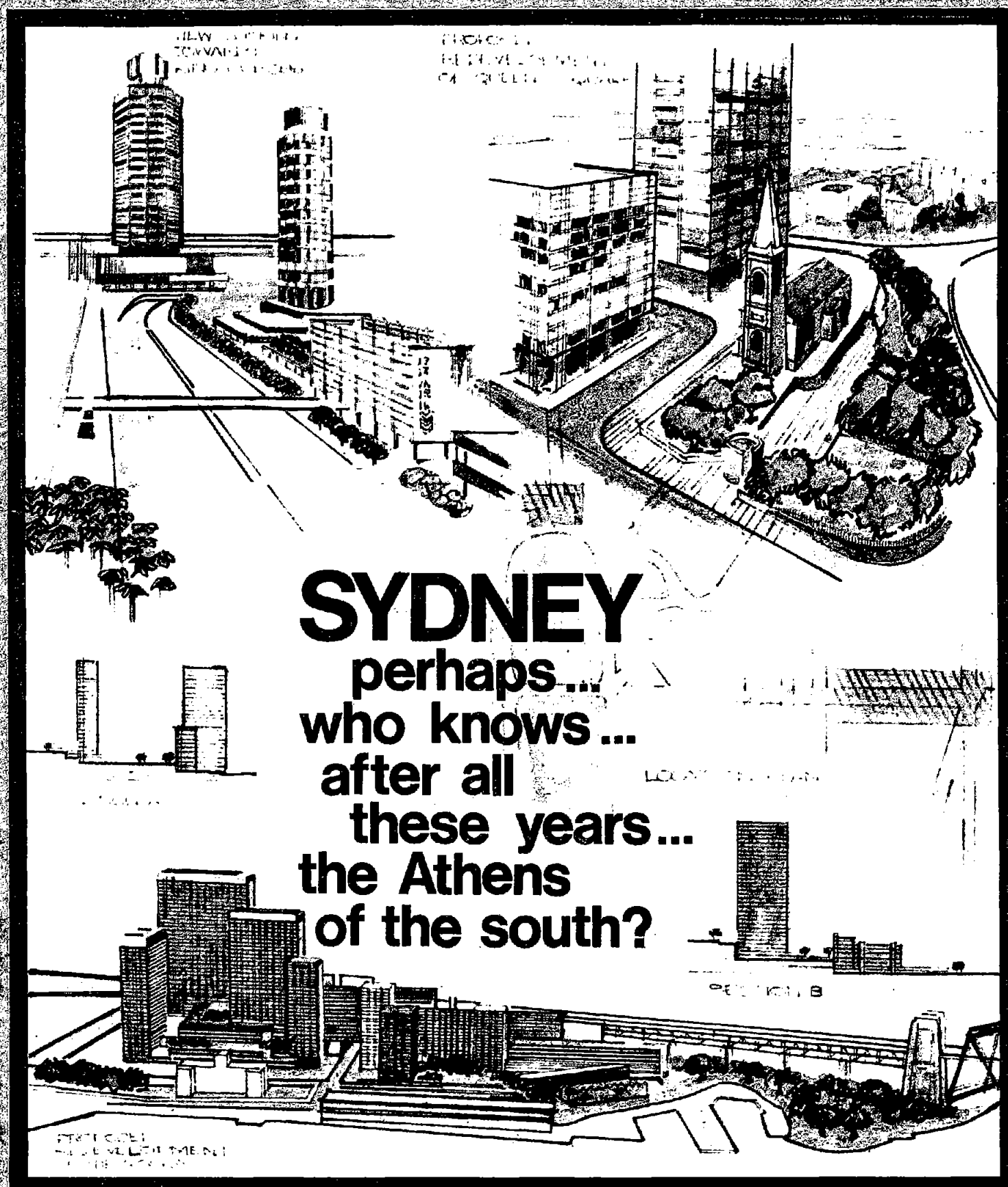


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# The Bulletin

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# SYDNEY perhaps ... who knows ... after all these years ... the Athens of the south?

