

ULTRA

Positions and Polarities Beyond Crisis

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Image: Michaelmore, Roeger & Russell, *Chester House*, Belair 1966, State Library of South Australia BRG 346/28/6/2.

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Hotel Australia to Oberoi Adelaide: The Transnational History of an Adelaide Hotel

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Keywords

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Abstract

In the decades following the war, the spread of international luxury chain hotels was instrumental in shaping the global image of modernity. It was not simply the export of modernist architecture as a style, but rather a process which brought about an overall transformation of the industry and culture surrounding modern domesticity. For Adelaide, well before the arrival of large brand hotel chains like Hilton and Hyatt, this process was initiated by the construction of its first international style hotel in 1960 – Australia Hotel. The proposed paper traces the history of this structure and its impact not only on local design and construction industries but also on domestic culture and lifestyle after the shadow period of recovery after the war.

This paper looks at three specific enduring legacies of this structure that went well beyond the modernist aesthetics employed by its original designers, the local firm of Lucas, Parker and Partners. The hotel was one of the first to employ the new technology of lift-slab construction and was recognised by the Head of Architecture at the University of Adelaide, Professor Jensen, as the outstanding building of 1960. It is argued that it was the engagement with such technological and process innovations that has allowed the building to endure through several renovation attempts. In her study of Hilton International hotels, Annabelle Wharton argues how architecture was used for America's expansion to global economic and political power. Following on from her arguments, this paper explores the implications of the acquisition of the Australia Hotel by the Indian hotel chain Oberoi Hotels in the late 1970s when it became Oberoi Adelaide. The patronage of Indian hotelier Mohan Singh Oberoi came alongside the parallel acquisition of Hotel Windsor in Melbourne, heralding a new era of engagement with Asia. Finally, the paper also highlights the broader impact of this hotel, as a leisure venue for the burgeoning middle class, on the evolving domestic culture of Adelaide.

01. "Oberoi 'better in every respect,'" *The Canberra Times*, June 13, 1980, 10. Available from National Library of Australia <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-page12398738>.

In June 1980, Australian news dailies were awash with controversies surrounding the acquisition of the iconic Windsor Hotel in Melbourne by an Indian hotel company – Oberoi Hotels. As an article in the *Canberra Times* claimed, the deal "immediately triggered claims that Oberoi was financed by Middle East cash and that the property could become a target for terrorists."¹ Over the following several years, not only did Oberoi successfully acquire and manage the Windsor Hotel, but also spent a considerable amount of money and effort to restore its landmark architecture and interiors to its original glory. From an architectural disciplinary perspective, this project opens up important considerations in terms of the global financial flows following the 1970s oil crisis, the growing impact of the transnational tourism industry and, particularly for Australia, the rising influence of Asian business patronage. But this narrative of an Indian hotelier acquiring an Australian architectural landmark for restoration goes back to a year earlier with the much less publicised case of Hotel Australia in Adelaide.



Figure 1: (L) Hotel Windsor in Melbourne (Source: Picture Postcard); (R) Hotel Australia in Adelaide (Source: SLSA ref. B19598)

02. This recognition is attributed to Professor Jensen, who was the Head of Architecture at the University of Adelaide at the time. See, Michael Page, *Sculptors of Space: South Australian Architecture Museum 1836 to 1986* (Adelaide: RAlA SA, 1986), 238.

This paper traces the history of this fascinating project as it made its journey from the ranks of the 'ultra-modern' in its use of innovative design and construction techniques in late 1950s, to the exemplar of 'ultra-luxury' with its acquisition by one of the most influential global hotel chains some two decades later, and finally to its more recent renovation as a high-end luxury apartment building. The paper will discuss two separate stages in the lifetime of this structure that help define its enduring legacy as a landmark of architecture and domestic culture in Adelaide. The first deals with the design and construction of the building in 1959-60. It was the first structure in South Australia to employ the newly developed technology of lift-slab construction and was recognised as "the outstanding building of 1960."² A discussion of this innovative construction history within the broader context of experimentation in concrete construction across Australia will help establish its relevance as a pioneering project. The next section focuses on the 1979 acquisition of the building by the Indian hotelier Mohan Singh Oberoi, under whose patronage the renamed Oberoi Adelaide became the centre of social life and leisure in Adelaide. Here the paper will help locate the restoration of this small hotel within the global flows of finance and patronage that was shaping the architectural market and defining Australia's transforming relationship with Asia. It is argued that the enduring legacies of technological innovations and the impact on local domestic culture of leisure are an integral part the building's heritage that need to be considered.

