



building ideas

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ROBIN BOYD
Visions of living

The publishers, CSR Building Materials, review in this issue the work and thought of the late Robin Boyd as exemplified in material compiled by Jeffrey Turnbull, of Melbourne. Grateful acknowledgement is made to the office of Romberg and Boyd Pty Ltd and to the other individuals and organisations whose generous co-operation has made possible this tribute to an architect of truly international stature who yet remained essentially Australian.

The illustrations represent only a selection of Boyd's buildings, arranged chronologically and fairly representative of his architecture. Many of the accompanying captions, like the textual commentary, contain quotations from his book, 'Living in Australia' (Pergamon Press (Australia) Pty Ltd, Sydney, 1970), for an attempt has been made to link the particular design with some aspect of his attitudes toward architecture. Page numbers are given with the quotations to facilitate reference and further study.

● Front cover shows interior of the Milne house at Toorak, Victoria, by Robin Boyd, 1969. (See also page 12).

Robin Boyd

The vision, then, is translated into reality by qualities of surface, space, structure and psyche. I could be more fashionable and even more alliterative by calling the last item soul. Perhaps it is best to average out and settle on spirit.

From 'Living in Australia', by Robin Boyd.

Robin Gerard Penleigh Boyd was born on 3rd January, 1919, and died on 16th October, 1971, in Melbourne. Perhaps stimulating, skilful, soul-searching, sensitive and sophisticated are appropriate alliterative epithets to describe Boyd as spokesman and practitioner. Considering the quality and number of buildings he produced in 25 years' practice as an architect, his authorship of 11 books, numerous articles (800,000 words between 1947 and 1956 in two Melbourne newspapers alone), speeches, lectures and talks, together with his involvement in official professional activities, one can only admire, and be humbled by, his energy, dedication and service. He had a love affair with architecture as deep as with any particular one of his buildings.

Before World War II Boyd was serving articles with the late Kingsley Ankateil Henderson, an important Melbourne architect. He attended evening classes at the Melbourne Technical College (now the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology) for three years and at the University of Melbourne Architectural Atelier for one year before war service intervened. On return from military duty, which included service in New Guinea, he passed the examinations of the Architects Registration Board of Victoria in 1946 and thus he became an architect, in the legal sense, at the age of 27. We say 'in the legal sense' because, according to his high standards, becoming an architect in the full sense of the word demanded attainments far beyond those required merely to achieve legal status.

Boyd produced many buildings (about 100 houses in 25 years, comparable to the output of Frank Lloyd Wright between 1891 and 1911). Continually he wrote about what he saw, what he thought, what he did, in a genuine search for principles in a regional Australian expression of modern architecture. He remained a student throughout his life, a student in the best sense, investigating, scrutinising and earnestly contemplating the puzzle of architecture.

In 1938 his painter cousin, Arthur Boyd, asked him to design a studio at Murrumbidgee. It was a bold, bare, functional little building, advanced for its period. Even then he must have been aware and observant of the works of Melbourne's architects eventually to produce 'Victorian Modern' subtitled 'One hundred and eleven years of modern architecture in Victoria, Australia', which was published in 1947 by the Architectural Students' Society of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects in lieu of the annual 'Lines'.

In 1946, he was employed in the Architectural Department of the Myer Emporium and began private practice in the firm of Architects Associated—Boyd, Pethebridge and Bell. In the years 1946-54 Boyd set up and

directed the Small Homes Service, an architect advisory service for the public, sponsored by 'The Age' newspaper and the R.V.I.A. In 1947 he won the Robert and Ada Haddon Travelling Scholarship and consequently spent a year in Europe in 1950-51. Between 1948 and 1956 he was a part-time lecturer in design and architectural history at the University of Melbourne School of Architecture.

The first Wright House (at Warrandyte, 1950) and his own home in Camberwell (1947, extended 1952) are the best known works of his early practice. As a student he had been involved with the magazines 'Smudges' and 'Lines', and in 1952 began editing and writing 'Cross-Section', a crisp monthly review of current Australian architecture, sponsored by Dunlop (Australia) Ltd and the University of Melbourne and distributed free to every architect in the nation. Also in 1952 'Australia's Home: its origins, builders and occupiers' (Melbourne University Press, Melbourne) appeared in the bookshops.

Architectural philosophy

The foregoing outline gives some idea of the range of activities Boyd engaged in so wholeheartedly at the beginning of his career and, indeed, throughout his life. The illustrations here show a fairly representative selection of his buildings. They are arranged chronologically, and if in the sequence some sharp contrasts appear, remember Boyd's intention was to design from the inside out. When the programme had unique qualities, the resultant design would have an appropriate character of uniqueness. By the word vision he meant an architectural idea, and a strong idea usually emerges. 'Every architect has his own style of ideas' (p. 112) and unlike, for example, Mies van der Rohe, who pursued the expression of a limited set of ideas in each building he designed, Boyd drew on a range of ideas suggested by the range of programmes he was involved in. 'The vision belongs to the architect's personality, his place and time'. (p. 111).

Indeed, Boyd's buildings are personal statements in the context of modern architecture and Australian architecture, given all that has been implied in this article about his response to the programme, which would include his estimation of the client's wishes and taste. In another way his architecture is personal in that it is recognisably within the parameters of the modern movement yet defies categorisation under any particularism and is not imitative of any master of modern architecture. His personality permeates his designs too because, ideally, he conceived them alone, although, as his writings on aspects of the practice of architecture show, he approved of all sorts of administrative and executive support in the realisation of his concept. Significantly, his first practice group was called Architects Associated, which meant individual designers sharing operational costs. He did not believe in design or conception by a team of architects, although he thought that an association of an artistic architect and a creative engineer could be mutually stimulating. Boyd conceded that the teams and architectural corporations could produce good buildings, but for him, to be 'Archi-



Robin Boyd

ture' a building must have the personal vision of an individual architect. Corporation architectural practice, or more precisely, team design and its growing acceptance and incidence in the production of buildings elicited from him the comment that 'architecture is going out of style' (p. 7) if only temporarily.

Boyd's 'place' was Melbourne or, to be more expansive, Australia. The appearance or character of many of his buildings can be explained only in terms of his pursuit of a regional Australian quality or a quality of the building's locality. Furthermore a distinction between urban building and country building, and perhaps even suburban building, is made. Design solutions for different situations express the difference of setting. The John Batman Motor Inn and the President Motor Inn (urban) compared with the Black Dolphin Motel, Merimbula, N.S.W., or the Baker house near Bacchus Marsh, or the Tower Hill Natural History Centre near Warrnambool (country) testify to this distinction. Perhaps buildings like the Lawrence house and flats, at Kew, and the Noble house, Vermont, can be characterised as distinctively Melbourne suburban. Continually Boyd scrutinised, and commented upon, the built environment of highly urbanised Australia. Very few Australian architects have enjoyed an international reputation such as Boyd achieved, principally through his writing: yet despite this and the fact that he travelled overseas on 20 different occasions, he was, in the sense in which David Saunders used the term, a stay-at-home.

Boyd's 'time' dated from the beginnings of the modern movement in Australia, when that movement needed an advocate and at a time when there was little critical assessment, awareness or knowledge of the built environment. He changed that. He lived to see a greater acceptance of the principles of the modern movement by practising architects. Sham, and sullied visions of those principles perturbed him as did recreations of past styles, but broadly speaking, he saw the latter as occurring outside the work of honest professionals and felt the blame lay with public taste. He produced the first general historical survey of the stylistic developments in Australia through the medium of the dwelling. Con-

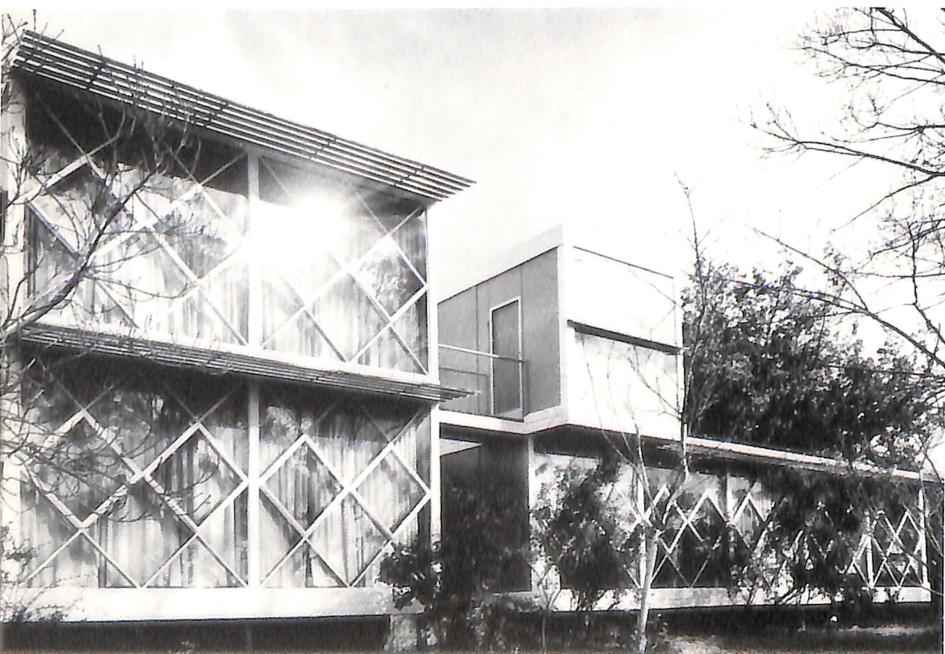
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1 First Wright house, Warrandyte, 1950

A timber truss shape is the generator of the form and nature of this space-enclosure, although a truss is not placed in the interior. In keeping with its lightness and directness, surfaces are smooth and joint-battening is shown. The truss hints at vernacular structures and so this house seemed to be a distinctly regional variant within modern architecture.

