RMIT DESIGN ARCHIVES JOURNAL

VOL 10 № 1 | 2020

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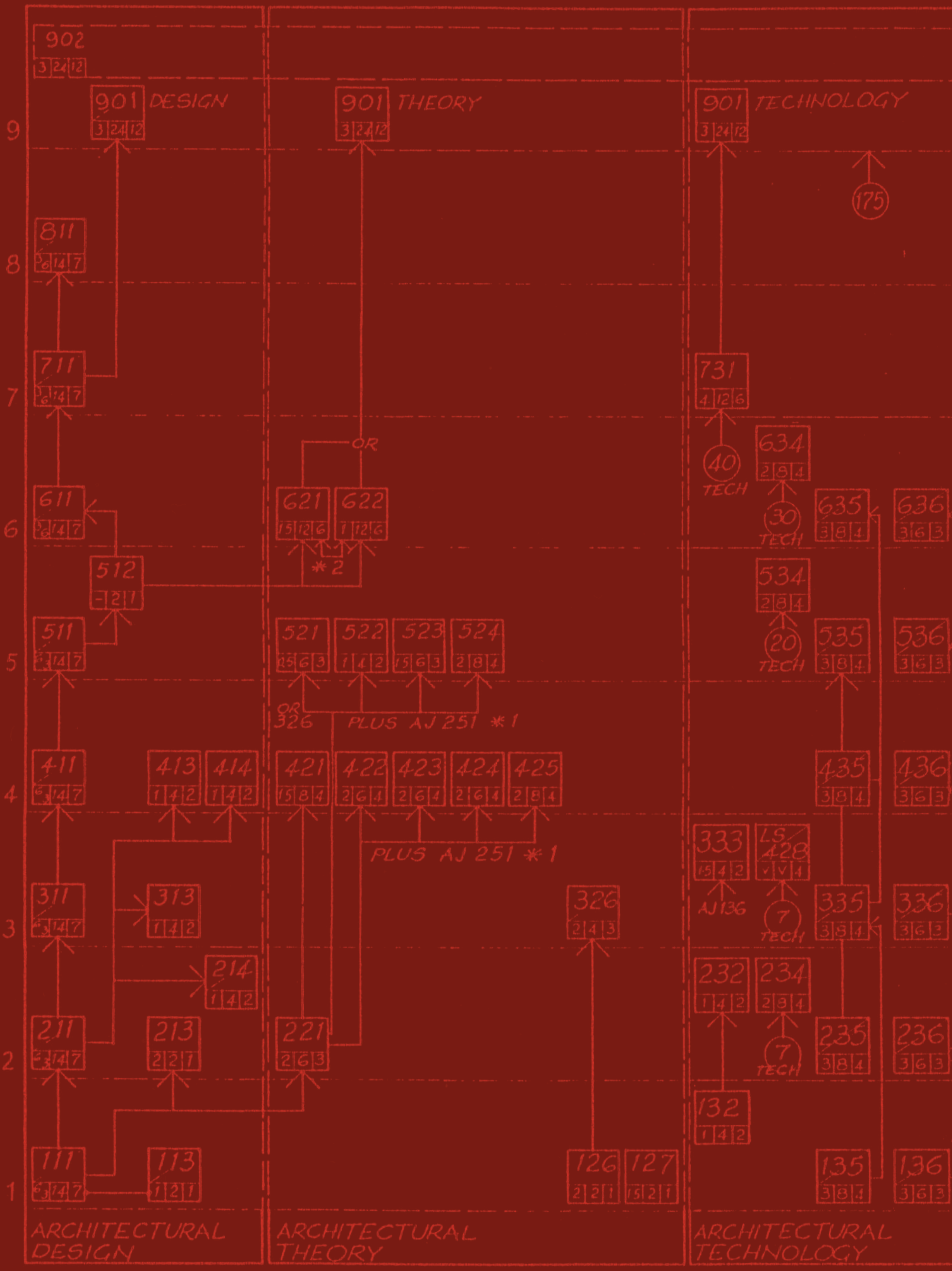
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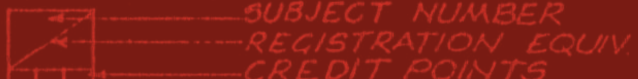
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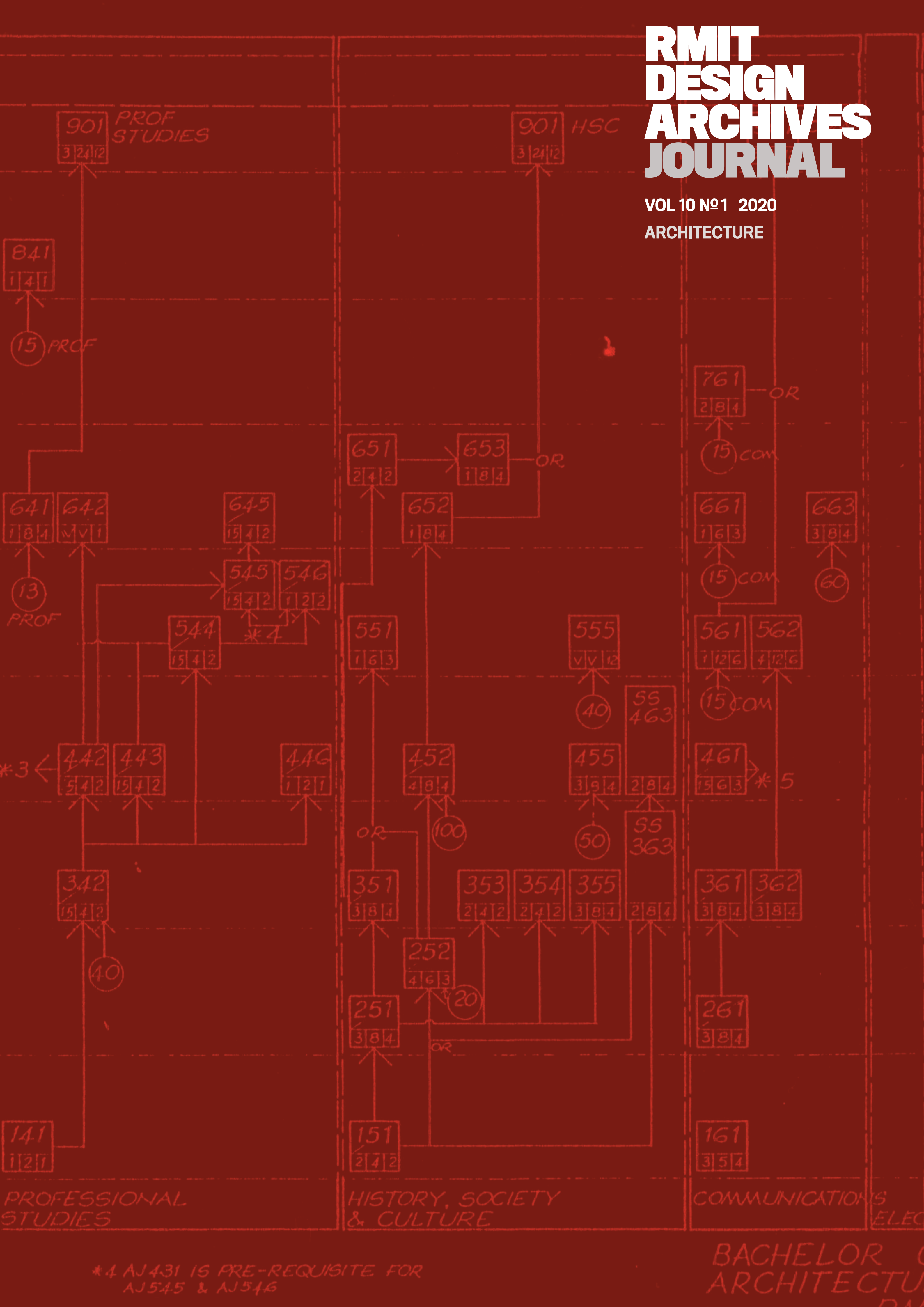
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VOL 10 № 1
2020

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CONTENTS

04
Editorial
Harriet Edquist

06
46 Little Latrobe Street: the office of Edmond & Corrigan
Michael Spooner

30
Intersecting identities in Geoffrey Woodfall's Woolnorth Homestead, 1969–70
Stuart King

50
A studio for Lina Bryans: Alex Jelinek at Erin Street Richmond
Roger Benjamin

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We acknowledge the people of the eastern Kulin Nations on whose unceded lands we conduct our business and we respectfully acknowledge their Ancestors and Elders, past and present.

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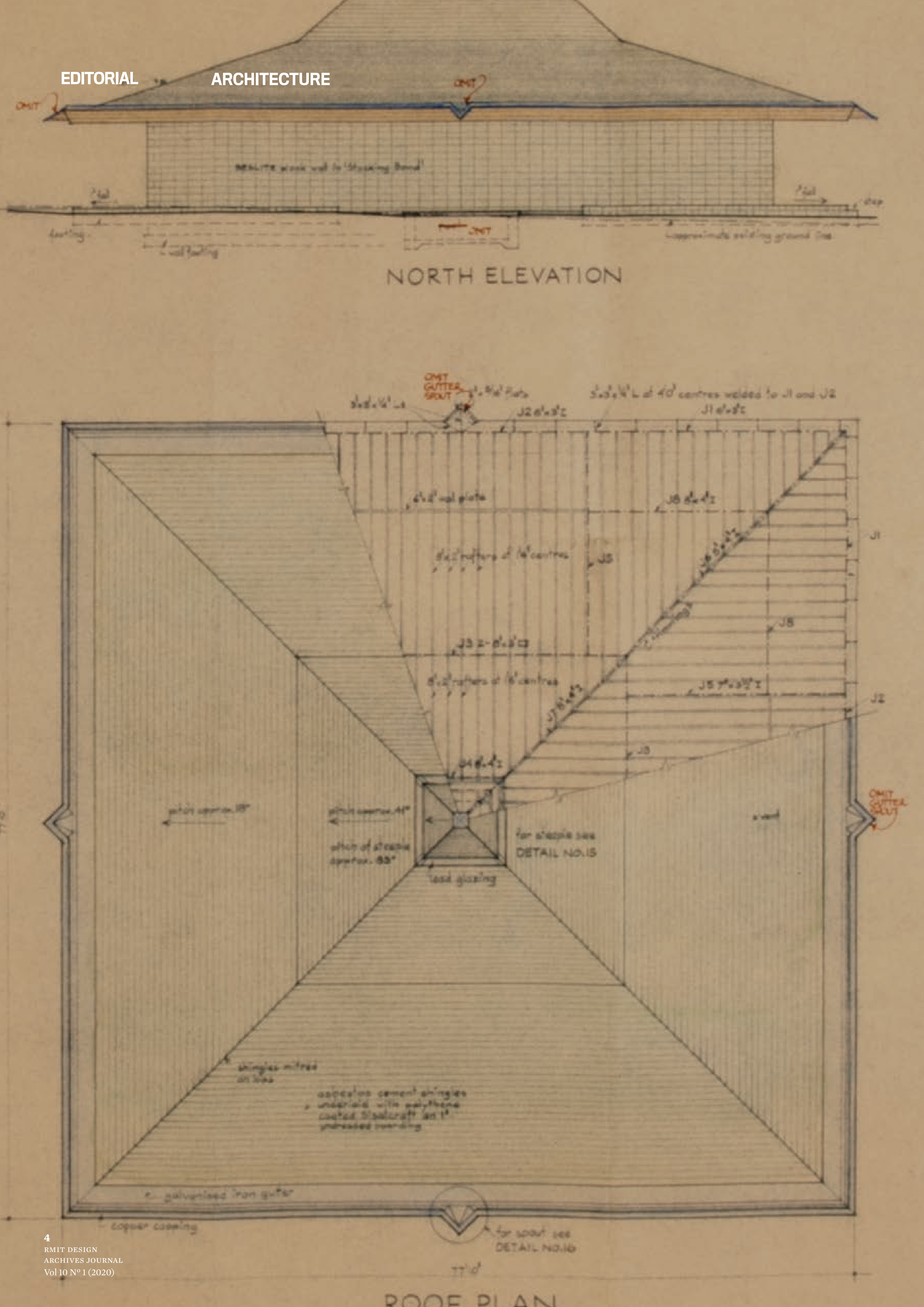
Cover
Section View
46 Little Latrobe Street
Image by Michael Spooner and William Bennie, 2019

Inside Cover
Peter Dowton, Hand-drafted Flow Chart of Bachelor of Architecture Degree, RMIT Department of Architecture, Photocopy in Peter Downton Collection (detail)

Below
Mid-semester presentation in the office studio of no. 46, RMIT Bachelor of Architectural Design studio Babylon, led by Michael Spooner. Photograph byMichael Spooner, 2019.

62
Frederick Romberg's work for the Lutheran Church of Australia 1954–62
Harriet Edquist

74
Antecedents, Aspirations, Diagrams and Documents: a speculative memoir of the incubation, production and operation of the 1985 RMIT Bachelor of Architecture Degree
Peter Downton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BEALITE block wall in 'Stepping Bond'
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OMIT GUTTER SPOUT
J2 6" x 3" I
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J4 8" x 4" I
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for steeple see DETAIL NO. 15
lead glazing
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galvanised iron gutter
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ROOF PLAN

This issue of the RMIT Design Archives Journal brings together diverse essays on Melbourne post-war and more recent architecture and architectural education. It is bookended by first-person narratives that in contrasting ways reflect on architectural education at RMIT over a 35-year period.

Michael Spooner opens with an investigation of Edmond and Corrigan's office in Little La Trobe Street which was the site not only of the architects' labour but also of Corrigan's teaching. Using research devices that are both empirical and creative, Spooner offers a new way of communicating architecture. Spurred on by the shock of entering the offices vacated after the death of Peter Corrigan in 2016, Spooner sets himself the task of reanimating the space before it is lost to history; it is indeed a heritage project. Corralling his memories as well as those of others who worked there, he brings together formal architectural analyses of the building's modernist lineage, a first-person account of moving through the space, a sort of animated architectural section, analysis of the architects' design process in forming the interiors and, a reanimation of the space through architectural studios he has conducted there. This text is accompanied by a set of remarkable drawings carried out by Spooner, Jack Murray and William Bennie; plans, sections and four 'capriccios' which are dense compendia of the research underpinning the text. Peter Downton, by contrast, consults his own memory, the recollections of others and various notes and diagrams to put together "a speculative memoir" of the 1985 RMIT Architecture course which, I must confess, I particularly admired. Downton and Tom Emodi wrote a proposal for a new architectural course in 1982, and after development and refinement by the architecture staff it was operational by first semester 1985. Downton's article, like Spooner's, exists as a first-person textual account, but also as a set of illustrations, the alluring 1985 flow chart for the course being a magisterial pedagogical diagram. Downton's act of historical recovery and reconceptualisation affirms a particular view of the university's role in student education. It was an experiment in student-focussed design pedagogy where each student could, and did, design their own pathway through the course offerings, negotiating core and elective subjects to suit their needs. The course unfortunately did not survive the rigours of RMIT bureaucracy for more than a few years. It lives on, however, as an elusive and compelling idea whose day might come again through digital means.

The three internal essays in this collection also have some common characteristics. Each focuses on one architectural practice during the 1950s and 1960s and foregrounds the agency of the client - corporate, personal and institutional – in the design process.

Stuart King's essay is broadly conceived, spanning the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' activities of one corporation, the Van Diemen's Land Company in Tasmania founded in 1825, and its Victorian agents Alan and Blyth Ritchie. It is in this historical context that he positions Geoffrey Woodfall's Woolnorth homestead, deftly spinning around this architectural object the threads of colonial and postcolonial Tasmanian histories, dynastic ambition and architectural form. The latter is important for, while Woodfall's work has been discussed in terms of Melbourne's Wrightian legacy, this is the first major architectural study of one of his key buildings that includes a close analysis of its spatial and tectonic form and Woodfall's "increasing rationalisation of space, structure and construction". King thus draws Woodfall out of the historiographical niche in which he has rather languished and placed him firmly in important architectural discourses of the late 1960s, including that of "regionalism". Roger Benjamin's recovery of an almost unknown work by Czech émigré architect Alex Jelinek foregrounds the architect's relationship with Melbourne painter and client Lina Bryans and her role in promoting Jelinek's architectural practice, through her family and other connections. While Jelinek's Benjamin house in ACT is a celebrated example of experimental modernism, the small studio that he designed for Bryans in Richmond, which still exists, has never been published. It is in its own way, original and striking and surprisingly contemporary, especially in the way the architect distinguishes his new work from the Victorian mansion to which it is attached. With access to correspondence between Jelinek and Bryans and photographs from the time of their occupation of the house, Benjamin offers an intimate account of the studio's creation.

Finally, Harriet Edquist's essay on Frederick Romberg, delivered at a conference on religious architecture convened at Melbourne School of Design in 2018, brings to attention the architect's work for the Lutheran community in Victoria, ACT and Northern Territory. Through this case study the impact of religious communities on the development of Australian modernism can be seen as "a pivotal component in the construction of culture and community in rural and suburban expansion".[1] Each of the five essays published here is richly supported by archival evidence, relying for its argument on maps, drawings, diagrams, correspondence and fallible, but potent, memories.

Harriet Edquist, editor

Opposite
Frederick Romberg, architect, Grounds Romberg & Boyd, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, working drawings, 1960, RMIT Design Archives, Frederick Romberg

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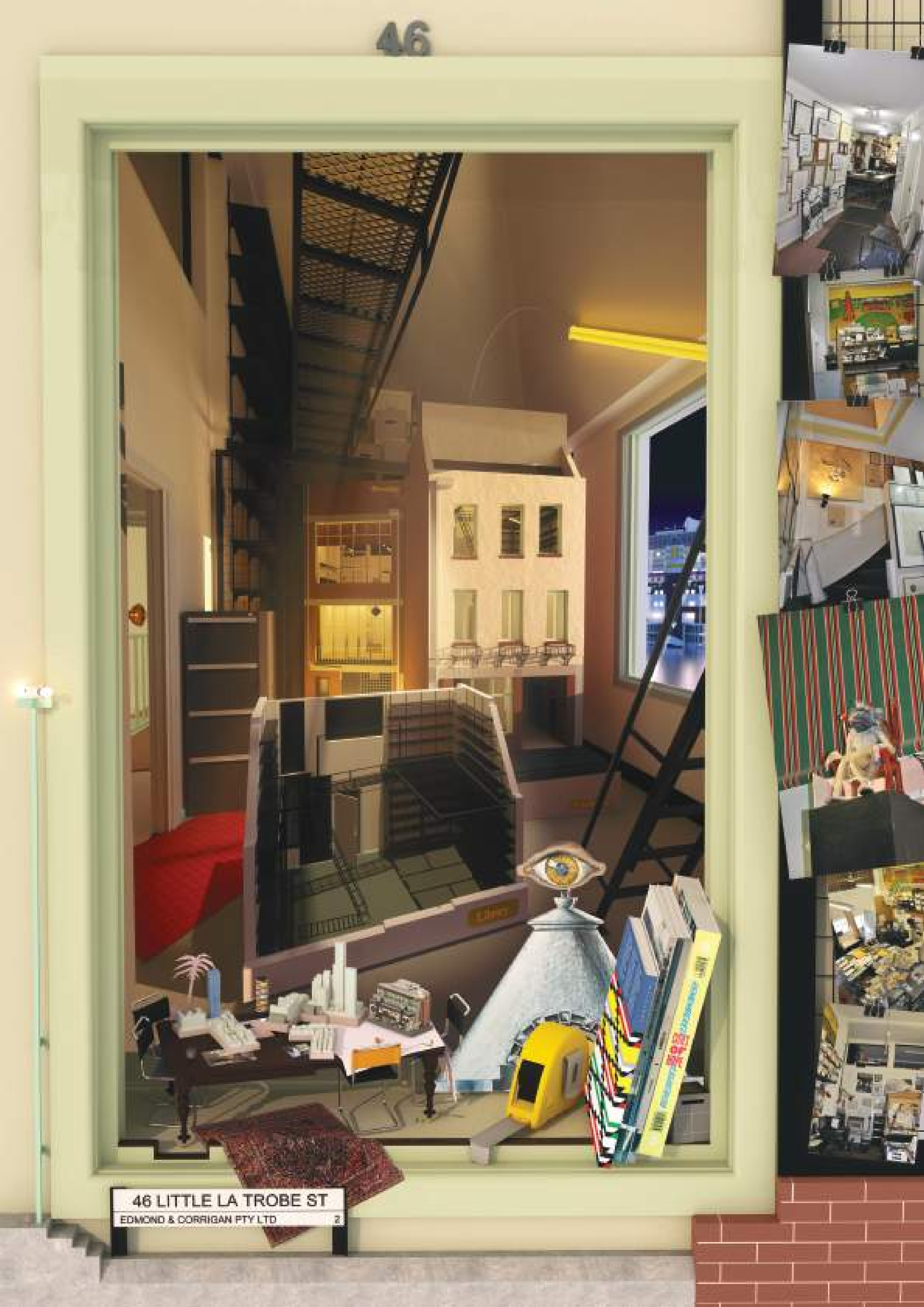
[1] Philip Goad and Lisa Marie Daunt, "Constructing faith: Postwar religious buildings in Australia" *ArchitectureAU*, November, 4, 2019, accessed June 16, 2020, https://architectureau.com/articles/constructing-faith/.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46 Little Latrobe Street: the office of Edmond & Corrigan

Michael Spooner

PEER
REVIEWED
ESSAY

ABSTRACT

Conrad Hamann begins his preface to *Cities of Hope Rehearsed/Remembered*, the monograph on the Melbourne architectural practice of Edmond & Corrigan, describing the interior of their office at 46 Little Latrobe Street and its contents.

Hamann makes a connection between the interior qualities of the office and the architectural output of Edmond & Corrigan, specifically RMIT Building 8. Hamann writes: “Inside both the office and the great university building [...] one finds one’s way through these interiors by experience, like grasping the world of a play or the themes and relationships in a sequence of history.”

Much has been written about Building 8 and its contribution to Australian architectural discourse including a three-volume monograph published in 1996 documenting its design, essays scrutinizing it, and a collection of writings by Corrigan and Edmond. Yet the building designed and occupied by the architectural practice at no. 46 has gone largely without comment.

For 30 years, from 1987 until the passing of Peter Corrigan in 2016, the building and the office from which projects such as Building 8 were shaped, was an accomplice to the architectural life of Melbourne — whether that of the student of architecture who attended the design studio run around the office meeting table, the employee or contributor to the design of buildings, stages or costumes, the guest in the library, or to one of the many who faced an ‘Irish coffee’ late into the night.

In mid-2018 I found myself with a set of keys to the second level office formerly occupied by Melbourne architectural practice of Edmond & Corrigan and located at no. 46 Little Latrobe Street in a building designed by them in 1986. Having assisted Corrigan on projects from 2008 to 2012, I had memories of the office, but I was not prepared to find it without its contents. The only indication of the space’s prior function was the material catalogues and samples left at the behest of Maggie Edmond for the instruction of students, and the colonial dining table and chrome cantilevered chairs upon which generations of students undertaking Corrigan’s design studio had perched, alongside a Victorian armoire that once held the office stationery.

I considered what remained of the earlier congestion and concentration of artefacts that had made the experience of the office so vivid. In the library a pile of book catalogues; in a cupboard the maquettes from the Mahony Masques; dressmakers pins used to secure work in progress to pin-boards; and brick samples from Building 8, now doorstops. But it was these few objects that allowed me to unlock moments from my time at work in the office: listening to Corrigan and Louis Saur, the American urbanist and architect who had retired to the antipodes, talk about Louis Kahn, Yale and Harvard University, and of American politics in the 1960s and 70s, with a mug of the notorious coffee and whiskey mix; or the covertly good time had with the artist Vera Moller, who had been invited to translate instructions for the documentation of Falstaff for Opera Graz, and her patience teaching me over red wine to curse in German.

It was sitting in the empty library that I thought to produce an exacting 3D model of no. 46 and the office. I was motivated not by a sense of restoration, but a sense of diligence and by my affection for the building now found, and my fear that it could all be lost; a digital record that could help visualise what was too large to deposit on the shelves of an archive.[1] As the measure-up diverged from the for-construction documents that I had obtained, the degree of success became less clear and the building become an impossible object to capture. Corrigan’s notoriously wry smile was summoned. That damn library mezzanine and the seemingly elastic gantry. The unstable dimensions of the three flights of stairs, a path for students undertaking Corrigan’s design studio at RMIT Architecture, who would take a gulp of air just before they got to the top. I am surely the first to end up horizontal under the meeting room

Opposite
Prologue – The Library
Image by Michael Spooner & Jack Murray, 2019

Opposite
Edmond & Corrigan, 46 Little Latrobe Street, exterior with employee of the office Marc Dixon leaning from library window. Photograph by John Gollings, 1993.

table with a measuring tape and the purpose to record its construction. My efforts realised a detailed digital model of the office and the building, the result of both forensic activity and supposition, composed from my measurements and the architectural documentation of the building that I could source.[2] I was also curious about the history of the building and so I sought further details through correspondence and conversations with others.[3]
I was given the keys to the empty office to document it and subsequently, in my role as a lecturer at RMIT Architecture, I occupied it to teach design studios. It was the reanimation of the office with students and the extraordinary effort they applied to its re-imagination as a studio and exhibition space, that provoked me to pursue the creation of vignettes crafted using the digital model of no. 46, that could illustrate and celebrate the findings and be presented alongside this essay and historical documentation.[4]

This project intentionally moved from the empirical mode of research into a creative approach, furnishing the digital model of the office with further digital reproductions. The building and office as found, proposed and unbuilt, canonical architectures, urban histories, and displaced ephemera, objects and books were posed in the library, interred in the studio, arranged as though taking place at the meeting table and, gathered somewhere else, student designs for the building and records of the events that took place during their occupation. These images – efforts at architectural capriccio – invoke a portrait of the building and of the office, offer a summation of the research richly imagined, and suggest my intimate belief in the meaning of the building that is still a feature of Little Latrobe Street.

Conrad Hamann begins his preface to *Cities of Hope Rehearsed/Remembered*, the publication on the Melbourne architectural practice of Edmond & Corrigan, describing the interior of their office at 46 Little Latrobe Street and its contents. Hamann makes a connection between the interior qualities of the office and the architectural output of Edmond & Corrigan, specifically RMIT Building 8. Hamann writes: “Inside both the office and the great university building [...] one finds one’s way through these interiors by experience, like grasping the world of a play or the themes and relationships in a sequence of history.”[5] Much has been written about Building 8 and its contribution to Australian architectural discourse including a three-volume work published in 1996 documenting its design, with essays scrutinizing it, and a collection of writings by Corrigan and Edmond. Yet the building designed and occupied by the architectural practice at no. 46 has gone largely without comment. For 30 years, from 1987 until the passing of Peter Corrigan in 2016, the building and the office from which projects such as Building 8 were shaped, was an accomplice to the architectural life of Melbourne — whether that of the student of architecture who attended the design studio run around the office meeting table, the employee or the contributor to the design of buildings, stages or costumes, the guest in the library, or to one of the many who faced an “Irish coffee” late into the night.

The purpose of the building after Corrigan’s death changed significantly. The library of more than 4,000 books and 5,000 journals amassed over 40 years occupying a room in the office and spread throughout the family home at 1032 Drummond Street, North Carlton, was transferred to RMIT University and interred in the library in Building 8 for the benefit of the students. Documents, models, drawings, and ephemera produced by and in conjunction with Edmond & Corrigan that had not already been relocated following the 2013 exhibition *Peter Corrigan: Cities of Hope* at RMIT Gallery, were placed in the collection of the RMIT Design Archives. Documents related to the theatre, stage and costume designs by Corrigan were offered to the Australian Performing Arts Collection, furthering a collection of theatre related documents acquired by the Academy Library UNSW Canberra in 1991. And, from mid-2018 RMIT Architecture, where Corrigan was an influential teacher and mentor for 40 years, procured a short lease of the former office, with the aim of supporting the activities of the architecture school.[6]

The architectural partnership between Maggie Edmond and Peter Corrigan was confirmed in 1975 on the completion of the Parish Centre for the Keysborough Parish of the Resurrection.[7] From then until the completion of no. 46 in 1987, the office occupied the top floor of no. 38–40 Little Latrobe, sharing the level with the Socialist Youth Alliance which Edmond recalls was “occasionally raided by the police”,[8] and above a motorbike repair shop. The three-storey brick warehouse remains on Little Latrobe Street, but preserves nothing of the original office. As Geoffrey Barton remembers “no. 40 was a lovely composition of pastel hues in the workspace, and a separate den with not much more than an exquisite Bellini lounge that Peter could snooze on as need be”.[9] Richard Munday also remembers the lounge:

> In the background was a reasonably good-looking Victorian mahogany bookcase with doors. Also, though in Peter’s office, was a glass-topped table, maybe a LC6, chrome tube and leather chairs jammed behind the door. There was another table, which could easily be the colonial table you are referring to [the table at no. 46]. There were piles of books, magazines, and papers, on every stationery surface. A red Olivetti Valentine typewriter and a LM telephone (dial on the bottom) marked ‘reception’ and generally being in the know, always important. Colours in the office were somewhat as Geoff Barton recalled, although ‘pastel?’ – not quite as I remember – more intense than that. Trim painted black, or maybe that is a mis-memory.[10]

Edmond confirms the colour as ‘watermelon’, across which Corrigan had envisaged a gold paint splatter effect but was seemingly held back from implementing. It was here that Edmond & Corrigan hosted Franco Belgiorno-Nettis, founder of the engineering company Transfield and the initiator of Sydney’s Art Biennale, who intended to establish Australia’s presence at the Venice Biennale. Edmond recalls that the office was “Italianised” so that only the Bellini couch, LC6 table and chrome and leather chair were present – everything else was hidden away. Evidently the strategy worked as Edmond & Corrigan secured the commission to design the first but unrealised Australian Pavilion for the Giardini delle Biennale.[11] The Australian director Paul Cox also brokered the use of the office for his

COMMUNICATION WORKS
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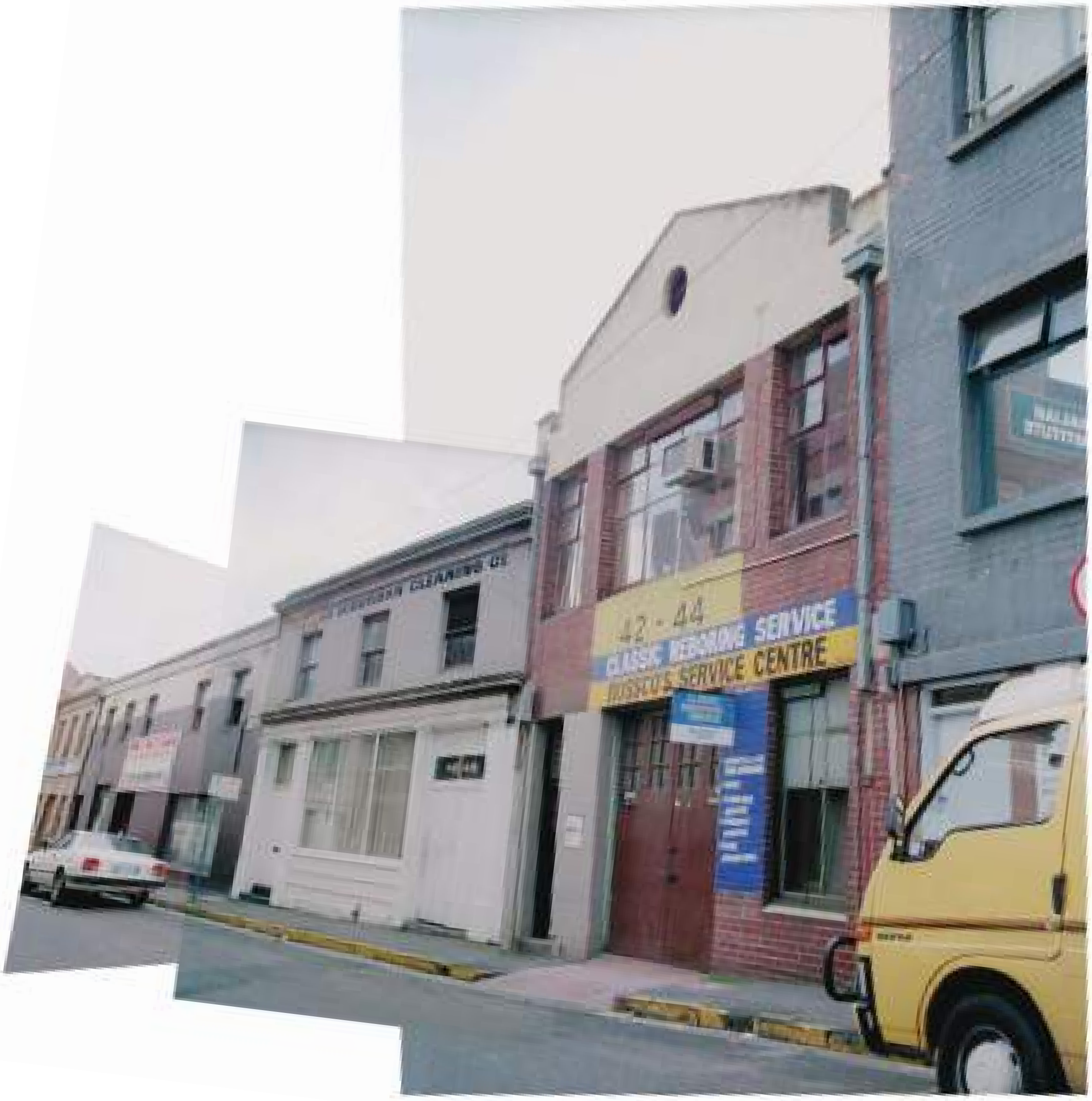
PE
ROSSO
SERVICE

46 LITTLE LATROBE STREET:
THE OFFICE OF
EDMOND & CORRIGAN

Continued

THE MOST COMPLETE POPULAR & MERCANTILE MAP OF MELBOURNE, VICTORIA
1990
2020
1925
1923
A'BECKETT
STREET
STREET
LATROBE
LITTLE
WILLIAMS
1918
LATROBE



Opposite
Development of Little Latrobe Street and its surrounds. Image by Michael Spooner & William Bennie, 2019

Top
Composite street view of 52-42 Little Latrobe Street using photographs by Graeme Butler completed for the Melbourne Central Activities District (CAD) Conservation Study 1985-1989 and made available digitally via the Melbourne Library service through funding from the Public Record Office of Victoria and City of Melbourne.

movie *Man of Flowers* (1983), along with the office's glass meeting table and chrome chairs, though its existence as an architectural office is obscured by the art-studio props.[12]

The façade

The former hotel building at no. 50 along with the original building at no. 46 and two adjacent sites were singularly owned when put up for sale in 1985. Graeme Butler's photograph of buildings along Little Latrobe, taken as part of his Central Activities District Conservation Study for the Melbourne City Council in 1985, exhibits the large For Sale sign on the front of no. 50 advertising the development opportunities of the four sites.[13] Corrigan had obtained the owner's address and when visiting his parents, who had moved to Queensland from Melbourne, attempted to purchase no. 46 but left the vendor's boathouse with no answer either way. [14] Soon after, Edmond & Corrigan in conjunction with Alan Lewis, an engineer and former client,[15] jointly purchased no. 46 at auction, Barton recalling that the agreed limit was exceeded by Corrigan.[16] Lewis' entrepreneurial cousin had run the Thumpin' Tum, a music

Opposite Left
Elevation
Little Latrobe Street.
Image by
Michael Spooner

Opposite Right
Elevation
Literature Lane.
Image by
Michael Spooner

venue at no. 50.[17] The existing but abandoned two-storey building, established in 1855 as a bakery,[18] was demolished and a three-storey building occupying the full extent of the lot was designed by Edmond & Corrigan, built and then occupied from 1987.

The building demolished to make way for no. 46 makes an uncanny appearance in the Little Latrobe façade of the newly erected building. The for-construction elevation conserves the window pattern of the original two-storey building, reflecting the large ground floor display window and pattern of windows of the level above, and proposes a similar cornice profile in-between the ground and first level. The cornice was never built, but the exposed concrete lintel seen in the built elevation still reflects the architrave that bridged the four pilasters of the original façade. The composition of the three windows on the upmost level, behind which sits the library, were altered during construction — "directed from the street"[19] — so that they step up and across unevenly, echoing the contraction of spacing in the windows that alight the façade of Gunnar Asplund's Villa Snellman (1918), but with no regard for a repeated rhythm. At first, I suspected Corrigan thought the order of the façade too genteel or wanted to recognise the additional level and the library it would eventually contain, structuring the façade back to the program and setting uniquely apart the volume of what would become the library. In doing so, the façade withdraws from the well mannered image conjured by the construction drawings, and instead accompanies the daily life in the street. This image narrows the space between the improvisation of theatre production and the conjuring on site of immediate solutions that would be a feature of Edmond & Corrigan's work. But Edmond told me that there was another reason for the composition, precisely that Corrigan was making a point. The irregularly arranged windows were designed to irk a local architectural practitioner whose prevailing attitude favoured order.

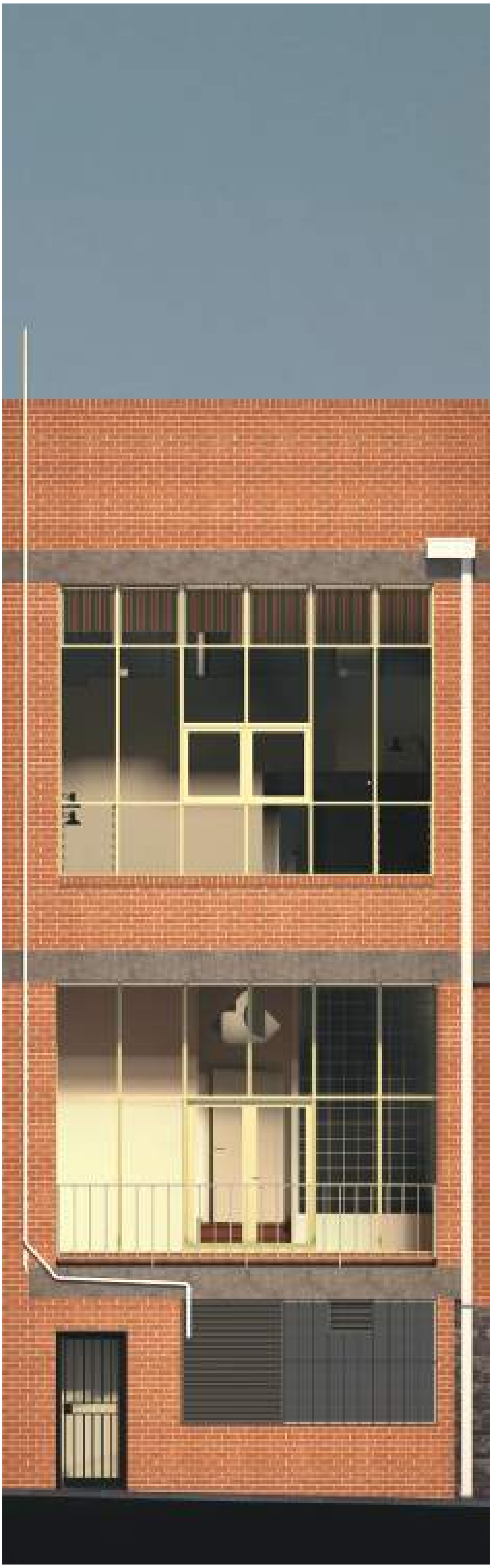
The building gathers some of its character from its context. In Literature Lane the façade of no. 46 has the appearance of the adjacent warehouses, including the warehouse the prior office occupied at no. 40, continuing the prevalent pattern of concrete lintel and brick. The Little Latrobe elevation implies a similar pattern, but the brickwork is covered from level 1 up with a cream render and defined by strongly incised windows. Seen in profile, no. 46 discretely suggests the stepped parapet detail of a brick warehouse at no. 47 across the road, built in 1924 and present at the time of construction, but demolished to make way for the Melbourne Central car park.

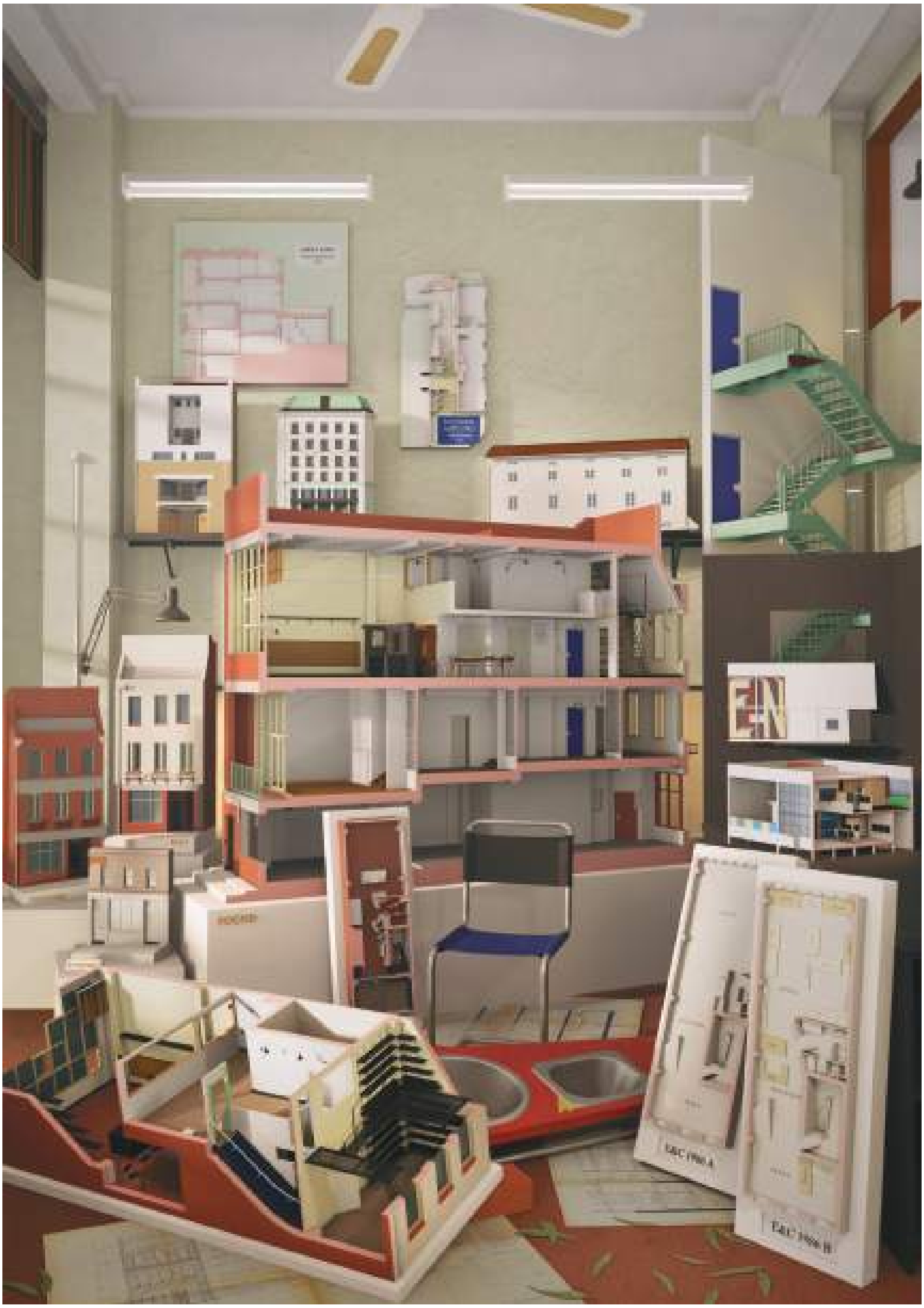
The work of Edmond & Corrigan is marked by its exchanges with the twentieth-century architectural avant-garde. There is a mutable resemblance in the building at no. 46 to Adolf Loos' house for Tristan Tzara (1926) in the expression of the lintels, the balcony and the definition of the recessed window of the lane façade. This can be characterised by the presentation of the Little Latrobe façade as *thin* by the veil of render through which can be seen the brick pattern, the distinct upper and lower floor materiality, the oblique entry of the level 1 ground floor, and the stepped floor plates of entry and level 1 revealed in section. The Little Latrobe façade also reflects Loos' Goldman & Salatsch Looshaus (1911), a building echoed in the repeated windows and, like the Tzara House, a clear material distinction between the lower level and un-ornamented upper. The flower boxes that decorate each of the windows on level 2 mirror the notoriety of the Looshaus that was certified only when flowerpots were mandated to decorate its equally unadorned façade. The plausibility of the occurrences between no. 46 and these other building are at once immediate, and lost, in the resurgent facial qualities of the two street façades. Both façades of no. 46 owe something to the domestic but monumental images that Loos' two buildings procure, and all three buildings share an archetypal form. But Loos' buildings mingle and lapse into an impertinent description when openly pursued in no. 46. However, the façade is the front line for these occurrences, and gives warning of further contact with the avant-garde in the formation of the architecture of the office on the second floor.

The Interior

From the street you enter the building through a vestibule from which you access the ground floor or the enclosed stairwell that attends to level 1 and 2. This sequence shares qualities of the prior office at no. 40 which had a separate entry for the ground floor and a recessed entry and a flight of stairs to the upper two floors. Level 2 secures a generous north glazed wall and balcony presented to the lane and enabled by the stepped floor compressing the height of the level beneath. This creates a tiered volume divided by intermediate glass block walls that was first occupied by the project management firm of Allan Lewis and Louise McNaughton. The stair continues up with each intermediate landing marked by two bulbs atop a square profiled pole, or a bare bulb fixed to the rendered wall. The walls are a mix of original bluestone, block and brick, all mitten-bagged and painted in a heavy almond colour. Alternating colours of charcoal-blue and a murky-red carpet on the open-stair tread is offset by the minty-green of the balustrades and exposed timber stringer. At the top,

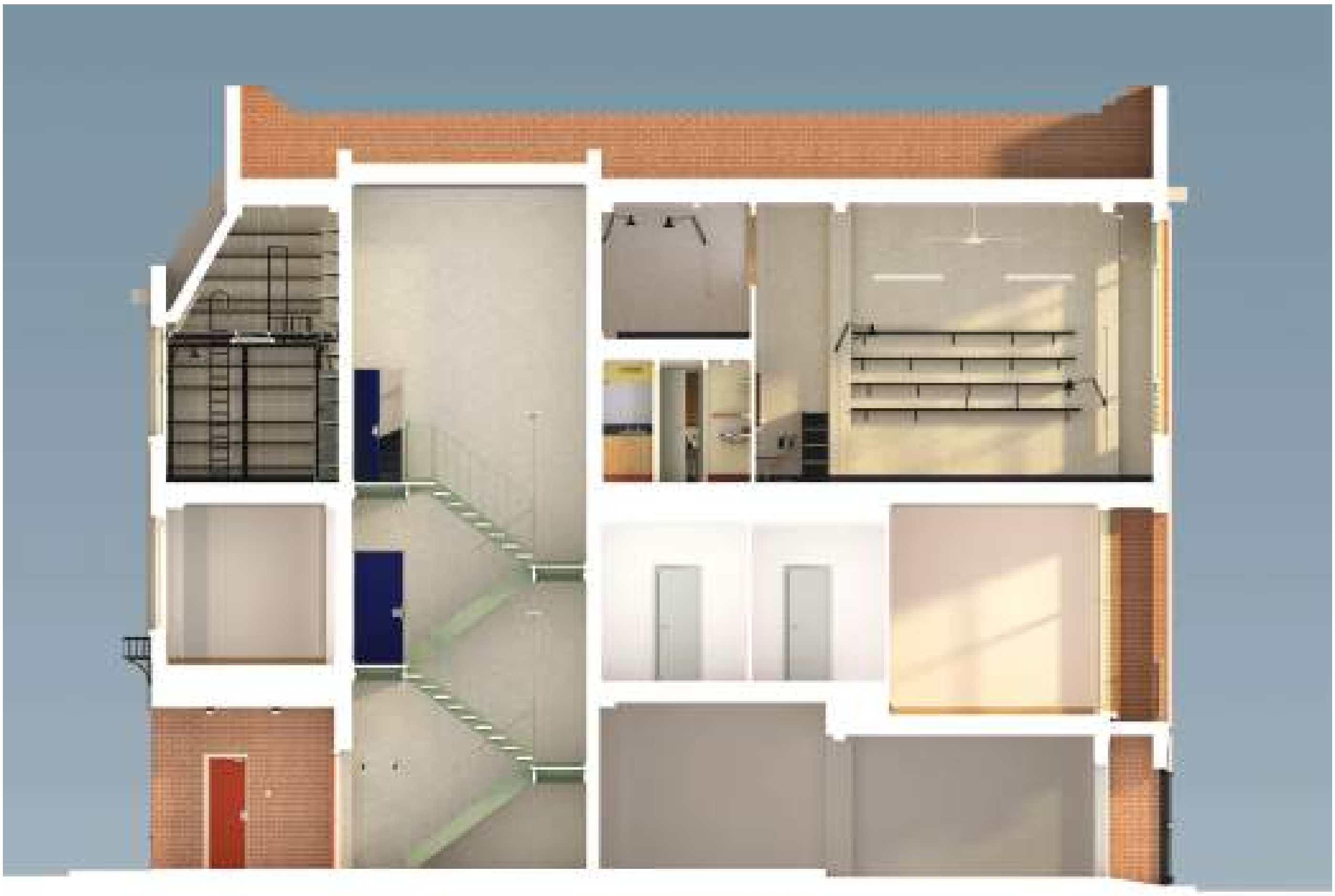
46





the stairwell continues without the stair and eventually protrudes through the roof, realising a dramatic volume above the blue entry door to the level containing the office of Edmond & Corrigan.

