



A WINNER BY MYLES

"This Corobrik/Natal Mercury Brick Design Award Winner embodies an attractive low maintenance finish with the use of different shades of Calsi SB face brick, which was specified as a variation from the palette of local clay products."
Myles Pugh Sherlock Murray

Developer: Futura Footwear Ltd
Architect: Myles Pugh Sherlock Murray
Main Contractor: Trescon (Natal)
Face Brick: Calsi SB Mercury Rockface and Platinum Smooth from Corobrik Natal

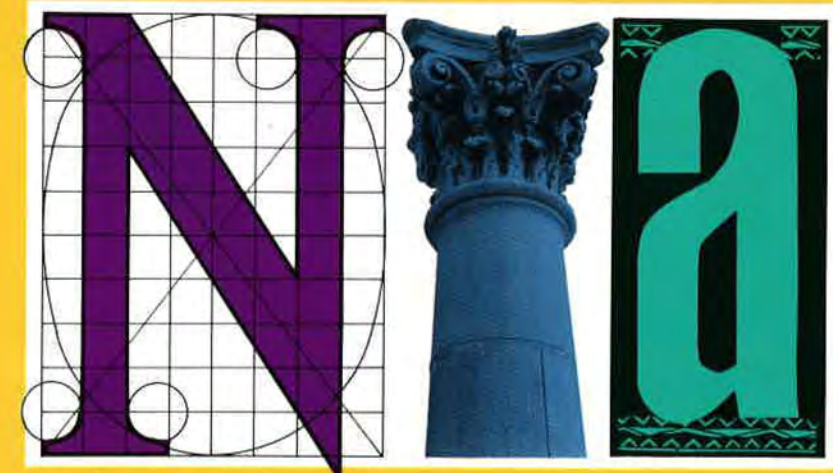


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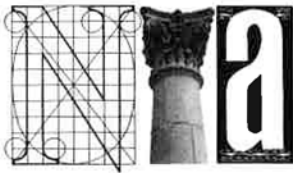
DALTON McCORMAC 1348

A
tribute to
Barrie
Biermann



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Barrie Biermann 1924-1991

THIS ISSUE is dedicated to the memory of Barrie Biermann who died in Durban over the Easter weekend of 1991. The contributors are some of his close friends and represent a cross-section of the very many friends Barrie had.

Hans Hallen has referred to Barrie as the successor to Rex Martienssen, as a *man of scholarship to fulfill the cultural need we have for heroes of myth and legend* (NIA Journal 2/1991). Mythical Barrie was the only lecturer I knew with two doors to his office through which he could literally disappear into thin air. Legendary were his lectures, brilliant if showmanlike. He had a special depth of perception and was a person whom students past and present would always respect. As Hans concluded, students would still, years later, find themselves asking: *I wonder what Barrie would think of this?*

It is known Hans often posed this very question. Barrie would be invited to the *court of creativity* to crit Hans's latest scheme, early in its conception. So did others. Barrie often assumed the role of a soundboard, if not always willingly. Such is the role of a teacher and in some rare cases that role lives on well after the formal student-teacher relationship lapses.

For Barrie the Natal School of Architecture was his life. Admittedly he indulged in a wide array of other interests: good wine, good food, hiking, and game trails. But Natal was his base and Durban the home of his choice.

When he retired, ill health beset him which was a tragedy since he may well have gone on to teach a further generation of architects, to become their father figure, confidant and mentor. While we mourn his irreplaceable loss, the candle Barrie lit for so many of us lives on. Barrie Biermann: myth, legend, teacher and standard-bearer, we are grateful for walking a part of your way with you.

Walter Peters, Editor

OBITUARY: Don Barbour 1924-1992

Donald Bruce Barbour and his wife Monica, tragically deceased in Durban on 7th March 1992.

Donald Bruce Barbour graduated at the University of Natal as an external student of the University of the Witwatersrand. Donald came from an architectural family, his father being William Barbour of Langford and Barbour who were responsible for many of Durban's art deco buildings.

He became a partner of Geoffrey Le Sueur and Partners in the early '60s. The Le Sueur partnership then merged with Stauch Vorster and Partners in the early '70s when Don became a director.

Industrial buildings of note that Don was involved with were: Dunlop's factory, Ladysmith; Durban Turf Club; Clairwood Turf Club; and Krommenie and Cadbury factories in Durban, to mention a few.

Don had an excellent track record for contract and site administration and was highly respected by consultants and the construction industry. He became a keen Round Tabler in the '60s (Durban No.2) holding office as secretary. In contrast to his strict discipline in business administration, his Round Table minutes were received with great amusement.

Don and his wife Monica had a son who predeceased them and two daughters. He was an avid lover of classical music, a keen theatregoer and a great supporter of the arts.

A deep void has been created in all areas in which both Don and his wife were involved and their tragic passing will not be forgotten by friends and colleagues alike for a long time to come. They will be sadly missed.

Peter Butler

Changes in addresses

Rougier, Croxon & Swaitke to No 3 Village Park, 19b Village Road, Kloof
DB Jay to 3 Bexmore, 306 Cato Road, Glenwood
McCaffery Wilkinson & Little to Strathmore Lodge, 305 Musgrave Road, Durban
PHPF Allen to 8 Kilmarnock Place, Morningside, Durban
RJ Platt to c/o Maurice Dibb Associates, 90 Davenport Road, Durban
KA Pearson to PO Box 1648, Durban 4000
Theunissen Jankowitz to Suite 148 (14th floor), Fedlife House, 320 Smith Street, Durban
N du Preez to 9 Cowens Crescent, Pietermaritzburg
PT Hoal to 15 Montcalm Road, Morningside
C Wilsenach, House of Delegates, Private Bag X54330, Durban
WH Morris to c/o van Wyk & Louw, PO Box 47292, Greyville 4023
H Förs, 7 Gardenia Park, 54 Collard Road, Umgeni Heights, Durban
Miss J Whitehead to c/o VARA Studio, 115 St Georges Street, Durban
K Lalloo to c/o Box 8785, Cumberwood 3235
AJ Hofman (Artek 4) to 601 Sanlam Centre, 331 West Street, Durban
AB Adkin to 1 Shamwari, 15 Marche Avenue, Manor Gardens
BJ Becker, (Artek 4) to 601 Sanlam Centre, 331 West Street, Durban
LS Devereux to 43 Capital Drive, Jindalee, Brisbane, Australia
M Napier to PO Box 11331, Dorpspruit 3206
BG Vogas to 7 Tibia Crescent, Umhlanga Rocks
DW Christer to "Springfield," Slaley, Nr Hexham, Northumberland, England
BR McLaren to 5 Greenleas, 1 Camp Road, Gillitts
JC Norris to PO Box 33098, Montclair
AM Ross to c/o Page Henderson, PO Box 101, Te Puke, New Zealand
GD Farrel to 12 Silvermist, 9 Dalry Road, Pietermaritzburg
Changes in Practices, etc
SR Pratt is now practicing under the style of SR Pratt & Associates
JH Royal is now practicing on his own account under the style of John Royal Architect at The Cowshed, 41 Cedar Road, Glenwood, Durban
McLaren Alcock Bedford change in style of practice to MAB Architects
Transfers in class
AJ West from AnT to Ordinary
MG Todd from AnT to Ordinary
Miss JE Masojada from AnT to Ordinary
GS Pallet from AnT to Ordinary
RJ Platt from Retired to Ordinary
AP Pretorius - from Ordinary to Retired
Professor DN Dyke-Wells - from Ordinary to Retired
Changes in Membership
RJF Hamilton - TIA to NIA - 11 Summer Place Gardens, Somme Road, Berea
H Friedel (Muller & Neumeister) - OFSIA to NIA - PO Box 1916, Newcastle
KW Morris - NIA to TIA
AG Koekemoer (Ant) - OFSIA to NIA - PO Box 10586, Meerensee
AR Orman (Ant) - NIA to BIA
MGM van der Voort (Retired) - NIA to TIA
New Members
Mrs MZ Cornford, (Ordinary) c/o ZAI, PO Box 3540, Durban
BN Walton, (Ordinary) 180 McDonald Road, Glenwood, Durban
Dr MPK Keath, (Ordinary) House of Delegates, Private Bag X54330, Durban
SH Lewis, (Ant) PO Box 2, Thornville, 3760
SP Naidu (Ant) 26 Winchester Drive, Reservoir Hills
Miss S Linke (Ant) 5 Princess Anne Place, Manor Gardens
P Venter (Ant) 24 Grace Avenue, Westville
Deceased
DB Barbour

