

Interiors of the 1960s in miniature

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ABSTRACT: In New Zealand most extant dolls' houses from the second half of the twentieth century are home-made. The venture by the Auckland firm Jomax into mass-producing a single-storey dolls' house in the mid-sixties was unusual. This venture may have been spurred on by the traditional two-storey dolls' houses being produced by the New Zealand Tri-ang factory, also in Auckland.

The Jomax "Little Princess" dolls' house does not, like the New Zealand Tri-ang houses, reflect a UK heritage, but is clearly a New Zealand house similar in form to many being built and published in the 1960s. Jomax also made sets of modern-style furniture suitable for fitting out its four rooms and a hallway. The paper examines the interiors of this New Zealand-designed house and compares them with those of UK (Tri-ang) and East German (Gottschalk) toy houses of the same vintage. The comparison explores the interiors, with their obvious differences and some similarities, and asks whether they reflect the full-scale versions of the time, or whether they were to some extent aspirational.

Dolls' houses in New Zealand

In their book on the toys of early New Zealand, Armstrong and Jackson state:

The style of doll's houses in New Zealand cannot be as accurately designated as the English ones; because they were made by the station carpenter, or by a grandfather or father in the garden shed, the architectural style was whatever the builder's imagination could conceive.¹

In 1929 the more enterprising child was encouraged to make a dolls' house from a cardboard box and furnish it with hand-made cardboard furniture.² Amidst this wealth of DIY dolls' houses, the Tri-ang factory did produce a version of the Tri-ang No.50, a four-room house with a pressed metal front. This was produced in the UK from 1948 until 1971,

the year Tri-ang UK went into liquidation. Tri-ang had taken over the New Zealand firm Joy Toys in 1947, and based in Auckland at the former Camp Bunn near Mount Wellington, traded as Lines Bros. (New Zealand) Ltd.³ A sliding metal front rather than the original hinged metal front was introduced in the UK c1959, and New Zealand houses with sliding fronts were available in the 1960s along with a change in the roof from impressed card to plastic. The transfers of foliage on the front differ from UK houses of the same type and date, although they still reflect generic English plants, such as the hollyhock, rather than New Zealand plants. The four rooms of the interior are left white, rather than painted as in the earlier versions, possibly so the owners could

personalise them. Although the earlier UK houses were factory-assembled, "Peggy remembers a friend of her sisters who worked in a toyshop saying that the houses came in as kits and were assembled in the shops."⁴ (Peggy Lines was the daughter of one of the three brothers who founded Tri-ang⁵). Whether with a hinged or sliding front, the Tri-ang No. 50 of the 1960s was not a New Zealand house, even if assembled here. This was to change when Jomax entered the story.

The Little Princess Dolls' House

The firm Jones and Max Ltd. (c1953-66) were in Auckland and made wooden nursery furniture and toys. In 1966 they became Jomax

¹ Armstrong and Jackson *Toys of Early New Zealand* p 33.

² Peter Pan "For the Little Ones" p 3.

³ Osborne *The Book of Tri-ang Dolls' Houses 1919-1971* np; Veart *Hello Girls and Boys* pp 122-124.

⁴ Osborne *The Book of Tri-ang Dolls' Houses 1919-1971* np.

⁵ Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon "Hamleys and the Gold State Coach: The Peggy Lines Collection" np.

