

**DICKSON &
PLATTEN**
ARCHITECTS
1950–2000

The Dickson & Platten Architects 1950–2000 exhibition is on display at ODASA (The Office for Design and Architecture South Australia, 28 Leigh Street, Adelaide, from 6 October – 28 October 2017.

This exhibition is the result of a partnership between Phillips/Pilkington Architects and the Architecture Museum, at the University of South Australia's School of Art, Architecture and Design.

Curators: Dr Julie Collins, Architecture Museum and Michael Pilkington.

Exhibition Concept Design: Michael Pilkington and Susan Phillips.

Exhibition text: Dr Julie Collins, Alison McDougall with excerpts from Newell Platten and Bob Dickson's published books and Rachel Hurst's articles and conference papers.

Exhibition Design Team: Dr Julie Collins, Michael Pilkington, Susan Phillips, Evelyn Allin, Meherzad Shroff and Tessa Sare.

Catalogue Design: Black Squid Design.

3D Printed Model Builders: Chantelle Fry and Stephanie Clutterbuck, the University of Adelaide, School of Architecture and Built Environment.

New Photography: David Sievers.

The curators extend a very special thank you to two original clients who remain in their Dickson & Platten houses and generously allowed us access, Margaret Lee and Graham and Barbara Dickson. To all other Dickson & Platten building owners, we also offer our sincere thanks for photography access.

Project Photography:

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OLD GUM TREE SHELTER
The Proclamation of South Australia
Charles Hill, Adelaide, c.1884.
Courtesy of Holdfast Bay History Collection

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The Architecture Museum acknowledges the Kaurna people as the traditional owners and custodians of Kaurna land, which includes the Adelaide Plains. We honour and respect their ongoing cultural spiritual connections to this country, and aim to treat Indigenous people, their customs and beliefs with respect.

ABOUT THE ARCHITECTURE MUSEUM

The Architecture Museum in the School of Art, Architecture and Design at the University of South Australia is a facility for the acquisition, preservation and management of architectural and related records produced by private practitioners based in South Australia. It holds more than 200,000 items including drawings, specifications, correspondence, books and ephemera. It is publicly accessible and is housed in a purpose-designed space in the Kaurna building, Fenn Place, Adelaide.

The Museum promotes scholarly enquiry into South Australia's built environment history; secures funding for research projects based on its collections; publishes research outcomes from Museum-centred projects; and arranges public exhibitions of its holdings. The Architects of South Australia online database at www.architectsdatabase.unisa.edu.au provides information about the professional lives and contributions of a selection of the state's architects from 1836 to the present day.

The curators wish to thank the following organisations and individuals for their contributions and generous financial assistance:

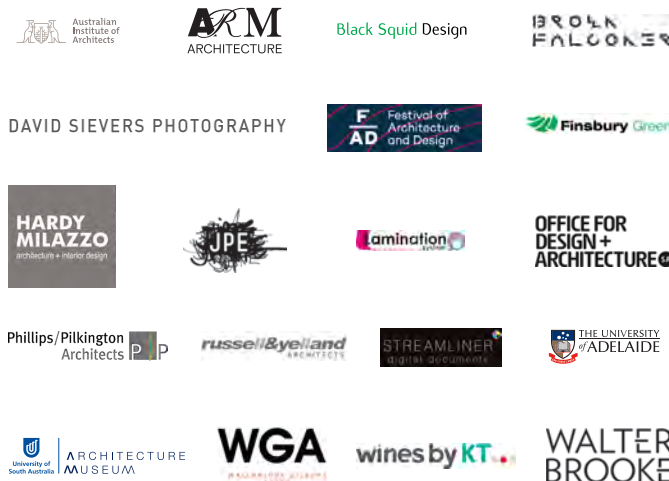
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Robert Harold Dickson (b.1926) son of Henry and May Dickson grew up in North Adelaide. In 1944 Dickson began training as a pilot in the Royal Australian Air Force, serving in Sydney. Following World War Two he returned to Adelaide to study architecture, graduating in 1953. During and immediately following his studies (1948-55) Dickson was articled to Claridge, Hassell and McConnell where he was influenced by Modernist Jack McConnell.

After some time spent in Europe he returned to Adelaide in 1957 and wrote feature articles on architecture for the Advertiser and later a regular column in the News, whilst he started his own practice. He also tutored at the University of Adelaide's School of Architecture. In 1958 he joined with Newell Platten to form Dickson and Platten.

In later years, Dickson was active in other areas of public life. His concern with the built environment was reflected through his role as President of the Civic Trust of South Australia from 1978 to 1980 and the AIA (SA Chapter) from 1978 to 1980. In 2010 he published his architectural memoir titled Addicted to Architecture.

Robert Dickson passed away on 8 April 2014, aged 88.

ROBERT DICKSON

Newell James Platten (b. 1928), son of Gil and Isabel Platten, spent his childhood at a tropical mission station on New Ireland before moving to South Australia. Dwellings and their surrounds, in both countries, would later exert their influence on his development as an architect. Those of New Ireland contributed to his love of indigenous architecture with its natural materials and interaction of building with landscape, whilst from South Australia he 'learned to enjoy stone walls and country towns' (Hurst 2004).

Graduating with a Bachelor of Engineering (Architecture) in 1951, Platten, along with fellow students, were frustrated that Modernism was seen as a 'passing fad' by many of their lecturers. After working for Lawson, Cheesman and Doley Architects from 1948 to 1951, Platten set out for London on a grand working tour. From there he travelled to Europe and North America. In 1954 he returned to Adelaide where he became involved in residential, commercial and hotel projects for the firm, working closely with Maurice Doley, before joining Bob Dickson in partnership.

Platten's interests outside architecture have been concerned mainly with family, visual arts, gardens, travel and writing. He was made a Member of the Order of Australia in the Queen's Birthday Honours List on 12 June 1995 for service to architecture and to town planning. He has written a biography and memoir in honour of his father in 2016 titled Hybrid Beauty.



NEWELL PLATTEN



"So began a 'long conversation about architecture'" NP

Some fifteen years ago, Bob Dickson invited Architecture Museum staff to visit his office to appraise a potential donation. What we found were over 800 architectural projects stored in cardboard tubes and boxes lining the storeroom walls of the premises on MacKinnon Parade. Back then, the Architecture Museum was in its infancy, with a collection of plan cabinets and shelving housing many smaller collections donated by privately practising South Australian architects. The donation of the works of Bob Dickson and Newell Platten would see our holdings expand to fill a second storage room.

By 2005, the Architecture Museum had moved to the City West campus of the University of South Australia and had begun to develop its public profile with lectures, publications and exhibitions about South Australian Architects and their works. Both Bob and Newell became valued friends of the Architecture Museum, attending events and exhibitions and encouraging us in our endeavours. The collection of archives which encompasses Dickson and Platten's work is still one of our most comprehensive, and when presented with the opportunity to select pieces to show in this current exhibition I was guided in many ways by conversations I'd had with Newell and Bob over the years.

The significance of the Dickson and Platten collection lies in the stories it helps us tell through the architectural traces that endure on paper to speak to us through time. From the hand-coloured invitation for the opening of their new office in 1958 embodying the youthful exuberance of the new practice, to the stunning photographs of their built works – some now lost in the relentless development of the city, the archival record remains safe for future generations to discover. Dickson and Platten, and those who worked with them, have made a valuable contribution to Australia's architectural life, and their works form part of a continuing conversation about the ways in which we shape and live in our environment.

Dr Julie Collins
Curator
Architecture Museum, University of South Australia

My connection with Dickson and Platten started with the commencement of architectural studies at the University of Adelaide in 1976 and enjoyment of the wonderful Union Building only recently completed. Sue Phillips had earlier connections, her architect mother Pam Phillips working at Dickson and Platten for several years from 1973.

Connections continued with, Bob's younger son Rohan Dickson studying in our year and elder son Nigel in the year ahead. Both Susan and I had the opportunity to work briefly with Bob at Robert Dickson and Associates in the office our practice now occupies.

We did not connect with Newell Platten until final year studies when we had the good fortune to have him as a tutor, where his sensitive and considered input was invaluable to the development of our fledgling designs. Our paths have continued to cross through our professional career with our work in public housing promoting an appreciation of the outstanding contribution Newell made to design quality in this arena.

All these connections promoted an interest in the work of Dickson and Platten which this exhibition has allowed us to explore. We hope that the exhibition and catalogue promotes the work of Bob Dickson and Newell Platten to a younger generation, showcasing the evolution of their design thinking and the legacy of an extraordinary portfolio of work and one that is largely still intact and able to be experienced. From the start, our strong desire was to work with the Architecture Museum at the University of South Australia to showcase their vast Dickson and Platten archive.

The exhibition was optimistically instigated with no funding, we simply trusted that the good name and design reputation of the Dickson and Platten would attract support. The exhibition would not have happened without the enthusiasm and untiring support of Dr Julie Collins, the Collections Manager of the Architecture Museum. Julie encouraged the progression of the exhibition when we thought it could not be mounted due to a lack of funding. Julie has co-curated the exhibition, undertaken much of the research and explored the depths of the Dickson and Platten Archive.

The notion of 'a union' underpins the exhibition:

- Literally with the University of Adelaide Student Union Building.
- Celebrating the partnership of Robert Dickson and Newell Platten and their individual and collaborative design genius.
- With the joint support of the University of South Australia and the University of Adelaide's architectural schools
- With the support of the Architects Practice Board of South Australia and the Office of Design and Architecture South Australia.
- With the support of many Architectural Practices both local and interstate.

As with all great architecture, the design work of Dickson and Platten, instigates a union of light, space, materials, volume, mass and the human spirit to create significant built-form.

The exhibition looks back to the end of the Second World War, a time of rationing and austerity, with architecture of humble beginnings. This modest architecture is imbued with a distinctive South Australian quality, which Ian alludes to in his essay.

The architecture evolving from residential beginnings maintains a consistent quality and expression over more than forty years. The same design patterns and motifs are evident across all work with an expression of materials, function, response to climate and context. Bob has stated that he never made an aesthetic design decision.

Thank you to all of our very generous sponsors, family members and long-suffering office colleagues for their support over the gestation of this exhibition. We would also like to particularly thank David Sievers for his stunning portfolio of current building photographs which are a fitting legacy of this project.

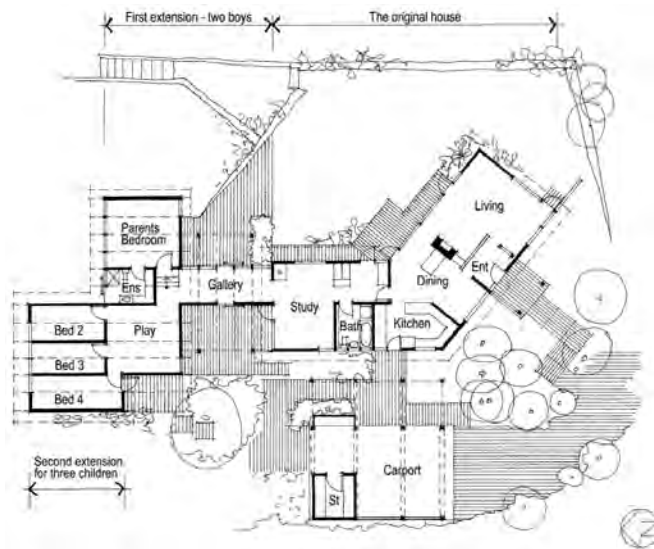
Finally, I must thank our Government Architect and APBSA Board member, Kirsteen Mackay, for her total commitment to this project from day one. And also particular thanks are due to Meherzad Shroff, Evelyn Allin and Tessa Sare for their tireless exhibition graphic design contributions. It has been great fun of course working with Dr Julie Collins and getting to know Newell Platten himself. My deep gratitude and admiration goes to my partner, Susan Phillips, for everything else.

Michael Pilkington
Curator
Phillips/Pilkington Architects



DICKSON HOUSE ROSTREVOR 1952



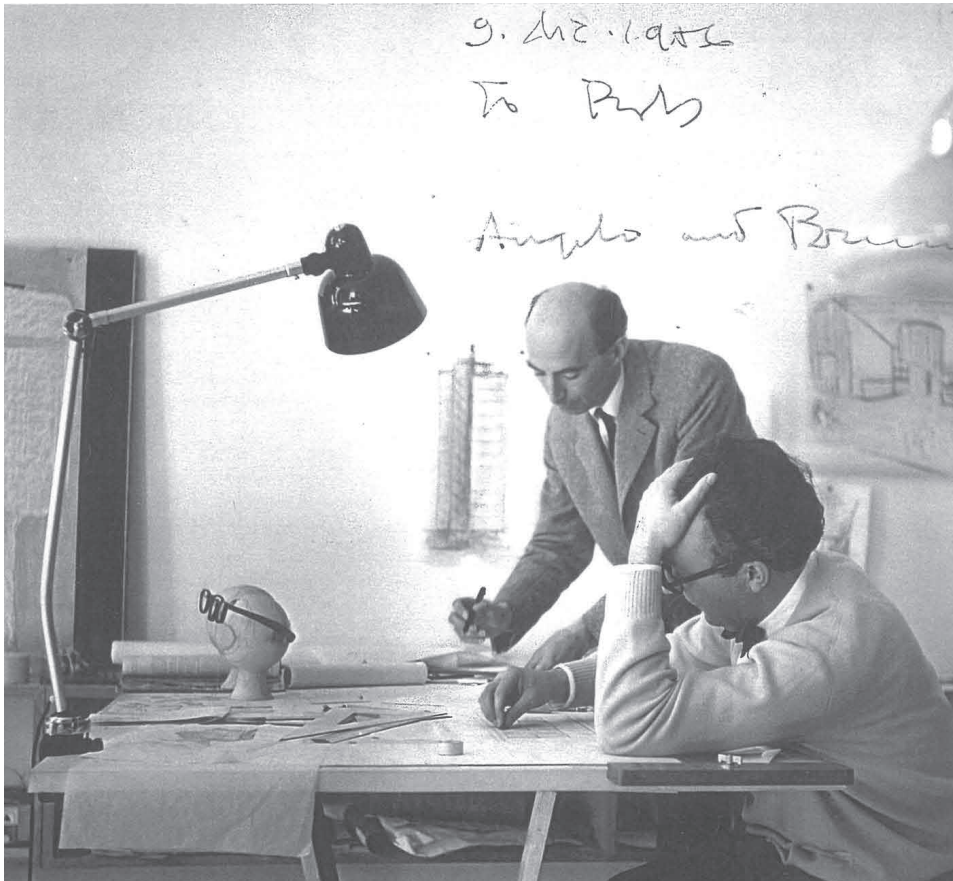


In 1949, while still a student, Dickson designed a house for himself and his future wife, Lilian, at Wandilla Drive, Rostrevor and took a year away from study in 1951 to build it. The house was later featured in the Royal Institute of British Architects Exhibition of Australian Architecture, 1956, and in 2009 was listed as a State Heritage Place which Dickson found 'very gratifying' (Dickson, Addicted to Architecture).



*"Letting the problem lead to the solution –
a philosophy for design that became my credo" RD*





In 1955 Robert Dickson travelled to Italy where he worked for Mangiarotti and Morasutti architects in Milan. This experience was an important influence on his future work and his love of all things Italian. In 1976 Mangiarotti was invited by Dickson to come to Adelaide and expose his ideas on design and architecture.

ROBERT DICKSON: ITALY 1955-1957



From 1961 to 1963 Newell Platten worked as an architect-planner with Doxiadis Associates in Athens, Greece. At the time, Platten was concerned at the near-irrelevance of architecture in the making of cities, towns and suburbs and hence was attracted to Doxiadis' holistic views. Platten had become aware of Doxiadis' work from RIBA through its journal, and so enthusiastically contacted Doxiadis' practice to apply for an internship. During his two years with the firm he was involved in urban planning and design projects in Pakistan and Ghana.

NEWELL PLATTEN: GREECE 1961-1963

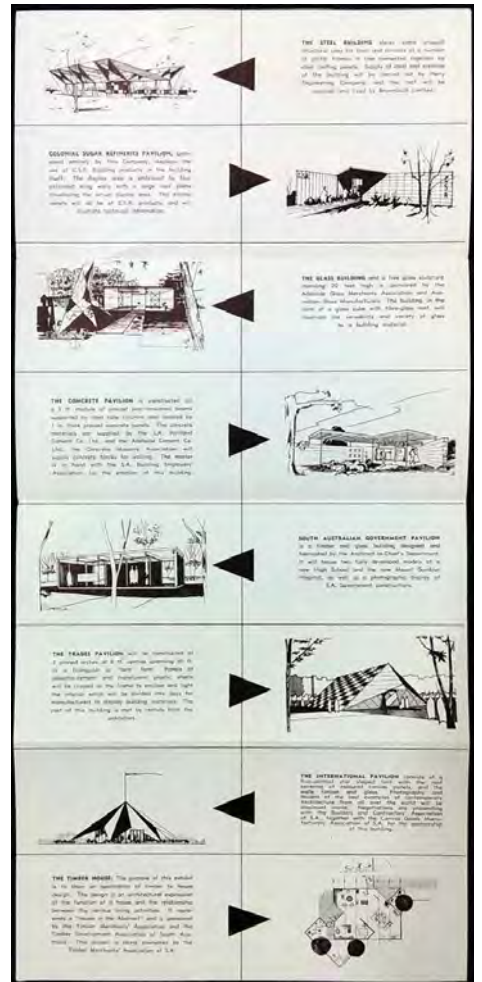




"No longer fighting for recognition, Modernism was out and about, ready to command the future." NP



In 1956, Adelaide's Botanic Park was the venue for major exhibition of modernist architecture. Staged by the South Australian Chapter of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects, the exhibition was designed to foster public interest in the latest developments in architecture and building materials through models and buildings. Brian Claridge and Bob Dickson had begun working up ideas before Dickson left for Italy, when Newell Platten was asked to join the Design subcommittee. Platten worked with Claridge on the overall concept and designed four of the pavilions, including the Entrance Canopy, the Steel Pavilion, the Glass Pavilion and the International Pavilion. The exhibition received considerable attention locally and internationally and was seen by some as a turning point in the public's acceptance of modern architecture in Adelaide (Hurst 2004).







“... the house’s light and interplay of levels and spaces lent theatrical qualities to ordinary events.” NP

In 1956, after stumbling across a piece of land in Torrens Park, Newell and his wife Margaret built a house with a view to their life together. Although it was a difficult time for housebuilding, with both material and labour shortages, ‘The result was a white and gold shell that was crude in parts and refined in others, penny-pinching and wasteful and a never-ending work in progress’ (Platten, Hybrid Beauty).

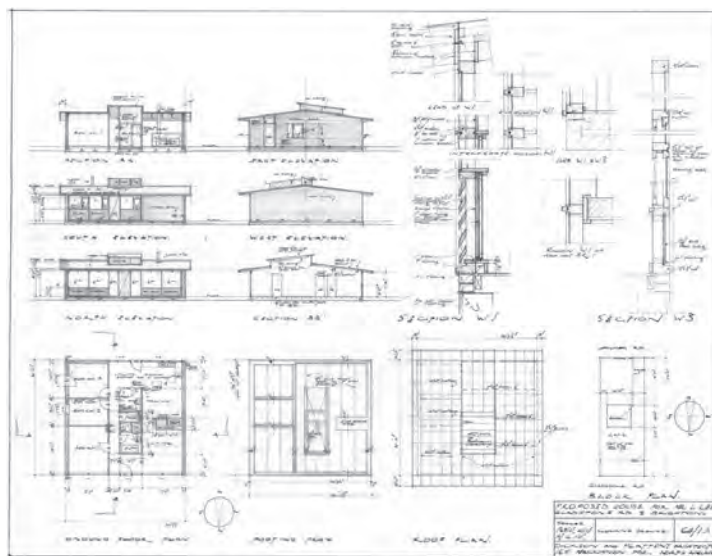


PLATTEN HOUSE TORRENS PARK 1956



"The plan of the Lee house is nearly square, with a compact central service core." NP

The first residential project of the new practice was Platten's 1959 Lee House at Gladstone Road, Brighton. Simple and modern in design, the front elevation is symmetrical with large windows, bedrooms on the eastern side and the living areas to the west separated by a central service core, top lit. (RAIA SA Significant 20th Century Architecture).

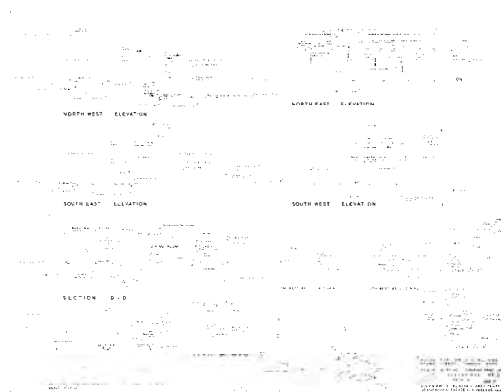
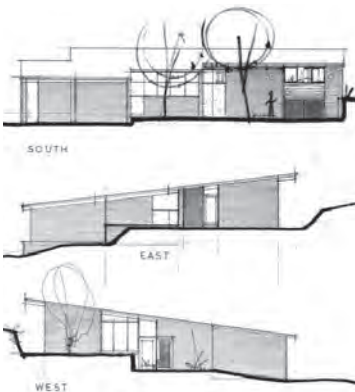
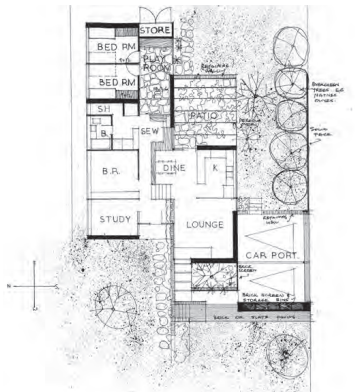


LEE HOUSE BRIGHTON 1958





"...its interior vocabulary of red brick, clear-finished timber, plywood and straw a precursor of bigger projects yet to come." NP



HURCOMBE HOUSE TORRENS PARK 1959

DICKSON & PLATTEN IN THE OTHER TRADITION OF ARCHITECTURE

EM PROF ANTONY RADFORD

The work of Dickson and Platten lies in what Colin St John Wilson calls 'the other tradition' of modern architecture, a tradition that diverged from the mainstream Modernism of the 'International Style' and softened the problem-solving rationality of Modernism with more recognition of local context and the ways people use and emotionally respond to buildings.

The 'other tradition' preferred the careful resolution of complex practical situations over the clear, sometimes formulaic, implementation of universal abstract theories. Alvar Aalto and Jørn Utzon are internationally famous leaders of this tradition.

When they joined forces in 1958 both Robert Dickson and Newell Platten were already designing in this 'other tradition', but Platten comments that their personal design languages grew more similar while they were in partnership, becoming a shared language of two partners who were both adept in its use. The language remained remarkably consistent to the end of their collaboration in 1973.

It is fascinating to see the way this language could speak in many kinds and scales of buildings, from small houses to public, commercial and even industrial buildings.

PLANNING:

- The orientation of living spaces (houses) and public spaces (public buildings) favours a north-east to north-west sector, often with terraces or balconies (see, for example, Mount Lofty Golf Club 1968)
- Shading and natural ventilation responds to local conditions including trees and noise sources (eg. Arkaba Corner Hotel accommodation 1967, Kathleen Lumley College 1967)
- Interior and exterior spaces link through similarity of materials and large openings (e.g. Destree House, Toorak Gardens, 1961)
- Internal spaces join in open plan or semi-open plan layouts, sometimes with split levels, offering internal views (e.g. Hurcombe House, Torrens Park, 1959).

SPACE:

- Internal spaces extend to the limits of their possible enclosure, such as the underside of upper floorboards for a lower floor and the underside of sloping roofs for an upper floor (e.g. Jacobsen and Kennedy (linked) Town Houses, 1966)
- Consequently, there are few ceiling spaces or other voids. Where ventilation ducts were needed, they were exposed as design elements (e.g. Salisbury Civic Centre 1972)
- The external form is therefore a direct expression of the internal spaces.

CONSTRUCTION:

- Structure is revealed and celebrated (e.g. Arkaba Corner restaurant, 1963–64)
- Shadow gaps between elements are common (East facade and details of precast concrete components, Union House, 1967–75)
- Partitions, built-in furniture and even some light fittings are made in finely worked (but robust) joinery e.g. (Architects Office, North Adelaide, 1970).

MATERIALS:

A restrained palette of 'natural' materials and finishes includes timber, brick walls and paving, strawboard ceiling panels (Solomit) (all are found in most projects) and 'off the form' board-marked concrete (notably in the offices for Associated Securities Ltd, 1969–72)

- Colour is rare. Most surfaces have the natural colour and texture of the underlying material. Internal brick walls were sometimes painted white (Hurcombe House, Torrens Park, 1959).

This language did not evolve through architecture school, which was very conservative. Students and graduates found contemporary architecture themselves. Although often labeled 'Adelaide regional style', it was a response to international influences. Both partners travelled and observed. In 1951, Platten

embarked on a 'grand tour' of Europe and North America.