2 Second Wright house, Warrandyte, 1965

The first house was destroyed by bushfire in 1962. A surviving stone wall was incorporated in the new design and one side has been white rough-plastered. This wall had been given a role and place in the design, but it did not generate the overall concept.

3 Gillison house, Balfwyn, 1952

To brace the otherwise flimsy structure, the timber window frames were constructed on the diagonal. The one room not so treated was Douglas Gillison's (writer) own study, set on the bedroom wing and approachable only by bridge from the upper living room. This room observed the (north) view through just one slit window at the eye level of a writer at the desk behind it.' (p. 24, 'Living in Australia'). Client needs, structure, materials (the house is on a four-foot cladding-sheet width module) are combined in a composition which balances the masses of units of space-enclosure.

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tinually he urged the public and professionals alike to consider the built environment, and there is no doubt that increased public awareness of architecture has been an outcome of his urgency. He was an innovator. He kept himself informed of changes and developments in practice and in design attitudes. He saw the rise of group practice, the use of the computer, the rise of modern Japanese architecture, the advent of Pop, the growing concern for the environment and the quality of life. His

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4 House at Jordenville in conjunction with a supermarket, 1954

'A series of timber arches was erected, canvas was drawn over them and then three inches of concrete, with some reinforcement, was laid on top.' (p. 101).

In this instance a new material technology producing a dramatic object in itself takes over in the final form, perhaps more so than in any other Boyd design. It has its place in the era of technical experimentation and innovation in Melbourne in the 50s.

5 Richardson house, Toorak, 1954

'It really would not have been possible to build a house any other way on this site.' (p. 129). The house bridges a dry creek bed. While the trussed arch and rectilinear regularity of the wall treatment do not integrate very well, it is the space-enclosure that seems to be more important than the structure.

6 Troedel house, Wheeler's Hill, 1954

'... natural growth has become, in time, part of the architectural surface ... nature kindly adds another decoration: a low winter sun (the only one which the two-layer pergola was designed to admit) reflects back and forth in the zig-zag glass wall as if trying to imitate a trellis.' (p. 28). Undoubtedly an engaging attitude — to use sun in surface as though it were texture. The pergola that produces such beautiful sunlight patterns surprisingly rakes across the directions of the grid established by the attenuated columns and sturdy beams. This sort of surprise in Boyd's work raises the question whether some quality of uniqueness in each design is akin to 'spirit'. He writes that uniqueness if applicable to the 'programme' is desirable. 'Architecture starts with a programme, the programme being a term for a comprehensive brief.' (p. 8).

7 'Pelican', Davey's Bay, 1956

'... [the roof] has been supported more or less independently and the rooms of the house have been constructed freely and separately and slipped in underneath ... The device has the advantages of permitting freedom in planning while economically providing larger areas of covered exterior living space. Most important, it shades the rooms like a raised parasol, allowing a free passage of air across the insulated tops of the boxes containing the rooms.' (p. 134).

The separate parts are blended into a single unified concept by a grandly-conceived canopy. The latter part of Boyd's statement above typically relates to the thinking of functionalism.

8 Robin Boyd's own house, South Yarra, 1958

'One of the principal objectives in planning was to create a private indoor-outdoor environment despite the narrowness of the allotment and the congested surroundings of an inner suburb.' (p. 64).

There is a two-storeyed parents' block, an inner court-garden and a single-storeyed children's block. Cables slung from steel girders at both ends of the house support the roof and visually unify the design with their relaxed curves.

'In the two-storey section the upper floor is not wall-to-wall. It is a platform independently supported, emphasising that the whole space enclosed here is one, and in it conventional segregations are neither necessary nor desirable.' (p. 64). An architect's house is always revealing because it is his own, and one suspects that it is the most significant design in a career where one pleases oneself. It is climactic of Boyd's attitude to an exciting space-enclosure where structure and surfaces are intended to combine in an integral wholeness.

9 Lloyd house, Brighton, 1959

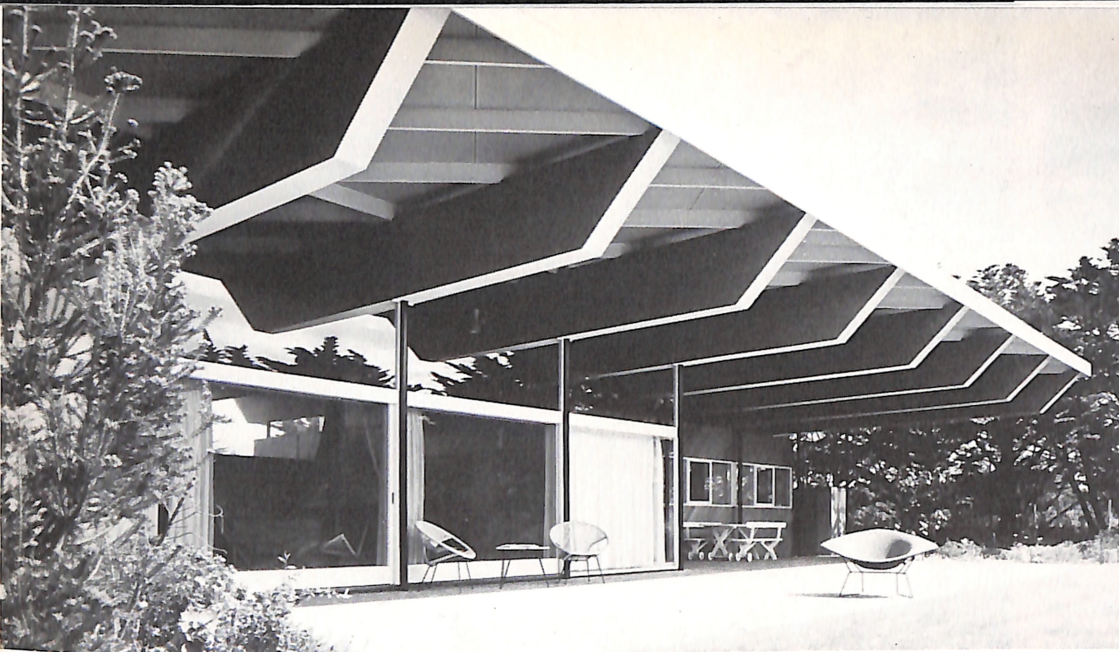
The house is designed as a crescent round a north court, but there is no sharp edge to this form. The roof structure is revealed by its extended overhang. The wall components are ample in their details. Sunlight further modifies the edge with changing patterns, almost at the scale of a bold texture.

10 Black Dolphin Motel, Merimbula, 1960

'It aimed to be an architectural tranquilliser by the Pacific Ocean.' (p. 72). '... a highly personal private enterprise [in motel designing] ... aimed its sights higher than the known average taste ...' (p. 131).

Given a bush setting, it seems inevitable that reference and response to it would be part of the design made with a vernacular flavour. The tree-trunk columns are that reference and response.





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involvement with his time was as deep as he could make it.

'The physical object of the building', Boyd says, 'is transformed by the strength of the architect's vision as it is built up gradually by his personal techniques in structure, space and surface' (p. 111). The transformation would, for him, be an aspect of the ingredient of 'spirit'. With respect to image-making, this statement implies that the final form is arrived at at the end of a process rather than, for example, beginning with a form which offers a Miesian 'universal space'. It is not characteristic of Boyd's work to have recognisable forms being repeated', says David Saunders in the Afterword to 'Living in Australia' (p. 147). The examples pictured here are testament enough to that. They also show that in time there is a building up of personal techniques. McCaughey Court, the Featherston house, Menzies College and other later works have a deftness, ease and maturity, a greater apleness of structural members and textures compared with the more attenuated detailing, smoother surfaces and overtly structural demonstrations of the Gillison house, the Richardson house and the Jordanville house. The latter-day works however are consistent in approach with the earlier ones. The personal techniques have developed and matured, but the results nevertheless show a similar freshness.

