



Lunch with Leo Schofield

# Building a better future

Architect Ed Lippmann has a plan for Sydney - and he's at odds with the government about how it should grow

Ed Lippmann has devised a master plan for the future development of Sydney. This is good news. To date no one else seems to have come up with one and the city has grown like Tokyo.

Lippmann is an admired Sydney architect. His is not a big practice but he enjoys a disproportionate reputation with clients and among his peers. A reputation that will no doubt be enhanced and consolidated by SYDNEY XXXL, his publication which outlines his imaginings for Sydney's future.

Architectural firms often produce hard cover records of their work. Most are destined to sit on coffee tables in reception areas of high-rise office buildings. Lippmann has taken a different tack. True, images of some of his buildings are larded though this blueprint for the future of our wayward, erratically developed metropolis, but not many. This sweeping architectural view includes historically and socially relevant information as well and, thus, stands aloof from vanity publications.

It was not Sydney's good fortune to bring forth a Baron Haussmann who could level most of medieval Paris to create that city's

grand boulevards, parks, gardens and incomparable vistas. Nor was Sydney laid out in orderly military grid fashion as were Manhattan, Savannah or even Adelaide. Major thoroughfares like George Street simply sprang up around meandering bull-dock tracks, not without charm, but inadequate to the needs of the current population.

Architects, (Lippmann being a good example) are interesting beasts. They are artists, for centuries responsible for the beautification of cities.

In capitalist societies like ours, lofty ideals seem to go by the board when costs, speed of construction, future income and durability are factored in with less romantic engineering and construction challenges. The artist who designs a chic body for a new car needs to have some knowledge of what goes on under the bonnet.

Then there is the business of fame. One triumphant commission can propel a talented firm or single architect from relative obscurity



to star status. Think Utzon's Sydney Opera House, Herzog and de Meuron's Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg, Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano's Centre Pompidou in Paris and those two virtuosic exercises in architectural eccentricity that shook up the City of London, Norman Foster's Gherkin and Piano's Shard.

Though not so grand, Lippmann's 8 Chifley Square provided a similar defining moment for his firm. Designed in association with Rogers (the principal is now Lord Rogers and the firm Rogers, Stirk Harbor) one of the most renowned architectural firms of the 20th century, the building is a standout.

Lippmann knew that Mirvac had bought the site and were planning a design competition to choose an architect. "I spoke to them and asked if I could get on to the short list. I was told in no uncertain terms that a small outfit in Surry Hills was not what they had in mind for such a prominent and prestigious building."

Terrier-like, Lippmann returned to the fray and told them a colleague had worked for Harry Seidler on high rise buildings and that they had the experience within the office to do it. Came Mirvac's reply: "We don't think you understand. This is the big end of town."

Undeterred, Lippmann persisted. "They had all the marquee name firms on their wish list. 'What if we did it with Rogers?'" he asked. "Eyebrows were raised. "That would be a different story."

On the night the board, chaired by Nicholas Collishaw, was deciding on the

short list, Lippmann was extremely nervous. He was asked how the thing with Rogers was going to happen? He promised an explanatory email from London.

"Richard (Rogers) didn't know anything about this discussion but the guys who worked there knew us. I did the competition and pre-

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sented with Tristram Carfrae from ARUP, a brilliant engineer whose house in St. Ives I'd designed. They were completely knocked out."

It wasn't over yet — there was a second stage. Two firms were left. They kept it as a two horse race between Lippmann and the veteran Richard Johnson whose National Portrait Gallery in Canberra is one of the best new buildings in the ACT.

More to-ing and fro-ing followed. The client remained uneasy until a video-conference was organised. "We all went down to Mirvac's head office at four in the morning in our suits and Ivan Harbor, who's the business manager in London, represented Rogers. He's an old hand there, goes back to the Pompidou days in the

70's and he was terrific. The Chairman of Mirvac told us that he was happy that we'd won. For them the flagging of an international brand was a matter of pride. And for us a most fruitful working partnership between Andrew Partidge in Rogers' London office and Tim O'Sullivan in ours."

It was clearly a triumph for Lippmann too. He seems to relish rehearsing the story of the pitch and is almost quivering with excitement as he recalled the win. "I was bursting. We were pushing sh\*t up hill to even get on the list. To win was absolutely thrilling." Having worked for a quarter of a century in advertising, the ritual was similar to those I'd participated in when pitching for new business — a heady mix of exhaustion and euphoria.

"For us it was a great opportunity. Prior to that building I'd never designed anything over five or six stories in height. I was 50, what a birthday present."

Lippmann, who married Sonia Blasco Lazaro, a director of the Intercontinental Hotel, Sydney, formerly the Colonial Treasury.

It was just before Christmas and, like naughty school boys, we laid waste to three tiers of assorted fro-frou cakes like Sugar Plum Guava Fairyfloss Tartlet, and Vanilla Rose Ballerina Cupcakes, inspired by the Australian Ballet's Nutcracker. What a blow out. A nuclear sugar hit.

Re-energised, Lippmann touches on many subjects, admiring the work of Graham Jahn at the City Council who encourages emerging architects, the design proposed for the new

## Planning Sydney's future

Ed Lippmann's eight point plan

1. Halt expansion
2. Cap population
3. Create polycentric city
4. Higher density
5. Improve circulation
6. Access to nature
7. Equitable housing
8. Design excellence



Ed Lippmann has high tea with Leo Schofield at the Intercontinental Sydney. Picture: Matthew Vasilescu

Our planned lunch had to be rescheduled because of a funeral but here we were, on the same day, in the cortile of the Intercontinental Hotel, Sydney, formerly the Colonial Treasury.

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Left, Lippmann at 8 Chifley Square, which his company designed. Picture: Matthew Vasilescu. Above: On his wedding day in December.

Powerhouse Museum at Parramatta (we both disliked it) and the challenges Sydney faces in the future, similar to those confronting many growing cities around the globe — social inequality, housing affordability and liveability, transport overload and congestion, and environmental damage, to

name just a few. "Sydney, however, has its very own special circumstances, namely its geology, geography, topography, vegetation and climate." He would like to see expansion stop — at odds with government projections for a city of eight million.

"In 250 years a once sparsely populated, serene natural environment is now replaced by infrastructure and buildings to service millions. Sydney is fortunate to have an enviable location, comparatively high living standards, but it can't rely on luck or its natural beauty."

Given the recent bushfires, the need for intelligent planning becomes more urgent than ever.



## High Tea at The Intercontinental Hotel

- A selection of ribbon sandwiches
- Scones with clotted cream and raspberry jam
- Sugar Plum Guava Fairy Floss Tartlet
- Vanilla Rose Ballerina Cupcake
- Chia's Berry Choux
- Raspberry Yuzu Cup
- Lemon Meringue Macaron
- Champagne