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Remembering Harry Seidler 1926-2006

Six authors pay tribute to the legacy of architect Harry Seidler

CHRIS ABEL

One of the greatest architects of any era to work in the southern hemisphere, Harry Seidler has earned a special place in the history of Modern architecture. Partly trained in an engineering school, his personal technical mastery, especially of reinforced concrete, was rare amongst his own generation of designers, let alone amongst earlier Modernists, and laid the foundation for the fluid, baroque forms he produced with Luigi Nervi that characterized his later work. Matching technical competence with sculptural flair, he was one of those few designers of his age capable of fulfilling the Modernist dream of integrating art and modern technology.

Yet there remains a curious ambivalence in critical circles, both local and international, regarding his more specific place in Australian architecture. The widely accepted view has it that Seidler was one of the last orthodox Modernists, whose origins go straight back to the Bauhaus through the group of celebrated émigré teachers, Walter Gropius, Josef Albers and Marcel Breuer, under whom the fledgling architect studied after the war in North America.

Admittedly, Seidler's frequent references and loyalty to his teachers, not to mention his occasional disparaging comments on Australia's status as a cultural 'backwater,' partly encouraged this view, provoking its own backlash.

However, the work tells a quite different story. Breuer himself—arguably the most important of Seidler's early teachers and the first to employ the graduate architect—can hardly be described as an orthodox Modernist, if what is meant by that is some kind of slavish adherence to the Machine as model and metaphor for architectural production. As his own early work in North America testifies, Breuer was profoundly influenced by his studies of vernacular architecture, the lessons from which he applied to his houses in New England, and which in turn impressed his young apprentice. It was those lessons—of modest houses made largely of local materials and carefully set into the surrounding landscape—that Seidler brought with him to Australia, together with the more frequently quoted Modernist spatial concepts.

Seidler also demonstrated his superior technical prowess—superior, that is, to his teachers' as well as to most contemporaries'—early on with the Rose House, 1952, which immediately followed the Rose Seidler House, his first work in his adopted country. Breuer had struggled to make his famed Cantilever House in New Canaan, 1947, stand up, and eventually had to prop up the overhanging portions with

supporting walls below. Though similar in outward appearance, the timber-framed upper structure of the Rose House was built around a more reliable, bridge-like steel frame, much like the suspended structures favoured decades later by High-Tech architects. Raised above the ground on slender steel legs, the 'floating house' type Seidler borrowed from Breuer also makes far better sense in the warm climate of New South Wales than it did in New England, and has direct local precedents in the raised houses commonly found up the east coast of Australia.

Seidler's greatest contribution to a regionalized Modern architecture, however, is in the series of heavily shaded towers and other large residential and office buildings he designed and built in cities in different parts of Australia and around the Pacific Rim. These later works owe more to Seidler's early association with the Brazilian designer Oscar Niemeyer, together with his admiration for baroque architecture in general, than to any orthodox Modernist influences. For all its mixed origins, however, the result is an architecture clearly belonging to and of the southern hemisphere, if not specifically Australia. For example, writing on Seidler's Riverside Centre in Brisbane, 1986, Kenneth Frampton, who has elsewhere also interpreted Seidler in more orthodox terms, decisively claims the work as belonging to the school of critical regionalism, even though, in this instance, he does not actually use that precise description:

With its arbitrarily placed 'façade-terraces' and its lush tropical landscaping and outriding organic forms . . . and above all with its rationally articulated central structure, Riverside may be read as a tectonically rigorous but topographically inflected work; as a building that consciously mediates between the demands of universal civilization and the constraints of the *topos*, between the received standards of a global practice and a critical commitment to the cultivation of a local identity and culture.¹

Conversely, for all its undoubted virtues as high quality social housing, the Neue Donau Housing Estate, which Seidler completed in Vienna in 2001, looks strangely out of place in the European setting and climate and reveals itself to us for what it is: an import from brighter climes in the southern hemisphere, skilfully adapted to its unique site on the banks of the Danube.

