

AUSTRALIA

Bilson's Restaurant, Sydney

A dining/bar facility designed by Mar

PHOTOGRAPHY: ASHLEY BARBER

What used to be Australia's immigration/customs checkpoint (comparable to New York's Ellis Island) was, in the 1950s, converted into a "gateway-to-Sydney" port for passenger liners. [Re]-renovated and refurbished in the '80s, the now officially named Overseas Passenger Terminal Building contains Bilson's, a posh restaurant identified with the luxury status of leisure-time ocean voyages. Each phase of the design program was tendered on a competition basis, with creation of "image and atmosphere, i.e., the feel of the interior" awarded to Marsh Freedman Associates. (Neville Marsh having retired and moved to Italy, George Henry Freedman was and is the principal in charge, also spokesman, for the project.) The firm's prime objective, the designer says, was to capitalize on and harness exposure to multi-directional views. Sydney Harbour Bridge, the famed Opera House (designed 1956-73 by Danish architect Jorn Utzon), and the skyline of the city itself compose the spectacular panorama.

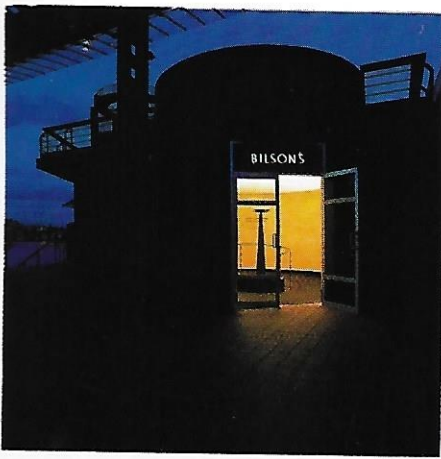
Bilson's, named for the original owner/chef, occupies a free-form space encompassing 3,500 sq. ft. on two levels. Starting with the predetermined premise of effecting a dramatic interplay between interiors and outlying vistas, Freedman carefully plotted sequential layout demarcations so that diners, as they enter and advance through the facility, gradually take in the several sights. The entry Rotunda, the spokesman explains, "[indicates the] beginning of the transition into the dining room. This is an introverted space, in contrast to the extroverted nature of the building and the city. It is where patrons wash off the experiences of the day and are prepared for the theater to come. They ascend the ramp

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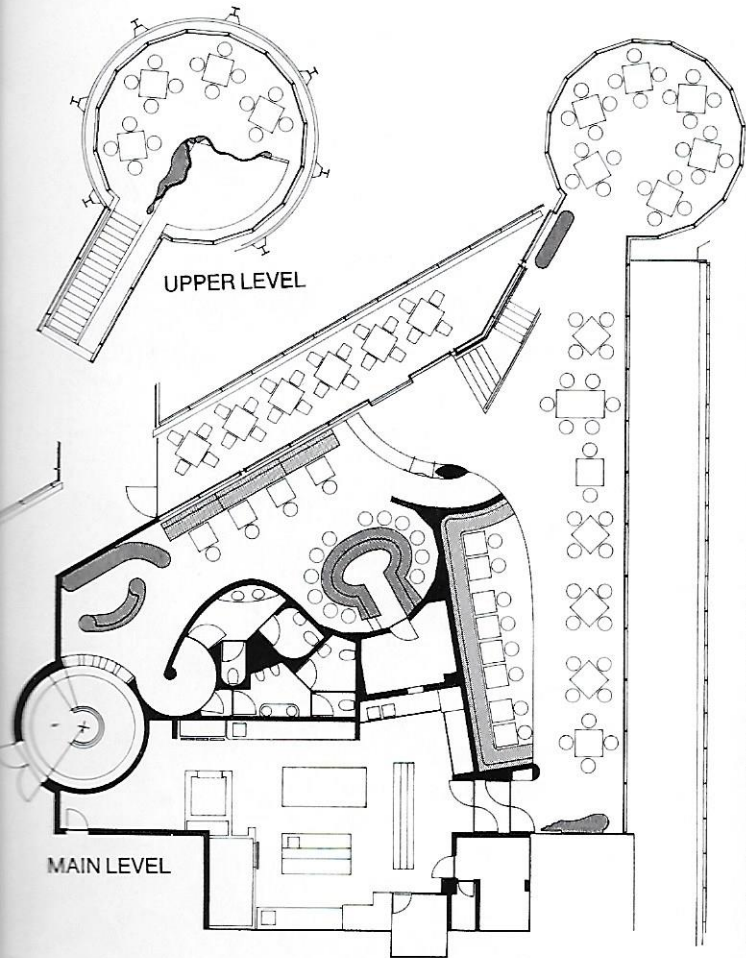
Opposite: Curved wall surfaced with industrial stainless-steel mesh (screening washrooms) and, seen through opening, entry rotunda. The restaurant has two access routes, one by stairs and the other by wheelchair ramp.