PERHAPS IT WAS the Opera House that began to get Sydney people used to the idea. For big-headedness in concept, and patience in waiting for a result, it has had some of the effects that must have been noticeable in Egypt when Cheops was building his pyramid. Perhaps it was the natural setting of the city — the assertive harbor and the unruly hills have limited even the most stubborn attempts at orthodoxy, and provided impulses to bragging for more than 100 years. Perhaps it was the fact that Sydney is the oldest of the Australian cities, in fact one of the oldest ports thrown up around the Pacific Ocean when it opened to world trade.

Whatever the reasons, there are signs that Sydney might at last be developing a sense of *grandeur* (noun, fem.: greatness; largeness; dignity; nobleness), about what it should look like.

*Grandeur* in Australia? Well, look at Canberra. In its display section it is Versailles all over again, only bigger and costlier, one of the most ambitious examples of conspicuous waste ever devised into a capital city.

But the possibility that Sydney might become really unique among the Australian cities — as unique as its natural advantages and its history demand — is still hard to accept. So much of the recent publicity has been spotty and mainly concerned with tug o' wars between residents who have something to preserve (Paddington, for example) and juggernauts such as the Department of Main Roads, prepared to knock over everything that gets in the way of the attitudes of 20 years ago.

"Development" was coming to mean little more than pull down and put up. Cram them in. Visions of the future were rewrite jobs dredged out of the general slush of what they were writing about "overseas."

The periodic exhibitions of wooden-block cities at the Town Hall lacked credibility. Some of the exhibitions were so vague in positive intention and had so many tentative qualifications that all the meticulousness that had gone into the placement of the wooden blocks hardly seemed worth the trouble.

Their critics could easily knock them down.

But in the past two years there has been a change in Press comment and public reaction. Ideas of a future Sydney are no longer merely those dreamy plans you read about in the Sunday papers and then forget.

For one thing, after being a joke for two or three generations, the Eastern Suburbs Railway is now actually being built. And, whatever its inadequacies, the State Planning Authority's "Sydney 2000" plan has let everyone know that Sydney is likely to be five and a half million people strong in 30 years and the SPA has provided relief by suggesting the expansion of Newcastle and Wollongong into bigger cities and the creation of the new cities of Campbelltown and Gosford-Wyong. The idea of a string of interrelated cities along the east coast might come off.

And within the City of Sydney itself, possibly the future heart-city of four or five other cities along the central coast of New South Wales, the new Council, prompted in particular by two of its members, Ald. Andrew Briger, an architect, and Ald. Leo Port, an engineer, seems to look as if it will really do something. At least it has advertised for a firm of urban planners to prepare the long-needed Strategic Master Plan.

The possibility of creating a new texture to the city and not simply pulling it down and rebuilding it higher was first raised when the Chifley Square plans were discussed. Qantas obligingly built a curved building, intended to be part of a semi-circle to be completed by a curving Commonwealth Office block. But the Commonwealth Government, although ready to make Canberra the new Rome, didn't want to waste money in Sydney. It sabotaged the plan by building straight up and down.

Then architect Harry Seidler, with

his Australia Square, showed that something could be done. His square is crowded every day with Sydney people displaying their Mediterranean mood.

Now something even more important is happening. If Australia has one street that can remind it of its beginnings it is Sydney's Macquarie Street. Soon, one end of Macquarie

Street will be cleared of its rubbish and become a pedestrian square. Opposite will be Greenway's convict barracks and a wing of the old Rum Hospital. Dominating the square will be Greenway's St. James' Church. The three best-known early colonial buildings will at last be able to be viewed — or sat among — in peace and quiet. (Perhaps they should move Queen Victoria's statue to some more Victorian part of town — the Queen Victoria Building-Town Hall-St. Andrew's section, perhaps — and instead of keeping up the "Queen's Square" name, rename it "Greenway Square.")

What is particularly important about this development is that it accepts the need for a change of texture in a city. This is also true of the plan to turn the George Street end of Martin Place into a car-free square (or "piazza," as successive aldermen delight in saying, in their European-inspired plans for the future). Once again there is some history about it — the G.P.O. building recalls the florid self-confidence of colonial self-government and the Cenotaph the attempts at self definition of Anzac Day. If the plan is put into action (as it almost certainly will be, once the Transport people stop their opposition) it will provide another space in the city where human beings can seem more important than concrete or four-wheeled internal-combustion engines.

