

# SECTION C

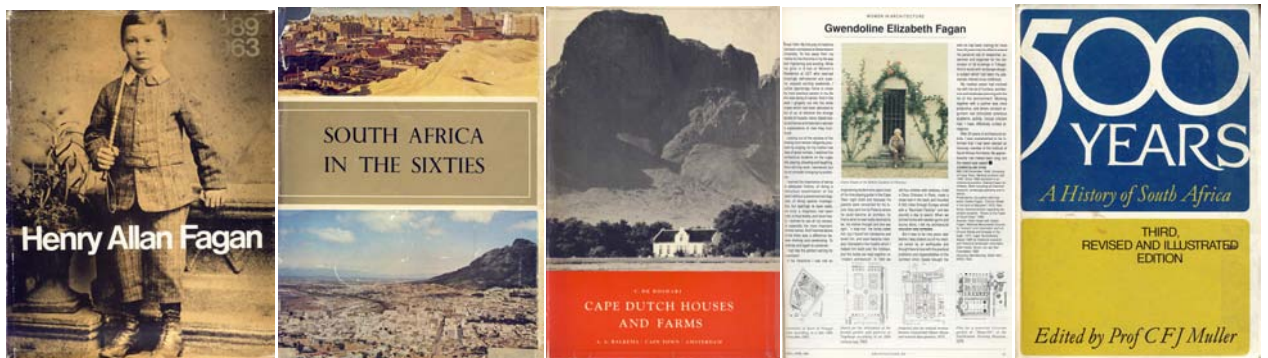
---

## CRYSTALLIZATION

**This section describes how a series of initiations have affected Fagan's philosophical and architectural outlook. The section acts as a mediation between context and expression.**

# Chapter 6

## INITIATIONS - THE MAN AS MEDIATOR



*Henry Allan Fagan cover (Fagan, Q., 1975). South Africa in the sixties, a socio-economic survey cover (Andrews, 1965). Cape Dutch houses and farms cover (De Boshari, 1971). Gwendoline Elizabeth Fagan (Architecture South Africa, March/April, 1993). 500 years - A history of South Africa cover (Muller, 1984).*

**This chapter briefly describes Gabriël Fagan's life and influences through the veil of a series of initiations and mediations:**

Fagan's childhood will be described as a first initiation resulting in a mediation between nature and nurture and hand and mind.

Fagan's tertiary education will be described as a mediation between science and the arts as it alternates between musical creativity, mechanical invention and part-time education.

Fagan's first work experience will be outlined as a mediation between corporate expression and regional inflections, and family life and business.

Fagan's experiences with conservation in relation to new designs will be highlighted.

## 6.1. First initiation (1925-1942): formative influences

But of course we are aware that to understand the architect we must understand the man (Herbert, 1975:2).

### 6.1.1 Nurture and nature

Fagan once remarked that a child can only fully develop if hand and mind are taught to work in synergy (Fagan, 1983b:2). His upbringing was clearly formed along these lines but a healthy dose of intelligence, creative genes and a privileged upbringing created a solid platform for these traits to develop to their full potential. He grew up in a well-respected family that encouraged artistic pursuits such as drama and writing. He was also influenced by his father's creative abilities and so, from a very early age, began to take mechanical objects apart and invent new ways of making.

Gabriël Theron Fagan was born in the family home Waveren<sup>151</sup> (see Fig. 6.1) in Avenue Road, Newlands, Cape Town on the 15<sup>th</sup> of November 1925 to Henry Allan Fagan (1889-1963) and Jessie (Queenie)<sup>152</sup> Theron (1896-1977)<sup>153</sup>.

My own second name Theron refers to French Huguenot ancestry and my great-great grandfather was an Irish immigrant from County Cork (Fagan, 1991a:1).



**Figure 6.1.** Fagan's childhood home as it existed in 2009 in Avenue Road, Newlands, Cape Town (Author, 2009).

Fagan's father was born in Tulbagh, a little town about one hundred kilometres north-east of Cape Town. He was one of eight children, two of whom died when they were around five years old. Fagan's grandfather, Henry Allan (1865-1931) (see Fig. 6.2), ran the general store in the town which had been, in turn, established and owned by his father, also H.A. Fagan (1837-1891) (see Fig. 6.2).

<sup>151</sup> Waveren was the original name given to Tulbagh before it was named after a Dutch governor of the time, Ryk Tulbagh.

<sup>152</sup> There is some confusion in the spelling of this nickname. At times it ends with a 'y' and at others with an 'ie'. For clarity 'ie' shall be used as it seems to occur more often in the published book on Fagan senior.

<sup>153</sup> See Appendix B for family tree.

Fagan's father was just ten years old when the family moved from Tulbagh to the Strand in Cape Town, where he became mayor and ran a law agency. The family later moved to Somerset West where a large house and garden with tennis court, fruit orchard and cement dam provided much pleasure for the children (Fagan, Q., 1975:25). In 1922, Fagan's father returned to his birthplace.

*Ek het darem vir een besondere doel na Tulbagh terug gegaan: om, soos Jakob van ouds, in die land van my herkoms vir my 'n bruid te gaan haal (Fagan, Q., 1975:50).*

[I went back to Tulbagh for one specific reason: as Jakob of old, to fetch a bride in the land of my birth].



**Figure 6.2.** Left: Gravestone of Fagan's paternal grandparents in the cemetery of the Dutch Reformed Church in Tulbagh (Author, 2009). Right: Gravestone of Fagan's paternal great grandfather in the same cemetery in Tulbagh (Author, 2009).

