

# Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture

**RSTCA No:** R053

**Name of Place:** University of Canberra Student Residences Group 2

**Other/Former Names:**

**Address/Location:** College Street BRUCE 2617  
Block 1 Section 3 of Bruce (1)

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Listing Status:	Registered	Other Heritage Listings:	
Date of Listing:	1984	Level of Significance:	Regional
Citation Revision No:	2	Category:	Residential
Citation Revision Date:	2004	Style:	Sydney Regional

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Date of Design:	1973	Designer:	John Andrews International Pty Ltd
Construction Period:	1975	Client/Owner/Lessee:	University of Canberra
Date of Additions:		Builder:	

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## Statement of Significance

The University of Canberra Student Residences Group 2, is an example of significant architecture and an educational resource. The residences are an excellent example of the combination of Late Twentieth-Century International style (1960-) and the Late Twentieth-Century Brutalist style (1960-), and are notable for displaying the design skill of the architect John Andrews. The design incorporates many of the features which are specific to the styles including: its cubiform overall shape, structural frame expressed, and plain smooth wall surface of the Late Twentieth-Century International style; and the strong shapes boldly composed, expressed reinforced-concrete, large areas of blank wall and off-form concrete of the Late Twentieth-Century Brutalist style.

The following design features are of additional significance; the Corbusian window motif (ribbon windows); contrasting non-rectangular shape (the bull-nosed roof); contrasting texture (corrugated roofing); the corner windows; the street/stairways; cantilevering structure and stepped planning, original detailing and finishes.

The student village community concept, achieved by an ingenious plan and section arrangement on a sloping site has an important association with the University of Canberra and demonstrates an important time in Canberra's history in the development of tertiary education with the establishment of the Canberra College of Advanced Education, now the University of Canberra, specifically as a Canberra oriented university alongside the Australian National University, that is more nationally oriented.

The residential college is a rare example of off-form insitu concrete architecture in university residential design in Australia. Occupants have a private room grouped around shared facilities in small self-supporting groups. The building makes a confident architectural statement with bold modeling and profiling.

The innovative planning and structure of the residences may contribute to the education of designers in their understanding of Late Twentieth-Century Architectural styles by locating the building in its historical and environmental contexts and placing it within the knowledge domain of architectural, urban and environmental histories.

The residences are important for their strong association with the talented internationally

noteworthy architect John Andrews, who is recognised as one of Australia's leading architects of the modern movement. This complex is his most significant work of university residential architecture. His most significant architecture in Australia being the nearby Cameron Offices Belconnen, 1976, which is of international significance, and two thirds of which are under threat of demolition.

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## Description

The University of Canberra Student Residences Group 2, 1975, by John Andrews International, is a very good example of the combination of the Late Twentieth-Century International Style (1960-) with its cubiform overall shape, structural frame expressed, and plain, smooth wall surface; and the Late Twentieth-Century Brutalist Style (1960-) with its strong shapes boldly composed, expressed reinforced-concrete, large areas of blank wall and off-form concrete **3**.

The University of Canberra is located in the suburb of Bruce to the east of the Belconnen Town Centre and is separated from housing to the east and south and reserves to the north and south by major roads. The institution was originally built as the Canberra Collage of Advanced Education and the original master plan for the campus placed the main buildings in the centre of the campus with the main entry, to the south, off College Street. The master plan set the buildings along a north south mall with buildings placed either side; the Teacher Education Building and Library on the western side, the Union and Administration Building and Lecture Centre along the east side, and the Environmental Design, Management and Applied Science Buildings at the northern end of the mall.

A secondary east west axis was planned, for associated non-academic activities, across the site with the sports centre to the east and the student residences to the west. The residences are separate from the main campus buildings, about 450m to the west of the mall, and their location places them near Aikman Drive, west of the original Block A-H residences and within easy walking distance of the Belconnen Town Centre.

