

# Architecture for a New Millennium

by Ed Lippmann

## Roots

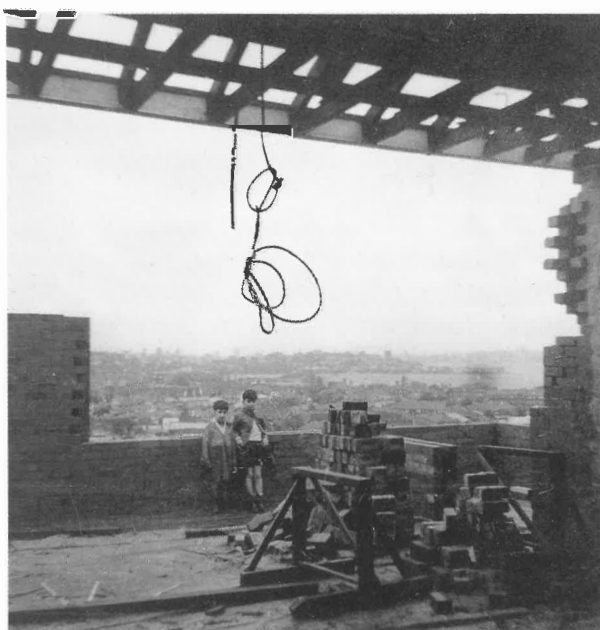
It would have been impossible to grow up in Sydney without being affected by the Sydney Opera House. The design competition for this great building was judged in 1957, the year I was born. I can clearly recall its construction in the 1960's. I toured its incomplete halls and carapace as a seven-year-old. The sight of the shells and auditorium clad in scaffolding was my first profound experience of architecture - of poetry wrought by inert matter. The magnitude of the project, its adventurous sculptural form and its dramatic gesture on a breathtaking site left a lasting impression on me. I was a keen photographer and captured the building on my pocket-sized camera. Not surprisingly, the photographs I snapped were abstract views of sails against a blue Sydney sky.

When I was five, my parents bought a house on a cliff-top site overlooking Sydney Harbour. They embarked on an ambitious remodelling of the house aimed at capitalising on its northern aspect and view over the city and harbour. It took two years to complete. Saturday mornings were often spent visiting the house with my father to inspect the progress. I remember one morning arriving on site with a small wooden toolbox, a birthday present from my parents, to the delight of the builders who welcomed me as one of their own.

My father, Henry Lippmann, was not an architect, but he was a creative man with a keen interest in architecture and building. Born in Berlin in 1921, he was among the last to flee Nazi persecution with a group of fellow engineering students in 1939, only days before the outbreak of World War II. As a refugee in Britain, he was suspected of being a Nazi spy and promptly deported to Australia aboard the infamous HMT Dunera.

In 1940 the Dunera dumped its human cargo at Darling Harbour in Sydney. Two years later, when the political folly of the episode became apparent, the internees were granted freedom and subsequently offered enlistment in the Australian army. As a result of that debacle, my father's formal education was never completed. Nevertheless, his many and varied interests included music, drama and architecture, all of which he later impressed on my older brother and me.

My mother, Julie Yehezkel El-Wakil, came from a large and respected family in Baghdad. She came to Sydney in 1947 to join her older sister and brother. Four other siblings and her parents soon followed. Two more sisters settled in the United States. My mother's family abandoned Iraq in search of a better life in the west. Their departure coincided with the rise of a hostile political regime



My brother and I "on site" at Rose Bay.

in what had been their family's homeland for more than two thousand years.

My father is the sole survivor of a family which had otherwise perished while my mother is part of a large, close-knit clan of remarkable stability. My father's domineering personality is the result of a gruelling plight which separated him, prematurely, from a rich culture. My mother's background in the ancient east led her to value intuition, modesty and reserve. For the sensitive boy that I was, the significant psychological and cultural differences between my parents made for an unusual and sometimes volatile family life.

My mother was a dress and pattern maker who was largely responsible for the success of the family business. Apart from her creative skills, she was the grounding influence of the family and held us together during difficult times. Both parents had a strong sense of family. My mother provided the nurturing while my father's gregariousness was a driving creative influence.

As with many Sydneysiders, we loved the sun and the outdoors. We moved from Woollahra to the new house at Rose Bay and spent our summer weekends at the beach. There were frequent expeditions to the Blue Mountains for hikes and picnics. From the age of 13, Saturdays were often spent sailing on the harbour with school friends. Aided initially by my older brother Michael, I got up to more than my share of adventure.

At the age of 15, my mother took me on a trip to the United States and Europe. My mother's two sisters, their husbands and children lived in New York and we stayed with them. Manhattan was overwhelming. I marvelled at the scale of the place

Below, warehouse at Hill End.

Right, woman in phone booth, Paddington and, below, good friends "acting tough".

and I was stimulated by the rich culture the city offered.

The wealth and variety of galleries and museums was a completely new experience. Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum was simply incredible. I returned to it many times in later years.

Jordan Riak, an uncle whom I met for the first time on this trip, was a photographer. He took me to photography exhibitions in Manhattan, introducing me to the work of Cartier Bresson, Walker Evans, Ansell Adams - and many other great 20th century photographers. With more than a passing interest in photography, I absorbed these influences voraciously.

Upon my return to Australia, I spent hours, and sometimes days, roaming the back streets of inner city Sydney. When I was barely old enough to drive a car, I embarked on trips to industrial country towns armed with camera and tripod. These expeditions were followed by long sessions in the dark-room where I painstakingly printed the images,



trying to capture the right light and tonal quality. The photographs were generally of simple everyday objects or still-life scenes, but always with a strong graphic quality and play of light.