Given these and many more examples of Seidler's regionalism, when, a few years ago, at Seidler's invitation, I first came to write something about his work, I found the received wisdom about his so-called orthodoxy both puzzling and disturbing. Puzzling, because I had always found something quite exotic and definitely unorthodox about Seidler's work, especially in the 80s and 90s, with its crisp, sun-drenched lines and curves. Disturbing, because, as I eventually concluded, it suggested a singular and particularly narrow view—deeply rooted in rural and 'bush' mythology—of what 'Australian' architecture is, or ought to be.

That view, encapsulated in the still favoured image of the detached house set in the bush, with its tin roof reminiscent of simple farm buildings, seems increasingly detached from reality, if not delusional. More than anything else, perhaps the greatest value of Seidler's work to Australia's architects, who often seem to be in deep denial of their urbanized history, is that he taught them to accept and to

work within the context of the modern Australian city, with all its problems of density, scale, multiple functions and cultural complexity. That, as a relatively recent European immigrant, he also produced an architecture more expressive of that special urban context than any other Australian designer has yet done, is something to be wondered at.

There was a blind spot in Seidler's outlook, however. In referring to Australia as a 'backwater,' even if only, as one suspects, to rub his critics up the wrong way, Seidler underestimated the current seismic shift in global economics and culture from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Whether it likes it or not—and most Australians seem to like it, including its architects, many of whom are now working around the Pacific Rim—Australia is being steadily drawn into this emergent vortex and may never be described as a 'backwater' again.

- 1 K. Frampton, "Seidler at Riverside: a retrospective synthesis," in Harry Seidler, Riverside Centre, Cammeray: Horwitz Grahame, 1988, p. 10.

PHILIP DREW

At first glance, Harry Seidler's choice of Sydney might seem quite accidental but there was a little more to it: Vienna which he had left was a frontier city on the edge of Europe and a bulwark across the Danube against Ottoman expansion, which it had successfully resisted with the assistance of other European powers in 1683. It was also a very provincial city that absorbed cultural currents from the east. In this respect it was comparable to Sydney as a bastion of the English empire in the Far East.

Seidler's father came from humble beginnings that have been traced back to Rumania, but in the prosperity of the 1920s managed, with the support of Seidler's uncle, to establish himself as a successful entrepreneur in the garment industry. Rose Seidler was ambitious for her son and sent him to the Wasagymnasium (1932-38) where many of Vienna's leading doctors, including Sigmund Freud, gained their schooling.

Seidler never finished school but left Vienna shortly after Anschluss by train for England, taking his heavy Austrian bicycle with him. It was typical of the values in architecture Seidler would espouse: heavy, strong and well-built, long lasting, with an elaborate set of gears, and demanding on the leg muscles.

Interned by the British as a foreign alien in 1940, Seidler was shipped to the Isle of Man and then to Quebec. Released from camp, he studied architecture at the University of Manitoba, Winnipeg (1941-44), and travelled to Toronto to work on hospitals. With the support of a scholarship, he rounded off his education at Harvard's GSD under Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer (1945-46). In his class were

Paul Rudolph and I.M. Pei, who were later to achieve fame and distinction.

At Gropius' suggestion, he studied design under Josef Albers at Black Mountain College, Beria, in North Carolina in 1946. He then joined Breuer as his first architectural assistant. Breuer could not afford to pay him a salary, but Seidler stayed regardless, doing his drawings and office errands, even taking care of the master when he came down with the flu, which earned him the nickname, *Mädchen für alles* ('the maid of all work'). He would live up to it in his later career, when his success depended as much on his other activities as it did on his purely architectural contribution. He was a great publicist and advocate of Modern architecture in an Australia which strongly resisted acceptance of his message. He was an entrepreneur, educator, adept at finance and a developer in his own right.

