

LEFT: Robin Boyd. BELOW: An example of the ugliness that inspired his book.

# THE SO-CALLED 'AUSTRALIAN UGLINESS'



BUM ↓

HAL PORTER  
comments on  
ROB'N BOYD'S  
book  
RAT. BAG

WILLIAM ST., Sydney, ascends from the city to King's Cross.

Its buildings are a lively chaos of 19th-century and 20th-century architectural styles. Neons, telegraph poles, light standards, traffic signs, litter-containers and such abound.

of what . . . only its own remote majestic, rather pompous kind of beauty."

Since the Parthenon falls short of his standards, which are never stated with clarity, although dealt with at length in undecodable jargon, nothing else can be expected to attain them.

Nothing does. His contempt for Australian architecture, and much of the Australian ethos, is whole-hearted.

He has coined an offensive word, *Austerica*, to sum up his attitude.

One cannot, without criticising, object to criticism. Much of what Boyd criticises is, from his kind of architect's high-falutin' throne, criticisable enough.

One can, however, expect a critic to offer solutions. To be a wrecker is not enough. Here, the author lets the reader down.

It is clear for example, that he disdains what many others love, neat lawns, cement storks, plastic roses, doors painted pink, and such.

### Idealistic theory

He admits the love but adds that "the language of love is at fault".

His crime as a wrecker is that he commends no alternatives, no shaggy lawns, Benini statues, rare chrysanthemums, at \$100 a bloom, and doors of unpainted ebony, and offers nothing instead except pages of idealistic theory clogged with abstractions.

These are interesting as the expression of a point of view but the problem of what is "beauty" and what is "ugliness" is never really solved. An opinion is not a solution.

Since Boyd was so perfervid it is almost extraordinary that he did not suggest, as a control on people content to work to earn the money to buy "ugliness", the methods of the Tokugawa regime in Japan.

In this case matters of taste were subject to law: the design, size, color, and composition of mats, fans, hairpins, bowls, sandals, fly-swatters, of anything and everything, were irrevocably fixed. A nation had "taste" by edict.

It is not necessary to disagree with all of

Boyd's generalisations and conclusions, nor is it necessary to agree with any of them. It is fascinating to observe his pleader's skill in marshalling absolute facts and a zealot's theories towards the point he is trying to make.

Indeed, if one can mentally side-step the evangelism which is largely that of an architect impassioned by his own architectural theories, the book can be enjoyed as a collection of interesting snippets of information.

### Attempts at perfection

Much of this information is already old-fashioned (the book was first published in 1960) but, as a record of changing tastes in furnishings, car designs, hotel architecture, hair styles, chimney-piece ornaments, all the fallals of civilisation, the book has value.

His outcries against Featurism are unimportant, as all outcries against a certain fashion must be.

The history of the world, architecturally and otherwise, is littered with attempts at "perfection". It depends on who one is, and where one stands, whether these can be said to have come off, to have nearly made it, or to have dismally failed.

The great boulevards and parks of Haussmann's Paris may well have appeared hideous to those whose houses and inns and medieval chapels were demolished to make way for them.

The artificially-elegant street, the flawless architect's building, the piece of exquisite silver work or porcelain, these are not what the untrained eye is always happiest with.

There are those, and there will always be those, who prefer a gaudily painted cement garden gnome to a T'ang statuette, a smooth wall painted yellow to one of knob-ly stone, a drainpipe free of tree-roots and properly functioning, to a poplar aesthetically rearing up in the front garden.

About people of this kind — that are many, many people — only organisations of the Tokugawa brand can really do anything.

It would be possible to sympathise more with the author's strictures if he were able to convince one that Australia's taste is really as appalling as he makes it sound, or that the "ugliness" exists.

Are telegraph poles and wires ugly? Why is an unpainted piece of wood showing the "natural grain" more beautiful to Boyd than a piece of wood painted an "appalling orange"? Why appalling?

He is unable to convince one because he is attempting, and neither clearly nor objectively, the impossible. His numerous partialities do, however, make the starting points for discussion.

