

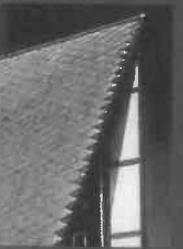
ISED AND UPDATED



HISTORY OF NEW ZEALAND

# ARCHITECTURE

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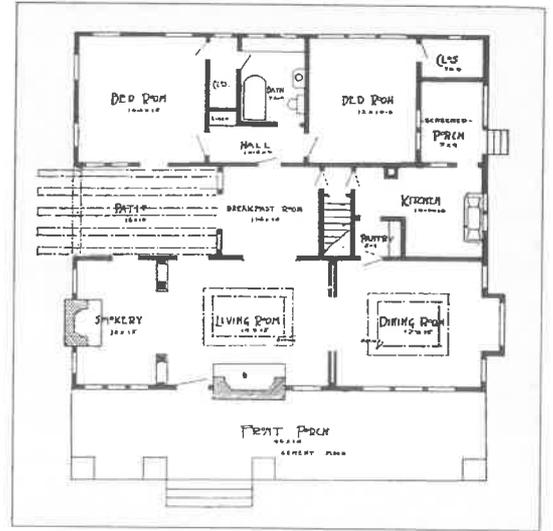


Interior of Los Angeles, c. 1913. The ceiling of the bungalow was generally lower than the villa's. Exposed rafters and a plate rail emphasise horizontality and a pair of sliding doors allow sitting and dining rooms to be closed off.

STEFFANO WEBB COLLECTION, ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY.

'Kosy Konka Home' built by Bassett & Co. at Ingestre Street, Wanganui.

In Auckland in 1913, the architect R. Atkinson Abbott (1883–1954) was commissioned to extend a gardener's cottage at Wharua Road, Remuera, and he provided the new structure with a low roof with exposed rafter tails and overhanging eaves, as well as a bay window and verandah with shingled skirts. Familiarity with the Californian bungalow style had increased from 1910 onwards, when a column in *Progress* ('from Our Californian correspondent') illustrated large numbers of plans and elevations of bungalows, to the chagrin of most of the country's English-trained architects. Builders all over New Zealand took to them with such enthusiasm that excellent examples of the style can still be found in most



Plan of a Californian bungalow from the 'Just a Little Different' catalogue. The relatively open relationship of rooms differs considerably from the more closed villa plan (see page 45).

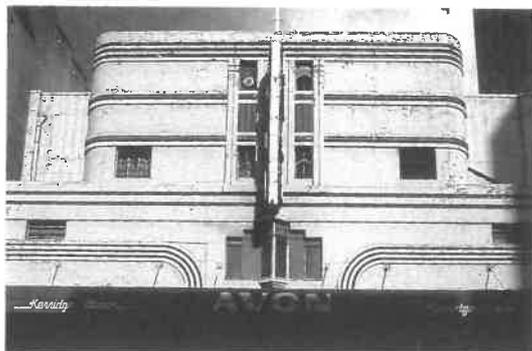
towns. In Wanganui, for instance, the builders Bassett & Co. made a speciality of the bungalow, building hundreds of 'Kosy Konka Homes' from over a thousand house patterns designed to encourage buyers to use the company's new concrete-sheet construction process.

Many architects realised that the bungalow was becoming increasingly popular with clients glad to be liberated from the omnipresent villa, and incorporated its features into their repertoire of styles. Some, like F. C. Daniell in Hamilton, produced two-storeyed houses. The house Daniell designed for the Murray family in Radnor Street in 1919 shares many features with the even larger Clunes, at Onewhero in Raglan County, which



An all-wood bungalow at Queen Street, Thames.

Wood & McCormack. Its corners, instead of being curved, are chamfered and give the house a geometric rigour further emphasised by clear and textured glass arranged in sharply angled decorative patterns. In the spacious stairwell a stained and painted window depicts a ruined Scottish castle. By contrast, the Blackie House (1947) at Victoria Street, Hamilton, is so curvaceous that it has become known as a 'waterfall' house. The enduring popularity of such large Art Deco-styled residences is evident from the fact that the house was built as late as 1947.



