

Islands of Density

Volatile Experiments in Highrise Apartment Procurement Across South East Queensland in the 1960s

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The most significant urban transformation of the city of Brisbane [Meanjin] came with the construction of the first speculative highrise apartments in the 1960s. Procurement was intimately bound up with the postwar development of the Gold Coast [Kurrungul], 100 kilometres south, which was proclaimed a city in 1959. The first apartment blocks were positioned on prominent hilltops or with commanding views of the Brisbane River [Maiwar] or Pacific Ocean [Sea: Borrogura]. They came with substantial risk for developers, builders, and architects, given the lack of local experience in highrise construction methods and paucity of applicable procurement and investment models.

1.

"Wavell State High School," Queensland State Heritage Register, last updated February 20, 2022, <https://apps.des.qld.gov.au/heritage-register/detail/?id=650067>

2.

"Chronology of education in Queensland," Education Queensland, last updated January 25, 2023, <https://education.qld.gov.au/about-us/history/chronology-of-education-in-queensland>

3.

Julie Willis, "Architecture and the School in the Twentieth Century," in *Designing Schools: Space, Place and Pedagogy*, ed. Kate Darian-Smith and Julie Willis (Routledge, 2016).

4.

"Wavell State High School," Queensland State Heritage Register.

Just prior to the credit squeeze implemented in November 1960, local newspaper the Sunday Mail reported on a state-wide building boom, while in 1961 its parent, the Courier Mail, heralded Brisbane as a "great and growing city with a bright future" in an eight-page feature supplement. The Australian economy was nevertheless strong in the 1960s, with growth of 5.3 percent Gross Domestic Product and inflation at 2.5 percent across the decade underpinned by a boom in the mineral exports, improved productivity for manufacturing, and strong population

growth. The pressures that came with postwar growth resulted in a diverse range of housing types and approaches to densification by architects and developers over the course of the 1960s. Rapid development of the coastal strips to the south and north also progressed; from 1964, the "sun coast" was promoted as a new ground for development to rival "Surfers."

Builders often took a development lead. Construction of Torbreck, the first in the region, began in 1957 and was completed in 1961. Designed by architects Job and Froud, and initiated by Rowley Pim, it was a mixed-use complex comprised of an eighteen-storey tower block and adjacent linear garden block, that provided 150 units at the top of Highgate Hill [Bennung-urrung]. Torbreck Pty Ltd was formed in 1957 to oversee construction, and became Torbreck Home Units Ltd in 1960. NA Kratzmann Pty Ltd, builder of the Chevron Hotel (1957) at Surfers Paradise, oversaw construction. In 1959 Torbreck was acquired by national real estate and development company Reid Murray Developments Pty Ltd, who proposed other Torbreck schemes for the Gold Coast at Surfers Paradise and Burleigh Heads. Torbreck Real Estate Brokers promoted them as "a new concept

of gracious living.” In 1963, not long after completion of the project, Reid Murray Developments Pty Ltd were delisted from the stock exchange. NA Kratzmann Pty Ltd were declared bankrupt the same year. At Surfers Paradise, Kinkabool (1960) was a ten-storey highrise apartment block designed by John Morton at Lund Hutton Newell Black & Paulsen and built by J D Booker Constructions (Gold Coast) Pty Ltd. The development and finance were formally arranged by Booker Felton Pty Ltd. A number of companies contributed, including property developer Stanley Korman, who had developed Chevron Island, Paradise Island, and the first stage of the Chevron Hotel. Kinkabool was marketed by national real estate agency network LJ Hooker Ltd. Soon after completing Kinkabool, the same design, building, and finance team initiated Glenfalloch (1962), a fifteen-storey highrise residential tower again designed by John Morton in Brisbane's New Farm that turned its back on the river.

Camden (1961), an eight-storey luxury highrise in Hamilton orientated for views to the Brisbane River and surrounding hills, was designed by Bligh Jessup Bretnall and Partners and built by Hutchinson Builders. It was built for developers Donald McKenzie and Solicitor and

former president of the Liberal Party of Australia, Leon Trout, on the site of a house with the same name. The development yielded three apartments on each level, with a penthouse and roof garden. A second stage was planned but never eventuated. The mid-1960s saw multiple developments completed in Brisbane and on the Gold Coast. Of particular interest, Gleneagles (1964) was a ninety-seven-unit, two-tower development in New Farm. It was designed by Ian Charlton from Curro Nutter and Charlton and built by TJ Watkins Ltd, to provide self-contained double units for retired couples close to the city.

Following the launch of Kawana Waters Canal development on the Sunshine Coast in 1967, Maroochy Sands Holiday Inn (1971), an eleven-storey mixed-use development with commercial tenancies on the ground floor, was its first highrise development, designed by Colin Balchin and Associates for Melbourne developers, Kinkora Courts Development Pty Ltd.

The 1973 oil crisis and domestic inflationary pressures brought this productive cycle of development to a pause, with the mix of public and private contributions yielding a fertile range of precedents for higher-density housing in South East Queensland.

5.

Russell Walden and Martin Purdy, “Le Corbusier and the Theological Program,” in *The Open Hand: Essays on Le Corbusier*, ed. Russell Walden (MIT Press, 2021).