

# **LONG LIVE THE MODERN**

**NEW ZEALAND'S NEW ARCHITECTURE  
1904-1984**

edited by Julia Gatley



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## INTRODUCTION

My family moved from Gisborne to Wellington when I was fourteen. The move made me nervous. Wellington was an unknown: a city big enough to have a motorway and tall buildings. Someone described it as a concrete jungle. This sounded bad, but when I got there, I found that it was good. Some of the concrete buildings were like sculptures (the steel frame of Stephenson & Turner's BNZ, frozen in time, seemed to confirm that there were advantages to working with concrete), and the motorway and the high-rises were among the things that made the city an exciting place to be.

There are many things I like about cities today, including the intensity of a skyline of tall buildings. Individually, too, high-rises can be awe inspiring, both from the ground looking up and from up high, where they give us the privilege of a bird's-eye view. They epitomise the exhilaration of modern architecture. They are not alone in doing this. Auckland's Grafton Bridge, for example, still thrills today, whether driving underneath it or walking on top. Beyond the urban environment, hydro dams provide a comparable sensation. These are powerful structures, and were major new landmarks. When built they must have shocked a public unused to such a scale and the possibilities of new construction methods. Some modern houses shocked too, particularly those that made use of new techniques and materials such as flat roofs, floor-to-ceiling glass, cantilevers or concrete block walls.

This book examines New Zealand's heritage of modern architecture. As indicated by the title and the period covered, 1904–84, the interpretation of the term 'modern architecture' is broad. It is not limited to the abstract and often white architecture of heroic or high modernism – the modern movement – that emerged in 1920s Europe and appeared in New Zealand in the latter 1930s and the 1940s. Rather, the term is used more generally to encompass twentieth-century architectural initiatives concerned with the new, in all its guises – new technologies, new materials, new forms, new building types, new ways of living – initiatives embedded with the belief that the new would necessarily change lives in positive ways.

Enthusiasm for the new meant change and development. Steel framing and elevators together enabled the advent of the high-rise. These turned our two- and three-storey towns into denser, and often livelier, modern cities. Cars proliferated; the suburbs sprawled. Apartment living became a viable alternative for more people than the mythical status of the detached suburban house of the New Zealand dream would suggest. That said, successive New Zealand governments were such committed builders of state rental houses in almost every town and city that the early state house is now an icon of New Zealand architecture. Motorways and commercially available flights increased the speed at which twentieth-century life was lived. New Zealand architects became fixated with the design of the small, modern house. Less celebrated, but deserving of greater recognition today, are the very fine public buildings built by the Ministry of Works in the post-World War II years.

This book is not an all-encompassing history of New Zealand's modern architecture. Rather, across a range of different categories such as building type, location, architect, design ideas and construction technologies, it identifies key modern buildings that survive and, importantly, maintain their design integrity. This does not preclude buildings with additions and alterations, but it demands that the original design remains legible. The book asks new questions of such buildings. Have our first flat-roofed, glass-walled houses survived intact? Are our 'clean, white boxes' still clean and white? How have the country's earliest experimental works in fair-faced concrete and concrete block fared? Are their beautiful, textured surfaces appreciated, enjoyed and celebrated or have they been painted over, plastered or even covered by a new layer of cladding? What of the country's experiments in modern urban planning, when high-rise buildings were dispersed in open or park-like settings: to what extent have the open spaces survived?

More specific questions are asked of our iconic modern buildings. Is the West Plaza Building still an Auckland favourite? Can the Beehive be described as good architecture, given the confusion that its circular lift core and circulation caused building users for many years? Is the BNZ a black mark on the Wellington skyline or is it deserving of acclaim? Is the beautiful red interior of the Christchurch Town Hall still intact? Does the Lyttelton Road Tunnel Building's toll plaza survive, now that a toll is no longer paid?

The purpose in pursuing New Zealand's extant modern buildings is twofold. First, the book is concerned with raising public awareness about the design significance and value of New Zealand's modern architecture and the extent to which modern buildings can be admired, appreciated and enjoyed today. Second, it aims to draw attention to the potential for our surviving modern buildings to be recognised for having heritage significance and value, and thus to be considered as candidates for heritage listing on district plans. The inclusion of modern buildings on heritage lists is important because such lists should reflect the breadth and depth of our history and development, they should include representation across a range of different themes and periods, and they should incorporate exemplars from the design movements that have influenced the form and appearance of our built environment. The modern is one such movement.

These two themes, modern architecture and modern heritage, are considered below. The main body of the book then identifies, outlines and celebrates 180 modern places, arranged in broadly chronological order, according to date of completion. For each, a short descriptive text is illustrated with recent and new photographs, many commissioned for this project, to show the places as they are today. The new images are supported by architectural drawings and/or historic photographs that show the buildings as they were.

The list of places is in no way definitive. It is offered as a starting point rather than an end point, identifying and presenting multiple subjects for reference and comparison for those who are faced with the task of assessing the heritage values of individual modern buildings. This book will facilitate the heritage listing of the best and most important of New Zealand's extant modern places, and encourage such listing before more of these places are compromised through adaptation or redevelopment or lost through demolition.

Our modern heritage is not limited to our modern architecture. In many cases, historic places are recognised not for their architectural values, but for their social, historical and/or cultural heritage values. Another book could be published on New Zealand's modern buildings significant for their associations with key 'events, persons or ideas of importance in New Zealand history'.<sup>1</sup> It would be a very different book from this one, and would further enhance the understanding of this country's modern heritage.