Australia Square, Queen's Square, and Martin Place are ways of adding a sense of humanity to the city — and of giving it variety and unexpectedness. But what will really change Sydney, if carried out, are three groups of plans intended to transform the main part of its harbor frontage — the Rocks area, Circular Quay, and Woolloomooloo.

The Woolloomooloo plan is the furthest advanced. The wooden blocks

went on exhibition at the Town Hall in August last year after a six-man working committee had spent 18 months of meetings with the State Planning Authority's architects and, although there are some legal complications, the plan will be put before Council when it meets on February 9. The Minister for Local Government then has to take another look at it. Then he can say it's OK to go ahead.

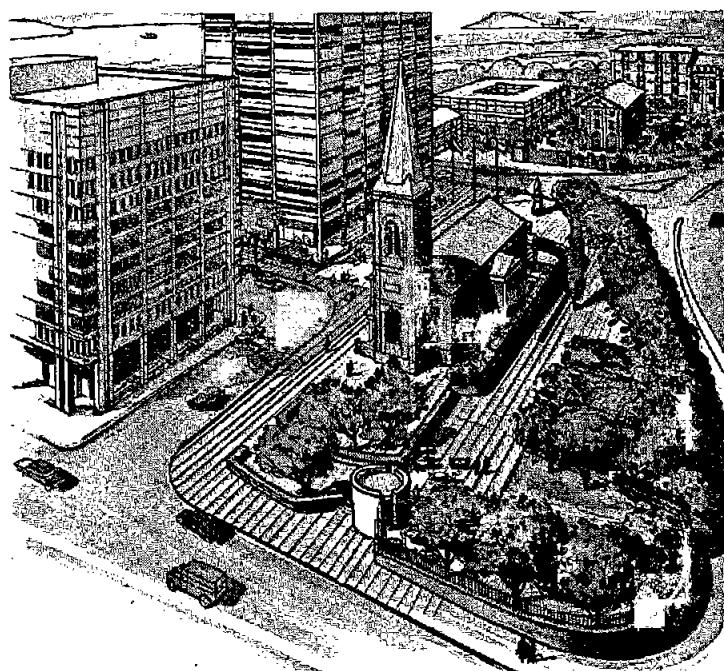
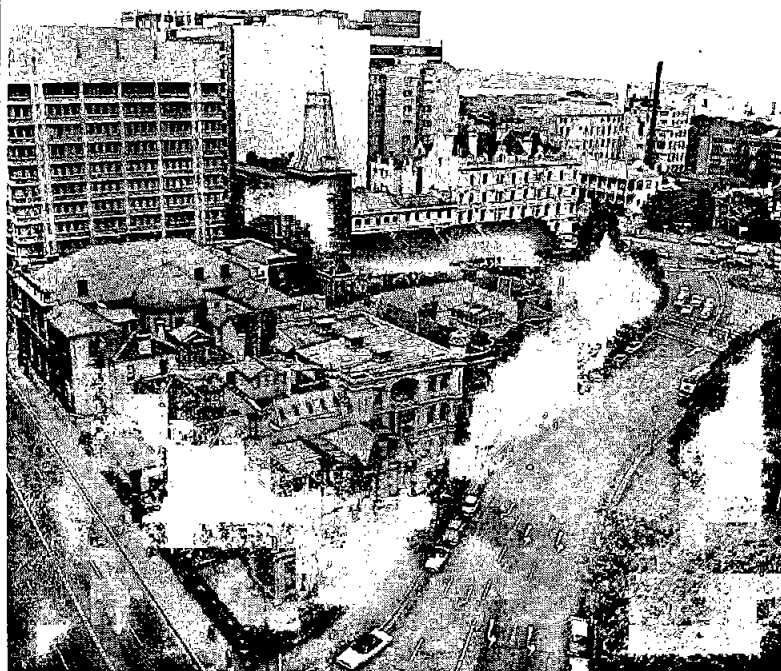
It was a pity about Woolloomooloo. One of the oldest developed areas in Sydney, its 100 acres of little houses lie in a valley between two hills, with the Harbor at one end, and if the terrace-restorers had got to it early it would have provided a splendid residential contrast between the parkland of the city and its funland up on Woolloomooloo Heights, where Kings Cross now spreads. But light industry moved in, and now the Eastern Suburbs Railway and the Eastern Suburbs Distributor Expressway are going to cut it up. But this makes the kind of area

