THE MODERN MOVEMENT IN NEW SOUTH WALES
A THEMATIC STUDY AND SURVEY OF PLACES

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Alternative Housing Types

At the beginning of the 1960s Sydney was considered Australia’s most modern place to live, mostly because it contained the largest number of flats.\textsuperscript{35} Until that time most flats were rented, though you could own shares in some higher end buildings (company title). Initiatives towards owner-occupation began shortly after the war. The largest was Urban Co-operative Multi-Home Units,\textsuperscript{36} whose finest effort was Aaron Bolot’s large block in Wylde Street, Potts Point. The building’s curved form responded to its awkward site while clever planning located living rooms and bedrooms on the sunny northern side, and kitchens and bathrooms at the back. A strong horizontal appearance due to almost continuous bands of windows and balconies brought Modern Movement style to this densely populated residential quarter.
Aaron Bolot’s celebrated 1950 block at 17 Wylde Street, Potts Point (left) and the slightly later St Ursula in Onslow Avenue, Elizabeth Bay, designed by Hugo Stossel in 1951. It too had living and bedrooms placed to maximum advantage on the outside faces of the building (Roy Lumby photographs).

In 1953 young architect Geoffrey Twibill came up with a scheme to replace most of Paddington with forty eight luxurious 49 metre high blocks of flats containing split level apartments. It all reflected Modern Movement influence via Le Corbusier’s drastic 1920s plans for Paris and his highly influential Unite d’Habitation in Marseilles (1949). Twibill’s unrealised high-rise garden city may have been radical for post-war Sydney but was not intended to rehouse displaced residents. It predicted the massive 1957 scheme sponsored by the McMahon’s Point and Lavender Bay Progress Association in response to a threat of industrial rezoning. Designers included Harry Seidler and landscape architect Harry Howard. The scheme included tall apartment towers and lower slab blocks surrounded by open space, and walk-up units along the Berry’s Bay shoreline. An international hotel rose above Blue’s Point. The only building to eventuate was Blues Point Tower apartments, on the hotel site.

Impression of Geoffrey Twibill’s slab blocks to replace terrace housing at Paddington, set in leafy open surrounds (left) and Harry Seidler’s 1961 Blue’s Point Tower (1961), the only tangible evidence of the Lavender Bay scheme of 1957 (Sydney Morning Herald, 4 August 1953, p.8; Roy Lumby photograph).
Harry Seidler designed a series of apartment blocks with expressed concrete frames, balconies (only becoming common in the 1950s), brick infill walls and careful attention to sun control, all in the best Modern Movement tradition and imitated by other architects. He also introduced novel innovations such as splitting access to apartments and double height living rooms overlooked by mezzanines containing bedrooms.

Seidler was not the only innovator. One of Neville Gruzman’s earliest projects was Montrose apartments in Alfred Street North, Neutral Bay, which was astonishingly minimal in appearance. Each apartment had two levels – the upper contained two bedrooms, the lower living rooms extending across the depth of the building. The exterior was like the latest office buildings, a glazed curtain wall but punctuated by glass louvres for ventilation. Montrose caused a sensation. 3,000 people turned up the first day it was open for inspection and every apartment was sold on the spot. Forsyth Evans & Associates’ Chilterns, New South Head Road, Rose Bay, was also extraordinary. Perhaps influenced by Le Corbusier’s Pavilion Suisse in Paris (1932), a Modern Movement icon, its three levels were supported off a single row of shapely piers. The use of new technology allowed speedy and cost-effective construction. For instance, steel formwork, precast concrete floors, hollow lightweight concrete walls and a simplified drainage system knocked 25% off the time it took to build architect Theodore Fry’s 13 storey Oceana in Elizabeth Bay Road, Elizabeth Bay.  

![Neville Gruzman’s 1954 Montrose at Neutral Bay (left) and Forsyth Evans & Associates’ 1953 Chilterns at Rose Bay (Roy Lumby photographs).](image)

Sydney’s harbourside suburbs were transformed by tall apartment blocks, especially after strata title came in. Flats really became a viable form of housing with the passage of the Strata Title Act in 1961. This largely happened because of Lend Lease’s founder Gerardus Dusseldorp, who engaged a barrister at his own expense to prepare the Act. For the first time in Australia freehold ownership of a flat was possible and the home unit came into being.