## MODERN ARCHITECTURE

Modern architecture is often associated with the experimentation pursued in Europe during and immediately after World War I and with the avant-garde use in the 1920s of flat roofs, little or no applied ornament, abstract forms, transparency and open floor planning.<sup>2</sup> Such attributes are epitomised by key buildings by the so-called 'masters' of the modern movement: Walter Gropius' Bauhaus Building at Dessau (1925–26), Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion (1928–29) and Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye near Paris (1928–31).

Early texts on modern architecture emphasised a range of additional attributes: the rejection of historical precedent, the celebration of new technologies and new materials, the expression of function, the importance of rational planning and rational structural design, the separation of structure from envelope or skin, and the relationship between modern architecture and progressive political and social ideals.<sup>3</sup> Many modern architects believed that architecture could, and should, be used to help make the world a better place. This included an emphasis on housing, not only for the wealthy but for everyone (public and worker housing, industrially produced mass housing, slab apartment blocks), and a desire to replan urban areas, to reduce congestion, and to bring fresh air and sunlight into cities and individual buildings.

Recurrent themes included the rejection of the old and the embracing of the new. The new architecture was known as exactly that in the 1920s,

but it soon attracted other names: the Bauhaus style, *die Neue Sachlichkeit* (the New Objectivity), the International Style. Protagonists objected to the application of the word 'style' to the new architecture. They argued that it was not a new style; that it was not a style at all; that the notion of architectural style referred explicitly to the historical styles; and that the new architecture, in rejecting the historical styles, was in fact rejecting the very notion of style.

Such polemic was exciting, especially in the context of the social change wrought by war and depression in many parts of the world. It was devoured by young architects and enthusiasts who were exposed to it around the globe through imported books and journals. In Wellington, for example, before reading J. M. Richards' *An Introduction to Modern Architecture* (1940), the young Bill Toomath, still several years away from architecture school, had enjoyed and admired the streamlined moderne buildings at New Zealand's Centennial Exhibition, Rongotai (1940), whereas upon reading the Penguin classic, he learnt to reject as superficial that very same streamlining and decorative detailing.<sup>4</sup>

Local journals were already carrying articles on European modernism by this time. In 1929, for example, the *Journal of the NZIA*, forerunner of today's *Architecture New Zealand*, published extracts from Le Corbusier's 1925 book, *Urbanisme*.<sup>5</sup> The extracts were reprinted from the *Architectural Review*, the British journal that was an important disseminator of ideas about modern architecture in the 1930s and was probably the most read of the imported journals in New Zealand, right through into the post-war period. In some cases, the knowledge gained through imported books and journals was supported by overseas travel and work experiences. This was the case for both Humphrey Hall and Robin Simpson, the designers of two of the first New Zealand houses to give full expression to the new aesthetic, leaving behind all vestiges of the streamlining that tends to characterise even the most advanced of our mid-1930s houses.

But modernism's early polemic and rhetoric were eventually challenged. Later scholars questioned the established canon and showed that key buildings like the Villa Savoye relied on rather than rejected historical precedent; that many 1920s modern buildings were constructed of plastered brick to simulate reinforced concrete rather than utilising the new material; that there was no such thing as a truly functional or rational building because it was not possible to dispense with physicality and thus aesthetics; and that modern architects were not united in their political views or social motivations.<sup>6</sup> Modern architecture was not what it had seemed. In addition, protagonists had claimed that the new architecture would be an international architecture, a universal architecture even, consistent the world over; the answer, the world over. This is emphasised in the language of its

self-definition: the International Style of the 1920s, international modernism of the mid-century. What these practitioners did not foresee was the reaction against universality that emerged from the 1930s in the work of the Finnish architect Alvar Aalto. This reaction mushroomed internationally after World War II, when many architects gave increased attention to site specificity, topography, climate, local culture, local materials and vernacular traditions.

The challenge to modernism's early rhetoric opened the floodgates for buildings previously considered pre-modern to be reinterpreted as modern. For example, Chicago's nineteenth-century skyscrapers and the Eiffel Tower (1889) both employed modern materials and construction methods, even though they were far removed from the new aesthetic of the 1920s. In a similar vein, it is steel framing and the advent of reinforced concrete that mark the beginnings of modern architecture in New Zealand, not our first white boxes. Important, too, in the 1920s and then the 1930s were increased initiatives in the standardisation and mass production of buildings, notably houses, first by the Railways Department and then by New Zealand's first Labour government. The houses looked like bungalows and English cottages, but their standardised components were factory-cut in large numbers and as such they conformed to Le Corbusier's demand that 'houses must go up all a piece, made by machine tools in a factory, assembled as Ford assembles cars, on moving conveyor belts'.<sup>7</sup> The Napier earthquake of 1931 was another definitive moment, for even though the new buildings were adorned with Art Deco detailing, the rebuilding of the city encouraged modern practices, notably the rationalisation of New Zealand's building industry and the introduction of new building regulations for withstanding seismic movement.<sup>8</sup>

The rise of Nazism and the Second World War had significant effects for modern architecture internationally. Many individuals and families with Jewish associations and sympathies fled Hitler's Europe. So too did leftist intellectuals, and modern artists and architects. A lot of them based themselves in London in the 1930s, where various British colonial architects, including New Zealanders such as Hall, Simpson and Paul Pascoe, were enjoying their overseas experience. Some of the European émigré architects stayed in the UK beyond the 1930s; others departed for the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Gropius and Mies van der Rohe both accepted significant academic posts in the United States and through their teaching influenced generations of American architects.