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COVER: Collage by Andrew Verster in memoriam of Barrie Biermann, April 1992. "This African scene is a landscape which spans centuries and continents. The allusions are puzzling, intriguing, amusing and contradictory. At the edge a man is watching. His expression does not betray his thoughts."



Barrie Biermann at the ISAA Natal Awards of Merit presentation ceremony, November 1985.

Jack Barnett Barrie Biermann

Save Barrie's house!

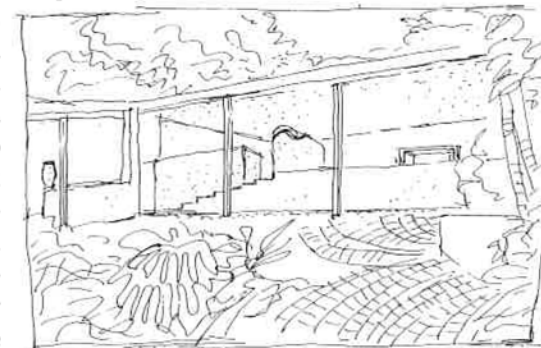
The death of Barrie Biermann last year leaves an important gap which makes the architectural world of South Africa considerably less interesting than it was during his life time. The profession badly needs the penetrating and original critical assessments that a man of Barrie's wide reading, dramatic skill and high intelligence provided, and even now it is doubtful whether many of the profession's leaders fully understand the loss that it has suffered with his passing.

He has bequeathed many essays, books, drawings and slides to posterity, which deserve to be collected and safely housed in a properly managed archive. In addition he designed and supervised the construction of a number of buildings, most of which are unknown to me personally. The one I do know and venerate is his own house, a building and an environment that says more about the architect's attitudes to architecture than anything he has written. It is literally a tract in brick, pavings, plants, garden walls, space, detail infused with humour, slightly cynical at times and full of intellectual vigour. From the moment one enters the property - all that is visible from the road is a small gate and a green hedge on the boundary - and walks down a brick and stone path through dense foliage to arrive at a charming front door, one is already a convert to Biermannism, captivated by cast cement heads in amongst the pavers, cast-iron Victorian fripperies salvaged from the demolition yards, and, an assortment of objects neatly slotted into a scene designed to amuse, embrace and enchant. The world outside is forgotten as one enters the modestly scaled front door, and the house itself. The entertainment continues, as almost everywhere one looks there are some lovingly inserted coins, bits of coloured glass and sculptural fragments to feast on. The living room and stoep, taking up almost the entire width of the house, look on to a beautiful internal garden through great floor-to-ceiling sliding glass To the left is a most ingenious kitchen half open to the living space, and off a covered way ramping down one side of the patio are situated the bedrooms and ablutions, none of which are conventional in shape or finish. The bedroom and study at the bottom of the patio look out on to more garden spaces on the other side.

It is not my intention to describe the house in any further detail, as all one wants to do is convey something of its atmosphere and great importance, in order to make the profession and the public aware of what it is one is talking about. I am convinced that the fate of the Biermann house - that is, whether it is preserved or allowed to drift unimpeded onto the insensi-

tive property market - will represent an important yardstick of the community's aesthetic maturity. It is my contention, and there are many in the profession who support this view, that the house should be bought, restored and permanently kept as a museum for the benefit of the whole South African community. It should be furnished and landscaped as when Barrie lived in it and be opened to the public from time to time as a museum, but perhaps also have a functional role of an appropriate kind.

Fortunately the house contains two separate apartments which could be allocated to a responsible student or lecturer caretaker to live in, so that the cost of looking after the property could be kept to a minimum. The obvious body to buy the house is either the Durban City Council, the University of Natal or the ISAA, all of whom have the infrastructure necessary to set up a workshop management policy to own it. Perhaps it could be jointly owned by all three authorities. It need not cost a great deal to manage, and if it were to provide accommodation for important academic visitors to Durban it could



in fact generate money. But whatever the economics, they are not of such a scale that a competent management could not be set up to handle them. There is also the option of sponsorship from one or more leading South African companies - the possibilities are manifold.

What is needed before all else is the resolve to save this very important house for the nation, as a record of Barrie Biermann's taste and intellect, a great humanist and lover of life. One thinks of the house of Carl Larsen in Sweden, which was saved and restored by the State, and which is today a tourist attraction of importance, as a model for what could be done with the Biermann house. Larsen's house is beautifully restored and furnished with Larsen's own things and is sheer joy to visit. If one could preserve Barrie's house, it will in the same way become a very special mecca for all those interested in architecture and the particular philosophy Barrie Biermann represented, and it will add something very special to the Durban tourists' itineraries.

Jack Barnett, Cape Town

Peter Melvin **Barrie Biermann**

Barrie Biermann - The Active Contemplative

Nineteen Eighty

I first met Barrie Biermann in February 1980. Little did it occur to me at the time that this encounter would be one of those rare experiences; one to savour like a good wine which improves on acquaintance, becomes hedonistic when mature and lives in the memory when the bottle is empty. In fact this encounter was to lead to my wife, and in young adulthood our daughter and two sons, all developing their own special relationship with the 'old warrior' as he was affectionately known by them.