Modern, Moderne and Deco

*Avon Cinema (1934), Christchurch, by L. E. Williams. The hallmarks of the 'streamlined' Deco style are apparent.*



All over New Zealand smaller, single-storeyed Deco houses sprang up, relatively few of them the work of architects. Most were constructed by local builders quick to grasp the essentials of a style closely resembling that of 'modern' state houses. Many such smaller houses exhibited the proportions of the Deco box but were given a Spanish dress with the addition of angled Cordova tiles on parapets, obscuring their flat roofs.

Elsewhere in New Zealand, businesses which did not feel the economic pinch employed architects to design cinemas, transport centres, swimming pools and insurance companies in the modern Art Deco style. The so-called 'streamlined' Deco with its futuristic obsession

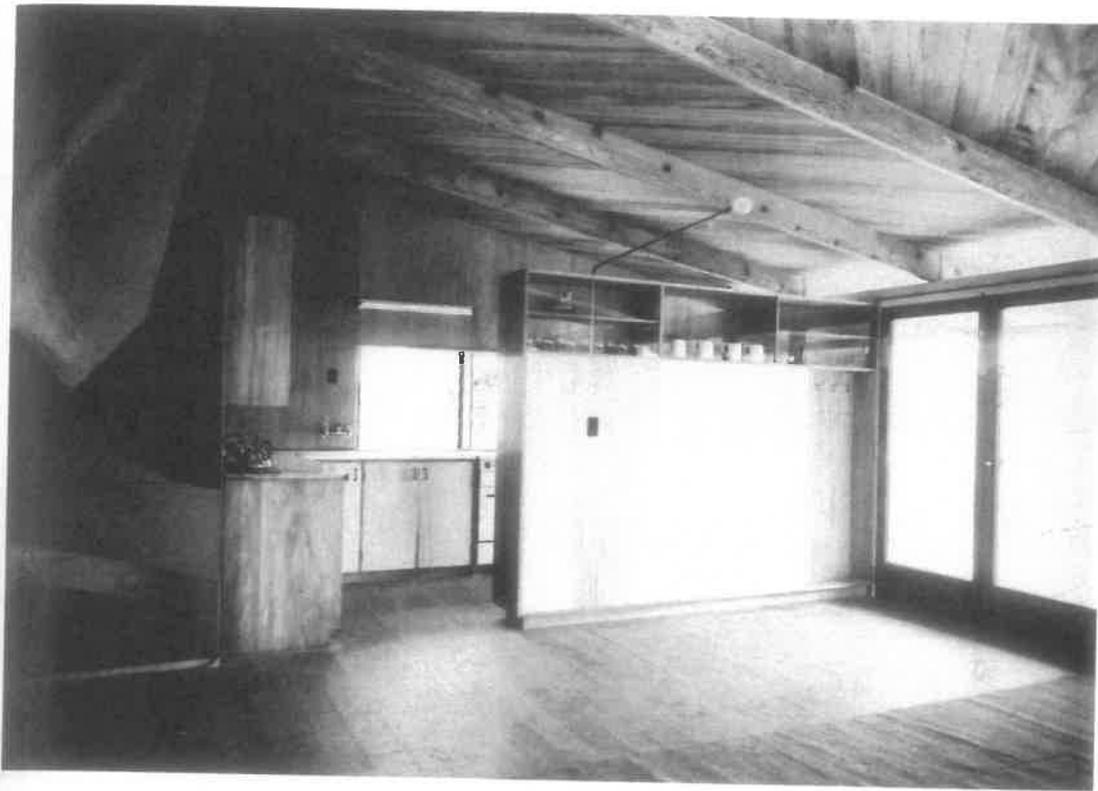


with movement made little impact here, although two cinemas, the State (1935) in Nelson by H. Francis Willis and the Avon (1937) in Christchurch by L. E. Williams exhibit the swooping linearity which characterised the style. Dunedin's Road Services Passenger Station (1936) by Miller & White owes its impressive appearance in part to an unusual site, which is a triangle nearly 125 metres on its longest side. Despite this, the architects designed a long, low building which actually curves smoothly around the site and is given definition by symmetrically placed, cobalt-blue metal sash windows, incised panels of vertical decoration and a superb entrance that was originally given even stronger vertical emphasis by a contrasting colour scheme of cream, brown and orange. Inside, three types of marble in black, pink and green, relieved by polished metal bands, created a stylish effect; on the second floor above it a social hall was provided with stage, dressing rooms and a jarrah floor for dancing. This was indeed a building

