

"UNIVERSITY OF THE AIR".

DESIGN IN AUSTRALIA.

1. INTRODUCTION: THE INTERNATIONAL BLENDER.

WORKING SCRIPT.

6th November, 1964.

VIDEO:

AUDIO:

In studio: C.U. of smart
kitchen blender in operation. Cut
to Boyd at desk. Other appliances,
objects, all around.

THEME: Sound - Super Sub-Title.

STUDIO: Boyd at desk.

It is intended in this series of talks to look
hard at our Australia - that is, our 20th
Century, man-made, largely urban Australia -
and try to determine why it looks as it does,
and to consider if this look is good, or if it
leaves room for improvement, and whether it is
unique, or distinctive, or just an anonymous
reflection of fashions that have been
determined by other people far beyond our
shores.

Track over recognizably Australian
products in the Studio: other
appliances, food packs, posters,
etc., some good, some bad (e.g.
mulga wood, souvenirs).

The look of Australia, as of any other highly
developed community, is seldom accidental.
It is mostly the result of conscious design:
professional, commercial or amateur. It is the
sum of the shapes and colours of everything
we make and everything that makes us.

FLIP CARDS (Set)

Sky-view of Sydney

Country town

Villa

Church

Washing-machine

Holden car

Can of spaghetti

Bottle of beer

Pack of Capstan

Hoardings

GRAMS:

FILM: track or pan across family scene in typical suburban room: Father reading Sun, mother Women's Weekly, close in on mantle-piece ornaments.

Dissolve to busy street scene, summer clothes. Cut to C.U. man's hair-cut L.S. with savagely pruned tree in foreground.

Dissolve to factory interior. Follow some steps of a production line to a final product that is recognizably British or American in design.

STUDIO: Boyd

Favour return to blender.
(Boyd indicates)

Q. The look of Australia is made up of such details

Q. the way we like our clothes cut,
and our hair cut,
and our trees cut.

Q. A great number of things that make up our shelters, our modern environment - the shapes that help to shape our lives - are made in Australia, by Australian hands under Australian management with Australian money.

But how Australian are they? If, as happens in some cases, the concept and invention behind them, all the thought and ideas behind them, are imported - are they really Australian? And if not, if a great deal of the design of the things we use is thus inherited, borrowed or stolen from our relatives and friends in older, bigger, richer, maybe wiser countries - if we have little or no design character of our own, does it matter?

This is a shrinking globe bound by tightening bands of radio, television and jet planes. Despite hot and cold wars, the cultural frontiers are not sharply defined or hotly defended./

The 20th Century's mass-production and mass-cultural techniques are like a great kitchen blender, buzzing all international cultural differences into a homogenized pulp in which all differences of taste and tradition ultimately cancel each other out.

No one can tell any more by style alone the nationality of a building.

SLIDES - (Provided by
R.B.):

Building of

U.S.S.R.

England.

Japan.

Australia (B.P.)

(hold last one)

Boyd at B.P.

B.P. Desert scene
Forest scene

Boyd.

FILM:

Montage of household appliances,
all plain, white, boxy:
refrigerator, stove, washers, air-
conditioners.....

Where, for instance do you imagine this was
built? Australia, America, England? It
happens to be Russian.

And this is English-

And this is Japanese-

And this Australian.

Modern building technologies in steel,
concrete and aluminium have levelled out the
old geological differences between countries,
and air-conditioning has levelled out the
world's indoor climates./

That being the case, is there any validity
any more in any concept of a national
architecture or national design?

Anyway, when one considers the differences
in the Australian geology and climate - from
a bleached, blistering northern plain/ to a
rain forest in the south/- is there any
validity in the concept of any overall
Australian kind of design for our cities and
buildings?/ In this context does the
Australian national concept mean anything?
Wouldn't the ideal be several regional styles
of design?/

And if these doubts apply to the biggest and
most permanent things we make, don't they
apply also to the smaller things? Is there
any room today for national cultural
boundaries?

All over the world the market places or
department stores are looking more uniform
the desirable appliances more familiar and
standardised in their white enamel suits and
chrome trimmings.

Monotonous beat music up.

then smaller household
goods: T.V's., radios,
fans, chairs, etc.

STUDIO: Boyd at B.P.

FLIPS:

Many views of modern
style:
Smart appliances
Glamorous interiors
Cars.

SLIDE: Bangkok.

Continue montage of goods
and buildings - all smart,
clean, U.S. style.

Q. Technology and mass production have made an international style of household goods. It radiates a promise of efficient labour-saving and fresh modernity to people everywhere: in America, England, the Continent, in darkest Africa, in Russia, Asia or Australia. This international style creates its own demand, and helps to create a new taste which extends the style beyond the manufacturers' need for standardisation.

An international style... but how international is it in origin? It may be true that many countries have contributed little devices and ideas to consolidate the style, but at base of course the character, the sense of style here is a product of the most powerful country in the world, the country with the highest development in technology, mass-production and the projection of desirable images.

The international look of today is very largely, if not entirely, the American look: a clean, sharp white look with glamorous touches of gold; a look of bright lights and polished surfaces, smelling of detergents and cigars, and promising health, wealth and air-conditioning.

This is the character and the atmosphere of new popular design through most of the world. Here it is in Thailand: a street in Bangkok; the visual style is as American as the language in the tourists' shops.

In Australia as in Thailand, England, or the U.S.A. itself, the modern style is the mass-produced, assembly line style that emanates from Detroit, Michigan, and Madison Avenue, New York: smooth as paint, bright as aluminium, realistic as a plastic indoor plant.

Only a few of the products actually available to Australians in their stores are of direct American origin. A great number, however - by some arrangements of contracts, agencies or plagiarism - are made in direct reproduction of an American design.

STUDIO: Boyd at desk.

Now, the world has become so small, and it is so inevitable that the most powerful country should be a dominating influence in style, or fashion, should not we be reconciled to it? Should we accept the role of a poor man's America with a second-hand culture? Should we feel our position as a little nation and copy the best we can find overseas wherever it happens to be?

But if popular taste today is dominated by the American influence as disseminated by Television, movies and magazines, other levels of taste reflect in various products other national influences.

Boyd walks to B.P. screen.
(Sweden)

At the level of the taste of those people who have the time or money or patience to demand something different, better, something more interesting or exciting - at the good-taste level, if you like:

-Sweden is inclined to have the dominating influence on furniture

- as Paris has in women's fashions

- and Denmark has in tableware

- and Japan has in gardens....

STILL: Paris fashion

STILL: Danish ornament

B.P. Japanese garden

(hold last.)

Boyd at B.P. Screen

The truth is that, contrary to all the levelling international influences, these countries - some of them quite as small in population and certainly no richer than ours - have managed to retain a character of their own. At least they have done this quite conspicuously in some field in which they have, by tradition or geographical accident, some special interest.

In fact many countries have retained some noticable degree of individual character despite the 20th Century super-blender. And this character ~~m~~akes these countries more lively, vital places to visit or to live in.

It makes visitor and citizen more conscious of region, and thus of reality - For in reality, in truth, of course, world culture is not all one huge tasteless homogenized pulp. It is still a fruit salad containing as well as pulp dozens of distinctly different flavours.

STILLS:

Underneath the levelling international neon-signs and beach-girl magazines and white appliances and chromium-plated cars,/people still live different lives because climates/ and historical back-grounds/and social conditions are different./

STUDIO: Boyd.

H & Q.To accept all internationalizing influences without resistance is one way of denying the need to search for reality, for truth. To accept them all and do no more original thinking for oneself is to die a little. This is one reason why many people are not prepared to sink down into the warm and cosy international blender and come out as pulp. There are at least two other reasons.

MUSIC UNDER (Advance Australia Fair (?)).

STILL: Memorial

One is not especially attractive and might even be called dangerous. It is the old chauvanistic, nationalistic reason.

FILM: Australian flag.

