

Exporting Australian Architectural “Expertise” as a Matter of Policy

Rowan Gower

University of New South Wales

*As highlighted by Jennifer Taylor and James Connor in *Architecture in the South Pacific: The Ocean of Islands* (2014) and subsequently discussed by Philip Goad in “Importing Expertise: Australian-US Architects and the Large Scale 1945-1990,” the exportation of Australian architectural “expertise” across the second half of the twentieth century was primarily driven by individual practices gaining private and institutional commissions in the Asia-Pacific region. Devised under the Gorton administration the “Australian Policy” however, would, for the first time, prioritise the appointment of Australian architects for overseas work at a government level, opening the doors for Australian architects to design diplomatic buildings for the government’s extensive construction programme announced by Gough Whitlam in 1973.*

The employment of Australian architects to design government buildings abroad came to the fore in 1965 when the Royal Australian Institute of Architects and Robin Boyd lobbied for an Australian architect to replace the Brazilian architect, Henrique Mindlin, to design the new Australian Embassy in Brasilia. This paper will examine this episode of institutional exchange and its significance for the local architectural profession and its future involvement in the foreign building program of the Federal Government. It will link this activity to the formation of the “Australian Policy” and posit that while this internal government policy was significant in encouraging the exportation of Australian design it was also wielded as a political weapon by the Department of External Affairs to diminish the role of the Commonwealth Department of Works which also had the skills to successfully “export” Australian expertise to the world.

Keywords: Australian embassy buildings; embassy architecture; architectural expertise; policy

Ten years after the conclusion of the Second World War the Asia Pacific region had altered politically beyond recognition due to rapid decolonisation and the onset of the Cold War. As former colonies became sovereign states and the influence of the European empires dwindled, Australia embarked on a propaganda campaign to encourage the newly independent nations to look towards the West and away from the communist bloc. After initially opting to open diplomatic missions in leased buildings to support these endeavours the Department of External Affairs (DEA) began to advocate for the construction of new embassy premises to better achieve its representational needs. This paper will present a brief outline of the Australian government's changing attitude towards the construction of diplomatic buildings overseas. This will be followed by an examination of the discourse generated as a reaction to the commissioning of Henrique Mindlin for the Brasília embassy project. This project was a catalyst for what became known as the "Australian Policy" which replaced the existing practices for commissioning architectural services for the design of new diplomatic buildings. The paper will conclude by presenting the effect institutional lobbying had on the Gorton administration and on the future role of both Australian architects and the Commonwealth Department of Works (CDW).

A Treasury Rethink

The Federal Minister for External Affairs, Richard Casey, undertook a tour of Southeast Asia in 1951 believing that "it was in the battle for the minds of the new nations of Asia" that the defence of Australia could be achieved.¹ In support of this view the DEA launched a number of new cultural, information and exchange programmes in conjunction with an ambitious expansion of Australia's diplomatic presence to assist in the promotion of Australia as a free democratic society.² As historian Joan Beaumont concluded, the projection of such a presence internationally and regionally during the 1950s was only possible because of the network of posts that the DEA opened.³ In order to quickly establish this presence in an environment that was undergoing immense change the DEA opted to lease premises in existing buildings. However it soon became evident that these properties were well below the standard required to represent Australian interests in the region.⁴ This led Casey to state that he was "anxious that Australian representation, especially in our own region, be housed in a way that is reasonably comparable to other missions."⁵ While the Treasury

1 Christopher Waters, "A Failure of the Imagination: R. G. Casey and Australian Plans for Counter-subversion in Asia, 1954-1956," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 45, no. 3 (September 1999): 350.

2 In addition to the Colombo Plan these programmes included the release of the magazine *Hemisphere*, the launch of the Asian visits scheme and an increase in funding for Radio Australia. In a clear attempt to control content, all programmes in the campaign projected an idealistic image of life in Australia and noticeably avoided any discussion of the White Australia policy or Australian military involvement in Asia. See Waters, "A Failure of the Imagination," 347-61.

