

Allan Temko. As quoted by Herb Caen in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Temko called the building "an abomination." But, as Caen continues, "Temko really hasn't liked much since Notre Dame."

## SEQUELS

### ONE YEAR LATER

In March of 1968, the landmark Kerner Commission report warned that "our nation is moving toward two societies — one black, one white, separate and unequal," and it contained mountains of supporting evidence.

What effect has the warning had? Pitifully little, according to a follow-up report produced jointly by Urban America Inc. and the Urban Coalition. Entitled "One Year Later," the report notes that some progress has been made, but not nearly enough to reverse the trend that the Kerner Commission spelled out. The new report concludes: "A year later, we are a year closer to being two societies, black and white, increasingly separate and scarcely less unequal."

The joint report is the result of a three-month staff study and was written by Donald Canty, director of Urban America's Information Center and former managing editor of *THE ARCHITECTURAL FORUM*. It was reviewed by an eight-man advisory panel which included two members of the Kerner Commission: Mayor John V. Lindsay of New York City, and Senator Fred R. Harris (Dem., Okla.). Among the principal findings contained in the report are these:

- "There was striking evidence of a deepening of the movement of black pride, black identity, and black control and improvement of ghetto neighborhoods. There were repeated suggestions that efforts toward community control and self-help had been a major contribution to the relative quiet of the summer of 1968."

- "There was no evidence that any more than a small minority of the nation's Negro population was prepared to follow militant leaders toward separatism or the tactical use of violence. This minority, however, continued to have an impact beyond its numbers, particularly on the young."

- "The deepening of concern about conditions in the slums and ghettos on the part of some white persons and institutions had been counterbalanced — perhaps overbalanced — by a deepening of aver-

sion and resistance on the part of others."

- "The mood of the blacks, wherever it stands precisely in the spectrum between militancy and submission, is not moving in the direction of patience. The black neighborhoods in the cities remain slums, marked by poverty and decay; they remain ghettos, marked by racial concentration and confinement."

### THE CAKE IS MISSING

In an article commenting on the Urban America-Urban Coalition report, William Raspberry of the *Washington Post* made these observations last month:

"White people in cities and suburbs have been asking—sincerely, I believe—what they can do to help heal the breach between themselves and their black brothers. And the sad answer is that there probably is very little that they can do, at least until the government creates the context within which they can perform.

"For even the most earnest dialogue cannot improve a ghetto resident's credit rating or get rid of the vermin in his overpriced tenement or find him a meaningful job or educate his ignorant children. Tutorial programs and trips to art museums may make attractive frosting. But the cake itself is missing.

"The fact that so many Americans, white and black, are searching for ways to do what they can, suggests that important segments of the populace may be ready for the kind of commitment that the Kerner Commission called for a year ago.

"But their willingness to follow is meaningless unless the national government is willing to lead."

### MODERATION WINS OUT

Welfare Island, largely abandoned but strategically located in the East River between the New York City boroughs of Manhattan and Queens, has been in limbo for years, but not exactly ignored. Development proposals for its use have ranged from high-density housing (June '61 issue) to gambling casinos.

Now, the Welfare Island Planning and Development Committee, one year after its appointment by Mayor John V. Lindsay (March '68 issue), has rejected large-scale housing that might "create a visual barrier of high-

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# AUSTRALIA SQUARE

City block in Downtown Sydney is a striking example of imaginative architecture, engineering and urban design. On the next nine pages, a report in words and pictures from Robin Boyd, a member of the Forum's Board of Contributors, on Architect Harry Seidler's most recent contribution to the skyline of his city.

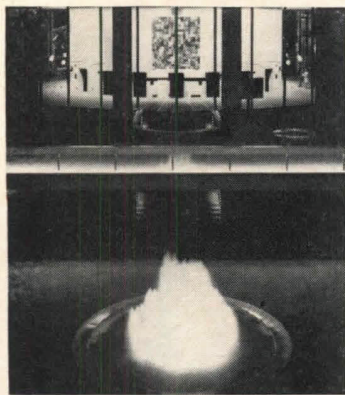






The first question is why anything so conspicuously round should be called square. The answer is that the name "Australia Square" refers to a redevelopment which consolidated more than 30 separate properties and some alley-ways into one island block of about one and a half acres in the most crowded part of Sydney. Much of this rectangular block has been left open as a public square. The tall cylinder is just the biggest of several elements built on it. The cylinder is also the architectural heart of the complex, but the open part—or plaza—is its social pulse and should be considered first.