This page: Circular enclosure connecting, through walnut burl veneered doors, with toilet facilities. Walls are spray painted or surfaced with glass mosaic tiles.

Marsh Freedman Associates to make the most of outlying views



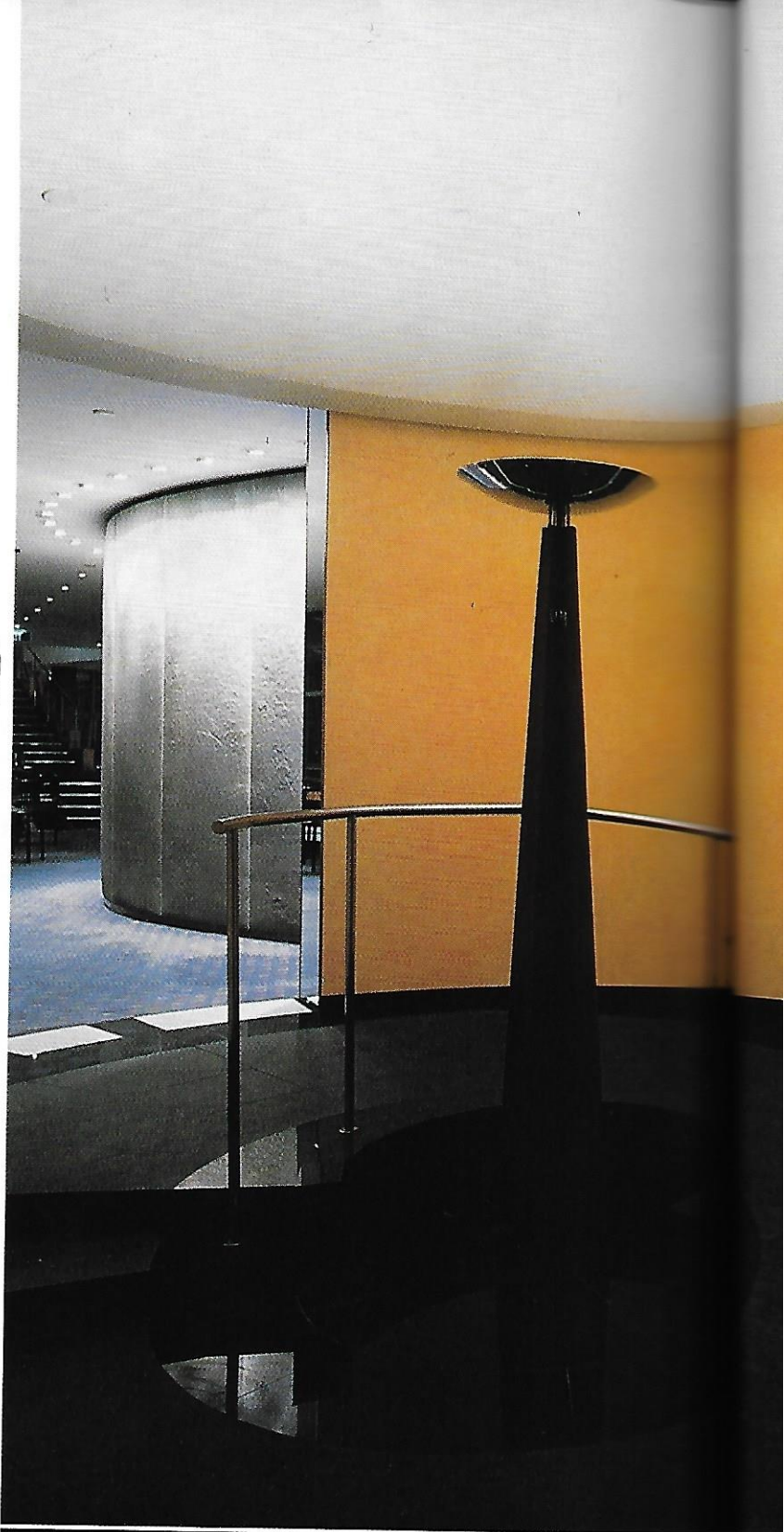
Above: Exterior view of main entry.



