Athfield Architects

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AUCKLAND
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

Contents

Ian Athfield, Ian Dickson and Graeme Boucher at the Athfield House and Office in 1971. PHOTOGRAPHER NOT KNOWN, AAL LIBRARY.

Luck and timing are often important in the development of architects' careers.[1] Ian Athfield was fortunate to spend time in New Zealand's three biggest cities at crucial periods in his formative years. Born in Christchurch in 1940, he grew up there and became interested in architecture just as that city's young Brutalists – the so-called Christchurch School – were having an impact on the urban fabric. He studied in Auckland in the early 1960s, when influential nationalist and regionalist protagonists were teaching in the School of Architecture and the Dutch architect Aldo van Eyck visited New Zealand to deliver inspirational lectures. Athfield then started work in Wellington at a time of frenetic public and commercial redevelopment, paralleled by increasing agitation about the city. Each of these locales and experiences had an influence on the development of his ideas about architecture and the kind of architect he might become.

CHRISTCHURCH

Athfield grew up in Spreydon, on the south-west side of Christchurch. His childhood was one of suburban norms. His father, Len, worked for booksellers Whitcombe & Tombs, progressing through the ranks from making boxes to finally heading the box-making department. Beyond work, he enjoyed art, particularly painting. Athfield's mother, Ella, worked as a typist before marriage, but not after.[2] Len and Ella made every effort to ensure a good education and the best opportunities for their two sons.[3] For example, to generate additional income, they took in a school teacher as a boarder in the family home. They also encouraged their boys to play sport, and during his years at Christchurch Boys' High School (1954–58), Athfield enjoyed both rugby and rowing. But suburbia often houses secrets, and in their late teens, he and younger brother Tony found out they were adopted. Says Athfield: 'I toyed with the idea of trying to track . . . [my biological parents] down. It was a shock. I wondered who I was and what I was about. I did discover my parents had been very young when they'd had me adopted. But I wasn't incredibly curious. I had extremely generous adoptive parents, and was more than satisfied that they were my parents.'[4]

Athfield knew from an early age that he would become an architect. When he was seven, the family's boarder, Jim Ashby, observed that the boy's strengths included art and mathematics, and suggested that this combination leant itself to a career in architecture. It was an astute observation about one so young and Athfield barely gave a thought to any other possible career paths. Ashby also saw in Tony a potential career in music.[5] Ella took particular heed and prompted both her sons to follow the teacher's suggestions. Athfield soon took the initiative, convincing Tony that they should build a garage at the family home,[6] surely an eye-opener for any young person interested in architecture. Len and Ella also encouraged both boys to learn music. They played in a band together in their early teens. The collaboration did not last, but Tony progressed through a series of musical groups – Max Merritt and the Meteors, the Saints, the Downbeats (with Ray Columbus) – and for a while, the family home served as the band practice room.[7]

Meanwhile, Athfield took an increasing interest in the very strong local architecture being developed by Warren & Mahoney, Peter Beaven and a host of others including Don Cowey, Don Donnithorne, Holger Henning-Hansen, George Lucking, Alan Mitchener and Trengrove & Marshall.[8] Many of the city's new buildings were local variations on the international language of Brutalism, characterised in Christchurch by the honest expression of structure and materials that included concrete block walls with exposed concrete beams and lintels, and timber-framed roof structures. The first of these appeared

Len and Ella Athfield, ca 1956. PHOTOGRAPHER NOT KNOWN, AAL ARCHIVE.

1 Andrew Barrie, 'Luck and Timing in Post-War Japanese Architecture: An Experiment in Analysis', in Antony Moulis and Deborah van der Plaat (eds), *Audience: Proceedings of the XXVIIIth International Conference of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand*, Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand, Brisbane, 2011, n.p.

2 Pers. comm. Ian Athfield to Julia Gatley, 5 August 2011.

3 Nicola Barnes, 'Ian Athfield: Changing the Character of Wellington's Landscape', *Evening Post Weekend Magazine*, 4 July 1987, p. 3.

4 Athfield interviewed by Joseph Romanos, 'Ian Athfield: The Rebel Architect', *Wellingtonian*, 25 June 2009, p. 12.

5 See Athfield interviewed by Tony van Raat, 'Gold Medalist: Ian Athfield: Interview by Tony van Raat', *Architecture New Zealand*, May 2004, p. 82; and Barnes, 'Ian Athfield', p. 1.

6 Athfield in Geoffrey Cawthorn (dir.), *Architect of Dreams: Ian Athfield*, Messenger Films, 2008.

7 Pers. comm. Athfield to Gatley, 5 August 2011.

8 Together these and other architects became known as the Christchurch School. See William H. Alington, 'Architecture', in Ian Wards (ed.), *Thirteen Facets: Essays to Celebrate the Silver Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth the Second, 1952–1977*, E.C. Keating Government Printer, Wellington, 1978, p. 344. For a wonderfully evocative account of the impact of Christchurch School work on a young architectural mind, see Paul Walker, 'Introduction', in Warren & Mahoney, *New Territory: Warren and Mahoney: 50 Years of New Zealand Architecture*, Balasoglou Books, Auckland, 2005, pp. 12–15.

Ian and Tony Athfield, ca 1955. PHOTOGRAPHER NOT KNOWN, TONY ATHFIELD COLLECTION.

in the city while Athfield was still at school. In particular, Miles Warren's Dorset Street Flats, completed in 1957, attracted busloads of tourists under the popular banner of being the ugliest building in Christchurch.[9] Young and emerging architects loved it. Warren formed a partnership with Maurice Mahoney in 1958 when he was offered the more complex job of designing the Dental Nurses' Training School, and from 1959 when it earned an NZIA Gold Medal the rest of the country was increasingly aware that Christchurch was generating a distinctive and nationally significant new architecture.

