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German trained architects Hugh and Eva Buhrich arrived in Sydney in 1939. Institutional acceptance was to be hard won. Thirty-two years later, finally passing the NSW Architects Registration Board approval process, in 1971 Hugh was permitted to call himself an architect. Board policy in the 1940s had been to “refrain from registering foreigners, especially those who had come from Europe in recent years.”

Eva worked with her husband without registration and in local offices, also as a freelance ‘designer.’ In spite of her professional education, recognition was to come through her architectural writing. In a substantial career she wrote consistently for Australian House and Garden, the Australian Women’s Weekly, Woman and Walkabout. A highly regarded architecture column in her name appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald from 1957 to the late 1960s. Hugh’s marginalisation was mitigated by Eva’s reputation as a critic, which offered an avenue for representation of his (and occasionally her) work in the context of other recognised professionals.

Years after her death in April 1976 and Hugh’s retirement in the early 1980s, the couples’ second home designed and built by Hugh at Sugarloaf Point, Sydney, was celebrated. Described in the 1990s as the “finest modern house in Australia,” and now enshrined, that work is emblematic of late, widespread acclaim. In 2014, the NSW Chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects newly named a ‘Hugh and Eva Buhrich Award for Alterations and Additions.’ Exploring a scrapbook kept by Hugh, containing published instances of his work (many in publications associated with Eva) from 1941 to the year of his registration, this paper will examine the early negotiation between these architects and institutional acknowledgment: Hugh and Eva, both inside and out of Australian architecture.
Hugh and Eva Buhrich had met in November 1932 on their first day at the Technical University in Munich, studying architecture. Both worked and studied further in Berlin and at the ETH Zurich under early modern German and Swiss architects Hans Poelzig and Otto Salvisberg respectively. Hugh has recorded additional employment with Alfred Roth in Zurich and his degree completion in 1936 at the University of Danzig. Displaced by war, via Holland and London the couple arrived in Sydney in 1939.

Forming the cover of her 2007 book 50/60/70 Iconic Australian Houses, Karen McCartney has selected a large photograph of the second home designed and built by Hugh for their family at Sugarloaf Point, Castlecrag. Within she notes the naming of this house in 2006 by a panel of Australian Institute of Architects judges as the “Building of the Decade” for the 1970s. Now known internationally, this architectural work has been repeatedly re-published in collections and exhibitions of important Sydney houses and is heritage listed as a nationally significant work of twentieth-century architecture. When Barry Bergdoll, Chief Curator of Architecture and Design at MoMA, New York, visited Sydney in September 2014, he was advised that one building he should visit was Hugh’s house on Edinburgh Road. That year moreover, the New South Wales Chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects celebrated this couple’s collective contribution to the profession, creating a newly named “Hugh and Eva Buhrich Award for Alterations and Additions.” Today rewarded, institutional acknowledgement for these architects had been circuitous.

McCartney comments in her book on the refusal by the NSW Board of Architects to recognise Hugh Buhrich's architectural qualifications “and, in doing so, denying him the right to practice officially as an architect.” She quotes Australian architect and writer, Peter Myers: “The Buhrichs must have been somewhat nonplussed by the refusal, especially as the equivalent body in the UK, the RIBA, had clearly recognized them as a talented couple, and helped support them financially to make the trip to Australia.” Hugh and Eva’s surviving son, Neil Buhrich, today describes his father repeatedly sitting and failing to pass an exam to gain architectural registration. Neil reports his parents being despondent about the lengthy process, discussing it during mealtimes. In a published interview conducted just months before he died, Hugh spoke about the effects of being unregistered, “Every time I designed a building,” he says, “I would get a ‘please explain’ letter from the registrar…”

