

Heritage inventory sheet

Based on the NSW Heritage Office State Heritage Inventory sheet

ITEM DETAILS			
Name of Item	The Penthouses, including interiors		
Former name			
Item type	Built, Landscape		
Address	Number 58-61	Street New Beach Road	Suburb Rushcutters Bay
Property description	Lot		DP SP 3143
Use	Current Residential flat building		Former Residential flat building
Statement of significance	<i>The Penthouses</i> is significant for its relationship to the change of land use; the change from single-family houses to a medium density residential building that reflects the need to accommodate a higher population, to accommodate an increasingly ageing and affluent population in apartments larger and more luxurious than the Sydney average. It is capable of demonstrating the NSW historic themes of 'accommodation' and 'towns suburbs and villages.' The national themes of 'building settlements, towns and cities' and 'creative endeavour' are also illuminated by the place. The historical significance of <i>The Penthouses</i> also lies in its pioneering utilisation of the stepped terrace form for medium density housing, utilising the steep slope of the site to provide apartments with extensive outdoor terraces and views of the harbour. It is also evidence of the post-war European Modernist influence on Australian architecture, with British immigrant, and furniture designer, Harry Sebel, the developer of the project. The place has historical associative significance as it is strongly associated with architect, Ken Woolley; landscape designer, Bruce Mackenzie; and, the Sebel family. Woolley is one of the most prominent and important Australian architects of the mid and late 20th century. Mackenzie, is an important and influential landscape designer of the late 20th century closely linked with the Sydney School style approach to design; and, the Sebel family, are prominent Sydney manufacturers and entrepreneurs. A number of the Sebels originally occupied units in the building and acted as financial backers of the project. <i>The Penthouses</i> is aesthetically significant for its 'effortlessly harmonious' (1969 Wilkinson Award citation) relationship to the steeply sloping site, human scale, structural brickwork, timber framed windows and doors, private entrances and courtyards, juxtaposition of textures, Australian native landscaping, and steeply pitched, tiled roofs, the building is an outstanding example of Sydney School style architecture. The building is important in the history of Australian architecture as one of the earliest of its kind (stepping back terraces) in Australia, and it was highly influential in later apartment and townhouse design. <i>The Penthouses</i> is an outstanding example of Sydney Regionalist Style architecture and is an outstanding example of the architecture of Ken Woolley. It has social significance being valued by an identifiable contemporary group – the Australian Institute of Architects – as evidenced by its inclusion on the "Australian Institute of Architects Register of Significant Architecture" and it being awarded the Wilkinson Award by the RAI NSW Chapter in 1968.		
Level of significance	State: No	Local: Yes	
Heritage listings	Australian Institute of Architects "Register of Significant Architecture"		

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DESCRIPTION	
Designer	Architect: Ancher, Mortlock, Murray & Woolley Pty Ltd (Ken Woolley architect in charge) Engineer: Taylor, Thompsen & Whiting Electrical & Mechanical Engineers: Norman & Addicoat
Builder	Girvan Brothers
Construction years	1966-1967
Physical Description	The development consists of two parallel blocks of apartments located on a site that slopes steeply up from the street. The apartments step up the site so that the roof of one apartment forms the terrace and floor of the apartment above and unglazed terra cotta tiles and planter boxes line the edge of the terraces to partially conceal them from below. It was described in 2004 in the following terms: No. of Storeys: Six levels in stepped form of maximum two stories at any one point, and one two-storey townhouse. Roof: Mono-pitched pan-tiled roof with deeply overhanging eaves. Tiles extend onto tops of flanking walls. Walls: White painted brickwork. Windows & Doors: Originally painted timber colour Mission Brown (now painted white). Apertures are of square or horizontal proportions but individual joinery units have a strong vertical emphasis with groups of narrow casement windows. Some doorways have arched heads. Form & Structure: Two distinct blocks of residential flats containing a total of 12 units, linked by a terraced, landscaped circulation area. Both blocks have a stepped profile with terraces facing Rushcutters Bay to the west. Style or period: Late Twentieth Century Sydney Regional style. Interiors: The townhouse (No 61) at the north end of the northern block was the only unit inspected internally. It seems to be more altered than most other units. It has a dual-aspect, split level design with a continuity of space between dining and living rooms via a low-level opening. Other units are single level and some have a single-aspect. Internal finishes and fittings of no. 61 are quite altered but the layout is as originally designed. It has new aluminium bi-fold doors and glass balustrade on the west elevation. All quarry tile paving has been replaced with concrete imitation stone slabs. The wall enclosing the front courtyard has been demolished. Contribution to streetscape: The Penthouses make a distinctive contribution to New Beach Road, enhanced by the addition of a later building of similar design to the south. The integration of architecture and landscaping is an attractive characteristic of the scheme from front and rear. Landscaping: There are a variety of attractive open spaces in and around the buildings. The gardens belonging to no 61 have been replanted, some of the other planting may be original (eg eucalyptus tree in front garden). More study should be done to understand what remains of the landscape design by Bruce Mackenzie. (CLSP study, 2005)
Physical condition	Good
Modification and Dates	Some units have replaced their joinery and currently all the joinery is painted white, which is an intrusive intervention in the fabric. Some units have built enclosures on parts of their terraces and one unit at level 4 in the southern block has altered its external openings. A small shared swimming pool has been inserted in the space between buildings.
Archaeological potential	The place is unlikely to contain archaeological potential due to its topography and disturbance during construction of the subject building.

