

Bruce Rickard

[1929-2010]

Bruce Rickard died peacefully on Wednesday 22 September 2010. He left a legacy of sensitive architectural and landscape designs that are regarded as some of the most significant and appropriate for the Australian condition.

Bruce Arthur Lancelot Rickard was born in Sydney in 1929, the third of four children. The family moved from their 5 acre property in Turramurra to a small flat in Roseville during World War II. This experience was one of the catalysts for Bruce's work. He reacted against a lifestyle detached from nature and limited by confined, sunless spaces.

Bruce was educated at Barker College, a boys' private school in Hornsby, and in 1947 began the architecture diploma course at Sydney Technical College (now the University of New South Wales). During this time he worked for his uncle, Ruskin Rowe, from 1947, and Sydney Ancher from 1949–1953. (Ancher was one of the first to introduce the International style to Australia, translating it to the local condition.) It is here that Bruce's direct solutions to the Australian condition and vocabulary of sensible and buildable detailing had their beginnings.

Bruce embarked on an architectural grand tour to America via Europe in 1954. He completed the horticulture-based Landscape Design course at University College in London, and received a fellowship to study landscape architecture at the University of Pennsylvania under the influential planner and landscape architect Ian McHarg (who subsequently wrote *Design with Nature* in 1969). His other tutors were Philip Johnson, Louis Kahn (who offered Bruce a position in his office), and Lewis Mumford.

While in America, Bruce conducted many informal visits to architecturally designed



buildings. Among the most influential proved to be those designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. Bruce visited Fallingwater and Taliesin West where he "...was impressed for the first time by a man-made environment..."

Bruce returned to Australia in 1957 and attended a town planning course at the University of Sydney. That same year, Don Gazzard, Ken Woolley and John James returned to Australia from overseas study. It was at this time that the call for regionalism, climatic appropriateness and Australian identity was being voiced by architects such as Russell Jack at Turramurra and W.E. (Bill) and Ruth Lucas. Viewed by his friends and colleagues, Bruce's slide shows of his Frank Lloyd Wright experiences proved influential and career shifting for many.

Throughout his career, Bruce designed more than 80 houses, and although the majority of his output was focused on the single-family dwelling, he also designed car washes, a drive-in restaurant, a church, several schools, several project homes, medium-density housing developments and coastal town developments, such as that at Ocean Shores, near Brunswick Heads in New South Wales. As a landscape architect he contributed to several large and significant projects throughout Sydney and New South Wales.

Establishing an independent practice in 1959, from the outset Bruce was concerned with orientation to the northern aspect and sun entering the living areas. Planning, elevational treatments and location of

outdoor spaces always reflected this logic, and all his designs incorporated accessible outdoor living areas such as terraces, verandahs and courtyards. His open-plan houses are an extension of the outdoors and integrate with the environment through large sliding glazed panels and use of natural materials, particularly local stone and timber. All display a horizontality reminiscent of Frank Lloyd Wright's work.

Built on a regular module, Bruce's designs are formulated with the human dimension as a prime generator. Of great importance to Bruce's work is the principle of spatial flow, material continuity and hearth as anchor. His works embody a holistic approach and sensitivity to the genius loci of a site through respect for and responsiveness to its natural features. Bruce instinctively augmented the existing landscape to reinforce the natural character of the site and the climatic performance of the building: winter sun is admitted to warm concrete slabs and re-radiate heat at night; high summer sun is shielded, and east and west sun excluded. In today's parlance: 'environmentally sensitive design'. This rigour sets Bruce apart.

Bruce established various prototypes for living through explorations for his own family. The first was in Warrawee in 1959. The second was at Kokoda Avenue Wahroonga in 1961, with the next being a staged alteration in Cottage Point in 1989–90. Bruce had several clients whose patronage also led to developments in his domestic design solutions. Primary

examples of this are Curry House 2, 1980, in Bayview and Marshall House near Port Macquarie, completed in April 2002. The latter house developed his architectural language from a timber and masonry language to a steel-framed and masonry idiom.

Notable in his espousal of the ideology of the native landscape, Bruce was a founding member of the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA). He was also one of the longest-serving Chapter Councillors with the Australian Institute of Architects (16 years), from whom he received design awards in 1972, 1977, 1983, 1992 and 2009.

From the late 1950s, Bruce tutored at the University of Sydney and the University of New South Wales. His influence in building and landscape has been significant on practitioners such as Ian McKay, Philip Cox, Harry Howard, Neville Gruzman, Bruce MacKenzie, Bruce Eeles, Peter Myers, and many others who have worked in his office or been taught by him.

