

Fig.198

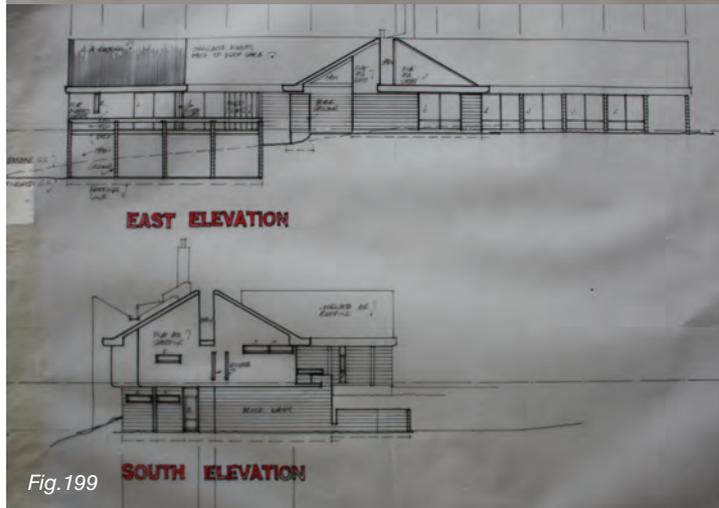


Fig.199

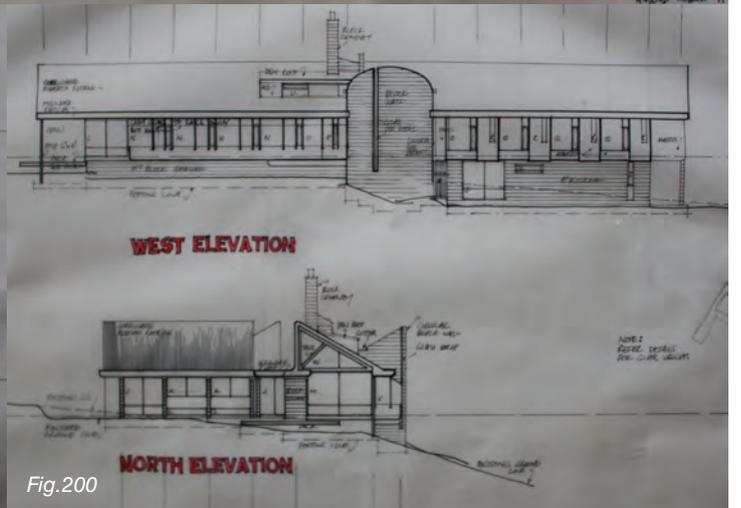


Fig.200

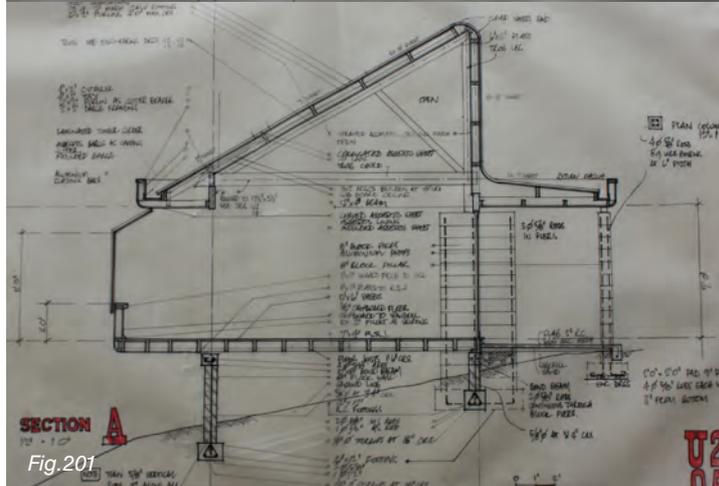


Fig.201

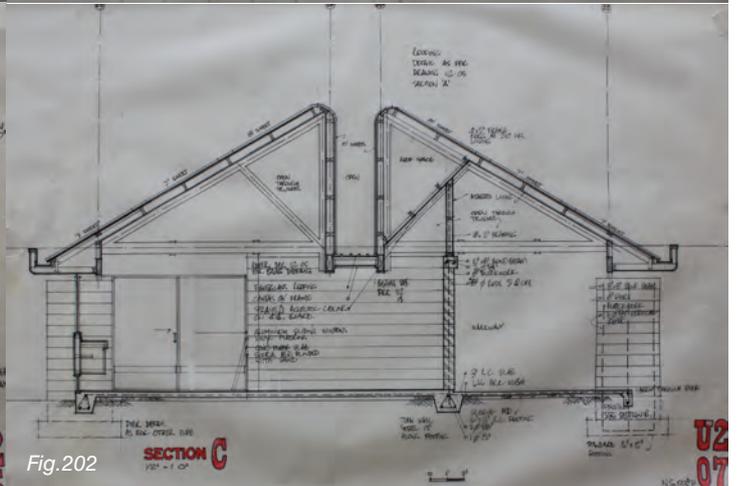


Fig.202

- Fig.198 NS017•70-U02, Ulrich House, Whitford, Plan, 1970
- Fig.199 NS017•70-U02, East and South Elevations, 1970
- Fig.200 NS017•70-U02, West and North Elevations, 1970
- Fig.201 NS017•70-U02, Section A, 1970
- Fig.202 NS017•70-U02, Section C, 1970

### 3.1 Larrikin and the Work of the 1970s

Strength and endurance were valuable attributes that contributed to the survival of colonial communities in New Zealand in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and so they have, over time, become entwined into the developing mythologies for the nation's identifiable male character. In times when the main Pakeha community was mainly male, certain social codes were reinforced to promote the development of positive aspects to the male character, and to avoid or suppress those deemed negative. The man alone image has been shown to develop from the constant positive reinforcement of a certain type; the un-named, isolated and contemplative person in spiritual connection with an empty landscape, a type illustrated by Pound with the artist Colin McCahon.<sup>1</sup> But there was another side to the pioneer male which had, since the late nineteenth century, been carefully suppressed through social and moral codes: the drifter. A single male of no fixed abode can be a threat to social progress, and any anti-social behaviour such as drunkenness and fighting was managed by encouraging employment and marriage.<sup>2</sup>

By 1900, this resulted in the man alone being re-imaged not only as a broody man of solitude, but a hard-working one, supported by a noble wife and invisible children. The drifter or hooligan was frowned upon in the socio-political reality but kept active in the nation's mythology through mateship, camaraderie and legend. It is proposed that this is the aspect of character of original pioneering males that was revived in the 1970s. Both Pound and Skinner have illustrated a shift in the nation's identity development from the brooding, isolated man alone figure to an acceptance in the 1970s of a more mischievous version of the renegade male. No longer a threat to the stability of the nation's growth, the mischievous and anti-authoritarian spirit of any man alone was made visible, and the silent figure in McCahon's empty landscapes had retreated. Perhaps most importantly, while the man alone relied on his anonymity, in the 1970s that renegade figure was finally visible and able to be identified. The personal and architectural life of Simmons in the 1960s and 1970s crosses both of these versions of the nationalist male, which has made it difficult to place the early work purely in the context of either. In the middle of the decade, the office of Hrstich, Curtis and Simmons shifted premises to 152 Hobson Street in Auckland.<sup>3</sup> Individual creative businesses were set up in the two-storey warehouse building, creating a lively and informal community, representative of the counter-culture movement in New Zealand.<sup>4</sup>

As Pound has pointed out, the nationalist version of the New Zealand identity slowed to an almost stop by 1970, by which time an international counter-culture movement, spurred by the first oil crisis in 1973, had begun in New Zealand. The counter-culture movement

<sup>1</sup> Pound, F. *The Invention of New Zealand. Art and National Identity 1930-1970*. 2009, 33. See discussions on Colin McCahon, *The Listener (Head)*, 1947, a painting depicting the back of a single male head, gazing over an empty landscape, inferring what Pound calls a spiritual rather than 'merely material' colonization of the landscape.

<sup>2</sup> Phillips, Jock *The Image of the Pakeha Male – A History*, Penguin, Auckland, rev. ed 1996, 54. Women and children have always been linked to the maintenance of social morality and responsibility, and Phillips suggests that the early success of the suffrage movement in New Zealand was linked to the need for control of the many single colonial males in New Zealand in the nineteenth century. He argues that by women obtaining the vote, it was considered that married men would in effect have two votes and more influence than single males. ' - the focus was on controlling men rather than giving freedom to women.'

<sup>3</sup> Refer Chapter 1.2, Work Experience: 152 Hobson Street 1975-1992.

<sup>4</sup> For some the offices at 152 Hobson Street showed that an architecture practice could be run with a touch of larrikinism. Dave Strachan, from SGA Ltd, was a student in the 1970s and recalls a professional practice assignment: disillusioned with the predominance of large firms and suit-and-tie professionalism, Strachan was relieved to find Neil Simmons in his office in Hobson Street, working in his casual clothes in an open plan office, talking of hunting and fishing as well as methods of practice during the interview. (Dave Strachan, pers.comm. 26/8/11.)

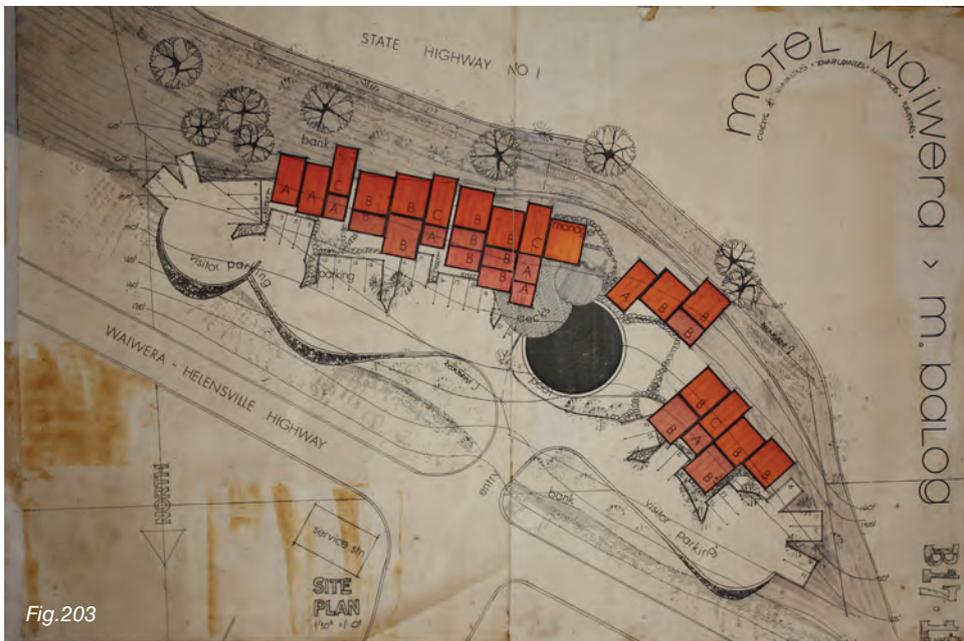


Fig.203



Fig.204

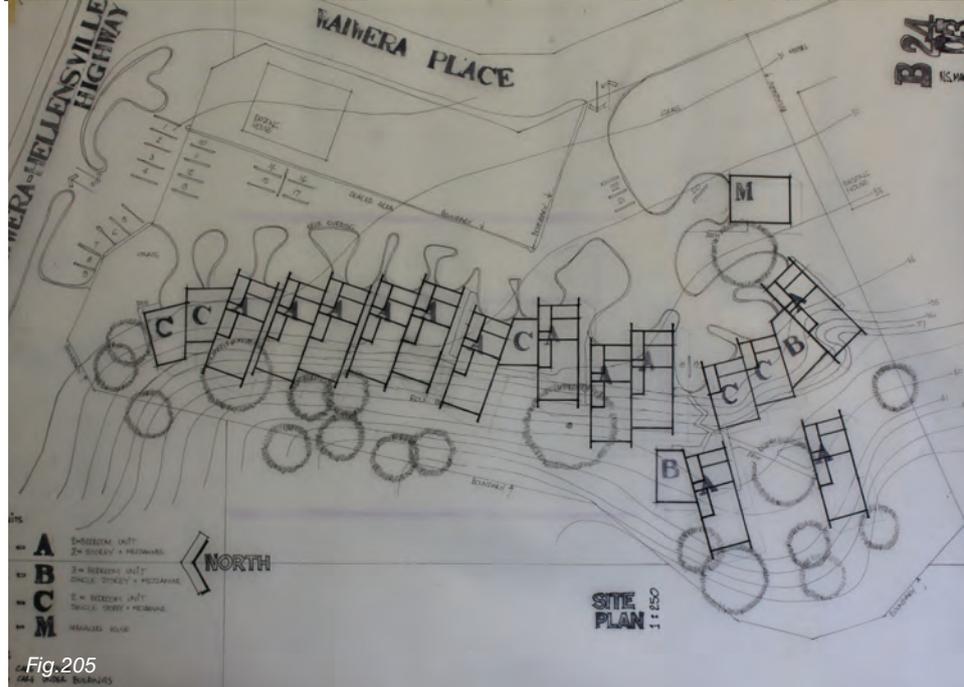


Fig.205



Fig.206



Fig.207



Fig.208



Fig.209

Fig.203 NS031•73-B17, Motel Waiwera, Site Plan, 1973

Fig.204 NS031•73-B17, Motel Waiwera, model, 1973

Fig.205 NS061•76-B24, Waiwera Pool Motel Complex, Site Plan, 1976

Fig.206 NS061•76-B24, Section A, 1976

Fig.207 NS061•76-B24, Room Plans, 1976

Fig.208 NS085•78-P19, Pilcher Pole House, Kawau Island, exterior from the sea,

Fig.209 NS085•78-P19, exterior, 1978

encouraged the individual to challenge authoritarian bureaucratic structures, and looked for alternatives to the post-war American suburban dream, with its ideals of ownership and possible outcomes of social isolation. Back to the land communities formed throughout the western world, taking transient (house-bus) or communal (commune) forms. All things hand-crafted, rather than mass-produced, were elevated in status and a craft-boom resulted. In New Zealand the identity development of the nation slipped easily into this decade, with landscape and do-it-yourself already well established at the core, the handcrafted timber house, and especially pole house structures, took on a more exuberant quality. The larrikin could finally, and safely, be released into public view.

