



architect victoria  
january/february 2002

# *tight*

COVER STORY



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"I wouldn't get out of bed for less than \$100,000"

This came from an Architect recently when I asked him if he had anything for this issue of *The Architect*, which would feature projects that cost less than \$100,000 - to be called *Tight*. This Architect suggested that not much was possible for this, and that the only person making money from such jobs was the builder.

"Tight" is a common expression in architectural practice - often the plan is getting tight, often the timeline to build is tight - but commonly, especially in firms who do this kind of work - the budget is tight. The projects here aspire to quality within this tightness. These limitations perhaps force quality to be about quality of expression and meaning rather necessarily quality of finishing. We remember Peter Corrigan's famous expression "Bang for the Buck" and I suggest it remains important in a wider culture that is often after "design" as depicted in the expanding world of design publishing, but from clients whose budgets are often limited. On top of this is our own desire to produce something that is satisfying to our discipline. In this compression, hopefully interesting outcomes in architecture result.

The projects here work with a budget to try and do something - often I would suggest at the cost of the Architect/designer. Fees for jobs like this often don't go to the Fee Scale - jobs less than \$60,000 would involve some form of extrapolation. On the Scale, a complex job at \$60,000 would have a fee of over \$10,000. And the cliché seems true, the smaller the job, the harder and more complex it is.

This issue is an opportunity to look at a series of built projects, that are sorted only in a budgetary way - no programmatic theme, location theme, or as popular in these times - themed on age or generation.

Projects range from \$5,000 to the full \$100,000. The diversity of these projects is perhaps the most interesting thing about this brief survey of practice - ranging from NMBW's fabric ceiling at Nudel Bar 2 to Dianne Peacocks' various works around Strathmore Secondary College. All are interesting, and all would have a story and probably a lesson for practice. NMBW's project is indeed tight at \$10,000 (the second cheapest on this wine list) - but does a lot for the money - extensively draping printed fabric (in the same graphical vein as Nudel Bar 1) across an existing fit-out, forming a passage of sorts. This is a critical use of the ceiling/overhead as the zone up for manipulation and expression.

Morgan McKenna's food court project foregrounds the sign/graphic in the front elevation, in a job that makes itself clear in this busy context - even if this job is perhaps more spatially tight than financially. Morgan McKenna also shows us that you can still build a good house for less than \$100,000 - even if a few years back. Graham Crist and Sarah Cope achieve a similar feat in their house/office project by building a small version of a big simple building.

Some practices identify a budgetary cut-off below which they tend not to do work - this is a luxury of the bigger firm, but letting those difficult balls go through to the keeper can be to the benefit of others willing to do those awkward, strange and often complex jobs.

Discussion of the cost of projects is uncommon in contemporary architectural/design publication - most of the time projects exist in a context outside of money, in the same way they are often depicted in a vacuum without occupants or stock. The consequence of this is that such publications are used by Architects and clients to help develop briefs - a subsequent process of trying to do the same thing cheaper can then occur.

Iredale Pederson Hook's BackPlug project is small in one dimension (the plan), but big in forming a new image (the rear facade) and inserting facilities for a house - those extra bathrooms and storage so often desired. BKK had their stretchy Grey House in planning/VCAT long enough for it to start to erode an already restricted budget - a spiral of additional costs that becomes problematic to both Architect and client when trying to achieve a minor addition.

Jody Chaney and Fred Chaney's project provides a re-working of the boundary, by internalising the space between house and fence in translucent corrugated plastic sheet. This job also shows a critical strategy in dealing with Council - rebuilding what is there only. Frank Maroli of Frank Stella Pty Ltd reworks the rear of house determinedly using big Modernist devices and spatiality in an ordinary backyard.

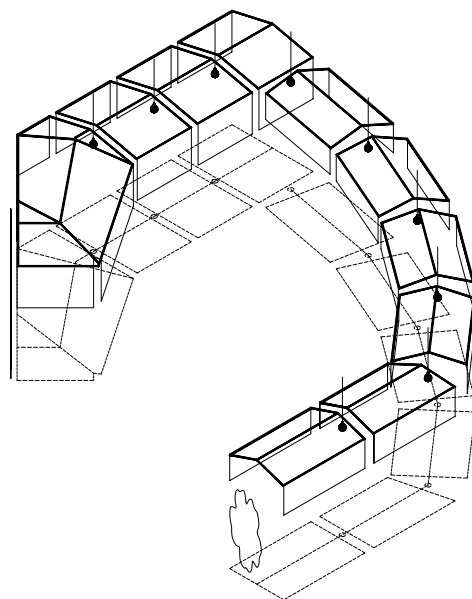
Not all of these commissions are, as you might expect, domestic in nature. Niki Kalms' office refurb is a great little job for \$30,000 and it becomes clear how expression can find a way within constraints - here a cross pattern at its most reductive, five squares, provides an icon that is readable at the level of a small space, and readable when reproduced on these grayscale pages.

Vicky Lam's restaurant fit-out provides us with a strategy that works with an existing icon of the Chinese restaurant (the arch), whilst intelligently leaving the other elements of an established functional system in place (the 45° counter).

Marcus White's bathroom and kitchen projects are in one sense typical of small private jobs that we often do "for the love of it" - but in this case thoroughly non-typical in their outcome - the small bathroom project perhaps the tightest job we have here - but proportionally there is a lot going on. Cost can be unrelated to quality.

Toward the rear we have an engaging project from RMIT Architecture/Landscape Architecture student Ben Akerman. Also up the back, Mark Raggatt reviews Philip Goad's *New Directions in Australian Architecture*.