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Further comments	It was put forward in 2005, by CLSP, that the stepped form allowed for the preservation of the landform while reducing the bulk of the building. All units have views and private open terraces and individual parking and access. A footpath is provided between the two blocks giving access from Yarranabee Road to New Beach Road. Ken Woolley recognised the important contribution made to townhouse design by <i>The Penthouses</i>, noting that the building was entirely compliant with Schedule 7 of the Local Government Act, the planning control at the time. Woolley stated that he was ... “quite pleased...that one could evolve such a different building to the norm at the time, within a set of regulations which did not envisage anything remotely like it. And ironically you can’t do it now - you could not build that building under the Council Code. You could build a building like it but it would not be as economical as that. In fact, because it won the Wilkinson Award and became quite famous in some way, Council actually then set out to write a code in the late 60s, early 70s, that would recognise it...[as] the most desirable kind of development for Darling Point, instead of having all those high rises...Of course we had a string of clients that, once they saw [<i>The Penthouses</i>] wanted to do it, and we could not do it because the [new] code did not allow it. The new code designed to encourage it actually prevented it. They over-prescribed to such an extent that it made the building uneconomical compared with the alternative of walk-up flats.” “[<i>The Penthouses</i>] is very consistent with what I was trying to do with housing. I suppose I demonstrated with Pettit & Sevitt that by working in a kind of modified vernacular...the modification became an influence on the vernacular itself, so that the vernacular became, or least part of it became... something that one actually created. That seemed to be a very important direction to work in, I think it has been frustrated as a long-term venture by all sorts of other things, but it was a view that I was taking.” (Cited in WMC: CLSP, Draft Heritage inventory, 2005) <i>The Penthouses</i> won the prestigious RAIA (NSW Chapter) Wilkinson Award in 1968. In particular the jury praised the “... provision of individual entrances, car space and garden, together with view privacy for each of the units, [which] shows considerable skill in planning in both two and three dimensions. The relationship of the building to the site is effortlessly harmonious and is well scaled to its environments.” (WMC: CLSP, Draft Heritage inventory, 2005)
HISTORY	
The site of <i>The Penthouses</i> was part of the <i>Glenhurst Estate</i>, a subdivision of Thomas Barker’s 1835 grant which was established in the traditional country of the Cadigal and Birrabirragal peoples. Four houses were situated on lots 2 and 3 of the <i>Glenhurst Estate</i> by 1910, owned by Emma Lewis of Dubbo and her heirs until 1954, when it was sold in four lots. In 1966, Town House Developments Pty Ltd acquired all four lots. (WMC: CLSP 2005 study) Town House Developments Pty Ltd was a Sebel family company, headed by Harry Sebel, the well-known furniture manufacturer and entrepreneur who commissioned Ken Woolley to construct a multi-dwelling building on the site. (WMC: CLSP 2005 study) The development consists of two parallel blocks of apartments located on a site that slopes steeply up from the street. The apartments step up the site so that the roof of one apartment forms the terrace and floor of the apartment above and unglazed terra cotta tiles and planter boxes line the edge of the terraces to partially conceal them from below. On completion, Sebel promoted its features including the level of detail; the quality of the finishes; private terraces; laundries and storage; live-in caretaker and luxury kitchens. For Sebel “Getting just the right architect was especially important not only because of the possibilities of the site	

