



Citibank Center, 1989.

Auckland City in the 1980s

The 1980s were turbulent times in New Zealand. The big moments included the Springbok tour in 1981, the election of the Labour government in 1984 and the radical program of economic restructuring that followed, the opening of the Te Maori exhibition in New York in 1984, the sinking of the Rainbow Warrior in 1985 and the stock market crash in 1987. It was a period when many of the key moments in our social and economic history originated here in New Zealand rather than flowed from events occurring elsewhere.

Our architecture, however, followed a different pattern. In the 1970s Miles Warren, JASMaD and the “new romantic” architects (Roger Walker, Ian Athfield, Peter Beavan, and Claude Megson) were at the height of the powers, making architecture that seemed to create something original here in Godzone. But in the 1980s many architects’ eyes turned again to the horizon, adapting ideas from abroad rather than continuing to develop their unique personal languages.

For architects looking to make a splash in the 1980s, a number of paths were opening up. For those who still held some faith with Modernist values, high-tech architecture retained the creation of functional and structural logic as central design tasks - notable Auckland examples include Warren & Mahoney’s Union House (1984) and Dodd Paterson’s Chase Stadium (1988). At the other end of the ideological spectrum, playful form-making and the use of historical allusions crystallised into “Post-Modern Classicism” – pediments and porticoes began sprouting out of mirror glass office buildings all over town. Later in the decade deconstruction appeared, but despite much local discussion and Kiwi academic Mark Wigley’s involvement at the centre of the movement, its tangible Auckland impact was limited to a few mostly domestic buildings.

Powered by dramatic new ideas and an economic boom, it was a good time to be an architect. The pace of urban redevelopment accelerated, and the period saw the rapid rise of development companies like Cromwell Corporation, Kupe Group, and Chase Corporation. The mid-1980s construction frenzy was both financial and urban dynamite, figuratively and literally. Chase became one of the largest companies on the local share market, spreading to Australia, England and the US before its implosion left behind NZ’s biggest ever corporate loss. Many developers became notorious for bulldozing heritage buildings to make way for speculative developments. Auckland was scarred not just by the loss of the old but by the absence of the new - following the share market crash of 1987, cancelled projects meant significant chunks of central Auckland remained car parks for years.

The 1980s also seemed to leave holes in our memory. Aesthetically, the 1980s are a period in their careers that many architects prefer not to dwell on, and many of the local monographs produced in recent years play down the work produced at that time. But just as a new generation of historians recuperated affection for mid-century modernism over the last 15 or so years, we can expect the rising generation to re-examine the 1980s. They’ll be more concerned with what was gained than what was lost – in terms of aesthetics, heritage and economics – and will restore appreciation. *Andrew Barrie*

Samoa House
283 Karangahape Rd, Newton
JASMaD



Commissioned by the Government of Western Samoa to be a focus for the Samoan community, the complex includes the offices of the Samoan Consulate, a fale, a commercial shopping arcade connecting the two street frontages, and a penthouse apartment.

The office building has been topped with a pitched roof and its corners recessed to emphasise its form as a ‘house’. Other references to pacific forms range from the literal adoption of forms (be sure to check out the fale, which faces Beresford St.). The building received an NZIA National Award in 1980. See *Home & Building* No. 1 1980

2

1981

Mid-City Centre
239 Queen Street
Sinclair Group



Inserted behind a super-flat mirror glass façade, this multistorey retail and theatre complex was built by high-profile property developers, Chase Corporation. Chase imploded following the share market crash of 1987, but Mid-City lived on, however, its shoddy construction condemning it to years of shabbiness before the multiplex eventually closed down almost a decade ago and the shopping arcade morphed into an oddly interiorised Asian quarter. Following a number of redevelopment proposals and becoming entangled in the Bridgecorp collapse, it has been recently been announced that the cinema complex will be reborn as a mix of office space and shops. See *Architecture NZ* Jan/Feb 1994.

3

1980-83

Auckland Harbour Bd Bldg
139 Quay Street
Dodd Patterson Newman
Pearce Architects Collaborative



This building is perhaps the closest Auckland got to Metabolism. It has all the elements of a 1960s "city in the air" - daring megastructure elements including brackets that suggest extend-ability, a central service core, and the creation of a void beneath the building. The building was almost a generation out of date when completed, but it added undeniable drama to a waterfront walk. The building now contains commercial office space and the undercroft has been filled in with shops and bars, demonstrating just the kind of flexibility that was the goal of Metabolism but ironically making the building much less interesting. The project received an NZIA National Award in 1986. See *Home & Bldg* Aug./Sept. 1983 and Aug./Sept. 1986.