3 During Casey's nine year term as Minister for External Affairs fourteen new missions were opened; fifty percent were opened in Asia with the other fifty percent of missions being divided between Europe (five missions) and the Middle East (two missions). See Joan Beaumont, "The Champagne Trail? Australian Diplomats and the Overseas Mission," in *Ministers, Mandarins and Diplomats Australian Foreign Policy Making 1941-1969*, ed. Joan Beaumont, Christopher Waters, David Lowe and Garry Woodard (Carlton: Melbourne University Publishing, 2003), 154-56.

4 One of the earliest discussions dates from 1946 between the High Commissioner of India, Iven Mackay and the then Acting Minister for External Affairs Ben Chifley. See Iven Mackay High Commissioner Australian High Commission New Delhi to J. Chifley acting Minister of State Department of External Affairs, August 23, 1946, Premises New Delhi-Building Project, 1945-53, A1838, 1428/19/4 Part 1, National Archives of Australia (NAA)

5 R.G Casey Minister Department of External Affairs to A. Fadden Treasurer Department of the Treasury, September 6, 1951, Premises New Delhi-Building Project, 1945-53, A1838, 1428/19/4 Part 1, NAA

would endorse a programme of construction to reduce escalating residential rents in New Delhi and Tokyo it denied funding to build new chancery buildings.

With the First Secretary in Djakarta, Neil Truscott, writing in May 1955 that “one of the reasons why the Australian Embassy is so often regarded as the poor relation is the building which houses our chancery,” the Public Service Board (PSB) sent Chairman William Dunk to investigate.⁶ On his return, Dunk recommended to the Prime Minister that an improvement was needed in both the management and standards of Australia’s overseas property.⁷ This forced the Treasury to alter its position and to announce that it would be receptive to building or buying when accommodation was scarce, living conditions were difficult or rent was excessive.⁸ With this change in policy direction the DEA released a five year construction programme to build premises in Djakarta, Tokyo, New Delhi, Washington, D.C. and Rio de Janeiro.⁹

The Case of the Brasília Embassy

Although the Commonwealth Department of Works was the primary department concerned with the design and supervision of all architectural and engineering works for the government it had limited experience administering projects overseas.¹⁰ As such, the CDW recommended to the Treasury and DEA that it act in the capacity of technical advisor for the new building programme.¹¹ This was supported by Casey who believed that local architects should be associated either in partnership with, or in lieu, of an Australian architect, as knowledge of local conditions would be crucial to the successful planning of these new projects.¹² Under this arrangement the DEA contracted an American architect, Joseph Allen Stein, who had resided in India since 1952 to design the Head of Mission (HOM) residence in New Delhi (1962) and approached an Adelaide-based architect Gavin Walkley to investigate and make recommendations on the possibility of building in Brasília.¹³

In a report presented to the DEA Walkley sided with Casey concluding that the best course of action was to commission a Brazilian architect to complete the design and supervision of the embassy compound as the procedures, building methods and materials were unlike anything in Australia.¹⁴ In supporting this Walkley provided a shortlist of three suitable architects - Henrique Mindlin, Affonso Reidy and Lucio Costa—noting his preference for Mindlin.¹⁵ The DEA referred Walkley’s report

6 Neil Truscott First Secretary Australian Embassy Djakarta to the Secretary Department of External Affairs, “Chancery Djakarta,” memorandum, May 31, 1955, Djakarta-Chancery Pengansan Barat 14, 1947-59, A1838, 1428/4/11 Part 1, NAA.

7 Australia Parliament Joint Committee of Public Accounts, “Financing and Administration of Property Owned or Leased Overseas by the Commonwealth Government,” in *The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Joint Committee of Public Accounts, One Hundred and Seventy Second Report* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1978), 1.

8 Proceedings of the sub-committee on staffing of the Joint Parliamentary Committee of Foreign Affairs, September 16, 1964.