Having made his decision to become an architect, Athfield found part-time work as a 'print boy' in the local firm of Griffiths, Moffat & Partners in 1958, during his final year at school.[10] George Griffiths was the more senior and established partner while the younger Maurice Moffat was soon aligned with the Christchurch School. As a print boy, Athfield was responsible for making copies of the drawings the architects and draughtsmen produced on tracing paper. It was a comparatively time-consuming job, with large sheets having to be run through a barrel printer to absorb ammonia and thus create duplicates. He also began colouring the firm's presentation drawings.

The following year, Athfield was faced with the decision of choosing between the two courses offered by the University of Auckland: a Bachelor of Architecture or a Diploma of Architecture. The degree comprised five years' study, whereas the diploma was aimed at those who worked in architects' offices up and down the country. Concurrent with their work, the diploma students could undertake two years of part-time study at their local technical institutes or polytechs, prepare the testimonies of study and sit the exams offered by Auckland University, and then move to Auckland to complete three full-time years at the university.

Athfield opted to take the diploma course and thus stayed in Christchurch for 1959 and 1960. He continued working for Griffiths, Moffat & Partners and was soon draughting and producing measured drawings for buildings that the firm was altering. He completed the courses offered by Christchurch Technical Institute and Ilam Art School.[11] Practising architects supported the apprenticeship students through the Christchurch Atelier, advising them on the university's testimonies of study and supervising its exams. In attending the Atelier, the students also got to know each other. This was an exciting period to be entering architecture in Christchurch, and Athfield recalls that he and the other young apprentices would visit Miles Warren, Peter Beaven and others after work, to have a drink and to see what they had on their drawing boards.[12]

Beyond architecture, rowing remained Athfield's main interest. The two were not mutually exclusive and, during his years with Griffiths, Moffat & Partners, he accepted a private job to produce working drawings for the Canterbury Rowing Association's new clubhouse in the eastern suburb of Dallington. The building was designed by architect Charles Thomas, who was some ten years older than Athfield and both a rower and a member of the Rowing Association. Athfield's working drawings include 92 details and demonstrate that his early work and training prepared him as an accomplished draughtsperson and technician.

9 Miles Warren, *An Autobiography*, Canterbury University Press, Christchurch, 2008, p. 46.
10 Pers. comm. Athfield to Gatley, 5 August 2011. George Griffiths was the father of one of Athfield's school friends.
11 Barnes, 'Ian Athfield', p. 1.
12 Athfield interviewed by van Raat, 'Gold Medalist: Ian Athfield', p. 82, and pers. comm. Athfield to Gatley, 5 August 2011.

AUCKLAND

After his two-year apprenticeship, Athfield moved to Auckland to complete his diploma. Auckland's architecture scene was quite different from that of Christchurch in this period. It had the nationalist rhetoric, creosoted walls and mono-pitched roofs of Vernon Brown, and the broad gables, open plans and exposed timbers of Group Architects. It also had New Zealand's only professionally recognised School of Architecture, with a host of well-known and influential staff including Brown, Peter Middleton, Gordon Smith and Richard Toy. Acknowledged Group leader Bill Wilson was also working part time in the School. Like Brown before them, Middleton and Toy were both English expats and keen New Zealandophiles, promoting a strongly regionalist architecture that responded to the local landscape, building traditions and peoples.[13] Group Architects had reintroduced gabled roofs into contemporary New Zealand architecture from 1949, but Middleton made the nineteenth-century referencing more overtly colonial when he fixed an old finial to one of the gable ends of his 1961 house in Grafton.[14]

Rather than being the egalitarian institution it may have believed itself to be, the School of Architecture was hierarchical, with difference drawn between the degree and diploma students. The former were assumed to be bright and creative, the latter mere technicians. Thus, the School taught them studio in two separate streams. Athfield remembers: 'We got the worst lecturers, we had the best fun, and we got into the most trouble. . . . We had the riff-raff.'[15] All students were then taught together for general lectures, and this meant the likes of Brown, Middleton and Toy. But Athfield remained detached from the local favourites: 'I was never interested in that next generation of architects, locally represented by Vernon Brown. . . . Many of my student contemporaries felt strongly about the work of the Group, but for some reason it failed to excite me.'[16]

Athfield, then, was not sucked into the Auckland scene. But he was struck by architectural history lectures: 'One of the most important things about architectural history is that you can be kicked into accepting that nothing is new. Someone will always have done it before – always.'[17] He became an admirer of the nineteenth-century Spanish architect Antoni Gaudí and the German modernist Ludwig Mies van der Rohe,[18] both separately and together, enjoying the complete contrast provided by the work of the two architects when placed side by side.[19] Gaudí's work was curvaceous, sculptural, decorative and sometimes playful, whereas Mies van der Rohe's was the ultimate in

The sculptural forms of the Spanish architect Antoni Gaudí at the Casa Mila, Barcelona (1906–10) and the reductive architecture of the German modernist Ludwig Mies van der Rohe at the Weissenhofsiedlung, Stuttgart (1925–26). PHOTOGRAPHS BY JULIA GATLEY.