His first house was designed in Breuer's office for an American client at Foxborough, Massachusetts. When he arrived in Australia to design his mother's house, he simply adapted this design with only very minor changes for a site that was the Australian bush equivalent of Foxborough. It had by that time been published in *Arts and Architecture* magazine.

It is surprising, looking back; how many houses he managed to build in little more than six years. His survey book, published in 1954, illustrated some 29 projects, and this did not include all the work. It is little wonder he never returned to New York, although it was always to remain his spiritual home. He was stunningly successful right from the outset. The reason is not difficult to understand. Seidler offered a comprehensive new approach to domestic design that was rational and took into account how people actually lived. Moreover, Hollywood movies often showed Modern interiors and were set in Wright or modern houses, so people could recognise the coming tradition in Seidler's architecture.

These early houses were done for quite ordinary clients, in contrast to his later de luxe houses of the 1990s, which are rich people's houses. Their plans had clarity, and were organised around the separation of night and day living areas. They also recognised outdoor living as a significant feature of Australian lifestyle by breaking down the boundary between inside and outside. Prior to Seidler, houses had been collections of rooms assembled along long hallways. He changed this by opening the rooms into each other so the space became continuous and flowed dynamically in a series of swirls. This gave the impression that the house was much larger.

He was credited with inventing the butterfly roof sloping inwards from two wings. His houses are highly articulated concise open diagrams of living. Some, as the Rose house at Turrumurra (1951), gained expressive strength by its lightweight steel frame of hangers suspended from slender columns.

The 1960s provided new opportunities for Seidler. He had already completed apartments in the city, but this repertoire was expanded by the Australia Square project under the aegis of Dick Dusseldorp. The chief obstacle was the number of small properties that would need to be consolidated to create a developable site.

Seidler really struggled; Dusseldorp sent him to New York to work alongside I.M. Pei, but, even

so, the design did not come quickly. Even after he had settled on the cylinder, it looked raw. Enter Pier Luigi Nervi, who supplied the idea of using the precast cladding as integral formwork for the columns and gave them their subtle tapered profile. Nervi added the marvellous ribbed lobby ceiling, and V-column pilotis for the low Pitt Street block. But the real achievement of Australia Square was its enormously successful food court and plaza area, which even today has become the measure of public spaces in the city.

The second significant architectural phase, undertaken with the Australian engineer Peter Miller, involved the development of a system of precast concrete T-beams, which was first applied in his ground breaking Trade Group Offices for 2000 employees, in Canberra, 1970-74. It was constructed from a combination of 15.24m T floor beams resting on 24.38m span I façade beams between cylindrical cores. As much as possible the construction used standard components and was mechanised. A similar approach was adopted in the later MLC Centre, Sydney (1971-75), in Seidler's own offices at Milson's Point (1971-73), the Navy Weapons Workshop, Garden Island (1980-85), the Australian Embassy, Paris (1973-77), and his many office towers. The beams became a structural signature of Seidler's work.

Before 1970, Seidler's forms had been strictly rectangular. With the Chevron project in Melbourne, he began investigating curvilinear and quadrant shapes for his plans, culminating in the Australian Embassy, where the curvature of the quadrants is opposed, and Grosvenor Place, which exploited overlapping quadrants around an elliptical core. This really signalled a new sense of geometry, and while his commitment to standardisation and mass-production remained unaffected, it is indicative of his search for a more expressive poetic approach to form.

Why he should have moved away from functional, masculine linear to an equally disciplined curvilinear planning approach is unclear, but Seidler often explained it by reference to the Baroque and his admiration of Borromini's masterpiece, S. Carlo alle Quattro Fontane, Rome, 1641. If so, it was strictly a case of geometry without the metaphysics or religious belief.

There may be a more personal explanation, as indicated by Seidler's pronouncement about Jørn Utzon's Opera House design, "that it was poetic." All the poetry was in the shell roofs, and this may have influenced Seidler—that is, poetry is about curves.