This open area is by no means parkland. It has three floors of parking under it, and it is split across the middle by a 12-ft. change of level. The plaza on the lower level slips in under the upper one and merges into a shopping arcade. The round tower rises from the upper plaza, and a 13-story rectangular office block fills the far end of the lower plaza. Nature is represented symbolically by a pro-

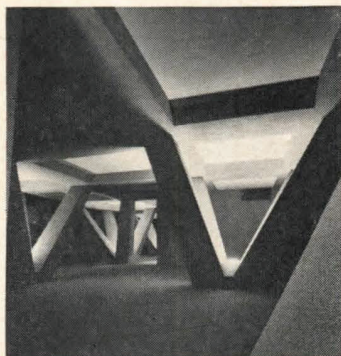


grammed fountain (above) that changes from birthday- to wedding-cake shapes at irregular intervals, and five planting beds, each with a tree.

In short, the open space is as crowded as necessary to justify itself economically. Yet it is just open enough; it does work as intended. It is the most usable bit of fresh air for blocks around and is a smashing popular success. At any time of the day most of its cafe tables are occupied, and at lunch time it is packed. It

**Mr. Boyd** is an architect practicing in Melbourne, Australia, and a well-known critic. He is a member of the Forum's Board of Contributors.

is a warmly human space because it is humanly helpful, and not because of any real or phoney warmth of materials, which it lacks. It is cool to the point of coldness in materials and generally austere in detail, as to be expected from Harry Seidler, who works in the mainstream tradition of modern architecture.

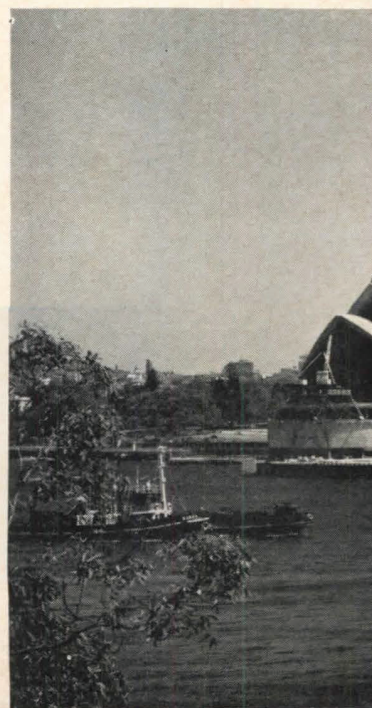
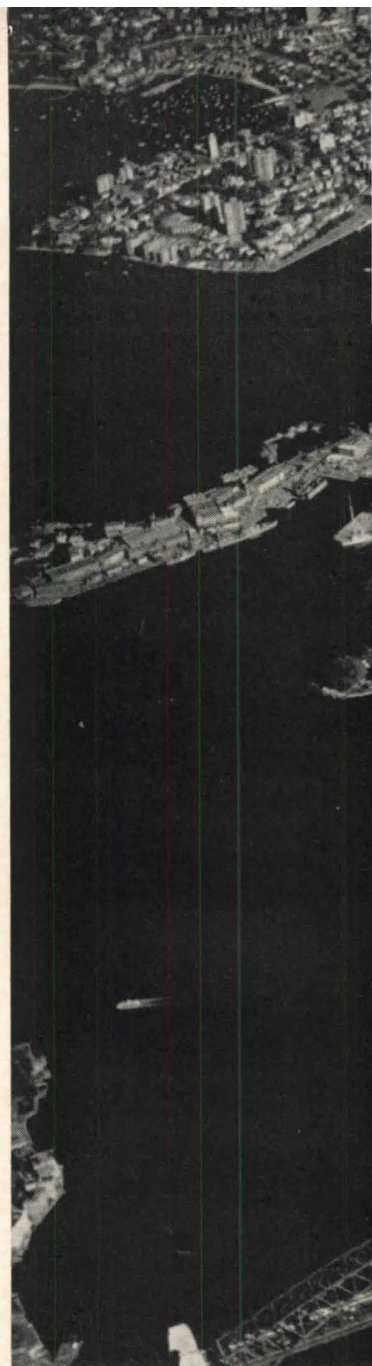


A strong attempt has been made to free the space at plaza level under the 13-story block (above). The columns have been drawn together at the base. Whether this device is successful is debatable. It eliminates the forest of verticals but substitutes some very sturdy branching trees. In any case, this building is only a foil to the giant cylinder which is revealed gradually, from the bottom up, as you walk from the shadows of those trees onto the lower plaza.

