ORGANIC ARCHITECTURE : ITS ORIGIN, DEVELOPMENT and IMPACT ON MID 20th CENTURY MELBOURNE ARCHITECTURE

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Architecture

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2008
Acknowledgements

Many people have helped throughout the course of writing this Thesis. I am indebted to all of them.

My gratitude goes to my supervisor Dr. Doug Evans, Associate Professor, School of Architecture and Design, RMIT University, whose sober advice, guidance and patience have assisted me through the process of writing my Thesis. His constant faith in my ability to write the core beliefs of my Thesis has been an inspiration. Apart from all that, Doug has guided me within the boundaries of my subject matter whenever I began to stray.

To Rex Patrick of Chancellor and Patrick, Geoffrey Woodfall, Kevin Knight and Terri Godsell, David Godsell’s widow, my boundless gratitude for their generosity with their time and welcomed me on a number of occasions to their homes. Winsome Callister’s advice on the work of some of the Melbourne architects mentioned in this Thesis has been most valuable. I would also like to thank Professor John Gregory, School of Art and Design, Monash University for the help he has given in some aspects of my research. To Christine Philips and Peter Barrett my gratitude for their insightful help and inspiration.

To Annette Sullivan and Bernadene Sward from RMIT Library my gratitude for the assistance they gave at the pivotal literature search stage of my Thesis, their willingness to ensure that my path through the tortuous labyrinth of library research is smooth is a credit to RMIT library. The duty staffs at Melbourne University’s School of Architecture library, on the occasion of my visit there, have also been courteous and helpful. To Linda Brown, my wife, whose support and IT skills have helped with the production of this Thesis.
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INTRODUCTION

Australia in the decades after the Second World War was riding high on the crest of social optimism, a political time known by many as a “golden era of economic prosperity and social stability” amidst “social conservatism and lost opportunities”.\(^1\) It was during these post-war years that the term *organic* architecture emerged as the subject of discussions by a select few of Australian practitioners at the time. The *organic* analogy emerged as a vital architectural point of departure in the United States around the turn of the twentieth century. One of its major proponents was the architect Frank Lloyd Wright (Fig 1). In the decades before and after World War II the work of Wright and other like-minded architects practicing primarily on the West Coast of the United States, generated a growing interest among Australian architects. This led to the introduction and proliferation of *organic* architecture in Australia during the two decades following the war.

This thesis focuses on the impact of the *organic* analogy on Melbourne domestic architecture during the middle decades of the 20\(^{th}\) century. It specifically describes

- The origins and growth of the *organic* analogy in American architecture throughout the twentieth century
- The process of transfer of the idea into Australian architecture during the 20\(^{th}\) century. Focusing on the decades following World War Two.
- Examines via case studies the use of this idea in the architecture of Melbourne domestic architectural practices. These are Geoffrey Woodfall, David Chancellor, Rex Patrick (Chancellor and Patrick), David Godsell and Kevin Knight (Oakley and Parkes).

Although the work of these architects, together with others only peripherally covered by this thesis, has not previously been the focus of substantial examination, this thesis highlights that collectively the output of this group of architects considerably influences the character of

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It was also a time where frenzied activities in the visual arts took place. This resurgence of Australian art led to its recognition in the UK with artists such as Brett Whiteley, Sydney Nolan, Albert Tucker, Arthur Boyd, John Perceval and John Passmore who lived and exhibited in London’s Matthiesen Gallery (Whiteley) and Marlborough New London in the post-ww2 years.
domestic and small-scale institutional Melbourne architects during these decades. The implication this has on this research topic is far reaching as the post- Second World War optimism that was all pervasive, created a social landscape which seemed conducive to the building industry in general. This in turn led to the gradual increase of architectural services and to the introduction of various approaches in residential architecture, albeit in the absence of a national style.  

**Post-WW2 immigration in Australia: its effect on the changing landscape of domestic architecture.**

There were also other factors that contributed to the well being of the country: post-war Australian immigration. The Second World War had devastated much of Europe. To many Europeans, Australia became the new frontier where new hopes and futures could be realized. The post-war Australian immigration policy was primarily intended to encourage the Anglo Celtic migrants from the UK and Europeans of Caucasian origin, who were not only welcomed but encouraged with financial inducement to populate the country against the threat of a perceived invading Northern Asian hordes. The White Australia Policy was devised to keep the country racially pure and white and had so far excluded non-Europeans from coming to Australia as migrants. While the majority of Australia’s post war migration was drawn from the UK, a substantial number came from the Mediterranean area. This mix of people “diluted the uniform Anglo-Saxon culture that had hitherto existed, resulted in new living habits, new tastes in food, clothes, and motor cars and helped to rejuvenate some of the derelict near-city terrace areas.”

Although it was also true that the attraction of a North American style of living as shown in popular US publications of lifestyle magazines such as *Architectural Digest* to the – generally educated and as well as the uneducated - Anglo-Celtic Australians in suburban and outer suburban Melbourne also contributed the growing popularity of ranch-type houses.

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3 It does seem ironical that while Australia sent its sons and daughters to die on foreign soil (in both wars) fighting the evil of racism (in WW II), seemed to permeate in its own racist immigration policy: the White Australia Policy.


5 For instance, Chancellor and Patrick Peninsula houses were a sophisticated expression of the ‘style’ at the time, e.g. Laidlaw House in Tempelstowe (1962) was a refinement of their earlier (Peninsula) houses.
There was a gradual shift in the way Australians perceived themselves as part of a dying British Empire. The allied relationship that began during the war between the United States of America and Australia further forged a closer relationship in the decades that followed; the so-called *American way of life* began to permeate in our social and architectural environment. Shared experiences in theatres of war often form the genesis of a cultural kith and kin relationship between participating nations.

Somehow, this rejuvenation of the inner city areas brought about a different approach to housing. At this time, the general populace, buoyed by relative abundance of available finance and encouraging social indicators that promised the fulfillment of everyone’s hopes and dreams, had tended to look outwards – away from the so-called ‘concrete jungle’ - to build their dream homes. In a translucent fashion, the demand for housing by the newcomers and their subsequent occupation of the inner cities, led to a change in attitude that was later to manifest in the 80s and 90s. But the readjustment of the population mix from a predominantly Anglo-Celtic ethnicity also gave rise to a relatively new appreciation of different life-styles. Increasingly, greater number of young Australians began their odyssey to their cultural womb, the Northern Hemisphere. While cultural adherence and similarities were acknowledged, the antipodean character began to take on its own unique qualities. This cultural metamorphosis in the typology of residential architecture became the genesis of an evolution of different architectural styles and ideals. Its implication on the growth of an *organic* approach in residential architecture was significant at the time.

**The Australian Urban Dream**

Although the memories of WW II, its violence and atrocities that directly affected Australians at war, were still fresh in the minds of many; nevertheless, the post-war national trauma was slowly being replaced by the growth of material abundance: a universal occurrence that seemed to prevail in countries that were not physically affected by the war such as Australia, New Zealand.

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6 Robin Boyd in exasperation at the way American models were haphazardly adopted in both architectural as well as urban styles, coined the word “Austerica”.

“The Americanization of Australian city life that welled strongly during the 50s was exemplified by the garage door but it took other forms as well. Most of it revolved around the acquisition of worldly possession made possible by the speed of credit buying and the desire to impress by displaying it. “ Freeland, op.cit. P285.
and those on the American continent. Although WW II had inflicted casualties and material shortages on its population, the country itself was spared from enemy invasion or occupation.

While the bombing of Darwin and the failed invasion by Japanese mini-submarines in Sydney Harbour incurred a sense of vulnerability in the Australian psyche\(^7\), Australia did not suffer any physical damage. The war was not fought on Australian soil. While the threat of invasion remained for decades to come\(^8\), the harsh realities of war that took place in the Northern Hemisphere did not leave permanent scars in the memories of many. It was the dawning of a new age that would see the growth of capitalism taking place among the general population. Australians in the decades to come would enjoy the highest standard of living in the region and lifestyles that would be the envy of most of the industrialized world.

Not needing to rebuild their cities, Australians built their own nesting places. The family home on the quarter acre block became the dream of every working Australian. The idea of owning one’s own home guaranteed one’s future. Its permanence somehow replaced the anxieties experienced by many during the war years. But it was peacetime now. The country heaved an enormous sigh of relief. The moment of optimism had arrived. It was to be the future of the country and its people that became the dreams of many; the Australian home. “The house, the home, the permanent address - this was the white man’s idea…” writes Robin Boyd in Australia’s Home\(^9\), or as he describes Australians earlier in the same book as “a race of cheerful agoraphobias (who) grew up in little weather-sealed boxes”\(^10\) dotted in an almost Arcadian landscape of suburbs that were the same all over the country.

This cynical observation of post-war Australia was exacerbated by the fact that as the cold war unfolded in Europe in the 50s, Australia and Australians were facing the future with the degree

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\(^7\) The invasion and subsequent occupation of the Netherland East Indies (now Indonesia) brought WW II to Australia’s doorsteps. Until then, Australians have always fought other people’s wars on foreign soil.

\(^8\) It was Robert Menzies who perceived the threat of Communism to the stability of the country and proclaimed in his 1949 electoral speech that he “promised that in power he would ban the Communist Party”. (Brian Carroll, The Menzies Years, Cassell Australia 1977 NSW/Victoria Australia pp75 – 82). By this time, the world’s political environment was divided into two distinct ideologies: Communism and anti-Communism. In the United States, Senator Joseph McCarthy became famous for his Committee of Un-American Activities. Meanwhile back in Australia, Menzies succeeded in passing the Communist Party Dissolution Bill.


\(^10\) Ibid. p 208.
of optimism befitting a young, vigorous and victorious nation. But in the case of domestic architecture, few had taken up the kind of architectural styles that were evident in the work of such luminaries as Annear, Haddon and Griffin to name but a few. Instead, what had tended to prevail, as far as the domestic architectural landscape was concerned, from European as well as American examples was either the pastiche versions of the Californian bungalow or the slavish reproductions of mock-Tudor or Georgian period styles.

**Architectural Polemic**

Architecture in Australia, certainly in the case of domestic architecture in the decades preceding the end of the Second World War, did not enjoy the rigorous debate – public or private – that the fine arts did. Unlike their brother or sister practitioners in fine arts, architects at the time were less articulate and vocal about commenting on the work of their peers. There was a more stringent adherence to the professional code of conduct. It was deemed unprofessional to publicly criticize the work of others, lest the public debate was seen as a sign of disunity among the profession. Generally speaking, there seemed to be a dearth in critical dialogues amongst architects, about architecture and its social context. While Australia’s draconian libel laws might have contributed to such intellectual drought, this was not the case with Australian painting and literature. The so-called “Golden Age of Australian Painting” – the Heidelberg School – began to

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11 Ibid. p 207.
12 Ibid. p 208, J M Freeland in Architecture in Australia as quoted by Serle writes: “At the same time there were some neo-Tudor excesses and a mild Georgian revival. A few young architects, such as Roy Grounds, Sydney Ancher and Walter Bunning, were returning to the environment and with inventive simplicity were using open pergolas and verandahs with low-pitched and flat roofs and rediscovering the colonial virtues of sunlight and shadow. After the wartime hiatus, catching-up with international fashion was signified by the influence of the first flat roofed box on thin pipe columns designed by Harry Seidler, a Vienna-born migrant student of Walter Gropius at Harvard. The young postwar architects crusaded for functionalism and finally overwhelmed conservative resistance, but in ransacking the world for ideas and in striving to be original they usually merely followed international trends.”

13 As early as the 1930s there had been differences in both cultural and ideological divisions in the Australian painting fraternity. Richard Haese in *Rebels and Precursors – The revolutionary years of Australian Art*, Penguin Australia 1981, 1988 writes “One common thread running through the warp of conservative values was that Modernism in art was symptomatic of a social and cultural decline in the wider modern world. For such men as J S MacDonald, director of the National Gallery of Victoria, a sick society inevitably presented a disease face to the world. Decadence in art was the product of “a generation revelling in jazz jitterbugging, the elevation of the dress-model to stardom, the transformation by artifice of women into broad-shouldered narrow-hipped, bottomless beings committed to ungainly attitude, the exalting of the discordant and the ugly”. Lionel Lindsay, a trustee of the National Gallery of NSW was in full agreement: Modernism as art is a freak, not a natural evolutional growth. Its causes lie in the spirit of the age that separates this century from all others: the age of speed, sensationalism, jazz and the insensate adoration of money.” (p 8).
disperse in the early 1920s and was soon to be replaced by a “tougher and more abrasive” period of discourses on modernism versus classicism in literature and painting.

All this intellectual/socio-political activity, somehow, eluded the architectural practitioners at the time, perhaps with the exception of a brief foray into social engineering by a Melbourne-based offshoot of the original British-based think tank, the Modern Architectural Research Group (MARS) founded in 1933. Even Robin Boyd in “Australia’s Home” alluded to the ‘apolitical’ nature of the profession. . There was no architectural equivalent of a Noel Counihan who challenged the politics of the Soviet Union that was then perceived as the political weapon against the rise of Fascism in Europe. Or for that matter a Sydney Nolan whose interest in schizophrenia was often expressed in his long correspondences on the subject. Nor were there architects who were publicly perceived as either rebellious or anti-establishment in the way that artists such as Albert Tucker, Sydney Nolan, Noel Counihan, Max Harris – of the Angry Penguins fame – John Reed or Bernard Smith were regarded in the public domain.

While Bohemia was raging in Sydney and Melbourne, few if any architects would associate themselves with any radical ideas about domestic architecture. The profession at the time was too busy building a new Australian urban environment; the Australian suburb with its “wide winding avenue of heavy oaks lined by tall fences and impenetrable hedges” in parts; elsewhere “a straight street one chain in width, with narrow grass strips dividing sidewalks from the roadway, cropped trees and telegraph poles set in line in the grass….” 

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14 Ibid. pp 5. Haese describes the decade after the Heidelberg School era as the “more somber-hued, intellectually both tougher and more abrasive” and that the character of the period “reflects the crises of these turbulent years, but also helped to drag Australia, at last, into the twentieth century. It was a time when artists refused to see themselves or be seen by their literary friends as painters in the narrow sense.”
17 Haese op.cit., p 6.
18 Ibid. pp 6 – 7.
It was left to historians such as the late Professor Max Freeland and a minority of architects all around Australia to lament at the lack of a homegrown architectural identity. “The general ideology that gained acceptance,” Freeland writes in Architecture in Australia, “was composed of bits and pieces from the main contending schools in Europe and America……because its adherents so little understood in any depth the tenets of what were mutually exclusive philosophies, it succeeded only in being crassly superficial”. 20

By the late 50s Freeland abandoned the practice of architecture and concentrated on teaching and writing. He left his brief tenure at the Melbourne Technical College (now RMIT University) and continued his academic career at the University of NSW. Freeland lamented the prevalent conformity of the time, the manner by which local architects modelled themselves on the Modern European masters.

Another equally perceptive watcher of the Australian architectural scene was the ubiquitous Robin Boyd who was variously described as historian (by Geoffrey Searle) and architectural critic by most people. Boyd through his life-long devotion to search for an Australian architectural identity had become somewhat of an icon in his brief life. He was prodigious in his written outpourings because of his genuine concern about the country’s architectural state of affair. While most of his contemporaries were busily engaged in building an Australian Modernism, Boyd extended his passion by critically annotating the architectural landscape around him. Not only were Boyd’s critical writings challenging, it was the way he posed those challenges; the way he questioned the most sacred of our dreams: the way we lived and the homes we lived in. Boyd’s writing was the product of his genuine search for an Australian identity rather than an egocentric desire for fame. The historian Philip Goad in an exhibition catalogue of Boyd’s work as critic writes: “Boyd was everywhere, in the newspaper, on the radio, on the television, in the popular home journals. He was a spokesman, a critical voice rather than a sage of architectural wisdom or bequeather(sic) of tectonic canons.” 21

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21 P Goad, *Pamphlets at the frontier: Robin Boyd and the will to incite an Australian Architectural culture*, catalogue, ”Robin Boyd the architect as critic “ exhibition, Melbourne 1989.
The Beginning of a Notion of an Organic Modernism in Melbourne

The concept of architecture as *organic* originated in the promulgation of ideas and writings of several twentieth century American architects and critics, these include Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, Lewis Mumford (America) and Bruno Zevi (Europe). The influence of this concept is also evident in the work of some European architects at the time, notably Henry van de Velde and Eric Mendelsohn.22

The application of the term organic to architecture implies that architecture is analogous on various ways to living organisms. This has been taken to mean that, as with living organisms architecture is shaped by environmental conditions such as climatic, geographical, social and cultural. This interpretation of the *organic* concept leads to notions of architectural regionalism. For example, the regional Modernism which flourished in the American mid-West and the West Coast during the mid-twentieth century shared a common ground with the architects and theoreticians responsible for the development of the idea of an *organic* architecture. The architectural ideology that these architects embraced was seen by those who practiced it as distinct and superior to the imported high modernism of Gropius, van der Rohe, Breuer and others.

At a gathering of British architects in 1939, Wright declared that *organic architecture* was like the “Declaration of Independence” of an *organic society* that “rejects exterior aestheticism or mere taste and embraces Art, Science and Religion” as one entity. 23

A contemporary of Wright, William Lescaze accused Wright for having proclaimed himself as the initiator of *organic architecture* and was inclined to dismiss the contribution by others such as Louis Sullivan who coined the word ‘*organic*’ in relation to architecture. In fact, the word ‘*organic*’ first made its public appearance in a lecture by Claude Bragdon who edited Sullivan’s *Kindergarten Chats* at the Art Institute, Chicago, in 1915.24

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According to Zevi it was Behrendt\textsuperscript{25} who pointed out that the word ‘organic’ was first applied to architecture by Burckhardt\textsuperscript{26} in reference to Vasari’s\textsuperscript{27} praise for the Farnesina Palace – non murato, ma veramente nato – not built but born. Leone Batista Alberti in his ninth book of \textit{Architectura} also observed that buildings are like animals – quasi come une animale – their forms come from within outwards.\textsuperscript{28} Thus the notion of \textit{organicism} which is a philosophical metaphor of living organisms rather than stylistic reference to a particular architectural movement can be traced back to Aristotle and Plato.\textsuperscript{29} For it was the former who was attributed to first use the term ‘organic’ in a philosophical context rather than in the modern idiom: “Organs are specialized structures in the body tailored to carry out a particular function, corresponding to the word \textit{organon}, or instrument, \textit{organic} meant instrumental. Aristotle compared the organs of animal movement with the \textit{organa}. Or part of war machines, like the arms of a catapult about to launch a projectile.”\textsuperscript{30}

Although both Batista and Plato’s interpretations are relatively close to one another in their intentions, they are not the same. The former recognizes that “our bodily feelings must be the measure of the world around us”, the latter infers the “application of the principles of that organic life to design”\textsuperscript{31}. In the context of buildings, \textit{organic} means that this integration into “an harmonious whole shall express a purpose similar to the conditioning of the forms of an \textit{organism} by the work it is created to perform. This purpose may be to express the structure, such as emphasis on the lines of stress, of thrust and support”\textsuperscript{32} but does not incorporate the “social purpose of the building, for this enters the realms of symbolism and departs from the physical context of \textit{organic architecture}”\textsuperscript{33} (my italics). The journey that \textit{organic} architecture took in

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid. P3, Walter Curt Behrendt, German born American architect, 1884 – 1945.
\textsuperscript{27} Giorgio Vasari, Italian painter, architect (Uffizi, Florence) and biographer (Michelangelo), 1511 – 1574. Source: [http://www.wga.hu/bio/v/vasari/biograph/html](http://www.wga.hu/bio/v/vasari/biograph/html)
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid. Pp68-69. Leone Batista Alberti, mathematician, humanist, architect (self-taught) and moral philosopher, born 1404 died 1472 (additional source: [http://www.acmi.net.au/AIC/ALBERTI_BIO.html](http://www.acmi.net.au/AIC/ALBERTI_BIO.html)).
\textsuperscript{29} Organicism [http://www.christianhubert.com/hypertext/organicism.html](http://www.christianhubert.com/hypertext/organicism.html)
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{31} Gerd, op.cit. p221.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid. It should be further noted that architects who subscribed to the organic concepts such as Mendelsohn believed that site conditions determine the design of his buildings. Wright was quoted to have said that “a building should not be on a hill, but of a hill, that it should appear to grow out of the earth.” (p221).
North America began in the work of Richardson and Sullivan. While the journey might have started haltingly, nevertheless, it became an odyssey in the work of Frank Lloyd Wright.

If organic design purports to be the result of a harmonious blending of materiality and its surroundings, is it not reasonable to speculate that the definition of organic merely becomes rhetorical? Therefore, the fundamental differences between, say, organic and inorganic, ambiguous as it is, are inexact and speculative. In fact, according to Zevi, some aspects of organic architecture as we know it are evident in the work of early Modernists such as Gropius and Le Corbusier, that is, the notion that although ‘form follows function’, it is also subject to its changing conditions. These so-called responses to changing conditions can be seen, for example, in the design of the sensuously undulating acoustic timber-lined ceiling in Aalto’s Library at Vipuri (1954), Gropius/Breuer’s 1940 housing project at New Kensington, the plan responding to the contours of the site and meanders in such a way to suggest a clear organic growth.

Melbourne architects in the immediate post-war period were much influenced by the North American architectural trajectory. Organic Architecture which was primarily associated with Frank Lloyd Wright and the advent of regionalism/soft modernism profoundly shaped the development of Australian architecture at this time. Organic Architecture was much discussed by a wide range of practitioners at the time including Chancellor & Patrick, David Godsell, Peter Jorgensen, Kevin Knight, Kevin Borland, Geoffrey Woodfall, Alan Hough and emerging architects such as Charles Duncan and Paul Archibald to name but a few.

Boyd writing in the Epilogue of the 1968 edition of Australia’s Home professes that notwithstanding his bias, his observation informs him that prior to 1960 the prevailing opinion at the time, as found “in any writing about modern Australian architecture” points to Melbourne.

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34 Zevi op.cit. Pp 70-71.
35 According to an entry on organic architecture (The Thames and Hudson Encyclopaedia of 20th Century Architecture, Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani (ed) translated from the German and edited by Barry Bergdoll, originally published in 1963 as Encyclopaedia of Modern Architecture, translated and adapted from Wolfgang Pehnt (ed.), Knaurs Lexikon der modernen Architektur, Munich and Zurich, Thames and Hudson, 1986, London: Hugo Haring’s approach to organic architecture differs from Wright’s penchant for decorative motifs that the former disparagingly referred as “the fairy tale aspect of Wright’s work”. In the same entry, both Aalto and Scharoun were cited as followers of Haring’s architectural principles and method, although their work was different.
as “Australia’s cradle of twentieth century design”. This was a claim that he attributed to the fact that Robert Haddon, Desbrowe-Annear and later Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony lived and worked in Melbourne in the early part of the 20th century. Both Griffin and Mahoney were part of a group of architects who belonged to the Chicago School, a movement that was synonymous to the work of a group of Chicago architects like Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, George Elmslie, William Drummond, Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony.

Boyd’s observations specifically referred to the advent of Modern regional Australian architecture rather than the beginning of a Melbourne-based organic ideal as promulgated by Frank Lloyd Wright et al. He was making a broad regional observation of the state of (for want of a better description) Australian Modernism. It seems reasonable, therefore, to also establish parallels between the Peninsula houses (Boyd), the Bay Region as represented by Wurster, Belluschi38 and Wright’s prairie houses to the architecture of Chancellor and Patrick et al based on regional climatic and socio-economic influences.

In a global sense, the evolution of Modernism was a period of simultaneous experimentation and development. Architecturally speaking, the prevailing “period revivalism”39 was being replaced by the architecture of the pioneers such as Berlage (Amsterdam), Louis Sullivan (Chicago) also Frank Lloyd Wright, Wagner (Vienna), Mackintosh (Scotland) at the turn of the 20th Century. In Melbourne, Desbrowe-Annear’s own house had “open planning, built-in furniture, no corridors or passages, but with a north wall of glass to catch the winter sun”.40 It was a bold departure from the prevailing decorative and “curvaceous Art Nouveau”.41 Desbrow-Annear also wrote that “Architecture can exist in the cheapest buildings….it can be brought to its own silent individual effort….Importation cannot help us; the ideas must be our own, born of our own necessities, our own climates, and our own methods of pursuing health and happiness”.42 Robert Haddon, although English born, must have been equally overwhelmed by the antipodean

37 Ibid.
38 D Evans loc.cit.
40 Ibid. p 5.
41 Birrell, loc. Cit.
42 Ibid. p 6.
qualities of his adopted country: his architecture and writings (for he was also a prolific writer) explored the organic qualities of Australian architecture.

The late Peter Wille, a Melbourne architectural photographer and writer, writing in Architect paid tribute to Frank Lloyd Wright’s organic architectural contribution to Victorian architects. Wille writes that Wright’s influence was imported into the country by Mahony and Burley Griffin: such as the “many (of the) elements of his (Wright’s) architecture were ideally suited to this country. The wide eaves promising cool shelter, and the open plan were naturals (sic) for our climate.”

In the same article, Wille draws our attention to the ‘Wrightean’ influence in Edward Billson’s Woodland’s Golf club House, Billson and Roy Lippincott’s University College, Auckland, New Zealand (Billson worked in Griffin’s Melbourne office and Roy Lippincott was his (Griffin’s) associate).

The “picturesque architecture with a craft aesthetic” which emerged in domestic architecture in and around Sydney in the 1960s spawned such architects as Neville Gruzman, Peter Muller and Bruce Rickard. They were the architects who in their formative years were influenced by Miles Dunphy – an early conservationist – who taught at Sydney Technical College and the painter Lloyd Rees. The painter Lloyd Rees could have provided the inspiration for the Australian Landscape while lecturing on the history of art in the Architecture Department of the University of Sydney. The same could be said of the influence Kevin Borland’s teaching had on the emerging talents of Melbourne architects such as Charles Duncan, Alan Hough, Geoffrey Woodfall, John Rouse, Daryl Jackson (who later formed a partnership with Evan Walker, a co-student). Through Borland’s connection with his friend, the so-called ‘bush architect’ Alistair

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43 Peter Wille, Frank Lloyd Wright in Victoria: One hundred years after his birth he still practices vicariously in Melbourne, p24/5 Architect November/December issue 1969 Melbourne.

44 Ibid. p34.

45 According to Goad in his contribution to architecturemedia.com’s Radarobituary (http://www.archmedia.com.au/aa/aaissue.php?issueid=200507&article=7&typeon=1), Gruzman was relatively unknown outside Sydney. Both Boyd and Freeland seemed oblivious of the person and his work. Even Jennifer Taylor made a passing reference to Gruzman in relation to (according to Taylor) the “Wrightian school in Sydney”: “This is surprising but perhaps not unusual, as these histories track movements rather than individual architects who began their practices in earnest in the 1950s – architects like James Birrell, Peter Burns, Alex Jelinek, Stuart McIntosh, and, of course, Neville Gruzman.”

46 Ibid p35.
Knox\(^{47}\) became known to this emerging group of young architects. While not exactly acknowledging the organic notional influence in his own work, Borland’s selective use of material in his building projects strongly suggests more than a passing commitment to organic architecture.

**The Structure of This Thesis**

The general structure of this thesis is as follows:

Introduction – The Introduction addresses aspects of the social landscape of the decades preceding and after the 50s to give meaning to the background of this research topic. It shows in summary how this sets the ground for the introduction of an *organic architecture* in residential design.

- **Part 1 - The American Story** – addresses the genesis and development of a new architectural ideal, the *organic* ideal, at a time when a classical revival environment seemed to re-emerge and dominate the American architectural scene. It shows the role that the Chicago School played in the advent of this architectural ideal. Among the key figures discussed include Henry Hobson Richardson, his disciples McKim, Mead and White, the central role that Louis Sullivan played in the design of tall buildings and his contribution to *organic* thought as Frank Lloyd Wright’s mentor, his *lieber meister*. It also discusses the birth of diverse ideals and styles as practised by Bernard Maybeck, the brothers Greene and Irving Gill et al in the American West, thus forming the architectural bud that blossomed into the modern regionalism of the architecture of the Bay Area.

- **Part 2 – The Australian and American Connection.** This part addresses the dynamics and characteristics of the Westward spread of this architectural ideal over the Pacific to Australia, primarily to Sydney and Melbourne.

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\(^{47}\) Alistair Knox (1912-86) was a Melbourne building practitioner who was a proponent of mud brick buildings. An admirer of Frank Lloyd Wright, Knox was also inspired by Francis Greenway and Walter Burley Griffin. Knox who was never formally trained as an architect sometimes employed architects in his Eltham, Victoria office. An early environmentalists with social concerns, Knox’s sustainable ideals were part of the burgeoning environmental movement of the 60 and 70s. Both Knox and his work were also known to the practising fraternity at the time, architects such as Rex Patrick, DavidGodsell, Kevin Knight et al.
It discusses the forging of an architectural link that began with the appearances of the Henry Hobson Richardson-inspired Life Assurance Society buildings in both Melbourne and Sydney. The emergence of architects such as Desbrowe-Annear who combined elements of Arts and Crafts and modern spatial planning in his residential designs and the pivotal role the Griffins played are discussed in relation to this trans-Pacific connection.

- **Part 3 – The Melbourne Story.** This part addresses the reciprocity between the imported influences, the established trans-Pacific links and the beginnings of an *organic* ideal in Melbourne architectural culture throughout the 20th century.

It discusses the apparent influence of this ideal in the work of such early modern pioneers as Grounds, Mewton and Seabrook and Fildes. It further shows perceptible evidence of the influence of Bay Area architecture, with particular reference to Wurster’s, on the work of the Melbourne architects previously noted.

This part also presents four case study designs by architects previously discussed. The projects are:

(i) The *Montague House* by Geoffrey Woodfall
(ii) The *Laidlaw House* by Rex Patrick from Chancellor and Patrick
(iii) The *Godsell House* by David Godsell

The *Brighton Municipal Offices* by Kevin Knight from Oakley and Parkes.

The presentation of the projects is strongly based on interviews with the architects, with the exception of the late David Godsell’s. In the case of the latter, Terri (Ursula) Godsell, David’s widow has provided much insight into the design of the family home.

The discussions show the influence of the *organic* ideals on the planning and intent of the respective designs. They also show the distinction between what the protagonists describe as ‘Wrightian’ and the apparent *organic* influence in their work.
Figure 1  Robie House (1907) – view from the street corner (Architect Frank Lloyd Wright from Robert McCarter
Frank Lloyd Wright, Phaidon Press, London 1997)
Part 1 The American Story

1.1: Prelude to a brave new architectural landscape

The architectural approach which would later become known as “organic architecture” came to prominence in the Midwest of the United States, specifically the Chicago region, in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The motor driving this event was the rapid growth of wealth resulting from the explosive expansion of American agriculture and manufacturing industries. This growth was based on the exploitation of “America’s most thoroughly national asset, its rich and abundant land”.48 The increased wealth promoted the growth of distinctive new literature with writers such as Emerson, Hawthorn and Melville at its core, and significant architectural patronage.

Popular taste was often a barrier to creative architecture where “the millionaire in search of a palace had been taught to trust the arbiters of taste, and the designers had learned something themselves about scale and proportions”49, the most talented architects found sufficient enlightened patronage to develop the historic antecedents of arts and crafts and art nouveau architecture into a distinctive new approach.