At the end of the 1960s the completion of Park Regis in Park Street, Sydney, hinted at the future. It was the first commitment to inner city living since the end of the war. Designed by Stocks & Holdings Architectural Department, its slender brick and concrete tower contained shops, a motel and apartments. Another hint of the future at this time was a 1967 walk-up block at Gladesville, Elizabeth Court in Meriton Place, Meriton’s first effort at home units.
Medium density housing became an option during the 1960s, coinciding with the rediscovery of inner suburbs such as Balmain and Paddington with their desirable Victorian terrace houses close to the city. The 1964 Sulman-winning St John’s Village in St John’s Road, Glebe, by Herbert Hely and Noel Bell for the Church of England was amongst the earliest. It was a retirement village of two room flats with communal lounges, dining rooms and kitchen arranged to form a central court. The irregular layout, bricks, tiles, and simple geometric shapes of the dwellings gave domestic scale and identity. The Penthouses in New Beach Road, Rushcutters Bay, by Ancher Mortlock Murray & Woolley (Ken Woolley), recalls Wyldefel Gardens’ terraces on the roofs of the dwellings below, although it is considered the first major example of its kind in Australia. Its brick and tile architecture was firmly of the Sydney School and it won the RAIA’s 1968 Wilkinson Award for housing. The complex was praised for its skilful, convenient planning allowing views from each apartment and the way it fitted harmoniously into its surroundings.\(^{40}\)
Several fine townhouse developments were constructed on Sydney’s Lower North Shore in the late 1960s. One was Clarke Gazzard & Partners flat roofed, cream brick Woodside in Milray Avenue, Wollstonecraft. Ten residences in three buildings were cleverly planned for maximum sunlight, privacy and views, while landscape architect Bruce Mackenzie saved many of the site’s natural features. Another was Ken Woolley’s The Cottages in Milson Road, Cremorne, finished with simple tiled gabled roofs and white painted brickwork. A number of other architects, such as Robertson & Hindmarsh, Ian Jack and Keith Cottier, and Towel, Rippon & Associates designed fine townhouses. Some of the most accomplished were by major Sydney architects in Canberra – Ian McKay’s Swinger Hill, John Andrews’ University of Canberra student housing and Harry Seidler’s Australian National University group housing.

John Andrews’ University of Canberra student housing, 1975 (Roy Lumby photograph)

Medium density housing was built in a number of centres across NSW. These two examples are in Newcastle. The inner-city building in the photograph at left in King Street is by Frederick Romberg (1975) and exploits the steep slope above the centre of the city. The building shown at right, in Scenic Drive, Merewether, also exploits a sloping site in an effective way (Roy Lumby photographs).
Don Gazzard revived the terrace house form with his own home at the intersection of Hargrave and Elizabeth Streets, Paddington (1972). It skilfully manages to blend Modern Movement aesthetics with a traditional house typology so that is very much of its own time but successfully integrated into a historic townscape (Roy Lumby photographs).

Public Housing

The Modern Movement accompanied agendas for social and community welfare in NSW.

Early experiments with public housing in NSW were undertaken in the 1910s and 1920s. Interest revived in the mid-1930s as the Depression eased. The ring of industrial and terrace house suburbs around the centre of Sydney were defined as slums and earmarked for renewal. The Housing Improvement Board of New South Wales was established in 1937 and Erskineville was singled out for special attention. The Erskineville Housing Scheme on Swanson Street, Erskineville, was designed by Louis Robertson & Son (Morton Herman in association with Ronald Richardson). It was intended to contain 218 flats and several shops but only 56 flats, for married couples and three children in seven widely spaced buildings, eventuated. They provided high standards, with gardens, playgrounds, sunlight and fresh air. Flats were quite generous for that time, with a living room, two bedrooms, balcony cum sleepout, bathroom, separate toilet and an efficient kitchen with fitted cupboards and a meal alcove.

If appearance was conservative site planning and amenity reflected best Modern Movement practice, apparently influenced by 1920s German housing schemes. Morton Herman, who had worked and studied in Britain and Europe, referred specifically to British and vaguely to “Continental” models.
Plan of a flat and isometric projection of kitchen and bathroom typical of the Erskineville Housing Scheme (left). The photograph at top shows buildings shortly after completion, the one below it in more recent times (plan - Building, 24 December 1938, p.34; archival photograph – SLNSW, Sam Hood photograph, digital order hood 23182r; Roy Lumby photograph).

The scheme was enhanced by the Lady Gowrie Child Centre, a model “Pre-School Child Development Centre” designed by Fowell, McConnel & Mansfield and interior designer Marion Hall Best. It was intended as the focus of the entire estate, accommodating 100 two to four year olds. It also contained a community hall, performing the role of residents’ social centre and parent education facility. The Erskineville Housing Estate represented cutting-edge, state-sponsored social welfare, responsibly interpreting the Modern Movement’s social agenda.