The architectural office is defined by the reception, library, large studio space and mezzanine. The reception recalls the narrowing spatial progression, triple door cupboard and ancillary stair of Villa Snellman, but as though folded to fit, achieving instead a congested sequence of alcoves and corners that accompany the corridor of space past the meeting room table, and a single door to the kitchenette and bathroom, before being released into the studio. The domestic scale of the reception conforms to the presence of the mezzanine above but contrasts with the vaulted ceiling of the studio. The studio is lit by a generous window, and by four bar lights suspended several metres above: both emphasise the monumental character of this space. A striped canvas awning, of the type found in suburban Melbourne drawn down against the harsh sun, is brought inside, and fixed to the pilasters, floating before the large window to act similarly. The awning, along with



Opposite
46 Little Latrobe Street Image by Michael Spooner & William Bennie, 2019

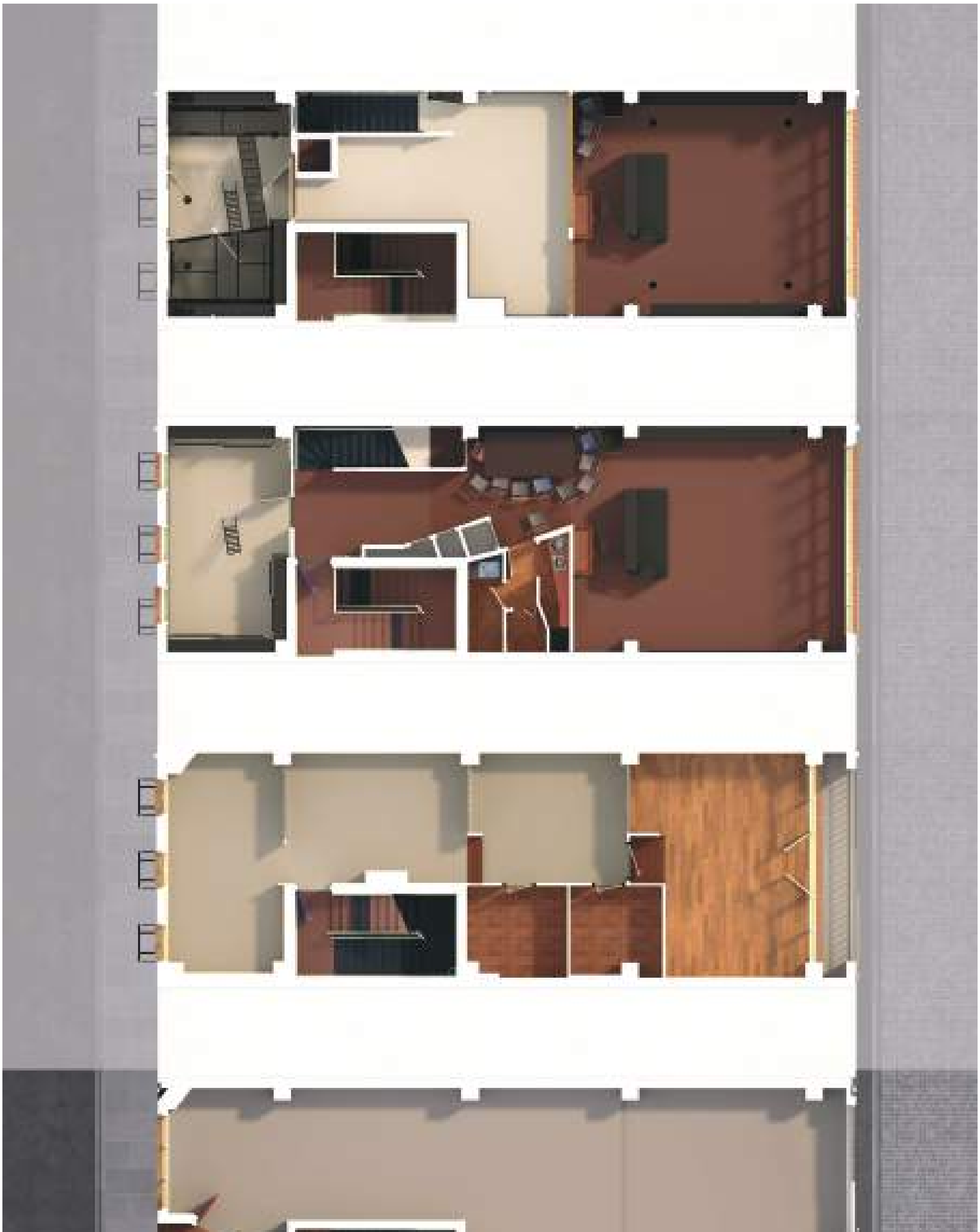
Above
Section through library, vestibule, entry stair and studio. Image by Michael Spooner.

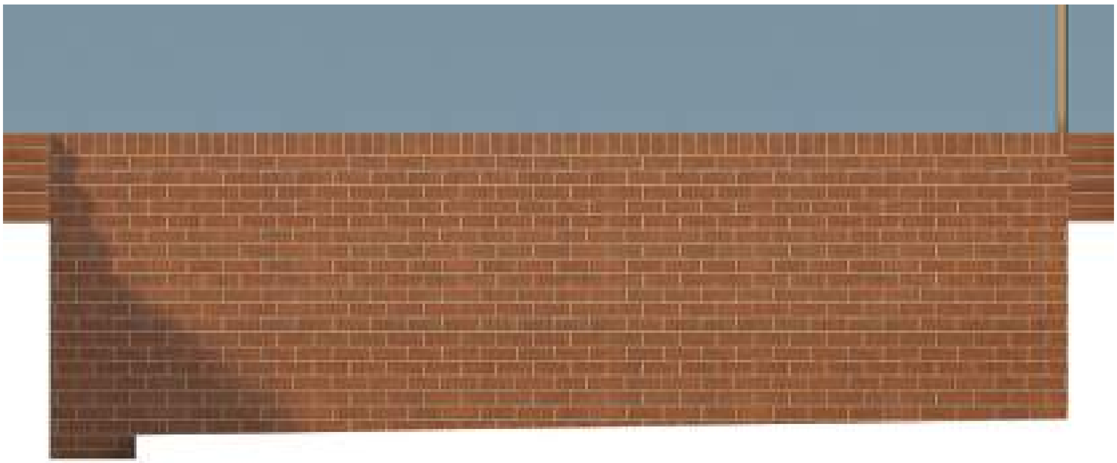
Overleaf Left
Floor Plans: Ground Floor, Level 1, Level 2 & Mezzanine. Image by Michael Spooner

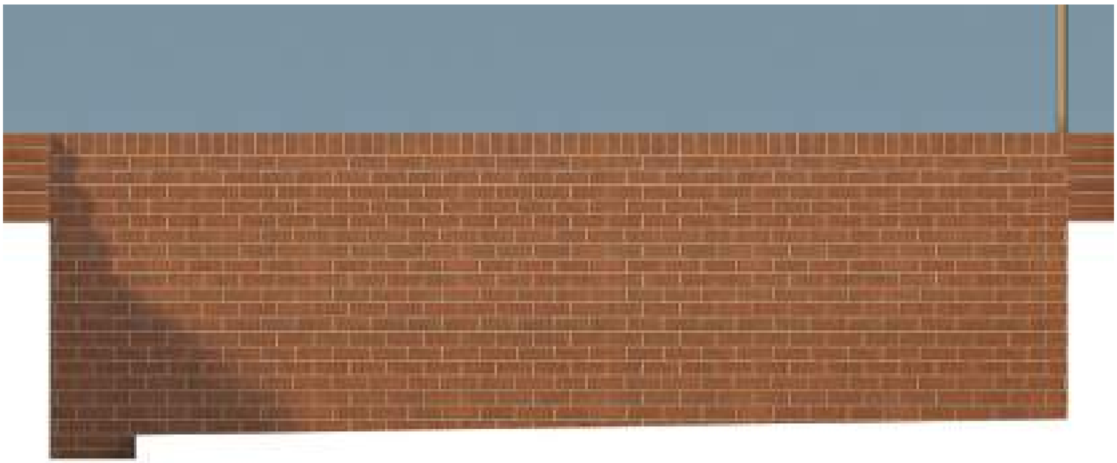
Overleaf Right
Section through entry stair to Level 2 reception and stair to mezzanine. Image by Michael Spooner.

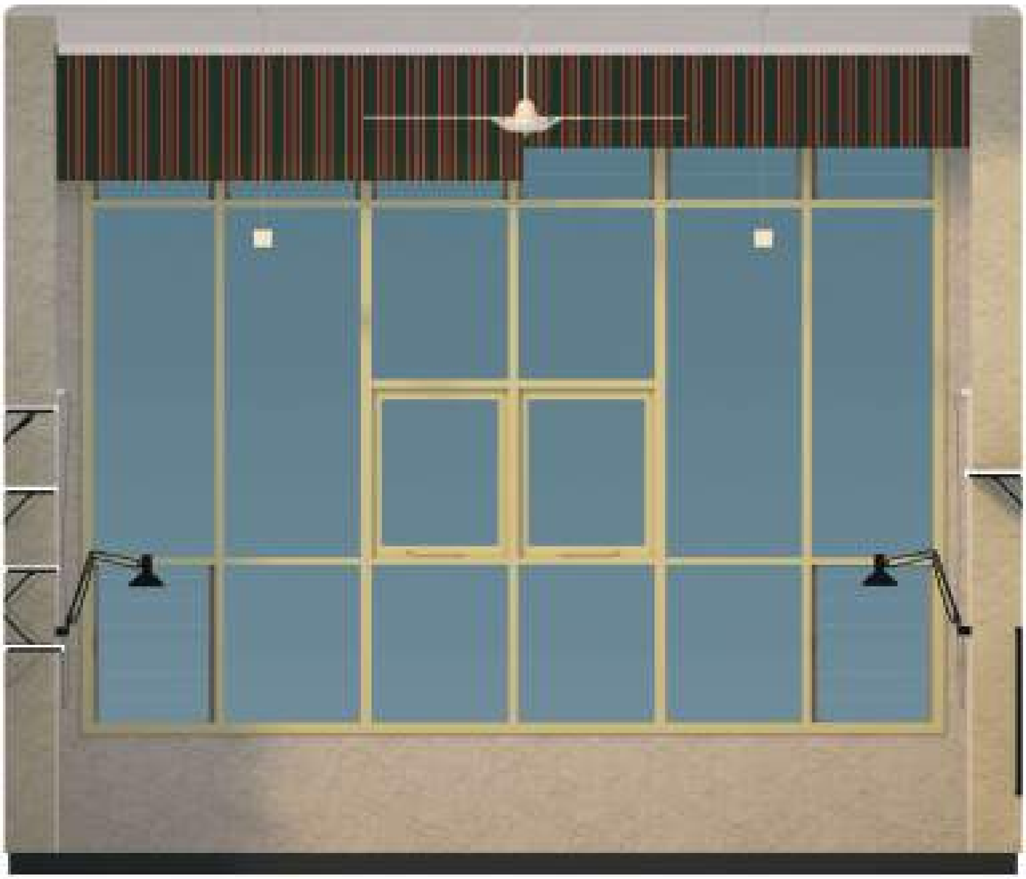
the rendered studio walls and glazed façade, twists the emphasis away from a decorous interior premised by the domestic reception and offers instead an urban stage that could contain the movements of the practice.

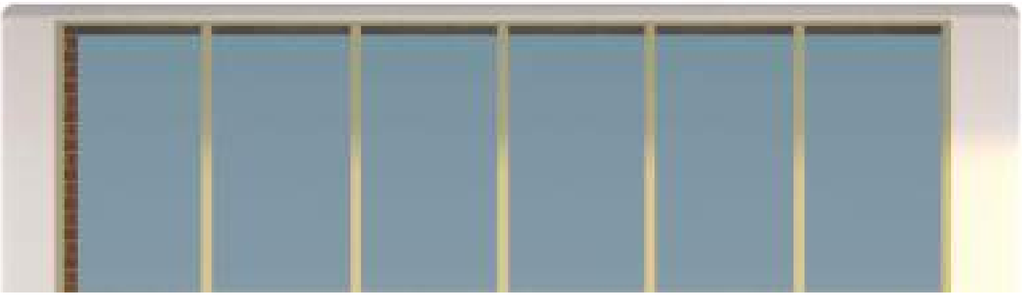
The library takes up a narrow double height space to the south of the reception and sits behind the three stepped windows that distinguish the Little Latrobe façade. This volume is bisected by a steel framed mezzanine, split in two, from which are hung the sliding screens that caged the books. The first mezzanine was accessed by a narrow steel ladder, from there an equally narrow, precarious bridge, to the second level was provided. The industrial tectonic owes something to the appreciation of Bernard Bijvoet & Pierre Chareau's Maison De Verre (1932). Openings in the wall between Edmond's mezzanine office and Corrigan's library completed with open steel mesh, implying both a door and a window in proportion, always gave me a sense of a confessional. But they also recall the peek-a-boo hatches cut into theatre backdrops, and it's not impossible that the grid of wire in these and the shelving doors could support an expression of the Maison de Verre's glass block façade.

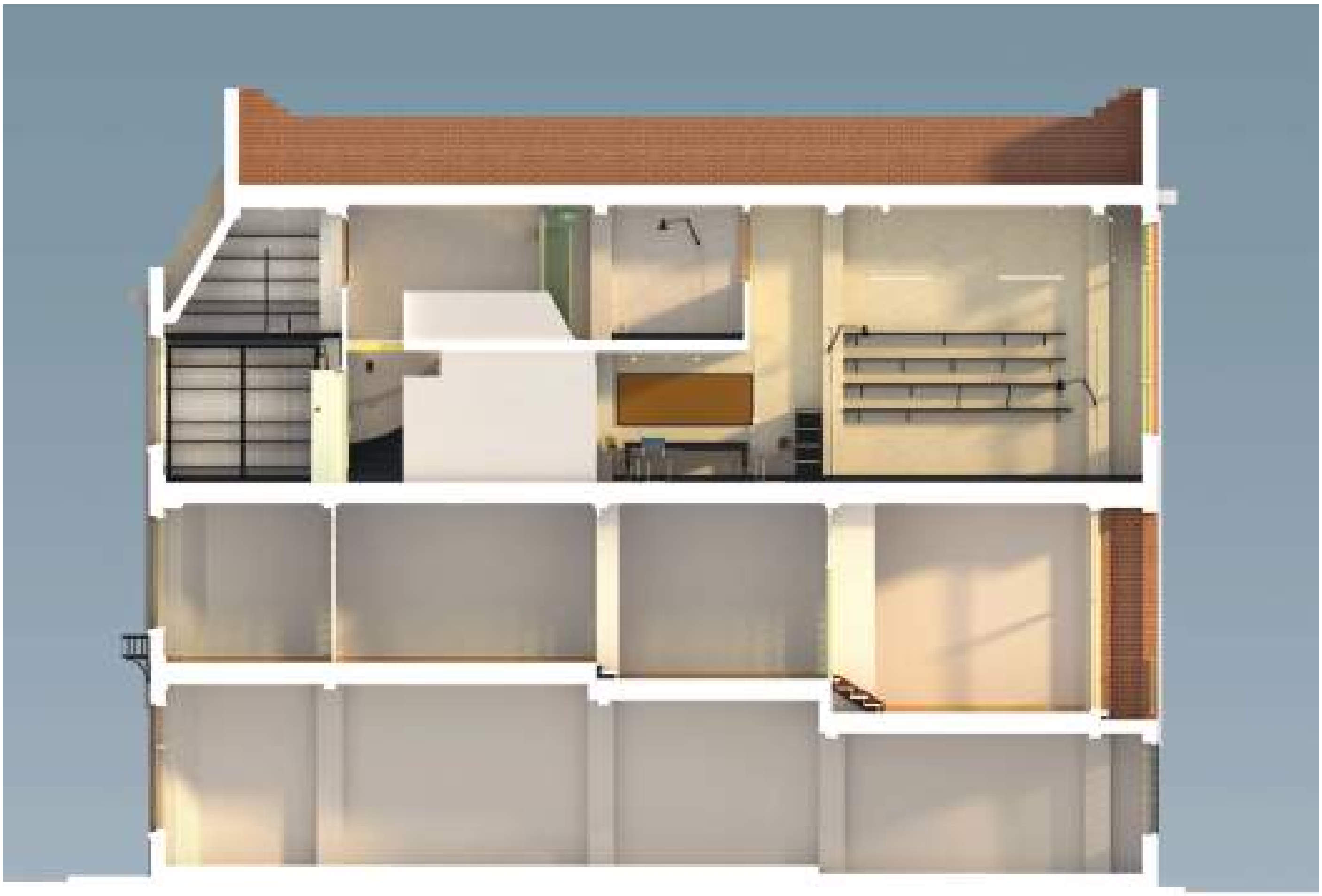












Previous Pages
Left
Section through mezzanine, kitchen and bathroom, and meeting area. Image by Michael Spooner.

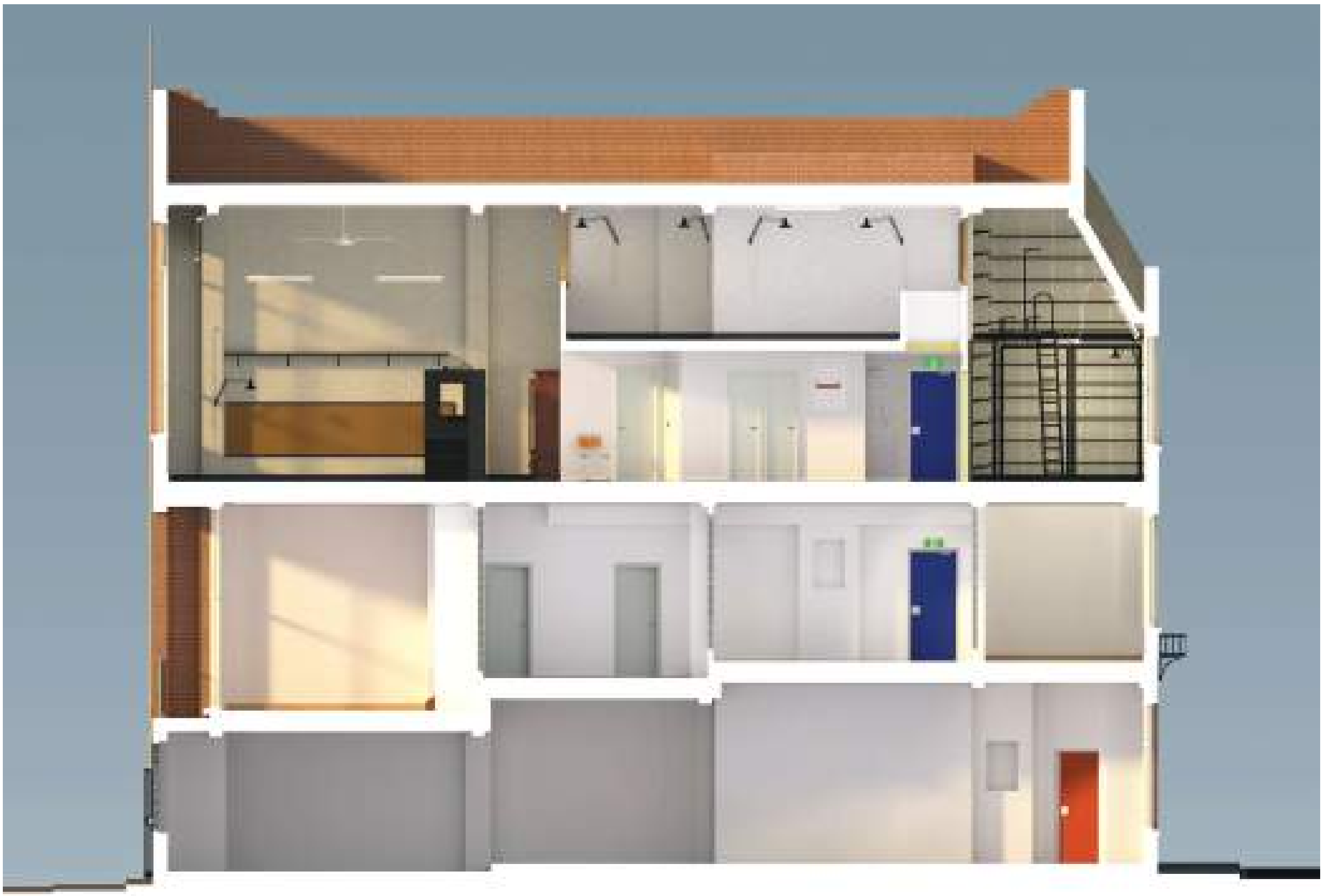
Previous Pages
Right
Section through studio. Image by Michael Spooner.

Where the block construction is unlined in the interior it has been mitten-bagged and ranges in colour from a marzipan yellow in the studio, the result of "a colour-blind Italian painter",[20] to various shades of muted white. Doors and window trim share the mint green of the stairwell, except for the fire cupboard and reception storage, which turn to an ailing green. A murky-red carpet embellishes the lower level reception and studio; a grey-blue adheres to the library floor and mezzanine, while the stairs to the mezzanine are a dark blue.

A solid balustrade secures the extent of the mezzanine, but it is given over to some theatrics. Above the lower landing of the mezzanine stairs is an oculus, realised through the pulling back of the balustrade to reveal the transverse support structure that remains. The interior surface of the resulting square opening is painted a pale yellow. At the top of the stairs is a full height solid door, but its adjacency to the balustrade, with a view over and into the office, presents the closed door as an uncertain feature. The handrail of the mezzanine stair is mint-green for half its length before it is decisively painted white, and rather than concluding against the wall that frames the door at the top, it passes through and appears on the other side, behind the open leaf. The oculus, door and balustrade revel in a dramaturgical estrangement.

Similar motifs are found in the studio, such as the power cable running from the floor up the pilaster and well past the location of the swing-arm lamps mounted to the wall, requiring the lamp cord to drop from the wall junction to the lamp several meters below. The unnecessarily long path of the cord and the mechanical reach of the wall lamp converge in an unruly assemblage, elevating the mundane into an expression of optimistic surplus. In the library a fluorescent strip light is mounted to the underside of the steel mezzanine floor, one end extending into the room.

A cable then loops up and is suspended in mid-air, before



terminating at another fluorescent strip lamp fixed to the steeply pitched ceiling at a rakish angle, its end slipping beyond the base of the ceiling so that it floats in front of the bagged wall. At the top of the mezzanine stair a wall lamp by Alvar Aalto is pressed awkwardly into the corner against the frame of the door. Rotated, it throws a short sharply angled light across the height of the wall and floods the ceiling with a striking circular glare. These off the shelf products, economically efficient except for the Aalto designed lamp press-ganged into service as if it was a more practical stage lamp, are transformed through their opposition to function. They furnish the office with fragments of a dissenting order and evoke an absolvent decorum that emancipates the office from the easily assumed daily labours of practice. From the mezzanine there is a clear view down into the studio from two framed openings, while narrow observations can be made of the library space, furthering the speculative meaning of the interior.

There is a germinal impression of the layout of the office in the modular dwelling that was the feature of Le Corbusier's Pavilion de L'Espirit Nouveau, for which a single unit was constructed in 1925 alongside a pavilion exhibiting drawings of the future urban environments that could be constructed with it. The double height living area and bedroom mezzanine of the villa-apartment cell is reflected in the proportions of the office studio and its relation to the mezzanine; the villa's reading area is perhaps serendipitously located where the library would emerge, while the internal stair aligned to the edge of the villa's living area is, in the office, pushed inwards and contained within the boundary of the building, securing vertical movement from the ground. Meanwhile, the glazed window that distinguishes the villa's living area and façade conforms to the extent of the office studio space and is presented on the lane elevation similarly complete, with paired side-hung opening windows at its centre. But, as always, Edmond &

Opposite
Section through library, reception, meeting area, mezzanine and studio. Image by Michael Spooner.

Above
Section through studio, mezzanine, reception and library. Image by Michael Spooner.

Corrigan confront this canonical project with an economy of abstraction and refusal of refinement, leaving the figure of the villa-apartment perching on the edge of focus.

Design process
1986

The as-built office differs from the construction documentation dated 1986. The drawings do not include the final telescopic sequence from reception to studio, and the bathroom and kitchen layout is remarkably ordinary compared to the final idiosyncratic scale and arrangement. The as-built mezzanine stair that turns back into the reception against the wall that confines the library, was instead proposed as a straight flight that appears not to have been enclosed, suggesting a far more open dialogue between levels and office spaces. Minor differences also occur in the negotiation of the remnants of the rough bluestone boundary wall that protrudes into the building and that are found in the entry stairwell, painted the same almond colour, though this amendment is marked in coloured pencil on the drawings from 1986. While this suggests a technical rather than design problem, the bluestone is left unobscured on the Little Latrobe elevation. The proposed reflected downpipes and classical rainwater heads are also abandoned for a single downpipe and head without a profile, a decision, like that of the misaligned windows and bluestone remnants, that avoids a symmetrical conclusion and creates a more expressive façade.

Opposite
Section through Library. Images by Michael Spooner

Later floor plan

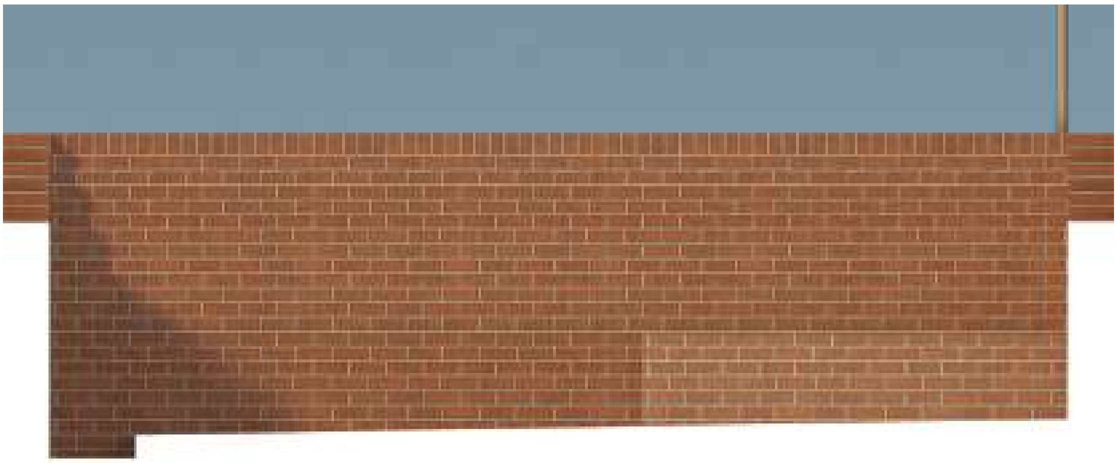
Another floor-plan, isolated and fixed to card, that is closer to the final as-built and so later than the construction drawing of 1986, alters the bathroom and kitchen to match the as-built, and acquires the narrow threshold between reception and studio produced by a splayed wall containing the kitchen. However, this plan also lacks the reception cupboards that precede the wet area entrance, which, along with the door leaves and trim being painted a different green from all other trim and the unpainted render on the cupboard interior, suggests they may have been considered during the construction. This plan also includes a furniture layout and the location of the office team. Edmond is found where the library would be, and Corrigan in the niche that would come to contain the meeting room table. In the studio sits Kate O'Brien, the office PA; architects Adrian Page, David Johnston and Christopher Wood, who would complete the 1986 construction documentation of the office.[21] The mezzanine contains the glass table from the first office and a Grant Featherston designed chaise Corrigan was known to have enjoyed an afternoon doze upon. The proposed welded vinyl flooring never materialises and instead carpet is laid, only to be haphazardly covered during the practice's occupation with large squares of black and red Pirelli rubber, a nod to the Maison de Verre, a pile of which was conserved in the empty library. The furniture-partition between the meeting area to studio, was conceived by Corrigan and built and installed by Greg Carroll, a theatre colleague who would become a distinguished theatre director, soon after practical completion.[22] The shelving in the studio, with the comical use of metal brackets alternating above and below the shelf, is also conceivably from this period immediately following completion. Intriguingly the two openings from the mezzanine to the studio were a later amendment to the waist high balcony, dramatically enclosing and delineating the once open mezzanine, and making reference to the mezzanine balustrade in the Pavilion de L'Espirit Nouveau.[23] Further amendments would ensue, including the extension of the kitchen area and the shortening of an adjacent bathroom, evidenced by wall tiles that pass behind the new wall, and the installation of black timber shelving in the mezzanine space in 1994, for which there is documentation in the RMIT Design Archives.[24]

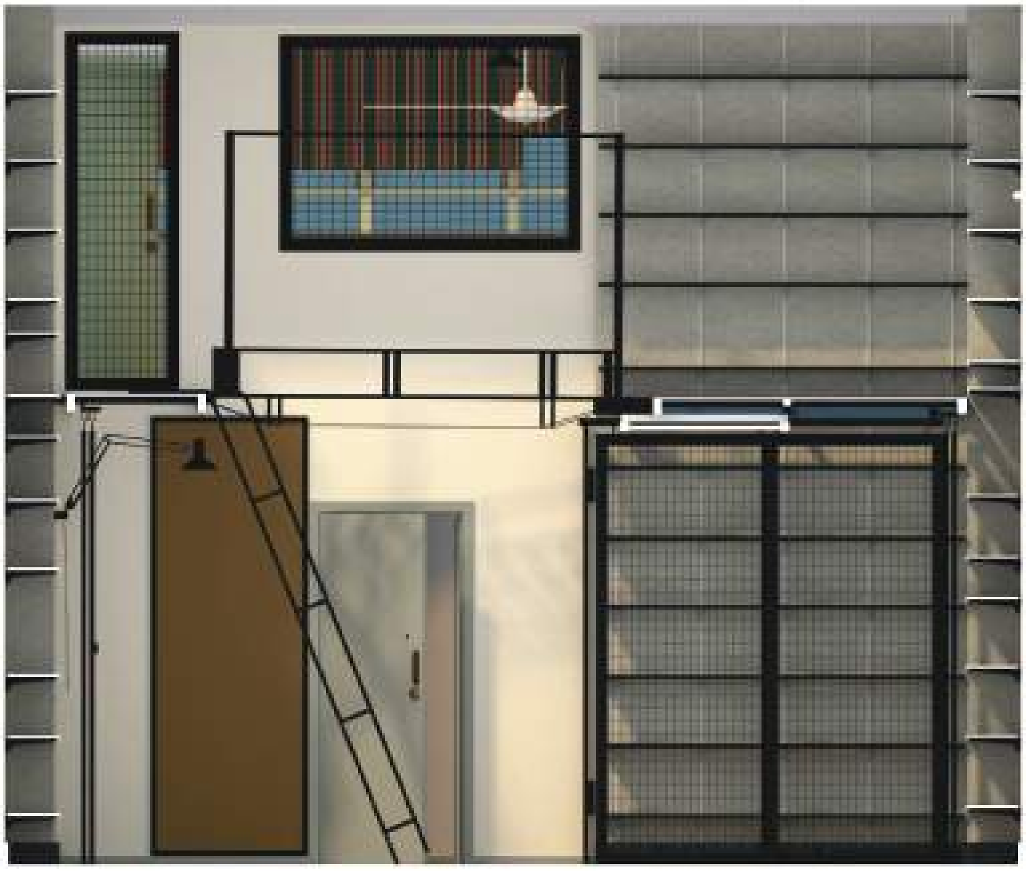
Notable in the two schemes is the lack of an identified space for a library, a defining aspect of the office and the eminence of Corrigan, whose interest in collecting books was prompted during his time as a student at Melbourne University.[25] In both plans the library is labelled as office 4, and in the later plan Edmond's workstation is located here. Originally Corrigan's books occupied a large bedroom at his parents' house at 78 Blessington Street St Kilda.[26] Antony DiMase remembers "visiting the house in St Kilda with Peter very late one night and seeing many books in a rather shambolic array in a darkened room." [27] Both Philip Goad and Geoffrey Barton remember very few books present at the first office space at no. 40, but that newly purchased books quickly appeared at no. 46 during the early occupation of the practice. As Barton recalled, "not just from St Kilda but also in big US mail bags from America. Peter would receive catalogues of available rare or first edition books & order with a passion".[28] Nevertheless, books were installed in the library during the establishment of the office at no. 46 signifying a progression during design and construction in the importance of Corrigan's collection of books to the role of the future office. However, it would be several years till the library found its final form. It wasn't until, at the latest, the end of 1989 that the sliding and lockable mesh doors had been installed across the shelves, with Goad recalling that:

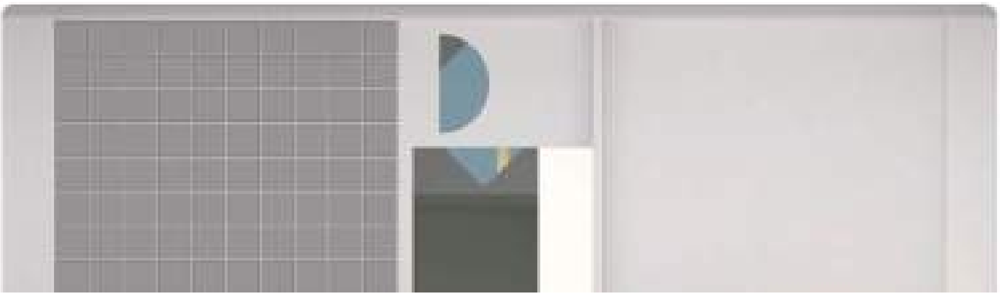
> In that first year when I came back to work on RMIT Building 8, 1990, Peter had just installed the grid mesh doors to the shelves and was mastering (after a fashion) their opening and closing. And he seemed to spend most of his time unpacking and arranging books and showing me new purchases.[29]

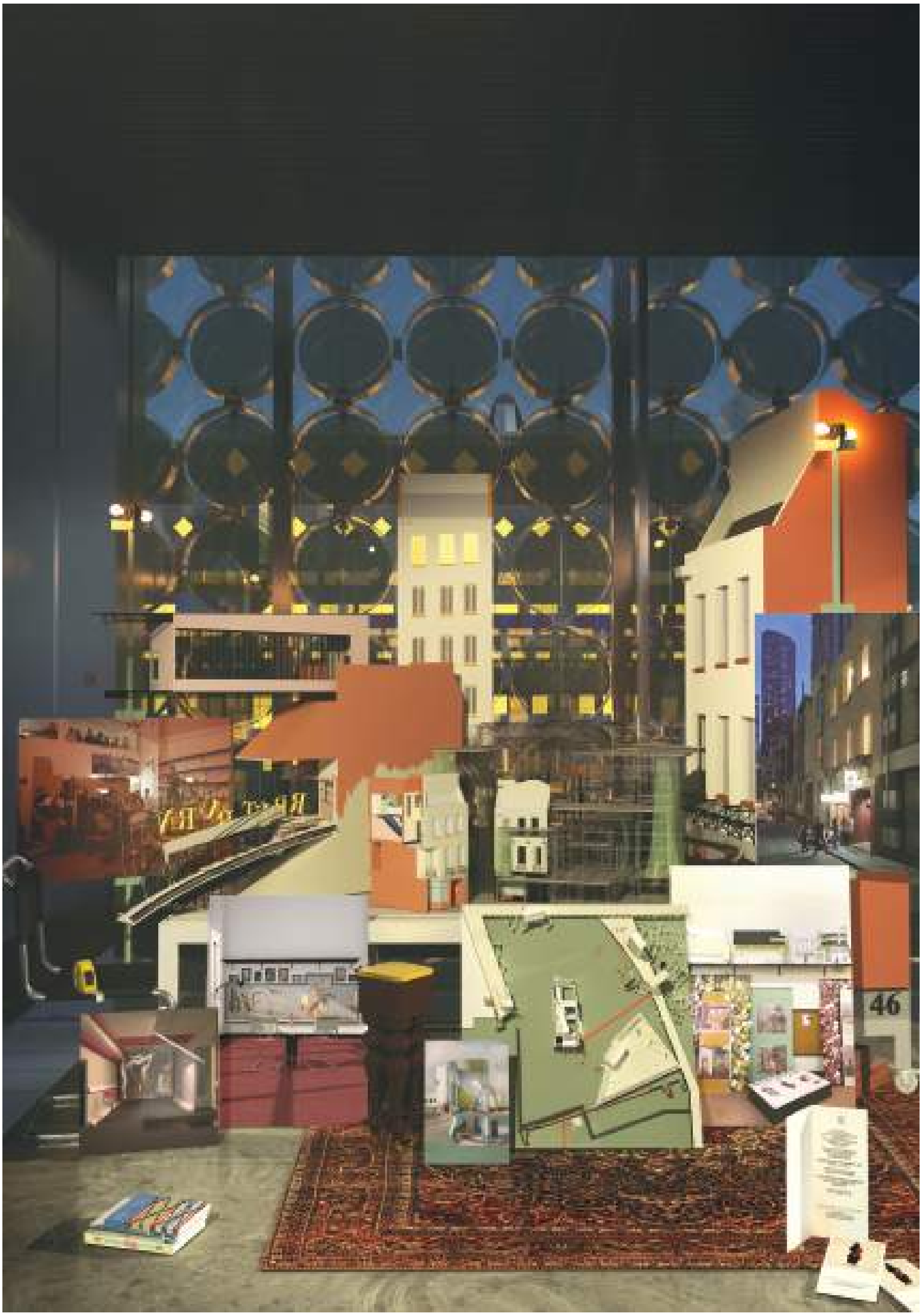
Present Occupation

Although the practice of Edmond & Corrigan continues in a limited form, maintained by Edmond from her home in Carlton, the building at no. 46 is present in the changing context of Little Latrobe Street, and the office space continues to harbour, of sorts, the architectural discipline. From mid-2018 the RMIT School of Architecture and Urban Design has leased the office and I have used it, almost exclusively, as a space for the teaching of architecture design studios. The digital model of no. 46 is a resource for students who are required weekly to speculate on a series of outwardly irrational extensions to the building. A recent studio brief secured a musical salon and rug warehouse as provocations, fixed in Edmond's account of an installation by John Leach of sizeable antique rugs from Iran, Iraq and Turkey just prior to the practice taking residence in the new building hung on the studio walls and over the mezzanine balcony with the opening elevated by a string quartet arranged on the mezzanine.[30] My weekly studio crits feature the remaining pin boards propped against the rendered walls and, standing before their work, the students present to the remaining studio members gathered around on the chrome cantilevered chairs, myself at the fringe

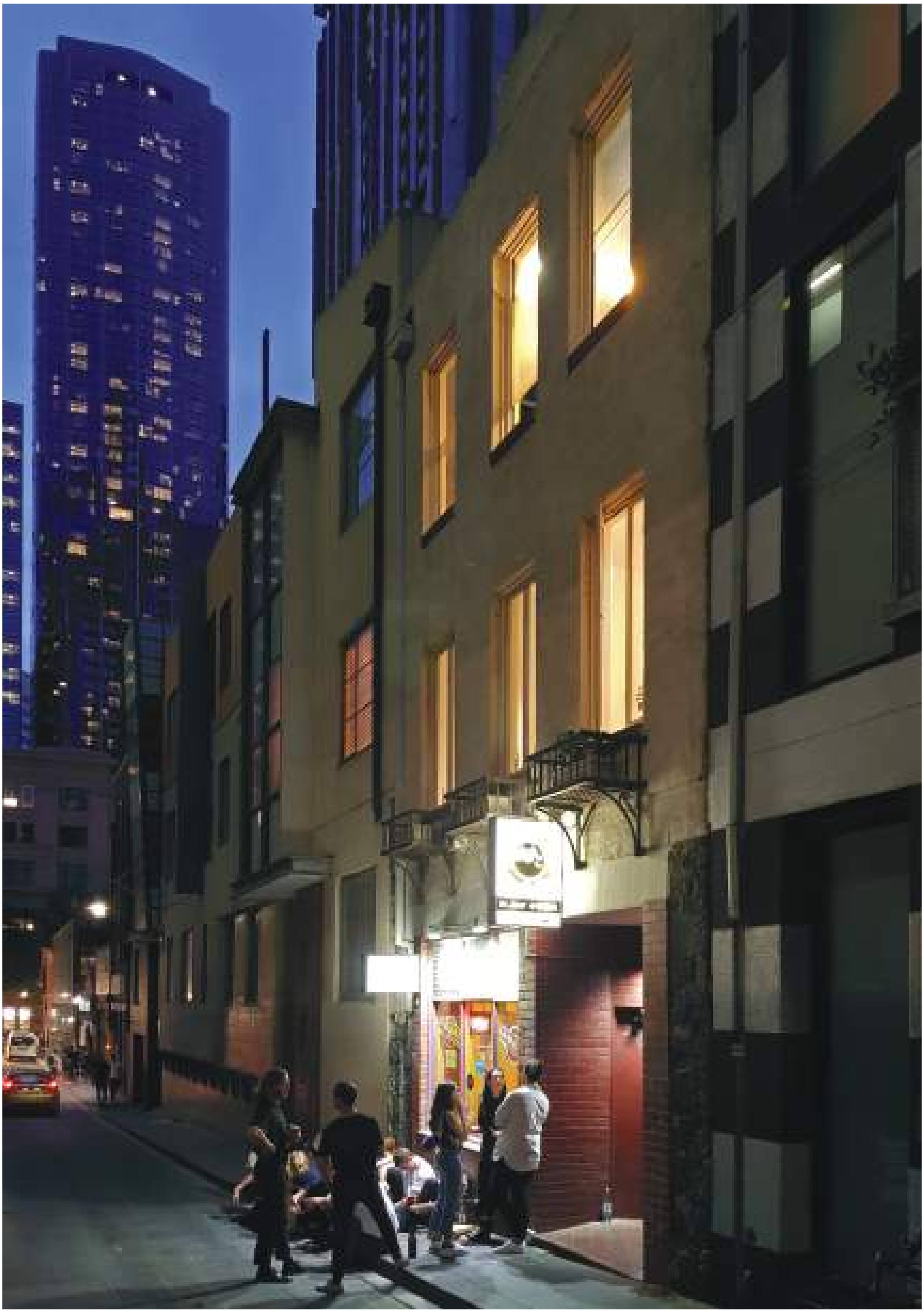








of this activity — or we gather around the meeting room table in a more intimate but boisterous consideration of the ideas. There is an awareness of the distance from the school up the road, that re-located from the purpose-built Building 8 to the Sean Godsell designed Design Hub in 2014. The office at no. 46, located in a ring of towers, behind a closed door and a flight of stairs, is reclusive and hidden from others who may wonder what disobedience is being hatched. Each semester the office has been given over to the exhibition of the studio's output.[31] All the projects are collated and discussed by the students, and a blueprint for discernment is put forth. To my astonishment I am very rarely called upon other than to hold work higher or lower. Models, drawings, projections and catalogues are installed in the studio, reception, library, stairwell and mezzanine with much effort and professionalism. An opening with the DJ on the mezzanine is arranged, and a celebration occurs of the student's confrontation with no. 46 in no. 46. The students revel and comment on the studio work surrounded by their peers from their world of architecture. The events are a marvel to be invited to, but word of mouth largely carries the offer of a drink. The evening always spills out

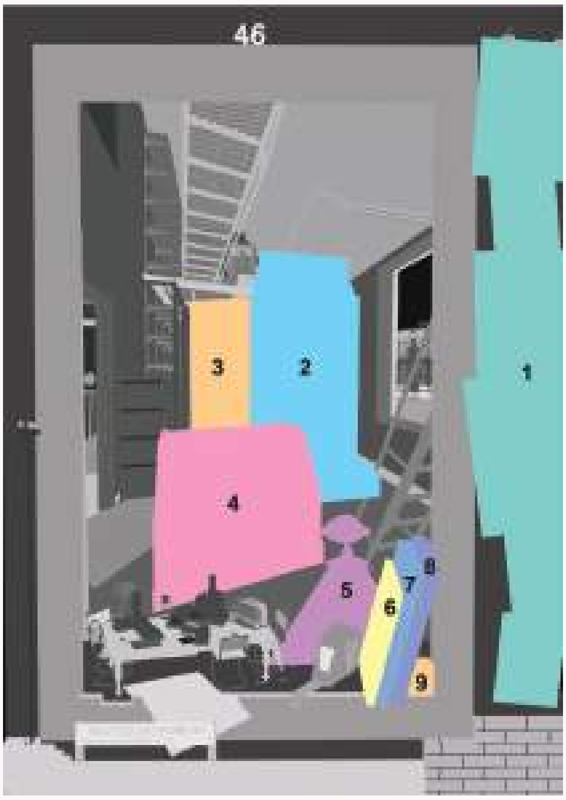


on to the street. Up the road Building 8 can be seen, and rather than to have mellowed with time, it appears more treacherous. Under the neon sign of the hot-pot eatery that occupies the ground level, cigarettes are lit. Above, the glow from behind the windows of what was once the library bear out a new life.

This project acknowledges the support of the SRIC in the School of Architecture and Urban Design at RMIT University.

Opposite
Epilogue –
The Design Hub Image
by Michael Spooner
& Jack Murray, 2019

Above
Students gather outside no. 46 during an end-of-semester celebration in the office, hosted by *The Last Studio*, an RMIT Master of Architecture studio led by the author. Photograph by Michael Spooner, 2018.



Prologue – The Library

Framed view into the library of 46 Little Latrobe Street with found artefacts, monographs and photos of the original occupation. Image by Michael Spooner & Jack Murray, 2019.

1 Interior of the office of Edmond and Corrigan. Photographs by Michael Spooner, 2012.

2 Little Latrobe Street façade, 46 Little Latrobe Street.

3 Literature Lane façade, 46 Little Latrobe Street.

4 Library of Peter Corrigan with steel framed mezzanine and openings from the mezzanine occupied by Maggie Edmond.

5 Peter Corrigan, *Masque of Air*, collage study for Mahony Masques, directed by Peter King, 1992

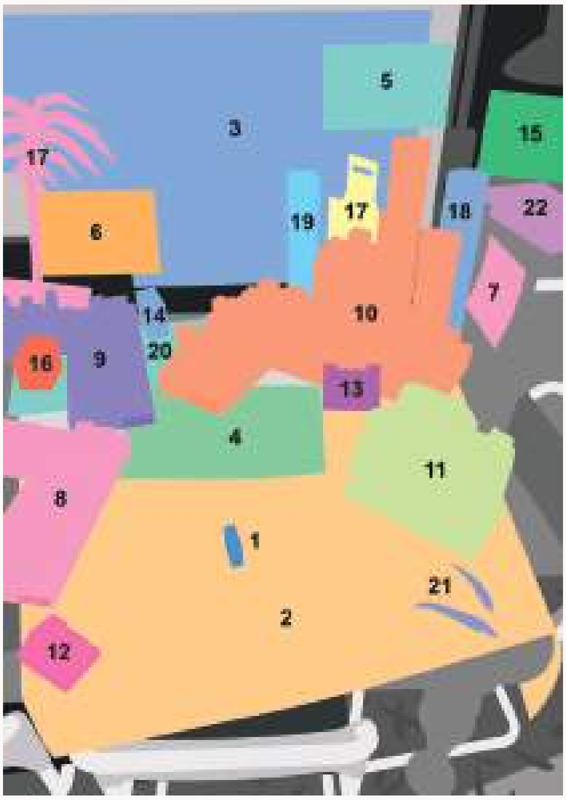
6 Vivian Mitsogiannni and Patrick Macasaet (eds.) *Influence: Edmond & Corrigan + Peter Corrigan*, (Melbourne: Uro Publications, 2019). Publication design by Michael Bojkowski with typographic illustrations by Nina Gibbes.

7 Leon van Schaik, Nigel Bertram and Winsome Callister (eds), *Building 8: Edmond & Corrigan at RMIT*, (Melbourne: Schwarz-Transition, 1996). Design and layout by Callum Fraser.

8 Conrad Hamann with Leon van Schaik, Vivian Mitsogianni & Winsome Callister, edited by Fleur Watson. *Cities of Hope Remembered/Rehearsed: Australian architecture and stage design by Edmond & Corrigan 1962–2012*, (Melbourne: Thames & Hudson, 2012). Design by Chase & Galley & Peter Corrigan.

9 Edmond and Corrigan, Swanston Street fountain from the front of Building 8 RMIT University. The fountain appears to reflect Adolf Loo's unbuilt tomb for Max Dvorák designed in 1921.

Image by Michael Spooner & Jack Murray 2019



Development of Little Latrobe Street and its surrounds

The models on the table were developed with reference to accounts of the founding of Melbourne and the original landscapes inhabited by the Kulin Nation by Richard Broome, Gary Presland and James Boyce, lithographs by De Grunchy & Leigh and Cooke & Calvert, historical photographs by Charles Nettleton, Airspy, Commercial Photographic Co., Thomas

1 Edmond and Corrigan, 46 Little Latrobe Street, 1986.

2 *Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works Detail Plan, No. 1022, 1023, City of Melbourne*, 1895. Maps Collection, State Library Victoria.