itself. At present Woolloomooloo is an unwanted, left-over valley, cutting the city off from Potts Point and Kings Cross. When it is put in its new form Potts Point and Kings Cross will seem more related to the city.

This effect is likely to be increased by the action of the Council—on Ald. Briger's suggestion—in wanting to replan William Street, one of Woolloomooloo's boundaries, and the main road link between the city and Kings Cross. If ever there was a street that lent itself to transformation into a *grand boulevard* it is William Street, with its broad, straight sweep up the hill on which Kings Cross is perched. At present it is lined with tattiness. Under the Council's plan it would be widened (it already has four lanes of traffic, with vegetation in the middle) and planted with trees; the proposed building bonus for open space would get rid of the present huddled look.

Up at the Cross the Eastern Suburbs

Quay area has been the subject of three plans since 1962, but nothing is yet decided. The first was a private scheme commissioned by a group of companies with interests in the area—AMP, British Tobacco, ICI, Lend Lease and Unilever. Their plan proposed a new square in front of the 84-year-old Customs House, and a new cross street to divert traffic from the Quay itself, making it an open space. But the City Council, at that time controlled by Labor, reacted to it by instructing its own City Planning Officer to draw up an alternative plan. Once finished, however, their plan was criticised by some as "too mundane." So it was back to the drawing board. In July, 1965, the City Planning Officer, in collaboration with Professor Denis Winston, Professor of Town and Country Planning at the University of Sydney, presented yet another plan, this one recommending a park, retention of the 84-year-old Customs House, and a long, low shipping pavilion with a pedestrian



of uniform decay in which planners find their best opportunities. They can pull it all up and start all over again.

The plan spreads Woolloomooloo out as something entirely new, as a mixture of what would be described in any country as a choice residential area with tourist and commercial centres. There would be two new passenger-ship berths, Customs and maritime buildings, shops, some offices, parking stations, motels and hotels with convention facilities, parks and apartment buildings. It seems a pity that there is no provision for medium-density housing. The shops rising from the harborside to Kings Cross would seem just right for town-house-type apartments, but, says the Council, this would be uneconomic.

But the rebuilding of Woolloomooloo will extend the city's comprehension of

*BEFORE* Queen's Square undergoes a plan to clean it of its architectural rubbish (l.) *AFTER*: a pedestrian square with Sydney's best-known colonial buildings exposed

Railway development has already led to the destruction of the sleaziness that previously topped William Street. The buildings going up in its place will probably breed others of like kind, and Darlinghurst Road, the busiest part of the Cross, is to be closed to traffic. The scheme allows for the fact that there is a splendid view from the Kings Cross buildings by restricting the height of buildings on the Woolloomooloo slope. If Sydney is to achieve its *grandeur* its Harbor means everything. None of the plans can afford to forget it.

There is no go-ahead yet on a plan that gives Sydney Cove a fitting architectural frame. The Circular

mall behind it, and a new road behind the pavilion.

Will something now happen? The State Planning Authority set up another committee in the middle of 1968 to look at Professor Winston's plan. There was talk about finishing the plan before the end of that year, in order to integrate the area with the Opera House on the eastern side and the Rocks to the west. As it turned out, there was no cause to worry about being overtaken by either of these projects. The committee has not yet made its report. But if something like Professor Winston's plan comes off—with the obligatory piazza plus fountains, outdoor cafes and a complex of seafood restaurants above the ferry wharves, as well as office buildings, the present crumbliness of Circular Quay will be replaced by something

## PERSPECTIVE

more grand in scope and more suitable to commemorate the fact that it all began at Sydney Cove. (Could the "piazza" become Phillip Place?)

