George Freedman, interior designer to the rich and famous of Sydney

The American-born interior designer George Freedman was a leading light on Sydney's design scene. For nearly 50 years his thoughtful, modernist designs and innovative use of colour brought an international sophistication to commercial and corporate buildings and private homes across Sydney.

This work has stood the test of time - his interiors for the corporate rooms at the Bank of NSW on George Street (now Westpac) are still praised today for introducing a touch of Manhattan glamour to provincial late 1960s Sydney.

In the 1980s, operating as Marsh Freedman Associates (MFA) with his then partner Neville Marsh, Freedman designed the interiors of some of Sydney's best restaurants including Kinsela's, Bilson's, Senso Unico and Chez Oz. MFA also created interiors for Hoyts Cinemas, Apple Computers, the Powerhouse Museum and the State Bank Centre on Martin Place.

With his later business partner, Ralph Rembel, working as Freedman Rembel, he designed the interiors for the AMP Building and Quay Restaurant at Circular Quay and oversaw the refurbishment of the Queen Victoria Building.

In 2010, Freedman joined PWT Architects as head of interior design, working primarily on residential projects including the Pacific Bondi Apartments on Campbell Parade.

Always discreet, he maintained an enviable private client list that included prominent members of Sydney's business and entertainment communities such as Barry Humphries, Clyde Packer, James Fairfax, Bob Oatley and John Nankervis.

Collaboration was important to Freedman and he enjoyed working with others, including the architects Glenn Murcutt and Peter Stronach. Discipline and a keen eye for detail ran through everything he did, with creative use of colour a particular speciality.

"He's very clever with the colour palette ... In the drawing room everything was green – carpet, curtains, furniture, everything - you stepped into this room and it was like moving into a dream. That's his talent, he's able to create feeling," said Ian Oatley, son of Bob Oatley, speaking about Freedman's design of the family's country home.

Freedman kept his clients at the centre of the design process, always aiming to exceed their expectations.

"Every interior is dictated by who the client is, and what their needs in the brief are. Every interior is unique," he said in 2014.

George Henry Freedman was born in Brooklyn, New York on March 6, 1936 to Nathan and Rose (nee Hirsch) Freedman. Educated at Brooklyn Public School and Manhattan High School, he left school in 1953, heading to Syracuse University, where he read architecture.

After graduating in 1958, he started working as an interior designer for the respected New York architect Ely Jacques Kahn, of Kahn & Jacobs Architects. While there he worked on the interior for the American Airlines passenger terminal at John F. Kennedy International Airport.

In 1961, Freedman set out to travel around Europe, spending the next five years working as an artist in Ibiza, Amsterdam and London. In 1965, he resumed his interior design career, working with the London firm Tandy, Halford and Mills on projects including the headquarters for the Bovril Group and Beecham Pharmaceuticals.

Freedman returned to New York in 1968, joining the International Planning Unit at Knoll Associates. One of his most

significant projects there was the design of the US Pavilion for the 1970 Osaka Trade Fair. He gave the pavilion a space age theme, in a nod to the 1969 moon landing.

In 1969, Knoll sent Freedman to Sydney to design the corporate rooms for the State Bank of NSW, a project commissioned by Nicholas Whitlam. At that time, most of the best commercial interior design work was being done in New York or Chicago, rather than Sydney, so it was thought that Freedman would bring a fresh perspective and a modern outlook with him.

The project not only helped establish Freedman's reputation in Sydney but also introduced him to the interior designer Neville Marsh. He and Neville formed both a personal and professional partnership and Freedman decided to move to Sydney to live with Neville. They established Marsh Freedman Associates (MFA) together in 1973. Based first in Woollahra and then in Woolloomooloo, MFA were in constant demand throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

In the late 1980s, MFA dissolved their partnership and Freedman carried on the practice as George Freedman Associates. He was joined as partner by Ralph Rembel and the practice became Freedman Rembel in 2002.

Freedman was a Fellow of the Academy of Design Australia and the Design Institute of Australia. He enjoyed mentoring the young designers who worked with him, many of whom are now some of Australia's leading architects including William MacMahon, Sam Marshall, Robert Puflett and Andrew Stanic.

"It has given me great pleasure, because there has been lots of lovely interaction. It's like watching flowers grow – seeing people develop into full bloom," he told *Monument* magazine in 1995.

In later years, Freedman and his husband, Peter O'Brien, a psychologist, and their two Scottish terrier dogs lived in an elegant Surry Hills apartment. Beautifully decorated, it was filled with original furniture by Le Corbusier , Eames, Mies van der Rohe and Florence Knoll and art by Peter Kingston, Dick Watkins and Freedman himself hung on the walls.

"I wanted to make a comfortable home for Peter and the dogs," he says. "A home of absolute simplicity, pared down to the design basics. I think I've achieved that," he told the *Herald* in 2006.

George Freedman is survived by his brother Sidney, and Peter.

Amy Ripley