3 Frederick Proeschel and James B. Philp. *The Most Complete Popular & Mercantile Map of Melbourne, Victoria* Compiled & Drawn by F. Proeschel. Melbourne: Printed by J.B. Philp, Lithographer, 1853. Maps Collection, State Library Victoria.

4 De Gruchy & Leigh, Lithographer. *Isometrical Plan of Melbourne & Suburbs*, 1866. Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria.

5 Charles Nettleton. *Swanston Street*, 1870. Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria.

6 Airspy, Photographer. *View Showing the State Library (with Domed Glass Roof) and the Exhibition Building*, 1927. Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria.

7 Commercial Photographic Co., Photographers. *Aerial View of Melbourne Showing Franklin, A'Beckett and La Trobe Streets*, 1960. Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria

8 Urban development of Little Latrobe Street and its surround circa 1925

9 Urban development of Little Latrobe Street and its surrounds circa 1990

10 Existing and projected urban development of Little Latrobe Street and its surrounds circa 2020

11 Edmond and Corrigan, Building 8, RMIT University, Melbourne, 1990–1994

12 Nonda Katsalidas, private residence, 65 Little Latrobe Street, Melbourne, 1994

13 Francis J Davies, Building 39 RMIT University, formerly WD & HO Wills Tobacco warehouse, 1925

14 WoodMarsh, apartment warehouse conversion, 42–44 Little Latrobe Street, 2000

15 Thumpin' Tum, formerly the Devon and Cornwell Hotel 1855, 50 Little Latrobe Street, just prior to demolition.

Image by Michael Spooner & William Bennie, 2019

Mahood and Graeme Butler, plans by the MMBW and Mahlsted's Insurance Plans, and online sources including Google Earth and the City of Melbourne Development Activity Model. Image by Michael Spooner & William Bennie, 2019.

16 Warehouse at 47 Little Latrobe Street (demolished)

17 Edmond and Corrigan, 'Ned Kelly and palm tree' balustrade detail, Building 8 RMIT University level 4 Swanston Street balcony extension 2008. The balcony was removed and the profiles reinstalled within the New Academic Street redevelopment of the Casey Wing and Building 8 by Lyons, in collaboration with Harrison and White, Maddison Architects, MvS Architects and NMBW Architecture Studio.

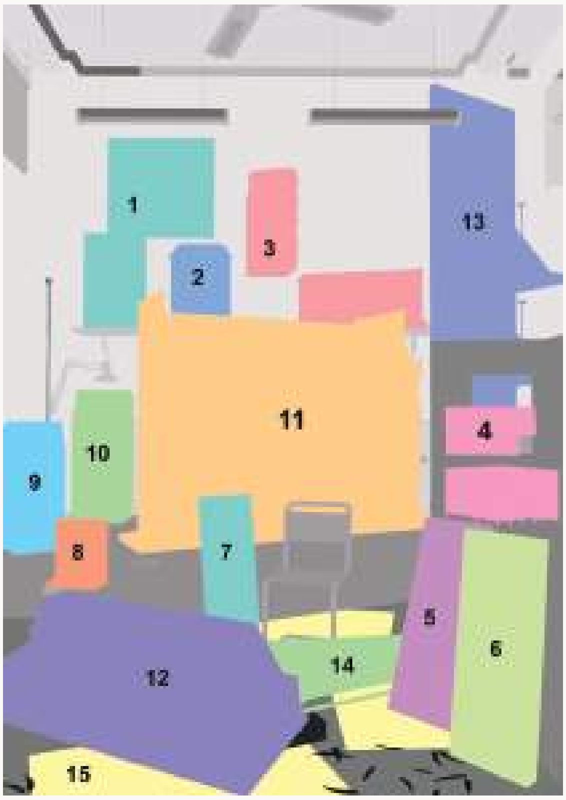
18 Peter Corrigan, 'Aztec' column, 2016. Corrigan was invited to provide mosaic designs for the unadorned columns of the John Andrews Student Union Building included in the RMIT New Academic Street redevelopment.

19 Edmond and Corrigan, 'Brancusi column', Rodda Lane, southeast corner of RMIT Building 8. The column reflects half of the sculptor Constantin Brancusi's *Gate of the Kiss*, 1937.

20 Robert Russell and Day & Haghe, Lithographer. *Map Shewing the Site of Melbourne and the Position of the Huts & Buildings Previous to the Foundation of the Township by Sir Richard Bourke in 1837.* Surveyed & Drawn by Robert Russell. Currie Collection, State Library of Victoria.

21 Leaves of the River Red Gum, *Eucalyptus camaldulensis*. The custodians of the land occupied by Melbourne are the Kulin, a collective of indigenous language groups: the Woi wurrung, Boon wurrung, Daung wurrung, Ngurai-illam wurrung alongside the Wath wurrung and Djadja wurrung, who share complex social, economic and spiritual practices extending back 40,000 years.

22 Conrad Hamann with Michael Anderson and Winsome Callister, *Cities of Hope: Australian architecture and stage design by Edmond & Corrigan 1962–1992*, (Melbourne; New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). Design by Michael Trudgeon.



46 Little Latrobe Street

Development of 46 Little Latrobe Street including early design proposals alongside influential buildings from the canon of architecture. Image by Michael Spooner & William Bennie, 2019.

1 Adolf Loos, Tristan Tzara House, Paris, 1926.

2 Adolf Loos, 'Looshaus' Goldman & Salatsch Building, Vienna, 1911.

3 Eric Gunnar Asplund, Villa Snellman, Stockholm, 1918.

4 Le Corbusier, Pavillion de l'Espirit Nouveau, Paris Exposition des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 1924.

5 First proposed level 2 plan for 46 Little Latrobe Street, 1986.

6 Second proposed level 2 plan for 46 Little Latrobe Street, 1986.

7 Existing plan of level 2 for 46 Little Latrobe Street, 2019.

8 Building at 46 Little Latrobe Street prior to demolition, originally a built in 1855 as a bakery.

9 Proposed Little Latrobe façade of 46 Little Latrobe Street, 1986.

10 As built Little Latrobe façade of 46 Little Latrobe Street, 1987.

11 Section through 46 Little Latrobe Street, as found 2019.

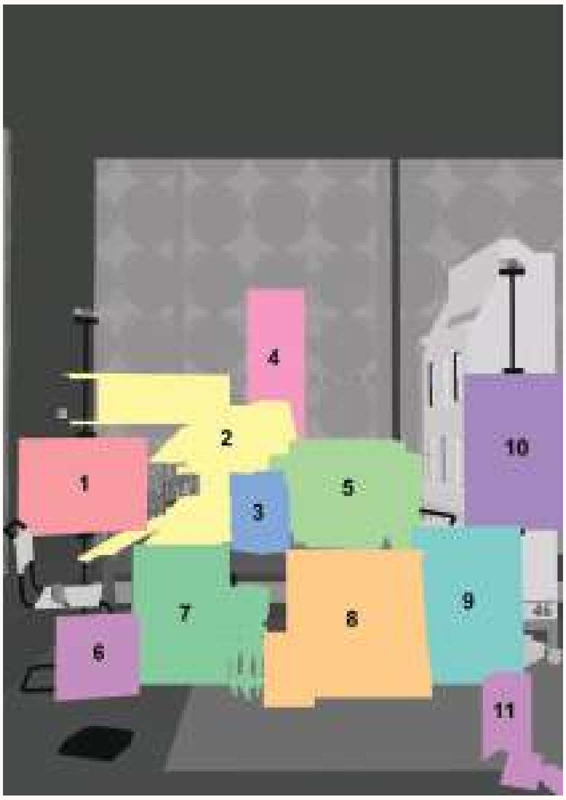
12 Cutaway of the office of Edmond and Corrigan revealing the studio, meeting table, mezzanine and library.

13 Stairway from entry to level 2 of 46 Little Latrobe Street

14 Kitchen bench from level 2 46 Little Latrobe Street with the lightning bolt icon appearing from beneath the lip of the sink.

15 For-construction documentation, 46 Little Latrobe Street, 1986.

Image by Michael Spooner & William Bennie, 2019



Epilogue – The Design Hub

Speculative alterations and additions to 46 Little Latrobe Street proposed by students in RMIT Architecture design studios led by the author. Image by Michael Spooner & Jack Murray, 2019.

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1 Mid-semester presentation in the office studio of no. 46, RMIT Bachelor of Architectural Design studio Babylon, led by Michael Spooner. Photograph by the author, 2019.

2 Suan Fang Yie Lee and Jacqueline Hays, *Carpet Burn*, Design Studio *Maggie* led by Michael Spooner, Master of Architecture, RMIT Architecture 2019.

3 Stan Tianruo Li, *The M House*, Design Studio *Babylon* led Michael Spooner, Bachelor of Architectural Design, RMIT Architecture, 2019.

4 Lewis Smith and Mietta Mullaly, *A House for a uartet*, Design Studio *Maggie* led by Michael Spooner, Master of Architecture, RMIT Architecture 2019.

5 Riley Pelham-Thorman and Brooke Barker, *House for a rug seller*, Design Studio *Maggie* led by Michael Spooner, Master of Architecture, RMIT Architecture 2019.

6 Isabella Konig, *The Six Chapels of Babylon*, Design Studio *Babylon* led by Michael Spooner, Bachelor of Architectural Design, RMIT Architecture 2019.

7 Mietta Mullaly, *An Impression of the Studio, In Situ*, Design Studio Maggie led by Michael Spooner, Master of Architecture, RMIT Architecture, 2019.

8 David Veidt, Wenzhao Zhong and Mietta Mullaly, *A Home for a Rug Seller*, Design Studio *Maggie* led by Michael Spooner, Master of Architecture, RMIT Architecture 2019.

9 Design studio exhibition in no. 46 by studio *Babylon* led by Michael Spooner, Bachelor of Architectural Design, 2019, featuring work by Jess Kease [shelf] and Audrey Avianto [wall and floor]. Photography by Michael Spooner.

10 Students gather outside no. 46 during an end-of-semester celebration in the office, hosted by *The Last Studio*, an RMIT Master of Architecture design studio led by Michael Spooner. Photograph by the author, 2018.

11 John Leach in conjunction with Edmond & Corrigan, *Discretion in Design: an exhibition of antique flat-weaves (kilims) from Iran, Iraq and Turkey, Office of Edmond & Corrigan*, 8–15 November, 1987. Printed invitation.

Image by Michael Spooner & Jack Murray, 2019

Endnotes

1 A Matterport scan of the interior of the office, that describes the interior occupied by furniture and objects, was completed by Kevin Francke, March 14, 2017. Visit the 3D Matterport scan of the Edmond & Corrigan office at: https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=TC2mg22bHxY. Emily Davies has also produced a series of digital models of the unoccupied office using Point Cloud laser technology during her RMIT Elective 'Cataloguing', a continuation of her RMIT Master of Architecture major project 'The Fourth Wall, or the Library for the Library' that speculated on the preservation of 46 Little La Trobe Street and the Edmond & Corrigan collection in the RMIT Design Archives. See: RMIT Architecture Major Project Catalogue Semester 2, 2017, (Melbourne, Vic: RMIT University, 2017): 8, accessed 20 April 2017, https://issuu.com/rmitarchitecture/docs/mp_20catalogue_20sem_202_202017_20v

2 The RMIT Design Archive has a formidable task in the sorting, documentation and cataloguing of 600 boxes of artefacts from the practice. I have, to be frank, constrained myself to the material which has already been catalogued and inventoried, and I would feel unease if it was thought this project is comprehensive.

3 With thanks to Maggie Edmond, Geoffrey Barton, Antony DiMase, Nigel Bertram, Conrad Hamann, Anna Jankovic, John Leach, Gregory Carroll, Philip Goad, Marc Dixon, Richard Munday, Peter Brew and Graham Crist for their conversations and stories about the office and Peter, many not included here, but which have served as encouragement. With thanks to Peter Knight for his encouragement after reading an early draft, and the late Gregory Spooner for providing an outsiders curiosity.

4 The images were produced in collaboration with Jack Murray and William Bennie, both RMIT University Master of Architecture students.

5 Conrad Hamann with Leon van Schaik, Vivian Mitsogianni & Winsome Callister, *Cities of Hope remembered: Australian architecture by Edmond & Corrigan, 1962-2012*, (Fishermans Bend, Vic.: Thames & Hudson Australia, 2012).

6 For a collective response to the passing of Peter Corrigan see, Vivian Mitsogiannni and Patrick Macasaet, eds., *Influence: Edmond & Corrigan + Peter Corrigan* (Melbourne: Uro Publications, 2019).

7 This is not explicitly the case with the partnership emerging across several works: St Coleman's Mortlake designed in 1974 but only completed in 1976 and the unbuilt Holy Saviour Vermont South a design that had caught the eye of Father Barry Moran, the new priest of Keysborough Parish. Corrigan was then invited to prepare a master plan for the Keysborough Parish of the Resurrection in 1974, and with Edmond, realised the Parish Centre in 1975. The office would complete a significant number of buildings for the parish. The Church of the Resurrection designed from 1974 and completed in 1976 is the building which secured the partnerships immediate notoriety.

8 Maggie Edmond, conversation with Michael Spooner, September 4, 2019.

9 Geoffrey Barton, correspondence with the author, September 17, 2019. Barton worked for Edmond & Corrigan from 1976-1980, then from 1981-1986 and 1992-1996, contributing to projects such as the Competitions for Melbourne City Square Competition, Parliament House, State Library and Museum of Victoria, coming in between times usually to work on theatre set and costumes, even after taking up employment with Peter Elliot Architects in 1997.

10 Richard Munday, correspondence with author, September 20, 2019.

11 Maggie Edmond, conversation with the author, January 13, 2020. See, Philip Goad, "Unbuilt Australia: Venetian 'City of Hope'", *Architecture Australia*, vol. 96, no. 6 (November/December 2007): 27; Nicholas Baume, "Guests in Venice: Australia's Biennale Pavilion", *Transition*, no. 29, (Winter 1989): 65-67.

12 Maggie Edmond, conversation with the author, September 4, 2019.

13 Butler's extensive photographic documentation of Melbourne's CBD have been digitised and made available in 2018 as the Butler Collection through the City of Melbourne Libraries.

14 Maggie Edmond, conversation with the author, September 4, 2019.

15 Alan Lewis was the city engineer for the country town of Sale and was responsible for a slew of projects designed by Edmond & Corrigan, both realised and unrealised, notably the Sale Football Club Pavilion 1979-83, and the RSPCA Shelter and Dog Pound 1980-81, both built. See Hamann, *Cities of Hope*, 54-87.

16 Geoffrey Barton, correspondence with the author, September 17, 2019.

17 Maggie Edmond, conversation with the author, January 13, 2020.

18 Maggie Edmond, conversation with the author, September 4, 2019.

19 Maggie Edmond, conversation with the author, September 4, 2019.

20 Maggie Edmond, conversation with the author, April 30, 2019.

21 The for-construction documentation from 1986 notes their author as 'CW'.

22 Greg Carroll, conversation with the author, September 19, 2019. Carroll would collaborate with Corrigan for over 40 years. The last set designed by Corrigan before his passing was for *Hell and Back* at Theatreworks in September 2016, directed by Carroll, and featuring two white chairs on a bare grey stage with white curtains on three sides.

23 Geoffrey Barton, correspondence with the author, September 17, 2019.

24 RMIT Design Archives, Edmond & Corrigan Collection, 0006.2017, Box 165, Commercial and Civic projects, 1979–2003, File 3.

25 Corrigan obtained some books from the university library that were being sold or given away as excess prior to the faculty's move into the new architecture building in 1964. Maggie Edmond, conversation with the author, January 13, 2020.

26 Maggie Edmond, conversation with the author, September 4, 2019.

27 Antony DiMase, correspondence with author, September 13, 2019.

28 Philip Goad, correspondence with author, September 13, 2019. Goad worked for Edmond & Corrigan at no. 40 in 1982 and 1985, then returned to work on RMIT Building 8 from September 1990 to September 1991 at no. 46. Geoffrey Barton, Correspondence with author, September 17, 2019.

29 Philip Goad, correspondence with author, September 13, 2019.

30 Maggie Edmond, conversation with author, April 30, 2019. John Leach's oriental rug gallery was in Rathdowne Street, around the corner from Edmond and Corrigan's residence in Drummond Street and next to the milk-bar Corrigan would frequent to collect his morning newspaper. Leach provided the author with a copy of the printed invitation: John Leach in conjunction with Edmond & Corrigan, *Discretion in Design: an exhibition of antique flat-weaves (kilims) from Iran, Iraq and Turkey*, Office of Edmond & Corrigan, November 8-15, 1987.

31 The student projects, documentation of the exhibitions and photographs of the events can be found at The Exhausted, accessed April 20, 2020, www.thexhausted.com

Intersecting identities in Geoffrey Woodfall's Woolnorth Homestead, 1969–70

PEER
REVIEWED
ESSAY

Stuart King

ABSTRACT

In 1825, the Van Diemen's Land Company (VDL Co.) was chartered in London and granted the right to select 250,000 acres for pastoral enterprise in Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania), ultimately located across the island's isolated north-west frontier at Circular Head (Stanley), Emu Bay (Burnie) and Woolnorth. The company established its headquarters in a fashionable Regency villa, Highfield, at Circular Head, designed by VDL Co. Surveyor, Henry Hellyer, (c.1835) and built with prefabricated elements imported from England. The company's subsequent enterprises served remote colonial expansion through the establishment of regional infrastructure and commissioning of architecture extending across the remainder of the nineteenth century. In 1966, the VDL Co. appointed its first Australian Governor, the Victorian Western District pastoralist and the company's largest single shareholder, Alan Ritchie (1895–1974).

Under Ritchie, the company's operations were consolidated at Woolnorth, with the construction of a large Frank Lloyd Wright cum Sydney School homestead designed by Melbourne architect, Geoffrey Woodfall (1930–2016). Occupying one of Australia's oldest, continuously-held company land holdings—with a known history of violent dispossession of north-west Tasmania's Aboriginal people—, the Woolnorth Homestead carries company, family and architectural lineages of colonial origin. For Woodfall, the commission also precipitated a plethora of unexamined commercial, community and residential buildings across north-west Tasmania built from the 1970s into the early 2000s, effectively reconstituting the dynamics of the VDL Co.'s earlier regional influence. This article is based on research across three archives, those of: the VDL Co. (Tasmanian Heritage and Archives Office); former VDL Co. Governor, Alan Ritchie (University of Melbourne Archive), and crucially the architect, Geoffrey Woodfall (RMIT Design Archives). It seeks to understand the intersecting histories and identities at stake in the architecture of Woolnorth.

Opposite
Geoffrey Woodfall, Woolnorth Homestead, Montague, Tasmania, c.1973. RMIT Design Archives. Gift of Geoffrey Rolfe Woodfall and Judith Woodfall, 2015

In 1969, in the dunes behind Cape Grim in Tasmania's far north west, the Van Diemen's Land Company (VDL Co., est. 1825) built a new homestead and headquarters designed by the Melbourne architect Geoffrey Woodfall (1930–2016). Nestled into a natural depression, affording some protection from the Roaring Forties as they sear the dunes, the four-hundred-square-metre timber homestead was inspired by dual interests in Californian, Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired modernism and meditations on the possibility of expressing identity in Australian architecture.

The homestead, Woolnorth, is known through architectural writing on Geoffrey Woodfall and in reference to regionalist architectural approaches in Melbourne and surrounds in the 1950s and 1960s, and Winsome Callister cites it, alongside Woodfall's Old Penola Homestead in South Australia, as the architect's pre-eminent work, embodying a personal design philosophy centred on questions of Australian identity.[1]

At the time of its construction, the homestead was a significant building in Tasmania evinced by the extent to which it dominated a multi-page feature on the state's residential architecture in national journal *Architecture Australia* published in 1973.[2] No other residential project in the state at the time matched the building's dramatic siting and scale. For Woodfall, the commission also precipitated a plethora of commercial, community and residential buildings across north-west Tasmania built throughout the 1970s and extending into the early 2000s. Curiously, though, Woolnorth and Woodfall are absent from accounts of Tasmania's twentieth-century architecture which are mainly focused on the work of prominent members of the architectural profession south in Hobart.[3]

This disparity between Victorian and Tasmanian interests might be understood by Woolnorth's location at the edges of overlapping regions, professionally and historiographically. Known through the lens of its architect, Woolnorth is most readily apprehended in relation to developments in Melbourne and Victoria. Upon closer inspection, however, is the intersection of regions, histories and identities including those of the VDL Co., its first Australian Governor, Alan Ritchie, and his son, Blyth Ritchie, a manager and company director at Woolnorth, who commissioned Geoffrey Woodfall. This article contends that the apparently regionalist architecture of Woolnorth cannot be understood without the company and personal histories and experiences that motivated the homestead. It thus re-approaches Woolnorth from the perspective of the Van Diemen's Land Company, via its archive at the Tasmania Heritage and Archives Office, the Ritchie family via Alan Ritchie's archive at the University of Melbourne Archive, and finally its architect, Geoffrey Woodfall via his professional archive at the RMIT Design Archives. So, firstly, some company history.

Opposite
Top
Highfield, Circular Head, Van Diemen's Land, ca.1835. Watercolour by W. Pursor. National Library of Australia. Rex Nan Kivell Collection, NK3564.

Bottom
Van Diemen's Land Company and Waterlow and Sons, Plan showing the Van Diemens Land Company's estates with road and railway connections, 1932. National Library of Australia, MAP F 233

Company Homesteads

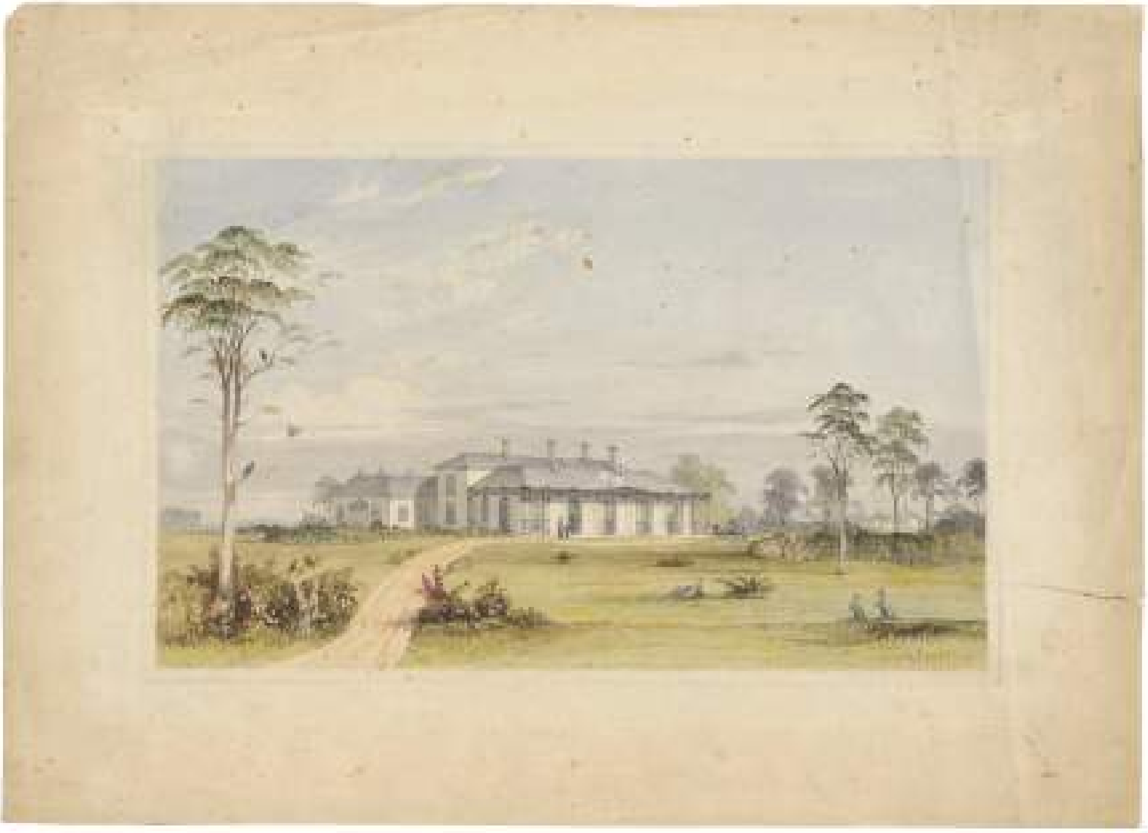
In the 1960s, the Woolnorth property was the last remaining rural holding of the Van Diemen's Land Company (VDL Co.), a joint stock company established and granted a royal charter in 1825, and operating in Tasmania from 1826.[4] While the company continues to operate today, the Woolnorth homestead built on the property in 1969-70 remains the company's last representative architectural enterprise, connected to its post-WWII re-consolidation in Tasmania. Its impetus appears post-colonial insofar as it was connected to the election of the company's first Australian-based governor, the Victorian Western District grazier Alan Ritchie, and the transfer of the company's residency from United Kingdom to Tasmania, specifically to Woolnorth, in 1968. Yet its construction was to serve a continuing colonial enterprise reified in the design of the building. While the VDL Co.'s institutional history is the homestead's history, it has overlooked in architectural accounts.

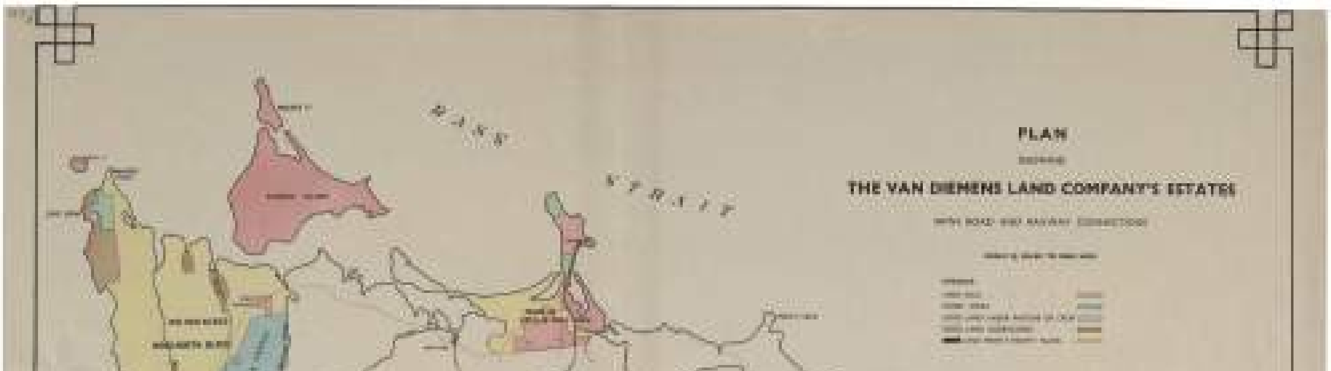
The VDL Co. was spearheaded by a group of British parliamentarians and businessmen who wanted to grow fine wool in Van Diemen's Land to supply British markets, an enterprise made economically feasible, despite the distance, because of the increasing cost of wool from European supplies.[5] It was granted a right to 250,000 acres, to be located along the island's un-colonised northwest coast, home to the Pennemukeer people soon to be violently dispossessed by the company.[6] In 1826, company officials arrived in Tasmania and commenced a survey of the region, ultimately selecting six discontinuous tracts of land, totalling 350,000 acres and allowing for 100,000 acres of unusable land. Chief among the selections were coastal holdings including Cape Grim (Woolnorth), forming the north west tip of the island, and towards the east, Circular Head (around the current-day town of Stanley) and Emu Bay (Burnie). South of Emu Bay were inland parcels named Surrey Hills, Hampshire Hills and Middlesex Plains. All selected for sheep grazing potential.

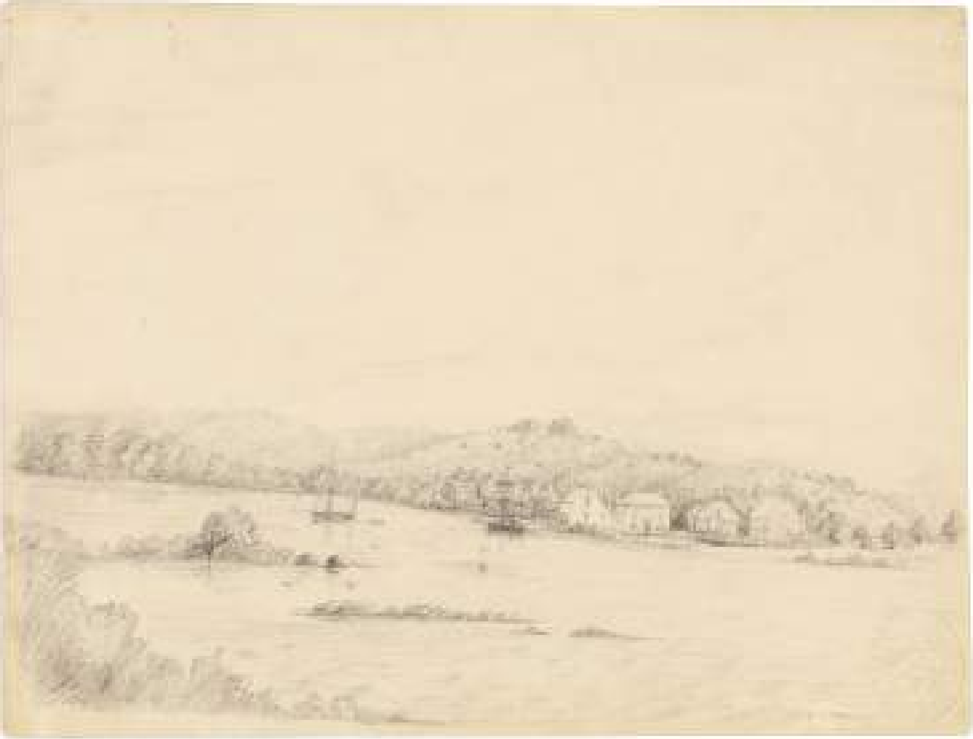
Construction was a priority for the company's operations and economic identity. Upon the recommendation of its manager in Van Diemen's Land, Edward Curr, Circular Head was chosen as the company's "homestead [original emphasis] and principal agricultural establishment" and, in 1827, construction commenced on an eight-room managerial residence in preparation for Curr's arrival.[7] With the exception of that residence, the company's early buildings were infrastructural comprising staff and convict accommodation, stores and jetties on the coast at Circular Head and Emu Bay, and accommodation, stores, sheds, stock yards etc. at Woolnorth, Hampshire Hills and Surrey Hills. By the late 1820s, these locations were interlinked by shipping routes, roads and tracks and from the 1830s a distinct region was coalescing around the company's holdings, transport infrastructure and its homestead.[8]

Although the company's wool production enterprises failed early on, the bloodlines of their imported stock proved profitable and by the mid-1830s they were supplying sheep and cattle, as well as timber, locally and to the establishing colonies across southern Australia including Western Australia, South Australia and, most especially, Port Phillip (Victoria).[9] More widely, the mid-1830s was a period of pastoral success in Van Diemen's Land, as wool prices in England more than doubled, and a time of competitive homestead building, as a first and second generation of homesteads were replaced by self-conscious architectural structures in fashionable Regency styles. Thus, despite the VDL Co.'s mixed successes, Curr sought a new homestead at Circular Head. Henry Hellyer, the company's surveyor and de facto architect, supplied a design and it was constructed employing components, fixtures and fittings shipped from England, broadly reflecting the company's imperial lineage.[10] The new homestead, Highfield, was completed in 1835, located on a rise overlooking the operational settlement and harbour at Circular Head, and oriented to look out over Bass Strait. It presented a highly visible representation of the VDL Co. which was to be further enhanced – extended, by Curr's successor John Gibson, in the early 1840s, to a design by one of the colony's most prominent colonial architects, John Lee Archer.

The Woolnorth property was (and still is) isolated within the region and early building following dispossession was largely infrastructural. An initial attempt to establish a flock of sheep on coastal grasslands in the vicinity of Cape Grim




PLAN
SHOWING
THE VAN DIEMENS LAND COMPANY'S ESTATES
WITH ROAD AND RAILWAY CONNECTIONS
BASS STRAIT
SOUTHERN OCEAN
TASMANIA



in 1827 resulted in violent conflict between the company's shepherds and the Pennemukeer culminating in what is now known as the Cape Grim massacre perpetrated in February 1828, and believed to have been an attempt to exterminate the entire tribe.[11] The company returned in September 1829 and established a settlement on the property's north eastern coast where supplies and produce could be received and despatched; it comprised six cottages, a store, stable and blacksmith's workshop as well as stockyards and a garden.[12] However, by 1832 as operations were expanding, the settlement, and all buildings except the manager's cottage, known as Courtland Hall, and the store, had been relocated inland, more-or-less in the lee of the Cape Grim dunes. The new settlement, Highbury, was protected from the worst of the westerly weather, closer to grazing areas with a secure water supply, and remains the nucleus of the property's farming operations today. (It was also away from the coastal massacre site).

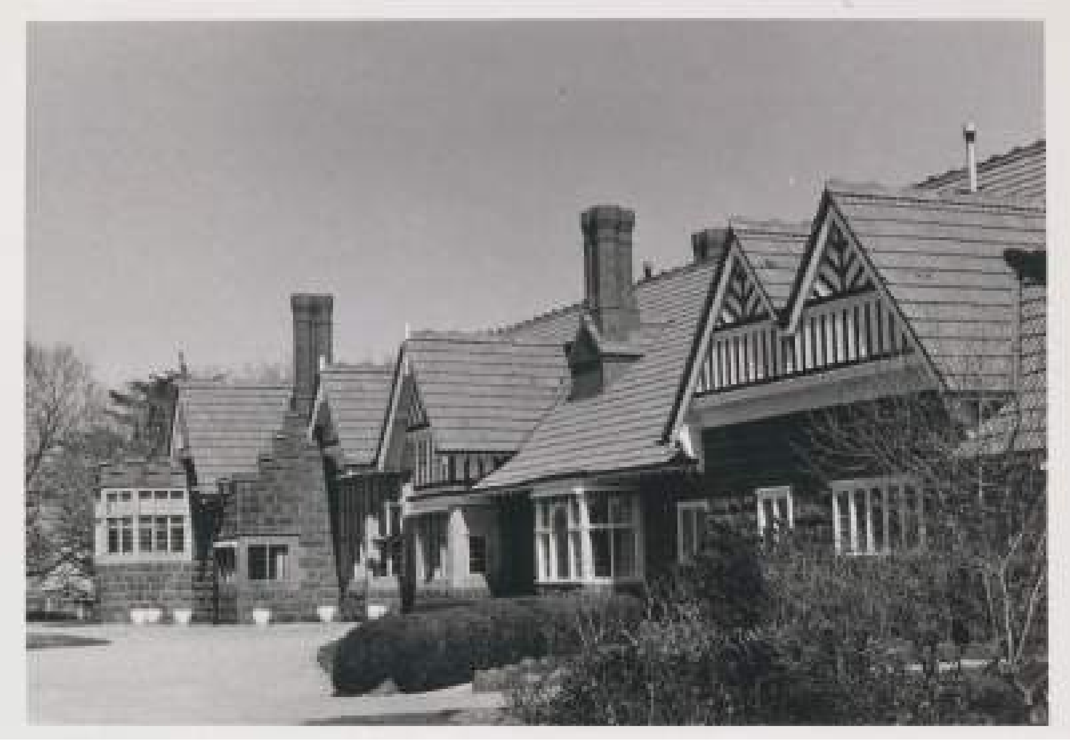
Although operations at Woolnorth showed promise in the mid-1830s, the combined impacts of drought, the loss of the right to assigned convict labour and a regional economic depression combined to precipitate a decade of decline in the VDL Co.'s farming operations. They therefore focussed on attracting tenant farmers. But between 1851 and 1853 the VDL Co. abandoned operations entirely, leasing all its properties, including Woolnorth, and selling all its stock, becoming an absentee landlord. At Circular Head, the company's local headquarters was transferred to its warehouse at Emu Bay and Highfield was let to tenants.

This relinquishment of the homestead, and its symbolic role at the heart of VDL Co.'s enterprises across the region, was emblematic of the shifting and uncertain nature of the company and its activities. While the VDL Co. would eventually re-occupy Woolnorth, it never returned to Highfield. The ideal of a homestead nonetheless lingered in the company's pastoral DNA.

Re-occupation started in the early 1870s, with the introduction of flocks of sheep and cattle in anticipation of new markets, in part connected to the emergence of a mining boom in the region.[13] In the decades that followed the VDL Co. diversified via subsidiaries and divested much of its land including Highfield, sold in 1914. It did, however, retain Woolnorth although reduced in size from an estimated area of 100,000 acres (40,469 ha) to 60,175 acres (24,352 ha).[14]

By 1954, one hundred and thirty years since the VDL Co.'s founding, Woolnorth was its only significant landholding and there was a revived interest in the property. The VDL Co. installed a new manager, Pat Busby, and embarked upon a program of converting scrub and heathland to pasture while improving the property's infrastructure including stockyards, fencing, employee accommodation and services.[15] Modernisation gained pace in the 1960s as Alan Ritchie, a Victorian Western District grazier and VDL shareholder (and personal friend of Pat Busby)[16] took control of the company. In 1962, he was also appointed as a consultant on improving Woolnorth. It was, however, a short lived appointment as it was soon revealed that he was the company's largest single shareholder and hence conflicted.[17] By 1964, he was a director and the following year he was elected it first Australian-based governor (1965-1973) directly overseeing the property's development. Ritchie's trajectory suggests he had strong ambitions for himself, his family and the company. In 1963, his son Blyth was appointed as a manager in charge of farming at Woolnorth and elevated to property manager in 1966.[18] In 1967, Ritchie transferred the company's residence from Britain to Australia to be headquartered at Woolnorth. In 1968, Blyth Ritchie was elected a company director based at Woolnorth.

It was amongst this commercial and dynastic manoeuvring that a new homestead was designed and built at Woolnorth for Blyth and his wife Gail Ritchie and as headquarters of the VDL Co. more than a century since the letting and subsequent sale of Highfield. Initial designs were procured from an unknown architect or, more likely, a draughtsman or builder in mid-1968. Those designs were prosaic but, usefully, they show a working homestead with a separate office and formal entertaining rooms, as well as a pay-room for employees at the rear.[19] However, in mid-1969 the Melbourne-based architect Geoffrey Woodfall was commissioned to produce a new design with



architectural intent, which began construction later the same year. Elevated on a plateau in the property's coastal dunes, protected from the worst of the weather and the violent history of dispossession associated with Cape Grim, the long, low gabled forms of the expansive homestead—likened by Winsome Callister to both a vernacular colonial homestead[20] and a woolshed[21]—looked east across the colonial core of Highbury, the grasslands and Bass Strait. Its design and construction was a symbolic gesture, re-asserting the company's proprietorship employing strategies rehearsed in Highfield, and not to be obscured by vernacular imaginings. Down below, Highbury was being redeveloped with contemporary farming infrastructure and employee housing. So, when the homestead was occupied by Blyth and Gail Ritchie in 1970, Alan Ritchie's annual report noted that "Woolnorth, the only farming land of consequence that the company owns, is now substantially in working order."[22] In 1973 the homestead finally fulfilled its role as company headquarters, with Alan Ritchie's retirement as VDL Company Governor and Blyth Ritchie's appointment as Governor (1973-77). For the first time, as the company approached a centenary and a half on the island, its Governor resided in its homestead.

Family Homesteads

In contrast to other pastoral properties established in the early nineteenth century, which were mostly based on models of familial enterprise, Woolnorth was late in acquiring a homestead as it was owned by a chartered company and managed by employees, never a property owner. In 1968, however, the company's governance and the property's management were connected by family ties—father and son—and the construction of a new homestead followed. In the process, family histories and identities were brought to bear upon the company's architecture.

The Ritchie family also has a colonial pastoral lineage, but in Victoria stretching from the colonisation of the Port Phillip District. It commences when James Ritchie took up a run near Penshurst of 35,000-acres in 1842, which he named Blackwood in recognition of the stands of Blackwood trees on the property.[23] In the years that followed, the success of the run was reflected in three generations of increasingly ambitious and self-conscious homesteads commencing with an initial two-room bluestone dwelling built by James Ritchie sometime after 1842. James' successor, his brother Daniel Ritchie, replaced it with an eight-room homestead, also constructed in bluestone, in 1864. Daniel Ritchie died in Scotland in 1865 and Blackwood was transferred to his son, Robert Blackwood Ritchie, who had been named after the family property. In 1886, Robert Blackwood Ritchie emigrated from Scotland to take possession of the property and, in 1891, commissioned the prominent Melbourne architects, Butler & Ussher to design a vast new homestead built in 1892.[24]

This third homestead was a large single-storey mansion ordered under a long gable roof, with a multitude of projecting bays with half-timbered gables drawing upon the elements and details of England's historic rural houses that inspired Arts and Crafts architects of the period. These roofs jostle above a heavy base of local basalt which erupts in occasional castellated turrets and connects the building, materially, to the property's earlier (and extant) homesteads and the landscape of volcanic plains more generally.[25] Three generations beyond the early colonial era of the once-fashionable Regency-styled Highfield in Van Diemen's Land, the romantic additive architecture at Blackwood in Victoria employs the Picturesque narrativising proprietorial and familial lineages in situ.[26]

As seen in the Ritchie family, these pastoral properties and homes impressed their histories and identities upon subsequent generations. Following the death of his wife, Lillian (née Ross) in 1897, Robert Blackwood Ritchie took his two sons, Robin and Alan, to Scotland to be raised by his mother. He then returned to Australia to spend another decade at Blackwood, representing the district in the Victorian Legislative Assembly from 1903 to 1907. He records that they were lonely years and he subsequently returned to his family in Scotland managing the property as an absentee landlord with the assistance of an overseer, Edward Copland, until selling it in 1916.[27] In 1919, he visited the Western District with his son, Alan, who mused in his diary about following his father's footsteps and a career in Australian politics while living at Blackwood.[28] Indeed,

Opposite
Woolnorth Establishment, Van Diemen's land, ca. 1830. Drawing by J. H. H.,Tasmanian Archives and Heritage Office, PH 30/1/632.

Above
Blackwood homestead, Penhurst, Victoria (built 1892), ca. 1968. Photograph by John T. Collins. State Library of Victoria, H98.250/1623.

Alan Ritchie did return to Australia in 1924 and, in 1927, repurchased Blackwood and restored the property, gaining a reputation as an innovative and influential pastoralist. He also restored the homestead as a family home for himself, his wife, Margaret (née Witcomb) and their four children, Robin, Blyth, Judy and Linton.[29]

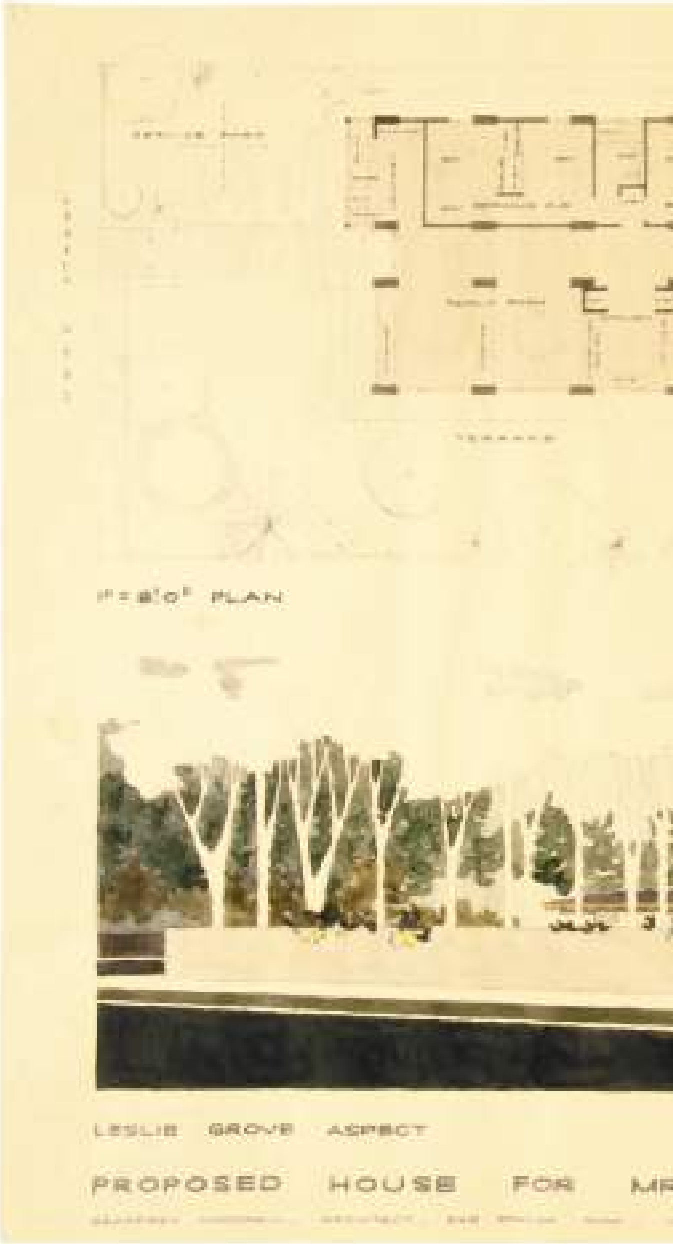
The timing of Alan Richie's interest and involvement in the VDL Co. then corresponds to generational change at Blackwood. In the mid-1960s, Alan and Margaret Ritchie's eldest son, Robin, married and he assumed custodianship of the property and residence in the homestead. Judy Ritchie married Peter Rymill and in 1968 the couple commissioned Geoffrey Woodfall to design them a new homestead – Old Penola – on the Rymill family property near Penola in South Australia. As already discussed, at this time, Robin and Judy's brother Blyth Ritchie was a VDL Co. director and manager at Woolnorth and was commissioning a homestead on behalf of the company. As the design for Old Penola was finalised in 1969, Blyth Ritchie abandoned the initial designs that had been prepared for Woolnorth and likewise commissioned Geoffrey Woodfall.

While a company history connects Highfield and Woolnorth; Blackwood, Old Penola and Woolnorth are connected by a family bloodline. Woodfall's archive reveals this intersection of familial and architectural genealogies that were to represent the VDL Co. at Woolnorth.

Geoffrey Woodfall's Homesteads
Geoffrey Woodfall's architecture of the 1950s and 1960s shows the influence of Frank Lloyd Wright and craft-based aesthetics being adapted to Australian suburban settings, via responses to local landscapes, conventional building materials and methods. The interest in Wright positions Woodfall among other Australian architects at the time including Peter Muller and Bruce Rickard in Sydney, and, in Melbourne, the firm Chancellor & Patrick—whose work he admired— and among peers and friends including Alan Hough, Charles Duncan and John Rouse all operating in a romantic regionalist mode.[30]

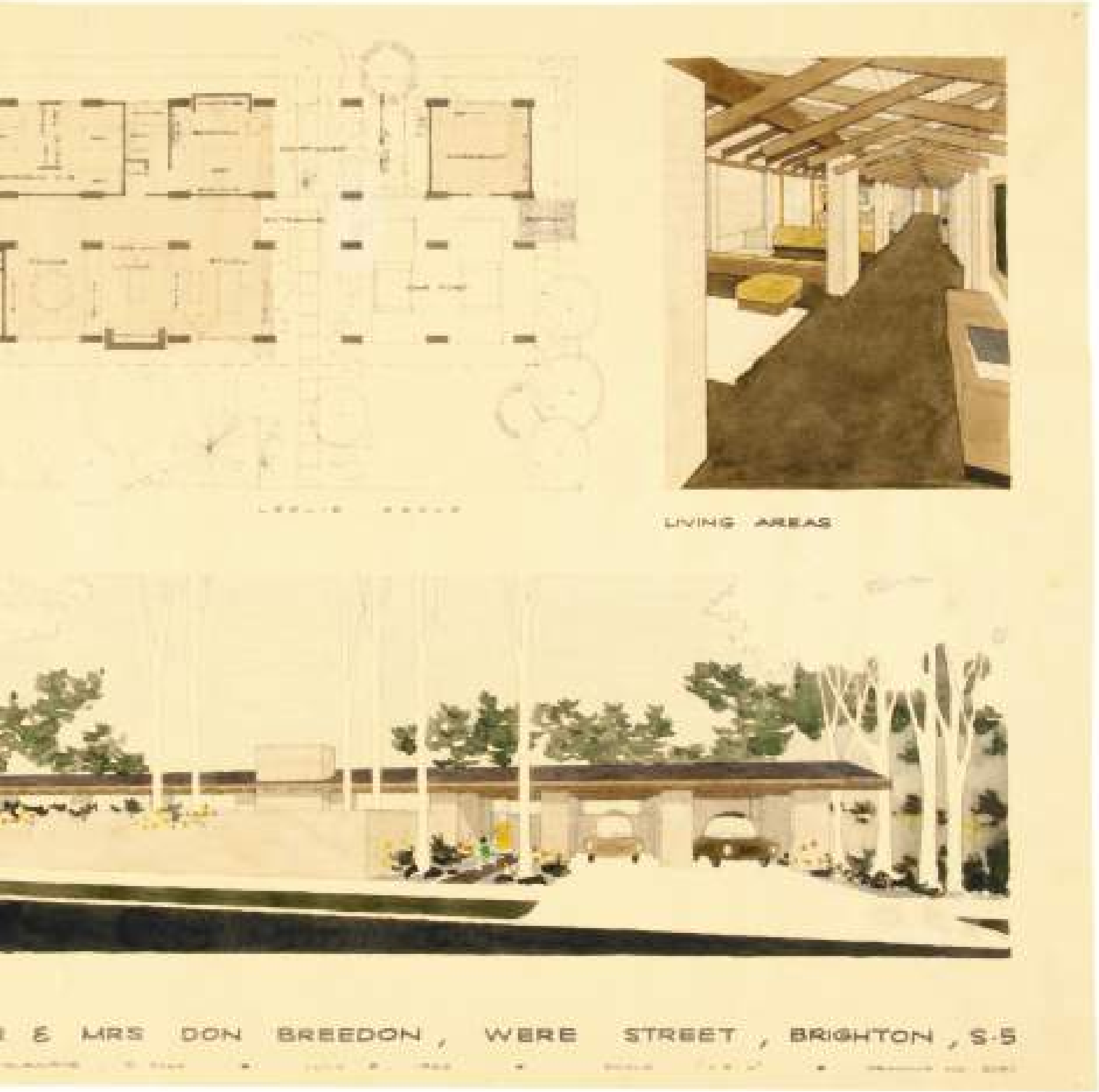
Woodfall's material-based regionalism was also inspired by the discourse and architects that he encountered during his training. He had commenced studies in architecture at Melbourne Technical College (now RMIT University) in 1948 and completed them at the University of Melbourne, graduating in 1956. As a student he was influenced by Robin Boyd's recently published *Victorian Modern* (1947) and Boyd's call for a locally attuned modern architecture. Woodfall pursued that call at the University of Melbourne, undertaking an investigative report on the Australian Arts and Crafts architect, Harold Desbrowe-Annear.[31]

Boyd had described Desbrowe-Annear's experimentation with Arts and Crafts formulae in the 1900s and 1910s as "hot on the track of a thoroughly organic Australian architecture." [32] Publishing an article based on his report, in *Architecture in Australia* in 1967, Woodfall characterised Desbrowe Annear as "first and foremost a nationalist," while revealing a keen interest in the pervasive craftmanship of Desbrowe-Annear's buildings.[33] Woodfall aspired to pursue those ideas.[34]



Opposite
Geoffrey Woodfall, architect, Diazotype of 'Proposed House for Mr. & Mrs. Don Breedon, Brighton Victoria (designed 1966). Drawing by Geoffrey Woodfall. RMIT Design Archives, Geoffrey Woodfall Collection.

