

## Going for Gold: New Zealand houses in the 60s through the veil of the NZIA Bronze Medals

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**ABSTRACT:** In 1926 the New Zealand Institute of Architects instituted a Gold, Silver, Bronze Medal system to recognise its members' work. By the 1960s, the Bronze Medal recognised the best designed single-unit house. The award system appears to have been a strict one, the Institute feeling no obligation to award the Bronze Medal in 1962, 1964 and 1969. This paper looks at the seven houses recognised by the Bronze Award in the 1960s.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:** Thanks are due to: Mike Austin, Lillian Chrystall, Alan Fairhead, Michael Findlay, Charles Prior Hoadley, Caryll Kenny, Russell Lowe, Mary Mark-Brown, Robin Skinner, Bill Toomath, and John Macarthur.

### The NZIA Bronze Medals

Seven houses (the Kenny House, the McCrae House, the Mackay House, the Orr-Walker House, the Becroft House, the Yock House and the Newcomb House) earned their architects NZIA Bronze Medals in recognition of being the best domestic work during the 1960s. Even though the medal system began in the 1926, it was not until 1940<sup>1</sup> that "it was decided to award a bronze medal for the best domestic work by a member."<sup>2</sup> In 1965 "domestic work" was further clarified as a "single unit house."<sup>3</sup> The accompanying conditions set at this time stressed that only one Bronze Medal would be awarded

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<sup>1</sup> "NZIA Awards: a brief history" p 28.

<sup>2</sup> "Awards of the Gold, Silver and Bronze Medals of the Institute" p 60.

<sup>3</sup> "Medal Awards and National Awards of Merit: Procedure adopted by Council on 29 March 1965" p 179.

annually,<sup>4</sup> and meant that buildings would have been completed for at least two years.<sup>5</sup> This prescription of delay means that the awards presented are not a true and immediate barometer of avant garde architectural thinking in New Zealand. In addition there were cases where architects doing private architectural jobs while working for firms specialising in non-domestic work

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<sup>4</sup> "Medal Awards and National Awards of Merit: Procedure adopted by Council on 29 March 1965" p 179.

<sup>5</sup> The Bronze Medal winner was selected "from among those which have received a national award of merit during the current or two preceding years of submission. ... [and] Buildings submitted for consideration must have been completed for a minimum period of two years at the date of submission provided, however, that buildings for temporary or portable use or of a demountable construction will be accepted at such less age as is consistent with their nature. ... Submissions shall be lodged ... by October 31 in each year." "Medal Awards and National Awards of Merit: Procedure adopted by Council on 29 March 1965" p 179.

were not able to get institute acknowledgement for the quality of their work.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, the projects recognised do indicate the directions and interests which occupied New Zealand house design during these and later years. They demonstrate the design priorities (and biases) held by the Institute, and, by proxy, the view of a majority of the architectural profession. The selection of houses though appear to have certain peculiarities: a higher than average percentage were built for professional couples without children (43%), and a geographical bias, with

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<sup>6</sup> As Robin Skinner has noted, because Tibor Donner's private architectural jobs were not sanctioned by his employer (the Auckland City Council), and he was unable to publicise them. Projects could not be published in the NZIA publications, nor nominated for awards, though Donner did have work anonymously published in *Building Progress*. Skinner, Robin "T. K. Donner – architect" University of Auckland: BArch thesis, 1994, p 189.

six of the seven awards received by Auckland architects, and five for houses in Auckland.

In 1970, the Bronze Medal, perhaps confused with the Olympic ordering of third, was relegated to a Local Branch Award;<sup>7</sup> and the Bronze connection with the "best" and the "domestic," predominant in the 1960s, disappeared.

**1960 The Kenny House, 9 Shera Rd, Remuera, Auckland** (c1956) George Kenny (d. 1989)

The decade opened with the 1960 Bronze Award presented to George Geoffrey Kenny (an architect at the Auckland City Council), for his own house at 9 Shera Rd, Remuera, an "elevated box" supported on circular steel columns."<sup>8</sup> The box lifts living clear of the ground, which, in this case, was largely produced by excavation and terracing (substantially consisting of fill from the concurrent Parnell Baths project<sup>9</sup>). The lifting of the house ameliorated the impact of the site, removing any need for level changes in

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<sup>7</sup> "NZIA Awards: a brief history" p 28.

<sup>8</sup> "N.Z.I.A. Bronze Medal Award: House at Remuera, Auckland" p 44.