13 Peter Bartlett, 'The Mid-Century Modern House in Auckland', in Meghan Nordeck and Simon Twose (eds), *Connections: The House in the Auckland Scene*, G4 Exhibiting Unit, Auckland, 1998, pp. 12–27.
14 Miles Warren, 'Style in New Zealand Architecture', *New Zealand Architect*, no. 3, 1978, p. 12.
15 Athfield interviewed by van Raat, 'Gold Medalist: Ian Athfield', p. 82.
16 Athfield interviewed by Gerald Melling, 'Golden Boy', *Cross Section: NZIA News*, June 2004, p. 9.
17 Athfield quoted in Barnes, 'Ian Athfield', p. 1.
18 Bill Alington in 'Athfield, Ian (Charles)', in Muriel Emanuel (ed.), *Contemporary Architects*, Macmillan Press, London and Basingstoke, 1980, p. 53.
19 Athfield interviewed by Melling, 'Golden Boy', p. 9.

An example of the limited material and colour palettes that increasingly appealed to Athfield. PHOTOGRAPHER NOT KNOWN, AAL ARCHIVE.

reductive planning and detailing. The enthusiasm for the contrast between the two architects' work is apparent in several of Athfield's student design projects, leading Gerald Melling to describe them as Mies/Gaudí collages.[20]

To this palette of Christchurch School meets Gaudí meets Mies was added a fourth influence, namely, the Dutch architect Aldo van Eyck, who visited New Zealand in September 1963 as the keynote speaker at a student architecture congress titled 'Social Aspects of New Housing'.[21] Van Eyck's ideas struck a chord with Athfield and stimulated his thinking about architecture and urbanism.

As a member of Team X in the 1950s, van Eyck had been one of a group of architects to challenge orthodox modernism and in particular its emphasis on efficiency and the abstract zoned city. Instead, he and other like-minded young architects promoted human experience and the importance of 'neighbourhood' and 'cluster', terms that were suggestive of community values. Van Eyck famously drew a parallel between a city and a house: 'tree is leaf and leaf is tree – house is city and city is house – a tree is a tree but it is also a huge leaf – a leaf is a leaf, but it is also a tiny tree – a city is not a city unless it is also a huge house – a house is a house only if it is also a tiny city'.[22] He also had a particular interest in anthropology and the traditional architectures of non-Western societies. He and his wife Hannie travelled extensively, including in northern Africa – Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and the Sahara – where he admired vernacular buildings and villages, interpreting them as non-hierarchical and flexible and noting their repetitive forms and recurrent use of circle and square motifs. In addition, van Eyck referred to binary opposites as 'twin phenomena' and aimed to fuse them to produce 'reconciliation' and the 'in-between'. Examples include the classical and the anti-classical, form and function, public and private, and outdoor and indoor.

At the New Zealand student congress and also at public lectures in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch, van Eyck discussed these ideas and showed images of both his own work and the northern African buildings and villages he admired.[23] His now well-known Municipal Orphanage in Amsterdam (1955–62) had been recently completed and was the ideal project for demonstrating the full repertoire of his ideas. He made a big impact on these audiences, with *RIBA Journal* editor Peter Murray later identifying the lecture tour as the 'turning point which gave local architects a new confidence in their hybrid cultural heritage'.[24]

Athfield did not attend the congress as it was aimed at degree rather than diploma students, but he did attend van Eyck's public lecture in Auckland and later acknowledged that, 'I was hugely influenced as a student by Aldo van Eyck when he came to New Zealand . . . and talked about the in-between space, the realm between private and public, the gap between house and street. I saw the significance in that.'[25]

Van Eyck's Orphanage and particularly his northern African precedents also demonstrated the use of limited material palettes. Athfield became increasingly interested in this approach during the course of his education. He found it too in images of the Mediterranean, particularly the Greek Islands and south-east Spain, where whole villages comprised plastered and lime-washed buildings.

During his student years, Athfield would return to Christchurch for the summer vacations. He describes himself as having been 'refreshed by the incredibly strong discipline provided by Miles Warren',[26] and in the 1961–62 summer spent three months working for Warren & Mahoney. He remembers being reprimanded for arriving late (9 a.m. was considered late) and for drawing walls as if they were 6 inches thick when only a 4-inch thickness was required.[27] He was, however, given some responsibility in the design of the Broderick Townhouses,[28] and he was allowed to continue with the working drawings when he went back to Auckland.[29] Interestingly, this was the period in which the firm's new office building at 65 Cambridge Terrace was under construction. The site was in a residential zone and, to satisfy the city council requirement that not less than half the floor area was used for non-residential purposes, Warren included a flat for himself in the building.[30] It is easy to imagine the conversations the office might have had about both local authority building regulations and the pros and cons of working from home, themes that would absorb Athfield in the latter 1960s and the 1970s.

There was more to Athfield's three years in Auckland than study. This included student parties and pranks. In addition, he met Nancy Clare Cookson and in December 1962 they married. Clare had moved from Northland to Auckland to attend teachers' college, with a view to becoming an art teacher, and she also worked at the Auckland Art Gallery. From the outset, her creativity complemented his and this has underpinned their long relationship. As Athfield says, 'She has a very good eye, an architectural eye. She is a great critic.'[31]

When he was nearing the completion of his Diploma of Architecture in 1963, Athfield began looking for full-time work. His first position was with Stephenson & Turner in Auckland. The firm had an Australian head office and a reputation for producing professional if not always the most exciting commercial buildings, often high-rise. Athfield worked on a twelve-storey bedroom block for the Mon Desir Hotel in Takapuna. The hotel was completed in 1966, but not to the design on which Athfield had worked. He was on shaky ground for the short time he was with the firm. A week after he started, he crashed his car into one belonging to the firm's senior partner.[32] Then, towards the end of the year when Ron Muston of Wellington's Structon Group Architects visited Auckland in search of young recruits for his office, Athfield

Ian and Clare Athfield shortly after their marriage. PHOTOGRAPHS BY TONY ATHFIELD.

