



Charles Sierakowski
 (*The West Australian*, 8 December 2009, p.53)

Kazimierz (Charles) Sierakowski (1924-2009) was born 26 January 1924 in Warsaw, Poland. Kazimierz was the second of four children to oil merchant Wladyslaw Sierakowski and wife Stanislaw, nee Wasik. He later called himself Charles, but retained his given name. His country was thrown into chaos with the commencement of the Second World War (1939-1945), following Germany's invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939. During the German occupation, nearly three million Polish Jews were killed in the Nazi death camps. The Nazis also severely persecuted the Slavic majority, deporting and executing Poles in an attempt to destroy the intelligentsia and Polish culture. In 1940 Kazimierz joined a large Polish resistance movement which fought effectively against the occupation. After the collapse of the ill-equipped Warsaw Uprising in 1944, he left Poland as a Prisoner of War.

Due to the political situation in which Poland found itself after the Second World War, Sierakowski decided not to return to the country of his birth. At the age of twenty, like many of his compatriots, he found himself without a country, profession, family or money. He re-joined the army, within the Polish 2nd Corps of the British 8th Army in Italy. While in uniform he was accepted as a student at the Facolta di Architettura, Universita di Roma. There he completed the first year and part of the second year. In November 1946 the Polish Army was transferred to England, and he continued architectural studies in London at the School of Architecture, Polish University College, obtaining his degree in 1950, and the Continental degree of Engineer Architect in 1951.

In 1955 Sierakowski received British Citizenship, and was elected as an Associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). This gave the opportunity of practicing not only in Britain, but also in all countries of the Commonwealth. Between 1950 and 1957 Sierakowski was employed at the Architectural Division within the Ministry of Works, London. He worked on a variety of projects, mainly connected with improvements and extensions to London museums and art galleries. His first project was the reconstruction of the south-west wing of the King's Library at the British Museum, which had been destroyed by German bombs during the war. In 1957 he joined the Special Works Division, London City Council, where he was involved with the design and documentation of the Crystal Palace Sports Centre, additions to the Royal Festive Hall, and the South Bank Development.

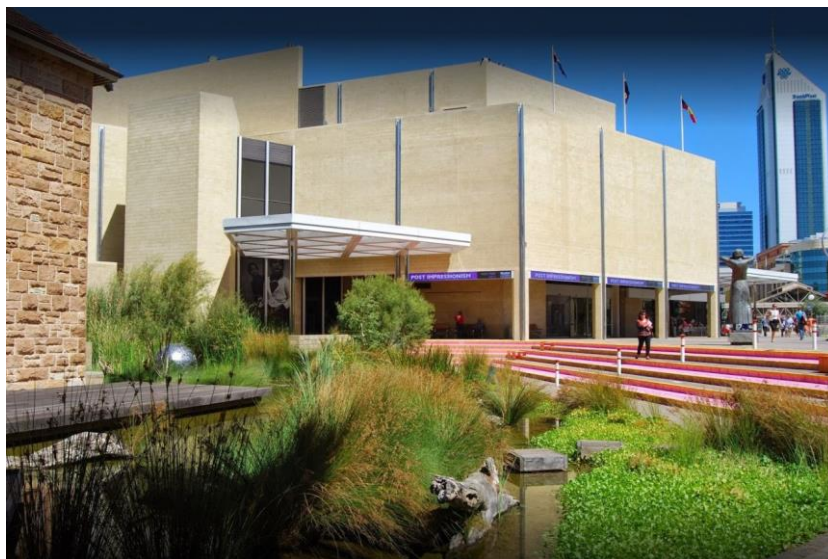


London Borough of Sutton Civic Offices (Google accessed Feb 2020)

In 1960 Sierakowski signed a government contract and travelled to Accra, Ghana in West Africa. He worked as a superintendent architect within the Ministry of Interior, leading projects for the Ghana National Construction Corporation. Charles returned to England in 1965 and started work at the London Borough of Sutton's Department of Architecture and Planning. As Assistant Borough Architect he was the project architect for the new Sutton Civic Centre. This work included a new city centre plan, design and construction of new buildings, the Council Suite and offices, a central library, a drama theatre, and a Liberal Arts College. The construction programme was divided into phases, with phase one commenced in 1971. However funding allocations indicated that it might be twenty years before the complex was finished. Sierakowski needed a new challenge, and with his family, decided a move was desirable.