My interest in photography grew to the point that I planned to return to New York in 1974 to study photography at the New School for Social Research.

That was not a career path endorsed by my parents, who considered photography an unstable profession. Besides, I was told, there were insufficient funds available to finance such a venture.

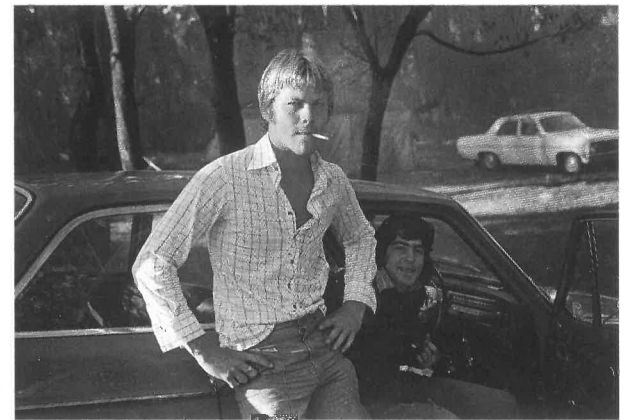
From childhood, I had been a good student. I was selected to attend "opportunity class" in primary



school. In high school I attained a grade enabling me to gain admission to virtually any course of study at university. My scholastic achievements, however, were matched by my rebelliousness.

My inquisitive nature led me to mischief, something I took great pride in.

My peers took up medical, legal or economics studies. I was drawn to the arts.



### Awakening

I took a job in a commercial photography studio when I left school and was responsible for printing large photographic posters for advertising campaigns. However, I soon became disillusioned with my position as it did not provide the creative opportunities I had expected. Instead I resolved to pursue formal studies. I enrolled in an arts degree at Sydney University and after successfully completing first year, transferred to Architecture at the University of New South Wales in 1976.

I drifted through the first three years of study without achieving any notable successes. I was interested in history, construction and design but did not fully understand their connection. At the end of third year, as my colleagues sought professional experience for their "year out" with local architects, I looked further afield.

Another American uncle, Hy Samra, arranged an interview for me with Marcel Breuer's partner and

design collaborator, Herbert Beckhard. I had saved some money from driving taxis while attending university. Those savings complemented a small inheritance that my father gave me on my 21st birthday, and with that modest sum, I set off for New York.

I had learned of the Bauhaus at university but nothing prepared me for my arrival at Marcel Breuer and Associates' Madison Avenue offices on a snowy March morning in 1979. While waiting in the foyer for my interview, I gazed at the photographs and models on display, the impressive accomplishments of this illustrious office. Herbert Beckhard emerged to greet me: "You've finally arrived!"

My commitment was shown by the fact that I was prepared to travel half way round the world for an interview. Beyond that there was my portfolio of student work and photographs which was received with interest. I was thrown into the office, working with a team of 12 architects from

but also examining drawings of other and older projects. Marcel Breuer and Associates was, at that time, run by five partners of which Herbert Beckhard was the senior. Marcel Breuer retired shortly afterwards due to ill health. I may have been a naive 21-year-old, but I considered my unpaid position to be a privilege. I also felt that I had become connected to the historic lineage of modernism.

In 1981, the year after I left New York, Marcel Breuer died. I wrote to Herbert Beckhard expressing my condolences and sense of gratitude for having been a part of that organisation.

My return to Australia in 1980 was necessary for financial and academic reasons, however I found it unsettling and anti-climactic. The loss of my entire portfolio - student and Breuer work - in transit was a devastating conclusion to this trip.

After the effects of that loss subsided, I returned to university with renewed purpose, focusing on design studios, often carrying out two projects

Left, outside the Madison Avenue office.

Below, Phillip Morris plant in North Carolina - Marcel Breuer & Associates.



around the USA and Europe on an industrial project for Philip Morris in North Carolina.

That year was unforgettable. I was initially given the task of making cardboard models of the plant and later moved on to the drawing board. I worked alongside Hazram Zainoeddin, a gifted designer who had been with Breuer for ten years. Equipped with an arsenal of brown pencils and electric sharpener he whipped up the most immaculate renderings and design drawings I had ever seen. He befriended me, often inviting me for a game of tennis or a meal with his Australian wife, Francis. Herb Beckhard too, invited me to spend a weekend with his family at their wonderful house at Glen Cove.

I learned what it meant to be an architect here by sheer osmosis, something that five years of university could not have delivered. I immersed myself in the office environment, carrying out my tasks

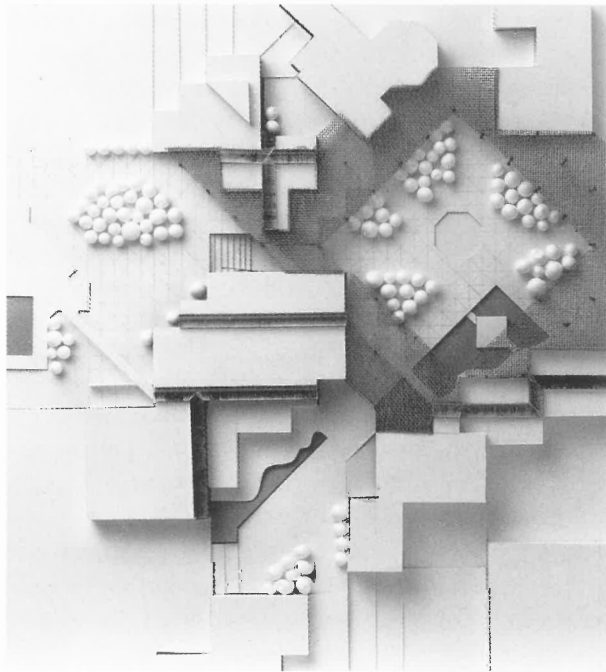
simultaneously. I gradually built up a body of work to replace the lost portfolio.