Le Corbusier remained in France, but in the 1930s was already moving away from the purist language of the 1920s. With lesser known houses like the Maison de Mandrot in Provence (1929–31) and the House at Mathes on the Atlantic Coast of France (1934–35), he pursued a dialogue between the man-made and the natural; a dialogue between industrially produced

building materials and those found in nature, notably stone. In the post-war years, he continued to move even further away from the heroic modern language he had helped develop.

In New Zealand in the latter 1930s and early 1940s, the return home of architects from London, combined with the arrival of Helmut Einhorn, Heinrich Kulka, Friedrich Neumann, Ernst Plischke and others from Germany and Central Europe, had an immediate impact on the development of modern architecture here, notably within the Department of Housing Construction but also through private practice. Several of the émigrés had fine pedigrees, including Kulka, who had worked for, and then been in partnership with, the renowned and influential Viennese architect Adolf Loos; and Plischke, who had trained under Peter Behrens – a former employer of Gropius, Mies der Rohe and Le Corbusier – and had worked for both Behrens and Josef Frank in Vienna. In New Zealand, the émigré architects often got their first private house commissions from émigré clients, with whom they shared first-hand experience of European modernism and who appreciated the beauty of flat roofs and floor-to-ceiling glass. This was not always without its consequences: neighbours of Joachim and Gertrud Kahn, for example, whose Plischke-designed house was built in the Wellington suburb of Ngaio (1941–42), were suspicious that the Kahns needed a hilltop house with lots of glass and a harbour view in order that they could spy on shipping activity in Wellington harbour during the war.<sup>9</sup>

The post-war world was far removed from the inter-war world in numerous ways. Decolonisation was a *cause célèbre* in many places, associated with demands for personal rights and freedoms and for recognition of personal and national identity; the cold war was an ongoing source of nervousness in others. This age also saw the rise of mass consumerism and mass communication, when everyone in the West suddenly demanded not only fridges and washing machines but also cars and soon televisions. Spend, spend, spend meant build, build, build: the post-war building boom resulted in remarkable mid-century modern buildings, from Paris and New York to Helsinki, Tokyo, Ahmedabad, Brasilia and Christchurch.

Not surprisingly, given the massive societal changes, the priorities and social visions of individual modern architects changed too, as did the architectural languages they were using. Modern architecture was no longer focused on housing and urban planning, but became the language of civic, institutional and commercial buildings; in the United States and then other places, it became the architecture of the corporate mainstream. This meant a raft of new building types – glass-clad skyscrapers, airports, shopping malls, motels, petrol stations, motorways, car-parking buildings and supermarkets – pursued in conjunction with a range of new materials: off-form concrete, concrete block, curtain-wall glazing, plywood, fibreglass, stainless steel and plastics.

Post-war modern architecture was considerably more diverse than the formative works of the 1920s. Some modern architects continued to celebrate the machine aesthetic, notably in pavilion houses and steel and glass skyscrapers; others became bored with the repetitiveness of this language and pursued a range of new ‘isms’ – regionalism, primitivism, brutalism, English New Brutalism, Dutch structuralism, structural expressionism and geometric formalism – to challenge the aesthetic attributes of 1920s modernism and reinvigorate modern architecture. Increased attention was given to local climates, cultures and materials; increasing inspiration was drawn from non-Western architectures; greater consideration was given to designing with a view to fostering neighbourhood and community; and reinforced concrete was pushed to new extremes in terms of sculptural potential and rich and varied surface treatment. Le Corbusier was again an international leader in the latter regard, notably at the Unité d’Habitation, Marseilles (1947–53) and the Chapel of Notre Dame du Haut, Ronchamp (1950–54), but also, importantly, from 1950 at Chandigarh, the new capital of the Indian Punjab. Le Corbusier’s lead in sculpting concrete was then pushed most creatively and most radically throughout the following decade in Japan, by Kunio Maekawa, Kenzo Tange, Arata Isozaki and others. The world took note, including New Zealand: by this time our overseas influences were direct rather than diffused via London.

New Zealand’s post-war modern architecture is consistent with this international divergence. In particular, as articulated so clearly by Justine Clark and Paul Walker in their insightful book, *Looking for the Local: Architecture and the New Zealand Modern* (2000), there were two broad strands: international modernism and New Zealand modernism. The former manifested itself in slick, flat-roofed boxes that would have been equally at home in other parts of the world, and the latter encompassed initiatives aimed at creating a modern architecture that was ‘inflected by the particularities of the place’.<sup>10</sup> Architects concerned with the latter, notably Vernon Brown and the Group, located their New Zealand modernism within ‘a putative pioneer tradition of straightforwardness’.<sup>11</sup> The straightforward was admired, and in turn pursued, in small, simple, utilitarian and generally timber buildings, particularly houses; in buildings that could be seen to have a lineage extending back through twentieth-century baches and huts to the shacks and shelters of pioneers and settlers and Maori whare; in buildings that protagonists considered to be ‘robust’ and ‘vital’, but others not versed in New Zealand modernism sometimes interpreted as resembling ‘nothing so much as cow sheds and chicken coops’.<sup>12</sup> However, as Clark and Walker note, even this search for a specifically local modernism was informed by ideas that circulated and held currency internationally.

