



QUAY QUARTER TOWER: URBAN, SOCIAL, AND ENVIRONMENTAL TRANSFORMATION

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The project, located in Circular Quay in Sydney's CBD, marks a milestone achievement: it is the most comprehensive transformation project ever completed, stripping back the existing AMP Centre at 50 Bridge Street and giving it new life as Quay Quarter Tower.



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"Quay Quarter Tower is a project about transformation: urban, social, and environmental," explains 3XN Founding Partner Kim Nielsen. "It is now also recognized as the most important transformation project ever completed – one that would not have been possible without an ambitious client and a great team. Instead of demolishing a building that no longer worked for its users, we have prolonged its life and given it new form and character – with its further transformation in mind."

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The radical sustainability strategy for QQT started with the client brief back in 2014, challenging the winner of the competition to keep as much of the existing tower as possible. 3XN's scheme retained 95% of the existing core and 65% of the previous tower's beams, columns, and slabs, cutting off the bulk of the building's northern façade and grafting on new floorplates. The resulting design doubles the usable area from 45,000 to 102,000 sqm and accommodates double the number of users (from 4,500 to 9,000). This approach resulted in embodied carbon saving (as compared to that of a similar, traditionally constructed tower) of 12,000 tons, the equivalent of 8,800 one-way flights between

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"It's a great sustainability story; we are pushing transformation of existing assets and, in doing so, saved about nine months of work in the process – so as an asset owner, you can fill up the building quicker. Circular economy is about *economy*," explains Fred Holt, partner and director of 3XN's Sydney studio. "But it's first and foremost a project that was designed with people top of mind. It's all about the user experience."

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Social sustainability was key to 3XN's approach, emphasizing the studio's ethos that "architecture shapes behavior". Despite enormous site and program constraints (not least the transformation, but also a mandate not to expand the solar envelope), the project was designed from the inside out. The tower's volume is divided into five smaller masses, reducing the visual bulk of the building and allowing for the development of smaller "villages" along the tower's vertical axis.

A successful user experience for any high-rise starts at the moment of arrival. QQT's podium links seamlessly to street-level activity, while creating a dramatic arrival by opening up fully to the public across the building's inclined site.

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"The winner was commissioned to provide a building on a world-class site and to retain a huge proportion of an existing 50-year-old commercial tower," said WAF Program Director Paul Finch in the award announcement. "The result was an excellent example of adaptive reuse. It has an excellent carbon story, and it is an example of anticipatory workspace design produced pre-COVID which nevertheless has provided health and attractive space for post-pandemic users. The client was prepared to risk building out an idea on a speculative basis; it worked."

"Mid- and late 20th-century towers are reaching the end of their usable lifespans," explains Kim Nielsen. "We know that we can no longer demolish and build the way we have in the past, that we must instead extend the life and potential of the buildings we already have. This is the most essential definition of sustainability in architecture and the driving force behind Quay Quarter Tower. This award emphasizes the importance of daring to reimagine how we approach the future of our built environment. Perhaps we can imagine skylines and towers across the world being transformed in the years to come."

