

CHAPTER VI - PRETORIA 1946 TO 1952

6.1 The Pretoria School of Architecture

The Pretoria School of Architecture under Prof. A L Meiring became an independent establishment in 1942. Initially it was staffed by Witwatersrand University graduates, until local staff became available, and Afrikaans became by degrees the language of tuition. The school tended to discard the teaching of le Corbusier in favour of those of Niemeyer, Wright, Stauch and Eaton and inclined towards a "get-down-and-draw" approach with reduced emphasis on design philosophy (South African Architectural Record, 1965, p 45. Article on Personalities of the 30's working today).

Stauch joined the staff of this four-year-old school in 1943 as a lecturer on design for an eight-year period.⁽¹⁾

As a lecturer he tended to approach the teaching of design on a one-to-one basis, coming quietly into the studio and discussing individually with each student the work on his board. It was an encouraging and positive attitude which brought out the best in each, stimulated the imagination and broadened the approach without losing sight of practical considerations. He did not deliver formal lectures to groups of students, as far as anyone can recall.⁽²⁾ He had the ability to see immediately the weak point in a drawing - not just the trained eye, but also the understanding and discipline to recognise the essential and discard the non-essentials⁽³⁾ - and in dealing with his students would in the same way locate the good points of a poor design and encourage them to build on these.⁽⁴⁾

6.2 Partnership with F J Wepener

Before 1948 Stauch had moved his office to Hochstetter House to cope with a growing practice, still mainly in the housing field,⁽⁵⁾ and was looking for a partner to assist him. At the time, Wepener had been senior

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1. Personal curriculum vitae by H.W.E. Stauch for issue to various magazines, kept with Stauch Vorster staff records.
 2. Interviews - Jan van Wyk, G.T. Fagan, T.J.R. Scholtz, 1984 and personal observation of the author.
 3. Wepener, F.J., Ex-partner of H.W.E. Stauch, 1984 - interview.
 4. Interviews - Jan van Wyk, G.T. Fagan, T.J.R. Scholtz, 1984 and personal observation of the author.
 5. Stauch Vorster project records and archives.

architect in charge of housing for ISCOR at Vanderbijlpark, with Ross Gildenhuis as his assistant. Not liking the job much, he left to work for an architect in practice there. He had met Stauch in 1936 when he was a student, and when Gildenhuis told him of an opening for a partner in Stauch's firm, he got in touch with Stauch, and joined the firm in 1948.⁽⁶⁾

In the three to four years that the partnership between Stauch and Wepener lasted, a number of commissions came its way; the post-war boom combined with a shortage of Afrikaans-speaking architects in Pretoria, a predominantly Afrikaans speaking city, helped to encourage the growth of the firm (South African Architectural Record, 1965, p 45. Article on Personalities of the 30's working today). The partnership produced some good and interesting work, much of which was published, amongst the most well-known of these being the houses for A E Wooll, Dr. Glen, van der Merwe, von Wielligh and D Marriott. (figs. 40 to 43). With the confidence born of consistent success, Stauch would draw out, ready for publication, all the house plans he did.⁽⁷⁾ Three typically compact houses designed during this time were for Anderson in Colbyn, Thom in Waterkloof and L Gillett in Pietersburg. During the period October 1948 to December 1951 no fewer than 90 houses and 20 other projects are listed in the records of Stauch Vorster, varying in scope between small alterations and large (for those times) office blocks, with a few blocks of flats included.

Stauch was good at detail and rational in approach. But, surprisingly to Wepener, he was not completely rational but also had an artistic approach, wilfully doing things just because he wanted to.⁽⁸⁾

He would constantly change the design and detail of his buildings, right up to the time of their completion, searching constantly for perfection in the same way that poets and writers search.⁽⁹⁾

He was not as irrational as Eaton, who was more an artist than an architect, and he was more sure of himself than Fassler and Gordon MacIntosh and even Martienssen. But he did not have their integrity. He accepted no rules, not even his own agreements, and this was a factor leading to the eventual dissolution of the partnership.⁽¹⁰⁾

6. Wepener, F.J., Ex-partner of H.W.E. Stauch, 1984 - interview.

7. Ibid

8. Ibid

9. Ibid

10. Ibid

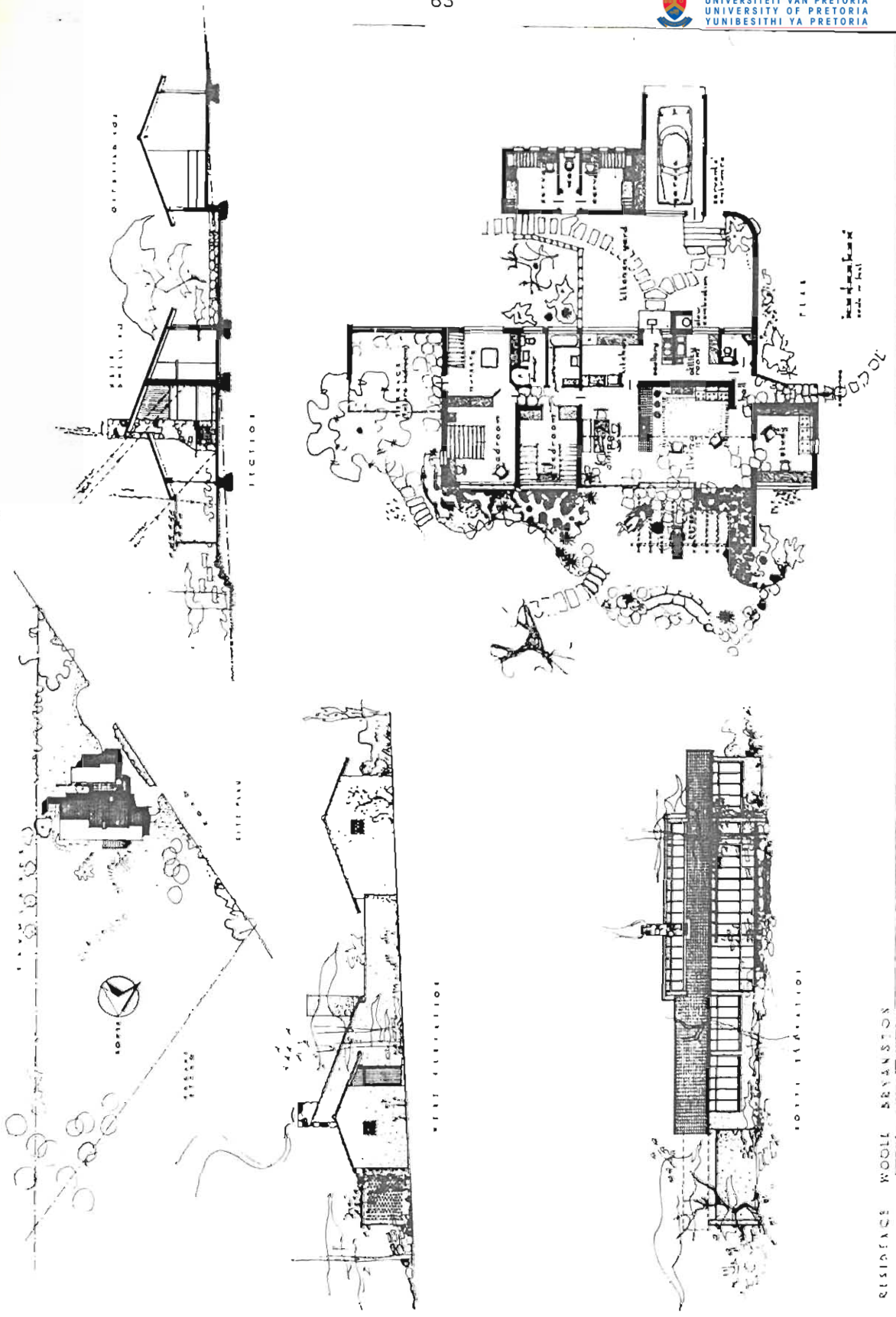


FIG. 40 House Wooll, Bryanston : Stauch and Wepener. This house, together with two other houses, for Marriott in Sandton and van der Merwe in Pretoria, were much published and are good examples of the character of the housing being produced by the partnership.

