

## **A Designed Incompleteness**

Quotation and Transfer In The Later Australian Work Of Romaldo Giurgola

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### **Abstract**

*Apart from his competition-winning scheme for the New Parliament, the hand of Italian architect Romaldo Giurgola (1920-2016) in his Australian firm's subsequent work has received relatively nominal critical attention. Having decided to reside in Canberra permanently after the completion of the Parliament, however, Giurgola personally undertook the design of several more buildings of critical note in Australia in the final two decades of his active career. These deeply personal late works – including churches, private residences and better-known institutional commissions – reflected a lifetime of transnational practice, observation, and emulation in the discipline of architecture. Italian-trained in the Beaux-Arts tradition but also deeply attracted early-on to the austerity and alterity of Nordic Modernism, he came to maturity as an architect in the East-Coast American crucible of Late-Modernism and contending Postmodern critiques, threads of which his Parliament project was often credited (or reviled) for having transferred to Australia. But, ever the outsider, Giurgola's increasingly refined and ultimately distinctive distillation of influences and affinities may be more accurately described, not as vapid winking to a transplanted 'insider's' discourse, but as an architecture that continually drew upon this diverse accreted wealth of memory and experience in an open-ended compositional response to new physical and cultural contexts. Reflecting on Giurgola's long geographic and intellectual journey to Australia, and his unique traverse across post-war architectural practice and theory, the paper examines several explicit quotations from the work of Alvar Aalto in Giurgola's designs for these final Australian buildings, among other more immediate influences, exploring the argument that the principled incompleteness that Giurgola had long-admired in Nordic modernist architecture was a particularly good fit for the new southern frontier that he had apprehended and ultimately embraced as his final home, in Canberra's verdant and urbane variant of Australian suburbia.*

## Introduction

The sampling of stylistic elements from vernacular sources and the historical canon was a defining feature of some of the most influential architecture produced by East Coast American architects in the latter half of the twentieth century. This intentional quoting (or mis-quoting) would later be discerned as a central characteristic of the postmodern movement: from the 'New York Five' who obsessively cited and fetishised the 'formalisms' of early modernist functionalism, particularly Le Corbusier's white villas; to the experimental fusion of local vernacular elements with functionalist aesthetics in seminal exemplars such as Charles Moore's Sea Ranch (1963-1964) and Robert Venturi's Vanna Venturi House (1964); and the cartoonish citation of classical elements and order in Venturi's Guild House (1963) or Moore's later Piazza d'Italia (1978). For influential architect/theoreticians such as Venturi, and many of those with whom he was associated or taught between the 1960s and 1980s, terms such as 'symbol', and 'sign' had displaced 'function' as the theoretical driver of design as they aspired to re-embrace the old, half-forgotten, idea of 'meaning' in architecture in the new light (and intellectual fashion) of contemporary semiological theory; that is, as a system of communication.<sup>1</sup>

When, in 1980, at the peak of postmodern pronouncements, the National Capital Authority announced the American firm Mitchell/Giurgola, with Australian architect/partner Richard Thorp, as the winner of the New Parliament House competition, the successful design was unequivocally proclaimed by local critics as the 'Postmodern parliament'.<sup>2</sup> Beyond the scheme's undeniably overt references to the stripped neo-classical style, spatial order, and symbolic programme of its 'historic' Canberra context, it was also deemed postmodern by the association of its lead designer, Italian born and trained Romaldo Giurgola (1920-2016), with his American colleague, Robert Venturi, among other academic associates and professional peers in Philadelphia – not least Louis Kahn – where he had taught and practiced for over two decades. In the critical assessment of Giurgola's peers, however, these links were not so straight-forward. Sympathetically distinguished by Robert A.M. Stern, who differentiated Giurgola from Venturi and other ostensible fellow travelers, such as Stern himself, subsequently associated with the ironic turn in American postmodern classicism, Giurgola was respected as an assured but restrained practitioner and teacher whose Roman upbringing and training contributed to a temperate sensibility 'that sketches with soft lines and gently shaded areas'.<sup>3</sup> Giurgola's focus was on the *chiaroscuro* experience of architecture, not the caricature of the architectural sign.