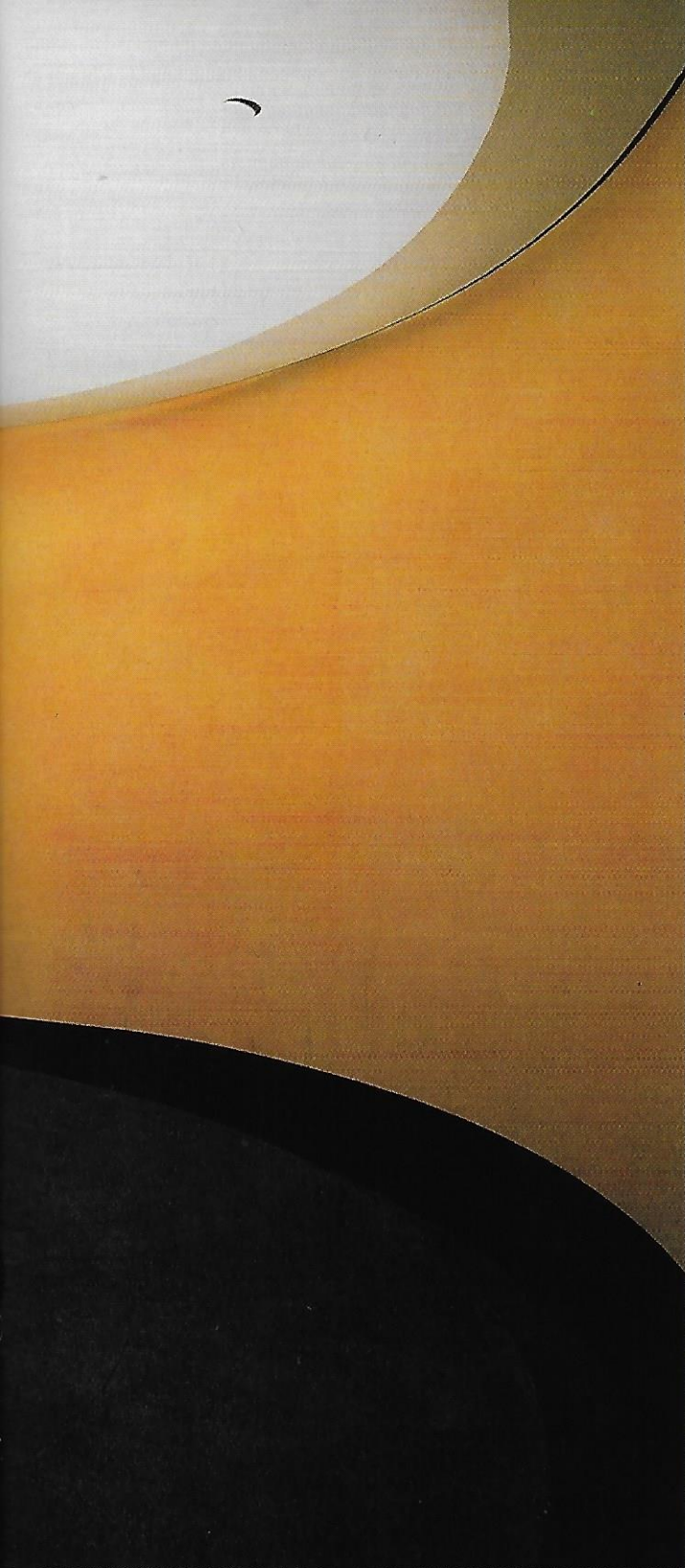
and are re-oriented, leaving behind their mundane lives and the city vistas . . . From the reception area—the first point of arrival—views are controlled and aspects limited. The ceremony of progression now is unfolding toward and down to the dining rooms . . . simultaneously controlled and released. The path is defined by the curvacious stainless steel wall paneling with sweeps toward the dining rooms . . .”

