and training are often important in the development of architects’ careers.” Ian Athfield was fortunate to spend time in New Zealand’s three biggest cities at crucial periods in his formative years. Born in Christchurch in 1941, he grew up there and became interested in architecture just as that city’s young Brutalists – the so-called Christchurch School – were having an impact on the urban fabric. He studied in Auckland in the early 1960s, when influential national and regional protagonists were teaching at the School of Architecture and the Dutch architect Aldo van Eyck visited New Zealand to deliver inspirational lectures. Athfield then started work in Wellington at a time of frenetic public and commercial redevelopment, paralleled by increasing agitation about the city. Each of these locales and experiences had an influence on the development of his ideas about architecture and the kind of architect he might become.

**CHRISTCHURCH**

Athfield grew up in Sydenham, on the south-west side of Christchurch. His childhood was one of suburban norms. His father, Len, worked for bookshop Whitcomb & Tombs, progressing through the ranks from making boxes to finally heading the box-making department. Beyond work, he enjoyed art, particularly painting. Athfield’s mother, Ella, worked as a typist before marriage, but not after. Len and Ella made every effort to ensure a good education and the best opportunities for their two sons. For example, to generate additional income, they took in a school teacher as a boarder in the family home. They also encouraged their boys to play sport, and during his years at Christchurch Boys’ High School (1954–58), Athfield enjoyed both rugby and rowing. For example, to generate additional income, they took in a school teacher as a boarder in the family home. They also encouraged their boys to play sport, and during his years at Christchurch Boys’ High School (1954–58), Athfield enjoyed both rugby and rowing. Athfield knew from an early age that he would become an architect. It was an astute observation about one so young and Athfield barely gave a thought to any other possible career paths. Ashby once saw in Tony a potential cause for concern. Les took particular heed and prompted both her sons to follow the teacher’s suggestions. Athfield soon took the initiative, convincing Tony that they should build a garage at the family home, and Tony progressed through a series of musical groups – Max Merritt and the Meteors, the Saints, the Downbeats (with Ray Columbus) – and for all a while, the family home served as the band practice room.

Meanwhile, Athfield took an increasing interest in the very strong local architecture being developed by Warren & Mahoney, Peter Beaven and a host of others including Don Cowey, Don Donithorne, Holger Henning-Hansen, George Lucking, Alan Mitchener and Trengrove & Marshall. Many of the city’s new buildings were local architects’ careers. It was a shock. I wondered who I was and what I was about. I did dis-cover my parents had been very young when they’d had me adopted. But I wasn’t incredibly curious. I had extremely generous adoptive parents, and was more than satisfied that they were my parents. Athfield knew from an early age that he would become an architect. When he was seven, the family’s boarder, Jim Ashby, observed that the boy’s strengths included art and mathematics, and suggested that this combination leant itself to a career in architecture. It was an astute observation about one so young and Athfield barely gave a thought to any other possible career paths. Ashby once saw in Tony a potential cause for concern. Les took particular heed and prompted both her sons to follow the teacher’s suggestions. Athfield soon took the initiative, convincing Tony that they should build a garage at the family home, and Tony progressed through a series of musical groups – Max Merritt and the Meteors, the Saints, the Downbeats (with Ray Columbus) – and for all a while, the family home served as the band practice room. Meanwhile, Athfield took an increasing interest in the very strong local architecture being developed by Warren & Mahoney, Peter Beaven and a host of others including Don Cowey, Don Donithorne, Holger Henning-Hansen, George Lucking, Alan Mitchener and Trengrove & Marshall. Many of the city’s new buildings were local architects’ careers. It was a shock. I wondered who I was and what I was about. I did dis-cover my parents had been very young when they’d had me adopted. But I wasn’t incredibly curious. I had extremely generous adoptive parents, and was more than satisfied that they were my parents. Athfield knew from an early age that he would become an architect. When he was seven, the family’s boarder, Jim Ashby, observed that the boy’s strengths included art and mathematics, and suggested that this combination leant itself to a career in architecture. It was an astute observation about one so young and Athfield barely gave a thought to any other possible career paths. Ashby once saw in Tony a potential cause for concern. Les took particular heed and prompted both her sons to follow the teacher’s suggestions. Athfield soon took the initiative, convincing Tony that they should build a garage at the family home, and Tony progressed through a series of musical groups – Max Merritt and the Meteors, the Saints, the Downbeats (with Ray Columbus) – and for all a while, the family home served as the band practice room.
in the city while Athfield was still at school. In particular, Miles Warren’s Desert Street Flat, completed in 1957, attracted hundreds of tourists under the popular banner of being the ugliest building in Christchurch. Young and emerging architects loved it. Warren formed a friendship with the more senior and established partner while the younger Maurice Moffat was soon aligned with the Christchurch School. As a print boy, Athfield was responsible for making copies of the drawings the architects and draughtsmen produced on tracing paper. It was a comparatively time-consuming job, with large sheets having to be run through a barrel printer and then cut and mounted into presentation drawings. He also began colouring the firm’s presentation drawings.