Another less conspicuous facet of the postmodern sensibility that appeared to connect Giurgola directly with Venturi was a mutual admiration for the work of Alvar Aalto. In his seminal polemic of 1966, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, Venturi had brought new light and relevance to the work of a number of non-conformist modernists, including Aalto, and by the mid-1970s Giurgola had begun to employ distinctly Aalto-esque patterns and forms in his own designs.<sup>4</sup> The Tredyffrin Public Library of 1976 and the Lukens Steel Company Administration Building of 1978, are two of the earliest examples that clearly borrowed from Aalto's compositional device of ordering irregular masses against a straight line. Giurgola was to further develop this relationship with Aalto and other Scandinavian inspirations in several subsequent commissions from the Swedish based car manufacturer Volvo during their expansion into the United States in the early 1980s.<sup>5</sup> But Giurgola had been cultivating an affinity for Aalto's ways of conceiving architecture and some of his form sources for considerably longer. Aalto's admiration of the way in which Italians integrated buildings into the landscape is well documented.<sup>6</sup> Aalto, among others of his generation of Nordic architects, admired forms that resisted perfect geometries and compositional order. Traditional Italian townscapes, with their off-center piazzas and facades that were almost (but not quite) symmetrical, had been a profound inspiration. Emboldened, perhaps, by the enthusiasm of his 'postmodernist' peers, Giurgola had now given himself the license to quote what Aalto had, in fact, appreciated and appropriated from the architecture of Giurgola's own origins.<sup>7</sup>

Whilst the New Australian Parliament was destined to be the most widely recognised and rhetorically conspicuous of all Giurgola's works, it is, arguably, one of the least representative of the particular

affinity for and approach to the uses of architectural quotation that were sustained and developed throughout much of his career, both before and after his move to Australia. As this paper will attempt to demonstrate, Giurgola 'quoted' not in the smug and superior sense of a knowing wink to the cognoscenti, but – closer to Aalto's approach – as a method of assembling forms, patterns, qualities and echoes of affect and meaning sourced from memory and experience, from which a novel architectural response to context could be composed.

Although Giurgola and partner Ehrmann B. Mitchell were well established in the United States with large corporate offices in New York and Philadelphia, upon completion of the Parliament Giurgola decided to emigrate permanently to Australia. The move was, ostensibly, precipitated by personal family matters, but also reflected a pattern of periodic transplantation over the course of his career, where new contexts offered open-ended opportunities for renewal and extension. From Giurgola's Canberra base, he undertook several design commissions, both in his newest adopted home, and abroad, for a wide range of institutional and government clients. These included: St Thomas Aquinas Church, Canberra (1986-1991); the master plan and design of a military academy for Singapore's Ministry of Defence (1989-1995), consisting of more than fifty buildings over eighty five hectares; the Vice-Chancellor's Residence, 'Bimbimbie', at the University of Canberra; the 'Red Centre' Faculty of the Built Environment, School of Mathematics and the International Centre (1996) and the 'Scientia' multi-purpose hall for the University of New South Wales (1999); the Science, Engineering and Mathematics buildings flanking the Barr Smith lawns at the University of Adelaide; St Patrick's Cathedral, Parramatta (1997-2003) and a small get-away house for himself in the Brindabella Ranges outside Canberra (2002-2003). Little is understood about these later buildings as discussion of Giurgola's contribution in Australia has been over-shadowed by criticism of the parliament building; a project that is often considered in isolation from the greater body of Mitchell/Giurgola's work.

In the following pages we will now examine the form-sources and distinctively incomplete, if not unresolved, ways in which Giurgola composed these quotations in three of the smallest of these final Australian projects.<sup>8</sup>

### **St Thomas Aquinas Church (1986-1991)**

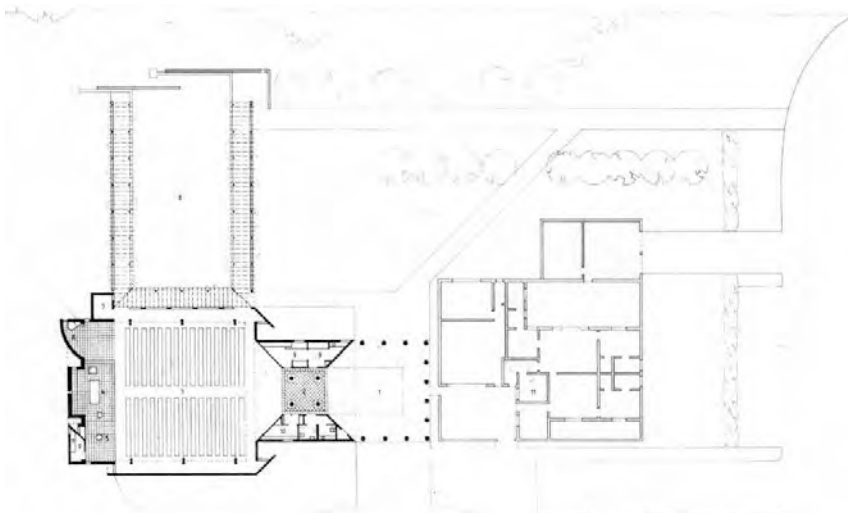
Giurgola's St Thomas Aquinas Church of 1986-1991 is in the Canberra suburb of Charnwood, on the outskirts of the Australian Capital Territory. The suburb was established in the 1970s as Canberra expanded to the north and south; outside of the original extent of the Griffins' Canberra Plan; in planned satellite towns. The suburb's layout was based on the 'Radburn' model, an updated American version of the garden suburb. Building lots were arranged in cul-de-sacs connected by collector roads and were expected to be filled with single family homes. Each suburb was serviced by a group of shops, schools, recreation space, and one or two low-slung public buildings clustered at the highway exit.

