
Case Study

PTW

Executive Summary

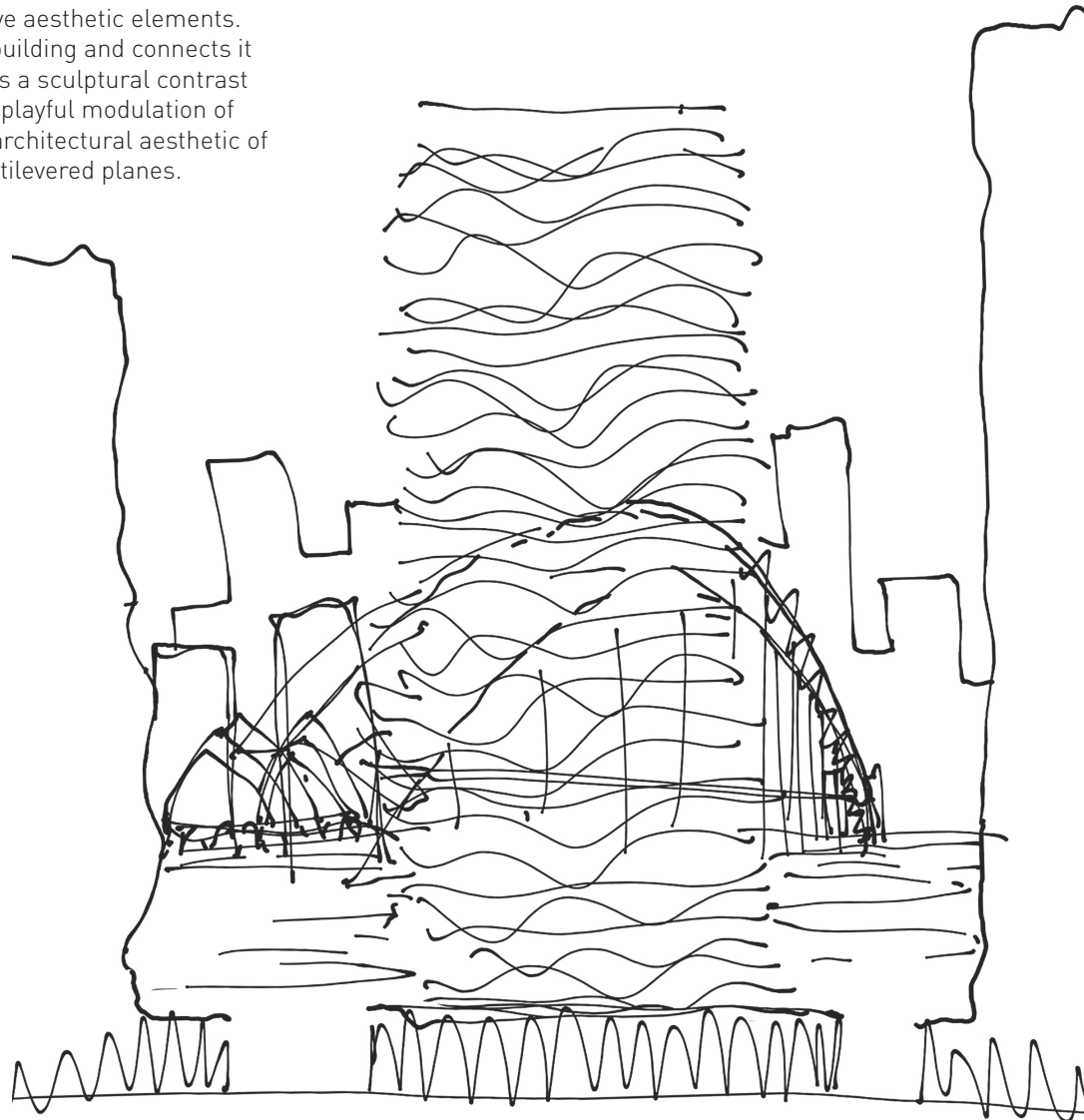
As the pandemic left many office towers empty and work-from-home became the new norm, Blue at Lavender Bay is a successful case study for how to repurpose empty, outdated office towers for the residential market efficiently—and beautifully.

The design transforms the previous commercial tower's uniform, pre-cast façade to reduce bulk. Now Blue at Lavender Bay's façade features protruding, curved glass wintergardens and balconies for a more lyrical expression with horizontal slim steel structures, stainless steel balustrades and fritted glass screens complementing the new lighter look.

