

Sydney Water Corporation Building (former Sydney Water Board Building & former Metropolitan Water, Sewerage & Drainage Board Building)

Address

115-123 Bathurst Street, Sydney, 2000

Practice

McConnel Smith & Johnson Pty Ltd

Designed

1960

Completed

1965

History &
Description

The 1939 Metropolitan Water, Sewerage & Drainage Board Building at 339-341 Pitt Street, designed by H. E. Budden & Mackey, is a significant Inter-War Functionalist style 7 storey office building clad in granite & purpose made faience (tiles).

The McConnel Smith & Johnson tower extension to the north of the 1939 building faces onto Bathurst Street with a double story entry portico set back from the street to provide a public plaza. Designed post the Height of Buildings (Amendment) Act the development was only finally approved after a failed court appeal. When completed numerous towers had risen above the city skyline. The design for the tower took advantage of the corner site creating a footprint that provided a relationship of the width to the length such that it should appear as a relatively slender but decisively proportioned rectangle alongside the 1939 building. This resulted in a tower with optimum solar orientation. The partner in charge was Peter Johnson, who had a team approach to building design.

The 28 storey, rigid steel-framed tower, including three basements, was constructed with pre-stressed precast-concrete double T-beam floor units & precast-concrete stairs clad with precast-concrete acid-etched façade-panels (including projecting sunshade hoods, spandrels, column casings & end wall cladding). The façade panels were finished with a layer of quartzite & granite grit in white cement; the fine texture & light ochre colour was an attempt to relate to the sandstone character of the city, particularly the nearby prominent Sydney Town Hall and St Andrews Cathedral, as well as to the ochre coloured faience of the 1939 building. The precast-concrete assembly was developed to shorten construction times. To provide column free office space the double T-beams were designed to span 7m between high-tensile steel beams spanning 25m. This innovation broke new ground for the steel supplier BHP. Two floor panels were erected at a time, allowing an entire floor to be laid in one day. The narrow form of the site & the north orientation enabled ample natural light to enter the office floors. Allied with the non-commercial building owner not requiring all facades to have a view there was no requirement for extensive glazing to the east & west facades which allowed the ends of the tower to contain the service cores, providing a design, unlike many curtain wall towers of the time, that limited solar heat gain. The precast hoods were designed to further improve solar efficiencies & act in conjunction with internal screens sliding up from the sills that kept winter glare off desk surfaces.

In 1967 Johnson was appointed as Professor of Architecture at the University of Sydney & between 1968 and 1986 the Dean of the Faculty. He was awarded the Gold Medal of the RAI in 1985. While he fostered a team approach to design the Sydney Water Corporation Building is considered an important work in his career.

Statement of
Significance

The Sydney Water Corporation Building demonstrates a theme of modern architecture with planning of a cubic form in plain wall surfaces incorporating external sun-control panels by one of Australia's notable architects. It has added significance in that it was the first tall building in Sydney designed to respond to the city's historic built character with respect to façade finishes & in establishing new innovations in the construction of tall buildings in Australia. The design pioneered rapid construction techniques in combination with precast concrete elements. It established a new urban design approach as Sydney's first tall building set back from the street to provide a public plaza.

Criteria
Applicable

N1. Significant heritage value in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class or period of design
N6. Significant heritage value in demonstrating a high degree of technical achievement of a particular period



Viewed from George St
c.1963



Pitt St elevation showing the
juxtaposition of the 1939
building to the tower.
Source: M Desgrand