'The object of a design, in architecture as in anything else, is to say or do the essential thing as simply and directly and purely as possible' (p. 111). It is the objective, the attitude, that should be morally direct, pure and simple, for the programme worked through in this spirit may inevitably lead to a complex object. The moral of his statement is related to functionalism and his designs belong to the functionalist ethic, yet they do not reflect the International-Style variety of functionalism by stressing machine-made finishes or smoothness of a mechanical sort, nor are they styled to appear as machine-made objects. Boyd took note of the fact that handcraft is still part of building construction. But in his functionalism are some qualities of the Australian ethos. David Saunders sums it up best by pointing to casualness as the core of his designs and notes that he has 'the skills essential for improvisation and for managing with simple, regional materials' (Afterword, p. 152). Boyd's designs are the outcome of necessity and of insistence on the most direct answer.

Spirit, structure, space and surface

'It [spirit] is there when an idea expressive of living, neither purely intellectual nor purely poetic, illuminates the building' (p. 113). Spirit is a quality that eludes definition by words, but if it is present in a building, for those who can perceive it, it 'transforms the familiar primitive experience of being sheltered from the elements' (p. 113). Spirit, too, for Boyd was a lasting quality, evident as long as the building remained standing. He pursued this elusive quality, believed in it, and this explains what he hoped would emerge in a design. He would believe that only time can reveal which of his buildings possess this spirit: It is not the purpose of this article to nominate them either. 'The history of architecture is commonly told as if following a bouncing ball hopping along the high spots, ignoring the lows; and each high spot represents a love affair, a belief in purity — a purity of structure, of space, of means, of living' (p. 112). . . . 'the real thing of architecture, [is] the creative activity aimed at producing a complete shelter that transcends mere usefulness into realms of pure delight' (p. 7). Boyd was arguing for the building as a work of art, not that every building the artist-architect

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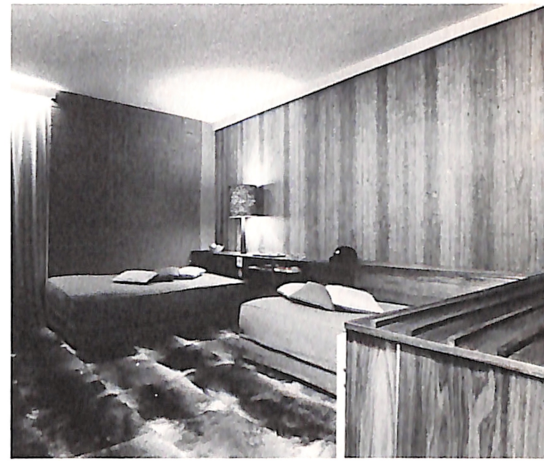


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11 Domain Park Flats, South Yarra, 1962

'The building was planned to be narrow enough to allow all main rooms to fill its width and have an outlook both ways, so giving these rooms a heightened sense of isolation and suspension in space.' (p. 58).

Vertical services are grouped in the white towers. The north side overlooks the Botanic Gardens and an association of residents has agitated for the prevention of any other high-rise developments overlooking the Gardens. However, when he wrote the words quoted above, Boyd was considering this design exclusively from the point of view of the inside-outside relationship.

'It represents one extreme in the range of personal tastes for types of shelter for living in Australia. It is the big city block of many flats, each flat a home but practically anonymous externally (despite a scatter of balconies here, placed to suit different internal arrangements, and some personal pot-planting on these balconies).' (p. 117).

12 John Batman Motor Inn, Queens Road, Melbourne, 1964

'... the John Batman, named after one of Melbourne's founders, was highly urbanised in concrete; and the Black Dolphin, named to evoke a holiday mood, used the thick trunks of gum trees as columns throughout.' (p. 131).

Consistently the concept is a response to the site and setting and the design is thought of as having an appropriateness to what is considered to be the programme.

'In short, visual or structural or environmental ideas can all give the motivation to architectural design; but I do not believe that any of them should be permitted to do that. They should be constant influences, but ...' (p. 10) living conditions are paramount and the atmosphere and function of the spaces above all.

Travellers on the international hotel-motel-motor inn circuit could be forgiven, if they did not venture outside, for not knowing which country they were in; for internal finishes and appearance are very often identical from Tokyo to Djakarta, from New York to Cairo, and back again. Finishes in the John Batman orientate the visitor to materials of this particular region of the earth.

13 Stegbar Ltd Head Office display space, Springvale, 1964

'Exhibitions are usually the most uncommunicative of all media of communication ... because [their design demands nothing] more from the viewer than passive acceptance of a visual experience [rather than a space-enclosure experience].' (p. 76). This building is a display of the Company's products, which involves the viewer in moving through its spatial arrangement to obtain information.

14 Shelmordine house, Portsea, 1964

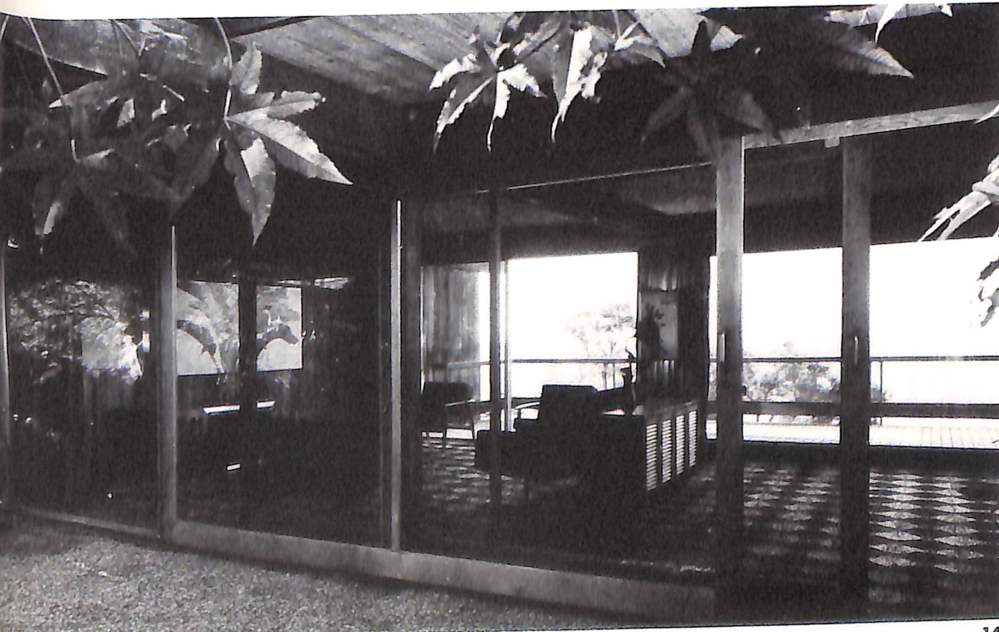
'The house was based on a tripartite living room, its conventional centre section opening wide to a protected land court on one side and a balcony exposed to the sea on the other.' (p. 101).

Three qualities of living space are simply achieved. 'So I arrive at a firm if not very revolutionary statement of the first part of a definition of a good piece of architecture: it is a building based on a concept of good living conditions.' (p. 10).

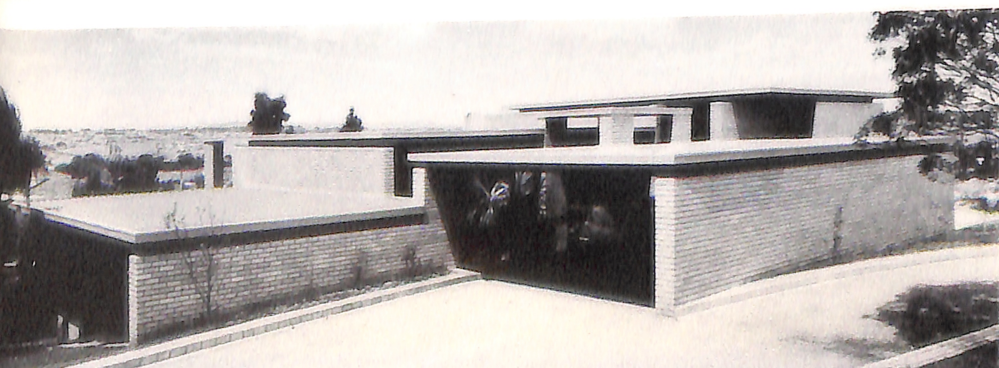
15 Burgess house, Ivanhoe, 1965

From the street, the house is below eye level and so the roof planes were considered as having a vital role in the concept. The walls, too, are conceived of as planar, and the composition emphasises solid vertical and horizontal planes and the void. The building is reminiscent of Mies van der Rohe's brick house projects of the 20s. However, Boyd's work is not imitative of any master, though this house has unjustifiably been dubbed his 'Paul Rudolph house'.

Page numbers in text and captions refer to 'Living in Australia', by Robin Boyd.