The following year, Athfield was faced with the decision of choosing between the two courses offered by the University of Auckland: a Bachelor of Architecture or a Diploma of Architecture. The degree comprised five-year study, whereas the diploma was aimed at those who worked in architecture off site and on the country. Concurrent with their work, the diploma students could undertake two years of part-time study at their local technical institute or polytechnic, prepare the testimonials of study and sit the exams offered by Auckland University. And so it was that while Athfield was still at school. In particular, Miles Warren formed a friendship with the more senior and established partner while the younger Maurice Moffat was soon aligned with the Christchurch School. As a print boy, Athfield was responsible for making copies of the drawings the architects and draughtsmen produced on tracing paper. It was a comparatively time-consuming job, with large sheets having to be run through a barrel printer and then cut and mounted into presentation drawings. He also began colouring the firm’s presentation drawings.

Athfield opted to take the diploma course and thus stayed in Christchurch for his first two years. He continued working for Griffiths, Moffat & Partners and was once draughting and producing measured drawings for buildings that he was3 never asked to supervise. He completed the courses offered by Christchurch Technical Institute and Ilam Art School. Practising architects supported the apprenticeship students through the Christchurch Anale, advising them on the university’s testimony of study and supervising their exams. In attending the Anale, the students also got to know each other. This was an exciting period to be entering architecture in Christchurch, and Athfield recalls that he and the other young apprentices would visit Miles Warren, Peter Beaven and others after work, to have a drink and to see what they had on their drawing boards.4

Beyond architecture, young remained Athfield’s main interest. The two were not mutually exclusive and, during his years with Griffiths, Moffat & Partners, he accepted a junior role to produce working drawings for the Canterbury Railway Association’s new children’s museum in the eastern suburb of Dallington. The building was designed by architect Charles Thomas, who was some two years older than Athfield and both a drawer and a member of the Rising Association. Athfield’s working drawings included plans which demonstrate that his early work and training prepared him as an accomplished draughtsperson and technician.

**AUCKLAND**

After his two-year apprenticeship, Athfield moved to Auckland to continue his studies. The environmental context in Auckland was quite different to that of Christchurch in this period. It had the national stadium, cricket grounds and motor-raced tracks of Victoria Square, the broad public open space and respected timber of Group Architects. It also had New Zealand’s only professionally recognized School of Architecture, with a host of well-known and influential staff including Brown, Peter Middleton, Gordon Smith and Richard Troy. Acknowledged Group leader Bill Wilson was also working part time in the School. Like Brown before them, Middleton and Troy were both English expatriate and keen New Zealanders, promoting a strongly regionalist architecture that responded to the local landscape, building traditions and peoples.5 Group Architects had reintroduced pahukie into contemporary New Zealand architecture from 1939, but Middleton and Troy were also introducing full-on Modernism, in particular colonial when he fixed an old finial to one of the gable ends of his 1961 house on the Auckland Peninsula.6 Rather than being the egalitarian institution it may have believed itself to be, the School of Architecture was hierarchical, with difference drawn between the degrees and diplomas students. The former were assumed to be bright and creative, the latter more technocratic. Thus, the School taught them studio in two separate streams. Athfield remembers as “the worst lectures,” we had the best boys, and we got into the most trouble. We had the off call.” All students were then taught together for general lectures, and this meant the likes of Brown, Middleton and Troy. But Athfield remained detached from the local scene. “I was never interested in that next generation of architects, locally represented by Vernon Brown. Many of my student contemporaries felt strongly about the work of the Group, but for some reason it failed to excite us.”