The occasion of the encounter was the result of a trip to South Africa to visit relatives in Cape Town. Knowing of this the then President of the RIBA - Bryan Jefferson - asked me to make informal visits to various Schools of Architecture in South Africa for the purpose of a forthcoming RIBA Council debate on the issue of recognition. The subsequent development of this subject is a story for telling elsewhere, nevertheless Barrie became inextricably entwined in it and as a result, the lives of my family and I were enriched far beyond the confines of apartheid and the issues of recognition.

Durban, in 1980, was my penultimate stop and on the first morning the hotel desk rang to say that Professor Biermann was in reception. My host the previous evening, a practising architect, had warned me that "the people up at the University live in the clouds" and on first sight this was a distinct possibility. A cross between Alec Guinness and Corbusier, Barrie wore a knee-length safari suit complete with owlish black-rimmed spectacles: he appeared to be the perfect professor. As we toured the School and he led me through the amazing collection of models, the pertinence of his quiet comments in explaining the relevance of particular subjects - 11 Campo in Siena and Villa Rotunda in Vicenza for example, and placing them in the context of continuity in teaching design - quickly dispelled any lingering hangover from the previous night's conversation. At the close of an illuminating day



there was dinner at 38 Glenwood Drive - a rabbit that Barrie pulled slowly out of the hat. This event was the first sign that Barrie and his house were synonymous - a spiritual duet of man and architecture illustrating in physical terms the rich cultural dichotomy of Durban ordered by the rigour of European modernism.

The memory of that balmy night and of our host's conjuring surprises with food and wines, lingered after much else faded in the weeks that followed my return to England.

Nineteen Eighty One

The following year in June I returned to South Africa to speak at the ISAA Congress and as the Norman Hanson Fellow to give a lecture at the three English-speaking University Schools of Architecture, as well as at the Bloemfontein School.

Although we had spent only a day together the previous year, the exchange of a few letters confirmed a trip, planned by Barrie, to conduct my wife Muriel and me from Durban to Cape Town by car via Bloemfontein offering an opportunity to see Southern Africa whilst fulfilling the lecture obligations.

Before turning to the journey across Africa, however, I should refer to Barrie's contribution to the Congress. The title of the Congress was 'Architecture, Man, Environment' and it took place from 2-6 June 1981. The proceedings were edited by E Tollman and E J Haarhoff and these contain the text of Barrie's paper "Educating the Architect." At the time I thought it to be a very polished contribution. Subsequently, as my understanding of his mind and method of working, or more particularly, his presentation, developed, I realised that the insight, diagnosis and advice are all present but buried at various levels commensurate with the intellect and commitment of individual members of the audience. Barrie did not tell the architects of South Africa what they wanted to hear, but his packaging of the truth with a mixture of mystery, scholarship and wit ensured a consensus of approbation, underwritten by his closing comment that "Education is a difficult process and it should be kept so."

On the Saturday morning exactly at the appointed time, Barrie picked us up and we drove to the Golden Gate stopping at Little Switzerland for lunch. As Durban fell away behind us another aspect of Barrie came into view, becoming more sharply focussed as the trip developed. An early example of this expansion of character was the subtle way he exposed one's prejudices for one's own bitter sweet enjoyment. In this case the plot involved a visit to an upland Free State farm where petrol was available from an illegal pump. Under the cover of this benign plot Barrie exposed our not uncritical views of the Afrikaaner Boer to the reality of a simple Boer family who were making their own and significant contribution to Man and the Environment; later we come to realise that the plot was conceived to be a double exposure of prejudice - the farmer and his wife having never previously received an English couple!

It was in this remote environment of mountains, bright blue skies, rocks, water erosion, mud and desert that Barrie came alive. He was a master of the wilderness and deftly enhanced each simple act or event with some aspect of his knowledge in an appropriate way. Crossing the Karoo we stopped for a lunchtime picnic short of



Peter Melvin **Barrie Biermann**



something to liven up our simple provisions. During a marital discussion we noticed that Barrie had disappeared only to return minutes later with a handful of exquisite herbs that turned our food into a gastronomic delight.

From the Golden Gate to Fouriesburg to Winburg, where we saw that design-worthy monument to the Voortrekkers by Hans Hallen, and so to Bloemfontein where we were to meet a relaxed and very different Leon Roodt from the previous year and where I lectured to a most receptive group of students. After two days we were off to Colesville, by way of the eroded hillocks of the central plain, and where we were to spend a night; then we journeyed through the Karoo and visited the exquisitely colonial towns of Graaff Reinet, Aberdeen and Beaufort West, gradually descending through various giant rock steps to spend the night at the Lord Milner at Matjiesfontein. Being mid-June the night was bitterly cold but we have warm memories; the three of us sitting huddled in a blanket on our balcony looking over the lunar-like landscape of the Karoo, the sharp geometry of the mountains etched in the moonlight enhanced at an appropriate but unexpected moment by the appearance of a battered flask of some powerfully alcoholic beverage, courtesy of the Professor.

The next day we journeyed on through Towsrivier to the beautifully restored old town of Tulbagh and finally through the mountains that Barrie told us had spat fire during the last earth tremors there, affording a display of pyrotechnics fit for the Gods; then by way of Stellenbosch to Cape Town. We learnt a lot about Barrie in this short trip; his resourcefulness in the wilderness no doubt borne out of respect for and knowledge of the environment, his understanding of the cultures of the races that have lived in and moved across Southern Africa and how all these ingredients became a part of his recipe for an inspired life, a life that gave so much and that became the more rewarding by being clouded in mystery.

During our stay in Cape Town with family, Barrie was staying at Revel Fox's cottage in Simonstown but we had one or two outings together including a visit to the Cape Dutch

wine farm of the Blake family where Barrie had persuaded the owners to retain a rare set of wall paintings for which he subsequently provided restoration advice. It was here that we enjoyed a bottle of 10 year old Faure wine from my wife's family vineyard.

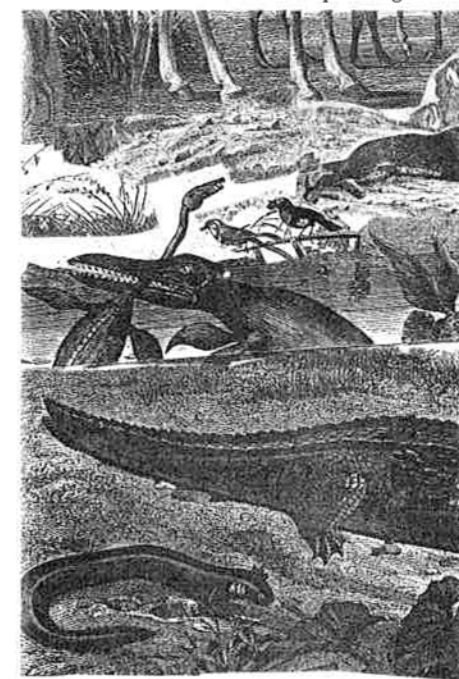
Nineteen Eighty Two

The following year I was invited to become a visiting Fellow of Natal University and in March Muriel and I once again journeyed to Durban and spent two weeks in the guest wing of 38 Glenwood Drive.

