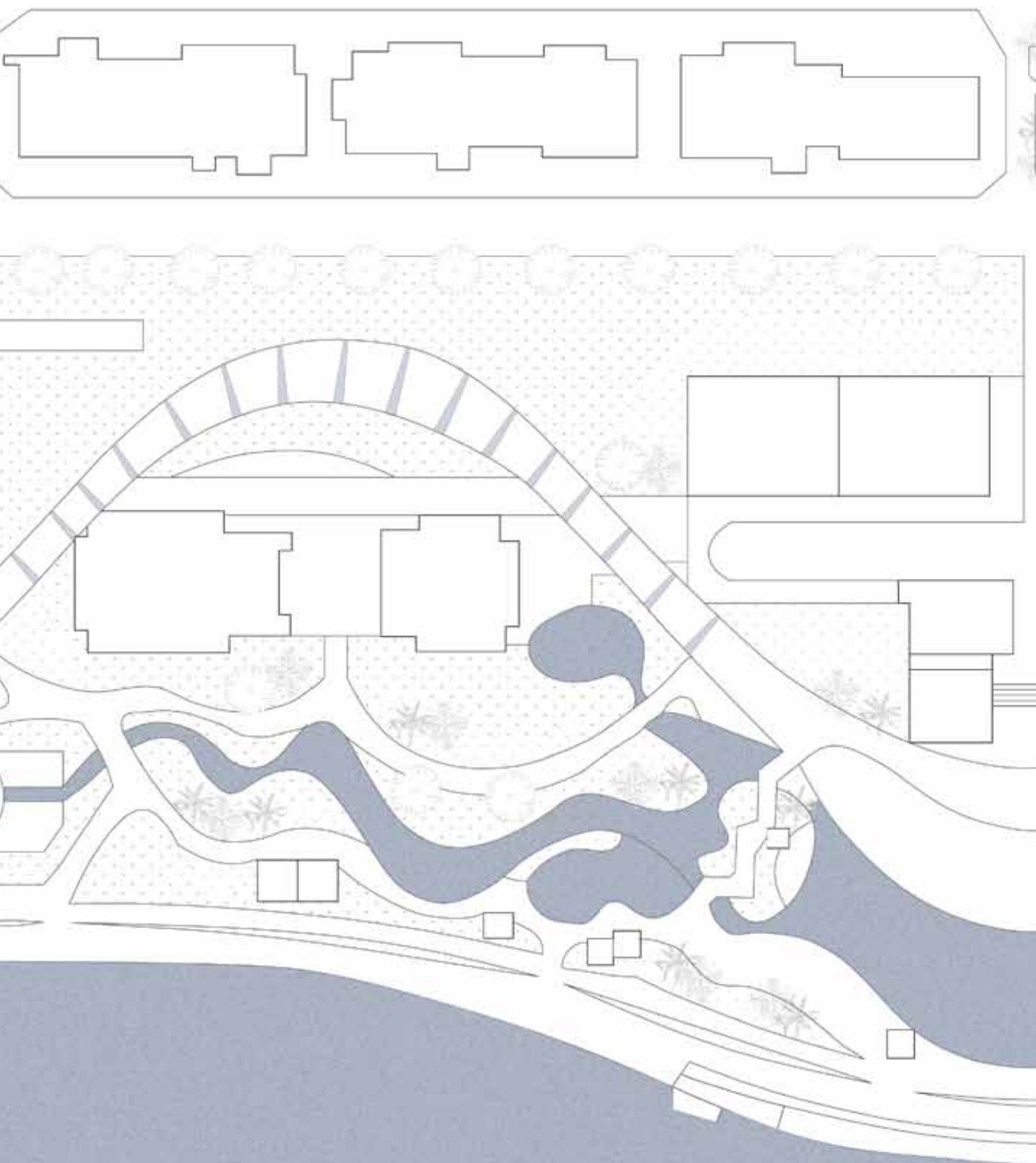
Brisbane had no infrastructures before on the river and everything changed later with the expo. It seemed the city discovered suddenly the river.

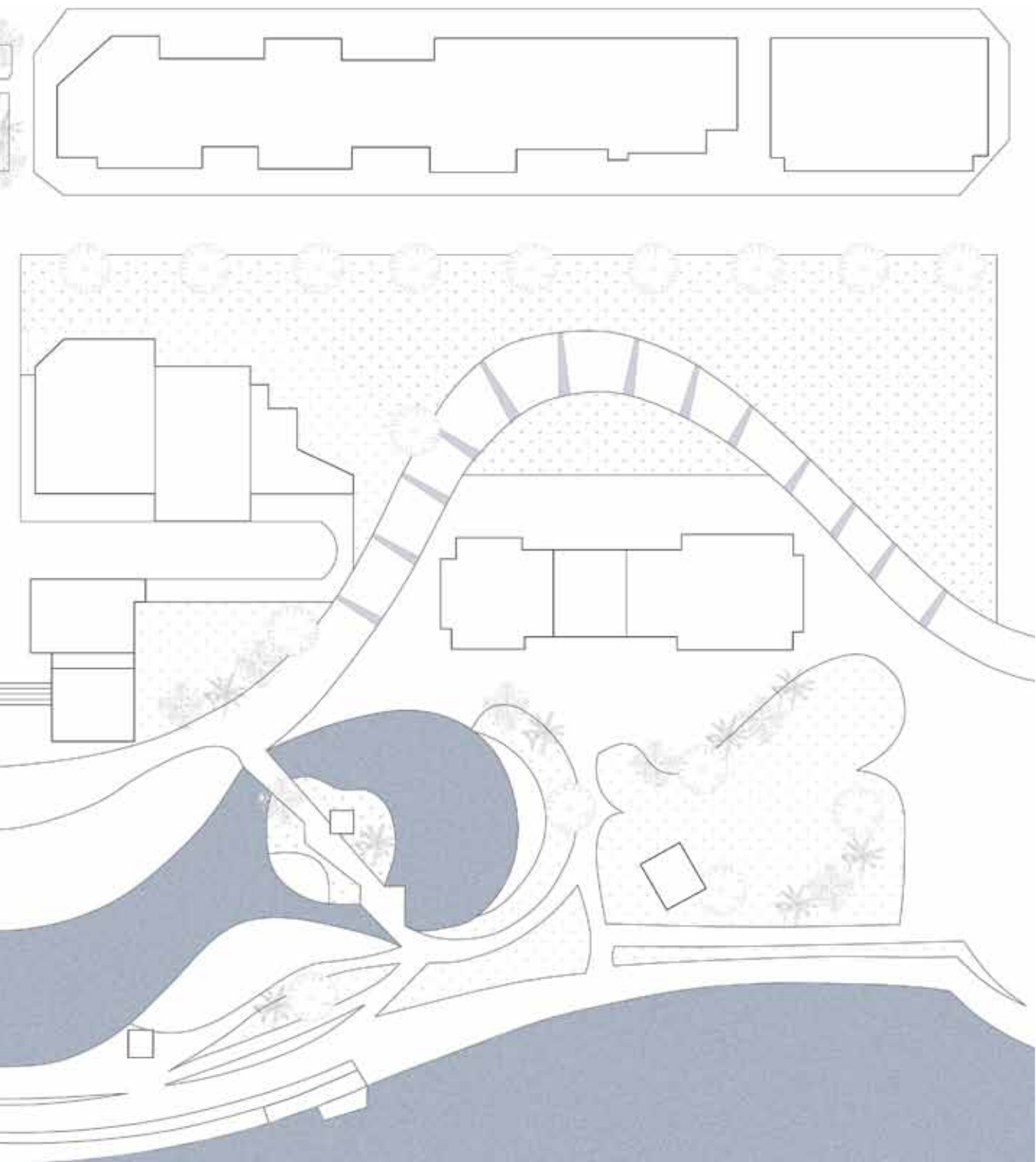
**Could you explain better how the infrastructures improved?**

Many people said the Brisbane had a change in maturity when the expo happened, because an expo is not completely about the tourists enjoying the exhibition. Behind this, there is a discussion with foreign embassies, diplomats introducing businesses. From that experience, Queensland was taken in consideration with a higher profile in the country. You couldn't recognize the city now, compared to what it was. All the bridges, the citycat and so on arrived after the expo.

**What did the expo give to Brisbane?**

I think it gave a sense of maturity, a sense of moving on. The city became more open socially and people discovered that Brisbane was a nice place to be.

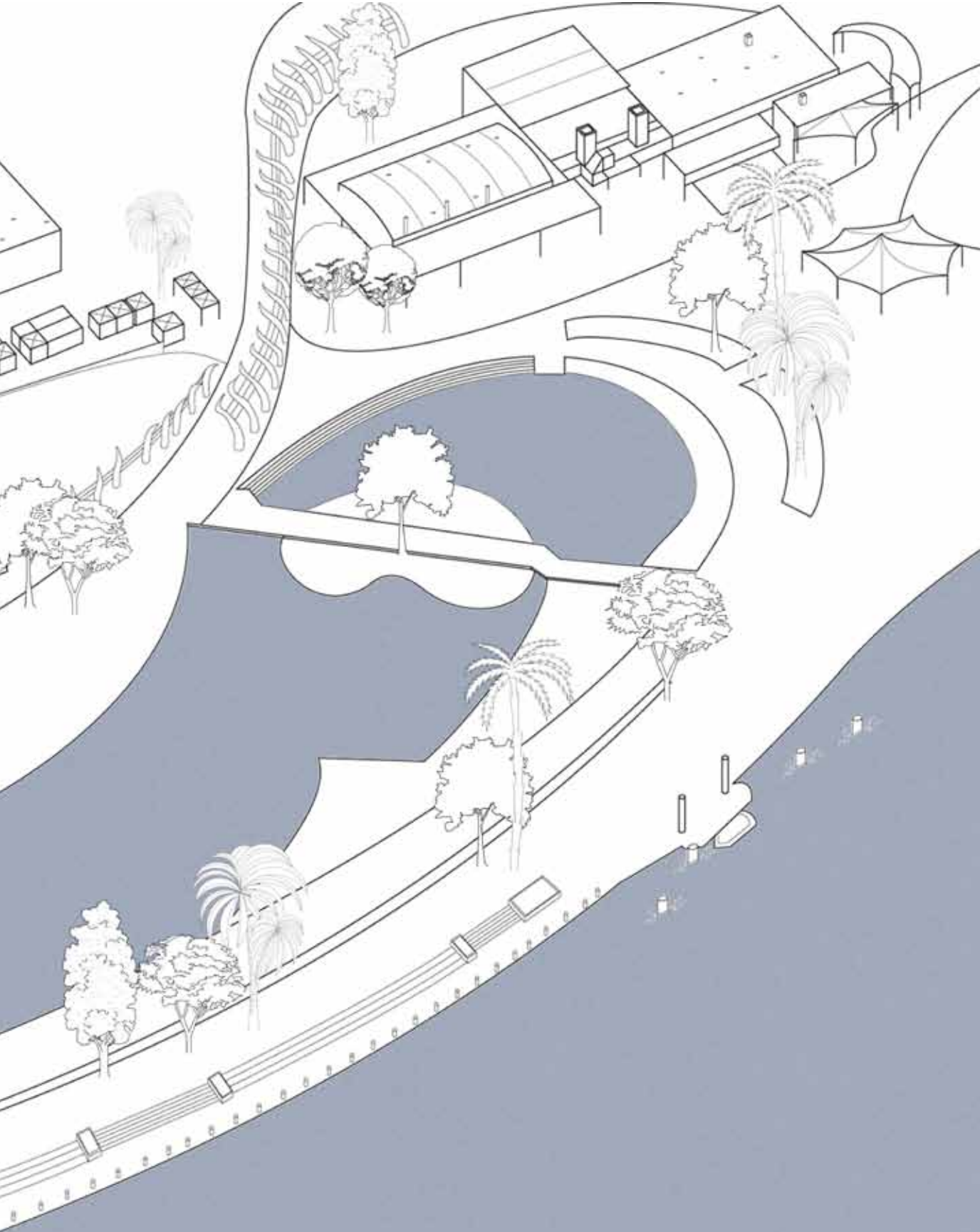




0m 20m 60m











*Denton Corker Marshall design of the steel pergola for the the Parklands project in Brisbane.*



\*

*Denton Corker Marshall design of the steel pergola, aerial view.*



\*

*View of the City from  
Parklands Lagoons.*





*The pedestrian path close  
to the river.*



## CONCLUSIONS:

### FROM A DEFINITION OF AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC SPACES TO A CRITICAL PROJECT

Coming to the end of this study and analysis of most significant samples of Australian public spaces, it is possible to point out main qualities and features, defining contemporary Australian civic areas.

In the previous chapters, an evolution of these spaces has been traced—beginning with the **British inspired squares of the 1850s** (see pp. 32-33) and ending with contemporary structures (see pp. .

Therefore, it's also important to underline the time frame in which these spaces were evolved, as it is definitely a short period of time in comparison with other countries having an established architectural history behind.

All of the case studies are successful public spaces which were part of an **urban regeneration project**. The sites were close to the city center, but they hosted factories and train or tram depots. Eventually, Australians discovered a need of city centers (in the case of Melbourne) or leisure time public spaces and consequently, solutions to the '*Australian Ugliness*', quoting Robin Boyd's words, started to be provided.

What is worth mentioning is the fact that most of the projects are megastructures with various functions as part of a **one large urban system**.

For instance, Federation Square is not just a civic plaza, but it is also a museum, an art center and television broadcast studios. Melbourne's laneways are accurate urban arteries connecting different public spaces and creating an overall system which may be easily changed over time.

The last but the most popular one is the Sydney Opera House. It is not just an Opera House, but also the square created by the podium, a beautiful viewpoint inside the city, and also a promenade with cafes and restaurants underneath.

Brisbane's Parklands as well, are not just the popular park with swimming pools, but they are also part of a rethinking of the promenade close to the river, and also the development of Little Stanley Street, which is part of the precinct known as 'South Bank Precinct'.

The next common feature is **water**.

All the case studies are located close to a river or sea what is an important element that helps visually (and also emotionally) to enjoy the 'slow time'—opposite to the fast life of the metropolis. That is why it is likely to find, among these projects, enjoyable **promenades** just next to the water, where one can jog, skate, have a coffee or simply relax.

Another feature is the visual **horizontality** of these projects (Melbourne's laneways are an exception as they are located in the City Center) in contrast to the 'verticality' of the CBD (mostly high-rising buildings).

All the case studies, are located outside the City Center (the laneways are an exception again), in areas which previously were neglected and which now are reachable and **well-connected** with the rest of the city.

From an architectural point of view, **new technologies** for the realization of the projects. The Sydney Opera House is an excellent example as all the calculations of the shells were realized with the first rudimentary computers. Also, Federation Square is an interesting casa thanks to its geometrical façade made through new prefabricated industrial techniques. These technologies guaranteed new shape investigations with the use of innovative materials over wide spans.

As a consequence of these observations, it is possible to conclude that there are some **guidelines**, which can help to describe what Public Space in Australia means nowadays. For sure, it is something distant from British garden squares or an Italian piazzas. In fact, we are dealing with mega-structures with multiple uses, which are part of an urban regeneration project and where the water plays an important role.

Moreover, those projects are dynamic because of their diversification, but at the same time it is also possible to find more intimate and quiet spots. The idea of the **core** (a reminiscence from the traditional piazza), is quite recurrent in those designs and recreates more intimate dimension.

It is definitely accurate to state that Australia is an appropriate territory for **experimentations**, when it comes to design public spaces.

Its historical and cultural background led public spaces to reach a different stage in their 'evolution'.

On the other hand, this is also a limitation in the way most of these projects are solved in relation to the context.

It was caused by the fact that the 'discovery' of a need for leisure time public spaces happened suddenly after the big urban interventions for international events, such as the Olympics of 1980 in Sydney and the World Expo of 1988 in Brisbane.

Since then, the typology of public space, became common, after years of strict regulations that were limiting social life in public spaces (e.g. food and smoke regulations of the 1980s).

Therefore, there is still **something missing** to achieve the idea of an idyllic public space where technology and good design can live together in harmony. We are not of course talking about *Australian Ugliness* anymore, but about its residues, about a naive immaturity when dealing with the

context.

For these reasons, in the next pages possible alternative **design ideas** to some projects are presented in the Appendix.

The ideas aim to find not only a '*visual simplicity*', but an '*ordered and clearly directed complexity*', following Robin Boyd's words.

The following design proposals are based on seven topics of public space, namely: the square on railroad tracks, the river shore redevelopment, the museum peninsula, the performing arts centre, the harbour redevelopment, the community hub and the civic centre.

The design ideas need to be read as suggestions to bring out the missing pieces in the analyzed framework, where innovation is playing an important role, but sometimes seems to forget the 'basics'.