'When I was in America as a young architect, just graduated, I saw works by Aalto, Frank Lloyd Wright and Mies van der Rohe. Mies's work was far too perfect for the cut and thrust of ordinary life; people do not live like that. One should not be overwhelmed by one's surroundings. Wright's work was unattainable; how does an architect find the people, those craftsmen, to do that? So of all these three, Aalto was the most accessible.' Much later, around 1972, Robert Dickson returned to Italy and northern Europe and met Aalto in Helsinki. He felt a sense of shared vision, of shared values.

Dickson writes that by 1954 he "was looking for an architecture that derived more directly from needs, more closely related to its context and the environment". This led him to Europe, where he worked briefly in the London office of Fry, Drew, Drake and Lasdun and then the Milan office of Mangiarotti and Morasutti.

Matthew Hardy, a long-time later employee of Dickson after the partnership years, comments "Dickson's work is strongly influenced by his time in Milan, a style known to Italians as Scuola di Milano (The Milan School), using raw concrete, brick, timber and tiled roofs in rationalist forms." Travelling in Europe, Dickson carried two textbooks "stored right under the car seat ... Bannister Fletcher's A History of Architecture ... [and] Siegfried Giedion's Space, Time and Architecture, a substantial history on the growth of the new tradition in architecture, and its interrelations with other human activities."

Shortly after the partnership was formed, Platten took 12 months leave to work in the Athens office of the highly influential Greek urban planner Constantinos Doxiadis. Platten remembers Sigfried Giedion visiting the office in 1962. Giedion told them that architecture was generally 'going the wrong way', with architects – particularly in certain parts of the USA – being too egotistical, in love with their own architecture. Aalto, Giedion said, was the exception.

Aalto was in love not with architecture but with life. 'This appealed to me and Bob (Dickson), making buildings that were emotionally attractive to people, with the use of craft and hand building. It implied that 'you subordinate your architecture to the people who will live in it, will use it.'

The office eschewed the American journals, only subscribing to the London journal AR (Architectural Review) in which they saw work by Utzon and Aalto many of the 'other tradition' designers. On the bookshelves was Gordon Cullen's Townscape, with its demonstration of the attraction of views, landmarks and variety in moving through urban space. These were background influences, though, and there was never a sense of emulating the work of others. Dickson described his design process simply as solving problems, without thought of aesthetics or style. Platten more clearly acknowledged the beauty and meanings of architecture, writing of the desire "To find beauty by blending traditions with the new", linking Modernism with the "crafts and ambiances of rusticity".

Either Dickson or Platten took close personal and individual responsibility for a project, in an office where staff learnt and understood the partners' ways of 'doing things'. Which details are their own direct works, and which their staff contributed, are not evident in looking at the buildings.

Gerry Nelson, an 'excellent' Dutch draftsman who worked for many years in the office, contributed to Union House, Kathleen Lumley College and other projects, but most staff at this time were transient, with no time to build up a deep knowledge and understanding of the office's design language. Union House and Kathleen Lumley College (both part of The University of Adelaide) are two wonderful buildings that exemplify the language, designed and built at roughly the same time.

Union House (stage 1: 1967–71; stage 2: 1973–75, led by Dickson) demonstrates the way the language dealt with a complex brief, difficult sloping site and construction conditions and the merging of new and old work.

The near-symmetrical north façade has verandas ending in two 1926 neo-Georgian pavilions, the restrained regularity of the new verandas (using precise pre-cast concrete) answering to the Classical columns of the old cloisters. The masterful asymmetrical composition of the distinct elements of the east façade has 'incomplete' corners, (especially where stage 2 adjoins the stage 1 bookshop), brick screens and precast concrete awnings. Inside, the rugged brickwork has resisted the abrasion of students and the exposed timber trussed roof structures, especially the roofs of the bookshop and top floor games room, deny any sense of institution. In the 1990s I often enjoyed the kinaesthetic pleasure and views from the ramps, steps and balconies of this east façade, up the stairs (often digressing through the bookshop), into the café/gallery that then occupied the games room on the top floor, to meet with colleagues and students on the balcony looking over the Torrens.

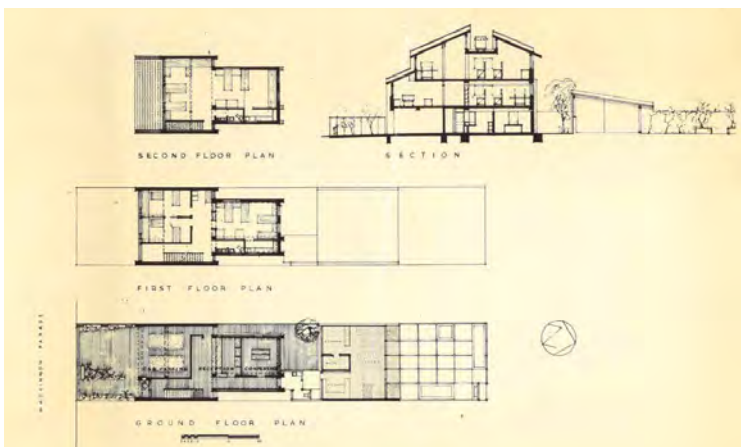
I did not get to Kathleen Lumley College (1967, led by Platten) so often, but was always refreshed by this tour-de-force in disciplined planning that dignifies and enriches student life through the individual identity of their rooms, the club-like common rooms and the quiet garden setting. The understated gate leads to a sanctuary suggestive of Mediterranean monastery and Japanese garden, assembled with Scandinavian restraint and truth to materials.

The same language is seen in the many detached single-family houses designed during the partnership years. Clients had adequate but not generous budgets. "So we built lean, sensible houses that could be warmed by winter sun and cooled by summer breezes and needed little maintenance. Their blank walls or deep verandas or shutters rejected harsh eastern and western summer sunlight; their open faces were turned towards some private garden or view. Often their presence on the street was only enough to signify an entrance."

The Jacobsen and Kennedy 'linked' Town Houses in North Adelaide (1963–66) are important because they show how the Dickson and Platten language could 'speak' a then-new Adelaide building type, the compact inner-urban town house. In a very compact design all of the typical language can be found, even two large beams in board-marked off-the-form concrete. A street-side zone is entirely visible to passers-by, designed around retention of a prominent tree that was important in the streetscape. A private zone begins with a small courtyard 'outdoor room' as a prelude to the interior, screened from the street by external stores and walls but linked to the interior by large windows. The front doors opened directly into dining/living rooms with an immediate view through north-facing window walls to the courtyard gardens beyond, large outdoor rooms. Overhead, the upper floor joists and the underside of the upper floor boards are exposed. Where they meet the rear walls, the spaces between the joists are filled with glass so that the rhythm of the floor joists is seen against the bright exterior.

The work of Dickson and Platten bears comparison with the best of international architecture. There is a sense of directness and confidence about their work, practical problem solving coupled with delight for the senses.

Their design language made for places with spatial interest rather than spatial gymnastics, understated originality in a familiar language rather than experimenting with new styles, and has amply demonstrated robustness and longevity. Some of their best buildings have been demolished or compromised, but many remain as wonderful places to live, work or play.

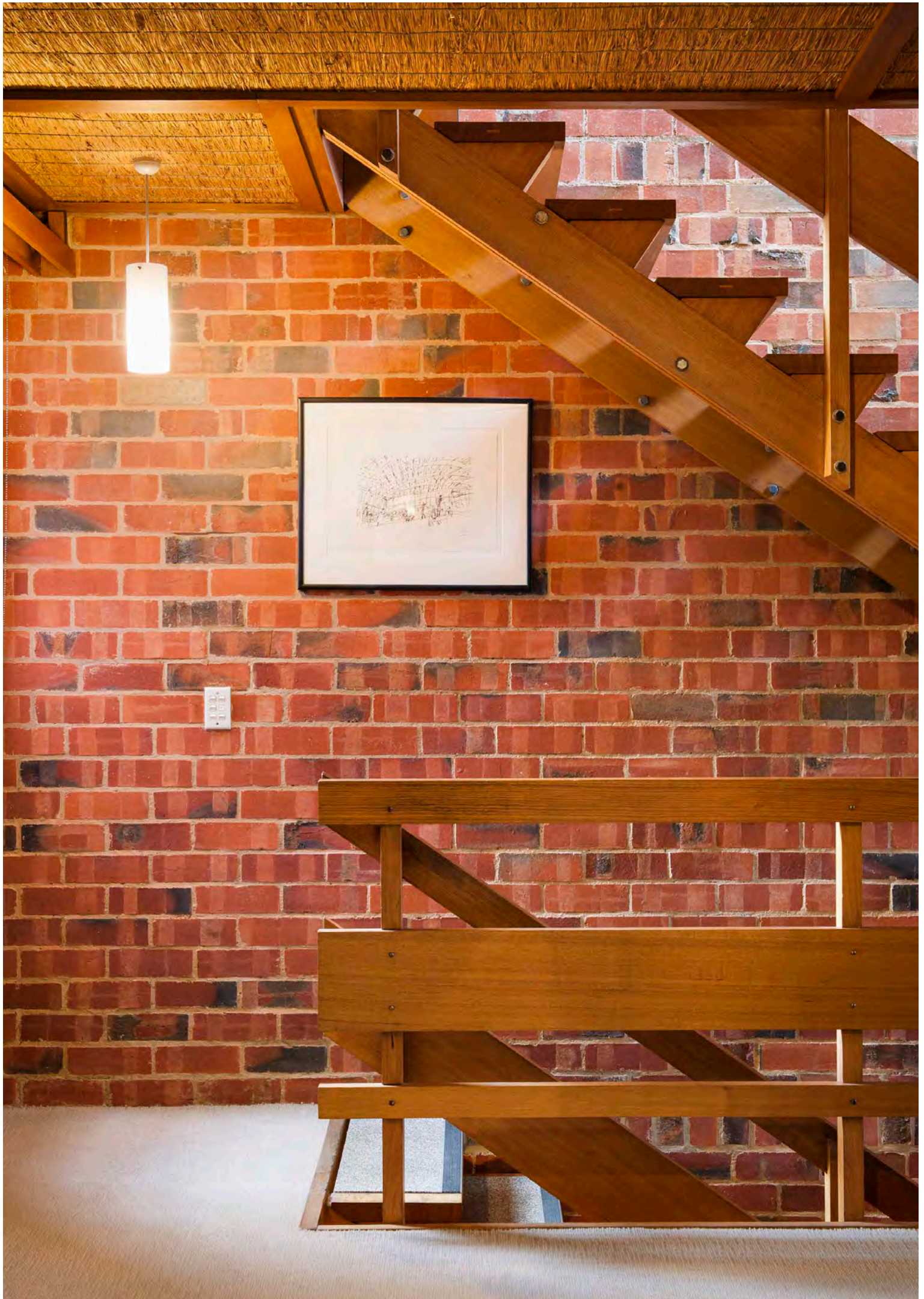


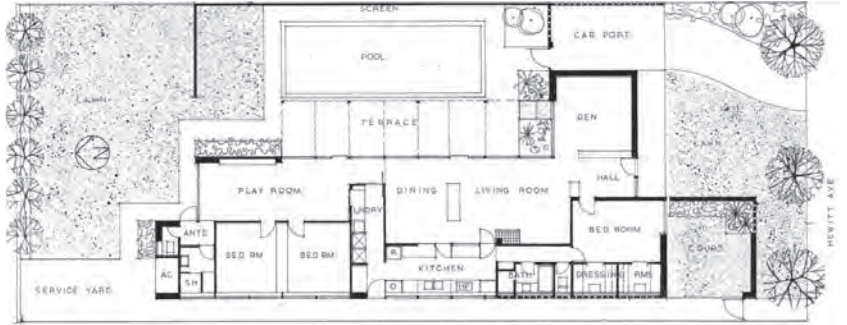
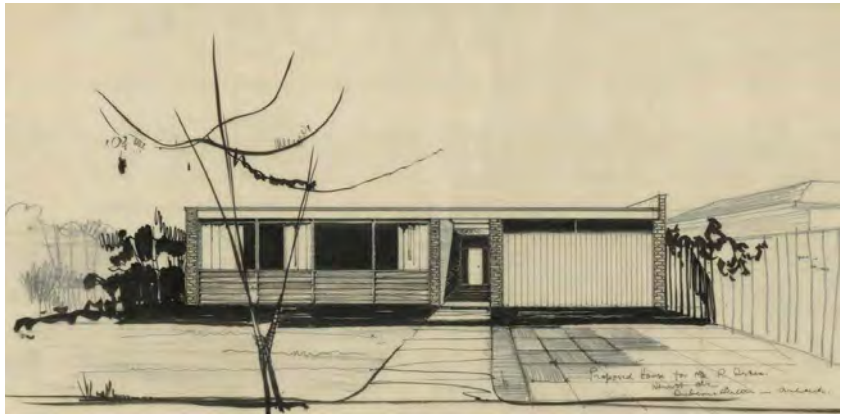
After a talk with Robert Dickson in October 1957 about his travels in Italy and approach to architecture, Newell Platten suggested they start an office together and in July 1958 they formed Dickson and Platten Architects. Initially located in Dickson's mother's renovated cottage on Mackinnon Parade, North Adelaide, the partners had a 'professional companionship', working in the one room, generally on separate projects but frequently conferring (Hurst 2002).

With the success of the partnership they redeveloped the practice's offices at Mackinnon Parade, North Adelaide, in 1970 into a three storied architectural studio featuring the locally available red brick. This office at North Adelaide was to remain Dickson's office until his retirement.

"As we worked side by side we talked about our immediate problems, our experiences and about the essences of architecture, and as we talked, worked and experimented we built an architectural ethos" NP

DICKSON & PLATTEN PRACTICE AND MAY'S FLAT NORTH ADL 1953-1973

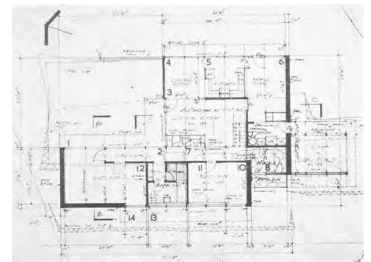




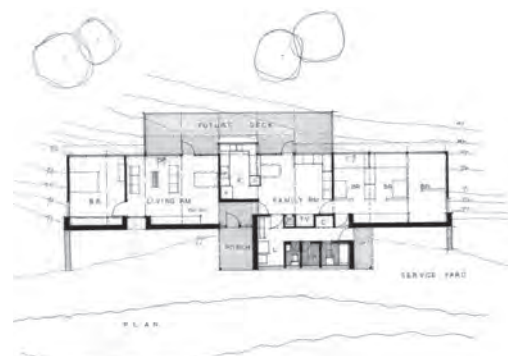
"The main rooms . . . share the shaded terrace and cooling view of the pool on the east side." NP

DESTREE HOUSE ROSE PARK 1961

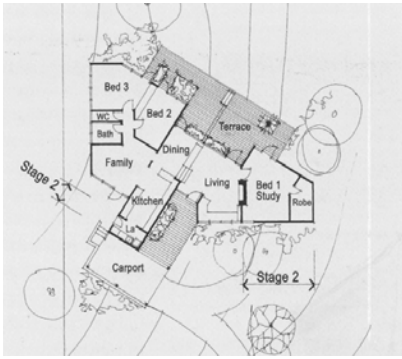
Early commissions for Dickson and Platten Architects were predominantly domestic, which they regarded 'as the most pure form of architecture'. Platten explains, 'I had to bond with the people I was working for. Houses are about life, in pure, continuous solid form' (Hurst 2004).



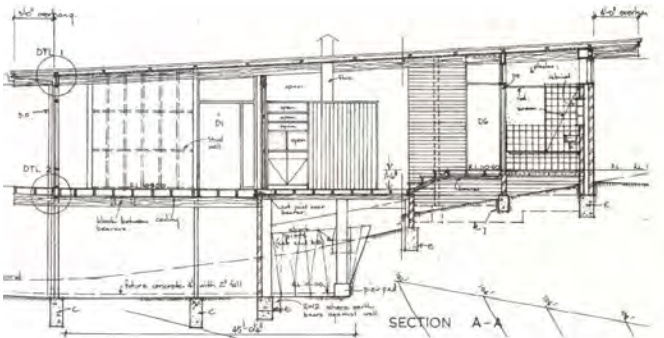
HANNAFORD HOUSE BELAIR 1961



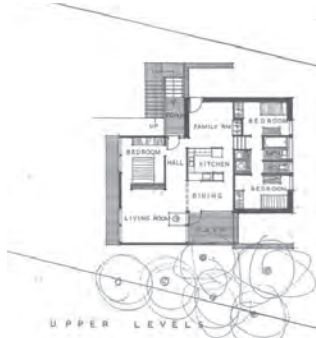
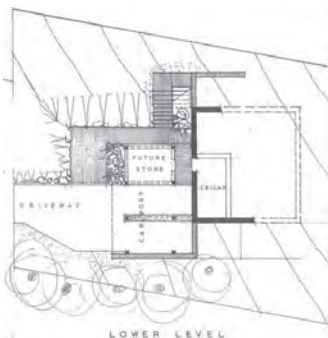
DINHAM HOUSE BELAIR 1967



BOWE/TURNER HOUSE ROSTREVOR 1953

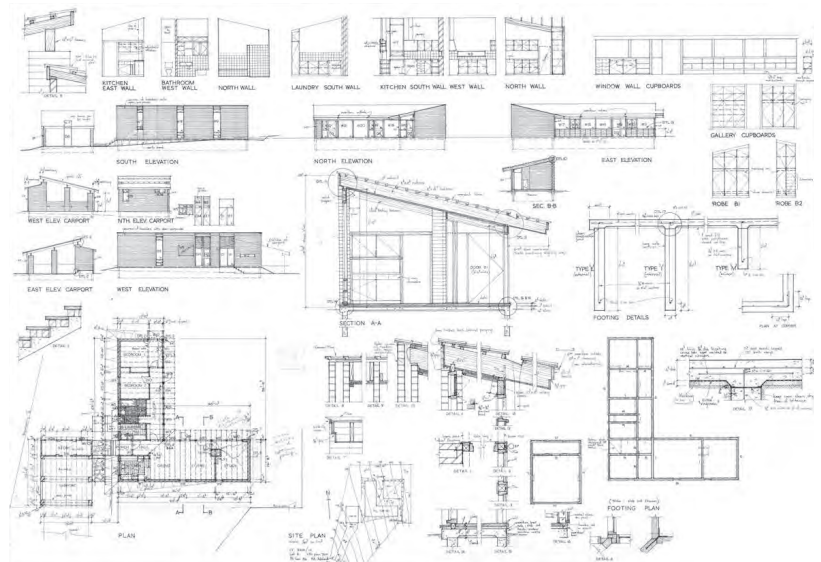
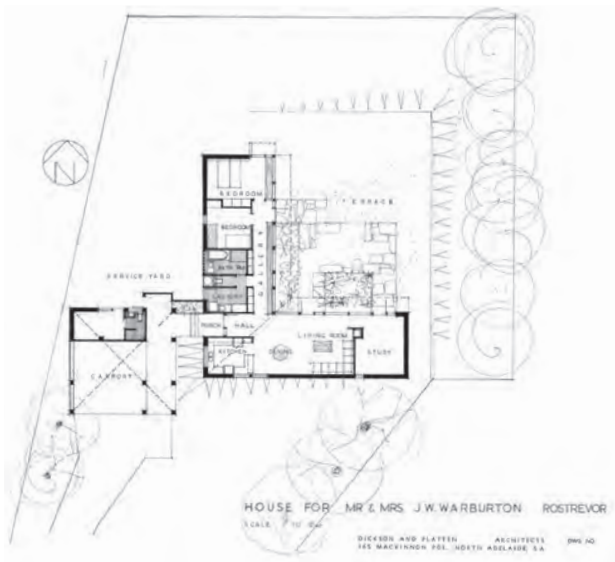


“...direct and elegant solutions... given the cooperation of a sympathetic and imaginative client, the design process became a joy.” RD

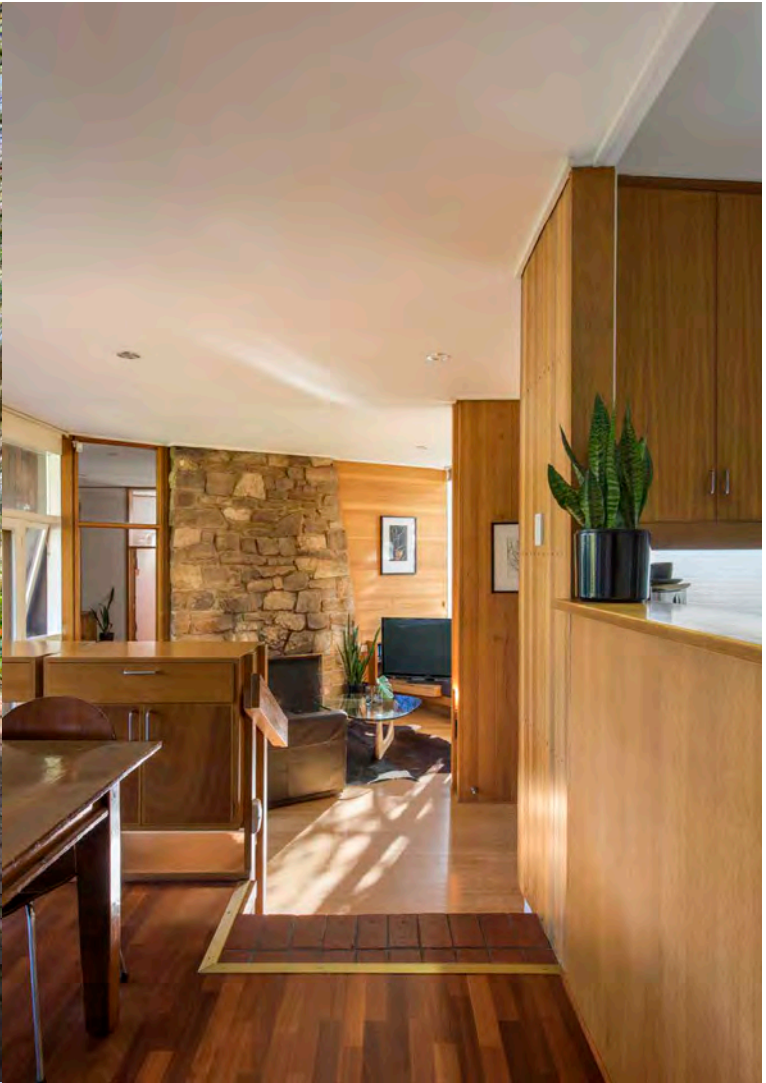


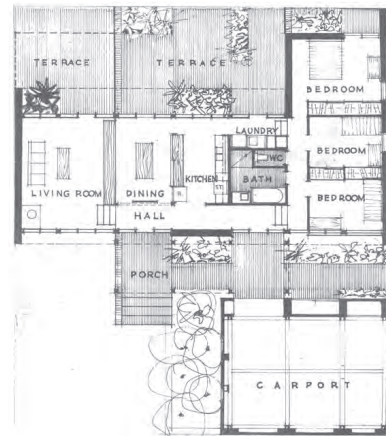
Nine houses were designed by Dickson in the Moriatta area in the years following his return to Adelaide from overseas.