9 The plan to develop an embassy compound in Rio de Janeiro would change after the Brazilian government announced that the capital would be moved to Brasília. See Department of External Affairs Capital Works Projects-Overseas Buildings Estimated Cash Requirements, February 21, 1961, Djakarta Building Proposals-Chancery, 1947-59, A1838, 1428/4/12 Part 1, NAA.

10 The CDW had undertaken work for the DEA since 1946 by conducting site investigations and assessing plans drawn by foreign architects. See Commonwealth of Australia Department of Works, “Overseas Projects,” *Works Review* 6 (1965-66), 30.

11 L. Loder Director General Department of Works to the Secretary Department of the Treasury, “Department of External Affairs: Proposed Overseas Works Programme,” November 9, 1953, Premises New Delhi-Building Project, 1953-54, A1838, 1428/19/4 Part 3, NAA.

12 F. Stuart First Secretary Australian High Commission New Delhi to the Secretary Department of External Affairs, memorandum, November 1, 1951, Premises New Delhi-Building Project, 1945-53, A1838, 1428/19/4 Part 1, NAA.

13 The DEA approached Walkley because of his position as Vice President and Councillor of the RAA and his role on the National Capital Planning Committee. For further information on Walkley see Julie Collins, “Walkley, Gavin,” *The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, ed. Philip Goad and Julie Willis (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 744.

14 Gavin Walkley, “Report on the selection of an Architect and the procedure to be adopted in designing an Australian Embassy at Brasília,” August 16, 1960, Property Brasilia-Building Project, 1961-67, A1838, 1428/23/4 Part 3, NAA.

15 Walkley, August 16, 1960, NAA.

to the CDW who as technical advisor undertook a review of Mindlin's work by referring to the publication authored by Mindlin, *Modern Architecture in Brazil*.¹⁶ In its recommendation the CDW wrote that Mindlin was an architect of "outstanding professional ability and international reputation."¹⁷ Based on this the DEA commissioned Mindlin on August 16, 1961 and he submitted sketch plans to the CDW for review in June 1962. While it was acknowledged by the DEA that the sketch plans were "original and striking" the CDW would recommend a revision of the plans as the scale of the proposal exceeded the permitted space requirements as agreed to in the office standards set by the PSB.¹⁸

The ongoing planning of the Brazilian embassy drew attention from the architectural community because of its inclusion within a new capital that was internationally recognised for its architectural modernity.¹⁹ Roger Greig, the Secretary of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA), began writing to the DEA after the RAIA Council had moved in 1963 that the President of the RAIA should write an appropriate letter to the Minister of External Affairs to seek his assistance in encouraging the government to employ Australian architects.²⁰ Having written an earlier letter to the DEA expressing hope that the design of the Brasília project would be a "credit to Australia and its architecture," Greig's second letter in November 1964 was written shortly after it had been announced in Parliament that Bates, Smart & McCutcheon (BSM) was to provide full architectural services for the development of the Washington, D.C. Chancery.²¹ Greig's letter argued that Australia's diplomatic buildings overseas would only achieve "a true Australian design flavour if carried out by Australian architects."²² To add weight to this statement Greig hinted that Peter and Alison Smithson, the architects designing the UK embassy in Brasília, had expressed concern that the Australian government had chosen a Brazilian and not an Australian architect.²³ In response, the secretary of the DEA outlined the working relationship it had with the CDW in the planning and design of projects overseas remarking that "the approach adopted in each case as far as architectural services, material and the like, are concerned, is determined by a great many factors."²⁴ In a separate memorandum to the Australian ambassador in Brazil the DEA requested that inquiries be made into the authenticity and substance of the alleged criticism made by the Smithsons.²⁵

After reading the letters George Maunder, the new Director General of Works, wrote to the DEA advocating for the

16 For a detailed description of Mindlin's work and the work of other noted Brazilian architects of the time see Henrique E. Mindlin, *Modern Architecture in Brazil* (New York: Reinhold Publishing, 1956).

17 C. Aitken to E. Hanfield Property Section Department of External Affairs, "Chancery Project – Brasília," memorandum, October 6, 1965, Property Brasilia-Building Project, 1961-67, A1838, 1428/23/4 Part 3, NAA.

