Modern Architecture and the Pioneers: Paul Pascoe and the New Zealand House, 1933–1950

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Abstract
The publication of the Group Manifesto, "On the Necessity of Architecture," in 1948 is widely regarded as a defining moment in New Zealand architectural history. The Group's ideal of a modern architecture shaped by the environment of their own country was, however, anticipated in the pre-war writings and subsequent buildings of the Christchurch architect, Paul Pascoe (1908–1976). Although unacknowledged by the younger generation of modernists, Pascoe highlighted unexpected parallels between colonial primitivism and modernist functionalism and helped to shape the intellectual climate in which architectural modernism developed in New Zealand during the post-war period.

Introduction

The publication of the Auckland-based Architectural Group's manifesto, "On the Necessity of Architecture," in 1948 is widely regarded as a significant moment in the history of New Zealand architecture.[1] Its first paragraph called for local solutions to local problems: "overseas solutions will not do. New Zealand must have its own architecture, its own sense of what is beautiful and appropriate to our climate and conditions."[2] The implication was that previous architects had not addressed this problem, depending instead on outworn ideas imported from elsewhere. "Our problem is to develop an answer suitable to our own conditions."[3] It is perhaps understandable that this idealistic group of young architects, committed to transforming New Zealand's built environment, should have dismissed the efforts of their pre-war predecessors to develop a distinctive New Zealand architecture.

Nevertheless, the ideal of a modern architecture shaped by the environment of their own country had already been formulated and acted upon by a small group of architects who had discovered modernism in the 1930s and who had begun to practise in the years immediately before the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939.[4] One of the key contributors to this pre-war development, and one of the most articulate and influential advocates of modernism in New Zealand was the Christchurch architect, Arnold Paul Pascoe (1908–1976), known as Paul.[5] His ideas anticipated many of the Group's concerns and helped to shape the intellectual climate from which the Group itself emerged. Pascoe also developed a persuasive narrative of the development of the New Zealand house that connected the earliest phase of settler architecture with the emergence of modernism as a dominant influence on domestic architecture during the late 1930s and 1940s. Pascoe's thesis has had a pervasive influence on discussions of New Zealand domestic architecture, and although The Group chose to ignore his contribution, the importance of both his buildings and his writings for the development of a locally inflected modernism has been acknowledged by later historians.[6]

The Group was closely linked to the School of Architecture at Auckland University College where its members were either students or recent graduates. Their mentor, the Englishman Vernon Brown, was an influential and charismatic lecturer at the school. Unlike the university-educated Group architects, Pascoe's architectural training was a traditional one. After attending Christ's College, he entered the office of the Christchurch architect, Cecil Wood, in 1927. Although a leading architect of the inter-war period, Wood's approach was conservative, and

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Pascoe's first real experience of modernism came when he travelled to Britain in 1934 to complete his architectural qualifications. By the time he returned to Christchurch in January 1937 he had worked for the New Zealand-born architect, Brian O'Rorke, a progressive figure within British architecture of the time, for the *Architects' Journal* and the *Architectural Review,* publications which actively promoted modernism, and for Berthold Lubetkin's Tecton Group, one of the leading Modern Movement practices in Britain from 1932 to 1939. Their works included the celebrated Penguin Pool for London Zoo (1934) and Highpoints I and II (1935–38), multi-storey modernist apartment blocks in London's Highgate. These buildings are among the most celebrated examples of British pre-war Modern Movement architecture. Returning to the still conservative architectural climate of late 1930s New Zealand must have been a shock for Pascoe after such close contact with British modernism.

Fired with enthusiasm for the new architecture, it is hardly surprising that the partnership Pascoe formed with Wood on his return was short-lived.[7] By December 1938 he had established his own practice, hardly a propitious time to take such a step, but indicative of his self-confidence and commitment to changing the direction of New Zealand architecture. Within the context of New Zealand as a whole in the 1930s, Christchurch provided a surprisingly vital artistic environment. The Group, founded in 1927, was an independent exhibiting society of artists eager to escape the limiting attitudes of the conservative Canterbury Society of Arts, and their exhibitions attracted work from many of New Zealand's leading artists.[8] The Group became synonymous with a new direction in New Zealand art and, twenty years later, when the Architectural Group was founded, the modernist resonance of the name cannot have gone unnoticed.

Probably the best-known painting exhibited in Christchurch during this period, Rita Angus's *Cass* (1936), was shown, however, not at a Group show but at the Canterbury Society of Arts' annual exhibition in March 1937.[9] Having just returned from London, Pascoe would inevitably have attended the CSA exhibition to catch up with recent artistic developments. Thus, he would have encountered this seminal work on its first public showing. The painting represented a part of Canterbury that Paul and his twin brother, John, knew and loved, having climbed and tramped the hills surrounding the Craigieburn basin where Cass is located.[10] Pascoe probably felt that he was seeing those hills with new eyes in Angus's simplified and stylised rendering, their sharp contours and sparse vegetation giving them a stark, elemental quality. But the simple, rectangular station building with its mono-pitch roof and sharply defined weatherboard walls in the centre of the composition must have had a similar impact (fig. 1).[11] Here was New Zealand vernacular building in all its direct simplicity. *Cass* demonstrated that New Zealand painters were developing their own voice; Pascoe must have realised that architects could do the same.

The connection between Pascoe and Angus did not end there. Six years later Angus moved into a timber bach that Pascoe had designed and built for his own use in the late 1930s at 18 Aranoni Track on Clifton Spur, overlooking the Christchurch seaside suburb of Sumner (fig. 2).[12] Like the Cass station, Pascoe's bach was a simple cubic form with a mono-pitch roof, although one corner was cut away to make a terrace, a timber-framed pergola defining the missing corner. Unlike the Cass station, which is clad in horizontal weatherboards, the Pascoe bach has an exterior skin of vertical boards and battens, possibly an allusion to the use of this kind of cladding on colonial buildings. Fully glazed doors opened onto the north-facing terrace from each wing of the house. An unfinished watercolour by Angus, dating from around 1943, emphasises the elemental simplicity of this minimalist, two-room dwelling.[13] It clearly suited the artist well since her father purchased it from Pascoe and she lived there for the next decade.

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Fittingly, *Cass* was hung in pride of place.[14] The shed-like form, timber construction and references to both modernism and the New Zealand vernacular make this humble building a precursor of the Group's early houses.

Figure 1. Public Works Department, Cass station, Cass, 1911. Photo: I.J. Lochhead, 2014.

Figure 2. Paul Pascoe, 18 Aranoni Track, Sumner. Photo: Paul Pascoe Scrapbooks, 1, Macmillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury.

The economic uncertainty caused by the prospect of war in Europe meant that commissions for new buildings were virtually non-existent by the end of the 1930s, and, as a result, Pascoe turned his hand to writing about architecture. Fortuitously, his brother, John, had recently been appointed illustrations editor for the New Zealand Centennial Committee's serial publication, *Making New Zealand.* The commission to write two issues, *Houses* and *Public Buildings*, for the series must have seemed like an economic lifeline, but it also provided the opportunity to place his ideas on architecture before a wide audience in anticipation of the resumption of building activity following the cessation of hostilities.[15] Pascoe was well prepared to write such

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a historical survey as the thesis he had submitted as part of his application for membership of the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1933 was an account of the development of architecture in Canterbury from the beginnings of European settlement until the end of the nineteenth century. The thesis examined both the primitive structures of the first phase of colonisation as well as later, more ambitious, projects, such as Christchurch's Gothic Revival ecclesiastical, public and educational architecture built from locally quarried stone. It concluded with an impassioned plea for a return to the simplicity of early colonial structures.

