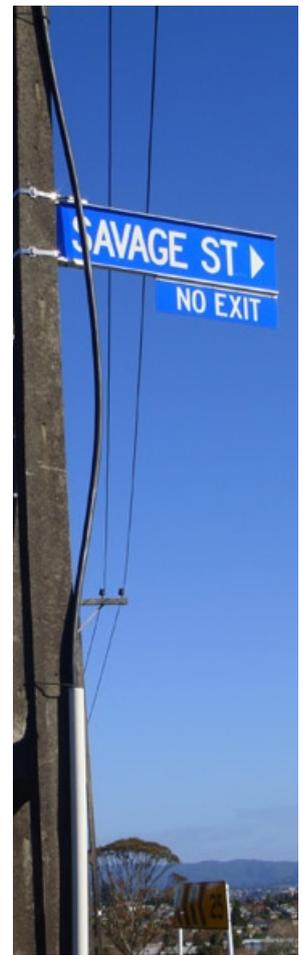
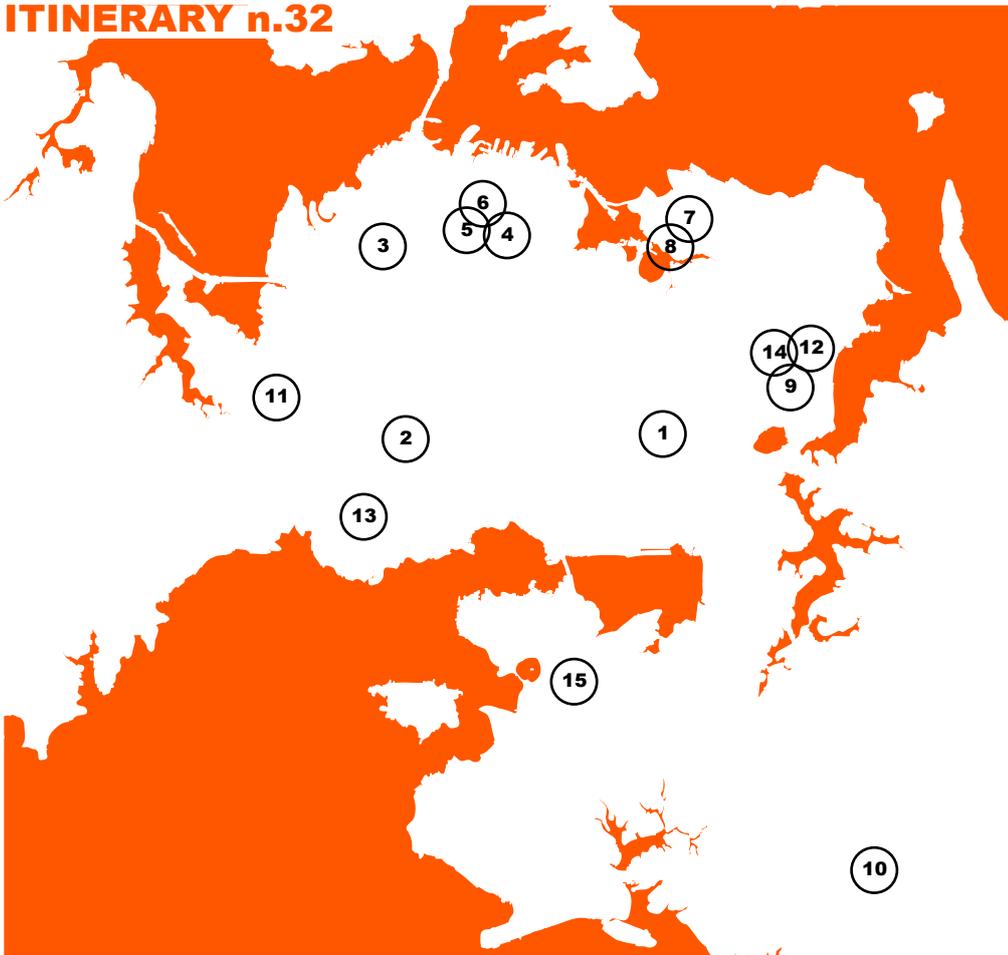


## ITINERARY n.32



## State Housing in Auckland

State house tenants can do anything. After growing up in a state house in Christchurch, John Key became an investment banker and then Prime Minister. The official Prime Ministerial residence, Vogel House in Lower Hutt, is one of the nation's flashiest state houses. In between these two poles, New Zealand's state house designs span diverse types produced over more than 100 years. This history starts with workers' cottages built from 1906, and includes semi-detached houses (duplexes), one and two storey row houses, and blocks of flats, some medium-density and others high-rise.