*RIGHT: Road Services Passenger Station (1936), Dunedin, by Miller & White. This is one of a number of fine Art Deco buildings in a city which is surprisingly rich in examples of the style.*

*TOP LEFT: Curtis House (1936), Forbury, Dunedin, by Wood & McCormack.*

*BOTTOM LEFT: Blackie House (1947), Hamilton. The exploitation of the smoothly curving stucco surface of houses such as this has led to the adoption of the descriptive term 'waterfall'.*



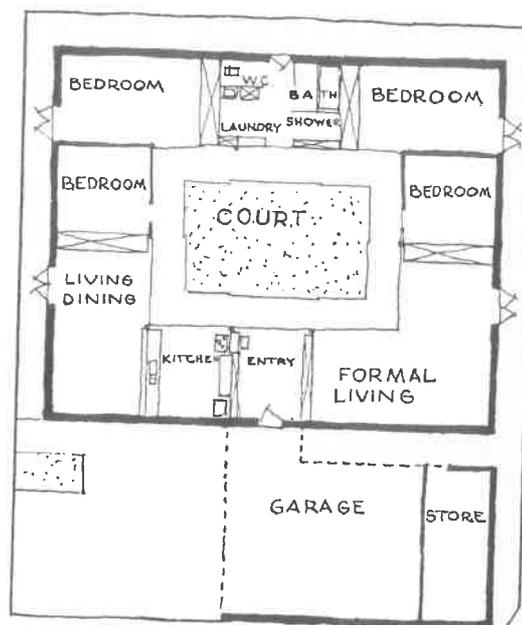
## The Search for the Vernacular

*Interior of First House (1950), Belmont, by the Group Construction Company. There being no client to accommodate, the architects drastically simplified the plan, subordinating everything to the need to be open to the sunny climate. The mural is by Anthony Treadwell.*

AUCKLAND UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE LIBRARY.

Upon graduation in 1950 the renamed Group Construction Company consisted of Bill Wilson, James Hackshaw, Ivan Juriss, Bruce Rotherham, Bret Penman, Campbell Craig and Allan Wild. They first produced two speculative houses for average-income owners in the Auckland suburb of Belmont. Using a low-pitched corrugated-iron roof, creosoted vertical weatherboard walls, and an open-planned, passageless interior with raked ceilings and plywood walls, these were a radical departure from the ubiquitous state house. Following the two Belmont houses, the Construction Company ceased building and began to practise as Group Architects; by 1953 three members — Hackshaw, Juriss and Wilson — were left, and the partnership split up finally in 1958.

During and after their period of association all three produced some fine houses. Juriss's own house at Stanley Point (1954) shows strong Japanese influence while Hackshaw's Thom House, in Mt Albert, designed in the same year, is an atrium house planned around a central courtyard, on to which sliding glass panels open.



*Plan of Thom House (1953), Morningside, by James Hackshaw. Behind a characteristically understated brick exterior is a house planned around an open courtyard, designed to be planted with flowers which would bleed colour into the glass-fronted rooms surrounding it.*

REPRODUCED IN HOME AND BUILDING, MAY 1955.

Read in conjunction with Moodle files about "the Group - 1950's" houses - images

almost invariably wealthier than the Group's in Auckland, the clients of both practices understood that it made economic sense to employ an architect who knew how to use—perhaps unconventional materials efficiently. The shocked resident of Mt Albert who observed to Mr Mann that his year-old Ivan Juriss house (see page 159) would be nice when it was finished was expressing the kind of architectural conservatism which had allowed the 1930s state house to hold the New Zealand suburban landscape in a kind of tyranny. In the public mind, concrete block was regarded as a material unsuited for domestic building but so, ironically, was timber.

The worst that the conservative observer could say about any modern house was that it looked like a farm building. Group Architects and other vernacularists may have delighted in the barn- or shed-like qualities of their indigenous houses, but it was this that made them unacceptable to the public. The State Advances Corporation, which granted loans for house building, agreed; it was extremely difficult to get a loan for anything other than a standard, conventionally planned brick-and-tile house. Wood was regarded as flimsy and unreliable, but bricks looked strong; the timber-framed house must be brick clad. The much-consulted *Carpentry in New Zealand*, first put out by the Department of Education Technical Correspondence School in 1958, illustrated exactly how the brick veneer wall should be attached to a timber frame on a

concrete foundation, using a 1½-inch (4-centimetre) cavity between the brick work and the timber framing in order to prevent dampness.