The tower is not a fashionable building. That is said in praise. Yet at the time it was designed, seven or eight years ago, it would have been much more fashionable, for, at that time, buildings with plans that were round or square or of any other basic geometrical shape were still quite the rage. It was constructed quickly once work on site began, the floors piling up and leaving one guessing as to the ultimate height, lacking a steel frame which would have sketched in the outline. But, before that, there was much backing and filling, including contretemps over acquisition of land and light angles. It could have been the highest reinforced-concrete building in the world at the time, but it finished just behind Montreal's Place Victoria. So the design remained an idea for some years while architectural fashion scrambled on into a new era of diagonal com-

## CIRCLE IN THE SQUARE

BY ROBIN BOYD



Bird's-eye view and silhouette of Sydney's skyline position the new, 50-story high, cylindrical tower at Australia Square in relation to the harbor and the still unfinished Opera House on the promontory. The site of Australia Square is a downtown block about 1½ acres in size.



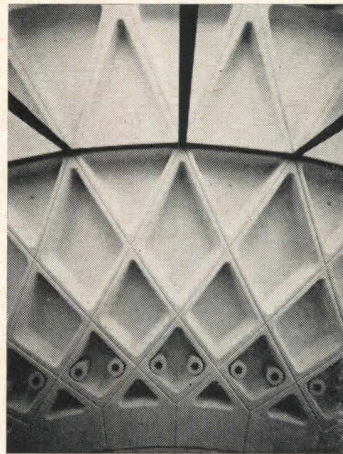




plexity fractured by protrusions. Australia Square Tower, as well as being simply cylindrical, is unfashionably bland and smooth. It does not attempt a great stride forward, which makes it refreshingly normal. It claims attention not through momentary excitement but because of explicit simplicity.

It is a beautifully made building, neither under- nor over-detailed, avoiding any suggestion of arrogant coarseness as well as effete elegance. You simply are not conscious of the technique, as you should not be when confronting any work of art, unless you are professionally involved in it.