Choosing her profession, Eva had “read all I could find about modern architecture which at the time was an expression of modern life” and traveled to Stuttgart and Berlin to see “the brave new architecture of Gropius, Corbusier and the Bauhaus … unfortunately I could not (or thought I could not) go to the Bauhaus because the diploma was not recognized in Germany.” Independently minded and politically engaged, she had prioritised institutional approval of her training. In a short unpublished autobiography, she has added an afterthought, “As it turned out, my degree was not recognized anyhow in Australia.” Never registering, working in offices and occasionally with her husband as a ‘designer,’ she received professional recognition through her writing. Articles under her name as well
as many pseudonyms appeared regularly in *Australian House and Garden*, the *Australian Women’s Weekly*, *Woman* and *Walkabout*. From 1957 to the late 1960s she was the *Sydney Morning Herald*’s respected architecture critic. Her engagement with specialised material and trade publications as well as popular home magazines offered avenues for public representation of Hugh’s and occasionally her designs for furniture, interiors and buildings. Aspects of his professional marginalisation were in this way mitigated.

Practising as a ‘designer’ or ‘planning consultant,’ a scrapbook kept by Hugh from 1941, close to the time of their arrival in Australia, is now part of an archive held in the State Library of New South Wales. Covered with grey contact adhesive and collecting cream and black paper sheets, the volume is approximately 7cm thick, 30cm wide and 38cm high. Assembled with care, it documents Buhrich’s architectural work via photographs taken with the view to publication as well as cuttings of published articles. Leaves could have been added or removed without damage by unscrewing two binding pins, although 50 pages remain unused. Seventy are filled with diligently accumulated newspaper and magazine mentions of Hugh or his designs. Throughout, images appear professionally photographed and Eva is frequently associated with the texts. Via primary archival research examining the format, layout and contents of his scrapbook, this paper will explore that document for its capacity to chart Hugh’s negotiation with local professional recognition. Recording a lack of official ‘architectural’ status through most of his working life, the album doubly indicates his distinctive body of early work and its wider public representation. It will be argued that Eva’s role in this last respect was vital.

Unfinished as a whole, early entries of the scrapbook are deliberately assembled, pasted in and annotated, with image and text arrangements slowly but progressively becoming less mindfully structured. Not pasted but loosely included in the latter section are numerous magazine excerpts, articles, newspapers, clippings and photographs of many sizes and proportion, from postcard sized images to 25 x 30cm prints, both colour and black and white. Inside the back page of the binder are some more personal items including close family photos.

Broadly ordered chronologically, marking Buhrich’s professional progress, the State Library archive dates this album from 1941-1959. Pages covered with pasted articles toward the end however include: 1962 press cuttings documenting a Middle Cove house; black and white photographs by Max Dupain, roughly A4 sized, of a 1964 Quakers’ meeting-house in Wahroonga; and 1965 newspaper clippings of a “New Kingsford Synagogue.” Also loose but within the rear pages are a sheet from the *Sydney Morning Herald* dated 28 May 1970 with an article on “The old Ritz Hotel at Leura” and its conversion into a convalescent home “under the supervision of Hugh Buhrich, a planning consultant.” A new nursing home “set among trees” at Yagoona by “the designer, H. A. Buhrich” is illustrated in an unidentified newspaper cutting annotated in pen, “June 24th 1971.” Artifacts collected in this volume thus span 30 key years of the architect’s working life. Why the album ‘ends’ unfinished in 1971, the year Hugh is finally registered is unclear.
Titled in handwriting, “Prelude: 1941,” the first album page shows three small, 11 x 8½cm, black and white photographs of furniture. Images of two well-proportioned, modern, freestanding timber cabinets sit above and below a cantilevered lounge chair formed from bent plywood and upholstered in a highly figured animal hide. Every aspect of these three modest elements, the care and attention given to their restrained geometric resolution, their discrete detailing, material selection and evident craftsmanship in realisation was to remain suggestively representative of Buhrich's built practice. In his final home, at 375 Edinburgh Road, Castlecrag, the lack of a clear distinction between furniture and architectural elements such as walls, doors, screens and stairs was characteristic.

