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Robert Riddel, *University of Queensland*

Paten House, 1963-67. A Client's Story: Offering a New Perspective for Architectural History

The Paten family has owned farmland overlooking the Enoggera Reservoir since 1858. In 1963, Dick Paten and his wife Del commissioned Brisbane-based architect Neville Lund to build a house on part of the land that was too steep for farming. Lund, who graduated from the University of Queensland a decade earlier, designed them a modest house, perfectly in tune with its site and time. His choice of materials - pale face brick walls, waxed quarry tile floors and timbers such as Rose Mahogany and Redwood, all of which are natural and unpainted - attest to his desire to attain a pure formal language (a reference to his modernist training), while the landscaped setting of the building reveals his fascination with Japan, a country that he visited and from which he derived much inspiration.

Throughout the construction process, Lund, who lived in the neighbourhood, struck up a friendship with the Patens. Next to supervising construction and visiting the site almost on a daily basis, he accordingly continued to advise the couple on their choice of furniture and art, resulting in a Gesamtkunstwerk that today - half a century after its completion - is a testament to its time. Lund not only recommended the Patens to purchase their furnishings from Marimekko, but he also introduced them to Ronald Sabien, who supplied the Danish potbelly stove, and took them to the Brisbane Craftsmen's Market, run by Joy de Gruchy at the time. When the first phase of the house was completed, he even gave the couple one of his own paintings, which to this day hangs on their bedroom wall.

To Lund's own admission - in a book he gave the couple, he acknowledged them as clients that architects only dream about - his relationship with the Patens was exceptional and the synergy between them led to an uncompromised design. And yet, the role of the client is often overlooked in architectural history. This paper uses oral history to narrate the story of the building, told predominantly through the voice of the Patens (as Neville Lund is no longer alive), placing a particular emphasis on the relationship between the architect and his clients. This story is enriched by the Patens' records, which meticulously detail the construction process of the house that they lived in and cherished for over fifty years.

Introduction

This is the story of a modest house built in the western suburbs of Brisbane fifty years ago. What makes it remarkable is that the Patens, the owners who built it, have lived in it continuously for half a century without the need to change it. Only now, as they approach their 80s, have they opted to leave their home, in exchange for a less demanding environment and while seeking opportunities for aged care in the future. What also makes this story a suitable subject for examination, is the fact that the house was designed by a prominent Brisbane architect for clients who became close friends. This relationship between client and architect allowed the design to demonstrate a number of themes without compromise, as the Patens freely took the advice of their architect, Neville Lund, in whom they trusted completely.¹ The story of this house was obtained through three interviews with Dick and Dell Paten, which gave revealing views on the house and its attributes from a clients' point of view rather than - as is more usual in recording architectural history - from the perspective of the designer.²



Fig. 1. The Paten House at 9 Mt. Nebo Road, The Gap (Brisbane), viewed from the east. Photograph by Mikki Finlay, 2013.

The Paten House and How it came about

The Paten family has owned land in the Gap area of Brisbane since 1858. Dick Paten's great grandfather, John Paten, built a substantial single-storey home in 1862 along the Waterworks road, which led to the Enoggera reservoir, supplying Brisbane with water. This home, known as 'Walton', was later extended in 1901 with an upper floor and in 1960 was inherited by Dick Paten as a newly married geologist.³ Dick and his wife Dell set about repairing the old home, which - through neglect - was in poor condition. Their intention was to make it their home. As the earliest house in the area, it also attracted the attention of Neville Lund, an architect who lived nearby.⁴ One Sunday morning

1 Neville H. Lund, born 1923, died in Brisbane in 1983. See: "Noted Brisbane Architect Dies," *Courier Mail*, 26 January 1983.

2 Dick and Dell Paten, Interview at 9 Mt. Nebo Road, The Gap (Brisbane), 11 October 2013.

3 Drawing by architect George Reading for additional floor at 980 Waterworks Road, dated 1901, held by Dick and Dell Paten.

4 Lund's house was 1169 Waterworks Road (The Gap, Brisbane) but is now accessed from Bromar Street.

Lund knocked on their door, and asked if he could have a look at their house, as he was interested in its history. The Patens sought Lund’s help in calculating the cost of the repair of the home. He agreed to assist, but it soon became apparent that the cost was likely to be much more than the Patens had envisaged. Finance was not available at that time to repair buildings older than fifteen years and so Lund suggested they would be better off building a new house instead. The old home was demolished and the land sold.

