

INTERVIEW WITH DON WINSEN

DATE 20 JUNE 2013

JG

00:02:27 So, we have to start with a little introduction, so we're here in Sinnamon Park, it's the 20th of June 2013, we're interviewing Don Winsen and interviewing him is Robert Riddel and myself, Janina Gosseye.

RR

00:02:35 Well, we've got a series of questions so we'll start with the first one, what architecture qualifications did you gain and from which institution?

DW

00:02:51 I was stunned to find at the end of my first three years that I was awarded a Certificate in Architecture which had absolutely no value whatever, it wasn't recognised by the Architect's Registration Board and it was, in effect, a Draftsmen's Certificate.

RR

00:03:29 But, it was only half way through the course.

DW

00:03:31 This was only half way through the course.

JG

00:03:32 And that was with the University of Queensland?

DW

00:03:34 That was Central Technical College and I fought practically to the end of my fourth year, where I insisted on attending all the lectures, even though they wouldn't accept fees from me because I wasn't enrolled, because I knew with my dogged persistence that by digging my heels in I'd get my way in time. And, I did.

RR

00:04:06 So, what did you get?

DW

00:04:08 Well, I ended up completing the six years and got a Diploma in Architecture from the University of Queensland.

RR

00:04:20 And, what year was that?

DW

00:04:25 That was 1952.

RR

00:04:27 Right. And, the people who you were with, that were in that same year, do you remember any of those?

DW

00:04:39 There were two I remember, there was Harold Paulsen and Bruce Knowland. And, his father was the director of the Queensland Housing Commission at that time. Also, a registered architect.

RR

00:05:13 So, which teachers in architecture did you study under?

DW

00:05:19 Athol Bretnall was my favourite lecturer in the early years. In fact, Athol used to drive me home after lectures in his funny old timber and canvas brake wagon, and we would sit outside my house for an hour, talking architecture.

RR

00:05:46 Really. Did he live near you?

DW

00:05:47 Yes. I lived at Albion Heights and he lived about a kilometre away out at Ascot, near the Ascot School.

JG

00:05:58 How come you decided to study architecture, what interested you in studying architecture? Why did you decide to study it?

DW

00:06:10 I became interested in architecture before I knew there was such a thing. When I did my scholarship year at Milton School, we did trade drawing and one of our

homework lessons was always to draw a building that had been either published as a sketch or a building you fancied from photographs from the Courier Mail.

RR

00:06:55 And, you were good at that?

DW

00:07:00 I was good at copying. I remarkably had a brain gap between my brain and my hand. The only way, when I was in private practice, that I could draw freely, without hesitation, was if I was sitting one side of the other side of the interview table, the client was sitting the other side, and I had to explain something to him and I would draw it for him, upside down, facing him.

JG

00:07:33 But, there were no architects or builders in your family before that? There were no architects or builders in your family that you spoke to or, you just - - -

DW

00:07:43 No. My father was a taxi driver, because where he ended up during the depression, he wasn't destined to be a dispensing chemist and he had to give up his studies to work as a nightwatchman at the Yellow Cab company.

RR

00:08:19 So, what do you remember about the course that you did?

DW

00:08:24 What do I remember about the course? I remember how thoroughly I enjoyed those six years and how I could not get enough of reading about architecture.

RR

00:08:41 So, you thought the course – you were quite happy with what you learned there?

DW

00:08:45 Yes. I ended up, after the end of six years, of getting 23 honours or credits and one conceded pass and that conceded pass was for structural mechanics, under Jack McWilliam, and he said, "Mr Winsen, you are a very clever and plotting man, you did enough calculations on every one of the questions to demonstrate that you understood what the questions meant to me and to you, but, your calculation rate was too slow to ever reach the termination."

JG

00:09:44 Do you remember any of the other teachers? You mentioned Athol Bretnall.

DW

00:09:48 Athol Bretnall, Colin Jessup taught us sketching, then Bruce Lucas came – Bruce Lucas came in when we changed over from the third year from it being called Central Technical College to Queensland Institute of Technology. And, Bruce was head of - Charlie Fulton was head of school at tech, Percy Cummings was Professor at George Street, it was George Street until the end of my course, already the full time students intake had begun and people like Jack Parkinson, Lou Hailey and so forth began the Bachelor of Architecture course then.

RR

00:11:16 So, how many were in your year when you finished?

DW

00:11:24 Ten.

RR

00:11:26 Ten? Do you remember any others?

DW

00:11:29 Any of the students? No, they were all a very pedestrian lot.

JG

00:11:43 Were there any women?

DW

00:11:45 No.

JG

00:11:45 All men?

DW

00:11:46 Yes. John Hitch, I admired John Hitch's teaching abilities, in fact towards the end of fifth year, Hitch was working at the Department of Works, Theo Thynne had been after he was demobilised from the Navy and he and Hitch teamed up and became Thynne and Hitch and I got a job with them.

RR

00:12:25 Your first job?

DW

00:12:27 No. My first job, after the City Architects Office during the war, was the Architect Group, which was a group of five architects which were Percy Cummings, Bruce Lucas, Colin Trapp, Ronald Voller and Heinz Jacobson, who had studied at the Bauhaus School before the pope was driven out by the Nazis.

00:13:16 And, he migrated first to Western Australia and then to Queensland.

RR

00:13:25 So, that group practiced from where?

DW

00:13:30 From a building called, it was a banking investment building near where the Myer Centre is now.

RR

00:13:48 In Queen Street?