Pioneering 'Ultra-Modern' Lift Slab Construction

03. For a general overview of the developments in this period, see Miles Lewis, *200 Years of Concrete in Australia* (North Sydney: Concrete Institute of Australia, 1988). Other details available from www.mileslewis.net.

04. Both Sydney Opera House and Shine Dome are prominent projects that have been discussed in several publications. But for a detailed discussion of the construction process and agencies involved in the Opera House, see Paolo Tombesi, Marianna Nigra, David Teoh, and Verity Saunders-Ducos, "Once they were heroes: What happened to the companies that built the Sydney Opera House?," in *18th CIB World Building Congress, Building a Better World*, 48-59 (Salford, UK: CIB, 2010). And more recently Luciano Cardellicchio, Paolo Stracchi, and Paolo Tombesi, "Danish Spheres and Australian Falsework: Casting the Sydney Opera House," in *History of Construction Culture*, Joao Mascarenhas-Mateus and Ana Paula Pires (eds), 786- 793 (Leiden: CRC Press, 2021).

05. University of Melbourne Department of Architecture, *Cross-Section*, No. 13 (November 1953): 2.

In 1959, even as work began on the Sydney Opera House, reinforced concrete construction in Australia was still going through a post-war experimental phase with new systems being trailed across the country.³ The famous 'spherical solution' for the Sydney Opera House, which employed the large precast concrete 'shell' panels supported on precast ribs, was still a couple of years away, and the 46-metre diameter 710-tonne concrete solution for Roy Grounds' Shine Dome in Canberra was concurrently being constructed with in-situ formwork.⁴ The decade had witnessed the growth of new precast and prestressed modular systems in order to rationalise on-site production but no method had taken hold. England Pipe and Marlite Ltd. (later EPM), which was established in Melbourne in 1951 by John Harris and W.P. Brown, had started manufacturing precast panels in 1953 but these were mostly used for external cladding. In South Australia, Concrete Industries (SA) bought out SA Portland Cement Company in 1953 and established a plant for precast hollow beam flooring, but its application remained limited.⁵ It was the Victorian Housing Commission that probably did the most to streamline building production by employing precast concrete tilt slab construction, but until 1952 most of its buildings were single storey, and by 1959 they had only constructed a few four storey blocks. Within such a context a new contender was to enter the market – Lift Slab Construction.

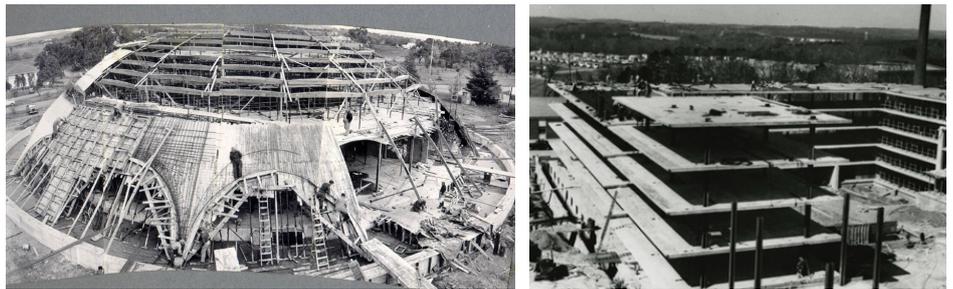


Figure 2: (L) Shine Dome, Canberra (Source: re-thinkingthefuture.com); (R) Johnstone Hall, Clemson University, South Carolina (Source: Clemson University Libraries Digital Collection)

06. M. A. Riusillo, "Lift Slab Construction: its History, Methodology, Economics, and Applications," *American Concrete Institute Symposium Proceedings* Vol 107 (1988): 59-68.

