

ITINERARY n.24

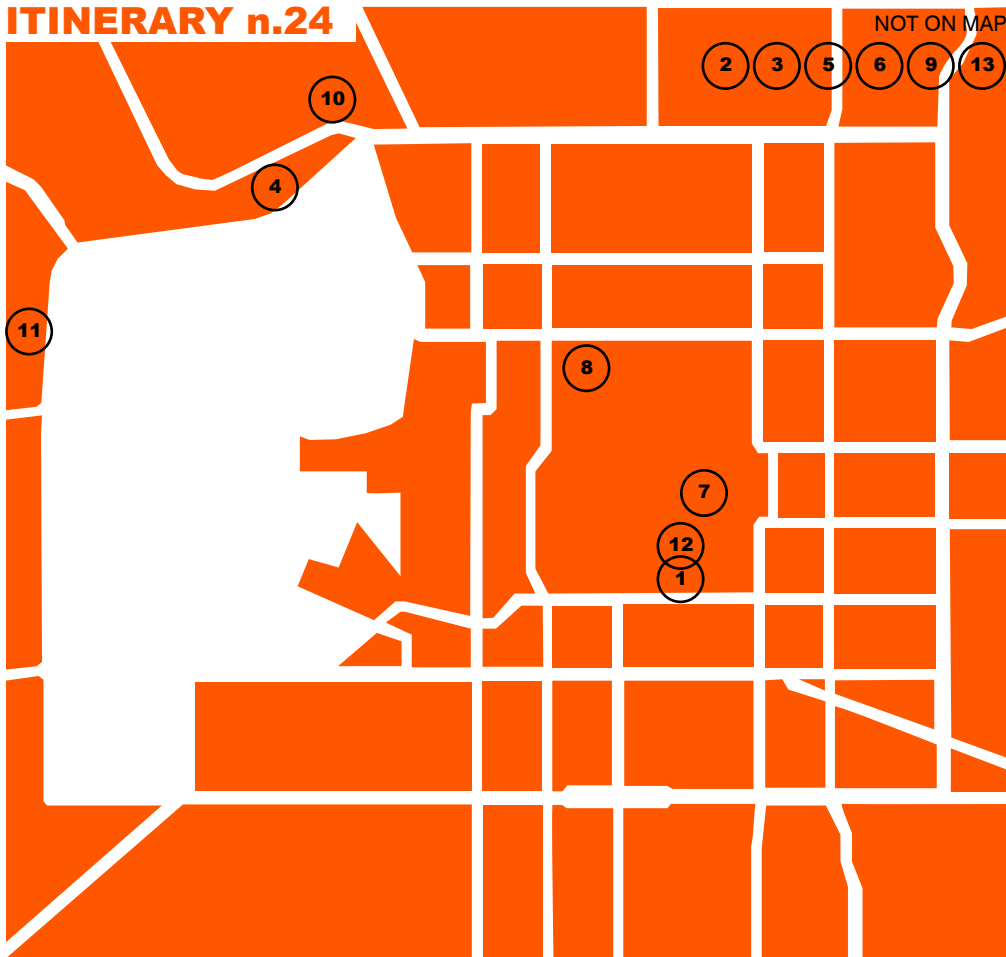


Photo: Stephen Goodenough

This itinerary looks at Peter Beaven's architecture before his hiatus in London in the late 1970s and early 1980s. A forthcoming itinerary will look at the work he has completed since his return to NZ.

Peter Beaven 1: The 60s & 70s

In 1972 an exhibition entitled "The New Romantics in Building" was held at the Dowse Gallery in Lower Hutt, including work by Ian Athfield, Roger Walker, Peter Beaven, Claude Megson and John Scott. The show celebrated one of the high points of 20th century Kiwi architecture, as a cohort of designers spliced local and international influences with such audacity that it seemed, if only briefly, that the nation could host a globally significant stream of architectural development. Peter Beaven was one of the senior members of this group (he's seventeen years older than Walker), but he had rapidly made the transition from a more orthodox modernism to the adventurous, hippy-fied approach of the youngsters. Such slipping in and out of both the Kiwi and international mainstreams has been the hallmark of Beaven's career.

Beaven established his office in the mid-1950s and his early work sits comfortably within the restrained, earnest modernism of the Christchurch School. He gradually began to shake off this local conformity, however, in favour of more global influences. Beaven travelled widely, spending six months living in Japan in the early 1950s, and making major excursions in Europe and Asia in the 1960s. This found its way into, in particular, the highly sculptural composition of the Lyttelton Tunnel building, which shows the influence of post-war Le Corbusier and his Japanese followers.