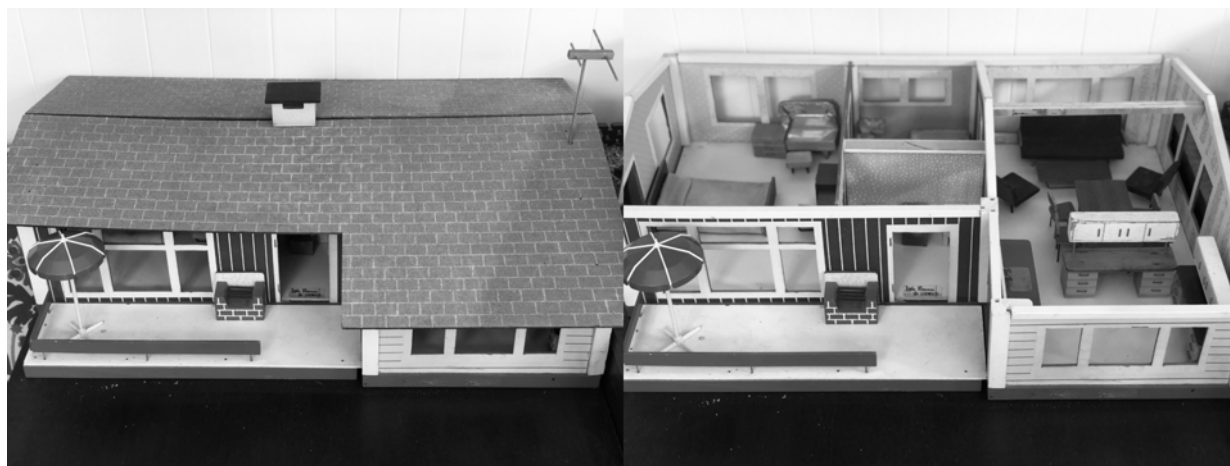


Figure 1: The 1967 Jomax house

Industries Ltd. under the ownership of the toy distributor I Yock.⁶ Apart from making tin-plate toys and wooden construction toys in 1967 they produced the single storey flat-packed Little Princess Dolls House, which was very much a New Zealand house of the times (Figure 1). Made from hardboard the wall panels with their unglazed window openings slotted into grooved corner posts attached to the baseboard. The grey hardboard roof painted to look like tiles was in two pieces that could be removed for play, and with a chimney and hole for a TV aerial. The low

pitch skillion roof form with its overhangs was typical for the era.⁷ The exterior walls were yellow with green gables apart from the front wall that was part red and part yellow, and with a small detachable white painted deck with a green railing. The interior was equally bright with pink and blue striped and spotted wallpapers contrasting with a bright yellow floor.

The extent to which such a colour scheme was either playful or even perhaps aspirational rather than reflecting what a child might

encounter at home is the next issue. The interior of the Jomax house looks more towards 1950s' America when "its citizens went mad for bright, bold colours, using whichever ones they pleased in every room they lived in."⁸ This is evident in both 1950s American exteriors and interiors.⁹ The nearest interior in its use of colour would seem to be the Nancy Martin and Frederick Ost kitchen as recreated by its current owners based on colours revealed when stripping paint layers back to the original. This Wellington house was designed in 1957.¹⁰ The kitchen floor is bright pink, and walls are in light orange with the pantry door picked out in a darker shade, and sky-blue.

Most New Zealand homes in the 1960s would not have been so adventurous in their use of colour, as evidenced by Barfoot and Thompson's images of the interior of a 1960s' state house.¹¹ Here the wallpaper in the sitting room has a discrete silver stripe and the carpet is beige with the colour coming from the sofas upholstered in purple. The kitchen has beige

⁶ Fun Ho! Toys "Jones and Max Limited (c.1953-1966) - Jomax Industries (c.1966-1974) - Owned by I. Yock" np.

⁷ BRANZ "1940-60s architect-designed homes: layout and form" np.

⁸ Horn *Fifties Style: Then and Now* p 118.

⁹ Hine *Populuxe* pp 50, 79.

¹⁰ Resene "bauhaus rules" np.

¹¹ Barfoot and Thompson "Different housing styles in New Zealand" np.

walls and a patterned lino of similar shades with the colour coming from the doors of the cupboards which are sky blue, and similar to the Ost kitchen, with cupboard carcasses painted white.

Images from *Home and Building* for December 1967 are equally reticent in their choice of colour and furnishings, as the interior forming the cover of the issue demonstrates, together with illustrations in an article on flooring in the same issue.¹²

Sample wallpapers from the 1950-60s by the New Zealand firm Ashley Wallpapers Ltd. were also subdued in colour and pattern compared to those of the Jomax house, consisting of pale pink and silver stripes, or a similar background overlaid with greyscale posies of flowers. However, the wallpaper collection held at Heritage New Zealand¹³ does include samples from 1967-75 that hint at something both brighter and more modern in terms of design motif for the bolder householder. Two examples show geometric designs in shades of brown and orange, another has large stylised dahlia-like pom-

pom flowers in shades of white, yellow ochre and pale blue on a dark background, and another with red and white daisy-like flowers on a red and white background reminiscent of whorls on a thumb print.