20 Gerald Melling, *Joyful Architecture: The Genius of New Zealand's Ian Athfield*, Caveman Press, Dunedin, 1980, p. 23.
21 Dick Scott (ed.), *Report '63: A Record of the Pacific Conference Organized by Students of the School of Architecture, University of Auckland, September 2–7 1963*, Whitcombe and Tombs for the School of Architecture and the Students' Association, University of Auckland, Auckland, 1963.
22 Aldo van Eyck in Vincent Ligtelijn (ed.), *Aldo van Eyck: Works*, Birkhauser, Basel, Boston and Berlin, 1999, p. 49.
23 Robin Skinner, 'Dutch Treat: The van Eycks in New Zealand', in Andrew Leach (ed.), *Formulation Fabrication: The Architecture of History; Proceedings of the 17th Annual Conference of the Society of Architecture Historians, Australia and New Zealand*, Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand, Wellington, 2000, pp. 287–96.
24 Peter Murray, 'Architecture in the Antipodes', *RIBA Journal*, vol. 91, no. 2, February 1984, p. 26.
25 Athfield interviewed by Melling, 'Golden Boy', p. 10.
26 Ibid., p. 9.
27 Athfield interviewed by van Raat, 'Gold Medalist: Ian Athfield', p. 82.
28 Warren, 'Style in New Zealand Architecture', p. 8.
29 Pers. comm. Athfield to Gatley, 5 August 2011.
30 Warren & Mahoney, *Warren & Mahoney Architects, 1958–1989*, s.p., Christchurch, ca 1989, pp. 4–5.
31 Athfield interviewed by Romanos, 'Ian Athfield', p. 12. At that time he said 'good critic' but in 2011 he upgraded 'good' to 'great'.
32 See Athfield interviewed by van Raat, 'Gold Medalist: Ian Athfield', p. 82.

The Wellington CBD in 1964. PHOTOGRAPH BY B. CLARK, AAQT 6401 75178, ARCHIVES NZ, F33145-1/2, ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY.

applied and was offered one of the positions.[33] It included agreement that he would be made a partner two years later, in 1965. This promise of a partnership 'was too good to refuse. It put me in a position of responsibility early in life.'[34] He accepted the offer, limiting his tenure with Stephenson & Turner to just six weeks and moved to Wellington before the year was out.

WELLINGTON

Wellington's architecture culture was quite different again from those of Christchurch and Auckland. The capital was home to the Ministry of Works. Its various departments and divisions were important employers of architects and town planners in the city, including the sizeable proportion of émigré architects who made New Zealand their home in the latter 1930s and the 1940s. In 1946, various Ministry of Works staff supported the formation of the Architectural Centre, a voluntary organisation that provided an informal alternative to the NZIA and was a lively forum for debate and activity in and about the city. In the 1940s and 1950s, this included exhibitions and publications. In the 1960s and 1970s, a swathe of new high-rises transformed the city, replacing two- and three-storeyed Victorian and Edwardian buildings. The city's new motorway required the demolition of many old houses and cottages in the suburb of Thorndon. The rate of change brought urban issues, including heritage issues, to the fore. Through the Architectural Centre, architects and others campaigned against key losses.

The 1960s were busy for established firms such as Structon Group, which was formed in 1944 when Muston merged his practice with that of Swan & Lavelle.[35] With a staff numbering about 80, Structon did interesting work for a range of clients, including Victoria University of Wellington, local authorities, banks, schools, commercial enterprises and manufacturers. The War Memorial Library, Little Theatre and St James' Church in the Lower Hutt Civic Centre are among their most admired projects of the post-war period. Other jobs attracted criticism. The Racing Conference Building in central Wellington (1959–61), for example, was described at the time as 'an over-dressed old lady'.[36] Regardless, Athfield learnt much from the firm. This included experience with high-rise construction, predominantly from working in the mid-1960s on a twelve-storey podium tower for the National Bank. It exposed him to a range of advanced technologies: a structural design that was 'computer checked', four high-speed lifts, a thermal fire alarm system that would 'automatically call the Central Fire Station', and a complete air-conditioning system designed to create 'a pleasant working environment throughout the building'.[37] Of his time with Structon, Athfield concludes: 'We had a lot of interesting people and we worked hard together';[38] 'There was a strong restraining discipline in that office . . . . It was an identifiably important part of my architectural education.'[39]

He was also personally ambitious, however, and took on a series of private jobs during his Structon years, completing them under his own name. These were mostly houses but also included the Waitati Hall north of Dunedin.

In 1965, Athfield became a Structon Group partner, joining twelve others. He was increasingly frustrated by the dominance of the firm's ageing senior partners over its energetic young designers. Thus, in 1968, he proposed that the firm introduce a retirement policy. The senior partners were outraged. They saw him as an 'upstart', with 'revolutionary' ideas,[40] and voted to dismiss him on the grounds that he had contravened their partnership agreement.[41] The date of his dismissal was 15 July 1968. He would remember it vividly because it was his birthday. He was required to leave immediately:

> So . . . I went around all the clients I was working for and said 'I've just been dismissed. If you've got anything you want to hand to me that's fine but I won't be at Structon any longer'. That night I went back to the office at about 12 o'clock, grabbed as much tracing paper as I could carry, left with a liftful of stuff and started practising the next day from home.[42]

In the following weeks and months, Structon Group lost a significant number of its staff, including a substantial proportion of the younger architects and draughtsmen who were shocked by the senior partners' treatment of Athfield.