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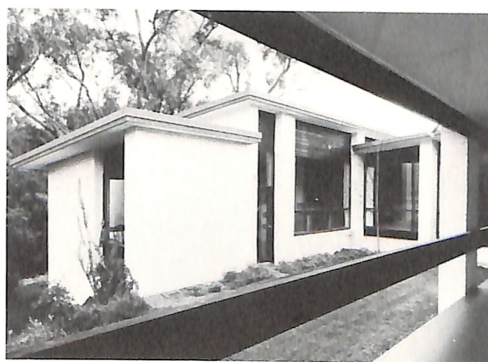
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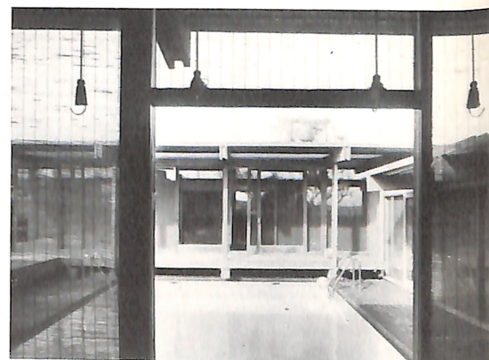
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created would necessarily have that elusive spirit. Spirit for him emerges through the programme and fabric of the building: it is not artificially applied and is never irrelevant, redundant or extraneous. Spirit is the essence of a work of art. Architecture is art, hence his belief in the individual personal design. The occasional gleam of precious metal amongst the dross of the general environmental mess is acceptable. No matter how sophisticated the means of analysing and organising the factors of the programme, Boyd believed that there remained a gap between that and the solution which had to be leapt intuitively. 'Architecture is good building and building is good structure . . . to most serious architects the idea of covering or disguising important elements of the systems which make the building stable and workable is objectionable' (p. 83). It can be seen that structure in his work is often striking and inventive and improvisational in character, neat structural feats. Boyd believed that any real progress in architecture came from structural progress, hence his interest, perhaps a little obsessive, in structure. However, structural feats do not totally dominate his designs in a super-technological way. The character of his structures is to exploit the material qualities of those structures. For example, he expressed the gentle curves of metal cables in his own South Yarra home, the arched latticed girders of the Richardson house are not overwhelmingly dominant, and he is not averse to using simple traditional and regional building techniques. (To page 10)



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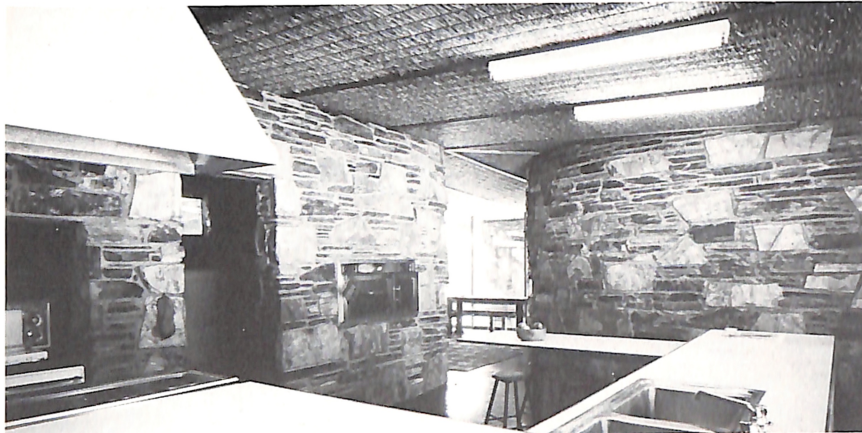
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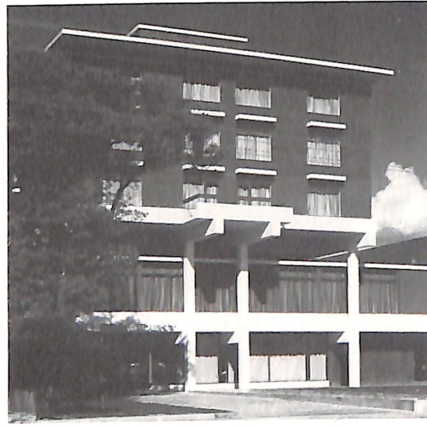
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16 Baker house, near Bacchus Marsh, 1965

'There is left today only one justification for building individual, one-off houses in a world devoted more and more to the ideas of standardisation and mass-production. The costly exercise is only justified if the building is unique to some extent, tailored to the life-pattern of the intending occupants.' (p. 117).

Here the uniqueness came from expressing the need to store roof rainwater in cylindrical tanks sheathed in chunky, split local brown slate. The corner cylinders do not contain tanks, however, but are for storage of tools and firewood. The curve is thematic in this design and is achieved naturally, or 'genuinely' or 'honestly' in stonework. An inner court has been formed spanned by timber members, over which is drawn an insect-proof mesh.

'Somehow it was like designing a building for Robinson Crusoe . . . despite the roughly romantic materials, a classic or closed formality seemed called for in the form of the building.' (p. 123).

' . . . the division between [the kitchen and the living-dining room] is not sharply defined and the materials are continuous.' (p. 36).

The continuity of surfaces contributes toward an integrated building. Not to have continued surface and space through the whole building and to have stopped and isolated surfaces and spatial volumes would have been 'featurism'.

17 Noble house, Vermont, 1966

In this instance units of space-enclosure remain expressed as such in the final form. This sort of example makes categorising Boyd's vision very difficult. In other examples of designs with units of space-enclosure a huge roof is the unifying element, as in 'Pelican'. In the Featherston house the open-form units are contained within a large hall space. Here in the Noble house wholeness is achieved in the balance of the masses of these units, balance being the key organising aspect of the design.

18 Kaye house, Frankston, 1966

A massive cantilevering, bracketed, beamed and columned structure is built out from a brickwork core founded on a small area of suitable ground. The plane of the balcony face is angled to the receding planes of the house, a response to a magnificent view from Oliver's Hill, where this house is situated.

19 President Motor Inn, Queens Road, Melbourne, 1967

'Its bedroom suites are held high on concrete columns, which improves their view of the lake in front and, more important, allows the noisier element of the restaurant to be slipped in independently underneath them.' (p. 94).

Perhaps, being sited in what is an imposing street of grand 19th-century mansions (now rapidly being redeveloped), this symmetrical, formal composition is appropriate.

20 Lyons house, Dolan's Bay, N.S.W., 1967

'A swimming pool was to be the centre of activity, but the site was solid rock, so the pool was built above ground in a concrete and brick structure which made the core of the building.' (p. 136).

Boyd would often determine the character of the whole design from an aspect of the client's programme, combined here with the nature of the site. Around the pool the verandahs are reminiscent of traditional Japanese architecture — or are they reminiscent of the traditional Australian verandah?

21 Lawrence house and flats, Kew, 1967

Parts of this building are 'hoisted' 20 feet above ground to take advantage of views of golf links and Melbourne's city centre.

'The hoisting might have been accomplished by posts of various kinds, but brick, the oldest of all technologies, was selected for the supports as well as for the walls above so that building and supports would be a whole thing. Step-backs and corbels of the brick courses negotiate the transfer of stresses from the walls to piers.' (p. 92).

22 Holiday houses, Portsea, 1968

The roofs over terraces tilt up abruptly allowing a deeper penetration of winter sun while giving shelter from rain.

' . . . familiar and unfamiliar architectural epithets could and should be used much more to enrich the usual square, trapezoidal prose of building.' (p. 84).

As a linguistic analogy, too, this comment is revealing.

'Instead of a passage, a semi-outdoor garden space, roofed but only insect-screened on one side, serves as a general hall.' (p. 60).

This connecting space is the dominant organiser of the interior scheme.

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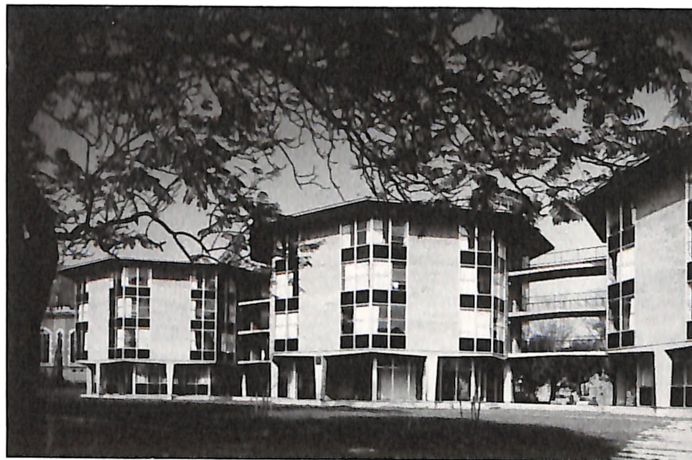
'The elements [of space] still include contrasts of confinement and release, changes of floor level in a single space, suggestions of far delights not clearly revealed, contrasts of brilliance and dimness to punctuate space, and all the games that can be played with perspective' (p. 45). This range of spatial ideas can be found in his work from the tantalising glimpse inside the Milne house or the Stegbar display gallery, where the joy for the viewer lies in moving through the spaces being confined and released. 'Getting there can be nearly all the fun in some buildings' (p. 47). The Featherston house is an obvious demonstration of multi-floor levels contained within a large hall space. The connecting hall inside the Portsea holiday houses has the intriguing character of inviting the user to explore the space beyond the far door and the alternating open and closed wall surfaces punctuate the hall space with differing light levels. The lines and slope of the cables in his own house would intensify the diminution or enlargement of space, depending on the direction from which one looked from the courtyard. 'The visual effects which can be created by the composition of these and similar spatial devices are the principal means of communication in architecture' (p. 46). This would mean that spirit is best revealed through spatial composition. While spatial arrangement determines the atmospheric character of a building, Boyd thought the space must have conviction by rationally providing privacy where appropriate and 'acoustical repose', as well as the delights mentioned earlier. Ponder this one: 'I have the feeling that ultimate architectural perfection will be achieved in a building of which every part is visible to any viewer at all times while any part is private to any user at any time he wishes for seclusion' (p. 47). While this is difficult to achieve, the idea is revealing: he may have been working toward it in such buildings as the Featherston house.

