

Kazimierz Sierakowski

I was born in Warsaw on Australia Day over seventy years ago. I left Warsaw in 1944 after the collapse of the Warsaw Uprising to become a Prisoner of War. Due to the political situation, in which Poland found itself after the Second World War, I decided not to return to the country of my birth. At the age of twenty, like many of my compatriots, I found myself without a country, profession, family or money. And so I became a twentieth century nomad. I re-joined the army, the Polish 2nd corps, of the British 8th Army in Italy. While in uniform I was accepted as a student at the Facolta di Architettura, Universita di Roma. There I completed the first year and part of the second year. In November 1946 the Polish Army was transferred to England. I continued my architectural studies in London at the School of Architecture, Polish University College, obtaining my degree in 1950, and the Continental degree of Engineer Architect in 1951. In 1955 I received British Citizenship, and was elected as an Associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects. This gave the opportunity of practicing not only in Britain, but also in all countries of the Commonwealth.

Between 1950 and 1957 I was employed at the Architectural Division, Ministry of Works, London. I worked on a variety of projects, mainly connected with improvements and extensions to London museums and art galleries. My first project was the reconstruction of the south/west wing King's Library, British Museum (destroyed by German bombs during the war). In 1957 I joined the Special Works Division, London City Council. I was involved with design and documentation of the Crystal Palace Sports Centre; additions to the Royal Festive Hall and the South Bank Development.

In 1960 I signed a government contract and went to Ghana, West Africa. There I worked as Superintendent Architect in charge of projects for the Ministry of Interior for the Ghana National Construction Corporation in Accra. I returned to England in 1965, started work at the London Borough of Sutton Department of Architecture and Planning. As Assistant Borough Architect I was also the project architect for the new Sutton Civic Centre. This included a new city centre plan and design and construction of new buildings; the Council Suite and Offices; a central library; a drama theatre; and a Liberal Arts College. The construction programme was divided into three phases. Phase one commenced in 1971, phase two and three were to be completed by 1980. However funds allocated for three stages of development indicated that it might be 20 years before the complex was finished. I was grateful to the London Borough of Sutton management for giving me the opportunity to design, among other projects, the Civic Centre, but I needed a new challenge.

I gathered my family round me for a family conference, my wife Aldona, Hannah our daughter and Mark our son. Together we decided a move was desirable, a move that might take us even out of England. We have travelled extensively in Europe and Africa always together, now that the children were bigger, we needed openings for all members of the family, not only a desirable position for me.

I met Tadeusz Andrzejaczek, an Executive Architect, P.W.D, Perth, WA, in London in 1972. As a graduate of the Polish School of Architecture, London, Andrzejaczek was interested in other graduate's achievements. Tadeusz visited my office as some of my designs were recommended worth a visit by the R.I.B.A, he was impressed with my work. We discussed the possibility of working together. A new Cultural Centre was planned for the remote capital city Perth. Later that year, on Andrzejaczek's recommendation, I was offered a three-year contract, by the Government of Western Australia, with the option of permanency after it's completion. This was the challenge I needed.

I arrived in Perth in February 1973. A year later I was elected an Associate of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects. I was involved in design and construction of the Perth Cultural Centre until my retirement sixteen years later, however, the design stage did not start immediately. The preparation work has been going on for many years. Both Stan Cann, the Principal Architect P.W.D and Ted Andrzejaczek have prepared the ground, the site was allocated, design had not yet started, no funds were as yet available. After my arrival we prepared several alternative designs, drawings and models, all emphasised the need to link the Perth Cultural Centre with the city centre. I worked closely with Tadeusz until his retirement in 1980, following which I was appointed Project Architect for the Perth Cultural Centre.

In 1975 I was delighted to be appointed the design architect for the proposed new Western Australian Art Gallery. The art gallery was the building chosen for W.A's sesquicentenary celebrations. Hundred fifty years of settlement, 1829 - 1979, to be celebrated with the opening of a major overseas exhibition in a new, international standard gallery. The then existing gallery facilities in Beaufort Street, two rooms in the wing of the museum, were substandard, and Perth was by-passed by the many exhibitions visiting Australia. I was authorised to visit and study other galleries in Australia, after which I designed and supervised the construction. The overall cost, including furniture and equipment was then, \$10,000,000. The official opening by Sir Charles Court, the Premier of Western Australia, was on 2 October 1979.

The gallery has four levels, covers an area of 10,338 square metres. The display section of the building, approximately 3,500 square metres on two levels, consists of a series of artificially lit, for the protection of the drawings and paintings from ultra-violet rays, galleries, grouped around a central core. The plan is based on a hexagon which allows a wide angle viewing of pictures. The galleries can be subdivided by full height floor-to-ceiling partitions, make a flexible utilisation of space possible.

Since the opening, the Gallery has successfully staged a number of great exhibitions of international standard; *The Entombed Warriors, Gold of the Pharaohs, Pompei 79, Treasures of Tutankhamen, Secret Treasures of Russia: One Thousand Years of Gold and Silver from the State History Museum Moscow, Imperial China: The Living Past, the Golden Age of Dutch Art, Contemporary Art in Asia; Traditions/Tensions and more.*

The building has been recognised with many awards. The Royal Institute of Australian Architects awarded the Art Gallery of Western Australia with the Architectural Design Award of 1979 and the Bronze Medal Award in 1983 (the highest recognition in the world of Architecture in Australia, there is no silver or gold).

After the completion of the Art Gallery I continued to work on the Perth Cultural Centre. I also designed the *TAFE College of Graphic Art and Design* in Aberdeen Street, remodelled the City Hall Building in Subiaco for the *Hole in the Wall Theatre* (awarded the Subiaco Award, 1985). I was an adviser to the Geraldton Art Gallery, opened in 1984 and the Bunbury Art Centre. I continued as a member of the Forrest Place/City Station Study Group; member of Design Advisory Panel of the Forrest Place/City Station Development; member of the Perth Foreshore Study Group; member of the University of Western Australia Art Gallery Project; Design Controller, Liaison Architect and the Chairman of the Artwork Committee for the Alexander Library, Perth Cultural Centre. In 1989, I was delegated from my office to prepare a feasibility study for the Parliamentary Precinct development for the Northern Territory Government in Darwin, Australia.

I have now lived in Perth, W.A. for nearly thirty years. I retired, retreated from public life, wrote my memoirs for the grandchildren, I paint for pleasure. I am pleased I had the opportunity to utilise my long and varied experience, gained prior to arrival, in the development of the City of Perth. When I pay a visit to the city, or stop by at the gallery, I feel proud of having contributed so much to it's development. Perth is my city and Australia my country. I was once asked which I loved more, Poland or Australia. There is no dilemma, one should not ask – the one is a mother the other a wife.