Stuart Harrison is a partner in the architectural practice, *S-Architecture*, and part time lecturer at RMIT University.



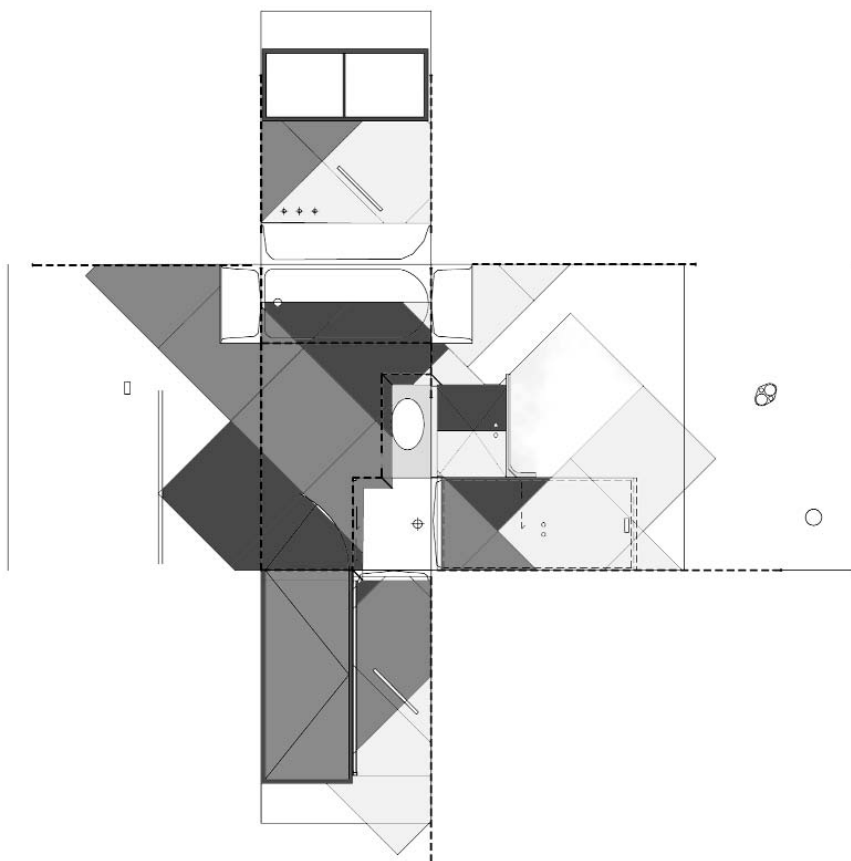
This is a temporary project. It will last about six months, after which the various pieces can be taken down and re-used in other configurations.

Fabric canopies surround an existing tenancy, which was left untouched. They add up to make a tunnel-like enclosure which customers can stand in, eat under and pass through. These elements step outside the tenancy boundary to identify a soft space within the amorphous 'common' of the food court. When lit, the temporary canopies become lanterns, wrapping staff and kitchen in a warm glow. Materials: neon sign, printed signage fabric, aluminium tube frames, incandescent globes.

Photography for fabric printing: Lyn Pool

Top image by Peter Bennetts, left image by NMBW

Built: September 2001



Brown Showers, started January 2000

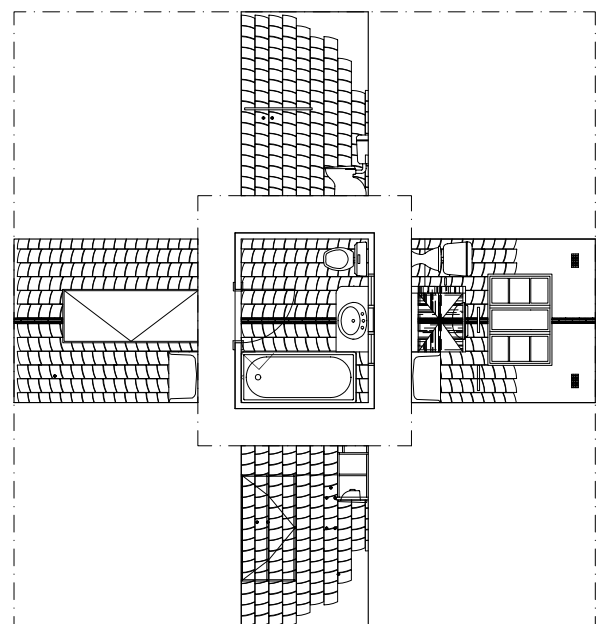
total budget = \$5,650.00

Bathroom reno in Katamatite, Victoria. Mondopave rubber tiles, red brown and beige.

