

## INTERVIEW WITH REX ADDISON

DATE 15 FEBRUARY 2013

**RR**

00:00:04 Well, here we are on the 15th of February 2013, and we're with Rex Addison, in his studio, at Mt Crosby.

**JG**

00:00:20 We have to say who we are.

**RR**

00:00:23 Janina, Janina Gosseye, and Robert Riddel who are asking the questions. The first question is to do with your architecture studies, what qualifications did you gain and from which institution?

**RA**

00:00:43 I went from '65 to '70 at University of Queensland at a time when it was three years full time and three years part time. So, you worked in offices in the last three years and went to the university at night.

00:01:00 And, then we – a group of four of us drove overland to England in 1971, when you could, and I did a post graduate year at the AA, '71 and '72.

**JG**

00:01:18 Post graduate in what, architecture, post graduate?

**RA**

00:01:22 Yeah. Yeah. It was a graduate diploma, is what it was called, so, that's the only formal education. I think – well, I think the UQ course, when it was three years full time and three years part time, it was happily a very good resolution. I don't like five years full time. I think the last two – I think there's something to say for a design immersion in the first three years, but, I think doing bigger and bigger projects in a vacuum in the last two years is pretty silly.

00:02:01 And, I think that working in real offices, we actually understood how the other consultants worked with you to produce buildings. It was much better form of education than the kids get now.

00:02:22 I think there's a lot to be said for post grad research and stuff, but, the last two years, I think – I mean, the French have it right don't they, they've got it separate

from a university system, whereas architecture is considered like science or something else, as academically significant and I think it's really a working thing rather than a – I know some people make their livings out of metaphors, but - - -

00:02:56 There's a story I'm fond of about a French, you bureaucrat who has a practical solution to the bureaucracy's problem and brings it to his senior officer. And, he says, "Yes, that's all very well in practice, but it will never work in theory."

**JG**

00:03:17 That's a good one.

**RA**

00:03:20 And, it points up the problem, I mean, architecture isn't just an increasingly bigger and bigger metaphor, it's really assisted by understanding the team of people you work with to produce the end result.

00:03:36 Anyway, I think it was quite good three year full time, three year part time. The drawback being that in the last three years some of my fellow students immediately took on the personas of the offices they were in, even if they were dead dreary and dull.

00:03:53 I was surprised at how quickly they took on the fairly low standards that I thought were around in the offices.

**RR**

00:04:01 And, the people who taught you at UQ?

**RA**

00:04:04 Ian Sinnamon was the best.

**RR**

00:04:06 You remember - - -

**RA**

00:04:07 Ian Sinnamon was the best.

**RR**

00:04:09 Yes. Now why?

**RA**

00:04:11 Because he was sharp intellectually, and still is. Bill Carr was intimidating.

**JG**

00:04:18 Why?

**RA**

00:04:20 Because he was class ridden. He was one of those – you're too young to know – but, he's one of those Australians who were still beholden to the British upper class system and he just made it his duty to make us feel unsettled about our prior life, our suburban life, our bourgeois life, and just was very scornful of – we had nothing to bring to the party.

00:04:51 We had everything to learn. And, it was very - he was a nasty piece of work, unless you came from the upper classes of Brisbane society, and, certain people did and did well because of it, whereas, my parents were working class and I didn't know what pate de foie gras was and that was apparently significant.

00:05:14 I mean, it's silly to think of it now, but he was in the Royal Navy during the war, rather than the Australian Navy and then couldn't stand the sound of people talking in Australia and it was just a real cultural cringe.

**JG**

00:05:28 Really?

**RA**

00:05:30 Yeah.

**JG**

00:05:30 And, what about his didactic techniques, we heard that he had some odd opinions on how to teach?

**RA**

00:05:38 Well, he was lazy and he'd go for sabbatical and come back a year late with shots of his holiday on the Riviera and stuff, you know, it was just – he just swanned around in it.

00:05:50 He came from inherited wealth. And, he didn't bring any rigor – I mean, he knew certain things but it was all wrapped up in class-consciousness that I think was quite destructive.

00:06:04 I mean, you'll get other opinions from people like Don, but, Don came from the upper reaches of Queensland society and I didn't. Anyway, Ian Sinnamon was good, Pat Moroney was good, Pat Moroney was a contemporary of Ian Sinnamon's and he'd been a working architect. And, so I thought he was good.

**RR**

00:06:26 I think he went on to be a sculptor.

**RA**

00:06:27      Yeah.

**RR**

00:06:29      And, gave architecture away.

**RA**

00:06:31      Probably, I haven't seen Pat for years. He lives just down the road from Greg Bamford. But, I haven't - - -

**JG**

00:06:38      And, what were they teaching, what was Ian Sinnamon teaching and Pat Moroney?

**RA**

00:06:41      Well, Pat took us in fifth year, just for studio. He didn't give us any formal lectures, he just took us for design projects. But, he brought a, sort of, working ability to it that Bill Carr couldn't and, you know, various imports into the department were pretty dull, you know, Bill Grieg and Hamish Murison were pretty dull teachers.

00:07:12      And, Ian Sinnamon was widely read and lectured us in history, ancient history.

**RR**

00:07:23      Modern history too?

**RA**

00:07:24      No so – not that I remember.

**RR**

00:07:28      Did anyone?

**RA**

00:07:29      Yeah. Prof Cummings, it was quite interesting. The professor then was Robert Cummings and he – one of the – the Americans were here during the second world war and one of the people on Macarthur's staff was Edgar Kaufmann, who was the son of Coffman who built Fallingwater.

00:08:03      So, Robert Cummings became friendly with Coffman, young Kaufmann, and stayed there in the '50s and showed us slides of the guest house at Fallingwater and he had slides from Europe and he had a penchant for a softer form of modernism. Dudok was his pin up boy. I think that was pretty sharp actually, in retrospect.

00:08:31 He'd wander backwards and forwards in front of his slides and his shadow – his profile would be cast onto the slides as he lectured us.

**RR**

00:08:42 Just like Hitchcock.

**RA**

00:08:43 Like Hitchcock. Very like Hitchcock. And, they were good. You know, Prof Cummings would be caught up with dilemmas like, what do we do in the modern movement when we're supposed to build in glass and we might have a client who's a bank and wants to express security, and how can we express security with all this glass. I mean no one gives that a second thought these days. But, it was a bit of a dilemma in his head.

**JG**

00:09:15 And, beyond Frank Lloyd Wright, were there – and Dudok, were there any other modernists?

**RA**

00:09:20 No. They're the most memorable. Karl Langer lectured us, in town planning and he'd have, you know about him I suppose, from – yeah.

**RR**

00:09:32 What's your take on Karl Langer?

**RA**

00:09:34 He's a very nice man. He failed nobody. No matter how badly, or how little – I mean, I think that people should have been a bit more respecting of his [00:09:52], but, I think though, we were teenage boys for the most part. There were five women in my year, in a class of 55.

00:10:04 And, you know, there was probably the general rabble going on and he didn't – he just kept talking, he didn't attend to any human frailties before him – he was a nice man. And, he'd have illustrations from magazines from the 1930s and '40s I suppose. And, they'd be ripped out of magazines and he'd put them in the epidiascope and throw them up on the wall. And, you got to learn about, you know -  
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**JG**

00:10:38 Which magazines were they?

**RA**

00:10:39 I don't know, they didn't have the headers on them, they were just old European magazines, often in German I guess.

**RR**

00:10:47 They were showing buildings?

**RA**

00:10:48 Buildings or city interventions, you know, and drawings. And, one of the things I remember him saying was that, in competitions in Europe, if you show shadows on your drawings you are excluded. Because, a rule that you couldn't distort – you know, you had to show, without distortion or PR, what you had on your mind. Yes. And, so, shadows out. Excluded.

**RR**

00:11:27 No storm clouds.

**RA**

00:11:28 No storm clouds. Nothing. Just line drawings to show what you had in mind, because, all other things were deceptive. He used to show a lot of Camillo Sitte drawings, you know, it was all that, sort of, the spaces in the middle of European towns were shown positive and the buildings negative.

**RR**

00:11:51 Were you aware of is actual design work in the buildings he'd done, in private practice?

**RA**

00:11:56 Yes. Yes. Dad worked on some. My father was a plasterer and he worked on St Peter's Lutheran College chapel, and I'd go over there on site and see them. And, I thought, you know, he was sort of, second to Birrell.

00:12:14 I thought Birrell was much more interesting, but, I thought, I could see that Karl had qualities that were interesting too.

**JG**

00:12:25 What do you remember of Birrell. Birrell was teaching - - -

**RA**

00:12:30 No, no, I worked for him in fifth year.

**JG**

00:12:31 You worked for him. Okay.

**RA**

00:12:32 In fourth year I worked for Geoffrey Pie, in fifth year I worked for Jim Birrell and in sixth year I worked for Conrad and Gargett.

**JG**

00:12:41 And, what are your experiences working there, at Geoffrey Pie's?

**RA**

00:12:46 I hawked my portfolio around a lot of offices, 50 or so I suppose and there was no work at the time, so I just - - -

**RR**

00:12:56 So, this was what year?

**RA**

00:12:57 Sixty-eight. I had a reasonable discussion with Geoffrey, so, I went around and said, you know, I don't require an income initially, so, how about I just sit in the room and see how it's done.

00:13:14 One of the things that I – I think, I don't want to put Geoffrey down, but, I think the thing I mainly learned in Geoffrey's office was how to talk on the phone. Just how to talk, where you service fit into the kaleidoscope of things that were going on to make a building.

00:13:36 Talking to engineers, talking to clients, we sat in the same room for a year and I heard everything he said on the phone. Apart from organising his trade library and dealing nicely with his Doberman Pinscher, who sat under my desk and farted a lot.

**RR**

00:13:57 So, how big was the office in those days?

**RA**

00:13:59 One room, the size of this room.

**RR**

00:14:01 Right.

**RA**

00:14:02 The size – half the size of this studio. This is the old garage and this is my addition to it, and the room that Geoffrey and I sat in would have been probably smaller than this.

