

Fig.293



Fig.294

Fig.293 NS118•84-M60, Millier House, Eastern Beach, Auckland, Ground Floor Plan, 1984

Fig.294 NS125•84-R17, Read House, Bucklands Beach, exterior, 1984

Conclusion

This study began with an intention to locate and contextualise the work of Neil Simmons in relation to the Block NZAFT Chart, Version 1.0 May 2008. It appears now that a literal insertion into this NZAFT chart may not be necessary or desirable, as its current form belongs to and reinforces what can be called a 'major' reading of the accepted canon of New Zealand architectural history. There is the possibility of producing an overlay or co-existing layer, one which includes the 'minor', or 'marginal' New Zealand figures. Another conceptual approach could be to thread such minor figures through, intertwining with the clear and well established structure to the chart.¹ A 'major' structuring of any history necessarily uses set standards as a frame of reference, through which to understand main and influential events. In architecture in New Zealand, then, there are many set standards as established by the professional, registration and academic bodies, annual awards, and institute and academic publications. 'Minor' histories are many, varied and concurrent with such major frameworks, they often support and overlap, and have a particular character. This is understood as an additive, rather than a subversive, approach and one that attempts to build on the substantial base that has been founded.

Often minor characters in a history can be more persistent in developing and evolving one of the main strands of the major history, and this research on the work of Neil Simmons reveals his contribution to the development of several themes which are hallmarks of the 1960s and 1970s architecture in New Zealand. In particular, the persistent search for some form of national identity throughout the 20th Century shaped the developing and dominant 'nationalist' style, which has at its core landscape and its perception. The Man Alone mythology has been shown by Pound and others to have been forged from a particular viewpoint based around the landscape and its relationship to the pioneering Pakeha male at the turn of last century. This powerful character has dominated the arts and architecture between 1930 and 1970, and Simmons' architectural education and first decade of practice fell into the in the latter period of this era. From 1970, this man alone era had a marked shift, which seemed to reinvent the earlier, discarded, drifter figure in New Zealand's history. The Larrikin had become a developed character by then, one that was less deviant or anti-social and therefore embraced more easily. This version of the pioneering male was suited to the 1970s era, influenced here from the counterculture movement in America at that time. This decade was well suited to the personal character of Simmons and his production of architectural work was prolific and lively.

To re-address accepted histories from a minor framework is, in the early 21st-first century, a familiar idea and we do have many examples of re-written histories from non-major gender, cultural, or social points of view. The interest in minor histories in New Zealand architecture is supported in many online forums, such as www.lostproperty.org.nz, which seeks to find the lost items of a particular, mid 20th Century period of our architectural history, and often are stored out of sight 'in a cupboard'. Austin reminds us, however, that with each new list proposed, there are more omitted, and so the threads, both major and minor, complex, concurrent and are never-ending;

¹ Deleuze and Pavnet describe this as having languages inside languages, for all strands to co-exist alongside or within the major reading of history: 'We must be bilingual even in a single language, we must have a minor language inside our own language, we must create a minor use of our own language.' Deleuze, G. and Pavnet, C. *Dialogues*, 1987, 4.



Fig.295



Fig.296



Fig.297



Fig.298

Fig.295 NS114•84-N14, New Zealand Police Recreation Centre, Stanmore Bay, exterior, 1984

Fig.296 NS114•84-N14, construction progress photo, steel frame

Fig.297 NS114•84-N14, exterior

Fig.298 NS114•84-N14, exterior with ramp

'In other words the list produces all sorts of new eliminations (just for example women, Polynesians government architects, builders, engineers, English expatriates, American expatriates, South Islanders) each of which could be argued for as a neglected exclusion, and each of which could become a new research topic. The list is never wide enough.'²