S T R E E T

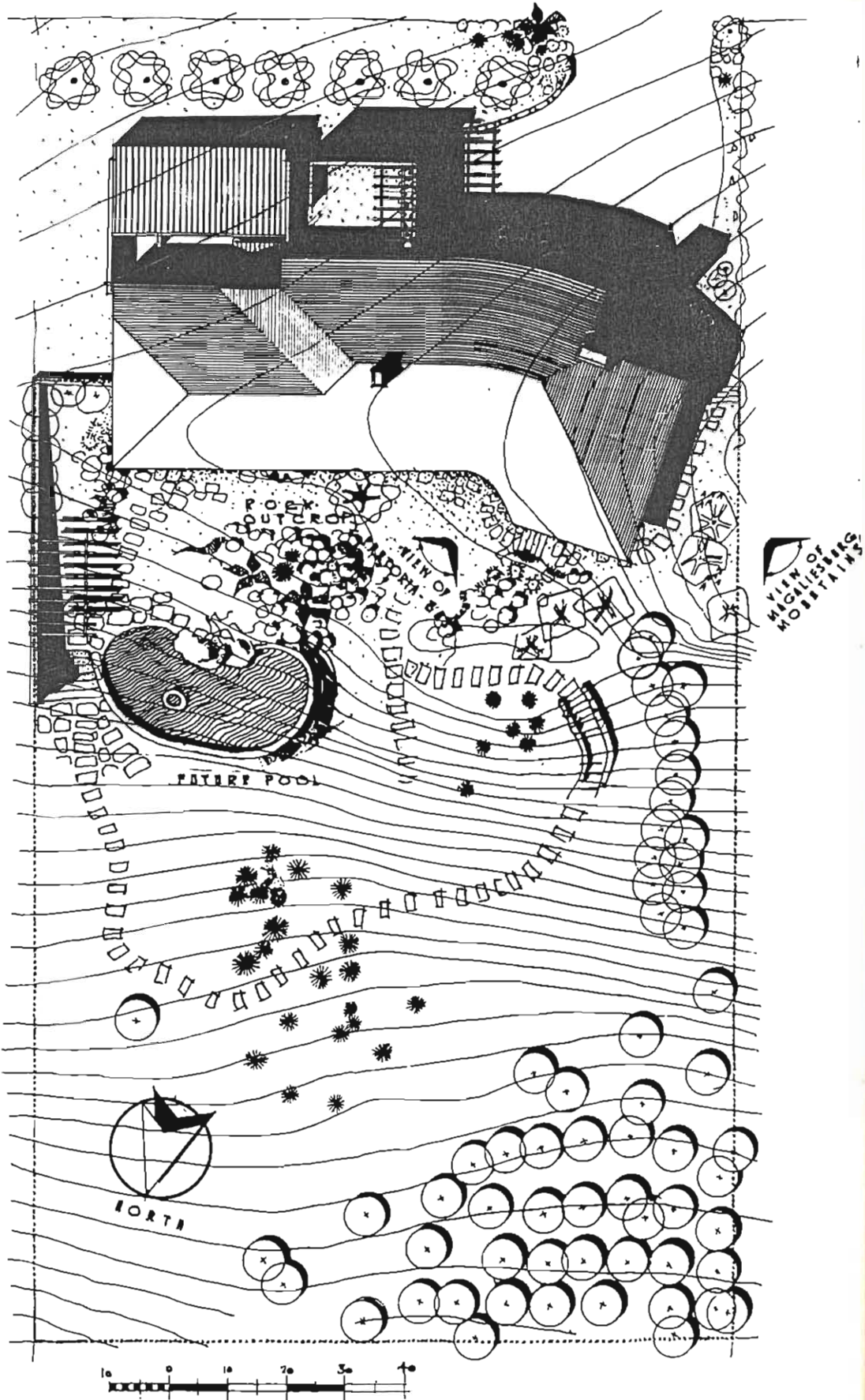


FIG. 42 House for Dr. Glen : site layout. The house plan is angled to enable the sloping site to be used to advantage, and the roof accommodates this with a firm but sweeping line.

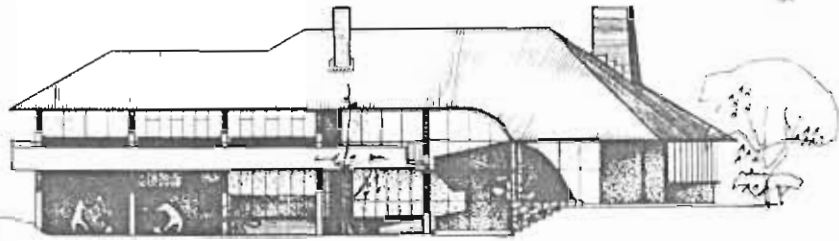
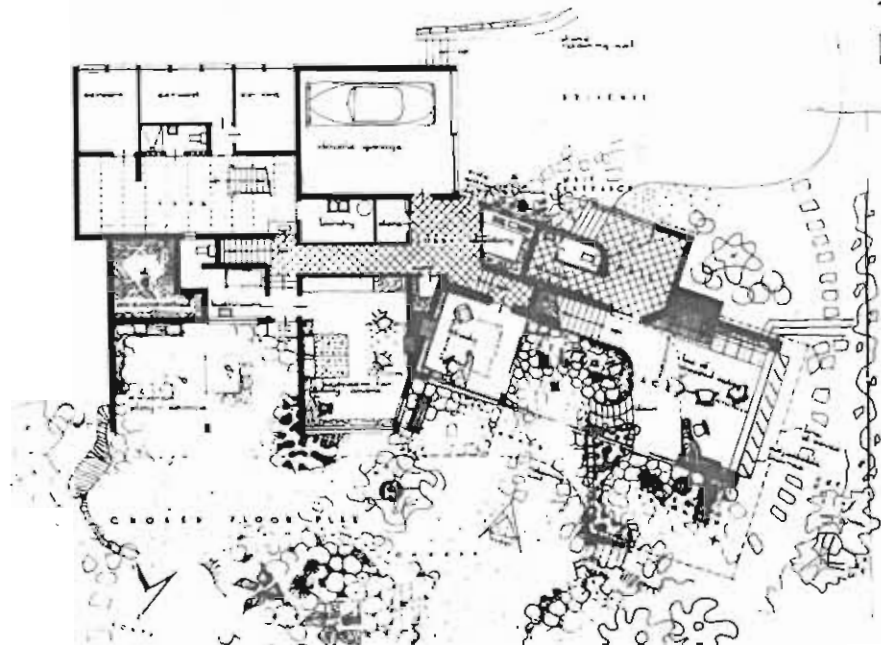
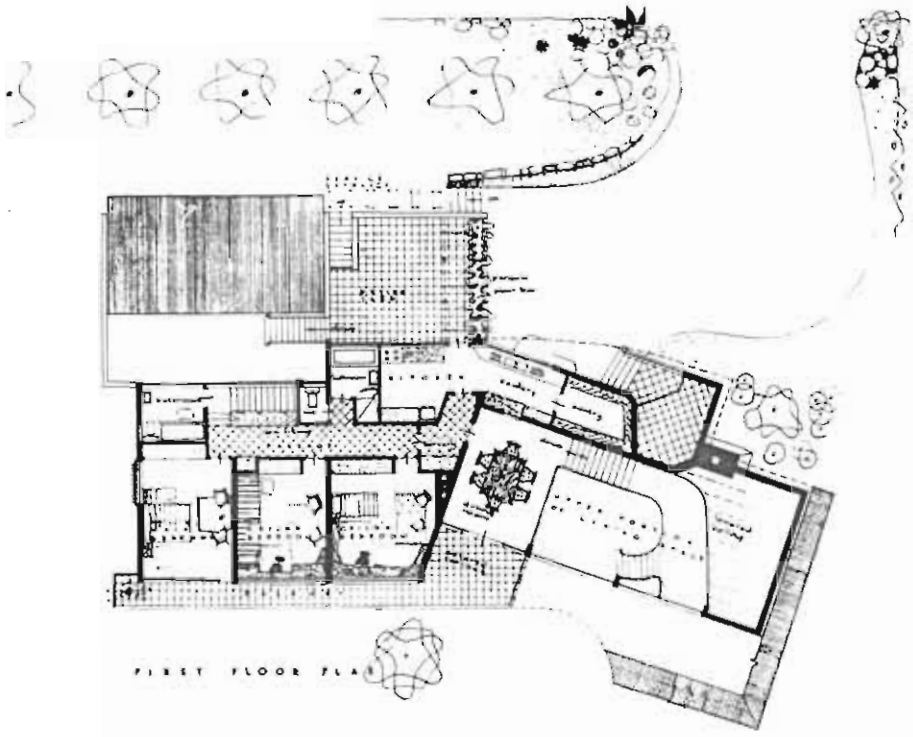


FIG 43 House for Dr Glen : plans, elevations and sections.