07. "Floors Lifted Bodily: New Method Coming to Australia" *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 03, 1956, 10.

The Lift Slab system was designed to reduce construction time and particularly eliminate the use of bulky and tedious formwork in the erection of moderately tall buildings with repeating floor plates. To begin, the ground floor concrete slab is poured in-situ to sit around a grid of columns, usually in steel. Then all subsequent floor slabs and roof slab are also poured at the ground level, one on top of the other, each layer coated with a special compound that would allow for the slabs to be separated later. The steel collars introduced around the columns during the pour are then used to support the slab as they are raised into place and attached to the column at the desired height. The system was originally developed in Texas USA with Northup Hall, Trinity University, Texas (1952) and later employed at the Johnstone Hall, Clemson University, South Carolina (1954) before being patented in 1955 by Philip N. Youtz of New York and Thomas B. Slick of Texas.⁶ The system was introduced in Australia under license in 1956 by Lift Slab of Australia Pty. Ltd., of Homebush, Sydney and first employed for the two upper floors of the new administrative block for Behr-Manning (Australia) Pty. Ltd., at Lidcombe, Sydney.⁷ Over the next few years around 20 structures

08. 'When finished the Royal Exchange Assurance building would be the tallest in the world at 186 ft.' See University of Melbourne Department of Architecture, *Cross-Section*, No. 72 (October 1958).

employed this system across the country and the tallest lift slab structure in the world was proposed for the Royal Exchange Assurance office block in Sydney.⁸ Experimentation with this new system was at the cutting edge of concrete construction technology and in 1959 South Australia's pioneering use of this system began with a proposed modernist hotel building in North Adelaide.



Figure 3: (L) Behr-Manning, Sydney (Source: Constructional Review, May 1957); (R) Alanda House, Adelaide (Source: SLSA ref. B14426)

09. Photograph of Brougham Place, North Adelaide, No. B 14426, Acre 739 Pictorial Collection, State Library of South Australia (SLSA) Archives. <https://www.catalog.slsa.sa.gov.au:443/record=b2063626~S1>

10. McDougall & Vines (Conservation and Heritage Consultants), "North Adelaide Heritage Survey," in *Survey & Recommendations for the City Heritage and Character Plan Amendment Report City of Adelaide* (2004), 1.

11. Jim Handby was also responsible for establishing other hotels in Adelaide like Challa Gardens in 1955 and the Hotel Seaton in 1956. His first hotel from 1935, which eventually became Seacliff Hotel, was originally also named the Hotel Australia. See McDougall & Vines, "North Adelaide Heritage Survey," 2004.

12. Susan Collins, 'Traces that Remain: Architectural Drawings as Contextual Records', Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of South Australia, 2007. Also see entry on George Parker by Susan Collins available from <https://www.architectsdatabase.unisa.edu.au>

13. Page, *Sculptors of Space*, 238.

The corner plot at the crossing of Brougham Place and O'Connell Street in North Adelaide had a uniquely elevated position with views over the city to the south and the Adelaide Hills to the east. The site was home to an old Victorian villa originally belonging to famous medical practitioner John Corbin (1878-1930) which was leased by Florence Eva McLeay from 1939 to 1946 and ran as a guest house.⁹ After alterations in 1946 the structure was popularly known as Alanda House. In 1959 the corner plot and three other adjoining properties were acquired by Herbert Harry Handby for the purposes of developing a hotel.¹⁰ 'Jim' Handby was a noted SANFL footy player who had won the Magarey Medal in 1928 but had later taken on to developing hotels.¹¹ Under the title of Alanda Ltd. he engaged Adelaide architectural practice of Lucas, Parker and Partners to design a new hotel building on this site. William (Bill) Lucas had retired in 1956 and the firm was being led by George Parker who was primarily responsible for the design of the project that came to be known as Hotel Australia.¹² The 8-storey modernist block was the tallest structure in North Adelaide and not only came to define the architecture of the high-rise development in the area but also launched George Parker's career as a designer of hotels for such chains as Travelodge in Australia and Southeast Asia.¹³

