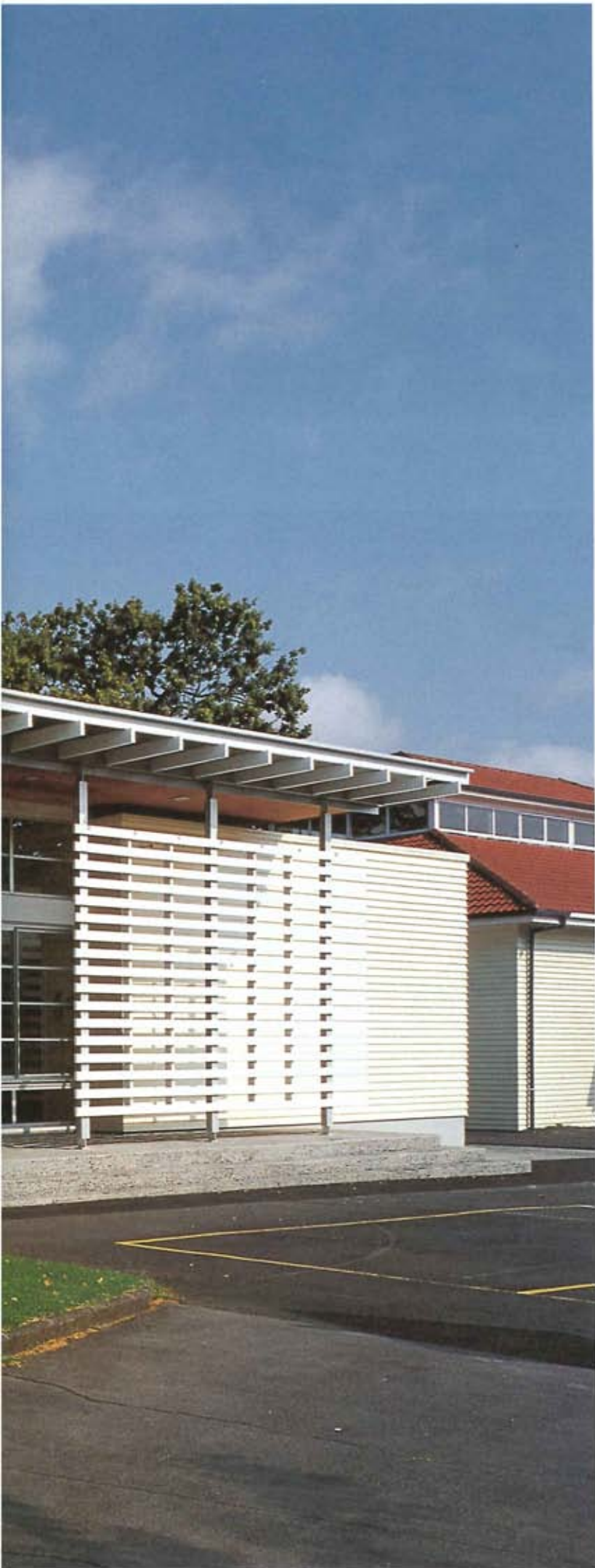




DEFINING SPACE

HERBST ARCHITECTS' NEW LIBRARY AT PARNELL DISTRICT PRIMARY FUNCTIONS AS BOTH A DISCRETE BUILDING AND A UNIFYING ELEMENT. COMMENT BY MARSHALL COOK; PHOTOGRAPHS BY BECKY NUNES.



ARCHITECT'S STATEMENT

The main forces to influence the design of the library were context, edges and scale. Our starting point was a decision that the existing buildings on the site largely created a pleasant environment and that any new buildings should contribute to the effect of a whole created by parts rather than stand alone as an intervention.