<sup>9</sup> Kenny 30 November 2005; The Baths received the 1957 N.Z.I.A. Gold Medal.

the elevated main floor. It is a strategy of physical disengagement with the site and harks back to the sentiments that Bartlett identifies as characteristic of the Group's "typical disinterest in the architectural challenges of site, landscape and occupant - matters which complicate rationalisation."<sup>10</sup> From the outside the house's well fenestrated front echoes moves in furniture design and commercial display cases. The large areas of windows meant "There weren't many places for paintings to hang."<sup>11</sup> Television, when it entered the living space, was relegated to a cupboard.<sup>12</sup>

Private and public zones are clearly and deliberately defined, as "living and sleeping wings joined by the service core of kitchen and bathroom."<sup>13</sup> The corridor forms a spine which glues bedrooms, bathroom, kitchen and access to the basement (laundry, workshop and carport) into a coherent private realm; the kitchen and the corridor door being the critical devices to manage social relationships.

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<sup>10</sup> Bartlett "The Mid-Century Modern House is Auckland" p 14.

<sup>11</sup> Kenny 30 November 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Kenny 30 November 2005.

<sup>13</sup> "N.Z.I.A. Bronze Medal Award: House at Remuera, Auckland" p 44.

This control of privacy, and the design of seclusion, operates beyond the geometry of the plan and the visual occlusion of physically enclosed and partitioned space. Kenny, a keen cellist and connoisseur of classical music,<sup>14</sup> consciously designed the house to perform as an acoustic instrument, noting that: "the service core forms an effective sound barrier for the bedrooms when parents entertain."<sup>15</sup>

The living spaces reflect the informal living associated with the open-plan, which bleeds previously distinct functions into each other, the furniture and fittings providing spatial articulation: "each section being defined by table height and door height fittings."<sup>16</sup> Geometrically compact, the house's concise form exploits the informality of the open plan to provide an economic and efficient space. The family represented in this house is a coherent and compact unit, with children.

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<sup>14</sup> Kenny, personal communication (30 November 2005); also: "musical activities make up a considerable portion of the owners' leisure time" "N.Z.I.A. Bronze Medal Award: House at Remuera, Auckland" p 44.

<sup>15</sup> "N.Z.I.A. Bronze Medal Award: House at Remuera, Auckland" p 44.

<sup>16</sup> "N.Z.I.A. Bronze Medal Award: House at Remuera, Auckland" p 44.

The house, now significantly altered,<sup>17</sup> was a pleasure to live in.<sup>18</sup>

**1961 The McCrae House, Wily Tce, Acacia Bay, Taupo** (c1961) Charles Prior Hoadley  
The Kenny House differs sharply in exterior form from the low-sweeping gabled McCrae House, which won Gummer Ford Hoadley Budge and Gummer the 1961 Bronze Medal for Charles Prior Hoadley's design.<sup>19</sup> It was unusual for the firm to design houses, and this commission derived from work the firm did for New Zealand Insurance, the client (Alec McCrae), being the manager for New Zealand Insurance and South British Insurance in Singapore.<sup>20</sup> The client knew and admired Richard Neutra's work and this influenced the design of the house, particularly its use of stone and timber.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Jones "Extended Play" pp 52-58.

<sup>18</sup> Kenny 30 November 2005.

<sup>19</sup> There is a contradiction in the *NZIA Journal* as to which year the Bronze Medal for the McCrae house was awarded. The April 1962 *NZIA Journal* states it was 1961 ("Annual Dinner and Presentation of Awards" p 71); the April 1963 *NZIA Journal* states it was 1962 ("Conference Report" p. 50). The award is listed as 1961 in "1927-2004 NZIA Award Winners" p 236.

<sup>20</sup> Hoadley 30 November 2005.

<sup>21</sup> Hoadley 30 November 2005.

The substantial living area of the house is open plan.<sup>22</sup> Bathroom, laundry, and second bedroom occupy secondary and self-contained spaces. The public living spaces (living, kitchen and dining) wrap around the fireplace, which "acts as a wall."<sup>23</sup> Direct visual connection (the path of the eye) differs from the path of the foot, as this kind of open plan interiorised and reinstated the eighteenth-century Picturesque ideal of providing a different path for eye from that of the foot. In the McCrae house, foot travel between living and dining took a longer and more circuitous path, than the direct line of sight, requiring passage through the kitchen, altering the established order of: living, dining and kitchen apparent in the Kenny House.<sup>24</sup>

The main bedroom occupied a position in the plan between public and private realms, influenced by the McCraes' desire "to view the

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<sup>22</sup> Open-planning was suggested by the architects and endorsed by the clients. Hoadley recalls that open-planning was "just coming into vogue" in the early 1960s. Hoadley 30 November 2005.