Highlights of this trip were a journey to Isandlwana to see the battle site, returning to the local hotel and hearing the proprietor confirm that certain accommodation had been booked for "Boozie" Biermann's party only to be quietly corrected by the Professor saying that "Boozie" was his Admiral cousin; hearing a middle-class suburban couple, who could have as easily been from East Cheam as from Durban, pronounce that no. 38 Glenwood Drive was "a queer house - after all no-one used the front entrance and anyway where was it? and just look at those steps down into the courtyard and without a handrail", and Barrie's request to an excessively boring lecturer from Peru to repeat her lecture so that everyone could enjoy the photographs. The most enduring impression was an early morning history lecture of Barrie's when he outlined the development of Cape Dutch architecture from Palladio houses in the Veneto - a few deft strokes with a board rubber and the Villa Malcontenta became a Cape Dutch farm house.

Nineteen Eighty Three

Barrie took a sabbatical in 1983, spending time in



Europe and North America. Muriel and I spent a month in Florence in May/June and Barrie joined us for a week, revelling in the treasures of the city, arguing about the quality of the townscape and weaving his magical stories about Palladio and the whole Cape Dutch movement amidst al fresco lunches and trattoria dinners liberally dosed with alcohol, including measures of a lethal potion poured from a battered aluminium water bottle into a communal plastic cup saved from his flight 3 months earlier. Later he came to England between trips to Holland and Canada and two expeditions were organised, one to the plains of Wiltshire, where we camped on the Ridgeway path, and the other to Shropshire, where we also camped, high up in the hills on the Welsh border. Never so happy in a city and particularly uncomfortable in London, he revelled in the many tumuli, standing stones and the traces of ancient civilizations in Wiltshire and the ruined castles and fortified manor houses of the Welsh borders.

That year, Barrie developed close relationships with each of our young, but close to adult, children. Although they met again in South Africa it proved to be the last occasion that Muriel and I saw him though we were regularly in touch by letter and telephone; and through a succession of Natal students coming through our office and who still continue to maintain the link with that extraordinary man and who contribute to the growing legend.

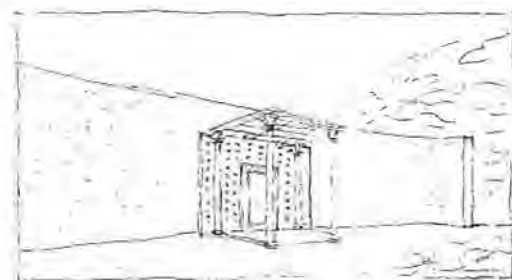
Peter Melvin, Hertfordshire, UK

House Biermann and the Experience of a Sloping Site: (A Comparative Analysis of House Biermann with the Monastery of Santes Creus)

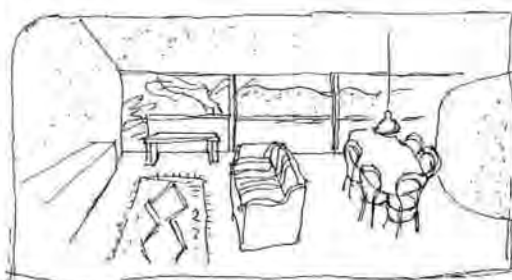
A few months before Professor Biermann died I spent some time at the Monastery of Santes Creus in Spain. My experience of the monastery, with its sequence of aligned terraces and quiet courtyards brought back memories of 1983 when I was fortunate enough to live in Professor Biermann's house, looking after it for him while he was abroad for most of that year. The journey up through the sequence of courtyards to the cloister entrance reminded me of my walk through his house each morning to prepare my cup of Rooibos tea. My experience of these

buildings has prompted me to write this essay.

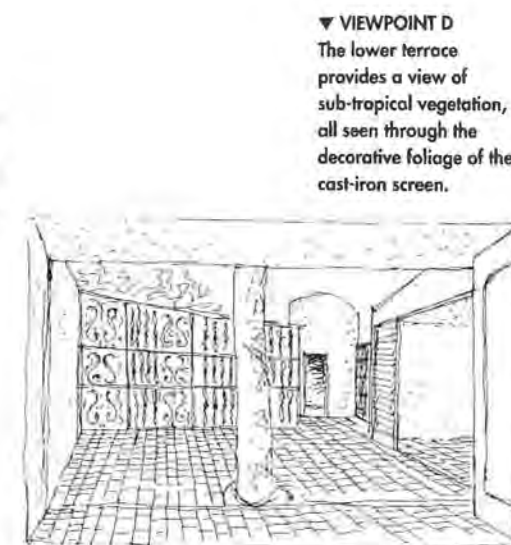
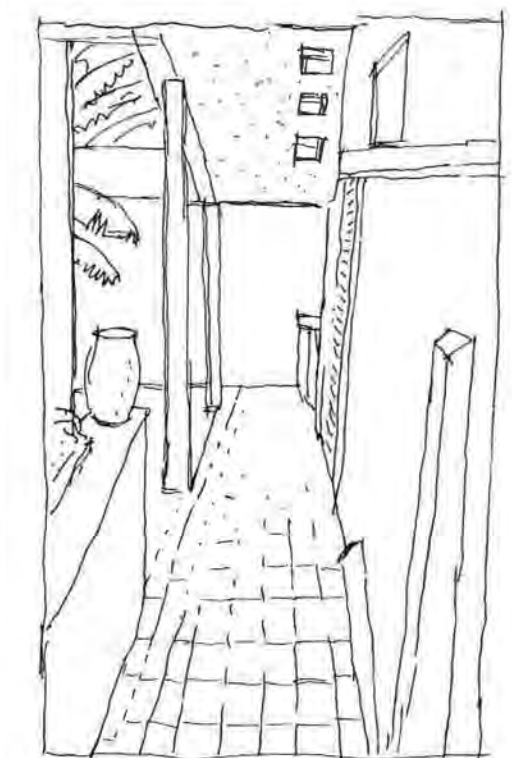
Both places demonstrate a similar approach to the problem of positioning a building on a sloping site. Firstly the progression through the spaces is controlled in such a way that the site is traversed extensively both horizontally and vertically, with frequent changes in direction. Secondly blank walls or architectural facades usually terminate the views and force the change of direction. These facades also perform as screens or layering devices, concealing views of landscapes and gardens which are later revealed at a



▲ VIEWPOINT A
The entrance facade is a long, whitewashed wall, punctuated only by the entrance door which announces the entrance to a private world. An entrance which is similar to that of a monastery.



