

Architects come out swinging to save '60s shrines of unloveliness

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With the NSW Masonic Centre on Goulburn Street finally finished to its original design, three other iconic buildings are under threat, including Harry Seidler's Australia Square.

According to the architect, the owners want to install 10-metre glass screens under Pitt Street's Plaza building and paint Australia Square's beautiful foyer ceiling,



Under threat ...
the Reader's
Digest building
in Surry Hills.

Photo: Peter Rae

designed by the Italian architect and engineer Pier Luigi Nervi.

Warringah Shire Council's civic centre area in Dee Why, de-

signed by Col Madigan, of Edwards Madigan Torzillo, may be demolished to make way for a hospital, and the idiosyncratic

Reader's Digest building in Surry Hills has been sold and might be converted for other uses.

The moves have prompted letters from Caroline Pidcock, president of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects, to the City of Sydney and Warringah Shire Council and to the NSW Heritage Office, outlining the significance of the three buildings and urging them to reject any proposals to alter or demolish them.

The Australia Square complex

was "an icon of '60s thinking and design in Sydney", had received numerous awards and was one of a small number of Australian buildings listed by the International Union of Architects.

"From Mr Seidler's description, [the] proposed works are particularly insensitive to the original intent of the design and would be detrimental to the complex," she said.

The Warringah Civic Centre was a significant partnership be-

tween Edwards Madigan and Bruce Mackenzie Landscape Architects, winning the Sulman Medal in 1966. The buildings were the prototypes for the National Gallery and High Court in Canberra, and were "testament to the social, cultural and architectural philosophy of the time".

Mr Madigan, who successfully fought plans to change the National Gallery, said last week that moves to sell the Warringah site ignored the far-sighted plans of

the councillors who had planned the complex to include an art gallery, gymnasium and auditorium.

The Reader's Digest building, with its wonderful rooftop garden by Bruce Mackenzie, was designed by John James in 1967 and still boasts some of its original fittings and furniture.

Roy Lumby, the president of the 20th Century Society, who did a heritage assessment of the building for a prospective buyer, said other significant features in-

cluded cast-iron grilles designed by the artist Douglas Annand.

While he said he thought such buildings were "fabulous", he said they were not generally popular.

"It's probably a lot to do with the choice of materials. They're made of robust, uncompromising materials like off-form concrete. It's not pretty architecture, and it's quite sculptural.

"But it needs to be acknowledged as a vital part of our architectural heritage."