

generational change



Successful extensions turn an Auckland house into a model of controlled spatial expansion.

The detached family dwelling is perhaps the most difficult building type to design. The architect is intent on understanding the needs of the people who will inhabit the dwelling. But there is also a desire to discover the essence of place, to imagine what it will be like to live there. In this discovery process, there are only a few basic certainties on which the architect can depend — climate, with its diurnal and annual rhythms, and the corresponding cycles of growth and decline in nature. These cycles, along with landform and its underlying structure, provide the raw setting into which the building must repose and integrate.

On these counts, Sue and Grant Alexander's recently acquired Devonport house performs well. The house, built in 1972, occupies a narrow portion of a Stanley Point site that slopes steeply north and west to the tidal flats of Ngataranga Bay. The building is situated on the clifftop, which stretches out 50 metres by 20 metres on a southeast-northwest axis, with retaining walls on two sides. Mature pohutukawa trees line the slopes and several carefully tended and venerable examples of these natives, along with a huge



LEFT: View from the east shows north facing decks. New bedroom addition in foreground.



RIGHT: View from garden shows loft extension for fourth bedroom.

FAR RIGHT: View from west. Verandah canopies along north face provide shade and shelter.

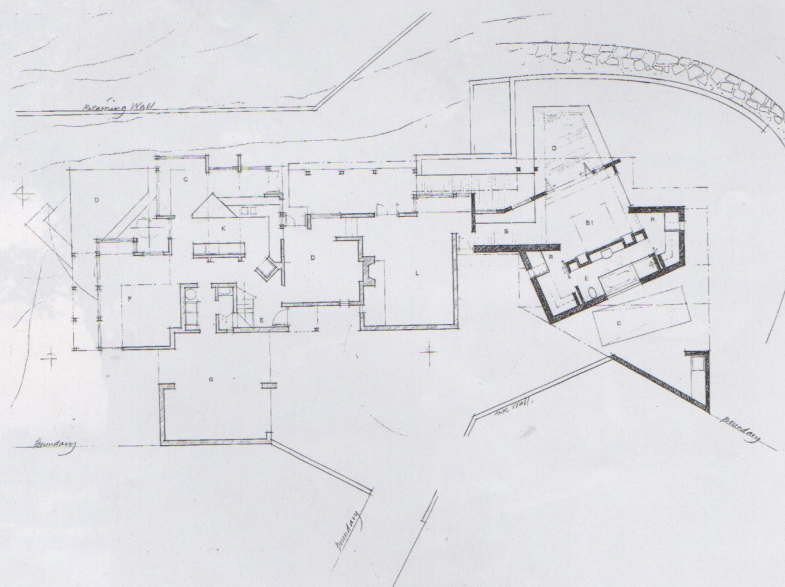
BOTTOM RIGHT: Floor plan of the most recent alteration (stage 4) shows new wing at east.

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP LEFT: Study and bedroom of new wing.

RIGHT: Carefully conceived cabinet joinery in dressing room. Fittings remain consistent throughout the house.

BOTTOM LEFT: Sloping ceiling reflects roof-line above.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Ensuite bathroom can be entered from either end.



old flame tree, also grace the upper part of the site with their presence, providing shade and shelter.

One arrives at the house through the arcadian estates of Stanley Point, then down a drive between two villas. The sandy beige stucco, south-facing walls and dark-blue, steeply pitched, LT7-profiled roofs – the first glimpses of the dwelling – are only rarely penetrated with lights or doors and form a solid block to the openness beyond. At this point, it is obvious we are approaching a house of the late 20th century.

The original brief for the site was for architect Neil Simmons to produce two Victorian-type houses for two members of the same family. But the second house was never built. Instead, one much larger house has, over time and with several additions, been developed from the original two-and-a-half storey, three-bedroom home.

Once inside the original portion of the house, the extent of the complex and economical space-planning that Simmons is

known for, becomes clear. This house is no barren modernist vision, nor some mass housing version of a place that is fit for Everyman. It is more like some medieval village, where every corner, yard and cupboard has become a place personalised by the architect's consciousness and fully occupied by the people who live here. The result of this built-in complexity in the original design is an encouragement for the occupants to explore into the house and grounds, a willingness to inhabit. As the requirements of the original owners changed,

