



Building the Cutaway

From concrete shell to culture and community landmark

April 2026



Message from the Minister



The transformation of the Cutaway reflects the NSW Government's commitment to delivering world-class public spaces and cultural infrastructure. Carved into the sandstone beneath Barangaroo Reserve, this remarkable venue will welcome the people of New South Wales and visitors from around the world.

The Cutaway strengthens Barangaroo's success as a vibrant cultural and economic precinct. Its scale and flexibility will support major events, festivals and exhibitions, boosting tourism and the night-time economy while complementing nearby destinations such as the Walsh Bay Arts Precinct and Millers Point. Delivered with strong environmental credentials, including 100 per cent renewable energy in operation, the Cutaway is a place for everyone and a significant addition to Sydney's cultural life.

A black ink handwritten signature, appearing to read 'Stephen Kamper', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

The Hon. Stephen Kamper
Minister for Lands and Property



Acknowledgement of Country

Carved into Sydney's sandstone ridge, the Cutaway sits on Gadigal land.

Infrastructure NSW acknowledges the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which the Cutaway stands. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and honour Barangaroo, the powerful Gadigal woman for whom this place is named. The Cutaway is a place where ancient ground meets a shared vision, celebrating more than 6,000 years of heritage.

Message from the CEO, Infrastructure NSW



The completion of the Cutaway marks a defining moment for Barangaroo and for Sydney. What began in 2015 as a dramatic, raw cavern beneath Barangaroo Reserve has now been transformed into one of Australia's largest and most versatile cultural and events venues.

This fitout represents the very best of what Infrastructure NSW strives to deliver: projects that are thoughtfully designed, expertly engineered, sustainably built and deeply connected to Country. Delivered in partnership with our design and construction teams, the Cutaway honours the sandstone it is carved from while embracing innovation in acoustics, lighting, technology and design.

The Cutaway's scale and adaptability make it unlike any other venue in the country. With its sculptural timber trees inspired by the 'Damun' (Port Jackson Fig) and 'giba gunya' (rock shelter), state-of-the-art production capabilities, and the reinstatement of the iconic Wellama artwork, it is uniquely placed to host the city's most significant events.

The Cutaway will serve artists, producers, festivals, businesses and communities with equal ease. Thank you to everyone whose hard work made this possible. I am proud of the collaboration that brought this ambitious vision to life, and I look forward to seeing the Cutaway become one of Sydney's most valued cultural places.

Tom Gellibrand, CEO
Infrastructure NSW



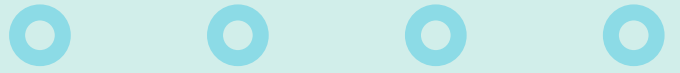
Delivered by | Infrastructure NSW on behalf of the NSW Government

Construction partner | FDC Construction & Fitout

Architect | fjcstudio with Bangawarra and Jake Nash

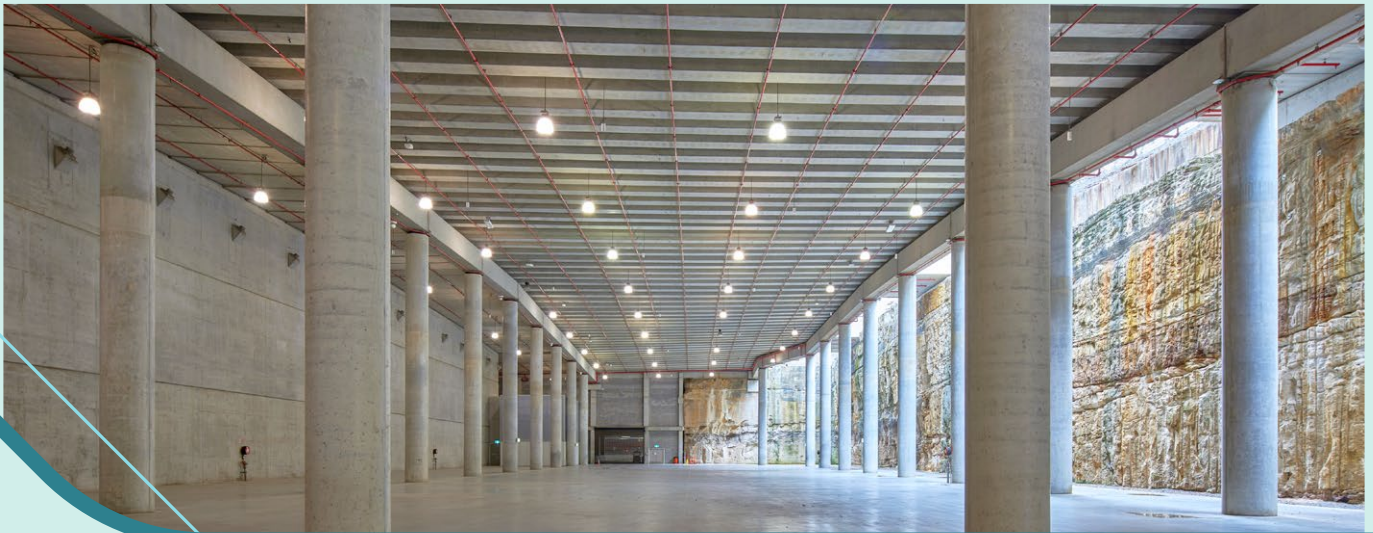
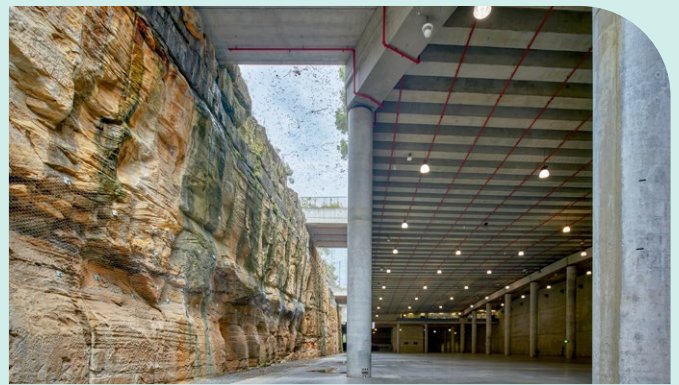
Construction contract value | \$103 million