18 P. Sullivan Department of External Affairs to the Director General Department of Works, "Brasilia – Building Project," August 14, 1964, Property Brasilia-Building Project, 1964-65, A1838, 1428/23/4 Part 2, NAA.

19 This was not lost on the DEA who kept a file of press clippings on Brasília. See K. Brennan Senior Assistant Secretary Management and Services Branch Department of External Affairs to the Minister Department of External Affairs, "Brasilia: Embassy Building Project," March 3, 1965, Property Brasilia-Building Project, 1964-65, A1838, 1428/23/4 Part 2, NAA.

20 "Annual General Meeting," *Architecture in Australia* 52, no. 1 (March 1963): 115.

21 R. Greig Secretary RAIA to the Secretary Department of External Affairs, October 29, 1964, Property Brasilia-Building Project, 1964-65, A1838, 1428/23/4 Part 2, NAA. Philip Goad discusses the development of the Washington, D.C Chancery and the Paris Chancery and HOM in "Designed Diplomacy: Furniture, Furnishing and Art in Australian Embassies for Washington, D.C, and Paris," in *The Politics of Furniture: Identity, Diplomacy and Persuasion in Post War Interiors*, ed. Freddie Flore and Cammie McAtee (London: Routledge, 2017), 179-97.

22 R. Greig Secretary RAIA to the Secretary Department of External Affairs, November 13, 1964, Property Brasilia-Building Project, 1964-65, A1838, 1428/23/4 Part 2, NAA.

23 Greig, November 13, 1964, NAA.

24 Secretary Department of External Affairs to R. Greig Secretary RAIA, December 18, 1964, Property Brasilia-Building Project, 1964-65, A1838, 1428/23/4 Part 2, NAA.

25 Department of External Affairs to Australian Embassy Rio de Janeiro, "Brasilia Project," November 17, 1964, Property Brasilia-Building Project, 1964-65, A1838, 1428/23/4 Part 2, NAA.

formation of a review committee to be attended by the President of the RAI A and senior members of the CDW.²⁶ The DEA were unaccepting of the proposal commenting that the RAI A as an organisation outside the Commonwealth service should not be involved, citing Arthur Stephenson's earlier requests to review the Brasília plans had been rejected based on this premise.²⁷ Maunder would retreat from his suggestion and acknowledge that consultation with the RAI A on future projects could be of benefit.²⁸

The RAI A lobbying was supported by *Cross-Section*, the newsletter of the Melbourne University Architecture Department as well as Robin Boyd and Jean Pierre de Monchaux, former student of the University of Sydney and principal planner of Milton Keynes in England. *Cross-Section* wrote that although recognised internationally Australian architects were apparently not good enough to design either the Qantas Wentworth Hotel in Sydney or the Australian Embassy in Brasília.²⁹ The publication chose to cite a letter from the Smithsons which declared "there must be some good architects in Australia who are used to the climate, they can do some very nice houses."³⁰ Robin Boyd also questioned the government in *The Australian* commenting: "even if we had commissioned Oscar Niemeyer himself we would still have been missing the point and the opportunity of making an original Australian contribution to this design mecca of the world."³¹

Boyd agreed that Brasília was not the most important post politically however he argued that Australia had made a mistake by economising when it was clear that prestige was a factor that needed to be recognised when "design is part of politics."³² Boyd continued by analysing the Australian government's "non-policy in diplomatic design" suggesting that while there was nothing inferior in the representational qualities of Australia's CDW-designed diplomatic buildings (possibly the recently completed Tokyo Chancery), which he quipped gave "no hint of the average taste in plastic flowers back home," there was a need to create an advisory committee to both guide the DEA building programme and to "protect and develop our visual character abroad."³³

The growing media publicity reignited discussion in Parliament and prompted Senator Adrian Gibson to ask the Minister for External Affairs, Paul Hasluck, to both confirm the nationality of the architect designing the Australian Embassy in Brasília and whether the project could be reviewed.³⁴ Hasluck responded

26 G. Maunder Director General Department of Works to the Secretary Department of External Affairs, "Brasilia Embassy-Brazil," November 11, 1964, Property Brasilia-Building Project, 1964-65, A1838, 1428/23/4 Part 2, NAA.