> The more the colony expanded, the worse became its architecture. Simplicity gave way to confusion of detail: reticent forms to the ostentatious Gothicism of the contemporary times.
> If the best influences of the buildings of the early days could be revived, then alive would be our new architecture; free would it be from the elaboration of otherwise simple and direct planning, free from the insincerity of façade and its resulting expression. Power would be applied, the power defined by Frank Lloyd Wright, the power of material resources directly applied to purpose, the power that should be modern architecture.[16]

The reference to Frank Lloyd Wright, along with the stylistic similarities of Pascoe's concluding paragraph to Wright's very individual prose style, provides a clue to the origins of his approach to architecture. Wright was a prolific writer on architecture, but it is hard to know what publications Pascoe had seen by 1933. Most likely he had obtained a copy of Wright's *An Autobiography,* first published in March 1932. There he would have encountered the American architect's rejection of nineteenth-century historicism and his passionate advocacy for an architecture that reflected the modern world of early twentieth-century industrial production. But equally important would have been Wright's desire to create an architecture that reflected American conditions of life and the natural world of the mid-western prairies. His emphasis on clean lines and the direct expression of materials had a significant impact on Pascoe's thinking even before he encountered European modernism in 1934. Pascoe's rejection of historicism would have also found support in the writings of the Christchurch architect, Samuel Hurst Seager, whose 1900 survey of New Zealand's nineteenth-century architecture closely paralleled ideas Wright would express the following year.[17] Seager had been in partnership with Cecil Wood between 1906 and 1912, and was a prominent figure in Christchurch when Pascoe was first studying architecture. Pascoe was clearly influenced by Seager's view that "we have no style, no distinctive forms of art. Many buildings, large and small, have been erected . . . but the story is told in the forms of art developed in England, Italy, America, and elsewhere . . . all our methods are those of the Old World." Seager argued that a

> . . . fresh environment cannot possibly produce fresh forms of art in opposition to the force of traditions and precedents with which the artists and the workers who have erected them have been imbued. With a knowledge of the principles which govern the ancient work it is possible only to the most gifted to free themselves from the forms in which these principles are embodied.[18]

For Pascoe, searching for a way to apply both Seager's and Wright's ideals concerning an architecture that reflected the place in which they lived and worked, the more ambitious buildings that echoed British architectural fashions became irrelevant. The unselfconscious, artless structures of the first phase of colonial settlement, however, suggested new possibilities.

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The underlying argument of Pascoe's 1933 thesis reappears in the embryonic account of New Zealand's architectural history in his two contributions to *Making New Zealand.* These appeared in 1940 as parts 20 and 21 of volume two of the series. The cover illustration of issue number 20, *Houses,* a photograph of a rudimentary earth-built farmhouse in Otago taken by George Chance, sets the tone for what follows (fig. 3). After a brief, two-page survey of Māori buildings, the remaining 30 pages are devoted to Pākehā dwellings. Pascoe reasserts his belief that houses of the pioneering phase of settlement were superior to those that came after: "the first huts and houses had features which might well be imitated by a later generation. Materials were put to the best use. Construction was sound, mouldings were hand worked, and careful craftsmanship was much in evidence. Above all, the early buildings had a simplicity which is lost to much work of later periods."[19]

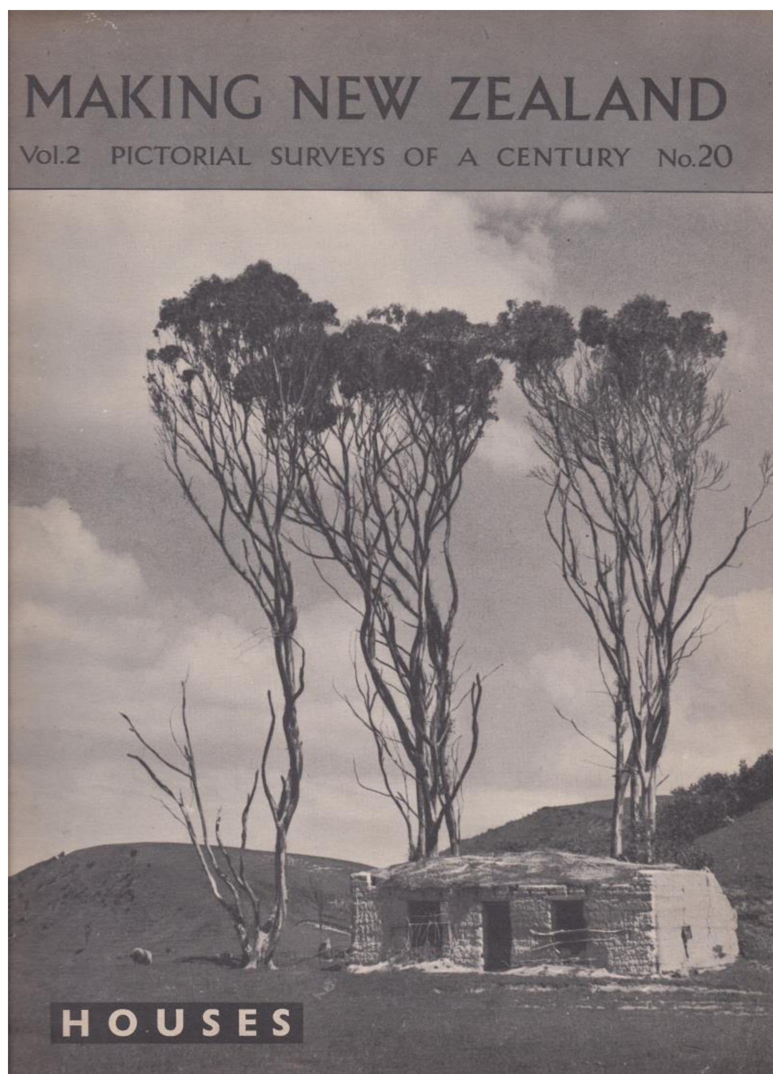

Figure 3. Cover of *Making New Zealand No. 20: Houses*, photograph by George Chance, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1940.

Pascoe's analysis of pioneer buildings is inflected by his modernist perspective. The often-crude early colonial structures and the rudimentary finishing is ignored, while the absence of ornament and any suggestion of connection to traditional architectural styles is seen as a virtue. In this regard Pascoe's analysis of Māori building techniques is of particular interest. Rather than viewing Māori architecture as a potential source of influence, and unlike Seager who, forty years earlier had completely rejected Māori design as a source of inspiration for Pākehā

architecture, Pascoe regarded Māori building as a parallel line of architectural development. Like New Zealand's first European settlers in the nineteenth century, Māori also had to find ways of adapting modes of building brought from elsewhere in Polynesia to the climate and materials of a new land. Māori "gradually developed distinctive types of dwelling which . . . were well suited to their surrounding and their way of life."[20] As a practising architect, Pascoe focused on the structural elements of Māori buildings and largely ignored their ceremonial and symbolic aspects. Although he recognised the virtuosity of the carved decoration, there is no suggestion in Pascoe's discussion that Māori design motifs should be incorporated into contemporary architecture as his mentor, Cecil Wood, had done in his design for the State Insurance Building in Christchurch (1934). Unlike architects influenced by the international Art Deco movement, who incorporated Māori decorative motifs into their designs, Pascoe eschewed ornament of all types.[21] The connection he saw between Māori and Pākehā building was in the use of the whare, which, he writes, "was a feature of all European settlements in pre-colonisation days, and long after immigrants gladly sought shelter in buildings of native design."[22] What linked Māori and Pākehā, as far as Pascoe was concerned, was their shared interaction with the materials and environment of the country.