Although the links to European culture were preserved, the new emerging50 society at that time revealed a “new way of life (that) gave it special qualities, a tang and perfume, a texture and colour, that were as distinctly its own as the strong bouquet of a New York State wine even when pressed from some grape long acclimated (sic) to the Garonne or the Rhine “51

But it was not altogether a new world-view that burst from the American psyche. The prevailing architecture and literature were still slavishly European dominated, in the main by English Gothic (Victorian) and French Second Empire styles.52

51 Ibid. p4.
The writers of the “Golden Day”\textsuperscript{53} such as Emerson (Fig 2), Hawthorne, Thoreau, Whitman and Melville were as excited by the “multiplying contacts that were taking place with non-western cultures in Africa, Asia and the South Seas”\textsuperscript{54} as by their European antecedents. It was also the fear of the gathering smoke and soot of and industrialized America such as that taking place in Manchester and Birmingham, led to interest in and acceptance of non-European cultures; “For Emerson, the Persian classics were as close as the Greek and Roman myths, just as for Frank Lloyd Wright, fifty years later, the clean exquisite lines of a Japanese print were even closer than the traditional image and line of the Renaissance.”\textsuperscript{55}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{emerson.jpg}
\caption{Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803 – 1882) – drawing attributed to Sam W. Rowse (Wikipedia)}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{53} Mumford, op.cit., p5.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
1.2 The legacy of Henry Hobson Richardson

The beginning of this collective movement – a group of architects who practised in Chicago from the late nineteenth century to the early part of the twentieth – could be traced to the practice of Henry Hobson Richardson whom Wayne Andrews describes as a genius in American architecture. There was no doubt that the patterns of Richardson’s architectural work were somehow woven into the multi-coloured quilt of what was to be known as organic architecture. Richardson was a prodigious builder of fine buildings for the wealthy at a time when the period between 1872 – 1913, the “Age of Elegance”, saw the emergence of millionaires such as the Vanderbilts, the Astors and the Howells from Boston and other millionaires who, to confirm their wealthy status, were also desperately in search of their own Venetian-Gothic palaces or Parisian Mansardic mansions, became a fertile ground for the Ecole de Beaux-Arts educated Richardson.

Richardson was born into a privileged family. His great-grandfather was the distinguished scientist Joseph Priestley who discovered the existence of oxygen. He grew up in family plantation in Louisiana, went to Harvard instead of West point because of a speech impediment. It was the accepted convention in those days that the sons of (mainly) East Coast blue-blooded Americans were sent to West Point for military training. His years at Harvard further provided him with the contacts for which he later designed buildings; amongst his wealthy clients were people like Henry Adams (a house in Washington), James A. Rumrill (railway station commissions) and his future wife’s brother.

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56 Andrews, op.cit., p150. Allen Brooks in The Prairie School, Frank Lloyd Wright and his Midwest Contemporaries describes the beginning of the Prairie School as having begun towards the end of the 19th century. Although the Prairie School is not (necessarily) synonymous to organic architecture, its protagonists, however, were known as having practised its romantic and harmonious ideals.
57 Ibid., p144.
58 Ibid., p145. (Note: William Dean Howells who was “more of a Brahmin than the Brahmins felt obliged to desert Boston for New York in 1891”.)
59 It is worth noting that Richardson’s legacy (and some of his contemporaries) extended to parts of Melbourne, for example a number of warehouses in Flinders Lane. What was happening in the US at the time was also known here and eventually led to the erection of a small crop of buildings in the Chicago School manner.
60 Andrews, op.cit., pp150-151.
But it was the five years that he spent at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts that shaped Richardson’s romantic ideals on architecture. The American Civil War halted his remittances from Louisiana, to support himself Richardson found employment in the office of Theodore Labrouste - whose brother designed the *Bibliotheque Sainte-Germaine* - while still taking part in the studios at the Ecole de Beaux-Arts (although he was not officially enrolled). Richardson was also an admirer of Viollet le-Duc who at that time taught at the Ecole de Beaux-Arts.

The years that Richardson spent under the guiding tutelage of Jules Louis Andre at the Ecole de Beaux Arts had clearly given him the confidence in his own abilities. So much so that he was quoted as saying to his fiancée that he didn’t know how long he would stay in Europe as he didn’t want to return to the US as a second rate architect, particularly as the country (the US) was already overrun by such mediocrity. He also said that he would only return to his country if he felt that his architecture warranted such a move. Such confidence, however, did not reward Richardson in the first seven years of his return from Europe in 1865. During that time Richardson was relatively unknown in his country of birth until, that is, he took the first prize in the competition for the design of Trinity Church in Boston. The win opened the door for Richardson as well as the “course of American architecture for the next two decades”. Although Richardson described Trinity as a “free rendering of the French Romanesque”, the use of masonry such as granite (Dedham and Westerly) and local stones (Longmeadow) gave the building an organic appearance on its site (“the granite mass on Copley Square”).

So began the rise of Richardson. Robert Treat Paine, chairman of the Trinity building committee, who made his fortunes out of copper mines (Calmet and Hecla) commissioned Richardson to refurbish the interior of his house (Waltham). Paine also had an unbounded admiration for Richardson. The combination between wealthy patronage and talented architect was forged. Hence, after Trinity the commissions kept coming in for Richardson. Powerful families such as the Ames family became his patrons, his design for the Ames brothers’ monument in random stones was followed by a railroad station, a town hall to commemorate Oliver Ames Jr., a library.

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61 Andrews p 152.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
in honour of his brother Oakes and a gardener’s cottage complete with a gate lodge for his son, Frederick Lothrop Ames.

The dynastical patronage of the Ames led to the designs of railroad stations such as North Easton (1882), Boston and Albany station (1884). They were all built in granite, considered in those days as a building material that challenged the architects’ ingenuity. Richardson had begun the fashion of building large-scale buildings with organic materials such as stone. Buildings that would seem to be sympathetic to their site and surroundings, rooted – as it were – into the grounds from where they seemed to spring. But Richardson also displayed a profound sensitivity to material and site. So much so that his sensitive response to such an organic environment led him to explore the “nature of materials” in relation to his architectural ideas with “transcendental overtones”.

But Richardson’s success did not stop there – at the Boston commuters’ line. His architectural fame could have extended beyond the railway stations into the city proper, if only the business fraternity of the day was less stingy and more generous by hiring architects rather than draftsmen for their building investments. Richardson’s most significant commercial commission was for the Marshall Field & Company to house their wholesale business in the city (Fig 3). The 7-storey building, which was subsequently demolished 45 years after it was built, would have been a dramatic example of the architect’s work: the giant arches on the fourth floor of the granite building that altered the scale of the building at street level. It was considered common for buildings of such size to appear to be supported by arches at street level, Richardson’s building, on the other hand seemed to ‘sit’ on a series of arches four storey high.

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Meister, Maureen, op.cit.,p32.
Ibid. It was Ralph Waldo Emerson who was known to Richardson, who wrote that “(The) geologists lays bare the strata, and can tell them all on his fingers, but does he know what effect passes into the man who builds his house in them? What effect on the race that inhabits the granite shelf?”
So impressed was Louis Sullivan with the building’s scale and simplicity that he compared it to an “oasis”: “Four square and brown it stands, a monument to trade, to the organized commercial spirit, to the power and progress of the age, to the strength and resources of individuality of character: spiritually, it stands as the index of the mind, large enough, courageous enough, to cope with these things, master them, absorb them, and give them forth again, impressed with the stamp of a large and forceful personality.”

Richardson did more than revive the spirit of the Romanesque. He also introduced a degree of “lucidity and the superb use of material, above all, in brickwork, which distinguish his earlier work: they show a decisive approach to what may be called the modern attitude towards architecture”. While Richardson was aware of and influenced by the transcendental writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, it was John Ruskin, the English critic and writer whose fundamental notion that “all art must be based on truth in nature, whether it revealed by science or the

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69 Meister, op.cit., p32. Richardson and his compatriot Frederick Law Olmsted, the landscape architect (who was also known to one of the Ames heirs, Frederick Lothrop Ames) were close friends of William Emerson – Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “passionately transcendental older brother, who had been their neighbour when they lived next to one another on Staten Island”.
Bible”\textsuperscript{70}, who profoundly influenced his thinking. In order to validate what he perceived to be the truth in art nature and architecture, Ruskin wrote \textit{Stones of Venice} in which he elaborated his organic vision by engaging the famous Matterhorn as a metaphor for a building, “analysing its walls, buttresses, peaks and ridge lines all as natural forms that lie at the root of architecture”\textsuperscript{71} – thus, it (the mountain) occupies a unique place in the “grand cycle of life”.\textsuperscript{72} The catalogue of Richardson’s body of work included such notable buildings like the Sever Hall at Harvard (1880), the civic legacy he left behind – the Albany City Hall (1882) and the Pittsburgh Court House and prison that were under construction when he died in 1886 short of his 48\textsuperscript{th} birthday. But Richardson’s architectural outpourings were not confined to public buildings such as the monumental granite-built Quincy Library, built in 1883 (Fig.4).

![Figure 4 H. H. Richardson’s Crane Memorial Library, Quincy, Mass., (1883) Andrews)](image)

His design of the gate lodge for one of the Ames’ estates for example (Fig. 5), with its long, low profile was almost, according to Meister, a precursor of Frank Lloyd Wright’s houses.\textsuperscript{73} Collaborating with the landscape architect Olmsted, Richardson designed the gatehouse perpendicular to the carriageway that led into the estate proper which, as a consequence was “cut

\textsuperscript{70} Not only was Ruskin, a distinguished amateur geologist he was also a “devout evangelical Christian” who had legendary knowledge of the bible (Meister p36). It is pertinent to note that the importance of Ruskin to the practitioners of Arts and Crafts of movement such as William Morris, that eventually led to the emergence of an organic ideal cannot be discounted.

\textsuperscript{71} Meister, op.cit.,r p38.

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid. p 158.
by the arched entry to the estate”.

The structure was constructed in glacier boulders that were arranged in such a way reminiscent to a countryside boundary wall made of stones.

![Figure 5 H.H.Richardson’s Gate lodge of F.L. Ames residence, Nth. Easton, Mass., (1881) Andrews](image)

So too was one of Richardson’s most successful domestic building: the house he designed for the millionaire William Watts Sherman at Newport (“the summer capital of (our) millionaires”).

The large family home with its pink stucco walls, its tall brick chimneys and solid granite walls, somehow predated Wright’s later buildings, although the former’s English influence seemed obvious. The Sherman House was described in Jeffrey Karl Ochsner’s *H.H.Richardson: Complete Architectural Work* thus: “Asymmetrical in composition, the exterior of the house is stone, half-timbering, and shingles. The main roof ridge runs longitudinally, but the front is marked by broad subsidiary gable. The first storey walls are of pink granite in *random ashlar with sandstone trim* (my italics), the upper stories of frame construction covered in shingles and inset with half-timber and stucco panels. With a porte-cochere centred on it the front gable is composed of horizontal bands of shingles alternating with bands of casement windows and stucco and half-timbering.”

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75 Ibid.
76 Meister, op.cit. p 160.
77 Ochsner, op.cit., p134.
It seemed, even then, that the architectural lineage that eventually led to the formation of the Chicago School began with Richardson and followed by McKim, Mead and White (who were Richardson’s disciples) and Richard Morris Hunt, Ernest Flagg or Horace Trumbauer. All of them, one way or another, were the instruments of the Vanderbilts or the Whitneys or the Villards of the day: the moneyed men who made their fortunes from minerals dug from the ground, cotton or transportations. Hence, there was sufficient evidence to suggest that a tradition of an organic approach in architecture that Zevi attributed to the “triumvirate of Richardson, Sullivan and Wright” began to appear from this time onward.

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1.3 Louis Henry Sullivan: The Chicago School, the architecture of tall buildings and organic thought.

Figure 6 Louis Sullivan 1856-1924. (Wikipedia)

From the stable of architects who practiced in Chicago at the time, Louis Sullivan (Fig.6) was the brightest and the most innovative. Sullivan would have been aware of Richardson’s ability to synthesize a romantic English-influenced architectural style and exploited the latest available modern engineering technique, the steel frame, and reproduced it in a series of great buildings: the Wainwright Building (Saint Louis 1890) and the Carson Pirie Scott store (Chicago 1899/1904)\(^80\). Built out of Missouri granite which emits a reddish tint, the Wainwright Building\(^81\) (Fig.7) embodied architectural qualities that Sullivan was known to espouse, the “functional correspondence”\(^82\) between the interior and exterior of the building (Wright who had just joined Sullivan’s studio, contributed to the design of the projecting corner pilasters\(^83\) of the building).

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\(^{80}\) Originally the Schlesiger & Meyer Store.


\(^{82}\) Ibid. p 79.

\(^{83}\) Ibid. Elia described it as a “horizontal projection, topping the building like an immense Doric abacus”.

American architecture seemed less concerned with the buildings’ outside appearances, rather it was their interiors that caught the imagination of many Americans; an appellation of “warmth, grace and dignity” took precedence over how buildings looked from the outside. It was this simple and – seemingly – naïve approach together with the amalgamation of a growing European influence that somehow described a modern American architecture.

Sullivan’s imminent arrival on the looming architectural horizon coincided with the fast diminishing age, the Western Frontier. The utopian vision as he intended to show in both his architecture and his writings received mixed receptions. While the former was generally accepted and, indeed, exerted some influence on the generation of architects that followed, the latter seemed to have a lukewarm effect on the readers. Sullivan, in his time, was unusual in that he was a practicing architect who wrote prodigiously, not only about his vision of architecture but also about the ‘meaning of life ‘itself. It has been said that Sullivan’s world-

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85 Ibid. pp17 – 21.
86 As he wrote in his autobiography that “The beauty, the passion, the glory of the past shall merge into a new beauty, a new passion, a new glory as man (sic) approaches power, never has there been such sound warrant for an attitude of optimism” (As quoted by Andrews, p206, *Architecture, Ambitions and Americans*, Andrews also attributed much of Sullivan’s philosophical meanderings to the poet Ralph Waldo Emerson whose
view was redolent with simplistic platitudes about his implicit faith in the goodness of human nature and humankind.  

This naïve belief of Sullivan’s, in some measure, influenced his architecture. So much so that his attempt to synthesize the essence of his architectural philosophy produced the much quoted maxim of “form follows function”; a simplification of a relatively complex architectural condition. According to Andrews his vision what architecture should or ought to be was not evident in his work. According to Andrews his vision what architecture should or ought to be was not evident in his work.  

There was this constant search in Sullivan’s mind for the ‘perfect’ architecture. Along the way, after a stint at MIT, and having failed to gain employment in Richard Morris Hunt’s office (reputedly the first American architect to have been trained at the Ecole de Beaux-Arts), Sullivan briefly worked in the office of Furness & Hewitt in Philadelphia. Although his time at Furness & Hewitt was relatively brief, it was while he was there that he was introduced to the transcendental philosophy of Ralph Waldo Emerson – Furness’ father’s friend. Sullivan then spent a relatively brief period in the office of William Le Baron Jenney (Fig. 8) before he joined the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Sullivan was impressed by Jenney’s sophisticated manner. An officer during the Civil War, Jenney was also a graduate of the famous Ecole de Beaux Arts and also spoke French, albeit badly. While his architectural design output was ordinary, Jenney who was trained as an engineer contributed immensely to the formation of what later became known as the Chicago School.

‘transcendentalism’ was widely influential. The architect grew up in such a social environment, so much so that Emerson’s influence could be found in his (Sullivan’s) autobiography.


Ibid. p207: “no one was less rigid than he at the drafting board” as Andrews described Sullivan.


Ibid., p10

Ibid. p14.
Jenney’s engineering background, his reputation to give structure to forms attracted a number of contemporary designers to his firm: Martin Roche, William A. Holabird, Irving K. Pond, Howard Van Doren, James Gamble Rogers, Alfred Granger and John H. Edelman. The latter who could be described as a renaissance man, familiar with the arts and music, and displaying a breadth of knowledge of current politics was idolised by Sullivan. Through Edelman, Sullivan discovered the “triumphal dimension of Wagner’s music” and connected this to his own youthful illusion of ‘power’ which was somehow impeded by his conservative upbringing. Through his association with Edelman, Sullivan was introduced to and subsequently became a member of the all-male Lotus Club.

It is worth mentioning here that while in Paris, contemporary social events such as the revolt of the Second Commune of Paris, Haussmann’s utopian ideals for a city or the democratic ideals of philosophers such as Rousseau left a scant impression on the young architect. His experience in Paris seemed to be dominated by the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and “even more surprising the figure of a professor of mathematics: Monsieur Clopet”.

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92 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid.p16.
It was Clopet’s mathematical idealism of perfection that appealed to Sullivan’s ideals of a supreme mind over all matters: “a single truth excluding all else”. Upon his return, Edelman – with whom Sullivan had kept in touch during the intervening years – introduced him to Dankmar Adler with whom Sullivan later on formed a partnership.

To appreciate the legacy that Sullivan would one day leave behind in an emerging architectural movement that seemed to embrace its organic roots, it is important to note that the architect arrived in a city which had been devastated by fire only two years earlier (1871). What Sullivan found was not only a city suffering from a post-traumatic despair, but also – simultaneously - seemed to exude hope and vigour. It was the latter mood that beckoned the young architect, a feeling that he noted in his 1924 memoir how exhilarated he was upon arrival in Chicago.

In many ways the evolution of Chicago as a significant architectural city came from the fact that much of its early inspiration was derived from the East. The choices for young and aspiring architects’ education were either confined to the recently established University of Illinois or MIT in Boston, or abroad such as Ecole de Beaux Arts, England or Germany. Even MIT’s curriculum was very much based on that of the Ecole’s. This Eastern influence extended to building styles and publications; to such an extent that building procurements were decided by the commissioning of Eastern architects. In other words, the Chicago of the 1870s was in reality the “architectural colony of an Eastern metropole”.

It was in the midst of Chicago’s impending building boom that a group of architects (mostly Easterners) arrived in the city around 1871, which later became known as the Chicago School. They consisted of architects like Dankmar Adler, Louis Sullivan, William Le Baron Jenney, Martin Roche, William Holabird, John Root and Daniel Burnham.

The rebuilding of Chicago required architectural inventiveness never before attempted in other parts of the US. Both the growth of population eager to take part in the rebuilding of a once

95 Ibid.
97 Twombly, Robert et al, op.cit., p22.
98 Ibid.
devastated city as well as site conditions that were not altogether conducive to building activities, such as a “dangerously high water table (that) had already generated an experimental spirit – prompting early innovation in foundation systems and lightweight wood (sic) construction, for example – that broadened after 1871 into an even greater receptivity to other new technologies, such as fire-resistant vaulting and iron and steel framing”.99

Slowly but surely a sense of regional identity began to emerge with the founding of a professional magazine, Inland Architect, an exclusively Midwest regional architectural association, finally culminating in the establishment of an academic institution: Chicago’s Armour Institute. The maturation of Louis Sullivan as a major player in the Chicago School, literally, took place out of the ashes of the great Chicago fire. Sullivan sincerely believed that the West represented some of idealistic vision of democracy and Chicago was the chosen city. To him the East was anathema to the true vision of democracy and honesty. And New York, above all, represented all that was undemocratic and lacking in “western frankness, directness” and true honesty.100 To Sullivan, New York’s European influence perpetuated an outmoded aristocratic and feudalistic social structure that was philosophically opposed to the free and democratic viz. American way of life. Sullivan also regarded this European influence as the “locus of tired cultural ideas that, having once served well, were now degenerate “.101

Sullivan likened the rebuilding of Chicago after the fire as a renaissance of spiritual values. New York, to him, was like the doomed cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, corrupt and deceitful. Its architecture was driven by greed and did not, in any way, reflect any social attempt to moralistic values. “Behind the screen of each building is a man” he wrote and the urban landscape, the city, was the “material reflection of the character of its inhabitants, who will it, who suffer it to be, whose thought it is. The city is their imagination, their materialisation.”102

It was also Sullivan’s philosophical belief that Chicago’s rebirth was akin to a burst of youthful energy. Unlike New York with its decadence and tired old social values, Chicago reflected the

99 Ibid. p23.  
100 Ibid.  
101 Ibid. p25.  
102 Ibid. pp 23 – 24.
West’s regional natural qualities. Democracy, according to Sullivan, seemed to prevail in the region, a Utopian manifestation of a true American architecture. And the architect, like a poet, became “organically rooted in his (sic) culture, was of the people, and, moreover, was not simply a man (sic) of words but was, at the same time, a man of deeds (sic).”  

To Sullivan the poet, came the vision of an American utopia which he liberally expressed in his writings, Natural Thinking and Kindergarten Chats.  

Sullivan’s poetic tendencies were not confined to simply literary outpourings, his poetry, so to speak, encompassed his beliefs in a democratic architecture that “his words and his designs had the same non-architectural (sic) – beyond architectural – objective.”  

It was also said of Sullivan that as an ‘architectural poet’ he conceptualized his ideas and built as well – “The poet sees and does, the architectural poet conceives and builds.”

It was Sullivan’s assertion that if this new, idealistic and democratic architecture was to survive – principally in Chicago – then it was incumbent on the architects to engage new construction technologies. Amongst them was the invention of the fireproof steel frame – the cast-iron having fallen victim to the great Chicago fire – and as Montgomery Schuyler, a contemporary critic remarked, “the elevator doubled the height of the building and the steel frame doubled it again”.

In “The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered” (1896), Sullivan’s urban vision manifest in his perception that the design of multi-storey structures was less of an architectural matter, rather it was more of a fundamental social issue. Or as he succinctly put it, “Architects of this land and generation are now brought face to face with something new under the sun, namely that evolution and integration of social conditions that resulted in the erection of tall buildings.”

While he rejected the idea that he was specifically dealing with social engineering, Sullivan was

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103 Ibid. p25.
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid.
106 Ibid.
108 Ibid.
109 Twombly, Menocal, op.cit., p33.
110 Ibid.
aware that the availability of new technologies such as steel construction, elevators and “increasing urban density, and escalating land rents”\textsuperscript{111} had significantly affected the social and urban fabric of his time. And almost prophetically, Sullivan recognised the role speculators played in the building of cities where architects and engineers were (are) relegated to the subservient role of agencies, “as the collaboration of a ‘modern feudal baron’ with his two employees in their allied interests, the skyscraper took on its quintessential social meaning in service of entrepreneurial gain”.\textsuperscript{112}

By 1885, Sullivan began to adopt a more hostile attitude towards the role speculators and investors played in the shaping of American urban fabric and the “characteristics of national architecture”.\textsuperscript{113} While he acknowledged the American business fraternity’s contribution to the nation’s economy, Sullivan was highly critical of the processes adopted, a fact that he condemned as “crude and harsh as to be revolting to a refined taste, and hence it is to be instinctively shunned”.\textsuperscript{114} Sullivan, however, was sufficiently optimistic to believe that power alone did not corrupt the entrepreneurs but its abuse. He believed that “once subtilised (sic), flushed with emotion, and guided by clear insights”, even the politically corrupt and socially unethical entrepreneurs and the creative artists of the land, would be “developing elementary ideas organically” towards a more just and equitable society.\textsuperscript{115}

Sullivan’s complex personality, his often contradictory beliefs in what he believed his architecture ought to achieve and what he produced, eventually led to his diminishing popularity in the competitive world of architectural practice.\textsuperscript{116} On the one hand Sullivan was designing tall buildings for the people he was beginning to despise, while on the other he condemned that the buildings “imprisoned human capacity”\textsuperscript{117}

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\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid. The quotation belongs to Twombly and Menocal, their interpretation of what Sullivan perceived to be the dominant role played by financiers and developers in New York and Chicago at the time. It is important to observe that very little had changed since Sullivan’s days. Much of contemporary urban architecture could well be the result of such speculative endeavours rather than significant architectural ideas.  
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.p58.  
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
The same dichotomy in Sullivan’s mind existed with regards to the banks he designed, National Farmers Bank, Owatonna, Minnesota, 1906 – 08, Merchant National Bank, Grinner, Iowa, 1913 – 14. As far as he was concerned, the banking system was also instrumental in imprisoning and controlling communities, to Sullivan, banks “if anything were even more ‘subversive’ than (his) skyscrapers” because their (banking) system perpetuated the idea that “democracy depends upon linking individualism to collective endeavour”. 118

It seems ironic that Sullivan’s philosophical belief and stance in what his architecture stood for would eventually lead to his professional demise.119

While Sullivan’s name is synonymous to the role the Chicago School played in the American architectural landscape at the turn of the last century – although it was William Baron Le Jenney who was accredited as having found the School – particularly with regards to tall buildings and numerous bank buildings, it is easy to overlook the contribution the architect made in residential designs. Early in Sullivan’s career and in collaboration with Dankmar Adler, between 1879 to 1895, the partnership was responsible for the completion of 60 single family and multiple dwellings.120 When the partnership was commissioned to design the Auditorium Building (Fig.9) – the project that made Adler and Sullivan nationally famous – their reputation grew. As a result almost 50% of the work that came into their office consisted of residential commissions. According to Twombly and Menocal Frank Lloyd Wright who joined the firm as chief draftsman in 1890 was responsible for the design of majority of the firm’s residential work.121

118 Ibid. This is a clear indication of Sullivan’s belief in the notion of free enterprise where collectivism destroys the very essence of a free and democratic populace. There is insurmountable documentation to indicate that Sullivan was a believer of the so-called capitalist system without actually knowing its underlying philosophy (Twombly).
119 Ibid.p59.
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid.
In *Louis Sullivan: The Poetry of Architecture*, Robert Twombly and Narciso G. Menocal extensively detailed Sullivan’s residential projects, and also provide readers the reason for the architect’s apparent lack of interest for the design of houses.\(^{122}\) The references contained, however, are outside the premise of this research thesis. Suffice to say, however, that unlike Wright, Sullivan did not understand the average householders’ needs and that residential design - to Sullivan – “was not the place to address social issues, unlike privately owned banks or skyscrapers that were seen and used by sundry and all.”\(^{123}\) Twombly and Menacol further suggest that “it is more likely, however, that Sullivan simply did not recognize the family as an important social institution or as necessary in any way to the construction of democracy.”\(^{124}\) Notwithstanding his Unitarian and Transcendental beliefs, Sullivan’s view of the world was too “Olympian” for the average family for whom he was designing. His approach to house design was regarded by many too intellectual and, therefore, did not connect with “the real lives of

\(^{122}\) Ibid. pp 59 – 72.
\(^{123}\) Ibid. p67.
\(^{124}\) Ibid. p68.
actual clients”\textsuperscript{[125]} In an abstract way Sullivan’s vision for an American “democratic people were intellectually manageable only at a distance and in large numbers”\textsuperscript{[126]} All the same, unlike Wright who disdainfully referred to the “masses as them asses”\textsuperscript{[127]} and throughout his life exhibited an arrogant disregard for the general populace, Sullivan, at least, was compassionate.\textsuperscript{[128]} Sadly, however, Sullivan’s compassion for humanity did not translate into his ability to understand individuals in order to design for them, something that he could have learned from his assistant Frank Lloyd Wright.

In the fading years of his professional life, Sullivan’s architectural work was increasingly regarded by contemporary critics as difficult to interpret and often philosophically contradictory, some would even suggest that they (Sullivan’s architectural work) were “complex intertwining of ideological motivations”.\textsuperscript{[129]} His literary production at this stage of his life also became increasingly metaphoric with such references as feminism and nature as the “mother of all building art in the machine age”.\textsuperscript{[130]} It does seem ironic that in spite of Sullivan’s increasing messianic pronouncements that his People’s Savings Bank in Cedar Rapids, Iowa – completed in 1911 – was regarded by the critic Montgomery Schuyler as “the most interesting event in the American architectural world to-day”. In 1991 the building suffered a humiliating blow by having a large building built alongside overshadowing\textsuperscript{[131]}

Louis Sullivan’s gloomy prediction of the future of American architecture led many people to believe that the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair spelt the doom of any inspiring new design and

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid. P68.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid. Twombly elaborated, “Wright never wrote about people with anything resembling Sullivan’s compassion, and his story suggests that while he (Wright) was entirely capable of loving individuals and understanding their domestic needs – which no doubt contributed to his brilliance as an architect of private residences – it also suggests that his scorn for humanity in general knew few bounds.”
\textsuperscript{129} Elia, op.cit., p154.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid. P157. It is worth mentioning at this point that Elia described Sullivan’s bank’s new neighbour thus: “This new building usurps with brutal indifference, the enchanted isolation of the latter. Most disquieting is the fact that the materials and plastic treatment of the awkward and cumbersome new building seek out an impossible dialogue with the earlier autonomous structure. Clearly, this was the architect’s ingenuous intent.” Does a similar fate await the destiny of Chancellor and Patrick’s ANZ Bank in Elizabeth Street, Melbourne, now that this fine example of a ‘Wrightean’ building is to have a superfluous growth stuck on top of it?
signalled the revival of classicism\textsuperscript{132}, valiantly led by the likes of McKim, Mead and White, Graham Anderson Probst and White, D. H. Burnham and Company\textsuperscript{133}.

But it was also a period of immense creativity, between 1895 – 1915, when Sullivan created his “own most original buildings, including the Schlesinger and Mayer department store (Figs. 10 & 11), of Wright’s bold and characteristic development of his Prairie Houses, to say nothing of his Larkin Building and Midway Gardens; it was (also) the period that on the Pacific Coast gave to Bernard Maybeck, to Irving Gill, to the Brothers Greene, the opportunity for many happy experiments with indigenous forms.”\textsuperscript{134} It was the beginning of an architectural diversity that spread across the American continent; the organically inclined prairie house in the Middle West region, “the shingled cottages with steep pitched roofs of New England, and the redwood house of the Bay Area in San Francisco, or the brilliant stucco houses, sometimes with flat roofs, but no longer ‘Spanish colonial’, which Irving Gill built in Southern California.”\textsuperscript{135} It was also a time when noted critics such as Montgomery Schuyler, while praising the work of Sullivan and Wright as pioneers\textsuperscript{136}, also bemoaned the fact that there was a resurgence of “the rehandling and rehashing of admired historical forms, in which there is no future or any possibility of progress”.\textsuperscript{137}

Lewis Mumford in \textit{Roots of American Architecture} describing this period as “this strange interregnum(sic)”\textsuperscript{138} was quite vitriolic with regards to the revival of classicism in the American architectural landscape\textsuperscript{139}, a phenomenon, which, according to Mumford, “lasted longer than it should have because of an impoverishment of ideas, an exaggerated respect for the historically accredited, gentility itself.”\textsuperscript{140}

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\textsuperscript{132} Mumford, op.cit. p14.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid. p15.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid. p16.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid. p17.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid. pp14 – 23.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
It was towards the end of Sullivan’s career, when he was no longer regarded by many as the “giant of American design, a role that had been inherited by Wright”,¹⁴¹ that the strained relationship between him and Wright was cemented once again. The 62-year old Sullivan was suffering from financial hardship, while the fifty-year old former student, now famous and had offices in Tokyo (Imperial Hotel project), Los Angeles and also in Chicago, while not exactly swimming in money was at least financially better off than his former mentor¹⁴². Wright’s generosity occasionally sustained Sullivan’s financial survival as well as providing his (Wright’s) Lieber Meister with the necessary moral support on architectural matters. It was a close and affectionate relationship that lasted until Sullivan died three days after their final meeting, April 11, 1924: “although it was Wright who had created a new architecture in America he could not have done it without Sullivan. That, at least, is how Wright reports the master’s final farewell and Sullivan may indeed have said these words, laying the foundation of an opinion that his student would in time develop.”¹⁴³

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¹⁴¹ Elia, op.cit., p171.  
¹⁴² Ibid. p167.  
¹⁴³ Ibid. p175.
Figure 10 Schlesinger & Meyer Store (now Carson Pirie & Scott Building) Chicago (1899).