Almost occupying the next full page is a large photographic colour image 22 x 30cm. Apparently the cover of “Australian House and Garden January 1950,” yellow text and building elements in red and blue are emphasised within a broader natural frame of stone walled base and fireplace surrounded by bushland. Facing it are three black and white photographs. Under these, annotation is in pen: “A house at last: 1947.” Constructed at Bayview on Pittwater in Sydney’s northern suburbs, a small weekender designed by Hugh had been published. Clearly professionally photographed, the larger (20 x 15½cm) black and white photo of the building exterior is printed on glossy paper. Two smaller, interior monochrome views are 19 x 10cm combined, joined together as if cut from the magazine. At “4.66 squares” this modest holiday home in architectural terms was a relatively small commission, yet clear in this presentation is that to Hugh it was “at last” a house, eight years since their Australian arrival. Three further years lie between the Bayview realisation and this 1950 publication. Buhrich’s extremely slow modest progression seems here embedded.

Over the next two sheets is an article from pages 28 and 29 of Australian House and Garden, July 1950 illustrating a perspective and plan “For intimate Indoor Outdoor relationship designed by H. A. Buhrich.” Underneath is written, “Still Paper Architecture: 1950.” Emphasised in the text body are practical considerations such as the carport offering protection against westerly winds and division of the house into activity zones rather than rooms. Environmental aspects such as shaded glazing to the north for summer protection/winter sun access and a fireplace that heats in two directions, are highlighted. Criteria such as tight planning on a three-foot module “for more economic use of framing timbers and sheeting materials” and “fixed glazing against the dressed timber studs” with a “less expensive” skillion roof all focus attention on economy in the design. Though clearly a source of frustration that these thoughts are only ‘on paper’ Buhrich articulates in this plan many architectural priorities: passive solar design; careful regard to minimising construction cost; economy of means in organisation; and collectively promoting interplay between a home’s inside and out.

“A real house: 1951,” forms the hand-written title of another magazine article pasted on the following pages. “The perfect island kitchen” is written by E. M. Bernard, one of Eva’s pseudonyms. Built at Castlecrag for Mrs. R Raubitschek, large-scale detailed section drawings through kitchen joinery elements are included in this publication emphasising
technical and practical aspects of the design such as ventilation holes and hot water pipes running through the towel rack cupboard to encourage drying.34

Two large, black and white photos fill the next double page. Both 25 x 30cm, this paired image of a home exterior and interior is simply titled by Hugh, “Success: 1952.”35 Miming the earlier article on an intimate ‘Indoor Outdoor’ relationship the photographs show an outside room opposite an interior that looks out. On the white border of the matt-paper prints, both are signed by Max Dupain. Titled “A house with glass walls”36 an article over the page by Megan Machin, notes that this “little house of glass and white rendered brick was designed by Sydney architect Hugh Buhrich for Mr. and Mrs. George Berg at No. 6, the Sortie Port, Castlecrag, New South Wales.”37 Three black and white images surrounding this clipping appear to be also from that article, the publication unidentified. Smaller photos (around 10cm high) indicate the street view and kitchen with the larger image (14½ x 24½cm) showing a glazed wall opposite a smooth rendered fireplace. Eleven years after his arrival, glass walls, an elemental stone fireplace and intersecting internal and external zones, form an elegant modernist house. One senses that this had been Buhrich’s first serious opportunity to frame a more ambitious architectural exploration. An aspect of his ‘success’ perhaps, is the project framed publicly as architecture, via Hugh’s (unauthorised) identification.

A hypothetical “Holiday home by the Water,”38 published in a full page of Woman faces the Sortie Port project cuttings followed by a sequence of retail and industry building designs clipped from publications such as the Sydney Morning Herald.39 Notated in the scrapbook as “Bread – and – butter: 1954 – 5 – 6,”40 Buhrich indicates these as day-to-day viable projects in his practice that although interesting, did not represent a significant personal architectural commitment. An article on a “Bright Sydney Milk Bar”41 published in the Australian Builder in 1955 is titled by Hugh “Art and architecture: 1953”42 for its collaboration with an artist. Four subsequent pages follow with eight photos by Max Dupain of Hugh and Eva’s first Castlecrag house at 315 Edinburgh Road. Handwritten under this collection of cuttings and photographic prints is: “Home: 1949 – 50 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9…”43 Time taken in the design and construction of this house is strikingly extended. Earliest drawings44 are dated 194145 with the built version documented as 1948.46 Eighteen years pass between the first documents and the finished construction. Financially constrained and working alone from the 1948 design, Hugh built the house himself, laboring in the evenings, weekends and on holidays. Images in the album indicate the building as widely published; entries appear drawn from a variety of (unidentified) sources. One colour photograph (20 x 14½cm) is cut from an absent magazine article. Under the image reads: “To dispel that ‘cold’ bathroom feeling and give warmth, Hugh Buhrich, home planning consultant, allied blue and brown wall tiles and enamel paintings in his Edinborough St.[sic], Castlecrag, Sydney home.”47 Variety in material, texture and structure is evident throughout the design. A perforated metal panel wall, precarious individually cantilevered stairs, a structural stone fireplace wall, a rope railing/screen, and a wall from a single large sheet of glass are all illustrated. A highly ambitious architectural work, elements present here such as inventive material exploration, connections with the bush landscape, unexpected colour (in the
bathroom), cut sandstone fireplace walls and a significant spiral stair, are all continued and developed as architectural aspects by Hugh in the Buhrichs’ second home, later in life, and located further up Edinburgh Road.

