



Vin Davies in the 1970s

(<http://50years.curtin.edu.au/history-makers/vin-davies/>)

Vincent Francis Ulick Davies (1928-2010) was born 11 July 1928 at Wagin, in the Great Southern region of Western Australia, approximately 225 km south-east of Perth. Vincent's parents were Francis and Dorothy (nee Atkins) Davies, who had married at St Mary's Church at North Fremantle in January 1925. Shortly after his birth the family moved to Albany where 'Vin' spent his primary school years, and where his brother Nigel was born. The family moved to Perth around 1940 where Vin went to Perth Boys and then Perth Modern School. He loved traditional jazz and was a drummer in a jazz band - the Alvan Street Stompers - in his late teens and early twenties.



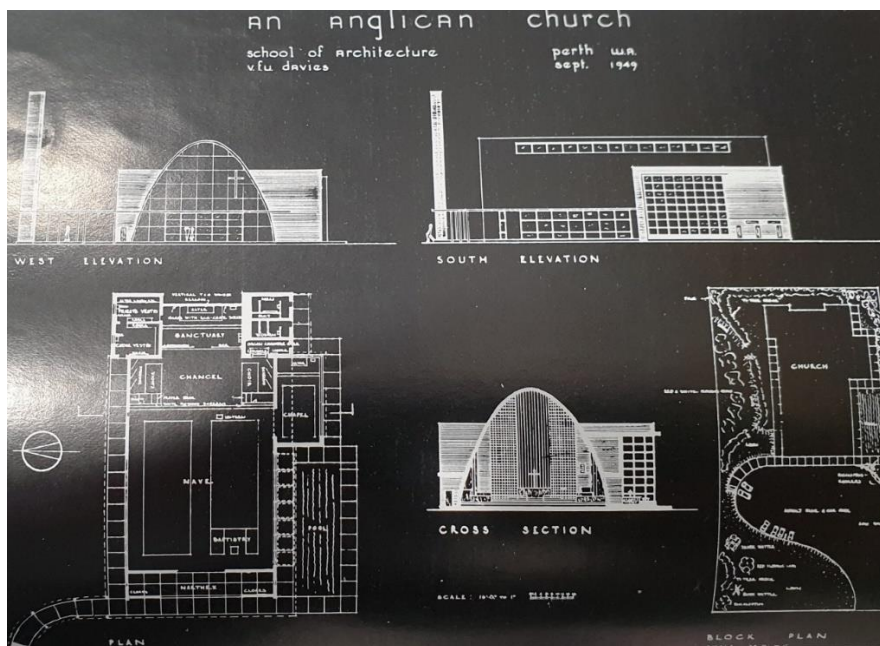
Vin Davies drumming for the Alvan Street Stompers in the late 1940s (Maira Russo)

After the hostilities of the Second World War (1939-1945) were over, seventeen year old Vin elected to enrol in the newly-founded (1946) five year architecture course at Perth Technical College (PTC). Prior to the Second World War, architectural students who did not receive academic training overseas or in other States, had been obliged to train in WA under a system of indenture to

individual architects. The products of this system of architectural education were trained rather than educated and clearly bore the marks of the architect who trained them. During the war it could be foreseen that great demands would be placed on the building industry when peace eventuated, and in 1946 William (Bill) Robertson (with Arnold Camerer) inaugurated the first academic architectural course at PTC.

Robertson had attended meetings of the Modern Architectural Research Society (MARS) in Sydney in the early 1940s, and through him the society's philosophies had an obvious influence on the nature of the course at PTC. The war had made housing a major consideration, and a practical objective of industrialization for the Modern Movement. Robertson was also strongly oriented to construction and practical aspects, and the curriculum he organized was accordingly a very practical one. But as has been elucidated by Geoffrey London and Duncan Richards in the late twentieth-century study *Modern Houses*, the major post-war architectural style inspiration on the west coast of Australia was derived from British (particularly London) and Continental sources, leading to a regionally distinctive form of architectural modernism.

In the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA) WA Chapter exhibition of 1947, Vin's example of a working drawing was selected from PTC student works for display, marking him as an exceptional talent.



