



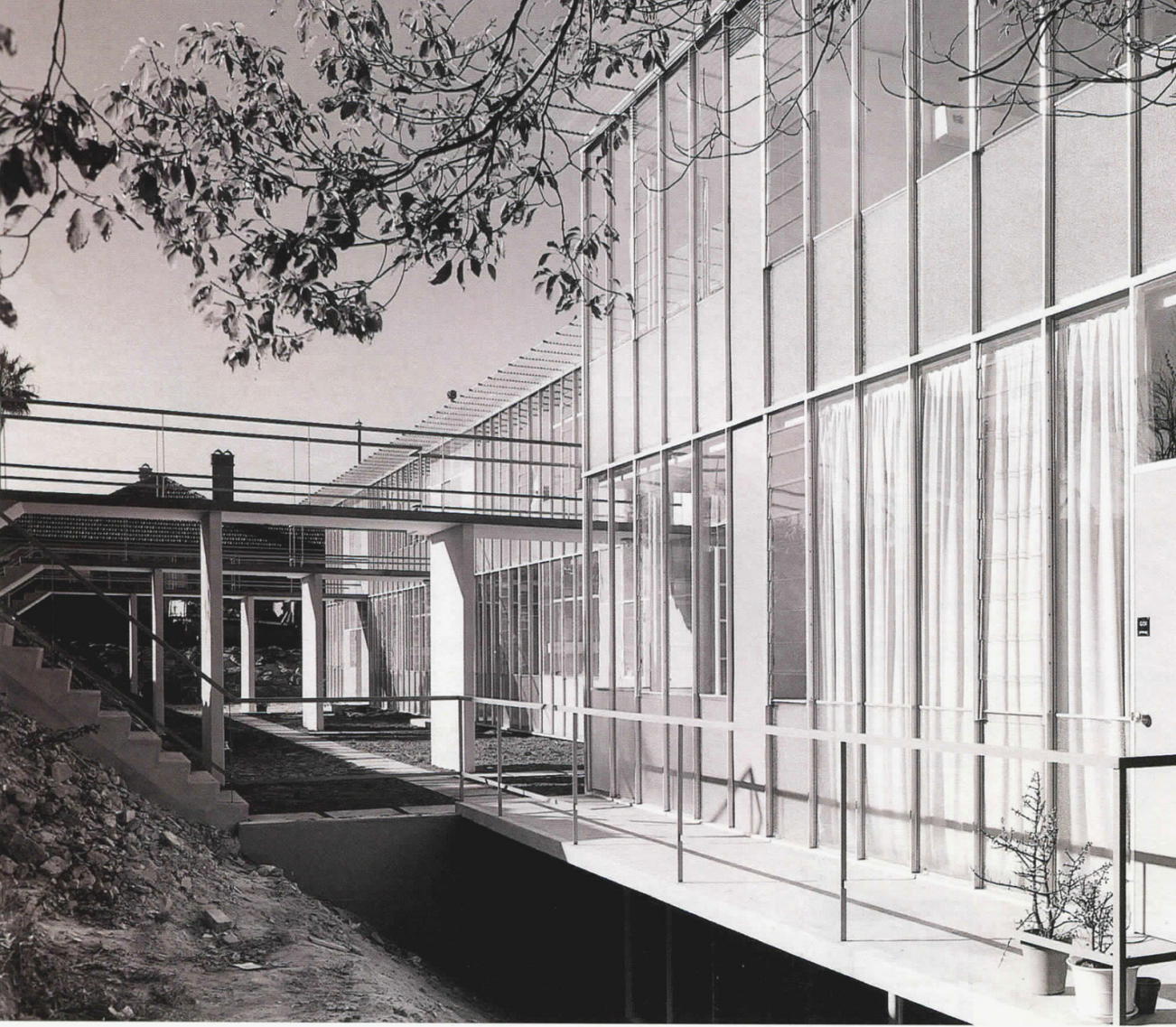
The Dancing House

Frank Gehry in Prague

Sunshine Coast Architecture
3D Modelling

Lawrence Nield | John Mainwaring | Herd Design | Renzo Piano | James Birrell
Gerard Murtagh | Neil Durbach | Neville Gruzman

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The Montrose Maisonettes / 1955, North Sydney NSW
Architect / Neville Gruzman

The Montrose Maisonettes then & now

AR lifts the curtain and rediscovers Neville Gruzman's
visionary 1955 Montrose Maisonettes