In *Volume 24*, editor Jeffrey Inaba posits that ideologies of the counter-culture era of the 1970s in America have become the basis for our mainstream culture today, and this also applies to other western new-world countries such as New Zealand.<sup>5</sup> Ideas that were regarded in the 1970s as 'outside' mainstream of society have, only thirty years on, become common in most laws, regulations and social attitudes. Inaba suggests that not only are the 1970s ideas now accepted, they have themselves become the foundations to the very mainstream institutions which were being rallied against. This can be exemplified with regard to the environment, where environmental ideologies in the 1970s were regarded as extremist views and in the twenty-first century these views more often form the basis of local body and national controls. Examples of this can be seen with the industries surrounding recycling and the Green Star award system in the building industry.<sup>6</sup> While in the 1970s the building industry generally regarded the environmental lobby as an 'emotive' fringe element, today the mainstream industry body supports the application of a quantifiable assessment, measured through statistical data, to buildings to satisfy environmental concerns. Inaba regards this shift, from the outside to the inside, as being common to most aspects of development and, possibly most importantly, is aided through technology.

In New Zealand, the 1970s was a decade of the revival of anti-establishment sentiments, a quality already partly established in the early 20th Century and evident in very early pioneer male identity in this country.<sup>7</sup> Anti-authoritarian ideals tended to suit this country's developing identity as it progressively separated from 'Mother England', a de-colonialisation process that had accelerated after the two World Wars. These ideals were seen in both domestic and international political events, in protests staged throughout New Zealand against the American war in Vietnam<sup>8</sup> and in the growing awareness of institutionalized inequality in the colonial social and political structures of the country.<sup>9</sup> While it is noted that links to and

<sup>5</sup>. (ed) Inaba, Jeffrey *Volume 24 Counter-Culture Issue*, 2009, 4. This is also the position of many of the contributors to this issue, including Fred Turner, author of *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*. University of Chicago Press, 2006.

<sup>6</sup>. 'Green Star is a comprehensive, national, voluntary environmental rating scheme that evaluates the environmental attributes and performance of New Zealand's buildings using a suite of rating tool kits developed to be applicable to each building type and function.' New Zealand Green Building Council (NZGBC) The wording is similar to that used by other Green Building Councils, such as Australia, South Africa, and the USA, indicating the close international relationship between building environment groups, as well as their maintaining of focus on national and regional environmental design requirements.

<sup>7</sup> This refers to the Pakeha male identity development, and the anti-establishment sentiments have been formed around the concept of 'mateship' through the pioneering era, through New Zealand's involvement in the two World Wars, and through the national sport of rugby. These examples are discussed in Phillips, Jock *A Man's Country? The Image of the Pakeha Male – A History* Penguin, Auckland 1996.

<sup>8</sup> Between 1964 and 1972, New Zealand sent troops to assist in the Vietnam War, fought by South Vietnam and the USA, against the communist North Vietnam and its supporters and lasted from 1959-75. This action enhanced New Zealand's military and political ties with America but was highly controversial and many protests occurred throughout the country. For photographic documentation of several protests see <http://www.vietnamwar.govt.nz/memory/john-miller-anti-vietnam-war-protest-photographer> and TVNZ Television Archives <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/media/video/anti-vietnam-war-protest>

<sup>9</sup> For example, a newspaper headline reading 'No Maoris, No Tour' *Auckland Star*, November 1959. It is interesting to note in photographic documentation of the Anti-War protests the groups that identified as a collective voice, for example images showing placards such as 'Women Unite Against the War' (Queen St protest, 1972, John Miller)



Fig.210

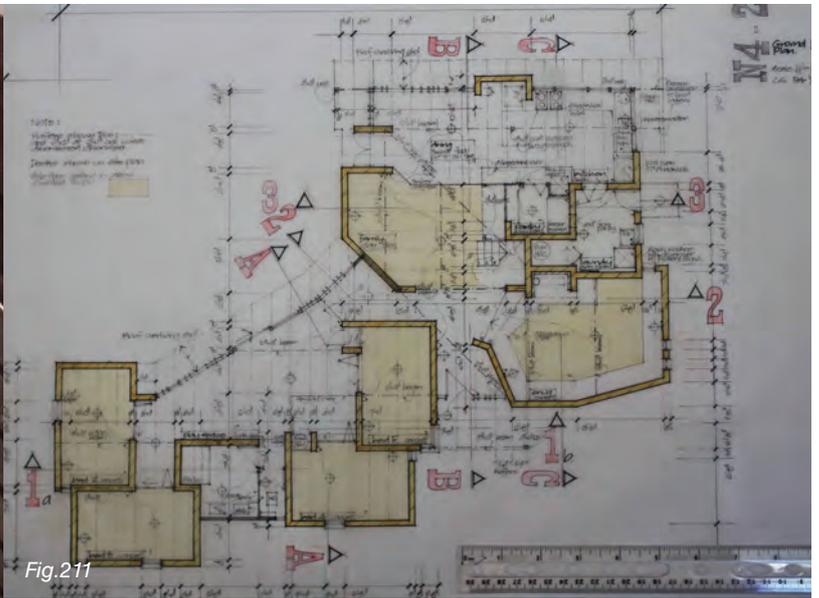


Fig.211



Fig.212



Fig.213



Fig.214

Fig.210 NS037•73-N04, Newbold House, Farm Cove, Auckland, interior, 1973

Fig.211 NS037•73-N04, Plan, 1973

Fig.212 NS041•74-M31b, Maraetai Beach Boat Club, view from the sea, 1974

Fig.213 NS048•75-G15, Gribble House, Whangaparoa, exterior, 1975

Fig.214 NS041•74-M31b, MBBC, view along beach, 1974

influences from America were becoming stronger as ties were being loosened to Great Britain, especially since World War Two, the events of the 1970s tested this relationship.

Environmental awareness became one of the dominant issues of the decade, due in part to a worldwide oil crisis that in New Zealand led to several environmental laws, including the establishment of 'car-less days'.<sup>10</sup> Technologies such as the development of solar, wind and geothermal power<sup>11</sup> supported the environmental movement, and as Inaba has demonstrated, this relationship between technology and the environment has continued throughout the decades.<sup>12</sup> As the price of oil returned to a manageable level, environmentally responsible architecture was less of a priority and focus was again on productivity and consumption. It can be read as a measure of the level of social concern at the time that in 1979 solar panels were installed on the roof of the White House by Jimmy Carter, and removed in 1986 by Ronald Reagan.<sup>13</sup> One alternative technology<sup>14</sup> that was not embraced in the 1970s was nuclear power, the force of which had already been witnessed in World War Two. Anti-nuclear sentiment gained momentum during the late 1970s around the world and in New Zealand this culminated in barring nuclear-powered ships in 1984 and the setting up of New Zealand's anti-nuclear foreign policy.<sup>15</sup> This development again demonstrated that politically, New Zealand was straining the relationships to its allies of England and America.

The re-evaluation of the individual in relationship to authoritarian structures can be seen, in part, as a rejection of the uniformity and regulatory ideals of modernism. This expression of the individual can be seen in the revival of interest in hand-made or crafted items, and there was a noticeable increase in craft retail collectives around the country.<sup>16</sup> In Auckland, these craft collectives included The Mill, Durham Arts, and Alicat Gallery, all located in low-rent central city premises and which operated as a collective rather than under an owner/staff business model. Neil and Sonia Simmons were both involved in these communities and Sonia Simmons worked at Durham Arts from 1977-1981.

'Craft, with its primitive handmade characteristics, fitted in perfectly with a world keen to distance itself from the implications of contemporary technology, the Vietnam War, and the oil crisis. The presence of craftworks in the home suggested the rugged individualism of the pioneer, a home in tune with its environment.'<sup>17</sup>

Architecturally, this extended to an interest in hand-made buildings and ad-hoc and self-build construction methods, such as adobe, rammed earth, domes, inflatable structures, pole houses and hyperbolic structures. All these building methods were discussed and

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and 'Polynesians Against the War' (14 July 1972, John Miller). This indicates the co-existence of New Zealand national identity against super-power nations with emergent gender and cultural equity identities within the country. It also shows that despite the corresponding rise in individualist ideologies, people tend to find strength in the collective voice at this time.

<sup>10</sup> Car-less Days legislation was put in place on 30 July 1979 by New Zealand's National Government, led by the Prime Minister of the time Sir Robert Muldoon. The legislation was reversed in May 1980. The oil crisis of 1973 was caused through an oil embargo instigated by the OPEC (Organisation of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries), in reaction to USA's funding of the Israeli military and its Middle East policy. In 1979 there was a second oil crisis, due to the Iranian Revolution, whereby a republic replaced the existing monarchy rule. There was also a stock market crash in 1973-4. Ref: <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/carless-days-introduced> and [http://www.nzherald.co.nz/fuel-prices/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1500966&objectid=10517835](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/fuel-prices/news/article.cfm?c_id=1500966&objectid=10517835) NZ Herald Archives.

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.nasa.gov/centers/glenn/about/history/70s\\_energy.html](http://www.nasa.gov/centers/glenn/about/history/70s_energy.html)

<sup>12</sup> ed Inaba, Jeffrey (2009) *Volume 24 Counter-Culture Issue*, Introduction.

<sup>13</sup> Zardini, Mirko (2010) 'A Crisis That Made Architecture Real.' *Perspecta 42, The Real*. pg 82 (Pp 79-82) In 2003 the Bush administration quietly installed new solar panels on the maintenance shed to service part of the White House requirements, at the request of the National Parks Service. In 2010, there is a petition to President Obama to install photovoltaic panels on the White House roof again.

<sup>14</sup> Alternative, that is, to the dominant energy sources of oil, coal, hydro and gas.

<sup>15</sup> New Zealand Nuclear Free Zone, Disarmament, and Arms Control Act 1987. The Labour Party, led by David Lange, banned nuclear ships in 1984. The campaign for Non-Nuclear Futures (CNNF) was formed in March 1976.

<sup>16</sup> Douglas Lloyd Jenkins covers the relationship between the crafted arts and architecture in Lloyd Jenkins, D *At Home. A Century of New Zealand Design*. Random House, Auckland, 2004, 243-247.

<sup>17</sup> Lloyd Jenkins, D *At Home. A Century of New Zealand Design*. Random House, Auckland, 2004, 243.



Fig.215



Fig.217



Fig.216



Fig.218



Fig.219



Fig.220

Fig.215 NS074•78-F07, Folwell Pole House, Muriwai Beach, model, 1978

Fig.216 NS045•74-R08, Roberts House, Whitford, exterior, 1974

Fig.217 NS059•76-C12, Christie Townhouse, Eastern Beach, Auckland, exterior, 1976

Fig.218 NS026•72-W14, Williamson House, Stanley Point, Auckland, exterior, 1972

Fig.219 NS026•72-W14, exterior, 1972

Fig.220 NS026•72-W14, exterior, 1972

illustrated in the *New Zealand Whole Earth Catalogue*<sup>18</sup>, a large format magazine based on the American Whole Earth Catalogue.<sup>19</sup> These qualities were well-suited to the New Zealand ethic of DIY ('do-it-yourself') prevalent in the nationalist pioneering spirit which had already been well established, and these were easily adopted by clients and architects here. To avoid the Local Authority Bylaws was regarded as a positive quality and supported the anti-authoritarian position of the time.<sup>20</sup> The crafted element can be seen in Simmons' work in such projects as the Laurie House,<sup>21</sup> the Mayson House<sup>22</sup> and the Christie House,<sup>23</sup> all located in the Bucklands and Eastern Beach areas.

'The 1970s began to reveal architecturally the complex personality of New Zealand culture.'<sup>24</sup>

In the accompanying document to the 'Connections. The House in the Suburban Scene' exhibition<sup>25</sup>, John Dickson refers to a group of architects working in this period as the 'third generation of modernism',<sup>26</sup> where a personalised approach to design was preferred over the International style of modernism, practiced by architects such as Tibor Donner and Plischke in New Zealand, and the timber modernism which followed from it.<sup>27</sup> Dickson describes this group of architects as focusing on intimacy in design, especially with nature. This group looked to scenography '...to achieve intimacy with nature and with people.'<sup>28</sup> John Dickson continues to say that 'the complex personality of New Zealand culture' is not necessarily the stereotyped suburban dream, but also one of violence and domestic abuse. He implies that the architects of the 1970s were addressing such compound social layers, and that they had moved away from a failed modernist promise of social reform.

'By their revolt, by parting company with the enforced anonymous ideals of modernism, and by identifying with particular social situations – children, family and ethnic and social minorities – prevailing modernism was re-isolated and identified as supra-national.'<sup>29</sup>

Dickson refers to proponents of this generation of architects in Auckland as being Mike Austin and Claude Megson, and I would suggest that this, too, is the group in which Simmons sits.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>18</sup>. *New Zealand Whole Earth Catalogue, First Edition* (ed) Owen Wilkes and others, pub. A. Taylor 1972, *Second Edition* (ed) Dennis List & A. Taylor, Pub. Alister Taylor 1975, *Third Edition* (ed) Alister Taylor 1977. Copies of these magazines are still held in the library of Neil Simmons.

<sup>19</sup>. (ed) Brand, Stewart and Kahn, Lloyd *Whole Earth Catalogue*. First Edition 1968. Lloyd Kahn was also the author of *Shelter*, 1973, a text encouraging the self-build movement.

<sup>20</sup>. Ian Athfield wrote an article titled 'Unconventional Building and The Building Regulations' for the *New Zealand Whole Earth Catalogue, Second Edition*, pg 289

<sup>21</sup>. NS053•75-L14. Laurie House, 40 Takutai Avenue, Bucklands Beach, 1975.

<sup>22</sup>. NS075•78-M38. Mayson House, 43 The Esplanade, Eastern Beach, 1978.

