Successes & Challenges for heritage buildings & adaptive reuse in The Rocks Sydney Australia

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The Rocks in context

The Rocks heritage precinct on the western shores of Sydney Cove ...

alongside the Royal Botanical Garden and Sydney Opera House, with Sydney CBD beyond and Sydney Harbour Bridge in foreground
Success #1 applying Burra Charter principles

skillful thoughtful ‘loose fit’ reversible

Encourage alternative solutions to meet performance requirements to minimise or eliminate impacts to building interiors...

for better performance making buildings sustainable, adaptable and durable (Government Architect NSW)
Success #1 loose fit reversible adaptive reuse

Unwins Stores, George Street The Rocks
1840s 3 storey colonial sandstone commercial row building
❖ AHW Studio
❖ The Doss House
❖ L’Occitane en Provence
Success #2 valuing the legacy

Reconstruction means returning a place to an earlier known state ...

Only when a place is incomplete through damage or alteration ...

(Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter)
Success #2 valuing the legacy

In some cases, reconstruction may also be appropriate as part of a use or practice that retains the cultural significance of the place

(Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter)
Success # 3 traditional building repairs, materials, trades

Reuse of existing building stock is more sustainable than ... new buildings and/or infrastructure

Traditional materials & techniques usually have less environmental impact

Traditional trade skills need to be maintained by a supply of traditional materials, and promote controlled salvage as part of a sustainable solution (Australia ICOMOS Strategy for traditional trades)
Success #4 precinct and place sustainability policies

Passive design improvements before mechanical
Supported by options analysis ... least impact to significant fabric and accounts for ongoing energy consumption
Avoid or minimize impact on significant spaces, elements and building fabric ... placed discretely (Place Management, Bushells CMP)
Challenge #1 project complexity, engagement, willing client & consultant

So how can we introduce synergy to a given situation or environment?

And then you are not on opposite sides of the problem – you’re together on one side, looking at the problem, understanding all the needs, and working to create a third alternative that will meet them (Covey)
Challenge #2 reconciling sustainable development standards

... a desire for improved building standards means that owners still want to upgrade the energy performance of their historic buildings

Essential they are supported by legislation and guidance in using correct methods and materials and not led to making inappropriate interventions (ISCES)
Challenge #3

avoid unnecessary changes to meet BCA & access

It may be necessary to modify proposed changes to better retain cultural significance

Approaches to compliance with building codes ... must focus on responding to the spirit and intent if strict compliance would adversely impact on heritage significance ... and result in unacceptable adverse impacts (PNSW Playfair’s Terrace CMP)
Challenge #4 facilitating good site & construction outcomes

Complete & undertake the works ...

It is advisable to select specialist designers and contractors, familiar with working with sensitive heritage assets, to avoid poor quality outcomes that can add risk, cost and delays to a project

(British Property Federation)
Sustainable heritage management in The Rocks ~ conclusion

❖ Successes continue to challenge
❖ Continue to work synergistically with interest groups
❖ apply and reinvent principles of sustainable heritage management for future generations of enjoyment, use and adaption of heritage buildings in The Rocks
❖ All contribute to the UNESCO Sustainable Development Goal 11 Sustainable cities and communities to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable