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'A Wonderful Little House'

Residential Architecture Sources in the Architecture and Planning Library

by John Maidment

The University of Melbourne's Architecture and Planning Library is most fortunate to possess an outstanding collection of historical material, much of it built up over many years through donations from prominent architects and planners, and the former library of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects. Some of the scarcest items are booklets and pamphlets relating to Australian domestic architecture, especially those offering designs and plans for prospective home builders. Many of these cannot be found in any other public collection.

The material that is held dates from around the end of World War 1, through the twenties and thirties, and then immediately after World War 2, when people were thinking about building their new 'dream' homes. In terms of style, the earliest material included homes designed in a post-Federation idiom, incorporating such elements as terracotta roofs, half-timbered gables, casement windows, and interspersing of brick and stucco. Following on from this, the so-called Californian bungalow begins to make its appearance, with its wide verandahs, sweeping roof lines, and provision of sleep-outs, for hot summer nights. We can also observe a change to more open planning, with a



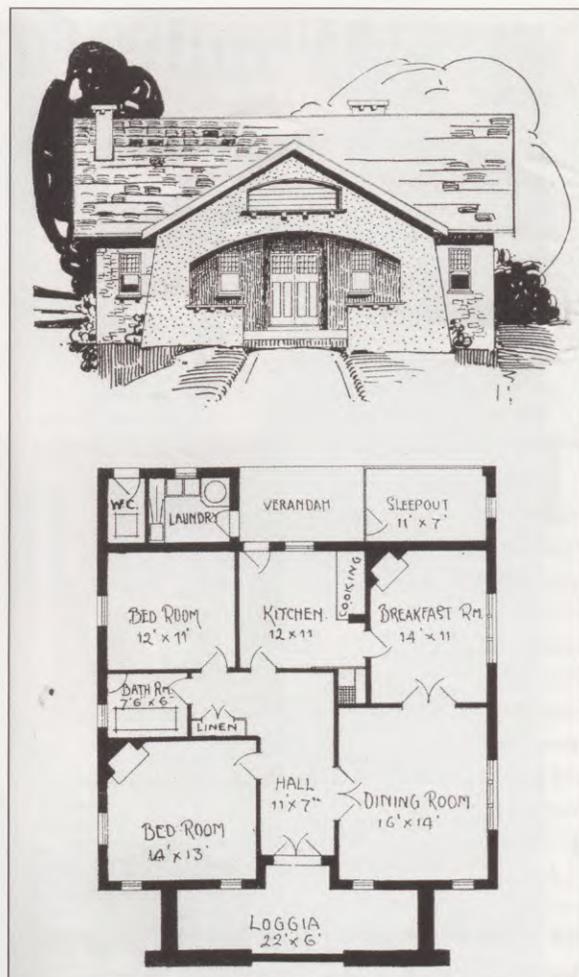
The introduction of *The Australian Home Beautiful* magazine in the 1920s reflected rising interest in the Australian 'dream home'. This vivid scene decorated the cover of the 1 April issue in 1931.

free flow of space through living areas. The design of gardens, too, was significant at this time, with a careful integration of the home with its surroundings.

During the twenties and thirties, it was just as much a battle of the styles as could have been experienced 50 years earlier during the land boom. It is interesting that the rise of the movies had a strong influence on domestic interiors, some of which show a strong stylistic correlation with picture theatres in the use of Spanish-American décor — exhibiting the use of rendering, massive beams and heavy furniture. The 'Tudor' look was well sought after, with its use of half timbering, diamond-paned leadlight and Gothic arched entrance. The Georgian influence was strong too, and regarded as the acme of social

desirability in such suburbs as Melbourne's 'SE2' (Toorak). Victorian homes were being given a period makeover, with brick walls stuccoed over, roofs redesigned, windows replaced and interiors reorganised — *The Australian Home Beautiful* magazine shows a number of significant examples. Modernist elements were starting to be grasped during the thirties and so we see streamlined cornices, stepped chimneys, steel-framed windows and elements of Art Deco incorporated into designs.

Two decades of stylistic change in speculative builders' designs: the first for a California bungalow style brick villa (right) in a 1923 edition of *The Australian Home Builder*; the second shows a mixture of influences producing a slightly 'Spanish' mood, from *The Australian Home Beautiful* in 1931.



Current enthusiasms for modernising old houses are not new. In *Centenary Homes 1934-35*, architect Leslie M. Perrott wrote on how to bring 'an old house up to our present standards', and illustrated it with this conversion of the front façade of an old St Kilda Road house into something more fitting for the 1930s, which included the removal of 'the needless ornament that encumbered the old-time dwelling'.



