VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON
Te Whare Wananga o te Upoko o te Ika a Maui

LIBRARY
PRESENTED
by
ROGER HAY
THE Architectural Centre Inc

The Architectural Centre consists of people who believe that good and decent living in our modern world must be consciously planned for; that good planning means good design, in large things and in small; that good design rests ultimately on need and purpose.

The general aim of the Centre, therefore, is to assert and maintain the value of design as an element in living, for the individual and the community. Its practical objects, as laid down on its constitution, are as follows:

(a) To work for the general improvement of town and countryside.
(b) To promote the association of persons engaged or interested in the arts and sciences concerned with planning and design.
(c) To carry out an educational programme for the advancement of the knowledge of planning and design principles in general, as well as for the assistance of students actively engaged in architecture and town planning study.
(d) To promote a true understanding of planning and design among the community.
(e) To collaborate with similar organisations in this and other countries.
(f) To issue or promote or assist in the issues of books, pamphlets, periodicals and other documents relating to the above activities.

The actual work done by the Centre includes:

(a) Part-time School of Architecture in Wellington for architectural, town planning and other students.
(b) Publication of Design Review
(c) Annual Summer School of Design.
(d) Public Exhibitions.
(e) Meetings, talks and discussions.

Membership

There are three classes of membership: corporate, student and honorary.
The entrance fee for corporate members is £1.1.0, and the annual subscription £2.2.0.
Annual subscription for students is £1.1.0. Further details can be obtained from the Secretary, P.O. Box 1628, Wellington, C.I.
GOOD HOUSING MATTERS. More than ever people are realising the importance of the places they live in to the well-being of their families and of their communities. Increasing thought and effort is being directed to designing and building better houses for all.

Much can be done to improve the design and construction of the present-day house. Its erection is costly and troublesome, so that once built, it is made to last from generation to generation. Most people base their ideas on domestic design on houses of their acquaintance and form their conception of the house they would like to build from the examples, both good and bad, of others they know or have lived in.

Loan authorities base their ideas of domestic design on what will protect their investment, and understandably favour what will have universal appeal. Public housing authorities base their ideas on the needs and tastes of the average family.

Thus the influence of environment, tradition and finance tends to make all houses fundamentally the same. This sameness, unless handled with skill in siting and street-planning, leads to the dull uniformity so typical of our suburban streets. Many people feel that this monotony of environment prevents their enjoying a fuller life. To some extent this explains suburbia's flight to escapist amusements or to the week-end bach. Too often the home loses its place as the centre of family activity and becomes a dormitory for eating and sleeping.

It is not claimed that the Demonstration House is a complete answer to this problem. However, it may suggest ways in which a home can be a more satisfactory place in which to spend leisure time—a place where the family wants to be and not a place from which its members want to escape.

The house is the unit which, multiplied many times, together with communal and commercial buildings, makes up the town. Last year the Architectural Centre planned a new shopping and business area for Te Aro Flat. That also was an answer to the flight from the city. Cities need not be ugly, nor suburbs monotonous nor houses dormitory-like. Architects, town-planners and engineers can create new cities and replan old ones which once again will be pleasant to live in.

The Demonstration House has been designed for conditions peculiar to Wellington. These are high hills, high winds, and high average sunshine. The design shows how the wind can be defeated and the sun exploited in order to give full scope for outdoor living. It permits ideal open-air conditions for children to play and for parents to lounge and for the family to enjoy casual meals in privacy and pleasantness. The terraced garden makes the patio even more livable. Every room in the house looks on to it, and it offers the shelter to the plants which Wellington gardeners so cherish. By way of contrast, the steep and rough slopes surrounding the house have not been cultivated. Most rooms also overlook these banks and they have been planted with suitable native trees and shrubs which in time will make an ideal setting for the house.

The Demonstration House is not a minimum house. The increased demand for housing and consequent shortages in recent years had tended to keep all housing to a minimum of floor area and equipment. The Architectural Centre considers that the time has arrived when thought should be given to provide something more than the austerity house. The house is within the permitted area for three-bedroom houses. While the U-shaped plan is more costly than the box-like plan, it is infinitely more livable. The finish and equipment is more costly than that of many recent houses but is by no means extravagant.