27 It was believed within the DEA that the CDW were using the formation of a review committee as an opportunity to reject Mindlin's plans in favour of a CDW design. See K. Brennan Senior Assistant Secretary Department of External Affairs to the Director General Department of Works, "Building Project: Brasilia." Property Brasilia-Building Project, 1964-65, A1838, 1428/23/4 Part 2, NAA.

28 J. Ryan, "Discussions in Melbourne with Works Department and Bates, Smart and McCutcheon, November 26, 1964, New Delhi-Chancery and other compound developments, 1964-65, A1838, 1428/19/10 Part 3, NAA.

29 Ryan, November 26, 1964, NAA.

30 *Cross Section* 148 (February 1965): 2.

31 Robin Boyd, "Lost Chance at Brasilia: Economy-Minded Canberra Spurns Australian Design," *Australian*, February 20, 1965, 9.

32 Boyd, "Lost Chance at Brasilia," 9.

33 Boyd, "Lost Chance at Brasilia," 9.

34 Robyn Boyd's article is referred to in correspondence between the CDW and DEA including at a ministerial level. See Property Brasilia-Building Project, 1964-65, A1838, 1428/23/4 Part 2, NAA.

with the following statement: “in general, it is my personal view that as far as possible we should use Australian architects, and I will have a look at this particular project to see whether an Australian architect could suitably be used.”³⁵

Hasluck’s comment was referred to the CDW who responded by stating that Mindlin’s design reflected the required “Brasília Idiom” and that an Australian architect would be unaware of Niemeyer’s philosophy for the new capital.³⁶ Hasluck however elected to terminate Mindlin’s architectural services in May 1967 on the basis that there was “a desire to see an Australian architectural approach introduced into the development of the project.”³⁷ The Treasury requested advice as to the reasons why this decision had been made when the CDW had considered it essential that a Brazilian architect be engaged. The Secretary of the DEA, James Plimsoll, responded stating that other “important countries” such as the US, UK, Japan, and Canada had all commissioned architectural practices of note from their own countries and that it was the minority of nations that were engaging Brazilian architects.³⁸ In an internal memorandum that could be read as a swipe at the CDW the DEA commented: “the smoothness in which the Chancery project in Washington has moved forward contrasts sharply with the slow progress of almost all our other projects.”³⁹

The “Australian Policy”

Although the RAlA’s lobbying had been successful in removing Mindlin from the project it continued to pressure the government to make the use of Australian architects a matter of policy. In 1968, RAlA President, Acheson Overend, wrote directly to Prime Minister Gorton to reiterate the stance of the Australian Professional Consultants Council on the promotion of Australian expertise overseas.⁴⁰ The letter suggested that the use of Australian consultants should be mandatory where “Australian funds are to be spent on Australian building projects abroad.”⁴¹ The letter was forwarded to the CDW for comment and advice. The CDW response clearly shows a department that was trying to stay relevant in a discussion which was leaning more towards awarding overseas projects to Australian architectural practices:

Although it would cost less for the Commonwealth to design all the overseas projects with its own staff, and work of this nature is important for the morale of the staff, it is considered desirable for Australia to

35 Question Australian Embassy in Brasilia Speech, August 24, 1965, in *Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Debates: House of Representatives Official Hansard*, No. 34.

36 Keith Brennan Senior Assistant Secretary Department of External Affairs to the Minister Department of External Affairs, “Building Project: Brasilia,” April 14, 1967, Property Brasilia-Building Project, 1961-67, A1838, 1428/23/4 Part 3, NAA.

37 E. Hanfield Property Department of External Affairs to the Secretary Department of the Treasury, “Brasilia Building Project,” May 5, 1967, Property Brasilia-Building Project, 1961-67, A1838, 1428/23/4 Part 3, NAA.

