

Australian vagaries of taste

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I FIND it very hard to think of Robin Boyd as an architect. As an author, lecturer, social critic and wit, yes. A sort of Antipodean Kenneth Clarke without the overtones of Queen Victoria that Sir Kenneth projects. On the contrary, Robin Boyd is very often amused.

This amusement at the vagaries of Australian taste in architecture and life style has (as is pointed out in the afterword by David Saunders) been the springboard for a lot of Australian self-mockery for the past 20 years. Would anyone dare admit to a feature wall again? If Edna Everage still makes sponge fingers, I'll bet it's in a kitchen delineated by Boyd. Sandy Stone is alive and well in the Australian Ugliness.

Living in Australia is a discussion of Boyd's own buildings, his approach to architecture and a definition of his humanism. The buildings range from small homes through motels, halls of residence and apartment houses to the tunnel of love of Expo '70.

Architects have always overawed me. (Sir Christopher Wren once said to some men, "If anyone calls, say I'm building St. Paul's.") But when an architect can say of his approach:

"I may seem to be trying to justify the rights of the people who are paying for or occupying the building (at least their interests are inseparable nowadays) against the rights of society. That should not be. The rights of society, as affected by the new

LIVING IN AUSTRALIA, by Robin Boyd and Mark Strizic (Pergamon Press; \$6.95).

Les Tanner

building which is thrust into its environment, must be respected. But these need never be incompatible with the rights and requirements of the occupiers.

"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 the most realistic and humanistic and successful motivating idea for a building is somehow based on the living conditions which will be provided for its occupants or users: the convenience of the planning, the quality of light, the outlook, the changing scene on moving into and through the building, the relationship between indoors and outdoors; above all, the emotive power of the spaces that will be created.

"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..." the awe vanishes and one is aware of the man.

The photographs and designs by Mark Strizic are splendid, but I am getting a bit sick of sans serif typography. It is very good looking, but hard to read.

The chapters apart from Boyd's

challenging general statement **Living and Architecture**, are **Surface, Space, Structure and Spirit**. In the section on **Surface** is a most Boydian statement:

"Any architect like me who objects must feel, I imagine, like the few remaining censors of the western world must feel, huddled in their dark musty corners of Eire, the Vatican and Australia, trying to apply an obsolete code to a transformed set of conditions. Yet, morals apart, a civilisation which demands comfort from photographic timber veneers and rock-faced bricks is not overwhelmingly admirable. So I continue to shun artificial decorative warmth, while finding pleasure in the sight and touch of almost any material that is not trying to look like another one."

It may be elitist, but thank heaven for an elite.