It is not suggested that the Demonstration House will suit every family or every site or every purse. It is suggested, however, that this house, in whole or in part, presents many new and pleasing ideas to those who are interested in domestic design and that it will stimulate that interest.
A HOUSE IS BORN

MOST HOUSES are the brain-child of three parents—an owner, a designer and a contractor. The Demonstration House had only one. Despite this state of near-orphanhood it was not a neglected baby.

The House was conceived in the spring of 1948. The Architectural Centre faced the problem of finding a worth-while project as a Summer School. The previous summer had been well spent in producing the "Te Aro Flat" Exhibition. This year it was decided that interest should be turned to the everyday problem of building, not in paper but in timber, not with ink but with perspiration, a problem that would be a challenge to the Centre's ability in design and construction.

Building a house nowadays is too much of an ordeal to be undertaken unnecessarily—let alone as a holiday exercise. But the idea would provide an excellent opportunity for getting practical experience in construction procedure, the lack of which is strongly felt in the world of text books and drawing-boards.

The child was not stillborn. Despite misgivings and fears, the Centre decided to proceed. A site was obtained and levels were taken. True, it was not everybody's choice, but it was accessible and had a good outlook; and in any case not every man who builds in Wellington can have level ground, and some must take it sloping away from the sunlight.

The design was the outcome of a competition between groups of students working under tutors. The hypothetical owner was to be a family man interested in his home, his garden, his books and his music. Fortunate indeed that he existed only on paper—such a man (and his wife) would have raised many posers, but possibly the conflicting ideas of a score or two enthusiastic students required equally careful handling. The competition produced an interesting range of solutions. The successful one was unusual (but not deliberately so) and capitalised brilliantly on the difficulties of the site.

November saw the working drawings and specifications prepared, and the other necessary "preliminaries" under way. December saw the students free from examinations and books. An experienced foreman was obtained and several students were employed on a full-time basis. Many more spent evenings and week-ends on the site. They found that "practical experience" was often obtained at the end of a pick or shovel. Specialist work like plumbing and electrical installation was done by contractors but students helped (and learned) where possible. Many city merchants were sympathetic. A number made donations of materials, others made specialist tradesmen available, and others loaned construction equipment. To everyone the project was a lesson in team work.

At the beginning there was an atmosphere of almost dangerous optimism. The tedious preliminaries had all been handled without delay and the future looked bright. But the project had been planned as practical experience in modern building, and practical experience it turned out to be. True, there was no labour problem while the vacation lasted, but the students learned quickly that "shortages of materials" was more than a newspaper term.

March came, and summer was over. The students were again tied to lecture hours and studio work. The evenings were no longer light, the week-ends were no longer always fine, and the house was by no means finished. Work continued with more paid labour and with what week-end help could be obtained.

The child grew. At times it was a troublesome brat—it had a healthy appetite for materials which the market could not always satisfy, sometimes it demanded from its parent a reply to a question which they had not considered. But eventually it came of age, to the intense gratification of the worried "parent"—the group of tutors and students who had conceived it (each secretly imagining himself the owner).

What had been planned as a summer project had lasted until the following spring. There was less ambitious idealism apparent at the end, but the parent had learned.
SOLDIERS live in barracks, bachelors in boarding houses, but families live in houses. A family will be influenced more by the house it lives in than will the bachelor by the boarding-house. The design of a house, then, demands special care, as families are more important to a country than are bachelors, or even soldiers.

More than all the labour-saving equipment, and the atmosphere of comfort and security, a family requires space—space for all the things they do together and space for all the things they do separately. Would the ideal house, then, be a huge structure with separate rooms for all these activities? Of course not. Even a woman would have only 168 hours weekly in which to clean it; even the most eligible of one-time bachelors would not be able to afford it; and even the most generous of building controllers would not allow it.

If we may not have the space, then, we must be satisfied with a feeling of space. Outside every house there is plenty of it. Need we shut ourselves from it with walls in which we punch small holes we call windows? The Demonstration House attempts to overcome this by grouping the rooms around the patio, which becomes in essence an outdoor living-room, and by providing generous windows and glazed doors opening on to it. All the main rooms are in this way made to seem part of the greater space outside.

