GOLD

The bibliographic citation for this paper is:

Stuart King and **Julie Willis** "Mining Boom Styles." In
*Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia
and New Zealand: 33, Gold*, edited by AnnMarie Brennan and
Philip Goad, 334-345. Melbourne: SAHANZ, 2016.

Stuart King University of Tasmania and **Julie Willis** University of Melbourne

MINING BOOM STYLES

The idea of a 'Boom Style' is now accepted within the lexicon of Australian architectural historians, typically used to describe the exuberant and individualistic architectural expression of the 1880s and early 1890s, especially in 'Marvellous Melbourne', and to lesser degrees in Sydney and Brisbane. These Boom Style buildings, originally describing domestic buildings, but latterly extended to include large commercial structures, are characterised by eclecticism and the enrichment of facades developed through multiple overlays of represented structure and ornament, exemplified in the likes of the Olderfleet Building, Melbourne (1889). For such works, 'Boom Style', as a stylistic label, refers not so much to a particular elemental vocabulary (elements could be combined from any variants of Classical or Gothic languages), rather a common compositional approach to the design. It was composition that enabled architects to negotiate the wealth and expectations of clients and an urbane populace, as well as an equally rich architectural milieu.

This paper examines the coining of the term 'Boom Style' as it is used specifically to describe architecture in Melbourne in the late 1880s and early 1890s, and generically elsewhere. It argues that if a contextually responsive compositional method prevails over an elemental language in a robust 'Boom Style', then the style should be identifiable against the backdrop of boom conditions in other places. Indeed, localised late-nineteenth-century boom styles can be observed elsewhere in Australia and New Zealand typically associated with sudden influxes of wealth from mining, for example, in, Western Australia in the 1890s, northern Tasmania in late 1890s and early 1900s, and, earlier, across the Tasman in Dunedin in the 1860s. This paper examines these apparent boom styles to better understand the phenomenon and its triggers.

The discovery of gold in the eastern colonies of Australia at the dawn of the 1850s instigated cycles of boom and bust that characterised the Antipodean colonies in the second half of the nineteenth century. Wealth, and then its lack, wrought significant change on architectural taste and fashion, encouraging its local distinction. So distinct was the architecture of Melbourne, at the height of its economic boom of the late 1880s, that it earned its own term to describe it: the Boom Style.

So what makes Boom Style? Is it the product of a series of influences that are unique to its place and time, or is it indicative of wider trends in Australasian architecture at that time? And, if similar conditions are in place at a different time and place, are there other boom styles? If so, what are the architectural and economic conditions that facilitate this? This paper explores the historiography of the 1880s boom period, the origins of the term Boom Style, and then goes on examine whether there are multiple boom styles: stylistically complex and sophisticated architecture emerging in a place as a result of boom conditions, such as gold rushes or mining booms.

What is a 'Boom Style'?

The historiography of Australian architecture of the nineteenth century has rested on the use of stylistic descriptors that derive from the mostly English-based ancestry of the buildings under discussion. The moods, battles and fashions that defined English architecture of the nineteenth century were imported to Australia courtesy of an ever-increasing migrant population of architects, each of whom brought new knowledge and sophistication to the local profession. Inevitably, as the number of architects who were locally trained grew, along with an increasing 'native born' population of clients, divergence from architectural sources began and local inflections and styles became evident. This was driven by increasing colonial wealth fuelled by the discovery of gold and supported by pastoral exports and commercial trade.

The exuberant architecture of the later Victorian period, the product of a sustained economic boom up the east coast of Australia, and later in the west, emerged from this wealth. It was built for newly-rich clients whose aesthetic taste had not been circumscribed by any aristocratic sense of decorum and civility. The buildings that emerged at this time are notable for their eclectic use of style and the free arrangements of tectonic elements, strongly influenced by Mannerism. Long derided by earlier architectural historians such as Max Freeland and Colin Caldwell, it is only relatively recently that such buildings have been celebrated for their virtuosity and skill in composition. The works do not easily relate to styles and modes developed elsewhere and, as such, cannot easily draw upon a pre-formed and pedigreed terminology of description: lacunae in architectural language that plagues discussion of so-called Australian styles.[1]

Into this fray steps 'Boom Style'. It is an evocative term, referencing the 1880s economic boom centred on Melbourne, when it became the third richest city in the British Empire, after Glasgow and London. In this it is more useful than the term 'High Victorian', as it is more specific in terms of the time period referenced. But Boom Style, as it has emerged within the writing of Australian architectural history, is not a style as usually defined. Instead it is compositional approach to façade design that freely borrows from multiple styles, including the Gothic Revival and various forms of classicism, to create richly textured and complex buildings.