Changes at Circular Quay are almost certainly bound to happen. There is a natural commercial impetus in that part of town. What the plan will mean — when it is finished — is that there will now be a path for future development. It was difficult — at least until this month — to be equally optimistic about changes in the 51 acres of the historic and therefore controversial Rocks area, site of Australia's first hospital, fort, military camp, warehouses, flour mill and bakery and notorious throughout the Pacific in the 19th century as one of the toughest seaport slums in the world.

It was in 1967 that the State Government scrapped a redevelopment plan drawn up by James Wallace Holdings and called in Sir John Overall, the National Capital Development Commissioner. Sir John's plan was accepted and, for some time, it looked as if it would be the one for the Rocks. It had a generally favorable Press; about the

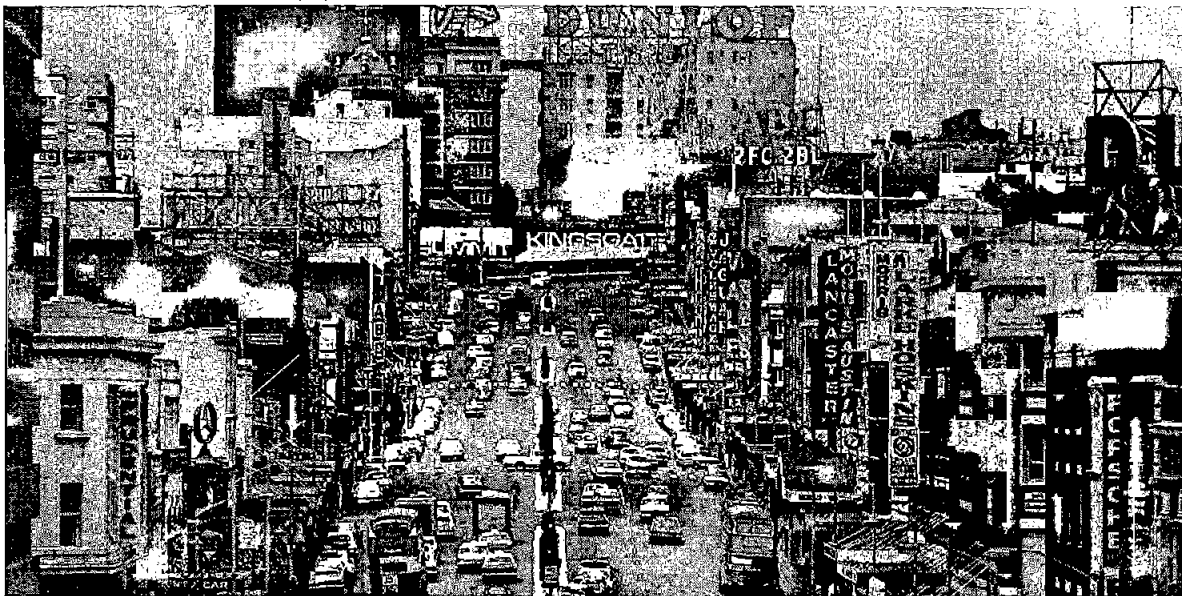
only public dissent was from the chairman of James Wallace Holdings ("It bears all the earmarks of having been prepared under pressure in too short a time with scant research in any depth"). Nobody repudiated the Overall Plan, but gradually it began to be referred to as "a pilot study." This month the \$300 million Rocks redevelopment was passed over to the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority (which is housed, appropriately, in Phillip Street). The Authority has to have something ready in wooden blocks within 12 months, using the Overall Plan as a "basis," but listening to other experts.

One of the most obviously attractive things about the Overall Plan was the way in which it united old and new. It did away with the rectangular monolith that houses the Maritime Services Board to make way for a square (no "piazza" this time) on the Quayside, to be bounded with a concourse flanked by a graceful row of bond stores. There was to be a landscaped park, restaurants and parking space among the

terraced podiums in which the office buildings were to be set. The National Trust's only quarrel was with the recommendation that only the facade of the Argyle Bond Store was to be preserved. If the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority keeps to the spirit of the Overall Plan, Sydney Cove will not only have something that looks good in building blocks, but that is also a reminder of some of the history that has sustained the growth of a city port.

