

EMOH RUO

MAISY STAPLETON

EVERY NEWLY WED couple dreamed of moving into a house of their own, but since almost half the population were tenants this was not easy. Australians assumed that the best home was a detached house on their own block of land. About three-quarters of the population lived in such homes, and 60 per cent of these houses were owned or being purchased. The rest lived in an enormous range of dwellings, from terraces, flats and boarding houses to barracks, shanties and prisons.

The young Wattons, who had lived all their lives around Eastwood in Sydney, bought land there in 1928. Then the depression delayed their marriage for eight years and it was another two before their house was built. Reg and Doris Southwell began saving for their house and land while courting, putting aside 'the 2s 6d it cost for the pictures towards the block of land' and visiting friends instead. Their thrift and a loan from Reg's father enabled them to buy a block at Epping in Sydney for £150. Fred Gibbons and his wife saved for the first three years of their married life, then combed Sydney's north shore from Lindfield to Gordon searching for the right block. They were not interested in land unless it was 'dead flat'. Where there were no roads they walked along the railway line. They found plenty of suitable land, 'fell in love' with a gum-covered block and, like the Southwells, paid £150. While the house was being built they 'just about lived there. Picnics up there every weekend'. The Crombies, transferred from Rockhampton to Sydney, similarly watched over the building of their new house in Roseville. 'We'd come up every weekend and see how our house was going . . . across the Bridge . . . it was quite a way from Bellevue Hill.' Marjorie Potts was left to inspect building progress alone, while Sam, her fiance, took a lucrative painting job at the Kosciusko Hotel. Marjorie visited the house regularly and shopped with her mother for lino and curtains. Unfortunately the builder took advantage of her untrained eye, and when Sam returned two weeks before the wedding he discovered that he had cheated on the finishing. Instead of moving into a brand new home, the newlyweds squeezed in with Marjorie's parents, 'where you couldn't swing a cat'.



Design No 4, 735 square feet. 'A small floor space with a modernistic trend of construction, and also being a better selling proposition by virtue of the appearance; may be extended a variety of ways, mainly on the back.' "99" Everyday homes for Queenslanders, Brisbane 1938.



Arthur Kirkwood, a young architectural draftsman with the Sydney builders Stuart Bros, and a fellow student, Jack Kitchen, took a keen interest in the new Woolcott-Forbes home in Edward Street, Gordon, on the north shore, partly because Kitchen worked for the architects, Joceland and Gilling.

A. KIRKWOOD,
1938 COLLECTION

More homes were being built than for almost a decade: from soaring red brick flats to bush huts, and from palatial mansions to small bungalows of timber, fibro or brick. One of the grandest houses built in Sydney was Burnham Thorp at Gordon. It was designed for J. Woolcott Forbes, a financier, by F. Glynn Gilling, an architect of numerous fashionable mansions, and built, a contemporary trade journal observed, 'on a scale new to Australia' with 'an air of spaciousness about it' that exuded 'a formal grandeur ... hitherto ... missing from Australian domestic architecture'. The house was reminiscent of the Georgian era, rendered in cream-painted cement with a green tiled roof. An immense two-storeyed facade faced the street, with a service wing to one side, balconies, and a pillared gateway before the front entrance. The rear 'garden front' was even more elaborate, with an arched and columned arcade set between two curved bays, terracing, stone walls and urn-shaped balustrades, and a grand double flight of stairs leading down to a swimming pool and tennis court.

The interior was similarly imposing. Entering through iron grilles and a glass door, the visitor walked into a marble-paved vestibule set with a black star towards a curved staircase with an elaborate wrought-iron balustrade sweeping up to an encircling gallery and balconies. The suites of rooms on the ground floor were carpeted in rich green; the joinery was painted ivory. The reception rooms ran along the garden front, with sliding glass doors leading to paved terraces outside. The architect had devised some clever geometric rooms: at one end an elliptical dining room furnished with a Georgian dining suite, at the other an elliptical library furnished with leather smoking chairs. A sitting room, drawing room and billiard room lay between, the last with a stone fireplace, a semicircular dais with columns on each side and a cocktail bar. Above, the main bedroom was decorated in 'subdued off-white tonings', with a circular mirror and furniture based on curves. In dramatic contrast, the bathroom was tiled in black, with black fittings, chrome taps and an engraved mirror depicting fish blowing bubbles and weaving through seaweed strands on the ocean floor.

A flourish of such luxury houses, including a modernistic mansion at Sherbrooke near Melbourne, built for members of the Nicholas family, makers of Aspro pain relievers, and an array of large houses overlooking the Swan River in Perth, with rounded window bays and jutting sun decks, led the magazine *Decoration and glass* to reflect:

it is too early to predict that the return to large homes means a radical social change and the reversion to the home life of a generation ago, but it is certain that in the suburbs of every capital city of Australia, large houses are now being built in greater numbers than ever before.

