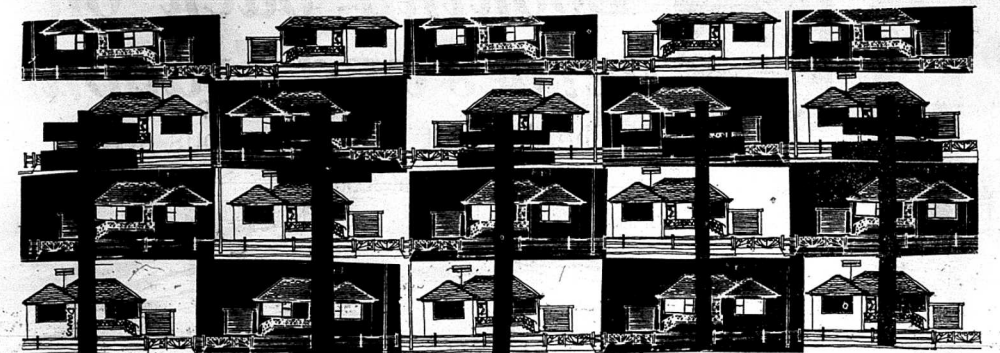


# THE HOUSES OF THE FUTURE



## Change in the world The home we live in

### A two-part report on the Australian house by the architect, Robin Boyd

BEHIND the latest deflating statistics and the economist's predictions that the housing boom is declining stands the image of a rather complicated box of bricks and windows, capped by a fractured pyramid of roofing and, standing in a little allotment of lumpy clay and rank tufts of grass: a new house.

To the economists it is one formless unit in about a hundred-thousand which Australia demands and somehow still manages to provide each year. To most Australians, it represents the inevitable shape of home. To about 200,000 people annually, many of them migrants, it is a symbol of hope and a happy marriage and a family and their future in the Australian Way of Life.

And there are other views of it. To town planners, the sprawl of these boxes, multiplying like old-time rabbits in the paddocks around all our cities, is a major headache. Some sociologists see the box as a sort of matriarchal five-roomer, millions that weigh down the spirit of young Australia.

Many architects and artists and people who like to pride themselves on their visual tastes deplore the gaudiness of the box itself and the ugliness of it when it gathers in groups around the telephone and electric poles, forming first rid the neighborhood of all native growth. To many others it is unspectacular bread and butter business.

That is the fault of the Australian house (although it is clear still, some people don't consider it a fault): an awesome stagnation. Any such generalisations must exclude the houses that are carefully and individually designed and built for specific owners. But these represent less than one per cent of the total. The ordinary product of

the housing industry is the last monument to the old, isolated, an expert, backyard phase of Australian industry.

A rule of thumb may be applied to the development of the shape and style of the Australian house during the first half of the 20th century: it changed every 10 years. Also it was almost 10 years behind the model it was copying.

(This model was at first English, in the so-called "Queen Anne" period, then American, then in the thirties vaguely continental.)

has nothing to be proud of in comparison with the American house — and what else would it want to be compared with? The American house, though almost as stodgy as the Australian in style is far more generous in planning and infinitely more adventurous in equipment. It may cost about twice as much, but this only means that it takes an equivalent proportion of the average salary. In any case, one inspection of the kitchen or the second bathroom of an American house indicates where the extra money goes. Again, although it can be as fussy and gaudy as the Australian, the American house is not offered for sale until the lawn and a couple of trees are alive. It is just that much more civilised.

people demonstrate some of the things that all houses could have when the Henry Ford of Australia housing eventually comes to light: carefully planned interiors making the most of every inch of space, kitchens which are efficient little factories, adequate shade, real temperature control, a private bathroom for each section of the family, and so on and so on.

The Australian house is responsible for its lack of such amenities: its plain lack of consideration for the people trying to make a happy home inside. What is wrong with the Australian house is not just that it offends some artistic sensibilities. Typically, the Australian house is not at all ugly. With good color and a garden it can be one of the best look vernacular houses in the world. Its trouble is that behind the plastic light-shades and the vivid paint on the eaves it has failed utterly to keep up with technology and to adjust to our less fortunate ways of living in this half of the 20th century.

## THE MAN FROM THE TUBS

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By SANDRA DAWSON

MICHAEL PLANT is a tanned, well-dressed and urbane young man who spends most of his life in the manufacture of perhaps the most elusive of all commodities — laughter.

He is one of the producers of television's *The Mavis Bramston* show which goes into its second run this month.

Many criticisms have been levelled at the programme. Mavis has been charged with copying the style of intimate review too closely, with being too objective in the choice of its subjects — thoughtless, in fact, — and that the mere fact that these criticisms exist seems to indicate that Mavis Bramston is wrong talking about and what's more, worth looking at.

Television has not been the only medium for Plant's comedy-in-matters style of approach. At Christmas he and Geoff Flower, the artist, collaborated to produce the *In and Out Book*, a self-mocking, localised satirical guidebook to the U and no-U, in which the aim was to debunk — without discrimination.

And the possibility that it is difficult to see and what's more, worth looking at.

Despite this and despite the difficulties encountered by any of us in our own amusement. These are the ones we like, but they're a little too outspoken to show.

This last is the impression given from an early conversation with Michael Plant. His philosophy as a producer is the antithesis of the let-make-the-audience-relax school — thoughtless, in fact, — in favor of making the audience work for every laugh it gets.

one trying to carve a living out of absurdity in Australia, Plant is one expatriate who would come home to make his fortune.