Beyond these two main strands of international and New Zealand modernism, New Zealand's post-war architecture also exhibits regional variation. The closer we look, the more localised that variation becomes. David Mitchell and Gillian Chaplin capture this vividly in their 1984 book, *The Elegant Shed: New Zealand Architecture Since 1945*. The chapter on Auckland conveys the local fixation with the small house. Vernon Brown and the Group loom large, transfixing later architects with their ideas about New Zealandness, directness and the straightforward. The Christchurch chapter highlights the importance of Miles Warren and Peter Beaven: 'Beaven was a maverick romantic, and Warren a restrained classicist.'<sup>13</sup> Where Warren and Beaven led, others followed, particularly in the use of fair-faced concrete beams and floor slabs in conjunction with white-painted concrete or concrete block walls. The chapter that focuses on Wellington covers both the international modernism of Ernst Plischke and the radical, multi-level, hipped and gabled houses of Ian Athfield and Roger Walker, the young rebels of late 1960s and 1970s New Zealand architecture. Otago and Southland share their chapter with Hawke's Bay. It opens with McCoy & Wixon's work in Dunedin and closes with John Scott's in Hawke's Bay. Ted McCoy's early buildings exemplify a new sensitivity to context, particularly to a context of historic buildings (the same can be said of Beaven and the Christchurch context). John Scott's distinctive work drew on both his Maori heritage and New Zealand's woolshed heritage – a variation on Vernon Brown's cowshed.

Following the post-war divergence came critique. Seminal internationally was Robert Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966), in which Venturi responded to Mies van der Rohe's dictum, 'Less is more', with his own, 'Less is a bore'. The challenge to modernism's principles and forms was continued by Venturi with collaborators Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour in *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972), which analysed popular, everyday architecture, as distinct from the high architecture that is the subject of most architectural discourse. Then came Charles Jencks with *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (1977), where he famously suggested that much modern architecture looked the same, using Mies van der Rohe's Illinois Institute of Technology campus of the 1950s as his example and suggesting that Institute users could not distinguish the chapel from the boiler house.<sup>14</sup> Amid this changing literature, the explosive demolition of Minoru Yamasaki's Pruitt-Igoe Apartments in the American city of St Louis in 1972, only seventeen years after their completion, was one particular event that for many represented a crisis in modern architecture and, for Jencks, the death of it.<sup>15</sup>

Post-modern classical projects, such as Charles Moore's Piazza D'Italia in New Orleans (1976) and Michael Graves' Portland Building in Portland, Oregon (1980–82), were promoted as exemplars of an alternative approach,

making overt reference to a range of historical precedents and bringing the references together in unconventional, playful and sometimes intentionally low-brow ways, including the manipulation of scale and the use of columns that clearly carried little or nothing in the way of structural load.

Here, Mitchell and Chaplin's *Elegant Shed* was clearly influenced by Venturi and his collaborators, particularly in its celebration of ordinary, everyday architecture and even in the primacy it gave to the word 'shed'.<sup>16</sup> In our city centres, post-modern classicism soon reigned supreme, with Warren & Mahoney, for example, producing such works as Christchurch's Finance House (1985), Wellington's Barclay House (1987) and Auckland's Citibank Building (1989). And in our houses, decadence, colour and eclecticism surpassed, temporarily at least, decades of refinement in efficient planning and timber crafting.

## MODERN HERITAGE

The 1990s saw both a resurgence of interest in and enthusiasm for the aesthetic of international modernism, and growing support for the heritage identification and assessment of modern architecture. The latter included the first governmental attempts to survey and assess the heritage values of modern buildings, as well as the mushrooming of DOCOMOMO International.

DOCOMOMO is the international working party for the Documentation and Conservation of buildings, sites and neighbourhoods of the MODern MOVement. Initiated in 1988 through the University of Eindhoven, The Netherlands, it is the most significant non-governmental organisation of experts devoted to the history, reassessment and preservation of modern architecture. A new organisation dedicated to the documentation and conservation of the modern was considered necessary in the late 1980s because modern architecture was by that time providing heritage professionals with new questions and challenges. This included the heritage assessment of the twentieth-century's new building types, as well as the conservation of its new technologies and materials. Compounding these challenges, there was, and often still is, the additional problem that many members of the public have difficulty understanding and appreciating the heritage value of the modern, sometimes struggling with the very idea that modern architecture might be considered to have heritage value. However, this state of affairs has changed in places where heritage bodies have pursued initiatives specifically aimed at raising public awareness, such as exhibitions and publications.<sup>17</sup>



Global support for DOCOMOMO International was strong from the outset and the organisation soon had more than 40 working parties in almost as many countries, each compiling a register of modern buildings, sites and neighbourhoods for its region, documenting the registered items and promoting their preservation. Consistent with changing interpretations of the term 'modern architecture', early DOCOMOMO initiatives were focused on modern movement buildings of the 1920s and 1930s, and more recent ones demonstrate an increasingly broad understanding of the term, one that embraces modernism's post-World War II divergence.