However, rather than becoming more international, his approach soon became more local. Beaven became increasingly focussed on his Christchurch context. This led, on the one hand, to his involvement in setting up the Christchurch Civic Trust, which was dedicated to protecting and preserving the city's ever more endangered architectural heritage. On the other hand, with projects such as Manchester Unity Building, he turned to Christchurch's Victorian heritage as a source of design inspiration.

Such historical referencing has led to Beaven being called our first post-modernist. But where the post-modernism of his local rivals followed global trends and looked to either pop culture or the classical world for inspiration, Beaven picked up the nostalgic, romantic, and picturesque qualities of the Victorian Gothic Revival. It was certainly "less is a bore", with turrets and spires sprouting from every rooftop, but if Beaven's form making was sometimes extravagant, his approach avoided the superficiality of run-of-the-mill Po-Mo; his way of building gave the greatest possible opportunity for the exercise of craft and for the intimate shaping of space.

Beaven has been a vocal advocate for good design, and also one of our most prolific writers, producing numerous articles and one of our first book-length architectural histories. But perhaps the most important, but still under-appreciated, contribution of Beaven's urbane approach is his medium-density housing. Projects such as Tonbridge Mews mimicked the additive, *ad hoc* character of vernacular building to create a rich, vibrant architecture, one that combined modern abstraction with traditional patterns to make an elegant, convivial lifestyle possible in the heart of the city. Like all passionate designers, he saw the logic of his approach as self-evident: he described his neo-vernacularism as "a concept which allies beauty with the familiar, with commonsense, and with an appropriate and convincing lifestyle".

Beaven's architecture of the 1970s set aside one of mainstream modernism's central traits – the need to create a break with history. His brand of modernism sought genuine connection with the past; a frequent Beaven-ism was "the continuity of tradition is the basis of living". He sought the shock, if anything, of the old. By the mid-1970s, however, he had departed for the UK, and the romantic stream in Kiwi architecture was soon swamped by the global tide of post-modernism. It would take Beaven's return to NZ after almost a decade in London for his irrepressible "other tradition" began again its dance with the mainstream. *Andrew Barrie*

Biography:

Peter Jamieson Beaven was born in Christchurch on 13 August 1925. He attended Christ's College, deciding to become an architect after a conversation with Paul Pascoe. He studied at the School of Architecture at the University of Auckland, his studies being interrupted by war service in the NZ Navy. Returning to his studies, he studied alongside members of the Architectural Group (which he deliberately avoided joining), becoming particular friends with Bill Wilson and John Scott. After graduating, Beaven spent four years in Timaru designing woolstores all over the country, before establishing himself in Christchurch with two design-build projects. In 1965, Beaven and several others founded the Christchurch Civic Trust, the first heritage lobby group in NZ. In the late 1960s he spent a year studying at the Architectural Association in London, participating in the first urban design course run at the school. Back in NZ, Beaven worked in partnership with Burwell Hunt, completing a number of large projects. The partnership ended when he left for England in 1975, where he worked in private practice for a decade before eventually returning to NZ.

1 1961
Canterbury Terminating
Building Society
159 Manchester Street
Christchurch



Built with a reinforced concrete frame, a sense of lightness was achieved in this eight-storey building by filling the entire structural bay with windows (although bronze panels were used as a lower spandrel). The seventh floor offices have a balcony all around recessed beneath an overhanging roof slab. Above this, a penthouse composed as a highly transparent steel-framed and glass-walled structure was for a time occupied by the architect. Beaven completed several projects for CTBS, including the Canterbury Arcade in Auckland (1965-67). After CTBS became UBS, he designed their office (1988) nearby at the corner of High and Cashel Streets (now a Holiday Inn). See *Home & Bldg.* Oct. 1962

2 1961
Canterbury Court
20-22 Twigger Street,
Addington



Located adjacent to the Addington Show Grounds, this exhibition building was built by the Canterbury Manufacturers Association and the Canterbury A & P Association as a venue for industrial and agricultural shows, as well as exhibitions, indoor sports and entertainment. Designed with engineer Bill Lovell-Smith, precast columns support a dynamic, long-span structure of zig-zagging roof planes and diamond-shaped skylights. The building has been extensively renovated as the sales centre for Pegasus, a new town being developed outside Christchurch, the display including a gigantic Chinese-made model. The bones of Beaven's building survive, but a visit is now an altogether sobering experience. See *Home & Building March* 1962, *NZIA Journal* Feb. 1963.

