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Jørn Utzon, Sydney Opera House architect: “World Heritage Listing is fantastic.... thank you”

Fifty years after he was confirmed as the architect for the Sydney Opera House, Jørn Utzon has been recognised as having created “a masterpiece of 20th century architecture”, worthy of inclusion on the World Heritage List.

Utzon said it was fantastic news for him personally, the other architects, engineers, builders and craftsmen who worked on Sydney Opera House, and especially for the people of Sydney.

“World Heritage Listing gives the building - on its peninsula, in the centre of the city - a completely new value,” he said from his home in Denmark.

“It is a gift to the city of Sydney.”

He said it was an honour to have his “House” listed alongside the other truly extraordinary cultural sites which include the Acropolis, the Palace of Versailles, the Great Wall of China and the Taj Mahal.

The expert report recommending World Heritage Listing stated that Sydney Opera House is revered the world over as “a work of human creative genius, and a masterful architectural and engineering achievement..... The Sydney Opera House is of outstanding universal value.... a great artistic monument and an icon.

“In terms of iconic masterpieces, the building is one of the most enduring images of the 20th century and world renowned monuments that traverse time and place.

“Utzon’s original design concept and his unique approach to building gave impetus to a collective creativity including architects, engineers and builders.”

Utzon said: “I heard several times after we finished the Opera House that it is the greatest asset for the city. That was what we were aiming at – all the people who worked with me and all the people who asked for the building.

“For an architect and for all the people who have worked on it, (this recognition gives us) the real feeling of what we are here for.”

Utzon described his original and ongoing vision for Sydney Opera House, “We are making a building which is giving the people who come here, the people of Sydney, a feeling of joy. Thank you very much.”

Utzon, who won architecture’s highest award, the Pritzker Prize in 2003, has been working again as the Sydney Opera House architect since 1999. He first documented Design Principles to guide future work and then designed a series of projects: the Utzon Room (named in his honour and opened in 2004); the Colonnade (opened in 2006) and currently the Accessibility and Western Foyers project as well as designs for the Opera Theatre.

“I am very conscious of the great responsibility I have in my role as the architect for the Sydney Opera House,” he said recently. “The Sydney Opera House is so close to my heart and is such a great part of my life...To me it is a great joy to know how much the building is loved.”

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