The selection criteria for the NZAFT chart itself, which is clearly defined in the text accompanying the diagram, can be looked at in relation to the work of a marginal figure such as Neil Simmons. The first criteria acknowledges the relationship between publication of architectural work and the establishment of an architectural canon, and the appearance in *A History of New Zealand Architecture* by Peter Shaw³ is a clear ground to lay, as this book has wide coverage, has been updated twice since its original publication in 1991, and is generally taken to form the basis of New Zealand architectural history. It continues to be relevant as a mainstream historical reference due to its variations and updates as the perception of history changes, again an example of how history can be understood as a living series of recorded perceptions, rather than a fixed entity. John Walsh, past editor of *Architecture NZ*,⁴ the official magazine of the New Zealand Institute of Architects (NZIA), has confirmed this; 'Architects have a vested interest in publishing criteria because the record, over time, becomes the canon.'⁵ He continues by noting that there is a substantial power held by the publications themselves in relation to architectural history, and that omissions occur often and easily; 'Some good buildings fall out of history, taking their architects with them, because they're not published.'⁶ Simmons' relationship with architectural media has been intermittent, and remains largely unpublished. A review of his published work (Appendix B) reveals that publication has generally occurred sporadically and has always been activated by others.

The second criteria immediately places the NZIA competition structure as defining the pool of high-quality architectural work, an obvious and well-supported measure. However it is known and acknowledged by the Institute itself that as this competition relies on self-selection, and many deserving buildings do not get entered and are therefore never recognized by the Institute. It appears that no research has been carried out into the possible reasons that some architects elect not to be involved in this award process,⁷ although the NZIA constantly reviews the awards process.⁸ Despite his involvement in many other competitions and award programmes over the decades, (Appendix C) Neil Simmons has never entered his own projects into this award programme (although more recently some projects have been entered for Local Awards on his behalf). It seems that personal characteristics have an effect

² Austin, M. Round Table Connections: The House in the Auckland Scene. *Interstices* 5, 2000, 133. Austin's article was in response to a challenge made by Bill McKay, (Senior Lecturer, architectural critic) who had argued for the inclusion of the many architects working in the international modernist style, who at that time were absent from the written histories of architecture in New Zealand. McKay, working with Julia Gatley and others, has redressed this imbalance with several publications, including 'Long Live The Modern', the journal *Modern New Zealand* and involvement with the organization Docomomo, and they have both received a New Zealand Institute of Architects Presidents Award (2009) for contribution to historical research.

³ Shaw, Peter. *A History of New Zealand Architecture*. Hachette NZ Ltd, Auckland, 2003. Originally published as *NZ Architecture: from Polynesian beginnings to 1990*. Hodder & Stoughton, Auckland, 1991. Second publication: *A History of New Zealand Architecture*. Hodder Moe Beckett, Auckland, 1997.

⁴ John Walsh, editor *Architecture NZ* 2001-2011.

⁵ Walsh, J. Architecture Matters. The Inaugural Lecture, 14 July 2011. *Block* 07, 2011.

⁶ Walsh, J. Architecture Matters. The Inaugural Lecture, 14 July 2011. *Block* 07, 2011.

⁷ Pers.comm. B.McRae, NZIA Chief Executive 11/10/11.

⁸ For example, the awards structure is constantly under revision to simplify the levels of awards, as well as entry criteria. Refer to (ed.) Walker, Charles *Exquisite Apart: One Hundred Years of Architecture in New Zealand*. Balasoglou Books, 2005 for an historical overview of the awards, as well as McCarthy, Christine 'Going for Gold: New Zealand houses in the 60s through the veil of the N.Z.I.A. Bronze Medals' in *the Proceedings of "...about as austere as a Dior gown..." New Zealand Architecture in the 1960s: a one day symposium*, Friday 8th December 2005 (ed) McCarthy, Christine. Centre for Building Performance Research, Victoria University, Wellington for discussion of the awards system and selections.



