

NINETY YEARS OF OUTSTANDING CONCRETE PUBLIC ARCHITECTURE

Commentary by Chief Judge, Peter Poulet

Australian Academy of Sciences, Canberra

The Martian Embassy - as it is referred to by some in Canberra - is a futuristic vision conceived during the space race of the 1950s. It is a testament not only to an optimistic view of the future but also an example of how building materials were being reconceived to represent a dynamic and exciting world. The role and mastery of concrete in a fluid and expressive manner was essential to Sir Roy Grounds when he conceived of this gem. Concrete used in this way was essential to a fantastic future.



Australia Square, Sydney

Breaking new ground in Australian architecture in 1967, Australia Square was the tallest reinforced concrete structure in the world when it was conceived. Harry Seidler's architectural mastery is unquestioned. However, it would be diminished without the properties, strengths and limitless potential of concrete. Harry knew concrete and concrete was an essential material in his architectural lexicon. This is a building of international standing with global links to Pier Luigi Nervi, Le Corbusier and Victor Vasarely.



Gladesville Bridge, Sydney

In 1964 the Gladesville Bridge was the longest reinforced arch span in the world. The elegance and structural expression of the bridge is a testament to the design and material choice. This project celebrates concrete as both a muscular and delicate material equally capable of serving large complex infrastructure and, at other times, providing the intimacy and plasticity more appropriate to an architectural setting. On the 50th anniversary of the opening, Gladesville Bridge was officially recognised as an 'Engineering Heritage International Marker' by Engineers Australia.



High Court of Australia, Canberra

An essential contributor to the Parliamentary Triangle in Canberra, the High Court of Australia is the pinnacle of judicial practice in Australia. A beautifully crafted monolithic structure imbued with the dignity and status of the highest Court in the land, built of reinforced concrete exemplifying the robust and enduring nature of the institution it contains and represents. The building, described as 'brutalist', is based on a bold asymmetrical geometry with a dynamic three-dimensional internal circulation. It is light-filled with strong links to neighbouring buildings and to the landscape.



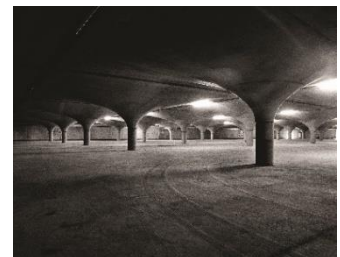
James Cook University Library, Townsville

Designed in the brutalist architectural style of the late 1960s, James Cook University Library is a building that makes brilliant use of reinforced concrete to achieve an outstanding aesthetic result. A building of inclined concrete walls with seemingly random circular openings capped with a floating copper roof, it is a true landmark on the Townsville campus of the university, boldly asserting the central role of a library. From a time when libraries were built to represent the holders of knowledge and history, this is an intriguingly strong concrete building, carefully proportioned, elegantly crafted and sensitively sited.



Melbourne University Carpark, Melbourne

A poetic piece of pragmatic infrastructure, the Melbourne University Car Park creates a wondrous space from simple geometry. The car park accentuates the inherent fluid nature of concrete to create a dynamic space, allowing for deep soil planting for trees above. An ingenious bringing together of engineering and architecture, the hollow columns allow for natural drainage.



Punchbowl Mosque, Sydney

This is a centre for religious teaching and community activities which honours the traditional forms of the past yet recognises the contemporary Australian Islamic community. The sculptural off-form, multi-domed ceiling contemporises the Islamic tradition and introduces shafts of light from each quarter dome to track the moving sun from dawn to mid-day prayers to dusk and finally to evening prayers. Manipulation of light makes for contemplative and spiritual spaces elevating our experience to a loftier place. The building is seen as dynamic and yet serene and still a testament to the material and the architecture.



Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane

A robust and pure cubic composition, the Queensland Art Gallery is an assemblage of huge concrete stepped containers piled over a layered series of gardens and terraces. Overhead natural light enlivens what are pure and monumental spaces. By making a variety of spatial experiences, connections, views and vistas, the gallery conceptually breaks down the barriers between art, the public and the surrounding environment.



Sydney Opera House, Sydney

On the UNESCO World Heritage List, the Sydney Opera House is described as ‘a great artistic monument and an icon, accessible to society at large. It is a daring and visionary experiment that has had an enduring influence on the emergent architecture of the late 20th century.’ The Sydney Opera House is a great architectural work of the 20th century that brings together multiple strands of creativity and innovation in both architectural form and structural design. “Its significance is based on its unparalleled design and construction,” UNESCO stated. We wholeheartedly agree.



Victorian State Offices, Melbourne

Precast concrete cladding unites an urban grouping of office buildings sensitively located in its urban context. Restrained and taunt, this is a composition of tuned proportions and tightly executed details. Structural precast and column free spaces make for a building built on innovation yet with longevity. Historically sensitive, true to its time and clearly of its place, this is modernism at its best.