"We were terrified to let anybody see it. The whole gimmick even the name, seemed so fancy. Yet, with the production it acquired a polish."

He went to England in 1959, did some acting in West End plays, quit when, in his own words, he got too old to play cabin-boy, and switched to writing for the BBC. He was writing for the BBC in 1954, then went to the United States on a student visa and enrolled at UCLA, California.

"Somebody might say you've got a certain pat and you're not, you know, say 'Oh, Mavis Bramston has a unique sense we've developed a certain pop, so as far as the show's concerned. You can sum it up in four words — shock, not censorship."

He studied TV production, enjoying lectures by such experts in the art as Cecil B. de Mille and William Wilder. But with the termination of the course came the problem — how to get a U.S. work permit, which would enable him to find a job as a scriptwriter? He wrote to the president of the drama club and he stayed. He worked first for MGM, writing scripts for the science fiction series, *One Step Beyond*, then he switched to *Gunsmoke*. Brothers to do *Devon Street Beat*, that work at the new studio was not as satisfying as at MGM — he did not have the opportunity to follow the script through to production, so Plant began writing a play, *Miss Isabelle*.

with Shirley Booth in the main role, but she was miscast. She was playing a 35-year-old grand dame, which was a challenge that she didn't quite meet, although it's a fine actress," he said.

Next came *Whiplash*, the Australian TV Western, which was filmed at Artrana Studios in Sydney.

"They asked me, as an Australian, to take on the job of story editor and I flew out here late to do anything much was to be done."

Plant then returned to the U.S., but Hollywood was beginning to lose its excitement and he was soon back, this time as with an historical background.

"I came back to work on it, because Hollywood had lost its sense of challenge for me and I was beginning to feel as if I was working in Australia was going to present a bigger challenge."

"If only something like the American TV production could be done here, perhaps as a sort of combined effort between the school for technicians that's been established at Gore Hill and the Institute of Dramatic Art at the University of NSW. This would be an invaluable training ground for and study a play in production. You can get from a look or in-"

But all the changes were deplorable and superficial, and at the same time the same mix of rooms made in the same way with the same materials.

The last attempt to change it was just 10 years ago. In 1955 the "contemporary" style was launched by a few builders.

This, of course, was recognised by wide windows, a longer plan and a low roof. It was a mortal enemy of the heavy roof tile which Australia had adopted from Marseilles 70 years earlier and now used more than any other place in the world including Marseilles.

Accompanying this style-change 10 years ago was a much more significant attempt to modernise the ancient habits of building. Several builders embarked on partial prefabrication. They standardised on one or two designs, pre-cut the timber in the factory, and gave the results brand names.

But that attempt to change the Australian home seemed to be a little too sudden and too drastic. It was only a qualified success. Certainly some concrete and brick houses are still semi-prefabricated and do not need to be plodded into the great mass of housing was the acquisition of a new set of building materials — concrete and brick — and tile-covered roof or rooms remained virtually unaltered, except that it opened its eyes wider and bathed itself in new light.

However, the spec builder who made it now save it some rather sumptuous names, like "The San Fernando" and began calling himself a Developer. In the new era, the smaller spec builder went under, and those that remained down did not change. They plodded on as they have done for 10 years ago.

Now, in accordance with the almost inflexible rule of the century, another attempt to revise its shape and style is due to be made. This time it is prefabrication promised a revolution the equivalent of that marked by the T-model Ford. (Remember the Beaufort House? It was tooled up ready to be produced in quantity — all killed for political reasons.)

The Australian house resists change in the face of overwhelming reasons. The average house offered to those 100,000 hopeful couples or young families each year falls tragically short of what it should or could be in this age of advanced technology and mass education. It is the barest, meagre shelter, while there are so many houses, additional amenities and delights it could be offering.

The minute proportion of houses being specially designed for richer or less-conformist

attached to parachutes. As side doors were opened a hurricane of slipstream tore at their clothes.

The Hastings dropped down to a few hundred feet at reduced speed, out went the flares with a mighty heave from the firmen, and the aircraft spluttered as the flight engineer banged open throttles to climb up and make another circuit.

The airstrip was completed in 11 runs and the lighted Hastings-headed-for-home.

Unlike the more violent war in Vietnam, where one week's casualties often exceed the total here since "confrontation" began in April, 1963, this is a war with a front of nearly 2000 miles. For centuries they formed a physical and psychological barrier between the Indonesian, South Borneo — which they call Kalimantan and North Borneo populated by Malays and Chinese and Iban and Dyak tribesmen in the interior.

And it is along the eastern

## MONDAY: What every home should have

## Piping the

From JOHN in Kuching,

THE ROYAL AIR FORCE flight lieutenant was singing "The rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain" as our four-engined Hastings transport dodged among peaks shrouded in clouds near the mountain border separating Indonesia's Borneo from Eastern Malaysia.

Somewhere below was a company of British infantry less than a mile from the border on a huge ridge, waiting for an airstrip of medium artillery shells for its supporting guns.

For nearly two hours our Hastings had dived over treetops in that jungle which is almost uniformly green, even under leaden skies. It poked in and out of gaps in the clouds to find a drop zone about 50 yards square over which a single brightly colored balloon would be floating.

Finally a break was found leading to the drop zone. Eighty crewmen in black dungarees, wearing safety belts attached to static lines over their hands crated of shells

RAF supply drop in Borneo