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but also because we and others who would occupy the building wouldn't be happy with ugly or unfunctional or dreary architecture." (WMC: CLSP 2005 study)

In her book, *Australian Architecture Since 1960*, Jennifer Taylor wrote:

"By the end of the 1960s, in Sydney in particular, there were signs in the private sector of increasing, widespread interest in denser more central housing. A balance between the suburban setting and high-rise apartment living was provided by generously landscaped, lower, apartment blocks and clustered townhouse developments. The finest of these was Woolley's Penthouses at Rushcutters Bay, 1967. The building stands on a sloping harbourside site providing fine views to the north and west. The units terrace back from the street frontage, affording each level a generous, planted patio to the front. Visual privacy is protected from level to level by the design of the balustrades and the placement of planting boxes. To the rear, a well-planned system of vehicular and pedestrian entries affords identity and protection to each individual dwelling. The Penthouses have a Mediterranean flavour with white, flat, planes of brick walls and tiled roofs. The mature growth of the planting, that throws vivid colours against the stepped sculptural walls, makes the building appear as a luxurious, terraced landscape. (Jennifer Taylor, 1990, *Australian Architecture Since 1960*, Canberra: RAI, p.148)

A *Sydney Morning Herald* article from 1967 describes the development in the following terms:

"Eleven single-storey apartments and one two-storey apartment have been built down a sloping site, overlapping one another. They are called Penthouses because each appears to be dwelling on a roof... Mr Woolley said he designed the houses to overlap because this would give all of them a Harbour view and would enable them to have open terraces, individual access and car parking – all desirable characteristics of town houses. Mr Woolley said he believed a building of this type was ideal for development of the harbour foreshores. "It preserves the form of the land, reduces the bulk of the building near the Harbour edge, and enables people further up the hillside to see over the tops," he added... Landscaping of the courts and terraces emphasises the domestic scale and individual approach to units. "In time this will produce a much more gentle relationship to the surroundings than the normal tower or slab flats buildings," Mr Woolley said..." (SMH, 12 Dec 1967, p.25). Interviewed by *InDesign* in 2009, Woolley discussed The Penthouses' tiered design: "That was a tremendous feeling of breaking new ground... On the world scene it was an important building because it was an expression of some of the principles of modern architecture and housing." In the hilly terrain of Sydney, the idea was commonly adopted for subsequent housing schemes (Jan Howlin, 'Indesign Luminary: Ken Woolley', 17 Dec 2017

<https://www.indesignlive.com/people/indesign-luminary-ken-woolley>).

Woolley considered *The Penthouses* to be a ground-breaking project on a world scale because of its fusion of Modernism and the particulars of the site and culture (ie regional Modernism). Woolley (1933-20, Sydney) achieved an exceptional beginning to his architectural career being a trainee in the Government Architects Branch, New South Wales Department of Public Health, Sydney, whilst studying architecture at the University of Sydney, from which he graduated with Honours in 1954. In 1955 he won the Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship. Woolley became a design architect with the Government Architects Branch, Sydney, and briefly an assistant architect for Chamberlin, Powell and Bon in London. (Drew, Philip, 'Ken Woolley' (extract), in Muriel Emanuel (ed.), *Contemporary Architects*, 1980, New York: St Martin's Press, pp.896-98.)

In 1964 Woolley joined the partnership of Ancher Mortlock and Murray and became Director of the company in 1969. He became the of numerous awards including, the Royal Institute of Architects Taubman House Competition Prize (with Michael Dysart) in 1958; Sulman Medal and Bronze Medal in 1962; four Wilkinson Awards; and, the Blacket Award in 1964 and 1969. He also received the St. Regis ACI Sisalkraft Travelling Scholarship in 1968, and the Merit Award from the RAI in the NSW Chapter in 1972, 1976 and 1978. In addition, Ken Woolley was made a Life Fellow of the RAI in 1976. (Drew, Philip, 'Ken Woolley' (extract), in Muriel Emanuel (ed.), *Contemporary Architects*, 1980, New York: St Martin's Press, pp.896-98.)