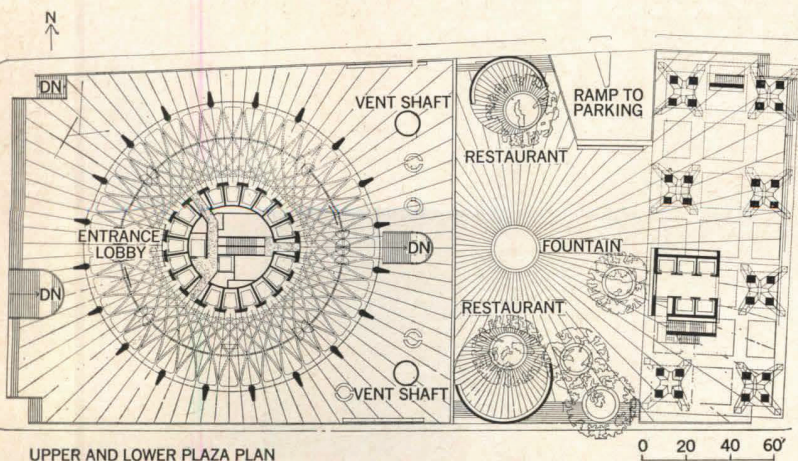
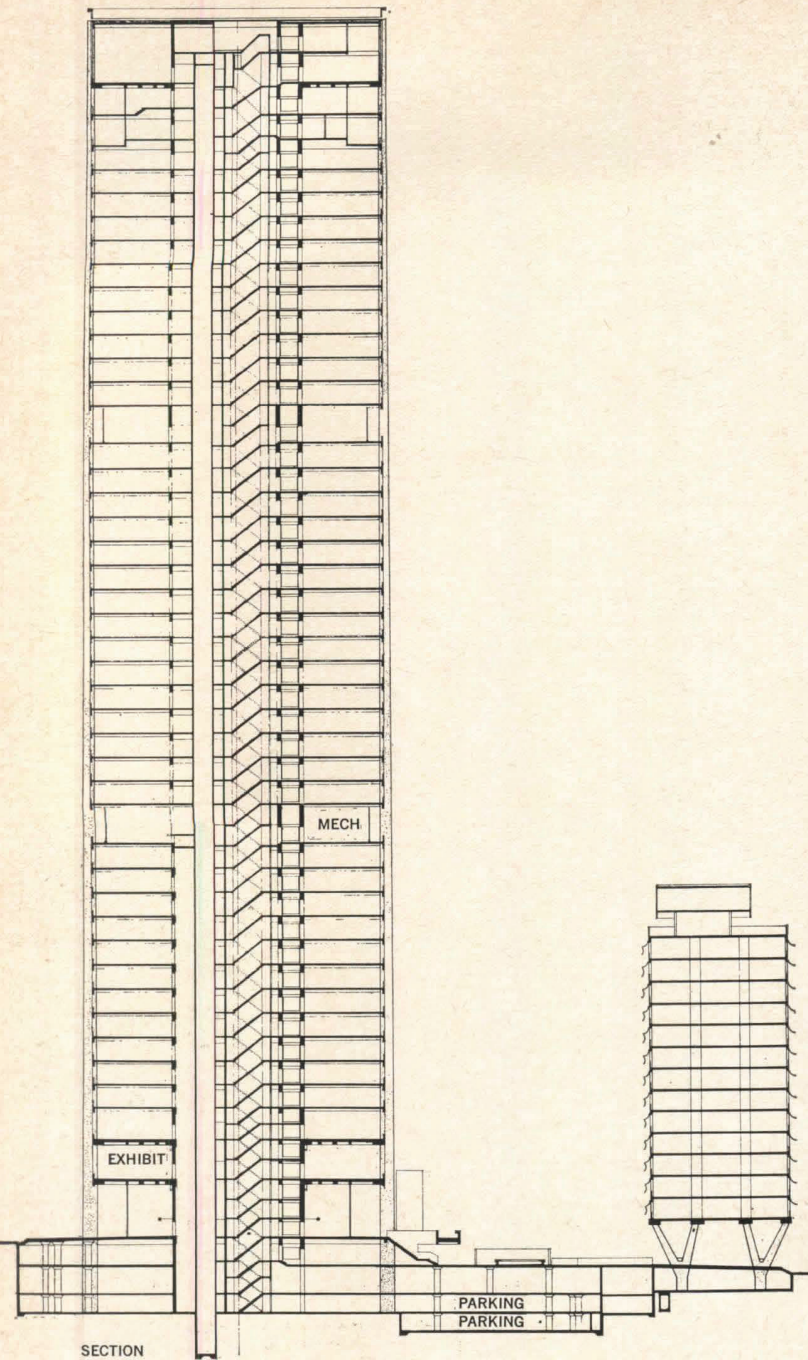
The two main, lower floors, which have to carry double the loading of the upper office floors, were designed by Pier Luigi Nervi. He used characteristic curved, crossing ribs (below) on the soffits, which may not be the simplest structural solution for a span of 35 feet but look at home in the circular context.



The fin-like external columns taper in most reasonably as they climb and their load is lightened, but this taper is not exaggerated. It is less than four feet in the 50-story height and is not immediately noticeable.