By careful planning the maximum use has been made of such space as is enclosed. The living-room is large, a separate laundry has been eliminated and what would have been passage-way has been absorbed in the utility room. This can be used as a play-room, sewing-room or a hobby-room.

We have become reconciled to "minimum houses" which are tightly planned boxes like the barrack block or the boarding-house. The Demonstration House shows that this feeling of restriction can be defied, and without extravagance . . . because a house is not where a family is imprisoned, but where it lives.

The next requirement of a good house is that it is suited to the particular family who live in it. In design it should be in harmony with the temperament of the occupants. It should have "personality" just as a barrack block or boarding-house can have no personality. In the design of the Demonstration House this was difficult, as the occupants were hypothetical people whose interests were outlined and much had to be imagined. Domestic design is not so much a thing of the intellect that personal likes and dislikes have no place.
The third criterion is efficiency. All theorising about environment and individuality is hypocrisy if the housewife is condemned to slavery in a badly-designed kitchen. Careful planning can save many needless steps and careful detailing can eliminate many dust-traps. The Demonstration House received special attention in this respect. Equipment can assist. The laundry tubs and machine have been placed in a curtained recess in the bathroom, thus doing away with the dismal "wash-house" and combining two rooms which are rarely used simultaneously. A built-in fan in one of the panes of the kitchen window is more than a novelty. In an open plan like this it is very effective in removing cooking odours.

Efficiency goes further than saving steps and saving embarrassments. It can mean saving fuel. The economical coke-burning heater in the utility room is the back-bone of the heating system. Intelligent use of large windows on to the (sometimes) sun-flooded patio allows the maximum use of solar heat. The living-room fireplace is designed to obtain more from fuel than the usual 18% efficiency of the open fire. The circular steel flue has not been taken outside the house, but has been exposed for its full height so that it will radiate into the room some of the heat which is normally lost.
It would be a selfish philosophy which allowed people to live in bliss and efficiency in an ideal house, regardless of the effect of its appearance on the passer-by. The good house will harmonise with the surroundings where possible. It should not draw attention to itself by pretentious ornament or artificial styling. By restraint in design, careful proportioning and studied colouring, it can be an asset to the scene. The Demonstration House attempts this. There is no aspiration to attract attention through ostentation, through style, be it classic or "moderne" or through deliberate freakishness. The elevations, like the plan, are the outcome of honest-to-goodness careful design.

All the foregoing have been general considerations. If that was all there was in house design, surely by now someone would have published a handbook of plans tabulated according to the client's purse, size of family, temperament and interests.

A house is a most immobile thing. It is most important that it be suited to the site to which it will be wedded—there can be no divorce.
Aspect, access, orientation and contours are of vital importance, and they vary from site to site. With the Demonstration House they deserved more than usual consideration.

The site had a good outlook to the east and south and west; it rose to the north. A small flat area was located near the north boundary and about 40ft above the road level, and apart from this area, it sloped very steeply. The cost of a good view was exposure to the southerlies. The cost of protection from the northerlies was an outlook on to a bank.

The schemes prepared by the students in the competition offered interesting solutions. One attempted to make full use of the flat area by placing the bedrooms upstairs. Some showed insufficient regard for the slope of the site, while others made the most of the view but offered no protection from the wind.

The successful design was the outcome of careful study of the difficulties of the site. The house was conceived as a U-shaped screen on three sides of a court. The view was preserved from all the rooms, while most also looked on to the court. This was sheltered from the northerlies by the bank, and from the southerlies by the house itself, while the windows on the exposed parts were kept as small as possible and not made to open. The bank is not so high that it blocks out the midday sun, even in winter. It is not often realised that Wellington’s sunshine record is comparable with that of Southern Italy. It is the high winds which prevent our exploiting the possibilities of outdoor living to the same extent. The patio of the Demonstration House makes full use of this sunshine possible by forming an outdoor lounge protected from all the winds and from public view.