Figure 11 Detail of entrance, Schlesinger & Meyer Store.

1.4 After Sullivan: An Organic Metamorphosis

Wayne Andrews in *Architecture, Ambition and Americans: A Social History of American Architecture* puts forward the premise that American architecture, historically speaking, falls into two broad categories: the ‘veblenites’ - so named after the economist Thorstein Veblen who was an ardent anti-individualist who “dreamed of a world in which we should all conform to a pattern laid down by an omniscient legislator who knew what was best for the average man.”145 Although Veblen’s economic philosophy was not architecturally related, someone like Gropius would comfortably fit into the category of being a Veblenite. The founder of Bauhaus spent his architectural formative years in the office of Peter Behrens, the designer of such industrial structures as I.G.Farben Trust headquarters and A.E.G.’s turbine plants. Gropius himself was also known for his 1914 Fagus shoe last works at Alfeld, Hanover and the famous Hall of Machines at the Deutscher Werkbund Exposition.146 Andrews further noted that Gropius would have been quite content to continue his work as designer of factories.147 The other Veblenites included the likes of Le Corbusier, Mies van de Rohe and Holland’s Oud148

Unlike Thorstein Veblen, William James, whose philosophy was adopted by those whom Andrews refers to as Jacobites, believed in the humanism of people’s endeavour. To James the “personal and romantic view of life has other roots besides wanton exuberance of imagination and perversity of heart. It is perennially fed by the facts of experience.”149 Architects who are in this category tend to be “individualistic, casual (sic), pragmatic, tolerant of the machine, fonder (sic) of the texture of materials than of their modernity” and are best known for their domestic work.150 Accordingly, Frank Lloyd Wright was the

145 Ibid. p249.
147 Ibid.
148 Ibid. p252
149 Ibid. p249.
150 Ibid. p250. “To simplify matters still further, you might say that a Veblenite would rather listen to the answers of the machine, a Jacobite to the question of man” *(my italics).*
most famous and “the greatest of all the Jacobites”. Andrew’s division of Veblenites and Jacobites is a useful adjunct to the origins and growth of the organic analogy in American architecture, in so far as it includes the contribution of West Coast architects such as Maybeck, the brothers Greene (Fig.12), Wurster, and “Wurster’s fellow Jacobite”, Harwell Hamilton Harris.

But true to the nature of the American society, there also existed – even then – what Mumford described as “diversities of style and strong contrasts of architectural design (that) are perfectly natural occurrence, when we take into account the early history of the nation and the circumstances under which it sprung into its present prominent position.”

Figure 12 Gamble House (1909) Pasadena, California, Greene & Greene (Andrews, “Architecture, Ambition, and Americans”, P271 (Photograph: Andrews))

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151 Ibid. p274.
152 Andrews, op.cit. Pp 274 – 288. Andrews further noted that Harris was, in his opinion, “the most sensitive architect since Frank Lloyd Wright in (his) use of materials” (p282).
153 Mumford, op.cit., p62. Note :Mumford also asserts in his essay that “The art of building faithfully portrays the social history of the people to whose needs it ministers, but can not get beyond those boundaries.” The readers are reminded that the period that this research alludes to refers to the growth of American capitalism.
1.5  Organicism as an Architectural Idea.

The word *organic* first made its public appearance in a lecture by Claude Bragdon, editor of Sullivan’s Kindergarten Chats, at the Art Institute, Chicago in 1915. Much later, at a gathering of British architects in 1939, Frank Lloyd Wright declared that *organic architecture* (my italics) was like the “Declaration of Independence, belonged to an organic society that rejects exterior aestheticism or mere taste and embraces Art, Science and Religion” as one entity.

The word *organic* in relation to architecture became a phenomenon that was debated by architects such as Behrends, amongst others, who reminded us that the word itself was first applied to architecture by Burckhardt in reference to Vasari’s praise for the Farnesina Palace - *non murato, ma veramente nato*, not built but born -. Doric temples have been described by Behrends as the embodiment of the “*organic* and the formal”.

The meaning of the word might not have entered the young Frank Lloyd Wright’s mind when his mother introduced him to Froebel’s building blocks that eventually played an important role in shaping the young Wright’s sense of design and space. “Mother’s intense interest in the Froebel system was awakened at the Philadelphia Centennial, 1876. In the Frederick Froebel Kindergarten exhibit there, mother found the “Gifts”. And “gifts” they were. Along with the gifts was the system, as a basis for design and the elementary geometry behind all natural birth of Form.”

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154 Ibid, p66.
155 Ibid.
156 Ibid. p68.(Note: Giorgo Vasari a Renaissance painter, biographer and architect. Vasari was better known as an architect than a painter, although he was also well-known for his seminal work of artists of the time *Le Vite de più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori italiani* – The Lives of the Most Eminent Italian Architects, Painters and Sculptors. Vasari was also known as the architect of the Uffizi in Florence.)
157 Ibid. pp 68-69.
158 Kaufmann, Edgar/Raeburn, Ben, *Frank Lloyd Wright: Writings and Buildings*, pp18, Meridian, New American Library, a division of Penguin Books USA, 1974. (Note: Froebel’s early childhood teaching philosophy which led to the founding of Kindergarten, became universally accepted. Froebel schools were synonymous to kindergarten in the country where I was born, Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia). As a child I attended a Froebel school where I played with the same wooden blocks and weaved patterns on shiny coloured paper.).
Not only did Froebel play a significant role in shaping young Wright’s mind, but also Victor Hugo’s essay on architecture which stated that “European Renaissance ‘the setting sun all Europe mistook for dawn’; thus, perpetuating classicism that Wright abhorred.¹⁵⁹

And so the journey to great architecture began when at the age of 19, Wright joined the company of Adler and Sullivan with self-confidence brimming over and “equipped, in fact armed, with the Froebel-kindergarten education (I had) received as a child from (my) mother. Early training which happened to be perfectly suited to the T-square and triangle technique now to become a characteristic, natural to the machine age ….”¹⁶¹

Like Richardson and Sullivan before him, contemporary thinkers such as Herman Melville (1819-92), Walt Whitman (1819-92), Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-82) who were still alive at the time had a profound influence on Wright’s world-view.¹⁶²

It is important to note that the period in question was indeed less than a hundred years since the birth of America as an independent nation (1776).¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. p19.
¹⁶⁰ Ibid. p21 –“The inexorable Law of Change, by way of which the very flow of human life provides fresh inspiration would compel new architecture, based upon Principle, to come alive.”
¹⁶¹ Ibid.
¹⁶² The common philosophical thread that bound architects like Richardson, Sullivan and Wright was Transcendentalism. As Robert McCarter noted that it was the “energetic and rigorous American culture of the 19th century” that prevailed at the time (McCarter, Robert, Frank Lloyd Wright Architect, p13, Phaidon Press, N.Y.,1997.
¹⁶³ See opening paragraphs of this Chapter.
In particular, Wright’s dogmatic and “combative stance in his dealings with the press and public can be traced to Emerson” who once said that “Whoever would be a man, must be a non-conformist; nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind. To be great is to be misunderstood.” In turn, Emerson and his co-transcendentalists were influenced by the writings of the Rome-based American sculptor and writer, Horatio Greenough. Greenough “wrote extensively on modern man’s relationship in historical form, and architecture was of particular interest to him” because it was not reliant on historical precedence. “Let us learn from principles, not copy shapes” was one of Greenough’s creeds. Although the form follows function aphorism was often attributed to Sullivan, it was Greenough who “first enunciated the principle and held (the view) that the edifices in whose construction the principles of architecture are developed may be classed as organic (my italics)”.

Wright was also very much aware of the significance of the environment he lived, with him as the fulcrum as evidenced in his belief that his birth on a stormy night was a “prophetic initiation”. Apparently the world welcomed the baby Wright with a chorus of thunder and lightning. As his mother would say, “Yours was a prophetic birth.” And Wright himself liked to say that “It goes to show that nature made her most dramatic display in greeting me on June 8th, 1869.” It was in contrast to his arrival in Chicago where his first employ was with J.L. Silsbee. Wright soon found that Silsbee’s was not what he was searching for. He then moved to Beers, Clay and Dutton where he found that his experience was too limited for the demand of the work. Wright moved back to Silsbee who quite gladly took him back. It was while he was working at Silsbee that he heard of a vacancy in the office of Adler and Sullivan. And the rest, as they say, is what legends are made of.

It was soon clear that the dynamics between Sullivan and Wright were formed in the early days of their working relationship. Sullivan soon discovered that his young protégé was not only talented, but also held him (Sullivan) in the highest esteem – as Wright later on would refer to Sullivan as his *lieber meister*. Wright soon after his arrival in the practice of Adler and Sullivan became their chief designer, “entrusted not only with the translation of his (Sullivan’s) sketches into construction drawings, but with commissions for houses”\(^{172}\) as the practice was mainly engaged in large scale work. Although Wright supervised Adler and Sullivan’s residential work, he was also busily engaged in other projects in the office such as the Auditorium Building, the Dooley Block (1890), the Getty Tomb (1890), the Transportation Building which was built for the Columbus Exposition (1890), the Wainwright Tomb (1892), the Schiller Building where he played a dominant role in its design.\(^{173}\)

In 1893, Wright left the practice of Adler and Sullivan to start up on his own. The departure from Adler and Sullivan although was not entirely amicable, it was not acrimonious either; it was 12 years later before Wright reunited with his *lieber meister* and forged the relationship until Sullivan died. Sullivan had always insisted that anyone working for him should not engage in private work but Wright “could not control the force which was driving him (now) on another course – his own work in architecture”.\(^{174}\) He was accepting commissions while still being employed by Sullivan. This was also at a time when Wright became a key figure in the office of Adler and Sullivan where his “astonishing ability to visualise and manipulate complex forms, an innate understanding of geometry, a voracious capacity to learn, a wide-ranging interest in ideas, and a sharp and ready wit”\(^{175}\) was complimentary to Sullivan’s “theoretical insights”.\(^{176}\)

While Froebel imbued in Wright that early childhood perception of space and colour, it was in his collection of Japanese prints that he found his inspiration; “by the juxtaposition of plain areas against other highly ornamented; by the balance between intricacy and

\(^{172}\) McCarter, op.cit., p18.
\(^{173}\) Ibid. p20.
\(^{174}\) Olgivanna Lloyd Wright, op.cit., p24.
\(^{175}\) McCarter, op.cit., p18.
\(^{176}\) Ibid.
austerity; by an incisively abstract in its language of patterns, line, and asymmetry, yet resilient in its grasp of living things.”¹⁷⁷ Wright was, at this stage (of his development), very much enamoured by the idea of decoration as part of his architecture, it became an “ornamental exuberance” as Mumford described it¹⁷⁸ and as seen in his (Wright’s) Midway Gardens and the Imperial Hotel (Tokyo).

The ‘restlessness’ that Wright had felt that prompted him to ‘go on his own’ while still employed by Sullivan was the germination of an idea; an architectural ideal. Wright had always believed that he was an individual who stood against the mainstream of the prevailing society, as his widow, Olgivanna Lloyd Wright described it: “To fit himself into a society which lived by long-established rules and standards often seemed impossible, but to Frank Lloyd Wright suffering only presented an inventive to action. He rebelled against outlived forms; it was impossible to build anything new on top of something that was already crumbling. He was already beginning to foresee a new society based upon a principle of architectural beauty, which could change not only the physical aspect but the social structure of the world……..”¹⁷⁹ The dominant influence that Sullivan had on Wright was obvious even at this stage, as the latter echoed the same sentiment that the former had expressed in his writings.¹⁸⁰ But Wright also expanded on this world-view in that he also believed that the “purpose of organic character and proportions in buildings, if made appropriate to life”¹⁸¹ would juxtaposition itself into the fabric of a democratic America. A view that Wright also expressed in these terms: “The needed interpretation had arrived in my own mind as organic and, being true to nature would naturally, so I thought, be visible to my fellow architects.”¹⁸²

¹⁷⁷ Jordy, William H., American Buildings and Their Architects: Progressive and Academic Ideals at the turn of the twentieth century, p188, Doubleday & Co., NY, 1972. (Note: According to Doug Evans (RMIT), Jeff Turnbull (Melbourne University) tells the story that Wright having borrowed $6000 from Griffin to travel to Japan upon his return paid off his debt with a stack of Japanese prints.)
¹⁷⁹ Olgivanna Lloyd Wright, op.cit., p24.
¹⁸¹ Kaufmann & Raeburn, op.cit.,pp35-36.
¹⁸² Ibid.
The Winslow House was the first commission that Wright undertook on his own after departing from Adler and Sullivan. By this time he established his office in the Schiller Building, the very same building that his lieber meister had designed in 1891. There was, however, an earlier example of his architecture; the so-called “Romeo and Juliet” tower for the windmill that Wright designed for his aunts Nell and Jane. Lloyd Jones in Spring Green, Wisconsin in 1887 (Fig. 14).

![Winslow House (1893) Frank Lloyd Wright](image)

**Figure 14** Winslow House (1893) Frank Lloyd Wright (From Heinz, Thomas E., “The Vision of Frank Lloyd Wright” P62, Chartwll Books, N.J. USA, 2007.

But the one building that, arguably, represented Wright’s ideal in *organic* architecture was the house that he designed for Frederick C. Robie, 1908 – 10, in Chicago. The house was a defining symbol of Wright’s Prairie House style with its “organisation characteristic of his early prairie houses” with its dominant fireplace and chimney thus “radiating the elements of (the) building from the trunk…. (Wright) created an architectonic analogy to growing things in nature.” Moreover Wright insisted that his architecture “exists in nature, but as formal entities, proclaiming man’s profound sympathy for his natural environment, while also asserting his conceptual independence of it.” (Fig.15).

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183 Jordy, op.cit., p207.
184 Ibid. p197.”More than this, by fragmenting the compositional elements of the Robie House, he (Wright) interweaves material and space, while he also complicates the pattern of light and shade. The effect is comparable to the interplay of solid and void, of sunlight and shadow, which occurs in nature.”
185 Ibid.
It was, indeed, this sense of ‘belonging to nature’ that distinguished Wright’s work from most of his contemporaries. His conceptualisation of the harmonious relationship between building and site (although the Robie House was built on a small urban site) that became a metaphor to natural growth was the hallmark of his organic approach, although comparisons have been made between Sullivan and Wright’s work – the latter having owed the formative years of his apprenticeship to his lieber meister. It was nevertheless obvious to observers that, in the case of Sullivan, the use of decorative features was “the surrogate for structure (articulating structure, or diffusely recalling the structural energies embedded within the elemental mass that barely erupt to visibility), more often as the exuberant overflow of interior energies bursting forth as quasi-cosmic metaphor”\(^\text{187}\), while on the other hand, Wright’s buildings brought forth the notion that the structure itself was its own decorative feature; “Wright’s ornament more directly, more abstractly, more circumspectly, develops from the particular structure and geometry that builds the mass.”\(^\text{188}\)

Writing in *Roots of Contemporary American Architecture*, edited by Lewis Mumford, Walter Curt Behrendt suggested that the rooms in Wright’s houses “are so bound to one another, spliced like muscles, that by their inner tension they are brought into

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\(^{186}\) Ibid. pp197 – 201.
\(^{187}\) Ibid. p201
\(^{188}\) Ibid.
indissoluble cohesion.” It was also fairly common for observers to relate Wright’s buildings to plants, something that Behrendt emphasised in the same collection of essays, thus: “Speaking of the structure of these buildings, it is not by chance that one is, again and again, urged to a comparison with world of plants. Like a plant, the building grows up from the earth to the light.” In fact the following quotation seems to accurately refer to the design concept of the Robie House: “Above a compact base unfolds a loosened bulk, developed into rich plastic form through the harmonic interplay of its necessary parts and through the extended fullness of its appropriate detail.”

It may seem curious to some people that the dominant volume of Wright’s work should concentrate on houses. Even from the beginning, the years Wright spent in the office of Adler and Sullivan, he would rather involve himself in designing houses rather than the firm’s major commissions such as “loft buildings, skyscrapers, hotels, factories, theatres and opera houses”.

My reading of available material while researching for this thesis has confirmed the view that Wright’s almost obsessive preoccupation for designing houses was the true reflection of his organic world-view. Also, the prevailing house designs during that particular time might have contributed to his innovative approaches. Wright considered that the “houses of his period were cut up, cluttered, claustrophobic; they buzzed and hummed at him. He longed for open spaces, scene vistas and ‘ineffable harmonies.’ A house must be welcoming and encourage a feeling of wellbeing. It should be ‘intensely human’. It should be a natural house.” But, however ‘great’ or inventive an architect like Wright might have been, it would be impossible for anyone – even one as creative as Wright – to be divorced from his visual environment. Wright’s own house, for example, was designed in the then popular Queen Anne and Shingle styles (Fig.16) that he had learned while working for Silsbee.

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189 Mumford, op.cit., p398.
190 Ibid. p399.
191 Ibid.
193 Ibid. p113.
194 Ibid. p114.
In the case of Wright, however, it was a deliberate move to attract future clients by designing his house in that popular style. In doing so, Wright had adopted Henry Hobson Richardson’s first rule of architecture, “Get the job”.\textsuperscript{195} There were, of course, other contemporary influences that appeared in Wright’s own house. For instance, according to Vincent Scully, Wright’s own house designed in 1889 was “closely modelled on two houses built by another architect, Bruce Price, in Tuxedo Park, New York, three or four years” prior to the construction of the house.\textsuperscript{196} Other examples of direct influences occurred in Wright’s Winslow House, its front elevation closely resembled “the façade of the tomb Sullivan designed in 1892”.\textsuperscript{197} Wright’s early designs also revealed that he was not immune from adapting designs by firms such as McKim, Mead and White, as evident in his (Wright’s) design for the Blossom House in 1892. The James Charnley house which Wright designed in 1891, while in the employ of Adler and Sullivan, clearly resembled a McKim, Mead and White townhouse in New York, built in 1884. Often the adaptations became the catalyst to Wright’s organic approach such as the case of the “Prairie Town” house which seemed to have been inspired by a house designed by Robert C. Spencer.\textsuperscript{198}

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\textsuperscript{195} Ibid. p112.
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid. p117.
\textsuperscript{197} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{198} Ibid. Secrest
But the so-called adaptation of other architects’ designs, indeed what architect if any has not consciously followed trends by adapting other people’s designs, became in one instance in Wright’s case, pure plagiarism. Wright’s submission for a competition for a public library and museum in Milwaukee\textsuperscript{199} was a direct copy of another architect; that of Rennie Mackintosh’s winning submission for the Science and Art Museum competition in 1890\textsuperscript{200} (Fig.17). Wright apparently reluctantly admitted that he stole the design as he referred “to these early experiments, he wrote, “I suppose I stole them.” It gave him, he added, a most uneasy conscience.”\textsuperscript{201}

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Frampton writing about this period of Wright’s architectural progression in \textit{Frank Lloyd Wright and the myth of the Prairie 1890 - 1916}\textsuperscript{202} writes that “in 1893 Wright remained uncommitted, for he could still design a thoroughly Classical façade for the Milwaukee Library”.\textsuperscript{203} Frampton further suggests that “Wright appears almost desperate at this point to break through to a new style: his public work is still part Italianate, part Richardson, while his domestic work is now consistently characterized by low-pitched roofs, poised at various heights over elongated asymmetrical plans.” The chronology of Wright’s maturation can thus be traced as follows: together with the collaboration of sculptors such as Richard Bock and Alfonso Ianelli, the engineer Paul Mueller, George

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\textsuperscript{199} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{200} Ibid. p118.
\textsuperscript{201} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{202} Frampton, op.cit., p59.
\textsuperscript{203} Ibid.
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Niedecken, a cabinet maker, the landscape architect Wilhelm Miller, Catherine Ostertag, the mosaic designer and Orlando Giannini who fabricated much of the glass and textile work from 1882 onwards\(^{204}\), Wright completed the Avery Coonley House (1908), the Robie House (1908 – 09), the Hardie House (1905) and the Midway Gardens (1914).\(^{205}\)

By adapting and readapting his own designs, Wright was on his way of perfecting the prairie mythology of his vision, the asymmetrical and articulated planning of his houses that liberated the spaces within. Wright’s vision of an organic architecture manifest in his Prairie Style that finally “crystalised…in the house plans designed for the Ladies’ Home Journal in 1900 and 1901. Its elements were now established: an open ground-plan (sic) contained within a horizontal format comprising low-pitched roofs and low bounding walls – the low profile being integrated deliberately into the site, in strong contrast to the vertical chimneys and internal double height volumes.”\(^{206}\)

At this stage, the syntax between site (environment) and building (where human occupation exists) seemed complete and manifest itself in an organic whole; a final resolution of an architectonic ideal.

That there were, at the same time, other architectural ideas happening elsewhere on the European continent was not surprising. If Richardson, Sullivan and Wright et al advanced the American ideal, then the same could be said of the protagonists of the Arts and Crafts Movement in England such as William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones, the social radicalization of the Garden City by Ebenezer Howard in 1898\(^{207}\), for instance. Howard’s political circle consisted of Fabian Socialists such as Bernard Shaw and the Webbs, Sydney and Beatrice\(^{208}\). Although Howard’s Garden City did not follow the Fabian creed to the letter, it was nevertheless “at once practical and ameliorative”.\(^{209}\) This slight departure from “the letter of Fabianism”\(^{210}\) might have also been due to the fact that Howard was equally influenced by other thinkers such as the “anarchist Peter Kropotkin

\(^{204}\) Ibid. p62.
\(^{205}\) Ibid. (Note: This was the last project that Wright and his team completed in Chicago. The design of the Imperial Hotel, Tokyo was largely based on the Gardens.
\(^{206}\) Ibid. p60.
\(^{207}\) Frampton, op.cit., p47,
\(^{208}\) Ibid.
\(^{209}\) Ibid.
\(^{210}\) Ibid.
and the American economist Henry George, who in his Progress and Poverty of 1879 had advocated a single tax on all ground rent.”

In the tradition that began with Pugin (Fig. 18) and Ruskin, the Arts and Crafts Movement also spawned the likes of Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo and C. R. Ashbee to name but a few. Mackmurdo (1851 – 1942) who spent his early architectural days with the architect James Brooks (who was known for his design of Anglican churches) also studied drawings with John Ruskin. It was Ruskin’s influence and Mackmurdo’s subsequent visit to Renaissance Italy that led to his (Macmurdo’s) active involvement with the Art and Craft Movement. Mackmurdo together with other fellow artists such as Selwyn Image founded the Centre Guild, a cooperative that was set up to promote the work of artists and architects alike. C.R.Ashbee’s Guild and School of Handicraft was modelled on Mackmurod’s Centre Guild. Ashbee who met Wright at the turn of last century was most impressed by the latter’s innovative ideas of cities, in particular Wright’s Broadacre City proposal.

Figure 18 Pugin’s St. Patrick Cathedral, Parramatta, Sydney, NSW (Originally designed in 1842 construction period 1854-81). The present cathedral has undergone a number of renovations. The tower and spire were spared from demolition in 1935. An aisled clerestoried church designed by Sydney architect Clement Glancy was added to the tower with details that were faithful to the original design. A fire in 1996 gutted most of the building. It has since been repaired and the Glancey additions now form part of the new cathedral which was opened in 2003 (www.puginfoundation.org/buildings/).

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211 Ibid.
212 Ibid. p42.
213 Ibid. p48. Note: Although Frampton makes no particular reference to Wright’s Broadacre City proposal in this context, he notes that “Ashbee styled himself a Constructive Specialist.” And that as a result of a meeting with Wright, Ashbee was “confirmed in his belief that the resolution of the cultural dilemma posed by modern industry depended on a proper use of the machine.”
Wright’s fame, by this time, had spread across the Atlantic due mainly to the publication of his work in a Dutch publication and had attracted considerable attention. The German architect Werner Moser had praised Wright’s urban vision of Broadacre City as the “landscape city – Stadtlandschaft”. Wright’s engagement of his utopian Broadacre City, which was the embodiment of his organic architectural ideals, was widely received in Europe. Wright himself had benefited by working with European architects such as Antonin Raymond, Rudolph M. Schindler and Erich Mendelsohn.

It was Wright’s vision that a self-sustaining community such as Broadacre City would eliminate pollution and the usual overcrowding associated with high-density cities. There was documented evidence how Wright’s Broadacre City would also solve the modern inner city’s burden, that of poverty. Unlike Howard, for instance, Wright’s architectural ideals were not as politically motivated as some of his contemporaries in the Arts and Craft movement. All the same, Broadacre City was to “create community that was self-sustaining and would blend into the landscape it encompassed.” and, by “infusing social and political ideals into his theme of organic architecture, Wright created a complete visualisation of this planned community.” It was the precursor of the sustainable living environment ideals of the late 20th century that governments of various political inclinations are still being confronted. The idea of government-donated one acre to “every man, woman and child” for cultivation that Wright promulgated as the nucleus of his ideal organic city complimented the American economist and social philosopher Henry George’s idea of the single land tax.

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214 Young, Pastricia M., “Frank Lloyd Wright: His Search For The Perfect Blend of Nature and City in His Model of Broadacre City”, a thesis presented to the Faculty of California State University Dominguez Hills in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree Master of Arts in Humanities, Fall 1997.
216 Young, op.cit., p16.
217 Ibid.
218 Ibid.
219 George’s single tax idea was based on the notion that land belongs to everyone (i.e. public resource) and not only to land speculators. Georgists, followers of George’s social and economic ideas believe in the virtues of private enterprise such as its encouragement for people to benefit from what they produce, it is the “insidious linking together of natural and public resources, monopolies, franchises, that produce unfair domination and autocracy” that is objectionable. (From The Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, “Who was Henry George” by Agnes George de Mille, http://www.progress.org/books/george.htm
Wright’s Broadacre City was a response to Corbusier’s Ville Radieuse (1932). Le Corbusier was equally adamant that cities should be designed for people; “The harmonious city must first be planned by experts who understand the science of urbanism. They must work out their plans in total freedom from partisan pressures and special interests: once their plans are formulated, they must be implemented without opposition.”²²⁰ While Howard and Wright rejected the notion of a modern city and instead attempted to replace them with an organic approach, Corbusier embraced the idea of a liveable cities where the buildings “are raised on stilts to permit the countryside to run freely below and freeways are likewise raised above ground to permit unimpeded flow of pedestrian movement. It was the original tower-in-the-park project.”²²¹ It was as inorganic, artificially conceived by humans as Wright’s was organic: as harmonious and at one with the environment. These were the two opposing architectural ideas that dominated the teaching of architecture as early as the late 40s to the 50s and 60s in Australia and particularly in Melbourne where, while they were not consciously delivered, they were promulgated as a teaching background. The choice of heroes were simply divided into two camps: those who followed the inorganic approach would steer themselves towards the work of Mies van de Rohe, Le Corbusier with the Bauhaus as their primary repository of ideas. Others who subscribed to the organic ideals were inclined to be the devotees of the work of Frank Lloyd Wright (US), Walter Burley Griffin (Australia), Pietro Belluschi (USA), Harwell Hamilton Harris (Fig 19) and Bernard Maybeck.

²²⁰ Littlewood, Alan, from a lecture “Jane Jacobs: Ideas that matter” delivered in October 1997 at St. Lawrence, Toronto, Canada. Littlewood, a Toronto architect taught at the University of Toronto’s School of Architecture.
²²¹ Ibid.
Figure 19 Clarence Wyle Residence, Ojai, Calif. (1948) Architect: H.H.Harris (from Andrews’ “Architecture, Ambition, and Americans” P281 Photograph Andrews).

The Griffins’s, Walter and Marion, arrival in Australia signalled the direct link between Wright’s organic notions into the relatively untapped and less sophisticated world of the architecture of the Antipodean. True, Grounds and Mewton’s Peninsula Houses had, decades after the Griffins left the local architectural scene, some of the essence of Wright’s prairie houses. But they were less consistent and lacked the kind of religiosity that drove the American architects; Richardson, Sullivan or even Wright. The work of the Australians was more accommodating of the harsh and unforgiving landscape rather than some deep-rooted notion about the democratization of their society.

It was also a time where each country’s native population were completely ignored and often exploited. Australian pioneers in urban design were least interested in the fate of a neglected indigenous minority, how they were housed or whether there ever was an architectural solution to this disgraceful episode of the growth of our nation, or as the prevailing opinion (at the time) would have it, such urban concerns are the province of social engineers.  

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222 In the last decade or so, the determinant factors of what constituted Australian architecture education had been dominated by career academics who managed to hold senior positions in academia, but who were also devoid of an historical understanding of the evolution of a vernacular architectural history. While the idea of heterogeneity was vigorously proposed in the early 90s, most schools of Architecture lack the open discourses and room for dissent. Therefore, it is the intention of this thesis to demonstrate that the birth of a significant architecture in Melbourne did not begin as some would us believe a decade or so ago. Nor did the radical changes of architecture education begin to display its innovative teaching
But the idea of an environmentally friendly and a ‘holistic’ lifestyle that Wright promoted had its critics as well. Wright’s detractors claimed that there was no diversity in the Broadacre City philosophy, at least not enough to cater for the diverse geographical and climatic conditions that exist in the American Continent.\footnote{Young, op.cit., p26.} Wright had introduced his Usonian residential models for the housing of his Broadacre City; the initial idea of the Usonian was to design affordable housing for the masses. It was “a design for the construction of inexpensive homes”\footnote{Ibid. p23.} that incorporated Wright’s \textit{organic} principles.

Wright had a great respect for the way Native Americans related with their organic environment. To Wright, the way Native Americans related to a peaceful and organic world was “proof that happiness can be found in organic lifestyles”\footnote{Ibid. p31.} and “to the Native American, land was a precious commodity and no one person had singly owned land.”\footnote{Ibid.} This notion of landownership and its adjunct relationship is similar to that of the Australian Aborigines: the idea of living in harmony with the land. While there is no evidence that the Australian counterparts who practiced what might be described as the ‘Wrigthian’ philosophy inherited such cultural predilections, they were cognizant of the contextual value of the harmonious relationship between buildings and land.\footnote{Boyd writing in “The Puzzle of Architecture” (P60) also referred by Goad in his doctoral thesis “The Modern House in Melbourne 1945 – 1975” rather perfunctorily referred to organic architecture as philosophically humanistic rather than based on any architectural ideals in the first instance, a distinction which immediately places the origins of Wright’s \textit{organic} approach in the realm of transcendental fundamentalism.}
1.6 The Architectural Frontier in the West.

Meanwhile, out in the West, in the idyllic landscape of California and from the ‘diversities’ that Mumford referred to, architects like Bernard Maybeck, the brothers Greene, Charles Summer and Henry Mather, who turned the humble Californian bungalow into “a work of art”, were practicing and adding to the kaleidoscope of a modern American Architecture. Maybeck who was five years older than Wright, had by that time already made a name for himself with his First Church of Christ Scientist in Berkeley and the romantic Palace of Fine Arts for the Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco. While the Greene brothers designed David Berry Gamble’s (whose father was one of the founders of Proctor and Gamble) mansion in Pasadena in 1909 and Standard Oil’s Charles Pratt’s winter home at Ojai. This period of American architectural history, at the turn of last century, also produced one of the country’s inventive architects of the time, Irving Gill, who Andrews described as “an intransigent individualist (who) might have ended as a Jacobite had it not been for his didactic impulse.” Gill’s path crossed Wright’s in Louis Sullivan’s office. From all account, it was a meeting of two strong-minded people. Gill’s sudden departure from Sullivan’s office was attributed to sartorial reasons rather than any deep-seated architectural conflict with Wright. However, Gill’s departure before the opening of the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago – for which the practice of Sullivan and Adler had designed the transportation building – was due to illness.