Fig.299



Fig.300



Fig.301

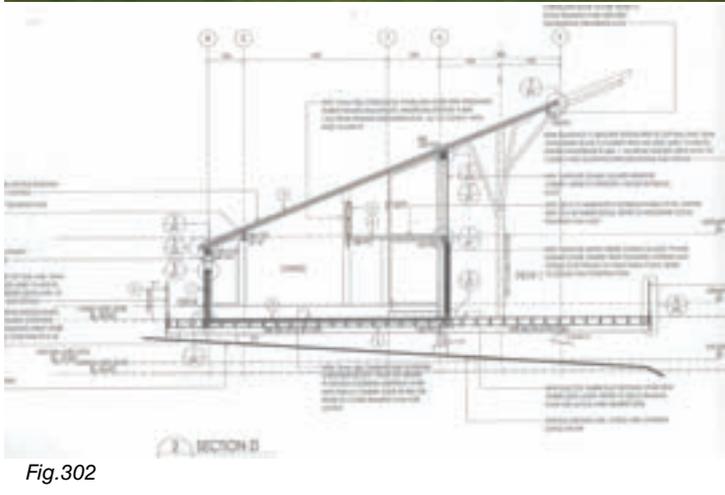


Fig.302

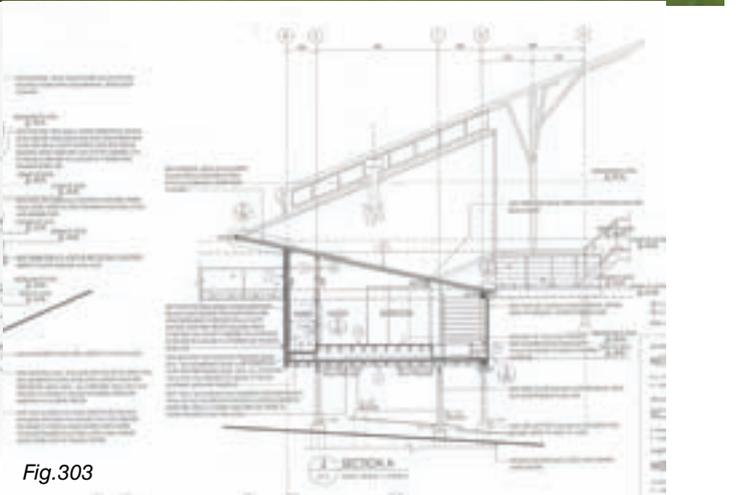


Fig.303

Fig.299 NS108•82-P27, Pakuranga Bowling Club, Lloyd Elsmore Park, Pakuranga, exterior across lawns, 1982

Fig.300 NS108•82-P27, exterior from rear, 1982

Fig.301 NS108•82-P27, exterior from lawns, towards Entry, 1982

Fig.302 S70, Sorenson and Dobbs House, Opito Bay, Northland, Section D, 2004

Fig.303 S70, Section A, 2004

on this decision, as Simmons has less interest in celebrating *completed projects* than in the potential of *unbuilt projects*, and selects instead to enter competitions that call for design proposals.

The first two criteria are easily measured because they are established in print, however the third is a less quantifiable measure. Architectural lineage relies on connections between groups and individuals, and here a distinction is to be made on whether such connections are 'significant'. Some form of editorial control must apply and this is where cultural and socio-political influences are evident. Simmons formed early connections with established practitioners, who became his mentors, and later established links into the counterculture movement, shown to influence his architectural practice. However Simmons himself tends to obscure influence and mentorship, and in typical response when pressed to discuss his own, Simmons replies that in his later career he 'tended to stand alone.'⁹ He values his outsider status and enjoys his separation from the establishment of organizations such as the Institute of Architects.