| Front cover image: The Cutaway



The vision

The vision for the Cutaway was to create a world class, flexible and culturally rich venue that is deeply connected to Country, delivers lasting public value for the people of New South Wales, and strengthens Barangaroo as a leading harbourside destination.



▮ Above: The Cutaway as first opened

A culture and events venue fit for the future

When the Cutaway opened as a large concrete shell, it was always envisaged that the space would require fitting out to improve function, operations and visitor experience. The space was open to the sky and exposed to rain, wind and heat, while sound would bounce around the walls and escape into the surrounding areas.

The Cutaway fitout has transformed the space into one of Sydney's largest and most versatile culture and community venues, with all the features you would expect to host major festivals, installations, exhibitions and community gatherings.

The fitout

The fitout has created a large ~10,000m² community space over a main level and two mezzanine levels. Spaces can be scaled down for intimate gatherings, or scaled up for major public events. Spaces can operate individually or in combination.

Flexible event spaces

- Main Event Hall, suitable for festivals, performances and large installations.
- Pre-function Space, a supporting space or stand alone venue for receptions, circulation, ceremonies and event transitions.
- Two Gallery Exhibition Rooms and a Gallery Lobby to support exhibitions, installations and smaller curated events.
- Dedicated First Nations education space for cultural programming and community learning.
- Waranara Room for workshops, talks, rehearsals and smaller gatherings.

Supporting infrastructure

- Dressing rooms.
- Green room.
- Commercial kitchen.
- Ticketing and cloak room.
- Rigging and audio.
- Event control room and back of house management spaces.
- Public lifts connect all levels from the basement carpark to Barangaroo Reserve, ensuring full accessibility across the venue.
- Accessible amenities on all levels.

Level 2

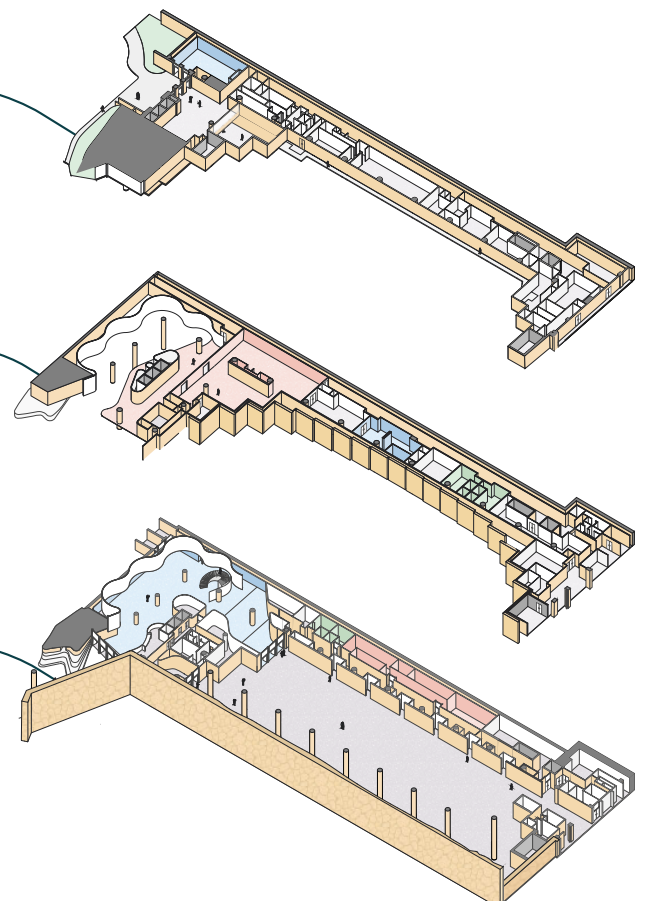
- ➔ Waranara Terrace
- ➔ Waranara Room
- ➔ First Nations Education Space