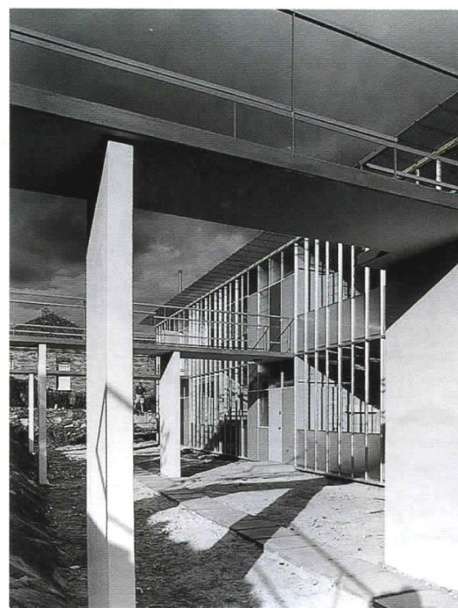
Compiled by Guy Allenby

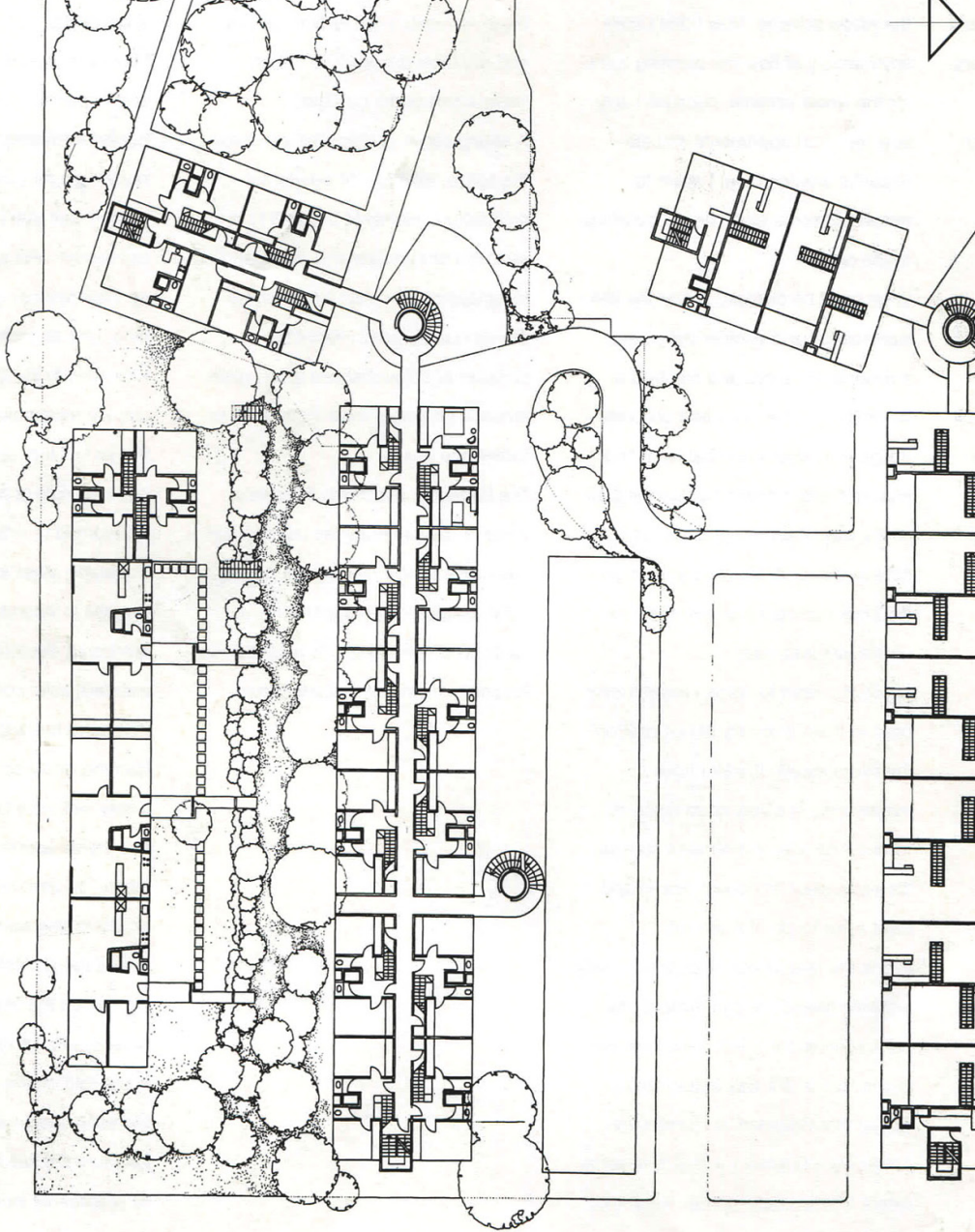
Photography by Ross Honeysett and Max Dupain

wall of aluminium sections and glazed panels (his system clipped together). Each unit was built (including foundations) in a remarkable 17 days. Plumbing and electrical services were designed so that they could be installed after the units had been built. Although the eight flats that were constructed represent only a prototype for a much grander plan and have since been encroached upon by less sensitive developments, they remain a pointed reminder of what could have been, had the vision, intelligence and style of the best of 1950s Australian architecture taken root instead of the speculative harbourside development that ensued in the following years. *AR* asked architects Professor Neville Quarry, Glenn Murcutt, Ian Moore and Ed Lippmann for their comments on Gruzman's innovative 1955 design. Trudi Scrymgour and Keith Glover, the team that worked on a recent renovation to unit three (pictured), also share their thoughts.