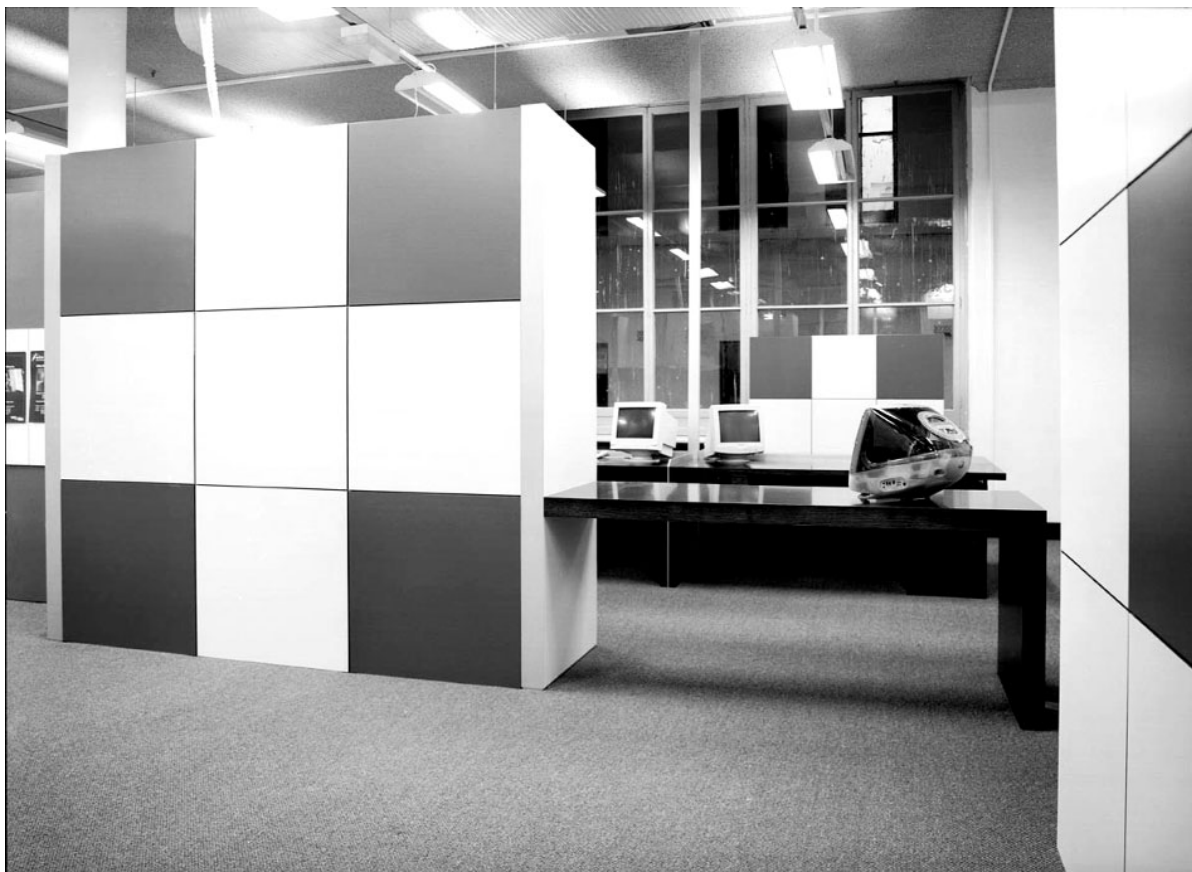
Caroma taps.... bath etc.

BCA wet area diagram roatated 45deg....

Marcus White for White Kelly Brady



Golden Showers & GoFaster Kitchen. Custom laser cut tiles \$400 first one, each after \$0.50c, in white and gold. Cupboard fronts by Acoustic Guitar manufacturer. Total cost for bathroom and kitchen.... \$16500. Phahran, 2000.

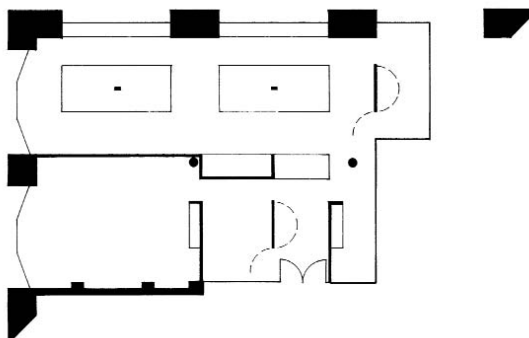


The Women's Information and Referral Exchange (WIRE) is a registered Public Benevolent Institution that has a specific feminist model underlying its ambitions. The nature of this project meant that the initial decision to provide paid and unpaid workers with a studio environment stems from the ethical systems of the organisation. There are 7 paid workers and over 100 volunteers that operate this telephone service 5 days a week.

The brief describes an existing, debilitated office area on the first floor of the government-subsidised building. With the minimal budget, the priority was to retain as much of the existing infrastructure as possible- the resulting scope of works consisted of two (x4 person) workstations, reception, lounge, storage area and movable screens for more flexible, intimate areas.

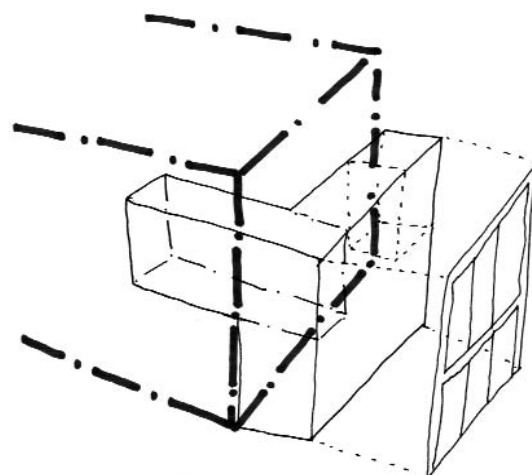


The workstations stand isolated in the space; there is no attempt to privilege the city view. The relationships of the spaces within the office reflect the ethos of the organisation- collaborative, flexible and unhierarchical. The facilities for the worker have been pulled back to a minimum- locating the administrative, formal and quiet areas in negotiable space. The graphic of the modular partition walls references the dominant Victorian windows, while the metamorphosing aubergine palette tests a new laminated ply product from Germany and subtly connects to the symbolic history of the women's movement.