DRAPER HOUSE ROSTREVOR 1966



WARBURTON HOUSE ROSTREVOR 1966

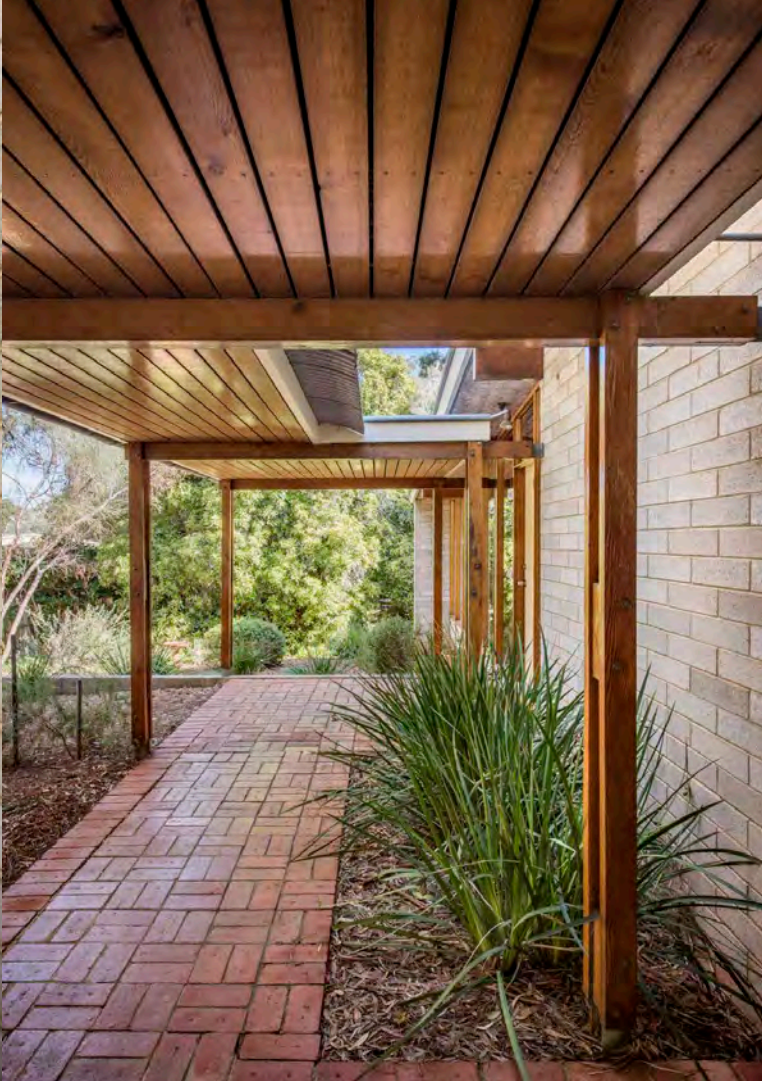
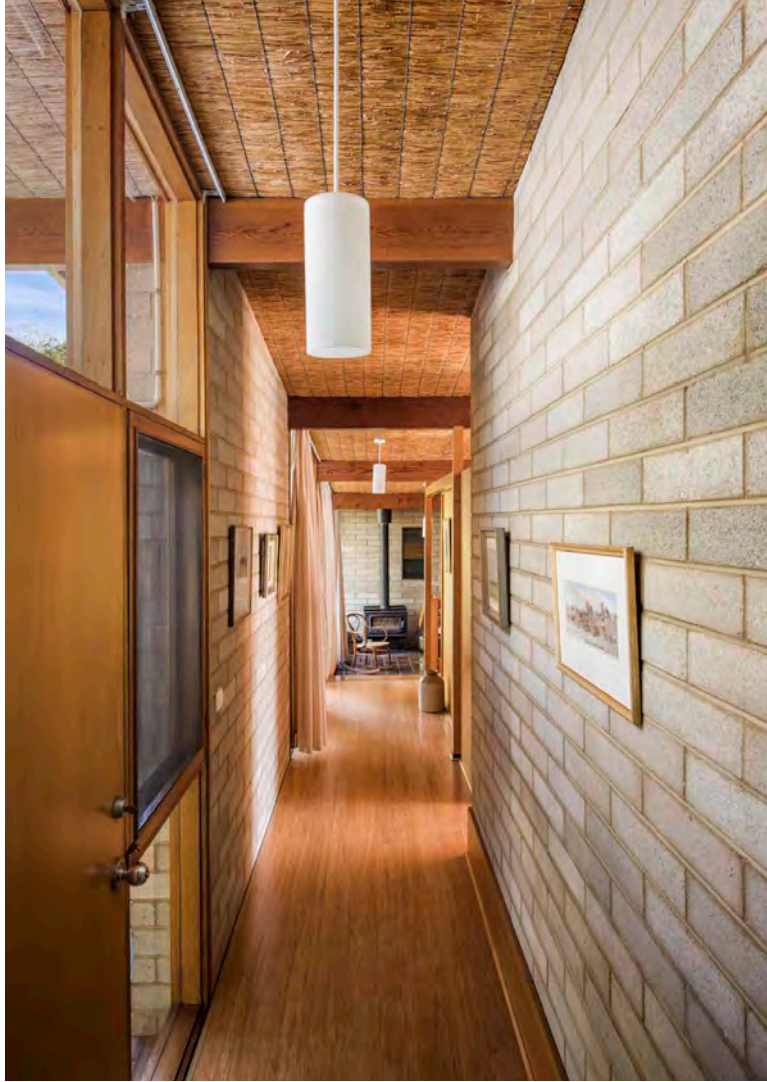




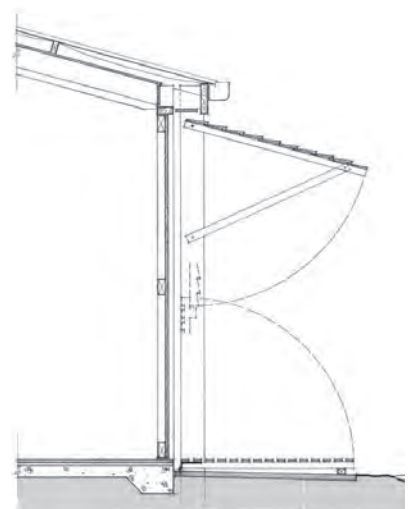
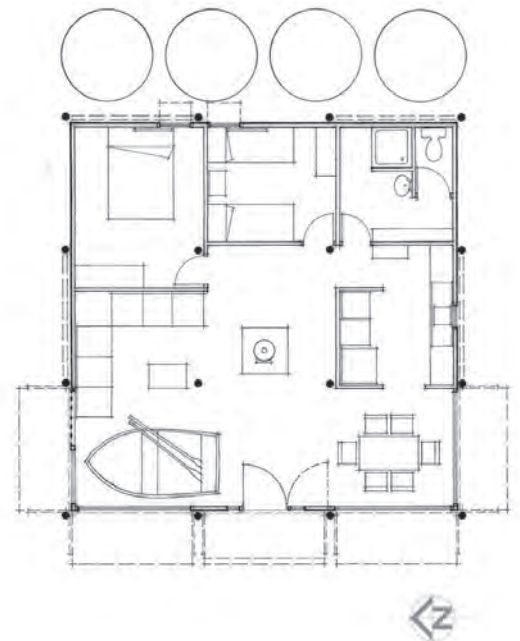
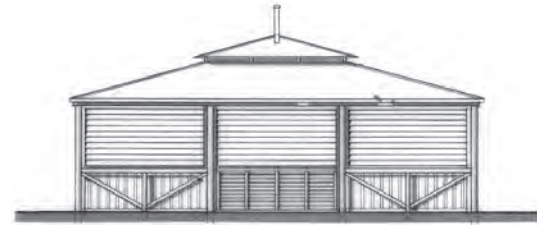
"...the internal areas of the house are arranged in positive relationships with the outdoor spaces and the plan form strongly defines, contains and separates the garden spaces." RD



GRAHAM DICKSON HOUSE 1958-1968

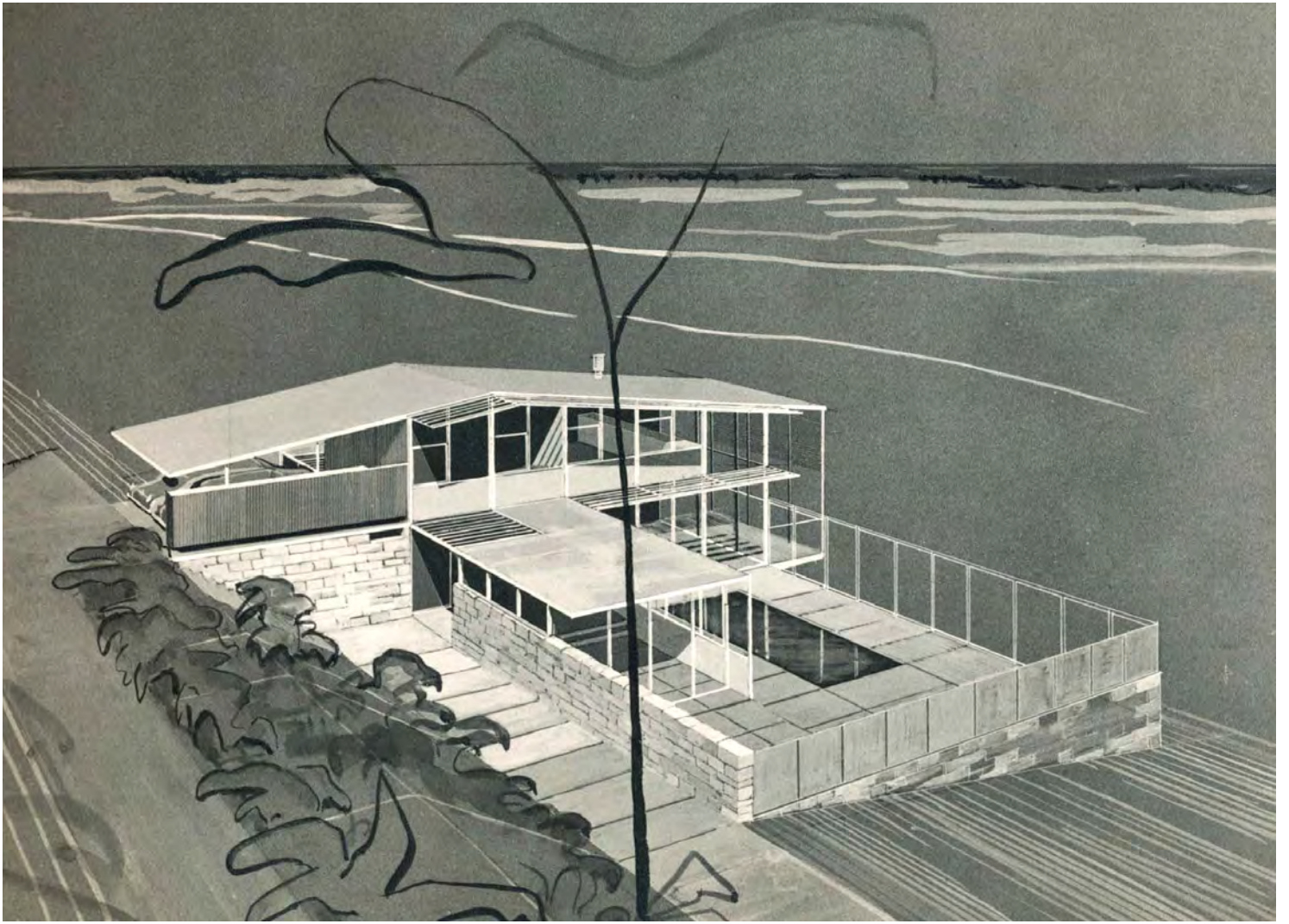


"The house is set just above high tide on the edge of an almost isolated beach..." RD



After arriving back home from their Italian adventures, Robert and Lilian visited their shared family beach house – a basic structure built from old timber doors and thick Willunga slate flooring. Renovations were necessary with the timber walls rotting and the ceiling sagging, as well as poor structural strength of the roof. Dickson designed a new independent structural frame, the treated pine poles set into the ground on the outer side of the original rugged walls. The new roof structure was designed to extend the interior space with a higher ceiling and roof vents to introduce natural air circulation. (Dickson, Addicted to Architecture)

DICKSON BEACH HOUSE LADY BAY LATE 1950s



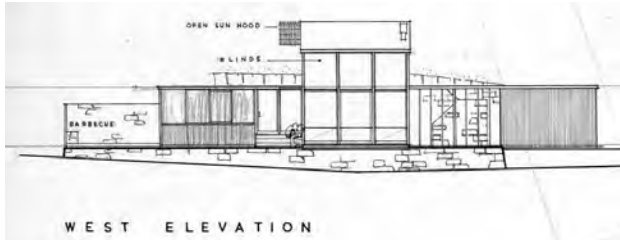
ZSOLT HOUSE EDEN HILLS LATE 1950s



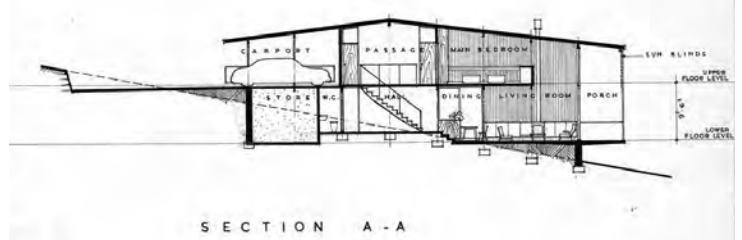
SOUTH ELEVATION



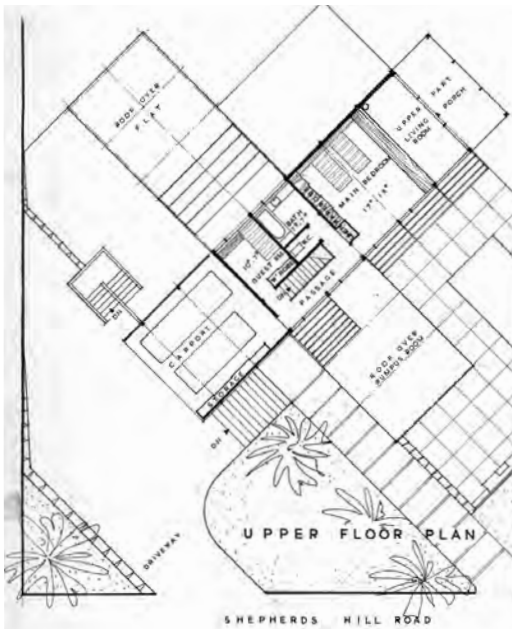
NORTH ELEVATION



WEST ELEVATION

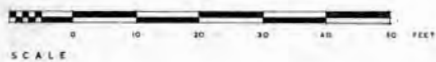


SECTION A-A



UPPER FLOOR PLAN

SHEPHERDS HILL ROAD



SCALE

HOUSE AT EDEN HILLS FOR MR. & MRS. I. ZSOLT

ROBERT DICKSON ARCHITECT
WANDILLA DRIVE ROSTREVOR PARK S.A.

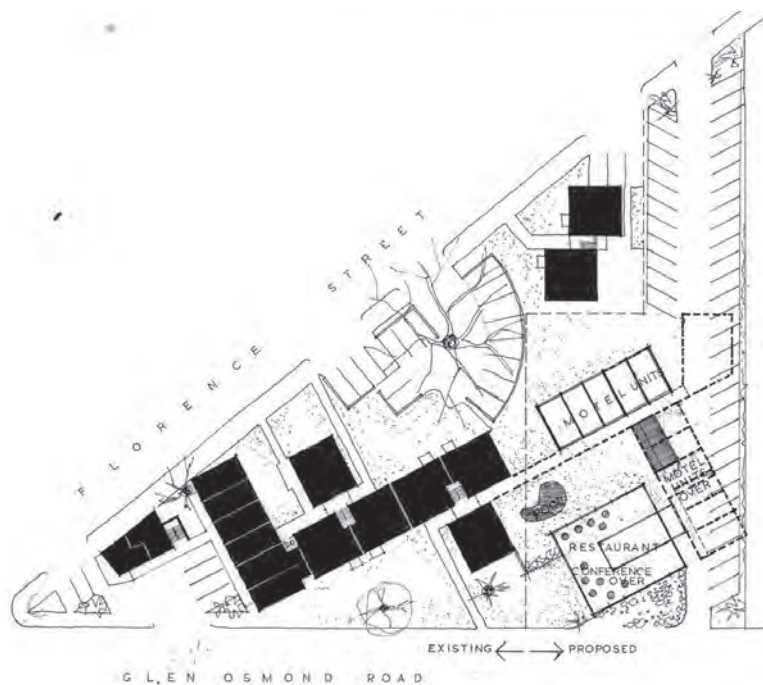


LOWER FLOOR PLAN

SHEPHERDS HILL ROAD



"I travelled widely with Zsolt... and learned from him a great deal about the art of the possible." RD



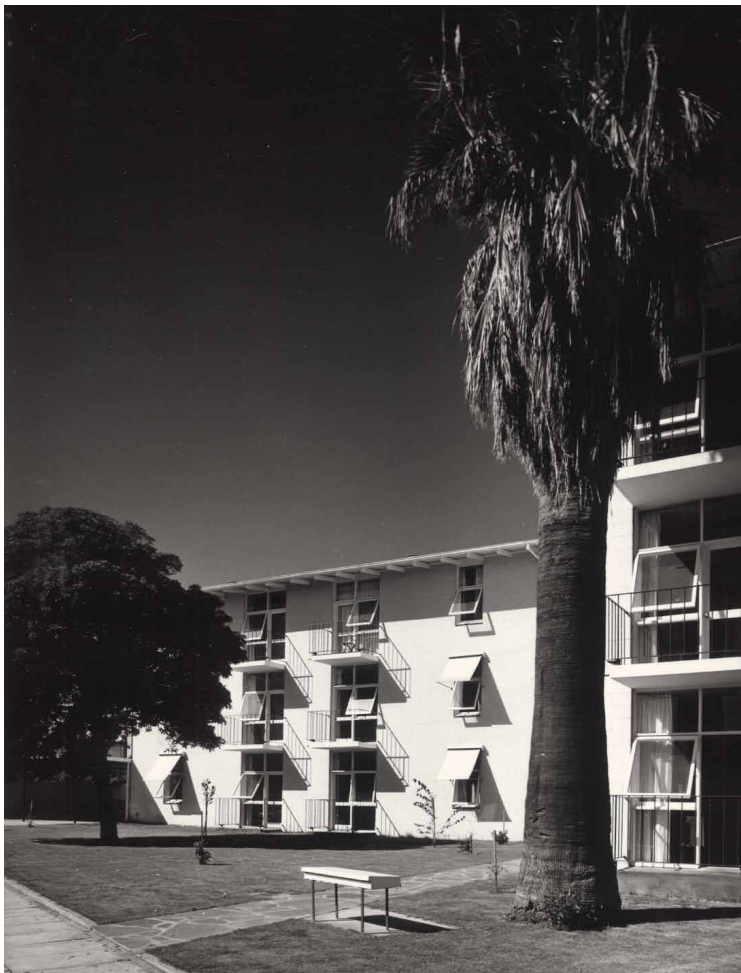
Work for trucking operator Istvan Zsolt provided Dickson and Platten with architectural jobs for ten years, from roadhouses and restaurants to flats and motels.

Small but fully-finished and furnished, the Arkaba Court Flats were originally intended to provide accommodation for Zsolt's truck drivers. Ultimately, they became the Arkaba Court Motel with 24 serviced apartments and, following an extension, an additional 20 motel units (Dickson, *Addicted to Architecture*).

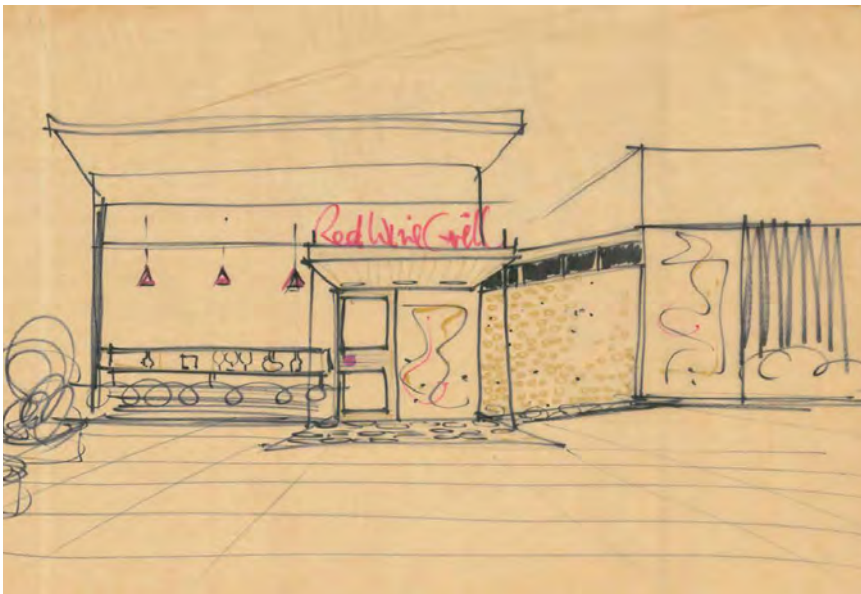


ARKABA COURT MOTEL FULLARTON 1957-1967

"Within days of signing... Zsolt announced that he had bought the adjoining site to the east. 'How many units with fit now?' he asked." RD







Built within a converted house and truck showroom, adjacent Zsolt's Roadhouse, a new restaurant catered for those who 'loved grilled steak and red wine, the natural complement'. The front bar area and secluded dining areas featured curving counters, custom-made tables and a wall built of sparkling wine bottles (Dickson, Addicted to Architecture).

RED WINE GRILL FULLARTON 1962

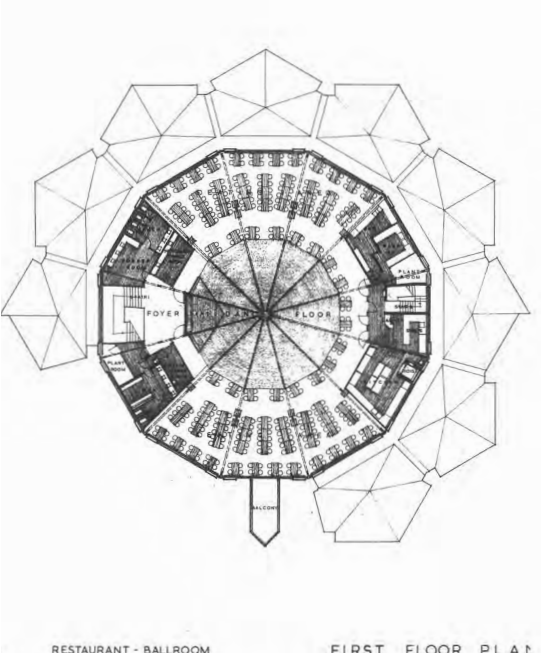


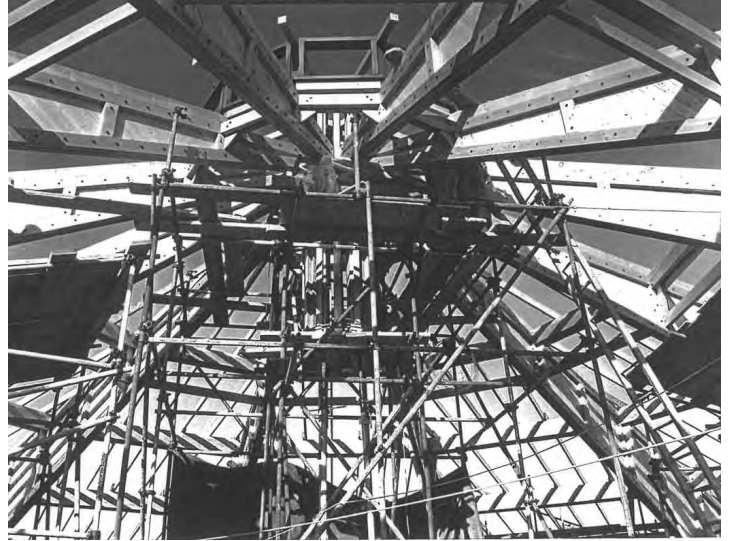
The Arkaba restaurant at Glen Osmond Road, Fullarton (1963) and subsequent hotel was the firm's first large scale commercial project and one of its best known. Adelaide architect and architectural commentator John Chappel described it as 'humble brickwork, timber, 'off the form' concrete and strawboard ... honestly used to contribute to the overall design' (Chappel in Page 1986). While Bob Dickson ran the project and most of the finer details were his work, Platten's contribution came during the conceptual stages for the twelve-sided (originally circular) inner core building. Platten recalls it was a strong team effort which also included the work of engineer Philip Fargher (Platten to McDougall April 2008). The Arkaba won the RAlA (SA Chapter) Award of Merit in 1965, bringing Dickson and Platten local and national attention. However, the complex has since been altered.



