



Ruth as a baby with parents Enid and Reg, siblings Anne, John and David (Anne Durack)

Ruth Durack (1951-2011) was born 16 March 1951 at Darwin, the fourth child to Reginald Wyndham (1911-1998) and Grace Enid (nee Tulloch) Durack (1915-2008), pastoralists at remote Kildurk Station (now Amanbidji) in the Northern Territory. Reg and Enid had been married at Perth in 1944 by her father, a Presbyterian minister, and soon headed north to Auvergne Station, where Reg was managing the property for the prominent Connor, Doherty and Durack company. Reg was the eldest of six children of renowned Kimberley Region pastoralists Michael Patrick and Ida 'Bessie' Durack. Of their four sons and two daughters, Dame Mary Durack Miller (1913-1994) gained distinction as an author, Elizabeth Durack Clancy (1915-2000) was a gifted painter, Kimberley Michael Durack (1917-1968) was a pioneer of agriculture in the Kimberley Region, William Aiden Durack (1918-2010) became a prominent architect, and David Johnstone Durack (1920-1982) was a highly successful civil engineer.

Seeking independence, in 1950 Reg and Enid moved with their first three children (David, Anne and John) from Auvergne to their own property Kildurk, where Reg soon built an airstrip and provided a pedal radio, so that they could call the base operator at Wyndham to send an airplane in case of emergency. With Ruth's birth at the end of the wet season, when transport is incredibly difficult, Enid travelled by Flying Doctor to Darwin for the delivery. At six days old, Ruth was flown back to the corrugated iron sheds that was the accommodation at Kildurk. There she was surrounded by the beauty and drama of the Australian north – drought, flood, bushfire and electrical storms played out against a backdrop of purple hills. Early schooling with her siblings and Aboriginal children from the station was by correspondence, supervised by Enid. Enid travelled to Perth for the birth of Ruth's younger brother Doug, as for the children other than Ruth.



Ruth as a child at Kildurk with 'Nippers Knob' in the background; Mary Durack Miller sketch at Kildurk of 1970 (Anne Durack). Reg and Enid sold Kildurk in 1972-73. Ruth's ashes were scattered on Nipper's Knob to the accompaniment of her nephew Nick playing the bagpipes.

Ruth won a scholarship to Presbyterian Ladies College at Perth, and in 1967 was dux. Uncertain of a career she was a cadet for West Australian Petroleum, mapping wells on Barrow Island. After Ruth's initial studies in science at the University of Western Australia (UWA), she travelled to Europe and the United Kingdom before settling on the study of architecture at UWA. Ruth recalled:

"I was sitting on the battlements of Edinburgh Castle looking down on Princes Street and realised that there was nothing more interesting than cities. I don't want to sound too dramatic, but it was an epiphany. I knew I wanted to get involved in making urban places, but I had never heard of urban design so I studied architecture."



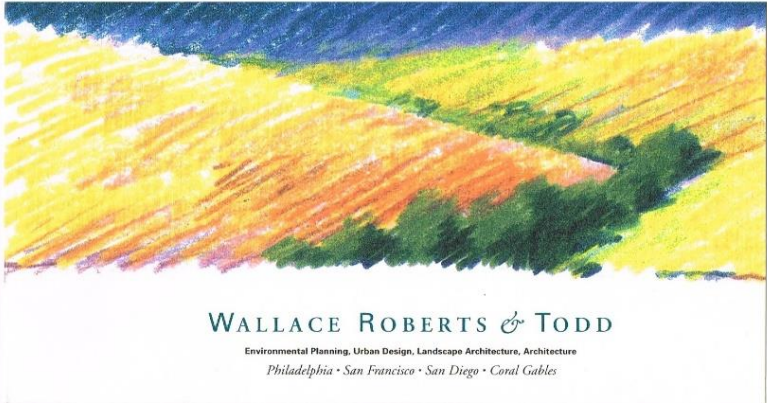
Ruth Durack in student years (Anne Durack)

In 1978 Ruth completed her undergraduate studies with first class honours, winning the J.A. Wood Memorial Prize for the most outstanding student from the faculties of architecture, arts, economics, law, education, and commerce. She was awarded the R. Summerhayes Prize, the Forbes and Fitzhardinge travel grant for an outstanding graduate and the Hackett Scholarship, a post-graduate award. An April 1979 headline in *The West Australian* newspaper read: *Ruth scoops the prize pool.*

Ruth travelled to the USA and Berkley University in California, where in 1980 she earned her masters degree in architecture. But by then she had discovered the distinct discipline of Urban Design, being taught most directly at the University of Pennsylvania – and to Philadelphia she travelled, a city Ruth came to love. She noted that:


“The power of working in collaborative design studios combining urban design, planning, architecture, landscape architecture, historical preservation and visual art was immediately obvious.”