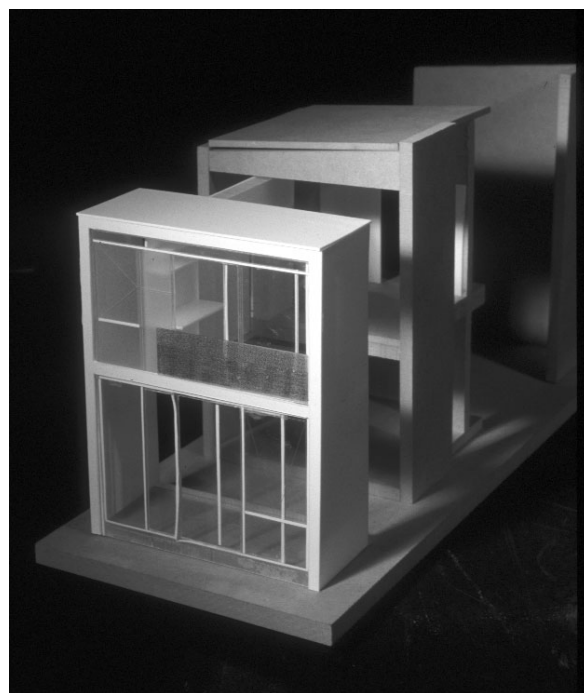


Niki Kalms (project in collaboration with Profile Furniture)





PLUG IN LIFESTYLE LIVING

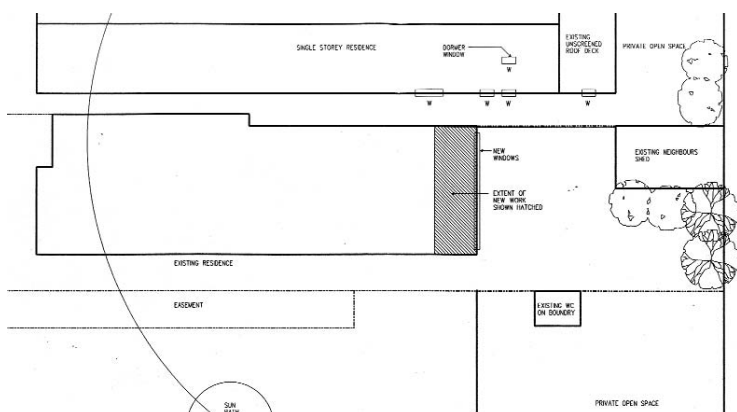


The strategy for this project in St Kilda was to simply replace the volume of an existing 'leanto' on the back of an existing residence with a box faced by a glass wall extending and opening the dark interior space, living room + first floor bedroom, into the existing courtyard garden.

A skinny ensuite is concealed behind a wall of storage, the shower has an exhibitionist view, the end of the storage wall becomes an office. Large sliding doors engage the exterior at both levels.

Planning took 10 months, the architect did not administer the contract, deals were done, the builder and client argued, construction was very slow, the GST arrived, the builder went to VCAT, the architect paid for the balustrade, the project cost less than \$50,000, the clients moved to Spain, we think they are coming back....

martyn hook  
iredale pedersen hook

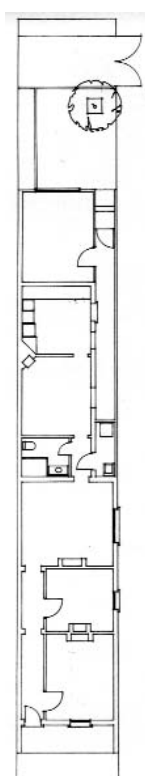




# Barkly St House, Brunswick

Jody Chaney & Fred Chaney

\$60,000



Alterations and Additions: Architects' House, Brunswick  
Constructed as Owner-builder.

Every thing about this project was tight, the budget, time and space. As we did not have time to get bogged down in the planning process we opted to 'reconstruct' the original lightweight structures attached to the original masonry dwelling. The new outbuildings are similar to those demolished in volume form and materiality. The strategy worked - only 3 weeks to obtain a permit.

The house is a single fronted Victorian terrace, including five original rooms. A tin enclosure had been added to the one metre side setback, and a tin lean-to housed a laundry at the rear of the house. The old laundry was demolished.

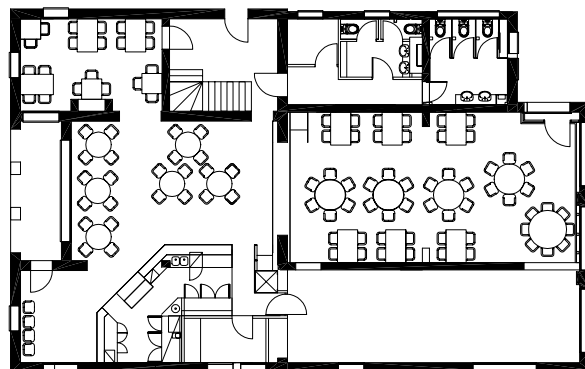
The additions included a new timber framed room at the rear of the house, the reconstruction of the side enclosure and a new rear fence and gate. Internal refurbishment was restricted to non-structural works including a new kitchen, minimal refurbishment of timber floors and bathroom and the removal of superfluous doors and windows from internalised walls.

The new side enclosure and rear room are clad internally and externally in fibreglass and tin sheeting respectively.