Athfield, then, was not sucked into the Auckland scene. But he was struck by architectural history lectures: “One of the most important things about architectural history is that you can be kicked into accepting that nothing is new. Someone will always have done it before—always.” He became an admirer of the nineteenth-century Spanish architect Antoni Gaudí and the German modernist Ludwig Mies van der Rohe.8 Both separately and together, enjoy the complete contrast provided by the work of two of architecture’s most public figures: Australian-born Ludwig Mies van der Rohe.9 Both separately and together, enjoy the complete contrast provided by the work of two of architecture’s most public figures: Australian-born Ludwig Mies van der Rohe.10 Both separately and together, enjoy the complete contrast provided by the work of two of architecture’s most public figures: Australian-born Ludwig Mies van der Rohe.11
reductive planning and detailing. The enthusiasm for the concept of the two architects’ work is apparent in several of Athfield’s student design projects, leading Gerald Melling to describe them as ‘Mies/Gaudí collaborations’.14

To this palette of Christchurch School meets Gaudí meets Mies was added a fourth influence, namely, the Dutch architect Aldo van Eyck, who visited New Zealand in September 1965. His keynote student lecture at a student architecture congress titled ‘Social Aspects of Architecture, University of Auckland and later acknowledged that, ‘I was hugely influenced as a student by Aldo van Eyck when he came to New Zealand… and talked about the in-between space, the realm between private and public, the gap between house and street. I saw the significance in that.’15

Van Eyck’s Orphanage and particularly his northern African precedents also demonstrated the use of limited material palettes. Athfield became increasingly interested in this approach during the course of his education. He found it in two images of the Mediterranean, particularly the Greek Islands and south-east Spain, where whole villages comprised plastered and lime-washed buildings.16

During his student years, Athfield would return to Christchurch for the summer vacations. He describes himself as having been ‘refreshed through meeting new friends, visiting Auckland in search of young recruits for his office, Athfield was, however, given some responsibility in the design of the Broderick Townhouses, and he was allowed to continue with the working drawings when he was taken ill.17

When he was nearing the completion of his Diploma of Architecture at Cambridge University, Athfield was offered a position as a partner in an architectural firm. He accepted the position and was given some responsibility in the design of the Broderick Townhouses, and he was allowed to continue with the working drawings when he was taken ill.17

In 1960, Ian and Clare Athfield shortly after their wedding. PHOTOGRAPHER NOT KNOWN, AAL ARCHIVE.
applied and was offered one of the positions.\textsuperscript{33} It included agreement that he would be made a partner two years later, in 1968. This created a partnership ‘was too good to refuse. It put me in a position of responsibility early on’.\textsuperscript{34} After two years, Low became aware of limited material palettes, particularly in the architectural education.’\textsuperscript{35}

WELLINGTON

Wellingt on’s architectural culture saw quite differentagain from those of Christchurch and Auckland. The capital’s home to the Ministry of Works. Its various departments and divisions were important employers of architects and town planners in the city, including the renewable proportions of unitised architects who made New Zealand their homes in the latter 1930s and 1940s. In 1946, various Ministry of Works staff supported the formation of the Architectural Centre, a voluntary organisation that provided an informal alternative to the NZIA and was a key forum for debate and activity in the city. In the space and 1950s, this included exhibitions and publications. In the 1960s and 1970s, a number of new high-rises transformed the city replacing two- and three-storey Victorian and Edwardian buildings. The city’s new motorway required the demolition of many old houses and cottages in the suburbs of Thorndon. The rate of change brought urban issues, in including heritage issues, to the fore. Through the Architectural Centre, he proposed that the firm introduce a retirement policy. The senior partners were outraged. They saw him as an ‘upstart’, with ‘revolutionary ideas’ and would threaten him in the grounds that he would contravene their partnership agreement.\textsuperscript{36} The date of his dismissal was 12 July 1946. He would remember it vividly because it was his birthday. He was required to leave immediately: ‘There was a strong restraining discipline in the working environment throughout the building.’\textsuperscript{37} He proposed that the firm introduce a retirement policy.