About a year after Wepener joined him, he went on a boat trip to Rio de Janeiro with the main intention of meeting Oscar Niemeyer and seeing his work. On this trip he met and became friendly with the then Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, J F (Tom) Naude, and this was to lead to a number of commissions in the Northern Transvaal which was "Oom Tom's" constituency. The most valuable of these was the Pietersburg Post Office, (fig. 44) and he re-opened the Pietersburg branch of his practice to service this project.

His visit to Niemeyer surprised him in many ways. Although he had a deep admiration for the South American architect, Niemeyer's disregard for such practicalities as whether or not the roof leaked came as a shock to Stauch. But Niemeyer's emphasis on aesthetic values appears to have appealed to him strongly; it was to a large extent dominant in his own architectural philosophy.⁽¹¹⁾

When, shortly after his trip, he was commissioned for the Meat Board Building, the Niemeyer influence was clear. His design for this building aroused a great deal of interest. Writing on the architecture of Johannesburg and environs, Nikolaus Pevsner discussed the lagging behind (in architectural character) of public buildings in general and went on to say "As for the public buildings a similar change is perhaps imminent. There is at least one extremely encouraging case. To design the new building for the National Meat Board a private architect H W E Stauch, was commissioned (telegraphic address: Bauhaus, Pretoria), and the result is excellent ..." (The Architectural Review, June, 1953). At least seven leading architectural magazines⁽¹²⁾ published full articles on the building, students in South Africa made a point of visiting it and its impact continued for years. (figs. 45 to 50)

6.3

The growing practice

At this time Stauch recruited a number of assistants including W.P.J. (Porkie) Maartens, whom he sent to Pietersburg to handle the increasing workload there. In spite of having Maartens there as a deputy, he kept in close touch with his clients in the Northern Transvaal, and

11. Stauch's description of his discussions with Niemeyer, Stauch Vorster Seminar record 1969

12. Architect and Builder, September 1952, pp 54 - 61.
Public Works of South Africa, July 1951, REPRINT, pp 1 - 8.
Instituto Technico de la Construccion y del cemento, February 1956.
Bauwelt 25, 1954.06.21, p481 - 487.
Architectural Forum, February, 1953, pp 146 - 149.
Architectural Design, Vol.XXVI, 1956, pp 181 - 197.
The Architectural Review, June 1953
SAAR, September 1952, p 211 - 221

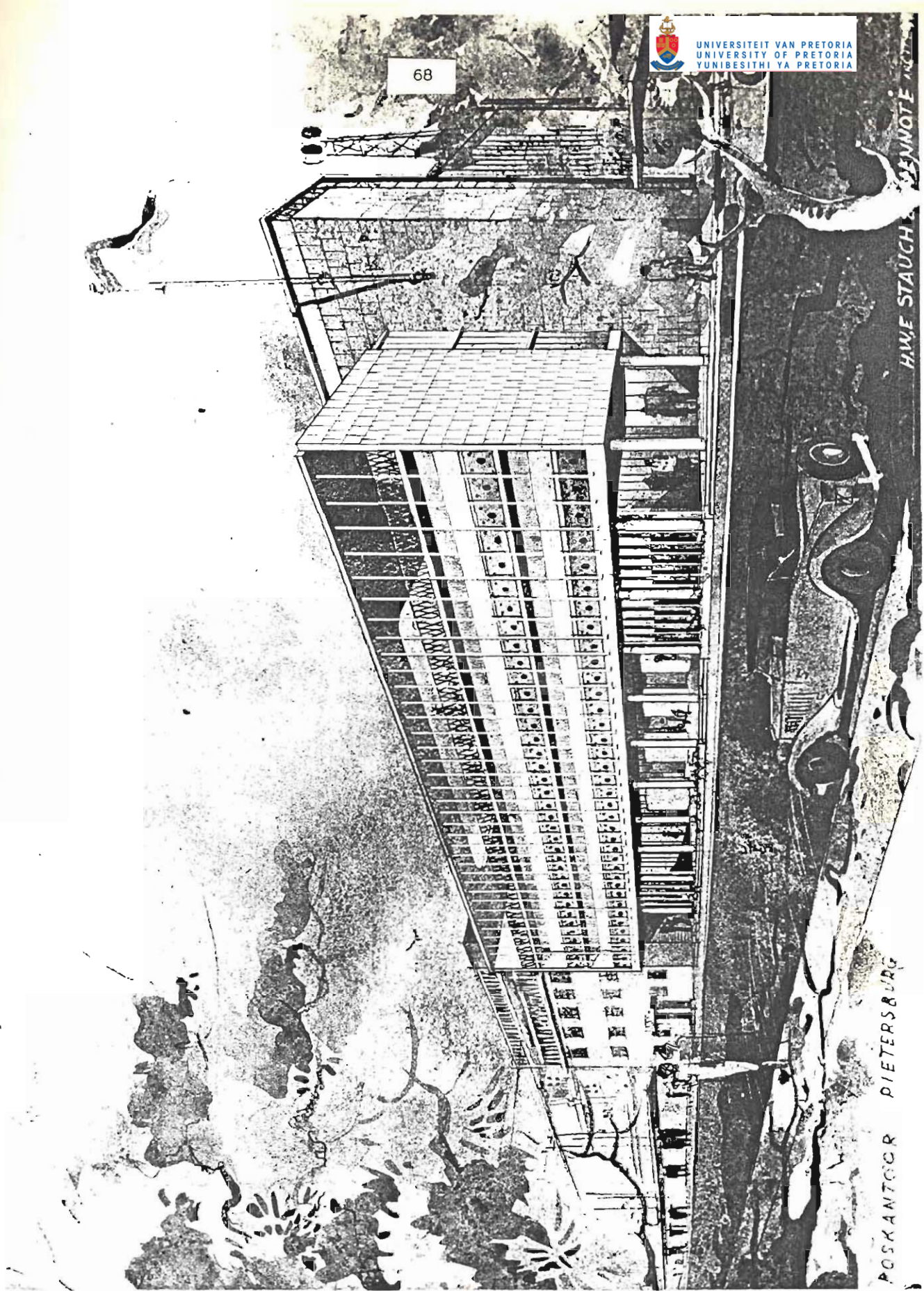
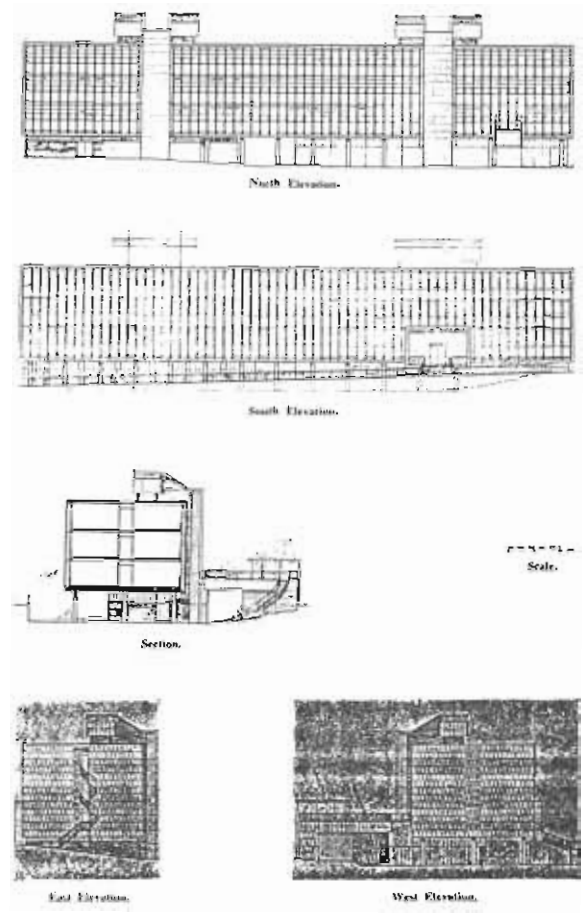
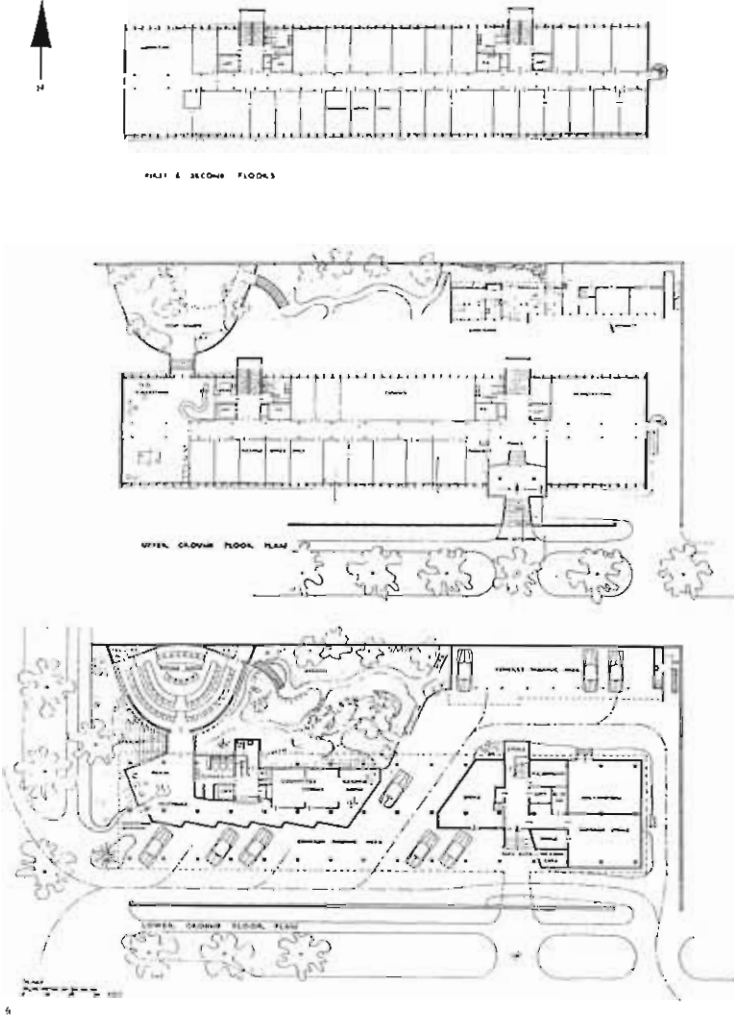