For Boyd colour and texture, the ingredients of surface, determine the 'taste as opposed to the creative art of the building'. In practice there are only two tastes, two desired qualities, on this entirely superficial plane: cool or warm' (p. 20). He measures the quality of all materials, their texture and colour on a scale between these two poles and asserts that he is inclined toward warm, 'while finding pleasure in the sight and touch of almost any material that is not trying to look like another one' (p. 21). This preference is readily discernible in his buildings. Usually it is the building's environment that has suggested the colour and texture used. With the Baker house, for example, there is perhaps an attitude of seeking to harmonise with the environment, but on other occasions when he thought the environment 'bad — that is, unsympathetic' (p. 21), he felt no qualms in creating a protesting and independent contrast. In 'Living in Australia', Boyd has dealt with surface, space, structure and spirit in the order of their ease or difficulty of perception by a building's user. In this article they are treated in the order in which his visionary architect would think of them. His theories are broad, articulate, well contemplated and argued, and from his faith in them he could proceed to the realisation of his 'vision' with dexterity and consistency. He was clear about his aims, and his likes and dislikes, from the outset, although 'Pop' interjects a disturbing cyclic reaction. This happens in any career. The problem of design for 'serious-minded' designers in all fields, he thought, was 'to find order in a confusion of functional requirements and conflicting economic demands, to blend separate parts into a whole, single, unified concept.' ('The Australian Ugliness', p. 12). The 'Featurist' on the other hand destroys any unified entity. Blending separate parts

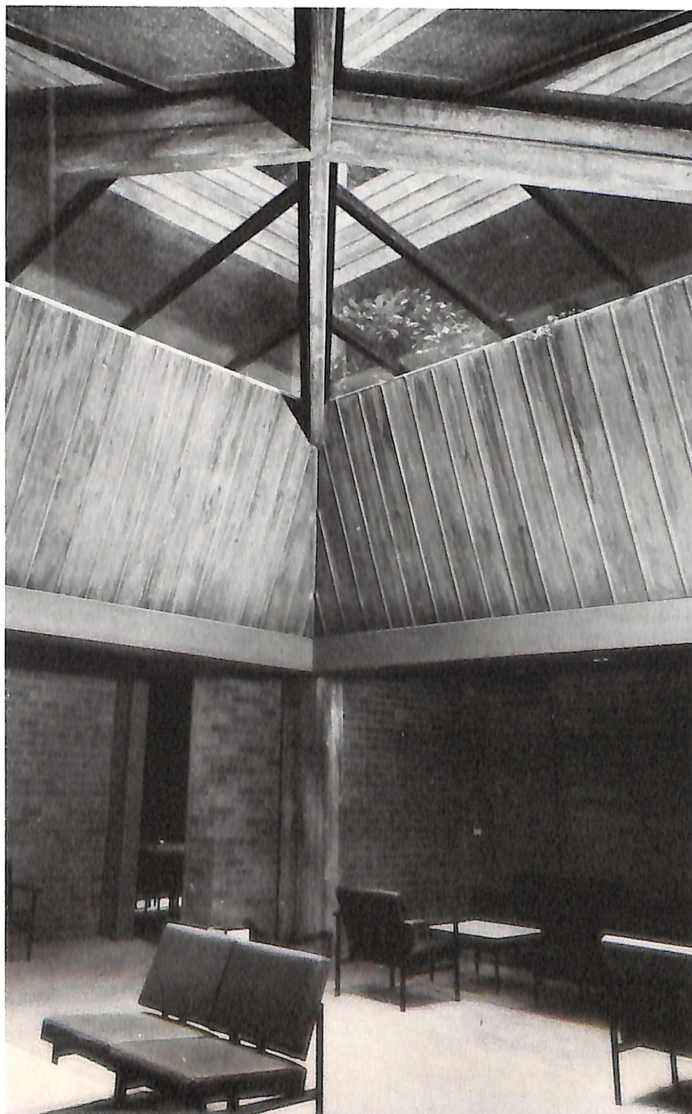
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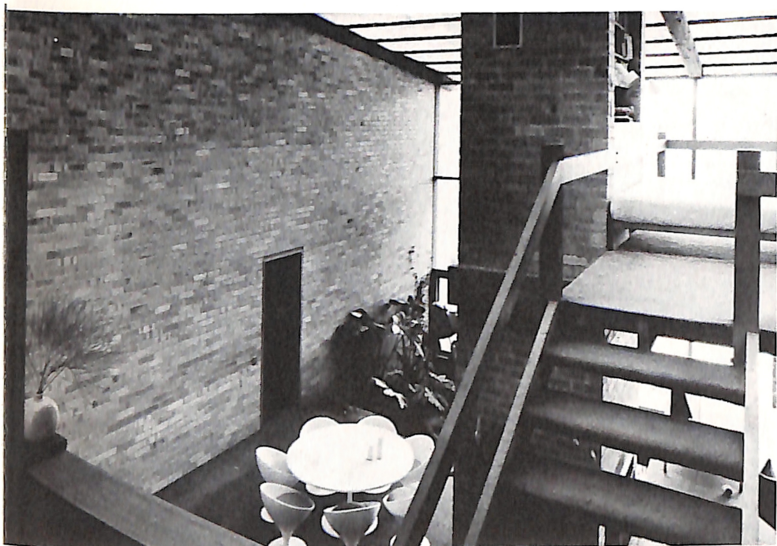


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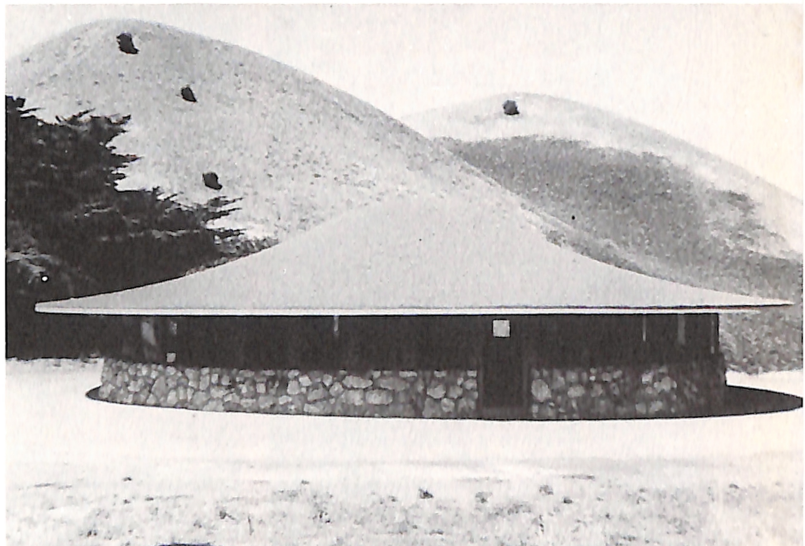


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23 Featherston house, Ivanhoe, 1968

'The quality of the space or spaces contained in a building is the art and heart of architecture.' (p. 45).

Within a regular form, top-lit and with a south glazed window wall, four floor levels are introduced, each with its own quality, from the earth of the indoor garden to the upper carpeted platforms.

'I have been fascinated for many years with the conflict between the opposed desires of privacy and freedom, between the cell and the great hall.' (p. 47).

In wings behind the blank brick walls of the multi-level living space are the essentially private cells — bathrooms, kitchen, guest rooms and so on.

'... the real thing of architecture, the creative activity aimed at producing a complete shelter that transcends mere usefulness into realms of pure delight sometimes seems in danger of being forced into the background to grow old ...' (p. 7).

Not here.

24 Tower Hill Natural History Centre, near Warrnambool, 1968

It is the innate properties of local stone and prefabricated laminated timber beams that give the interior its decorative quality. Lamination of beams allowed the roof form to mimic the curves of the surrounding grassed hills.

25 Picken Court, Ormond College, University of Melbourne, 1962

Architect, Frederick Romberg, of Romberg and Boyd.