"The romantic values of the "Sydney School" are epitomised by Ken Woolley's domestic architecture, which is typified by a selection of warm natural materials, picturesque organisation of form and fluid handling of space...Between 1965 and 1968 Woolley helped pioneer the town house type of housing in Australia. "The Penthouses," a terraced group of flats at Darling Point overlooking Rushcutter's Bay, were an important step in gaining

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acceptance in the town house concept.” (Drew, Philip, ‘Ken Woolley’ (extract), in Muriel Emanuel (ed.), *Contemporary Architects*, 1980, New York: St Martin’s Press, pp.896-98.)

HISTORICAL THEMES		
Australian Theme	NSW Theme	How the historical theme is demonstrated in the local area
4. Building settlements, towns and cities	Towns, suburbs and villages, Accommodation	Subdivision of larger estates creating closer, suburban settlement
8. Developing Australia’s cultural life	Creative endeavour	Work of a creative, well-known architect

HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE ASSESSMENT	
Historic significance SHR criterion (a)	The significance of <i>The Penthouses</i> lies in its relationship to the change of land use; the change from single-family houses to a medium density residential building that reflects the need to accommodate a higher population, to accommodate an increasingly ageing and affluent population in apartments larger and more luxurious than the Sydney average. The historical significance of <i>The Penthouses</i> also lies in its pioneering utilisation of the stepped terrace form for medium density housing, utilising the steep slope of the site to provide apartments with extensive outdoor terraces and views of the harbour. It is also evidence of the post-war European Modernist influence on Australian architecture, with British immigrant, and furniture designer, Harry Sebel, the developer of the project. <i>The Penthouses</i> is associated with the NSW historic themes of ‘Accommodation’ and ‘Creative Endeavour’ and the National themes of ‘Building settlements, towns and cities’ and ‘Developing Australia’s cultural life’.
Historical association SHR criterion (b)	The place is strongly associated with Ken Woolley (1933-2015), who is one of the most prominent and important Australian architects of the mid and late 20th century. <i>The Penthouses</i> is an important work as one of his early townhouse/apartment building complexes. It was one of the early projects he designed at Ancher, Mortlock, Murray & Woolley architects within a few years of having left a distinguished early career at the NSW Government Architect’s Office. Woolley is immediately recognisable as the architect of his various homes for his family, the Pettit & Sevitt project homes. The place is associated with the landscape designer, Bruce Mackenzie, who is an important and influential landscape designer of the late 20th century, and is closely linked with the Sydney School style approach to design. The place is associated with the Sebel family, prominent Sydney manufacturers and entrepreneurs, as a number of members of the family originally occupied units in the building and acted as financial backers of the project. Harry Sebel, as an immigrant and furniture designer, had commonalities with the work to other European post-war immigrants who collectively had a major impact on Australian architecture as proponents of Modernism.

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Aesthetic/ creative/ technical achievement SHR criterion (c)	'The Penthouses' is aesthetically significant for its 'effortlessly harmonious' (1969 Wilkinson Award citation) relationship to the steeply sloping site, human scale, structural brickwork, timber framed windows and doors, private entrances and courtyards, juxtaposition of textures, Australian native landscaping, and steeply pitched, tiled roofs, the building is an outstanding example of Sydney School style architecture. The building is important in the history of Australian architecture as one of the earliest of its kind (stepping back terraces) in Australia, and it was highly influential in later apartment and townhouse design.
Social/cultural/ spiritual significance SHR criterion (d)	The place is valued by an identifiable contemporary group – the Australian Institute of Architects – as evidenced by its inclusion on the "Australian Institute of Architects Register of Significant Architecture" and it being awarded the Wilkinson Award by the RAIA NSW Chapter in 1968. Less formally, its value is evidenced by its inclusion in Jennifer Taylor's <i>Australian Architecture Since 1960</i>, as well as Graham Jahn's guide, <i>Sydney Architecture</i>, testifying to its high regard by Australian architects and others interested in Australian architecture.
Research potential SHR criterion (e)	The archaeological potential of the building is low due to the construction of the building. The building is a resource for understanding the constructional and architectural detailing of the architect, Ken Woolley, and the overall design and planning of the buildings on the site as well as the landscape design aesthetics of Bruce Mackenzie. It is also evidence of the aesthetic sensibilities of immigrant furniture designer, Harry Sebel, and has relevance to an understanding of Sebel's oeuvre. Research potential has been enhanced by the survival of the original drawings and documentation at WMC.
Rare SHR criterion (f)	'The Penthouses' is rare in 1960s apartment buildings in its use of the off-set terraced solution to a steep site.
Representative SHR criterion (g)	'The Penthouses' is an outstanding example of Sydney Regionalist Style architecture and is an outstanding example of the architecture of Ken Woolley. The building is also representative of the input of the immigrant developer/furniture designer, Harry Sebel.