The carpets shown in the 1967 December issue of *Home and Building* are again subdued in colour, although such carpets might have been partly covered by a scenic rug made in the 1960s by the Riccarton Carpet Manufacturing Company of New Zealand, whose designs included "Mount Egmont, and Map of New Zealand ... Auckland Harbour Bridge, Queenstown, Lake Taupo, Russell, Wellington Harbour, and Mount Cook."¹⁴ Te Papa describe the same series of rugs as manufactured by Feltex Carpets New Zealand Ltd. having taken over the Carpet Manufacturing Company of New Zealand by the time the first rug (the map of New Zealand) was produced in 1957.¹⁵ Each year saw a new design. Armstrong lino flooring from the 1960s was also not very colourful. The catalogue for 1963 shows patterns of browns and beiges with muted reds.¹⁶

The Jomax house thus appears to represent more of an ideal interior for the time than that found in the average New Zealand home, and although Brindley writing of colour in the kitchen in 1955 suggested "By a careful selection of bright, gay, liveable colours it will be found that fatigue in the kitchen is reduced to a really astonishing degree,"¹⁷ his centrefold for colours for an New Zealand house were again muted. Perhaps the Jomax colours are far brighter simply to appeal to a child as young children tend to prefer bright colours and primary over secondary colours.¹⁸

When it comes to the Jomax Little Princess furniture and appliance sets they seem more in line with what was available in New Zealand at the time, at least for those with money to buy new furniture. Danske Møbler opened its first retail store in 1962 in 192 Symonds Street, Auckland, although the founding couple, Ken and Bente Winter had been previously selling their furniture

¹⁷ Brindley *New Zealand Home Decorator and Painter* p 76.

¹⁸ Read and Uppington "Young Children's Color Preferences in the Interior Environment" pp 494-495; LoBue and DeLoache "Pretty in pink: The early development of gender-stereotyped colour preferences" p 657.

¹² Anon "Elegant carpets are a way of life" p 72.

¹³ Heritage New Zealand "Explore the Collection" np.

¹⁴ "Riccarton Scenic Rugs" Eph-B-DECOR-1962-01

¹⁵ Te Papa "Rug" np.

¹⁶ Kueber "Awesome flooring for a 1960s or 1970s house" np.

inspired by Danish design to other retailers.¹⁹ Certain aspects of Danish style were easy to reproduce in miniature—the simple forms became slabs of wood and the splayed legs were easily reproduced using thin metal or short plastic rods. The wood could be covered in fabric for chairs and sofa and plain D-handles were simply reproduced using staples. The Jomax wooden kitchen in terms of its dresser and sink unit was equally basic in form and construction bearing a resemblance to the images of kitchens from the 1960s, and, although there was a Jomax fridge, there was no cooker. For outside it was possible to buy a wooden table and umbrella and a wooden painted brick barbecue.

In being brightly coloured and with some attempt at making robust furniture, though the splayed metal legs were anything but, the Jomax Little Princess house was a toy New Zealand house unlike the two-storey British models stemming from the Tri-ang factory of the time. Its only other competitor, apart from DIY, were the sets of painted cast aluminium dolls' house furniture produced by Fun Ho! from 1942-65,²⁰ but these were 1:16 scale rather

¹⁹ Danske Møbler "Our Story" np.

²⁰ Fun Ho! Toys "Sandcast Aluminium – Dolls Furniture" np.

than the 1:12 scale of the Jomax house.

Jennys[sic] Home

In 1965 in the UK Tri-ang launched a new range of dolls' house furniture under the trade name Spot-on. Spot-on toy vehicles were accurate scale models made in Tri-ang's Belfast factory. The Spot-on furniture, made in the same Belfast factory, was similarly modelled on real furniture and fittings such as the Leisure kitchen chair and sink unit, the 1962 G-plan wing-backed chair that featured in the films *Goldfinger*, *You only live twice*, and *Help!*,²¹ and the G-plan TV chair. The latter had the splayed legs typical of the period, whereas the model wing-backed chair had to be given four splayed legs in place of the castors of the original. The button tufting on both chairs was reproduced in the moulded plastic of the models. As a brand, G-plan dates from 1953 established by the grandson of Ebenezer Gomme, who began making hand-made furniture in 1898²² and G-plan furniture has now gained retro desirability. This was the type of furniture children would have seen in department stores and furniture

²¹ British Antique Dealers Association (BADA) "G-Plan 6250R Brown Draylon Armchair 1962 James Bond Blofeld" np.

²² G-Plan "Our Design Heritage" np.

emporium. The moulded plastic chairs of the area, such as the 1967 Universale injection-moulded stacking chair in ABS by Joe Colombo or Verner Panton's 1968 single injection moulded S-shaped stacking chair, were more in the realm of high design than what a child might have seen in the high street.

