

At Home He's a Tourist: New Zealand's Architectural Culture in the Eighties

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ABSTRACT: I will discuss how architecture was presented and received during the 1980s in the non-specialist print media: magazines and books intended for the general public. During the decade, both the magazine and book publishing industries enjoyed unprecedented growth. The magazine sector saw the dominance of the *New Zealand Listener* challenged by new titles. Of these, *Auckland Metro* is the most interesting for architectural culture, since it published regular critiques (by the likes of Peter Shaw, Hamish Keith, David Mitchell and Pip Cheshire) of buildings and of town planning in Auckland. It also documented the rise and fall of the property developers, while arguing for the protection of historic buildings. Equally remarkable, though, is how *Metro's* interest in the civic aspects of architecture waned during the middle of the decade, as it became less concerned with politics and more with "lifestyle." Its emphasis shifts from public buildings to private houses, and discussion of these houses is centred more on the client than the architect. At the same time, individual architects are pictured as men (and sometimes women) of style, alongside fashion designers and hairdressers.

This movement towards lifestyle can be found in other publications of the period and represents a withdrawal from the public square to the private space. Architecture is represented less as a public concern and more as a personal desire - about finding the ideal home. This acquisitive and aspirational interest in architecture is represented most clearly in the *Trends* family of publications, but also in books of the period. A contiguous development was a growing interest in historic buildings. These are shown both as desirable places to live, but also as representations of New Zealand identity. Old buildings also became an important aspect of New Zealand's tourist industry. One important part of this representation is in the work of art photographers, such as Robin Morrison and Laurence Aberhart.

Parallels obviously can be made with the political climate of the decade, with its emphasis on personal gain and the dismantling of the public sphere by privatisation and de-regulation. Equally apparent is the contradiction of New Zealand discovering its heritage at a time when the historic buildings of its cities were being demolished. During the decade, buildings, architects and architecture become totems of larger forces in New Zealand society: of a nostalgia for the recent past, of progress to a brighter future and of a rediscovery of collective identity.

New Zealand, as the tourist guides so often remind us, is a land of contrasts. So it is hardly surprising that an architectural tourist, clambering over the published remains of the 1980s, should find stark contrasts and even some conflicts in the discussion of architecture. This particular tourist guide aims to draw the reader's attention to some of them. Its scope will be confined to the general media: to books, magazines and television programmes that are intended for the general

public, or at least not intended specifically for the architectural profession. Instead, it looks at those instances where architecture is discussed in public. Its purpose is to attempt to discover what the New Zealanders of the 1980s made of architecture, what status it had and how it was presented to them by the media. In short, it looks at New Zealand's architectural culture in that decade, in the broadest terms.

In the crude terms of the amount of media produced, the Eighties was a good decade for architecture. Never before had so much been written, photographed or televised about the buildings of New Zealand. Books were published about architecture, about buildings, and about towns. The decade saw publication of the first biography of a living architect, Gerald Melling's *Joyful Architecture: the Genius of New Zealand's Ian Athfield*; and the second, the same author's *Positively Architecture!:* *New*

Zealand's Roger Walker. The Historic Places Trust published its guides to the historic buildings of the North and South Islands¹ as well as regional guides to the buildings on its register. Several local guides were published, such as Peter Shaw and Peter Hallett's *Art Deco Napier*. Publications of local history, often were concerned with buildings. Many institutions reached 100 years of age during the Eighties, and celebrated their longevity with centennial books. Among these are publications about the Auckland City Art Gallery,² Columba Presbyterian Church in Oamaru,³ and St Joseph's Cathedral in Dunedin.⁴

In the magazine trade, the *Listener* continued to examine society from its lofty position; it remained New Zealand's most popular title throughout the decade, although its circulation peaked at nearly 376,000 in 1982.⁵ It was joined by several new titles, one of which - *Auckland Metro* - took architecture

¹ New Zealand Historic Places Trust *Historic Buildings of New Zealand: North Island*; New Zealand Historic Places Trust *Historic Buildings of New Zealand: South Island*

² Gamble *Auckland City Art Gallery*

³ Rudduck *Centennial 1981: Columba Presbyterian Church, Oamaru*

⁴ Mee *St. Joseph's Cathedral, Dunedin*

⁵ Holcroft "As I Remember It" p 53.

quite seriously. The *Listener* continued to publish articles about architectural topics, rather dutifully and at a rate of about 16 articles a year; *Metro*, on the other hand, took to architectural criticism with vigour, allowing architects to write on what was right or wrong about Auckland's architecture; its regular "Cityscape" section included opinion pieces by Pete Bossley, Pip Cheshire, Ivan Mercep, Marshall Cook and David Mitchell. *Metro* did not stop there, exposing the deals of property developers and criticising local eyesores.