The most common house was the bungalow, its design styles as diverse as its occupiers. Stark, ultramodern boxes sat beside cottages reminiscent of England. The range of styles could be confusing, but at the Architects' Exhibition in Sydney in March prospective home builders could sort out styles from a gallery displaying the year's plans, sketches, photographs and housing models. The *Sydney Morning Herald* imagined an eager young architect taking a client, a young married woman, on a tour through the exhibition. He adroitly steers her past a cottage with small lead-paned windows and a steeply pitched roof. 'It's utterly unsuitable for Australia—that roof is built to shed a heavy fall of snow ... here, well it's just an expensive fashion.' He dismisses a house in the Spanish mission style. 'After the old English, the old Spanish is the next most popular in Sydney. A good reason in my opinion, not to have one.' He scorns 'a specimen, in which the Old English and the Spanish and the ultra modern have been blended into one rococo extravaganza by an architect who was either crazy or who was trying to please half a dozen members of a family'. Finally he recommends a modern design, simple in style, with a flat roof. 'It's the style for today and the future.' The flat roof will allow 'a hundred' uses, from al fresco eating to a gymnasium and sleepout.

His client demurs. 'It's so very different, isn't it? ... aren't modern houses for swanky people?' Her husband, she fears, is rather conservative. 'I can't get him to wear tropical suits in the summer ... he says nobody else does.' The architect explains kindly that it is old-fashioned buildings that keep people conservative. New buildings change that. When her husband lives in a modern house he will start wearing tropical suits, and besides: 'You are the personification of the modern, smart young woman. If you build the kind of home I advise, it and everything that goes with it, will merely be catching up with you'. She is converted. 'Very well then, a modern home it shall be. Let us have the sketches as soon as possible.'

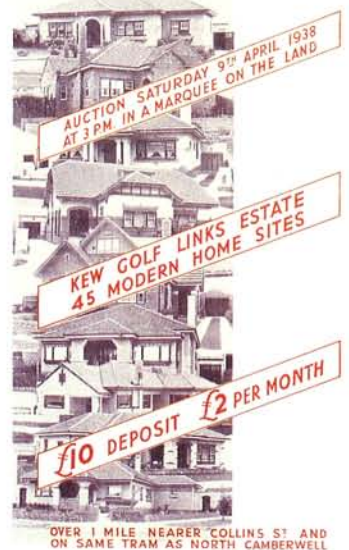
Architects were not for most home seekers. Young couples generally turned instead to builders, family or friends for inspiration. At Hearne Bay in Sydney the Wicks based their first home on a friend's house, and Mrs Watton borrowed her brother's plan, although an architect reversed the layout for them to give the best aspect and let in the sun. Wilma Leard's father drew up the plans for her home in Denistone, and Blanche Enderbury's father, a carpenter, built her house for the cost of materials and wages using his own home as a model, with minor alterations. It took six weeks to complete.

Builders copied existing houses, borrowed ideas from published designs, or developed a repertoire of designs which could be varied easily. Harvey Bourke bought a block of land at Rodd Point in Sydney from his father-in-law, who also recommended a builder, T. Lumb, who had put up most houses in the area. The Bourkes considered a plan they thought 'very compact for the size', altered it to bring in the outside toilet, and had it built. Big Jim Summers, a huge man, 'a sweetie', had built a row of houses in Janis Street, Granville, when the Spears bought land opposite. They asked him to build their house too, and he doubled the

Most married couples dreamed of owning a home of their own, but few could afford it until they were in their thirties unless they had help from relatives or an employer. The sound of the auctioneer's hammer could be heard in newer suburbs. Edward Haughton & Co, Auctioneers, offered their Kew Golf Links Estate to the Melbourne public in April. 'If you are interested in a SUBURBAN HOME SITE close to Melbourne, in beautiful surroundings and moderately priced, or Allotments as a speculation, you can hardly afford to be absent from this realising auction ...'

BAILLIEU MAP LIBRARY,
UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

AMONGST THE MODERN HOMES ON BELFORD HILL
KNOWN AS KEW GOLF LINKS ESTATE



workmen on the site to finish the job in six weeks so they could move in after their honeymoon. On their return he ceremoniously handed over the key, and remained a friend for life.

The typical builder's cottage was cheap and serviceable, but sufficiently up to date for its new owners to be proud of it. The single-storeyed Californian bungalow, double fronted with a low, double-pitched roof, was the basic design. It had been popular for a decade or more, but was being refashioned with geometrically patterned leadlight windows featuring an amber glass sunrise or some other jazz-age motif, or with an art deco symbol worked out in coloured brickwork on the facade. Otherwise it would remain undecorated, in keeping with contemporary views of functional simplicity. The once familiar front verandah, which *Decoration and glass* considered 'unnecessary and useless under [our] climatic conditions', had shrunk to porch size, although an open verandah with a canvas blind or curtain often stood at the rear of the house as a sleepout. Sleeping out was 'the real thing', the recipe for healthy living, allowing communion with nature and coping with an overflow of children in a two-bedroom house.