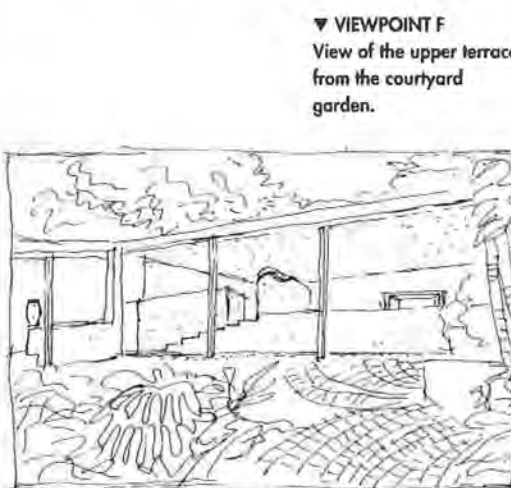
▲ VIEWPOINT B
Only when one passes beyond the hall screen is the wonderful view from the upper terrace revealed.



▼ VIEWPOINT D
The lower terrace provides a view of sub-tropical vegetation, all seen through the decorative foliage of the cast-iron screen.



▼ VIEWPOINT E
View from the Essex Road gate of the lower terrace.



▼ VIEWPOINT F
View of the upper terrace from the courtyard garden.

point where the drama of the view is most poignant. Thirdly the passage through the buildings is characterised by a sense of unfolding courtyards, or terraces, often aligned up the slope so that the experience of the same view, but at different levels, can be appreciated. Both examples demonstrate that a simple plan, carefully organized on a sloping site can produce an experience which is rich and delightful in its clarity.

House Biermann is the private world of a private man; a place where the chaos of the external world is put into order. Views out into the world, beyond its walls, are controlled. Views in from the outside are excluded. Nature, through the garden, is close at hand, available for contemplation. The building also offers itself for contemplation from every viewpoint within its walls. The simplicity of the spaces is directly comparable to that of a monastery, as is the austerity of its accommodation, juxtaposed with the subtle beauty of organisation and detail. House Biermann strives, in the same way as so many monasteries, to create here on earth an ideal environment where one can pass one's days quietly in contemplation.

House Biermann is normally approached from the top of the site, off Glenwood Drive. A path through a dense garden leads down to the entrance courtyard. This courtyard, enclosed by the jungle-like garden, immediately establishes the privacy of the house off the street. The entrance facade is a blank, long, white-washed wall punctuated only by the entrance door and its cast-iron canopy (See Viewpoint A). The single door set into the blank wall is in many ways similar to a monastery entrance.

Once through the door one is confronted by yet another blank wall. Only when one passes beyond this screen is the elevated position of the living room platform revealed with its wonderful views over the roof of the lower platform toward the inland hills of Natal (See Viewpoint

B). The hall screen also forces the first of several changes of direction as one moves through the house.

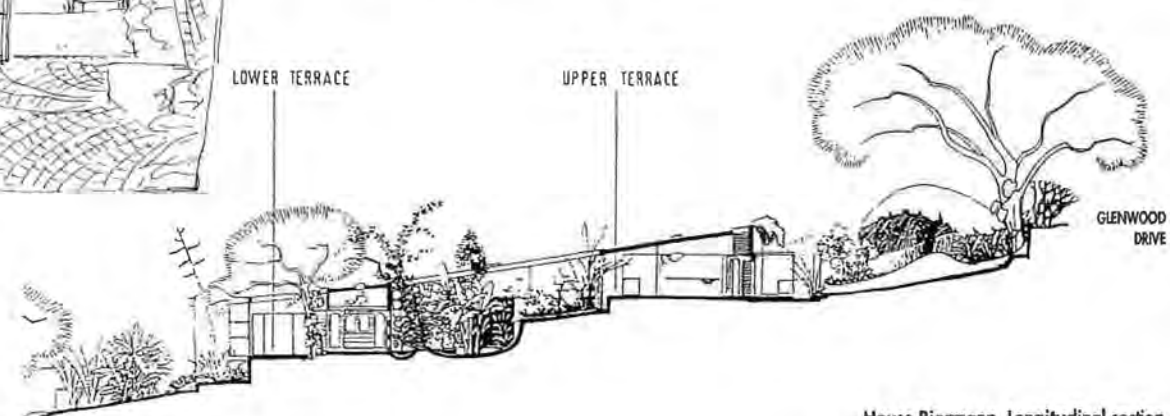
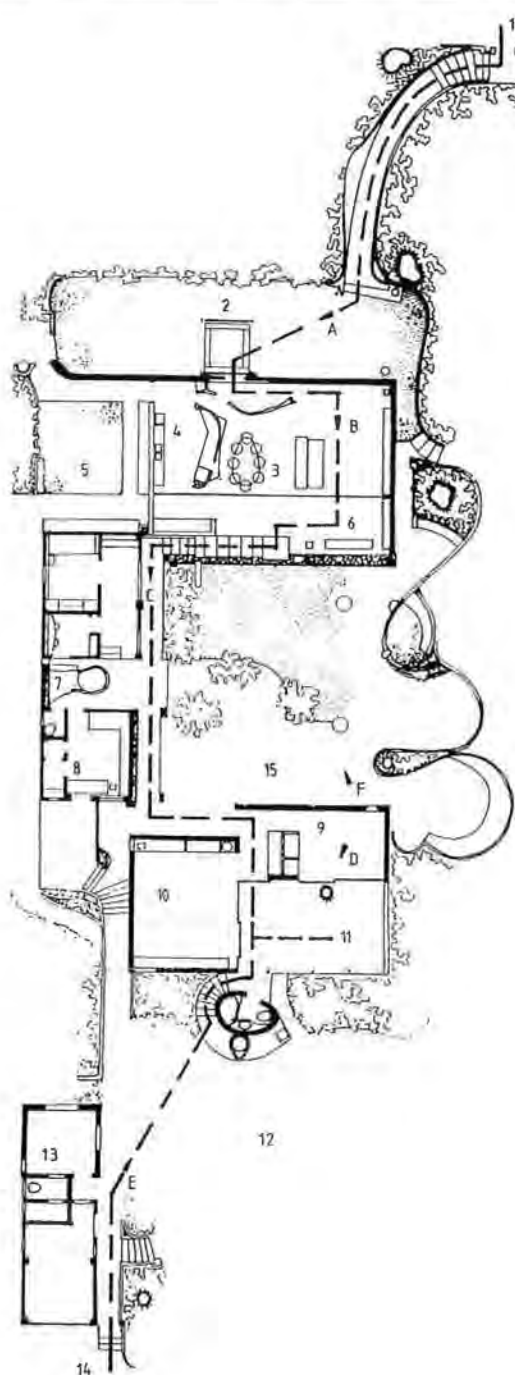
From this first platform one descends the Carrara marble steps, which are deliberately elongated to ease the descent from the upper level to the 'cloister walk' and the courtyard garden. This brick paved 'cloister walk' slopes gently down to the lower platform, giving access to the private study, bathroom and bedroom like a monk's cell (See Viewpoint C). Again this walk is terminated by a blank whitewashed wall, hung with African artifacts. A change in direction leads into the second platform with its brick paved terrace enclosed by a cast-iron screen. At this point one has returned to the same alignment as the upper terrace, but now at a lower level. Elevated here above the lower garden one has an immediate view of sub-tropical vegetation, avocado trees and banana palms, all viewed through the decorative foliage of the cast-iron screen (See Viewpoint D). This view is in pleasant contrast to the distant view of the hills which was provided by the upper terrace.