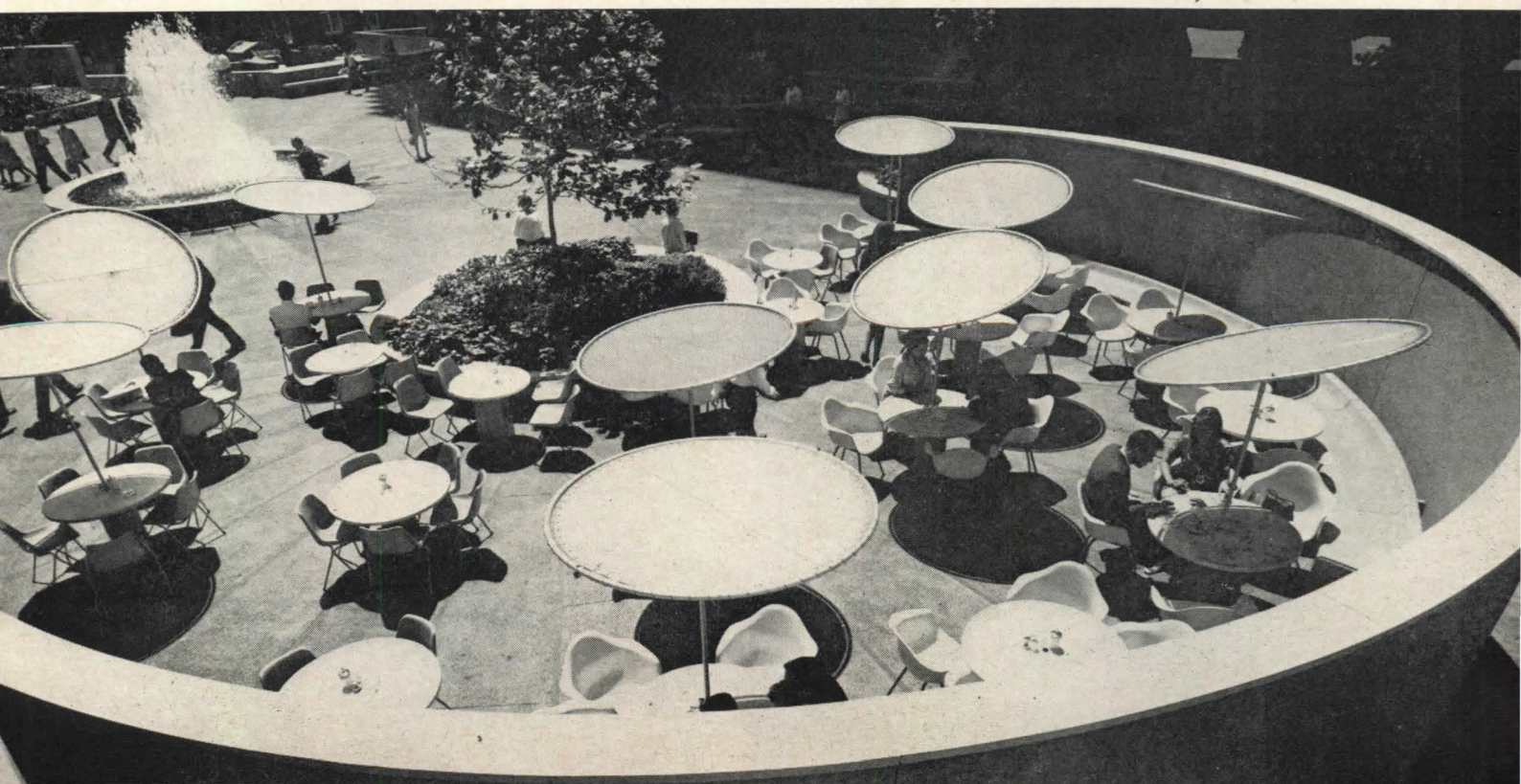
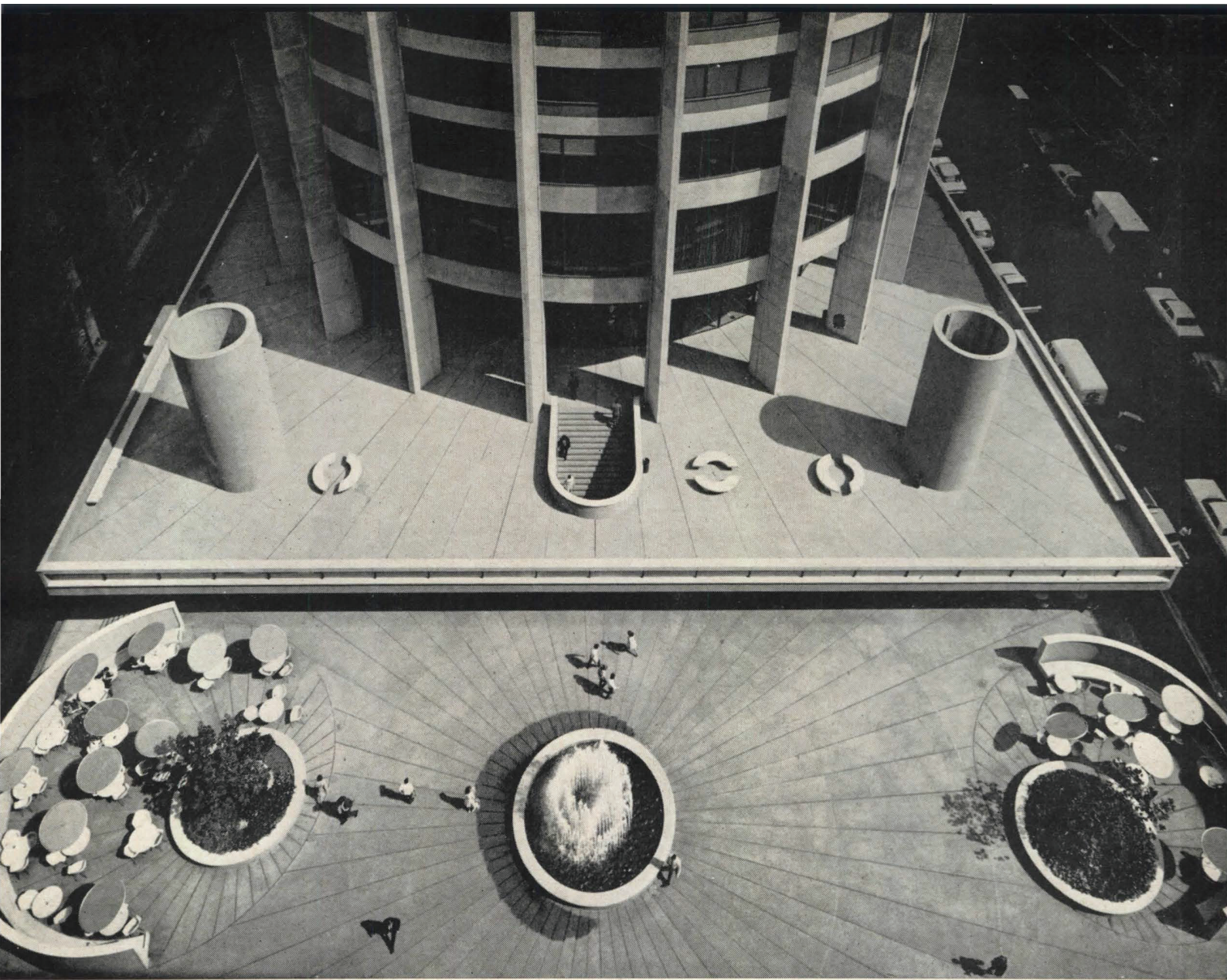
If there is one detail that might be called an affectation, it is the change of color in the pre-cast concrete of the horizontal panels between the windows. The beam section is white, the non-structural spandrel is dark. Whether this is done for ornamental or moral reasons, it is worth mentioning only because it is the one detail that might be questioned on rational grounds.