**RR**

00:14:13 And, was it in his home, or - - -

**RA**

00:14:14 Yes. At New Farm.

**JG**

00:14:16 What were the projects he was working on when you were there?

**RA**

00:14:19 Houses – Brisbane Realty, a commercial building in town, and a couple of things he let me work on were a little – he was doing some sort of thesis for the Valley business man and he wanted concrete through the Valley and I must have made a timber positive, which my father made a plaster mould of and we cast positives from that, in plaster, that made – and I saw photographs of it recently, I've got rolls of drawings from that era, Geoffrey's firm.

00:14:56 And, he also let me do a pumping station, which is still inexistence, up at Noosa. It's got a little poured concrete roof, it was, sort of [Venturiquesque 00:15:05], which is quite unusual for Brisbane at that time. Kids get up on there skateboards now and ride on the roof.

00:15:16 But, Geoffrey was willing to have a go, I did a gate in the Brisbane Realty that I passed the other day.

**RR**

00:15:22 So, you consciously wanted to do a year with three different architects?

**RA**

00:15:27 No, that's just the way it turned out. I was too poor by the end of then and I wanted to get a job. And, I asked him to put in a good word for me with Birrell, and he did, and I got the job. And, Birrell paid very bad money and I worked for something like \$20 a week, and I asked him for a raise every couple of months and worked up to \$40 a week and his work wasn't good at that stage. You're recording this, I guess I shouldn't say.

00:15:55 I mean, I'm a big fan of Jim's and I printed – I gave a little address with Don Watson, which introduced him when he got the gold medal, but, his best work was done in running two small bureaucracies – he was Brisbane City Council architect and then university architect. When I worked for him he was trying to get – you don't have to read it now - - -

**JG**

00:16:21 His private office?

**RA**

00:16:22 Private work and I think the standard of work went down. And, I complained about it at the end of the year and we parted company.

**JG**

00:16:32 That was when Richard Stringer was there as well?

**RA**

00:16:35 No, he'd left by then. Philip Conn was there, I was working on one of Philip's projects, knocking down a Dods to build crappy - - -

**RR**

00:16:42 Yeah.

**RA**

00:16:43 - - - crappy town houses and I said, "This is no good," and Birrell said, "You're paid to draw not think," it was as crude as that. I said, "Not on this one." But, I mean, I still think his early work was good, because, Birrell was very – borrowed a lot of ideas, but, unlike a lot of Brisbane practices where they get watered down, he improved them.

00:17:12 I mean, I think the stairs on the end of J D Storey are better than anything Corb's done.

**RR**

00:17:19 And, was that because of Jim's input the he had or that he had a good team around him?

**RA**

00:17:22 No. I don't know. He had a great team, Laurie Culley was great, Laurie was there but Laurie was drinking pretty heavily by then. I worked in Sydney years later and Laurie came for a job and he was a pretty sad figure.

**RR**

00:17:38 But, I mean, Don was there. There was Bruce Goodsir - - -

**RA**

00:17:41 Yeah. Bruce Goodsir was hugely influential in the building of the agriculture building. He was running that. Don's always a bit of a gadfly on all these things. Don

had – before I got there – worked on some halls of residence up in PNG that are pretty interesting.

**RR**

00:18:05 So, he was already in PNG at the time?

**RA**

00:18:08 No – Birrell was – yeah. But, that year, 1969, I mean, at the start of this I said I worked in Jim Birrell's office as a fifth year architecture student, 1969. I saw Neil Armstrong walk on the moon in Jim's office. It's more or less the way I felt when I got the job there.

00:18:34 'Cause, he was a big hero and we worked on the Steamships Hotel for most of the year and it never went ahead. It was a hotel in Moresby.

**RR**

00:18:47 Did Graham Davis work on that too?

**RA**

00:18:50 No, not that I'm aware of.

**RR**

00:18:52 Okay. So, then your third experience with Conrad and Gargett?

**RA**

00:19:02 Well, I touch on that and I was desperately trying to find some old Conrad and Gargett drawings that I used in that talk and I can't remember whether I used them as slides or whether I got them scanned and put on a disc. Macarthur's away this week, so I haven't been able to verify it.

00:19:19 But, I used a Keith Frost drawing because I felt you were maybe pegging him a little high and I'd like to bring it down a bit. I did a scheme, I talk about it in their – he was doing a house up at Point Cartwright and he had this project to do Centaur House, up on Wickham Terrace.

00:19:49 And, the zoning of the land was 50 percent residential, 50 percent commercial. And, so, I had some open space down below and some accommodation [00:19:59] up above. And, so it took on a, sort of, it very Corbusier – I did it in a day and I did a quick perspective, which I could do because Don and I were quite competitive in Birrell's office.

00:20:15 He was always on the make and we were always producing schemes quickly for him, and so, it was, sort of, good training in a flashy sort of way, to do it. So, I did it for Frost while he was out of the office for the day and he came back, he didn't change

any of the planning, but, said a building couldn't look like this, because, I'd expressed it in a cellular way up the top and [00:20:35] down below, because it was looking west, across to Albert Park.

00:20:42 It was obviously a La Tourette type scheme and he laid his butter paper over it and drew over my perspective and changed all the window treatment to all coffered windows all the way down, that's because the building had to have unity.

00:21:01 I just used it in that introduction to show how – it would have got, you know, full marks at Birrell's and he would have taken it to the client. But, I think he was so far ahead of the pack, in Brisbane, that it didn't happen anywhere else.

**RR**

00:21:15 So, where did Keith Frost study?

**RA**

00:21:21 I've no idea.

**RR**

00:21:22 I mean, was he a Brisbane person or not?

**RA**

00:21:25 I don't know. I only worked for him a short period when I first got there and then, at Needham House, then they sent me across the road to the old building and I worked out on the veranda with Lindy and Rob Akers and Wilf and Beryl, and Charlie Hamilton was sick that year, Lou Hailey would storm around and give – I spoke to him, I thought he was a bit of a bully.

**JG**

00:21:49 Really?

**RA**

00:21:50 Hmm.

**JG**

00:21:53 Doesn't come across like that.

**RA**

00:21:54 No, he's 90 now. Yeah, softened down. Perhaps he's entered better years.

**JG**

00:22:02 And, what other projects were going on at the office at the time you were there?

**RA**

00:22:06 Conrad and Gargett, they were finishing the SGIO building, which is now called something else.

**JG**

00:22:10 Suncorp.

**RR**

00:22:12 Well, it's no longer that even.

**RA**

00:22:14 Yeah. Well, I was working on the revolving restaurant at the top, I couldn't believe how that – there was a guy called John Parnell in there who was just terrible to work with. And, I couldn't believe how many materials and things they were proposing to use. I had to do a display board of all their materials.

**RR**

00:22:35 This is the fit out of the restaurant you're talking about?

**RA**

00:22:39 Yeah. I thought the only way to homogenise these 30 different materials with different textures and glitter and stuff, was to put them all in slightly milky plastic bags, so, I put them all in slightly milky plastic bags and hung them on hooks. And, I got into trouble for this. They wouldn't trust me to do anything.

00:23:02 I was allowed to draw perspectives and greeting cards and things – I don't remember doing anything meaningful there. But, I didn't draw a good wage.

**JG**

00:23:12 That was the reason why you went there, primarily.

**RA**

00:23:15 I thought Birrell's work was crook and I didn't see how anyone else's work was any worse. And, I thought there'd be an opportunity to work there and maybe if I'd worked with Duncan McPhee it might have been okay. But, I was in a pretty – Rod Hawkins was out on the veranda, it was all pretty gung ho and - - -

**JG**

00:23:35 And there were no other places you wanted to go at the time? Robin Gibson's office or any - - -

**RA**

00:23:39 No. I could be sued for - - -

**JG**

00:23:47 We can stop it.

**RA**

00:23:49 No, well, I mean, I thought he was disciplined, but I thought he was limited.

**RR**

00:23:56 Well, there were other practices around that you probably approved of, but, they'd be small.

**RA**

00:24:01 I needed money.

**RR**

00:24:02 Yeah. And, Pat Moroney would have been a good person to work for?

**RA**

00:24:05 Yeah. Yeah. I tried to work for John Railton, I went to 40 offices or 50 before I went to work a year for Geoffrey, you know, it's not as if I didn't try anywhere else. But, you know, after fourth year and fifth year of not getting much money, if any, I just needed it.

00:24:26 Because, we were going overseas. I didn't see that – I thought there'd be an opportunity to do something, and indeed there was, in Conrad and Gargett, they just didn't want to listen to you. They didn't like what you did.

**RR**

00:24:38 What did you think of what they were doing? I mean, their two big projects - - -

**RA**

00:24:42 I thought it didn't have any rigor.

**RR**

00:24:44 The two big projects were the Commonwealth Bank and the SGIO building, and, I mean, what do you think of those projects?

**RA**

00:24:54 I think they're pretty – I don't think highly of them. I find it difficult to remember the Commonwealth Bank. It was more interesting than the SGIO. They lost a few workmen on the SGIO because it was a steel building with shear connectors and they were pouring slabs on top.

00:25:15 Shear connectors are like bolts sticking out of the top of the steel frame, the guys would just trip on them and fall off.

**RR**

00:25:23 I seem to remember they, sort of, thought there was a rule of thumb for every million the building cost you'd lose a person, in a construction like that, so, it all went with the game, with the territory.

**RA**

00:25:36 Yeah. I suppose you wouldn't lose them know because they'd all have harnesses on, but, they, you know, in those days they didn't. I thought the planning was expedient on them, you know, at the time, bigger buildings, you know, I can remember thinking about Lou Kahn's ideas about served and servant spaces and, I mean, Conrad and Gargett's buildings, if that's the shape of the site that would be the shape of the building.

00:26:08 And, then the toilets might be here and the lift might be here, and you know, everything was just jammed into the rectangle, whereas there wouldn't be an articulation or an idea about the hierarchy of things.

**RR**

00:26:21 But, in the case of the SGIO, the big idea was to turn the - - -

**RA**

00:26:26 Forty-five degrees.

**RR**

00:26:27 Yeah. Now what did you think of that?