The bogey of space, the bogey of southerlies, the bogey of suspicious neighbours, and the bogey of steep sites have all been overcome.

The Demonstration House is more than a good solution to a difficult siting problem. It is more than an example of careful visual design. It is more than an efficient machine. It is a place where a family will live. They should live well.
M**A**N, it is said, shapes his environment, and then it shapes him. This is particularly true with regard to his dwelling for it is in its design and arrangement that the average man finds his greatest opportunity for exercising a personal influence over his surroundings and, in turn, the environment thus created has by reason of its intimate association with his every action during the time he spends within it, a considerable effect on his outlook towards life. Thus the responsibilities of the architect or designer, whose job it is to translate this attitude to life into terms of walls and roofs, and the spaces they enclose, is very great indeed.

But conversely, through his design, the architect may have the opportunity to suggest a particular mode of living. If he is able to form a broad and spacious conception of the good life and represent this successfully in concrete form, he can open up to his client new and exciting avenues for living. To attempt this for the consideration of the general public was one of the principal aims of the Architectural Centre in building this house.

Its designers share a firm belief in the influence of the physical environment on the mental and spiritual well-being of the individual, and they have endeavoured to create an environment which will be more conducive to enlightened living than can be found in the conventional bungalows we see about us.

In every well-designed house there is a complete unity between the inside and the outside. The design of the interior cannot be disassociated from the overall conception of the dwelling—it is simply a more intimate expression of the particular approach to living envisaged. Historically this has always been so, but varying emphasis has been placed on the exterior and interior from time to time. Today the emphasis is placed on meeting the needs (both practical and aesthetic) of the occupants rather than making these needs subservient to the demands of a preconceived exterior. Fewer people nowadays seem to feel the need to impress their neighbours with an over-burdened facade, and the contemporary architect plans from the inside to the outside. This, of course, makes it all the more important that he should investigate fully the basic living requirements of the occupants.

While the designers in this case were able to form a reasonably clear picture of the way of life for which they were planning, it was difficult to decide questions of interior detail as the taste and temperament of the future occupants (which could only be assumed) had also to be considered. Therefore the interiors had to be somewhat non-committal and yet avoid the impersonal atmosphere of the hotel suite; they had to provide an unobtrusive background which would allow full scope for individual expressions of taste when the family took up residence.

And so the aim generally throughout the house has been to use plain materials and fabrics with simple wall treatments, and to rely for interest on the natural grain of woodwork and contrast in form and texture of materials rather than in applied decoration and floral patterns.

Making the best use of limited floor space available is a pressing problem today, and in this house built-in furniture has been used as much as possible. This frees the space within the rooms, but a great deal of attention must be paid to its convenient arrangement at the outset as the flexibility obtainable with movable units is lost. It is not possible to change one's mind and rearrange the furniture if it is built-in, but space-saving considerations will generally outweigh this disadvantage. What movable furniture there is in the house has been designed to be as light as possible to heighten the effect of space in the rooms. This also has practical advantages—think
of the daily effort involved in moving the usual heavy chesterfield suite in order to sweep underneath.

Several family activities will take place in the living-room—dining, reading, writing, listening to the radio, talking and entertaining friends. The furniture has had to be planned and disposed to meet all these requirements without making the room appear overcrowded. The low fitting along one wall houses the writing desk, fireplace and fuel bins, radiogram and record storage, and magazine cupboard, while a divan to seat three is built in at one end. The fireplace is covered by a flush-fitting firescreen during the summer months to fill that dreary gaping hole which usually becomes a receptacle for waste paper and cigarette ends.

The dining table is placed at the other end of the living-room and can be moved under the hatch from the kitchen so that places can be laid and dishes removed without leaving the kitchen.

Lightness has been achieved without sacrifice of comfort in the easy chairs by the use of strong but light plywood and foam rubber upholstery.

The design is straightforward for ease in construction and there is no heavy stain to obscure the natural beauties of the wood.

General illumination is provided in this room by two recessed fittings in the ceiling, and there are additional light fittings for special uses, e.g., over the desk for writing, and a movable standard lamp for reading or sewing.