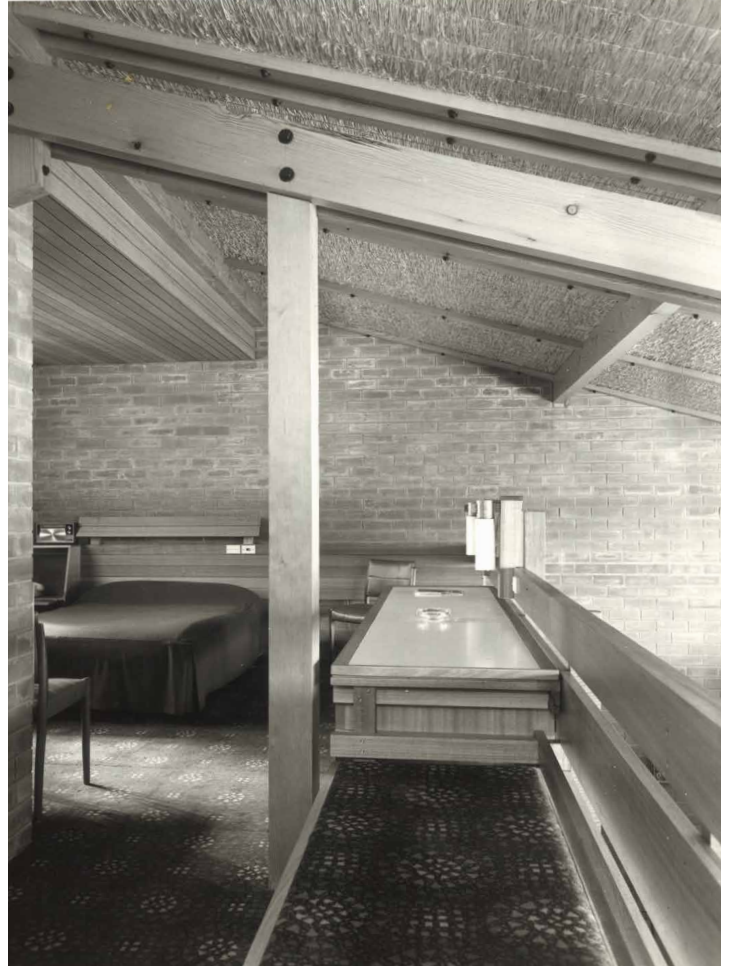
ARKABA CORNER & HOTEL FULLARTON 1957-1967

(shades of my old flying days)." RD





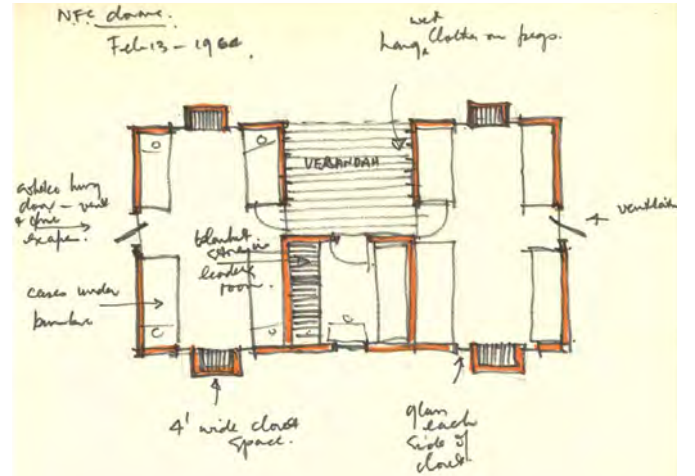
The cantilevered rafters came together and "became 'the chandelier'". It was serendipity - a golden opportunity." RD







Dickson and Platten designed several recreational buildings, notably golf clubs at Mt Lofty (1968) and Blackwood (1970), the Youth Camps for the National Fitness Council at Mylor in 1969, and later at O'Sullivan's Beach, and the Whyalla Recreation Centre (1971).



"I believe that Permapine was used architecturally in South Australia for the first time at Mylor." NP



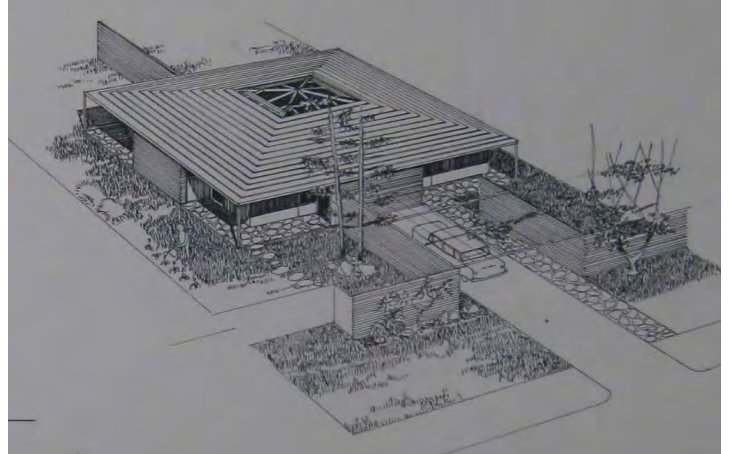
MYLOR DORMITORIES 1969



"Continuous windows along the veranda allowed those rooms that were public to flow outwards and engage the fairway and the creek, whose willows in the autumn repeated the colour of the straw ceilings." NP



MT LOFTY GOLF CLUBHOUSE 1970



"I calculated that Boyd would give first prize to a square house with a fly-screened central courtyard." NP



Dickson and Platten were awarded first prize in the News Home of the Year Competition in 1965. Designed by Newell Platten, who worked on the entry at home at night, the house was square in plan with a fly-screened central courtyard, both calculated to appeal to competition assessor, well known Victorian architect Robin Boyd.



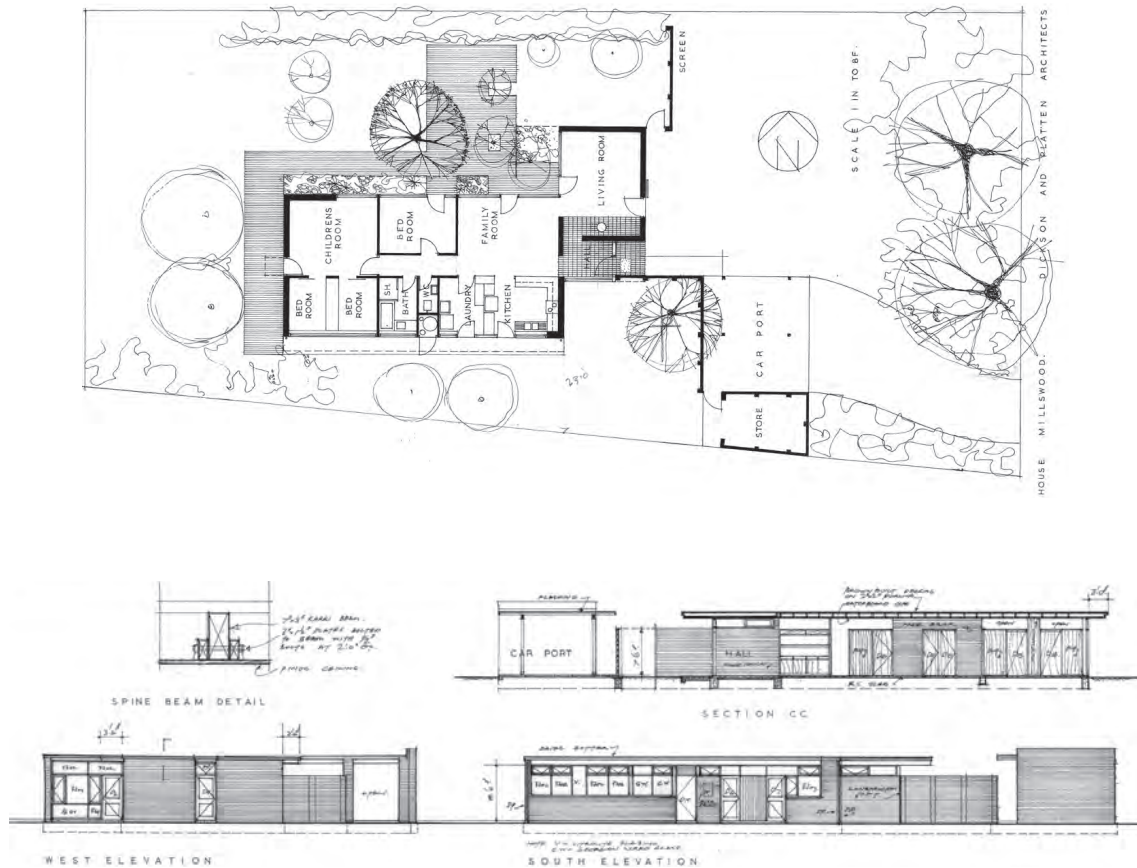
"THE NEWS" HOUSE OF THE YEAR COMPETITION MODBURY 1965



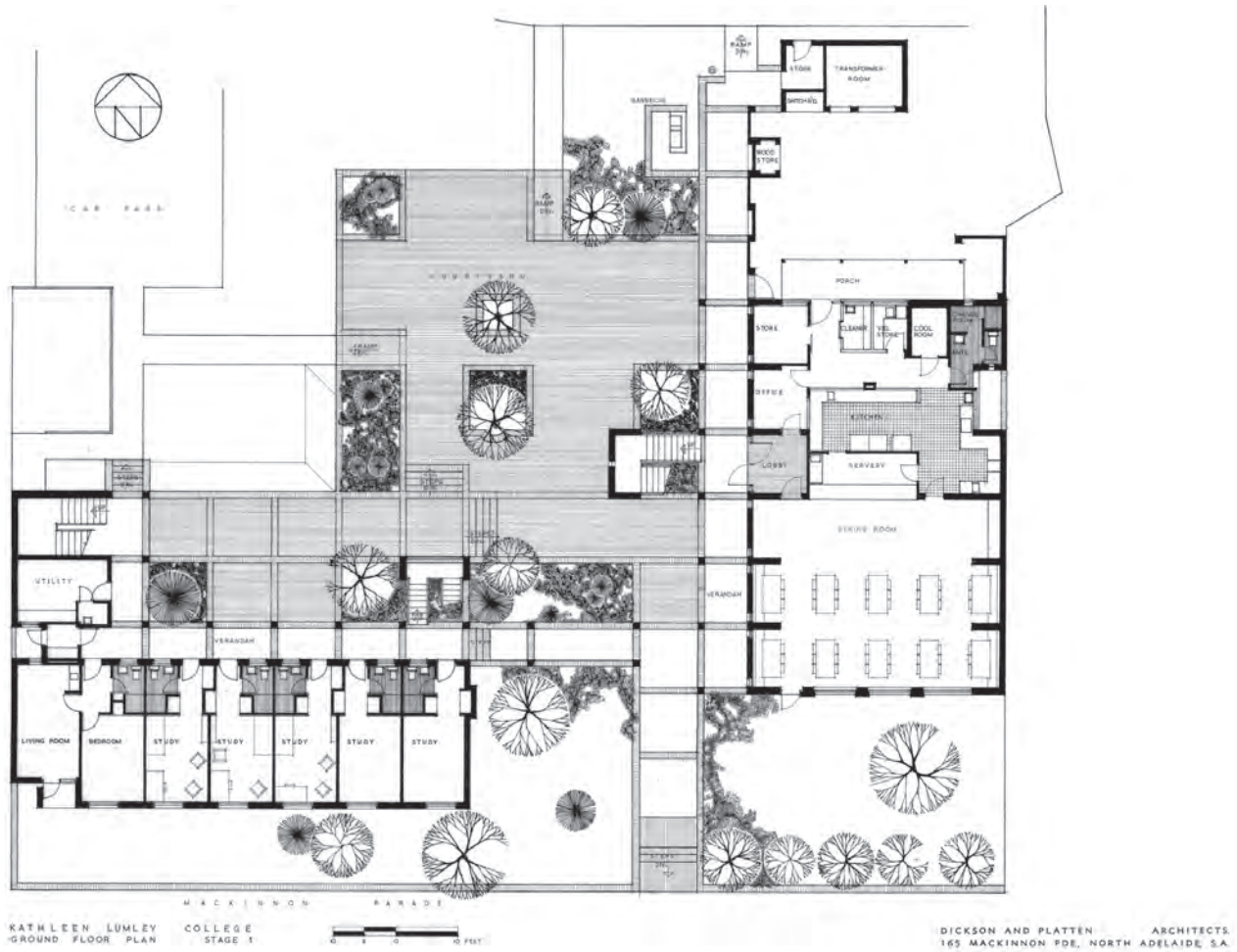
In the late 1960s, Platten was engaged by Hickenbotham Homes, an early and uncommon collaboration between an architect and a housing developer, to prepare house plans with a split-level capability that could adapt to various site conditions. These particular plans turned out to be unpopular with potential home buyers, although other Dickson and Platten designs were successful (Hickenbotham 2004; Platten to McDougall September 2008).

The Taylor House is an example of this type of collaboration with a volume house builder.

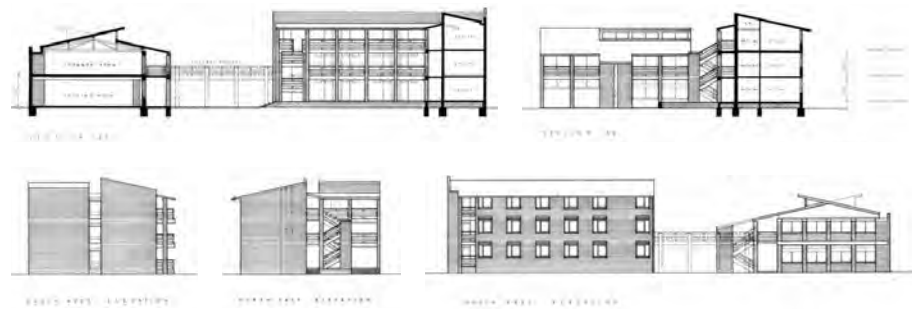
"A jury of architects, very likely seduced by rooms displaying the owners' handsome furniture, gave it an award." NP



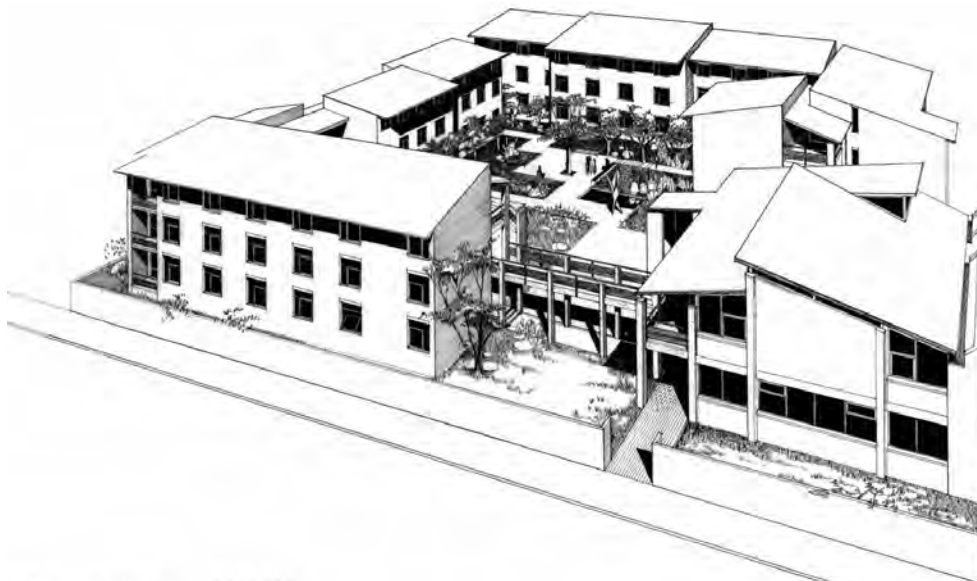
TAYLOR HOUSE MILLSWOOD 1965



KATHLEEN LUMLEY COLLEGE NORTH ADELAIDE 1968



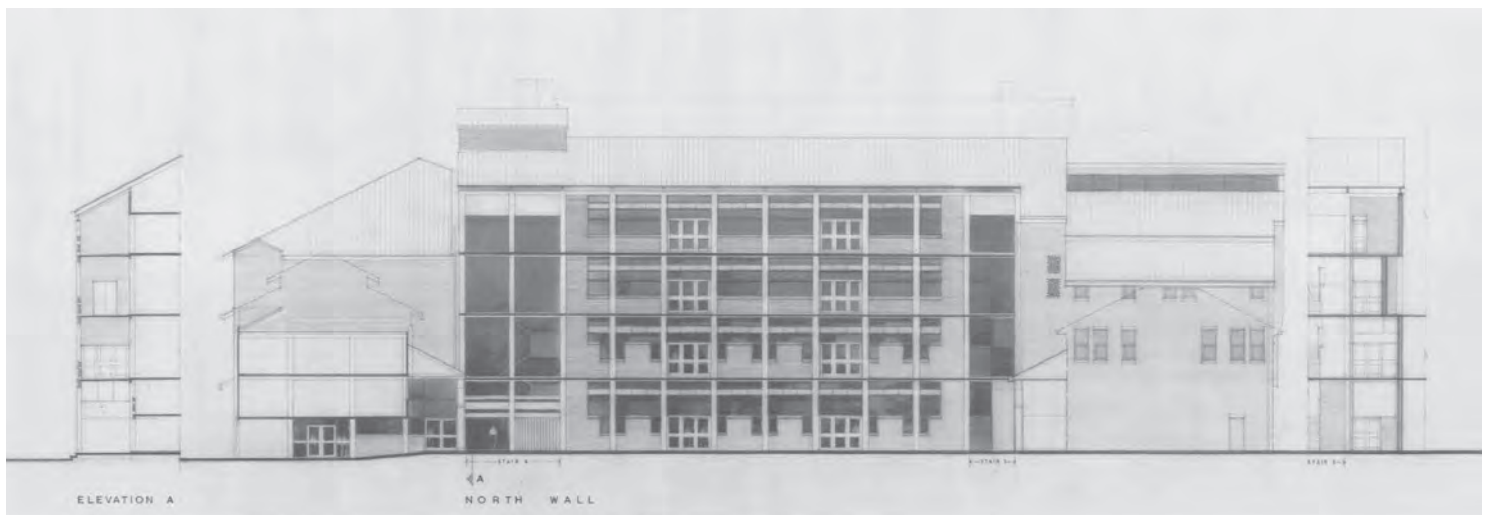
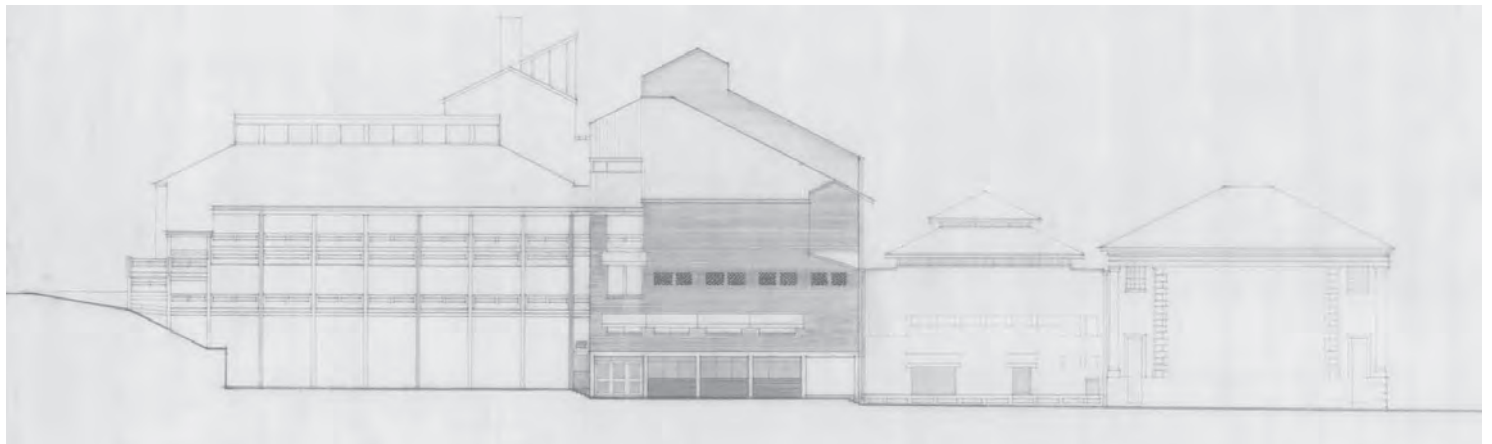
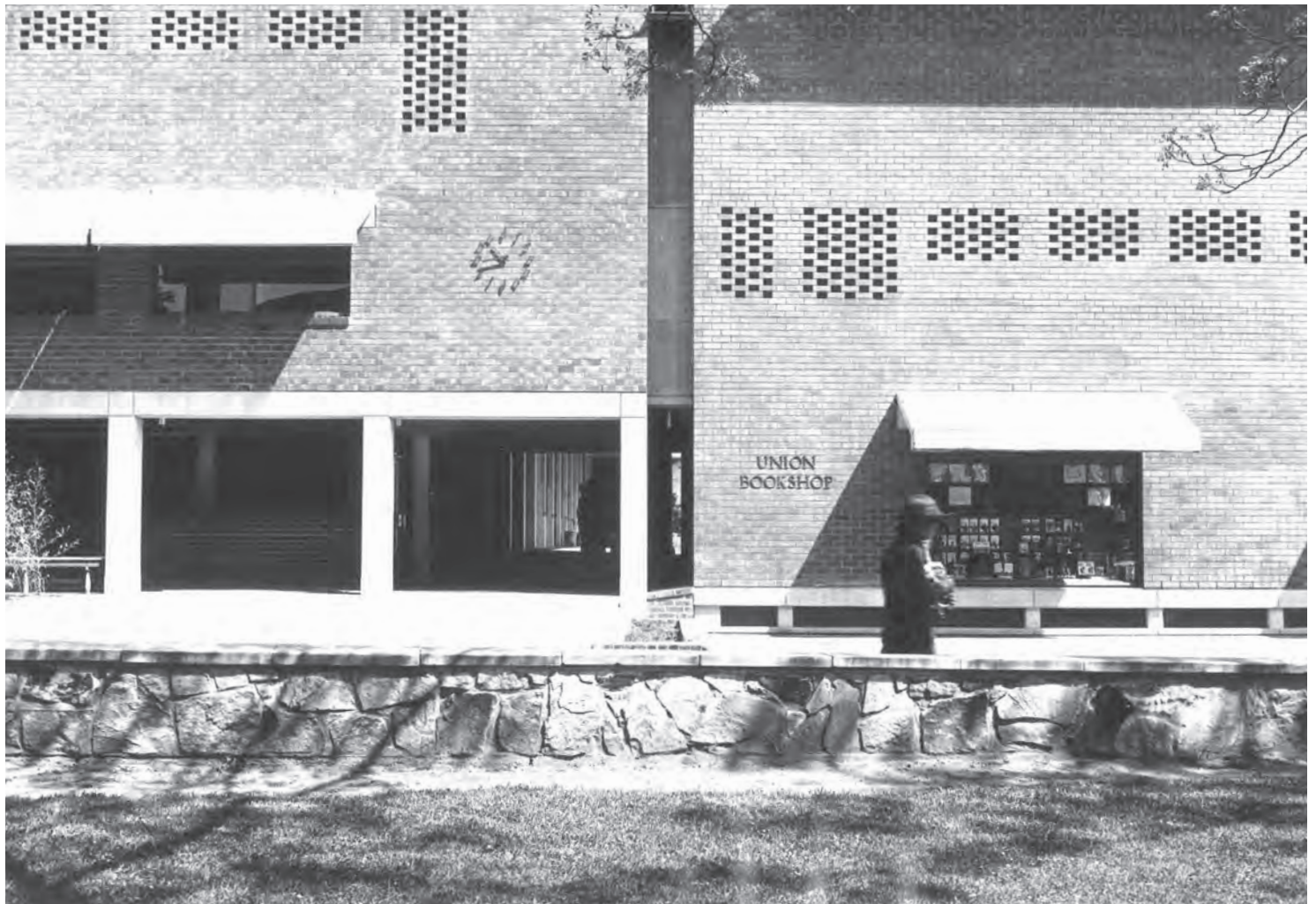
Educational building complexes were a significant component of Dickson and Platten's work. The Kathleen Lumley College, a project steered by Platten, was a residential college for university students. It won the 1969 RAIA (SA Chapter) Award of Merit and a Civic Trust Award for the landscaping (in association with Ray Holliday).