The Melbourne-led economic boom began around 1880, when the city hosted its first international exposition in the newly-completed Exhibition Buildings (1879, Reed & Barnes), reached its apotheosis c1888-1890, and lasted through to the deep recession that began in 1892. Melbourne, as a city, was transformed in this period from one that was populated mostly by buildings of two or three stories, to one that had multi-storey 'skyscrapers', reaching ever higher.[2] In the suburbs, grand houses were being constructed at a rapid rate. Such buildings are notable for their use of applied modelling, in the form of non-structural decoration or represented structure, and variety of form and materials. The compositional approaches evident in Melbourne at that time are also apparent in works in Sydney and Brisbane, although Boom Style is only rarely used to describe them.

High Victorian Opulence

Architectural writing on the 1880s in Australia has usually resorted to derogatory adjectives to deride the heavily ornamented and richly detailed designs of the period. In stark contrast to the modernist asceticism that was these authors' contemporary frame of reference, 1880s architecture was a riot of deeply modelled decoration of garlands, festoons, statuary, tracery, pilasters, columns, triglyphs, oriels, dentils, and pediments of every conceivable type. In extreme instances, 'encrusted' is perhaps the only suitable description for facades in which only the tiniest slivers of plain wall surface remained.

The distaste in which some authors viewed these buildings is clear. In 1966, Colin Caldwell described the period thus:

> The fruits of mining and land speculation had created and were still creating a whole class of newly-rich patrons, many of them uneducated and lacking established standards, and in fact it is from this period that we can trace the disappearance of traditional taste from Australia. … Buildings, many with good body and proportion, put on fancy dress and were overloaded with the most incongruous detail. Here is the final triumph of stucco — pilasters, pediments, garlands, shells (a frequent motif) and statues are to be found in close and impossible proximity, while parapets and balustrades sprouted strange growths of urns, knobs and spikes, both absurd in design and top-heavy in appearance.[3]

Caldwell dismissed such architecture for not following 'traditional' rules of taste. These traditions were presumably the plainer designs that had preceded the 1880s, beginning with the Georgian, then with the Renaissance, Roman and the plainer Gothic Revival, rather than the traditions of the Baroque and Mannerism. For Caldwell, the breaking of compositional rules – laid down through eighteenth and nineteenth-century revivalist edicts, scholarly documentation and interpretations of the original modes – was an offence to proper architecture.

Max Freeland in 1968 saw them as "full-blown and gaudy buildings"[4], there being a "general fashion for extravagance".[5] At the heart of the boom, architecture was "swimming exultantly in a welter of stylism".[6]

> High Victorian architecture reached its most opulent in booming Melbourne where buildings of both the highest and lowest degree shared in and were imbued with the excessive love of voluptuousness. [7]

These authors saw ornament as a distraction from the building, rather than intrinsic to its design: a corruption of good architecture. After all, beginning with Adolf Loos' famous essay 'Ornament and Crime' (1910), the tenets of modernism encouraged a rejection of ornament in favour of the purity of building form. But, for architects designing within the nineteenth-century discourses of style, the aesthetic embellishment of building was architecture.

The origin of the term Boom Style was Robin Boyd's *Australia's Home*, first published in 1952. Boyd coined the term as a title to one of the chapters and as one of the eleven "Steps of Stylism", which were drawings of generic house types present in various decades of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century.[8] The book, one of the first to consider broad swathes of Australian architectural history, focused on discussing Australian houses, from grand architect-designed mansions to humble 'spec-built' housing: Boyd was interested in the mood, movements and ideas these houses represented, as a reflection of the emergence and development of the nation.

