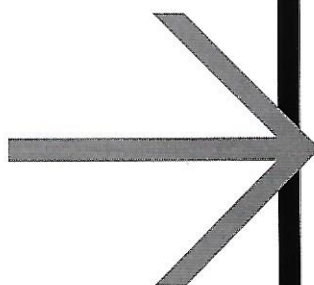


REVIEW ANTONIA WILLIAMS AND CHRIS FRANCE PHOTOGRAPHY SHARRIN REES



DINING AT ITS FINEST, AMPERSAND IS SLEEK, SUBTLE AND A LESSON IN PLEASURE TO MOST. IT IS TESTIMONY TO THE SOPHISTICATED PALETTE OF **GEORGE FREEDMAN AND ASSOCIATES**, WHO HAVE CREATED A RESTAURANT THAT OFFERS A VISUAL SYMPHONY TO MATCH THE RENOWNED FARE OF SYDNEY RESTAURATEUR TONY BILSON.

ampersand

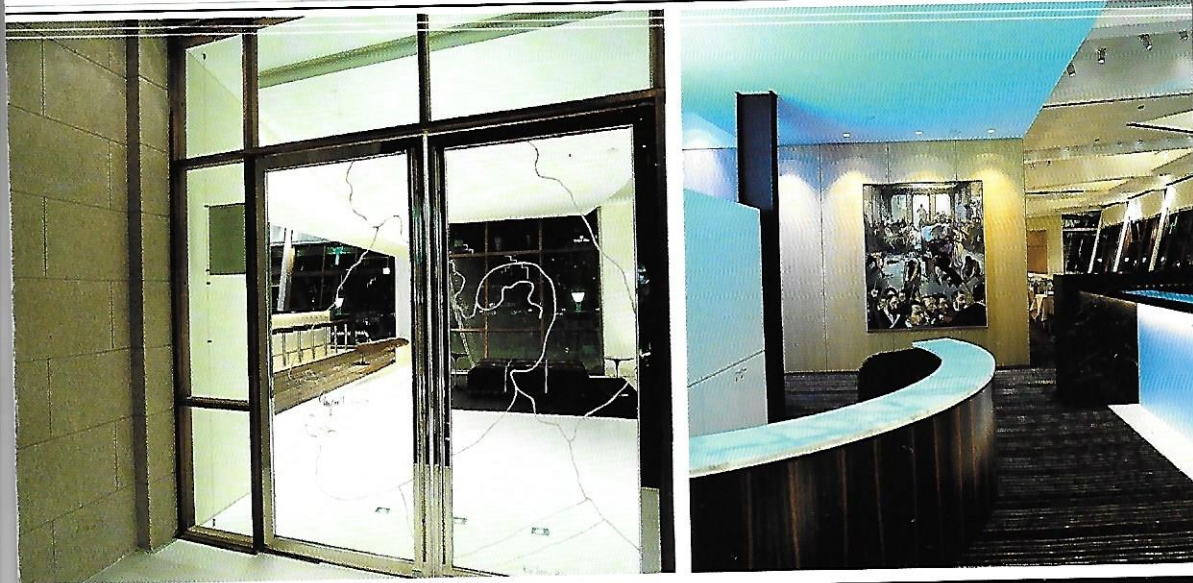




→ The budget and ambitions were big, the space not quite big enough, and time was short. Opening last November at the top of Sydney's Cockle Bay Wharf, the east side of Darling Harbour, Ampersand is the restaurant in this Lend Lease Development most geared to Olympian dining.

The players are interior architect George Freedman for Tony Bilson & Company – chef/restaurateur Tony Bilson, ex hotelier Ted Wright and Rob Oliver. Lend Lease was represented on the job by project manager Christopher Carolan. The plan: to produce something they considered Sydney lacked, a serious restaurant serving the apogee of modern French food in a setting of classic modern style and efficiency – Freedman's forte.

