

Citation – Phyllis Constance Murphy

Born in 1924, Phyllis Constance (née Slater) Murphy commenced her architectural education at the Melbourne Technical College in 1942 where she undertook two years of study before transferring to the Melbourne University Architectural Atelier to undertake design studies from 1944-1945. She was a brilliant student, winning the VASS Prize in 1944 and in 1947 she took third prize in the Light in Architecture Competition. After working for Yuncken Freeman Bros. Griffiths & Simpson (1945-6) and travelling in Europe, she enrolled at the University of Melbourne in 1948 from where she topped her fourth year and graduated with a Bachelor of Architecture degree in 1950, one of only two women out of eighty students to graduate.

After completing her studies Murphy formed an architectural partnership with her husband John Murphy, and very early on they were successful in submitting the winning design for the Olympic Swimming Stadium for the 1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne. The project was won and undertaken in collaboration with fellow University of Melbourne graduates Peter McIntyre, Kevin Borland and engineer Bill Irwin. Much of the early work of John and Phyllis Murphy concentrated on residential commissions, and although constrained by the post-war shortages of building materials, manpower and finance, they found new ways to use lightweight construction materials such as plywood, drawing inspiration from their earlier visit to Sweden where they saw living spaces as small but with a simple fresh elegance. This residential work, always understated, functionally responsible, and humanist in outlook and finish earned the practice a national reputation and their work was published widely, including in the British journal, *The Architectural Review*. Some of this work was also closely aligned with the Melbourne School of structural/functional work of the time, which also included the work of respected architects Robin Boyd and Peter McIntyre. By 1960, they had completed more than fifty modern houses in Victoria.

Murphy was also involved in a number of larger housing developments, such as the Hotham Garden Flats in North Melbourne (1958), which was completed in association with other architects of the period and promoted low-rise medium density housing for the inner suburbs. Her other work included several innovative school commissions, including buildings for Fintona Girls School (1952) and Caulfield Grammar School, and commercial buildings, including a television station in Shepparton.

During the late 1950s, Murphy was supportive of the 1958 establishment of the National Trust of Australia in Victoria, and she and her husband became members of the Trust and active proponents for the preservation of historic buildings. For more than a decade they worked in an honorary capacity for the National Trust, undertaking significant conservation works, which constitute a major contribution to Victoria's heritage, and which to this day remain largely unacknowledged. Other heritage-related projects included the restoration of the Emu Bottom Homestead in Sunbury, Victoria (1969), the Collins Street façade of the Block Arcade, the removal and restoration of Governor La Trobe's historic 1839 prefabricated timber cottage, and the restoration of Collingwood Town Hall in collaboration with Peter Lovell, which won them RIAA awards for outstanding building renovation after its completion.

In addition to her work as an architect, Murphy is nationally respected for her expert research knowledge on historic wallpaper design and restoration, on which she has published a number of works and on which she has taught as a guest lecturer within the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning at the University of Melbourne. Her publications include *The Decorated Wall: Eighty Years of Wallpaper in Australia, 1850-1930* (1981), *Decorating with Wallpaper* (1987), and *Historic Wallpapers in Australia, 1850-1920* (1996).

As one of the most significant women in Victorian post-war architecture, in a profession traditionally dominated by men, Phyllis Murphy's achievements have been remarkable. As is typical of her demeanour, her contributions have been measured, understated and quietly transforming. Murphy was honoured by the RIAA with a Life Fellowship in 2009, an overdue recognition of Murphy as a role model for women architects, as a role model of excellence in the practice of domestic architecture, and as a dedicated and selfless heritage architect. She would be a worthy recipient of an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Melbourne.