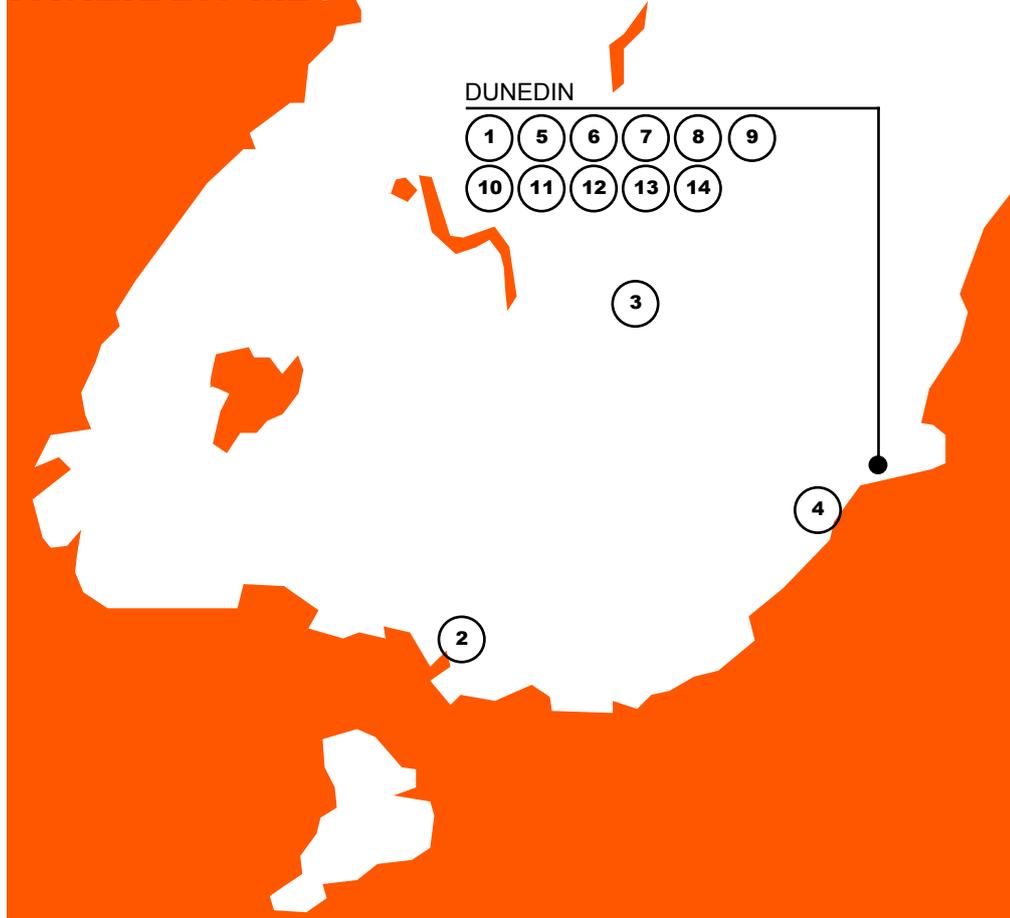


ITINERARY n.26



Ted McCoy

McCoy & Wixon - Public Bldgs in the South

"I'm in love... with the South!" TV personality Marcus Lush might have turned these words into an aphorism in the past couple of months, but he is no man alone in articulating intense feelings for the southern end of the mainland. Ted McCoy expresses it in the title of his book, *A Southern Architecture*, and more overtly in the section of the book titled 'Influences', which highlights Dunedin, Dunedin buildings, the Otago Peninsula, the Otago landscape.... He goes as far afield as Arrowtown. Elsewhere in the book, he acknowledges his admiration for Britain's architectural heritage, including its cottage and housing traditions – precedents that allowed him to better understand the development of the architecture that surrounded him in Otago – and for Le Corbusier, Aalto and Kahn, "who would have greatly influenced most students of my era."

The result is a modernism inflected by history, heritage, context and the local, the kind of thing that Peter Beaven would in due course call modernism's "other tradition". The southern tradition of solid materials – stone and brick – was an important part of McCoy's regional modernism. It could be explained in terms of references to British precedents and appropriateness to the southern climate, while actually it also followed Aalto's beautiful brick surfaces at Baker House at MIT (1947-48) and the Säynätsalo Town Hall (1949-52).

McCoy, then, like many of his generation, moved around in the space between the Group who were, at least in their rhetoric, committed to developing local solutions ('overseas solution will not do!'), and someone like Miles Warren who consciously brought in the latest ideas from overseas and applied them to the local scene. But even with this knowledge he placed great stead on the hardcore functionalist approach of High Modernism: "After arriving at his basic design by a synthesis of all the requirements and parameters of the brief, He likes to 'refine, refine, refine' to the bare essentials: 'not fat, no unnecessary nonsense'." (*Architecture NZ* Nov./Dec. 87).

This could be understood as a desire to escape questions of style – something the early moderns, in their desire to shed the eclecticism of their elders, placed great value on. But what this intention had morphed into for many of McCoy's generation was a reluctance to speak about style directly. They preferred entirely pragmatic explanations of their buildings – "they emerge directly from the brief" – or to explain them as references to their context – baches and whares in the north; Victorian heritage or landscape in the south. But for most of those who enjoyed long careers, contemporary styles and international ideas inevitably made their way in; not so readily apparent from the buildings listed in this itinerary is McCoy's adoption of post modernism in the 1980s, with projects like his Dunedin College of Education being fully-developed Kiwi PoMo – gable ends, colonnades, and the decorative use of metal pipework.

Whether or not we accept the regional rhetoric that surrounds them, there is no doubt that the buildings produced by McCoy, and from 1967 with partner Peter Wixon, include some of the finest designs of their times. *Julia Gatley & Andrew Barrie*

Biography:

Edward John (Ted) McCoy was born in Dunedin on February 25, 1925, and studied at Otago Boys' High. After graduating from the Auckland University School of Architecture in 1949 he returned to Dunedin and established his own firm in 1950, quickly gathering some surprisingly large commissions. In 1956 McCoy won two NZIA national medals with his first projects – a Gold for Aquinas Hall and a Bronze for the Nees House – the first time two medals had been awarded to one architect in the same year. Peter Wixon was born in Wellington in 1927. He managed the Dunedin office of Stephenson & Turner, before joining McCoy in partnership in 1967. In the partnership, McCoy continued as main designer, while Wixon specialised in contract administration and practice management and other members of the firm's staff looked after documentation. McCoy was NZIA President (1979-1980), and received the NZIA Gold Medal for lifetime achievement in 2002. McCoy retired in 1998 and Wixon in 2000; Wixon died in 2004. The firm is now run by John McCoy and Hamish Wixon, the sons of the two founders.

1

1950-54

Aquinas Hall
74 Gladstone Road
Dunedin



This was built as a Catholic hall of residence for Otago University. On a steep site sloping to the south, it comprises three main buildings – dormitory, priory and chapel – forming three sides of a courtyard which is open on the fourth side to the spectacular view over the city and sea beyond. The multi-storey dormitory block, with its regular bays, exposed concrete frames and brick infill, dominates the composition. A rooftop terrace has been closed in, compromising what was once a particular point of interest, and the chapel has been converted into a gymnasium. Awarded an NZIA Gold Medal in 1956. See *Home & Building* April 1957.

2

1956

St Teresa's Catholic Church
40 Perth Street, Windsor
Invercargill



McCoy continued in brick at this Catholic church in Invercargill. The brick surfaces are adorned with relief patterning and contrasted by the concrete frame and the figure of St Theresa which is believed to be in Oamaru stone. The concrete structure and gaps between consecutive bricks make a landmark out of the adjoining belltower. The building has a shallow pitched roof, the concrete columns and beams expressed internally and contrasted by timber sarking. Interior walls are mostly timber-lined at the lower level, with understated panels of both coloured and colourless glass above. See *Arch. Review* Oct. 1959.

3

1958

Church of St John the Baptist
1 Killarney Street
Alexandra



Constructed from simple materials – concrete block (buff colour due to fabrication from yellow Dunedin sand), in-situ concrete, and steel frame – and a straightforward gabled volume, the magic in this building comes from McCoy's use of light. A continuous strip of windows along the top of the wall makes the roof hover over the nave. The sense of lightness is further exaggerated by a large skylight above the sanctuary, a skylight strip running the length of the ridge line, and blocks of coloured glass set into the side walls. See *Arch. Review* Oct. 1959, and *Home & Building* March 1960 and May 1965.

4

1962

Holy Cross Seminary Chapel
Holy Cross College
89 Church St., Mosgiel



Built at what was originally New Zealand's national Catholic seminary, this chapel picked up the brick-and-tile material palette of the existing buildings. Internally, the sides of the nave were originally lined with rows of small chapels enclosed by free-standing walls of Oamaru stone – these were required to provide spaces for the many priests-in-training to say mass each day. The seminary moved to Auckland in 1998 and the chapels have now been removed, but the original pews and colourful stained glass remain. The proportions of the gabled interior, unvarnished timber ceiling, and strong use of colour are strongly reminiscent of the ambience of a Maori meeting house, which comes as a surprise given the thoroughly suburban exterior. See *NZIA Journal* Dec. 1967.

5

1963

Moran Chapel
Moran Building, 8 The Octagon
Dunedin



Located just a few steps from the sidewalk of the Octagon and tucked into a row of bars, this Catholic chapel is surprisingly well used. Slotted into the floor-to-floor height of a M&W-designed office building, a concealed sidelight brings in diffused daylight to invest the space with a sense of calm and repose (now slightly compromised by the insertion of a low screen wall). A crafted timber ceiling and Oamaru limestone-lined walls further divest the space of the commerce taking place all around. Built as a Catholic Centre for Dunedin (note the cross motif in the precast panels of the façade), the building initially housed various Church facilities and administrative offices, rental office space, a library, bookshop, and M&W's studio. See *NZIA Journal* Dec. 1968.

6

1964

St Paul's High School
Cnr York Place & Rattray Street
Dunedin



Built to replace the Christian Brothers' High School – the name was changed at the time of construction of the new buildings – this project was an entire school to accommodate 600 boys. The design includes a main classroom block, a science block, an arts block, and several courtyard spaces. Located on a cramped, steeply sloping site close to the centre of the city, McCoy stacked these functions to create a vertically-oriented composition of hardwearing (this was a boys' school) concrete block walls, fair-faced concrete, and quartz aggregate plaster. This project won an NZIA Gold Medal in 1965, and is now part of co-ed Kavanagh College. See *Home & Building* May 1965 and *NZIA Journal* Jan. 1966.

7

1969

National Bank
George Street
Dunedin



Located on a corner site on Dunedin's main shopping strip, this two-storey bank branch was a thoroughly modern composition in glass and concrete frame. With its inclusion, however, of a double-height banking hall, it recalled the grander days of Dunedin's Victorian-era prosperity. This interior has been replaced with a late-Po-Mo fit-out, and the now enlarged exterior submerged under corporate branding. See *NZIA Journal* Sept. 1974. M&W completed several other National Bank buildings, including the now altered head office at 164 Hereford Street in Christchurch (see *Home & Building* No.2. 1980) and the Otago University Branch at 62 Albany St, Dunedin (1987).

8

1969

University College
314 Leith Street
Dunedin



This hall of residence for 324 students was built to mark Otago University's centenary. The dining hall, common rooms, and other amenities are located in a single storey block facing Leith Street, with the study-bedrooms stacked in two tower blocks – one for males, the other for females, with no direct access between them! The building won an NZIA Otago Branch Bronze Medal in 1969, the jury reporting they were "attracted by the robust treatment, the detailing and use of materials, aided by fine workmanship, which are all in keeping with the function of the building and its surroundings." The building has been roughly handled since – the bluestone aggregate panels replaced with metal mesh and the fair-faced concrete panels painted pink. See *Home & Building* March 1970 and *NZIA Journal* Nov. 1971.

9

1971

Completion of St Paul's Cathedral, The Octagon Dunedin



Prior to modern times, cathedrals took so long to build they often consisted of sections in various styles that reflected the changing tastes and technologies of the construction period. Kiwis have carried this pattern into the modern era; like Auckland's Holy Trinity, Dunedin's Cathedral combines gothic revival and modern sections, although the hybrid is happier here. The Cathedral was begun in 1915, but work ceased in 1919; the M&W-designed sanctuary completed the building. The project won an NZIA Silver Medal in 1973, and a 25 Year Award in 2000. See *Home & Bldg Dec./Jan. 1972-73*, *NZIA Jnl Apr. 1973* and *Arch. NZ May/June 2000*.

10

1973

Archway Lecture Theatres Univ. of Otago, Cnr Leith Walk & Union St, Dunedin



Imagine the plan of Louis Kahn's Trenton Bathhouse (1955-59) and then replace the central courtyard with a toilet block and, voila, you have the basic arrangement of the Archway Theatre complex: four lecture theatres flaring out from a central circulation and services core. Making them great are the raked lecture theatres floors, the ribbed surfaces of the pre-cast concrete wall panels, and the 1970s super-graphics that identify Lecture Theatres 1, 2, 3 and 4. The siting was determined by the intention to demolish Anscombe's Consumer & Applied Sciences Building, later reversed, creating an odd relationship to neighbouring buildings.

11

1979

The Hocken Building Univ. of Otago, Leith Walk Dunedin



Built during a period of University expansion, this complex was designed to house the departments of anthropology, education, geography, and law, as well as the Hocken Library. Built high to accommodate all the required spaces on a constricted site, it is configured as a series of linked blocks that create an overall long, narrow slab that maximises light and air. The layout of the textured pre-cast concrete panels and glazing reflects the requirements of the rooms behind, avoiding the ruthless gridded façade typical of high-rises. Now renamed the Richardson Building, the project won an NZIA National Award in 1983. See *NZIA Jnl Dec. 1976* and *NZ Architect No.1. 1982*.

12

1982

Otago Boys High School Redevelopment 2 Arthur Street, Dunedin



Located high on the hill to the west of the CBD, the original Otago Boys' High School building is a prominent Dunedin landmark, a High Victorian Gothic Revival pile by R. A. Lawson, dating from the 1880s. M&W have added various buildings to the school – classrooms, a gym, a hall – all of them responding to Lawson's original building in scale, massing and material palette, making this complex among the firm's most successful contextual work. Particularly fine is the reinterpretation of basalt walls and limestone dressings in textured off-form and pre-cast concrete, some with exposed aggregates. The project won an NZIA National Award in 1985. M&W also did a new teaching wing at Otago Girls' High. See *NZIA Journal July 1974*.

13

1988

Castle Theatres 1 & 2 Univ. of Otago, Leith Walk Dunedin



This complex is located at the south end of the Hocken Building at the centre of the campus. Built in two stages on a plan that wraps around an existing beech tree, the complex houses two large lecture theatres and four seminar rooms. The surrounding area presented a difficult context to negotiate – the closed off end of Castle Street, the river, an enclosed quad, and the end of the Hocken – so the building presents a different face in each direction. The resulting composition is an astonishing hybrid that combines Po-Mo glazing and plastered concrete with panels faced with the same stone used in original 1878 university buildings. The project received an NZIA Otago Branch Award in 1988. See *Architecture NZ May/June 1992*.

14

2000

Otago Museum Redevelopment 419 Great King Street Dunedin



McCoy was pulled out of retirement for this job, which turned an old "rabbit warren" into a twenty-first century facility. He removed an exterior stair which previously took visitors to an entry at first floor level; reinstated the main entry at ground floor level off a public reserve; and punched holes in the two floors the above new entry to create a three storey atrium. More than simply improving circulation, these devices together ensured that visitors could make sense of and negotiate their way around the old building. A new cafe was also installed at ground floor level.

Other addresses:

Kenmure Intermediate School
500 Kaikourai Valley Road
Dunedin (1973)
Now part of Kaikourai Valley College.

St Thomas Aquinas' Church
84 Great North Road
Winton (ca.1979)
See *NZ Architect* no. 1, 1980

Water Pollution Control Plant
10 Tahuna Road
Dunedin (1981)
See *Home & Building* No 2. 1983.

Post Office (1981)
107 Gordon Road, Mosgeil

Mornington Methodist Church, 1 Galloway Street
Mornington, Dunedin (1985)

Centre City Supermarket & Mall, 133 Great King Street
Dunedin (1986)

Dunedin College of Education
Owheo Block
Forth Street, Dunedin (1990)
See *Architecture NZ May/June 1992*.



Mosgeil Post Office

Sources:

Except where noted, all photographs are by Julia Gatley or Andrew Barrie. Many thanks to Ted for his generous help in preparing this itinerary.

The key source on McCoy & Wixon's work is McCoy's own book, *A Southern Architecture: The Work of Ted McCoy* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2007). Other useful texts are M&W practice profiles in *NZIA Journal* Sept. 1974 and *Architecture NZ* Nov./Dec. 1987, and a series of articles published in *Architecture NZ* July/August 1993 that includes texts by Ross Jenner, Cathy Sheehan, Gary Blackman, and John Hawkhead. See also McCoy's "Influence and Inspiration" in *Architecture NZ* Mar./Apr 1999, and his citation for the NZIA Gold Medal in *Architecture NZ* May/June 2002. The story of McCoy & Wixon's competition-winning but unbuilt scheme for the National Art Gallery is told in *Architecture NZ* Nov./Dec. 1989. An obituary of the late Peter Wixon (1927-2004) was published in *Architecture NZ* Sept./Oct. 2004. McCoy published several articles on Dunedin's Victorian buildings – *Home & Building* March 1967 and August 1969, as well as a book with Gary Blackman, *Victorian City of New Zealand* (Dunedin: John McIndoe, 1968).