10 stories: writing about architecture/2

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New Zealand Institute of Architects Incorporated

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Introduction

The 10 essays in this book were selected from the 90 submitted into the 2016 iteration of the Warren Trust Awards for Architectural Writing. The writing competition was launched in 2015 by the New Zealand Institute of Architects, with the support of the Warren Architects' Education Charitable Trust, to promote and acknowledge longer-form writing about architecture. The competition has two entry categories: open, and secondary school. Winners are decided in both categories, and highly commended awards may also be made; in 2016, three such awards were granted.

The winning essays in each category of the 2016 Warren Trust Awards for Architectural Writing, as well as the three highly commended essays, are published in this book, together with five other essays selected by the book's editor. As with all the pieces entered into the competition, the essays are responses to the topic: 'Write about a journey you have made to an architectural site – it could be a new building or an old one, a town or city, or even a ruin. Explain why you went and describe what you found, and what it means to you.'

The competition's judging panel comprised Nicola Legat, publisher for the Massey University Press and former publisher for Random House New Zealand; Jeremy Hansen, the longtime editor of *HOME NZ* magazine and now editor of the Auckland weekly publication *Paperboy;* and John Walsh, Communications Manager of the New Zealand Institute of Architects and the author of several books on New Zealand architecture.

The Institute of Architects thanks all those who entered the 2016 Warren Trust Awards for Architectural Writing, and encourages anyone interested in the craft of writing and the subject of architecture to consider entering the competition in the future.

John Walsh
New Zealand Institute of Architects

The Titan

Diana Noonan

"It was full of prostitutes," says my mother, sipping coffee from a deep cream cup. "And a madman lived halfway up the street." She steals a sideways glance through the narrow sash window of my tiny living room. "Or perhaps it was opposite."

I straighten the hooked rug beneath my feet, smooth the wrinkles in the crocheted throw that covers the tired sofa, and will her to leave.

"Whenever there was a new moon," she continues, "this old man would scream blue murder and throw bottles from his doorway onto the footpath." She helps herself to a piece of shortbread. "Titan Street was notorious! A dreadful place."

My mother knows these things. Eighty years ago she lived just around the corner, in a flat above her parents' shop. But I have no wish to hear her diminish Titan with her torrid reminiscences for I have fallen hopelessly in love with its most diminutive dwelling – The Robert Lord Cottage. Billed by the trust which administers it as "quite possibly the smallest home in Dunedin, in the city's smallest street," the 1909 residence is a retreat for writers like myself in search of solitude, and I am already wishing my six-week stay in it was to be six months.

An hour later, my mother leaves, kicking aside the shards of broken glass spilling from my student neighbours' rubbish bag, and muttering to herself that "nothing's changed". I wave goodbye, sighing with relief as her Nissan weaves its way down Titan tributary and into gushing George Street.

I have left my Catlins home to be here, abandoned quiet bays and amber kelp and tracts of pristine rainforest to fish for inspiration among the beer cans and the dying pizza boxes in this city of literature. "A squalid street on the edge of Scarfieland" and a historic brick cottage with pale pointings is my temporary home, and I could not be happier. For a little time, this other world is mine and the late, deliciously intriguing playwright Robert Lord my company.

Robert was 30 and had written six successful plays and tucked a Katherine Mansfield Young Writer's Award under his belt when he made the decision in 1975 to leave New Zealand and base himself in New York. From his apartment on 85th Street West and Broadway he would stroll to Riverside Park to walk his beagle, Becky, or visit his favourite delicatessen, Zabar's. And for the next 15 years, while the deadly HIV virus gathered momentum and cut a silent swathe through the city's gay community, he continued to produce plays at an admirable pace, returning briefly to New Zealand in 1987 to take up the Burns Fellowship at the University of Otago.

It was at about this time that Robert began house-hunting in Dunedin and, with limited means with which to purchase something, settled upon 3 Titan Street. A rectangular, single-storeyed, one-bedroom worker's cottage with a front door fitted directly to the street, and within a stone's throw of the university, it could not have been more modest; yet his close friend, Nonnita Rees, remembers Robert, in a state of high excitement, summonsing her to look at it. "He was desperate for a place of his own – and this was it."

Sometimes, as I sit at the writing desk in Robert's living room, his mother's handiwork decorating floor and furniture, and the warmth of the unlit fireplace with its coal insert and

kauri mantel behind me, I feel his delight. A writer's mind is seldom static. Thoughts move at such speed; ideas arrive and vanish almost simultaneously, or linger to converse and meld or pirouette and dance from brain to page. Was it the solidity of this old home, the dependability of its double-brick walls and sturdy ceilings of wide battened timbers, that drew him to it? Or its simplicity – a single passageway off which open three simple rooms? Was it that, in a cottage of such plainness, there was, at times, relief from the complexities of thought?

Cornices and iron hips and wythes and dado panelling – the architecture of this cottage sings more of poetry than plays.

In the pocket handkerchief backyard with its outdoor privy and little shed roofed with red corrugated iron, pale narcissi are in bloom and the upturned cups of violet anemone fill with tiny leaves that fall like rain from the kowhai under which Robert's ashes are buried.

He died in summer, on my birthday. He was 46. Antiretroviral therapy was only in rehearsal. The play opened too late to save him.

The funeral service at All Saints Church was, by all accounts, as unsentimental and straightforward as the cottage, the vicar noting simply that Robert had "reached that point in his life where he was not to stay on".

Friends and family gathered afterwards at 3 Titan Street: Sam Neill, bearded for Jane Campion's *Piano*, and former artistic director of Downstage, Sunny Amey, negotiating two broken legs from a recent fall.

If I open the panelled door of the living room where I write, and walk across the squeaking floorboards of the passage to the kitchen, still lined in places with comfortable tongue-and-groove, I can hear the tinkle of the mourners' spoons against their teacups, the soft pop of a cork, the quiet chink of a

glass placed with care upon the cold cast-iron plates of the Shacklock Orion.

Death is no reason not to smile and, peering in through the door to Robert's bathroom, a small group, late back from the church, gathers to admire the vast stainless-steel swimming pool of a bathtub that Robert, at six foot three, installed at a time when it would have taken less than a small mortgage to fill it with hot water. Outside, in the garden, a woman sits cross-legged on the edge of a boxed-brick surround built to hem in a tiny flower bed. Beside her, someone reaches up to tap the faucet of the impossibly high al fresco shower Robert used whenever weather permitted.

Where he could, Robert liked to make changes to the cottage himself, although his sense of the aesthetic at times overrode more important considerations. "He was not a particularly practical person," recalls actor Karen Elliot. Living in the cottage during a period when Robert was engaged in renovations, she was alarmed by his intentions to use an interior door on the outer north-facing wall. He felt it suited the building.

Others who knew him echo her sentiments and smile at his work, which I have also come to enjoy: the painted-over wallpaper with its agreeable lumps and bumps, the oddly interesting wardrobe in the bedroom with its twin-opening panels constructed from a kauri door which Robert sawed in half. His height is daily with me as I stand on tiptoe to look into a mirror or reach a light switch in the kitchen, or struggle to pull the shower curtain on a railing out of reach.

From his framed portrait on the living room wall, Robert smiles at my difficulties with gentle humour and bright eyes. His elbow propped on his knee, and his mouth half covered by the fingers of one hand, he may even, on occasion, be laughing.

But he understands what it is to write; to gather and assemble voices, situations, half-remembered conversations; the water-colour wash of phrases, the subtle pastel tones of pace, nuance painted with the lightest brushstroke.

At the end of my second week in the cottage, my mother phones to ask if I am bored.

"No," I reply, "I am writing a book."

She has been shopping. Pak'nSave was overrun with beneficiaries, the check-out queues long, the car park crowded. She has found a new microwavable pie that promises not to disappoint. She wants to come to visit me again in Titan Street.

I open my mouth to make excuses, but Robert stops me in my tracks.