Site plan and section (left) explain two-level plaza arrangement on 1½ acre site. Space between 50-story cylindrical tower and 13-story rectangular office block has been turned into a screened and paved plaza, complete with restaurant and programmed fountain. Views of plaza are seen at right. Cylindrical pipes emerging from upper level of plaza are vent shafts that serve underground parking and loading facilities.

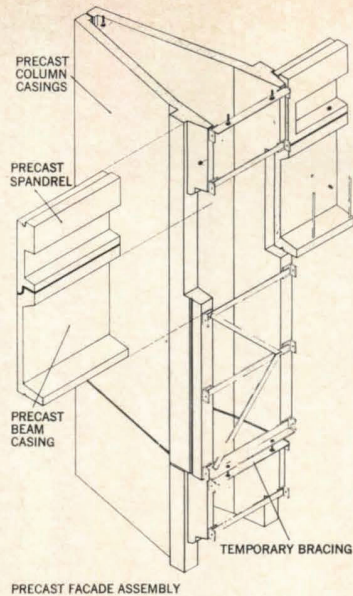
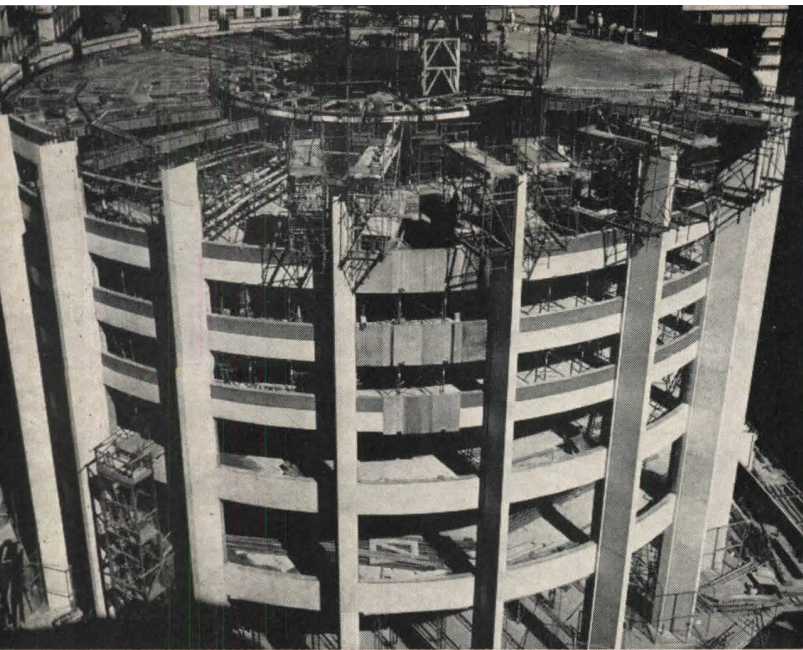