# Lam's Marble Dragon

Vicky Lam

\$70,000

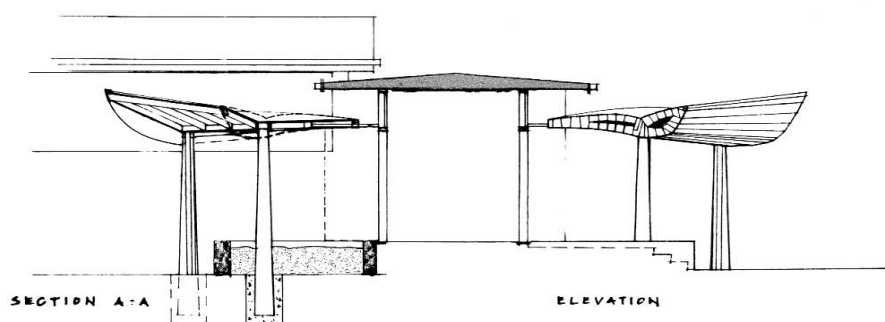


Lam's Marble Dragon relocated to the Old Colac Post Office in 2001. MDF panels, perforated with LAMs, screen an office, house station areas, and form a generic chinese arch that divides the take away area from the dining. The character "LAM" means "forest". Halved, it means "wood". Tripled again, it means "forest". But we liked the symmetry of LAM in an ancient font.

In its new address, Lam's Marble Dragon more than doubled its seating capacity, and has a wine bar. Their menu includes Chicken Florentine and Roast Duck with Chinese Vegetables, both \$18.50.

# At Strathmore Secondary College

Dianne Peacock Architect





Four projects; budgets totalling under \$100,000, part of ongoing work with Simon and Freda Thornton Architects at Strathmore Secondary College.

#### 1 ENTRY CANOPIES AND DOORS (AKA SHRINE) 1998

If this project were costed separately it may not have been built in this form. It slipped into a school wide maintenance contract to become the new main entrance. Productive coincidences between a Leonora Carrington painting, a Julie Doucet comic and the brief were given form. Zincalume sheet was cut, folded, wrapped and nailed and red doors were given teeth and mirrors.

#### 2 BIRD MONSTER AND CIRCUIT MONKEY SWIMMING POOL WINDOWS 1998

At Strathmore, beneath the flight path, black, anodised Bird Monster swoops. A claw extends to pluck a car from the Tullamarine Freeway. It fights off other monsters. Large, pink mouth hangs down, open.

These monsters continue a series of projects which relish gains in translation between various media; in this case manga comics and architecture.

Bird Monster enlarged and replaced a damaged decorative window to the school's 1960's swimming pool building. Two conventional skylight pyramids moulded from pink perspex sit base to base to form a jewel-like octahedron. Its cavity houses a light fitting and the monster's mouth glows at night. At the far end of the pool Circuit Monkey holds a deep blue octahedral light.

#### 3 PSYCHOLOGIST'S OFFICE 1999

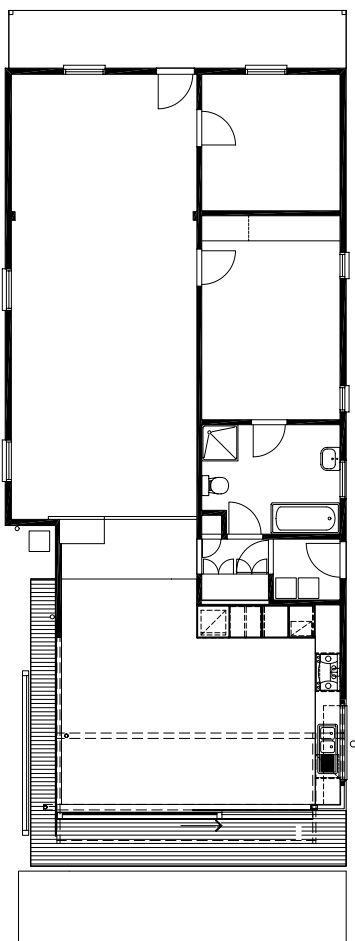
This conversion of a relocatable classroom store was clad with oriented strand-board, (chip-board with giant chips) a material sometimes used in packing crates. An applied clear finish highlighted the dramatic contrasting grains in this material which appear as a larger version of the patterning of galvanised steel used for the wall's patches and cover straps. Metallic gold (for a little extra cost) venetian blinds attempt to glamourise the privacy in a visit to the Department of Education visiting psychologist.

#### 4 COVERED WAY TO CAFETERIA (with Simon Thornton) 2000

An earlier version of the covered way was slashed from the Stage One program (see Architect, June 2001, p. 17.). It was later reprised in a leaner and cheaper version not unlike an enlarged suburban carport with puny angled struts.

Prior to establishing her own practice Dianne Peacock worked for Simon and Freda Thornton Architects, a rare firm where employees are encouraged to claim authorship of work designed by them.





The project is a relatively straightforward addition to an existing Victorian house in Williamstown. The existing house whilst adequate in size, lacked space. A conservatory with glazed walls and roof was demolished to make way for the new addition. The existing ceiling was lowered in the addition and the extent of glazing was reduced and placed to avoid interruption by walls or structural members. A large glazed sliding door, as large as a wall in the existing house, opens onto a small deck and provides access to a secluded garden at the rear of the property. The large sliding door is unusual in the context of the modest scale of the existing house. It has been likened to a Fellini film set or backdrop, that is at once both surprising and disconcerting when moved backwards and forwards.

Construction Cost: \$85,000

Total Project Cost: Less than \$100,000

Completed: 2001

Frank Marioli for Frank Stella Pty Ltd





This is a small house located on the inland dunes country of Blairgowrie and is a holiday residence for a small middle class family. The site is a conventional sized suburban bush block with two street frontages and a steep fall (six metres) containing dense coastal tea tree.