Although sole practice was thrust upon him, Athfield’s formative years had served him well to meet its challenges. He had learnt the lessons of the Christchurch School, including disciplined planning, some fragmentations of the form of building under a series of gabled roofs and a love of ornament in brick in conjunction with exposed timber roof structures. As a student, he had been persuaded to experiment with the sculptural forms of Gaudi and the ultra-rationalism of Mies van der Rohe. He had absorbed von Eyck’s ideas about the co-existence between, admiration for ‘architecture without architects’, and the possibility of thinking of the house as a small city at village and vice versa. He had become aware of limited material palettes, particularly in the architectural education.’\textsuperscript{38} He had proposed that the firm introduce a retirement policy.

The Wellington CBD in 1964. PHOTOGRAPH BY B. CLARK, AAQT 6401 75178, ARCHIVES NZ; F33145-1/2, ANZ.

The Wellington CBD in 1964. PHOTOGRAPH BY B. CLARK, AAQT 6401 75178, ARCHIVES NZ; F33145-1/2, ANZ.
Athfield's student projects of the early 1960s show wild experimentation with a range of free, sculptural, curving forms. More than this, they demonstrate his admiration for the work of both Gaudí and Mies van der Rohe, and particularly the contrast between the two architects' work by combining the sculptural with the rectilinear. These 'Mies/Gaudí collages' include a Music School, with an animal-like auditorium; a Hostel for Medical Students, with six 'chimneys' for each individual student; and a project titled Church Group, with five distinct 'chimneys'. Athfield executed this approach in his most complex student project: an office and retail scheme proposed for the site at the top of Auckland's Myers Park, extending through to Karangahape Road. Each low-rise shop and staircase is shown with its own conical roof. This scheme also included a six-storey tower, characterised by oblong windows at each floor level and capped by a liftroom with the same conical roof. Equally interesting, but for different reasons, is Athfield’s scheme for the Auckland Table Tennis Association Clubhouse. It is an orthogonal complex with a bulging entrance. The structure is shown as tensile with tension cables to hold the building in place, pinned to the ground by large blocks of concrete or stone. His Marine Research Station for Auckland University's staff and student marine biologists was again orthogonal, a flat-roofed building with five bunkrooms and men's and women's ablution rooms downstairs, and kitchen, living, laboratory and storage spaces upstairs. Clearly for Athfield, architecture school provided the opportunity to explore a range of different design challenges and to take risks.
During his three months in Warren & Mahoney’s Christchurch office, Athfield prepared sketch designs for the Broderick Townhouses, a group of three double-storey units on a flat site in Merivale. Warren & Mahoney’s ‘Pixie’ mode of houses was well established by this time. These houses were generally rectilinear in form, with the overall mass divided into multiple (often three) pavilions according to function. The pavilions were then either off-set or at right angles to each other, with steeply pitched roofs, tightly cropped eaves, abstract square windows, exposed concrete block walling, concrete beams and lintels, and windows and doors terminating at eaves level. Exterior walls were often extended from the building into the landscape to enclose private courtyards and gardens. The concrete and the blocks were generally contrasted internally by exposed timber roof structures (stained dark), timber sarking (clear-finished), and some brickwork and/or clay tiles. The Broderick Townhouses were in this tradition, adapting the language from detached house to two-storey townhouse. The three townhouses were sited in a line, running approximately east–west, with the middle unit off-set to the north to increase the privacy of each townhouse and its associated garden. To reduce the overall height of the building the side walls at first-floor level were limited to 3 feet, meaning the roof structure shaped the upstairs spaces and windows were located within the triangular gable ends. Athfield is credited with the introduction of some narrow slot-like windows. The townhouses were severely damaged in the February 2011 Christchurch earthquake.
Four projects from 1962, all for real clients, show Athfield itching to build before he had finished his diploma. They also show him turning his hand to a range of building types and degrees of complexity. The first was a coffee shop in Levin for his aunt, Doreen Hopkins, with white formica table tops, black vinyl seats and a spiral stair to first-floor level. The other three projects, all unbuilt, were larger and more complex. They demonstrate lessons learnt in the Warren & Mahoney office as well as tentative moves to break away from the classical ordering of much of that firm’s work. For example, to the established combination of pitched roofs, doors and windows that terminate at eaves level and exterior walls that extend into the landscape, the Adams House design introduces a pyramidal roof and cylindrical bathroom. The Sparrow Building, which Athfield designed for a Parnell neighbour, followed suit, with a large pyramidal roof above a studio space. All remaining parts of this design were rectilinear with flat roofs. The Kaikohe Methodist Church Hall commission resulted from Clare Athfield’s Northland contacts. The proposal demonstrates a commitment to giving architectural expression to the different functional parts of the building. In particular, the entry bay is recessed, while the hall proper has zigzag roofing and the associated ‘future church’, a butterfly roof. The common attribute that underpins these three unbuilt designs is their rational planning: all were well resolved in terms of spatial layout, access, circulation, and provision of natural light and ventilation.
Athfield’s Merwood House drawings are dated April 1964, confirming that he was committed to producing buildings under his own name, even when he was still quite new to the Structon Group staff. The client, Lindsay Merwood, was a builder and he first met Athfield when he built the fit-out for Doreen Hopkins’ Levin coffee shop. Merwood would in time build several early Athfield houses, including two for himself, of which this was the first. It remains in the tradition of the Warren & Mahoney ‘Pixie’ houses and Athfield’s Exton House, while at the same time demonstrating his enthusiasm for experimentation with materials. The house combines three gabled pavilions, all on an axis that sits clockwise of north–south. At the north end, the living pavilion has a veranda on the main north-west façade, while to its south two bedroom pavilions (one for the main bedroom and the other originally containing four children’s bedrooms) present their gable ends within this main façade. Utilities extend along the south-east side of the house. Rather than continuing to build in concrete block, with which he now had some experience, Athfield here specified a timber frame, sheathed with 6 x 1 inch boards laid diagonally. These were then pebble-dash plastered to give the house a uniform rough, textured finish. Doors and windows are all the same height, although their lintels are not given any architectural expression. Texture is an important attribute internally too. The chimney is pebble-dash above a brick hearth, and rough-sawn scissor trusses are exposed in the living area, beneath battened Pinex ceilings.