The tower comprises three distinctive aesthetic elements. The solid base podium anchors the building and connects it to Milsons Point. The bulk tower adds a sculptural contrast between solids and voids to create a playful modulation of the façade, and the roof frames the architectural aesthetic of the building with floating rooftop cantilevered planes.

The 2-storey base podium now engages Lavender and Cliff Streets on a much more human scale, lifting the public space. Blue at Lavender Bay's generous lift lobby further invites interaction amongst residents, connecting to a communal space and residents library perfect for shared events.

The interiors introduce casual, refined luxury with stone, timber and brass trims channelling a light harbourside mood inspired by its location near the Art Deco icons of Sydney Harbour Bridge and North Sydney Pool.



Media Commentary

In April last year, roughly one year into the pandemic, NSW chief economist Stephen Walters made a suggestion that a lot of people had been thinking about for a while.

Noting the virtually empty streets of Sydney CBD and realising – as we all were at that time – that working from home really was a viable option for most of us, he says, “We are not coming back in [to the office] 100 per cent five days a week and so the reality is the demand for office space is not going to be what it used to be.”

“It could be that those extra unused floors are sublet, or even turned into residential so you have retail on the bottom, offices in the middle and residents up top.”

While Walters’ idea wasn’t exactly ground breaking – repurposing old commercial towers for residential use has been going on for years – the advent of COVID-19 gave his comment a fresh relevance. The pandemic has shifted the goal posts in terms of the future of CBDs.

“It is hard to know where the balance between working from home or the office will finally settle; what population of workers will return at least for part of their time to their offices, what population will not,” says Simon Parsons, PTW MD Asia Pacific, Sydney practice leader.

“It is likely that there will be some significant decrease in the population at any one time in the city and this will have follow on impacts from the level of support services to the quantum of demand for office space.”

PTW recently transformed an office tower (located at 61 Lavender Street, Lavender Bay) in the North Sydney CBD into luxury apartments, so Parsons’ views on this topic are worth noting.

Now complete, the new development (called Blue at Lavender Bay), comprises three distinctive aesthetic elements. The solid base podium anchors the building and connects it to Milsons Point. The bulk tower adds a sculptural contrast between solids and voids to create a playful modulation of the facade, and the roof frames the architectural aesthetic of the building with floating rooftop cantilevered planes.

The design modulates the previous commercial tower’s uniform, pre-cast façade to reduce bulk. Now Blue at Lavender Bay’s facade features protruding, curved glass

wintergardens and wavy balconies for a more lyrical expression with horizontal slim steel structures, stainless steel balustrades and fritted glass screens complementing the new lighter look.

Asked about the general challenges associated with this type of work, Parsons says the most significant difference is the need to consider how people live, in the case of residential projects, rather than just where they work.

“Residential apartments require good access to natural light and cross ventilation whereas commercial space is more flexible, designed to suit a range of different internal environments and not tailored to specific views,” he says.

“Commercial towers also tend to have facades with curtain walls which are completely sealed where residential have highly permeable and operable exteriors with windows, doors, balconies, and so on. This leads to a completely different type of facade.”

Turning to this most recent project, Parsons says there was a need for extensive construction work.

“The most substantial change was the relocation of the central lift and services core in order to optimise the location of the floor space for residential use. In addition to this in order to create a living facade where residents could enjoy outdoor spaces with views over the harbour there was extensive additional elements added onto the original building structure,” he says.

This isn’t the first time PTW has worked on a project of this type – the practice transformed a similar building (now known as North), just two doors to the east along Lavender Street.

As it stands, nobody knows exactly what will happen to Australia’s CBDs in the medium to long term, and the jury is out on how viable projects of this type are on a larger scale. But as Parsons says, “The one thing we can be sure of is that once the dust has settled, that ability to transform commercial space into other uses may well become more relevant.”

Source: Indesign Live article by Matthew McDonald
29 March 2022

<https://www.indesignlive.com/projects/blue-lavender-bay-aqualand-ptw>

Project planning & design

Planning and overall design

61 Lavender Street is located on the north-west edge of Milsons Point. The conversion of the existing commercial building to residential use is consistent with the changing character of Milsons Point and relates in scale and mass to the adjacent neighbouring buildings along Lavender Street.

The building comprises three distinctive aesthetic elements. The solid base podium anchors the building and connects it to Milsons Point. The bulk tower adds a sculptural contrast between solids and voids to create a playful modulation of the façade, and the roof frames the architectural aesthetic of the building with floating rooftop cantilevered planes.

