

LETTERS

UTZON'S POSITION

The following is a partial text of Architect Jorn Utzon's letter to Davis Hughes, New South Wales minister for public works, rejecting Hughes' terms for Utzon's return to the Sydney Opera House project. A full report on Utzon's resignation is on page 21.—Ed.

Dear Sir,

I acknowledge receipt of your letter of the 11th March, 1966, to which I have given my most careful and anxious consideration.

Might I say at the outset that I have been very concerned at what has occurred recently and for the following reasons:

1. Having designed the Opera House and having worked on this great project for the past nine years, I have naturally been anxious to see it through to completion; and without going into detail, I think it should be assumed in my favour that I would not lightly have resigned.

2. Having regard to the intricate nature of the design and the infinite problems associated with its execution, I feel—and I am sure any experienced architect would confirm—that it would be virtually impossible for any architect or panel of architects, however eminent, to take over at this stage and produce a building which would be in accordance with the original concept. Any departure from this concept would in my opinion be disastrous and would produce an inferior building. Naturally, I am anxious to assist in avoiding such a calamity.

3. I feel very strongly, and this also I think would be confirmed by any architect of experience, that a change of architectural control at this stage would not only result in great delays but also add immeasurably and unpredictably to the ultimate cost of the Opera House. This, too, I would wish to assist in avoiding.

Coming now to your proposals which were enclosed with your letter under reply, it seems to me that they envisage that I should no longer be the architect in control of the project but should be relegated to the subordinate role of "design architect".

As I understand the proposal, it involves the setting up of a team of leading architects in private

practice under the control of the government architect to perform, amongst other things, all those functions ordinarily performed by the architect in charge of a project such as this. . . . It would seem, therefore, that I am merely to prepare designs in accordance with instructions and leave it to others to supervise construction.

Such a proposal is not only unpractical but quite unacceptable to me.

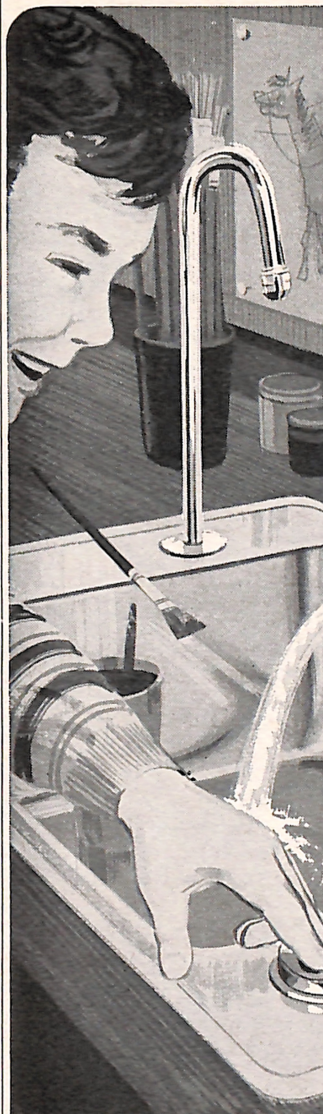
If I am to prepare all designs, plans and specifications, etc., necessary to continue the building operations, then if efficiency is to be achieved it must be done by me assisted by my own trained staff and my own consultants. Furthermore, if I am to carry out this planning work, then in an intricate and complex building such as the Opera House, I must, as a matter of common sense supervise construction. In other words, I must, if disastrous consequences are to be avoided, be responsible for the carrying out of the work in accordance with such plans. As you will appreciate, problems constantly arise during construction which need immediate attention and can ordinarily only be satisfactorily resolved by the architect. Any attempt to deal with such problems by one who is not responsible for the design must lead to great delays and additional expense however eminent and competent that person may be. . . .

I have not the slightest objection to the proposal that you should have a team of leading architects in private practice and consultants headed by the government architect to be your controlling and liaison panel and thereby assist you to arrive at decisions in all matters. Indeed, I have asked you to obtain a better liaison and controlling staff who would be able to interpret my very complicated work. I would welcome it and I would also welcome any constructive criticism of my work which they might see fit to offer. Furthermore, I would at all times be prepared to confer with them. . . .