Yet amid this diversity, the image of the standard 'brick and tile' state house endures. Some would go so far as to call these houses icons of New Zealand architecture. The reason they are recognisable to all of us is because the country's first Labour government built so many of them – about 30,000 up and down the country – during its 1935-49 term. A survey conducted in 1935 had concluded that about a quarter of the country's housing stock was substandard and worthy not of repair but of demolition. The state housing programme was conceptualised both to re-house the New Zealanders living in such conditions, and to stimulate our manufacturing and building industries after the Great Depression. The early state house designs were produced through the NZIA and Fletcher Construction. In planning and appearance, they were far removed from the house type that had dominated 1920s New Zealand: the Californian bungalow. In contrast to bungalows, which developed a low-cost stigma and maintained American connotations, the comparatively conservative English cottage aesthetic of most of Labour's state houses remained popular in architectural circles in the 1930s and early '40s.

Concurrently, the burgeoning modern movement introduced open-plan living areas, flat roofs and large expanses of glass. Labour's medium- and high-density housing schemes, such as the Greys Avenue and Symonds Street Flats (both 1945-47), provided the Department of Housing Construction's own staff architects, working under chief architect F. Gordon Wilson, with the opportunity to explore these innovations and both blocks were key buildings in the development of New Zealand's modern architecture.

Housing New Zealand Corporation (HNZC) continues to produce interesting new buildings today. The most striking attribute of the more recent schemes is the emphasis on medium-density arrangements. This is the case for both new schemes erected on fresh sites, and for the redevelopment of older schemes, when densification is often one of the aims.

Since the 1980s, our state housing schemes have mostly been produced by architects in private practice rather than by government employees. Public housing provides particular design challenges, including tight budgets, efficient use of space, and the need for hardwearing structures and surfaces capable of withstanding a few knocks. Taking good design to the 'man in the street' was one of the aims of the modern movement, demonstrated particularly in the work of German modernists such as Gropius and Hilberseimer. Thus it is appropriate that in our neo-modern times, award-winning architects continue to work in this vein. *Julia Gatley & Andrew Barrie*

## The Facts:

The Liberal government passed New Zealand's first Workers Dwellings Act in 1905, building 650 houses in small groups. Between 1919 and 1935, public support for worker housing was largely in the form of low-interest loans rather than house construction. Better known than these early twentieth-century initiatives is the extensive housing programme of the country's first Labour government, comprising 30,000 houses nationwide and twelve blocks of medium- and high-density flats in Auckland and Wellington. Later governments continued to build state houses and flats, joined in the 1950s, 60s and 70s by the larger, wealthier city councils, notably Auckland and Wellington, which focused on the provision of medium- and high-density rental flats in urban rather than suburban locations. Muldoon's National government celebrated the completion of New Zealand's 100,000th state house in 1978. Construction of state housing continues today, although in recent years the sales of state houses on expensive sites seem to make bigger headlines than the openings of new housing schemes.

① ca. 1910  
Lawry Settlement Workers  
Dwellings  
Ramsgate, Findlay, Hewson &  
Cawley Sts, Ellerslie



Ben Schrader has identified the Liberal government (1890-1912) as 'the first central government in the Western world to build public housing for its citizens.' While Wellington and Christchurch houses from this period are well documented, little has been written on the Auckland ones until recently, with Michael Roche identifying Woburn Temple as the designer of many of those built in the 1910s, such as in Ellerslie's Lawry Settlement. They are small, simple cottages, generally with a central front door on the street facade and a window on either side.

② 1937-1949  
Labour Gov't State Housing  
South of Mt Albert Rd.,  
Sandringham, and south  
of the mountain, Mt Roskill



The first Labour government's state houses can be seen in many parts of Auckland. Sandringham is representative of the pattern of development from speculative bungalows of the 1910s and '20s (north of Mt Albert Road) to state houses (south of Mt Albert Rd). The state houses are compact with standardised roof lines and windows, each house orientated to have its living room on the north side to maximize sun. In an effort to avoid stigma, Dept of Housing Construction architects consciously introduced variety in building materials and house shape and size, using both one and two storeys, semi-detached buildings and four-house units within individual housing schemes.

