



The Darwin Signature Restaurant and (below) Styx Valley Shelter.

Lost gems to haunt Venice

Australian architects are creating a series of ghostly delights for the 2014 Venice biennale, writes **Ray Edgar**.

The Venetian ghosts haunting the Bridge of Sighs will soon have neighbours. During next year's Venice architecture biennale, Australian buildings will float in St Mark's Square.

But only ghosts and those with augmented reality software will be able to see the life-size buildings. Everyone else will be oblivious to the showcase of Australian architecture from the past century - and spooked by the weird behaviour of people wandering around looking at "imaginary" buildings.

"Visitors will be able to point their smartphone at the trigger images to open up a catalogue of virtual material allowing them to visualise, walk through and admire the scale and greatness of each project," explains co-curator Professor Rene Van Meeuwen of the biennale creative team felix_Giles_Anderson+Goad.

Twenty-four public buildings will be on display around Venice as part of Augmented Australia, our contribution to the 2014 biennale.

While the list of 11 historical buildings will be revealed at the exhibition launch, the 11 contemporary buildings have just been announced. Among them are a war memorial in Canberra, a restaurant in Darwin and a protest shelter 65 metres up a Tasmanian tree.

The creative team whittled down 138 entries to 11 contemporary projects.

"It was really difficult to select," says Van Meeuwen, who couldn't quite cull the list to an agreed 10.

The added twist with Australia's exhibition is that these are buildings that, for various reasons, were never built or have been torn down. It's an opportunity to reanimate the past and explore the history of what was and what could have been.

"It's taking projects off architects' hard drives and breathing life into redundant data," says Van Meeuwen.

Australia's exhibition responds in part to Venice Biennale curator Rem Koolhaas' ambition to gener-

ate an international overview on the effects of modernism on a national architecture. But Van Meeuwen believes his exhibition will reveal many narratives.

Andrew Maynard's treehouse project in the Styx Valley in Tasmania "tells a story about our current Australian climate and our environmental condition. Maynard's is a big idea done with a small piece of architecture."

Just as modernism may provide an international language, Van Meeuwen believes software may

also offer an architectural lingua franca.

Melbourne-based architects Minifie van Schaik's speculative contribution will probably make Jorn Utzon turn in his grave. According to the Melbourne-based architects, the Sydney Opera house is "looking a bit tired, time for a reno".

According to Van Meeuwen such projects reflect an industry "dominated by the production of architecture using software. Melbourne is a geographical hot spot for computational-based design."

The idea of using augmented reality has been particularly convenient as Australia's Philip Cox-designed Venice pavilion is being replaced by a new DCM black box. Yet visitors will also receive a glimpse of both these buildings in augmented form.

"For me the question might be is it architecture if it's animation? Is it architecture if we can use augmented reality and walk through them? Maybe part of the whole exhibition and the biggest narrative is that."

The creative team hopes its animations of lost architectural gems may turn into a 12-part TV series, akin to "Grand Designs unbuild".