"It's all grist to the mill," he says. "Go on. Invite her over."

THIS ESSAY WAS HIGHLY COMMENDED IN THE OPEN CATEGORY OF THE 2016 WARREN TRUST AWARDS FOR ARCHITECTURAL WRITING.

Yvonne's House

Graeme North

Journeys start in many ways. Some with a first step. My architectural pathway opened up by sitting down. I was contemplating the universe from a gravestone in Auckland's Grafton Gully, in 1971, long before the gully became a motorway. It was a sunny day amongst the trees, on someone's cold memorial, the buzz of traffic overhead a faint reminder of others.

It was a second-year freehand drawing class by the exuberant Pat Hanley, assisted by 'Speed' Quinn. Speed claimed the longest time to gain his architecture degree, something like 12 years, a boast usually followed by *Beat that, you academic bastards!*

Speed, 6B pencil in hand, plonked down beside me, and together we contemplated the universe.

Whatcha doing over the summer?
Dunno. Getting out of Auckland.
Want to come and help me build?
Where?
Up north.
Tell me more.

And so I headed north, to the rundown shack that Speed lived in, beside the Whangarei Harbour.

Next day we drove along the harbour, through miles of dirt road to the very end of a remote peninsula. Along chugged a red VW

dune buggy. Hanging out the window was a large rugged face, and when the door opened a powerful but kindly woman emerged.

Meet Yvonne Rust.

On the back of the buggy sat an enormous black Labrador. *This is Spider.*

So there I was, in the middle of nowhere, thankful that this large beast appeared friendly and had only four legs.

What can I do round here?
Go and look at the beach!
What's the fishing like?
Don't know, but here's a fishing line.

So I scrambled down through the scrub to end up beneath an ancient pōhutukawa draped over a small cove. A sand spit separated this beach from the sweep of the next bay. I went out onto the spit, threw out my line, and retreated back under the tree.

What's this place going to be like over summer?

A two-kg snapper! *This will do!*

And so it began. We built retaining walls out of old telegraph poles, and waited for Speed to work out what we were going to build next. Barry Brickell arrived in his launch to help Yvonne build her kiln. Yvonne was starting a new career after retiring from teaching high-school art. She dreamed of being a full-time studio potter, but first she needed a studio.

I helped, and I fished. Speed wasn't true to his nickname and his final drawings never eventuated. I helped Yvonne procure a shed that could cover the kiln.

It was a great summer. Yvonne, Spider and I became great mates. Yvonne taught pottery at summer schools to topless

women and lusting men. It was the '70s, after all. The *Fri*, an 80-foot Baltic trader sailing ship, came in to be careened on the beach. This was the start of its journey to Mururoa to lambast the French nuclear tests.

Life was good and life was fun. Yvonne's thoughts turned to her house. It was obvious that Speed was never going to get anything drawn so I offered to design it. The arrogance and cheek of youth.

Yvonne wanted a house made from clay. I designed a north-facing house of rammed earth, ex-glassworks kiln bricks, reused bridge beams, a floor of railway sleepers – all tucked under two counterpoint inverse curved roofs with sweeping kauri-sarked ceilings inside. To the west, a huge circular window was also an enfolding seat, a visual connection with the large pōhutukawa outside.

At the District Council counter the design was condemned. *My wife would hate that!* was the verdict of the Plumbing and Drainage Inspector. The toilet and bathroom/laundry were off a sheltered back verandah. He shook his head and repeated his judgment, in case I was dim.

Does it comply? I asked. In case he was dim, I repeated my question.

But it did comply. The house was under way. Builders were helped by friends, students and local farmers. I helped ram earth walls, adzed hardwood timbers, laid bricks, made doors. Those were the days when an aspiring architect was not afraid to take off his shirt and knock down bricks to rebuild inaccurate work. We all lived in the studio while the house slowly grew.

I returned to architecture school after a year away to continue my degree to be met with po-faced derision. I was supposed to be learning, not doing. I left for another gap year.

The house became a gathering place. People were drawn by Yvonne's skill, warmth, kindness and extraordinary generosity. Generosity given was repaid when a kiln fire meant that the studio building needed to be rebuilt.

In 1976 I returned from a few months' exploring Europe to help build, but also to spend time learning the business of manipulating clay into ceramics. The precision involved in firing the down-draught kiln – hot, dangerous work – was a skill I relished.

Pots were produced in large numbers. Peter Sinclair, a well-known TV personality, came to buy pots for his shop in Ponsonby. *Who are you again?* Yvonne did not have the time or inclination to watch TV. It was difficult for Peter not to get clay on his white strides. Spider slurped from his mug of tea but no one said a thing.

The house was completed and came alive. Hundreds of colleagues and friends partners came and went, students, apprentices, love affairs, funerals and weddings. Not to mention the copious amount of red wine scoffed at great volume from Yvonne's pottery goblets while ensconced in huge antique armchairs. The chairs and sofa were the only major items rescued from the studio fire, and they finally took up residence in the house.

Heated discussion nearly solved all the world's problems, artistic and political. There was no time for any 'isms' apart

from patriotism. God help you if you did not want to save the Queen. The kitchen produced vast quantities of lavish food. It featured a large kahikatea butcher's block. Yvonne could not be bothered with chopping boards. I was instructed to carve a large bowl into its top surface.

Why?

A mixing bowl for scones.

Everyone who came had to be given tea and scones and sometimes there were hundreds of visitors a day.

Yvonne started to get up at 3am to work in peace and quiet. The morning I woke up with a family of four standing around my bed – *We heard you got up early so we came early to have a look* – did not induce one of my finest moments.

Yvonne painted a wonderful mural in her bedroom using paint she made from clay and linseed oil. It features all the little children that her young friends around her were producing in the early '80s.

Yvonne had her house made from clay and natural local materials. My first house was built, and my career in natural building launched.

A few years passed. Reluctantly, in 1985 Yvonne sold the house and moved away. For 30 years I did not see the house nor know what had happened to it.

At Yvonne's funeral in 2002 I spoke after Raymond Hawthorne's eulogy. Who else would have put me in that position? *Trickster to the last!* I said I was amazed that a 50-plus-year-old had had that much confidence in a 21-year-old to let him design her a house. I inherited the chairs. I sit in them every day.

In 2015, I found myself near Parua Bay. On a whim I went to look for the house. Off I went down the dirt road, searching for the unrecognisable turn-off. That pitted muddy track I learnt how to control skids on was now a well-formed road. And then there was the task of identifying the right driveway. The trees had all grown up and everything was different. But finally, *Yes, this is it. I wonder who owns the house now? Do they have a Rottweiler? Will they be friendly? Look how all the trees have grown. I planted those ones!*

Out of the car. From out of the garden comes a woman. Friendly. *Graeme – I have always wanted to meet you – not a day goes by when I don't thank you for this wonderful house. Come in. Look around. We have only recently closed in the verandahs.* This had been done well.

Taking in the house, it is flooded full of memories. There is the small round stained-glass window I made. The billowing ceiling. The floor I finished with the adze given to me as a family heirloom in Somerset. The adzed rimu doors I built. The glass encrusted bricks I helped select and lay. The thick embracing earth walls. The enormous hardwood bridge beams that we drove miles to obtain.

I sat for a moment in the window seat in the large round window, sipping tea, remembering Yvonne doing the same, looking out at the pōhutukawa in bloom.

Walking through to the main bedroom, the mural of all the cherubs in swathes of clematis is still there. I think that red-headed one is my daughter.

THIS ESSAY WAS HIGHLY COMMENDED IN THE OPEN CATEGORY OF THE 2016 WARREN TRUST AWARDS FOR ARCHITECTURAL WRITING.

