

Changing Sydney Skyline **HOMES a** The Event Of 1963

In this review of architecture in N.S.W. in 1963, Sydney architect, **PETER JOHNSON**, says the change in the Sydney skyline has been the spectacular architectural event of the year.

ON THE AIR
FOR

It seems far more than 21 months since the A.M.P. Building was completed and controversy was rife concerning its scale in relation to Circular Quay and the remainder of the city.

The city skyline behind it is now not only growing to meet it, but at some points will even surpass it. This change in the skyline is the most spectacular architectural event of the past 12 months.

Returning travellers confess to a feeling of pride that the changing skyline is a symbol that Sydney is a city of increasing international stature.

These travellers also note, however, that despite the vigorous growth which is taking place, there is still too much uncontrolled clutter at every street corner.

The laudable attempt of a private group to organise one of the most important areas of this clutter into an imaginative scheme at Circular Quay has resulted in a dull compromise with a scheme prepared by the City Council. This surely will prove acceptable to no one.

The quality of the individual buildings which have contributed to the change which is taking place can be best described as competent and anonymous. As a group they are certainly no worse than similar cross-sections in many other part of the world. None are inspired and none have had



MR JOHNSON

the money, care and genius lavished on them which is necessary to produce a monument of our time, like the Seagram Building in New York.

There has been a major break from the glass curtain wall—a building solution which created problems of climate control, difficult and expensive to overcome, and aesthetic problems of flat monotony, demanding for their solution impeccable proportions and such natural gifts as the reflections of water and lights.

Now solid materials have reappeared in the form of the traditional Sydney sandstone, granite, marble and, in ever-increasing quantities, precast concrete with exposed aggregate, acid etched or tooled faces.

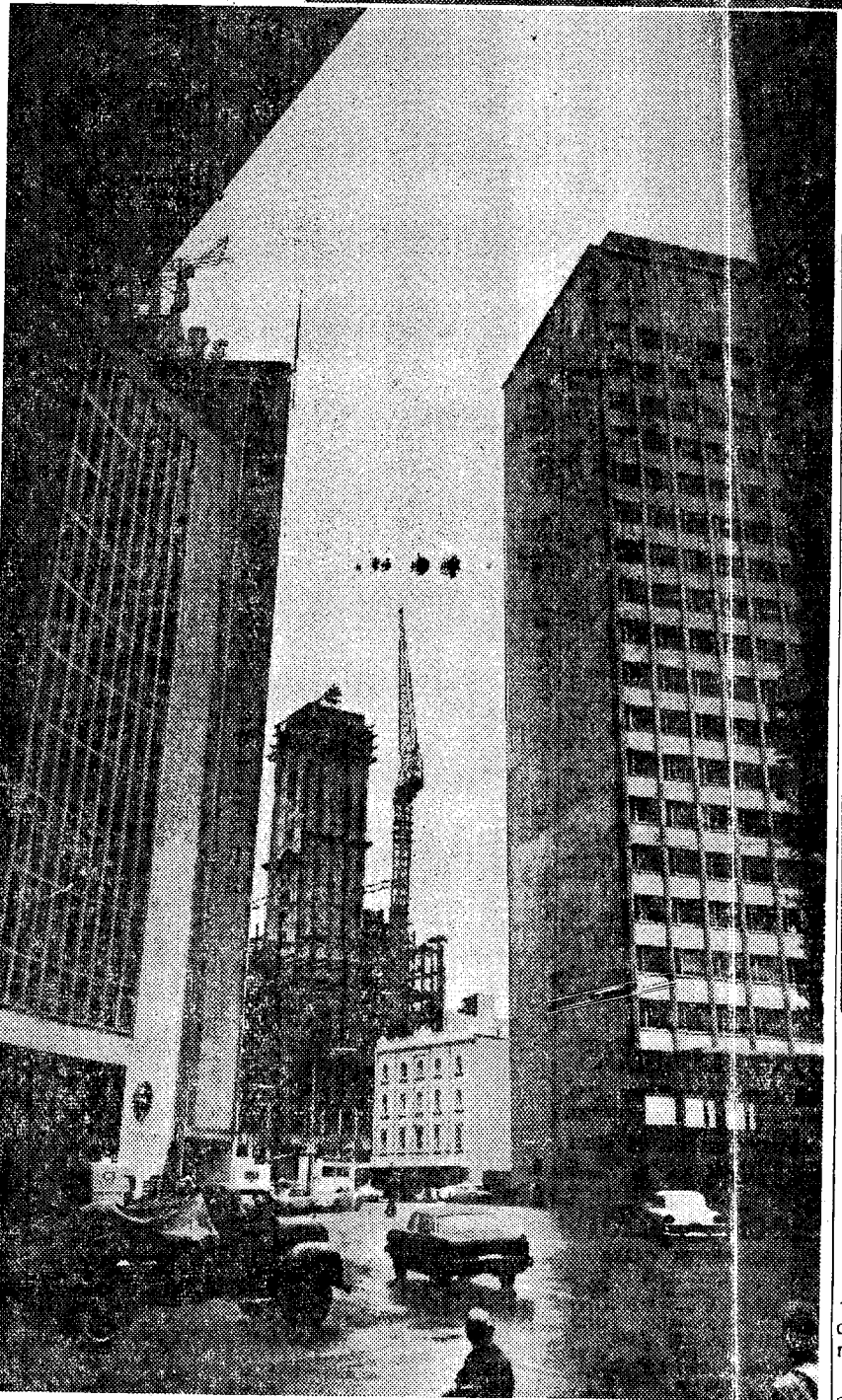
There has been increased use of sculpture in city buildings. It is unfortunate that in the new Commonwealth Offices the Minister denied to the city what would have been one of its most interesting works of sculpture in relation to architecture.