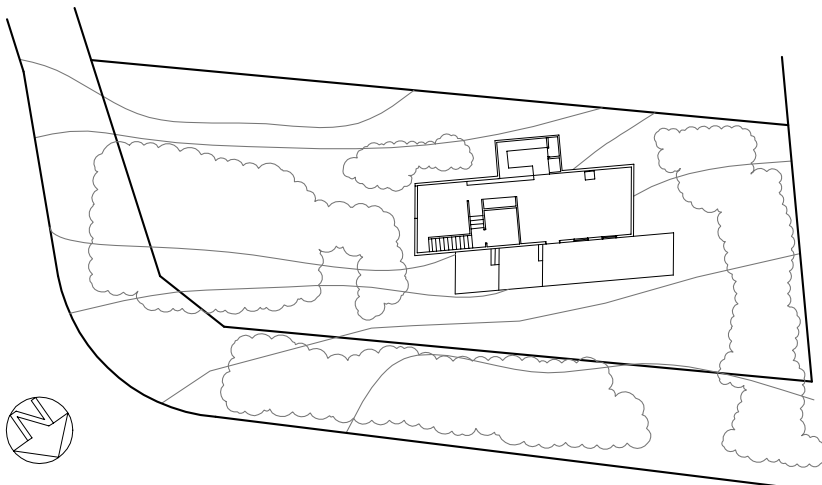
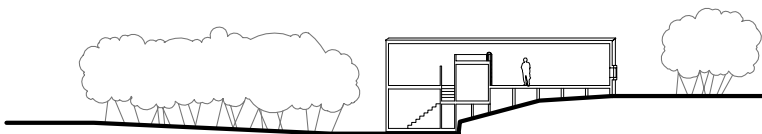
The house plan is a stretched parallelogram of two levels to fit the site contours. Interior spaces include a lower level bedroom; an upper level open living area; verandah and terraces (to the north); and a bathroom located on the stair landing with a loft area over for children's sleeping.

A frugal beach shack relates to the area's typology and provides a key to delivering a solution to match the small budget. Timber framing with natural cedar cladding combines with a skillion roof to create a minimal volume. Windows of glass and perspex are frameless, sliding panels are placed strategically to accentuate bush views and cross ventilation. Horizontal proportions accentuate the flat volume; a stair window leans to express this effect. The interior has a raw unfinished aesthetic of unpainted stopped plaster and exposed medium density fibreboard recalling Frank Gehry's 1970's California lofts. The site remains as found with minimal garden and site works.

Negotiations with the builder were vital to meeting budgets, refining finishes and agreeing on carpenter's detailing. The house is finely constructed by a builder with a pride in the craft of constructing a simple timber house.

Client: Anna Curnow, Design & documentation: Michael McKenna

Design & construction date: 1997, Structural engineer: Perrett Simpson P L, Builder: Alan Pitman (Portsea), Site area: 646 sqm, Floor area: 87 sqm, Contract sum: \$87,000





The project is for a building in a South Melbourne site containing an office and residence.

The tightness of the project made necessary a fairly empty shell. This was built for around \$98,000 in 1998.

The project tested out some clichés of domestic life, and the advantages of living in a non-residential neighbourhood. It engaged seriously the immediate built environment for all its ordinariness, and detached itself from petty formal refinements and detail.

The black front (south) façade is flush with the adjacent white workshop, and its parapet aligns with it. It is like an extension to it in negative.

The side (west) façade is a blank wall in Maidenhair green as chosen by the neighbour Reg de Winter.

The rear façade is largely white polycarbonate stuck to the frame by double sided tape. A very small window views the Rialto Towers down the rear alley.

Site area 115m<sup>2</sup>, building area 140m<sup>2</sup>, site coverage 74% private open space 30m<sup>2</sup>

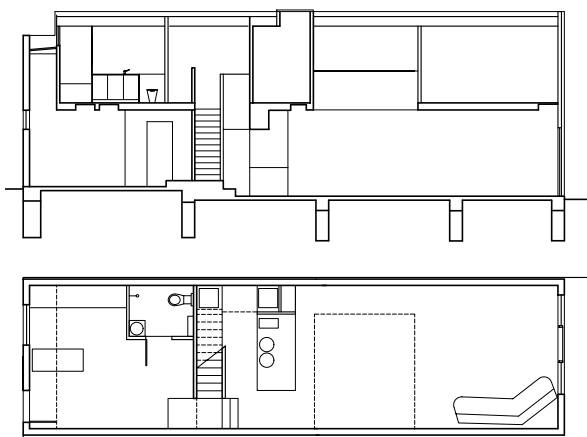
The interior read through the section, is like a courtyard house with some of the courts filled in - admitting diffuse light from above.

The caretaker's residence of 115m<sup>2</sup> serves an office/showroom building of 25m<sup>2</sup>. The disabled toilet represents 18% of the office/showroom area.

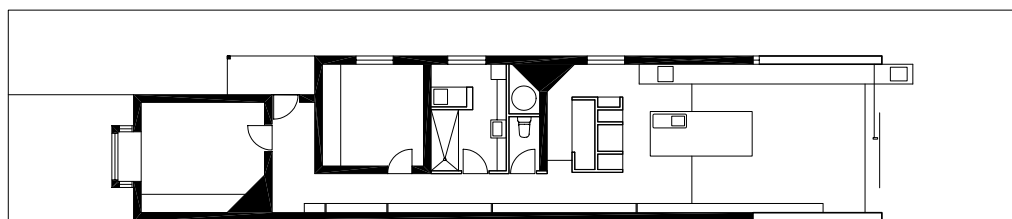
The house has a bedroom that is 1.8m wide and a skylight only.

The interior read through the plan reflects a division of space for a use which was undecided.

There is no off-street parking, and no residential permit parking. The building should permit change of use, change of decoration, extension or partial demolition, very well.