<sup>23</sup>. NS059•76-C12. Christie Townhouse, 7 The Esplanade, Eastern Beach, c1976.

<sup>24</sup>. Dickson, John 'Architectural Modernism in New Zealand 1960-1990'. *Connections The House in the Suburban Scene*. G4 Exhibiting Unit, Auckland, 1998, 37.

<sup>25</sup>. *Connections. The House in the Suburban Scene*. G4 Exhibiting Unit, 1998. The book held three essays written by former and current staff at the School of Architecture at the University of Auckland: Dr John Dickson, Prof Peter Bartlett and Bechir Kenzari. ed Simon Twose and Megan Nordeck, Foreword by Simon Twose,

<sup>26</sup>. Dickson, John. 'Architectural Modernism in New Zealand 1960-1990'. *Connections The House in the Suburban Scene*. G4 Exhibiting Unit, Auckland, 1998, 33.

<sup>27</sup>. Refer to MacKay, Bill *Block Itinerary no 13* 'Modern Houses in the West' and Lloyd-Jenkins, Douglas *At Home. A Century of New Zealand Design* for further discussion on the development from an International Modern approach of the 1950s through to a nationalist regionalist version of modernism. Lloyd-Jenkins includes such terms such as 'Pan Pacific' to discuss the growing informality of New Zealand houses, chapter4, and how the 'nationalist-focused humanist architects' such as R. Toy and Ivan Juriss had influence on students from the late 1950s, 178.

<sup>28</sup>. Dickson, John (1998) 'Architectural Modernism in New Zealand 1960-1990'. *Connections* G4 Exhibiting Unit, Auckland, 33.

<sup>29</sup>. Dickson, John (1998) 'Architectural Modernism in New Zealand 1960-1990'. *Connections* G4 Exhibiting Unit, Auckland, 33.

<sup>30</sup>. This was discussed with Mike Austin during an interview (31/8/11) and he confirmed that Simmons was ideologically opposed to the dominance of the International Modernist style, and that Simmons' design ideology was based on the social concerns of this time. Other architects whose early work could be related to these issues are John Goldwater and John Scott.



Fig.221



Fig.222



Fig.223

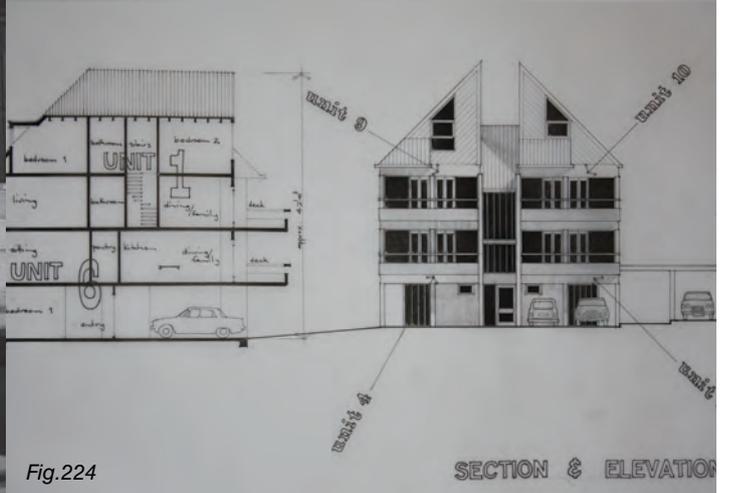


Fig.224

Fig.221 NS032•73-B16, Bridge Homes Lts, Onehunga, Townhouse proposal, 1973

Fig.222 NS034•73-B19, Bridge Homes Ltd, Devonport TownHouses, 1973

Fig.223 NS033•73-B18, Bridge Homes Ltd, Onehunga, Townhouse proposal, Section & Elevation, 1973

Fig.224 NS033•73-B18, Bridge Homes Ltd, Onehunga, Townhouse proposal, Section & Elevation, 1973

As Simmons' work moved into the 1970s, the humanism focus was embraced and developed, and one expression of this can be seen in the elevated status of anything handcrafted. Lloyd Jenkins describes some architects of this decade as 'The New Colonials,'<sup>31</sup> where 'New colonial houses need not look colonial, but they needed to blend the modern with the pioneering spirit.'<sup>32</sup> The usual exponents of this decade are the early works of Wellington architects Ian Athfield and Roger Walker, who Lloyd-Jenkins shows were influenced from South Island architects as well as overseas (mainly Japanese metabolist) influences. Importantly, this influence is less in form-making than in the shift to a humanist position.<sup>33</sup> Attitudes to past decades change with time and fashion, and in New Zealand the architecture of the 1970s has, until recently, been largely ignored.<sup>34</sup>

Writing in 1984, and clearly attempting to separate the work of the new decade from the previous one, in *The Elegant Shed*, David Mitchell provides his overview of the era;

'By the late 1960's some architects were being caught up in the Whole Earth movement. They looked towards a new Utopia based on small communities. The vision was backward-looking, and so in the main was its architecture, but it attacked the corporate image of business. It rejected the grid, the cube, the office block and most things 'straight'. And it celebrated the personal, the individual, the eccentric.'<sup>35</sup>

Despite the somewhat negative tone in this description, the identification of 'small communities' is important. The focus had definitely shifted from design for mass communities, to design for the small units of social groupings that make up those larger communities. Common architectural terminology included 'the village'.<sup>36</sup> In residential design, there was a move away from what was regarded as monotonous and unifying,<sup>37</sup> in both the architecture and social life. This politics takes form in the individual taking priority over the social(ist) and fits with the artistic 'individual expression' of the time, as well as the environmental politics of the early 1970s. Due to his collaboration with Hrstich and Curtis on Town Planning projects, Simmons worked on many 'village' schemes in the early 1970s. Some projects were constructed and many remained unbuilt, examples of which can be seen in the work produced for the client Bridge Homes Ltd.<sup>38</sup>

Where socialist thinking gave power to the collective voice, (unions, committee votes etc) Simmons' form of humanism argues instead for the individual. While he supports socio-political systems that work for the good of many and the even spread of wealth, it would be wrong to assume this also means he supports systems that elevate the communal over the individual. In a typical 1970s approach, Simmons believes in the power of the artist's voice,<sup>39</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Lloyd Jenkins, Douglas *At Home. A Century of New Zealand Design* Godwit, Random House, Auckland 2004, 218. See Chapter 8: The New Colonials, 213-247.

<sup>32</sup> Lloyd Jenkins, Douglas *At Home. A Century of New Zealand Design* Godwit, Auckland 2004, 222.

<sup>33</sup> Lloyd Jenkins cites Miles Warren, Peter Beavan and Ted McCoy, Lloyd-Jenkins, Douglas *At Home. A Century of New Zealand Design* Godwit, Auckland 2004, 218. Lloyd Jenkins states that Warren, Beavan and McCoy '...had rejected modernism in favour of a modern humanism...'

<sup>34</sup> Julia Gatley, editor of *Group Architects. Towards a New Zealand Architecture* (2010), is currently working on the work of Ian Athfield, which covers the 1970s with depth.

<sup>35</sup> Mitchell, David and Chaplin, Gillian (1984) *The Elegant Shed*. Oxford University Press, 95.

<sup>36</sup> Lloyd Jenkins, Douglas *At Home. A Century of New Zealand Design* Godwit, Auckland 2004, 226. 'Village' was one of those words that the 1970s latched on to and took up as their own.'

<sup>37</sup> It should be remembered here that the construction of The Beehive, New Zealand's new Parliament building in Wellington, spanned the whole of the 1970s. (designed 1964, completed 1982.)

<sup>38</sup> See NS032•73-B16 and NS033•73-B18, both unbuilt proposals for Ngatiawa Street, Onehunga, 1973. Bridge Homes Ltd was linked to Landop Developments, who also engaged Simmons for several village-type development projects. The only built project for Landop Developments was NS023•72-L07, 16 Townhouses plus a renovated Historical Homestead, 51 Vauxhall Road, Devonport, 1972.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Lloyd Jenkins, Douglas *At Home. A Century of New Zealand Design* Godwit, Auckland 2004, 245. Lloyd Jenkins provides a quote from Barry Brickell typifying the artistic individualism of the time. The beginning of the quotation is reproduced here: 'I am a visionary individual and have my own thoughts. I do



Fig.225



Fig.226



Fig.227



Fig.228

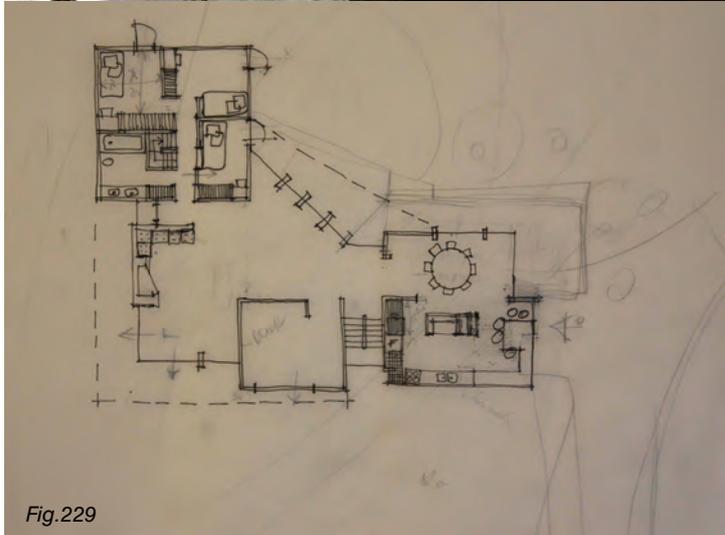


Fig.229



Fig.230

Fig.225 NS042•74-C08, Clark House, Titirangi, exterior, 1974

Fig.226 NS042•74-C08, exterior at rear, 1974

Fig.227 NS042•74-C08, interior, Living Room towards fireplace, 1974

Fig.228 NS042•74-C08, exterior from rear, 1974

Fig.229 NS042•74-C08, sketch plan, Ground Level, 1974

Fig.230 NS042•74-C08, Elevations, 1074

and of the renegade against the rules. Simmons has declared that ‘no good decision ever came from a committee,<sup>40</sup> and adheres to the principle of each individual’s ability to connect with the universe through the sub-conscious, following the writings of C. Jung<sup>41</sup>.

Simmons’ world-view supports the expression of each individual, the cluster of these individuals, and the subsequent grouping of the clusters. In this way, each individual (person, unit, form etc) has autonomy, as well as a connection to the whole. Architecturally, this has affected his practice method: he considers himself a ‘sole practitioner’ while maintaining a small office structure. Work of this era tends to maintain an overall formal unity (representing the family) as well as providing external expression in parts of the individual spaces within (each family member). Examples can be seen in the Berman Pole House,<sup>42</sup> the Newbold House,<sup>43</sup> and the Upton House.<sup>44</sup>

By the mid 1970s, Simmons was using the wedge form roof on many of his projects. Experimentation with raised and folded roof planes, as an alternative to the flat or low gable roofed structures dominating the 1950s residential work in Auckland, began for Simmons with projects such as the McIndoe House and the Simmons House. His interest in vertical space continued to develop and wedge roof forms using a 45° pitch became a common device to enable mezzanine rooms to be tucked under the roof incline. Examples are seen in the design of the Maraetai Boat Club,<sup>45</sup> the Roberts House,<sup>46</sup> and the Gribble House.<sup>47</sup>

This questioning of the existing social order meant that alternative living models to the 1950s suburban dream were being sought, and experimental communities borrowed from nomadic and commune-based societies. House-bus communities tested the issue of land occupation and ownership, while communes challenged the nuclear family as a social model and the concept of private ownership. The communes of the western world effectively failed,<sup>48</sup> due in part to the general success of individualism in the capitalist system. However, the ideology behind the commune and the transient communities still exists, and it could be argued, as Inaba does, that contemporary cyber-communities are the embodiment of those 1970s social experiments – he cites social participation, free access to information and mobile, inclusive communities as being examples of both 70s alternative living models and the mainstream use of the internet today.<sup>49</sup> Again, with the aid of technology, the counter-culture ideologies of the 1970s have become the basis for mainstream social structures.

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not want to be conditioned in my outlook by conventional or popular opinion and am prepared to be labelled an eccentric if necessary.’ (Original source is Leov-Leyland, C *Barry Brickell: A Head of Steam.*)

<sup>40</sup> pers. comm. Neil Simmons, 10/5/11.

<sup>41</sup> Carl Jung 1875-1961 Swiss Psychiatrist. Considered the founder of analytical psychology. ‘Individuation’ could be considered his central concept, whereby the self becomes whole through a process of integration of all aspects of personality, as opposed to being part of a collective psychology. Individuation as a concept appears in the work of G. Deleuze.

<sup>42</sup> NS020•71-B11 Berman House, 16 Asbury Crescent, Campbells Bay, 1971.

<sup>43</sup> NS037•73-N04 Newbold House, 23 Davita Place, Farm Cove, 1973.

<sup>44</sup> NS096•80-U07. The Upton House (unbuilt) Cockle Bay, 1980.

<sup>45</sup> NS041•74-M31b Maraetai Beach Boat Club, 196 Maraetai Drive, Maraetai Beach, 1974.

<sup>46</sup> NS045•74-R08. Roberts House, 289 point View Drive, Whitford, 1974.

<sup>47</sup> NS048•75-G15. Gribble House, Whangaparoa, 1975.

<sup>48</sup> Fred Turner is quoted in an interview saying ‘These communes became either very authoritarian, or very chaotic, and fell apart very quickly.’ *The Establishment of Counterculture* in ed Inaba, Jeffrey (2009) *Volume 24 Counter-Culture Issue*, 7. A system which allows extended amounts of power to individuals has been also given in *Volume 24* as a reason for the dissolution of communes in the West after this period. This is a larger issue and the scope of this discussion is too wide to cover in this study.