However,

the Lines Brothers marketing department realised that if the range was going to be used by children rather than adults, then play value was probably more of a selling point than cold accuracy, and the range was rebranded as Dollies Home.²³

This was very soon followed by a second rebranding after the realisation that the appearance of Barbie in 1959 and Tri-ang's own version, Sindy, in 1963 had led play into the realm of identification with the doll and acting out the child's own possible future life. A range of plastic rooms was now produced along with the furniture, launched as Jennys[sic] Home in 1967 in collaboration with *Homes and Gardens* magazine. Jenny was to be the child of this new type of modular dolls' house, where rooms and furniture could be added every Christmas and birthday, but

²³ Brighton Toy Museum "Category: Jennys Home" np.

equally where the furniture and fittings could be used in a shoe box or played with on the floor. The modular rooms came in two sizes and could be stacked to imitate apartment living, but could also be arranged to form a bungalow that could be fitted with lighting with the aid of a ranch style chimney housing the battery. The large room had a sliding transparent plastic side thus imitating the ranch slider, though this looks somewhat out of place when the rooms are stacked vertically, as in the eight-storey version prepared for the exhibition of dolls' houses at the V and A Museum of Childhood. It does allow for easy access for play.

The furniture and fittings made for Jennys Home are of moulded plastic and metal. Chairs and tables have a metal base and legs and moulded plastic seat. The bathroom set was also largely metal with a plastic bath and basin. The kitchen units were either all metal including the opening drawers or, later, had a metal base and plastic front, top and opening drawers. The moulded plastic dressing table and chest for drawers came with all drawers opening, as did the sideboard and the bookcase had sliding plastic fronts. The furniture thus had a high degree of realism not often found in dolls' houses.

There was a Jenny doll along with parents and a dog and a pony, which must have been difficult to accommodate in an apartment. The rather sombre grey, brown and light blue plastic rooms could be fitted out with felt carpets in saturated colours together with striped curtains. The interiors thus have the strong colours that are reflected in the interiors shown in the ercol furniture catalogue of 1965,²⁴ although the furniture in Jennys Home does not imitate that of ercol. ercol furniture was at its peak in the 1950s and 1960s with production of some 2,000 items a day,²⁵ and although mass-produced and affordable, such furniture often featured in interiors of architect-designed houses for the relatively wealthy.²⁶ However, its archetypal forms based on the traditional Windsor chair would not have readily lent themselves to being reproduced in plastic and metal.

Jennys Home was not the first attempt at making a modular dolls' house that resembled an apartment. This happened in the 1930s in the UK when Bassett-Lowke advertised a 1:12 scale modular flat consisting of five rooms—a

²⁴ ercol "ercol Catalogue Archive" np.

²⁵ Wustemann "Chairway to heaven; Design" p 12.

²⁶ Clifford *Country Life Book of Houses for Today* pp 41,49,66,131.

kitchen, living room, dining room, bedroom and bathroom with interconnecting doors, as can be achieved with Jennys Home by removing the doors when the modules are place side-by-side. This would then have cost £4 4s. compared with a "Stockbroker-Tudor" two-bedroom, dining room, kitchen, bathroom and garage, rooms fitted with electric light of a similar date by Tri-ang would only have cost 59/6 (£2 19s 6d). Bassett-Lowke intended this apartment to be the home of the 1:12 scale furniture that, although marketed under the name of Nuways, thus referring back to Bassett-Lowkes' 1926 flat roofed modernist house New Ways designed by Behrens, was hardly modernist in outlook, seeming more fitted for a gentlemen's club.²⁷ However, like Jennys Home the aim was for realism in miniature, whereas the Jomax furniture that was the contemporary of that of Jennys Home was, in the main, built to last rather than for realism.

Gottschalk dolls' houses of the 1960s

Jennys Home when stacked in quantity bears some resemblance to the flats typical of East Germany made of precast concrete slabs

²⁷ Fuller *The Bassett-Lowke Story* pp 278-279; Brighton Toy Museum "Category: Nuways dollhouse furniture (Bassett-Lowke)" np.