Inside the house planning was compact and efficient, if tight. Long passages were eliminated, and the bathroom was brought under the main roof, although in areas without sewers the toilet remained outside. There were both dining and living rooms, sometimes joined by glass doors, and in the living room a wireless was usually prominent. A parlour, 'kept nice' for company, belonged only to larger and more formal houses and sometimes a glassed-in sunroom served as the equivalent of the solarium or sundeck of richer homes.

Differences in house design from state to state were being blurred as popular styles crossed the nation in magazines, newspapers and films. Local materials were still widely used. Houses in Perth displayed polished jarrah joinery, those in Queensland polished maple. Adelaide had converted from stone to brick; Brisbane still built weatherboard dwellings lined internally in timber; and while many new Queensland houses rested on low brick foundations like their counterparts in other states, many still rose high on stilts in the traditional manner.

Residence of Dorothy and George Gear and their daughter Evelyn, aged three, at 22 Brookfield Road, Kenmore, Brisbane. Designed and built by Jack Jones, the two-bedroom weatherboard house cost £484. Mortgage repayments totalled £80. George Gear came to Australia in 1926, having spent his childhood in an English orphanage. After a long struggle to save the deposit, the excited family moved into the house in July.

D. MENGEL, 1938 COLLECTION





Heather Thomas (back right), her two sisters Muriel and Hazel and her friend Queenie played in the backyard of their home in West Subiaco, Perth. No vegetation yet softens the appearance of the outside toilet.

H. COLLERAN, 1938 COLLECTION

The Gears' weatherboard house in Kenmore, near Brisbane, built in July, was typical of Queensland houses. It incorporated open verandahs protected by wooden venetian blinds, casement windows with panes of coloured glass, and a trace of decorative timber detailing on the verandah frieze. The living room was furnished in semitropical style, with a suite of cane furniture, a stained timber sideboard and a mantel radio, all illuminated by a white china shade. The bedrooms had iron beds, hygienic in the climate, wardrobes and 'duchesses' (dressing tables) in painted pine, and a toilet set. The house was not sewered, so there was a china chamberpot in the main bedroom. On the open verandah were cane chairs, a lounge, a table, potted palms and Mrs Gear's Singer treadle sewing machine. Here the family spent much time, overlooking the garden and taking advantage of the breezes. An orchard had been planted on the block before the house was built, and cement paths, vegetable and flower beds and a fernhouse were added later. The garden was a surround to the building rather than a planned landscape.

At Haberfield in Sydney the Polleys' front garden was a buffalo grass lawn, a rosebed along the front wall, sweet peas along the side paling fence and a cypress pine on either side of the front door. The frangipani, hibiscus and poinsettia of semitropical front yards were matched by beds of roses or annuals further south, although more adventurous yards might have a rockery or plants such as cacti, bird of paradise or gladioli, much favoured for indoor flower arrangements.

In backyards, where a play area was, if possible, left for children, there was a lemon or a locquat tree, a vegetable patch, a chookyard and a clothesline swung between two posts. The Spears, who lived at Granville, could afford a fernery with a corrugated iron roof which 'kept the rain off when going to the toilet or the laundry'. A decorative lattice arch and later a tennis court completed their landscaping. There were few garages and fewer cars: although he had no car Mr Spears built a garage, carrying the timber from Rollinson's Timber Yard at Parramatta home on his pushbike.

Real estate developers always claimed that owning a home was better than renting one. Such advertisements had a particular point in Sydney, Melbourne and Hobart, where well over half the dwellings were tenanted. They also appealed to Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth residents, where more than 40 per cent of dwellings were tenanted. Australian home beautiful, Dec 1938.



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The price of land was usually only a small proportion of the cost of a home. Land at Palmyra in Perth cost the Sheas about £48. 'A loan was all on bricks and mortar . . . if you wanted a loan it wasn't the land, it was the value of your house, the land didn't mean anything.' Most home buyers got loans from banks or building societies. The Wicks' land cost £60, and their new house, a two-bedroom brick building with a red terracotta roof, and living, dining and sunny breakfast rooms, cost £815, financed by the Canterbury-Bankstown Building Society over 28 years at 5 per cent interest. The Armsons joined a building society knowing that, 'with the help of the government, young people could obtain a loan of £8-900—it depended on your ability to provide the balance to make the £1000 required to build a home at that time'. Their house at 10 Edward Street, Kingsgrove, Sydney, cost £810 and the land £150. Repayments were 22s 6d a week over 28 years.