26 McCaughey Court, Ormond College, University of Melbourne, 1967-8

This multi-storey student residential block is in keeping with the earlier forms of Picken Court by Boyd's associate in practice. Both building developments are revealing in their comparison. It should be noted that they embody individual attitudes of their respective designers. Boyd in his writing says that 'architecture is going out of style' and he means there is a trend to architect team design rather than design by individuals, though he approves of collaboration between architect and engineer as offering a stimulus to the design concepts of each on a job. Hence it is 'genuine' and correct that Boyd and Romberg would each produce buildings of a different character given the same formal theme. McCaughey Court is more ample in sizes of members, has rougher textures and seems to be more regional in flavour. Grainy timber plank formwork has given a strong 'natural' texture to the reinforced concrete throughout this building.

'... much handwork is still necessary in any building construction and efforts to make its results look as if it has just emerged from a plastic press are hardly logical and rarely successful.' (p. 20).

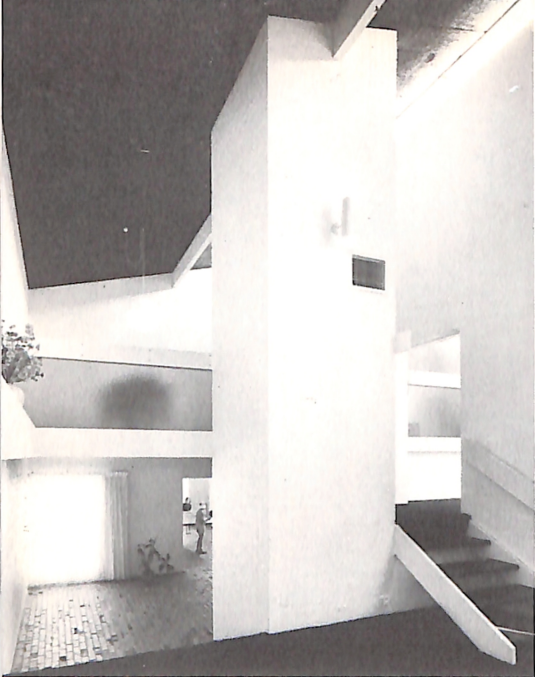
A boned and skin-sheathed canopy to a central court, which is the Common Room, appears again here. It would seem to be a favoured theme when applicable and appropriate to the programme.

27 Marks house, Mornington, 1969

'A concrete deck on a single support steps forward to command the bay view ... Two floors are stepped along the middle to allow the rooms on the side away from the water to see over the heads of the rooms on the view side.' (p. 66). The attainment of an uninterrupted view of the sea permeates the design in many ways, including the overt deck and gangway device. In this design and others Boyd shows a preference for spatial complexity and excitement.

Page numbers in text and captions refer to 'Living in Australia', by Robin Boyd.





28 Milne house, Toorak, 1969

'I detect in myself a barely controllable weakness towards vivid colours, including white, and towards pronounced textures. All of which puts my work generally some sixteen to eighteen degrees below warm on the surface-temperature scale.' (p. 21).

29 McClune house, Frankston, 1969

Almost lost or on the brink of being taken over by the surrounding bush, the building displays a direct and simple structural expression of timber post and beam with steel bracing. This structural expression, as usual, is not a technological whiz-bang, but understated, subordinated to a role equal with those of surface and space-enclosure qualities. This sophisticated structural scheme reflects the Australian vernacular tradition in dealing with structure, a structure that is demonstrated and genuine. The steel cross-tie is an element expressed deliberately — not substantial and dominating in the design, but there all the same. Alternative bracing solutions could have been hidden away.

The house is yet another example of a Boyd design which centres on a 'bone-and-skin-topped' courtyard.

'It has a big parasol roof of steel and fibreglass sheeting in the shape of a square doughnut, supported on steel-braced timber posts independent of the structure of the rooms. These follow a comparatively free plan beneath the raised roof.' (p. 105).

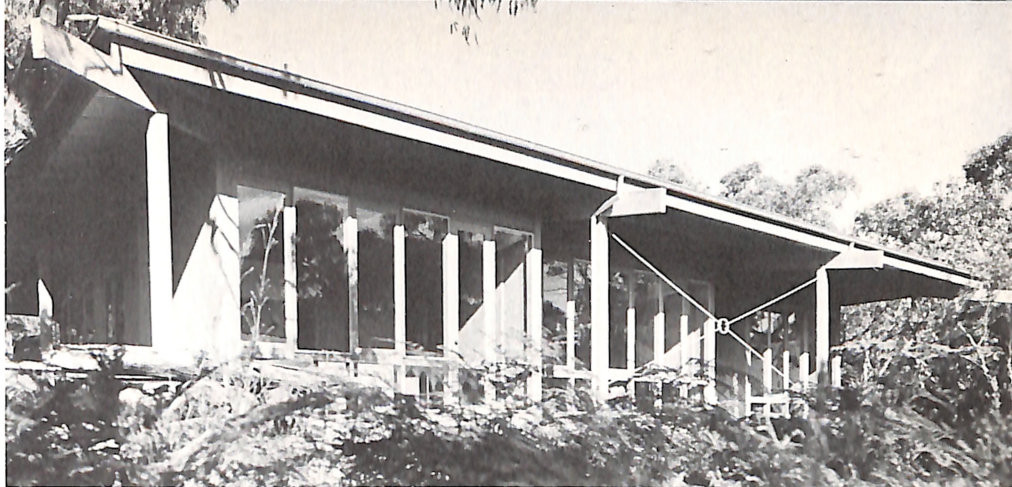
30 Menzies College, La Trobe University, Melbourne, 1968-70

'Blank structural walls explain the form of a building as glass and metal cannot do . . . Blank is beautiful, so the architectural fundamentalists have always argued.' (p. 127).

Excepting that the haunched bay window to the Resident Fellow's flat obtains the best view to the west. With the same wit Boyd can remark that 'the blank walls are also useful to student protestors for slogan-writing with pressure-pack paint.' 'The concrete columns and braces required here to make a rigid base for the (load-bearing) brickwork are necessarily sturdy and not ashamed of it.' (p. 98).

Response to structure, as usual, has the flavour of the direct traditional Australian vernacular.

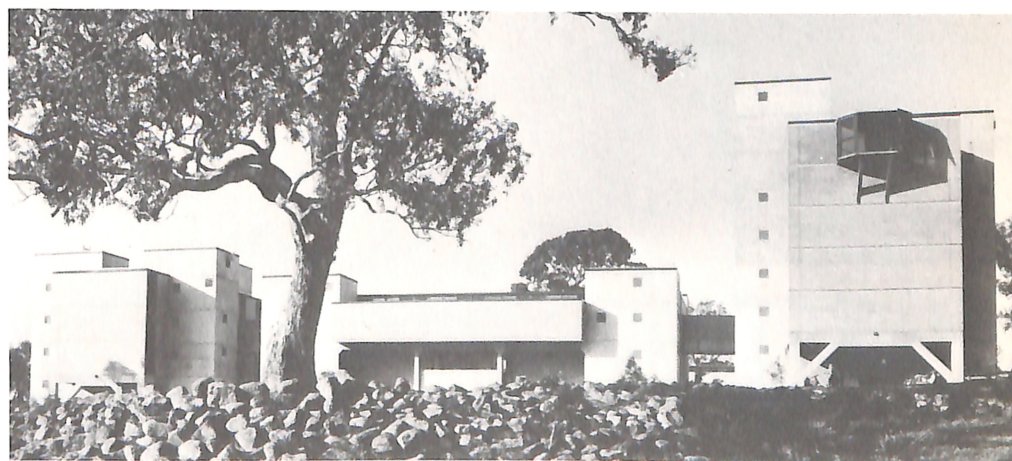
'I find in myself a mounting impatience when the pursuit of cold purity in detail starts to become a precious and introverted end in itself.' (p. 20). A textural pattern to the brickwork, a smooth but not polished finish to concrete structural mem-