Post-modernism was at its height at that stage. Mitchell Giurgola had won the Australian Parliament House Design Competition. The "Pleasures of Architecture" conference encouraged a rejection of the staleness of the international style. My colleagues at university were poring over the latest magazines, full of American post-modernism. Having just returned from my own first hand discovery of modernism, I found myself completely out of step with that prevailing sentiment.

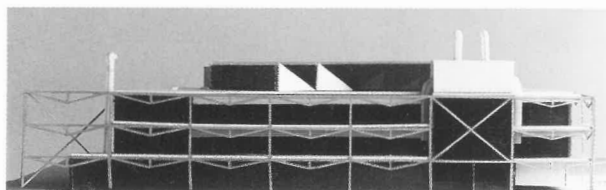
Instead I searched for a contemporary modernism, not a regurgitation of the 1930s or of a high style but the continuity of a principle, for a fresh and relevant reinterpretation.

I found Norman Foster, Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers. It seemed that their work was at the forefront of contemporary architecture, embodying

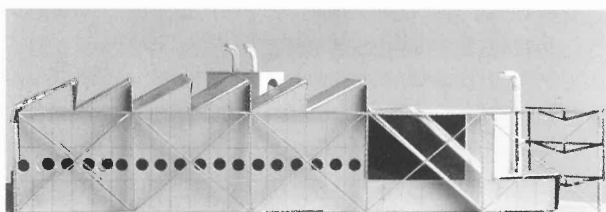
Left, Mount Druitt Town Centre masterplan and Blackwattle Bay shipbuilding school. Right, at work.



integrity and honesty - qualities I had found in the pioneering spirit of early modernism as expressed by Le Corbusier in *Vers une Architecture*. Their work embodied an optimistic, utopian view of the world that distinguished them from the scepticism of the post-modernists. This was tremendously appealing to me.



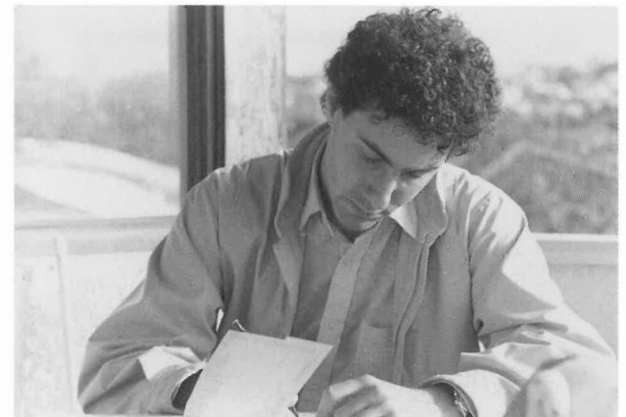
These architects were not as well recognised then, as they later became. I studied all the books and publications I could find on their work, analysing each project in terms of idea, planning, structure and construction. I gained a fresh appreciation of how buildings could be built via a new language of construction and materials - lightweight factory-produced components as distinct from the traditional site-based processes. The marriage of design and technology, fundamental to the Bauhaus ethic, was all there, albeit in a new form. I explained the work as a development of a historical continuum, emanating from the Industrial



Revolution and through modernism - Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, the Futurists, the Bauhaus, Buckminster Fuller and Archigram of the 1960s. The study was submitted to the university as a graduate thesis and was an invaluable vehicle for shaping my approach to design.

My work in the design studio explored rational planning, structural expressionism and constructional clarity. I developed these student designs with Richard Hough, an engineer on staff at the university, who had worked with Foster Associates in Germany. I found immense freedom developing my designs with an engineer capable of finding inventive and practical solutions to construction and technical problems. It was here that I first experienced synchronicity with an engineer. Hough later urged me to go to London on the basis of his recommendation for a job at Foster Associates.

I graduated with honours in 1982 after topping the graduate design studio run by Daryl Jackson,



an eminent Australian architect based in Melbourne. The graduate project was a town centre at Mount Druitt, an outlying western suburb of Sydney. Daryl Jackson encouraged each student to find solutions to their own questions rather than conforming to his personal design philosophy. As a mature student, that teaching approach allowed me the confidence to freely explore my own ideas.

### Getting Started

Towards the end of the studio term, Daryl Jackson was awarded the commission to design the Australian Film and Television School in Sydney. Without an office in this city, he immediately offered me the position as local "anchor man". Before even submitting my final graduation project, I was pulled into the job.

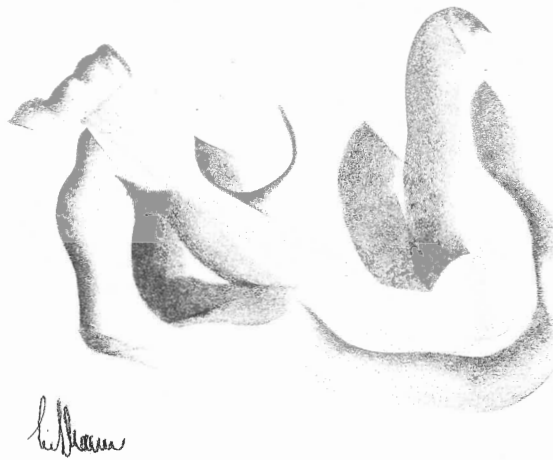
I initially interviewed school staff and students before assisting with the design brief, engaging consultants, co-ordinating design work sent from

Melbourne and attending client meetings. The project was interesting in that it involved complex social and technical relationships. I supplemented my professional role in the office with life drawing classes.