Land and houses in prestigious locations naturally cost more. In Sydney, Mrs Sale bought land at Vaucluse for £1000. Her house, designed by architects Peddle Thorp and Walker and built of special hard-burnt bricks and ceilings designed by the sculptor Raynor Hoff, cost £3300. Mrs Sale, an art student, appreciated the artistic quality of these finishes and invested the proceeds of a legacy in the house. Her father 'nearly passed away with horror at the idea'. Leslie Wilkinson, Australia's first professor of architecture and a practising architect, designed Maialla, a sprawling Mediterranean villa at Warrawee, which cost £5160; at Hopetoun Avenue, Vaucluse, another of his houses cost £3060.

People often saved money by doing some of their own building. Fred Gibbons's house at Gordon, designed by an architect, 'a chap called Moore who was in the rowing club', cost £1700, but was built cheaply because he used bricks from an adjacent demolition, and because, 'my wife's twin brother was . . . working for the chap who did the job so we knew that there was good work going into it'. William Polley, a plasterer, built himself a brick house for £650, using subcontractors and

his own skills. Mr Gear put in all the foundation stumps for his house in Kenmore, and Sam Potts, a house painter, painted his house inside and out to save money.

Other owners built homes with traditional bush skills. When Harley Taylor was working as a sharecropper at Kokotunga in the Dawson valley in central Queensland, he helped a local farmer, Harry Hoggett, build a house. First they erected posts to form a rectangle about four by eight metres, then,

Some miles away we cut ... log saplings that had grown tall and straight ... [T]hese were nailed onto the posts [as cladding] ... The roof was a plain hip with galvo iron nailed on, though it sported a ridge cap. It of course had guttering, as this is very dry country and a tank of water is essential.

The house took four or five weeks to build, and 'gave good service against the winter cold even [if] it did nothing to keep the heat of summer out'. It had no door, windows or floorboards, but 'plain dirt that was gravelly and ... hard on cleaning'.

At Norseman in Western Australia, Reg Lever watched miners put up similarly rough and ready 'homesteads' on blocks leased for 99 years at 10s 6d a year. There was no water, no power, no sewerage, no building restrictions. The houses were built from sapling poles, with an iron roof, an earth floor pounded flat, and walls of heavy-duty canvas or hessian waterproofed with three or four coats of whitewash.

In contrast the blocks of flats multiplying around Sydney and Melbourne offered up-to-date living facilities. They were fitted with modern kitchens and bathrooms, had hot running water and built-in furniture. Functionally they were often superior to houses. Gowrie Gate, in Macleay Street, Potts Point, Sydney, was typical, with its six storeys of red brickwork, curved corners, central tower, large metal-framed windows elegantly spaced over the facade, and curved skirting, red and white banded, at the base of the building. It had a coffee shop on the ground floor and over fifty flats of varying sizes above, including bachelor flats. Designed 'on continental lines' by Dudley Ward, who had studied architecture on a scholarship in Europe and was now imparting his knowledge at home, the flats were popular 'for the bachelor, the business girl and the small business family'. They provided compact accommodation in a bed-sitting room, with a kitchenette fitted into a cupboard in a small alcove, a shower room and plenty of closet space.

Cheaper flats were built in Sydney as part of a recent policy for improving inner city slum areas by demolition and rational rebuilding. The Erskineville Re-Housing Scheme, proposed by the New South Wales Housing Improvement Board in 1936, was the first test of the policy. Many thought it unnecessary and urged instead that slum dwellers be sent to live in the country. But the first stage of the scheme was completed in December 1938: blocks of two-bedroom flats were set on a green lawn and arrayed to form courts, drying yards and play areas. The buildings were simple, of brick with a pitched tile roof, green-painted eaves, white-painted windows and a flowerbox beside each entrance door. The architects, Morton Herman and W.R. Richardson, ensured that each flat required little maintenance, was 'modern, hygienic, compact' and vandal and vermin proof.

The 56 flats cost some £700 each, about the price of a small new house. The blocks were aligned north-south to enable the sun to penetrate every room at some time of the day, and each flat was no more than two rooms wide to help ventilation. Each had a sitting room, an eat-in kitchen, a sleepout verandah and two small bedrooms. The flats were hardily built, with lino on concrete floors, metal picture rails, tiled walls in the bathroom to make cleaning easier, a gas fire in the living room and a kitchen lined with cupboards. The rent, 19s a week, was not cheap.

