

COLONIAL BEGINNINGS - 1.

"If I were asked to describe the Old Colonial of Australia, I would call it an architecture of sunlight and shadows... Shingles, split from great trees felled in the vicinity, curling and twisting as they seasoned, gave the roofs a charming texture. The common colours were grey on the roof, red brick, golden stone, or white-washed walls, and white-painted woodwork with apple-green shutters, a pleasant harmony and fragrant in its cleanliness. The scale, the symmetry, the broad surfaces textured beautifully, long colonnaded verandahs, six-panelled doors, twelve-paned windows, the staircase winding on its wall... make up a charm about the name, 'Old Colonial', which recalls broad eaves and hospitable porches set amidst sunshine and history."

- from "Old Colonial Architecture in New South Wales and Tasmania", (Sydney, 1924), by Hardy Wilson, whose drawings are reproduced here. These houses are typical of the period in New South Wales between Australia's founding in 1788, and 1840. The big picture is of "Bungarribee", a homestead on Eastern Creek. The others, top to bottom, are a cottage in Parramatta, a row of houses in Surry Hills - a suburb of Sydney, and "Horsley", a typical early nineteenth century country homestead near Smithfield. In an atmosphere of brilliant sunlight, security and limitless space, the English Georgian style dropped to a single storey and spread horizontally behind shading verandahs.

COLONIAL BEGINNINGS - 2.

THE VERANDAH TRADITION

Through the middle years of the nineteenth century rich house and poor house alike followed the tradition of a plain two-square plan surrounded by a verandah. These are century-old houses in Victoria. The little cottage, in "The Basin" area, is representative of the earliest cottages of the pioneer "squatters" who farmed the wild bush country. The eucalyptus trees were split into weatherboards and fixed with hand-wrought nails. The bigger house is "Como", near Melbourne, built largely by aboriginal labour and now preserved as a public monument by the National Trust of Australia. The ornamental iron work of the columns and balustrades heralded an era of cast-iron decoration of verandahs which grew more and more flamboyant towards the end of the century. Below: an inner-suburban Melbourne house of the early eighteen-nineties.

COLONIAL BEGINNINGS - 3.

DOMESTIC CHARACTERISTICS

In the island State of Tasmania the pioneer builders of the early nineteenth century found a much milder sun in summer and penetrating cold in winter - a climate more like the English one in which the builders had learnt their trade. The houses here more frequently went to two stories and the verandah was not ubiquitous. Nevertheless certain other Australian domestic characteristics continued to develop. There were no elaborate mansions and little adornment. Even in the city areas the smallest cottage was usually set apart in its own ground. The big picture is of "Entally", a historic pioneer house at Hadsphen, preserved by the Government as a national home. The others are "Rosedale" and "Passey".

Qualities which took shape in colonial days have been developed further this century and often colour the international modern architectural influences. Still today most Australians (85%) live in private detached family homes. There are no extremes of huge houses or small apartments. Australia has more rooms in private homes than she has people. The great majority of houses still are single-storey. Many are frame structures - in timber or, nowadays, steel. Most are conscious of the sun, devising ways of blending indoor and outdoor living through most of the year and of screening excessive sun in the few hottest weeks of summer. The following panels show a selection of recent Australian houses representative of architects' work in the middle-income range and reaching from tropical Darwin in the north, with heavy sun-shielding, to the open, glassy houses of Melbourne in the south.