Although at odds with Daryl Jackson's design approach, my position enabled me to learn the logistics of setting up and running an office, establishing a project and working with institutional clients.

I never pursued the Foster option, something I was often to regret. However, I visited Foster Associates in Great Portland Street in 1984. I met Chris Seddon, one of the associates, who invited me to visit the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank under construction in Hong Kong. One floor of the Hong Kong Hilton was permanently reserved for project consultants and guests.

The Hilton was located opposite the site, with the architects' and engineers' offices on the adjacent street corner. I met Graham Phillips and various team leaders who were responsible for the construction packages which the project had been broken into, under the pressure of an extremely tight program. At night from my hotel room window, I watched the welders work around the clock as they assembled the mighty frame amidst



Charcoal life drawings.

the sticks of bamboo scaffolding.

I left Daryl Jackson's office soon after my return to Sydney.

By 1984, a vast amount of building work in Sydney was being commissioned for Australia's Bicentenary celebration and Philip Cox seemed to have grabbed it all. Most of his new projects were large-span steel structures around Darling Harbour or sports stadia being designed with Ove Arup and Partners. Philip Cox's office suddenly swelled uncontrollably and I was offered a position virtually on whatever project I was interested in.

### Independence

Since my time with Daryl Jackson, I had carried out a number of small, private commissions out of office hours. In 1985 I was commissioned to design an addition to a regional shopping centre in Moree, a country town in New South Wales.

On the strength of this project, I went out on my own.

The Balo Square shopping centre project never materialised, because of problems with foreign funding. Some other projects suffered a similar fate and I fell back on more modest residential and retail commissions.

In 1986, a commission to design my first new house - for Arthur and Liz Ouzas - led to a court challenge against the local council, which had refused my building application. Aided by elder spokesman Neville Gruzman, who urged me to "never compromise", the refusal was overruled. This project was the first of 10 challenges that I have brought before the Land and Environment Court to contest local council decisions on aesthetic and planning issues. As many of these residential projects are sited in heritage conservation zones it was inevitable that these projects would raise the ire of the heritage lobby - particularly at a time when historicism was the order of the day.

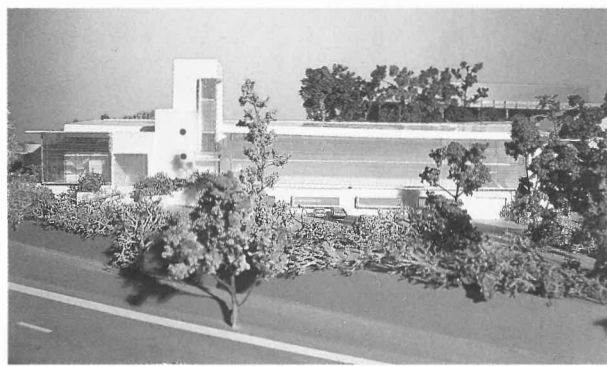


Below, Dee Why Gateway as it should have been and as it is.

Right, British Oxygen Company plant, Bangkok, Thailand.

When BHP, Australia's steel-producing giant, discussed with me the possibility of developing a prototype for project housing, the Ouzas House became the test case.

The idea was to utilise simple repetitive and economical elements that could provide a wide variety of



choice and suitability for varying site conditions. By 1990 commissions began to include larger projects - a nightclub, a warehouse complex and others. In 1991 came the commission to design a gas production plant and corporate headquarters for the British Oxygen Company in Thailand. It was exciting to work with a large corporation in a foreign country but it was frustrating to find myself at the mercy of petty project managers whose personal ambitions proved disastrous. As with the Dee Why Gateway project in 1996, I resigned during construction as a result of changes I had not authorised and which under-



mined the quality of the project.

Nevertheless, many other successful client relationships have been established over the past three years. The City of Sydney, through its City Projects office in particular, have provided the support and patronage that has made a new oeuvre possible.

In 1996 I was commissioned by the City of Sydney to design the King George V Recreation Centre in the Rocks, the oldest part of Sydney. This was an opportunity to build not just in the city but in its sensitive historic birthplace. Controversy sur-

rounded the project initially, but it has proven to be an overwhelming success, much used and loved by local residents and city workers.

In 1998 my office won first place in the design competition for the Andrew "Boy" Charlton Swimming Pool, a coveted public commission on an extraordinary and sensitive harbourside site. This project marks a significant break.

### Travels

Growing up in Australia has been a unique experience. Most of the population on this continent inhabit its coastal rim. Sydney is situated around a spectacular natural harbour on the edge of the Pacific. As a boy, I absorbed this geography daily. The calm harbour waters contrast with sandstone cliffs that form a stunning edge to the ocean. The diverse experiences possible on and around the waterways still intrigue me.

Sydney has its own special light and climate. As a photographer I learned to work with this light. My father's love for the outdoors led me to appreciate this unique climate and topography.

My travels in Australia have been concentrated on the eastern seaboard, a narrow strip of land between the Great Dividing Range and the Pacific Ocean.

I am greatly impressed with the work of Harry Seidler and Glen Murcutt, who have built a great deal around Sydney. Nevertheless, I have gravitated to the source of things, to the first-generation modern masters whose work I initially studied in books and at University.