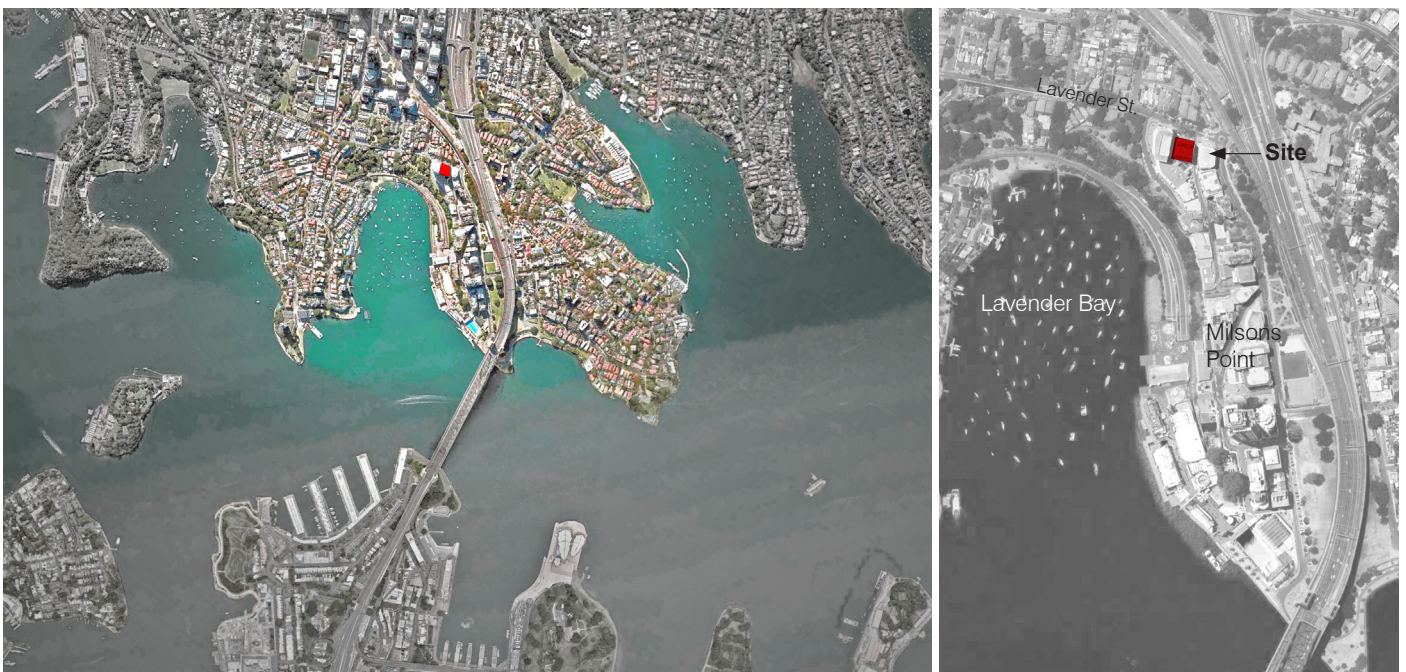
Streetscape and context

The building is positioned between two similar scale buildings in east-west orientation. The built form of this composition of buildings acts as the visual threshold to the Sydney Harbour.

The buildings main aspects are Sydney Harbour and CBD to the south and the North Sydney skyline to the north. The site has a close proximity to all the amenities of North Sydney and Milsons Point with access to parks and waterfront-edge. Lavender Street forms the main address point to the building while Cliff Street provides access along the eastern edge of the site creating opportunities for further activation.

Landscaping

The development provides a well integrated design of landscaping and architecture. Along the north, planting is introduced along the base to softened the edges towards the public domain. This relates to the high quality warm sandstone in keeping with the vernacular of the area and adds to the overall public domain quality. The space adjacent to the residential entrance lobby provides a café area incorporating landscaping features such as landscaped columns further extending the public domain within the ground plane of the building. The communal courtyard includes landscape elements.



Problem solving, consultation and negotiation

Façade Design/ Aesthetics

The façade was entirely re-designed; the previously homogeneous pre-cast façade grid was modulated and dematerialised to reduce bulk of the existing tower. The protruding façade elements of curved glass wintergardens balconies gave the façade a much more lyrical expression. The horizontal lines to the façade are expressed in slim steel structure and stainless steel balcony balustrades that emphasize the playfulness of the facade. Translucent glass fins and fritted glass screens complement the lightness of the façade and become distinctive design feature for this building, leading a once outdated tower into a new era.