"I wanted to make a garden the centrepiece of the future college. Overlooked from balconies and rooms, it would exert a constant presence and be a setting for human movement, quiet contemplation, random meetings and friendly gatherings." NP







UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE UNION BUILDING 1967-1975

"The massive increase in area required by the Union, the restrictions on outward extensions and the desire to retain the fine older buildings together prompted some dramatic proposals..." RD

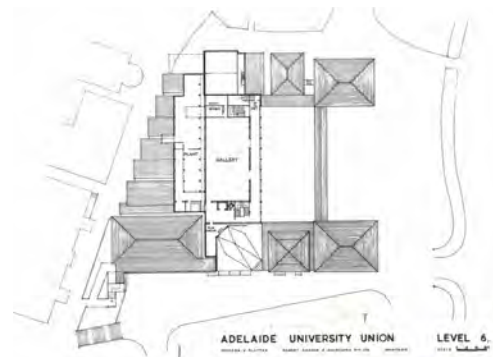
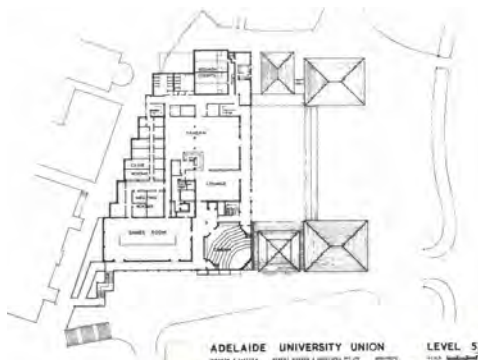


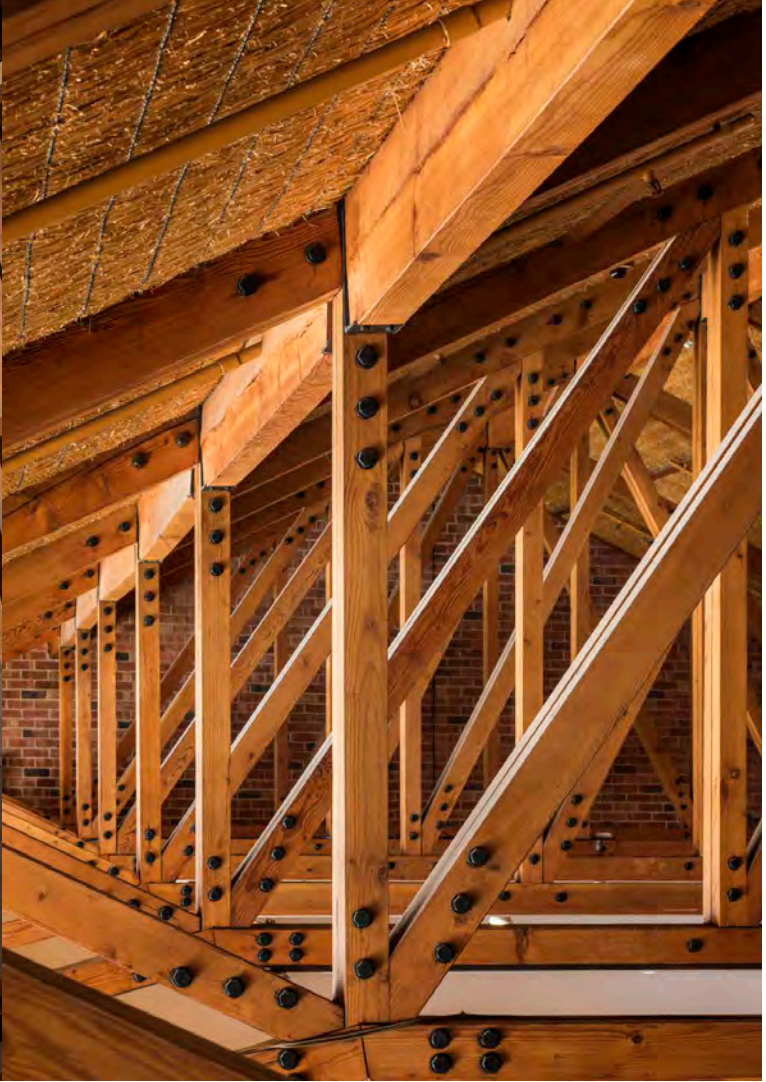
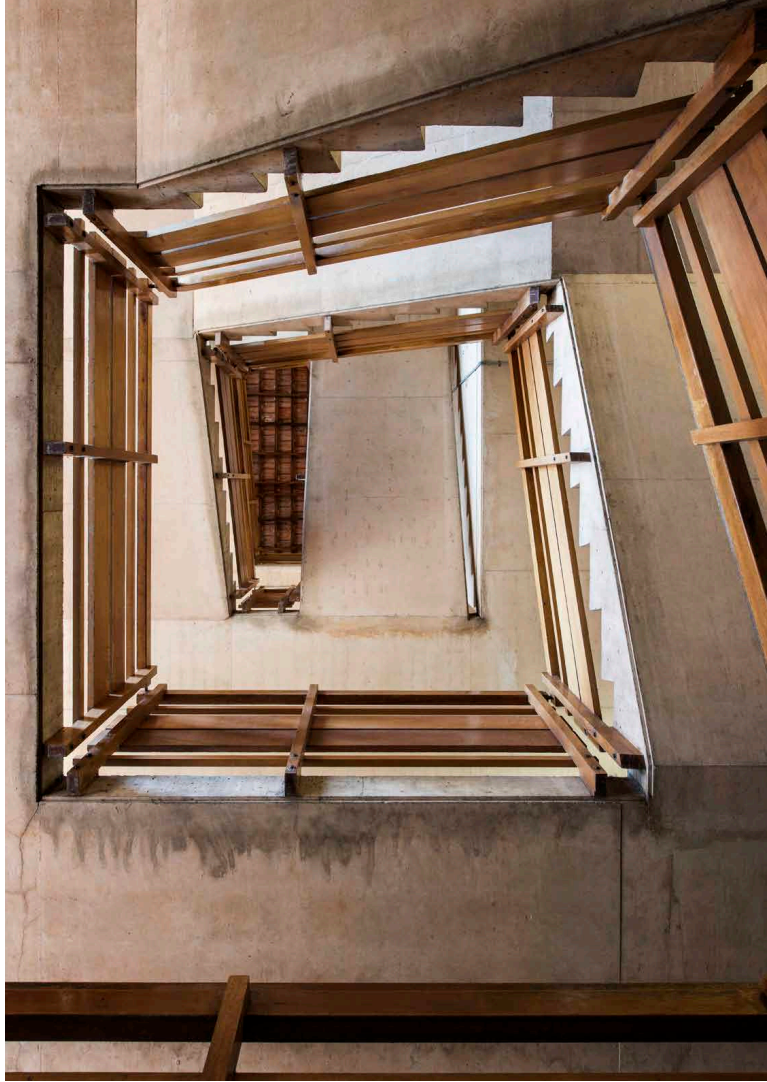
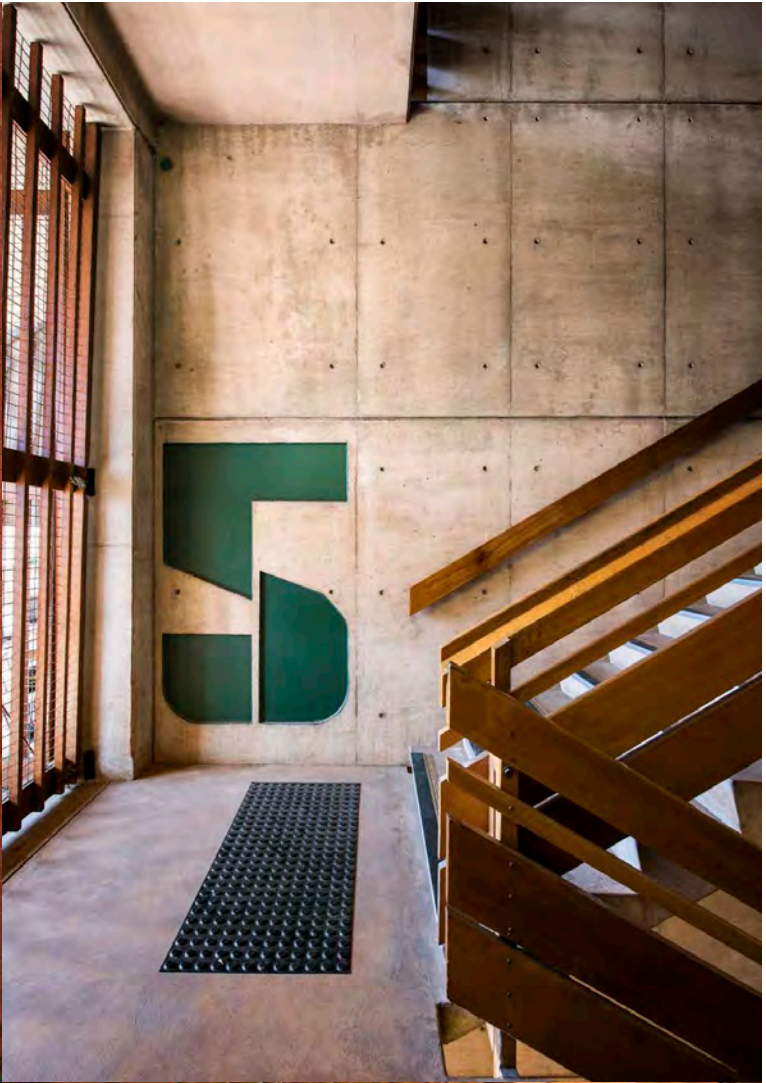
One of Dickson and Platten's most significant buildings, the Adelaide University Union Building, was built in stages from 1967 to 1975 and although primarily and substantially Dickson's work, was also influenced by Platten. Its vocabulary of brick, concrete and timber, and its detailing, can be said to represent the culmination of a joint approach developed over many years.

It has several entrances, balconies and terraces connecting it to the multiple levels of the University site. The building embraces a diversity of functions with space for a bookshop, shops, refectories, a cinema, theatre, gallery and offices.

It received an Award of Merit from the RAI in 1974, a Civic Trust Award in 1975 and a RAI Twenty-five Year Architecture Award in 2005.







DRAWING SD/6 : DICKSON & PLATTEN AT WORK

DR RACHEL HURST

Drawing SD/6 in the Architecture Museum is a design for a 'Table for N. Platten'. It is, like the majority of Dickson & Platten drawings in the collection, frustratingly undated, but probably produced around 1970 for the expanded premises of 165 Mackinnon Parade, as the practice grew beyond its 'cottage industry' origins.

And like almost all D&P drawings it is sparse, clear, confident. There is no excess annotation, no seduction in the blunt graphite on butter paper.

But, there is generosity and ingenuity in the design of the thing itself. Though the table might seem unremarkable by contemporary standards of sophisticated neo-materials and double curvature, this is a cunning piece to support a clever way of working. The clue is the three-inch gap in the middle. It divides the table into two zones — a conventional desktop and a drawing surface — making a neat separation of tasks, but also a space for a T-square to run, so the table can be an impromptu drafting board, regardless of orientation.

I don't know exactly where this table sat in the big front office of Mackinnon Parade, but I do know that the two partners, Robert (Bob) Dickson and Newell Platten worked alongside other for the duration of the practice, and assume there was a companion, a 'Table for R. Dickson', perhaps with a similar idiosyncrasy to accommodate Bob's manner of working. The design of furniture was for D&P a natural extension of any architectural project, as it was for all the influential Modernists of the 20th century.

I've looked at many similarly expedient drawings in the D&P archive, as well as the labyrinthine documentation of major projects like the Adelaide University Union and Associated Securities Limited (ASL). I've used them in lectures, research papers, copied them and painted them as case studies for the way modest architectural moves can elevate the everyday into something profound. I've recognised drawings I drew myself, in the five years I worked at Robert Dickson & Associates.

I know the signatures of D&P detailing: the deliberate selection of indigenous timber (Australian Oak, tough and golden); the double structural members for both stability and reduction of timber sizes; ¼" detail grooves to define edge and junction; and expressed dowels as careful punctuations and reminders of what holds it all together.

But here I think of this table as analogous to the practice and architecture of D&P itself — twinned, direct, adaptable, materially satisfying and durable — and this essay consciously approaches the work of D&P from the intimate scale of the table. For although their work has undeniable impact in the complex public and institutional works, like the Arkaba and Kathleen Lumley College, and speaks to the broader context of landscape and place in projects like the National Fitness Council and Hope Valley Water Filtration Plant, their work excels in the immediate accommodation of the everyday. It is, after all, where much of their thinking about architecture begins. What Bob would call 'first principles' or as Newell explains

"We designed inside to outside... an organic response to the needs of a client". And it is at this level — across a table or two — that I too have insights from working with them.

In the role of ingénue employee at RD&A, I saw Bob's absorption in the problem-solving nature of architecture and his quiet firm way of getting things done. His own clarity of architectural intent made excellent training for those working for him. We learnt through a combination of brisk, never decorative, drawings issuing from the front office and open discussions around our drawing boards. It was an office of familial scale and atmosphere as well as origins, where one felt mentored in the pursuit of intelligent, humane architectural solutions. Confessing to an incapacitating shyness, Bob was never one to "chuck his weight around."

This characteristic served the practice well in securing the Adelaide University Union project, over the established University architects, "who seemed more intent on telling rather than listening" in the early scoping stages of the commission.

Perhaps because of his social reserve, Bob preferred to address projects through one principal client contact, even on large projects like the Civic Centre series. But he was not shy of the genuine affection that grew out of such liaisons, declaring "All my old clients are friends today... that's a great joy." He was nevertheless adept at deploying his reserved demeanour to great effect. His general rejection of pugilistic tactics disarmed confrontation in favour of reasoned debate, both in the invariably collegiate office, but also on site. He could be wonderfully, stubbornly, selectively deaf, simply refusing to hear arguments as to why some defect couldn't be fixed, and moving, apparently oblivious, to the next issue.

In due course I came to know Newell through writing about D&P. What began as academically motivated research quickly developed into an informal collaboration and friendship. We now exchange letters and postcards from far-flung places, feed each other's writing projects, share a coffee and a grizzle about the dire state of current architectural pretensions, and end with a laugh at our own conceits to affect any of it.

I sometimes wonder how it would have been to work for Newell, as opposed to know him from this more reflective and companionable position. Because of the synchronicity of their architectural voices, D&P's work defies distinct authorship. Newell recalls being warned D&P "were doomed to failure because we were too much alike — too quiet, too serious, neither of us a salesman." The two worked in such close consultation that even long-term associate Gerry Nelson could not identify consistent differences in their architectural vocabularies. When pressed, he hazarded some subtle variations in their handling of fenestration. If the built results are enigmatic, I offer some tentative hypotheses based on observations of the day to day.

If Bob delighted in discussing built form, with an inexhaustible memory for the detail of constructional challenges and resolution, Newell always seems to divert the topic to the urban and landscape, and often only as a pathway to considering collective behaviours and values. His architectural compass leans more towards ideology than technology.

Bob, however, had an abiding attraction to refined mechanics and the Le Corbusien tropes of modernity and mobility, with his collection of streamlined cars, sails, and Mangiarotti and Georg Jensen timepieces. While I recall Bob arriving in his ultra stylish Citroën Diane or Porsche 911, Newell makes memorable entrances these days on his octogenarian trike, and his home speaks as strongly of an art aesthetic as it does of an engineered one.

Ever the perfectionist, Bob sometimes found visits to nearly completed projects discomfiting, reconciling himself to the minor compromises that had had to be made; Newell, on the other hand, is sanguine, almost curious, about modifications that have happened to his projects over time. Both men have eschewed self-promotion in their careers, yet both have achieved distinguished positions of authority through contribution in public and professional forums (notably for Bob as President of the RAlA SA Chapter from 1978 to 1980, and for Newell as Chief Design Architect and Planner with the SA Housing Trust from 1973 to 1980). But whereas I suspect Bob consciously worked hard to 'network' smoothly, Newell is a disingenuous charismatic for whom such things appear to come easily (despite his Methodist distaste for such prowess). So what did I learn first hand of the processes of refinement that contribute to the cumulative power of D&P's architecture? What were the negotiations at the drawing

tables that make the whole much greater than the sum of its ostensibly straightforward parts —

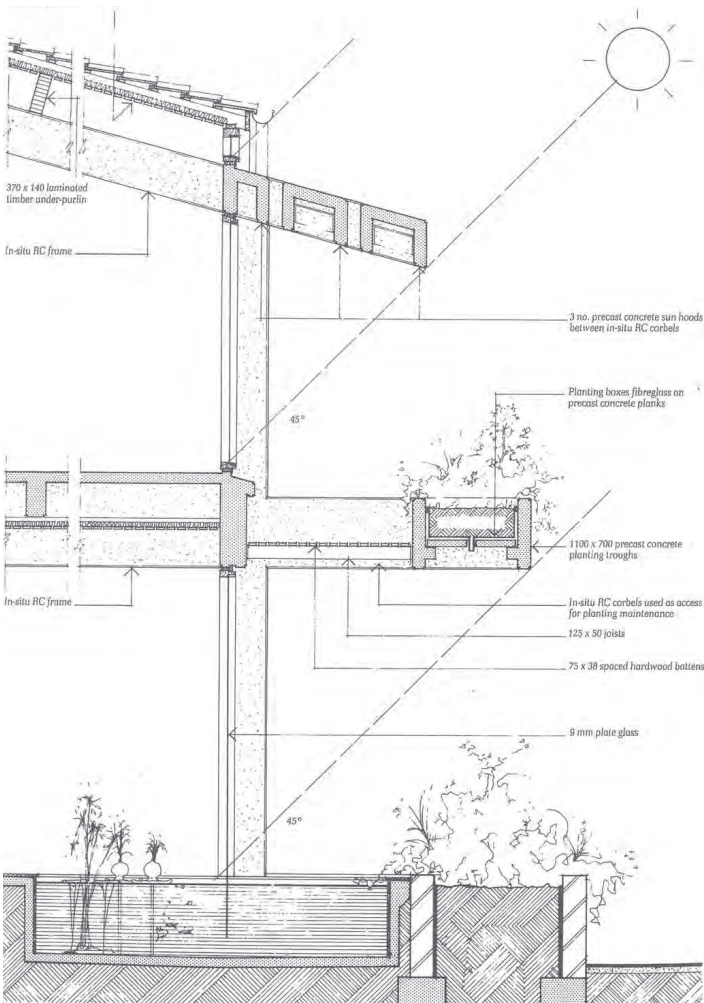
"an architecture of no style that spelt the end of style"? Firstly, I learnt to define space through the body, measuring rooms, openings and windows in a combination of brick modules, body widths and, often, table widths.

Simultaneously, I was taught not to be afraid of mass or singularity. A masonry wall — if it is good masonry and good proportion — can be just that, without interruption. It can be expansive and fine grained at the same time. I was taught to really see the colours of brick, timber and terracotta. With the help of the gracious Salisbury Civic Centre and ASL, I learnt to forgive cream brick its previous suburban abuses.

I learnt to understand economy of means, to pare back roof edges obsessively, ridding them of superfluous elements. I learnt never to mistake a barge for a fascia, for they terminate wall or roof respectively, and should behave accordingly. I learnt to use downpipes and rainwater heads as almost bar markings for the tempos of the roof. I was instructed how to organise services in concert with structure, for there are there few places to hide in the plasterboard-free world of D&P architecture. I was schooled in the unforgiving nature of Australian light, to understand the intensity of the overhead sky and how not to make glaring mistakes [literally] with windows that are too large or unshaded.

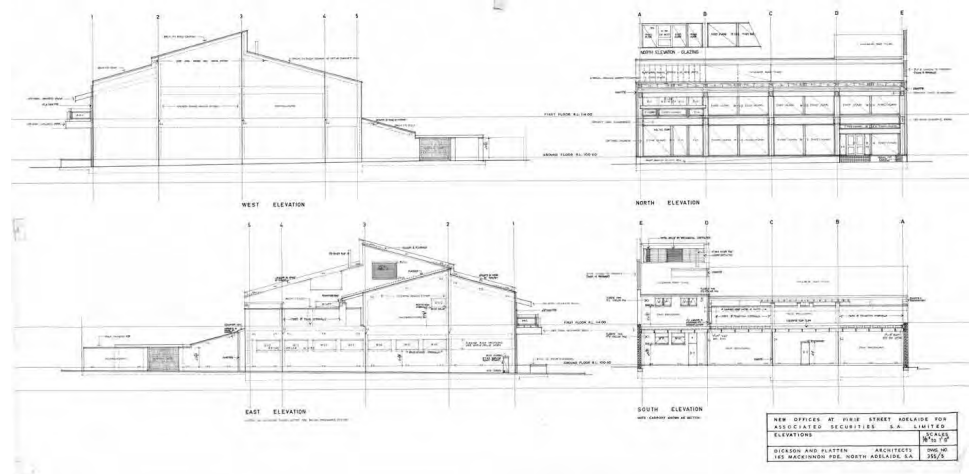
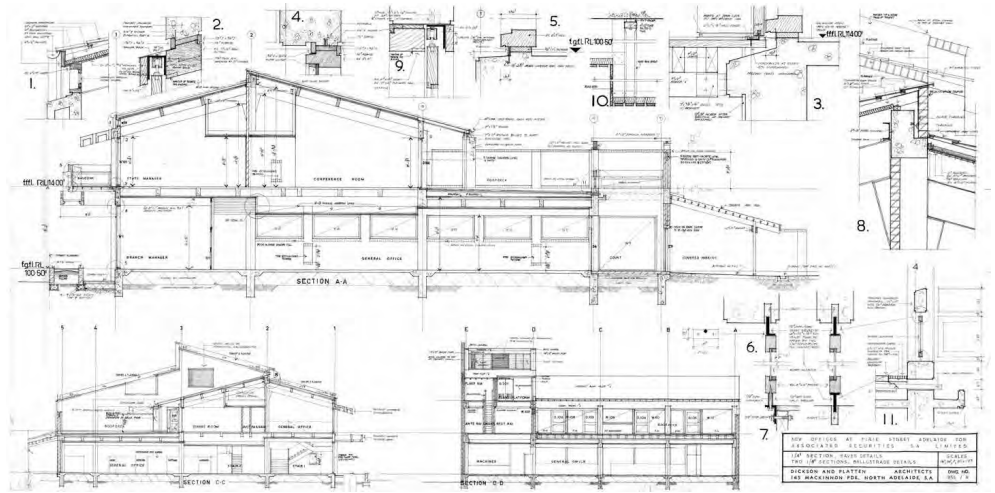
I learnt to minimise thresholds between inside and out, to flatten them as close to natural ground as possible, while dramatising them internally to activate view and movement. And I learnt to respect the 1:50 section more than any other drawing; to make only eloquent detail, not decoration.

Ian McDougall queries my use of the term 'critical regionalism' to describe D&P's work, and I concede it is a too convenient label. It does not capture the intrinsic architectural virtues of this sensitive and simpatico duo, nor the effect their personal ethos of humility and humanity had on their work. I think of the civitas laden gathering places they have designed, or the textured domestic havens that sit 'just so' in their sites — urban, suburban or bush. I think of the solid sunny comfort of sitting at one of their work or dining tables, and I think of their sustained gentle questioning of the hows and whys of architecture, and their own denial of ego in any of it. A better term, then, might be self-critical regionalism.

