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Opera House an architectural 'tragedy'



Tragedy: The Sydney Opera House destroyed the career of architect Jorn Utzon, a study says. Reuters

By News Online reporter Emma Rodgers

The Sydney Opera House has been described as a tragedy in world architecture which destroyed its designer's career and robbed the world of other great works he may have made.

The study, *Design by Deception: The Politics of Megaproject Approval* published in the *Harvard Design Magazine* also claims that the Opera House is unsuitable for opera because of the changes that were made to the original design after architect Jorn Utzon left the country.

The study by Professor Bent Flyvbjerg of Aalborg University, Denmark, compares the construction of the Opera House to Spain's Guggenheim Bilbao Museum.

The study says the Guggenheim, which was delivered on time and on budget, is an architectural triumph which has boosted the career of its designer in comparison to the Opera House, which had the opposite effect.

"The real loss in the Sydney Opera House project is not the huge cost overrun in itself. It is that the overrun and the controversy it created kept Utzon from building more masterpieces," the report said.

The report says the then NSW government's low estimate of the the cost of Opera House and its inevitable blowout turned it into a political football which eventually made Utzon a target.

"Every overrun now set off an increasingly menacing debate about the emerging structure in Sydney Harbour," the report says.

"He was said to have lousy taste."

Utzon left Australia in 1966.

The report claims changes made to the construction after Utzon left means it is not suitable for opera.

Utzon's son Kim, who was interviewed for the study, says after the major parts had been built, they were then torn out again.

"A full revolving stage and a full rigging loft

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delivered from Germany were removed. They also dynamited part of the structure in order to create space for more seats - from which, by the way, you cannot see the stage," he said.

The Guggenheim's designer Frank Gehry says one of the failings in large public projects is the interference of politics and business.

"The goal is to prevent political and business interests from interfering with design and thus to arrive at an outcome as close as possible to the original design drawings," Gehry said.

"These clients often eliminate good architecture because they don't understand it and they're wary of it and they're unable to imagine that somebody who looks like an artist could possibly be responsible."

In 2001 Utzon was invited back to help restore the building and he agreed to oversee its renovation.

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