Pascoe found vindication for his views in the writings of the pioneers themselves. James Edward FitzGerald, newspaper editor, politician and amateur architect, arrived in Canterbury with the first contingent of Canterbury Association settlers in 1850, becoming the first provincial superintendent in 1853. FitzGerald's only known design was Big School at Christ's College (1863), a building Pascoe would have known well, and he no doubt admired its "massive strength, stability and simplicity of character," qualities that FitzGerald hoped would impress themselves on the students who used it.[23] As editor of *The Press,* the Christchurch newspaper he founded in 1861, FitzGerald was a prolific writer on architecture, and Pascoe no doubt encountered his advocacy of simplicity and directness in design when he researched his 1933 Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) thesis. In *Houses* he quotes from a lecture by FitzGerald given at the Colonial Museum in Wellington in 1868:

> The one class of buildings which most awaken my feeling of the beautiful, and they are now very rare, are those small unpretending tenements which were built by the early colonists; some of them not ungraceful in their proportions; all of them possessing the beauty of simplicity and truth, devoid of vulgar pretension, tawdry vanity, and inappropriate ornament.[24]

FitzGerald thus provided Pascoe with a contemporary justification for his views on colonial architecture. FitzGerald was, in reality, a committed Gothic Revivalist. Nevertheless, the Ruskinian virtues of truth to materials and honesty in construction that FitzGerald espoused evolved over time to become fundamental Modern Movement principles.[25]

From his modernist perspective Pascoe viewed the architecture of the later nineteenth century as a betrayal of the simple honesty of earlier buildings. Once settler society became more affluent, strenuous efforts were made to imitate the architectural fashions of Victorian Britain; historicism came to dominate architectural expression and structure was hidden by a proliferation of ornament. Pascoe rejected imported styles irrespective of where they came from; he regarded the arrival of the Californian bungalow in the early twentieth century as bringing about a further decline, particularly what he regarded as their contorted plans and needlessly complex roof forms.

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Pascoe's brief survey established the framework for subsequent readings of New Zealand's architectural history in which modernism's task was to rescue architecture from the abyss into which it had fallen and create houses that were appropriate for local conditions and modern lifestyles.[26] The *Houses* issue of *Making New Zealand* concludes with a clear statement of Pascoe's architectural creed:

> New Zealand will have gone far if its homes meet the requirements of living simply and adequately. In fulfilling these primary needs New Zealanders may in time develop a style of their own. For though modern architecture shows a tendency to become international, it may also be expressive of national character. In New Zealand it will have to take account of the available materials; it will pay attention to climatic conditions—wind, rain, sunlight, and temperature—and to the necessity for earthquake-proof construction. Though it is unlikely that an architecture so distinctive as the Maoris' [*sic*] will evolve, there is no reason why New Zealand should not contribute to architecture something as valuable in its own way as its contribution to other spheres of human effort.[27]

Although it lacked the urgency of the Group's manifesto, Pascoe's aspirations clearly anticipated those of the next generation. The simple forms and direct expression of materials that he identified in pioneer dwellings also have their parallel in the Group's celebration of the structural directness and formal simplicity of the New Zealand shed. The appeal of pioneer dwellings for Pascoe was the fact that the urgent necessity of providing shelter meant that all considerations of architectural style or fashion were cast aside and replaced with a focus on the bare essentials, using the materials that were to hand. Although never directly stated, it is clear that he saw a parallel with architectural modernism, which sought to renew architecture through a return to first principles. Where the German architectural historian, Nikolaus Pevsner, in his classic 1936 study of the origins of modernism in European architecture, *Pioneers of the Modern Movement,* found precursors in the work of nineteenth-century engineers using the new industrial materials of steel and glass, Pascoe drew inspiration from his own group of pioneers working with whatever materials came to hand.[28] It is unclear whether, by 1940, Pascoe was aware of Pevsner's book, but in any case he had already identified his own New Zealand architectural pioneers seven years before. He continued to elaborate his thesis in subsequent writings.

Houses also illustrated Pascoe's own prototype for the modern New Zealand house.[29] Ideas present in embryonic form in the Clifton Spur bach were now explored on a larger canvas. The L-shaped plan is orientated to the north with the main living spaces opening onto a terrace. With its flat roof and horizontal lines, the modern character of the house was unmistakable, while the use of horizontal weatherboards gave it a local inflection (fig. 4). Functionally the plan was divided into two zones, with bedrooms to the east and the north-facing living spaces contained within a single large room. Interior and exterior space is linked through the use of large windows and French doors. More than just an ideal concept, a modified version was built in Dunedin in 1940 for the Otago University librarian, John Harris, a committed socialist.[30] There is little evidence, however, that Pascoe shared his client's political convictions at this stage of his career. Although the social role of architecture was central to the Group's aims, the links between modernism and socialism were still undeveloped in the New Zealand of the early 1940s.[31]

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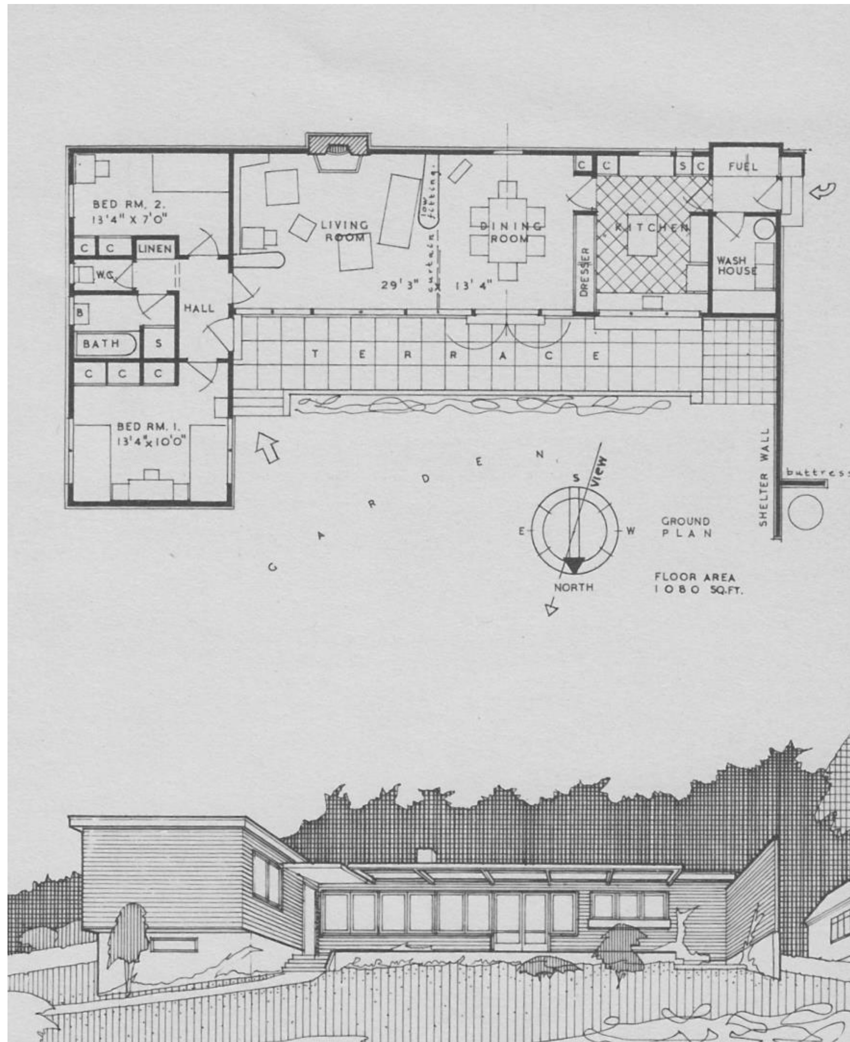

Figure 4. Paul Pascoe, Plan and perspective view of a house published in *Making New Zealand No. 20: Houses*, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1940.

