

**Margo Lewers' garden & the Ancher house:
engaging with the original designer via family and friends**

Meredith Walker, *Heritage Futures, Sydney, Australia*



Lewers house, original farmhouse c1901

photo June 2009



Ancher house, constructed 1961-64

photo June 2009



Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest

River Road, Penrith

Lewers house c 1901

Ancher house 1961-4

Regional gallery 1981

Farley workshops 2004

New entrance & café 2007





Margo Lewers in studio

Margo Lewers (1908-1978) in her studio, 1950s



Gerry Lewers (1905-1962) working on 'reclining figure', 1957



Sydney Ancher (1904-1979)
a pioneer of modern domestic
architecture in Australia
photo Max Dupain

Winner of the Sydney Morning Herald
Garden Competition 1956

*'The garden created by Margo
and Gerry at Emu Plains around
1956 was the genesis for public
commissions such as the
MLC garden, North Sydney,
ICI Circular Quay, and
ICI Melbourne'*

Tanya Crothers



ICI House, Melbourne 1958 Architects Bates Smart & McCutcheon Garden BSM, John Stevens
& Gerald Lewers

“The garden (along with its component parts i.e.: the Lewers fountain and the water feature) is of significance due to its role in determining the plot ratio that allowed the breaking of the height limit as well as defining the original formal entry to the building.”

Extract from Statement of significance Heritage Victoria





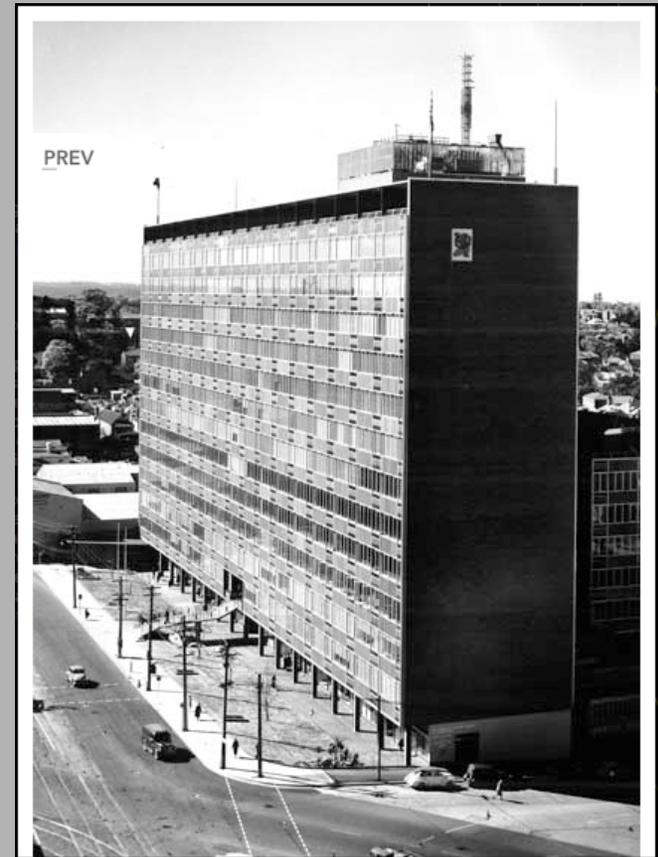
ICI building circular Quay
(demolished)

Margo and Gerry Lewers with
unknown man



Garden photos courtesy Tanya Crothers

MLC Building, North Sydney, 1957,
Bates Smart & McCutcheon



Expansion 1960, Margo Lewers, Mosaic Mural, Canberra Rex Motel



EXPANSION 1960 MARGO LEWERS Mosaic mural, Canberra Rex Hotel.
Photograph by Heidi Smith from *Works of Art in Canberra* published by National Capital Development Commission