The Student Residences Group 2 is also referred to as Blocks I-N and by the students as "New Ressies" The mixed sex residential complex consists of 26, six study/bedroom "units" totally 156 student study/bedrooms, organised on a 3.05m (10' x 10') planning grid, in 6 tiers of 5 levels which cascade on a sloping site, each tier being separated, but functionally connected by access street/stairways. The innovative planning orientates the blocks to the northeast while the stairs step down in a more northerly direction requiring a slight off-set at each level that forms an external alcove at the unit entries. This solution very successfully resolves the visual dilemma of standing at the top of the flight and looking down an extensive stair. Combined with the landings and entry porches, the affect is reminiscent of a southern European hill town.

All external surfaces are off-form concrete except for the painted masonry walls to the rear entries and the bull-nosed corrugated roof.

The interlocking composition of residential units, staggered in plan, provides all units with a NE orientation that allows four of the six study/bedrooms to receive good winter morning sun and all to have views across the natural landscape. Each unit is rectangular in form and is entered off the external communal street/stairway at the southwest corner from a front entry porch. The porch is given emphasis by a blade column placed within the stair treads that support the unit over and partially divides the stair to form a more intimate route. The porch is separated from the stair by a concrete balustrade wall that has a splayed top.

There is approximately a two metre change in floor level between each unit as they step down the site, a climb of 13 rises to the street/stairway, while there is a small step down in floor level across the whole residence from the east to the west. The level change across the site required a reduction in units to the western most tiers where the end tier has three levels and the second last tier has four levels.

The entry door and sidelight have timber framed full height glazing that opens into the lounge area. The study/bedrooms are arranged in groups of six with common lounge, dining, cooking and ablution facilities. The rectangular shaped lounge room is on two levels and is planned in a north/south direction. It is predominantly enclosed and surrounded by rooms with the

study/bedroom in an inverted "L" form around the lounge. The communal kitchen is to the east and one of the study/bedrooms is to the west. The upper lounge area is approached up four steps next to the kitchen. This area leads to the second study/bedroom that has a north corner window, and to two of the northeast study/bedrooms. A short passage to the east leads to the remaining two study/bedrooms. Each of these northeast rooms has full width glazing. The separate wet areas open off the passage. At the end of the passage is the entry that opens onto a small porch off another main external street/stairway.

Most internal walls are masonry with the end wall to the wet areas painted externally.

The communal laundries are located one level below the top southwest level of the residences and are approached just behind the entry porches to this level's units. These are set below ground and are naturally lit from above by sloping glazed roofs that extend along the southwest façade.

Smooth insitu off form concrete and the original roofing material, corrugated asbestos cement, and barges gave a uniform one material effect to the construction and visual character of the building. The roofing has been replaced with painted corrugated metal, however, it is an olive green colour and not grey to match the colour of the original fibre cement.

Other architectural elements of the Late Twentieth-Century International style (1960-) displayed by the building that relate to the external forms are:

- Corbusian window motif;
- contrasting non-rectangular shape (the bull-nosed roof), and
- contrasting texture (corrugated roofing).

The additional significant design features are; the corner windows, the street/stairways, cantilevering structure and stepped planning.

While there are many student residence buildings on the university campuses in Canberra arguably only three are of great architectural significance. The University of Canberra Student Residences Group 2, 1975, can be contrasted with Burgmann College by Dirk Bolt & Associates, 1971, and Toad Hall by John Andrews International, 1977, both at the Australian National University and both examples of the Late Twentieth-Century International style. The face brick Toad Hall has an irregular interlocking plan of bedroom clusters around common rooms with internal stairs and circulation, while Burgmann College is more traditional with its rooms organized off corridors in two multi leveled wings with a well designed student dining hall.

The residences can be compared with other off-form insitu concrete buildings in Canberra, many of which are of international and national significance. The nearby Cameron Offices, 1977, by John Andrews International, and the Belconnen Public Library, 1982, by Robin Gibson, both in Belconnen; the High Court of Australia, 1980, and the National Gallery of Australia, 1982, both by Edwards Madigan Torzillo Briggs International. All of these buildings express strong, robust, sculptural, forthright architecture.