"My country right or wrong" polished or crude, good or bad, beautiful or hideous./

Dissolve to Six o'clock swill scenes - pandemonium

For very good reasons this sort of attitude is highly suspect today. Yet it exists. It is reflected in Australia not so much in Military parades as in the defiant maintenance of old Australian habits/ even when they are patently inferior to new ideas from outside.

Dissolve to crowded Melbourne trams.

This blind sort of Australian design happens frequently enough in fields of production or consumption that have not yet been subject to the hard-selling techniques invariably associated with international-style products.

STUDIO: Boyd - B.P. Screen
Nolan.

STILL: Arthur Boyd.

3rd Painting.

And there is another reason why some Australians resist being sucked into the International blender. This reason is more emotional, less aggressive, and more difficult to explain./ We can call it the Australian mystique: The spell, the promise, of the great South Land that attracted the explorers even before Dampier and Cook - that excited our earlier poets, and haunts or taunts our artists still today./

The land itself, the great silent heart, the bush: a love and a fear of it acts in the heart, in the conscience, of many Australians who never leave nor wish to leave their cities on its fringe.

STUDIO: Boyd at desk.
(painting b.g.)

The bush has been a sort of pagan god of Australian culture, requiring appeasement before the white man can feel free to pursue his trivial alien crafts.

Only through some kind of physical sacrifice to the outback can we, the interlopers, be cleansed and become real Australians - this was the message of bush balladists like Bernard O'Dowd:

Reads poetry.

"Till we become ourselves,
distinct, Australian

"(Your native lightning
charging blood and nerve)

"Stripped to the soul of
borrowed garments, alien

"To that approaching Shape
of God you serve.... "

Shows copies of
Jindyworobak
journals. (on desk)

C.U.

Boyd reads statement.

Hence such intense Australianistic movements as the Jindyworobaks, between the two world wars, headed by Rex Ingamells, the poet.

Jondyworobak was an aboriginal word meaning to annex or join, and the movement endeavoured "to free Australian art from whatever alien influences trammel it; that is (they explained) to bring it into proper contact with its material." The 'Jindys' drew their "spiritual sustenance", they said, from the bush. /

One of them, Victor Kennedy, wrote: "We have not yet learned that man cannot live anywhere without adapting himself to the country and its climatic and absorbing its atmosphere.." Good, sensible words. But in their efforts to adapt to Australia the Jindyworobaks fell back on aboriginal myths -- not as the sole basis, but as a big contributor to white Australian culture. This didn't really work, and it didn't last for long.

STILLS:

Australian ornaments:
South Yarra Post Office
Dum-nuts in Spring
Street... develop
montage sequence to
modern 'aboriginal'
ornaments on modern
products.
Finish with worst
examples.

There was no precise equivalent of the literary Jindworobaks in the visual design field, but all through this century popular decorators leaned quite heavily on bushland devices and aboriginal motives - or rather, fret-work and plastic caricatures of the motives that the aboriginals used to paint in blood and clay on the walls of primeval caves.....

MUSIC ("Gundagai"? or other nostalgic Australian pop).

H & Q.

Is this Australian design?

Indeed it is no other country's, and no less Australian just because you and I may not be especially proud of it. But it is not (thank heaven) the only Australian design.

STUDIO: Boyd.

STILL:

Dissolve to typical
suburban villa -
cottage....

There are also much less artificial,
unself-conscious idioms in everyday design
which are recognizably Australian, stubbornly
Australian no matter how hard the blender
works to rubb off their rough edges.

STILL:

Dissolve to
good design.

And again there are many vital people in the
country creating original, distinctive,
imaginative things. These are Australian
designs too, in that they are done by
Australians in Australia. But can one trace
any family resemblance, any national
characteristics in them?

H & Q.

Music up to end.

STUDIO TO END:

So the question which this series of
programmes will pursue through different
media of design are in essence these:

SUPER LINES OF TYPE:

Is it Valid?

First: Is the concept of a national style
valid in this modern age?

Do we have it?

Second: If so, do we in Australia have it
- any visual style we can call our own?

How much is good?

Third: If so, if we have our own style
(or maybe styles), how much of it is good?

END TITLES:

THEME:
