

KIMBERLEY ARCHITECTURE - A PERSONAL VIEW

At the meeting of 5 July 2000, Finn Pedersen spoke about Kimberley architecture as he saw it and contributed to it. In 1992, as a recent graduate, Finn was appointed as a consultant for housing with the NBC Aboriginal Corporation, an Aboriginal owned architectural firm based in Broome. He was also a founding committee member of Environs Kimberley, which formed to prevent a dam being built at Dimond Gorge. The group's goal is to preserve the nature of the Kimberley and provide a voice for Aboriginal communities on environmental matters.

Finn formed his own partnership, Iredale Pedersen Hook Architects, in June 1999 and has recently completed six houses for the Budulah and Djimund Nguda Aboriginal Corporations in Stanley Street, Derby. He has also worked with the staff of the Broome Bird Observatory to produce a mission statement, long term plan and sketch designs of a new observatory building on Roebuck Bay. Iredale Pedersen Hook Architects are consulting to the Perth Zoological Gardens and are designing the new home for the orang-outangs at the Perth Zoo. This last project certainly ties in with the partnership's specialisation in innovative solutions for unusual projects in the areas of landscape, environmental design, urban planning, remote residential design, interiors, education and corporate design.

Finn sees architecture as a background or prop for community events and started his talk with slides of the Derby jetty, an icon of the Kimberley with its forest of columns and new ore-loading conveyor belt. He saw the Derby Historical Museum (formerly the Wharfinger's House), with concrete piles, shutters, an inner core and verandahs, as typifying the basic style of old houses built to suit the climate of the north west. He also commented on shed architecture, galvanised walls and double skillion roof, allowing scope for light and ventilation in the gap between the two halves of the roof. Another very basic style is the bough shelter with an iron roof supported on wooden posts, with walls of chicken wire stuffed with spinifex, which can be kept wet to provide evaporative cooling.

Finn was shocked at the third world conditions he saw at Kalumburu in 1993. The community was housed in small, verandahless houses, built in the 1980s without consultation with the people, each housing up to 15 people. Overflowing septic systems resulted, transmitting hookworm and other diseases through faecal contamination of the ground. These problems have since been rectified.

In Broome Finn was impressed by the simple austere buildings of the 1950s and 1960s and earlier buildings in Chinatown—of which one of the most authentic remaining examples is Streeter's Store which retains the functional air scoops on the west side of the roof. He thought that recent attempts at a so-called "Broome style" house had overworked the superficial decoration at the expense of the

functionality of old Broome houses. The Broome Courthouse (formerly the old cable building) was Broome's first prefabricated building, built in 1889, with a cast iron frame, galvanised iron walls and a double iron roof allowing air circulation between the two layers with hot air escaping through a roof vent at the top. Decorative cast iron balustrades surround the verandah. Another style of architecture seen in Broome is a roof without walls, exemplified by the Uniting Church (circa 1930s) where the walls slide away and curtains behind the altar cover louvred glass windows giving a luminous effect. Verandahs are a mixed blessing in the Broome climate, they are pleasant in summer (except in driving rain) but in the dry season they can be cold and dusty. A compromise is to enclose them with windows above the rail and shutters or louvres below. McDaniel's house is a fine example of an old Broome residence. It has not been greatly altered and consists of cubical rooms surrounded by wide verandahs that provide the living space. These are enclosed by huge shutters on the ends with small shutters on other windows and a high roof.

Turning to his own contribution Finn described some of the buildings he had designed while employed with NBC Aboriginal Corporation. One is a house for the Chairman of the Wah community at Mount Elizabeth Station and another is the Karrayili Adult Education Centre at Fitzroy Crossing. He also designed new buildings for the Junjuwa community in the same town. These are in six styles, some are high set, some low, they have shutters and timber walls below then galvanised iron upper walls and roof with sections of polycarbonate sheeting on the high walls to let extra light in. Ventilation and breeze catching is an essential aspect of the houses. Finn also designed the Kimberley Language Resource Centre in Halls Creek. This has walls of rammed earth and termite resistant western red cedar, with shade screens on windows and high windows for light and ventilation. However air conditioning is used during the wet season.

Finn concluded his talk by saying that his was a very personal view of Kimberley architecture derived from his own experience, hence he didn't discuss station architecture or towns he had not visited.

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