A Death in the Family

Craig Martin

In September 2016, the John Scott-designed Visitor Centre at Āniwaniwa, near Lake Waikaremoana, was demolished by the Department of Conservation [DoC]*, despite vigorous protests from the architectural community and despite the building's classification as a Category 1 Historic Place. The former Urewera National Park Headquarters was only 40 years old but had been empty for nearly a decade. DoC claimed that the building was an earthquake risk and that it had watertightness issues, but both claims were disputed by independent engineers and architects.*

Gone, like some beloved uncle, only worse. Not a natural death, but first a decade of neglect, then despatched unceremoniously by bureaucrats.

John Scott is best known for his churches, particularly Futuna Chapel in Karori, Wellington, and Our Lady of Lourdes in Havelock North. But in the 1970s he designed a small gem for the National Park Board for use as its Urewera headquarters. He used a difficult site and built a reverential and intimate tribute to the bush and to the Urewera.

I grew up in a John Scott house and have had a lifelong interest in his architecture. I have photographed many of his buildings and made pilgrimages to his churches and public buildings, from Waitangi to Westport. Māori mythology is

full of tricksters and mischief-makers. I think Scott is one of them. A shapeshifter. Scott's work is cheeky, full of good humour and wit. He subverts conventions and pokes fun at the conventional. These are the qualities I like in his buildings.

In 2004 I drove the 750 kilometres from Nelson to Lake Waikaremoana to revisit the Āniwaniwa Visitor Centre. It was a long and winding trip. The bush in the Urewera is primordial. There is something ominous about this place, unwelcoming, its history uncomfortable for Pākehā.

The Centre was several kilometres' drive around Lake Waikaremoana towards the Āniwaniwa Falls, tucked in the bush off the road. To the side was a sheltered entranceway – a waharoa – that led to an elevated concrete walkway towards the back of the building. The walkway was narrow in parts, then opening out onto larger balconies and up two series of steps to the door. Scott wanted you to enter through the bush, to be up in the trees, to hear the birds, feel the rain, breathe the air and smell the earth. Any other entrance would have been more practical but this way you understood the meaning of the building: it is both a tree hut and a church in the forest.

At the top of the last set of stairs you were greeted by a round window and, to the left, wooden doors, painted orange. The windows had orange and yellow trim and wooden flaps for ventilation. The flaps and colours were common to many Scott buildings from the 1970s. Inside was an entry hall with vaulted wooden ceilings and black rafters. The spaces interconnected like a series of tents, each with windows of different shapes: square, rectangular, arched, and the round one in the entrance. All of them looked back out to the bush.

The Visitor Centre was not a Māori building. It was a modernist building with Māori references. This is true of most

of Scott's work. His is an architecture to bring us together; it is about our similarities rather than our differences.

In traditional Māori architecture everything has meaning. The whare tipuna is the ancestor, the ridge pole is the spine, the rafters, ribs, and the maihi, arms. The building is the person and is rich in cultural symbolism both inside and out – the tukutuku a flounder, a stairway to heaven.

Modernism abandoned the symbol. It is architecture where the wall is just a wall, where the structure is exposed and it means only to hold up the roof. It is concrete, not spiritual. Nothing is meant to be symbolic; the building is a machine. Modernism is architecture un-adorned – the building without baggage.

Scott's buildings are intimate, and it's an intimacy that is often lacking in modernist buildings. His work is warm in spirit, the volumes are human in size, the details subtle and simple. There are no grand gestures; the elements are integrated and complete the whole. Not only are the windows and walls well proportioned but also the size of the spaces, the heights, the light.

Scott's subtlety and simplicity is not universally appreciated, particularly, perhaps, by politicians and bureaucrats.

The lack of easy-to-read symbolism might be the flaw with the Visitor Centre. It was largely devoid of symbolic meanings, and those Scott included were new and hard to read. The windows were different shapes. Were they eyes or a mouth, a karu or a waha, or just windows? In a church the elements are easier to read; they all have names: the nave, the altar, the steeple, celestial light.

The process for developing the historic displays at the Centre was fraught and is still a sore point with Ngāi Tūhoe. The

Park Board was staid and couldn't find a place for genuine iwi input. Tūhoe offered to provide carvings for the building but this offer wasn't taken up by the Board and the pou in the Māori gallery was left bare. I liked the naked pou.

The Park Board commissioned Colin McCahon to paint a mural for the Centre, to capture the spirit of the Urewera. There are ironies and contradictions in this choice and from the start the mural was controversial. Tūhoe wanted changes to the text and when it was installed staff thought it was overpowering. The Urewera triptych was stolen by Tūhoe activists as a protest in 1997 and returned almost a year later, adding to its fame.

I've always found the mural a powerful piece of art. In the building it was like another window out to the spiritual past. It was also a statement about the here and now. *Ko Maungapohatu te Maunga. Ko Tūhoe te iwi.* Tau cross and five-pointed star, dark and brooding sky, stubborn bluffs: more modernism although this time with plenty of symbolism.

But the painting is problematic. The Visitor Centre was built to tell the story of the Urewera, but it was inappropriate for the Park Board to tell that story. In hindsight, it was probably wrong for McCahon to tell that story, too.

There is one word on the Urewera mural that encapsulates the essence of the issue. In the bottom right-hand corner McCahon has written "Their Land". By "their" McCahon means Ngāi Tūhoe, and immediately places himself and the viewer as outsiders here. This painting needs to read "Our Land" but McCahon can't paint that because although the Crown "owned" the land (had confiscated it) that wasn't what he meant. The land was Tūhoe's, the story was Tūhoe's and the painting needed to be painted by Tūhoe and read "Our Land". This is fundamental to the cultural issues around the Visitor

Centre and Tūhoe's relationship with it. Tūhoe didn't want those who had dispossessed them of their land to also take and tell Tūhoe's story.

Ngāi Tūhoe didn't want the Visitor Centre as part of their Waitangi settlement. For them it was a symbol of colonial oppression and cultural misappropriation.

It surprises me how hard all this is, how far apart the world views are. It still surprises me how stubborn Pākehā are about learning te reo Māori, how our national day is still mispronounced.

Of course, there are tensions and history and baggage, but that is true of any meaningful journey. The cultural tensions added to this building, placed it at the heart of New Zealand's developing biculturalism. If there wasn't disagreement and conflict, there would be no progress. Scott's building was part of that and part of our ongoing struggle to become bicultural. Heritage is important to us because it records difficulties overcome, journeys made, struggles resolved. Unfortunately, the history of the Visitor Centre at Āniwaniwa was not left to play out to its proper end but cut short somewhere in mid-life, demolished in the heat of the moment.

When I first visited in the 1980s I took two photos of the Centre: one of the McCahon mural inside; the other, the exterior from the road. In 2004 I was still using a film camera, with a 28mm lens or a 35mm tilt-shift and I took a roll-and-a-bit of film, perhaps 30 photos, which in today's digital terms seems like way too few. Now that the building is gone and photos are all we have left, it seems a wasted opportunity.

We have lost a building that is important to New Zealand architecture. Our architecture. Scott's genius is that he created buildings that relate to this place, to us. He referenced our

buildings: the barn, the woolshed, the wharenui, and he created, perhaps more than any other architect, a New Zealand vernacular.

It is gone because we lacked the goodwill and the cultural maturity to see the importance of the Āniwaniwa Visitor Centre and to appreciate its place in our architectural and cultural history.

THIS ESSAY WAS THE WINNER IN THE OPEN CATEGORY OF THE 2016 WARREN TRUST AWARDS FOR ARCHITECTURAL WRITING.

American Dreams

Anna Blair

I am surprised when we pull into the car park. After hours following only trucks on the Interstate and slowing for chipmunks on smaller roads, we are at Fallingwater with, apparently, all of America. We drive past hundreds of cars in hundreds of parking spaces before pulling into one of our own. Walking from the car, I see licence plates from Pennsylvania, but also Florida, Texas, Michigan, Virginia, Oregon, Illinois, New York, Nebraska, Iowa, Arizona and New Jersey.