Whatever the motivation, from the 1970s on, and more especially in his later work, the forms become curvilinear, until in the Horizon, North, and Cove apartments of the 1990s the facades become so animated that the balconies almost fly off. Collin Griffiths points to the Tuggeranong Offices, Canberra project (1974-76) as a significant opening shot but Seidler's Rocks scheme in 1963 also incorporated continuously curved wings lifted aloft on pilotis that was reminiscent of Le Corbusier's Algiers plan for 'Obus' for Algiers in 1932.

One thing that is rarely commented on, but which influenced many young Sydney architects such as Kenneth Woolley, Michael Dysart and others, was the sheer clarity of Seidler's plans. Each was a

beautiful diagram of living and memorable in its own right. By placing his plans side by side in series, the entire story of his architecture can be seen unfolding, becoming more diverse, taking up and developing particular themes, as in his series of office towers from 1975 on. The plans look like stamps or flowers in a kaleidoscope.

This illustrates an aspect of Seidler's career, his systemisation of form. There is nothing arbitrary, ideas for projects are never wasted, but are picked up at a later date and reused where the programme allowed it. Seidler never seems to be satisfied until he has exhausted the formal possibilities of a particular motif. He is quite dogged.

No account of Seidler's legacy can avoid mentioning his city towers and the themes they developed. Often accused of ignoring people and the street, Seidler undoubtedly adhered to the Modernist proposition of the tower set back on its plaza and has suffered for it. It was an approach he never apologised for, even extending it by adapting Utzon's Opera House platform for his MLC Centre. They should be taken as a series much as one would view a Frank Stells painting series. The MLC simplified the polygonal geometry of the Australia Square into a square with chamfered corners; Grosvenor Place (1982-88) imposed two quadrants around a core; Riverside, Brisbane (1983-86) is a triangle with round corners; the Shell Headquarters, Melbourne (1985-89) is a question mark posing as a shell growth generated from adjoining small and large circles; QV1 Tower Perth (1987-91) is a combination of three circles in a triangular pattern pressed into two swelling bum cheeks at the rear by small circle that results in a 'V' tower shape that looks out over the Swan River in two directions, but is pushed inward on the other side.

The Capita Centre, Sydney (1984-89) is more like a palm tree trapped between its neighbours and struggling upwards into the air. It was configured vertically with its 30 floors on three sides forming an open spiral. In this sense, it is a departure from the pattern but is easily explained as the result of Kevin Roche's Ford Foundation in New York.

His domestic clients changed. They were rich and wanted houses that were expensive, up-market palaces. This was in contrast to his early 1950s domestic work for a broad cross-section of Australian society.

So what of the later houses? Even during the busiest times in his commercial practice through the 80s and 90s, Seidler continued to design houses despite his busy commercial practice. They were a change of pace, an outlet for creative impulses that were unsatisfied by the longer haul, city office towers that required so much sustained dedicated effort on his part.

The Hillside Housing, Kooralbyn, Queensland (1979-82), and Yarralumla group Houses, Canberra (1982-84), are typical of his systemised vernacular approach using cubic shapes with single pitched roofs arranged in tilted combinations reflecting the contours, much like an expanded Mediterranean village.

The Waverly Cultural Centre, Melbourne (1988), with its two wave roofs, is a literal translation that was to reappear later in several houses, notably the Balmain and Southern Highlands houses. The Hamilton house, Vacluse (1989-91) was a stylishly baroque affair with its two dancing 'S'-shaped balconies overlapping each other in a vertical sequence that recalled Borromini. Inside, with the exception of the central circular stair, everything is rectangular and square. The curves are imposed on the outside and over the entrance, so they do not interfere with the logic of the interior functions.

Seidler believed the will could accomplish anything it set its mind to. To rephrase Schopenhauer, one might summarise his approach as 'Architecture as Will,' but he is perhaps best seen as an instance of Friedrich Nietzsche's 'over-man' trapped in a godless and irrational reality, destined to realise the fullest possible 'enhancement of life' through architecture. In Seidler's case, the nihilism of the present is overcome by the heroic will of the architect in imposing order and geometry in an inherently unstable, disorderly world. As in 'Superman,' the outcome depends on him alone.

