

# What I like about you



Photography: right and bottom left Wolfgang Sievers (State Library Victoria)

## Harold Holt Swim Centre • 1969

Melbourne

Architect: Kevin Borland and Daryl Jackson

I grew up not far from the Harold Holt Swim Centre and spent many cold mornings doing laps in the pool. It was a building unlike any other I knew as a child. It was not like a home, a shop nor a school. It was imposing but not unfriendly with its surfaces inviting touch and its ramps gently guiding you through its open spaces and down to the outdoor pool and gardens.

Later at university I studied the building with a new perspective and could better appreciate the values and ideas that architects Kevin Borland and Daryl Jackson imbued in their 1969 design. The relationship of solid to void with heavy concrete volumes on two sides bookending a glazed double-height volume in the centre. The openness of this central space which draws sunlight inside while inviting views through the building and across the outdoor pool to the diving tower at the end of the site. The celebration of movement through a series of ramps that journey from the main entrance, across the void, over multiple levels and connect through the site. The raw materiality of concrete, timber and glass that combine with exposed services to give the building a strong tactile sense and material expression.

In the early 2000s the pool was subject to an unsympathetic renovation and some of these wonderful qualities were lost. At the time, there was a concerted effort from many architects to protect the original design and bring to it a better understanding and appreciation of Brutalist architecture. Sometimes referred to as terrible beauties, these buildings challenged accepted ideas of appropriate design within Australian culture. While the efforts failed to alter the proposed renovation, they did broaden the dialogue about how different types of buildings can be understood, valued and protected.

When I pass 'the Harold Holt' these days I'm still struck by the intensity of Borland and Jackson's vision and the bold, open and inclusive values they installed in the built fabric – values worth holding onto today. Oh, and the 10-metre diving platform still strikes fear in my heart.

**Oscar Sainsbury**  
**Oscar Sainsbury Architects (OSA)**  
[oscarsainsbury.com](http://oscarsainsbury.com)