3 1962
Carson House
16 Dyers Pass Road
Cashmere



Located on the road that heads over the Port Hills towards Lyttelton Harbour, this house sits on a dramatic site that looks over the city to the Canterbury plains. The house has been extended and modified, but was originally a crisp composition of a blank concrete block façade wall, weatherboards, and a metal roof. Built for a doctor and his young family, the house was planned so the parents occupied the ground floor, with a bathroom and a large open room for the children placed upstairs. The sleeping and services areas were accommodated within a gabled volume, with living areas and covered outdoor spaces arranged as flat-roofed volumes around its perimeter. See *Home & Building June* 1962 and *NZIA Jnl.* April 1965.

4 1962
Beaven House
4 Millbank Lane
Merivale



Designed by Beaven for his own family, this three bedroom house was located at the end of a narrow lane; standing on a small site on the banks of the Avon River, it looked out on Hagley Park. Like much of Beaven's other work of the period, this house is a prismatic form but the crisp walls of white painted concrete block were interrupted by large panes of glass and softened by timber floors and wooden joiner. The house had been sympathetically updated over the years, but changed hands recently. In the time its has taken to prepare this itinerary, the house was demolished and a new home is now rising on the site.

Photo: www.christchurchmodern.co.nz

5 1963
Askew House
128 Dyers Pass Road
Cashmere



Positioned back from the street on a steep hillside site, this three-bedroom house is accessed via a long staircase and a dramatic bridge. The building is composed, with "Christchurch School" severity, of two crisp vertically-oriented barn forms linked together and animated by square windows punched into the weatherboard walls. The house originally stood isolated and looked out over bare hills, but is now surrounded by greenery and other houses. Now slightly modified, the house was recently sold and the section appears to be being readied for subdivision. See *NZIA Journal* Sept. 1964.

6 1962-64
Lyttelton Tunnel Authority
Administration Bdg & Toll Plaza
1 Bridle Path Rd, Heathcote



Regarded as one of Beaven's most important buildings, this project won an NZIA Gold Medal in 1966 and a 25 Year Award in 1999. The building, located at the Christchurch entrance to the tunnel, housed tollbooths, administration offices, and workshops for the tunnel. The design combines local symbolism – conceived as a "fifth ship" to compliment the four that famously transported Canterbury's founding settlers – with a crisply modern handling of form and function. Sadly, the concrete canopy that sheltered the now absent tollbooths is scheduled to be removed. See *NZIA Jnl.* Dec. 1964, *Home & Building June* 1965 and May 1966, *RIBA Jnl.* Sept. 1967, *Arch. Design* Jan. 1968 and *Arch. NZ* May/June 1999.

7 1964-67
Manchester Unity Building
180 Manchester Street
Christchurch



This project received an NZIA Canterbury Branch Bronze Medal in 1969. When the building won an NZIA 25 Year Award in 1999, the jury suggested that the tower sat "as comfortably alongside Mountfort's adjacent church as with the neighbouring commercial buildings of various vintages." Combining modernist elements with those from older traditions, this project marks the start of Beaven's engagement with contextualism. The building was remodelled by Noordanus Architects in 2001. See *NZIA Jnl.* Dec. 1964 and June 1968, *H&B March* 1970 and *Arch. NZ* May/June 1999.

8 1966
Christchurch Town Hall
Competition Entry
Christchurch



Published as the ominous sounding "Entry No. 17", Beaven's scheme was commonly understood (possibly with Beaven's encouragement) to have come second in the high profile Town Hall competition. The scheme was highly commended by the Jury but had in fact not advanced to the second round of judging. Featuring exuberant, Scharoun-ish roof forms, the Jury did, however, describe it as "one of the most adventurous and original" schemes submitted, but felt it could not be realised within the budget. Beaven's perspective drawing is now on display at the Gus Fisher. See *NZIA Journal* October 1966.

9

1971-3

Queen Elizabeth II Park
171 Travis Road
New Brighton



Designed with Christchurch engineer Bill Lovell-Smith as "principal consultant" (architects and engineers worked in the same studio), this complex was built as the venue for athletics and swimming events for the Commonwealth Games, held in Christchurch in the summer of 1974. The design cunningly combines main buildings, so that the main roof trusses span over the pool and cantilever over grandstand seating. Five levels of roofing are suspended from these trusses according to needs of spaces below, with exposed ventilation ducts threading through to live up the composition. The building has been treated harshly, but is still heavily used as a multi-sports center for the city. See *H&B* Nov. 1973 and *NZ Conc. Constr.* Dec. 1973.

10

1971-4

Tonbridge Mews
12 Shrewsbury Street
Merivale



This complex is composed of 18 two-bedroom units, each with a garage and most with private outdoor space. The units are accessed via a series of courtyards and pedestrian lanes that link across the city block between Shrewsbury and Tonbridge Streets, and form a charmingly romantic vernacular streetscape. That the complex survives in almost original condition attests to the enduring nature of its appeal. The project received an NZIA Local Award in 1975 and an Enduring Architecture Award in 2002. See *Arch. NZ* Nov./Dec. 2002.