Level 1

- ➔ Two Gallery Exhibition Rooms
- ➔ Gallery Lobby
- ➔ Dressing Rooms
- ➔ Green Room

Ground

- ➔ Main Event Hall
- ➔ Pre-function Space
- ➔ Dressing Rooms
- ➔ Commercial Kitchen





Barangaroo development pillars

The Cutaway fitout demonstrates what can be achieved when history, engineering, and creativity meet. It is a place where the natural environment meets a shared vision, and where every detail reflects a commitment to design excellence, sustainability, art and culture, and partnerships – the development pillars of Barangaroo precinct.

Design excellence

The Barangaroo Design Excellence Panel helped ensure strong design excellence principles were built into the design brief.

The Cutaway fitout followed a design excellence process, structured around three core components:

- Embedding design excellence requirements in the design brief
- Shortlisting outstanding architects, advised by the Panel
- Contractual obligations to maintain excellence through construction.

The concept submitted by fjcstudio was chosen as it delivered on the vision for a flexible, high-performing and internationally competitive events space.

Art and culture

Art and culture are embedded throughout the Cutaway's design, purpose and experience. Designing with Country was embedded in the project design brief, guided by First Nations advisor, Dharawal and Yuin artist Alison Page. The concept submitted by fjcstudio responded to the brief with a design that honours Salt Water Country through natural forms inspired by rock shelters and fig trees.

The Wellama audio visual artwork by Alison and Nik Lachajczak remains at the entrance of the Cutaway, and the word 'Wellama' means 'to come back'.

Collaboration

Engaging with event operators early in the project planning phase, helped provide the core functionality for the fitout to become a world-class venue. This was critical to understand how the space needed to function in practice and informed requirements such as audience and performer flow between spaces, rigging and loading specifications, acoustics, back-of-house operations, dressing rooms, and a fully functional catering kitchen capable of supporting major events.

Other engagement occurred with key stakeholders including the City of Sydney, Placemaking NSW, Registered Aboriginal Parties, technical specialists, and local community.





| Above: Aerial of Barangaroo

Sustainability

The project is targeting a 6-Star Green Star (as built) rating, a first for a cultural institution in Australia. Through strategic reuse, nature positive design, highly efficient building systems and a strong cultural foundation, the Cutaway fitout sets a new benchmark for sustainable place making on the harbour.



Learn more about sustainability and the Cutaway project

Sustainability Quick Facts



Powered by 100% renewable energy. No fossil fuels power the building.



Low toxicity materials to minimise indoor pollutants, such as low volatile organic compound paints, adhesives and sealants and low formaldehyde joinery and composite materials.



The building is naturally cooled with seawater from the harbour, known as 'Harbour heat rejection', and includes shared infrastructure with the Barangaroo Metro Station.



94.7% of construction materials were recycled or diverted from landfill.



Timber was sourced from certified forests, contributing to carbon capture and 6 star Green Star rating.



Natural ventilation is used when conditions allow, reducing energy needs during operation.



Greywater systems are in place to be used in toilets.



Secure bicycle parking and end of trip facilities support active transport for staff.



A certified 'Changing Places' facility supports universal access.