The new building needed to address the heavily trafficked Gladstone Road, and a quadrangle edge. The library presented an opportunity to complete the quadrangle by creating a link between the two primary structures on the site and completing the line of well-defined edges. The quadrangle edge comprises two layers – a screen of slats conceived of as a fractured weatherboard face, and the solid faces of the library spaces – separated by the void of the central circulation space. The building presents an edge to the road which deflects vehicle noise and activity. The concrete block resource room is an initial buffer. The mass of the building is then staggered in height away from the road; windows facing the road are screened.

In establishing the masses of the library we translated the functions of the brief into individual masses: two introspective reading rooms; a light and dynamic issue/circulation space; a reference area; an office; and a resource room. The need to maximise wall space for shelving allowed for a purist articulation of forms, with light being largely gained from above. *Lance Herbst*

COMMENT

Auckland's Parnell District School is cherished by generations of local residents. It is a focal point for the local community for whom familiarity has bred respect. Its architectural shortcomings have consistently been received with a benign acceptance. The main school buildings were built in the 1930s during a period of rising social expectations, and they reflect the manifesto that the state should be a nurturing provider for its citizens.

Recent architectural insertions into the powerful framework of these established buildings have resisted the tendency of contemporary architecture to derive its legitimacy from other discourses. The newly completed school library by Herbst Architects has slipped harmoniously into this framework without skipping a beat. The architect's aims were to design a new library within the contextual language of the existing buildings that would be legible in those terms and also relevant to the time in which it was being built.

The palette of wall materials was dominated by painted weatherboards, and

the search for compatible scale within such a diminutive space brief was solved by an astute division of spatial requirements. The library is broken down into a series of activity responsive rooms. Two reading rooms form the bulk of the building to the quadrangle and are over-scaled to provide height to that frontage. The central circulation area is defined by a raised lean-to roof with clerestory lighting; the service area and resource room have a lower stud height to the street. Clean walls of weatherboard, uninterrupted by window penetrations, have a visual mass and appear larger than similar sized adjoining walls.

Nestled between two large classroom blocks, the library fulfils several functional purposes. It encloses the western side of the playground and reinforces the edge; it provides protection from the prevailing westerly winds and sound insulation from a busy feeder road; and it provides a relatively protected link between existing classroom blocks. This all seems a small change compared with the effect it has had in creating an iconic quadrangle, and



SOUTH ELEVATION



NORTH ELEVATION

raising the consciousness of its users. When this fourth wall completed the square it also showed the need for further work on the other blocks to bring the school into the 21st century. The need for porosity, accessibility and social communication is now realised by the school administration and Herbst Architects have been engaged to provide solutions to these problems.

It would be easy to perceive this building from the point of view that it is rational, logical, and clear, and assume that this view matches the architect's thinking. This perception, however, would lessen the importance of the empathetic and intuitive part of the design process from which this small gem derives its charm. The library

building is as much an experience as it is a representation. Lance Herbst has designed an object rather than a symbol; it privileges depth and substance over surface and image, and it emphasises the collective over the individual and the durable over the consumable.

Herbst's South African background in solid systems construction shows through in the areas of plastered block work which are sensitively set against the tactile rhythm of the weatherboards with their deep shadow lines and sharp serrated edges. The visually delicate yet structurally robust screens to the verandas form both an interstitial space and a bulwark against the volley of mis-aimed playground projectiles. The top-lit entry

and library areas are visually warm, socially intimate and perfectly scaled. The central control consul appears on plan to dominate the small spaces, but in reality it plays a pivotal role as a social focal centre. Its scale and detail are essential to the character of the interiors.

Given that the building consists of only seven similarly finished interconnected spaces, it is hard to establish why each seems to have its own experiential identity. Subtle colour and texture variations, changes in floor finishes, changes in light quality, and a variety of ceiling heights add a complexity that generates this special response.