<sup>23</sup> Hoadley 30 November 2005.

<sup>24</sup> Rigby.Mullan's Greer/Firth House, Swanson, Auckland (1959-60) has an atrophied and less dramatic version of this re-ordering of living, dining and kitchen. For the plan of the Greer/Firth House see Lloyd Jenkins *At Home* p 168.

open fireplace from the main bedroom to give extra comfort in the long, cold, winter evenings."<sup>25</sup> This bedroom has two entrances: the conventional door from the hall, located firmly in the private side of the house, and two large doors<sup>26</sup> which dramatically removed the wall between the living space and the bedroom, effectively locating the bedroom in the realm of public space. The door from the hallway meant privacy and convention could be restored with the closing of the large sliding doors, as the design of the house provided the possibility of the bedroom's location in both the private area of a house, and the more informal public area of the holiday home.

Views of the lake could be seen through the glass sliding doors leading to a large deck overlooking the lake, taking, as Hoadley notes, "the inside out, or the outside in." The deck, stretches out to enable access to the sun to spite the southern orientation of the site. Its built form, as roof to a secondary

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<sup>25</sup> "Bronze Medal Award: House at Acacia Bay, Taupo" p 45.

<sup>26</sup> The plans published in *Home and Building* show these doors as cavity sliding doors ("Bronze Medal Award: House at Acacia Bay, Taupo" p 45); Hoadley describes them as folding doors. Hoadley 30 November 2005.

accommodation unit (with its own viewing deck), appears as a detached fragment of the larger house.

In what seems to be a radical move, it was in this detached unit that the architects located the children's bunkrooms outside of the house, under the main viewing deck,<sup>27</sup> and on top of the watertanks.<sup>28</sup> This separation was initially driven by the clients requesting that "the children's sleeping area be segregated from main living and sleeping areas."<sup>29</sup> This extreme spatial separation of children from parents (which breaches even the boundary wall of the house), and the figuring of the living space as an extension to the parents' bedroom, have both provided innovative domestic spaces (possibly only achievable in the less conventional space of a Taupo holiday home), and suggest the emergence of new ideas about domestic living occurring in the 1960s.

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<sup>27</sup> Hoadley describes this as a self-contained flat, but also confirms that the children lived there. Hoadley 30 November 2005.

<sup>28</sup> "Bronze Medal Award: House at Acacia Bay, Taupo" p 45.

<sup>29</sup> "Bronze Medal Award: House at Acacia Bay, Taupo" p 45.

**1962 The Mackay House, 58A Chatsworth Rd, Heretaunga (c1961<sup>30</sup>)** S. William Toomath (1925-)

The 1962 Bronze Medal<sup>31</sup> was presented to Toomath and Wilson for Bill Toomath's Mackay House at Silverstream, which like the McCrae House is spatially progressive, achieved in an equally unconventional domestic space – a house for a couple without children.<sup>32</sup> A key dilemma was how to

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<sup>30</sup> Lloyd Jenkins states the house was built in 1962 (Lloyd Jenkins *At Home* p 167), but later dates the house from 1956-1960 (Lloyd Jenkins *At Home* p 173.)

<sup>31</sup> Publications vary as to whether Toomath received the 1962 or 1963 award. Toomath's documentation dates his Bronze Medal to 1962, as do: Lloyd Jenkins *At Home* p 172, "Awards 27:76" p 23, "Bronze Medal Awards" (1965) p 120, "Bronze Medal Awards" (1964) p 61, "1962 Bronze Medal House Silverstream, Wellington" p 41. The following publications give the date 1963: "Conference Report" p.50, "1927-2004 N.Z.I.A. Award Winners" p 236.