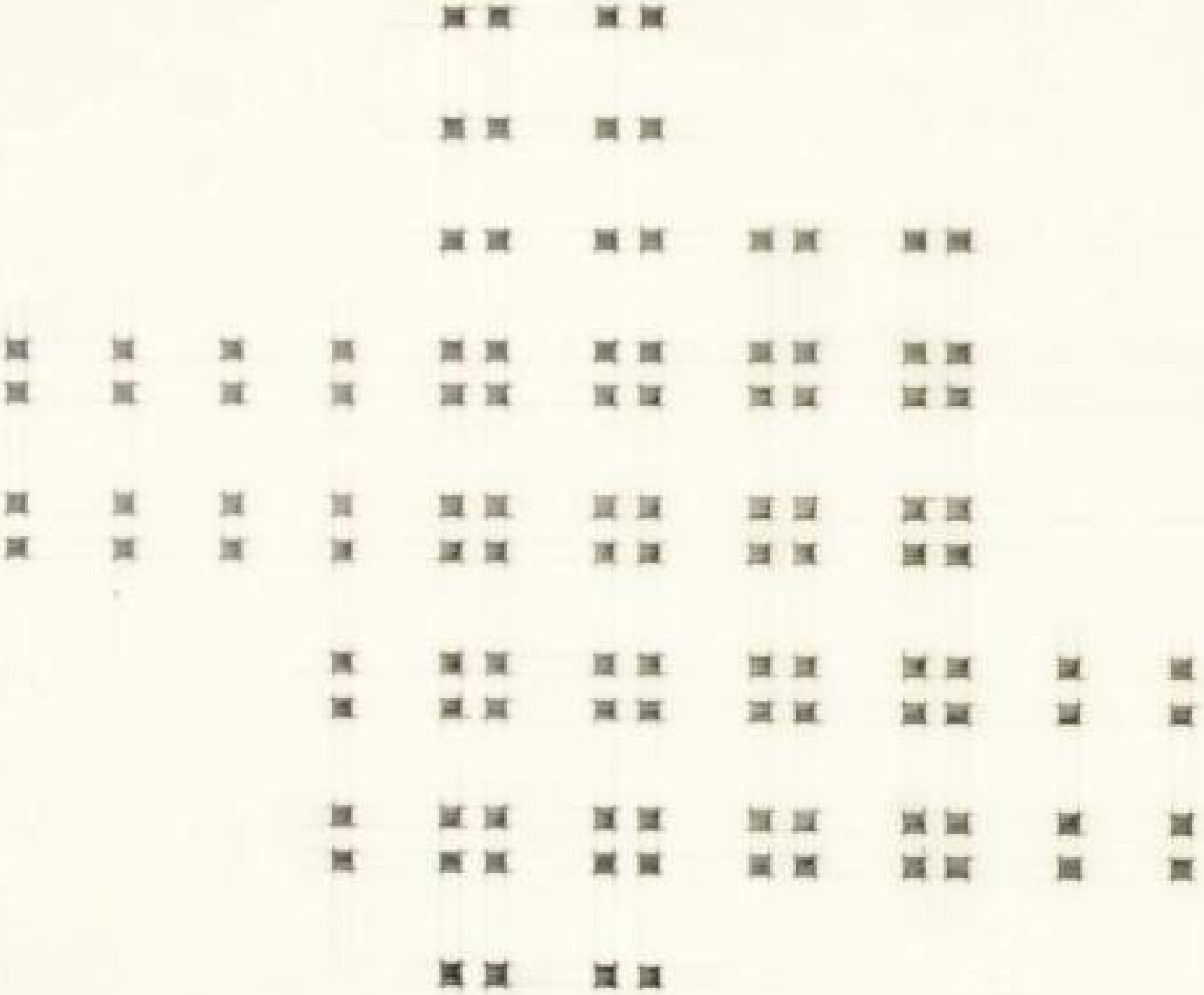
Upon graduating he practised in two brief partnerships before embarking on a career as a sole practitioner in 1962, primarily in residential work. His early designs, such as the Hellier House in Beaumaris (1958), were inspired by Wright's Usonian houses, built in brick and timber with free plan living spaces that opened onto private terraces and gardens, all sheltered by low-pitched roofs and pergolas. Woodfall's interest in rationalisation is seen in a brief foray into project homes for CHI (1966), which the journal *Cross-section* characterised as exercises in a "diluted Usonian style."[35] What distinguishes Woodfall's practice in the mid-1960s, however, is the increasing rationalisation of space, structure and construction – still in brick and timber – connected to a structural-functional idiom prevailing in Melbourne architecture in the postwar years.[36]



This evolved in parallel with a romantic referencing of Australia's vernacular building cultures rooted in rural and colonial traditions seen more widely in the mid-1960s, echoing the explicit use of hipped, verandahed homestead forms in Ian McKay and Philip Cox's rural colleges at Leppington (1963) and Tocal (1964), and in the simple constructional details of the brick and timber houses employed by architects such as Ken Woolley and Peter Johnson.

The overlay of romantic references to the historical and local surfaces in Woodfall's work in 1966. The key device is an expressive timber-framed gable section developed to include served and servant bays, reminiscent of the section through an archetypal Australian rural homestead sheltered by verandahs, which Woodfall understood as a pathway to the expression of Australian identity in architecture.[37] Winsome Callister has noted this occurring in a house for Mrs Murray Maxwell in Hopetoun Rd, Toorak (1966),[38] to then be resolved in the construction of the Breedon house, Brighton (1966). The section of the Breedon house comprised two low-pitched gables set in parallel and interlocked to create a central circulation spine the length of the building. The architecture was refined as a rational system of brick piers aligned to the length of the structure, and systematically infilled with timber wall and window panels. Overhead the two timber roof structures are exposed, interlocking along the spine of the building and bringing a romantic constructional complexity to the architecture. Voids within the structural-spatial grid integrate the building with the landscape of its suburban block.

Overleaf
Geoffrey Woodfall, architect, Revisions to Preliminary Design of Old Penola Estate, 1969, RMIT Design Archives, Geoffrey Woodfall Collection.



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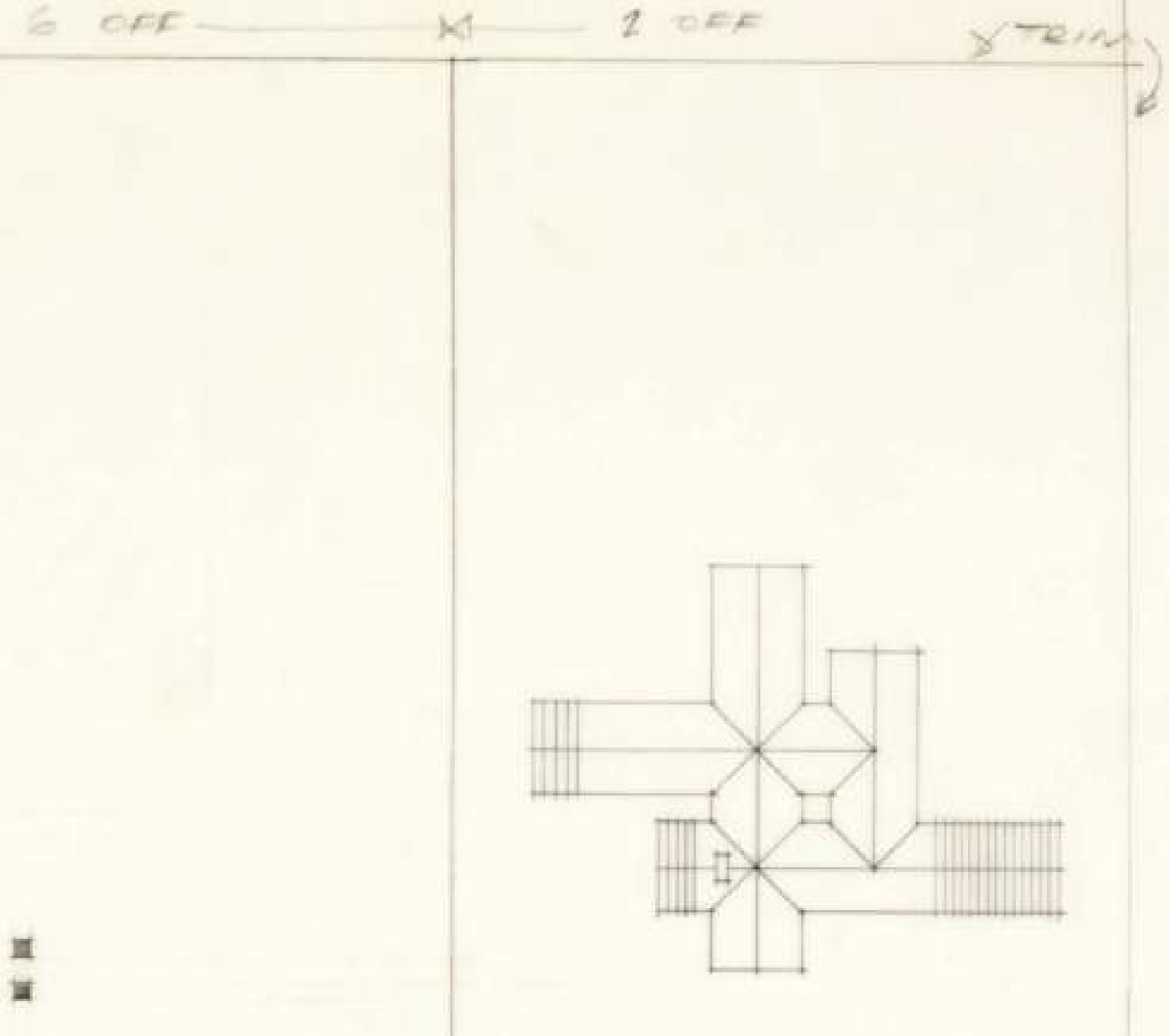
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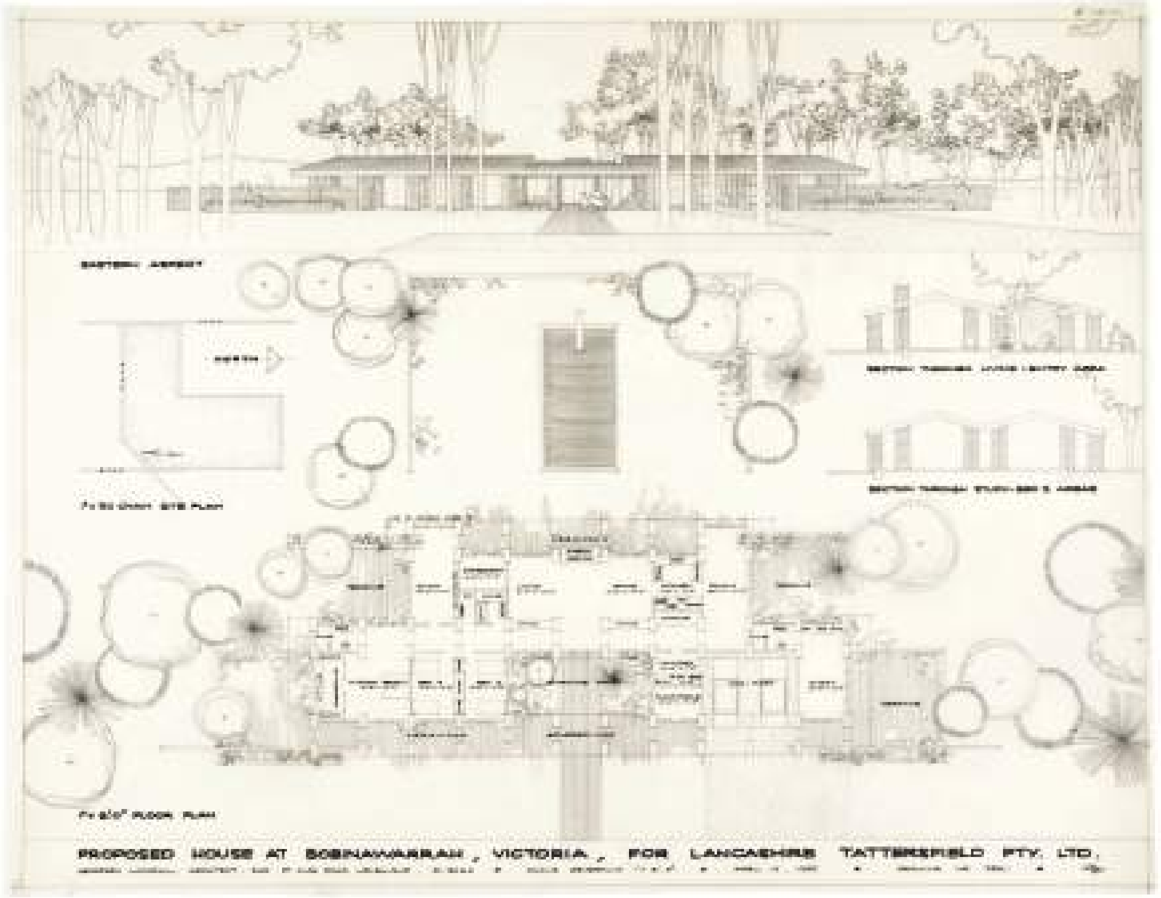

EASTERN ASPECT
NORTH
1/8" FLOOR PLAN
PROPOSED HOUSE AT BOBINAWARRAH, VICTORIA, FOR LANCASHIRE TATTERSFIELD PTY. LTD.

Opposite
Geoffrey Woodfall, architect, Working drawings for New Homestead, Old Penola, Estate, South Australia (January 1969). RMIT Design Archives, Geoffrey Woodfall Collection.

Above
Geoffrey Woodfall, architect, Lancashire Tattersfield house near Wangaratta, Victoria (designed 1967), RMIT Design Archives, Geoffrey Woodfall Collection.

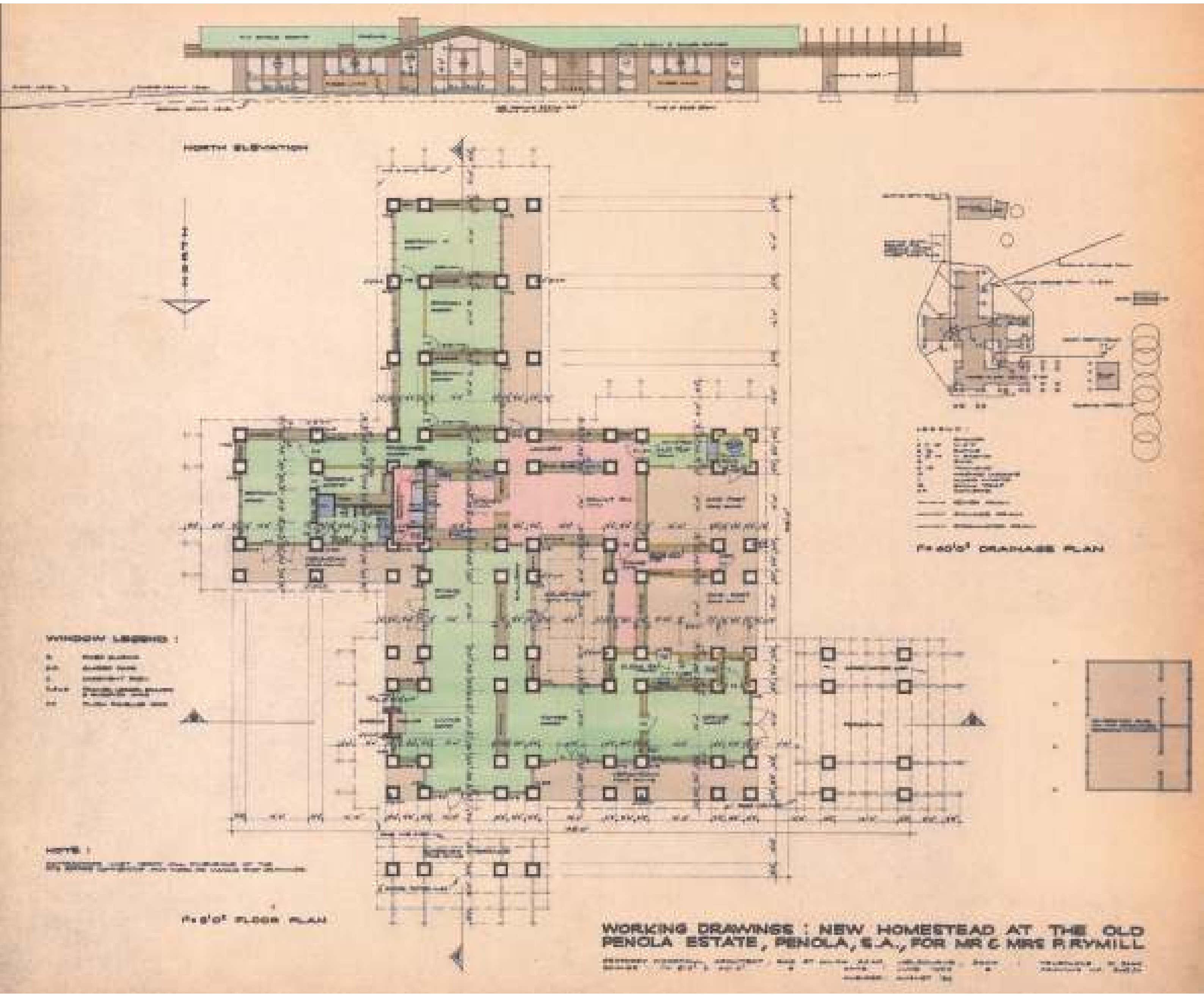
Left
Geoffrey Woodfall, architect, Lancashire-Tattersfield house, near Wangaratta, Victoria (designed 1967). Photographs by Geoffrey Woodfall 1970. RMIT Design Archives, Geoffrey Woodfall Collection.

In 1967, Woodfall adapted the forms and elements of the Breedon house to a rural situation in the design of the Lancashire-Tattersfield house, near Wangaratta, providing a precursor to Old Penola and Woolnorth in 1969.[39] Two critical manoeuvres are performed in the Lancashire-Tattersfield house related to an understanding of the homestead in context. Firstly, the diagram of the two gabled sections employed in the Breedon house was elaborated – each gable section was given outer 'verandahs'. They again interlocked to create a central circulation spine while outer bays performed literally as verandahs to shade the building. Secondly, the piers were aligned to the span of the gables and increased in size, both their width and breadth, giving the building mass and presence. The overall visual effect was a simplified structure appearing only as brick piers with a long shallow roof over, all revealed by shadow in the bright light of its open landscape.

When Judy (nee Ritchie) and Peter Rymill sought an architect for their South Australian homestead, in late 1968, they invited expressions of interest from multiple architects including Woodfall, whom they knew of via reportage on his design for the Australian High Commission in Wellington, NZ.[40] Front of mind for the Rymills was an architect who could deliver a structural and aesthetic solution for their proposed 400 square (c.370m^2) homestead.[41] Woodfall responded by highlighting the attributes of his Breedon and Lancashire-Tattersfield houses, notably their shared use of modular planning and construction applied in suburban and rural settings, respectively, emphasising the applicability of his approach to Penola:

> It is my firm conviction that modular planning, prefabrication and interchangeability of components must replace the prevailing traditional domestic building practice. The advantages of the new idiom in the country are even greater because of the general lack of skilled labour to execute sophisticated building techniques in these areas.[42]

Woodfall's correspondence also communicated his romantic interest in landscape, describing how his design "wed" the Lancashire-Tattersfield house with its open landscape via terraces, pergolas, wing walls, and planter boxes all extending out into it. He secured the Rymill


NORTH ELEVATION
WINDOW LEGEND :
NOTE :
F=8'0" FLOOR PLAN
F=40'0" DRAINAGE PLAN
WORKING DRAWINGS : NEW HOMESTEAD AT THE OLD PENOLA ESTATE, PENOLA, S.A., FOR MR & MRS P. RYMILL

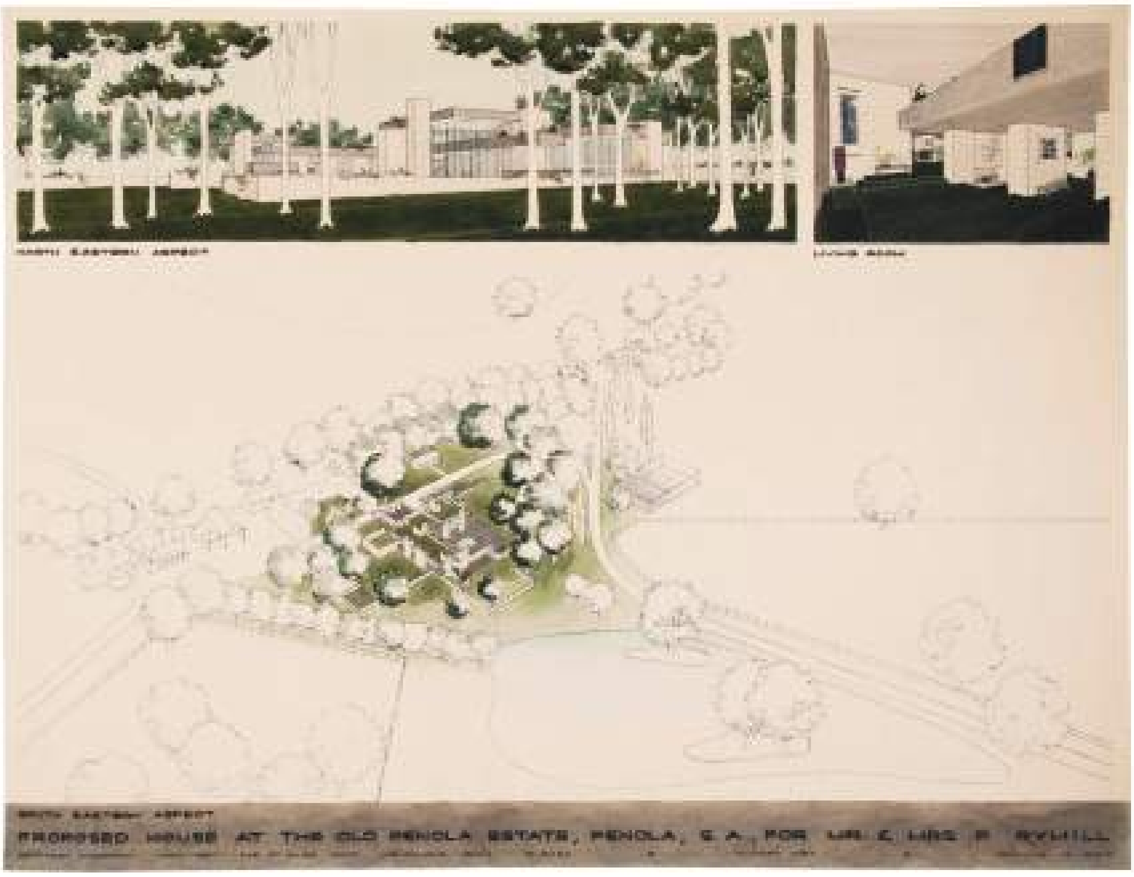
commission and quickly established a strong rapport with the Rymills. As part of his practise, Woodfall requested separate written briefs from both Peter and Judy Rymill and those provided were comprehensive. The extent of conversation between Woodfall and the Rymills prior to the writing of the briefs is unclear, however, Peter Rymill had clearly absorbed the design of the Lancashire-Tattersfield house, which he interpreted as a reductive re-iteration of a rural Australian homestead and a pathway to a modern Australian architectural identity, writing:

> we must develop a new form of modern Australian architecture. My thoughts are, that there are two starting points: a) long, and low and solid, to fit in with the country, and b) that the verandah posts are possibly the most typical feature of Australian country architecture; therefore could these be modified and developed into stone or brick pillars, or pillars which form the wall between the windows?[43]

Peter Rymill also expressed a romantic aesthetic sensibility informed by the Picturesque, seeking an emotive architectural response to landscape and identity:

> I am looking for an original approach to the problem, not necessarily a modification of something conventional. It can be as 'mod' as you like (but not 'mod' for its own sake), as long as the proportions are always in harmony, and it is a pleasure to look at. I want to look at the house and have the same feeling as I do for a painting that gives me pleasure. But, above all, it must enjoy being a part of its environment. I have grown up here, and therefore love this rather undramatic countryside, and I want the house to give me the same feeling, and if it were possible, to feel the same way itself.[44]

Yet for Woodfall, localised forms in the landscape were not necessarily a fait accompli and Wright remained his primary point of departure. Woodfall sought to inspire the Rymills in the work of his architectural idol, sending them books on Wright, including *Frank Lloyd Wright: An Autobiography* (1932) and *Frank Lloyd Wright: Writings and Buildings* (1960) among booklets from a collection of Wright ephemera.[45] This material came from Woodfall's personal library on Wright, amounting to 66 books plus a box of Wright ephemera collected over the course of his career.[46]


NORTH EASTERN ASPECT
LIVING ROOM
SOUTH EASTERN ASPECT
PROPOSED HOUSE AT THE OLD PENOLA ESTATE, PENOLA, S.A. FOR MR & MRS P RYMILL

Above
Geoffrey Woodfall, architect, Proposed House for Old Penola Estate, 1969, RMIT Design Archives, Geoffrey Woodfall Collection.

Opposite
Top
Geoffrey Woodfall, architect, Plan for Woolnorth, Tasmania (September–October 1969). RMIT Design Archives, Geoffrey Woodfall Collection.

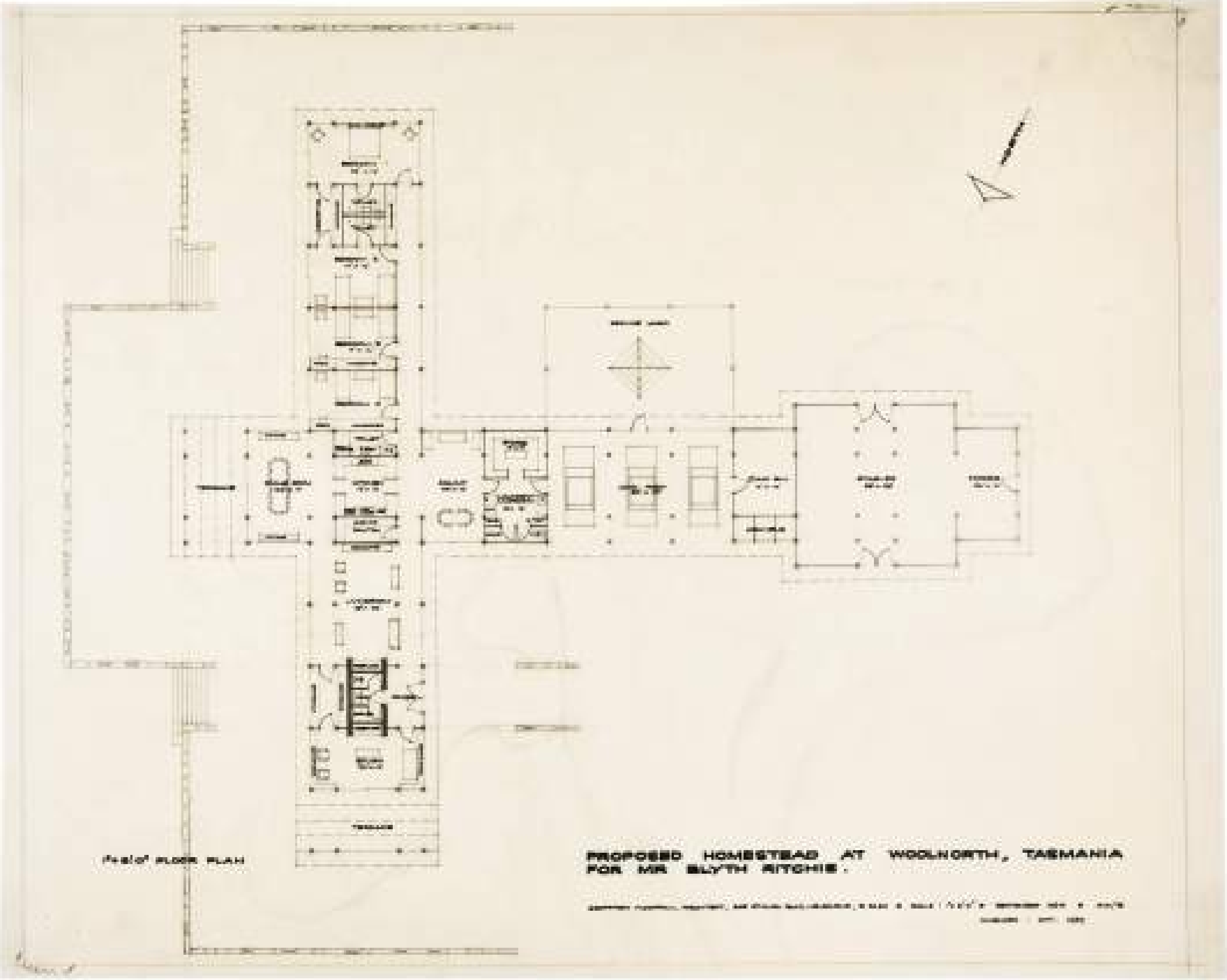
Bottom
Geoffrey Woodfall, Architect, Design for Proposed Homestead, Woolnorth, Tasmania (August 1969). RMIT Design Archives, Geoffrey Woodfall Collection.

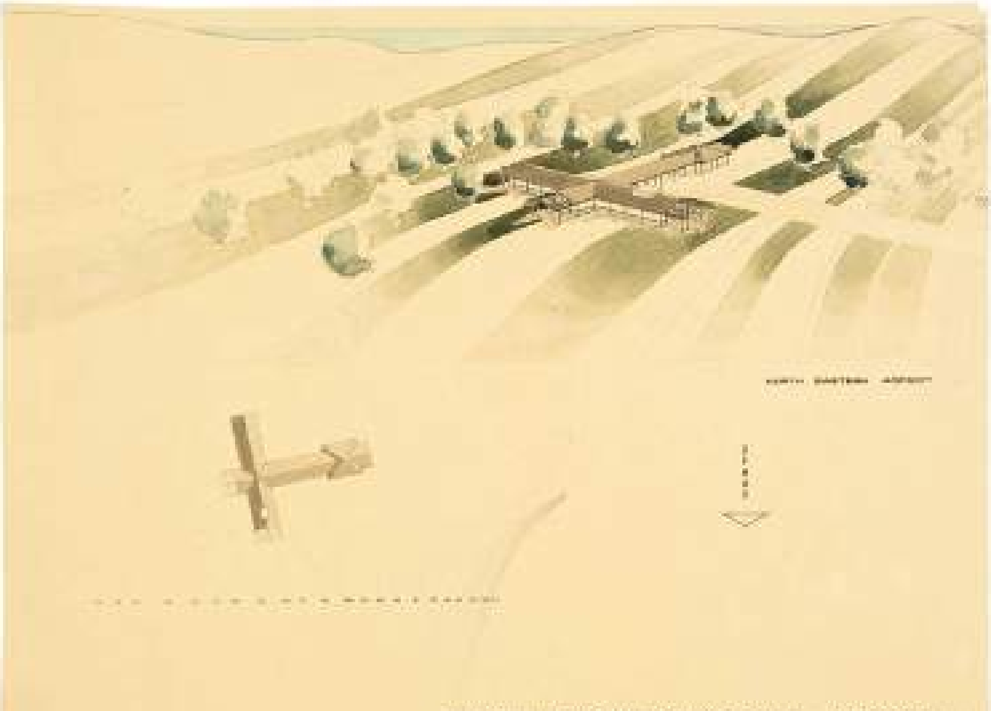
The first design for the Rymills that followed (presented on 3 February 1969) was entirely Wright-inspired without any of the afore-mentioned architectural references to the local.[47] Indeed, it was his boldest interpretation of Wright's legacy, its planning inspired by Taliesin East (1911) with cantilevered concrete forms and walls of glass echoing Fallingwater, Pennsylvania (1935).

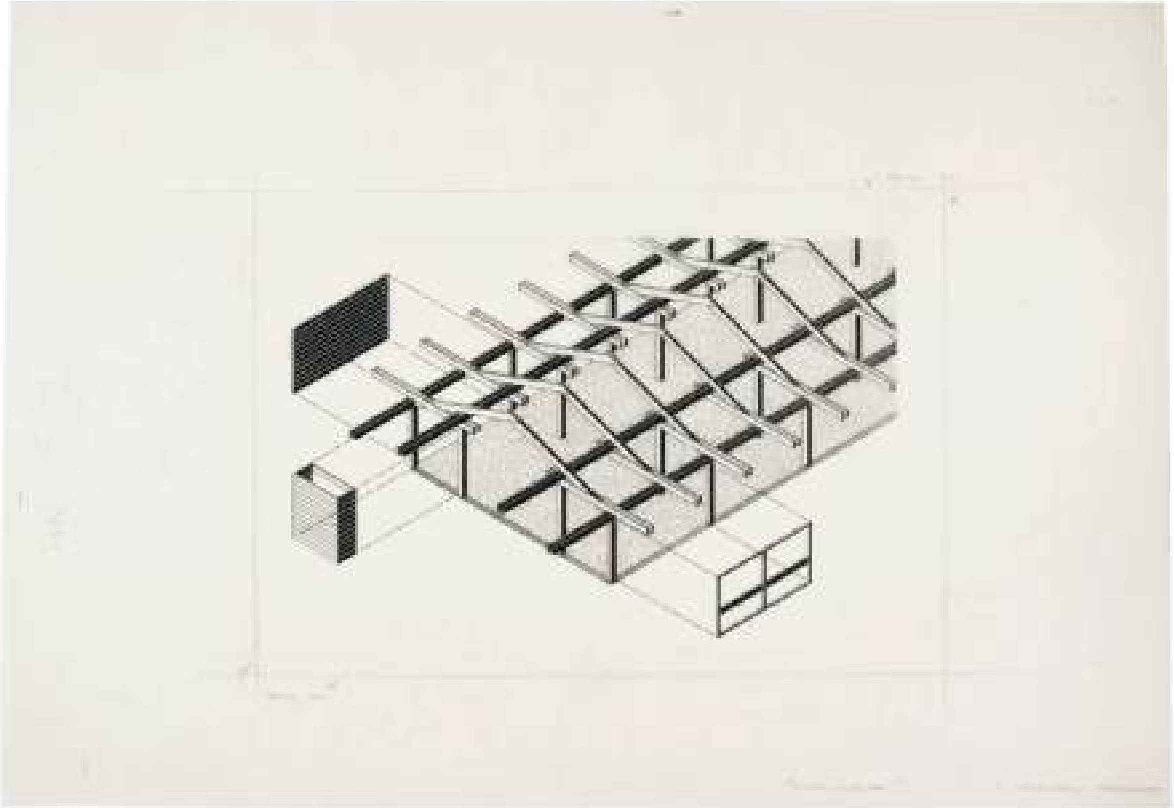
Old Penola was a familial property and the site for the new homestead is an established and landscaped home precinct, and for the Rymills, the building's fit with the setting was paramount. Peter Rymill recalls that its bold concrete forms (intended to be bushfire-resistant) were incompatible with the site's gentle landscape, and the design was rejected.[48] Notes from their meeting reveal that the planning of Taliesin East appealed but the Rymills related more strongly to the familiar forms of Wright's Prairie style houses. In the days that followed Woodfall reconfigured his plan into four functionally-zoned wings that pinwheeled around a central living space in a sketch that resembles the cruciform arrangement of Wright's Wingspread (a.k.a Herbert J. Johnson) House (1937).[49] At this point a more integral relationship with the landscape was sought and Woodfall offset the four functionally-zoned wings to pinwheel around a central open courtyard. With a parti established, Woodfall modularised the planning and conceptualised it as a tartan grid of square piers defining served and servant spaces, extending out into the park-like setting. The dynamic nature of the Old Penola grid recalls the spatial arrangement and use of large square piers in Wright's Martin House (1904) even more than the linearly arranged piers in the Breedon and Lancashire-Tattersfield houses. With reference to Woodfall's own work, the grid at Old Penola was rationalised and romanticised following the trajectory articulated by Peter Rymill. The sequence of sketches show the architecture conceived as pure gird to comprise over-scaled structural piers built of locally-quarried limestone, connecting to the region's geology similar to the Picturesque use of basalt at Blackwood in 1892. It was then rigorously infilled with lightweight wall and window panels, externally, and joinery, internally, while low-pitched gabled roofs over-sailed it. The archive clarifies the pervasiveness of Woodfall's interest in Wright but, equally, the identity and agency of the Rymills in the process of abstracting antecedents.

While Woodfall revised the design of Old Penola, the Rymills were visiting Judy's brother Blyth Ritchie in Tasmania. In general, family connections between Tasmania, Victoria and South Australia were strong and Blyth Ritchie would have been aware of the progress with Rymills' homestead plans and his interest no doubt piqued by his own undertakings. As already discussed, at this time, plans were likewise afoot for a VDL Co. homestead and headquarters, and prosaic designs – without architectural intent – had been procured from an unnamed architect or, more likely, a draughtsman or builder.[50] The contrast to Woodfall's design for Old Penola would have been stark and, in May 1969, Woodfall wrote to the Rymills letting them know that Judy's brother had been in contact about a homestead for Woolnorth.[51] As soon as the working drawings for Old Penola homestead was complete, Woodfall designed Woolnorth.

Woodfall's archive is without the job files and correspondence for Woolnorth, which is a surprising omission given his otherwise meticulous record-keeping. It is thus difficult to interpret Blyth Ritchie's agency in the design process. However, the sequence of drawings suggests a linear progression from concept design to building, employing Old Penola as one of its models. Indeed, there is a sense that the two homesteads were conceived and designed as a complementary pair, responding to the properties' contrasting settings and histories. Firstly, the preliminary designs for Woolnorth—held in Woodfall's archive—were discarded and the brief was increased by approximately thirty percent, matching the scale and square meterage of Old Penola.


FLOOR PLAN
PROPOSED HOMESTEAD AT WOOLNORTH, TASMANIA
FOR MR BLYTH RITCHIE.


NORTH EASTERN ASPECT
PROPOSED HOMESTEAD AT WOOLNORTH, TASMANIA,
FOR MR BLYTH RITCHIE
SITE PLAN



Above
Geoffrey Woodfall, architect, Constructional System for Woolnorth. Drawing by Geoffrey Woodfall. RMIT Design Archives, Geoffrey Woodfall Collection.

Opposite
Top
Dining Room, Woolnorth ca. 1970. Photograph by Geoffrey Woodfall. RMIT Design Archives, Geoffrey Woodfall Collection.

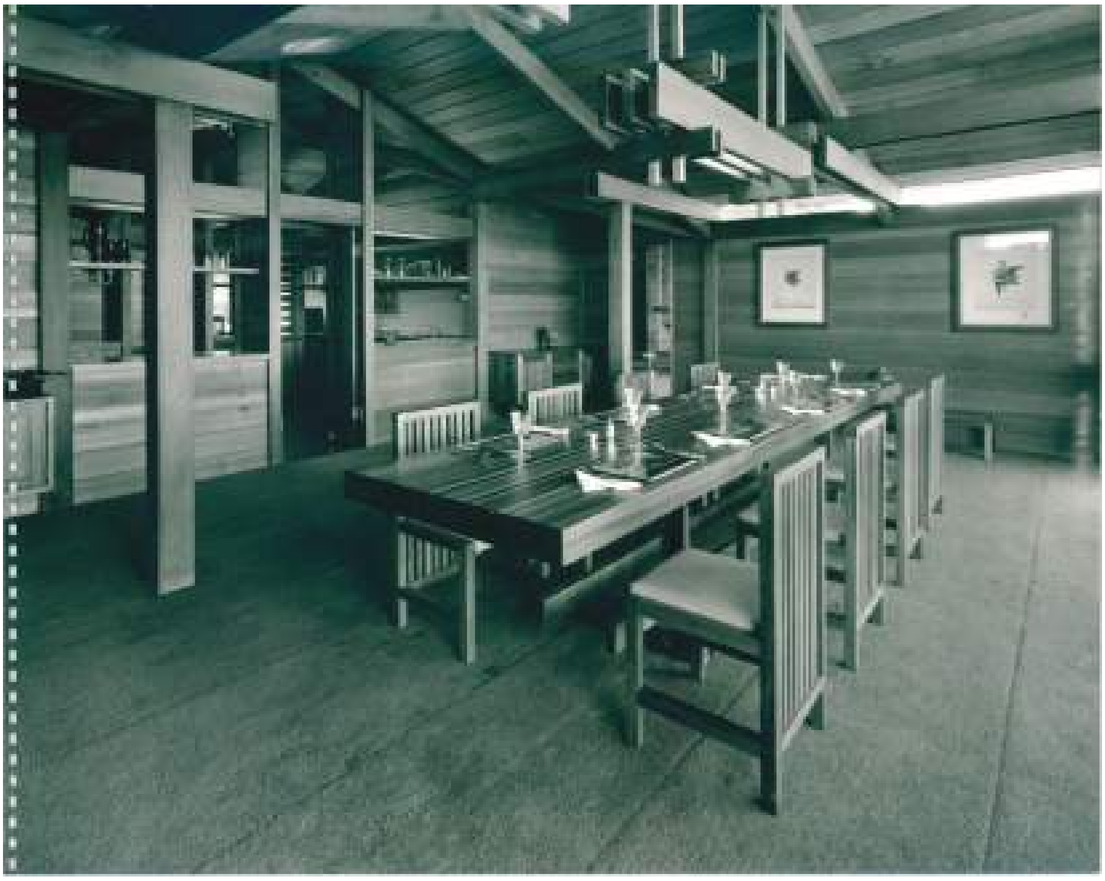
Bottom
Dining Room, Old Penola Estate, ca. 1970. Photograph by Geoffrey Woodfall. RMIT Design Archives, Geoffrey Woodfall Collection.

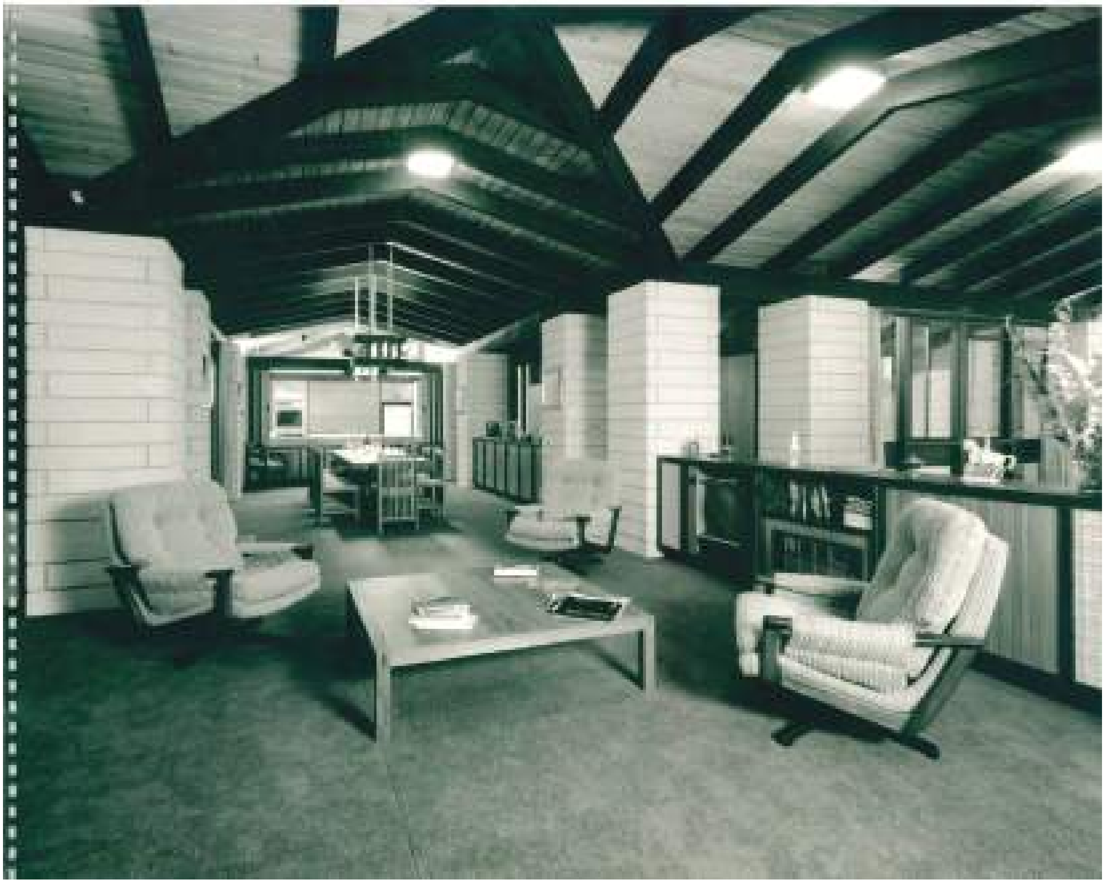
Without the history of a homestead at Woolnorth, which would otherwise have been co-located with the colonial station buildings that comprised Highbury, a site was selected high in the sand dunes on Woolnorth's western coast. As already discussed, it commanded Highbury with sweeping easterly views across the property assuming a proprietorial stance in the landscape and ensuring the homestead's prominence upon entering the property. Indeed, with reference to its site and status the homestead is now colloquially known at the Top House.[52] Woodfall configured the (now) 400m2 building in a cruciform plan extending it out into the windswept landscape via a diagram similar to that used to re-iterate Old Penola. The result was a functionally zoned Latin cross aligned with the westerly winds and the shaping of the dunes, rendered for presentation with an inescapable allusion to an aeroplane and, indeed, Blyth Ritchie's identity as a keen pilot. A dining-cum-boardroom is located at the head of the cross claiming the prospect.