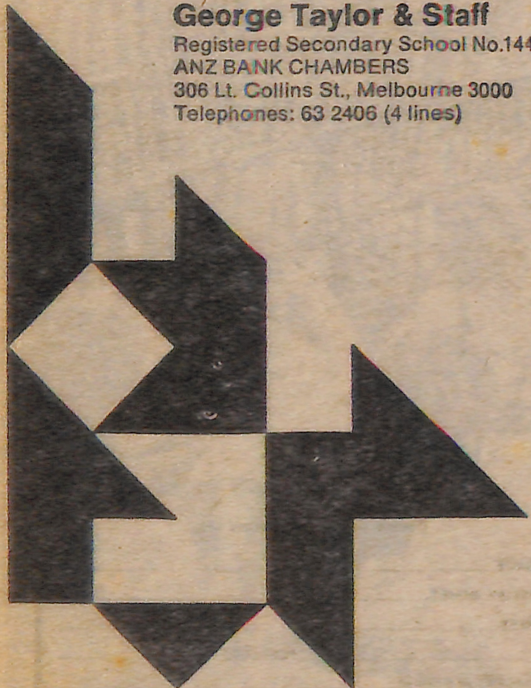
Whether one sides ultimately with men of Slessor's breed or men of Boyd's, "ugliness" (Australian or otherwise) and "beauty" are still, thank God, not subject to rules.

## Taylor's for results

Higher School Certificate, Leaving, Form IV, Form III Day School, Night School or Correspondence. A registered Secondary School teaching continuously from 9.30 a.m. to 9.30 p.m. There is a specialised course to suit the exact requirements of each student at each stage of the study year. Write or call for our information folder S10 on all courses available at Taylor's. Invitation to Parents or Students You are cordially invited to come in and discuss study problems.

### Taylor's

George Taylor & Staff  
Registered Secondary School No.1441  
ANZ BANK CHAMBERS  
306 Lt. Collins St., Melbourne 3000  
Telephones: 63 2406 (4 lines)

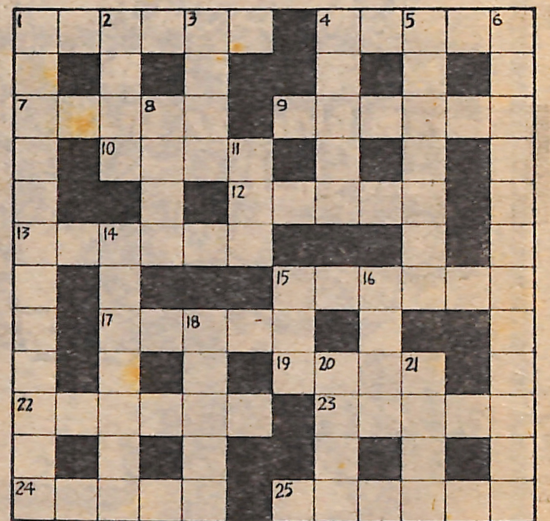


Established 1920

GTS47/R

### WHO... WHAT... WHERE?

- ACROSS
- A large merchant ship of the 16th and 17th centuries (6).
  - "I may not call you" (said to have been addressed by Queen Elizabeth the First to the wife of the Archbishop of Canterbury) (5).
  - American author of mining-camp stories, one of which was "The Outcasts of Poker Flat" (5).
  - A professional reviewer (6).
  - The lower part of an interior wall painted differently from the upper part (4).
  - A revolving aerofoil (5).
  - This edge is the rough edge of paper before trimming (6).
  - The long arm of the Arabian Sea between Africa and Arabia (3, 3).
  - A river of India, over 400 miles long of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat (5).
  - A light machine gun which took its name from Brno in Czechoslovakia, and Enfield in England (4).
  - French seaside resort connecting with cross-Channel traffic (6).
  - drab is the fabric of this color used for U.S. military uniforms (5).
  - The customary call of the Swiss and Tyrolean mountaineer (5).
  - Summerhouse or roof turret with a fine view (6).



- DOWN
- The first day of Lent (3, 9).
  - Department of France in which Nimes is situated (4).
  - A — oyster is one which is ready for transplanting (4).
  - The King of Naples who married Napoleon's sister (5).
  - Poisonous plants of the thorn-apple genus (7).
  - Florentine sculptor and painter whose "Pieta" of St. Peter's brought him instant fame (12).
  - In sailing, to make a zigzag course (4).
  - Either of two units of currency of Denmark and Norway (3).
  - One of the two projecting beams on a ship's bow, through which is passed the tackle for raising the anchor (7).
  - The principal vein of a leaf (3).
  - A combat between two rivals (4).
  - The round opening in the eye, through which the light passes (5).
  - Bonheur, French animal painter. Her "Horse Fair" is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City (4).
  - French resort which is a centre of the perfumery industry (4).