Design philosophy and inspiration

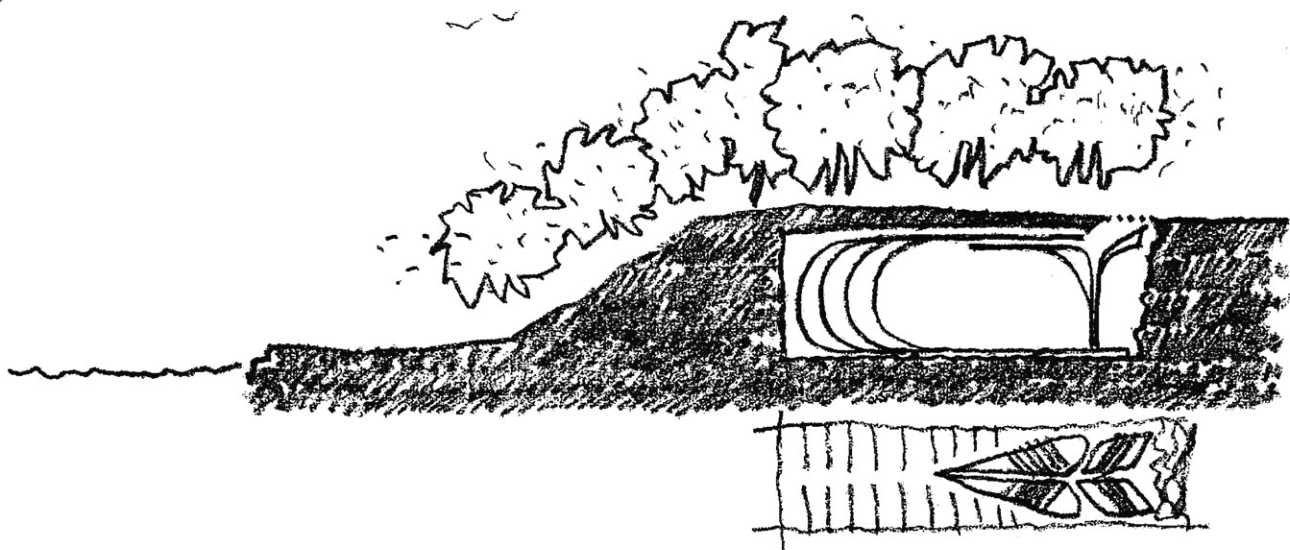
The fitout design is a collaboration between fjcstudio, Shannon Foster of Bangawarra, and artist Jake Nash.

The design reveals the memories of Salt Water Country through soft, natural forms. Curved, cave-like interiors reference 'giba gunya' (rock shelters), while sculptural timber trees evoke the space beneath the 'Damun' (Port Jackson Fig). Natural light filters into the space, casting shadows reminiscent of body art onto the floor below, holding multiple layers of cultural reference and meaning.

Themes of nature, culture and connection are woven throughout the building. Guided by deep First Nations engagement, Connecting with Country principles, and a strong commitment to sustainability, the

design seeks to celebrate Aboriginal cultural history, and create a space that is flexible, inclusive and memorable for future generations.

Beyond its visual and cultural expression, the project presented a significant technical challenge to transform an echo-prone space with a 15-second reverberation into an acoustically refined environment with a maximum two-second echo. The resulting acoustic performance is a remarkable achievement, balancing technical precision with architectural and cultural integrity.



| Above: Early design sketch (fjcstudio)

Design features

Skylights

- Three skylights made of 98 individual glass panels and span 76 lineal metres.
- Two layers of thick glass, separated by an air cavity, allow natural daylight into the space, create a fully weather-tight interior and reduce noise impacts on surrounding residential areas.
- Blackout blinds add to the event's flexibility, such as daytime fashion shows.

Spiral feature stairs

- Bronze spiral stairs provide an architectural feature.
- Appear as floating stairs between the pre-function space and the gallery lobby.

Sandstone feature wall

- A defining feature of the Cutaway, it continues to stand as a 14-metre-high centrepiece of the main event hall.
- Reveals the natural geology of the site and forms a dramatic backdrop for events.