In the text to the NZAFT, Barrie hints at the erasure of the man alone myth, and concludes that perhaps the rugged individualist is not prevalent in the architectural community;

'The chart also shows the importance of horizontal connections – partnerships – with most architects having operated in joint or group practice at some point. It seems the romantic image of the kiwi architect as rugged individualist – attractive though it may be to local sensitivities – rarely holds true.'¹⁰

It is equally possible that it is only those who work in group situations that become visible to the profession. There may be many examples of actual rugged individualists, man alone or *larrikin*, who are as real as ever, albeit under the radar. Despite being relatively unseen, it is believed that minor voices do have a huge impact in the architectural history of Auckland and New Zealand.

This study acknowledges the personal framework taken, a review of a father's architectural work from the view of an architect daughter. It is also a 21st Century review of work produced over 27 years ago, and a review from a female perspective of a very male character and work. It may be that parts of the analysis provided come as a surprise to Simmons himself, and it is never assumed that he consciously worked with the themes as discussed. The written analysis on the family home designed by Neil Simmons, has included both a description under the theme of man alone, and a personal reading from the experience of having known this building for over 40 years.

A 21st Century perspective means that the colonial perception is no longer the dominant one, as summarised by Pound;

'Given the now unavoidable presence of a Maori voice, it is no longer possible to presume a single identity for a New Zealand culture, as the Nationalists had, with their unitary 'our', 'we' and 'I'. Nor is it possible any longer to see New Zealand as a silent and empty land, awaiting a history and culture of its own.'¹¹

When this research began, it was difficult to separate my personal knowledge of Simmons' work as an architect, and of his qualities as an individual. From the viewpoint of being both

⁹. Pers. comm. N.Simmons 30/6/11.

¹⁰. Barrie, A. 'New Zealand Architecture Family Tree' *Block Version 1.0*, 2008.

¹¹. Pound, Francis *The Invention of New Zealand. Art & National Identity 1930-1970*. Auckland University Press, 2009, 364.