Frank Lloyd Wright was born almost 150 years ago; on his next birthday, in 2017, New York's Museum of Modern Art will open an exhibition examining his archive. I, like many who spend their thoughts on architecture, have feelings toward Wright that swoop between aggression – at the love of cars and detached homes that shaped many of his projects – and admiration, which isn't hard to explain. Wright's buildings are richly textured and majestically staged, with low ceilings and narrow passageways that cradle and shade their inhabitants before releasing them into large, rich rooms that feel contiguous with their landscape.

I have come to Fallingwater because of the interplay of horizontal volumes, because of the way in which the materials match the landscape and because it feels necessary, at the end of a year studying architecture in the United States, to visit Frank Lloyd Wright's most iconic building.

But I didn't expect Fallingwater to feel relevant to so many people. A man with a megaphone stands at a desk, announcing

tours that depart every five minutes. We can visit the café or gift shop, he tells us, while we wait for the number 30 to be called.

Around us, teenagers argue about who can throw a Frisbee furthest, about who is tallest. Adults wear the American tourist uniform: coloured polo shirts tucked into khaki shorts; baseball caps; and hiking boots. The scene contrasts with the surrounding birch trees, quiet and thin, and the way that light scatters down their trunks and illuminates the spaces beside the welcome centre – an open, hexagonal pavilion of wood and painted concrete, perhaps larger than Fallingwater itself.

I am the only foreigner in our tour group of 14 people. One woman has lived nearby, in Uniontown, for 50 years, and is visiting now, for the first time, only because she is about to move to Florida. An elderly man from California wears a white shirt and black glasses, like Le Corbusier, and my suspicion that he is an architect grows when he asks our guide, Karen O, how the house's cantilevered terraces are holding up, after almost 80 years.

"Not well," she replies, and points out a support that has been added beneath the lowest platform, which finishes a set of stairs dropping into air from the living room floor, above the stream.

We are hurried through Fallingwater without any of the ceremony one expects at a pilgrimage site. There is barely room, in some parts of the house, for 14 people, and it's hard to get a sense of the spaces, blocked as they are by the crowds. In the guest bedroom, the changing height of the ceiling is intended to direct the eye to the window, but I can't see more than the window edges through the group. It's easier to focus on details, like the way the windows fold open or the quarter-circle of the side table.

One man asks about an artwork on the wall, and Karen urges him to keep walking, telling him she can answer as we move up the stairs. I feel a little bad for Karen, who is knowledgeable and freshly trained, excited about everything, but who apologises to the group behind us waiting on the landings as we try, in our allotted seconds, to memorise each space. The tour ends, too quickly, and we are delivered to the renovated carport, where a woman makes robotic jokes and asks us for donations, telling us a gift of over $125 will result in a free walking stick.

I don't feel as if I've really seen Fallingwater. Wright designed the house for Edgar and Liliane Kaufmann and their son, Edgar Kaufmann jr, and guests often visited. I can't imagine, despite Wright's ego, that he ever considered how the building might be experienced as a tourist attraction. I can see through the crowds only at a distance from the house, looking up at the vantage point from which photographs are always taken, and wondering if there's any point in taking a picture that's been taken by so many people before me. I think of drawings I've seen in books on Wright which show the dynamism of the cantilevers to a degree that's missing here, as coloured shirts move across and around the balconies, torsos leaning over to look at the stream, and I remember that Wright wanted Fallingwater's concrete to be gilded so as to catch the light. I feel a little closer to the building as I think of books on Wright piled on a library desk.

Afterward, driving south through Ohiopyle State Park, we pass a sign advertising a house that's for sale. "FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT", it reads in large red letters, appealing to the passing cars. "Inspired", it reads in smaller black ones. We stop to buy water in a café which has a small homemade sign advising

customers that they can buy "Frank Lloyd Wright's favourite drink" for $4, and that Frank Lloyd Wright's favourite drink is a "Cherokee Red Float". Frank Lloyd Wright, in Pennsylvania's Laurel Highlands, has a mythology that persists even though, or perhaps because, it's so hard to grasp Fallingwater while visiting it. The responses of other tourists, which I hear as we leave and as we travel further south, speak to an unfulfilled desire for possession, spinning on the verb *to wish*. Everyone, it seems, wishes to own a house "like that", to sit alone on a platform beside a stream.

I had expected an operatic drama that would pierce crowds, but I also expected something intimate, sweeter and richer in its details. Photographs suggest complete and appealing isolation: Fallingwater is an invitation to escape. It is famously attuned to its surroundings, to the small stream and steep clusters of rock. Wright is an architect firmly in favour of individualism, not community, and this house makes a compelling case. But it's only possible, these days, to see Fallingwater through the imagination, which can erase the choppy rush of tourists that crowd the landings and spread out across the balconies. I wonder if, in turning to my knowledge of the house to supplement my experience of it, I am also seeking some sort of ownership of Fallingwater. This is a way, perhaps, of imagining an intimacy with architecture that's hard to generate when constantly being asked to move into the next room. I am tempted by the idea of sipping Wright's favourite drink, even as the casual racism of the name repels me.

After leaving the Laurel Highlands, we drive past the 76-year-old Dixie Motel, on the border of Maryland and Pennsylvania, and continue along Route 40, which takes us through Appalachia. The twilight abstracts hills into textures and tones

that intersect one another, shifting as the road rises and falls. In the foreground, I see signs advertising pancake breakfasts and gun sales. Fallingwater's crowds have dispersed in their various directions, their cars small against the landscapes of the United States.

It is this drive, comfortable and secure despite the forbidding trees and darkening skies, which impresses upon me what it is, precisely, that makes Fallingwater so American and, in that, so difficult to grasp. Wright's house is an architectural embodiment of this continent's romance of vast landscape, a romance in which nature is at once forbidding and inviting. Cantilevered above a stream, Fallingwater is luxurious and precarious. It is an embodiment, too, of the American Dream, with its promise of a wealth that can only be delivered to a few. Fallingwater is compromised even as it becomes available, balancing on wishes.

Hinemihi

Ellen Andersen

I don't know why it took me so long to visit her. I had been living in the UK for over a year, and visiting her had always been on my must-do list. Time had slipped by, but she waited. It seems she is rather good at waiting.

As I arrived in the car park of a grand old estate, I felt a sense of relief. I had finally made it here to see her. The estate is the National Trust property of Clandon Park, near Guildford in Surrey, and the grand old lady waiting patiently in the garden is Hinemihi.

Clandon House is the ancestral home of the Onslow family. It was the fourth Earl of Onslow who, during his time as Governor of New Zealand from 1889 to 1892, amassed an extensive collection of taonga Māori, which he took back with him and displayed at Clandon House. One of these taonga was the meeting house Hinemihi, carved by the famous Ngāti Tarāwhai carver Wero and his apprentice Tene Waitere. Hinemihi famously protected 60 people, including Tene Waitere himself, during the eruption of Mount Tarawera in 1886.

Hinemihi is an ancestral house, biding her time at someone else's ancestral home. I approached the woman at the information desk and rather awkwardly announced, "I have come from New Zealand to see Hinemihi." The woman was very accommodating, and her only question of me was to ask if I knew Jim Schuster from New Zealand. I told her I didn't, but I had heard of him. Little did I know that I would return to New

Zealand and go on to work with him for over a decade. (Jim is Heritage New Zealand's Māori Built Heritage Advisor.)

One of the guides showed me to the rear of the property, and after passing through a series of immaculately clipped hedges, a grassy expanse extended towards Hinemihi, like an English marae ātea (open area). It turns out that even when a wharenui has been removed from its traditional context, the protocols of a first encounter still are necessary. A quiet karanga whispers out with each exhalation as I approach, calling to Hinemihi, acknowledging the many who have come before, acknowledging her people and my people who have passed on. All my previous feelings of excitement leave me, and I feel sad. I am sad for her, and lonely for her, but at the same time she is impressive, and beautiful, and she is still standing.

The guide leaves me to spend time alone in Hinemihi, and my attention eventually turns to looking at the building itself. The setting is certainly picturesque, with a large oak tree beside the whare, but the tree is far too close in all practicality; moss and dampness will likely be a problem. And what if a branch were to fall on her?