DW

00:13:49 In Queen Street.

RR

00:13:50 So, that was your first job?

DW

00:13:54 That was my first job after the City Architect.

RR

00:13:59 And, then after that?

DW

00:14:04 Frank Cullen, for which I was head hunted by Robin Gibson, who worked there at the time. George Henderson, who ended up as Harry Seidler's right hand man in Sydney. Then Thynne and Hitch, which became Theo Thynne and Associates, me being the associate, and then when I became overburdened, I brought Robin in who was still a student, he had still a few years to go.

00:14:53 Then John Dalton, Ian Charlton, Neville Miller, the Governor General's husband Michael Bryce, who ended up becoming a graphics designer, the best one in Australia until Jen Marchant turned up on the scene, here in - - -

RR

00:15:23 In your backyard.

DW

00:15:24 In my backyard. How did you know that?

RR

00:15:29 I know Jen very well.

DW

00:15:32 Do you?

RR

00:15:33 Yes.

DW

00:15:35 Sweet, sweet girl and she and Sally are still the best of mates. They were born one day apart.

RR

00:15:45 So, who were the architects you most admired when you were a student?

DW

00:15:51 Harry Seidler, who had just turned up in Australia and the only building I knew of his then was Rose Schneider's house, his mother's house, Meldrum and George did one or two in – oh, Robin – the artistic family.

RR

00:16:32 Boyd.

DW

00:16:33 Boyds, Robin Boyd and overseas, most of the Bauhaus men who migrated to the United States, particularly Mies who was everyone's God, the Brazilian man - - -

RR

00:17:10 Oscar Niemeyer?

DW

00:17:10 Oscar Niemeyer.

JG

00:17:19 How did you now about Mies van der Rohe and Niemeyer, were they taught when you studied, had you seen their work?

DW

00:17:28 I saw to it that Theo Thynne always subscribed to the best architectural magazines. The Architectural Review from England, the Architectural Record from the United States and Domus from Italy. And, the unpronounceable French one, L'architecture d'aujourd'hui.

JG

00:17:59 And, Athol Bretnall, who was the one teaching history at CTC, was Athol Bretnall the one teaching architectural history and did he ever show any international examples during his course? OR, was it local architecture that he was showing? What was he

DW

00:18:15 No, it was all based on Bannister Fletcher.

RR

00:18:21 Which is the same as it was for me.

DW

00:18:25 The bible. And, by sheer good fortune, friends of my parents had just returned from an overseas trip and he was a camera freak, and, I was able to illustrate all my architectural history notes with his photographs of the buildings I was speaking of. So, of course that got me and honours.

RR

00:18:57 So, did you do any other study after you finished the course, did you - - -

DW

00:19:02 No, I could only afford to travel or to marry, so I chose to marry.

RR

00:19:12 Very sensible.

DW

00:19:13 After two years of trying to produce children, we had no success, and I said to Pam, "Let's learn Italian, I want to go and live in Italy and work for Gio Ponti."

RR

00:19:32 And?

DW

00:19:34 She fell pregnant instantly. The hot Latino blood.

RR

00:19:46 Gio Ponti once came to Brisbane for a student conference in 1967.

DW

00:19:53 I didn't go to it. No, I was very busy with my own architectural practice then.

RR

00:20:08 So, turning to your architectural career, when and where did you start practicing as an architect?

DW

00:20:14 Macarthur Chambers, which was then called the AMP Building, for a very short term, then I moved to a little wooden structure on Wickham Terrace which, by sheer good fortune, was in the basement had one of the best restaurants in Brisbane, Chez Tessa, and that's where I used to by my lunch every day, spaghetti and meat balls.

RR

00:20:55 So, what year did you start this, at Macarthur Chambers?

DW

00:21:00 Sixty-one.

RR

00:21:03 Sixty-one, and then you moved to Wickham Terrace.

DW

00:21:05 In '63. Then Jack McWilliams put an extra floor on their building in Fortescue Street, Spring Hill and Nutter and Charlton moved from their tiny office in Lower Edward Street, I moved from Wickham Terrace and we occupied all of the top floor of McWilliams' building.

00:21:58 I had the most magnificent view that you could have from any office building. When I was very, very busy in summertime, I would rise before the sun, I would drive the ten minutes into my office, pen my office door as the sun came up over Moreton Island.

00:22:21 That was at quarter past four.

RR

00:22:23 So, you were an earlier riser?

DW

00:22:26 I have always been an early riser, I still am now, drives the people here mad. I'm even worse since I've had my three strokes.

RR

00:22:40 So, how long did you work in that office?

DW

00:22:44 I worked in that office until 1975 when the bottom fell out of the building industry and I ran into Don Williamson, of Conrad and Gargett in my lunch hour and told him my woes. He went back to Peter Gargett and Peter Gargett said, "Don't lose him, grab him right now."

RR

00:23:34 Good.

DW

00:23:38 And, I went from there, they allowed me six months working from their office to wind up my own practice and then I got to work seriously for them.

RR

00:24:04 So, when you were in that practice, were you on your own, with Ian McWilliams.

DW

00:24:11 Yes. I was what I called a restoration architect.

RR

00:24:23 Which was a fairly rare animal, I would have thought, in those days.

DW

00:24:28 It was the nickname of Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, I think it was, in England. Not because he did restoration but because it was the restoration period when he began his practice.

RR

00:24:48 Did you ever travel to England?

DW

00:24:50 No, I couldn't.

RR

00:24:53 Did you ever leave Australia?