Fagan's father married Jessie (Queenie) Theron on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June 1922 (see Fig. 6.3). Jessie was one of four daughters born to Gabriël Theron (1853-1925) and Jessie Bennett (1885-1945). The family lived in Tulbagh and it seems that Fagan's mother's nickname originated due to her rather diminutive frame and ladylike appearance. Dr. D.F. Malan<sup>154</sup>(1874-1959) sent a telegram to Fagan's father on the eve of their wedding indicating that he needed to be careful that the Queen did not rule over him! (Fagan, Q., 1975:50).

— <sup>154</sup> See Appendix J.



**Figure 6.3.** **Top left:** Fagan's parents in the garden of their Newlands Home. (Fagan, Q., 1975: 51). **Top right:** Hennie and Gawie Fagan c.1932 (Fagan archive, undated). **Bottom left:** Hannes and Gawie Fagan in the Gardens in Cape Town c.1935 (Fagan archive, undated). **Bottom right.** Fagan and his white rabbit in the garden of their Newlands home. c.1935 (Fagan archive, undated).

Three children were born from the marriage. The first was the sporty Henry Allan (1923-2004) (see Fig. 6.3) who trained as an engineer at the University of Cape Town. He practiced in Angola until he had to hastily retreat during the bush war of the 1970s. He arrived back in Cape Town destitute and started farming in the Bottelary area till his death from stomach cancer in 2004 (Fagan, J.J., 2009). Gabriël (Gawie) Theron Fagan (see Fig. 6.3) was born in 1925 and his younger brother Johannes (Hannes) Jacobus (1927-) followed soon after (see Fig. 6.3) Hannes qualified as a lawyer and became a judge like his father, ultimately achieving notoriety as an inspecting judge of prisons in South Africa from 2000-2006. Today he is retired and lives in the city bowl of Cape Town in a grand Victorian house altered by Fagan. The two remaining brothers are very close and see each other regularly for dinner and long and involved conversations (Fagan, J.J., 2009).

Fagan's father had an illustrious academic, professional and political career. He trained as a lawyer at the University of Stellenbosch (1905-1909) and at the Middle Temple University in London from 1910 to 1914, where he received his LL.B. degree. Thereafter he successfully wrote both the English and South African bar exams (Fagan, Q., 1975:36).

I recall my father telling how he as a student at the Middle Temple in London, was requested by his uncle Jan Smith (later of the Groot Woerdeboek) who was at the time studying philosophy in London, to write poetry or prose in Afrikaans for publication in South Africa (Fagan, 1991:6).

Fagan's father set up practice in Cape Town, but the war years intervened and he became the secretary of *Die Burger* newspaper committee in 1915 and later a member of the board of directors and assistant editor to Dr. D.F. Malan. Around 1917 he met C.J. Langenhoven<sup>155</sup> (1873-1932) who became a lifelong family friend. At *Die Burger* Fagan senior honed his journalistic and writing skills, an asset he clearly passed on to his son who displays meticulousness with written texts. His daughter Helena remarks:

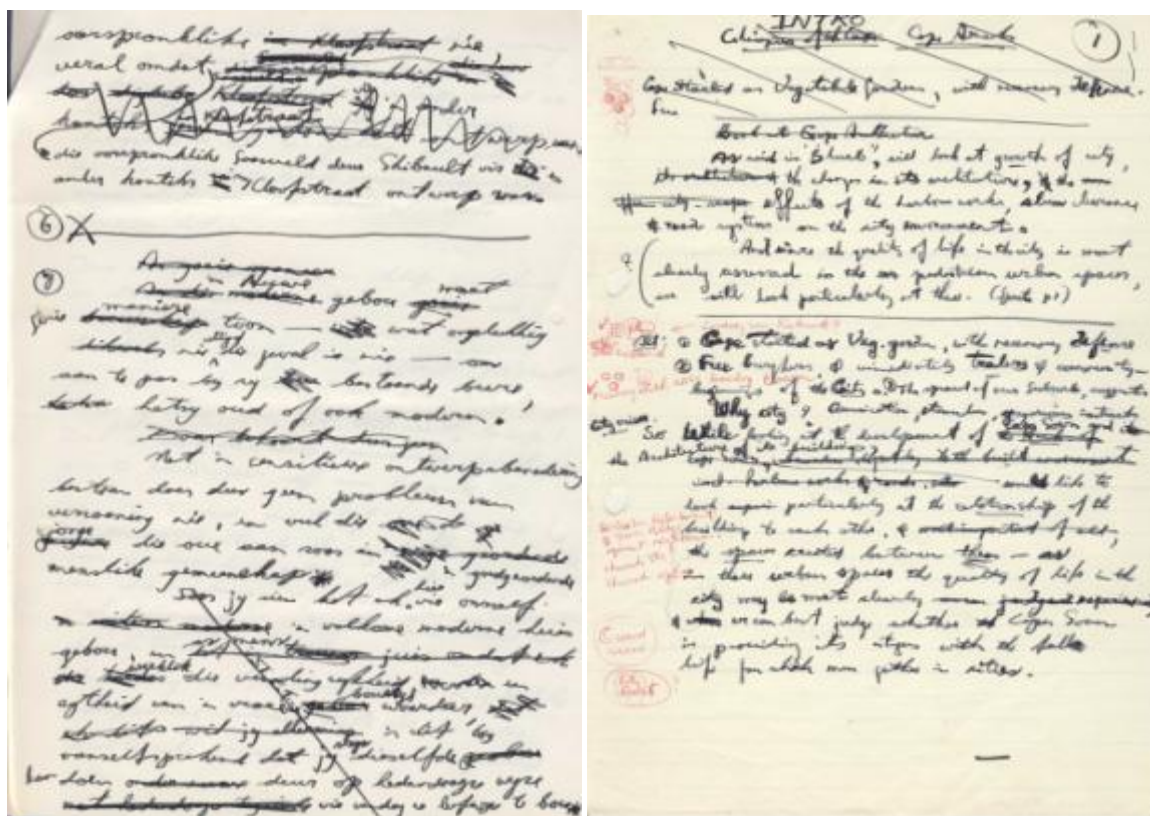
... and bad spelling!! One of his pet hates. He even marks mistakes in the newspaper and gets all worked [up] when he finds 'a bad one'. On the subject of language – he is extremely set on writing and speaking a good pure Afrikaans and protecting its rightful place in our throwaway culture. He has a deep inherited love for the language and takes much care with the choice of words (Fagan, H.E., 2009)