She is cloaked in a thick English-style thatched roof, which makes me think of 19th century photographs of Māori women in Victorian-style dress, cloaked in foreign garb, but with beauty, mana and grandeur emanating from them. The thatch also reminds me of photos taken of Hinemihi following the eruption of Tarawera, where the roof is piled with volcanic ash to roughly the same height as the thatch is stacked here.

Inside, she has a dirt floor, and her poupou are closer together than you would expect, making her seem far too small to shelter so many at Tarawera. Historical photos show that originally she had woven tukutuku panels between these

beautifully carved wall posts, but the tukutuku are no longer here, and perhaps never were, as she was shipped in pieces as a consignment of carvings back in 1892 when Lord Onslow negotiated the purchase. Hinemihi was dismantled and removed from one of New Zealand's earliest 'red zones' when the township of Te Wairoa at Tarawera was abandoned and many of the Māori families relocated to the thermal village of Whakarewarewa in Rotorua.

It's not all that common for a carved meeting house to be named after a female ancestor, but there are three named after Hinemihi. All three also have a connection to the carver Tene Waitere. When Hinemihi was being carved at the beginning of the 1880s, it was one of the first houses that Waitere worked on with the renowned master carver Wero. Hinemihi was the last house that Wero completed before his death, and the second Hinemihi was the last carved house to be completed by Waitere before his death. He completed it in 1928 for his granddaughter Rangitiaria Dennan, the famous Guide Rangi of Whakarewarewa. The third Hinemihi was not opened until the 1960s, but the carvings that adorn the front were also carved by Waitere, originally for the house of Maggie Papakura. The carvings on this most recent Hinemihi have travelled all the way to the UK, too, accompanying Papakura's concert party for the 'Festival of Empire' in 1910. It took more than 50 years for these carvings to return home, but they did return.

There are records that show this was not the first location or even layout of Hinemihi at Clandon House. She originally stood by a small lake, and it is said she was used as a boat shed. During the First World War Clandon House was used as an Auxiliary Military Hospital, providing 100 beds and an operating theatre for injured soldiers. A number of Māori

soldiers spent time at Clandon House, and upon discovering a finely carved meeting house in the grounds, set about rebuilding her correctly and fixing errors in the layout. Hinemihi provided the soldiers with a connection to home, and a purpose during their recuperation on the other side of the world.

It was apparent that, even now, Hinemihi still had people caring for her well-being. There was a new door lintel, carved in the same Ngāti Tarāwhai style of the rest of the house. This was done in the 1990s by descendants of the original carvers. The Ngāti Ranana London Māori Club has a close association with Hinemihi also, and return to her on a regular basis for their activities, but there are many who have advocated for a return to her homeland. As I left Clandon Park that day, the loneliness I felt on behalf of Hinemihi betrayed my opinion on this matter, formed by feeling rather than critical analysis.

A return home for Hinemihi seems unlikely when she is emphatically owned by the British National Trust, so efforts have been made by her descendants to care for her as they can. A significant restoration project began in the early 2000s with the National Trust recognising the important part that Hinemihi's descendants played in her current life in England, and looked to work with them in developing a new approach to conserving the house. A working group, led by Jim Schuster, was formed to liaise with the National Trust. A project was developed, and even new tukutuku panels were woven for her and taken to England to be part of the redevelopment.

A new life in England was taking shape for Hinemihi, but on 29 April 2015, fire devastated Clandon House. British newspapers reported the loss of heritage treasures including a football taken into battle on the first day of the Somme

Offensive, a desk from the Palace of Versailles, tapestries and portraits. New Zealand news outlets noted the loss of mounted huia and kākāpō, a kiwi feather cloak, and a greenstone patu (weapon). All of the tukutuku panels made for Hinemihi were being stored in the mansion, and were lost also. Clandon House was cordoned off – yet another red zone for Hinemihi – and visitors were prohibited, for safety reasons and to prevent fossickers. All of the plans for Hinemihi's restoration have been put on hold, while the future of Clandon Park is decided by its owners.

Back in New Zealand, Te Wairoa is no longer a red zone, but a fully developed tourist destination again. The site where Hinemihi originally stood is still bare, still owned by her people, and still available to her should she return. Jim Schuster succinctly described the situation when he commented to me, "Hinemihi may belong to the National Trust, but we belong to Hinemihi".

This grand old lady has survived volcanic eruptions, two world wars, and devastating fires. She has endured being pulled apart, packed up, put back together (at times poorly), treated as a folly, as a garden shed and as a curio beside a Palladian mansion. That mansion is now gone; she is nobody's folly. Perhaps it is time for her visit to England to come to an end.

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The Swedish Cemetery for Heartbroken Tourists

Sharon Lam

There are no travel guides for heartbroken tourists. So when I was stood up in Stockholm – a lover having fled town via high-speed train trip timed ever so carefully to *just* precede my arrival – I had no idea what to do with myself. His desperate, last-minute escape was so extreme that it verged on the absurd. Yet I couldn't help but feel miserable. The Abba museum was just not going to cut it.

Floating to the top of my thoughts appeared an appealing possibility: Skogskyrkogården, otherwise known as the Woodland Cemetery, designed largely by the early 20th-century Swedish architect Gunnar Asplund. I recalled spooky images of the cemetery from a sleepy lecture. Woodland was presented by a faceless lecturer as a cemetery designed to be sublime. A sublime cemetery; it seemed just right for a very fragile traveller.

A short, bleary-eyed, teary-eyed subway ride later, there I was: stepping into an acre-large cemetery south of Stockholm, hot on the heels of heartbreak, trying to brush off my cold, cold ex while in an emotional daze in a foreign city. It seemed everyone was bound to let you down, that the only way to get through life was to keep everyone an arm's length away. At least, these were the thoughts passing through my mind when a vast green meadow opened up in front of me, punctuated only

by a surreally large granite cross. I swear that, in that moment, I *was* the cross. Like the towering monument before me, I was the sole marker of my life, singular but impressive. I am a rock. I am an island. Even Simon and Garfunkel broke up.

I continued inwards with my only friend, the cross, passing behind me. A gem of modernism, the Woodland Crematorium increased in proximity on my left. Its long square colonnade was reassuring. As I passed each column, I could see and feel my progress with each step. Who would have thought that something so modern could be so comforting? The building was on my side.

Next, I came to the wooded area of the cemetery, where graves stretched out in rows and rows, underneath rows and rows of tall, slim trees that divided the sunlight into shade and hope. Alone until now, I saw people dotted around the area. Some were tending to small flower beds in front of each gravestone. A figure in military uniform stood still, looking pensively down, and a groundskeeper carefully washed a wheelbarrow. Everyone was quiet and absorbed in their own worlds.

I spent the rest of my time within the heart of the cemetery, ambling around aimlessly, appreciating the quiet and the uncanny natural light. But as poetic as calming hurt feelings with nature and architecture is, one eventually must attend to more prosaic concerns, and I desperately sought out the visitor centre to find a toilet. There weren't many other people around, and, thanks to its cosy, sauna-like wooden interior, the toilet didn't cut the expressive figure of the rest of the cemetery, despite its tourist-centric purpose.

I also found myself surrendering to my stomach, and sat down at an outside table and hungrily ordered some

pancakes. When they arrived, I soon realised they weren't just any pancakes. These were the most delicious pancakes that have ever come into existence. *So* bewitchingly delicious, they made me suspect there was something dark involved in their making, but I didn't care! Golden brown, folded quarters of thin pancake, freshly whipped cream, strawberry and blackberry jam, all fresh from an other-worldly kitchen. I was so moved I found myself becoming tearful. Alone in a vast cemetery in a foreign land, I had found tangible beauty and joy, and I ate every last crumb of it.

