



06 SEP, 2019

Architect nails it with timber wrapping

The Australian, Australia

Page 1 of 2

Architect nails it with timber wrapping

BEN WILMOT

When famed Japanese architect Kengo Kuma began work on the The Darling Exchange building in Sydney's harbourside precinct, the idea of wrapping it in timber had not even occurred.

Fast forward three years to the just completed product — which will add to his glittering line-up of work in global capitals — and the complex is entwined in New Zealand-sourced radiata pine, and he is satisfied with the project and what he found on the local development scene.

Kuma was initially worried about the craftsmanship when the project began but says the distinctive finished product was beautiful. "The details and the joints are so beautiful," he says.

The architect, ranked as one of the best of this century, praises the open and informal approach of the city, and is optimistic it can set new design standards. "Sydney can show a new model of lifestyle and a new model of working style for a big city," he says.

He says the Chinatown location of Darling Exchange, which serves as library, childcare centre and has bars and restaurants, is very important in the city.

"It's a crossing point of different cultures. We tried to create a kind of physical melting point of the cultures."

One of the key aspects is its Japanese-influenced architecture, which Kuma says shows how to best use wood, create shadows, and natural wind corridors.

"Traditional Japanese building is a kind of sustainable building," he says, noting, however, that buildings must be customised to their surroundings. "In each project we respect each location and naturally we find a solution for each place."

But he emphasises the Sydney building's brief from developer Lendlease was to respect its environment. "I wanted to place a round organic monument in the

square," he says, gesturing to the surrounding luxury apartment towers.

"The randomness of wood can make people relax and shape-wise we have no corners, no solid

walls; this building is very open to everybody," Kuma says.

The ground plane is cool and breezy. "I want to represent the beauty of nature in Sydney and Australia by using wood," he says. Kuma admits implementing the design was not so easy in practice. But it was worthwhile.

Kengo Kuma & Associates chief project manager Yuki Ikeguchi says the wood has been used in a "playful" manner akin to a bird's nest. The firm had used radiata pine in other projects in Japan but it could work even better in Sydney as the climate was more suited.

Kuma, who has helped turn the 20th-century fixation with steel-and-concrete towers on its head, is an outspoken proponent of using natural materials to help deal with climate change.

"Our approach is different from our former generation of architects ... those people try to represent themselves in the building. Our approach is different," Kuma says.

Kuma adds that size is not material in how projects are approached and says precincts adopting timber building will be "very important" to help "avoid global warming".

He says the conversation with major developers was "exciting" as they were thinking about "big ideas".

"Everywhere people want to destroy the borders between working and living and city and nature," he says. "Sydney is a kind of leader of that direction."

The group is known for projects ranging from art galleries and train stations to commercial developments.

Kuma says there was a shift towards buildings which showed softness and warmth, but also

projects that break down barriers between earthworks and modern materials.

His firm is also working on a harbourside hotel and apartment project at Circular Quay. Final designs are still in the works but Kuma says the waterfront is the best location for using wood.

"There is natural material and water echoing each other," he says.

"Water is calling us," quips Ms Ikeguchi.



06 SEP, 2019

Architect nails it with timber wrapping

The Australian, Australia



Japanese architect Kengo Kuma

BRITTA CAMPION