Margo's mosaics at the Lewers house



works by Gerald Lewers in PRG&LB garden



PRG&LB - locations of permanent art works 1978- 2008

Works by Gerald Lewers

- G1 Wall relief (sandstone, untitled) 1950s
- G2 Down pipe (copper on sandstone base) c1956
- G3 Birdbath (sandstone) c1952
- G4 Grey Lady (2002 reproduction of original c1951 basalt work; removed to avoid decay by weathering)
- G5 Fish form (wood, unfinished work, c1952)
- G6 Fish form (sandstone)
- G7 Free form (sandstone) integral part river boulder composition
- G8 Fountain (copper) 1961, designed for Coca Cola factory, moved here 1983
- G9 Free form (sandstone) 1950s
- G10 Site of *Dancing Figures* (marble) removed for safety reasons?
- G11 Pelican birdbath 1947, moved here 1980s
- G12 Fountain (copper) 1961, designed for Canberra Rex Hotel, moved here 1970s
- G13 Female form and other carvings (1950s) used to make sandstone edge
- G14 Site of basalt sculpture removed for safety reasons
- G15 Site of sample of Reserve Bank sculpture 1961 (used at two locations)
- G16 Site of Gerald's outdoor work area
- G17 Site of Gerald's studio, constructed 1950s, dem. 1980

Works by Margo Lewers

- M1 Living room - mosaic to hearth and mantelpiece c1956; fitment
- M2 Kitchen - floor mosaic mid 1950s
- M3 Wall mosaic (mosaic tiles) c1960
- M4 Wall mural (PVA on rendered brick) c1970
- M5 Floor mosaics bathroom (1950s?)
- M6 Floor mosaic kitchen porch c1956
- M7 Floor and wall mosaic bathroom (Ancher house) c1962
- M8 Dining room wall fitment c1962
- M9 Kitchen and laundry mosaics and fitment
- M10 Site of wall mosaic (Ancher service courtyard; removed due to decay, 1982)
- M11 Site of mosaic table (removed due to decay, 1980s)
- M12 Site of art work on wall (removed due to decay 1982)
- M13 Margo's studio 1951-1978
- M14 Site of one of Margo's outdoor work areas

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Works by other artists

- A Two Aboriginal engravings in sandstone one of a man, and one of a fish (rescued by GL from destruction by new road at Brookvale in 1950s; placed here by GL 1961)
- DL downpipe, Darani Lewers 1963 (copper, with river stones at base; designed at request of Margo who envisaged 'a large feature, splashing water into a rockery')
- MH Six Day War 1, Margel Hinder, 1967 (Lyten steel) placed here 1982
- LD construction, Lyndon Dacswell, 1975 (stainless steel), placed here mid 1980s
- IMCK Marionette 1V, Ian McKay, 1974-84 (steel rusted), placed here mid 1980s
- BF table with cactus, Bert Flugelman, 1975 (stainless steel), placed here mid 1980s