Elsewhere, modern design introduced zigzag cornices in living rooms and flush-panelled doors with plain varnished architraves and skirtings to replace the

Sydney architects E.C. Pitt and A.M. Bolot designed this art deco block of flats in 1936. Hillside, in the eastern suburb of Edgecliff, attracted well-to-do tenants who preferred a convenient location close to the city and harbour and a functional living area with no garden to maintain. Photograph by P. Spearritt, 1984.



more elaborately moulded joinery of previous decades. Believing in brightness and airiness, modern designers allowed sunlight to stream into rooms. When Margaret Tepper moved into her war service home in Roseville, Sydney, built in 1922, she immediately noticed that 'The wallpaper was all dark and hung with a shocking... [frieze] of grapes—I'll never forget it. The curtains were navy blue with gold in between. It looked as gloomy as I don't know what'. Blanche Enderbury also wanted to be modern. Her fibro house at East Bankstown in Sydney was given the rounded corners and porthole windows of modern 'ship style' architecture, with stained doors and skirtings and 'no picture rails—by special request'. As fibrous plaster sheets were manufactured only to picture rail height, the Enderburys had to pay a plasterer to fill the crack left in the wall.

Traditional oak and Georgian furniture still had a fashionable following. Mr and Mrs Max Lawton's house at Mitcham, Adelaide, was an 'extremely modern design', a two-storeyed, cement-rendered building with rounded window bays and a curved glass brick stairwell enclosing a sweeping stair with a chrome handrail. Yet visitors might be surprised to 'find the rooms furnished in period instead of modern styles'. The dining room in Mr and Mrs F.W. Cornell's Park Terrace home at Eastwood, in Adelaide, imitated a fashion set by the renowned white interiors of London decorator Syrie Maugham, wife of Somerset Maugham. It had cream walls, painted off-white furniture, white Queen Anne style chairs upholstered in off-white hide, tablemats of the same leather and matching white velvet curtains. The whole was set off by a glittering Venetian glass mirror, a Georgian style chandelier, old Spanish paintings and a dusky pink carpet. The South Australian magazine *Homes and gardens* featured it as the 'Ideal room of the month' in September.

Young couples buying their house on a mortgage and their furniture on time payment could rarely afford the latest fashions. After their marriage in June, Jean and Ivan Vincent paid £15 for a second-hand jarrah lounge suite. The Potts could not at first afford to furnish their lounge room at all, and the Wicks's second bedroom at Hearne Bay remained empty until they could afford furniture.

'A Kitchen of charm and efficiency showing the "F-C-B" Cabinet, "Early Kooka" Gas Range and Stainless Steel Sink and Drainer, which can be made in any style and size to suit individual requirements.' Made in Australia, Sydney 1938.



Stores advertised special deals to furnish an entire home. For £100, to be paid off at £1 a week, Hall's in Sydney offered a 'full polished' bedroom suite in walnut veneer, a dining room suite of four chairs, a table and sideboard, a three-piece lounge suite covered in figured genoa velvet, carpet squares for bed and lounge rooms and lino for the dining room. The Crombies' house at Roseville was furnished by Farmer's, who fitted venetian blinds to the windows. These proved a novelty to other aspiring home owners. The Crombies, who 'were used to venetian blinds in Queensland', noted that people 'used to come out and sit at the front and look at the venetian blinds, having been sent, ... [presumably] by Farmer's'.

Joyce Spears chose autumn tonings for her house at Granville. The lounge room had a 'cathedral ceiling' with highlight windows, the walls were pale green, the carpet square was autumn coloured, and so were the 'side drop' curtains, which featured a leaf pattern. The curtains were cream voile, and a deep green velvet three-seater lounge and chairs with square arms were arranged against the walls. On a circular centre-table was a lamp made by Joyce's husband Edward, featuring a pair of chrome nudes supporting a lampshade. The dining room was reached through a glass door from the hall. Cream walls and autumn tones featured again in the floral patterned curtains and the geometrically patterned carpet square. The dining suite was a golden brown veneer, with a heavy-legged table, six chairs upholstered in green, a sideboard and a china cabinet beneath a hanging mirror. The wireless matched the suite, and above the corner fireplace was a chiming clock. The sunroom, for 'everyday living', was furnished in cane upholstered in autumn colours. The bedroom was painted a soft lemon, with a green carpet, cream flower-sprigged curtains and a walnut bedroom suite. The bed had a lace cover revealing a green marcella quilt beneath, and on the dressing table glittered a crystal dressing set, including a lamp. The second bedroom was the nursery, complete with white-painted cot and horsehair mattress made by Joyce's father, a white Peter Pan wardrobe and a white dressing table with frilled skirt.


The work centre of the house, the kitchen, often displayed some of the most up-to-date designs and materials. Terrazzo benches, porcelain or stainless steel sinks,



'Individuality, distinction and colour are asserting themselves more than ever in the home, the eloquent appeal of which is emphasised by the refinement and design of its more personal quarters. Today, unostentatious beauty combined with comfort that is unobtrusive is demanded in the bathroom—where one begins and ends the day. Modern bathroom equipment eschews the useless ornamentation, and is designed for efficiency and permanency—for distinctive service and instant appeal.' Bathroom fixtures constructed in the factory of Metters Limited, showing the new trend for colour and design. Made in Australia, Sydney 1938.