**RA**

00:26:31 I don't think I gave it a great deal of thought. I'm sorry, I can't think of anything meaningful to say about it. I suppose it was an issue. Did that – the SGIO building, if I'm correct, north is probably on one of the short blank sides, is it?

**RR**

00:26:52 I would have thought that that would have been the western end.

**RA**

00:26:55 This face looks down into the City Square doesn't it?

**RR**

00:26:58 Yeah.

**RA**

00:26:59 And, if that's the City Square, I think that's looking northeast, but, the main grid of Brisbane is running northeast.

**RR**

00:27:11 It's half and half, it's not - - -

**RA**

00:27:13 So, north is out there. Well, maybe it's okay. I don't know. Was it rotated for that reason?

**RR**

00:27:19 I think so.

**RA**

00:27:20 Yeah.

**RR**

00:27:22 But, I mean, there's another, you're balancing that against what the rest of the city's doing and whether you need to relate to anything there. It was also about casting shadows in the square, I think.

**RA**

00:27:36 Okay.

**RR**

00:27:37 And, also in deference to that Church and whatever, that was next door to it.

**RA**

00:27:42 Did it help in relating to the Church. I mean, I think it does a – even if it's on the grid – it does meet the street with a face doesn't it? The theatre enters of there.

**RR**

00:27:55 The theatre they had to provide because they took out the old hall. So, they had to reproduce that facility.

**RA**

00:28:02 Which I went to, in high school.

**RR**

00:28:06 Me too.

**RA**

00:28:07 To see Hamlet or something. Anyway, we're drifting off.

**JG**

00:28:11 So, by final year you had decided that you wanted to go overseas to study at the AA.

**RA**

00:28:17 No, I didn't know I was going to study at the AA, we just wanted to get out. I mean, it was such a long time, six years is so long. And, Australia is so far away from everywhere, that we all wanted to clear out.

00:28:32 I mean, I tried to leave UQ during, about fifth year and finish at Sydney. But, making enquiries, you had to complete at least half your course at that university to gain a degree from that university. So, you couldn't go between, you know, you're at a point where I'm not going to increase – I'm not going to go even more years.

**JG**

00:28:58 And, why did you want to go to Sydney? Just to get another experience?

**RA**

00:29:00 Susan got a job there, we'd met by that stage, she got a job with AAP Routers down there and I thought, oh well, I'll finish down there.

**JG**

00:29:11 But, it was not for – because you thought they were doing better architecture down there?

**RA**

00:29:16 No. No. But, I thought Sydney might be more exciting, or it would be nice to be exposed to a different city. We all thought it was pretty racy down there, didn't we?

**RR**

00:29:25        Yeah. Well, it was, compared to us.

**RA**

00:29:27        Compared to us, it was very suburban up here.

**RR**

00:29:31        I think we used to go for trips, for the weekend.

**RA**

00:29:33        Yeah. There'd be conventions. Each year during your student life there were architectural conventions. In my first year I drove with three other guys down to Melbourne and then in fifth year we drove down to Sydney.

**JG**

00:29:49        So, who was speaking at the convention in Melbourne?

**RA**

00:29:54        No one of note, but the one in Sydney had Buckminster Fuller. And, the one in third year we had the convention in Brisbane and Gio Ponti spoke. And, Jim Birrell was at that, spoke at that. And, an English con man called Tony Gwilliam.

**JG**

00:30:14        Why con man?

**RA**

00:30:16        Yeah. He was trailing on the shirrtails of [Arkie Graham 00:30:17], but he wasn't in their group, and, you know, it was just probably some spiel from the AA.

**JG**

00:30:26        And, what else were you learning from this, influence from the student conference, because you were building geodesic domes in the main square?

**RA**

00:30:35        No, not me.

**RR**

00:30:38        The great court.

**JG**

00:30:39        Yes, the great court.

**RA**

00:30:41 No, I don't – geodesic domes, that must have been some other year?

**RR**

00:30:45 Yeah. I don't know which year. I know it happened.

**RA**

00:30:48 Okay.

**RR**

00:30:49 But, my memory of Buckminster Fuller though was in Perth, maybe he spoke in Sydney as well, I don't remember that.

**RA**

00:30:57 I'm pretty sure he came to Sydney and I heard Ian McKay's speak and I thought his work was good. And, after I'd been two years away, I came back and worked for Ian McKay in Sydney.

**JG**

00:31:13 So, you said there were 55 students in your year?

**RA**

00:31:17 Yeah.

**JG**

00:31:18 Were there any that stood out in your memory?

**RA**

00:31:20 Well, Bob was at QUT, so, he's exempt from it, it was QIT then wasn't it? Russell Hall's the standout other person in my year, I think. Memorable. We were close friends from first year, so, he's still a friend.

00:31:42 Don was a year ahead of me, and, he sets the bar pretty high for us all. So, Don Watson. And, I worked with him at Birrell's. That was the nice thing, we could break down those, sort of, year things if you're working in the same office.

00:32:01 And, sixth year I worked with Lindy Crofts, who was in my year, not that – she's not all that interested in architecture, she's more interested in photography these days. But, you know, contemporaries she worked with.

**RR**

00:32:22 The time at the AA, well, tell us about the trip across Europe, I mean, or across the world I mean, to Europe.

**RA**

00:32:32 Well, we bought a Kombi Van in Singapore, four of us were going to go over. It was going to be five, it was going to be – Susan and I had married by that stage, and a friend of hers, Liz Dalley was going to go with us, but, she pulled out. So, it ended up Don Watson, Susan and I and Ian Sinnamon, who's the best lecturer.

**JG**

00:32:57 How come he went?

**RA**

00:32:59 He's a complex person, but, he was – his first marriage was in the process of breaking down at that stage and he was a father of five, but, he had a sabbatical year and he heard that we were going and so he cast his lot in with us.

**JG**

00:33:19 So, he didn't really make a distinction between professor and student, or lecturer and student, there was not a problem?

**RA**

00:33:25 Well, we were graduates by that stage, so, there wasn't anything, he – you know. I thought it was a bit stiff at the start, but, we were just pals at the end. It was a bit tricky at the start, I think, but - - -

**JG**

00:33:40 And, during your trip, were there buildings or places that you'd set out to visit or - - -

**RA**

00:33:46 Sure. We saw all the Kahn things in Ahmadabad and all the Corb things in Chandigarh, and, just India besides and then Pakistan.

**JG**

00:34:03 Doxiadis?

**RA**

00:34:05 Sorry?

**JG**

00:34:05 Doxiadis?

**RA**

00:34:07 No. He was a figure around. He used to grow tomatoes in Brisbane.

**JG**

00:34:14 What?

**RA**

00:34:14 He was a tomato grower in Brisbane, did you know that?

**RR**

00:34:17 I didn't.

**RA**

00:34:18 At Redland Bay.

**RR**

00:34:19 Are you sure?

**RA**

00:34:21 I'm pretty sure, yeah. I don't know whether he invented the Brisbane's contribution to – well tomatoes, the stackable tomato.

**RR**

00:34:30 The cube.

**RA**

00:34:32 Well, yeah, tough and tasteless, but, stacks high. Yeah, I could check on that but I think he had a period where he was a Greek migrant, then he went back to Greece and achieved that world reputation.

00:34:47 But, I didn't see any of his work. Have I missed some in India or something, have it?

**JG**

00:34:51 In Pakistan, and those [00:34:53-00:34:57] That's where - - -

**RA**

00:34:58 Sorry. I mean, all the Islamic buildings in Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, that's where we drove. We had guides of ancient sites, I mean, Ian was encyclopaedic about – I've forgotten the name of it – but the ancient Assyrian stuff,

there was an arch at [00:35:38] and some early Assyrian stuff. But, all the Greek and Roman sites across – yeah, maps for those and we got into ruin allergy. If I saw another ruin, castle or Doric Templar thrower - - -

**JG**

00:36:04 Yeah. Well, I can imagine.

**RR**

00:36:06 Did you see the Parthenon?

**RA**

00:36:07 Yeah.

**RR**

00:36:09 So, you came through.

**RA**

00:36:10 But, 20 other things besides. I saw the Crac des Chevalier, the Crusader Castle where Mick Kenniger's father in law died, he fell over the wall there. Yeah. Alison's father died at Crac Des Chevalier. Obscure bit of knowledge.

**RR**

00:36:36 And, what about the Corb things in France? I mean, do you - - -

**RA**

00:36:41 Yes. But, my camera – we were right across the world without much of a problem, and the first day in England the Kombi Van was broken into and our camera stolen. And, I have photographs of Maison [00:36:58] are in the stolen camera.

00:37:04 But, we saw La Tourette and Ronchamp and Marseilles.

**JG**

00:37:12 And, did you also go to Scandinavia?

**RA**

00:37:14 No. No. We drove across – we got into – a little bit into France, we drove down to Barcelona and saw the Gaudi buildings and then drove across France into England. It took six months. And, I didn't know what to do there, I worked for a while, in a not very interesting firm, and then - - -

**JG**

00:37:42 Do you remember which firm you worked at?

**RA**

00:37:44 Yeah. You don't want to know, it doesn't matter, Schlock – Schlock and Schlock – so, I worked twice – I worked as an architect twice in Britain, the first time to get fees to go to the AA, although I applied for a bursary and I got it, which halves the fees.

00:38:05 And, then at the end, after I finished, I worked for fairs to come home. So, I worked for fees and fairs.

**JG**

00:38:13 But, you didn't drive back?

**RA**

00:38:14 No, we flew back. God no. But we - - -

**RR**

00:38:18 I can remember you arriving, you didn't look too healthy at that stage.

**RA**

00:38:22 No. No. We – Alison remembers most indelibly, she said we had the spacey sort of look, and there's one photograph from that period, where we're – yeah. We were just – we'd been in a little capsule, the four of us, for six months and we were a bit spacey I think.

**RR**

00:38:41 In need of a shower.

**RA**

00:38:42 We got into England, I can remember having milk delivered to the van. We were still living in the van, getting the milkman to deliver milk.

**RR**

00:38:54 Yeah. I think I'd told you to go and park outside Haig's place, so at least you could use the loo.

