



# RMIT DESIGN ARCHIVES

SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN  
UPDATE 08

'It is instructive to recall that Charles Darwin, for example, was first and foremost an obsessive collector, and it was this obsession with taxonomy that generated his world-changing insights about the evolution of species and living systems. Today he would probably be a Director of a museum.'

**Dr Terry Cutler**

*Creativity, the Arts and Innovation*  
A Currency House Conversation  
Sydney Opera House  
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## The RMIT Design Archives (RDA) is a growing facility which actively collects material relating to Melbourne design practices from the twentieth century to the present day.

The RDA incorporates the collections of the former Frances Burke Centre, established in 1994 and named after pioneering textile designer and design advocate, Dr Frances Mary Burke, which housed archives of some of Melbourne's key fashion and textile designers. Building on this significant collection the RDA is bringing together archives from other design practices in order to tell the story of Melbourne as a 'design city'. These archives are both digital and material, representing historical and contemporary practices in fashion and textile design, architecture, industrial design, interior design, landscape architecture, graphic design, gold and silver smithing and sound design.

The RMIT Design Archives is committed to raising awareness of the design heritage of Melbourne and Victoria through collecting, preserving and providing access to the primary records of significant design practitioners and practices in the region. It supports the work of scholars and industry by providing the resources for research into our designed environment, design professions and design practices.

It actively encourages the use of its collections through a programme of publication, exhibitions, research projects, seminars and lectures. Through its association with RMIT's Design Research Institute, the RDA is also engaged with issues to do with knowledge management and the future role of the archive.



**The RMIT Design Archives has a commitment to supporting research on its collections and helping to build a sustainable research culture around the history of Melbourne design practices. The RDA, together with staff members from the School of Architecture & Design, are involved in long-term projects around specific collections which will result in major exhibitions and publications in the future. In addition, the Archives is looking at proposals for postgraduate research projects in its areas of interest and is actively engaged in building this aspect of its work.**

In March the RDA supported the management of the 10th Annual Conference of the International Foundation of Fashion Technology Institutes (IFFTI) titled *'The Body-Connections with Fashion'* hosted by the Fashion program in the School of Architecture & Design and the School of Fashion & Textiles. In September, in collaboration with the Geoplaced Knowledge Program of the Design Research Institute, the RDA hosted a one-day symposium on the Digital Archive.

Also in September, the RDA collaborated with the School of Architecture & Design's Urban Interior collective, supported by the Design Research Institute, to occupy Craft Victoria in Flinders Lane, Melbourne. Itinerant curator and Fashion lecturer Robyn Healy, selected artefacts of significant Melbourne design practices from the Archives for two, day-long 'performances' of the archive at Craft Victoria. During *Nomadic Archive One* (10 September) and *Nomadic Archive Two* (17 September) Healy 'unpacked' the archives of textile designer Frances Burke (1907-1994), industrial and graphic designer, Gerhard Herbst (born 1911) and the notorious Melbourne design collective, Fashion Design Council of Australia (FDC 1981-1993). Artefacts included 16mm films, audio-tapes, designer notes, textiles, clippings, inventories and storage vessels.

Nomadic Archive brought together, for the first time, four experimental films relating to the commercial and educational work of Gerhard Herbst. Projectionist David Thomas screened *Portraits in Fabric* c.1950; *Language in Design* 1951, winner of the Cine service documentary film award (courtesy of ACMI); *Positives & Negatives* c.1960, produced by the RMIT film unit; and *Fabrics in Motion* c.1951 (courtesy of ACMI).