DOCOMOMO New Zealand, the local working party of this international organisation, was initiated through the New Zealand Historic Places Trust in 1999,<sup>18</sup> and incorporated in 2004. This book, which presents a national framework for the heritage assessment of New Zealand's modern architecture, was conceptualised under the auspices of DOCOMOMO NZ.

Since supporting the formation of DOCOMOMO NZ in 1999, the New Zealand Historic Places Trust has taken something of a backseat position with regard to the heritage identification of modern places, registering them in comparatively small numbers. This is partly because the Resource Management Act 1991 shifted primary responsibility for heritage identification and protection from the Trust to local authorities. Thus, New Zealand's initiatives in the heritage identification and listing of modern buildings have predominantly occurred at the local level.

The strength of the local listing system is that it capitalises on local knowledge. But in a number of other ways it is limiting. For example, listings are being made to varying degrees around the country, rather than consistently, systematically and rigorously throughout. The wealthier urban councils, notably Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch, have on-staff expertise to assess heritage values and are leading the way in listing modern buildings. Some mid-sized councils, such as Hutt City and Rotorua District, have the budgets to employ heritage consultants, who also have the expertise to identify the modern heritage in these areas.<sup>19</sup> But this is not necessarily possible for our less populated local authorities. Their modern heritage runs the risk of going unidentified.

There are a number of other issues. For example, if buildings are assessed locally, how is anyone to know which ones are of national significance? In addition, as discussed above, our local architectures have not developed in isolation. They have always been entangled in both international and national webs. They have been informed by overseas books, journals, ideas, travel and people.<sup>20</sup> They have also been informed by our national networks: education (until the 1970s, New Zealand had only one professionally recognised school of architecture); the profession (a national body, the New Zealand Institute of Architects [NZIA]), with its conferences, lectures,

awards and activities; and our own books and journals, which are often national in their coverage and circulation. Some of our architects have lived and worked in a range of places; others have produced buildings away from home. Some clients – both public and private – have commissioned related buildings up and down the country and the significance of each can only be assessed with reference to the national phenomenon.

Housing New Zealand is one building owner to have recognised the latter. Several years ago, given the very real possibility that each of the country's 85 local authorities might have wanted to heritage list its first or biggest or best state housing schemes, Housing New Zealand employed architectural historian and heritage consultant Greg Bowron to compile a national inventory of state housing and to assess the heritage significance of the individual schemes throughout the country so that it could contribute to the local authority listing decisions in an informed way and also give due attention to heritage values when redeveloping its own older housing schemes. It is to be commended for taking the initiative in conducting this national survey.

Another national initiative of relevance is the 25 Year Awards introduced by the NZIA in the 1980s, to identify and celebrate buildings that continue to be admired 25 years after completion. John Scott's Futuna Chapel earned the first of these awards in 1986, and Warren & Mahoney's Harewood Memorial Garden and Crematorium Chapel the second in 1990. Consistent with the growth in other initiatives recognising the enduring significance and value of the modern in the 1990s, there was a proliferation of these awards that decade: they were given almost annually from 1994; two were given for the first time in 1995; and three for the first time in 1999. The 2003 name change to Enduring Architecture Awards freed up eligibility, and the following year it was to two 1950s houses that the awards were given.<sup>21</sup>

Every organisation that operates a heritage list – including each local authority, the New Zealand Historic Places Trust and DOCOMOMO International – has its own criteria for the identification and assessment of buildings. The DOCOMOMO criteria cover a place's technical, social, historical and aesthetic/cultural significance and value and its canonical status. Canonical status refers to whether a building is known and has had an impact at the local, national or international level.

DOCOMOMO NZ is in its infancy. Members have not yet established a register of buildings, sites and neighbourhoods; the places included in this book have not yet been through a recognised assessment process. The book was preceded by a national 'top 20', selected in 1999 for a DOCOMOMO International publication, *The Modern Movement in Architecture: Selections from the DOCOMOMO Registers* (2000).<sup>22</sup> In expanding the 'top 20' for this book, a national database of modern places was established. It was compiled from secondary sources and brainstorming among the national

network. It currently numbers around 400 places and continues to be updated as others are suggested.<sup>23</sup> Buildings from the database were then selected for publication here for a range of different reasons.

First, as the 'CO' in DOCOMOMO stands for CONservation, current condition was necessarily a consideration. Next, because of the objective of creating a national framework for assessing the heritage values of individual modern buildings, it was important that the list include representation across a range of themes, such as chronology, building type, scale, location, architect, architectural design ideas, construction method and material palette. The list sought a range or spread within each of these categories.

This was not easy to achieve, even with regard to building type. For example, of the new building types mentioned earlier, glass-clad skyscrapers, airport terminals, mass-produced housing, slab apartment blocks and motorways are represented on the current list, but shopping malls, motels, petrol stations, car-parking buildings and supermarkets are not. Perhaps the groundbreaking and significant examples of these latter building types do not survive; perhaps they have been altered beyond recognition; or perhaps, even though we are looking, we are still not seeing the heritage values of those that remain extant. We invite suggestions for examples of these building types that could be added to the DOCOMOMO NZ database and assessed for inclusion on the register in the future.