They looked for a gap in the Sydney foodscape and found Cockle Bay, a given with certain constraints of time, size (they needed to accommodate 300 covers), and shape. The Cockle Bay signature is the heavily timbered sloping window, rather mid-western in clunkiness. Beyond is the unalterable view – you might



OPENING PAGES: BANQUETTE SEATING IN THE MAIN DINING ROOM BACKING ON TO THE EASTERN WALL.
THIS PAGE: (TOP LEFT CLOCKWISE) ENTRY DOOR AND ENTRY FOYER.
RECEPTION AREA WITH PAINTING BY GEORGE DEEM.
MAIN DINING ROOM LOOKING NORTH.
FACING PAGE: MAIN DINING ROOM LOOKING SOUTH.

Imagine you're on a luxury liner docked in a less than salubrious port. Does Ampersand work? In almost every sense, yes. It's a beautifully realised space. It's very smart. From the moment you reach the front door, glass etched with Proustian reference, you are drawn into the subtly illuminated foyer and behind reception is achieved entirely with light. There is stainless steel and variations of chocolate brown in the striated carpet, the nubuck upholstered bar and wing stools, the Macassar ebony veneer of the reception desk and woman base. The bar is clad in Chodopak glass with a 20mm glass top, framed in stainless steel with a paper thin electro-luminescent panel below the glass.

Moving into the length of the dining room, lighting becomes more subliminal. You can go down to the more open public space along the windows or up to the intimate level where the solo luncher or diner feels untrammelled. Here lovers

and maybe-lovers can sit in harmony on the black French horsehair banquettes. Banquettes are the new/old signature of a fine dining room, and as someone remarked, dining side by side on a banquette is much the same as eating in bed. By day the finely calibrated tones and textures of the scheme are pleasing. In the dining area, a controlled monotone palette that moves through the bronze chenille texture of the panelled back wall, the black of the banquettes to the faint beige of the linen cloths, the chocolate carpet, and the American white oak veneer and Calcutta white marble of the low central wall. In this is another quotation, a narrow pulsating blue lightbox referring to New York's Four Seasons, the Philip Johnson designed icon in the Seagram Building; but you'd need to come at night to catch this small but pleasurable effect.

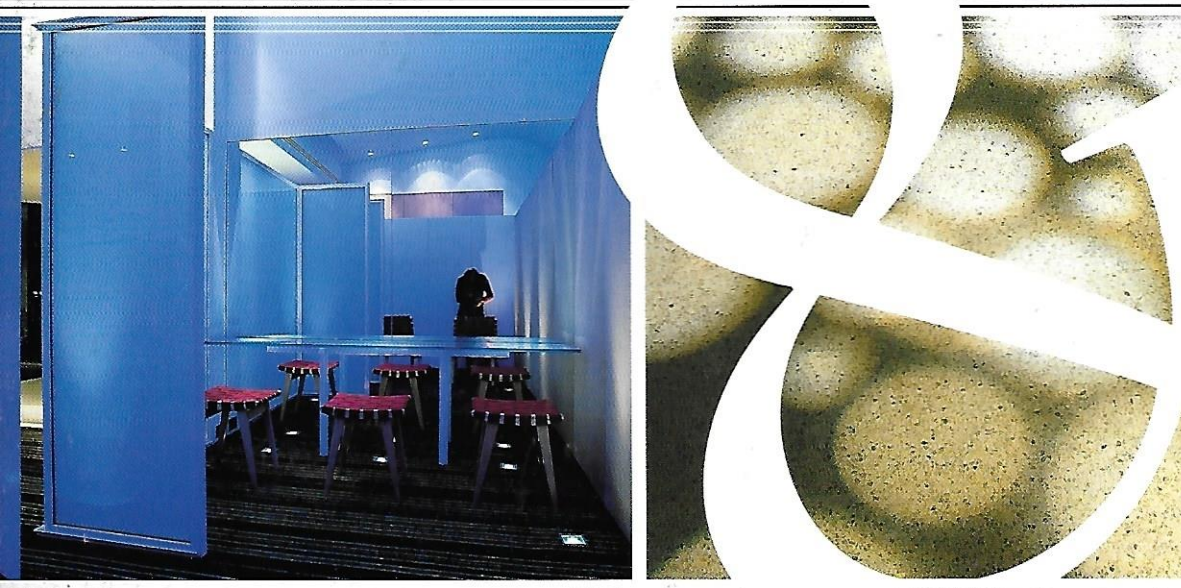
It is by night that Ampersand really comes into its own, with a heightened glamour that, in the best sense, allows the diners to be glamorous and at ease. This has a lot to do with the lighting. From pinprick reflections along the