Then there was television. David Mitchell's *The Elegant Shed* was a six-part series about New Zealand architecture since 1945; it was accompanied by a book with photographs by Gillian Chaplin.⁶ New Zealanders were presented their architecture by an architect in a documentary which was lavish by today's standards. Architecture made other television appearances as well, including *City and Suburb* - Hamish Keith's 1983 documentary of two parts over two hours about New Zealand's housing,⁷ Peter Beaven's "Capital Punishment" for *Kaleidoscope* and a *Kaleidoscope* interview with Dr Mark Wigley,

⁶ Mitchell *The Elegant Shed*

⁷ Keith *Native Wit* p 317.

our first Post Modernist architectural theorist - an interview which prompted letters to the Editor of the *Listener*.⁸

Architecture thus was better represented than ever before in the Eighties, and possibly since. However, the story told about New Zealand architecture was largely one of homes and sheds. Vernacular architecture and domestic architecture dominated the discourse. It is noticeable how infrequently public architecture was discussed, that a feature on a single building was a rare thing indeed and that architectural history was largely absent.

Public architecture usually only makes an appearance when it is a matter of controversy. Such was the fate of the design for Auckland's Aotea Centre, criticised in *Metro* by Peter Shaw as "adequate but tame,"⁹ pitied by Marshall Cook as "tucked away in such an unpleasant environment around Aotea Square,"¹⁰ and included in a feature on "Lost Opportunities."¹¹ The *Listener* waited until

⁸ Symonds "Architectural Wit"; Porsolt "New Zealand Architecture" p 12.

⁹ Shaw "The Aotea Centre: Something Merely Average?" p 119.

¹⁰ Cook "Aotea Centre: The Real Issues" p 193.

¹¹ Gordon "Lost Opportunities" p 146.

1988 to discuss the building and then only to note that it would probably not be completed in time for the 1990 Commonwealth Games.¹² Wellington's Michael Fowler Centre fared somewhat better, with a colour feature in the *Listener*. It was accompanied, however, by an assessment (by political scientist and art critic John Roberts) entitled "One Man's Monument ... may be another man's folly."¹³ The *Listener* also featured the new National Library, but said nothing of its architecture; instead it spoke of the "resentments and rivalries among the guardians of our books."¹⁴ Otherwise, public buildings did not feature in the *Listener*. Despite this apparent lack of interest, the *Listener* decided, in a 1987 feature, that architecture was a public issue.¹⁵

Examination of a single building, a critique of architectural merit, is more rare still in the *Listener*. On one of these rare occasions Warren and Mahoney's New Zealand Embassy in Washington, was praised generously; but the author was American and the article reprinted from the *Washington*

Post.¹⁶ Cultural cringe seems to be at work here, as it is in the *Listener's* publication of David Mitchell's piece about Noel Lane winning a competition in Japan for a design that made imaginative use of Helensville's town dump.¹⁷ The New Zealand characteristic of worrying about how foreigners think of us is most stark in another *Listener* article, "As Others See Us," which poured scorn on New Zealand House in London, as well as on some tower blocks in Auckland and Wellington.¹⁸

Being praised or beaten up by foreigners is a recurring theme. Both can be seen in "Architectural Indulgences by Talentless Hacks,"¹⁹ a letter from a Toronto architect published in *Metro*, which thoroughly condemns Auckland's new Harbour Board building, but also praises local architects. To be fair, *Metro* also took the opportunity to beat up both foreigners and Aucklanders when the Sheraton Hotel, designed by the Hawaiian firm of Winberly, Whisenand, Allison, Tong and Goo, was built. Peter Shaw's article,

entitled "Blandness on the Edge of Town,"²⁰ was critical of both the design and of Auckland for having allowed it. *Metro* also allowed David Mitchell to write a scathing review of the new Bank of New Zealand Building - "The Nadir of Bad Taste: another nail in the Queen Street coffin,"²¹ and a very complimentary piece about the Harbour Board's new Straddle House.²²

Such praise or criticism is rare. One other place where it can be found is in Gerald Melling's columns for the *National Business Review*, some of which were published as a collection, *The Mid-City Crisis and Other Stories*, in 1989. Melling's topics included the Auckland University Music School, which he described as "one of the most refreshingly eclectic essays in New Zealand architectural history," the National Library, "an enormous lump of serrated concrete," the demolition of the Wellington Club; and the homes of the newly-enriched.²³ Like the *Metro* writers, he

¹² Gooding "Aotea: A Long Running Drama" pp 32-34.

