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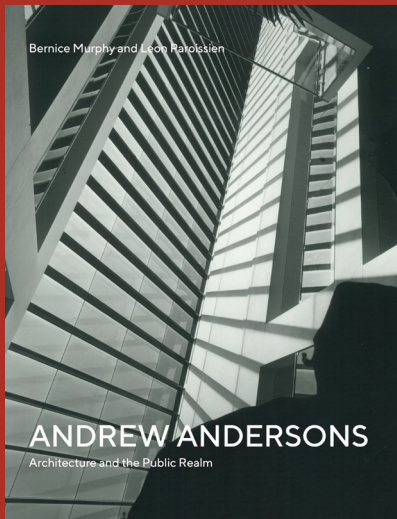
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# Andrew Andersons Reimagining the Museum

*Book Review*  
**PAUL MCGILLICK**



THE ARCHITECT ANDREW ANDERSONS HAS MADE A HUGE CONTRIBUTION TO THE PUBLIC REALM, IN PARTICULAR WITH HIS INNOVATIVE EXHIBITION SPACES. A NEW MONOGRAPH PROVIDES AN EXCELLENT OVERVIEW OF ANDERSONS'S CAREER, WITH DETAILED EXAMINATION OF HIS GROUNDBREAKING MUSEUM AND PERFORMANCE-SPACE DESIGN.

When the Australian colonies began to build their first museums – inaugurated by what is now known as The Lady Franklin Museum at the foot of Mount Wellington in Hobart in 1842 – they naturally reflected the taste of their time, namely neoclassical. The porticos, columns, and pediments, often with relief sculptures, elicited the spirit of ancient Greece, deemed to be the origin of all “high art.”

By the late 1960s, however, even Australia had to acknowledge that the very idea of high art was, at the very least, under siege. Hence, beginning in 1968 with Roy Grounds's National Gallery of Victoria, a new wave of museum design swept the country, reflecting not just changing architectural taste, but also an increasingly diverse visual arts culture. This produced buildings which remain significant cultural icons – Kazimierz “Charles” Sierakowski's “brutalist” Art Gallery of Western Australia, 1979, Edwards Madigan Torzillo and Partners' National Gallery of Australia (NGA), 1981, and Robin Gibson's sublime Queensland Art Gallery (QAG), 1982.

But the NGA and the QAG also flagged a key concept which continues to drive not just gallery design, but the design of all cultural infrastructure – indeed, all architecture in the public realm. This is the idea of connection: connection between the building and its external context, connection between the building's interior spaces, and connection with the broader cultural context.

Of course, there is more to cultural infrastructure than art galleries and museums. There are also drama and music theatres, multipurpose cultural buildings, and outdoor cultural amenities. In fact, at the end of the day, all public architecture reflects the cultural character of a community.

This brings us to architect, Andrew Andersons, and a very fine and welcome monograph pulling together his outstanding legacy of public and private architecture. It is not just his impressive portfolio of museum design, but all of his public architecture which reveals a sensibility acutely sensitive to its cultural

role and context. Andersons's museum design has been alterations and additions to existing historical galleries. Hence, connection has been crucial not just spatially, but also historically, in order to generate a contemporary cultural experience informed by the past.

This is a theme in his work going right back to the first part of his career in the New South Wales Government Architect's Office with the Captain Cook Wing at the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW), 1969–72, the Bicentennial Wing to the State Library of New South Wales, 1983–88, the AGNSW Bicentennial Wing, 1984–88, and the extension to New South Wales Parliament House, 1975–88, with its luminous Fountain Court featuring one of Robert Woodward's finest water features.

The monograph's authors, Bernice Murphy and Leon Paroissien AM, provide a detailed background to Andersons's life – he was born in Latvia in 1942, immigrating to Australia with his parents as a young boy – and education – an architecture degree from the University of Sydney and postgraduate studies at Yale University, in the US – in the first chapter of the book, based on exhaustive interviews with Andersons over some years.

