



Fabrications

The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and
New Zealand

ISSN: 1033-1867 (Print) 2164-4756 (Online) Journal homepage: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rfab20>

Style and Climate in Addison's Brisbane Exhibition Building

Paul Walker & Stuart King

To cite this article: Paul Walker & Stuart King (2007) Style and Climate in Addison's Brisbane Exhibition Building, *Fabrications*, 17:2, 26-47, DOI: [10.1080/10331867.2007.10539609](https://doi.org/10.1080/10331867.2007.10539609)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10331867.2007.10539609>



Published online: 01 Aug 2012.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 55



View related articles [↗](#)



Figure 1: The Brisbane Exhibition Building.
Photograph by Paul Walker.

Style and Climate in Addison's Brisbane Exhibition Building

Paul Walker & Stuart King

In the 2001 book *A Short History of Brisbane Architecture*, the old Brisbane Exhibition Building, designed by George Addison in a competition in 1888 and occupied by the Queensland Museum for over eighty years from 1901, is described twice. In the introduction, it is briefly characterised by Michael Keniger as 'the almost Byzantine Exhibition Building', while in the one page entry on the building in the book's main text – attributed to Patrick Bingham-Hall and Philip Goad – it is described as being 'in an Indo-Saracenic style ... an exotic hybrid design, paralleled by colonial monuments in India.'¹ Elsewhere, it has been described as Romanesque, Victorian, Federation, Saracenic, and Indian.

The various descriptions of the Exhibition Building could be taken to imply the availability of its design to contesting but quite discrete and coherent interpretations. But stylistic categories may themselves be considered as contested terrains within which various agendas are at stake explicitly or tacitly.

The matter of style could be taken to be particularly acute in regard to the Brisbane Exhibition Building not only because of the range of stylistic terms applied to it but also because exhibition buildings have been regarded – at least in modernist architectural historiography – as a type that at the moment of their invention in the middle of the nineteenth century eschewed style altogether. They are therefore sometimes taken as harbingers of a putatively style-less twentieth century modernism. But by the end of the nineteenth century exhibition buildings in general had assumed the varied stylistic garb of other public buildings.²

It is difficult, however, to determine whether this narrative line has pertinence with respect to the Brisbane Exhibition Building. While indeed there was what could perhaps be construed as a "style-less" technological alternative to the Addison proposal, the Brisbane building does not sit easily in the history of the type, in this country or elsewhere.³ It was not built for a single great international exhibition, though it housed the relatively modest Queensland International Exhibition of 1897. Rather, it was part of the congeries of facilities developed from 1875 by the Queensland (later Royal) National Agricultural and Industrial Association (RNA) to accommodate its annual "show", the

replacement of a timber structure built in 1876 to the design of F D G Stanley that burnt down in 1888.⁴ The RNA's show continues as "the Ekka" to this day, housed in grounds adjacent to the building that is the subject of this study. The story of this building is therefore only tangentially related to the history of such structures as the Royal Melbourne Exhibition Building.

The issues of style we want to raise here are therefore of a different kind than belong to exhibition buildings as a category. They connect less to building type than to another key organising idea in architectural historiography, to place. With respect to this, in the case of Queensland architecture and more specifically the historiography of Queensland architecture, one of the most prevalent of agendas at stake in architecture's stylistic categories foregrounds climate in the apprehension and interpretation of buildings.

The view of the styles to which the Exhibition Building has been assigned as contested terrains will be developed in this paper by considering the approach to the stylistic categories of art history taken by Ernst Gombrich in his 1966 essay 'Norm and Form'.⁵ There, Gombrich argues that apparently formal, descriptive terms – Gothic, Baroque, Impressionist – have their origins in normative judgments from which, he suggests, they cannot entirely be freed and which render the use of such terms always uncertain. Conversely, the proposition will be explored here that stylistic ascriptions are now tactically used by presenting as disinterested analysis what are in fact normative propositions about the buildings to which they are applied. These normative propositions are linked to broader formations in architectural discourse.

Describing the Exhibition Building

In 1891, when the building had just been completed, a description of it published in *The Brisbane Courier* did not offer any stylistic classification: 'The ruling idea of the building is to make the constructive features aid the ornamentation.' But by 1898, it was described in an anonymous article on Brisbane architecture in the British periodical *The Builder* as follows: 'A modern treatment of round arched Romanesque is the style that has been adopted, though in parts some crudities of Gothic origin make their appearance.'

After a hiatus of more than seventy years, the next description that can be located in architectural discourse is a building citation by the National Trust of Queensland from 1974, in which the building is characterised as 'flamboyant Victorian eclectic ... the styles are mainly Romanesque, Byzantine, Saracenic and Indian.' These terms establish a generous repertoire with which the building is always subsequently located. In Jane Hogan's *Building Queensland's Heritage* (1978) it is 'flamboyant Victorian Revival architecture'; the museum's historian Patricia Mather in 1986 describes the building as

Byzantine; in De Gruchy's *Architecture in Brisbane* (1988) it is characterised as having 'Byzantine references' and 'Romanesque Revival forms'.

A year later, Robert Riddel returns to *The Builder*, noting that Addison's 'confident, free handling of Romanesque motifs' had been described by the British journal as 'A modern treatment of round arched Romanesque'. For Apperley, Irvine and Reynolds (*A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Style and Terms from 1788 to the Present*, 1989) the Exhibition Building exemplifies 'Federation Romanesque', while Peter Marquis-Kyle writes in 2000 that 'In current Australian parlance its style is called Federation Romanesque'. In 2001 in *A Short History of Brisbane Architecture*, as we have seen, Keniger says 'almost Byzantine', while Bingham-Hall and Goad choose 'Indo-Saracenic'. Also from 2001, the strangely titled *The Architecture of East Australia: An Architectural History in 432 Presentations* suggests:

This is an exotic building from the Victorian period which incorporates Romanesque, Byzantine, Indian and Saracenic architecture The style of the building has been described by some as Federation Romanesque.