The direct, unpretentious character of Pascoe's design may have been derived in part from local vernacular structures, but he was surely aware of contemporary British houses such as Tecton-associate Anthony Chitty's 1935 *Avalon* at Churt, Surrey, a flat roofed, weatherboard house in the modern idiom.[32] Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian houses, with their L-shaped, modular plans, timber and brick construction and orientation to the sun were another important source. Pascoe was already familiar with Wright's insistence that houses should grow out of their sites rather than merely sit on them, and that they should reflect the nature of contemporary life.[33] By 1940 his enthusiasm for the vernacular architecture of New Zealand's colonial pioneers had been given focus and refined through his knowledge of contemporary British and American architecture.

The New Zealand Centennial celebrations of 1940 also helped to promote a growing cult of the pioneers, of which Pascoe's RIBA thesis was an early manifestation. The series of *Centennial Surveys*, published by the Department of Internal Affairs, included the volume *Settlers and Pioneers*, written by the historian James Cowan. Cowan characterised the pioneering stage of New Zealand's history as the country's "heroic" age, glossing over the dispossession of Māori from the lands that had been guaranteed to them by Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the Treaty of Waitangi.[34] Both John Pascoe, as a member of staff in the Department of Internal

Affairs, and Paul, as an architectural consultant on a range of centennial projects, were closely involved with the official events surrounding the national celebration of the centennial and, as John was to comment a decade later, “the pioneer age, of all our different periods, is to me the most stimulating.”[35] Almost certainly, his twin brother shared these sentiments. As we shall see, this pioneering ethos was to be evoked when Paul designed a house for his brother in 1946.

In 1940 Pascoe’s belief that modernism should be given a New Zealand inflection was, nevertheless, a challenge to the widely accepted view that a defining characteristic of modern architecture was its internationalism. This was certainly the belief of the Austrian émigré architect, Ernst Plischke, who arrived in New Zealand in 1939. In spite of the difference in their views, Plischke’s first design for a New Zealand client, the Frankl house in Christchurch (1939), has many features in common with Pascoe’s contemporaneous design (fig. 5).[36] Both have L-shaped plans and flat roofs and are of timber construction. In both, north-facing living spaces open onto outdoor terraces, although Plischke’s windows extend to floor level, effectively filling the entire wall with glass. For Plischke, the laws of architecture remained the same whether building in New Zealand or Austria; modernism was a mode of design that was universally applicable. While Pascoe admired Plischke’s sophisticated understanding of modernism, he remained committed to his belief that architecture must respond to the local environment.

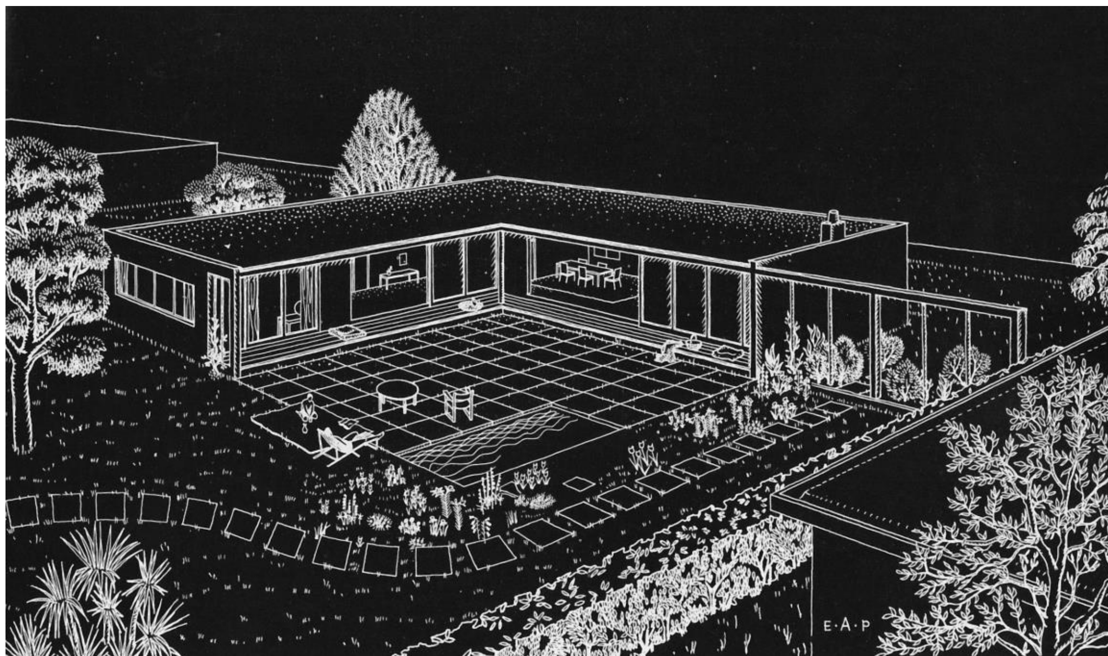

Figure 5. E.A. Plischke, Frankl House, Christchurch, 1939. Perspective view reproduced in E.A. Plishke, *On the Human Aspect in Modern Architecture,* Vienna, 1969.

In an enthusiastic review of Plischke’s *Design and Living* (1947) Pascoe observed that,

> . . . to many colonials, modern architecture typifies ugly, new, box-like buildings, and in their nostalgia for old-world picturesqueness they sweepingly condemn good contemporary architecture along with the “modernistic” hybrid. Modern (or, to be more emphatic, “contemporary”) architecture is not a passing fashion or salesman’s label, it is the skilful use of today’s materials for today’s problems with economy, artistry, and simplicity.[37]

Pascoe's view of New Zealand's architectural history has much in common with Plischke's as outlined in *Design and Living.*[38] Plischke's European background meant that he saw more relevance in New Zealand's brief phase of pre-colonial architecture than in the rough-and-ready structures of the early colonial period. The elegant proportions and simplified Regency classicism of John Verge's British Residency at Waitangi of 1834 (fig. 6), now better known as the Treaty House, provided a local touchstone of architectural excellence for Plischke, but like Pascoe he saw the rise of Victorian historicism and the widespread use of architectural ornament as a backward step.[39] Both architects agreed that modernism was the answer to the impasse resulting from a reliance on historical styles.