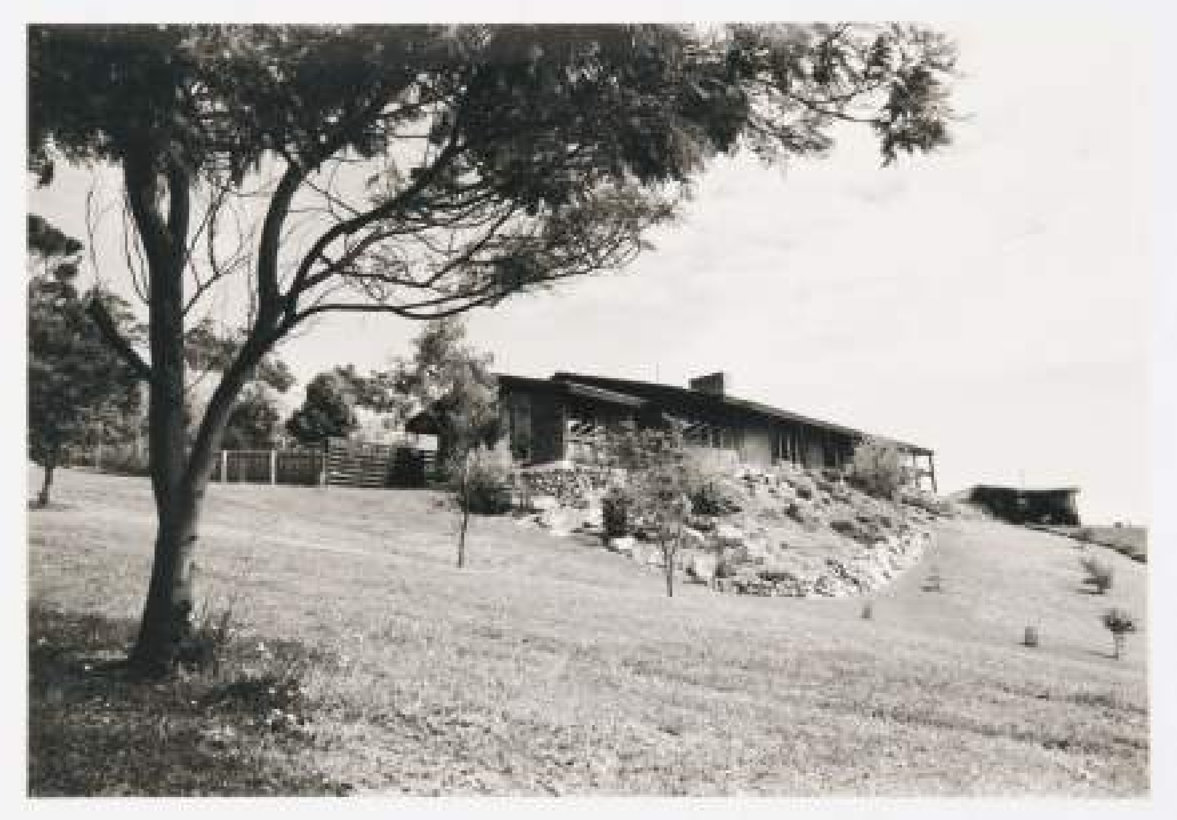
As with Old Penola, the design of Woolnorth was mediated by American antecedents. Woodfall's intertwined interests in Frank Lloyd Wright and the Arts and Crafts, via Harold Desbrowe-Annear in Australia, as a pathway to a regionalist mode of practice, echoed the trajectory of one of Wright's Californian acolytes, Harwell Hamilton Harris. Trained by Richard Neutra and inspired by Californian Arts and Crafts architects Charles and Henry Greene and Bernard Maybeck, Harris's practice provided a model for Woodfall.[53] His work was featured in multiple MoMA exhibitions and surveys including MoMA's catalogue *Built in the USA: Post-war American Architecture* (1952) and popularised in architecture and design journals. And Harwell's designs that exploited the expressive potentials of modularised timber constructional systems with low-pitched gables, such as the Wyle House in California (1948), Johnson House also in California (1951), and the Pacesetter House in Texas (1954), can be seen in the expressed roof construction at Old Penola and fully realised in Woolnorth.

The design was developed based on modularised planning and constructional components explored by Woodfall across his project homes, suburban homes and rural homesteads, and, at Woolnorth, required by distance and difficulties in physically accessing the remote site.[54] A shallow gabled structural section incorporates served and outer (verandah) servant bays, followed the iterations in the Breedon house and Lancashire-Tattersfield and Rymill homesteads, with its allusion to an Australian vernacular. Whereas his prior homesteads established their presence in the landscape by an exaggeration of their masonry grids, which supports their modulated timber roof structures, at Woolnorth, the entire structural and constructional system is timber, primarily imported Western Red Cedar. Spatial definition then relies upon an elaboration and expression of the timber constructional system, as seen in Harris's work. Beams are paired, overlapped and notched into posts. Outriggers extend outside to become pergolas. All joints are exposed without any visible metal fixings giving the architecture a strong craft-based aesthetic. The envelope was conceived as infill timber panels and all walls linings, externally and internally, are boarded. In a nod to Colonial and Arts and Crafts prototypes, even the roof was designed and specified to be timber shingles.[55]

Woodfall's recognition of the Arts and Crafts movement as a means of expression identity in architecture, if not







Above
Stubbs Residence,
Burnie, Tasmania, 1979.
Photograph by
Geoffrey Woodfall.
RMIT Design Archives.

Opposite
Stubbs Residence,
Burnie, Tasmania, 1975.
Photograph by
Geoffrey Woodfall.
RMIT Design Archives

the Ritchies' lived experiences of Blackwood's Arts and Crafts interiors, saw the design of fittings and furnishings, using Tasmanian Blackwood cut from stands at Woolnorth establishing a material connection to place – an attribute shared by the Ritchie and Rymill homesteads. Chief among them was a Wright-inspired dining-cum-boardroom suite including a table, chairs and side boards with a Blackwood light fitting over. A matching suite of furniture was also made from the property's Blackwood and shipped across Bass Strait to Old Penola, reifying familial connections between Woolnorth in Tasmania, Old Penola in South Australia and (by material association) Blackwood in Victoria.

Woolnorth and the Region

Networks and identities intersected in the design and construction of the VDL Co. homestead at Woolnorth. Yet it is an outlier in Tasmanian architecture and architectural history, geographically and professionally. It features in a survey of residential architecture in the state, and across Australia's states, published in *Australian Architecture* (June 1973) and was distinguished by its extreme site and scale. It does not, however, appear in a Royal Australian Institute of Architect's survey of the state's twentieth-century buildings for nomination to the Register of the National Estate, undertaken in 1994 and including nominations built later than Woolnorth. More notably, Woolnorth does not gain a mention in *Architecture from the Edge: The 20th Century in Tasmania* (2002) – a curious omission for a title about architecture at the periphery. That volume, the only sustained account of Tasmania's twentieth-century architecture, is openly oriented to the development of an architecture culturally specific to the island state and its focus is on Tasmanian-based practitioners and the Tasmanian ex-pats. So, Wrightian and Californian influences, via Richard Neutra, are represented by small houses by the Hobart architect Ray Heffernen designed in the late 1950s and, later, Bob Nation's Latrobe Council Chambers (1970) designed while working for Albert Freak in Devonport. More localised regionalist associations overlook Woolnorth for mid-1960s and early-1970s houses by Bevan Rees and Peter Giblin in suburban Hobart.[56] Those buildings are of their time and the profession in Tasmania. Yet, architecturally, the Woolnorth homestead presents more developed interpretations with potent specificity to historical circumstances that have influenced Tasmanian architecture.

Moreover, Woodfall's Woolnorth homestead does not stand alone in Tasmania. The relationships generated by the commission led to more than fifty additional projects by Woodfall scattered across the region. Among them are further buildings for the VDL Co. at Woolnorth including an office (1971), stables (1973) and manager's residence (1973). A relationship between Woodfall and the builder of the Woolnorth homestead, Stubbs Construction, generated numerous projects.[57] Their architecture is largely commercial in nature, nonetheless, shopping centres in Roseberry (1973), Burnie (1975), Ulverstone (1979), Cooee (1979) and Devonport (1980) as well as supermarkets in Launceston (1974), Deloraine (1976) and Georgetown (1981), all for the northern Tasmanian developer Rolf Vos, and municipal and recreational facilities in Somerset

(1970, '78 & '85) and Wynyard (1979, '84, '86, '91 & early-2000s), all contributed to shaping the region's towns and communities.[58]

In 1972, Woodfall also designed a new suburban home for the director of Stubbs construction, David Stubbs. In this instance, a split-level linear plan followed the contours of a sloping site maximising views to the ocean, and under a low-pitched timber roof. It also included another edition of the dining suite that Woodfall had designed for Woolnorth and Old Penola and that Stubbs had fabricated. And evincing a lasting affinity with the making of the homestead, Stubbs is today the custodian of Woolnorth's original Blackwood dining suite at which the VDL Co. board and the Ritchie family would have formerly gathered. In 1976, Woodfall designed another large rural homestead for friends of Blyth and Gail Ritchie, producing a sprawling residence for the Campbell family near Perth, Tasmania.[59] The Campbell residence is another exercise in Wrightian themes, comprising three wings that pinwheeled around an open terrace with fin walls stretching out into the landscape, but conventional without the rationalisation of form, space and structure seen in Woolnorth. These commissions were all products of personal and professional networks interlinked by the VDL Co. and reconstituted the company's earlier role in building and architecture in the region.

Conclusion

Woolnorth's late twentieth-century homestead was the product of intersecting interests and identities – commercial, familial and architectural. As a homestead and company headquarters, its conception and construction were allied to a pivotal moment in the VDL Co.'s 150-year history in Tasmania with the transfer of its residency from the United Kingdom to Woolnorth in 1968. It re-established an architectural identity for the company that had been surrendered with former homestead, Highfield, built in the early 1830s, leased in 1853 and sold in 1914. The history and agency of the Ritchie family are also crucial to understanding the architecture at Woolnorth. Successive generations of the Ritchie family had represented its pastoral successes at Blackwood through homestead building, most significantly in the grand Arts and Crafts mansion built by Robert Blackwood Ritchie in 1896, sold in 1916 but repurchased, renovated and reoccupied in the 1920s by Alan Ritchie. This lineage of buildings provided actual rather than abstract touchstones for the next generation of Ritchie homestead building which included both Old Penola, for Peter and Judy Rymill, and Woolnorth, for the VDL Co. and Blyth Ritchie. Those buildings also point to the legacy of selfconscious, not unselfconscious, colonial architectural origins. These networks of people and buildings, and their agency in the design process re-emerge from the archive. With them it can be observed that Woodfall's nascent ideas about expressing an Australian identity via a regionalist architecture, drawing upon international sources, cohered most fully in the Old Penola and Woolnorth homesteads, in relation to vested histories and connections to property.

Endnotes

1 Winsome Callister, "The 1950s and 1960s Revisited: Chaos or Complexity," *Transition* (Sept. 1970): 30–32; Winsome Callister, "The Response to the City: Melbourne Regionalism of the 1950s and 1960s," *Transition* (Winter 1989): 33–48; Philip Goad, "The Modern House in Melbourne, 1945–1975," (PhD diss. University of Melbourne, 1992); Winsome Callister, "Woodfall, Geoffrey," in *Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, eds. Philip Goad and Julie Willis (Port Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 773.

2 "Tasmania," *Architecture Australia*, (June 1973): 31–33.

3 Jennifer Taylor, "Architecture in Tasmania from 1930 to 1980," *Transition 2*, no.2 (June 1979): 37–42; Barry McNeill and Leigh Woolley, *Architecture from the Edge: The 20th Century in Tasmania*, (North Hobart: Monpelier Press, 2002).

4 Tasmania was known as Van Diemen's Land, until renamed in 1856 following the constitution of responsible government. For the sake of clarity, given this article's focus in the twentieth century focus, it will employ the name Tasmania.

5 H. J. W. Stokes, "The Settlement and Development of the Van Diemen's Land Company Grants in North-western Van Diemen's Land, 1824–1860," (Hons diss. University of Tasmania, 1964), 4.

6 Nicholas Clements, *The Black War: Fear Sex and Resistance in Tasmania*, (St Lucia, Qld: UQP, 2014), 180–86.

7 *Hobart Town Courier*, December 20, 1828, 2.

8 Wendy Roberts, "Company Transfer: the Architectural Dialect at the Edge of Empire," in *Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand*: 31, Translation, ed. Christoph Schnoor (Auckland, New Zealand: SAHANZ and Unitec ePress; and Gold Coast, Queensland: SAHANZ, 2014): 598.

9 Stokes, "The Settlement and Development of the Van Diemen's Land Company Grants," 30-31.

10 Roberts, "Company Transfer,"595–6. See also: Miles Lewis, "Highfield and the VDL Company, *This Australia* 5, no.3 (Winter 1986): 17–23.

11 Clements, *The Black War*, 182–83.

12 "The VDL – XVIII," *The Advocate*, December 22, 1925, 12.

13 Geoff Lennox, "Van Diemen's Land Company," in *The Companion to Tasmanian History*, accessed March 2020, https://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion_to_tasmanian_history/V/VDL%20Co.htm

14 "Woolnorth: Smiling Pastures Hedged by Savage Seas," *The Advocate,* April 7, 1954, 4.

15 See: VDL Company Reports, 1960–73, Tasmanian Heritage and Archives Office, VDL334/1/1.

16 P. Busby to R. Tadman, letter, February 12, 1963. Tasmanian Heritage and Archives Office, VDL 340/1/1.

17 R. Tadman to D. Neilsen, letter, June 26, 1963. Tasmanian Heritage and Archives Office, VDL 340/1/1.

18 P. Busby to R. Tadman, letter, February 12, 1963. Tasmanian Heritage and Archives Office, VDL 340/1/1.

19 These drawings are contained in Woodfall's archive, but are clearly not his own. House for B. Ritchie Esq. August 1968, RMIT Design Archives, Geoffrey Woodfall Collection, Box 90.

20 Callister, "The 1950s and 1960s Revisited," 32.

21 Callister, “The Response to the City,” 44.

22 Alan Ritchie, “Van Diemen’s Land Company Report, 30 June 1970,” Tasmanian Heritage and Archives Office, VDL 334/1/1.

23 Melinda Barrie and Sophia Garrett, “A man, his Dog and a Diary: James Ritchie’s Journey in the Western District, 1841,” *University of Melbourne Collections*, no.12 (June 2013): 32.

24 On the sequence of building at Blackwood, see: Blackwood Homestead Complex and Cemetery, Victorian Heritage Database, accessed March 2020, https://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/23171.

25 Harriet Edquist, *Pioneers of Modernism: The Arts and Crafts Movement in Australia*, (Carlton, VIC: Miegunyah Press, 2008), 75-78.

26 Harriet Edquist, “Homesteads of the Western Districts,” in *Designing Place: An Archaeology of the Western District*, eds. Lisa Byrne, Harriet Edquist and Laurene Vaughan (Melbourne: Melbourne Books, 2010), 128–147.

27 Alex Millmow, “RB Ritchie and Sons and their unsung contribution to Australian economics,” in *Scots Under the Southern Cross*, eds. Fred Cahir, Alison Inglis and Anne Beggs-Sunter (Ballarat: BHS Publishing, 2014), 95.

28 A. Ritchie Journal: Alan Ritchie Family and R.B. Ritchie & Son Business Records, University of Melbourne Archive, 2014.0026, Unit 5.

29 “Repairs to House by Bill Keilor,” A Ritchie Papers, Alan Ritchie Correspondence and Business Records, University of Melbourne Archive, 1975.0115, Unit 2.

30 Callister, “The Response to the City,” 43.

31 Geoffrey Woodfall, Harold Desbrowe Annear 1855-1933” (Investigation Report, University of Melbourne, 1956). University of Melbourne Library

32 Robin Boyd, *Victorian Modern* (Carnegie, VIC: Architectural Students’ Society of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects, 1947), 23.

33 Geoffrey Woodfall, “Documents in Australian Architecture: Harold Desbrowe-Annear, 1866-1933,” *Architecture in Australia* (February 1967): 100–108.

34 Callister, “The Response to the City,” 43.

35 *Cross-section*, October 1, 1965.

36 Goad, “The Modern House in Melbourne,” 6/42.

37 Callister, “The Response to the City,” 44.

38 Callister, “The 1950s and 1960s Revisited,” 32.

39 Lancashire Tattersfield Pty Ltd house at Bobinawarrah Vic, 1967, RMIT Design Archives. Geoffrey Woodfall Collection, Box 87.

40 Peter Rymill, conversation with Stuart King, December 11, 2019.

41 Mr and Mrs Peter Rymill to Geoffrey Woodfall, letter, October 8, 1968. RMIT Design Archives, Geoffrey Woodfall Collection, Box 50.

42 Geoffrey Woodfall to Peter and Judy Rymill, letter, Geoffrey Woodfall Collection, RMIT Design Archives. Geoffrey Woodfall Collection, Box 50.

43 Peter Rymill, “Proposed House at Old Penola Estate: Architect’s Brief by Peter Rymill,” RMIT Design Archives, Geoffrey Woodfall Collection, Box 50.

44 Rymill, “Proposed House at Old Penola Estate,” RMIT Design Archives, Geoffrey Woodfall Collection, Box 50.

45 Geoffrey Woodfall to Judy and Peter Rymill, letter, December 24, 1968. RMIT Design Archives, Geoffrey Woodfall Collection, Box 50.

46 Woodfall’s library included a further 107 volumes on Australian, American and European architecture, RMIT Design Archives, Geoffrey Woodfall Collection.

47 Old Penola Homestead 1969, Sketch plans and elevations January to April 1969, RMIT Design Archives, Geoffrey Woodfall Collection, Box 105.

48 Peter Rymill to Stuart King, email, December 11, 2019.

49 Old Penola Homestead 1969, Sketch plans and elevations January to April 1969, Geoffrey Woodfall Collection, RMIT Design Archives, Geoffrey Woodfall Collection, Box 105.

50 House for B. Ritchie Esq. August 1968, RMIT Design Archives, Geoffrey Woodfall Collection, Box 90.

51 Geoffrey Woodfall to Peter Rymill, letter, May 23, 1969, RMIT Design Archives, Geoffrey Woodfall Collection, Box 50.

52 Kerry Pink, Winds of Change: *A History of Woolnorth* (Timaru, N.Z.: Van Diemen’s Land Company, 2003), 187.

53 On Harwell Hamilton Harris see: Lisa Germany, *Harwell Hamilton Harris* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), 110. Winsome Callister has previously noted Woodfall’s interest in Harris. See: Callister, “Woodfall, Geoffrey,” 773.

54 The Woolnorth homestead was built by Stubbs Construction, located in Penguin, Tasmania, approximately 2.5 hours (by road) east of Woolnorth.

55 Revised during construction because they were being lifted by the strong westerly winds.

56 McNeill and Woolley, *Architecture from the Edge*, 82–85.

57 David Stubbs to Stuart King, email, October 14, 2019.

58 Geoffrey Woodfall Collection, RMIT Design Archives, Box 91, 92 and 93.

59 Campbell House, 1976. RMIT Design Archives, Geoffrey Woodfall Collection, Box 92.

ABSTRACT

The studio that Alex Jelinek designed for his partner Lina Bryans is one of only two surviving buildings by the maverick Czech-born architect, author of the experimental modernist Benjamin House (1957) in Canberra, made famous in the photographs of Wolfgang Sievers.

Using unpublished photographs, Jelinek's plans and Bryans' correspondence, the article shows how Bryans, a well-known Melbourne painter and arts patron, used family money to buy a Victorian tower mansion at 39 Erin Street Richmond in 1956. This was a barely a year after meeting the émigré designer, then a builder on the Snowy Mountain Scheme. Jelinek made immediate modifications to the existing house before devising a radical two-storey rear extension that still stands today. Designed in 1962–3, the extension was completed in 1965; furnishings included a tapestry by Michael O'Connell and the "Lina Bryans Writing Table" (1956) by Schulim Krimper.

Above a garage and utility area (where he went on to make aluminium sculpture) Jelinek provided a large room with painted brick walls and frameless plate-glass windows inclining west and north. The open fireplace in stepped brick is a design tribute to Czech Cubism, twinned with a brick pier supporting a steel frame and a ceiling of massive Oregon beams, Perspex skylights and pine lining-boards. The exterior features irregular clinker bricks where extruded mortar creates an earthy rusticated effect. The Bryans extension is still the heart of the property, carefully preserved by the current owner, a Czech-born psychiatrist.

A Studio for Lina Bryans: Alex Jelinek at Erin Street Richmond

PEER
REVIEWED
ESSAY

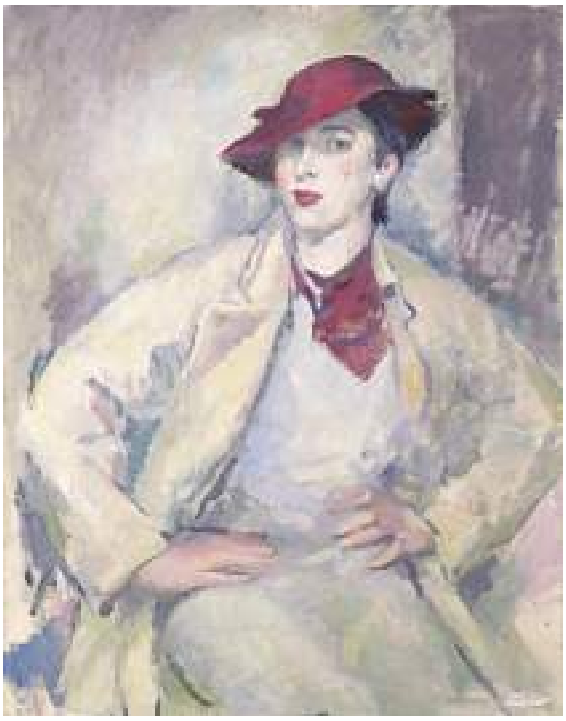
Roger Benjamin

Only two buildings designed by the maverick Czech architect Alex Jelinek (1925–2007) still stand: the well-documented Benjamin house in inner Canberra, and the extension to a Victorian mansion in Richmond, Melbourne. Jelinek's extension, which makes an impact on all who visit it, is unpublished but recent archival finds of plans, photographs and correspondence can now correct this lacuna in Australian architectural history.[1]

Beginnings: From Hradek Králové to East Melbourne

The story of how Alex Jelinek fled the 1948 Communist takeover of the former Czechoslovakia by high-jacking a light plane (and negating his prospects as a star postgraduate architect in the process) will be told in detail elsewhere.[2] Jelinek had been born into the family of a master-builder in the former royal town of Hradec Králové, north-east of Prague. It was a site of fine building: in the 1910s and 1920s Hradec Králové experienced a boom in modernist civic architecture (including the schools attended by Jelinek) laid out on a novel urban plan. His father Vaclav had several construction teams and young Alex was often onsite; after middle school he attended the Škola Stavitelská (technical building school) in the years of the Third Reich's wartime occupation of his country. Prague drew Jelinek soon after the war concluded: the historic Baroque city of Rudolph II had, since the founding of the new Czech Republic in 1918, become a centre for radical Cubist and then 'Czech Functionalist' architecture. In 1946 Jelinek entered the Prague Academy of Fine Arts, as one of a small group in the atelier of leading Functionalist, Professor Jaroslav Fragner. His idyll was curtailed by the Communist takeover of February 1948. Convinced that there was no future for creative architecture under the Stalinist-inspired regime, Jelinek and an engineer friend fled the country in November 1948 (three weeks before Jelinek's graduation), never to return, in a high-jacked light plane.

After more than a year in Germany living as a Displaced Person, Jelinek (and his wife of 15 months Eliška Jelinkova) left via Naples and arrived in Melbourne in March 1950; both had Victorian Government contracts for two years' work. The couple lived first in a Williamstown migrant hostel and then in an East Melbourne flat. Eliška worked initially at Glenelg Sanatorium as a nurse while Alex made a living as a day-labourer for Victorian Railways, and then as a draftsman for an architect specialising in Georgian mansions.[3] This was a sore trial for a man who wrote home soon after arrival: "I am really disgusted with the proportion of bad taste in housing and residential buildings, with the lack of artistic feeling. . . . There is only a little of what could be called advanced architecture."[4] His work as a draftsman however honed Jelinek's graphic skills and taught him the local building regulations needed for work in Australia.

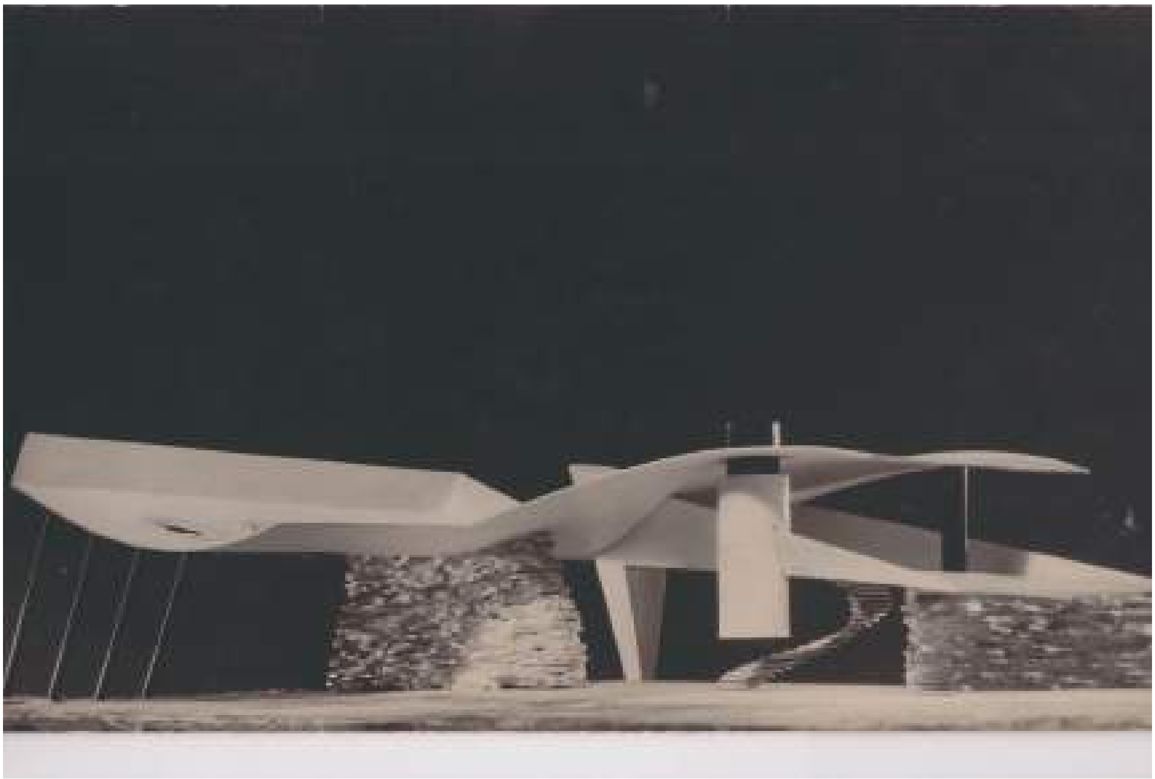


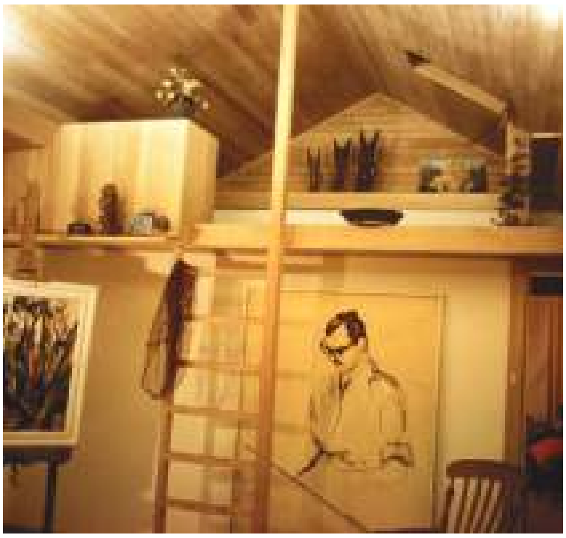
Opposite
Alex Jelinek at Mallacoota, 1965. Photograph by Lina Bryans, Alena Plodkova Archive, Jarvornice, Czech Republic.

This Page
William Frater, *The Red Hat*, 1937, oil on canvas, (91.2 x 71.2 cm), National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Felton Bequest 1943, (1225–4). Lina Bryans was Frater's lover at this time.

Lina Bryans and the start of a career

By the end of 1953 Alex and Eliška were divorced, and Jelinek took off for the Snowy Mountains Scheme, where he used his building skills at the Guthega Dam and Munyang Power Station, ending up in 1956 as a Leading Hand on the Eucumbene Dam project. He spent his evenings making futuristic architectural drawings and models, for example, of a large Anglican church for the relocated town of Adaminaby At the start of 1955 Jelinek met the painter and art patron Lina Bryans on a visit back to Melbourne.[5] Lina Bryans (1909-2000) was sixteen years older than he, and also divorced. Born into the wealthy Hallenstein family of Melbourne, the cosmopolitan Bryans had become a painter in the 1930s with the encouragement of George Bell (whose school she briefly attended) and Jock Frater, who portrayed her in his well-known Cézannesque painting *The Red Hat*. Bryans became a prolific portraitist of her friends in the literary, artist and gallery worlds, maintaining a popular 'salon' at Darebin Bridge House in outer Melbourne.





Top
Alex Jelinek, model of "Wave House" 1955, photograph by Wolfgang Sievers, Alex Jelinek Archive, Canberra. © National Library of Australia

Bottom
Alex Jelinek, photograph of his renovation to Lina Bryan's Victorian terrace at 134 Albert Street, East Melbourne, 1956, Alex Jelinek Archive, Canberra. Bryan's *Yellow Portrait: Portrait of Alex Jelinek*, 1956 (National Portrait Gallery, Canberra) is on the rear wall.

Opposite
Top
Alex Jelinek, Ground Floor Plan, Residence for Mr. and Mrs. Bruce Benjamin, 1957, Alex Jelinek Archive, Canberra.

Bottom
Alex Jelinek, formal Sitting-Room of Benjamin House, 10 Gawler Crescent, Deakin, ACT, December, 1957, photograph by Wolfgang Sievers, National Library of Australia 2477-AH, © National Library of Australia.

From the mid-50s Bryans's landscape painting blossomed, as her partnership with the adventurous Jelinek from 1955 saw them travel to regional and remote Australia. They became a lifelong de facto couple.

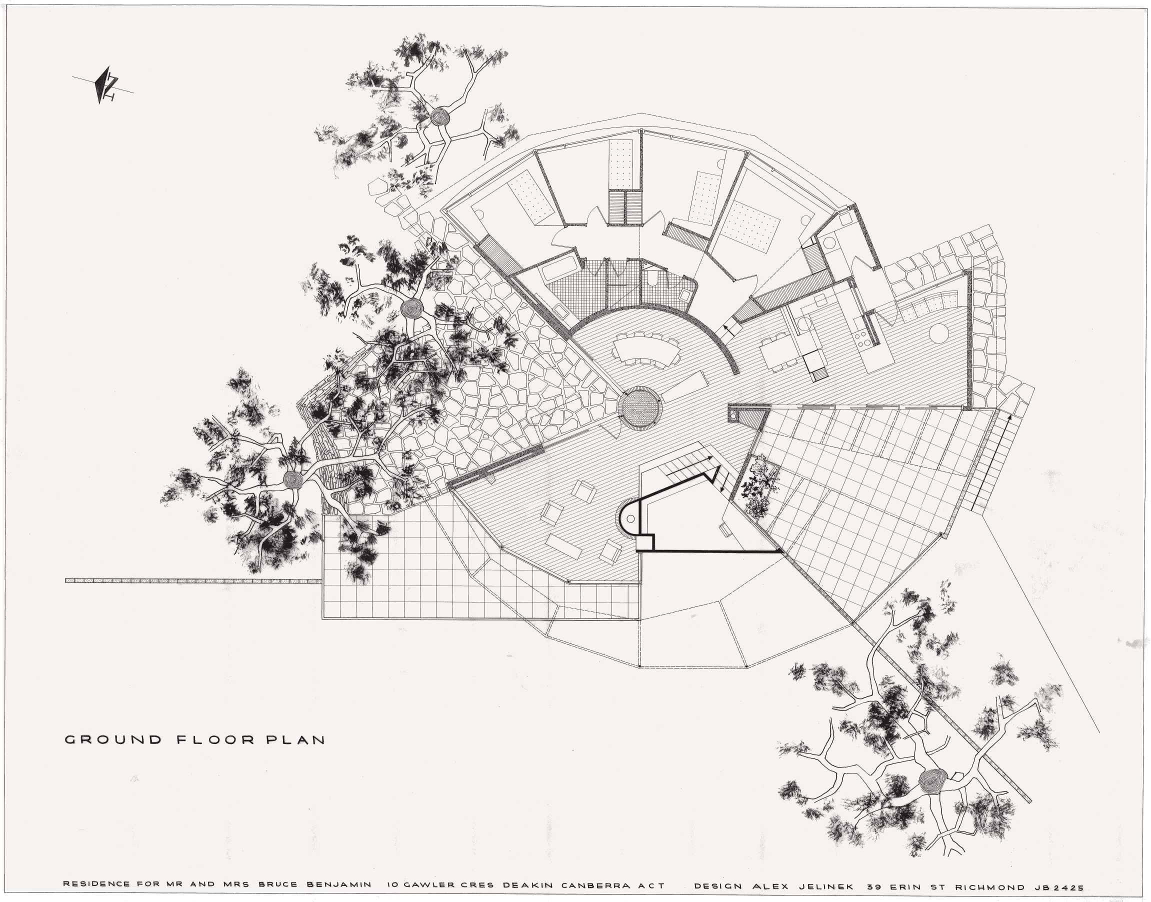
When they met, Bryans had been buying and selling terrace houses in East Melbourne and Richmond (as did Margaret Ollie in inner Sydney).[6] At the very beginnings of the urban renewal movement Bryans' business acumen gave Jelinek his first opportunity to build to a design. In 1955 he refurbished the small living room of her Victorian terrace at 134 Albert Street, East Melbourne, apparently by sending drawings from the Snowy to Bryans' trusted carpenter.[7] This is the first documented building by Jelinek and although small, it is telling in that it is an uncompromisingly modern intervention into a modest Victorian terrace house. It has the massive timber beams and timber lined ceiling that he would later use at Erin Street.

Soon after, Jelinek commissioned leading Melbourne photographer Wolfgang Sievers to make studies of his favourite small-scale model, of a futuristic private villa Jelinek called his Wave House. This schematic project consists of two elements, ground-hugging stone cylindrical piers and a wave-like roof above. The contrast between the two gives the project its dynamism and he was to use a similar idea of separating contrasting elements later in the Benjamin house and Peregian Road House.

Using these images and other drawings, in March 1956 Bryans suggested Alex as an architect to her second cousin, the ANU philosopher Bruce Benjamin. Bruce and Audrey Benjamin had purchased a large block in Deakin, Canberra to build a home for their growing family. Offered the commission, Jelinek resigned from the Snowy and was soon busy designing the house. Lina wrote to her son Edward in London in triumph "Bruce and Audrey are thrilled with Alex's house and will build it. So it is a great triumph for him and no better place than Canberra for publicity etc."[8] His intensive phase of design and detailed work in March to May 1956 is captured by Lina: "I am about to start another painting of Alex this time on the board – doing details & spec. of Bruce's house – it will take him a couple of weeks – a chance to have a constant sitter."[9] The result was her *Yellow Portrait (Portrait of Alex Jelinek)*, now in the National Portrait Gallery, Canberra.[10]

Jelinek's Benjamin house exhibited a complex radial design based on the Pythagorean spiral, with blade walls and a flat roof directing water to a central glass-lined impluvium and fountain. It sat halfway up a sloping $3500\,m^2$ block with views of the Brindabella Ranges and was carefully sited among several large old-growth Yellow Box eucalypts. Construction by local builder Ross Loosely & Son took place between mid-1956 and late 1957, and the designer stayed in Canberra for extended periods supervising the work. Lina herself frequently drove to Canberra and back. At the end of the year Wolfgang Sievers was invited to Canberra to photograph the finished house, as Jelinek had ambitions to have it published in Europe and the USA.

This was a master-stroke: on the basis of Sievers's dozen photographs and the architect's plans, Jelinek was awarded Best House of the Year for 1957 by Ken MacDonald and the jury of *Arts and Architecture*, the leading Australian journal.[11] The house was later published in *Aujourd'hui* in Paris.[12]

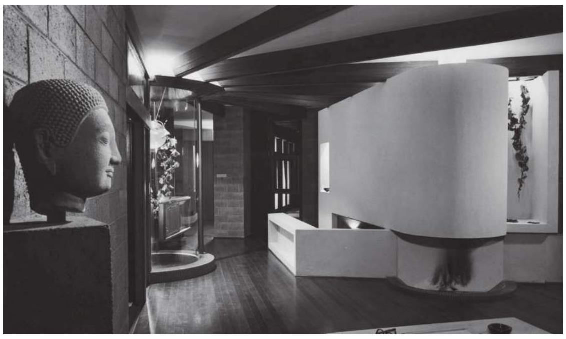

GROUND FLOOR PLAN
RESIDENCE FOR MR AND MRS BRUCE BENJAMIN 10 GAWLER CRES DEAKIN CANBERRA ACT
DESIGN ALEX JELINEK 39 ERIN ST RICHMOND JB 2425

Settling into 39 Erin Street

Meanwhile back in Melbourne, in March 1956 Bryans had inherited additional money from the Hallenstein family estate following the sudden death of her sister Margaret (then married and living in Kingston, Barbados).[13] By the middle of the year Bryans had decided "to avail myself of terms in father's will to let the trustees buy me a house and fix same".[14] Soon after she bought one of the finest houses on Richmond Hill, at 39 Erin Street, Richmond. In August, in an elated letter, she recounts driving her newly-acquired Bristol sports-car back from Canberra with "what I hope is a good painting, sun and distant blue mountains . . . . Very simple but telling." Bryans adds that she will "get 39 Erin St. in a week & will start immediately to do it. Not a great deal outside painting & everything pretty straight forward." [15]

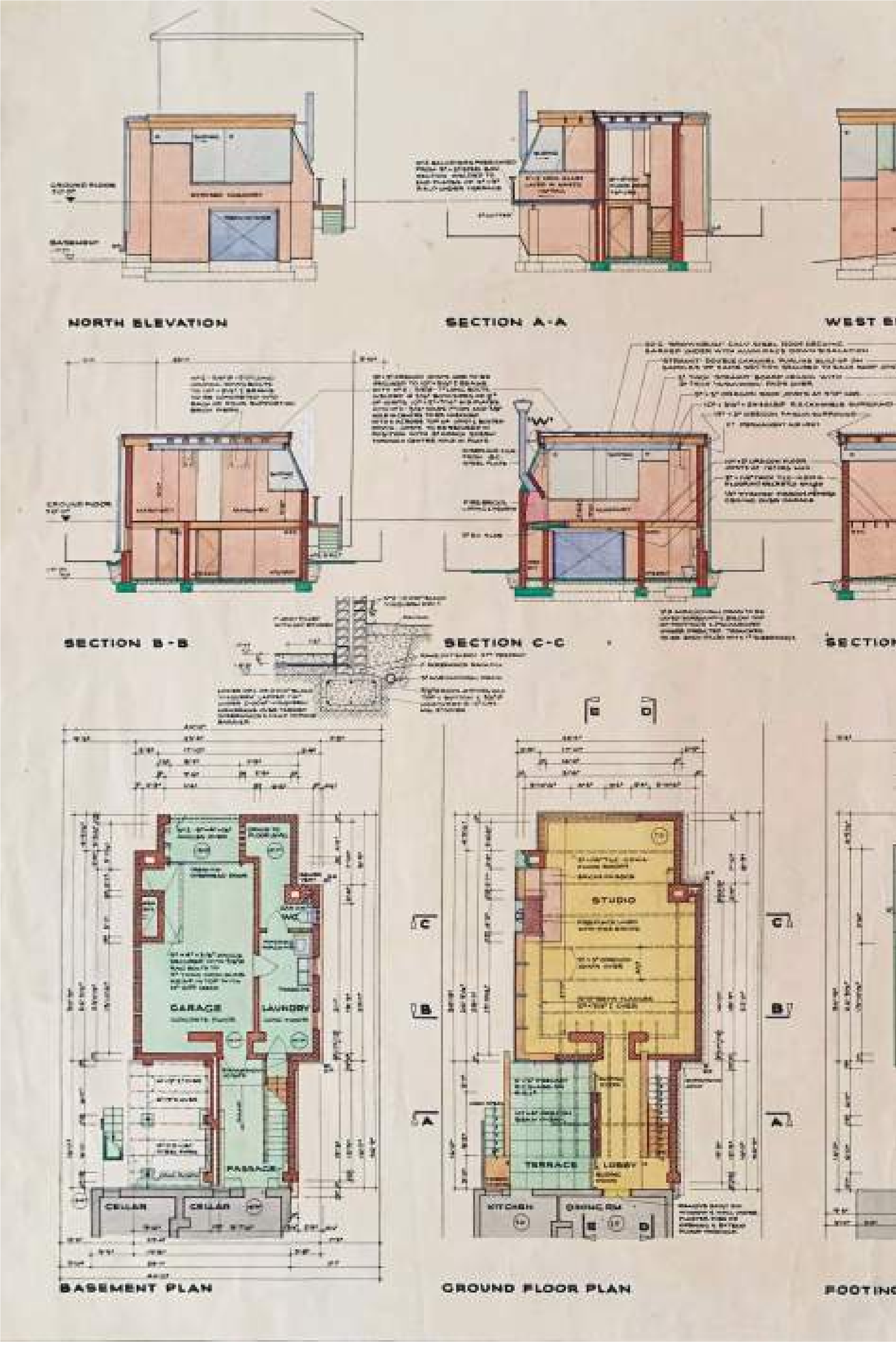
Part of the house's attraction must have been its sheer size and central location. The ten-room house had been completed by 1882 and originally boasted a steeple over the square brick tower that still stands today.[16] Bryans had opened a large house to her friends before, being famous in Melbourne art and literary circles for the "salon" she had kept at Darebin Bridge House in the 1940s (Ian Fairweather had been her tenant, and Bryans was his first collector).[17] Bryans was a highly social person, and the Erin Street mansion offered her the chance to re-establish her circle in what her biographer Gillian Forwood called "a permanent home which appealed to her sense of history and style".[18] The "splendid drawing-room" of the original house had long performed such a function according to an earlier owner, the surgeon Sir Clive Fitts, who grew up there and, Bryans followed suit after remodelling it.[19] Bryans' letters to her son Edward show her original ambitions for Erin Street:

> The whole idea of Richmond is that it is handy, a large block and existing house, solid and has character. I finally want to make Studios there and have a ground floor studio flat for myself, and a spare room – upstairs a large self-contained studio and spare room and shower and toilets. In no sense will it be a normal house as the others – just a really adequate work-place where I can mess about, and where could one find that so close to town?[20]



In short, the initial idea was an artists' house of at least three large studios, with bedrooms, bathrooms and kitchens to support this. Jelinek was to have a room and bathroom upstairs, as was a certain Catherine, presumably an artist friend paying rent.

At his desk at Albert Street Jelinek drew up a plan of the building and the alterations to the existing interior, following Lina's brief. His work included providing the lobby with new tiles and fanlights, and moving the floor levels of the bathrooms, which were to be refitted as were the kitchen and upper kitchenette. The large downstairs drawing-room and the room beyond it were to be made into one, as Jelinek wrote on the plan: "Studio 1: remove 4 ½ inch walls at side of fireplace. . . . make two fireplaces into one." This double-sided fireplace in the middle of a large room was a striking feature for visitors and is visible in a photograph of the day. Like the addition at Albert Street, it was a noticeably modernist insertion into the Victorian fabric of the house.


NORTH ELEVATION
SECTION A-A
WEST E
SECTION B-B
SECTION C-C
SECTION
C
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A
GARAGE
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BASEMENT PLAN
GROUND FLOOR PLAN
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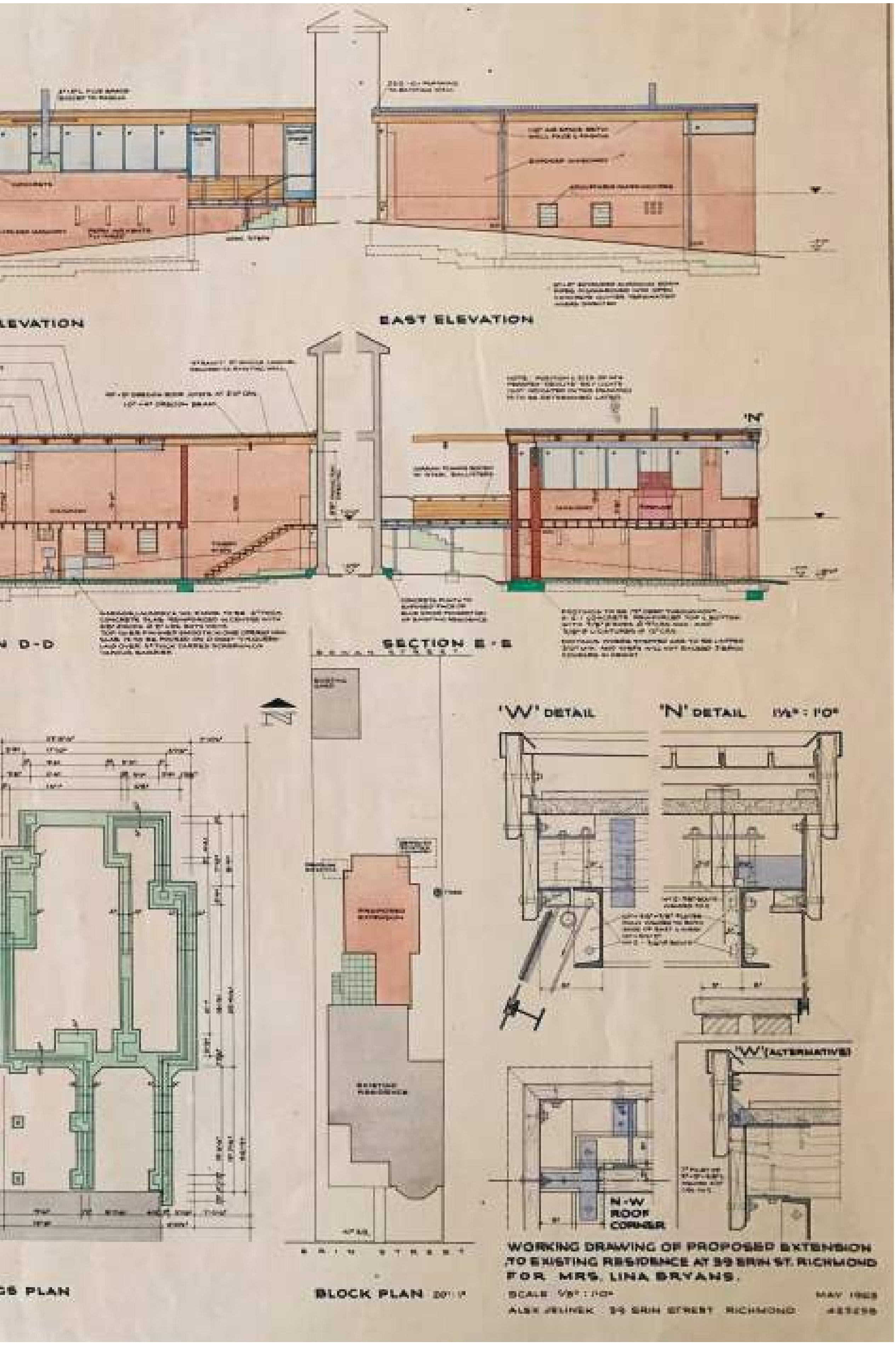
LEVATION
EAST ELEVATION
'N'
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'W' DETAIL
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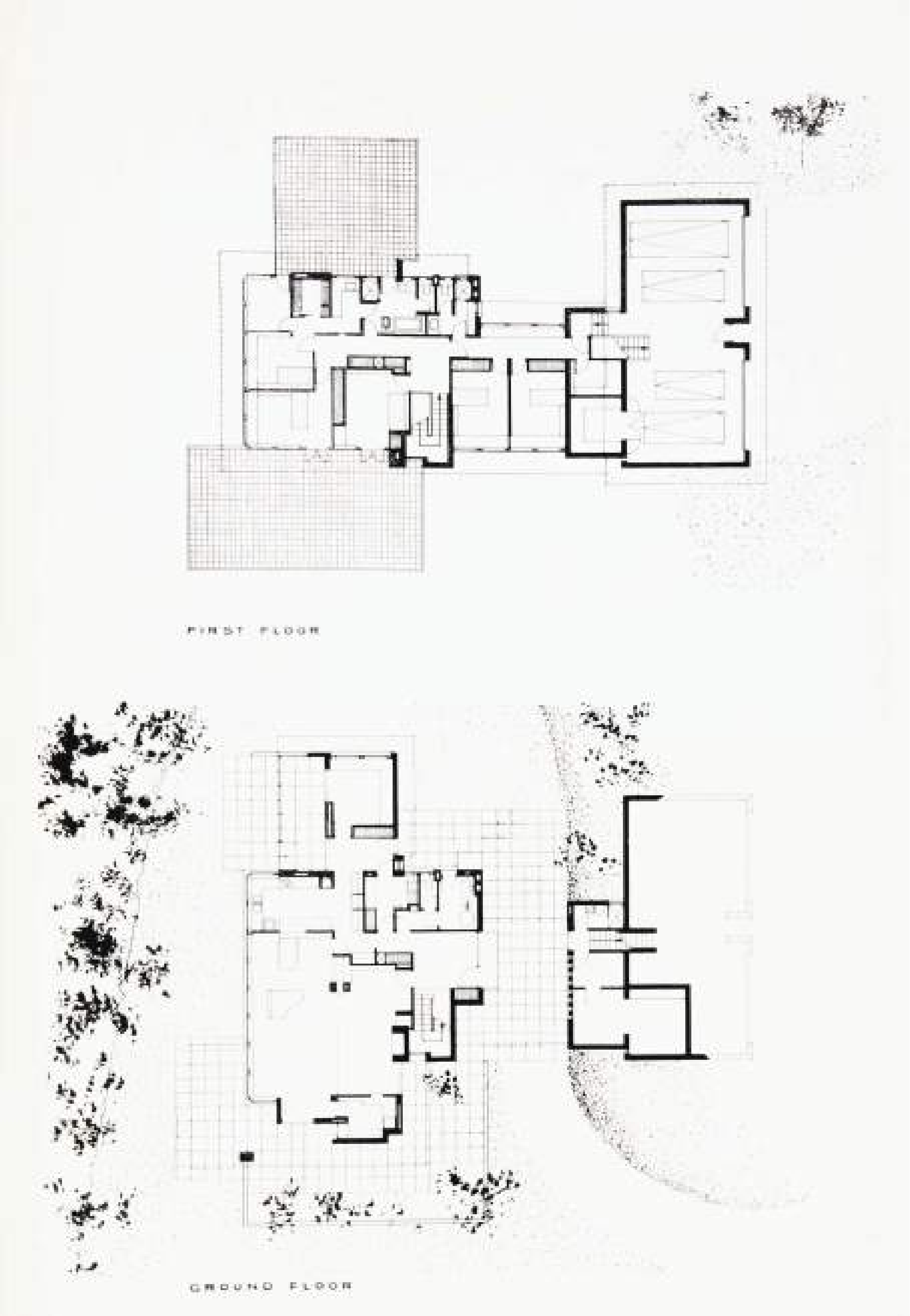
'W' (ALTERNATIVE)
N-W
ROOF
CORNER
PROPOSED EXTENSION
EXISTING RESIDENCE
ERIN STREET
GS PLAN
BLOCK PLAN 20' : 1"
WORKING DRAWING OF PROPOSED EXTENSION
TO EXISTING RESIDENCE AT 39 ERIN ST. RICHMOND
FOR MRS. LINA BRYANS.
SCALE 1/8" : 1'0"
MAY 1963
ALEX JELINEK 39 ERIN STREET RICHMOND

Left
Alex Jelinek,
Working Drawing of
Proposed Extension
to Existing Residence at
39 Erin Street, Richmond
for Mrs. Lina Bryans,
May 1963, Alex Jelinek
Archive, Canberra.