PRG&TLB
Landscape conservation
management plan 2004

PLAN 2 GARDEN ELEMENTS - ART WORKS

Michael Lehany & Meredith Walker +
Gina Plate



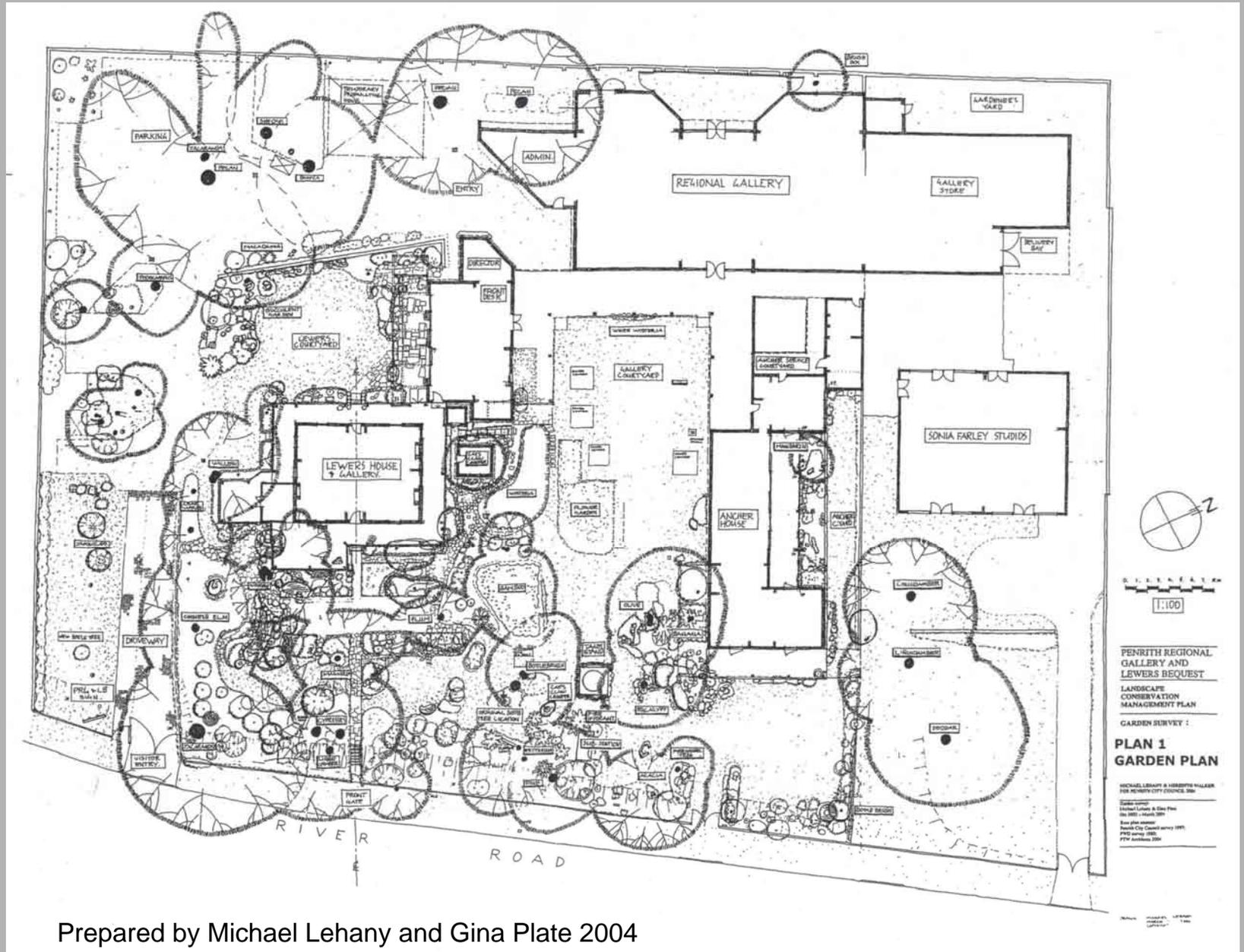
Domestic garden to public garden



Lewers house courtyard 1981

Photo Penny Twiddle

Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest garden plan



Prepared by Michael Lehany and Gina Plate 2004

Engagement via discussions with family and friends, tours of the garden, especially requested essays, documentary sources



Michael Lehany and Darani Lewers in the garden at PRG&LB

Garden practice notes - included quotes from essays and notes by Darani Lewers, Tanya Crothers and Gina Plate

Garden beds: creating new beds

Garden beds: edges

Garden beds: plant form and arrangement

Garden beds: use of plants

Gardening equipment and use

Grass/ lawn

Grass: worn areas, paths

Grooming and hygiene

Mulch

Paths

Extract from *mulch*

Margo did not use any hay-like mulch on top of the beds, only compost {GP}

Wood chips and/or hay were never used to retain moisture because they detract from the visual appearance of the garden. {DL}



Extract from Gina Plate's essay 'Lewers' family life in the garden'

Vegetable Garden extract.....

.it was always a pleasure to be sent to the vegetable garden to collect salad and vegetables for what we knew would be another delicious meal: the luscious vegetables growing in the well-tended vegetable plot had an order about their arrangement in formal rows not experienced in the rest of the garden. The formality of the vegetable garden still had a 'Margo' feel however, as the rows of vegetable and salad plants were interspersed with flowering annuals and flowering herbs which Margo would pick and strew over her salads with stunning visual effect.



Vegetable garden June 2009 not perfect all the time, but heading in the right direction....

