

# SHAPING SYDNEY

## THE STORY OF **CONYBEARE MORRISON**

Few designers have made such an indelible mark on Sydney's urban spaces, infrastructure and architecture as Darrel Conybeare and Bill Morrison. Together, these two have produced innovations so pervasive through Sydney that they have become part of the 'furniture' – yet their significance has largely gone unrecognised. Outdoor Design Source takes a closer look at Conybeare and Morrison's contribution to the design of the Harbour City and seeks to discover the secret to their extraordinary partnership.





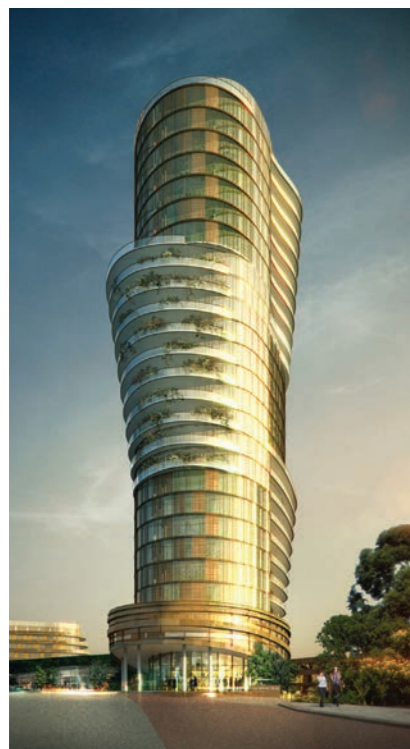
*Previous page:* Bill Morrison and Darrel Conybeare on their SFA classic, The Plaza Seat

*Top left:* Mixed-use residential and commercial towers, Figtree Drive, Homebush

*Bottom left:* Conybeare Morrison's recent residential work, Epping Road, Lane Cove

*Top right:* Rose Bay Promenade (Winner 2008 Woollahra Conservation Award)

*Bottom right:* Street Furniture Galleria Seats, Pyrmont



In 1962 Darrel Conybeare graduated from the University of Sydney with First Class Honours in Architecture winning the prestigious University Medal. He attained a Masters in Architecture and City Planning at the University of Pennsylvania and went on to work in various American architectural practices, including the esteemed office of Ray & Charles Eames as the Project Design Director of the National Fisheries Centre and Aquarium.

His work with the Eames practice has had an enduring influence on Conybeare's work and life. He suggests the Eames' success was due to their unique approach to working out design directions using model-making. "Charles and Ray were an extraordinary design partnership. To work there was to witness the incredible 'backroom' machinery that was their support infrastructure. Much of this involved modelling... to sketch and then to fabricate these spaces as camera ready make the experience so real and believable. The joy and delight of design activity was made palpable."

On his return to Australia, he worked in a range of practices before being appointed the Principal Environmental Designer of the City of Sydney Strategic Plan 1970. Hailed by many as the introduction of urban design to the Australian consciousness, the ambitious task for Conybeare and others was to 'reshape' a city that had until then been devoid of an overall guiding strategy: to foster economic growth; improve accessibility to and within the city network; increase the diversity of the city's activities and services; open up the potential for residential uses and conserve and improve the City's public domain. The visionary work of the Strategic Plan set Sydney on the path to becoming a global city.

In 1971 Conybeare went on to jointly establish Planning Workshop. At a time when urban planning was still developing as a concept the firm tendered for and won the Geelong Growth Centre Project together with sundry Council design projects, the extension of Martin Place, the restoration and adaptive re-use of Luna Park,

Sydney Park and Parramatta Park. Through this period he sought to raise consciousness towards a redesign for Circular Quay.