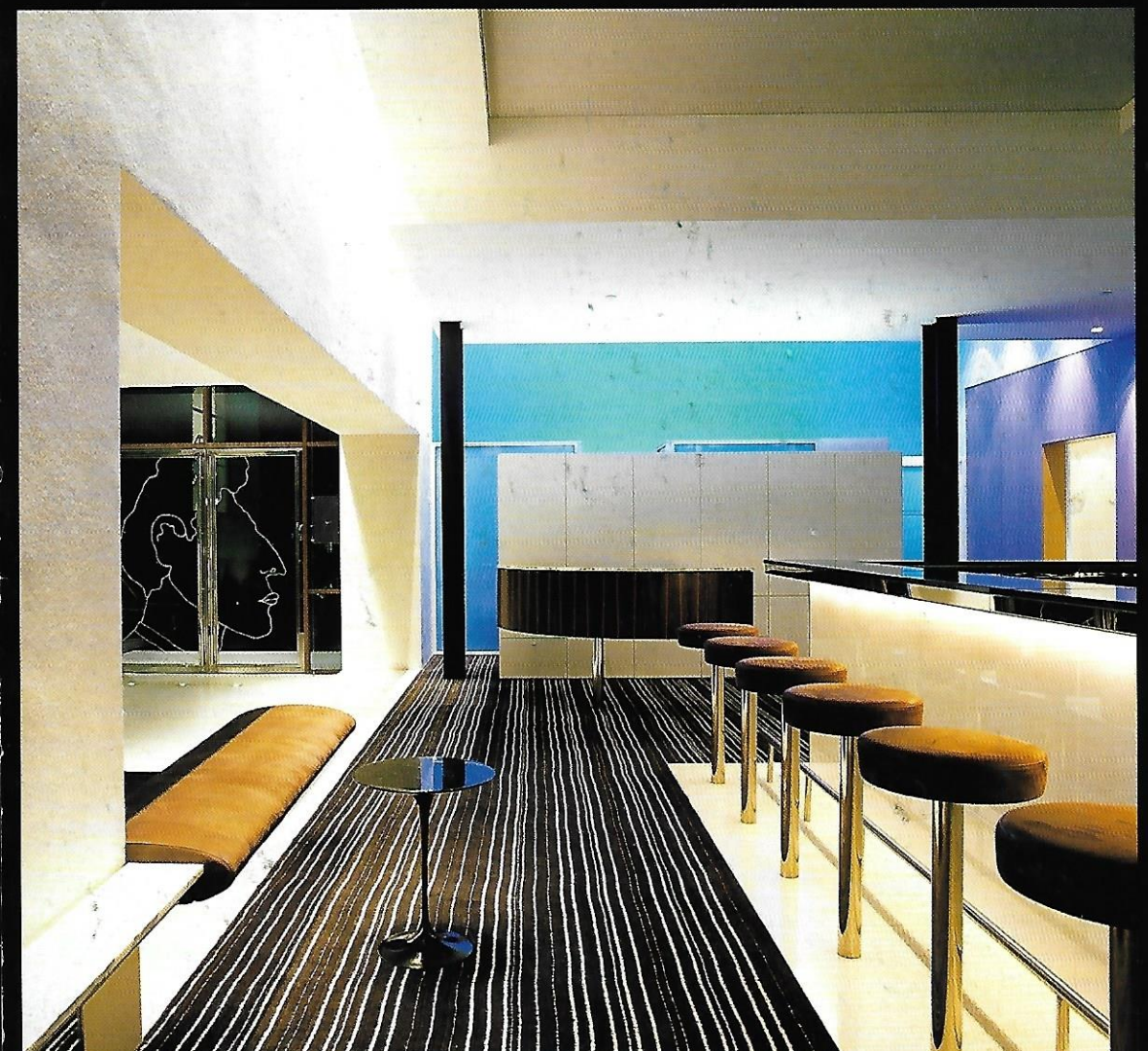
topmost level, individual adjustments to each spot to the overall manipulation of atmosphere. Lighting designer Peter McLean is referred to as 'the Merlin of Light'. Whatever the lighting's pitch, high to ensure internal reflection on the windows, low to get the distant neon outline of the Novotel et al, night is much kinder to the view.