The floor treatment in the living-room is simple, and richness is obtained by contrast in texture between a plain wall-to-wall covering and loose rugs. Similarly the woven fabric of curtains contrasts pleasantly with the smooth wall and ceiling surfaces.

An interesting feature in the kitchen is a built-in breakfast table where the family can have light meals. Asphalt tiles have been used on the floor of this room and of the bathroom, hall, and play-room-utility-room, to provide a smooth, durable and attractive-looking finish. They also have the advantage of not being cold to the touch—a quality usually associated with a tiled floor.

The decorative possibilities of pine timber with its delicate grain and dark knots have long been
appreciated in Scandinavia and America, but in this country it has not yet been extensively used as an internal wall lining. It is appropriate, therefore, that it should have been used throughout the hall and play-room and utility-room of the Demonstration House.

A saving of space is effected in the children's bedroom by the use of built-in bunks. These are arranged one above the other in a recess, giving a shipboard feeling which should appeal to the young mind. Allowance has been made for the mattress to slide outwards while the bed is being made, so that the tucking-in difficulties which usually occur with bunks are avoided.

A light fitting is placed above each bunk and recessed in the wall to avoid accidents. This room will have to serve as a study for the children as well, and the built-in dressing-table can be used as a desk. Book-shelves and a separate wardrobe for each child are also built-in. A heavy curtain instead of a door separates this room from the passage so that the space can be opened wide to the court on sunny days.

The smaller single bedroom has been planned with built-in bed, book-shelves, and dressing-table for an older child. Space is at a premium here, but the compact layout of the furniture allows full advantage to be taken of the area that is available.

The main bedroom, which must also serve as a dressing-room, has ample wardrobe space for hanging clothes. Sliding trays in the wardrobes provide storage for the smaller items of clothing. The top of the dressing-table is hinged over a tray, designed to contain scent bottles, cosmetic jars, and the usual oddments.

The double bed is built low on simple lines. Here again interest is provided by the natural grain of the wood. The room is lit by wall bracket lamps on flexible couplings.

Throughout all the rooms in the house there has been a conscious attempt to obtain the best possible design for each article and fitting, down to the smallest door handle. In several cases a suitable pattern has not been available ready-made and a new one has been designed and fabricated. This is not merely an attempt at novelty as such, but derives from the unfortunate fact that many manufactured articles available in this country today are by no means as good-looking or as suited to their functions as they might be. It is hoped that the exhibition of this house and its contents will make some contribution towards a keener appreciation by the public of good design, so that the demand for the well-designed article will become universal.
ONE OF THE PURPOSES of the Demonstration House was to explain to students contemporary methods of building. In most aspects, therefore, the construction system and materials used are in accordance with typical New Zealand practice. Several significant variations from these standards require some explanation.

The house has a concrete floor. This is reinforced with a steel mesh and poured over well-consolidated filling. It is surfaced with asphalt tile, and in the living-room, carpet over insulating board. This construction permits access from the house to the patio down only one step. Under-floor draughts are eliminated and the surfacing gives a warm and resilient finish. The problems of foundation dampness and vermin do not arise, and, what was important in this case, many additional yards of excavation were avoided.

With the exception of those opening on to the patio, most of the windows are formed of sheet glass fixed directly into the frame, without the normal cill. Ample ventilation is provided through a solid pivoted panel over the windows. It is difficult to weatherproof a conventional type of window in such an exposed location. The system used allows controlled ventilation with complete weather resistance, and gives a larger uninterrupted area of glass.

The choice of a flat roof raises further questions of weather resistance. Provided that the initial installation is well done, and that the owner realises the importance of maintenance, this type of roof is quite satisfactory. By eliminating a parapet, and by dishing the roof to form its own gutter, the two major trouble points in flat roof construction have been avoided. Structurally a flat roof enables large economies in framing timber, is far more simply constructed and provides less earthquake risk than a tiled roof. From the designer’s point of view it allows much more freedom in planning.

All the framing timber, and the exterior sheathing, is insiginis pine treated against borer before erection. With the dwindling supply of native timbers, the use of exotic timbers of this type will become increasingly necessary. Insignis pine is light, easily worked, and has adequate strength for domestic construction. The paneling in the utility room shows that it is suitable for dressed surfaces.

