

Heritage danger for Opera House

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RENOVATIONS to the Sydney Opera House, due to start this week, have raised fears the building's proposed World Heritage listing could be jeopardised.

In the first major change to the appearance of the building, a 45m verandah – or loggia – is to be built along the western wall facing the Sydney Harbour Bridge. The plans include the opening of nine large windows in the wall alongside the Drama Theatre, Studio and Playhouse to give theatre patrons million-dollar views of the harbour.

Joern Utzon, the Opera House's creator, has been engaged by the NSW Government as consultant architect on the project. But James Weirick, professor of landscape architecture at the University of NSW, said the designs were out of keeping with the rest of the building.

"I think it puts at risk any hope of it being World Heritage-listed," he said.

A 3m hoarding surrounds the construction area and there is a message from Utzon that says it is "natural" to modify the building to suit modern needs.

Utzon's biographer, Philip Drew, has called the loggia a "bastardisation" of the building that spoils its poetry.

The beauty of the Opera House, he said, depended on the solid base of the platform, and the curve of the sails above. But the holes created in the base by the new windows would spoil its solid appearance, while the loggia was out of scale with the building.

Mr Drew said a fear of offending Utzon – who quit the contentious building project in 1966 – had curtailed debate about the changes.

Accusations of Utzon's mistreatment by the then state government have been repeated in Harvard Design Magazine by Bent Flyvbjerg of Denmark's Aalborg University. He claims the damage done in Sydney to Utzon's career denied the world further great buildings.

The loggia is part of a \$69million package of alterations to the Opera House announced by Premier Bob Carr in 2002. The venue's chief executive, Norman Gillespie, recently said the loggia would help enliven the "dead facade" of the western wall.

It is understood the state and federal governments are working on a proposal to nominate the Opera House for World Heritage listing.