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229 Ibid.
231 Ibid. p268.
232 Ibid. “He (Gill) might never have moved from Chicago to the West Coast if he had not had an unfortunate collision with Frank Lloyd Wright. Gill was so indiscreet, so Wright tells us, as to show up for work sporting the hairdo and the flowing black tie which the future lord of “Taliesin” had made very much his own. “Wright did acknowledge that Gill was very much an individualist as himself. He also commented that Gill’s “individual character came out to good purpose in the good work he did later in San Diego and Los Angeles. His work was a kind of elimination which if coupled with a finer sense of proportion would have been a real contribution to our so-called modern movement.” This was praise indeed coming from someone like Wright.
233 As quoted in the TV station KPBS Television publicity material by Michael Good advertising a documentary program on Gill’s life - Fundamental Truths: The Architecture of Irving J. Gill -. According to Good, Gill’s nephew Louis Gill “chalked the departure (from Sullivan’s office) up to overwork”. (From Why Do We Know So Little About Irving Gill? Irving Gill Central website.)
The Ecole des Beaux-Arts-educated Maybeck (Fig. 20) upon his return from Europe joined Carrer and Hasting, a newly formed practice.²³⁴ Maybeck was a friend of Thomas Hasting who had earlier worked for the practice of McKim, Mead and White. During his lifetime, Maybeck completed a number of significant buildings that signaled the importance of the architecture of the San Francisco Bay Area²³⁵, amongst them were the result of the Hearst fortune patronage – Hearst Hall bath house, University of California (built December 1907, subsequently destroyed in 1922), George H. Boke house (1902) with which Maybeck successfully combined vertical and horizontal features of the elevation that are “remarkably exciting and contemporary”²³⁶.

Figure 20 Palace of Fine Arts, San Francisco, Calif. (1915) top), Church of Christ Scientist, Berkeley, Calif. (1912) bottom) both designed by Bernard Maybeck (from Andrews P269, photographs by Andrews). The important place that Irving John Gill (Fig. 21) occupied in this tableau of architectural endeavours was the role he played in “the company of such architects as his

²³⁵ Ibid. pp 239 – 250.
²³⁶ Ibid. pp 74 – 75. (Note: Maybeck also played a brief yet significant part in the birth of Canberra. His competition entry drawings for the capitol city also contained proposals for the building of temporary structures to “shorten the delay between conception and realisation in large scale planning” (P 193) – a concept which he developed for housing the industrialist J.L. Brookings’ timber mill workers. In 1915, at a reception lunch held in honour of Alfred Deakin, the Australian Prime Minister at the time, Maybeck mentioned to the PM’s wife that he disagreed with Walter Burley Griffin’s choice of the site of the parliament house. The remark led to Deakin meeting with Maybeck whose proposal for the building of temporary structures appealed to the PM. Maybeck followed this by establishing a series of communications with “three successive prime ministers, a premier and the High Commissioner, which lasted over e period of more than seen years” (P 193). Maybeck’s attempt to wrest the commission away from Griffin failed. Griffin was made aware of this by the new incoming PM, Bill Hughes (1917). It was a reflection of Griffin’s character that despite Maybeck’s seemingly underhanded attitude, he (Griffin) did not totally condemn the scheme. The onslaught of the war eventually prevented the two architects to meet each other. It also delayed the construction of Australia’s capitol city.
Viennese contemporary Adolf Loos\textsuperscript{237}. Accordingly, both architects from two different continents “espoused an architecture of rational \textit{sachlichkeit}\textsuperscript{238} and minimalist restraint.”\textsuperscript{239} Both Loos and Gill became the inspiration for the up and coming generation of architects such as Richard Neutra and Rudolph Schindler.\textsuperscript{240}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure21.jpg}
\caption{Irving Gill’s Residence of Miss Ellen Scripps, La Jolla, Calif. (1917) From Andrews, photograph Irving Gill).}
\end{figure}

Destiny might have decreed that when Gill moved to Chicago in search of an architectural El Dorado, having been apprenticed in the practice of Ellis G. Hall\textsuperscript{241}, by “securing a job in the Chicago office of Joseph Silsbee, formerly a partner of Ellis Hall’s in Syracuse.”\textsuperscript{242} It was coincidental that Silsbee was the architect of a small Unitarian family chapel for Wright’s relatives in Spring Green, Wisconsin. It was also in Silsbee Chicago office that Wright was briefly employed until he moved on to the “even more prestigious firm of Adler & Sullivan, which, unlike Silsbee’s mainly residential practice, focused on the design of the tall commercial towers that would come to be called skyscrapers”.\textsuperscript{243}

\textsuperscript{238} In this context, the German word \textit{sachlichkeit} means ‘the new functionalism’.
\textsuperscript{239} Ibid. p13.
\textsuperscript{240} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{241} It was almost common to the young aspiring future architects of Gill’s generation, impatient with the formalities of schools of architecture, honed their skills by working rather than studying. The apprenticeship was then an accepted alternative to going to an architectural school.
\textsuperscript{242} Thomas S. Hines, op.cit., p35.
\textsuperscript{243} Ibid.
By 1891, Gill left Silsbee and worked for Sullivan where he also came under the supervision of Wright who, by this time, was the chief draftsman of the practice. While employed in the practice of Adler and Sullivan, Gill “worked closely with Sullivan on the design of the Transportation Building for the Chicago World’s Columbian Exposition”. It was also during his Chicago sojourn that Gill was exposed to such significant building as Sullivan’s Wainwright Building in St. Louis (1890, the year before Gill joined Sullivan’s office), Burnham & Root’s Monadnock Building (1889-91), Henry Hobson Richardson’s Marshall Field Wholesale Store 1885 – the building which impressed Sullivan with its simplicity and Wright’s Winslow House which was “completed the year Gill left Chicago”.

Meanwhile, the mantel of greatness which was Sullivan’s slowly fell upon the shoulders of an emerging architectural genius, Frank Lloyd Wright. Sullivan’s legacy was the metamorphosis of a “refined humanistic culture with the religious strength and faith of the American pioneer” that evolved as an “organic concept of architecture”. For Sullivan truly believed that, like life itself, buildings “should be conceived as living entity” in harmony with their surroundings. It became Wright’s life-long commitment to spread this messianic belief in what constituted, in his mind, the true destiny of American architecture.

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244 Ibid. p36.
245 Ibid. p37.
246 Zevi, op.cit., p84.
247 Ibid.
248 Ibid.
1.7 The Architecture of the Bay Area: a modern regionalism.

As previously noted in this research topic, an architectural ‘movement’ that was unique to the region was simultaneously also advancing modern architecture in the American West. Led by individualists such as Maybeck et al\textsuperscript{249}, the ‘movement’ was more a collection of diverse architectural minds whose work transcended the boundaries that Wayne Andrews describes as Jacobites and Veblenites. Among the practitioners who pioneered California’s Modern architecture, Maybeck, Gill, the Greene brothers, followed by Wright, Harwell Hamilton Harris and William Wurster (both of whom were Californians) was Pietro Belluschi. It was Harris’ architectural lineage that stretched back to Richardson and Olmsted by way of Wright.\textsuperscript{250} Harris served his early ‘apprenticeship’ with Neutra and Schindler who at the time were practising in Los Angeles. This early experience eventually led him to abandon the European Internationalists and wholly embraced the Prairie creed of organicism. Although Harris’s career took a different turn in later years – more inclined towards the orientalism of Greene and Greene’s work – Wright’s (almost) canonical Hollyhock House which was built in 1920s maintained its strong influence on the emerging architectural stellar of the Pacific Rim.\textsuperscript{251}

This was also a time when the issue of whether the architecture of the American West was part of a regional or national development. It was also contentious at the time whether Modernism was brought into America by the European émigrés, Schindler, Neutra, Gropius et al, or found its origin in the work of the so-called forgotten homegrown heroes such as Maybeck and Gill.

Harris all the while maintained that the regional focus was always the “locus of a transforming modernity”\textsuperscript{252} in the area. All the same, it is not an idle speculation to suggest that Harris’s ‘conversion’ to organic architecture began when he visited Wright’s Hollyhock House in the bosom of Olive Hill: “The experience on Olive Hill was the

\textsuperscript{249} See 1. 4 After Sullivan: An Organic Metamorphosis.
\textsuperscript{250} Frampton, Kenneth, Foreword to Harwell Hamilton Harris, p xi, University of California Press, Berkeley, USA, 2000.
\textsuperscript{251} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{252} Ibid P xii
supreme artistic epiphany it was because it made Harwell Harris feel understood, made him know that his own yearning for expression had been real and honest and right, if misplaced. Everything in his creative life was destined to take shape around this single event – the love of privacy, the drive toward sculptural form, the respect for nature. After the Hollyhock House it was just a matter of time before Harris switched from sculpture to architecture”.253

The notion of an American home-grown evolution of Modernism was further confirmed by Talbot Faulkner Hamlin, American architectural historian, as quoted by Jean Murray Bangs writing in “Architectural Record 100” January 1948 edition that “American life has most truly developed along its peculiar and most characteristic lines – let us say roughly along the Pacific Coast – where in general American mores as distinguished from those of Europe, are most freely accepted, there is evolving a kind of domestic architecture that is perhaps the most advanced domestic architecture in the world today.”254

It is, at least to this researcher, more than just a mere coincidence that while the debate was continuing that in 1948 an exhibition of Californian houses was being shown in Melbourne. Harris, in an accompanying note describing examples of Californian architects’ work, amongst them that of Maybeck and the Greene brothers’, wrote: “The soil in which these houses are rooted is the same soil that led to the flowering of California architecture almost 50 years ago. It is a combination of abundance, free minds, love of nature, and an unspoiled countryside. Simple as such a combination seems, it has happened but seldom in the world’s history. The eventual reward for its cultivation is a spontaneous architecture in tune with democratic aspirations.”255

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253 Germany, Lisa (ed) Harwell Hamilton Harris, op.cit., P23. It is worth noting that Harris himself who was the source of the information.
255 Ibid. The exhibition was called “Six California Architects”
In an introduction to a slide presentation of his own work to the School of Design, North Carolina State, Harris publicly acknowledged Maybeck and the Greenes’ influence on his work that was integral to the place where he grew up, California.\(^{256}\)

While it is not the intention of this chapter to dwell further into the regionalism versus Modernism debate, it would be remiss not recognize its importance in the emergence of an “intuitive native American yearning for a Modern style”.\(^{257}\)

While the regionalism debate flared on, Harris maintained a point of view that suggested that regionalism contained within its diverse architectural menu some elements that could be deemed modernistic.\(^{258}\)

The notion of houses that are “rooted” in the Californian soil, as Harris would have it, was also evident in the work of William Wurster, a Californian architect, whose early work belonged to the Spanish Colonial Revival or California Tudor genre. Marc Treib writing in *An everyday modernism: the houses of William Wurster*\(^{259}\) notes that the architect was less concerned with the theatricalities of architectural features than the spatial planning of his early houses: “spaces addressed to daily living”\(^{260}\) Although his Beaux-Arts training was evident in most of his earlier public buildings, it was the influence asserted by John Galen Howard that gave Wurster his initial Bay Area signature.\(^{261}\) It was Howard’s architectural dictum that left an impression on Wurster: classical, in the sense that it would defy changing fashions, clean, simple and, above, all

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\(^{256}\) The text of Harris’s talk – given in February 11, 1976. Among other things, Harris colourfully described the work of Maybeck and the Greenes as “natural as the earth, the sky and the vegetation. It was California and – to me – American. And even now it affects me like the Stars and Stripes suddenly encountered on the opposite side of the world. Their American quality was, of course, an important part of my liking for Whitman and Wright.”

\(^{257}\) Germany, Lisa, op.cit. P122

\(^{258}\) Ibid.


\(^{260}\) Ibid.

\(^{261}\) Ibid, P14. John Galen Howard who was a contemporary of Maybeck tended to design his residential work in the wood and shingles idiom.
devoid of ornamental gestures, but it (the building) must also be poetic without being pompous and arrogant.\textsuperscript{262}

Treib’s analysis\textsuperscript{263} of Wurster’s part in the evolution of a Bay Region style suggests that it had its precedence in Wright’s “softer modernism” as demonstrated in such projects as Fallingwater and the series of Usonian homes for example: “The origin (of this style) were certainly mixed, but the result was a flexible native style which could go over into modern architecture without any serious break. Wurster, for example, was producing straightforward, essentially modern houses well before 1932, based on good sense and the California wood tradition rather than on specific theories of design.”\textsuperscript{264} (Fig.22).

\textbf{Figure 22} Lyman House, Tiburon, 1941 (architect William Wurster from “An Everyday Modernism: The houses of Wiliam Wurster” (Marc Treib (ed)

Wurster’s early tenure with the New York firm of Delano and Aldrich would have left a considerable impression during his (Wurster’s) formative years.\textsuperscript{265} An aspect of the impression was the Beaux-Arts trained principals’ fundamental adherence to “the overriding importance of proportion in design and the possibility of realizing twentieth-

\begin{footnotes}
\item[262] Ibid. Howard declared this at the dedication for the Hearst Memorial Mining Building, 1907, as cited in David Bohn, \textit{East of these Golden Shores: Architecture of the early days of Contra Costa and Alameda Counties} (Okland Junior League of Oakland/Scrimshaw Press, 1971) P117 (Notes P76)
\item[263] Treib, Marcus, op.cit. P31
\item[264] Ibid P33 (from Elizabeth Mock \textit{Built in the USA 1932-1944} (New York, MOMA, 1944) P20 as cited by Treib.
\item[265] Ibid P155, Gebhard, David \textit{William Wurster and His Californian Contemporaries: The idea of Regionalism and Soft Modernism.}
\end{footnotes}
Wurster’s reputation as an architect gradually gained acceptance, not only in the State of California but also nationally across the United States. Publications of his houses appeared in such reputable architectural journals such as Architectural Forum, his inclusion as one of America’s prominent architects in the popular magazine *Life* confirmed his professional reputation. The magazine followed this by commissioning Wurster to design one of its “Life Houses”.

Gebhard further noted that Wurster’s reputation grew after his move to the East Coast and his appointment as Dean of Architecture at MIT. Wurster was one of the Bay Region architects whose work were the subject of an exhibition at the MOMA, NY in 1944. The exhibition which was organised by Elizabeth Mock included such Bay Region (Area) luminaries as Gregory Ain, Pietro Belluschi, Burton Cairns, Harwell Harris et al.

Although Lewis Mumford accorded Wurster the distinction as having the same status as Bernard Maybeck and Wayned Andrews named him as one of the most significant Jacobites together with the like of Harwell Harrison, there were detractors such as MOMA’s Alfred Barr who referred the architect as “an example of the ‘International Cottage Style’ while Peter Blake commented, “I think of the Bay Region Style as lots of fun…..but I don’t think it has much to do with what we should be trying to do today”.

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266 Ibid. As Aldrich noted: "In architecture more than half the fundamentals are proportion, the shaping of space and the disposition of voids and solids. Laymen should know that is what makes architecture, and not superficial details. By all means let us meet modern problems in a straightforward way, but let us not forget that in order to say new things it is not necessary for us to invent a new language” (my italics) P155.

267 Ibid P166. Wurster was one of the eight distinguished architects who were commissioned to design a so-called dream home for 4 typical American families with household incomes, at the time, ranging from US$2000 to US$ 10,000. Frank Lloyd Wright ‘Usonian-influenced’ design won the Modern House category. (Source: www.life.com/Life/dreamhouse/taliesin/dreamhouse 1938.html)

268 Ibid. Elizabeth Mock, ed. *Built in USA 1932-1944* as cited by Gebhard.

269 Ibid P166. Gebhard also writes that modernists such as Giedion and Henry-Russel Hitchcock “generally dealt with the embarrassing question of Wurster and other exponents of regionalism and soft modernism by ignoring them. In most instances, when the eastern establishment critics discussed Wurster – as John Burchard and Albert Bush-Brown did in their 1961 book, *The Architecture of America* – he was dismissed as an unfortunate romantic who was still designing picturesque buildings in the post-World War II period.” Wurster, according to the author was never acknowledged as innovative as either Neutra or Schindler (P167).

(Note: The American East v West coast parochialism is similarly enacted between the Sydney-Melbourne rivalries from everyday life style choices to architecture, as Geoffrey Woodfall pointed out how Jennifer Taylor completely ignored the contribution that Melbourne’s Chancellor & Patrick made to Australian architecture in *Australian Architecture since 1960*).
Notwithstanding the lack of critical acclaim from architectural commentators such as Scully, Frampton or Wiliam J.R. Curtis, both of whom “completely ignored Wurster and California’s version of soft modernism or presented him as someone behind the times”\textsuperscript{270}, the architect, nonetheless, managed to leave his mark in the Bay Area. Coincidentally, Wurster was not the only one who received the dubious critical snub, other Californian architects such as George Washington Smith whose Ostoff House (San Marino 1924) with its bland façade was dotted with Spanish windows as motifs, or Wallace Neff whose hacienda-like Bourne House (Pasadena 1927) certainly would have evoked Alfred Barr’s disdainful “International Cottage Style” label.\textsuperscript{271} Wurster’s body of work could well be characteristically compared with:

“The Southern California figures who came to share with their Bay Area compatriots a preference for comfortable woodsy (my italics) modernism were Harwell H. Harris, at times Lloyd Wright, Gordon Drake, and, above all, H. Roy Kelley. Harris’s strong but suggestively easygoing designs in wood (sic) or stucco always ended up being delicate, beautifully conceived pieces of sculpture………….the Southern California figure who was the closest to Wurster was H. Roy Kelley (1893-1989).”\textsuperscript{272}

By the time Wurster married Catherine Bauer in 1940, he was well and truly established as one of the leading soft modernists practising in California. His reputation was built on his ability to adapt his clients’ wishes into “spare yet emphatically comfortable, casual yet finely composed; each provided an ideal setting for the ordinary yet precious events of daily life, a setting that heightened, but never upstaged, the human events that took

\textsuperscript{270} Ibid P161.
\textsuperscript{271} Ibid P167. (Note: Gebhard in \textit{The Romance is Back} (http://www.architect.com/Publish/Romantic.html) refers to Santa Barbara’s “quirky” Hispanic-influence architecture, how its revival after the “Post Modern doldrums” failed because the architects responsible, unlike the Beaux-Arts – trained architects of the 1920s who began the fashion, were “not trained to design traditional buildings”. On a more optimistic note, Gebhard concluded that there are architects who approximate the “revivalist atmosphere of the 1920s.”
\textsuperscript{272} Gebhard also made the following observation that Lutah Maria Riggs, a Santa Barbara architect, “whose work displays some parallels to Wurster” (footnote 76, P183 of the article cited). Both Riggs and Wurster came under the tutelage of John Galen Howard at the University of California, Berkeley, both were known for their “soft version of modernism”.

place...”

simply enhanced his reputation. It might have been the combination of the need for work and his association with Catherine Bauer – who had, by then, established her reputation as a “housing reformer”- or both that led to Wurster’s to work in low-cost housing and community projects such as Carquinez Heights for the Vallejo shipyard workers. But Wurster was not the only one who benefited from his association with Bauer, she too “expanded her concerns and her work as well”. The relationship also made Wurster more conscious of the expanded role of architects. It was his contention that “it was the duty of architects to challenge the status quo – in social as well as formal terms”.

Wurster also made some valuable contribution to the academic sphere, after his return to Berkeley and eventually ‘reconfiguring’ the School of Architecture into becoming the College of Environmental Design. His academic leadership at Berkeley also revived the regionalism debate: clearly it was an attempt, on the part of Wurster (and Bauer), to reaffirm the Bay Area Style as a legitimate modern movement, a retaliation against the accusation that it was merely “Disneyesque……evoking an idyllic past, suggestive of a defensive populism, hostile towards anyone who might upset the comfortable status quo.”

While it is beyond the scope of this research to wade into the regionalism debate, it is pertinent to note that while Wurster (and his collaborative work with Bauer on public housing) was included as one of the most significant architects working in the region, his particular concern for local conditions, climatically as well materially, placed him within

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273 Wright, Gwendolyn, A Partnership: Catherine Bauer and William Wurster, P184, Treib, Marc, op.cit.
274 Ibid. P187. (Note: The relationship and influence between Bauer and Wurster, as well as Bauer’s relationship with Mumford, are comprehensively described in Gwendolyn Wright’s chapter in an everyday modernism: The Houses of William Wurster, ed. Marc Treibe as previously cited.
275 Ibid. P189.
276 Ibid. P192.
277 Ibid.. (Note: it would be interesting to compare this notion with the Melbourne architects whose work in the 60s are the focus of this thesis. Anecdotally speaking, Wurster’s philosophically driven architecture would have been regarded by some Australian architects/academics as ‘social engineering’.
278 Ibid. P197. (Note: The radical changes that were promulgated at RMIT in the early 70s, the change from an ‘ordinary’ architectural curriculum to that that embraces the environmental issues (see footnote 221).
279 For further reading on the subject of Australian regionalism refer to Winsome Callister’s A Continuing Regionalism, MA (Prelim.) Visual Arts Department, Monash University, Victoria 1985.
the realm of modern architecture in the Bay Area: or as Wurster himself had said that he was a regionalist in so far as he believed that “all buildings are on a specific site, subject to the custom and norms of that site…..(they) shouldn’t be different just to be different but they will be different if they solve the problems of the area.”

Together with Harris and Wurster, Pietro Belluschi’s part in the advent of Bay Area’s soft modernism must not be overlooked. Born to a middle class Italian family in Ancona, Belluschi arrived in America in September 1923 and enrolled in an engineering course at Cornell. Belluschi’s social connections were extensive enough to enable him to secure employment after his mediocre graduation from Cornell with an electrical engineering company. Belluschi, plagued by the wintry condition in Idaho and an ulcer that was caused by the demanding job, nine months later decided to give the West Coast a trial. Armed with the company manager’s introduction letters to a number of architectural firms, Belluschi decided to try his luck in Portland, Seattle and San Francisco. Portland was, at the time, enjoying a frantic building boom “in its half century history”. One of the letters of introduction that Belluschi carried with him was for the architectural firm of A.E. Doyle & Associates.

The prevailing architectural style in Portland was that of McKim, Mead & White of New York. Doyle became the de facto heir to that East Coast architectural tradition of “highly sophisticated, well-designed mostly classical buildings, characterized by the perfectly scaled, balanced proportions and fine detailing for which McKim, Mead and White were known”. It was also Doyle’s early apprenticeship to the New York practice of Henry Bacon – the designer of Washington’s Lincoln Memorial – and his attendance at Columbia University, together with the winning of a scholarship that enabled him to

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282 Ibid. PP18-20.
283 Ibid.
284 Ibid.
attend the American School of Archaeology in Athens, culminating in a grand tour of Europe that contributed to his eventual professional success as a leading architect in Portland.\

Belluschi joined Doyle’s firm in 1925 – at the time that Doyle was already suffering from the Bright disease that would eventually claim his life three years later – and was able to take advantage of his Italian background, given Doyle’s penchant for Greek and Italian influences. It was also a cultural advantage for Belluschi, especially in a social environment that constantly looked to Europe for inspirations. Belluschi also met and worked with Charles Greene in Doyle’s office. Belluschi had a grudging respect for Greene’s draftsmanship but was “privately contemptuous of Greene’s attempt to imitate traditional Italian forms”\(^{287}\), as it was often the case with so many architects whose imagination was dominated by the Beaux-Arts tradition.

While there was no documented evidence of the precise moment of Belluschi’s embarkation into Modernism, Portland Museum saga (Fig.23) could well be his architectural defining moment.\(^{288}\) In an effort to win over his client with his modern solution for the museum, Belluschi sought Frank Lloyd Wright’s advice and support. The museum building committee wanted a Georgian building while Belluschi’s solution was modern and functional: “There is really no argument against a person’s taste. The worst part was that they were so nice about it and so unmovable………In this country we are inevitably kicked between fashion and dead tradition.”\(^{289}\) Wright’s response was positive and he also commended Belluschi for his stance and commitment to modernity.

By the time the Portland Art Museum was almost completed, the effect of the depression was beginning to take its toll as work obtained by the Doyle practice was diminishing. It was at this time (October 1932) that Belluschi decided to return to Italy, presumably to escape the depressing economic environment, as he could live cheaper in Italy with his

\(^{286}\) Ibid. P21.
\(^{287}\) Ibid. P23.
\(^{288}\) Ibid.P54.
\(^{289}\) Ibid. P60. Belluschi’s letter to Wright, July 3, 1931 as cited by Clausen.
family, or an opportunity to culturally revitalize himself. However, a year later Belluschi returned to Doyle’s office. The Depression was, by this time, at its lowest point. In order to pass the idle time productively, Belluschi designed a studio cottage for his friend Harry Wents the, who gave him shelter, since he returned to the US. It was a simple cottage, with an open plan that was spatially divided by alcoves and partitions rather than walls that linked the adjacent private courtyard with its interior - “Like the seaside cottage Doyle had designed for Wents close to a decade and a half earlier at Neahkanie, it proved seminal.”

![The Portland Art Museum](image.png)

**Figure 23** The Portland Art Museum (1932) Pietro Belluschi (from Wikipedia, Pietro Belluschi)

As it has been previously mentioned, this was also the time of a vigorous debate on regionalism characteristics of the Bay Area architecture. There was a revival of both the economy and national identity under the vestiges of Roosevelt’s New Deal: “Communities throughout the country after decades of looking abroad for cultural direction were urged to return to their roots and to re-establish their regional identity.” This was a move that was not only encouraged and supported by the Federal Government, but was also considered by the West as a “reaction not only against European influences, but also against the hegemony of the architectural establishment on the East Coast.” The undercurrent of the advent of this regionalism was perceived by

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290 Ibid. Pp64-69.  
291 Ibid. P82.  
292 Ibid. P84.  
293 Ibid.
Meredith Clausen as not only a “celebration of indigenous American culture”\textsuperscript{294} but also Emersonian in its ideals: “with the image of American artist deriving energy straight from nature, free to set his own standards and create his own norms”\textsuperscript{295} (Fig.24). All this activity was followed by a series of public exposures of the work of the Bay Area architects in such august places as the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1933.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{image.png}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{294} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{295} Ibid. NB: Pluralistically speaking, this notion of transcendentalism was not reflected in the work of architects such Geoffrey Woodfall et al in the 60s – 70s.
Part 2  The Australian and American Connection

2.1  The Transference of Ideas.

Melbourne was established as a free settlement in 1834, three years before the American architect Henry Hobson Richardson was born (1838 – 1886). By the time the Australian goldfields in NSW and Victoria were opened in the early years of the 19th Century (1850s), Australia had already prospered on the back of Spanish Merinos in the early 1800 that eventually led to the establishment of the sheep industry in every colony by 1830. But the discovery of gold also catapulted these early British colonies into “economically wealthy and culturally sophisticated parts of the Empire” as well as becoming desirable destinations for fortune hunters all over the world.

It was the discovery of gold on the two continents in the mid-19th century that established the beginning of a trans-Pacific connection, politically as well as economically, that eventually marked the development of transference of architectural ideas between America and Australia.

The discovery of gold in the fields of California took place a couple of years earlier than that in Australia. The news that there was gold in ‘them thar hills’ soon spread across the Pacific and drew fortune hunters and seekers of wealth like bees to a honey-pot. As important as the beginning of the Pacific connection was, it was the discovery of gold that started it all; the ignobility of a mass exodus to the mythical El Dorado.

Historically speaking, the connection between Australia and the West Coast of America was first established by the French explorer Jean-Francois de Galaup, Comte de La Perouse who arrived in Botany Bay in 1788 having surveyed the Pacific region, its

“native people, flora, fauna and geology (and) had two years earlier visited the Spanish settlement at Monterey Bay”\textsuperscript{299} on the West Coast of America. Later in 1791, George Vancouver, an English explorer surveyed the southwest coast of Australia and while searching “an eastward passage to the Great Lakes, and a site for an English settlement north of San Francisco Bay”\textsuperscript{300} had used Port Jackson as a “supply base for (his) expedition while surveying the North American west coast.”\textsuperscript{301}

At the same time, as trade between North America and China increased its frequency, Monterey in California became an important port for the trading ships that plied their trade between the two continents. Apart from the trading ships, there were whaling ships that harvested the abundance of the Pacific, all needed ports that were in relative close proximity for repairs and provisions; the ports in Sydney and Melbourne along the Eastern seaboard provided those facilities. \textsuperscript{302} Soon the sea lanes between the two continents, North America and Australia, became crowded with trading ships ferrying goods and fortune hunting passengers.

There was also a different kind of precedence that signalled the transference of ideas between the two countries: “a group of interconnecting prefabricated timber frame houses believed to be of Australian origin, which stood at the corner of Webster Street and Munras Avenue, Monterey are said to have the state’s first timber frame buildings.”\textsuperscript{303}

Van Diemen’s Land played an important role in this burgeoning trade exchange between the two continents, Australia and North America. Although Sydney was often credited for having established this trade connection, The role of Van Diemen’s Land in the “export

\textsuperscript{299}A F Rolfe *California. A History of*, pp98 – 99 as quoted by Barrett, pp16-17.

\textsuperscript{300}California Historical Quarterly, 26 (3), (September 1947), p279 Barrett p17 footnote.

\textsuperscript{301}Anderson, Bern, Surveyorbof the Sea: The Life and Voyages of Captain George Vancouver pp 122, 124-126, 165 and 174, Barrett p17 footnote.

\textsuperscript{302}The story how trade between Australia and North America evolved was comprehensively described in Barrett’s Masters thesis. It was mainly due to the British East India Company’s preference to trade in the richer markets of India and China – the Company held the exclusive trading rights from “the Cape of Good Hope to the Straits of Magellan” that included Australia – that “NWS and Van Diemen’s Land had to rely on the infrequent visits by United States vessels (that) traded their goods from China for seal skins.” (Barrett, p17).

\textsuperscript{303}Barrett, op.cit. P18 (Claims that Australians introduced timber frame constructions to California before the Gold rush are, according to Barrett disputed due to the conflicting accounts of events, Barrett’s 1.4 The Bushton Myth).
of building materials to California is often overlooked.” In fact, Van Diemen’s Land exported “three times the number of prefabricated houses that New South Wales did.”

By the middle of the 19th Century, the connection that began with the discovery of gold in the two continents resulted in the number of Australian labour that took part in the building and “economic transformation of California from a former Mexican province to a state of the Union.” (31st State, September 9, 1850). The flow-on effect of the gold rushes in the two continents was naturally the migration of people across the Pacific: “The influx of people into Australia from California had a marked effect on Victoria during the gold rush. Melbourne’s development from a town into a wealthy modern city in the early 1850s saw it compared with San Francisco.”

One other factor that played an important role in bridging the gap between the two continents – although the frequency between them was significantly reduced after the euphoria of the discovery of gold – was the American transcontinental railways system that virtually cut the travelling time between Australia and her traditional trading partners such as Britain via the Suez Canal route. The travelling time between Australia and Britain via the American route across the continent was at least two to three weeks faster than through the traditional Suez Canal journey.