Since the overseas trip with my mother in 1972, I have embarked on several journeys to discover places of particular interest. Equipped with maps and myriad rolls of photographic film, these pilgrimages have been based on tight itineraries. The trip to Breuer's New York office in 1979 was followed by trips to Europe, the USA and Asia in 1983, 1986 and 1989. I studied Corbusier's work in great detail, visited the Bauhaus in Dessau, the Gropius house in Lincoln, and Mies van der Rohe's pavilions in the USA and Germany.



In 1989, Jenni Boehm and I were married under a fig tree in Sydney's Botanic Gardens. She is the other half of my sky. In 1994 we travelled the world together. It was on this trip that my appreciation for the integration between architecture and landscape reached maturity. A staircase down to the stream at Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater leads the visitor out of the house to the flowing waters and lush green forest beyond. Standing on the landing at the bottom of that stair, I commented to Jenni on how powerful this was - a stair to nowhere! For Jenni however, that stair led everywhere.

The expression of edges and boundaries, seamlessness and continuity is important to me. The distinction or lack of distinction between inside and outside is a condition I seek to master.

Perhaps because I am a city boy, it has taken me a long time to realise how important the connection is between architecture and site. My experience of the Sydney Opera House on the harbour as a seven-year-old held all the lessons I needed.

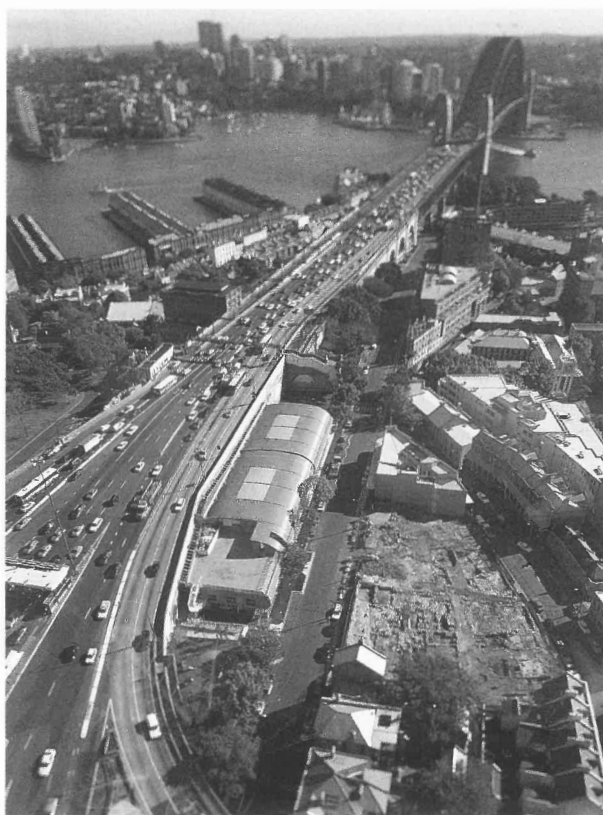
### The road ahead

This monograph charts the past decade's work. During this time there have been significant changes. Although I am still interested in craftsmanship and the way that buildings are made, my interest in urbanity is being extended through an increasing number of public commissions.

At the time of writing, I am building a house for my family, celebrating victory in the Boy Charlton Pool design competition on Sydney Harbour and awaiting funding from Japan for the Toyota project. In addition, a series of houses, apartments and commercial buildings are in progress. The range of work is broadening, which brings with it great creative stimulus. It also brings the need for hard work to maintain the freshness of ideas and quality of execution. As a result of this, the office barely stops.

I am indebted to my loving family who have accepted my frequent absence over these past years. Jenni's support and natural instinct for design has been a real contribution. There are also two delightful children - Ryu our older boy and Eve the younger girl whose zest and creativity is an inspiration. The office consists of a team of highly committed architects and students - my associates and collaborators - who are integral to this work. Together we search for new forms, for an architecture suited to the new millennium. These architects deserve more than my gratitude. I think of them as my other family.

So too, the close liaison with the engineers and



King George V Recreation Centre in its context.

the team of builders and sub-contractors who put the pieces together. That kind of collaboration is crucial to every project.

Good architecture is the result of relationships with clients who offer patronage.

Those who commit themselves to this partnership with confidence and trust are assured of outstanding results. The best projects are evidence of this.

Regular daily practice of transcendental meditation enables me to maintain clarity of mind and the vision which is so important in the work that I am involved in. For me architecture is not a job, not even a career, but my way of life.

There are consistent principles in the projects, although each one may appear different to the next. As every site, program, client, budget and circumstance varies, so too does the solution.

There are no formulas. Innovation and resourcefulness is preferred to repeating good but conventional solutions.

The exploration of quality in architecture through the application of ideas and principles - as opposed to expediency and the hunt for the fast buck - has been fundamental to the process. For every problem there is always a solution one better, if there is the time and the will to find it.

That search has become my journey.