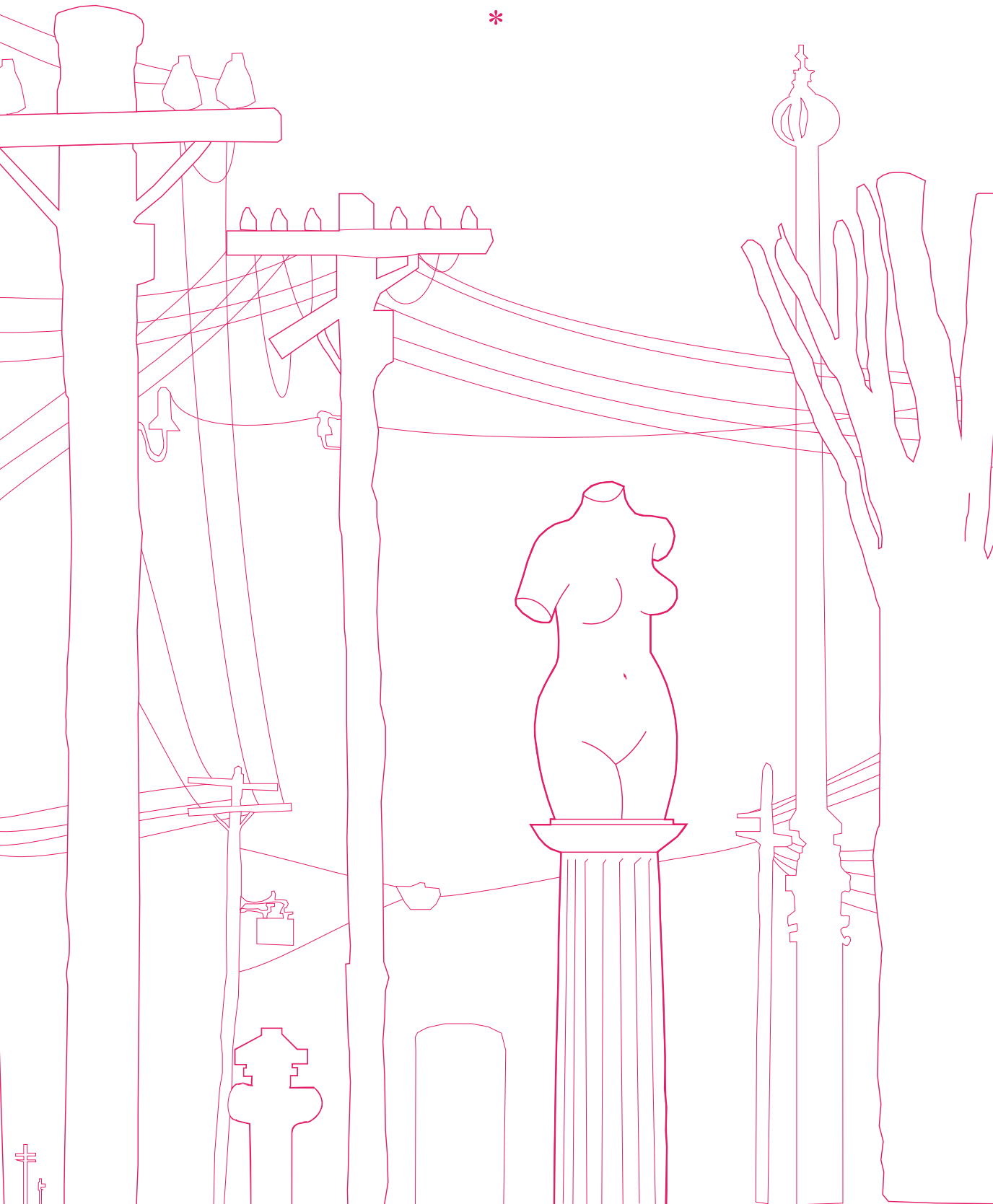
They aim, indeed, to be a **new vision** of what these projects should be to improve their relation to the context and landscape as well as enhance their perception and thus, also their social impact.



*The image on the right is a reworked sketch by R.Boyd and it was used as the book cover for his book "Australian Ugliness" in 1968.*

## 4. TOWARDS A CRITICAL PROJECT

\*



# THE CIVIC SQUARE ON RAILROAD TRACKS

no1

Project name: Federation Square  
Architects: Lab Architecture Studio + Bates Smart + Karres en Brands  
Landscape architects  
Location: Corner Swanston St & Flinders St, Melbourne, Victoria, AU  
Function: museum + art center + television broadcast studios + tourist information center + exhibition space + civic plaza  
Surface (site area): 360.000 m<sup>2</sup>  
Year: 2002

Federation Square, is a **mixed-used development** located in the Central Business District close to the Melbourne's busiest railway station and it is between two major public spaces: St. Paul's Court and the Square (open spaces) and the Atrium (covered space).

Over the last two hundred years, there were in this site a morgue, a fish market, corporate offices and rail yards.

However, in the meanwhile, planners had long dreamed of linking the CBD with the Yarra river, but the division of the railway station had always postponed the achievement of the dream.<sup>1</sup>

The project is basically made of five components: a Civic Plaza, the Atrium, an Art Gallery Complex, the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, different eateries and shops. All the above elements are built on a deck of 4 hectares (55.000 square meters) roofing the railway yard.

-**The Civic Plaza** can accommodate up to 15.000 people. The design of the square was the key-component in the competition.

-**The Atrium** is a covered public component, which complements the plaza, and it can accommodate about 1.000 people.

-**The Art Gallery Complex**, which is an extension of the National Gallery of Victoria. It comprises more than 7.000 square metres of exhibition space and it houses 22.000 Australian art objects.

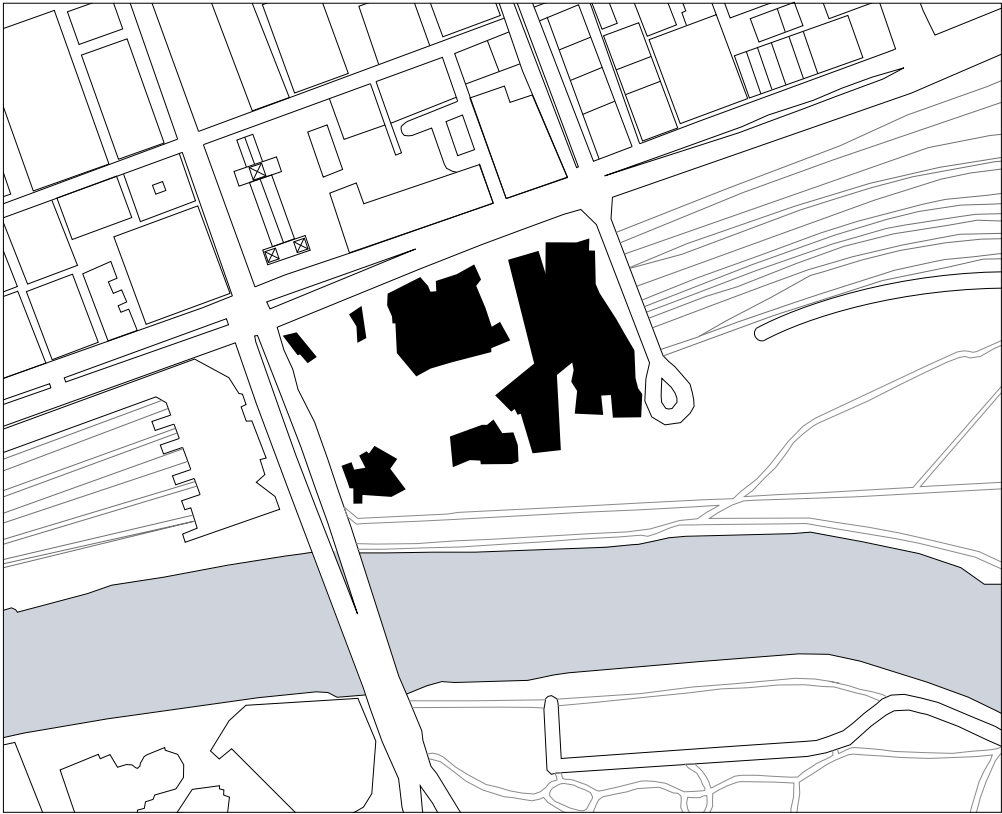
-**The Australian Centre for the Moving Image** includes several cinemas with the latest technology for preservation, exhibition, and education relating to the moving images. There are also theaters and a concert hall for live performances.

-The variety of **eateries and shops** include also a riverside reception venue and a multi-level car park.

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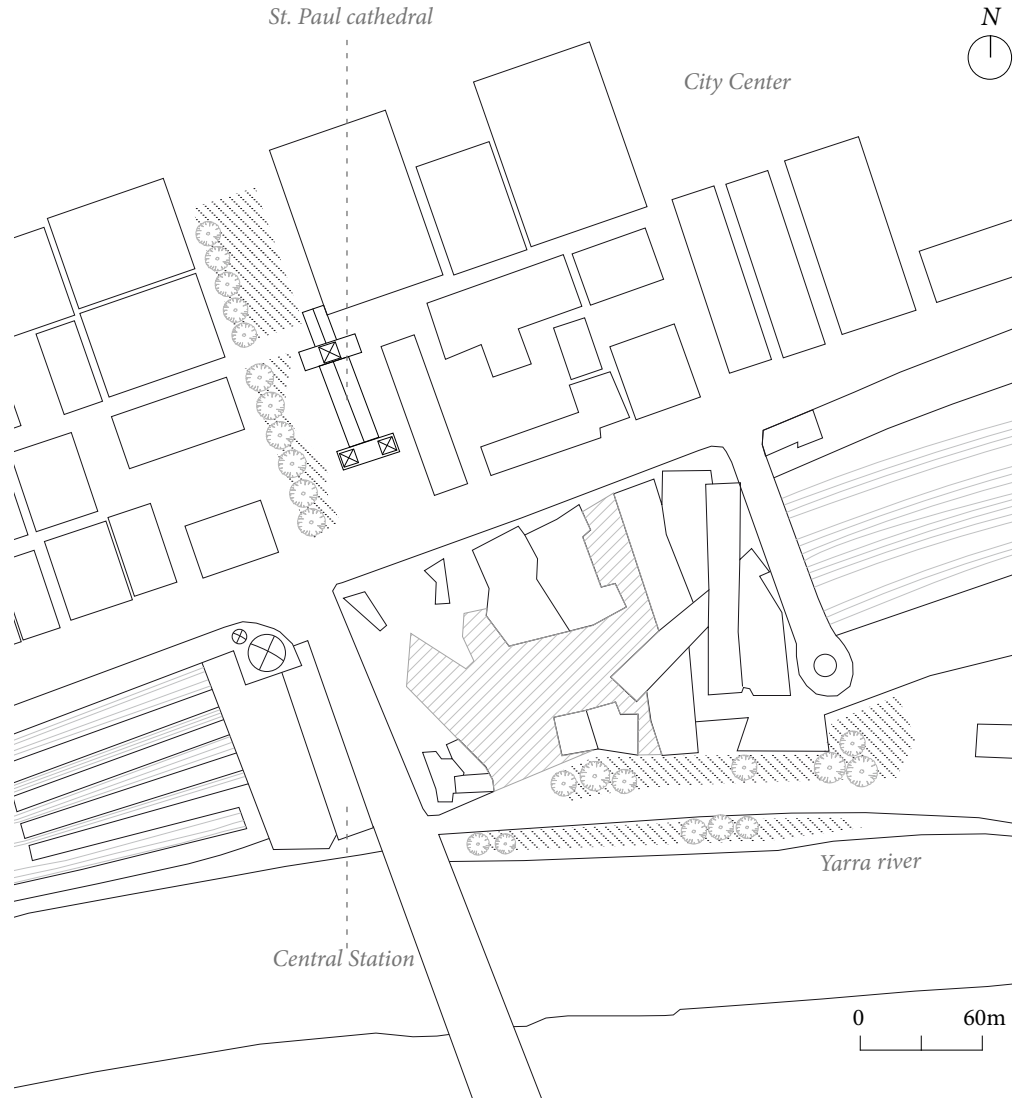
1 History + Design, [www.fedsquare.com](http://www.fedsquare.com)



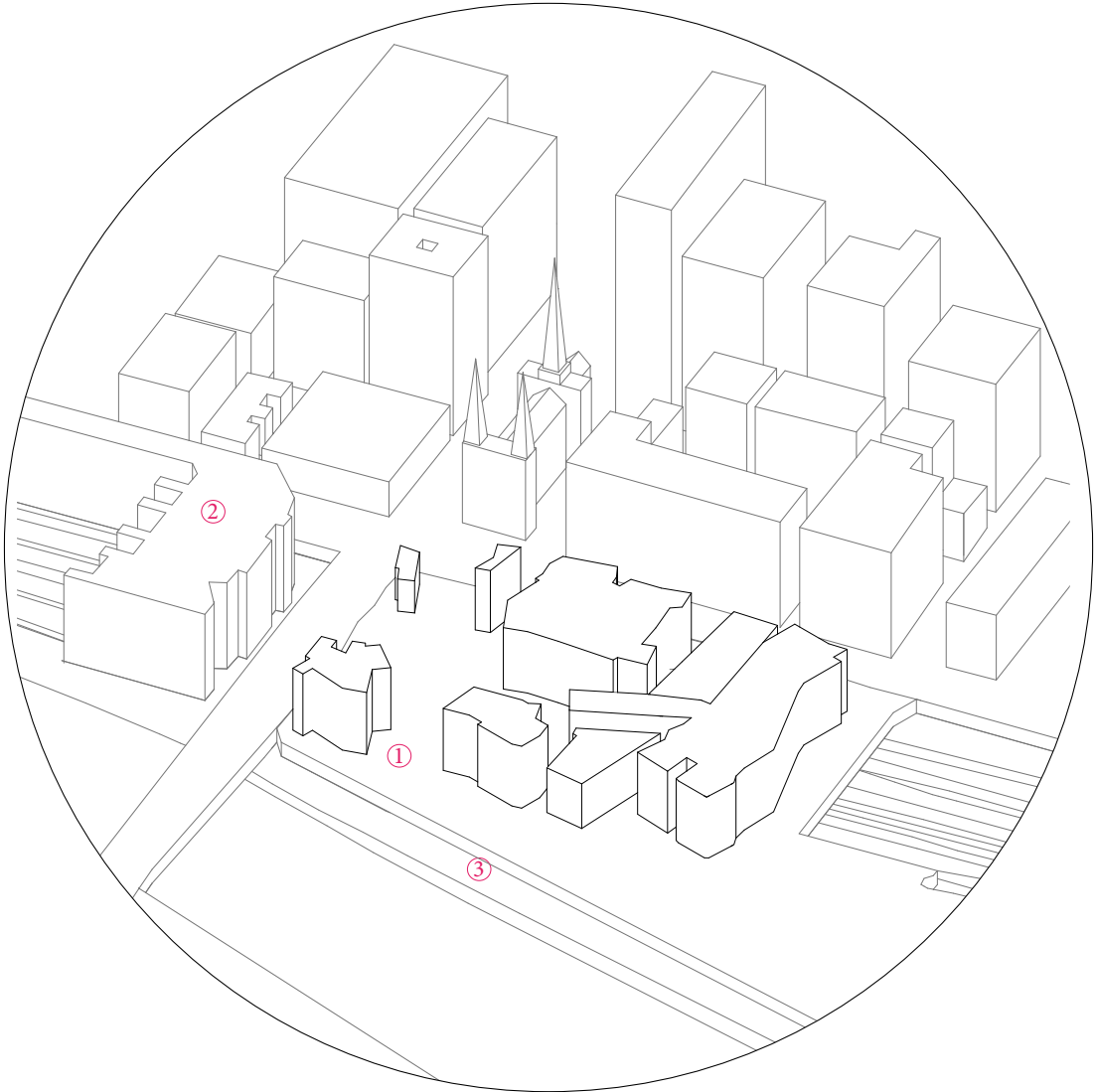


*Federation Square close-up overview.  
Image source:urbanfile.org*

*\* to read all the historic dynamics which involved Federation Square look at pp. 62-79*

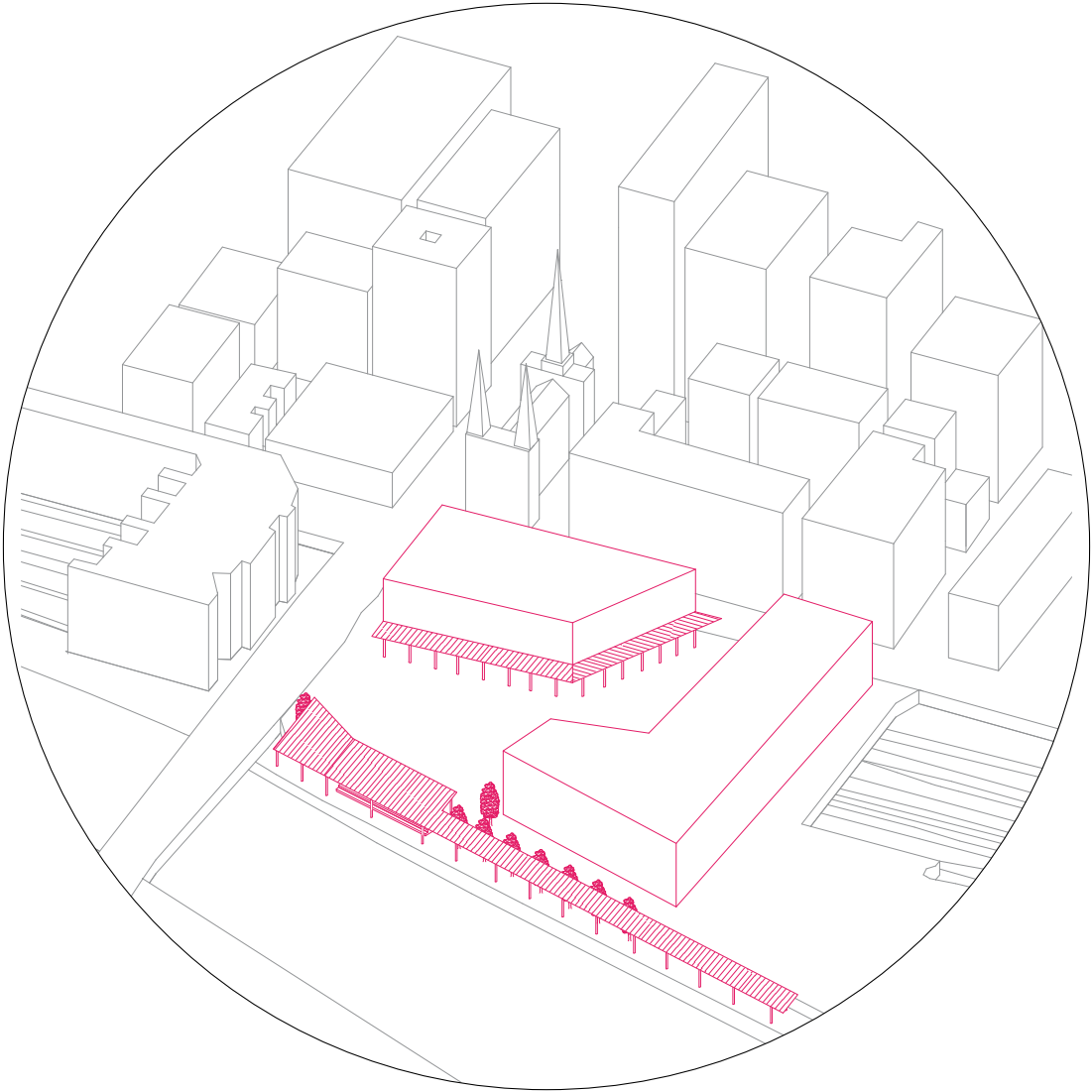


# CRITICAL POINTS



- ① Relation to the river
- ② Relation to the train station
- ③ Accessibility to the river

## WHAT THE PROJECT SHOULD HAVE BEEN





The square with the rediscovered view of the river

# RIVER SHORE REDEVELOPMENT

no2

Project name: Parklands + Grey St redevelopment  
Architects: DCM (Denton Corker Marshall)  
Location: South Bank, Brisbane, Queensland, AU  
Function: park + swimming pool+ Little Stanley street/Grey street redevelopment  
Surface(site area): 150.000 m<sup>2</sup>  
Year: 1992

After the Expo '88 and after that the idea of creating a theme-park close to river was luckily abandoned, a new masterplan for the area was designed by the architecture firm based in Melbourne **Denton Corker Marshall** with the master architect John Simpson. DCM were partly selected because of their previous experience in Canberra in the early 1970s where they had experimented with contemporary reinterpretations of traditional street patterns.