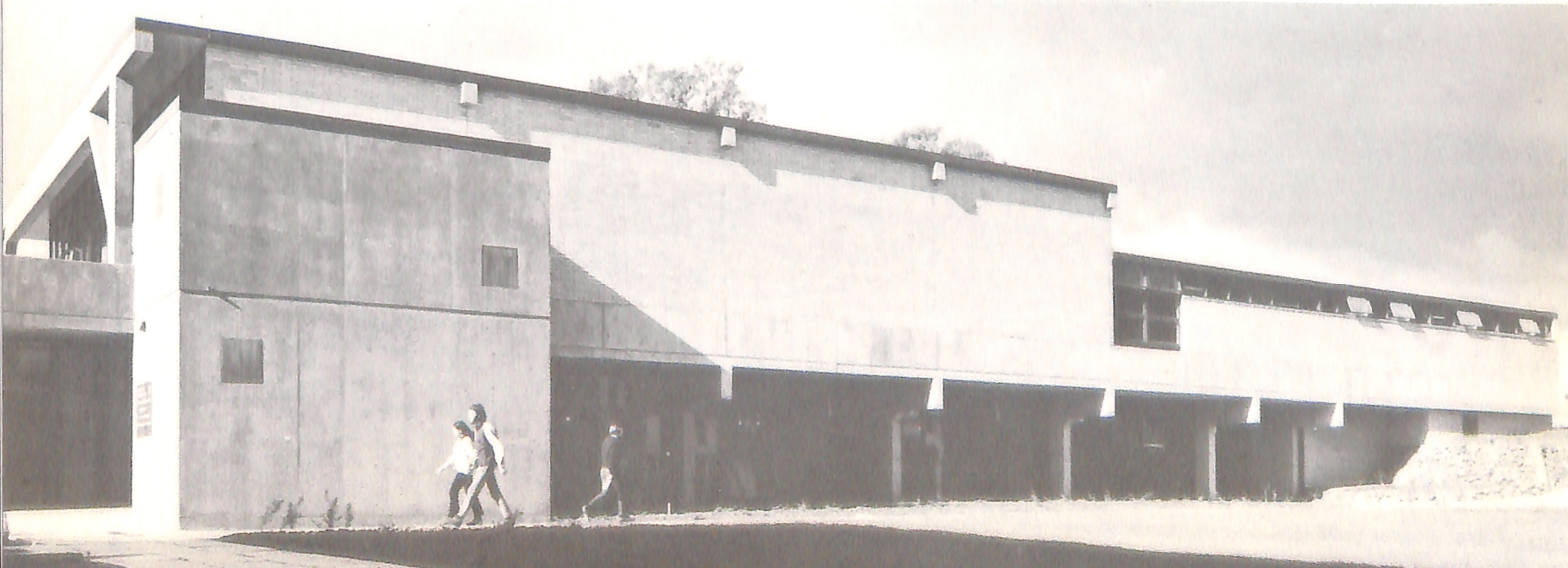
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bers, elegant but adequate member sizes in the timber windows bear witness to Boyd's attitudes — joy and warmth rather than purity and coldness. While this is a physically large residential institution, it retains a comfortable domestic scale by the expression of floor levels and projections of domestic size. The building is elevated, providing a sheltered ground-floor level mostly left free to be given a use by the occupants.

31 'Fishbowl', South Yarra, 1970

'The ivory tower must be descended. Popular taste must rule. Thus any blooms that are permitted in the mechanistic avant-garden are blown-up pop, projected, animated, strobe-lighted, vivid fragments pinched from television commercials of life at Las Vegas. That is the current progressive stance.' (p. 11).

Boyd wrote that futurism 'is the evasion of the bold, realistic, self-evident, straightforward, honest answer to all questions of design and appearance in man's artificial environment' ('The Australian Ugliness', p. 10). This check-list of adjectives can all be ticked affirmatively here, in that none of the properties they signify is evaded. The programme has its solution, except perhaps the response to setting: the uniqueness of the form in relation to the surrounding buildings is overwhelming. The building in itself, however, is a whole, single, unified concept.

'I believe that every building, from a national valhalla to a shoe factory, can have, in greatly varying degree, the something more, and should have it. The something more is most simply described as appropriate character.' (pp. 14-15).

32 Churchill House, Canberra, 1972

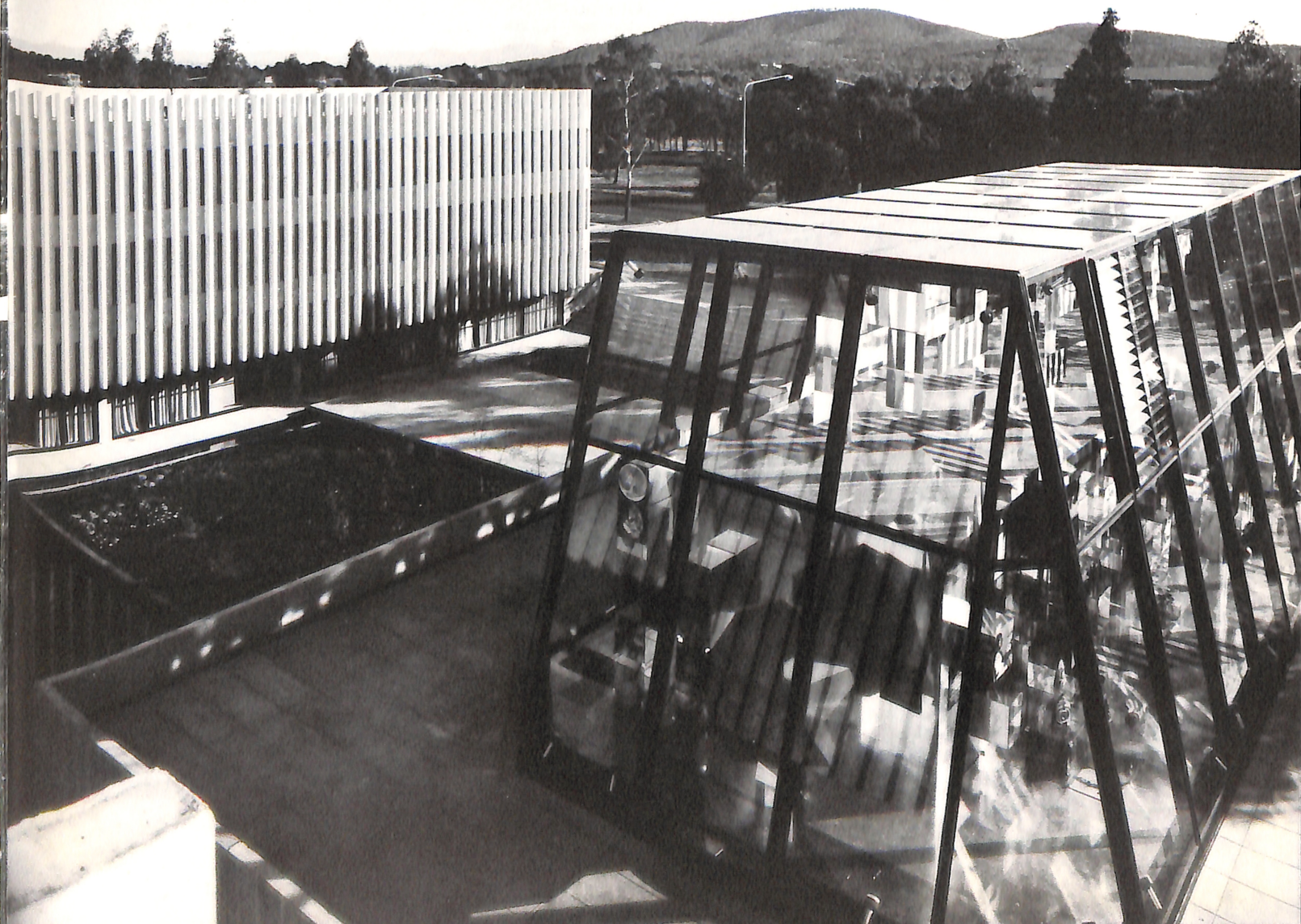
The flat site on Northbourne Avenue was moulded by earthworks so that the base of this building complex for the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust is set below the street level. Also set well back from the street, it is self-effacing amongst the line of commercial buildings. The north and west walls of the two wings of lettable offices are patterned by closely-spaced vertical concrete sun-breakers. Sun, shadow, and repeated ample elements read as a grand-scale texture. Beneath this surface can be seen Boyd's often-used diagonal prop.