With regard to range or spread within the category of architect, there is at least one apparent exclusion: the work of women architects. There are projects that we would have liked to have included, such as Lillian Chrystall's best-known house, the NZIA Bronze Medal-winning Yock House in Auckland, but additions and alterations meant that it did not meet the criteria for inclusion. Other women architects and their projects prior to the 1980s remain under-researched at the present time. While the lack of women architects is disappointing, it must also be acknowledged that buildings tend to be attributed to principals or partners in firms, with little or no recognition of the extent to which collaboration and teamwork were/are central to architectural production. To attribute a building to a firm is to attribute it to a group of individuals and this will in many cases include women architects whose names are not yet part of the published historical record.

At the other end of the spectrum, much is already known about New Zealand's best modern houses, through work by Peter Shaw, Justine Clark, Paul Walker, Douglas Lloyd Jenkins, Bill McKay and a host of other scholars and writers,<sup>24</sup> many of them contributors to this book, and by Jeremy Hansen and John Walsh, the editors of *HOME New Zealand* and *Houses New Zealand* respectively, as a result of their commitment to including mid-century houses in their magazines, alongside the twenty-first-century new. It was wonderful, too, for Lloyd Jenkins to have taken us inside so many of

New Zealand's best twentieth-century houses in his television programme, *At Home in New Zealand*, screened in 2006.

Because houses are so much more widely published and so much better known and appreciated than any other building type, a comparatively small number of them are included here. Fewer houses meant more room for other building types: medium- and high-density housing, public and commercial buildings, facilities for education and recreation, churches, factories and public infrastructure projects. The architectural merits of such projects are not always appreciated by the general public, but such places have a much more direct impact on the daily lives of many more people than do privately owned, architect-designed houses, which are often hidden from public view and enjoyed by comparatively few.

Every chronological list requires both a starting point and a finishing point. DOCOMOMO International does not impose start dates or cut-off dates for its regional registers. Thus, for the present list of 180, we floated and discussed many possibilities. The 1999 DOCOMOMO NZ 'top 20' began with the housing programme of New Zealand's first Labour government, and more specifically with the Savage Crescent State Housing Scheme in Palmerston North (1937–45). Earlier starting points considered for the expanded list included the railway housing programme of the 1920s, which demonstrates the standardisation and mass production of houses and house parts, and the Lake Coleridge Powerhouse (1910–14), which was 'the state's first major investment in electric power supply',<sup>25</sup> and was thus an initiative consistent with early modernism's association with politics and social change and its embrace of new technologies. We finally agreed on Sydney and Alfred Luttrell's New Zealand Express Company Building in Christchurch (1905–7) to acknowledge the development of commercial high-rises as inherently modern, even when they were adorned with historicist dressings and details.

There was another debate about where to end the book. The heritage assessment of the architecture of the very recent past is complicated by issues of fashion and taste. The current distaste for post-modern classicism and the resurgent enthusiasm for the clean lines and minimal details of the modern movement together provide a case in point. As a result, some heritage bodies operate a 30-year rolling cut-off date, meaning that at any one point in time, a building completed 30 years earlier can be listed, whereas more recent buildings cannot.

The 1999 DOCOMOMO NZ 'top 20' ended with Ian Athfield's Buck House in Hawke's Bay (1980). Discussion about possible end points for the expanded list revolved initially around whether or not post-modern architecture should be included within the current project. It also extended to New Zealand's most overt late twentieth-century celebration of technology, Craig, Craig, Moller's Sky Tower in Auckland (1995–97), and to the four

New Zealand projects included in *The Phaidon Atlas of Contemporary World Architecture* (2004). To have included the latter projects would also have necessitated the inclusion of examples of the very fine work being produced by a raft of other firms and individuals in the 1990s and the opening years of the twenty-first century.

A cut-off point needed to be imposed to make the project manageable. The year 1984 was chosen for several reasons. First, with the election of David Lange's Labour government leading to the introduction of Rogernomics and the dismantling of the welfare state, 1984 is notable in this country for the kind of ruptures that often mark historical periodisation. Second, 1984 was the year in which *The Elegant Shed*, a 'watershed' in New Zealand architectural discourse, was published.<sup>26</sup> And third, in terms of built milestones, it was in 1984 that Stephenson & Turner's Wellington BNZ was finally completed. Given that it hovered as a steel frame over the capital for much of the 1970s and early 1980s, this landmark building, a comparatively late example of its genre, can be seen to encapsulate something of this country's own crisis of modern architecture. The seemingly late date for a book on modern architecture also allowed us to include buildings by architects like Roger Walker and Ian Athfield who, to quote Paul Walker, 'retained the belief that architecture could be the vehicle of a general amelioration of the social realm'.<sup>27</sup>

While modern and post-modern architecture co-existed in the 1970s and 1980s, overtly post-modern buildings were excluded from this book in order to simplify what was already a complex project. Post-modern architecture lends itself to a different project, a future project, perhaps even a 'DOCOPOMO NZ' book project. The decision to exclude overtly post-modern architecture meant the exclusion of some very good buildings. It also opened up its own set of complexities and contradictions for the reason that the distinction between the modern and the post-modern is not always black and white; there are also greys, as suggested by later modernism's embrace of difference, diversity and pluralism, and there are buildings included in this book that will also be included in future histories and reassessments of New Zealand's post-modern architecture.

Appropriately, then, the list starts and ends with high-rises. Between the two is a range of other buildings, some well known, others little published previously and in some cases not published at all. Final decisions about what to include and what to exclude were my own, but the depth and breadth of the list and the inclusion of so many little-known buildings reflects the collaborative nature of the project and sustained input from the national network of DOCOMOMO NZ members and interested and concerned others.