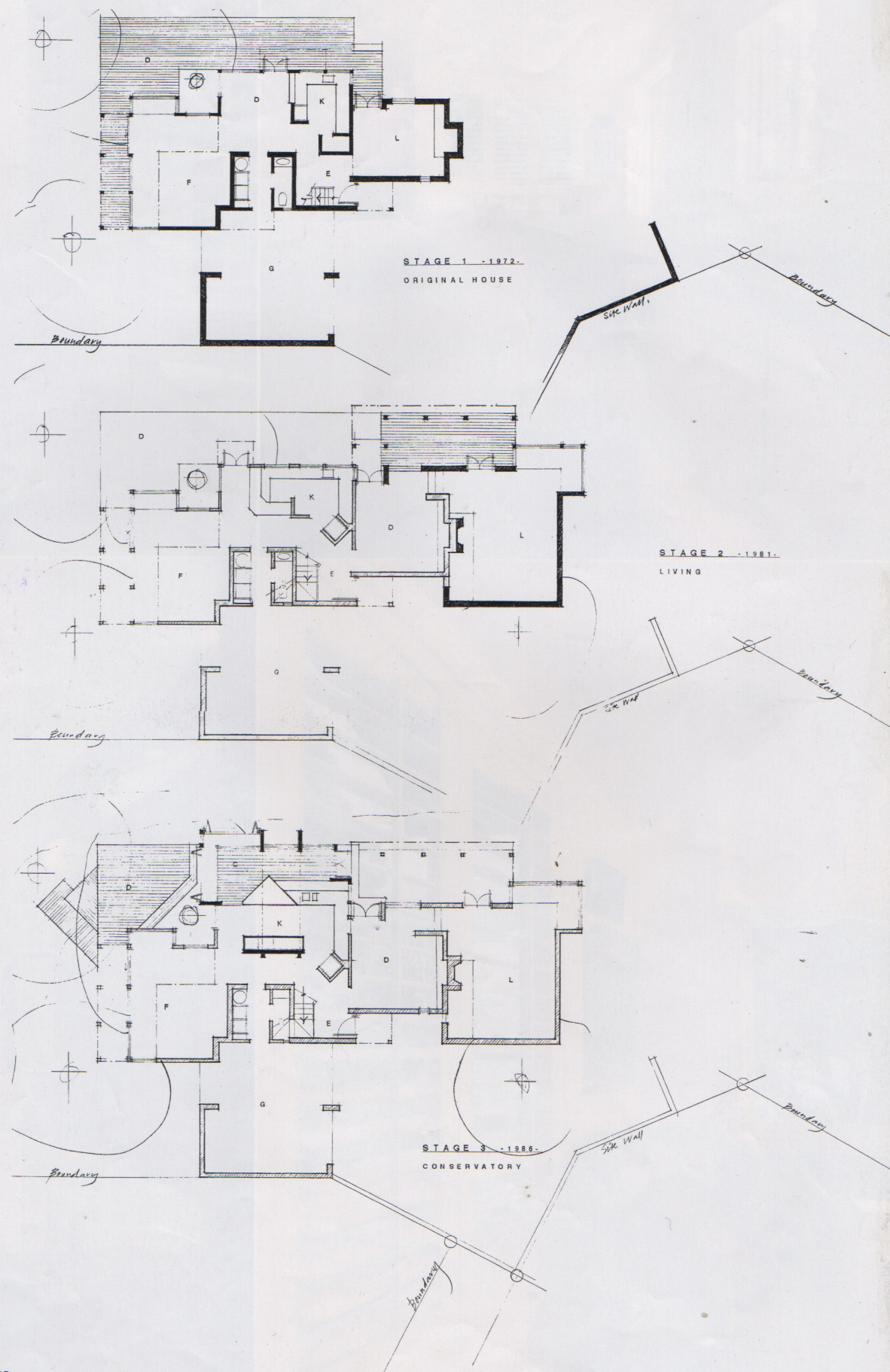
more spaces were added by the architect. In 1981, the loft was extended to become a fourth bedroom and a lounge was added to the east end of the dining room. The fireplace was turned to face into this new room. A second addition, in 1986, again by Neil Simmons, saw a cantilevered conservatory bay to the north face of the kitchen. In this extended kitchen, the current owners can comfortably entertain up to 25 people even though, in terms of floor area, the space is seemingly inadequate for this number. Again, there is deft organisation of the interconnecting spaces.

Most recently Simmons' daughter Lynda, working through Neil Simmons Architects, was commissioned by the Alexander's to add a bedroom/bathroom/study, which follows the building's easterly drift. This is now perhaps the most exceptional part of the house.

Lynda has been bold in reforming the axial direction of the plan, while maintaining a consistent roofline. This has created a greater external complexity to the form, which in turn, both



TOP, MIDDLE,
BOTTOM: Floor
plans show
successive
alterations and
additions. Original
house (1972),
stage 2 (1981) and
stage 3 (1986).



ABOVE: Bedroom
opens onto deck
with views to
Ngataringa Bay.

TOP RIGHT: Huge
flame tree located
on northwest
corner.

RIGHT: Convoluted
roofline and stucco
walls present
impenetrable
facade from street.

enhances and reflects the spatial interest of the original interior. In this newest extension, space-planning is perhaps more clarified and direct. Here the volumes are first set from the 15° angular disparity between walls and roof. The dissecting wall between bedroom and bathroom, for example, slopes to follow the roofline above. The associated dressing rooms, although similar on plan, show an unexpected diversity in volume due to the turning of the room below the roof, to the north.

In this most recent extension, interior complexity is made in conjunction with form-giving, as opposed to the more intensive space-planning apparent in the original house. Features that are consistent throughout the dwelling include the design and careful detailing of fittings and furniture. From the drawer handles to the stainless steel mirror surrounds, every item has been carefully considered.

The house is oriented clearly to the north and every habitable room receives energy from the sun, which is elegantly moderated by the trees above and by the various veranda canopies that protect the decks and glazing on the north side of the house.

This finely crafted example of New Zealand architecture, built over a quarter of a century, has shown itself to be appropriate for both changing times and changing owners. It is appropriate also that successive generations of architects have been employed to work on this house, and this familial connection has enhanced the easily habitable accommodations. ■



KEY SUPPLIERS

ARCHITECT Neil Simmons Architects
(Lynda Simmons)

CLIENT Grant and Sue Alexander

CONTRACTOR Andrew Wilson Builders

JOINERY McNaughton's Joinery

CABINETRY Woodzone Joinery

ELECTRICAL S & M Electrics

PLUMBING Foreshore Plumbing

DRAINAGE Rob Kelsey

STAINLESS STEEL Sid Thompson,
Prism Design

ROBE RAIL SYSTEM Tube Systems

LIGHTING Fabbian Lighting NZ

TIMBER FLOORS Wooden Floors

CARPET Hills Flooring

PAINT Resene