Under a Max Dupain black and white photograph printed on glossy paper 18 wide x 24cm high, Hugh has written, “The most-published stair: 1953.” Pages illustrating his first family home show two images of this element. With no additional supporting structure, the laminated plywood spiral, daring in its material employment, striking appearance as well as via the suggested dramatic experience of its use, formed an arresting photograph. Pasted into the album is a small 1956 newspaper clipping from the Sydney Morning Herald with this image. Titled “Unusual Stairway,” it reads: “This stairway – circular, without either a centre pole or a handrail – was designed by planning consultant Hugh Buhrich and built into his home at Castlecrag. It leads from the living-room to his study. Veneered in silver ash to match the furniture, the stair takes up a minimum of space; it is functional, but also has the effect of a piece of modern sculpture.”

Writing about Hugh’s projects under additional names such as Eva Bernard, her unmarried name, Eva also promoted his work anonymously. An article titled “Stair design has changed,” “By a Special Correspondent” was published in the Sydney Morning Herald, June 14, 1960. It showed an image of a plywood spiral stair “in a house in Mosman … designed by H. A. Buhrich.” This nominally later staircase looks remarkably like the ‘most-published’ image by Dupain.

Several pages further into the album, Hugh’s work is seen in distinguished architectural contexts. An issue of Architecture and Arts, from January 1954, presents two of its four featured houses by “Hugh Buhrich, Designer.” On the cover is a large black and white photograph (20 x 14cm) of a house designed by Hugh at Northbridge. Buhrich’s buildings are first in the magazine; these pages are glued in the scrapbook. Settled into natural rocks and stepping around a tree, a modern dwelling within its landscape forms the Architecture and Arts cover image. Additional photographs of that house show three further exterior views (10-12cm high), one wider and larger, also of the northern façade, together with a significant interior. Around 20 x 15cm, the latter shows a substantial stone fireplace between two glass walls with an oblique view into a kitchen timber cabinet wall. Clearly addressing an architectural audience, images in this careful publication have been abstractly composed. Text has been minimised.

A roughly A4 sized black and white full bleed photograph of a house designed by Hugh at Mosman is pasted opposite an Architecture and Arts page showing the house plan at approximately 1:200. Framed by a significant eucalyptus tree and within the Sydney bush landscape, this large photograph shows the house precariously perched, looking outward from a remarkably steep slope. Included on the white page opposite with text above the plan is a very small photograph (4½ x 5cm) of Hugh Buhrich smoking a pipe, examining an architectural model. Emphasising practicality, the text is concise. Hugh’s long narrow verandah-like plan faces north and a “magnificent view over miles of water and headlands.”
Almost every room enjoys this aspect with only service elements located to the south. Three additional photographs of this house are included, another exterior (8 x 21cm) and a horizontal band around 10cm high connecting images of both the kitchen and living areas.