**RA**

00:39:00 No, we used the loo in the tube.

**RR**

00:39:03 Okay.

**JG**

00:39:08 What made you decide to study at the AA, because you - - -

**RA**

00:39:12 I didn't know what else to do really. I think it was a hasty decision. I mean, we used to – AD was an interesting magazine at the time and it seemed like the learning institution equivalent of what was being discussed in that magazine at the time.

00:39:35 But, in retrospect, I would have been happier in an American school I think.

**JG**

00:39:40 Why?

**RA**

00:39:42 Well, I think, it's hard for you to understand that the conversation at the time was, maybe the answer wasn't a building and I think I was too young to say, well, actually I'm interested in buildings.

00:39:56 It just seemed so uncool to be interested in buildings.

**JG**

00:40:00 And, who was teaching at the AA when you were there?

**RA**

00:40:02 The archigram – Peter Cook was there, Dennis Crompton, Ron Herron took my graduate school option, Paul Oliver ran the thing and he's encyclopaedic about everything. He writes books about jazz and blues and shelter and – I mean, you just walk into a room and he'd give a one hour seminar on anything, this object here. He'd just talk.

**RR**

00:40:31 Still, you gained by knowing that people like that are out there and you didn't get that experience in Australia very often.

**RA**

00:40:42 No, the most indelible thing I saw at the AA while I was there, was that Richard Rogers had won the project to do Centre Pompidou, which was called Plateau Beaubourg then, I think, it was in Les Ailes, the suburb.

00:41:03 And, at the same time in London they were thinking of doing major developments in Covent Garden, which is a similar area to Les Ailes in Paris, old market centre of the city.

00:41:18 And, so, half the school thought Richard Rogers was God and the other half thought he was the Devil, because he was ripping the heart out of an ancient city. And, so, you go to a lecture that he gave about winning this and it was the sort of equivalent of – it's like an archigram building getting built, you know.

**RR**

00:41:45 I mean, Renzo Piano was part of this too.

**RA**

00:41:47 That's right. And, he wasn't a very big name at the time, but, he became big and, you know. But, he gave a lecture and the room was packed, at the AA, and half the people were adoring and half were jeering and wanting to through stuff at him.

00:42:08 I thought, well, that's a pretty interesting cultural climate to – whatever he produced he's doing it in a pretty critical climate and things just aren't criticised in Australia. I mean, famously, Harry Seidler took a cartoonist to Court for a cartoon about one of his buildings.

00:42:30 He lost, but, it's indicative of, you know, the cartoonist just drew a cube and there was a hole here, and people were delivering food there and there was a hole here and people were coming with shovels to collect shit here, and it was called Harry Seidler's home for the aged, or something or other.

00:42:57 And, he took the cartoonist, Cox I think, to Court and lost. But, it is indicative that we don't have a critical mass of people here. So, the place is too small to engage in that sort of vitriolic debate about what buildings might be like and they'd be a bit better if we did have a bit more vitriol flowing around.

00:43:30 Not that I'm very combative, but, I just – that was the most memorable thing that happened at the school. Apart from one of the lecturers, I mean, the lectures on every day about, I mean, there were so many people coming, the day Louis Khan came to the school, I was just a bit tired so I didn't go in.

00:43:49 He was found dead in a lavatory in Penn Central Station about a year later, I mean, I just – that's the worst thing I did, I should have gone in to see Khan.

**JG**

00:43:59 Who else did lecture at the AA?

**RA**

00:44:03 Just people from all around the world, because, London is fairly central. And, I remember, I suppose there are other big names, I just can't remember, I just didn't go to the - - -

**RR**

00:44:12 Well, Venturi, I mean he - - -

**RA**

00:44:13 No, he wasn't there in my time. But, he – I mean, he's been there of course, but, not in my time. But, I remember someone coming in from South America and they actually bought – what are those big spiky animals – armadillos or something?

**JG**

00:44:29 Yes. Do they have armadillos or - - -

**RA**

00:44:32 No, they have armour don't they, but, this one has long spiky quills, I think – he had it with him and he's giving this lecture and this animal is walking around the room and the room's pretty full, but, people are just parted as this animal's just, sort of, making its way through the room. That was the most memorable – well, apart from Roger's thing.

**JG**

00:44:59 In that publication you also mentioned that you were influenced by Hertzberger?

**RA**

00:45:05 Hertzberger, yeah. No, he didn't - - -

**JG**

00:45:06 He didn't lecture there?

**RA**

00:45:07 No.

**JG**

00:45:08 But, how did you – your only learned about Hertzberger's work when you were in London, or you know about it - - -

**RA**

00:45:13 No. Magazines. Hertzberger, Sterling, that I'm aware of, and I saw Gino Valle's work on the way over in Italy and I liked it. I've never read anything, I keep meaning to get a book on Gino Valle, I suppose he's dead now. I've never read anything theoretical about his work, but, I imagined I knew what he was on about.

00:45:41 We saw one of his buildings in the middle of – he worked around a little town in north of Italy called Udine, I think, is that the correct pronunciation? And, we went

to one of them. I didn't know of it before there, but, just driving into the town it was obvious this was a Gino Valle building, it was just beautiful, sitting in that town. It was just scaled to the place perfectly.

00:46:07 And, we saw his big industrial building at Pordenone, which I still think is fantastic.

**RR**

00:46:14 And, did you look up Ponti, because you'd known of him?

**RA**

00:46:16 No, I wasn't all that interested. I mean, we saw the Pirelli building, yeah, we went to, is it in Rome? No, it was Milan. Yes, but, we saw Ponti buildings in Baghdad. I saw an Utzon in Tehran, he did a bank in Tehran. We got in momentarily, before the security guards shuffled us I think.

**RR**

00:46:49 And, well, you didn't think about staying in London after you finished this one year at the AA?

**RA**

00:46:56 No. No. Unlike you, I wasn't in love with it. I could cope with the weather and the cold, I couldn't cope with the dark. And, going to work in the dark and coming home in the dark, I thought, was just the most miserable life on earth.

00:47:18 And, I just think growing up in a place like this, it is more than – what's the word – it was a visceral reaction to it. I can remember seeing a corny movie while I was over there, called Cisco Pike. It had Chris Kristofferson in and it was all set in Los Angeles and they were just zooming around Venice and stuff. And, it all seemed like home, and I just wanted to go somewhere like that. I could have gone to LA, but, then I came home.

00:47:52 But, it's good when you're overseas, it helps to crystallize what you like about where you come from. You must be going through it. And, you see it in a clearer light when you're away from it.

**JG**

00:48:10 I think my reaction is the opposite, I see what I don't like about it.

**RA**

00:48:14 Well, yeah, maybe I should have seen more there, because I saw possibilities back here that I think were pretty hard to achieve. I thought there was a way of doing things that we could – I mean, eventually, I suppose I think that vernacular is generally associated with old buildings. But, I think actually, we should be working

on the leading edge of vernacular and architecture gets – there's a subject called design where people all put smocks and think they're geniuses and it just goes off into a wanky sort of world, and I think that we should be – most of my work has been on the, sort of, I didn't see it at first, but, I mean, I think it's just trying to take that conversation further forward.

**RR**

00:49:19 So, this is a regional conversation do you think?

**RA**

00:49:22 That's what it was called back in the '80s and I think I'm tarred with that brush, I suppose, forever. But, most provincial towns, like Brisbane, you know, I can remember when – and you will remember this, there was a fellow in Conrad and Gargett called Graham Thiedeke, whom you've probably interviewed, who did a little copy of a Frank Lloyd Wright chapel for Old Bishopsbourne up in Hamilton.

00:49:51 I can remember John Dalton used to write the copy for that Cross Section magazine. And, he wrote in it, I can remember word for word, 'When most buildings in Australia come second on third hand from overseas, can we complain when someone dips a little closer to the source.'

00:50:11 And, I thought that was pretty much on the money. I do think it's a copy and I think Eddie Oribin's work is more interesting than that. Because, the Thiedeke thing is more or less a copy, although it's roof is not nearly as complex, I've been to the real building, and it's a different kettle of fish.

00:50:31 But, Eddie Oribin's work, which we'll get on to, up in North Queensland, is much more inventive in his own way and takes a lot of cues from Wright's work. But, I think mainly in provincial towns like Brisbane, things get watered down.

00:50:49 Whereas, you could have actually taken – I don't know, I can barely open my eyes when I drive into Brisbane these days, whereas, it was much more obvious when you drove in there that there was a good building tradition and it's, sort of, gone nowhere.

00:51:09 And, I thought that could have been taken further, and it just isn't, because we're too intimidated by the rest of the world.

**RR**

00:51:22 This brings us to when you start practicing.

**RA**

00:51:26 A real downer.

**RR**

00:51:28 Well, you decided to practice what your thought.

**RA**

00:51:32 Yeah. But, the important thing that you haven't touched on, is when I came back from England, I worked for Geoffrey again, and then I worked for Goodsir Baker Wilde for four years. And, that was the best working experience I'd had. Of all those offices, that was by far the best working experience.

00:51:47 Because, they were a traditional firm and Bill Goodsir's son Bruce, who'd worked for Jim Birrell, but before me, had got back into his father's firm and he was stirring the place up. So, it was easy for me to come in and make – have initiatives that weren't thrown out the window.

00:52:10 The old boys were told to pay attention and help. And, it was terrific, it was a real learning experience. Bruce was on a set of hospitals and I worked on some buildings up in Papua New Guinea, and I had, the older partner – Bill Goodsir was his father, but Ken Baker was the other older partner, I worked with him.

00:52:35 Ken had all the technical expertise in the world. And, he'd just bring it to bear, helping you to resolve what the building could be. And, because, unlike Geoffrey's office or Birrell's office, which were entrepreneurial and lots of things didn't go ahead. When I worked for Geoffrey the second time I think I worked on about 20 projects, one of which went ahead.

00:52:56 Yeah. It's just all pie in the sky stuff, you know, that doesn't happen. Whereas at Goodsirs, clients would come and they'd get a brief, and they'd do sketch plans, and they'd do working drawings and you go out on site. And, then clients would come and – you know, it was like waves rolling into the shore, and it was really calm, organised place where I could get things done.