The project is reinforcing the parallel circulation in comparison with the river through **Grey Street** and through the pedestrian and bicycle path just next to the river. The streets, park and river spines were reopened to a neglected 'hinterland' (as Louise Noble wrote in her article on [architectureau.com](http://architectureau.com) reminding us a term often used by South Bank Corporation when describing West End area).

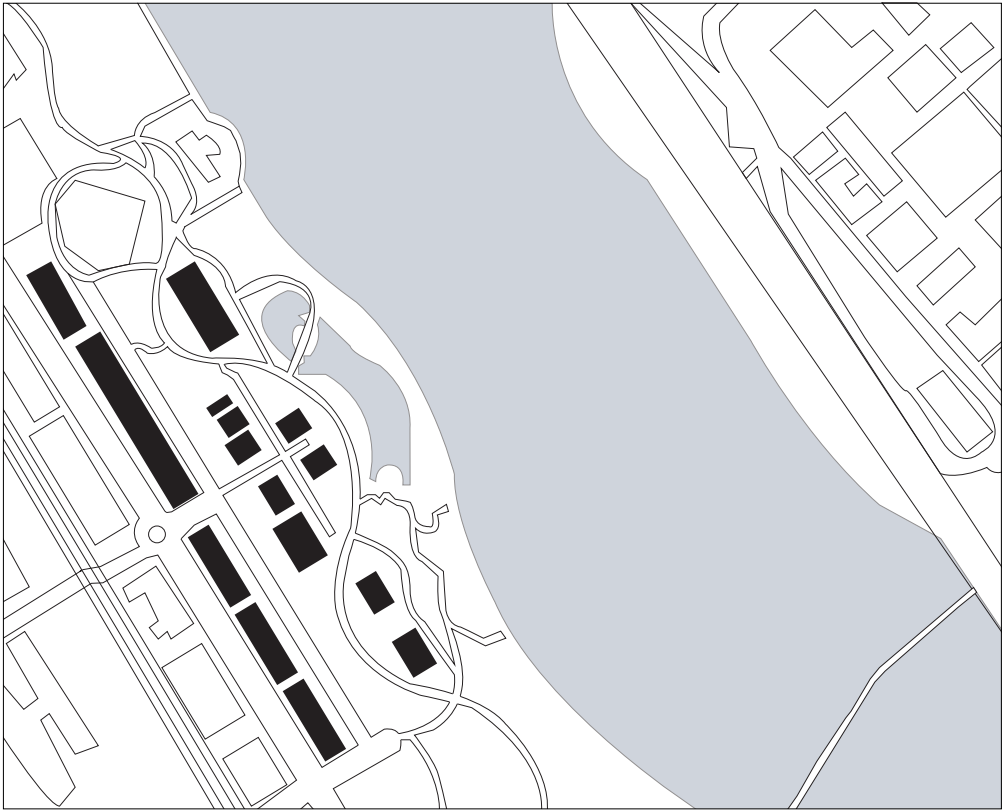
Landscape elements are qualifying the public domain almost becoming the protagonist of the scene: *'A seven metre high steel pergola is a contemporary version of a unified street facade which accompanies the planting of low shade trees to the footpath and a median strip of tall Kauri pines'*.<sup>1</sup>

Recreational areas close to a public swimming pool with free access is not something quite common to see and the result is definitely outstanding in terms of being a tangible gathering point in the city. Probably the project is less outstanding for the formal choices, but the curved features, softened by a flourishing tropical vegetation, are directing successfully the pedestrian flows.

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1 L.Noble, South Bank Dreaming, [www.architectureau.com](http://www.architectureau.com)



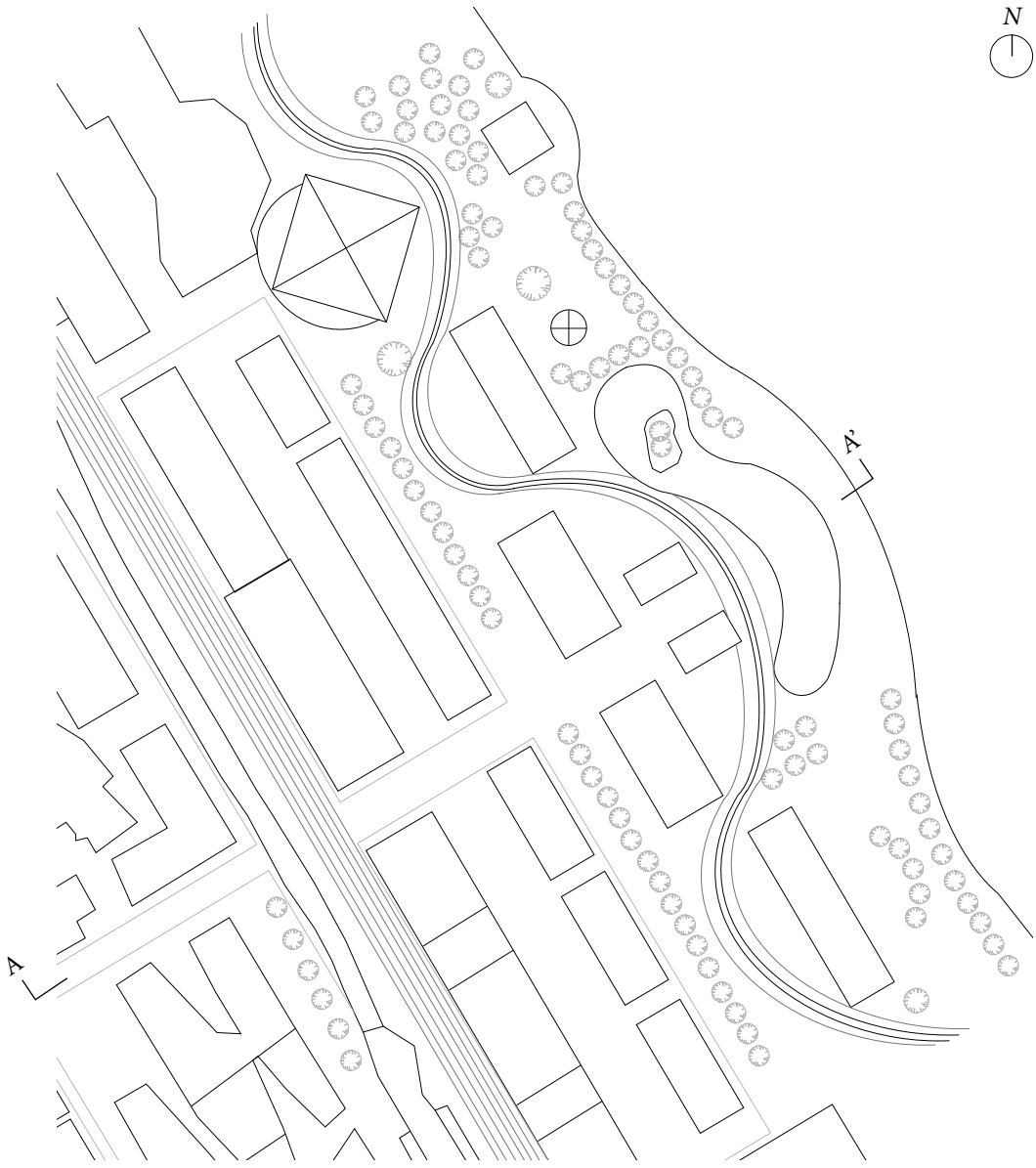


*Aerial view of Parklands in Brisbane.*

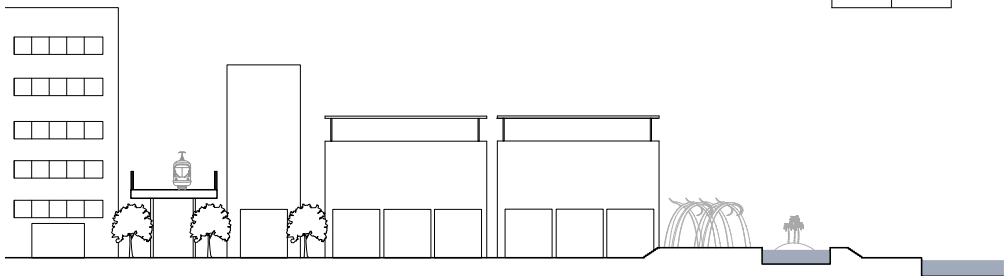
*Image source: <https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com>*

*\* to read all the historic dynamics which involved the parklands look at pp. 131-145*





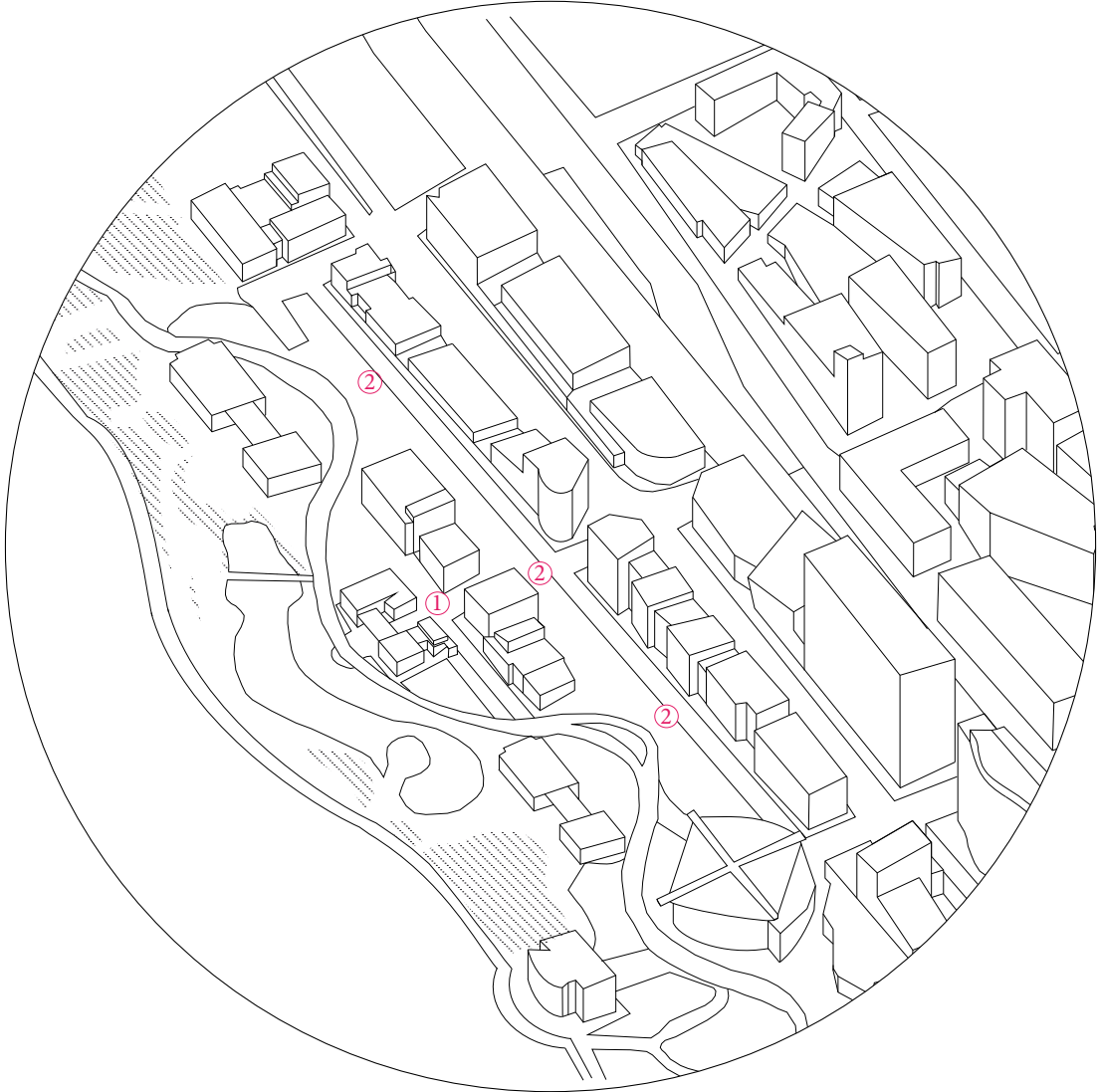
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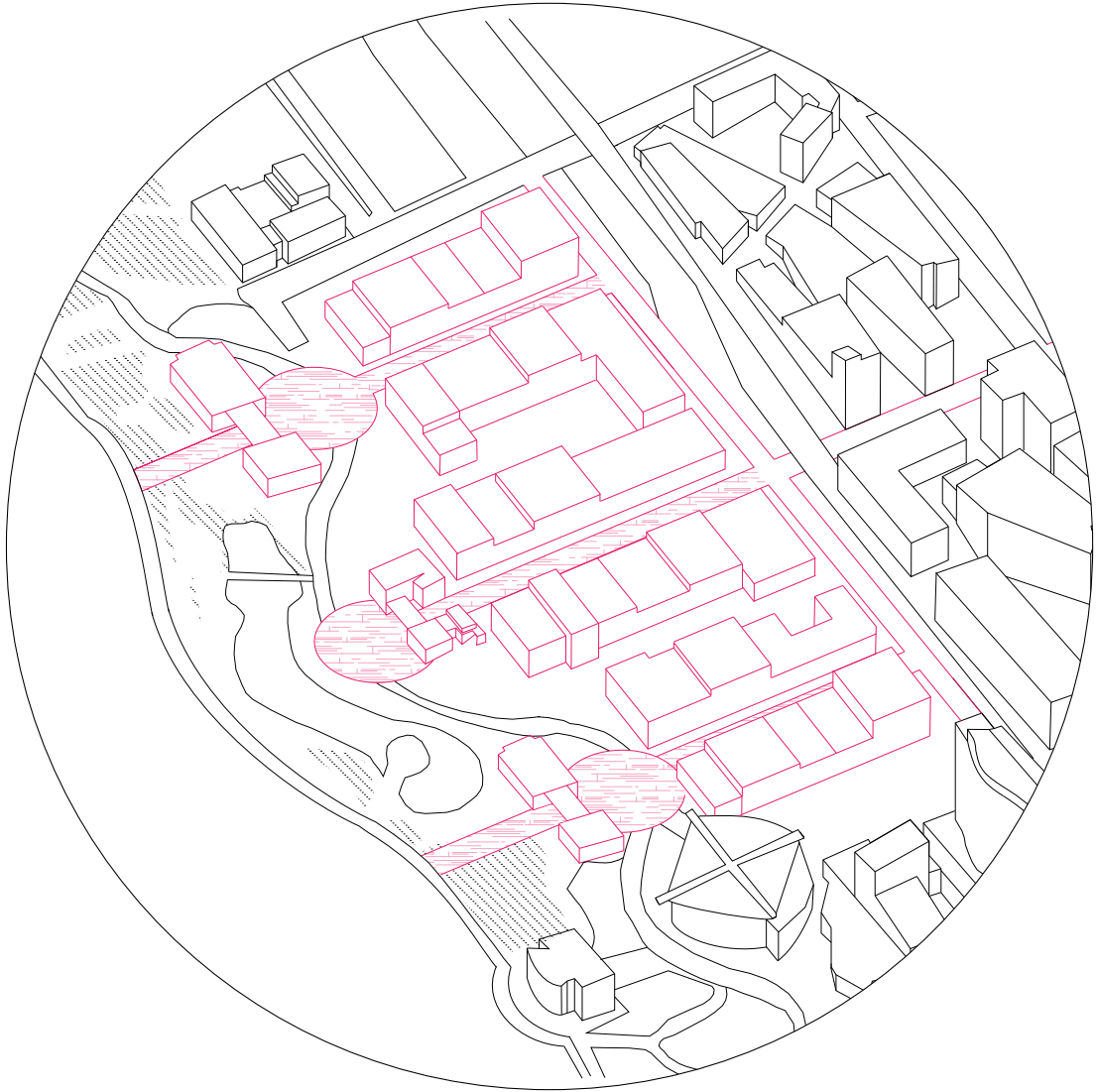
0 40m

# CRITICAL POINTS



- ① Empty area during the evenings
- ② The perpendicular axis to the coast are weak

## WHAT THE PROJECT SHOULD HAVE BEEN





The view from the central perpendicular urban axis to the coast (Ernest st.)

Project name: National Museum of Australia  
Architects: ARM architects (Stephen Ashton + Howard Raggatt + Ian McDougall + Nikolas Koulouras + Antony McPhee)  
Location: Acton Peninsula, Canberra, AU  
Function: museum  
Surface(site area): 20.000 m<sup>2</sup>  
Year: 2001

The National Museum of Australia is located on a peninsula projecting into Lake Burley Griffin in Canberra.

Since the site is outside the Parliamentary Triangle containing Canberra's most important civic buildings and tourist attractions, the architects felt free to create a complex of buildings with a deconstructivist taste.

The plan uses the metaphor of a Boolean string, a computer generated mathematical precept with tangled threads, to reflect the intricate stories which form Australia's cultural heritage.

The threads manifest in the ribbon canopies, pathways, crescent-shaped footbridge and complicated knot-shape of the main hall.

Asymmetry predominates throughout the volumes bordering a courtyard known as the Garden of Australian Dreams.