DW

00:24:55 Yes.

RR

00:24:56 Where did you go?

DW

00:24:57 In 1988 my firm sent me on a study tour because I had two huge resort designs on my plate, this was while I was working at restoring part of my house. One at Magnetic Island and one at Airlie Beach.

00:25:37 So, I went to California, Texas, South Carolina, Florida, then across to Yuketen where there was an iconic Mexican architect working who built international hotels, worldwide, based on Mayan temples in their rich red, gold and blue colours.

RR

00:26:24 So, did the resorts you were working on at the time, did they reflect anything that you'd seen?

DW

00:26:32 They came to naught.

RR

00:26:34 They didn't happen? But, you designed them?

DW

00:26:37 I designed them, yes.

RR

00:26:38 And, did you design them in a way that you had – based on what you had seen?

DW

00:26:46 Mostly I designed them, we called into Hawaii for three days on our return trip to Australia and I designed them on the Mauna Loa Hotel and the – what was Christopher Skase's - - -

RR

00:27:16 Mirage. He called it Mirage.

DW

00:27:20 Mirage Five. Mirage Five.

JG

00:27:24 Do you remember the early projects that you worked on when you started your practice? Which projects did you have when you started your practice? Do you remember any of those? Smaller residential - - -

DW

00:27:43 I – because I was a one man band I didn't get large jobs. And, I very quickly tired of having to take orders from the rich bitches whose husbands could afford the sort of houses their wives wanted.

RR

00:28:02 But, did you design a house that you're proud of at that period?

DW

00:28:06 Several.

RR

00:28:07 Where are they?

DW

00:28:10 I've forgotten, I've forgotten the client's names, as you will see there, I was a very naughty boy. When I closed my practice and took all my files home, they were getting in my way and I dumped them.

00:28:27 I had never heard of the Fisher Library and when the Fisher Library heard of me and what I had done, they phoned me and, boy, did they roast me.

RR

00:28:38 Is this the Fisher Library in Sydney, or the John Oxley Library here?

DW

00:28:42 No, the Fisher Library.

JG

00:28:42 The Fryer Library.

DW

00:28:44 The Fisher Library at Queensland University.

RR

00:28:46 It's the Fryer Library.

DW

00:28:47 Fryer Library. Sorry, Fryer Library.

RR

00:28:53 Yes.

DW

00:28:55 I had a lot to do with the John Oxley library here, later of course, when I was researching for the government buildings in George Street. With, Bruce Buchanan assisting me.

RR

00:29:07 And, that was at Conrad and Gargett?

DW

00:29:09 Yes.

RR

00:29:09 Yeah. So, Bruce worked with you there?

DW

00:29:11 Yes. He was our historian consultant and he did all the pedestrian work like scrapings for walls to discover colour schemes and that sort of thing.

RR

00:29:26 But, he was working from his own practice in Ipswich.

DW

00:29:27 From his own practice in Ipswich, yeah.

RR

00:29:33 So, the work that you did when you were in Wickham Terrace, for instance, do you remember any of those projects?

DW

00:29:44 No.

RR

00:29:46 They were all houses do you think?

DW

00:29:48 All houses and my practiced was buoyed by a large amount of valuation services to, what were called, building societies in those days, of valuing the houses for loan purposes.

RR

00:30:19 So, when you said that you were known as a restoration architect, I think that was the term you used, what projects did you do that would come under that category?

DW

00:30:31 Number one, most remarkable, it was the last surviving wooden framed sanitary cart in existence in Queensland. I was – everybody else in the City Architect's office of course turned it down, because you had to go to Sandgate Sanitary Depot to do it. And, I thoroughly enjoyed doing that measured drawing.

RR

00:31:03 Does it still exist, that drawing?

DW

00:31:05 I've no idea.

RR

00:31:07 So, this was a motorised vehicle or a horse drawn?

DW

00:31:10 No, it was a horse drawn vehicle, two horse drawn vehicle, but the council didn't do their homework properly, they found that all coach builders in Australia had been conscripted by the army to build troop carrier mountages for the backs of international trucks.

RR

00:31:54 So, you couldn't get anyone to do the work?

DW

00:31:57 Couldn't find anyone who could do the work.

JG

00:32:02 In those early days when you were practicing, who were the other architects that were practicing in Queensland at the time that you thought were doing good work? Was James Birrell around, who was around at the time, were Hayes and Scott?

DW

00:32:21 I didn't really start enjoying the people I was working with until I enlisted Robin Gibson and John Dalton for Theo Thynne and Associates.

RR

00:32:48 And, what were you actually doing there, what projects were happening?

DW

00:32:53 That was the time when all those service stations around Brisbane were being constructed for the American petrol companies.

JG

00:33:03 Were those the Amoco service stations?

DW

00:33:07 Amoco, yeah, Amoco, Phillips.

RR

00:33:07 Sixty-six. Phillips 66 they used to call it.

DW

00:33:09 Yeah, Phillips 66. It had a pointy awning, sloping up fast like that, and, on one particular site you'd face two major roads, so I put two of these on – and that really woke up people to what you can do if you've got imagination.

RR

00:33:29 Do you remember where that was?

DW

00:33:31 Yes, that was at Rocklea.

RR

00:33:35 On the corner of Ipswich Road and - - -

DW

00:33:37 No, it's now on a side street at an underpass, under the Ipswich Motorway, not far from the Rocklea waterhole notorious underpass that floods.

RR

00:34:00 Yes. And, it still exists does it, that service station?