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Integrity	The Clive Lucas Stapleton & Partners Pty Ltd photos from 2005 reveal that some of the apartments had removed the dark brown stain/paint from the terrace windows and doors and painted them white. All the exterior joinery and woodwork is now painted white rather than the original dark brown stain with the exception of the terrace planter box handrails. The staining emphasised the contrast between the walls and dark openings. The window and door woodwork has been given equal visual weight to the walls. The design of the windows etc, however, has remained as per the original where parts of the windows are divided in thin vertical strips with an adjacent larger glass sheet viewing panel. The original "Sydney School" aesthetic of dark-stained woodwork contrasting light-coloured bagged brick walls has been lost, bearing in mind that Ken Woolley always denied the existence of the "Sydney School" and he certainly wasn't a member of any movement. There has also been a loss of planting on the terraces when compared to earlier photographs that had been commissioned by Ken Woolley. Paint colour schemes are reversible changes and landscaping can be reinstated. However, construction of rooms on the west-facing terraces is more problematic and harder to reverse, and there is one Council-approved example already completed.
RECOMMENDATIONS	
Recommendations	Despite alterations (as listed below) the whole development is worthy of listing at a Local level on the Woollahra LEP. The boundary of the listing should be SP 3143. Non-structural internal changes are permissible as the building's significance is mainly tied to its exterior and spaces around it, however, care must be taken to preserve the sectional concept of the design as well as the unity of the building's design when viewed from the public realm. The original landscaping concept should be reinstated. Any joinery replacement should follow the original design. Remove external additions that detract from the original design (such as rooms constructed on the main terraces) and no further additions on the terraces should be permitted. Some of the changes that have been made to the exterior of the building (woodwork colour, landscaping) are reversible. However, additions to the building that detract from its appearance, also detract from its architectural significance. <i>The Penthouses</i> is of such a level of architectural significance that it should be nominated for listing to the Heritage Council of NSW for listing on the State Heritage Register. The original colour scheme could be reinstated.

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INFORMATION SOURCES				
Type	Author/Client	Title	Year	Repository
Study	Robertson & Hindmarsh Pty Ltd / Woollahra Municipal Council	Woollahra Contemporary Buildings Study: Heritage Peer Review and Update	2024	Woollahra Council records
Study	Clive Lucas, Stapleton & Partners Pty Ltd (CLSP) / Woollahra Municipal Council	Woollahra Contemporary Buildings Heritage Study	2005	Woollahra Council records
Archival records	Woollahra Municipal Council	Building Application Records	Various	Woollahra Council records
Study	Hericon Consulting, Colleen Morris & Peter Spearritt / Heritage Council of NSW	The Modern Movement in NSW: A Thematic Study and Survey of Places	2013	Heritage NSW
Book	Stephen Dobney (ed)	Ken Woolley and Ancher Mortlock & Woolley: Selected and Current Works. Mulgrave: Images Publishing Group Pty Ltd	1999	Various
Book	Ian McKay, Robin Boyd, Hugh Stretton, John Mant	Living & Partly Living: Housing in Australia. Melbourne: Thomas Nelson (Australia) Pty Ltd.	1971	Various
Journal article	Anon	"Apartments and Townhouse," Architecture in Australia, pp.617-620	1969	Various

AUTHOR OF THIS REPORT	
Name Robertson & Hindmarsh Pty Ltd (Dr Scott Robertson) & Sue Rosen Associates (Dr Sue Rosen)	24/5/2024

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IMAGES			
Image Caption	The Penthouses viewed from New Beach Road, 2024.		
			