<sup>49</sup> ed Inaba, Jeffrey (2009) *Volume 24 Counter-Culture Issue*, 4. In fact, those involved in the early stages of development of the internet were part of the counter-culture movement in America, as discussed with Fred Turner in an interview with Inaba, Yukiko Bowman and Julianne Gola, 6-7. Turner discusses how terminology such as ‘information’ and ‘system’ were being used in the *Whole Earth Catalogue*. (ed Stewart Brand). There is now an online version, called WELL (Whole Earth ‘Lectronic Link) with which Brand is still involved.

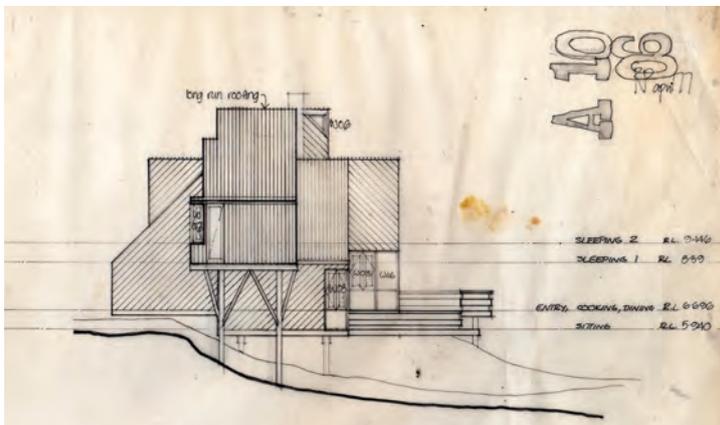


Fig.231 EAST ELEVATION

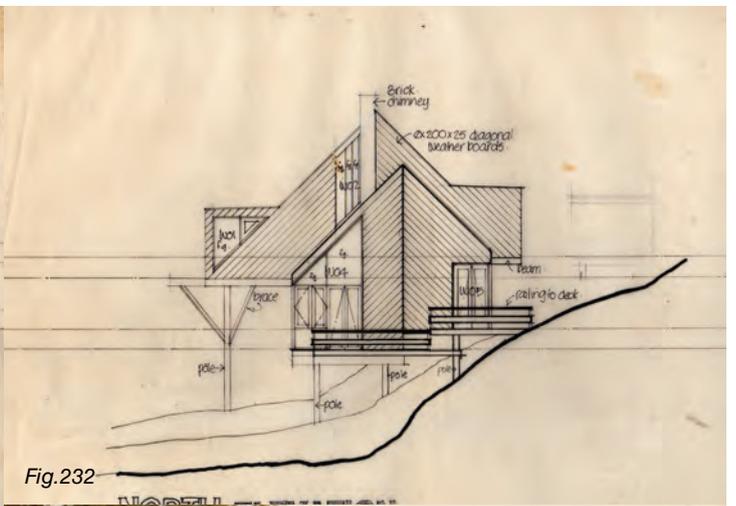


Fig.232



Fig.233



Fig.234



Fig.235

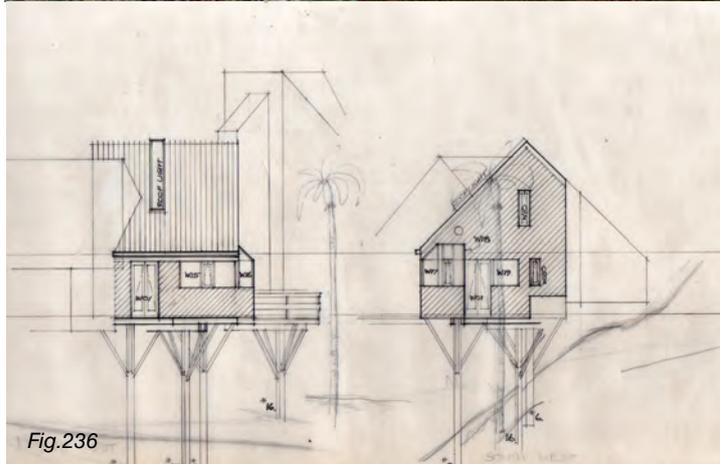


Fig.236

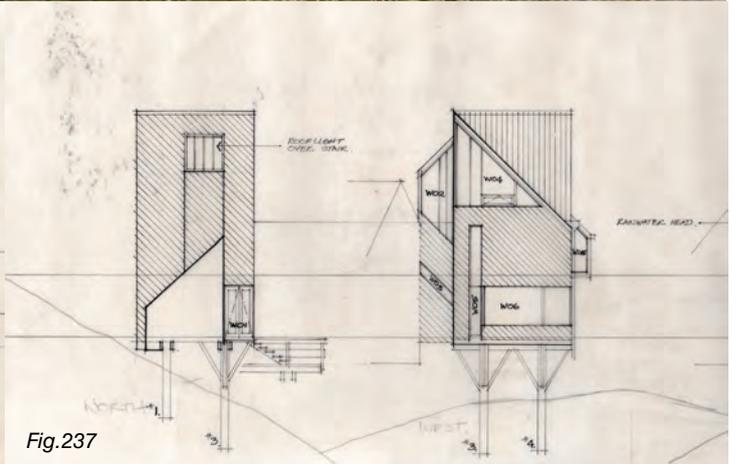


Fig.237



Fig.238

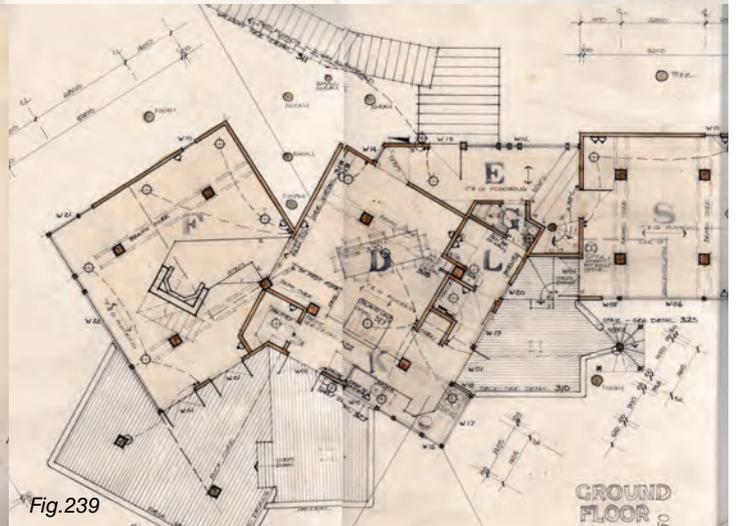


Fig.239

Fig.231 NS067•77-A10, Anderson Pole House, Hamilton, East Elevation, 1977

Fig.232 NS067•77-A10, North Elevation, 1977

Fig.233 NS067•77-A10, exterior, 1977

Fig.234 NS067•77-A10, exterior, 1977

Fig.235 NS067•77-A10, exterior, 1977

Fig.236 NS068•77-H42, Hart Pole House, Titirangi, Elevations, 1977

Fig.237 NS068•77-H42, Elevations, 1977

Fig.238 NS068•77-H42, Site Plan, 1977

Fig.239 NS068•77-H42, Floor Plan, 1977

### 3.2 Neil Simmons: Pole Houses of the 1970s

In addition to the establishment of a solid, raised ground platform as discussed in relation to the Simmons House,<sup>1</sup> there is a second typical building to land relationship used by Simmons, where the platform floats above the ground and there is a deliberate disconnection of the floor plate from the surrounding site. This approach applies to the pole house designs of the 1970s, which were often located on difficult sites and in harsh climates. From 1970 onwards, Simmons worked on many pole house designs for densely forested sites in newly subdivided areas of Auckland, such as Titirangi, as well as newly available coastal sites, such as those along the eastern coast of the Coromandel Peninsular.<sup>2</sup> These areas were usually steep, with a very small available building footprint due to dense forest, or on unstable ground such as shifting sands, and subject to storms. The complete detachment of the living platform from the site through using this building method allowed for many previously unavailable sites to be built on affordably. The pole house designs produced by Simmons in this decade probably best exemplify how his work suited the anti-authoritarian and handcrafted values of the Larrikin era.

Pole house construction<sup>3</sup> was popular at this time along the Pacific edge of North America, as part of the counter-culture movement, which also encouraged other alternative construction techniques such as adobe, inflatable structures, ferrocement structures and domes. Books such as *Shelter I & II*<sup>4</sup> and the *Whole Earth Catalogue*<sup>5</sup> were effectively guides on how to construct using these methods, using community involvement and unskilled labour. The exponents of these building methods were a part of what is often referred to as the back to the land movement, and the connection of environmental concerns with architecture was a priority.<sup>6</sup> Ideally, construction was to be handmade and, if possible, self-made. To this end, many how-to guides<sup>7</sup> were published and these record the anti-authoritarian tone of the era. The first appearance of pole construction in New Zealand publications appears to be in 1973 in *Home & Building*,<sup>8</sup> followed by *The Second New Zealand Whole Earth Catalogue*, published in 1975.<sup>9</sup>

In a 1976 publication, Peter Norton discusses the contribution of pole house construction methods to the continuing national identity argument.<sup>10</sup> He states his belief that pole houses may come closer to '...an indigenous style of building' than any previous type, and bases this

<sup>1</sup>. Refer Chapter 2.2 Neil Simmons: Houses of the 1960s.

<sup>2</sup>. Typical North Island sites of this period of development were in the Waitakere Ranges, parts of the North Shore, the Coromandel, and some islands in the Hauraki Gulf area, such as Waiheke, Kawau and Great Barrier.

<sup>3</sup>. Pole construction differs from stilt or pile construction in that the foundation poles themselves rise through or around the complete structure, and are not cut off at the floor level, a method usually referred to as 'pole platform' construction.

<sup>4</sup>. Kahn, Lloyd *Shelter*, Random House, 1973 and (ed) Kahn, Lloyd and Easton, Bob *Shelter II*, Random House, 1978.

<sup>5</sup>. (ed) Brand, Stewart and Kahn, Lloyd *Whole Earth Catalogue*, First edition 1968.

<sup>6</sup>. An important language distinction indicating the relationship between architecture and the environment at the time is evident, where in the publications mentioned the word 'shelter' was used in place of 'architecture'.

<sup>7</sup>. For example, *The First New Zealand Whole Earth Catalogue* Alister Taylor Publishing Ltd, 1972. The 'Shelter' Section covers Huts, Domes, caves, adobe block, 'unconventional concrete', Ferrocement, and inflatables.

<sup>8</sup>. Studholme, D 'Pole Houses' *Home & Building*, August 1, 1973, 19-21. And Norton, P 'architect's own house' *Home & Building*, August 1, 1973, 22, 23.

<sup>9</sup>. (Ed) Dennis List & Alister Taylor, *The Second New Zealand Whole Earth Catalogue* Alister Taylor, 1975, 310, 311. 'Building on Poles' and 'Best Books on Pole Building', which reviews the 1974 American publication Merrilees, Doug & Loveday, Evelyn *Pole Building Construction* Garden Way Publishing, Charlotte, 1974. In this edition the Shelter section also covered building methods for polyhedron structures, domes, and living in Car Cases. Also included is an article written by Ian Athfield 'Unconventional Building & The Building Regulations', 289.

<sup>10</sup>. Norton, Peter *The New Zealand Pole House* Pelorus Press Ltd, Auckland, 1976, 1.

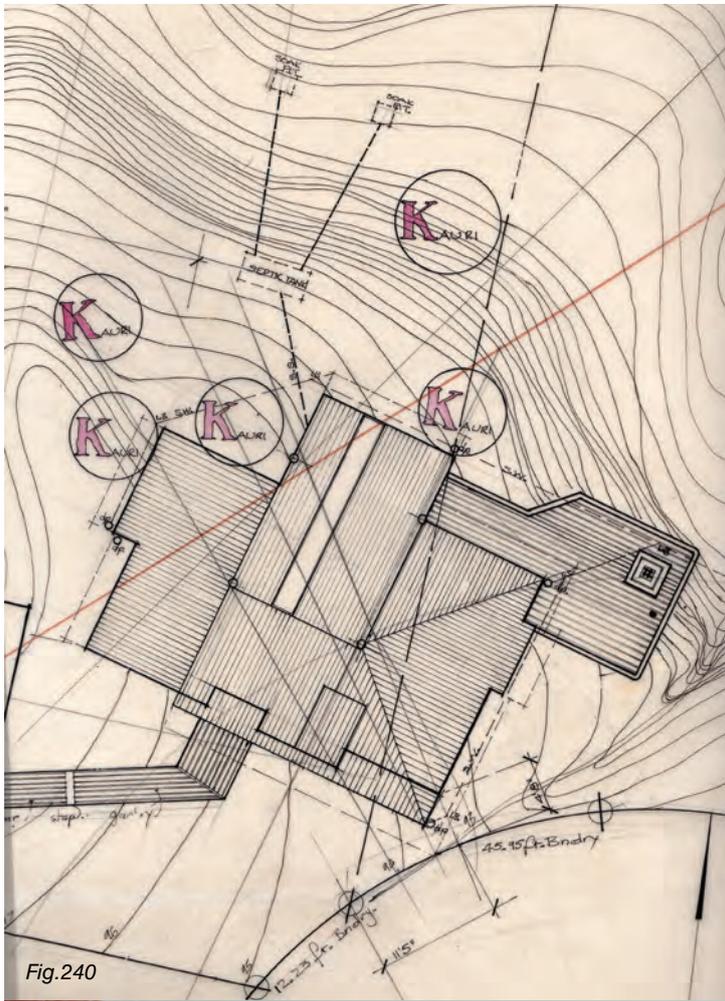


Fig.240



Fig.241



Fig.242



Fig.243



Fig.244

- Fig.240 NS047•74-T10, Treggerthan Pole House, Titirangi, Site Plan, 1974
- Fig.241 NS047•74-T10, exterior, 1974
- Fig.242 NS047•74-T10, exterior, 1974
- Fig.243 NS069•77-W20, Walker Pole House sketch, 1977
- Fig.244 NS082•78-H46, Harre, House, Great Barrier Island, exterior, 1978

claim on the abundance of timber in New Zealand, the rugged terrain, and the environmental ideal of touching the earth lightly.<sup>11</sup> Pole construction methods are not new, and the rise in its popularity at this time could be related to the focus on vernacular issues that were popular.<sup>12</sup> Buildings on poles of all types are seen throughout the world, for example in the Pacific, Asia and Africa as seen in Rudofsky's popular *Architecture Without Architects*.<sup>13</sup>

With pole house building methods, previously difficult sites were made accessible for new building, which often placed the domestic realm within the rugged and wild landscapes of New Zealand's identity folklore. Such untamed sites are the antithesis of suburban groomed, flat sections and suited the rebellious spirit of the 1970s. The separation of the building from the ground allowed for minimal interference with the landscape, and fencing, planting beds and pathways were avoided as part of the language of an old, colonial, order. Instead, pole houses allowed for an artificial but desired erasure of the boundary line. Long grasses and native ferns, grown seemingly at will around and beneath the structure, reinforced a kind of pioneer spirit by now well established in the minds of New Zealanders. This physical shift in site selection also had an economical effect. These sites were cheaper and therefore available to more people, supporting the idea that New Zealand's society is an egalitarian one.