DW

00:34:06 Yes, but I don't think it's any longer used as a service station.

RR

00:34:15 So, with those people who worked at Theo Thynne, they all left there and started their own practices, did you ever think of practicing with any of them?

DW

00:34:30 Yes, Robin Gibson and I had already decided we were going into practice together and I went home and told Pam. Robin and I lived opposite each other at Yeronga on the river and Robin's wife, Twink and Pam were the best of mates and when I told Pam she burst into tears and said, "Twink has told me how she and the children never see Robin, I don't want our family to grow up like that. Please rethink." And, I did.

00:35:12 So, instead of being wealthy, like Robin, I'm a pauper.

JG

00:35:15 Around what period was it when you thought about starting a business with Robin Gibson, around what time was that?

RR

00:35:21 Which year?

DW

00:35:22 That was early 1960 and by the end of 1960 I went to Theo Thynne and said, "Theo I'm giving you fair notice of three months that I will be quitting at Christmas time and starting up my own practice. Give you plenty of time to look around for a replacement for me."

RR

00:35:59 So, the work that Theo Thynne was doing, what was it?

DW

00:36:06 Mixed bag. A mixed bag and none of it big.

RR

00:36:10 Any of it good?

DW

00:36:14 I believe there were a lot of little gems in it. Some of the flat level service station were almost Mesian.

RR

00:36:24 I can remember a little building in River Terrace that he'd done for a dentist, it was just beside the South Brisbane library, remember that one?

DW

00:36:43 No.

RR

00:36:45 Okay.

DW

00:36:41 The only buildings I can remember in South Brisbane were Butterworths fishing rod factory, which was rather Stirling and Gowan and two buildings – well the Queensland Fish Board, one was their huge snap freezing plant for exporting prawns to the United States and the other one was the staff facilities building.

00:37:36 They again were Stirling and Gowan type buildings. I lost all three of those to Expo 88.

RR

00:37:52 So, they were all on that - - -

DW

00:37:54 I used to say it's not many architects who see their buildings torn down before they drop dead.

RR

00:38:03 Well, they didn't envisage Expo 88 coming in. There was a very nice drive in bank there too that someone had done, a circular bank on Southbank.

DW

00:38:15 Yeah. I remember that bank being there. I'm just trying to think who that was. I think that might have been Eddie Codd. I think it might have been Eddie Codd.

RR

00:38:27 So, what do you think was the best project that you did?

DW

00:38:30 The best project that I did came very, very much later, and it is my daughter's house in Toowoomba right on the edge of the escarpment at Prince Henry Heights overlooking the valley below, all the way out to the Minden Range, and the roof forms were based on the [OG forms 00:39:00] of the low setting sun hitting the farmland down below.

RR

00:39:08 And, what date would that have been built?

DW

00:39:11 What date would that have been built darling?

??

00:39:15 I don't know dad. It's recent, it's probably 14 years.

DW

00:39:17 About 1990.

RR

00:39:22 So, it's still there and unchanged.

??

00:39:25 I reckon our house was pretty good dad.

DW

00:39:28 Yeah.

RR

00:39:27 You built your own house.

DW

00:39:32 In five stages.

RR

00:39:33 Five stages, yeah.

JG

00:39:36 When was the first stage?

DW

00:39:39 Nineteen fifty-six.

JG

00:39:45 And, where was that?

DW

00:39:47 Rome Street South, Yeronga. A one bedroom house and as the children appeared, one more bedroom would appear, until it ended up, mainly one large level containing all the living areas, Sally and her older sister Jane had their own pad downstairs, with ensuite, and Roger and Alice had extra rooms upstairs.

RR

00:40:40 And, Robin Gibson built a house at the same time?

DW

00:40:47 Yes. Robin built it after he returned from overseas to discover that the land he intended buying and building on, Don Winsen had got it in his absence. He didn't say that he intended building on it, he just what a beautiful block of land it was and it came on the market while he was away and I thought, Robin's going to miss out but I'm going to make sure I don't.

00:41:32 So, he bought a tennis court on the opposite side of the little street right on the river, where I'm one block back from the river.

RR

00:41:40 Your much higher.

DW

00:41:40 Mine's very, very steep.

RR

00:41:43 Did his flood?

DW

00:41:46 The bottom floor flooded 300millimetres in the '74 flood, but, I had already taken out anything perishable from the floor, except I'd taken the wardrobe doors out and taken up the carpet. The only thing I had to replace was the timber wardrobe floors.

??

00:42:09 But, the Gibson's house didn't flood dad in 1974, the Gibson's house didn't flood.

DW

00:42:16 No, it was high enough not to.

RR

00:42:21 So, there was Stuart Macintosh lived in that street too?

DW

00:42:24 Yes.

RR

00:42:24 Did you know him?

DW

00:42:26 Yeah. Just above Robin.

RR

00:42:33 And, what do you know of him?

DW

00:42:37 Very little, because he had nothing to do with anyone. He was very introverted.

RR

00:42:46 I think worked at Toowong, did he not? He worked at Toowong?

DW

00:42:50 I don't know.

RR

00:42:51 I mean, all I know about him is that he won the competition for Main Hall.

DW

00:42:57 Yes.

RR

00:42:58 Which Robin finally built.

DW

00:42:59 Then he couldn't make is operable walls operate and they fired him and hired Robin who was the second premeated designer.

RR

00:43:14 So, how did they get on after that happened?

DW

00:43:16 Badly.

RR

00:43:17 And, they were neighbours, interesting. Do you remember when that competition would have been?