Representation of Buhrich’s houses in this publication situated his work in distinguished architectural company. Ancher, Mortlock and Murray Architects designed the two other featured dwellings. Walter Gropius’ words formed the issue’s editorial, and towards the end, a book of Frank Lloyd Wright’s recent drawings is reviewed prior to construction drawings showing a stone fireplace and rope handrail detail by Marcel Breuer. The Sydney photographer is Max Dupain. Kenneth McDonald is the magazine editor and the list of “contributing editors” includes Eva Buhrich. Though still nominated as a ‘designer,’ this ambitious architectural magazine framed Hugh’s work in an explicitly professional context.

In a paper titled “Migrant Architects Practicing Modern Architecture in Sydney, 1930-1960,” Rebecca Hawcroft notes that during the 1940’s the Board was not registering architects who were not naturalized citizens of the Commonwealth. Describing the Hungarian architect George Molnar and his registration refusal for not being a naturalised Australian citizen, she refers to the Board’s contemporaneous stated policy to “refrain from registering foreigners, especially those who had come from Europe in recent years.” Hugo Stossel was another Hungarian architect who emigrated in 1938 and was forced to prove his ability and sit further qualifying examinations. Listed in his 1946 registration application are numerous projects in Vienna and Budapest such as a theatre for 2000 that had been featured in European and American architectural magazines. After registration Stossel maintained a successful modernist architectural practice in Sydney through the 1950s and 1960s, his firm maintaining prominence into the 1980s.

As noted, Buhrich’s application for registration was only approved after 32 years of Australian practice. He was 60. It is mysterious why his process took so much longer than that of other migrants such as Stossel and Austrian Hans Peter Oser, both with European qualifications who as noted by Hawcroft, faced additional hurdles as a result. The NSW Architects Registration Board does not have records of unsuccessful exam attempts for this early period. Prior to June 1976, when the AACA Practice Exam began, examinations had been conducted by the RAIA. Buhrich’s final registration is recorded via the unusual mechanism under Paragraph (ci) of the 1921 Architects Act. Approval was here finally granted on the basis of his acceptance in 1971 as an associate of the RAIA. Seven of the nine applications approved at this Board meeting in November 1971 fell into this unfamiliar category, four of which were Fellows or Associates of the RIBA.

Harry Seidler’s 1949 move to Australia did not appear to generate such difficulties. A parallel scrapbook, not dissimilar to Buhrich’s, was kept by Seidler and is similarly now held in a State Library of New South Wales archive. On the first page, the first newspaper clipping pasted into the book under the title “Sydney” reports: “Young American architect Harry Seidler entertained 25 guests at a cocktail and film party” Seidler appears to be easily referred to as an architect from the outset.
Questioned in relation to the varied experiences of émigrés seeking registration, Roger Greig, who from 1955-1970 held the combined positions of National Secretary of the RAIA, Secretary of the RAIA (NSW Chapter) and Registrar of the Board of Architects of NSW, has referred to the problems in evaluating overseas qualifications, stating, “I think it was beyond our ability.”63 Hawcroft has commented: “In terms of an exposure to ‘authentic’ modernism there are many parallels between the education of Hugh Buhrich and that of Harry Seidler. … Buhrich is perhaps the only architect to work in Australia who had direct experience of expressionist modernist teachings. Yet while Buhrich was practicing as an architect in Sydney he remained virtually unknown.”64

Documenting his public output and impact from 1941 to 1971, Hugh’s surviving scrapbook records for that substantial time period, traces of an extremely slow, patient struggle with official recognition. Yet the album doubly evidences occasional ambitious works and their representations in the press. Eva’s role as an architectural critic in this respect was crucial. Publications for which she wrote such as Australian House and Garden, Woman, Sydney Morning Herald and Architecture and Arts are seen in the scrapbook to consistently represent Hugh’s work, in numerous cases with elegance, precision and architectural sensitivity. Evaluating her specific effect on his reception is complex, particularly as many articles in the album are anonymously authored65 and publication names and/or dates are absent. Of an approximate total of 50 articles in the album however, at least 20 are from publications for which Eva worked, or are explicitly written by her or by one of her pseudonyms.