This fervour is reinforced by the reworking of lectures that have been discovered in Fagan's archives (see Fig. 6.4). Layers and layers of rewritten text testify to his thoroughness to find the exact wording. This drive for perfection can also be seen in design sketches where ideas are explored over and over again. He was, according to his children (personal communications), a very strict man.

He would expect the same standards from us as he did from himself. Nothing less than perfect was good enough and you don't stop till it is (Fagan, H.E., 2009).

---

– <sup>155</sup> See Appendix J.



**Figure 6.4 .** Fagan's reworked lecture notes: SABC, 11 Dec 1975:6 and Glimpses of the Cape 20 April 1977:14 (All Fagan archive).

Fagan's father's career took another turn when he became the first professor in Roman Dutch law at the newly established law faculty of the University of Stellenbosch. His political<sup>156</sup> career began in 1933, when he became a member of the Swellendam House of Assembly for the National Party coalition. He was later a successful candidate for the Stellenbosch region after turning down an appointment as judge. In 1938 he became minister for Native Affairs in the United Party<sup>157</sup> cabinet of General Barry Herzog<sup>158</sup> (1866-1942). Not long thereafter the Second World War broke out and the coalition broke up. Along with Herzog, Fagan's father moved to the opposition benches but in 1943 he was appointed by the Smuts government as judge in the Cape region.

He was an eminent member of South Africa's judiciary appointed by General Smuts to chair a commission of inquiry whose report predicted mass urbanization, with a migration of blacks to the cities. This vision, then politically unpalatable, was contradicted by a later commission (Anon, 1991:15).

— <sup>156</sup> Fagan indicates that his father was unwillingly drawn into politics and that Queenie tried to stop him (Fagan, 2008b).

— <sup>157</sup> The United Party was South Africa's ruling political party between 1934 and 1948. It was formed by a merger of most of Prime Minister General Barry Hertzog's National Party with the rival South African Party of Jan Smuts, plus the remnants of the Unionist Party. Its full name was the United National South African Party, but it was generally called the "United Party". The party drew support from several different parts of South African society, including English-speakers, Afrikaners and 'Coloureds'.

— <sup>158</sup> See Appendix J.

In 1950 Fagan's father became Appeal Judge, and in 1957 the 11<sup>th</sup> Chief Justice of South Africa until his retirement in 1959.

### 6.1.2 Hand and mind: the experiential and the didactic

Fagan's father's professional career was balanced with other pursuits such as translation, writing poetry and music. Fagan remembers that in the evenings, for relaxation, his father used to play Beethoven on the baby grand piano (given to his father by his grandfather as a wedding present), accompanied by his wife who was a very good singer. The timber floored house in Newlands allowed Fagan to fall asleep to the playing and singing (Fagan, 2008b).

For years I slept on the balcony of my parents' bedroom, later shared an upstairs bedroom with Hannes, and finally had my own room above the garage (Fagan, 2010b).

Although there was a piano in the Newlands house (Fagan, J.J., 2009), of the three brothers

... Gawie was the only musical one, so he was sent to take piano lessons with Elsie Hall's sister, a Mrs Hughes (1877-1976) ... but classical music did not interest him. Playing on his own held no excitement, and he was more and more attracted to jazz music where the live interaction with fellow musicians as well as the creative process of improvising your own solos appealed much more to him (Fagan, H.E., 2005:5).

Fagan was more interested in the guitar and played for hours with a friend, Jimmy Rogers, who lived up the road. Fagan recalls that as a child he made a tin guitar with one or two strings. He notes (c.1975:14) that he and his wife Gwen both grew up in musical homes and that his four children all inherited this gift. But Fagan's creative streak made him more interested in jazz music, a passion he pursues to this day. The reception space in his Cape Town office still houses a piano. The author was once witness to an impromptu jazz performance by Fagan, rather rudely interrupted by the dog needing some attention. "May I not play?" was Fagan's Afrikaans response. Fagan rarely plays for anyone but himself these days and I wonder if he wanted to show off his dexterity and skill. He knew I was there.

Fagan's love of jazz epitomises his approach to architecture. Firstly, the inherent structure of music is recognized but the strong foundation allows for a freedom of expression. Secondly, jazz was

... born of a regional expression. Its invention is inconceivable outside the particular milieu of New Orleans from which it sprang. Jazz is a musical form based strongly in tradition (Speck, 1987; 2007:72).

Thirdly, its compositions are born of an intuitivity and immediacy that is difficult to achieve with other more cerebral (perhaps classic) music forms. This supports Fagan's claim that he regards



himself as a designer that is 70% intuitive and 30% rational (Fagan, 2008b)<sup>159</sup>.

Fagan's father was also an inventive man, at one stage recognizing the inconvenience of opening and closing farm gates. He developed a full-scale prototype of a gate (built by a Mr. Ludwig in Cape Town) that would be mechanically opened and closed by the car as it drove over a set of metal plates. Unfortunately the cattle grid was developed at the same time, which immediately put pay to this ingenious invention. Fagan recalls that his father did not really make things himself but did fix things (out of necessity) around the house (Fagan, 2008b). Fagan's son Henry (2009) recalls that his grandfather also designed an alternative to the qwerty keyboard for typewriters and developed his own shorthand system (Fagan, H. 2009).