If the same route is traced up the site, beginning at the Essex Road gate, new experiences of the building and courtyards are revealed. The pattern of movement however is similar, with the route traversing horizontally and vertically across most of the site. The passage of the site draws attention to the building, while the route down the slope focuses on the distant landscape and the more immediate views of gardens and courtyards.

The problem of sloping sites was one which Professor Biermann often addressed in his lectures. He also considered the problem in several articles e.g. the approach to the citadel of Maleoskop (Ref. 1). His other two houses in Durban, viz. House Blatchford and the 'Turkey Run' at Corumben are also situated on sloping

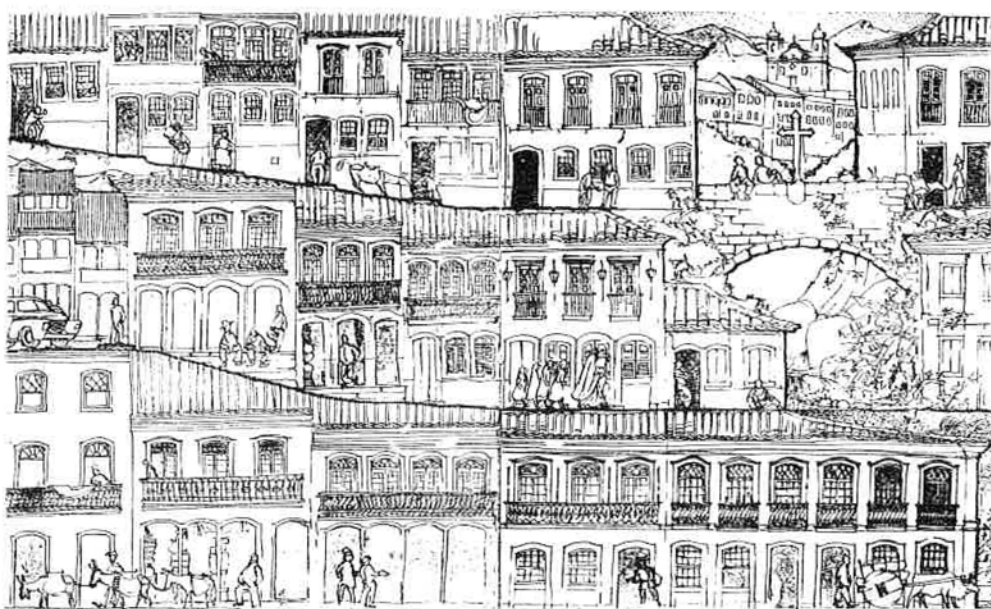
HOUSE BIERMANN

- 1 GLENWOOD DRIVE
 - 2 ENTRANCE COURTYARD
 - 3 LIVING/DINING
 - 4 KITCHEN
 - 5 COURT
 - 6 UPPER TERRACE
 - 7 BATHROOM
 - 8 PRIVATE STUDY
 - 9 BEDROOM
 - 10 STUDIO
 - 11 LOWER TERRACE
 - 12 LOWER GARDEN
 - 13 SERVANTS
 - 14 ESSEX ROAD
 - 15 GARDEN COURTYARD
- — — ROUTE
- ▲ VIEWPOINTS