Julia Gatley

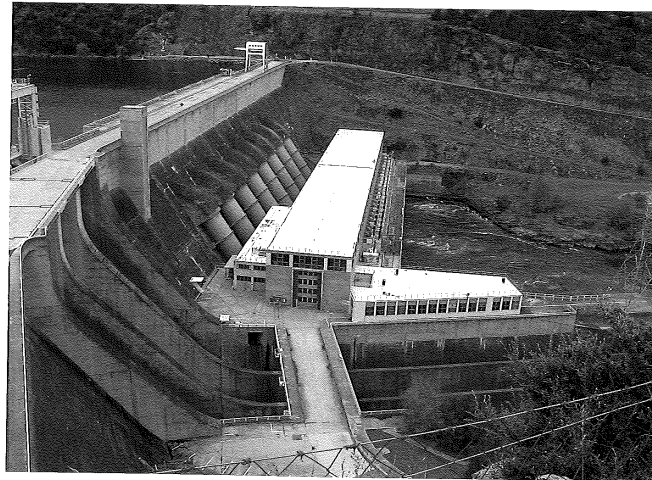
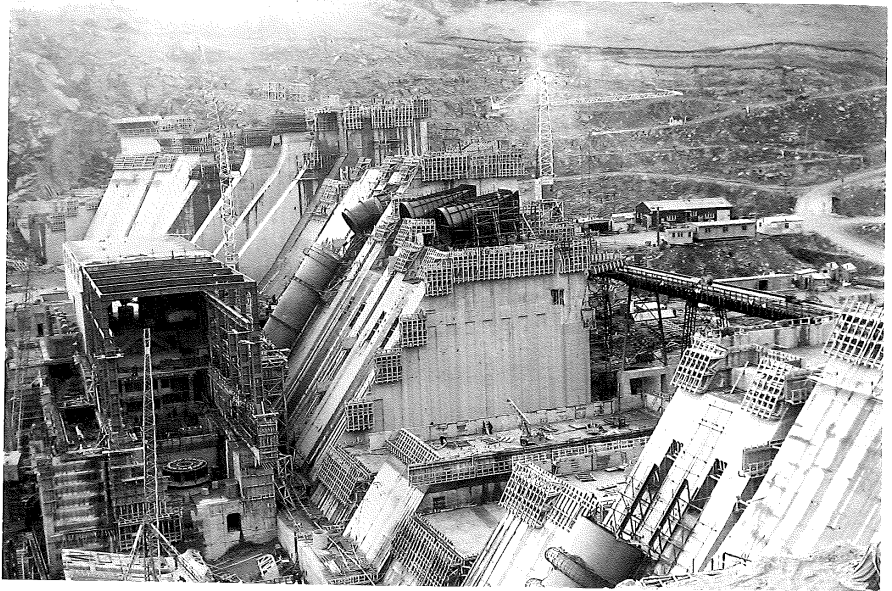
- <sup>1</sup> Historic Places Act 1993.
- <sup>2</sup> Recommended overview texts on the international development of modern architecture include, firstly, Curtis, *Modern Architecture Since 1900*; and, secondly, Colquhoun, *Modern Architecture*. For a broad overview of the history of New Zealand architecture, including modernism, see Shaw, *A History of New Zealand Architecture*; for a succinct overview of modern architecture in New Zealand, see Walker, 'Modern Architecture in New Zealand'; for a more complex and nuanced analysis of international and New Zealand modernism after World War II, see Clark and Walker, *Looking for the Local*; and for information on many of New Zealand's best modern houses, see Lloyd Jenkins, *At Home*.
- <sup>3</sup> Early and influential texts on modern architecture include Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*; Hitchcock and Johnson, *The International Style*; Pevsner, *Pioneers of the Modern Movement*; Richards, *An Introduction to Modern Architecture*; and Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture*. See Goldhagen, 'Coda', p. 301.
- <sup>4</sup> Bill Toomath, Personal comment at the symposium, 'Pleasing Homogeneity'.
- <sup>5</sup> *Journal of the NZIA*, December 1929, pp. 126–30.
- <sup>6</sup> Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, is credited with demystifying the architecture of 1920s Europe, showing that it was less functional and less honest to materials than its protagonists had claimed. Other texts significant in the questioning of the canon were: Rowe, 'The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa'; Jordy, 'The Symbolic Essence of Modern European Architecture of the Twenties and Its Continuing Influence'; Ciucci, 'Il mito Movimento Moderno e le vicende dei Ciani'; Anderson, 'The Fiction of Function'; Colquhoun, 'The Modern Movement in Architecture'; and Blundell-Jones, *Hans Scharoun and Hugo Häring*. See Goldhagen, 'Coda', pp. 301, 321.
- <sup>7</sup> Le Corbusier quoted in Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, p. 222.
- <sup>8</sup> See Walker, 'Shaky Ground'.
- <sup>9</sup> Beaglehole, *A Small Price to Pay*, p. 110; Tyler, 'The Urban and Urbane', p. 37.
- <sup>10</sup> Clark and Walker, *Looking for the Local*, p. 7. See also Clark, 'Ephemera'.
- <sup>11</sup> Clark and Walker, *Looking for the Local*, pp. 8–9.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- <sup>13</sup> Mitchell and Chaplin, *The Elegant Shed*, p. 49.
- <sup>14</sup> Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*, pp. 16–17.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- <sup>16</sup> This was acknowledged in Austin, 'Kiwi Architecture', p. vi.
- <sup>17</sup> English Heritage's thematic surveying and listing programme of the 1990s exemplifies this, combined as it was with public education initiatives.
- <sup>18</sup> See *Proceedings from the New Zealand Historic Places Trust Launch of DOCOMOMO New Zealand*.
- <sup>19</sup> Several years ago, Hutt City Council commissioned conservation architect Ian Bowman to survey its modern heritage, leading to the publication of a small book on that city's 1950s buildings. See Bowman, *1950s Buildings*. Rotorua District Council commissioned conservation architects Jane and Antony Matthews to undertake a study of its inner-city heritage, leading to the recognition of a 'Modern Architectural Alert Zone' within the city centre. See Matthews & Matthews, 'Rotorua Central Area Built Heritage Study Part One'.
- <sup>20</sup> Clark and Walker, *Looking for the Local*, pp. 35–44.
- <sup>21</sup> NZIA awards to 2004 are listed in Walker (ed.), *Exquisite Apart*, pp. 236–40.
- <sup>22</sup> See 'New Zealand', in Sharp and Cooke (eds.), *The Modern Movement in Architecture*, pp. 185–92. New Zealand's 'top 20' was reduced to a 'top 19' without consultation. The twentieth building was the Dental School Building at the University of Otago, Dunedin, designed by Ian Reynolds for the Ministry of Works from 1954 and built 1957–61.
- <sup>23</sup> This database is the responsibility of the DOCOMOMO NZ Registers Coordinator. It is a working document and is not publicly available as yet.
- <sup>24</sup> For example, see Shaw, *A History of New Zealand Architecture*; Shaw, 'Modernism in New Zealand Architecture'; Clark and Walker, *Looking for the Local*; Lloyd Jenkins and McKay, 'Top 50 Homes'; and Lloyd Jenkins, *At Home*.
- <sup>25</sup> IPENZ Engineering Heritage, 'Lake Coleridge Power Station', <http://www.ipenz.org.nz/heritage/itemdetail.cfm?itemid=58> (accessed 9 January 2007).
- <sup>26</sup> Wood, 'Watershed'.
- <sup>27</sup> Walker, 'Modern Architecture in New Zealand', p. 46.