00:53:23 I did a halls of residence up in Papua New Guinea in 1975, '74 – '75, which are still there and the Papua New Guinea – I run into people who went to university and lived there and think fondly of them – and they're in good shape.

00:53:42 Ken Baker wrote the spec for it and gave me a lot of advice on the way. And, he said it was the most complicated timber spec he'd ever written. And, I think he – in all my buildings, it's probably the simplest.

**JG**

00:54:01 How was the office organised. Because everybody got to work on a particular project, because you said you did [00:54:06] - - -

**RA**

00:54:06 No, Bruce and I were stirring up – were doing most of the design work and bringing it into documentation. It wasn't just put a smock on and think of something. And,

people like Ken Baker, or specifically Ken in my case, were helping make up for my technical deficiencies and giving me an education basically. Ken gave me an education.

**JG**

00:54:34 But, it was only the three senior partners and then you and Bruce?

**RA**

00:54:38 No, there were lots of other people. We were directing other people. But, Bruce and I were the major design pushers in there, at the time.

**RR**

00:54:49 Just before you left Geoffrey, I was there for a short time and you and I went out to the tower at UQ - - -

**RA**

00:54:53 Yeah. I've seen the buildings we were working on. I've got them in rolls out here. That was the one job that went ahead, the caravan park, and they were real spivs.

**RR**

00:55:06 They were. But, we were out at the university to demonstrate what went on in an office. But, not too many people were interested in what we were doing, I think.

**RA**

00:55:17 No, we were running Geoffrey's office out there, just the two of us, working on this caravan park project. And, little else I think. And, the flood hit and we went out in trucks to help people at Corinda.

**JG**

00:55:35 And, how long were you in the tower, to do that?

**RA**

00:55:39 Two months.

**RR**

00:55:40 Couple of months, yes.

**JG**

00:55:41 But, the students didn't pay any attention to you?

**RA**

00:55:43 They walked through. And, they'd talk.

**RR**

00:55:46 Ian Sinnamon used to come for chats.

**RA**

00:55:48 I can remember he sent Patrice Derrington to see me because she was doing something that was influence by Venturi and no one know who Venturi was at the time. " I think Rex knows, this."

**RR**

00:56:04 Well, at least you owned learning from Las Vegas. Not many people would have.

**RA**

00:56:09 No, it's got 1968 written on the inside, I pulled it down the other day. So, it was fairly new. It was a very small format.

**JG**

00:56:20 How did Goodsir Baker and Wilde get this project in Papua New Guinea? Was there a connection?

**RA**

00:56:26 They were an old traditional firm, Bill was a good – Bill mixed in society so he knew the Dean of Engineering out at the University of Queensland, and he'd done engineering buildings out at the University of Queensland, and that Dean of Engineering was on the Board up in Papua New Guinea setting up – it was a University of Technology, so they did – I worked on the halls of residence and an academic and communications building on the campus.

00:56:56 And, I also documented a building that Chris Hills designed while he was there, for extensions to the admin building.

**JG**

00:57:07 Were they also doing projects in Brisbane or Queensland at the time?

**RA**

00:57:11 Yeah. Bruce was working on a big hospital in Rockhampton, and - - -

**JG**

00:57:19 Was the hospital Heathwood work?

**RA**

00:57:24 No. It's received very little publicity, but, it was a unique project. A huge amount of effort went into it. They had the hospital jobs all the way up the Queensland coast. And, I worked on Gympie Base Hospital, but, they were doing Maryborough Base Hospital, Bundaberg Base Hospital.

00:57:43 Bill Goodsir worked for Stephenson and Turner for a while, back in the '30s and he also worked for that French engineer that Don mentioned the other day that did those big [Con Set 00:57:54] huts, out of tiny pieces of timber.

00:57:58 Because, I knew it was a French engineer, I just didn't know his name. Bill said – and Bill also worked with the American architect who worked on the Metro picture theatres. He was brought out from America to do stream form, you know the Metro line?

**RR**

00:58:14 Yes.

**RA**

00:58:14 They were stream forms and he died in the Stinson aircraft that crashed on the border ranges, that Bernard O'Reilly found the couple of people who'd survived

**RR**

00:58:24 So, would he have also done the Regent Theatre or not?

**RA**

00:58:28 No, I don't think so, he was brought out of the Metro.

**JG**

00:58:31 The French Engineer was [Emile Pouget 00:58:33], was it that guy?

**RA**

00:58:35 Whoever Don said the other day.

**JG**

00:58:36 That did the fourth assembly on the aircraft - - -

**RA**

00:58:40 Yeah. Bill Goodsir worked for him.

**JG**

00:58:43 Yes. Okay. Just to have it on tape.

**RA**

00:58:46 Okay.

**JG**

00:58:48 And, after Goodsir Baker and Wilde you started your own practice?

**RA**

00:58:52 Yeah, 1978. I tried to get – I was going up to Papua New Guinea and supervising stuff up there and there was an opportunity to do a large hotel in Lae and I left the firm and I did that.

**JG**

00:59:17 But, this project you did - - -

**RA**

00:59:20 It never went ahead. In the best traditions of hotel jobs, like, I spent the whole of 1969 in Birrell's not going ahead. My version of it didn't go ahead, someone else's version – it was pinched by an engineering firm in Brisbane.

**JG**

00:59:35 But, you're own house you did when you were working at the - - -

**RA**

00:59:38 At Goodsirs.

**JG**

00:59:39 Goodsir Baker and Wilde, but that was – you had your own projects alongside or you just did your own house and - - -

**RA**

00:59:44 I did my own house, I asked Ken if I could use their letterhead on the submission to council because I said I thought it might have more gravitas than mine. He said, "Yeah, you can use it but it won't mean anything."

**RR**

01:00:00 But, you didn't have any trouble, did you, with council?

**RA**

01:00:02 No. No. But, I thought it was – I thought they might think it was a bit weird, and it was weird.

**JG**

01:00:11 That it was your house and that the name of the - - -

**RA**

01:00:13 No. No. I mean, I had a model for it sitting on my desk at Goodsir's and one of the more conservative guys in there saying, "You extending a house?" Because it looked like it had been chopped.

**RR**

01:00:32 It was a house like no other at that time.

**RA**

01:00:36 Yeah.

**RR**

01:00:37 So, you were drawing on things that other people probably hadn't seen.

**RA**

01:00:44 Yeah. I mean, it's just that the generation before us, in Brisbane, were all still working in the first throws of the modern movement. I know people think they're modernist architects now, but, it's sort of come back as a retro style now, rather than a conviction.

01:01:03 These people had moral convictions in those days, that they were pushing the good cause forward. Modernism was the medicine you had to take.

**RR**

01:01:14 But, I mean, Geoffrey would have had that idea with his work.

**RA**

01:01:17 Geoffrey and Gibson and all those people - - -

**RR**

01:01:21 And, Noel Robinson picked it up.

**RA**

01:01:23 Yeah. But, they had – it was a particular brand of modernism that worked backwards from minimal lines, so, you'd sort of say the ceiling and the soffit had to

be like that and the glass had to enter it and then you did all the complex detailing up in that part of the roof, to make sure that those things happened.

01:01:47 It was a, sort of, it was driven by an abstract idea about planes meeting, that I didn't subscribe to, it didn't acknowledge that the building had fabric that you should work with.

**RR**

01:02:06 But, on the other hand - - -

**RA**

01:02:07 It was an abstract idea.

**RR**

01:02:08 It also drew on the traditions that were all around us, in the way that you put it together.

**RA**

01:02:16 This?

**RR**

01:02:17 No, this was put together like a traditional house that might have been around 50 years earlier.

**RA**

01:02:21 Well, when I was in England Russell sent me some slides that made me homesick. Apart from seeing that bad movie, Cisco Pike, because I've seen it since and it's embarrassing, so, I wouldn't recommend that you see it. But, it was just the background that I was looking at – and, it was all about drugs – but, Russell sent slides and Russell grew up on a farm outside Ipswich and it's just a lot of country slides and it just – there was a physicality about it.

01:02:52 I mean, I can remember coming back here and you wore an overcoat for 18 months or something or other and you just shed all this stuff, and jumped into the ocean, it was just exhilarating.

**RR**

01:03:07 Well, I can remember when I came back and you driving me around the suburbs of St Lucia and these places where there's just so much vegetation and so many smells, you just knew you were somewhere else.

**RA**

01:03:23 Yes. That's right.

**RR**

01:03:24 It was just so different to Europe and therefore the architecture that existed in these places needed to be very different. And, it was.

**RA**

01:03:34 But, we had a good tradition here that, an idiosyncratic way of building that I thought we could carry forward. And, I thought that was what Gino Valle was doing over in Italy, I thought he was working with the tools to hand and he wasn't producing, you know, who says Corb's got the answer to everything. But, that's what people thought at the time didn't they?

**RR**

01:04:03 Well, they had thought that years earlier, perhaps by then, they were questioned what it was about.

**RA**

01:04:09 Yeah. And, so, yeah.

**JG**

01:04:14 But, this notion that Queensland had a particularly style of building, that's something that you got to realise in the UK or was it something that was already happening while you were here?

**RA**

01:04:23 No. I was just learning design skills when I was a student.

**JG**

01:04:28 You didn't, because, I think it was in 1967 that Richard Stringer did this Queensland background exhibit on the Queensland House and was trying to make people look at it.

**RA**

01:04:36 Look, I thought the houses were fine, but, I think if you looked at my student work you wouldn't see any particular influence. I think as a student you're just learning abstract skills about how to organise things and - - -

**RR**

01:04:50 But, after you'd been in Europe, you consciously used to study this by taking beautiful photographs of Brisbane bits that you thought you could use or you just loved.

**RA**

01:05:04 Yeah.

**RR**

01:05:05 And, you did that with a purity that no one else did.

**RA**

01:05:10 Well, I've got a wall full of slides over there. All those – and - - -

**RR**

01:05:17 And, then I guess you see it later in your art work, you know, you're celebrating these places.