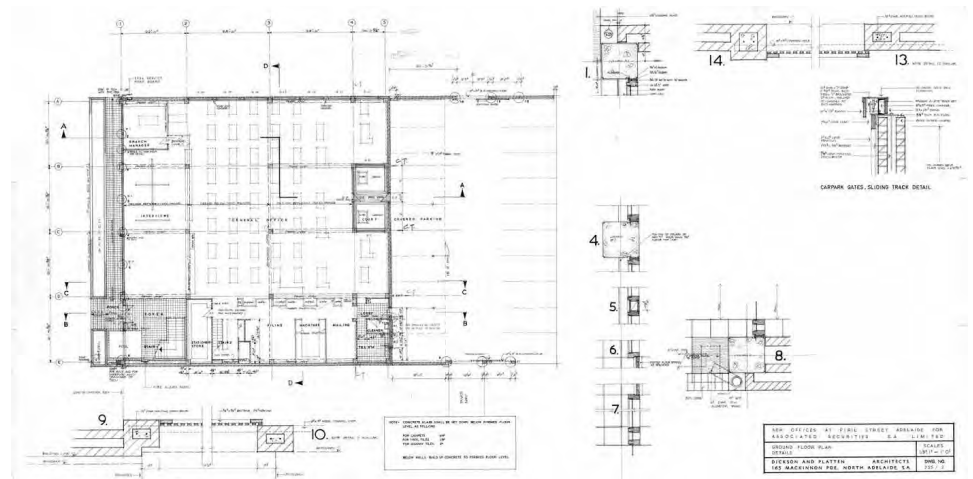
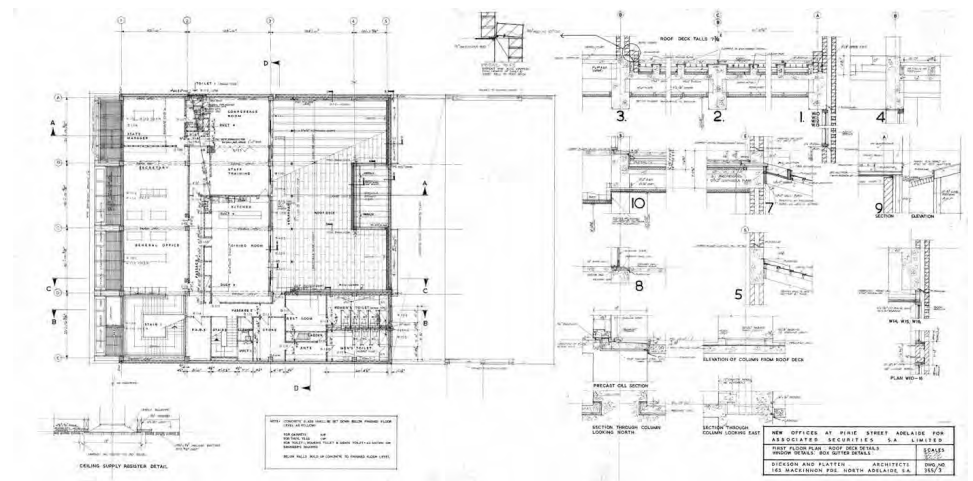


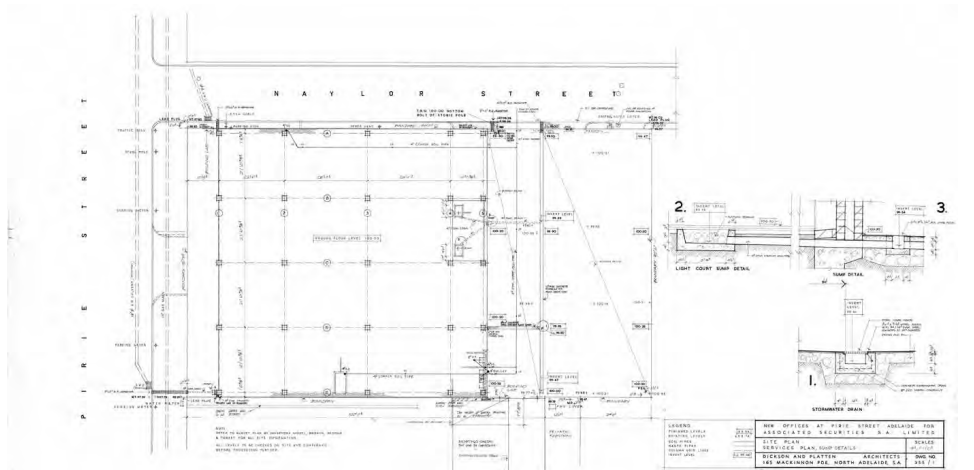
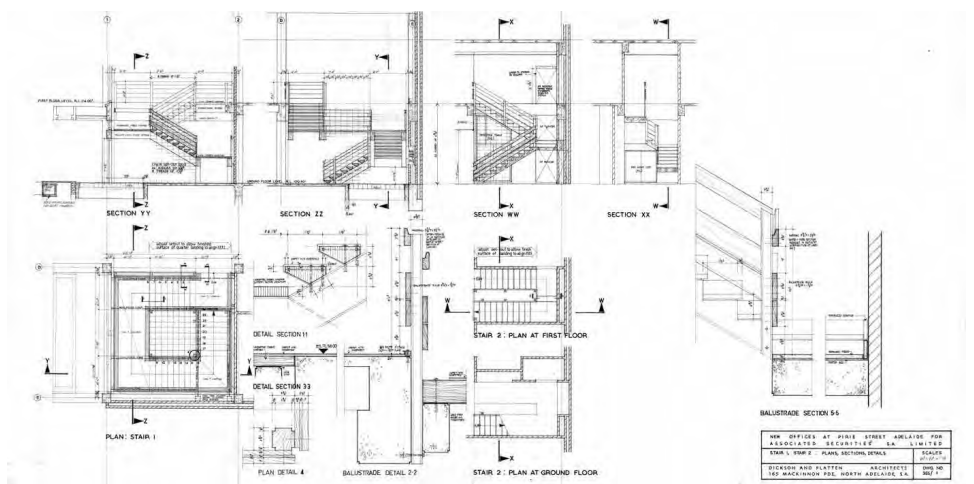
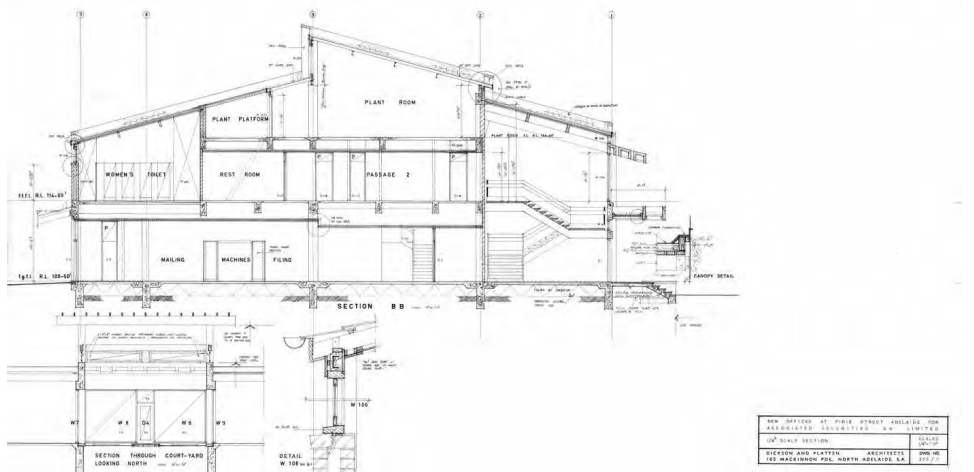
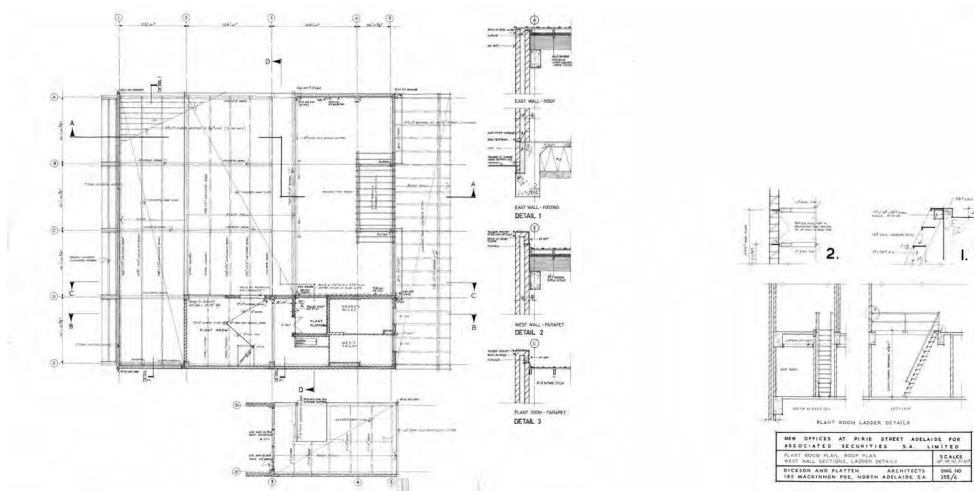
Associated Securities Limited were intent on creating an ideal office environment of high architectural quality to embody the company image. The Pirie Street site, facing north over Hindmarsh Square, featured spacious offices and large open areas including the central garden light court. Large north facing windows and balconies were shaded by cantilevered extensions of the roof structure. The building presented a faintly domestic quality, given by its raked ceilings and materials, face brickwork and timber (Dickson, Addicted to Architecture).

ASSOCIATED SECURITIES LIMITED ADELAIDE 1969-1972



"The project was interesting in that it logically utilised frame construction in its design. We were able to apply our recently acquired experience for the Union's Stage 1 to develop it further." RD







The linked town houses were designed for two couples, Mr & Mrs Jacobsen and Mr & Mrs Kennedy, on land that was unusually vacant for old Lower North Adelaide, at a time when the Adelaide City Council did not favour development on small sites. The site faced south and fronted the Parklands, giving the opportunity for the houses to open to the north on to private courtyards. The houses were planned to the full width of their sites and were kept to a simple rectangular form. The external shells of the two houses were virtually identical however, the variations in site treatment and internal planning accommodate the different needs of the owners. Construction of the houses utilised exposed red brick walling with exposed timber construction and bound straw ceilings internally. The pair of houses gained the RAlA (SA Chapter) Award of Merit in 1967. - Addicted to Architecture, RD



INSPIRED planning and meticulous use of ground space on a tiny piece of land have provided a new and exciting design for urban living in Mr. and Mrs. Philip Jacobson's home in North Adelaide.

Built on a narrow block with a 25-foot frontage and a depth of 120 feet, the property contains, incredibly, two courtyards, a carport, swimming-pool, swimmers' change room, tall trees, and a comfortable, five-roomed house of two floors.

The architects, Dickson and Platten, achieved all this by making the most of every foot of the area and by overlapping on the next-door property, so that a three-foot wide passageway, covered by first-floor walk-in wardrobes extending from both houses, is shared with neighbors without any sacrifice of privacy for either home.

The architects, who also designed neighbors Mr. and Mrs. H. C. Kennedy's house, obtained special permission from the Adelaide City Council to erect two houses on the two narrow blocks, which together made a site of only 6000 square feet. A minimum site area of 2560 feet is normally required.

The three-foot-wide passageway provides access to the rear gardens, the houses are staggered in price, shortening the link between them to give complete privacy.

Small screened entrance courtyards are formed in the space between the houses and the separately built carports and stores. This increases the privacy from the street.

A front-gate buzzer (with transmitter system) to the inside of the house) announces callers, who are admitted through a high wooden gate to the walled courtyard leading to the front door.

The houses are in red brick, exposed as facework both inside and out. In the furnishing and decor, Mrs. Jacobson concentrated on a variety of textures to enhance and be enhanced by the rich tone of the red brick walls.

The concrete floor is covered in slate, left bare in summer and carpeted with seasoned-green rugs in winter. In summer, too, the black-slated courtyard seen through the picture windows appears as an extension of the inside flooring and gives an impression of distance.

How to place a swimming-pool in a back garden 25 ft. wide and less than 20 ft. deep (the swimmers' change room takes up ten feet of the depth) presented a problem, especially since it had to be three feet away from the site boundaries to comply with council regulations.

This was overcome with a design of three different-sized rectangles staggered to make what Mrs. Jacobson calls a "spearhead" shape.

A massive gum tree (it was another problem in the planning of the swimming pool) shades the back courtyard, and a large jacaranda, carefully preserved in its place on the site, blooms purple-blue from a far corner of the garden.

On a bright day the sunlight streams in through the rear windows and highlights the sun colors in the house — golds, oranges, greens, ochre, and mustard.

"They would be the first 'town houses' to be built in Adelaide." RD



MACKINNON PARADE TOWNHOUSES NORTH ADELAIDE 1966

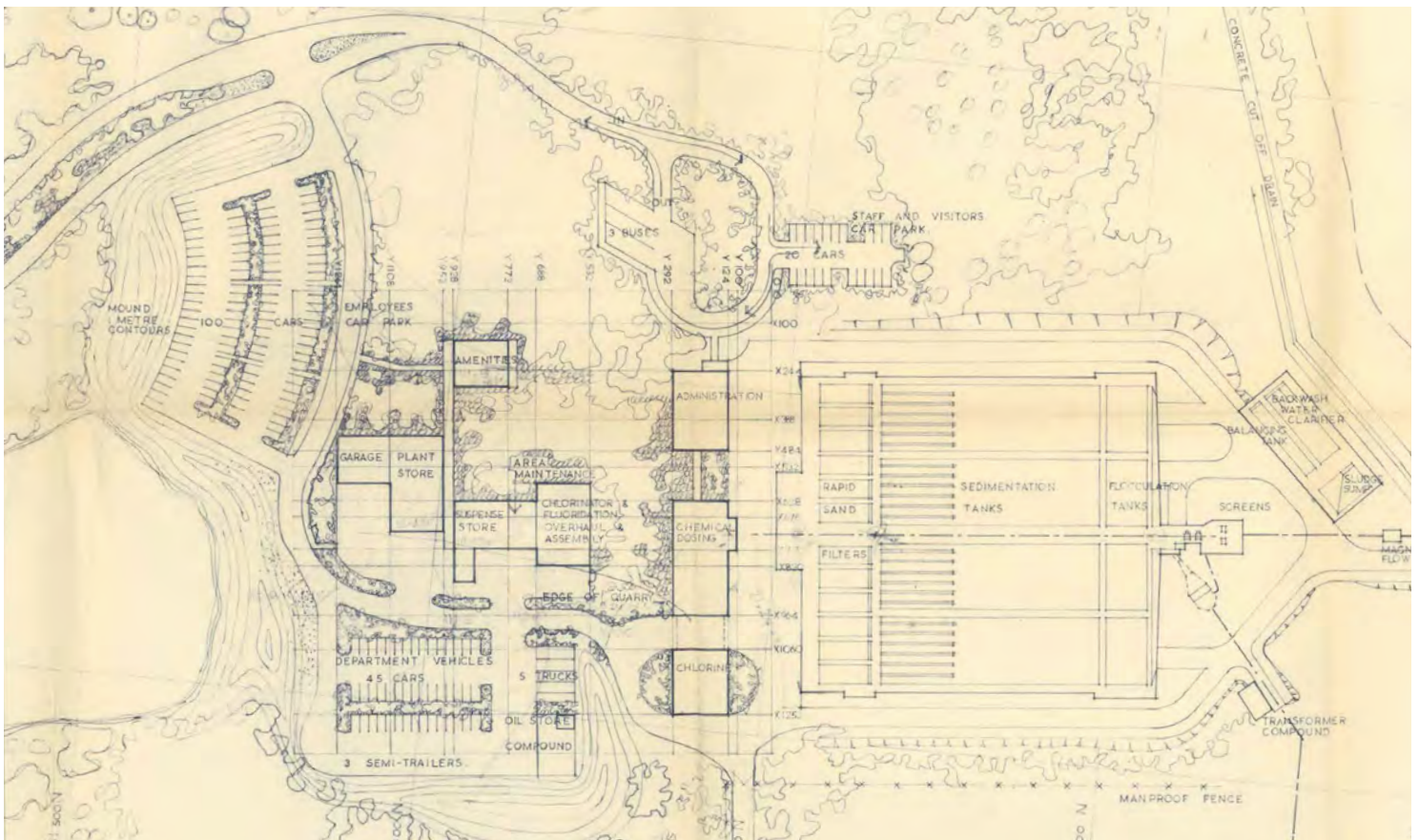




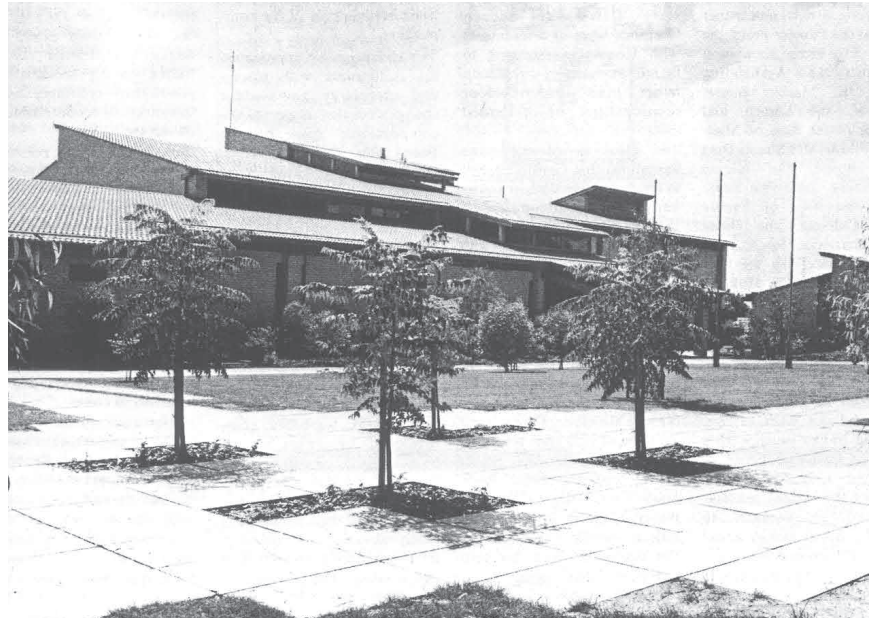
"Given the general thrust of my career, it is a touch ironic that the last major project I designed in the Dickson and Platten partnership was a large industrial complex..." NP

The large industrial complex had two parts: the administration and chemical dosing buildings, lined up like a boulevard and connected by a bridge; and another group of buildings, garages, workshops and amenities, clustered amongst pines, a little removed from the other buildings. The walls are pale brick. The roofs are counter-pitched, broken with skylights, and rise like squat towers to accommodate internal function (Platten, Hybrid Beauty).

The project received the SA Chapter RIA Award of Merit as it 'established domestic into utilitarian and office buildings' (RAIA SA, Significant 20th Century Architecture).



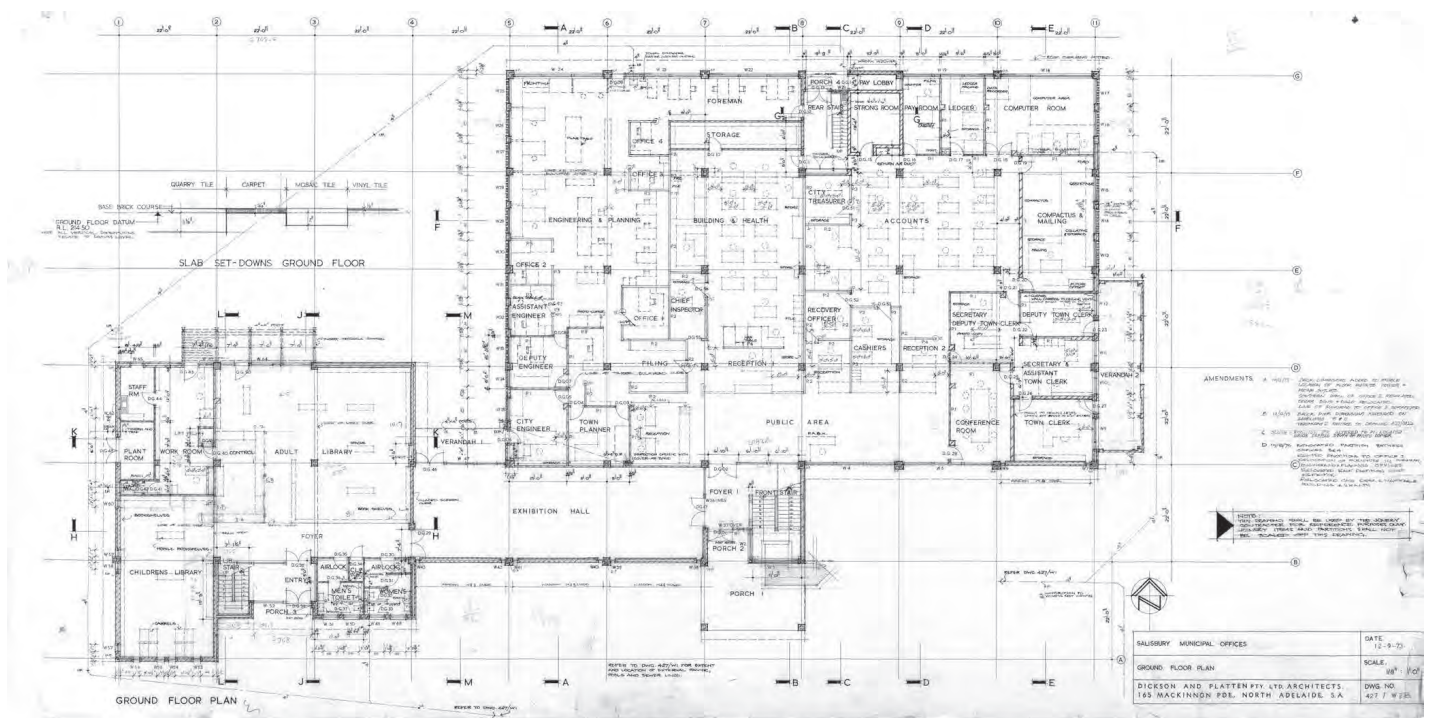
HOPE VALLEY WATER FILTRATION PLANT 1976



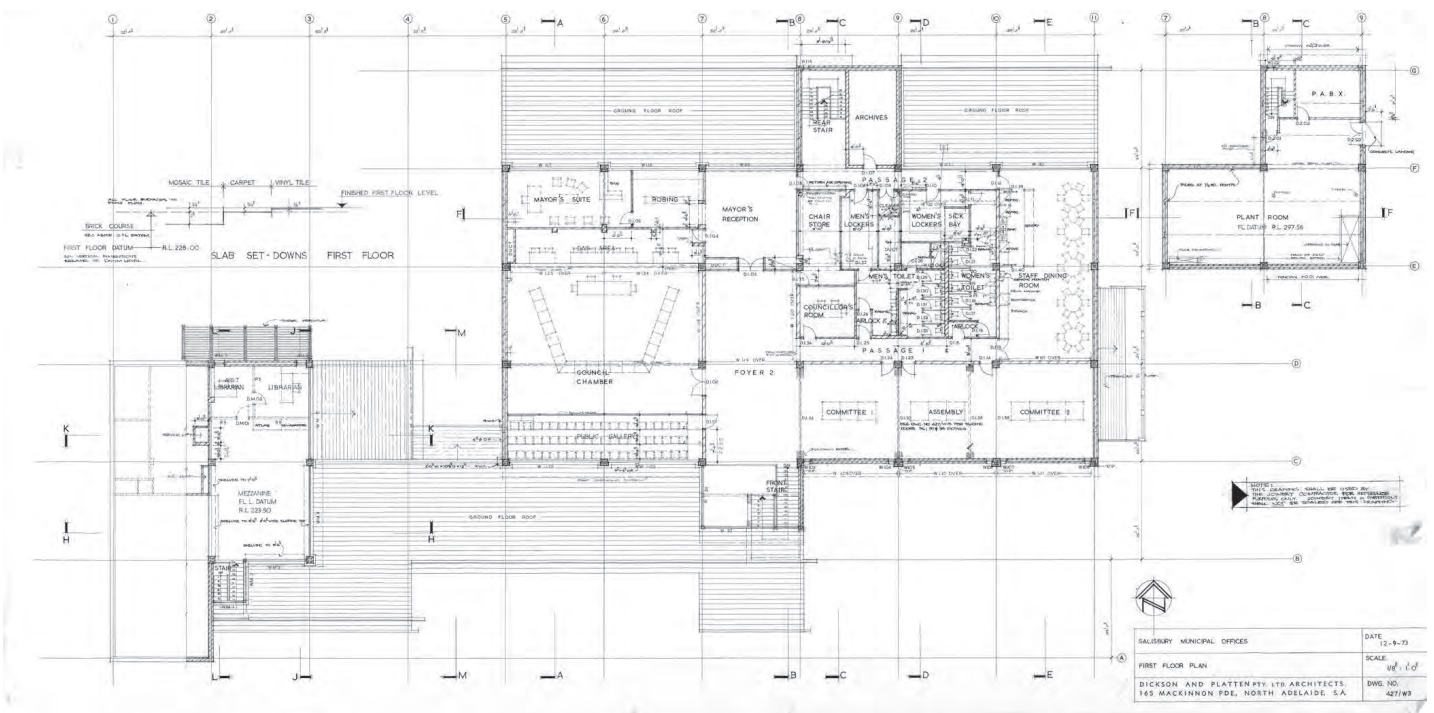
'The building reflects more open access to local government, while expressing and facilitating community identity and involvement' (RAIA SA, Significant 20th Century Architecture).