Boyd defined the Boom Style thus:

> Here was a fashion in applied ornament so brash and enthusiastic and universal that it almost grew out of the class of decoration into the dignity of a style. It lay indiscriminately on the houses of rich or poor, on stone, brick or timber structures, transforming them all with its own overpoweringly fruity flavour.[9]

Elsewhere in the chapter, he describes a "[d]eliberately mixed period ornament" and "extravagance in form" which became more pronounced as the land boom of the 1880s progressed:

> the colour deepened, the forms stood out rounder and bolder, the detail in shadows lightened… Eventually the scene was dazzling. Every big house had an arcade verandah [*sic*]. In large and small houses, coloured leadlights filled every fanlight, statuettes and urns crowded the parapets, stucco left the external walls, and mixed coloured bricks were laid in stripes and radiating arches. Caryatides, statuettes, urns, marble inserts and curved glass bay windows smothered the street facades.[10]

GOLD

Boyd's description of Boom Style is not of a definable style. It cannot not be adequately delineated by its elements or motifs, or aligned with a pedigreed style of the past: it is eclectic and more of a mode or approach, than a formula. The adjectives he uses are just as judgmental as those of Freeland and Caldwell, demonstrating this generation of architectural historians' deep distrust of this architectural mode.

Delving into the High Victorian

The rehabilitation of the era came with a younger generation of architectural historians who sought to understand the nature of this boom period architecture. In 1976, George Tibbits' essay "The Classical Tradition in Victoria, 1850-1890: Represented Structure and Style" examined the question of eclecticism and ornamentation across the late nineteenth century in terms of the composition of the architectural profession. He argues that by the late 1880s there were three generations of architects in practice each working within learnt modes of design particular to the contexts of their training.[11] The older generation employed straightforward interpretations of the Renaissance Revival, noted for their regularity and "evenness of expression". Mannerist techniques of montage and superimposition were typical of the middle generation. Tibbits then argues that in the late 1880s, a younger generation entered practice and "spring boarded" from the work of the generation before in designing complex and richly ornamental facades in an increasing array of styles available to architects at the time. Tibbits notes that the "extravagant" work of this younger generation "is now rather unceremoniously lumped together as 'boom style'." Some of the examples built at the peak of the boom period cited by him were the Block Arcade, Melbourne (c.1888) by Twentyman & Askew (Figure 1); Premier Permanent Building Society Offices, Bourke Street, Melbourne (1887 dem.) by Charles d'Ebro; Sun Insurance Building, Melbourne (1888) by Alfred White of F. M. White & Son and, in the suburbs, the former Savings Bank, Burwood Road, Hawthorn (1889), among others. Tibbits' broader analysis showed that eclecticism and varying approaches to composition and the use of ornament was thus, in part, related to the make-up of the profession.

FIGURE 1 The Block Arcade, Collins St, Melbourne. Twentyman & Askew, c1888. Photographer: Commercial Photographic Co., c1930s (copyright expired) Source: Harold Paynting Collection, State Library of Victoria, Persistent link: http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/50136

SAHANZ 2016 Conference Proceedings | 337

The compositional effects of some of those most distinctive buildings of the boom period were subject to further scrutiny by Peter Kohane in "Classicism Transformed—A Study of Façade Composition in Victoria, 1885-1892" published in *Transition* in 1983. Kohane deferred any pejorative assessment to explore the compositional methods employed to achieve "complex, but controlled relationships within facades".[12] Again, this was not an exercise in attempting to define a Boom Style, rather to understand compositional strategies and their effects on the aesthetics of classicism at the time. Nonetheless, some specificity attached to the otherwise named Boom Style buildings began to emerge.

From here Boom Style appears to be variously used, either generically, allied to perceptions of excess, or, specifically, with reference to underlying compositional rationales mostly seen in Melbourne. Indeed, the term was used both ways as a foil to a national survey of architectural developments - 'Federation' architecture - that followed the boom and bust of the 1880s and early 1890s. With a debt to the thesis of Robin Boyd, in *Towards the Dawn* (1989) Trevor Howells and Michael Nicholson wrote:

> In architectural terms, the 1880s responded directly to these conditions with the emergence of the Boom style. Clad almost always in the apparel of High Victorian Italianate architecture, other stylistic flourishes were sometimes thrown in. It was hardly surprising that the most extravagant architectural Boom style confections were located in Victoria, centred on Melbourne. For it was there that the fortunes of the land speculators and merchant princes and the ostentatious expression of the nouveaux riches found their glorious apotheosis.[13]

Further references to the Boom Style in *Towards the Dawn* appear in individual chapters, notably George Tibbits' contribution on Victoria, "An Emanation of Lunacy". Here Tibbits uses the term with specificity, writing of "Boom Style Classicism" as one many styles within the preceding and eclectic milieu of the 1880s.[14] In contrast, Robert and Miranda Morris-Nunn appear to adopt it generically, writing of a "conservative Victorian Boom Style", in northern Tasmania in the late 1880s when wealth flowed from mining ventures in the island state's northeast and west.[15]