DW

00:43:29 I can't put a date on it I'm sorry. Your university records would have a lot - - -

RR

00:43:32 Yes. They will have that.

DW

00:43:37 The Great Hall.

RR

00:43:38 The Great Hall. Did you work with any colleagues that you consider that are significant architects?

DW

00:43:54 Yes. Robin Gibson, John Dalton, Gabriel Poole. I had a lot to do with Gabriel Poole after he set up his practice in, initially Alexandra Headlands and then in Noosa. Because, he used my office in Brisbane as his depot to interview and be briefed by his clients.

00:44:50 And, I enjoyed doing a hell of a lot of working drawings for him, for which he was very grateful, I ironed the bugs out of them. Because the way he designed them they'd have leaked like sieves.

JG

00:45:21 Do you remember which projects they were that you did the working drawings for?

DW

00:45:29 There was one at Tamborine Mountain, I think the rest of them were on the Sunshine Coast somewhere or other.

RR

00:45:41 So, that was the office that was in Fortescue Street, that he shared?

DW

00:45:46 Yeah. I had a big office there, I really rattled around in. I sort of figured, you know, I ought to allow to have three or four draftsmen. I had one for a while.

RR

00:46:00 Who was that?

DW

00:46:03 Arthur Athanasiou who disappeared from architecture and I have no idea where he ended up.

RR

00:46:10 But he'd studied in Brisbane?

DW

00:46:13 No, I think he was only interested in being a draftsman.

RR

00:46:20 So, which buildings, built in Queensland, in this period after the war, 1945 to 1975, in that period which buildings do you like or think were important?

DW

00:46:40 I'll need my notes.

??

00:46:46 I don't think you touched on that dad, I think you touched on more historical buildings. Yeah. So, you've looked at history here in your notes.

RR

00:47:04 I mean there were buildings like Torbreck and there were building like - - -

DW

00:47:11 Torbreck, Theo Thynne would not allow Robin and I to do that in the office under his name, and he referred it to Job and Fraud, because he did not trust a one armed country fencer to be a good client, using his grandmother's land at Highgate Hill.

RR

00:47:37 So, the person you're talking about is Kratzmann, the person you're talking about is who, the one armed - - -

DW

00:47:44 Rowley Pinn.

RR

00:47:44 Rowley Pinn.

DW

00:47:45 Was his name.

RR

00:47:47 So, he was the developer?

DW

00:47:49 He was the developer.

RR

00:47:51 And, I mean, other buildings of that period.

DW

00:47:53 I've been trying for weeks to think of Rowley Pinn's name. The moment you asked that question it just rolled off my tongue.

RR

00:48:01 Well, that's something.

JG

00:48:04 And, what did you think about the buildings that were being built at St Lucia, the university, what do you think about – where there any buildings that you like on the campus at St Lucia?

RR

00:48:22 Because, Birrell was doing things there.

DW

00:48:28 Yes. Jim Birrell's Union College.

RR

00:48:44 And, Steve Trotter was doing buildings there too.

DW

00:48:47 Steve Trotter was doing building there. I was less impressed with them, I was never very impressed with any Steve Trotter buildings. This is one of them, it convinces me even me.

RR

00:49:01 So, Bligh Jessup were doing some work there too, Bligh Jessup Bretnall.

DW

00:49:06 Probably. Yes, they were doing work there. Yeah, practically everyone did some work there.

RR

00:49:18 But, which do you think were the good ones?

DW

00:49:21 Not many.

JG

00:49:22 The library.

RR

00:49:24 Robin Gibson.

DW

00:49:26 Who did the library? Robin, yes.

RR

00:49:28 He did Main Hall and the library, either side of the tower.

DW

00:49:32 Yeah. That's right. That's right. Yeah.

RR

00:49:36 And, I heard there was a third building proposed that was going right in front of the tower but it didn't happen.

DW

00:49:40 Yes. And, everybody considered that that front lawn was sacrosanct.

RR

00:49:51 I think they were right, do you?

DW

00:49:53 Yes. I think they were right.

RR

00:49:52 And, there was another building proposed to go in the Great Court, which was inside.

DW

00:50:05 That would have been another travesty. Unless it had been a tower building on [00:50:20] and the tower building is not very successful for students, because, moving students around vertically is too difficult.

RR

00:50:38 Well, there was a lift as part of architecture when it was in the tower and a lot of things happened to that lift.

DW

00:50:49 Stairs and escalators are the only way to move students.

??

00:50:56 Dad, what do you think of the refectory out at UQ?

DW

00:51:02 Now who – the refectory, a pleasant little outdoor space. The staff club, who did the staff club?

??

00:51:14 Birrell.

DW

00:51:15 Birrell, that's right. I thought enough of the staff club that I had my eldest daughter's reception there because they were married in St John's Chapel, just down the road.

JG

00:51:34 You said that you admired John Hitch. Are there any projects of his that you think are particularly good? He was at the Works Department.

RR

00:51:52 John Hitch. Did you remember any work by him that you liked?

DW

00:52:02 Yes, they were mostly outback homesteads. I did a number of outback homesteads that I rather admired too. Did one for Earl Loughnan out at Dirranbandi way.

RR

00:52:28 When would you have done that?

DW

00:52:30 In the mid '50s. It was a big hollow square with the odd projections for all membrane rooves to be attached here and there.

RR

00:52:50 And, what sort of farm was there. I mean, was it a sheep property?