And finally, three current heritage register descriptors: '...[T]he building exhibits many characteristics of the Romanesque architectural style' (Queensland Government EPA Heritage register). And: 'Large scale flamboyantly conceived design, very Victorian in its eclectic styling which incorporates elements of Romanesque, Byzantine, Indian and Saracenic architecture' (Australian Heritage Database, Register of the National Estate). And 'Its flamboyant Victorian Revival architecture with decorated brickwork and exotic architectural motifs, render the building one of the best of its kind in Brisbane' (National Trust of Queensland).⁶

These descriptions of the building clearly demonstrate the processes by which a canonical architectural interpretation is constructed: statement, modification and elaboration, reiteration, and consolidation. The complete process of the emergence of an accepted canonical reading is described lucidly by Juan Pablo Bonta in his 1979 book *Architecture and its Interpretation*.⁷ But while Bonta's work on accounts of Sullivan's Carson Pirie Scott Department Store and Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion focuses on how formal attributes of these buildings have been described, it is striking in the descriptions of the Addison building that it is stylistic terms that are iterated and reiterated:

Figure 2 (next page): G M H Addison (1858-1922), Architect's drawing of Exhibition Building, Gregory Terrace, c1890. Pen, ink and gouache on light-brown heavy smooth paper 68 x 109cm; 94 x 134cm (framed).
Courtesy of the Queensland Art Gallery. Gift of Herbert S. Macdonald, 1958.





Romanesque, Victorian, Byzantine, Indian, Saracenic, Indo-Saracenic, and the dubious Federation. These terms in themselves are contradictory, as if despite a pattern now being established in how the building is habitually described, this pattern itself is rather indistinct, evasive, and even unreliable. After all, the apparent lack of pointed arches in the building would surely be evidence that at the very least we could exclude Saracenic and Indo-Saracenic from the list of admissible descriptors. Byzantine or Romanesque would certainly appear to be more appropriate.

But this could turn out to be more complex than may be imagined: while the Exhibition Building's arches as constructed indeed appear to have round heads, on Addison's drawings they seem rather to be a mixture of round and subtly pointed, sufficiently distinct for us to infer that the difference was meant to be apparent. And in what appears to be a presentation drawing of the building – apparently done after the 1888 competition – there is an arcade at the base of the building with arches that are quite clearly pointed (Fig 2). But it is not just the forms here that are evasive; it is also the terms by which we might categorise them. For example, the term Indo-Saracenic is itself not particularly determinate. It is usually used to refer to British work in India using local Mughal precedents, and in this capacity has some sense. But it seems hard to establish when the term was first used this way. James Fergusson, who did more than any other writer to make knowledge of Indian architecture available to British architects, used the term “Indian Saracenic” to describe the Islamic architecture of India; the application of ‘Indo-Saracenic’ to apply to British Indian architecture may be construed as a variant that survived both the term from which it was derived and that term's original meaning.⁸ Thomas Metcalf, whose influential book *An Imperial Vision* is one of the most acute contemporary analyses of British architecture in nineteenth century India, uses “Indo-Saracenic” to characterise *any* European work influenced by *any* Indian architecture – Mughal, Hindu, whatever.⁹ And some designs now habitually described as Indo-Saracenic such as Robert Fellowes Chisholm's Madras University Senate House of the 1870s seem to incorporate Byzantine references.¹⁰

Queensland Architectural Historiography

The stylistic descriptors of heritage buildings in Brisbane or elsewhere rarely range as broadly as those applied to Addison's Exhibition Building. This may be understood against the building's apparent stylistic hybridity combined with the lack of a leading stylistic description from the time of the building's design and construction. This has left determination of the building's architectural style open to the interpretation of subsequent commentators and historians. The discourse of Queensland architectural historiography thus offers an avenue to

consider the varied descriptions of the building. This discourse has consistently construed Queensland architecture as a climatically inflected regionalism.

This regional character has been located predominantly within the vernacular tradition of lightweight timber buildings, exemplified by the traditional Queensland house. The climatic orientation of this tradition has been mostly explicitly laid out by Jennifer Taylor in the chapter “Building for the North” in her book *Australian Architecture Since 1960*:

Climate is always an important factor in Australian design, but in this area [Queensland and the Northern Territory] it is a prime consideration. ‘Northerners’ are noted for their easy-going manner, friendliness and parochialism. They tend to see themselves as a group distinct from the ‘Southerners’. Further, the north has a regional heritage in architecture of a delightful unself-conscious style admirably suited to local needs.¹¹

Although the deterministic role of climate as suggested by Taylor has been debated by other historians of Queensland architecture including Ray Sumner, Michael Keniger and Robert Riddel, climatic contingencies have nevertheless been established as a primary explanation for deviations from European norms.¹² Entangled in these arguments is an apprehension of Queensland’s apparent remoteness, particularly in the nineteenth century. A pragmatic, functionalist tradition developed within the autonomy of the “outback” has been projected by Australian architectural historiography as underpinning a vernacular, climatic architecture resistant to (southern-cum-European) metropolitan paradigms. According to Robert Riddel, for example, in the case of Queensland domestic architecture between 1895 and 1910, ‘often the new styles from the south could not offer what climate and humidity demanded and for this reason the established traditions persisted, with modifications.’¹³