At Charnwood, set between the highway and a collector road, is a strip of shops, fast-food restaurants and land reserved for 'community use'. The latter land parcel saw the development of a Catholic community school and presbytery, constructed in the 1970s. It is a collection of commonplace concrete block educational buildings. Giurgola positioned the new building, of around 500m<sup>2</sup>, to the south of the existing presbytery and school, arranging the components in what at first glance appears to follow the traditional sequence of spaces: narthex–nave–sanctuary, interleaved with open courtyards. And, conversely, again agreeing with established patterns, Giurgola's church has a cross-axial, L-shaped relationship with a cloister/courtyard space. Looking more closely, in Giurgola's plan (Figure 2), the north and south walls of the cloister are fragmented. To the north, the courtyard's enclosing wall is open to the nave, visually connecting the two spaces, a theme explored earlier in his Lang Music Building at Swarthmore College (1970–1974) in which the main performance space opens onto the surrounding woodland. To the south the courtyard wall is again fragmented and incomplete, allowing nature to flow in.



**Figure 1.** St Thomas Aquinas Church, Charnwood, Canberra. 1986–1991. East Elevation (Left); Lhotsky Street/North Elevation (Right)  
Photographs by John Gollings © Guida Moseley Brown Architects.

The second challenge to the traditional symmetrical pattern is evident in the absence of chapel wings in Giurgola's plan. These absences correspond to two major geo-political and topographic influences on the site: the city to the east; and Charnwood suburbia to the North. In the distribution of volumes in the church, the Griffins' plan is also an important influence. Although outside the direct grasp of its radiating arms: the distant counter-point of Black Mountain, the topography of the land, the existing presbytery and the arterial road approach are site forces that pull the centre of gravity of the building to the south, and are reflected in the rising central mass. Further, the pull towards the Canberra centre is felt where a portion of the main mass is fractured away from the main volume, symbolically indicating its importance.



**Figure 2.** St Thomas Aquinas Plan. Mitchell/Giurgola & Thorp Architects.

The result of these influences is an emphasis to the north-eastern corner of the complex. Along the east side, the cloister acts as a tail and the central mass has the scale and importance in a 'head and tail' configuration, often associated with Aalto.<sup>9</sup> The vertical thrust of the dominant mass is accentuated by the long, low horizontal wall of the cloister, connected to the horizon and the earth. Along the north side, the main volume and sacred spaces are elevated in importance by their

relationship to the aisle, narthex, and ultimately the presbytery. Conversely, along Lhotsky Street, the effect of the falling height leads the eye to its lower end as the point of entry, expressed as a low scale open area between the narthex and presbytery. (Figure 3)

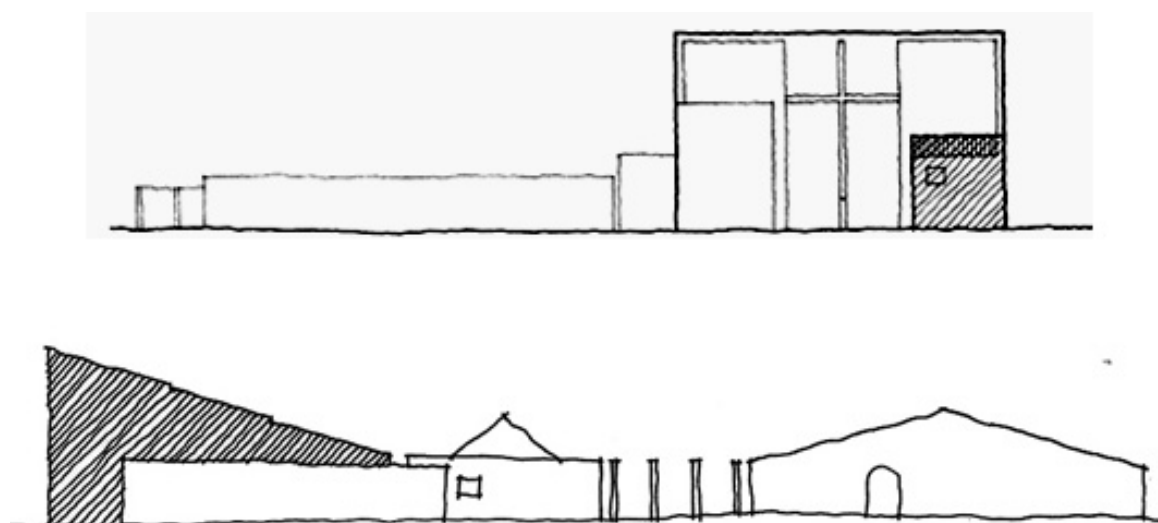
Here again, Aalto appears to have been one of Giurgola's muses. The sleek white wedge of the southern elevation of the nave recalls another recurring pattern in Aalto's repertory, illustrated most notably in the Maison Louis Carre of 1959, in which the distinctive use of smooth and rusticated white-painted brick appears to be a further cue to the careful composition of forms and materials in the St Thomas Church. Constructed of a rough-textured brick, the low aisle walls resonate with the existing presbytery and the mundane character of the suburban houses in nearby streets, protecting the more refined lines and soaring volume of the nave contained behind, which is faced with a smooth brick and painted white. Symbolically, the nave strikes a clean figure against the sky, the heavens; while the aisle is tied to the earth and the human and suburban dimension. Meanwhile, the narthex roof is a reiteration of the larger pyramidal form of the neighbouring school and the hipped roof forms of Charnwood suburban housing. This contextual motif occurs again in the choice of roof materials where the terracotta roof repeats the qualities of the presbytery and, equally, the roof forms of the surrounding neighbourhood. The clerestory window over the altar is the less visible repeat of a comparable use of familiar suburban forms.