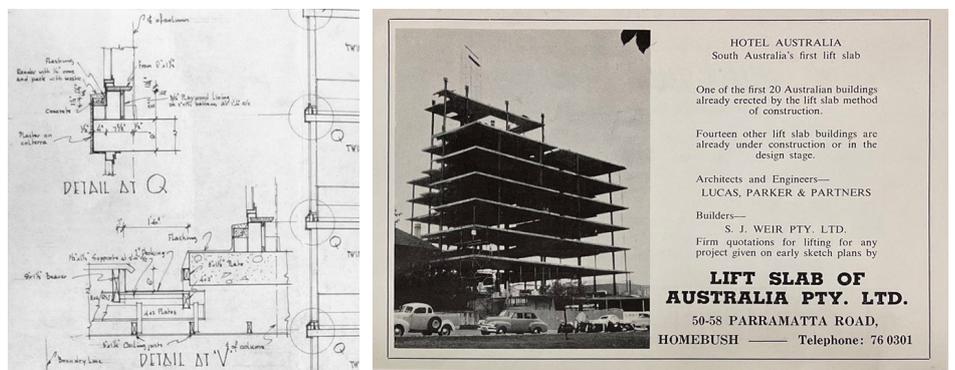


Figure 4: (L) Detail drawings by Lucas, Parker & Partners, 1959 (Source: City of Adelaide City Archive, 2482/0037-BAP12880:03); (R) Magazine Advertisement, 1960 (Source: *Building and Architecture*, May-July 1960)

14. *Building and Architecture*, May-July (1960): 11.

15. *Building and Architecture*, May-July (1960): 11.

The building works for Hotel Australia were carried out by general contractors S.J. Weir Pty. Ltd. of Edwardstown, Adelaide in collaboration with Lift Slab of Australia Pty. Ltd., of Homebush, Sydney. Constructed in only eleven months, between September 1959 and August 1960, the building set record time for construction of a property of this size. S.J. Weir attributed the saving of up to five months in construction time to the use of the new lift slab construction method.¹⁴ The process of pouring all slabs at the ground level also created savings in costs of equipment and formwork required to complete the task. While these were to be expected, some of the unexpected value came from the elimination of beams which reduced the total weight of the structural steel and also the total height of the building. Since the placement of the reinforcement steel was being done at the ground level it also increased the speed and thus lowered the cost of reinforcement. The reinforcing contractor, ARC Engineering Pty. Ltd., reported that they were able to average approx. 17 tons for five men per day, which was almost twice their normal average, due to the repetitive nature of the work.¹⁵ These economies were also replicated for the pouring of the slabs, and the actual time to pour the ground and the succeeding nine floors was only three weeks. A further three weeks were allowed for curing and in four more weeks all the floors had been lifted to their final position. So, within a total time period of ten weeks from the first pour, all slabs were in place and work could begin simultaneously across all floors for masonry and finishes.

16. *Building and Architecture*, May-July (1960): 19.

While many of these savings can be attributed to the lift slab construction system itself, the pioneering nature of the work meant that it came with new challenges which the team in Adelaide were able to address through their specific collaboration and innovations. One of the well-known challenges of the system was that the slabs being cast one on top of another would be difficult to separate at a later stage. Here the floor topping contractors, Mosaic Flooring Co. Ltd worked closely with British Paints (Australia) Pty Ltd to address this concern.¹⁶ British Paints had manufactured a special separating compound which needed to be applied with constant thickness and cover across the slab surface. This removed the need for timber separating formers and the topping became the formwork for the ceiling above. Not only were Mosaic Flooring able to achieve this task with no problems for separation, but the evenness of the process also ensured that there was no plastering or finish required for the ceilings upon separation. This elimination of rendering or false ceilings further created extra savings in cost and time.

17. University of Melbourne Department of Architecture, *Cross-Section*, No. 97 (November 1960): 2.

18. *Building and Architecture*, May-July (1960): 11.