I remember a meeting at his Killara house. I had brought a copy of my recently finished manuscript on Glenn Murcutt, *Leaves of Iron*, with me. When there was a lull in the conversation, and after listening to Seidler talk at length about his own work, I slipped the manuscript across to him. There was silence. Seidler looked pensive, absorbed, but did not move. After a time, he reached forward and pushed it aside. This was not something he was prepared to look at or acknowledge. It was as though I had betrayed him by writing about someone else.

Such was Seidler's self-absorption; it left little room for the appreciation of other architecture. He bitterly opposed post-modernism when it arrived—perhaps rightly, given its shallowness and blatant misuse of history—and he lived long enough to see a revival of support for Modern architecture in the 1990s.

There is no doubting that his death on 9 March, 2006, marks the end of an era. He dominated Australian architecture for nearly six decades and was the leading spokesperson, publicist, teacher and exponent of Modernism in this country. Though his work changed and evolved, his basic beliefs remained largely unaffected. What he believed, he believed. No one was ever left in any doubt about that. Sometimes he was caught out in inconsistency, as when he deplored Sir Norman Foster's Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank Building as 'tin can architecture,' then abruptly changed his position when Foster arranged for his Gold Medal from the RIBA in 1996.

While he was often a difficult and controversial personality in life, this should in no way obscure the true nature of his achievement and contribution to Australian life and architecture, a contribution that was monumental and sustained for such a long period. With his passing, one is reminded that Modern architecture, though just as valid now as it was when Walter Gropius completed his Model factory for the Werkbund exhibition at Cologne in 1914, must, as the name requires, stay anchored in the present.

Seidler would have strongly approved that sentiment, just as, in practice, he always sought to move with the latest technology, but saw it not as an end in itself, but as leading towards an architecture that was fully imbued with, and expressed, the spirit of its age.

TOM HENEGHAN

'Horizon,' in Sydney, is 'larrikin' architecture. A loud, vivacious, energetic, hedonistic building that celebrates the same characteristics as its country. Newly-arrived from the etiquette of England, via the manners of Japan, I couldn't understand the exuberance of the building... until I began to understand something about Australia. Horizon celebrates the 'spirit'—an un-common quality in the works of a profession which can take itself far too seriously—except, say, at Sydney Opera House, Bilbao, Ronchamp, etc.

Did Harry take himself too seriously? If he did, he had the right to—no one can seriously question the genius of much of his work. He knew the responsibilities and possibilities of architecture, and could hardly fail to be aware of his abilities. But, his frequent generosity and his often self-deprecating humour contrasted starkly with the 'terribilita' of his public persona and works. He was certainly impatient, as were many of his generation who lived through the wars of the 20th Century and emerged from their experiences determined to use their gifts to re-make the world. James Stirling was exactly the same. These were people impatient with bureaucrats who had power but no design sense. They were also impatient with architects whose sense of responsibility did not match their own. It is irresponsible to talk of Seidler's architecture without considering the world-events that framed his ethic. His buildings were heroic gestures against asphyxiating mediocrity, and for 'joie de vivre.'

The public spaces in Grosvenor Place and the Capita Centre, and the lobbies of the Cove Apartments in Sydney and the Riverside Centre in Brisbane show modernity's commitment to the public domain, and Seidler's commitment to the notion that what is called 'modern architecture' need not be bland—in fact, that it is a pre-requisite of 'modernity' that it must not be bland. These are among the most exhilarating spaces ever built. The absence of any other urban architecture in Australia of whom the same might be said is a measure of the vacancy that Seidler leaves.

LAWRENCE NIELD

Harry Seidler was a forceful personality who for fifty years made forceful architecture. Sydney is fortunate to have a number of his buildings in its central area. Central Sydney would be much the worse for not having them. Similarly, the lesser number of his buildings in Melbourne (turning the corner), Brisbane

(opening to the river), Perth (strengthening the street) and Canberra (great linked courts) are also apt and important. I believe that it is in these major office buildings that we will most miss him.