**RA**

01:05:24 But, even in – I had to produce some drawings to graduate at the AA and one of the drawings was a suburban scene and they were all craftsman houses, as they call them in America, it was in a suburb called Echo Park in Los Angeles, I'd never been to, but, it looked like a better version of Ashgrove to me.

**RR**

01:05:51 Would you call that a garden suburb or not?

**RA**

01:05:52 Yeah. Yeah. It was a suburb of craftsman houses that I did awful things to, at the AA, but, really, I was more interested in the houses than the stuff that I did on their front lawns, you know. But, I didn't know at the time.

**RR**

01:06:15 But, I guess that the hard question here is about which building is constructed in Queensland between '45 and '75 do you consider significant, either personally or generally? Now, how do you respond to that, I mean, you've mentioned the people that you liked, but, is there a building that really fits that bill?

**RA**

01:06:41 Well, I think those Birrell buildings are interesting buildings, but, they're not specifically important to me, I guess. Although, I do show, as I say in that talk there, I do show people from overseas his buildings.

01:07:00 But, that's at a more abstract level. I used to take people – I mean, when Brisbane was more palatable, when it – it's been interfered with a fair bit, in my eyes, maybe not in yours though – I used to take them through the suburbs, just up and down over the hills round Toowong and show them all the houses that just – not, one is particularly interesting, but, in toto they are.

01:07:33 The way they spread over the landscape. They've knocked buildings down that I considered interesting, you know, the old picture theatre at Annerley, it was much more - - -

**RR**

01:07:44 The Boomerang?

**RA**

01:07:45 Yeah, I think that's a more interesting building than the Treasury buildings, that all the architects got their knickers in a knot about in the middle of town. The Treasure building is just – I suppose it's important for the history of Brisbane – but, it's just another tug in the forelock sort of building, not descript building, in some out of the way part of the British Empire that got built, isn't it?

01:08:11 It is to me. Whereas, that couldn't be anywhere else and it's three dimensionally interesting. It's built on – it's a theatre that's built on a hill with a two way sloping roof, gable running up the hill, that's a really inventive way to make a picture theatre, and faces the street in a, sort of, traditional way.

**JG**

01:08:35 Looking at this book, and being a bit of an outsider, I notice that you always put a lot of thought to roof structures on your project, or it seems like you always - - -

**RA**

01:08:44 Yeah. Yeah.

**JG**

01:08:45 Is that something you're conscious of while doing it, or - - -

**RR**

01:08:47 Well, roof geometry, rather than structure maybe.

**JG**

01:08:49 Geometry, yes.

**RA**

01:08:51 Yeah. Well, one of the things about working in Lae, in Papua New Guinea, which is where all – I've worked in the Highlands as well, but, it's got four times the rainfall of Brisbane, and, it's tropical. And, it's hotter and it's more humid.

01:09:12 So, if things are going to fail they fail very quickly. So, any vanities you might have to work out on your buildings are quickly called to account, because they just fail. I mean, mould grows over everything and if it's going to leak it will leak instantly. Because it rains like there's fire houses coming vertically down from heaven, you know.

01:09:40 And, so, a good roof seems like a good start. But, Papua New Guinea was like – and a bad version of the building experimental station – remember they used to have that thing, you know, where they'd put building materials to a test? It used to happen down in Melbourne, it was a part of the CSIRO, I think, and they'd make codes for the use of materials.

01:10:08 But, in PNG, it was like that every day. Everything was being tested to destruction, and, so you - - -

**RR**

01:10:16 Well, it's not only that rain, it was also the tremors that happened.

**RA**

01:10:20 They had earthquakes, they had regular earthquakes, but, the rain was the significant thing. And, so, if it was going to fail it failed quickly. So, I was – I didn't think the modern movement had much to tell Papua New Guineans, who already had an interesting way of building themselves.

01:10:38 They had beautiful traditional buildings, and, so what do you do in a country like that? You know, I had the five points of modern architecture, the open plan, the curtain wall, it's doesn't mean anything.

01:10:54 So, it was a good place to do a lot of building early in my, and yes - - -

**RR**

01:11:01 And, you did a lot of building.

**RA**

01:11:02 Yes. I did a lot of building, a lot more – it gave me much more than Brisbane ever did, and - - -

**JG**

01:11:10 But, was, when you were studying at UQ was there this tradition of looking at the heritage of Queensland buildings?

**RA**

01:11:18 No. Not at all. Well, let's see, when I was in first year, Bill Carr would be very big on Japanese houses, which had a, sort of, integrity, which you can understand. And, there was one built in New Farm wasn't there?

**RR**

01:11:44 There was.

**RA**

01:11:45 And, it was taken up to North Queensland wasn't it?

**RR**

01:11:46 Yes.

**RA**

01:11:48 And, Bill knew about that and because we knew we'd get good marks if we did a Japanese house, we all did Japanese house and Japanese type houses or something. I suppose that was, in a way, quasi related to what was going on – no one made the leap of saying, "Hang on Bill, I know there aren't any hard back books on Queensland houses, but, there's a way that things are put together here that is interesting as well. But, they weren't around at the time.

**JG**

01:12:26 By the time you got back from London, did you notice that there was an increase in the, sort of, attention for the local, or, did that still happen much later?

**RA**

01:12:32 No. Much later, I would say. Wouldn't you?

**RR**

01:12:37 Well, it was that time in the Bjelke Peterson era, where conservation started to - - -

**RA**

01:12:45 That's right.

**RR**

01:12:47 - - - be raised as an issue and there were demonstrations against knocking buildings down.

**RA**

01:12:51 Yes. And, friends were working in heritage areas that heightened your awareness of the older buildings.

**RR**

01:13:00 And, I guess that really happened around '74, is my recollection of it. I don't remember - - -

**RA**

01:13:05 When did they knock the Bellevue down?

**RR**

01:13:06 Then.

**RA**

01:13:07 Seventy-four. Well, - - -

**RR**

01:13:11 And, then Cloudland, you know, happened in '82. And, so, there were people, sort of, recognising and trying to struggle, well, what is it that we want to preserve, and you know, that was a new kind of thinking. But, other places had done it much earlier.

**RA**

01:13:36 But, I mean, Bob and Dick Allen and Don, all got heavily involved in Heritage work and I didn't, as it turned out, I just thought – whilst I liked the old buildings, I didn't concentrate my skills on their techniques, I was just interested in taking the conversation further forward.

**RR**

01:14:01 But, they did influence you, or - - -

**RA**

01:14:03 Yeah.

**RR**

01:14:03 Very specific examples. I mean, you didn't take everything, you took what you needed from places and put it together.

**RA**

01:14:13 You've got something in mind.

**RR**

01:14:16 Well, that was the first thing. I was in England when you did that and I was, well, I thought it was an important building.

**RA**

01:14:26 Yeah. Very nice.

**RR**

01:14:28 I still do, and it's gone through stages, and it grew and I've worked in it and I've been in it and I know it well. And, you practice has just continued and you've been refining that whole idea that you started off with and it's gone a long way beyond that.

**RA**

01:14:47 Yeah. But, I think that it represents a, sort of, misreading of today's world. I think --  
-

**RR**

01:14:59 Well, maybe it is.

**RA**

01:15:00 It's not a very good fit with today's world, it's a different world now.

**RR**

01:15:05 But, it was a building of its time, or perhaps before it's time.

**RA**

01:15:09 Yeah, I'm not running away from it, and, I mean, I'm still interested. I mean, I'm interested in doing things a certain way, it's just that I don't think capitalism in its current form, is interested in that. But, you know, the ships quietly going down.

**JG**

01:15:31 So, it is.

**RA**

01:15:31 And, I think we should be less greedy and I think there are important messages in these buildings still and we should learn to be living with less and, you know, yeah.

**RR**

01:15:45 You've already answered this one, but, it says, name the architects, international or local, from any period that have had a formative influence on your architectural outlook. Are there any others you want to include? You've got - - -

**RA**

01:15:59 Internationally or locally? Well, I think I – I thought I understood what Gino Valle was on about, I don't know – I'm not too aware of a lot of his work.

**RR**

01:16:17 I suppose we could look at your library and see what books on architecture you've bought.

**RA**

01:16:22 Heaps on Frank Lloyd Wright.

**JG**

01:16:26 But, that was when you were a student or later on?

**RA**

01:16:29 All eras, from second year on. He's a continuing thread in my life, I mean, I think he was probably a pretty miserable person, but, I think he had an incredible ability, a very resilient character.

01:16:50 I don't know where you start. I mean, the prairie stuff rose out of the Arts and Crafts movement, but, then he tried to reinvent himself through the '20s when his life was in turmoil.

01:17:10 When he's on [01:17:10], the design resolutions grow out of the materials he's using. He likes to describe the work as organic, and, I think some of the buildings almost have a DNA. There's a way for them to propagate themselves forward and they do.

01:17:34 But, the late work is pretty senile and I'm not too attached to that, you know, the Guggenheim and all that sort of stuff is a bit whacky. But, you know, his own in house period is fantastic. And, I've been to see quite a few of them.

01:17:52 I've been to see my favourite one, here's a good story. I didn't – I was standing outside the footpath outside the second Jacob's House, the curved one, that looks to the south, in the northern hemisphere, and you can't see it. And, I'm not very pushy, so I don't go and knock on the door and say, I'm an architect from overseas, I must see your house, I'm no good at that.

01:18:23 But, the second time – I visited America twice in recent years – and the second visit I did a bit of research and found out who owned it and I emailed her, so, technology's moved on and you can send emails and get instant feedback.

01:18:44 And, so, I ingratiated myself with them and visited it. And, I was so thrilled to be there that I'd forgotten – I'd taken a little lino cut print of banana trees that I'm fond of and I was going to give it to her as a token of my appreciation, I forgot, and so, when I got back home I wrote her a letter and sent it off to her saying, "Look, I don't care if it sits in the bottom of your drawer in the study, I'm just happy for it to live in your house."

01:19:15 And, she said, "No, no, no, we really like it – they're chemistry professors, he and she, John and Betty – and she had it framed and she photographed it and sent me the photo, so, I've got a print of banana trees on the best Frank Lloyd House.

