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Harry Seidler's Umbrella is an incisive and personal collection of writings on architecture and design by architecture writer and editor Joe Rollo. From an up-close account of Jørn Utzon's re-engagement with the Sydney Opera House and a poetic rendering of the design and making of the landscape at TarraWarra Estate and Museum of Art, to encounters with Harry Seidler and a walk through the multi-billion dollar Victorian Desalination Plant, Joe Rollo opens readers' eyes to an exciting way of looking at the built world. Written in the easy, straightforward and engaging language for which he has become known, the book brings clarity and passion to considerations of the problems and pleasures of looking at architecture and design in Australia.



JOE ROLLO: HARRY SEIDLER'S UMBRELLA

HARRY SEIDLER'S UMBRELLA

SELECTED WRITINGS

ON AUSTRALIAN ARCHITECTURE
AND DESIGN

JOE
ROLLO

Jørn Utzon's Magnificent Obsession / Hamer Hall / Remembering Akio Makigawa / Victorian Desalination Plant / Harry Seidler's Umbrella / Making Pictures / Giuseppe Terragni / Phoenix Apartments / Designing on the Land / Shrine of Remembrance / Burley Griffin's Capitol Theatre / Royal Exhibition Building / Sandridge Bridge #1 / Sandridge Bridge #2 / Southern Cross Station / Guilford Bell / Is There a Future for the Super Skyscraper? / Melbourne Museum / Forest Gallery at Melbourne Museum / International Gateway, Tullamarine Freeway / Garangula Gallery / Melbourne City Square / Abedian School of Architecture / Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney / Yuncken Freeman / Plastic Fantastic / Centenary Pools, Brisbane / Australian Academy of Science, Canberra / Australian War Memorial Annex, Canberra / Seidler House, Sydney / Wickham Terrace Car Park, Brisbane / Sydney Opera House / Melbourne University Car Park /

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Photograph: Jennifer Soo

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Museum of
Contemporary
Art Australia



MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, SYDNEY

Born out of confusion and controversy, the new Mordant Wing of the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) at Circular Quay in Sydney stands as a reminder of what cities get when they run international competitions and fail to make up their minds. It is here, at the landing of the First Fleet on the western shore of Sydney Cove, amid the bustle of tourists, tacky opal and souvenir shops, harbour ferries and cruise ships, the might of the Harbour Bridge at its shoulder, and the billowing sails of the Opera House across the water at Bennelong Point, that you'll find the city's newest landmark, tacked on to one end of the uninspired sandstone pile that houses the MCA, in what used to be the Maritime Services Board (MSB) building.

First, however, some background to a saga that began as a promising, well-intentioned competition turned to farce and nearly ended in tragedy. As compromised competitions go, it's probably hard to beat. In 1997, an international competition to add to the MCA was won by Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa, the team that is SANAA, with a radical vision for a cinematheque, comprising a glowing white glass box complete with cinemas, a film library, additional galleries, new cafe, rooftop restaurant and a performance space. They beat a field of architects that included Andrew Andersons (Sydney) in partnership with Atsushi Kitagawara (Japan); Mikko Heikkinen and Markku Komonen (Finland); Enric Miralles (Spain); Steven Holl (USA); Maggie Edmond and Peter Corrigan (Melbourne); Matthias Sauerbruch and Luisa Hutton (Berlin and Madrid); and Tod Williams and Billie Tsien (USA). The selection committee included John Reid, then chairman of the MCA board; MCA foundation director Leon Paroissien; chief curator Bernice Murphy; NSW Government Architect Chris Johnson; and film maker George Miller, who was so moved by Sejima's scheme as to declare that it had 'the ability to enchant ... like all great art her work is clear, potent and inefable. I have no idea how she does it, but the magic is unmistakable.' Soon after the announcement, however, the scheme and the architects were dropped without explanation, not to be heard of again. A new invited competition was held in 2000, sans Sejima (she was invited belatedly but, wisely, refused). This round of the saga saw Matthias Sauerbruch and Luisa Hutton and local architect Richard Francis-Jones with MGT Architects lead the pack with impressive proposals, but neither scheme was deemed appropriate. The competition was then extended to an unplanned second stage, with architects given the option to demolish the old MSB building and to propose an entirely new building for the site. Sauerbruch and Hutton's scheme appeared a winner but, again, no cigar.

Inexplicably, in 2002 Sydney architect Sam Marshall of Architect Marshall got the job, in association with the NSW Government Architect's office. Now, Marshall is no Sejima, but his scheme is a competent addition to Sydney's waterfront nevertheless. His response was to place a composition of glass reinforced concrete boxes, coloured in shades of black and white and grey, stacked and pushed and pulled, set against the strong, symmetrical sandstone boxes of the old MSB. He selected glass-reinforced concrete because, as he puts it, 'large-scale, cast three-dimensional panels can be fabricated out of a single material just 12 millimetres thick...it has the unique quality that allows it to be folded over from the vertical to form roofs and ceiling. Thus, one cladding material could be used for most of the building, striking walls, ceilings and roof as one.' Folded panels as large as 9 metres x 3 metres with 1.5-metre returns were achieved in the production of the boxes. The

colours of the panels, derived from the predominant colours of The Rocks and Circular Quay, add to the three-dimensional quality of the new wing. The result is a crisply detailed facade, of light and shadow, which makes no attempt to joust with the Opera House – what Australian building can? – but makes its own mark on Circular Quay as a significant piece of new architecture in its own right.

