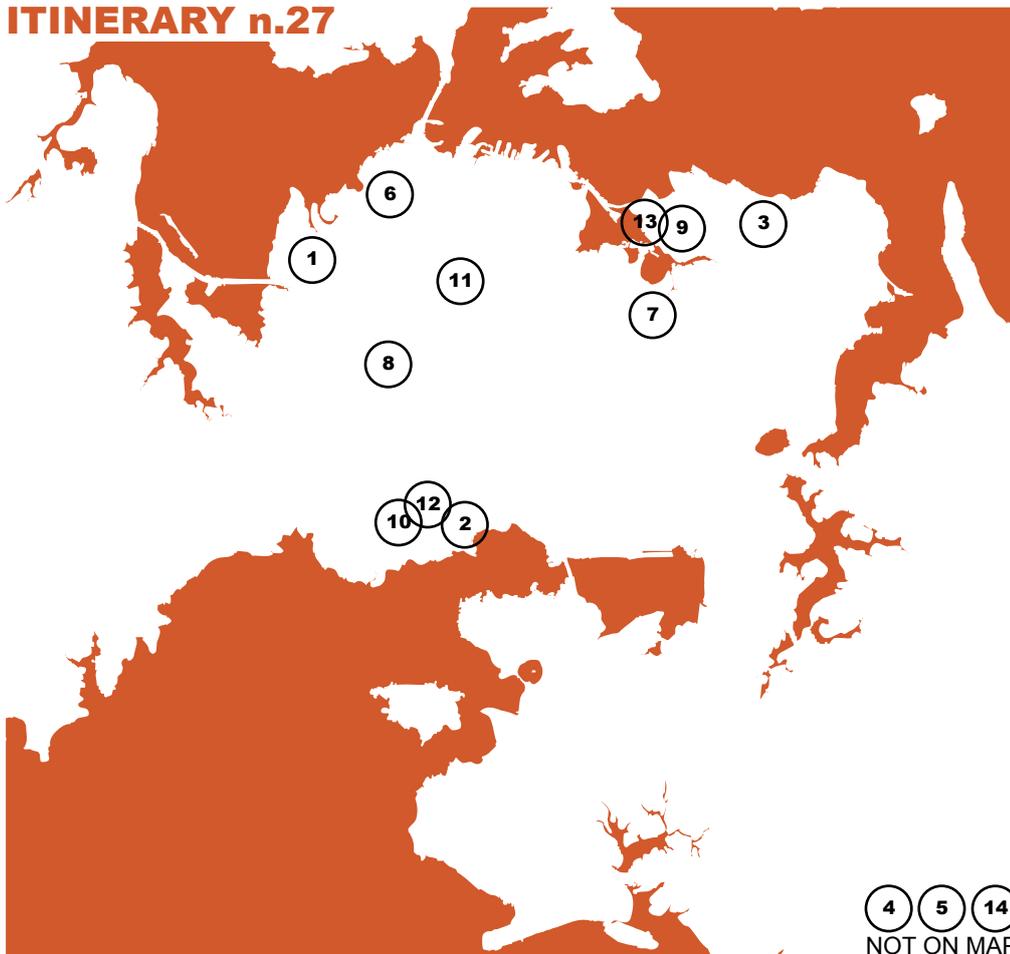


## ITINERARY n.27



This itinerary was prepared by Kenneth Albert's granddaughter, Claire Yakas. The research was undertaken as part of Claire's MARCH(Prof) thesis, recently completed at the University of Auckland.

## Kenneth Albert in Auckland

The years following World War II were a time when different approaches competed for attention in the New Zealand architecture scene. Modernist ideas from Europe and North America whose adoption had been delayed by the war were becoming widely accepted within the local architectural mainstream. Also, reassessments of modernism – particularly its most visible form, the abstract white architecture of the International Style – began filtering through. Here in New Zealand, it was a time when nationalist sentiment was rising, and many felt the time had come to cast off ideas from abroad and establish a local identity. Our architectural histories have tended to divide our mid-century architects into regionalist and internationalist camps, with approval largely falling on the regionalists. Closer examination of the output of these architects shows, however, that in many cases the story is more complicated.

Kenneth Albert is a useful example in considering these overlaps and complexities. Albert began working in the late 1940s, and practiced in Auckland throughout the fifties and sixties. Although Albert's career was cut tragically short, he demonstrated his talent across a range of projects – houses, offices, shops, flats, churches, and even two service stations. This work was widely published in the journals of the time, but was absent from our pre-millennial architectural histories; he became one of a number of architects who were 'lost' in the telling of our history.

Albert's rediscovery included the publication of his Paora Flats in Clark and Walker's *Looking for the Local* (2000), and mention of his work was made in the third edition of Peter Shaw's *History of New Zealand Architecture* (2003). It was Douglas Lloyd Jenkins, however, who is most responsible for restoring Albert's profile over the past ten years. His *At Home: A Century of New Zealand Design* (2004) included three of Albert's projects - the Paora Flats (1959-1960), the McClell House (1966) and Presbytery of St John Vianney (1966). These slick, flat roofed boxes incorporated floor-to-ceiling glazing, clean lines, open planning, and orientation towards the sun; from these projects, we would assume Albert was a committed internationalist.

However, a more comprehensive investigation of Albert's work shows that he also adopted many characteristics of the so-called New Zealand modern. He used pitched roofs, for example, in a few of his houses (including the Tolich House) and in other building types such as the Barnett Barnett Furniture Showroom. In buildings such as his David Lichtenstein House, he also adopted exposed timber rafters, although these elements were used in combination with generically modern elements such as floor-to-ceiling glazing and open planning. Even when Albert used a shallow pitched roof, these projects have still been composed to have the appearance of an abstract box.

Albert's work, then, demonstrates the limits of any attempt to set up a clear dichotomy between regionalism and internationalism in our mid-century modern architecture. Further, Albert's case highlights the danger of drawing conclusions based a limited selection of an architect's output. *Claire Yakas*

## Biography:

Kenneth Leo Albert was born in Wellington on 29 October 1922. In 1939 Albert completed his first year of a Diploma of Architecture through The University of NZ in Wellington. He worked as a draftsman at Swan & Lavelle in Wellington, and in 1943 joined the air force, flying in the Pacific during WWII. Albert later studied at The University of Auckland, completing his Bachelor of Architecture in 1948. He worked at the Education Board in 1949, and was registered in 1950. The next year he went to work for Greason Architects before starting his own private practice. In 1951 Albert started a structural engineering degree by correspondence from London. He was admitted as an Associate of the RIBA in 1952, and joined the Institution of Structural Engineers in London in 1957, and in 1969 was admitted to the NZ Institute of Engineers. Albert began lecturing at the University of Auckland in 1958, and taught papers in construction and structure throughout the 1960s. Albert returned to the University of Auckland and gained his Masters in Architecture in 1970, but his career was cut short by his early death the same year.

1

1951

Point Chevalier Service Station  
340 Point Chevalier Road  
Point Chevalier



The first Auckland service station to be designed with accommodation above, this elevated accommodation works with the elevated canopy to give the design an urban presence. Access to the three bed-sits is located separately and independent from the ground floor. Outdoor living can be enjoyed to the utmost on the large sundeck that wraps around the facades. The building is still in use, and Douglas Lloyd Jenkins suggests it is the "highly unusual integration of living quarters over commercial complex which ensures the ongoing usefulness of Albert's structure ... Nobody would think a gas station has architectural, let alone historic worth. Albert's Pt Chev masterwork might prove this exception". See *NZ Herald* Dec. 10, 1952, *Home & Building* June 1953, and *Viva* April 1999.

2

1953

Tolich House  
67 Hillsborough Road  
Hillsborough



Albert was presented with a brief requiring private outdoor space and for all rooms to gain maximum sun. This was achieved by incorporating the carport into the house, creating a long narrow plan with a balcony off the dining room. The construction is simple and logical with a corrugated iron roof. The sidewalls overhang the brick base, giving a sense of a lightness and the illusion that the house is floating. Albert was generous with glazing throughout the house, and also glazed above the normal partition height in the living areas. The ceiling follows the rake of the roof, which contributes to the spaciousness of the interior. See *Home & Building* Jan. 1956.

3

1953

Gibbons House  
25 Comins Crescent  
Mission Bay

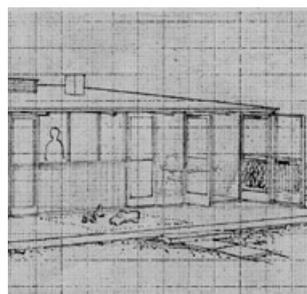


Built on a sloping site, all the main rooms of this house face the sun and view, and the living areas are separated from the three bedrooms and bathroom by a change in level. The house can be read as two boxes, suggesting they have been composed to respectively accommodate the public and private spaces. To take advantage of the views, the public spaces are placed higher on the site, with the land contours positioning the bedroom wing a half-level lower. The way in which Albert's roofline follows the slope of the site, used in conjunction with a change of level, was an innovative move for the 1950s. See *Home & Building* Feb. 1955.

4

1953

Winning Scheme  
Government Housing  
Competition



Albert's scheme won the design section of a Government-run housing competition. None of the entries were ever built, as the intention of the competition was to assess the economic viability of building a house given the restrictions on building materials following the Second World War. Albert's scheme is a one storey box with a shallow pitched roof. The walls are clad in vertical ship lap and the roof is corrugated material. Albert made use of modular joinery components and structure to simplify construction and costs. Albert's open plan design eliminated circulation, and located all service areas in a central core, which was innovative for the time. See *The Auckland Star* August 6, 1953.

5

1955

Wright House  
134 Kimihea Road  
Huntly



The elevated design consists of an L-shape plan arranged around an open courtyard. The exterior palette of the shallow pitched house is a combination of brick and timber weatherboards used in conjunction with extensive glazing. Internally, Albert's use of exposed rafters creates an open spacious environment. Albert continued the rafters to the exterior, which acts as a continuation of space to the outside. The roof line of the eastern façade can be seen to be on a slight slant north. In conjunction with the glazing this slant creates a visually effective façade and opens the space up internally. Albert's design shows his detail of planning towards the sun, light and views.

6

1957

Herne Bay Medical & Dental Ctr  
2a Albany Road  
Herne Bay



This commercial building consists of two shops and medical and dental rooms. The medical and dental block consists of two medical rooms and two dental rooms, with a lab adjacent to each, and a waiting room. The shops are placed on the corner of the site overlooking the road. The building was designed as simply as possible, with brick and timber construction with all windows opening outwards, forming a horizontal line along the road front. Albert's building is still in use as the Herne Bay Medical Centre. Slight alterations have been made to the interior, but otherwise it remains the same. See *Home & Building* June 1957.

7

1958

David Lichtenstein House  
2 Elmstone Avenue  
Remuera



Given a small site and a need to maximize accommodation, Albert utilized the entire plot by interconnecting the garden and house areas - the main rooms open onto an enclosed courtyard. Throughout this single-storey house, an open spacious feeling has been created with a ceiling that follows the shallow pitched of the roof and by using glazing above the usual partition height. The construction was simple, consisting of a concrete floor slab containing heating cables. Exposed roof beams and rafters are a key internal feature, and together with stone paving and dark weatherboard cladding creates a rich, textured material palette.

8

1958

Barnett Barnett Furniture Showroom  
629 Dominion Road, Mt. Eden



Originally designed for a furniture company, this building was intended to create a large unrestricted floor space with maximum facilities for displaying a range of products. The construction consists of steel portal frames spanning 62 feet with cavity brick walls and extensive glazing. The showroom was designed with 160 feet of continuous display windows. Albert overcame reflection problems by the use of three sides of the building for show windows, by continuous high lighting throughout the building and by sloping the main display windows outwards at the top. Today the glazing at the apex of the roof has been covered and is now a solid façade, and extra advertising has been added. See *Home & Building* Nov. 1958.

Photo: Barry McKay Industrial Photography

9

1959-1960

Paora Flats  
32 Coates Avenue  
Orakei



Albert's most recognized, admired, and published project, in the 1960s this ten apartment block represented a sophisticated new model of apartment living. The block stands tall on its corner site, the floating white box held aloft on pilot columns. The exterior of this crisp volume is animated by patches of color (these are not original - Albert's moresombre colourscheme was replaced in the 1990s) and two sets of fully glazed internal stairs. Albert employed a French structural system of Freyssinet pre-stressed concrete slabs and bearing walls, eliminating the need for visible columns or beams that might have intruded upon the clean lines of the interior. See *Home & Building* Nov. 1960, *Metro* June 2005, *Canvas* August 16-17, 2003, Douglas Lloyd Jenkins *At Home* (2004), and Julia Gatley, ed. *Long Live the Modern* (2008).

10

1964

St John Vianney Church  
317 Hillsborough Road  
Hillsborough



Albert's design for the church came at a time when he had been more than a decade in practice and he was maturing architecturally. This church is sited on six acres on Hillsborough Road. Although it was built to a restricted budget, the church is very attractive both inside and out. The construction of the church consists of steel framing and brick, and includes a roof of decorative tiles. Albert used rustic bricks for a majority of the exterior, together with timber for the roof. The church displays a pitched roof, in which glazing can be extensively seen in the apex. The interior ceiling of the church is clear stained tawa. The pews inside, and all other woodwork, is heart rimu or mahogany. See *Home & Building* Aug. 1965.

11

1964

Mt Eden ASB Bank  
414 Mt Eden Road  
Mt Eden



Situated on a corner site amongst the Mt Eden village shops, Albert's design for the bank is a single storey rectangular building. Albert has used a mixture of materials which complement each other including brick, concrete block, glazing including frosted glazing, tiles and plaster; all of which have been painted an off white. A strong horizontality is present in Albert's design, which is emphasized by a plastered band that finishes the top of the building. Acoustic tiles have been placed on the ceiling, which help to eliminate any unwanted noise created by nearby traffic.

12

1966

St John Vianney Presbytery  
317 Hillsborough Road  
Hillsborough



The two-storied presbytery stands adjacent to the Albert-design church, and was identified by Douglas Lloyd Jenkins and Bill McKay as one of NZ's top fifty 20th century houses, although they suggest the design is "more along the lines of a jewelled casket, than a house designed for a priest". At first glance the presbytery appears to be based on boxes, with all of the structural components clearly expressed. However, Albert's use of delicate tracery contrasts with the tightly controlled brickwork, the screen casting a shadow that softens the hard edge of the brick. Albert's use of delicate tracery and contrast of texture and colour contributes to this sophisticated design. See *NZ Home & Entertaining* Dec./Jan. 2000.

13

1966

McClew House  
16 Ngaiwi Street  
Orakei



When Douglas Lloyd Jenkins presented the much-admired McClew House in *At Home*, he called the design Albert's "masterpiece". The house, designed for a university lecturer and his family, stands elevated and prominent on a sloping site in Orakei gaining views across to the harbour. Albert wrote of it: "Steep site and spectacular views lead logically to the structural system employed - a concrete slab foundation, cantilevered to form a balcony, steel framing to the ground floor, similar balcony at first floor level, almost completely glassed front wall and light metal balustrading. These elements, in turn, are given very logical, simple and crisp expression in the exterior. See *Home & Building* Sept. 1966 and Douglas Lloyd Jenkins *At Home* (2004).

14

1967

St Anthony Church  
340 Great South Road  
Huntly



This church was constructed of reinforced concrete foundations, floor and piers, with the main superstructure of structural steel supporting timber purlins. The church is a combination of brick work and timber. Vertical slating, which acts as sun shading, has been placed on the exterior of the church. The ceilings and soffits were finished with cedar boarding, while the exterior timber and joinery was cedar and totara. Selected shades of local Huntly bricks were used as the main walling material, in both cavity and veneer work. The interior finishing timbers, doors and entrance paneling are of sapele mahogany, and the entrance floor is mosaic tiling. Albert designed all the interior fittings, including the altar, timber pews, and light fittings. The building faces the main road through Huntly - pull over for a look next time you are passing through. See *NZIA Journal* Nov. 1971.

## Other addresses:

**Albert House (1949)**  
306 Hillsborough Road  
Hillsborough

Albert's first house in which he designed for himself and family. Albert's first furniture appeared here. Now altered.

**Eric Smart Men's & Lady's Wear Shop (1955)**  
157 Rodney Street  
Wellsford  
Now a Postie+.

**Wellsford Farmhouse (1955)**  
1402 State Highway 1  
Wellsford  
Albert designed a farmhouse at Wellsford which took advantage of the panoramic views and displayed his detail of planning towards the sun and light.

**Mason House (1959)**  
34 Little John Street  
Hillsborough  
Slightly altered, although the interior still adopts Albert's open plan living spaces.



Tolich House

## Sources:

Except where noted the photographs are by Claire Yakas. Many thanks to Maureen Albert, Kenneth's widow, and the rest of the Albert family for their help with this research project.

Albert was extensively published throughout the 1950s and 1960s in *Home & Building* magazine and in local newspapers. The most comprehensive source on Albert is Claire Yakas' MArch(Prof) thesis, *Development of the Modern Movement in New Zealand: Through Kenneth Albert* (2009), completed at the University of Auckland. Albert's projects were included in Douglas Lloyd Jenkins *At Home: A Century of New Zealand Design* (Auckland, Random House NZ, 2004), Peter Shaw's *A History of New Zealand Architecture*, Third Edition (New Zealand, Hodder Moa Beckett, 2003), and Julia Gatley ed. *Long Live the Modern, New Zealand's New Architecture 1904-1984*, (Auckland, Auckland University Press, 2008), and Justine Clark and Paul Walker's *Looking for the Local: Architecture and the New Zealand Modern* (Wellington, Victoria University Press, 2000). See also "150 Years of Auckland Design" in *Metro* June 2005.