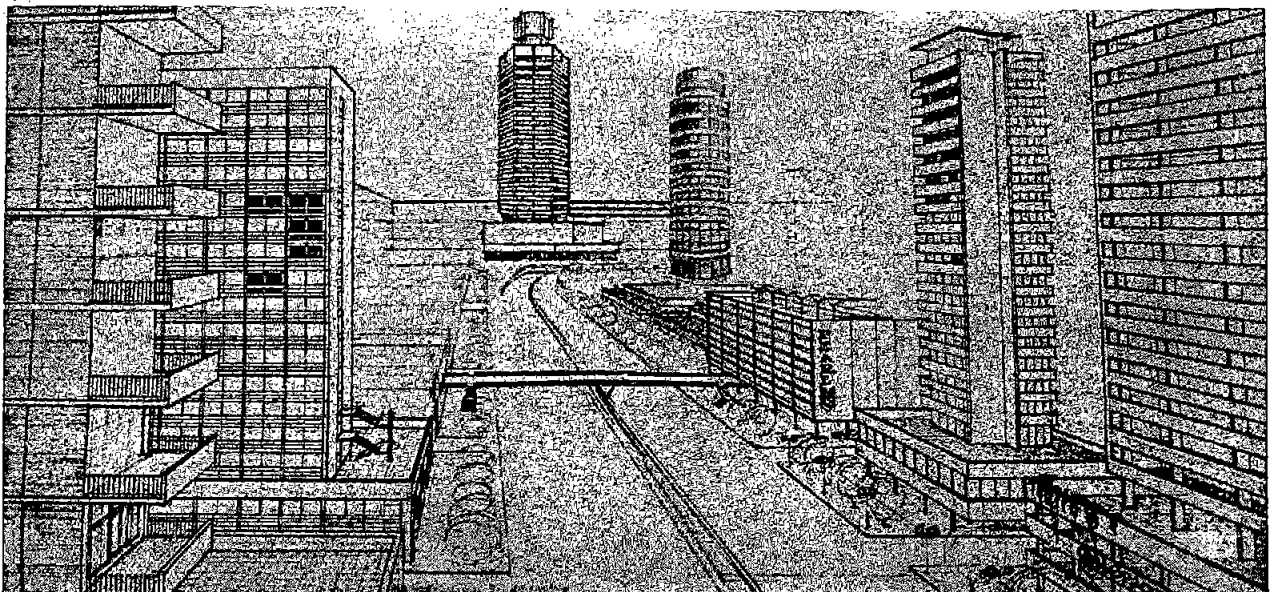
The Woolloomooloo-Circular Quay-Rocks changes — changes that, from the Harbor, will make Sydney a new city — have now all entered the planning works. Now, and with a broader approach than would have seemed possible a few years ago, the Council is having a look at uptown Sydney. This largely neglected area will be a special concern of the planners hired for the Strategic Master Plan.

Off their own bat a private group of architects, surveyors and town-planners calling itself "The Professional Group" has already presented an unsolicited



William Street's straight sweep up to Kings Cross is lined with tattiness (above)

But it lends itself to transformation into the grand boulevard envisaged (below)



"scheme in principle" for this area. They put their show on in the Town Hall last month. No wooden blocks this time, because, they said, theirs was simply a generalised plan raising possibilities and calling for special studies, especially of a suitable traffic pattern related to the proposed Western Distributor. They did, however, come up with suggestions — including two art centres surrounded by parklands, a tourist-entertainment complex and an international hotel. In the meantime, the Lord Mayor has been thinking out loud — about a residential and entertainment complex on the site of the Tivoli Theatre as "a catalyst to generate the whole area."

Sydney people are cynical about the disjointed mass of excited reports that are followed by sad stories of delays and disagreements. But something does seem to be happening. The new Queen's Square is definite. The Martin Place project seems pretty definite. Natural commercial push will probably activate the Woolloomooloo and Circular Quay projects, and perhaps the Rocks plan,

too. If all this happens, momentum and fashion will change the rest.