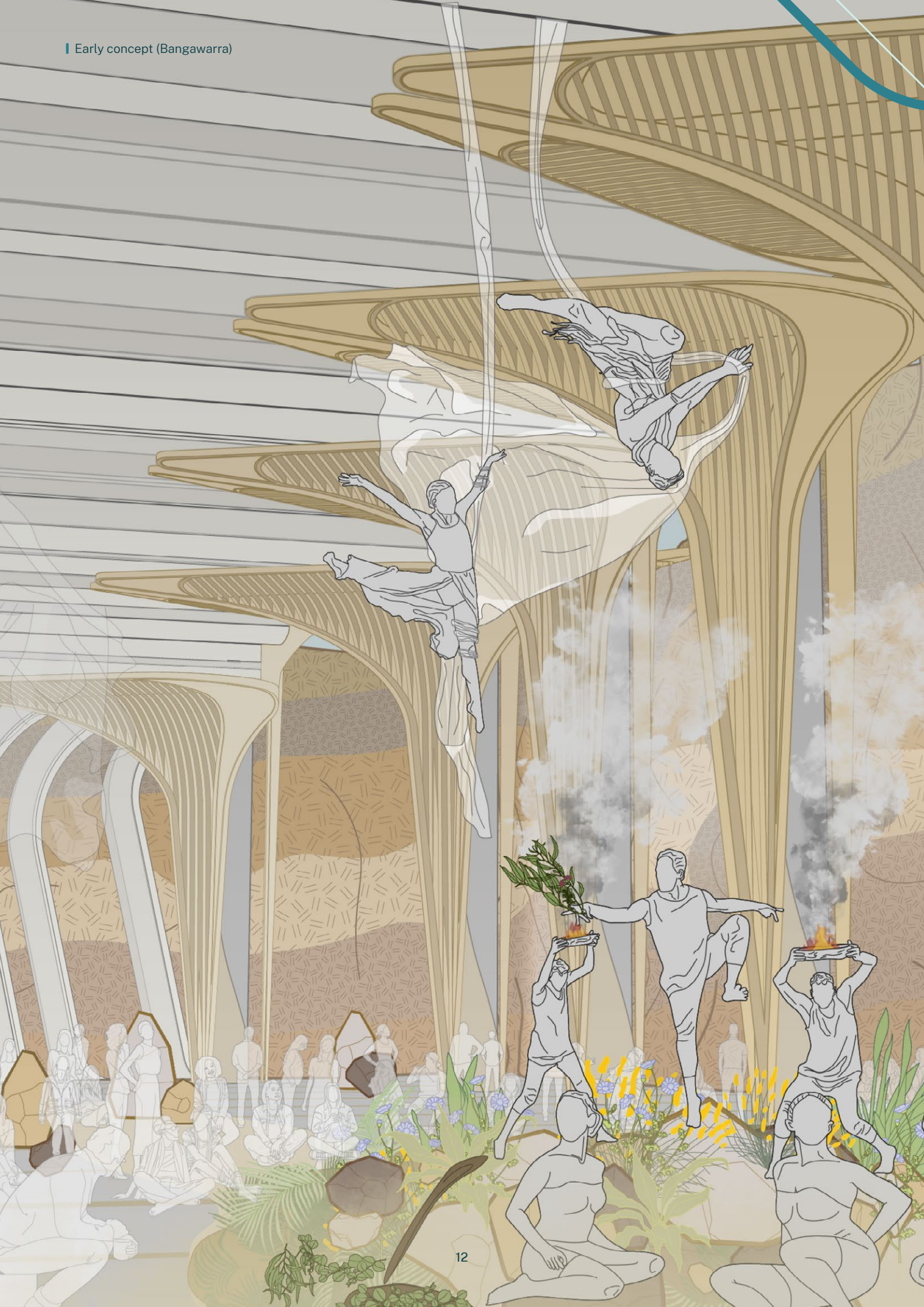
Sculptural timber trees

- 13 sculptural timber trees surround the concrete pillars – 9 in the main event hall, 3 in the pre-function space, and 1 at the entrance.
- Crafted from European spruce glulam (glued laminated) timber tops from Germany and Tasmanian oak bottoms from Australia.
- The trees are both architectural and acoustic features, with perforated plywood and insulation to absorb sound.
- The design was inspired by the 'Damun' (Port Jackson Fig).
- Their canopies cast shadows that reflect Salt Water ceremonial markings, and their forms reference both trees and fish skeletons, linking to cultural narratives and performance.











“Seeing the first tree-like timber forms rise within the Cutaway is an incredibly proud moment for our team. This milestone brings to life years of design thinking and collaboration with our First Nations designers. The intricate and beautifully assembled elements are a powerful architectural and cultural statement; complex in form, rich in meaning, and central to the transformation of the space. It has been a privilege to work on such an ambitious and significant cultural project for what will be one of Sydney’s most iconic event venues.”

Richard Francis-Jones | fjcstudio Director



“For me, these trees are not only striking architectural forms, they are cultural expressions that listen to Country and carry memory into the heart of the Cutaway. To see them now standing within the space is a powerful moment, knowing they will hold story and connection for generations to come. For me, these trees are a reminder that every act of building can also be an act of honouring. They carry forward culture, connection, and care — leaving a legacy that will outlast us all.”

Jake Nash | Hunt Quietly Founder



“The design carries the markings of Salt Water Country, the memory of ceremony, and the spirit of my grandfather’s teachings. As the shadows of the canopy fall across the floor, they remind us that we are always walking with those who came before us.”