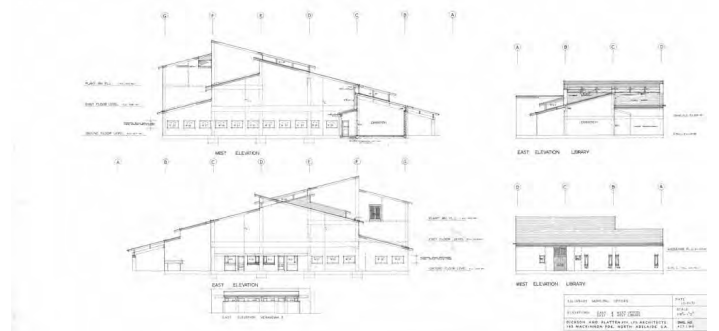
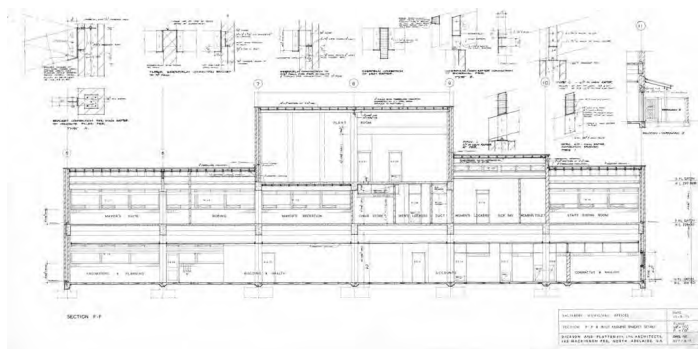
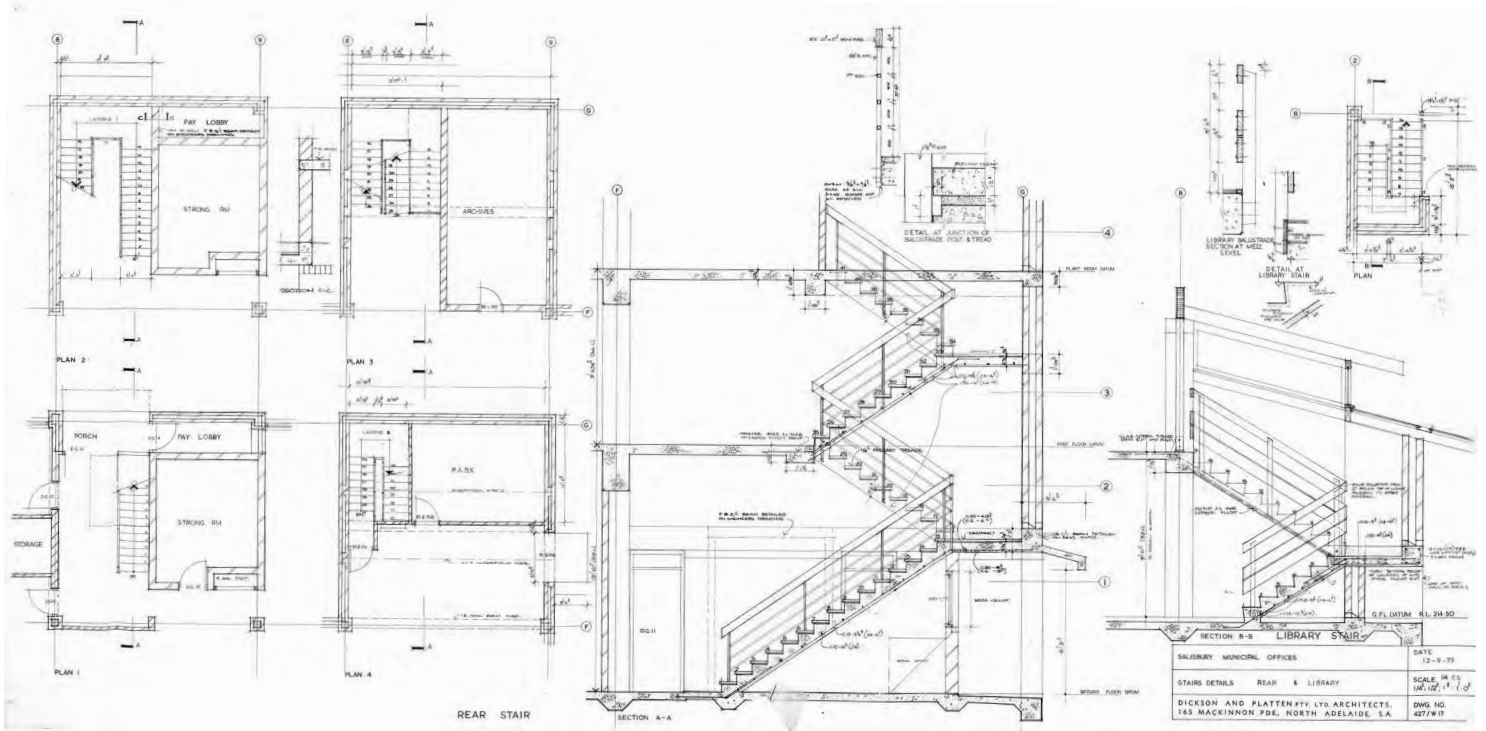
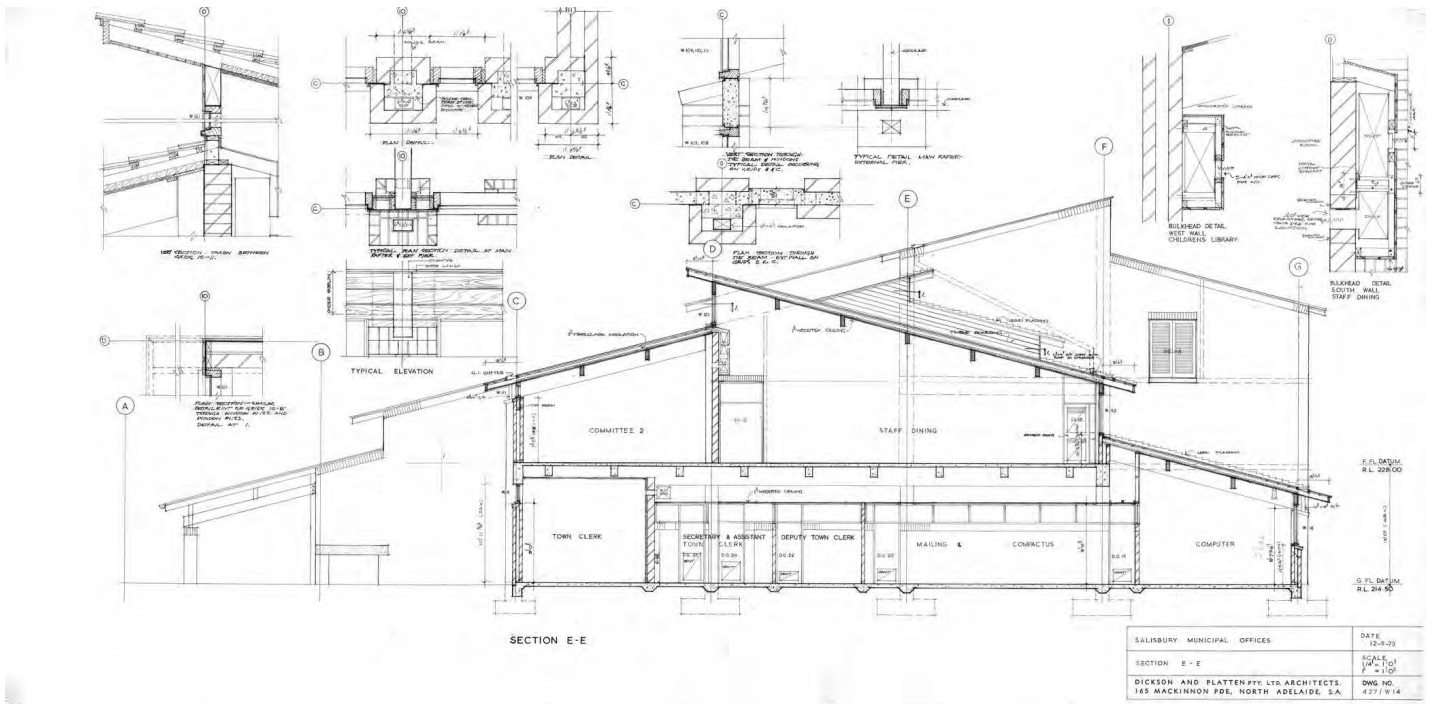
The new municipal buildings were planned as a series of interconnected spaces; council offices, meeting rooms, assembly space and staff facilities, exhibition gallery and library. The building was required to appeal to a wide cross-section of the community. Timber is the dominant material, both internally and externally, and a high level of natural light is achieved with generous highlight windows. The general feeling within the spaces is of warmth and informality (Architecture Australia, April/May 1977).

SALISBURY COUNCIL BUILDING & LIBRARY 1973



"...we endeavour to provide only that which is necessary. And we let the problems lead us to the solution. The spatial qualities, the construction and finishes, sensibly and sensitively utilised, serve alone to create the aesthetic qualities." RD









"Old and new buildings and old and new residents now live agreeably together in a mixture of public and private housing. The project was successful." RD

DICKSON: HACKNEY NEIGHBOURHOOD RENEWAL 1971



"...I had designed the centre intuitively, in response to topography and my preference for tight, complex and car-free urban forms." NP

PLATTEN: NOARLUNGA TOWN CENTRE 1973



"...opportunities should be sought to establish active relationships, to link development with parkland, such as pedestrian short cuts to ensure its usefulness." RD

DICKSON ET. AL.: MONARTO TOWN CENTRE 1975



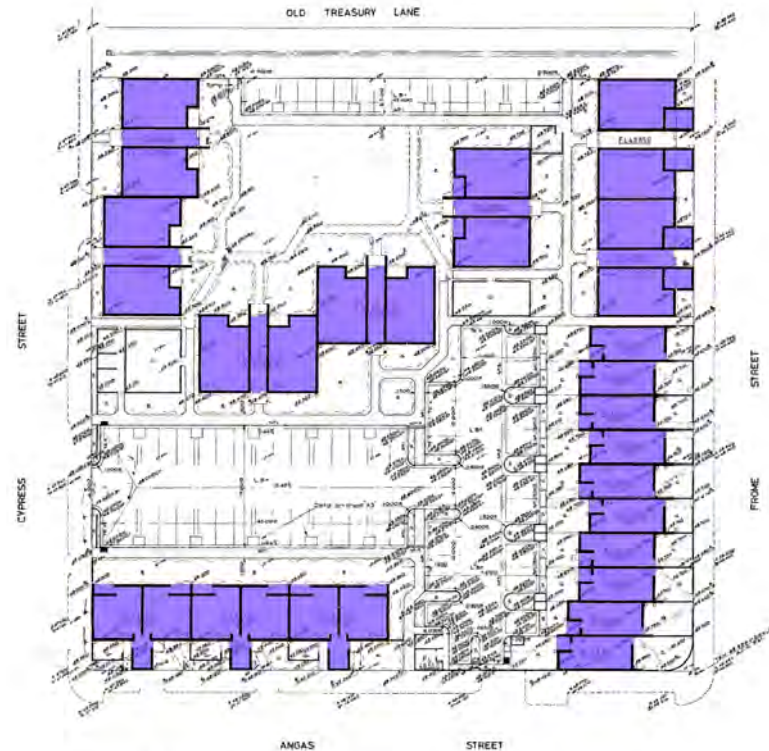
"The first decision the Trust made was to expose the creek, landscape it and make it the focal point in the development. The creek runs roughly east to west. On the southern side are three storey high blocks of flats that enjoy winter sunshine and overlook the creek from bedrooms and living rooms. The site plan responds to the creek's route. Stairwells give residents direct access to the creek one side, to car parks and clothes lines the other side. Originally we planned two storey flats on the north side. Local resistance brought about a change to single storey pensioner dwellings." NP



When Newell Platten left the partnership to join the South Australian Housing Trust as Chief Design Architect and Chief Planner in 1973, he took with him this 'unpretentious but fine-grained sense of the fitness of things', and Peter Ward believes South Australia's best post-war public housing was the result. Platten wanted to boost the Trust's design standards and according to historian Susan Marsden he did this 'in terms of human scale and gentleness', with an emphasis on siting, composition and landscaping.

The previously industrial Hallweld site at Norwood (1980) bounded by First Creek incorporated a landscape revegetation to make the creek the focal point also won a Civic Trust Award. On the southern side three storey high blocks of flats overlook the creek from bedrooms and living rooms.

Platten's Housing Trust work in Adelaide includes the Playford group (Old Treasury Lane), Angas Street (1979) and the Box Factory group, Carrington Street (1978), the latter receiving a Civic Trust Commendation in 1981.



SAHT BOX FACTORY ADELAIDE 1978 & OLD TREASURY LANE ADELAIDE 1979



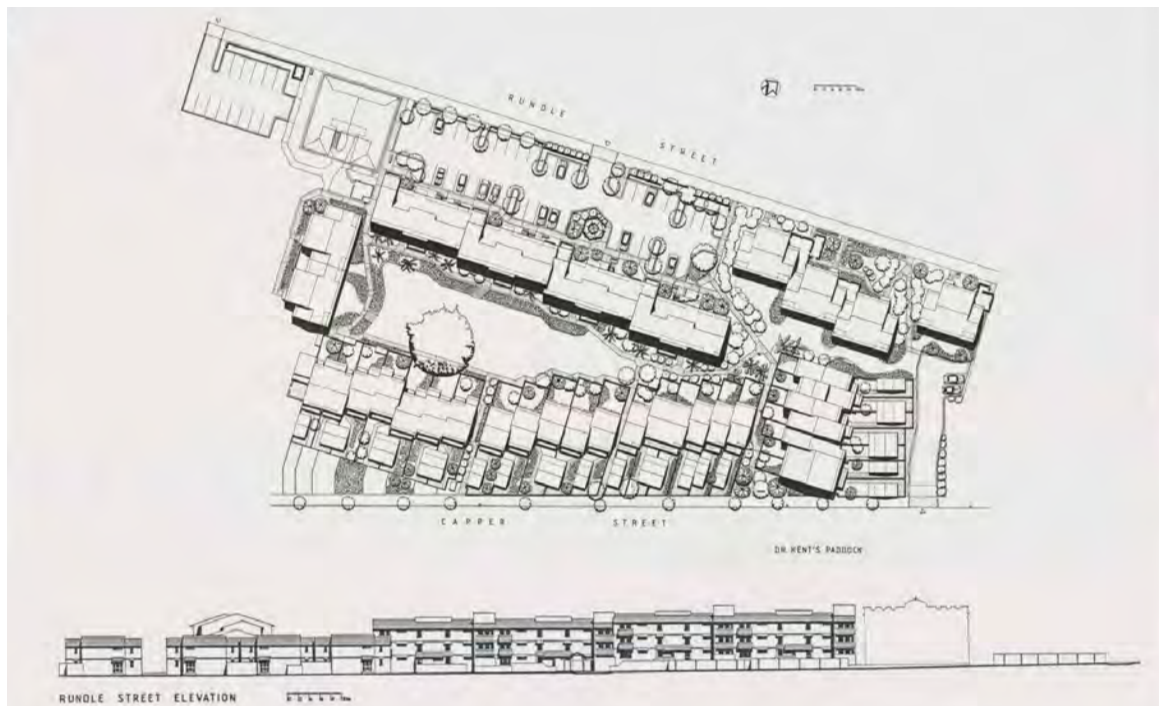


Located close to the city of Adelaide, Dr Kent's Paddock comprises flats and townhouses for a mix of families, pensioners, couples and singles on low incomes both as rental accommodation and owner-occupiers. A two storied warehouse dating from 1912 was retained on site and converted into ten apartments. The remainder of the site is composed of linear form residential accommodation around the perimeter with a large shared internal garden accessible to all dwellings. The greenspaces were preserved including mature trees and enhanced with new plantings. The palette of materials used for the construction included off white concrete masonry, grey concrete roof tiles, timber balconies and fenestration, while redbrick screening and fencing was used in the landscaping, reflecting the materials of the old warehouse.



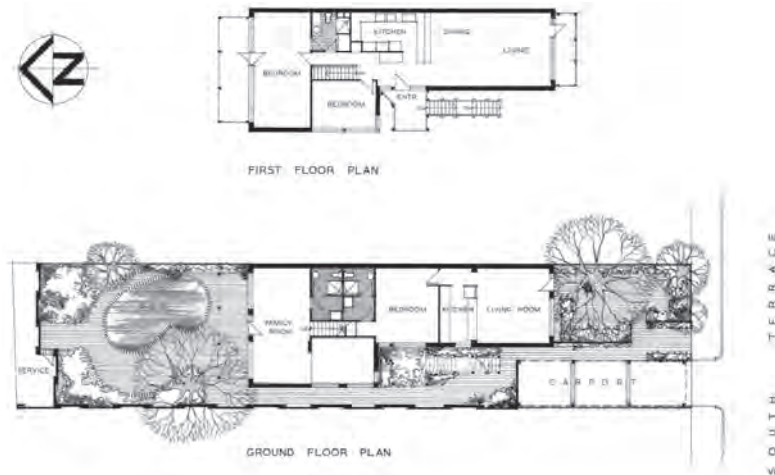
SAHT DR KENT'S Paddock KENT TOWN 1978-1982

"All the buildings bear traces of Dickson and Platten detailing, particularly in lintels, window proportions and eaves." NP

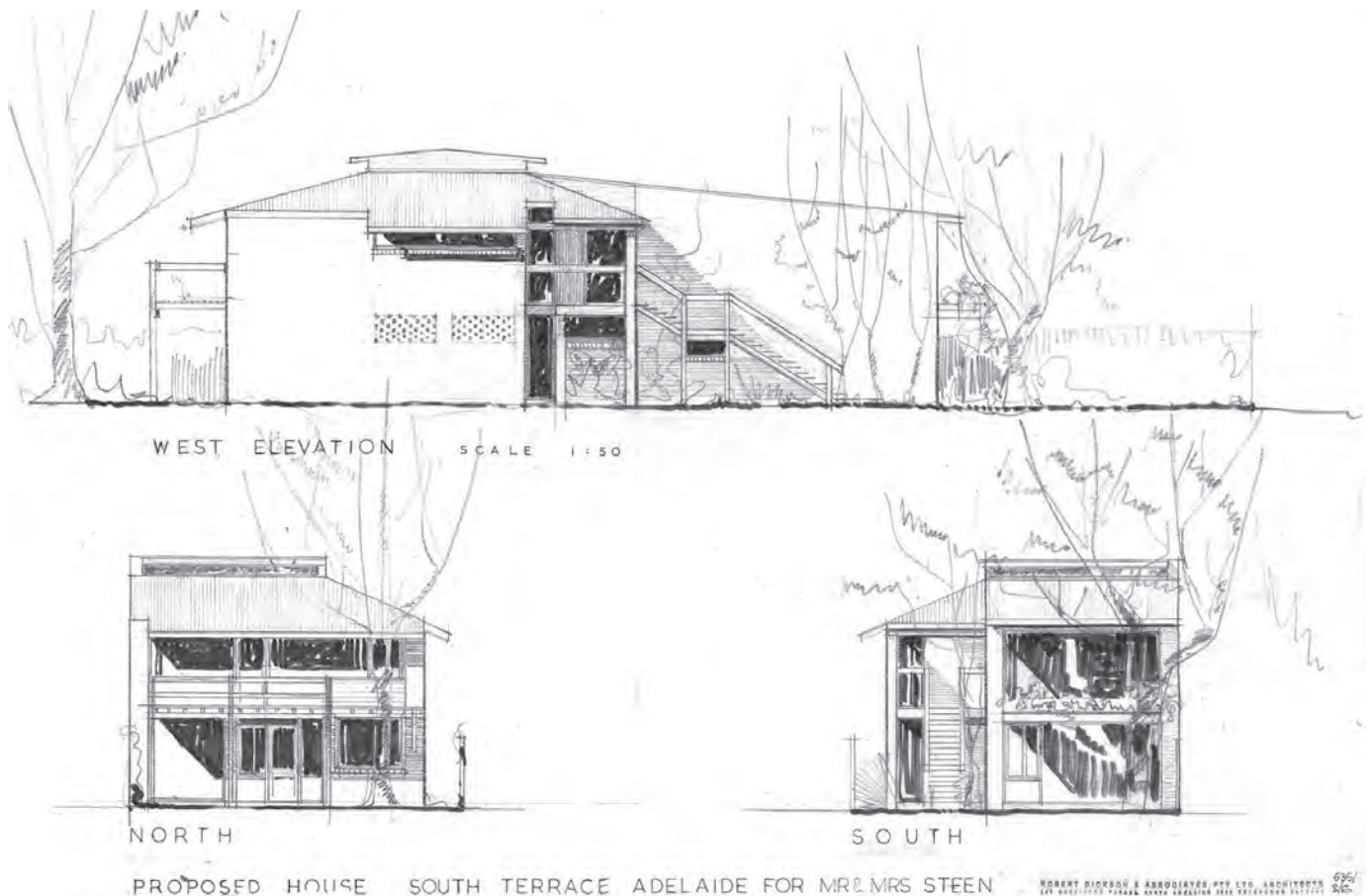




"An approach where objectivity is the overriding attitude guiding the creative act." RD



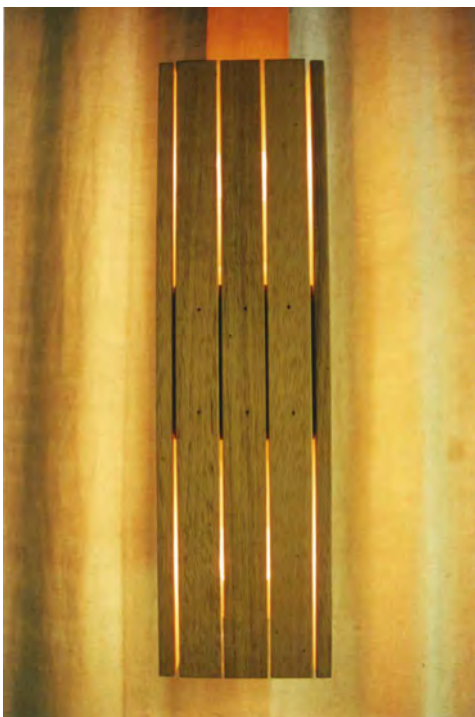
The brief for the project was for a family home with a self-contained upper level apartment and private courtyard for the parents and town house accommodation and pool garden for their three adult children. The South Terrace house enjoys a prime outlook to one of the loveliest sections of the Adelaide Parklands (Dickson, Addicted to Architecture).



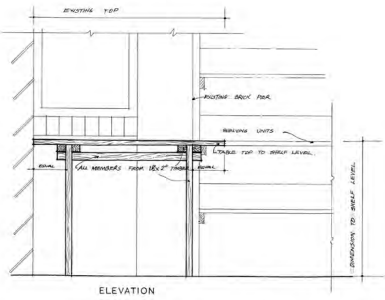
STEEN HOUSE ADELAIDE 1977



"I have found increasing interest over the years in designing simple timber furniture – fitments, tables, divans – and even light fittings throughout the house, enjoying the sheer beauty of the clear expression of the structure and the materials." RD



FURNITURE



ELEVATION

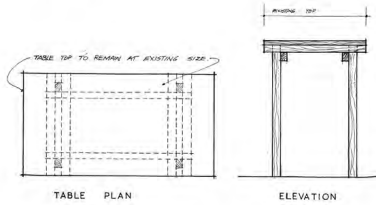
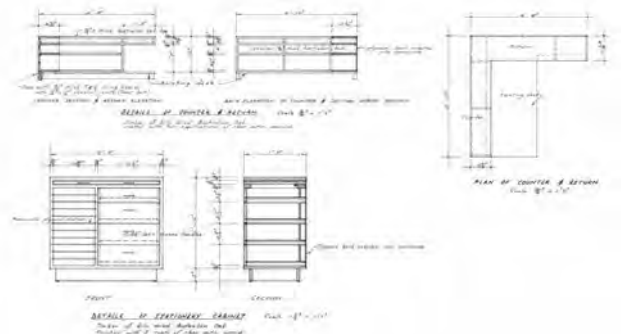


TABLE PLAN

ELEVATION

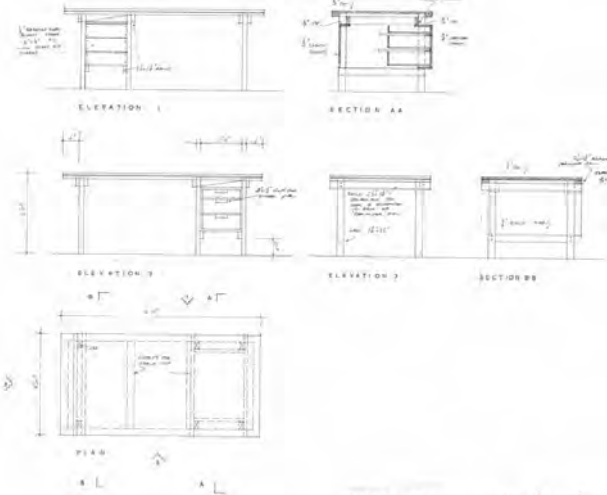
SCALE: 1" = 10'