FIRST FLOOR
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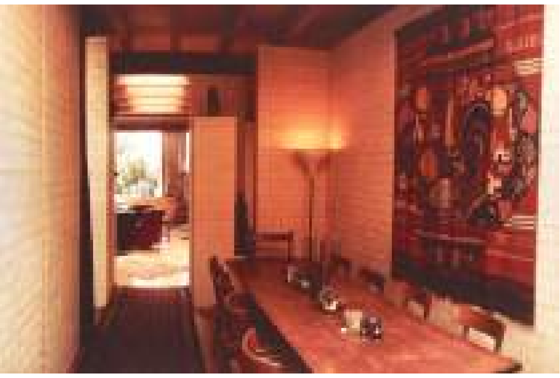
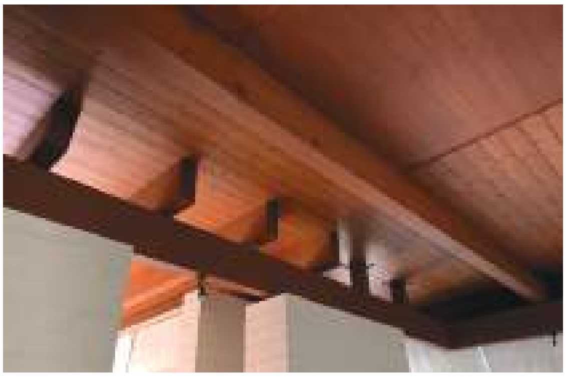




Opposite
Alex Jelinek, House at Eltham for Mr. and Mrs. Roy Barden, published in *Architecture and Arts*, February 1960. The house was never built.

Top
Alex Jelinek, Lobby/dining-room at Erin Street, c. 1968, photographic print, Alex Jelinek Archive, Canberra. A tapestry by Michael O'Connell is on the right.

Middle
Brick, steel, oregon beams and pine lining-boards in the ceiling structure at Erin Street. Note the timber panel that has filled in the original skylight, photograph by Roger Benjamin, January 2020.

Bottom
Alex Jelinek sketching at a soirée in the renovated drawing-room with double fireplace to his design, 39 Erin Street, Richmond, c. 1960, photograph by Lina Bryans, Alex Jelinek Archive, Canberra.

Renovations progressed steadily from the moment Bryans gained possession of Erin Street at the start of September 1956. Towards the end of the year Bryans, Jelinek and friends attended the Melbourne Olympics – enjoying the wrestling, the marathon (run from the City to Clayton and back), and British ace Stirling Moss winning the car races at Albert Park. She wrote "painting, tiling and carpentry still going strong at Richmond. I don't think I'll be in by Christmas but one never knows. How glad I'll be to have some space, real space and all the fruits together in the studio."[21] Meanwhile the craftsman Bill Morgan was installing "beautiful plain glass" (still in place) around the front door. The couple moved to the Erin Street house from Albert Street early in 1957 and lived there for some six years before a new building campaign was to begin. Lina had seen this potential from the first, describing the property as:

> high and dry and structure perfect & has had a new tiled roof put on. It has a lovely little tower room with marvellous views . . . and best of all it is the highest spot and enough land at the back for, if ever required, building.[22]

Jelinek's 1965 extension

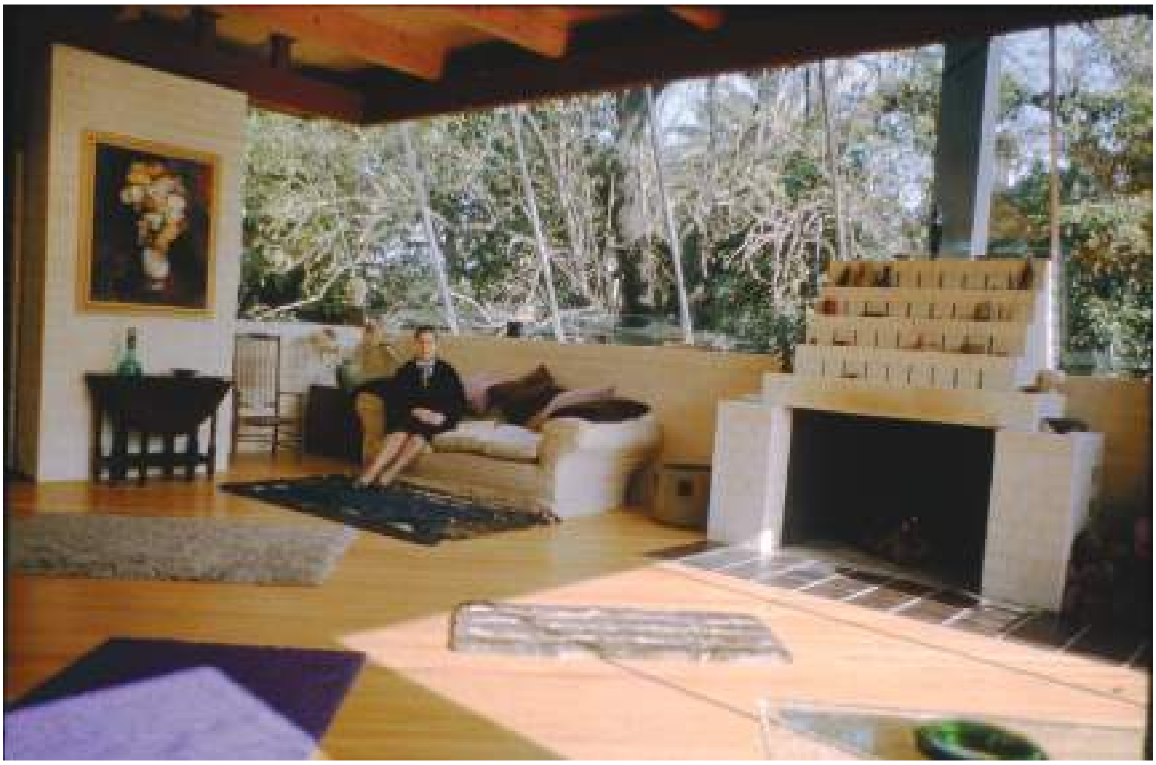
Jelinek's first detailed drawing, "Proposed extension to existing residence at 39 Erin Street Richmond for Mrs. L. Bryans" dates to January 1963 - six years after the couple's occupancy. This time-lapse may be partly explained by Jelinek's long absences in Canberra, where he oversaw work on the Benjamin house throughout 1957 and the granny-flat in 1959 and on the Sunshine Coast in 1960–61 when he was busy with the Peregian Road House.

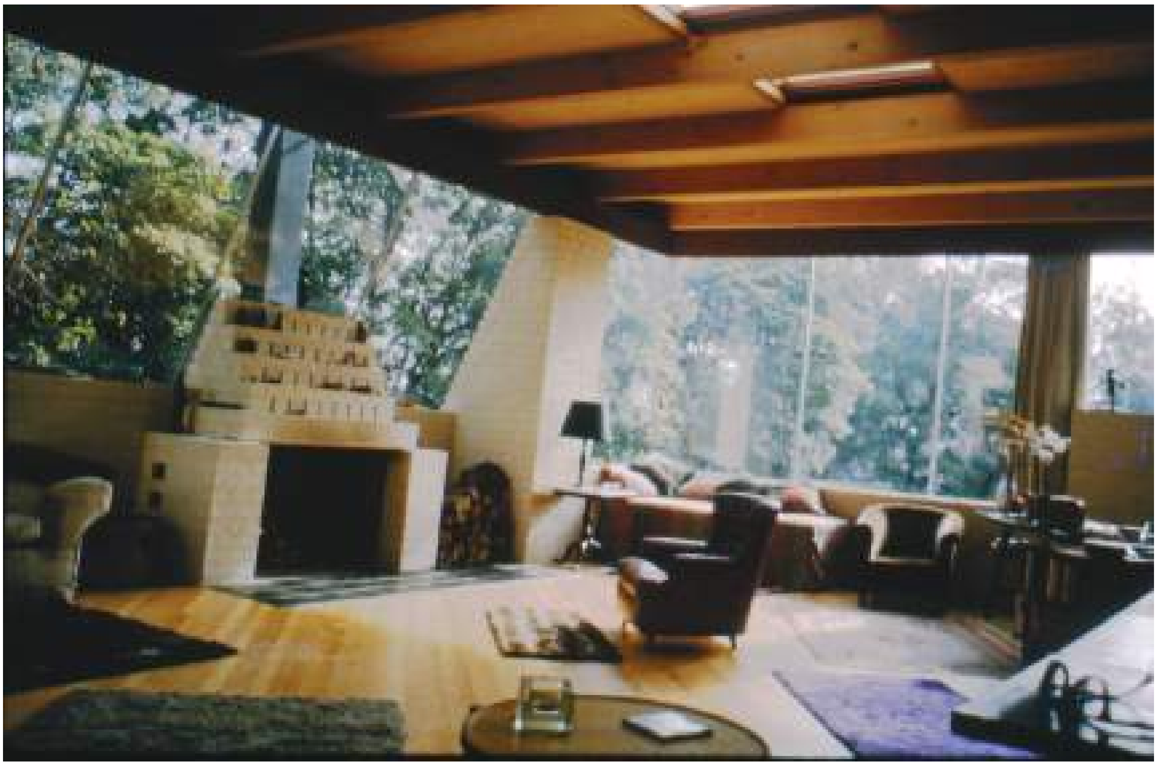
The road house was commissioned by the Melbourne property developers T. M. Burke Pty. Ltd., who owned a large tract of coastline they intended to subdivide. Jelinek lived at nearby Noosa for almost six months, and oversaw construction of what was probably the first steel and concrete, architect-designed building on the Sunshine Coast.[23] Its plan, based on five triangular sections radiating out from three cast-concrete water tanks, bore a certain resemblance to that of the Benjamin house. The proto-Brutalist building with its prominent cylindrical tanks, was meant to attract the attention of travellers on the highway and to provide a comfortable café environment for potential purchasers but suffered the indignity of conversion to a low-grade motel after the architect quarreled with his client Noel Burke. At the same time Jelinek published another design in *Architecture and Arts*, a large house for Mr and Mrs Roy Barden in Eltham which reflects the contemporary influence of Frank Lloyd Wright.[24] The house was never built, however.

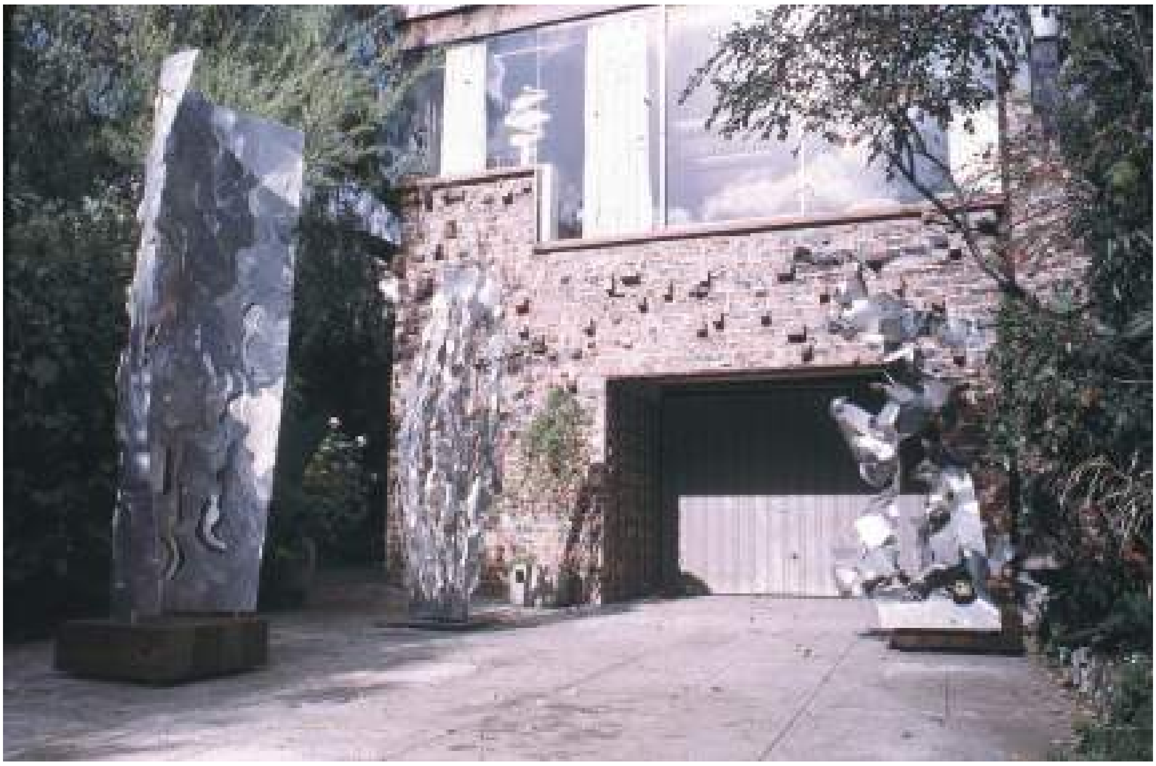
Jelinek probably began the detailed Erin Street designs in late 1962. The May 1963 working drawings set out all the ideas elaborated in subsequent drawings, which range up to September 1964. Construction must have taken place in 1964-65, and we can assume Jelinek managed the project and had a role in the building work.

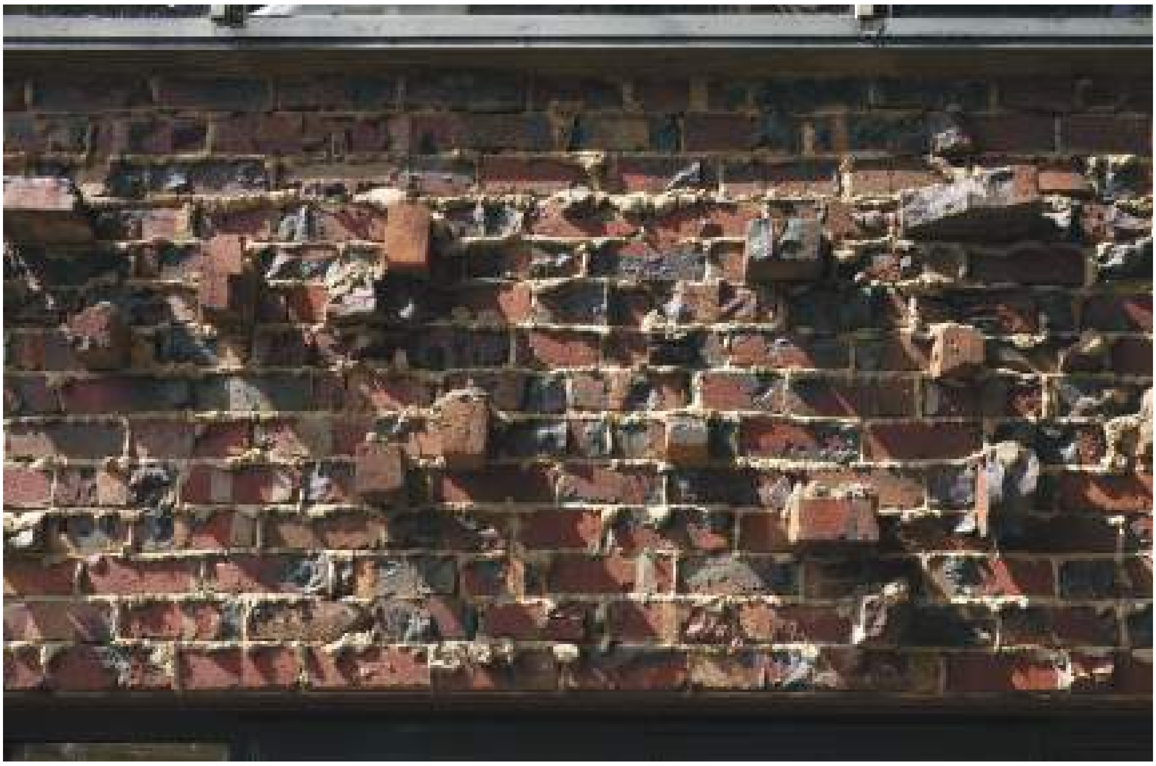
The extension was in fact a separate two-storey building comprising a studio and lobby above a basement level containing a garage, laundry, WC and cellar. The lobby, which housed the dining room, was accessed from the renovated kitchen and a large plexiglass skylight marked the transition between the old and new sections of the house. The lobby had exposed brick walls with two full height windows to the west. Jelinek's photos show a long dining-table set for ten, probably custom-made with simple modern timber chairs, while a bold hand-printed textile with a crowing rooster by the prominent Anglo-Australian textile artist Michael O'Connell, dominates the room.[25] Bryans bought it from Melbourne's Georges department store which had held an exhibition of O'Connell's post-war hangings in 1953 and not all had sold.[26] The ceiling above the brickwork piers between the lobby and the studio beyond can be seen in a contemporary photograph and shows Jelinek's modernist preference for making a feature of the building's structure, much as he did in the Albert Street house. A steel beam, painted lead oxide red, sits directly on the masonry and runs right around the rectangular extension, supporting the frame of large Oregon beams, to which the steel is attached by small custom-made steel fixings. Six narrow skylights have been recently closed off by Baltic pine lining-boards when the studio was re-roofed.

The studio had extensive west and north-facing plate-glass windows: in theory it was a space in which the artist Bryans could paint at her easel. It is a very large room looking directly into the foliage of trees such as the ancient peppercorn on the east side of the building. The space is dominated by the fireplace, a kind of stepped-back geometric arrangement of fire-bricks which may be a tribute to early









Top Left
Alex Jelinek, Lina Bryans on sofa at her Erin Street studio, c. 1968, Alena Plodkova Archive, Javornice, Czech Republic. Bryans' *Brown Still Life* is to the left.

Top Right
Alex Jelinek, Sculpture court at rear of Erin Street, c. 1973, Alena Plodkova Archive, Javornice. Three of Jelinek's aluminium sculptures are on plinths; another is visible inside. The recessed tilting door led to the garage, workshop, laundry and cellar.

Bottom Left
Alex Jelinek, Studio at Erin Street, c. 1968, Alena Plodkova Archive, Javornice, Czech Republic.

Bottom Right
Close-up of the brick exterior at Erin Street, northern wall photographed by James Bryans, January 2020.

Czech Cubism. It can also be read as a reaction to the volutes of the "Adam fireplaces" that Jelinek had to research and draw in his first architectural job.[27] The flue for the wide fireplace is a rectangular metal column that rises outside the glazing, going up to a tall metal cowl of inverted cones. This structure remains intact, although Jelinek's exterior lamp mounted on a tripod, with a circular birdbath hovering above the corner window, has been removed.

Immediately to the right of the fireplace is a brick element sloping up at 60 degrees to follow the line of the glazing. This is in effect a masonry pier holding up the floating ceiling. The ceiling is an elaborate, sculptured surface in finely finished, warm blonde timber (the May 1963 drawing specifies "Oregon roof joists and liner boards", the September 1964 drawing Karri hardwood; Oregon with Baltic pine boards won out). The Oregon beams sit directly on the steel channel-beam running above the glazed incline. The effect of the ceiling, a lateral coffering, is of great sculptural interest. The concealed lighting makes for a delightfully warm effect as shown in the few night-time photographs taken by the architect on 35mm colour slide film. Completing the timbered interior, the planks of the floor ("KDMA flooring secretly nailed" in the specification, although the very narrow boards look to be Kauri pine) run at 45 degrees to the axis of the studio.

Bryans decorated the room sparsely, combining her traditional furniture (probably inherited from her family), including brown Chesterfield armchairs, a circular drop-sided table with scrolled legs, various cabinets with a few modern side-tables and several small mohair rugs. Her own large canvas, *Brown Still-Life*, decorated the south wall. The most significant piece of furniture in the studio was the writing table made for her by the celebrated émigré cabinet-maker Schulim Krimper.[28] This was designed while Bryans was living at the Albert Street house, and consists of a cube of drawers in Black Bean wood and, on a pivot, a pair of daringly-cantilevered legs which support a curved glass table-top. The design has similarities to contemporary desks of the Italian designer Gio Ponti and was used again by Krimper for other commissions. In a letter of June 1956 Bryans wrote to her son: "The desk that Krimper has made is beautiful. A work of art. It has a large glass top and side drawers but has to be seen. I will tell A [Alex] to take a photo of it and the house later."[29] It was Krimper who, in the course of 1957, went on to interpret Jelinek's designs for an ensemble of dining-room furniture for the Benjamin House – a curved table, dining chairs and a large buffet, all in Japanese maple.[30]

While the interior walls of the extension were a neutral sand-coloured bagged brick, on the exterior Jelinek animated the brick work with a seemingly random pattern of clinker bricks which stand proud from the surface and produce a form of rustication. Some of them are broken or set at 90 degrees to the wall, while extruded mortar is deliberately emphasised between the reddish-brown bricks, tinged here and there with blue-black glazing. While clinker bricks had been rediscovered in the1950s by architects interested in naturalising the texture of buildings, the overall effect of Jelinek's treatment of the material is powerfully sensual, making the mass of the exterior alive with visual incident and an almost fleshy appeal.

Jelinek's studio for Bryans was far from an austere high modern interior. The timberwork feels like Alvar Aalto (whom Jelinek much admired). In the ceiling above were six "Decklite perspex [in caps elsewhere] skylights" with curved caps to illuminate the interior and give visual incident to the room. The skylights were set parallel to the Orgeon beams and Baltic pine lining boards; above that was a clip-lock "Brownbuilt" galvanised steel roof: the latest materials for a modern building. The whole thing seems geared to comfort with warm materials, ample natural light and space.

Perhaps it was to celebrate the completed building that Bryans and Jelinek took a painting holiday at Mallacoota, the East Gippsland township already famed for the beauty of its estuary and its forests A small group of snapshots dated 1965 show Lina seated at her easel in a rocky coastal cove (probably Quarry Beach, East Mallacoota), and another with Alex holding a baby penguin. Two major Bryans paintings eventuated: *Mallacoota Inlet* and *Rock Rhythm*.

Jelinek's surviving slides of the Erin Street exterior date to the early 1970s, after the couple's return from a year living in Alice Springs, where Bryans had been advised to go to relieve her arthritis and vascular disease.[31] Having apparently shelved his career as an architect (which had stalled largely because of his inability to negotiate with his clients), Jelinek turned with real seriousness of purpose to producing the sculpture visible in his photographs. All of this sculpture was in the 'new' material of aluminium, which had become popular in Melbourne in the late 1960s, partly due to the impetus provided by the Comalco Sculpture Prize, first won by fellow-émigré, the Lithuanian-born Vincas Jomantas.[32] Three of Jelinek's monumental sculptures – all made by cutting into a thick sheet of aluminium and hammering and bending the resultant elements into patterned arrays – are visible in his photograph of the rear courtyard at Erin Street. A variant of one, The Quill of 1974, was later gifted to the National Gallery of Victoria by Bryans.

The renovated and extended Erin Street house, Bryans's "most-loved and creative home for almost fifteen years", was sold in about 1973.[33] Since that time it has largely been used by senior medical practitioners allied to the Epworth Hospital on Richmond Hill.[34] From 1989 the owner has been the distinguished psychiatrist Dr. George Wahr, who by chance is also a Czech immigrant (arriving in 1952 at the age of 14 from the German-speaking Sudetenland). Dr. Wahr has undertaken extensive repair work and some remodelling of the Victorian house, but has been at pains to preserve the main features of the Jelinek/Bryans extension.[35] In late 2018 Dr. Wahr welcomed a film crew from Czech national television which shot a brief segment in the studio at Erin Street. This was part of a 30-minute television program on the life and architecture of Alex Jelinek, in the long-running series Šumné Stopy animated by the prominent architect and actor David Vávra.[36] The program is proof that the work of the late Czech expatriate is now generating considerable interest in the country of his architectural formation.

Endnotes

1 Sincere thanks to the Jelinek family of Hradec Králové, Alex's home town, who hosted me in late September 2019 and shared the photographs and letters that Jelinek sporadically posted home from Melbourne between 1948 and 2007. The architect's great-niece Zuzana Sykorová organized my visit, helped with translating and interpreting, and scanned the archives of her aunt, Alena Plodkova of Javornice. The trip was part-funded by the School of Arts, Literature and Media of the University of Sydney. I would like to thank Harriet Edquist for her support and multifarious inputs into this essay, and James Bryans for his friendship and fine photography.

2 Pending a book in preparation, see Roger Benjamin, "Modernist who loved the bush" (Alex Jelinek obituary), *The Age*, Feb 28, 2007; "Prague on the Sunshine Coast: the Peregian Roadhouse by Alex Jelinek", *Fabrications, Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand*, 21, no. 2 (March 2012): 60–81; and "Fugue in Yellow", *Portrait. Magazine of Australian & International Portraiture*, 49 (Winter 2015): 34–36.

3 Jelinek, Alex. Interviewed by Roger Benjamin, November 20, 2006, 15 Bowen St, Kew, Victoria.

4 Alex Jelinek to his Parents, letter in Hradec Králové, undated (mid 1950), Alena Plodkova Archive, Javornice, Czech Republic. Kindly translated by Hana Flanderova of the Czech Consulate, Sydney.

5 Gillian Forwood, *Lina Bryans: Rare Modern, 1909-2000*, (Carlton, Vic.: Miegunyah Press, 2003), 126. When they met Alex was 30, Lina 46 years old.

6 Documented in Lina Bryans correspondence with her son Edward Bryans in London, Alex Jelinek Archive, Canberra.

7 Jelinek, Alex. Interviewed by Roger Benjamin, November 20, 2006, 15 Bowen St Kew, Victoria.

8 Lina Bryans to Edward Bryans, letter, postmarked Canberra, March 19, 1956. Alex Jelinek Archive, Canberra.

9 Lina Bryans to Edward Bryans, letter, postmarked Melbourne May 28, 1956. Alex Jelinek Archive, Canberra.

10 Benjamin, "Fugue in Yellow".

11 The Sievers photographs are visible online at the National Library of Australia; see "House in Canberra by Alex Jelinek", Architecture and Arts, no. 56, (March 1958): 24–27, and "House and Building of the Year Awards for 1957," *Architecture and Arts*, no. 58, (June-July 1958): 52-53.

12 "Habitation à Canberra, Australie. Alex Jelinek, architecte," *Aujourd'hui* (Paris), no. 23, (September 1959): 72–75.

13 Lina Bryans to Edward Bryans, letter, postmarked Guthega, March 25,1956, 3. Stating Bruce Benjamin passed on the news "that my sister Margaret died at Kingston Barbados of a heart attack on the 25th. It is a great shock to me I can hardly take it in she was only 47".

14 Lina Bryans to Edward Bryans, letter, postmarked Melbourne, May 6, 1956.

15 Lina Bryans to Edward Bryans, letter, postmarked Melbourne, August 22, 1956. (Sent from 134 Albert St. East Melbourne).

16 See Lee C. McDonald, "House Histories: 39 Erin Street", unpublished typescript, Fig. 6. Courtesy Dr. George Wahr.

17 See Forwood, *Lina Bryans*, 89–92.

18 Forwood, *Lina Bryans*, 132.

19 Forwood, *Lina Bryans*, 132.

20 Lina Bryans to Edward Bryans, second letter, postmarked Melbourne, June 9, 1956.

21 Lina Bryans to Edward Bryans, letter, December 5, 1956. (Sent from 134 Albert St. East Melbourne).

22 Lina Bryans to Edward Bryans, letter, postmarked Melbourne, July 22, 1956 (Sent from 134 Albert St. East Melbourne).

23 See Benjamin, "Prague on the Sunshine Coast".

24 "House at Eltham for Mr. and Mrs. Roy Barden, designed by Alex Jelinek," *Architecture and Arts*, VII, no. 76, (February 1960): 42–43. (A perspective of the façade and two plans are shown).

25 See Harriet Edquist, *Michael O'Connell: The Lost Modernist*, (Melbourne: Melbourne Books, 2011).

26 John McPhee to Roger Benjamin, email, January 20, 2020

27 On Fragner see Benjamin Fragner and Jiří T. Kotalík, *Jaroslav Fragner: Náčrty a Plány.* (Praha, 1999). Jelinek, Alex. Interview by Roger Benjamin, November 20, 2006, 15 Bowen Street, Kew, Victoria.

28 On this table see Kirsty Grant et. al., *Mid-Century Modern: Australian Furniture Design*, (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 2014), 63; and Roger Benjamin, "Schulim Krimper", *Australian Art in the National Gallery of Australia*, ed. Anna Gray, (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2002), 230.

29 Lina Bryans to Edward Bryans, letter, postmarked Melbourne, June 9, 1956, third letter, last page.

30 Ian Johnson, "Two Pioneers of Modern Furniture in Melbourne: Schulim Krimper and Fred Lowen", *Transition. Discourse on Architecture*, no. 24, (Autumn 1988): 85-86. The Krimper ensemble is still extant.

31 See Forwood, *Lina Bryans*, 145-46.

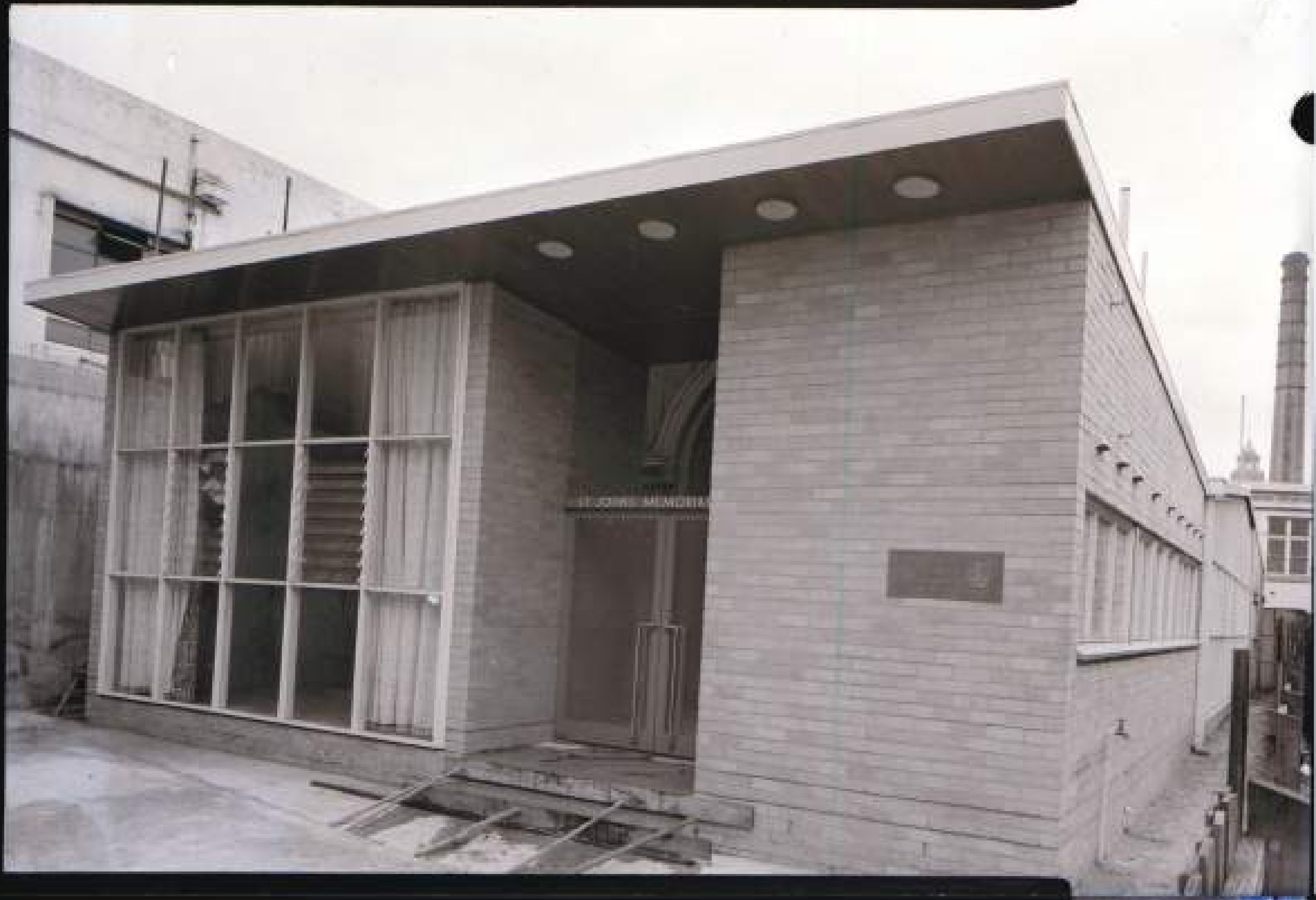
32 See Robert Lindsay and Ken Scarlett, *Vincas Jomantas Sculptor*, (Roseville NSW: Beagle Press, 2018), 168.

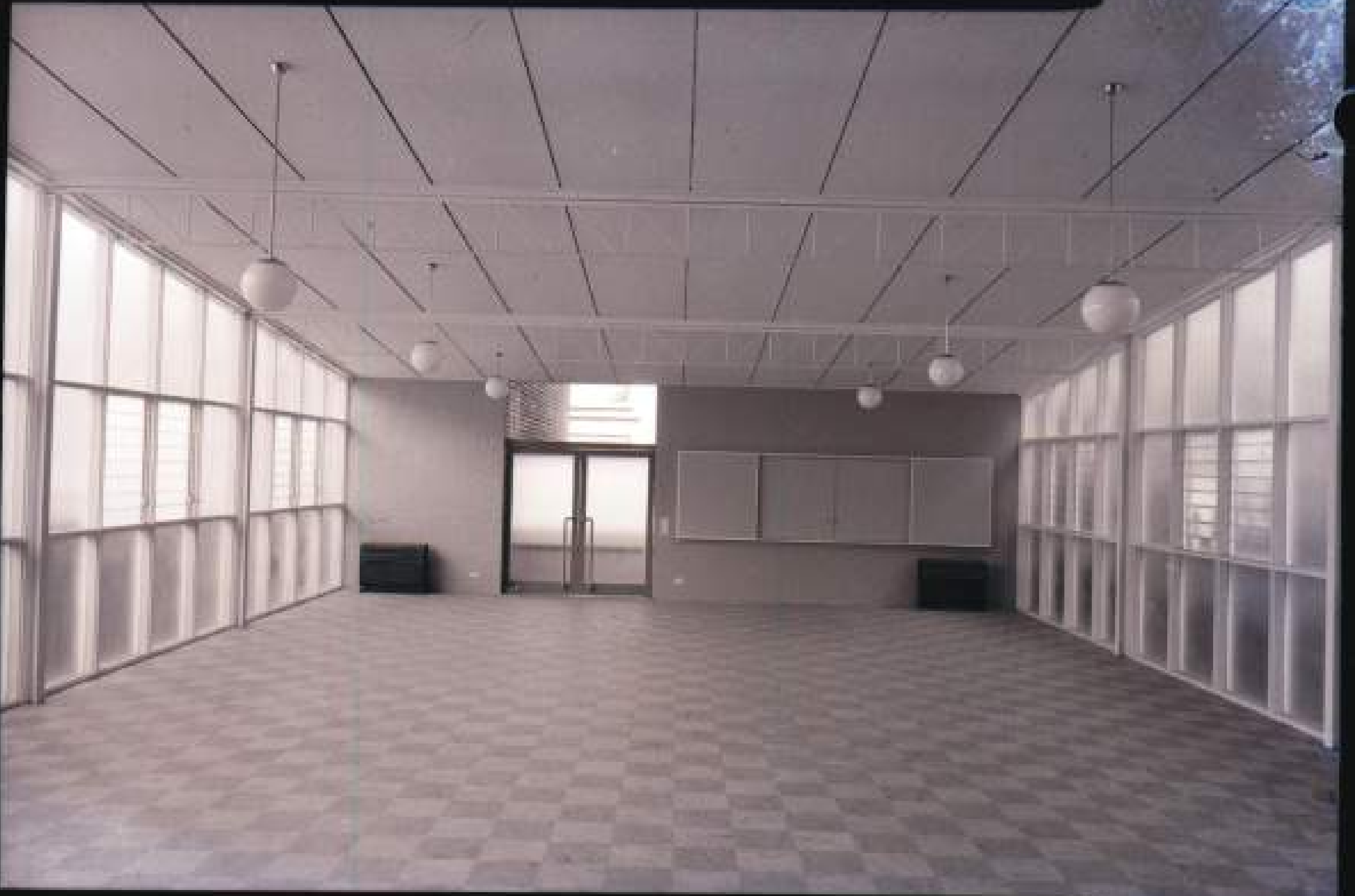
33 James Bryans, the artist's grandson, notes that after returning from Alice Springs, Jelinek and Bryans lived with Edward Bryans's family in Hawthorn for a year before buying their final residence, at 15 Bowen Street Kew.

34 See McDonald, "House Histories: 39 Erin Street".

35 The principle changes, undertaken by George Wahr with advice from an architect, are: six skylights in the ceiling closed off with timber boards, and the metal roof replaced; the open fireplace in the Studio filled in with a 'Gasmaster' style ceramic log fire; and the garage converted to an apartment room with French doors at the outer edge replacing the tilting garage door. In most other respects the fabric of the 1965 building is unchanged.

36 Radovan Lipus and David Vávra, *Šumné Stopy, Austrálie: Alex Jelínek, Česká televize* Praha, 21 May 2019, accessed June, 2019, https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/10262550261-sumne-stopy/217562260100002-australie-alex-jelinek/


ST JOHNS MEMORIA



PEER
REVIEWED
ESSAY

Frederick Romberg's work for the Lutheran Church of Australia 1954–1962*

Harriet Edquist

ABSTRACT

Frederick Romberg's Lutheran connections lie deep in his ancestry. Among the eminent lawyers, professors and civil servants who fill his robust family tree is his great-great grandfather, theologian Julius Wegscheider born in 1771. Wegscheider studied theology at the University of Helmstedt, produced a dissertation in 1805 at the University of Göttingen and was professor of theology at the universities of Rinteln in Hesse and Halle. He was a leading figure in early nineteenth-century rationalist Lutheran theology.[1] According to Romberg however, he was part of the opposition movement to King Friedrich Wilhelm III's attempt to merge the Lutheran (the majority of Prussian Protestants was Lutheran) and Reformed churches into one, centrally controlled, Prussian state church.[2] It was in protest against this authoritarianism that the first Lutherans came to Australia, arriving in South Australia in 1838 with Pastor August Kavel.[3]

This paper explores Romberg's relationship with the Lutheran church as an architect in the practice of Grounds Romberg and Boyd. His three known Lutheran buildings expressed different needs for different, disbursed congregations; a church hall in inner Melbourne, a school in an outer semi-rural suburb of Melbourne and a suburban church in Canberra. The three buildings were commissioned by the Lutheran church and funded by local congregations and district councils to provide accommodation for a growing range of services including memorialisation, worship, youth activities and education.

Lutherans in Victoria

The first ship with German immigrants bound for Port Phillip arrived in February 1849, a decade after arrivals in South Australia and Moreton Bay, Queensland. While Sydney-based Scotsman J D Lang had been instrumental in bringing out the Berlin-trained missionaries to Moreton Bay and George Fife Angas, from his London-based South Australia Company, had assisted Kavel, Melbourne was a project of the South Australian congregation. The first Victorian Lutheran congregation held its services in borrowed buildings in the city, its services conducted by laymen until Matthias Goethe, a teacher at J D Lang's college in Sydney "accepted the charge and, on Good Friday, 1853, was inducted pastor of the Lutheran congregation in Melbourne".[4]

Their first church St Peters was built on Eastern Hill, East Melbourne in 1854, replaced by the present church, designed by C H E Blachmann, in 1872. In late 1860 a group of Old Lutherans who wanted the Trinity congregation of East Melbourne to affiliate themselves with the South Australian Synod, broke away and formed their own congregation in South Melbourne when this wish was not granted. This factionalism is typical of the early history of the Lutheran church in Australia and dominates W H Paech's history of the Victorian congregations making it almost impossibly convoluted and difficult to follow.[5] The breakaway group sought a pastor from South Australia who visited intermittently and the elders held meetings and services where they could, in halls of other denominations or in people's houses. This again is typical of the early years of the church and the network of informal places of worship forms a significant part of the architectural history of Lutheranism in Australia. For example, some services for the South Melbourne congregation were held in Gottlieb Thiele's house in Doncaster, which he called "Friedensruh" ("Peaceful Rest").[6] The Thiele family were pioneers of the district in the 1850s and it became an important centre for German Lutheran immigrants. Thereafter, pastors came and went but for almost 70 years the South Melbourne congregation did not have its own place of worship. Eventually a modest church designed by George Nichterlein in an eclectic late Arts and Crafts manner was built in City Road in 1928. The drawings were completed by Cynthia Teague, then in Nichterlein's office.[7] With its steeply pitched roof, attic windows and spare preaching hall it echoed albeit on a pared-down domestic scale, the East Melbourne church. According to James Bittner a present member of the congregation "the church served mainly working class and middle class families with a few well-to-do families, from all areas of Melbourne, who were mainly descendants of the German Lutherans who migrated to Australia in the mid-19th century".[8]

Post-war immigration

Paech records that by 1950 about 21,580 immigrants arrived in Australia who identified as Lutheran. Their countries of origin were the Baltic States – Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania – as well as Hungary, Poland, Rumania, Yugoslavia and Germany. Over 14,000 Finns arrived in the late 1950s and 1960s and the two Lutheran churches, UELCA and ELCA agreed to cooperate in ministering to these new congregations.

According to Paech, it was in anticipation of this new group of post-war immigrants that St John's congregation and the Victorian District joined forces to buy a Baptist church and hall in Dorcas street, South Melbourne, in 1949. The Pastor at the time was Rev. W H Noske who served from 1942 to 1964. Numbers were not great however and they sold the property.[9] Presumably proceeds from this sale went into the new hall on the City Road site. James Bittner believes that as Romberg was a member of the congregation he was an obvious choice of architect.[10] The contract with builders McDougall and Ireland was signed by the trustees of St. John's on 2 March 1954 and St. John's Memorial Hall was

Opposite
Top
Frederick Romberg, architect, Grounds Romberg & Boyd, St John's Lutheran Memorial Hall, South Melbourne, 1954, Photographer unknown, RMIT Design Archives, Frederick Romberg Collection.

Bottom
Frederick Romberg, architect, Grounds Romberg & Boyd, St John's Lutheran Memorial Hall, South Melbourne. Photographer unknown RMIT Design Archives, Frederick Romberg Collection.

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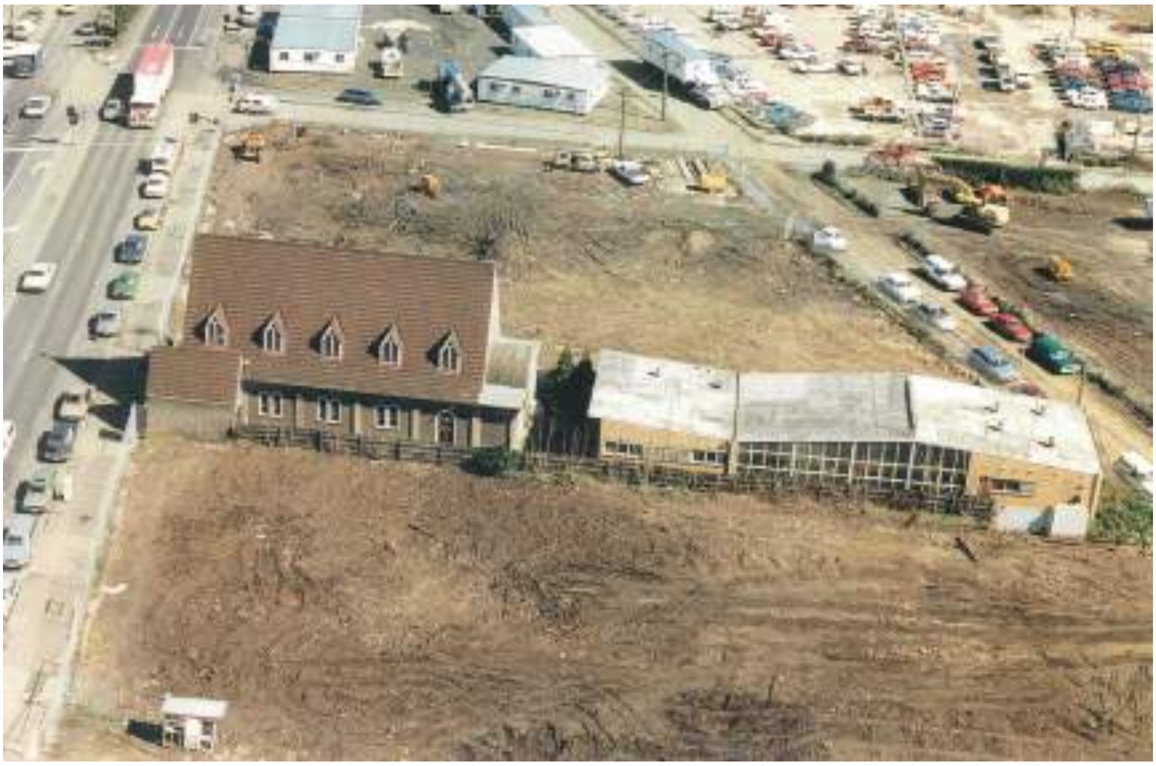
* A version of this paper was presented at the symposium: *Constructing Religious Territories. Community, identity and agency in Australia's modern religious architecture* convened by Lisa Marie Daunt (University of Queensland) and Philip Goad (University of Melbourne) Melbourne School of Design. University of Melbourne Friday 24 August 2018.

Right
St John's Lutheran Memorial Hall, South Melbourne, just prior to demolition in 1989 to make way for Southgate. Photo courtesy James Bittner.

Opposite Top
Aerial photograph of Eero Saarinen Concordia Senior Campus, Fort Wayne, Indiana 1958–1965. Unknown photographer. Courtesy Concordia Theological Seminary.

Opposite Bottom
The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia, "New College at Croydon, Victoria", brochure showing aerial view of proposed first stage, 1959 , RMIT Design Archives, Frederick Romberg Collection.



