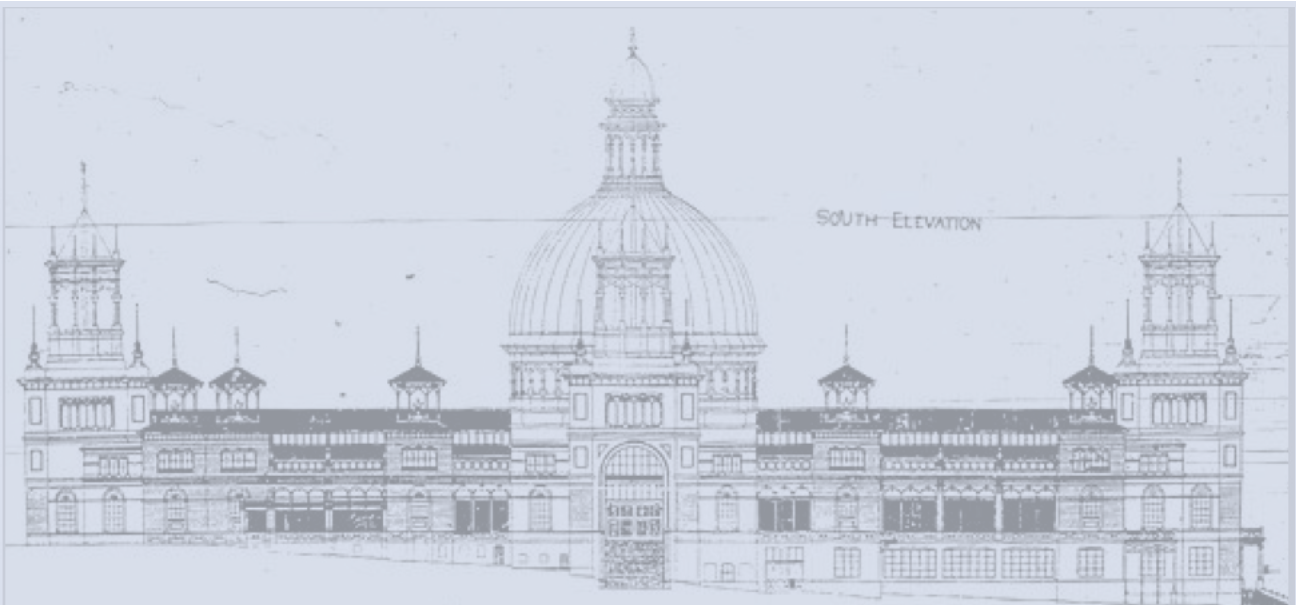


DRAFT PROPOSAL

For modern interpretation of
Garden Palace Exhibition Building,
for use as the new
Exhibition/Convention Centre in Sydney



PROPOSAL SUMMARY

Construction of a modern interpretation of the Garden Palace (Sydney International Exhibition Building), built in 1879 and destroyed by fire three years later in 1882. Meeting Sydney's current exhibition, convention and tourist needs with reference to a lost part of Sydney's history.

- **To be located:** Wherever the planned new exhibition centre is to be built. Current NSW Liberal Party preference is for it to be built at Darling Harbour at the Sydney Entertainment Centre site, although other suitable locations could include at northern tip of Barangaroo within the planned parkland, at its original site in the Domain, or at White Bay/Glebe Island.
- **A modern interpretation would not be a literal rebuilding.** A design competition can provide a new version that symbolises both Sydney's heritage and its future, emphasising the dome's potential to be one of the landmark sculptural forms in Sydney's skyline.
- **Government and industry outcomes:** A practical solution to the extra convention/exhibition space currently needed by Sydney, that also provides the city with a new architectural icon; an ideal 'destination building' to encourage pedestrian traffic; and an ideal tourist attraction.
- **Guiding principles and wider benefit to Sydney:** The Opera House, the Harbour Bridge, and the Garden Palace are the three buildings that have symbolised Sydney internationally. This proposal provides an opportunity to restore a new version of this missing link in Sydney's architectural and cultural history that can be the bold gesture needed to increase Sydney's share of the convention market, and can provide a popular 21st century reaffirmation of what the Garden Palace was first designed to symbolise: Sydney's status as a global city.

DIMENSIONS OF THE BUILDING

Original Garden Palace: 250 m long, 150 m wide; dome 30 m in diameter, 47 m above ground floor. It was the sixth largest dome in the world when built, and the largest dome in the Southern Hemisphere.

Altering dimensions: Proposed modern versions will, and should, of course change the shape and dimensions in many ways. Wherever it was to be located, the idea is for a new interpretation of basic elements of the old structure—a modern building inspired by the original.