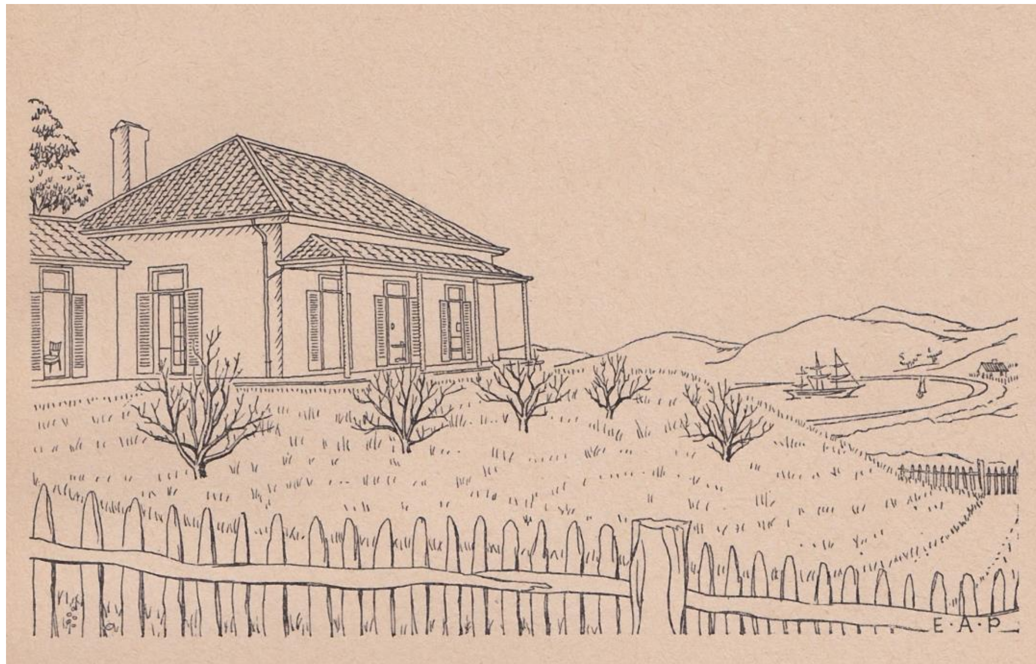

Figure 6. John Verge, British Residency at Waitangi, 1832. Drawing by E.A. Plischke, reproduced in *Design and Living*, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1947.

Although his own practice was gradually gaining momentum, Pascoe remained a prolific writer on architecture. Articles promoting a better understanding of modern architecture, co-authored with his partner, Humphrey Hall, were published in the Canterbury University College student newspaper, *Canta*, in 1946 and 1947.[40] *Canta* was a recognised forum for debate on progressive ideas and Pascoe was no doubt aware that educated young people would be those most likely to adopt new approaches to architecture.

Pascoe and Hall's major contribution to the debate on modern architecture, "The Modern House," was published in the second issue of the pioneering arts journal, *Landfall,* in 1947.[41] Although primarily a literary journal, *Landfall* also endeavoured to reflect new developments across the full spectrum of the arts. The readership of *Landfall* was precisely the intellectual and cultured audience that Pascoe and Hall hoped to reach, and from which they no doubt hoped future clients would emerge.

"The Modern House" expands on earlier themes: the relationship of the house to its site; the generation of the plan from the requirements of the brief; its development from interior organisation to exterior expression; the importance of free planning, large windows and wide, projecting eaves:

> It will have a definite personality and an affinity with nature. The modern house is emancipated from accepted tenets and the doctrines of historical styles, except as the best of the old styles employed the materials and techniques and mirrored the social conditions of their day, so does the new idiom the new materials and the conditions of today. There is no false allegiance to Tudor, Georgian, Colonial or Spanish peculiarities.[42]

The examples of Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier were invoked, and a brief bibliography provided references to their writings, including Wright's *An Autobiography.* Pascoe and Hall stress yet again the need to adapt modern architecture to New Zealand conditions, although they acknowledge that the "wide range of climatic variation in New Zealand demands varying solutions to the problem of house plans. The warmer conditions of the north lend greater possibilities to the free-flowing plan with fewer internal partitions. The far south demands greater insulation and compactness." Nevertheless, in accepting differences they also saw a degree of national consistency: "While it is a far cry from the Takapuna beach to the Central Otago valley, the corresponding building problems and their solutions are not necessarily so different."[43] The article ends with a further plea for the rejection of past styles and conventional forms and for acceptance of the new: "The possibilities for well-designed houses in such a vigorous young country as ours are unlimited. The new environment formed by these houses will have its effect on the rising generations, and the New Zealand town and country scenery would not be betrayed as it is now by bad and indifferent houses. The new setting for living is here if we will but shape it."[44] The underlying modernist theme of architecture as an agent for social change, so important to the Group, was now clearly part of Pascoe's thinking as well.

"The Modern House" anticipated many of the concerns explored in more polemical fashion in the Group manifesto the following year, yet there seems to have been little acknowledgement by members of the Group of the southern architects' contribution and Pascoe in turn seems to have paid little attention to architectural developments in Auckland. The Group's journal, *Planning*, a single issue of which appeared in 1946, included no contribution by Pascoe, although both Vernon Brown and Plischke were contributors, and neither Pascoe's writings nor his buildings were mentioned. *Planning's* denunciation of Cecil Wood's traditional design for St Paul's Anglican Cathedral in Wellington may have meant that Pascoe was ignored simply because he was a former pupil and associate of the despised Wood.[45]

Members of the Group could hardly have been unaware of either Pascoe's writings or his buildings, which were consistently published in *Home and Building* and *Progress* during the 1940s, but they may also have been dismissed as irrelevant to the Group's desire to remake the New Zealand house from first principles. Although they were modern in appearance, Pascoe's houses were structurally conservative, their timber frames hidden behind weatherboards on the exterior and by plasterboard on the interiors. In this respect they had little in common with the pared down, exposed structures of the Group's houses. Pascoe's preference for low, mono-pitched roofs differed from the shed-like, low-pitched gabled roofs of the first Group houses (fig. 7). His houses were also more conventional in plan, as can be seen in the group of eight prefabricated houses designed for the Rehabilitation Department in Christchurch's Riccarton state housing area, although the plan and appearance of these houses may have been dictated by the client. Pascoe's preferences were more likely reflected in an experimental version with a more sophisticated plan and modern exterior, which he published in *Home and Building* alongside the more conventional built versions.[46]

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Figure 7. Group Architects, House no. 1, Takapuna, 1949–50. Interior of living area.
Photo: I.J. Lochhead.

Figure 8. Paul Pascoe, John Pascoe house, Eastbourne. Perspective view, 1946.
Macmillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury (Lawry and Sellars collection).

The essence of Pascoe's approach to the problem of the modern New Zealand house can be seen in two designs from the late 1940s. The first of these, for his brother John, was built on a sloping section surrounded by bush in the Wellington suburb of Eastbourne (fig. 8). Its white-painted basement contrasts with the dark, creosoted weatherboard walls of the main living space on the first floor, creating the impression that the upper floor hovers among the trees. Interior spaces were planned for flexibility and furnished with spare simplicity. It has much in common with contemporary houses by Vernon Brown in Auckland and Charles Fearnley in Wellington, both architects approved of by the Group. Like his brother, John Pascoe had a passion for New Zealand's alpine regions and his bush-clad Eastbourne section allowed him to work in a Wellington office by day, while enjoying a secluded natural setting during his leisure

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hours. His description of building the house, published in 1947 in *New Zealand Design Review,* the journal of the Wellington Architecture Centre, a strong advocate for modern architecture, suggests parallels with the experience of colonial pioneers, who carved out a space from the bush to build their first homes utilising the country's natural resources. Such a narrative must have appealed to Paul as much as it did to John. With the construction of the John Pascoe house, the distance between colonial directness and simplicity and modernist honesty and rational planning has been miraculously shrunk in a single, bold step.[47] John made the connection explicit when he recalled the project several years later. "We had all the excitement of pioneer settlers without their inaccessibility."[48]

While John's house evolved naturally from Paul's previous designs, Paul's own house was a unique solution to an unusual site (fig. 9). Initially designed for a section on the Esplanade in Sumner, it was eventually built on Colenso Street, four blocks back from the ocean.[49] Responding to a narrow site on the axis of a street that led directly towards the beach, Pascoe designed a house that was both individual and idiosyncratic. The elongated plan was necessary in order to squeeze the maximum floorspace onto a constrained site. This was achieved by locating the bedrooms on the ground floor with a centrally positioned stair-hall giving access to the living space on the upper level. Although the house was located some distance from the waterfront, Pascoe ensured that the sea was still visible from the upstairs living rooms. Yet, for all the modernist gestures of Pascoe's design, its elongated form, vertical stacking and subdivision of spaces have little in common with the free-flowing interiors that were soon to emerge in Group houses in Auckland.