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Australian home beautiful,
Dec 1938.

tiled or 'tilux' walls, fitted cupboards and benches, lino floors and matching canisters, breadbin, saucepans and kettles were all common, usually in popular shades of cream and green and laid out to save labour. The Wicks's kitchenette was designed so 'anyone working in it could reach all facilities without having to move to any extent'. Just by turning around it was possible to reach sink, cupboards or stove, and bread, milk and other items were delivered into the servery.

The promoters of Melbourne's Ideal Home Exhibition in 1936 predicted confidently that the home of the future would be a marvel of convenience, efficiency and beauty. Contemporary European designers regarded the house as a 'machine for living', with kitchens and bathrooms as efficient as laboratories, with sophisticated, technically advanced means of heating, cooling and lighting, and ingenious devices for reducing labour and replacing servants. Yet many people could afford only basic equipment and some none at all.

Central heating was rare. Warmth generally came from a single source, an electric radiator or a gas fire. Few wood or coal-burning fires were built into modern houses, though their gas and electric counterparts were set into a fireplace surround, perhaps of 'tapestry' bricks or a more contemporary looking slab of structural glass 'vitrolite' in a fashionable colour such as black, 'tango red', 'shell pink', green, ivory or primrose. Slow-burning coke stoves were also popular, providing a gentle heat that spread out over the house during the day. The Kosi was a popular brand, while the Crombies had an Esse fitted into a brick surround, its coloured case harmonising with the shade of the room. 'Esse coke' was supplied by a contractor; one and a half tons was enough for the family's needs each year.

There were water heaters to cater for a range of family budgets. The Innes family of St Georges in Adelaide heated their bathwater in the laundry copper to avoid using the chip heater in the bathroom. The heater used thin sticks and crumpled paper and made a mess whenever it was lit. Not far away, in Burnside, the Opies got their hot water from an iron fountain simmering all day on a wood-burning stove, and in Queensland the Gears used stove-boiled water for baths. It was common to boil water to wash the clothes or the dishes. Only more

fortunate households could afford a time-saving gas heater that lit with a minor explosion and a whiff of gas, or the modern wonder of a complete electric or gas service providing instant hot water from an out-of-sight tank. In slums, running water might be available only from a tap in the backyard.

The laundry was often a skillion-roofed addition to the rear of a house, or (on a sloping site) a basement. Washing machines had recently become available. They were expensive, and operated with a mechanical churning action and a wringer usually turned by hand. Electric, gas, coal or wood coppers were more common. John McKenzie, one of a family of seven boys brought up by a maiden aunt in West Leederville in Western Australia, learned what it meant to keep the copper clean: 'you'd get verdigris and what-not on it—you'd scour it and clean it up, salt or something I think we used to use, and cut the wood and stoke up the fire, of course'.

Ice chests were general in new and old houses alike. Ice had to be rationed in very hot weather, 'only half a block a day', and kept wrapped in paper or corrugated cardboard to make it last. The McCances' ice chest used to overflow when they forgot to empty the tray underneath: 'it used to flood the back verandah'. Though still expensive, gas, electric and kerosene refrigerators were becoming more readily available. Laura Crombie had an Electrolux gas refrigerator and a Metters gas stove, 'a good one—thermostat and all'. Her electrical appliances included an electric kettle, iron, vacuum cleaner and Mixmaster with a mincer attachment: 'we both enjoyed rissoles'. Electricity seemed the most modern power source. Most rooms had a central hanging light and in newer homes a power point, though many poorer homes in both city and country had no power at all. Telephones were uncommon: families without a phone relied on a neighbour for incoming emergency calls and used telephone boxes to ring out.

The Wicks of Hearne Bay in Sydney lived in a typical modern urban house: all-electric, with a BGE electric range, an electric copper and hot water service. Unlike many country town homes, it was not sewered, relying on a pan service from an outside toilet and running the house water into the street gutter. But it was a home to be proud of. The Wicks were young newlyweds with a new house and furniture, and they moved into their first home with a mixture of excitement and nervousness, with 'everything we wanted and up to our ears in debt'.