Historians have been more ambivalent about the climatic responsiveness of Queensland’s major civic buildings. On the one hand, the necessity of maintaining European ideals of decorum and civic identity has been taken to override climatic concerns in these buildings, and they have therefore been viewed apart from the early emergence of a regional tradition.¹⁴ On the other, the tiered arcading of Queensland’s Houses of Parliament (Fig 3, designed in 1864), the Brisbane General Post Office (1871), Brisbane Supreme Law Courts (1875, now demolished) and former Public Offices (Fig 4, 1884) can be viewed as adaptations of European types and styles made to yield the shade and comfort desirable in a sub-tropical climate. Moreover, some recent stylistic descriptors have been inflected to construct claims to climatic orientation. For example, Bingham-Hall and Goad have revised earlier canonical descriptions of the Queensland Houses of Parliament – classical, French renaissance and Second Empire – with ‘tropical French classicism’.¹⁵ Again, the contingency of climate provides a lens to identify these buildings whilst feeding the wider



construction of a climatically sensitive local architecture. Concluding the introduction to *A Short History of Brisbane Architecture*, Michael Keniger observes that a ‘mix of pragmatic response to need and circumstance, matched by an engaged interaction with the sensuality of place and climate, has become the distinguishing hallmark of Brisbane’s architecture.’¹⁶ This raises a parallel question: to what extent does the contemporary concern with the specificity of place influence Queensland architectural historiography? Is a description of Addison’s Exhibition Building as Indo-Saracenic a tacit proposition that its architecture is appropriate for someplace tropical?

However, despite the climatic orientation of Queensland architecture’s histories, the ideal of a climatically sensitive architecture rarely bears upon the statements of significance for Queensland historic buildings provided by cultural heritage agencies.¹⁷ If period sources explicitly documented a concern with response to climate it is certainly recorded as a demonstration of architectural acclimatisation.¹⁸ Otherwise aesthetic or architectural significance is mostly measured through the connoisseurship of style deemed of interest to the public and more specifically architectural historians or conservationists.¹⁹

Locating Addison

Where, then, does the reality of the Brisbane Exhibition Building’s design lie? Does the climatic argument have any leverage? With regard to the thin archival sources directly pertinent to the building, the evidence is equivocal. Before proceeding with the construction of Addison’s winning entry to the design competition it held for the Exhibition Building in 1888, Queensland’s National Association gave some consideration to importing a prefabricated iron and glass exhibition building instead, the “style-less” alternative alluded to in the introduction above. This indeed had its origins in the circuit of international exhibitions, having previously served at the Liverpool International Exhibition of Navigation, Travelling, Commerce and Manufacture of 1886 (also known as the Liverpool Jubilee Exhibition). There it formed part of a large structure around 380m long and with a dome 30m high. Much of this building, in turn, came from the Antwerp Exhibition of 1885.²⁰ The Queensland National Association was interested in purchasing only part of the Liverpool assemblage. While concern was expressed about the climatic suitability of this building, the main arguments in favour of proceeding with the Addison design were framed in terms of the fillip this would give to the local construction industry.²¹ Moreover, the climatically desirable arcade apparently intended to surround Addison’s

Figure 3 (opposite, above): Queensland Houses of Parliament, designed by Charles Tiffin (1864), c. 1894.
Courtesy of the Queensland State Archives, ref SRS 177/1, Photo ID 003.

Figure 4 (opposite, below): Public Offices (Treasury Building), designed by John James Clark (1883), c. 1898.
Courtesy of the Queensland State Archives, ref SRS 177/1, Photo ID 046.

building was modified in the realised design, reduced on the front of the building to a remnant port cochere. Presumably this change was motivated by economy.

While Addison apparently left no lengthy discussion specifically on climate, its influence is clearly identified with his more general conception of architectural design. In his lectures titled “Evolution in Architecture” (1889) and “Architecture in its Relation to History” (1899) Addison deployed a natural history metaphor to explain the development of architecture and its relationship to local conditions.²² He explained:

Architecture was one complete system of evolution – a gradual accretion of parts and perfecting of forms. Its growth was governed by the environment, which included climatic influence, the natural scenery, and available building materials of its location – always dominated by the mental characteristics of the people to whom it had ministered.²³

A concern with climate may also be deduced from Addison’s other Brisbane buildings. His Wesleyan Church (designed 1888) was described in the local press ‘as an entirely new departure for Australia, inasmuch as an attempt has been made to harmonise the style with the requirements of a tropical climate.’²⁴ The heavily buttressed church incorporated an exterior cloister wrapping around the building. In 1890, Addison’s design for The Mansions comprised a three-storey terrace of six residences set behind a street edge of double storey arcading. Addison also provided extensive verandahs, able to form outdoor rooms, to many residential projects. These are indicative of a deep concern with the elaboration and formal development of this building element. Most notably, for the residence called Cumbooquepa (1890) Addison designed a sprawling, single storeyed house, only one room deep incorporating breezeways and wrapped in arcading and verandahs.

Questioned at the end of his lecture on “Architecture in its Relation to History” about the prospects for the development of an Australian style of architecture, Addison identified the verandah as a potentially definitive element of Queensland domestic architecture. But he was ambivalent as to any prospects of vernacular development, instead advocating a wide ranging eclecticism: ‘So long as the public of Queensland failed to recognise that there was an architecture outside of Queensland architecture, there would be no advancement in architecture here’.²⁵ Thus, while climate was invoked as one stimulus for architectural response, for Addison, the sources were not local. Addison’s argument for a wide ranging eclecticism stimulated by local conditions, such as climate, may be aligned with Nahum Barnet’s 1882 argument for climatic eclecticism, which was extended by Wilson Dobbs’ proposition of a ‘living style’ for Australian architecture published in 1891.²⁶

The mature Addison’s argument for eclecticism may have been a reiteration of arguments he had articulated earlier. Addison’s career was associated with

a Melbourne-based firm, the partnership of Terry and Oakden, which published an explicit account of its approach to design. Addison worked for Terry and Oakden after he arrived in Melbourne from Adelaide, being made chief draftsman in 1884. He shifted to Brisbane in 1886 to supervise the London Chartered Bank building Terry and Oakden had designed for the city. He stayed in Brisbane as a partner in Terry, Oakden and Addison, and then Oakden, Addison and Kemp from 1887.²⁷ Terry and Oakden's book, entitled *What to Build and How to Build It*, was published in 1885, coinciding with Addison's period in their Melbourne office.