38 J. Walshe Department of External Affairs to the Secretary Department of the Treasury, “Australian Building Project, Brasilia,” June 21, 1967, Property Brasilia-Building Project, 1961-67, A1838, 1428/23/4 Part 3, NAA.

39 Brennan, April 14, 1967, NAA.

40 The Australian Professional Consultants Council was formed after a survey tour was instigated by the Department of Trade with the aim of exporting consultant services overseas. The tour was led by Mervyn Parry the RAlA president at the time. The mission visited Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, Libya, Lebanon and Iran. See “Minutes of the 30th Annual General Meeting, Hobart, April 3, 1968,” *Architecture in Australia* 57, no 3 (June 1968): 456. The Mission was also reported in *Cross Section* 173 (March 1967): 1.

41 A. Reiher Director General Department of Works to the Secretary Department of Foreign Affairs, “Australian Embassy Paris,” May 23, 1973, Premises General-Joint Chancery Construction Project Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, 1972-73, A1838, 1428/1/51 Part 2, NAA.

*develop a national character in its overseas buildings and this can best be done by sharing the work with selected consultants. Whether the work is done by the Commonwealth or consultants, the Department of Works can provide continuity in briefing and in interpretation of Client's requirements.*⁴²

42 Reihier, May 23, 1973, NAA.

Gorton would take the CDW evaluation and respond to a request from the Association of Consulting Engineers of Australia to use Australian engineers overseas:

*I am advised that in the majority of cases, the employment of consultants by Commonwealth Departments is determined by assessment of which firm, in the opinion of the client, is considered most likely to be the most efficient in undertaking a particular engineering or other consultant requirement. I am further advised that it is the usual practice, where this procedure is followed, for Departments to engage Australian Consultants wherever possible and that overseas engineering consultants are only engaged on rare occasions when it is deemed that special skills which may be required for a project are not available at the time from amongst the Australian engineering profession.*⁴³

43 Reihier, May 23, 1973, NAA.

While the engineering profession is emphasised in this particular instance it was understood by the new Director General of Works, Alan Reihier, that the procedures outlined by Gorton also applied to the architectural profession. The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA)⁴⁴ termed this internal government policy as the “Australian Policy” and used the letter to argue for the exclusive use of Australian architectural practices in future overseas projects.⁴⁵ While the Treasury accepted this financially in an effort to stay relevant the CDW requested that it oversee any future projects and be involved in the redesign of the Chancery and HOM residence in Tokyo.⁴⁶ This frustrated the DFA who commented that perhaps the CDW had realised that the involvement of leading Australian architects had led to “a further diminution of their involvement in the projects.”⁴⁷

44 On November 6, 1970, the DEA was renamed the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) by Executive Council Meeting No. 18 (Prime Minister's Minute No 45) taking over all its predecessor's functions.

45 F. Murray Director Overseas Property Section Department of Foreign Affairs to C. Wade Assistant Director General Department of Works, “Appointment of Consultant Architects: Singapore, Kuala Lumpur & Paris,” May 10, 1973, Property Brasilia-Building Project, 1961-67, A1838, 1428/23/4 Part 3, NAA.

46 A. Reihier Director General Department of Works to the Secretary Department of Foreign Affairs, “Djakarta Chancery: Proposed Extensions,” May 28, 1973, Premise-Bangkok-Chancery, 1968-70, A1838, 1428/3/5 Part 6, NAA.

47 F. Murray Director Overseas Property Section Department of Foreign Affairs to J. Ryan First Assistant Secretary Management Services Division Department of Foreign Affairs, “Works Department,” June 4, 1973, Premises General-Joint Chancery Construction Project Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, 1972-73, A1838, 1428/1/51 Part 2, NAA.