¹³ Roberts "One Man's Monument" p 42.

¹⁴ O'Hare "Opening the Books" p 32.

¹⁵ Shaw "Architecture: A Public Issue" p 61.

¹⁶ Van Eckardt "Well Mannered Embassy" pp 22-23.

¹⁷ Mitchell "Phoenix from Helensville" p 34.

¹⁸ Fry "As Others See Us" p 5.

¹⁹ Buch "Architectural Indulgences by Talentless Hacks" p 10.

²⁰ Shaw "The Sheraton: Blandness at the Edge of Town" p 26.

²¹ Mitchell "The Nadir of Bad Taste - Another Nail in the Queen Street Coffin" p 23.

²² Mitchell "No Substitute for a Red-Blooded Idea" p 20.

²³ Melling *The Mid-City Crisis and Other Stories* pp 17, 19, 31-33, 39-41.

gives both approval and its opposite, creating a small space in the media where architecture is taken seriously.

Architectural history is conspicuous by its absence. *Landfall* published only one piece about architecture during the decade, an essay by Ian Lochhead about 1930s Modernism in New Zealand.²⁴ *Antic*, one of the little magazines that appeared and then vanished during the Eighties, published Don Bassett's "Third Empire? Variations on a Nineteenth Century Theme in New Zealand Postmodern Architecture,"²⁵ which commented on the fashion for mansard roofs on contemporary buildings.

The only magazine to publish architectural history consistently was *Art New Zealand*. Over the course of the decade, nine essays on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century New Zealand architecture appeared. *Art New Zealand* also took an active interest in the preservation of architecture. Ross Fraser's editorial in the Spring 1982 edition talks of "the disgraceful destruction and displacement of old Auckland architecture of rich

²⁴ Lochhead "New Zealand Architecture in the 30s: The Impact of Modernism" pp 466-481.

²⁵ Bassett "Third Empire?" pp 52-67.

association and aesthetic importance,"²⁶ while an article by Roger Blackley, in the same edition, titled "The Continuing Demolition of Auckland," discusses Partington's Windmill, Victoria Arcade and the threatened demolition of the Supreme Court.²⁷ A 1988 piece by Peter Entwisle, "The Battle for Old Dunedin" (one of the few articles published anywhere that recognised the existence of the city) claimed that "the demolition of old Dunedin is the destruction of New Zealand's biggest surviving work of art of that time."²⁸ Also published was a memorial to Auckland's recently-demolished His Majesty's Theatre in the form of a photograph by Charles Fearnley.²⁹

Art New Zealand had no interest in contemporary architecture, other than museums and arts centres: the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery,³⁰ the additions to the Auckland City Art Gallery,³¹ the new Waikato

²⁶ Fraser "Editorial" p 11.

²⁷ Blackley "The Continuing Demolition of Auckland" pp 18-19.

²⁸ Entwisle "The Battle for Old Dunedin" pp 108-110.

²⁹ Fearnley "RIP His Majesty's" p 41.

³⁰ Schulz "The Govett-Brewster Art Gallery" pp 50-53.

³¹ Wilson "The Reconstruction of the Auckland City Art Gallery" pp 52-57.

Museum,³² and the Auckland Customhouse (renovated as an arts centre) are all featured.³³ Architectural history had further exposure in books. Many of these publications were not academic and most were not written by architectural historians, but at least they concerned themselves with old buildings.

The frequency of discussion of buildings in mainstream media is one possible indicator of the health of architectural culture. Another is the discussion of individual architects. In both cases, such discussion seems to show that architecture and architects have a significant position in cultural life, that they are worthy of attention and that readers will be capable of appreciating them. In the mainstream media of the Eighties, it was not often that an architect was interviewed or discussed. The *Listener* spoke to David Mitchell in 1981,³⁴ to Peter Beaven in 1985,³⁵ and to Sir Miles Warren in 1987.³⁶ *Metro* asked Sir Miles his opinion of recent Auckland architecture in 1989, and received the reply "the central city

³² Gleeson "The New Waikato Museum" pp 78-80.