*Ed Lippmann October, 1998*







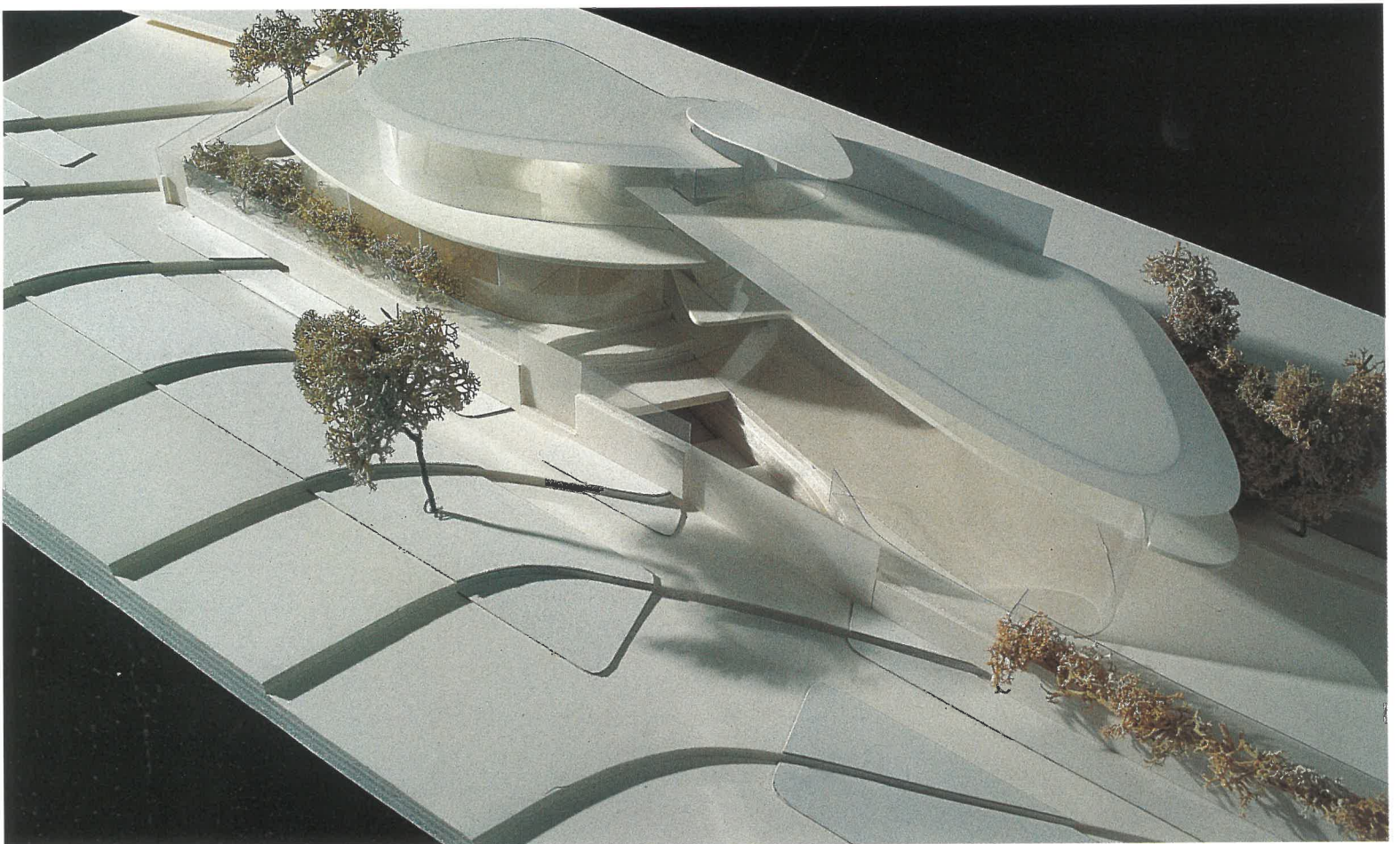
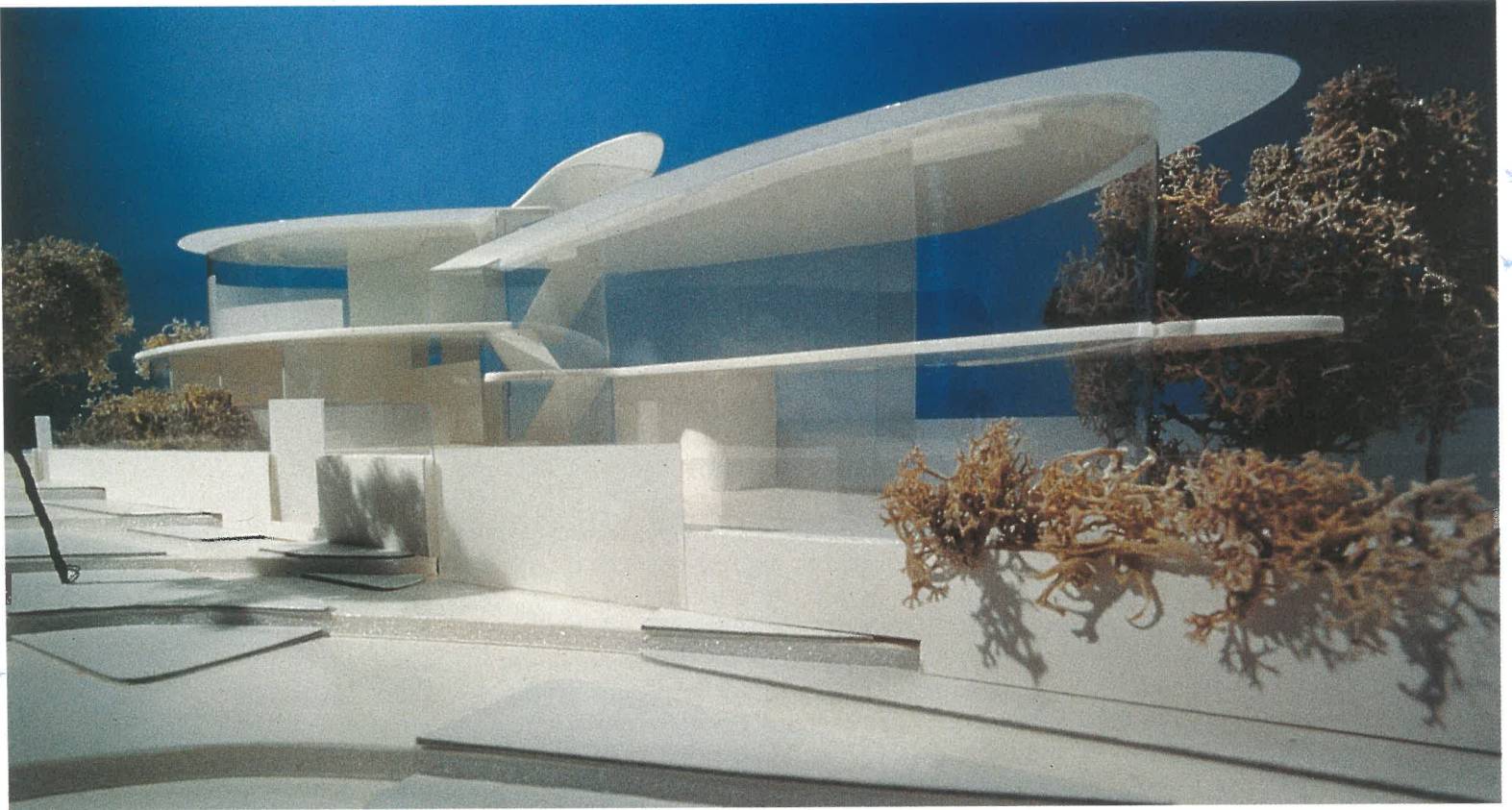