The introduction of the “Australian Policy” opened the doors for Australian architects and architectural practices to be involved in the construction drive initiated by Whitlam's expanding foreign policy objectives. A press release on September 19, 1973 announced the government's plan to build six new embassies and high commissions that “should not only be functional

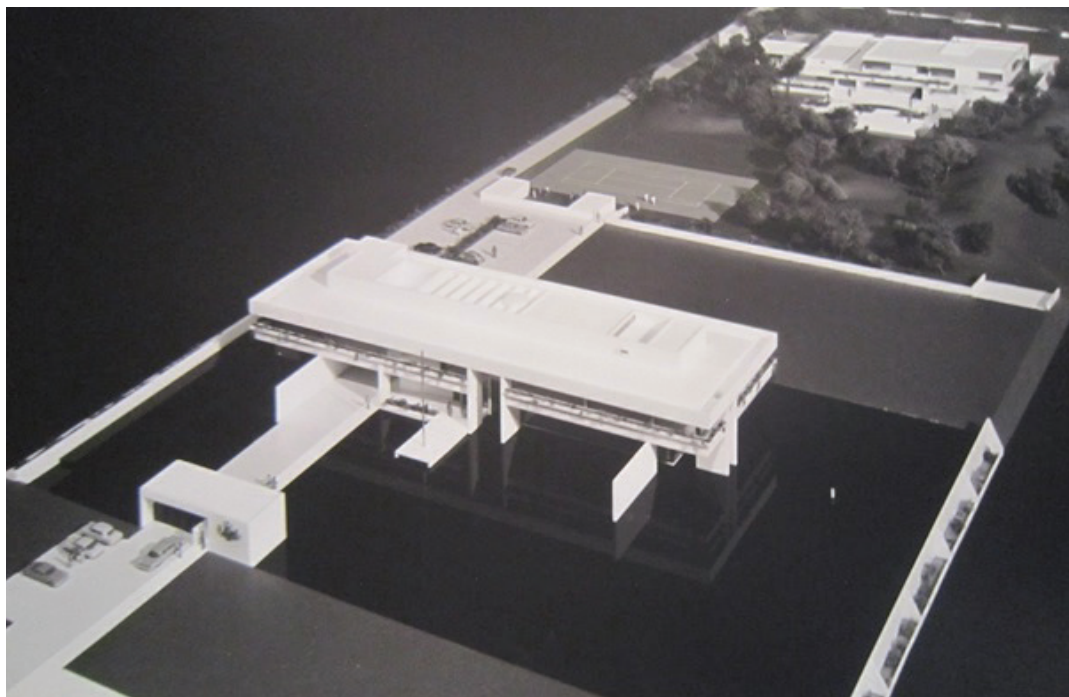
and efficient but demonstrate overseas the qualities and skills of some of Australia's leading architects.⁷⁴⁸ The press release publicised that Daryl Jackson Evan Walker had been selected to design the Suva HOM residence and that Leighton Contractors had been commissioned to develop the Saigon Chancery. Joyce Nankivell Associates and Godfrey & Spowers were to plan the Kuala Lumpur and Singapore Chanceries respectively while Ancher, Mortlock, Murray & Woolley had been commissioned for the Chancery and HOM residence in Bangkok. It was also announced that Harry Seidler & Associates were awarded the contract for the Paris Chancery and HOM residence and that Peddle, Thorpe & Walker were to undertake the planning of substantial extensions to the Jakarta Chancery. Although it was not announced in the Press release, Perth based architectural practice, Cameron, Chisholm and Nicol were commissioned in lieu of Mindlin to design the embassy and HOM residence in Brasília. Even though the design they presented was described by Whitlam as "an exciting concept," it was never built due to cost concerns (fig. 1).⁴⁹

The only project that was allocated to the CDW was the redesign of the Chancery and HOM residence in Tokyo which would become a point of contention and highlight continued tensions and political manoeuvring between the CDW and DFA. Because of its location and significance to Australian

48 Department of Foreign Affairs, "Australian Architects Chosen for New Embassy Buildings," news release, September 19, 1973, 2.

49 For a discussion of Cameron, Chisholm and Nicol's design see G. Whitlam Acting Minister Department of Foreign Affairs to Cabinet, "Chancery and Official Residence-Brasilia," submission, September 1975, Proposed New Chancery and Official Residence-Brasilia, 1975-75, A5931, CL1642, NAA.