<sup>32</sup> Toomath 11 November 2005; "With no children to consider, its design allowed Toomath to experiment with a plan that was freed from the constraints of conventional family living." (Clark "Space Explorer" p 171). Recognition of the unconventional nature of the house was made apparent when the Mackay's sold the house, re-employing Toomath to add a bedroom to make the house more normal. (Toomath 11 November 2005). "A new bedroom wing was added by Bill Toomath's original clients when they came to sell the house in order to bring it into line with general conceptions of what a house should be." Clark "Space

address the British clients'<sup>33</sup> discomfort with the flimsy nature (in their eyes) of New Zealand timber buildings.<sup>34</sup> Budget constraints meant a masonry house was not a plausible solution, and the clients didn't like the "sham" of brick veneer.<sup>35</sup> Toomath credits the hybrid timber/brick design which eventuated to a moment in a client meeting where his cupped hands formed two facing "U"-shapes in an attempt to express the enclosure and security he wanted to provide for the clients in the design of the house. This form became "the cradling within the house of

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Explorer" p 172.

<sup>33</sup> The clients were Ian M. Mackay and Joan Mackay. Ian Mackay was a Scotsman, a seafarer who had turned to marine law, and Joan Mackay was a Welsh doctor. Toomath 11 November 2005. Other issues which informed the brief were "the aim to create ideal forms which would answer the special needs of two busy professional people," and that "there was no necessity to plan for children's needs." "Awarded N.Z.I.A. Bronze Medal, House, Silverstream, Wellington" pp 40, 41. Clark notes that the Mackays "were described by Toomath as among his most "intellectually demanding" clients" (Clark "Space Explorer" p 170). Toomath notes that as a result of the commission he and the client became and have remained very close friends. Toomath 11 November 2005.

<sup>34</sup> Toomath 11 November 2005; "Toomath's clients ... found New Zealand timber houses rather flimsy." Clark "Space Explorer" p 171.

<sup>35</sup> Toomath 11 November 2005.

the visually substantial wall,"<sup>36</sup> which translated into a pair of brick "U"-shaped walls. Their appearance of solidity was reinforced by a coat of white paint, lit from a skylight.<sup>37</sup> To reinforce this weightiness 6"x6" timber beams and posts, "all showing their warm natural grain,"<sup>38</sup> tie the space together.<sup>39</sup> Placed at the centre of a "flimsy" timber house, the brick walls act as a constant reminder that solidity is at its core.

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<sup>36</sup> Toomath 11 November 2005.

<sup>37</sup> Toomath notes that the only bricks available had a hard mechanical colour, meaning that the wall conveyed the image of brick used on the outside of a house, and so was "not sufficiently internal." Toomath 11 November 2005; c.f. The brick walls "are painted white to bring out their texture" "Awarded N.Z.I.A. Bronze Medal, House, Silverstream, Wellington" p 41.

<sup>38</sup> "Awarded N.Z.I.A. Bronze Medal, House, Silverstream, Wellington" p 41.

<sup>39</sup> Such moves equally contributed to the heightened sense of materiality in the original house. "[E]verywhere the house emphasised the natural character of the materials used. This in itself was a characteristic that modernism had long since borrowed from the Japanese. What was different in the Mackay House was the new intensity of commitment to Japanese craft aesthetics – the internal posts in the house, "instead of being just machined ... were painstakingly shaped by hand to a perfect finish." (Lloyd Jenkins *At Home* p 172). The curtains and furnishing "provided moments of intense colour within the otherwise muted space." Clark "Space Explorer" p 173.

The plan is a continuous space which threads its way around the house. Three utility rooms (bathroom, ensuite, and laundry) operate as walls to succinctly segregate the functions of dining, kitchen, bedroom and study into discrete *and* continuous spaces. A bathroom bifurcates the front entry, a laundry separates kitchen and dining, and an ensuite shower and toilet divide bedroom and study. Spatial interconnection is reinforced by the "two deep timber beams"<sup>40</sup> which cross "the whole space and [underline] ... its unity."<sup>41</sup>

The house is singular among the 1960s Bronze Medal houses, in its uncompromising commitment to both symmetry, and this continuous space, which deceptively suggest the planning is straightforward and simple. Toomath attributes the symmetry to his interest in a more serene modernism,<sup>42</sup> reflecting the classicising formalism occurring in New England work at this time, which satisfied his increasing interest in a kind of calmness, simplicity and serenity in his architecture. This symmetry though is made

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<sup>40</sup> "1962 Bronze Medal House Silverstream, Wellington" p 41.

<sup>41</sup> "1962 Bronze Medal House Silverstream, Wellington" p 41.