As Watson and McKay have pointed out, the extremely accomplished drawings that illustrate *What to Build* are by Addison. Fiona Gardiner has suggested the whole of the book may be substantially his.²⁸ Developing this point, in the course of current doctoral work at the University of Melbourne, Tracey Avery has established that *What to Build and How to Build It* borrows extensively and without acknowledgement from Moncure Daniel Conway's *Travels in South Kensington* of 1882.²⁹ She suggests that Addison was the likely vector of this appropriation as he may have been familiar with the text through his studies at South Kensington and at the Royal Academy Schools in the early 1880s. His drawing of the Norman Porch at Canterbury Cathedral which appears in *What to Build and How to Build It* was exhibited at the Royal Academy Exhibition in 1883. Addison had drawn it in the early 1880s while working as an assistant to the architect James Neal as he undertook repair work to the cathedral. It had been previously published in *The Builder* in 1882. Two other Addison drawings in *What to Build*, of a Norman doorway at Jedburgh Abbey and of Wren's steeple for St Mary Le Bow, Cheapside, had also appeared in *The Builder*.³⁰

Despite this early proclivity to ecclesiastic work, the full collection of Addison drawings in *What to Build* shows buildings of various types – houses, commercial buildings, churches – and building elements and interiors in a number of styles. The text in fact makes an explicit argument for stylistic eclecticism, at least in regard to interior decoration:

The sentiment of association, for instance, strongly influences in the selection of style; we are apt to look back on some past era as one offering more charms than our own, and we try in our decoration and furniture to surround ourselves with reminders of that era – hence we have Gothic, Elizabethan, Queen Anne, Classic, or Pompeian furniture. This instinct may generally be safely followed, for time weeds out the meretricious specimens of art from the various eras, and what is left for us to imitate is almost invariably the best of its day.³¹

This eclecticism does indeed seem to be reflected in the range of Addison's built work.



Figure 5: The Brisbane Exhibition Building.
Photograph by Paul Walker.

If Addison's writings or putative writings are one source of insight into his design work, so too is what he read. Addison's familiarity with the contemporary design scene in Britain, its empire, the United States and western Europe can be ascertained from the extant evidence of scrapbooks he kept of images published in *The Builder* – where he himself had published drawings early in his career – and other contemporary journals. These are now housed in the Fryer Library at the University of Queensland. As it happens, the scrapbooks that are available there cover the period during which Addison worked on the Exhibition Building, from the competition design of 1888 to the modified design that was built in a very short period in 1891. The seven scrapbooks encompass a very wide range of design approaches, including some that are quite exotic. Thus, there are Byzantine influenced designs such as W M Emerson's entry in the competition for Liverpool Cathedral, and Ashton Webb's Church of St Bartholomew the Great, West Smithfield. There are also illustrations to a series of lectures on Byzantine architecture held in London in 1891. The presence of such images in Addison's scrapbooks could give credence to the categorisation of the Exhibition Building as Byzantine, even though it anticipated by several years the greatest nineteenth century achievement in the Byzantine manner, Bentley's Westminster Cathedral in London (1895-1903). It also anticipated the most important essays on the Byzantine, Lethaby's book on Sancta Sophia, Constantinople of 1894 and Robert Weir Schultz's "Byzantine Art", which appeared in *The Architectural Review* in 1897.³² There are also Romanesque designs, including H H Richardson's All Saints' Cathedral in Albany, of 1889, and a range of Richardson-influenced projects in New York, Washington, Los Angeles, and London, Ontario.³³ Indo-Saracenic is also represented, with Chisholm's premiated design in the Bombay Municipal Offices competition of 1888, and his Baroda Museum of the following year – a version departing from the realised design in its roofscape of five domes. There are also designs for administrative buildings in Aden and Calcutta with stacked, arcaded verandahs. Again, the presence of these various styles of architecture could lend weight to one reading of the Exhibition Building or another.

But none of these examples from Addison's scrapbooks shows so close a connection to the Exhibition Building design as T E Collcutt's Imperial Institute. This appears in the scrapbooks no less than three times: twice in the competition-winning version of 1887, and again in the amended design of 1889.³⁴ There is a remarkable similarity between Addison's building and the central and end pavilions of Collcutt's: in each, a masonry gable is flanked by engaged octagonal towers which terminate in little domes; rows of windows, the uppermost with round-arched heads, are separated by projecting cornices which also wrap the side towers; and so on. (See Figs 5 & 6) And there is the remarkable overlap of dates. But having discerned this connection, we are no

closer to knowing how to describe Addison's Exhibition Building stylistically, for Collcutt's building seems to be subject to an equally diverse array of stylistic categories. As in the case of the Brisbane Exhibition building, the Imperial Institute is typologically hard to place. Like an exhibition building, the Imperial Institute's main purpose was to display commodities and thereby promote trade, but the building it can most readily be compared to is, rather, a museum and its neighbour in South Kensington, Alfred Waterhouse's Natural History Museum. In a recent analysis, G Alex Bremner makes this comparison and notes that

At one level, the stylistic variety of the Imperial Institute might simply be understood as a straightforward rendition of 'free classic' eclecticism. As a prominent example of this mode, Collcutt's scheme was described in contemporary architectural journals as comprising a range of influences, Gothic and Renaissance, Flemish, French, German, and Spanish.³⁵