Vin Davies' fourth year PTC design for an Anglican Church in 1949 (Phi 1950, p.15)

The results of the annual examinations for the associateship course at PTC were announced in *The West Australian* newspaper in mid-December 1950, and the very first graduates of the course were feted by their friends as the 'magnificent seven'. Stuart Coll, Vin Davies, John Hallam, Gil Nicol, Alan Shepherd, Ray Strauss and Geoff Summerhayes had passed the final four units of the course. Vin was registered as an architect with the Architects Board of WA during early 1951 (reg. no. 215) in concert with his fellow PTC graduates: Nicol 216, Shepherd 217, Summerhayes 218, Hallam 219, Strauss 220, and Coll 221.



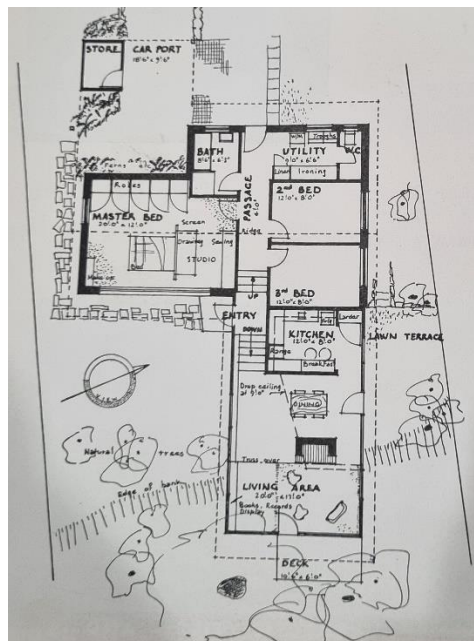
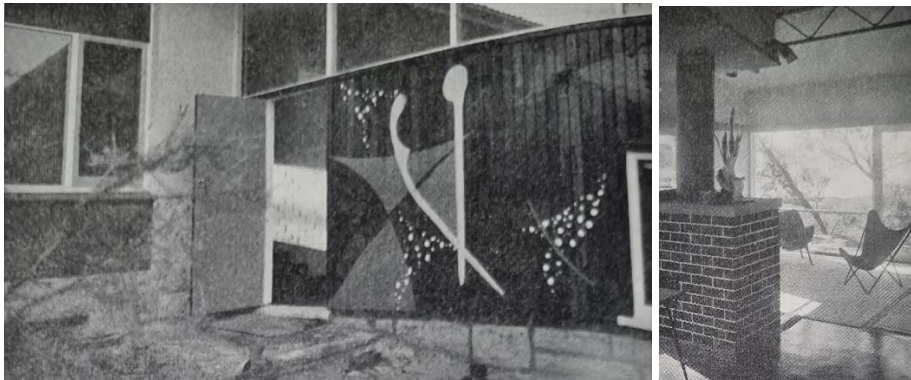
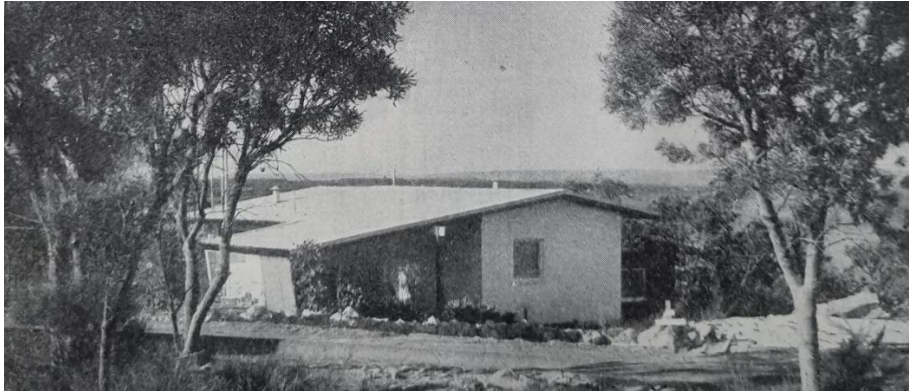
PTC students at sail, left to right: 1 John Hallam, 2 Arthur Smith, not identified, 3 Stuart Coll, 4 George John, 5 Ray Strauss, 6 Vin Davies, 7 Gil Nicol, 8 Geoff Summerhayes (Jane Adjuk).

After graduation Vin joined the Public Works Department as a cadet architect, progressing through the State Government organisation and eventually becoming a senior design architect. Vin Davies and Joan Keiller were married at St Luke's Church Mosman Park in March 1953, and had a daughter, Moira.