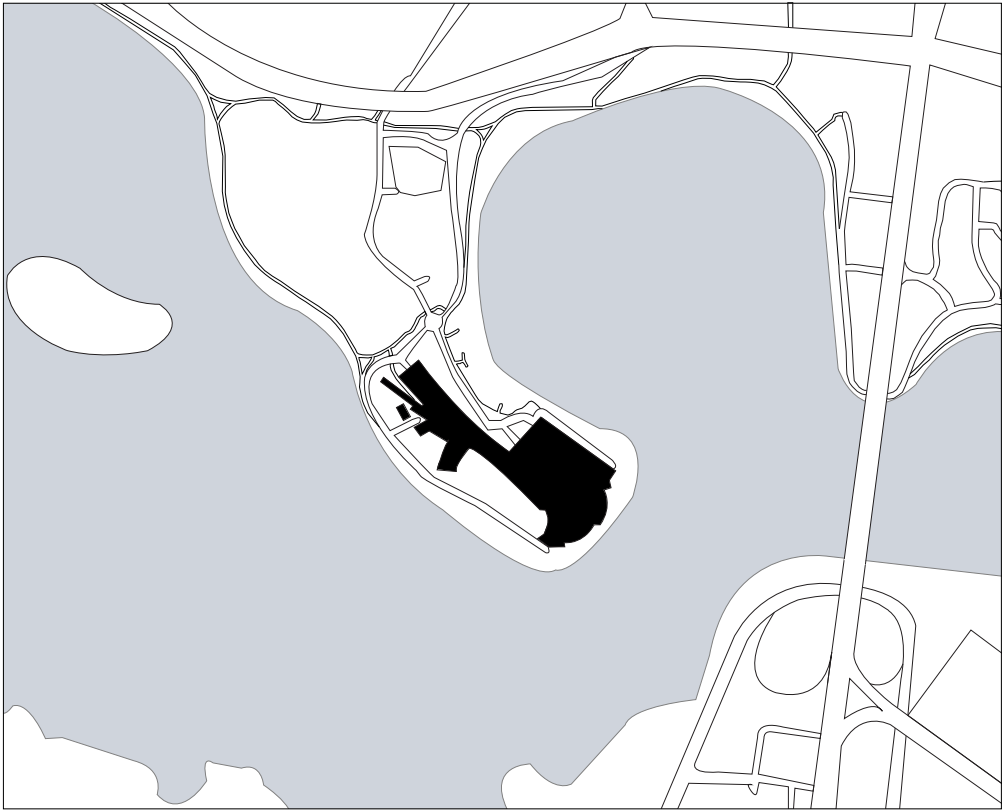
A map showing the tribal boundaries of Aboriginal Australia shapes the garden's surface. Coloured, anodized aluminium panels inscribed with Braille encircle the courtyard. Permanent galleries are organized in a crescent, while the wing housing the Gallery of the First Australians is quoting Daniel Libeskind's Berlin Museum.

The north wing houses temporary exhibitions and adjoins administrative and curatorial facilities. The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies is the building set apart and it quotes the entrance to Aldo Giurgola's Australian Parliament building, and is the red and black of the Aboriginal flag.<sup>1</sup>

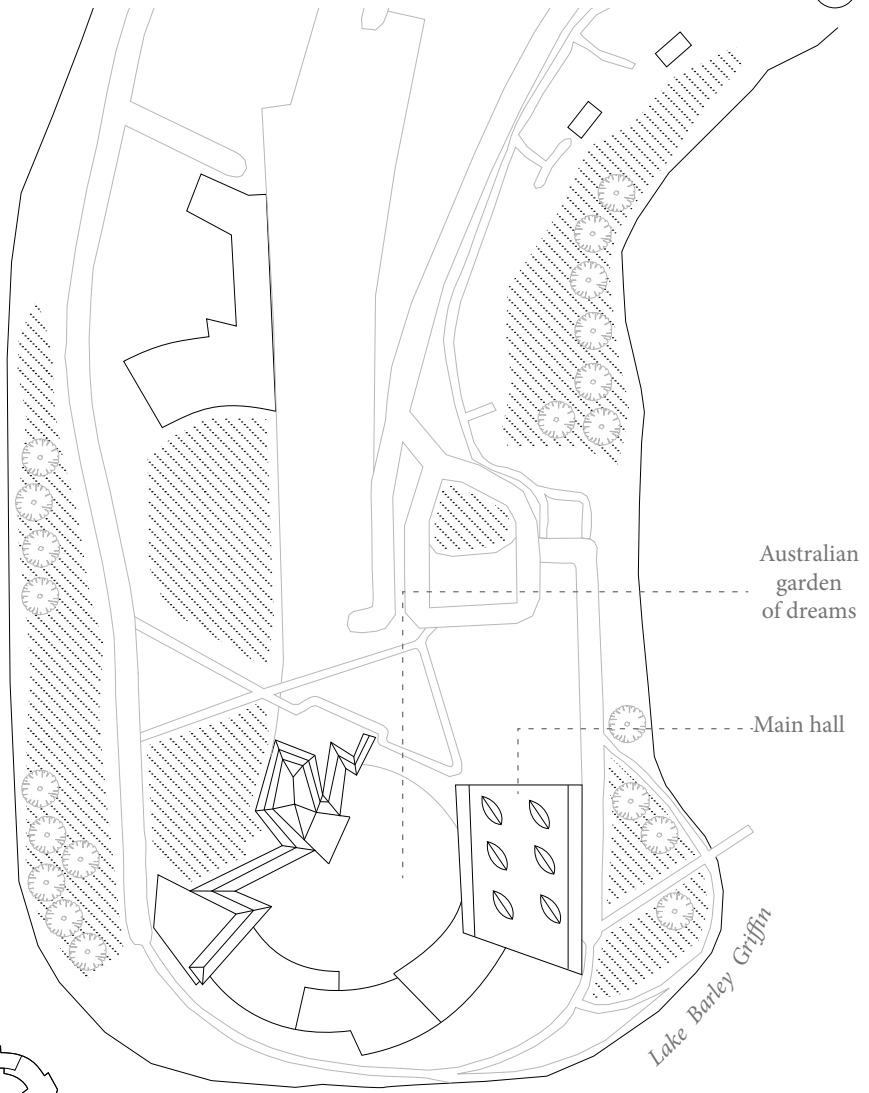
Moreover: *'The relationship between the circulation and narrative of the Museum is an important part of the experience reinforced by visual connections to outside by carefully located windows 'punched' through the facade.'*<sup>2</sup>

1 <http://phaidonatlas.com/building/national-museum-australia/1768>

2 [http://www.a-r-m.com.au/projects\\_NMoA.html](http://www.a-r-m.com.au/projects_NMoA.html)



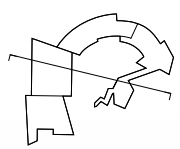
*View from the Garden of Australian Dreams.  
Image source: Photography by John Gollings on <https://flickr.com>*



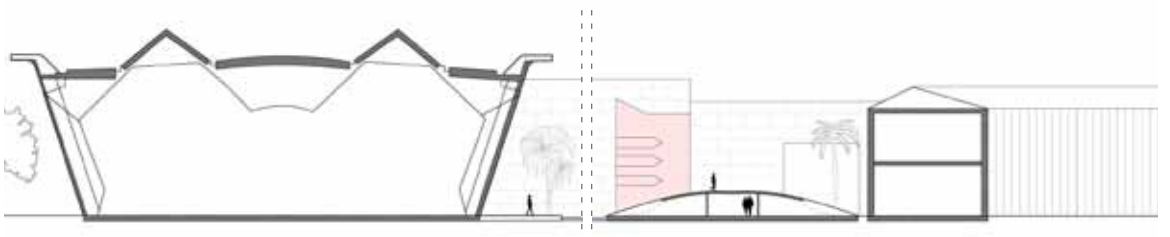
Australian garden of dreams

Main hall

Lake Barley Griffin



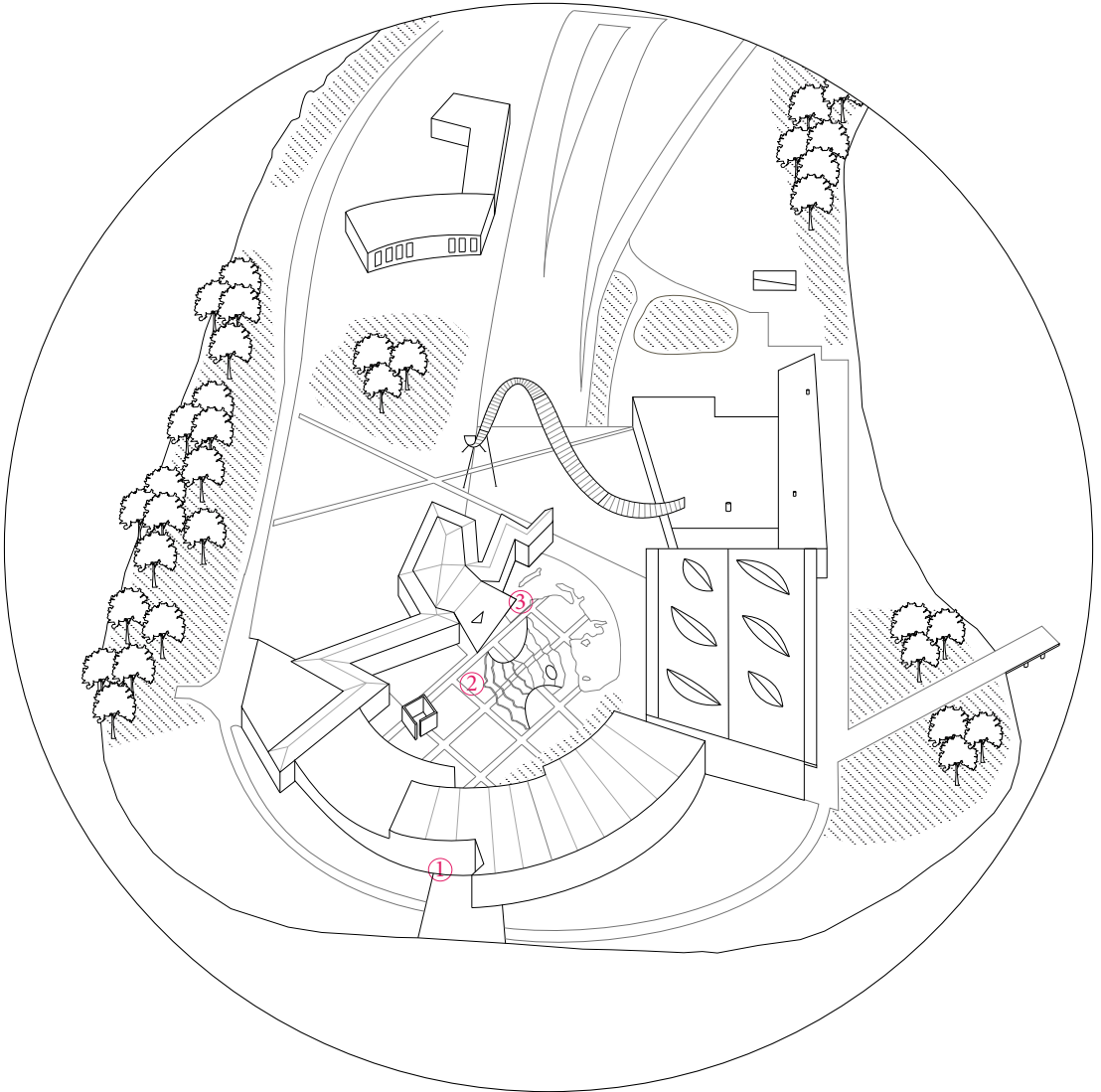
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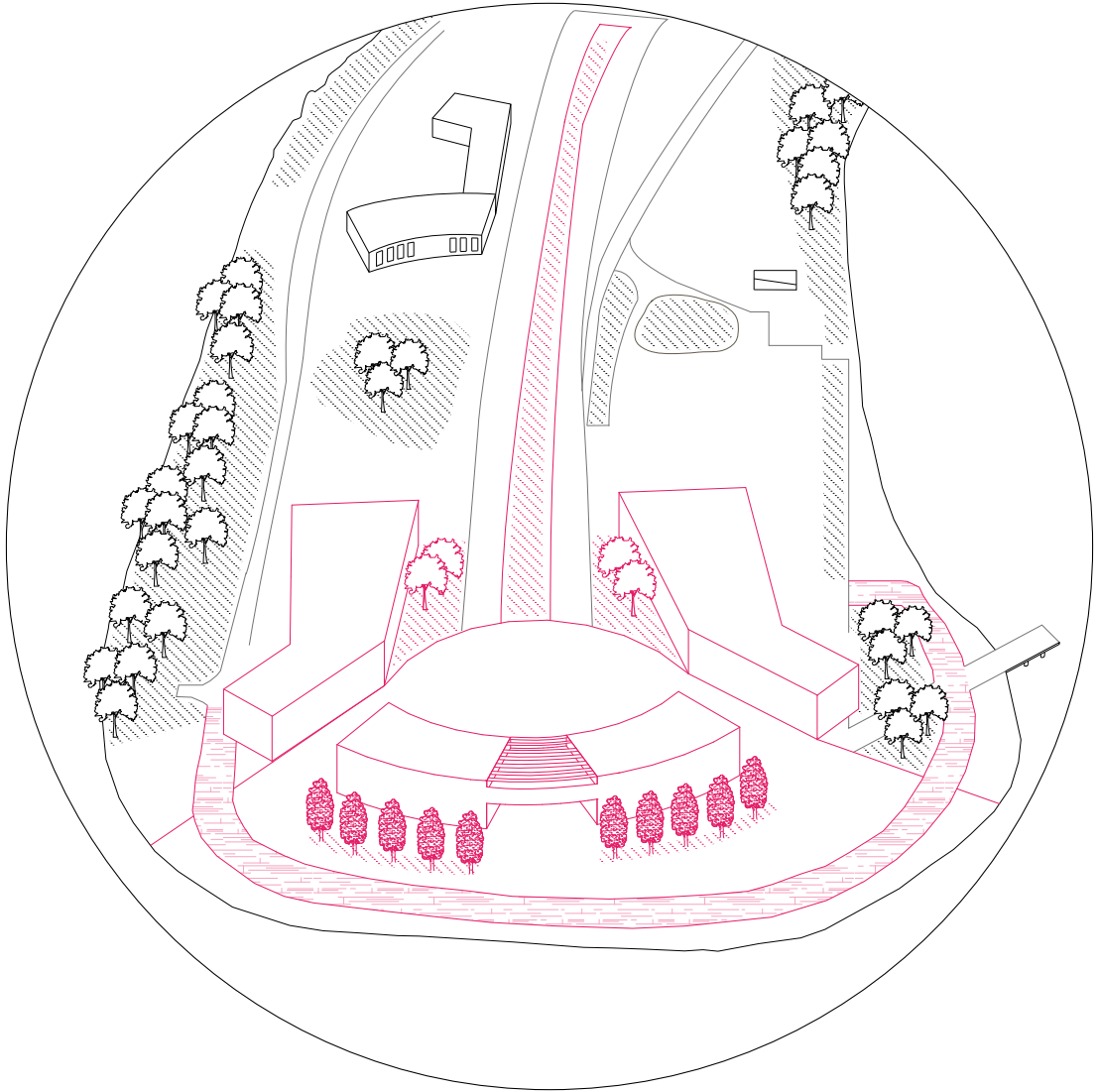


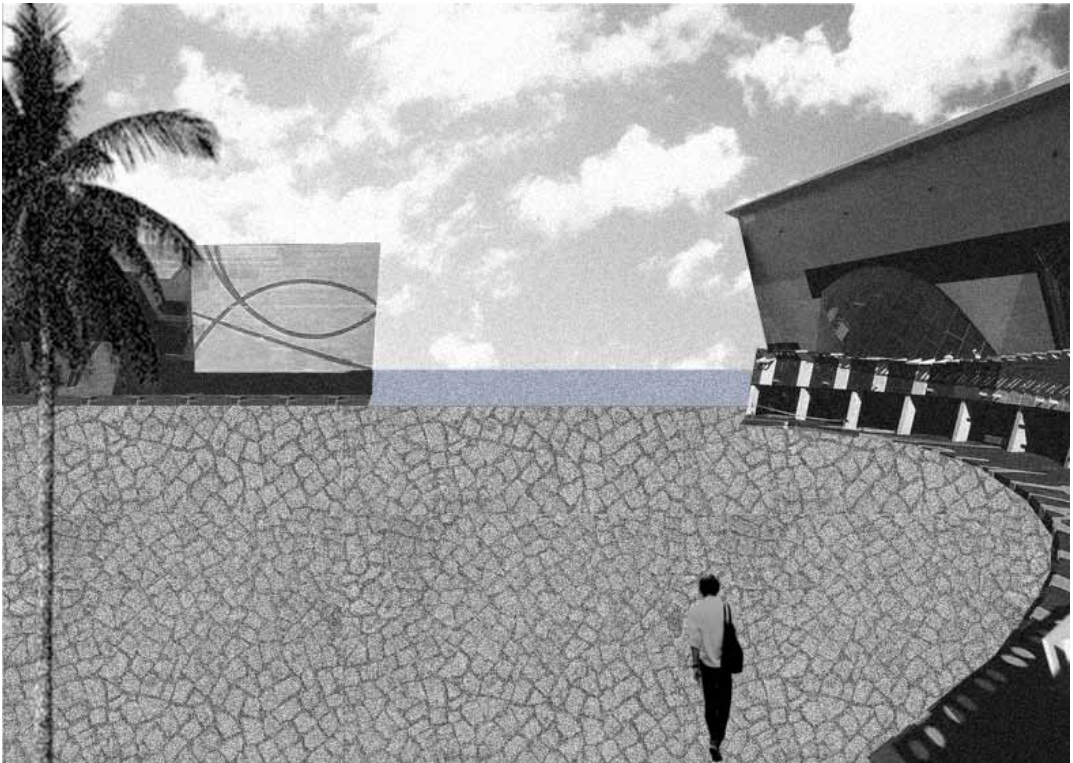
## CRITICAL POINTS



- ① Relation to the lake
- ② No visual connection with the bay
- ③ The mountain in the middle prevents the communication between the buildings

## WHAT THE PROJECT SHOULD HAVE BEEN





View from the central core with the opening to the lake.

Project name: Darling Harbour Live  
Architects: OMA + Hassell + Populous  
Location: Sydney, New South Wales, AU  
Function: ICC Convention Centre + Exhibition Centre + ICC Hotel  
+ entertainment open areas + the boulevard + event deck + the Hay  
Market  
Surface(site area): 540.000 m<sup>2</sup>

Sydney western harbour is currently under construction to give birth to the new harbour redevelopment, called '*Darling Harbour Live*'.

Two Philip Cox buildings, the convention centre and the exhibition centre -which were designed on the occasion of the Olympics-, were demolished in order to have new buildings with the same function.