<sup>42</sup> Toomath 11 November 2005.

perverse in slight details - the horizontal kitchen window on the front elevation deliberately undoes the expected symmetrical relationship with the vertical window in the study.<sup>43</sup>

Such unexpected shifts acknowledge Toomath's appreciation of Walter Gropius' interest in giving architecture something "unexpected that gave you a jolt."<sup>44</sup> The twin entry doors disconnected by the bathroom, also draw their source from Toomath's long term fascination with Palladio. For Toomath, Palladio was subversive in his muting of axial climax by the placing of blankness on axis, with flanking points of interest, making "two points of emphasis instead of one."<sup>45</sup> The Mackay House entry, addressing the visitor with a blank wall flanked symmetrically with the two entrance doors, leans strongly on this interpretation of Palladio.

The Mackay House is particularly driven by explicit and intentional architectural thinking, informed by reconsiderations by the architect over a period of 50 years. Yet Toomath was not interested in a singularly rationalistic

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<sup>43</sup> Toomath 11 November 2005.

<sup>44</sup> Toomath 11 November 2005.

<sup>45</sup> Toomath 11 November 2005.

architecture in the Mackay House. The lessons learnt from Gropius, to twist the status quo, mean for Toomath that he "brought ... [the house] to life, I didn't want it dead symmetrical. ... It wakes you up to what you are looking at."<sup>46</sup>

### **1965 Orr-Walker House, Titirangi, Auckland** (1964) Peter Mark-Brown (1929-1978)

After gaps in 1963 and 1964, when no Bronze Medals were awarded, Peter Mark-Brown's Orr-Walker house won the 1965 Bronze Medal. The Orr-Walker House, described as the firm's "most celebrated domestic work,"<sup>47</sup> was built in 1964<sup>48</sup> for John Orr-Walker, a dentist,<sup>49</sup> and his wife. Alan Fairhead, Mark-Brown's partner at the time, notes the pair visited California and the Case Study Houses just prior to Mark-Brown designing the Orr-Walker House,<sup>50</sup> including seeing Raphael

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<sup>46</sup> Toomath 11 November 2005.

<sup>47</sup> Lloyd Jenkins *At Home* p 172.

<sup>48</sup> "it was completed in December 1964 after an eight-month contract period." "Bronze Medal Award 1965: Orr-Walker House, Titirangi" p 18.

<sup>49</sup> Fairhead 18 November 2005.

<sup>50</sup> Fairhead 18 November 2005; They had addresses of the Case Study Houses from *Art and Architecture* (Fairhead, personal communication (18 November 2005)); Clark and Walker also note their interest in John Entenza's *Art and Architecture*. Clark and Walker *Looking*

Soriano, who lived on a yacht.<sup>51</sup> Soriano's influence is apparent in both the planning and the polished aesthetic of the Orr-Walker house, the house conceptually a series of linked pavilions, where the outside linking spaces, are highly crafted continuations of indoor space.<sup>52</sup>

The house is of course not a simple copy of Soriano's architecture. Back in New Zealand, the dense bush context of Titirangi, and the contours of the site impacted significantly on the design.<sup>53</sup> Organised as three discrete pavilions (the carport, the living room and the main house), "linked by corridors, walkways and courtyards,"<sup>54</sup> the house appears to wind through and above the tree canopy.

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*for the Local* p 55.

<sup>51</sup> Fairhead 4 December 2005.

<sup>52</sup> Fairhead states that Neutra's planning is evident in the firm's work. Fairhead 18 November 2005.

<sup>53</sup> At the time of the award *Home and Building* wrote that the client stipulation, "that the site and its growth be left intact," significantly influenced the design and "as a result, [the house] was built along the natural contours of the land" ("At Home Among the Trees" p 52). Mary Mark-Brown recalls her husband's great respect for the site. He said you could never design a house in isolation from the site. Every piece of land required an unique building. Every slope dictated part of the design (Mark-Brown 22 November 2005).

<sup>54</sup> Lloyd Jenkins *At Home* p 167.

Deploying a floating, rather than elevated, box, the Orr-Walker House is not interested in a strategy of a distinct space between house and ground. The carport, no longer garage,<sup>55</sup> but rather an increasingly more integral part of the '60s house, becomes a critical component of the house, setting up the material, spatial and other formal strategies which link and pace this series of pavilions.

An L-shaped pathway provides a controlled route from the carport to the entry hall, around a white concrete block wall, selectively penetrated by patterned terracotta screens<sup>56</sup> which tantalisingly restricted and filtered glimpses of an outdoor court and the living room which cannot yet be entered. Access to the living room hence required a turning back, the full impact of the architecturally composed bush setting strategically deferred, and realised with the sinking of the living room floor which is pulled down closer into the forest canopy; the lowering of the ground beneath allowing "this

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<sup>55</sup> Wagener notes of contemporary Californian houses: "Carports and garages were used as multipurpose spaces for recreation and leisure." Wagnener *Raphael Soriano* p 33.