**Top Left** *Gerhard Herbst in studio, c1950s*

**Top Right** *Herbst, now 97 years old, was impressed by the consideration RMIT showed toward his work. His grandson, Stephen Herbst, said: 'The unpacking and presentation of Gerhard's archive proved to be very compelling. Personally, it was a wonderful introduction to his past practice, and an invaluable opportunity to connect with his design process'. Pictured from left: Robyn Healy (RMIT Fashion Lecturer), Kaye Ashton (RMIT Design Archives), Gerhard Herbst, Stephen Herbst.*

**Bottom Right** *Mick Douglas (Industrial Design Lecturer) and Urban Interior collective collaborator helps 'travel' the archive from RMIT to Craft Victoria.*

## Geoffrey Woodfall (b.1930) Collection

*Gift of Geoff Woodfall*

### 2 folios of drawings and photographs of the Ritchie house (1969) and Rymill house (1970)

Geoff Woodfall is a well-known Melbourne architect who has been in practice continuously since 1955. He studied Architecture at the Melbourne Technical College and lectured in architectural drawing in the 1950s. He is best known for his Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired houses of the 1960s and 1970s and this gift comprises folios detailing two of the most significant of these works. Old Penola Homestead, South Australia (1969), was designed for Mr and Mrs P Rymill, while Woolnorth Homestead, Montagu, Tasmania, was designed for Mr Blyth Ritchie at about the same time. The folios contain photographs and full documentation of the houses, including the sitting-room and dining-room furniture which Woodfall designed in a Wrightian style. Woolnorth is particularly interesting because, located in an inaccessible site, the homestead was fully prefabricated. These works give an insight into the small but strong interest in the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright in post-war Melbourne evidenced as well in the houses of Alistair Knox, David Godsell and Charles Duncan.



Above Geoffrey Woodfall, Woolnorth Homestead, Tasmania, dining room, c.1969. Photo: Geoffrey Woodfall



## Frederick Romberg (1913–1992) Collection

*Gift of Diane Masters*

**Printed material, scrapbooks, photograph albums, correspondence, plans, office records and two texts; an autobiography and a history of the Grounds Romberg and Boyd architectural practice.**

This gift comprises the private archive of eminent Melbourne architect Frederick Romberg. German-born Romberg came to Melbourne in 1938 having completed his architectural degree at the prestigious ETH in Zurich. He came to prominence in the 1940s with his innovative flats Newburn, Stanhil and Hilstan and in 1953 joined Roy Grounds and Robin Boyd in Grounds Romberg and Boyd (Gromboyd) which was to become one of the most prominent architectural practices in Australia at the time. After the practice dissolved in 1962 Romberg continued with Boyd as Romberg and Boyd. In 1965 Romberg was appointed the foundation Professor of Architecture at the University of Newcastle, a position he held until 1975 when he returned to Melbourne. Here he carried out a scaled-down practice until his retirement in the mid 1980s. Romberg was associated with the Melbourne Technical College (now RMIT) when, in 1945 he was appointed a senior lecturer in the history of architecture.

Above Frederick Romberg, Stanhil flats, Queens Road, Melbourne, 1943–1948





## Barry Hudson (1935–2008) Collection

*Gift of the Hudson Family*

### GE KE 12 Electric Kettle and associated items

In 1977, while Research and Development Manager at General Electric, Barry Hudson won the Industrial Design Council of Australia's design award for the KE 12 plastic kettle, an extremely successful product which was innovative in both design and fabrication.

Barry Hudson was born at Yallourn in Gippsland in 1935 and moved with his family to Melbourne while still in primary school. He completed year 10 at the Christian Brothers College in St Kilda and went on to an apprenticeship in sheet metal work at the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation at Fisherman's Bend. While there he won the 'Craftsman of the Year' award in 1955. During the 1950s he studied Mechanical Engineering at the Melbourne Technical College working at the same time as a draughtsman at the Astor Company. Later he joined the design office of Rosenfeldt, Gherardin and Associates and by the mid 1960s he was working at Varian Techtron in Springvale, scientific instrument makers; in 1969 he won the Prince Philip Prize for Australian Design for the outer casing of the atomic absorption spectrophotometer.