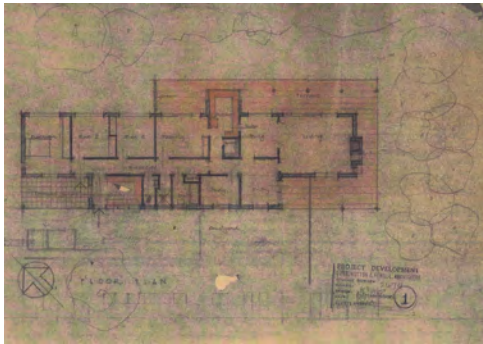


Fig. 2. Schematic plan for the Paten House by Neville Lund
Source: Fryer Library, UOFL211/
job number: 2474/ date: 1963.

The Patens selected a site on family land further west, overlooking the Enoggera reservoir, but with views to Brisbane city to the east and beyond, as far as Moreton Bay and Stradbroke Island. The site at 9 Mt Nebo Road was then accessed from the southern side and had been levelled as a building site by Dick’s father who had removed about a metre on the most elevated part of the land. The house was positioned east-west on the level pad that had been prepared, which in its unimproved state contained large granite outcrops. The site of the new house was eventually connected by a driveway from Mt. Nebo Road to the west.

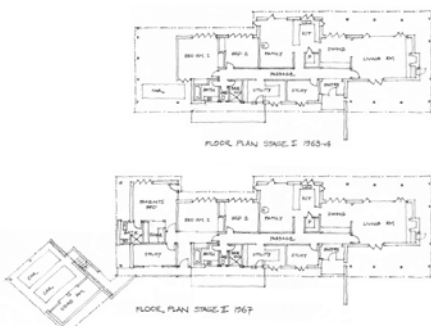


Fig. 3. As-built plans of the Paten House.
[Top] Stage 1, 1963 [bottom] Stage 2 with extension
to the western end, 1967.
Source: redrawn by author.

The design of the house took the form of a simple rectangle with several indents, forming a veranda on the Eastern end. The end elevations were essentially blank with windows along the two long walls, protected by a generous overhang of the roof. The entry was from the Southside and guests were

directed along a path, parallel but below the south wall, to a porch near the far end and opposite the dining room. The living room, to the right of the entry, contained a built-in fireplace and chimney at the eastern end. A double carport and turning area, positioned on an angle to suit the driveway, were separate to the house but connected by a wall to the back entrance.

Building the house

The house began construction in late 1963 after drawings were completed by Lund in April the same year.⁵ To save money, the excavation for concrete footings were done by Dick and his father and because of the delay in the delivery of reinforcing steel, the trenches were washed away by a sudden downpour.⁶ Lund's recommended builders, Tilden & May, organised the trades; such as the bricklayers, Blom & Warren. Lund, as he lived locally, visited the site almost daily and drew details as required – often on the white bricks. He was constantly refining the design, and his clients were happy with this approach.⁷ The ceilings were Brush Box boarding, which followed the roof pitch and were naturally finished. The ceiling was lowered over the central passage and entry. Many of the light fittings were placed asymmetrically and recessed into the ceiling lining. The house has some individual design features with niches and shelves within the brickwork walls, with concealed speakers behind black hessian panels. The Patens requested that the doors from 'Walton' be used in the new house and provisions were made to increase the width of doorways accordingly. In the end, the only door reused was the cedar front door as the other doors required too much work.⁸ A mirror from the old house was also incorporated into the dining room. The cost of the work was about 6000 Pounds paid from savings and a bank loan of 2500 Pounds.⁹ It was built on a cost plus 10% basis.

Later Developments

The house has had some improvement and enlargement since it was first constructed. The first works in 1967 occurred after four years. When the family had grown, an additional bedroom, bathroom and study was added at the western end, as well as a double carport. These elements were all designed by Lund and completed his design intent. The concrete driveway from Mt. Nebo Road was the next improvement before landscaping works within the largely bush garden. Lund assisted with the garden design and relied on his friendship with landscape architect Arne Fink for advice. At the eastern end an in-ground pool was added in 1975.¹⁰ Described as a "squashed lemon" shape.

5 Lund, Hutton, Ryan, Morton collection at University of Queensland, Fryer Library: UQFL 211, job number 2474, drawings 18T, 1963.