As a practitioner, Bruce possessed a sympathetic and unassuming way towards his clients, approaching each commission with a dedication and thoroughness that has inspired many. He contributed to the architectural



tenor of the state of New South Wales through regular lectures and house tours, and his work has been widely published in Australia and Europe (Paris, in particular).

Perhaps Bruce's work is best summarised in his own words: "...My approach is to integrate the building with the site, for the building to reflect and emphasise in form, materials and colour the dominant character of the site environment...of great import to me is the interior spatial relationship and the play of major and minor spaces flowing together and sliding in sequence both horizontally and vertically as one moves about..."

Bruce is survived by his partner Louise, his children Jane, James, Sam, Nick, Angus and Acacia, his stepson Philip, his grandchildren Eleni and Anna, and his sister Juanita; (his first child, Peter, died in the 1970s). He will be missed by the many friends and colleagues who attended countless soirees, dinners, lunches and drinks at his house or office.

A celebration of Bruce's life was held on 29 September at the Lady Davidson Private Hospital Chapel in North Turramurra, the church Bruce designed in 1970. Around 300 people, including his former wives, Robyn and Marian, family members, friends, clients and colleagues, came to pay tribute. As befitting his personal design philosophy, the small chapel has a north-facing glass wall bounded by trees and a verandah that allowed the substantial gathering to spill outdoors. Vale Bruce Rickard, your [Institute] Gold Medal and Queen's Birthday Honours are now overdue.

Jacqueline Urford, HBO+EMTB

Postscript: Several Bruce Rickard buildings are on the Institute's register of significant 20th century buildings.



1. Bruce Rickard inside the Curry House 2. Photo: Neil Fenlon
2. On a steep site in Bayview NSW, Curry House 2 embodies Bruce Rickard's finesse in marrying building with site, and his affinity for Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater. The Australian Institute of Architects honoured Bruce for the building with a Merit Award in 1983 and the 25 Year Award in 2009. Curry House 2 is included on the Institute's register of significant 20th century buildings. Photo: Neil Fenlon.
3. Interior of Rickard's Cottage Point House, built 1985–1992.

Bruce Rickard was a warm and loving father and friend, and a sincere and sometimes brilliant architect.

His houses emanate a warmth, comfort, respect of site and nature, and they have a timeless simplicity and beauty.

He never sought the limelight, but always remained true to his ideas and ideals.

Much as he admired Frank Lloyd Wright he never copied [him], but adapted his own designs to the site and client, leaving behind some marvelously personal environments to live in. He will be sorely missed.

Ian McKay, Architect

While Bruce Rickard is best remembered as an architect, he was also formally trained as a landscape architect. I believe that it was his rare ability to seamlessly fuse architecture and landscape — to bring the outside in and the inside out — that represents his greatest contribution to Australian design.

After completing his architectural studies in Sydney in 1953, Bruce set off overseas to work, study and explore. In order to be a 'complete architect' he enrolled in landscape design at University College, London, but soon found this unsatisfactory; instead of gardens he wanted to learn about how buildings related to the broader landscape. In 1955 he won a fellowship to study under Ian McHarg at the University of Pennsylvania, and became the first Australian to be awarded a Masters in Landscape Architecture.

While in the US, Bruce experienced many modernist buildings, but it was Frank Lloyd Wright's buildings — especially Fallingwater, Pennsylvania, and Taliesin West, Arizona — that most influenced him. Wright's use of materials, the contrast of direct sunlight and deep shadow, the complexity of internal and external spaces, and the dialogue between building and landscape had a profound effect on Bruce. An exhibition by Burle Marx was also influential; Bruce saw for the first time indigenous Brazilian plants being used in a modernist way, and realised the possibilities of using indigenous flora to create distinctly Australian landscapes.

On his return to Australia, Bruce briefly lectured in landscape architecture in Denis Winston's Town Planning course at the University of Sydney while setting up his architectural practice. In 1967 he became a founding member of the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA), along with Harry Howard and Allan Correy.

Throughout his career, Bruce undertook a number of landscape commissions, promoting the use of Australian plants. His largest and best-known landscape project was Ocean Shores at Brunswick Heads (1972–1975), New South Wales, where he proposed a town centre and low- to high-rise residential buildings framed by extensive natural reserves and streets and gardens planted with local species. However, it is in his warm, inviting, light-filled houses — so beautifully sited and detailed — that one can best see Bruce's vision and skill in integrating architecture and the bush. ■■■

Barbara Buchanan, Landscape Architect