FIG. 44 Pietersburg Post Office. Sun-screening, the free-standing structure with non-structural free facade, and extensive use of mosaic - all new to Pietersburg at the time - are reminiscent of the Meat Board Building.

FIG. 45 Meat Board Building : plans and elevations, (Public Works of South Africa (July, 1951).



MEAT BOARD BUILDING — PRETORIA
Architects: H. W. E. Stauch & Partners

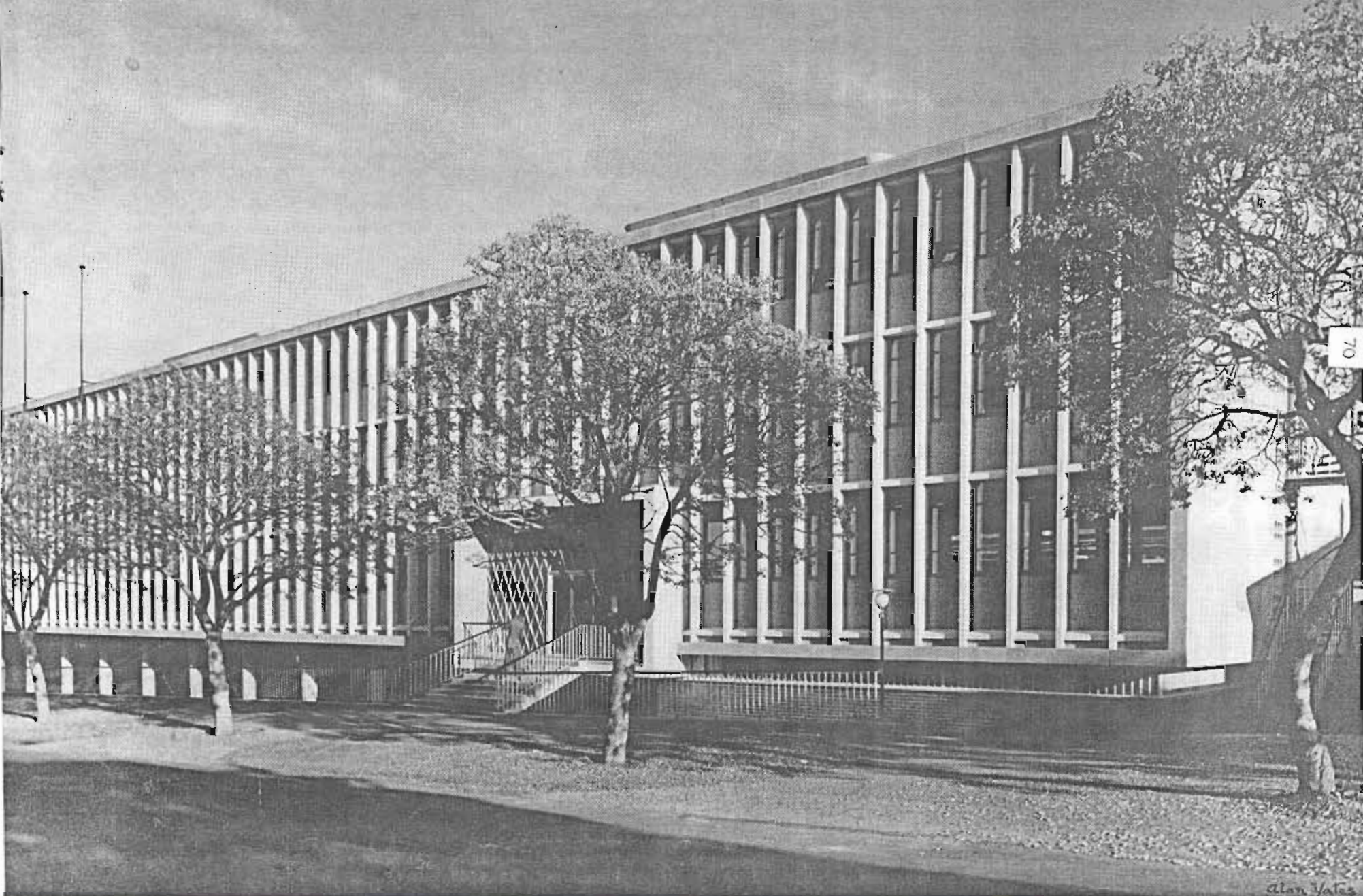