Garden practice notes

Extract from Garden edges

There were no defined edges to the flower gardens The stone paving and concrete paths that butt up against lawns and gardens were not edged. Grass was lifted around the garden beds and sand added to deter the lawns from overgrowing into the beds. Edges were always soft and asymmetrical – in keeping with the asymmetry of the plants. Lawns were clipped very carefully around beds to avoid the destruction of plants and to allow them to spill naturally onto the grass. {DL}



Not like this



Pruning *‘No shrubs or trees were ever pruned into formal shapes such as spheres, rectangles, squares or triangles (pyramids); such a practice would have destroyed the character of the garden’*



Lewers garden 1981 photo Michael Lehany

How is the garden managed now? What's missing?

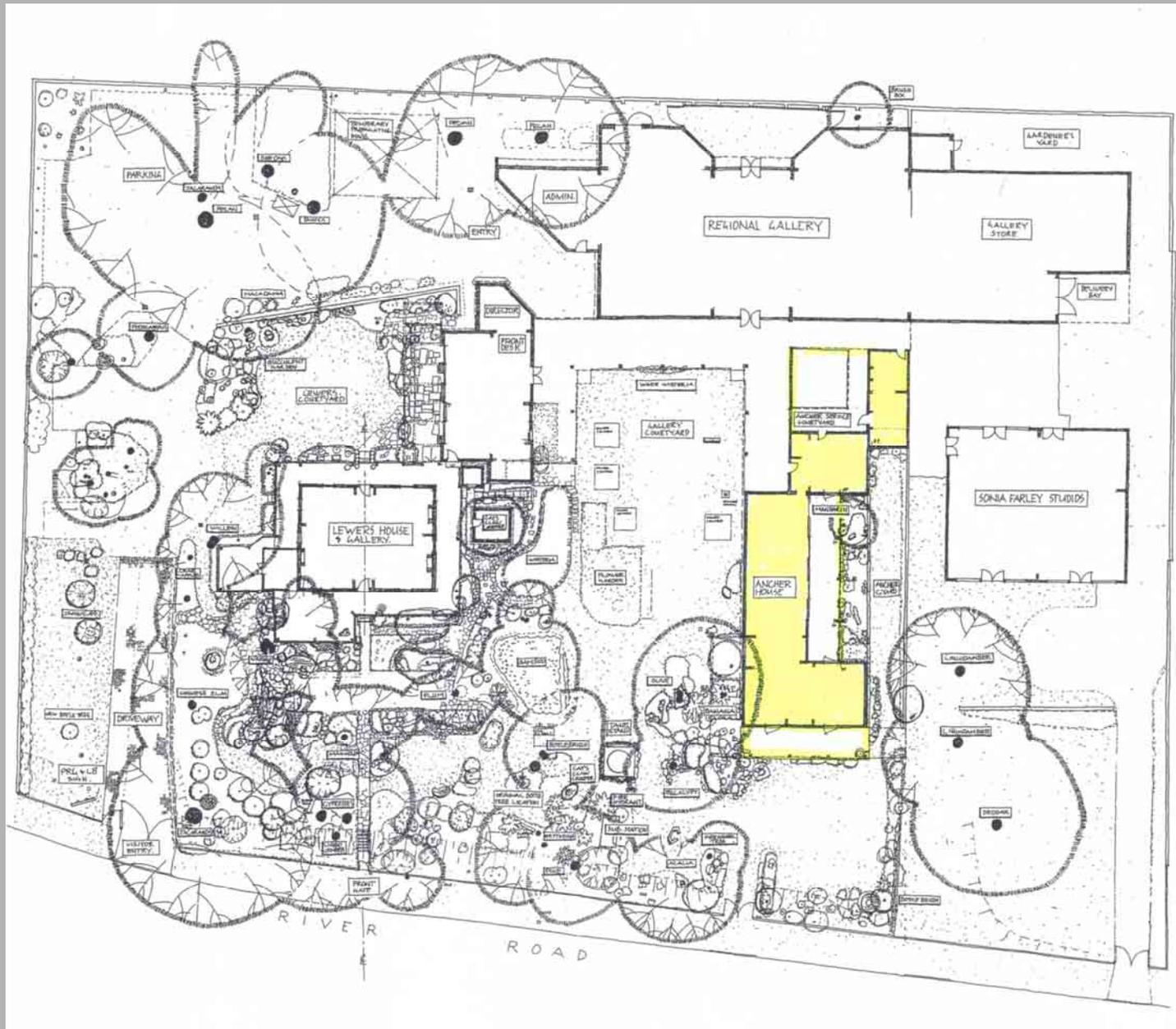
There is a full time gardener, with skill and enthusiasm