<sup>56</sup> These screens were made specially for the project "At Home Among the Trees" p 52.

area [to have] a taller stud height."<sup>57</sup> This living room pavilion "also incorporates floor-to-ceiling sliding doors, and narrow banks of louvres which echo the vertical trunks of the trees outside and make the relationship of house with surroundings more intimate."<sup>58</sup>

The entry hall (simultaneously the middle of the house, and its point of entry from outside), connects the three circulation spines of the house. This is the point where spatial relationships become apparent and Mark-Brown's fascination with "space going into other spaces"<sup>59</sup> is more poignantly revealed. The third pavilion centres on the informal living space and is seemingly more prosaically arranged. Yet this building plays out a distinct and different understanding of the view. Here access to the bush is filtered by a perimeter of rooms (bedrooms, kitchen, study, laundry, bathroom and court), the central living spaces becoming more interior and more insulated from the bush context of Titirangi. Views of the outside bush becomes more exclusive, and given to the more private realms of the house: "each bedroom having

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<sup>57</sup> "Bronze Medal Award 1965: Orr-Walker House, Titirangi" p 18.

<sup>58</sup> "At Home Among the Trees" p 54.

<sup>59</sup> Mark-Brown 22 November 2005.

direct access to a deck which virtually hovers among the tree-tops."<sup>60</sup>

**1966 Becroft House, 9 Lake View Rd, Takapuna** (1961) Peter Middleton (1917-1996) Peter Middleton, the architect of the 1966 winning entry for the Bronze Medal, is possibly best known for his controversial Grafton Rd house and its notorious finial, which at the time was considered to be a departure from modernism,<sup>61</sup> but was later revealed to be "based on "the modular and Brubeckian rhythms.""<sup>62</sup> The Becroft house (*sans finial*) demonstrates shifts in the external form of houses, in horizontal and vertical planning, and in internal spatial relationships. Externally the house appears to be a series of structures built over time, suggesting a certain vernacularity and formal complexity which radically distinguished it from the more pure geometric forms characteristic of the earlier

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<sup>60</sup> "At Home Among the Trees" p 54.

<sup>61</sup> "his house on Grafton confirmed our suspicions that he was a backslider. We thought it was the joke of the town – it even sported (can you believe?) a finial on the end gable." Austin "Obituaries: Peter Middleton" p 15; "His house was famous too for breaking with modernist traditions and displaying some of the knick-knackery that [Vernon] Brown had found so offensive 20 years before" Mitchell and Chaplin *The Elegant Shed* p 35.

<sup>62</sup> Austin "Obituaries: Peter Middleton" p 15.

Bronze Medal houses.

The Becroft house can be seen as a spatially tighter and more compact interpretation of the luxurious separation of zones into three distinct pavilions. If the Orr Walker House separated its space into three distinct but linked pavilions, Middleton's Becroft House does this conceptually and then brings the defined zones (of "formal" entertaining, children, and parent space) into close proximity, if not collision. Overlappings occur in plan, particularly in the spaces most intimately associated with the family. The "L"-shaped Kitchen/Family Room is critical to the success of the plan as it both operates to tie together the two family zones and engineers a separation between the formal and family living areas. It does this by folding into its space the functions of: boundary wall,<sup>63</sup> Kitchen/Family room, informal entry to the backyard, and invisibly-felt corridor to the family's bedrooms.<sup>64</sup>

The bathroom enacts a similar schizophrenia

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<sup>63</sup> between public and private areas of the house.

<sup>64</sup> "the family room, being long and narrow, allows for a variety of smaller scale activities at the same time, and gives access to all the family bed-rooms." "In an Auckland Suburb" p 59.

and doubles as both ensuite and communal bathroom, its two distinct doors bringing shifts in associations and functions – just as the McCrae house had deftly shifted from family home to bachelor pad contingent on the activation of either the single hung, or double sliding, doors in the main bedroom. The Becroft bathroom hence operates as an "and/or" hinge between child and parent realms.

