

GUEST EDITOR



GEORGE FREEDMAN

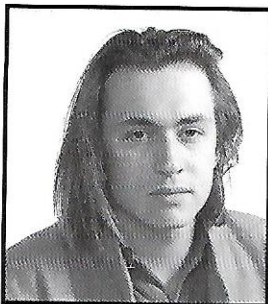
Whether it's domestic or commercial work, George Freedman's signature is immediately recognisable. As one of the major local forces in interior design it is a great pleasure to have him sitting behind the desk as guest editor. Since arriving from New York where he worked with Florence Knoll, Freedman has combined both professional integrity and a creative spirit to become an industry leader.

At the core of Freedman's approach is a love of the history of design and a concern for personal expression: two aspects which have made his most ambitious project to date, the executive levels of the State Bank, (featured pages 80 to 100) a seminal work for corporate design in this country. Trying to do justice to a project of this size involved long days of

research and photography. The result, we feel, manages to convey both the complexity and ingenuity of this outstanding interior.

George Freedman studied architecture at Syracuse University, N.Y., and served his apprenticeship with Cahn and Jacobs in New York before leaving for Europe where he embarked on a career as an artist in Spain. Later he was employed as a freelance illustrator and graphic designer in the Netherlands. Prior to joining Knoll International, he worked in England with Tandy, Halford and Mills, Interior and Industrial Designers. In 1970 he moved to Sydney and became a partner in Neville Marsh Interiors which later became Marsh Freedman Associates. In 1986 George Freedman and Architects was established.

FEATURED DESIGNERS



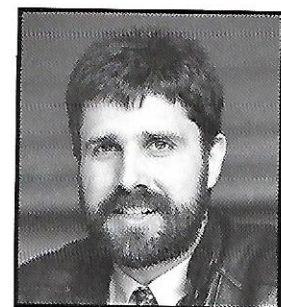
MARC NEWSON

Jewellery turned furniture designer, Marc Newson, is making waves with off-beat seating that is meant to be oggled at as well as sat on. Sculptural, though practical, Newson's designs seem somewhat too sophisticated for the everyday market. Conceived as a collectors items for those who appreciate difference, his latest range is as unusual as it is remarkable. Newson makes a good case study as an aspiring *enfant terrible* in Creative Expose (pages 34 to 45).



PETER STRONACH

For anyone who appreciates architecture the name Peter Stronach must ring bells. A partner with Allan, Jack and Cottier since 1976, Stronach, now 40, could quite easily be an old master. Having won numerous awards and accolades since graduating from university in 1970, Stronach has managed to constantly refine his inventive design vocabulary. His latest effort (pp104-113) is a bold architectural statement that solidly reinforces his concern for good, functional design.



NONDA KATSALIDIS

Transforming the shell of a weatherboard house into a Tuscan villa is not every architects dream. However, for architect Nonda Katsalidis the project provided enough scope to devise some unexpected solutions. The result (pages 70 to 78) is an imaginative translation of the clients wishes. Katsalidis previously made his mark for his award winning design of the Metro Cafe in Bourke Street, now a landmark for Melbourne's urbane bon vivant.