3 Peter Myers and Bronwyn Hanna both state this in independent, slightly diverging entries for Hugh and Eva, in The Encyclopaedia of Australian Architecture, ed. Philip Goad and Julie Willis (Port Melbourne, Vic.: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 112-113.
4 Hugh Buhrich, Application for Registration as an Architect, approved 16th November 1971, Board of Architects of New South Wales records.
6 Announced at the AIA NSW Chapter Awards Ceremony held in Sydney on June 26, 2014.
7 McCartney, 50/60/70 Iconic Australian Houses, 165.
8 McCartney, 50/60/70 Iconic Australian Houses, 165.
9 Taped copy, Neil Buhrich interviewed by John Murphy, recorded by the NSW State Library, November 6, 2007, private collection, Neil Buhrich.
10 Note: Neil remembers this being particularly due to Hugh not passing the ‘design section’ of the exam. Neil Buhrich, unpublished interview with the author, May 9, 2015.
12 Buhrich, Autobiographical essay, 16.
13 Buhrich, Autobiographical essay, 16.
14 In those days it was rare for a woman to train in a technical profession. Eva noted, “At a technical university, there were 50 boys to every girl.” Buhrich, Autobiographical essay, 16.
15 “Because Nazi pressure was already strong in the late twenties in Nuremberg, I joined the Kameraden, a Jewish group of socialist leanings and fairly lax religious views.” Buhrich, Autobiographical essay, 16.
16 The body of the text is typed and paginated. Edited additional notes are throughout in Eva’s handwriting. Buhrich, Autobiographical essay, 16.
18 Hugh Buhrich scrap album & mounted architectural presentation drawings with photographs, 1941-1959, NSW Mitchell Library Drawing Archives, PXD 1012, np.
19 Hugh Buhrich scrap album, np.
20 Hugh Buhrich scrap album, np.
21 Hugh Buhrich scrap album, np.
22 Hugh Buhrich scrap album, np.
23 Hugh Buhrich scrap album, np.
24 Hugh Buhrich scrap album, np.
25 Hugh Buhrich scrap album, np.
26 Shown on a 1947 presentation board Buhrich assembled for this house in Hugh Buhrich scrap album, np.
27 Hugh Buhrich scrap album, np.
31 Hugh Buhrich scrap album, np.
32 Hugh Buhrich scrap album, np.
33 Note: Bernard was Eva’s unmarried surname. She uses it as a pseudonym with at least two alternate spellings, also as here, with just her initials.
34 Hugh Buhrich scrap album, np.
35 Hugh Buhrich scrap album, np.
36 Unidentified publication in Hugh Buhrich scrap album, np.
37 Unidentified publication in Hugh Buhrich scrap album, np.
38 “Holiday home by the Water,” Woman, June 16, 1952, 43.
40 Hugh Buhrich scrap album, np.
42 Hugh Buhrich scrap album, np.
43 Hugh Buhrich scrap album, np.
44 Drawings located in Hugh Buhrich - collection of architectural and design plans, ca. 1940-1988 NSW Mitchell Library Drawing Archives, PXD970. Two different designs for this site are evident; the earlier design has not been previously published.
45 “Cottage for Mrs EM Buhrich,” in Hugh Buhrich – collection of architectural and design plans, ca. 1940-1988. Note: Practice name for the 1941 drawing is “H. A. Buhrich, Designer.”
47 Hugh Buhrich scrap album, np.
48 Hugh Buhrich scrap album, np.
49 “Unusual Stairway,” Sydney Morning Herald, April 12, 1956, 3.
50 “Stair design has changed,” Sydney Morning Herald, June 14, 1960. A cutting of the article is in a scrapbook kept by Eva, Private collection, Neil Buhrich.
57 Molnar registration papers, New South Wales Architects Registration Board records.
59 New South Wales Architects Registration Board records.
61 Architects Accreditation Council of Australia.
65 Note: A number of the un-authored articles in the scrapbook are associated with the Sydney Jewish community. Eva was from an irreligious German Jewish family and her connections to the publications are unclear. However, Hugh Buhrich was not Jewish. In her article, “The Rewards of Experiment,” Harvard Design Magazine (Summer 1997): 28-31, Susana Torre suggested that both Buhrich and Harry Seidler were German Jewish refugees. The editor William S. Saunders published a correction to this mistake in the following issue of Harvard Design Magazine.