Welcome Signs

Welcome signs of an enlightened approach by the Housing Commission during the year suggest that in 12 months' time it may be possible to report definite advances in a field where it will be most appreciated. The commission is developing row housing and courtyard houses, some designed by its own architects, some by private architects like Clarke Gazzard and Yeomans, the winners of the 1962 Wilkinson Award.

The 1963 Wilkinson Award went to a house designed by Ken Woolley. This was a well deserved award to a house which exhibits many of the ideas currently being developed by Sydney architects working in the domestic field. It respects, almost to the point of worship, its sloping wooded site. It uses simple, solid and essentially friendly materials—clinker brick, bare timber and terra-cotta tiles and it is planned for informal living.

Many of the best individual houses built during



The State Office Block, which will be 425ft high, under construction in Phillip Street. It is seen here framed by the Commonwealth Offices and Qantas House.

the year exhibit a similar attitude—concern for their sites, emphasis on function and the use of honest, sometimes rough materials.

Work being designed by the N.S.W. Government Architect is the most consistent in the State, if not in Australia. The award of the R.I.B.A. Bronze Medal and the Sulman Award to the Government Architect and T. E. O'Mahony in collaboration, for the Fisher Library at the University of Sydney recognised a building which is dignified and at rest with its illustrious neighbour, the nineteenth-century Gothic front of the university.

At the University of Sydney new buildings for the Faculty of Engineering have provided an honest straightforward solution which should stand the test of time in use and the test of time in freedom from aesthetic trickery.

The new dining hall in the extensions to Basser College at the University of N.S.W. uses bold forms in in-situ concrete and bold slabs of clinker bricks to create a hall of monumental proportions. The residential colleges, of which it is a part, echo this quality on the exterior but regrettably, and perhaps for reasons of economy, resort internally to tight planning and large areas of white paint.

Stands Out

Of the new shopping centres and malls which have appeared in the past 12 months, the Warringah Mall at Brookvale stands out. A compliment to its success as environment has been the attention given it by teenagers both in and out of working hours.

Fewer home units have been completed during the year and few are under construction. Most of those

erected have been tawdry and restless and display the current fads in abundance. There are honourable exceptions amongst them. The commanding building overlooking Double Bay known as Bibaringa, is one.

Routine industrial building has proceeded during the year with emphasis on economy and usefulness. It is hard to class the Smith Kline and French pharmaceutical building at French's Forest in this category since its stylish opulence seems to demand a category of its own.

In all it has been a rather restless year, with evidence of new thinking, which is just reaching finished building stage, with evidence of continued energy and expansion, and with promise of increasing public appreciation and awareness of the quality and character of the buildings and the environment around us.