The Fagan children grew up after the South African Depression but they were still raised with a sense of frugality. Fagan's wife (2008b) recalls that no food would ever go to waste and that Fagan's father refused to throw away old bananas. Fagan's brother Hannes remembers (2009) that Fagan's 'free trip' on a local bus resulted in him being dragged by Fagan senior to the bus station to pay the outstanding debt. The children also received a great deal of mental and intellectual stimulation outside the formal educational environment. Hannes Fagan (2009) recalls that many a heated argument at the dinner table was settled through two sets of encyclopaedias that the family possessed. But exposure to making things did not rely on merely doing but rather on creatively investigating possibilities. Access to materials and machinery were instrumental in fostering these explorations. A relationship with nearby neighbours, the patriarch's lead and the availability of tools seemed to have fostered a love of making things, with Fagan being the most inventive of the brothers. Fagan's most daring invention was a diving helmet constructed from an old tin with the top removed and a Ford hubcap soldered on. Melted lead was used to fix glass panels in place, and was also applied to the base of the tin to keep it upright. A car pump and hose supplied air. Hannes became the guinea pig when the boys tried out the helmet in Kalk Bay harbour (Fagan J.J., 2009 and Fagan, 2008b).

Fagan does not recall that his father and he made things together, probably as his father's work took him away from the family home very often, something that he found hard to bear.

*Ek het in die trein baie gelees, in die twee boeke oor Salazar en in 'A Hindu way of life'. Een sinnetjie het my veral getref op 'n oomblik toe my werk my so ver van my familie af wegneem. Dit is 'Man's real happiness lies not in mere happiness itself but in the happy acceptance of his duty'. Op hierdie tydstip vind ek dit makliker gesê as gedaan"* (Fagan, Q., 1975:50).

[I used to read a lot in the train, in the two books on Salazar and in 'A Hindu Way of Life'. One sentence struck me in a moment when work had taken me so far away from my family. This is 'Man's real happiness lies not in mere happiness itself but in the

---

– <sup>159</sup> Fagan later explained this statement in more detail - see Chapter 8.4.

happy acceptance of his duty'. At this time I find it easier to say than do.]

Fagan's mother Queenie brought a sensitive touch to his upbringing. He was the favourite son, by all accounts, and took after his mother more than the other brothers, if not in looks then certainly in physical stature. Fagan disagrees, however:

No, I tended to see Hannes as spoilt by our mother, whom he was not above charming with little gifts like chocolates (Fagan, 2010b).

Jessie was an accomplished singer, actress and gardener. She organized and took part in many a play in a shed the Fagans built in their garden. The family was surrounded by creative people (Fagan, 2008a) and this must have rubbed off on Fagan as a child. His mother encouraged artistic pursuits with all her children and provided them with moulding clay and a blackboard-painted wall in their playroom (Fagan, 2008b). Here the children could express themselves.

I had a sketchbook, and my mother had a wall painted for us to draw on with chalk. I did not draw buildings on paper, but built a covered tree shelter where I could read undisturbed, and an earth covered shelter about which my mother was less charmed as it was dug in the middle of her rose garden (Fagan, 2010b).

Fagan attended Simon van der Stel Primary School<sup>160</sup> in Wynberg (a suburb of Cape Town) and Jan Van Riebeeck High<sup>161</sup> in the city bowl. He did not have to work hard to be at the top of his class in primary school. In high school (see Fig. 6.5) he enjoyed Latin and English (as he had a good teacher) but did not put much effort into his schoolwork. More attention was paid to creative pursuits outside of the school environment (Fagan, 2008b).



**Figure 6.5.** Fagan's matric class of 1942. Fagan is at the top right. (Photo courtesy of Jan van Riebeeck High School, 2009).

Fagan's final high school year marks are rather average, with language subjects the highest and mathematics the lowest (see Fig. 6.6). This demonstrates the affinity Fagan has for languages and the difficulties he had with the engineering course he later attempted to complete at the University

— <sup>160</sup> The school was established in 1930 with many learners whose parents were in the nearby military base.

— <sup>161</sup> The school was established in 1926.

of Cape Town. His position in class varies from 13<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup>. This supports the notion that he made a limited effort academically. The most interesting part of the results page is the teacher's comment that Fagan should improve his learning work and shift his interests (presumably away from his hobbies) to his school work.

Geskiedenis	Aand.	Leit.	Kuns	Musiek	Totaal	Persentasie	Poorsie
78					418	69.7	21
173					1259	66.3	13
175					1179	62.1	24

	Afrikaans	Engels	Duits	Latyn	Malies	Sinnat.
A Fagan, Gabriel Theron	55	71		76	69	69
	228	206		232	194	226
kan eerswerk later doen - skrif leef/hobby's?	240	211		225	130	198

Figure 6.6. Fagan's final year high school results (Photo courtesy of Jan van Riebeeck High School, 2009).

Fagan was not a great sportsman although he did take part in athletics. He often cycled from his Newlands home to school in Cape Town which, together with all of the other outdoor pursuits, was regarded by Fagan as enough exercise. Fagan's developmental influences were contextualized through a love of sailing that allowed him to understand the elements and their effect on human beings and architecture. All of these influences were instrumental in allowing Fagan to understand both the static and dynamic aspects of context.