The other challenge related to the lifting of the formed slabs using hydraulic jacks along the entire length of the columns. The need for a flat slab with enough rigidity to hold up to the lifting process meant that all beams were eliminated, and high strength concrete had to be used. The final thickness of the slab in this case came out to be 9 inches (230mm) and each floor weighed about 250 tons.¹⁷ To lift the slabs across the entire height of the building also required the columns to be exactly plumb. To achieve this a turnbuckle was attached to a tie rod welded diagonally between two columns to correct any drifts and the collars on the slabs were welded to the columns once at the final position. The slabs were lifted at a rate of 7ft per hour in pairs or threes using hydraulic jacks and lifting rods mounted on top of the steel columns.¹⁸ Once they had reached a height of 25 ft (7.5m) further sections of the column were

added to lift the slab to the desired floor level. Each stage of lift and weld ensured greater rigidity to the structure for further lifting processes.

The process also required perfect cooperation from all the various service providers to allow for continuous lifting to go according to schedule, which included steel supply and welding (Forwood Johns and Waygood), steel erection (J. Radcliff), plumbing (PHR Ltd.), and of course concreting (Universal Ready Mixed Concrete). This further introduced new innovations in the use of public address systems and an electronic safety system circuit to ensure perfect coordination between the various parties involved in the delicately managed lifting process.

19. K.J. Woodger, "Technical Advances in Lift Slab," *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 21, 1961, 23.

The construction of this building provided new solutions for challenges relating to flexibility in the design of floor plates for a system designed for repetition. The third, fourth, fifth and sixth floors of the building had large, cantilevered floor areas of about 20'x 20' (6mx6m) which would have proved a challenge for lift slab construction in terms of column integration. But the reinforcement was calculated in a way that the aesthetics of the building were not compromised. Similarly, a large opening in the slab on the ninth floor of approx. 44'x13' (13mx4m) was also incorporated without any compromises in the building design or the construction process.¹⁹ The overall construction cost came to only £650,000.

20. *The Bulletin*, October 26, 1968.

21. Ray Polkinghorne, "A 'bargain' at \$5.3m," *Advertiser*, February 29, 1980, 4.

The construction of Hotel Australia launched a new era of luxury in Adelaide and the structure soon became the heart of social life in the city with restaurants, cabarets, and night clubs, as well as visiting artists from interstate and overseas. The hotel was later acquired by Hotel Holdings Ltd. who engaged the now expanded practice of Lucas, Parker, Berriman and Lake in 1964 to do some extensions and alterations to the building. In 1968 Federal Hotels of Melbourne made a deal with Hotel Holdings Ltd that gave them 49% interest in the company.²⁰ The hotel would eventually be acquired by Federal Hotels until its transfer to the Oberoi Group in the late 1970s.²¹

Introducing Global Standards of 'Ultra-Luxury'

22. Thomas Borstelmann, *The 1970s: A New Global History from Civil Rights to Economic Inequality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

By the late 1970s the 'ultra-modern' aspirations of Hotel Australia were starting to fade and the whole building was in need of some extra care; indeed, all of Australia was. Following the oil crisis of the early 1970s, which led to a fall in economic growth rates across most Western nations, Australia had experienced a combination of inflation and unemployment – a phenomenon described by economists as stagflation.²² This period of economic recession would continue well into the 1980s until the full impact of the economic reforms initiated under Bob Hawke in 1983 would be felt. From a global perspective, this same economic phenomenon had opened up new opportunities for entrepreneurship in Asia that would have a profound impact on Australian architects and architecture.

The first couple of decades after the Second World War saw a long process of decolonisation whereby new nation states emerged in Asia. As the power shifted from expatriate colonial capital to the local entrepreneurial elite, the mid 1970s also saw the rise in new

23. Annabelle Wharton, *Building the Cold War: Hilton International Hotels and Modern Architecture* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2001); and Eunice Seng "Temporary Domesticities: The Southeast Asian hotel as (Re)presentation of Modernity, 1968–1973," *The Journal of Architecture* 22:6 (2017): 1092-1136.

24. Amit Srivastava and Cole Roskam, "Fusion of Horizons: Australian Architects in Asia, 1950s-80s," Exhibited at Tin Sheds Gallery, Sydney. 13 July-7 September, 2019.