Back to the future: Rumours flew before opening – about the four million plus budget, about the state of the art kitchen ceiling. There was a research trip overseas, a tour d'horizon that included Paris and Robouchon, found to have this amazing ceiling that was all exhaust system. Says Freedman, "The first thing Tony did on our return was to put a picture into Chris' hands. 'See that ceiling? I want one of those'." Bilson also says, "it means eye-to-eye contact for the brigade, and not to have steam and used air dragged over the food."

A first in the Southern Hemisphere? Australasia, and like Robouchon's, it was designed by the Tokyo-based man from Idaho Jeffrey Schnack, and made by



THIS PAGE: (ABOVE LEFT) PHOTOGRAPHER IN LADIES POWDER ROOM.
 (ABOVE RIGHT) FLOOR DETAIL AT ENTRANCE DEFINING RESTAURANT ACCESS.
 (BELOW) THE BAR AREA LOOKING TOWARDS THE BACKLIT BLUE OF THE CURVILINEAR RECEPTION DESK.
 FACING PAGE: ENTRY LOBBY WITH BAR.



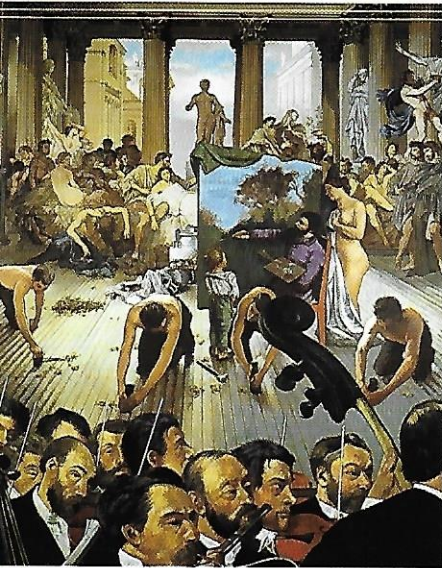
German Wimbok. One dozen chefs get an unusually balanced environment including a window out to the city, and as you rise from the carpark you may see their several hats caught in a snap of techno wonderland. Further into the job 66cm of dining room were given to the kitchen to ensure the seamless passage of waiters to and from the pick up area. So the dining space is a little tight; at a busy time you can sense it, on the lower level between tables, despite waitperson skills and on the upper, intimate level, with the narrowness of tables. "There were two mistakes," says Freedman; "If having to shave the dining room width was one, the other was very minor, the grubby area by the exit door from the kitchen; the whole purpose of this space is that it be immaculate, the whole purpose is to support the food and service." There is great overall refinement of detail, a clever use of space. Freedman's partner Ralph Rembel had much to do with this. The southern end octagonal banqueting room and its open lobby in no way interrupts the visual and physical