Platonic volume, abstract, crisp and relentlessly disciplined by a constant curtain wall facade wrapped consistently around all elevations. Modifications which might disturb the homogeneity of form and facade were few – metal gridded sunshades on the top edge of the north elevation, adjustable glass louvres every third or fourth vertical panel and sliding glass doors. From an embankment to the north, bridges cross a sunken garden to first floor entrances. Their fine metal balustrades as sophisticated and as dangerously outmoded as long cigarette holders, but just as languidly elegant. There are no embellishments, no symbolic associations (except with similar examples of the modernist genre), no contextual references, no doubts, anxieties or plumbing services expressed. To architecture graduates in the late 1950s, the Montrose maisonettes embodied the confidence, radicalism and sheer exhilaration of the optimism that expected modern architects to save and grace the brave new world. In retrospect, this sort of modern idealism was bound to succumb to the circumstances of content, commerce and cultural complexity that now confront us all. For those brief spasms of heroic endeavour that are typified by the Montrose apartments, architects should retrospectively genuflect.

or early Murcutt. You would hear from time to time of a chance discovery by a fellow student and make a weekend pilgrimage to inspect the latest find. Alas this haphazard self-education did not lead us to the Montrose apartments. Attending a casual slide show given one weekend by Neville Gruzman I was intrigued by images of a prototype apartment building in North Sydney, for which I searched in vain until I chanced upon it while designing a house a few hundred metres down the hill. It is as fresh and exciting today as I am sure it was when built in 1955. The siting and planning of the apartments is handled skilfully in allowing car parking under the western side of the building where the land falls away towards the street. The main body of the building sits on a level lawn with a twin path system and a graded embankment to the north, allowing individual entries to all units (the upper level by way of elegant bridges from the top of the embankment). The internal planning with its narrow width allows northern sun to penetrate the living spaces through the entry and kitchen while exploiting the view to the south towards the harbour and city. The ample louvres allow for cross ventilation and the upper level glazing is shaded by horizontal aluminium louvres. Unfortunately this shading has not been repeated for the lower level glazing. The regular vertical mullions of the curtain wall system impart a finely proportioned scale to the building which breaks down the simplicity of form, and provides the delicacy and lightness of





The Montrose Maisonettes as originally proposed by Neville Gruzman

To architecture graduates in the late 1950s, the Montrose maisonettes embodied radicalism and sheer exhilaration of ... the brave new world

apartments. All provide harbour views to the south and all receive winter sun from the north. An open plan pavilion delivers the result – simple yet effective.

However it is the lightweight skin which is of particular note. The building is a masonry structure yet the envelope consists almost entirely of aluminium and glass. The roof is aluminium, chosen for its durability. The walls are glass set into a patent aluminium framing system. This glazing consists of clear plate glass, louvres and Georgian wired diffuse glass to provide transparency for views, ventilation and privacy respectively.

The emergence of 'dematerialised' lightweight architecture has led to greater acceptability. Nevertheless, the notion of transparency continues to be one of the most fascinating aspects of contemporary architecture and technology.

It is reassuring to rediscover Montrose which has so much in common with the best contemporary architecture 40 years on.

realised was the smallest component of the whole scheme. Now I don't have any memory of how the planning went for the whole scheme, because I only saw the small apartments and the beautiful drawings, but I seem to remember some much bigger buildings to the rear.

What must be clarified, is that the site was sold off and another developer arrived recent times and has built a whole lot of other brick and concrete things in front of it and behind it and around it and it doesn't follow the plan in any way. The original drawings were streets ahead of what finally went up – the brick numbers that eventually went up are just trad bad.

Although I have to admit I haven't ever been in them (I've only driven past on the expressway), the Montrose maisonettes is a very good piece of work for its time and remains so now. It's just a piece of decent design and there's not much of it around.

I think the mid-to-late fifties was a really fantastic period. When I think of the work coming out, particularly from Bill Lucas, some of it was extraordinary. To say that Gruzman or Lucas were powerfully influential [on me] is to some extent true and also untrue. What they did was reinforce much of what was already laid in my own family.

fittings were removed, retaining only those elements such as light pelmets and electrical ducts which are an integral part of the building.

A strong sense of discipline pervades the space, relating not only to the architectural elements but also to the selection of materials and the controlled, tonal layering of colour which unites the various elements. Reflective surfaces of colour-backed glass, glass mosaics and timber were introduced to extend the space.

The bathroom punctures the space, which is reinforced by the use of linear monotone panels. The weight of 'the cube' provides a foil against the lightness of structure, which creates an essential whole, set in sharp focus.

Architecture students: mark it down in your diaries for this weekend's pilgrimage