³³ Goodman "The Renovation of the Customhouse" pp 36-37.

³⁴ Keith "The Great Public Art" pp 38-39.

³⁵ Ansley "Beaven's Way" pp 16-17.

³⁶ Riley "Classicist with a Cause" p 64.

has been crushed on the anvil of Post-Modernist architecture."³⁷ In 1987, *Metro* published "Men of Style," subtitled "trendsetters in clothes, hair and architecture."³⁸ The architectural trendsetters were David Mitchell, Jack Manning, Noel Lane and Richard Priest. Hairdressers and fashion designers are not usually the artistic company that architects keep but this was the height of the financial boom. For those who benefited from the boom, style - whether it be in clothes, hair or houses - was desirable and could be bought.

The "Men of Style" feature was published in August 1987; two months later, on Black Tuesday, the boom turned to bust. Architecture was one of the casualties of the crash, not just in financial terms but also in its reputation. Architects had built the office buildings and the ostentatious homes of the new rich. Their work had transformed Auckland and Wellington. They did not make themselves popular.

The reputation of architecture in the Eighties inevitably was associated with construction

³⁷ Keith "Aggression and Beauty" p 171.

³⁸ Gordon & Reynolds "Men of Style" pp 160-174.

and demolition. Auckland and Wellington witnessed the removal of buildings that had stood for years and their replacement with glass towers, often of dubious merit; as one *Metro* article commented "Buildings continue to sprout like asparagus spears about town. Very few, however, are as well-designed as that elegant vegetable."³⁹ In a *Listener* article of 1987, Finlay Macdonald wrote that, as buildings and streets disappear, "so does a city's collective memory."⁴⁰ Architects were blamed for their part in the alienation that resulted.

Most of the leading architects, though, were aware of the dangers of unregulated development and had warned of it before others had noticed. As early as 1981, Pip Cheshire had written - in an article titled "Shag-piled accountants' hutches":

the stunted buildings we have may be a metaphor for a town struggling for the trappings of urbanity and not yet having the confidence to aim for the stars, but seen in the light of the paucity of concessions made to us streetwalkers, the developers' attitudes seem either short sighted or cynically arrogant toward the city's population, upon whose wealth and patronage the

³⁹ Gordon "High Style" p 35.

⁴⁰ Macdonald "The Vanishing City" p 23.

buildings' success ultimately depends.⁴¹

In 1982, Anthony Ward, then Senior Lecturer in Architecture at Auckland University, wrote:

Auckland's environmental heritage has been squandered over years of atrocious development characterised by callous, cynical buildings, each one having progressively less regard for human well-being than the last.⁴²

Peter Beaven also had made continued pleas for city architecture of quality; shortly after the crash, one of his letters to the *Christchurch Press* was republished by the *Listener*, which made it part of a feature on the problems of architecture.⁴³ The feature, the single most sustained examination of architectural issues in any general magazine of the decade, was introduced thus:

New Zealand architects are boxed in by greedy developers and condemned by people forced to work in the artificial air of ugly glass towers. Still the fever of demolition and construction continues to afflict our cities. On these pages leading architects Ian Athfield, Sir Miles Warren and David Mitchell lash out at a system

⁴¹ Cheshire "Shag-piled Accountants' Hutches" p 87.

⁴² Ward "How to Have the Most Remarkable Urban Landscape South of the Equator" pp 133-134.

⁴³ Beaven "Untitled" p 61; Shaw "Architecture: A Public Issue" p 61.

where people come last.⁴⁴

Architects lost both ways: criticised by the public for their part in the problem but frustrated by their inability to influence development with architectural values.

It did not help that one of the civic leaders who had been most closely associated with redevelopment - Wellington's Mayor, Michael Fowler - was himself an architect. Fowler had devised a somewhat draconian scheme to make Wellington safe from earthquakes: existing buildings had to be modified to resist earthquakes or be replaced by new buildings.⁴⁵ As one *Listener* article put it: "most cities wait until the devastation and then rebuild ... Wellington is doing the reverse."⁴⁶ Inevitably, many of the city's older buildings were demolished.