Fig.304

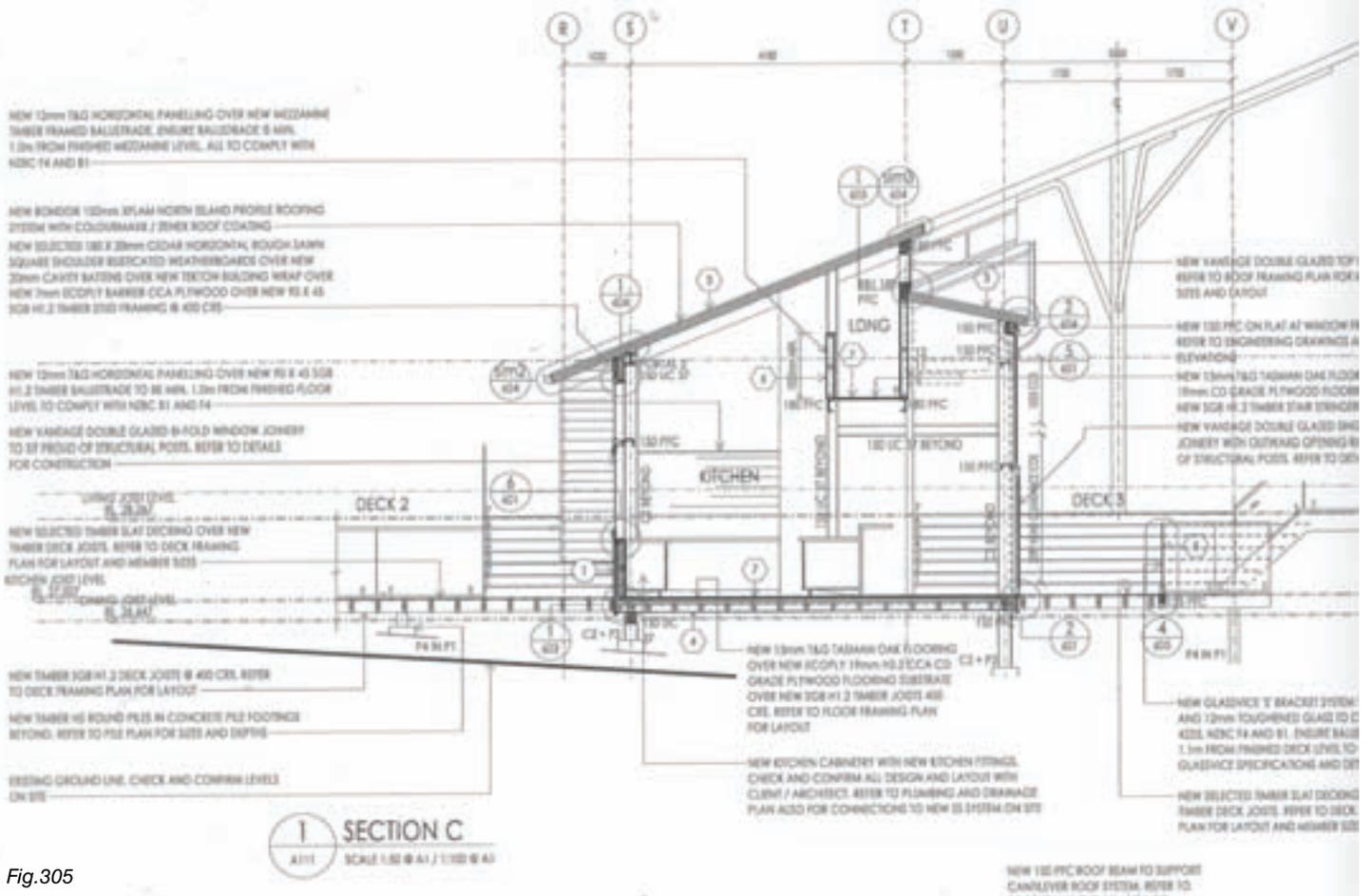


Fig.305

Fig.304 S70, Sorenson and Dobbs House, Opito Bay, Northland, model, 2004.

Fig.305 S70, Section C, 2004. Neil Simmons currently practices architecture from his home studio in Eastern Beach, Auckland, and the Sorenson and Dobbs House is an example of recent work to provide an indication how his architectural projects have developed since 1984.

his daughter and an architect who has at times worked in the office of Neil Simmons • Architect, the two aspects have over the years intertwined. Simmons' architectural projects have always appeared to be slightly non-conformist yet not of an extrovert nature, a match to his personality. In the course of the research, an understanding has emerged of how Simmons' early work was produced from a nationalist, man alone position, and transversed to the easy fit of the larrikin figure in the 1970s. Earlier attempts to place his work in context with peers and the accepted canon of architectural history was difficult due to this crossing from one form of New Zealand's pakeha male identity development, to the other.

That both of these aspects of the pioneer male have co-existed throughout Simmons' work, in both the 1960s and the 1970s, a clear picture was not evident to me. It has emerged that it was quite possibly the changing character of the nation that had an effect on the way his work was perceived at the time and accepted or otherwise. That is, the nationalist viewpoint dominant during his student years and first decade of architectural practice revealed the solitary introvert character whose spiritual connection with the land was a clear fit to the time. His larrikin nature during this period did not fit with the profession and it remained less visible. The architectural work at this time appears contemplative, spatially economical and with a strong sense of interior intensity.

As the nation's identity shifted to a position of acceptance of the maverick aspect of the pioneer character, albeit a hard-working and 'safe' one, Simmons' offbeat humour and lifestyle became visible to the profession. During these years the melancholic and solitary aspect to his architectural work and personality receded somehow, and in the pole houses of the 1970s an exuberance, previously not revealed, is expressed. When the study began, I believed that the architectural work of my father mirrored his personality as a proudly introverted misfit, yet by placing the work in this context it is seen now as being very clearly of its time. In fact, I believe the early architectural work of Simmons is of not one time but two, belonging to both the man alone and the larrikin eras simultaneously, over the twenty-five year period of this study.