01:19:34 You now, those people think Fallingwater – Fallingwater is a show off house, and it's certainly a virtuoso show off, I've been there, but, the stream of ordinary house is what I like and this is, I think, about the best of them. And, I've got a picture hanging on the wall.

**RR**

01:19:55 Well, what about California itself. I mean, did that have any lessons for you?

**RA**

01:20:00 This is in Wisconsin.

**RR**

01:20:02 No, but, I know that, but - - -

**RA**

01:20:05 California, Los Angeles? Well, it is physically a bit like Brisbane, although, Los Angeles is an irrigated desert actually. You've been there?

**JG**

01:20:14 Yes.

**RA**

01:20:14 Yeah. Well, I mean, there's not water flowing, it's just desert isn't it. I mean, and, the suburban developments, I've been to Pasadena, that's fantastic. I mean, the Green and Green work is interesting, and I used a Green and Green detail in one of my Papua New Guinean buildings, remember the – perhaps I can show you.

01:20:44 Sorry to leave the camera. I've still got the working details. Bob came up and helped me, I had hepatitis in Papua New Guinea and I asked him to come up and help me. I didn't know how quickly I'd recover.

01:21:04 We worked on this building for the Coffee Board and they had circular columns, and this is a Green and Green detail. The columns eventually cracked, vertically, and in order to allay the client's fears about the cracks that will inevitably happen in the circular columns, we used these opposing wedge things and after the timber dries you go around and drive the wedge and it tightens the strap.

01:21:35 That's a Green and Green rip off from Los Angeles. But, not many people were looking at those craftsman buildings in those days, were the

**RR**

01:21:47 No. Well, they were looking at MacIntosh in Scotland and you did too?

**RA**

01:21:51 Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely.

**RR**

01:21:53 And, Sterling.

**RA**

01:21:54 Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. But, when you get to Pasadena the Heinemann Brothers, who weren't actually qualified architects, were so good as buildings that they induced them to join the institute. They did really humble little housing courts and things that are fantastic to see.

01:22:21 They're in my library.

**JG**

01:22:27 Don't know them.

**RA**

01:22:28 Well, the whole craftsman movement, craftsman houses throughout the states were propagated out here too. That's why Ashgrove looked like Echo Park, because we got the magazines at the turn of the last century, buy Gustav Stickley and these people that propagated the building as a type.

**RR**

01:22:49 Well, there's only a few questions left here.

**JG**

01:22:53 But, did we ask the question which one of your projects is your favourite, of your buildings?

**RA**

01:22:59 My buildings? That's a bit hard. I mean, if you go to my website, the thing that's called recent work, they're all related buildings that show a pretty similar world view, I think.

**JG**

01:23:17 So, there is not one that you would single out?

**RA**

01:23:21 I don't know. My studio, back in Taringa is pretty good, I think.

**RR**

01:23:30 And, recognised as such. But, while you were up in Papua New Guinea you produced a design for the competition for Parliament House.

**RA**

01:23:41 Which you walked past when you came in. Yeah.

**RR**

01:23:43 So, that was a huge undertaking for a two person office.

**RA**

01:23:48 That's right. Dennis made the model and I did all the drawings. The drawings are still there in rolls, they're on AO, and you try working on an AO sheet of paper in the tropics. It grows this much.

01:24:05 Anyway, it was very good working on the Canberra Parliament House, I say I came 11<sup>th</sup>, I don't know where – I mean, 300 or 400 firms entered, and then were premiated. But, I knew one of the judges, not at the time, but later, and he had remembered the work and like it and he liked the Coffee Board building.

01:24:32 Paul Reed, the fellow who was one of the judges there, previous head architect of NCDC. But, it was so humungous that when the competition for Darwin Parliament House came along a few years later, when I came back to Brisbane, it was like doing a doll's house by comparison.

01:24:54 And, I did a better building for that, and I've still got the model for that, which you walked passed as well, I came second in that. Now, there's two items of regret; Phil Cox came first – Cox's office came first and I think it was the worst building, it was not a resolved thing, but, I think they gave him the job, politically, because he had

work in the Northern Territory and he was a big office, which was a very disappointing Australian outcome for, you know, it's just not adventurous.

01:25:32 And, second ball, because it's in Darwin, they're cowboys up there anyway, and they didn't build that, they built just, Warren Anderson's one from the bottom draw. Just an entrepreneurial builder who would have gone to the parliament in Darwin and said, "I can do it cheaper." And, so, he did.

01:25:53 And, so, that's how things happen in the frontier. But, I did learn through Patrick Bingham-Hall, who was talking to one of the judges in Darwin, "Oh, yes, Rex did the best scheme, but, we gave it to Cox 'cause..." And, you could see that it wasn't - - -

01:26:09 I mean, Cox would have been capable of a better building. It wasn't - I'm not a fan of Cox's work, but, this was far from the best of his work. He just dashed it out and that.

**RR**

01:26:23 Or, maybe someone else did it.

**RA**

01:26:24 That's right, someone from his office did, whereas, mine was actually - I'd still stand by that building, whereas, when I was doing the Parliament House in Canberra, it was a good organisational idea, but, it wasn't mine in any particular building way. It was a good organisational solution to the hill.

01:26:47 Whereas, Darwin was a good organisational solution and it was my building and I liked it. And, it would have been a good building.

**RR**

01:26:55 In the City. In that city?

**RA**

01:26:57 Yeah. Yeah. It would have.

**RR**

01:27:00 Well, was there any significant architects who worked for you, in your office?

**RA**

01:27:08 Lots of people. You worked there. I'd be a bit remiss if I didn't say it.

**RR**

01:27:17 Well, I only worked there for a very short time.

**RA**

01:27:19 There were a couple of periods. PNG and then Kambah. Yeah. You don't want me to go through all the people do you? I mean, Dennis Formiatti came and worked with me in Papua New Guinea and he was terrific, he was a student I thought was pretty bright and it was his year out.

01:27:41 And, he worked up there and then, when I came back to Brisbane he worked in my office again. He's a gifted designer and he's doing small construction work with a partner, down in Canberra, so, that's interesting.

**RR**

01:27:55 Yeah. But, he understood what you were on about and he just picked it up and helped.

**RA**

01:27:59 Yes. Yes. And, he worked in Dick Allen's office, did he work in your office?

**RR**

01:28:03 No.

**RA**

01:28:05 But, he worked in Dick's office. Yeah. Peter Skinner worked in my office.

**RR**

01:28:13 But, you kept the office small, I mean, it wasn't like you - - -

**RA**

01:28:16 Michael Scott worked there for a while? You know, lots of people. I kept - I mean, the office was as big as it needed to be. I had four - for those days - four pretty large sized jobs in a row, in Canberra, four \$4 million projects in a row, through the '80s and into the '90s.

01:28:39 And, that kept the staff rolling along. Kept the professional indemnity premiums high and - - -

**RR**

01:28:48 So, how many people did you have, at the most?

**RA**

01:28:52 Wouldn't have been more than ten. At Brett House we had packed a few in there. But, would never have been - then I had it - it's hard, well, Bob will tell you, it's hard to know how to structure a practice over time.

01:29:13 I had a couple of unsuccessful partnerships.

**RR**

01:29:18 Well, that's always the hardest bit, is how you - - -

**RA**

01:29:21 I didn't know how to shed the load.

**RR**

01:29:23 Yeah. That's right.

**RA**

01:29:24 And, I wanted to keep my finger on the pulse.

**RR**

01:29:26 And, you did.

**RA**

01:29:28 Yeah. But, you know.

**RR**

01:29:30 You probably learned that from Frosty.

**RA**

01:29:33 I didn't learn anything from Frosty. Bob is much more interested in Keith Frost than I am. I just had that one bruising experience that's documented in there.

**RR**

01:29:49 Well, do you think that your practice has had any impact on present day architecture in Queensland?

**RA**

01:29:55 No. No.

**JG**

01:29:57 No?

**RR**

01:29:58 I think others would disagree.

**JG**

01:29:59 Yes.

**RA**

01:30:01 Well, show me what?

**RR**

01:30:05 Well, that's harder. But - - -

**RA**

01:30:08 Well, that's what you're asking me.

**RR**

01:30:09 You influenced a lot of people and I suppose - - -

**RA**

01:30:14 But, I think the conversation's moved on – I don't know why it makes that mark, don't worry about it - - -

**RR**

01:30:20 You know, I think people like Peter Roy, who went on to do quite a lot of work, publicly, was very much influenced by you.

**RA**

01:30:32 Well, I was hoping Peter would be a partner at one stage. But, life didn't go that way.

**RR**

01:30:40 I mean, Libby Watson Brown, I think, was influenced by you and I don't know how long she worked in the office.

**RA**

01:30:47 She didn't.

**RR**

01:30:48 Well, she worked for me when I was in your office, so, she was there. That was my memory of it, because she was working on my projects when I was working in your office.

**RA**

01:31:00 Okay. It all becomes a bit – no, I think that, you know – I think my generation didn't do too well in public works in Queensland. They were missed out, for whatever

reason. I went in to try to hawk my wares in public works to try to get a decent public commission. I didn't get one.

01:31:25 People like Garry May were in charge there and he was a guy in my year and they just weren't adventurous. Whereas, younger firms, like Donovan Hill have done very well through the public sector and otherwise.

01:31:40 Somehow, it wasn't – I mean, we can get onto a philosophical discussion about where the work's going, I just see it as more interested in international design trends than in producing local product.

**JG**

01:31:55 But, I think – well, I don't think that question should be taken too literally. I think your office, seeing it as an outsider, has an influence in the way you reinvented a bit of the local building tradition and made it modern. I don't want to use the word modern, but - - -

**RA**

01:32:15 Yeah. No. No. No. But, I think that's what, you know, I went to Malaysia a couple of years ago and you're driving up and you see the work that the young English architects were doing for ordinary buildings for barracks and meeting halls and things. And, I really admire it, because, these people were trained in offices, they didn't have an idea that design was something precious that you popped a smock on and had a metaphorical idea about. It was taking a way of making buildings for it.

