



Chairman
Heritage Council of NSW
Locked Bag 5020
PARRAMATTA NSW 2124

Dear Sir,

**Sirius Building, 36-50 Cumberland Street, The Rocks
Proposed SHR listing**

Docomomo Australia supports the proposed listing of The Sirius Building on the State Heritage Register to enable protection of this important landmark building under the Heritage Act.

The Sirius Building is important historically as the built, physical embodiment of the resolution of the Green Bans that sought to preserve The Rocks and to maintain the residential component of the area that had been threatened by the proposed wholesale redevelopment of The Rocks. The Green Ban was lifted so this public housing building could be constructed and the historic buildings below were saved.

The Sirius Building is important architecturally as a building that responds to its physical, urban and topographic context as well as referencing one of the world's great Modernist buildings, Habitat 67 designed by Moshe Safdie in Montreal in 1966-67 for the World Expo of 1967. Whilst Habitat is comprised of numerous series of stacked prefabricated concrete oblongs forming an island-bound megastructure of three-dimensional honeycomb, Sirius references the stacked apartments but in a more planar manner that curves slightly along the modern ridge above The Rocks. Sirius is a poured in-situ concrete building with off-the-form board marks clearly visible in the concrete side walls of the apartment building's exterior. Sirius breaks the horizontality of the Sydney Harbour Bridge's southern approach spans and acts as a physical reference to the jumbled rocks that once characterised the place and gave the area its name in the 18th century. The design of the apartments capitalises on one of the world's iconic city views of Circular Quay, Sydney Harbour and the Sydney Opera House and placed public housing tenants on an equal footing to more well-off Sydneysiders in the great dream of harbour views.

Whilst the glazing of the rectangular prisms encloses their short ends in a picture frame of moulded concrete the glazing pattern creates a subtle Mondrian-like grid that also serves as a safety barrier at balustrade height. The wall to wall window creates the illusion that the entire apartment is a covered verandah which prefigures the more recent adoption of explicit indoor-outdoor verandah rooms in Sydney developer architecture. To achieve this in a public housing complex indicates the excellence of the design achieved by the NSW Housing Commission project architect, Tao (Theodore) Gofers.

The interior public spaces are also worthy of note and careful retention. The architect-designed haut-relief timber murals of the entry and public room must be retained. The warmth of the timber colour against the cooler grey concrete walls is heightened by the strong-coloured and -patterned carpet throughout the ground floor. One of the murals was moved from the front foyer to another location on the ground floor when the access ramp was constructed.

Docomomo Australia, urges the Heritage Council to list The Sirius Building on the State Heritage Register as a matter of urgency and to encourage the future purchaser of the building to undertake minimal changes to the exterior and interior public spaces in order to maintain the significance of the place.

Yours faithfully

Dr Scott Robertson
President
Docomomo Australia