- The garden is loved - but not as much as is it could be
- *'It's a gallery now'*
- Curatorial input needed
- A little more money
- Implement more of the recommendations
- More active promotion



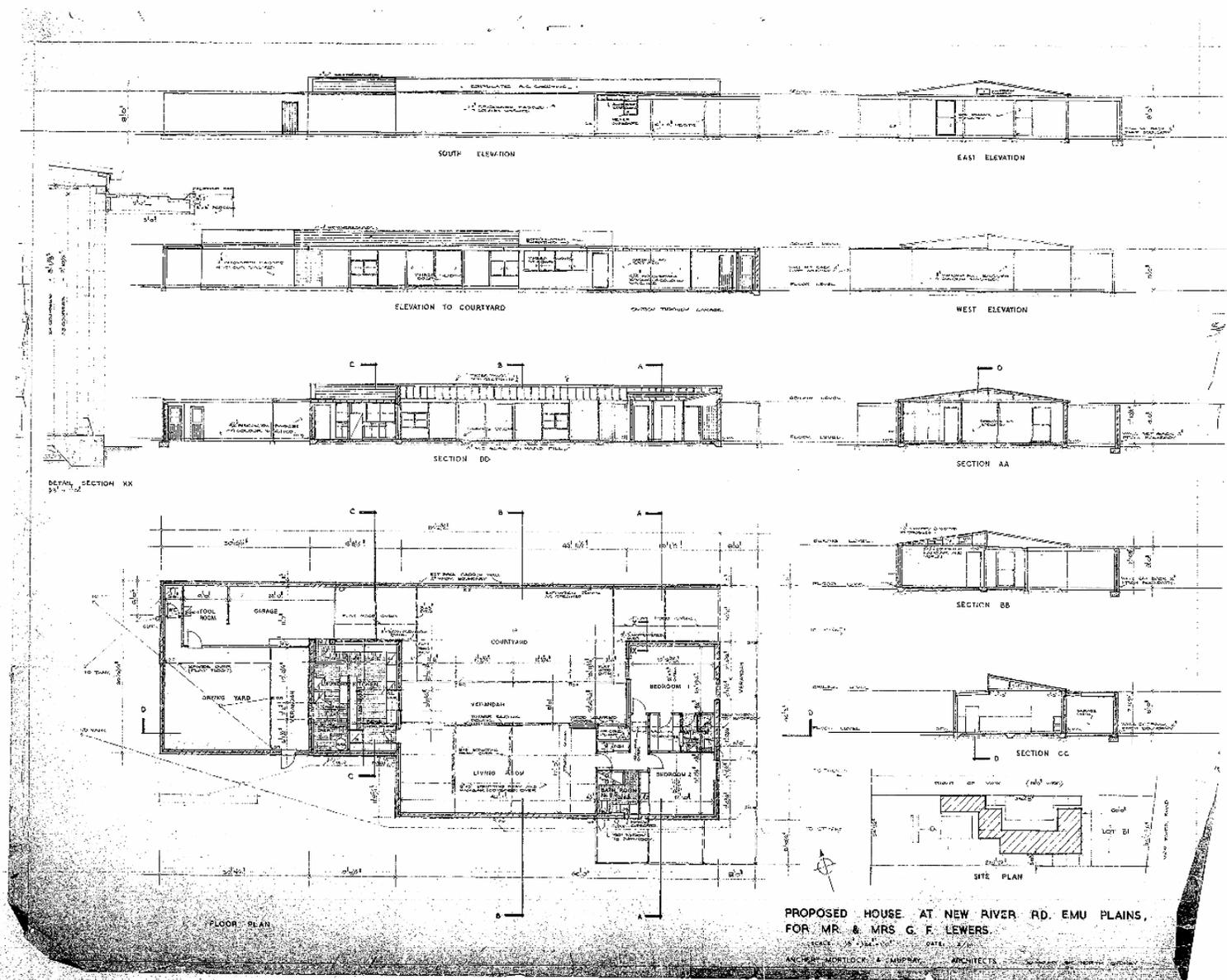


Margo Lewers and the Ancher house



Composite garden plan prepared by Michael Lehany and Gina Plate 2004

[Ancher house] Working drawing 1962



House at New River Road, Emu Plains Ancher, Mortlock & Murray architects

24 March 61

PENRITH
B 2225

New River Road,
Emu Plains,
N.S.W.

March 22nd
1961

My dear Margo, ^{working drawings}
 The enclosed ~~plans~~
~~is~~ is a preliminary
 print of the final ~~plans~~
 for you to check. Sorry
 it has been so long
 appearing. Actually the
 plans has been finished
 for weeks. The specifications,
 as usual, is the ~~shortest~~ ^{ultra-short} +
~~biggest~~ ^{biggest} way; I hope it
 won't be ~~much longer~~ ^{going through the machine.}
 You will be receiving a
 list of queries shortly.
 Meanwhile if you have
 changed your mind over
 anything, or if you have
 any particular ideas to
 pass on regarding ^{internal} fittings,
 (chairs, sinks, stove, freezing etc) ^{please tell.}
 floor finishes, extent of external paving
 etc

Love Syd.

Dear Syd, dear, dear
 Syd when do I get
 some plans?

Are you too busy with
 Canberra and the
 University?

Love
 Margo

Ack. 24-Mar 61.
 P.T. O
 J

Northbourne housing group, Canberra: Ancher, Mortlock & Murray, completed-1962



Gerald Lewers, executed by Margo Lewers, Reserve Bank, Canberra, 1964



Ancher house continued design concepts from Lewers house alterations



Lewers house extension Syd Ancher 1956

Photo: Richard Stringer 1983



Ancher house courtyard sunken garden 1964



'I don't like concrete...'

Ancher drying yard



I would prefer the southern aspect to have no windows



Downpipes

For added irritation of this kind of worry & is inclined to spend the extra effort + time.