William Morrison graduated in architecture at the University of Sydney in 1965. His early years were spent with the Commonwealth Department of Works and at the National Capital Development Commission, Canberra, which introduced him to a broader vision. He travelled to London and worked with William Holford and Partners, Holford being one of a small group from Liverpool University credited with the birth of post-war town planning in Britain. Morrison subsequently joined a radically different practice, a young start-up company which was making waves, challenging traditional concepts of architectural design and urbanism. The Farrell Grimshaw Partnership grew from 12 to 40 staff in Morrison's first year. "Looking back it is extraordinary to think that these young trend setting architects should become leading international figures of contemporary architecture. Terry has gone on to become the UK's pre-eminent urban designer whilst Grimshaw's approach has resulted in many 'high-tech' architectural masterpieces around the world."

On his return to Australia in 1974, Morrison says "I felt it impossible to join an established practice, and sought a company itself setting out on a new future. A colleague suggested that Darrel Conybeare had started a new practice and that I should look him up. The multi-disciplinary practice (Planning Workshop) covered many of my interests but with a weighting toward planning. The challenge was to bring that back to architecture and urban design where Darrel and my interests lay." Conybeare agrees "In hindsight I devoted too much of my professional life to Planning Workshop. Design excellence was not a priority there, but that is what Bill brought to the business."

In 1980, the pair founded their architectural practice Conybeare Morrison and Partners (now Conybeare Morrison International). Morrison recalls "The common ground between Darrel and



*"Their work has subtly and skilfully become part of the fabric of Sydney's metropolitan landscape."*

I was extensive, and given the innovative nature of much of our work (after all in those days it was necessary to explain what urban design was) the early practice flourished."

In the lead up to the Bicentenary in 1988, Conybeare Morrison was engaged to improve the visual amenity of Circular Quay – transforming what was a drab transport interchange, shabby wharves and government workshops into a vital focus for tourists flanked by two world-famous landmarks, the Opera House and Sydney Harbour Bridge. Conybeare Morrison created an urban design masterplan for the entire Circular Quay precinct, including detailed design and documentation of Circular Quay West, First Fleet Park, Hickson Road, Campbells Cove, Dawes Point Park and the waterfront promenade. Their work won a national award in Civic Design and Landscape Excellence (AILA National Award in Landscape Architecture 1988) and was heralded for being "highly effective in unifying the surrounds of Sydney Cove [forging] a connection with the eastern side of Sydney Cove to link with the Opera House [and using] a continuity of materials with a good mix of broad scale space, and more intimate spaces".

During the two-year Circular Quay project, Conybeare and Morrison created their own range of civic furniture. The original idea for the street furniture concept came in 1978 when, as part of a commission to design a public mall in Canberra, they were unable to find a suitable Australian producer: "The sourcing of high quality locally designed and produced street furniture products proved an impossible task," Conybeare recalls. Their first seat, the 'CM Plaza' (now known as the 'Classic Plaza Seat') was to become the flagship of their future venture,

Street Furniture Australia. Founded in 1986 under the directorship of Conybeare and Morrison, Street Furniture Australia became market front-runners in the design of high quality urban seating, litter bins, bollards, drinking fountains, bike parking products and more. The Street Furniture Australia range has become iconic in Sydney having been incorporated in so many of the major public spaces and promenades Conybeare Morrison have redesigned, including: Circular Quay; Campbell Parade, Bondi Beach; Darling Walk,

Darling Harbour; George Street North, The Rocks; Glebe Point Road; Luna Park; Macquarie Street Boulevard and Springfield Precinct in Kings Cross.

In 1990, they founded Context Landscape Design together with Oi Choong, creating a truly multi-disciplinary practice, and one of the first in Australia. The cross-fertilisation of the disciplines of architecture, urban design and landscape architecture offered the two firms the advantages of an expanded viewpoint and integrated design expertise. ➔



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Over 23 years, the firms have collaborated on many infrastructure and urban design projects in Sydney and throughout the world. Conybeare and Morrison maintain an active engagement with Context, though Conybeare says "Context runs its own race, competently guided by Oi. It now has the potential to evolve into a great, ecologically driven landscape practice."