FIG. 46 Meat Board building : view from street

alan yates

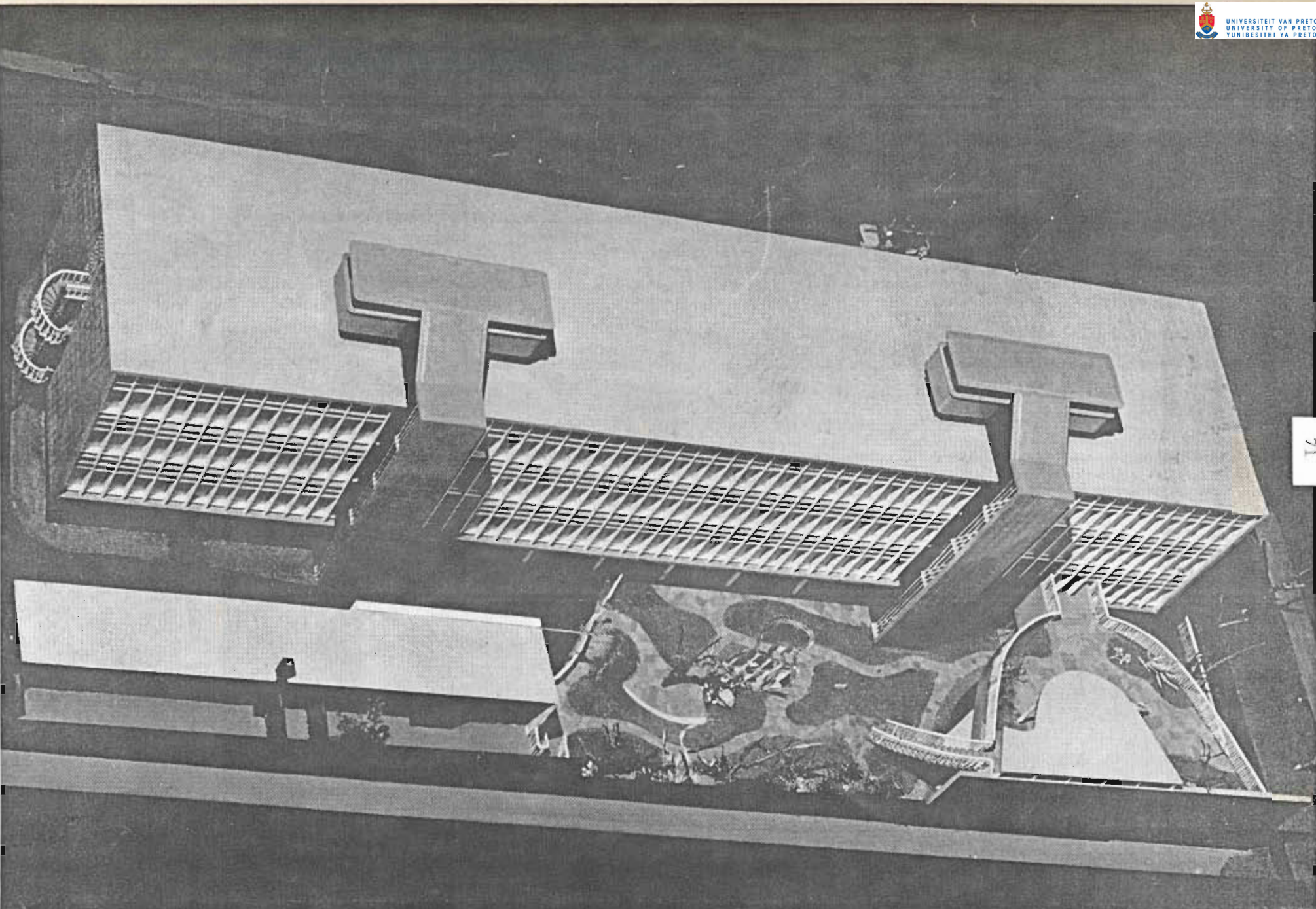


FIG. 47 Meat Board building : photograph of model, showing massing of

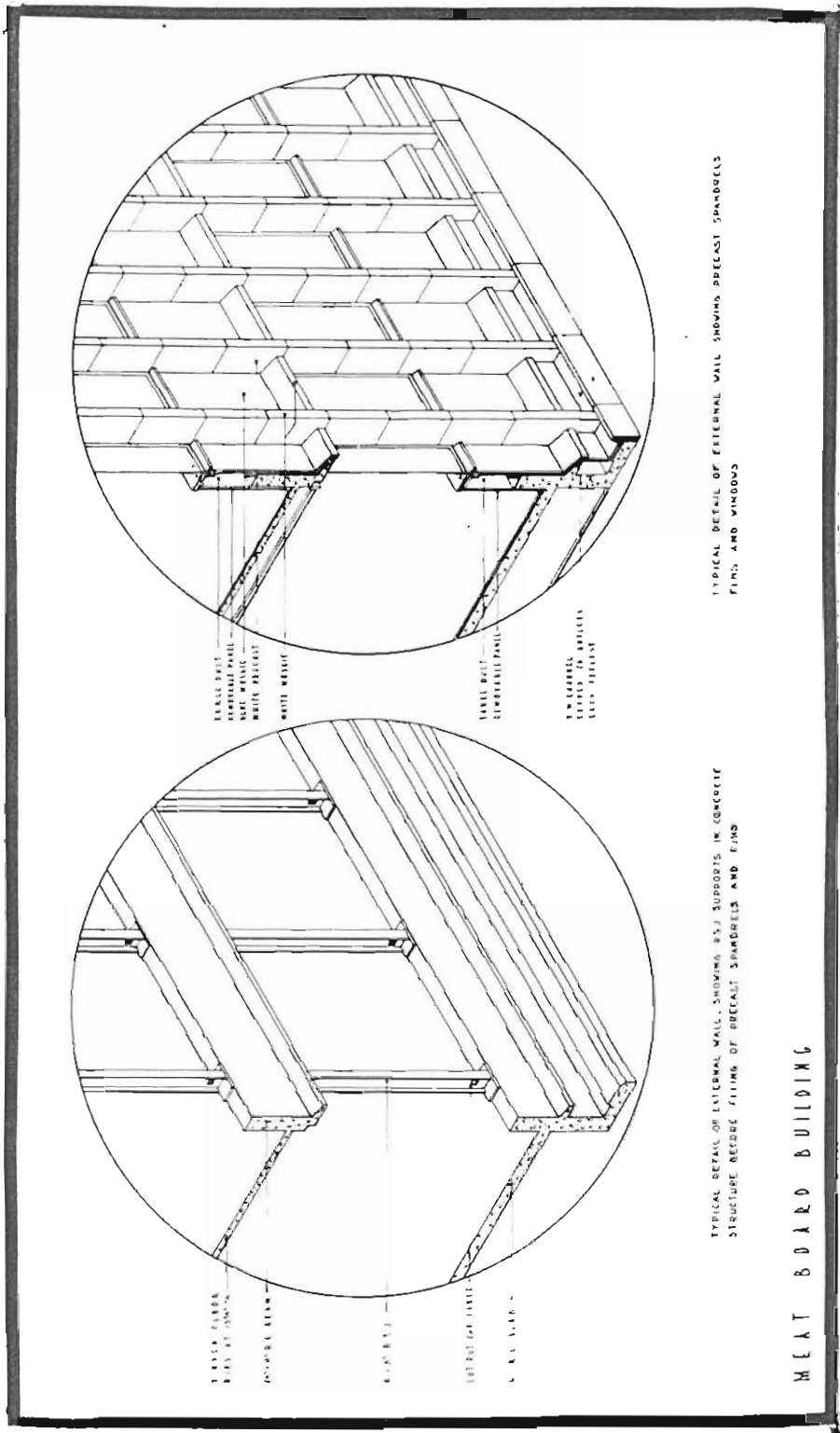


FIG 48 Meat Board building, illustrating the components of the facade and their inter-relationship.

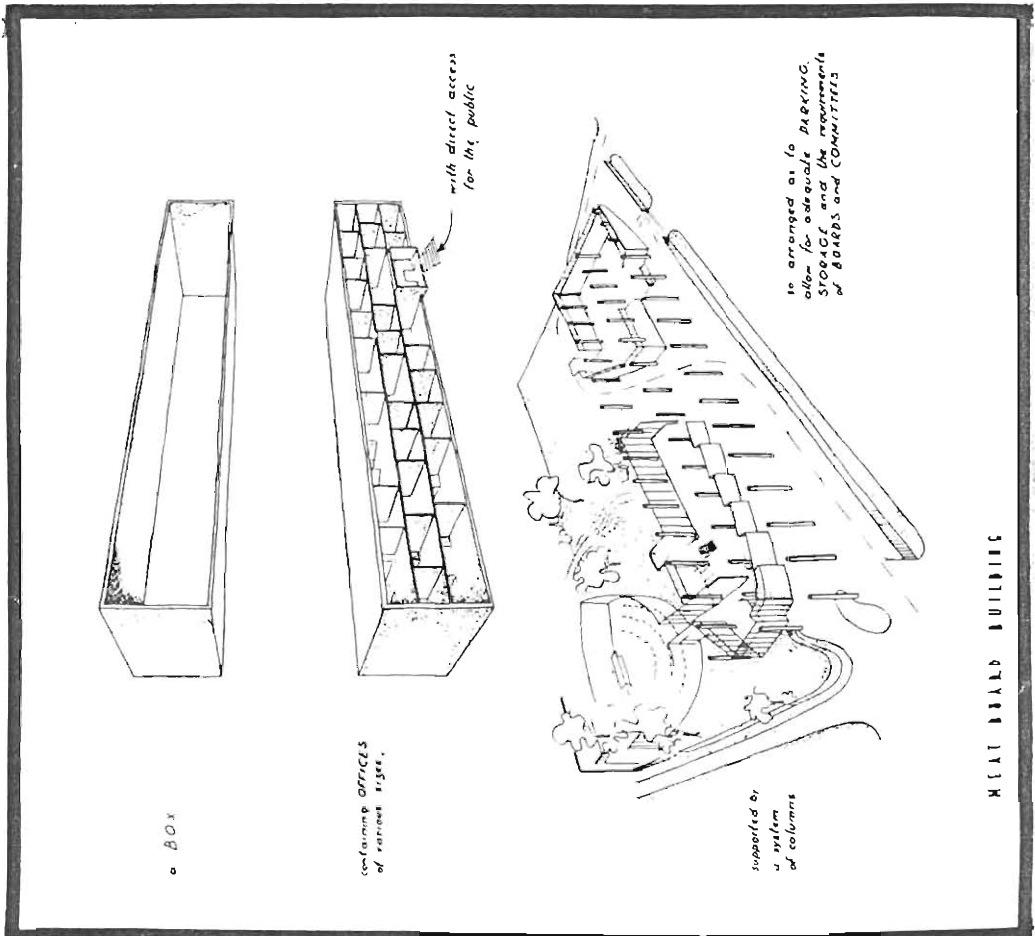


FIG. 49 Meat Board building, illustrating main structural components and their inter-relationship.