In 1950 the returned serviceman who was the client for the Group Construction Company's first house managed to obtain a State Advances Loan only because the architects stood their ground and argued for construction in wood. Ivan Juriss recalled:

They weren't implacably opposed to timber, but they put all sorts of restriction on its use. Exterior vertical board and batten construction for instance was forbidden because it was regarded as likely to let in water, however, the first Group House was clad with vertical ship-lapped boards . . . it all depended on the individual building inspector.

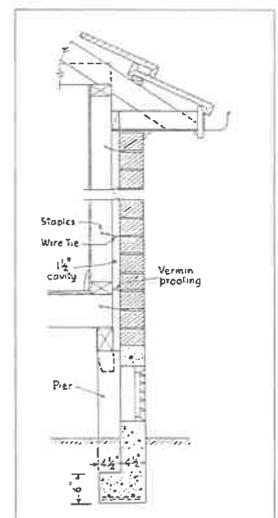
There was also official disapproval of plans which had kitchens opening out on to living areas. Sometimes it was necessary to produce two sets of drawings, one for the client showing an open-plan concept, the other showing a separate kitchen in order to satisfy a council official. To guarantee a good resale value the home owner was well advised to avoid exposed rafters, weatherboards and anything other than a concrete base. Body carpet covered fine matai floors, gibraltar board lined the walls, and ceilings were plastered over at considerable expense. In kitchens wood was banished in favour of formica, sometimes with an imprint that mimicked a timber or tiled surface. The patio, as opposed to

## Architecture as Individualism

*BOTTOM LEFT: A typical brick-and-tile house built at Avondale, Auckland, during the early 1960s. There is no wood visible, and the wrought-iron patio railing is a characteristic feature. The Venetian blinds would invariably have remained closed all day to prevent fading of the carpet.*



*Figure from Carpentry in New Zealand, showing how brick walls should be attached to timber frames.*



these and other houses Athfield deliberately omitted randomness. A fierce opponent of the conformity of state housing, he emphasised an individualistic approach to architecture, working closely with his clients, whose involvement in the construction process was a condition of the contract. Ten years later, his Buck House at Matakana North (see page 192) indicated that Athfield, in creating a dwelling that is a veritable masterpiece, was still developing ideas which had their origin in his own house of 1966. Roger Walker's Wellington houses were different but scarcely less shocking. Like Athfield, he was appalled at 'the sameness and degrading monotony of our suburban areas', but equally he criticised the 'applied veneers and temporary imitations of the consumer housing brochures'.<sup>8</sup> He believed that there was an increasing demand for houses that reflected the variety of people themselves: rooms should be conceived as spaces rather than compartments, and these spaces should flow into and hang over one another, with different roof shapes and heights reflected internally (compare this with the Group's belief that if the planning was right the exterior would follow), and much stronger colours used.



Walker's 1973 Wood House, originally built as a speculative venture, used rustic weatherboards; its cottage-like form with double gables sported finials and a colonial verandah. Undoubtedly his 'domestic cause célèbre' was the large Britten house (1972-74) at Seatoun Heights, which Gerald Melling described as 'a village-house'.<sup>9</sup> The house is distributed over no fewer than ten levels, the top-most one a turret-like capsule which functions as a retreat above the main bedroom and allows the inhabitants to be completely isolated from the rest of the house and from the neighbours. The house is a series of small spaces independently roofed but with larger kitchen and living spaces opening onto a brick-paved courtyard. With its round windows set in huge drain pipes, soaring metal flues, cross braces across windows, and sliced-off gables which terminate in a horizontal roof or a square wooden box, the Britten House exemplifies Walker's distinctive architectural wit. The building won for its architect a national award in 1977 and, like Athfield's own house, attracted attention far beyond Wellington. Unlikely though it may seem, both Athfield and Walker also designed blocks of flats. David Mitchell has commented that Park Mews (1974) 'was a pop assemblage of Colonial peaks and Walker circles . . . the last thing Walker would let any building of his design say was "this is a block of flats" . . . so Park Mews looks like a huge Walker house (though a Walker house looks like a string of minute flats to some)'.<sup>10</sup>



Architecture  
as Individualism

LEFT: Britten House (1972-74), Seatoun, Wellington, by Roger Walker. 'Imagination is stalking the streets,' wrote Roger Walker early in his career. This house shows just how far he was prepared to go in designing houses which bore as little relationship as possible to anything in New Zealand's architectural history.