His new workplace was the house he had started building for himself and Clare in 1965, high above the city in the northern suburb of Khandallah. They bought the 1.3-acre section shortly after their move to Wellington, choosing land in favour of spending money on overseas travel.[43] The site was steeper than most architects would work on at that time, with expansive views over the harbour and the city. The site was also highly visible, and in the design of the house, the young architect's aim was to be noticed and through this to generate new clients who might want interesting and unconventional houses.[44] Thus, he used bold forms, producing an array of small spaces, each with its own distinct roof, some gabled, some with projecting drainpipe skylights and others flat in order that they could be used as outdoor terraces.

Athfield had not initially designed the house to double as his office, but with his same-day dismissal from Structon, he could not afford to rent office space elsewhere. So practise from home he did, with work from former Structon clients helping to ensure that his transition from corporate partner to sole practitioner was relatively painless.[45]

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Although sole practice was thrust upon him, Athfield's formative years had armed him well to meet its challenges. He had learnt the lessons of the Christchurch School, including disciplined planning, some fragmentation of the form of a building under a series of gabled roofs and the use of concrete block in conjunction with exposed timber roof structures. As a student, he had pushed himself to experiment with the sculptural forms of Gaudí and the ultra-rationalism of Mies van der Rohe. He had absorbed van Eyck's ideas about the in-between realm, admiration for 'architecture without architects',[46] and the possibility of thinking of the house as a small city or village and vice versa. He had become aware of limited material palettes, particularly in the architecture of northern Africa and the Mediterranean, and been struck by the resulting sense of unity. And, finally, he had been through four-and-a-half years of Structon Group finishing school, progressing to partner, and designing and supervising the construction of buildings of varied type and scale. Thus it was, that on 16 July 1968, he first opened the doors of Athfield Architects.

33 Pers. comm. Athfield to Gatley, 5 August 2011.
34 Athfield interviewed by Romanos, 'Ian Athfield', p. 12.
35 'Structon Group Celebrating 50 Years in Building Design', *Evening Post*, 15 November 1994, p. 14.
36 Christine McCarthy, 'New Zealand Racing Conference Building', in Julia Gatley (ed.), *Long Live the Modern: New Zealand's New Architecture, 1904–1984*, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2008, p. 116.
37 'National Bank Building, Wellington', *Home and Building*, April 1970, pp. 62–64.
38 Athfield interviewed by van Raat, 'Gold Medalist: Ian Athfield', p. 82.
39 Athfield quoted in Barnes, 'Ian Athfield', p. 1.
40 Ibid.
41 Athfield interviewed by van Raat, 'Gold Medalist: Ian Athfield', p. 82.
42 Ibid.
43 Athfield in Cawthorn, *Architect of Dreams*.
44 Athfield in Sam Neill (dir.), *Architect Athfield*, New Zealand National Film Unit, Auckland, 1977; New Zealand Television Archive, Auckland, 1997. See also Athfield interviewed by John Walsh in John Walsh and Patrick Reynolds, 'Ian Athfield', *Home Work: Leading New Zealand Architects' Own Houses*, Random House, Auckland, 2010, p. 22.
45 Athfield interviewed by Romanos, 'Ian Athfield', p. 12.
46 A year after van Eyck visited New Zealand, Bernard Rudofsky's important book, *Architecture without Architects: An Introduction to Non-pedigreed Architecture* (Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1964) focused further international attention on traditional, vernacular, non-Western architecture.

// Auckland University Student Projects

Designed by Ian Athfield
Designed: 1961–1963
Unbuilt

Athfield's student projects of the early 1960s show wild experimentation with a range of free, sculptural, curving forms. More than this, they demonstrate his admiration for the work of both Gaudí and Mies van der Rohe, and particularly the contrast between the two architects' work by combining the sculptural with the rectilinear. These 'Mies/Gaudí collages' include a Music School, with an animal-like auditorium; a Hostel for Medical Students, with an 'igloo' for each individual student; and a project titled Church Group, with five distinct 'chimneys'. Athfield even used this approach in his most complex student project: an office and retail scheme proposed for the site at the top of Auckland's Myers Park, extending through to Karangahape Road. Each low-rise shop and staircase is shown with its own conical roof. This scheme also included a six-storey tower, characterised by oblong windows at each floor level and capped by a liftroom with the same conical roof. Equally interesting, but for different reasons, is Athfield's scheme for the Auckland Table Tennis Association Clubhouse. It is an orthogonal complex with a bulging entrance. The structure is shown as tent-like, with tension cables to hold the building in place, pinned to the ground by large blocks of concrete or stone. His Marine Research Station for Auckland University's staff and student marine biologists was again orthogonal, a flat-roofed building with five bunkrooms and men's and women's ablution rooms downstairs, and kitchen, living, laboratory and storage spaces upstairs. Clearly for Athfield, architecture school provided the opportunity to explore a range of different design challenges and to take risks.

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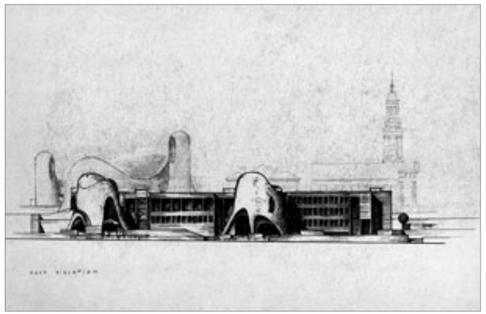

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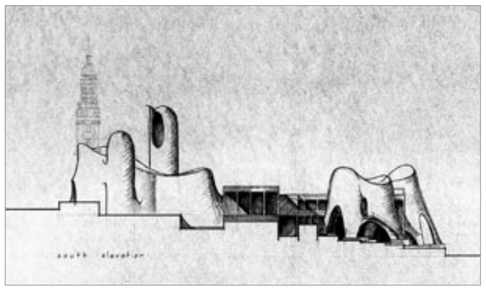

1, 2 Athfield's Music School combines rectilinear office and teaching spaces with a sculptural entry and auditorium.
3, 4, 5 The Hostel for Medical Students continues the Mies/Gaudí approach on a larger scale with a greater degree of complexity.
6, 7 Athfield proposed conical roofs and oblong windows for Karangahape Road.
8 His orthogonal Auckland Table Tennis Association Clubhouse was a more conventional scheme. DRAWINGS BY IAN ATHFIELD, AAL ARCHIVE.

