

## A building that embraces the future

**T**he word icon was interpreted entirely differently by those opposing Barangaroo and its supporters at a public hearing on the development application for the Crown Sydney Hotel Resort last week.

Pro "icon" people such as Tourism and Transport Forum's Margy Osmond spoke enthusiastically about the future tourism market from China and how the hotel resort would be such a drawcard. One opponent was Professor Peter Webber who seemed to hate buildings that stand out from the pack. He saw icons as only being religious artefacts and certainly not to be associated with gambling or a hotel.

The issue, of course, is bigger than Barangaroo. Should cities have buildings that all look the same or should some buildings stand out? Who decides what is considered "iconic" and whether a particular building or site is worthy of such attention?

Sydney's GPO building in Martin Place with its central tower was criticised when it was first built as being way out of scale with the two-storey terraces adjacent. Even the Opera House attracted early criticism from some architects as being too complex a design.

### Chris Johnson



Visitors love going to Paris but is it because it is all the same with six-storey masonry buildings, or is it to see the iconic Eiffel Tower? Do they go to the Louvre to see masses of similar expressionist paintings or to see the iconic Mona Lisa?

Barangaroo is a site that calls for something special. I was chair of the judging panel for the original design competition and while the jury chose a winner, it also heavily qualified this with conditions to change the mindless long straight edge from the container wharf days to go back to the flowing, organic harbour edge that nature originally provided.

The evolution of this flowing water's edge saw plans to project a wharf with an iconic hotel into the harbour. So the straight line was changed, both by bays eating in and a wharf protruding outwards, but importantly an icon became part of the plan. A change of government led to the icon hotel moving back onshore, but there was a binding approval for it to be located on the harbour.

The solution was to keep the hotel close to the water, set back to the same distance as the other buildings that define the waterfront promenade along the city's western edge.

Many people like seeing and visiting an icon and unusual site or building; others prefer urban environments with consistency. Many architects and designers prefer uniformity but just as many prefer innovation and new forms of expression.

My opinion is that if we are going down the icon path then let's get the best possible design and I think Chris Wilkinson, of the internationally acclaimed architecture firm Wilkinson Eyre, has delivered this.

Much of the negative comment on Barangaroo has been against the very concept of an icon and a preference for more parkland.

In some ways having an iconic building at Barangaroo is a sign of the times. It is a sign of the coming importance of Asian tourism and Sydney showing off as a global city. Not everyone wants this, but I prefer to go along with the future and I think many Sydneysiders do as well.

Chris Johnson is the chief executive of Urban Taskforce. Lend Lease and the Barangaroo Delivery Authority are members of Urban Taskforce.

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