BUILDING ON TRUST

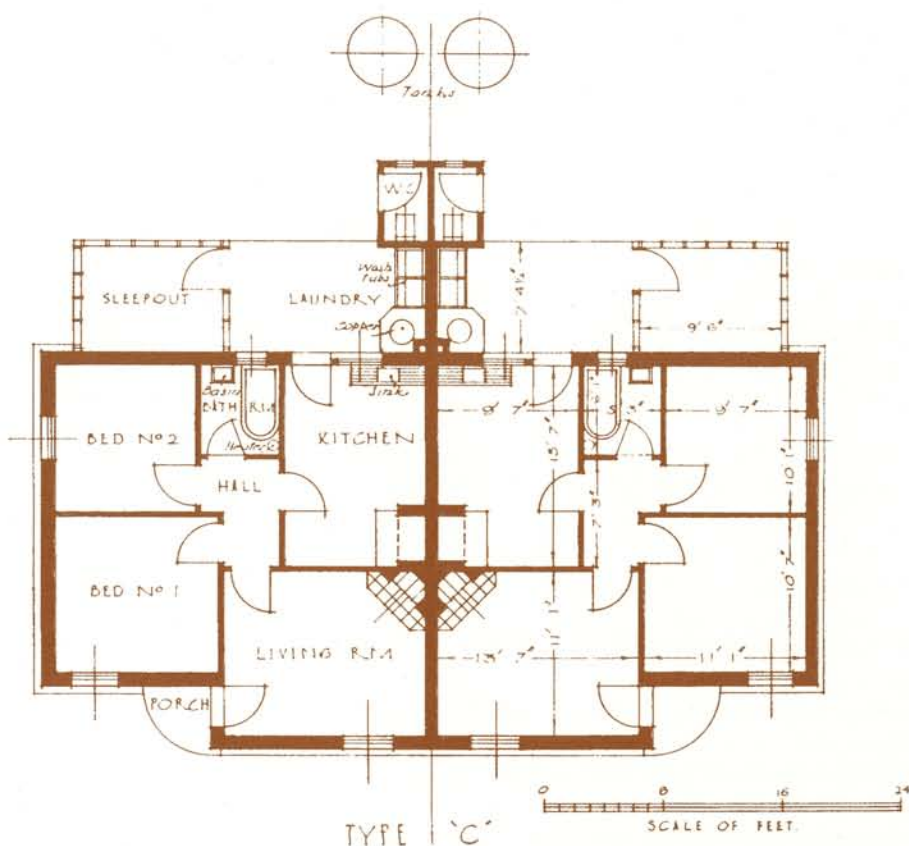
BERNARD O'NEIL

The South Australian Housing Trust was established by the state government in 1936 to build cheap, comfortable houses and rent them to low-paid workers. Employers needed a reliable workforce to make the state's industry competitive; workers and their families often endured poor housing and high rents. The trust, a semigovernment body established with a £25 000 government loan, hoped to attract loans and gifts from manufacturers and wealthy citizens, but in this it was disappointed. By mid-1938 it had been forced to borrow a further £100 000 from the government.

The trust built houses costing less than £500 or less than 820 times the daily wage at the time of contract, including the cost of land and the provision of fencing, sewerage, lighting and water services. E.F. Marshall, the building contractor, operated on a 2½ per cent margin, the discount he got for paying builders' suppliers within seven days. The first houses completed, in McNicol Terrace, Rosewater, were occupied on 22 November 1937, and by March 1938 Marshall

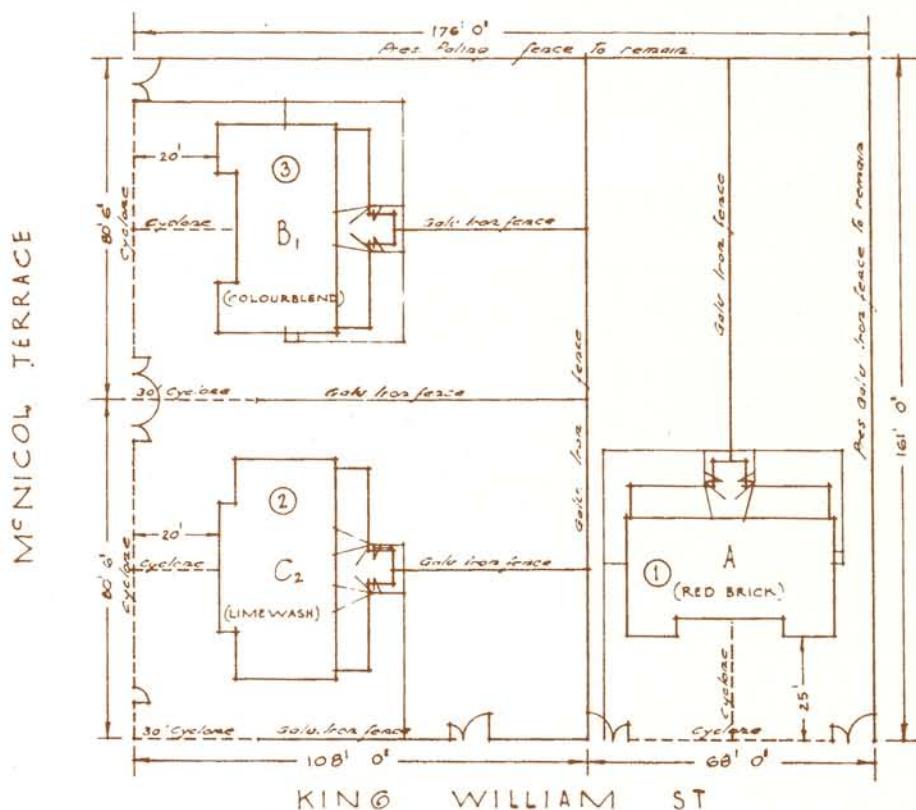
This plan shows one of the three variations for trust houses. Each house had a living room, kitchen, two bedrooms, sleepout, bathroom, back verandah, laundry with built-in 10-gallon copper and two-tub galvanised iron washing trough 'with water service', 600-gallon rainwater tank for the laundry, and toilet. There was a lean-to woodshed, and mains water and electricity, but no entrance hallway, lounge or garage.