An element of the east façade composition is, however, the most pronounced and intriguing instance of Giurgola's reference to context. The modelled end façade is composed of three forms in which the centre piece of the arrangement, the apse, features a large Christian cross sliced through a taught flat surface that is sharply articulated and seemingly projected from the main volume of the building. The effect recalls the sign-board like facades with which Venturi, in his early projects, had proposed that a post-modern re-thinking of the house and the functional shed could restore both meaning and decoration to the ambit of architectural design. In Giurgola's more refined and respectful hand, however, the semiotic gesture is balanced if not subsumed by the elegance of its formal resolution. At either side of the apse are two lesser forms, one curving and poetic, containing the confessional, and the other small and oddly domestic in scale, containing a small anteroom. This combination of elements introduces an intriguing counterpoint of major (symmetrical/archetypal), and minor (asymmetrical/prosaic) orders into the composition of this key façade. Again, this could be interpreted as another echo of Giurgola's dialogues both with Venturi and with Aalto, and their mutual fascinations with creative conjunctions and contradictions of high and low, in architecture. Although the small anteroom has also been interpreted as an 'obvious' quote from yet another source – in this case Kahn's distinctive articulated treatment of the fireplace and flue on the exterior of his Esherick House – it appears to be a particularly intentional nod to the idea of the vernacular interrupting the possibility of completing what might have been a more formally perfected composition.<sup>10</sup> With its almost perversely squat proportions and the banality of its detailing relative to the elegance of the adjacent apse, it is like an ad-hoc 'lean-to' or the backyard 'add-ons' and out-buildings of the neighbouring houses.

Upon entering the building, the expressed thinness of the enclosure is evident, recalling more the cardboard-like construction of Venturi's projects than the rich layering of contrasting materials that tend to complicate the relationships between inside and outside in otherwise comparable works of Aalto such as the church at Imatra, or, in the same tradition, Utzon's church at Bagsveard. In Giurgola's church, hidden connections to exposed steel portal frames support the upper walls and roof of the nave, exaggerating the slenderness of the enclosing volume. The slicing through of walls to admit light, as in the apse, also serves to amplify the leanness of the construction, and the use of oblique natural light further expresses the sheer surface. Naturally finished wood is applied consistently to the ceilings of the two public spaces, the narthex and nave. From the narthex, the darkness of the material draws the eye to the more brightly lit end wall of the altar, but the low head of its ceiling is not entirely revealed until entering the nave where the ceiling rakes upward as the floor



inappreciably slopes down toward the sanctuary – a feature of early non-conformist churches. The processional axis is accentuated by the symmetry of the plan and structure, the focus of the cross and the hanging light fixtures. Daylight enters the main volume from the sides as well as from above, obliquely, where the sanctuary is fractured away from the volume, and from clerestory windows above. The effect as it washes over the surface in this precise way highlights the qualities and slight imperfections of the materials. Here, affinities with the churches of Aalto and other Scandinavian modernists, such as Erik Bryggman's Resurrection Chapel in Turku, are, arguably, more pronounced, yet hardly as direct as they would appear to be with Tadao Ando's contemporaneous and much better-known Church of Light, in which the precise and ever-changing wash of light and shadow on minimally adorned materials has been widely admired. Completed only in 1989, however, Giurgola had already tied down the essential principles of his design for St Thomas at least three years before Ando's church was first published. In a revealing letter to a colleague written early in the life of the project, Giurgola (1986) emphasised the primacy of light in his design for the church: 'The focuses [sic] are made clear by light...are the light in a literal sense...It should be real because of the things it touches, giving life to each of them. Walls, floors, tables, plants ...'<sup>11</sup>