The first pole structure design by Simmons was in 1970,<sup>14</sup> which is early when placing his work in context of other pole house design in New Zealand. Peter Norton<sup>15</sup> built his own house as a prototype for pole structures in Titirangi in 1973, which he has claimed was the first pole house in New Zealand,<sup>16</sup> although other houses by Dennis Oldham and Niels Nielsen are featured in the 1973 *Home & Building* article,<sup>17</sup> and by then Simmons had completed at least two pole houses.<sup>18</sup>

Structurally, in Simmons' houses, the poles always connect all the main elements of the building; roof, walls, floors and foundations. All are tied together into a single system through the pole framework and loads are transmitted directly to the ground. Conceptually this suits the modernist ideals of economy, efficiency and expression of the structure. With the use of un-milled, undressed round poles, the inherent qualities of the timber in its natural state were being employed.<sup>19</sup> The natural tapering of the pole is expressed rather than being mechanically altered, creating a direct connection between the timber structure and the

<sup>11</sup> The publication includes examples of Peter Norton's pole house buildings, which show similarities with the work of Neil Simmons, not only in the pole construction technique but also in the wedge roof forms and the relationship of the buildings to their surrounds. Differences are seen between Norton's and Simmons's designs in Norton's planning methods, which tend to be horizontally arranged rooms, while Simmons' interiors utilize open planning and a vertical, often spiral, arrangement of spaces.

<sup>12</sup> Refer to the Chapter 2.2 Neil Simmons: Houses of the 1960s, and the discussion on the popularity and influence of the book *Architecture Without Architects* in New Zealand. Rudofsky, B *Architecture Without Architects* MOMA, NYC, 1965.

<sup>13</sup> Rudofsky, B *Architecture Without Architects* MOMA, NYC, 1965, Plate numbers 109, 110.

<sup>14</sup> NS016•70-M16. Male Pole House, 'The Transformer', 113 Captain Cook Road, Cooks Beach, Coromandel, 1970.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Norton (b.1942) Managing Director of Environmental Design Ltd and author of *The New Zealand Pole House* Pelorus Press Ltd, Auckland, 1976. Refer also to *Home and Building* August 1973, and *NZ Home and Building* June/July 1985 'Peter Norton – The Pole House Man'.

<sup>16</sup> 'I am the Managing Director of my company ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN LTD established in 1974, and hold a Diploma in Architecture from Auckland University, granted in 1966. I have designed buildings as a sole practitioner since 1974, one year after the completion of my own house which is the first pole frame house in New Zealand.' From a reference letter for Scott Crook, Construction One Residential Builders. (no date to the letter.)

<sup>17</sup> Studholme, D 'Pole Houses' *Home & Building*, August 1, 1973, 19-21

<sup>18</sup> NS016•70-M16 Male Pole House, 113 Captain Cook Road, Cooks Beach, Coromandel, 1970 and NS020•71-B11 Berman House, 16 Asbury Crescent, Campbells Bay, 1971.

<sup>19</sup> 'As a tree grows, the wood fibers grow around any knots or imperfections, thereby becoming an integral part of the strength of the total mass. An "undressed" round wood pole remains a flexible and strong element in the pole house skeletal structure.' Retrieved from website [http://www.polehouses.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.display&page\\_id=19&CFID=97944113&CFTOKEN=44591823](http://www.polehouses.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.display&page_id=19&CFID=97944113&CFTOKEN=44591823), 12/5/11.



Fig.245

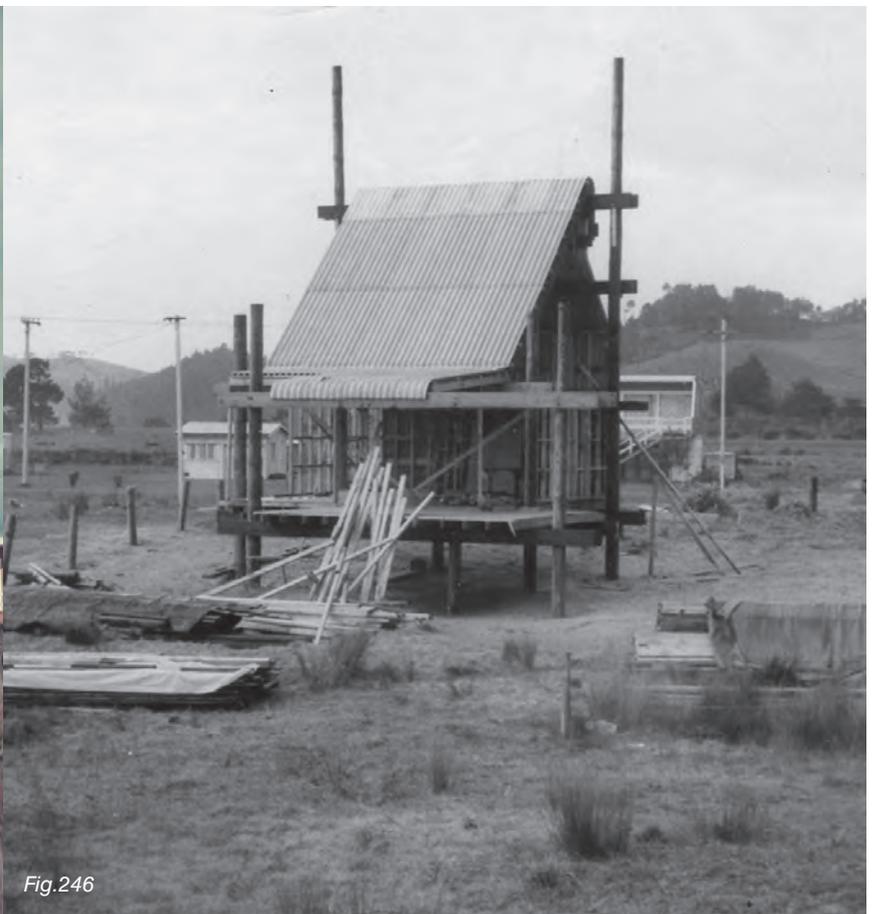
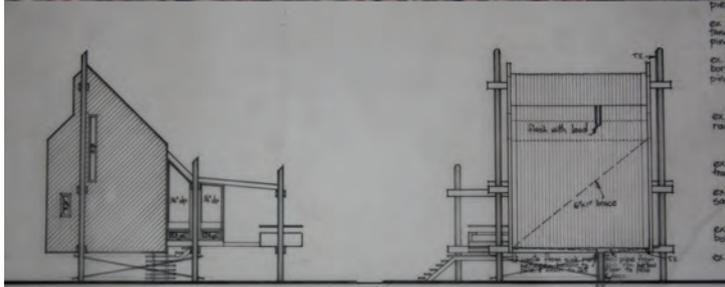
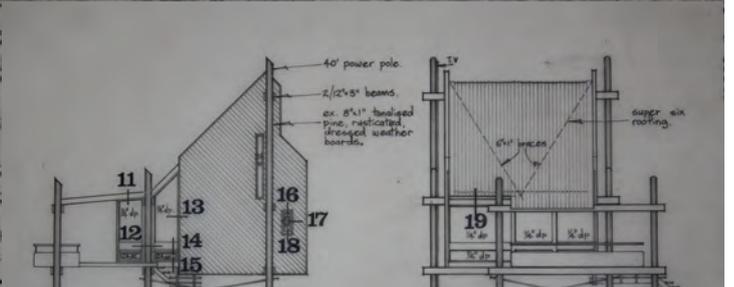


Fig.246



EAST ELEVATION 18' x 10'

SOUTH ELEVATION 16' x 10'



WEST ELEVATION 18' x 10'

NORTH ELEVATION 16' x 10'

Fig.247

Fig.248

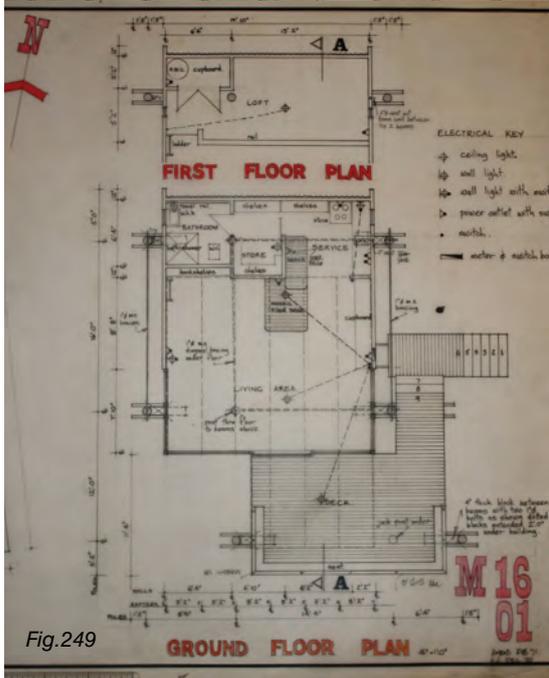


Fig.249

GROUND FLOOR PLAN

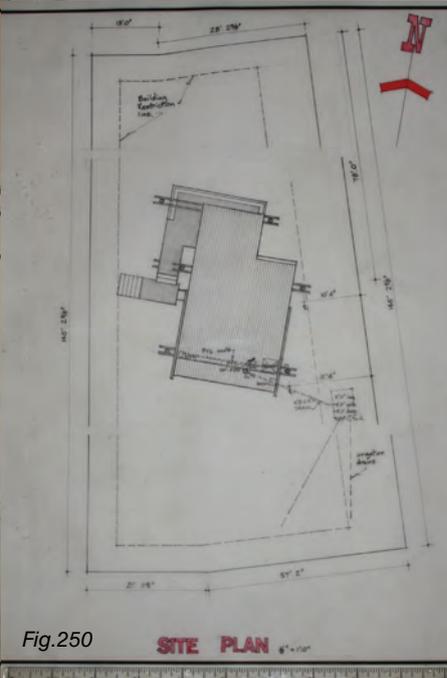


Fig.250

SITE PLAN



Fig.251

Fig.245 NS016•70-M16, Male Pole House, Cooks Beach, Coromandel, exterior, 1970

Fig.246 NS016•70-M16, construction progress photo, 1970

Fig.247 NS016•70-M16, East and South Elevation, 1970

Fig.248 NS016•70-M16, West and North Elevation, 1970

Fig.249 NS016•70-M16, Ground and First Floor Plans, 1970

Fig.250 NS016•70-M16, Site Plan, 1970,

Fig.251 NS016•70-M16, view from rear, including addition NS107•82-M51, Marsh, 1982

source of the timber itself. The poles in Simmons' designs are only ever connected to the main structural elements, and are set apart from any exterior or interior walls. In this way, the structural pole is in free space, just as a tree grows in its natural setting. As Ross Jenner had noted during the course of an interview regarding one of Simmons' pole house designs,<sup>20</sup> this connection between tree and structure infers Bachelard's view of the tree in the forest.<sup>21</sup> The pole houses that are sited in a bush setting certainly evoke the experience of being in a tree hut, along with the intensity of interior that implies.<sup>22</sup>

With the search for a national vernacular being played out in the design of small, singular, timber structures, there was opportunity provided for architects to be directly involved with the construction of the structures themselves. Clark and Walker show an ideological link between this New Zealand physical approach to architecture and the pioneering spirit of the time; 'The modern architect physically builds the house with the materials at hand, just as the pioneer did.'<sup>23</sup> This attitude to architecture was prevalent at the Architecture School while Simmons was a student<sup>24</sup> and was one he adopted quickly and has continued throughout his career.<sup>25</sup> During the 1970's Simmons was very involved in the construction of several houses for clients, either with the clients themselves as the builder<sup>26</sup> or as an assistant to a contractor.<sup>27</sup>

### **Male Pole House, Cooks Beach, 1970<sup>28</sup>**

'With Neil as your architect it was a sure bet that your house would be different. The bach was the first of its kind in the bay and for a while the locals refused to believe it was being built to function as a house. Early labels were 'The Transformer' 'The Grandstand' and 'The Pole Box,' since the construction was suspended among nine large poles with two bay markers rising 40 feet into the air from ground level.'<sup>29</sup>

The pole house was designed in 1970, with construction completed in 1971. From the context photographs of this beachside building, the separation between the main living platform and the constantly shifting sandy ground is evident. The design decision to lift this living platform 1.5 meters off the sandy site has proved to be an important one that has enabled the building's easy maintenance and survival over many years of storms and tides, which constantly erode and change the shape of the beach frontage sites. This separation from the site was an essential response to the environment, and had a direct relationship to the use of poles as the main construction method. )

<sup>20</sup> Pers. comm. Ross Jenner, 27/6/11. Ross Jenner had worked on this project as a second year student, and the conversation revolved around his memories of the Simmons design, and how it may have fitted into a context of 1970s architecture. (Refer fig 103.)

<sup>21</sup> It is understood that Jenner was referring to the ideas of a limitless and unbounded condition experienced in a forest. Such feelings of infinity are not related to physical scale, and can exist in a single tree reference. Refer to Bachelard, G. *Poetics of Space*, Beacon Press Books, Boston, 1969. (First Pub in French 1958) Chapter 8 'Intimate Immensity', 185-187.