Image Year	2024	Image author and Copyright Holder	Robertson & Hindmarsh Pty Ltd

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IMAGES

Image Caption	<i>The Penthouses viewed from New Beach Road, 2024.</i>
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Image Year	2024	Image author and Copyright Holder	Robertson & Hindmarsh Pty Ltd
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IMAGES

Image Caption	<i>The Penthouses viewed from New Beach Road, 2004.</i>
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Image Year	2004	Image author and Copyright Holder	Clive Lucas Stapleton & Partners Pty Ltd (WMC)
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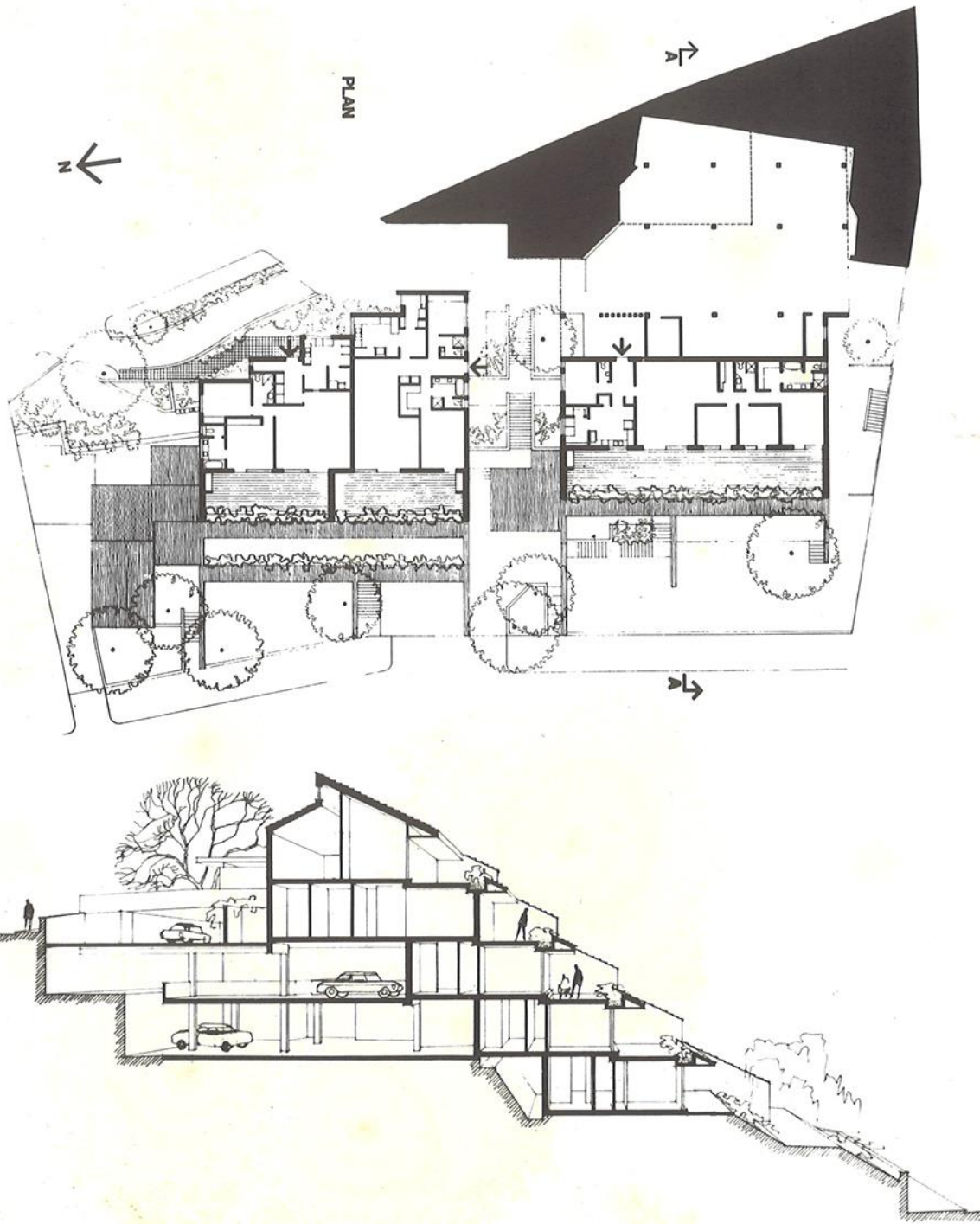
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IMAGES			
Image Caption		The Penthouses viewed from Yarranabee Road, 2024.	
			