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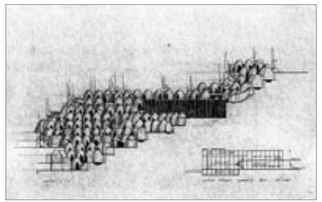

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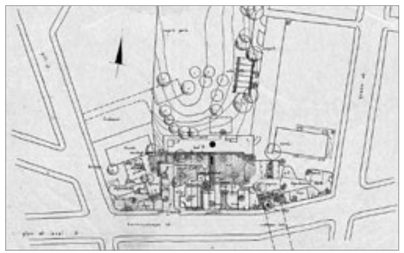

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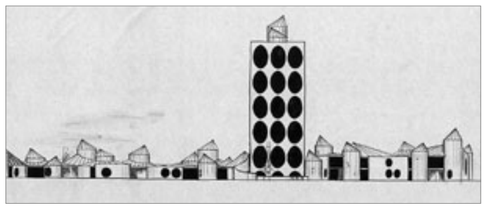
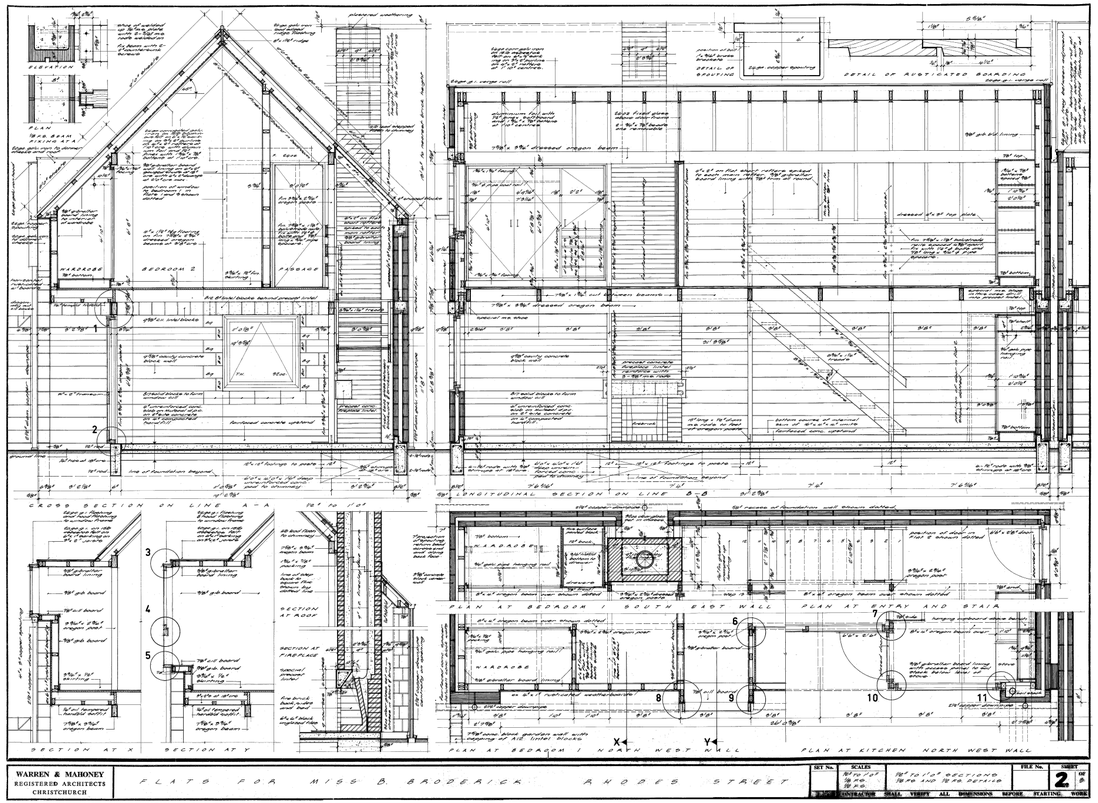


8

Broderick Townhouses

Merivale, Christchurch
Designed by Warren & Mahoney
Designed: 1961–1962
Completed: 1964

During his three months in Warren & Mahoney's Christchurch office, Athfield prepared sketch designs for the Broderick Townhouses, a group of three double-storey units on a flat site in Merivale. Warren & Mahoney's 'Pixie' mode of houses was well established by this time. These houses were generally rectilinear in form, with the overall mass divided into multiple (often three) pavilions according to function. The pavilions were then either off-set or at right angles to each other, with steeply pitched roofs, tightly cropped eaves, abstract square windows, exposed concrete block walling, concrete beams and lintels, and windows and doors terminating at eaves level. Exterior walls were often extended from the building into the landscape to enclose private courtyards and gardens. The concrete and the blocks were generally contrasted internally by exposed timber roof structures (stained dark), timber sarking (clear-finished), and some brickwork and/or clay tiles. The Broderick Townhouses were in this tradition, adapting the language from detached house to two-storey townhouse. The three townhouses were sited in a line, running approximately east–west, with the middle unit off-set to the north to increase the privacy of each townhouse and its associated garden. To reduce the overall height of the building, the side walls at first-floor level were limited to 3 feet, meaning the roof structure shaped the upstairs spaces and windows were located within the triangular gable ends. Athfield is credited with the introduction of some narrow slot-like windows. The townhouses were severely damaged in the February 2011 Christchurch earthquake.