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Herbert Ypma

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George Freedman

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Natalie Bowra

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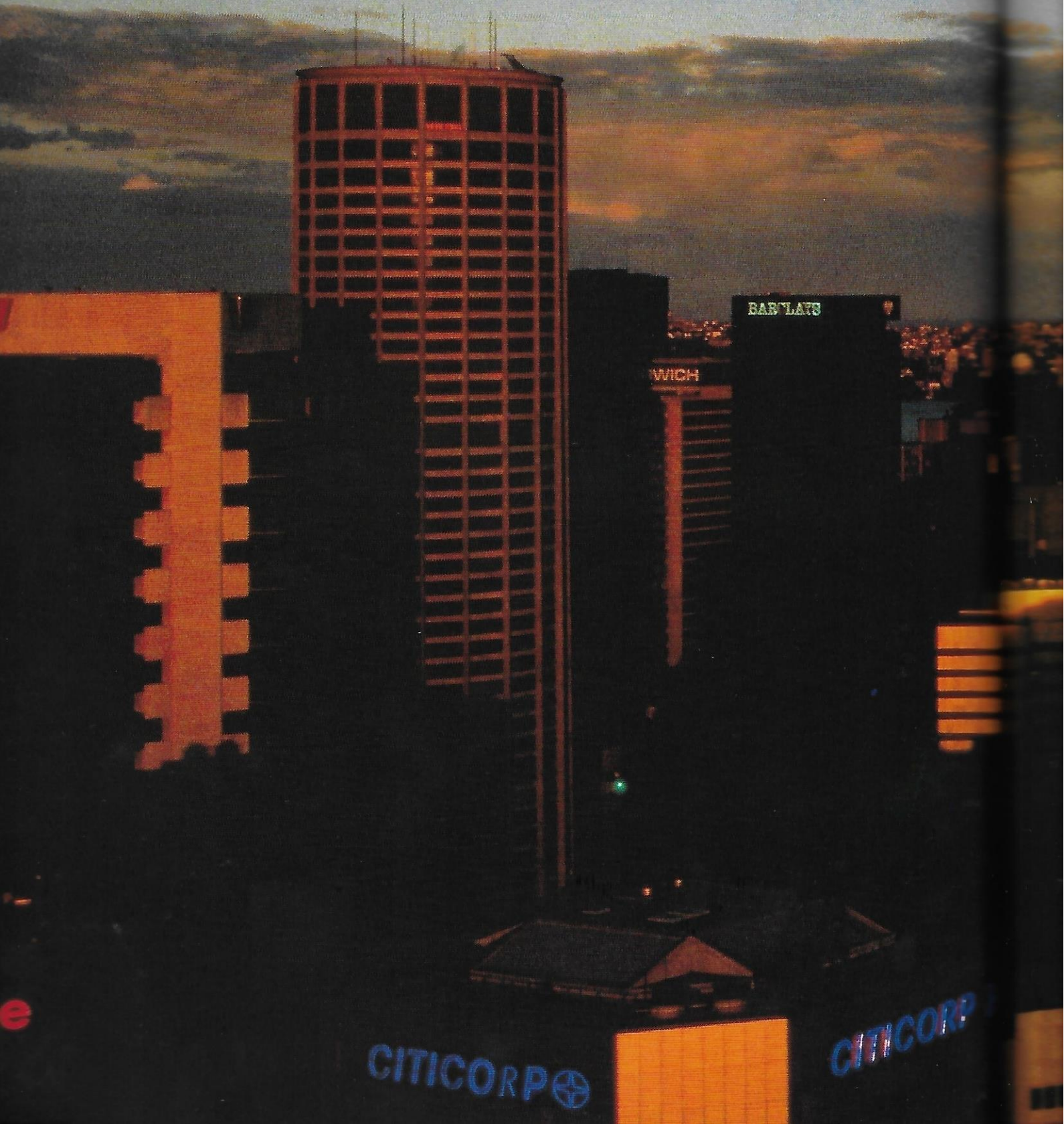
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HEAVEN'S GATE

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The deregulation of the Australian banking system combined with the frenetic activity of the money market has led to a plethora of major office refurbishments and high rise developments in recent years. At the centre of this boom are a number of financial institutions committed to standards of excellence.

As the new 'Medicis' these corporations have commissioned leading design firms to transform the office landscape into works of art. Setting the pace are the executive levels of the State Bank, designed by Marsh Freedman Associates. Here innovative design and a client who wanted the best provides an inspired departure for corporate life at the top. The result, which took over two years to complete, is startling to say the least. By successfully blending a wide variety of styles and sources with a unique approach, Marsh Freedman has produced a seminal work that is a watershed for Australian interior design.

The State Bank executive levels occupy the 35th and 36th floors of the corporation's recently completed headquarters in Martin Place, one of the most prestigious addresses in Sydney's central business district. The project involved transforming the shell of two floors into a complex arrangement of more than 80 spaces. Allowances had to be made for rapid growth in the company's senior management. Floor plans were designed to take advantage of the spectacular views of the city. "Because the two floors are on top of the building, we suggested that the window sills be lowered to floor level. We wanted the city to be always immediate," says George Freedman.