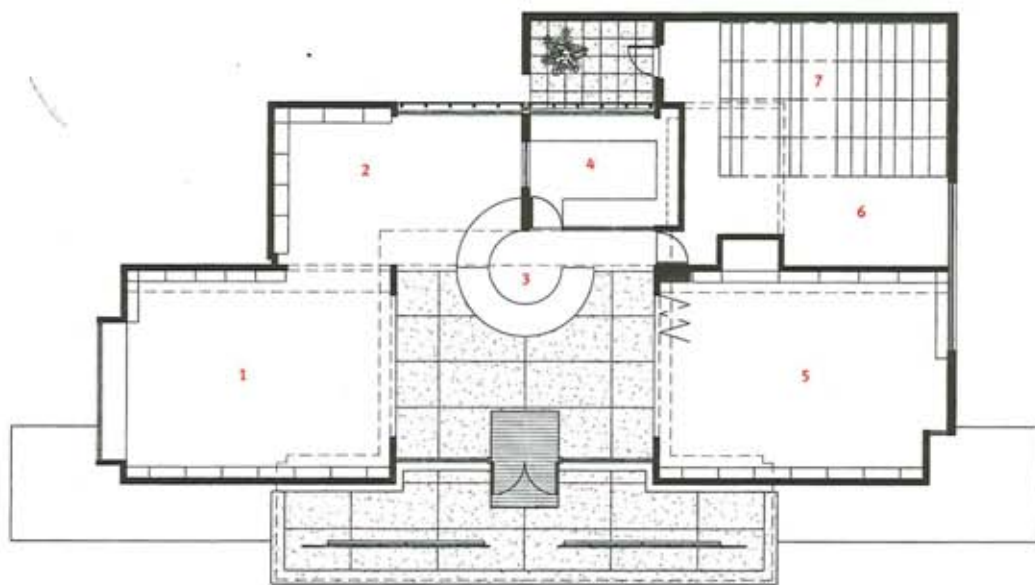
When entering the building there is a moment of anticipated recognition. It is

that moment when you know the exterior had prepared you for the interior, that the integrity of the design is intact, and that the occupiers of the library understand, enjoy and respect the subtle poetics and cognitive aspects of the design. This little library shows that it treasures its contents and welcomes the inquisitive. It is, in my book, a major achievement.

Marshall Cook

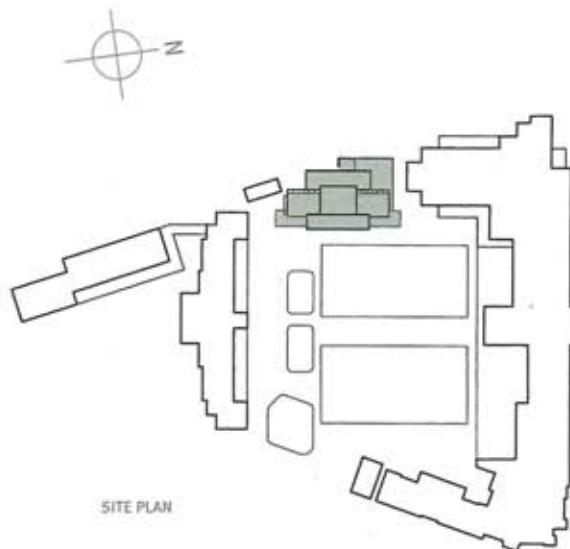
PROJECT CREDITS

- ARCHITECT** HERBST ARCHITECTS
- STRUCTURAL ENGINEER** BROWN AND THOMSON CONSULTING ENGINEERS
- CONTRACTOR** MF ASTLEY LTD
- CABINETRY** WOODSTAR



FLOOR PLAN

- 1 NON-FICTION
- 2 REFERENCE
- 3 ISSUE DESK
- 4 OFFICE
- 5 FICTION
- 6 TEACHING
- 7 COURTYARD



SITE PLAN

OPENING PAGE: THE FRONT (EAST-FACING) FACADE OF THE PARNELL QUADRANGLE OF SCHOOL BUILDINGS. FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: LIBRARY FRONT; LIBRARY REAR; THE LIBRARY INTERIOR – NON-FICTION AND REFERENCE SPACES, AND ISSUE DESK.