the office there flourished, although later it was closed between + 1955 and 1958, when Maartens had left and no replacement was readily available. Notable projects in Pietersburg were the Post Office already mentioned (195-), Pietersburg Civic Centre (1958), Lex Building (1948) (figs. 51 and 52), Bakers Garage and Showroom (1950), Shops for B Glass (1950), the Native Affairs Building (1959), Pietersburg Cold Storage Affairs building (1959), Pietersburg Cold Storage Building (195-) and houses for L. Gillett, Dr MacKenzie and several others. Contacts were also being made in Potgietersrus and Tzaneen where clubhouses were designed (+ 1950), which would during the fifties and sixties be followed by a great deal of residential and other projects, in and around the major centres of the Northern Transvaal.⁽¹³⁾

In Pretoria the emphasis of the practice was still on residential buildings although the number of other building types was increasing. Stauch also frequently bought and developed ground, designing and drawing projects in the office, which he considered to be good for publicity, disregarding financial aspects of partnership agreements.⁽¹⁴⁾ The block of flats known as Toscadi, in Troye Street, Pretoria, built in 1951, was one of these.

6.4 The break-up of the Stauch/Wepener partnership

Added to the friction generated by his privately owned building ventures was Stauch's tendency to disappear off to regattas with little or no warning. He had no sense of time and would work under intense pressure for a few days and then vanish for a few days. He had made an agreement with Wepener that they would not be away from the office simultaneously, but Wepener would go on leave and then read in the paper that Stauch was involved in a regatta in the Cape; he was a law unto himself. Eventually the pressures became too great and the partnership broke up at the end of 1951.⁽¹⁵⁾

6.5 Hakahana

About 1951, Stauch exchanged Kiepersol for a property 18 kilometers East of Church Square, and started building his new house. In an interview, published in 1955 (Architect and Builder, May, 1955, pp 34 -

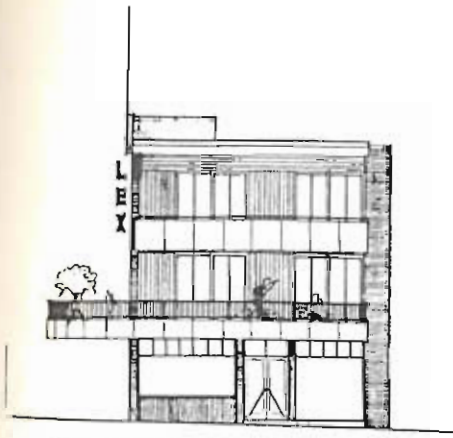
13. Stauch Vorster records.

14. Wepener, F.J., Ex-partner of H.W.E. Stauch, 1984 - interview.

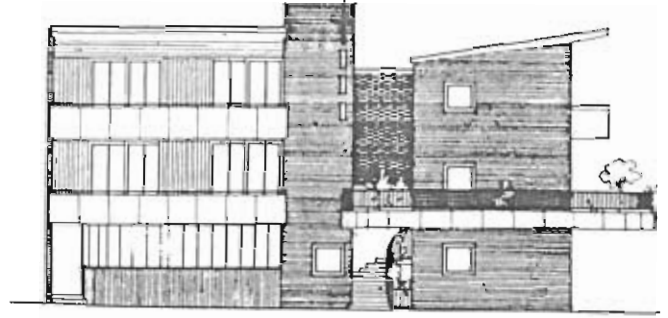
15. Ibid



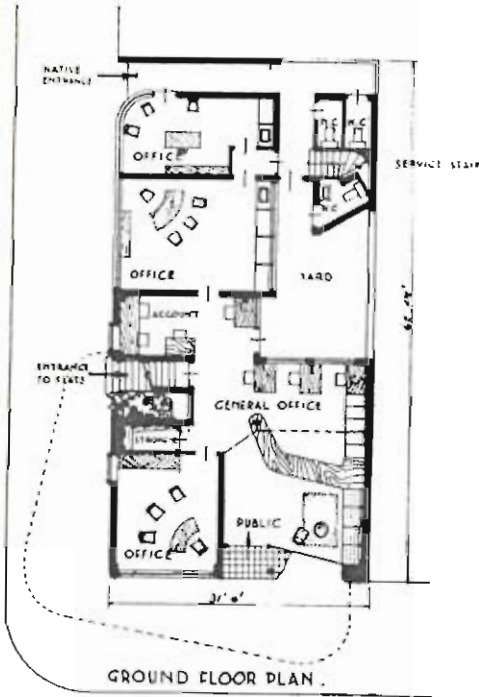
FIG. 51 Lex Building : view from street. This small and compact building was built to accommodate an attorney's office on the ground floor, with three duplex flats above it. It makes use largely of natural materials - rustic bricks, re-constructed stone, oregon board panels and ceilings and wood-block floors.



NORTH ELEVATION .

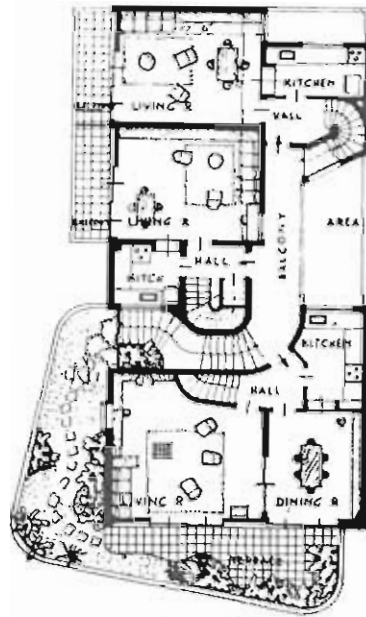


EAST ELEVATION .



GROUND FLOOR PLAN .

SCALE IN FEET



FIRST FLOOR PLAN



SECOND FLOOR PLAN

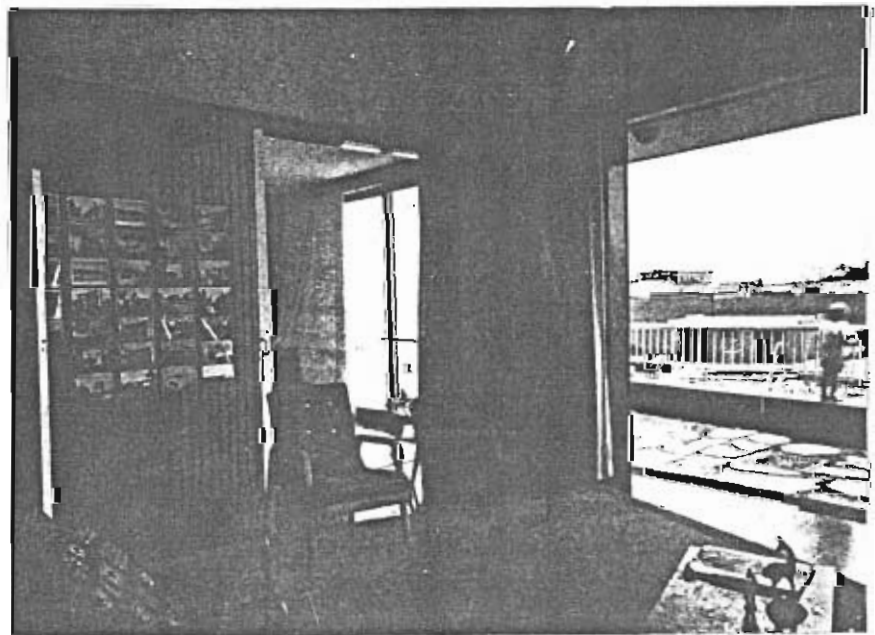


FIG. 52 Lex Building : Plans, elevations and interior.