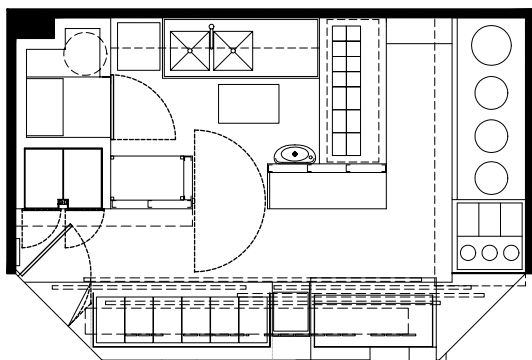




Existing single storey residence + 4070mm rear addition and internal fitout = 12 month planning application + VCAT appeal + \$98,000.00 + 5 months construction

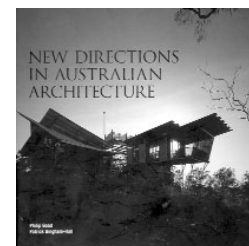


Located in a hidden corner of a hinterland shopping mall, the AGA Sushi Noodle Bar design needed to make a splash. In a part of Melbourne that has seen little Asian immigration, the shop design was required to face off with Colonel Sanders for customer conquest. The approach was to inflate a Chinese character into a super graphic. All of the architecture is in the sign, a three and a half metre high light box. There is no other architecture in the takeaway, only an intensive knot of services and joinery.



The sign is two things: firstly, metal, polycarbonate and fluorescent tubes; and secondly the union of the signifier and the signified. The signifier is as follows. Metal, polycarbonate and fluorescent tubes are assembled in the form of a Chinese character, specifically a Hong Kong dialect of Cantonese that means....WHAT?!, developed in our office by Chung Hsiao Hsieh. Almost none of the consumers will translate this meaning of WHAT?!, but it doesn't matter. The importance lies in what is signified: it's obviously Asian, and really big.

Location: Chirnside Park Shopping Centre, Client: Asian Gourmet Affair, Designed & completed: 2000, Project team: Paul Morgan, Chung Hsiao Hsieh, Shopfitter: Acacia Developments Pty Ltd Contract sum: \$100,000.



*New Directions in Australian Architecture* is the latest document setting to paper the diverse production of Australian architects. It is the product of a collaboration between Melbourne based academic Philip Goad and Sydney photographer/publisher Patrick Bingham-Hall. The book falls somewhere between lush coffee table book and concise popular history. It would seem that the beautiful 'flick book' has come of age.

Much has been made of Goad's selection of architects. The first point of contention has been the dominance of Melbourne based firms, constituting half of the fourteen architects. Some have found grievance in the authors' singular concentration on firms with a relatively substantial body of built work, apparently at the expense of architects with fewer sites to visit but a backlog of oftentimes important 'theoretical' work. These are understandable grievances but seem ill directed and would be more accurately aimed at the lack of open architectural publication within the local community.

In his introductory essay Goad argues that 'theorising and design experiment does not emerge from within the academy or within the journals, but on the building site', that 'recent Australian architecture gains its credibility through...the building and actual testing of design propositions.' This seems less a comment on the activity of local practitioners in recent years and the fact that architecture is a commercial practice than a telling reminder of architectural journalism's willingness to indulge in reductionist posings.

This begs the question as to whether or not *New Directions* makes a valuable contribution to the architectural culture to which it belongs or if it is just another 'glossy' perpetuating the market driven drivel of lifestyle myth making. The answer, I believe, is in Goad's obvious and diverse joy in local architecture. Goad resists lazy description and mindless categorisation, nor does he fall for the same developer lingo that fills out Davina Jackson and Chris Johnson's *Australian Architecture Now*.

*New Directions* will prove a useful and justifiably popular book. It combines succinct, intelligent and easily accessible text with smoochy (though boring) photographs. Goad is well aware of the niche *New Directions* occupies in the market place, in commenting on the marketing of Australian architecture to the world, Goad states; 'it is really...a question of who selects which image to market the country. Identity is thus a troubled but necessary pursuit.' his is the understanding, though not the aim of *New Directions*, as Goad himself asserts, *New Directions* is but a 'glimpse of contemporary Australian architecture [and] that glimpse is itself tantalisingly partial', unfortunately the brevity of discussion in this book is often annoyingly partial.

Goad does well in outlining the development of architecture in Australia, making note of each city's particularities, both historic and environmental, outlining the development of each city's architecture, forming the analogy of an 'archipelago of architecture cultures.' However, as a young reader, I hoped to find some analysis of these positions and an indication of the complex relationships between these movements. Though informative, *New Directions* does not take on this responsibility; it is, in essence, a time capsule, committing to history the realised visions of these 14

selected architects.

Goad identifies several conditions within Australian architecture; it is these that constitute his arguments towards identifying our new directions. Goad places each condition within an historic or environmental context providing an excellent starting point for greater study. He necessarily covers a great deal of ground, touching on *Landscape and Space*, *The House as Model*, *Centre and Periphery*, *Defining Aboriginal Architecture*, *The Rise of the University* and *Coming in from the Verandah* amongst others. But *New Directions* struggles to carry such a load, even as a partial glimpse into the culture, falling short in providing the reader with a greater understanding of Australia's diverse relationship with architecture, it's successes, failures and futures.

