

ARCHITECTURE

New Law School Buildings: University of Sydney and University of New South Wales

Universities are now more than ever intent on the marketing edge that smart campuses are seen, rightly or wrongly, to give. Over recent years, both University of New South Wales and Sydney University have concocted campus masterplans to improve spatial quality, quantify building need and identify opportunity.

UNSW has used this plan as Barcelona used its Olympics: to fix the desperate and godforsaken hole that passed for a campus. USyd's problem — if indeed it had one amidst the gardenias — was different. Its Camperdown campus was the loveliest made landscape in the country. Studded with sandstone gothic and picturesque with London planes, it offered, too, a rare example of congenial car-biped coexistence. It was, no doubt, gently troubled by shabbiness and inefficiency, but these were also part of its charm. And in truth the campus needed little more than a decent spit and polish.

The solution is far more final. It is as if USyd (through its consultants, Cox) accidentally collected the wrong songsheet and applied UNSW's plan instead of its own: peripheralising traffic, liberating build-sites, superimposing a ten-lane pedestrian freeway as primary organising principle. All very logical. And fine, for some. But what was for UNSW a major step up has proved, for USyd, an irreversible downhill stumble. In the design of two new law buildings, however, the tale is reversed.

Richard Francis-Jones' new Law Faculty at USyd is a serene yet commanding presence on the campus edge, a town-gown interface whose glorious transparent walkways and subtle generousities effortlessly dignify staff, students and visitors. The building recognises space and light as its main psychotropic media, sculpting them into welcome, intrigue, excite or awe (viz the Turnbull reading room). By comparison, the dumb physicality of Lyons' Law building at UNSW is an admission of defeat, a collapse in the face of architecture's real

task and a compensatory slide into clever angles, ironic materials and clashing, high-chroma hues.

In design-strategy terms, the two law buildings are diametrically opposed. Where the USyd building opens itself to both campus and park, offering glimpses in and out at every turn, filling the interior with fresh air natural light, UNSW's has a Darth Vader presence, forbidding without and frenetically claustrophobic within.

Where the USyd building maintains a strong and simple plan discipline, keeping complexity for the third dimension, the UNSW building seems determined to complicate and obfuscate from the outset, with barely a wall, stair or joint parallel to any other.

And where the USyd building elevates even the humblest student lounge to the flattery of a first-class flight club, UNSW's building contrives to muddy even its most sacred spaces — even the Freehills library, even the moot court, for godsake — with a distinctly undergrad feel, so that you half expect to smell burnt toast in the corridors. The entire experience, indeed, resembles nothing so much as finding yourself trapped inside the purple and green pasteboard gizzard of some intergalactic Dr Who reject.

Further, where USyd's withdrawal from downtown was expected to weaken its much-envied professional links, the reverse is apparently the case, with barristers and judges who swore they'd never venture up hill drawn willy nilly by the building's loveliness. Architects have long battled for their art to be seen as exercising genuine pull-power. If that's not evidence, what is?

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DAY AFTER TOMORROW

Joan Baez; CD
Proper/Planet; 2008, \$28.00

Many late arrivals on the Bob Dylan bandwagon tend to downplay the importance of Joan Baez but it was a teenage Baez, with silvery, persuasive vocals, who made such an impact on America's folk revival before the British rock 'invasion'. From her Newport Folk Festival debut and eponymous solo LP in 1960, she set a benchmark as performer and political activist —encouraging Dylan in the process. Now at 67, this folk matriarch has released a career-defining statement: *Day After Tomorrow*

Baez put her faith in Steve Earle (with his 'Twangtrust' production colleague, Ray Kennedy) and a team of top instrumentalists who lend such warmth and sonic colour to an already-rich musical palette. The album includes three Earle songs, as well as contributions from Tom Waits, Elvis Costello, Patty Griffin and Thea Gilmore. Two by the emerging Eliza Gilkyson — 'Requiem' and 'Rose of Sharon' — recall the classic '60s Baez repertoire.

As with Randy Newman's recent effort, this is another underweight effort at ten tracks and just 37 minutes. That said, every song delivers, from Earle's powerful 'God is God' to his gospel-driven 'Jericho Road'. But Baez's solo take on the Tom Waits–Kathleen Brennan title song (A Soldier's Letter Home) resonates loudest of all.

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