Leaving the only reminder of society that was the visitor centre, I decided to follow the paths that the architects had carefully planned with the mourner's experience in mind. The paths passed all the buildings within the cemetery, each one a chapel or crematorium with its own character. I soon realised I had come on a day where the buildings were closed to visitors and I was resigned to missing their interior mysteries.

So I was surprised when I saw the doors of the Woodland Chapel, once called the "Parthenon of the Modern movement", wide open amongst the trees. I walked intrepidly towards it, and then inside. As my foot came into contact with the floor, I was astounded as Grieg's *Morning Song* started playing. What *was* in those pancakes? Had I crossed over to somewhere else? In the ethereal glow of the small round chapel, anything seemed possible. The sight of an elderly Swedish lady standing at a laptop broke my supernatural train of thought.

"I am so sorry," I said, realising too late the casket at the front of the chapel. To my surprise, the elderly lady was not at all bothered that I had stumbled into her late husband's funeral, moments before guests were to arrive. "You could actually help me very much," she said. And so that is how I

spent the next little while: sitting in different seats inside a secluded Swedish chapel, listening to Grieg at different volumes and helping a stranger with a funerary service soundcheck.

After the pancakes and helpful encounter at the Woodland Chapel, I felt much happier. I started down the Way of the Seven Wells, a clear path that cuts straight through the middle of the cemetery, with the Resurrection Chapel directly behind and the Meditation Grove atop a hill straight ahead – a dramatic final passage for a funeral mourner. I found myself feeling melancholic again on the long stretch of path, the impact of leaving the woods and going back out onto the open meadow jarring.

Finally, the path sloped upward near the Meditation Grove, warping the perspective of the tuft of trees at the top and the rest of the path that parted the hill straight down the middle. The visual result was akin to a pool-less infinity pool, where there seemed to be nothing on the other side of the hill but blue sky.

Reaching the top, this illusion subsided but the awe did not. Here, the entire cemetery could be seen, and I was reunited with the familiar granite cross I had met at the beginning of my visit. I still couldn't comprehend the peaceful eeriness of the entire place, even the figure raking leaves within the grove seemed more like a mystical silent guardian rather than a focused gardener. Sitting down on the grass against a tree, I looked down upon the cross and modernist crematorium. It was just as surreal from an aerial view; I was no longer thinking about suddenly being alone in Stockholm, but rather how alone everything on earth is, and what a strange feeling it was to be here and now.

In my cheesy *Eat Pray Love* stupor, I ended up having a quick nap underneath the tree, and if it was all in fact a dream I would not be surprised. The old woman and the funeral sound-check. The impossibly delicious pancakes. The weird light that came through the trees that could not simply be explained by its Nordic latitude. I had gone to the cemetery merely seeking a quiet place to have a bit of a cry, but left instead with a profound experience of space and self.

When Asplund designed with the mourner in mind, he was almost definitely *not* thinking of lone, bespectacled Asian girls seeking solace over their runaway man-child ex-boyfriends. This is the fun of architecture – every space ends up being nothing more than an open stage. One can design for this or that, but all sorts of other this's and that's will happen regardless.

I will never know if it was the fresh heartbreak or Asplund's achievements in capturing the sublime that created that surreal afternoon in the Woodland Cemetery. I like to think that Asplund designed the cemetery as a half; its full effect is felt when you bring to it your own experience of loss.

A Kind of Beautiful

Michelle Goodall

When I was about eight years old my friend asked me if I wanted to go to a film festival. “What’s a film festival?” I asked, because I was eight years old and had never heard of such a thing. “How is it different than the normal movies?” I asked. She shrugged. “It’s in the city,” she said, “and the movie is about a dog that goes on an adventure.”

My friend lived next door to me, in the most amazing house I had ever seen. The ceilings were high, and exposed wooden beams framed the harbour like a real-life picture. The hallway was dark with rich, soft, green carpet. In the kitchen there was a drop-down ladder in the ceiling which led to a hidden room where my friend’s dad kept a desk and an assortment of papers. It was a bit of a mission to get up there and we were hardly ever allowed but that just made it more exciting. The whole place smelt like Rose’s Lime Cordial.

My parents didn’t like that house. They found it kind of strange. It was different from the other houses I knew but I always loved it precisely because it was like nowhere I’d ever spent time before. It makes sense that these neighbours would be the ones to take me to a building which, now that I think about it, shaped my life.

So we went to town. I don’t remember the journey. We could have taken the train, or the bus, but most likely I think we drove there. I don’t remember much about the weather or what I ate for tea or any of those other things. What I remember,

quite clearly, is finding myself in Molesworth Street, I think for the first time in my life (although it's possible I had already been to the Beehive and Parliament House).

A huge building made from pebbly concrete rose greyly above me. Towering darkly against the blustery sky, it cast long, cold shadows. I shivered in the wind and pulled my jacket closer around me. The building was sitting starkly on a corner site, glaring at me with malicious intent. I didn't want to go inside. But we were there and I had to, or we couldn't see the movie. My friend's mum was saying, "Come on, we'll be late; the film starts soon." I looked through the tinted glass doors. She held one open to reveal the hospital-green walls. Inside, the theatre door was open like a hungry mouth. My heart beating quickly, I followed my friend and her mum into the building. Neither of them seemed particularly worried. I hoped they hadn't noticed how scared I was.

I don't remember much about the movie itself, apart from an image in my head of a flickering 1980s' film with a little Scottie dog in a tartan jacket. Now I think of it, the story was a bit like a live-action Hairy Maclary, although as far as I know Hairy Mac hadn't yet infiltrated the New Zealand consciousness quite the way he has now, and actually I'm not sure if he's even a Scottie dog.

Anyway, when I think about how my life turned out, I wonder how much that early experience affected me. It's possible that it had far more of an impact than I'd like to admit. I didn't know what the forbidding building was. And because I was an inquisitive child who asked a million questions about everything and always wanted to know why, my friend's mum could barely shut me up on the way home. "What is this building?" "The National Library." "The National Library? But

there's a theatre there – where are the books?" "The books are in other places, on other floors," my friend's mum told me and probably a lot of other things that I don't remember asking.

When we got home I told my parents about my adventure at the National Library. My mum and dad exchanged a look. "Ugh," my mum said, "that's such an ugly building." "I know," I said, "and scary." I kept finding myself thinking about it at odd moments, remembering the sound of the wind, seeing that silvery sky reflected in the windows and going down through that dark door.

My grandmother came around. "What are you going to be when you grow up? How about a teacher? That's a good job," she suggested. "No," I said; "I'm going to be a librarian. I want to work with books." This hadn't occurred to me before then, although I always loved books. I remember being both frightened and overawed by the National Library building. I wanted to find out its secrets. What was inside? Where were all the books? How many were there? Were there other things inside? Could the librarians read them?

Those were the days when librarian stereotypes were rampant, and maybe for a reason. They were less-friendly days for tiny library visitors. Children were not allowed in the adults' section of the library and even though I sometimes borrowed adult books, my mother had to come with me to keep a watchful eye on any youthful vandalism I might feel like perpetrating. I always liked the library, though. You could borrow as many books as you wanted.

After a while I mostly forgot about the trip to the National Library. I didn't give much thought to the film, the building or the idea that I could ever be a librarian. I found myself overwhelmed with high school.

I didn't really see the library again until I was studying history at Victoria University. We were instructed to go to the Alexander Turnbull Library to use the photographic archive. "The Turnbull is in the National Library," our professor told us. On the appointed day, I found myself walking up Molesworth Street. The building loomed over me again, its windows like eyes and the stairs welcoming and daunting all at once. I walked into the main foyer. It wasn't like I remembered. Although I felt frightened by the outside, the inside was welcoming, comforting. The space was large but I didn't feel small. I felt myself wrapped in the embrace of books and the scent of old film fixative. I breathed deeply and looked up at the ceiling. I walked down the corridor and saw a girl I knew from school. "Hello! What are you doing here?" I asked. "I work here," she said. "How did you end up doing this?" I asked. "I just applied for a job. I saw it in the paper," she replied. As I left I felt like I was at home. This place had grown on me. I looked up at the sky reflected in the windows. It was kind of beautiful, if you liked that sort of thing. And someone I knew worked there. I no longer felt frightened by the building.