In this fervour of development, it is understandable that New Zealanders should seek solace elsewhere. One of the characteristics of the decade is a turning away from the city and from the present, towards

⁴⁴ Shaw "Architecture: A Public Issue" p 61.

⁴⁵ Dasler "Michael Fowler: Wellington the Way He Wants It" pp 14-15.

⁴⁶ Taylor "Broken Premises" p 62.

the regions and the past. The objects of attention became the home and the shed. Rather than architecture, writers talked about buildings, often those which had never seen an architect. But, even when a house is new and designed by an architect, often they are absent from the discussion.

New Zealanders looking for a new home had long been catered for by *Home and Building*, the NZIA publication which aimed to gently persuade its readership to choose an NZIA member to design their home. The Eighties also saw the first publication of *Trends*, which soon sprouted various offshoots, magazines devoted to particular types of house or to particular rooms of the house.

Architect-designed houses were also presented in two books by Stephanie Bonny and Marilyn Reynolds, books intended for those looking for ideas for a new home. In *Living with Fifty Architects* of 1980, Bonny and Reynolds (who both had worked in architectural fields) show houses that architects had designed for themselves, with photographs and plans, as well as a photograph of the architect. The introduction says:

Houses that architects have built for themselves and their families have been brought together in this book for a number of reasons. Architects' own homes should reflect more clearly than most houses the underlying cultural and social values of their time. Other houses built for general sale represent what is currently merchantable, or they are built for specific owners who are anxious to conform with the fashionable expectations of what a house should look like. Architects designing a home for themselves can generally ignore these constraints.⁴⁷

Their 1988 book, *New Zealand Houses Today*, takes a different approach. The houses featured are grouped according to location and size: the sections are called "Built in the Country," "On the Edge of Town," "Larger Houses," "Smaller Houses," and "City Sites Redeveloped." There are no photographs of the architects and no mention of them, other than in an index at the end of the book.⁴⁸ The accompanying texts suggest the houses have been chosen not for their freedom from constraints but for their conformity.

New Zealand Houses Today is far from unique. The traditional way of discussing houses had been to talk about them as the work of architects, observing how the architect faced

⁴⁷ Bonny & Reynolds *Living with 50 Architects* p 6.

⁴⁸ Bonny, Reynolds & Sims *New Zealand Houses Today* p 198.

and solved problems of the site, how the design related to their other work and the influences upon their style. The Eighties way was to ignore the architect. In *New Zealand Houses Today*, Bonny and Reynolds discuss the designs in a neutral manner, avoiding mention of who did the designing. In *North and South*, the architect is replaced by the client. From 1989, the magazine ran a regular feature, "Living in Style." Each month a different house was featured. Although these are often designed by architects, the architect usually is scarcely mentioned. Instead, the story of the clients is told. It is usually a story of people who escaped the city or who had returned to New Zealand after years overseas and who were looking for somewhere to nest. Article titles included "A Sense of Place," "Country Comfort" and "Grandma's Legacy."⁴⁹

North and South was a new kind of magazine. First published in 1987, it proclaimed itself to be "New Zealand's Lifestyle Magazine," lifestyle being a peculiar invention of the Eighties. It did not concern itself with architecture, other than homes. Only once in the Eighties did it look at houses as

⁴⁹ Faraway "A Sense of Place" pp 126-128; Millar "Country Comfort" pp 140-143; McLeod "Grandma's Legacy" pp 162-164.

architecture, in a feature entitled "Our Houses - Now They're an Art Form."⁵⁰ The text begins:

We are into an area of experimentation in new home design unparalleled in this country's history. If the architects are to be believed, there is no typical new house anymore - at least not at the top end of the market. House design is being turned into what many architects have maintained it should be - an art form.

On this occasion, the architects at least were mentioned. They were: John Blair, Gordon Moller, John Scott, Marshall Cook, Auckland; Pip Cheshire, and Simon Carnahan.

North and South also ran a regular feature called "My Home Town," a nostalgia piece in which writers recall their childhood days. A representative example is "Campbells Bay - Baches by the Sea," by Rod Melville.⁵¹ Naturally enough, houses feature often - baches, childhood homes, farm houses. These houses are central to the story but also incidental: they are a setting for the stories of their inhabitants. To some extent, the houses in the "Living in Style" section are similar.

⁵⁰ Hayward "Our Houses - Now They're an Art Form" p 82.