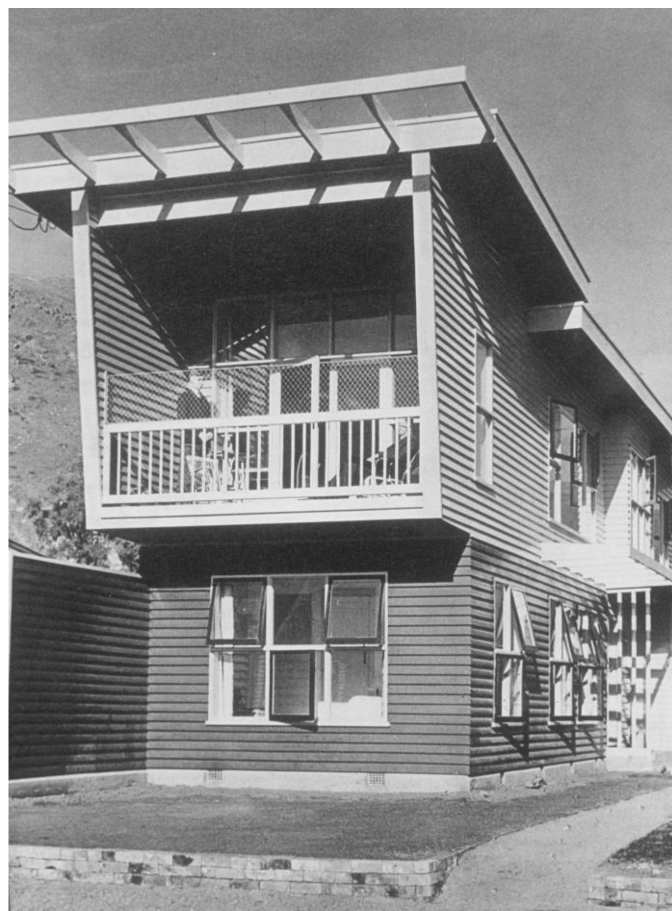

Figure 9. Paul Pascoe, Pascoe house, Sumner, 1947. Photo: Art History and Theory Visual Resources Collection, University of Canterbury.

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The completion of the Sumner house marked something of a watershed in Pascoe's career. After 1950, domestic architecture became less important to his practice as the post-war resurgence of construction brought larger commissions, among them the design for Christchurch International Airport. In 1955 the partnership with Hall also came to an end, shortly after Keith Mackenzie joined the firm.[50] Pascoe continued to design houses but he was no longer a leader in the field. Whereas his early writings helped to set the agenda for domestic architecture, during the 1950s Pascoe himself seems to have been influenced by the Group, the low-pitched gable and expansive fenestration of *Englefield* at Dunsandel on the Canterbury Plains owing much to their example.[51]

The year 1950 represented a milestone of a different kind as it marked the centennial of the founding of the Canterbury Settlement. Unlike the national centennial commemorations of 1940 and the provincial centennials that followed during the early 1940s, Canterbury's centennial was celebrated free from the overshadowing clouds of war. It was thus an opportunity to look forward to a positive future. Ann and Paul Pascoe's Christmas card for 1950 reflected this new spirit of optimism, but it also referenced Canterbury's past (fig. 10). Beneath the heading, "Canterbury Centennial Year," a centrally positioned map of New Zealand highlighted the Pascoes' home province. Above the map an outline of Aoraki/Mount Cook referenced their love of the mountains, while to one side of the map Pascoe positioned a sketch of a colonist's "V" hut and on the other one of his own modernist house designs. A conventional reading of these juxtaposed images would interpret them as illustrating the continuous progress of the province from 1850 to the present, although a more nuanced analysis that takes into account Pascoe's individual interpretation of New Zealand's architectural history reveals much more. The card juxtaposes the two phases of the country's architectural history that so fascinated the architect, an idealised pioneering past and the modernist future. Once again, in what for most people would have seemed an unlikely context, Pascoe reasserted the connection between early settlers and architectural pioneers. One can only wonder what the friends and family who received the card made of Paul's ongoing obsession.

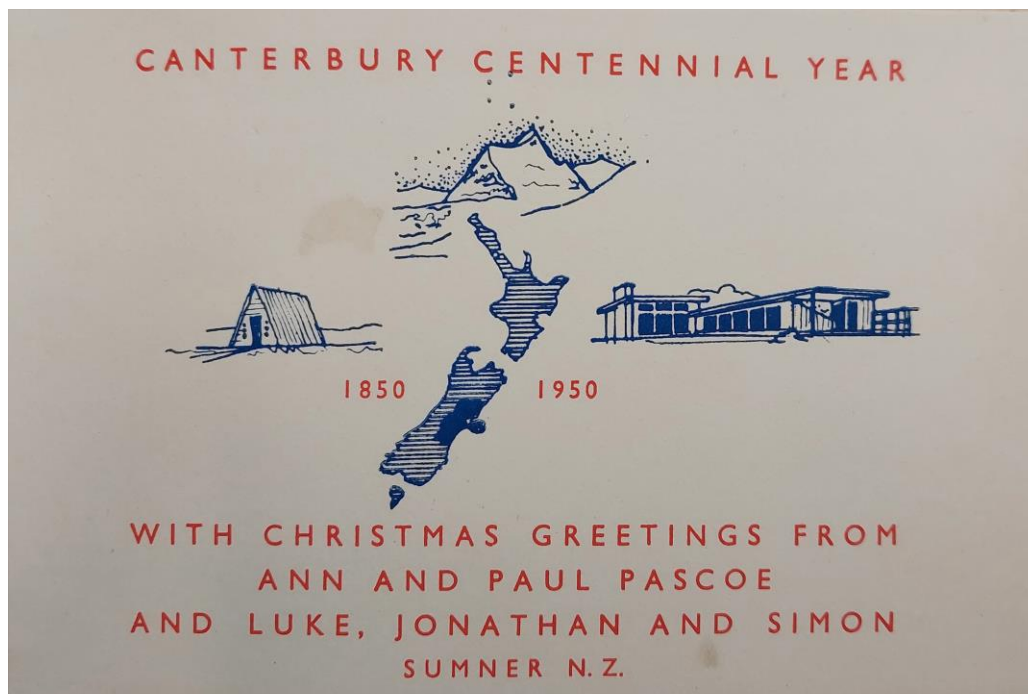

Figure 10. Paul Pascoe, Christmas card for 1950. Paul Pascoe Scrapbooks, 2, Macmillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury.