Since then I've spent a lot of time at the National Library, researching, reading and meeting up with other library friends. I've run into friends and colleagues using the collections and find it fitting that this confusing, frightening (at first) but now comforting place has chosen to call its café Home. I never thought I'd like that building, but now I can honestly say that it is full of meaning, memories and even love, as I often meet my public library friends for lunch there when I'm visiting Wellington. Recently, I was chatting to a colleague about Brutalism. He asked me, "What's your favourite Brutalist building?" "The National Library in Wellington," I told him;

“I still remember the first time I ever saw it.” After my friend left I realised I didn’t know if I’d be a librarian without that experience.

When I think about that building I now link it with many other buildings, in the style that I now know to be called Brutalism (and I’m not sure if I should admit this but, in true librarian style, as I visited each place, I mentally tagged and classified similar structures that reminded me of each other). I’m not sure if this is accurate, but they all looked very similar yet different to me: National Library; The Michael Fowler Centre; Victoria University Library; and later, after I moved to London, the Southbank Centre, and that ultimate example of Brutalist architecture – The Barbican. As I began to think about these buildings, I began to understand them more and feel affection for all that concrete. Sometimes it’s not until many years later that you realise that a place has profoundly shaped your life, and clearly the National Library building in Wellington has shaped mine. I’m glad it has. I really like my job.

Villa Savoye

Iris McGarva

On 3 September 2014, I took a trip with my family that I'd rather not remember. We were on a visit to France and while we were there I saw many amazing buildings and places that will stay with me forever. Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye was not one of them. The house, to someone who knows nothing about architecture, was little more than just another leaky concrete house like those I can see all the time at home, albeit on a larger scale. The underwhelming destination, coupled with a long and tiring journey, left my parents with an extremely impatient and bratty 12-year-old.

Leaving New Zealand in early August meant that by the time we were visiting the Villa I had already been made aware of the stunning historical architecture that France had to offer. As a family we had previously visited the almost magical Château de Chenonceau in the Loire, the golden Musée de l'Armée in Paris and seen the pinnacle of it all: Versailles. It was fair to say I had my expectations set pretty high. Mum had told me that the grounds of the Villa Savoye would be spacious and clean-cut. That, coupled with the delicate name, meant to me that it sounded as though the Villa would fit right in with the other monuments.

On the train ride over, I had been conjuring up pictures in my head of what it might be. I began to daydream of fences topped in fleur-de-lis or marble fountains. There would be a crystal chandelier and on the roof a show of angels and clouds

intertwined. Adorning the walls would be paintings, biblical scenes and half-naked women framed by swirls of gold. I hoped it would be just as whimsical and elegant as the homes of Disney princesses, like the past half dozen sites had been. My dreams, however, were not to be realised.

It had been quite the schlep from our beloved apartment in the 18th *arrondissement* to the Villa in Poissy. A walk, two trains then another walk and a wait in a bus stop that looked remarkably like the ones I stand outside of along Great North Road at home. Followed by a bus that was stuffy and smelt like a locker room and yet another walk – all in the summer heat. I was ready to go home, but of course I got dragged along regardless.

My visions of a château were dampened as I saw the suburbs surrounding the tall hedge. But sticking with the fairy-tale theme, I started picturing a Goldilocks cottage instead, perhaps with a vine curling up around an old wooden porch. I fed off my mother's excitement, thinking positive. So, despite the urban environment, I still expected to see my gingerbread house. I couldn't have been more wrong.

Instead of the home of a princess, I found what could have been the base for the *Thunderbirds* – if they had suffered a budget cut. To me the Villa was blunt, standing out like a sore thumb from the green backdrop. Instead of marble and gold, off-white concrete. I felt betrayed; the house looked so unlike anything else we had seen in France. It felt clinical and unnatural. This wasn't what I wanted to see.

Later I learned that Le Corbusier thought that houses should be machines, so Villa Savoye's sparse aesthetic made sense. This ideal conflicts greatly with my own: that houses should reflect their surroundings, feel comfortable and be functional

and peaceful places in which to relax. The Villa felt all wrong – famously leaky, all sharp angles and edges. I couldn't imagine anyone wanting to live there.

My mum followed the tour closely, dancing up the ramp and giggling like a kid at Christmas. I lagged behind, staring in disbelief at what reminded me only of a cheap motel. I couldn't understand what Mum was seeing or why this had been worth the trip. The house was meant to be modern and chic but the mustard-coloured tiles, pastel pink walls and uncomfortable furniture were anything but. I understand why Villa Savoye was a pioneer of its time but I can't help thinking they should have stuck with what they knew.

Le Corbusier's creation means the world to my mother; to me it's a version of the leaky buildings I see all the time at home. In my mind the Villa Savoye means disappointment, the culmination of unpleasant travel experiences: so much effort to get there; so much build-up only to be let down. I remember it as a warning to research anything my mum describes as 'fun'. There are many places we visited and I cannot wait to go back. The Villa Savoye is not one of them.

Encounters on Future Islands

Ellen Ashenden

The 7.38am train leaves München *Hauptbahnhof* and cuts through the Brenner Pass in the Alps on its way due south to Venezia *Santa Lucia*. It is early July, so outside the window the Bavarian fields are bright green, and the houses are thick and triangular. In the mountains, the rail infrastructure is sleek and dark and has been designed to fit in with the landscape, and I realise we must have already crossed into Austria. The crossing at Brenner/Brennero is more obvious, as the Italian buildings are not quite as well maintained or homogeneous, and the larger industrial farms have been replaced by family-sized plots. The Mediterranean feels closer as the outside temperature rises, and around 2pm the train crosses the final causeway to Venice.

The city's light has an unusual quality to it, both soft and bright, perhaps caused by multiple reflections off the stone buildings and waterways. Today, the sea and the sky are exactly the same blue; the islands of Venice float in between, not quite existing. Away from the train, the streets barely contain the ferocious press of tourists. As a city, Venice is frustrating and then, at the next turn, entirely captivating.

Future Islands, the New Zealand exhibition at the 2016 Venice Architecture Biennale, is being staged in the Palazzo Bollani, a magnificent 17th-century Renaissance palace with original stones catalogued by Ruskin (sequence 179-180-181-182-183).

The journey from the exhibition attendants' apartment to the palazzo takes approximately 15 turns and crosses six bridges; it passes the garden with the talking parrot and the piazza with the overpriced chemist.

Perhaps it is disappointing to find that the exhibition is not housed in the main Giardini or Arsenale venues, but being a geographical outlier has its advantages. The Palazzo Bollani brings in both seasoned Biennalians in search of something new, as well as casual tourists intrigued by the sign pointing down a narrow, mysterious alleyway towards a "New Zealand Exhibition".

As volunteer exhibition attendants, before opening for the day we first do a quick sweep of the entry floor where chips of the palazzo's red stone walls have come down during the night. If you are quiet, you can literally hear the building falling down around you. Each morning, the signora of the house comes down from the adjoining apartment and speaks to her walls, bemoaning their loss.

Walk up the stairs to the exhibition rooms and step by step you are taken into the clouds. These Future Island forms are described by the exhibition's Creative Director as being open to interpretation; they might be "land masses or clouds, bodies of water or volcanic fields, plinths or boats". The islands elicit interesting interpretations from some of the visitors – "flying meadows", for example, and "cracked eggs". Together, the islands create a metaphorical archipelago, upon which is modelled a diversity of New Zealand architecture projects – and several hundred cows.

One of the most popular projects is Ian Athfield's Amritsar House, a village seemingly mutating out of the wall. It hooks people in to work out a route all the way up the winding stairs, fascinating visitors ranging from a seven-year-old boy

to a pair of Venice's most artfully-dressed locals. It is a good conversation starter.