DETAIL OF WINDOW & SILL

DETAIL OF STATIONARY CABINET

PLAN OF COUNTER & RETURN



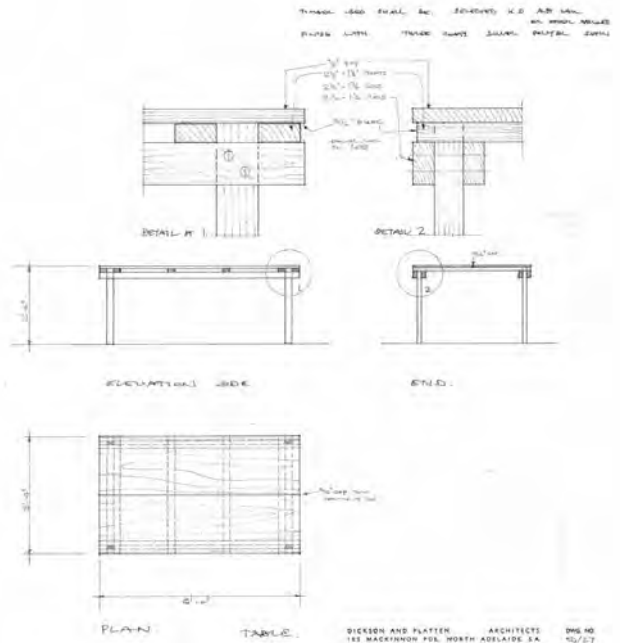
ELEVATION 1

SECTION AA

ELEVATION 2

SECTION BB

PLAN



DETAIL 1

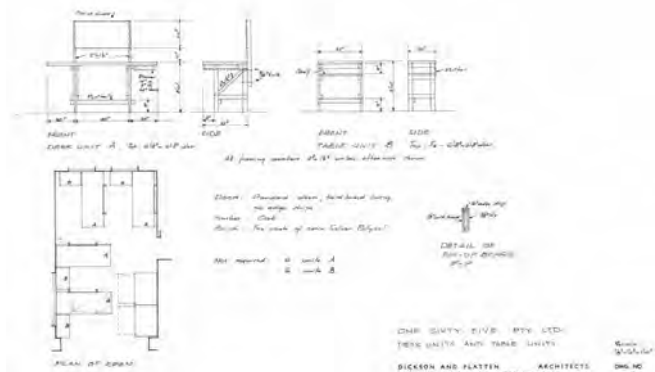
DETAIL 2

ELEVATION 1

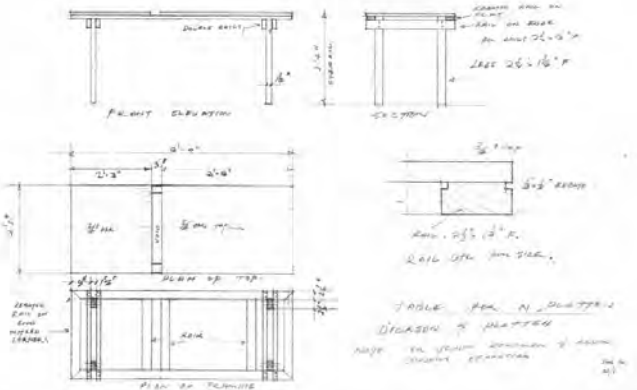
ELEVATION 2

PLAN

TABLE



PLAN



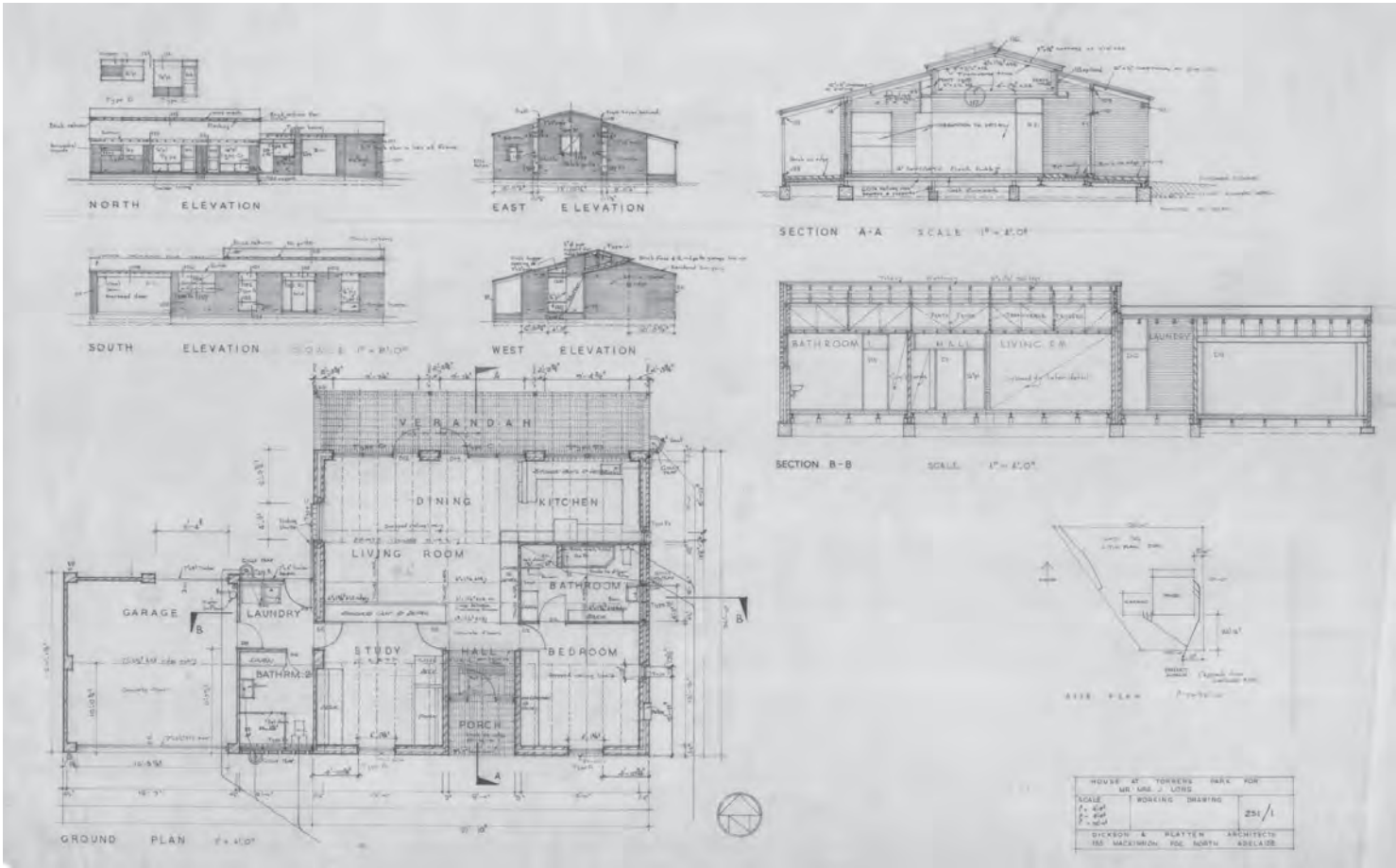
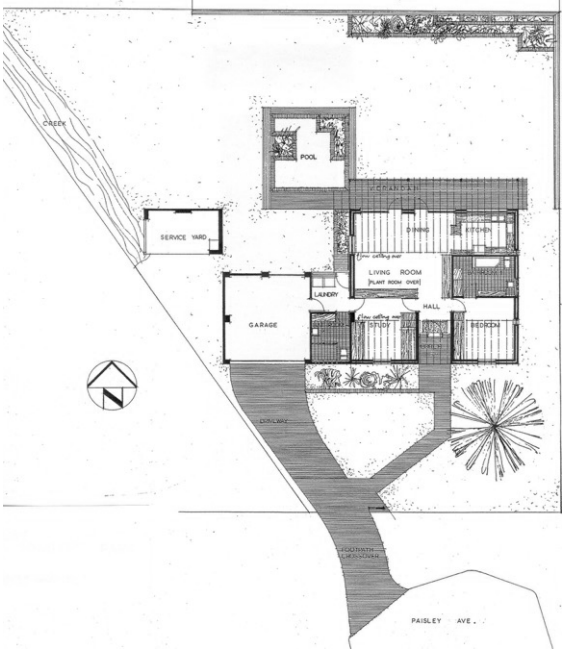
FRONT ELEVATION

SECTION

PLAN OF TOP

PLAN OF BOTTOM

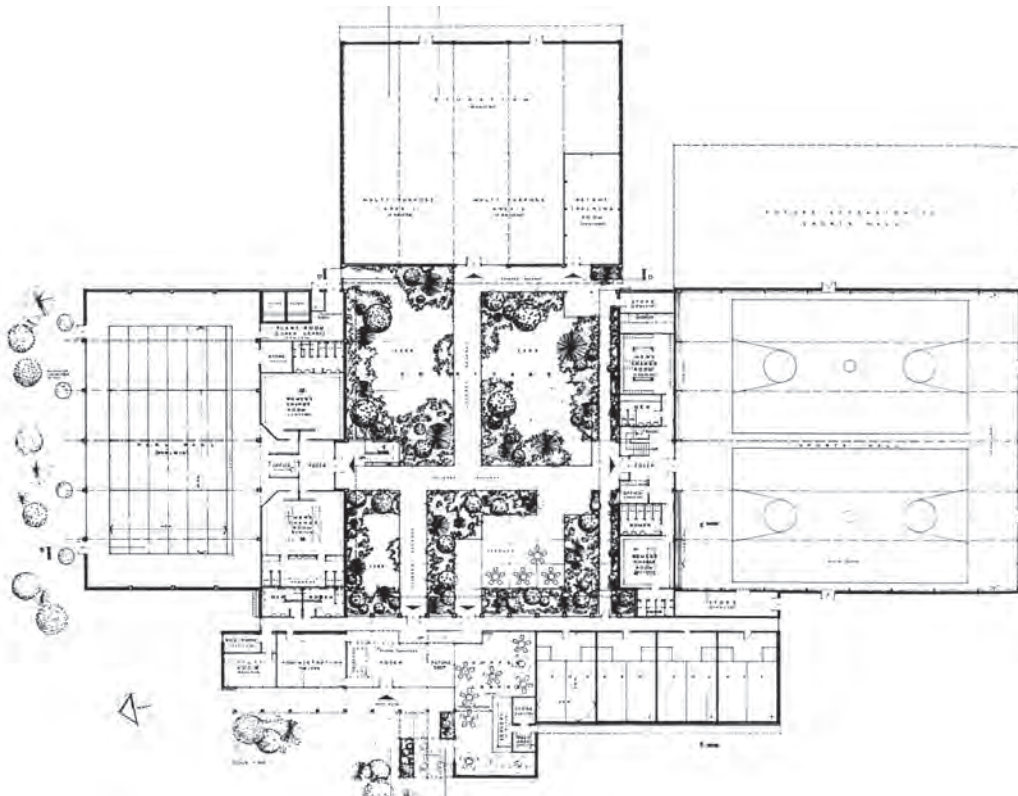
TABLE FOR N. DICKSON



LONG HOUSE TORRENS PARK 1965



"... the central 'oasis' courtyard acting as the principal circulation space. By this arrangement each of the elements... having markedly different spatial characteristics, were slightly detached from one another to facilitate independent expansion..." RD

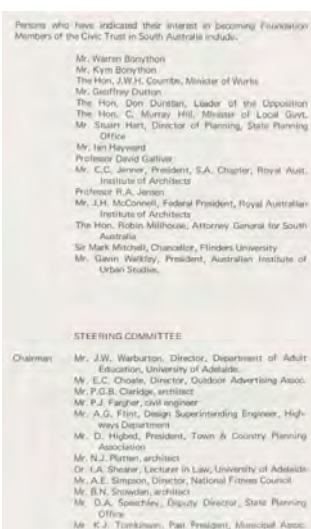
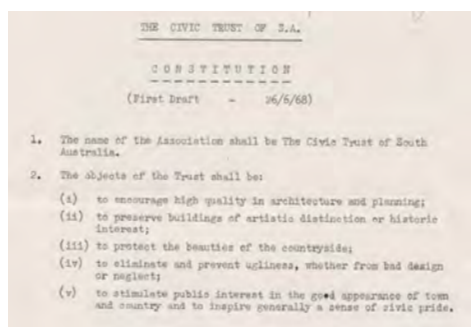


AUSTRALIAN OUTRAGE

The Decay of a Visual Environment : A Study by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects. Foreword by J. D. Pringle

Two dollars fifty cents

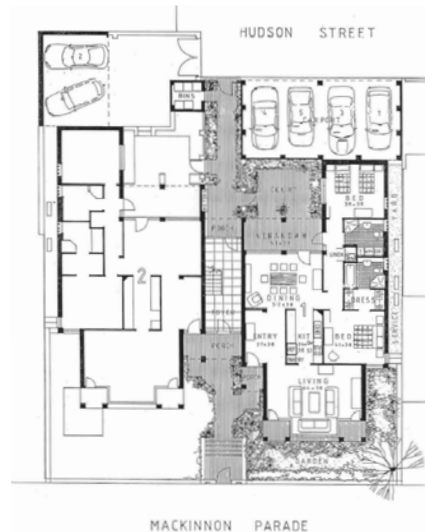
A Ure Smith / ART and Australia Publication



Outrage, an exhibition of protest, was held by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (NSW Chapter), "attacking the casual way in which the appearance and quality of our surroundings is being debased" (RAIA SA).

During his working life, Newell Platten advocated and frequently debated in public forums the need for quality environments and appropriate approaches to urban planning. He spoke out against the subsequently abandoned transport scheme for Adelaide, the Metropolitan Adelaide Transport Study known as the MATS plan ('President's Medal' 1993).

Platten was involved in the formation of the Civic Trust of South Australia as a direct result of chairing the RAIA Public Relations Committee. That committee organised the 1967 symposium 'Outrage' which focused on the state of the built environment in Australian cities and precipitated moves towards the establishment of a local branch of the Civic Trust. Platten was its President from 1984 to 1987 (Newell Platten: Curriculum Vitae 2003; Hurst 2004; Warburton 1986).



"...creating a transition between the existing adjoining developments on each side which were markedly different in character...designed to soften the arrangement." RD



The development features traditional roof forms and a building fabric designed for high durability. Outdoor areas, private courtyards and balconies to the north respond to the urban landscape of old North Adelaide. To the south, large bay windows capture views to the green of the Parklands, the city and the Adelaide Hills beyond (Dickson, Addicted to Architecture).

MACKINNON PARADE APARTMENTS 1994

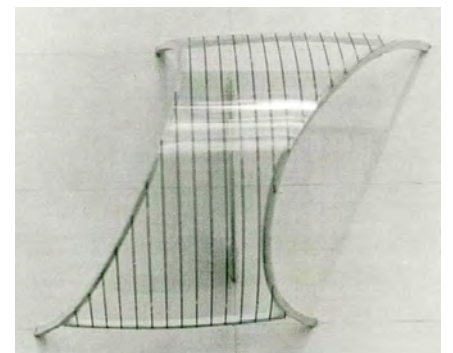




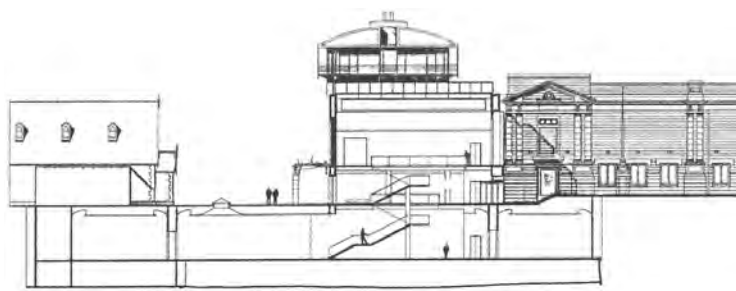
"It should be an elegant yet minimal structure, having architectural quality in its own right, but complementary to the form of the monument it protects." RD



Robert Dickson and Associates were asked to design a shelter to protect The Old Gum Tree at Glenelg, the site marking the spot on which the Proclamation of the State of South Australia was read on 28 December, 1836. The project was an exercise in basic shelter design with details derived solely from the resolution of structural and shelter needs. The elegant and minimal structure, constructed of arched tubular steel frames and corrugated galvanised iron roof sheeting, sits in harmony with the rounded form of the Tree (Dickson, Addicted to Architecture).

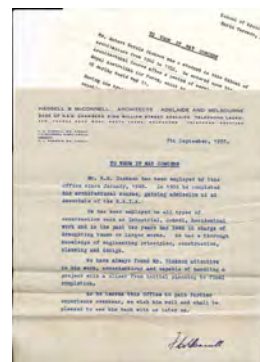
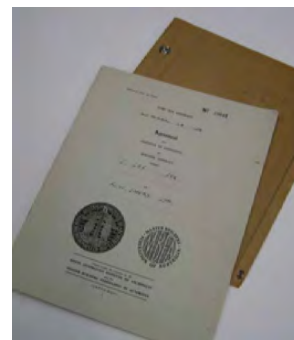
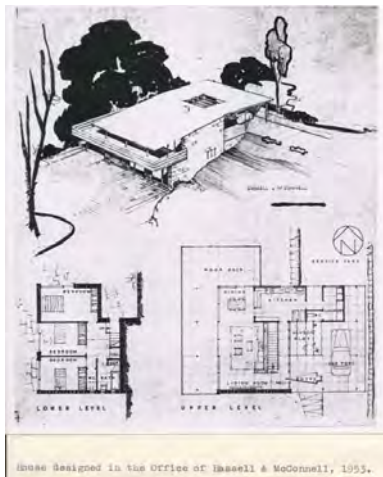
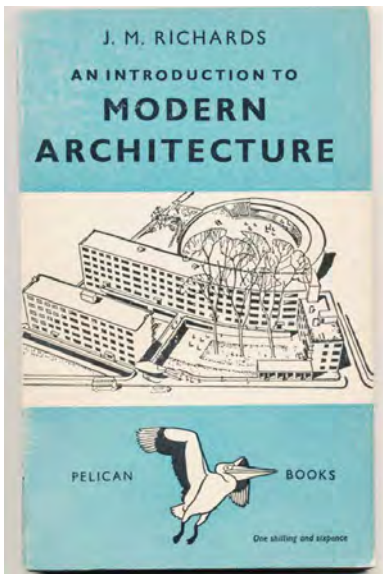


OLD GUM TREE SHELTER GLENELG 1984



“...another case of needing to achieve harmony with heritage buildings.” RD

The Art Gallery extension delivered extensive new display areas, large underground areas for visiting exhibitions, improved visitor facilities and a second gallery entrance and lobby. It was a case of needing to achieve harmony amongst multiple heritage elements, accomplished through an emphasis on the relationships between old and new. The extension project, operated under 'Puddle Thorp Architects – Robert Dickson Architects – Architects in Association' also included links to the Gallery's existing buildings on all levels, an additional level to its 1963 wing, basement extension and landscaping of courtyard areas around existing sculptural art works (Dickson, Addicted to Architecture).



UNION BUILDING – FIRST ENCOUNTER

IAN McDUGALL

I clearly remember standing beside the Barr Smith lawns, surrounded by the student life of the early seventies: a band, activist stalls by the SRC, the SDS, the Anarchists, even the rowers lounging around. A callow architecture student, I remember vividly being deeply attracted to the Adelaide University Union building. Such a complicated assemblage of raw cream concrete and red brick and orange roof tiles and straw ceilings. These materials were so familiar in this dry State; these are the materials of the scattered suburbia of our youth. The Union buildings, and especially the Union bookshop, are still beautiful buildings. In the main building, there is an apron of open balconies that creates a facade screen, de-massing the bulk of what is a big building. At each upper level, these balconies provide a natural ambulatory allowing casual, open air public space, overlooking the beautiful 1929 cloister. The detailing is important here: strict, stylistic, juxtaposing the brick and concrete, the sealed timber trims and windows, the straw ceilings – all contribute to a masterful composition of what is simultaneously informal yet dignified. The buildings seem casual but are highly thought out, spatially sectorised into careful rooms, paths and nodes.

The concrete and timber structure is separated out as a something of a higher order, a skeleton, a frame of permanence, against the changeability of everyday functions that it protects. The bookshop was a masterwork, spacious and inspiring, but not overblown.

Indeed, the complex was like nothing I had seen before: familiar and rustic, but sophisticated, composed and born of belief. Later, I saw the Kathleen Lumley College in North Adelaide. Here the same mix of the informal and the erudite, similar sense of materiality but the siting and mood of the public spaces is more picturesque. Where the Union building is urban, the college is more village. What struck me then was the way the gardens and pavilion-like elements of the college interlocked. This was the 1970s and Dickson and Platten's work offered we aspirants something striking. Their lives as architects were models radically opposite to the businesses that were Hassell McConnell & Partners and Cheesman Doley Brabham & Neighbour. They created holistic environments, imagined worlds then realised as both familiar and new. They were nothing like the corporate, one-stop-shop 'problem-solvers' of commercial practices. In my eyes, their buildings seemed to speak of more important things that an architect might aim for.

At the end of 1975, my fourth year at Adelaide University, we were required to work out in the 'real work' for the last half of the year. I scored a job at the Housing Trust working under Newell Platten, with Michael Watson and Alan Faunt. We worked together on the Southern Areas Study, an urban design report for the development of the Noarlunga area. These were energising times in Adelaide, with Premier Dunstan and the development of the Noarlunga Regional Centre. Newell was a remarkable figure, accessible, very softly spoken, gentlemanly, almost dapper. Looking back, he stands apart from the puffed-up narcissists one meets through their architectural life. Here was a real architect.

He showed me that the practise of architecture is more than the design of buildings, more than our obsessions with the individual block. Newell left private practice to pursue the social agenda of architecture. He showed us that architecture can also be, indeed must be, about the wider making of cities, of conceptualising and organising the mechanics and culture of urbanism.

Under his leadership we worked at making the spread of suburbia more than just putting a brick dwelling on a 20-by-33 block, but about the creation of networks of infrastructure and civic assets that make a community.

DISTANT RESPECT – FALSE HISTORY

At the end of my stint at the SA Housing Trust, I left Adelaide, so I was never sure how much of what we did actually happened. I left to enter the circumscribed architectural family of the eastern states, with its powerful ancestry of Desbrowe Annear, Mahoney and Griffin, Boyd, et al. I lost contact with what Dickson and Platten were doing through the 1980s; it seemed there was less and less building work (Dr Kent's Paddock excepted). The view from Melbourne seemed to me to be that Adelaide's architecture became dominated by multidiscipline corporations (apart from Geof Nairn and maybe Rod Roach). Dickson and Platten appeared to be prematurely relegated to some distant past, their masterworks classified as a regional flowering of something Robin Boyd called the Sydney School. In 1967, he had tagged it a school that was 'able to rediscover in the uninspiring local vernacular... a native cunning with brickwork and carpentry'. Jennifer Taylor expanded this thesis describing the common characteristics in Sydney houses between 1953 and 1963 as 'the use of rough textured, self finished materials... that suggest rustic origins. A second characteristic is their relation to site: a deliberate attempt to blend with and hide amongst the [steep and rocky] existing environment' of northern Sydney. Interestingly, Taylor attributes the origins of this regional school to Peter Muller. Muller was an Adelaide born architect, a youth with a strong empathy for the natural environment who graduated from the University of Adelaide and the SA School of Mines and Industries in 1948. It was here he developed, surprisingly, a deep interest in carpentry. He was a contemporary of Dickson and Platten. It would be an interesting research project to find the conditions in Adelaide of 1930–45 that drew these three to the common architectural realm of the natural world and the 'raw'.

However, while there are similarities with the Sydney School, there are distinct differences. Unlike the Sydney School, which Taylor notes as 'introverted...turning its back on the street', Dickson and Platten's work is urbane architecture, settled in the city and participating in it. As well, the Sydney work is internally complicated, stepped and sequenced, while Dickson and Platten's work is more direct, less maze-like and calmer; is their work attuned to the classical roots of Australian vernacular?

It was not until many years later I read that Dickson had spent formative years working in Milan, in the mid-1950s. What a revelation. Here was Bob Dickson, in Italy during the most significant schism in Modernism since the 1920s: a fight between Italian Neo-liberty and British Techno-functionalism. Here he would experience the explorations of post war Italian architects as they attempted to establish a contemporary architecture as a 'continuità', an uninterrupted line, that linked their work to Futurism and Italian Modernism, but also back to architecture's deep history in Rome, Classicism, the Renaissance and also to Italian vernacular (through the theoretical structure of Leftist neorealism). Where CIAM (Congres Internationaux de l'Architecture Moderne) pounded the drum of Modernist dogma, the Italians of the 1950s looked to an inclusivist and contextual architecture. This fight between the scientific and the artistic, culminated in Reyner Banham's attack in the Architectural Review of 1959, in his article, 'Neoliberty – The Italian Retreat from Modern Architecture.' Being in Milan in the 1950s, Bob would have understood the cultural propositions of the Italians. Later work seems to indicate he was more resistant to the arguments of the technology-driven British.

In any case, the linking of the work of Dickson and Platten to the Sydney School always seemed to belittle their true worth. In a leap of faith and in the light of Dickson's Italian links, I associated their work with a commitment to a local architectural history and experience, something rustic and urbane, like Adelaide. I still believe that it is extremely superficial to classify the work

merely by materials and seeing it as derivative of something from the Eastern States. For me, it is more interesting as an attempt to generate an architecture that continues to address a local narrative, linked to the refined Adelaidean architecture of Walter Bagot and Louis Laybourne Smith.

Dickson and Platten created an architecture which is borne out of the dour caution of South Australian life, but they crack the legacy open, making urban solidity graceful, making brick buildings light, frugal materials rich, closed orderliness open and informal.

And add to this the ongoing project for a social and democratic city, and Platten's considerable contribution to this all-but-halted project. Where Dickson worked in Milan, Platten had worked in London on new town developments. He seemed to grow increasingly interested in urban planning and design. Like Dickson, he came into contact with the idea of a continuous line of cultural history in understanding architecture and for designing cities. He undertook a study/working stint with Constantinos Doxiadis in the early 1960s. Doxiadis' complex and problematic methodology for designing cities was nevertheless underpinned by a disciplined study of the history of settlement. The city was, he said, 'a place where the projections of the artist and the builder merge'.

IT'S ABOUT TIME

It is a constant source of pleasure that while much of Adelaide's design work of the 1980s and 1990s, especially public projects, left us a city of placeless, anywhere tokens, plundered from the latest overseas trip or magazine, Dickson and Platten's work has endured and grown in stature. Rachel Hurst has been one true crusader. In documenting their work and their thoughts she has kept their fire alight, and we should all be thankful for her work. In her review of Robert Dickson's Addicted to Architecture she refers to the work as 'critical regionalism'. I have never been comfortable with this tag, with its impossible balancing of the universal and local. I have always felt that topography and climate as drivers for architectural expression are very low down the scale in comparison to one's cultural and philosophical mission.

For me, the work offers more culturally than just some instrumentalist response to heat and bright skies. I was inspired by their Union Building, their Arkaba, their College and I learnt that there is more to being a good architect than designing modish buildings – one must absorb our history, understand our craft and be a participant in the way our cities are made.

Given their contribution and the shining quality of their work, I have always been a bit peeved by the lack of national recognition. If Australia knows them at all, they are too often cursed with the false annexure by the Sydney School. These gentlemen have been true architects, nationally significant, skilled and concerned, dedicated to their city and State, role models for our profession and art.

What, no Gold Medal?