Elaborating, Freedman speaks of the materials, detailing and, inseparably, colorations that impart distinctive character to Bilson's. From the entry drum with black granite ramp one passes a concave enclosure

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a dramatic interplay between int



Left: Access rotunda with cruciform/chrome-finish bowl torchiere leads to ramped and staired restaurant entries. Here and elsewhere, hard flooring is of negro absolute granite with white Thassos marble inserts. Mirror-panel edging of reveals is another recurrent detail.

Above: Lower segment of bi-level tower (Sydney Harbour Bridge can be glimpsed to the left); mezzanine dining section above shows lacquered molded-plywood facade of waiters' station, seen from a different angle on the cover.

Below: Another view of main dining space with mirrored walls and stainless steel ceilings, the reflective surfaces picking up fragments of outlying views.



interiors and outlying vistas



with spray-painted or glass mosaic-tiled walls and walnut-veneered doors (leading to washrooms), then approaches a curved wall paved with stainless-steel industrial mesh. To one side is the bar backed with faceted mirrors, to the other an angled dining segment looking to the bridge. The perpendicular leg of the main dining room faces the opera house and cityscape. Inside references to water and land beyond consist of custom carpeting patterning inspired by nighttime light reflections on waves and mirror-playbacks of segmented exterior views. Black granite stairs connect with the mezzanine-level tower dining space.

From awarding of commission to completion, the job spanned less than a year. Costs came to Australian \$1,300,000, about US \$1,014,000, not including fees. Among design team members were Tim Allison, Assoc. B/Arch, Robert Puflett, B/Arch RAIA, and Ralph Rembel.

MONICA GERANI

Above: A mobile cognac trolley, commissioned by the French purveyor Remy Martin (but likened by Freedman to a Brighton boardwalk wheeled chair), is of stainless steel tubing with glass/rubber/granite shelving and burl veneer drum. Stairs lead to mezzanine dining.



Above and right: Stair entry to main dining area is defined by decorative handrails seemingly tied to yellow almond-shape column. Close-up focuses on bar table with exotic timber veneer inlays of zebrano, burl elm, walnut burl and macassar ebony on gold-lacquered steel base.

Stainless steel woven-mesh panels, custom cabinetry, millwork: Charlick Constructions Pty. Ltd. through Swiss Screens Australia Pty. Ltd. • **Custom carpet throughout:** Tascot Templeton • **Tridek multi-color spray paint throughout:** Techpro Pty. Ltd. • **Cruciform torchere with chrome-finish bowl, steel/brass balustrade, stair rails:** HTS Industries Pty. Ltd. • **Glazed wall tiles:** Maestri Brothers • **Glass mosaic tiles:** Vetricolor through Pazotti Tiles Pty. Ltd. • **Black granite/white inserts flooring:** Volpato Design Group Pty. Ltd. • **Mirror-finish stainless steel ceilings:** Gridlite P/L • **Banquette upholstery fabrics:** Lorenzo Rubelli through I. Redelman & Son • **Cocktail bartable:** De De Ce Joinery • **Cognac trolley:** Mag Industries P/L • **Low-voltage lighting:** Reggiani through Crosslite • **Dining chairs:** Lubke • **Lighting consultant:** Barry Webb • **Acoustics consultant:** Wilkinson Murray Griffiths P/L • **General contractor:** Partnership Cartona & E A Bilson P/L.