DW

00:52:56 Yes. Sheep. And, there was another one too, the Burnie Board factory at Bundamba, which again was a long rambling building with courtyards, shade for people to enjoy their lunches in. And, two buildings in Sherwood Road at the Graceville end, that I did at Theo Thynne's for what was then called – a family name, it ended up as Architectural Engineering who made a steel and aluminium windows and prefabricated structures, which I designed.

RR

00:54:08 When would that have been?

DW

00:54:10 That would have been in the later '50s – early '50s, mid '50s.

RR

00:54:17 So, are there any architects, either Australian or foreign, from any period that have influenced you in how you do architecture?

DW

00:54:34 I think you could probably say that I draw something from every architect whose design I see. I ingest it and it regurgitates at the appropriate time.

RR

00:54:45 What about an architect like Karl Langer. Did you like what he did?

DW

00:54:52 No, it was too blocky.

RR

00:54:54 I mean, the things that he's known for, I suppose, are the Main Roads Building in Spring Hill.

DW

00:55:01 That was Karl wasn't it, yes.

RR

00:55:02 Which Col Tesch finished, but - - -

DW

00:55:05 The Main Roads, that was all right. Do you know that at the time that that was built, computers were so large that the computer for the Main Roads Department occupied one entire floor.

RR

00:55:22 Yes, I remember that time. Well, that building now is empty and you think, well what's the future of it.

DW

00:55:35 The bin.

RR

00:55:37 Well, I hope not. I think it could go on and be something else.

DW

00:55:45 Yes, but I think the real estate value, as such now, that it would need to be 25, minimum , stories.

RR

00:56:05 Well, perhaps not in that part of town, but, anyway we'll see. You mentioned Harry Seidler, what about buildings like the Opera House?

DW

00:56:31 When I saw that I said, "How on earth is the exterior of that building going to reflect what is going to go underneath it?" And, of course it didn't.

RR

00:56:59 No. I suppose it was the first of a group of buildings where the form of the building was more important than the function. And, sounds like you've got a problem with that.

DW

00:57:18 Yeah. Form follows function. Yes, my entry was very, very different.

RR

00:57:28 You entered the competition?

DW

00:57:29 Yes.

RR

00:57:30 Karl Langer had something to do with the setting up of that competition and the choosing of the site, because he knew Goossens who - - -

DW

00:57:41 He couldn't have chosen a better site. Possibly have chosen a better site.

RR

00:57:45 If it had happened today though they would have said that what was on the site was probably too important to remove and, it was a tram depot, but, it was old and it was there.

JG

00:57:58 Can you describe the design that you did, can you remember your design?

DW

00:58:09 It was a rectangular building with a dome form roof where the beams supporting the roof slab came down to the ground. It all stood in a shallow moat with bridges across it. Probably inspired by one of the structures in Brazilia.

??

00:58:52 What about your design for Federal Parliament House. I remember that was a pretty big thing when we were growing up.

DW

00:58:58 Yes. Our Parliament house design was a six sided building representing the six states and territories.

RR

00:59:21 So, were there other competitions, did you go in for competitions a lot?

DW

00:59:30 Women's College at university, but, that was a dummy competition, University of Queensland had already decided that Conrad and Gargett were going to get it anyhow.

RR

00:59:50 And, they did.

DW

00:59:52 And they did. But, John Dalton and I designed that together, at Theo Thynne's.

RR

01:00:00 And, what was your scheme like?

DW

01:00:03 My scheme was like a great long rambling dormitory school building.

RR

01:00:21 But, nothing like Union College or any of the other colleges?

DW

01:00:25 No. It had a cottagey feeling about it. Because all those girls came from out bush and where their houses had pitched rooves.

RR

01:00:43 So, what did you think of the winner then?

DW

01:00:46 Pedestrian. But then a lot of that could have been sour grapes.

RR

01:00:52 But, it did have pitched rooves.

JG

01:00:58 You said you designed it together with Dalton. Is that – Dalton is know for his roof [01:01:03] that let light in, was the roof like that as well in your design?

DW

01:01:09 Yes. That were, being rooms either side of a corridor. And, that allowed you to have a roof light to let natural light into the corridor.

RR

01:01:24 Well, Robin Gibson, would he have gone in for that competition too? Women's College, or was he too young then?

DW

01:01:38 No. That must have been after Robin pulled up roots with Theo Thynne's early in '60, when that competition happened. Otherwise Robin would have made sure he had a finger in it. Robin was like that.

RR

01:02:00 Robin went overseas though, for some time too.

DW

01:02:04 It was while Robin was overseas.

RR

01:02:12 And, do you think going overseas benefited him?

DW

01:02:15 Yes.

RR

01:02:19 And, I mean, he came back and he won the competition for the Southbank Cultural Centre, which was quite prestigious.

DW

01:02:36 It was.

RR

01:02:38 What did you think of that?

DW

01:02:41 Wonderful. Wonderful.

RR

01:02:44 The Art Gallery has always been the bit I liked the most and the Performing Arts Centre probably less.

DW

01:02:55 Yes. The Performing Arts Centre was a huger challenge of course, because you had to have so many changes of levels in the lobby areas to be able to get access to the different layers of seats inside.

RR

01:03:22 But, they work well.

DW

01:03:24 They work well.

RR

01:03:25 That's the consequence I suppose of having that shape of theatre, that you have to have all those levels.

DW

01:03:32 That's right. That's right. Yes. Well, the Greeks invented the Colosseum, it's still the only one that works, to house a lot of people to be able to see the action.