By the 20th century, almost five decades had elapsed since the first cries of jubilant gold diggers rang through the Californian goldfields, the state had become part of the United States. And dotted right across the Pacific were the annexed territories of the United

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304 Ibid. P32.
305 Ibid. Barrett also describes that James Thomson, an architect from Hobart, and someone else named E. Gilbert exported the first batch of prefabricated houses from Van Diemen’s Land to California (p 33); these first exchanges were not that of ideas but pure business enterprise.
306 Ibid. P46. California was ceded by Mexico under the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo that was concluded February 2, 1848 and subsequently proclaimed July 4, 1848. Until December 20, 1849 California was under a military government. During that time until it achieved its statehood it was never declared a territory.
307 The comparison, as noted by Barrett, was tenuous as (quoted by Barrett) Margaret Carnegie in Pacific Gold, California 1848 Australia 1851 only made scant reference to the Victorian goldfields. It was the Sydney Morning Herald of 27 September 1853 that had made the bold reference that Barrett actually referred to, Barrett P61.
308 Ibid. Pp 66 – 68.
This connection between North America and Australia which began as a commercial enterprise soon developed into the forging of an architectural link. At the turn of last century, the Australian architectural landscape that hitherto was dominated by European influences was beginning to be filled with new ideas from across the Pacific. Even Henry Hobson Richardson’s architectural innovations that touched the creative hearts and minds of luminaries such as Louis Sullivan found their way in the Equitable Life Assurance Society of the USA buildings in Melbourne (1892) and Sydney (1890), both designed by the Austrian-born American architect Edward Raht. The buildings clearly displayed Richardson’s Romanesque-styled influence in their “giant arched facades in rusticated stonework and the interior steel framework provided an example of advanced American design and constructional principles.” The establishment of this connection is hardly surprising, given that Richardson, Sullivan and Wright are known to have been the major players in America’s contribution to the emerging modern movement at the time.

By the turn of the 20th century, the architectural style of Chicago and New York was prominent in buildings in urban Australia including the landscaping of their surroundings. While the ubiquitous Romanesque arches that decorated many of the office building elevations could be considered as simplified versions of Richardson’s style, some similarities could be found in the work of Boston trained architect John Horbury Hunt who arrived in Sydney in 1863 and joined the practice of Sydney architect Edmund Blacket.
Hunt whose life and work was celebrated by the Museum of Sydney in an exhibition titled *John Horbury Hunt, Radical Architect 1838 – 1904*, was born in Canada and trained in Boston. His arrival in Sydney in 1863 marked the beginning of four decades of architectural work that was distinctive and relatively speaking, radical to Sydney and its region. Hunt was declared to have “sowed the seeds of modern architecture in Australia”. Hunt’s distinctive architectural work owed much to the way he located the buildings to create “dramatic presence with their siting, asymmetrical balance, excellent brickwork and quality craftsmanship. Hunt was at the forefront of a worldwide movement where every brick and board was placed for a structural purpose, not for ornamentation.”

Some of the architectural legacy that Hunt left included the Convent of the Sacred Heart at Rose Bay, St. Peter’s Cathedral, Armidale, Victoria House for Farmer & Co., Pitt Street, Sydney, Rouse Hill House (stable and carriage room), Rouse Hill, NSW, Cranbrook House, Double Bay, NSW (Fig.25). Hunt joined Edmund Blacket’s practice in 1863 and played a significant role in the designs that came out of the practice. The Smithfield, London-born Blacket who was appointed as Colonial architect in 1849 arrived in Sydney 6 years earlier, although he originally intended to settle in New Zealand. Through a series of introductory letters, Blacket’s first job was as a building inspector and teacher in Anglican schools. In 1854 Blacket resigned his position as building inspector and began his own practice with a commission to design the central administration building for Sydney University. Although Blacket was self-taught, the façade of his university building is still regarded as one of the finest examples of Gothic revival architecture in Australia.

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316 Ibid.


318 Ibid.
At the time of Hunt’s emergence as an important architect, at least in NSW, he had gathered a growing following among the younger practitioners. There was more than a hint of Henry Hobson Richardson’s influence in Hunt’s work. Projects such as Cranbrook Cottage in Rosebay (1873 – 75) with its elaborate use of brickwork, shingle-line walls and crafted turned timber work or Hunt’s own house “with its shingled upper walls, stone base, decorative ridge tiles turned timber posts and elaborate brick chimney was a most unusual house for the early 1870s in Australia.”

Hunt’s architecture parallels with the growth of organic architecture in America. Although Tanner claimed that Hunt’s architecture, as in his (Hunt’s) famous “Camelot”(1892), showed the influence of the English Arts and Crafts architecture, notably by the likes of Charles Francis Annesley Voysey (1857 – 1941), Edwin Lutyens (1869 – 1944) and M.H.B. Scott of the 1890s. Voysey whose work extended to wallpaper designs, fabric and furnishing material was a prominent member of the English Arts and Crafts Movement. As an architect he avoided the prevailing historical style and chose instead a more simple approach such as his liberal use of “white rough rendered walls with horizontal ribbon windows and huge pitched roofs (are) recognised for their simplicity, originality and total abandonment of historical tradition.”

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319 Tanner, op.cit., p 54.
320 Ibid.
321 [http://www.visitcumbria.com/voysey.htm](http://www.visitcumbria.com/voysey.htm), Charles Francis Annesley Voysey. Another example of the Arts and Crafts Movement was also present in the work of Baillie-Scott, his extensive use of a more modern open plan seemed closer to Wright’s Prairie House style as in the case of Voysey’s horizontal ribbon windows, for example, and massive chimney stacks – an architectural signature that decades later
This so-called “abandonment of historic tradition” and a regional interpretation of the Arts and Crafts Movement was further extended in Australian cities in the late 1880s by such architects as James Barnet, the Colonial Architect, and Walter Liberty Vernon who became the NSW Government Architect after Barnet.

Building activities are the essential by-product of a nation’s economy. Such was the case when the Western world was hit by the economic depression of the 1890s. For the next few decades – that included the 1914-18 Great War – building activities slowed down across the world and the blanket of economic doom also covered the Australian continent. But what did take place was the demand for housing from a growing marriageable population; the Australian urban sprawl had begun. By the time the First World War had ended, the kaleidoscope of housing styles, from Richardsonian Romanesque to home grown interpretations of the English Queen Anne, was further extended to include the ubiquitous Californian bungalow.

It was the Sydney architect, American-born Jefferson Jackson who “grafted some of its features in a timorous and far from successful way on to what were basically and mainly Queen Anne houses”. Soon a plethora of adaptations, variations and combinations of the bungalow sprang up designed by some notable and not so notable architects. Among those who contributed to the popularization and stylization of the bungalow were names such as Horbury Hunt. The familiar trademark of the bungalow was dotted all over (predominantly) Eastern Australia: the “simple, unadorned, low-pitched gable over the

emerged in the work of Peter Muller. Although Muller’s architectural influence could be traced directly to the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, there were aspects of his (Muller’s) work that was identified as both romantic and imbued with craft aesthetics (see Introduction, Taylor, op.cit Pp34 – 50).

Walter Liberty Vernon (1846-1914) was an English-born architect who, due to health reasons (bronchial asthma), migrated to Australia. He was in private practice for 7 years (1883 – 1890) until he was appointed government architect (NSW) on August 1, 1890. Prior to his appointment Vernon worked with Wardell on some of the latter’s Melbourne projects. It is important to note that Vernon’s appointment (1909) to the Federal Capital Advisory Board played an important role in appointing Walter Burley Griffin’s scheme as the winning design of Canberra (Extract from Peter Reynolds, Vernon, Walter Liberty (1846-1914), Australian Dictionary of Biography, Pp 320-322, Vol 12, MUP, 1990.


Freeland writing in Architecture in Australia (p227) suggests that as “the number of people reaching marriageable age had not dropped and the number of new families had increased steadily during the period of darkness, the most pressing need, because it was most personal, was always housing.”

Freeland, op.cit., pp 228 – 233,
main house with one other bold gable at right angles facing the street”. The bungalow would be sited on a rectangular block, the ordinary suburban ‘quarter acre’ block that dominated (and still does) the hopes and dreams of many young couples. This seemingly ‘watered-down’ version of Greene and Greene’s architecture without the obvious organic feel about it, almost immediately took hold of the country’s suburban imagination. But none, as far as this researcher is concerned, could match the grandeur of the Greene Brothers’ Gamble House with its “gabled roofs and gently lifted above the terrain by walls of arroyo stone and clinker brick.” In the main, the Australian Californian bungalow was not so much an architectural statement, rather it was an adopted style that suited both the climate and the housing need of the time. It was also a residential style, as popularized by home magazines that appealed to the mainstream of the population.

With the arrival of the popular Californian bungalow and the subsequent popularity of the Spanish Mission styles, North American architectural influences were becoming more entrenched. Local pioneers such as Wilson, Desbrowe-Annear, Dods, and Haddon to name but a few were the vanguard of modern architecture in Australia. Dods who was trained in Scotland would have known Norman Shaw (later they would form a close friendship) and had actually met Charles Rennie Mackintosh and would have been inspired by the latter’s work. While Dods brought with him the ideas from overseas, he did not “pioneer modern form, but like Voysey in England, he discarded historical styles and ornament.” And shades of the Chicago School that were evident in such buildings as the Bank of New South Wales in George Street, Sydney (1932), the E.S & A Bank, 

326 Ibid. P 229.
328 Freeland reaffirmed by stating that the “style (the Californian bungalow) was suitable only for a small single storey two or three bedroom house. It broke down, both functionally and aesthetically, if it became two-storey or was not placed across the block. For this reason it was restricted to lower and lower-middle class areas but such areas were in the majority anyway.” (Freeland, op.cit., p 229).
329 Richard Norman Shaw (1831-1912) Scottish-born, London-trained (Royal Academy under William Burn) whose early work was influenced by the neo-Gothic style, occupied a dominant position in the Arts and Crafts Movement. His work in domestic architecture, particularly those in the “Old English Manorial” and “Queen Anne” styles significantly inspired the formative development of both English and American domestic architecture (source: Hatje, Gerd, et al ed. Encyclopaedia of modern architecture, P256, Thames & Hudson, London, 1963.
Collins Street, Melbourne (1939 – 41) and the Bank of N.S.W., King William Street, Adelaide (1940) by Claridge, Hassell & McConnell in collaboration with Louis Laybourne-Smith were soon to follow.331

But while the general landscape of contemporary Australian architecture seemed to suggest the presence of European as well as American influences, the true bearer and most influential messenger of organic architecture that could be traced to Frank Lloyd Wright was the American Walter Burley Griffin. In the early years of the new century, right up to the start of the World War 1, Australian architecture was being held back by a universal revival of Classicism. In the case of Australia, “Most architects were hostile to the glimmerings of modern architecture and, like Lange L. Powell, one of Brisbane’s most successful architects between 1910 and 1930, preferred ‘something with a bit of pedigree’. Before 1930 the best that could be said for the profession’s production in general was that its eclecticism opened the way for more creative thought.”332 Although this architectural hiatus was short lived, thanks to the gradual infiltration of new architectural ideas, the groundwork of architectural conservatism that dominated (in the main) the domestic market remains to this day. It was just as well that the push towards a more appropriate architecture – an architecture that was more suited to the country and its psyche – was maintained by a group of heroic (heroic in the sense that the risks these practitioners took would have affected their professional livelihood) individuals such as Desbrowe-Annear, Dods, Payne and Haddon: they “stood almost alone in their attempts to formulate an architecture suitable to Australia.”333

In a sense, what they stood for was an organic Australian architecture from the various influences and inspirations, to establish a regional as well as a vernacular identity.334 It was, in other words, a vision that was less nostalgic that contributed to the widening of the door to architectural modernity in Australia.

331 Freeland, op.cit. pp 258-260.
332 Birrell, p7.
333 Ibid.
2.2 Harold Desbrowe-Annear.

Harold Desbrowe-Annear began his architectural career being apprenticed to the architectural office of William Salway\textsuperscript{335}, at a time when Melbourne began to grow into a metropolitan city. It was a time of plenty and prosperity: “Melbourne’s metropolitan ambitions were embodied in the extravagant 1880 International Exhibition housed in Reed and Barnes’ Renaissance Revival Exhibition Building.”\textsuperscript{336}

But the boom years that gave Melbourne the title of ‘Marvelous Melbourne’ soon burst and became mere fragments of a depressed economy “second only to the Great Depression of the 1930s”\textsuperscript{337} that led to the closure of a number of architects and builders’ businesses in Melbourne, while a number (of architects) left for greener and prosperous fields such as overseas or the new gold fields of Western Australia.\textsuperscript{338}

Desbrowe-Annear, however, stuck it out, as it were, and resisted the temptation to join the exodus of departing architects by remaining in Melbourne, supporting himself by teaching at the Working Men’s College (from 1888 to 1902) and devoted himself “fully into the public life of architecture and used the opportunities afforded him to refine and articulate a view of practice that was to remain with him for the rest of his life”\textsuperscript{339}: the philosophical tenets of such Gothic Revivalists, John Ruskin and Eugene Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, and such practitioners as Norman Shaw and Henry Hobson Richardson.\textsuperscript{340} Richardson who virtually pioneered the notion of spatial design was, by this time, already a most influential figure in contemporary architecture. What Desbrowe-Annear did, however, was to reinterpret the Ruskinian ideals in an Australian context by way of publishing a series of polemical discussions on the future of architecture both in practice and education.\textsuperscript{341}

\textsuperscript{336} Ibid. p6.
\textsuperscript{337} Ibid. p 11.
\textsuperscript{338} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{339} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{340} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{341} Ibid., pp 15 – 19,
“On the one hand he (Desbrowe-Annear) was attracted to Ruskin with the fervour of a recent convert, and was about to publish what amounted to a manifesto to that effect. On the other his friends were heartily sick of Ruskin and of Smith, who had dominated Melbourne’s art establishment from the pages of the Argus for long enough. Desbrowe-Annear used Ruskin to claim a place for the architect-artist; Streeton and the others saw Ruskin as an impediment to their art.”

While Desbrowe-Annear seemed clearly at odds with the prevailing ‘anti-Ruskin’ view (that was held by some of his contemporaries), his architecture was, nevertheless, also inspired by the apparent entrenchment of the English and American Arts and Crafts ideals in the work of local architects. This was evident in what Edquist describes as his (Desbrowe-Annear’s) “most enduring work, the Eaglemont houses in 1903”. The connection with Henry Hobson Richardson was also evident in Desbrowe-Annear’s house for William Warren, Manager of the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company, in East St. Kilda. Desbrowe-Annear had a high regard for Richardson whom he perceived as “the greatest modern architectural genius”.

“A comparison of the Warren House with the work of Richardson is instructive. Its composition of large dominant roof mass balanced by a tower and turreted bay on either corner has precedents in Richardson’s work, and curved sleek bow of the dining-room can be compared with both Richardson (Stoughton House, 1882-83) and the American shingle-style manner of McKim Mead and White.”

The architectural nexus between North America and Australia in general and California and Desbrowe-Annear’s in Melbourne in particular, was further forged by the employment of the balloon frame in the Eaglemont houses (Figs 26 – 28). Edquist in her

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342 Dobbs, The rise and Growth of Australian Architecture, pp 401 – 2 as quoted by Edquist , p 19. (Note: The Smith referred to in the above quotation was James Smith who was the Argus “Ruskinian art and drama critic” (p18).
343 Ibid, p 11.
344 Ibid. p 33.
345 Ibid.
seminal work *Harold Desbrow-Annear: A Life in Architecture* refers to this at some length: “Desbrowe-Annear used the balloon frame introduced into Australia from California in the mid-nineteenth century.” Although much of Desbrowe-Annear’s decorative features were largely influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement, particularly that of Viollet-le-Duc and a dash of Art Nouveau as in the house in Outlook Drive, it was the liberation of the internal spatial planning of his (Desbrowe-Annear’s) Eaglemont houses, in particular, that displayed elements of *organic* planning:

“In the Eaglemont houses, Desbrow-Annear’s combination of modern ideas about the spatial organisation of domestic dwelling with personal interpretation of the Arts and Crafts principles was to be surprisingly enduring. The sliding door was fundamental to these principles, important because it enabled the provision of a large living area for family life.”

By this time, it would have been inevitable that Australian architects such as Desbrowe-Annear who tended to push the boundaries of architectural limitations, as it were, would have been inspired by the works of the American Arts and Crafts influenced architects such as Greene and Greene, and indeed Frank Lloyd Wright.

I return to Edquist again who writes:

“Frank Lloyd Wright provided a third American source – this time in relation to the interior and its low-spreading character, and to the dominance of the hearth as the focus of the living space. Robert C. Spencer in a long appreciation of Wright in *The Architectural Review* (Boston) in 1900, summed up the impact of Wright’s Oak Park work in words that might just as easily be applied to the Eaglemont houses: ‘These modest buildings are more interesting than nine-tenths of the so-called important work’ of the present time. They embody new thought and new ideas. They have life. They express clearly and consistently certain ideals of home

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347 Ibid. p 64.
348 Ibid. p 67.
and of quiet, simple home life, and are solutions of problems which have been developing among our people of the intelligent middle class.”

While the influence of Wright’s Oak Park house seems evident in Desbrowe-Annear’s Eaglemont houses, the association of the latter’s work was closer to that of the Arts and Crafts movement rather than the legacy left by Wright’s organic architecture. All the same, both Desbrowe-Annear and Wright shared the same romantic ideals in their architecture. Wright’s work was often linked to the American Arts and Crafts movement, although he had never publicly denied nor acknowledged the association. While Desbrowe-Annear’s work was influenced by Voisey and other stylistic influences such as the use of Quattrocento elements and other classical features, they somehow placed him outside the realm of organic architecture as practiced by someone like Wright.

Figure 26 H Desbrowe-Annear, Chadwick House No.2, Eaglemont (1903 – from Harriet Edquest’s “Harold Desbrowe-Annear: A Life in Architecture”)

349 Ibid. p 70. Edquist further stated that like the inspirations (Greene and Greene’s Pasadena’s work and Wright’s Oak Park) Desbrowe-Annear had clients who were sympathetic to his architecture. The collaboration between client and architect, the mutual respect they develop, often develop into the kind of patronage that produces significant architecture. The Ames family and its relationship with Richardson comes to mind. In the case of Desbrowe-Annear it was the Tisdall family, W.H. Martin and other “established Heidelberg families” (pp 70 – 77).

350 Andrews’ reference – op.cit., p 274 - to the Jacobites as romantics, whose work was very much influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement, includes Wright whom the author refers as “the greatest of all Jacobites”.

There were other examples that clearly point the direction of Desbrowe-Annear’s work slightly away from that of, say, Maybeck or the early Gill: the country houses between 1919 and 1928 that were documented by Edquist\textsuperscript{352}, they all displayed a variety of styles ranging from Arts and Crafts (e.g. Grimwade house, Frankston, 1924) to the Gothic-inspired Delgany (Fig.29).

\textsuperscript{352} Ibid. pp 161 – 184.
“In his country and peninsular houses, Desbrowe-Annear ranged across many of the available possibilities for the rural house. In the Lansdale homesteads he reinterpreted the established fors for the rural villa in this country – the Australian vernacular bungalow homestead and the Palladian villa. Allanvale on the other hand was a hybrid of the colonial and the Arts and Crafts, possibly Prairie idioms. Both Mulberry Hill and Cruden Farm evolved into modest versions of the American colonial house of the rural south, with a Palladian inflection in the case of Mulberry Hill.”353

Figure 29 Delgany, Armitage House, Portsea (1925)

353 Ibid. p 183.
2.3 The Griffins: their part in the exchange of architectural ideals.

The Griffins, Marion Mahony and Walter Burley Griffin, were central to the transition of the forging of the architectural link that began in Chicago.

Walter Burley Griffin was 36 years old when he arrived in Australia in 1913, having won the world-wide competition for the design of Canberra, the new Australian capital city. The part that the Griffins played in furthering modern architecture in Australia and maintaining its environmental ideals was pivotal; Walter Burley Griffin in particular played a singularly important role in the transference of the architectural ideals.

Before his arrival in Australia and subsequent appointment as Federal Capital Director of Design and Construction, Griffin had already established his architectural reputation. His early years, after his graduation from the University of Illinois with a Bachelor of Science in Architecture, were spent in Chicago offices where architects like Dwight Perkins, Robert Spencer, Webster Tomlinson and Frank Lloyd Wright\textsuperscript{354} walked the same corridors. Contrary to popular belief, Griffin was not the product of Wright’s stable of young architects; on the contrary, even before Wright employed him, he had independently produced architectural as well as landscape work. Griffin’s first architectural work of significance was the W.H.Residence, Elmhurst, Illinois (Figs. 30 – 31), built in 1901-02.\textsuperscript{355}


\textsuperscript{355} Ibid. p 12.
Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony met in Wright’s Oak Park practice; a meeting that was later bonded in marriage. The Griffins were, at that time, identified as ‘belonging’ to the Prairie School, a movement that was embedded in the heart of organic architecture; its origin sprang from “the American Midwest, with the focus on suburban Chicago during the formative years and the vast reaches of rural Illinois, Minnesota, Iowa, and Wisconsin during the school’s epic period: it was a regional manifestation of the international revolt and reform then occurring in the visual arts.”

It was within this movement that Griffin’s architectural innovations are now being recognized and seen as totally independent from the influences of Wright. The common denominator that united the group of architects who belonged to the Prairie School movement was in their approach to residential design:

“The disposition of the single mass or composite massing, the shape of the low, long hipped or gable roof, the horizontal banding of windows, the emphatic belt course or shelf roof between the storeys – which often continued on one side as a lateral porch – and the broad, often forward-set foundation and surface – an inheritance from the earlier Shingle Style –

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lent horizontal unity to the design, and against these horizontals a spirited interplay was established with short vertical accents, such as piers, mullions, and subsidiary masses.”

**Figure 31** William H. Emery House, Elmhurst, Ill., 1901-02 (photo Thomas A. Heinze)

It was the convention at the time to use traditional materials such as brick, timber or plaster for residential construction. The use of steel as structural material was, generally speaking, confined to larger buildings such as banks and office construction. There were notable exceptions such as “Sullivan’s Bradley house of 1909 or Wright’s Robie house of the previous year”. Although the use of concrete was beginning to gain acceptance in smaller constructions such as Wright’s Unity Church (1906), the use of the less expensive concrete blocks was virtually pioneered by Griffin in his Page and Blythe houses in Mason City, Iowa (1912-13) that he later patented in Australia, “a system of Knitlock concrete blocks.”

The story of Griffin’s involvement in the realisation of Canberra has been well documented in Turnbull and Navaretti’s catalogue of the architect and his wife Marion Mahony’s collective architectural efforts: “*The Griffins in Australia and India*”.

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357 Ibid. P5.
358 Ibid.
360 Christopher Vernon’s contribution  *An ‘Accidental’ Australian: Walter Burley Griffin’s Australian-American Landscape Art*  (Turnbull/Navaretti Pp2 – 15) describes in some detail how the architect managed to salvage the execution of his winning design that was in danger of being corrupted by a government-formed Board consisting mainly of the Federal government’s Public Works Committee. The
As the Federal Capital Director of Design, Griffin’s move to Australia was finally confirmed. Griffin’s term of contract also enabled him to practice privately both in Australia as well as internationally. It was during the days of Griffin’s struggle with the Public Works Committee and their incessant efforts to undermine his Canberra plan that he was commissioned to design “town plans for Mossmain (Montana) and Venderhoof (British Columbia) and a campus plan for the University of New Mexico. All three were designed in parallel in Australia, for landscapes dramatically different from Griffin’s native Illinois prairies – design initiatives to civilise North America’s western frontier. Disappointingly, however, all would remain unrealised.”

The ferociousness of the Public Works Committee hostility towards Griffin’s design for Canberra extended well into 1916 – almost 4 years after Griffin was announced the winner of the competition – when a Royal Commission of Inquiry was called to investigate the charges that were levelled at Griffin by a hostile committee. Canberra today is a sad reminder of how bureaucrats and self-serving numbers men often manage to sabotage well-designed ideals. The only memory of Griffin’s involvement in the birth of a national capital, was the naming of Lake Griffin in 1963. Paul Reid in *The Griffins in Australia and India* writes:

“The Federal Capital Advisory Committee (FCAC) was established without Griffin in January 1921 and replaced by the Federal Capital Commission (FCC) in 1925. Both were staffed by Griffin’s old enemies. Continually reminded by the government that they were to build Griffin’s design, the FCAC and FCC labelled it ‘monumental’ and built their own temporary Garden Town on Griffin’s 1918 road layout. In 1927 the Australian Parliament moved from Melbourne to a provisional building directly in front of Camp Hill where it confounded all subsequent planners.”

struggle that ensued is also comprehensively documented in Paul Reid’s contribution: *Walter Burley Griffin’s struggle to implement his Canberra Plan, 1912 – 1921* (Turnbull/Navaretti Pp 18 – 25).

The battle with bureaucracy was not the only distraction that Griffin had to contend with, however major that was. Bernard Maybeck, the Californian architect who designed the Palace of Fine Arts building at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco in 1915, was one of the unsuccessful entrants for Canberra in 1911. A chance meeting at a luncheon held in honour of Alfred Deakin who was at the time Australia’s Prime Minister, Maybeck who was seated next to the PM’s wife casually commented that he thought it strange to place the (Australian) Parliament House on a hill and proceeded to engage Mrs. Deakin in a discussion about Canberra. This led to a visit by Deakin to the Maybeck’s office. It is obvious from Maybeck’s letters to Bill Hughes, who by now was Australia’s Prime Minister, several years later (1920) that Maybeck had relentlessly pursue his goal to be involved one way or another in the building of Canberra.

It was Maybeck’s contention that by adopting his idea of creating an ‘instant’ city by using timber stud frames and plasterboard lining:

“International expositions have been used for commercial development alone. They have taught us what is possible in a short time, and proved a stimulus. Building a temporary city of cement-staff and wood and not to cost more than 3,000,000 pound sterling. Build it in two years fully equipped and ready to use in 1920.”

Not only did Maybeck, in pursuing his objective to be involved in the creation of Canberra, corresponded with various members of parliament, but he also corresponded with Griffin. Griffin to his credit was very accommodating and (at least to this researcher) generous. In a letter to Maybeck dated 3 June, 1919, Griffin firmly yet succinctly explained why Maybeck’s proposed scheme for temporary structures would

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364 Deakin had suggested that Maybeck ought to present his idea for an ‘instant’ capital city to someone like Hughes whom he (Deakin) considered had some influence on matters such as the building of Canberra.
not work in Australian conditions. In the last paragraph of the same letter, Griffin alluded to his appreciation of the existence of an indigenous vernacular:

“Unfortunately so far as the Australian practice goes it is recognised as almost altogether foreign now and largely that local English type of foreignness which is climatically farthest possible removed from indigenous art. This latter is what I wish we could get the very soonest possible and my policy has been considered most full and seriously in the light of experience and history, with that object in view”.

Griffin was consistent in his appreciation of the importance of landscape and the architecture within. It was this holistic approach that nourished Griffin’s architecture and provided an indelible pattern in the development of an organic architectural ideal in Australia. An aspect of Griffin’s early work in Australia which has, only relatively recent, surfaced was the role his wife, Marion Mahony, played. We now know that it was Marion’s draftsmanship that contributed to the brilliance of the drawings that came out of Wright’s office. Mahony spent almost a decade, on and off, in Wright’s office where she was his principal draftsperson, working side by side on projects such as the “Susan Dana Lawrence house in Springfield, Illinois (1902), and the Meyer May house in Grand Rapids, Michigan (1908).”

The more personal aspects of Mahony’s personality that could have contributed to the Griffins’ collective work could be gleaned from Turnbull and Navaretti’s The Griffins in Australia and India,

“American architect Marion Mahony Griffin began work on ‘Magic of America’ when she returned to Chicago in 1939 after Walter Burley Griffin’s death in India. It was probably finished in 1949, is over a thousand pages long and has never been published.

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365 App.
366 App.
367 Turnbull/Navaretti, op.cit., P
‘Magic of America’ is an extraordinary work, but has often been dismissed as rambling and fragmentary. In reality it is contemporary and demanding, a text that challenges the reader to interpret a world of creative work, ideas, sharp commentary and personal reflection. Griffin scholar James Weirick describes its importance succinctly:

“It is in ‘Magic in America’ that the Griffins’ various attempts at changing society, changing architecture, changing individuals, are fragmented and collaged into a series of small triumphs semi-utopias, revealing sensibilities, inspiring commitments. It offers not a totality of vision but an endless array of distinct possibilities.” 368

Jeff Turnbull in his contribution to his and Peter Navaretti’s tome The Griffins in Australia and India – A Reading of the Griffins’ Early Australian Work – notes that Walter Burley Griffin’s architecture evolved from various influences, both Eastern as well as Western. Griffin, like some of his fellow Chicago architects, was also affected by the theories of Gottfried Semper (1803 – 1879), a German architect and writer who proposed the notion of formative motives in architecture, consisting of basic design elements: the “hearth, mounds, roof and vertical enclosure”. 369 Semper’s theories seemed to have found a niche in Griffin’s idealog of a democratic architecture that embodied both spirituality as well as universality (the basis of organic architecture to those who practised it, Sullivan and Wright for instance), an architecture that was described as ‘architectonic’. 370

“Architectonic is the aesthetic produced by the form (but not the substance) of the visual types constituted by various fundamental structural principles and construction methods. Essentially this aesthetic results from observing the static resistance of construction to gravity. The architectonic aesthetic cannot be felt or understood from a rational appreciation of structure and construction alone; it

368 Turnbull/Navaretti, op.cit., p38 – Through the Looking Glass of ‘Magic of America’: Marion Mahony Griffin’s role in Australia and India by Anna Rubbo. The essay provides further insight into the difficulties the Griffins encountered during those early years that were subsequently sustained by a hostile public service.
369 Ibid. P61, Notes.
370 Turnbull/Navaretti, P48.
derives from seeing and feeling the geometric rhythms of the parts and joints of constructional assemblage.”

It is also unsurprising that Griffin would have been introduced to Nathan Clifford Ricker’s translation of the German architectural historian and theorist Rudolph Redtenbacher’s “definitive text on architectonics”, The Architectonics of Modern Architecture. There were other influences as well:

“Another translation by Nathan Clifford Ricker that was available to Griffin while he was still a student at Urbana-Champaign was the 1898 edition of Otto Wagner’s book Modern Architecture (1896). This English translation was published in Chicago in 1901. In the revised editions of his book, Wagner emphasized that the new forms of a modern architecture would emerge from structure—which would have confirmed for Ricker, and for Griffin, the vitality of architecture.”

At Urbana-Champaign Griffin was exposed to architectonics, his contemporaries such as Wright, on the other hand, was influenced by the Beaux-Arts trained Henry Hobson Richardson. It was an architectural approach that was different to that adopted by Wright and his contemporaries; their preoccupation with composition was almost geometrically formulaic. It was also an architectural language that was employed to describe tangible forms and shapes in buildings. Griffin, like Wright and the others was also seduced by the exotic elements of other cultures: he “considered the architectonic themes shared by all newly discovered cultures of the past to be appropriate for inclusion in the creation of a new modern democratic architecture. His aim was that a new

\[371\] Ibid.
\[372\] Ibid.
\[373\] Ibid. Note: Stylistically speaking, Griffin’s sources of inspiration could be found both in Redtenbacher and Wagner’s theories. This may not be a pivotal moment in Griffin’s architectural evolution but it does highlight the importance of structural integrity in his work.
\[374\] It is interesting to note that although Marion Mahony was to marry Griffin and collaborated together, their early architectural training was different. Mahony, like Wright and her cousin Dwight Perkins and those who were associated with the Prairie School, was trained in the Beaux-Arts tradition, architectural composition.
architecture of inclusion would express a worldwide universality and unity, and that it would embrace fundamental types of the ancient past”\(^{375}\).