The living-room fireplace differs from normal in that the flue is exposed to the room. It is constructed of steel plate with brick flue liners, and lagged with mineral insulation. This will permit a comfortable amount of radiation and consequent reduction in heat loss, together with improved draught.

CONSTRUCTION DETAILS

FOUNDATIONS: 6in reinforced concrete wall.
FLOOR: 5in concrete slab reinforced with No. 8 and No. 5 gauge wire mesh, finished with plaster screed and asphalt tile, or body carpet on insulating board.
FRAMING: 4in x 2in insiginis pine wall framing. 8in x 2in pinus insignis roof framing.
SHEATHING: 10in x 1in insiginis pine board and batten vertically, over building paper.
ROOFING: 3-layer fabric roofing on 1in timber sarking, finished with pea-gravel and sand.
LININGS: Gypsum-cored wall board, enamelled in bathroom, kitchen and W.C. Elsewhere flat enamelled on lining paper. Insignis pine panelling in utility room.
CEILINGS: Fibrous plaster.

JOINERY: 1in solid core flush doors, white pine veneers. Built-in furniture of matai and rimu, and 6in coreboard. Window frames and doors of totara.
GLAZING: 6in plate glass in large panes. 32oz sheet glass around court. Elsewhere 24oz.
LIGHTING: Incandescent electric fittings throughout.
HOT WATER SUPPLY: 30-gallon thermostatically controlled electric cylinder.
PLUMBING: Copper piping. Silent flushing valve to W.C.
VENTILATION: Resin-bonded plywood panels, protected by metal hoods, above windows. Electric fan built in to kitchen window.
COURT PAVING: Terra cotta hollow tiles halved.
FRONT STEPS: Australian stringybark (eucalpt obliqua).
RETAINING WALL: Terra cotta hollow tiles.

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### Specification

#### Living Room:
- **Gibraltar Board**
  - 1st Coat—Taubmans PETRISEAL
  - 2nd Coat—Taubmans DULSETTA Undercoat
  - 3rd Coat—Taubmans DULSETTA SEMI FLAT ENAMEL
- **Woodwork**
  - 1st Coat—Taubmans PETRISEAL White (wiped)
  - 2nd Coat—Taubmans FINE HARD OAK VARNISH
  - 3rd Coat—Taubmans EGGSHELL GLOSS VARNISH

#### Kitchen:
- **Gibraltar Board & Woodwork**
  - 1st Coat—Taubmans PETRISEAL
  - 2nd Coat—Taubmans PETRIFYING Undercoat
  - 3rd Coat—Taubmans PETRIFYING ENAMEL

#### Bathroom & Laundry:
- **Gibraltar Board & Woodwork**
  - Same procedure and finish as Kitchen

#### Bedrooms—3
- **Gibraltar Board**
  - 1st Coat—Taubmans PETRISEAL
  - 2nd Coat—Taubmans DULSETTA Undercoat
  - 3rd Coat—Taubmans DULSETTA SEMI FLAT ENAMEL
- **Drawer Fronts & Doors**
  - 1st Coat—Taubmans PETRISEAL White (wiped)
  - 2nd Coat—Taubmans FINE HARD OAK VARNISH
  - 3rd Coat—Taubmans EGGSHELL GLOSS VARNISH

#### Playroom:
- **8in. Insignus Pine Dressed Boards**
  - 1st Coat—Taubmans KNOT SEALER
  - 2nd Coat—Taubmans FINE HARD OAK VARNISH
  - 3rd Coat—Taubmans EGGSHELL GLOSS VARNISH

#### Ceilings:
- **All Fibrous Plaster**
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  - 2nd Coat—Taubmans RUSSELENE Flat Wall Paint
  - 3rd Coat—Taubmans RUSSOLENE Flat Wall Paint

#### Exterior:
- 1st Coat—Taubmans Quick Drying GENERAL PURPOSE PRIMER
- 2nd Coat—Taubmans SUPER PAINT Undercoat—Red
- 3rd Coat—Taubmans SUPER PAINT—Tile Red

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