His first major inner city building, Australia Square (1961), remains a significant and timeless piece of architecture and urbanism. It brought city public space and street definition to the city; it eschewed podiums and slabs. The round office tower rose straight from the pavement while allowing an Alexander Calder sculpture to address the street. Few ensembles have such clarity. At George Street, the lobby with its lifts, under the giant Le Corbusier tapestry and the Pier Luigi Nervi stress-pattern structure on the soffit above, is an extraordinary address. At the Pitt Street level there are bars, cafes and shops and genuine urban activity with miraculous sun at lunchtime. The Plaza Building retains the alignment of Pitt Street while opening to the square at street level. This was one of the first of Sydney's towers, and it remains the best.

In all his central city buildings he astonishingly produced both lightness and gravitas. He showed the confident materiality of precast concrete, glass and stone. The buildings had both reductionism and extravagance. There was no phoney pattern-making in curtain walls—no 'glossiness.' I suggest that these will be the buildings for which he is remembered.

Seidler, I suggest, had a confidence and originality in his large buildings that is not nearly so apparent in his houses. His early houses were referential and his later houses, certainly in their materials, lacked clarity. It seems to me that very few architects in Australia have been able to bring coherent propositions to both houses and larger projects. The environment of doing a house (for a special and empathetic client) is quite different from the constrained and often hostile design environment of major buildings. The struggle is harder. Seidler's personality and tectonic understanding seemed perfectly suited for this major project environment, particularly the major commercial projects. He did things that few others could.

The Hong Kong Club and Offices building (1980) shows him at the height of his architectural powers. It is a building that uses concrete, and particularly concrete precast spandrel or beams, in the richest and most provocative way. The Club marks a departure from the more structurally disciplined and directed buildings of the 60s and 70s. It introduced a different formal order, one that we see developed in his later buildings. There is a new fluidity. It is a remarkable building in its use of concrete in a way that shows both its means of support and its giant curvilinear columns, and yet floats with a lightness, a Borromini plasticity and order, that drives from an intrinsic understanding and mastery of his material. This is a building of order, programme and rich substance. Australian cities will miss him. The major project will miss him.

PETER OBERLANDER

Harry was born into a well-regarded and successful family of shirt-makers, who brought their skills to Australia after being expelled from their native Austria. Harry's life trajectory included a significant period in England; a highly influential learning period in the US, aided by a significant human experience of living and working in Canada. I knew him through most of his life and shared many ups and downs. Above all he was an ARCHITECT'S ARCHITECT, whose life was totally consumed by designing, building and documenting an unparalleled portfolio of internationally significant buildings.

All his buildings, from the Rose Seidler house, lovingly dedicated to his Mother, and today preserved as a National Heritage Site, to building highrise towers in Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth, and Canberra, as well as Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, and Vienna, exhibited the inimitable Harry Seidler mark on the urban environment.

If I would have to choose amongst the innumerable Seidler creations, my choice would be Australia's Embassy in Paris, built more than 30 years ago. The Embassy—a mere 400 meters from the Eiffel Tower—overlooks river palisades with a tree-lined park. The design of two opposing quadrant shaped buildings relates to the axis of the Champs de Mars. In designing and placing the buildings Harry paid tribute to the historic context of the city while achieving a significant Australian presence along the Seine.

Harry brought Modern Architecture to Australia, embracing innovative structural engineering (Pier Luigi Nervi), and the essential presence of art and sculpture (Josef Albers, Alexander Calder). Architecture and graphic art, intertwined and interdependent, were essential components of introducing Harry's innumerable clients to European and North American standards of taste and aesthetics.