In contrast, Richard Apperly, Robert Irving and Peter Reynolds' *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present* (published in the same year as *Towards the Dawn)* avoids the term.[16] This still-popular guide developed a complex, at times overly-specific, nomenclature based upon periods and elemental characteristics immediately at odds with the polemical origins of Boom Style. However, the compositional approaches of the 1880s discussed by George Tibbits and Peter Kohane are captured across a selection of late nineteenth-century Mannerist and Free styles, including Victorian Mannerism, Victorian Free Classicism and Victorian Free Classicism, all connected to the boom period of the late 1880s and early 1890s.[17]

> [t]he rich, complex rhythms and textures of William Pitt's late nineteenth-century commercial façades which line the city streets of Melbourne show how exuberantly Free Gothic designers departed from academic correctness as they expressed something of the euphoria generated by the city's financiers in the years before the crash of the early 1890s.[18]

Nonetheless, the term Boom Style has retained a currency, particularly in and about Melbourne such that in the architectural guidebook *Melbourne Architecture,* published in 2001, George Tibbits could write of a local architectural parlance in a contribution on the decade of the 1880s: "The architecture of Marvellous Melbourne has long been given its own defining label, the Boom style, a term which combines wonderment and opulence with decadence and abuse."[19] But still a definition remained elusive until, ten years later, the *Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture* attempted to clarify the term as one of some thirty entries dedicated to stylistic terms:

> The term "Boom style" has come into use, but it does not refer to a definable style as such; instead to the compositional approach used in the building, dressed in layers of represented structure (both arcuation and trabeation) and ornament, sometimes to the point that little or no plain wall surface remains such as in William Pitt's Olderfleet Building, Collins Street, Melbourne (1889).[20] (Figure 2)

FIGURE 2 Olderfleet Building, Collins St, Melbourne, William Pitt, c1889.
Photograph: Julie Willis, 2009

With composition at the fore, the entry argues that "Boom style was not confined to a particular architectural language" and cites Gothic Revival, Renaissance Revival and French Second Empire examples of the style.[21] Melbourne continued to hold the key exemplars, however, the idea of a broader phenomenon in Australian architecture is flagged in the entry with mention of Sulman & Power's Mutual Life Assurance Building, Sydney (1891) and the work of Andrea Stombucco in Brisbane.[22]

The process by which the idea of a Boom Style has entered Australian architectural history, as we have outlined it, follows a pattern described by Juan Pablo Bonta: acceptance of the term is a cumulative result of repeated interpretations filtered and distilled.[23] It has also followed the passage from a term of denigration to normalisation, familiar prior to the rise of academic architectural history. But it has maintained an ambiguity. Through this process two views on the Boom Style have emerged, firstly, and more strongly, a historical category concentrated in Melbourne in the late 1880s, supported by a defined group of exemplars with shared stylistic attributes; and, secondly, but more loosely, as a formal or aesthetic category manifesting under similar conditions at other times and places, thereby allowing for multiple boom styles. In the case of the latter, interpretation remains hampered by the lack of a definable visible vocabulary typically used by architectural historians to classify styles. The nature of boom style designs, as most recently defined, is that they experimented with known stylistic vocabularies. However, if Boom Style in Melbourne can be clarified as a way of working whereby compositional strategies were used to negotiate a rich economic and architectural milieu, might it be used to diagnose wider trends in Australasian architectural history not bound to the brief period of the late 1880s? In other words might the Boom Style point to boom style approaches more widely? One way to test this is to consider the possibly of a distinguishable boom styles elsewhere. This might begin to call into question the interplay of historical and aesthetic categories as the bases of a wider category of boom styles in Australasia.

Boom Style Melbourne

The conditions that led to Melbourne's boomtime, and thus Boom Style, have already been indicated in this paper. The mining of gold, and then agriculture, manufacturing and retail, led to significant investment and wealth generation, that reached its height in the 1880s. Such wealth and opportunity lured architects to the city, which saw a rapidly increasing population that translated into demand for housing and, in turn, civic infrastructure. In 1850, the population was just 23,000; by 1880, it was some 281,000. Melbourne's central grid – a four by eight block grid, bounded by the river and swamp to the south, a steep escarpment and swamp to the west, parkland to the east and, by the 1880s, existing development of suburbs to the north – was tightly contained, and provided both focus and pressure on the available land within the grid to realise the ambitions and aspirations of the businesses and institutions contained therein. Land values soared, buildings rose in height, complexity and sophistication.[24] Higher-rise buildings demanded new approaches to design and composition, for the established precedents of the Renaissance palazzo with its modest three stories, would no longer suffice. The intense street-side competition, with multiple new buildings vying for attention, further encouraged experimentation.

