

MULLER, Peter Neil

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BIOGRAPHY

Peter Muller was an independent practising architect with a passion for organic architecture and a profound concern for place for much of the latter part of the twentieth century.

Peter Neil Muller was born in Adelaide on 1927. He was educated at St Peter's College between 1943 and 1944 and then at the South Australian School of Mines and Industries and the University of Adelaide from 1945 to 1948 to gain his architectural education. He graduated with a Fellowship of the South Australian School of Mines and Industries and University of Adelaide Diploma in Applied Science in the course of Architectural Engineering. Muller won a South Australian Travelling Scholarship in 1947 from the Architects Board of South Australia. He also received a Fulbright Travelling Scholarship in 1950, which enabled him to live in the United States of America where he studied for his Masters of Architecture at the University of Pennsylvania between 1950 and 1951 with the assistance of a University of Pennsylvania Tuition Scholarship in 1950.

Muller married Rosemary Winn Patrick in 1953 and they had three children, Peter, Suzy and James (dec'd). They later divorced and he married Carole Margaret Mason in 1964 from whom he was divorced in 1991. Subsequently he remarried and following the death of his third wife, he returned to Carole and to Sydney to live. Muller lived in many places including London, France, South Australia and Sydney and travelled extensively overseas to further his education and special interest in Buddhism.

Following his return from the United States in 1951 Muller started his own independent architectural practice called 'The Office of Peter Muller' in Sydney in 1952 and later practised from his grazing property 'Glenrock' at Marulan in country New South Wales. Muller was employed as a visiting tutor at the University of New South Wales in Sydney in 1962. He was Director of the National Capital Branch of the National Capital Development Commission in Canberra from 1975 to 1977 during which time he had responsibility for the design implementation of the new Parliament House and the National Triangle. This close association with the development of Canberra allowed him to author 'The Esoteric Nature of Griffin's Design for Canberra' in 1976. He has been a member of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects. He was the founding Principal of 'Regional Design and Research' in 1978. And from 1988 onwards he worked as an independent architectural design consultant as 'Peter Muller International' from locations around the world.

When Muller returned from studying in the United States in the 1950s he moved to Sydney where his first architectural work was the Audette House at Castlecrag, NSW in 1952 in which the influence of Frank Lloyd Wright is evident. Following this Muller built his own house at Whale Beach, NSW in 1955. This was a family home which nestled into its site. Muller used earthy colours, dark timbers, and large expanses of glass including a glass roof to the living area (Taylor 1972: 28). The Richardson House at Palm Beach, NSW (1956) was a radial design which featured a fibre-glass domed foyer and circular rooms. His architecture has been described as being 'characterized by a strong sense of geometry and axial composition' (Drew 1988: 681). The Patrick house of 1959-61 at Castlecrag further expresses his environmental sensitivity with the house moulded around a large natural rock face. The

MULLER, Peter COLLECTION

Architecture Museum, Adelaide University

Gunning house (1960) at Castlecrag is said to be a culmination of his ideas about domestic architecture (Drew 1988: 681).

In South Australia his works were few but notable. The Michell House, on Robe Terrace, Medindie (1964) uses stone and timber and has strong sympathies with Frank Lloyd Wright's work. He also designed the IPEC headquarters, Glen Osmond Road, Frewville (1964) which allowed him to explore a commercial building contained on a domestic scale designed to provide a pleasant working environment. In the city centre he planned the redevelopment of the Regent/Paris Theatres and Arcade, Rundle Street, Adelaide (1968).

Muller visited Bali, Indonesia in 1970 a trip about which he wrote 'This experience really transformed me, because I understood that indigenous architecture contained within itself everything I had been intuitively searching for ... the utilisation of renewable local materials assembled in a thoughtful, practical way to suit the spiritual, cultural, emotional and physical needs of the community of individuals. The simple complexity was stunningly beautiful to me, so expressively honest and environmentally harmonious' (Muller to Johnson, 1996). Following this he designed the Hotel Matahari (not built) and the Oberoi hotel (1974) in Seminyak, Bali (then called the Kayu Ayu). His best-known work is perhaps the Amandari Hotel (1989), Bali, Indonesia which was awarded 'The Best Hotel in the World' title in 1992 and 1995. In 2014 Peter Muller was recognised for distinguished service to architecture, being awarded as an Officer of the Order of Australia in the Australia Day Honours, for the adaptation and preservation of Indigenous design and construction, and the integration of the built and environmental landscape.

Muller has been most comfortable designing residential and resort hotel architecture. He developed 'an alternative to the Modern Movement, an organic conception of architecture' (Drew 1988: 681) using natural materials, valuing craftwork and the regional context in which his buildings were set.

Peter Muller passed away on 17 February 2023.

Julie Collins

SOURCES

Collins, Julie, 'Muller, Peter Neil', Architecture Museum, University of South Australia, 2008, Architects of South Australia:

[http://www.architectsdatabase.unisa.edu.au/arch_full.asp?Arch_ID=48]

COLLECTION DESCRIPTION

The Muller collection comprises a USB which holds architectural sketches, finished drawings, writings, and photographs.