The State Housing Commission was established in 1942, committed to large-scale housing for low income earners. The 1945 Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement provided state governments with low-interest loans to build rental housing. The Housing Commission struggled after World War II but built many houses on greenfield sites such as Villawood and Green Valley and experimented with higher densities.

Among its early efforts was Morrow & Gordon’s Greenway on Greenway Drive near Ennis Street, Kirribilli, four interconnected brick blocks that were comparable to New York City Housing Authority apartments. Morrow & Gordon also designed the largest 1940s Housing Commission project, the Devonshire Street Housing scheme, which was based on Swedish public housing models. It may have been Australia’s most utopian workers’ housing – low-rise functional modern flats with rational plans but sported dull styling in a park-like neighbourhood.47
The Housing Commission built large blocks of flats on land cleared of old houses in Redfern, Waterloo and Surry Hills. They suggested Le Corbusier’s 1920s tower block city by way of low income housing projects in London. One of the largest, Lipson & Kaad’s Sir John Northcott Place at Surry Hills, was a massive 15 storey building surrounded by earlier Swedish-influenced walk-ups. It provided flats, shops, meeting rooms and other social amenities. Lipson regarded the project as a high point of his career, an opportunity to design socially responsible architecture. Although initially successful, its design and later concentration of economically disadvantaged people has highlighted the deficiencies of such a single-minded approach to public housing.

Harry Seidler’s off-form concrete flats at Rosebery (1967) introduced Brutalism to public housing. The Brutalist concern with expressing function was translated into a free standing lift and stair tower between slab blocks, linked to them by foot bridges. Sirius, towering above Cumberland Street in The Rocks, was the last tall Housing Commission apartment block. It was designed in-house (Tao Gofers project architect). Apart from its distinctive stacked appearance it was truly egalitarian, providing glamorous city views on prime real estate. The building gives insight into broader issues overtaking the Modern Movement. It resulted from community resistance to redevelopment proposals for The Rocks in the 1960s where high-rise office buildings, hotels and apartment buildings would displace long-term residents. After concerted opposition, including Builders’ Labourers Federation green bans, blocked development, those who wanted to stay were personally consulted so that their requirements could be incorporated into Sirius.
The Housing Commission’s Sirius in The Rocks, 1979 (Roy Lumby photograph).

The Housing Commission also experimented with medium density dwellings. Clark Gazzard & Partners’ 1967 Riverwood housing scheme consisted of rows of single storey dwellings with north-facing living areas facing private courts. Ancher Mortlock Murray & Woolley’s 1973 townhouses at Macquarie Fields paired houses with mono-pitched roofs to link individual front and rear courtyards. Houses were two stories, a single storey or split-level. They offered an alternative lifestyle, close to schools, shops and playing fields. The Commission persisted through the 1970s - John Andrews’ 1980 scheme at Little Bay mixed single, family and aged dwellings that all had gardens and roof terraces. Medium density schemes were also built outside Sydney, in centres such as Newcastle, Albury, Griffith and Narrandera.

**Community Impetus**

At mid-century lean, functional Modern Movement architecture was ideal for expressing ideals of community health and recreation. The notion of community lay behind much town planning and was realised in many localities by local government, groups of people and individuals. Social facilities symbolised good government and were tools to influence the general health of citizens and encourage productive use of leisure time. Local councils began constructing community buildings during the 1950s - libraries, baby health centres and halls. They sometimes grew into large civic centres.

The 1944 Library Act included provisions for state subsidy and local government administration. Grafton Council is thought to be the first to take advantage of it. In 1948 funding increased and then local libraries really took off. Perhaps the most important was Davey & Brindley’s 1954 East Lindfield Library. It was an essential Modern Movement building - refined, minimalist and visually satisfying. It also proved to be influential - regularly spaced steel columns supporting exposed roof trusses allowed unobstructed, flexible, well-lit space.
Davey & Brindley’s influential 1954 public library on the Pacific Highway at East Lindfield – as built (top left) and as it appears today (bottom left), plus the plan of the original section (*Architecture*, Volume 43 No 1: 13, January-March 1955; Roy Lumby photograph).

