



Iris Rossen c.1979 (*WAY 79*, 1980, p.343); and c.1980s (RAIA - WA)

**Vivian Iris Patricia Rossen** (1928-2018) was born 9 May 1928 to parents Erick Noel Lawson Raymond and Alice Elizabeth Anne Raymond (nee Saunders), on Cephalonia in the Greek Ionian Islands, where she spent her childhood. In 1938 Iris moved north with her family to the island of Corfu, where they lived until 1940. Following the outbreak of the Second World War (1939-1945) they were evacuated by fishing boat and the mainland to Crete, and then under fire from Crete across the Mediterranean to Alexandria in Egypt, and on to Cairo.

In 1942, at the age of fourteen, Iris was evacuated again from Cairo with her mother and younger brother Neville on a British troop carrier to Cape Town, South Africa. Iris attended an English school for eighteen months, and won a scholarship to study architecture at the University of Cape Town, under Professor Thornton White. In 1949, she graduated with 1st Class Honours and a distinction for her thesis, hence gaining admission to the Royal Institute of British Architects.

Iris was multilingual - being proficient in Greek, Italian, French, German, English, Attic Greek and Latin; and she had a broad and diverse cultural, literary, and historical reference. In Cape Town, under the influence and teaching of the Jesuits, she developed a deep Christian faith and commitment to the Catholic Church. This was reflected in her family and professional life.

In 1949, Iris Raymond married fellow architecture student Ernest Rossen, and shortly afterwards they moved to Salisbury in Rhodesia (now Harare, Zimbabwe), where Iris worked as an architect with the firm Parker and Parker.

In 1959 they chose to leave Africa with their five children, settling first at Vancouver Island, Canada and then at Laguna Beach in California USA. In 1962, Iris and Ernest and seven children (Francis, Therese, Bernadette, Greg, Paul, Angela and Claire) emigrated again and arrived on the P&O ocean liner *SS Canberra* at Fremantle. They settled in Western Australia, embraced the Australian lifestyle and opportunities, and had two further children at Perth - Linda and Jenny.

While raising their nine children Iris continued to collaborate with Ernest on projects. Most notably, the design of St Denis' Catholic Church Joondanna, inspired by Le Corbusier's Chapel du Ronchamp, was completed in 1968. Iris was responsible for the interior design including the striking front doors of the Church. The building was recognised by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (WA) as one of the significant modern buildings of Perth. A number of prominent Western Australian artists collaborated on the artworks which form part of the liturgical functions of the church.



St Denis' Catholic Church of 1968 is located at 60 Osborne Street, Joondanna (Wikipedia)

In 1972 Iris commenced practice in association with Peter Hunt, before establishing the practice Iris Rossen and Associates in 1977 - providing architectural services to a wide range of public, institutional, community, church and private sector clients. Works included: educational, community, health care, aged care, church, monastic, residential, master planning, project and event planning and heritage projects. In practice she completed many projects including 32 Churches, 28 schools and 6 monastic buildings.

In 1972 Iris was appointed a founding member of the Western Australian Liturgical Committee which saw her actively contributing to the discussion on the role of art and architecture in church liturgy. In this role she delivered seminars, forums, and workshops in churches and parishes throughout Western Australia. For many of her works Iris designed the furniture and fittings in collaboration with artists and artisans. Every part of Iris' buildings including furnishings was conceived with careful consideration for function and design. She was an accomplished artist working across a variety of media. Her drawings, stained glass and textile works were integrated into many of her public buildings. Iris's work was informed by a modernist philosophy. She commissioned many liturgical art works from West Australian artists and craftspeople. These works were exhibited in the inaugural Liturgical Art Exhibition in 1972 held at The Old Fire Station gallery, an important venue of the Perth art scene at the time.

One often-seen example of Iris' design work is on the uniforms of Mount Claremont's John XXIII College, founded in 1977. Iris, architect and parent, designed the crest with the Cross of Jesus resting on the circle - representing justice and commitment, life, friendship and communication. The royal blue and gold of the crest represents the amalgamated schools, Loreto and St Louis.