The Entry, Dining Room, Sitting Room, Stair, Study and Attic are one continuous space. This space is the largest in all dimensions: floor area, volume, and height. It is, in addition, the most spatially complex and possibly the most intense material experience. Steps reinforce the doors which define children's bedrooms and entry into the family room. They elevate entry into a new space, the entry foyer leading down to the dining room, amplifying the increase in height which distinguishes the formal areas of the house. These level changes follow "the contours of the land,"<sup>65</sup> instilling a blind awareness of the world outside, additional to the views garnered by the spatially leaky nature of the building envelope. Openings proliferate as

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<sup>65</sup> "Bronze Medal Award 1966" p 62.

the house becomes some kind of filter between inside and outsides and an astute manager of space.

**1967 Yock House, 119 Ngapuhi Rd, Remuera**  
Auckland, 1964,<sup>66</sup> Lillian Chrystall (b. 1926-) The Yock House, winning in 1967, was designed by Lillian Chrystall. The Yocks' personal interest in Japan<sup>67</sup> resulted in a request for the house to be influenced by, but not naively imitative of, Japanese architecture. The Jury citation described the project as "a brilliant essay in assured simplicity ... A difficult site is turned to advantage by the form and placing of the house and by superbly controlled landscaping."<sup>68</sup> This site was critical in driving the design, following Chrystall's strong belief that "landform conditions design."<sup>69</sup> The house was initially conceived of as a series of "Italian style terraces," recognising that the first thing Italians do when they are farming is to "terrace the steep hills."<sup>70</sup> As terraces, rather

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<sup>66</sup> Shaw *New Zealand Architecture* p 158.

<sup>67</sup> Anthony Yock had visited Japan two or three times prior to the commission. Chrystall, personal communication, 1 November 2005.

<sup>68</sup> "Medal Awards & National Awards of Merit 1967: Bronze Medal" *JNZIA* (May 1967) v. 34, n. 5, p 153.

<sup>69</sup> Chrystall 1 November 2005.

<sup>70</sup> Chrystall 1 November 2005.

than pavilions, the building was immediately conceived in terms of landscape form.

The carport is envisaged as the first of these terraces. Distinct from the enclosed form of a garage, the carport form supports the openness suggested by terms such as pavilion and terrace, and initiates a sequence of structures and planes through the contiguous rooms, and decks, and down to the proposed jetty in the water.<sup>71</sup> The roof connecting the carport to the house is aligned to an axis which is visually continuous through the house, but "bent" at its centre in the entry into the living room. Here a bookshelf, as balustrade to a short flight of steps, channels the inhabitant away from the view in order for a delayed gratification on the steps' return. The balustrade continues delineating the perimeter of the hall as a half-height wall which reveals the bedrooms<sup>72</sup> and utility rooms<sup>73</sup> as two distinct blocks, the hall and living spaces meandering, maleable and fluid,

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<sup>71</sup> Chrystall, personal communication, 1 November 2005.

<sup>72</sup> The plan describes one of those rooms as "spare rm" "N.Z.I.A. Bronze Medal for 1967" p 37.

<sup>73</sup> The utility rooms are split between the two levels of the house. The bathroom and tool room are on the upper level. The kitchen and laundry are on the lower level.



between them. The interest that Chrystall, as one of the younger generation of architects, had in exploring "see-through spaces and the spread of space"<sup>74</sup> is made apparent here succeeding "without affectation, but with tremendous subtlety and sensitivity."<sup>75</sup> The Yock House hence uses the discrete locations of utility, living, and bedrooms to demonstrate the formal qualities of architectural space: conditions of edge solidity, spatial fluidity, transparency and the filtering of space.

**1968, Newcomb House, 9 Judge St, Parnell, Auckland** blt 1963 Bartlett, Peter<sup>76</sup>

The final award of the Bronze Medal in the 1960s went to Peter Bartlett for the Newcomb House in Parnell. The Newcomb House was the third Bronze Medal house to sport a gable roof in as many years, it confirmed the increasing incorporation of the carport built into the house, and presented the decade's third walk-in-wardrobe. The house's entries led to the gallery hallway, a linear spine to the house described as: "a filtering space engendered largely by reception requirements

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<sup>74</sup> Chrystall, personal communication, 1 November 2005.

<sup>75</sup> "Medal Awards & National Awards of Merit 1967: Bronze Medal" p 153.