6 Dick and Dell Paten, Interview.

7 Paten, Interview.

8 Paten, Interview.

9 Paten, Interview.

10 The quote for the pool was \$6368 if dry weather and \$6668 if wet. Source: personal records of Dick and Dell Paten.

The pool, built by Pleasure Pools, was one of the first to use salt water instead of chlorination. It was published in the magazine *New Ideas for Beautiful Pools*¹¹ and featured a black interior and brick-paved edges. The landscaping around the pool shows a Japanese influence. A photo of the home was used to illustrate the contemporary nature of the veranda in an article in *House and Garden*, circa, 1976.¹² More recently, the kitchen was refurbished. The original white Laminex bench tops were replicated and an overhead cupboard was removed above the bench, separating the kitchen from the family room. The removed cabinet was reinstalled in the laundry. A dishwasher was incorporated below the sink. Finally, a pergola was added to increase the paved outdoor living area on the south side of the living room. This location enjoys the best views of the water in the dam.



Fig.4. The freeform pool in its landscaped bush setting.
Photograph by Mikki Finlay

The Thumbprint of the Architect

The style of the house and the way it was furnished was owes a lot to its architect, Neville Lund. Lund studied architecture after war service with the RAAF, where he had served as a navigator in bomber command. He graduated from the University of Queensland in 1954. Lund joined the local Brisbane firm of Ford Hutton and Newell¹³, which, around 1958, became rebadged as Lund, Hutton and Newell, after the death of Eric Ford. Lund had built his own home along Waterworks Road, the Gap, mid-way between 'Walton' and the site of the Paten's new house.¹⁴ While both houses share some structural similarity in roof framing and orientation, there were considerable differences in that Lund's own home was timber-framed and high-set, while the Paten's home was constructed of brick on a concrete floor slab laid on the ground. The decision to use face brick walls was made due to its associated low maintenance as well as appearance, as the pale cream bricks provide the finish for both the exterior and the interior walls. The bricks, "Newmarket Creams", were the locally made by

11 "Freeform or Geometric? The Case for Curves," *New Ideas for Beautiful Pools*, no. 125: 24-25.

12 "The Charm of the Verandah," *House & Garden* (undated): 6-7.

13 Don Watson, Judith McKay, *A Directory of Queensland Architects to 1940* (Brisbane: The University of Queensland Library, 1984).

14 According to a newspaper article, published in the *Courier Mail*, Lund's own house was "best known for its [...] Japanese gardens with bamboo water pipes, lily ponds and raked gravel which attracted busloads of visitors." *Courier Mail*, 1 June 1996.

Newmarket Brickworks. The Patens' home has almost no painted surfaces, since timber beams and ceilings, as well as window frames and doors, are all stained natural finishes. The concrete floors originally had Honan-seagrass matting (now replaced by carpet) to the living area, with cork in the kitchen, entry hall and bedrooms, waxed quarry tiles to the family room and ceramic tiles in wet areas.¹⁵

Years after Lund's death, his clients still refer to him as an artist. He introduced them to the Craftsman's Market at Toowong, which was run by Joy De Gruchy at the time. Lund's predilections included Marimeko fabrics throughout for curtains and wall-coverings, as well as the Arabia-ware ceramics, evident in the kitchen. The Patens were also introduced to Ronald Sabien, who provided the Norwegian (Jøtul) potbelly heating stove in the family room.¹⁶ Lund visited the house frequently and wanting to dress it when the Patens first moved in, and thus presented them with a painting he had recently finished, to hang on the bare brick walls of the living room. The painting was done during classes conducted in Brisbane by Roy Churcher.¹⁷ The Patens were introduced to Brisbane's art scene by Lund, who took them to various galleries, such as the Johnson in Bowen Hills, Kennigo Gallery and the Design Arts Centre in Spring Hill. The architect, clearly pleased with his work, used it as a vehicle to spruik his services to intending clients. He also brought groups of students on tours to the house.

Lund's Influences

By the time of the first addition, Lund had visited Japan and this is evident in the detailing of the former main bedroom, which is separated from the passageway by sliding Soshi screens. Also, Japanese garden elements using the natural granite of the site and raked gravel appear in several places. Another influence on Lund's architectural work was his admiration for the work of Brisbane architect Robin Dods. In his undergraduate thesis of 1954¹⁸ Lund studied and extolled the virtues of the houses Dods had designed fifty years earlier. Lund considered Dod's best design to be the Littledike House of 1902 in Clayfield, which has a similar floor area to the Paten House. The differences are many, but most importantly the Dods house is highset and of timber construction, with a steep (32.5°) hipped roof while the Paten house is a slab on the ground with face brick walls and flat with a low set (7.5°) gabled roof, with ceilings following the line of the rafters. Both houses favour North side openings for the rooms to the outdoors and both make use of stained finishes, in preference to paint.