The Harland House commission came to Athfield through his Christchurch rowing connections. Frank Harland was the Christchurch Boys’ High School rowing coach when Athfield attended the school. Although unbuilt, the design is interesting in several ways. First, it is a strictly orthogonal and well-mannered design. Second, it shows further experimentation with building materials, with Athfield now proposing to build in brick, for both the side walls and a series of columns or piers running the length of the house. These brick piers were designed with a cavity in the centre, to be filled with reinforced concrete. The brick sides were to be left-fired. Inside and out, other than the gable ends that were to be pebble-dash externally. The design has additional interest because it was prepared for a sloping site in Christchurch. Athfield responded to this by splitting the house into two levels along the contour line, with a linear arrangement of den, living room, dining room and kitchen running along the lower portion to face north and, four steps up, a passage providing access to the three bedrooms, the bathroom and the laundry. The planning was rigorous, with the regularly spaced piers setting up a modular system and dictating the placement of interior walls. Above it, the roof trusses were asymmetrical on either side of the ridge, to connect with the same roof of the bedroom wing and, almost 3 feet below it, the veranda roof projecting to the north on the living side of the house.
Athfield acknowledges that his own house and office is probably his most important building. Much of its significance derives from his ongoing interest in creating an alternative to the uniformity and expected norms of detailed suburban housing. He never had a fixed end point in mind for the house. Rather, he imagined that, like a Mediterranean village, it would grow down the Khandallah hillside and accommodate a community rather than a nuclear family. Over the years this has included members of his and Clare’s extended family, notably both his parents and her mother as well as grown-up children and grandchildren. It also includes employees and interested others. After more than 45 years, the complex now has some 25 people living in it and 40 working in it. Athfield would like to see it grow to be twice the size and three or four times as complex, to demonstrate his alternative to suburbia more overtly. But even at its current size, it is often described as a village and is an extension of Aldo van Eyck’s idea that a house is in fact a small city.

The earliest model suggests a two-storey home with upper-level entry, but from the outset it was more complicated than this, with stairs near the entry leading down into the double-height living space that is flanked by a mezzanine dining room and den, with other openings leading to nooks, crannies and unexpected spaces. The model and associated drawings also show a look-out tower with circular windows. This was built in 1971 and immediately generated the attention Athfield desired. The house earned an NZIA Silver Medal that year and he