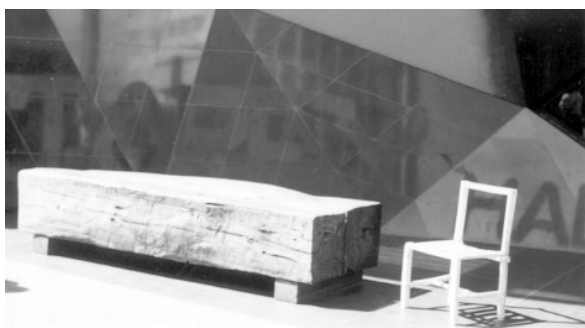
The second and larger half of *New Directions*, (by virtue of Bingham-Hall's photographs) progresses through each architect individually and formulaically; a Goad summary followed by the familiar semi-iconic photography of Patrick Bingham-Hall. The summaries are adequate to familiarise the reader with the body of work belonging to each architect, however, Goad takes a less than critical approach to the work, providing the reader with a celebration of the diversity in architectural practice over the last ten years. He avoids comparative studies allowing each architect to stand alone, this can be vexing as the book begins to become formulaic and often timid in appraising the architects' relation to, and impact upon, the environments in which we live and the culture and politics of Australian architecture. Despite this criticism, Goad provides excellent descriptions of the work; unfortunately the photographs often don't relate to the descriptions - opting for style over content, they will, however, ensure the book moves quickly from the shelves.

Typically in the 'future icon' style, the photographs are lush, scenographic and ubiquitous. Where, for example, Lyons Architects institutional work on the outskirts of Melbourne 'responds to the scale of the urban periphery' we are treated to images either free from context or brooding black and whites robbing the buildings of their colour and surface treatment. Predictably, where Goad argues a building is a 'venture into the...essential nature of dwelling' (which is bad enough) there's not a sign of life, there are, however, some very nice ferns and the lights are left on - it would seem no one was home. That said, Bingham-Hall's contribution to the book is a valuable one, in addition to contributing a large and respected body of work in his photographs, he is both editor and publisher. No doubt he carries some influence as to the selection of work and the format the book has taken, though to what extent, one can only make idle conjecture.

*New Directions in Australian Architecture* will prove 'a litmus test for the next decade', it will be a useful resource for anyone interested in contemporary local architecture and provides an excellent service to the culture in committing an important period to history. Books of the *New Directions* ilk, like the architects on its pages, are important touchstones to our culture but to maintain a lively and public debate; smaller, more frequent publications are required in order to give voice to another generation of architects.

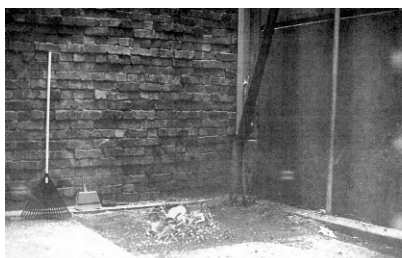
*New Directions in Australian Architecture* is published by Pesaro Press, \$69.95.

Mark Raggatt is an Architecture student at RMIT University.



*The capitalist production system has unified space, breaking down the boundaries between one society and the next. This unification is a process, at once extensive and intensive, of trivialization. Just as the accumulation of commodities mass-produced for the abstract place of the market inevitably shattered all regional and legal barriers, as well as all those corporative restrictions that served in the Middle Ages to preserve the quality of craft production. So too it was bound to dissipate the independence and quality of places. The power to homogenize is the heavy artillery that has battered down all Chinese walls.*

*-Guy Debord, Society of the Spectacle*





This work was a result of an undergraduate studio at the Landscape Architecture school RMIT' coordinated by Jo Scicluna. The studio was concerned with examining the idea of site specificity. The brief entailed a series of investigations, primarily to isolate a site in a predetermined zone of the Melbourne CBD and subsequent exercises to appraise the site, in order to ultimately build a 1:1 prototype of an installation that would demonstrate the particulars of the chosen site. The installation was then to be moved with the intention of observing how a new context altered the piece and vice versa.

I identified a space at the end of Lacey Place (off Little Bourke) that has occurred as a consequence of recent development. The resultant gap had the quality of being a residual condition with a strong sense of removal from the city fabric. Additionally there were intant elements that suggested, with some implementation and reordering, the site could be a 'place'. I had the optimistic hope that with some care and attention, the site could be transformed from a perceived, dangerous, back alley condition, to a location that could be used, by those that discovered it, as a comfortable retreat to sit, smoke and talk.

My research has been focused on examining the ephemeral, temporal and process based qualities of landscape and the reconfiguring of the existent rather than the imposition of the new. Consequently my first moves involved cleaning up the site. Acting as an underground municipal agent I regularly visited the site and swept, raked and generally maintained the area. The city's newly marginalised workers from the surrounding buildings used the site for taking their smoke break in. Additionally I prepared the ground, appropriated some native violets from another public space in the city and transferred them to Lacey Place. These interventions had some effect on the site, but it became apparent that another level of intensification was required in order to demonstrate my intended objectives.

A collage, Lucy Draffin, noticed that of the two trees (*Alianthus ultissima*) on the site, one was not budding into its spring leaf. Further investigation indicated that the tree was dying as a result of compacted soil from the adjacent towers. As an extension of my illegitimate civic duties, it followed that the tree should be removed, and as a corollary, provide the material for the project. This permitted the idea of cutting down the tree and utilising the timber to make a chair.

Due to my previous forays, not only had I become familiar with the site but I had also become familiar to the site. My presence had become so accepted that it allowed me to cut down the tree whilst talking to the security guard.

The chair was an apt solution to my reluctance to create an object. A chair is an iconic object that is a definitive mediator between body and place. This chair was intrinsically of the place yet a chair is such a quintessential, emblematic item that, through its very ordinariness, becomes almost indiscernible both on its specific site and its transitory sites. This project can be seen as an exemplar to demonstrate an attitude towards urbanity as a way of accepting the qualities of, and recognizing the potentialities in, the existent, rather than a continual pursuit of the new.

Ben Akerman