③ 1940s  
Pensioners Housing  
Great North Road  
Grey Lynn



These are an example of the single-storey four-house units built by the first Labour government. They become like short versions of row or terrace housing. This group also demonstrates the enthusiasm for the cul-de-sac that is recurrent in the street layouts of Labour's state housing schemes. The cul-de-sac had been popularised by the planning of Radburn, New Jersey, Clarence Stein and Henry Wright's community for the motor age. The aim was to reduce the amount of traffic on residential streets, thus making them safe for pedestrians.

④ 1945-1947  
Symonds Street Flats  
Symonds Street, City  
Design architect, Fred Newman



While state houses were generally aimed at nuclear families, the Housing Division and the State Advances Corporation recognised that other types of applicants such as childless couples and single people could be more efficiently accommodated in flats. The design of the Symonds Street Flats followed that of Wellington's Dixon Street Flats (1940-1944), while also introducing a T-shaped footprint and a subtle curve in the street facade, which echoes a bend in the road. Of the 45 flats, 26 were one bedroom, 18 were two bedroom and one was three bedroom.

⑤ 1945-1947  
Lower Greys Avenue Flats  
93-113 Greys Ave., City  
Chief Architect, F. Gordon  
Wilson



In 1941, with financial support from Auckland City, the Labour government embarked upon a scheme of 'slum clearance' in Greys Avenue. The initial scheme comprised 468 units on both sides of the street. Construction was delayed because of the Second World War. From 1945 four blocks were completed to this original design. The architectural language was a continuation of that used at Dixon Street and Symonds Street. Of the 50 flats, five were one bedroom, 42 were two bedroom and three were three bedroom.

⑥ 1957-1958  
Upper Greys Avenue Flats  
115-39 Greys Ave., City  
Government Architect, F.  
Gordon Wilson



Construction to the south of the Lower Greys Ave Flats was delayed because construction costs were disproportionately high in the wake of World War II. By the mid 1950s when the decision was made to proceed, the 1940s design was no longer considered appropriate and the Upper Greys Avenue Flats were redesigned to reflect technological developments. The later block is taller, slimmer and, with reduced mass and more extensive glazing, lighter, in both senses of the word. It comprised 70 two-bedroom maisonettes and 16 bed-sits.

⑦ mid-late 1950s  
Kupe Street State Housing  
Scheme  
Orakei



Much of the Kupe Street ridge had been occupied by Ngati Whatua o Orakei. The government erected houses in Kitimoana Street to rehouse these Maori owners and then developed Kupe Street. The usual government policy of 'pepper-potting' was not followed here. Rather, medium-density housing was used to situate a greater proportion of Maori residents closer to their ancestral land at the north end of the street. Kupe Street became a testing site for the Housing Division to trial new designs for medium-density housing, the latter encouraged by government policy of the 1950s.

⑧ late 1950s-early 1960s  
Star Flats  
Kepa Road  
Orakei



Star flats are believed to have been designed by English immigrant architect Neville Burren during the time that Fred Newman was head of the Housing Division. Each block is three storeys, with a dozen one- and two-bedroom units. The name derives from the combination of cruciform plan and butterfly roofs. In Freemans Bay, the same design was utilised for Auckland City Council housing. Too often blocks of star flats have suffered from the replacement of their butterfly roofs with a giant hipped roof, making them look like oversized houses.

9

1940-early 1950s

Tamaki State Housing Scheme  
Panmure, Tamaki, Point  
England and Glen Innes



Tamaki was controversial in the early 1940s because it was so big: it was conceptualised to accommodate 30,000 people and was therefore like a whole new town. The south end includes Reginald Hammond's garden city-type arrangement of concentric crescents, including Coates Crescent. In 1944, Ernst Plischke drew up the shopping complex and community centre. His design included a series of reserves and walkways for pedestrians. The street layout was built to Plischke's design, but the buildings were not, with the government selecting new designs for imported houses, multi-units, duplexes and housing for single people.

10

Completed 1989

Rata Vine Drive Housing  
Rata Vine Drive, Wiri  
Manning Mitchell



This estate of 35 houses brought post-modernity from the inner city to the suburban fringe. This project used low-cost materials – wooden trellis, Fibrolite-and-batten – and vivid paint schemes to invest the seven house types with charm and wit. The decorative, Sure-to-rise colours have been painted over with muted tones, but the articulated volumes of the houses, the low fences, and especially the now-established trees give the estate a pleasant village-like ambiance. Rewi Thompson's state housing scheme in nearby Laurelia Place, completed around the same time, has been removed. See *Architecture NZ* July/Aug 1989.