House Biermann, Longitudinal section

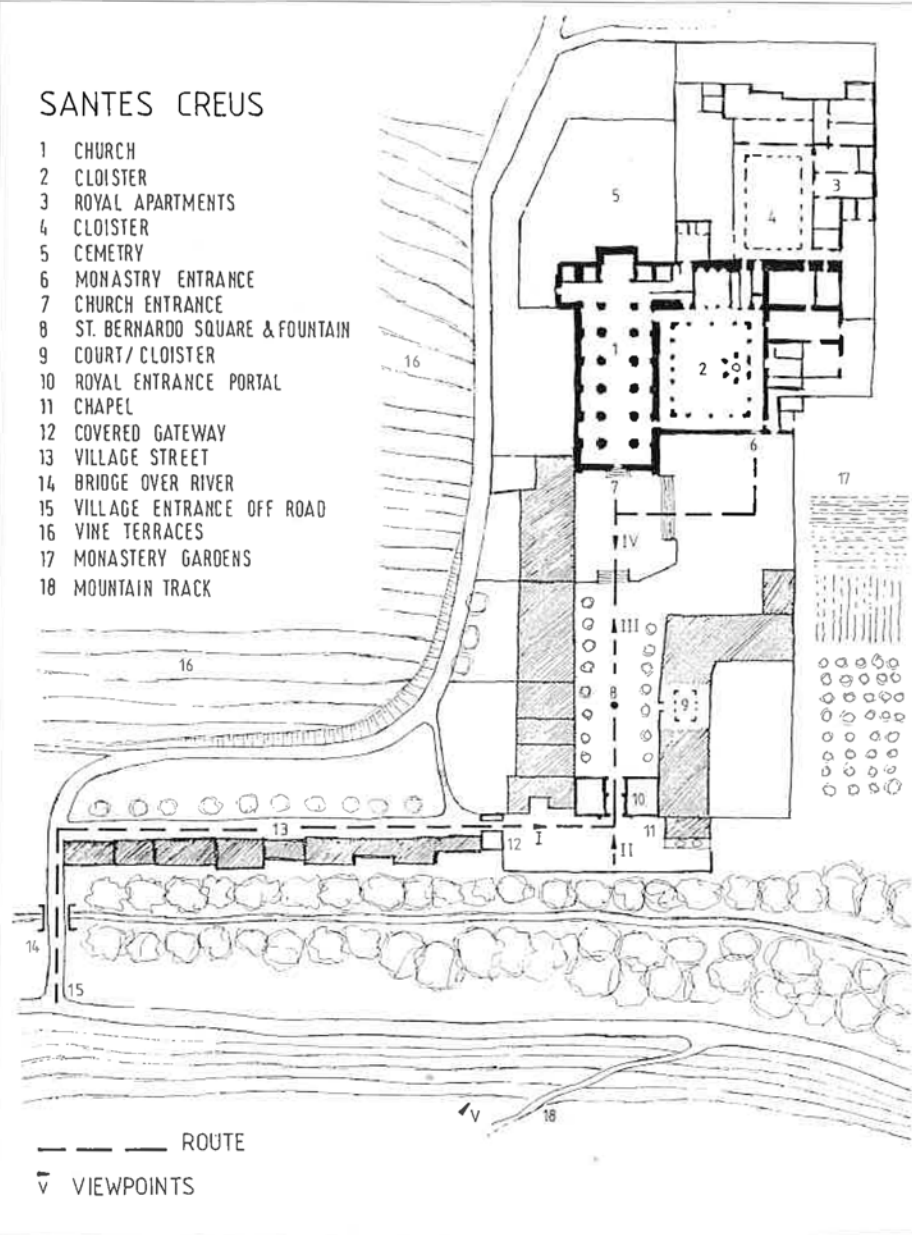
Craig Hamilton Barrie Biermann



Field sketch of street scene in Portugal by Barrie Biermann 1946

SANTES CREUS

- 1 CHURCH
- 2 CLOISTER
- 3 ROYAL APARTMENTS
- 4 CLOISTER
- 5 CEMETRY
- 6 MONASTERY ENTRANCE
- 7 CHURCH ENTRANCE
- 8 ST. BERNARDO SQUARE & FOUNTAIN
- 9 COURT/CLOISTER
- 10 ROYAL ENTRANCE PORTAL
- 11 CHAPEL
- 12 COVERED GATEWAY
- 13 VILLAGE STREET
- 14 BRIDGE OVER RIVER
- 15 VILLAGE ENTRANCE OFF ROAD
- 16 VINE TERRACES
- 17 MONASTERY GARDENS
- 18 MOUNTAIN TRACK



sites. Furthermore he often recorded sloping or elevated sites in his sketchbooks. One of his sketchbook drawings is illustrated here, showing a street scene in Portugal.

The 12th Century Cistercian monastery of Santes Creus is situated between Barcelona and Tarragona in Catalonia. The church and adjoining monastery occupy the high ground of a sloping site overlooking the river and small road which links the monastery to the outside world. The village adjoins the monastery, its courtyards and main street performing as an extension of the cloisters and spaces within the monastery walls.

A bridge over the river announces the entrance to the village. The village itself consists of a single street, lined on one side with modest, terraced 18th and 19th century houses and shops and on the other side by an avenue of mature trees. The spatial experience of the site begins in this street as it slopes up toward the covered gateway. From the gateway one enjoys a direct view of a small chapel. (See Viewpoint I). This gateway gives access to the first viewing platform which overlooks the river. Having enjoyed the view through the screen of trees one turns and looks through the Royal Entrance Portal into the courtyard of St. Bernardo Calvo. (See Viewpoint II). This courtyard rises steadily up toward the steps which lead up to the second viewing platform in front of the west doors to the church (See Viewpoint III). At this point one turns and looks back, down along the approach route, across the tunnel-like space of the St. Bernardo Calvo courtyard, lined with its tall 18th century houses and over the roof of the Royal Portal, toward the hillside on the far side of the river (See Viewpoint IV).

The first and second viewing platforms are aligned so that one experiences the same view but at different levels. The drama of the distant view, revealed at this point, is enhanced by the memory of the earlier, more restricted view from platform one through the screen of trees. In the alignment of these terraces we see a direct parallel with the use of terraces in House Biermann. Adjacent to the monastery entrance is a further platform which provides views over the cultivated gardens of the monastery.

The spatial progression through the inner courtyards of the monastery is similar to that experienced on the approaches through the village to reach the monastery. Restricted gateways give access to open cloisters, reinforcing the already established pattern of restriction, followed by enclosed open spaces. In the cloisters we see many direct parallels with House Biermann. The open screens of the cloister define the courtyard but also allow the garden and cloister to merge. The cloister walk also provides

Craig Hamilton Barrie Biermann



VIEWPOINT I
On passing through the covered gateway a view of a small chapel dominates.



VIEWPOINT II
The 18th Century facade of the Royal Entrance Portal, with a view into the courtyard of St. Bernardo Calvo.



VIEWPOINT III
The west front of the church viewed from the courtyard of St. Bernardo Calvo.

access to the private cells of the monks and the Royal Apartments. Having experienced the outside world through a beautifully orchestrated sequence of spaces one is led through the inner world of the monastery by means of an equally subtle progression of spaces.

The exit through the monastery, out into the world and down through the courtyard of St. Bernardo Calvo completes the experience, with the distant view of the stone fountain and the east elevation of the Royal Entrance Portal. The two roads out of the valley provide further viewing platforms to look back at the complex, one from above and behind, the other from high ground across the river at a level slightly below the site of the monastery buildings. (See Viewpoint V).

As has been demonstrated the principles employed in the design of both buildings are similar. They also share inward looking and contemplative qualities, where the beauty and logic of the design, as it reacts to the site, are revealed in a subtle way to a patient and observant viewer. These qualities are all too rare in contemporary buildings.

Patrick Leigh Fermor describes in his book 'A Time to Keep Silence' (Ref 3) how he asked a monk in the monastery Abbey of St. Wandrille de Fontanelle to sum up his way of life in a couple of words. "Have you ever been in love?" the monk asked in reply. "Yes" replied Fermor. "Eh bien," answered the monk with a large smile spreading across his face, "C'est exactement pareil ...". I am sure that those who have visited and enjoyed Professor Biermann's house would sum up their experience of it in much the same way.

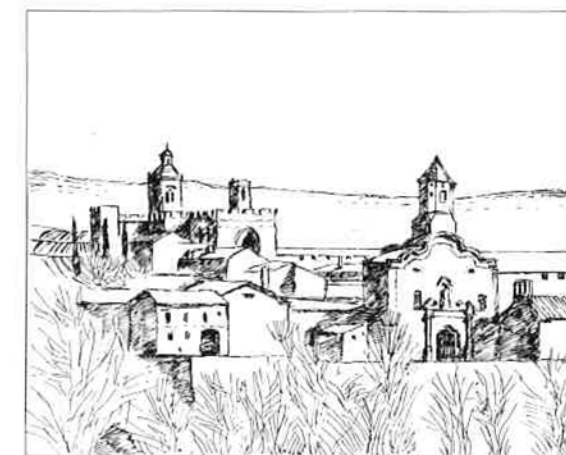
Craig Hamilton, Alcester, UK

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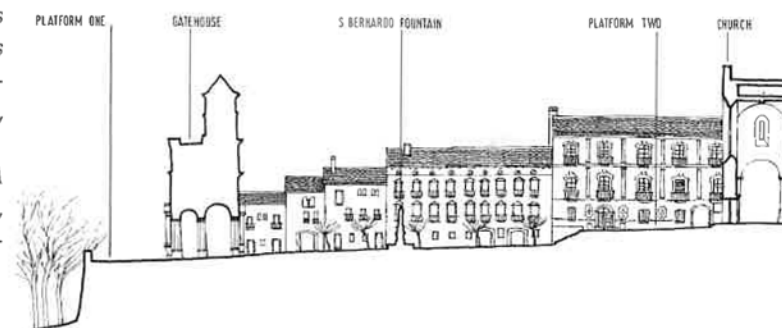
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VIEWPOINT IV
Having reached the west front of the church one turns and looks back down the tunnel-like space of the courtyard of St. Bernardo Calvo and over the Royal Portal to a view of the hillside across the river.