Image Year	2024	Image author and Copyright Holder	Robertson & Hindmarsh Pty Ltd

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Image Caption		The Penthouses viewed from Yarranabee Road, 2024.	
			
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IMAGES			
Image Caption	The cross-section shows the arrangement of the apartments utilising the roof of the apartment below as an outdoor terrace facing west towards the harbour. The plan shows a lower level of apartments with their west-facing terraces overlooking New Beach Road. (Hugh Stretton, Ian McKay, John Mant, Robin Boyd, 1971, "The Penthouses," <i>Living & Partly Living: Housing in Australia</i> , Melbourne: Thomas Nelson, p.166.)		
 The image contains two architectural drawings. The top drawing is a plan view of a building complex, showing multiple levels and terraces. It includes a north arrow pointing towards the top-left. The bottom drawing is a cross-section of the building, showing the internal structure, including a car garage on the ground floor and a terrace on the roof of the lower level. The drawings are rendered in a sketchy, hand-drawn style with black lines on a white background.			
Image Year	1969	Image author and Copyright Holder	Ancher, Mortlock, Murray & Woolley Pty Ltd, Architects

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IMAGES

Image Caption	Model of the proposed development. (WMC: BA 66/0423, F000135390)
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Image Year	c.1966	Image author and Copyright Holder	David Moore
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Image Caption	<i>The Penthouses viewed from Yarranabee Road, 1969.</i> (<i>Architecture in Australia</i> , August 1969, p.617.)
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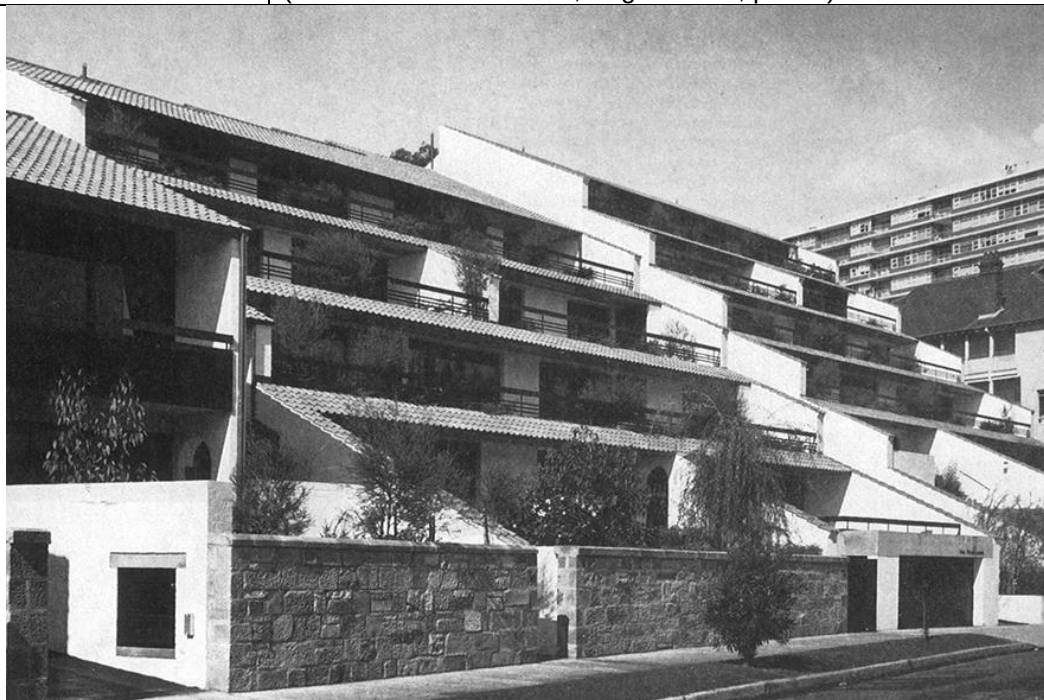


Image Year	1969	Image author and Copyright Holder	Max Dupain
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