In the 1980s Hudson established his own business, Barry Hudson Industrial Design, and in the following decade began a new career as an educator in the Industrial Design program at RMIT. Here he undertook a Masters degree and followed this with a PhD, 'The Production of Power by Pure Rotary Means', which was examined shortly before his death in August 2008.

*Above Barry Hudson, GE KE 12 electric kettle designed for General Electric, 1977*



The *Savage Luxury: Modernist Design in Melbourne from 1930–1939* exhibition at Heide Museum of Modern Art included ten textiles by Frances Burke (1907–1994) and four rare textiles by Michael O'Connell (1898–1976) and co-designer Ella O'Connell (1900–1981) from the RMIT Design Archives.

Curated by Nanette Carter, design historian and lecturer at Swinburne University of Technology, the exhibition presented an insight into early modernist design in Melbourne during the 1930s revealing how furniture and interiors came to express a modern way of life and a new sense of Australian cultural identity.



Film maker, Richard Lowenstein will use material from the FDC (Fashion Design Council of Australia) archive in his feature-length documentary about Martin Grant who began his fashion career in Melbourne and is now a well-known Paris-based couturier.

Directed by Lynn-Maree Milburn the film will delve into the Australian fashion scene during the significant period of the seventies and early eighties. As a part of this project Lowenstein has transferred the old FDC film footage to DVD for easier research access.

*Top Michael O'Connell and Frances Burke textiles displayed in 'Savage Luxury' exhibition at Heide Museum of Modern Art*

*Bottom Richard Lowenstein with father, Werner Lowenstein*

## Michael O'Connell (1898–1976)

*Gift of Christopher Wood*

**Fabric piece; presumed to be a fragment of a wall hanging showing a group of women dancing, dating from around 1931.**

This fabric came from the collection of Marjorie, Edith and Helen Wood of Geelong. The Wood sisters were involved in Harry Tatlock Miller's avant-garde journal *Manuscripts* which in the early 1930s published works by many of Australia's major poets, painters, print-makers, photographers and designers. Michael O'Connell published three articles on textiles and interior design in this journal and it is through this connection that his textile probably came into the Wood collection.

In the inter-war years Michael O'Connell was the most innovative textile designer in Australia. Born in England in 1898, he arrived in Melbourne in 1920 and spent a decade building a design practice in a range of media. After travelling to England and Italy in 1929 O'Connell and his wife Ella established textile design as their focus, concentrating on furnishings and in particular wall hangings as an independent art form. Leaving Melbourne early in 1937 the O'Connell's went to England where they built a house at Perry Green, Hertfordshire, where English sculptor Henry Moore was also to establish his house and studio at about the same time. O'Connell's practice flourished and he exhibited widely in England and overseas until 1970.

The RDA has embarked on a research project to establish the context for this fabric within O'Connell's oeuvre and would welcome any information that may assist us.



## Hall Ludlow (1919–2003) Collection

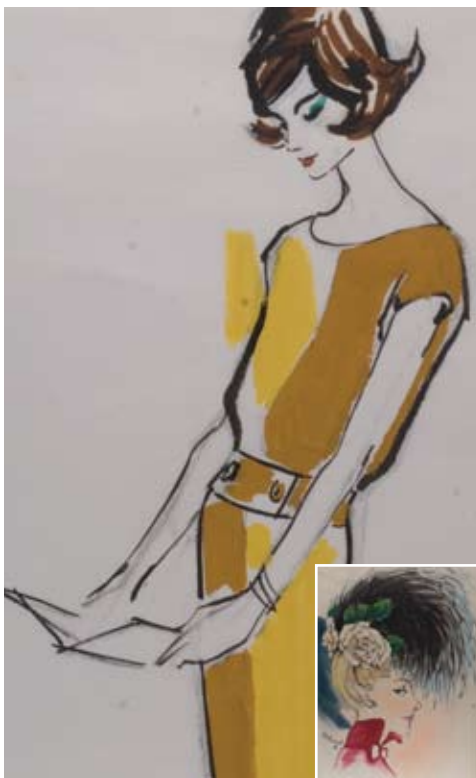
*Gift of Diane Masters*

Former fashion model, Diane Masters, was a favourite of Australia's first true 'couturier', Hall Ludlow. RMIT Design Archives was pleased to accept Master's collection of artefacts relating to the designer, comprising bows, epaulettes, a few garments and garment labels, toiles and extensive biographical information compiled by Masters.