VIEWPOINT V
The view from high ground across the river toward the monastery. Key: a: The west front of the church. b: The Royal Entrance Portal. c: Covered Gateway.



Santes Creus, Longitudinal section

Andrew Verster Barrie Biermann

Planting Palms in the Desert : A Tribute to Barrie Biermann

"It has been my experience that when one is very straightforward and plain then people misunderstand one, so perhaps one should be a bit more devious and clear matters up." Barrie Biermann used simple words though his meanings were often obscure. When he spoke of "planting palms in the desert" he was indeed talking about the greening of the Skeleton Coast, making "a small little dorp", Swakopmund, "like something on the French Riviera." He could equally have been talking about his life of teaching for he was prophet and missionary sowing seeds in ground which was often stony.

He had clear thoughts and always saw the whole picture. When writing an article he used neither notes nor drafts. It was already formed in his head waiting to be recorded. I once watched as he fed some paper from the roll into his typewriter and began to work quickly though with only two fingers. He never stopped nor did he read what he had written. At the end he tore off the metre of typing, signed his name and, without checking it, folded it, put it into an envelope and sent it for publication.

In his head too were stored pictures of places he had been, remembered in exact detail. He would come into a lecture room and begin drawing at one end of the board and work in silence to the other, dust his fingers and face his astonished audience of students for the first time. He might then speak. Behind him would be a panorama of Venice with its buildings and carvings, its domes and spires. The silence too had created wonder and his silences were as eloquent as his speech.

Words were never squandered. A lecture at the Art Gallery once used none. On the left screen were slides of Durban, on the right, Venice. It was for us to make the links. The views were meticulous in composition, and yes, the cranes and the harbour details fringing the water did rhyme with the Canaletto spires of the other city reflected like ours in a lagoon of water. The music he chose helped the illusion. When the lights went on I said to him I thought it a conjuring trick. No he said, Durban is like this if you care to look. But he looked with the eyes of a visionary and saw connections we didn't, and projected an image of our city as it could be and could become had it the imagination. In what other city, he once asked, could you be surprised to find an ocean liner at the end of the street. The new harbour plan takes each of these views of water, ships and Bluff, the very views down Field Street and Gardiner Street and narrow lanes that make us unique, and blocks them off with buildings in the bay.

He chided Durban for its small ambition. "It is simply a question of will for Durban to drop the image of a lower middle class English bathing town and really to get some touch of international style into it. We have everything going for us".

There were few cities he didn't know, but few he loved as much as this one. He constantly made comparisons, however, to keep us on our toes. If some had "realised the impossible," so could we. At Swakopmund "the Germans came to a desert and left it a tropical paradise, we have come to a tropical paradise and we have left it..." He let the slide complete the sentence.

He saw palms on the beach, not stranded in the paving behind a railing but right in the sand, and he saw West Street transformed by them "into a pleasant place to be." He spoke with love of the view of Durban coming in from the North Coast "a magnificent landscape of canefields and sea", one of "the finest approaches to any city anywhere in the world." "Sleazy suburban development" must not be allowed to "eat into the landscape" and destroy it forever.

He saw things, in a big perspective. When he talked of "the modern world," it wasn't the time since the war, or even this century, but the period from the Greeks onwards. The world's history was as real to him as his own and he talked of its people as he did of his friends. Seeing the Laurentian Library in Florence for the first time he was curious to find out how

Michelangelo had dealt with the problem of resolving the junction of two different architectural orders. At the corner of a flight of steps he discovered the answer. He'd avoided the issue by using a device of some sculpted leaves. He was amused and reassured. Faced with a similar problem when he was young, he told me, he had planted a tree.

Fearing a catastrophe in Europe he devised a scheme to have plaster casts made of all the great classical sculptures and brought to South Africa where they would be saved. It hasn't been necessary - yet - but the plan is there.

There were other dreams too which did not happen.

After years of teaching he had discovered that there was a life after the University. The four years of work that he had planned as a defence against his fear of the inertia of retirement, he quickly discovered to be unnecessary. He had never worked harder, he told me, or with more joy. He was writing, working on designs, drawing, reading, gardening and travelling, not abroad, but to wild places where he would hike and climb and prepare himself for the next task.

All lives are not equal. Being with him made you feel richer. Here was a giant.

Andrew Verster, Durban
April 1991



biography & bibliography Barrie Biermann

Biographical Notes

Barrie Ebenezer Biermann was born in Bloemfontein on 26 December 1924. He was educated at Boys High School, Kimberley, and Grey Institute, Port Elizabeth. On graduating from the University of Cape Town with a B.Arch degree in 1948, he became the first Helen Gardner Memorial Prizeman and undertook a tour of study in Brazil in 1949.

While at the NBRI as an HB Webb Scholar and research assistant, he was a collaborator in the establishment of the Minimum Standards of Accommodation. For his doctorate on the origins of Cape Dutch architecture he travelled in the Dutch West Indies and in Europe. The degree Ph.D. was awarded him by his alma mater in 1952. In August of that year he assumed a lectureship at the Natal School of Architecture which was established in 1947. In due course he was promoted to Senior Lecturer and Associate Professor; he often deputised as Head of Department and served a term as acting Dean of the Faculty of Architecture and Allied Disciplines. He retired at the end of 1989 and in the following year he was appointed part-time lecturer for the course History of Related Arts, an appointment he held until his death.

Barrie Biermann died at his home, 38 Glenwood Drive, following a cardiac arrest, on Good Friday, 29 March 1991.

House Blatchford

The built oeuvre of Barrie Biermann was limited. Besides his own house at 38 Glenwood Drive, he was responsible for House Blatchford (1972/73), a six-bedroomed house in Upper Glenwood. The house was subsequently altered by Tollman Haarhoff & Partners (1985) when two minor bedrooms were converted to become a north-facing loggia.



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