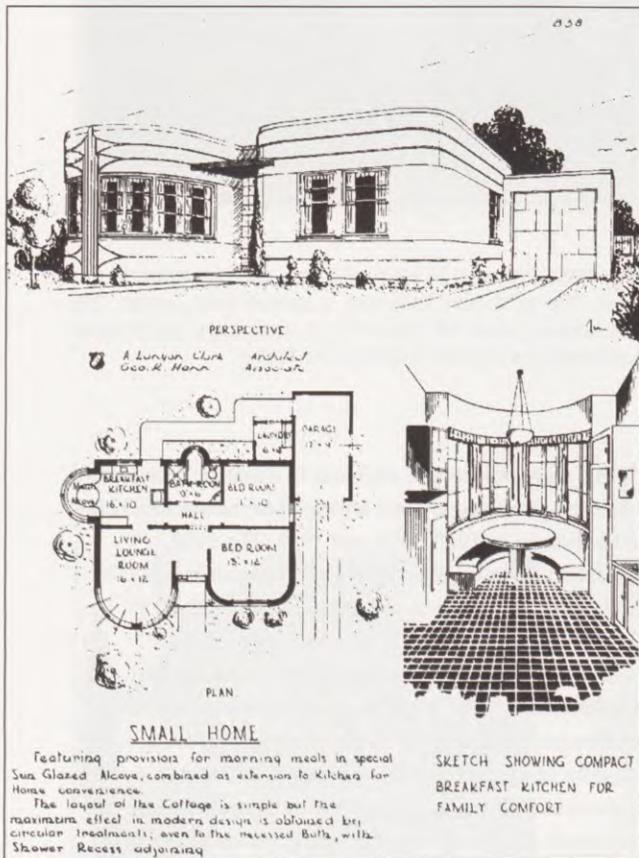
Members of the Architectural Atelier at the University of Melbourne in 1933, pictured in *Harmony Row*, the catalogue to the Atelier's 'Exhibition of Domestic Architecture' held in March that year. The exhibition chairman, Leighton Irwin, wrote, 'the architects behind this Exhibition are ready to illustrate to the prospective home owner the possibility of obtaining a good house at a moderate cost'. The exhibition name referred to a display of 22 architectural models made by the Atelier.



The more progressive elements in domestic architecture were promoted at three architectural exhibitions held in Melbourne in 1928, 1933 and 1935. The 1928 exhibition, sponsored by the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects, took place at the Allied Societies Hall, 55 Collins Place, in May 1928 and later proceeded to Geelong and Ballarat. The list of firms represented in the exhibition catalogue reads as a virtual 'who's who' of Melbourne's architectural establishment. Interestingly, the majority of the homes that were displayed were in wealthy socio-economic areas, predominantly Toorak. Rugs, ornaments and furnishings accompanied the displays of photographs and plans from The Arts and Crafts Society, and sculpture by Paul Mountford.

The 1933 exhibition took place at the Metropolitan Electricity Supply Building in March, and was sponsored again by the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects and the Building Industry Congress. It was arranged by members of the Melbourne University Architectural Atelier. The accompanying booklet, entitled *Harmony Row*, has a striking cover in linocut style and shows a

The book, *Fifty Modern Homes*, features this 'Small Home', a sleek design with art deco influences by A. Lanyon Clark and George R. Hann. The bathroom illustrates an advertisement — one of many for building materials and fittings — for Metters' 'stainless and acid resisting enamel'.



cubist looking house with the exhibition title lettered in Art Deco script below. The exhibition included 22 models fashioned during the final course in architectural design at the Atelier, some of which are illustrated. The photographs that were exhibited showed the work of prominent architects — again their work was predominantly for wealthy clients in salubrious suburbs. The booklet included a number of essays as well as eye-catching advertisements. The Building Industry Congress of Victoria's Centenary Homes exhibition of 1934–1935 shows a quantum leap in the adoption of modernism, with the illustration of designs entirely free from period stylistic references. We can see illustrations of homes with flat roofs, steel-framed windows, block-like forms, although alongside more conservative designs. The essays cover a diversity of topics including modern interiors, furniture and colour schemes.

The promotion of modernism in Australian house design takes off in *Fifty Modern Homes*. This book shows plans for houses designed by A. Lanyon Clark with associate George R. Hann and published in 1940 by the doyen of Australian architectural writing Florence M. Taylor through her Sydney-based Building Publishing Co. While illustrating many of Clark's sleek and contemporary block-like designs, there are also photographs of cutting-edge designs by other Australian architects and an array of advertisements for building materials and products.

Banks were at the forefront in the interwar years in promoting affordable housing through the issuing of standardised designs for cottages. Many of these were published in issues of *The Australian Home Builder* during the twenties with variants on a basic plan and elevation.



