

- Julie Mackenzie: Uh, my name's Julie Mackenzie. I'm from Tonkin Zulaikha Greer architects. And I'm the Director of Heritage and Adaptive Reuse.
- Julie Mackenzie: Yeah, well, it means I'm an architect, but I specialize in, um, heritage buildings, I guess. So, um, we do a lot of work that involves old buildings with the really contemporary overlay, if you like. So giving old buildings a new life,
- Julie Mackenzie: It's important to preserve old buildings because they provide evidence of our past. They, uh, well, there's lots of reasons why they're important. Uh, sometimes they might be a work of art. They might be, um, of aesthetic significance. Other times they might tell us some, some story of history. Um, they might also just be associated with a group of people that used to gather there, or there's lots of different reasons, yeah.
- Julie Mackenzie: Okay. Okay. Well I think a historic buildings also give us a sense of, well, they give us a sense of identity in a funny way. They, they reflect the past. Look, if you put other layers on them, they're kind of looking toward the future. And there's this continuum between the past and the present and the future that they kind of can embody if you like, particularly through the community that uses them. If it's something like the Eternity Playhouse or other public buildings
- Julie Mackenzie: Okay. I think, um, I think old retaining old buildings, um, and giving them new life implies a certain pride that a community has in their environment. And, and also I think that, um, old buildings in a modern environment they're often landmarks or they're, they're just places that give a sense of identity.
- Julie Mackenzie: The identity that old buildings provide to a community is really important because it, um, I'll start again. They're kind of tricky questions like that. They're straightforward, but then they're not, you know, tell me, what's the answer about identity. Culture, identity, and build community.
- Julie Mackenzie: Yeah. I think old buildings say to modern communities, um, lots of different things, but they, they give a community a sense of identity. They, they tell stories about the past. There's lots of associations within, um, within communities with old buildings. Uh, so I mean, the Eternity Playhouse had so many fabulous stories associated with it that with not only the community that existed around it at the time, but also communities gone, you know, gone in the past. And so, yeah, it's just very important to keep them that didn't make any sense. Um, I mean, yeah, they are the reasons why it's important obviously to keep old buildings is that they, they can be really beautiful places. Um, is it that you used fabulous materials, craftsmanship that some of which is, is hardly there anymore. Um, so they tell us a little bit about how as a society we've evolved to be where we are now. And yeah, now these

buildings are quite precious because buildings aren't necessarily built in the same way anymore. So they reveal lots of, lots of things about us as a society.

Julie Mackenzie: Okay. So historical buildings represent to Sydney layers of history, um, layers of our past, but also layers of our present. And as they get put up today, layers of our future. So there's kind of a thread between them, which is a historic continuum. If you like, um, where gradually the older buildings have been adapted over time to serve new uses, um, some have been demolished, some have been restored and then new buildings put up in between them. So yeah, they make up the fabric of, of our environment.

Julie Mackenzie: I think historic buildings in a, in a suburb or an area, uh, have a huge contribution to the character, the sort of look and feel of a place, but also often the sort of the human scale. So the level of detail in an old building compared a new building is often a lot finer grained. And so it's a lot more human scale and kind of personable, if you like

Julie Mackenzie: I think restored buildings, uh, can tell all sorts of stories. And part of our job as architects working with old buildings is to interpret those stories, if you like. So that they're understandable for people of today. So at Eternity Playhouse. So it's really important to understand if you're working with an old building, it's very important to understand the history and the significance of the place before you start tweaking with it. Um, because then, then you can sort of shine light on the important aspects, remove the parts that are less important and give it a new life. And in doing that, it's also important to tell some of those stories that you discover along the way that, that make it worth keeping. So at Eternity Playhouse, we did lots of research. We went to the Baptist archives. We, we did all sorts of things to find out more about the history of the place we spoke to different people that had used the building. Um, and yeah, gradually out of the woodwork, all sorts of really interesting stories came out that we tried to then convey to the public in all sorts of different ways. So some, some on panels that tell a story, literally there's all sorts of ways. You can tell stories, obviously, a film or a digital platform or something that's two dimensional in the form of a sign or in the case of Eternity Playhouse. We, we reused a lot of the, um, salvage materials, but in a different way so that when you go there today, the ceiling is actually what used to be the floor of the church. And, um, there's old windows, but there's new windows that are slightly different. So there's little, if you look close, there's all sorts of stories there. Um, and if, if in the fabric you can't pick it, you can also read it as well. So Yeah