The residences are well maintained and in good condition. The original concrete construction joints appear not to have been well formed and have obvious patching, most likely done at the time of construction. The top-level entry porches have fibre sheet clad roofs.

The original Janitor's Flat is now the accommodation for the "Ressies Councilor", located in the top southeast unit. This unit has been clad in painted fibre sheet. In the original plan it was a self-contained two bedroom unit with an office and waiting room, planned within the same external form as the student units.

The builder was Leighton Pty Ltd.

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### **Condition and Integrity**

The residences are in good condition. The corrugated fibre cement roof has been replaced with a corrugated green metal roof.

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## Background/History

The Canberra Collage of Advanced Education, designed by Hassell, McConnell and Partners for the NCDC in 1970, was a relatively new type of tertiary education facility in Australia at the time. Colleges of advanced education were planned and constructed to enhance teacher education and to take the place of existing teachers colleges.

At the time of the design of the University of Canberra Student Residences Group 2 in 1973 there was a major expansion in tertiary education within Australia promoted by the new Federal Labor Government under Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, 1972-75. Substantial sums of Federal Government money was provided at the Federal and State levels to improve both existing tertiary facilities and to build new tertiary education facilities after the Whitlam Government introduced free tertiary education.

The student residence is one of two Andrews designed in Canberra, the other being Toad Hall at the ANU.

"Before the mid-1960s there were few buildings in Australia...(that) indicated the rich possibilities of the exploitation of the plastic properties of reinforced concrete for sculptural form." JT

The strong and forthright architecture of the University of Canberra Student Residences Group 2 and its innovative planning make it arguably the most architecturally important student residential college in Canberra and otherwise one of Canberra's more important buildings of its time.

Andrew's choice of insitu off-form concrete for the residences contrasted with the architectural theme of the campus that required light coloured brick clad and framed buildings. The campus planner's brick aesthetic theme continued well into the 1990s.

The use of off-form-insitu concrete associated with robust and raw sculptural architecture, has its origins in the post World War II work of Le Corbusier, including his various Unite d'Habitations, France and Germany, the Chapel at Ronchamp, France, and the government buildings at Chandigarh, India. "The Brutalist ethic was one of social concern, urban responsibility and integrity in the expression of the material, structure and function." **13**

"The scale and distribution of the units creates a level of intimacy more closely resembling that provided in general residential developments." JT ARCH> PERF

The use of off-form insitu concrete as the structural and enclosing material in student residences is rare in Australia. There were some university buildings constructed in this material throughout Australia including Hale School Memorial Hall, Perth, 1961, by Marshall Clifton in association with Anthony Brand; the Social Sciences Building, Flinders University Adelaide, 1969, by Cheesman Doley Neighbour and Raffan, and the Wentworth Building Student Union, University of Sydney, 1972, Ancher Mortlock Murray and Woolley.

The earliest and possibly only other fully off-form insitu concrete student residential building is the Menzies College Student Housing, La Trobe University, Melbourne, 1968, by Robin Boyd of Romberg and Boyd. The planning of the Menzies College is quite different in that it is a four storey complex with vertical fenestration and dominant stair towers more in the approach of standard student residential buildings.

John Andrews returned to Australia in 1969 after studying at Harvard University and carrying on his own practice in Toronto, Canada from 1961 where he designed notable buildings such as the Scarborough College, Toronto, Harvard Graduate School of Design and the Miami Passenger Terminal.

The Cameron Offices, Belconnen, 1976, is Andrew's major work in Canberra and Australia. The Callam Office, Woden, 1981, (former Woden Technical and Further Education College) and student residential housing at Toad Hall ANU, 1977, are his other major buildings in Canberra.

In Australia his notable buildings are The American Express Tower, (formerly King George Tower), Sydney (1976), , (1981) Darling Harbour Convention Centre, Sydney, (1990), and various university buildings and residential works.