flow. Housekeeping is spotless. The Citterio Melandra B & B armchairs are comfortable. The acoustics are brilliant – achieved from minor detail, the vinyl padding of the tables, through to major – using Barasol on the ceiling, a new French perforated stretch vinyl that's pulled over panels of tontine acoustic blanket. "We estimated, Tony and I," says Freedman, "that you had to be able to sit in a restaurant and hold a conversation, and everyone at the table hear." Even the mildly deaf GF can do this. That's only some of the detail, you could carry on remarking the touches of red on the woven fabric of the Jens Risom armchair and stools for Knoll used in the blue light of the powder room. The Bertoia dining chairs and small diamond chair on the deck. And then there are the unisex loos. ("I didn't want to waste a that real estate," says Freedman). Each self-contained cubicle is mirror and glass mosaic tiled in a different sizzling colour. Another talking point when you're ignoring the view? ●



(LE MUSEE D'ORSAY)

→ George Freedman's choice of one major work of art for the interior of Ampersand attests to his integrity. Sensitive placed within the entrance space, New York artist George Deem's *Le Musée d'Orsay* 1997, engages the viewer with both its familiarity and its intrigue. Well known images from Couture's *Romans of the Decadence*, Courbet's *The painter's studio*, Caillebotte's *The floor scrapers*, and Degas' *The orchestra of the opera* are immediately recognisable, yet the way in which they have been harmoniously combined and altered, leads the viewer away from the purely reflective towards new considerations. In 1994 George Deem responded to a request from the National Gallery, London, to incorporate in a single composition the images of several paintings held by

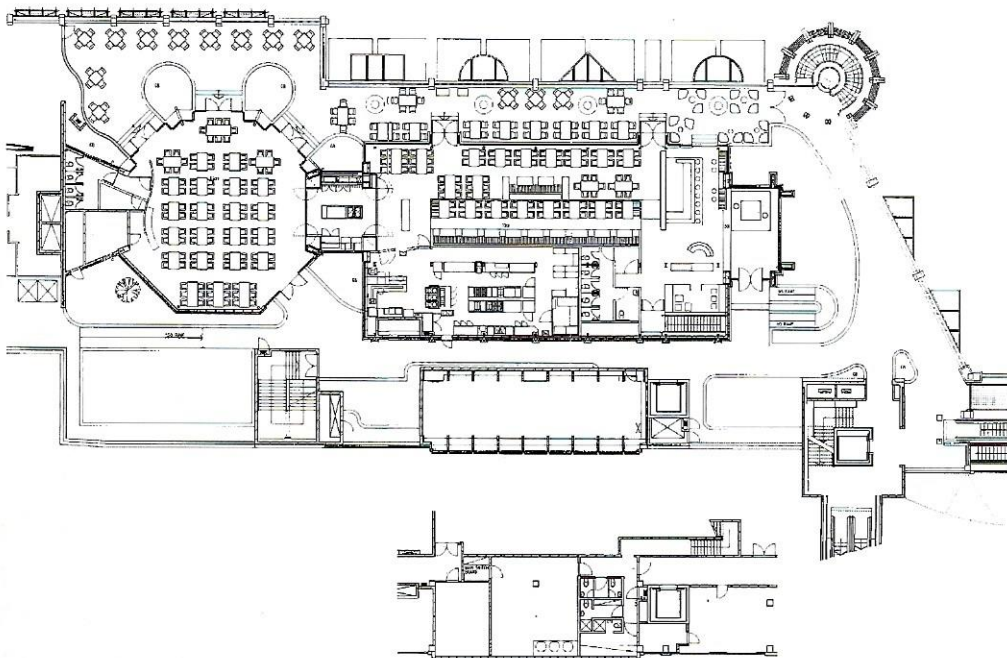


EDWARD PETERSON JNR



(PROJECT SUMMARY / AMPERSAND)