This “new architecture of inclusion” that at times was romantic, exotic and certainly \textit{organic} in its architectonic elements is clearly evident in the design of Newman College (Fig 32), Melbourne University (1915 – 18): “The idea of roof terraces in a stepped silhouette at Newman College was inspired by both the ziggurat and the pueblo adobe.”\(^{376}\).

![Figure 32 W.B. Griffin, Newman College 1915 – 17 (photograph Wolfgang Sievers).](image)

But further back in time, even before Canberra and Newman, at the core of Griffin’s architecture was his love for the land, the surrounding with which his buildings would harmoniously blend. Griffin’s love for natural environment would have led him to “the work of Frederick Law Olmsted and other American landscape architects working as city planners and using natural land formations as determinants of form and circulation”\(^{377}\).

Before his arrival in Australia Griffin had been involved in a number of landscape projects, amongst them was the Trier Centre Neighbourhood, Winnetka, Illinois, - an exercise in circulation and movement between public and private spaces. It preceded the famous Radburn plan by Clarence Stein and Henry Wright by fifteen years, where the

\(^{375}\) Turnbull/Navaretti op.cit., P52.
\(^{376}\) Ibid. P58.
\(^{377}\) Johnson, Donald Leslie, op.cit., P27.
communal residential private space was shielded from the public space: “the communal space in the centre was surrounded and enclosed by houses. This was accomplished in part by eliminating through traffic in this small nine-acre (3.642 ha) site. Second, a common driveway provided shared parking space for two houses in many instances. Third, the living spaces of the houses were oriented to the internal community space.”378

In projects such as the Roger’s Park Subdivision, Chicago or the residential development in Rock Crest-Rock Glen, Mason City, Iowa, Griffin’s particular attention to siting, sightlines, contours and land formations led him to observe: “The endless fascinating possibilities for domestic architecture with the unrepeated variations of view, soil, ruggedness, luxuriance, prominence and seclusion, need only the due attitude of appreciation to work themselves out in structures as unique as their sites, cut into rock or perched on the crest or nestled in the cove as the case may be.”379

Although it is beyond the scope of this research thesis to discuss in detail Griffin’s landscape work, nonetheless, it is pertinent to draw some conclusions regarding its central role in his (Griffin’s) architecture. There is also strong evidence of the acceptance of Griffin’s ideas on landscape architecture as shown in his appointment for the design of a number of subdivisions subsequent to his winning the Canberra competition, amongst others there were the Town Plan for Griffith, Leeton – including its Town Centre and Civic Buildings, Crawley Campus, University of Western Australia (1916), Canberra Arboretum and Botanic Gardens, ACT, - of which only the Botanic Gardens was completed, Glenard Estate, Heidelberg, Victoria (1916), and the Castlecrag development.380

Griffin, like Wright before him, was also influenced by the land reform ideas of Henry George, Ebenezer Howard’s concept of a garden city and together with the work of

378 Johnson, P28.
379 Ibid. From (Walter Burley Griffin), ‘Rock Crest and Rock Glen, Domestic Community Development, Mason City, Iowa’, Western Architect (US), XX (August 1913) p.76.
380 The names of the project are obtained from Turnbull/Navaretti’s The Griffins in Australia and India, part 2: Catalogue Raisonné, to reinforce this researcher’s contention of the Griffins’ deep understanding of forms in an organic context.
Daniel Burnham (his involvement with the Chicago Exposition), Louis Sullivan and the eminent landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted. With such galaxy of stellar company to enhance his architectonic ideals, the Griffins metamorphosed into the Australian architectural landscape and gradually established their reputation in a country that would evoke the memories of their beloved western prairie.381

However, acceptance and recognition from the Griffins’ Australian colleagues did not come easy, particularly as Griffin brought with him the type of architecture that was refreshingly different to that, generally, practiced at the time. Griffin was also able to obtain the right to private practice in conjunction with his appointment as the Federal Capital Director of Design and Construction. The Griffins subsequently set up practice in Sydney with the collaborative efforts of some established local practitioners. The professional jealousy and hostility that originated from his newly established local enemies finally drove them to Melbourne where “for the next ten years they disseminated a type of architecture they head learnt from the Chicago School in general and Frank Lloyd Wright in particular”.382

Historical evidence as provided by Professor Freeland in the chapter titled Transition 1917 – 1929 Architecture in Australia showed that the impact the Griffins’ architecture had on the local scene was minimal until they left Australia in 1936 for India.383 The years that the Griffins spent in Australia were spasmodically fraught with frustration and disappointments, they were constantly the subject of local jealousies and parochialism. The people who directed this hostility towards a new and refreshingly progressive architecture were bureaucrats, as in the case of the Canberra debacle, and local architects in Sydney and Melbourne. The entrenched conservatism of the profession, then as well as now, had seen the departure of architects such as the Griffins from a country that could very well benefit from them. Paradoxically, the post Second World War influx of overseas academics in architecture was indiscriminately welcomed by the universities.

381 Johnson, op.cit., pp 30 – 32.
382 Freeland, op.cit., p.245. Freeland’s reference to Wright as having a major influence on Griffin is in contrast to this researcher’s understanding that both architects contributed equally to the notion of organic architecture, they managed to influence one other.
concerned. However, it was fortuitous that an up and coming generation of architects who emerged from the ashes of the Second World War began to appreciate the meaning of Griffin’s contribution to a relatively new form of architectural ideals: “To them and every student generation since, Griffin assumed the proportions of a deity.”

The genesis of Modern architecture in Australia, according to Professor Freeland, was brought about by the architecture of Hardy Wilson, Robin Dods, Desbrowe-Annear and Walter Burley Griffin. Each one of them in his way had drawn out some aspects of their work that was in contrast to the prevailing convention, they had dared to be different. But it was in the work of Griffin that organic architecture found its real estate:

“The Griffins are doubly important to Australia because their architecture here portrayed a uniquely Australian character. It was organic, and was often submerged in the foliage, seemingly rooted in the land, massive and rock-like, or delicately skeletal, as in vertebrates. It is their interest in the Australian Bush, as well as their use of Australian native plants in house gardens and in street landscapes, and the vast programme they undertook to propagate and plant local species throughout Castlecrag, that defines the Griffins as the originators of our contemporary regard for native landscapes as a cultural expression of national identity.”

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384 Freeland, p247.
385 Ibid.
386 Turnbull/Navaretti op.cit. Introduction Pxxvii. The Griffins’ interest in Australian flora was further evidenced that after their arrival in Melbourne – as related by Turnbull – they spent much of their time drawing the diverse collection of flora in the Botanical Gardens. This researcher is aware of the underlying esoteric ideas that the Griffins held with respect to their architecture. This so-called hidden aspect of the Griffins was the subject of an ABC Compass program that was broadcast on April 18, 2004. The program attempted to find out whether the esoteric principles that the Griffins supposedly were to employ in their designs, in particular the Canberra plan, were evident in their architecture. Among those who took part in the television broadcast were Greg Burgess, architect, Marie Nicholls, daughter of Eric Nicholls who was the Griffins’ partner in Melbourne and Professor Peter Proudfoot, architectural scholar. The program (text obtainable from [http://www.abc.net.au/compass](http://www.abc.net.au/compass)) did not come to any conclusion except to reaffirm the Griffins’ allegiance to Rudolph Steiner’s Anthroposophical ideals. According to Marie Nicholls her parents were very much influenced by the Griffins, eventually they (the Nicholls) too became devotees of the new philosophy.
More than anything else that the Griffins have left as a legacy to a burgeoning group of architects few decades later is their understanding of the relationship between nature and the built forms. To the Griffins, nature was the dominating force that determines the nature of how their architecture manifest. As Christopher Vernon (QUT) writes in his paper “From the American Prairies to the antipodes: Walter Burley Griffin, Roy A. Lippincott and Australia and New Zealand national identity”\textsuperscript{387}, with particular reference to Griffin’s work (Fig.33): “his (Griffin’s) design are best characterised as experiments produced in a quest for reverential harmony and community with nature. For Griffin, this was not achieved through the scenographic simulation of a romanticised ‘raw’ or ‘wild’ nature. In contrast, he sought an Arcadian relationship; one achieved through nature’s rational use and cultivation. For Griffin, landscape architecture clarified nature’s latent order and expressed its ‘maximum possibility’.” It is this notion of an “Arcadian relationship” with nature that manifest most clearly in the work of some architects in (mainly) the Bayside suburbs of Melbourne in the 60s and 70s (Geoffrey Woodfall’s houses immediately come to mind). Other aspects, such as the Griffins’ love for Australian flora has also embedded itself in the minds of Australian architects whose designs are significantly and consciously in harmony with nature, even those who might have toyed with the idea of organicism, for example in the work of the late Kevin Borland.\textsuperscript{388}

But alongside the influences that were brought about by the Griffins and those of Horbury Hunt, Leslie Wilkinson and Hardy Wilson’s role on the popularization of a less traditional domestic architecture must not be ignored. A graduate from the Royal Academy School of Architecture in London, Wilkinson arrived in Australia in 1918 to take up the position as the “first professor of architecture in an Australian university. Wilkinson’s influence could be found in the manner he directed, through his academic position, or as Donald Leslie Johnson puts it: “Much of what he argued as correct in

\textsuperscript{387} SHAHANZ, Auckland 1996.
\textsuperscript{388} As a student of Kevin Borland’s, this researcher remembers his (Borland’s) frequent references to the importance of native flora in the environment. Borland also lamented the fact how little majority of Australians know and appreciate indigenous culture and landscape. While Borland did not make direct references to the Griffins’ Arcadian ideals, he often expressed admiration for Wright’s architecture.
architecture in general, he argued as being correct for Australian architecture in a regional sense”.389

Exactly what Johnson means by ‘regional sense’ is not clear, in particular as Wilkinson had a penchant for Italian architecture and believed that what he (Wilkinson) saw in Spain and the Americas would have suited the Australian environment.

“The plain surfaces, loggias, trellised walkways and verandahs (as opposed to fully roofed), cortiles and courtyards he saw as architecturally vital, when one compared the geography of the regions where Spanish architecture had flourished and Australia.”390

Wilkinson did not only teach, he also built, his architecture exuded the kind of modern simplicity that eloquently combined historical references as well as progressive spatial planning as in the case of his own house in Vaucluse (1923).391

Hardy Wilson, on the other hand, although a traditionalist by inclination, employed simple geometric forms in the design of the Waterhouse residence in Gordon, New South Wales (1914), considered to be “one of the most exquisite pieces of residential architecture in Australia”392 The house also accommodates Wilson’s interest in Oriental Art and his client’s passion for Chinese painting.

By the time the 40s and the clouds of World War 2 began to shroud the Australian political landscape, the architectural links that began in the mid-1800 has forged itself in the Australian built environment. In the work of a few architects who nurtured their

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390 Ibid. P73.(Note: It does not surprise this researcher to find that an English-educated academic like Wilkinson was able to set the educational agenda for the teaching of architecture in this country. Wilkinson’s subsequent appointment as Dean of the School of Architecture at Sydney University was the beginning of many such appointments given to largely foreign-born academics. Parallels can be drawn with Tom Wolfe’s seminal From Bauhaus to our house, a lament of the European dominance in the teaching of architecture in prestigious universities such as Harvard and Yale during World War 2.)
391 Ibid. P73.
392 Ibid.
practice in the 30s and 40s, the seeds of *organicism* began to grow to an architectural ideal that was both refreshing and challenging.

**Figure 33** W. B. Griffin, Auditorium, Capitol Theatre, Melbourne, 1921-24 (photograph Adrian Crothers).
Part 3  The Melbourne Story

3.1 An organic expression

Victorian Modern according to Robin Boyd emerged in the beginning of the 20th century. After its initial “brief precocious burst” in the early 20s in the work of Desbrowe-Annear’s houses in Heidelberg and the Knitlock houses of Walter Burley Griffin (Fig.34), it was revived in the early 30s by the work of Mewton and Grounds. For instance, the Henty House in Frankston by Roy Grounds and Geoffrey Mewton’s Stoke House in Brighton won the RVIA’s “best house design in Victoria this century.”

Although Boyd lamented the absence of an architectural vernacular at the time that Victorian Modern was published in 1947, he conceded that there had been a kind of renaissance in the evolution and development of a “discernable Victorian type”:

“In Victoria now, the greater quantity of building is still modernistic rather than modern. This does not claim to be serious architecture, but it does pride itself on being smart and stylish……..But Victorian Modern which is no more than honest building which demands no appreciation of the niceties of style and fashion, is steadily replacing all falsely costumed building. For the first time in the story of Victorian architecture the great majority of designers have a common goal: - Victorian architecture.” (my italics).

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393 The use of the word ‘expression’ in this context is from Goad’s article, Robin Boyd’s Victorian Type and the expression of the modern house circa 1933 – 1942, Architecture Australia June 1988, Australia.
395 Ibid. P67 (Grosvenor Court Toorak, Halifax Street, Brighton and Long Island Frankston (circa 1935) to cite but a few. Both houses have since been demolished. (Note: no current images are available for most of these houses (pp 30-32).
397 Ibid. P14
398 Ibid. P14
It was also Boyd’s contention that a Victorian ‘type’ or ‘idiom’ that existed in Melbourne’s residential architecture, had its most common basic configurations a North facing living room with a fireplace as its central focus and East facing bedrooms with the service areas located as a fulcrum at the centre of the two wings:

“Reduced to a minimum proportion this house becomes just two wings; the living room in one, the bedrooms in the other, with the entrance and services at the junction. Expanded by a more liberal budget it spread its wings in all directions and often, near the centre, sprouts another floor of bedrooms.”

Professor Phillip Goad writing in *Architecture Australia* June 1988 edition disputes Boyd’s Victorian typology. Goad asserts that Boyd’s conclusion of a Victorian Type was “historiographic” and concluded on “selected peaks of Australian architecture based on the primitive functionalism of the Colonial homestead, the visionary and heroic forms of Griffin, and finally, the pragmatic and circumstantial functionalism of post-war austerity.” Goad further questions Boyd’s intention by suggesting that perhaps his (Boyd’s) conclusion regarding the Victorian Type was an attempt to be witty rather than factual. Goad further questions Boyd’s interpretation of the word ‘Type’. According to

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399 Ibid P67.
400 Goad, op.cit. P56.
Goad, the word “implies a universally accepted building form, drawn from history and merged into timeless canon”, that Boyd’s typological assertion did not meet. Goad then proceeds to extend his argument by speculating that what Boyd perceived as a ‘Victorian ‘Type’ might indeed be closely associated with the so-called ‘bush’ or ‘urban’ “expression” rather than ‘Type’. 401

Goad’s paper’s argument was less about Boyd’s credibility in the matter of whether or not a ‘Type’ existed but more of the existence of a ‘bush’ expression in modern houses (in an urban context) in the 30s. While it is speculative to attribute the influence that resulted in the ‘bush’ expression to the assortment of architectural work of Desbrowe-Annear or, even, Griffin’s Knitlock houses402, it is clear that the houses were designed to merge with their environment, a clear attempt to adopt an organic feel into its existence. These houses were, in the main, covered by low pitched corrugated iron or asbestos roofing material, white timber windows, exposed timber rafters that extended the eaves thus giving it the impression of a heavy browed building close to the ground that surrounded it. And since the plans were “long and stretched linear wings of single room width, sprawling informally and responsively across the site unhindered by the horizontal limits of the suburban block”403, these houses truly fitted the description of having been designed with the organic ideals as their basic premise. Most of these houses were built along the Mornington Peninsula, Victoria, as weekend cottages or places such as Croydon, Ringwood, Warrandyte and other outer Melbourne ‘bush’ type suburbs.

In the Architecture Australia paper cited earlier, Goad further makes the connection between these so-called Peninsula Houses with the “houses of Northern California architect, William W. Wurster, an architect whom (sic) Roy Grounds and Geoffrey Mewton admired enormously, reveals closer sources for this new breed of Australian house.”

401 Ibid.
402 Boyd op.cit. Victorian Modern  P67
403 Goad op.cit. P63
The Wurster influence could be found in Grounds’s ‘Portland Lodge’ at Frankston, Victoria; a “stretched linear plan with outdoor terraces to either side”\(^{404}\), echoing Wurster’s choreography of architectural elements – the “living porch, the glazed gallery, the screened verandah and the garden living room…….accompanied by single room width linear plans strung informally together to create protected courtyards and terraces”\(^{405}\). Among the early examples of Grounds’s ‘Wurster-inspired’ creations are the ‘Chateau Tahbilk’ at Nagambie, Victoria, which also had the familiar “vocabulary of wings, French doors, gabled prisms and outdoor rooms…….. (the) Ramsay house, Mt.Eliza has…..a Wurster-space that includes kitchen, living room, dining room and drawing office”\(^{406}\).

However, lest one is led to believe that Grounds’s architectural inspiration was concentrated on Wurster’s ideas, ‘Wildfell’ at Upper Beaconsfield (1933) displayed a pot-pourri of ‘bush’ expression and the so-called ‘soft modernism’ of the American Bay Region (Fig. 35). This is a notion that Goad promotes in *Eclectic Modernism in Melbourne – Modern and the quest for style*\(^{407}\), that is, Melbourne’s early modernists (Goad’s definition), amongst them Geoffrey Mewton, Roy Grounds, Best Overend, A. M. McMillan and Edward Bilson tended to experiment with various ‘styles’ ranging from the “Moderne and the International Style which were transplanted from Europe, Great Britain and the United States to Australia”.\(^{408}\)

Conrad Hamann\(^{409}\) alluded to Grounds’s maturation in the rural homesteads that he designed in Victoria, Lyncroft (1934), for example displayed all the tenets of an organic approach, from the use of “cement blocks made on site”\(^{410}\) to the choice of untreated timber left to weather with the seasons. In the suburban environment of Toorak, Grounds

\(^{404}\) Ibid.
\(^{405}\) Ibid.
\(^{406}\) Ibid.
\(^{407}\) Goad op.cit. Pp 11,59. Note: Goad also maintains that the protagonists of this Modern Movement were merely adapting the original styles without understanding their theoretical or ideological premise.
\(^{408}\) Goad, op.cit. P1/11.
\(^{410}\) Ibid.
maintained his sympathy with the site, the Watt house (1935) was designed “round a tree, rather than remove existing foliage”.\textsuperscript{411} Although Robin Boyd did declare the Toorak house as “Victoria’s first genuinely International style building”\textsuperscript{412}, it avoided the pristine blandness of the genre by being part of its existing site conditions.


Although the import of ideas was not confined to the broadening of travel destinations by local architects\textsuperscript{413}, professional or trade journals such as \textit{Builder, The Australian Engineer} or \textit{Architect} or the \textit{Journal of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects} and popular magazines like \textit{Australian Home Beautiful} were also instrumental in bringing overseas ideas to Australia\textsuperscript{414} as well as giving publicity to local architects such as the Griffins and their followers whose architecture was perceived to be modern. The

\textsuperscript{411} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{412} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{413} As early as the turn of last century travelling scholarships for architects were already available such as the Kemp Memorial Medal travelling scholarship, NSW Board of Architects Travelling Scholarship, the Haddon Medal and Travelling Scholarship in Victoria. These various scholarships enabled architects like Raymond McGrath, a University of Sydney graduate to gain some experience overseas by working with the likes of Sergei Chermayeff in Cambridge, England; Sydney Ancher who, by becoming a recipient of a travelling scholarship, was introduced to the architecture of Dudok in Holland in 1939 (Johnson, op.cit. Pp90-94). Grounds, for example, travelled to England and the US between 1929 – 1932. Between 1930-1932 he worked as a set designer in the studios of RKO and MGM.
\textsuperscript{414} Johnson, op.cit. P88. Johnson regards the transference of ideas as cross-fertilisation (of ideas) between Australia, Europe and America that increased the horizons of Australian architecture. Australia remains, in Johnson’s view, the recipient of imported ideas but not necessarily their source.
magazines were also known to have supported other young architects whose work badly needed the publicity.

The ideas that began as a notion of transference, but later took the form of a gradual exchange were more often than not germinated with a degree of religiosity, such as Transcendentalism. The absence of the religious factor, by the time these new ideas had merged into the Australian architectural psyche was curious but, all the same, interesting. Whether or not architects such as Seabrook and Fildes (Fig. 36) who flirted with Wright’s architectural ideas as well as Dudok’s were aware of the religious inclination of their idol(s)⁴¹⁵ is unknown. Or were they simply seduced by their (Wright/Dudok) style? Thus giving credence to Goad’s assertion that to “most Melbourne architects, the tenets of International Modernism had not the ideological base that its originators had, no understanding of the theory, nor experience from its teaching in the architectural schools”⁴¹⁶.

![Figure 36](norman_seabrook_mac_robertson_girls_high_school_1934_c.1942_source_school_archive_from_christine_phillips_a_hybrid_approach_to_architecture_limits_proceedings_of_the_21st_annual_conference_of_the_society_of_architectural_histories_australia_new_zealand_melbourne_2004_phillips_christine_a_hybrid_approach_to_architecture_the_residential_work_of_seabrook_and_fildes_in_limits_proceedings_of_the_21st_annual_conference_of_the_society_of_architectural_histories_australia_new_zealand_melbourne_2004_goad_philip_the_modern_house_in_melbourne_1945_1975_phd_thesis_melbourne_university_1991_note_one_of_the_architectural_schools_that_goad_referred_to_was_the_university_of_melbourne_architectural_atelier_muaa_which_was-founded_by_rodney_alsop_and_later Managed by Leighton Irwin Irwin a graduate of London’s AA. Seabrook believed that MUAA was the source of the greatest influence on Melbourne architecture (Johnson, op.cit. P91).}
3.2 Geometry as an Organic Expression.

Whether or not the teaching of Melbourne University’s Architectural Atelier or the influences acquired elsewhere was evident in the work of some Melbourne architects, a period of the so-called Geometric School emerged in the mid-1950s in the designs of the groups of architects loosely adhering to one of two schools of architectural thoughts: the Walter Gropius/Corbusier-influenced ‘functionalists’ and the predominantly Frank Lloyd Wright organic philosophy.

Houses designed by Melbourne architects whose reputation, one way or another, became dominant in creative domestic architecture – at least to those who were both educated and intelligent enough to engage architects – were being designed based on geometric patterns.

Geometry, like form and balance, was closely linked to the teaching of Beaux-Arts. So there was nothing extraordinarily new in the use of geometry as part of house design. Freeland suggests in Architecture in Australia that Melbourne was the centre of geometrically-inspired architecture, at least as far as house designs were concerned in the 50s. Among the more significant examples of the so-called geometry-inspired houses were Roy Grounds’s circular house in Frankston, 1950, and Leyser House, Kew (1951) (Fig.37). Grounds was further influenced by his association with the Australian-born architect Raymond McGrath in England. McGrath’s was known for his geometry-inspired buildings such as his Hyde Park Court apartments in Knightsbridge in 1932, - Grounds’s Moonbria flats in Mathoura Road, Toorak (194)) with a McGrath signature of

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418 Callister, op.cit. 26-27.
419 Freeland, JM, op.cit. P276.
420 Goad, ibid, P5/42: “The plan was an equilateral triangle sith its apex pointing to a spectacular view over the Yarra Valley.” (Note: Goad makes the link between Frank Lloyd Wright’s use of the triangle as a “planimetric generator of design” and Grounds’s Leyser House in Kew. All the same, Grounds’s eclectic repertoire of ideas somehow precludes him from being ‘labelled’ as an architect who practised within the confines of organic architecture.
glazed cylindrical staircase, for example. It was the time when Grounds was totally immersed in the geometric genre.

![Diagram of a building plan](image)

**Figure 37** Roy Grounds, Plan of Leyser House, Kew, Victoria, 1951 (from Peter Cuffley “Australian Houses of the Forties & Fifties”, photo *Australian Home Beautiful*, February 1954).

As recent as the early 50s, Grounds’s ‘flirtation’ with the *organic* aspects of geometry-inspired architecture extended to “the triangle, the cylinder, and the square”\(^{422}\), as clearly demonstrated in the second Henty House at Frankston (1952), a “double storey cylinder built on a sloping site overlooking Port Phillip Bay”\(^{423}\) (Fig. 38).

The Wurster influence is clearly evident in choice of material, the subtle combination of contrasting colours of the stained vertical timber work and the grey sand-lime bricks.\(^{424}\) There was also the inevitable references to Frank Lloyd Wright’s circular design for the Sol Friedman House in Pleasantville, New York (1949), although Grounds’s reference to Wright’s design was not as literal as that adapted by Peter Muller in the Molinari House, Forrestville, NSW (c1954).\(^{425}\) Other examples of the geometric approach can be found in Guildford Bell’s Anthony Hordern House at Point Piper Sydney (1956). The geometrically influenced footprint of the house, “a huge annulus with a circular courtyard as its focus”\(^{426}\), cascades down the site over three levels.

\(^{422}\) Ibid, P5/45. (Note: it is this researcher intention to highlight the tenuous link between geometry and organic-inspired architecture. For a more comprehensive description of the ‘geometry style’ refer to Goad’s PhD thesis, previously cited, Chapter 5 – *Form and the so-called Melbourne Geometric School*.

\(^{423}\) Ibid.

\(^{424}\) Ibid, P5/46.

\(^{425}\) Ibid.

\(^{426}\) Ibid, P5/47.
The use of site-related geometrically influenced architectural forms was not confined to the architects mentioned previously, it can also be found in the works of Melbourne architects such as Peter & Dione McIntyre, Douglas Alexandra, the collective work of Grounds, Romberg and Boyd, Rae Featherstone, and Neil Clerehan (Coil House, circa 1954)\(^{427}\). While none of the afore-mentioned architects’ work can be labeled as Wrightian in their forms, there is, however, strong evidence that the plethora of publications on Frank Lloyd Wright’s work led to the general debate between “organic” and “inorganic” architecture or as Boyd describes it in the *Puzzle of architecture*\(^{428}\) as “cottage style” versus “functionalist”.

Following a nation-wide exhibition of Bay Region architects, *America Today*, in 1948, Boyd wrote in *The Age* of the close links between the architecture of America’s south-west coast and that of Australia’s.\(^{429}\) All the same, Boyd was insistent that the links did not necessarily influence contemporary architecture that it would develop into some kind of architectural *genre*. Boyd maintained that although there was evidence of Wrightian influence in the work of some architects, they were less philosophically-inspired and more stylistically induced. In fact, Boyd was dismissive in his observation of the emergence of the so-called Wrightian influence:

“At this time Wright’s own style was too difficult for workaday architects to assume, it could be watered down quite successfully, however, by injecting Wrightian flavours – something of the warmth of his preferred surface treatments of wood, stone, and rusty autumn colours – into the cold rectilinear geometry of


\(^{429}\) Castle, Jane, *Vernacular, Regional and Modern: Lewis Mumford’s Bay Region style and the architecture of William Wurster*, pp60-61, M Arch Thesis, Melbourne University, Melbourne, Australia, 2006. (Note: Castle’s thesis is mainly centred on regional aspects, rather than any references to the organic-inspired architecture of such architects as Belluschi, Harwell Hamilton Harris, Wurster et al (see Part 1 Chapter 7 The Architecture of the Bay Area: a modern regionalism.).
the European form. This branch of the movement was inclined to call itself Organic.”

Figure 38 Roy Grounds, Henty House, Frankston, Victoria 1952, (from Peter Cuffley (photo *The New Australian Home*, Melbourne 1954).

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430 Boyd op.cit. P60. (Note: it is also interesting to note that Goad in his PhD Thesis, P5/83, refers to the establishment of this architectural link as “transformation” of Wright’s organic ideals rather than *transference* of ideals (my *italics*).
3.3 Aspects of *organicism* as practiced by Geoffrey Woodfall, Kevin Knight, Chancellor and Patrick and David Godsell.\(^{431}\)

In the wake of what Goad describes as “Eclectic Modernism in Melbourne”\(^{432}\) there emerged a group of practitioners to whose work the *organic* label, according to Sullivan’s interpretation, could be attached\(^{433}\). This group of architects was representative of the growth of a Melbourne *organic* school of architecture, at a time when the debate between the so-called functionalist and *organic* approaches took place\(^{434}\).

The architects and the works cited here\(^{435}\), in varying degrees, shared a common philosophical belief in the virtues of *organic* architecture as promulgated by Sullivan and Wright. Woodfall describes his work as *organic* rather than ‘Wrightian’\(^{436}\), the harmonious blend of material, structure and site dominates his design approaches. According to Rex Patrick\(^{437}\), his partnership with David Chancellor grew at the time when the International Style as dominated by the Bauhaus ideology had a strong influence on Australian architects in the 50s. But it was Wright’s *organic* approach that was significantly evident in most of their domestic work. Like Woodfall’s architecture, Chancellor and Patrick’s were *organic* rather than ‘Wrightian’. Although Kevin Knight\(^{438}\) admits that he’s a devotee of Wright, it is the architect’s *organic* notion that he adheres to. Apart from the Brighton Municipal Offices and the IOOF building in Russell Street,

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\(^{431}\) The title of this chapter does not suggest any chronology either in the development of organic architecture in the work of the architects concerned, or in the manner their respective projects have been discussed.

\(^{432}\) Goad, op.cit. Pp 5/82

\(^{433}\) Goad in the chapter titled “Frank Lloyd Wright and the House in Melbourne 1945 – 1960” identifies a group of Melbourne architects who were “involved in the 1960s Wrightian survival (sic)”, among them Chancellor and Patrick, Geoffrey Woodfall (from late 50s) and 60s onwards, Charles Duncan, David Godsell, Oakley and Parkes (Kevin Knight was principal design architect with the firm), Peter Jorgenson and Alan Hough, Philip Sargeant, Alex Jelinek and John Rouse (who managed the Frankston Office of Chancellor and Patrick at the time).

\(^{434}\) Callister, op.cit.P27.

\(^{435}\) The architects discussed are not listed in the order of importance. It was their availability to be interviewed that finally determined the list.

\(^{436}\) Conversation with Geoffrey Woodfall, 21 August 2006.

\(^{437}\) Conversation with Rex Patrick October 30, 2006.

\(^{438}\) Conversation with Kevin Knight June 28, 2005.
Melbourne, much of Oakley and Parkes’ (of which Knight was a senior partner) output could not be described as characteristically *organic*.

David Godsell, on the other hand, is a true Wrightian disciple, in the manner by which he detailed his domestic projects. Godsell had successfully transplanted Wright’s architectural ideology to the suburban environment of Melbourne with such passion and a deep understanding of its *organic* principles. The house he designed for his family in Balcombe Road, Beaumaris, embodies all aspects of Wright’s architecture, from the detail of its windows, overhanging eaves and balcony ballustrading to the spatial arrangements of its interior and their relationship with the surrounding native gardens.

Louis Sullivan once wrote that to understand the meaning of the word ‘organic’ one should also grasp the relative meaning of words such as “organism, structure, function, growth, development, form.”439 He further added that all of the words that are linked to the philosophical notion of *organicism* also mean the “initiating pressure of a living force and a resultant structure or mechanism whereby such invisible force is made manifest and operative. The pressure, we call Function: the resultant, Form.”440 In the work of Frank Lloyd Wright this concept is further realized in the way his buildings were designed to be in harmony with nature and not in conflict with it. To this end, the works described here have captured the essence of *organicism* as defined by Sullivan and implemented by Wright. A survey titled “Post War Domestic Architecture” in the June 1961 edition of Architecture & Arts441 observes, somewhat arrogantly and disapprovingly, that:

“The early post war period also saw a great deal of imitation and “master architect” adherents. Frank Lloyd Wright’s prairie houses began to pop up in both NSW and Victoria. Marcel Breuer type houses could be seen in the bush and waterside around Sydney and the mass produced houses of Charles Goodman in

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440 Ibid.
the USA were leaving an unmistakable impression on local mass housing ventures.”