01:32:51 I think they probably came out to the empire, as it was then, made a few stupid mistakes and figured out how to do things within a tradition of building, and, they did it. And, I think they're terrific buildings. I just thought that I was doing similar things here.

01:33:10 But, I think that, you know, it's too complex now, capitalism is a tricky paradigm, that's the only one in existence in the world now, communism has gone down the chute. And, so, you know, people are interested in ingredients now, I think, and, when they, you know, when things become more dire, that's – I don't know, it's just tricky.

01:33:45 There are too many – I heard an expression the other day, 'There's too much staff, I'm dying of staffication,' .

**JG**

01:33:59 I haven't heard that one.

**RA**

01:34:00 No, I thought it was pretty good. It's very hard, you know, there are new building products, for instance, every couple of months and they're not tested and they'll fall off the market quickly and - - -

**RR**

01:34:13 But, do you – I wouldn't think that I even needed to know about them, I mean, I just distrust them.

**RA**

01:34:19 I don't, I don't. Yes. But, you're regarded as some antediluvian , sort of - - -

**RR**

01:34:27 Unless it's a technical breakthrough in something that, you know, you need to fire proof something in a way that you couldn't do before. I mean - - -

**RA**

01:34:35 I mean, it's not to say that I'm not interested, I'm - this is the way houses used to be put together and after the war, after 1945, this is how they had to be put together, because there were – there's a book around here – yeah, here it is – that's just a page from the Commonwealth Savings Bank - - -

**JG**

01:35:04 Acceptable standards of construction.

**RA**

01:35:05 - - - housing loans. So, after the war, you could – bricks became available and Gabriel Poole, another Queensland architect, describes brick veneer as expensive paint. Which is pretty accurate.

01:35:20 But, this became – before the war, this was ubiquitous, after the war this was ubiquitous, all over Australia. This is ubiquitous in Queensland only. And, then suddenly in Australia everywhere, because of the finance people, produced – and, this is – I tried to produce a third section in this, just when I was doing work for the Centre for Subtropical Design, and, I used all the new age timber products.

01:35:53 I mean, I don't – I'm not quite sure how they'll stand the test of time, but, trying to use current technology to take that conversation, bypassing that, and taking it further forward. I think that's where the game is, or that's what I'm interested in, but, I don't think there are commissions out there for it.

01:36:16 You know, I had a mining company ring me up and suddenly, you know, "Yes, yes, we're on with this," and then you hear nothing from them for three months and

then they ring you up and say, "It's got to be done by yesterday." And, I just say, "Get stuffed."

01:36:36 Maybe if I was a huge organisation, maybe if I was Conrad and Gargett I could respond, but, I think these people scrub the floor with you, you know, Gina Reinhardt comes in and says, "Yes, I've got money, do it."

01:36:48 And, they're not really committed to doing it. Whereas, if there was some forethought, I mean, because we've only got a small population, the top building we can produce in Australia, are – with any forethought – is the Titan Shed. That's all we bring to the table.

01:37:08 You know, you've seen the ads on TV, the sheds that everyone thinks are invisible, if they're green colour bond, you know, they've got no eaves and they're just tin. But, you go – yeah, on one of those Kevin – what's his name, the guy who does the building design project show on TV, Kevin McCloud.

01:37:34 My favourite one of those was this older couple, ordered a prefab German house and it was just so schmick, you wouldn't believe. It's like a BMW house, and they were all – the whole house is done and all the tradesmen come to England and they're all there and they're working like clockwork and the one thing that holds them up is the English crane driver can't find the site.

01:38:03 Other than that, the whole thing goes together like that and it's a really sophisticated product. But, all we can produce here, in Australia, is the Titan Shed. It's numbers, it's numbers, they've got market.

**RR**

01:38:23 Well, there's one more question.

**RA**

01:38:25 Sorry, I'm depressing – I'm depressing you, very young person.

**RR**

01:38:32 Post '75, are there any buildings constructed in Queensland that you - - -

**RA**

01:38:36 Post '75?

**RR**

01:38:37 Post '75, any buildings constructed in Queensland that you consider significant?

**RA**

01:38:45 Yeah.

**RR**

01:38:51 This is the time of your practice, when other people were building things, as well as you, there must have been something there that you thought was okay. Maybe it's a Bruce Goodsir or maybe it's one of yours.

**RA**

01:39:07 Well, I mean, Bruce did that - - -

**RR**

01:39:09 Or, one of Don's.

**RA**

01:39:10 Yeah. One of Don's. Don's a good friend of mine. You've met him, spoken to him?

**RR**

01:39:31 We can come back to that.

**RA**

01:39:33 Do you mean - - -

**RR**

01:39:34 That's the last question.

**RA**

01:39:35 Do you mean an institutional building, a major institutional building.

**RR**

01:39:37 Well, Don did a lot of TAFE buildings.

**RA**

01:39:40 Yeah. I'm not too familiar with a lot of them.

**JG**

01:39:43 It doesn't have to be an institutional building, it can also be a house, if you think that was - - -

**RA**

01:39:46 Well, I did my best. But, you know, Bruce went – Bruce Goodsir went to Tasmania, so it's not in Queensland.

**RR**

01:39:57 He did a few - - -

**RA**

01:39:58 He did early hippie houses up in Mt Nebo.

**RR**

01:40:00 And, I've never really seen them, I've seen a few blurry photographs.

**RA**

01:40:03 They're quirky. They're sweet and quirky.

**JG**

01:40:10 I know them.

**RR**

01:40:12 Well, what about Russell's work?

**RA**

01:40:14 Russell's work, yeah. That print up there on the wall, Architecture Australia asked me to produce something that commemorate 100 years of publishing architecture and all of those buildings are in Queensland. And, they cover 100 year period and as well spaced as I could get out.

01:40:42 The top one's a Dod's, the second one is a craftsman house over in Greenslopes, that's been demolished, so has the Dod's house. That's a Dod's house, that's Dod's own house that was demolished for a block of shonky units in New Farm.

01:41:04 That's a craftsman house that was built in Greenslopes that's been demolished. Not unlike the Heinemann Brothers that I was talking about. This is Eddie Oribin's studio in Cairns, done in the '50s, late '50s early '60s. That's Russell Hall's house on Camp Island, just off the coast of Queensland in Bowen.

01:41:28 And, that's a house that I did in Brookfield. So, those are the ones that I picked out because I wanted a personal connection to them all.

**JG**

01:41:39 That's a good answer to that question.

**RA**

01:41:41 Yeah.

**RR**

01:41:42 It is. I mean, it's the best answer we've ever had.

**RA**

01:41:54 Have you reached the end of your digital life, or - - -

**JG**

01:41:57 I think so. We're nearing the end of our tape, so, unless you have another question Robert?

**RR**

01:42:03 Well, the story that you told, before we turned on the tape, perhaps if we could get you to repeat it.

**RA**

01:42:10 It was a about a house I did in Goondiwindi when I was working for Goodsir Baker Wild and it's in this book. It was done for a wheat farmer at Goondiwindi, who was in his '50s at the time, and I thought that was pretty old, I was in my '20s. I'm now in my '60s.

01:42:30 An important house, ipso facto for him, was a brick house and, no amount of talking could convince him otherwise, even though the soil out there was very volatile, it was expensive black soil and it's very difficult to build masonry houses on the black soil because they develop cracks everywhere.

01:42:51 So, in order for the house not to move we drilled the foundations more than 15 feet, at the time, I guess – it might have been in metric, is was on the cusp of changing to metric – imperial to metric – so, they went down 15 or 20 feet and they belled out, the house cost \$150,000, which was a lot in the late '70s.

**RR**

01:43:16 What did you house cost at that time?

**RA**

01:43:22 About 10, something like that.

**RR**

01:43:24 Fifteen times?

**RA**

01:43:26 Yeah. And, so, but it cost \$50,000 to get to ground level is what I'm saying. The foundation – a third of the money was poured in the ground because he wanted

bricks. So, we gave him a brick front and it was largely timber elsewhere and I had an elaborate chimney, because it gets cold out Goondiwindi, and, the chimney [coiled 01:43:53] in two directions out of the wall and became free standing as that - -

**RR**

01:43:57 It was a brick chimney?

**RA**

01:43:58 Brick chimney and a brick fireplace. And, I detailed it all and I used to go out on the site, but, the bricklayer was there one weekend when I wasn't there, and was breathing in the client's ear.

01:44:13 The client had not had confidence in me to date because I was in my 20s and I had longish hair for the era, and it was a conservative firm I was working for and he was hoping to get one of the senior partners, rather than the young buck.

01:44:26 So, he rang me up on the weekend and said, the bricklayer said that the chimney is going to fall down if he builds it like this. And, I can remember Bill Goodsir, who was the senior partner in the firm being a fairly combative character, using this expression I said, "It won't fall down" I was confident it wouldn't fall down because I worked through it with Les Adsett, the engineer.

01:44:54 And, I said, "And, if he changes anything, I'll give you a written guarantee," which was Bill's expression, "That it will smoke the house out." And, there was silence on the other end of the phone.

01:45:10 He said, "Okay," and he went off and read the riot act to the bricklayer and the bricklayer got on with it. Anyway, months later, it was finished – the house was finished and we were driving through Goondiwindi on our way to Canberra, and we called in, and there'd been a big function in town, a rodeo or gymkhana, call it what you like.

01:45:31 And, all the people from the town were back and the fire was going, it was drawing perfectly, and, Torbert tapped the glass and stopped everyone talking, and told them this story. Because, it had obviously changed his opinion of me, "And, Rex said that it wouldn't fall down and he'd give me a written guarantee that it would smoke the house out if he changed anything." And, I thought, I'd rather the bloody thing fell down than smoke the house out."

01:46:05 And, as you can all see, it hasn't fallen down and it works. So, it was good.

**RR**

01:46:09 Must have been the highlight of your career.

**RA**

01:46:12        Just about the best story from my architectural career, yeah.

**RR**

01:46:17        A win.

**JG**

01:46:18        That's a nice ending to our recording.

END OF TRANSCRIPT