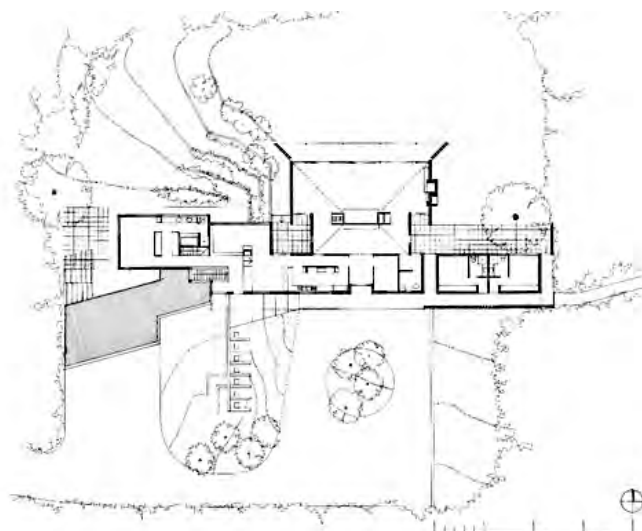


**Figure 3.** Head and tail configurations on East (Top) and North (Bottom) elevations. Note also the curious juxtapositions of banal and sublime.

#### **'Bimbimbie': Vice Chancellor's Residence, University of Canberra (1994-1995)**

'Bimbimbie' is the official residence for the Vice Chancellor at the University of Canberra, located on the edge of the university campus, well set back from the nearest public road to the south. Originally established in 1967 as the Canberra College of Advanced Education, the University was laid out as a purpose-built campus in a landscape setting in a manner consistent with the development in Canberra, in the 1960s and 1970s, of low density fringe suburbs that integrated with the local topographic setting.

Mitchell/Giurgola & Thorp competed with local architects, Jackson Swain and Roger Pegrum for the house commission. Margin scrawls on the drawings from one of the jurors comment that Giurgola was 'Classic' and 'able to design within budget'. Meanwhile Jackson Swain are described as 'Modest' and Pegrum as 'Japanese'.



**Figure 4.** Vice Chancellors Residence Ground Floor Plan.  
Mitchell/Giurgola & Thorp Architects

The residence comprises accommodation for the Vice-Chancellor and family; a reception and entertaining room; a private lounge; guest rooms; and surrounding landscaped areas. Its plan is arranged with service spaces drawn into a linear spine, neatly separating the public (road) side from the private (garden) side, and acting as a baseline from which springs the main rooms in a tensile relationship to this reference; akin to similar strategies Aalto adopted between conventional linear forms and radial offshoots, as in the Rovaniemi Library. Towards the end of the linear spine another offshoot splays out towards the landscape, containing the garaging for the house with a balcony over from the main bedroom. Aalto's influence is again evident in sketches for the landscape form with cascading irregular steps flowing out into natural topography, a further quotation from the Maison Louis Carre, perhaps, or the turf-covered steps up to the courtyard of the Saynatsalo Town Hall.



**Figure 5.** Vice Chancellors Residence Sketch. Mitchell/Giurgola & Thorp Architects

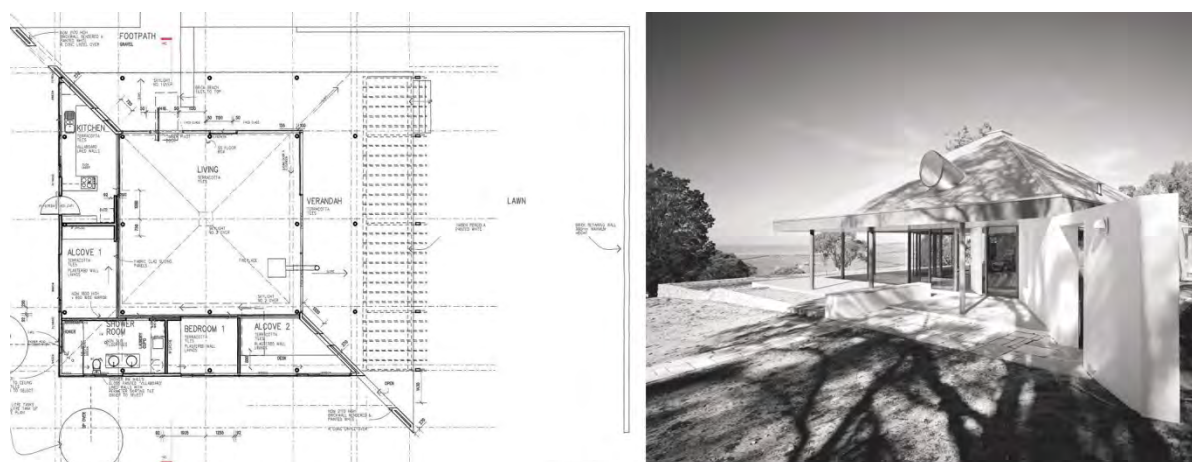
Encased in the spine is the centrepiece of the composition, a large and regular pavilion-like room with a hipped roof rising to a clerestory window above that closely resembles the simpler getaway house Giurgola was later to design for himself. In many of Aalto's works, a single room is designed to carry the essential architectural idea, quite like the notion of a 'room' more explicitly described by Louis Kahn.<sup>12</sup> (Although Kahn is said to have criticized Aalto's work saying that a building composed of designed responses to casual activity would be a monument to casualness). Another reading of the