Born in the shadow of Table Mountain, a stone's throw from here, some of my earliest recollections are literally of this wonderful earth – because I enjoyed nothing more than shaping the soil in our large garden, and modelling in mud, or by adding some branches, building little shelters. For me, these basic elements, earth and water, have always retained their mystery, and I pity the pink-eyed products of today's sophisticated computer games who are nevertheless deprived of the basic lessons and skills to be learned from creative handwork: for the child can only develop fully if hand and mind explore together (Fagan, 1983b:1).

This is reminiscent of Barragan's reflections on his youth, echoing Fagan's subscription to a synthesis of context and universality:

My earliest childhood memories are related to a ranch my family owned near the village of Mazamitla. It was a pueblo with hills, formed by houses with tile roofs and immense eaves to shield passersby from the heavy rains which fall in that area. Even the earth's colour was interesting because it was red earth. In this village, the water

distribution system consisted of great gutted logs, in the form of troughs, which ran on a support structure of tree forks, 5 meters high, above the roofs. This aqueduct crossed over the town, reaching the patios, where there were great stone fountains to receive the water. The patios housed with stables, with cows and chickens, all together. Outside, in the street, there were iron rings to tie the horses. The channelled logs, covered with moss, dripped water all over town, of course. It gave this village the ambience of a fairy tale. No, there are no photographs. I have only its memory (Frampton, 1983a:152).

The domestic setting of Waveren, Fagan's Newlands family home, with its tennis court, gardens on a slope and the nearness of the then uncanalized Liesbeeck River at the bottom of Avenue Road, fostered a love of nature's elements to which Fagan's buildings still respond to this day. Fagan recalls that he and his brothers dug holes and tunnels in their garden and that tree houses were built in the trees of the surrounding streets, much to the horror of the parents who worried that their children might be buried alive or fall to their deaths. Fagan notes (c. 1975:14) that he also built tree houses and through this experience learnt the value of protection from the elements. He also noted that someone who bought his house with money rather than labour was poorer for the experience (or lack of it).

Fagan made his first boat when was about ten years old, and recalls that by the time he had completed construction (a year later) he had outgrown it but that it did not matter as the building process was its most satisfying aspect. He and his brothers sailed this boat with its makeshift sail of iron marked sheets at Zeekoevlei (see Fig. 6.7). Fagan recalls that a neighbour, dr. Petronella van Heerden, felt sorry for him and donated an eighteen foot dinghy which he sailed at Zeekoevlei and eventually in Hout Bay.

My first boat, a homemade tin canoe, was also launched here on the Liesbeeck, where it flowed as a clear mountain stream under Thibault's Watervoort Bridge past the brewery and Newlands Mill. I soon graduated to Zeekoevlei, and my fascination with sailing ever since has been in the basic, yet infinitely complex interaction of wind, water and weather, with always the romance of the protective vessel contrived through man's ingenuity to harness these forces, while providing him with shelter in an alien environment (Fagan, 1983b:2).

The love of boating must have been instigated by Fagan senior (although Fagan recalls that his father did not really have an interest in sailing). A photograph (see Fig. 6.7) of Fagan at about eight years old at Bloubergstrand depicts the family on an outing, with his father assembling a boat with Hannes and Henry seemingly more involved! (see Fig. 6.7) Fagan recalls (c. 1975:2) that a neighbour, Fred Smithers, had taught him to sail on the yachts Stella and Viking, and that he eventually sold his yacht Westwind to Fagan for R10 000. This yacht would be renamed Suidoos and would eventually win the Cape to Uruguay race in 1982<sup>162</sup>.

---

– <sup>162</sup> See Chapter 6.5.1.



**Figure 6.7. Left:** The three Fagan brothers on the Liesbeeck river with their tin boat. Johannes is on the left and Henry on the right. c. 1933 (Fagan archive, undated). **Right:** Fagan and family at Bloubergstrand, c.1931. Fagan is on the left in earnest conversation with his mother (Fagan archive, undated).

Fagan is unsure of how Cape based architecture became an important inspiration in his architectural life. He notes that the family did not go on any specific visits that would have exposed them to Cape architecture, but that his parents did take them on drives to Stellenbosch and Swellendam (Fagan, 2008b). A photograph (see Fig. 18 right) of Fagan and his younger brother in Cape Town Gardens suggests that the children were taken to places of historical interest.

Fagan notes (2010b) that he and his brothers' trips to his uncle's sheep farm in Hopetown (Fagan J.J., 2009) over the winter school holidays probably fostered an interest in vernacular buildings and their contextual appropriateness.

An uncle on my mother's side, Pieter Theron, was member of parliament (sic) for the Hopetown area (close to the Orange River, south of Kimberley) and stayed with us in Newlands every year during the session. Every year we three boys would then spend our June holiday month on his farm – go by steam train to Witput station (the stop before Hopetown) and get fetched by horse cart for the twelve miles to the farm.

Fagan also indicates that he has always had a love for the Karoo and its vernacular buildings (Fagan, 2011a). He was, however, certainly aware of the traditions of the Cape.

One of my most enduring childhood memories are attending a Bo-Kaap wedding or mysterious khalifa with my parents and that great champion of the Cape Muslims, I D du Plessis (Fagan, 1992a:5).

## 6.2. Second initiation (1943-1951): Tertiary education – Engineering and Architecture

Fagan's activities in the period from 1943 to 1946 alternated between musical creativity, mechanical invention and a 'part-time' education in engineering.

### 6.2.1. University of Cape Town

The next few years were spent quite literally making music for my first sports car, and meeting the maidens; as these included my future wife. I have never had cause for regret but it did contribute to my dropping half way out<sup>163</sup> of the civil engineering course to study architecture, as my mother had always suggested I do (Fagan, 1983b:2).