The buildings realised during this period all offered a new level of complexity of form, with layered frontages, festooned with modelled decoration. While the individual building might be recognisably Gothic or Classical in the origins of its decoration, most melded some aspect of the Gothic sensibility with Classical or Italianate elements. In civic buildings, this was layers of arcuated screens and bundled columns or pilasters; in the domestic, the picturesque façade with Tudor bay window, rendered in the Italianate with rounded balusters and bracketed eaves. Examples, beyond those already noted, include the Mercantile Bank, Collins St, Melbourne, by Salway, Wright & Lucas (1889); the Sun Insurance Building, Collins St, Melbourne by FM White & Son (dem., 1888); the Federal Coffee Palace, cnr King and Collins Sts, Melbourne by William Pitt and Ellerker & Kilburn (in association) (1889); and the Temperance and General Insurance Building, cnr Lt Collins and Swanston Sts, Melbourne, by Alfred Dunn (1887).

Boom Style Beyond: Brisbane and Sydney

The compositional approach seen in Melbourne during the late 1880s and early 1890s may also be identified in Brisbane, and to a lesser extent Sydney, suggestive of a wider phenomenon. Queensland experienced boom conditions during the 1880s on the back of pastoralism, agriculture and mining, and the decade saw the city's population more than double, rising from 48,000 to 104,000.[25] Boom Style characteristics can be seen in Andrea Stombucco's commercial buildings that revelled in the layering of structuralised ornament. For example, the façade of Hecklemann's Building (1884) in Elizabeth Street comprised only structuralised ornament, achieved with two layers of superimposed trabeation, while the facades of Her Majesty's Opera House, Queen Street (1888) is made up of four layers of arcuation and trabeation with Serlianas suspended between. To Stombucco's work, one might add Richard Gailey's Courier Building, Edward Street (1885-7) - Brisbane's first high-rise - which is comprised entirely of variously rusticated piers and tiers of inset arcading to frame windows, and the Hill's Building (later Queensland Country Life Building), Queen Street (1888-9). This apparent Boom Style approach also surfaced in commercial buildings by FDG Stanley in the mid-1880s, such as the Spencers Retail Warehouse (1889-90) and the DL Brown & Co. Warehouse (1888-9).

In Sydney, layered and heavily decorated compositions are also evident. Sulman & Power's Mutual Life Building (1891) employed bundled giant order columns, pilasters and piers over layers of aedicules, blind oriel windows and decorative consoles to create a screen in which wall surface is barely visible. (Figure 3) The Sydney Town Hall (Thomas Sapsford, c1884) used French Second Empire details to create a richly layered composition. Later examples too appear to carry this approach to layering and decoration, but tending towards the Edwardian Baroque for their principal language, as seen in the Standard Buildings, Elizabeth St, Sydney (c1898), the Phoenix Fire Insurance Buildings (c1898) and the Romanesque Queen Victoria Buildings (George McRae, 1893-8).

Figure 3: The Mutual Life Building, Sydney, Sulman & Power, 1891.
Photographer: Kerry & Co., c1900 (copyright expired)
Source: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney
Persistent link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mutual_Life_Assurance_Office_from_The_Powerhouse_Museum_Collection.jpg

Boom Style/boom styles

Perhaps one of the real tests for a boom style is to examine the architecture of Dunedin, New Zealand, after its 1861 gold rush. It is an important test case, as Dunedin's rapid rise in wealth came before what is considered the High Victorian period, at a time when architectural fashions were plainer and more closely aligned with revivalist styles and known precedents. It is important to note the close connections between the eastern Australian colonies and New Zealand at that time, fostered by trade and the regular movement of people between them. This included a significant influx of architects in the early 1860s, particularly from Melbourne and surrounds.

Dunedin prior to 1861 had been somewhat typical of a pioneer town: buildings were constructed out of necessity, responding to the availability of materials, building expertise and bare functional requirements. Predominantly timber, the buildings were modest and utilitarian. John Turnbull Thomson, who took up his post of Chief Surveyor of Otago in 1856, described the small settlement of Dunedin as "sunk in poverty and filth, it had earned the more appropriate title of Mud-edin".[26] But the discovery of gold soon brought about dramatic change.