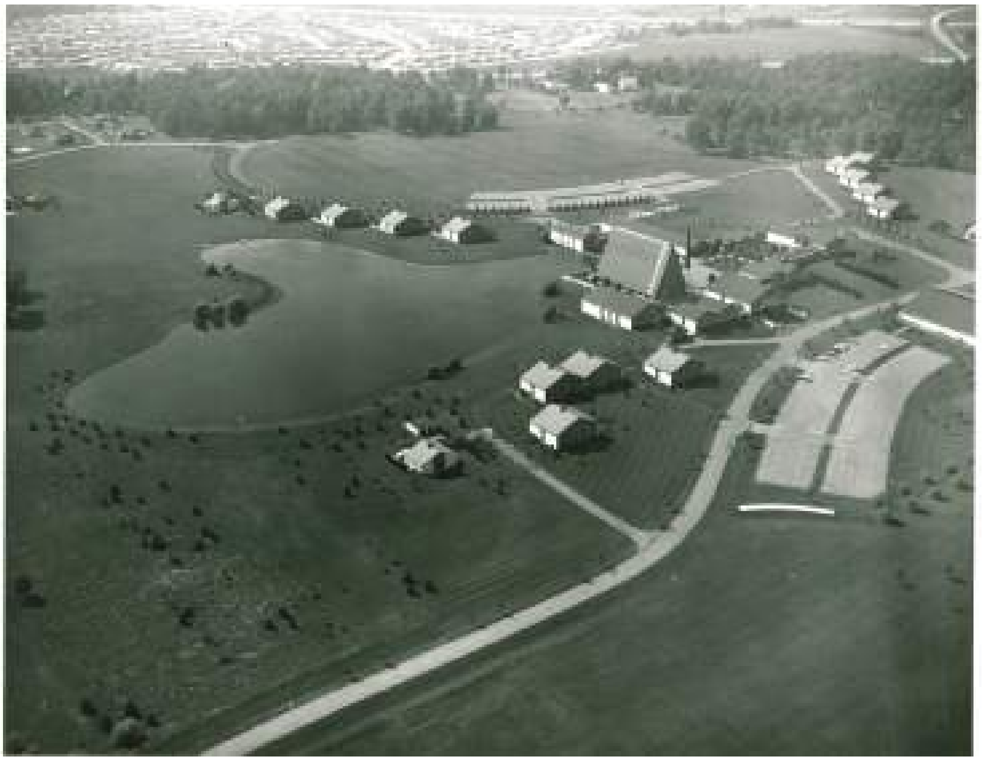
dedicated on Sunday 29 August 1954.[11] The costs, £11,816 were met by donations from all Lutheran congregations in Victoria in response to an appeal promoted by the governing body of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Victorian District in conjunction with St John's.[12]

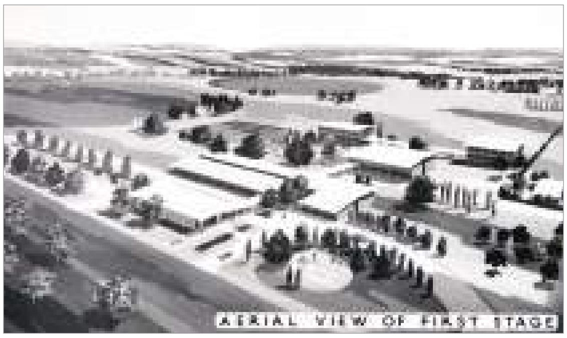
The constitution of the Memorial Hall stipulated firstly, in a carefully worded phrase, that it was "to perpetuate the memory of those members of St John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, City Road, Melbourne who served to win peace in World War II". It was to assist the programme of the church itself and also more generally the Evangelical Church of Australia, Victorian District and it remained under the jurisdiction of both bodies. It was particularly concerned to engage young Lutherans, to keep them within the church by providing facilities for "wholesome entertainment and recreation".[13] A carved timber panel with the inscription "In Memory of the Members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Victoria Who Served the Nation in World War 2" and a bronze dedication plaque fixed to the front of the building by Andor Meszaros would, according to Bittner, have been commissioned by Frederick Romberg.[14] They proclaimed that the hall was as much memorial as functional space. It may well be that some of those people memorialised on the honour board were Germans who had been declared enemy aliens and served in labour units during the war, like Romberg. This building therefore was an assertion of the community's contribution to the nation, as Australian Lutherans.

Romberg deftly squeezed the hall into the long thin slice of land available behind the church. Aerial views taken just prior to demolition show the central volume with glazed walls and slightly pitched roofs bookended by brick-faced rooms. Romberg's own photographs show the entrance with an overhanging eave punctuated with inset circular lights, a modular glazed wall to the left of the front door and the Meszaros plaque on the brick wall to the right. Interior photographs show a simple volume with glazed walls, a small stage to one end with curtains probably designed by Frances Burke.

St. John's Hall was a centre of Lutheran activity. For example, at the end of 1956 the Latvian Congregation of St John's wrote a letter of thanks to the Church Council expressing 'gratitude for co-operation and support' they had received from the Council for more than six years including use of the church hall.[15] By the 1960s St John's Hall provided additional income for the church when hired by external community groups including the Youth Board of the Lutheran Church of Australia, the Royal Horticultural Society of Victoria, Selex Decel, and the Canary Breeders Association of Australia.[16] The request of the French Club of Victoria in 1968 to sub-let the hall on a monthly basis for their cultural and social activities was curtly declined as it involved dancing and a liquor licence. At a later date St John's commissioned another architect to design new accommodation adjacent to the church that involved demolishing Romberg's hall.[17] This project did not eventuate but both the church and hall were demolished to make way for the construction of Southgate in 1989. While St. John's Memorial Hall is a little-known work of Romberg, it is an accomplished example of post-war modernism and his first work for the Lutheran Church.

The relationship Romberg forged with Noske during the building of St. John's Hall was clearly fruitful. For decades Concordia College in Adelaide, founded in 1890, was the




AERIAL VIEW OF FIRST STAGE

only secondary school of the Lutheran church in Australia. Then in 1929 the idea of establishing a second school was discussed in the New South Wales District and for almost thirty years continued to be discussed by numerous committees in other Districts at their various conventions. Eventually it was agreed Victoria would build the new college for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia and a 20-acre site in Croydon, a rural suburb east of Melbourne, was bought in May 1957. The Reverend Noske, who was on the committee for preliminary planning and also on the building sub-committee, as was W G Cornish, had determined on Romberg as architect. Both men met with Romberg on 7 October 1958 and presented him with a detailed brief. There does not appear to have been a tender process and Romberg had, in fact, been earmarked for the project by Noske much earlier.[18] Romberg presented his plans to the general convention in Albury in March 1959. The convention then "instructed the Executive Council to appoint a committee for the development of the plans". Noske, Cornish and Paech were on this committee, Romberg was added later. The entire process was run by resolutions of conventions that established committees of oversight and it is clear Romberg was earmarked for the commission from the outset.

In March 1957, before the Croydon site had been bought and in fact a different site was under consideration, Romberg wrote to Boyd, who was in the United States on a visiting professorship at MIT:

> Just a brief note in connection with the possibility of future school work for the Lutherans on Melbourne. The position is that they have for years been planning the construction of a college in Melbourne similar to the Sacred Heart College. Finance, of course, is the stumbling block, and it would be quite wrong if I told you there were any immediate possibilities of this work going ahead. Nevertheless, I had a chat with Pastor Noske recently about this matter, and it was agreed that it might not be a bad idea, if your itinerary takes you to St Louis, to look up the leading American Lutheran College, which is called Concordia Lutheran Seminary. The man to contact there would be the boss man, the Reverend Professor Dr. Rehwinkel. Noske said if reference is made to him Rehwinkel would receive you with open arms. Be that as it may, but if it does not involve any inconvenience a taxi ride to the nearest corner of the Concordia may be indicated, so you can say you have been there and are the greatest living expert on Lutheran Seminaries. This should suffice to completely defeat Mr. Cornish in what would promise to be a series of heated committee meetings. Let me emphasize that the position is so vague at the moment that it would not warrant any changes of itinerary, and the call should be made only if you happen to be in St. Louis anyway.[19]

Boyd did not visit the Lutheran seminary in St. Louis as Romberg suggested but referred Romberg to Eero Saarinen's new seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana:

> Fred – Enclosed P/A clip shows Saarinen's new Lutheran Seminary now half-built and the only architecturally-noteworthy one in the US. Now that I am the greatest living foreign authority on US Lutheran Seminaries, Dr Rehwinkle and I are in almost continuous contact and President Neeb of the enclosed school and I are getting on just like that. I thought you might pass the enclosed on to pastor Noske, if he has not seen it, just for something to do; mentioning I've discussed it with the architect (I saw a model when I visited Saarinen) and, well, you know. . .[20]

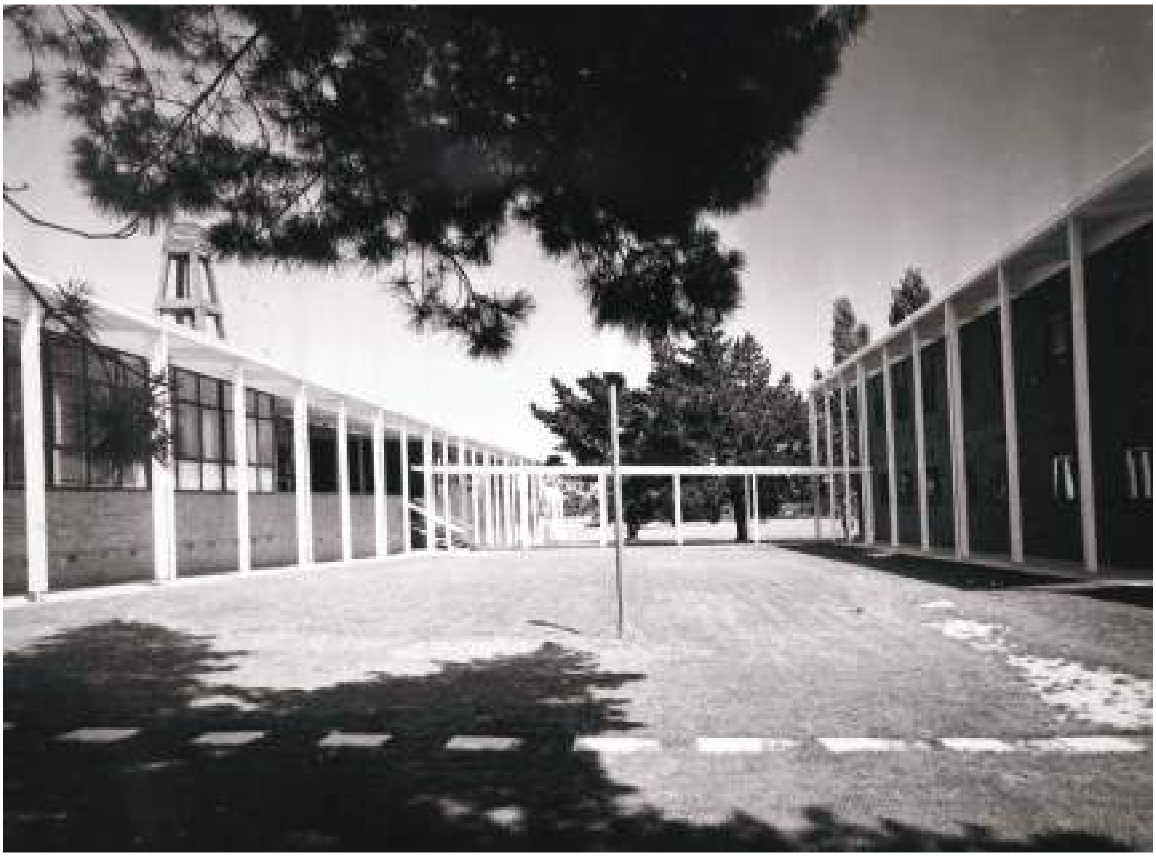
Boyd had visited Saarinen in Detroit in March and been shown around the office where there were "models everywhere" including presumably Concordia.[21] Saarinen's 19-acre campus for the seminary's senior college in Fort Wayne, Indiana offered a distinctive way of dealing with an educational facility on a green field site. If the committee had envisioned multistorey dormitory blocks, the Finnish architect gave them a riff on the Scandinavian village with its low-rise clusters of buildings for staff and students, featuring a white-washed, diamond-shaped brick and black-tiled, pitched roofs. The focal point was Kramer chapel situated at the centre of the campus with its steeply pitched roof in homage to Finnish tradition rising above the campus, visible from all sides, reflected in the artificial lake adjacent. At the 1958 dedication of the campus, Saarinen noted,

> Our concern was the creation of an architecture which would support and express the idea of this particular college ... The strategic question was the relationship of the buildings to the world. On the one hand, we all felt that they should not be inward-turning and removed like medieval monasteries; but, on the other, we felt the group must - for its purpose - have a tranquil atmosphere of at least partial self-sufficiency.[22]

These last words of Saarinen provide a clue to Romberg's approach. It is easy to see how the most prominent element of Saarinen's campus plan – its low scale, dispersed character and uniform architecture – has been used by Romberg in Croydon. The materials were subdued and minimal - red brick, walls with modular glazing panels as at St John's but enlivened by white timber colonnades that provided covered walks and links between the buildings and visually tied the campus together. As Romberg described it:

> The buildings are loosely grouped on the site, connected by covered ways. All windows face due north or south and are protected by wide verandahs. The red brick work has flush joints of matching colour. Verandah posts and ceilings are white.[23]

If Saarinen's campus harked back to the vernacular Scandinavian village Romberg countered by deploying vernacular colonial villa forms in his buildings. Whereas Saarinen planned his buildings around a common green, a sort of rural quad focused on the chapel Romberg planned his on a more dispersed stem and branch arrangement that separated the living spaces from the teaching spaces, thus



This Page
Luther College, Croydon, 1964, RMIT Design Archives, Frederick Romberg Collection, Photographer: Kenneth Ross

Opposite
The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia, "New College at Croydon, Victoria", brochure showing perspective view of proposed first stage, 1959, RMIT Design Archives, Frederick Romberg Collection.

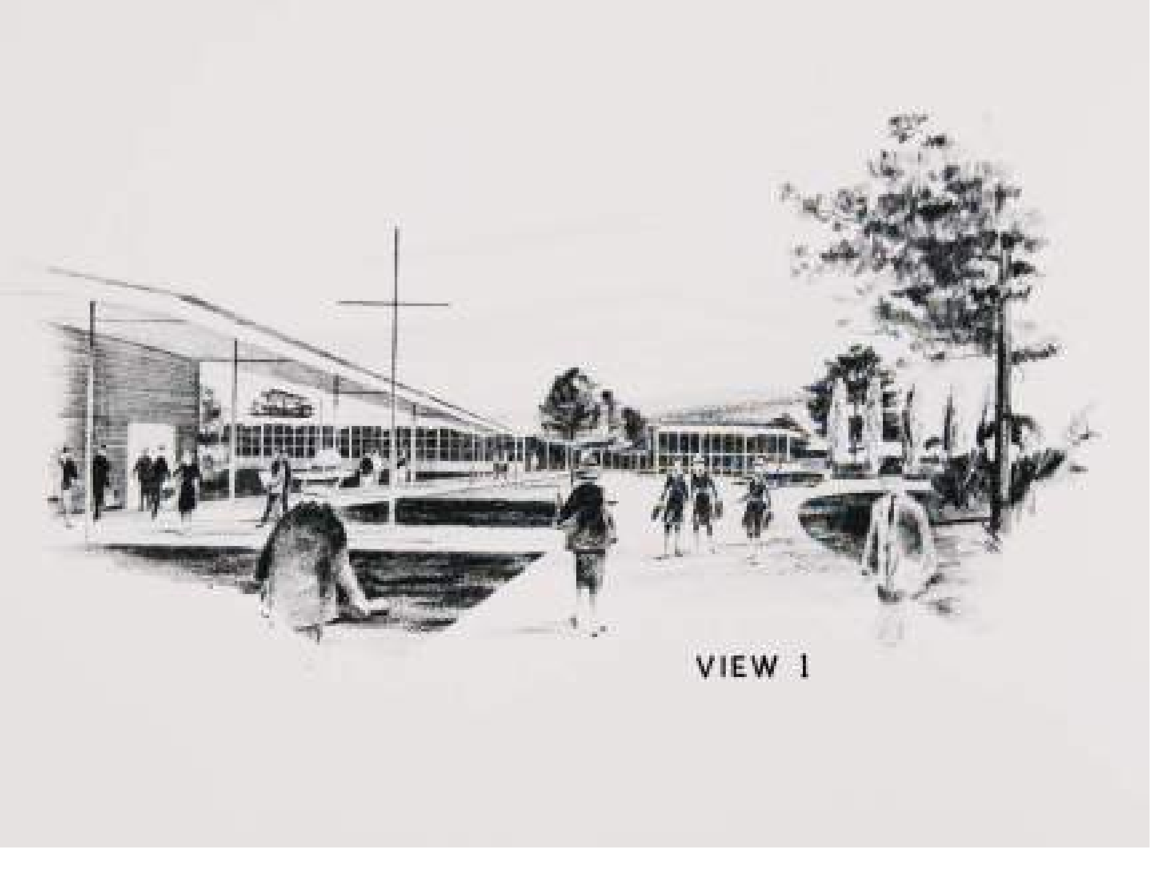
providing the students with privacy and the campus with the capacity to expand without destroying its integrity. The only formal reference to Concordia was the attenuated clock tower which has a familial likeness to Saarinen's campanile. The founding head of the College, W H Paech, later wrote to Romberg:

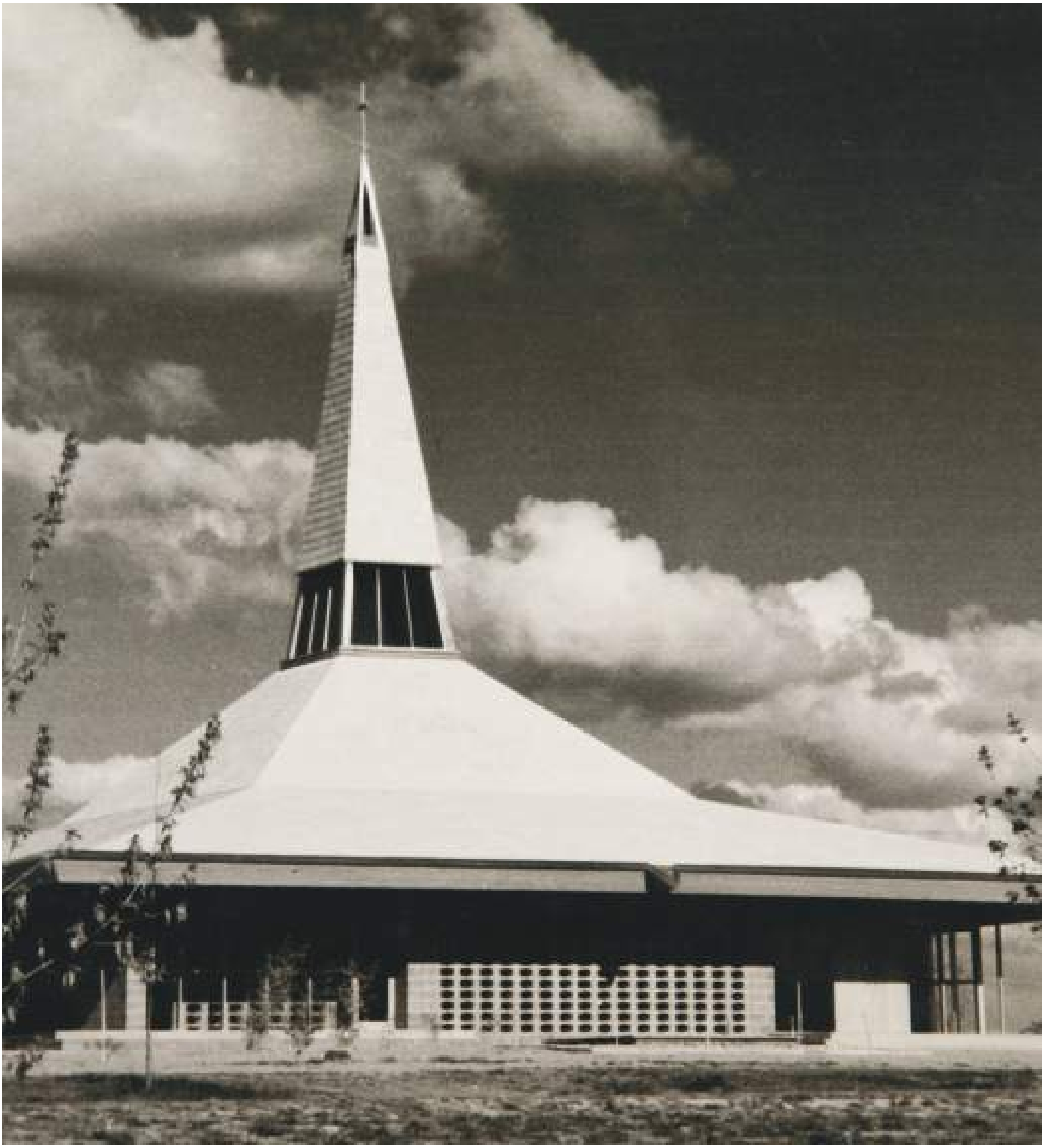
> I must say that it was a privilege and pleasure to render some service to the Lutheran Church and to the community.
>
> I assure you that my association with you during the years of planning for Luther College is a very happy memory. I am extremely happy that you set such an excellent architectural standard of the College.[24]

The first building was the classroom-administration block then dining-kitchen-domestic block, two boarding-houses and service block. Just as the second stage development was to get underway Romberg accepted the position of foundation professor in the School of Architecture at Newcastle, New South Wales and the College severed connections with him. Interestingly enough they went to Mockridge, Stahle and Mitchell a distinguished Melbourne firm that had designed the centenary building at Melbourne Grammar School in 1959. Their work for Luther College comprising seven classrooms and two science laboratories was dedicated in April 1967, and was seamlessly inserted into the formal and physical structure Romberg had provided. As Paech commented, "It is good that your successors maintained the standard set by you".[25]

While Luther College was under construction Romberg was working on Holy Trinity Church in Canberra the best known of his Lutheran buildings and one of the most distinguished architectural works commissioned by the Lutheran church in Australia. It joined other buildings completed by Grounds Romberg & Boyd in Canberra around that time: Grounds' Academy of Science Building (1959), Forrest Townhouses (1959), 42, 44, 46 Vasey Crescent Campbell (1960) and CSIRO Phytotron Building, Acton (1962), and, Boyd's Zoological Building at ANU (1963). The Lutheran church executive in Adelaide authorised the finances including a loan from the Lutheran Laymen's League, the church extension fund department of the ECLA, for the building to go ahead in April 1959.[26] Design commenced in 1959 and the working drawings were finished by Fritz Suendermann in mid-1960; he was the project architect and supervised its construction from an office in Forrest ACT. After the contractor Jakob Hafner defaulted, Civil and Civic were taken on as the contractors in 1961 and construction was completed in 1962.

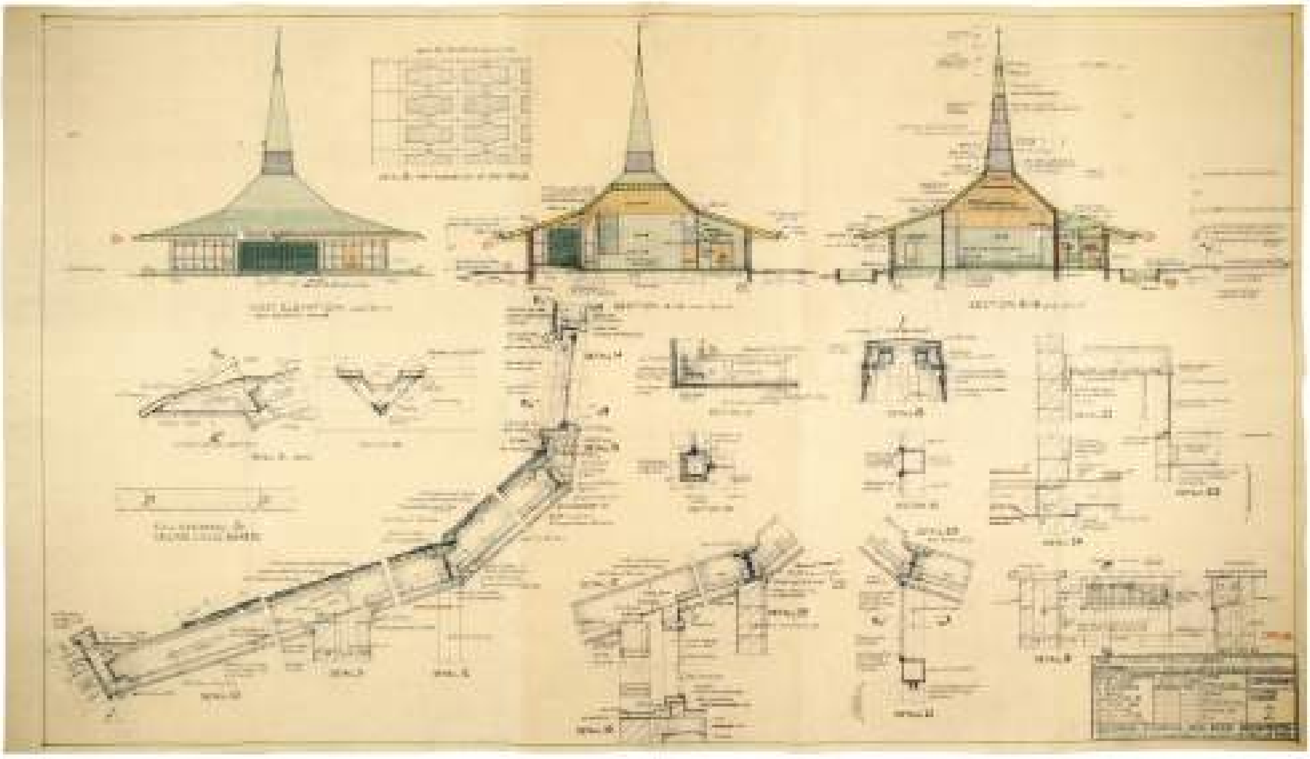
Holy Trinity was one of two churches built concurrently in Canberra for the two Lutheran congregations ECLA and UECLA, the other being St Peter's Memorial Church in Forrest, completed in 1961. These churches accommodated the post-war influx of Lutheran migrants to the ACT from Germany, Latvia, Estonia, Finland and elsewhere; most were skilled tradesmen who came to work on government housing projects in Canberra, as well as projects at Cooma and in the Snowy Mountains.





Above
Frederick Romberg, architect, Grounds Romberg & Boyd, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, 22 Watson Street, Turner, ACT, 1962, RMIT Design Archives, Frederick Romberg collection, unknown photographer.

Opposite
Frederick Romberg, architect, Grounds Romberg & Boyd, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, working drawings, 1960, RMIT Design Archives, Frederick Romberg Collection.



Whereas the A-frame form of Saarinen's Kramer chapel provided a model for St Peter's Romberg absorbed the fundamental idea of Saarinen's college and developed it within an Australian context, as he had done at Luther College. He re-tuned the square plan that was endemic in the firm's architecture and capped it with a big roof with overhanging eaves that were redolent of the vernacular homestead. Rather than a separate campanile as at Concordia, vertical emphasis was given by the spire that forms as it were a natural extension of the roof. Romberg used the affordances of the open site to enable his pavilion to be viewed from all sides and the original plan provided for reflecting pools centrally placed in front of each elevation in a manner that probably referenced Saarinen's use of reflecting water at Concordia and at MIT Chapel (1955), a building that was influential on Grounds' contemporary design for the Shine Dome in Canberra.

The Heritage citation for Holy Trinity contains this appraisal of Romberg's careful control of detail and sightlines.

> The entry doors are slightly off-set from the southeast corner where a concrete porch extends in front of the corner glazing leading from the perimeter carpark. The lobby (narthex) is fully glazed on both external walls while the timber-panelled doors that open to the nave of the church are placed on the corner, at right angles to each other without a central jamb. These doors are carefully detailed so that when closed they form the right angled corner of the nave perimeter wall and when opened provide an unobstructed diagonal entry to the nave from the lobby.
>
> Once the doors are open the eye is drawn up the timber lined ceiling to the central highlights at the base of the "fleche' and the structure of the church becomes apparent. Suspended within the square recess of the fleche glazing at the high point of the timber-lined ceiling is an aureole with seven lights. [27]

Romberg was initially worried about the modular Besser block he had specified (Concordia used a 5x4 modular brick) but decided he liked the effect when the building was finished.

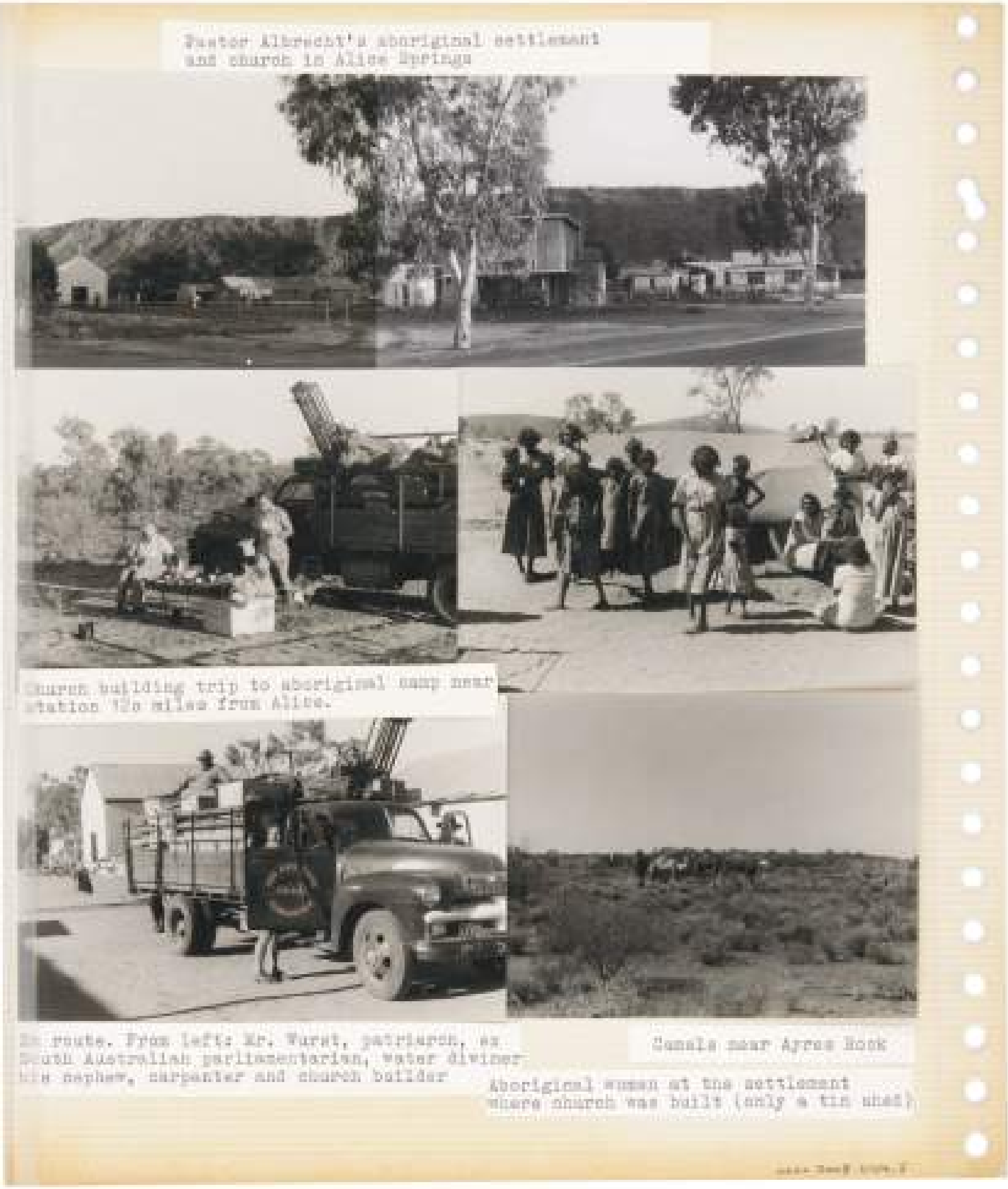
On 3 May 1961 Grounds wrote to Romberg who was in London "I saw the Lutheran Church in Canberra last week, all framed up. In scale and concept, it's a honey".[28]

Interestingly, the external form of Holy Trinity has a strong resemblance to Saarinen's North Christian Church Indiana (1964) although their planning is fundamentally different; whereas Saarinen separated the sanctuary from the community spaces by burying the latter underground, Romberg maintained the dual purpose of his building by arranging sacred and social spaces on one plane in the Lutheran manner. Saarinen was appointed architect of North Christian in February, 1959 a few months before Romberg gained the contract for Holy Trinity. Saarinen submitted the final version of his design in August 1961, a month before his death.[29] The similarities between the two buildings, while striking, are therefore not causal. In 1976 Holy Trinity was assigned to the Finnish community to hold services in their own language.

While Luther College was progressing and Holy Trinity on the drawing board, immersed in Lutheran history, Romberg joined George Tippett on a car trip to the Northern Territory. Tippett was medical officer in charge of the new Commonwealth Department of Health Aerial Medical Service (Flying Doctor Service) in Central Australia, based at Alice Springs.[30] His wife Helen, an architect who had worked in the Gromboyd office just after graduation, had opened an office in Alice Springs "designing solar houses and buildings for church and Aboriginal settlements".[31]

While in transit, Tippett and Romberg heard "on the pedal radio" that Tippett's patient, Albert Namatjira, had died.[32] Pastor Friedrich Albrecht delivered Namatjira's eulogy and when Romberg visited him in Alice Springs, where he had moved with his family in 1952, the pastor gave him a copy of the text. Namatjira had been born at Hermannsburg (Ntaria) and in 1905 when he was three "the family was received into the Lutheran Church".[33]

In 1877 the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Australia (ELSA) established the Finke River mission among the Aranda/ Arrernte people sending up its first two missionaries A. Hermann Kempe and Wilhelm F. Schwarz recently arrived



Pastor Albrecht's aboriginal settlement
and church in Alice Springs

Church building trip to aboriginal camp near
station 120 miles from Alice.

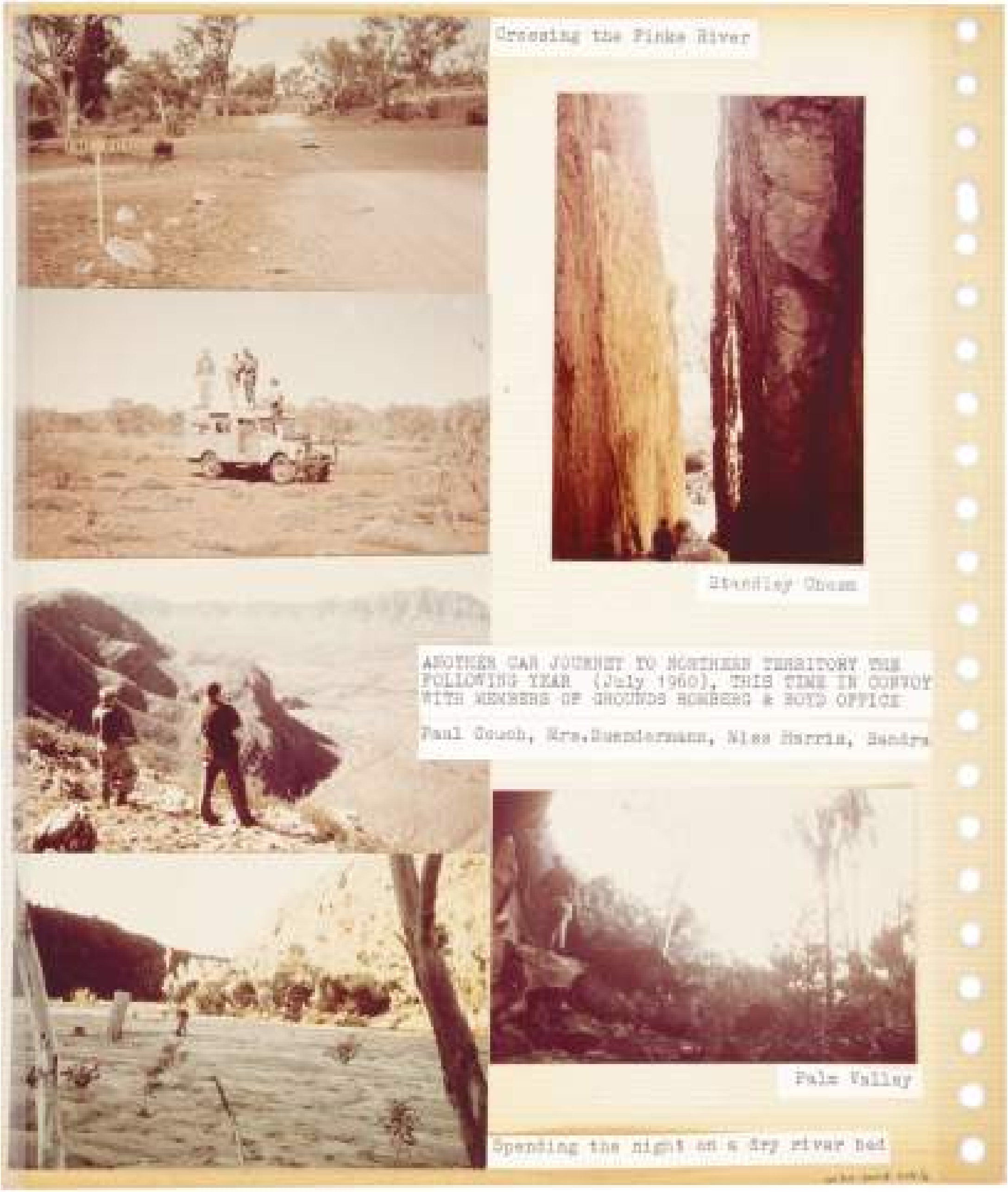
En route. From left: Mr. Wurst, patriarch, ex
South Australian parliamentarian, water diviner
his nephew, carpenter and church builder

Camels near Ayres Rock

Aboriginal women at the settlement
where church was built (only a tin shed)

Above
Views of Hermannsburg (Ntaria) Northern Territory, 1959.
RMIT Design Archives, Frederick Romberg Collection. Courtesy Brayden Kantjira, Elder and Traditional Owner, Hermannsburg (Ntaria).

Opposite
Members of the Grounds, Romberg & Boyd office around Hermannsburg (Ntaria), Northern Territory, 1960, RMIT Design Archives, Frederick Romberg Collection. Courtesy Brayden Kantjira, Elder and Traditional Owner, Hermannsburg (Ntaria).



Crossing the Finke River

Standley Chasm

ANOTHER CAR JOURNEY TO NORTHERN TERRITORY THE FOLLOWING YEAR (July 1960), THIS TIME IN CONVOY WITH MEMBERS OF GROUNDS ROMBERG & BOYD OFFICE

Paul Couch, Mrs.Buendermann, Miss Harris, Sandra

Palm Valley

Spending the night on a dry river bed

from Germany. Kempe learned the Arrernte language and produced the first Arrernte book:

> a 21-page primer *Intalinja Nkenkalalbutjika Galtjeritjika*. He next compiled *A Grammar and Vocabulary of the Language Spoken by the Aborigines of the MacDonnell Ranges*, South Australia. The vocabulary alone numbered some 2000 words with their meanings. The essay, translated and published in Vol XIV of the *Transactions and Proceedings of the Royal Society of SA*, ran into 54 pages. In 1891 there appeared the first Aranda book of Christian instruction and worship: *Galtjintana-Pepa Kristianirberaka Mbontala*. It embodied Old and New Testament stories, psalms, the small Lutheran catechism, occasional prayers and 53 hymns. Printed at Hermannsburg in Hanover, it comprised 160 pages.[34]

ELSA severed connections with the mission in 1891 because of internal dissention with the mother church and in September 1894 the breakaway Immanuel Synod bought the mission and sent Carl Friedrich Strehlow, who had graduated from the seminary at Neuendettelsau in 1891, as Pastor. Like Kempe, Strehlow combined his pastoral duties with scholarship and added to Kempe's work in the Lutheran tradition, including his *Die Aranda und Loritja-Stamme in Zentral-Australien* (1907-1920).[35] His work was contemporary with that of Baldwin Spencer, Professor of Biology at the University of Melbourne and Frank Gillen, Post and Telegraph Stationmaster in Alice Springs, but where these two represented the British anthropological tradition based on Darwinian evolutionary theory that dominated Australian discourse, German anthropology had, according to Anna Kenny, "a humanistic agenda".[36]

Strehlow died in 1921, the mission was taken over by the UELCA and Albrecht became pastor in 1926. His early years were haunted by drought that led to scurvy and a high death rate in the mission.[37]

Romberg had been to Alice Springs before, during the war when, as an enemy alien, he had been called up by Allied Works in July 1943 and sent to the Northern Territory, first to Katherine and then to Alice Springs; his memoirs of that time understandably do not indicate any awareness of the existence of missions. His archive, however, contains a photograph album on two pages of which are 12 small black and white photographs that record Hermannsburg mission (Ntaria) 60 years ago. On one page are six photographs, the top two joined together to form a panorama depicting 'Pastor Albrecht's Aboriginal settlement and church in Alice Springs'. The lower four are intriguing. One is labelled 'Church building trip to Aboriginal camp near station 120 miles from Alice' another; 'Mr Wurst, patriarch, ex South Australian parliamentarian, water diviner, his nephew, carpenter and church builder'; a third 'Aboriginal women at the settlement where church was built (only a tin shed)' and finally, 'Camels near Ayres Rock' one of several photos taken on another trip, to Uluru, about 460k from Alice where Romberg presumably flew with Tippett. Accompanying these photographs is a one-page typed text from which we learn that:

> At Pastor Albrecht's request (F.R. "being an architect") he accompanied an expedition to a remote station to build a small church for the local Aborigines. While there he went water divining with Mr. Wurst and played marbles with the male Aborigines.[38]

As far as I am aware Romberg never wrote about this work anywhere else. Built of corrugated iron and timber, it would probably have been a simple, single-room structure, its whereabouts now unknown. Paech notes that by 1959 Albrecht and his son, Pastor P.G.E. Albrecht, had four congregations in their care as well as Alice Springs: Henbury, Jay Creek, Maryvale and Erldunda. It is possible that one of these was the destination of Romberg's road trip in that year.[39]

Conclusion

At Hermannsburg through the legacies of Pastor Kempe and Pastor Carl Strehlow and his son, anthropologist Theodor (Ted) Strehlow, Romberg could feel the full weight of the German intellectual tradition that he was so conscious of in his own ancestry. Aboriginal Lutherans sang German hymns in language because from the beginning the Lutherans translated their hymns and biblical texts into Arrente and Pitjinjara. As Anna Kenny notes:

> German missionaries in Australia brought their linguistic tradition with them. Among the missionaries, it went without saying that it was paramount to learn the language of the people they were working with and sent to serve. . . .Luther preached that the word of God was to be taught in vernacular and translated into a people's mother tongue.[40]

Archaeologist Mike Smith has noted that Hermannsburg was "one of the few places on the Australian colonial frontier where there was such sustained intellectual engagement between Aboriginal people and Europeans over several generations". The mission was "an intellectual conduit by which Aboriginal perceptions and knowledge entered European thought".[41]

Perhaps it was pride in this German heritage (even if contentious today) that prompted Romberg to organize another trip to the Territory for the Gromboyd office in July 1960. The page of fading colour photographs show Paul Couch, Mrs Suendermann, Berenice Harris and Sandra.

No longer the enemy alien of 1943 Romberg, through his eighteenth-century ancestor Julius Wegscheider, could lay claim to a personal history that distinguished him from his Australian-born partners Boyd and Grounds. Interestingly one of his last completed works was the Aboriginal Keeping Place, presently the Bangerang Cultural Centre, at Shepparton that is understood today as an early attempt at reconciliation.[42]

Endnotes

1 For Julius Wegscheider see, for example, https://www.revolvy.com/page/Julius-Wegscheider https://books.google.co.au/books?id=rgkWCgAAQBAJ&pg=PA375&lpg=PA375&dq=Julius+August+Ludwig+Wegscheider&source=bl&ots=mkAXw3iFD&sig=-MRuWJivDWc8yX_IgRF4iay2uXY&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjC_Mj8grLcAhXEf7wKHXKtAPY4ChDoATAGegQIBRAB#v=onepage&q=Julius%20August%20Ludwig%20Wegscheider&f=false, accessed 22 July 2018.

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25 W H Paech to Professor F. Romberg, copy of letter, June 28, 1976, RMIT Design Archives, Romberg and Boyd Collection.

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37 Albrecht had been trying to get piped water from the Kopolilya Springs four miles away but lacked the funds. In 1932 Melbourne artists, cousins Violet Teague and Una Teague visited Hermannsburg and in 1934 Violet organised an art exhibition and sale at the Athenaeum and the proceeds, over £2,000 bought the pipes that, with extra funding for their transport, made water supply a reality.

38 Frederick Romberg, typed page of notes accompanying photographs of Hermannsburg, August 1959, RMIT Design Archives, Romberg and Boyd Collection

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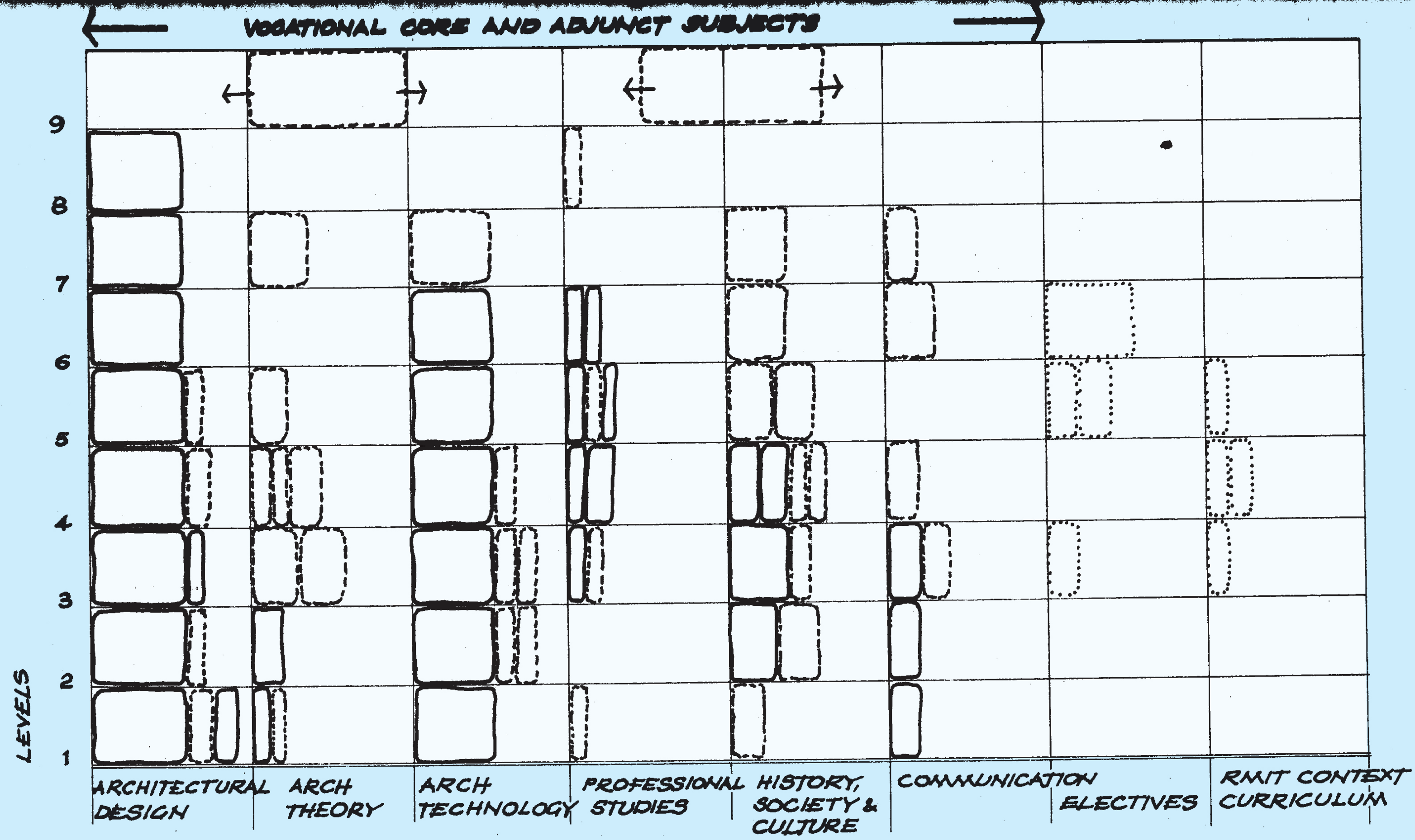
VOCATIONAL CORE AND ADJUNCT SUBJECTS
LEVELS
9
8
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6
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3
2
1
ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN
ARCH THEORY
ARCH TECHNOLOGY
PROFESSIONAL STUDIES
HISTORY, SOCIETY & CULTURE
COMMUNICATION
ELECTIVES
RMIT CONTEXT CURRICULUM

FIGURE 3: SCHEMATIC DIAGRAM OF COURSE AFTER PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

SUBJECTS DESIGNED TO COVER ARBV SYLLABUS ARE SHOWN SOLID

Antecedents, Aspirations, Diagrams and Documents: a speculative memoir of the incubation, production and operation of the 1985 RMIT Bachelor of Architecture Degree

PEER
REVIEWED
ESSAY

Peter Downton

ABSTRACT

The coffee houses of Melbourne hosted us over four months of intermittent discussion, debate and scribbling. The two of us, Tom Emodi and I, put out a paper to our fellow staff in June 1982 titled 'ELEVEN ARCH-QUARKS: Architectural knowledge and implications for a course in architecture'. This was an endeavour to present an organised contribution to the growing swell of discussion about the existing RMIT architecture degree. It serves as an opening to this tale of the development of a new degree because we hoped to establish some grounded educational philosophy to draw on in our developmental processes. At the time Tom and I were both senior lecturers heading different programs within the architecture department. By the end of 1982 Tom had departed.