The new redevelopment should be open in December 2016 and the new hotel designed by OMA was already called as the '*new Sydney landmark*' by the media.<sup>1</sup>

It will be the '*Sydney's largest red carpet entertainment venue, a hotel complex with up to 900 rooms, and a new urban neighborhood in Haymarket*'.<sup>2</sup>

The plan includes an additional hectare of open space, including an expanded/renovated Tumbalong Park (which will be re-integrated into Darling Harbour with new connections), a new Boulevard (which will act as the central North-South pedestrian route), and three new public gathering spaces integrated into the city: Harbourside Place, Chinese Garden Square, and Haymarket Square.<sup>3</sup>

The challenge for this project was definitely represented by the connection with the previous Darling project from the 1980s and with the rest of the city, whereas the road infrastructures represented a real difficulty due to the fact that they are crossing the site preventing a visual and functional continuity.

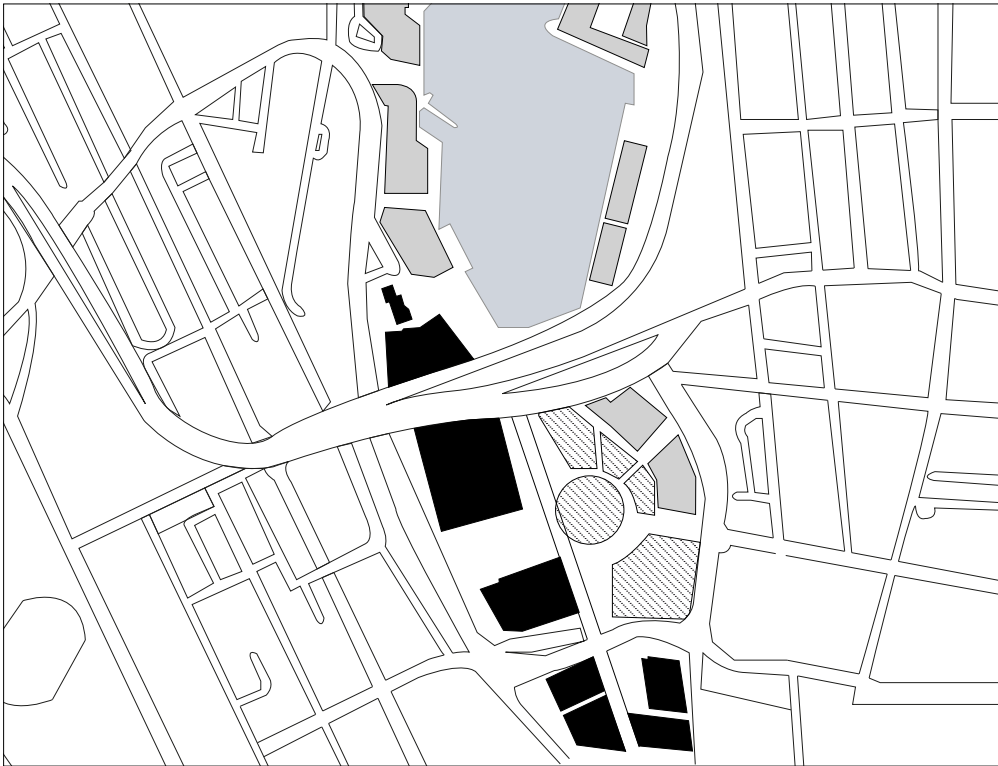
An Australian MP Barry O' Farrell said: '*The redevelopment goes far beyond improving facilities – it's also about re-shaping the city*'.

The project wants to mark a definitive image of a metropolitan Sydney, which is not reflecting anymore the image of the light and white architecture designed by Philip Cox.

1 <http://www.darlingharbourlive.com.au>

2 V.Quirk, HASSELL, OMA, and Populous *To Redevelop Sydney Harbour*, 11 dec 2012 on <http://www.archdaily.com>

3 *Ibidem*

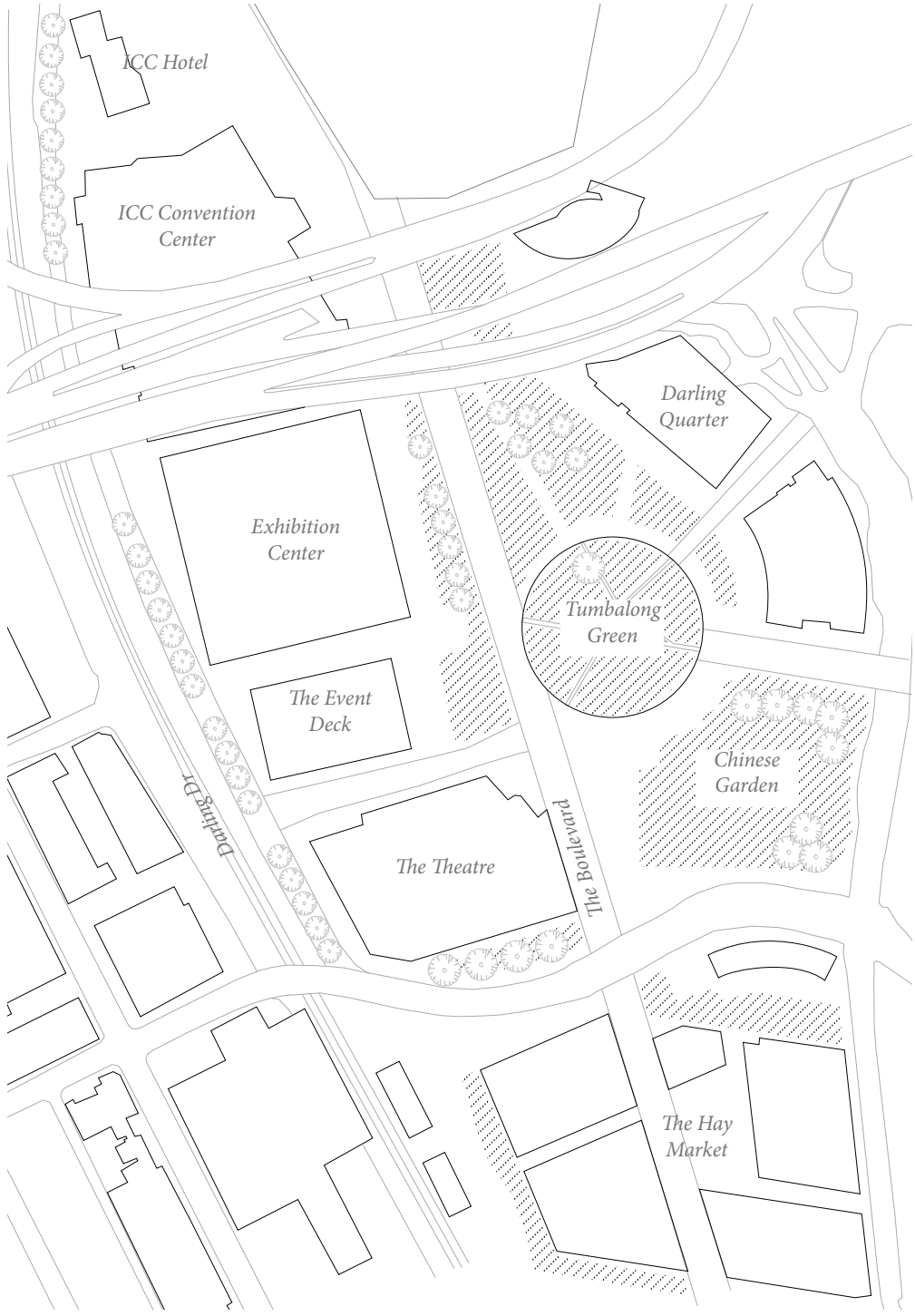


- New redevelopment project by OMA, Hassell and Populous
- buildings realized during the first harbour redevelopment during the 1980s



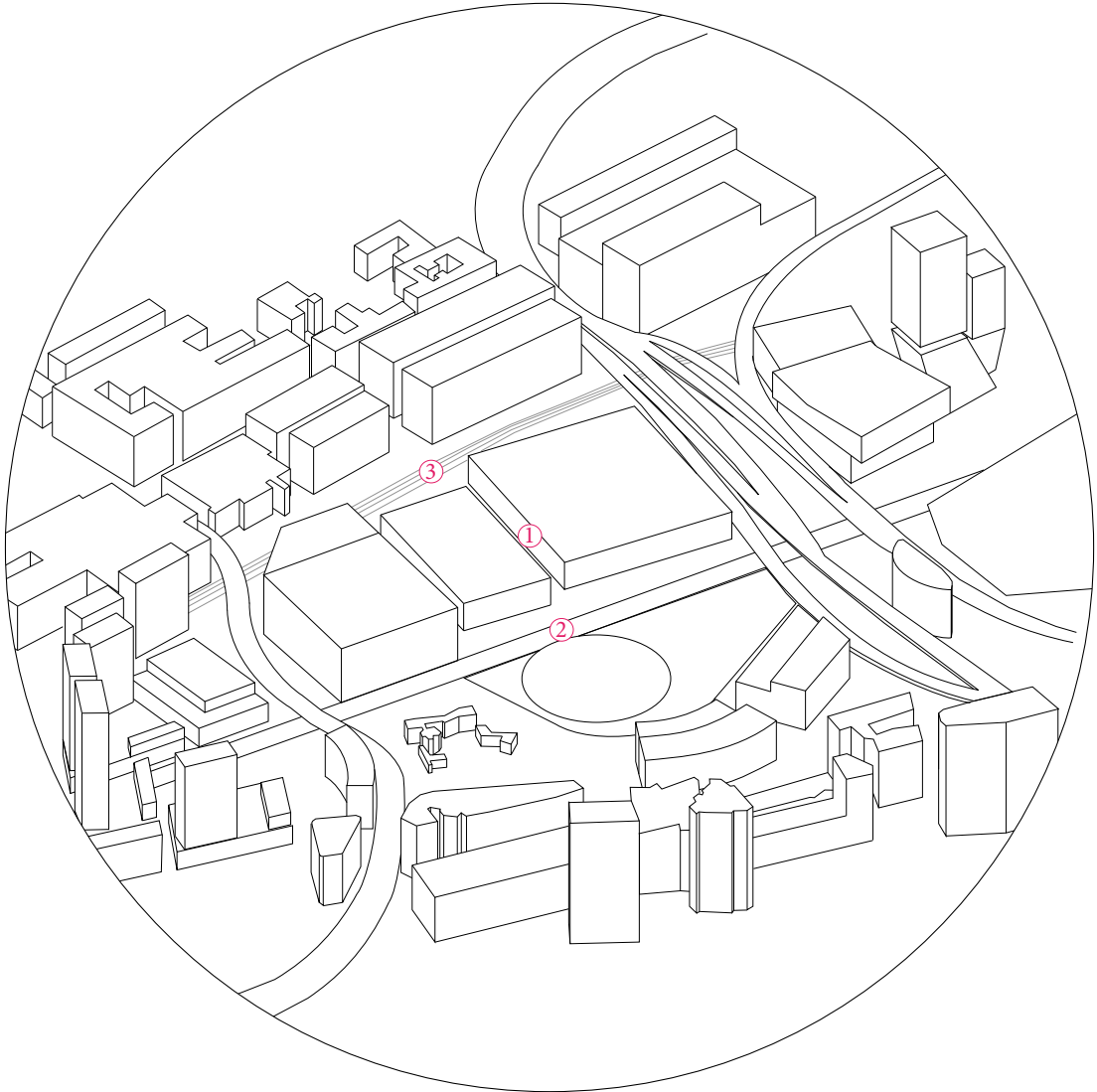
*This image is a render of the project currently under construction by OMA, Hassell and Populous. The project is supposed to be finished in December 2016.*

*\* to read all the historic dynamics which involved the harbour look at pp. 118-129*





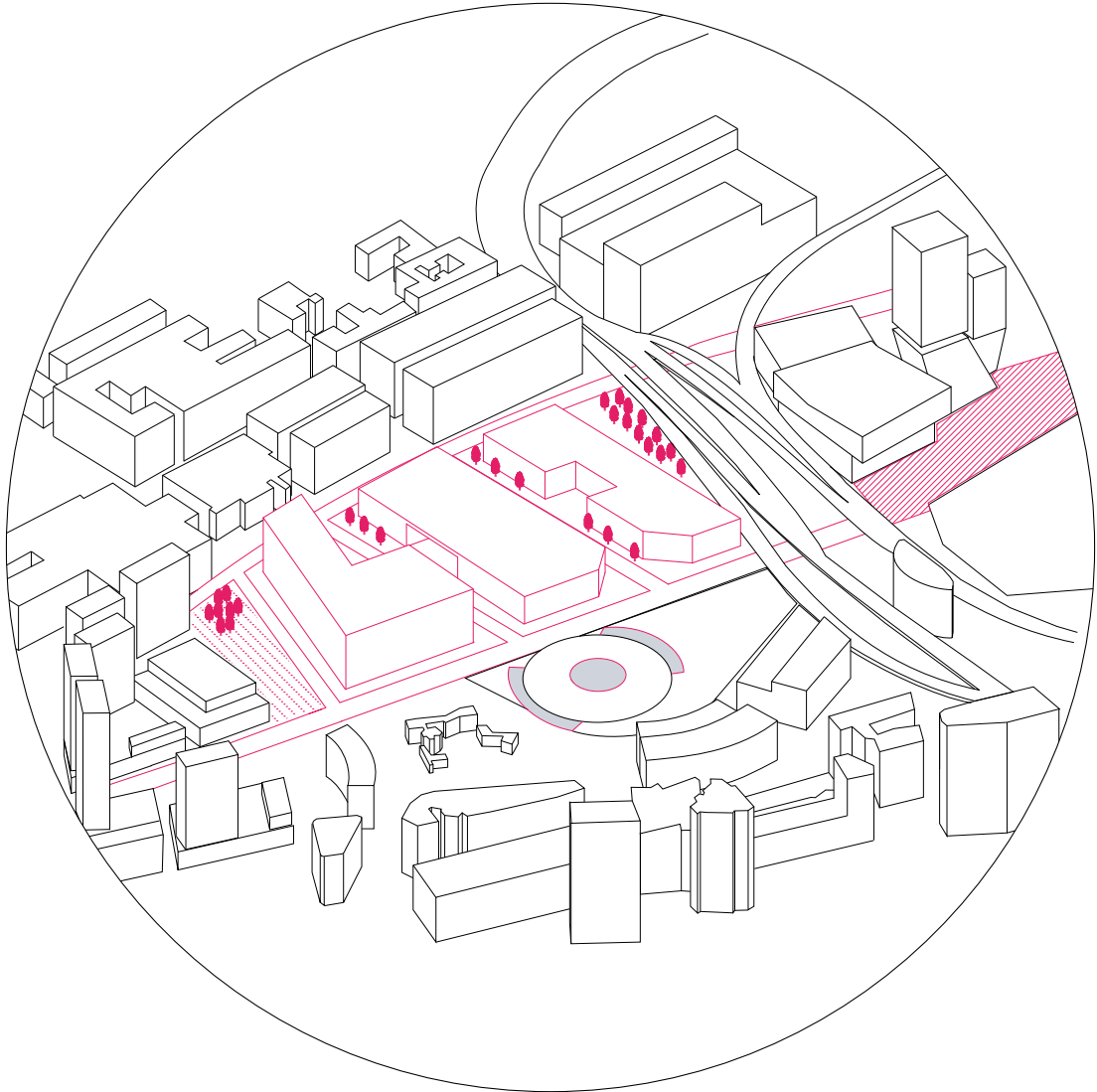
## CRITICAL POINTS



- ① Transversal connections to the boulevard are weak
- ② The boulevard is not well connected to the rest of the harbour
- ③ The communication between the two sides of the boulevard is not so powerful



## WHAT THE PROJECT SHOULD HAVE BEEN





View from Darling Dr. towards Tumbalong Green.

Project name: Adelaide Festival Centre  
 Architects: HASSELL studio  
 Location: Adelaide, South Australia, AU  
 Function: lyric theatre + smaller drama theatre + experimental theatre + outdoor amphitheatre  
 Surface(site area): 14.200 m<sup>2</sup>  
 Year: 1973

It was the first performing arts centre built in Australia, opened in 1973. This architecture had a big impact on the city, almost as the Sydney Opera House in Sydney, with the will of becoming an important landmark and gathering space. **John Morphett**, one of the most influential people in the history of HASSELL, led the design team.

Hassell had definitely contributed to the developing of modernism in South Australia, which is considered nowadays part of Australian architectural heritage.

The Adelaide Festival Centre was built in three parts from April 1970 to 1980. The main building, the Festival Theatre, was completed in 1973, within its budget of \$10 million (the Centre was completed for \$21 million). In comparison, the Sydney Opera House, also completed in 1973, cost \$102 million.

Built in three stages and completed in 1980, it includes a lyric theatre seating 2,000, a smaller drama theatre, an experimental theatre and an outdoor amphitheatre. A major art installation by German environmental artist Otto Herbert Hajek adorns the plaza over a 300 space car park.<sup>1</sup> It was called with the name of 'sharp-edged clouds' because of its unconventional shape.<sup>2</sup>

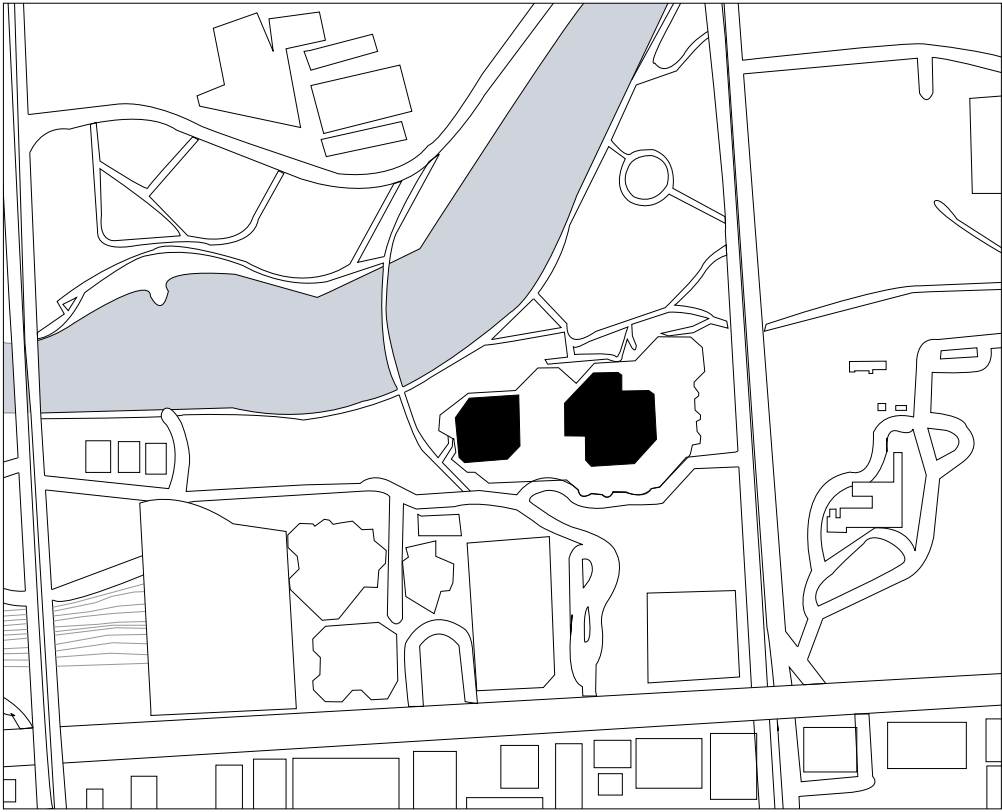
However, the open elevated plaza resulted to be a failure.

