

ITINERARY n.41

NOT ON MAP

10 13



Gratton Hall

Auckland in the 1960s

In May 1961, as part of the Auckland Festival of the Arts, the Auckland Branch of the NZIA arranged an exhibition of contemporary architecture. Entitled "Towards a Metropolis", the show painted a picture of the rapid growth that Auckland was then undergoing, and included many of the buildings in this itinerary: photos of the Silver Medal-winning building for Makower McBeath, drawings of the ACC Workshops and the Mt. Albert War Memorial Hall, and models of the ACC Administration Building and the Methodist Central Mission.

Receiving almost 8,000 visitors over a fortnight, the show was regarded as "a gratifying success", and the Institute's Journal published extensive commentary on the show (see JNZIA May 1961). It is both remarkable and depressing how similar these comments sound to present debates about urban development: "Leadership is the important thing and in this matter architects are better fitted than any other group in the community to give it." There was, however, none of the exasperation of our time; the 1960s were a period of tremendous optimism. Graham Dawson, District Architect for the MoW, commented "The freshness of design shown in the buildings, their clarity of presentation ... give reason to expect that efficient and beautiful buildings will be the rule in the future Auckland."

There was a hunger for new ideas, and they flowed in from abroad. Bill Wilson's comment on the exhibition was that the "drawings and projects of the local architects indicate that they are already adept in the manipulation of many of the new building techniques and materials developed in Europe and America. And that there is in this country no entrenched opposition to the new aesthetics consequent upon their use." It was a moment, rare in the history of our architecture, when commercial pressures and architectural ambitions aligned, leading to the rapid adoption of ideas – only ten years separate Skimore Owings & Merrill's epoch-defining Lever House in New York (1952) from Thorpe, Cutter, Pickmere & Douglas' AMP Building on Queen Street (1962).

This was a moment when "new" was good. Nationally, our celebrated buildings of the 1960s include John Scott's Futuna Chapel (1960), and Warren & Mahoney's Harewood Crematorium (1963), Peter Beaven's Lyttelton Road Tunnel Authority Building (1965). The bold shape-making and structural innovation of these schemes were also a feature of suburban Auckland buildings, but in the central city attention focused on a specific building type – the tower. Powered by a building boom and enabled by new technologies – the curtain wall, heat absorbing glass, air conditioning, even automatic doors – local architects explored the full range of expressive possibilities; from TCPD's monolithic Miesian prism to Beatson Rix-Trott & Carter's breezy University Library to Peter Beavan's vernaculo-brutalist sliver.

All of this building activity supported huge growth in the architecture profession, and it's no accident that two of the nation's biggest firms – Warren & Mahoney and JASMAX – can trace their roots to the 1960s boom. While recent years have seen revived interest in many previously underappreciated architects from this era – Mark-Brown & Fairhead, Rigby, Mullan, Vlad Cacala, and so on – attention has focused on residential work. Many key commercial architects, however, remain in obscurity. Peter Shaw's 1991 history, for example, includes nothing by Haughey, Fox & Partners, KRTA, or Adams Dodd, all major firms during this time. Let us hope our current debates about growth and development, and our own obsessions with new technology, don't tempt us to erase our 1960s heritage before we both remember its quality and learn its lessons. *Andrew Barrie*

1

1960
Makower McBeath
Silk Warehouse
Cnr Wellesley & Nelson Streets
Mark-Brown & Fairhead



MB&F were leading players in Auckland's architecture scene in the 1960s, generally tagged as representing an international (or perhaps Californi-fied rather than regional) version of modernism, particularly demonstrating the influence of Neutra, et al. This crisp composition of planes floating on piloti housed a shop, office and warehouse for a textile importer. It's looking a bit dour these days. The ceramic tile facades have now been painted over, and the windows closed up – it's now part of a brothel! The building won an NZIA Silver Medal in 1961.

See *Home & Building* Aug. 1960 and May 1961, *Btg. Progress* July 1960 and May 1961, as well as *JNZIA* May 1961.

2

1962
Ellen Melville
Pioneer Women's Hall
Freyberg Place
Auckland City Council Arch Div'n



Initiated to honor a former city councillor, this was very much Tibor Donner's project. He designed the raised hall (projecting like the podium of the Lever building) to provide a large meeting hall without compromising circulation in the then open space below. The design is materially rich and has many champions. Its cradling, quartz-encrusted reinforced concrete frames may owe something to Mies' Crown Hall that Donner had visited in 1956; it seems unlikely, however, that the project would have appealed to modernist purists. The hall with its undulating slatted ceiling (a homage to Aalto's Viipuri Library) is one of the most impressive modernist interiors in the city. (RS)
See *Home & Building* March 1965 and *Modern NZ* 1 (1995)

3

1962
AMP Building
Cnr Queen & Victoria Sts
Thorpe, Cutter,
Pickmere & Douglas



Attributed to Jack Manning, then a TCPD staffer, this building was acclaimed as introducing the curtain walled office tower to Auckland. The office floors are contained within crisp, edge-to-edge planes of tinted glass, green spandrel panels, and polished stainless steel mullions. The recessed glass line and black clad columns at ground level originally exaggerated the floating prism of glass, but this effect has been diminished by a canopy added along Queen Street and trees growing along Victoria Street. Now home to The Data Center, the building received an NZIA Honorable Mention in 1966. See *Home & Bldg* July 1962 and May 1966, and *JNZIA* Nov. 1963.