Bremner goes on to argue that the development of free-classic movement in British architecture was influenced by imperial experience, particularly in India, citing as an early example of this the 'Indo-Saracenic' detail on James Fergusson's entry in the 1857 Government Offices competition.³⁶

Gombrich: Style, Norm and Form

The modes of research described above – into the influences on the architect and the stylistic repertoire which he defined for himself as evident in what he wrote, what he built, and in images he chose to collect – are important. But establishing the historical accuracy, appropriateness or otherwise of the terms used to account for a building does not help us necessarily understand the provenance, prevalence and power of descriptions applied to it. These may have little to do with accuracy. In this regard – as stated at the beginning of this paper – it could be inferred from the availability of the Exhibition Building to various readings that its design is a contested discursive terrain where certain claims about architectural history and identity are played out. But the stylistic categories through which these claims are made are themselves not always very certain. They too can be contested.

Gombrich shows that art historical categories such as Gothic, Baroque, Rococo and Impressionist all have their origins in terms first used to describe deviations from artistic ideals. Thus the art or architectural historian's Gothic has its beginnings in Vasari's disparaging comments on an architectural mode he saw as anti-classical; Baroque in similar views about that manner set out by Bellori; and while the term Rococo may not have been invented by Winkelmann, it was he who characterised it as a degraded mode of design, a reputation it has not entirely lost. Gombrich points out that Vasari, Bellori and Winkelmann each modelled their criticisms of the kinds of architecture and design which they despised after a famous passage in Vitruvius. This is the passage in *The Ten*



**Figure 6: T E Collcutt,
The Imperial Institute.**
Source: *The Builder*, 9 July 1887.

Books on Architecture in which Vitruvius attacks the fashions in interior wall decoration of his own day.³⁷ This is the only part of the Vitruvian text which specifically makes *normative* judgments: judgments about what should *not* be done. For the most part, Vitruvius is otherwise concerned with rules about *form*, most importantly about the morphological characteristics of the orders.

Gombrich notes that we are not obliged to maintain the original meaning of words: Gothic, Baroque, and Rococo are all terms that architectural historians generally use with confidence to describe works which each feature morphological characteristics, characteristics of form. By the nineteenth century, the styles had become akin to a series of natural categories that could be deployed without passing judgment on the works to which they were applied. All the styles could be considered to be like the classical orders: each a kind or a *species* differentiated on the basis of a set of formal characteristics:

the claim ... arose in the nineteenth century that the historian can ignore the norm and look at the succession of these styles without any bias; he can, in the words of Hippolyte Taine, approach the varieties of past creations much as the botanist approaches his material, without caring whether the flowers he describes are beautiful or ugly, poisonous or wholesome.³⁸

This of course finds an exact parallel in the eclectic architectural design practice of the period, such as that of Addison. It finds another parallel in contemporary heritage descriptions and guide books which characterise cities not so much as the architectural analogues of botanical reserves, but of botanical gardens or zoos populated by rare live specimens, or museums populated by their dead remains.

This approach to styles as if they were natural species that can be described in a disinterested and objective manner can be found in perhaps the most

important Australian work on architectural style, Apperley, Irving and Reynolds' *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture* of 1989. They classify styles by period and then by 'style characteristics'. Thus we get 'Federation Academic Classical', 'Federation Free Classical', 'Federation Filigree', and so on – twelve variants of the purportedly endemic Federation style, including the Federation Romanesque to which Addison's Exhibition Building is assigned. Each is delineated in terms of a series of features: the relationship of parts of the building to each other and the whole; building shape; space inside and around the building; scale; and so on. Julie Willis and Philip Goad have written of the proliferation that results from the approach of Apperley, et al.:

Their intentions are admirable but the divisions are too numerous and too prescriptive, clouding the important and significant hybrid nature of the design tradition. To talk about Federation Anglo-Dutch reaches the point of arcane label creation.³⁹

But such complex taxonomies are the inevitable result of a natural history metaphor underpinning this approach to style – Federation Filigree, Federation Romanesque, Federation Anglo-Dutch are the analogues of *Pinus insignis*, *Pinus pinea*, *Pinus pinaster* Or – given the indigenous theme – perhaps we could more aptly connect them to eucalyptus species. Indeed, in the first paragraph of the foreword to *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture*, written by the then chairman of the Heritage Council of New South Wales, this natural metaphor is made clear:

Many if not all people have walked through the bush enjoying its general ambience without a thought for what it is they are walking through, other than perhaps a general awareness of 'gum trees'. Have you ever walked through the bush with a botanist? It is an experience at a different level, a deeper, richer and at times a surprising experience.⁴⁰

The naturalism at the heart of the book is also apparent in the visual look of the chart of styles on page 20: appearing at first glance like a drawing of a cluster of dahlia tubers, it is also like a diagram of the evolutionary history of plants and animals. It figures the economic depressions of 1890s and the 1930s as the great extinction events of stylistic evolution in Australian architecture.

While the names of the styles are terms which might be used now to describe the general formal characteristics of design genres, such characteristics cannot be considered as necessary for any specific example to belong to such a genre. Pointed arches may be typical of the Gothic, or the Indo-Saracenic, but their absence does not necessarily make it impossible to reasonably describe a project as Gothic/Indo-Saracenic. Returning to Gombrich, his next point in 'Norm and Form' is that if stylistic terms are not anchored at their origins to the formal characteristics of works, they cannot subsequently be held to formal characteristics alone when their normative origins have been disregarded.

Moreover, stylistic terms begin to *exceed* form when the architectural historian falls into the essentialism that follows on from taking the natural history metaphor too far.