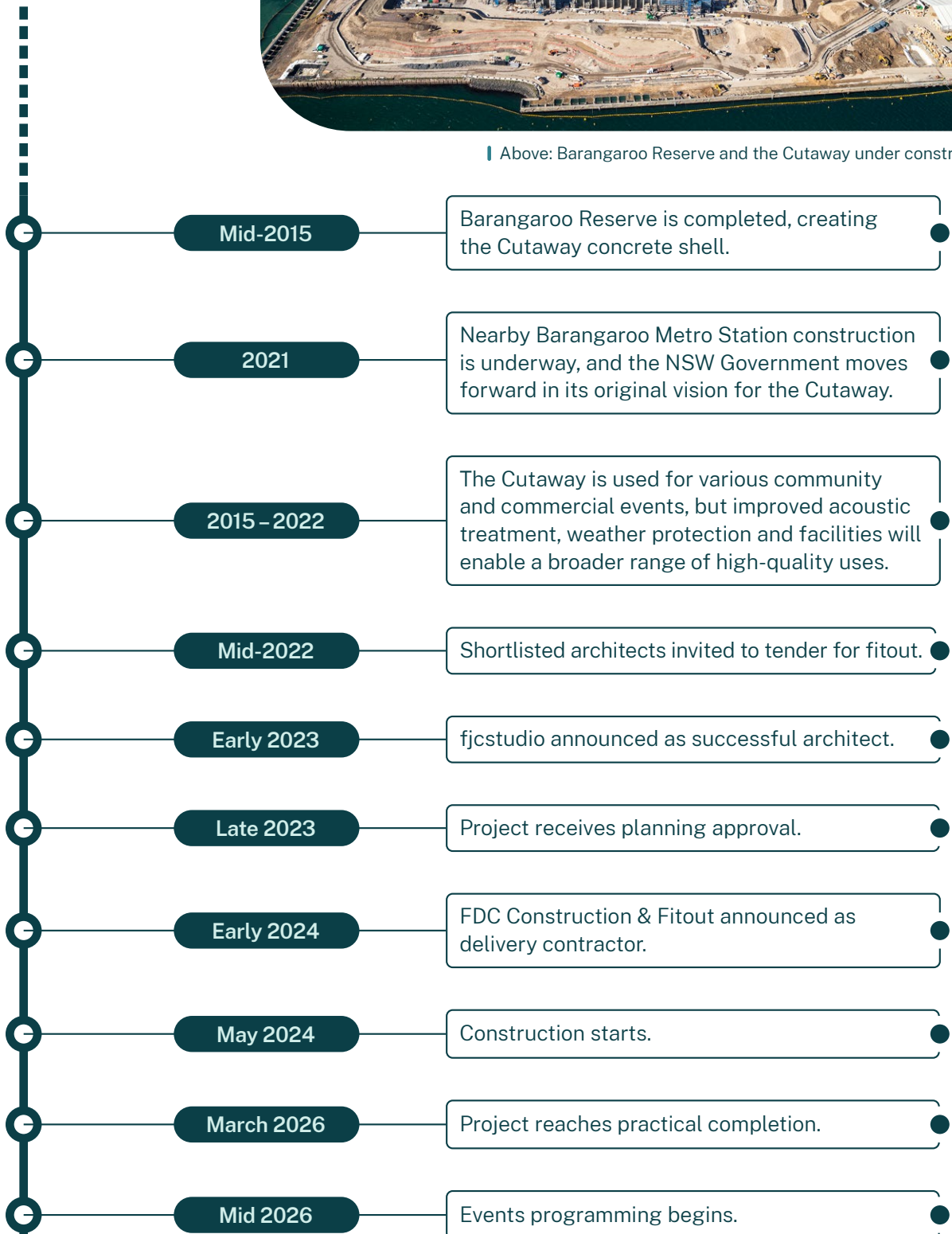
Shannon Foster | Bangawarra Principal



Project timeline



Above: Barangaroo Reserve and the Cutaway under construction



Construction journey



“Completing the construction of the Cutaway has been a once-in-a-generation project for FDC – transforming an extraordinary sandstone cavern into a world-class cultural venue for Sydney.”

“This milestone reflects the strength of our long-term partnership with Infrastructure NSW where we have worked closely to deliver complex, city-shaping projects that create lasting value for communities across the state.”

“Right in the heart of historically significant Barangaroo, this was an intricate project requiring precision construction and engineering, and careful logistics from our team as well as deep collaboration with fjcstudio and the wider group of project partners.”

“We’re proud to have helped bring this culturally significant space to life, ready to host major creative events and experiences that will continue to shape and invigorate Sydney’s arts and culture scene.”

**Russell Grady, Managing Director,
FDC Construction & Fitout**



Construction in numbers

- ➔ **444 tonnes** of steel installed
- ➔ **25,603** screws used in the sculptural trees
- ➔ **5,121** individual tree members
- ➔ **150 tonnes** of timber
- ➔ **3,800 litres** of stain applied to timber
- ➔ **1,366 cubic metres** of concrete
- ➔ **5,030 litres** of decorative paint applied
- ➔ **13,300 sheets** of plasterboard
- ➔ **10,409 linear metres** of pipework (combined services)
- ➔ **188,710 linear metres** of cabling (combined services)
- ➔ **90%** of project waste was recycled
- ➔ **1,784** workers inducted on site
- ➔ **7.4%** women in trade roles, above the 4% target
- ➔ **35%** learning workers (including apprentices and trainees), above the 20% target
- ➔ **Over \$6.4 million** in Aboriginal business engagement, with all interior fabrics and furniture sourced entirely from Aboriginal owned businesses
- ➔ **Zero** environmental incidents and lost time injuries during construction, resulting from a strong safety culture.