4

1962
Auckland Central
Telephone Exchange
45 Airedale Street
Ministry of Works



If the AMP Building exhibited a slick Miesian sophistication, and Stephenson & Turner's towers demonstrated International Style solidity, then this building has a touch of another kind of modernism – Tropical Mod. The heavily textured composition featured bush-hammered and exposed aggregate concrete panels, but seems intended to provide maximum openness to the environment – breeze blocks, sun shades, louvers, detached stair towers, and particularly a roof top cafeteria that offered views as far as the harbor. The exchange moved down the hill in the late-80s, but the building is still used by Telecom. See *Home & Bldg* March 1965 and April 1965.

5

1964
ANZ Bank
203 Queen Street
Stephenson & Turner



With its automatically opening doors, motorized window cleaners' gantry, and full air conditioning, the building was a state-of-the-art machine for banking in. The techno-joy was evident in descriptions of the building, which breathlessly explains that the electrically-operated calendar clocks in the ground floor banking hall "advise the public of the date." Every 24 hours the date automatically changes. See *Home & Building* Feb. 1964 and Dec. 1964, and *NZIAJ* Aug. 1966.

6

1966
Auckland City Admin. Building
1 Greys Avenue
Auckland City Council Arch Div'n



Design commenced in 1954 with subsequent work remaining true to the initial proposal. In 1956 Donner and ACC engineer, Vern Coleman, undertook a research tour abroad. They attended the first World Conference on Earthquake Engineering and met with the Californian structural consultant, John A. Blume. He advised using a steel frame with bolted moment connectors rather than welded diagonal braces. This steel frame and the development of technologies locally – such as aluminium extrusions, neoprene window seals and ceramic acoustic tiles – were novel and extended the range of architectural technologies in New Zealand in the 1960s (the building was completed in 1966). (RS)
See *Home & Bldg* Nov. 1966 and *NZIAJ* May 1968.

7

1965/1968
Canterbury Arcade Building
47 High Street
Peter Beaven



A complex infill project, this building includes a slim office tower and an arcade connecting to Queen Street. Beaven has been producing bold and structurally adventurous buildings hinting at various international modern influences, but this project appeared at the moment he began to combine modernist elements with those from older traditions, marking the start of Beaven's engagement with contextualism. This building is much admired for its balconies, shutters, and attic floor of its narrow street façade bringing a European flavor to High Street.

8

1967
The DB Tavern
Wellesley Street
Le Pitit, Naylor & Company



The first licensed premises built in the city for almost 40 years, this was not a particularly celebrated building at the time it was produced but is a favorite of this author. The building housed three floors of bars, a services level and four levels of staff accommodation. It employs a very restrained modernist palette – expressed concrete frame, brick infill panels, and floor-to-ceiling glazing – but the activities housed within each part of the building were expressed directly in handling of the volume and the arrangement of the façade without any attempt to smooth or mask the difference. The version of functional logic this projects still seems remarkably contemporary. See *Home & Building* Jan. 1968.

9

1968
South Pacific Hotel
8 Customs Street
Stephenson & Turner



Now the Mercure, this hotel demonstrates the hallmarks of S&T's work of the era – a panelized façade, a highly rational structure, and then-advanced servicing systems (full air conditioning). The hotel included one of NZ's first roof-top restaurants. See *Home & Building* Dec. 1964 and May 1968. S&T produced a number of notable Auckland buildings in the 1960s, remaining structures include the 1965 Methodist Central Mission at 370 Queen Street (*H&B* Dec 1964) and the 1967 Bank of NSW at 79 Queen Street (*H&B* May 1967).

10

1969

Grafton Hall of Residence
40 Seafield View Road
Haughey Fox & Partners



The architects of this building are best known for two chapels – the Wilson Home Chapel in Takapuna (1965) and the Enoch & Edith Bond Memorial Chapel at the Everill Orr Home in Mt Albert (1967). This dormitory, built on what were the tennis courts of a Methodist theological college, consists of a low pavilion containing a dining rooms and social facilities and a ten-storey accommodation tower. The dorm rooms were notable for amazing views across the city through floor-to-ceiling glazing and (having been built by three church organizations) their prohibitively narrow single beds! See *Home & Building* July 1972. While you're in the area, pop over to 27 Carlton Gore Road to see The Liberal Catholic Church of St. Francis by Jack Patterson (1964).

11

1960s

Univ. of Auckland City Campus
3-26 Symonds Street, Auckland
Various

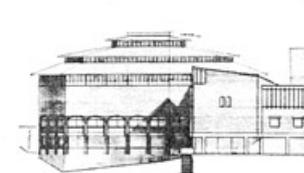


The University underwent a period of rapid expansion in the 1960s, as the demographic surge of baby boomers flowed in. Key projects completed during this decade included: Hoadley Budge & Gummer's Maclaurin Chapel (1964), Warren & Mahoney's Student Union (1965-73), Beatson Rix-Trott & Carter's Elam School of Fine Arts (1963) and Main Library (1969), as well as KRITA's Thomas Building (1968) and School of Engineering (1969). See NZIA Journal Nov. 1963, *Home & Building* Nov. 1963 and Sept. 1970, *Designscape* 87 (Dec./Jan. 1976/77).