25. Amit Srivastava, "Hijas Kasturi and Harry Seidler in Malaysia: Australian-Asian Exchange and the Genesis of a 'Canonical Work'" in *Proceedings of the SAHANZ 30, Open*, eds. Alexandra Brown and Andrew Leach (Gold Coast, Qld: SAHANZ, 2013): 191-205.

26. Peter Scriver and Amit Srivastava, "Cultivating Bali Style: A Story of Asian Becoming in the Late Twentieth Century," in *South East Asia's Modern Architecture*, eds. J. Chang and I. Tajudeen (Singapore: NUS Press, 2019), 85-111.

opportunities of trade and investment as well as professional exchange. An early impact was felt in the international tourism and hotel industry which had already benefitted considerably due to the availability of affordable jet powered commercial air travel and the recent introduction of the Boeing 747 airliner (1969). As Annabelle Wharton and others have noted, this space was originally dominated by western hotel chains like Hilton and Sheraton, but now the growing market also gave rise to Asian brands like Peninsula, Marco Polo, Furama, Shangri-La, Taj Hotels and the Oberoi Group.²³ Accordingly, major Asian economic centres like Hong Kong, Singapore and Mumbai became home to large international design practices that defined the architectural and interior design aesthetics of hotels across East and Southeast Asia.²⁴ With the economic recession in Australia and lack of local projects, numerous Australian architects and designers found work in the neighbouring regions of Asia.²⁵ Eventually these elite business leaders from Asia also initiated direct trade and investment on Australian shores and brought their approach to design in their engagement with Australian designers.²⁶ It can, therefore, be argued that it was the patronage of this entrepreneurial elite class that prompted a region-wide development of architectural and interior design expertise, and defined the international luxury tourism industry in the 1980s.



Figure 5: (L) Magazine Advertisement for Oberoi Imperial, Singapore, c.1971 (Source: flickr.com/photos/glenhsparky/6700054099); (R) Oberoi Sheraton, Mumbai, c.1973 (Source: www.oberoihotels.com)

27. The Alan Gilbert Archive is held as a private collection in Sydney currently managed by Adrian and Judith Snodgrass.

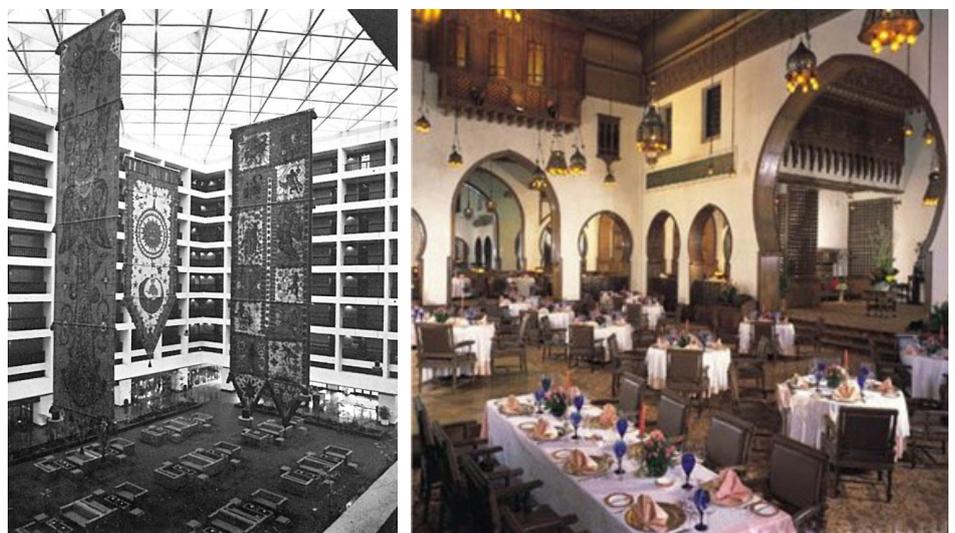


Figure 6: (L) Lobby Interiors for Lanka Oberoi; (R) Restaurant Interiors for Mena House, Egypt (Source: Alan Gilbert Archive)²⁷

28. Bachi Karkaria, *Dare to Dream: A Life of Mohan Singh Oberoi* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1992).