Sierakowski met Tadeusz Andrzejczek, a Western Australian Public Works Department (PWD) architect at London in 1972. As a fellow graduate of the Polish School of Architecture, London, Andrzejczek was interested in other graduate's achievements. He visited Sierakowski's office on the recommendation of RIBA, and was impressed with Charles' work. They discussed the possibility of working together, as a new Cultural Centre was planned for Perth in Western Australia. Later that year, on Andrzejczek's recommendation, Sierakowski was offered a three-year contract by the Government of Western Australia, with the option of permanency after its completion. This was the challenge he needed.

Sierakowski arrived in Perth in February 1973. He became an Associate of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA), and registered as an architect in WA (no.758) in 1974. He was involved in the design and construction of the Perth Cultural Centre until retirement sixteen years later, however, the design stage did not start immediately. The preparation work has been going on for many years. Both Stan Cann, the Principal Architect of the PWD, and 'Ted' Andrzejczek had prepared the ground - the site was allocated, but design had not started, as funds were not as yet available. After Charles' arrival several alternative designs, drawings and models were prepared. All emphasised the need to link the Perth Cultural Centre with the city centre. He worked closely with Andrzejczek until Ted's retirement in 1980, following which Sierakowski was appointed Project Architect for the Perth Cultural Centre.



Art Gallery of Western Australia exterior in March 2013 (Google Picasa accessed Feb 2020)

In 1975 Sierakowski was appointed the design architect for the proposed new Western Australian Art Gallery. The art gallery was to be completed for WA's sesquicentenary celebrations in 1979, and celebrated with the opening of a major exhibition in the new, international standard building. The previous gallery facilities in Beaufort Street, two rooms in the wing of the museum, were sub-standard, and Perth was by-passed by many exhibitions visiting Australia. Charles was authorised to visit and study other galleries in Australia, after which he designed and supervised the construction, valued at \$10 000 000 including furniture and equipment. It was officially opened by the Premier Sir Charles Court, on 2 October 1979.



Art Gallery of Western Australia interior in February 2020 (Google Picasa accessed Feb 2020)

The Art Gallery has four levels, covers an area of just over 10 000 square metres. The display section of the building, approximately 3 500 square metres on two levels, consists of a series of artificially lit, for the protection of the drawings and paintings from ultra-violet rays, galleries, grouped around a central core. The plan is based on a hexagon which allows a wide angle viewing of pictures. The galleries can be subdivided by full height floor-to-ceiling partitions, providing a flexible utilisation of the space. Following the opening, the Gallery has successfully staged a number of great exhibitions of

international standard, and recognised with many awards. The RAI A awarded the Art Gallery of Western Australia the Architectural Design Award of 1979 and its Bronze Medal in 1983.

After the completion of the Art Gallery Sierakowski continued to work on the Perth Cultural Centre. He also designed the TAFE College of Graphic Art and Design in Aberdeen Street, remodelled the City Hall Building in Subiaco for the Hole in the Wall Theatre (awarded the Subiaco Award, 1985). He was an adviser to the Geraldton Art Gallery, opened in 1984 and the Bunbury Art Centre. He continued as a member of the Forrest Place/City Station Study Group; member of Design Advisory Panel of the Forrest Place/City Station Development; member of the Perth Foreshore Study Group; member of the University of Western Australia Art Gallery Project; Design Controller, Liaison Architect and the Chairman of the Artwork Committee for the Alexander Library, Perth Cultural Centre. In 1989 he was delegated to prepare a feasibility study for the Parliamentary Precinct development for the Northern Territory Government in Darwin.

Sierakowski retired in 1989, wrote his memoirs and painted for pleasure. He was once asked which he loved more, Poland or Australia. He replied: "There is no dilemma, one should not ask – the one is a mother, the other a wife." Kazimierz' wife Aldona died in July 2009. Sierakowski subsequently travelled to visit family members in Darwin and England, and Poland – where he died of pneumonia on 1 November 2009 aged 85 years. He was survived by daughter Hannah, son Mark, and their families.

References:

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Contributing author: John Taylor

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