Yale (1965/66), and his subsequent tour of Europe and work in London with Arup (who famously solved the engineering challenges of the Sydney Opera House), proved decisive in shaping Andersons's approach to museum design. Paul Rudolph's Yale Art and Architecture Building and Louis Kahn's Yale University Art Gallery, Marcel Breuer's Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, and the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark were all significant structurally, materially, and for the use of light. At the same time, Vincent Scully's lectures at Yale were crucial in forming Andersons's overall philosophy. Scully, say the authors, “provided a rich intellectual background for Andersons in reconsidering the past not as a repertoire of historically sequenced precedents but as a dynamic flux of multiple possibilities.”

Also at Yale, Serge Chermayeff proved to be crucial in developing Andersons's core

beliefs about the civic responsibility of architecture, the umbilical link between architecture and urban design, and the importance of human scale and the public realm generally – reinforced by Anderson's long association with the New South Wales Government Architect's Office from 1959 to 1988.

Offered the position of Government Architect in 1988, Andersons ultimately declined because he was rightly concerned about the way the New South Wales Government was systematically winding the office back. Once the largest architectural practice in the country, responsible for building new work, maintaining built heritage and generally shaping the state's architectural character, the office today has a tiny staff and acts only as an advisory body.

Instead, Andersons joined Peddle Thorp & Walker (PTW), Australia's second-oldest continuing practice. Given PTW's pedigree of "civic enhancement," this was a perfect fit, and Andersons worked as a director with the practice until his retirement to work privately in 2014. Murphy and Paroissien appropriately provide a concluding chapter on PTW.

The other eight chapters of the book are chronologically organised, but thematically contextualised and so with some chronological overlap. Hence, chapter 2 is "Public Works and Public Buildings (1967–88)," chapter 3 is "Enhancing the City: Preparing for the Bicentenary (1976–88)," chapter 4 is "Master Planning and Urbanism (1989–2012)," and so on.

Museums and art spaces have a dedicated chapter, as do Andersons's theatres and performance spaces, which are just as extensive and impressive as his museum work. The book boasts an impressive list of references in the form of end notes and a very useful illustrated timeline – a "catalogue of works and projects" – including unbuilt work and the names of Andersons's collaborators on all his projects.

The book also provides generous high-quality illustrations with explanatory plans, sections, elevations, and renderings – including before and after photos and drawings to illustrate how old and new connect.



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## *“His architecture for the public realm argues for public space as cultural space”*

Architectural monographs tend to date quickly. This one won't, because Andersons's career as a specialist designer of cultural venues, especially in Sydney, neatly encompasses what will always be a crucial era in the city's evolution. Although Andersons has never had the opportunity to design a museum from the ground up, Murphy and Paroissien discuss no less than thirteen projects, mostly in Sydney (four of them at the AGNSW), but also in Adelaide, Ballarat, Launceston, and Canberra. Collectively, these projects have re-shaped our expectations of museums. At the same time, Andersons's exhaustive consultations with museum professionals and his acute awareness of context have created a new paradigm for the process of designing museums. Beginning with the 1969–72 expansion of the AGNSW, his museum projects form a forty-year arc of investigation into the nature of the museum experience and how we encounter art as a living phenomenon inseparable from its broader cultural, urban, and natural context.

Ultimately, Andrew Andersons's cultural architecture embodies an always welcome – but frequently overlooked – blend of innovation and respect. At the same time, his overall architecture for the public realm argues for public space as cultural space, whose meanings are generated by the marriage of immediate experience with a sense of continuity. In this way, we oppose the threat of anomie with the reassurance of belonging. ▀

### **Andrew Andersons: Architecture and the Public Realm**

Bernice Murphy and Leon Paroissien  
NewSouth Books, 2022  
RRP AUD\$89.99

01 Drawing by Rod Simpson, illustrating the relationship between the Art Gallery of New South Wales's 1972 Captain Cook Wing and the 1988 addition

Courtesy the authors and NewSouth Books