Ludlow developed a distinct aesthetic and style of dressing that competed with the best of international design trends, and was awarded the prestigious Gown of the Year award in 1953 and 1959. Ludlow collaborated with celebrated local photographers Helmut Newton, Athol Shmith and Bruno Benini and elite models such as Diane Masters and Maggie Tabberer. His Collins Street salon was a magnet for Melbourne's jet set, popular with theatricals and admired by the fashion elite. His work which continued into the 1990s was described as sculptural and sumptuous yet subtle. Hall Ludlow's work has left an indelible mark on Australian fashion history. In March 2005, Ludlow was the focus of an exhibition at RMIT Gallery, *Dressed to the Eyes: the Fashions of Hall Ludlow*.

**Left** Michael O'Connell (attrib.), textile, featuring women, c1931

**Right** Diane Masters, drawing, Hall Ludlow design



## Alfredo Bouret (b.1926) Collection

*Gift of Lex Aitken*

**150 drawings by fashion illustrator, Alfredo Bouret;  
1 scrapbook and 3 folders of associated media clippings.**

Born Alfredo Gonzalez Acevez in 1926 in Mexico, a prize-winning entry in a design competition took Bouret to Paris in 1948 where he worked for Pierre Balmain and French Vogue. Subsequently he established a base in London. Bouret's illustrations appeared in English *Vogue*, *The Tatler*, *Queen* and *Glamour* magazines and he covered the designs for post-war couture houses including Chanel, Christian Dior, Jacques Fath, Pierre Cardin and Givenchy. He was the only artist of any discipline granted access to record the collections of master couturier, Balenciaga. From 1969 to 1972 he established an outlet in Sydney under the name of 'Mexicana Bazaar' together with 'The John Gavanagh ready-to-wear' shop. In 1985 he moved to Sydney and became an Australian citizen in 1990. In April 2007, Bouret was the focus of an exhibition at RMIT Gallery, *Fabsolute: the fashion illustration of Alfredo Bouret 1940s-1960s*, and the gift of Bouret's works was donated to the University soon afterwards.



## Yarra Falls Ltd (est 1917) Collection

*Gift of David Alexander*

**2 Minute books relating to Yarra Falls Ltd (weaving mill) and Globe Worsted Mills Pty Ltd meetings (1960s).**

These artefacts add to an existing donation comprising textile samples from 1960s through to the 1980s, promotional materials and documentation. Yarra Falls Spinning Co, which later became Yarra Falls Ltd, built its first mill for spinning wool yarn on Johnston Street, Abbotsford, near the Yarra River in 1918. Yarra Falls became a major worsted and woollen yarn spinner to meet the growing demand of the nation for high quality knitwear and weaving yarns. Yarra Falls Mills was one of the sites of battle between textile employers and workers throughout the 1930s Depression. Heavy investment was made in modern automated equipment to ensure Yarra Falls remained competitive in the market. The 1990s saw significant rationalisation of the textile industry in Australia and other developed countries, and the acquisition of Yarra Falls by Australian Country Spinners in 1998. The mill buildings have been converted into residential complexes.

*Top Alfredo Bouret, drawing of Corvette dress featured in English Vogue, 1960, gouache and ink Inset Alfredo Bouret, drawing, La Familia magazine cover, 1946, gouache*

*Main Yarra Falls mill during construction, 1918 Inset top Yarra Falls, interior, c1919 Inset middle Yarra Falls, laying of foundation stone, Feb 1919 Inset bottom Yarra Falls, view of completed mill, Dec 1919*