11

1972-3

Chateau Commodore Hotel
Kilmarnock St
Riccarton



Designed for a client looking to make a statement, the designers reportedly "never considered for a moment that what they were producing would actually be built". What they produced is a Gothic Revival fantasy; a pleasure palace conceived as a wildly eccentric composition of steeply pitched roofs, heavy timbered halls, turrets, towers and moats. The building is now called Chateau on the Park, and new hotel wings have been added by Sheppard Rout and Dalman Architecture. Stay there if you get a chance. See *Designscape* 75 (Nov. 1975) and *Arch. Review* August 1976.

12

1972

Canterbury Building Society
Cnr Manchester & Cashel
Streets, Christchurch



Photo: Mannerling & Associates

The CBS was at the time one of the largest financial organizations in the country, and this building was their third Beaven-designed multi-storey office. It features a large mansard roof and what would become a characteristic Beaven turret-ising of the lift shaft. Narrow balconies on the office floors give workers access to the exterior, while on the inside huge bridge girders provide a column-free floor plate in which pot plants and shrubbery were intended to create an office "landscape" - a first for NZ! See *Home & Building* March 1974.

13

1973

Banks Peninsula Cruising Club
Lyttelton



Photo: Mannerling & Associates

With this project, which featured porthole windows, plastic domes and chisel-point roofs, Beaven's "gothic mod" comes close to Roger Walker's "colonial pop". It's exuberance was clear in the jury citation when the building received a NZIA Canterbury Branch Merit Award in 1973: "A small building full of exuberance and vigour. Entirely appropriate to its function and its waterside, light hearted, holiday setting. A brightly coloured fun house." Built on a new wharf as an extension to an existing structure, the building was demolished in the 1980s. See *Home & Building* March 1974.

Other addresses:

Brevet Club (1964) Christchurch

Formed by WWII air crews, this building stood on the approach road to the airport. All that now remains are some walls and a Spitfire on a stick.

Isard/Lambie Farmhouse (1968-69)

Totara Valley, Rd. Pleasant Point, South Canterbury
This farmhouse stands 10 miles from Temuka.
See *NZIA Journal* May 1970.

1973

Ramada Inn Columbo St overlooking Victoria square

This building was originally a mixed-use stack - two stories of hotel facilities, five stories of bedrooms and three floors of let-able office space. Now the Copthorne Hotel, this building has had most of the Beaven-ness has been scraped off. See *Blg. Progress* Jan. 1966, *NZIA Jnl.* Oct. 1973, and *Home & Building* Nov. 1973.



Ramada Inn in 2009

Elsewhere:

Canterbury Arcade (1965-67) High Street, Auckland

This project revitalised the interior of existing buildings added a new structure, and created a dynamic arcade.

Springs Junction Village & Motel (1966) Springs Junction, Mairua Plains

The master plan was only partially constructed, but its worth planning a stop there. See *NZIA Journal* Sept. 1966.

Habitat Housing (1972) 9-11 Pitarua Street, Thorndon, Wellington

First mews style project in Wellington, this low-rise medium-density housing complex contains 37 family units built over three stages. The project received an NZIA National Award in 1977. See *NZIA Jnl.* No. 3 1977 and *Home & Building* No. 6 1977.

Mt. Albert Housing (1974) Cnr Richardson and New North Rds, Mt. Albert, Auckland

Rata Village (1976) 56 Rata Street New Lynn, Auckland

This HCNZ project took a hammering when a busy street was extended along one side of the site. See *Designscape* 80 (May 1976).

Sources:

Except where noted, all photographs are by Andrew Barrie, and the drawing is courtesy of Peter Beaven Architect. Many thanks to Peter for his generous help in preparing this itinerary.

Perhaps the best source on Beaven's work is *Peter Beaven-Architect: Buildings and Projects* (Christchurch: University of Canterbury, School of Fine Arts, 1995), a small catalogue published to accompany a retrospective exhibition of Beaven's work at the University of Canterbury in 1995. See also Thelma Strongman's review of the exhibition in *Architecture NZ*, Nov./Dec. 1995. Beaven's own prolific writings include "Criticism" in the *NZIA Journal* July 1965, "The Post Colonial World", a rambling review of the state of local architecture in *NZ Architect* No.2 1982, and of course the book, written with John Stacpoole, *Architecture 1820-1970* (Wellington: Reed, 1972).

Among the many published interviews with Beaven, the best include Keith Cronshaw's "Turrets all over town" in *Home & Building* March 1974, and "Of whimsy, wit and Celtic lightheartedness" an interview with Peter Beaven" in *Home & Building* Dec./Jan. 1985/86.