From the inception to completion, consideration was given to providing the bank with an interior scheme that would

satisfy its needs for many years to come. It was this consideration that dictated the final outcome. "We wanted to create the feeling the bank had always been there. We didn't want newness, rather a feeling that they had been there for the past 50 years and will continue to do so for the next 50 - an immediate appearance of something familiar, continuous, substantial."

Freedman's vast historical knowledge of interior design was a guiding factor. Throughout both levels there is a layering of historical periods mixed with experiments in colour, unusual wall treatments and complex geometries.

Freedman juxtaposes order with chaos and simplicity with ornamentation. The circular antechambers off the private conference rooms are a contemporary translation of a Palladian rotunda, while undulating corridors and connecting rooms owe much to the work of the Spanish architect, Antonio Gaudi (page 86). Space is hermetic, giving rooms a distilled classical elegance, or it is fractured and bent, so walls have a Baroque plasticity and appear limitless.

The combination of technical virtuosity and rationalism is at the core of the design. Says Freedman, "Over the years I have been working on several design vocabularies and this project is an amalgamation of these different directions. The base plan is my route in Internationalism, my training under Florence Knoll - the purity of materials, of finishes and planes. On top of that I have been playing with ornamentation where planes are broken, bent and reflected. The games that mirrors play are very important. Making space extend and repeat on angles is a feature used throughout. Rather than have constant control you have whimsical chaos, pleasure, constant surprise."

The all black lift lobby with a vaulted gold leaf ceiling on the 35th level provides the first glimpse of the intricate nature of the project. Inspired by the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles, it is as much a theatrical display of rich surface treatments as it is a serious design statement. On entry, images are reflected and then dissected on every plane. The idea is to neutralise any preconceptions about what lies ahead and to create a dramatic schism between executive levels and the rest of the building.

The main reception foyer is a pastiche of historical models ranging from the work of Adolf Loos and Josef Hoffmann to Art Deco. Because of space limitations, the foyer had to be placed on a different axis to the lift lobby. Freedman's solution involved making surfaces appear sculptural, as though they had been carved and chiselled out of wood. For the walls and stepped ceiling, similar veneer treatments were used and decorative inlays applied. The reception desk mirrors the violent dismembering of planes. Designed as a series of receding boxes that form a cone-like shell, Freedman likens the desk to Marcel Duchamp's most important Futurist work, "Nude Descending the Stairs," painted when Hoffmann and Loos were the most influential architects in northern Europe.

The project provided scope for Freedman to get ideas off his chest and to make numerous references and cross-references to other periods. In style and treatment all the executive offices adopt a strict formalist Bauhaus approach. The Deputy Managing Director's suite with large office is completely International, a homage to Modernism. The choice of furniture and finishes, and the streamlining of simple shapes and spatial relationships owes much to Freedman's formative years as a designer in New York. "This office is a tribute to Florence Knoll with

whom I trained and who trained with Mies van der Rohe. Florence was an absolute genius, a brilliant colourist, a wonderful planner who could visualise everything three dimensionally. She was able to sketch rooms and spaces out of her head and in an instant determine what they would be, and then carry them through without deviating from the original inspiration. Once committing herself to an idea she would make it a reality. She believed in truth and clarity."

The most sumptuous interior is the octagonal Boardroom on the 36th floor. Here Freedman uses a number of devices to ensure the eye is never bored. Apart from the ornate use of flame mahogany veneer, other treatments have been introduced to create a dazzling play of images. Mirror and black marble panels are butted together and when seen at different angles appear to extend into infinity. The heavily panelled ceiling is a direct reference to John Soane's Bank of England, while the shape of the room was inspired by an 18th century Rococo interior, the Crillon Room from the Place de la Concorde.

While critics might conclude the Boardroom is nothing more than a quasi-historical interior festooned with precious finishes, Freedman points out: "design does not have to be limited by concepts of newness. It can be an opportunity to explore existing models, periods which have played an important part in our evolution. It's also about choosing which models you consider the best, the most suitable, giving them a context and your own signature. And that's what we attempted to achieve - vignettes of the designers and periods we respected most and making them contemporary, relevant. So from the time the lift doors open you know you are going through a design adventure."