UPPER AND LOWER PLAZA PLAN





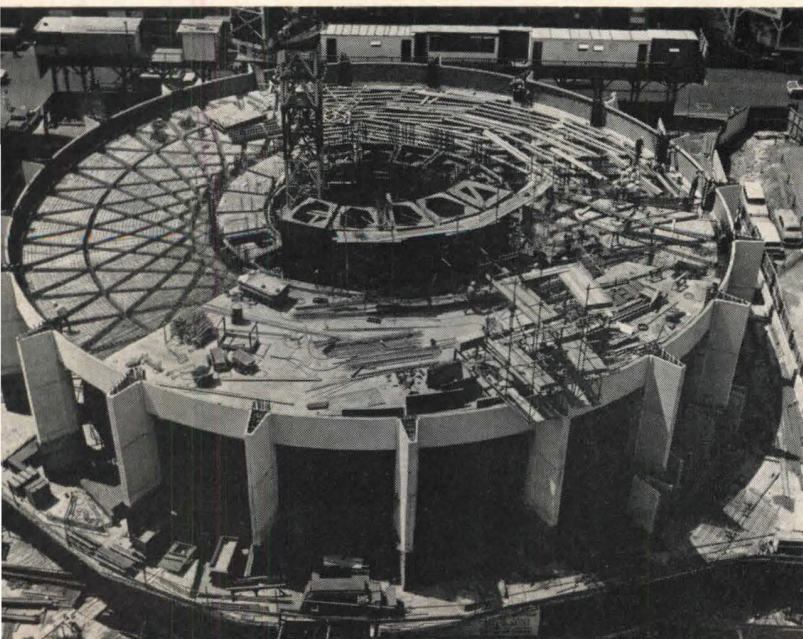
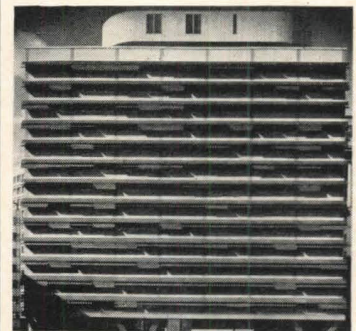
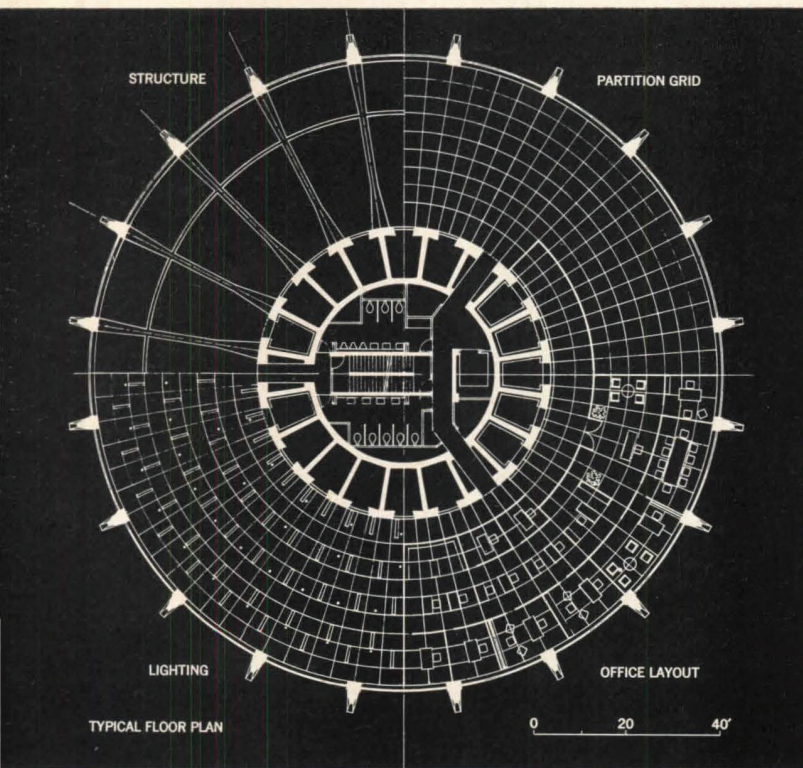