3.4 Geoffrey Woodfall.

Woodfall, whose Breedon House (Fig.39) which Goad describes as a “convincing interpretation of Wrightian ideal”⁴⁴², having completed the (then) Diploma of Architecture at the Royal Melbourne Technical College (1948-1954 - now RMIT University), followed by gaining a Bachelor degree in Architecture at the University of Melbourne, is one of those architects whose formative years were spent in the Functionalist versus Organic debate at the time.⁴⁴³ Callister argues that what Jennifer Taylor describes in An Australian Identity: Houses for Sydney 1953 – 63 as regional architecture has its concurrent development in Melbourne in the work of Geoffrey Woodfall, Chancellor and Patrick, Jorgenson and Hough, to mention just a few.⁴⁴⁴ In simple terms, Melbourne architects who followed the functional style of Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius or Richard Neutra were characterized as belonging to the International School. Those who were influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright, were grouped as practicing organic architecture. Woodfall’s domestic architecture falls in the latter category.⁴⁴⁵ Two diverse examples of Woodfall’s domestic architecture could best be illustrated by the Montague House (1983) at Lysterfield in the rural fringes of Melbourne and the Hill House (1987) in suburban Kew.

⁴⁴² Goad, Phillip, Melbourne Architecture, P185, The Watermark Press. Sydney, Australia, 1999 reprinted 2001. This was subsequently agreed by Woodfall in a conversation with him as recent as Wednesday 28, March, 2007. Woodfall maintains that although he is a great admirer of the ‘master’, he describes his architecture as being ‘organic’ rather than ‘Wrightian’.

⁴⁴³ This is the term that Winsome Callister describes in Chapter 2 (of the same name) of her Masters Prelim (Monash University, Melbourne, 1985) of the 50s and 60s period in the context of her broader regional emphasis. I understand that Callister’s premise on what constitutes regionalism precedes that of Goad’s argument for an eclectic Modernism in Melbourne (See Goad’s “Eclectic Modernism in Melbourne: Moderne and the quest for Style” previously cited).

⁴⁴⁴ Callister has also included the work of Melbourne architects like Roy Grounds, Peter and Dione McIntyre, Kevin Borland, Mockridge, Stahle and Mitchell as part of the regional search. The work of these architects and their involvement with Callister’s premise of regionalism is outside the confines of this research topic.

⁴⁴⁵ Callister, op.cit. P27, “Those architects termed ‘organic’ were seen as followers of Frank Lloyd Wright and his theory of harmonious union between man, nature and architecture, the horizontality of form and natural materials echoing the land.”
Woodfall regards the **The Montague House**, 1983 (Figs. 40, 41, 42) as one of the better residences that he designed in the Outer Melbourne area. The 20 to 30-odd acres site, off Horswood Road, Lysterfield, Victoria, has a commanding view of the Dandenongs with an Eastern aspect and was once part of the Montgue Orchard Estates.

Viewed from the South-East the house with its cantilevered deck reminds one of Wright’s Kaufman House. Woodfall, however, rejects the idea that Wright’s famous house influenced the design of the Montague House. In conversation with Woodfall, it is clear that although he is an admirer of Wright’s work, he is less of a ‘Wrightian’ than, say, Charles Duncan or David Godsell. Woodfall’s architecture is philosophically *organic*, the design and planning of his houses are harmoniously married to their surroundings. Woodfall also freely admits that his details are definitely not ‘Wrightian’, less meticulous than can be found in some of the other admirers of Wright’s work. According to Woodfall, studying the work of a genius, such as Wright, could be likened to drug addiction that could lead to those who are addicted to lose their identity. In the case of architecture, the architects in the course of adhering to someone like Wright’s philosophy could indeed lose their own architectural identity.

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446 Conversation with Geoffrey Woodfall, 21 August 2006.
447 Ibid.
448 Conversation with Geoffrey Woodfall 5 December, 2006.
As one approaches the Montague house from the South-eastern side, the lower Ground Floor appears to be dug into the steep sloping site to form the base of the main part, the Ground Floor. A balcony which has a cantilever of 10 meters completes the total concept of the house growing, as it were, out of the ground. The site consists of granite boulders that provide it with a solid organic material for the retaining walls and foundation for the brick and timber structure of the main body of the house. It is Woodfall’s intention that the foundation of the house seems hewn out of the site, analogous to an organic growt

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449 The cantilevered decking is supported by welded steel trusses which are concealed in the timber structure of the house, a conventional practice of the day. By coincidence, William Jordy in *American Building and their Architects*, p196 Vol 3 in describing Wright’s Robie House refers to the concealed steel structure as a “stiffening element”. Jordie further refers to Wright’s Falling Water with its definable use of “concealed metal in the reinforced concrete structure”.
The lower Ground Floor also consists of a substantial office space, a wine cellar which is adjacent to a bar, a guestroom with an adjoining shower room and an ancillary storage and plant room. All the rooms have access to the in-ground pool and terrace on the East and the panoramic views of the site. The Games Room is located directly below the Living Area on the Ground Floor, the central core of the house is the staircase which is located at the centre of the cruciform shape of the house with its major rooms distributed along its North-south axis.

At Ground Floor level, the sloping site allows the Garage to be dug into the hill side. Entry to the main part of the house is at this level. Visitors arrive under car port cover and enter the house by descending half a dozen steps down to the Entry Foyer.

The almost concealed approach, via the car port, to the Entry Foyer is reminiscent to the concealed entrance to Wright’s Robie House.\(^{450}\) This tenuous comparison is not meant to suggest that Woodfall had Wright’s Robie House in mind when he designed the Montague House. While Woodfall who has visited Robie House is full of admiration for

\(^{450}\) Jordy, William, *American Buildings and Their Architects – Progressive and Academic Ideals at the turn of the Twentieth Century*, P209, Doubleday NY, 1972. Jordy informs us that Wright’s concealed entrance to Robie House was compositional as well as a conscious decision to achieve an organic progression from public (street) to private space, e.g. “a winding path through varied spaces, alternately dark and light, toward the core of the house” (P208).
the work of Wright, our conversation about the Montague House did not lead this researcher to conclude that there is any obvious architectural connection between the two houses.

Bedrooms 2 & 3, bathroom/toilet/a small laundry and a garage which is accessible from the Northern approach to the house are distributed along the West side rectangle. While Bedroom 1, adjoining ensuite, study, dining and family room are on the Eastern rectangle, 4 steps below the service area (West). The living room with its deck jutting out of the sloping site gives the house its dramatic appearance. The fireplace which dominates the living room becomes a point of reference for the landscape; it beckons people to step outside onto the deck to take full advantage of the panorama. The fireplace which is meant to be the pivotal element of the house is asymmetrically located, thus providing a fulcrum to the equilibrium of the house plan. Its strategic location connects as well as defines the interior space, the Living Room from the external Deck. A similar device was employed by Wright in Robie House where the fireplace articulates the interconnecting Living and Dining spaces\textsuperscript{451}. Except in this case, the Montague House, the window fenestrations on the North and South walls of the Living Room terminate at the Fireplace on the East wall.

\textsuperscript{451} Jordie, op.cit. Pp 211-213.
The staircase which is located at the centre of the house provides a fulcrum that can only be appreciated as one travels from Lower Ground to Ground (Fig.42). It is at this point of arrival that the visitors are confronted by the view which lies beyond the fireplace, where also the three spaces, the Dining, Living and Study meet. It is at this spatial junction that the low pitch steel gable roofs cross each other along the NS and EW axis. The gables overhang by at least 2 metres, giving the house a series of furrowed brows on the East and North and South ends.

Viewed from the East, the Montague House appears to grow out of the gentle slope of the hill, its protruding granite outcrops forming a solid base with parts retaining the earth to give it (the house) a nesting place. The timber-lined ceiling follows the roof’s low pitch. Inside, the split level that divides the Western rectangular block from its Eastern neighbour is a reminder of the site’s sloping character. All along the Eastern side, from Bedroom 1 in the Southern end of the rectangle to the Family Room at its Northern end, one has a constant view of the landscape beyond. The Living Room space flows beyond the North-South axis of the house onto the cantilevered timber deck.
While the Montague House enjoys the expansive views, the Hill House (1987) in Kew (Fig.43) sits in a traditional Melbourne suburban ‘quarter-acre block’, claustrophobic as well as devoid of any views apart from its close neighbours. The house itself runs on an East-west axis with the Study at the front of the house, the central Living Area and Bedroom 2 at the Eastern end enclosing two North-facing courtyards. While the Store and the Family Room protrudes to enclose a Southerly aspect court. These exterior rooms as Woodfall calls them give the East-west glazed gallery which runs as a spine of the house, an extended feel. The house is a single-storey structure on a relative flat site. It is, unlike the Montague House an inward-looking house with both North and Southerly aspects courts, both give the house that essentially organic spatial flow. From the street, the North-south low-pitched hip roof gives it that low-browed sheltered appearance. The landscaped forecourt half conceals the Entry and the brick paving at the front of the house and the carport provides the interface between public and private spaces.

The Hill House has its ancestry in the now demolished Samuel House, Brighton, 1957, which was designed out of the practice of Woodfall and Reynolds (1959 – 62). Like the Samuel House, the Hill House has its utility area (Toilet/Dressing Room and Store Room) adjacent to the Entry. a planning device which was relatively uncommon for the ordinary suburban residence at the time. In the case of the Hill House, visitors arrive and negotiate their way through a glazed gallery to the Living Room. The Gallery or passage continues beyond the spatial divide that is the kitchen to the family zone, Bedrooms 2 and 3.
The lyrical qualities in Woodfall’s designs are evident in both examples, the Montague House and the Hill House. Each has its own site requisites, the former set in the Dandenong Ranges complete with panoramic views while the latter is modestly located in a conventional suburban block. Yet both successfully achieved the desired effect, that free flowing spatial interplay of architectural space that is universally identified as being the hallmark of organic architecture.

Parallels can be drawn between the Montague House with Harwell Hamilton Harris’ house for Clarence H. Wylie, Ojai, 1946 – 48\textsuperscript{452}, both have simple gable roofs with a clear Greene and Greene influence. Although the site conditions are similar, expansive views of a vast landscape, Woodfall’s Montague House (Fig.44) differs from Harris’ Wylie House in that its rooms are simply arranged and the house descends with the sloping site while the latter has its four wings “sent out to maximize (the) view”.\textsuperscript{453} But

\textsuperscript{453} Ibid, P110. (Note: In the course of our conversation about the Montague House, Harris’ architecture was not discussed.)
they both share the same organic spatial arrangements between the interior and the wide open space outside, an *organic* overlap between house and landscape.

In the case of the Wylie House, Harris gave it an intimate space in an alcove created by the placement of the brick chimney, reminiscent of the Laidlaw House by Chancellor and Patrick. The references to Harris and, in some instances, Wurster do not end there. Traces of their influence can be found in the work of Chancellor and Patrick in the early 60s.

![Figure 44 Montague House: Lower Ground and Ground Floor Plans (source: Geoffrey Woodfall)](image)

3.5 **Chancellor and Patrick.**

The beginning of the **Chancellor and Patrick** partnership took place when Rex Patrick met David Chancellor in the office of Yuncken Freeman while completing his (Patrick’s) architecture course at the Melbourne University Architectural Atelier in the evenings in the latter half of the 1940s where he subsequently graduated in 1949.\(^{454}\)

\(^{454}\) Conversation with Rex Patrick October 30, 2006.
In a conversation with Rex Patrick on April 21, 2005, he related how a chance meeting with a concreter at the tender age of four years eventually led him to an architectural career. The path of an Australian working class boy in the 40s was strewn with social hardship that would fall in his way at the time. From an early stint at Brighton Technical School, Patrick was then apprenticed in the office of Purnell and Pierce, architects. When the practice required Patrick’s family to pay an annual fee of a hundred Pounds for the privilege of being apprenticed to the firm, he returned to Brighton Tech to complete his studies instead. In 1943, having completed his studies at Brighton Tech, Patrick enrolled in the architectural course at Melbourne Technical College (now RMIT University). The Alison Harvey Scholarship which was awarded to Patrick for his best academic performance at Melbourne Tech made it possible for him to join the Melbourne University Architectural Atelier. During his Atelier years, Patrick divided his working time between the offices of Yuncken Freeman Bros., Griffith and Simpson, and Ronald J Wilson architects.

It was at Yuncken Freeman’s that Patrick’s association with David Chancellor eventually led to their forming a partnership in 1954. Although the practice produced outstanding commercial and institutional work (E.S. & A Bank banking chambers, Frankston Hospital, residential college at Monash University and Student Union Building at La Trobe University) it is their domestic architecture from the 50s and 60s onwards that is acknowledged as having a significant impact on Melbourne’s architecture of that decade. All the same, their Dromana granite cladded E.S. & A. Bank in Elizabeth Street, Melbourne which Winsome Callister cites as having contributed to Melbourne’s regionalism\(^ {455}\), reminds one of Wright’s Frederick C. Bogk House (1916)\(^ {456}\) with its monumental façade. The building has been grossly altered that it has lost its essential ‘Wrightian’ qualities, except for its remaining granite exterior cladding.


But it was not only Wright’s architectural idealism that inspired the partnership’s work, Patrick also alluded to the influence that both Belluschi and Neutra had on their work. Although the manner with which the practice adopted these influences seemed pragmatic, it was their application that was tangibly linked to the local site conditions; an approach that closely followed the *organic* ideals in design. This amalgam of influences is evident in David Chancellor’s own holiday house in Mt. Eliza (1951) and Rex Patrick’s own house in Cheltenham built during 1951 – 56. In the case of the former, the combination of a timber framed house with “a central rock fireplace” sitting, as it were, “on a battered rock base, earth hugging, with a lightweight framed structure above” accordingly both these early work point the way to Goad’s description of the practice to be aptly described as ‘Wrightian’. According to Patrick, *organic* architecture seems to reaffirm the Australian character of their residential work; the emphasis on orientation, the strong horizontality of the roof lines and that deliberate attempt to design the structure to blend into the environment, long before architectural sustainability became the paragon of good design.

Patrick regards the Laidlaw House (circa 1962) in McDonald Avenue, Lower Templestowe, for Mr. & Mrs. B. H. Laidlaw as a comprehensive example of Chancellor and Patrick’s adherence to the principles of *organicism* in their domestic work. The house is situated on the pre-metric era of three-quarters of an acre site with a gentle slope towards the North. Lower Templestowe, in the 60s, was regarded as part of the bush. Hence its rural environment tended to attract those who wanted to live in a cleaner and relatively peaceful environment that suburban living could not provide. Although the site is not blessed with grand panoramic views, it does have vignettes of a bush environment.

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457 Refer to conversation with Rex Patrick on April 21, 2005.
458 Goad, op.cit. 5/82
459 Ibid.
The East-West axis of the house allows its long low roofline to define its Southern elevation. The Entry lies beyond the car shelter and partly concealed by the utility block which contains the Kitchen and its adjoining Nook (sic) and the Laundry. The Service Yard is hidden behind a wall but directly accessible from the Laundry. Patrick employs a similar planning strategy as Woodfall in the way the utility block is placed at the point of entry to the house. The ‘neo-cruciform’ shape of the house is part of a repertoire that is evident in a number of Chancellor and Patrick houses, such as the Miller House, Frankston, 1959 which Goad refers to as “one of the flat-roofed T houses (sic)”\(^\text{460}\).

The client’s brief of the Laidlaw House was to accommodate the family in a single-storey ‘rambling’ residence that would take advantage of the site’s bush surroundings. The gradient of the site falls towards the North-western boundary. The driveway approach to the house is from the South-west. There is a half-hearted attempt to conceal the Entry to the house. The walkway which is flanked by a Besser block wall that acts as a pier which supports the overhanging roof over the entrance (Fig.46), provides a ceremonial sequence to the entry of the house. In this instance, the entrance is almost formal and ritualistic as

\(^{460}\) Goad, op.cit. 5/93.
that of Wright’s Lloyd Lewis House (1940), Libertyville, Illinois. Beyond the glazed screen entrance facade lies the ‘hub’ of the house, the Dining Room/Kitchen/Family Room. This ‘hub’ separates the children sleeping quarters on the Eastern flank of the house from the Living Room and the parents’ zone on the Western flank.

**Figure 46** Laidlaw House, south entrance showing pier supporting the roof overhang over the entrance. Photography: Adrian Featherston.

The Living Room is hidden behind the Gallery, an intimate space which is dominated by the fireplace (Fig.47), in other words, an inglenook so reminiscent of Harris’ Wylie House. As the gradient of the site is towards the North-western end, a change of level separates the Parents’ zone in the Western flank from the rest of the family, immediately West of the Entry.

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462 Germany, op.cit. P110.
Figure 47 Laidlaw House, Living Room fireplace (photography: Adrian Featherston).

Although the linearity of the plan suggests a deliberate attempt to separate the family’s pool and surrounding terrace in the Northern part of the site from the landscaped entrance court in the South, the spatial continuity is maintained by the use of polished Besser floor material throughout the areas. The carpeted floor in Bed Rooms 2, 3, and 4 and the Passage leading to them, defines the private zone at this end of the house from the central ‘hub’, as it were. Throughout the house, the timber lined ceiling provides both the spatial continuity as well as material contrast with the polished Besser floor in the ‘hub’ (Entry, Dining and Family Rooms).
The East-West axis linearity of the house owes its affinity to Wright’s Lloyd Lewis House (1940), Libertyville, Illinois. In the upper floor plan of the Lewis House, the ‘wing’ which contains two Bedrooms, served by a glazed gallery overlooking a river view, is separated by a change of level from the intimate Living area which opens to a terrace.\footnote{This description of the Lewis House is based on Sergeant’s Frank Lloyd Wright’s Usonian Houses (previously cited) Pp 66-67. In Frank Lloyd Wright’s Usonian Houses, ed. Yukio Futagawa, A.D.A. EDITA, Tokyo Co. Ltd., Japan 2002, an extra Bedroom has been added at the end of the bedroom wing.}

In the case of Chancellor and Patrick’s Wilson House (1961 – 62) at Mt. Martha (Fig.48), a seaside holiday house, the intimate inglenook adjacent to the dominating fireplace, as in the case of the Laidlaw House, is replicated. While it does not exactly fit into Sergeant’s description of a ‘Raised Usonian’, the Wilson House could very well be described as a ‘diminutive’ interpretation, in the manner of Wright’s ‘in-line Usonian’ such as the Sturgess House (1939), Brentwood Heights, California\footnote{Sergeant, op.cit. P66.} with its economical circulation. The Wilson House has a similar arrangement of Bedrooms and Living Room, one is spatially linked to the other, though a corner of the Living Room has been deliberately created as an intimate space, an inglenook. The fireplaces in both Wright’s Sturgess House and Chancellor and Patrick’s Wilson House dominate the living rooms that open unto terraces. Both houses have diligently adhered to the organic principles of intertwining the use of material to the site condition, both have achieved a sense of belonging to their respective architectural environment. The sloping site of the Wilson House allows the timber deck to be cantilevered to absorb the view of Mt. Martha’s foreshore. A contemporary newspaper description of the Wilson House describes it thus:

“Many new ideas have been incorporated in a house built for Mr. Harper Wilson on the northern slopes of the Mt. Martha Creek, among a group of old gums, with outlooks to undulating hills, the bay and the foreshore. The architects are Chancellor and Patrick………To harmonise with the natural bush setting,
materials are simple and left in the natural state wherever possible. All joinery, weatherboards and structural timber are of treated redwood."

Figure 48 Wilson House, Mt.Martha (1961-62) source: undated newspaper clipping courtesy of Rex Patrick).

Similarly, Wright’s Sturgess House has a cantilevered timber deck which overlooks the Southerly view towards Los Angeles. Sergeant\textsuperscript{467} compares this dramatic characteristic of the Wright’s Sturgess House to Falling Water, a reference that could also be applied to Woodfall’s Montague House.

A less dramatic variation of the theme, that is, the ‘in-line Usonian’ as translated in the Wilson House, is the house on the Esplanade at Mornington (circa 57) on Beleura Hill (Fig.49) which overlooks the Mornington township. The surrounding ti-tree environment means that part of the house is elevated to enable the view to be seen above the clumps of ti-trees. The entrance is located adjacent to the basement car parking area next to a 45 degree-angled Rumpus Room on the western side of the house. This is not a front entrance in the conventional sense, it deceptively reminds one of a secondary trades’ entrance of the past. The house was designed to be a permanent residence when the owners retire at some future date. Unlike Wright’s Sturgess House, the house does not

\textsuperscript{466} Undated photocopy of contemporary newspaper cutting supplied by Rex Patrick. 
\textsuperscript{467} Sergeant, op.cit. Pp52-53.
perch at the edge of a cliff. Instead the entrance at ground level and its adjacent car parking space and adjoining Rumpus Room become the utility area. Upstairs, which has been designated as the Ground level, contains three bedrooms, Shower/WC/Bath and Powder rooms separated from the Kitchen/Laundry/Breakfast Nook/Living Room and Study by the stair hall. The Living Room is dominated by a large open fireplace also opens to a spacious timber deck which becomes the balcony to the South-facing Bed Rooms. The Study which is three steps lower than the Living Room is turned into a more private part of the house by the change of level. The absence of a door between the Study and Living Room further reinforces this subtle division between the two spaces. These spatial transitions provide the necessary half light that illuminate intimate spaces such as an inglenook in all of Chancellor and Patrick houses.

Figure 49 House at Esplanade, Mornington (c. 1957) from Architecture & Arts, 1964).
3.6 **Kevin Knight.**

Kevin Knight’s contribution to the organic school is the least known compared to Woodfall, Chancellor and Patrick and David Godsell’s. Yet Goad identified Oakley and Parkes which appointed Knight as partner in 1956 (the year he returned from a two-year stay in England), as one of Melbourne’s architects who were part of the ‘Wrightian’ influence in the late 1950s to the 1960s.

Knight’s career in architecture was virtually forged at the tender age of eight when he used to thumb through his mother’s *American Home Journal* magazines\(^{468}\) and copied some of the illustrated buildings. Some of Frank Lloyd Wright’s buildings that were featured in the magazine inexplicably attracted his eight-year old mind.

In 1936, Knight was dux at the Swinburne Junior School from whence he went to Swinburne Technical School (now Swinburne University of Technology). As Swinburne Technical School did not offer an architectural course, Knight moved on to Melbourne Technical College (now RMIT University). Knight remembers that the Melbourne Tech architectural course was excellent because of the involvement of some of Melbourne’s, in his words, “top practitioners” at the time, such as Leighton Irwin and Harold Desbrowe-Annear. While studying at the Melbourne Technical College, the late Harry Winbush\(^{469}\) who was teaching there at the time offered him work in his (Lord and Winbush) office (1939). Knight left Melbourne Technical College to join Melbourne University Architectural Atelier in 1940 where he also joined the university’s Rifle regiment (MUR). The war eventually beckoned him. Knight volunteered for active service in 1941 where he found himself installed in the Survey Unit, eventually joining the Engineering Unit. Knight remembers vividly being in the same transport carriage with the late Robin Boyd that took them from Colac to Brisbane, Queensland. All throughout his army service, including the time he spent in New Guinea, Knight’s mother would send him copies of Architectural Forum. It was at this time that his interest in Wright’s work went

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\(^{468}\) Conversation with Kevin Knight June 28, 2005.

\(^{469}\) Harry Winbush was Head of Architecture and (later) Building at RMIT from 1944 until his retirement in 1968. Source: Wilson, Granville, *Centenary History: Faculty of Environmental Design and Construction, RMIT*, RMIT Press, Melbourne, 1987.
beyond the architectural images to attempting to fathom Wright’s approach to designing, the *organic* ideal. Knight ended his army service by being honourably discharged in 1948, soon after he joined the Melbourne firm of Martin & Tribe. Knight became a registered architect in 1949 whereupon he joined the post-war exodus of young Australians in search of their cultural ties with England and Europe. While in London, Knight was employed in the office of Tripe & Wakeham, one of the country’s prestigious practices at the time. By 1956, Knight returned to Australia and joined Oakley and Parkes as a partner. Knight, following the restructure of the company, became the partner-in-charge of the practice in 1983.

Earlier, however, in the years after the war, the notion of designing in the *organic* manner, where the form is dictated by the function of the building, where the material used is evocatively in harmony with the site, has begun to permeate the then to be demobilized young Kevin Knight’s architectural thinking, rather than simply being a ‘Wrightian’ devotee. Knight is still irritated at the inference that the Brighton Municipal Offices complex (1959) Fig. 50) was entirely based on Wright’s Guggenheim Museum in New York. According to Knight, the shape of the building was determined by the way the local authority operates. It was accepted at the time that the functions of the city engineer and town clerk were separate, there was little inter-communication between the staff generally. There seemed, in other words, a division in both authority and the way day-to-day council business was operated. Knight believes that the design of the Brighton building is the culmination of the organic principles that he adhered to. The gradient of the site, for instance, allows Knight to reduce the height of the main building (which houses the double height Public Space and the Council Chamber) by sinking the Ground Floor by a metre. The surrounding planting boxes that are at street level further give the illusion of the imposing cylindrical shaped building to grow out of the ground rather than rising from it.

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470 Conversation with Kevin Knight June 28, 2005.
471 The site has a gentle fall from East to West. The Forecourt is oriented towards the East.
Knight revealed that the *Castel Sant’Angelo*, popularly known as the *Mausoleum of Hadrian* in Rome (Fig.51), had some significance in determining the cylindrical shape of the Brighton Municipal Offices. Furthermore, according to Knight, the drum shape lends itself to the day to day operation of the municipality. The first consideration, according to Knight, was the daily routine of servicing the local residents’ needs such as the payment of rates, dog licenses and ordinary businesses that make up the function of a local municipal office. The municipal complex was planned on a 1200mm grid which provides Knight with an economical dimension for most of the building material including, where appropriate, standard office partitions.
The Brighton Municipal Offices like Wright’s Solomon Guggenheim Museum in New York is both courageous and inventive. In the case of the former, it breaks all the conventions relating to the stereotypical models of the local municipal offices while the latter liberates the notion of what a museum/gallery purports to represent.

Structurally speaking, both cut a swath across contemporary building construction, Brighton’s load-bearing brick drum and Guggenheim’s sculptured reinforced concrete curvaceous spiral form. Knight opted for the use of bricks as a building material to blend with the surrounding Brighton residences. The external and internal face-bricks resulted in a low-maintenance public building. Apart from the rigid requirement in the brief to provide adequate facilities for the variety of services in the municipality, both administratively as well as the implementation of local governance, the historical ensemble of furniture of the Council Chamber including the Mayoral seat were to be retained and installed in the new building (Fig.52).

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Figure 52 Kevin Knight’s Brighton Municipal Offices. Part Plan at Council Chamber level showing the geometry of interlocking circular spaces of upperparts of Public Lobby and Committee Room. Plan courtesy of Kevin Knight.

The complex nature of the day-to-day operations of a municipality means that provisions had to be made for administrative offices, affiliated council facilities such as committee rooms, the Mayor’s private offices including amenities and the Council Chamber. Site constraints prevented the housing of all the facilities in a single-storey building, let alone in a rectangular configuration. It was also Knight’s intention to ‘democratise’ the processes of local authority by releasing the boundaries imposed by conventional planning within a square or a rectangular volume.

The building functions as, both an administrative ‘hub’ for a local authority and as the principal seat of local government, the venue for important public functions as well as
ceremonial rituals. The series of steps leading to the forecourt of the Brighton Municipal Offices give rise to such a ceremonial feeling, although, at a day-to-day level they represent a generous series of steps that would be less intimidating to some of the senior members of the community. The forecourt provides a kind of ‘logia’ for informal interactions either after or before the payments of rates and fines have been completed. The Public Space which is located a level (five steps) above the Entry emphasizes the hierarchy of spaces, thus allowing the public to orientate themselves before approaching the appropriate business counter. The Town Clerk and the City Engineer’s offices are located at opposite ends beyond the circular Public Space, they are, however, linked by the General Office area directly behind the curved public counter that forms part of the circumference of the circle. The open plan of the General Office area avoids the conventional notion of compartmentalized cubicles of municipal offices of the past, another aspect of modernizing the workings of local government that has been behind Knight’s design intentions.

Affiliated service areas such as Strong Rooms (4), Plan Printing and Stationery Store are located on the western flank of the complex. Staff amenities, including a circular Staff Lunch Room are placed just north of the main area at a slightly lower level (two steps) through a doorway. Access to the First Floor, Committee Rooms (1 & 2), Public Lobby and Mayor’s Room is made possible by a second conventional staircase, Stair 2 – Stair 1 is a circular staircase that rises from the Ground Floor adjacent to the Town Clerk’s annexe. For general businesses such as payments of rates and so on, the public is served from the Public Counter directly opposite the Entry foyer; the set of steps immediately to the right leads to the Town Clerk’s annexe. The plant room and the PABX communication station is located directly below the Entry and the Public Space at Ground level.

Access to the Mayor’s office, ancillary spaces and Committee rooms 1 and 2 is by a spiral ramp which clings along the western circumference of the circular Public Space (Fig.53). All the time as one travels along the spiral ramp, the interior of the complex is in full view, the continuum of space is maintained throughout the procession. One is
reminded of the spiral ramp in Wright’s Morris Gift Shop, San Francisco (1948 – 50), in the case of Brighton, however, the ramp becomes the main route to the floor above. The stairs in the Public Lobby at this level, which is the first interlocking circular space, the other two enclose Committee Rooms 1 and 2, leads to the Council Chamber and public gallery (Fig.52).

Here is where Knight’s attempt to democratize (the administration of local government) is most evident as the public gallery overlooks the Council Chamber where the business of local government is being conducted in full view of the city’s constituents. While the process itself is not new, it is the geometry of the circular space that provides the perceived intimacy that exists between the audience and the attending councilors.

**Figure 53** The spiral ramp alongside the circumference of the circular shaped Public Space (photograph: Alex Njoo).

The structural concept consists of load-bearing red brick walls with the dome-shaped roof supported by 300mm (15 in.) diameter concrete columns. The main roof is constructed from a series of 300mm deep coffered waffle slabs, thus achieving a relative light weight roof construction that meets the acoustic requirement as well as providing a decorative

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473 Jordy, op.cit. pp286 -287: “Less a structural conception than a space modifier, the Morris ramp timidly clings to the walls....”
ceiling pattern above the Council Chamber. A fiberglass dome provides translucent light to the Council Chamber. The circular brick drum has an outward slant; a reinforced concrete band above the Public Space houses the ribbon of windows which encircles the circular structure. It is inevitable that some comparisons will be made between the structural concept of Brighton and that of Guggenheim, the structural cylindrical wall and the reinforced floors between the levels. In the case of the Guggenheim, the floors are cantilevered in both directions while Brighton’s Council Chamber’s floor is a “50ft in diameter, is of 9in thick concrete dished 18in in the centre” and is held a loft by a series of “double 4in by 3in steel channel ribs radiating from the centre of floor” to the series of columns around the perimeter of the structure\(^\text{474}\) (Note: the principle is similar to a bicycle wheel). By comparison, Knight’s design for Brighton has a more convincing structural integrity than that of Wright’s Guggenheim which relies on a complex integration of cantilevers and reinforced columns\(^\text{475}\).