Below, sunroom and kitchen.  
Bottom, open planning - sunroom, dining and sunken living beyond.



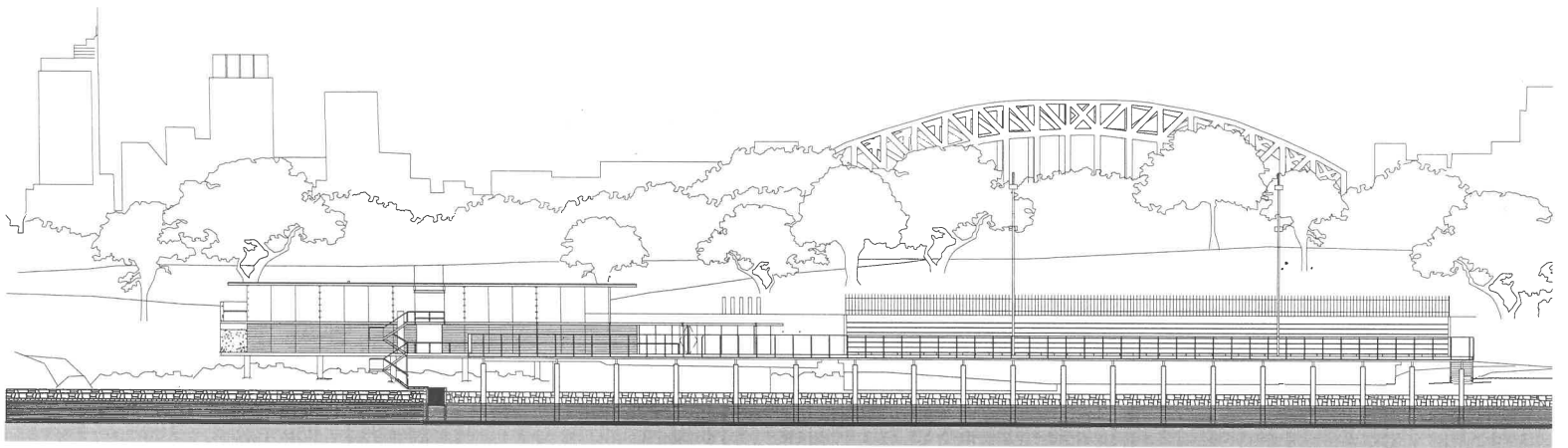
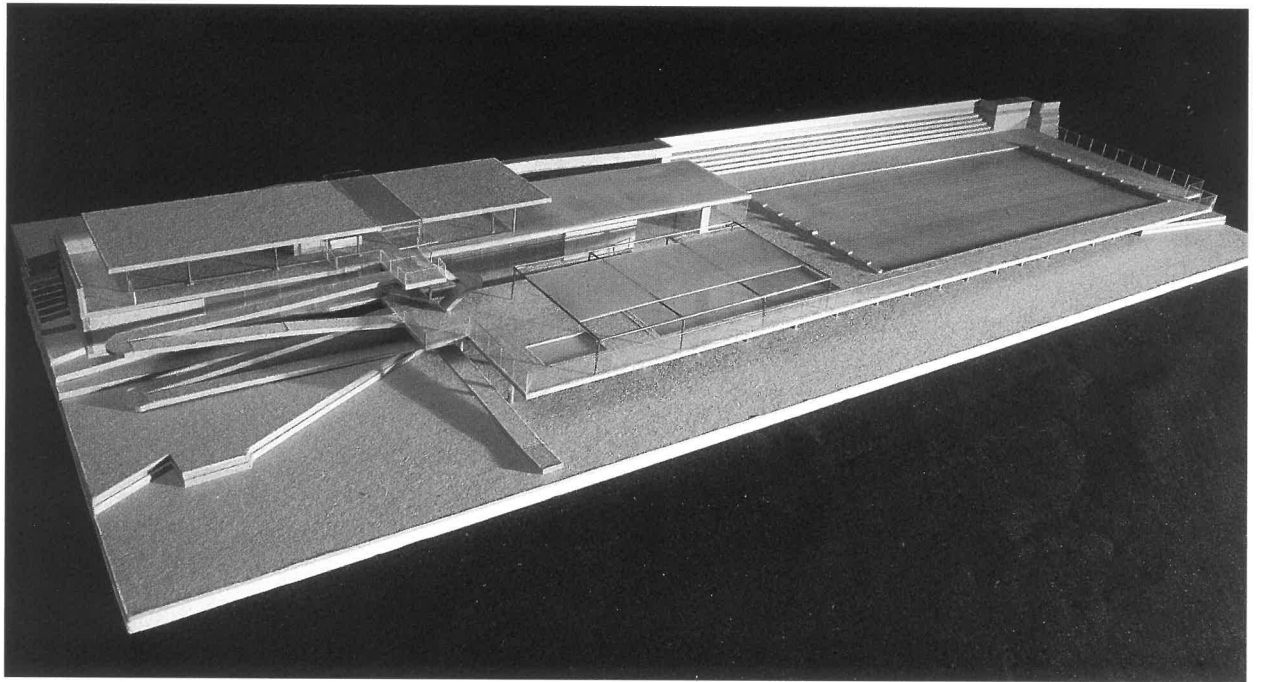