<sup>22</sup> Refer to 2.1 Man Alone and the Early Work for discussion of the interior condition of huts.

<sup>23</sup> Clark, Justine and Walker, Peter 'Book, House, Home' *At Home in New Zealand. House History People*. Ed Brookes, Barbara. Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 2000. 206. Clark and Walker remind us that this was an important component to the work of The Group, in that their design experimentation continued through the process of construction.

<sup>24</sup> 1952-1958. Refer to Appendix A Timeline. The Architecture Group confirmed this relationship between design and construction with their Experimental House (First House) Takapuna, Auckland 1949-1950. (ed) Gatley, J. *Group Architects. Towards a New Zealand Architecture*, Auckland University Press, 2010, 8.

<sup>25</sup> Neil Simmons has always maintained a carpentry workshop from the Garage of the family house, as his carpenter father did in the childhood home in Meadowbank.

<sup>26</sup> For example NS016•70-M16 Male Pole House, 113 Captain Cook Road, Cooks Beach, Coromandel, 1970. The client, Kevyn Male took on the role of main contractor and assembled a building team from his acquaintances, and Simmons was involved in weekends during the course of the construction. Male provides a colourful and amusing description of building with poles in *The Wheeler Dealer*, Kevyn G Male, 1984.

<sup>27</sup> For example, NS043•74-S15. Storey Pole House, 6 Hahei Beach Road, Hahei, Coromandel. The builder was Dave Bryant and Simmons would assist in the construction process during his weekend visits to the sites in the Coromandel.

<sup>28</sup> NS016•70-M16 113 Captain Cook Road, Cooks Beach, Coromandel, 1970.

<sup>29</sup> Male, Kevin, *The Wheeler Dealer (Recollections)*, (self-publication, 1984, 67.

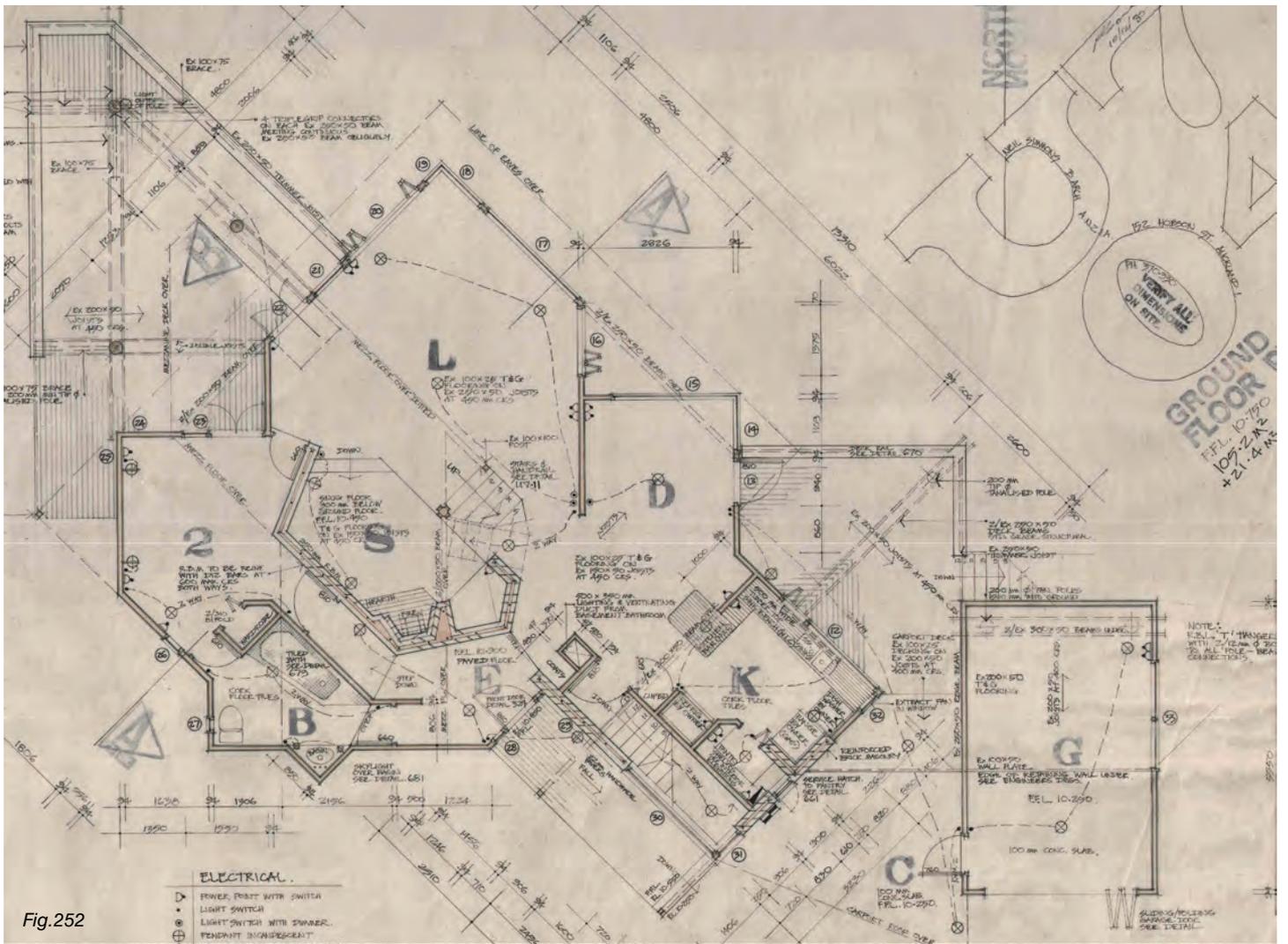


Fig.252

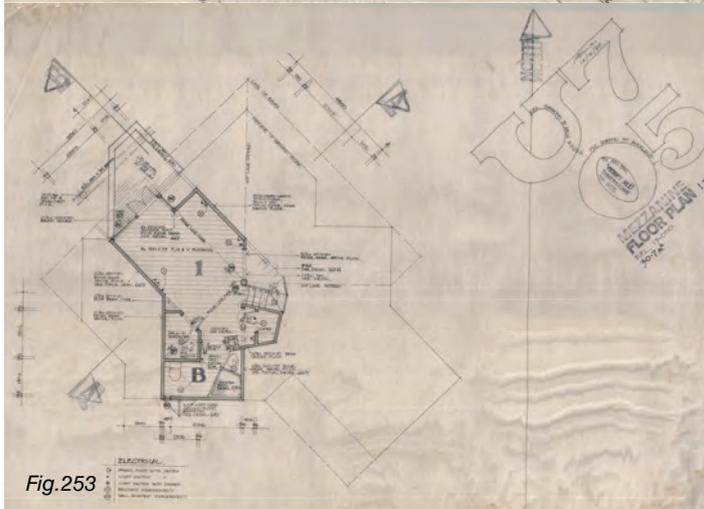


Fig.253



Fig.254



Fig.255

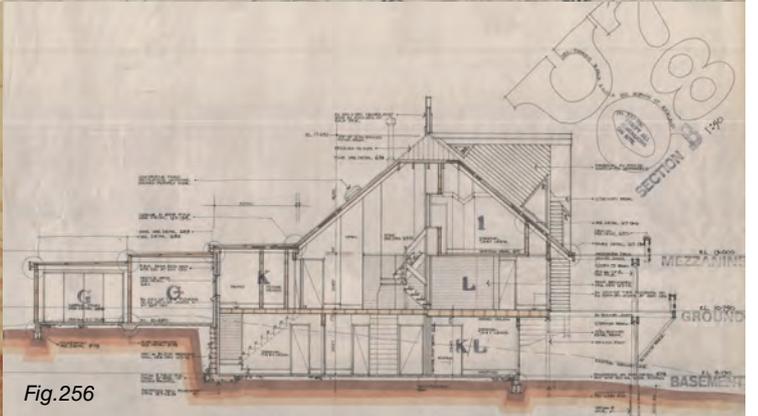


Fig.256

Fig.252 NS096•80-U07, Upton House, Cockle Bay, Ground Floor Plan, 1980 (unbuilt)

Fig.253 NS096•80-U07, First Floor Plan, 1980

Fig.254 NS096•80-U07, Site Plan, 1980

Fig.255 NS096•80-U07, model, 1980

Fig.256 NS096•80-U07, Section, 1980

Rather than conceal the poles within the body of the building, this house has an exterior pole structure,<sup>30</sup> connected with the main roof and floor beams and from which the entire compact form is supported. The poles were not trimmed on site, but left to extend further than functionally required, acting as vertical markers and exaggerating their structural role. This building contrasts with the few beach houses that existed at the time of construction, which were examples of flat-roofed modernism and gabled cottages. The project involved architect Brian Elliot and draftsman Jake Jacobsen who were working in the Victoria Street office at this time. Brian Elliot had recently moved up to Auckland from Wellington, where he had spent some time working for Roger Walker, and this influence is seen in the design and detail development of this project.<sup>31</sup>

### Going Vertical

Vertical space often results from tight footprint allowances, for example with inner city living conditions or in steep topographies such as Wellington. In Auckland residential design, the generosity of suburban land plots and undefined edges to the outer city boundary has allowed for a broad spatial preference to emerge. By the mid 20th century, confirmed with the influence of residential design of The Group added to the international modern style having influence on post-war architecture, Auckland houses have tended to treatment of the plan as a horizontal continuum, with spreading roofs and open plan interiors.<sup>32</sup> A vertical understanding of space when discussing residential architecture in New Zealand is usually reserved for Wellington architects, who work in a compressed and steep landscape. In particular, either Ian Athfield or Roger Walker, or both, are the examples most often used from the 1970s period;

‘New Zealand architects before Walker had explored vertical space, but it had never been the primary emphasis of a house. Before Walker, verticality was internalized. It was a surprise encountered once visitors were inside a seemingly horizontal form.’<sup>33</sup>

Shaw also compares the horizontal spatial quality of the Group with the work of Walker and Athfield; ‘In their work the ordered horizontality of the Auckland architects was banished; now the emphasis was to be vertical.’<sup>34</sup>

One example of the difference between the horizontal and vertical orientations of Auckland and Wellington architectural concerns can be seen by comparing the curatorial approach of two concurrent exhibitions. In the same year that the ‘HomeBuilding’<sup>35</sup> exhibition was held in Auckland, the Architecture Centre in Wellington held an exhibition titled ‘Living in Cities.’<sup>36</sup> The Auckland show provided an overview of the design of the domestic house in New

<sup>30</sup>. The structure has 9 poles in total, with 6 expressed externally. The two tallest poles rise 12m above ground level.

<sup>31</sup>. Simmons provides an example of how Elliot brought this influence to the details in the treatment of the side walls, where the side fin walls are capped and expressed, whereas Simmons would have wrapped the asbestos Super 6 sheets over the barge edges of the sloping roof. Pers. Comm. Neil Simmons 18/6/11.

<sup>32</sup>. Refer to (ed) Gately, Julia *Group Architects. Towards a New Zealand Architecture*, Auckland University Press, 2010 for wide coverage of essays and an extensive bibliography. For an example of a multi-level Group house retaining its horizontal spatial arrangement, see the Rotherham House 1951, Stanmore Bay, Auckland.

<sup>33</sup>. Lloyd-Jenkins, Douglas *At Home: A Century of New Zealand Design*. Godwit Random House, Auckland, 2004, 217.

<sup>34</sup>. Shaw, Peter *A History of New Zealand Architecture*. Hodder Moe Beckett Auckland, 2003, 166. As well as the vertical organising of space, the domestic work of these Wellington architects is discussed around the exterior visibility of expression of individual internal spaces, so that the entire building became a collective of individual forms. Peter Shaw entitles his chapter for this area of architectural history as ‘Architecture as Individualism’, and places an image of John Scott’s Futuna Chapel on the chapter title page. Chapter 9, 157-178

<sup>35</sup>. The HomeBuilding Exhibition 1954 held in Auckland at the Auckland Art Gallery. Catalogue ed. Garrett, J. *HOMEBUILDING 1814-1954: the New Zealand Tradition*. Catalogue of the Exhibition Group, School of Architecture, Auckland University College. Auckland: Pelorus Press, 1954. Refer to Chapter 2.1 Man Alone and the Early Work for further discussion on this exhibition and catalogue.

<sup>36</sup>. Clark, Justine and Walker, Paul *At Home in New Zealand. House History People*. (ed) Brookes, Barbara Bridget Williams books, Wellington 2000, ‘Book, House, Home’, 195-209.



