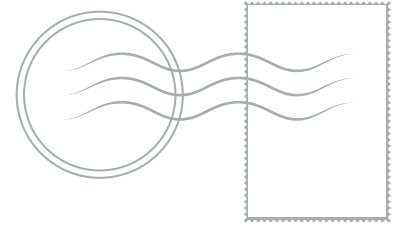


POSTCARD

Sydney



As the Sydney Opera House celebrates its 50th anniversary, head behind the scenes with **Natalie Marsh**

It's a beautiful sunny morning in Sydney and I'm peering out across the harbour as the water ripples gently below. But rather than standing at one of the popular viewpoints at Circular Quay, I'm inside the Sydney Opera House.

We're in a foyer outside the entrance to one of the performance spaces, and our guide is pointing through the windows at the tiles coating the outside of the adjacent 'sail'. To my surprise, they're slightly yellow, not the gleaming white that you see from a distance. It's an optical illusion: one of the many lesser-known facts I discover on this behind-the-scenes tour of one of Sydney's most recognisable icons – whose design was chosen from the entries in a global competition. The Sydney Opera House Tour lasts one hour, costing \$43 for adults and \$33 for children between the ages of five and 15. There are other tours available, including a Backstage Tour, with a visit to the rehearsal spaces and orchestra pit, and a new Hidden House Tour that takes guests to back-of-house spaces for the first time, including a look at the world's biggest mechanical pipe organ.

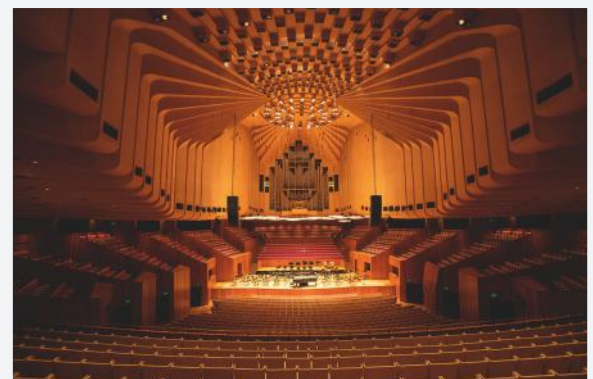
The Opera House is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, after opening in 1973. But its construction wasn't without its difficulties. Danish designer Jørn Utzon faced a lot of opposition and the project was over budget. It was expected to take three to four years, but ended up lasting 14. At one point, a public lottery was created with a \$100,000 prize, to help fund the construction. Utzon ended up resigning and leaving Australia, never to return, even after it was completed. More recently, with the construction drama firmly in the past, the Concert Hall reopened after a two-year renovation and acoustics upgrade – just in time for its half-century celebrations. Special performances will be held this year, culminating in a birthday festival throughout October.

Just outside the Opera House is the Opera Bar, a picturesque spot that draws crowds to enjoy an evening drink as the sun sets and the sails light up – illuminating a building that it's hard to imagine Sydney without. **TW**



BOOK IT

If Only offers a six-night stay at Spicers Potts Point in Sydney for £2,899, including return flights with Emirates, private transfers and breakfast daily. The price also includes The Backstage Tour of the Sydney Opera House and breakfast. ifonly.net



FROM TOP: The Sydney Opera House; Concert Hall

PICTURE: Shutterstock/RAW-films, Jan von Uxkull-Gyllenband, Mikhail Grachikov