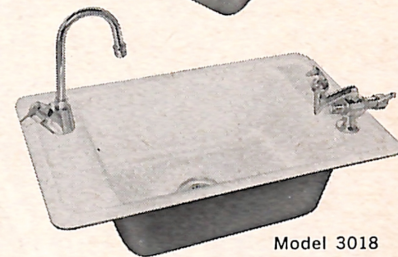
In other words, for reasons which I have already indicated, I am at all times prepared to work with them as your representatives, but not under them. Indeed, I think that this arrangement would lead to more prompt dealing with matters of the kind which have resulted in delays in the past. . . .

JORN UTZON

(continued on page 91)



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LETTERS

(continued from page 89)

URBAN PLAYBOYS

Forum: There seems little doubt that we must adjust our institutions to meet the needs of a new epoch in an urbanizing world. For urban problems no longer correspond to the old dimensions. The old boundaries and administrative subdivisions have become obsolete.

"City Planners" were trained for obsolete tasks and took refuge in data gathering which logically had no possible ultimate commitment. Action was equally obsolete: Expediency cures while planning is by definition preventative.

Urban renewalists have declared blight in enormous parcels, with colossal subsidies from *the public purse*. Clearance has not yet been matched by comprehensive construction but has followed a piecemeal pattern of development for *private profit*, but alas in public places.

The reason why city planning in Europe is superior may be traced to a design Civil Service. Nothing in America can match the London County Council, Liverpool, Newcastle, Sheffield, Coventry, etc. more recently, to cite England alone.

Crisis has, in typical American fashion, produced crash programs, which can hardly be described yet as comprehensive. Our hope must lie with the new department for urban affairs. But even this Cabinet level responsibility will require legislation to make it effective and this may be hard to come by.

All this is the serious side of the urban battlefield. Urban design is now in double jeopardy: the chaos we have inherited or made accidentally, and the new brand of chaos which we are now invited to make on purpose. The familiar "Green Carnation" crew which until recently were content to exchange their precious peccadillos in private are now trying for the center of the stage.

Their intentions are, of course, fundamentally reactionary, to restore laissez-faireism, to stay with the cycle of boom and bust.

Such irresponsible propaganda will provide new scenery at best and total confusion at worst.

Share your concern. Can we afford the shenanigans of the playboys of the Western World on an urban scale? Whether the result will be chaos of laissez-faire or the

chaos of whimsical invention is unimportant. The intermission will be costly; socially and economically.

Concern and distaste is not enough. Urban renewal and reconstruction must not fail through default by people of social responsibility.

I commend your effort to build up this resistance. (Since reading your March issue, 4,000 Americans have died on the roads and we can't count the number of urban places that have perished and the thousands of acres of country which have been cut to ribbons.)

New Haven
SERGE CHERMAYEFF
Architect

LARSEN HALL

Forum: The Larsen Hall story points out with great clarity that you run a free press. I think this is good. It is something you can do that journals can't do because of professional ethics.

I found the story most interesting and I enjoyed seeing Damora's beautiful photographs in print. My partners and I appreciate the coverage.

Houston
WILLIAM W. CAUDILL
Architect

Forum: Bravo to James Ackerman for his clear-sighted honest crit.

Bravo to Forum for publishing it.

Los Angeles
SAMUEL D. CARSON
Architect

CORRECTIONS

Forum: From your March issue, Footnote, page 85, I quote: "Like the original [Statue of Liberty], Flattau's 50-ft. copy is of cast iron."

Bartholdi's work is of copper—3/32 inch thick sheets hand hammered into shape.

Wonder if your reporter assumed that the beautiful blue-green color (copper's natural patina) was paint?

Waterbury, Conn.
S. F. COOK
Anaconda American Brass Co.

Forum: As always, I enjoyed the latest issue of Architectural Forum and enjoyed, particularly, Roger Montgomery's book review and your comments on it.

I should point out a transposition error, however. On page 26 you say, "Urban renewal will chug along under a \$275 million authorization during the next fiscal year . . ." The figure is \$725 million—a considerable difference.

Washington, D.C.
WILLIAM L. SLAYTON
Commissioner
Urban Renewal Administration

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