Fig.257



Fig.258

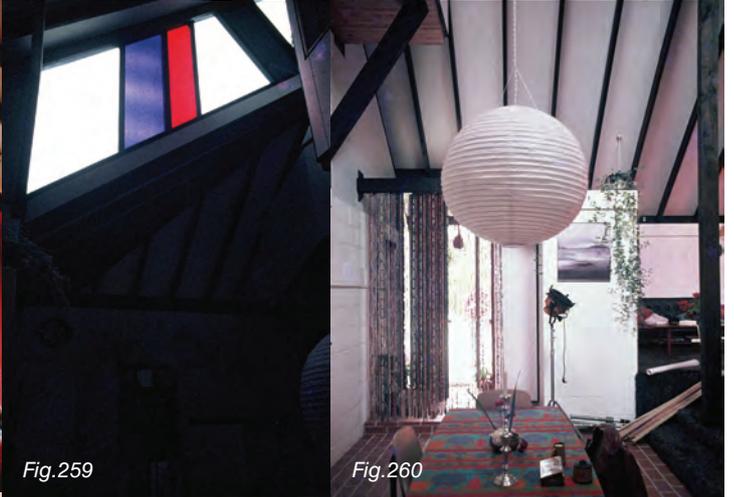


Fig.259

Fig.260



Fig.261



Fig.262

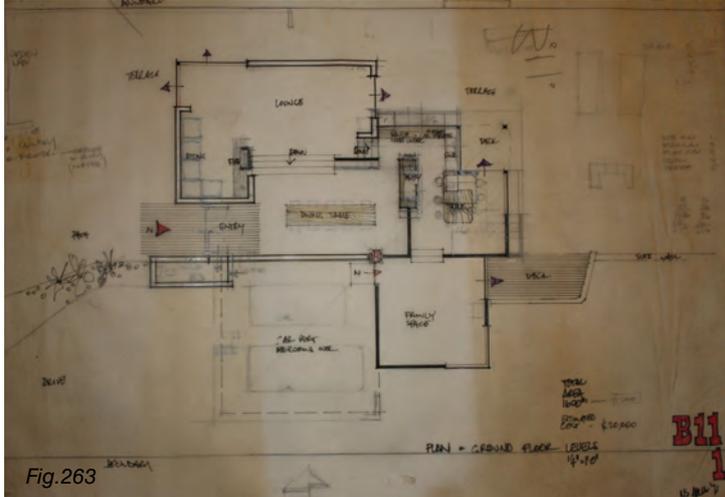


Fig.263

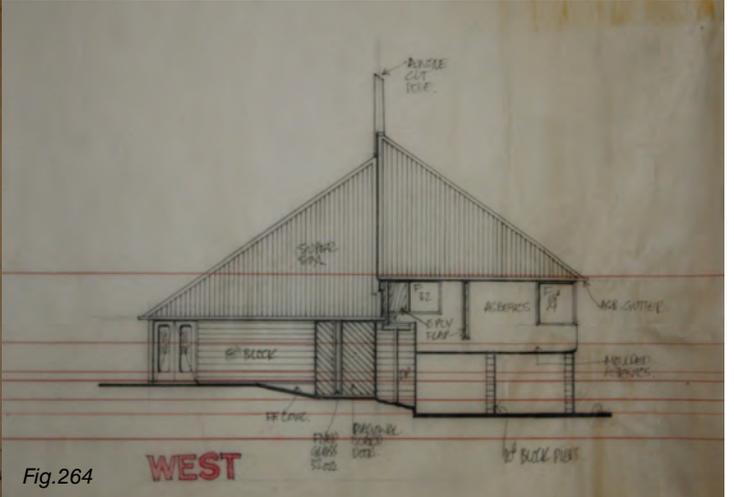


Fig.264

Fig.257 NS020•71-B11 Berman House, Campbells Bay, Auckland, Interior, 1971

Fig.258 NS020•71-B11, interior, view towards Mezzanines, 1971

Fig.259 NS020•71-B11, Roof Glazing,

Fig.260 NS020•71-B11, interior, Dining

Fig.261 NS020•71-B11, exterior, 1971

Fig.262 NS020•71-B11, interior, looking up towards ceiling

Fig.263 NS020•71-B11, early sketch plan, 1971

Fig.264 NS020•71-B11, West Elevation, 1971

Zealand, whereas the Wellington focus was on design for inner city living. The initial title for this Wellington exhibition was 'Vertical Living'<sup>37</sup> indicating how the Architecture Centre was concerned with solving urban density design issues and that it was ideologically opposed to urban sprawl.<sup>38</sup>

'Notable among these initiatives was the 1954 exhibition Vertical Living. Assuming that 'not every household needs a house,' this project addressed apartment living for 'the forgotten people': 'bachelor girls', students, 'professional and clerical cadets', the elderly, childless couples, widows and widowers, and so on.'<sup>39</sup>

For Simmons, pole house construction allowed for a vertical organization of space, rather than dependence on a horizontal open plan arrangement. In line with his concern with economy, Simmons endeavoured to use the full length of a minimum number of poles rather than spread a wide footprint with many poles. Several small floor plates occur at several levels, with poles continuing through several floors to support the roof. The openness that can be generated in a horizontal plane is still present in the vertical dimension via spatial connection between all levels. It is important to note that to offset the vertical dynamic, Simmons achieves compositional balance in his designs with the use of low, horizontal elements. The provision of a stable, grounded base from which the vertical can move freely is important, and the design of elements such as furniture design, window sills and fittings usually reinforce the ground plane through devices such as being set lower than is typical and the use of a heavy scaled timber at floor level.

#### **Berman House, Campbells Bay, 1971<sup>40</sup>**

The Berman House,<sup>41</sup> designed in 1971, places this stage of the work of Neil Simmons in the company of what Douglas Lloyd Jenkins describes as 'The New Colonials'.<sup>42</sup> The single central vertical structural element is a large recycled wharf pole<sup>43</sup>, around which all circulation is arranged vertically. Each floor level is located at a split level from its adjacent floors on this spiral arrangement. This allows for less reliance on horizontal organising devices such as walls, internal doors and hallways.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Ref footnote 22, Clark, Justine and Walker, Paul *At Home in New Zealand. House History People.* (ed) Brookes, Barbara Bridget Williams books, Wellington 2000, 'Book, House, Home', 195-209.

<sup>38</sup> While some members of The Group were also members of Architecture Centre and may have held similar ideological beliefs, when practicing in Auckland they had to contribute to that very sprawl due to the nature of Auckland's planning policies. See Clark, Justine and Walker, Paul *At Home in New Zealand. House History People.* (ed) Brookes, Barbara Bridget Williams books, Wellington 2000, 'Book, House, Home', 202.

<sup>39</sup> Clark, Justine and Walker, Paul *At Home in New Zealand. House History People.* (ed) Brookes, Barbara Bridget Williams books, Wellington 2000, 'Book, House, Home', 202.

<sup>40</sup> NS020•71-B11 Berman House, 16 Asbury Crescent, Campbells Bay, 1971. This house, designed around a wharf pile, is discussed later in the chapter with regard to vertical space. Refer also figs. 23-30.

<sup>41</sup> The clients, Keith and Anita Berman, were contemporaries of Simmons with a young and growing family. To select an architect, visited Simmons in his own recently finished home and interviewed several architects, including Ivan Juriss. Juriss was an original member of Group Architects which had become Wilson and Juriss at this time.

<sup>42</sup> Lloyd-Jenkins, Douglas *At Home: A Century of New Zealand Design.* Godwit Random House, Auckland, 2004, 217. Chapter 8: The 1970s: The New Colonials.

<sup>43</sup> The design was developed with the intention of using a power company square timber pole, which is approximately 400 x 400mm. (Refer sketch design plans and Construction Drawings.) However these poles were not long enough and the Harbour Board was subsequently approached. At that time they could provide only huge (one meter diameter) round poles, and it was agreed to hand-adze back to the desired proportions. The Australian hardwood wharf pile was left larger than the construction drawings and the design was adapted to suit the larger pole. The weathered exterior of the pole was removed to the structurally sound timber pole core, exposing the worm-track holes of previous sub-sea worms, a welcome decorative effect.

<sup>44</sup> Simmons particularly dislikes narrow hallways, and endeavors to keep the number of internal dividing walls to a minimum. Pers. Comm. Neil Simmons 18/5/10. This dislike is from a social as well as spatial point of view, and Robin Evans has discussed how the development of the hallway in Europe in the early seventeenth century was a spatial device for social separation - to separate the servants from the genteel classes. The corridor was installed parallel to already inter-connected rooms, as a secondary method of connection and one which would not cross paths with the other. Evans, Robin 'Figures, Doors and Passages.' *Translations from Drawing to Building and other essays.* MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1997, 71.



HOLE DRILLED  
POLES DRIPPED IN WITH RIC  
POSITIONED ON PADS  
FLOOR BEAMS IN

3 DAYS

10<sup>th</sup> SEPT '75

POLES

STRUCTURE



FLOOR JOISTS DOWN  
FLOORING JOINTS  
SEALED

16<sup>th</sup> SEPT

GRD. FLOOR

FLOOR DIAGRAM



28<sup>th</sup> SEPT

GRD & FIRST FLOORS



28<sup>th</sup> SEPT



9<sup>TH</sup> OCT

ALL FLOORS

2ND FLOOR BEAMS  
2ND FLOOR MILL FLOOR  
STAIRS

4 DAYS

COMPLETED  
STRUCTURE



20<sup>TH</sup> OCT

FRAMING



20 OCT



8<sup>TH</sup> NOV

SHEATHING

COMPLETE FRAMING  
PARTIAL FIBRO SHEATHING  
JOINTS FITTED  
DECK CONSTRUCTED  
4 DAYS

COMMENCE  
SHEATHING



5.12.75

CLOSE IN

COMPLETE ROOFING  
BUILD WEST DECK  
GLAZING  
4 DAYS

SHEATHING  
GLAZING  
ENCLOSURE



FROM BEACH



24.1.76

FROM N.E.

Fig.265

Fig.265 NS043\*74-S15, Storey Pole House, Hahei, construction progress polaroid photographs, 10 September 1975 - 24 January 1976

The single, central pole sits in a well-founded raised solid platform and supports the unfolding roof. Solutions to the form, space planning, tectonics and decoration are derived from this single structural element. The roof form is separated into quarters, each relating to a different internal level and each of varying sizes to express the differences within. As each 'quarter' slips around the central pole, light enters between the gaps created, with some insertions of coloured glass taking advantage of the changing position of the sun. The approach to the house is from above<sup>45</sup> and from this viewpoint of looking down on the roof the house is deliberately coherent as a single form. The Wharf pile protrudes through the roof at the apex reminiscent of an umbrella, from which the individual roof sections gradually unfold on the journey to the entry door. This unfolding is from a singular form - representing communal interior space - to several and complex formal expressions, representing for Simmons the many individuals residing within. The expression of the individual within a group is a theme common to the 1970s, and Simmons works with this theme in several projects from the mid 1960s through several decades.<sup>46</sup>

As a result of this spiralling form, the interior double and triple height spaces are in places dramatic, especially in the Dining area placed near the entry. It essentially formed the grand entry hall, connected to the oversized entry door<sup>47</sup> with a concrete blockwork wall. The client accentuated the triple height space with wall-mounted candle-holders, and has allowed the wax residue which dripped down the wall to build up over the years. Simmons recalls the initial design influence deriving from a film;

'Anita bought two wrought iron candle holders to go with my memories of a high space and drunk dogs and owner feasting in a Baronial Hall in the film *Tom Jones*.'<sup>48</sup>

Vertical interior circulation also had effect on the economic use of attic space. Mezzanines were quite literally tucked under steeply sloping roofs, with the intention of economically using the maximum internal volume for the minimum external skin material. The treatment of window openings in this house shows an approach typical of the 1960s and commonly used by Simmons: fixed glass panels with hinged solid ply panels. The solid ventilating panels in this house are mainly vertical<sup>49</sup> and are generally 400-450mm wide, a dimension used due to its relationship with the human body.<sup>50</sup>

The Berman house was included in the 1998 exhibition 'CONNECTIONS The House in the Auckland Scene' held in the Sarjeant Gallery, Whanganui.<sup>51</sup> The focus of the exhibition was to express the 'thin-ness' of New Zealand residential architecture and in particular the suburb, re-presenting the suburb as a type of thin blanket on the land rather than as an established, permanent architecture. The exhibition panels were printed onto and presented on Formica sheets, which curled away from the walls due to their lack of lamination onto a rigid substrate.

<sup>45</sup>. The site in Campbells Bay, North Shore falls away from the northern aspect and street access downwards towards a low-lying creek. Simmons described the site as 'scrappy' (pers. comm. NS 7/9/10.)

<sup>46</sup>. See for example the Upton House U7 (unbuilt) 1980, images of the model have been used by John Hunt in his Auckland University lectures in the 1980s.

<sup>47</sup>. The very tall door used in the Berman house was made from diagonal off-cuts of the cedar weatherboards used on the house itself, a detail already employed and seen by the clients on the Simmons House. Exposed copper fixings / rivets were used on the weatherboards to achieve the studded appearance.

<sup>48</sup>. NS email, dated 2/9/10. The British film *Tom Jones* was based on the novel *A History of Tom Jones, A Foundling* by Henry Fielding and was made in 1963. (dir. Tony Richardson.)

<sup>49</sup>. There are many houses designed by Simmons throughout the 1960s with fixed panels placed horizontally, at floor level, beneath fixed large format plate glass with sills set at 450mm from ground level. For example, Austin House, Milford, 1960 and Hill House, Eastern Beach, 1962.

<sup>50</sup>. This measurement is the approximate width of a human body. The use of bodily proportions shows an influence of Le Corbusier's application of the 'Modulor Man' proportion system.

<sup>51</sup>. Exhibition curated by Simon Twose, Mahendra Daji and Albert Refiti of the G4 Exhibiting Unit, November 1998. G4 Exhibiting Unit also published a catalogue of the same title to accompany the exhibition. (ed. Megan Nordeck and Simon Twose, 1998.) The book held three essays written by former and current staff at the School of Architecture at the University of Auckland.