[T]he historian who looks at a sufficient number of works ... will gradually arrive at an intellectual intuition of the indwelling essence that distinguishes these works from all others, just as pine trees are distinguished from oaks. Indeed, if the historian's eye is sufficiently sharp and his intuition sufficiently profound, he will even penetrate beyond the essence of the species to that of the genus; he will be able to grasp not only the common structural features of all gothic paintings and statues, but also the higher unity that links them with gothic literature, law and philosophy.⁴¹

Gombrich mentions Gothic here because his principal example of such overweening interpretation is Paul Frankl's *The Gothic*.⁴²

It may seem that none of the stylistic terms which have been used to describe Addison's Exhibition Building make such broad claims as Gombrich suggests are entailed in Frankl's account of Gothic. But according to Willis and Goad, the meaning of the term "Federation style" for one of its inventors, Bernard Smith, certainly did entail such historical and national over-determination. Willis and Goad cite two texts by Smith that make this clear: his review of J M Freeland's *Architecture in Australia* of 1969, and the last chapter of the book *The Architectural Character of Glebe, Sydney*, co-authored by Bernard Smith and Kate Smith. In this second text, for example, the use of the term "Queen Anne" to describe turn of the century work is dismissed:

Here we shall call it instead, Federation style. Firstly, because it was a style that flourished throughout Australia from Fremantle to Bondi during the years immediately before the federation of the Australian colonies into the Australian Commonwealth in 1901. Secondly, because it developed a character that is unique to Australia and deserves therefore an Australian name.⁴³

Smith's use of 'Federation' does not have the negative implications that Gombrich says were present at the birth of stylistic terms such as Gothic, but it is certainly normative. It implies an ideological assessment of value.

*

Stylistic attributions, then, may come with acknowledged or unacknowledged ideological implications. They are not the neutral assignment of examples to discrete taxonomic categories. It may seem that the styles do not much matter now, that they are a bizarre nineteenth century curiosity of limited relevance to serious architectural history. But stylistic terms are of public consequence and have public agency more than any of the other apparatus of architectural historiography. How is this agency deployed? A key way is in attempts to establish the importance of work so that it can be valued by heritage organisations and by the public that cares for such things or is open to persuasion. Heritage assessments are full of stylistic terms.

So too are guidebooks, such as *A Short History of Brisbane Architecture*. This book could nearly bear the sub-title “a hundred buildings in a hundred styles”: colonial Georgian, colonial, moghul-inspired, Regency-style, Second-Empire French classicism, Gothic, Gothic revival, classical, grand classical/Corinthian, Baroque, Roman Revival, and so on. Buildings in Brisbane are ascribed to all these finely nuanced styles by that book’s authors. The tacit power of these terms is to make the buildings to which they are applied important – possibly unique – in a local context, and simultaneously to give them the charisma of metropolitan or international connections.

In the local context, “Federation” is clearly more loaded. It is difficult to identify anything particularly Australian in the design of Addison’s Exhibition Building. We agree with the misgivings that Willis and Goad have about “Federation”: they suggest that while Bernard Smith’s account of the Federation style precedes corresponding accounts of turn-of-the-century architecture in England, the formal attributes of the Australian work hardly distinguish it from its British equivalents. But while describing the Exhibition Building as “Federation” is of little use to understanding its formal characteristics, it implies a proposition about the building’s connection to Australia’s social and political history. It so happens that the concert hall in the Exhibition Building was the venue for an important meeting to discuss the political issue of federation in August 1899, and the opening of the Queensland Museum within the Exhibition Building occurred on Federation Day, January 1, 1901.⁴⁴ If “Federation” makes a proposal about the building’s place in the evolution of a local political culture which turns out to be so directly felicitous, to call it “Indo-Saracenic” implies exactly the opposite: our need to establish an international sense of connection, even if this is apparently on the terms of Empire.

Our need for this connection has come as Australian architectural historiography grapples with the problem of “the north”. In this regard, describing Addison’s Exhibition Building as Indo-Saracenic is almost certainly anachronistic: this stylistic interpretation is motivated by present concerns about the nature of place. Since the 1950s the tropicality of the Queensland climate has been increasingly idealised as the preferred destination for leisure, recuperation, and – as southeast Queensland and Brisbane in particular booms – as a place to live.⁴⁵ But this recent phenomenon must not be taken to belie the firm nineteenth and early twentieth century belief that tropical climates were degenerative. While this climatic anxiety motivated arguments for climatic eclecticism published in the Australian architectural press in the late nineteenth century, these ultimately sought refuge in the adaptation of European forms and styles. Thus, while E Wilson Dobbs’ 1891 outline of climatic eclecticism included references to what would now be termed the Indo-Saracenic, these were to be carefully framed so as not to disturb essentially European forms. He argued that

any 'Eastern departures' drawn from Anglo-Indian precedents must be 'balanced' with classical forms and interior decoration.⁴⁶ Such a formula aimed to overcome the negative associations of an oriental tropicity. But these negative associations have now been vitiated, and the retrospective connection of Queensland to India, for example, could now seem desirable.

Gombrich concludes his discussion in "Norm and Form" by suggesting that the stylistic terms used in art history do not designate classes of works which are in fact completely morphologically different. The anti-classicism of the Baroque, for example, is only relative: buildings which architectural history designates as "Baroque" deploy a classical language. It is on the constraints and scope of the relativity of evaluations and statements about works which Gombrich suggests we should focus. Works of art, or architecture, entail many values and attributes which may be differently privileged by their authors and their various readers. While we may be discountenanced by the range of stylistic terms to which Addison's Exhibition Building has been subject, we cannot entirely resolve how it should be described. But more importantly than this, the multiplicity of ways in which it can be described indexes the complexity of issues in historically locating it.