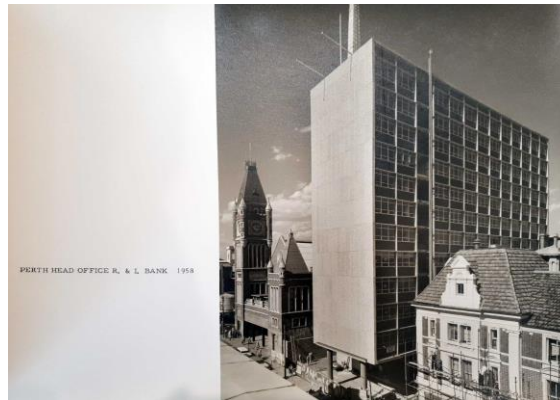
Vin Davies with Joan Keiller, early 1950s (*Western Mail*, 15 February 1951, p.29; Moira Russo)

Retired Perth engineer Peter Bruechle recalls that in the 1950s Vin worked on the R & I Bank head office tower (now demolished) in Barrack Street Perth, and Technical School buildings at Salvado Road in Subiaco. Vin designed his own modern family home overlooking the Canning River on a steeply sloping bank at 27 River Way Salter Point, and it was built over ten months in 1955.



Davies family home at Salter Point (now demolished): view across ROW from S-W, entrance mural, view through living area, site and floor plan (*The Architect*, September 1957, pp.30-32)

Joan and Moira remember Vin's work on R&I banks and schools for the PWD, but mostly on the new campus for the Western Australian Institute of Technology (WAIT). WAIT's nucleus comprised the tertiary programs of PTC, which had opened in 1900. The site in Bentley was selected in 1962, and officially opened in 1966. The first students enrolled the following year, and with steady growth, WAIT became Curtin University of Technology in 1986.



Rural & Industries Bank Head Offices, Barrack Street Perth 1958 – now demolished (A.E. Clare retirement album 1960, courtesy Bill Clare)

Curtin University relates some of Davies' design influence on its formation:

Public Works Department architect Vin Davies was given the role of designing WAIT's first buildings. His bold signature style, combining bricks and off-form concrete, is still evident on the Bentley campus today.

In 1960 Davies was assigned to begin design development of the Perth Technical College site on James Street, but he questioned the aesthetic and environmental appropriateness of situating a major technical institution next to the State Library and a proposed new art gallery.

Along with the then Deputy Director General of Education, George Hayman, he also questioned whether machinery noise and industrial effluent from the laboratories would be acceptable to either the Perth City Council or local property owners. The project was then re-examined completely and in 1962 the government announced the new institute of technology would be built on the current Bentley site.

Davies regarded the design of the WAIT buildings as his most rewarding project, due in part to the large scale of the Institute. In honour of his work, building 303 is named after him.

Moira remembers her father taking her to the Bentley site when she was about seven years old, and taking her photo in front of a sample red brick wall. Moira notes: “I think it was from WAIT that I got my love of off-form concrete, like my dad. I ended up working at WAIT, so I did see it every day! Mum and I remember that he worked on building standards (with CSIRO?), making many trips to the east coast of Australia.”



Curtin University buildings 307 at left, 306 behind, and 305 at right, circa late 1960s. Photo taken from the west, on the current location of the library (B105) opened in 1971 (Moira Russo).

Prominent WAIT architecture student of the mid-1960s and later architect Graham Harler (reg 456), designed a dome at WAIT in the style of Buckminster Fuller, and became a good friend of Davies' through their interactions at the campus. In his many professional associations, Vin was a long-term member of the RAIA, and was made a Fellow of the Institute in October 1974.

A list of senior Officers of the PWD as at 1 July 1984 included Davies as Architect Schools Design. Vin, who had worked at the PWD for around 35 years before its demise on 30 June 1985, was among a number of senior architects who retired from the public service soon after the creation of the PWD's successor, the Building Management Authority. In his later years Vin took the time to mentor architecture students. In March 1987 WAIT's Professor Laurie Hegvold suggested the RAIA should 'seek a grant' to fund the writing of its history. Nothing was to come of this proposal but as a preliminary move and to keep the project moving, the Institute made funds available for Vin Davies to review, collate and list available Institute records as an aid to future work; Vin completed this task in 1988. In March 1988 the Institute's *Chapter News* called for expressions of interest in writing the history, with little interest shown. It was not until mid-1989 that an agreement was reached between the Department of

Architecture at Curtin University and the RAIA (WA) to undertake the work, eventually completed by Duncan Richards in 2003 as the comprehensive publication *High Hopes*.

