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Architecture was his life — he fought the Australian Ugliness

Robin Boyd

dies, aged 52

Robin Boyd, Australia's most insistent architectural conscience, died in the Royal Melbourne Hospital on Friday evening. He was 52.

Mr. Boyd was both one of the country's leading architects and its most passionate critic of the Australian ugliness.

He was president of the Victorian chapter of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects.

Son of the artist Penleigh Boyd, he was born in Melbourne in January, 1919.

He began architectural studies before the second world war, but they were broken when he spent four years in the Australian Survey Corps.

He became a registered architect in 1946 and a year later wrote his first book, *Victorian Modern*.

He later wrote *Australia's Home*, a biography of Kenzo Tange, *The Puzzle of Architecture, Living in Australia, New Direction in Japanese Architecture* and the children's book, *The Wall Around Us*.

His best known work was *The Australian Ugliness*, published in 1960.

He began private practice in 1947 with two associates in the firm Associated Architects — Boyd, Pethebridge and Bell. In 1954 he was a founding partner in Grounds, Romberg and Boyd, and in 1962 became a partner in Romberg and Boyd.

He won numerous awards — from the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects design scholarship in 1949 to the country's highest architectural tribute, the Royal Australian Institute of Architects gold medal in 1969.

Mr. Boyd was visiting

professor to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1956-57.

He was an honorary fellow of the American Institute of Architects, an honorary doctor of literature, a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and a trustee of the National Gallery of Victoria.

From 1947 to 1954 he was the first director of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects' Small Homes Service.

He designed the interiors of the Australian pavilions at Expo 67 and Expo 70.

He was a member of the Melbourne Underground Railway Loop Authority, a former member of the Industrial Design Council and a member of the National Planning Committee.

He received a CBE in June this year for services to architecture and Government.

Mr. Boyd leaves a wife, Patricia, a son and two daughters.

The funeral will be private. The Royal Australian Institute of Architects has arranged a public tribute at 616 St. Kilda Road at 3 p.m. today.

Achievements of a lifetime

By Patrick McCaughey

Only in death can we begin to appreciate the extent of Robin Boyd's achievement. His stature was already apparent.

Architect, writer, lecturer, ironic polemicist — these are the familiar labels attached to the man. Taken singly, none of them encompasses his breadth of interest and influence.

For all his public service and public endeavor, his achievement was remarkably personal. Personal vision generated public acts and that vision sprang from the belief that the art of architecture must concern itself fundamentally with the quality of living. If architecture was not grounded in the human, it would decay into forceless, impotent decoration.

How personal stance interacted on public attitude was borne out in his career. The core of his architecture lay in his domestic work, in his houses, his apartment and college buildings, an architecture explicitly directed towards the ordinary living needs of people.

Yet his writing from *The Australian Home* (1952) through his classic tract, *The Australian Ugliness* (1960) to his most recent book, *Living in Australia* (1970) reflected the widest interest in the environment as a whole.

No human structure could or should be alien to the architect's scrutiny. Robin Boyd encountered all and countenanced only the best.

If one had to choose one overriding accomplishment, it would be that Robin Boyd gave the Australian architect a public voice and that voice, by turn sharp, urbane and passionate, established him as the representative of the best and most enlightened aspects of Australian culture. He gave

others confidence, he raised the consciousness of our society and the level of our expectation.

No life was more relevant to its times than Robin Boyd's. His architecture was a response to human needs and his belief in the role of the architect was firm but it eschewed entirely the idea of the architect as a cultural tyro.

That sense of relevance is surely the reason why he struck so responsive a chord from so many areas of society. He was a man who was crucially involved with his age — not simply "of it".

No doubt it was that which brought him such diverse distinctions — a Visiting Professorship at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1956-7, the Gold Medal of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects in 1970, a member of the judging panel for the new Houses of Parliament at Westminster earlier this year and so on.

But public honors cannot measure this man. It was he and his presence among us which mattered and was the shaping spirit of our awareness. Robin Boyd is irreplaceable. His example, his architecture and his writing remain, however, a force and resource for the future.



Mr. ROBIN BOYD

A friend looks back, remembers

In 1946 Robin Boyd and I became interested in the work of Walter Burley Griffin. There was nothing much being built in that bleak post-war year and the hunting out, however desultory was a diversion from other more important things — for him setting up in practice, for me getting on with my course.

Today Griffin's work is being studied all over the world but 25 years ago there was no documentation — just memories. The buildings themselves were easily identifiable. Griffin developed and maintained a unique and consistent style. But how will another generation locate Robin Boyd's legacy to them. Every building he did was different. A professional can sometimes pick out details which match, but that is only the result of office arrangements rather than a desire for consistency.

Robin Boyd had no style as we apply the word to an architect. Each building presented to him a challenge to be solved from the ground up — in all senses. He had a consistent approach to design problems but the solutions were always different.

This is the most significant difference between his work and the work of his peers here and overseas. That and the fact that he was the only top-flight prac-

itioner who was also a top-flight critic.

I don't know of any architect who could design two buildings as disparate as Menzies College at La Trobe University and the Featherston House in Ivanhoe in the same year.

Both are positive, clever and at times brilliant statements. (I had the impression that the latter building was his favorite.) But only careful documentation will convince a historian in the 1890s of their common authorship.

So, to make things easier for the future wave of students, I am going to try and compile a definitive list of his work. The many triumphs and the few near-misses.

The buildings, the writings and the graphics. This latter category will include a wonderful series of Insulwool advertisements and a catalogue of the then-revolutionary Stegbar window-wall. That brochure has instructions. Telling a generation of home builders how to use the product. They must have read them well for they then went out and gave a distinctive glassy look to the early postwar suburbs.

Those instructions were printed in a facsimile of his handwriting — in that neat upright script which gave heart to all of us lefthanders and which brought such instruction, pleasure and commonsense to so many of us.

—NEIL CLEREHAN