The appointment of Charles Swyer as Provincial Engineer in 1862 saw the introduction of new building standards. Swyer, who had arrived from private practice in Melbourne where he had been in partnership with Albert Purchas, based his building regulations on Australian requirements. And other architects, many from Melbourne, soon joined Swyer, including the Melbourne-trained WB Armson (1833-1883) appointed Assistant Architect to the Provincial Engineer, who had undertaken his articles with Purchas & Swyer from 1853[27] and the Luttrells from Tasmania. It took time for a building boom to emerge - the trappings of prosperity follow the initial accumulation of wealth – but by the 1870s a building boom was in full swing in Dunedin. Classicism was the *mode de jour*, with Gothic reserved for ecclesiastical and educational buildings: "[t]he classical tradition provided the quality of elegance with ideal proportions… and with dressings that turned a wall into art."[28] Knight and Wales write that "architects felt free to use a mixture of the traditional forms"[29] which suggests a level of confidence and experimentation in composition that appears to be characteristic of boom styles. An extraordinary example of experimental composition evident in Dunedin is the Oriental Hotel in Princes

Street (1863, dem) (Figure 4), possibly by WH Clayton, which is an amalgam of layered detail that lived up to its exotic name.[30] Elsewhere, the Venetian Gothic of the Ross & Glendinning building in Stafford Street (John McGregor, 1866) also contributed a sense of exoticism.[31] William Mason's Bank of New Zealand (c1864) employed Classical elements but in a layered composition that offered a distinctive interpretation of the Renaissance. And the works of RA Lawson, including the Municipal Chambers (1876-1880) and the additions to the New Zealand Loan & Mercantile Company building (1885), show a confident and complex approach to composition.

FIGURE 4 Oriental Hotel, Princes St, Dunedin, 1863, possibly WH Clayton Photograph: D L Mundy, 1864 (copyright expired)
Source: Built in Dunedin/Toitū / Otago Settlers Museum
https://builtindunedin.files.wordpress.com/2013/12/oriental.jpg

This Dunedin period architecture shows that the rapid increase of the city's fortunes played out in buildings that consciously demonstrated the opulence and confidence that boom appears to encourage in architect and client. In the examples shown, historical and formal commonalities can be seen within a Victorian milieu, however the same pattern and results can de detected amid booms beyond it: for example, in northern Tasmania and the Western Australian goldfields from the mid-1890s.

A minerals boom in northern and western Tasmania from the 1870s through the 1890s not only created the boomtowns of Zeehan and Queenstown - the second and third largest towns in Tasmania at the turn of the twentieth century - but also returned wealth to Launceston as investment returns flowed back to that city. This boom was separated from that of the 1880s by the depression of the early 1890s and a new architectural milieu. The scale and requirements to build in Launceston were also very different to Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. Yet the arrival of architects and new ideas encouraged a confidence in architectural experimentation characteristic of a boom style. Here it was played out via stylistic eclecticism mediated by compositional dexterity. The Luttrell brothers - before the moved to Dunedin - designed in various 'free' styles, characterised by exaggerated ornament seen, for example, in Price Memorial Hall, Launceston (1895), and the Empire Hotel, Queenstown (1900). Similarly, boom style characteristics appear in series of new mansions by various architects in the early 1900s, most notably, in Thomas Searell's highly eclectic Lemana (1906). (Figure 5) Lemana comprises a picturesque asymmetrical composition of forms including gables, bell-shaped and ogee domes. Built in a prevailing 'Federation' mode it was constructed in exposed brickwork with terracotta tiles, ridges and finials, and ornamented with contrasting white carved timber posts, balustrades, valances, struts and fretwork. Despite the subsequent stylistic vocabulary, Lemana's form and exuberance echoes Boyd's illustration of a Victorian Boom Style.

