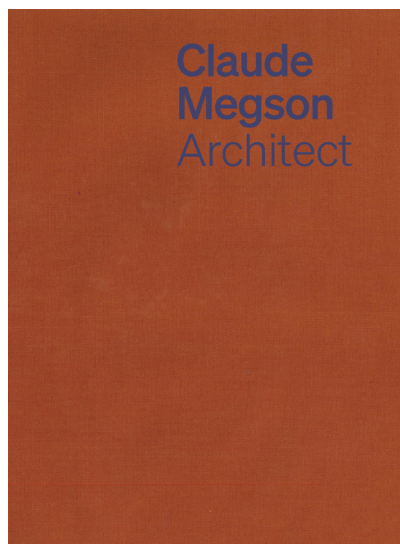


Claude Megson

Architect

GILES REID AND JACKIE MEIRING



\$75

CATEGORY: Architecture,

NZ Non Fiction

ISBN: 9781991309198

THEMA: AMB, 1MNL

BISAC: ARC006020

PUBLISHER: Massey University Press

IMPRINT: Massey University Press

PUBLISHED: April 2026

PAGE EXTENT: 424

FORMAT: Hardback

SIZE: 255 x 180mm

RIGHTS: World

AUTHORS' RESIDENCE: London, Unit-

ed Kingdom, and Tāmaki Makaurau

Auckland, New Zealand

Carton quantity: 12

CELEBRATING THE WORK AND LEGACY OF A GREAT NEW ZEALAND ARCHITECT

From the 1960s until his early death in 1994, New Zealand architect Claude Megson forged a significant body of experimental houses — typically abstract and fantastical, they could seem almost unfathomable in their complexity.

His work was written about in the same company as Ian Athfield, Peter Beaven, John Scott and Roger Walker, and as a teacher he influenced generations of architects who studied at the Auckland School of Architecture.

Claude Megson Architect interrogates the arc of Megson's career, bringing together new photography and 150+ of his remarkable drawings. It both celebrates and illuminates his work, at a time when his legacy is being newly appreciated.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Giles Reid worked for Auckland practice Architectus after graduating from the University of Auckland School of Architecture and was employed by the Renzo Piano Building Workshop on the design and construction of the Shard, first in Paris, then London, where he now lives. He then started his own architecture practice, focusing on arts-related and domestic projects. He produces an ongoing series of books on forgotten New Zealand buildings. His monograph on emigré architect Henry Kulka was published in 2022.

Jackie Meiring is an Auckland photographer who specialises in architecture as well as advertising, beauty, fashion and lifestyle. For over 20 years her work has appeared in many leading architecture and design magazines.

SALES POINTS

- Another in Massey University Press's series of highly regarded books about New Zealand architecture
- Handsome cloth covered hardback
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Wong House 1963–67

Warrington Road
Remuera
Auckland
Architecture Archive CMS

The whole housing developed a baronial atmosphere, quite grand and dignified. This of course was not inappropriate for the surrounding environment and rather recalled the existing fine old houses of Remuera.

—Claude Megson

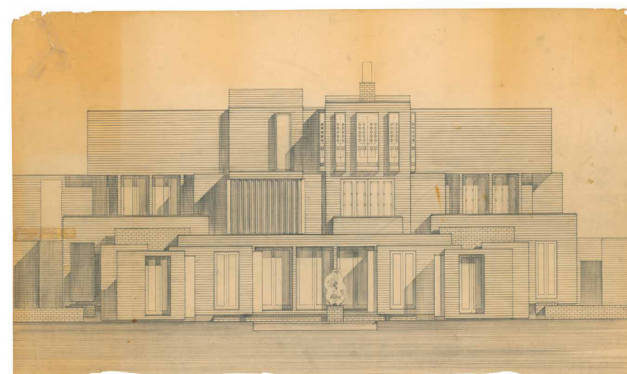
We were working with a colour consultant from Remuera, who was a friend of Claude's. With a fourth baby on the way we needed a larger house. She gave us his phone number, and that was the beginning. In 1963, he suggested to first have a look at the Japling House, and we were impressed with its style. Next step was to find some land. Claude found the site, which was a subdivision of 42 perches. It was very steep with a chicken run and some great trees — 22200. We went with him... and he virtually already had in his head what he would design. Remembering at this stage we had spent a lot of time discussing our needs: a bedroom for each child, a large playroom and that we had entertaining.