Pascoe never abandoned his belief that vernacular structures could shape modern buildings. His chapel for the alpine settlement of Arthur's Pass drew inspiration from the simple forms of mountain shelters to create what he referred to as a "mountain modern vernacular," in which structural steel and concrete block were used alongside local stone (fig. 11). Yet this simple structure inevitably evokes the timber Gothic churches of the Canterbury plains as well as more recent churches in mountain settings such as R.S.D. Harman's Church of the Good Shepherd at Lake Tekapo (1935).[52] For all his commitment to modernism, Pascoe was well aware of the historical context provided by pioneer buildings, and recognised that the pioneers' attempts to adapt to their new surroundings had parallels with his own desire to adapt modernism to New Zealand. Pascoe's responsiveness to the architecture of the past further differentiates his approach from that of the Group.

Figure 11. Paul Pascoe, Arthur's Pass Chapel, 1956. Photo: I.J. Lochhead.

Although the Group were dismissive of their predecessors, Pascoe's role as a pioneer of modernism in New Zealand is incontrovertible. His commitment to the development of a local modernism preceded the Group's and should have made his writings of more interest to them than Plischke's advocacy of internationalism, but it may have been precisely this common ground that made it harder for them to acknowledge Pascoe's earlier contribution. Furthermore, as Pascoe himself acknowledged, the climatic extremes of Canterbury and Otago were very different from the more equable conditions in the north, meaning that his buildings probably seemed less relevant to Auckland-based architects. Nevertheless, as both architect and writer, Pascoe helped to ensure that when the Group manifesto was published in 1948 and their first houses were completed soon after, an informed public already existed for a modern New Zealand architecture.

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Pascoe's recognition of the affinity that existed between modernism and the building practices of New Zealand's Pākehā pioneers also entered the mainstream of New Zealand architectural thinking in the 1950s. In 1954, a group of senior students from the Auckland University College School of Architecture, in conjunction with the New Zealand Institute of Architects, organised an exhibition entitled *Home Building 1814–1954: The New Zealand Tradition*, held at the Auckland City Art Gallery. The exhibition catalogue, written by James Garrett, was divided into seven sections, beginning with traditional Māori buildings and continuing with a now familiar narrative tracing the evolution of nineteenth-century settler architecture, from the honest simplicity of the pioneers to the decline into decorative elaboration during the later Victorian period and ending with the arrival of modernism in the final decade surveyed, 1940 to 1950. The second section of the exhibition, "Pioneering Simplicity 1820–1860," is summarised in a concluding statement: "These pioneers had little time or money for refinements. They used material and structure logically and honestly to build simple homes."[53] The concluding section is entitled "The New Pioneers 1940–1950." These New Pioneers are identified as

> . . . the writers, poets, and printers who began in the thirties to discover themselves and their own country. They aroused an awareness of the influences found in this country, and nowhere else. The younger architects reflected this "New Zealandness" in their work. . . . Many individuals were seeking to restate the fundamentals of good design in terms that express present day ideals, social life and new techniques.[54]

Although neither Pascoe's writings nor his designs are mentioned in the catalogue, he had unquestionably influenced the underlying conceptual framework of the exhibition. As one of the earliest of these "New Pioneers," Pascoe could have, with some justification, felt himself to have been unfairly ignored, although he could also have felt quiet satisfaction that his ideas had been so thoroughly assimilated.

An earlier version of this article was presented to the Group symposium at the University of Auckland School of Architecture on 30 August 2008.

[1] "On the Necessity for Architecture: The Manifesto of the Architectural Group," reprinted in Douglas Lloyd Jenkins, ed., *New Dreamland*, *Writing New Zealand Architecture* (Auckland: Godwit, 2005), 142-45. The standard work on the architectural Group is Julia Gatley, ed. *Group Architects: Towards a New Zealand Architecture* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2010).
[2] "On the Necessity for Architecture," 142.
[3] Ibid, 144.
[4] See Ian Lochhead, "New Zealand Architecture in the Thirties," *Landfall,* 152 (December 1984): 466–481.
[5] For accounts of Pascoe's career see Robyn Ussher, "The Modern Movement in Canterbury: The Architecture of Paul Pascoe" (M.A. thesis, University of Canterbury, 1986); Ana Robertson, "A New Zealand Identity: The Architecture of Paul Pascoe" (M.Phil. thesis, 3 vols., University of Auckland, 1997); and Ana Robertson, "Pascoe, Arnold Paul 1908–1976," *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007, http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/.
[6] See, for example, Peter Shaw, *New Zealand Architecture from Polynesian Beginnings to 1990* (Auckland: Hodder and Stoughton, 1991), 146–47. Pascoe's role as a precursor is also acknowledged by Gatley, *The Group,* 25–26.
[7] Lochhead, "New Zealand Architecture in the Thirties," 472. For a detailed account of Wood's career, see Ruth Helms, "The Architecture of Cecil Wood" (PhD thesis, University of Canterbury, 2 vols., 1996).

[8] For an account of The Group, see Julie Catchpole, "The Group" (M.A. thesis, University of Canterbury, 1984) and Peter Simpson, *Bloomsbury South: The Arts in Christchurch, 1933–53,* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2016), 73ff.
[9] Jill Trevelyan, *Rita Angus: An Artist's Life* (Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2008), 68. On the relationship between The Group and the C.S.A., see Warren Feeney, *The Radical, the Reactionary and the Canterbury Society of Arts 1880–1996* (Christchurch: University of Canterbury Press, 2011), 65–67.
[10] For a discussion of *Cass*, see Peter Vangioni, "The Landscape Comes Alive: the Cass Works," in William McAloon and Jill Trevelyan, eds., *Rita Angus: Life & Vision* (Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2008), 22–25.
[11] The Cass station is based on a standard Public Works Department design dating from 1907 (PWD 2351/1907). The design was used for many small stations across the New Zealand rail network in the early twentieth century. See "Cass Station," New Zealand Rail Heritage Trust, accessed 24 January 2024, https://railheritage.org.nz/buildings/cass-station/. Pascoe included a reproduction of Angus's painting in the *Public Buildings* issue of *Making New Zealand* as an illustration to the section on buildings for transport. Paul Pascoe, *Making New Zealand: Public Buildings* 2, no. 21 (1940), 27.
[12] Trevelyan, *Rita Angus*, 140–45. Paul Pascoe's and his wife Ann's Christmas card for 1940 carries the address, 18 Aranoni Track. Paul Pascoe Scrapbooks, 2 vols., Macmillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury, I, n.d., n.p.
[13] Illustrated in Trevelyan, *Rita Angus*, 144. The unfinished watercolour, *The Artist's Cottage, Clifton,* c. 1938, is in the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, on loan from the Rita Angus Estate.
[14] Trevelyan, *Rita Angus*, 145.
[15] Chris Maclean, *John Pascoe* (Nelson: Craig Potton, 2003), 87ff.
[16] Paul Pascoe, "The Study of the Early Buildings in the Canterbury Settlement of New Zealand, Erected by the Canterbury Pilgrims in Their Effort to Found a New England . . . the Conditions Under Which They Worked, Their Treatment of New Materials and Resulting Influences" (R.I.B.A. thesis, 1933), 110. A copy is held in the University of Canterbury Library.
[17] See Samuel Hurst Seager, "Architectural Art in New Zealand," *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, 3rd series, 7, no. 19 (1900): 481. For the parallels between Seager and Wright, see Ian Lochhead, "The Architectural Art of Samuel Hurst Seager," *Art New Zealand*, no. 44 (Spring 1987): 92–94.
[18] Seager, "Architectural Art in New Zealand," 481.
[19] Pascoe, *Making New Zealand: Houses* 2, no. 20 (1940), 10.
[20] Pascoe, *Houses*, 2.
[21] For example, the former Bank of New Zealand, Napier, by Crichton, McKay and Houghton (1932) and the former Ross and Glendinning building, Napier, by E.A. Williams (1932). See Peter Shaw, *Art Deco Napier: Styles of the Thirties* (Auckland: Reed Methuen, 1987), 36–37.
[22] Pascoe, *Houses*, 5. Pascoe's positive attitude towards the raupo whare is the opposite of the nineteenth-century perception of this building type as a temporary makeshift, the replacement of which by more permanent structures was considered a mark of progress. See Kristyn Harman, "'Some dozen *raupo whares* and a few tents': remembering raupo houses in colonial New Zealand," *Journal of New Zealand Studies,* NS 17 (2014): 47–51.
[23] For a discussion of FitzGerald's architectural writings, see Ian Lochhead, "Mrs Grundy and the Gothic: James Edward FitzGerald and Architectural Criticism in Colonial Canterbury," *Bulletin of New Zealand Art History* 14 (1993): 71–92.
[24] James Edward FitzGerald, "On the Nature of Art," *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* 2 (1869), 264. The passage is quoted by Pascoe in *Houses*, 13.
[25] For a discussion of how Gothic Revival architectural principles became part of the theoretical basis of modernism, see David Watkin, *Morality and Architecture: The Development of a Theme in Architectural History and Theory from the Gothic Revival to the Modern Movement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).
[26] Pascoe's *Houses* was described as "a very valuable addition to New Zealand architectural history," by Professor C.R. Knight, head of the Auckland University College School of Architecture, in a review published in *Home and Building* 5, no. 1 (December 1940): 37.
[27] Pascoe, *Houses,* 30.