Baby health centres were an important community facility, underscoring perceptions of future benefits accruing from a modern healthy environment. Although purpose-designed centres were built from the mid 1920s on, the Commonwealth government published guidelines in the 1940s. The new centre opening at Epping in November 1946 was the state’s 253rd, partly financed by the government and partly by municipal contributions.52

A contemporary description of Kenwood & Hoile’s baby health centre at Bexley (since mutilated) says it all - “modern treatment of Modern utility ... The Architects’ aim was to obtain an atmosphere of efficiency, cleanliness, and good health, thus in its small way the design follows the style familiarly adopted for modern hospitals, while the open character of the entrance, waiting room, and toddlers’ playroom imparts an air of friendliness, and captures the morning sunshine as well.”53

Kenwood & Hoile’s 1946 Bexley Baby Health Centre on Stoney Creek Road (left, since modified) was amongst the earliest post-war buildings to show Modern Movement influence. The Modern Movement informed many post-war baby health centres, such as the facility in Hercules Street, Brighton Le Sands, built in 1956 (SLNSW - Government Printing Office 2 – 26993 and 09194).

A series of delightful Modern Movement pavilions was built across the state during the 1950s. Sometimes they were incorporated into multi-purpose buildings. Thus Davey & Brindley’s Bankstown Library included a baby health centre, as did Morrow & Gordon’s Burwood Library. So did the Sulman-winning Florence Bartley Library at Kings Cross (1959; demolished) by Arthur Collins of the City of Sydney’s Architects’ Branch. Clarke Gazzard & Partners designed a series of baby health centres in the mid 1960s at Hornsby, North Epping, West Pennant Hills and Mona Vale.
From the outside they could easily be mistaken for Sydney School houses but were betrayed by their plans - a large waiting room and pram parking room, a consulting room or two, a test feed room and staff facilities with a separate entry.\textsuperscript{54}

General view of Davey & Brindley's circa 1951 Earlwood Baby Health Centre in William Street, Earlwood (SLNSW Government Printing Office – 2 06014)


Kindergartens, another building type devoted to early childhood, illustrate the pivotal role the young held in the post-war era. The first kindergartens in NSW were intended to help the children of poor families and contribute to social reform. The Lady Gowrie Centre in Erskineville, described above, institutionalised pre-school education. Kindergartens became a middle class aspiration\textsuperscript{55} and by the 1960s were becoming a standard feature of early childhood. They were built by local communities, sometimes with council support, or by local councils. Generally engaging low-key buildings, many were designed by significant architects.

Amongst them was Eleanor Cullis-Hill’s kindergarten at Wahroonga, which had extensive banks of windows, a jaunty butterfly roof and colourful checkerboard panelling. It doubled as a community hall.\textsuperscript{56} Peter Muller’s Whale Beach kindergarten had a Wrightian character and contained a large open space enhanced by floor to ceiling glass. And as for Collard Clarke & Jackson’s St Ives kindergarten, “a charming innocence that is wholly suitable to the function pervades this rather perfect little pavilion with its exactly square plan, wide veranda [sic], and pyramid roof.”\textsuperscript{57}
Peter Muller’s 1958 kindergarten at Whale Beach (SLV, Peter Wille photograph, image H91.244/3802).

Early childhood facilities could lead to bigger things. Davey & Brindley’s 1954 “day nursery” on Beamish Street in Campsie was the important first stage in a comprehensive civic centre that included a library (Davey, Brindley & Vickery) and council offices (Whitehead & Payne). These multi-purpose civic centres became quite common and were contemporary architectural expressions of civic pride. Other examples include Thelander & Deamer’s 1957 East Maitland Neighbourhood Centre, which included a municipal building, library, baby health centre and electricity and gas showrooms. Kevin Curtin & Partners’ Bankstown Civic Centre on Chapel Road in Bankstown included a library, impressive town hall and circular council chamber. Buckland & Druce’s Ryde Civic Centre in Devlin Street, Ryde, planted a miniature AMP Building in red texture brick and curtain walling into the heart of the municipality - a “skyscraper” identifying local government. It was accompanied by a library and hall.

Davey & Brindley’s 1954 Campsie Baby Health shortly after completion (left). And the low-key library built next to it several years later by the same architects (SLNSW – Government Printing Office - 2 48670; Roy Lumby photograph).
Whitehead & Payne’s 1963 Canterbury Council Offices at Campsie, the final stage of the civic centre started by Davey & Brindley’s baby health centre in 1954 (left). Buckland & Druce designed an office tower for Ryde Council, completed in 1964. It was augmented by a low hall and library that were completed in 1972 (Roy Lumby photographs).

Kevin Curtin & Partners’ 1963 Bankstown Civic centre included an impressive town hall (left; presently undergoing modification) and an engaging circular council chamber (Roy Lumby photographs).