—Bob and Mary Wong

The Wong House is located on the lower slopes of Otirua/Mount Hobson, just below the ridge of Remuera Road. It is Megson's first great house, hugely impressive for so young an architect, and it represented a decisive leap in terms of budget, scale and imagination. Spatially, it shows greater ambition than anything he had attempted before. As was recognised at the time, he self-consciously made an appeal to history, setting himself against the likes of Roy Lapwood (1955–1960) and House Massey (1956–1970), architects who during the inter-war period created some of Auckland's finest houses for its captains of retail and industry.

Here, Megson bypassed the architects of post-war modernism, looking instead to a period of high cost, indeed, to an architecture indebted to the Arts and Crafts movement, and to Auckland's own idiosyncratic style. Of the eight proponents, the architect he studied most closely was Roy Keith Binney (1885–1957), who had worked for Sir Edwin Lutyens between 1900 and 1915. The association is made explicit in the extraordinary dark-stained horizontal cedar weatherboards that wrap the entire house, as well as in the projecting vertical stained glass windows that formerly occupied the bays above the dining area. The combination is lifted from Guisness Court at 330 Remuera Road, the house Binney designed for his mother in 1914. Similar windows can also be seen on Binney's Mill House at 4 Upland Road in Remuera (1926).

→ The interior just inside the entrance, with the front La Roche glass-roofed porch.



→ Rear elevation drawing, CMS.

100–101



Mayes House 1968–70

Arney Road
Remuera
Auckland
Architecture Archive CMS

The Mayes House dramatically entered the public imagination in late January 2002, when during record rainfall that caused severe and widespread flash flooding in Auckland, the escarpment directly below the house crashed onto a villa on Shore Road. The landslide knocked the villa off its foundation, collapsed the house, and killed long-time Museum of Transport and Technology volunteer David Lennard. The Mayes House was immediately 'red-slipped' by the city council and entry was prohibited until engineering assessments could be carried out.

Photographs of the Mayes House taken from Shore Road showing the precariously exposed foundations under the swimming pool made national news, becoming some of the building's most iconic images in the media reports.

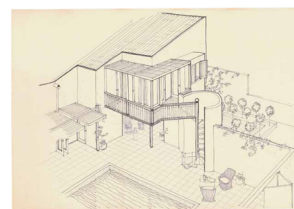
This reporting obscured the reality of little import in the context of this tragedy, that the house's current manifestation bore only passing resemblance to its design. In the early 1960s, it had already been altered by the original owner, Joan Mayes (who died in 2005, at the age of 93), and there had been at least three extensive renovations since — but four counts the new retaining work built following the slip! At one point, the swimming pool, the focus of the landslide, had been enclosed in a huge conservatory. This structure had then been removed, and the pool decked over, only to be revealed in its penultimate incarnation.

The interior today has wall-to-wall pale carpet, aluminium sliders, bright white paint and banded skylights. Despite real estate claims to the contrary, it does Megson a disservice to continue to link his name to this work without mentioning these alterations. Originally, the Mayes House had a more rustic flavour. The upper-floor bedroom terraces were accessed by outdoor spiral stairs, and the pool was surrounded by a wall to the north, with a generous opening, protected by canvas windbreak that could be folded away. The upper-level windows had timber shutters, and the doors and window frames were also timber, comparable in style to Megson's earlier work.

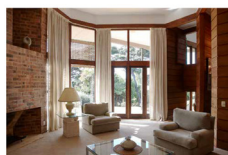
The lower-level glazing was shaded by slatted timber awnings and the roof had terracotta panelling. This, in combination with its white-plastered walls and C-shaped plan, facing north, suggest the Borneo courtyard house as a source of inspiration. Curiously, this ancient archetype reappears every decade or so in Auckland architecture: consider James Hinchey's Thorn House in Morningside (1964), the House Rose Avenue built for his mother above his own in Morningside (1969) and, most radically, Andrew Patterson's Summer Street House in Parnsey (1969).

Megson organised the rooms and corridors to the upper-ground floor bedroom level about different ceilings, built beneath the monolithic roof, and decorated by tiles in the entrance area. Both floor columns to the internal balconies and tall columns to the living area.

→ Perspective of the private courtyard, with swimming pool, and the living area, built CMS.



102–103



→ The living room.

→ Perspective of the living room, courtyard (right) above.



→ Rear deck.

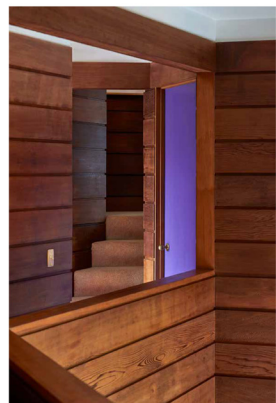
104–105



→ The view from the study into the living room.

→ The bedroom seen from the study.

→ The main bedroom.



→ The steps leading up to the second bedroom.

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