This is what the architect Lu Balsamo, who was part of the design team, said about it: *'There's no reason to go there – that's the biggest issue (...) If you had kiosks, if you had formal entry to the theatres, if you had booking halls ... once there's activity, people will go there. If there's nothing there, then people won't go there.'*<sup>3</sup> The problem, Balsamo believes, is the separation between the Centre and the adjoining Plaza.

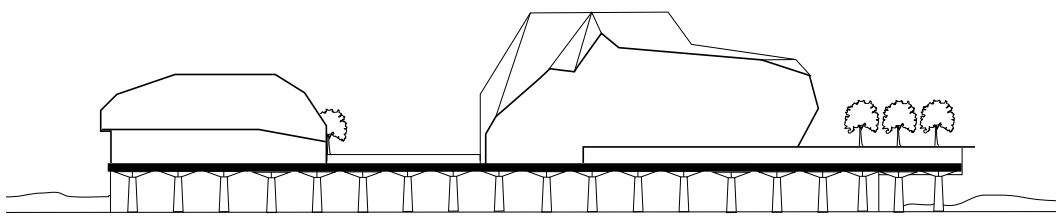
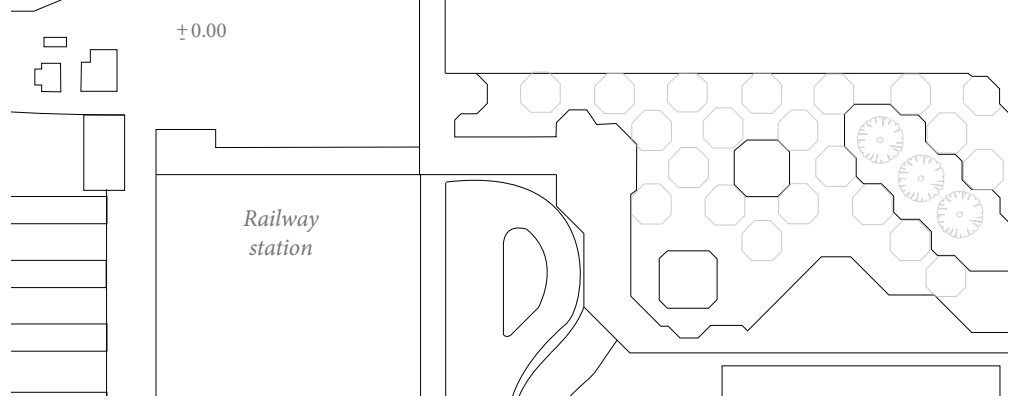
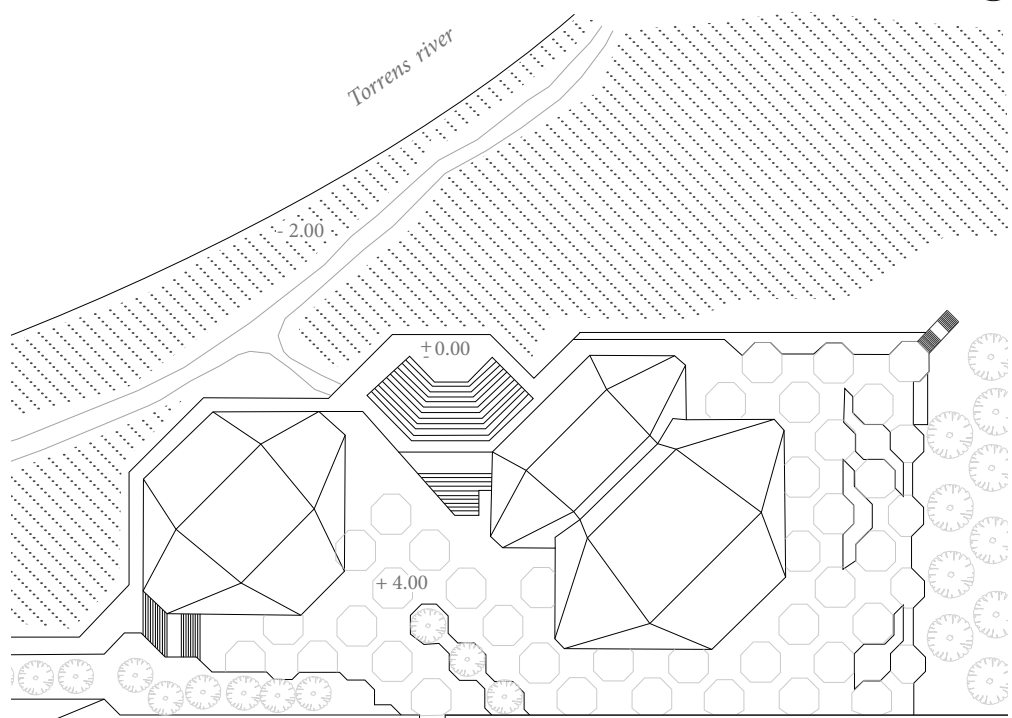
1 <http://hassellstudio.com>

2 <http://architectureau.com/articles/major-upgrade-for-australias-first-performing-arts-centre/>

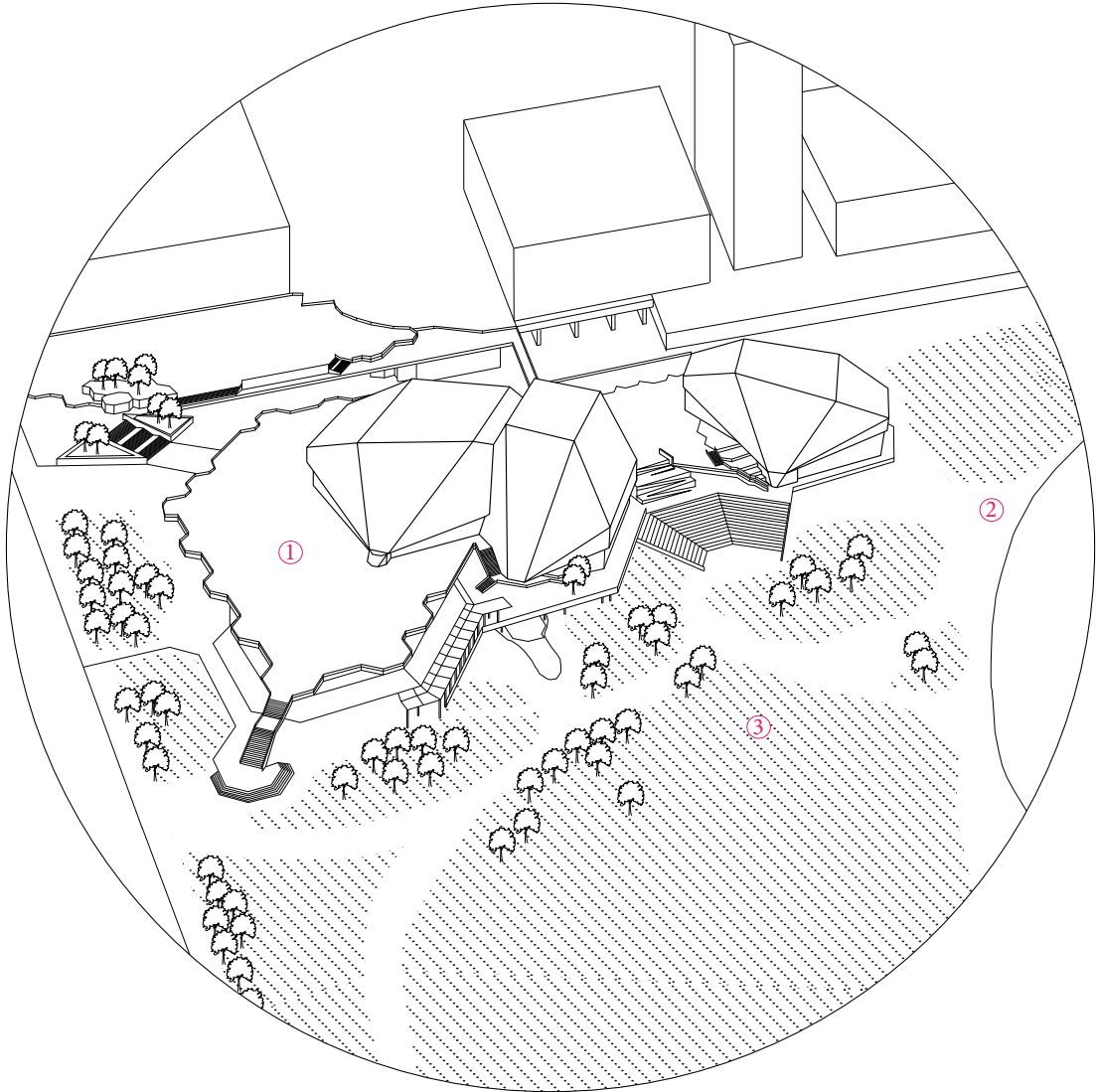
3 L.Mannix, *'It's not too late to fix Festival Plaza: architect'*, 20 January 2014, <http://indaily.com.au>



Adelaide Festival Centre.  
Image source: <http://adelaidenow.com.au>

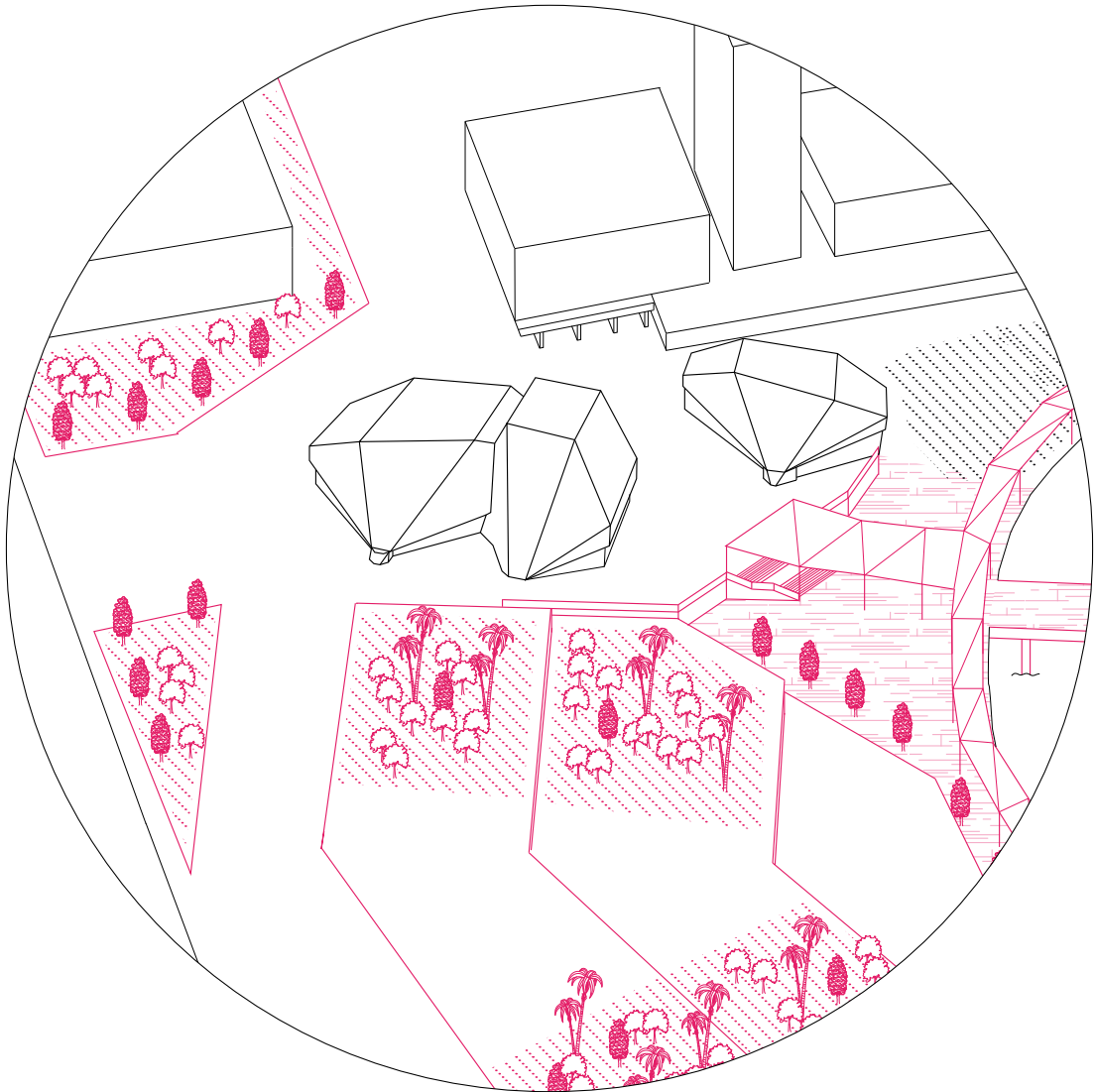


## CRITICAL POINTS

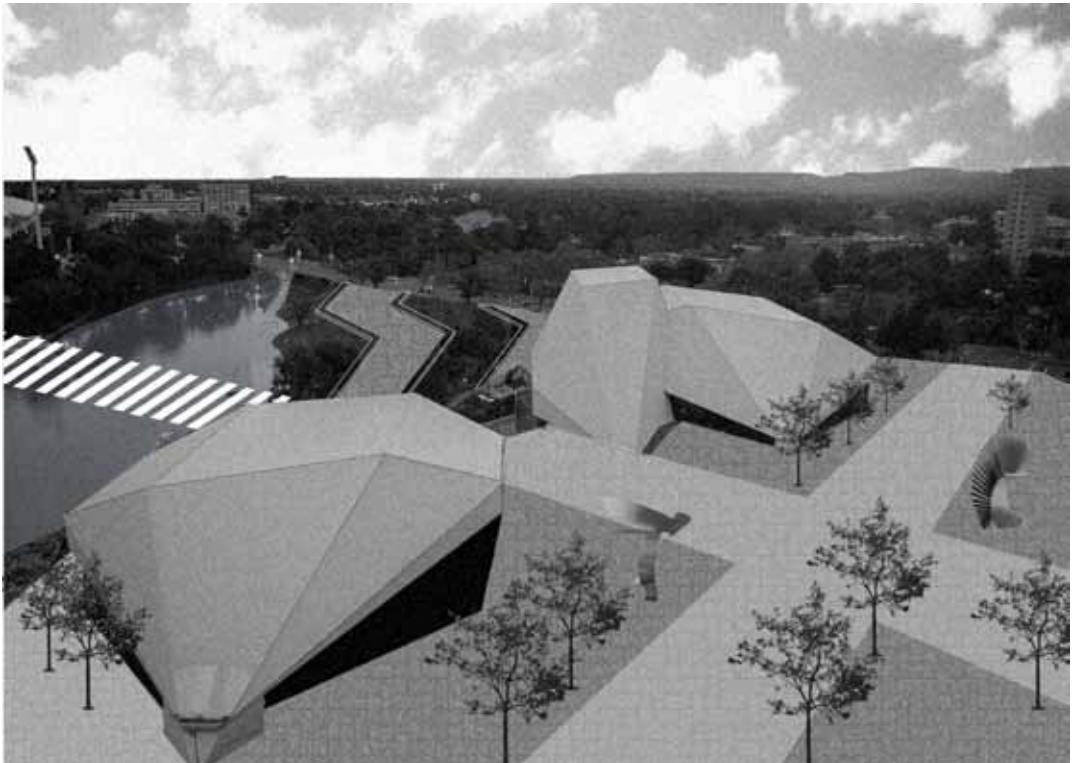


- ① The elevated plaza is isolated and disconnected from the context
- ② Relation to the river
- ③ Relation to the park

## WHAT THE PROJECT SHOULD HAVE BEEN







Aerial view showing the relationship with the Torrens river.

Project name: Caboolture Hub  
Architects: Peddle Thorp Architects + James Cubitt Architects  
Location: Caboolture, Queensland, AU  
Function: public library + regional gallery + learning centre + cafes alongside the Caboolture Town Square  
Surface(site area): 5.600 m<sup>2</sup>  
Year: 2011

The architects had to build a community facility designed to offer the people of Caboolture- which is a small town of Queensland- a centre for local culture, art, history and education. The project provides a double height library space, learning facility and art gallery catering for all sections of the community.

The diversity of use extends beyond the defined space of the building by way of a civic-scaled colonnade linking the building to each side of the city. The engagement of the building to the wider precinct had to establish a stronger civic presence for the town square.

The architects wanted to reinforce the relationship with the inward activities with the outside world by creating an internal amphitheatre that can reveal itself to an outside plaza and bring the inside world to the public domain.