Fig.266



Fig.267

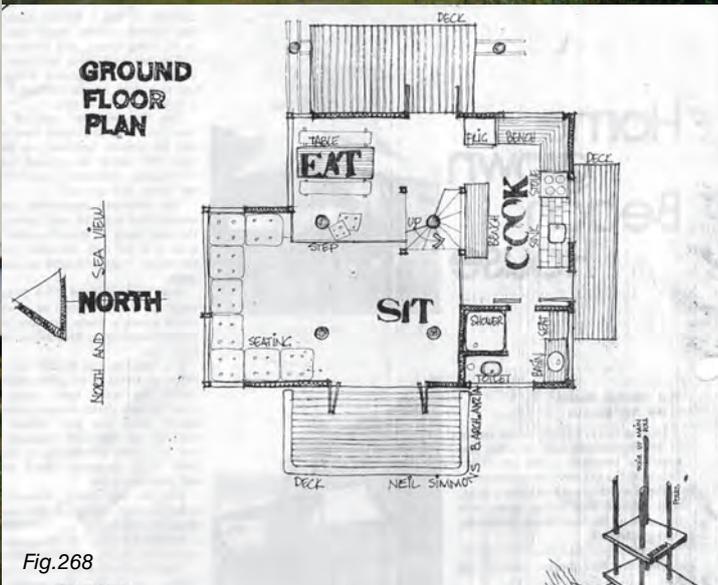


Fig.268



Fig.269



Fig.270



Fig.271



Fig.272

Fig.266 NS043•74-S15, Storey Pole House, Hahei, exterior, 1974

Fig.267 NS043•74-S15, exterior, 1974

Fig.268 NS043•74-S15, sketch plan, Main Floor Level, 1974

Fig.269 NS049•75-G19, Griffiths Pole House, Cooks Beach, Coromandel, exterior, 1975

Fig.270 NS049•75-G19, construction progress photo, framing

Fig.271 NS049•75-G19, construction progress photo, cladding

Fig.272 NS049•75-G19 and R25, Reid addition 2006

### **Storey Pole House, Hahei, 1974<sup>52</sup>**

'Architect Simmons tried out his plans by building the house himself in partnership with a builder friend, Dave Bryant. The pair spent about four days every other weekend over six months doing the work – living happily, says Simmons, on smoked mullet, tuatua and wild pork.'<sup>53</sup>

This pole house was designed in 1974, when the design model and sketch plans were used for students at The University of Auckland Architecture School so they could prepare construction drawings and details, as part of their construction course.<sup>54</sup> Construction Drawings were subsequently drawn by Jake Jacobsen and construction began on site in September 1975, with completion in January 1976.<sup>55</sup>

An article on this building featured in the *Auckland Star*<sup>56</sup> in which it is described as looking like a 'Red Indian tepee, with the ends of the pole frame projecting through the roof.'<sup>57</sup>

The elimination of interior walls and corridors was achieved through vertical circulation, with a single spiral staircase linking four different levels. The materials are Super 6 asbestos sheets, with pre-formed curved panels again used for the balcony rail detail, side panels and gutters.

### **Griffiths Pole House, Cooks Beach, 1975<sup>58</sup>**

This pole house employs an inverted roof, with a single valley gutter and downpipe, enabled a simple water collection system. The diagonally opposite high corner has an exposed bracing system, which helped to earn the building the moniker of 'the grandstand'<sup>59</sup> among locals at the time of construction. The four exterior poles express the structure at the tall section of the building, while a single internal pole with a spiral staircase organizes the vertical circulation to the interior. Again the building is compositionally vertical, and is 10.7 meters at its highest ridge, slightly higher than the 10 meter maximum permitted height at the time. American warehouse construction detailing was employed, with the timber flooring spanning between beams, eliminating the need for floor joists. Each timber element was hand-nailed in-situ because no laminated engineered timber product was available at that time.

### **Male Potting Shed / Tennis Pavilion, Whitford, 1978<sup>60</sup>**

'My offbeat architect Simmons became involved and it was odds on poles would be the order of the day.'<sup>61</sup>

This large shed, designed for the same client as Simmons' first pole house at Cooks Beach, was constructed with a similar structural system to the earlier design. Two vertical old jarrah power company poles are located on the exterior of the building envelope, linked with roof and floor beams.

'Neil drew up this fancy plan (after pinching most of the ideas from me) about holding the whole show together with two forty-foot transformer poles. He poked the deal

<sup>52</sup> NS043•74-S15 Storey Pole House, 6 Hahei Beach Road, Hahei, Coromandel, 1974.

<sup>53</sup> Blakely, Elizabeth 'Home Grown Beach House' *Auckland Star*, date unknown. Due to the date and page information, this article has been included in the Appendices (Appendix F).

<sup>54</sup> Refer to Chapter 1.2 Neil Simmons: Work experience for further information on this project with Auckland University students, including current Senior Lecturer, Dr Ross Jenner.

<sup>55</sup> Refer to the Polaroid images covering the five month construction process.

<sup>56</sup> Blakely, Elizabeth 'Home Grown Beach House' *Auckland Star*, date unknown. (Appendix F)

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, date unknown. This is a good example of the common usage of vernacular references of the 1970s era.

<sup>58</sup> NS049•75-G19 Griffiths Pole House, 5 Endeavour Place, Cooks Beach, Coromandel, 1975. Additions were carried out in 2005 for different clients, Mr and Mrs Reid, (NS Job Number: R25) after which Simmons received an NZIA Local Award in 2007.

<sup>59</sup> This is the second house designed by Neil Simmons to earn this moniker. The earlier house for Kevyn and Sue Male (NS016•70-M16) was also called the grandstand, as well as the 'Transformer'.

<sup>60</sup> NS073•78-M37 Male Potting Shed, 415 Whitford-Maraetai Road, Whitford, 1978.

<sup>61</sup> Male, Kevyn G *The Wheeler Dealer Kevyn Male*, 1984, 83.



Fig.273

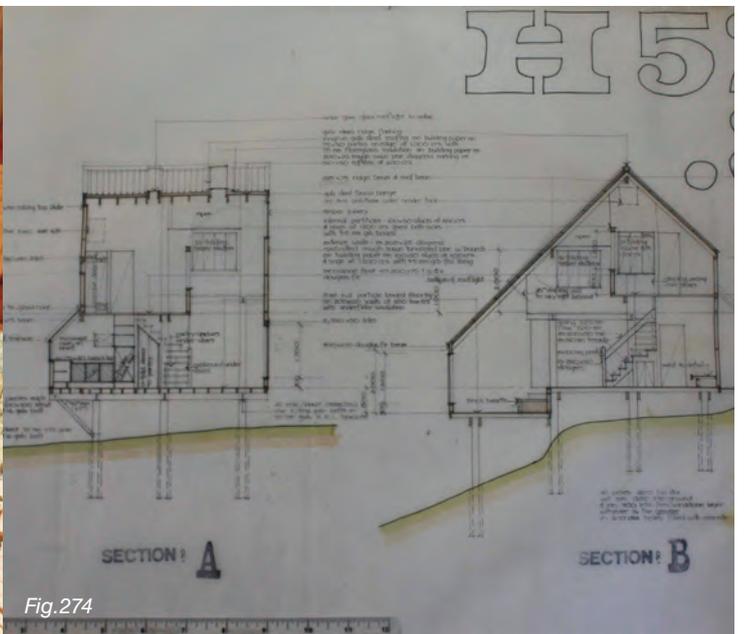


Fig.274

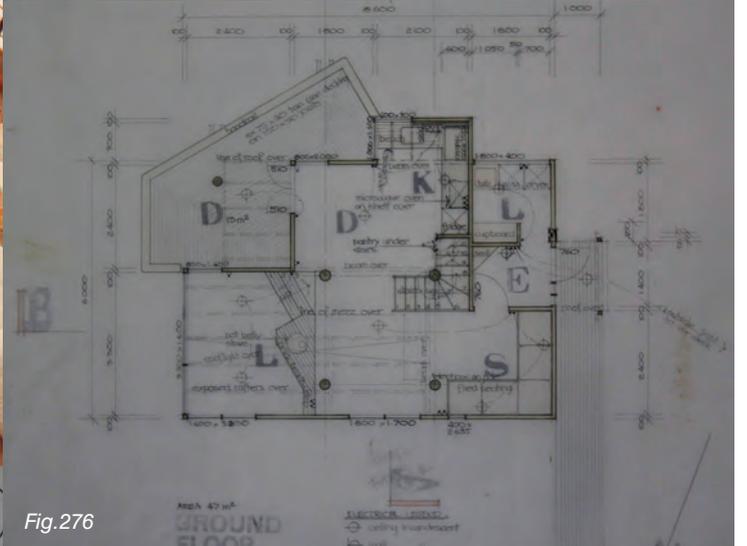


Fig.276

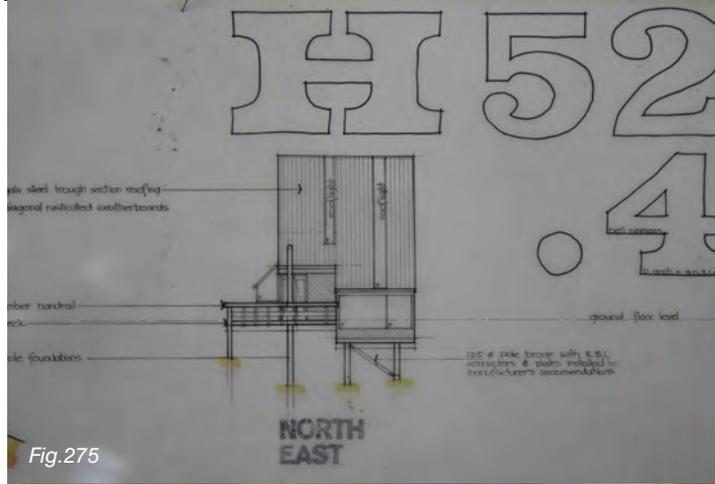


Fig.275

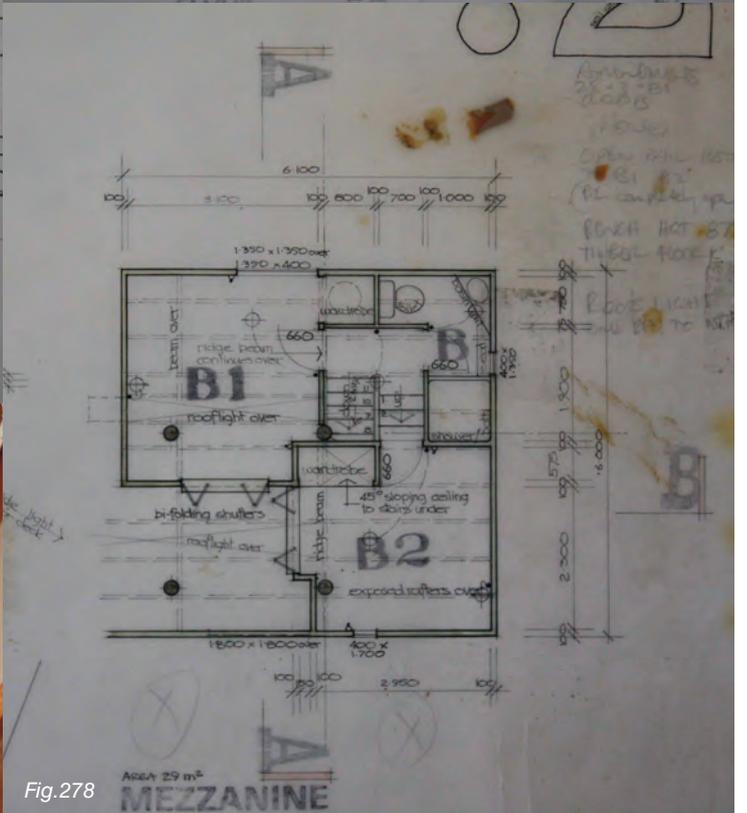


Fig.278



Fig.277

- Fig.273 NS097•80-H52, Hart Pole House, Titirangi, interior, 1980
- Fig.274 NS097•80-H52, Section A and B, 1980
- Fig.275 NS097•80-H52, North East Elevation, 1980
- Fig.276 NS097•80-H52, Main Floor Plan, 1980
- Fig.277 NS097•80-H52, interior, looking down from Mezzanine
- Fig.278 NS097•80-H52, Mezzanine Floor Plan, 1980

through the Council under the guise of a garden shed.<sup>62</sup>

These quotes from the client indicate the celebrated values of the time; anti-authoritarian trickery and a casual approach to construction, where structural feats can be performed with everyday materials and do it yourself labour.

This building is located on a large rural site in Whitford, which the client continued to develop with another architect, Noel Lane, in the 1990s.<sup>63</sup> The entire property was sold in 2004 and now operates as an upmarket holiday retreat called 'Zen Garden.' Bookings can be made for overnight stays in the Potting Shed as well as in the main house.<sup>64</sup>

### **Hart Pole House, Titirangi, 1980<sup>65</sup>**

An initial design for this site was prepared in 1977 for clients Diane Hart and her husband,<sup>66</sup> for a relatively large home, separated into several smaller pole structures due to the density of the native trees and the difficult terrain.<sup>67</sup> The concept of this original design was 'a deck of cards,' seemingly randomly arranged among the many trees and poles.<sup>68</sup> The couple separated soon after the design and construction drawings for this project were completed and it was put on hold.

In 1980, Diane Hart returned to Simmons with a different brief for the same site, this time for a building of at least half the floor area and half the budget of the first design, as a home for a single parent and her son. By this time the recurring themes of Simmons' pole houses were well-established; economical use of space, strong vertical spatial connections, simple structural expression and minimal intrusion into the existing landscape. The final design involved five dispensations from Town Planning Bylaws to enable the construction of the small house, which has a footprint of 60 square meters, including decks.<sup>69</sup> Since no tractor could gain access to the site, the building was constructed firstly from the road and then from the parking platform, with the pile holes made using a portable tripod digger. A block and tackle was used to pull up the digger and to lift the poles into place, as there was also no possibility of lifting poles into place via a helicopter, due to the density of the trees.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 83.

<sup>63</sup> A large courtyard house was designed by Noel Lane, which has a client-directed influence of Japanese timber rural housing.

<sup>64</sup> Zen Garden <http://www.zengarden.co.nz> retrieved 10/8/11.

<sup>65</sup> NS097•80-H52. Hart Pole House, 40 Otitori Bay Road, Titirangi, 1980. Refer figs. 274-279.

<sup>66</sup> NS068•77-H42. Hart Pole House, 40 Otitori Bay Road, Titirangi, 1977. Refer figs. 237-240.

<sup>67</sup> The Council (then Titirangi Borough Council) had considered the site as unbuildable due to the slope, drainage problems and landslip possibilities. Neil Simmons recalls lowering the engineer, Tony Smith, on a rope from the road for the initial site inspection. Pers. comm. NS 4/2/11.

<sup>68</sup> Pers. comm. Neil Simmons, 10/5/11.

<sup>69</sup> Two of those dispensations were to allow the building to be positioned within the Front Yard Setback, and to construct the parking platform on Council Road Reserve Land.

# **From Man Alone to Larrikin: The Work of Neil Simmons 1958-1984**

**Lynda Simmons**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
of Master of Architecture, The University of Auckland, 2011.