Figure 1. 1975 model of the proposed embassy and HOM residence in Brasília. Courtesy of the National Archives of Australia, NAA: A5931, CL1642.



trade relations the DFA argued that the Tokyo project was perhaps more prestigious than Washington, D.C. and Paris and therefore it was an opportunity to demonstrate the design skills and achievements of Australian architects by implementing the “Australian Policy.”⁵⁰ In an internal memorandum that clearly highlights the strained relationship between the DFA and CDW it was stated that “Works designs are just not good enough.”⁵¹ In its defence the CDW reassured the DFA that it would assign staff of the highest calibre to the project stressing that the Department was recognised for its outstanding skills in architecture and had at its disposal some of Australia’s leading architects including Richard Ure and Richard Johnson.⁵² To reinforce the point Reiher commented that he had no doubt that the Department’s design and management of the Tokyo project “would be at least as efficient and effective as the services that could be provided by private consultants.”⁵³ In order to deescalate the situation the DFA would “bow to the inevitable” and accept the CDW as the architects for the project.⁵⁴

Conclusion

Projects undertaken in the 1950s and 1960s demonstrated a lack of experience by the DEA and CDW in the management and administration of an overseas building programme. This experience however led to an adjustment in policy and economic considerations which brought to the fore the importance of constructing new diplomatic buildings as a way of meeting representational needs. As part of this rethink the merits of commissioning Australian architects as a means of imbuing these buildings with an “Australian design flavour” became a point of contention. With the local architectural community arguing for its importance and keen to contribute, the Brasilia project became the turning point that persuaded the Gorton government to introduce the “Australian Policy” and commission Australian architects for future building projects.

While Australian design had permeated the region through the works of individual architects and independent practices this policy expedited its “exportation” through government commissions. Although these commissions benefited these practices their nature as testing grounds often highlighted the changing attitude of the government towards design. This can be seen in the political manoeuvring that the DFA undertook to ensure that CDW involvement was kept to a minimum even though as a department it was staffed with locally-trained and reputable architects.

50 A. Fogg Acting First Assistant Secretary Management Services Division Department of Foreign Affairs to the Acting Secretary Department of Foreign Affairs, “Tokyo Compound-Redevelopment,” August 9, 1973, Tokyo-Chancery Project, 1973-74, A1838, 1428/32/4 Part 19, NAA.

51 F. Murray to J. Ryan, “Works Department,” 4 June 1973, Premises General-Joint Chancery Construction Project Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, 1972-73, A1838, 1428/1/51 Part 2, NAA.

52 The CDW in 1972 employed 6,472 staff of which 437 were classified as professional architects and 192 were cadets in training. Richard Ure started his career as an Architect Grade 3 with the CDWH in 1946. He designed the Australian-American Memorial (1949), Allawah, Bega Courts and Currong Apartments (1956), Royal Australian Mint (1965). He also worked on the design of the Reserve Bank of Australia building in Sydney (1964). At the time of the Tokyo redevelopment he was Senior Assistant Director General of the CDW. Richard Johnson was a principal architect with the CDW from 1969-85 and had placed fourth in the Houses of Parliament competition, Westminster with Peter Page in 1970-71. He was later responsible for designing the Australian Pavilion at Expo 1974, Spokane with James McCormick and for designing the Australian pavilion at the 1975 Okinawa Expo. It was also noted that Albert Ross had specifically been recruited for the project having previously won the Haddon Architectural Travelling Scholarship (1960) and placing second in the competition to design the Reserve Bank in Canberra (1962). See A. Reiher Director General Department of Works to the Secretary Department of Foreign Affairs, “Tokyo Compound Development,” July 26, 1973, Tokyo-Chancery Project, 1973-74, A1838, 1428/32/4 Part 19, NAA.

53 Reiher, July 26, 1973, NAA.

54 An extension to the existing chancery was completed in February 1973 however further development of the site would cease due to cut backs introduced under the Fraser Government. See Fogg, August 9, 1973, NAA.