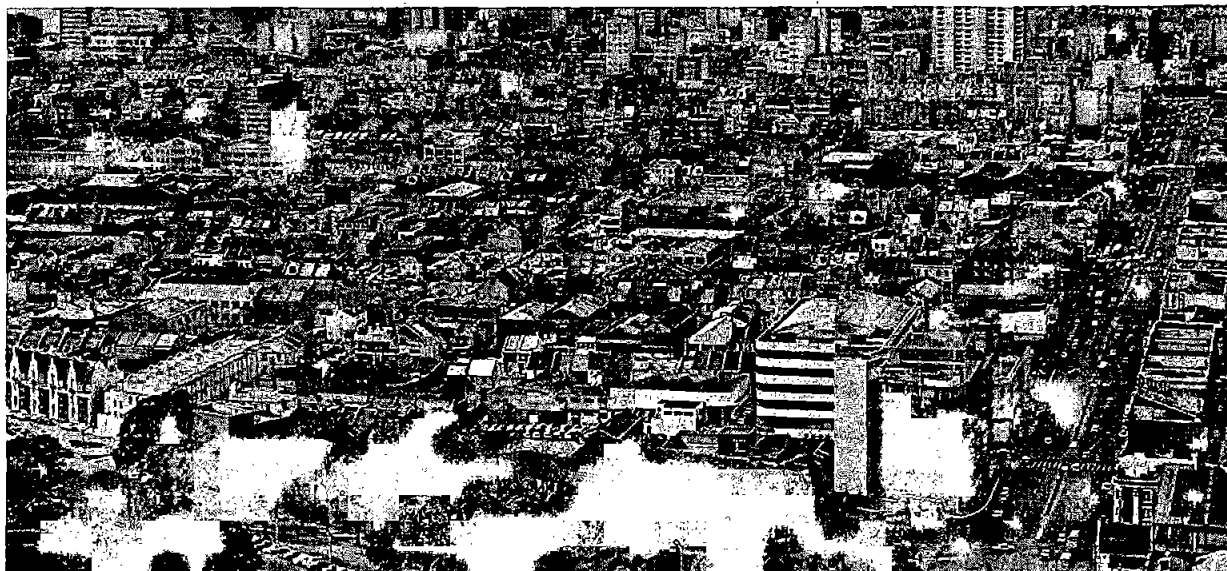
And if all this goes on, Australia will have a very unusual city. The smaller cities cannot contemplate change on the same scale. Melbourne is the only other city big enough to do it. But lacking Sydney's natural advantages it would probably have to change its whole street structure to get striking effects. In any case, it is showing less initiative than Sydney and it hasn't the same sense of history.

If Sydney comes up with something that uses its natural advantages and its sense of the past and turns itself into one of the world's most striking cities, it is to be hoped that the rest of Australia will not feel jealous about it — it's not costing them anything and they might even share a bit of Sydney's pride.

Sydney used to think nationally. Its people are still less State-minded in their concept of themselves than those of other cities, perhaps seeing themselves more as Australians and less as New South Welshmen. Those who are planning changes to the city should

also think nationally, making Sydney the place to which people can come — whether from Melbourne or Manila — to learn something about Australia's past. An imaginative convict museum in Greenway's convict barracks, an exposition of colonial life in the wing of the Rum Hospital adjoining it, a continuance of use of the present Parliament House (by far Australia's oldest), a maritime museum in the Customs House, a dozen other galleries and museums . . . by these means the city becomes a national institution. They give people something to look at by day before they go up to Kings Cross at night.

There should be care that some old things stay up. The Lands Department Building, for instance — or for that matter all Paddington and some of the other terrace suburbs as well. These are already on the list for tourists: they give the city a living sense of uniqueness in which conventional Victorian buildings, because of terrain and light, take on a unique aspect, and continue to provide a sense of lively use.



At present (above) Woolloomooloo, one of Sydney's oldest developed areas, is an unwanted, left-over 100-acre valley of uniform decay with the Harbor at one end

Later, if the plan (below) going before Council next month is approved, it will become a choice residential area with tourist and commercial centres