Crest of John XXIII College (<https://www.johnxxiii.edu.au> › pages › our-heritage)

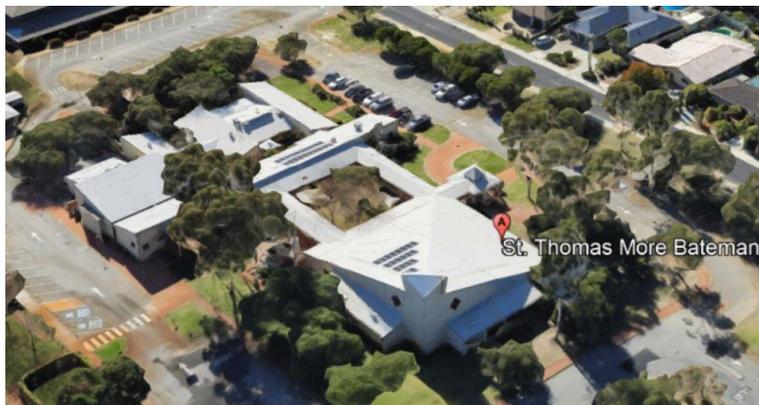
Iris designed a number of churches in northern Western Australia. Some of these include six churches and three rectories comprising part of the Outback Church Foundation (OCF). These are multi-purpose buildings serving not only for church uses but also for a variety of group and community activities. Representing some of her metropolitan works, Our Lady of Mercy Catholic Church, Girrawheen was built in 1985 in a finely resolved design.



Our Lady of Mercy Church of 1985 is located at 5 Patrick Court, Girrawheen (Google)

In 1986 Iris was part of a team managing the Papal Visit to Perth. Iris transformed Perth's Ascot race course to accommodate a congregation of over twenty-five thousand people for the Papal mass, designing the layout for crowd movement, control and safety; and designing the backdrop, sanctuary, furnishings and vestments for Pope John Paul II.

Iris's work is characterised by a logical approach to planning with an emphasis on the user experience and spatial relationships. The St Thomas More Catholic Church Complex at Bateman is a good example of this. From 1986, the design demonstrates a simple arrangement of the key components – the church, parish centre and presbytery - organised around courtyards and linked by a covered colonnade. The Church is a simple square, but arranged on the diagonal, allowing parishioners to “gather” around the sanctuary. The planning for St Thomas More Church is based on the theological idea that the church building is the place for communal worship, and the idea of “gathering” was the driver of not only the practice's church commissions, but also of their schools and healthcare projects



St Thomas More of 1986 is located at 100 Dean Road, Bateman (Google Earth)

Iris was also commissioned to design a series of churches for communities throughout the remote Pilbara and Kimberley regions by Bishop Gerald 'Ged' Muston, the Anglican Bishop for North West Australia from 1981 to 1992. The Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Robert Runcie visited WA in 1990 to open and consecrate these churches in a tour, which Iris remembered fondly.

St Paul's Anglican Church, City Beach was designed by Iris and built in 1990 alongside an existing hall, with the two buildings linked by an entry. At that time the hall was re-roofed in colorbond sheeting to match the new church, and the two buildings create a uniform whole.



St Paul's Church of 1990 is located at 57 Brompton Road, City Beach (HCWA place 11489).

The Anglican Church of St Mark's located in Porter Street, Kalbarri was built in 1992 to Rossen's design. The layout is to suit north-west WA conditions, and is split into two internal sections separated by glass panels that allow half to be used as a function area, or an extension of the chapel area.



St Mark's Church of 1992 is located in Porter Street, Kalbarri (Google)

Throughout her years in practice, Iris's work was carefully briefed, well designed, thoroughly detailed and documented, collaboratively managed in construction, and delivered on time and budget. She developed lasting working relationships with clients, consultants, builders, sub-contractors, artists, the trades and craftsmen. Iris was known for her fairness, collaboration and good management and was admired and respected by those she worked with.



Iris Rossen ([www.artefacts.co.za](http://www.artefacts.co.za))

Iris was supported in her practice by her associate Noel Ryan, and a team of young architects and graduates, for whom the practice was an excellent learning studio. A generation of practicing architects had the advantage of practical experience gained under Iris and Noel. Iris received National and State architectural awards for housing works, aged care and education buildings. Iris retired from practice in 1995, and in 1998 was awarded the Architects Board of WA Award for “her outstanding contribution to the profession through her work and in the community”. Iris was thrilled when her architect son Paul won the same award in 2013. In 1999 Iris was awarded a Life Fellowship of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects and in the same year she was awarded Life Fellowship of the Royal Institute of British Architects. In retirement Iris wrote “Golden Threads” a book about her childhood in Greece. She enjoyed time with her extended family, the leisure to contemplate life and walk on the beach, which she so loved. Iris led quite an extraordinary life; surviving the Second World War, travelling the world, having a family and running a successful architectural practice for a quarter of a century.

Iris Rossen died at Cottesloe 17 December 2018, aged 90 years. Ernest had died in 1991, aged 63 years. At her passing, she was survived by her nine children, fifteen grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

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