The design team embraced the ideal that public architecture in regional areas should display as much presence and accuracy of design as that which is created in capital cities. They believe that regional communities should feel part of the state and of the country as well as their own locale - *'to feel connected and respected'*.<sup>1</sup>

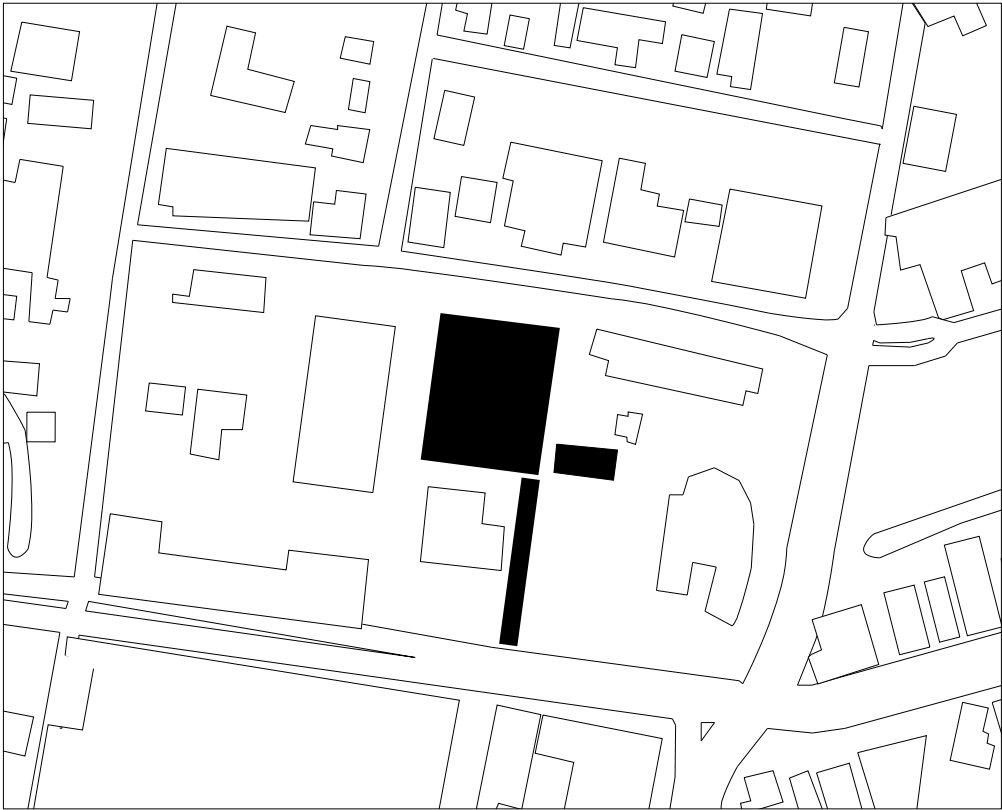
They created a kind of 'promenade' inside this new civic centre, in which the visitors can experience the architecture.

Moreover, the client required a design focused on delivering a contemporary and modern facility and features a wealth of exposed structure.

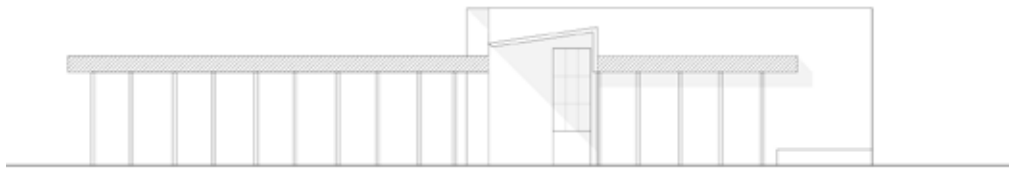
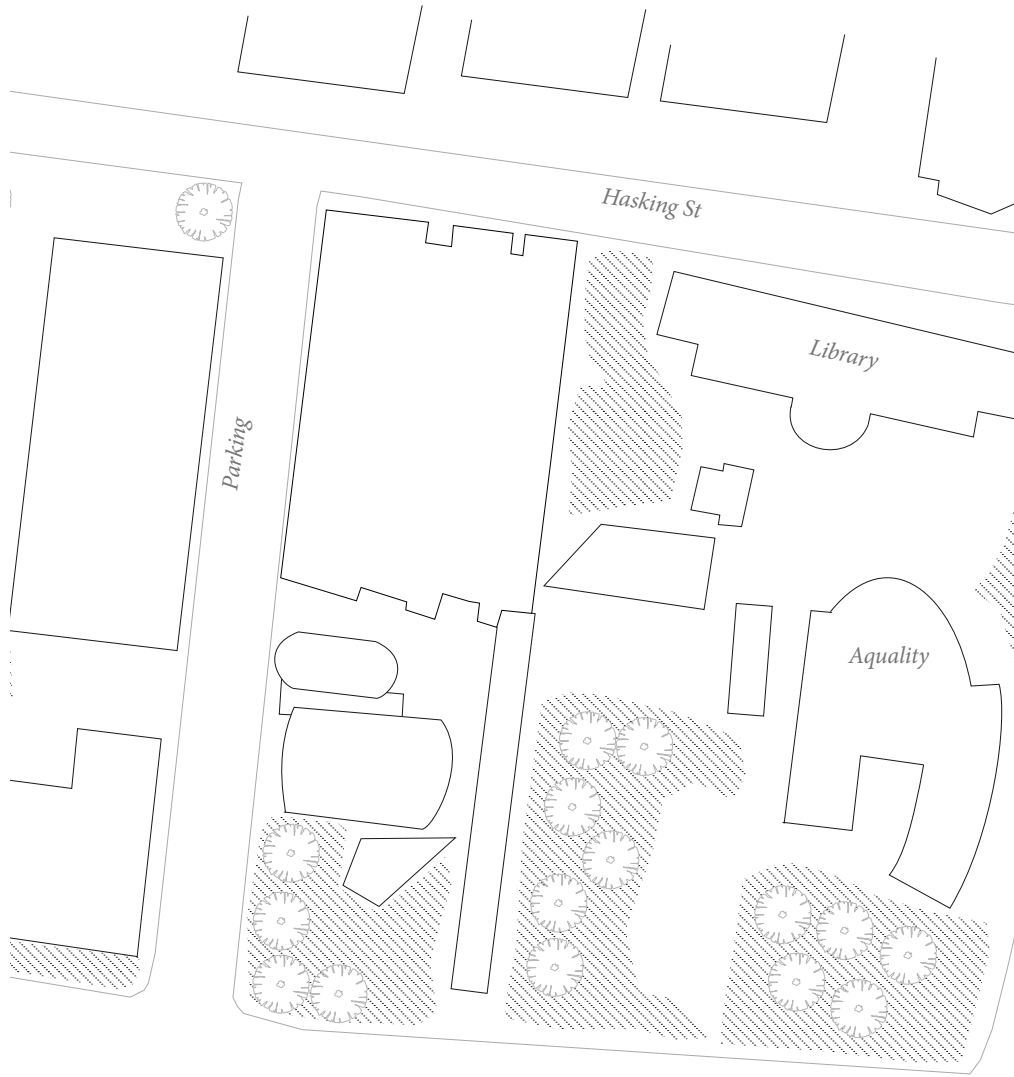
The unusual dyed concrete has therefore required a high level of careful detailing to ensure a continuous high quality and a smooth finish to meet these expectations.<sup>2</sup>

1 Caboolture Hub, <http://www.architectureanddesign.com.au/projects/public-buildings/caboolture-hub>

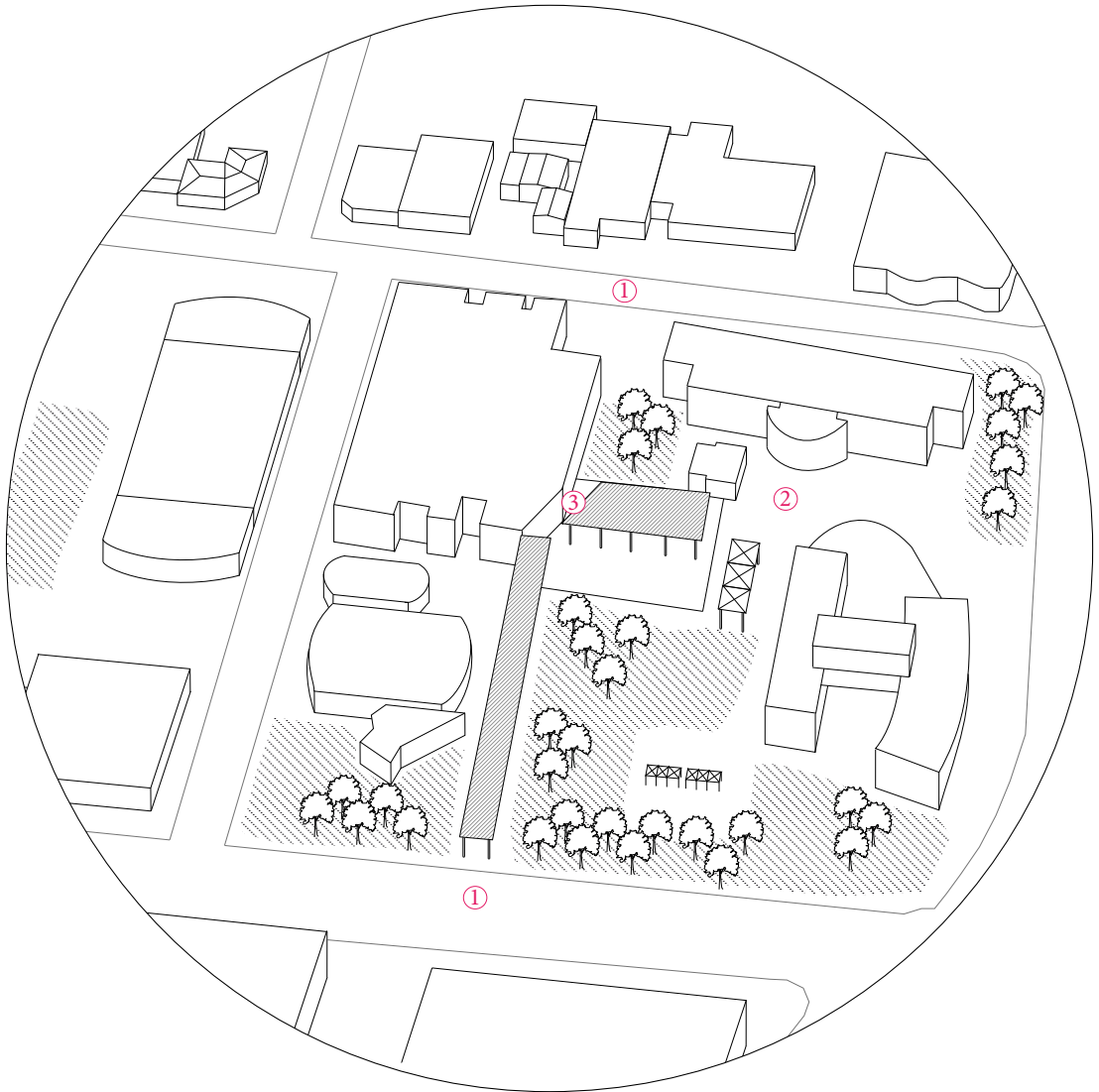
2 L.Taylor, Caboolture Civic Hub, <http://www.meinhardt.com.au/projects/caboolture-hub/>



*A view from the shelter entrance to Caboolture hub.  
Image source: [http:// peddlethorp.com.au](http://peddlethorp.com.au)*



# CRITICAL POINTS



①

Relation to the street

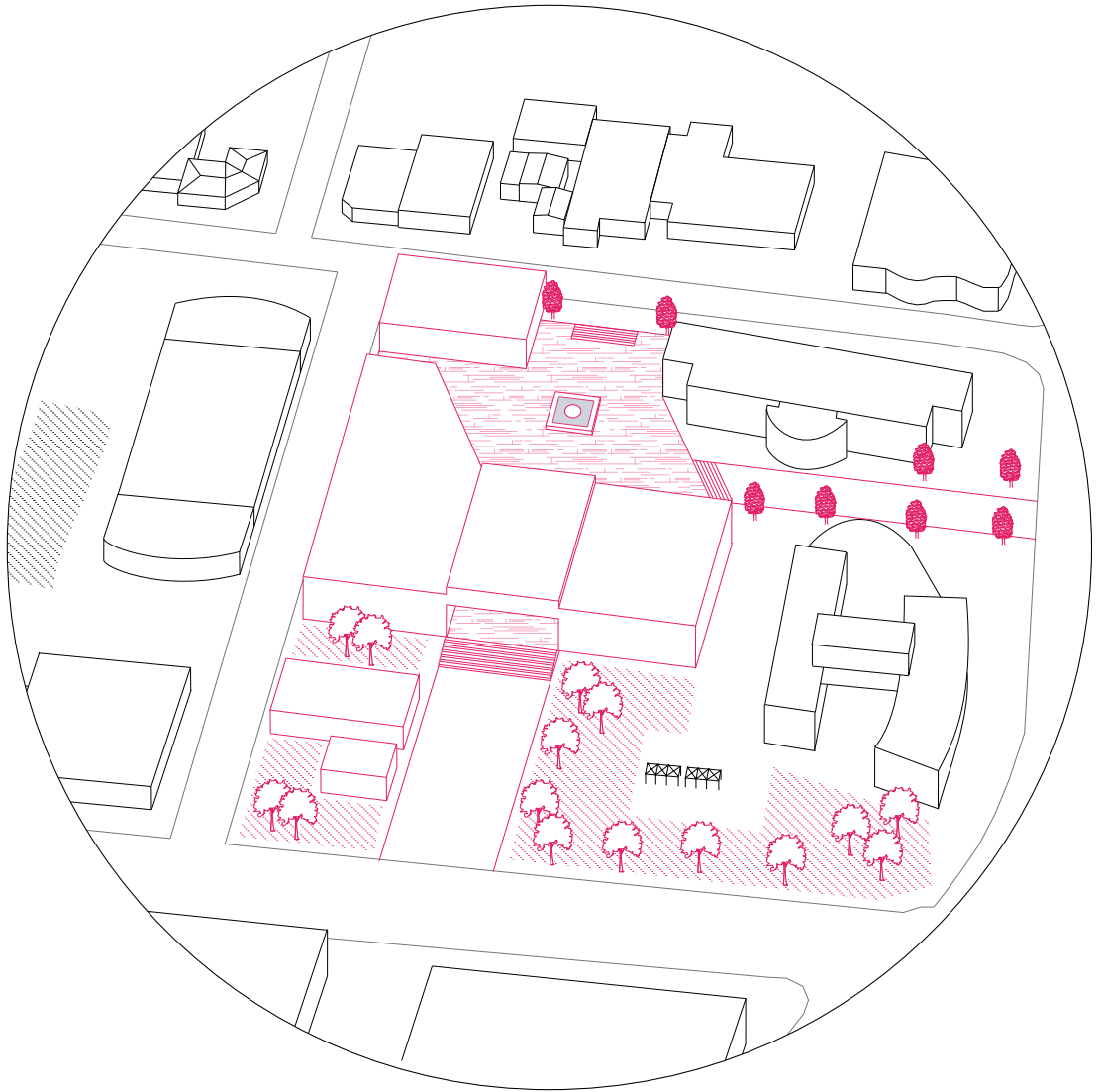
②

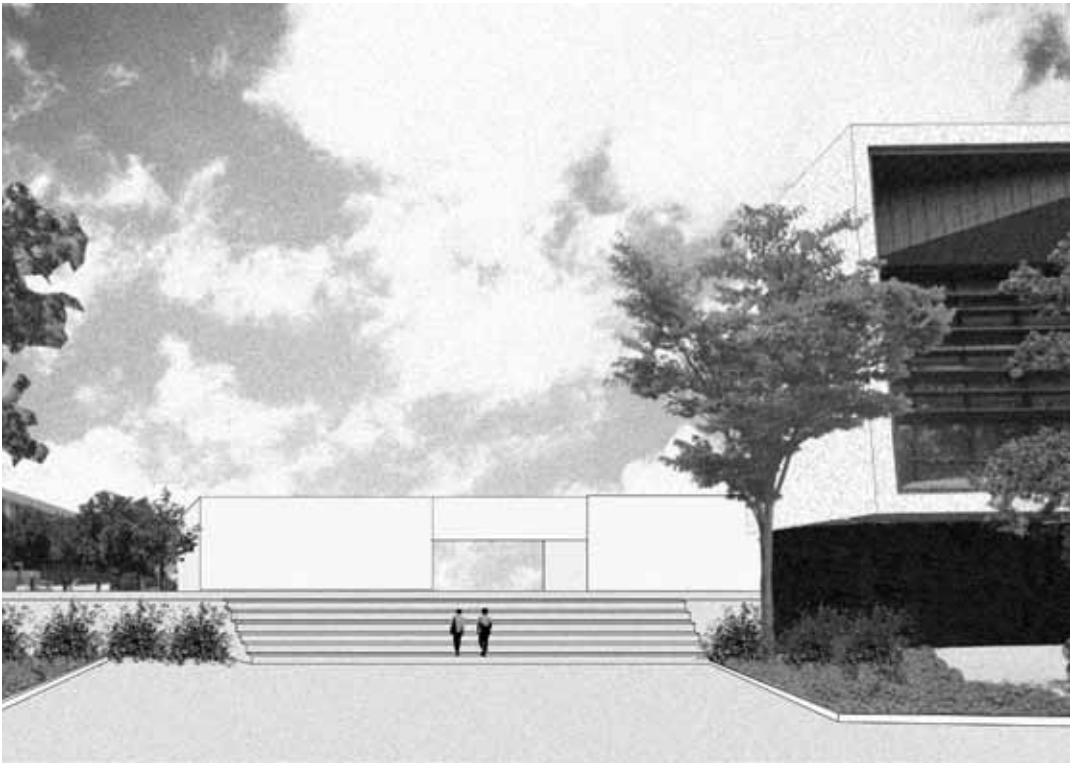
The circulation inside the open public space is intricate

③

The location of the main entrance

## WHAT THE PROJECT SHOULD HAVE BEEN





The view of the entrance into the community hub from Hasking St.



Project name: Dandenong Municipal Building  
Architects: Lyons Architects + Rush/Wright Associates + Material Thinking  
Location: Dandenong, Victoria, AU  
Function: Municipal building + civic square + public library + community meeting rooms  
Surface(site area): 13.000 m<sup>2</sup>  
Year: 2014

The project had to provide a new civic centre for Dandenong, a small town close to Melbourne.

For the occasion, the architects had to think how to create an open public space, a plaza, which could relate to the context. The civic square is to provide events, gatherings, diversity, art and culture.