When a vacancy occurred within Institute management, Vin Davies, who had previously helped out on a casual basis, 'was grabbed with both hands', taking up the position as the new executive director of the RAIA (WA) in January 1989. Vin retired in 1993, to be replaced by Paul Wellington who later became the RAIA (WA) state manager to comply with the new national corporate vision of the RAIA, and Meino Mirkva took over the position in February 1996.



Vin Davies in later years (Maira Russo)

Vin's family note that he loved reading, especially history, photography, his garden, especially camellias, and that he was a very spiritual person with a love for the bible. He died at Salter Point 16 September 2010, and was survived by Joan, Maira and her husband, two grandsons and their growing families.

It is important to recognise that prior to the First World War, the overwhelming majority of architects in WA had been born and trained elsewhere. This gradually changed during the Inter-War years (1919-1939), as more locally born individuals studied whilst under articulated arrangements with senior practitioners. Davies was one of the first of the new breed of architects in WA in the highly-charged post Second World War development period. Although a few still chose to develop their skills through an article system (with Architect Board examinations), and immigration brought a small number of European refugee architects, the majority of WA architects at this time were locally born and graduates of PTC. The close association of PTC graduates of the 1950s and 1960s gave this group a strong sense of familiarity and cohesion, and many

soon travelled overseas together to absorb further international developments in modern architecture. They developed distinctive local domestic and commercial styles, now gaining further study and recognition.

References:

'Marriages', *The West Australian*, 14 February 1925, p.1 (Francis Davies and Dorothy Atkins).
 'Births', *The West Australian*, 21 July 1928, p.1 (to Mr and Mrs Francis H. Davies of Wagin, late Glenalban, Palmyra).

'Architect 5: V. Davies', *The Architect*, September 1957, pp.30-32 (Salter Point family home).
 Margaret Pitt Morison, and John White (eds), *Western Towns and Buildings*, University of Western Australia Press, 1979, pp.139-40.

Le Page, J.S.H., *Building a State*, Water Authority of Western Australia, 1986, p.636.

V Davies, *21st Anniversary Clay Brick Awards*, Clay Brick Manufacturers Association WA, 1987.

V.F. Davies, *Research Material for History of the Institute of Architects in WA*, 1988 (RAIA WA).

Davies, Vincent, 'Building in the Public Realm. A personal view', pp.6-8, in 'Creating the Public Realm: public architecture in Western Australia: 1890-2000', catalogue for exhibition curated by Barbara van Bronswijk and Duncan Richards at the Alexander Library Building, 1994.

Visions and Voices: Curtin University Celebrates 50 Years of Architectural Education 1946-1996, ed. Barbara van Bronswijk, School of Architecture Construction and Planning, Curtin University of Technology, Bentley, WA, 1996.

White, Michael A., *WAIT to Curtin: a history of the Western Australian Institute of Technology*, Paradigm Books Curtin University, 1996.

London, Geoffrey and Richards, Duncan; *Modern Houses: Architect-designed Houses in Western Australia from 1950 to 1965*, School of Architecture, UWA, 1997, pp.2-3.

Richards, Duncan, *High Hopes - A history of the Institutes of Architecture in Western Australia*. Royal Australian Institute of Architects (WA), 2003, pp.13, 14, 137, 175, 176, 188.

Murray, Andrew, and Matthews, Leonie, "Geodesic Domes and Experimental Architectural Education Practices of the 1960s", *Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand: 32*, pp.435-445, Sydney: SAHANZ, 2015.

'Vin Davies', <http://50years.curtin.edu.au/history-makers/vin-davies/> accessed 21 Dec 2018.

'Greater Curtin Stage 1 Development Guidelines', StageOneDevelopmentGuidelines.pdf (curtin.edu.au) accessed 21 Dec 2018 (Graham Harler dome in style of Buckminster Fuller).

Pers. comm. Peter Bruechle 1 February 2021.

Pers. comm. Arthur Hunt 2 February 2021 (noted Graham Harler as friend of Vin Davies).

Contributing author: John Taylor

Heritage Committee review: 20 May 2021 Last updated: 27 March 2023

Citation details:

Taylor, Dr John J., 'Vincent Francis Ulick Davies (1928-2010)', Western Australian Architect Biographies, <http://www.taylorarchitects.com.au/Biographies.html> accessed DATE.