The houses were brick on reinforced concrete, with roofs of galvanised iron on oregon roof timbers. Pine floors on jarrah beams, plaster walls, plasterboard ceilings, a fireplace finished with semiglossed tiles, a wood cooking stove, a cast-iron porcelain enamelled bath with wood heater, cupboards, a clothesline and other fittings were all made from used South Australian materials where possible. South Australia Parliamentary papers.



31-33 McNicol Terrace, Rosewater. One of three variations of the standard trust design. Photograph by J. Tomlinson, 1984.

House location plan, McNicol Terrace and King William Street. The brickwork was either plain, colour-blend, full colour, frieze coloured or plinth coloured. The woodwork, fencing and alignment of each house also varied so that in a row of fifteen pairs of houses no two houses appeared identical. South Australian Parliamentary papers.





35 McNicol Terrace, Rosewater. In 1937 Bob Whelan, a railway porter, and his wife Dot were renting a small weatherboard house in Newcastle Street, Rosewater, for 12s 6d a week, when Dot saw a newspaper article about the first six housing trust homes, then being built. She went straight into the trust's office in the city and applied for one of them. Two hundred and sixty others also applied. Trust officers came and inspected the house in Newcastle Street, talked to the neighbours, and questioned the Whelans on their living habits, then gave them 35 McNicol Terrace for the same rent, 12s 6d a week. They moved in with their two children late in November 1937. 'It was lovely to go into our new home', said Dot. 'It was so much bigger than the old place, with so many more conveniences, like the copper and the bathroom and everything.' Photograph by J. Tomlinson, 1984.

had finished six houses at Rosewater and 40 at Croydon Park. He built another 216 houses in 1938, on six sites.

Applications for housing far exceeded the supply. By 30 June all 84 available trust houses had been occupied by 168 adults and 222 children, and by the end of July another 1200 applications had been received. Not all these applicants were qualified: unemployed, destitute and pensioners were ineligible, as were applicants with their own homes. Married male workers with families, regularly employed on 'the lower range of incomes' and regarded as reliable, were given preference, as were some families leaving condemned homes.

To determine reliability, the existing housing of prospective tenants was inspected by representatives of the trust, and current or former landlords, local shopkeepers, publicans and neighbours were questioned. A successful applicant signed a tenancy agreement undertaking to pay rent weekly, to conduct himself and his family in a manner not to cause offence to the trust or other tenants, and to maintain a garden with 'at least one tree ... in good order'.

The houses had a five-year rental period with the right of renewal, and many tenants obviously regarded them as their own homes. The trust acknowledged this when it stated that 'adherence to the trust's reasonable conditions and regular payment of rent meant permanency of tenancy'. Rent for a five-room trust house was between 12s 6d and 15s a week, whereas in the first quarter of the year Adelaide's average weekly rent for a four- or five-room house was 19s 3d. The trust had no arrears in rent; indeed many tenants paid early at the trust office in the city instead of waiting for the rent collector.

Almost all the tenants were keen to improve their premises. Sheds and other additions could be erected subject to the approval of the architect, Hubert Cowell, and many tenants arranged with the trust to have wire screens and doors installed, paying off the cost in weekly instalments. Gardens and lawns were encouraged by donations of cuttings and plants from the Botanic Gardens, and for ornamental borders, grottoes and fishponds the South Australian Portland Cement Company gave free cement. Competitions were held for the best kept houses, gardens and floral displays.

Limited funds restricted the trust's 1938 program to metropolitan Adelaide, though Port Pirie and Port Augusta were inspected for potential sites. The scheme was approved by everyone from the lucky tenants to the prime minister, Joseph Lyons, who visited Croydon Park on 15 December, but there was still insufficient housing in Adelaide to offset the rising cost of renting a small house.

The **Australian Baby Book**



A Souvenir Record of Baby's Life
TOGETHER WITH
Valuable Hints on Mothercraft
AND
General Information on Children's Ailments

The Australian baby book advised mothers, 'Children should not be given liver, kidneys, veal or pork; Stimulants—Tea, coffee or alcohol; Condiments—Spices, pickles, sauces; fried foods; pastry at a minimum—it is difficult to digest . . . Get expert advice before making any new departure. Visit your Baby Health Centre or doctor regularly.'

The Australian baby book, Adelaide c1937.