Edwards Madigan Torzillo & Briggs’ Warringah civic centre at Dee Why was infused by the Sydney School and Brutalism. Monumental concrete forms interfaced with a bushland setting. The library was innovative, with a double height reading room surrounded by galleries naturally lit from above. The council offices were also internalised, with ramps lit by skylights giving access to each level. Surviving bush was regenerated and supplemented by Bruce Mackenzie’s carpark planting. The same architects designed the prismatic library at Warren, also the first stage of a civic centre.
Edward Madigan Torzillo & Briggs’ Warringah Civic Centre consists of the 1966 Library (top) and the 1973 Council offices. Here the buildings have been skilfully integrated with the natural features of the site, augmented by Bruce Mackenzie’s landscaping of the carpark (Roy Lumby photographs).

Of course, civic centres were constructed in other centres. Newcastle built Newmec’s blocky New Empiricist War Memorial Cultural Centre on Layman Street in Cooks Hill.\(^5\) It contained a library, an art gallery and conservatorium of music. A new art gallery by John Baker of the Newcastle City Council’s Architectural Section added a mildly Brutalist note. Across the way a circular administration block was constructed to the design of Romberg & Grounds. Frederick Romberg was an important architect who migrated to Australia in 1939 and became Professor of Architecture at Newcastle University in 1965. This complex of buildings is unique in NSW, integrating several phases of Modern Movement architecture with historic buildings and a major park.

Other examples include Fowell McConnel & Mansfield’s 1957 Monaro Shire offices at Cooma, F J Madigan’s North-West County Council, Inverell (1954, in association with Edwards Madigan & Torzillo) and Edwards Madigan & Torzillo’s Ophir County Council, Orange, a handsome two storey building with exposed structural frame and sun control louvres.
Post war buildings associated with Newcastle’s civic centre include Newmec’s 1957 War Memorial Cultural centre (now the Newcastle Regional Library, top left, Romberg & Boyd’s 1977 Administration Centre (in association with Wilson & Suters, bottom left) and the Newcastle Regional Art Gallery by the Newcastle City Council. The complex is organised around Civic Park (Roy Lumby photographs).

Several councils built community centres, flexible halls for the locals. Amongst the most exciting is the Lilac Time Hall by Brown & Brewer in Lilac Place, Goulburn (now a cinema). Its audacious overstated Googie structure brought the Modern Movement right into the city. It was an important community initiative fulfilling a valuable social role. Women’s rest centres were a more specialised public amenity. The one by Harold Smith in Bexley shopping centre (1954) was the first in Sydney’s suburbs. It contained a waiting area, meeting room on the first floor for women’s organisations and a tea room. The State government pledged money for them in selected suburban and country shopping centres. The Country Women’s Association also constructed rest centres at this time, such as Ross Aynsley’s striking Hornsby building in Hornsby Park, near the Pacific Highway.
Swimming pools were another important initiative. Healthy minds and bodies underscored the Modern Movement agenda. The National Fitness Council was established in 1939 to promote physical fitness. Physical education became compulsory in some primary schools and secondary schools in 1941 and in 1944 learning to swim became compulsory in primary schools. In 1947 the State government released *Standards for Modern Swimming Pools*, which by 1951 were regarded as a necessary community facility. At least 25 were constructed in the Sydney region between 1953 and 1967 in an arc from the southern to the northern suburbs. As Sydney’s population expanded to the west, coastal regions become less accessible to more and more people.

Amongst the first to be completed, in 1954, were Victoria Park Pool in Darlington and Prince Alfred Park Pool in Surry Hills, constructed by the City of Sydney. In regional NSW Bathurst Pool (architects Figgis & Jefferson, who designed a number of pools), Canowindra Pool and Griffith Pool all opened that same year. Between 1955 and 1959 new swimming centres included facilities in Gosford, Liverpool, Parramatta, Marrickville and Canterbury. There were many others. One of the most interesting is the Ruth Everuss Aquatic Centre in Church Street, Lidcombe Designed by Frank R Hines in association with Auburn Council’s engineer, it offered comprehensive facilities - male and female pavilions, club rooms, kiosk, manager’s flat, spectators’ gallery, and a free-form diving tower.

The entrance lobby was covered by a cantilevered butterfly roof supported off inverted A-frames while the folded kiosk roof was apparently inspired by Hines folding a banknote and supporting a glass of beer on it, then asking if this could be translated into concrete. There is more than a hint of Googie in this festive place.