<sup>76</sup> Lloyd Jenkins *At Home* p 181.

and the need to reach the living zone."<sup>77</sup> The hall is spatially defined by a masonry wall considered as "a backdrop to the life of the house, a screen against the/ cold weather, a guarantee of privacy."<sup>78</sup>

This tightly rendered and linear space leads to an explosive opening above and below this level:

The dining-room overlooks the tall sunny portion of the living space. Up half a level there is a suspended mezzanine study also overlooking the living-room below and, in addition, offering the highest viewpoint within the limit of the building height restriction.<sup>79</sup>

This contrasts with the intimacy of the fireplace below, designed as a "deeply interior protective space in contrast with the extrovert sunny north wall with its dramatic views."<sup>80</sup>

The Newcomb house's interest appears to be in the introduction of a new formality into domestic architecture, and as a house without children, it threatens to take on a less

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<sup>77</sup> "Bronze Medal Award: 1968 Newcomb House Auckland" p 149.

<sup>78</sup> "Bronze Medal House – 1968" pp 34-35.

<sup>79</sup> "Bronze Medal House – 1968" p. 35.

<sup>80</sup> "Bronze Medal House – 1968" p. 35.

conventional form. Russell Lowe has noted<sup>81</sup> the similarity of the Newcomb house to hotel architecture where the entry into the hotel room is dense with utility services. The description of the house at the time of the award, seemingly supports this observation describing the plan form in terms of domestic insulation: "the bedrooms are insulated by, and accessible through, private lobbies which also give access to the various bath, shower, and toilet rooms making up the services core."<sup>82</sup> Rather than the use of utility rooms by Toomath to articulate continuous and open plan space, in the Newcomb House these thicken the wall of entry intensifying access as a breach of privacy. The additional door to the main bedroom illustrates this, but also suggests the apparent anxieties for protection and security which are conventionally seen to be at odds with mainstream notions of a domestic house. The hotel, unlike the house, asserts itself as a housing of strangers, and a transient accommodation.

### Conclusion

Over the decade, the Bronze Medal houses saw increasingly more complex and

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<sup>81</sup> Lowe 2nd December 2005.

<sup>82</sup> "Bronze Medal House – 1968" p 35.

sophisticated planning, both in plan, and vertically in section. The compactness of the 1950s house shifts to accommodate, an increasing separation of parents' bedrooms from children's, and a move away from the more extreme experiments of open planning to increasingly compartmentalised and hierarchical space, favouring the zoning of the house into children, parent and guest spaces. A conscious separation of adult and child sleeping spaces occurs with the late 1950s. Such separations were not so much innovative, as counter to the norm which was significantly influenced by the state house plan. Separation (if it occurred) ranged from the use of wardrobes or an ensuite to zoning the house into domestic wings, suggesting changing attitudes to family structure and in particular the position of children within the house. Writers in 1959 noted that: "Separation of sleeping and living, adults from children ... is ... an essential factor in open plan design,"<sup>83</sup> and:

In order that the children should have some privacy (and responsibility) of their own, ... an endeavour should be made to separate the children from the adults and provide for them an area for both sleeping and recreation and that parents and children should be able

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<sup>83</sup> "Low Cost House in Steel and Concrete" p 87.

to entertain friends at the same time.<sup>84</sup>

The houses often referenced a respect for trees and site contours, often resulting in increased spatial sophistication in the articulated relationship between inside and outside, and in the forms required to accommodate attempts to preserve trees, or reduce earthworks. Similarly, there is a fascination with internal spatial relations, especially visual relationships, and complexity between materials. There is a move away from fully transparent exterior walls. Internal changes of floor level via the use of steps become more common toward the end of the decade, with the consistent inclusion of a sunken living room in the last five Medal houses. Similarly roofs move from a 1950s monopitch to toward gables, and more complex roofs, and the carport becomes the key entry point into the house, reflecting Middleton's 1962 comment that "now ... cars go from carport to carport."<sup>85</sup>

Finally, the impact of television on house design is difficult to measure, as Lloyd Jenkins notes: "Although it [television] had required some rearrangement of living room furniture, its real impact was in the way that Kiwis

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<sup>84</sup> "With a Swimming Pool in the Terrace" pp 36-37.

<sup>85</sup> Middleton "A House is a House is a Home" p. 151.

could now see how the rest of the world lived."<sup>86</sup> The situation is doubly complicated as many of the Bronze Medal houses were designed prior to, or on the cusp of the introduction of television, with several instances of televisions placed in cupboards to deny their aesthetic intrusion into architecturally designed space. One might consider whether the decline of floor-to-ceiling glass walled living rooms is related to problems of glare on the screen, or the possibility that a narrow cone of vision, induced by a fascination of, and addiction to, television supported an increasingly introverted architecture.

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<sup>86</sup> Lloyd Jenkins *At Home* p 176.

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