## Roxburgh Power Station

Clutha River, Central Otago  
Designed by: Hydro Design Office (HDO), Ministry of Works, under  
Section Head (Architectural), Frederick H. Newman  
Designed and built: 1949–1956

Roxburgh was among the first major infrastructural projects designed by the multi-disciplinary Hydro Design Office, established within the Ministry of Works in 1947 to address the massive national electricity shortages being experienced post-war. Roxburgh is exemplary of the outcomes to which Fred Newman claimed the architectural profession could aspire when teamed with engineers of various specialisations. The signature structure of this complex is a 150-metre-high concrete gravity dam spanning 750 metres. This is punctuated vertically by three massive concrete control gate structures and the slender mass of a glass and concrete lift enclosure. The skewed axis created by the gates, crowning the dam, is carried forward into the spillway structure. Running past the powerhouse and administration complex, rectilinear forms are articulated to generate tension and rhythm, while the 10-metre-wide penstock pipes punctuate the dam side of the powerhouse with extraordinary force. Both space and light in the powerhouse are regulated by the building's structural elements, the portal frames, which are further delineated by an almost classical geometry. Landscaping by the HDO and a new town to accommodate power-station personnel complemented the power-station complex. Other than technical upgrades, the power station is largely unaltered.

*Andrew Leach*



TOP The dam under construction in 1955. The powerhouse is on the left. NZ Free Lance Collection, PAColl-6203-23, Alexander Turnbull Library.  
LEFT The road above the 150-metre-high concrete gravity dam is open to the public and is exhilarating to walk or drive across. Photograph by Julia Gatley.

at the University of Tasmania and as a New Zealand Historic Places Trust conservation advisor. With Greg Bowron, she was a co-initiator of DOCOMOMO NZ in 1999 and is currently its Registers Coordinator.

**Jonathan Gibb** is a graduate of the Auckland School of Architecture, is in practice and is a part-time tutor. He has written a Master of Architecture thesis on Vernon Brown, titled 'Inspiration'. He has a strong interest in the use of timber and the appropriateness of architecture.

**Richard Goldie** is a graduate of the Auckland School of Architecture and a director of Peddle Thorp Architects. He has maintained an interest in the work of Henry Kulka since 1986, when he completed his BArch research report on the émigré.

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**David Kernohan** is an architect and researcher, an author, co-owner of Gladstone Vineyard in the Wairarapa, a Deputy Environment Commissioner, a Board member of Wellington Waterfront, and a former Associate Professor of Architecture at Victoria University of Wellington.

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**Amanda Ohs** has a Bachelor of Arts with First Class Honours in Art History from the University of Canterbury. She has been a Heritage Planner in the Strategy and Planning Group of the Christchurch City Council since 2001.

**Duval O'Neill** is one of four directors of Herriot+Melhuish Architecture Ltd, established in 1997 by Max Herriot and John Melhuish. The practice has a staff of fifteen in its Wellington office, with branch offices in Christchurch and