Park Mews (1974), Wellington, by Roger Walker. The architect was able to adapt his highly individualistic architectural style to the problem of designing inner-city apartments.

NEW ZEALAND  
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*Lyttelton Road Tunnel Authority Building (1962–65), Heathcote Valley, Christchurch, by Peter Beaven. Intricate in detail, imaginative in its symbolism, and sculpturally daring in form, this building was ahead of its time.*

supporting a tub-shaped, cantilevered top floor. The colour scheme and all furniture were designed by the architect, who in 1965 won an N.Z.I.A. Gold Medal for his striking creation.



Beaven's 1971 Banks Peninsula Cruising Club at Lyttelton is much more intimate in scale than the monumental Tunnel Authority building; with its lighthouse-derived verticality, proliferation of nautical detail, use of bright colour and yacht-like nooks and crannies, it has something of the wit and exuberance of Roger Walker's Wellington houses. Unlike Walker, who managed to get his outrageous Whakatane Airport (1971) approved by the Ministry of Works, Beaven's innovative spirit was controlled and not overtly theatrical, because it was based on a respect for tradition.

*Whakatane Airport (1971) by Roger Walker. A shock for both tourists and travelling New Zealanders, the building's practical limitations are outweighed by its fancifulness. The exposed timber roof structure, tunnels, perilous circular stair and cottage-like rooms firmly contradict passengers' expectation of what an airport should be.*



When he designed the playful Chateau Commodore Hotel in Christchurch in 1972–73, Beaven blatantly advertised his debt to Mountfort and the earlier Canterbury architect's medieval antecedents. Here is a monument to pleasure which alludes to the baronial halls of England. An oriel window supported with brackets refers to Stokesay Castle, Shropshire, built in 1285, and the dining room, with its struts, beams and trusses, refers to a thirteenth-century barn at Cherwill, Wiltshire. There are even turrets and moats in this rural building, which is sited at the edge of Hagley Park in Christchurch.

Peter Beaven did not, however, neglect New Zealand's colonial heritage. He had long been an advocate of mews-type housing developments as the solution to New Zealand's high-density city living problems. He believed that linked-row housing in cottage-like clusters with social amenities nearby would eventually supplant the traditional quarter-acre subdivision for at least half of New Zealand's population. In 1969 his highly innovative student village proposal for Canterbury University came to nothing when the Professorial Board, alarmed at reports of student rioting in Europe, scrapped the scheme because they were persuaded to believe that it could be too easily barricaded. The following year Beaven's Habitat, now called Pitarua Court, was built in a quiet cul-de-sac in Wellington's Tinakori Hills, but neither the Riccarton Mews proposal, a true neighbourhood centre comprising thirty-seven houses, a paved area with trees, a licensed restaurant, a pub, a swimming pool and an artificial stream, nor the elaborate colonially detailed scheme for twenty-four apartments next to Pompallier House in the Bay of Islands went ahead.

By contrast, Miles Warren's career during the 1960s and 1970s, when he designed some of the country's most noticeable and widely publicised buildings, was quickly to bring the practice of Warren & Mahoney, founded in 1958, to national eminence. Warren's Constructivist leanings were apparent as early as 1962, when the Harewood Crematorium, which took full advantage of an absolutely flat site, provided the country's architectural magazines with some of the most dazzling vistas they had ever illustrated. Every detail of construction was clearly exposed, including the now familiar white-painted concrete blocks and the dark-stained trusses and purlins of the V-shaped chapel roof. The New Zealand Institute of Architects awarded the building a Gold Medal in 1964.