AUTHORS' NOTE

This paper develops Paul Walker, "Contesting Style: Addison's Exhibition Building", in *Contested Terrains: Proceedings of the XXIII Annual Conference of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand*, edited by Terence McMinn, John Stephens, & Stephen Basson (Perth: SAHANZ, 2006), 569-74. The research documented in this paper was supported by an Australian Research Council Discovery Grant.

NOTES

1. Patrick Bingham-Hall, ed., *A Short History of Brisbane Architecture* (Sydney: Pesaro Publishing, 2001), 7, 40.
2. Michael Wilson, "Consuming History: The Nation, the Past, and the Commodity at l'Exposition Universelle de 1900," *American Journal of Semiotics* 8, no. 4 (1991): 131-153.
3. The most significant work on the architecture of exhibitions in Australia, Kirsten Orr's "A Force for Federation: International Exhibitions and the Formation of Australian Ethos" (PhD thesis, University of New South Wales, 2006) deals only with the Sydney International Exhibition of 1879, the Melbourne International Exhibition of 1880-81, and the Melbourne International Centennial Exhibition of 1888.
4. Peter Marquis-Kyle, *Old Museum Building Conservation Management Plan* (Brisbane: Queensland Department of Public Works, 2000), 7-16.
5. E. H. Gombrich, "Norm and Form: The Stylistic Categories of Art History and their Origins in Renaissance Ideals" in *Norm and Form: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance* (London: Phaidon, 1966), 81-98.
6. "The New Exhibition Building," *Brisbane Courier*, August 15, 1891, 7; "Brisbane," *The Builder*, August 20, 1898, 164; Building Citation, The Queensland Museum, National Trust of Queensland, December 2, 1974, cited in Marquis-Kyle, *Old Museum Building Conservation Management Plan*, 14; Janet Hogan, *Building Queensland's Heritage* (Richmond: Richmond Hill Press, 1978), 34; Patricia Mather, *A Time for a Museum* (Brisbane: Queensland Museum, 1986), 73; Graham De Gruchy, *Architecture in Brisbane* (Brisbane: Boolarong Publications with Kookabura Books, 1988), 116-17; Robert Riddel, "Sheeted in Iron: Queensland" in *Towards the Dawn: Federation Architecture in Australia 1890-1915*, ed. Trevor Howells & Michael Nicholson

(Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1989), 109; Richard Apperly, Robert Irving & Peter Reynolds, *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms for 1788 to the Present* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1989), 116; Michael Keniger, "Introduction: Brisbane Architecture" in *A Short History of Brisbane Architecture*, ed. Bingham-Hall, 7; Patrick Bingham-Hall & Philip Goad, "Former Queensland Museum" in *A Short History of Brisbane Architecture*, 40; Bill McMahon, ed., *The Architecture of East Australia: An Architectural History in 432 Presentations* (Stuttgart & London: Axel Menges, 2001), 196; "Old Museum Building" (ID 600209), Queensland Government EPA Heritage register, <http://www.epa.qld.gov.au/projects/heritage/index.cgi?place=600209>; "Queensland Museum (former)", (ID8384), Australian Heritage Database, Register of the National Estate; "Old Museum Building," Citation File Number NTQ BNE 1/147, National Trust of Queensland.

7. Juan Pablo Bonta, *Architecture and its Interpretation* (London: Lund Humphries, 1979), ch. 4.

8. James Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* [London: 1876, 1910] (New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1998); G. H. R. Tillotson, *The Tradition of Indian Architecture* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1989), 46.

9. Thomas R. Metcalf, *An Imperial Vision: Indian Architecture and Britain's Raj* (London & Boston: Faber, 1989).

10. Metcalf, *An Imperial Vision*, 63; see also Paul Walker, "Institutional Audiences and Architectural Style: The Napier Museum" in *Colonial Modernities: Building, Dwelling and Architecture in British India and Ceylon*, ed. Peter Scriver & Vikramaditya Prakash (London: Routledge, 2007), 264n19

11. Jennifer Taylor, *Australian Architecture Since 1960*, 2nd ed. (1986, Sydney: Law Book Co., 1990), 116.

12. Ray Sumner, *Settlers and Habitat in Tropical Queensland*, Monograph Series 6 (Townsville: Department of Geography, James Cook University of North Queensland, 1974); Riddel, "Sheeted in Iron," 108-20; Michael Keniger, "Introduction" to *Australian Architects: Rex Addison, Lindsay Clare, Russell Hall*, ed. Judy Vulker, Michael Keniger & Mark Roehrs (Canberra: RAI Education Division, 1990), 4-5.

13. Riddel, "Sheeted in Iron," 108.

14. De Gruchy, *Architecture in Brisbane*, 54.

15. "Parliament House, 1867" in *A Short History of Brisbane Architecture*, 21.

16. Michael Keniger, "Introduction" to *A Short History of Brisbane Architecture*, 14.

17. Stuart King, "A Climate of Confusion: the Significance of Climatic Adaptation in 19th Century Queensland Architecture" in *Panorama to Paradise: Scopic Regimes in Architectural and Urban History and Theory: XXIVth Annual Conference of SAHANZ*, ed. Stephen Loo & Katherine Bartsch (Adelaide: SAHANZ, 2007), cd-rom.

18. For example, "Townsville Customs House" (ID 600937), Environmental Protection Agency, Queensland Government, <http://www.epa.qld.gov.au> (accessed May 18, 2007).

19. "Getting on the Register: Entry Criteria," http://www.epa.qld.gov.au/cultural_heritage/registers_and_inventories/getting_on_the_register (accessed November 8, 2007).