This also applies to the guttering and down pipes. Not to have to paint, same as the first place & not to have further repairs would be wonderful. As you know I find gutters and pipes unsightly, but you do appear firm in this regard. May be there could be fewer pipes and larger ones? Better still couldn't we have a large feature, splashy water into a rockery which could be built on top of a rubble sump? I quite definitely want aluminium or copper. I have enquired the price on copper (30 per yard no price on aluminium) and I think it would be well worth the extra cost.

Margo Lewers to Syd Ancher ...

Downpipe at Ancher house by Darani Lewers 1963



Tiling & mosaics

Should be in a position to make a final discussion regarding air conditioning this week. Two firms are in the £1400's and this includes kitchen + laundry. I will take their specifications to the County Council Building Advisory & rely on their advice as to which method (according to specification) will be the most efficient. Also I will want to see the vents etc., as I don't want any unsightly gilded grates + things.

I will probably tile kitchen, laundry + bathroom floors myself but I haven't quite decided on the tones yet. Probably yellows Gilly's room + greys black + yellow in the main bathroom.



Kitchen floor

Main bathroom



Cupboards

'I am very cupboard-minded'



Fitment, living room



Source? Summer house, Katsura Palace, Kyoto suggested by Gina Plate



Problems in design



Acknowledgements



People: Darani Lewers, Tanya Crothers, Gina Plate, John Kirkman & PRG&LB, Anne Higham, Ken Woolley, Ancher Mortlock Woolley architects

M Lehany & M Walker + G Plate, *Penrith Regional Gallery & the Lewers Bequest Landscape Conservation Management Plan*, 2004

Denise Hickey, *Gerald and Margo Lewers - their lives and work*, Grasstree Press 1982