My task here, is to think about why and how this new course in architecture came about in its time and locale and to consider how courses tire and require refurbishment or replacement. To inform the reader of my background: I am writing in 2020 and challenging my memories of some forty years prior; I write from the position of an emeritus professor who assumed the mantle of departmental head for four years at the time we were constructing the framework for the new degree; I had a later four-year period as foundation head of a school formed from architecture and cognate design disciplines; and later still I was Professor of Design Research. For almost half my academic life I conducted research about designing. In parallel (when wearing my teaching hat) I offered about fifty design studios, myriad lectures and countless seminars. I focus here on the RMIT course that commenced in first semester 1985 because I can write of it first-hand. The 'Eleven Arch-Quarks' paper was not the beginning of the processes of producing that new course. Probably, the beginning could be traced to the formative influences that shaped all those involved in developing the course. I commence my tale with the Arch-Quark paper because for me it was an effort to produce a considered and carefully expressed condensation of ideas about architectural education and present them in a formal structure. I cannot recall the frequency of our meetings, or their number, although I remember we sometimes worked at my house – possibly with limited coffee. I no longer know the sequences of idea development. This illustrates why my account is not to be taken as authoritative, although I can draw on privileged first-hand involvement: I unavoidably write as an historian of the partial and somewhat smudged information available to me from a melange of memory and documentation. I speculate where necessary.

Introduction

The paper we concocted itemised what we thought of as a set of eleven concepts about architecture called 'arch-quarks' to parallel Murray Gell-Mann's concept in physics of the quark: a fundamental building block of hadrons and thus ultimately all matter. Each arch-quark had the following form: first a statement, then a discursive text giving support and elaboration, and finally, a set of pointers for architectural education. The eleven statements were also assembled into an introductory summary. We settled on these structural devices early and beat our thinking into the prescribed form until we exhausted our ideas. We harboured no enthusiasm for the number eleven – there might have been more, and the arguments of each arch-quark might have been expanded or refined. The document produced, was one of several I wrote (sometimes in collaboration with Tom) as part of departmental discussions about the weaknesses of the existing architecture degree and the form and character of its replacement. In my view the degree that had started in 1975 (two years prior to my arrival in the department) was strong in terms of its educational principles, but only sometimes strong in implementation.

Note that throughout I use the terms 'subject' and 'course' in the ways then current in RMIT. A subject comprised a series of lectures, studios, seminars, or workshops. Students attended these (or not), performed the appropriate assessment tasks, and received a grade such as pass, credit, distinction, or fail. A course at that time was composed of a number of subjects held together by rules specifying the specific subjects to be done and passed in order to satisfy the requirements for the course and hence the award of the degree of Bachelor of Architecture. Subjects were arrayed in a year structure where the completion of a year was prerequisite for entry into the following year. In Architecture in the 1975 version of the course, progress requirements were enforced somewhat randomly, and students progressed in interesting and rather administratively challenging ways. Subsequently, RMIT adopted more typical North American usage, and acceptable parlance became 'course' for 'subject' and 'program' for 'course'. To avoid bafflement as a reader, you may wish to perform substitutions.

The preceding degree

The 1975 degree had found many means of upsetting the prevailing ways in which Australian architecture degrees were structured. It also challenged the content they contained. Much of that content was prescribed by the assorted state architecture registration boards and was hence substantially similar across the country. What the schools of architecture, by the 1980s, described themselves as doing could be categorised as filling incoming empty heads with professional knowledge on a techno-rational model with the (hidden?) aim of producing graduates able to do what architects do. Judging from informal conversations, many practising architects would still expect to see this in potential employees. The approach of such courses was at least partially projective, in that there was an assumption that the knowledge and skills imparted were appropriate for graduates to utilise at least seven years on from the time of starting a course. That is, the material would remain current, or at least useful, until registration as an architect.

Opposite
Peter Downton, Schematic Diagram of Course after Proposed Amendments, Course Review, Bachelor of Architecture, 1984, Peter Downton Collection

In the intervening decades the expected skill sets of the immediately employable have been radically reformed. This attests to the need for courses to equip graduates with thinking and learning abilities, not only with a collection of precisely focussed items of professional knowledge agreeably wrapped with a little culture. Regardless of the character of self-description, the courses and the institutions around them – universities, the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (as it was then) and the registration boards – were collectively legitimising a mode of operating, while giving protected access to a class of knowledge and to the extant supporting power and financial structures. As with its predecessor, the 1985 degree was developed to similarly question and challenge some of this status quo, and to give considerable responsibility to individual staff and students for shaping each individual's learning experiences. It also aimed to address the delivery and operational shortcomings of the earlier degree.

To offer clarity about the milieu of the 1985 degree, a brief outline of the 1975 one is provided here. It was fathered by Graeme Gunn (as Head of School prior to becoming Dean in 1977) and was part of his program of revitalisation. The detailed design was by John Baird and Randall May and showed strong influences from Barry McNeill at Hobart.[1] As I remember it, in the first three years of the degree, each student, each semester, wrote a four-page contract with his or her advisor outlining a project to be undertaken under that advisor's guidance. The contracts specified what resources the student would employ to do this. For example, the student might attend several lecture subjects in different appropriate topic areas, consult with certain people, read in particular areas, and produce an agreed outcome. It could sensibly be described as asking of early year tertiary students that they behave as self-motivating research post-graduates. Lecture subjects and workshops were provided. Typically lecture attendance faded, material proved too hard to source, and the project drifted into something less-ambitious than initially proposed. For the highly motivated student working with a conscientious staff member the 1975 degree provided an outstanding educational process; for others it could become rather vague, or completely hopeless. Assessment was sometimes difficult, and warranting that all students were covering the syllabus required by the Architect's Registration Board of Victoria could not be honestly done. There was a pile of recognisably 1970s dogma surrounding the course. At times self-assessment was undertaken. There were frequent very wearisome, mostly earnest and well-intentioned, student-staff meetings. Often the student projects were not particularly architectural, but socially responsible in intent, with insubstantial and naively constructed research and excessive writing – approaches that were similar (in my perception) to other architecture degrees around Australia in that era. It was the late 1970s after all. The part-time night-time evening second three years of this degree was far more structured and traditional. In parallel, a fully part-time diploma was conducted, with the last survivors still wandering the corridors in the 1980s.

Dissatisfactions and desires

Many members of staff had much to say about the characteristics of the 1975 degree. Discussion in meetings was considerable and often oppositional between the 'for' and 'against' factions. My earliest partial critique of the degree described above was "A case for the radical middle ground in architectural education" published in 1978 in An Indulgence #5 – an occasional journal of the department. As one of that journal's editors I considered my paper well worth publishing. Looking back, I appear to have been seeking a way of reconciling the opposing positions and searching for interesting educational ideas that could be implemented fully. I apparently extended these aspirations across the other courses in the faculty, and am quoted as having opened another paper (that I do not remember and cannot source, although it is believably my writing) titled "A Vision of the Faculty in Five Years" with:

> There will be no Mickey Mouse courses. Definition of Mickeymouseness: n. an entropy-like quality which is both a measure of the degree to which a course fails to foster imagination, rigour and responsibility in its students, and a measure of the extent to which these attributes lack harmony.[2]

I had also produced, again with Tom Emodi, the now presumably lost "Revised first exploratory hesitant draft ideas for a re-design of the architecture courses", dated March, 1981. My self-bibliography lists this as then revised under my sole authorship in May, 1981. I have no memory of the relationship of this paper to the Arch-quarks one, which was inherently positive in character, rather than predominantly offering a critique; the later paper promulgated a potential underlying philosophy. In various ways, and to differing degrees, these papers resonated with members of staff. I presume some detested my thinking and some were persuaded by it, or accepted some of these writings after debate or dismissal. There were ongoing discussions in meetings and corridors about the wide-ranging dissatisfactions with the prior course. As many of the dissatisfactions were largely opposed to one another, proposed alternatives could be irreconcilable. Some partially articulated proposals seemed to me to be attempting to make an RMIT degree more like an imagined ideal university degree – academically punctilious and conventionally respectable. Desires doubtless also drew on where people had studied, and whether they now respected or disliked their undergraduate education. (I had moved to RMIT in 1977 from a research and teaching role in The University of Melbourne – unquestionably held to be respectable at the time – where I had taught design studios in the architecture degree which, for a year or two around 1973 and 74, had combined the design students in all its five years into vertically-streamed studios. The then professor of architecture, Charles Robertson, with whom I had worked closely, harboured at least some enthusiasm for a degree structured into Architecture 1 to Architecture 5.)

Within the context of the then Faculty at RMIT, where new departments and courses had recently been introduced, there was a formal requirement for an amended degree in architecture "... to take its appropriate place within the educational framework of the Faculty".[3] This was to allow things such as: integration between courses in the realm of the built environment at different scales; accommodation of education for the growing range of architectural activities both within and adjacent to normal architectural practice; consolidation of changes made to the prior degree to allow the varied enrolment patterns required after the termination of the fully part-time diploma; utilisation of so-called 'micro-computers' in learning; facilitation of varied entry paths for new students with existing degrees and/or an interest in combined degrees or in tailoring their education; enabling subjects to be reconfigured to be of single semester duration; and the reduction of scheduled weekly contact hours (both requirements of RMIT).[4] [5]

The generation of the form and character of the 1985 degree

As far as I can determine, the form, concept and outlines of the 1985 Bachelor of Architecture course were largely generated in an intense two weeks. I think this was probably late in 1983. Earlier that year, I had assumed the role of heading the department when the substantive head, John Woollett, began acting as dean. With John's blessing, I assembled a group of people representing different teaching areas of a possible architecture course and more-or-less bullied them into staying in one room together on a daily basis for two weeks. We were operating before the mass presence of computers, email, the internet, mobile phones and social media. Face-to-face conversations took place. While these comments might be ridiculed as nostalgia for the olden days, the absences of such toys made the necessary collective thinking immediate and possible. We hand wrote. We worked on white boards and large sheets of paper. (Working remotely with collaborators has enabled other projects of mine, so I am clear about the strengths of more recent means of working, as well as what is not enabled). Progress to an agreed position was relatively rapid.

The group of people consisted of me as self-appointed sheep dog, Greg Missingham, Diane Routt, Jason Pickford, Michael Jorgensen, and Doug Evans. This was a particularly diverse group of personalities who brought wide-ranging experiences and views to the process of devising a new course. Historian and researcher Diane, our principal generalist and the sole non-architect, had studied in a points-based system in Chicago and subjects sized by points were to be a requirement for any new RMIT courses. Doug had completed his degree in Copenhagen, had worked and travelled in Asia, Europe and the UK, and brought a specialised expertise in climatic design in architecture. Jason offered richly alternative views and interests and an amazing drawing ability – his aspirations for an architectural education would have resulted in a twelve-year course. Michael, while representing the 'professional practice' section of architectural study, published and taught in a range of other areas. Greg (who had undertaken research, teaching and practice) and I had shared interests in the relations of people to the built world and the ways architecture might facilitate and enhance these relations.

Greg disinterred from his archives, originals and copies of a number of outlines for subjects he and I offered collaboratively – including a related subject we ran for two years in the late 1970s at the University of Melbourne in the Master of Urban Design degree. He drew my attention to examples where elements of our joint and collaborative teaching from 1976 onwards contained seeds of the ideas and approaches that underpinned some of the 1985 course. Reviewing these outlines, handouts and even a transcript of a two-hour joint lecture, many of the ideas that were collectively occupying us over this period were evident. Also of note, is that in 1978/9 Greg, Tom, and I, each undertook philosophy subjects at the University of Melbourne. In my case, I included one particularly pertinent subject 'Epistemology, Logic and Methodology' which enabled more formal grounding in a number of my ongoing interests. We each chose to study areas of personal concern, and this can be discerned in the subject outlines, content and approaches we taught. Perhaps the largest influence I can see is the PhD work both Greg and I were conducting. In my case, I finished late in 1983, so my thinking had become fairly clarified and focussed in my areas of interest. These fascinations are, for me as a reviewing historian in 2020, evident in the subjects conducted and distilled into the course proposals.

While the above describes some important aspects of what we each brought to the conversation, much richness is missing. Collectively, we agreed with, learned from, or (probably) calmly disputed, the ideas of others about the nature of architectural education (both good and bad), its topics, approaches and significances. Those with current or past architectural practices had realistic concepts of what structural, construction, and material knowledge needed inclusion in an architecture course. We collectively shared an aversion to architecture courses where architectural designing was under the firm thumbs of engineers of various kinds – which most of us had experienced. There was no-one specifically representing construction aspects of architecture, but this area was constantly present.

The flurry of challenges to orthodox modernism that gathered pace from the mid-1960s that everyone in architecture at the time lived through had been part of the education and early careers of the people working on the design of the new degree. We were all steeped in late modernisms and the various post-modernisms – both through the seminal texts of the era and via the built examples. Quirky Brutalism was around and *The Whole Earth Catalog* was hugely influential. Within our parent department there was a notable presence of environmentally responsible designing which later evolved into the RMIT Centre for Design. I can recall no efforts on anyone's part to incorporate ideas specifically derived from any movements in architecture into content for the degree. What we were developing was a structure that would enable any material to be offered to students and explored by them. We were not promulgating political or doctrinal positions although there was much on offer – as rehearsed on the Radical Pedagogies site.[6] We intended, I think, to allow people running studios and seminars to responsibly push the wheelbarrows they saw fit and to shape accounts of history and theory through current or future filters.

Opposite
Top
Peter Downton,
1985 Course Diagram,
Vocation and Core
& Adjunct Subjects,
Course Review, Bachelor
of Architecture, 1984,
Peter Downton Collection

Bottom
RMIT Department
of Architecture,
Flow Chart in General
Course Information,
1985 Course handbook,
Peter Downton Collection

All of us shared a (probably not well-articulated) view of our task as concocting a liberal arts degree centred on architecture. Whilst we were engaged in proposing a vocational and professional degree, we had shared aspirations to enable a wider educational milieu that would encourage students to gain knowledge and abilities in a non-vocational realm and promote exploration beyond the edges of the common domain of architecture to thus bring alternative modes of thinking to bear on architectural issues. What emerged from the debate was principally a structure for a degree course centred on architecture. It was a proposal unlike 'standard' architecture courses in established Australian universities. It was even less like any course operating within RMIT, or seeking approval. As course creators, we neither had, nor sought, any detailed knowledge of courses around the world at the time. We apparently felt confident that we could design a good course. I do not remember anyone setting out to be reactionary, radical, or rare on principle. We challenged one another, responded to what we considered sound and dubious aspects of our own educations and teaching experiences; we operated in a conceptual structure of our own generation and paid limited initial heed to the dictates and prescriptions from the various institutions and approval bodies surrounding our efforts. This intentional innocence subsequently caused some back-tracking and reworking, but it resulted in us starting from a position we could argue for and which displayed coherence as a set of educational ideas. We negotiated with others from this basis.

We proposed and implemented a points-amassing structure for the degree, not a year-based one.

The principles of operation and the character of the overall content for the degree were established while we still held a fluid concept of the ways in which the materials could be divided into content areas. This division became a honed version of received traditions – the accepted views of what was necessary in an architectural course, filtered through our collective epistemological outlooks. This shaping also came from tempering factors related to extant staff competencies and views, and unavoidably from compliance with assorted pragmatic requirements. We were, after all, devising a course to be taught in that department at that time, by the people on staff, and by plausible others; we were not producing a timeless, placeless ideal or promulgating an urgent radical alternative.

The diagrammatic description of the course

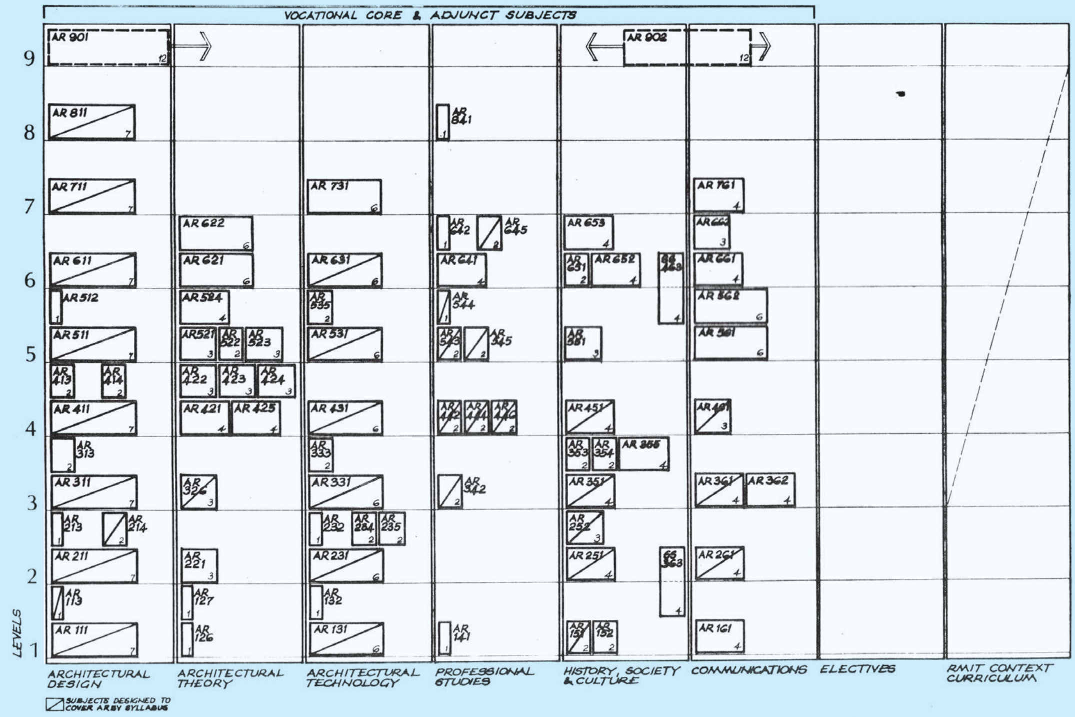
The content areas that coalesced were arranged contiguously along the x-axis of a schematic descriptive diagram.[7] As part of establishing the claim that the course was an amendment to the existing course, the extant subjects were notionally grouped together in the proposed structure. The content areas were extended upward in the y-dimension to form diagrammatic columns of content. Rough ideas for appropriate subjects were stacked in each of these columns. Some subjects were inherently empty boxes with generic, non-specific, titles. They were to be shaped, filled and curated by those offering such subjects.

A more detailed course diagram was contained at the back of the proposed amendments documentation.[8] Figure 3 shows my hand drafted A0 flow chart of the degree as it operated. Someone produced a handbook version of this as it stood at the time. It was variously described as bewildering and as a circuit diagram, but these diagrams endeavoured to provide a clear means for a student to visually navigate possible paths through the degree. Soon, the simplifications started. As early as the July 1985 Course Brochure (aimed at 1986 prospective applicants) the diagram had been relegated to a corner somewhere and an orderly and polite textual list was substituted.[9]

Each subject had an allocated points size. The degree as a whole required a set number of total points expected to be attained over five years of full-time study or a greater number of years of part-time engagement. Conceptually, a student could amass the requisite number of points for the degree by successfully passing subjects until the required total was reached. This implies that substantial personal shaping of an individual's course could be possible. However, to satisfy Architect's Registration Board requirements, there were some prescriptions and proscriptions. These requirements, and our promulgated requirements for the degree, were not tightly aligned. Notionally, provided proper documentation could be ensured, award of the degree might not, necessarily, be counted for registration, as a student would be able to assemble a different set of subjects toward a non-vocational degree. As the processes of implementation unfurled, external constraints necessitated the introduction of pre- and co-requisite subjects controlling paths through the course such that an individual's course (at least minimally) satisfied registration requirements.

A culminating major piece of work (labelled AJ 901 Major Project A) in any one of the areas was initially specified. In the first form of the degree, there was an option to do a final project that spanned two or more of the designated study areas (AJ 902 Major Project B). A student might concoct a project spanning construction and history, or professional practice and design. Maybe two years post-implementation of the course, undertaking final projects in areas other than design ceased, as there was no strong demand from students in any other area and it was difficult to resource. However, at the outset, a number of students undertook a final project in the technology area and very small numbers did their final work in history, theory, or professional practice. As the course solidified, some people managed to successfully bend the shape of a major project in design into a topic focussed on another area, but filtered through design.

The defining difficulty for implementation of the original proposal was the resourcing of a necessary array of subjects in the course levels below and leading to a final project in all of the study areas. Without them, requisite knowledge and skills could not be attained prior to the final project to thus enable a good standard of work at that level. The design stream was a given and there was substantial material in the technology area, but a heavy use of possibly inappropriate elective subjects was necessary in any other area.



VOCATIONAL CORE & ADJUNCT SUBJECTS
LEVELS
1
2
3
4
5
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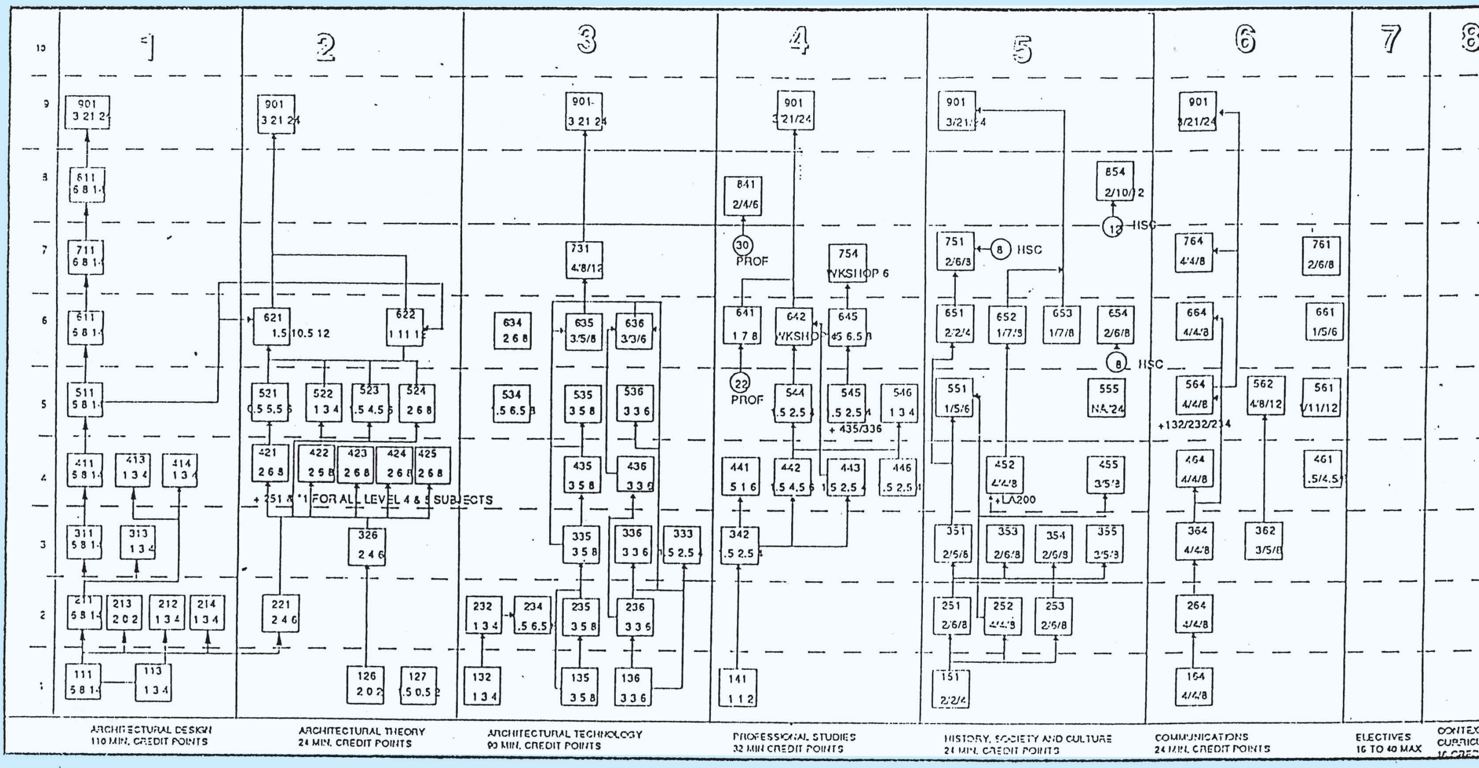
9
AR 901
AR 902
ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN
ARCHITECTURAL THEORY
ARCHITECTURAL TECHNOLOGY
PROFESSIONAL STUDIES
HISTORY, SOCIETY & CULTURE
COMMUNICATIONS
ELECTIVES
RMIT CONTEXT CURRICULUM
SUBJECTS DESIGNED TO COVER ARBV SYLLABUS

CONSTRUCTION
DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE

GENERAL COURSE INFORMATION - Bachelor of Arch

FLOW CHART — of HANDBOOK, FACULTY ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION available at RMIT Bookshop



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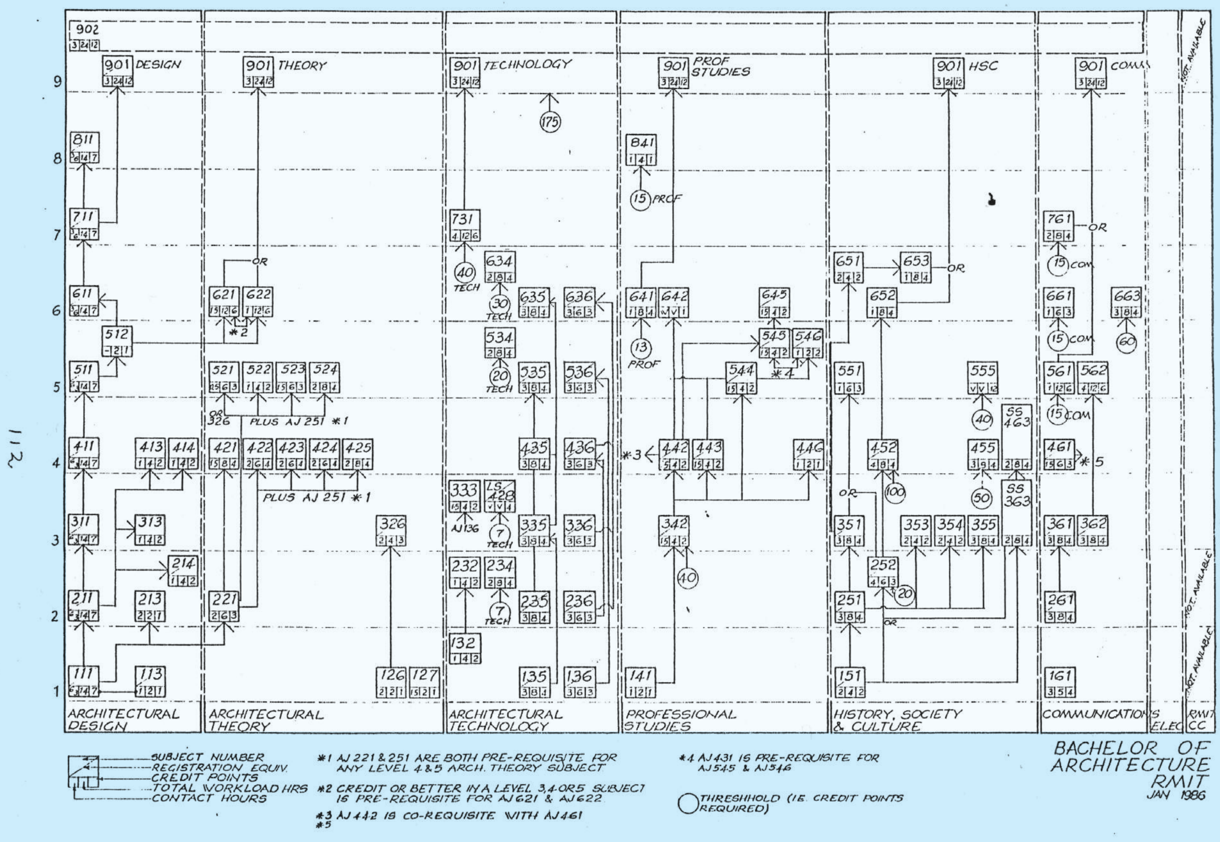
+ 251 & *1 FOR ALL LEVEL 4 & 5 SUBJECTS
PROF
WKSHOP 6
HSC
+ 435/336
+ LA200
+132/232/234
ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN 110 MIN. CREDIT POINTS
ARCHITECTURAL THEORY 24 MIN. CREDIT POINTS
ARCHITECTURAL TECHNOLOGY 90 MIN. CREDIT POINTS
PROFESSIONAL STUDIES 32 MIN CREDIT POINTS
HISTORY, SOCIETY AND CULTURE 24 MIN. CREDIT POINTS
COMMUNICATIONS 24 MIN. CREDIT POINTS
ELECTIVES 16 TO 40 MAX
CONTEX CURRICU


901 DESIGN
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901 PROF STUDIES
901 HSC
901 COMM
902
ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN
ARCHITECTURAL THEORY
ARCHITECTURAL TECHNOLOGY
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HISTORY, SOCIETY & CULTURE
COMMUNICATIONS
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PLUS AJ 251 *1
TECH
PROF
COM
OR
SUBJECT NUMBER
REGISTRATION EQUIV.
CREDIT POINTS
TOTAL WORKLOAD HRS
CONTACT HOURS
*1 AJ 221 & 251 ARE BOTH PRE-REQUISITE FOR ANY LEVEL 4 & 5 ARCH. THEORY SUBJECT
*2 CREDIT OR BETTER IN A LEVEL 3, 4 OR 5 SUBJECT IS PRE-REQUISITE FOR AJ 621 & AJ 622
*3 AJ 442 IS CO-REQUISITE WITH AJ 461
*5
*4 AJ 431 IS PRE-REQUISITE FOR AJ 545 & AJ 546
THRESHHOLD (IE. CREDIT POINTS REQUIRED)
BACHELOR OF ARCHITECTURE
RMIT
JAN 1986
112

At one point we proposed that any subject could be taken by a student in any of several different point sizes. Perhaps, 4 point, 8 point and 16 point versions of a subject might exist, each with the same lecture or seminar input, but requiring very different assessment tasks. (Diane had studied in such a system). It was in use elsewhere, but enquiries revealed that this would not be permitted – ostensibly because the central administrative system could not handle such an approach, but perhaps it also stemmed from a prescriptive mentality in realms beyond our department, which centred on the idea that there was a set amount of material each person must complete in each area in a vocational degree.

Some rules and some detail

To be eligible for the award of the degree, a minimum of 207 credit points was required, 36 in study area 1, at least eight points in each of study areas 2 to 6 inclusive, and minimally another 8 points of electives with a maximum of 20. Electives had to be external to course subjects, but could be taken within the Faculty, RMIT or another approved tertiary institution. Four RMIT Context Curriculum subjects had to be taken after the first two semesters and before the anticipated last one. Intended as somewhat general, socially aware and/or arts-like subjects, these could be characterised ‘as more of the same’ given our range and specification of electives.

Either Major Project A or B (12 points each) had to be completed. Minimum and maximum enrolment loads were controlled and there were mechanisms for obtaining a degree with distinction. Simple arithmetic shows that undertaking a minimum enrolment in each of the study areas provides only about half of the total points required. Students had to decide to specialise in a couple of areas or cover all areas at above minimum requirements.

The latter option, but with a bias toward design, was chosen by most people. Students predominantly attempted to replicate the more-or-less standard balance apparent in other architecture courses; they infrequently engaged in innovative responsibility for their own education.

The study areas were:

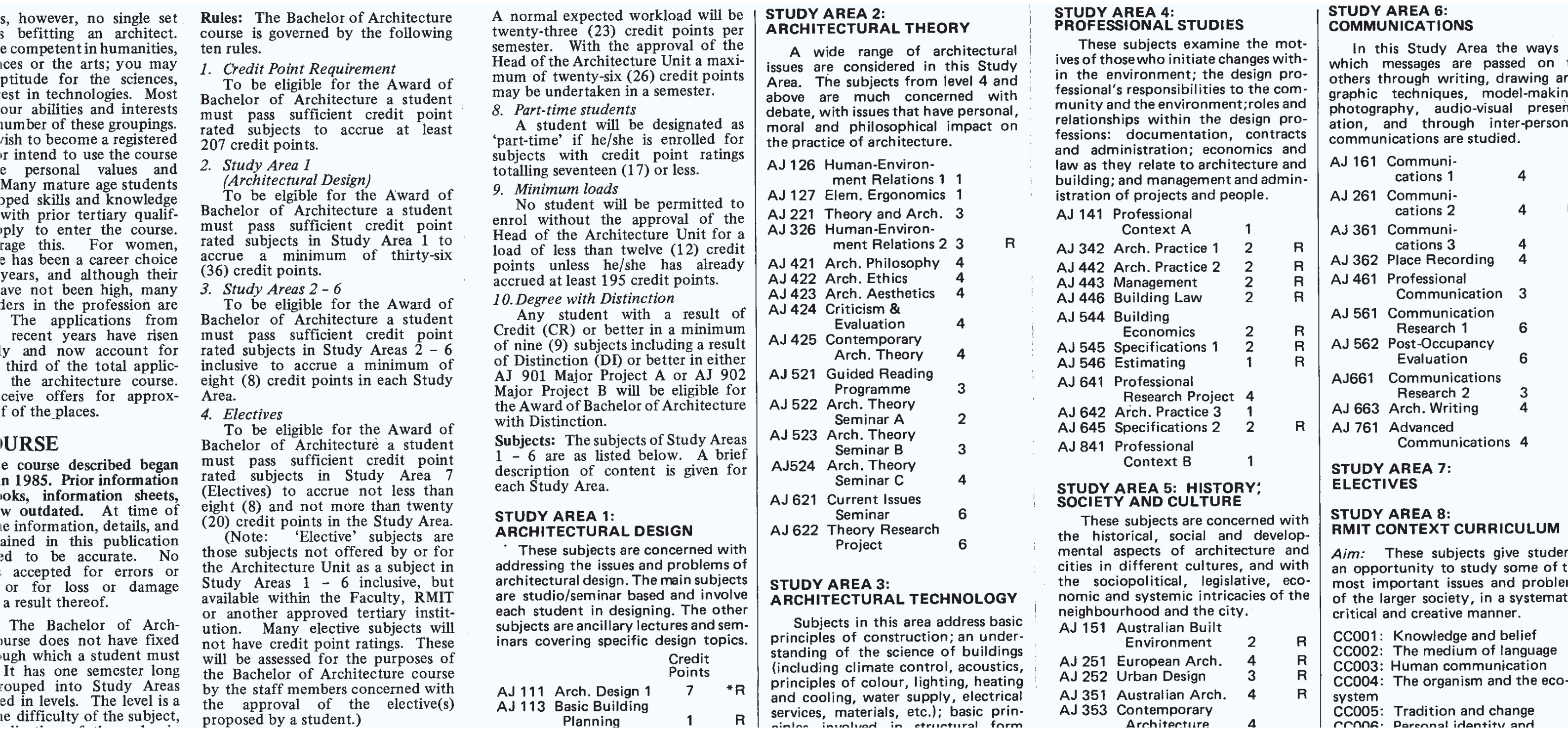
1

Architectural Design. This study area concerned all aspects of design and designing in architecture, and included a number of small subjects such as 113 Basic Building Planning (1 credit point), and 214 Site Analysis and Design (2 credit points), as well as the semester length problem-based studios 111 to 811 (all 7 points).

Of significance, was AJ 512 ‘Design Review’, which required each student to make a presentation of the material they had completed in their first five semesters showing how their work formed an educational whole. It was mandatory, worth only one point, but pre-requisite to all subsequent subjects. It was possible to fail this subject although all the work re-packaged for it, had necessarily been of pass standard or higher. We believed strongly in the value of this subject. Later, it was struck out by the responsible RMIT committee on the dubious grounds that it entailed double assessment for the same work.

2

Architectural Theory, which considered ethical, personal and philosophical issues impacting on architectural thinking such as 421 Architectural Philosophy, 422 Architectural Ethics, 424 Criticism and Evaluation (all 4 credit points) and 522 to 524 Architectural Theory Seminars A, B, and C which frequently varied in content and carried 2, 3, and 4 points respectively.



s, however, no single set
s befitting an architect.
e competent in humanities,
ıces or the arts; you may
ptitude for the sciences,
est in technologies. Most
our abilities and interests
ıumber of these groupings.
vish to become a registered
r intend to use the course
e personal values and
Many mature age students
oped skills and knowledge
with prior tertiary qualif-
pply to enter the course.
rage this. For women,
e has been a career choice
years, and although their
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The applications from
recent years have risen
ly and now account for
third of the total applic-
the architecture course.
ceive offers for approx-
f of the places.

URSE

e course described began n 1985. Prior information oks, information sheets, w outdated. At time of ıe information, details, and ained in this publication ed to be accurate. No accepted for errors or or for loss or damage a result thereof.

The Bachelor of Arch-
ourse does not have fixed
ugh which a student must
It has one semester long
rouped into Study Areas
ed in levels. The level is a
ıe difficulty of the subject,

Rules: The Bachelor of Architecture course is governed by the following ten rules.

1. *Credit Point Requirement*

To be eligible for the Award of Bachelor of Architecture a student must pass sufficient credit point rated subjects to accrue at least 207 credit points.

2. *Study Area 1 (Architectural Design)*

To be elgible for the Award of Bachelor of Architecture a student must pass sufficient credit point rated subjects in Study Area 1 to accrue a minimum of thirty-six (36) credit points.

3. *Study Areas 2 – 6*

To be eligible for the Award of Bachelor of Architecture a student must pass sufficient credit point rated subjects in Study Areas 2 – 6 inclusive to accrue a minimum of eight (8) credit points in each Study Area.

4. *Electives*

To be eligible for the Award of Bachelor of Architecture a student must pass sufficient credit point rated subjects in Study Area 7 (Electives) to accrue not less than eight (8) and not more than twenty (20) credit points in the Study Area.

(Note: 'Elective' subjects are those subjects not offered by or for the Architecture Unit as a subject in Study Areas 1 – 6 inclusive, but available within the Faculty, RMIT or another approved tertiary institution. Many elective subjects will not have credit point ratings. These will be assessed for the purposes of the Bachelor of Architecture course by the staff members concerned with the approval of the elective(s) proposed by a student.)

A normal expected workload will be twenty-three (23) credit points per semester. With the approval of the Head of the Architecture Unit a maximum of twenty-six (26) credit points may be undertaken in a semester.

8. *Part-time students*

A student will be designated as 'part-time' if he/she is enrolled for subjects with credit point ratings totalling seventeen (17) or less.

9. *Minimum loads*

No student will be permitted to enrol without the approval of the Head of the Architecture Unit for a load of less than twelve (12) credit points unless he/she has already accrued at least 195 credit points.

10. *Degree with Distinction*

Any student with a result of Credit (CR) or better in a minimum of nine (9) subjects including a result of Distinction (DI) or better in either AJ 901 Major Project A or AJ 902 Major Project B will be eligible for the Award of Bachelor of Architecture with Distinction.

Subjects: The subjects of Study Areas 1 – 6 are as listed below. A brief description of content is given for each Study Area.

STUDY AREA 1: ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN

These subjects are concerned with addressing the issues and problems of architectural design. The main subjects are studio/seminar based and involve each student in designing. The other subjects are ancillary lectures and seminars covering specific design topics.

		Credit Points	
AJ 111	Arch. Design 1	7	*R
AJ 113	Basic Building Planning	1	R

STUDY AREA 2: ARCHITECTURAL THEORY

A wide range of architectural issues are considered in this Study Area. The subjects from level 4 and above are much concerned with debate, with issues that have personal, moral and philosophical impact on the practice of architecture.

AJ 126	Human-Environment Relations 1	1	
AJ 127	Elem. Ergonomics	1	
AJ 221	Theory and Arch.	3	
AJ 326	Human-Environment Relations 2	3	R
AJ 421	Arch. Philosophy	4	
AJ 422	Arch. Ethics	4	
AJ 423	Arch. Aesthetics	4	
AJ 424	Criticism & Evaluation	4	
AJ 425	Contemporary Arch. Theory	4	
AJ 521	Guided Reading Programme	3	
AJ 522	Arch. Theory Seminar A	2	
AJ 523	Arch. Theory Seminar B	3	
AJ524	Arch. Theory Seminar C	4	
AJ 621	Current Issues Seminar	6	
AJ 622	Theory Research Project	6	

STUDY AREA 3: ARCHITECTURAL TECHNOLOGY

Subjects in this area address basic principles of construction; an understanding of the science of buildings (including climate control, acoustics, principles of colour, lighting, heating and cooling, water supply, electrical services, materials, etc.); basic principles involved in structural form

STUDY AREA 4: PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

These subjects examine the motives of those who initiate changes within the environment; the design professional's responsibilities to the community and the environment;roles and relationships within the design professions: documentation, contracts and administration; economics and law as they relate to architecture and building; and management and administration of projects and people.

AJ 141	Professional Context A	1	
AJ 342	Arch. Practice 1	2	R
AJ 442	Arch. Practice 2	2	R
AJ 443	Management	2	R
AJ 446	Building Law	2	R
AJ 544	Building Economics	2	R
AJ 545	Specifications 1	2	R
AJ 546	Estimating	1	R
AJ 641	Professional Research Project	4	
AJ 642	Arch. Practice 3	1	
AJ 645	Specifications 2	2	R
AJ 841	Professional Context B	1	

STUDY AREA 5: HISTORY; SOCIETY AND CULTURE

These subjects are concerned with the historical, social and developmental aspects of architecture and cities in different cultures, and with the sociopolitical, legislative, economic and systemic intricacies of the neighbourhood and the city.

AJ 151	Australian Built Environment	2	R
AJ 251	European Arch.	4	R
AJ 252	Urban Design	3	R
AJ 351	Australian Arch.	4	R
AJ 353	Contemporary Architecture	4	

STUDY AREA 6: COMMUNICATIONS

In this Study Area the ways which messages are passed on others through writing, drawing ar graphic techniques, model-makin photography, audio-visual presen ation, and through inter-person communications are studied.

AJ 161	Communications 1	4
AJ 261	Communications 2	4
AJ 361	Communications 3	4
AJ 362	Place Recording	4
AJ 461	Professional Communication	3
AJ 561	Communication Research 1	6
AJ 562	Post-Occupancy Evaluation	6
AJ661	Communications Research 2	3
AJ 663	Arch. Writing	4
AJ 761	Advanced Communications	4

STUDY AREA 7: ELECTIVES

STUDY AREA 8: RMIT CONTEXT CURRICULUM

Aim: These subjects give studer an opportunity to study some of t most important issues and probler of the larger society, in a systemat critical and creative manner.

CC001: Knowledge and belief
CC002: The medium of language
CC003: Human communication
CC004: The organism and the ecosystem
CC005: Tradition and change
CC006: Personal identity and

3

Architectural Technology, which included construction principles, structures, and building science material such as thermal and acoustic design. The main technology subjects, 131 to 731 were all 6 point subjects, while 132 Introduction to Computers and 232 Micro-computer applications were each 1 point – a telling reminder of times when desktop computers were a radical idea, floppy disks held 200 to 400 kB, Photoshop was a few years away, the internet was an infant and the web was about six years in the future.

4

Professional Studies, included professional responsibilities, management, documentation, specification writing, and contractual, legal, and procurement aspects of architectural practice. After an initial introduction, the subjects in this area properly commenced mid-course and included the possibility of research projects.

5

History, Society and Culture This covered the domains of its title in architecture and cities, and overlapped with some of Architectural Theory concerning the context and effect of architecture and its practice. Architectural history was either focussed on Australia, Europe or Non-Western Architectures, or divided into periods. There were subjects in urban and historical research.

6

Communications covered transmission of ideas by drawn, written, modelled, visual, aural, and verbal means. Post-occupancy evaluation and research subjects were also offered.

Each subject was graced with a three-digit number such as '123'. The first of these digits specified the level at which that subject was offered; the third digit distinguished parallel subjects from those in the same area at the same level. The numbers of the study areas given above were placed in the middle position. On the course diagram, arrows designated prerequisite paths. Some subjects also had a minimum number of amassed points as a prerequisite, or a minimum number from the study area of the subject. These requirements were also coded onto the course diagram.

The proposal document and its approval

A number of people wrote handbook-style subject outlines, but the bulk of the production of this descriptive material fell to me. Many of the descriptions were obfuscations for purposes of approval; they purported to itemise material to be covered, while leaving complete freedom for the person ultimately offering the seminar to take responsibility for its detailed design and content. The following imaginary seminar descriptor illustrates the style: 'Part two will consist of a detailed investigation of the key concepts in contemporary theorising in the field'. It is quick to write, sounds serious, but fails to specify the means of the investigation, what (for its purposes) the key concepts are held to be, the time span covered by 'contemporary', or the extent and character of 'the field', and thus it would allow scope for the seminar leader to take full responsibility for the subject's form, content, and development. The extent of 'empty-box' subjects facilitated possibilities for content and approaches allowing an architecture course that extended beyond the then current norm around Australia. Equally, within the same structure, very particular and intensely architecturally focussed subjects could be offered. Given that there was a multi-choice design studio policy in place at every level, a richly varied array of content and approach was ensured in design – the most prescribed subject area in the course. A student in her fourth semester of design might

Opposite
Peter Dowton, Hand-drafted Flow Chart of Bachelor of Architecture 1986 Degree, RMIT Department of Architecture, Photocopy in Peter Downton Collection.

Above
RMIT Department of Architecture, 1985 Course textual list, 1985 Course Brochure, Peter Downton Collection.

have had a choice of seven different studios conducted by staff of differing expertise and interests. Within her chosen studio she could expect to work alongside students from semester levels below and/or above her.

The document for approval was evocatively titled: Course Number 130000 Bachelor of Architecture: Amendments Proposed for Introduction in First Semester 1985, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Faculty of Architecture and Building, Department of Architecture, August 1984, and contained the necessary subject outlines, diagrams of the 1975 and proposed 1985 courses, and the amendments asked to be approved for transitioning from the former to the latter the following year. It was describable as a set of amendments since the length was not changing, the offering institution remained the same, etc. It was, however, a considerable shift from its predecessor and was at odds with the rather regimented and prescribed RMIT degrees of the time. There were many people arrayed in the approval process who had a marked lack of enthusiasm for this child of our efforts, some with a hostile dislike of it and uniformly I was criticised in meetings for its complexity and my (intentional) failure to follow the standard formats of courses and approval documentation. Fortunately, there was sufficient support centred on a single powerful person (who was not a designer, an engineer or a scientist) in the responsible committees for me to be able to get it through. It began to operate in the first semester of 1985.

Operation, ossification and outmodedness

Compared to the aspirational structure initially devised and the quietened version approved, freedoms were constantly removed once the course was running: the major piece of work was offered only in the design stream, prerequisites proliferated until there was little wriggle room, and point sizes were simplified and standardised – partially because RMIT subsequently adopted points of about half the size of their original system and established a requirement for 48 points per semester. Award of the degree thus required 480 credit points. In stages, central edicts limited the minimum number of points per subject. So some of the content within smaller subjects was absorbed into larger subjects.

Within a few years of initial implementation, the set of subjects and the course rules were congealing, largely in accordance with the views of the current staff; in a few more years the apparent freedoms enshrined in the diagram were illusions. One had to mind the gap between the ostensible offerings in the course diagram and the actual possibilities for enrolment; the course had deflated into a year structure with a complex description. At some uncertain point a few years into the 1990s I carried out test modellings of likely enrolment paths for imaginary students and demonstrated that the cherished freedoms supposedly enshrined in the course description were almost totally illusory, certainly unsupportable, and that very little of what was then in place would be lost by their abandonment.

The structure had enabled a constantly fresh smorgasbord of content, but another decade had passed; re-thinking was again needed. While staff and students continued to undertake work that was inventive within the available subjects (many of which maintained descriptors that facilitated this, or at least failed to preclude it), the flexible choices of the original structure had withered. Lurking just beyond the horizon was the integration of architecture with other disciplines within a new school and, later, the award of a master's degree at the end of five years.

Desktop computers and the internet had been available, although under-utilised for the life of the 1985 course, but by the mid-1990s web content was budding, if not blossoming, and early web-based search engines were offering new modes of discovery, while computers were starting to gain useful amounts of power and speed, and software was both enabling and provoking changes in the ways architecture was designed, represented, and managed. It was evident that most areas of any architecture degree were being affected and were subsequently swamped by the escalating rate of change.

Reviewing the early 1980s forty years later, there is a sense that, while it was a prior era, the core values of both architecture and an architectural education, if not the means of making architecture, can be coherently argued to have remained similar. For any educator who has a clear set of values that can be reasonably articulated, the quest is to find sensible means and manners through which to induce apposite values in students and to do so in ways that mesh with the circumstances that are current.

Endnotes

1 Granville Wilson, *Centenary History* (Faculty of Environmental Design and Construction, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, 1987), 47–5)6.

2 Wilson, 66.

3 Peter Downton, *Course Review, Bachelor of Architecture*, (Melbourne, Vic: Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Faculty of Architecture and Building, Department of Architecture, August 1984), 17.

4 Downton, 17–20. Note that the same expressed needs are also presented in the document cited in endnote 5

5 Department of Architecture, *Course Number 130000 Bachelor of Architecture, Amendments Proposed for Introduction in First Semester 1985*, August 1984, (Melbourne, Vic: Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Faculty of Architecture and Building, Department of Architecture, August 1984), 4–5.

6 Beatriz Colomina with the PhD students, School of Architecture, Princeton University, *Radical Pedagogies*, accessed 26 March 2020, https://radical-pedagogies.com.

7 RMIT Department of Architecture, 17.

8 RMIT Department of Architecture, 142.

9 RMIT School of Architecture, Course brochure, (Melbourne: Vic: Royal Melbourne Institute of Architecture, School of Architecture, July 1985). Notable for a Jason Pickford drawing on the cover.

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This Page
PhD Examination Presentation by Stephen Banham, October 2019 Practice Research Symposium, RMIT Design Archives, Photography by Matt Houston Photography

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