COMMERCIAL POTENTIAL FOR THE BUILDING

- **Other uses:** In addition to convention/exhibition use, a modernised Garden Palace interior can be adapted for all kinds of commercial/cultural/hotel/cruise-ship terminal use. A multi-use building will allow the proposal to pay for itself, prevent it becoming a white elephant outside convention/exhibition times, and allow it to be one of the most desirable business and entertainment venues in Sydney.
- **Tourist interest:** The proposed building's close proximity to the tourist precincts of Darling Harbour, The Rocks, and the CBD will ensure tourist interest.
- **A new dining/entertainment precinct:** Ideal potential exists for harbour-facing interior and exterior spaces of a modern Garden Palace, on ground and upper floors, to be made into café/restaurant/entertainment venues with city and water views. Extensive balcony promenades and rooftop spaces were included in the original design, and should be included in the modern version.



HISTORICAL AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Cultural importance of the Garden Palace: One of Sydney and Australia's most politically and culturally important buildings; announcing to the international community in the late 19th century that the colony had come of age, and that Sydney was able to participate successfully in both the international exhibition movement and the burgeoning global economy of the era. The building also triggered massive city, suburban and cultural growth, and a new urban ethos that intersected with national aspirations which accelerated the federation process. (Architectural historian Dr Peter Proudfoot, editor of *Colonial City, Global City: Sydney's International Exhibition 1879*, can provide expert opinion on these issues on request.) The building was the subject of a major exhibition at Customs House at the time of the 2000 Olympics, so is well known in Sydney.

Designed by James Barnett, NSW Government Architect, who completed the Sydney GPO among many other projects, its importance can be understood more easily by the fact that the domed Melbourne Exhibition Building of exactly the same period was the first building in Australia to be granted World Heritage status, in 2004. A key point is that Sydney once had in its skyline one of the largest domes in the world, attached to a very popular and important public building, and Sydney would still have that building today if not for an accident of fate.

Precedents for reinterpreting/reconstructing architecture of the past: Many precedents exist for reconstructing and/or reinterpreting architecture destroyed by fire or other accident. A recent example is the 2005 literal rebuilding of Dresden's 18th century Frauenkirche Cathedral, destroyed by fire in the 1940s. This building has in common with the Garden Palace that a landmark dome was temporarily lost to a city skyline.

Leaving aside that the history of architecture is one of constant reinvention (neo-classical, gothic revival, post-modern etc.), and the countless examples of buildings destroyed in

war and later rebuilt, some other recent examples include: rebuilding of Moscow's 19th century Manezh Exhibition Hall, with an altered interior, after a 2004 fire; literal rebuilding of Venice's opera house after a 1996 fire; literal rebuilding of Sydney's Macquarie Lighthouse after structural damage; and rebuilding of St Kilda bathers pavilion in Melbourne in a similar style after 1990s redevelopment. There are current plans to rebuild Tel Aviv's 1930s Produce of the Land exhibition palace and London's 19th century Crystal Palace exhibition hall, the initiator of the international exhibition movement that the Garden Palace engaged in. Sydney's recent Paddington Reservoir project, St Mary's cathedral new spires and Berlin's modern dome on the Reichstag in 1999 also provide other, different, examples of a 20th and 21st century willingness to revisit/reconstruct/reinterpret past architecture.

Norman Foster's Reichstag project provides an excellent example of what can be achieved by a modern interpretation of a lost dome.

Relocation of the structure from its original harbour/Domain site also has precedent. The Crystal Palace was re-sited to another suburb before it was destroyed by fire in 1936. Both Mies van der Rohe's and Le Corbusier's 1920s international exhibition pavilions were reconstructed and re-sited in the 1980s; and recent examples include the re-siting of the 19th century Murray House barracks in Hong Kong from the CBD to the waterfront, and the re-siting of two of Manchester's historic hotels to a different part of the city following IRA bomb damage.

Engagement with nearby architectural context: If built at Sydney Entertainment Centre, Barangaroo or White Bay, Garden Palace dome can be seen as engaging with the spires and domes of Balmain, the dome of the Sydney Observatory, and the iconic curve of the Harbour Bridge can also be seen as a nearby sculptural/skyline context for a dome shape. Rebuilding it at these locations, or at its original site, can be seen as forming a neatly symbolic topographical line, giving an excellent tripartite representation of the three key structures of Sydney's cultural history.

Some theoretical considerations: A decision to reinterpret a historic building has more validity than a decision to destroy a historic building, as has happened too often in Sydney. Each decision is a value judgement on architectural and cultural history. But no decision was taken to destroy the Garden Palace—it has not been given the chance to become part of Sydney life, having lasted only three years because of an accident.

- The key theoretical point is that Sydney can be seen as a city confident and bold enough to look to its heritage, as well as to its future. It can be seen as confident enough to mix its many modern 'rectangular' architectural forms with one important (modernised) reminder of its heritage. Built to symbolise Sydney's status as a global city in the 19th century, the Garden Palace can be seen as fulfilling that role again in the 21st century.



CONCLUSION

The unique sculptural form of this convention centre proposal can be seen as the factor to ensure its success, taking its place amongst the Harbour Bridge, the Opera House, Aurora Place and other sculptural monuments in the skyline of 21st century Sydney that continue to attract international tourist interest.

In order for Sydney to regain the ground it has lost in the international convention/exhibition market, it must make a bold gesture to enable it to stand out in this competitive market, and prevent the real danger of unimaginative commercial/residential development 'defining' the harbour in future.