TOP LEFT: *Vernon Town House (1985), Auckland, by Pip Cheshire. The architect's familiarity with Cubism and Dutch De Stijl design has given these two units an appearance quite unexpected amid their Victorian neighbours. Such a deliberate collision of style is typical of architects who regard the notion of 'blending in' as encouraging dullness.*



*Vernon Town House. Wit and architecture are not generally associated. By picking out unusual details in bright colour such a connection is underlined.*

TOP RIGHT: *Markus House (1988), Milford, Auckland, by Pip Cheshire. Built without a specific client in mind, this 'white house' relates to the 1930s Art Deco houses and also to New York Late Modernism.*



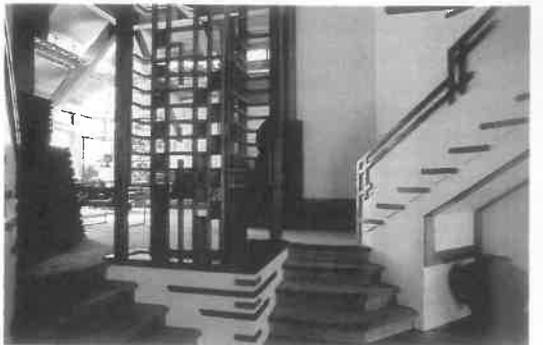
outside and inside. Rational planning was supplanted by spatial games and comfort by a sense of daring. Modest plainness was abandoned in favour of the conscious pursuit of cool elegance. Such houses could be quickly dismissed as playthings for the nouveau riche by those who conveniently forgot that some of the finest New Zealand domestic architecture had been produced in exactly the same way.

MIDDLE RIGHT: *Barnes House (1986), Herne Bay, Auckland, by Pete Bossley. Here the architect pays extravagant homage to Frank Lloyd Wright.*

BOTTOM RIGHT: *Interior of Barnes House. The architect's attention to detail knew no restraint.*

Pip Cheshire's work first attracted wide public attention with his white houses, which related to both the Neo-modernism of the New York Five architects and New Zealand's tradition of white 1930s Moderne houses. Nothing, however, could have been further from the country's wood tradition, and houses such as his Markus House (1988) at Milford, Noel Lane's pink Moor House at Stanmore Bay (1987), and Pete Bossley's Heatley House at Achilles Point (1984-86), aroused ire in the neo-vernacularists, who regarded them as rip-offs and were prepared to supply a roll call of the American architects who had been plagiarised. Given such accusations in a profession as frankly mimetic as architecture, it is appropriate to recall Oscar Wilde's remark that plagiarism is the privilege of the appreciative man.

While the Markus, Moor and Heatley houses certainly owed not a little to Michael Graves and Richard Meier, the American designers of what Charles Jencks memorably named 'ideal pavilions of private life', their real importance for New Zealand architecture lay in their flagrant denial of principles already in danger of becoming fixed. These houses demonstrated that no longer was there a need for a clear relationship between



One of the most expensive houses built during the 1980s exploited the Post-modernist fervour for historical allusion. Pete Bossley's enormous act of homage to Frank Lloyd Wright, the Barnes House (1986) at Herne Bay, Auckland, was to be

*Public Library, Civic Square, Wellington by Athfield Architects (1992). A colonnade of nikau palms is a grand gesture combining skill and wit.*



*Civic Square, Wellington (1992) by a group of Associated Architects. New buildings were positioned alongside older ones to create a focus for the city's cultural life.*

Building is awkward, and Robert Franken's water mural in front of the new library is unworthy of its prominent relationship to such a fine building.



Unfortunately, without the balconies originally designed for it, the city side of the building lacks interest by comparison and gives no indication of the vibrant qualities of the interior.

Athfield Architects' 1992-94 Wellington Civic Square development incorporated the new Public Library and Capital Discovery Place, signed by the same practice; the refurbishment of the city's Municipal Building by Craig Craig Collier; the conservation of Wellington Town Hall by the City Architect and Works Consultancy and Stephenson and Turner's upgrading of the Civic Administration Building. Involving the building of some new structures and the upgrading of older ones, this scheme cost \$30 million and resulted in a new piazza which provided a vibrant focus for the city. Some sections of it were more successful than others. Though small, the glass prow which now joins the Town Hall and the Civic Administration Building seems fussily obtrusive. The nikau colonnade that joins the library with Capital Discovery Place, stretching around the square's interior perimeter behind the City Gallery, was a brilliant stroke combining wit with grandeur, but is isolated from the central core of activity. The Victoria Street entrance's high portal linking the library with the new Civic Administration