15 Dick and Dell Paten, Interview.

16 Dick and Dell Paten, Interview.

17 The Contemporary Art Society ran art classes taught by prominent painters at Kangaroo Point in Brisbane. This is where Lund attended the classes by Roy Churcher in 1962.

18 Neville H. Lund, *The Life and Work of Robin S. Dods A.R.I.B.A.*, unpublished dissertation (Brisbane: University of Queensland, 1954).

Neville Lund was the managing partner of a progressive and growing architectural practice from 1958 until his death 25 years later. Within the firm of Lund Hutton Newell Black and Paulsen, there were a number of architects capable of design, such as Maurice Hurst and John Morton. Lund used their skills freely while paying more attention to securing projects and maintaining client relations. The practice also collaborated with other firms, such as the Chicago-based firm Skidmore Owings and Merrill, who worked with them on the new offices for the works department in George Street between 1966 and 1974.¹⁹ The Paten house was a small project and for Lund to personally design it, was as a favour to the Patens, who were his close friends. The Stodart house at Fig Tree Pocket, for instance, which Maurice Hurst designed for other clients of the firm at the same time, had a budget of perhaps four times the cost of the Paten project and was considerably greater in size.²⁰

Conclusion

This paper is part of a larger survey of the development and evolution of the Queensland house from European occupation in 1824 until the present. The study looks to record data on a selected list of examples, arranged chronologically to establish the following: date of construction; floor plan as built and site plan; floor area; cost of construction; owner/ architect/ builder.²¹ Suitable examples of houses were given as research assignments to students with the aim of assembling a database of measured drawings for comparative analysis. The Queensland house has always been considered to have distinct differences to those built elsewhere in Australia.²² There were several reasons for this, including: the wide use of quality timber from local sources; climatic considerations; as well as comparatively limited financial resources. The examples selected covered a wide range of social ranking and economic circumstance on the part of the owners and/or occupants. To be useful, apparent innovations had to be identified, which contributed to and became absorbed into the tradition of house aspiration, form and design.

What first drew my attention to this rather modest example was that the Patens were friends of Neville Lund, which suggested that the design was probably Lund's own. The interview with his clients established beyond doubt this was the case and their architect had free reign. Lund was one of my lecturers, when I was a student at the time the house was built. He was also the principal of a large practice with offices in Brisbane and Townsville and employed a number of good designers.²³ I was never sure what he personally believed and which works that came out of the firm could be attributed to him. After his earlier study of Robin Dods, he always maintained that he was much

19 Queensland Public Works Department, 1980 George. Entry for '25 Year Award Enduring Architecture' (undated film).

20 Lund, Hutton, Ryan, Morton collection at University of Queensland, Fryer Library: UOFL 211, job number 1944a/ 1944b, drawings 8N, date 1959/1962.

21 The project was begun some years ago when I taught Architectural History at the Queensland Institute of Technology (QIT, now QUT) in Brisbane.

22 Rod Fisher, Brian Crozier (ed.), *The Queensland House. A Roof over our Heads* (Brisbane: Queensland Museum, 1994).

23 Among them were Maurice Hurst and John Morton.

influenced by the fine work done by this architect. While in his thesis, he says of the Littledike house: "perhaps Dods' best",²⁴ - it is confined to descriptions of the lyrical detailing of the veranda, as well as the design of the front fence, its gate and gateposts. Generally, he mentions the characteristic of all Dods' houses, which concealed the "ugly forest of bare poles"²⁵ by sheeting the undercroft of the house with wall cladding, to more effectively balance "what might have been an overpowering roof",²⁶ and helped to tie the house positively to the ground. He makes no mention of the piazza space of the veranda, and the way verandas were used as living space.

What the Paten house also shows is that - although Lund had great respect for the work of Dods - he was also responding to the traditions and taste of his time and the discipline of attainable cost of construction. The house Lund designed for the Patens is typical, in many ways, of houses built by other architects in Brisbane at the time. For example, Hayes and Scott, John Hitch and Ted Crofts - all used similar low-pitched pavilions. Nonetheless, it is a pure example of Lund's own design predilections (which incorporated a range of design influences) and it is unusually well preserved. Even though he had passed away some thirty years prior to my visit, the story of the house could be retrieved through recorded interviews with his clients, who were also friends, while the house and its contents existed largely unchanged - a rare occurrence that was worth pursuing.

24 Lund, *The Life and Work of Robin S. Dods* A.R.I.B.A., 21.

25 Lund, *The Life and Work of Robin S. Dods* A.R.I.B.A., 15.

26 Lund, *The Life and Work of Robin S. Dods* A.R.I.B.A., 16.