

THE AUSTRALIAN

Utzon decries Opera House 'sleepovers'



Danish architect Jan Utzon, son of Sydney Opera House architect Jorn Utzon. Picture: Ella Pellegrini

SAMANTHA HUTCHINSON THE AUSTRALIAN 12:00AM January 14, 2017

The son of Opera House architect Jorn Utzon, Jan Utzon, has spoken out against a plan to open the landmark to overnight guests, saying he has "sincere reservations" about the idea.

Months after warning Opera House management that clutter on the forecourt could put the building's UNESCO World Heritage status at risk, the Denmark-based architect cautioned against the overnight plan, saying the interior spaces need protecting.

"This seems to me a strange idea, and would be like allowing churches, town halls, power stations and parliament buildings to be made available for public use, as a hotel," he said of the plan, which is sitting with the NSW Department of Planning and Environment.

"Why mix functions in this way? Are we, as an affluent society, really in need of this kind of entertainment?"

His comments come as NSW planners mull over the proposal for the performing arts venue to open its doors up to six nights a year, under two separate plans.

One proposes to convert the building's boardroom and Utzon Room temporarily into Danish-themed overnight suites, which could accommodate up to five guests, for six nights a year.

The second plan proposes to accommodate up to 100 overnight guests on cot-style beds in the northern and southern foyers of the Dame Joan Sutherland Theatre and the Concert Hall, in an event taking place once a year.

Utzon, who collaborated with his father on upgrades to Sydney's Opera House that are ongoing, warned that the overnight plan would require changes to the site's security plan, and more investment to protect interior features.

"If such a concept were to be implemented at the (Sydney Opera House), a serious step-up in security would be needed, and many of the interior spaces should be exempt from such use," Utzon said.

While the plan has raised the ire of heritage consultants and architects, a suggestion that Opera House management is considering introducing a lottery-style system for guests to sleep overnight inside the building may get the public onside.

A spokeswoman confirmed this week that the Opera House did not expect to charge visitors to stay the night, and opportunities to do so could be granted to patrons and guests through ballots, visitor experiences, competition prizes or promotional activities.

"At this stage, it is not anticipated that we would charge people to stay overnight at the Opera House," she said.

"As indicated ... we envisage that some partners may wish to collaborate with us on the proposed overnight experience."

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