Since the tower is so impeccably done, so sensible and convincing, the question of its roundness becomes all the more insistent; for, without doubt, roundness in plan has often been a mark of commercial gimmickry. Moreover, the formal justification of a round tower rests to a great extent on its being isolated. This tower does command Sydney at the moment, but the city has embarked on a height race and soon a neighboring office block will reach above it.

Yet even the roundness of the plan is explained by the architect in matter-of-fact terms. It was, he says, derived by a process of elimination: from a rectangle, to a square, to a square on the diagonal, and thus to a circle. The last not only gave better outlooks; it actually made a greater floor area permissible, for the building code allowed the setback from each boundary to be measured to the average point of the curved surface facing it.

The tower, then, is convincing and confident, extending radial lines out across its plaza and raising echoes of circles in all the planting pockets and benches of its furnishings. Yet all this close harmony ends abruptly at that 13-story block (below), which bears little or no relation to the rest. It has elaborate sunshades and is even different in



Construction photos and typical office floor plan show radial structure developed in consultation with Pier Luigi Nervi. Ribbed floor system in interlocking curves (left top and bottom) was used for the heavily loaded bottom floors. Exterior columns taper from bottom to top, were poured into precast "forms" that then served as permanent, exterior finishes. Typical precast "form" is shown in diagram at top of page. All columns and beams are of exposed white quartz aggregate concrete. Non-bearing spandrels and screens were precast with a darker aggregate. Right: Portico of cylindrical tower at upper plaza level. The rectangular, 13-story office block is seen beyond the ring of columns.

color. This is inconsistency, but not actual conflict. The only real crunch in Australia Square has *nothing* directly to do with the architecture.

It is the art, which has been introduced with love and lavishness, but is a minor misfortune. Two tapestries, by Le Corbusier and Vasarely respectively, hang, or flop in a dog-eared way as tapestries do, above the two main banks of elevator doors. They



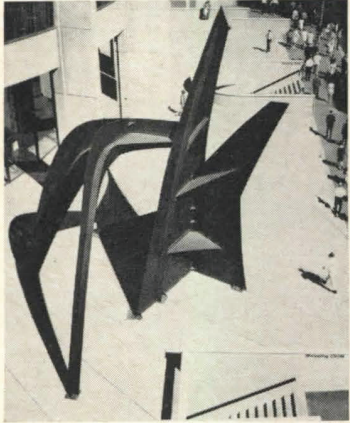








appear unhappily temporary on the travertine background and one can only hope they will go away eventually, for they do nothing for the building. But a larger item which appears immovably permanent is a 38-ft.-high Calder stabile (below) which manages to find a foothold at the base of the tower. Allowing that Calder is a master of shapes and



images, what he does to those poor old steel sheets—lapping and welding at random, torturing them into spikes—is in total conflict, an innocent but nonetheless direct intellectual snub to the rational, respectful use of materials in the building itself. The stabile looks almost as incongruous as the neon junk in the streets outside the architectural oasis of Australia Square.

#### FACTS AND FIGURES

Australia Square, Sydney, Australia.  
 Owner: City Centre Development Ltd.  
 Architect: Harry Seidler & Associates.  
 Engineers: Civil & Civic Pty. Ltd.  
 Consultants: Prof. Pier Luigi Nervi (structural); Consentini Associates (mechanical); Edison Price (lighting).  
 General contractor: Civil & Civic Pty. Ltd.  
 Building area: 953,000 sq. ft.  
 Cost: \$27 million (U.S.), including land, financing, and fees.

PHOTOGRAPHS: Max Dupain

Top left: 47th floor contains a revolving restaurant with spectacular views of Sydney's harbor. Note the Opera House in the distance. Bottom left: Main lobby at upper plaza level. Tapestry is by Le Corbusier. Ceiling height in lobby is 24 ft. Right: Telephoto view of cylindrical tower against Sydney's skyline, with roof shells of Opera House in foreground.