After Fagan completed his high school education in 1942, he enrolled in a mechanical engineering course at the University of Cape Town (UCT). In those days, there were no prior applications or interviews. Fagan's older brother Hennie took him to registration day and as Fagan was unsure what to study he ended up standing in a queue with his brother. The intimidation of Dean Duncan 'Drunken' Mc Millan resulted in Fagan signing up for an engineering course (Fagan, 2012), but the course did not hold his attention and the fact that he did not do his homework (Fagan, 2010b). He did however have an affinity for geology and applied mathematics. Fagan (2010b) recalls the subjects he had to study:

I can't remember clearly, but think we had geology, pure maths, applied maths, engineering drawing, theory of structures and mechanical engineering which was taught by Prof Duncan (Drunken) Mc Millan, a Scott. The only thing I remember from his classes was his story of two bursary applicants who appeared before him. In taking notes, he purposely broke his pencil, took out his knife and re-sharpened it while the student looked on. He did the same with student number two, who immediately took out his own pocket knife and said "May I, sir?" So Prof asked "And who got the burrrrsary? An engineer must be a prrrrrractical man." So I at least learned something at Varsity, and to this day will never venture anywhere without my pocket knife.

During the four years at the University of Cape Town, Fagan developed his technological pursuits and musical hobbies, but also met his future wife.

### 6.2.2. Gwen Gannon<sup>164</sup> – wife, mother and business partner

Gwen Gannon was born on 25 September 1924 in Victoria West to an Irish father (see Fig. 6.8), Benjamin Charles Gannon and an Afrikaans mother, Helena (Nauti) Johanna Elisabeth Basson.

---

– <sup>163</sup> Fagan, in fact, remained in the course for 4 years, from 1943 to 1946.

– <sup>164</sup> See detailed curriculum vitae in Appendix A.

After her father disappeared in 1926<sup>165</sup> while they were living in Durban, she and her mother went to live with friends in Irene in Pretoria. Not long thereafter, on her uncle's insistence, her mother moved to Stellenbosch to teach music while Gwen was forced to stay with her uncle in Moorreesburg (Fagan, 1999:14). At the age of seven she finally went to live with her singer-teacher mother in Stellenbosch (Fagan, 1999:70), attending Rhenish Girls' High School. After school she started her medical training at the University of Stellenbosch, and one year later switched to the University of Cape Town where she completed her MBChB degree in 1948.



**Figure 6.8.** **Left:** Gwen at 18 months old with her father (Fagan, G.E. 1999: 9). **Middle:** Gwen in her twenties (Fagan, G.E. 1999: 182). **Right:** Fagan and his wife among the euphorbias in the Eastern Cape next to Fagan's Adler sports c.1944. (Fagan, archive, undated).

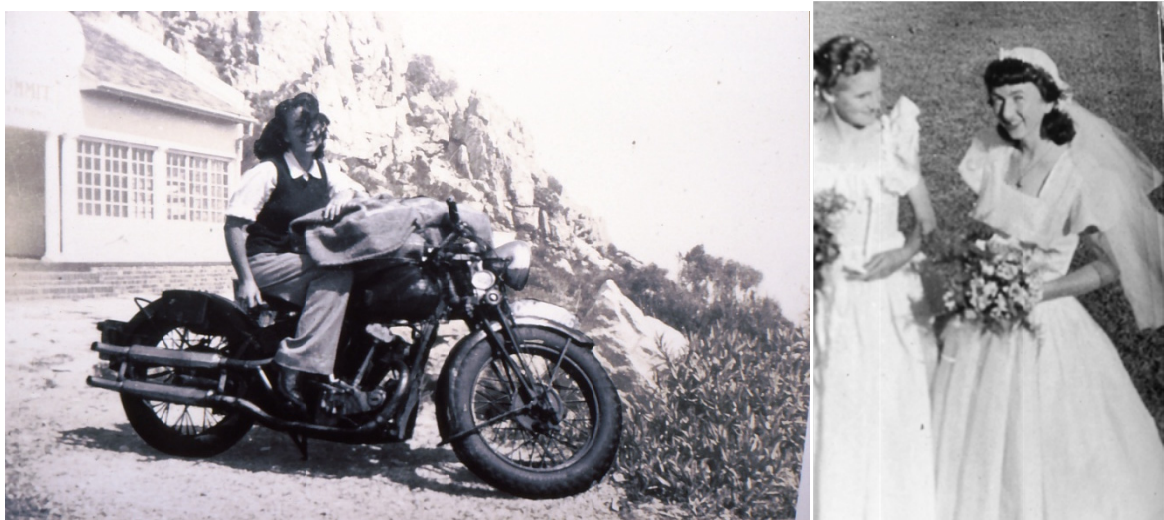
In 1944, Fagan met Gwen Gannon while she was studying medicine at UCT. They were both in their second year of study. Gwen recalls (Fagan, 2011a) that she first encountered Fagan at the women's residence where a group of friends met to play a game called 'Beetle Drive'. Fagan's friends evidently teased him about his mother's insistence that he court Suzanne Krige, but Fagan was not particularly interested. Suzanne eventually married another prominent and now deceased Cape Town architect, Revel Fox. Gwen notes that the connection between her and Fagan came a little later when Fagan drove past her when she was returning to the medical residence after singing lessons in Mowbray. They chatted and thereafter Fagan would rev his motorbike under her window and often take her out on drives (see Fig. 6.8). Gwen notes that she had just lost her mother and that the connection with Fagan was 'nice to have'. The relationship cemented itself when Gwen was invited by a residence friend to her parents' house in Onrus. There Gwen discovered Fagan camping in a little tent eating only condensed milk! She (1993:27) notes that during her medical training (1942-1948) she

... learned to use all my senses, but especially the most important: common sense. And I learned above all that there was a difference between thinking and cerebrating. To cerebrating and again to cerebrating. I had had the perfect training for an architect! In the meantime I had met an engineering student who spent most of his time playing

– <sup>165</sup> He returned to South Africa a few years later, begging for forgiveness for leaving his family. After promises of getting work in Durban and reuniting the family, a divorce was requested as he had met a widow on the boat from England who demanded he marry her! (Fagan, G.E. 1999:26).

guitar in the Cape Town night clubs and because his parents were concerned for his future, they sent him to Pretoria where he could become an architect, for that is what he was really destined to be, his mother thought and she was right. "n Vaal mot"<sup>166</sup> my family called him, but I found him handsome and loved him, and soon became intensely interested in the models which I helped him build over the holidays, and the books we read together on "modern architecture".