Prior to the Sydney 2000 Olympics, Darrel Conybeare and Oi Choong were appointed to a select group of architects and landscape designers to review and prepare a new masterplan for the 2000 Olympic Games site at Homebush Bay. The work was carried out over a four month period and established the urban and open space structure of the site and all its principal functions. The team also introduced the concept of surrounding this harbourside site with Millenium Parklands. Conybeare Morrison was then involved in the development of the Sydney Showground together with Cox Group and Peddle Thorp Architects. The team were responsible for the major urban redevelopment of the new Showgrounds at Homebush Bay, together with design of the Showground Arena and a series of exhibition pavilions.

Their versatile partnership has extended to devising masterplans for the long-term development and conservation of Sydney's unique natural environments and heritage, such as Bobbin Head and Apple Tree Bay, Goat Island, Cockatoo Island and the Royal Botanic Gardens. They have had major influence in the design of prestigious Sydney campuses including UNSW, Sydney University, UTS, Macquarie University and in the master planning of new campuses for the University of Western Sydney. Additionally their work has been crucial in responding to Sydney's growing population in the urban design of motorways such as the Westlink M7 & Airport Motorway and transport systems such as the Liverpool to Parramatta Transitway, the Innerwest Busway and light rail and metro studies, and more recently in the Urban Activation Precincts of Wentworth Point and Rozelle Bay. Conybeare Morrison has also been providing the Barangaroo Delivery Authority with urban design advice and specialist public realm services.

Conybeare Morrison has completed many projects in other parts of Australia and

throughout the world. With a multi-disciplinary approach the firm has designed and master planned entire satellite cities in Vietnam and China. Their campus design work has included universities in China, Botswana, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore and Papua New Guinea.

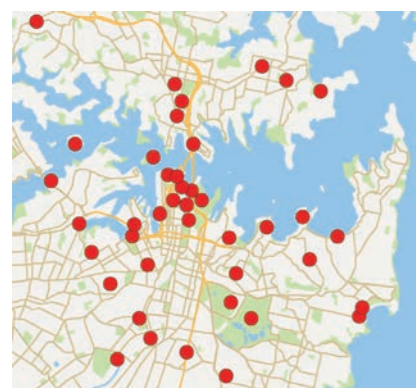
For over 40 years Conybeare Morrison's award-winning designs have sensitively anticipated the changing needs of the city and asserted the importance of vibrant public environments. Their work has subtly and skilfully become part of the fabric of Sydney's metropolitan landscape. As arguably Australia's seminal urban designers, Conybeare and Morrison's contribution to the city has enriched life for its communities both past and future.

When asked the secret to a successful partnership Conybeare responds, "Mutual respect has provided the foundation. We have our ups and downs but in the end there is a strong common uniformity of purpose. Over the years we have built a good team and this is the backbone of the practice – not any single person." Morrison agrees "There has always been a complementary nature to our work with Darrel providing much of the bigger picture vision and with me providing much of the follow through. The longevity of our partnership is based on this, on mutual respect and the fact that we never argue and always work toward a common goal.

Into the future Conybeare has hopes for further improving Circular Quay "ripping out the Cahill Expressway would be a good start" he says with a grin "and undergrounding the Quay railway to reconnect the city to the waterfront". He then explains his vision for the future of the Group, "that the intellectual capital, design expertise and consistent relentless focus on public domain enhancement will leave a legacy and enable the Group to survive well into the future."

Morrison believes the future lies within the Group's versatility, preparedness to reinvent, and dedication to innovative design. "It is important to maintain a fresh attitude, as if a start-up company with a long way to go."

Even after a 40 year long partnership, there is still plenty of work ahead for the pair in their life-long pursuit of design excellence. ■



**Top left:** Heirisson Island Bridge, Perth WA

**Middle left:** Map - Conybeare Morrison's projects in inner Sydney

**Bottom left:** Street Furniture Arqua Fountain at Circular Quay

**Top right:** North Beach Bathers Pavilion, Wollongong (Winner 2013 National Trust Heritage Award for Regeneration and New Development)

**Middle right:** Westlink M7 © Brett Boardman

**Bottom right:** Waterpoint, Vietnam