4

1984

Arts & Commerce Building
18 Symonds Street
JASMaD



The building on the street side of the site was designed to fit in with the adjacent houses of Symonds Street and Grafton Road, while the larger building to the rear was positioned to screen the bulk of the adjacent Human Sciences Building. This concern for human scale gives the building an almost domestic character, as a series of landscaped courtyards thread down the slope to Wynyard Street. Inside, a series of commissioned artworks were integrated into the circulation spaces. The building won an NZIA National Award in 1987. While visiting, stroll down Wynyard Street to JASMaD's other 80s University building, the Marae (1988). See *Home & Building* Aug/Sept 1984 and *NZ Architect* no. 3. 1987.

5

1980-84

Union House
2 Commerce Street
Warren & Mahoney



The external precast concrete bracing to absorb earthquake loads was a first for high-rise buildings in NZ. The cunning piles-in-tubes base-isolation system was a global first. The original layout had an open plaza on the eastern side to allow glazed facades on all four sides, but this was later built over in rather dreary fashion. Some 80s trivia - Fay Richwhite once occupied a fifth floor space blinged-out in mirror-ceilings and black marble. The project received an NZIA Regional Award and an NZ Concrete Society Award in 1984. See *Home & Building* Dec./Jan. 1984/85 and *NZ Conc. Construction* May 1984.

6

1986

Univ. of Auck. School of Music
6 Symonds Street
Hill Manning Mitchell



One of NZ's key post-modern designs, this building is a collection of references, allusions and quotations. The sources span the range from the world of music to international architecture to local buildings: sine curves and piano-lid shapes; entrance porticoes retained from a previous building on the site; vernacular shed forms. Underlying the post-modern collaging is a concern for climate and usage. The building's more public spaces - library, reception, music theatre - are arranged around an intimately scaled cloister and courtyard overlooked by balconies and seating areas. The open, bright foyer is one of the most dynamic public spaces in the city. The building received a NZIA National Award in 1987. See *NZ Architect* No.6 1986.

7

1987

BNZ Tower
125 Queen Street
Walker Co-partnership



The original Bank of New Zealand building was designed by Melbourne architect Leonard Terry in 1865, just four years after the bank was founded. He designed just the Greek Revival façade - not the banking chamber - but this stood out as it was one of the first stone buildings in a largely wooden town. In the 1980s, the building was subjected to one of the most controversial practices - facadism. Those in favour argued that this was the only economically feasible way in which heritage can be retained, while critics of the BNZ project described the retained bank façade as an "unburied corpse". See *Historic Places in New Zealand* June 1987 and *Home & Building* Feb./Mar. 1987.

8

1988

Chase Plaza
72 Albert Street
Walker Co-partnership



Aside from being home to the city branch of Georgie Pie, this project's most memorable feature was its space-framed roof canopy assembled from vaulted Plexiglass specially imported from Germany. Following the Stock Market Crash of 1987, the name was changed to Finance Plaza after Chase Corporation went into decline and eventual statutory management at the end of the decade. The Plaza, which occupies a rooftop that formed a podium to a number of office towers, is now being gradually occupied by sports facilities.

9

1984-88

Fay Richwhite Building
151 Queen Street
Dino Burratini with
Peddle Thorpe & Aitken



Clad in bronze-colored Dutch glass and Argentinian granite, this project is Auckland's most sculptural curtain-walled tower; Peter Sargisson went so far as to describe the building as "a virtuous display of architectural skills". The 29-storey building reportedly contains 200 carparks, retail and office space, residential accommodation, and a health club complete with fitness center, tennis court, 25-meter pool and dining facilities. The building won an NZIA National Award in 1992. See *Architecture New Zealand* Nov./Dec. 1988.

10

1988

Demolition of His Majesty's Theatre
171 Queen Street
Pacer-Kerridge Corporation



Photo: Dinah Holman

His Majesty's Theatre was completed in 1902 to designs by the Australian William Pitt with local firm Edward Mahoney & Sons. A permit for its demolition was issued on 31 December 1987 (reportedly after hours), and its destruction began in early 1988. Protestors maintained a constant vigil at the site, demonstrations being attended by Mayor Dame Cath Tizard and then Minister of Conservation Helen Clark. Support even came from Prince Charles, but the building was leveled anyway. The intense publicity brought the preservation of historic buildings to wide public attention. Pacer-Kerridge went into receivership in 1992 and the site remained vacant for many years. It now holds the City Life Apartments. See *Historic Places in NZ* Mar 1988 and *Architecture NZ* Mar/Apr 1988.