(*Plattenbau*) in the 1960s whereas the 1968/69 dolls' house by the DDR (German Democratic Republic) firm Moritz Gottschalk does not even look towards the rural housing of the DDR but is much more modern, playful, and would not look out of place in 1950s-60s USA. Gottschalk, located in Marienberg in the Erzgebirge, started making dolls' house in 1873 along with other toys and had a big export market for houses that looked traditional. After the partition of Germany following WWII, they resumed production in 1947. Although early post-war houses were both small and traditional looking, being a copy of a pre-war design,²⁸ they still exhibited some of the flamboyance of the houses to come, with the striped awning and balcony. Interiors are subdued in terms of colour and this was also true of the Gottschalk houses of the 1960s. What these interiors did have were realistic representations of the types of furniture available in the DDR at the time, making the interiors reflect life even if the dwellings failed to do this, and this furniture was not dull in either design or colour. A collector has claimed that:

a large part of these dolls' houses and miniature furniture, which document so clearly the prosperity of

²⁸ Green "Moritz Gottschalk Dolls Houses 1947-1971" np.

the Federal Republic of Germany's economic miracle, was produced in the DDR. Not available for sale there, many of these toys were produced in the traditional wooden toy strongholds of the Erzgebirge, exclusively for export to capitalist countries for the purpose of obtaining foreign currency.²⁹

This story of export may well be true, although a study of toys in department store and mail order catalogues from both East and West Germany reveals many more of the houses for sale in the East. It is clear that these toys represented furniture design in the DDR and that they were available there. The story of furniture design in the DDR goes back to firms such as the *Deutsche Werkstätten Hellerau GmbH*, a furniture manufacturer, founded in 1898 and from 1910 based in the garden city of Hellerau in Dresden, during the Arts and Crafts period of the early twentieth century.³⁰ Founded as the *Dresdner Werkstätten für Handwerkskunst* (Dresden Workshops for Handwork Art) the company was one of the most important German manufacturers of furniture designed by well-known artists and designers, including Peter Behrens, Joseph Maria Olbrich, Mackay Hugh Baillie Scott und

²⁹ Bohn "Virtuelles Spielzeugmuseum der 50er – 70er Jahre" np.

³⁰ Anon "*Deutsche Werkstätten*" np.

Charles Rennie Mackintosh.³¹ Apart from making prefabricated wooden houses after WWI, earlier in 1903 the factory began to make what they called *Maschinenmöbel* (machine furniture) using a similar concept to modern flat-pack furniture to simplify transport to the purchasers' homes. It consisted of units designed to work individually or in combinations, making it possible for lower-income households to build up a room setting gradually. In 1906, the first full range of machine furniture was presented at the *Dritten Deutschen Kunstgewerbeausstellung* (Third German Arts and Crafts Exhibition).³²

This machine furniture range was called *Das Dresdner Hausgerät*. *Gerät* is a versatile word, it can be used to mean a piece of equipment, a device, a tool, an appliance or a utensil. The famous German four-wheel-wheel drive vehicle, the *Unimog*, gets its name as an abbreviation of *UNI*versal-*MO*tor-*Gerät*, or Universal Motor Device.³³ The furniture range could be translated as *The Dresden House Equipment*. Whatever we may call it, the

³¹ Ziffer "Möbelbau in Dresden – Unikat und Serie" p 84.

³² Arnold *Vom Sofakissen zum Städtebau. Die Geschichte der Deutschen Werkstätten und der Gartenstadt Hellerau* p 180.

³³ Maclou "History of Unimog and Museum of Gaggenau" np.

furniture range was produced until 1925, when it was replaced by another set of designs called *Die Billige Wohnung* (The Cheap Flat).

The company was a supplier to the German armaments industry in the Second World War. They made wooden rifle stocks, and later, parts for the wooden Heinkel 162 S, the two-seater glider trainer for the equally wooden He 162 jet fighter (Marko. 2019).³⁴ Not surprisingly, the factory came under state administration as part of war reparations and it was nationalized on January 1, 1951. From then on, it operated under the name *Volkseigener Betrieb Deutsche Werkstätten Hellerau. Volkseigener Betrieb* (VEB) (ie People's Own Company) was the name given to nationalised companies in the DDR. A joke at the time was that VEB stood for *Vatis ehemaliger Betrieb* (Daddy's former company).³⁵