March 2024



May 2025



October 2025



Challenges and innovations

Acoustic performance

Achieving the required acoustic performance within the Cutaway was one of the project's most complex challenges, driven by its proximity to neighbouring heritage residences and the highly bespoke design.

To manage this, extensive performance mock-up (PMU) testing was undertaken early to establish clear benchmarks and validate design assumptions. The results directly informed material selection, construction detailing and build-ups across the space.

Acoustic performance was delivered through layered wall and ceiling systems, combining absorptive and dampening materials concealed within specialist finishes. These build-ups were carefully detailed to control reverberation while preserving the architectural intent.

Two defining elements — the exposed concrete slabs and the sandstone rock wall — limited the use of conventional acoustic linings. These constraints required tailored solutions elsewhere in the space, with performance achieved through targeted treatment of surrounding surfaces rather than covering key architectural features.

Key acoustic achievements

- Optimal acoustics have been achieved with reverberation time down to ~2 seconds.
- Oversized acoustic panel absorbers (up to 2 metres deep) were used to control sub-bass frequencies.
- Skylight glazing, wall panels, and architectural timber sculptural 'trees' all received targeted acoustic treatments to maintain high sound insulation performance.
- Sound inside the building is now for amplified music and speech, and suitable for cultural events.

A puzzle of sculptural timber trees

The bespoke glulam trees are a defining architectural feature of the Cutaway and one of the most technically complex elements of the project.

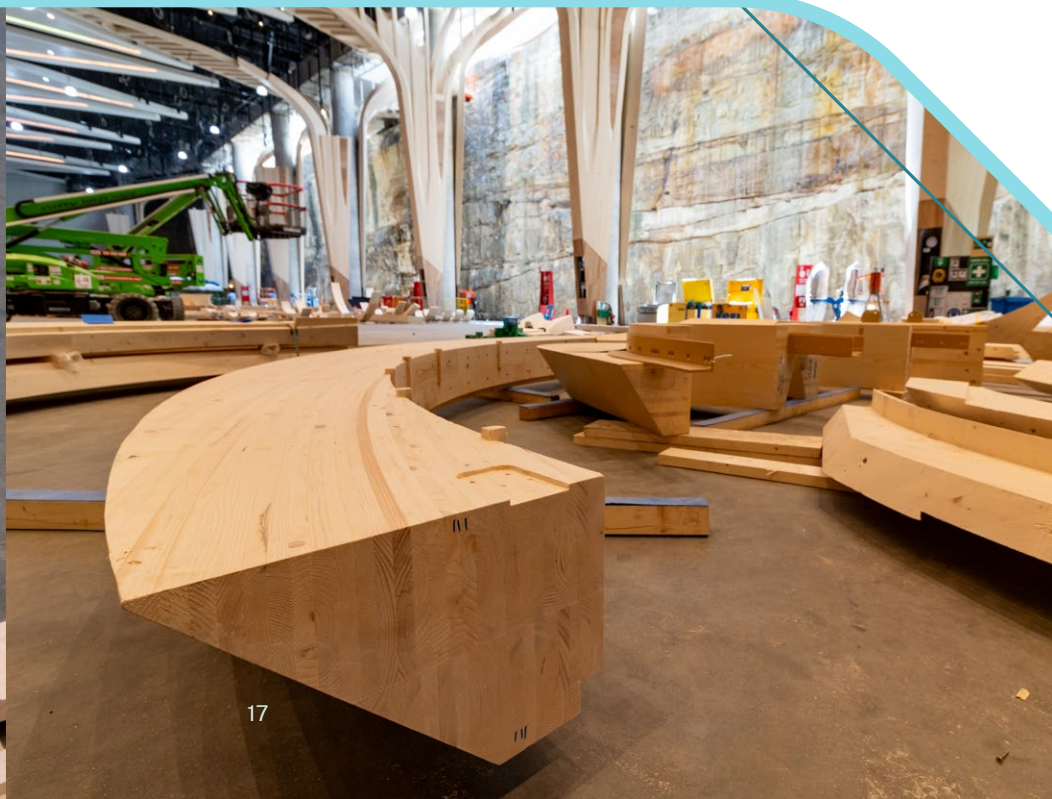
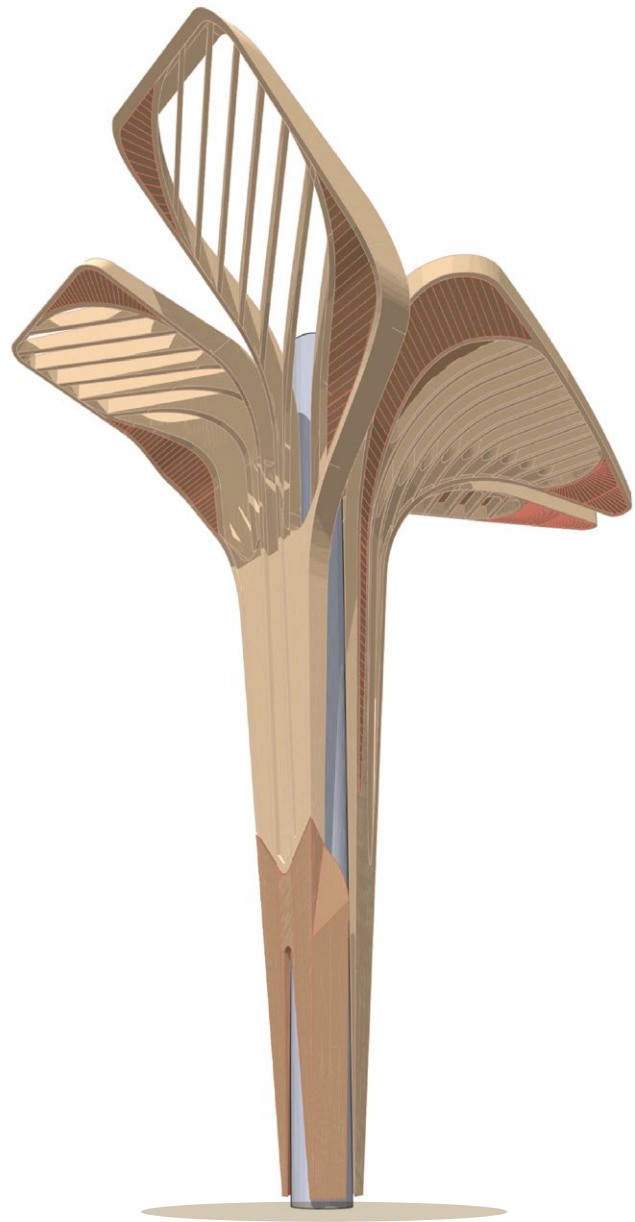
Each tree comprises between 85 and 115 individually fabricated components, with no repeatable geometry and heights reaching 17 metres. A full visual mock-up process was critical in refining the final colour and finish to ensure alignment with the design intent.