20. K. G. Beauchamp, *Exhibiting Electricity* (London: Institution of Electrical Engineers, c.1997), 144-45. A letter of offering the building to the Queensland National Association, published in its journal – *Journal of the National Agricultural & Industrial Association of Queensland* 34, no. 31 (October 1888): 7-8 – describes the portion on offer: '... nave 640 feet long including dome, transepts 312 feet long ..., the width of each 122 feet made up as follows – main building 82 feet, 2 aisles 20 feet each.' A picture of the building as it was configured for its stint in Liverpool was published in the *Illustrated London News*, May 8, 1886, and is reproduced in John M. Mackenzie, ed., *The Victorian Vision* (London: V&A Publications, 2001), 274.

21. Paul Walker, "Sunday Opening: Modes of citizenship in colonial museums" in *Additions to Architectural History: XIXth Annual conference of SAHANZ*, ed. John Macarthur & Antony Moulis (Brisbane: SAHANZ, 2002), cd-rom, 10-11.

22. G. H. M. Addison, "Evolution in Architecture," *Australasian Builder and Contractor's News* 5, no. 125 (September 28, 1889): 296 & *Australasian Builder and Contractor's News* 5, no. 126 (October 5, 1889): 324; Anon., "Architecture and History: Mr GHM Addison's Lecture," *Brisbane Courier*, June 29, 1899, 6.

23. "Architecture and History," 6.

24. Anon., "Wesleyan Church – Albert Street," *Brisbane Courier*, August 20, 1888, 6.

25. "Architecture and History." In 1887 architectural writer John Sulman (based in Sydney) invoked the Australian climate to advocate the verandah as a formal device for Australian houses. Sulman referred to contemporary American domestic architecture for examples of the incorporation of

- verandahs and piazzas. See Sulman, "Verandah and Loggiae," *Australasian Builder and Contractors' News* 1, no. 2 (1887), 23 & *Australasian Builder and Contractors' News* 1, no. 3 (1887), 39.
26. Nahum Barnet, "Climatic Architecture," *Victorian Review* 7, no. 37 (1882): 37-43; E. Wilson Dobbs, "An Australian Style of Architecture," *Australasian Builder and Contractors' News* 8, no. 199 (February 28, 1891): 158-61.
27. Donald Watson & Judith McKay, *Queensland Architects of the 19th Century: A Biographical Dictionary* (Brisbane: Queensland Museum, 1994), 5.
28. Fiona Gardiner, "Artist Architect: G M H Addison the Brisbane Connection of Oakden Addison & Kemp," unpublished paper presented at "Colonial Connections," 7th Annual Conference of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia & New Zealand, Melbourne, 1990.
29. Moncure Daniel Conway, *Travels in South Kensington* [London: 1882] (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977).
30. "The Norman Staircase, Canterbury," *The Builder*, March 4, 1882; "Norman Doorway, Jedburgh Abbey," *The Builder*, October 29, 1881; "The Crown on the Steeple-Sir Christopher Wren, Architect," *The Builder*, December 9, 1882. Various drawings from *What to Build and How to Build It*, including the Norman Porch image, were republished by Addison in *The Building and Engineering Journal of Australia & New Zealand* in 1891. See 7, no. 161 (August 1, 1891).
31. Terry & Oakden, *What to Build and How to Build It* (Melbourne: George Robertson & Co., 1885), 44.
32. W. R. Lethaby & Harold Swainson, *The Church of Sancta Sophia, Constantinople, a Study of Byzantine Building* (London: Macmillan, 1894); Robert Weir Schultz, "Byzantine Art," *Architectural Review* 1 (1897): 192-99, 249-55.
33. On Richardson and Australia, see Myra Dickman Orth, "The Influence of the 'American Romanesque' in Australia," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 34, no. 1 (1975): 2-18.
34. The drawings in the scrapbooks come from *The Architect*, July 22, 1887; *The Builder*, July 2, 1887; & January 5, 1889.
35. Alex Bremner, "'Some Imperial Institute': Architecture, Symbolism, and the Ideal of Empire in Late Victorian Britain, 1887-93," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 62, no. 1 (March 2003), 66. See also Mark Crinson, "Imperial Story-lands: Architecture and display at the Imperial and Commonwealth Institutes," *Art History* 22, no. 1 (March 1999): 99-123.
36. Bremner, "'Some Imperial Institute'," 68.
37. Vitruvius, "On Wall Painting," *On Architecture*, Book 7, Chapter 5, trans. Frank Granger (Cambridge, Mass.: Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1934), 103-9.
38. Gombrich, "Norm and Form," 86.
39. Julie Willis & Philip Goad, "A Myth in its Making: Federation Style and Australian Architectural History" in *Formulation Fabrication: The Architecture of History, Proceedings of the 17th Annual Conference of SAHANZ* (Wellington: SAHANZ, 2000), 117.
40. Robert M Hope, "Foreword" in *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture*, by Apperley, Irving & Reynolds, 9.
41. Gombrich, "Norm and Form," 88.
42. Paul Frankl, *The Gothic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960).
43. Bernard Smith & Kate Smith, *The Architectural Character of Glebe, Sydney* (Sydney: University Cooperative Bookshop, 1973), 107, cited in Willis & Goad, "A Myth in its Making," 115.
44. "Meeting at the Exhibition: Monster Demonstration," *Queenslander*, Supplement on Federation, August 12, 1899, 14. Kirsten Orr argues that participation in exhibitions helped to create an Australian national consciousness and they were therefore important precursors to political federation. See Orr, "A Force for Federation."
45. David Walker, "The Curse of the Tropics" in *A Change in the Weather: Climate and Culture in Australia*, ed. Tim Sherratt, Tom Griffiths & Libby Robin (Canberra: National Museum of Australia Press, 2005), 101.
46. Dobbs, "An Australian Style of Architecture," 160.