RR

01:03:54 Robert Cummings, I can remember having a chat with him, many years ago when Gibson had just finished that Cultural Centre and he was saying that he found as a public building, to occupy that space, he thought that it didn't perform that function very well, as being a landmark on the south side of the river. Do you have any views on that?

DW

01:04:22 I can't agree with that. I can't agree with that. It is a far more prominent landmark than the Conservatorium.

RR

01:04:34 He was probably thinking of Roy Grounds and what happened in Melbourne, where a very much bigger symbol of a cultural centre. I mean, do you have a view on which way – you know, do cultural centres need to be symbolic or do they just need to be functional?

DW

01:04:56 They need to be both. They must be both.

RR

01:05:03 And, I guess one of the big ideas about the Cultural Centre in Brisbane was that it had this great separation between the traffic and the circulation of the users, being one level up. Which had problems in - - -

DW

01:05:26 One level up and one level underneath Melbourne Street.

RR

01:05:36 Well, I mean, the way you entered the building was from below, from underneath. And, there's always then how you joint that onto the rest of the city, because you're one level up. And, that's not always easy to do. But, it was the idea that built the Barbican in London and I guess Robin had seen that and other things in the US and so on. But, that was the whole idea of that side of the river was going to be done that way, I guess.

DW

01:06:13 I think one of Robin's greatest influences from his England trip, was probably Sir Hugh Casson.

RR

01:06:23 That whole idea of building a cultural complex on the south bank of the river is quite like what happened in London anyway, with Festival Hall and things that came after it.

DW

01:06:39 That's right. That's right. Yes, well when you think of the wharfs and the shipping companies that were along there, before this was mooted, what a dreadful waste of a beautiful river.

01:07:10 They should have been moved downstream much sooner than they were.

RR

01:07:15 Well, maybe it was good that it took so long, then you got a more substantial lot of buildings replacing them that would have happened if it had happened earlier.

DW

01:07:31 Could be so. Yes. Yes it might have happened piecemeal otherwise.

RR

01:07:37 So, what do you think of what's happened at Southbank, overall? That Expo site, I mean, you lost some buildings, but did you think the buildings that went back had any virtues?

DW

01:07:56 Yes. Yes. Even the commercial buildings that are going up are of merit.

RR

01:08:11 Well, the big difference is that people live there now, in much greater densities than they used to. I mean, Stanley Street, in my memory, was a fairly interesting street, but, it had been the centre of commerce for Brisbane before the big floods made it go across the river, and then it died.

DW

01:08:28 Yes. Well, it was the obvious place for the first expansion while it was still a convict colony.

RR

01:08:40 Well, you weren't allowed to go on the other side of the river in those days, any free settlement had to be on the south side. So, what about your work later at Conrad and Gargett, when you did a lot of conservation type projects, in George Street, which ones did you work on and who were you working with?

DW

01:08:57 Ian Charlton was the partner in charge, I was only an associate then. And, I started at Parliament House and just worked my way up the road until I got to the Lands Administration Building, and then there, of course, was Queens Park and then the Treasury Building.

01:09:35 Now the Treasury Building had such tiny spaces to be able to run communications wiring and absolutely no way of running air conditioning ducts and valuable ceilings that the Works Department agreed must be left intact. And, I said, "We can't meet those conditions."

RR

01:10:31 Well, it was designed to be a naturally ventilated building, with windows on the inside to a courtyard.

DW

01:10:38 That's right.

RR

01:10:40 Was the courtyard then vacant or was it filled with the building?

DW

01:10:45 The courtyard had a two storey building on stilts in the middle of it, as overflow office space.

RR

01:10:55 And, what effect had that had?

DW

01:10:59 It wasn't used for anything else.

RR

01:11:00 But, it stopped the light and the ventilation going through - - -

DW

01:11:03 Not a lot.

RR

01:11:04 No?

DW

01:11:05 No, not a lot.

RR

01:11:07 So, what do you think about what happened then with the casino in that building, do you think that was a good use?

DW

01:11:14 Yes. Yes I did.

RR

01:11:16 I mean, they pulled the building out of the middle and roofed it.

DW

01:11:18 Yes. And, roofed it as the gambling mall.

RR

01:11:25 But, I've only been in there a couple of times, but I thought it was a horrible place to be.

DW

01:11:31 I haven't been in there at all. The only casino I've seen is the Broadbeach one and I vowed I'd never go near another casino in my life, ever.

RR

01:11:50 Good, I think that's a good decision. What about the things that were happening on the Gold Coast. I mean, Hayes and Scott were doing work down there, did you do any?

DW

01:12:09 Yes, I did one or two little cottages.

RR

01:12:23 Do you remember where they were?

DW

01:12:23 Broadbeach, Burleigh Heads.

RR

01:12:25 Do you think they're still there?

DW

01:12:26 No idea. As far as I'm concerned the Gold Coast lost all charm for me, years and years and years ago.

RR

01:12:34 So, where did you have holidays, what meant something to you?

DW

01:12:40 The Spit at Mooloolaba was where our family holidays were all held.

RR

01:12:45 Did you build anything there?

DW

01:12:48 No. Gabriel Poole had that tied up.

RR

01:12:50 Well, was there anything that he was doing that you liked?

DW

01:12:55 Yes. He built the one multi storey building on the spit. Which was quite an acceptable structure.

RR

01:13:06 And, I think Aubrey Job did some work, or maybe that was Noosa where he built quite a few houses.