'A Modern Home and Ideal Corner Setting'. This 1930s house was built on the Beauville Estate at Murrumbeena, Victoria, the first large-scale suburban subdivision by property developer and builder A.V. Jennings. The photograph appears in *Better Homes*, a booklet published in the 1940s by Jennings to promote its Beaumont Estate in Ivanhoe.

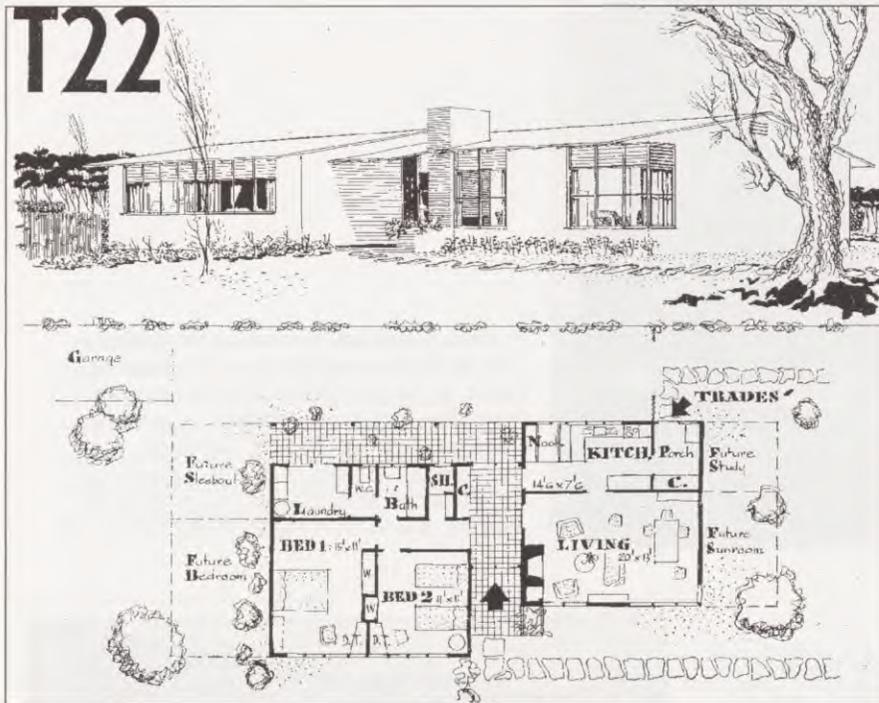
It was also the period when the speculative builder began to produce imaginative designs for houses, often in new estates. A.V. Jennings was a prominent name. The Architecture and Planning Library holds two very rare catalogues of interwar designs for estates in Ivanhoe: *Beauview Homes* and *Better Homes*. Many of these houses survive today and are highly valued for their design and solidity of construction.

Following World War 2, the Victorian newspapers actively promoted the construction of new homes of contemporary design, taking account of careful solar orientation, logical internal planning and economical use of materials such as brick, glass, timber or asbestos cement sheeting. We can observe in these designs the use of large glass windows, skillion roof lines and 'feature' materials such as Castlemaine slate. Robin Boyd, noted architect and writer, and director of the Small Homes Service of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects, in association with *The Age* newspaper edited and issued the booklet *Small Homes*. (Boyd was Director of the service from 1947 to 1953.)

The illustrations and plans shown in these publications are a rich mine of information. We can observe original colour schemes and finishes. During the twenties, unfinished roughcast stucco was liberally used, while timber surfaces were painted in dark colours. Shingled gables were finished in dark creosote. Later generations have smothered these crisp exteriors with white paint (including brickwork and stucco) or indeed altered windows and openings. Original fences have frequently been demolished. Owners restoring such properties will find these publications highly useful.



This 1930s sitting room shows clearly that 'the introduction of new materials such as glass and chromium-plated metals have ... widened the scope of the interior decorator'. So declared the author of the article, 'Colour — the secret of successful interior decoration', in the publication *Centenary Homes 1934-35*.



Style T22 features in *Small Homes*, a late 1940s best-selling booklet featuring 32 modernist house designs of the Small Homes Service (1947–1968). It was run by the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects and publicised through a weekly column in *The Age* newspaper. For a small fee, new home builders received two full sets of working drawings and specifications for their chosen, architect-designed house.

The advertisements that are included in many of the publications are fascinating. They show just how quickly technological advances took place in the years after World War 2, particularly in the fifties. This is particularly evident in the design of stoves, refrigerators and water heaters. The furnishings too that are illustrated show that during the twenties, lounge, bedroom and dining furniture was heavy and traditional but that by the early fifties it was sleek and functional, complementing the sparse interiors.

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Photographs

Wolfgang Sievers

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FOR EVERY MAN HIS HOME
AND MINE FOR ME.