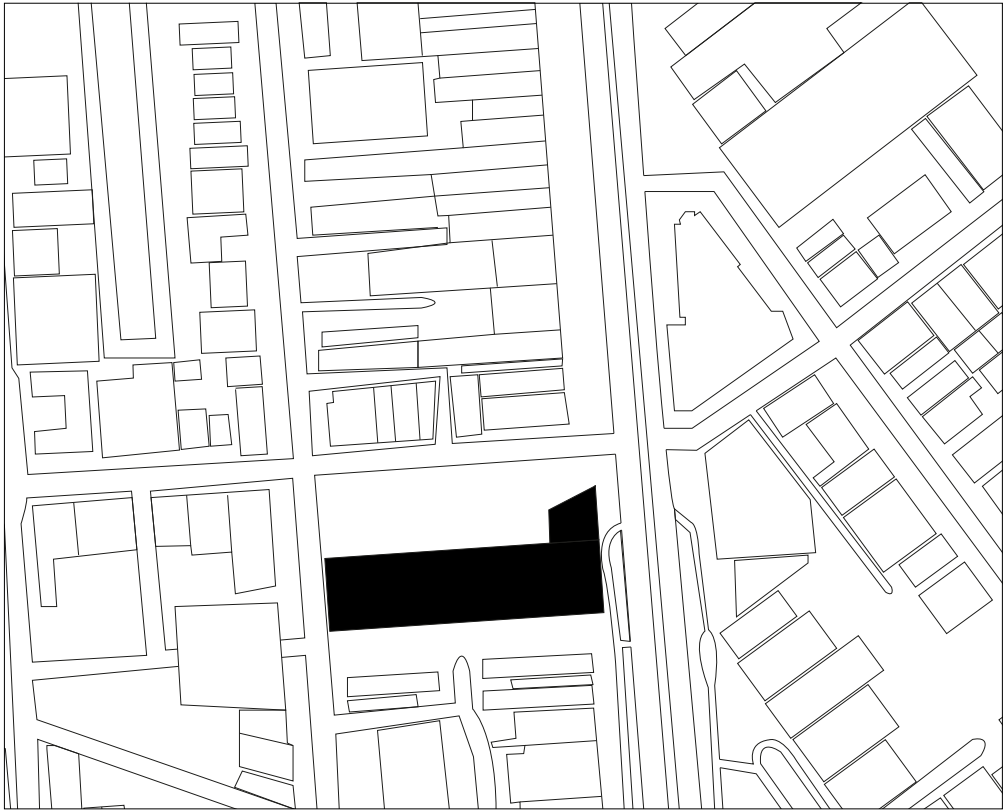
In a strategic sense it is a critical site for the broader revitalization program that has been underway for some years, particularly for the new pedestrian spine linking the commercial areas across Lonsdale Street to the station. Located along this thoroughfare and cater-corner to the old town hall, the council chambers, library and civic square complex acts as the hinge of this axis of the refashioned public realm and helps to bridge the barrier imposed by Lonsdale Street.<sup>1</sup>

The architects worked with the local company 'Paul Carter of Material Thinking' to develop the design for the main paved surface of the square. The architects used knowingly strong and vivid colors for the coverings of the building, but also for some urban design elements (such as the orange/seating planter), to put them in contraposition with a building typology which should be considered sober. The main challenge for the circulation was definitely represented by the slope of the site, which was anyway partly resolved by the architects. A thicket of araucarias, visible beyond the distinctive lower-level Lonsdale Street entry to Rush\Wright Associates' recently completed Dandenong Civic Square, wants to be a sign of something different.

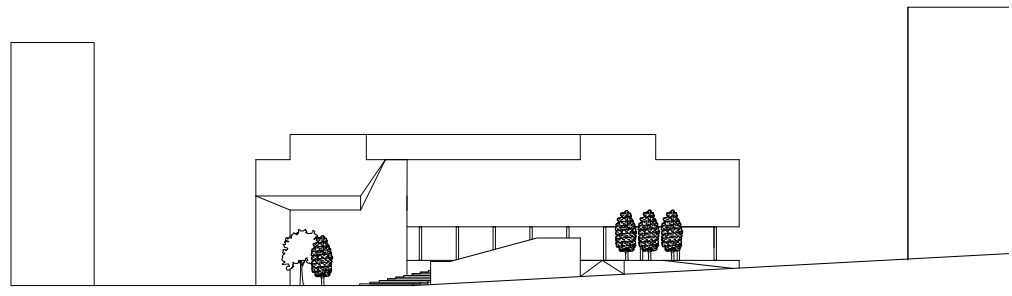
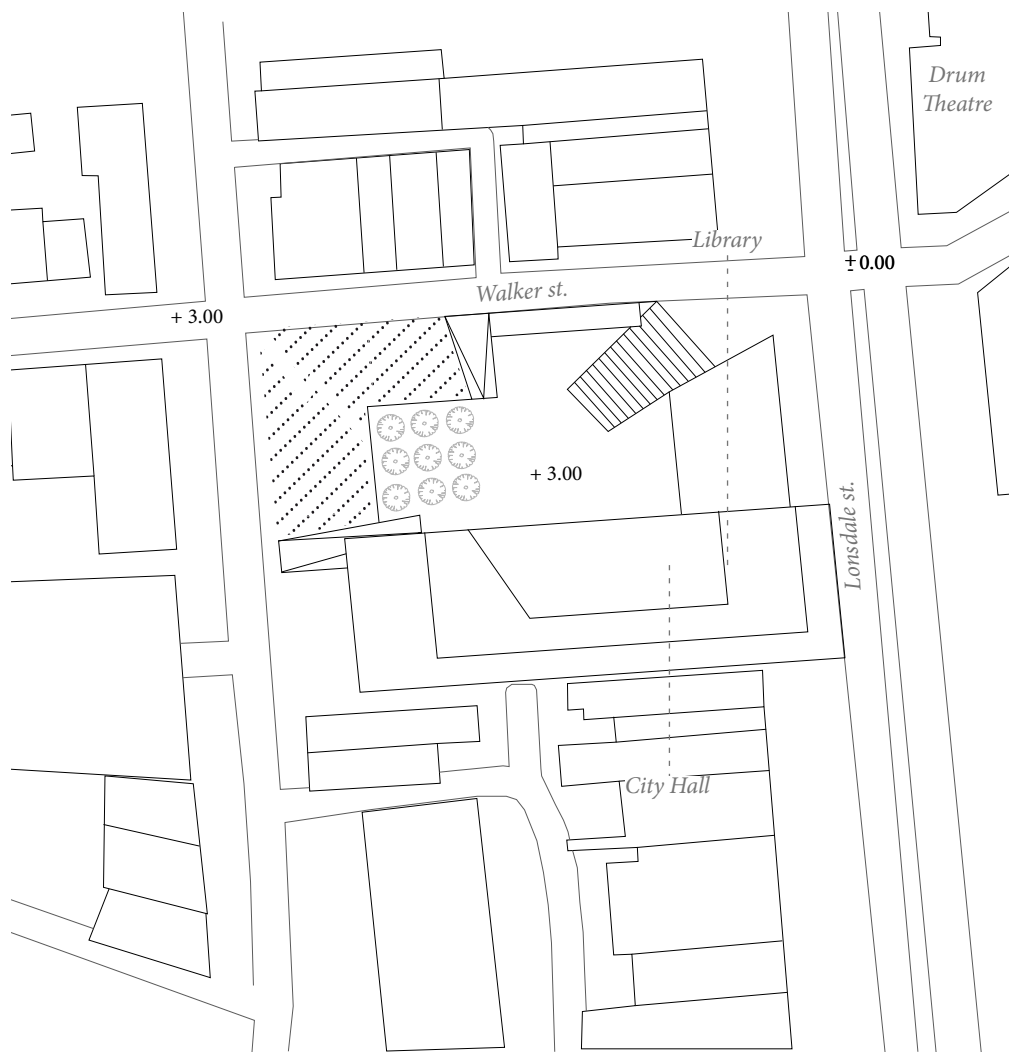
However, in her article, Kate Gamble wrote that: *'One oddity of the space is the grassed north-west corner. Graded so that it's easy to imagine families picnicking and sizeable enough for kids to play, it brings the backyard to the civic. It does, however, look and feel temporary'*<sup>2</sup>

1 K.Gamble, *Cultural Infusion: Dandenong Civic Square*, 16 February 2015, on <http://architectureau.com/articles/dandenong-civic-square/>

2 *Ibidem*



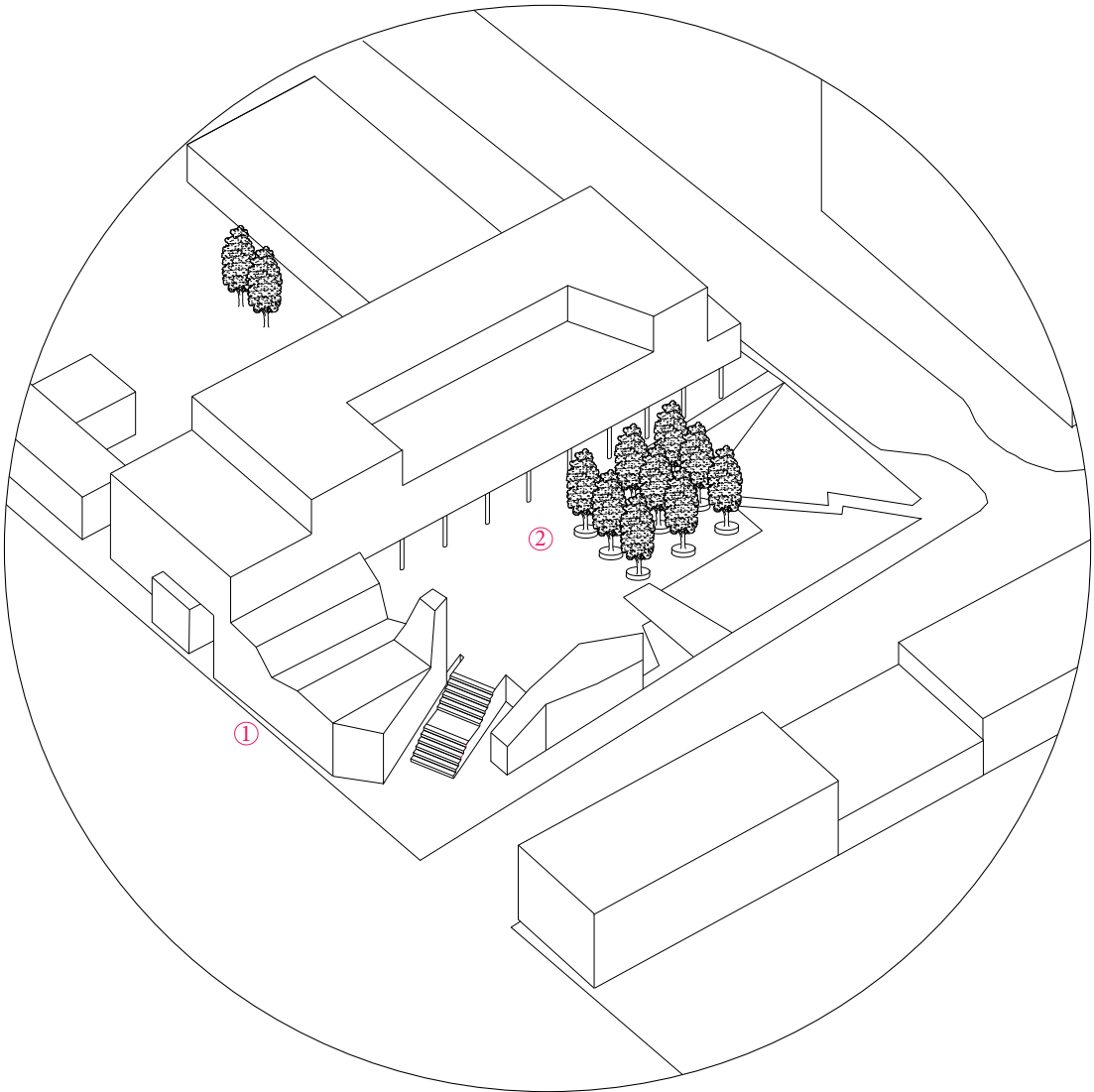
*Dandenong Civic Square by Rush/Wright Associates, Lyons and Material Thinking.  
Image source: photography by Chris Erskine*



North elevation

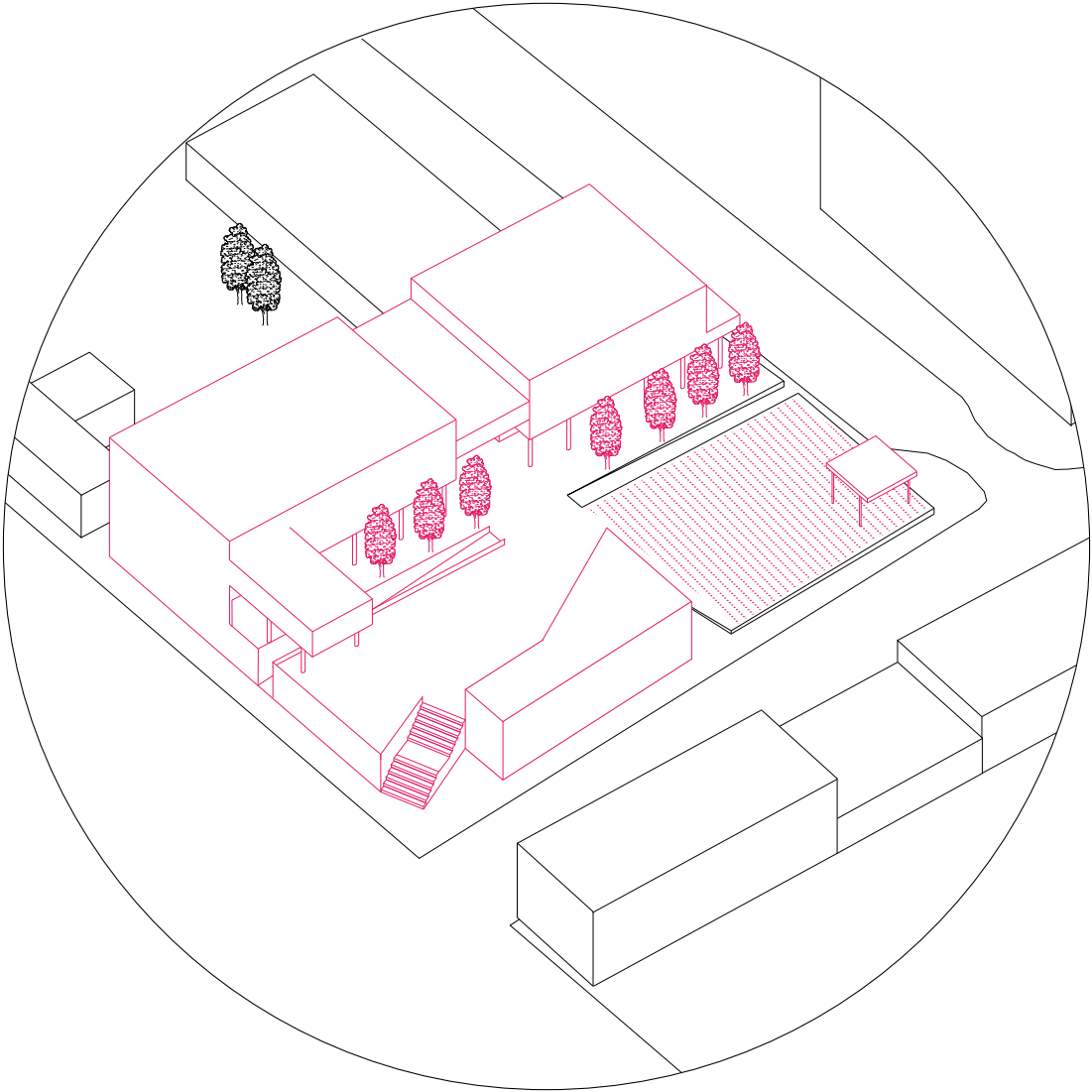


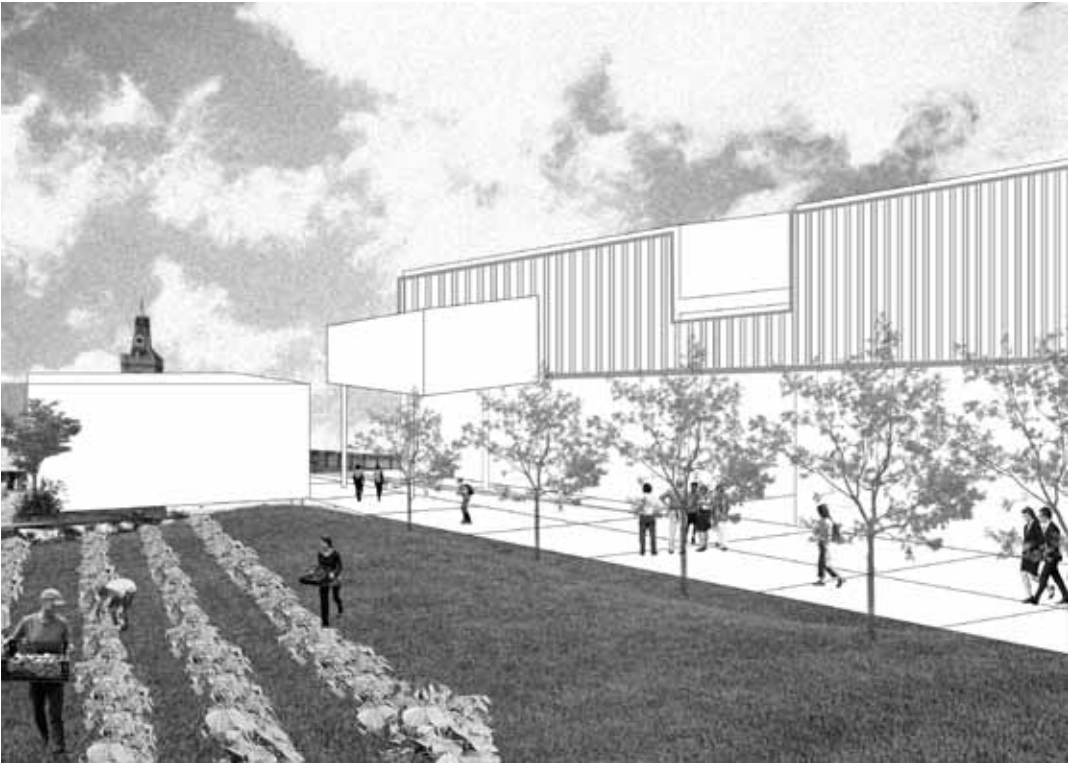
## CRITICAL POINTS



- ① The civic square doesn't relate properly to the street
- ② The distribution of volumes doesn't accomplish a good working dynamism inside the open public space

## WHAT THE PROJECT SHOULD HAVE BEEN





View showing the new disposition of the civic square from Walker st.

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