



Claude Megson

Architect

GILES REID AND JACKIE MEIRING



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\$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: Limpbound
SIZE: 255 x 185mm
RIGHTS: World
AUTHORS' RESIDENCE: London, United 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.

'If you're a Megson fan, as I am, you'll turn off all notifications and head for a secret hideaway to deep dive into the information and images in this monograph' — Claire McCall, *Homestyle* magazine

'A compelling account of the life and works of New Zealand architect Claude Megson . . . The book's cedar-coloured cover echoes the stained cedar weatherboards from which many of Megson's homes were constructed' — Anne Kerslake Hendricks, *NZ Booklovers*

'I love a good architecture book, and Massey University Press make some of the best' — Jenny Nicholls, *Waiheke Weekender*

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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 émigré 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 limpbound
- A must for all interested in New Zealand architecture

Wong House
1963–67

Warrington Road
Remuera
Auckland
Architecture Archive CMS

The whole missing 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 Resene, who was a friend of Claude's. With a fourth baby on the way we needed a bigger house. She gave us his phone number, and that was the beginning. In 1963, he suggested to first have a look at the existing house, and we were impressed with its style. Next step was to find some land. Claude found the site, which was a subdivided 42 perches. It was very steep with a chicken run and some great trees — 22000. We went with them... and the virtually already laid in the 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

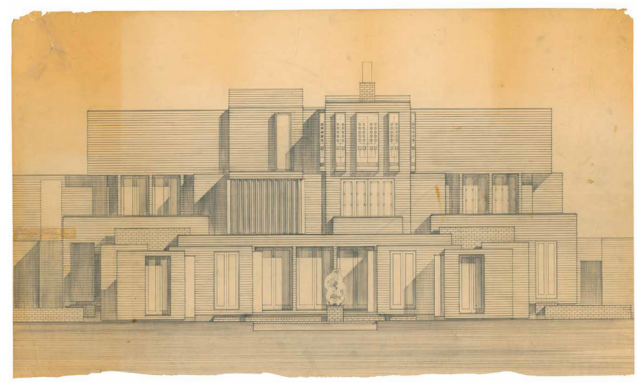
The Wong House is located on the lower slopes of Otirua/Mount Hobson, just below the ridge of Remuera Road. It is Megson's first great house, hugely impressive for so young an architect, and it represented a decisive leap in terms of budget, scale and imagination. Spatially, it shows greater ambition 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 Lupton (1955–1960) and Horace 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 opposed 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 1918 and 1925. The association is made explicit in the extraordinary silk-screened horizontal cedar weatherboards that used to wrap the entire house, as well as in the projecting vertical stained glass windows that formerly occupied the ledgers above the dining area. The combination is lifted from Guinness Court at 532 Remuera Road, the house Binney designed for his mother in 1924. Similar windows can also be seen on Binney's Mt House at 4 Upland Road in Remuera (1928).

The interior just inside the entrance, with the best La Roche glass reception shed.



100–101



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 'bad-sited' by the city council and entry was prohibited until engineering assessments could be carried out.

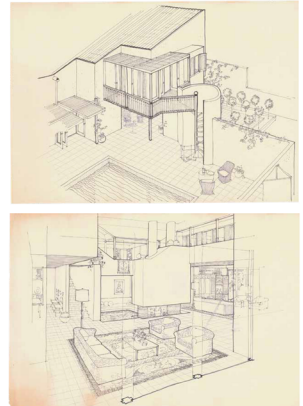
Photographs of the Mayes House taken from Shore Road showing the precariously exposed foundations under the swimming pool made national news, becoming some of the defining images of that extreme weather event. Claude Megson was widely referred to as the building's architect in the media reports.

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 his design. In the early 1960s, it had already been altered by the original owner, Joan Mayes who died in 2005, at the age of 98, and there had been at least three extensive renovations since — but if one counts the new retaining works 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, aluminum sliders, bright white paint and banded ceilings. 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 flavor. The upper-floor bedroom terraces were accessed by outdoor spiral stairs, and the pool was surrounded by 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, compatible in style to Megson's earlier work.

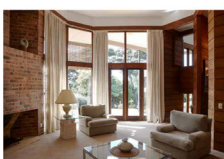
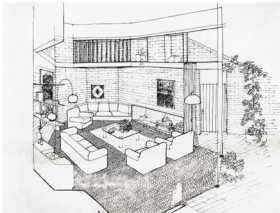
The lower-level glazing was shaded by slatted timber awnings and the roof had terracotta pantries. This, in combination with its white-plastered walls and C-shaped plan, facing north, suggest the Borner courtyard house as a source of inspiration. Curiously, this ancient archetype reappears every decade or so in Auckland architecture: consider James Hocken's Thorn House in Morningside (1944), the House Rose never built for his mother above his own in Masseyburn (1960) and, most radically, Andrew Patterson's Summer Street House in Parnassia (1968).

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




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

102–103



The living room.

Perspective of the living room, Courtesy: Hayley Abbott



Rear decking.

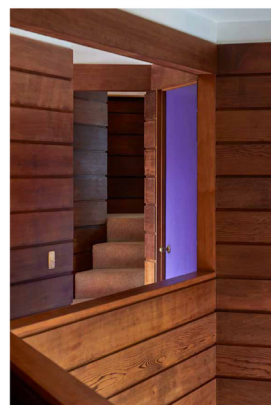
104–105

The view from the study to the living room.

The bedroom gallery seen from the study.

The main bedroom.



The steps leading up to the bed bedroom.

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