29. See Scriver and Srivastava, "Cultivating Bali Style."

30. Polkinghorne, "A 'bargain' at \$5.3m," 4. The hotel was supposed acquired outright by Oberoi in March 1980.

31. "Oberoi chief has room at the top" *Advertiser*, February 26, 1980, 8.

Of relevance to our narrative is the case of one such emergent Asian entrepreneur, Indian hotelier Mohan Singh Oberoi (1898–2002). It was as part of a parliamentary trade delegation to Australia in 1975 that Oberoi had first visited Adelaide and became enamoured by its patrician colonial charms.²⁸ Over the next few years, as his engagement with Australian design expertise expanded, he contemplated building a new business in Australia.²⁹ Following the successes of his international ventures and particularly the engagement in the Middle East, Oberoi's financial capacity and freedom increased as he bowed out of the US aid tied support in India and by 1978 secured Saudi and other Middle Eastern investors as financial backers for his Australian ventures. Before the prestigious but contentious hotel deal for the 19th century architectural landmark of the Windsor Hotel, Oberoi made his first inroads into the Australian market with the acquisition of the Hotel Australia in Adelaide in 1979.³⁰

In a late 1970s turn to post-modern aesthetics, the international style functionalist building for Hotel Australia was recognised by the discerning patronage of Oberoi as a particularly fine example of the genre which could benefit from his strategy of acquiring iconic properties and restoring them to nostalgic glory with the help of local design expertise. M.S. Oberoi acquired the Hotel Adelaide for \$5.3 million, a significant sum at the time and the highest paid for a building of the size. He would spend another \$3 million to refurbish the entire hotel and restore its original presence as a pioneering mid-twentieth century structure in conservative Adelaide. As they would do with Windsor a year later, Oberoi exercised a distinctive 'glo-cal' sensibility, investing in seemingly anachronistic values and tastes that eventually proved to address market needs and redefine the standard of 'ultra luxury'. M.S. Oberoi once again engaged the original design firm of, Lucas, Parker and Lake Architects & Structural Engineers to do the renovations, but the interior works were carried out by a Singapore interior designer in keeping with the emerging international trends. The modern interiors of Hotel Australia were transformed to be more opulent and glossy, in line with international hotel interiors similar to his previous experiences. As the custodian of his own brand and quality, M.S. Oberoi oversaw the renovations personally and stayed at the hotel premises for several months.³¹

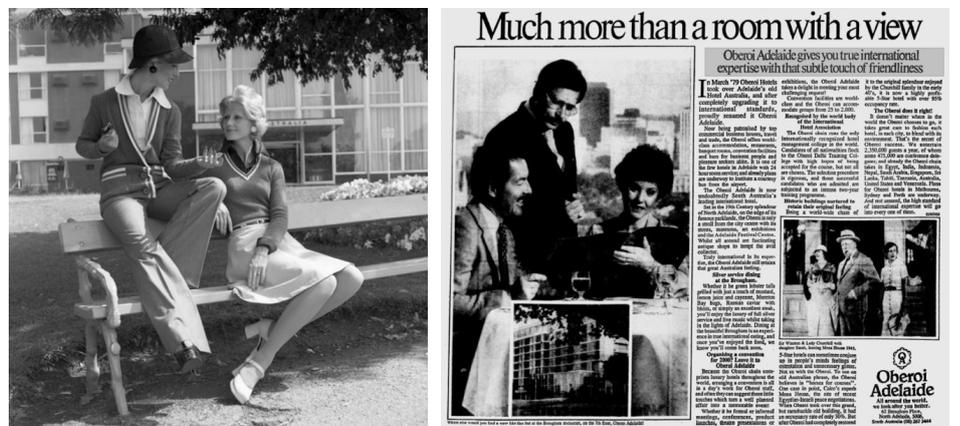


Figure 7: (L) Fashion shoot at Hotel Australia (Source: SLSA ref. PRG1662/7/580/1); (R) Article on Oberoi Adelaide (Source: The Age June 09, 1980, 5.)