11

Completed 1992  
John Tait village  
115 Blockhouse Bay Road  
Avondale  
Melling:Morse Architects



William John Tait was mayor of Avondale Borough in the 1920s, and this village of pensioner houses sits on land transferred to the Housing Corporation by his widow. His homestead has been retained in the development, serving as community room and caretaker's flat. The seventeen stand-alone two bedroom houses have been clothed in a two-tone brick that smoothly integrates the development into the suburban streetscape. Melling:Morse subvert suburban niceties with circular outdoor areas that 'bite' into the volume of the house and a landscape 'happening'. See *Architecture NZ* July/Aug 1991 and May/June 1992.

12

ca. 2001

Rowena Cres. Redevelopment  
Rowena Crescent, Glen Innes  
Architectus



This project reconfigured an existing 'quarter acre' subdivision to allow the insertion of medium-density housing. The streets were reorganized to create lanes and slip roads. A mixture of housing typologies and unit configurations provide for a range of occupants, including large families and the elderly. The most striking buildings are several blocks of brightly coloured townhouses that create a continuous and lively street frontage. Their garages are accessed from rear lanes, defining private garden areas in the zone between houses and garages.

13

Completed 2003

Pensioner Housing  
580 Hillsborough Rd, Lynfield  
Woodhams Meikle Architects



'Housing New Zealand is building houses again', wrote John Walsh when he reviewed this scheme. It was opened by Prime Minister Helen Clark in March 2003 and comprises 50 pensioner units in a series of two- and three-storey blocks of pre-cast concrete. Lifts and gallery walkways provide access to the upper levels. Each unit is two-bedroom, with balconies off living areas. North- and south-facing units are a mirror image of each other, meaning that southern units have south-facing living rooms and balconies. A courtyard garden works as a social, communal outdoor area. See *Architecture NZ*, May/Jun 2003.

14

2008

Talbot Park  
Area Bounded by Apirana Ave,  
Point England and Pilkington  
Roads, Glen Innes



The Talbot Park development is one of a number of community renewal projects initiated by Housing NZ in 2001. Produced in partnership between HNZC, Auckland City Council and the local community, the project was intended to revitalise a neighbourhood of dilapidated 1960s public housing spread across five hectares. The project, which includes design work by Architectus, Bailey Architects, Boffa Miskell, Common Ground, Crosson Clarke Carnachan, Stapleton Architects, ASC Architects, and Pepper Dixon, involved the refurbishment of 108 apartment units and the building of 111 new dwellings in a variety of types. The public spaces and street network were also radically rearranged. See *Commercial Design Trends*, Vol. 23, No. 4, 2007.

15

Completed 2008

Ventura Street State Housing  
Ventura Street, Mangere  
Designgroup Stapleton



This collection of townhouses has been designed according to principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design. A private lane passes through the centre of the site, and double-storey units have been placed around the perimeter, with accessible single-storey units at the centre of the site. Careful attention has been paid to the design of gardens and fences to allow natural surveillance of the street. However, there is no sense of meanness here - a marvel of design on a strict budget, these crisp, colourful buildings would be equally at home in Parnell or Ponsonby. See *Commercial Design Trends*, Vol. 24, No. 18, 2008.

## Sources:

All photographs are by Andrew Barrie or Julia Gatley.

Housing New Zealand Corporation has long recognised the significance of the country's history of state housing, supporting the publication of two books on the subject: Gael Ferguson, *Building the New Zealand Dream* (Dunmore Press and Dept of Internal Affairs, 1994) and Ben Schrader, *We Call It Home: A History of State Housing in New Zealand* (Reed, 2005). HNZC also employed the late Greg Bowron from 2003 to 2006 to compile a national inventory of state housing and to assess the heritage significance of the individual schemes. Greg's work remains unpublished at the present time but we are optimistic that HNZC will pursue publication in the future. Julia Gatley has written on the flats built by the first Labour government, for example in Barbara Brookes (ed.), *At Home in New Zealand* (Bridget Williams Books, 2000). Michael Roche is currently doing research on the houses built under the Workers' Dwellings Acts. See, for example, his paper in *Green Fields, Brown Fields*, the proceedings of the 2010 Australasian urban history / planning history conference.