1 The Broderick Townhouses photographed from the street. 2 Part of the scheme drawn in plan and section. PHOTOGRAPH BY MANNERING & DONALDSON. PHOTOGRAPH AND DRAWING COURTESY OF WARREN & MAHONEY.

First Independent Projects

Hopkins Coffee Bar
Levin
Designed by Ian Athfield
Designed: 1962
Built: ca 1963

Adams House
Diamond Harbour, Banks Peninsula
Designed by Ian Athfield
Designed: 1962
Unbuilt

Sparrow Industrial Pictures Building
Parnell Rise, Parnell, Auckland
Designed by Ian Athfield
Designed: 1962
Unbuilt

Kaikohe Methodist Youth Centre Hall
Park Road, Kaikohe, Northland
Designed by Ian Athfield
Designed: 1962
Unbuilt

Four projects from 1962, all for real clients, show Athfield itching to build before he had finished his diploma. They also show him turning his hand to a range of building types and degrees of complexity. The first was a coffee shop in Levin for his aunt, Doreen Hopkins, with white formica table tops, black vinyl seats and a spiral stair to first-floor level. The other three projects, all unbuilt, were larger and more complex. They demonstrate lessons learnt in the Warren & Mahoney office as well as tentative moves to break away from the classical ordering of much of that firm's work. For example, to the established combination of pitched roofs, doors and windows that terminate at eaves level and exterior walls that extend into the landscape, the Adams House design introduces a pyramidal roof and cylindrical bathroom. The Sparrow Building, which Athfield designed for a Parnell neighbour, followed suit, with a large pyramidal roof above a studio space. All remaining parts of this design were rectilinear with flat roofs. The Kaikohe Methodist Church Hall commission resulted from Clare Athfield's Northland contacts. The proposal demonstrates a commitment to giving architectural expression to the different functional parts of the building. In particular, the entry bay is recessed, while the hall proper has zigzag roofing and the associated 'future church', a butterfly roof. The common attribute that underpins these three unbuilt designs is their rational planning: all were well resolved in terms of spatial layout, access, circulation, and provision of natural light and ventilation.

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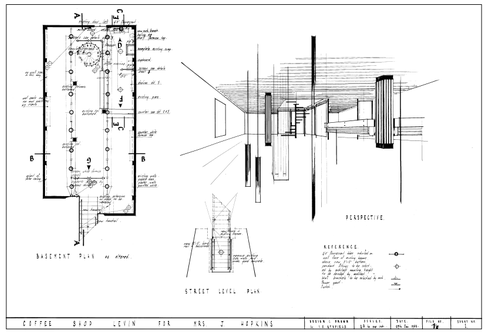

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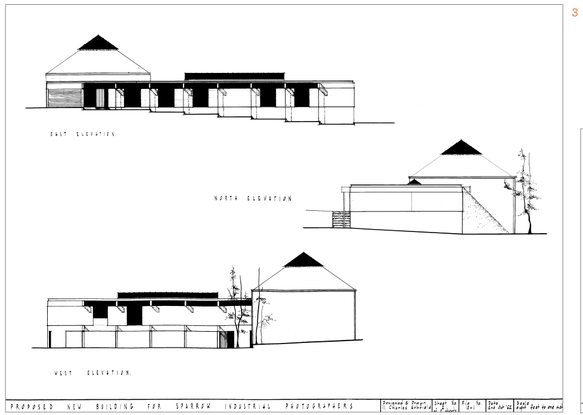

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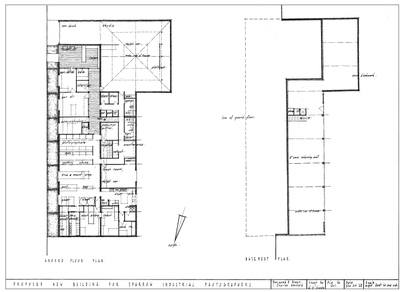

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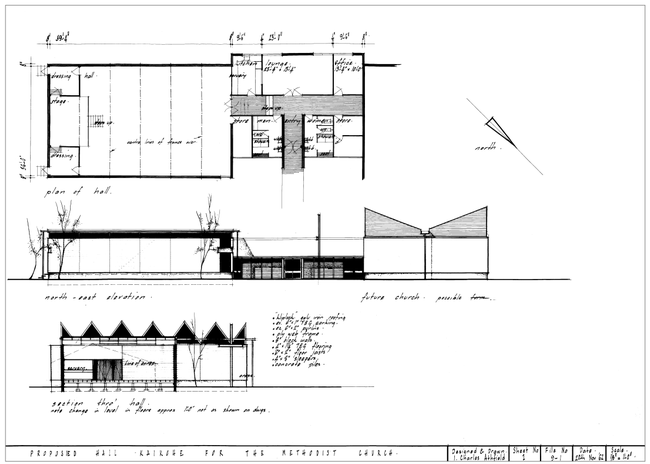

1 The Levin coffee shop that Athfield designed for his aunt. 2 The pyramidal-roofed Adams House. 3, 4 Athfield reused the pyramidal roof form in his proposal for Sparrow Industrial Pictures. 5 The Kaikohe Methodist Church Hall was enlivened by zigzag and butterfly roofs. DRAWINGS BY IAN ATHFIELD, AAL ARCHIVE.

