



## News Update

April 1999

### **"Beyond Architecture" Farewell Saturday 1 May 2.30pm at Powerhouse Museum's Target Theatre**

As a farewell to the Griffin exhibition at the Powerhouse the Society has organised a special event with guest speaker Trevor Waters, a conservation architect who will talk about "Pyrmont Incinerator and its place within Sydney".

See enclosed invitation for further information.

### **ABC TV Gardening Australia program on the Griffins' landscape architecture 23 April**

Gardening Australia, the ABC television program on Fridays at 6.30pm will feature the Griffins' landscape architecture 'exploring the influence of these progressive landscape architects and their use of bushland and flora in their designs.' It promises to be a very interesting eight minute feature illustrated with material from the *Beyond Architecture* exhibition and film footage of Castlecrag landscape design, and with an interview with Professor James Weirick.

### **David Pratten House for auction**

Designed by Walter Burley Griffin in 1935, it was named 'Juniper Green' by Griffin's clients Mr and Mrs David Pratten who owned and lived in the house until the 1950s. Located at 88 Telegraph Road on the corner of Mona Vale Road, Pymble, it will be auctioned on 1 May if not sold before by Burns and Burns, Pymble tel. 9449 9211. Inspection times are Saturday 1.30 to 3.00pm and Wednesday 12.00 to 1.00pm. The house features a stunning circular lounge and a staircase that sweeps up and over the double doored entry lobby.

Early photographs such as the one in the *Beyond Architecture* exhibition show the house's dramatic

decorative exterior corner piers. Unfortunately they were removed in the fifties. It would be wonderful if the piers and their geometric ornament were reinstated in the future.

### **Castlecove bushland walk Sunday 18 April**

Organised for Heritage Week by Willoughby City Council this will be an easy 2.5 km walk from 10.00am to 12.30pm. Bring snack, lunch, water, hat, sensible walking shoes (some steep stone steps), no dogs.

Cost \$5.00 per person. Bookings essential, maximum number 40. Tickets available Willoughby City Library. Contact Carol Russell (02)9777 7925.

### **Capitol Theatre bought by RMIT**

The Capitol Theatre at 113 Swanston Street, Melbourne completed in 1924 was bought by RMIT University last month. The theatre which is part of Capitol House, a ten storey commercial building designed by the Griffins in 1921 was recently strata titled by its owner Mr Barry Bloom to allow for the separate sale of the theatre.

Melbourne City Council has been very supportive of working towards the theatre's conservation and set up the advisory committee 'Working Capitol' making Councillor Peter McMullin the Chair and the owner Mr Bloom a committee member. The Council and the committee have welcomed the sale to RMIT.

The Director of Commercial and Legal Services at RMIT, Mr Peter Cork has said that the theatre will be used by RMIT's Business Faculty as a lecture theatre and restored in the long term. As with the Institute's other auditoriums it is likely that it will be hired out for functions.

The theatre's spectacular interior originally seated

2,000 people. In 1965 major alterations removed the stalls and the circular entrance stairs leading to the upper foyer to make way for a shopping arcade but the ornate crystalline ceiling and walls and the stage remain intact.

The theatre is listed on the Register of the National Estate as of international significance and is listed on the Victorian Government's Heritage Register.

The Society is pleased that the theatre will once again be fully operational and looks forward to its restoration.

### **Capitol Theatre: a further update**

The Capitol Theatre as a viable auditorium seems assured with the purchase of the Capitol by RMIT University. The Theatre is being used every evening this month as part of the Melbourne International Comedy Festival. Several other organisations are interested in booking the Theatre for film festivals. It is expected that RMIT will only require the auditorium during daylight hours. The Faculty of Business which has an enrolment of over 6000, is located only about 50 metres away in Bourke Street. The Capitol is a perfectly situated venue for the Faculty which does not have a suitable lecture theatre to cater for the large enrolment of first and second year students.

An exciting aspect of RMIT's purchase is that Peter Y. Navaretti, author of "The Griffins In Australia and India" and who is RMIT's Heritage Strategy Planner, and member of our Society, will oversee the improvements and the eventual restoration of the Theatre's upper foyers, which have been locked away from the public for 35 years. When these upper foyers are linked to the auditorium and the lower foyer the whole complex will be a spectacular asset to the City.

Initially RMIT will carry out a regulatory upgrade of the Theatre, including a fire protection system, new airconditioning, new exit doors, a disabled lift and additional toilet facilities. A public appeal is to be launched to replace the missing coloured lights in the ceiling thereby restoring this magnificent feature.

Peter Navaretti would like to hear from anyone who is able to donate artefacts or building fragments which were salvaged from the Theatre when it was closed in the 1960s. Already the upper circle balustrading and some light fittings have been donated towards the restoration. Of particular interest are the lost standard lamp stands from the foyers. Peter can be contacted by telephone on (03) 9925 1985, Fax (03) 9925 2740 or E-mail <peter.navaretti@rmit.edu.au>

### **Avalon: Harmony & Landscape: Walter Burley Griffin, Alexander Stewart Jolly & Harry Ruskin Rowe - a new book**

This book just to be released documents some of the unique organic architecture of Avalon including the house Walter Burley Griffin designed in 1933 for Stella James, now owned by the National Trust of NSW. Ian Stephenson, senior curator of the National Trust, writes about the Stella James House. To accompany this section and published for the first time are photographs and blueprints of the house from the Clare Stevenson collection in the State Library of New South Wales. Also of interest is "Occupational Conservation" written by Griffin and published in the appendix. It was originally published in *Australian Wildlife* journal in 1937.

Jan Roberts, historian, Avalon resident and the book's editor invites members of the Walter Burley Griffin Society to the book launch on Saturday 17 April at 2.30pm at 28 Ruskin Rowe Avalon Beach. RSVP ASAP tel.9918 8810. The book is published by Ruskin Rowe Press and retails for \$39.95

### **Beyond Architecture exhibition to travel to Canberra and possibly Melbourne**

After closing at the Powerhouse Museum on 2 May the Griffin exhibition will reopen in Canberra in a reduced format concentrating on Australia. The National Archives of Australia will host the exhibition from mid July to late September at the National Archives of Australia Building (near Old Parliament House), Queen Victoria Terrace, Parkes, Canberra. For further information telephone (02) 6212 3600 or go to the National Archives of Australia website [www.naa.gov.au](http://www.naa.gov.au)

Later in the year there is a possibility that the exhibition will go to Melbourne and be hosted by RMIT University in Storey Hall. In Melbourne the exhibition would focus on the Melbourne subdivisions, Café Australia, Newman College and the Capitol Theatre.

### **From Fibro House to Opera House: Conserving the Heritage of the Mid Twentieth Century - two day conference**

Friday 23 July to Saturday 24 July presented by the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales at the Museum of Sydney, Bridge Street, Sydney. This national conference will explore the development of Australian architecture, landscape and urban design through the mid-twentieth century, and its conservation.

In association with the conference, the RAI day tour of heritage houses of the twentieth century will follow on Sunday 25 July.

Further information telephone 02 9692 8366. Telephone bookings 02 9518 6866