He also designed the Intelsat Headquarters, Washington USA, (1980).

John Andrews was awarded the RIAA Gold Medal in 1980. "His presence in this country has provided a stimulating influence for Australian architecture." <sup>15</sup> Andrews was a committee member for the judging of the Parliament House of Australia.

Andrews wrote of the residential complex that: "As a social environment the CCAE is very successful. In this respect it is by far the best of the four residences I have designed".

The approach used to facilitate the project was similar to a "Design and Construct" procurement system where the architect was employed by the builder to only produce the design and documentation without a contract administration role given to the architect. This process can lead to changes in the design intent and usually a poorer result aesthetically. Andrews believes this system of engagement resulted in the construction detailing of the concrete façade being carried out to a level below what he would have required as the contract administrator.

The university students value the residence as a pleasant place to live and study.

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### **Analysis against the Criteria specified in Schedule 2 of the Land (Planning and Environment) Act 1991**

*(i) a place which demonstrates a high degree of technical and/or creative achievement, by showing qualities of innovation or departure or representing a new achievement of its time*

The creativity of the architect John Andrews is apparent in the design of the University of Canberra Student Residences Group 2 1975, which was innovative when compared with other residential colleges built in Canberra and Australia. There is one other earlier example of an off-form insitu concrete student residence in Australia that being the Menzies College Student Housing, La Trobe University, Melbourne, 1968, by Robin Boyd of Romberg and Boyd. The complex is one of two college residences in Canberra designed by the leading nationally significant architect John Andrews. Andrews believes that this project is of great importance in his architectural career.

The University of Canberra Student Residences Group 2 is of considerable architectural merit, demonstrating a new and innovative architectural response to the need of student accommodation on campus with its scale and distribution of the units, the use of reinforced concrete as both the structure and the external wall material and its accomplished site planning where the residence steps down the site facilitating private northern views from, and northern sunlight into the study/bedrooms.

The residence is featured in national publications.

*(ii) a place which exhibits outstanding design or aesthetic qualities valued by the community or a cultural group*

The University of Canberra Student Residences Group 2 is a significant example of the combination of the Late Twentieth-Century International Style (1960-) with its cubiform overall shape, structural frame expressed, and plain smooth wall surface; and the Late Twentieth-Century Brutalist Style (1960-) with its strong shapes boldly composed, expressed reinforced-concrete, large areas of blank wall and off-form concrete. It is notable for displaying the high design skill of the architect John Andrews.

The following design features are of additional significance; the Corbusian window motif (ribbon windows); contrasting non-rectangular shape (the bull-nosed roof); contrasting texture (corrugated roofing); the corner windows; the street/stairways; cantilevering structure and stepped planning.

The student residence is highly valued by the RIAA as an excellent example of this style of architecture by a leading internationally significant architect. The strong and forthright architecture and its innovative planning is characteristic of the work of the architect John Andrews.

The residences are valued by the students.

*(iii) a place which demonstrates a distinctive way of life, taste, tradition, religion, land use, custom, process, design or function which is no longer practised, is in danger or being lost, or is of exceptional interest*

The design of the University of Canberra Student Residences Group 2 demonstrates an important time in Canberra's history in the development of tertiary education with the establishment of the Canberra College of Advanced Education, now the University of Canberra, specifically as a Canberra orientated university along side the Australian National University, that is more nationally oriented. The design of the residences reflected a swing away from the more traditional block type that had internal corridor access and individual room accommodation.

The residences are particularly interesting as they demonstrate innovative planning, both of the site and the units, allied with the use of insitu reinforced concrete as both the structure and the external wall material that was at the foundation of much of Andrew's architecture. The use of off-form insitu concrete in this manner is rarely practiced in Australia today.