⁵¹ Melville "Campbells Bay - Baches by the Sea" pp 38-39.

Houses are a substantial subject of architectural publishing in the Eighties. They are presented not just as desirable places to nest or as ideas for the prospective client, but as symbols of New Zealand identity. A recurring theme in writing of the period is the artful balance of old and new. Take, for example, an article from the short-lived magazine *The New Zealander*, entitled "Old fashioned space ... a new design for Living," which begins: "For about 16 years, Sue and Hamish Keith's Auckland villa has coped with their changing work patterns and family needs - becoming not too much a house but more a way of life."⁵² That people should set themselves the challenge of living modern lives in old houses is never questioned; it seems to be enough that they can do it, a demonstration of Kiwi ingenuity. Living in old buildings, restoring them and adapting them to modern living became a middle-class ideal in the Eighties. It was not just a house but a way of life, the run-down villa found in the inner suburbs, bought for next to nothing and lovingly restored.

Restoration even had official approval: the

⁵² Chunn "Old Fashioned Space ... A New Design for Living" p 74.

Government Printer published *Restoring with style: preserving the character of New Zealand houses* in 1985.⁵³ The cult of the villa exasperated architects. In an article for *Metro*, "The Tyranny of the Victorian Villa," Nigel Cook wrote:

Most of the praise for the "colonial" style that has filled the media for the last twenty years comes, I'm afraid from the fevered minds of lady correspondents. The list of advantages laid out for ignorant readers has been endless, and most of it have been nonsense.⁵⁴

Elsewhere, *Metro* encouraged the villa fetish and the fashion for living in old suburbs, with prose such as "Devonport is like no other Auckland suburb. A place where time seems to stand still. But a place too that may represent the future."⁵⁵

Homes also made for glossy books. Michael Fowler's *The New Zealand House* of 1983 mixes historic, vernacular and modern houses; state housing is barely mentioned. The *Otago Daily Times* published three volumes of Lois Galer's collected columns from the paper, which again include some modern homes amongst

the old houses.⁵⁶ In other publications, the old house is joined by another building type of great symbolic value to New Zealand, the shed.

The old home is the private space - rescued from the past by its new owners. The shed occupies the public space - a picturesque building that remains from the past, apparently belonging to no-one and to everyone. Sheds feature prominently in such picture books as *New Zealand Odyssey: A Graphic Journey*, for which the authors travelled the land, looking for buildings to draw and photograph.⁵⁷ Their book is whimsical, mixing works of architecture with oddities of building to evoke some notion of national character. Much the same is done by David McGill (an author who has made a career of "kiwiana") and illustrator Grant Tilly, who collaborated on three books of written and drawn observations.⁵⁸ Photographer Jane Ussher and writer Fiona Kidman collaborated on *Gone North*, which

shows the decaying buildings of the Far North, and which is both picturesque and poignant.

Then there is *Corrugated Iron in New Zealand*, a collection of photographs made by John Maynard and Warren Viscoe, apparently the result of ten years' work by each. The book includes an essay by David Mitchell and one by Geoff Chapple, who writes:

New Zealand is a nation of primitive builders, and like primitive builders across the world we've shaped whatever cheap material is to hand for our purposes. Corrugated iron has been slapped together for beach baches, for temporary fences which linger, for dog shelters you couldn't dignify with the name kennel. The modern middle class, finding permanence and tidiness more attractive, would rather not know. But corrugated iron has now been built into our way of life, and without it the country would collapse.⁵⁹

Mitchell concludes his essay, a history of corrugated iron building, with the observation:

Surprisingly, iron has reappeared as part of an architecture based on nostalgia. The post-modern manner, avant-garde in the 1970s and fashionable in the 1980s - is full of formal and stylistic references to the architecture of earlier times. It is not the efficiency of iron that has caused its renaissance, but the visual

⁵⁹ Chapple "The unremitting ripple" pp 9-10.

⁵³ Hill *Restoring with Style*

⁵⁴ Cook "The Tyranny of the Victorian Villa" p 164.

⁵⁵ Chapple "Devonport Mon Amour" pp 29-32.

⁵⁶ Galer *Houses and Homes*, *Galer More Houses and Homes*, *Galer Further Houses and Homes*

⁵⁷ Donovan & Sarginson *New Zealand Odyssey*

⁵⁸ McGill *In Praise of Older Buildings*; McGill *Harbourscapes*; McGill *My Brilliant Suburb: Wellington Writings*.

reminders it has given us of the buildings of our past.⁶⁰

Together, Chapple and Mitchell crack the code of corrugated iron: it is a material of nostalgia and of authenticity, never respectable, but always genuine.