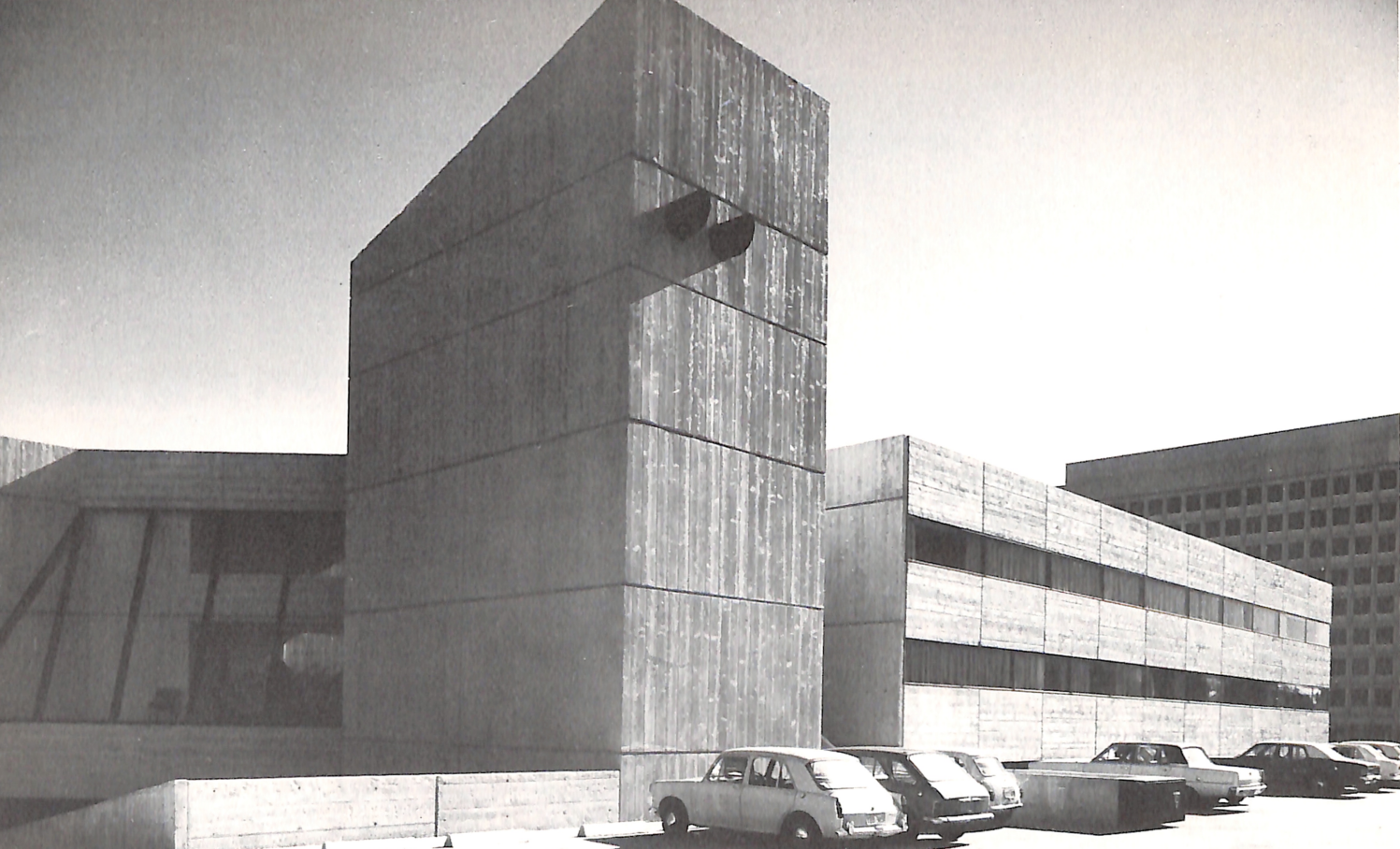
The public podium is the roof of the Trust's offices and supports the huge display case, the design of which is a direct, pragmatic response to the problem. This design, together with the detailing at the junction of the wings, is consistent with Boyd's innovative structures, inventions of the humble vernacular tradition.

(Continued overleaf)

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32 Churchill House, Canberra, 1972

The composition of the unscreened east and south elevations would appear as creditable company with the international exhibition at Stuttgart in 1927, but a powerful surface treatment and some dramatic sloping lines and surfaces ensure its place in modern Australian architecture. The smooth, white stuccoed, taut surfaces of the International Style are denied by the natural colour and deep texturing from sand-blasted oregon formwork. The slab-like size and disposition of the surface divisions look well and appropriate with the skilled tower.

(From page 10)

is the key notion and this is fraught with difficulties. For example, there is the unavoidable problem of combining a number of materials in any project. If only one material could accommodate all functional and structural requirements he would have preferred it. The Fishbowl is not Featurism: it is 'Pop'. The caption that accompanies the illustration of that building is puzzling in that one can't be sure of whether he approved of the current stance. However, there the building stands, an appropriate answer to the programme.

In an important way, apart from his own house designs and his writings, Boyd has brought architect involvement in domestic design to the forefront of public consciousness. The Peninsular House of the 50's, for Contemporary Homes Ltd, was Australia's first project house and used pre-cut fabrication methods. The architect-involved project house has really caught on. Boyd also designed the original 'window-walls' for Stegbar Ltd. These represent very direct ways in which he has influenced the built environment.

Books by Robin Boyd

The basic proposition of 'Australia's Home' is that the Australian house began as a simple integral form, a well-proportioned Georgian box. From time to time this basic form was embellished with a new fashionable dress and the narrow hallway ran through the middle or was placed to one side, or was bent. This may be true of the very small house. The larger architect-designed houses were visually and spatially more sophisticated and complex than that. However the book had at least two positive

attributes. Firstly it asked the reader to look at and think about the quality of the built environment and secondly it asked the reader for involvement. Above all, the book was the first historical analysis which covered a whole range of stylistic developments from the days of the early pioneers to the then current early 1950s.

Boyd's next book was 'The Australian Ugliness', (Cheshire, Melbourne, 1960), which again had the virtue of making us take a critical look at the built environment. The message is still valid today although some architects are pursuing the cult of the ordinary image, grappling with popular taste, and celebrating it in the work of art. 'Kenzo Tange' (Prentice Hall International, London, 1962) and the later 'New Directions in Japanese Architecture' (Studio Vista, London, 1968) are an indication of his interest in a regional expression within the modern movement, architecture that works within a tradition, nurturing that tradition, but working with the new technology. 'The Walls Around Us' subtitled 'The story of Australian architecture told and illustrated for young readers' (Cheshire, Melbourne, 1962) sets out Boyd's attitudes, observations and theories for children. 'The New Architecture' (Longmans, Melbourne) was published in 1963 and then came 'The Puzzle of Architecture' (Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1965), which seeks to re-examine modern architecture in the world scene and to give order to its trends. The Boyer lectures of 1967 were published as 'Artificial Australia' (Australian Broadcasting Commission, Sydney, 1968). Next to appear was 'Living in Australia', designed and photographed by Mark Strizic, which concentrates on Boyd's own work and his attitudes to design. Recently published was 'The Great, Great Australian Dream' (Pergamon Press (Australia) Pty Ltd, Sydney, 1972) and 'A Night at the Opera' is in preparation.

Active professional life

Robin Boyd had become an Associate of the R.V.I.A. in 1947. He was elevated to Fellowship in 1958 and to Life Fellowship in 1970. From 1952 he served on the Council of the Royal Victorian Institute of Archi-

tecs and continued to serve when the R.V.I.A. became the Victorian Chapter of the R.A.I.A. in 1966. He was Honorary Treasurer in 1965/66, Honorary Secretary in 1966/67, Vice-President 1967/68, Senior Vice-President 1968/70. He was elected President for 1970/72. He was awarded the R.A.I.A. Gold Medal in 1970. As well, he was an Honorary Fellow of the American Institute of Architects from 1960.

In 1954 he became a partner in a new firm, Grounds, Romberg and Boyd, the practice subsequently becoming, and continuing as, Romberg and Boyd. In 1956-57 Robin Boyd was in the U.S.A. as Visiting Bemis Professor of Architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He was presented with an honorary degree, D. Litt., by the University of New England, N.S.W. in 1967. He was also a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, London. He was created Commander of the British Empire in January 1971.

In an abundantly active life, Robin Boyd was a Trustee of the National Gallery of Victoria from 1965, a member of the National Capital Planning Committee, Canberra, from 1968. He was also a member of the Industrial Design Council of Australia and of the Melbourne Underground Rail Loop Authority. He designed the interior of the Australian Pavilion at Expo 67 at Montreal and the Australian Pavilion at the 1970 Osaka Fair. Robin Boyd was one of two Commonwealth architects invited by the British Government to join a panel of judges for the architectural competition for the Redevelopment of Westminster and Whitehall. He originated the concept of the Melbourne Architectural Papers, sponsored jointly by the Victorian Chapter of the R.A.I.A. and Australian Consolidated Industries Limited. Under this scheme, yearly since 1969 a paper presented by a distinguished architect or critic from abroad has brought current thinking on architecture before the general public as well as the profession.

Photographs in this issue were from Marc Strizic (front cover, portrait on page 2, and numbers 2, 3, 6, 8-14, 17, 18, 20, 21, 23, 26-30), Wolfgang Sievers (5), Kenneth Ross (7, 25, 32), Ian McKenzie (16), Andrew R. Lyell (19), David Walker (31).



33 BMA Tower, Chatswood, N.S.W., 1972

Architects, H. Stossel and Partners.
An 18-level office block developed by Manchil Pty Ltd in reinforced concrete with end walls of cavity brickwork. The imposing facade of bronze polyurethane-finished aluminium and glass curves symmetrically about the external lift shaft. The lift itself rising to the upper floors of the building commands sweeping views across Sydney Harbour to the city and to the western suburbs. Aluminium windows are by Wunderlich in accordance with AS CA53.

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 - Dust infiltration, of particular significance, for example, in industrial buildings surrounded by unpaved areas.
- Procedures for carrying out a variety of tests on the strength, stability and performance of window assemblies, fittings and hardware are also described.

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(From previous page)

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34 Wentworth Hotel, Sydney, N.S.W., 1966

Architects, Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, U.S.A., and Laurie and Heath in association.

The main entrance with its curving canopy of ribbed copper links the two extremities of the 200-foot-high arc of steel-framed brickwork that constitutes the central building. The regular banks of bronze-anodised aluminium windows, relieved on the lower floors by slim-balustraded balconies, overlook a landscaped area. All aluminium windows and doors are by Wunderlich.

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