11

1985-1989

TVNZ Network Centre
Cnr Victoria & Hobson Sts
Warren & Mahoney



If pluralism is (was?) the defining characteristic of post-modernism, this project demonstrates just how post-modern W&M was in the 1980s. Produced at the time W&M was busy cranking out classical office towers, this project is intriguing in that it smoothly integrates classicist elements (banded stone and glass) with neo-modernism (slick glass skin) and W&M's characteristic "constructivism" (expressed structural frames). The complex received NZIA Regional and National Awards in 1990. See *Arch. NZ* Nov/Dec. 1989 & May/June 1990. For a purely neo-modern effort, check out W&M's twelve-storey Sofrana House (1986-89) at 101 Customs Street.

12

1987-89

Citibank Centre
23 Customs Street
Auckland



The top six floors of this building were originally occupied by Citibank, and it's up top that we see W&M's PoMo at its most charming – airy colonnades rather than heavy pediments. The building was developed by Brierley Cromwell Property, for whom W&M designed numerous other towers in central Auckland in the late eighties, although many of these projects went unrealised in the wake of the '87 stock market crash. Fans of W&M's PoMo styling's might like to check out the multipedimented classicism of the Salvation Army Citadel (1986) at 369 Queen Street.

13

1989

Symonds Center &
O'Rorke Hall
47-51 Symonds Street
Stephenson & Turner



If Hobson Street is the place to understand how developers worked last decade, upper Symonds Street was the equivalent locus of development in the 1980s. This project replaced a ramshackle collection of buildings that originally constituted the O'Rorke student hostel. Sarah Treadwell wrote of the Symonds Centre that its "classical references were not to be taken seriously", wittily suggesting its string courses might have been provided by Marley or Stormcloud. The Symonds Centre was originally intended, like many 80s commercial developments, as twin towers. Due to the late-80s financial drama, the second tower remains a pergola'd stump. See *Architecture NZ* Mar/Apr 1990.

14

1989

Oriental Tower
Cnr Lorne and Wellesley Sts
Fairhead Sang & Carnachan



The 1980s saw the rise of the east in global affairs. In particular it saw the ascendancy of Japanese manufacturing – unemployed America autoworkers taking sledgehammers to Toyotas were a TV news staple. Auckland's CBD began to become visibly more Asian, with kanji appearing on signs and a proliferation of specialty shops and restaurants presenting tastes and goods of various eastern nations. This building is one of the clearest expressions of Asian architectural presence, although pessimists might complain the apartments blocks of Hobson Street are more Kowloon or Shinjuku. See *Home & Building* Feb./Mar. 1992.

Other Addresses:

Price Waterhouse Center
Cnr Wyndham & Hobson Sts.
JASMaD (1986)
A Chase Corporation development.

Liverpool House (1987)
63 Karangahape Road
Stephenson & Turner

Victoria Park Market (1984)
210 Victoria Street West
Stephen Cashmore

The refurbishment of Victoria Street Refuse Depot, which until served from 1905 to 1973, into a bustling shopping and entertainment center.

National Bank Center (1989)
Cnr Queen & Victoria Sts.
Glossop Chan Partnership
A whole city block is replaced with a low podium and two fully glazed towers; twin tower projects were a bit of an 80s thing, but unlike many others this project managed to get both towers built.



National Bank Center

Beyond the Inner City:

Boehringer Ingelheim Office & Warehouse (1986-89)
47 Druces Road, Wiri
Rewi Thompson
See *Architecture NZ* Nov/Dec 1989 and May/June 1990.

Otara Town Centre (1987)
East Tamaki Road, Otara
Rewi Thompson
See *Architecture NZ* Sept/Oct 1993.

Chase Stadium (1988)
237 Kohimarama Rd.
Kohimarama
Dodd Paterson Architects
Now known as ASB Stadium, this hi-tech confection was built on the grounds of Selwyn College, the project initially intended as a relatively modest school gymnasium expanding to become the venue for gymnastics during the 1990 Commonwealth Games. See *Architecture NZ* Mar/Apr 1988.



Chase Stadium

Sources:

All photographs are by Andrew Barrie. A trawl through the 1980s issues of local journals – *NZ Architect/Architecture NZ* and *NZ Home & Building* – published is illuminating, not least for the way in which their production qualities dramatically improve over the period. Equally dramatic is the shift in editorial concerns from energy efficiency and community making to slick interior design and massive commercial projects. Two of our key general architectural histories give accounts of the key moments in Auckland's 1990s transformation: Peter Shaw's *New Zealand Architecture* (Auckland: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991) and Terence Hodgson's *Looking at the Architecture of New Zealand* (Grantham House Publishing, Wellington, 1990). Gerald Melling's *The Mid-City Crisis and Other Stories* (Thumbprint Press, Wellington, 1989) presents a stinging critique of both the forces at work in 1980s and the results they produced. For an overview of one of the most controversial issues of the era, facadism, see Carol Bucknell's "Towering Inferno?" in *Home & Building* Feb./Mar. 1987 and John Cattell's "Saving Facades" in *Historic Places in New Zealand* June 1987.