The design of the residences demonstrates an important development in architectural style in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Few student residential buildings were built in off-form insitu concrete in Australia, and this is the only one in Canberra. Modern architecture was the most important architecture of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Canberra is one of the few 20<sup>th</sup> Century designed cities in the world. The combination of modern architecture and urban design is of exceptional interest.

*(iv) a place which is highly valued by the community or a cultural group for reasons of strong or special religious, spiritual, cultural, educational or social associations*

*(v) a place which is the only known or only comparatively intact example of its type*

Few student residential buildings were built in off-form insitu concrete in Australia, the only other known example is the Menzies College Student Housing, La Trobe University, Melbourne, 1968, by Robin Boyd of Romberg and Boyd. The University of Canberra Student Residences Group 2 is the only example in Canberra.

*(vi) a place which is a notable example of a class of natural or cultural places or landscapes and which demonstrates the principal characteristics of that class*

The University of Canberra Student Residences Group 2 is a notable design in a combination of the Late Twentieth-Century International style (1960-) and the Late Twentieth-Century Brutalist style (1960-). The residences contain the key elements of the style at a time of exceptional expansion in tertiary institutions and education in Canberra and Australia.

The choice by Andrews of insitu off-form concrete for the residences contrasted with the architectural theme of campus of brick clad and framed buildings.

*(vii) a place which has strong or special associations with person, group, event, development or cultural phase which played a significant part in local or national history*

The design of the University of Canberra Student Residences Group 2 demonstrates an important time in Canberra's history in the development of tertiary education with the establishment of the Canberra College of Advanced Education, now the University of Canberra, specifically as a Canberra orientated university along side the Australian National University, that is more nationally oriented.

The design of the residences reflected a swing away from the more traditional block type that had internal corridor access and individual room accommodation.

The residences are important for their special association with John Andrews who played a significant role in Australia's cultural history. He is one of the most important architects of the late twentieth century in Australia and this is an important work in his Australian career in terms of its

size and type. Andrews believes that the University of Canberra Student Residences Group 2 is by far the best of the four student residences he has designed.

Professor Jennifer Taylor referred to John Andrews as providing:  
"a stimulating influence for Australian architecture".

John Andrews was awarded the RAI Gold Medal in 1980.

The University of Canberra Student Residences Group 2 is featured in major national publications.

*(xi) a place which demonstrates a likelihood of providing information which will contribute significantly to a wider understanding of natural or cultural history, by virtue of its use as a research site, teaching site, type locality or benchmark site*

Through its architectural style and planning this building is a valuable educational resource for designers and planners. Its architecture is a significant example of the combination of the Late Twentieth-Century International style (1960-) Late Twentieth-Century Brutalist style (1960-).

The architecture of this residences may contribute to the education of designers in their understanding of Late Twentieth-Century Architectural styles and the heritage value is enhanced by its educational worth for students of architecture. Experiencing heritage buildings enables the visitor to locate the building in its historical and environmental contexts and to place it within the knowledge domain of architectural, urban and environmental histories. These experiences readily enable the establishment, understanding and interpretation of the building's heritage value and significance. This building is a very good example of the combination of these two styles. Its innovative planning contributes to its significance and educational heritage. .

The residences can be contrasted with Burgmann Collage by Dirk Bolt & Associates, 1971, and Toad Hall by John Andrews International, 1977, both at the Australian National University and both examples of Late Twentieth-Century International style. The face brick Toad Hall has an irregular interlocking plan of bedroom clusters around common rooms with internal stairs and circulation while Burgmann Collage is more traditional with its rooms organized off corridors in two multi leveled wings with a well designed dining hall.

The residences can be compared with other off-form insitu concrete buildings in Canberra, many of which are of international and national significance. The nearby Cameron Offices, 1977, by John Andrews International, and the Belconnen Public Library, 1982, by Robin Gibson, both in Belconnen; the High Court of Australia, 1980, and the National Gallery of Australia, 1982, both by Edwards Madigan Torzillo Briggs International. All of these buildings express strong, robust, sculptural, forthright architecture.

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## References

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## Other Information Sources