A highly detailed 3D model was developed from first principles to coordinate architecture, structure and fabrication. Extremely tight tolerances — within 2mm — were required to ensure the trees aligned precisely with the pre-installed structure.

The sculptural timber tops were sourced internationally due to their scale, specification and the technology available for curved forms, introducing extended lead times and logistical complexity. Installation within the constrained underground space required innovative construction sequencing and careful staging.

Constructing the sculptural trees

- Each tree comprises between 85 and 115 individual timber members.
- Almost all of the pieces are bespoke, weighing between 7kg and 950kg.
- The trees range between 7 to 17 metres in height.
- Prototyping informed colour and finish decisions, with the final finish being a lighter colour with natural tones.
- Event electrical services are located within the trunks for added event flexibility.
- Each piece was machine cut to precision and installed to 0–2mm tolerance.



Event spaces

The fitout has transformed the Cutaway into one of Sydney's largest, most versatile cultural and events spaces, capable of hosting festivals, exhibitions, performances and community gatherings.

Events will benefit from the option to scale up or scale down with the supporting facilities.

Event space	Main event hall	Pre-function space
Level	Ground level	
Capacity	~2,300 people	~1,200 people
Type of events Indicative configurations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Banquet dinners – 1,860 people table service or 1,640 people self-service ➤ Fashion show – 2,300 people ➤ Stage and concert hall – ~2,300 people ➤ Exhibition and markets – 60 stalls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Exhibition space (stalls and markets) – 16 exhibition booths ➤ Cocktail event – 28 high tables
Supporting infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Temporary bar and stage ➤ Lighting and speakers available ➤ Facilities panels located throughout ➤ Rigging system with fixed and motorised rigging points 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Facilities panels located throughout
Add-ons For event flexibility to scale up or scale down	Pre-function space Green room <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Kitchen ➤ Dressing rooms ➤ Catwalk (technical access) 	Ticketing office and cloak service Main event hall <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Gallery lobby ➤ Gallery rooms ➤ Kitchen





The NSW Government would like to thank the local community and neighbours for their support throughout the project.