Vice Chancellor's Residence plan is the unfolding of Kahn's servant rooms from the served room. Giurgola thus carries forward both the strategies of Aalto and Kahn with approximately equal weight. The result, as represented in his pencil sketches, is the appearance of an Italian hill town, an informal assemblage surmounted by a central pavilion. Such a bucolic 'casualness' marks a distinct deviation from the geometric formalisms and control of Mitchell/Giurgola's previous campus architecture in the USA, notably Bryn Mawr College in the late 1960s.

### 'RG House', Lake Bathurst (2002-2003)

In a sketch of the house Giurgola designed for '...my daughter, myself and a dog...' in the Great Dividing Range overlooking Lake Bathurst he depicts a lone figure, hunched over his desk, not facing the wide scenic valley below, but busily at work, the view to his left. Immediately there are comparisons to the summer retreats of other celebrated architects: Aalto's summer house, and Le Corbusier's Cabanon, for example. The square plan of Giurgola's retreat, slashing diagonal and temple like roof have also led to comparisons with the villas of Palladio, and with Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye of 1929-1930.<sup>13</sup> For others, the spirit, or 'total experience', of the house derives from Giurgola's nomadic condition and his adaptation to Australia's diverse culture and conditions.<sup>14</sup>

On a walk to the top of the densely-wooded hill behind the house in 2003, Giurgola commented to one of the present authors that he had considered two potential locations for the getaway house. The first was atop the wooded hill and the second, and eventually favoured location, was on a clearer patch of ground on the hill's saddle, about 100m down from the peak. On settling for the latter position, Giurgola commented that he considered a range of practical reasons such as access to electrical supply, the steepness of road access, tree clearing that would be needed, as well as a quite detailed consideration of the view. The most jarring factor in the view from the top of the hill was a high voltage power line that ran across.



**Figure 6.** RG House Plan (pergola not built). (Right) View of RG House from the north-west. Photograph by John Gollings (by permission of the photographer).

On the lower elevation site Giurgola established a rectangular, flat platform part cut into the slope and part elevated, retained by a bounding masonry wall. Approaching the house from the gravel driveway, a path is made from simple stones and passes between a low seating wall and the diagonal wall. Suspended atop slender columns is a simple pyramidal roof, it gives a similar impression to the proportions and primitive form of the Skogskapellet cemetery chapel, designed by Gunnar Asplund. The path leads up to a timber door created by Kevin Perkins from Giurgola's favoured blonde timber, Tasmanian Oak. It is a heavy door that swings on a pivot, like those favoured by Le Corbusier. Above, the verandah ceiling is clad in matchboard timber, painted a sky blue blending the soffit with the



colours of the sky. Underfoot are burnt red terracotta tiles on a concrete slab, evoking Giurgola's Italian origins.

The house itself is a square plan, sited to the back (hill) end of the platform – a square within a rectangle. The remainder of the flat terrace set in front of the house is informally grassed and frames expansive views across the farmed valley below to the Morton National Park beyond. The proportional relationship of the square to the rectangle of the platform on which it sits is 1:2 and does not appear to have any special significance, except that it is approximately two squares. Internal to the house, the separation of space dimension (of the servant spaces) from large dimension (of the main room) at a proportion of 1:1.3, and the main room is a square plan with a proportion of 1:1 with its height. Thus, in arranging the site, Giurgola does not appear to establish any special proportional relationship between dimensions that could be understood to be a close relationship with known compositional 'rules'.

The second organising device of Giurgola's plan is the diagonal; a device that has become synonymous with Mitchell/Giurgola's architecture; from the 1962 Boston City Hall competition bid that brought the fledgling firm to prominence, through to the Australian Parliament, the diagonal and square are base organising devices that run through much of their work. Slicing from corner to corner in the house it acts as the spatial divide between private and living spaces, and extends beyond the enclosed space, obfuscating the difference between inside and outside at the corners of the main room. Giurgola (2003) commented that the wall was aligned to two large trees that he preserved from the pre-existing landscape, demonstrating his concern with fitting the building into its natural context.