All in all, the design of the Brighton Municipal Offices pays homage to its immediate surroundings, an affluent suburb of red brick houses; it is also a majestic seat of local authority without necessarily imposing its presence by its physical mass. It may not appear to look like Castel Sant’ Angelo by the bank of the Tiber in Rome, but it does evoke the same visual emotion that is usually generated by carefully crafted buildings.

The Brighton Municipal Offices building is presently used as a library, although the Council Chamber still functions as a meeting venue for local authority. Since the completion of the project in the early 60s, minor additions have been made to the original complex. It is an affirmation of Knight’s design that the building and its surrounding landscape maintain their integrity with the passing of time and the intervention of subsequent additions. Conversations with some of the library staff also confirm the view that although the building was originally designed for a different purpose, the geometry of its architecture suits the function of a municipal library (Fig.54).

\(^{475}\) Jordy, op.cit. Pp290-296. The cross-sectional diagram on P270 further indicates how Wright arrived at th outward slant of the external walls and the opposing inward cantilevered ramps.
Figure 54. The approach to the present Municipal Library. The annexe shown is the result of a renovation by another architect. (Photograph: Alex Njoo).
3.7 David Godsell.

Of all the architects to whom Goad describes as being devotees of Frank Lloyd Wright, the most ‘Wrightian’ of all would have been the late David Godsell. While the Sydney architects Peter Muller and Bruce Rickard could also be included in that list of ‘Wrightian’ practitioners, Godsell truly embraced Wright’s humanistic philosophy to its core, including the latter’s belief in his own “conviction with a strong sense of vocation”.

The English-born Godsell, whose father was an Australian naval officer studying in Portsmouth and his English mother, arrived in Australia with his family at the age of 13 (1943). He completed his high school years at Caulfield Grammar in 1947 and intended to pursue, like his father, a military career. His ambition to enroll as a cadet at Duntroon Military College was thwarted due to a minor deafness in his right ear. In later years this slight problem became a permanent disability. Although Godsell senior would have preferred that his son pursued an engineering career, instead Godsell enrolled as a part-time student at Melbourne Technical college (now RMIT University) while being apprenticed in Marcus Martin’s architectural practice. This was followed by Godsell completing the Melbourne University Architectural Atelier course. Bell who was a visiting guest lecturer at the time offered Godsell a position in his burgeoning practice.

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476 Goad, op.cit. 5/82
477 This researcher worked alongside Godsell in the office of Guildford Bell 1968 – 69. Godsell’s ‘Wrightian’ philosophy was, in fact, at odds with Bell’s work. Although Bell admired Wright, it was the American West Coast luminaries at the time such as Craig Elwood that had a profound influence on his (Bell’s) work. This strange conflict in ‘architectural beliefs’ did not interfere with Godsell’s task as Bell’s right hand person. All the same, this researcher spent many hours being ‘lectured’ by Godsell on the virtues of organic architecture according to Wright’s ideal.
478 Godsell, Ursulla, source:http://users.tce.rmit.edu.au/E03159/ModMelb/mm2/modmelbprac2/dg/dgbio.htm
479 Ibid. Note: According to Goad, Godsell joined Bell’s practice as a graduate architect in 1955. This was disputed by Ursulla Godsell who maintained that Godsell began his employment with Bell as a senior student in 1953. Goad also suggested that it was due to Bell’s admiration of Wright that Godsell interest in the architect’s work “became noticeably more pronounced”. As far as this researcher remembers, Godsell’s interest in Wright’s organic ideals was more fundamental and profound, rather than the result of someone else’s introduction. Godsell was uncompromising in his belief that true architecture is one that is at one with its surroundings: "to embrace and enhance the beauty of the site on which the building stands for both occupier and (the) viewer”, he was once quoted.
While working for Bell, Godsell completed the building of his own house in Balcombe Road, Beaumaris. The house embodies all that he held sacrosanct in *organic* architecture. The house received wide publicity in contemporary newspapers (Fig.55) and lifestyle magazines. It was featured in the July 1963 edition of *Australian House and Garden* (Fig.56) under the heading of “Melbourne Architect’s Redwood House”. In the feature article, the anonymous author makes some vague reference to Australian Modernism thus:

> “Houses designed to hold their own by world architectural standards, are becoming easier to find all over Australia. In the newer suburbs, or carved up old estates, these gems of architecture which honestly express, the times we live in, crop up from time to time.

The home built by architect David Godsell for his family is such a house – a site-hugging Californian redwood structure which rises beautifully with the slope of the land to become a handsome, almost rugged-looking two-storey house.”

The article goes on to describe how the external Californian redwood cladding blends with the shrubs and the pine trees that dominate the site. It does not attempt to describe the architectural qualities of the design. It is more of a reportage from a home builder’s perspective. Nonetheless, in an era not known for its architectural innovations, the Godsell House drew the attention of some sections of the populace. It was the relative widespread acceptance by some sections of the general population, through such publicity in magazines like *House and Garden* that spurred Godsell into leaving Bell’s office to begin his own practice.

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Figure 55 Facsimile of a contemporary newspaper article describing David Godsell’s house in Balcombe Rd., Beaumaris, Victoria.

Figure 56 Facsimile of illustration from House & Garden July 1969 feature. The caption reads: “Looking back from the living room there is a view of the dining area (where Mrs. Godsell is standing on the steps), and of the front entrance walk on the left where slabs of concrete set in gravel make a stepping stone path. Glass doors on the right open to a side courtyard. Seagrass matting is used on a brown PVA cement floor”.

To suggest that the design of the Godsell House faithfully follows the organic ideal is an understatement. The Godsell House is ‘Wrightian’ in every detail, from its “site hugging” appearance to the detail of the fascia board. There is even a touch of whimsicality in the brick pattern of the mock-chimney above the carport (which was subsequently enclosed to form an office – Fig.57.)

The site falls towards Balcombe Road, this allowed Godsell to design the house to appear to emerge from its immediate surroundings. Not unlike Woodfall’s Montague House
(1983) in the Dandenongs, the Godsell House emerges from its (now) suburban surroundings camouflaged by the trees around it.

![Godsell House view from the Balcombe Road approach](image)

**Figure 57** Godsell House – view from the Balcombe Road approach (photograph: Alex Njoo).

Owing to the gradient of the site, the slightly concealed entrance is a level above the carport (subsequently converted into an office). Upon entering, visitors would find themselves in the Living Room facing a characteristic ‘Wrightian’ inglenook which is dominated by the fire-place (Fig.58), an adjacent mitred glass corner window gives the room a glimpse of the original lawn terrace outside. According to Mrs. Godsell[^481], the Living Room was intended to have a sunken floor, however, the cost for achieving such an effect was considered prohibitive at the time. The skylight that runs the full length of the room and is perpendicular to the North-south axis of the house, however, is reminiscent of one of Wright’s Usonian houses, the Sturgess House(1939)[^482]

[^482]: Sergeant, op.cit. P52, the in-line Usonian.
The Godsell House is U-shaped with the Living Room at one end and the original parents’ Bedroom, stair-hall and Utility Room which later became a nursery, facing each other across the Courtyard, with the Dining area, Kitchen and Shower/WC area forming the connecting link between them. A larger parents’ bedroom and its adjoining en-suite were later added to the first floor of the house.

The Dining area which is separated from the Living Room by a change in level, nestles immediately to the left of the virtual entrance. There is no entrance hall in the conventional sense. Godsell’s seemed to have intended that the semi-concealed entrance occupies the role of a conventional entrance hall⁴⁸³. The galley kitchen next to the Dining area has a commanding view of the Courtyard which had its practical application when the children were young (Fig.59).

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⁴⁸³ NB To many first time visitors to the house, the office which was once the carport may present itself as an entrance to the house. However, it is the inclined path past the office that would take visitors to the covered entrance.
By placing the Kitchen and the Gallery that runs alongside it as a fulcrum of the house, Godsell has wholly adopted Wright’s Usonian ‘principle’ of the kitchen as a central hub of the house\(^{484}\). As in Patrick’s Laidlaw House, the various functions of the house seem to radiate from the central hub. The spatial connections between the various ‘zones’ are defined by the way the floor levels are changed to accommodate the sloping site. The original house had three bedrooms, later when the family was extended by the arrival of another child, another bedroom with an adjoining Dressing Room and En-suite was added.

Where the house excels in the application of Wright’s \textit{organic} ideals is in the way Godsell used Californian redwood both inside and outside. Mrs. Godsell commented that her husband was “very fussy” about every aspect of the design. He was meticulous in his details as well as the selection of material. The house echoes the familiar characteristics of Wright’s \textit{organic} planning. As with the Robie House, Godsell’s House is also extended “outward towards its surroundings”\(^{485}\). The balcony outside the Bed Room upstairs – a reference to the cantilevered terrace off the living room at Falling Water\(^{486}\) - is extended to almost touch the fully grown trees nearby, while at the same time it has the desired Easterly aspect (Fig.60).

\(^{484}\) Sergeant, op.cit. P14.
\(^{485}\) Jordy, op.cit. P196.
However, traces of the Prairie School can also be found in Godsell’s expressive use of horizontal lines of his house, the band of windows, overlapping fascia boards and some of the horizontal timber lining of internal walls. The sand-coloured brickwork further adds to the spirit of the school’s characteristic style.\footnote{Brooks, op.cit. Pp 4 – 5: “The continuity of line, edge, and surface – an inheritance from the earlier Shingle Style – lent horizontal unity to the design, and against these horizontals a spirited interplay was established with short vertical accents, such as piers, mullions, and subsidiary masses.”}  

The Chapman House (1963, Figs. 61, 62), however, is directly influenced by Wright’s Usonion ideals. Although the excentric juxtapositioning of the basic square plan, thus creating triangular protruding spaces at ground level, two fireplaces are formed out of the masonry cruciform wall, and terraces off each of the three bedrooms on the first floor, could be termed as having a closer association to the hexagonal Usonion patterns.\footnote{Sergeant, op.cit. Pp60 – 65.} The footprint of the house is such that three outdoor terraces are formed to surround the house. All the rooms at ground level, Living, Dining and Rumpus rooms have views of the terraces. By design, the triangular site allows the house to be surrounded by a winter terrace on its South-western side, a garden wall conceals it from a relatively busy Hampton Street as well as the South-westerly weather; and the remaining terraces forming a summer outdoor space with a North and North-eastern aspect respectively. The original carport has since been enclosed to provide the second owner, Norman Braun, a painter, a studio. The minor renovation to the original carport was sensitively executed by Peter Schenkel, a Melbourne architect.
According to the present owner, Douglas Drury who had lived with the late Braun for more than a quarter of a century, the *organic* qualities of the house are evident in the way the interior spaces seem to extend beyond to the surroundings outside. Drury cited that despite the compact plan of the house, Dining, Living, Rumpus (now den) and Kitchen down stairs with a central stair access to the three Bedrooms and Bathroom upstairs, it is not claustrophobic. The crafted timber staircase which greets the visitor upon entering the house is adorned with horizontal railings, a departure from the usual balustrade of staircases. Bookshelves and built-in cupboards occupy the corners created by the projected triangular spaces in the Living, Dining and Rumpus rooms. With its rich timber wall linings, the interior is truly Usonion. Natural light streams from all directions into the house from the series of French doors that virtually adorned the external walls of the house. The Bedrooms upstairs all have access to a narrow balcony and projected terraces that are formed by the apex of the triangles.

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489 Conversation with Drury 050507
With the exception of the Kennedy House (1963) Figs. 62 – 64), Chapman House is one of Godsell’s overtly geometric interpretations of a ‘Wrightian’ idea. The Kennedy House, with its semi elliptical plan, is reminiscent to Wright’s “solar hemi-cycle “ for the Jacob Family (1943)\textsuperscript{490}. The elliptical suburban house also owes its design from the Friedman House (1950) with its intersecting circles and masonry retaining wall that seem to burrow into the surrounding earth, a true manifestation of Wright’s organic ideal.

Godsell had held this belief, that “organic design was only part of organic life”\textsuperscript{491}, throughout all his working life. In a sense, the organic philosophy that dominated most of his work is also the result of the expression of his own personality.

\textsuperscript{490} Ibid. Pp82-83.
\textsuperscript{491} Ibid. P88.
Figure 54 Kennedy House Plan courtesy of Mrs. Godsell.

Figure 63 Kennedy House: Entrance. Photograph by Doug Evans.
Figure 64 Kennedy House: Courtyard. Photograph by Doug Evans.
CONCLUSION

The historical chronology of the impact of organic architecture on Melbourne architecture suggests that a series of diverse confluences took place rather than the result of a single source of influence.

The Peninsula houses that Boyd referred to\(^{492}\) with their “long low profiles (of) horizontal lapped boarding, large windows and asbestos (sic) roofs, frequently combined with heavy chimneys of local Moorooduc stone”\(^{493}\) could have been one of the early manifestations of a ‘Wrightian’ organic architecture in Victoria (c1940). Peter Mulller’s “Molinari” house in Forestville, NSW, seemed to echo the elements of the Peninsula houses, in particular the heavy Moorooduc stone chimney which was the central feature of Muller’s house.

The proposition that the advent of post-war modern architecture began in Sydney\(^{494}\) was contradicted by Boyd who suggested\(^{495}\) that Melbourne in the 60s was “Australia’s cradle of twentieth century design”. Notwithstanding the parochial rivalry between Melbourne and Sydney, it would still be wrong and presumptuous to assume that the organic architecture as practised in post-war Australia grew out of Sydney. A simultaneous development of its philosophical adherence would be a more accurate description.

No doubt the debate whether the impact of organic architecture in post-war Australian architecture constituted the development of a regional architecture will continue for some time. In the meantime the works by Geoffrey Woodfall et al remain in the realm of a post-war Australian organic architecture.

In the case of Woodfall and Chancellor and Patrick’s domestic architecture, they seem to have derived conceptual lessons from external models such as the work of Frank Lloyd

\(^{493}\) Callister, op.cit. Transition 38:72.
\(^{494}\) Taylor, op.cit. P34.
\(^{495}\) Boyd, Australia’s Home, op.cit. P297.
Wright or the Greene Brothers to name a few, and were subsequently applied in an organic functional manner to meet local site conditions. Although Patrick acknowledged Neutra’s as well as Belluschi’s influence in the partnership’s earlier domestic work, it was, nonetheless, Wright’s organic ideal that effected the greatest influence.

Kevin Knight’s work, at least in the case of the Brighton Municipal offices and the IOOF building in particular, on the other hand, displayed a different allegiance to the organic ideal. In his own words, Knight admitted his admiration for Wright’s architectural achievements. It has been, as he acknowledged in the interviews, the inspiration of his architectural life. While it could be argued that the monumentality of the Brighton Municipal offices might have been the result of a different requirement from suburban or rural houses, the source of its influence is undeniably Wright’s Guggenheim museum in New York; a comparison that Knight has vehemently denied. It is, however, in the way the building operates that the organic ideal seems to dominate; the democratisation of a municipal bureaucracy.

Godsell’s architecture clearly displays its fullest devotion to the Wrightian ideals. Like Wright, Godsell was completely immersed in the architect’s ancestral mythology and humanistic philosophy. Every detail in his Balcombe Rd. house is an almost perfect replication of Wright’s. While the threads of organicism are faithfully maintained in his work, it is tenuous whether Godsell’s buildings are truly organic in the manner of the other three practices, such as the deliberate attempts to blend with the site, for instance. All the same, the historiography of organic architecture is clearly present in his work.

By the time these influences reached the work of this small, yet significant band of architects, its dilution, as a result of local conditions, climatically, or geographically, is clear; the organic ideals have found its natural resting place in the work of these modern Australian architects.
APPENDIX

Preamble

Bernard Maybeck, whose entry in the Canberra competition was unsuccessful, relentlessly attempted to alter the sequence of events in his favour by what could be described as underhanded means. At an official lunch held in honour of the Australian Prime Minister, Alfred Deakin who was visiting California at the time, Maybeck who was seated next to the Prime Minister’s wife, was able to express a dissenting view of Griffin’s successful Canberra proposal to Mrs. Deakin. This eventually led to Maybeck’s meeting with Deakin, who was apparently seduced by his (Maybeck’s) proposal for building temporary structures to hasten the Australian Capitol project. Maybeck was able to establish a series of communications with successive prime ministers and an assortment of bureaucrats that lasted for seven years, thus delaying the starting time of the project altogether. Maybeck’s efforts to wrest the project from Griffin ultimately failed.

The following are various copies of letters that Maybeck wrote to Prime Minister Deakin, his bureaucrats and including exchanges with Griffin. Throughout this entire saga, Griffin remained true to his character, impeccably generous and gracious.

(Facsimiles courtesy of Peter Barrett)
The Honorable W. A. Watt, M.H.R.,
Commonwealth Offices,
Melbourne, Australia.

Dear Sir:-

Experience of recent years in the construction of expositions, fields of beautiful buildings richly embellished with sculpture and paintings, indicates the financial wisdom of beginning anything as permanent and vital as a country's capital by first constructing an experimental model. By that I do not mean a group of miniatures, but a temporary city to be lived in, - - "tied on" as a man would try on a suit of clothing, giving the sailor an opportunity to take in a bit here and let it out a little there.

For the practical value of a city there is no other test but use; and nothing but use can enable us to avoid giving permanent form to mistakes whose cost would be unending.

The construction of expositions involves almost all the practical problems arising in any sort of city building except the quality of permanence, and yields experiences of tremendous value. Expositions are commonly built of wood covered with plaster, reproduce the richest design, are erected with great rapidity, and are surrounded with extensive garden plantations. I am not recommending such construction because it is cheap merely, but because it is swift and temporary and hence exactly suited to experimentation.

It is far easier to make a mistake in the plan of a building than in the plan of a suit of clothing. The risk is tremendously multiplied in the plan of a city, and worse complicated in the plan of a capital. Only by experience can we be sure the offices are properly related to one another, and the different capital buildings to the residential, commercial and shopping districts that will grow up about them.

The amusement street of the exposition at San Francisco was planned by some of that city's shrewdest business talent and engineering skill, guided by an amusement expert. They foresaw all that men could be expected to foresee. Yet mistakes were made that were vital and in themselves caused immense loss. Had the street been a permanent one, impossible to change, the losses would have amounted to an annual burden...
of hundreds of thousands of dollars, and perhaps it is not too much to say that in a few years business would have abandoned the entire investment. But the problem of an amusement street is simple compared to that of a permanent city, and you can hardly abandon a capital once built in permanent form, no matter what burdens its inconvenience may impose on the community and posterity.

The suggestion is not so radical as it might at first appear. An experimental model city would almost pay its way in addition to demonstrating permanent requirements. It would house the offices of government for twelve or fifteen years during which the rental value would operate as set-off against the investment. And the occupancy could begin much sooner than in the case of permanent and less rapid construction. Both efficiencies and errors of design would become plain through actual use; and rebuilding in permanent materials could begin as early as seemed wise, and proceed bit by bit, with a minimum of financial strain. The building of a model city would not be a rash experiment but a very conservative investment and the first step of a sure and logical evolution toward a perfect result. Australia is fortunate in the ability to carry out so prudent and profitable a policy.

It is possible to estimate the cost of such construction with reasonable certainty, and under a properly centralized system of control to keep the actual cost rather close to the estimate. Such a system of control was developed and employed in the San Francisco World's Fair with most satisfactory results.

I propose that the experimental Federal City of Canberra shall be built within two years, to last from ten to fifteen years. All the Federal buildings shall be highly but harmoniously colored, and ornamented with sculpture, colonnades, great vaulted assembly halls and miles of balustraded terraces, all in cement plaster, and the whole to be surrounded by gardens and trees transplanted or grown rapidly as they were at San Francisco, where in a few months they took on the appearance of having been established a quarter of a century. Shopping districts could be constructed in the cheapest manner, but with richly ornamented fronts, as they were after the conflagration at San Francisco. Thus miles of streets could be made ready for business while the government buildings were under construction. If improperly located or defective in ground plan the abandonment of such a district would cause a minimum loss. If found suitable the shops could be replaced as the rentals provided the money. Markets could be given an airy and festive
appearance, and office buildings could be made harmonious and beautiful. The railway station could be made to look like a monument of Roman glory, with hotels and cafes in beautiful groups about it. Even the railway yards and workshops could be given the most orderly arrangement and be made as neat as a ship. An opera house of porphyry and gold set in a fine park would contribute a note of Byzantine magnificence. And all these things through the demonstration of actual use would ultimately find their way to the most convenient, effective and valuable locations. I could continue these descriptions indefinitely without adding to the clarity of the picture.

To build permanently from the outset when there is an opportunity for such experimentation seems like a tragedy. It would perpetuate every blunder and multiply its annual cost by every succeeding year. In such an experimental city as I have suggested, however, the citizens would inevitably find many reasons for change, just as they do in every city. They might find that the business section was too far from the railway, or that the great church was in the wrong end of the town. Trial would show them exactly what they needed, and what was a costly hindrance to business; and they could destroy their architectural mistakes without hesitancy or regret. In San Francisco we destroyed nearly fifteen million dollars worth of main exposition buildings, to say nothing of those in the state and foreign sections and the amusement street, because they had done their work and it was economical to get rid of them; and we destroyed them all at once. The first City of Canberra should be a dream city, to be inhabited, tried out, tested by actual occupancy and use and the million complex activities of public and private business, and then gradually replaced on sure and solid lines to stand and do its work with the least cost and waste as long as the Commonwealth of Australia has any need of it.
February 4th, 1919.

The Honorable W. A. Watt, M.H.R.,
Commonwealth Offices,
Melbourne, Australia.

Dear Sir:-

If the temporary city of Canberra mentioned in my former letter of September 18, 1318 is not feasible, then I wish to make another suggestion.

Do not waste any money on permanent Parliament buildings or on any other building in Canberra for several years to come, but on the contrary, build all the new buildings when they are needed, and build them of temporary material. Where fireproofing is needed, build the buildings of light iron frames and a concrete skin, say 2" thick for the outer wall, the inner wall can be as usual of plaster.

But build the out buildings that are intended for adornment rather than for use. These could be built of wood and cement plaster, preferably cast in glue molds. This means wall as well as coving columns.

Since there is room enough for everything, and the only real expense will be the utilities, such as pavements, sewers, water supply, conduits, electricity, and the other things such as gardees, parapets, balustrades, stairways, colonnades, etc. I hope the powers that be will not try to make one building serve more than one master. I mean, do not pile the various needs in story upon story, but so far as possible keep things all on one floor. There are many reasons why in the long run. Above all, the waste spaces of today will be needed for unexpected things in later years.

My principal reason for wishing the buildings to be temporary is that it is foolish for Australia to get foreign architects and artists, for the time will come when the local architects will have a distinct Australian view point, and this will show conspicuously in the art of their time. A foreign note in a building too expensive to be torn down will hinder for even a hundred years the natural development of the immediate surroundings, and will clash with the new ideas and be hideous.

Environmental Design Archives
University of California, Berkeley

Collection
Canberra will not at this stage of the game find the right Australian artists and architects. The architect you will get now will in all probability be one who can not have the ability of the artist of the future for whom you keep a place. If therefore you are satisfied with using home talent and for the time being the result will seem beautiful, and the newspapers will stimulate all efforts no matter how mediocre, then there will be no harm in building if the buildings are not of permanent materials.

And the expense will be so low that attempts at embellishments, outside of the mere necessities will be not only possible but imperative, encouraging the wildest optimistic art endeavors.

In summoning up both letters, the first letter suggested that steps be taken before planning the Parliament buildings or any of the federal buildings, to replace the government group from the Parliament background and surroundings down to the Molonglo River in detail; so that when finished the group will be the harmonious composition of buildings, terraces, colonnades, trees, balusters, utility stations, smaller units for postal telegraph, booths, walks, drives, refreshment places, Parliament buildings and trees, vines even up to the cornices of the most elegant edifices, flowers and riot of all foliage color and architecture and sculpture, and joyous forms full of optimism fitting and inspired by the topography in detail. The second letter tells of the need of avoiding permanent constructions, so that the new generation of Australia shall have an opportunity to express the Australian spiritual life.

Respectfully Sir,
May 2nd, 1919.

Senator Grant,
Parliament,
Melbourne, Australia.

Dear Sir—

I noticed in the Brisbane Courier of March 13, 1919 your remarks about the delay in moving the Federal Capital to Canberra. I enclose letters to Mr. Watts and Mr. Hughes in which I ask them in the first place to build a temporary beautiful town on the site of Canberra and almost like the adopted plan.

In San Francisco we rebuilt the town after the fire in a very short time, limiting the time so that the temporary constructions would be allowed to remain. In a very short time we had a gala town, with pretty shops, business houses, theaters and hotels.

Shortly after that we had the Panama Pacific International Exposition, at which Australia was represented. I do not know whether you have seen it, but if you had you would have some idea of how beautiful a quickly built town could be, and attractive enough to entice, "the ministers and members of Parliament, and public servants no doubt prefer life in a big city to the prospect which a raw new capital offers, and the longer they stay there the more reluctant they will be to move, rooted as it were to the Melbourne soil, etc". If this temporary city of Canberra were started with pretty shops, theaters, hotels and lovely gardens and flowers, more like a great Monte Carlo for beauty but in other ways entirely different, it would be a serious businesslike city. And all this can be done in two or three years and be considered as a memorial to the heroic self-sacrifice of the Australians in the War.

I am sending these letters to you: Premier Holman, Ex prime Minister Deakin and Mr. Andrew Paterson of Brisbane, the brother of Mr. Paterson who was a member of Parliament before he died. Mr. Paterson has met me and he knows who I am.
I have been writing about this matter of Canberra for several years to several Ministers, and I hope there will be a serious consideration of the things I mention in my letters.

Yours sincerely,
Feb., 12, 1823.

Honorable William H. Hughes,
Melbourne, Australia.

Dear Sir:-

In the files of the architects for Canberra there are probably letters of suggestions for improvements at Canberra, some of which may have been written as long ago as 1817. It may be well to have some one re-read them. I would like to be free to send suggestions as they come to my mind, and have them filed with the other letters.

Suggestions come to me from time to time in our Berkeley Planning Commission (Having jurisdiction over streets, parks and public construction) of which I am a member.

I am anxious to protect Canberra from the mistakes we have made in our older towns and cities, and which are so difficult to correct.

My first suggestion would be to establish a City Planning and Civic Art Commission for Canberra of not more than five members; men who are sensitive to the physical welfare of the future city. They serve without pay and win the good will of the newspapers for a city planning propaganda.
Dear Mr. Maycock,

Though we have so far only exchanged letters I am looking forward to meeting you face to face soon.

Meantime the next best thing is to let my first assistant have the privilege, for he, like myself, has much in common in ways of looking at things architectural.

The bearer is Mr. Henry Pynor.

Yours faithfully,

[Signature]

Mr. R.R. Maycock
Architect
San Francisco
California. U.S.A.
Sept. 6, 1919.

Mr. W. B. Griffin, Federal Architect,
Commonwealth Offices,
Melbourne, Australia.

Dear Mr. Griffin:

I thank you for remembering me and writing.

I know it is not easy to see through other people's eyes and yet more difficult for the younger generation to see through the eyes of the older one.

If the issue should materialize in favor of building a Canberra according to your plan of Canberra in two or three years, I hope you will seize the opportunity and work for its realization with all your might. Its success will make you immortal,—perhaps you do not care for such gaudy fineness, but I mean it in a solid sense, in the sense of what you will have done for mankind.

As your town is to materialize, I make one suggestion hoping you will forgive me for doing so. Then you make the streets for your plan of Canberra, (and the plan shows a series of circles in places and other geometric forms), do not hesitate to make curves that are not circles but which will adapt themselves as nearly as possible to the circles and the topography, and still keep the spirit of your plan. I believe the engineers
January 5th, 1930.

Honorable William H. Hughes, Prime Minister,
Commonwealth of Australia.

Dear Sir:

The reason for writing to yourself and your predecessors about Canberra spring from a conversation I had with Ex-Prime Minister Deakin, who I am told has died.

While Mr. Deakin was in San Francisco representing Australia at the World's Fair, 1915, he daily passed the Fine Arts Building of which I am the architect.

At a luncheon given to him and Mrs. Deakin, it happened that she sat at my right at the table, and in a thoughtless way (not knowing her history) I said, "It is queer to put the Parliament House on the top of a hill". She replied, "Do you think so", and thus began a discussion of Canberra.

A few days later Mr. Deakin came to my office to hear a suggestion which had come to my mind after my talk with Mrs. Deakin.

I had the accepted plan of Canberra before us and explained to him the idea that was brewing. Both Mr. Deakin and myself had the object of our illustration before us, namely, the rebuilding of San Francisco after the fire, and the World's Fair buildings and many departments that made up the business activity of the Fair.
Mr. R. V. Maybeck,
35 Montgomery Street,
SAN FRANCISCO.

Dear Mr. Maybeck,

I have been in receipt, sometimes forwarded, of correspondence addressed to Messrs. Beak, Fisher, and Hughes, on phases of the architecture of the Federal Capital, which I have been awaiting an opportunity to discuss fully with you, for I find points of interest, although I feel that some of the most important psychological elements of the problem of building a Capital have not been given due weight by you, or could not be at that distance.

I hope you will give me your opinion of the outline of my 1913 report sent herewith, which is the basis skeleton on which the whole of the design, development, and scheme of operations are based, working from generals to particulars, while at the same time, from little to big, after lengthy study of the conditions, and effort to determine consequences, so that least possible retracement may follow.

It is a large subject, and can hardly be touched upon in a letter, and I have been too sorely pressed to find time to elucidate in that way, but I shall forward you subsequent printed reports as they appear, and desire as much advice, and criticism thereon as such an idealist, as I know you to be, can offer.

Yours sincerely,
Dear Mr. Maybeck,

I have intended writing further upon my letter to you of 17th January 1917. However, just before the leaving of one of our infrequent mails I wish to say that several suggestions of yours in the interim have been forwarded to me and have proven very interesting.

The immediate problems have been however of an altogether different class from the constructive ones we would have wished and you may have imagined. Perhaps there will be a new era when the war crises are past when some attention can be secured to this fascinating project as a real possibility not as a political bogey.

Primarily, as to temporary construction, the conditions in Australia virtually preclude frame construction because both timber and metal are very expensive not only relative to American prices but to the other and locally produced building materials. Staff or stucco are hardly considered temporary expedients here for the latter are largely employed what are already deemed to be permanent buildings such as the Business Houses and Government Buildings and the proper architectural aim would appear to be to get away from the imitation methods in which these materials, practical in this climate, are generally used, and toward a straightforward honest recognition of their place as a suitable covering for substantial coated structures.

To do this properly will not of course preclude a profusion of fanciful creations, terraces, colonnades, balustrades and sculpture, etc., which can be cheaply obtained but it would be wrong it seems to me to encourage further imitation of stone construction which though excusable in frankly temporary expedients would only be continuing a half-century practice here of such imitative and plaster construction which is to all practical intents and purposes permanent.

Of course the scheme would start as a done story proposition but in view of the ample provision of site space for all time it is doubtful if any requirement of greater height would eventuate within the life period of even so called permanent buildings.

Unfortunately so far as the Australian practice goes it is recognized as almost altogether foreign now and largely that local English type of foreignness which is climatically farthest possible removed from indigenous art. This latter is what I wish we could get the very soonest possible and my policy has been considered most fully and seriously in the light of experience and history, with that object in view.

Sincerely yours,

[Signature]

Federal Capital Director of Design and Construction.
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