



ROBIN BOYD  
HOUSE OF IDEAS

## EXHIBITION DESIGN AND CURATION

Alan Pert + Philip Goad

## CATALOGUE EDITOR

Philip Goad

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge that this exhibition takes place on stolen land. We pay our respects to the traditional custodians of the land, the people of the Kulin Nation, particularly the Wurundjeri and the Bunurong, to their elders past, present and emerging. Sovereignty was never ceded.

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HOUSE OF IDEAS

HOUSES

EXHIBITION

DISPLAY

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Most people think of Robin Boyd as a writer on architecture. He was. Many people know of him as an architect of houses. He was that too. But a little discussed aspect of his life and his career as a writer and as an architect was his life-long commitment to the idea and challenge of exhibiting design in all its aspects. Above all, this commitment was one that saw design as a public action with public consequences whether at the level of the everyday house, an expression of national identity, or even as way of selling fish and chips. Boyd's involvement with the idea of exhibition could be local, national and international and he wrote and designed – brilliantly it has to be said - across all three fields. In Australia, this makes him and his contribution rare, especially as involvement with exhibitions was peculiar within his profession locally. But for Boyd, it formed a distinctive and intrinsic part of his everyday practice – because it was about the projection of ideas.

### House

If the house was a private prize for most Australians, for Robin Boyd it was a public preoccupation. While he designed more than a hundred individual houses for individual clients, he also designed a series of demonstration houses and project houses that were intended for public display and ultimately public education. Authorship was not important for him in these projects. In the tradition of modernist housing exhibitions such as the Weissenhof Siedlung, Stuttgart (1927), it was the series of generic ideas in these houses that could be presented publicly that was paramount – but for Boyd achieved in an Australian way. The House of Tomorrow (1949), Sunshine House (1951), Peninsula House (1955) and Appletree Hill Estate (1965) were ultimately polemical exercises. Even the Stegbar Windowwall (1953-), while clearly intended for mass-consumption and commercial success, had as its aim the goal of shifting perceptions about what constituted normality in terms of house design, daylighting and everyday construction practices.

### Exhibition

In 1970, Boyd was to write in *Living in Australia* that “Exhibitions are usually the most uncommunicative of all mediums of communication”. It was a typical Boyd negative that underplayed his own expertise in the field. He became fascinated with international expositions after trips to Interbau, the International Building Exhibition held in Berlin in 1957 and the Brussels World Expo in 1958. He was also involved regularly in writing about and presenting Australia in international forums and professional journals. Expositions had, since the Great Exhibition in London in 1851, been seed beds for new ideas in architecture and technology, as well as contentious venues for national representation. For Boyd, another personal preoccupation of his was Australian identity and its place internationally, and especially the role of design in that discourse. As exhibits designer for Australian pavilions at Expo 67 in Montreal and Expo 70 in Osaka, Boyd was at the very epicentre of a global ‘what’s on’ in contemporary culture. As such, his designs like the ‘Space Tube’ need to be judged alongside not just the well-known expo architects of the day like Frei Otto, Buckminster Fuller, Kenzo Tange and Kisho Kurokawa, but also with those designers intimately involved with curatorial strategies for culture such as Charles and Ray Eames and Bernard Rudofsky. For Boyd, it was the expo experience that would inform his exhibition designs on Australia, witness his plywood cylinders at Australia Square for ‘Australia: The First 200 Years’ (1968) and his acrylic cylinders for the Australian Chancery in Washington DC (1968).

Australia: The First 200 Years' (photograph: Max Dupain, courtesy Eric Sierins)



## Display

Robin Boyd also designed buildings that were for and about display. One of the first was his Haddon Scholarship winning entry for an art gallery in Mildura (1948); in plan, it's like a rehearsal for the House of Tomorrow. But the later work, the Tower Hill Natural History Centre (1962-70), Neptune's Fishbowl (1968-9), the Morris Wines Tasting Room (1970-2) and Churchill House (1968-70, 1972) all take on the quality of elegantly designed vitrines: buildings to show off objects within but without are themselves objects that convey his mantra of a 'single controlling idea'. There's also the recurring theme of the circle as a curatorial device across his exhibition designs and his buildings for display. And also to the locus of this exhibition. The door plates to Walsh Street are brass circles – impressed upon the peephole are the words 'Robin Boyd'.

This exhibition is the outcome of student-based research within the MSD graduate elective *ABPL90367 Critical and Curatorial Practices in Design* held in semester 2 2017 and led by Alan Pert and Philip Goad. The exhibition evolved through what students were able to find in archival collections such as the Grounds Romberg and Boyd collection at the State Library of Victoria and the National Archives of Australia, through library, journal and newspaper holdings, interviews with architects like Peter McIntyre, Norman Day and Paul Couch, contact with local historical societies and community groups, and reconstructing Boyd projects in drawn and model form. They looked at drawings, specifications, contracts, interviews, marketing material, photographs and a variety of other evidence. The students proposed graphic strategies for the catalogue and the exhibition, and they designed installation pieces for the exhibition in an astonishing variety of drawn, book, model and digital forms.

The class brought to light new thinking about Robin Boyd and his ideas about exhibition and architecture. Visual and intellectual connections across projects meant revelation and sometimes serendipitous discovery. But that is always the delight of the archive – the ability to surprise. As a pedagogical exercise, the curating of an exhibition is itself like the design, construction and delivery of a building. It is a work of architecture that continues to unfold always until the very end.

Finally, this exhibition also coincides with the fifty-year anniversary of Robin Boyd's delivery of the ABC Boyer Lectures in 1967. To mark that occasion, we have republished Chapter 2 of 'Artificial Australia' in this catalogue: its title is 'The Architecture of Ideas'. As a form of double echo therefore, we think it is a fitting tribute that this exhibition, installed in Robin Boyd's own house, should be titled as he himself had publicly labelled the Sunshine House in 1951, the 'House of Ideas'.

**Professor Philip Goad** is Chair of Architecture and Co-Director of ACAHUCH (Australian Centre for Architectural History, Urban and Cultural Heritage within the Melbourne School of Design).



Front door, Boyd House II (photograph: Philip Goad)

## THE CULTIVATION OF IDEAS - A REVERSE CHRONOLOGY

Alan Pert

The 'House of Ideas' presents a poignant window into a collection of works that often sits outside the more familiar writings or buildings by Robin Boyd. The significance of this collection is the lack of scrutiny it has had up until now and the relationship to Boyd's wider portfolio of projects. In many ways, 'House of Ideas' is an invitation for the viewer to travel through and across multiple 'Boyd' ideas – buildings, display homes, exhibitions, curatorial strategies, installations, products, prototypes, grand visions and two World Expos in Montreal (1967) and Japan (1970).



Similar to *Critical and Curatorial Practices in Design* in 2016, referred to as 'Fooks: the House Talks Back', the 'House of Ideas' in 2017 uncovers untold narratives and expands the scope and knowledge of Boyd through, juxtaposing projects and places that were previously unconnected. For the first time, disparate archives have been drawn together, catalogued and assembled at Robin Boyd's Walsh Street home, while simultaneously an unusual body of work has been displayed so that architectural ideas can be examined alongside ideas about display. At the same time glimpses into an experimental portfolio of projects and associated writings are superimposed upon his built work and new associations can now be revealed. The house, as exhibition, with its details, its furniture, its archives, its artefacts, its objects and its collection of books suggest a rich and diverse collection of thoughts and ideas: a kind of autobiographical debris brought together as the 'House of Ideas'.

For the first time, we are also overlaying three chronological narratives to allow a comprehensive reading of Boyd's work. A literary and biographical chronology is superimposed on a chronology of built work with the addition of his exhibition work, competitions and Expo projects filling in some previous gaps in our reading of Boyd's life and work. While the chronology is suggestive of a beginning and an end we are instead encouraging viewers to consider a kind of reverse chronology. In other words, it's about the journey not the destination.

Travelling back into time from the point of departure of 'Boyd's Last Building' (Churchill House) to the very beginning (Arthur Boyd Studio, 1938) you are invited to weave together relationships via Neptune's Fishbowl, The World Exposition Project from 1965, Expo 67 and Expo 70, The House of Tomorrow, Peninsula Homes, Appletree Hill, Stegbar Windows, Tower Hill Natural History Centre and the Boyer Lectures of 1967, as well as even lesser known projects like the opening exhibition of the Australian Chancery in Washington DC in 1968. You will start on an exhibition route that is reversed, an anti-clockwise journey that physically joins the entrance of the house with the exit from the exhibition.

Australian Pavilion, Expo 67  
(source: National Archives  
of Australia)

## *Fuller's sphere sitting like a clean scoop of ice-cream on a ...flavoured fruit-salad of shapes*

Robin Boyd, *Architectural Review* Vol.148, 1970.

By superimposing these disparate chronologies, you are being continuously pushed and inspired to consider the formation of Boyd's ideas. By absorbing the visual material and wandering around the house, sometimes venturing back to compare one work with another or sitting down to absorb a piece of writing we are not suggesting a simple linearity to Boyd's ideas but instead encouraging a superimposed reading of his ideas through writing, drawing, prototyping and the making of architecture. Visitors to the 'House of Ideas' are as such encouraged to draw their own conclusions about Boyd's ideas. Did it start with his writing and evolve into his architecture or vice versa? What is the significance of the circular geometry so evident in many of his exhibition installations and display devices? Is Lecture 2 'The Architecture of Ideas' as part of the Boyer Lectures a clue to the circular geometry in Tower Hill Natural History Centre? Is Neptune's Fish Bowl a nod to Expo 67 and Buckminster Fuller's geodesic dome or even earlier to the Brussels Expo of 1958?

On entering the house, we begin with two of Boyd's last works: photographs of Churchill House and Neptune's Fishbowl. Just to consider one of these comes to the curatorial intention of this exhibition. Often described as 'Boyd's Last Building', Churchill House was published the year after his death in 1972. At the heart of the entire complex is a public podium with a faceted glazed showcase for displaying the work of Churchill Fellows. This is a building that could have been consumed by ideas of monumentality similar to its neighbours but instead entering via a sunken garden or alternatively rising to the podium display case offers a sense of occasion when navigating your arrival. There is a synthesis of earlier ideas coming together in the building, some previously tested at the scale of a house or in a winery before successfully finding their place in a larger more public arena. This is the nub of Boyd's restless genius – he is forever returning to and continuing to build his own 'house of ideas'.

**Professor Alan Pert** is Director of the Melbourne School of Design at the University of Melbourne.

Artificial Australia

by Robin Boyd

The Boyer Lectures 1967



  
Australian Broadcasting Commission

## Lecture 2

### The Architecture of Ideas

In the first lecture in this series I spoke of Australia's great need to cultivate ideas, and promised to try to define this rather loose term "ideas" in relation to my own fields of architecture and design. This I will do now, and I will concentrate on the timeless and international problem of the design of the biggest artificial, useful object: a building. In later lectures I will relate the question to other objects and more specifically to Australia. But I speak of architecture first, for she is the mother of all design, and if she can be satisfied most of her children will follow dutifully.

I use the word idea as meaning the conception of a principle, and in architecture the need for such ideas occurs at two levels.

First, for most men or women seriously engaged in the creation of buildings, there is a hunger for a theory, a need to define to himself in some satisfying way what is the ultimate object of all building, what is the aim of architecture.

Then, at the second level, the need for a motivating idea arises afresh with each new problem. The architect must seek a concrete idea, of structure and form, which satisfies all the problems as he sees them and which will be his guide vision through the long processes of preparation and construction.

But to take ideas at the first level first, I must explain at the start that it takes many different kinds of architect to make a world, and not all architects are convinced of the need for any overall theory. To some the object of architecture is so evident that any theorizing is an irritation. The object is simply to erect a building that works and is beautiful. While few architects would contest that, to others of us such an easy explanation is not enough. It leaves undefined

two vital qualities. What must a building be or do in order to "work"? And what is "beauty"?

Just as many good people of the highest intelligence find satisfaction in the concept of God as a substitute for further discussion in seeking answers to the ultimate questions of life, so many fine architects and sensitive patrons of architecture are satisfied by the word beauty as a substitute for theory and for principles in building. However, among those who are not so satisfied, the father figure is a famous old man of Roman architecture, Vitruvius, who wrote ten volumes of theory just before the birth of Christ. Horrified by the contemporary architecture being run up around him in Rome, Vitruvius looked back wistfully to Greece and asked himself what was it that made Athens a dream to set the spirit soaring, and what was it that made Rome, which was stolidly copying all the outward shapes and symbols of Athens, a clumsy, lumpish city. He saw that architects need to be directed by more than their eyes. They require a little heart and intellect as well: in short, an idea. "Theory", he wrote, "is that which is able to explain and analyze material constructions by the exercise of . . . reason." Vitruvius then gave his definition of what architecture is, or should be. He specified three essentials to good building: strength, utility, and beauty. And this has remained the classical definition, although the words have been pulled around a lot. For instance, Sir Henry Wotton in 1624 paraphrased the three virtues as "commodity, firmness and delight", and last century John Ruskin, after much evident mental torment, arrived back at virtually the same conclusion when he said that a building should "act well, speak well, and look well".

The Vitruvian theory served well enough, with few dissenters and few diversions, through nearly 1900 years, through classical, Renaissance, Gothic and other Revivalist styles, until about 115 years ago. But then a change in the technique of manufacturing the artificial products of the world forced a reconsideration. The change was the Industrial Revolution, and the re-examination which it forced upon architects and all designers of artificial objects of use was centred on the mystery which was cloaked by that facile word, beauty.

Industry raised a fascinating new problem. Before this there had never been such a thing as vulgar design. The

aristocrats had had their fine things artfully enriched, and the peasants had had serviceable things artlessly crafted. Now industry made it possible for reproductions, or caricatures, of the rich man's artifacts to be interminably repeated, and for cheap products to be elaborately dressed in ornaments, and it opened the door for everyman to previously barred delights of colour and texture. As we all know, people without any advantage of education or experience of art responded greedily to every curlicue of ornamentation that could be applied, and the period of decadence in design known to us as the Victorian era came into being. However, as well as vulgar ornament, the Industrial Revolution brought iron frames and steel suspension bridges and the mass production of glass and other portents of revolutionary building techniques.

Our present-day ideas of architecture and of the design of all useful things began to take form at that time — in the middle of last century. Some prophets, excited by the mighty, imaginative, inspiring bridges and horrified by the excesses of petty ornament, began to seek a new theory of design, a new artistic concept, to fit the new conditions.

Looking at those magnificent bridges and towers like the Eiffel, they had a revolutionary idea. It was that everything made by man for his own use should be shaped according to its function—to the job it had to do—with no concessions to tradition, no false overcoating to give a “better” appearance, no extra frills or ornamentation of any sort. Everything was to be cruelly honest, completely naked and unashamed; and have no fear, the prophets said, the results will not be ugly but as beautiful as nature. “In nakedness I behold the majesty of the essential instead of the trappings of pretension”, wrote Horatio Greenough of America in 1853.

This new concept, this artistic bombshell, was of course called Functionalism, and its supporters could gather corroborative evidence from many quarters. Without question, complete visual satisfaction — assuredly, beauty, if of a hitherto unrecognized kind — could be found in many objects traditionally shaped for use only, without any pretensions or visual aspirations. The revolutionaries pointed to many humble tools and utensils (think of the superb sculptural shape of a scythe). As for architecture, a functional tradition was strongly rooted in charming unadorned farm-

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houses, wharves and numerous other utilitarian buildings.

As the 19th turned into the 20th century, the Functionalist ethic gained a lot of ground. Architecture sometimes deliberately followed the lead of primitive buildings and finished up as a little knot of whitewashed boxes. Simplicity was prized highly in the progressive quarters of most of the visual arts. And every now and then some spectacular proof of the concept appeared, some vindication of the most extreme theories of Functionalism. Imagine, for example, the joy of the early Functionalists when they beheld an aeroplane. Here was an instance of an unquestionably 20th century product that *had* to be made scientifically and honestly, that *had* to ban ornamentation and false nostalgic effects or it would never get off the ground; and yet it was beautiful. If ever the time came when all things were made as honestly and as plainly as an aeroplane, then — thought the Functionalists — we would have the visual millennium. For many years they fought against the majority of people who had no theoretical, moralistic desire for design to be honest and who much preferred to cling to the visual effects handed down to them by past generations, to cosily familiar styles like the Gothic and the Georgian.

Nevertheless, a new way of building — which is still known, for want of a better term, as Modern Architecture — slowly conquered the world. If I may be permitted to simplify history to a gross extent, I can say that it began in Europe and built up strength gradually, standing on the shoulders of the English honest craft movement of William Morris, and the Art Nouveau movement of Van de Velde and Mackintosh, and the concrete constructional freedom of Perret. It grew with the formal freedom suggested by Peter Behrens, and the moral anti-ornament ethics of Adolf Loos. It reached a first plateau of success and acknowledgement shortly after the First World War with the appearance on the world stage of the stars of the first act: Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius and, as yet playing the butler, Mies van der Rohe. But, as I say, that is gross oversimplification. In fact, another great star was working in another theatre, and the impulse of his work affected the Europeans I have mentioned. This other star was Frank Lloyd Wright, the American, whose intensely individual development of what he called Organic Architecture preposterously complicates the

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telling of modern architectural history. Nevertheless, considering the central stream of the movement only we can gain a reasonably accurate picture. This central, European stream produced by 1925 or so a vision that was as sharp and memorable as that produced by any major style of the ancients. In its classic form it was a stark white flush box, flat-roofed, and slit by a few random windows. When the function served was complex, as in a multi-purpose school or a civic centre, the box broke up into several parts, each shaped more or less in accordance with some special internal requirement.

Thus, in a rather stolid architectural way, the complex sometimes looked like a machine, in which the many parts were related by the purity of the geometry and the sense of common purpose. As a matter of fact, the architects of the time were disproportionately moved by the beauty of machinery. Although they still had to work most of the time with conventional materials, they dreamt of a time when all buildings could be stamped out by giant machines like Chevrolets were. (Do you happen to remember an exciting film made by Alexander Korda to H. G. Wells's scenario *Things to Come*? It was made at the height of the Functionalist movement about 1936, and I am not being rude by asking if you remember it, for it has been shown on television quite recently. In it Wells pictured buildings of a Utopia to come being made by huge robot machines fitting into place steaming, enormous slabs of white plastic.) In the meantime, the real-life architects of the '20s and '30s had to make do with humble old materials like brickwork, but they plastered it, hoping that no one would catch them in the act, to look like something plastic. For a decade or two more this style was the vision of progressive building, the symbol of Functionalism. It had its problems — banning by Hitler and by Stalin included — but, as it crept slowly round the world, to Scandinavia in the early 1930s, to England, America, Australia, it became known more and more as the International Style. And after the Second World War was over, it gained official international recognition. It was accepted by the United Nations as the style for its headquarters in New York. The 40-storey slab of the U.N. Secretariat was the biggest, bravest box in the world. It was also the climax and the curtain of the first act. The glass

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liant new feats of engineering involving shell concrete or tensile steel.

With remarkable speed this movement sank into decadence. Soon the "significant" forms were shaped with no real motivation except to be different, and thus an enviable monument to their architect. Practically all reference to the natural shape of the activities being housed was subjugated to impressive external imagery. And now that the stern ethic of Functionalism appeared to be abandoned by the leaders, the other ranks of architecture, with obvious relief, felt free to break all disciplines. Often they reverted backwards out of the 20th century, to ornament and false arches. At the height of this movement, in the late 1950s, it was commonplace to hear the statement from architects that honesty in building was a shibboleth best forgotten and that Functionalism was a dreary maxim now as dead as any fashion that has run its course.

Was Functionalism just a fashion? The plastered white box was; there can be no doubt about that. But the principles behind it were much bigger than the box and inevitably they began to surface again. A reaction against over-exciting shapes began to set in some time before 1960.

You may have noticed that the latest architecture, as illustrated in photographs of completed buildings from abroad — or projected buildings here — no longer has that bland, one-piece look. The two most apparent reactions to those sophisticated great shapes of the 1950s have been a return to rugged, rustic textures and to fragmentation. In place of the flush plaster of the earliest modern, and the classic marble and polished metal loved by many of the men of the romantic second act, we often find ourselves nowadays back with coarse bricks, undressed timber and bare concrete. But, more importantly, there is a reaction against that one-piece look, that monumental, monolithic form which can be taken in at a glance and is retained in the eye without effort. Buildings are showing again their separate parts. Indeed, they often seem to break themselves up for no apparent reason, so that their walls and roofs are fractured into many vaguely related sections. This is sometimes done just to be fashionable, as is the swing from feminine to masculine textures, and should not be taken any more seriously than Carnaby Street clothes. However, behind

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the frivolous fragmentation and tough texture there is often today a much more significant revision of architectural principle.

There is often again these days a proud exposition of the separate functional elements of the building, so that you can often guess from the outside what happens inside — in general terms. You say to yourself: there's the office wing; there's the service block (look at that flue); there, obviously, is the council chamber. It is reasonable and right that these things should be apparent, and unreasonable when all such diverse elements are packed against their will into an exercise in pure geometry. By that I don't mean that all geometrical, monumental ideas in architecture are necessarily unreasonable, any more than all fragmented complexes are necessarily reasonable and right. My point is only that ideas in architecture are not necessarily the obvious sort of brain-waves detectable in simple, monolithic shapes. A simple, exciting shape *may* be reasonable for the problem in hand, and therefore right. But it may be unreasonable, and therefore, in terms of architectural integrity, wrong.

The rumours of Functionalism's death appear to have been exaggerated. It has made a remarkable recovery, and these days, in its new sporty clothes, it is as young in heart as ever. I don't mean that the argument about Functionalism is over. It will continue as long as men build, while other motivations from time to time will undoubtedly divert the main stream of architecture. I don't mean by this that form should follow function so slavishly that it has no will of its own. I mean that function is the major factor distinguishing architecture from all the other arts, and to serve function means only to serve people, and that is what architecture is here for. I don't mean that the old Vitruvian three-part definition is cast aside. Good buildings still seek strength, utility and beauty. But the emphasis is different. The motivation is the central factor: utility or function. The starting point is people — not strength, not beauty. Those two follow as a matter of course. Finally, among these things I don't mean, I don't mean that *people* should be served by a building at the expense of *art*. I mean that the art of architecture *is* serving people.

After a decade or so of beautiful delinquency, I think that architecture is back on the rails and recognizes its first

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responsibility, to function. The worship of irrelevant beauty, the falsifying of structure and the twisting or cramping of function for the sake of a striking monument, are becoming abhorrent again in the little world of the architects' drawing offices. Abhorrent is not, I assure you, too strong a word. You would probably find it hard to believe, if I were to tell you how passionately many architects feel about the integrity of building. What we know as "dishonesty" in architecture; that is, presenting an effect that is not true to the structure behind it, like a false column added just for visual symmetry or a domed ceiling hung inside a perfectly sufficient flat ceiling and pretending to be the real structure — these pretty tricks are repugnant.

Why do such things grate so badly on some of us? Often the falsity is well disguised and only the experienced observer can detect the subterfuge. Often the visual effect is satisfying, orderly, familiar, even imaginative. Then why should it move some of us to immoderate opposition? The rather embarrassing answer is this: numbers of architects anthropomorphize buildings outrageously, virtually applying a human morality to the bricks, steel and concrete. In more sentimental days a century ago, they spoke of buildings as an extension of God's work, a continuation of the life force flowing out through the mason's hand into the building stone. In this more rationalising age, the argument tries to cut away excessive sentiment. The principal claim now is that building is too important as a social activity, and too conspicuous and influential on the whole culture of society, to allow room for tricks disguising the truth. Nevertheless, the passion remains under the reasoning. Falsity seems in almost every respect as distasteful as dishonesty in a person. Architects are perfectly aware that such an attitude appears ludicrous to many better and saner people, who are satisfied if a building looks all right, and have no desire or intention to crane around corners to see if it is theoretically "dishonest".

Nevertheless, many of us can't help feeling this way. Some architects are inclined to be even more emotional and unreasonable in such matters than any artists in other fields when they are faced with bad work in their own medium. Architects are not so easily prepared as some others to be philosophical and to laugh off the bad. They seem, to many

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observers, to take themselves or their work too seriously. I suppose this is the result of the insistence on principles that I have mentioned, the hunger for ideas at the first level.

Ideas at the second level, relative to each building problem, are inclined to be more sympathetically received by non-architects. These ideas cannot be abstract, and are usually evident to all in the finished building. At least one of the ideas of the building on Benelong Point, for instance, is clear at first sight: the idea of covering whatever it is inside, not with walls and a roof but with a series of great sail shapes inter-related in form. The motivating idea or concept behind Sydney's Australia Square tower also is clear immediately: it is a shaft thrust up into the sky, and feeling itself thus in command of the city, it looks out all round: hence a circular shaft or needle, braced against the stresses of the four winds by regular tapered sinews all round.

The idea behind some houses is clear to all. The classic vision of a luxurious residence in Egypt, at Pompeii, and still today in many parts of the world, including Australia, is something like a square in plan shape with all main rooms looking on to a courtyard in the middle.

Ideas as obvious as those were more common in the second act of modern architecture to which I have referred. Nowadays, the idea in each building tends to be more subtle, but it is present still in some form in every building worthy of any close attention or admiration; by which, I regret to say, I refer to only about one building in every hundred.

This idea at the second level, the concept for a building, may at the start have nothing to do with shapes or a concise external image. The oldest architectural idea in the world, as in every Egyptian or classical building, is symmetry. A new idea, like Moshe Safdie's idea in that already famous stack of concrete flats known as *Habitat* built at Montreal's Expo '67, may have no symmetry, nor even any discernible visual pattern. Yet its idea and the ancient architects' ideas have one thing in common. That is, they have order—a sense of order apparent immediately to every observer, a sense which grows with investigation. Such order is not achieved by luck after a bit of sketching on the drawing board. It is intellectual. It is achieved only by an architectural idea, old or new. At the very beginning, before he has designed

anything, probably before he has put pencil to paper, the architect has devised some orderly shape, structure, system or theme which is suited to the nature of the building and will hold all its parts together. He has had an idea.

Now, how can this sort of specific, concrete idea — an idea at the second level — be consistent with the overall ethical idea which I have discussed at the first level? It is not difficult. There is no conflict with the Functionalist ethics when the idea for a building springs from the function.

This is not saying the same thing as if I were to quote the famous slogan of Louis Sullivan (Frank Lloyd Wright's great early master): "Form Follows Function". What I am saying is that an architect, when designing, when searching for the motivating concept or idea for the building, should be above all most conscious of how the building will serve the people who will use it, serve them in the fullest sense. He does not follow function best by letting every little functional requirement state its own terms for the shape required to house it. These shapes may well conflict unless he first studies the whole problem and all the functions and finds an order which characterizes or averages out all these functions. He then imposes this order on the whole programme of requirements of the building. The idea, the order which he picks, is the essential creative act of architecture. The spirit, or poetry, or art of architecture enters at the point when this order is conceived. The architect has in this act determined what he perceives to be the overall functional character of the building. He has, if you like, perceived the function in an emotional light, and has conceived a formal order around this perception. He has taken the decisive step that can make the finest and most exciting art out of the ancient and pedestrian activity of building.



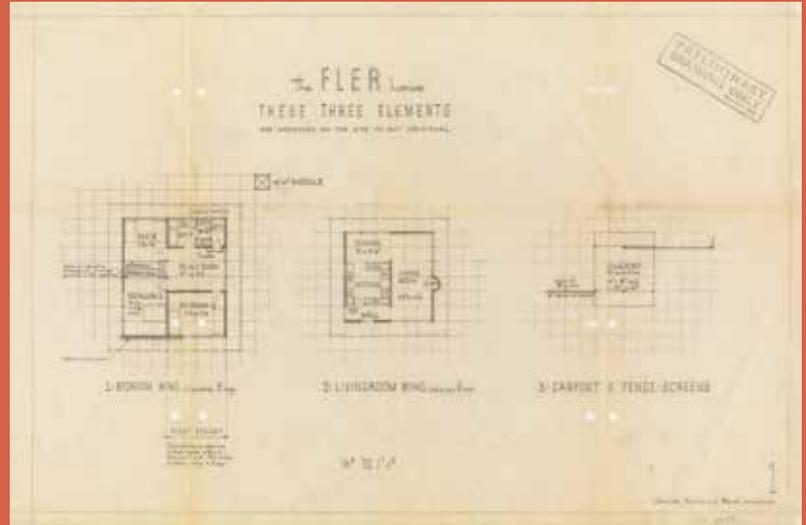
Photograph: Mike Oh

HOUSES

## HOUSES OF IDEAS

Ali Galbraith  
+  
Mikaela Prentice

Robin Boyd was pivotal in rethinking and designing suburban life for post-war Melbournians. After the great hardship and lack of stability of World War II, and the subsequent shortages of labour and materials, there followed a time full of optimism in architecture and the designed environment. Most importantly, and due in part to Boyd's influence, the suburbs underwent a major revival. Young architects like Boyd and colleagues such as Neil Clerehan, John and Phyllis Murphy, Kevin Borland, and Peter and Dione McIntyre brought a renewed sense of architectural identity to suburban housing. Architecture was no longer reserved for the elite or for the financially able. Instead, the rise of the RVIA Small Homes Service and architect-design project houses made good design accessible to everyone.



The monumental shift in thinking of how families would live in the postwar period was translated into reality through architecture. Young architects were able to experiment and prescribe new ways of how families might live within the suburbs. This was aided new subdivisions, particularly in Melbourne's eastern suburbs, like Blackburn, Beaumaris and Box Hill. Boyd wrote extensively on good design as well as what he perceived to be failures of Australian design in suburban housing. The Appletree Hill Estate project in Glen Waverley gave Boyd the opportunity to propose the 'right' from the 'wrong' he so widely wrote about. This project was one of the most progressive attempts to harmoniously integrate good design into suburban life, combining urban planning, landscape design and architectural design to achieve idealised suburban outcome. Whilst the project never came to fruition, Boyd's concerns of familial occupation, neighbourhood interface and environmental siting were carried through and further investigated in his subsequent work and also work by other project house initiatives such as Merchant Builders.

Prior to Appletree Hill Estate, Boyd was responsible for the design of arguably Australia's first project home in 1955, the Peninsula House. The Peninsula House, designed for Contemporary Homes Pty Ltd, provided architecturally designed housing stock to the general public. The houses were advertised in public newspapers and were able to be built for around 3000 pounds. These plans were widely purchased and built throughout suburban Melbourne. The huge number of Peninsula Houses, with many still existing in some form today, make for a lasting legacy of Boyd's success in redefining suburban family living. His engagement with project homes extended to include a number of designs for various other companies, including the Fler and Banksia Houses.

Fler House (Fler house files, GRB Archive, SLV)



In addition to advertising projects in the newspaper, Boyd also contributed to the public's architectural education via exhibition. The Sunshine House was exhibited at the Jubilee Homes and Better Housekeeping Exhibition in Melbourne's Royal Exhibition Building in 1951. Its very public display was a statement from Boyd in which he sought to "arouse and stimulate" public perceptions of domestic architecture. The design choices made in the architecture, furniture selection and paint colours were all a response to the criticisms Boyd had about the state of design in 1950s Melbourne. Like Boyd's House of Tomorrow (1949), the Sunshine House, only viewable from outside through forerunners of what would become Stegbar Windowwalls, allowed spectators the opportunity to view the proposal from afar, speculating about what might exist further inside the house. Boyd was undoubtedly a showman, and this curatorial strategy was intended to provoke interest and conversation amongst the Melbourne public.

In addition to facilitating views, both into, and outward from the house, the Stegbar Windowwall played a pivotal role in increasing light permeability of Boyd's contemporary living spaces. As such, access to, and use of natural light was central to Boyd's architecture, and that of many postwar architects. Boyd's collaboration with Brian Stegley to commercialise the design of the Windowwall is evidence of his commitment to making modern living accessible to the masses. The Stegbar Windowwall was a structural wall system built of hardwood transoms and mullions, with floor to ceiling glazing, that was incorporated into many contemporary home designs across Australia. In addition to Boyd being able to showcase the genius of the Windowwall in most, if not all of his designs, the innovation was also widely taken up by industry. The Windowwall had an incredible presence in both industry and public press.

In Boyd's self-designed family home in South Yarra, the Windowwall acts as the intermediary between the central courtyard, the main house and the children's pavilion. The house perfectly exemplifies the design principles Boyd proposes in his writings, including its inwardly facing layout, with the central courtyard as the focal point. The home was designed as Boyd's testing ground, and as a showcase to promote his work to friends, colleagues and potential clients. Nowadays, its purpose is not all that different. The house is a benchmark from which all architects, students and purveyors of good design can learn.

In all that Boyd did, the promotion of 'good design' was ever-present. The mass housing market in which he found himself in the 1950s and 1960s was a perfect platform to present good design to the general public, and to ensure that people began to live 'good design', and not just read about it in the newspaper. For him, every house might be a house of ideas. Through this exhibition, one will see the lasting legacy of Boyd's unique role in and contribution to improving the quality of housing and suburban living in Australia.

## HOUSE OF TOMORROW

ROYAL EXHIBITION BUILDING, MELBOURNE, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA

1949

ROBIN BOYD

Anna Kilpatrick

+

Emma Lippmann

Robin Boyd's House of Tomorrow was a full-scale display home erected inside the Royal Melbourne Exhibition Building as part of the 1949 Red Cross Modern Home Exhibition, *Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*. The project was part of an endeavour to bring international modernism into Australian domestic life and encourage an independent design scene locally. It served as a vehicle to showcase Australian designers such as Grant Featherston, Frances Burke, Brown Evans & Co, Arthur Merric Boyd, Alan Lowe and Robin Boyd himself. Australian designer Richard Haughton James was largely responsible for the realisation of the exhibition, hoping to promote good Australian design. James was looking to convince everyday Australians to accept modernism into their homes by proving both its exciting elegance and its affordability.

By 1949, Boyd had already written and spoken extensively on the importance of good taste and its absence in conservative suburban Melbourne, which remained within the grips of the "corruption"<sup>1</sup> of traditional architecture. Ironically, the format of the exhibition was itself an embodiment of a somewhat elitist and exclusive attitude toward design. Visitors were not able to enter the house but were left to peer through its large windows into the interior, the modernity of which would remain inaccessible to them. While some visitors appreciated it as "practical and attractive",<sup>2</sup> others saw it as "too revolutionary a change".<sup>3</sup> Following mixed responses to the house, Boyd wrote a number of articles in *The Age* aiming to convince the public of the benefits of modernist design, particularly in regard to improving domestic life.

The House of Tomorrow was in stark contrast to the Victorian architecture, with which most Australians were familiar. The exhibition aimed to prove that this was a benefit. Minimalism, connection to industry, honesty of materials and elements such as Windowalls, an open plan and carefully selected artworks were markers of the International Modernism that so fascinated Boyd. However, the bright colours of the interior walls and vibrant fabric selections distinguished the house from those designed by architects like Mies van der Rohe and the local designers involved further rendered the project distinctly Australian.

Works by these designers can be observed in Wolfgang Sievers' photographs of the house as can a copy of *The New Yorker*, indicative of Boyd's desire that everyday Australians might be part of a global architectural conversation. In 1951, the Californian journal *Arts & Architecture* featured a story on the House of Tomorrow, bringing Boyd's wish to fruition.<sup>4</sup>

After all the hype and excitement, what did the Modern Home Exhibition of 1949 and, more specifically, The House of Tomorrow achieve? Its legacy was the conversation that it successfully triggered regarding what constitutes good modern design in Australia and where its future lies.

1 Robin Boyd, "Tombs in Toorak", *Smudges*, 3 (1941).

2 "Latest home developments practical and attractive", *The Age*, 26 October 1949, 40.

3 "The morning after", *The Age*, 2 November 1949, 6.

4 "Notes on A Modern Home Exhibition in Melbourne, Australia", *Arts and Architecture* (June 1950), 20.

House of Tomorrow  
(photograph:  
Wolfgang Sievers, SLV)



HOUSE OF TOMORROW



House of Tomorrow (photograph: Wolfgang Sievers, SLV)



House of Tomorrow (photograph: Wolfgang Sievers, SLV)

HOUSE OF TOMORROW



House of Tomorrow (photograph: Wolfgang Sievers, SLV)



House of Tomorrow (photograph: Wolfgang Sievers, SLV)

## SUNSHINE HOUSE

ROYAL EXHIBITION BUILDING, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA

1951

ROBIN BOYD

Alice Schenk-Green

Robin Boyd's design of the Sunshine House was driven by an intent to achieve three key purposes that aligned with his promotion of good design: first, there is the desire to educate, second to experiment, and third, to make architecture accessible. These ambitions came through in Boyd's writing about the project in the Small Homes Service column for *The Age* newspaper around the time the Sunshine House was being exhibited at the Jubilee Homes and Better Housekeeping Exhibition in Melbourne's Royal Exhibition Building.

This exhibit presents a series of photographs of the Sunshine House taken by young graduate architect Peter McIntyre, who was assisting Boyd at the time. The photographs are accompanied by an interview with McIntyre, in which he describes Boyd's determination to challenge the 'cream and green policy' of post-war Melbourne. Because of his discontent with Australian architecture at the time, Boyd sought to shock and invigorate people with the vivid colours that are captured in these photographs.

In 1951, the Sunshine House was one of 200 standard designs offered by the RVIA Small Homes Service and the plans and specifications for the project were available for purchase for five pounds. Through a project like this, Boyd was encouraging future home-builders, giving them access to new construction details, making modern ideas accessible and allowing the opportunity for such a project to be realised numerous times.

The Sunshine House promoted good design through experiment and provocation. Boyd embraced the public critique that the project received, with an acute awareness that it was such critiques that made the house successful in its spread of ideas. Boyd himself claimed that the intent was to "arouse and stimulate", by attacking what he described as thoughtless habit - the principal vice of home-builders. The two most experimental features in the house were the use of colour and the copper hood chimney, each responding directly to a public contentment with what he deemed to be unsuccessful design in 1950s Melbourne.

Boyd's design intention was to deliver economic luxury: the scale, materials and flexibility of the Sunshine House were to cater for diverse users and the plan had to be capable of accommodating an average family. This challenge was tested by offering the house as a competition prize, open to anyone who visited the exhibition. The winner was a young woman named Veeda Garwood, who accepted the offer to have the house built on a donated block of land in Glen Waverly that was included in the prize. In June of 1952 the process of dismantling and rebuilding the house was complete and the Garwood family moved in, choosing only to change the bedroom colours. The Sunshine House, and by extension the RVIA Small Homes Service, was not only about sharing Boyd's and other young architects' ideas, but it was also about donating an entire house to promote well-designed architecture's accessibility and proof that these ideas were adaptable and transferrable to a broader market.

## SMALL HOMES SECTION

# 'SUNSHINE HOUSE' IS OPENED TODAY

*Some visitor to the Exhibition Building will win it.*

## HOUSE OF IDEAS

When the sponsors of the Jubilee Homes and Better Housekeeping Exhibition asked the Small Homes Service to provide the designs for its "Sunshine House," the problem was to find a plan capable of almost universal application.

THE ARCHITECTS SET out to find a plan which would suit as many different habits of living as possible and as many blocks of land as possible and as many people as possible—without necessarily reducing the whole thing to the lowest common denominator of popular taste.

The plan had to be capable of suiting the living habits of any average family, because someone is going to win the house in a

competition organised by the exhibition sponsors, the Better Housekeeping Bureau of Australia.

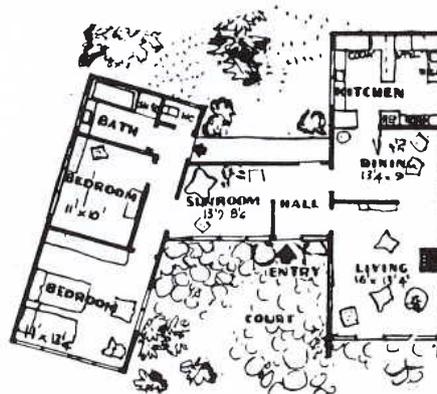
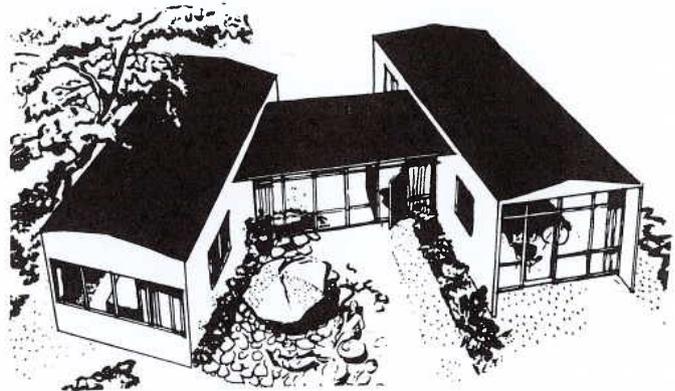
### Problems of design

Unlike a house built purely to demonstrate principles of design for an exhibition, the Sunshine House had to have its feet firmly on the ground.

The structure had to be solid and permanent, not merely a display. Also, it had to be built in a fortnight, and had to be demountable for re-erection on the actual site.

Although a block of land is to be given away with the house, others may want to build the "Sunshine House" on other blocks. Blueprints and specifications for it will be on sale at the exhibition.

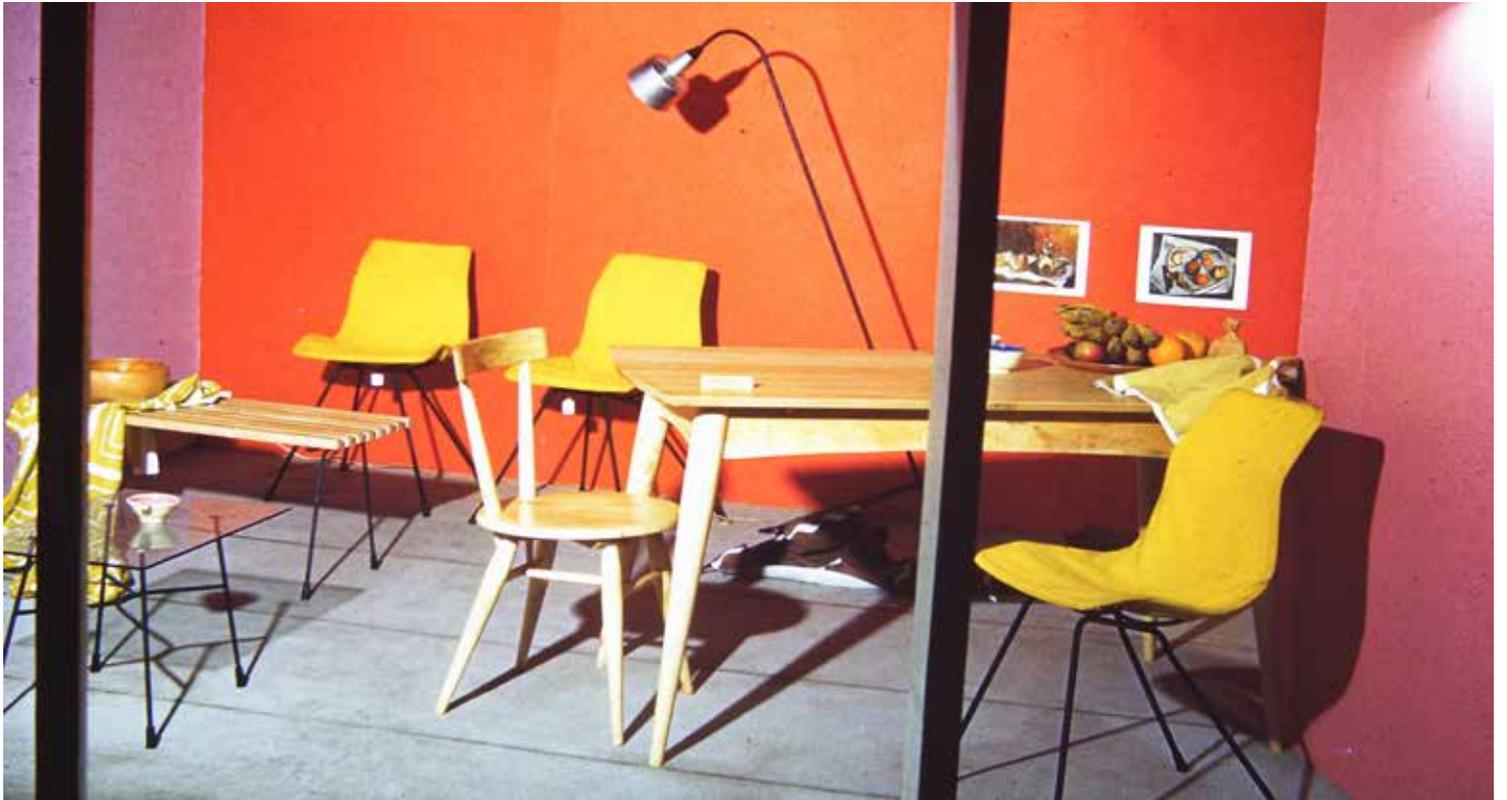
**SMALL HOMES** *The Age*  
Service  
of the Royal Victorian  
Institute of Architects



SUNSHINE HOUSE



Sunshine House (photograph: Peter McIntyre, McIntyre Partnership Pty Ltd)



Sunshine House (photograph: Peter McIntyre, McIntyre Partnership Pty Ltd)

SUNSHINE HOUSE



Sunshine House (photograph: Peter McIntyre, McIntyre Partnership Pty Ltd)



Sunshine House (photograph: Peter McIntyre, McIntyre Partnership Pty Ltd)

## STEGBAR WINDOWALL

1953-5

ROBIN BOYD (GROUNDS, ROMBERG & BOYD)

Sarah Mair

The modern theme of access to light characterises much of the work of Robin Boyd. From Arthur Boyd's studio, the affordable Fler House to the house he designed for Grant and Mary Featherston, the wall of windows spans his oeuvre.

Boyd's collaboration with Brian Stegley<sup>1</sup> in developing and commercialising the Stegbar *Windowall* is symbolic of his commitment to making modern standards of life, in particular living in light, accessible to all. The Stegbar Windowall was recognised as an accessible, affordable and quality modern element for the suburban home by architecture professional and homeowner alike. Boyd's invention, marketed alongside the RVIA Small Homes Service and Contemporary Homes designs, was characterised by an effective design rationale. The *Windowall* with its characteristic continuous kiln-dried hardwood transoms and mullions, often of equal dimensions (5 1/2" x 1 3/4" - 140mm x 45mm) and copyrighted lapped intersections resulted in a structural wall system that was easily incorporated into the suburban home.<sup>2</sup> Its modular prefabricated design did away with the need for specialist joinery skills and associated fees. It was a cost effective, high quality, multifunctional product.

With production and showroom facilities positioned in expanding suburbs like Moorabbin and Springvale and complemented by city advertisements,<sup>3</sup> exposure in magazines and newspapers, the Windowall was seemingly ubiquitous. Conveniently located showrooms were designed to be attractive day and night, with longer opening hours to attract working family appointments in the evening. The Stegbar showroom, frequently located alongside its workshop, as was the case in Springvale, brought physicality to the plans of aspiring homeowners and builders. With many clients purchasing directly off the plan, the ability to experience the scale and materiality of the Stegbar *Windowall* range in a showroom made this new building element tangible and accessible. In the showroom setting, an architectural wall of windows became the rationalised Windowall, an understandable consumable that allowed modification for individual interests, whilst retaining its overall formal structure. Whilst no design was the same, the section of the *Windowall* remained constant.

Boyd's directorship of the Small Homes Service gave him the opportunity to extol the virtues of glazing between structural stud work, through weekly articles, often accompanied by drawings of exemplary houses and Stegbar *Windowall* advertisements. It had a multi-media and multi-dimensional presence in the professional and public press. Advertising came at the public from all sides, in the newspaper (SHS and accompanying ads), in magazines (*Australian Home Beautiful* and *Architecture and Arts*), in exhibitions (House of Tomorrow, 1949), in the work of architects, in post-war project houses (Peninsula House, Fler House), in housing competitions, and in demonstration houses (*The Age Dream Home*, 1955 by Neil Clerahan).

The Windowall represented an affordable, environmentally sensitive and locally specific adaptation of local construction techniques. It was often highlighted as a key selling feature with lines like "Stegbar Windowalls give Maximum Light and Ventilation in the Space-Line Home."<sup>4</sup> Promotion like this effectively cemented Stegbar and its Windowall as a trusted household name. Glazing entire facades of the everyday home became one of Boyd's signature and unsung contributions to the development of the Australian postwar suburb.

1 Correspondence between Robin Boyd and Brian Stegley, 1962-4, Box 76, State Library of Victoria (SLV).

2 Windowall Brochure, *Windows By Stegbar: More sun...more air...more healthy living comfort!* 1954.

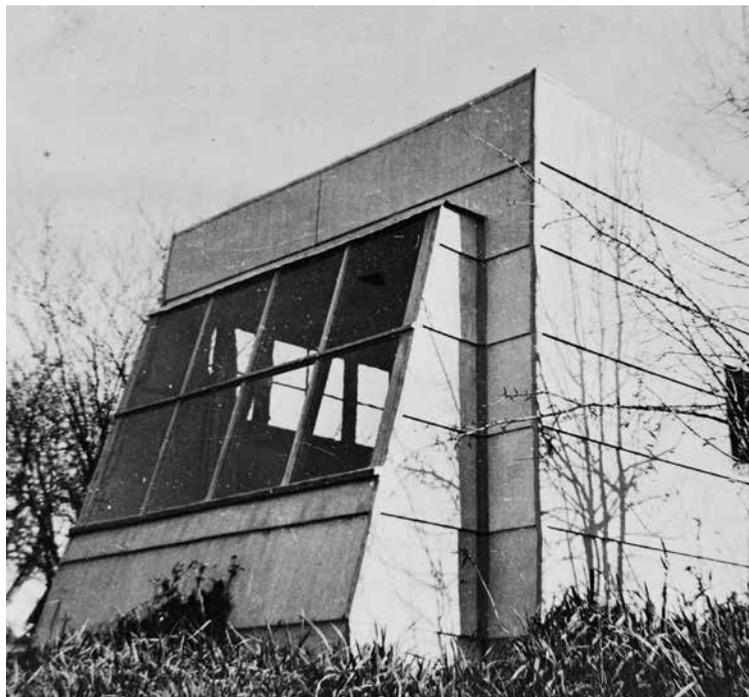
3 Robin Boyd, letter to Brian Stegley on the character of the Stegbar Windowall advertisement in the city, 1962, Box 76, SLV.

4 *The Age*, 4 October 1956, 13.

Browne House  
(photograph:  
Peter Wille, SLV)



STEGBAR WINDOW WALL



Featherson House (photograph: Mark Strizic, SLV); Arthur Boyd Studio (photograph: unknown, SLV)



Black Dolphin Motel (photograph: Mark Strizic, SLV); Dunstan House (photograph: Peter Wille, SLV)

STEGBAR WINDOW WALL



**STEGBAR**

**STEGBAR WINDOW WALLS** Dept.  
**ARE USED IN ALL CLASSES OF BUILDINGS** . . . . .

HOUSES . . . . . COMMERCIAL . . . . . FLATS . . . . . SHOPS . . . . . RESTAURANTS . . . . . HOSPITALS  
 INDUSTRIES and OFFICE BUILDINGS . . . . . GARAGES . . . . . CLUBS . . . . . RECREATION . . . . . SCHOOLS . . . . . CHURCHES  
 RAILS . . . . . AIRPORTS and WAREHOUSE BUILDINGS . . . . . PARKING WALLS . . . . . OUTDOOR SWIMMING Pools

**SERIES 'S'**

1000	1200	1400	1600	1800	2000	2200	2400	2600	2800	3000
1000	1200	1400	1600	1800	2000	2200	2400	2600	2800	3000
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**SERIES 'W'**

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1000	1200	1400	1600	1800	2000	2200	2400	2600	2800	3000

Popular types and sizes, including Series 'S' and 'W' are supplied as standard, but—  
**YOU ARE NOT LIMITED TO THESE STANDARD SIZES!**

**"WINDOW WALLS" are made only by STEGBAR WINDOW WALLS PTY. LTD**  
(Dept.)

What are Stegbar Window Walls?  
 How are they made?  
 Standard sizes?  
 Are they structurally strong?  
 Angle windows?  
 What type of opening sash?  
 Will they suit my home?  
 Glazing?  
 Can they be fixed?  
 Do Builders and Architects use them?

**STEGBAR**—The Modern Form of Window best suited to Australian Conditions

Of unique construction and handsome modern appearance, Stegbar Window Walls offer home builders and other property owners a completely different conception of flexibility in window treatment to suit any individual architectural design. Arrangement facilities . . . corner windows . . . door and window combinations . . . highlights . . . lowlights . . . fixed or opening lights. Genuine Window Walls are supplied only by Stegbar Window Walls Pty. Ltd. "Window Walls", like the word "Stegbar", is a registered trade name.

**HOW ARE STEGBAR WINDOW WALLS MADE AND WHAT MATERIALS ARE USED?**  
 Made from fabric portions of exclusive and improved design, Stegbar Window Walls are wire-welded in construction. Only selected grades of properly conditioned metals are used. Sections are machine-jointed, using a method (patent applied for) which ensures water-tight construction and permanent rigidity. Frames are separately assembled and fitted under expert supervision, being of stainless-steel construction throughout, each completed unit will last as long as the building in which it is installed.

**ARE THEY MADE IN STANDARD SIZES?**  
 YES . . . BUT, YOU ARE NOT LIMITED TO STANDARD SIZES.  
 Window Walls can be specified for any width, and height, and regular shapes and with any spacing of mullions or transoms. Windows can be supplied to suit any size of opening—from a small fixed pane to the entire wall of a house.

**ARE WINDOW WALLS STRUCTURALLY STRONG?**  
 YES, remarkably strong . . . Stegbar Window Walls can be used under all normal load conditions and wind pressures. Actual Window Wall tests will show to your entire satisfaction the building design or architectural planning.

**CAN WINDOW WALLS BE USED WITH ALL TYPES OF BUILDING CONSTRUCTION?**  
 Stegbar Window Walls may be installed in brick walls, brick veneer, brick frame, concrete block, reinforced concrete and any other recognized form of construction.

**ARE STEGBAR WINDOW WALLS EXPENSIVE?**  
 NO . . . in spite of their remarkable advantages, Stegbar units require more than reasonable prices with any window glass made window of similar size, while the finished cost of Window Walls is far cheaper than "window-in-wall" construction.

**WHICH TYPE OF OPENING SASH IS AVAILABLE?**  
 Stegbar units can be fitted with double-hung operation, sliding or hopper type sashes. Only four-packs, double and triple are made. Frames may be supplied according to requirements.

**WHD ALL PARTS BE GLAZED?**  
 YES . . . frames not required to be glazed may be fitted in with rubber bonding, or one sheet building material, including aluminum, timber, aluminum and reinforced.

**CAN WINDOW WALL FRAMES BE FINISHED IN ANY COLOR?**  
 YES . . . being of selected, properly seasoned metals, frames can be painted the one other window building material or stained and varnished.

**ARE STEGBAR WINDOW WALLS SUITABLE FOR RENOVATION OF EXISTING BUILDINGS?**  
 While they were developed especially for contemporary architecture, Stegbar Window Walls incorporate well with many existing buildings. Stegbar Window Walls have been used with great success in the alteration and reconstruction of a long-year-old structure frame.

**DO ARCHITECTS AND ENGINEERS RECOMMEND STEGBAR WINDOW WALLS?**  
 Very definitely, YES . . . better design, better construction, fine finish, neat appearance and ease of building in, have gained great popularity for Stegbar Window Walls with architects, builders and owners alike—be sure to specify genuine "WINDOW WALLS" for your home!

**No Limit to Size or Design — Beautiful Modern Appearance**





## PENINSULA HOUSE

1955

ROBIN BOYD (GROUNDS, ROMBERG AND BOYD)

Ali Galbraith

+

Mikaela Prentice

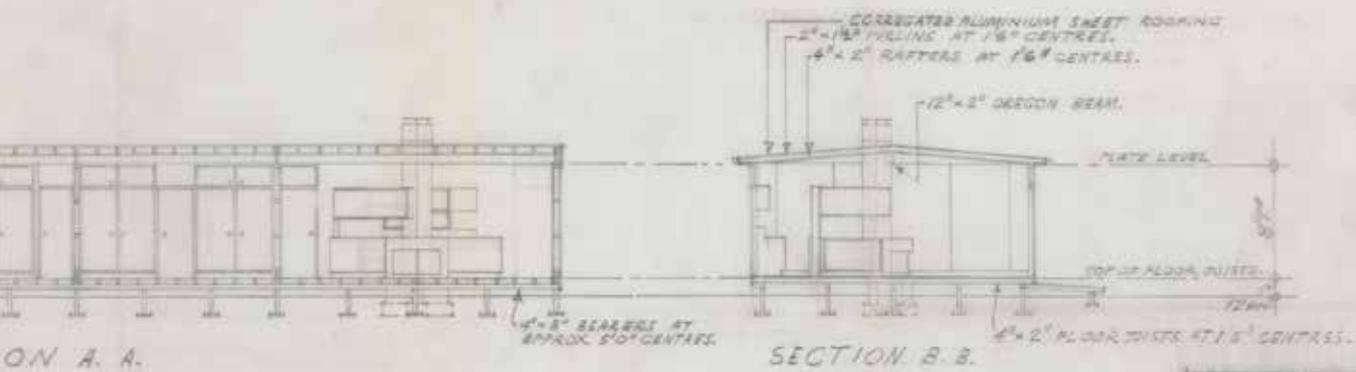
Through making architect-designed houses accessible to the wider population, Robin Boyd's Peninsula project houses for Contemporary Homes Pty Ltd invited a new model of suburban living and encouraged good design for everyday building. It was also part of Boyd's ideas on better accommodating Melbourne's rapidly growing population and improving the quality of the city's subsequent suburban sprawl. Through the multitude of Peninsula houses constructed, with several variations on the original rectilinear design, it is evident that his approach to revolutionizing suburban living was successful. This was due largely to the manner in which the Peninsula House was advertised and promoted through popular media, especially in newspapers. Advertisements in newspapers, for example, were often accompanied by articles written by Boyd which discussed contemporary living and good design for the suburban home. These two components when paired together presented a convincing argument for a new model of living and were substantiated by a proposal of how it could be achieved.

Boyd's engagement with suburban living is evident through the flexible location of the project homes on their sites. The rectilinear plan, with proportions aligning to that of the subdivision of a typical suburban block, meant that houses could be located for correct solar orientation, either facing north across the width or length of the block. A concentration of Peninsula Houses in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne, typically within 10 to 20 kilometres of the city, with some outliers in the Mornington Peninsula, exemplified the widespread popularity of this new attitude to suburban living.

The modular design of the home was a result of a number of factors, namely the rise of prefabrication. By modulating the plans, Boyd ensured that the houses accommodated current living needs, whilst allowing for future expansion as required. This led to a typically rectangular plan with a low pitched gable roof. Dimensions were repetitions of modules based on the size of standard building sheets. The design employed Boyd's structural Stegbar Windowall, which supported the roof directly, without columns or lintels. This glazed perimeter housed the living rooms and bedrooms, with service rooms flanking these. Cabinetry was used to define zones in the plan, both in the laundry and in the wardrobes, which pushed out into the hallway. Similarly, the fireplace divided the living room from the uniquely shaped triangular kitchen. The price of the houses was around 3000 pounds, and was advertised as being capable of being built in just six weeks.

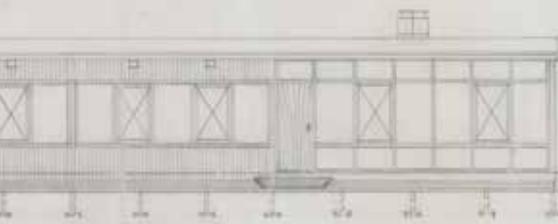




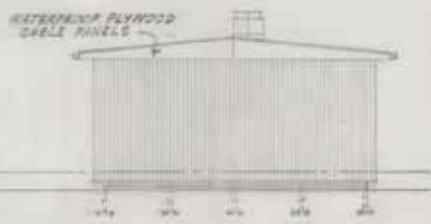


SECTION A. A.

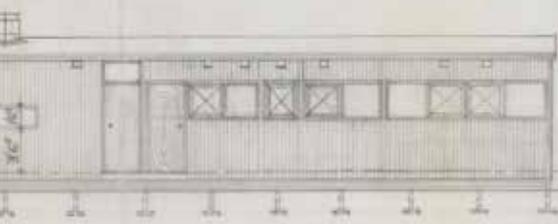
SECTION B. B.



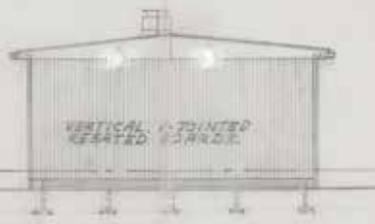
ELEVATION.



WEST ELEVATION.



ELEVATION.



EAST ELEVATION.

SITE PLAN. 40'0" TO 1/4" INCH.

3" EAVES CUTTER.

UNITED

LOCATION OF DOWNPIPES.

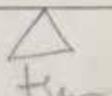
SUPERSEDED BY SHEET 24

JOB: 3 BEDROOM HOUSE FOR CONTEMPORARY HOMES PTY. LTD., VICTORIA.  
DRAWING: WORKING DRAWING.

FIGURED DIMENSIONS TO BE TAKEN IN PREFERENCE TO SCALE. CONTRACTOR IS TO VERIFY ALL DIMENSIONS ON JOB BEFORE STARTING WORK.	AMENDMENTS	DATE	DRAWN BY B.C.R.
	DATE	NAME	
	7. 8. 1965	B.C.R.	
	22. 9. 1965	B.C.R.	
	SCALE	3/16" = 1'0" = 1/8" = 10'	

GROUNDS, ROMBERG AND BOYD, ARCHITECTS  
340 ALBERT STREET, MELBOURNE, C.B. TEL: JA 6881, 52

Allow 1/2" margin



PENINSULA HOUSE

HOUSE TYPE	OWNER	ADDRESS OF NEW HOUSE	DATE STARTED	DATE PLACED	FINANCE SOURCE	ROYALTY	SPECIAL SUPERVISION
Peninsula I	Contemp.Homes P/L	Lot 19 McNaught St., Beaumaris	before 29/11/56	29/11/56		£75	Received
"	"	Lot 131 Hotham St., Beaumaris	"	"		£75	"
"	"	Lot 164 Dalgety Rd., Beaumaris	"	"		£75	"
"	"	Lot 142 Reserve Rd., Beaumaris	"	"		£75	"
"	"	Lot 151 Hotham Street, Beaumaris	"	"		£75	"
"	"	Lot 146 Hotham St., Beaumaris	"	"		£75	"
"	F. Cooley	Lot 65 Barkley St., Mornington	"	"		£75	"
"	D.H. Alexander	" 15 Oak St., Beaumaris	"	"		£75	"
"	Dr. Rowe	" 15A Morrison Ave, Mt. Martha	"	"		£75	"
"	J. Greenberg	" 8 Old Mornington Rd., Mt. Eliza	23/2/56	"	State Savings	£50	2% of Contract Sum received
"	A.I. Ker	" 93 Hotham St., Beaumaris	"	"		£50	"
"	R.A. Bidstrup	" 55 Graham St., Sydnal	"	"		£50	"
"	L.G. Mitchell	" 14 Jackson St., Forest Hills	"	"		£50	"
IV	K. Anderson	" 28 Broome Avenue, Mentone	before 6/3/56	12/4/56	War Service	£50	1 1/2% of Contract Sum rec'd.
IV	J.D. Drummond	" 31 Dunscombe Ave, Sydnal	"	"		£50	"
I	C. Ferry	" 12 Lemon Rd., Mt. Selwyn	"	"	State Savings	£50	2% of £2,075
"	P.R. Buckle	" 24 Kenwood Ave, East Ringwood	"	"	War Service	£50	1 1/2% of Contract Sum rec'd.
"	G.P. Hoskin	" 54 Mattle Ave., Beaumaris	"	27/4/56	State Savings	£50	2% of £2140 received
"	G.B. Sewell	" 54 Cleveland St., Mt. Waverley	"	May, '56.		£50	"
"	J.S. Nelson	" 80 Clonsore St., Beaumaris	1/6/56	1/6/56	War Service	£50	1 1/2% of £2140 received.
< I	H.E. Gunn	Lot 2 Central Rd., Blackburn	Cancelled		State Savings	Cancelled	2% of £2165 Now cancelled.
I	C.F. Chatfield	" 28 Clifford St., Glen Waverley	28/2/56	27/4/56	State Savings	£50 Received	2% of £2140 Received.
"	A.J. Wylie	" 2 Fairway Ave., Cheltenham	mid March	17/6/56	<del>State Savings</del>	£50	2% of £2140
III	D.W. Jones	" 5 Burwood Rd., Burwood	24/4/56	June, '56.	State Savings	£75	2% of £2000 £2630 Received
I	B.D. Douglas	" 83 Fairhill Rd., Glen Waverley	24/4/56	19/6/56	War Service	£50	1 1/2% of £2220
"	L.G. Crisp	" 96 Haldane St., Beaumaris	"	"	War Service	£50	1 1/2% of £2145 Received
"	K.H.B. Tandy	" 84 Ian Grove, Burwood	"	"	State Savings	£50	2% of £2240 Received
"	J.E. Slee	" 53 Kennedy St., Glen Waverley	"	"		£50	2% of £2250 Received
"	D.P. Thorpe	" 16 Ruskin Ave., Croydon	26/3/56	1/6/56		£50	"
"	E.J. Polak	" 277 Fortesque Ave., Seaford	"	"	State Savings	£50	2% of £2220 Received
"	H.W. Cobby	" 10 High St. Road, Sydnal	3/6/56	29/6/56	War Service	£50	1 1/2% of £2220
"	K.J. Clarke	" 68 Compton St., Tully Ho	Cancelled		State Savings		2% of £2140 Now CANCELLED
"	J.A. Johannessen	" 10 Amesbury Rd., Mt. Eliza	"	"	State Savings	£50	2% of £2280 Received
✓ "	R.D. Steel	" 52 & 53 Central Ave., Mooroolbark	Cancelled				This contract cancelled.
"	C.A. Luxton	" 14 Hilda St., Mentone	"	"	State Savings	£50	2% of £2220 Received
"	R.C. Hislop	" 8 Dalgety Rd. (Cnr. of Cloris Ave), Beaumaris	"	"	State Savings	£50	2% of £2180 Received
"	H.C. Peers	" 136 Glenwoods Ave., Beaumaris	"	"	War Service	£50	1 1/2% of £2180 Received
"		" 61 Mount View St., Mordiallo	"	"		£50	"

Peninsula House (Contemporary Homes Pty Ltd files, GRB Archive, SLV)



Peninsula House (photographs: Peter Wille, SLV)

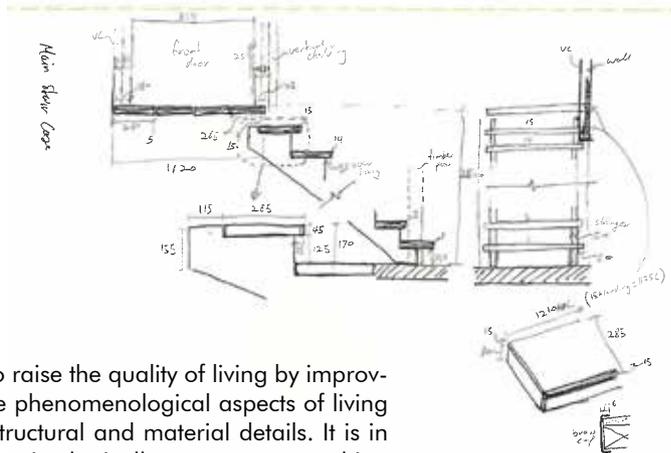
## BOYD HOUSE II DETAILS

SOUTH YARRA, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA

1957-9

ROBIN BOYD (GROUNDS, ROMBERG & BOYD)

Mike (Dong Suk) Oh



Robin Boyd's contribution to the notion of home within Australia was to raise the quality of living by improving the quality of the house.<sup>1</sup> He had an intrinsic understanding of the phenomenological aspects of living in a home and the manifestation of it was often expressed through structural and material details. It is in the details, not often celebrated, where experience moves beyond what is physically present to something greater than the sum of its parts. Not all architects are able to do this.

This exhibit presents a set of detail drawings of the Boyd House II at Walsh Street in South Yarra. The material is presented in two forms: the working process of on-site measuring and hand sketches, and a printed documentation set of the details drawn on computer. The intention is to provide a resource that does not exist at present. It is also an attempt to connect a fundamental part of architectural practice – the detail - to Boyd's ideas on good design within the house.

Boyd describes architecture in Australia as being closely connected to the notion of home<sup>2</sup> and it is easy to see in his diverse residential portfolio that this was one of his most commonly explored design ideas. Throughout his career, he remained connected to the prominent architects of his time, engaging critically in discussions of good design internationally. Yet he maintained a realistic and humanistic language, ensuring good design through ideas of a complete shelter for its occupants and users.<sup>3</sup>

At Walsh Street, there is a clarity in the way in which Boyd has used materials and envisioned their construction that connects the user to his ideas of what a house should be.

The way corners are turned with vertical cladding is obvious. There is a clear modularity to the spacing of timber posts. There is nothing hidden away underneath a layer of plaster board. Visibility of these aspects of the house speak of honesty, of the need for this space as a home to be one where you are made to feel relaxed. There is no need to pretend here. It is a space for people to be used and felt. It is not a display suite of luxurious finishes too precious to be lived in.

1. Robin Boyd and Mark Strizic, *Living in Australia*. (Fishermans Bend, Victoria: Thames and Hudson Australia, 2013), 5.
2. Boyd and Strizic, *Living in Australia*, 4.
3. Boyd and Strizic, *Living in Australia*, 10.

Boyd House details  
(sketch, photograph:  
Mike (Dong Suk) Oh)



BOYD HOUSE II DETAILS

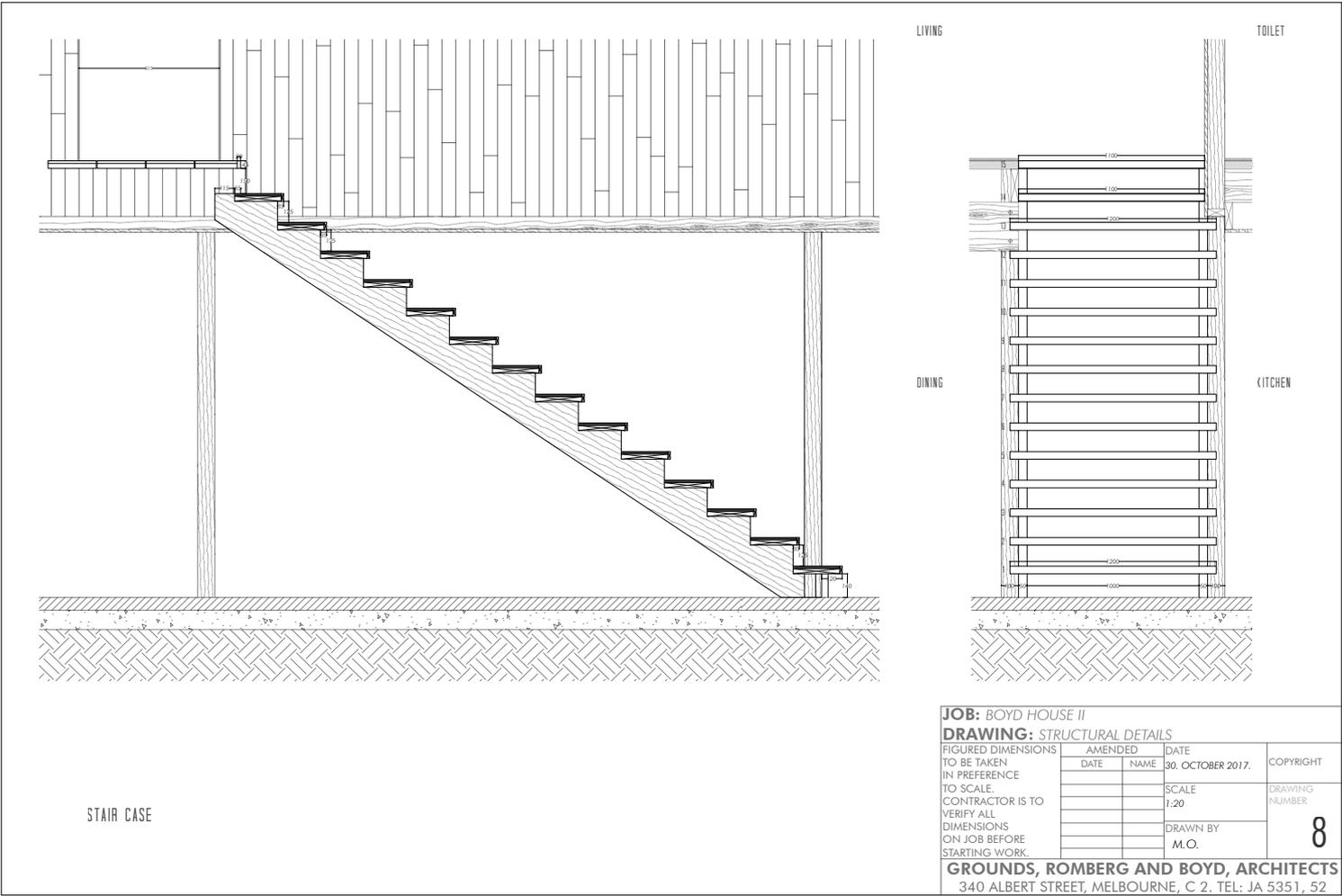


Boyd House details (photograph: Mike (Dong Suk) Oh)



Boyd House details (photograph: Mike (Dong Suk) Oh)

BOYD HOUSE II DETAILS



**JOB: BOYD HOUSE II**  
**DRAWING: STRUCTURAL DETAILS**

FIGURED DIMENSIONS TO BE TAKEN IN PREFERENCE TO SCALE. CONTRACTOR IS TO VERIFY ALL DIMENSIONS ON JOB BEFORE STARTING WORK.	AMENDED		DATE	COPYRIGHT
	DATE	NAME	30. OCTOBER 2017.	
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M.O.			8	
<b>GROUND, ROMBERG AND BOYD, ARCHITECTS</b>				
340 ALBERT STREET, MELBOURNE, C 2. TEL: JA 5351, 52				

Boyd House details (drawing: Mike (Dong Suk) Oh)



Boyd House details (photograph: Mike (Dong Suk) Oh)

## APPLETREE HILL ESTATE

GLEN WAVERLEY, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA

1965-6

ROBIN BOYD (ROMBERG AND BOYD) & LEND LEASE HOMES

Fady Ghabbour

Robin Boyd's vision for project housing and community design through Appletree Hill was one of the most progressive attempts in Australia to come from a project builder. Boyd's objective was, first, the creation of a sizeable community – a 'microverse' in a way – a self-contained miniature suburb where houses, landscape and hardscape were all harmoniously integrated. The second objective was the creation of an environment of beauty and dignity that would set the project apart from the ordinary Australian suburbs. His third was to encourage a level of quality in residential design that he believed was missing from Australian suburbia.

By November 1966, the project was voted to be the most exciting development of the year by the popular magazine *Australian Home Beautiful*. It was also around that time that Lend Lease and Robin Boyd decided to abandon this endeavour, making it the most disappointing dropout of the year.

This exhibit displays a collection of original photographs of Appletree Hill Estate captured by Wolfgang Sievers. Accompanying the photographs is a scrapbook of items of correspondence between Boyd and Lend Lease as well as colleagues. For years the failure of this project was a puzzling incidence for many who were familiar with Boyd's work and who had watched the project grow from its beginnings in early 1965. The scrapbook offers an insight, a story, into some of the issues that were faced and some of the technical and financial difficulties that arise when a visionary attempts to realise a concept that is foreign to his world, one that probed the very foundations of living in suburban Melbourne and wider Australian suburbs at the time.

Sievers' staged images, captured to market the project and promote it, are placed against the backdrop of difficulties and issues faced in the project's realisation, which ultimately led to its downfall.

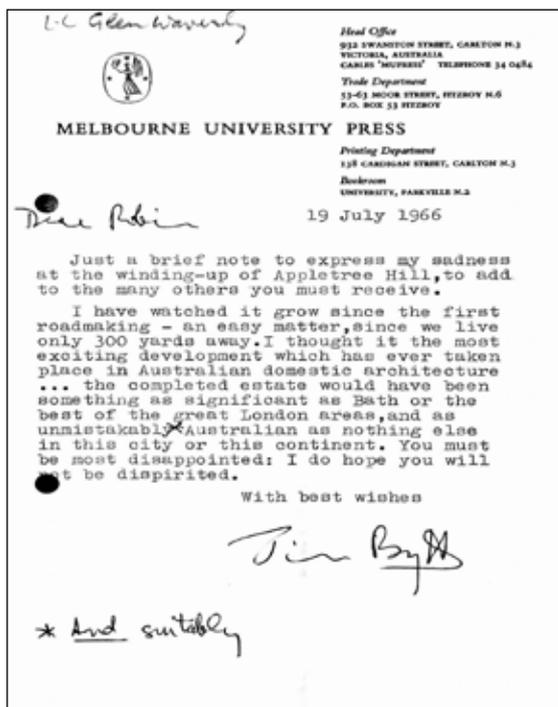
Boyd's concern with how we occupy the home, its interface with the street and neighbours emerge from his writings in *The Australian Ugliness* (1960). At Appletree Hill he wanted to implement a scheme that is based on Australian suburban conventions. But rather than impose new conventions, Boyd wanted to elevate and improve existing conventions.

The paradox of Appletree Hill was the preoccupation of a singular authorship of a suburb and a consistent handwriting through the architectural approach and its counterparts in contrast with, ultimately, indefinite customization to each individual lots according to each individual family. A major selling point of the scheme was the ability of each owner being allowed to choose from a variation of house plans, lots and architectural elements. Boyd had curated a scheme wanting to impart harmony on the whole but without denying the individuality of its parts.

Appletree Hill (photograph:  
Wolfgang Sievers, National  
Library of Australia)



APPLETREE HILL ESTATE



Letter (Appletree Hill files, GRB Archive, SLV); Appletree Hill (photograph: Wolfgang Sievers, National Library of Australia)



Appletree Hill (photograph: Wolfgang Sievers, National Library of Australia)



23 AUG 1966

NATIONAL CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION  
CANBERRA

COMMISSIONER

2 August 1966

*Dear Robin,*

It was with a great deal of regret that I read of the abandonment of the scheme for the development of the Appletree Hill Estate in Melbourne. I was personally very impressed when I made a brief visit to the area and thought it was one of the best endeavours of its kind that I had seen.

I do hope that there might be some belated recognition of the quality of the proposal by the public in some way. If there is any possibility of any development in Canberra we would be delighted to see this.

With all good wishes,

Yours sincerely,

*J.W. Overall*

(J.W. OVERALL)

Mr Robin Boyd,  
Architect,  
340 Albert Street,  
MELBOURNE. C2. VIC.



Appletree Hill (photograph: Wolfgang Sievers, National Library of Australia)



Takara Beautillion, Expo 70  
(source: Architectural Forum,  
March 1970)

EXHIBITION

## EXHIBITING IDEAS

James Francis



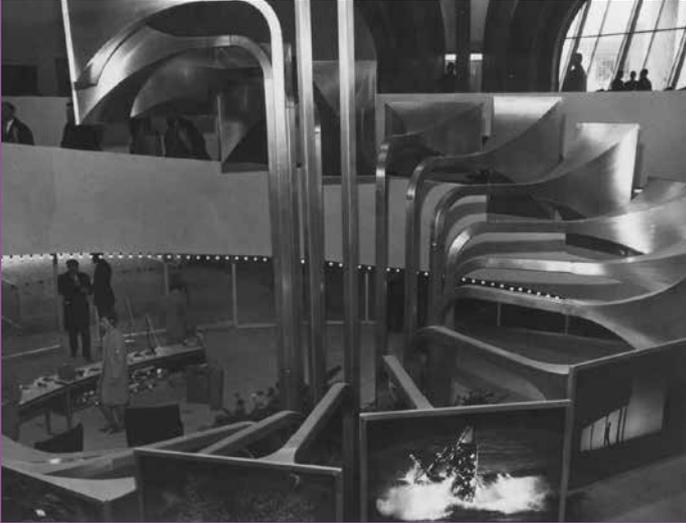
The phenomena of Expo 67 in Montreal and Expo 70 in Osaka represent distinct moments in architectural history. They were forums to test the futuristic and avant-garde ideals of the 1960s. The exposition pavilions were often at the forefront and sometimes experimental fringe of global architecture, demonstrating new and speculative forms of urbanism, structure and experience. The worlds of the Expos were a glimpse of the future, and represented the strengthening of new ways of thinking about modern architecture. Aesthetically and programmatically, the pavilions were massively ambitious. They were intended to showcase culture, industry, and new ways of living as a means of cultural exchange, with the ultimate aim of improving future society or, as the slogan for Expo 70 read 'progress and harmony for mankind'.

The mega-structures produced by these Expos were often enormous in scale, highly experimental and designed to attract the attention of the world's press and the millions of visitors that would pass through these vast sites over the life of an exposition. The cities that hosted these events were for a moment in time, the centre of the world's attention, and the focus of the world's architectural press.

Robin Boyd was an active contributor as an architect, designer and commentator to Expo 67 Montreal and Expo 70 Osaka, with his enthusiasm extending to a proposal for a Melbourne Expo in 1976.

In his capacity as a designer Boyd was selected to be Australia's 'exhibits architect' for the national pavilion at Expo 67 in Montreal. He designed the exhibits and the interiors to impart the feeling of being in a comfortable living room. As part of his role, Boyd commissioned eminent Australian furniture designer Grant Featherston to design the pavilion's famous 'Talking Chairs'; chairs that would play recordings in English and French of prominent Australians on aspects of Australian science, industry and culture.

Expo 67, Montreal (source: <http://www.celebrate88.com/australiaatworldexpositions/montreal67/>)



For Expo 70, Boyd was again selected as exhibits architect. This time he embraced the avant-garde, Metabolist influenced spirit of the Expo. He created his own experiment in Expo Architecture: the 'Space-Tube', a multimedia, multi-sensory experience as part of the main Australian pavilion. Inside the long Archigram-esque structure, visitors would stand on moving walk-ways and pass animatronic, light and sound displays. The displays created sometimes abstract and bizarre glimpses of life in an urban, industrious, creative Australia – vastly different to the sparse agricultural landscapes visitors might have associated with Australia.

For both Expo 67 and 70, Boyd was also a prominent critic, writing extended pieces for international journals such as *The Architectural Review*, *Architectural Forum*, *Arts and Architecture*, *Hemisphere*, in addition to his presence on Australian television, radio and newspapers. The Expos and Japan more broadly, were gateways for Boyd to international architectural dialogue. In his articles, Boyd commented on the architectural promise of the expo pavilions, using them to speculate on the future of architecture, sometimes in praise of a pavilion's ingenuity, and sometimes sharply critical.

The diverse body of work produced by Boyd as part of Expo 67 and 70 reveal a distinct and lesser known side of his career, one removed from his more classically associated work in the Australian residential context. Through the Expos, Boyd engaged with global architectural design culture and dialogue, he experimented with entirely speculative, avant-garde architecture, whilst remaining characteristically Boyd.

Australian Pavilion (source:  
[http://www.celebrate88.com/  
australiaatworldexpositions/  
montreal67/](http://www.celebrate88.com/australiaatworldexpositions/montreal67/))

During his career, Robin Boyd contributed regularly to a number of significant, internationally published architecture journals. For Expo 67 in Montreal and again for Expo 70 in Osaka, Boyd was invited to critique the pavilions for the British and American journals, *The Architectural Review* and *Architectural Forum*. Already a prominent critic in Australia, Boyd's articles positioned him as a distinct and sometimes prophetic voice in global architectural discourse. Boyd, in this collection of articles, speculated on the future of architecture and critiqued the often extravagant, avant-garde experiments in urbanism, structure, form and materiality.

For Expo 67, Boyd wrote on Moshe Safdie's cluster housing experiment 'Habitat', Frei Otto's "magnificent tent"<sup>1</sup>, the German Pavilion. For Expo 70, he critiqued Kisho Kurokawa and Kenzo Tange's Metabolist mega-structures, the 'Takara Beautillion' and Festival Plaza.

World expositions had the overall intent of creating a better future society through an open exchange of culture, as well as winning potential tourism and trade. The national pavilions were often showcases for each country's industry, innovation and way of life. The Montreal and Osaka World Expos provided a forum for new and experimental architecture to be tested in the public realm. It was an architecture free from the constraints of economics, durability and sometimes rationality, as Boyd noted "almost before their mortar has set, three months before they were seen by the public, tenders were already being called for their demolition."

Boyd's prophetic critiques reveal his position on a broad range of architectural movements at the time, as well as giving insight into a lesser known side of his career and influence as an international critic. He praised Moshe Safdie's 1967 experiment in density, prefabrication and urbanism with his cluster-housing experiment, 'Habitat'. For Boyd it represented the realisation of an idea that "has hovered in the background of the architectural conscience all this century." It was a building that "in terms of sociology, technology and architecture demonstrates a third way of life, and a possible way of building it".<sup>2</sup>

Although Boyd expressed enthusiasm for the Metabolist movement in his 1968 book *New Directions in Japanese Architecture*, he was somewhat disappointed by the ad-hoc fixings, tacked-on staircase and service ducts, and underwhelming interiors of the Metabolist super-structures on display at Expo 70. For Boyd, the Takara Beautillion demonstrated the possibility of architecture's death due to "suffocation by its own servants", a compromised building, concerned with superficial elements, that had to assert itself with "empty exhibitionist pretensions."<sup>3</sup>

The articles were a direct critique of expo architecture, but more generally they conveyed Boyd's architectural sensibilities in the context of global architectural movements; his concern for a holistically considered building, his rejection of featurism, and his careful sense of materiality and detail. Boyd's reflections on the future of architecture presented at Expo 67 and 70 were in many prophetic, forecasting contemporary architectural discourse, and laying bare the failings of emerging 1960s architecture.

- 1 Robin Boyd, "Germany", *The Architectural Review*, 142: 846 (August 1967), 129-35.
- 2 Robin Boyd, "Habitat's Cluster", *Architectural Forum*, 126: 4 (May 1967), 36-41.
- 3 Robin Boyd, "A Glimpse of the Future", *Architectural Forum*, 132: 2 (March 1970), 32-5.





Takara Beautillon, Expo 70 (reconstructed image: James Francis)

# A GLIMPSE OF THE FUTURE

BY ROBIN BOYD

The most exciting piece of architecture among the almost hysterically excited company of buildings just completed or (at the time of writing) nearing completion on Osaka's Expo 70 site is not one of the national pavilions nor the biggest of the commercial ones. It is not the wildest nor even necessarily the best building (if it is fair to judge any of them before their official openings). Yet in all that surfeit of weird shapes it is the most compelling because it gives a glimpse, as through a glass polarized darkly, of what a building of the future might look like.

The building labors under a horrible name: "Takara Beautification." It is the pavilion of the Takara Group of four furniture companies, and it is the design of one of the founders of the Japanese Metabolist movement: young (36) Noriaki Kurokawa. It is the best manifestation yet built of the sometimes fevered Metabolist theory—mainly qualities of growth and change.

As I write this, before opening day, the builders have long left it. But is it finished? It seems so, yet it certainly looks unfinished, and this, for a Metabolist building, is the most extravagant praise. For a first rule of Metabolism is that a building should be capable of growth wherever and whenever required.

In this case, the structural system is based on a single prefabricated framing unit which is repeated some 200 times. Each unit is made up of 12 blunt right-angle bends of steel pipe (10 cm. diameter) welded to make six arms, each consisting of four pipes grouped in a square, thus forming overall a 3-D, six-pointed cross measuring 3.3 meters in each of the three dimensions. The steel is painted white.

The end of each arm is welded to a flat circular disc, like a hand, holed for bolts. When several of these units are bolted together at the discs they make up a space frame of repetitive cubes. The frame is spiked externally by its unengaged arms, and at the extremity of each arm is one of the flat hands, waiting with its bolt-holes ready to grasp the hand of any other unit that might join it.

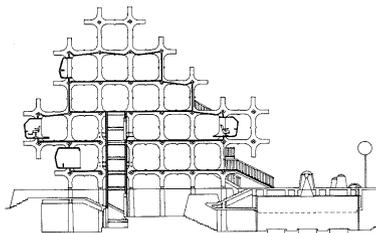
Floors are of precast concrete slabs, dropped into the steel frame. The whole system looks as easy and as full of fun as a toy construction kit. Yet the larger scale brought structural limitations, and Kurokawa cautiously restrained the overall shape, keeping to a fairly conservative irregular pyramid, four stories high above the concrete foundation piers. However, he could not resist adding a few unusable extra units on top, and some others cantilevered out front, just to show off the system. Free arms grope blindly in the air like a robot octopus searching for a mate.

Into the square holes of the body of the pyramid, Kurokawa has plugged at random various things designed to keep the rain out and his visitors entertained: 30 stainless steel boxes containing exhibits, some colored glass Pop pictures, cones, bubbles.

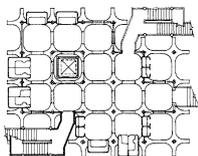
## Exhibitionist extensions

The whole thing may sound, so far, suspiciously like a beautifully simple concept which might result in a beautifully unified building, but there is more to come. Service pipes and ducts cannot easily be accommodated in such a trim frame system. Does that worry a Metabolist? Of course not. The services are led externally in and out the framing members and are painted in bright code colours (although it is to be noted that the publicity model displayed no service pipes). Two stairs were required. Do they embarrass Kurokawa? Evidently not. The main one, wrapped in glass, and an open escape stair are stuck on each side of the systematic frame, bearing no structural or geometrical relationship to it. They are quite big stairs. Taken together they almost compete in bulk with the building they serve. And from some aspects they threaten, along with all the pipes and plug-ins, to destroy the architectural identity of the system. Maybe that is why it has to assert itself with empty exhibitionist extensions.

Suffocation by its own servants may be the future of architecture: a Frankensteinian end, as many have been hinting. The Takara building actually demonstrates the possibility for the first time; and demonstrations like this are among the best justifications for World Fairs.



SECTION



FIRST FLOOR PLAN

The frame of the pavilion is assembled out of six-armed units, measuring about 11 ft. in each dimension, fabricated out of steel pipe. At the base of the pavilion, they are anchored to concrete piers; at the sides and top of the structure, they appear ready to sprout extensions.

Mr. Boyd, the Australian architect and critic, is a member of our Board of Contributors. Among his books is *New Directions in Japanese Architecture*.



## HABITAT'S CLUSTER

BY ROBIN BOYD

Moshe Safdie was the architect of Habitat 67 in every sense of the word. Without him it would not only have looked different, it would not have happened at all.

It was he who first proposed the idea of a living demonstration of urban housing as one of the highlights of Expo 67. He was working on a master plan for the Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition, and he saw the chance to build the subject of his final-year thesis study at McGill University—a study that was still much in his thoughts. He sold the idea to the corporation, was granted money to develop it, and prepared a presentation that carried away three governments: municipal, provincial, and federal. Thus it happened in 1964 that Safdie, at the age of 26 and just three years out of college, was commissioned to build his dream.

It was not a lonely dream. The Habitat idea has hovered in the background of the architectural conscience all this century, one way or another. Its basis is that modern architecture must become more involved in making an appropriate total environment for modern life. The rules require the integration of car traffic, vertical circulation, outdoor and indoor communal amenities, and last, but perhaps not entirely least, apartments in which people might actually want to live. Not so very long ago its image was the Corbusian spectacle of towering headstones linked by ribbons of elevated roads strung across parkland. This vision faded after World War II when glass slab skyscrapers and elevated freeways suddenly appeared in discor-

Mr. Boyd is an architect practicing in Melbourne, Australia, and a well-known critic. His most recent book is *The Puzzle of Architecture* (reviewed in our June '66 issue). He is a member of our Board of Contributors.

ganized abundance and lost their romantic novelty. So the monumental vision dissolved into Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation, in which the individual units were beginning to have identity. Then the Unité image gave way to the cluster concept, which starts with the individual units and builds up to a monument.

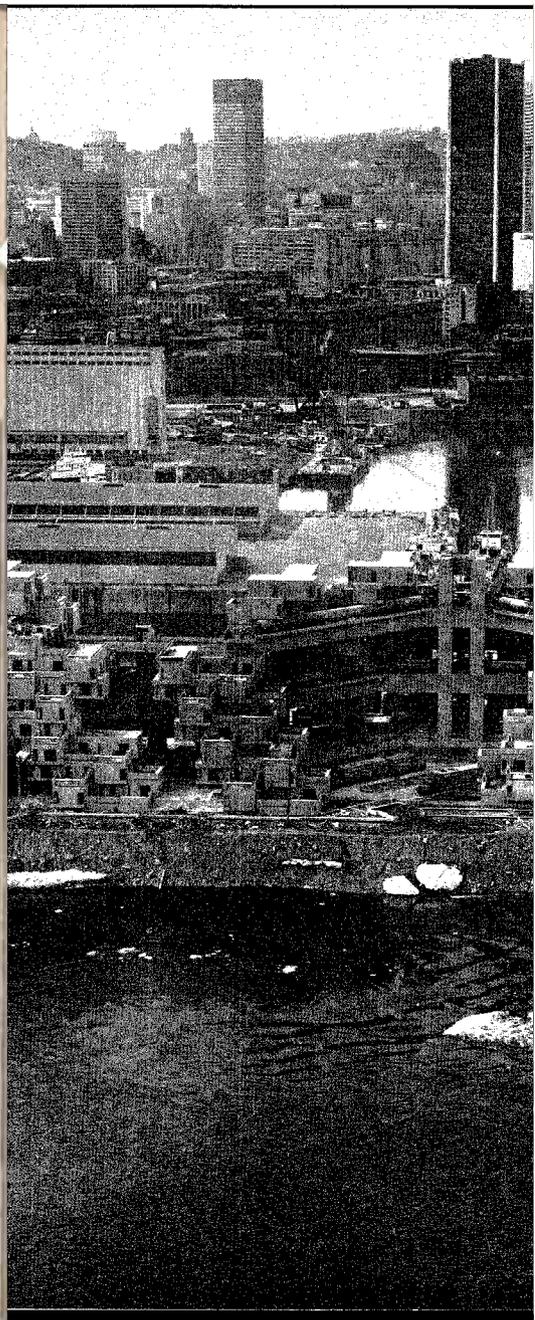
According to Reyner Banham, the cluster concept was first stated in an article by Kevin Lynch in 1954—the year Unité was completed. In 1967 Alaco and Peter Smithson described the ideal as a "close-knit, complicated, often-moving aggregation, but an aggregation with a distinct structure." They advised: "We must think out for each place the sort of structure which can grow and yet be clear and easily understood at each stage of development."

In the following decades many a building was erected which professed to subscribe to these high principles but which finished up as just another closed, competitive apartment block. In 1960, Kenzo Tange, with his students at MIT, first gave the cluster a powerful image, and later that same year developed the idea further in his well-known proposal of a plan for Tokyo.



But Moshe Safdie was the first to keep hold of the ideals, and a strong image, and to get it built—even if not quite as he first proposed.

His original scheme had some 900 dwellings for 3,000 people in two separated blocks. The larger was composed of parallel, spaced, staggered rows of neo-Unité slabs which were, in effect, toppled inwards until their top corners touched and they supported each other while making an equilateral triangle with the ground. It was a nice development from the Tange-MIT scheme, which clustered the dwellings on the sides of enormous tennis. These threatened to be somewhat dingy on the inside,



whereas in Safdie's scheme the undersides of the slopes still had open outlooks. His smaller block was a shorter modification of the first; all the slabs leaned the one way, although they zig-zagged in plan. They were supported by vertical circulation shafts.

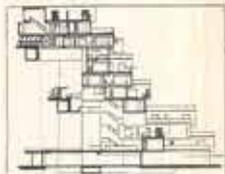
What has been built is only a large part of the smaller block, capable of housing some 700 people in 158 units.

Safdie's triumph is that, despite this, he has held on grimly to the essentials of the original idea and has not allowed it to become, in spirit or image, just another one of those familiar things. It manages to convince as a little scrap of tomorrow. Since this was the object of the exercise as an Expo exhibit, almost any price paid in practical building discomfort and economics was prejustified. The estimated final cost of about \$100,000 per average apartment sounds ridiculous enough, but these few units have to be considered as pacesetters for something bigger, or not considered seriously at all. This cost, after all, includes massive overheads—for example, one special crane costing \$750,000—which would have been no more costly for the originally planned 990 units.



The sociological objective of all clusters is to bring people back close to the heart of the city (or to cheer up those who are still left there) by restoring a sense of community—yet, at the same time, providing something of the space and privacy enjoyed in the suburbs. Habitat 67 responds to this in several ways. Its site is a socio-architect's delight, for it recovers a section of Montreal's lost waterfront. Its

size is just big enough and its character quite strong enough to impress any inmate with a sense of a unique environment. There are communal play terraces, and various amenities leading off the wide balconies which serve as communication on every fourth floor and which are called, as you may have guessed, streets.



The technological objective of clusters is to exploit mass production of the minor, monotonously repetitive elements of dwellings within a major structural system. Habitat 67 responds to this with a technique already well publicized. Concrete boxes measuring 17 ft. 6 in. by 38 ft. by 10 ft. high, and weighing 90 tons, are precast in a "factory" on the site, sandblasted and fitted out on the ground, and hoisted into place on that expensive traveling crane. Compromises along the way have led to less than half the finishing trades being done on the ground. Bathrooms are continuously moulded glass fiber shells. Kitchens are neat but ordinary.

The apartments come in three sizes. The smallest is a single box (665 sq. ft.). Bigger units are made of two or three boxes linked together, usually in a two-story arrangement.

The Russians, of course, have been precasting apartment boxes for years. The standard Russian boxes are about the same size as Habitat's, but are stacked into slabs safely and equarely and are held together by gravity.

Safdie's biggest innovation was to tie pairs of blocks together vertically by post-tensioned cables, three on each side, fitted into internal pilasters, the outer ones 2 ft. from the ends of the boxes. This system allows the boxes to be stacked in almost any way imaginable. One can be tied down at right angles to the box below. Another box



can be offset above with nearly half its length cantilevering out over, perhaps, a children's play plaza. Up to five such cantilevers may be stepped out perilously one above the other if the architect calls for it. This device has made possible the outdoor-living decks enjoyed by all apartments on exposed parts of the roofs of lower boxes. (The decks are bor-



dered by automatically watered sewer boxes!) It also provides the anti-gravity, science-fiction Flying Housing look, which is exciting, frivolous and entirely appropriate for Expo 67.

To that extent it is a resounding success. Nevertheless some awkwardness is inherent in the free-stacking scheme. For instance, plumbing is necessarily scattered haphazardly throughout the complex. Safdie solves the resulting problem of waste pipes by gathering those of each apartment together under a false floor and discharging them into the nearest vertical plumbing stack. He passes them through a single antisiphon trap. This eliminates the need for any back vents, which indeed would have reduced the attractions of life on the roof gardens. The system works, but the need for false timber floors everywhere deflates the concept of precast, self-sufficient boxes.

The artistic objective of clusters is to make the whole greater than the sum of the parts. Habitat 67 achieves this, first, by making sure that there is a whole. All the structural elements, the vertical elevator towers, sloping stairways and horizontal "streets," as well as the boxes, are consistently of precast concrete. The surface

throughout is sandblasted and as austere as the form is extravagant. Although a fashionable diagonal is stressed both in plan and in section, the progression and recession of the boxes in defiance of the overall discipline lends a quality of irrefutable empirical aptness reminiscent of villages not far from Moshe Safdie's birthplace of Haifa. But the hollows between some boxes, affording glimpses of other precariously stacked boxes several floors and maybe hundreds of feet away, play a teasing game with space that is entirely of this century; while the cornice, yet open-ended, almost still-growing form of the whole belongs intimately to the late 1960s.

Thus, in terms of sociology, technology, and architecture, Habitat 67 should go far—as far as it is possible for any building of its size to go—in fulfilling its primary function of demonstrating to Expo visitors a third way of life, and a possible way of building it.

A fourth objective of cluster blocks is humanist: to make the units especially good places for living. In Habitat 67, the apartment boxes, which are literally and figuratively the bricks that support the whole idea, are found to be, on entering, somewhat anti-climactic. After the spatial thrills and the brave grey concrete of the exterior, the inside of the boxes seems no more communicative than most other good, conventional, compact, smoothly plastered apartments. After all, that is the nature of a box. Half the model apartments have been decorated by a shelter magazine, so perhaps the interior quality of the architecture is irrelevant.

#### FACTS & FIGURES

Habitat 67, Montreal, Canada. Owner: The Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition. Architects: Moshe Safdie and David, Bonett, Soutar, Associated Architects. Engineers: Dr. A.E. Korndorff (structural consultant); Montl, Lafleur, Larive, Haden & Associates (Structural); Hertz & Thibault and Nicholas Fodor & Associates (mechanical and electrical). Landscape architects: Harper & Lavigne Consortium. General contractor: Angin-Norecose Quebec Ltd. PHOTOGRAPHS: Page 25, staff photo. Pages 26-41, Aerial Photos of New England.

**AUSTRALIAN EXHIBIT, EXPO 67**  
MONTREAL, QUEBEC, CANADA  
1966-7  
ROBIN BOYD (ROMBERG AND BOYD)

Yanyi Leong

The exhibit design for the Australian Pavilion at Expo 67 in Montreal is an example of Robin Boyd's approach to exhibiting architecture. His aim for this exhibition was to display Australian modernity against the backdrop of the world. However, back then, his idea of the international world was confined largely to North America (i.e. the USA and Canada) as these were countries from where most of the Expo visitors would have come. This was also due to the political situation of the time, where the Cold War was in full swing and the major two powers of the world were the USA and Russia, and Australia was inclined to indicate its alignment. Though Boyd did not design anything in the exhibition, he was in charge of every detail that was placed in the exhibition, as seen in the voluminous amount of correspondence that he had with all the different groups of people associated with the exhibition's content and implementation.

Through his correspondence, Boyd was very clear on his idea that the world at the time meant largely North America, but only included mention of it when physically displaying how Canberra was planned and how it was eventually projected to look like in fifty years. He was also in direct control of every other exhibit, including the thirty kangaroos and wallabies and their temperature control in order for them to survive the harsh Canadian winters, the fishes and turtles in the Barrier Reef Exhibit, the type of Australian wool and timber used in the carpet, the curtains and furniture used in the pavilion, and the different tableware to be used in the dining area for the twenty VIPs. His attention to the smallest of details to the larger scale of the pavilion is testament to his ability to display architecture and ideas.

This exhibit at Walsh Street provides some insight into the level of detail that Boyd was looking into while designing Expo 67 exhibition. It also mimics Boyd's main idea of making use of audio material and allowing visitors to the exhibit to sit down and rest while still absorbing Australian culture. The audio presented at Walsh Street is divided into two parts: the first showing Boyd's management and decisions in designing the exhibit and the second describing the final outcome as presented at Expo 67.



Australian Pavilion, Expo 67 (photographs: National Archives of Australia)

May 6th, 1966.

Beauvais Associates Pty. Ltd.,  
35-37 Fitzpatrick Street,  
REVEESBY, N.S.W.

Dear Sirs,

TECHNAMATION: EXPO 67

We have asked the general exhibits contractors, Displaycraft Pty. Ltd., to get in touch with you regarding the item 3 referred to in your letter of March 16th: the 3 ft. radiation in the centre of the map of Australia. When you have discussed this with them will you please let us have a sketch, however rough, showing your proposal for the effect.

What we want is a radiation which will move slowly out from the centre, gathering speed towards the perimeter and will fade out very gradually at the edge - definitely no hard perimeter.

The colour is to be light, bright orange-gold in the centre, blending to red and then deep ruby as it fades out at the edge.

The Canberra Lake animation can also be put in hand if you are ready to start. The model is now being made by Alan Chandler, of 62 Station Street, Fairfield, Victoria, and I should appreciate it if you would get in touch with him to make sure that the lake surface will be prepared to suit you.

We are writing to the Prime Minister's department recommending their acceptance of your quotations in your letter of March 16th, as follows:

1. Canberra Lake Animation	\$667.00
2. 12 panels in science stands with motors, polarising discs, and simple animation to future agreement, without light sources or basic transparencies.	417 \$5000.00
3. 3 ft. radiation effect on map.	\$369.00
	<hr/>
	\$6036.00

Item 2 will have to be discussed by us when we have finished the graphics design.

Yours faithfully,

RB/SS

March 2nd, 1966.

Mr. William Worth,  
C/o R. W. Holberton,  
Australian Trade Commissioner,  
Imperial Bank of Commerce,  
MONTREAL. CANADA.

Dear Bill,

EXPO 67 - SOUND CHAIRS

I have just inspected Grant Featherston's preliminary mock-up of the chair, which is going very well, and in course of discussion with him covered the following points with which I should acquaint you:

In view of the fact that Featherston has designed the chair with a small, loose circular cushion in the seat (zipped in position), I decided that the cushion should be the colour language-key. i. e. all chairs will be the dark green but 25% of cushions only (in 60 chairs) will be in the orange. Another 60 orange cushion covers will be made, allowing for dry-cleaning one set when necessary. This means that the dark green will take the brunt of wear, and it should not show dirt, while the regularly cleaned orange cushions, one in four should always lend a fresh look to the whole.

For, as we must admit, wool will get dirty and will wear quicker than, say, a vinyl plastic. It may even be necessary to recover the chairs after the first 100,000 or so visitors have used them. This could be done easily enough, but I suggest that we need not anticipate it. We can see how the wool is wearing during the course of the exhibition and order more wool if necessary. But I think that any of the disadvantages of wool are overwhelmed by the symbolic and attractive qualities of it. If you do not agree it is still not too late to change to a trouble-free plastic.

Yours sincerely,

EXPO 67 had significant meaning for Australia. Participation in the exposition was an announcement that Australia was no longer an isolated wilderness but a sophisticated self-reliant nation equal to any in the world.

The theme of the Australian exhibit was the spirit of adventure: a spirit that enabled Australians convert one of the oldest land masses in the world into a modern society. Robin Boyd decided on the Australian theme. He was also in charge of displays in the Australian Pavilion, which had been designed by his ex-employee, James McCormick, then a senior architect within the Commonwealth Department of Works.

Boyd's intention was that through his exhibition design any visitor might be able to imagine what constituted real Australian life. Three design principles were established. First, the aim was to provide a simple enclosure for the exhibition hall. It was to be a place of relaxation and comfort. Second, the number of exhibits was to be reduced to what was practical in telling the story of the Australian adventure. Third, the theme of this spirit of adventure was to be expressed beneath the tree forms that supported four independent roof sections together covering 152 feet by 152 feet (46.3 metres by 46.3 metres).

The main exhibition space had a 23 feet (7 metre) high ceiling and the visitor was conscious first of the vaulting of the four tree forms that formed the roof construction. Each one of the four-exhibition realms had 60 'Talking Chairs'. Visitors sat down on one of these chairs, and at once they started to introduce you to Australia and Australians. The tapes played through the Talking Chairs featured the voices of famous Australians including:

- Sir Robert Menzies on natural resources
- Sir Hudson Fysh on aviation
- Sir Robert Helpmann on ballet and the theatre
- Sir Mark Oliphant on science.

EXPO 67 had a significant social effect in Australia: it was discussed almost every day during the expo period. This exhibit collects the newspaper articles from the time and reassembles them to recreate a new newspaper format and thus make a cross-spatial-temporal feeling. It acts as a reference document to acknowledge the immediate effects of Expo 67 back in 1967. It also collects current events, news, and other information. This old version of media was an intrinsic part of Melbourne's daily life in 1967.

The newspaper is changed every two days during the exhibition period. The old newspaper will be stored at the side to increase the feeling of life in the house. Circulation and readership increase the connection between visitor and exhibition project.





AUSTRALIAN EXHIBIT ORGANIZATION, P.O. BOX 702, CANBERRA CITY, A.C.T.

## press release

Background Bulletin No. 1 (Revised February 3, 1966)

### The Exhibition

The Universal and International Exhibition of 1967 will be held from April 28 to October 27, 1967, in Montreal, Canada. Australia is one of 70 nations who have accepted invitations to participate. The year 1967 is the centenary of Canadian Confederation. The short title of the exhibition is "Expo 67". In sharp contrast to the international trade fairs of the past, Expo 67 will be an educational, scientific and cultural exhibition designed to portray the accomplishments of mankind. It takes as its theme "Man and his World". Australia plans to give expression to this theme by accenting adventure, and exhibits in the Australian pavilion will tell how adventure still beckons and impels Australians today -- in the arts, in sport, in science, in industry and in other fields. The Bureau of International Exhibitions has granted Expo 67 first category rating. The only other exhibitions to have rated so highly were the Paris Exhibition of 1937 and the Brussels World Fair of 1958. The Montreal Exhibition will be twice as big as the Brussels Fair, which had 42 participating countries.

### Site

The exhibition site occupies about 1000 acres. It spills from the riverside of the St. Lawrence River on to two large islands -- Ile Sainte Helene, which has been enlarged, and Ile Notre-Dame, which has been built on a shoal in the river from millions of tons of rock fill. The Australian site is well placed and covers 64,967 square feet. It is open on three sides and has the West German pavilion as a neighbour to the south-west. Ceylon, Barbados and the European Economic Community have pavilions across the main road to the north-west. An intra-exhibition mono-rail system passes in front of the Australian site and a mass transit elevated rail system runs close to the south-eastern boundary.

Mel Pratt, Public Relations, 61-2123



Australian Pavilion (photograph: National Archives of Australia)

AUSTRALIAN EXHIBIT, EXPO 67



Australian Pavilion (photograph: National Archives of Australia)



Talking Chair, Expo 67 (source: Powerhouse Museum)

## OPENING EXHIBITION FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CHANCERY

WASHINGTON DC, USA

20 JUNE 1969

ROBIN BOYD (ROMBERG & BOYD)

Filia Christy

The exhibition for the opening of the Australian Chancery in Washington D.C. on 20 June 1969 encapsulates Robin Boyd's ingenuity and capability in exhibition design. It also demonstrates his ideas on how to represent through modern design an impression of Australia to a global public. Following Expo 67 in Montreal and with the upcoming Expo 70 in Osaka, the exhibition was part of the Australian Government's broader political intention of putting forward the nation's industrial competitiveness for global reception. It also marked the opening ceremony of Australia's largest chancery overseas, exhibiting national themes relating to history and other associations with the United States of America. The exhibition was located in the 'Approach and Display Area' on the ground floor of the new building, which had been designed by Bates, Smart and McCutcheon. Here visitors were entertained and welcomed in grand public scale.

Boyd's exhibition design demonstrates his distinctive approach, where characteristic elements are shared across his other exhibition projects. Central is the promotion of modern design which served as the basis from which Australia's history and culture might be perceived. Additionally, engagement with technology through machinery and auditory sound effects became part of elevating perception, similar to tactics employed for the Expo 67 and Expo 70 exhibition designs. Other techniques such as using rounded elements to allow continuity of pedestrian flow, the grouping and arrangement of objects based around progressing topics, and an enclosing screen which directed visitors' focus toward the display content were well articulated well in this exhibition, as was also apparent in Boyd's design for 'The First 200 Years' exhibition at Australia Square in Sydney.

The exhibition itself comprised six cylindrical display cases made out of clear acrylic that were individually designed to showcase different topics. The right combination of machinery rotating effects, object artefacts, pictures and tape playback recordings were tailored to communicate the message. For example, the enacted conversation on politics was played on Exhibit No. 4 entitled 'The Democratic Spirit', where the Australian flag was printed on a perspex screen that could open and close to show the screen projector inside.

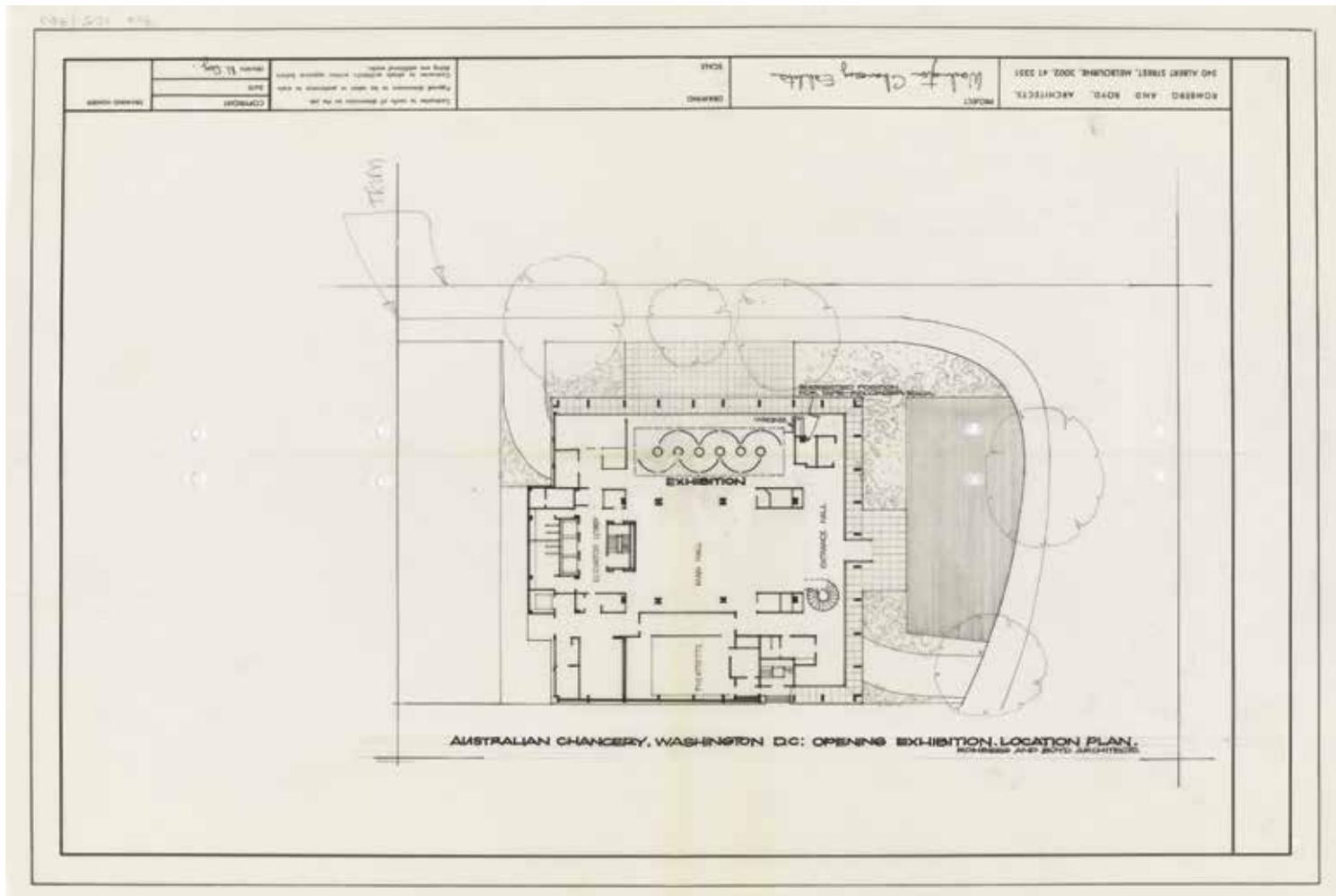
Of special note was Exhibit No. 1 which displayed an unprecedented technique of using anamorphic optical illusion that had never appeared in any of Boyd's previous exhibition designs. Coloured photographs were "deliberately distorted by an anamorphic lens during and will be optically corrected again in the display case by the use of the perspex half-cylinders."<sup>1</sup> Inside the case, a cylindrical pole was filled with the compressed images, back-lit and rotated using a motor. In front of this pole, eight acrylic half-cylindrical elements, which acted as lenses, were fixed alternately to the top and bottom of the inside of the display case. When the moving photographs were seen through the fixed lenses, the images could be seen with normal proportions. It was a masterful use of modern technology in exhibition design.

1 Washington Chancery Exhibition Correspondence, Grounds Romberg and Boyd Collection, Box 105, M11780, Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria.



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OPENING EXHIBITION FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CHANCERY



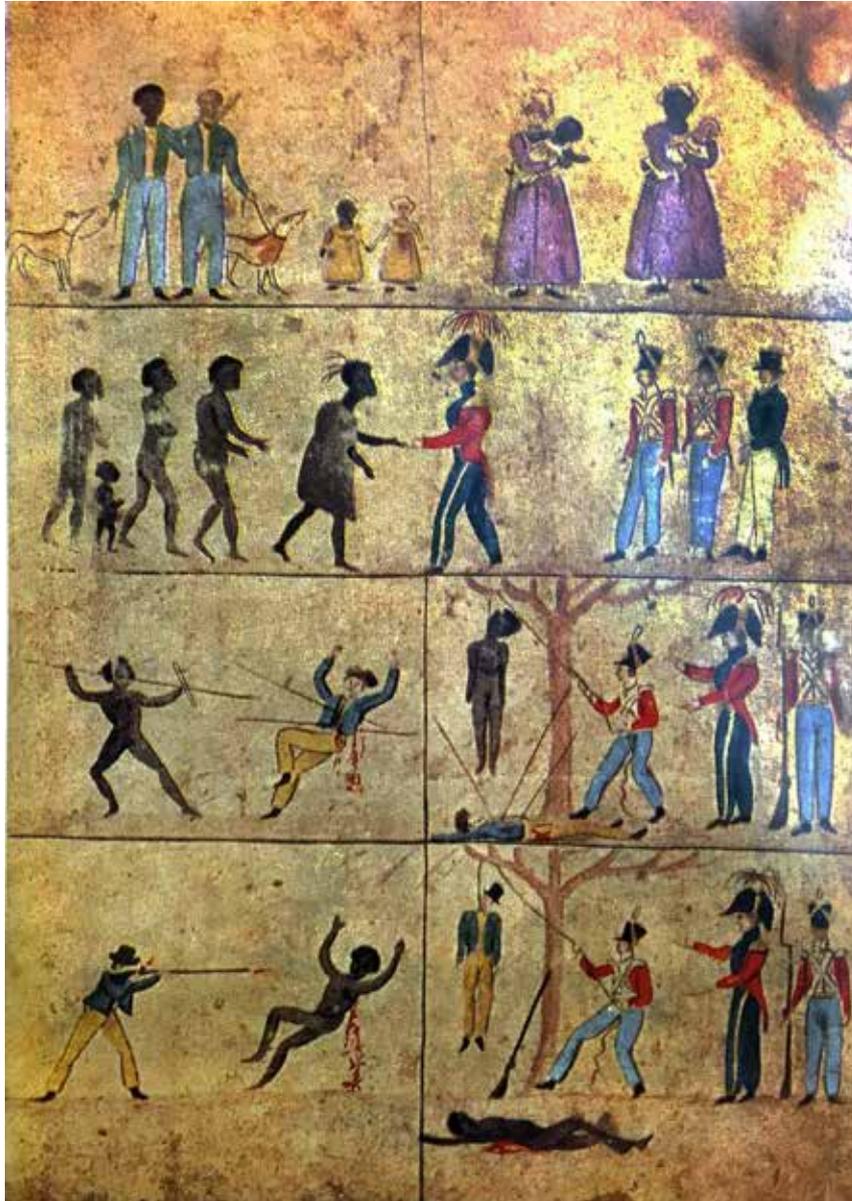
Drawings, Opening Exhibition, Australian Chancery (Australian Chancery Exhibition files, GRB Archive, SLV)



OPENING EXHIBITION FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CHANCERY



Images, Opening Exhibition, Australian Chancery (Australian Chancery Exhibition files, GRB Archive, SLV)



Image, Opening Exhibition, Australian Chancery (source: GC Ingleton, *True Patriots All*, 1952)

## AUSTRALIA, THE FIRST 200 YEARS

AUSTRALIA SQUARE, SYDNEY, NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA

1968

ROBIN BOYD (ROMBERG AND BOYD)

Anthony Richardson

'Australia, The First 200 Years' was an exhibition designed by Robin Boyd and held on the sixth floor of the recently completed Australia Square in Sydney. It was commissioned by the Industrial Design Council of Australia and opened by the HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, on 14 May 1968. Boyd worked with Sydney-based graphic designer Harry Williamson to achieve the dramatic graphic effects. Located in twenty hanging cylinders, the exhibition focussed on a variety of categories including place, minerals, land, people, children, industry, construction, science, plastic arts, music, architecture, literature, entertainment, design, design for environment, design for work, design for transport, design for recreation, design for knowledge and design for living. The idea of the exhibition was suggested by the Duke himself, who had requested that it could look at much more than just design.

The hanging cylinders were constructed out of plywood and hung at a level where visitors would need to stoop down to enter inside each one. There were differing sizes, both in diameter and height, along with the hanging height. To give an example: cylinder 5, 'The Children', was 914mm in diameter and 3,505mm in height. It was also hung the lowest, intended only to be seen by children who could easily access inside as opposed to an adult. Cylinder 11, 'Architecture', was larger in diameter (1,828mm) and 2,895mm in height.

Each of the cylinders was minimal on its exterior side, with just the cylinder number and the name of the display placed inside the number. Internally, each cylinder was painted a different colour. However, with access to only a few coloured slides taken by the architect Harry Seidler, it is difficult to determine the exact colours of each cylinder. Though, cylinder six, which was 'Industry', was painted an orange colour on the inside.

The manner of which each category was displayed differed widely. Cylinder 3, 'The Land', had photographs hanging from string. Cylinder 20, 'Design for Living', had a painting fixed to the inside of the cylinder. However, if you were to look up you would have seen a complete dining table arrangement staring down at you. Chairs, a table, plates and food were fixed to the ceiling section of the cylinder, giving the viewer a unique perspective.

The day after the exhibition's opening it was reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that Prince Philip entered 14 of the 20 cylinders and grabbed his back humorously after bending to come out of the last. When asked by a newspaper reporter later about how he felt having to bend so low to enter each exhibit, the Duke said, "Very strenuous. I'm exhausted."

Advertisement, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 May 1968

# Australia Square



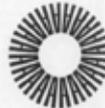
## Project Completed

Today marks the completion of Sydney's tallest giant—Australia Square—standing proud in the heart of Sydney signifying the upward surge of Australian progress and development. To celebrate and on the occasion of H.R.H. The Duke of Edinburgh's Third Commonwealth Study Conference, City Centre Development Limited in conjunction with the Industrial Design Council of Australia is sponsoring the exhibition "Australia—The First 200 Years".

**Exhibition:** "Australia—The First 200 Years"—open to the public from Wednesday 18th May, 1968 for two weeks.

**Admission Free—**10 a.m.—10 p.m. Mondays to Saturdays.

**Location:** Australia Square—Exhibition Floor (lifts from main lobby in George Street).



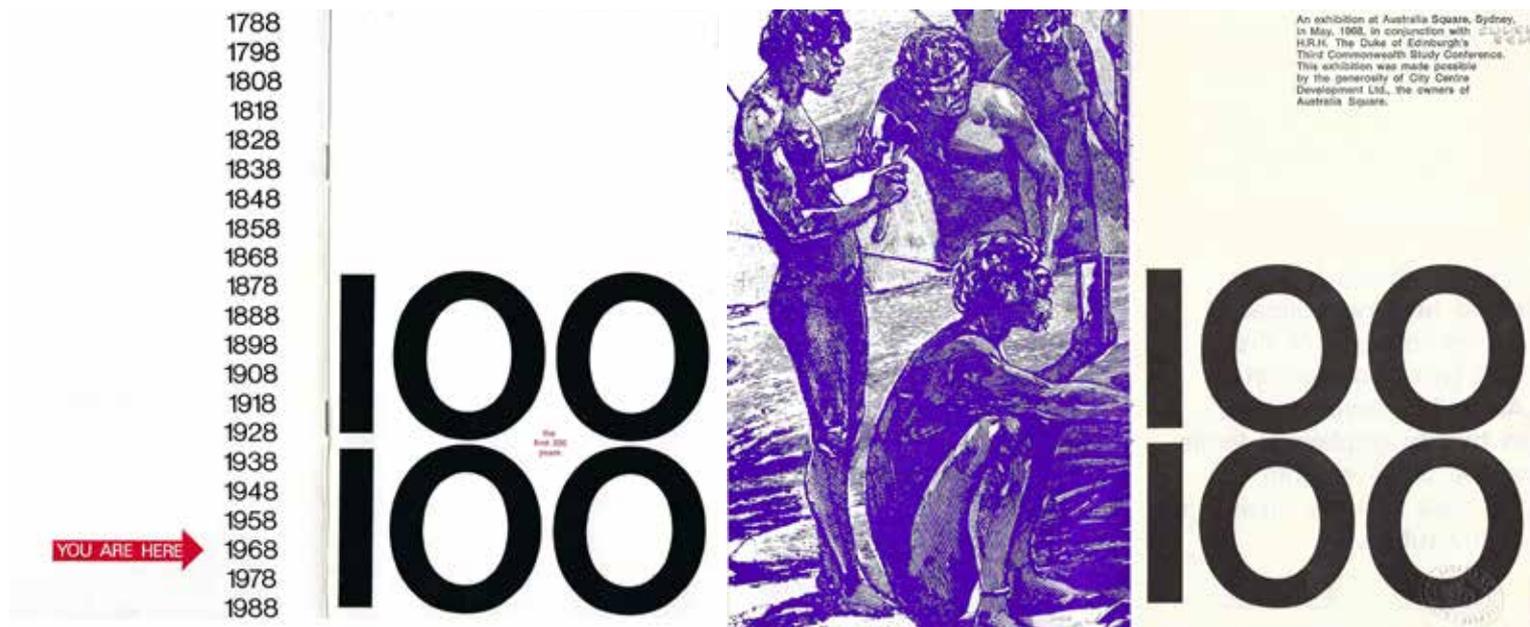
AUSTRALIA SQUARE—was constructed, developed and is managed by the Lend Lease Group of Companies for the owners of the project—City Centre Development Limited, a Company jointly owned by Lend Lease Corporation and British Financial Institutions.





Australia: The First 200 Years' (colour images: photographs: Harry Seidler, copyright Penelope Seidler; black and white images: Max Dupain, courtesy Eric Sierins)

## AUSTRALIA, THE FIRST 200 YEARS



catalogue, 'Australia: The First 200 Years' (source: National Library of Australia)



## SPACE TUBE, AUSTRALIAN PAVILION

EXPO 70, OSAKA, JAPAN

JUNE 1968 - 1970

ROBIN BOYD (GROUNDS, ROMBERG AND BOYD)

Yanyu Su

Robin Boyd's exhibit design for the Australian Pavilion at Expo 70 was one of his later display works. It shows his ongoing preoccupation with incorporating new technologies of multimedia into architectural form. The exhibition area, which was called the 'Space Tube' is a mature example of Boyd's contemporary experiments into networked systems in exhibition design.

The exhibition design was implemented through a collaboration between James Maccormick, who designed the main pavilion, and Robin Boyd, who was responsible for exhibition content and design. Instigated by different government arms, the two architects reached an agreement to "strike a chord of sympathy" in the Japanese audience "by showing that certain values of the Japanese, held to be good, are also respected and striven for in Australia".<sup>1</sup> As a solution to the tensions that arose between the two architects, the designs of both were compromised. Even though the two sections of the design were committed to be awkwardly attached, as described by Carolyn Barnes and Simon Jackson, as an integration, the exhibition was accredited as a masterpiece of modern architecture at the time.<sup>2</sup>

In the exhibition, instead of letting viewers move at their own pace, they were transported from the main pavilion to the 'Space Tube', a subterranean display area by moving walkways. There they viewed displays fitted into the cells along a long tunnel. In this way, the focus of the exhibition was not the only information, but also a multimedia experience received in a dynamic form. The audience were given a visually dynamic environment which featured with sound and animation.

Based on the main theme of Expo 70 - 'Progress and Harmony for Mankind' - the topics of Boyd's exhibit was divided into four sections: 'Man', 'Man and Nature', 'Man and the Man-made' and 'Man and Man'. Boyd organised the display with an attempt to correct the world's understanding of the national development of Australia in technology, industrialisation and international modernisation, while also consolidating and promoting the relationship between Australian and Japan. In order to resonate with the Japanese audience, who were unfamiliar with Australia, the design of the Space Tube was linked with the new technologies and experimental architectural forms of Kenzo Tange and the Japanese Metabolists.

Boyd put great effort into bringing an immersive, multimedia environment to the visitors. In his own words, the purpose of the displays was to "capture the eye and the ear with light and colour and movement with music and sounds with 28 movie projectors and 46 synchronised slide projectors with hundreds of fluorescent tubes and 200 incandescent lamps."<sup>3</sup>

The elements to realise this atmospheric experience that Boyd proposed were display boxes that were installed radially around the tube. They were elaborately arranged to create various opportunities for exhibition effects. The display boxes on the top of the tube communicated literally and figuratively. By contrast, the boxes at 45° to the horizontal were enriched with more perspectival images and objects. The horizontally viewed display boxes which were easiest to view were able to be animated as the moving of viewers meant that these could be enriched significantly with projecting, lighting and sound effects.

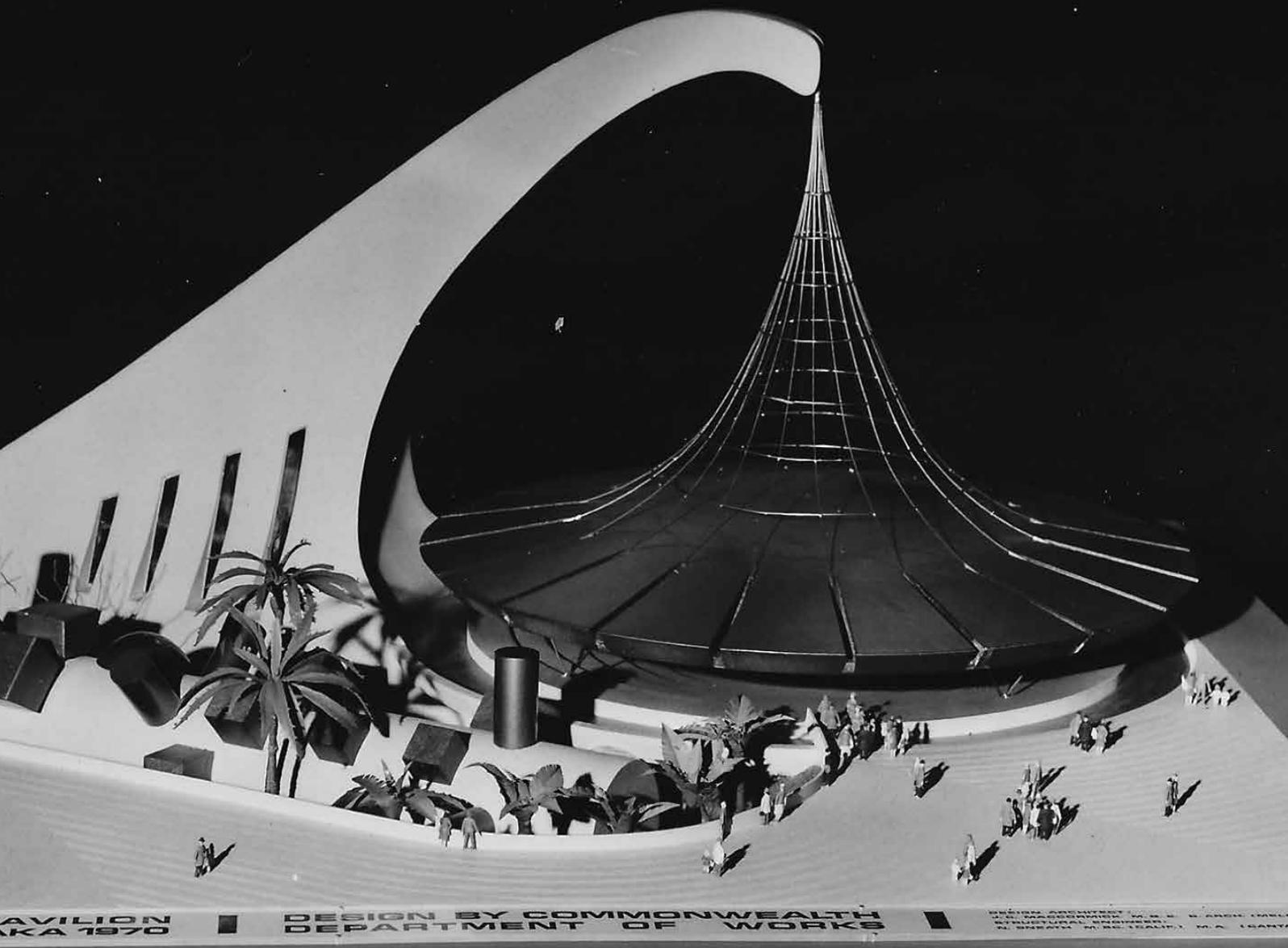
Innovative at the time was the lighting, the animated screen projects, the hidden speakers and also the moving walkways as were the controlled computers and lasers to videophones and closed-circuit television surveillance networked systems. Boyd's exhibit was therefore a great promotion at the time for the applications of these technologies not just to contemporary exhibit design but also to everyday life.<sup>4</sup>

1 C. Barnes and S. Jackson, "Staging Identity: Australian Design Innovation at Expo '70, Osaka", *Journal of Design History*, 25:4 (2012), 400-13.

2 C. Barnes and S. Jackson, "Creature of Circumstance: Australia's Pavilion at Expo '70 and Changing International Relations", *Panorama to Paradise, Proceedings of the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand* (2007), 1-16.

3 Robin Boyd, 'Expo '70 Osaka: The Australian Pavilion Proposals for the Exhibits': 4-5, AJM.

4 P. Raisbeck, (2017), *Was Robin Boyd on Acid? The multimedia Space Tube at Expo 70.* [online] Peter Raisbeck: surviving the design studio. Available at: <https://peterraisbeck.com/2016/04/26/was-robin-boyd-on-acid-the-multi-media-space-tube-at-expo-70/> [Accessed 14 Sep. 2017].



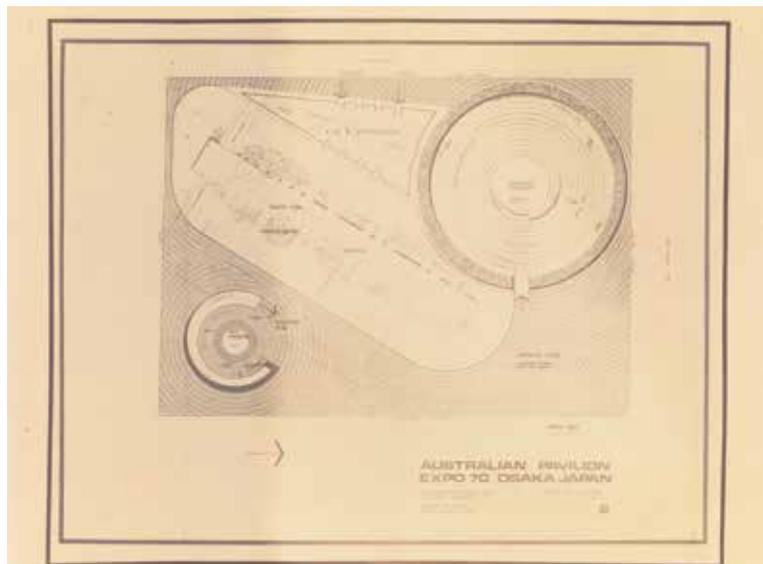
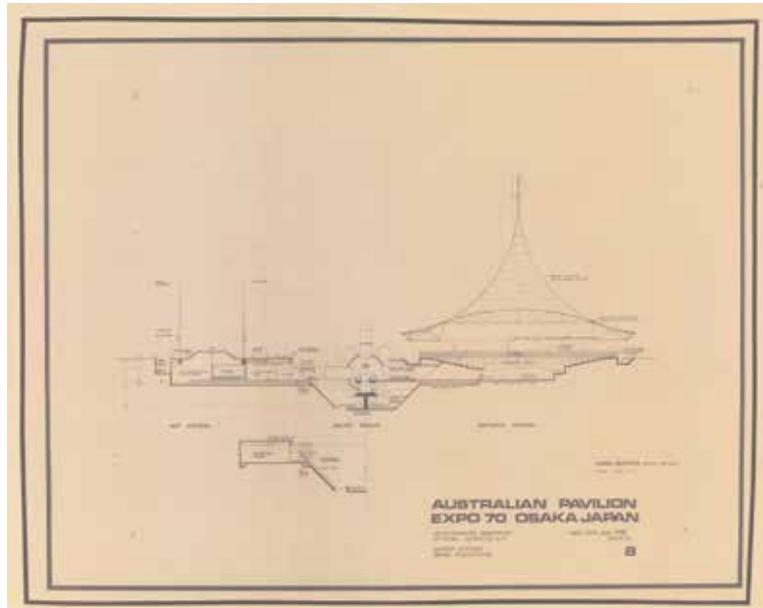
AVILION  
KA 1970

DESIGN BY COMMONWEALTH  
DEPARTMENT OF WORKS

ARCHITECTS: M. S. S. ARCHITECTS  
STRUCTURAL ENGINEERS: M. S. S. ARCHITECTS  
SCULPTOR: M. S. S. ARCHITECTS

Australian Pavilion, Expo 70 (photograph: Cross-Section Archive, University of Melbourne)

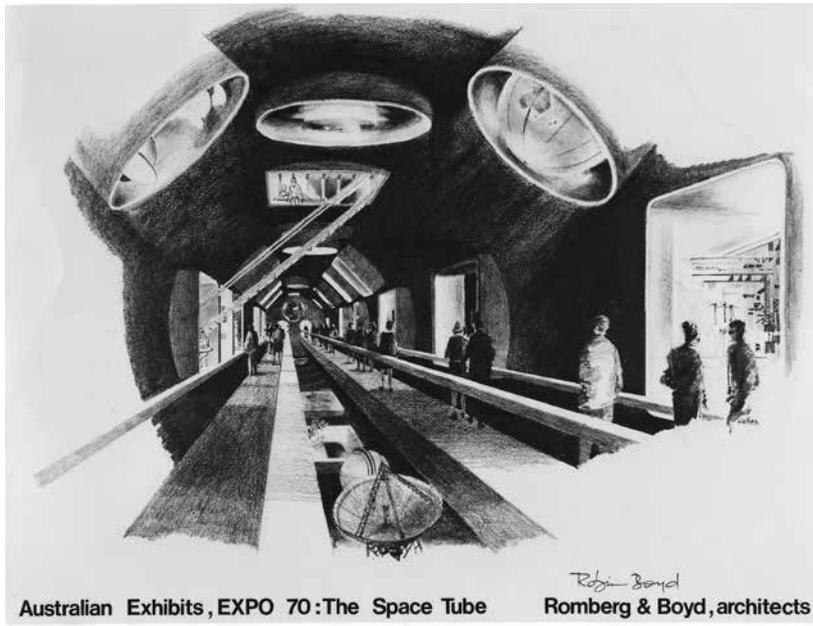
SPACE TUBE, AUSTRALIAN PAVILION



Australian Pavilion, Expo 70  
(Expo 70 files, GRB Archive, SLV)



Australian Exhibits, EXPO 70: The Space Tube

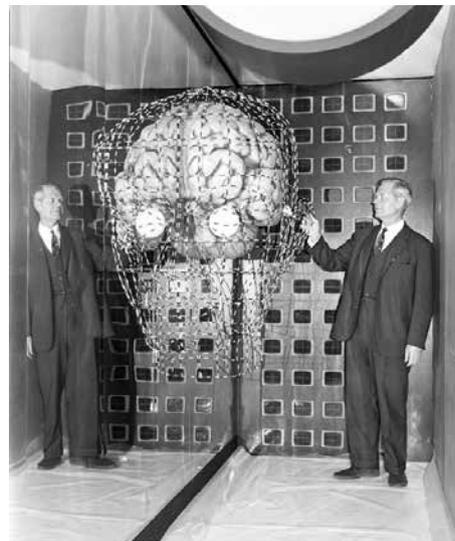
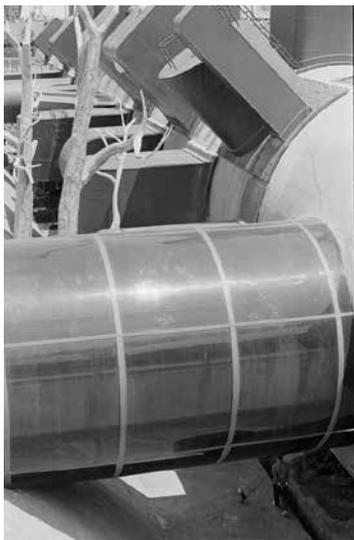


Australian Exhibits, EXPO 70: The Space Tube

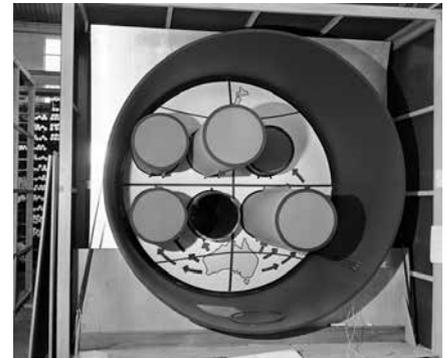
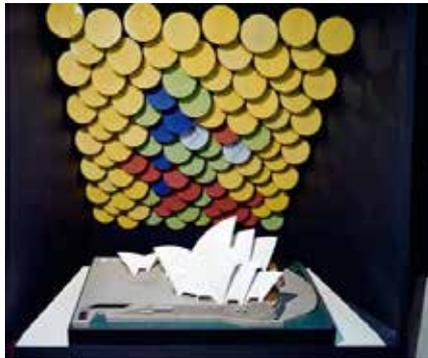
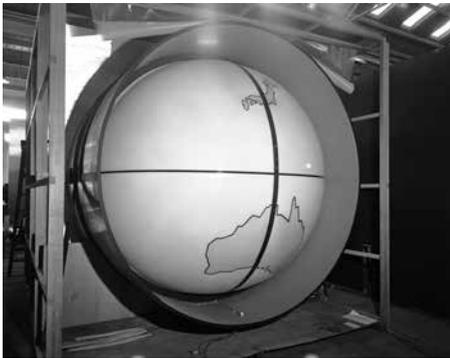
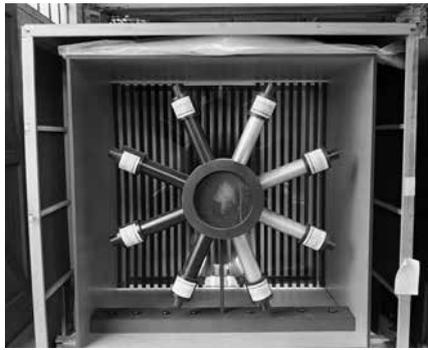
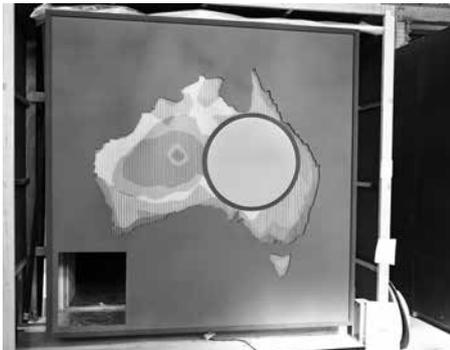
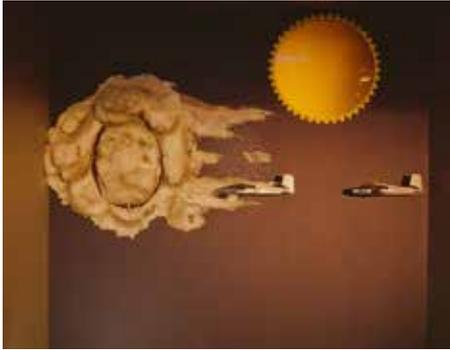
Robin Boyd  
Romberg & Boyd, architects

Space Tube, Australian Pavilion,  
Expo 70 (photograph of  
drawing: Cross-Section Archive,  
University of Melbourne)

## SPACE TUBE, AUSTRALIAN PAVILION



Space Tube and exhibit boxes, Australian Pavilion, Expo 70 (photographs: National Archives of Australia)



Space Tube and exhibit boxes, Australian Pavilion, Expo 70 (photographs: National Archives of Australia)

**AUSTRALIAN WORLD EXPOSITION PROJECT (1976)**  
ALBERT PARK, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA  
1965  
ROBIN BOYD (ROMBERG AND BOYD)

Katerina Ford  
+  
Rebecca Toh



In 1965, Robin Boyd produced a schematic plan sketch for the 1976 World Exposition in Melbourne. Whilst the project was never built, research undertaken has revealed Boyd's interests in promoting quality design in an ideal suburb and encouraging themes of 'living together' and 'unity'. Archival material, including correspondence, feasibility studies and drawings have been collected and presented into a project legacy book. The art piece produced for the exhibition at Walsh Street is an abstract interpretation of Boyd's schematic plan sketch.

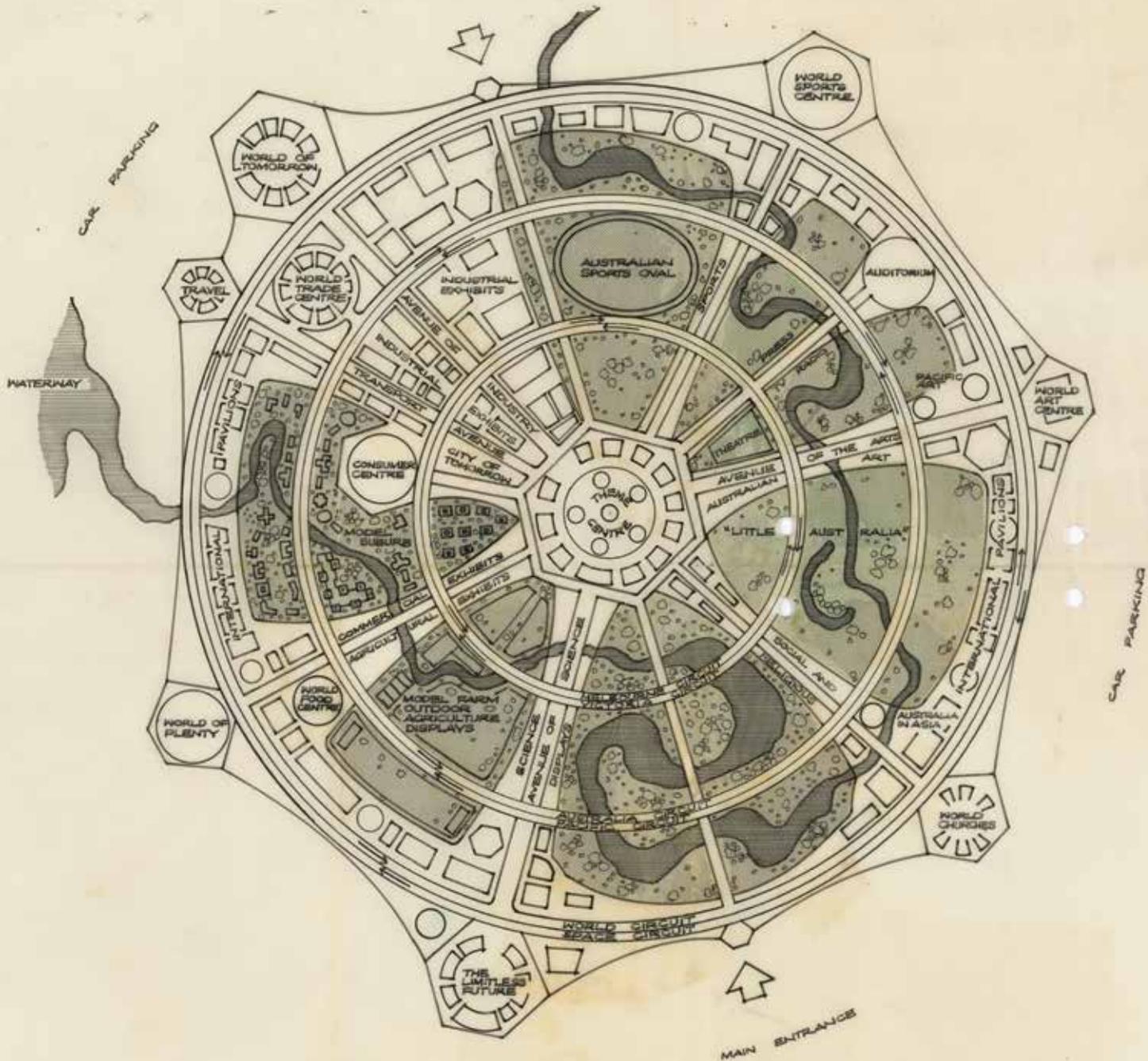
A World Exposition located in Australia would have focussed international attention on Australia's achievements at a time when the nation was growing in international significance. It would have marked the beginning of a new period of cultural self-reliance. Boyd's drawing of a 250-acre (101 hectares) urban plan under a giant dome embodied one of the Expo sub-themes, 'Living Together'. He argued that Melbourne needed something bold and unprecedented to set it apart from all previous expositions, and envisioned an enormous translucent space dome that enclosed the entire precinct. This macrostructure may have been influenced by Buckminster Fuller's Geodesic Dome which had just been exhibited at the 1967 Montreal World Exposition. Boyd's dome introduced ideas around providing optimal environmental conditions and uniting society in an urban context. This idea of unity was also a recurrent theme in his built work.

Boyd's utopian ideal suburb consisted of concentric circles around a central, municipal building. It appears to have been influenced partly by the Griffins' 1912 Canberra masterplan. Throughout his career, Boyd made reference to Canberra and greatly admired it. However, he observed that its image as a practical, well-planned city had been disrupted by the forbidding and pretentious houses in its suburbs. In response, his proposal for an ideal suburb for the Melbourne World Exposition sought to promote a greater diversity of housing styles, which would seek to break down the barriers that existed amongst social classes.

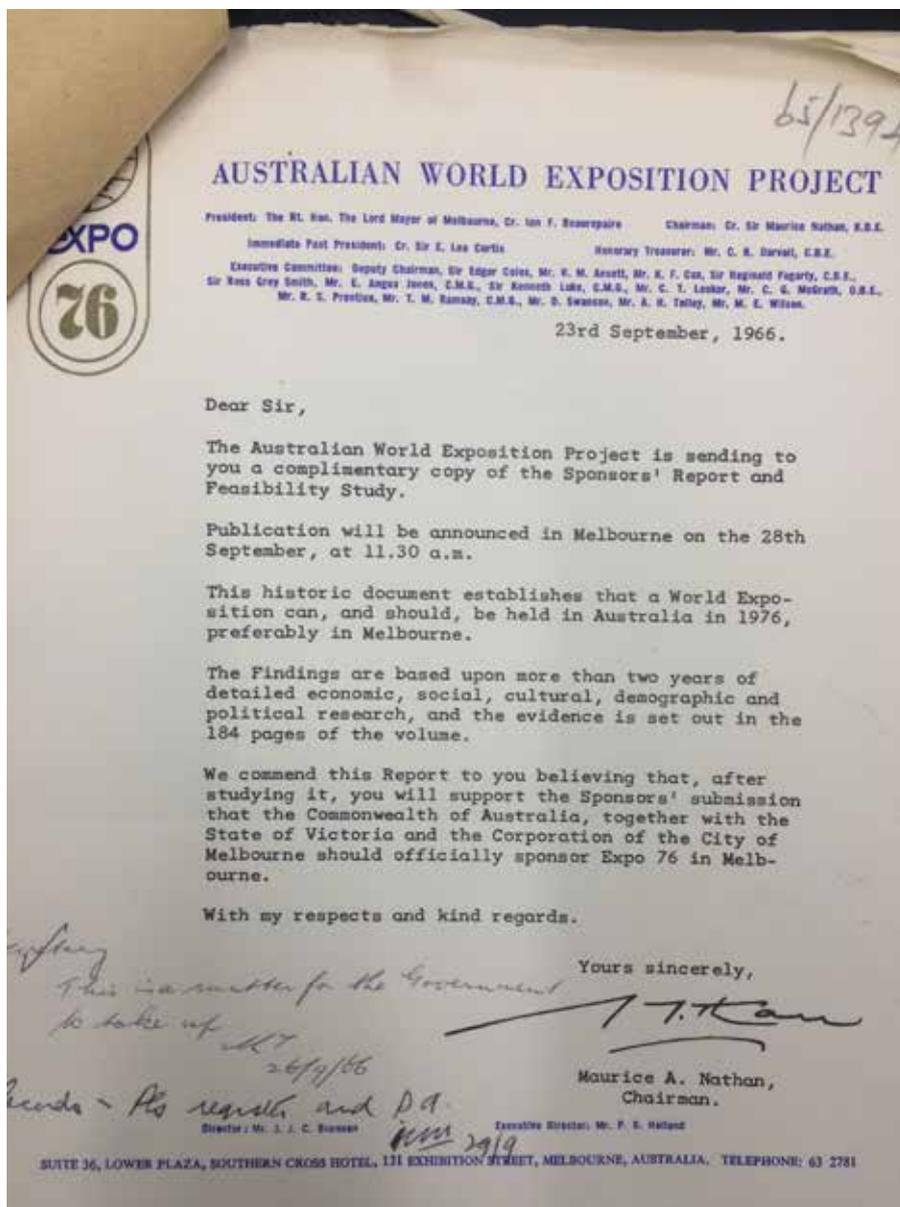
A well-known critic of Australia's built environment (as demonstrated in his criticisms of Australian suburbia in *The Australian Ugliness* (1960)), Boyd was an advocate for better design. Upon completion of the exposition, Boyd's designs, including the pavilions and his model suburb of 50 ideal houses were proposed to be made permanent. His hopes were that this ideal suburb would have been the beginning of a new movement to provide better quality design accessible to all Australians.

Canberra plan (source:  
National Library of  
Australia)

Australian World  
Exposition (Australian  
World Exposition files,  
GRB Archive, SLV)



AUSTRALIAN WORLD EXPOSITION PROJECT : SCHEMATIC GROUND PLAN



Letter, Australian World Exposition (Australian World Exposition files, GRB Archive, SLV)



Sir Maurice Nathan pulls a beer (source: National Archives of Australia)

## CARNICH FLATS

EAST MELBOURNE, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA

1969-71

ROBIN BOYD (ROMBERG & BOYD)

Rita Liao

The Carnich Flats is an unbuilt project designed by Robin Boyd and is representative of his late career ideas and thinking. Overlooking the Fitzroy Gardens on Clarendon Street, East Melbourne, a comparison can be drawn between it and Boyd's earlier Domain Park Flats (1960-2) overlooking the Royal Botanic Gardens in South Yarra. These two projects highlight Boyd's contribution in bringing international ideas in high-rise residential living to the Australian context through his interest and writings on exhibitions, and then translating them into practice.

Of his visit to the Interbau - the West Berlin housing expo of 1957 - featuring works by Alvar Aalto, Oscar Niemeyer and Max Taut among others, Boyd writes in detail on three projects among the 36 apartment blocks presented, namely those of Pierre Vago of Paris, Fritz Jaenecke and Sten Samuelson of Malmö, and Walter Gropius.<sup>1</sup>

Two years later Boyd produced Domain Park, where strong parallels can be drawn between the planning and massing of this project and those of the Interbau which Boyd considered as noteworthy. Namely, all share a long, thin plan with every two apartments sharing a service core, and a distinct front and back, the front being characterised by balconies which overlook the adjacent landscape. Similar to Gropius and Jaenecke & Samuelson, the service cores are expressed externally and separated from the main building mass.

If Domain Park is of distinct European pedigree, the project for Carnich is something else entirely – a result of Boyd's growing interest in Japanese architecture and the work of the Metabolists. In 1961 Boyd visited Tokyo as part of research for his monograph on Kenzo Tange that was published in 1962. This book was followed by *New Directions in Japanese Architecture* (1968), which profiled a number of notable Japanese architects. Among these are featured works by Tange and Yoshinobu Ashihara, whose Japanese Pavilion at Expo 67 Boyd had encountered on his visit to Montreal.

The design of the Carnich flats drew upon the strategies employed in Tange and Ashihara's projects through two main aspects: first, what Boyd called the "trabeation theme", an expression of horizontal and vertical elements at a colossal scale; and second, the elevation of program above the ground plane, leaving a continuous open space below.<sup>2</sup> A clear reading of program in the form is similarly of Metabolist influence.

In writing of 'The Space Psychosis' in Japan, Boyd wrote of the rise of the Metabolist movement being borne out of the problem of running out of space for living, megastructures as a response to the need for greater densification within or rather above the existing urban fabric.<sup>3</sup> In an Australian context, there was no such pressure at the time for densification, although Boyd did experiment with this in speculative drawings for Melbourne in the year 2000 for Expo Electric 69.

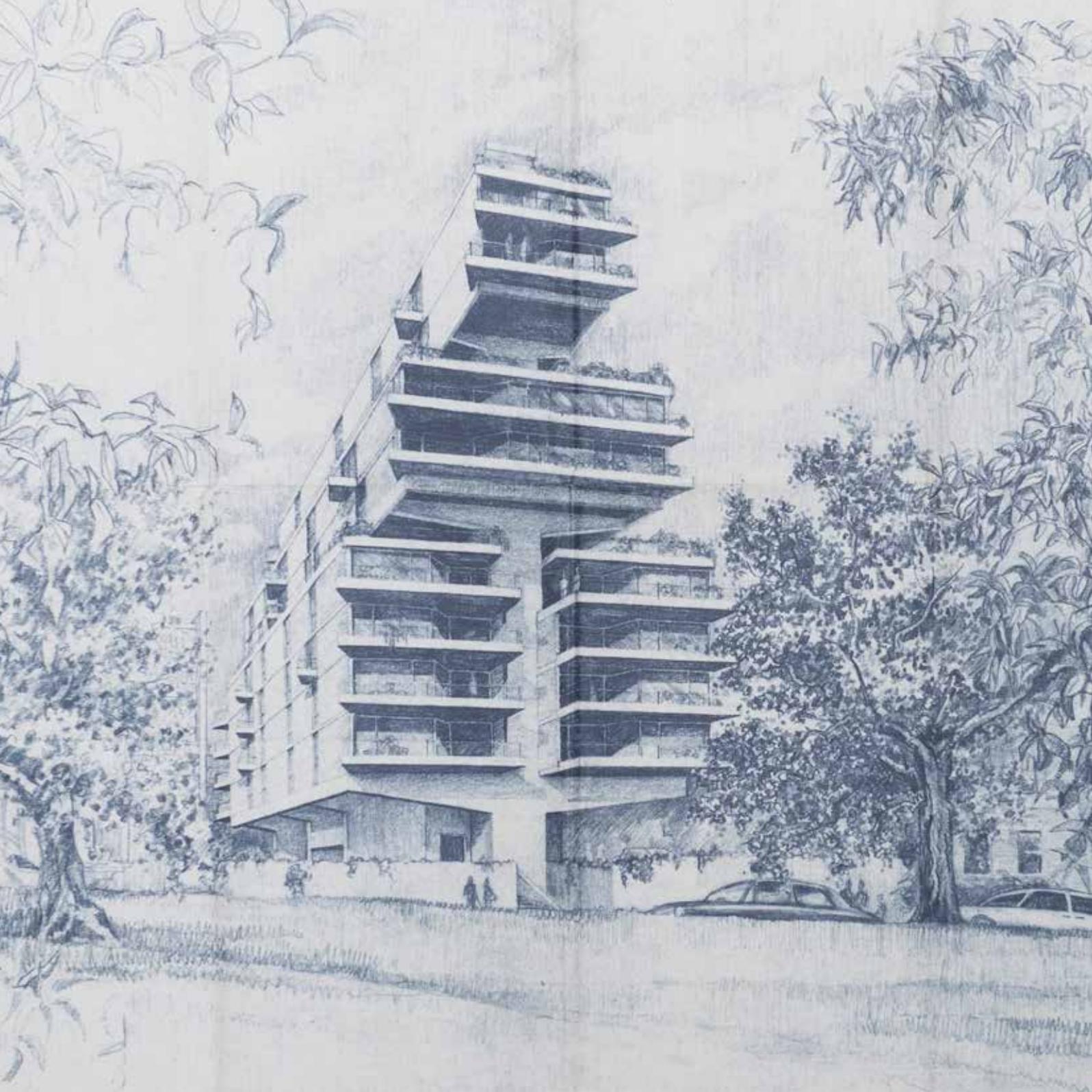
Rather, these two high rise projects can be viewed together as representing Boyd's evolving ideas on an ideal housing typology. The typical single detached suburban house is aggregated into multi-residential blocks and the typical backyard is translated into a shared outlook extending into public open space – a translation of the Australian dream through the ideas of European and Japanese modernism.

1 Robin Boyd, "Interbau: A Quick Look at the International Building Exhibit in Berlin", *Architectural Record*, 122:4 (October 1957), 205-210.

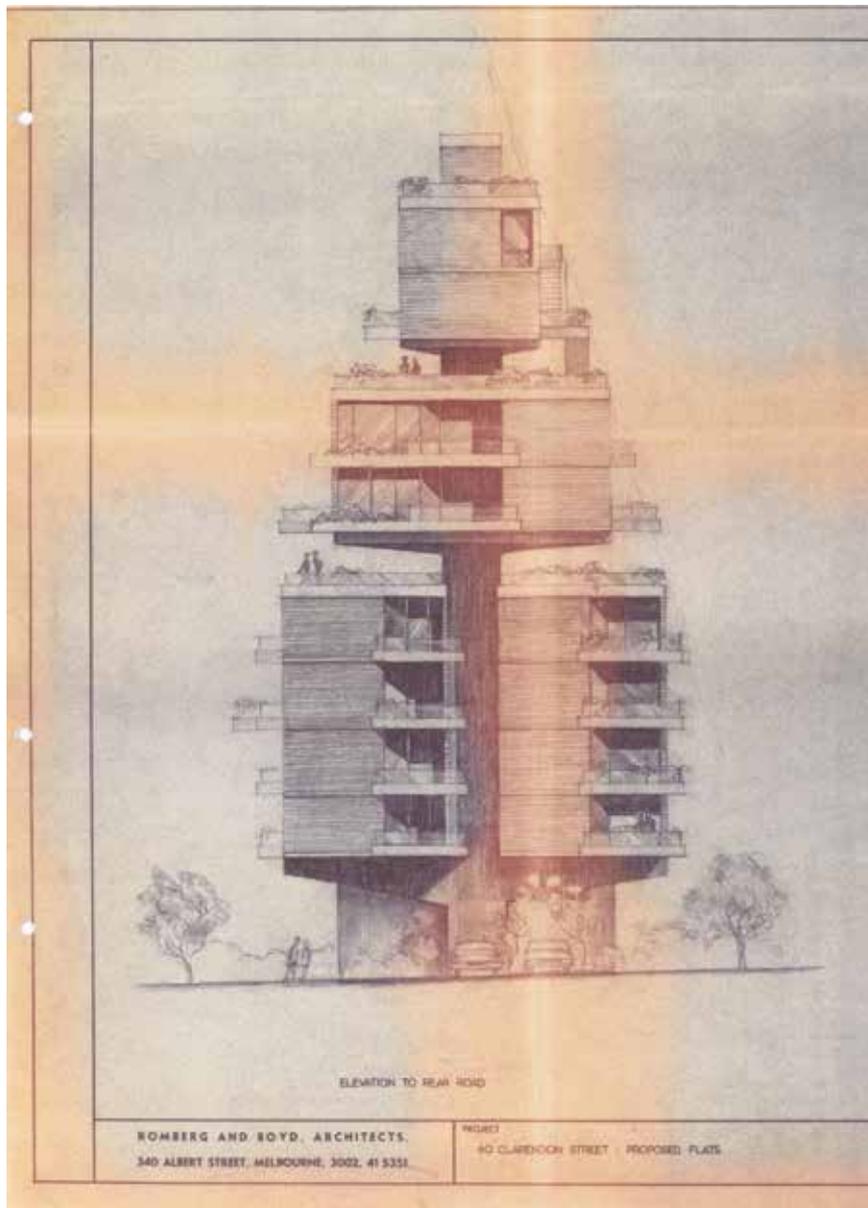
2 Robin Boyd, *New Directions in Japanese Architecture*, New York: Braziller, 1968, 110

3 Boyd, *New Directions in Japanese Architecture*, 12-25

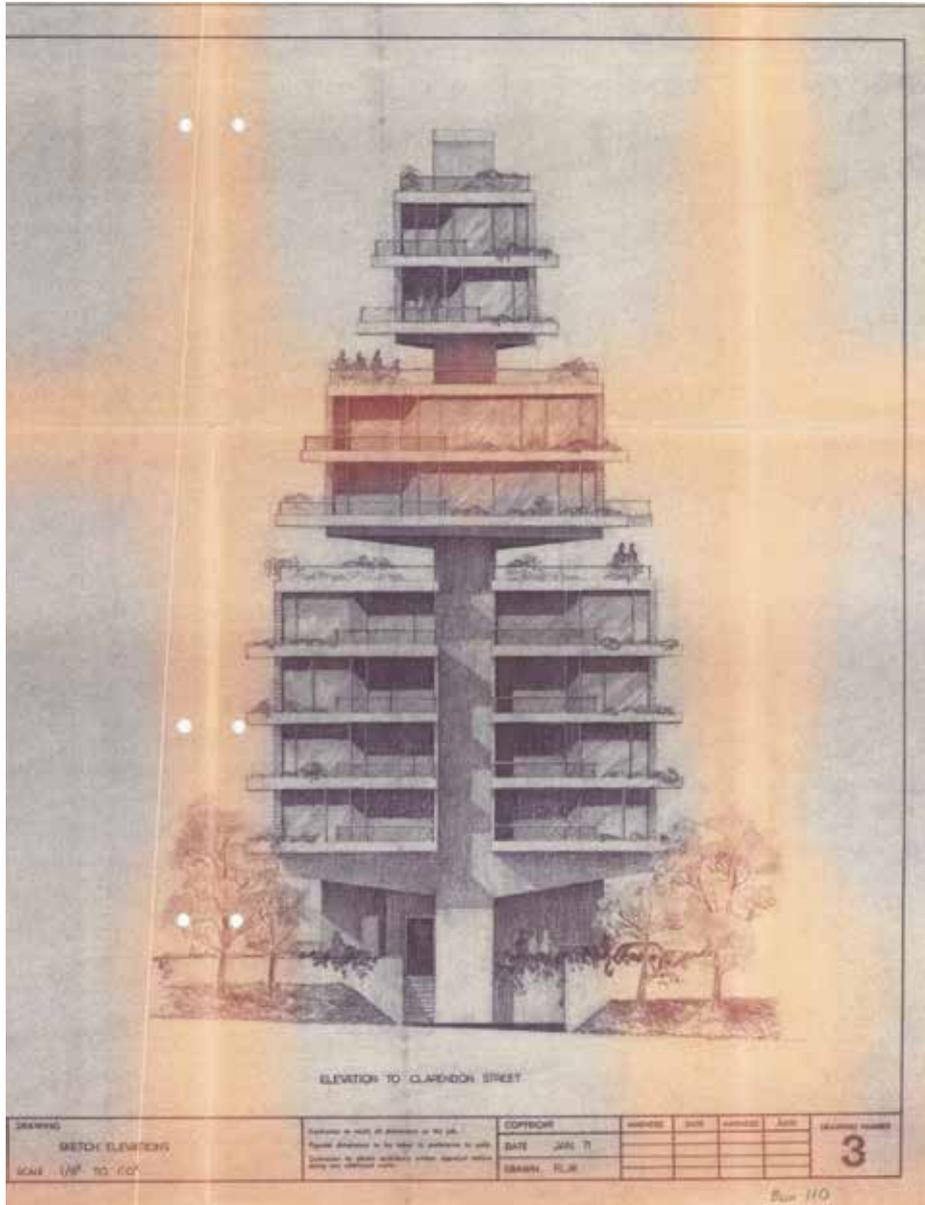
Carnich flats, unbuilt scheme  
(source: Romberg and Boyd  
Collection, RMIT Design Archives)



CARNICH FLATS



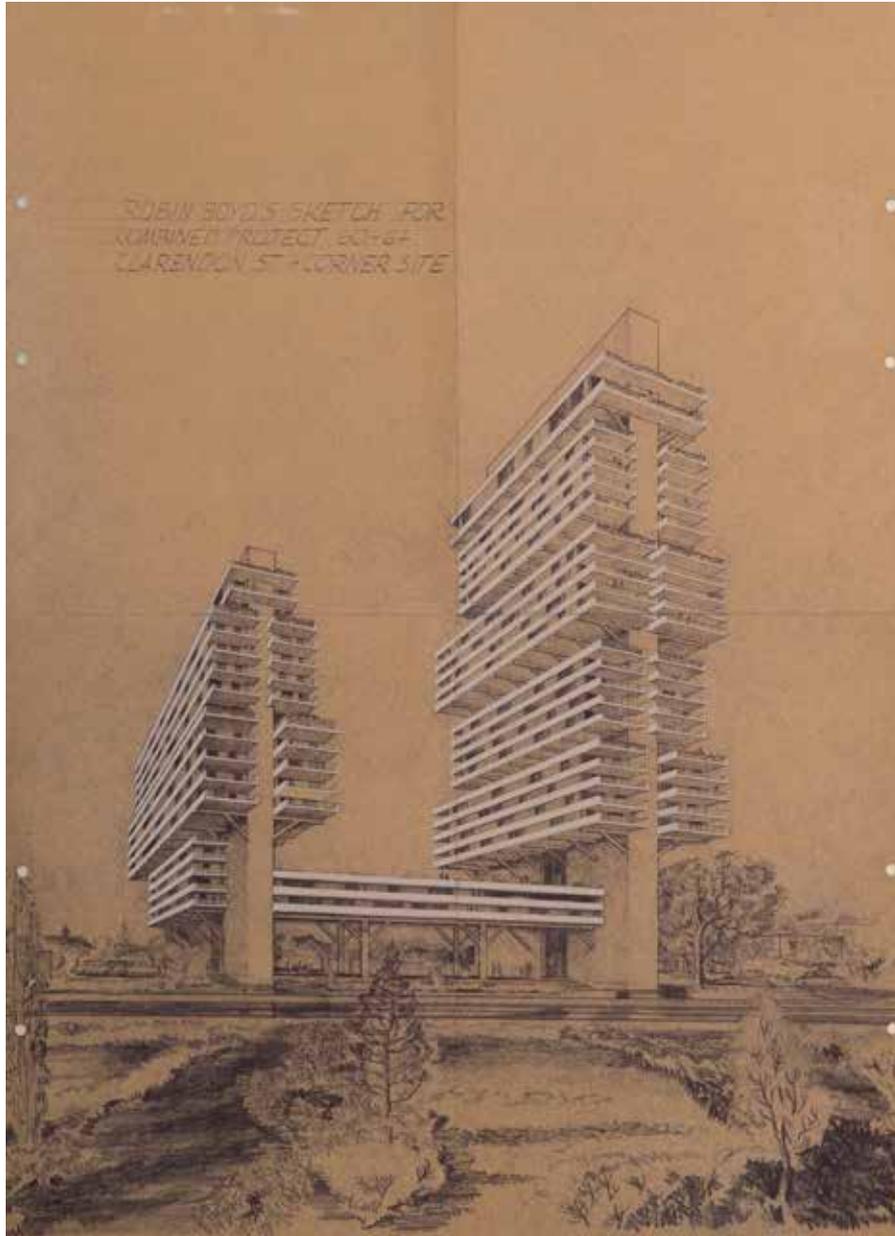
Carnich flats, unbuilt scheme (source: source: GRB Archive, SLV)



CARNICH FLATS



Domain Park flats (photograph: Mark Strizic, courtesy Philip Goad)



Carnich flats, unbuilt scheme (source: Romberg and Boyd Collection, RMIT Design Archives)



Natural History Centre,  
Tower Hill (photographs:  
Mark Strizic, SLV)

DISPLAY

In Robin Boyd, one finds an architect who believed that “every building [should be] a vital expression of life and society”.<sup>1</sup> In his works designed as vessels for display, one finds this ethos imbued; the works in this catalogue double as built-expressions of the hopes for modern civic life in Australia.

The architecture here represents an Australia deciding to begin the remediation of its landscape damaged since colonial invasion (Tower Hill Natural History Centre), an Australia finding its own urban character in the national capital (Churchill House), an Australia discovering the excitement induced by dreaming-up bold franchises (Neptune’s Fishbowl), an Australia of broadening cultural tastes (Morris Wine Tasting Room) and, an Australia of outward-looking artistic celebration (Haddon Scholarship entry for an art gallery in Mildura).

For Boyd, in his design of structures built to exhibit objects, ideas and even food and wine, the notion of ‘display’ extends into the building’s very fabric. In varying ways, these projects are complete “[one-pieces]”;<sup>2</sup> they are displayed objects as much as objects designed to display. Often they are vitrines, allowing both for looking out from the interior space and looking from the exterior, towards the architectural-object itself in space. Boyd plays with this duality, inviting the onlooker to become the inhabitant by displaying and providing glimpses of that which is inside the building. Some of the highlights of modernist Australian culture are encased within these glass facades. In Australia, we drink wine, we view art, we eat fish and chips and we live in well-designed homes. And once we have been drawn inside, Boyd’s work serves the visitor so that they may now focus on that which is being displayed.

Boyd believed that good design did not arrive through chasing complexity but arose instead through the pursuit for “more [comfort], less [cost and] more satisfying shelter”.<sup>3</sup> Architecture to Boyd was an art form and the “mother of all design”.<sup>4</sup> It departed from art when the designer’s emphasis leaned towards functionality. In the Boyer Lectures delivered in 1967, Boyd describes architecture as having a different starting point to art: the motivation must be functionality.<sup>5</sup> Good buildings should still be inherently beautiful and strong however, architecture exists to serve people. Arguably though, for both art and architecture, the end goal remains the same: inciting sensation.

Boyd saw architecture as having this capacity - able to “help by heightening the experience through the medium of space enclosure, subjecting the visitor to some unfamiliar sensation of space”.<sup>6</sup> The Fishbowl, developed and documented largely by Norman Day, is an unfulfilled yet arguable exemplar of Boyd’s vision of architecture to evoke feeling. Although never realised, the Fishbowl was intended to be an icon along Australia’s East Coast, its geodesic dome an easily recognisable symbol, attracting Australians to its produce.

The planned kiosks would not conform to the “dull orderliness”<sup>7</sup> of Australia’s early 1970s suburbia. In a letter to Martin Elks found in the Boyd manuscripts, it states “I hope you agree that [the Fishbowl] has only one idea, simply carried through”. A single idea—an ocean-blue dome—was enough for Boyd to imagine something recognisable and able trigger nostalgia for a summery take-away food.

Robin Boyd had an incredible ability to seemingly effortlessly find “effete elegance” in “brutal honesty”.<sup>8</sup> The Tower Hill Natural History Centre in Warrnambool conceals nothing, displaying even its junctions. It appears, like a mushroom in its surroundings. It is astutely aware that in its context, it is an “artificial interloper”<sup>9</sup> yet, it is as far from folly as possible. What other form would as perfectly fit its brief? Its simplicity means it is easily read and digested and therefore shifts focus quickly to the landscape which enfolds it. The material palette links and ties the building to its landscape, the centre’s lyrebird shaped beams rolling to form another horizon. It exhibits precisely Boyd’s own description of the requirement of architecture: “the object of a design, in architecture as in anything else, is to say or do the essential thing as simply and directly and purely as possible.”<sup>10</sup> In fact, it is not only the Natural History Centre at Tower Hill that does this. All his works surrounding display support and encourage that which is exhibited to speak and rise to the foreground after the inhabitant has been greeted and introduced to the works by the architecture.

It is telling that Boyd concludes his book *The Walls Around Us*, with his admiration for the public’s decision to construct the Sydney Opera House and the National Gallery of Victoria. He stood and rallied for an Australian culture that would be identifiable largely through its iconic, simple and thoughtful architecture. If one perceives Boyd’s architecture as display, then one must also ask what it is being displayed. Could it be that Boyd’s architecture is a display of modernist Australian culture? What do the walls around Boyd’s ideas speak of? Whatever it is, they articulate Boyd’s ability and readiness to demonstrate good Australian design.

1 Robin Boyd, *The New Architecture*, Croydon, Vic. : Longmans, 1963, 5.

2 Robin Boyd and Mark Strizic, *Living in Australia*, Sydney: Pergamon, 1970.

3 Robin Boyd, *The Walls Around Us: The Story of Australian Architecture*, Melbourne: Cheshire, 1962, 82.

4 Robin Boyd, *Artificial Australia: Boyer Lectures*. Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1967, 11.

5 Boyd, *Artificial Australia*, 18.

6 Boyd, *Living in Australia*, 76.

7 Boyd, *The New Architecture*, 7.

8 Boyd, *The New Architecture*, 6.

9 Boyd, *Living in Australia*, 143.

10 Boyd, *Living in Australia*, 111.

## HADDON SCHOLARSHIP ENTRY FOR AN ART GALLERY IN MILDURA

MILDURA, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA

1948

ROBIN BOYD

Michael Thorpe

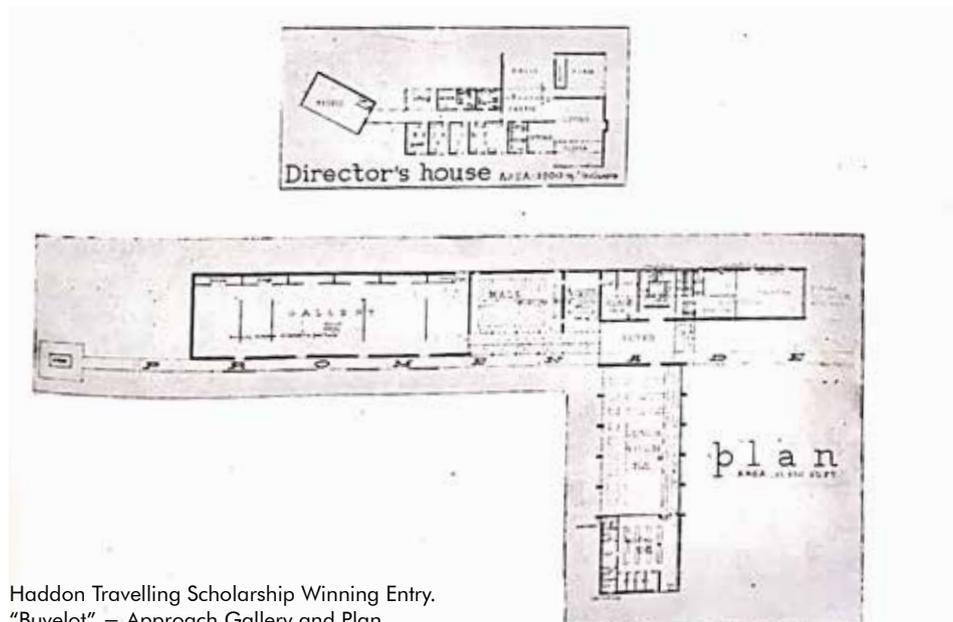
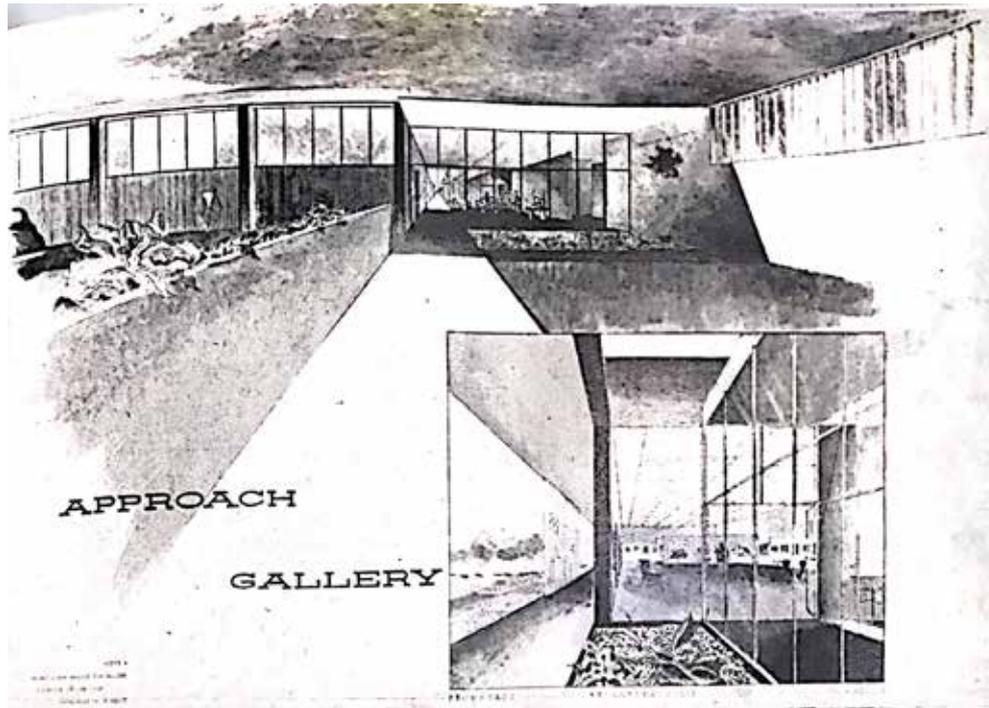
In 1948 Robin Boyd submitted a design proposal for an art gallery, located in the north-west Victorian regional town of Mildura. This competition, initiated in 1934, was the result of the well-known British-born architect Robert Haddon and his wife Ada Haddon. Haddon, relocating from London to Melbourne in 1889, believed travel and drawing were keys to success in architecture. After Haddon's death in 1929, the provisions for a travelling scholarship were formalised into the Robert and Ada Haddon architectural bequest, the most financially substantial award of its time. Boyd was awarded a 'joint first place' for the competition in 1948 and the design was published in October of that year in the *RVIA Bulletin* and again in the national journal, *Architecture*, in January 1949. Boyd was able to use the travelling scholarship to go on his first overseas trip, laying the foundation for what was to become a distinctly international outlook for his thinking on Australian architecture.

Boyd's 1948 design for the art gallery in Mildura was and has been mostly forgotten. Despite some translation of architectural features and spatial gestures that he went on to incorporate into his subsequent built work, the proposal's lifespan seemed to have reached a close. This exhibition is a perfect forum to begin to understand and interrogate the little information that was made available as part of the competition. To start to piece the puzzle together, Boyd's two rendered sketches were located within his plan, and with support of the scholarship jury commentary, one could start to appreciate Boyd's aesthetic ambition. This information was then translated into a three-dimensional digital model where interpretations were made to see how Boyd's design approach and theory were embedded in the architecture.

Boyd's design was based around a slender external promenade that led to a single sculpture beyond the end of a long, linear gallery wing. The functional program of this main linear block comprised an entry foyer framing a main hall, library and administration facilities. This block was offset by another perpendicular-placed block, which contained a dining area immediately to the left of the entry. A separate gallery director's house was included in the scheme.

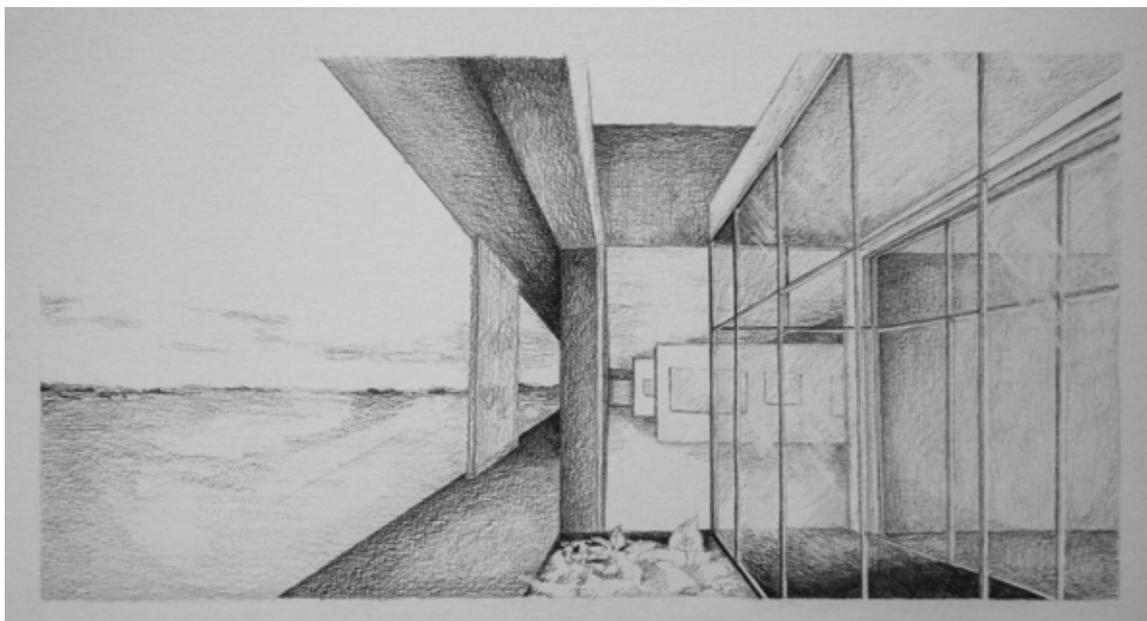
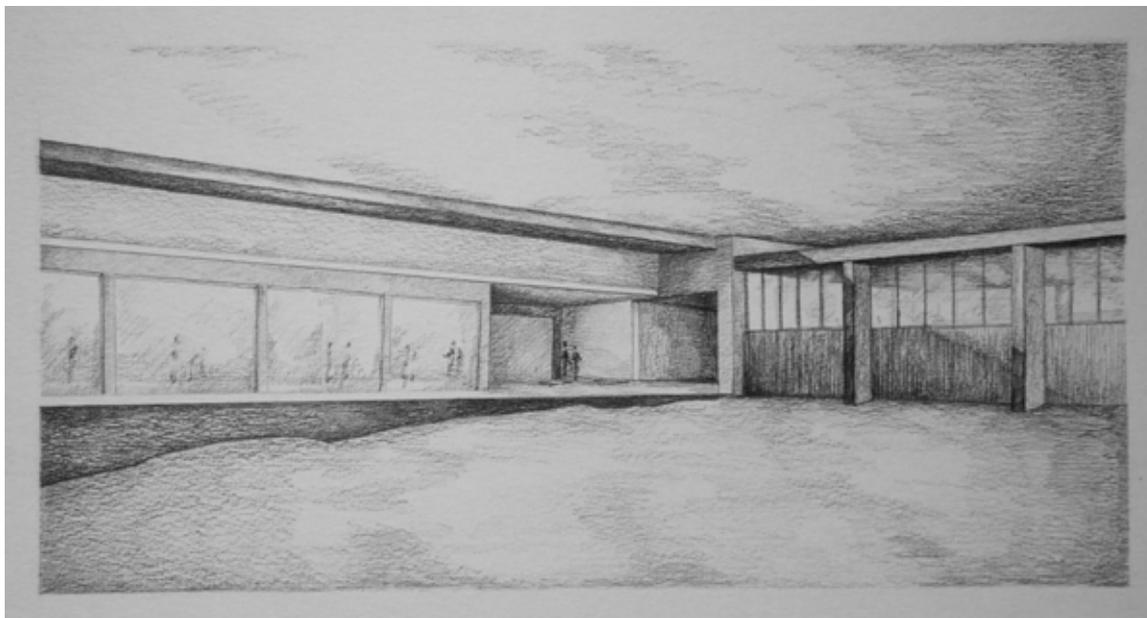
Through the process of realising Boyd's proposal, the 'freeness' of hand rendering had to be translated to the hyper accuracy of computer modelling. It was a way of understanding how Boyd would have designed this project. The next step was represented by a full-circle return to a valuable skill that both Robert Haddon and Robin Boyd held dear, hand rendering. Four new hand-drawn perspective renders and a physical model were produced. They allow new insight into this forgotten project, which stands at the inception of Boyd's engagement with the global dialogue of architecture.

Art Gallery for Mildura (source:  
*Architecture*, January 1949)

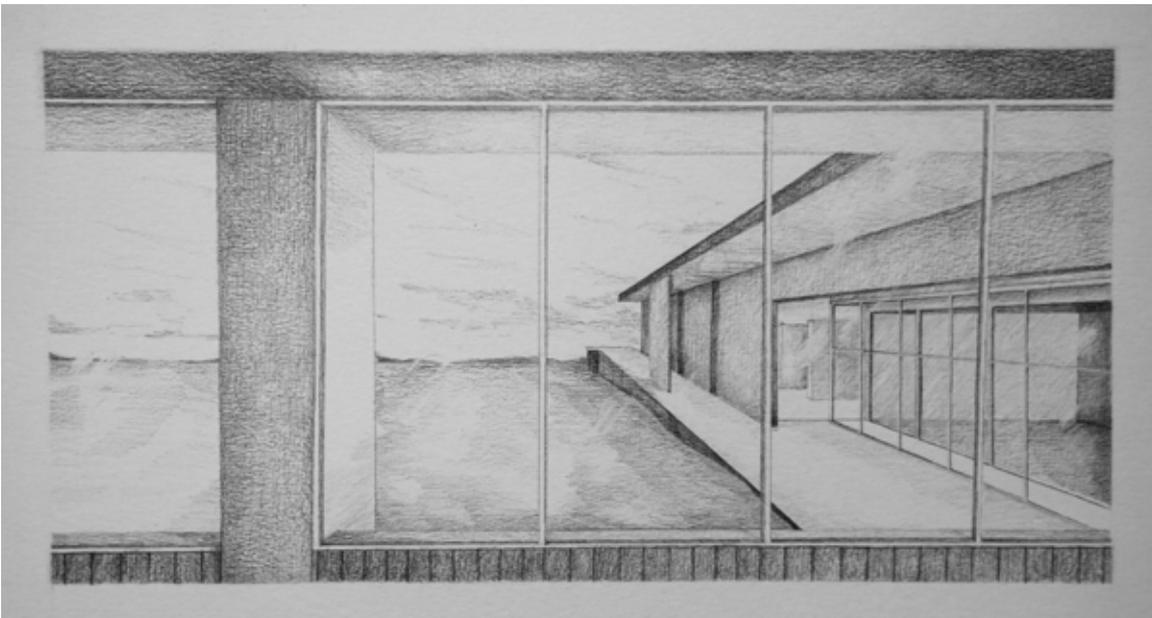
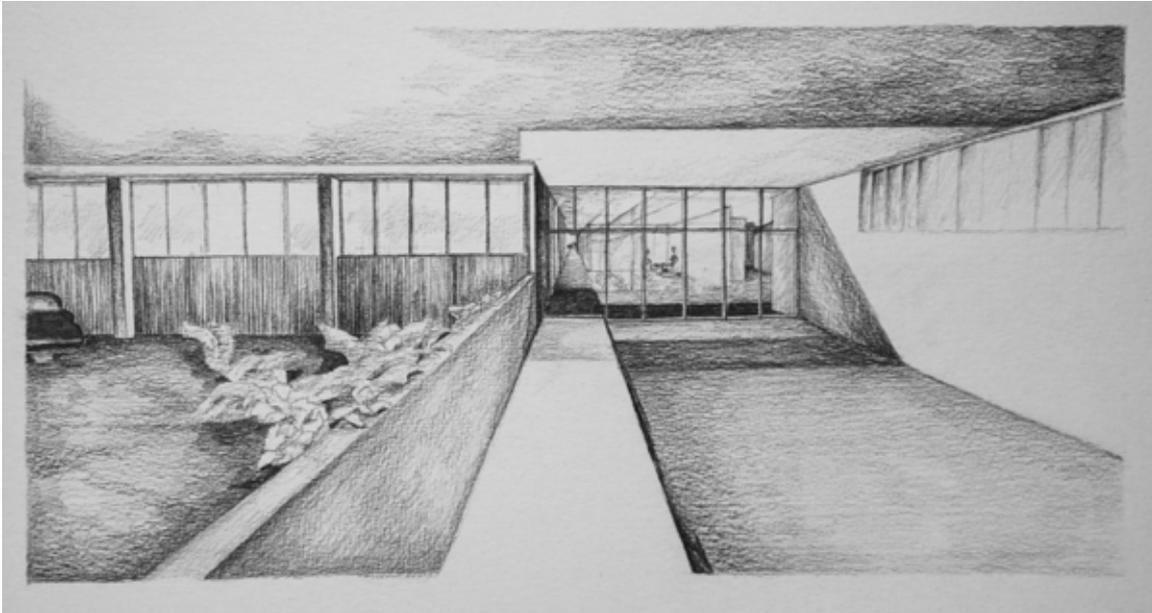


Haddon Travelling Scholarship Winning Entry.  
"Buvelot" – Approach Gallery and Plan.

HADDON SCHOLARSHIP ENTRY FOR AN ART GALLERY IN MILDURA



Art Gallery for Mildura  
(drawings: Michael  
Thorpe)



## NATURAL HISTORY CENTRE

TOWER HILL, NEAR WARRNAMBOOL, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA  
1962-70  
ROBIN BOYD (ROMBERG AND BOYD)

Victoria King  
+  
Olivia Potter

Robin Boyd's Tower Hill Natural History Centre sits mushroom-like<sup>1</sup> in its volcanic surrounds. There it appears, an "artificial interloper" (Boyd, *Living in Australia*, 143), a guest in its colonially ruptured landscape. A lookout still marks the place where, in 1855, Eugene von Guerard once painted the now recovering scene. His now famous painting, 'View of Tower Hill, 1855', speaks of the landscape that once was and it was this former landscape that was sought to be restored by the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife when Boyd was engaged to design the centre.

A small museum for Boyd could be seen as an anomaly in his large body of residential work, but reading Boyd's own words, it emerges that this work speaks explicitly of his theory that "the object of a design, in architecture as in anything else, is to say or do the essential thing as simply and directly and purely as possible" (Boyd *Living in Australia*, 111). The centre was designed to display and exhibit the landscape and its recovery and Boyd's design choices reflect this aim. It is an extremely elegant yet simple form that reveals and makes accessible the site's beauty. It seeks to encourage people to appreciate the landscape at Tower Hill. Boyd's centre uses the topography in order to make an icon and civic gesture to reinvigorate the recovering landscape. The role of the site's architecture becomes almost a symbol.

From an outsider's perspective, looking towards the building, the landscape is amplified – the bitumen-roof profile mimics the curves of the surrounding dormant landscape, while, from an insider's perspective, the landscape is framed in a panoramic view. The central cylinder in the museum provides another focal point for displaying the landscape. Under a dome, a geometry so frequently used by Boyd in his exhibition displays, lies a topographic model, which, examining correspondence manuscripts, was once agonised over.

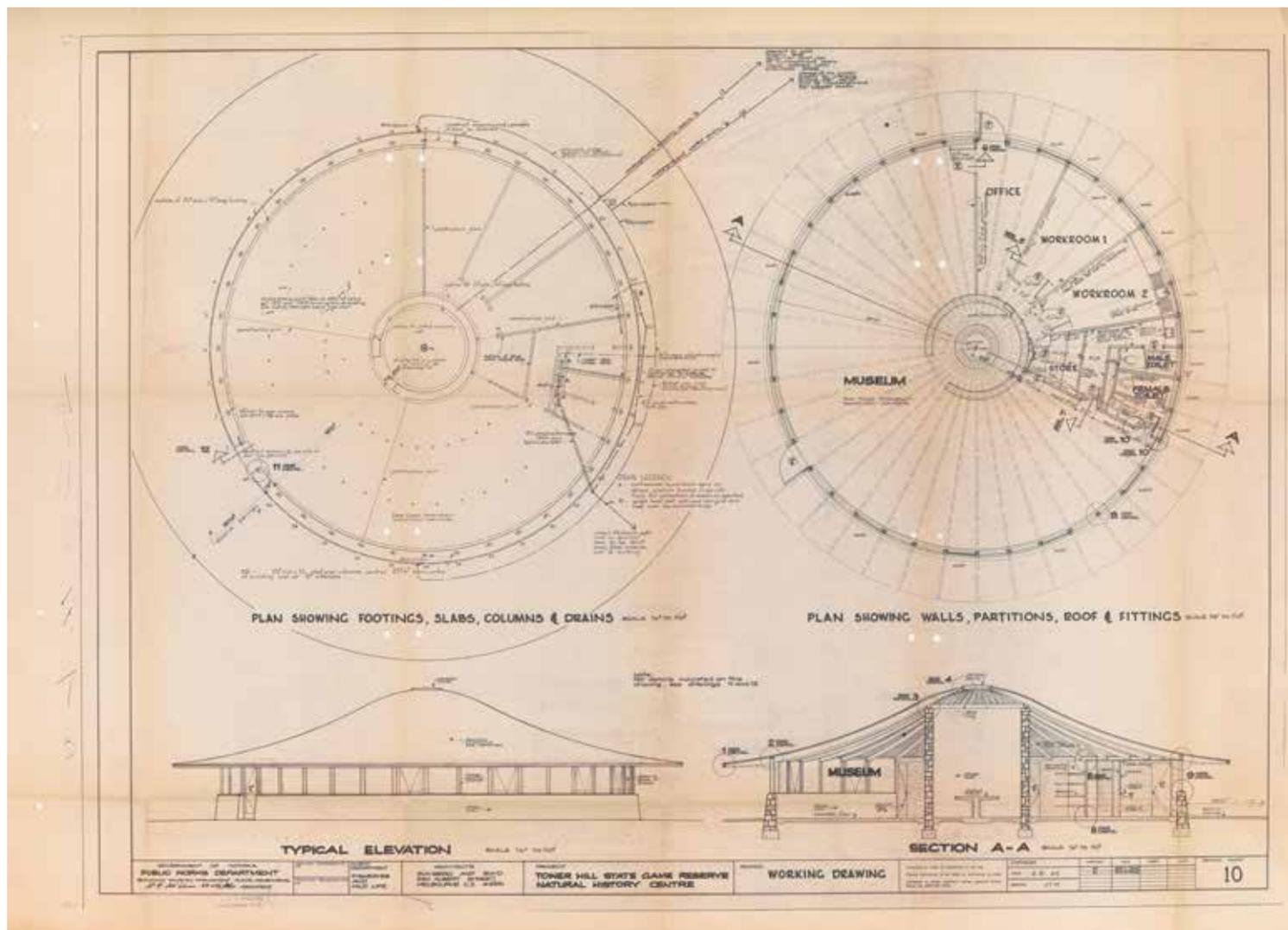
1 Robert Ingpen, graphic designer for the signage of the Natural History Centre, said to the authors on the phone, that he and others used to call it the "Mushroom."

Natural History Centre,  
Tower Hill (drawing: PROV;  
photograph: John Collins, SLV)

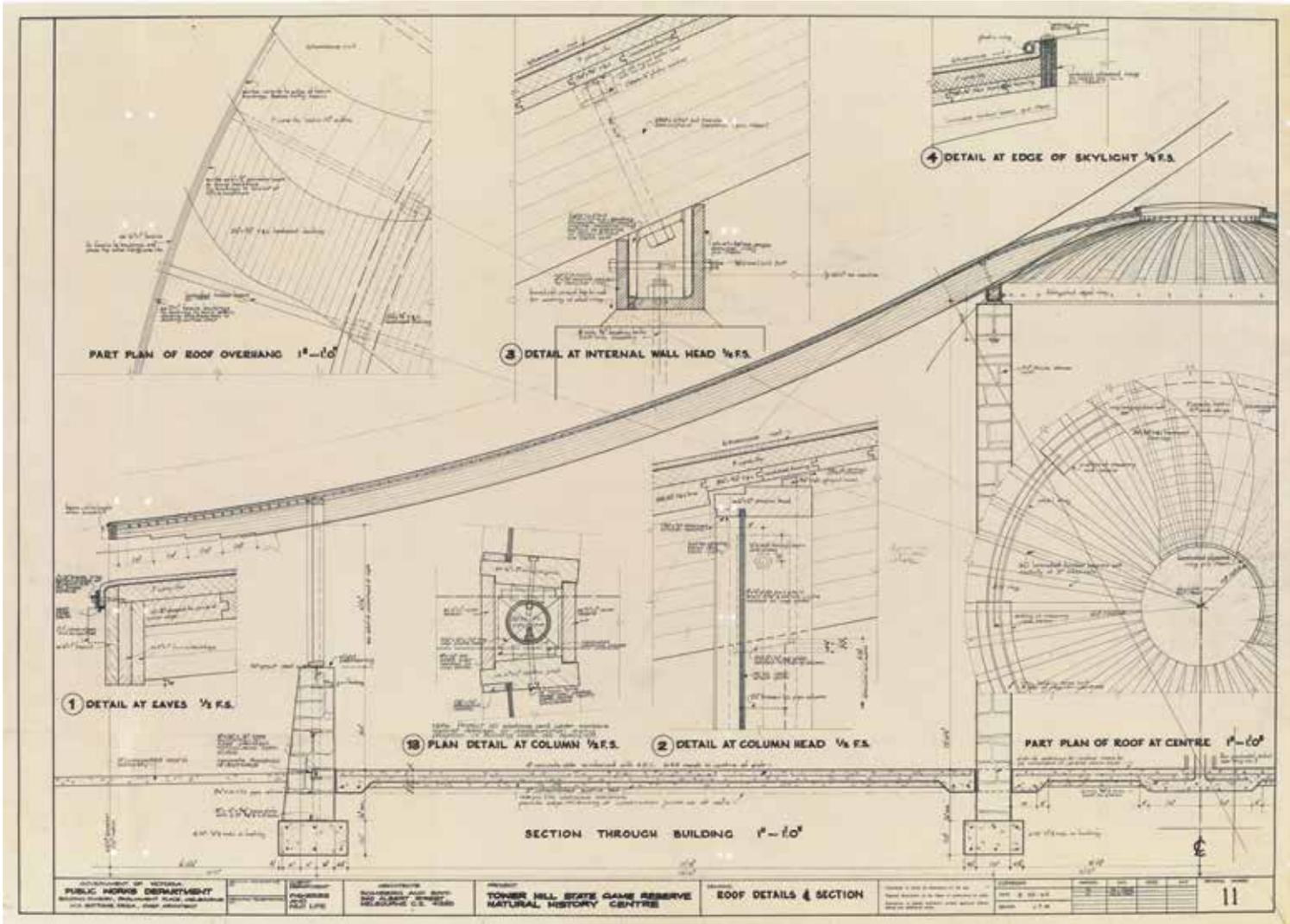
Architects sketch of Centre in situ



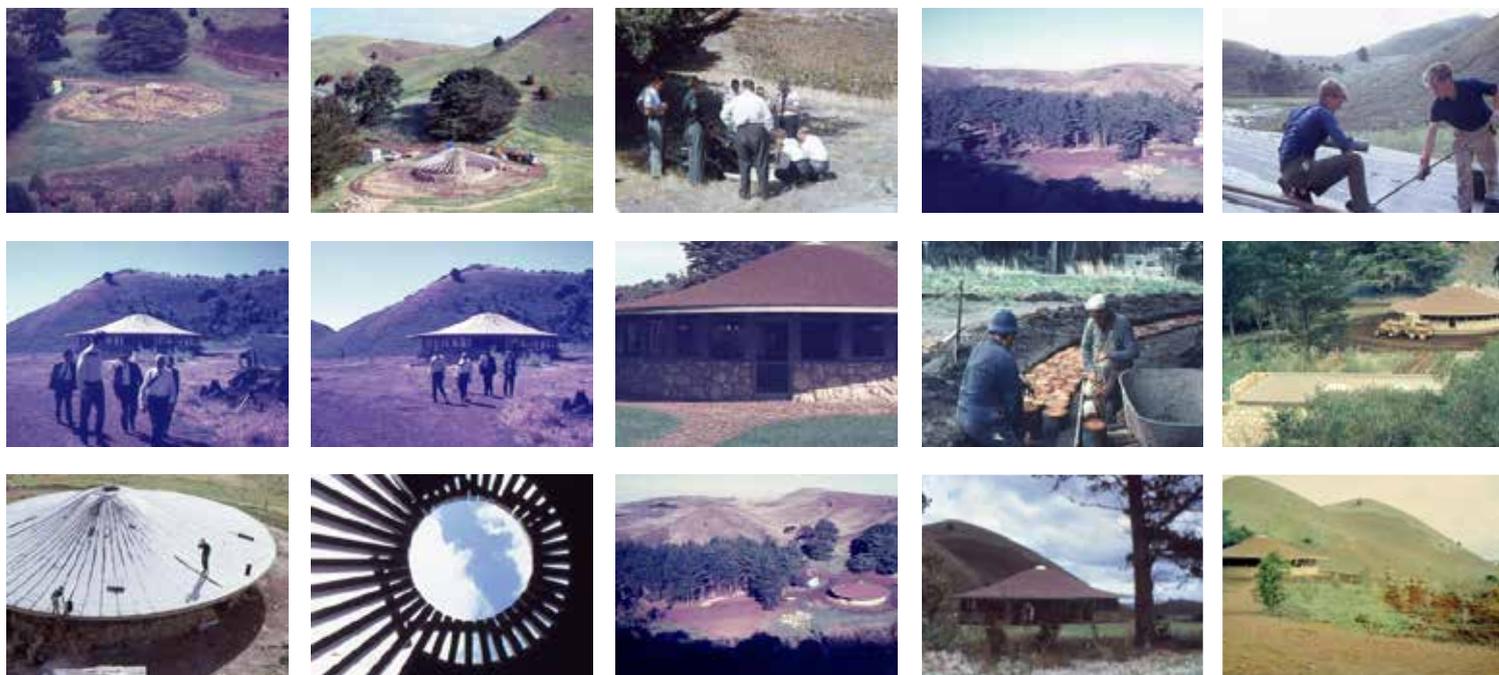
NATURAL HISTORY CENTRE



Natural History Centre, Tower Hill (Natural History Centre, Tower Hill files, GRB Archive, SLV)



## NATURAL HISTORY CENTRE



Construction, Natural History Centre, Tower Hill (photographs, courtesy Worn Gundidj Aboriginal Co-operative Ltd)



## NEPTUNE'S FISHBOWL

312-314 TOORAK RD, SOUTH YARRA, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA

1970

ROBIN BOYD (ROMBERG AND BOYD)

Hans Liu

Neptune's Fishbowl was a fish and chip shop located at 312-314 Toorak Rd, South Yarra, completed and opened with great pomp and circumstance in 1970. Taking the form of a circular kiosk or pavilion, it was immediately noticeable with its blue fibreglass dome. With a concrete slab and geodesic steel construction, the Fishbowl remains one of Robin Boyd's most curious architectural sojourns, and a frequently forgotten work.

Neptune's Fishbowl is one of Boyd's most controversial projects both in its conception as well as its architectural underpinnings within the context of his practice. Accused of being 'Featurist' while seemingly against it, the Fishbowl's influence on Australian architectural discourse perhaps falls short of the vision, the marvel and the struggle of its inception. It was the Fishbowl's ambition, arguably at the hands of Norman Day, who was closely involved in the project's design development and documentation, that makes this project significant among Robin Boyd's works. Aside from deviating heavily from Boyd's aesthetic lexicon, its unorthodox construction methodology pushed the roles of computational tools in architecture (decades before 'parametric architecture' became the zeitgeist), geodesic structures and non-standard construction techniques.

At the hands of clients Peter Shelmerdine and Richard Frank, a pair of restaurateur entrepreneurs, Neptune's Fishbowl was also socially significant in its ambition of scale. With the rise of McDonald's as a model, Neptune's Fishbowl was intended to adopt the same franchise model that would spread these distinctive kiosks throughout the east coast of Australia. The project remains a great 'what if' in the portfolio of Robin Boyd's work. Had professional differences between Shelmerdine and Frank not occurred, two-hundred Fishbowls would have drastically changed the way Boyd's architecture was and might still be read both among architects and more importantly, the greater Australian public.

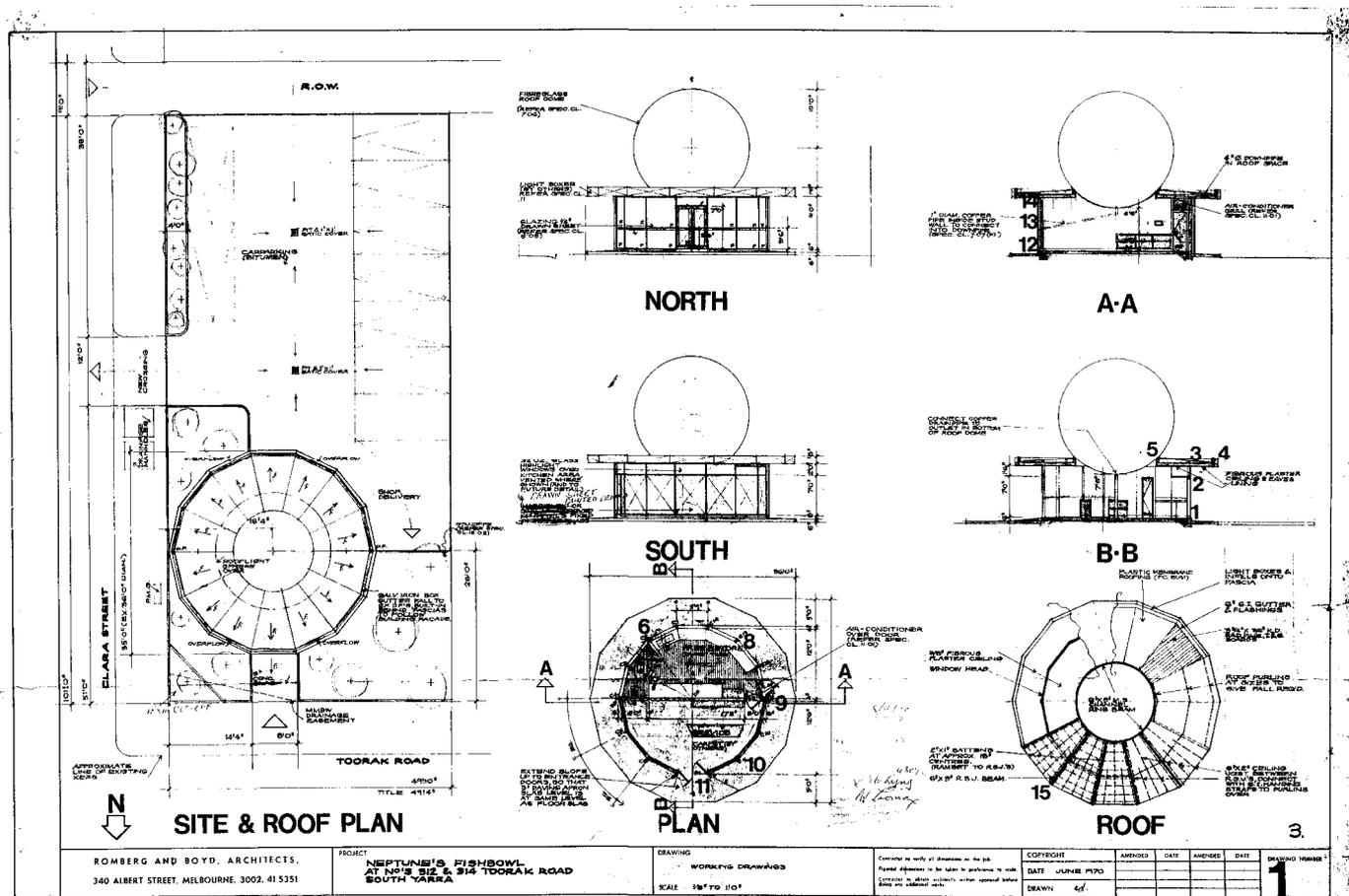
Neptune's Fishbowl  
(photograph: David Watson,  
courtesy Philip Goad)



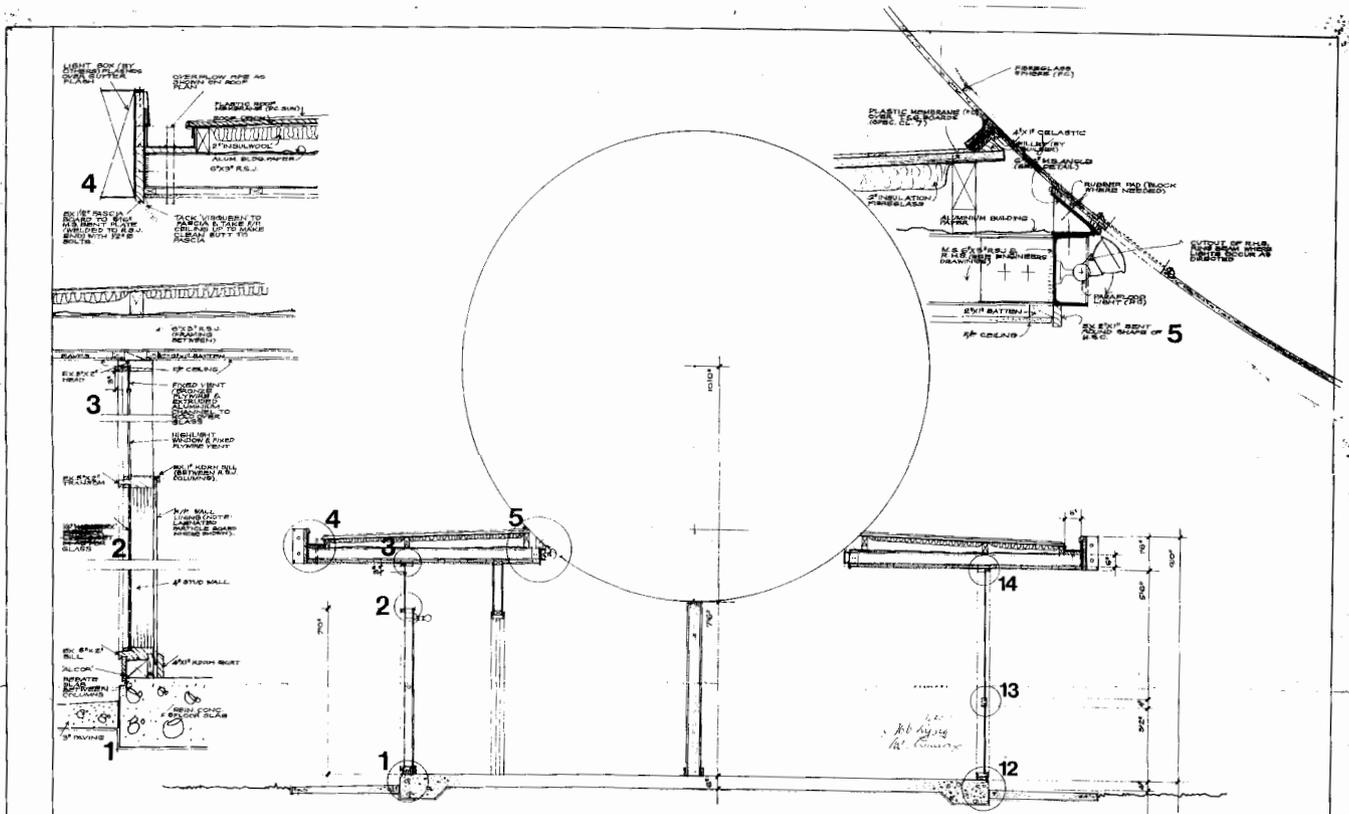
FISHBOWL FISHBOWL FISHBOWL FISHBOWL

NO STANDING  
EXCEPT  
FOR  
LOAD UNLOAD  
OR  
PAVING  
OPERATIONS  
ONLY  
EXCEPT  
AS SHOWN  
ON THIS SIGN

# NEPTUNE'S FISHBOWL



Neptune's Fishbowl (Neptune's Fishbowl files, GRB Archive, SLV)



SECTION C-C

ROMBERG AND BOYD, ARCHITECTS. 340 ALBERT STREET, MELBOURNE 3002, 41 5351	PROJECT <b>NEPTUNE'S FISHBOWL</b> AT NOS 312 & 314 TOORAK ROAD SOUTH YARRA	DRAWING SECTION & DETAILS SCALE 1/8" TO 1" @ 6 1/8" BS. & 3/4" P.	COPYRIGHT DATE JUNE 1970 DRAWN <i>Agf</i>	AMENDED DATE AMENDED DATE AMENDED DATE	SHEET NUMBER <b>2</b>
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**NEPTUNE'S  
FISHBOWL  
OPENING 24 MARCH**  
312-314 TOORAK RD.  
SOUTH YARRA

Young ladies with pleasing personalities for serving take-away foods in this new exciting franchise operation.  
Full or part time, smart uniforms provided, excellent wages and conditions. Apply in person to the above address, from 10 a.m. Monday.

November 16th., 1970.

Neptune's Fishbowl  
312-314 Toorak Road, South Yarra.

Names of menu items.	Prices
1. FISHBOWL FELLETS.	.75¢
2. LOUSTER CAPRICORNIA.	\$ 1.05
3. PARMIGIA FRIED PRANIS.	\$ 1.20
4. FISHERMAN'S PIZZA.	.30¢
5. SPAGHETTI MARINARA SCROLL.	.20¢
6. REEFURNER.	.25¢
7. SEAFOOD-ON-A-SPEAR.	\$ 1.05
8. HOUR OF PLENTY.	.45¢
9. HOSTESS SEAFOOD ROLLS.	\$ 1.00
10. OYSTERS NATURAL.	\$ 1.20
11. SCHLAPFER MINAPUSSA.	.25¢
12. DEEP SEA HARVEST.	.90¢
13. FAMILY SANDWICH.	\$ 3.50
14. SENDI APPLE TURNOVER.	.20¢

**T**HE opening this week of the Frank-Shelmerdine take-away seafoods enterprise, Neptune's Fishbowl, South Yarra, was, as expected, a razzamatazz plus.

This was to be expected because Richard Frank's wife Lillian was MC.

"Why don't they get Lillian to organise Moomba? She'd be a wow at it," said someone, surveying the milling throng.

Fred Asmussen, silvered and floating in blue and white chiffon, as King Neptune; a mermaid; give-away goldfish in water-filled plastic bags; streaming faces in the marquee's Turkish bath atmosphere; champagne and trays of utterly delicious seafoods.

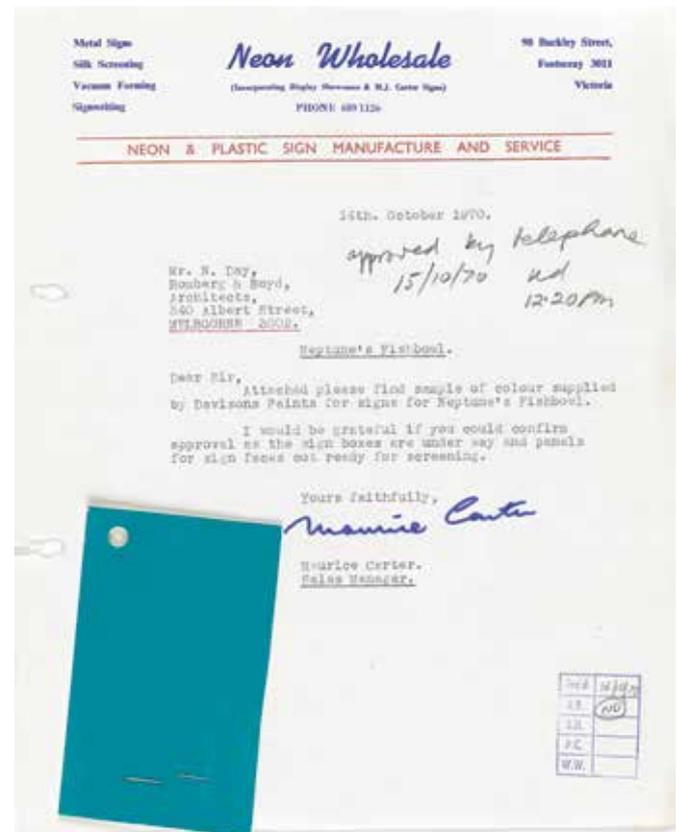
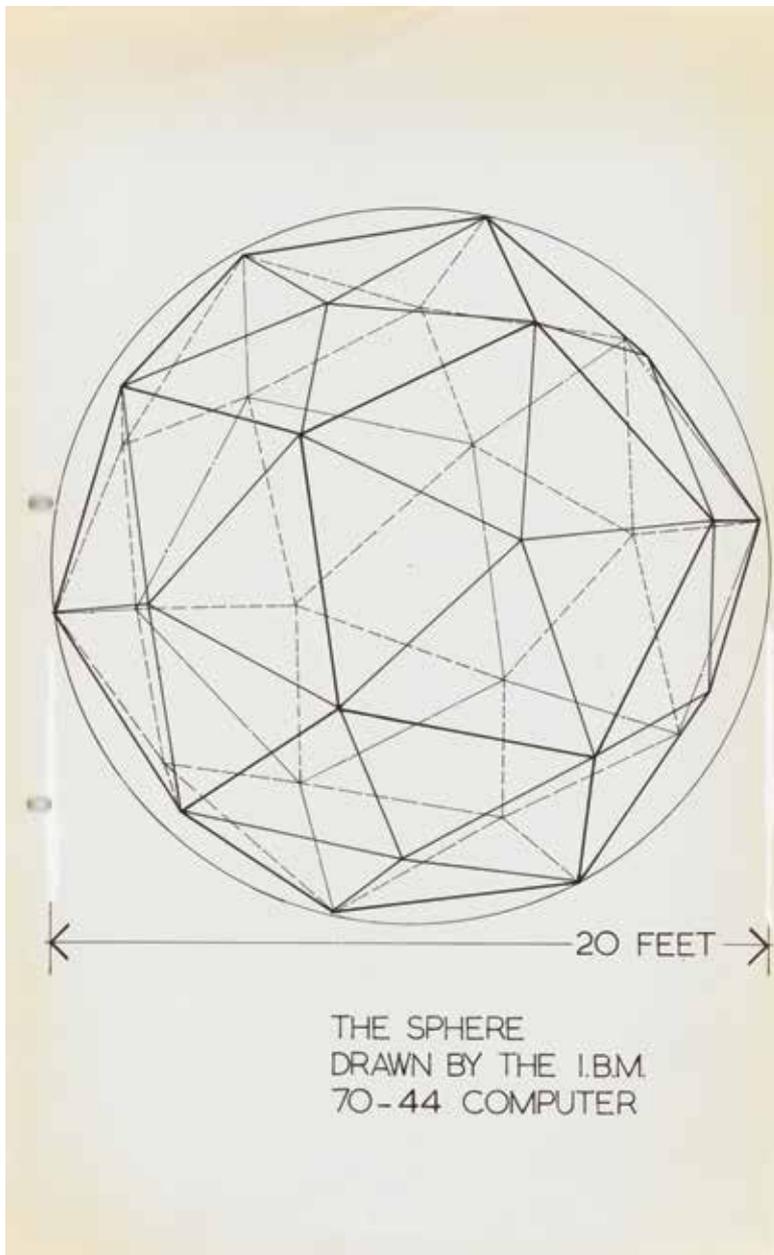
Although the opening was frivolous, Mr. Frank and Peter Shelmerdine are dead serious about getting the seafood take-away business on an international footing.

Mr. Shelmerdine said: "It's time Australia dealt out the franchises instead of buying them from America. We've already had inquiries from Honolulu."

With the international scene in mind they worked out their recipes to be adaptable to comparable seafood anywhere in the world.

Lovely, lovely — not a dob of urky batter in sight.

Graphic, menu, newspaper clipping, Neptune's Fishbowl (Neptune's Fishbowl files, GRB Archive, SLV)



Drawing of sphere by Faculty of Engineering, University of Melbourne, Neptune's Fishbowl (Neptune's Fishbowl files, GRB Archive, SLV)

Letter and colour sample, Neptune's Fishbowl (Neptune's Fishbowl files, GRB Archive, SLV)

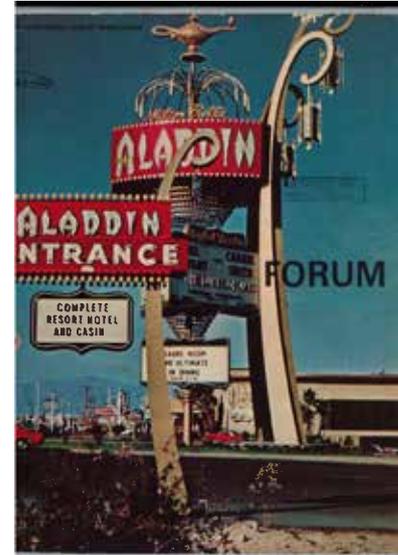
## NEPTUNE'S FISHBOWL AND THE BIG APPLE

TOORAK ROAD, SOUTH YARRA, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA

1970

ROBIN BOYD (ROMBERG AND BOYD)

Jingyi Mao



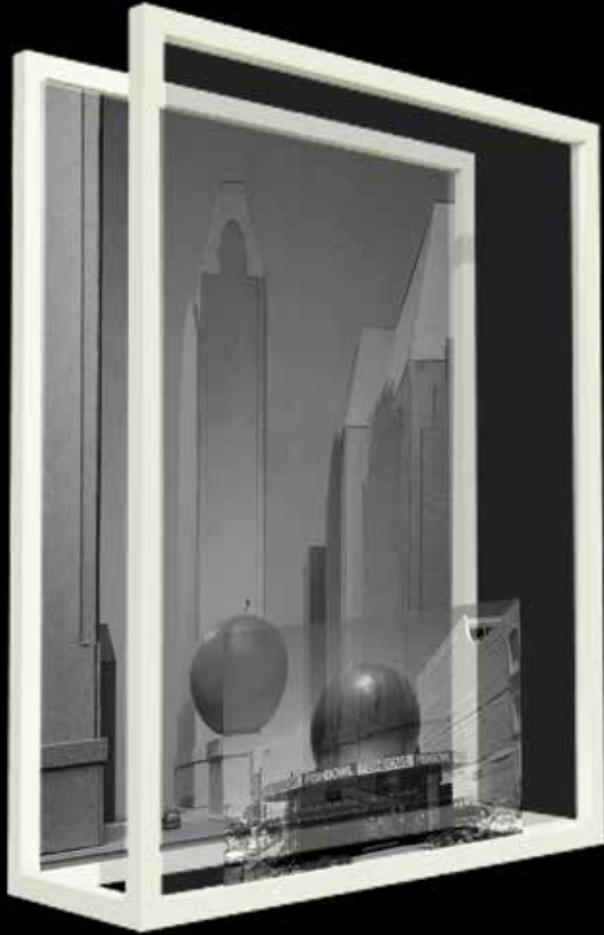
Neptune's Fishbowl, built in 1970 and located in Toorak Road, South Yarra, was one of Robin Boyd's most controversial works of architecture. It was originally designed for owners Peter Shelmerdine and Richard Frank as a one in a future chain of take-away fish and chips outlets. The building featured a very large blue fibreglass bowl composed of 60 triangles which was later dismantled and put into storage at the Mitchelton Winery in northern Victoria in 1972.

The design was thought by many as being the type of 'featurism' which Boyd himself had long criticized in *The Australian Ugliness* (1960). His theoretical term, which placed a negative connotation on signs and symbols was later supported by Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour in their book *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972), which discussed the commercial vernacular of the city in terms of symbolism and display. In response to the critics' label of "featurism", Boyd described the Fishbowl as exemplifying a single integral idea for an architecture, which in short, means there should be one single controlling idea per building.

The exhibit at Walsh Street aims at emphasizing the Fishbowl's building form as an integral concept as well as reproducing the building image in comparison with another contemporary project that encapsulated the concept of display. Printed images of the Fishbowl and the Big Apple (1984) designed by Robert Venturi for Times Square are exhibited. The material is presented in two forms. One is a large printed photograph of the Fishbowl taken by Peter Wille in 1971. This is to indicate the Fishbowl as being an iconic piece of architecture in South Yarra. The other is a model with pictures of the Fishbowl and the Big Apple<sup>4</sup> printed on transparent paper and overlaid onto each other: it is an attempt to connect the two designs as two representative and valid architectures of symbolism.

Cover, *Architectural Forum*, March 1968  
(cover photography by  
Denise Scott Brown)

Exhibition installation,  
Neptune's Fishbowl  
(image: Jingyi Mao)



NEPTUNE'S FISHBOWL AND THE BIG APPLE



Neptune's Fishbowl (photograph: Peter Wille, SLV)



The Big Apple in Times Square, New York, project by Venturi, Rauch & Scott-Brown (source: *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui*, February 1991)

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THE AGE, Wednesday, November 25, 1970

**nat** Bare breasts for a day, and then just fish

By MAX BEATTIE

They tried. Pretty blonde model Barbara Challinor rode bare-breasted along Toorak Road on the back of an open truck. (Not quite bare-breasted, of course. She wore "pasties".)

As she arrived, a jazz band blared a greeting. Barbara wore a silver-covered mermaid's undergarment. Her fair tresses flowed down.

It was all to do with the opening of a fish food place, Neptune's Fish Bowl, in Toorak Road, South Yarra.

Barbara was dressed, more or less, as a mermaid. She told me the reaction from the Toorak Road passers-by had been fabulous.

A couple of hundred socialites, and various photographers, went along.

It was all rather complicated, as

Toorak things are apt to be, but the Red Cross will gain by \$700 or so from the champagne and fish opening lunch.

Neptune's Fish Bowl is, however, a commercial proposition from today.

Robin Boyd, one of the country's top architects, was there. He designed the place, which has a large, blue, ball-shaped structure above the selling area.

"Some people will hate it and some people will love it," he told me.

"This is better than not being noticed at all."

Most of yesterday's activity went on in a marquee behind the Bowl. Eager young matrons from the Red Ribbon Committee organised it all. Guests were presented with red goldfish in plastic bags full of water.

Newspaper clipping, Neptune's Fishbowl (Neptune's Fishbowl files, GRB Archive, SLV)



**THE QUESTION:** Dear Mr. Boyd, Your book, *The Australian Ugliness* contains lengthy discussions on Featurism. In it you used as one of your examples the New World Supermarkets, the "Featuremarkets". Doubtless to say, you would also take the Red Barns as another example of featurism. But how can you distinguish a food shop made to look like a Red Barn from a fish shop made to look like a fish bowl? (I'm referring of course to your fish bowl restaurant). Surely both are examples of Featurism?

I am a fourth former at Peninsula Grammar School, and as your book is part of our art course your answer to this question would be very much appreciated as our Art master cannot give an answer. — MARTIN ELKS, Mt. Eliza.

**THE ANSWER:** Dear Martin, I was most interested in your letter, and I am sorry if I have wasted any of your's or your art master's time in trying to reconcile my writings with my Fishbowl. I don't see any inconsistency between them, and I hope that I can explain why in a few words. I think that my definition of Featurism on or about p.26 of *The Australian Ugliness* still explains my attitude as clearly as I can. I have never objected to advertisements, if they are well designed, or to having a bit of fun in the design of buildings, if it is appropriate. I look mainly for an idea — that is, one main idea per building — instead of the more usual assortment of little ideas which are shaken up together to make a building; typically, the "Featuremarket", with its many loud, stale ideas mixed together. On the other hand, Red Barn is not a Featurist so much as an "idea" building, and I don't dislike it as much as I do a shambles like the New World Supermarket. The thing that I do find slightly objectionable is that its idea is pretty weak: the stage-setting it creates is so unimaginative, nostalgic, foreign, gaudy and unamusing.

When asked to design another food chain shop, in direct commercial competition

with that kind, I accepted it as a challenge. The Fishbowl is not made to imitate a real fishbowl (did you ever see a dark blue one made up of 60 triangles?) but the idea of a fibreglass sphere as a memorable emblem which may be associated with the idea of fish seemed to be valid in this small commercial building. If you don't agree, if you think it looks as gaudy and silly as a New World Supermarket, that is a matter of taste; but I hope you will agree that it has only one idea, simply carried through, and that you can see that the thinking behind it and the New World started out from opposite ends of the span of architectural motivations — ROBIN BOYD, East Melbourne.

Letter from Martin Elks and Robin Boyd's response (source: *Architect*, November-December 1971)

**TASTING ROOM, MORRIS WINES CELLAR DOOR**  
154 MIA MIA ROAD, RUTHERGLEN, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA  
1970-2  
ROBIN BOYD (ROMBERG AND BOYD)

Mackenzie Keenan

Designed by Romberg and Boyd the Tasting Room of Morris Wine Cellar Door materialised as a glazed timber pavilion, surrounded by wine barrels and housed inside a heavily patinated timber-framed storage warehouse. Constructed in pale timber, with an atrium-like glass structure, it is not dissimilar to the modulated glazing structure seen in the Boyd House.

The pavilion is timeless, a classic feature of many of Boyd's works and with the use of sleekly detailed glazing, Boyd created the pavilion itself as an object of display and as a gesture to the long history of Morris Wines. One can taste the wine, smell the aroma of matured oak wine barrels and admire the settings and process of winemaking from inside the pavilion.

The exhibit at Walsh Street aims to give the public a better understanding of the significance of the Tasting Room within Boyd's work. In order to capture both the essence of the cellar and Boyd's character, the display immerses the visitor in the world Boyd epitomized: a socialite with a love for wine and an eye for beauty.

The concept of 'display' was used cleverly by Boyd. He created a pavilion that displayed the wine inside and the warehouse's barrels outside. Both were separate entities architecturally but spatially and visually they combine in perfect harmony, a rare feat. It was a strategy that is comparable to the Boyd House itself, which seamlessly folds together the kitchen, courtyard and adjoining bedrooms with a visual connection through similar glazing while the architectural object remains independent.

This exhibit piece aims to recreate the experience of being in the pavilion. Seated behind the bar at the Walsh Street house one is faced with a single chair. Once seated a set of headphones is provided, taking one back to the time of the wine's production, a recount of the history of Morris Wines and setting the scene for an afternoon at the cellar door. The front of the display consists of a scale model of the pavilion behind which is an historical image of the pavilion. Immerse yourself in the display; hear the glasses clink and taste the wine and uncover the spectacle that is Robin Boyd.

Tasting Room, Morris Wines  
(photograph, courtesy Morris Wines)



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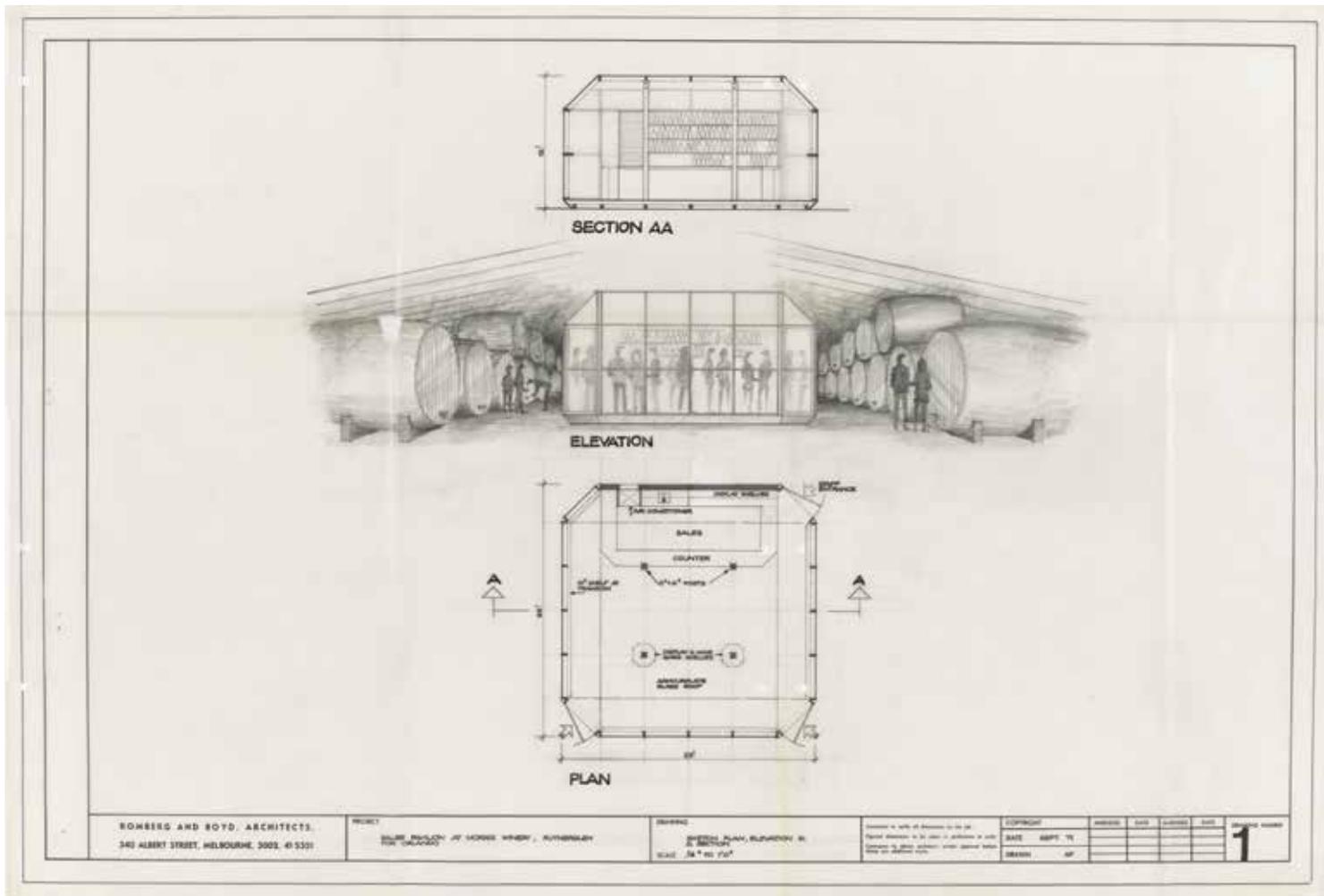
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TASTING ROOM, MORRIS WINES CELLAR DOOR



Bill Peach and Mick Morris, Tasting Room, Morris Wines (photograph, courtesy Morris Wines)



Tasting Room, Morris Wines (Orlando Wines files, GRB Archive, SLV)

## CHURCHILL HOUSE

NORTHBOURNE AVENUE, CANBERRA, AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY, AUSTRALIA

1968-70, 1972

ROBIN BOYD (ROMBERG AND BOYD)

Philip Goad

Churchill House was Robin Boyd's largest commission in Canberra, and today remains as the largest extant commercial commission of his thirty-five-year career across Australia. It was also one of his last buildings before his untimely death in 1971 at the age of 52. It was also a building about display.

One of the major functions of Churchill House was to display the building design guidelines developed by Boyd and Professor Gordon Stephenson for the National Capital Development Commission under the direction of John Overall. These guidelines dictated low-rise buildings in concrete (preferably white), copper roofs where visible, and a strong ordering module – in short, a palette that would introduce consistency and coherence to Canberra's new buildings from the late 1960s into the future. Churchill House was one of the first buildings completed in Canberra to demonstrate these principles.

Boyd's design demonstrated a high degree of creative ingenuity: its L-shaped plan of lettable offices embraced a sunken landscaped courtyard that in turn highlighted the podium composition of the Churchill Trust headquarters and its giant trapezoidal glazed display case, which was designed like a giant vitrine to show off publications and projects completed by Churchill Fellowship recipients. At night, the glazed case glowed like a lantern. The only problem was that as time went by, the books literally cooked in the case and it was later replaced by an elegant steel and glass pavilion (1972) designed by Neil Clerehan.

The north and west facades of the L-shaped block are distinguished by their facing in vertical L-shaped concrete 'planks'. This was a design that demonstrated that commercial buildings in Canberra could be architecturally polite, defer to landscape, be responsive to climate and materially consistent. Technically, Churchill House demonstrates a high degree of technical achievement. It demonstrates Boyd's intention to minimize material use through inventive and experimental construction techniques, especially as they related to concrete construction. These included the experimental use of disposable plastic formwork moulds, understood to be the first of their kind in Australia at the time. These plastic moulds, inspired by Arnotts biscuit packet casings, were designed to reproduce economically the more conventional timber graining pattern achieved by expensive sandblasted Oregon timber forms that wasted timber in reuse and didn't achieve consistent outcomes in terms of quality. Boyd's invention ensured excellent and consistent quality throughout in terms of the timber graining. It was also his tactic to soften the appearance of the white concrete, especially on the exposed interior walls, and east and south facades. Also included in the construction were the clever precast concrete L-shaped 'planks' that formed an integral wall and external sunshade system and inside the building, tilt-slab construction was used for some internal partitions. Boyd also adopted sophisticated yet daringly simply glass and neoprene gasket detailing, based on automobile windscreen details, for all glazing.

Churchill House (photograph:  
Mark Strizic, courtesy Philip Goad)



CHURCHILL HOUSE



Churchill House (photographs: Mark Strizic, courtesy Philip Goad)



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The Department of Fisheries and Wildlife Mr Butcher, Mr Cowling, Mr Holbench, Mr Ceremy, Mr L. R. Simmons

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Specifications of Morris Wines WINE TASTING PAVILION BOX, State Library of Victoria

Correspondence Morris Wines Cellar Door Manager

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