The State Bank's Executive floors (above), make a dramatic statement from the moment the lift doors open on the 35th floor, with black glass walls and gold leaf on the vaulted ceiling. All aimed at neutralising any preconceptions about the other levels of the Bank which were designed independently. "The idea," says designer George Freedman, "was to realise a space that would wash

out everything you experienced prior to coming to the two top levels. It's a black game played on the Hall of Mirrors of Versailles, but pushed as far as it could go. When you enter you're in another world, a world that continues in terms of reflected images." By using a grid pattern that diminishes in size as it rises up the wall, scale increases and space expands to become imposing. The

repetitive arches of the lift doors and the shell light fittings are a direct reference to those used in early high rise buildings where foyers often imitated European palaces. "We wanted to give the impression that they were always there. That's the essential part of this scheme, creating the impression of reliability, consistency, of always-ness." The use of gold leaf for the ceiling gives the

lobby a Byzantine richness and is also allegorical. "It's a tongue-in-cheek expression about finance and money, a whimsy about the gold and silver standard", says Freedman. The pattern of the marble floor was specially designed by Robert Jacks which was a continuation of the Bank's policy of commissioning artists and involving them in the design scheme of the building.





The main foyer on the 35th floor was restricted by the shape of the building and structural columns. A fluid transition of space could not be achieved because it could not be built axial to the lift lobby. The solution devised fractured the space by bending and contorting walls and surfaces. Making spaces appear almost plastic, in an almost Baroque fashion, was a popular procedure throughout the two levels, particularly with corridors where space was often limited by structural considerations. According to Freedman, "the foyer is a distillation of things about to happen. You go through a design adventure of complex shapes, veneers, patterns and the conceit of shapes. Timber veneers were selected because they can be bent and moulded, even wrinkled."

The overall design scheme of the foyer pays particular homage to Adolf Loos. A major exponent of the Wiener Werkstaette, which preceded Bauhaus, Loos' approach was both classically inspired and innovative. His passion for sumptuous surface treatments influenced the choice of materials. A richly figured, locally grown camphor laurel veneer was selected for the walls and ceilings with Macassar ebony inlay added to give graphic and textural interest. Freedman sees the combination of these elements as "a curious juxtaposition of dross and precious. Camphor laurel is a local timber which is regarded as a weed. As a veneer it was appropriate and certainly complements the use of Macassar ebony which is a precious wood. Colour accents were also important. The four Josef Hoffmann Kubus chairs which are normally upholstered in very sober colours were covered in bright yellow leather to introduce a high key, and to complement the green carpet which is a development of an Australiana theme."



Details of the reception foyer (right) help set the pace for the rest of the executive levels and provide a glimpse into the workings of the bank's upper echelons. "The foyer is the entrance into the mechanics of the bank and its public facade", says its designer. Black marble on the floor continues the theme of the lift lobby. The reception desk, made from burl elm veneer with a Nero Marquina marble top, was designed as a series of fractured surfaces descending into a

cone-like shell. Its dynamic form reiterates the treatment of the walls which are crinkled and bent to form a non-static space. Doors are partially disguised and become part of the rich surface treatment of the walls and stepped ceiling. They have been constructed on a cross axis and lead to the Deputy Managing Director and Managing Director's offices. Macassar ebony inlay features as a strong decorative element and apes the quasi-Egyptian style, popular with Art Deco.

Rich timber veneers and glass bricks (above) are used throughout both levels particularly in the corridors so that light from the periphery can filter through and privacy can be maintained. Corridor walls are frequently made to undulate and often form rhythmic configurations which have a similar feeling to the work of the Spanish architect, Antonio Gaudi. "We didn't want straight alleys", remarks Freedman. "It's as though we were taking a piece of fabric

and waving it. The walls are meant to have their own energy, especially the corridors because they provide staff circulation around the building. They act as streetscapes where all buildings are different. We saw it as an interior city where behind each door is a senior executive who has a separate function and represents a separate company. The corridor walls express those divisions without making strong delineations between functions."







The Deputy M.D.'s office was inspired by the work of Florence Knoll who trained Freedman in New York, and is the most International of the executive suites. "This room is my homage to her because she was my patron saint. In taking the elements she had used, and playing with them in a similar way, I was satisfying an old whim. The colour scheme is 60's New York. At the same time the choice of pale timbers for the floor, pale fabrics and upholstery is very 20's and 30's

Anglo-American. It's also 30's Scandinavian with its emphasis on natural finishes." Furniture items range from a Florence Knoll sofa, desk and side table to Barcelona chairs designed by Mies van der Rohe in 1927. They were selected because they were used by the King & Queen of Spain at the opening of the Barcelona Pavillion. "They represent a pair of thrones," says Freedman. "It is a visual statement of the officer, his public role representing a multiple image of the corporation."

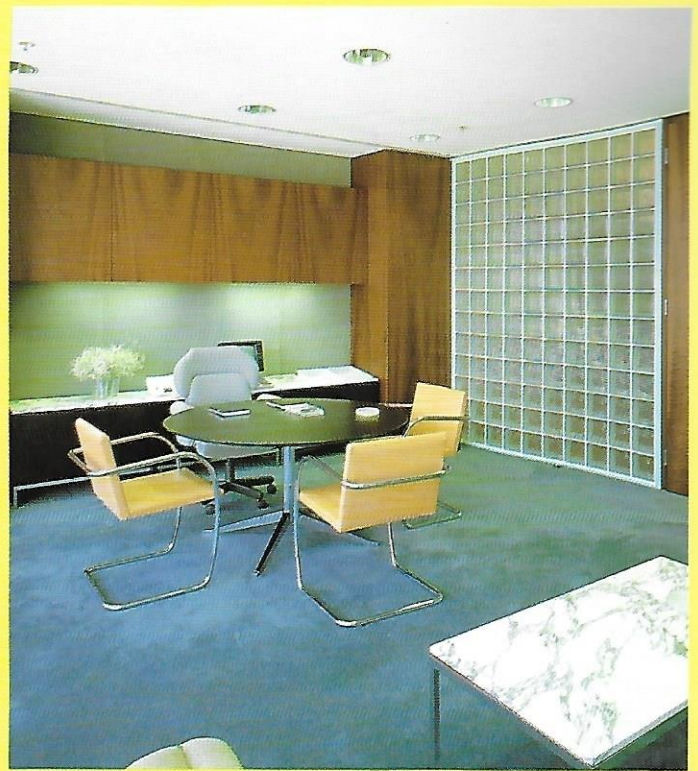


According to Freedman the M.D. Nick Whitlam's room, has no obvious historical reference. Although it is similar to the Deputy M.D.'s in presentation of wall and flooring treatments, the furniture is completely contemporary. All the items were designed in the late 70's and early 80's by Otto Zapf for Knoll, and were selected because of their bold, voluminous contours. The bright blue wool covered desk chairs, for instance, are large scale and very comfortable, and the more subdued green velvet sofas are equally generous.

"Nick Whitlam's office," says Freedman, "is full of strong accents and big statements that are capable of handling large gestures. But the furniture itself is really quite minimum in terms of numbers and placements. Whereas the Deputy M.D.'s office is full of complicated accents and balances, this office has been reduced to the absolute essentials in terms of planning. But it is comfortable, highly coloured and generous in scale and form. An aspect which very much reflects the man - his scale, attitudes and vision."







The scheme and layout of the ten general managers' offices acknowledges the bank's strict corporate hierarchy. The offices are identical in plan, structure and size, all played out on a variety of specific design treatments. Different colours and furniture items, which run the gamut from classic Bauhaus to '60's utilitarian, were introduced for diversity and to maintain the concept of separateness.

Streamlined surface treatments ranging from marble, lacquers, wood veneer and glass block screen walls for light and privacy to sober colour paints and fabrics, provide a functional and comfortable backdrop for each office. Says Freedman, "These offices are efficient and straightforward interiors where emphasis has been placed on creating an uncomplicated relationship of forms and space. They have been designed for constant use and easy maintenance. Environments which reflect sound decision-making - symbols of stability and continuity that are as timeless as they are practical. And that is what they should be."





Stairwells play an important part in distributing traffic flow, integrating the 35th floor executive offices with the Board accomodation, Chairman's office, Secretariat and dining room on the 36th level. Attention to detail and a combination of design elements create a rich play of finishes that unite the design theme on both floors.

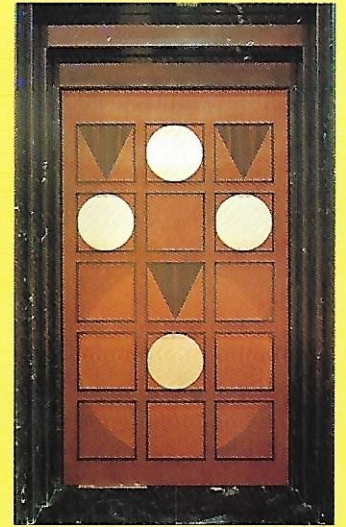
The service stair (right) provides the general managers with access to the Bank's secretariat. A number of rich and slightly precious marbles ranging from Giallo Sienna and Nero Marquina to Verdi Issorie, have been used to maintain visual interest. "The inspiration for this service stair came from celluloid - a Bette Davis movie

"The Letter" set in 19th century France," points out Freedman. "The handrail is embellished to parody a French town house staircase, while the stair has been pushed off axis creating a vortex and a feeling of accelerated traffic flow."

The main staircase (above), which is far more ceremonial in scale and positioning, connects the bank's senior executives with the Board facilities. Marble walls and balustrading anchor both levels. A further expression of Freedman's delight in the visual paradox is demonstrated with the fine metal handrail that also works as a door handle to the disguised private conference room behind a seemingly solid facade.







In form, shape and choice of materials the black marble lift lobby on the 36th floor (above left) duplicates the imposing entrance lobby of the preceding level. Silver leaf, instead of gold, has been applied to the vaulted ceiling.

The smaller reception areas (left and far left) on the 36th floor are symmetrical and have identical finishes but different colour treatments. Highly reflective surfaces including polished marble and mirrored walls expand and fracture space. They provide multiple images and create optical effects where forms run off into nothingness. Freedman explains, "By using mirrors in a certain way you're always aware there is something beyond. A wall doesn't have to be a barrier, it can be a physical enclosure that is visually limitless. This constant multiplicity is very important for seeing other spaces, people, another side of the bank."

Set into a stepped marble frame, the door to the Chairman and Board's suites (above right) combines geometric forms and a grid pattern constructed from a variety of wooden inlays ranging from European ash, birds eye maple, emboyna to Macassar ebony. The door to the dining room on the east side uses identical patterning but is made from applied glass on mirror and frosted glass.







According to George Freedman, "planning and designing the Chairman's office was almost like designing a French royal suite. The Alun Leach-Jones' rug is a modern equivalent to an 18th century Aubusson, while each item of furniture was selected for total clarity. The desk is custom-designed by Marsh Freedman but influenced by Mies van der Rohe's furniture for the Tugendhat House in Brno, Czechoslovakia. Brno chairs were chosen because they are the epitome of the International Style; they also complement the contemporary Italian sofas."



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Defined by its designer as "an enclosed space for inspirational decision-making", the State Bank's Boardroom is an impressive layering of historical associations and inventive design solutions. A sumptuous interior in the grandest sense, it is certainly a vision of corporate splendour complete. The original inspiration for the square panelling of the ceiling came from John Soane's Bank of

England, while the room's octagonal shape was influenced by the Crillon Room from the Place de la Concorde built in the 18th century. Another source was the decorative combination of mahogany veneer and Nero Marquina marble used by Adolf Loos for the bathroom in the Villa Karma, Switzerland. This same flame mahogany veneer, popular with cabinet makers in the 18th century, was used on

walls and ceilings because of its warmth and flamboyance, while vertical black marble panels were butted against mirrors. "This creates the illusion that on one side they are double width columns, and on the other side hollow," says Freedman. "What is solid is also transparent. It is part of the overall concept to entertain and visually stimulate." The table top is a solid piece of Calca granite from South Australia

that had to be hoisted to the top floor prior to work beginning on the top levels. Two tapestries by Colin Lanceley face each other across the room depicting the sea to the east and the mountains to the west. Set between the column and mirror panel arrangement, they give the impression their horizon line extends forever.

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