Interior architects George Freedman Associates **Project design team** George Freedman, Ralph Rembel, Micha Hinden **Project manager** Lend Lease Interiors, Christopher Carolan, Chris Silva **Client** Tony Bilson & Company, Ted Wright, Tony Bilson, Rob Olver **Builder** Lend Lease Interiors, Andreas Winkelmeier, David Coutts, Mirko Marinkovic, John Dahdah **Electrical & lighting design** Lighting, Art + Science **Hydraulics & fire design** Whipps Wood Consulting **Mechanical design** Bassett Consulting Engineers **Kitchen consultant** Cini Little **Services coordination** Lend Lease Design Group **Structural design** James Taylor & Associates **Acoustics** Peter R Knowland & Associates **Graphic design** Fabio Ongarato Design **BCA** Trevor R Howse & Associates **Time to complete** 4 months **Authority** Darling Harbour Authority **Subcontractors** Auswide Interiors, Ace Ceramics, Stretch Ceilings, Harison Electrical, Environ, AFS, Boone & Willard, Southern Cross Stainless Steel, TAM Terrazzo, Laminated Glass & Glazing, G James, Case, Rintoul, DJQ Industries, Aardvark **Kitchen equipment** Regethermic **Joinery** The Designing Pair **Upholsterer** Swiss Design & Decor **Fabrics** From Ascraft, Arkitex, Contemporary Leathers, Knoll, South Pacific Fabrics and Space Furniture **Audio** AVsound Productions **POS** Ambiance **Hardware** Keeler Hardware, design by George Freedman Associates **Terrazzo** TAM Terrazzo **Blinds** Silent Gliss **Curtains** Erica Riley **Acoustic wall panels** Acoustica **Timber veneer** Quarter cut American white oak from George Feathers **Stone** Calacutta moonlight and nero marquina from Ace Ceramics **Carpet** Whitecliff Imports, design by George Freedman Associates **Dining furniture** Internal chair: B&B Italia Melandra Armchair from Space; external chair: Knoll Bertoia Side and Armchair from dedece Tables; bases from Anibou **Other furniture** Knoll Risom lounge chair and stools from dedece; Knoll Saarinen stool and side tables from dedece; ottoman design by George Freedman Associates **Ceiling** Perforated Barrisol, plasterboard **Glass** Colorseal from Astor Glass, black and white Chodopak from D&D Glass, white translucent from Pilkington, white frost glass from DMS Glass **Wall finishes** Stucco Antico Venetian Spatulate by Art Coatings, Granosite from Wattyil, paint from Dulux and Evergard **Table lamps** Neoz Lighting, design by George Freedman Associates and Lighting, Art + Science **Reception artwork** George Deem, New York City



THIS PAGE: (ABOVE LEFT) NEW YORK ARTIST GEORGE DEEM'S *LE MUSEE D'ORSAY* 1997. (ABOVE RIGHT) SOUTHERN DINING ROOM AND FUNCTION ROOM. FACING PAGE: BLACK MARBLE WALL AT THE REAR OF THE BAR DEFINING THE MAIN ACCESS TO THE RESTAURANT.



that gallery. Since then he has embarked on a series of works which focus on museum collections. Le Musée d'Orsay quotes four key nineteenth century works from the Paris collections. Drawing attention to the fact that the quotation or appropriation of the image is scarcely a post-modern invention Deem chooses Couture's massive painting Romans of the Decadence which in turn has borrowed from both Raphael and Veronese.

From Courbet's epic work he has taken only the central figures of the artist at his easel, his model, and a small boy. Implying the centrality of creation, the point at which Courbet's brush touches the canvas is the centre point of Deem's composition.

In the foreground Degas' group portrait has been cropped and the stage in the

original work eliminated. Deem unites this unpredictable juxtaposition of images with an extension of Callebotte's floor boards, now lit from the columned atrium of Romans of the Decadence, and unifies the composition the additional figure of a fourth floor scraper. Like all Deem's work, Le Musée d'Orsay engages in dialogue with artists across time. His composition is intertextual, the complex interaction of paintings do not spell out conclusions rather they invite the viewer to think through and to experience a series of concepts made available by the artist.

Freedman's selection of this work expands our experience of intentional contemporary art. Its placement as the key element in an appropriately proportional space recognises the importance of art beyond the decorative