First Merwood House

Levin
Designed by Ian Athfield
Designed: 1964
Built: 1964–1965

Athfield's Merwood House drawings are dated April 1964, confirming that he was committed to producing buildings under his own name, even when he was still quite new to the Structon Group staff. The client, Lindsay Merwood, was a builder and he first met Athfield when he built the fit-out for Doreen Hopkins' Levin coffee shop. Merwood would in time build several early Athfield houses, including two for himself, of which this was the first. It remains in the tradition of the Warren & Mahoney 'Pixie' houses and Athfield's Exton House, while at the same time demonstrating his enthusiasm for experimentation with materials. The house combines three gabled pavilions, all on an axis that sits clockwise of north–south. At the north end, the living pavilion has a veranda on the main north-west façade, while to its south two bedroom pavilions (one for the main bedroom and the other originally containing four children's bedrooms) present their gable ends within this main façade. Utilities extend along the south-east side of the house. Rather than continuing to build in concrete block, with which he now had some experience, Athfield here specified a timber frame, sheathed with 6 x 1 inch boards laid diagonally. These were then pebble-dash plastered, to give the house a uniform rough, textured finish. Doors and windows are all to the same height, although their lintels are not given any architectural expression. Texture is an important attribute internally too. The chimney is pebble-dashed above a brick hearth, and rough-sawn scissor trusses are exposed in the living area, beneath battened Pinex ceilings.

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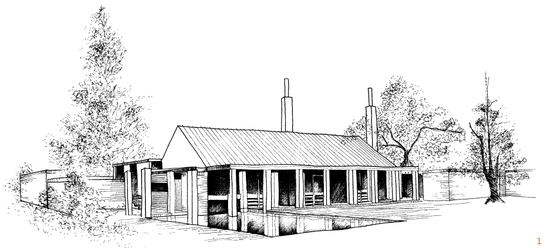
1 The north-west façade of the first Merwood House in 2011, its pebble-dash plaster now pale yellow.
2 Rough-sawn scissor trusses and battened Pinex ceilings are still visible in the living room.
PHOTOGRAPHS BY SIMON DEVITT.

Harland House

St Martins, Christchurch
Designed by Ian Athfield
Designed: 1965
Unbuilt

The Harland House commission came to Athfield through his Christchurch rowing connections: Frank Harland was the Christchurch Boys' High School rowing coach when Athfield attended the school. Although unbuilt, the design is interesting in several ways. First, it is a strictly orthogonal and well-mannered design. Second, it shows further experimentation with building materials, with Athfield now proposing to build in brick, for both the side walls and a series of columns or piers running the length of the house. These brick piers were designed with a cavity in the centre, to be filled with reinforced concrete. The brick was to be fair-faced inside and out, other than the gable ends that were to be pebble-dashed externally. The design has additional interest because it was prepared for a sloping site. Athfield responded to this by splitting the house into two levels along the contour line, with a linear arrangement of den, living room, dining room and kitchen running along the lower portion to face north and, four steps up, a passage providing access to the three bedrooms, the bathroom and the laundry. The planning was rigorous, with the regularly spaced piers setting up a modular system and dictating the placement of interior walls. Above it, the roof trusses were asymmetrical on either side of the ridge, to connect with the flat roof of the bedroom wing and, almost 3 feet below it, the veranda roof projecting to the north on the living side of the house.



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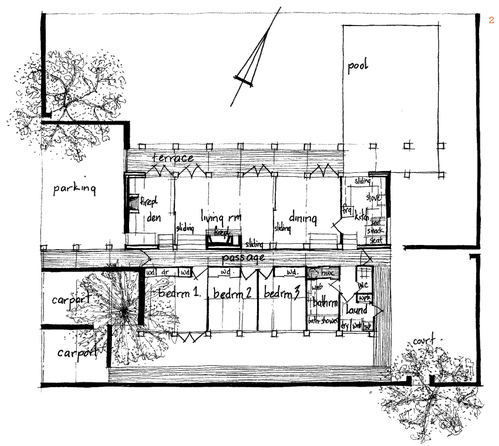

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1 The design was strictly orthogonal, with split levels responding to the sloping site. 2 The floor plan, with living and bedroom wings linked by a passage. DRAWINGS BY IAN ATHFIELD, REDRAWN BY HUI MIN TAN, 2011.

// Athfield House and Office

105 Amritsar Street, Khandallah, Wellington
Designed by Ian Athfield
Designed and built: 1965–present
Awards: NZIA Bronze Medal, 1970; NZIA Silver Medal, 1971; NZIA 25 Year Award, 1996

Athfield acknowledges that his own house and office is probably his most important building. Much of its significance derives from his ongoing interest in creating an alternative to the uniformity and expected norms of detached suburban housing. He never had a fixed end-point in mind for the house. Rather, he imagined that, like a Mediterranean village, it would grow down the Khandallah hillside and accommodate a community rather than a nuclear family. Over the years this has included members of his and Clare's extended family, notably both his parents and her mother as well as grown-up children and grandchildren. It also includes employees and interested others. After more than 45 years, the complex now has some 25 people living in it and 40 working in it. Athfield would like to see it grow to be twice the size and three or four times as complex, to demonstrate his alternative to suburbia more overtly. But even at its current size, it is often described as a village and is an extension of Aldo van Eyck's idea that a house is in fact a small city.

The earliest model suggests a two-storey home with upper-level entry, but from the outset it was more complicated than this, with stairs near the entry leading down into the double-height living space that is flanked by a mezzanine dining room and den, with other openings leading to nooks, crannies and unexpected spaces. The model and associated drawings also show a look-out tower with circular windows. This was built in 1971 and immediately generated the attention Athfield desired. The house earned an NZIA Silver Medal that year and he

1 The Athfield House and Office in the 1990s. PHOTOGRAPH BY GRANT SHEEHAN.