While the RG House is much indebted to Kahn's formulation of the served room, Giurgola's deletion of the second wing of servant spaces is where it departs from Kahn's isolated interiors. The pattern evident in Kahn's buildings is for the main atrium spaces to be wrapped on all sides by their servant rooms. Whereas, Giurgola's, on the other hand, is a calculated ruined adaptation of the 'difficult whole' in which the diagonal provides the inflection. Upon entering the house, the interior of the large room is vaulted up inside the pyramidal roof to a central square lantern which lights the space from above balancing the light from the large picture windows overlooking the artificial plateau. Two circular dormer windows, formed by cylinders, punch through the ceiling envelope at the angle of the opposing roof, and extend out beyond, giving the impression of a deeper volume. They also provide two tracking lights that mark the passage of the day and the seasons, as in the side lights of the Florence Cathedral dome, or Asplund's Stockholm library. And yet, Giurgola's dormers defy the highly symmetrical building as they are offset from the centre axis, marking an oblique, off-centre, entry.

Internally, there are no doors for access to the flanking servant spaces. Instead, floor to ceiling sliding screens are covered in richly coloured felts and conceal the private spaces beyond. Whereas the tenets of modernism demanded the use of white, bland surfaces detaching the inhabitant from the landscape, Giurgola's choice of naturally finished materials externally, and internally, a simple palette of terracotta tiles for the floor, timber boarded ceiling, and coloured felts on the walls — like those of the Scandinavian tradition — seek to connect the inhabitant with the familiar and the comfortable. Giurgola and his daughter, art collectors and painters themselves, later expressed some regret with the screens as there was no wall space in the grand room for hanging their works of art.

## Conclusion

There are obvious quotations throughout Giurgola's Australian work. The St Thomas Church is most heavily indebted, in both its form and its materiality, to the work of Alvar Aalto, his Maison Louis Carré in particular. But, it is the underlying device of 'incompletion' that goes further than a simple citation. The odd suburban and natural intrusions into the composition challenge the otherwise highly architectural spaces; while they aid, at the same time, to fuse the architecture to its place. The odd incursions are not the overt quotation of suburban motifs that featured in the work of notable

postmodern Australian contemporaries such as Edmond and Corrigan in their Chapel of St Joseph. Instead, Giurgola's church synthesises the 'ordinary' into the overall composition; a more softly spoken conversation with suburbia. At the same time, these small-scale suburban elements act to amplify the modest-size church, a motif of changes of scale Giurgola had experimented with in his earlier designs, including Parliament House, where he used the scale of the flagpole and roofs over the houses to mediate between the scale of the Canberra landscape and the human scale experience of the building itself. The incorporation of the existing presbytery as an integral part of the design also demonstrates that Giurgola's concern is with lifting the 'quality of the whole' by careful consideration of its individual parts, or 'fragments' as he referred to them. Formally and symbolically, Giurgola's church can then be understood as a conversation along its two axes. The major axis is the procession or transitional axis, from the secular to the sacred, affirming the traditional processional rites of the church. In this direction, the quotation of materials and elements drawn from suburbia are in dialogue with the context onto which the church faces. In the cross-axial direction, the sacred space converses with nature through the cloister. In both directions, the composition connects the building with its context(s), rather than completing it in an insular, self-contained manner.

The Vice Chancellor's House for the University of Canberra, meanwhile, references both Kahn and Aalto in roughly equal measures. There is not the same direct expression of incompleteness in the design as there is in the St Thomas Church. Instead, it is the tension created between the two opposing strategies: one wanting to be with the landscape, and the other wanting to be a pure pavilion, each being the host of the other.

Finally, Giurgola's country house is a fitting close, by which the tension is created by off-centre elements in an otherwise symmetrical composition, itself a quotation of the ideal villa. The house's pyramidal roof set over a defined platform consolidates this impression. The configuration of the plan geometry appears to have its roots in the mid-century reappraisal of the Renaissance by Wittkower and Rowe that Kahn and Venturi had explored in their designs of the late 1950s and 1960s, respectively. However, Giurgola's secondary moves to remove the servant spaces on the view side, and the smaller oddity of the dormer windows oppose a straight-forward interpretation; as does the exaggeration of the diagonal wall beyond its instinctive limits. Although they have very little direct stylistic association, a further reading of the house against Aalto's summer house at Muuratsalo provides surprising additional insight into Giurgola's deep appreciation of the Finnish master. The plans of Aalto's main pavilion of his summer house are remarkably similar in the zoning of service spaces around atria. Where an atrium would expect to be encircled, Aalto and Giurgola remove two sides and allow it access to the view. Aalto's is open above and walls fragmented to allow views to the lake beyond. Urban elements are re-composed in the Finnish woods giving this house a sense of theatre and play, which is further emphasized by Aalto's experiments with red brick and glazed tiles that line the interior of the courtyard. Giurgola's atrium, on the other hand, is calming and centralizing. Its symmetry and platform are what binds it to the landscape; an object in the landscape. Instead of being a grand entry, they are orientated outwards towards the countryside. In other words, 'the porticos act more like theatres for a spectacle that pre-dates the building: the landscape all around'<sup>15</sup>. It is this odd juxtaposition of urban elements from his Italian roots re-projected in the countryside that perhaps resonated in Giurgola's mind when introducing and composing such tensions in his buildings. Whereas Aalto's villa is suspended between the Finnish woodland and the Italian hill town Giurgola's is suspended between memories of his rambles around Palladian villas in his youth, yet unaffected by Kahn's immutable monumentalism, and Giurgola's later interaction with the Australian landscape. Between earth and sky, short view and long view, closed spaces, and open spaces, Giurgola's villa converses with its natural context, and simultaneously with the history of the villa type in a way similar, not in form, but in sensibility to how Aalto's summer house converses with the history of Finnish construction through a series of tectonic statements and responses that had continued over time and remained open-ended and incomplete.