Apart from Harry's unique design talent he pursued a heroic career in photography. Never without his beloved *Leica*, he and Penelope, his partner in life and travel, "travelled the world with an architect's eye." Three years ago *Taschen* published the results of Harry's life-long addiction to photographing buildings around the globe, initially guided by his brother Marcel over more than half a century. Harry's *The Grand Tour* (more than 700 pages long) truly captured buildings around the world and shared with us his unique vision of the built environment.

Despite Harry's unique photographic and unparalleled technical skill, he fell prey to the architect's antipathy to people "cluttering up the image." With very few exceptions, Harry photography pays tribute to the built form, its sculptural qualities and its spatial inclusions. Apart from his beloved Penelope, the human form does not intrude into the photographic built form.

His life and achievements were celebrated at home and abroad. Ten years ago, Queen Elizabeth II conferred upon him the Royal Gold Medal of the Royal Institute of British Architects. Ten years earlier he had become Companion of the Order of Australia, and fifteen years before he was elevated to Officer of

the Order of the British Empire. Innumerable Honorary Doctorates traced his professional career.

Accident and coincidence contributed to my sharing Harry's formative years: kindergarten, high school and graduate studies at Harvard, together with a memorable stretch at Black Mountain College, all intertwined our lives. Shortly before his fatal illness he visited Vancouver and delivered a unique lecture linking his buildings to an evolving philosophic perspective, as if to summarize his professional life in the presence of long-term friends.

Harry's perspective can be summarized in his own words:

Free rein must be given to the expression of the laws of nature—not what is *imagined* to be so by many structurally naïve architects, but the unassailable physical truth of statics. Richness of expression can result from such search, which will have that irreplaceable quality of longevity, of remaining valid, being born of the immutable and irrevocable truth of nature."

When the Viennese welcomed Hitler, and his Storm Troopers entered Austria on Thursday March 12 1938, Harry & I were skiing in the Tyrol Alps, as we did during our high school term breaks. We were in the middle of our sixth years of Latin and four years of Greek—the Classic High School curriculum. The next day, upon our return to Vienna, we were expelled from School immediately . . . This is how our Odyssey began.

As middle-teenagers (we had reached 16/17 years) . . . our fathers were arrested for various spurious reasons, especially for our religious beliefs. Our families were devastated. After being 'Austrians' for many generations we had to 'flee' for our lives in whatever way possible.

The next time Harry and I met again was in Hyton and the Isle of Man—British internment camps—on our way to another surprise TRIP, this time in a leaky overseas bucket destined (unbeknownst to us) to Canada . . . Various camps & two years later, Harry ended up at the University of Manitoba and I at McGill. Both of us determined to become architects. By September 1946, I was surprised by being offered a fellowship for Graduate Studies at Harvard's GSD. I was assigned a dormitory late. In fact there was only one bed left in a double residence suite at Perkins Hall. Having no choice, I took it. SURPRISE, SURPRISE: Harry was the other HALF. We were once again united. What a year it was!!! With Walter Gropius & Martin Wagner & Marcel Breuer, and during the '47 summer at BLACK MOUNTAIN COLLEGE with Josef & Anni Albers and all the subsequent 'pioneers,' such as Rauschenberg, Merce Cunningham, John Cage, Don Page.

While Harry proceeded to 'visit' his family in Australia (never to return), I returned to Canada. But we never lost track of each other, our respective families or our commitment to skiing.

JAMES PERRY

It was an interesting journey to have studied under Harry, some 5 years ago. He taught the value of architecture based on his remarkable understanding and experience of space and place making so evident in his vast portfolio of work. As a teacher, he never accepted any superficial justification or unclear direction and would be rigorous and demanding in achieving the highest quality and outcome. He pushed each student to a new level of work, both in expectation and output and there was no excuse to achieve anything less.

I will remember Harry for his wonderful appreciation of the possibility of architecture and his unabated determination to achieve the highest quality possible. Probably the most defining moment in understanding Harry's determination was, when asked which was his most interesting and favorite project, his response was "the next one"!