32. "The Hotel that did not die of Shame" *POL Magazine* Holiday Issue 1980/1981, 96 - 99.

33. Karkaria, *Dare to Dream*, 1992.

34. Hotel Oberoi Promotion pamphlet, Wedding Catering Menu. The State Library of South Australia, (AuASA) b19605924, Hotel Oberoi Adelaide [ephemera collection], <https://www.catalog.slsa.sa.gov.au:443/record=b1960592~S1>.

35. Polkinghorne, "A 'bargain' at \$5.3m," 4.

The renamed, Oberoi Adelaide brought new standards of luxury and leisure to Adelaide's social life.³² It was the first hotel with a doorman in Adelaide, a more international menu, brunch events and live music.³³ The hotel also included the Rang Mahal Indian restaurant, the Brougham Restaurant, and the Imperial Lounge and Cocktails, where one could enjoy live music and spectacular views of Adelaide. The hotel boasted of global standard business facilities to hold conferences of up to 1000 attendees.³⁴ A local daily described the opening night as a "glittering affair with orchids for women, lapel carnations for the men, champagne cocktails, live music and dancing and an elaborate dinner, served with split-second timing. There were gifts, imported from India, for all 200 guests."³⁵ Oberoi Adelaide would continue to define the standard of 'ultra luxury' over the next several years, before large international brands like Hilton (1983) and Hyatt (1988) finally arrived in Adelaide. By the mid-1980s Oberoi Adelaide was sold to Perth based Interwest Group and they eventually renamed it Hotel Adelaide International. The hotel went through yet another renovation in the mid-1990s by local architect Kenneth Milne, who was responsible for renovations of many mid-century hotels, before finally being closed in early 2000s to be converted into high-end luxury apartments in 2009.



Figure 8: Oberoi Adelaide pamphlets advertising the wedding and lifestyle package (Source: SLSA ref. AuASA b19605924)

36. Seng "Temporary Domesticities," 1092.

37. Bob Byrne "All Class on O'Connell," Advertiser, August 17, 2020, 40. Also see Facebook group page: [facebook.com/adelaiderememberwhen](https://www.facebook.com/adelaiderememberwhen)

While the management of the hotel by the Oberoi Group was relatively short-lived, the impact of Oberoi Adelaide on the domestic culture of Adelaide cannot be brushed aside so easily. In her work on Southeast Asian hotels and the changing nature of domesticity, Eunice Seng argues that such luxury hotels can be seen as "temporary spaces of domesticity and consumption" and the experience as well as media coverage does much to define local ideals of domesticity.³⁶ From that perspective, the impact of Hotel Australia and Oberoi Adelaide is still very much perceivable in the local recollection of the social life during that era.³⁷ Finally, the direct transformation of the building into high-end luxury apartments extends this idea into concrete form by bringing the domestic spaces within the walls of the hotel and redefining its place within the social and cultural fabric of the city.

Conclusion

In this paper we have outlined the rich history of a seemingly unremarkable building. The hidden innovations of the pioneering structural system are rarely discussed or publicised in regard to this particular building. And as our investigation has revealed, there is a lot more still to be understood about the specific agency of the various service providers and their small scale but essential improvements to the process that not only defined this structure but had an impact on the broader construction industry. Luckily, recent scholarship in the area of Construction History is paving the path for such an interrogation, and it is hoped that further work will help highlight the real contribution of these unsung actors to the broader realm of architecture. Furthermore, the discussion about the acquisition of the building by the Indian owned Oberoi Hotels group has also opened up new opportunities to understand the impact of the shifts in architectural patronage and transnational practice, as it emerged in the late 20th century, on the Australian architecture and design discourse. By recognising the building as a cultural artefact, we can further appreciate that the influence of its architecture is not limited to the built form, but is also replicated and carried forward in cultural perceptions of domesticity and social life. It is this acknowledgement of the cultural embeddedness of design that has allowed us to excavate both, the contribution of the unrecognised construction agents and the influence of the unassuming cultural actors.