Bay windows

To maintain privacy yet enhance available light, vertical blade louvres were added to the full height glass bay windows which cleverly allow acute views from apartments where available.

Building height/ top level replaced previous signage

The design of the tower remained within the approved signage envelope and maximum building height. By building within the previous signage zone the top floor is occupied by the upper level of the penthouses and engineering plant areas.



Sustainability

The reuse of the structure and basement in the building's transformation achieves sustainable outcomes due to reduced impact on required material resources (embodied energy) and construction time.

Through passive and active sustainable design there is also a reduction in life-cycle energy-use (operational energy) through sustainable design.

The small floor plate provides cross ventilation and reduces the need for air conditioning during large parts of the year. In addition, a central core allows for centralized services, providing efficiencies of energy and water use throughout this development. Louvres are used to provide sun control and privacy from the neighbouring buildings.

Apartment interiors along the east and west sides of the building feature generous bay windows providing additional natural light and space.

The integration of winter gardens with the living spaces improves the natural light, ventilation and multi-purpose usage for the internal apartment space.

The design is guided by the principle that interior spaces and urban settings gain their meaning through the experiences of people and by a strong sense of responsibility to the wider community and environment. In the pursuit of sustainable development, communities have much to gain from adaptively reusing outdated buildings (not just heritage listed ones), bypassing the wasteful process of demolition and reconstruction, combined with energy savings and community benefit.

The reuse/regeneration of this building aims to attract people who are encouraged by the idea of living close to facilities of North Sydney, Milsons Point and being close to the city, public transport (bus, rail, ferry), bike tracks and pedestrian connections. The generous entry lobby allows people to come together and use the café area adjacent to the building entrance. The design of this space will bring a new dimension in the quality of public space to Lavender Street. The generous lift lobby area invites people to interact with their neighbours. The lobby connects to a communal space which can be used for shared events. The compact floor plate with typically 6-8 apartments per floor help to facilitate an intimate community environment.

Heritage, environmental & engineering considerations

The development proposed a built form which responded to its context, scale and materiality. The approved proposal dramatically changed the appearance of the existing building, while reusing the majority of the existing structural components.

As the project still maintained a substantial amount of the existing building structure, its impact, in terms of construction activities was minimised. The re-construction involved essentially replacing the existing internal vertical core and re-cladding the façade and adding balconies to the principal facades. Initially the existing façade was removed and resealed to minimise duct and noise breakout. The existing core was maintained while the new one was being erected. This enabled the existing lifts to be used as construction hoists eliminating the need for noisy external materials hoists. Once the new core and stairs were complete the old core was removed and the floors made good. The fitout of the building then proceeded normally.

The existing commercial floor plate converted well into a residential apartment configuration. The relatively small floor plates in relation to a central core provided efficient layouts of apartments facing mainly north and south making use of the immediate amenity of solar access to the north and harbour views to the south

Innovation and unique features

As the pandemic left many office towers empty and work-from-home became the new norm, Blue at Lavender Bay sets a gold standard for how to repurpose empty, outdated office towers for the residential market efficiently—and beautifully. Apartments have unobstructed views to the Sydney Harbour towards the south and apartments with good solar access to north overlooking North Sydney.

The additional balconies to the north provided amenity to the apartments while creating a pattern and depth to the facade.

The additional winter gardens to the south created a strong vertical built form with glazed curved articulations visible from the harbour contrasting with the expression from the south.

The already renowned Loulou Bistro, Boulangerie and Traiteur in the entry podium together with the uplifting, elegant design of the common areas and apartment interiors has made Blue at Lavender Bay a vibrant new hub for Sydney.

The interiors introduced casual, refined luxury with stone, timber and brass trims channelling a light harbourside mood inspired by its location near the Art Deco icons of Sydney Harbour Bridge and North Sydney Pool.

Inspired by the rich creativity and detailing from the Art Deco and Arts and Crafts eras, the striking black and white patterned marble flooring in the entry level lobby is complemented by the gentle curves and soft tones of timber walls. Lift lobbies on each level feature brass trim framing the lift zone and entry doors with matching brass numbering and door furniture. Plush geometric carpet, fabric clad walls, and elegant lighting elements enhance the uplifting sense of arrival home.

The design team developed these ideas into three different interior options for the apartments providing rich sensual, tactile palettes including timber, marble and brass with fine joinery and detailing.



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