From 1966, the workshops produced the highly successful *Montagemöbel Deutsche Werkstätten* (hence MDW) furniture range in large quantities, making half a million items

before production ceased in 1990. This furniture system, developed by Rudolf Horn with Eberhard Wüstner, remained in production for 24 years and became a furniture cult classic in the DDR, as shown in the description of Horn as the Design-Pope of the East.³⁶ The modular system made of chipboard with mahogany veneer finish could be put together individually by the users in different combinations, just like the company's *Maschinenmöbel* of 1903. It was not universally loved. The DDR's Head of State, Walter Ulbricht, who was said to prefer the middle class Biedermeier furniture of the nineteenth century, said "These are just boards."³⁷ In spite of this, the manufacturers say that the self-assembly furniture was their most successful range of furniture during the whole of the DDR era, meaning that it found its place in many East German apartments.³⁸

Unsurprisingly, similar furniture found its way into the dolls' houses of DDR giving them a fitted appearance, somewhat different from the items-placed-in-space nature of the

Jomax and Tri-ang houses. This had an effect on the design. The Gottschalk houses are open at the back for access, and tend to have one wall with a window and two solid flank walls for the placing of furniture units, whereas the Jomax house has been described as having too many windows for easy placement of furniture,³⁹ and Jennys Home is not much better with glazing and doors to three sides.

Dolls' Houses of the 1960s: aspiration or reality?

Chen described the dolls' house as "a miniature world in which the environment of human living is reshaped by imagination and creativity."⁴⁰ The purpose of playing with a dolls' house is only partly made up of room design. In fact, there seems to be two distinct modes of play with dolls' houses. The first is as a vehicle for interior design, and many adult miniaturists and dolls' house collectors fit into this category, and the second is the acting out of life in all its quirks and conventionalities. The latter theme is found in comments ranging from the architectural critic John Summerson's allusion to dolls' house

³⁴ Marko ""Heinkel He 162 Volksjäger" Plane Encyclopedia" np.

³⁵ Pilleul-Arp ""VEB-GmbH": "Vatis ehemaliger Betrieb - geklaut mit besonderer Höflichkeit" p 160.

³⁶ Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk "Rudolf Horn - der Design-Papst des Ostens" np.

³⁷ Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk "Rudolf Horn - der Design-Papst des Ostens" np.

³⁸ Bille "Rudolf Horn und das MDW" np.

³⁹ Moor "The Jomax Little Princess Furniture and Dolls House" p 28.

⁴⁰ Chen "Playing with Size and Reality: The Fascination of a Dolls' House World" p 279.



Figure 2: Home-made dolls from the 1960s.

play being a strict analogy with adult life,⁴¹ to Frances Hodgson Burnett's story *Rocketty-Packetty House* (1906), which is a delightful description of the inhabitants of an abandoned dolls' house having parties and balls, marrying and having families, suffering whooping cough and scarlet fever and dying and being suitably buried, all of which might be acted out in child's play.⁴² Given the focus here is on the interior of the 1960s, and particularly that of New Zealand, the three examples offer a useful comparison. The Jomax house looks like a New Zealand house

but one that is very brightly coloured to appeal to the child. Its furniture and fittings are crude but bright but with a nod to the Scandinavian design that was made popular through outlets such as Danske Møbler. Lloyd Jenkins, referring to the early 1960s, states: "If there was a theme that brought every New Zealand house of this period together it was the pursuit of Scandinavian-style furniture."⁴³ Looking at the Jomax furniture, it might equally be argued that the wire and wood that gave an illusion of Scandinavian style might be born of New Zealand pragmatism. The

Gottschalk houses could be viewed as the opposite of the Jomax. The houses were far from where most children in the DDR lived but the furniture for the interiors and the rather subdued décor mirrored the interiors of the child's experience. The Tri-ang Jennys Home has features of both—interior furniture and fittings that echoed those of reality and a rather grim exterior presence that matched that of the high-rise social housing of the time. What Jennys Home did, however, was recognise that the dolls' house has never been a cheap toy.⁴⁴ Its modular form allowed for gradual growth. It may be the cost of the manufactured house means that many New Zealand dolls' houses were home-made. Figure 2 shows such a house that is very similar to the Jomax house in form, but with the added reality of a better two-bedroom plan and separate kitchen, living room, and bathroom as well as a carport and deck. The twist in the tale is that the plan for this house appeared in *Australian Women's Weekly* in 1963.

Maybe this is where Jomax got the idea ...

⁴¹ Summerson *Heavenly Mansions* p 1.

⁴² Burnett *Rocketty-Packetty House* pp 7-92.

⁴³ Lloyd Jenkins *At Home: A century of New Zealand Design* p 189.

⁴⁴ Chen "Playing with Size and Reality: The Fascination of a Dolls' House World" p 280.

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