After completing her studies she practised general medicine, moving to the Transvaal to be closer to Fagan who had begun his studies at the University of Pretoria two years earlier. They visited each other during the university vacations (Fagan: 2011a) after Gwen started her medical housemanship at Standerton in 1948. This was the nearest hospital to Fagan she could find. She later completed a stint as an army doctor at One Military Hospital in Pretoria during the latter half of Fagan's studies and his Volkskas tenure. Fagan married his long time girlfriend in the Moederkerk in Stellenbosch (Fagan, 2011a) in December of 1949, in his fourth year of study (see Fig. 6.9).



**Figure 6.9.** Left: Gwen on Fagan's motorbike c.1942. Right: Gwen at her wedding in 1949 (both Fagan archive, undated).

Fagan's relationship with his wife is an extremely close one. Mamma (as he affectionately calls her) has been part of his office as a researcher, supervisor and organizer (Fagan. G, 1993:27) since work began on restoring buildings in Tulbagh damaged after the 1969 earthquake.

*My vrou Gwen, het haar mediese werk gelos om voltyds navorsing oor die huise te doen (Fagan, 2004:2).*

[My wife Gwen left her medical work to do full-time research on the houses.]

Over the last few years she has also become a sounding board for his designs and she is the only one he trusts with this role (Fagan, 2008b). According to Lourens (2008) and Swanepoel (2012), she has also been involved in detail planning issues such as kitchen design and landscape design

— <sup>166</sup> It was obviously a derogatory remark, meaning he looked like a grey moth flitting among the veld flowers (Fagan, 2012).

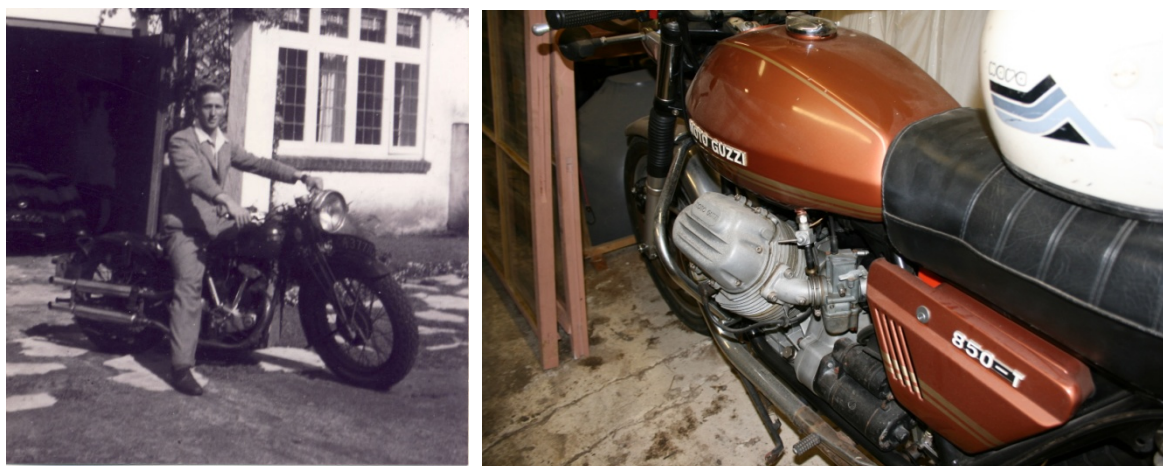


(Meintjies<sup>167</sup>, 2012:1). She has now taken control of landscape design projects (a passion since childhood) and in 1988 published a seminal work *Roses at the Cape of Good Hope*. In 1995 she received a PhD from the University of Cape Town for a study titled "An introduction to the man-made landscape at the Cape from the 17th to the 19th centuries". She is Fagan's right hand woman and possibly idolises him in the same way that his mother idolised his father. They are constantly in one another's company and often still hold hands. They finish one another's sentences (she more than him) and share everything including a plate of food.

### 6.2.3. Music and technology

During his engineering studies, Fagan was clearly more interested in pursuing his technological interests and bought about thirteen second-hand motorcycles (see Fig. 6.10) that he repaired and sold on, finally purchasing, with the proceeds of his sales and music performances, an Adler<sup>168</sup>, a German sports car.

One "dark and stormy night" in Rondebosch Avenue my friend Denis and I came out of his house. Two pairs of bare feet were sticking from underneath my Adler racing looking car. I made my presence known and two young boys in shorts came out from under the car eagerly asking for technical details of the motor, all the while dripping and shivering. When departing they made me promise to let them buy this vehicle. I turned to my friend laughing, surely these youngsters can't afford to buy the car. Denis told me they can, they are the sons of Judge Fagan (Kreft, 2005:8).



**Figure 6.10.** **Left:** Fagan on his B.S.A. 500cc "Police Twin" motorbike outside his parents' house in Newlands c.1944 (Fagan archive, undated). **Right:** Moto Guzzi motorbike still parked in the basement of Fagan's 156 Bree Street Office in Cape Town (author, 2010).