[28] Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936). Pevsner's book was subsequently revised and reissued as *Pioneers of Modern Design* and remains in print today. It is not included in the list of publications at the end of Pascoe and Hall's 1947 *Landfall* article, although they do include another classic account of the history of modern architecture, Sigfried Giedion's *Space, Time and Architecture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941). Gatley points out the slightly earlier use of the term "pioneers" by Henry-Russell Hitchcock to designate the first generation of European modernists, which included Walter Gropius, Mies van de Rohe and Le Corbusier, in his *Modern Architecture: Romanticism and Reintegration,* 1929, although this comparatively scarce book was probably unknown to New Zealand architects at the time. See Gatley, *The Group,* 245, note 19.
[29] Pascoe, *Houses*, 25.
[30] "Malory," as the house was known, was published in *Home and Building* (December 1941): 12–13. Pascoe probably took advantage of his connections at the Architectural Press in London to ensure its publication in England. See "House at Dunedin, New Zealand," *The Architects' Journal* (21 May 1942): 361–4. See also Ussher, "Paul Pascoe," 72–81 and Robertson, "A New Zealand Identity," vol. 1, 26. For a more recent discussion, see Douglas Lloyd Jenkins, *At Home: A Century of New Zealand Design* (Auckland: Godwit, 2004), 93–95.
[31] Michael Findlay, "Streamline Paradigm: Influences on Architectural Modernism in Dunedin 1934–1950," *The Modern World Conference* (Auckland: Unitec, 1995), 17–18.
[32] Jeremy Gould, *Modern Houses in Britain,* ([London]: Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain, 1977), 33 & plate 33.
[33] The Herbert Jacobs house was first published in a special issue of *Architectural Forum* devoted to Wright's work in January 1938. On the Usonian houses in general, see Frank Lloyd Wright, *An Autobiography* (London: Faber, 1945); Frank Lloyd Wright, *The Natural House* (London: Pitman, 1971) and John Sergeant, *Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian Houses: The Case for Organic Architecture* (New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1976).
[34] James Cowan, *New Zealand Centennial Surveys IV*: *Settlers and Pioneers* (Wellington: Department of Internal Affairs, 1940).
[35] Quoted in Maclean, *John Pascoe,* 166.
[36] See Ernst Plischke, *On the Human Aspect in Modern Architecture* (Vienna: K. Wedl, 1969), 128–29; Linda Tyler, "The Architecture of E.A. Plischke in New Zealand, 1939–1962" (M.A. thesis, University of Canterbury, 1986), 66–73; and August Sarnitz and Eva B. Ottillinger, *Ernst Plischke: Modern Architecture for the New World: The Complete Works* (Munich: Prestel, 2004), 159 & 258.
[37] Paul Pascoe, "Modern Architecture and Town Planning," *The Press*, 7 June 1947, 8.
[38] Ernst Plischke, *Design and Living* (Wellington: Department of Internal Affairs, 1947). *Design and Living* expands on ideas that Plischke had outlined in a pamphlet for distribution to New Zealand's armed forces: E. A. Plischke, "About Houses," *NZ Services Current Affairs Bulletin* 1, no. 20 (20 September 1943).
[39] Plischke, *Design and Living,* 31 ff.
[40] Paul Pascoe and Humphrey Hall, "The Aims of the Architect," *Canta*, 30 October 1946, 1; "Designs of Today," *Canta*, 26 June 1947, 1.
[41] Pascoe and Hall, "The Modern House," *Landfall* 1, no. 2 (1947): 121–25, reprinted in Lloyd Jenkins, *New Dreamland,* 132–37.
[42] Ibid, 134.
[43] Ibid, 138.
[44] Ibid, 137.
[45] "The Wellington Cathedral Design—A Criticism," *Planning* 1 (August 1946): 18–25. On Pascoe's relationship with Wood, see Robertson, "A New Zealand Identity," 9–12 & 17–23.
[46] "Eight Prefabricated Houses," *Home and Building* (June 1945): 12–13. See also Robertson, "A New Zealand Identity," 1, 40–41.
[47] John Pascoe, "Family in a Forest," *Design Review* 1, no. 2 (July 1948): 5–7. See also "A Mountaineer's Home," *Home and Building* (October/November 1948): 35. For a discussion of the role of *Design Review* in promoting modernism, see Paul Walker and Justine Clark, "Bursting into Print," in Julia Gatley and Paul Walker, *Vertical Living: The Architectural Centre and the Remaking of Wellington* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2014), 55–71.

[48] John Pascoe, *Land Uplifted High* (Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1952), 29, quoted in Maclean, *John Pascoe,* 166. See also John Pascoe, "Shapes for Shelters in the Mountains," *Design Review* 2, no. 6 (May/June 1950): 120–21. Duncan's hut, built of totora slabs in the upper Rakaia valley, was described approvingly as being "simple, primitive and made from local materials; it blended into the landscape."
[49] "An Architect's own Home at the Seaside," *Home and Building* (October/November 1948): 10–11 & 52; "House in Christchurch," *Architectural Review* 106 (September 1949): 194; Ussher, "Paul Pascoe," 94–97 and Ian Lochhead, "Pascoe House," in *Long Live the Modern: New Zealand's New Architecture, 1904–1984*, ed. Julia Gatley (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2008), 48.
[50] Robertson, "A New Zealand Identity," 1, 44–46.
[51] "'Englefield' Homestead, Dunsandel," *Home and Building* (September 1959): 45. The article noted that the roof form suggested "a Maori elevational character."
[52] John Wilson, "Arthur's Pass Chapel," in Gatley, *Long Live the Modern*, 73.
[53] James Garrett, *Home Building 1814–1954: The New Zealand Tradition* (Auckland School of Architecture, Auckland University College, 1954), 8.
[54] Garrett, *Home Building*, 18.

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