JENNIFER TAYLOR

Harry Seidler made a greater sustained contribution to the architecture of this country than any other architect in its history. Over the years, from when he first arrived, he never wavered in the pursuit of excellence. Australian architecture will forever be indebted to him, as it grew up in terms of culture, ethics, and performance under his determined and courageous leadership and tutorage.

"Harry"—what a remarkable performer on the architectural stage. There was Harry and the rest of us. Harry Seidler stood alone in a particular zone of distinction that he fashioned for himself through creativity, courage, confidence and conviction. Not only did he dramatically act out his role as leading man with style and authority, but also in the process he set the standards, raised the bar, and elevated the expectations and the profile for performance for Australian architecture.

Seidler, with his intercontinental background and his intellectual rationalism, was an anomaly when he entered the Australian architectural milieu in the 1940s and, despite almost sixty years in Australia, his European-American upbringing fundamentally conditioned his perception and he remained immersed in the wider world of international culture, of which his classic modern architecture is an outcome.

His was a memorable personality. He expected respect and received it, but while he was certainly Australia's best known architect, to most he remained an admired but distant figure, not always easy to relate to, and certainly impossible to argue with. Be it in a law court, council chamber, a boardroom or on the building site, he fought for what he believed was right and was unshakable, dismissing with contempt contrary positions that he regarded as mindless.

Seidler's was a formidable figure, not simply because of his creative ability but due to his unwavering tenacity. He never swayed from the lessons instilled in him at Harvard and at Black Mountain College, nor those learned from practising modern architects such as Oscar Niemeyer. Modern art, notably American art, provided further inspiration, and later the Baroque. These exemplars served as a catechism and his certainty as to their unquestionable correctness gave them, and him, an irrefutable authority. This conviction made it possible for him to achieve a remarkably consistent follow-through from design to builtwork, and to sustain the quality performance characteristic of all of his architecture. Like Mies, Seidler believed in the process of continual evolution and refinement of a determined and tested 'model-type' and his pursuit of this direction is evident in his persistence with the development of the 'city building' and 'house' types that he had arrived at early in his career.

Seidler's contribution to the culture in Australia came in so many ways; as an advocate in the press and in the courts, as a designer, writer, photographer, teacher, and as a supporter of the arts. He commanded every scene he entered. To the classroom and lecture hall he brought the same unarguable message and the students were swept up by his rhetoric. His bow ties became an icon of Australian architecture, and I suspect he secretly enjoyed it when students, with good-natured humor, would turn up to his lectures wearing paper replicas!

Seidler's admired and reviled uncompromising modern houses of the late 1940s and early 1950s served as shock therapy to a rather complacent and insular profession. Seidler was a mentor to many, stood aloof from the criticism of others, and persisted with these ground-breaking buildings that gave Australia its first local taste of an unadulterated modernism, and so opened a new era for its architecture.

I first heard of Seidler when I was a student in architectural school in America in the 1960s through the publication of Australia Square, which remains one of the most important buildings of his career. This seminal urban project established him as a major civic architect of world standing, and later served as the 'type-model' for the many urban towers that were to pay a significant part in shaping Australian cities. In it one finds the fundamental characteristics: the building as a free-standing sculptural object to be read from all sides, the urban gesture at ground level, the rationale of structure to determine form, the refinement of concrete technology, and the importance of art as a complimentary foil to the architecture. In Seidler's mature work the curved lines of the circular plan of Australia Square were set free and, within a geometrically controlled order, roamed in diverse ways enriching the buildings. Riverside Centre, Brisbane, can be singled out to demonstrate the best architectural and urban qualities of the later city buildings. Riverside Centre is a notable urban achievement, which, besides being an accomplished work of architecture, regenerated an entire urban precinct and turned the focus of a city towards its river with unprecedented generous riverside plazas. Extending this urban riverfront stands Riparian Plaza, Seidler's last major building, that marks a fitting climax to his career as it explodes in celebration against the sky with an exuberant crown of weaving curves of concrete ribbons.

Thank you Harry. We will miss you.