Living areas face  
harbour views to the west,  
bedrooms view the ocean  
to the east view over  
the "butterfly wings".

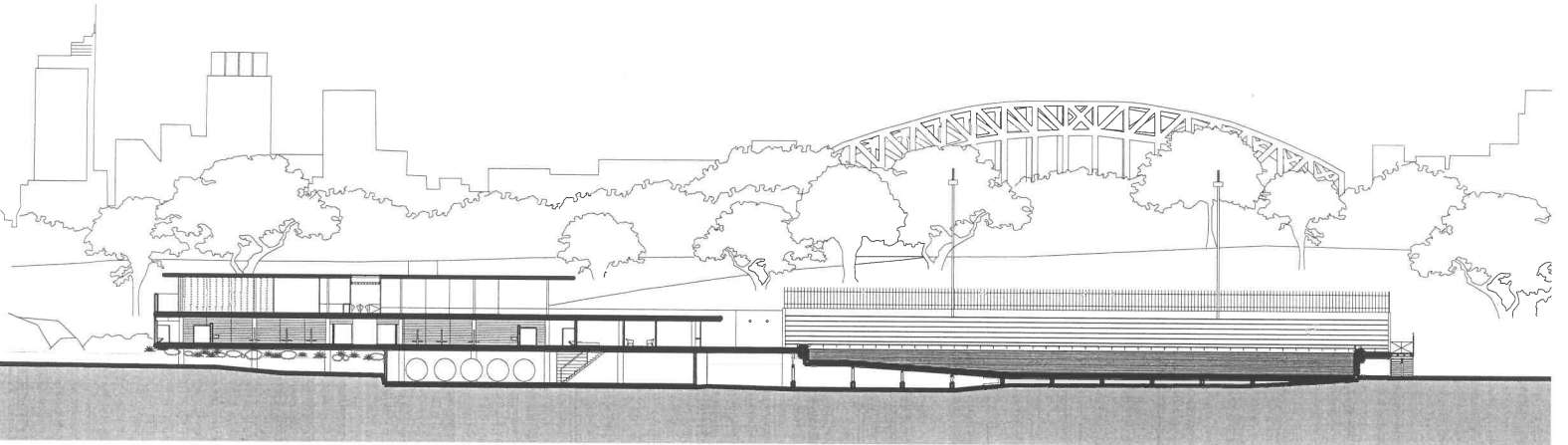


View of multi-level  
showrooms from outside.

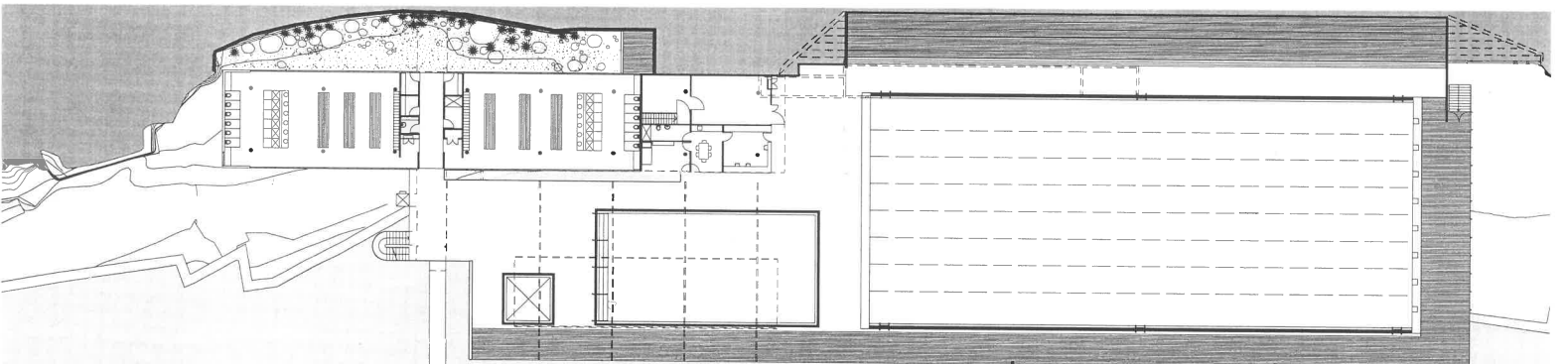




EAST ELEVATION



LONG SECTION



POOL CONCOURSE PLAN