Julie Mackenzie: The research is really important just to understand often buildings, uh, evolve over time. And so there's lots of change and some, so it's, it's important to sort of understand the layers of history because you're adding another layer effectively. Um, and depending on what the new use for the building is, some parts of it might not work anymore, or they might need to be updated to suit current standards or whatever. Um, so it's important to

understand that so that you keep the best bits, dumbing it down, um, and only lose the bits that are of less importance. Yeah.

Julie Mackenzie:

Um, the external facade was already preserved by the time we got there. Um, when the se..., You know, the whole story about the city of Sydney. So when they purchased the building, um, it needed work, needed love. It had been disused for several years and in a state of decline for probably 50 years before that. And so they spent some money just making it safe and watertight, they replaced the roof, they did all the work on the facade. And when they were doing that work, that was when they discovered the ceiling because the roof actually flew off onto the street. You heard that story, literally, they were about to fix up the roof and there was a big, big storm. And yeah, before they knew it, the roof was on the street. So then they had to fix the roof. And when they did that, plaster fell off the ceiling, revealing the timber. Cause before that, if you look at that, just had plaster on it. So then they had to spend quite a lot of money restoring the ceiling. So when we were engaged, the external fabric of the building had already been conserved and inside was very ordinary to sort of basement was fairly leaky and moldy and, and, um, upstairs had a sloped floor that was awkward to sort of imagine seating 200 people in yet they used to have a thousand dinner, you know, church service. So, yeah.

Julie Mackenzie:

So I think as, as a heritage architect, often you do assume the role of storyteller because you have to dig into the past of a building to, to unravel all the layers. Um, and, and then kind of put it all back together again, if you like. So with the eternity Playhouse, once we started delving into the stories, they were so fascinating. You know, the idea of having a thousand people at our church servicing that hall was just, um, you know, unimaginable. Um, and then the more we found out about the place, it was a really incredibly evangelical church. They used to have a van that went up to Taylor square, where they would, you know, broadcast their sermons, trying to attract people back. And in the basement, they had a soup kitchen and then it was the depression. And so people like Arthur Stace came to get a bowl of soup. And then before, you know, it you're upstairs and you've got, you know, you're fully ensconced in this service. I imagine they were all very supportive community. And really the reason the building declined was because Surry, Hills would have been pretty tough in those days. And as people gradually made their way out into the suburbs to have a bit more space to bring up the family, um, the congregation suddenly found itself down dwindling to point where in the fifties it was 50 people or something, you know, it just became hardly anything. But I think all of those stories about it being filled with people and life and, and, um, kind of good Samaritans on this, you know, but they also, they had these fabulous publications. They had one that was the crooked made straight, you know, which sort of gave you an idea of how intense the sermons would have been. Um, and so somebody like Arthur, Stace who, you know, being an alcoholic and living a pretty tough life is then, um, fully geed up by the Reverend giving the sermon, you know? So yeah, I think there's lots of fantastic stories there and it is important to

share them with, you know, the community and the people that then use the buildings once you've finished the project,

Julie Mackenzie:

Buildings convey a lot of these stories themselves. And, and often we in our new work, try to sort of just encourage that if you like, rather than putting signs everywhere to explain, you know, what year this was built or what, whatever, um, in a way it's nicer, if it can be something a bit more subtle. So yeah. Maybe you need to have a discerning eye to pick some of those stories, but they certainly tell stories all of the scars and all of the, the layers of paint and the layers of, of, you know, use to sort of revealed in that. Yeah. Eternity. Eternity.