What is remarkable about *Corrugated Iron in New Zealand*, however, is the photographs. Depicting some very mundane buildings and some very peculiar ones, they have an eerie quality: all these buildings are made from the same material; many appear to be abandoned; no people appear in the photographs. The photographs undermine the warm tone of the texts, which place corrugated iron in the comforting history of Kiwi can-do. These are buildings in heartland New Zealand: they are old and worn and they should be picturesque; but instead they are menacing. These buildings may be of corrugated iron, but they are gothic.

This is another, darker, side to New Zealand architecture. It is found often in the work of photographers and artists. It can be seen in the work of Laurence Aberhart, such as his photograph of Lodge Concord #39: a small piece of Neo-Classicism set in an indifferent

⁶⁰ Mitchell ""Dunnies Should be made of tin"" p 34.

suburb of brick and timber.⁶¹ Architecture here is an oddity, out of place with its surroundings. In another photograph from the same collection, a shed stands at the edge of a deserted cemetery, the only sign of habitation being the graffiti which mars its white paint and demands "death to disco."⁶² In the next photograph, a bulbous caravan blocks out the house of its owners.⁶³ In another, home is represented by the ugly furniture and mawkish, badly-hung, pictures of a sitting-room in Russell.⁶⁴

Robin Morrison made a living from photographing buildings; his reputation was largely established by his 1978 book, *Images of a House*, which studied Gummer's Tauroa in Havelock North. Buildings feature often in his photographs. But his views on New Zealand architecture are stark:

There is little tradition in our white culture of blending the architecture from "home" with the landscape of the new culture, and the resulting warts express a great deal of our feelings towards the land. We have imposed upon it, and the more definite we make our architectural statement, whether through colour or oddness, the more

⁶¹ Aberhart *Nature Morte* p 21.

⁶² Aberhart *Nature Morte* p 22.

⁶³ Aberhart *Nature Morte* p 23.

⁶⁴ Aberhart *Nature Morte* p 13.

comfortable we seem to be. We are not going to let this country dictate to us how we should build. And if architecture is the mother of art, then the New Zealand landscape is our gallery.⁶⁵

If one had not noticed already, this statement reinforces that there is no comfort to be found in Morrison's buildings.

The painters offer little consolation, either. Peter Siddell's views of Auckland's older suburbs seem to be quite cheerful at first sight.⁶⁶ They are colourful, they feature well-kept weatherboarded houses. But again, there is nobody about and the buildings are uncomfortably mute. George Baloghly painted Auckland street scenes. But again, there are few people on the streets; the cars seem threatening and the buildings hostile.⁶⁷

The buildings of New Zealand's photographers and painters are, to paraphrase Sam Neill, an architecture of unease. Some people might call them home, but there is no shortage of unheimlich. They are a long way from the home of one *Metro* article, which enthused,

⁶⁵ Morrison *Sense of Place* p 22.

⁶⁶ Bosworth "Peter Siddell, Auckland Painter" pp 52-60.

⁶⁷ Brown "George Baloghly's Urban Real Estate" pp 50-53.

right now, it's that cool continental look with lots of glass, sharp exterior angles, discreet roofs, Mediterranean colours and plaster wall. For the moment, the woody look is passe.⁶⁸

They are distant, as well from the cheerful photographs of Michael Fowler's *Buildings of New Zealanders*⁶⁹ or the elegant sheds presented by David Mitchell.

Architectural culture in Eighties New Zealand is a peculiar thing: major public buildings, which are barely mentioned, historic buildings that are not noticed until they disappear in the night, run-down buildings that gain iconic status; then there is the architect, as hero, as villain, as iconoclast, as gentleman and as mayor. For the historian, this can all be quite infuriating. It is difficult to find a pattern, a theme on which to create a history. Perhaps one must admit that there are many stories. Perhaps, we must also admit that a decade which often is characterised as glib and materialistic has deeper and darker qualities that are revealed, in part, by its attitudes to architecture. This is, after all, a land of contrasts.

⁶⁸ Parker "The Designer House" p 192.

⁶⁹ Fowler *Buildings of New Zealanders*

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