45) (figs. 53 to 55) he described the brief for Hakahana and because this illustrates clearly his approach to the design of a house, part of the interview is quoted here verbatim:-

"Our requirements:-"

"Bedrooms away from the ground, if possible floating in the air, entirely away from the rest of the house, yet conveniently accessible. They must be airy, sunny in winter, shady and cool in summer. They must not be earthbound - we want to sleep and dream properly, fly away, sever our ties."

"Generous living space for relaxation, entertainment, conversation. This is where we are near the earth and want to feel it. The garden touches this space, comes right into it. The living space must be divisible into small areas, one portion to be 'cave' with low ceiling, warm materials, large fireplace, books, music, comfortable seats. (From this area we want to see the upper pool through the striplight over the seats, the overflow into the lower pool, and the lovely view through the NW picture window. Imagine the cool room with the sound of falling water on a hot summer's day - or an ice cold winter's day, with the water emphasizing the chilly sensation, with a roaring logfire in the fireplace, which warms up the concrete hood and surrounding slate walls!)"

"Diningspace, which is connected with the Living, rather large for entertaining many friends, but reducible in size for intimate parties. For people who like good food and drink, the Diningroom is a most important feature, because pleasant surroundings will stimulate the appetite, and; as everyone knows, good appetite is a basic requirement for an enjoyable meal!"

"A Studio for work and play, attached to workshop and garage to form a large 'hobby' and utility area, with convenient access to the rest of the house, but sufficiently detached for separate activities. This is also the farm office, from which farm wages are paid."

"Guestrooms, with own entrances, sittingroom and bathroom. When our friends stay with us, we want them to be independent, and retain their individual personalities."

"As a contrast to the wide open space, we wanted an enclosed garden court, which could be made 'out of bounds' to the less intimate friends, with a small swimming pool. The pools play an important part, because in South Africa, where water is at a premium, we wanted to fully enjoy the water we have - we wanted to see it all the time, wanted to wrap it

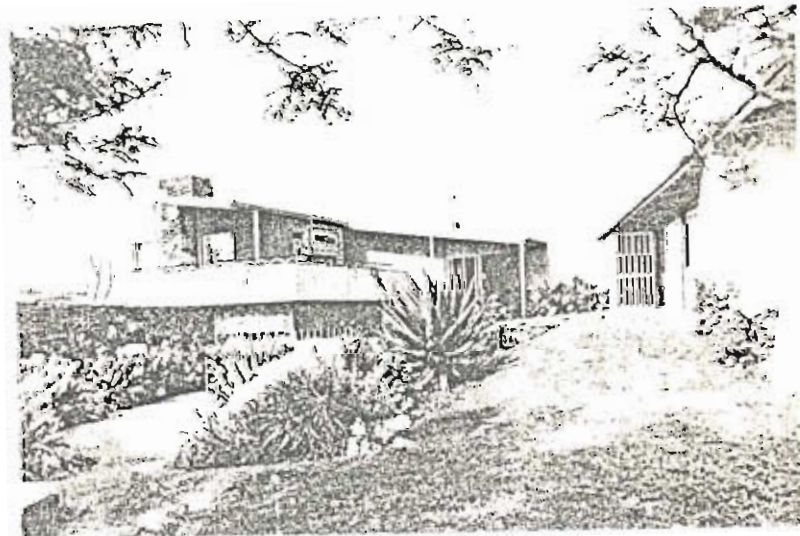
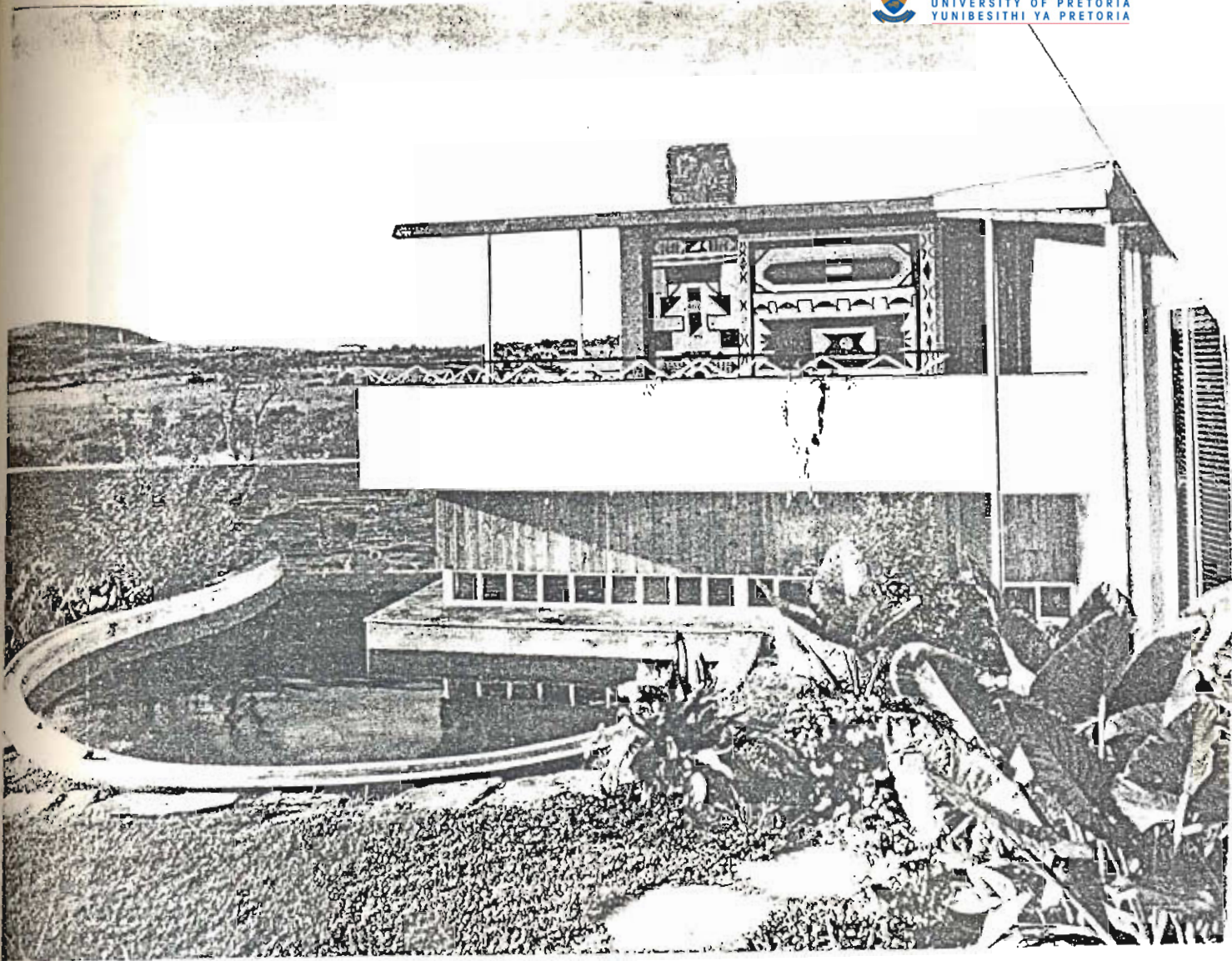


FIG. 53 Hakahana; views from South. The wall painting was carried out by a Mapoch woman who used a toothbrush and oil paint. The cill level of the small high windows at the rear of the lounge is just above the level of the upper pool. (Architect and Builder (May, 1955).