QUOTATION: What does history have in store for architecture today?

But, it is not just the addition of the landscape and Giurgola's sensibility to the continuation of existing patterns that can fully explain the work.<sup>16</sup> Without an appreciation of the longer time-frame and varieties of geography and milieus in which his architectural ideas were gathered, actioned, and continuously added to, adapted and renovated, our understanding of Giurgola's architecture is incomplete.

*We would like to thank Harold Guida of Guida Mosely Brown Architects (formerly Mitchell/Giurgola & Thorp) for providing access to the firm's archives and his review of the paper. We would also like to thank the University of Canberra for their assistance with archival records.*

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> This agenda had, most influentially, been manifested in Robert Venturi, Denise Scott-Brown and Stephen Izenour, *Learning from Los Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1977), but had already been the focus of lively academic debate within the discipline since the mid-1960s: Charles Jencks and George Baird (eds), *Meaning in Architecture* (New York: George Braziller, 1970); and long before Jencks's and others later, but ultimately premature, pronouncements of the death of modern architecture. For a more recent and detached re-appraisal of the rhetorical function of quotation in the iconic architectures of the 1970s-80s as compared to iconicism in early 21<sup>st</sup> century architecture, see: Thomas L. Schumacher, 'Facadism Returns, or the Advent of the Duck-orated Shed' *Journal of Architectural Education* (2010), 128-137.
- <sup>2</sup> Jennifer Taylor & P Buchannan, 'Post-Modern Parliament: Mitchell/Giurgola Thorp Winning Design', *Architectural Review*, 168, 1006 (1980), 354-359.
- <sup>3</sup> Robert A.M. Stern, *New Directions in American architecture* (London: Studio Vista, 1984).
- <sup>4</sup> Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1966).
- <sup>5</sup> Stephen Frith, *Past and Present Exchanges in the work of Romaldo Giurgola*. Paper presented at the Interspaces: Art and Architectural Exchanges from East to West, Melbourne (2010).
- <sup>6</sup> Malcolm Quantrill, *Alvar Aalto: A critical study*, (London: Secker & Warburg, 1983).
- <sup>7</sup> David Bell in his article, 'Unity and Aesthetics of Incompletion in Architecture' likens the American work of Giurgola and Venturi, amongst others, to the strategies employed by Aalto. *Architectural design*, Jan. 1971-(7) (1979), 175-182.
- <sup>8</sup> Unless indicated otherwise, the original observations and analyses from which the following sections have drawn are developed more fully in Stephen G. Schrapel, Romaldo Giurgola in Australia and the 'Other' Modern Tradition, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Adelaide, 2015.
- <sup>9</sup> Antony Radford and Tarkko Oksala, 'Alvar Aalto and the expression of discontinuity' *The Journal of Architecture*, 2007; 12(3):257-280.
- <sup>10</sup> This observation is attributed to Paolo Tombesi in an unpublished lecture on Giurgola delivered at the School of Architecture, CEPT University, Ahmedabad, India, January 30, 2017.
- <sup>11</sup> Personal facsimile from Giurgola to Pamille Berg titled 'St T.A'., dated 25 July 1986.
- <sup>12</sup> Britt Anderson, 'Alvar Aalto and Jørn Utzon - An Architecture of Ancient Gathering Forms' *UME*, 22 (2011), 44-59.
- <sup>13</sup> Beck Haig & Jackie Cooper, 'R G House', *UME*, 17, 1 (2004), 2-11.
- <sup>14</sup> Manasseh, Cyrus and Favaro, Paola, 'A Total Experience: The Constructed Environment of Romaldo Giurgola's "Casa di Campagna" in Australia', *International Journal of the Constructed Environment*, 1, 3 (2011), 127-140.
- <sup>15</sup> Pier Vittorio Aureli, 'The Geopolitics of the Ideal Villa', *The Possibility of an Absolute Architecture*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011), 47-84.
- <sup>16</sup> Paolo Tombesi, 'Patterns of a Journey, The Giurgola Effect'. *Erasmus Effect: Italian Architects Abroad*, edited by Pippo Ciorra & Catarina Padoa Schioppa, Museo Nazionale Delle Arti Del XXI Secolo (2013).