Celebrating World Heritage

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April 18 is a major celebration for the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and each year the state representatives of Australia ICOMOS organise a number of activities to celebrate the diversity of the world’s cultural heritage. Aligning this year with the National Trusts’ Heritage Festival, this special day offers an opportunity to raise awareness about cultural heritage places and landscapes whether they be of international, national or local significance, including the efforts that are required to protect and conserve them.
April was endorsed as *The International Day for Monuments and Sites* by UNESCO in 1983. Through its Scientific Council, ICOMOS develops a triennial plan for the themes for the International Day for Monuments and Sites. Previous themes to date have included Save Our Historic Villages (2001), 20th Century Cultural Heritage (2002), 40th Anniversary of ICOMOS (2005), Industrial Heritage (2006), Heritage and Science (2009) and Heritage of Agriculture (2010). The 2011 theme was Heritage and Water, which was a joint theme of the recent national conference *Waterworks* held jointly in Melbourne by Australia ICOMOS and the National Trust (Vic).

The 2012 theme chosen to mark the 40th anniversary of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, will focus on "World Heritage and Sustainable Development: the Role of Local Communities" – which spans community involvement in the nomination, management and conservation of properties, local socio-economic perspectives, and the consideration of Indigenous management practices and traditional knowledge.

The World Heritage Convention was born in the wake of a series of successful UNESCO campaigns to save irreplaceable cultural and natural treasures including the Abu Simbel temples in Egypt, and Venice and its Lagoon in Italy. The *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* was adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO on 16 November 1972. In 1978, 12 sites were inscribed on the original list. Following the 35th session of the World Heritage Committee in June 2011, the World Heritage List includes 956 properties. Of these properties 725 are cultural, 183 are natural and 28 are mixed properties.

Australia was one of the earliest countries to ratify the World Heritage Convention and the Australian Government made a mark by quickly getting Australia’s first entries on the list in 1981. These sites were the Great Barrier Reef, Kakadu National Park and Willandra Lakes Region. Today Australia has 19 sites on the World Heritage List. Until the inscription of Melbourne’s Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens in 2004 and the Sydney Opera House in 2007 all World Heritage sites in Australia were either natural or combined natural and cultural properties. Australia’s latest two additions to the World Heritage List are the Australian Convict Sites (2010), consisting of 11 sites across Australia, and the Ningaloo Coast (2011) on the remote western coast of Australia, which includes one of the longest near-shore reefs in the world. An additional outcome for Australia at the 2011 meeting of the World Heritage Committee was the decision to modify the boundary of Kakadu National Park to include the Koongarra area in the World Heritage Area.

This 800-page Encyclopedia is an instant classic in Australian architecture publishing. Containing more than 1000 entries compiled by more than 200 contributors, illustrated by 500 drawings and photographs, and taking five years from commissioning to launch, words like epic and sumptuous barely begin to describe it. The relief of the editors was palpable at the launch in Melbourne last November.

Philip Goad and Julie Willis, based at the University of Melbourne, have taken on a gargantuan task and produced an unparalleled work of reference. It is not simply a list of architects and their works but also contains detailed thematic accounts. Philip Goad says the book profiles leading Australian architects and building styles as well as looking at construction materials, influences the development of the profession and many other aspects of the built environment. This only hints at the breadth of material covered. Appropriately, the opening entry is Aboriginal architecture and the entry explains how Aboriginal architecture is now understood as encompassing the full range of traditional Aboriginal built environment, including traditional dwellings, camps, associated engineering structures, (such as weirs, dams and wells) secretive ceremonial structures and installations.

For those whose business or interest is heritage, the Encyclopedia will be a constant reference. That the publication was made possible by the support of the Grollo Foundation and Lovell Chen reveals something of the nature of the work: the contribution of architects made possible by the need to build, and the nuanced heritage industry that has followed in its wake in Australia. While entries on conservation, heritage, the Burra Charter and the National Trusts are rightfully only entries to the subject, they indicate the broad grasp that the editors have for the architectural inheritance enjoyed by Australians, and which is well documented in the entries.

The skill in editing a massive volume like this is to give it a uniform and authoritative voice, and the editors have somehow succeeded. With time there will be the inevitable rise of new knowledge and assessments about much of the subject matter. Just don’t ask the editors when a second edition is likely.