As Australia's eastern colonies suffered economic depression the early 1890s, gold was discovered in Western Australia supporting a building boom in the west. In 1893 - at the beginning of the Western Australian gold rush - there were only twelve architects recorded in the colony; four years later, in 1897, there were one hundred and two architects seeking opportunities created by major infrastructural and architectural investments associated with mineral discoveries and enterprises.[32] Observing the demands for building and the influx of architects, historians of Western Australian architecture have documented a period of rapid change and the suggestion of a boom style. Kate Hislop

FIGURE 5 'Lemana', Elphin Road, Launceston, designed by Thomas Searell, 1906. Photographed by Stuart King (2015).
Photograph: Stuart King (2015)

has written: "Perth and rural centres were transformed from sedate colonial to flamboyant Victorian towns."[33] While existing towns and settlements were transformed, new towns on the goldfields materialised from nothing. Gold was discovered in the vicinity of Kalgoorlie in 1893 and the township was declared in 1894. Within ten years, Kalgoorlie's population was 28,000 and the town sported ninety-three hotels as well as public buildings, banks, company offices, shops and entertainment venues.[34] Philip Goldswain and William Taylor have described the coalescence of an "intense, but fleeting urbanism".[35] A variety of revivalist and 'free' styles brought urbanity to the desert, for example, the Palace Chambers (c1900), the Oriental Hotel (dem., 1900,) and the impressive formal and stylistic eclecticism of the York Hotel (1901) designed by Daniel T Edmunds. Experimentation in commercial buildings is also evident in the MacKenzie Building (c1906), with its illuminated steel corner tower; the unusual composition of stark forms seen in the DJ Fowler building (1912) and the exotic eclecticism of the Laslett Building (c1906).

Mining the Boom Style

Mordaunt Crook's *The Dilemma of Style* (1987) draws upon EH Gombrich to succinctly define style as a "conscious system of design, a visual code based on a tectonic preference."[36] This typically leads to evaluations of styles based upon elemental vocabularies and taxonomies. However, taxonomical systems are rarely able to account for traditions of eclecticism or hybridity in architecture without an incalculable expansion of overly determined categories. Boom Style, understood as a way of designing associated with a certain economic environment, offers the possibility of discussing the phenomenon of complex and hybrid styles seemingly so different to those that developed elsewhere such that they cannot easily draw upon a pre-formed and pedigreed terminology of description.

So, does Boom Style, or indeed boom styles, exist? Certainly there appears to be a common thread amongst the buildings discussed in this paper that notes their association with times of boom – times of high net wealth and rapidly rising land prices – and similar compositional approaches that involve the layering of multiple architectural elements drawn from disparate stylistic traditions and fusing different compositional sensibilities. The approach of these buildings – often describes as eclectic or free style – is seated in a frame of experimentation. These buildings, perhaps in the intense heat of the boom, deliberately set out to attract attention often in an increasingly crowded streetscape. And they come at a time where there is a tremendous influx of new architectural talent, lured by opportunity and ready to please the newly-flush clientele with an appetite for statement buildings. Yet, the difficulty around discussing and defining what Boom Style might encompass is evident, for the usual means by which architectural composition is defined and delineated is deeply challenged by the cross-style tendencies of Boom Style.

Beyond the thorny questions of defining Boom Style, it highlights architectural divergences and local inflections in style created by a rapid increase in wealth. Across the nineteenth-century Australasian colonies, rolling mineral

discoveries, pastoral enterprise and commercial trade, fuelled these divergences. Without question, these were distinctive conditions in eastern Australia in the 1880s and played out in regional mineral booms. But to understand the architectural and aesthetic consequences one needs to more fully understand the impact of different economic conditions on the dynamics of the architectural profession and practice. Indeed, to identify boom styles quickly leads to a trace of the movement of architects who followed booms and escaped busts across Australia and New Zealand (and beyond). Boom Style, or perhaps booming styles, might also serve to understand the continuums of architectural practice across geographies linked by economic cycles.

Endnotes

1   See, for instance, the evolution of the term 'Federation architecture', as described in J Willis & P Goad, "A Myth in its Making: Federation Style and Australian Architectural History," in *Formulation Fabrication*, *Papers from the Seventeenth Annual Conference of The Society of Architectural Historians, Australia & New Zealand*, eds. Andrew Leach & Emina Petrovic (Wellington, NZ: SAHANZ, 2000), 113-18.

2   Until the City of Melbourne placed a height limit of 132 feet to ensure fire-fighting equipment could reach all the floors, which remained in place from 1916 until 1957.

3   Colin Caldwell, "Architectural Style," in *Historic Buildings of Victoria*, ed. David Saunders (Melbourne and Brisbane: Jacaranda Press in association with National Trust of Australia, 1966), 42.