In 1982, Ruth was awarded a master of city planning from the University of Pennsylvania, and subsequently taught as assistant professor in the architecture and urban design faculties of Drexel, Temple and the University of Pennsylvania, where she was chair of the urban design program in 1991. Professor Durack was a citizen of the USA from 1996, where she spent most of her working life in city planning / urban design, and fashioned an international reputation. Joining the prestigious San Francisco firm of Wallace Roberts & Todd as early as 1981, she became director of urban design (West Coast).



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RUTH DURACK
*Director of Urban Design
San Francisco, San Diego*

Ms. Durack rejoins the firm after two years with the City of Philadelphia as project director of the reuse strategy for the Philadelphia Naval Base, one of the country's largest military bases to be closed under recent defense cutbacks. Durack adds this valuable experience with the public sector to fifteen years in private practice and over a decade of teaching urban design and architecture.

- For WRT, Durack has led urban design projects ranging in scope from mixed-use development of an historic canal system in Richmond Virginia, to campus master planning for Drexel University; from residential conversion of the Warehouse District in New Orleans, to commercial development of the Ohio riverfront in Cincinnati.
- Her pragmatic approach to problem solving is informed by continuous involvement in research and design education. Durack was a Loeb Fellow of the Graduate School of Design at Harvard in 1992, and she has been on the architecture and urban design faculties of Drexel, Temple and the University of Pennsylvania, where she also served as acting Chair of the Urban Design Program in 1991.
- Ms. Durack will be based in WRT's San Francisco office where she will oversee urban design assignments of the firm's West Coast offices.

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Ruth worked for Wallace Roberts & Todd at times between 1981 and 1997 (Anne Durack)

Ruth organized and taught a program in Israel on housing for Soviet immigrants. And US president Bill Clinton visited her to discuss plans to convert the naval base in Philadelphia for commerce and housing – Ruth was project director with the City of Philadelphia on this project for two years. Professor Durack was awarded a Loeb Fellowship to the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University in 1992, and was the subject of an American TV documentary on women who led their field.

In 1998 Durack was appointed Director of the Urban Design Centre of Northeast Ohio, where she directed a non-profit urban design service to improve local communities. Ruth developed Kent State University's Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative (CUDC), opened at Cleveland's landmark Pointe Building, a triangular arrowhead aimed at the bustling intersection of Huron Road and Prospect Avenue. Practical Ruth noted:

“I don't think we could have chosen a better location. The problems that typically face today's urban architect are right outside our door.”

CUDC's mission allowed Kent State's graduate students to gain hands-on experience in designing and developing central-city areas, while Cleveland gained a resource to help rebuild neighbourhoods and revitalise urban centres.

In 2004 Ruth grasped the opportunity to return to WA, launching the Urban Design Centre (UDC) at Perth. As the first director of UDC – a collaboration between the former Department of Planning and Infrastructure and the universities of Curtin and WA - she undertook planning projects for the Port of Bunbury, Town of Port Hedland, Town of Claremont, City of Fremantle, Medina Township and Town of Kwinana. As well she taught a post-graduate study program for the UDC, the first non-profit Australian agency of its kind devoted to improving the quality of urban places.

With her siblings, Ruth was one of a number of brilliant academics in the Durack clan. She was passionate about making urban spaces better places in which to live. Following a celebrated thirty year international career in urban planning, Ruth died on 4 July 2011 in Hollywood Hospital, Nedlands, at just 60 years of age. Ruth's family noted that she accepted her lung cancer as a consequence of smoking. Ruth did not marry, and left fifteen nieces and nephews.



In later years, architect-planner Ruth Durack (at right) with siblings Doug (media), David (medicine), Anne (medicine) and John (law)— all high-achievers shaped from the independence of a remote upbringing (Anne Durack)

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Contributing author: John Taylor

Heritage Committee meeting approval date: 17 February 2022 Last updated: 17 February 2022

Citation details:

Taylor, Dr John J., 'Ruth Durack (1951-2011)', Western Australian Architect Biographies, <http://www.taylorarchitects.com.au/Biographies.html> accessed DATE.