A generous if too steep concrete stair up from Circular Quay, across a broad plaza, now takes visitors directly into the new building and to the main foyer from where they can access the various parts of the refurbished old building, via stairs or glass-enclosed lifts. From here a 'street' cuts through the building to George Street, and it is from there that visitors begin to savour the many glimpses and views out to the harbour and beyond, created by Marshall's careful articulation of the boxes. Three new gallery spaces, including two double-height rooms – 18 metres square x 5.8 metres tall – have been included in the new wing. Look carefully and you'll see how the folded panels act as an external 'wrapper' for these new galleries. In total, the new building has added an additional 4,500 square metres of new space, increasing the MCA's total size by almost 50 per cent. Gallery space has been increased by 26 per cent. The National Centre for Creative Learning (NCCL), a centre for innovation and contemporary art education, is also housed in the new building. Occupying 40 per cent of the new wing, NCCL features a dedicated multimedia studio and digital studio, two creative studios, a 117-seat theatre and room for children with specific needs. A cafe and sculpture terrace on level four provides spectacular views across the harbour, the Opera House, Harbour Bridge and beyond. It is one of the best vantage points from which to enjoy the city.

Though Sydney passed up an opportunity to have an important building from the sublime hands of Sejima and Nishizawa, Marshall's addition provides the MCA with an identifiable marker nonetheless and yet one more reason to wander down to Circular Quay on a visit to Sydney.

Photography Credits

Peter Bennetts

Abedian School of Architecture.

Earl Carter

Harry Seidler's Umbrella.
More or Less at The Potter.
Where to Go, What to See.

Max Dupain

Australian Academy
of Science: Canberra.
Australia Square: Sydney.
Australian War Memorial
Annex: Canberra.
Guilford Bell.
Plastic Fantastic.
Seidler House: Killara, Sydney.
Sydney Opera House: Jørn Utzon
1957–1973

John Gollings

Buhrich House: Castlecrag, Sydney.
Burley Griffin's Capitol Theatre.
Centenary Pools: Brisbane.
Designing on the Land.
Forest Gallery at Melbourne Museum.
Garangula Gallery.
Hamer Hall.
International Gateway,
Tullamarine Freeway.
Is There a Future
for the Super Skyscraper?
Making Pictures.
Melbourne City Square.
Melbourne Museum.
Melbourne Terrace Apartments.
Melbourne University Car Park.
Phoenix Apartments.
Royal Exhibition Building.
Sandridge Bridge #1/#2.
Shrine of Remembrance.
Sirius: The Rocks, Sydney.
Southern Cross Station.
Victorian Desalination Plant.
Wickham Terrace Car Park: Brisbane.

Kate Gollings

Remembering Akio Makigawa.

Fritz Kos

Beach Kiosk: City Beach,
Perth.

Ian McKenzie

Plumbers and Gasfitters
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Jennifer Soo

Museum of Contemporary
Art, Sydney.

Joe Rollo is an architecture writer and editor. He reviewed architecture for *The Age* newspaper, Melbourne, from 1994 to 2015. He has written extensively for newspapers and magazines, including *The Australian*, *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, *The Spectator Australia*, *The Australian Financial Review Magazine*, *The Bulletin* and *Wallpaper** magazine. He is the founding editor of *C+A*, an international magazine of concrete architecture, and the author of three books: *Contemporary Melbourne Architecture*, a collection of reviews from *The Age* (1999); *Concrete Poetry: Concrete Architecture in Australia* (2004); *Beautiful Ugly – The Architectural Photography of John Gollings* (2011). He holds a Master of Architecture degree (Honoris Causa) from RMIT University. He was born in Sicily and lives and works in Melbourne.

Acknowledgements: A book of this type does not happen in isolation. My thanks to those photographers who have kindly provided permission for their memorable images to grace this book: John Gollings, Earl Carter, Dianna Snape, Eric Sierins, Peter Bennetts and Jennifer Soo. My thanks to Penelope Seidler and Enrico Taglietti for use of photographs by Max Dupain; to Graeme Gunn for use of photographs by Ian McKenzie; to Kate Gollings's family for use of her portrait of Akio Makigawa. A special thank you to Sue Shanahan, John Gollings's gracious and very able assistant, who managed to source images for me from the extensive Gollings archive almost at a moment's notice. My thanks, also, to all those architects and designers who, across the years, have afforded me the privilege of seeing and visiting buildings and places I would have otherwise never been able to experience. Finally, my thanks to my friend Garry Emery, whose idea this book was and who has designed it as only he can, assisted by Alexander Hevey.

Typeface: The typeface selected for this book is Franklin Gothic, first designed by Morris Fulton Benton in 1902. It was named in honour of prolific American printer Benjamin Franklin. Franklin Gothic has traditionally been used for headlines in newspaper publishing.