"It sounds like you're from New Zealand, too, then."

"I am. Are you here for the Biennale?"

"We just saw the sign! We're on a Europe trip for the summer."

"Oh, very nice. Where are you off to?"

"We've been to Rome and Florence. After Italy we go to France and Spain, and then over to the UK to visit our daughter."

"Sounds lovely. And what do you think of the exhibition?"

"It's great... I hadn't thought about architecture in New Zealand before."

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"It's a desert... What do the cows eat? *Hahaha*."

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"I think I'll have to go to New Zealand now. I've always wanted to go, and this, this is really beautiful. I'm a graphic designer. The branding is excellent – you should pass that on. The concept is very good."

"I will do. And, yes, you should go!"

"I think I will have to."

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"Oh look, there! We recognise that building..."

"You must be from New Plymouth then. The Len Lye, pretty recognisable! I love that building, too."

"How cool is that!"

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“The Land of The Long White Cloud! Now this makes me want to go back to New Zealand.”

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During the day, we perform an operation of opening and closing of the large windows, a delicate balance between allowing enough breeze in to break the immense heat, and not so much as to send the flying islands literally flying. Amongst the heat, a wiri of melody rises up from the stairwell: “Te Aroha, Te whakapono, Te rangimarie, Tātou tātou e.”

Seagulls and salt air and shouting from the delivery men in the canal below. The water from the Rio della Pietà reflects off the underside of the island vessels, as white as Antarctica, supporting Holly Xie’s “Vanishing Acts”. A rush of air and the futuristic spaceships fly past the imagined planets of Rehua Wilson’s alternative architectural space time.

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“Why cows and not sheep? A sign of the times, I suppose.”

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“Do you think the curators did this on purpose? This island has a social housing project at the top, grounded in the middle of the city like a fort, and then, all around it, it’s surrounded by coastal baches facing out and floating on the edge. They are beautiful, but ones obviously only a few could afford.”

"Yes, I see. I wonder if that was intentional..."

•

"One of the best pavilions at the Biennale this year... Maybe even the best one ever, and I have been to a few."

"Oh, wow. Feel free to write in the guest book..."

"Of course!"

•

"So, what do you think?"

"No, it doesn't look like New Zealand to me. No, it's all too white. Sorry."

•

"Nice work, you Kiwis."

"Aha, it sounds like you're from Australia."

"From Sydney."

"Oh, we've had a few Sydneysiders through today. Have you been to the Giardini yet? Only you Aussies could get away with just a swimming pool as a pavilion."

"Yes, it's great, isn't it? *Haha*."

•

"Bellissimo! Animato... Vivente..."

From the black sheep seat in the corner, you can watch people's faces light up along with their minds as they enter this world at the top of the stairs. Visitors duck down to view Sarosh Mulla's photo slides, offering a miniature perspective of a landscape within a landscape. The "Whare Ladies", with their feet dangling over the edge, is the most photographed model – the only human figures in an otherwise bovine universe.

"I really like the metaphor – of the landscape changing."

"It makes me consider: what next? This exhibition and the first one [in 2014] are great but it's more like a tasting platter of New Zealand architecture. I mean, it shows what New Zealand architecture is good at, making very well crafted individual houses. But there are many issues that New Zealand could focus on: the relationship between architecture and the RMA; different meanings of landscape overlaid in the same place, from biculturalism to multiculturalism, for example..."

"I guess we shall have to wait and see for the next Biennale!"

"It's great. It lets your mind wander."

“Danke!”

“See you, schönen Tag noch!”

The islands are anchored to the floor only by their shadows that are dragged around the room each day by the sun. In the early evening, the light lowers and shines upon their Antipodean undersides. The Biennale is a stage where countries present their generalised personality traits, their quirks, failings and strengths, and in doing so find an important moment for introspection. Through this journey, we can imagine, navigate and connect possible futures through a rich series of encounters.

The House Behind the Oak

Amelia Meredith-Vaughan

Our little house sits on a hill, all red brick and soft, aged oak and richly-polished rimu. Warm reds and welcoming browns invite you inside. It's as if the house is smiling genially, politely taking your coat, and ushering you through to the high-ceilinged dining/sitting area. Simple, unpretentious lead-panelled windows frame the views: north, out to the street and over the city to Mt Cargill; south, over the St Clair Esplanade, sheltering in the shadow of the hill, and out to the vastness of the Pacific Ocean.

I remember us stumbling across the house, almost by accident. That Sunday, we went open-home viewing, a popular pastime in my family. That Sunday, we found our home. It's funny now to think how close we were to never seeing it at all. It had started innocently enough, a flick through the property pages of the paper over breakfast, but then, well, then my father – ever the house-buying enthusiast – found a house that piqued his interest. Soon my mother and I had made our picks, so a trip was in order.

The first house turned out to be *distinctly* less charming in person, and we missed the second. Our rush to make it to the last house of the day saw us scrambling out of the car just as the real estate agent closed up the house. But a quick bit of banter and our palpable enthusiasm persuaded the agent to let us in – "but only for a couple of minutes," he warned us.

From the sheltered porch, I recall looking up, up, at the towering oak that guarded the house. It was bare from the autumn and the trunk skewed out at a strange angle, but still I thought it was beautiful. In we went, through the pastel-yellow bubble-glass double doors into the wide entrance hall. Did I mention the house's violently-clashing duck-egg blue window sills, russet-red brick and watery-yellow plasterwork? The colour choice was appalling, but even that could not mar the house's well-balanced form, with its generous bay window placed firmly in the middle, partnered to the right by an artistic, tri-panelled window with a curving top to the centre panel.

It was a masterclass in design. To the left of the bay window lay a lower-ceilinged extension. Now, you must understand how easily that extension could have ruined this near-perfect house, but, somehow, the extension did not argue with the original house. Rather, its clever incorporation of the original window frames and modest profile allowed it to not only blend with but also enhance the existing house. Its roof tucked neatly under the eaves of the main house, the extension tidily filled much of the space between the old house and the boundary hedge. Inside, thanks to some ingenious later renovation, the space had been left open. A thoughtfully-placed, grey-tiled modern kitchen was at the south end; the north was home to the dining table. The old window frames would surely allow plentiful sunlight to pour in. Here, in this room, some of the house's other less-desirable aspects were revealed: the fireplace, for instance, a multicoloured clay brick thing, each block adorned with strange spiral carvings, and the cheap sliding door out to the back garden, its shrunken height exaggerated by the high ceiling. Well, every rose has its thorns.

And what a rose it was. The house was strangely unconventional in its layout. The doors to both the lounge and master bedroom were set at 45-degree angles, making clever use of a modest space. Beautifully restored polished oak panels graced the main entranceway, and elegantly-understated plaster mouldings, each individual, each beautiful, adorned each room's ceiling. Although generous with living spaces, the three bedrooms were small, tidy and compact. Finally, to the bathroom and laundry, tucked away in the southern-most corner of the house. The bathroom was an ugly duckling dressed in bright-blue wallpaper and cherry-red tiling, but curiously complemented by rimu panels and rich cork flooring. The laundry, accessed from the back deck, came with an infinitely high ceiling and a chipped red-concrete floor.

I've loved this house since that first moment when I stepped out of the car that Sunday afternoon, almost three years ago. It has always felt like home, even on that first visit. It's not a perfect building, but frankly I love it all the more for its quirks. I find it hard to express exactly how much I adore my house, but I really do.

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Sharon Lam is, supposedly, she says, in her final year of a Master's degree in architecture at Victoria University of Wellington, where she has authored pieces for *ArchDaily, Salient* and *Starling* – along with thousands of iPhone notes.

Craig Martin lives and works in Nelson. His parents, potters Bruce and Estelle Martin, built a John Scott-designed house in the late 1960s and Craig has had a lifelong interest in Scott's architecture; he is responsible for the website www.johnscott.net.nz.

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