Mahurangi Flats. 13 May Street, Hamilton East

Mahurangi is a quintessential mid-century housing scheme.

Overall small in stature and surrounded by tree growth, it is a humble scheme, with 7 attached single bedroom flats and a two-bedroom house, originally designed for the owners, who rented the flats out.

Materially it is no different to the majority of mid-century housing blocks in New Zealand. However, where it departs is in the spatial qualities of the flats. While the majority at the time were characterised by concrete block, timber and galvanised steel, most had low ceilings and small footprints, colloquially known as “sausage flats”.

Rod Smith and Roger Brown knew the importance of volume in small footprints.

While each flat is only 55m2 in footprint, they feel much larger. The Scandinavian influenced steep mono-pitch roof which gives Mahurangi its striking appearance, drives a ceiling height of over 4.5m, and the unique layout of each flat, with the living areas below and bedrooms and bathrooms upstairs.

Visitors to my own flat have been impressed at how comfortable and spacious the flat feels, in contrast to a typical mid-century block.

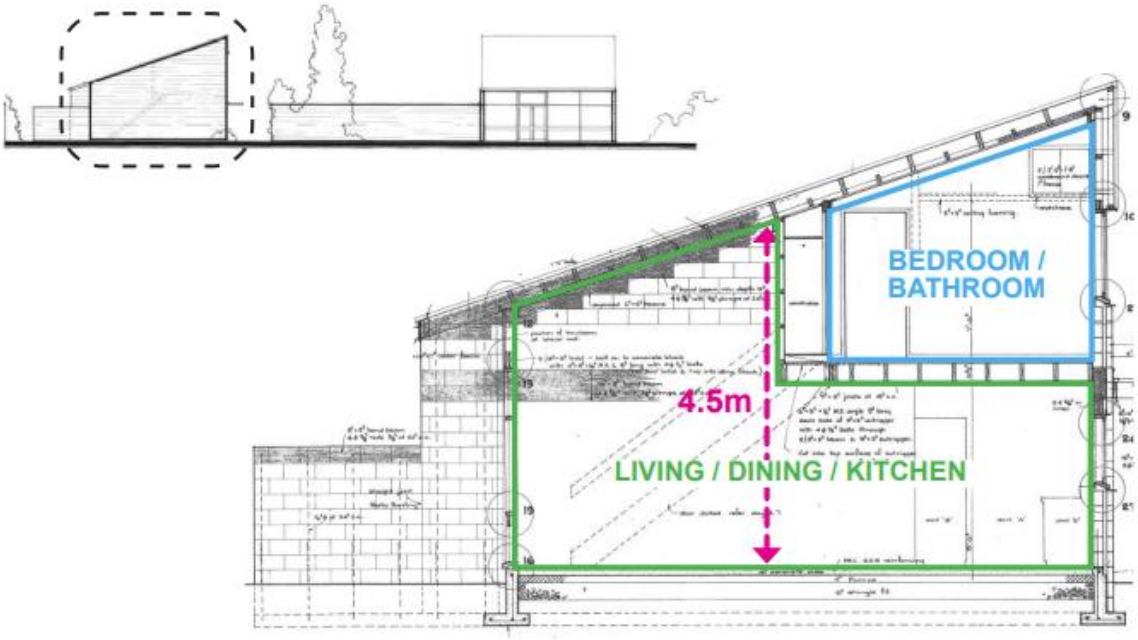

Fig 1. Original N-E elevation and typical long section

Fig 2. Photographs inside Unit 4

The scheme at Mahurangi is more relevant than ever in Aotearoa.

In a worsening housing crisis, which is increasingly reliant on the private sector, good architecture needs to be recognised and protected.

I spent a lot of time between Hamilton and Auckland before moving to London. In that time the intensification of Hamilton was impressive to see, particularly around Hamilton East. However, the quality of the architecture is often driven by metrics and profits.

Aotearoa has woefully little mid-century modern housing work that is either recognised in the form of receiving an NZIA Enduring architecture award, or heritage listed, with the Dorset Street Flats by Sir Miles Warren being the only other heritage listed MCM housing scheme.

While Mahurangi has fortunately received an NZIA Enduring architecture award, the question has to be asked, what is limiting it to being heritage protected and therefore further recognised and respected?

The majority of my professional career has been focussed on housing, and this is undoubtedly where my passion for architecture lies. I purchased my unit because of Mahurangi's contribution to housing in Aotearoa, its history and its qualities already mentioned.

Before purchasing, I knew a lot of work would be required due to years of body corporate neglect. A group of us, including Patricia, who is also providing evidence in support of the application, have fought hard for long overdue maintenance, including a new roof, matching the original galvanised standing seam.

What has become obvious since taking ownership, is that Body Corporates are incredibly insufficient and archaic as a means of handling maintenance issues, because of the conflict of interests between owners, and the commodification of housing in Aotearoa and Western society at large.

Protecting good architecture that is easily at risk of deterioration, while also recognising good architecture for its contribution to society through improving our built environments, and also allowing it to serve as a form of education, is a necessity.

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