12

1969

Synagogue & Community Center
106-116 Greys Avenue
John Goldwater



The complex was awarded an NZIA Silver Medal in 1969 and a NZIA 25 Year Award in 1995. The citation for the later read: "This important community and school building ... was described in the 1970s as 'an unselfconscious piece of architecture embodying a sense of community akin to the monastic tradition'. The beauty, coherence and exquisite sculptural elements of the spaces ... remain as fresh today as they were then." Substantial alterations were made by Peddle Thorp in 2008, winning an NZIA Auckland Award in 2010. See *Home & Bldg.* Dec 1969 and April 1970, *NZIAJ* May 1970 and July 1970 and *Arch. NZ* May/June 1995, Sept./Oct. 2007, and Nov./Dec. 2009. Fans of this building might like to check out Temple Shalom, completed by John's father Albert in 1960 at 180 Manukau Road. See *Home & Building* Oct. 1961.

13

1969

Auckland Grammar School
Centennial Centre
Mountain Road, Epsom
Peter Bartlett & Ian George



This building includes a multipurpose theatre, senior common rooms, library extension, exhibition foyers and a swimming pool. Awarding an NZIA Bronze Medal in 1974, the judges wrote that the complex "has been sensitively handled by the architects to harmonise with and complement the existing architecture on the site and to incorporate existing features and landscaping. ... The subtle blending together and contrasts resulting from the blending of new and old, has made a merit of a difficult requirement of the brief." The building went on to win an NZIA National Award in 1975. See *Home & Building* Jan./Feb. 1975

Other Addresses:

Norwich Union (1964)
177 Queen Street
Beatson Rix-Trott Carter & Co.
This was at the time New Zealand's tallest reinforced concrete building. See *Home & Building* Dec. 1964.

Liston House (1961)
30-32 Hobson Street
Gummer & Ford
See *Home & Building* July 1961.

ACC Workshops (1965)
Cnr Nelson & Wellesley Sts
Auckland City Architects Dept.
Winner of an NZIA Silver Medal.

Auckland Central Police Station
Cnr Vincent and Cook Streets
Ministry of Works (1967)
The Administration Building received a pitched roof, and Baracks Block on Vincent Street is now a YMCA. See *Home & Building* Dec 1967.

BNZ Computer Center (1967)
Cnr Federal & Victoria Streets
KRITA
Now an aptment building. See *NZIA Journal* Aug. 1968 and *Home & Building* July 1967 and Sept. 1967.

Beyond the Inner City:

Paora Flats (1960)
32 Coates Ave, Orakei
Kenneth Albert

Mt. Albert War Memorial Hall
773 New North Road (1961)
Mt Albert
Wilson Moodie & Gillespie

St Josephs Catholic Church
470 Great North Road (1961)
Guy Chambers
Described by Don Bassett as "a modern masterpiece of striking simplicity and space."

St Peter's Church (1962)
11 Killarney Street, Takapuna
Owen, McKenzie & Foote
A fabulous high modern interior. See *Home & Bldg* March 1965.



St. Francis

Ceramic House (1967)
3 Totara Ave, New Lynn
Neville Price & Associates
Now a Lone Star restaurant.

St Helen's Hospital (1968)
28 Linwood Ave, Mt Albert
Newman Smith & Associates
Now the AIS St Helens, a private tertiary institution. See *Home & Building* Nov. 1965.

Bond Memorial Chapel (1966)
53-63 Allendale Road, Mt. Albert
Haughey, Fox & Partners
Winner of an NZIA Merit Award in 1969. See *Home & Building* June 1969.



Mt. Albert War Memorial Hall

Sources:

All photos are by Andrew Barrie. The two Tibor Donner listings are repeated from Robin Skinner's (RS) *BLOCK* Itinerary (no. 10) on Donner. Worthwhile general sources for the 1960s include John Stacpool & Peter Beavan's *Architecture 1820-1970* (Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1972), David Mitchell & Gillian Chaplin's *The Elegant Shed* (Auckland: Oxford Univ. Press, 1984), and Julia Gately's *Long Live the Modern* (Auckland, Auckland University Press, 2008). Useful references on the work of key firms active in the 1960s are John Balasoglou's *Stephenson & Turner* (Auckland: Balasoglou Books, 2006) and the architecture-related sections in Douglas Lloyd Jenkins' *40 Legends of New Zealand Design* (Auckland: Godwit, 2006). Those interested in the University of Auckland's building program could look up Michael Fowler's *University of Auckland* (Wellington: Mallinson Rendel, 1993). Try also the somewhat controversially received essays by Peter Bartlett and John Dickson in an exhibition catalog: Meghan Nordeck & Simon Twose eds. *Connections: The House in the Auckland Scene* (Auckland: G4 Exhibiting Unit, 1998).