DW

01:13:14 Yeah. And, Jim Birrell built right at the very end of the Spit, what everybody called the flat iron building, because it was shaped like that.

RR

01:13:30 I don't know that one, but - - -

DW

01:13:32 No, sorry, that wasn't Jim Birrell, that was a young bloke who worked for Danny.

??

01:13:44 Do you mean the red brick apartments or the ten storey triangular building?

DW

01:13:48 No. The white one.

??

01:13:51 The Cheese.

RR

01:13:57 Was it Noel Robinson, perhaps?

DW

01:13:59 Yes.

??

01:13:59 No, he built one on the corner of Brisbane Road.

DW

01:14:00 No, Noel Robinson built the Cheese, yes.

RR

01:14:11 So, did you ever have any contact with him? Did you know him?

DW

01:14:15 Yes. He was an impossible know all.

??

01:14:28 Hey dad, what did you think of the Butterfly House on the Spit, that was always an interesting one?

DW

01:14:32 The Butterfly House, when it was first built for the Cilantos, was simply a Marcel Breuer clone and it just got destroyed by later owners, trying to maximise the number of people they could cram into units.

01:15:03 We stayed once in it, while it was under construction.

RR

01:15:07 And, who did that? Who designed it?

DW

01:15:13 Don't know.

RR

01:15:20 No? Okay. Do you think that your practice and what you did has had any impact on Queensland and other architects?

DW

01:15:32 I believe it did because of knowledge that I was able to pass upon to them of my experiences. I would have been good in [01:15:50]. I was very good at remembering things, the don'ts as well as the dos.

RR

01:16:10 On how to keep the water out.

DW

01:16:12 On how to keep the water out.

RR

01:16:16 What about concrete, did you ever have to work in concrete?

DW

01:16:25 I have never built any totally concrete buildings, no. Concrete frames with infill, yes.

RR

01:16:39 Whereas Robin Gibson wanted to do that from the very beginning, I would have thought, but I may be wrong.

DW

01:16:45 I did one building in precast concrete, that was what is now called, I think it's called Sunmap Centre, at Woolloongabba.

RR

01:16:58 Which is a government building.

DW

01:17:01 Yes. And, that was at Works Department dictate. I did not want to do it that way, I wanted to do it with simply a concrete structure which then carried lightweight external walls.

RR

01:17:22 And, you were working - - -

DW

01:17:23 And sunshading.

RR

01:17:26 You were working with Conrad and Gargett at that time?

DW

01:17:28 Yes. Yes. That was late '80s.

RR

01:17:42 And, the work that was done on the George Street buildings, Parliament House and the Mansions, the Harris Terrace, I mean, what did you think about the Bellevue being removed from that group of buildings and the subsequent building of the Works Department?

DW

01:18:10 It was my favourite watering hole as a student of course.

RR

01:18:16 I think there were many who went to it.

DW

01:18:17 Being the closest.

RR

01:18:19 Down George street that stopped there. Yes.

DW

01:18:23 Yeah. The Bellevue and the Cecil

RR

01:18:26 Yes. The Cecil was the other one. But, the Bellevue had a very important position between Parliament House and the Mansions.

DW

01:18:35 But, it was irretrievable, the termites had totally eaten the inside of it out and as I found when I moved into the Mansions, - - -

RR

01:18:49 It was the same.

DW

01:18:50 It was the same.

RR

01:18:52 Oh well, but, you sorted the Mansions out, they survived. So, was there no termite protection? I mean, these were masonry buildings, so - - -

DW

01:19:03 Well, the termites found their way by tunnels underneath the roads from the Botanic Gardens where they had plenty to feed anyhow, into the Queensland Club and the Bellevue and the Mansions.

RR

01:19:29 Termite heaven. Well, then there were the West Indian termites as well, which were the flying ones.

DW

01:19:36 They were confined to government buildings, through using West Indian cedar and as pieces of that furniture got broken or no longer wanted for use, the Works

Department workmen would get rid of them by putting them up in the ceiling of Parliament House.

RR

01:20:26 And, they were termite snacks.

DW

01:20:28 Yeah. And, of course, they moved them onto other government buildings before they were aware that they were infested and other buildings all over town suffered.

RR

01:20:48 Yes, a big problem. So, are there any buildings in Queensland that you particularly like, from any period?

DW

01:21:07 Well, in places I haven't seen a lot of Queensland, excepted outback Queensland, but, I do find that the outback homesteads with their drawn down rooves over open verandas are raised on stumps to keep them away from white ant infestation and also because it's easier to realign stumps in black soil, is about the only way you could go.

RR

01:22:00 So, they were a pure response to the conditions?

DW

01:22:06 Yes.

RR

01:22:09 So, when you did a homestead out at, I think you said Dirranbandi, was it anything like that or is it in a different design?

DW

01:22:21 Not, it was very, very different in that I used single slope roofs inwards around a ring courtyard and buried rainwater tanks in concrete, under the buildings.

RR

01:23:04 So, they had concrete floors or not?

DW

01:23:08 No, raised timber floors.

RR

01:23:18 Black soil?

DW

01:23:21 Yeah. And, all you did in black soil was you put a stump jump jack chain to the post, jacked it up to its right position and rammed the earth all around it until things were solid again.

01:23:43 Even, what's his name, see the two buildings side by side there, those two.

RR

01:23:50 Murcott.

DW

01:23:51 Murcott, that orangey red one was his response to Northern Territory. Up on stumps, air to blow through, gauze - - -

END OF TRANSCRIPT