

## **Interchange Pavilion**

*An interview with Chris Fox, Founder of Studio Chris Fox*

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***Interchange Pavilion: Studio Chris Fox considers the railway 'switch' in the heart of Sydney.***

*Interchange Pavilion* is a new architectural pavilion and public artwork in the revitalised South Eveleigh Village created by artist and architect Chris Fox with his studio team. The pavilion will act as a meeting place for the public and to host events for the community. Created from 250 metres of stainless-steel ground rails, 15 tonnes of robotically moulded glass reinforced concrete and 1400 pieces of router cut hardwood, supported by a 14 tonne structure made up of over 1650 pieces of digitally fabricated aluminium, the result is a monumental 350 square-metre public art installation and an exciting addition to South Everleigh's public art series.

*Interchange Pavilion* is inspired by Sydney's historic rail network, representing the rail switch — creating a meeting place where tracks converge, a place of interchange where paths cross. The work is a tribute to the diverse stories and journeys of people connected with the Eveleigh Rail Yards.

***Interchange Pavilion is an architectural artwork inspired by railway switches; where did the idea first come from?***

CF: It began with the rail tracks of the area around Redfern Station, Carriageworks and The Locomotive Workshops, where I noticed the distinctive switch geometry: in particular a point where the rail lines diverge off into many different tracks. These were identified as the salient geometries of the railroad switch; the point at which a train can change its course, moving from one trajectory to another.

From that moment, I started to see a really wonderful way to access the past stories of the site. The switch became concept through which to follow all these different journeys or paths.

***How does the switch link into the history of the site?***

CF: The switch is an archetypal symbol of the trains and they conjure a rich and vast collective memory.

Historically the archetypal image of the railroad brings up a nostalgic notion of an industrial age in which Australians had to fight for rights. In particular, the famous 1917 General Strike became one of the first major industrial strikes for working conditions; beginning in Eveleigh and eventually spreading across Australia it became one of the most significant civil action strikes in Australian history.

On a more contemporary level today, the railroad switch conjures notions of connectivity and convenience. Perhaps the meaning behind the iconic image and geometry of train tracks will continue to evolve with society in ways we are yet to anticipate.

***How does this history feed into The Interchange Pavilion?***

CF: The Pavilion is less specific about one particular story, but rather, the many stories that have occurred in the location. The work takes the logic of the railway switch and this idea of a physical switch that moves from one direction to another. As a concept, the switch transmits an idea of many journeys, many paths and many stories occurring on the one site; an interchange of journeys.

The project is also about volume—as these tracks come up and envelop us with volumetric space that you can occupy.

***Did you use any real tracks? What other materials were used?***

CF: We didn't use any real tracks, instead, it's a metaphoric reference. We've fabricated the whole project out of stainless steel, aluminium, timber, and glass-reinforced concrete and then concrete on the ground.

***And you had the artwork built by a marine fabricator?***

CF: I've worked with marine fabricator, Lumark for quite a few projects. For example, they also helped build *Interloop* at Wynyard, as they have a very particular way of working there. They often use very fluid materials, particularly aluminium, which helped for the twisting forms.

***Did you face any challenges?***

CF: This is the biggest project I've taken on. We've also been developing all this new technology, new ways of building, which is challenging because, for everyone in the project, it's the first time it's been done.

***Were there things that you learned from *Interloop* that crossed over into this new project?***

CF: In *Interloop*, using the particular timber meant there was an amazing connection to the site, as the treads had been walked on for 85 years. Once they're removed from the use of the escalator, they're referencing those journeys and the loop from the past into the future. In *Interchange*, there is no direct reuse of material, but it was closely connected to this notion of journeys and paths.

The new project is about the past stories and then into future stories, trajectories, and movement through the site. There's a formal connection, with *Interloop* and most of my projects, looking at movement but, also, the points of contact to the architectural tectonic of the site. The project is tethered to the site, connecting, peeling and extending from the ground plane.

***I've noticed that with both of the art installations, they are everyday things that people walk over, but in these instances, they've come out of the ground, and they're towering over the audience instead.***

CF: There is a direct connection with the idea of material that you're so used to. I think the pavilion is something different again; while it's reminiscent of these geometries, it's becoming something quite different and flamboyant. *Interchange* is really about a transformation of the tracks into spatial form. The rail tracks unfurl becoming a volumetric space and encapsulating amphitheatre.

***Did you find that you became, whether consciously or unconsciously, in dialogue with the other public artworks that are in the precinct?***

CF: There was definitely an understanding of the other works that were getting built, and I spotted a formal connection between *Interchange* and *Eveleigh Tree House* by Nell, which takes on that pod-like structure. They both have a twisting geometric, almost bodily, form, that had come up from the ground, which is interesting because it was coincidental. *Interchange* has become an encapsulating,

encompassing pod form or flowering form, that has ended up looking quite different from than the original proposal.

***What did the original proposal look like? Did you have to respond to a brief?***

CF: The original proposal had a very similar sense to it, but it wasn't timber, it was mainly just all concrete and was generated out of the site in a different way. Through the process of building, it needed a lot of rework based on getting to the final stage.

The brief was for a Pavilion; it had to offer some shelter, while also being a functional space that could hold events both small and large; so there were architectural constraints that were part of the proposal. I always had this very clear notion of the sketch straight away. But the final product came out of pretty extensive development. Mirvac and the committee were flexible with it still being an artwork. They didn't see it just as an architectural pavilion; they saw it primarily as an artwork.

***Did they want something specific to the site as well?***

CF: Almost everything I do is site-specific and physically engaging the location.

A big part of the project is scaling and flamboyance relative to the large urban context. There's the Channel Seven building and The Foundry building which are both large scale multi-storey commercial offices and pretty much rectilinear. There's a huge amount of overlooking, it has to perform sculpturally completely in the round. The pavilion is viewed from all aspects including from above.

***That's interesting because you mentioned Interchange Pavilion originally was just going to be concrete. Did you use wood as a juxtaposition against other concrete in their prescient?***

CF: It was a conscious effort to think, this is really quite important to make it a pretty wonderful space to be in, that felt welcoming and warm. I think the coldness of the concrete was quite interesting and I quite liked the starkness of that. And it turns out it was quite smart to have a robust concrete outer shell to protect the delicate timber interior. The timber also relates to the way the old hardwood sleeper between the tracks holds them up, and the distortion of that.

***The concrete curves on the outside almost reminded me of the Opera House when I first saw Interchange Pavilion.***

CF: They are both flamboyant forms, and the geometry of the Opera House is a crucial precedent. Jorn Utzon's Opera House is a unique masterpiece and has become a global landmark. While there's not a direct connection to my process, we did look at it earlier on—to rationalise the geometry which can be understood as an ingeniously deconstructed sphere. *Interchange Pavilion* has ended up with a great deal more complexity due to the twisting curving forms which is only possible due to an entirely new generation of design and build processes. Being able to pull off the Pavilion depended on cutting edge technology: scripting forms, robotic milling, moulds to make the panels, and CNC routing all the aluminium. In this way, the unfurling form was constructed. The resulting structure is bold and striking producing its own unique identity.