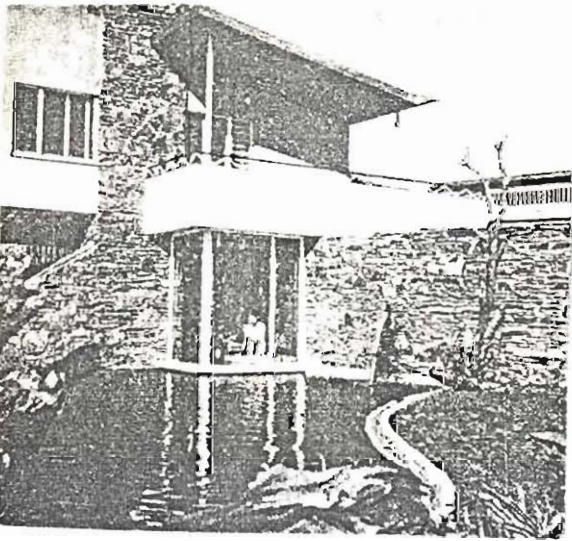
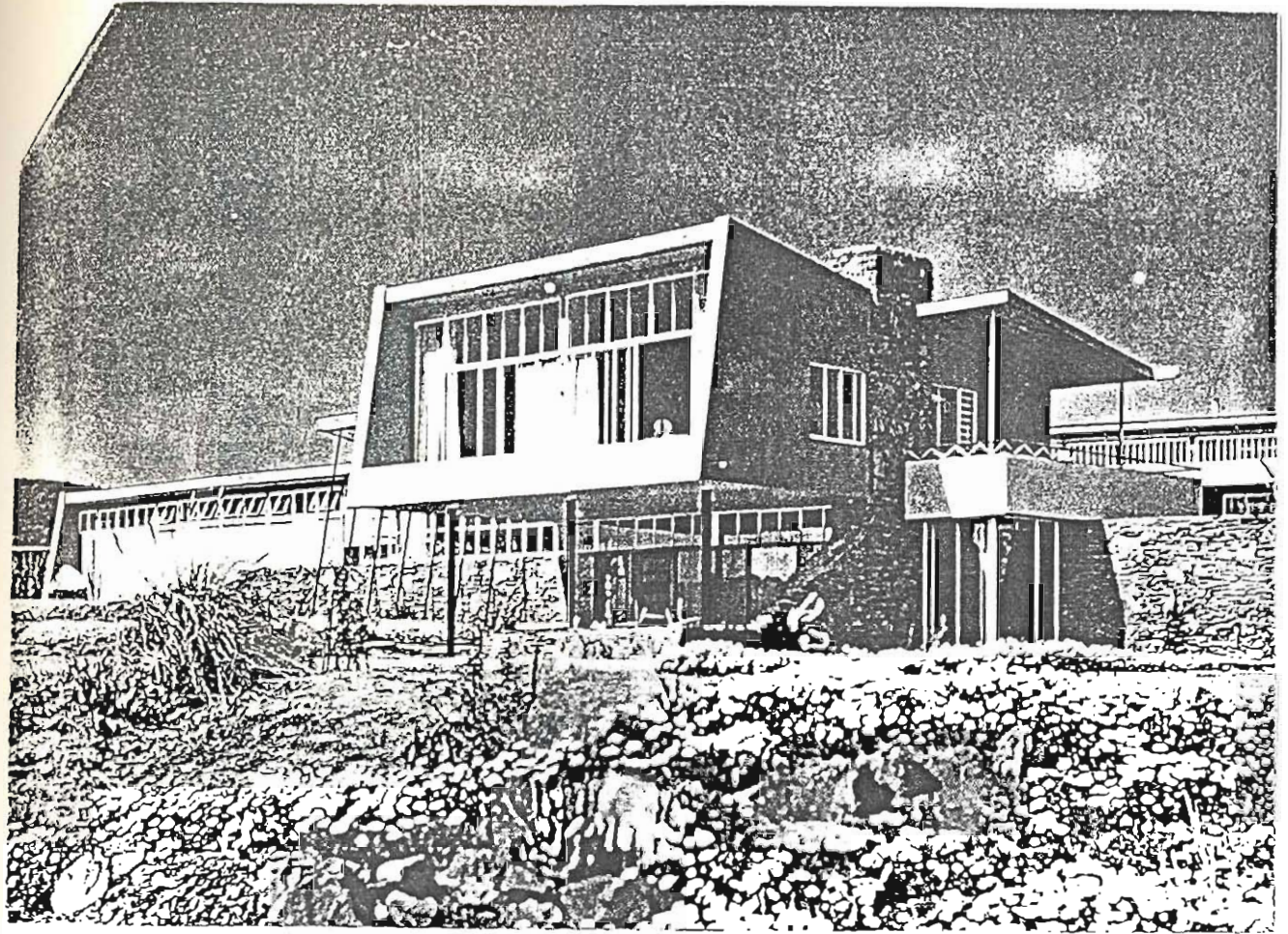


FIG. 54 Hakahana; views from North/West. The garden of succulents and "dry-land" plants is in dramatic contrast with the lower pool, which fringes the living-room windows (Architect and Builder (May, 1955)).

Reprinted from DECORATIVE ART (No. 46) 1956-7

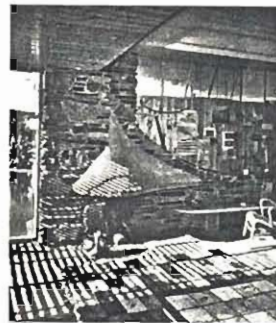
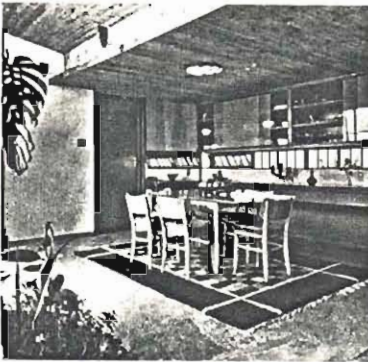
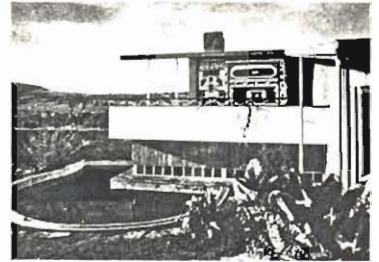


PRETORIA—SOUTH AFRICA

An artesian borehole, a beautiful view over distant hills, indigenous trees, and a river with a series of dams are the setting for this house, situated in a lovely valley about 10½ miles west of Pretoria.

It was built by the architect for his own use and is christened 'Hakahana', meaning 'quick', because he and his wife had to act speedily to get a roof over their heads and to establish a farm. The rear block—a tubular steel structure with non-loadbearing walls—was completed within a month, and was their temporary home: it now houses guestrooms, studio games room, and garage.

In designing the main house, the readily available
(continued below)



water supply played an important part—'we wanted to see it all the time, to hear it running'. This desire materialised into a swimming pool at two levels abutting directly onto the living room, which has a picture window at water level. This creates a sense of coolness in summer; in winter the concrete-hooded fireplace and slate walls retain the heat and keep the room cosy. Opposite is a bar with steps leading up to the dining room. The bedrooms, raised high above ground level, jut out from the house and command a magnificent view.

Exterior walls are plastered grey; a mural by a native woman of the Mapoch tribe decorates one wall. Architect: H. W. E. Stauch, MIA (SOUTH AFRICA)



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FIG. 55 Hakahana; reprint from Decorative Art (no. 46) 1956-7. This shows the building in occupation for some time. Today it is surrounded by tall trees and its relationship to the landscape has changed, but the building fabric remains unaltered.

around the house, we wanted to hear it running."

"'HAKAHANA' means 'Quick' in Herero language. We had to act quickly to get a roof over our heads, to surround ourselves with lawns and gardens, to establish vegetables and fruit, and the farmyard with stables for cows, horses, pigs, fowls, ducks, etc."

"In order to get a roof over our heads, we designed a structure, which would be adaptable to varying uses in future. It consists of tubular steel columns, to which beams and double rafters are bolted, which carry the roof structure, so that all walls are non-loadbearing and therefore changeable. This we built within a month, and lived there for 2 years. It is the portion at the rear, which now houses guestrooms, studio and garage."

"In the short time at our disposal, we could not design the future house. All we could do was to estimate its probable extent and decide on its rear line, direction, and the levels. We fixed this, which determined the corner in the upper pool. Later we found it rather tricky to actually fit the house into the allocated space with the restriction imposed by the 'corner'. But, perhaps it was just as well to have imposed a restriction in this form, because without that one tends to ramble far afield - it is difficult to discipline imagination sometimes!"

"In designing the house proper, the problem was to integrate the new with the existing so that it would not spoil the setting and the view of the rear block, and could be built whilst the first portion was occupied."

6.6

Bauhaus Pretoria

In January 1951 Stauch commenced work on an office block in which his own office would be incorporated, and named it "Bauhaus", and by the end of the following year he had once more moved his office. (16)