4   JM Freeland, *Architecture in Australia: A History* (Ringwood, Vic: Penguin, (1968) 1972), 171.

5   Freeland, *Architecture in Australia*, 180.

6   Freeland, *Architecture in Australia*, 193.

7   Freeland, *Architecture in Australia*, 185.

8   Robin Boyd, *Australia's Home: Why Australians built the way they did* (Ringwood: Penguin, (1952) 1978), 52-65.

9   Boyd, *Australia's Home*, 55.

10 Boyd, *Australia's Home*, 56-7.

11 George Tibbits, "The Classical Tradition in Victoria, 1850-1890: Represented Structure and Style," *Art Association of Australia: Architectural Papers 1976* (Sydney: Art Gallery of NSW, 1976), 18pp.

12 Peter Kohane, "Classicism Transformed - A Study of Façade Composition in Victoria, 1885-1892," *Transition* (February 1983): 28-9.

13 Trevor Howells, "Towards the Dawn," in *Towards the Dawn: Federation Architecture in Australia 1890-1915*, eds., Trevor Howells and Michael Nicholson (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1989), 10. Reference to Boyd might be detected when Howells uses the example of Melbourne's Labassa to illustrate the point, describing it as "an opulent mélange of Italianate with liberal garnishes of French Second Empire, the favoured architecture of the reign of Napoleon III, distinguished by its elaborate use of surface decoration on walls capped with distinctive steep, slate-clad roofs terminating in a flourish of cast-iron ridge filigree." (p10) Howells then averred the interiors of the Melbourne Arts Centre Opera (State) Theatre, completed in the mid-1980s, as an afterlife of the city's nineteenth-century Boom Style: "for it is there that the rich and unrestrained architectural taste of the 1880s has been resurrected a century later." (p11)

14 George Tibbits, "An Emanation of Lunacy: Victoria," in Howells and Nicholson, *Towards the Dawn*, 49

15 Robert and Miranda Morris-Nunn, "Pure Air and Lovely Aspect," in Howells and Nicholson, *Towards the Dawn*, 87.

16 Arguably, this may have been because the term was so closely associated with a particular region, and did sit across the established taxonomy of style that the book relied upon. Richard Apperly, Robert Irving and Peter Reynolds, *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present,* paperback edition (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1994 (1989)).

17 Apperly, Irving and Reynolds, *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture*, 64

18 Apperly, Irving and Reynolds, *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture*, 82.

19 George Tibbits, "Marvellous Melbourne, 1880-1890," in *Melbourne Architecture*, ed. Philip Goad (Sydney: Watermark Press, 1999), 54.

20 Peter Kohane and Julie Willis, "Boom Style," in *The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, eds. Philip Goad and Julie Willis (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 97.

21 Kohane and Willis, "Boom Style," 97.

22 Kohane and Willis, "Boom Style," 98.

23 Juan Pablo Bonta, *Architecture and its Interpretation: A Study of Expressive Systems in Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1979), 145.

24 Just as similar conditions in Chicago had prompted new approaches to architecture that saw the development of the skyscraper.

25 Ross Fitzgerald, *From the dreaming to 1915: A History of Queensland* (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1982), 183.

26 Thomson, as quoted in Hardwicke Knight and Niel Wales, *Buildings of Dunedin* (Dunedin: John McIndoe, 1988), 32.

27 Shipping records to Victoria show a Mr Armson, aged 20, arriving in Melbourne in April 1853 on the 'Velocity'. See Index to Unassisted Inward Passenger Lists to Victoria 1852-1923, Public Records Office of Victoria.

28 Knight and Wales, *Buildings of Dunedin*, 35.

29 Knight and Wales, *Buildings of Dunedin*, 35.

30 See "Built in Dunedin: Historic Buildings and their Stories," https://builtindunedin.com/2013/02/24/lost-dunedin-3-oriental-hotel/, accessed 12 April 2016.

31 See "Built in Dunedin: Historic Buildings and their Stories," https://builtindunedin.com/2015/11/26/ross-glendining/, accessed 12 April 2016.

32 John White, "Building in Western Australia 1881-1939", 110.

33 Kate Hislop, "Western Australian Architecture," in *The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, eds. Philip Goad and Julie Willis (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 761.

34 Geoffrey London, "Bearing Witness: The Making of a City (A Pictorial Essay), " in *An Everyday Transience: The urban Imaginary of Goldfields Photographer john Joseph Dwyer*, eds. Philip Goldswain and William Taylor (Perth: UWA Publishing, 2013), 11.

35 Goldswain and Taylor, introduction to *An Everyday Transience*, 1.

36 J Mordaunt Crook, *The Dilemma of Style: Architectural Ideas from the Picturesque to the Post-Modern* (London: John Murray, 1987), 13.