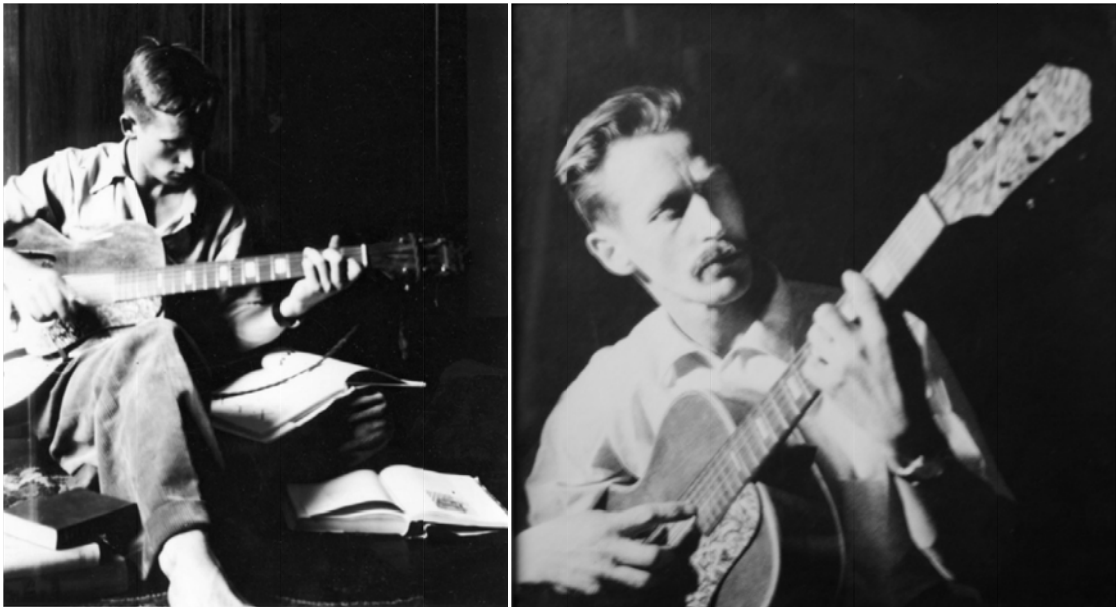
An interesting aside is that an advert was placed by the African Continental Trading Company in

---

– <sup>167</sup> See Appendix J.

– <sup>168</sup> The east elevation of Fagan's thesis project (see Appendix G) has an elegant representation of an Adler parked behind a tree.

the famous South African *zero hour* (sic) publication of September 1933 for a viewing of the Adler motor car. The advert notes that professor Walter Gropius of the Bauhaus had been appointed as the chairman of the Adler design committee. Fagan's journey into the Modern Movement had been unknowingly initiated! This does, however, demonstrate Fagan's natural appreciation of the relationship between function and beauty.



**Figure 6.11.** Fagan and his guitar as student in the 1940s and later as father and architect in the 1960s (Fagan archive, undated).

As a counter to the exploits in technology, Fagan played the guitar (see Fig. 6.11) in a night club jazz band in Long Street and at the ice rink in Plumstead, with fellow musicians Albie Louw on accordion, Boetz Ohlson on piano, Dick van der Velde on clarinet and saxophone and Gertjie Schreuder on drums (Fagan H.E., 2005). As the acoustic guitar was not loud enough, Fagan made his own amplifier with the help of a friend, Dirk Elzinga. According to his brother Hannes it was beautifully crafted in wood, but it weighed a ton! (Fagan J.J., 2009).

During this period Fagan extended an initial foray into flying. Fagan's younger brother, Hannes, recalls that Fagan made kites as a child, often with water bags attached, that could be mischievously released on unsuspecting locals (Fagan, J.J., 2009). Fagan and Hannes later took up flying lessons at the UCT flying club at Youngsfield. There the students could hire a Piper Cub for one pound ten shillings which, according to Hannes, was cheap at the price.

Apart from boats, I was always fascinated by flying machines, inspired by Leonardo da Vinci. (I even wrote my notes in mirror-writing, which I can still do!) I built a glider, which refused to fly when I jumped off a high wall with it. So when the opportunity arose through the UCT flying club, I was sure to grab it. Being younger, Hannes probably started two years later (Fagan, 2010b).

Fagan then started to take photographs from the air as a hobby, a passion which fostered the publication *Brakdak: flatroofs in the Karoo* in 2008. Another contextual influence had been added to his already honed and intimate understanding of water and earth. A technological spin-off of the "flying" photography was Fagan's construction of his own enlarger (Fagan J.J., 2009).

The time had come for Fagan to commit to a career after four years of recreational studies, musical exploits, merry maidens and technological tinkering. His childhood forays had reached maturity. A deep understanding of climatic elements and the earth provided a solid foundation for the experiences of the next few years. Although Fagan's 'part-time' engineering training did not result in a formal qualification it had provided him with a new (perhaps more scientific) set of tools that concretised his already developed sense of making.

#### 6.2.4. The University of Pretoria

In 1947, Fagan registered for architectural studies at the University of Pretoria, after his mother had decided that it was time for him to leave the distractions of the Cape and attend what she regarded as one of the best upcoming architecture schools. Fortunately, the time spent on technical courses in the UCT engineering course did not go to waste:

I was exempted from having to repeat these subjects in my architecture course in Pretoria. I had also become a very good draughtsman, and probably have a better sense for engineering than most architect colleagues (Fagan, 2010b).

Fagan was educated at an important juncture in South Africa's architectural history. The Martienssen Modern Movement influence of the Witwatersrand School of Architecture (Wits) was waning after the architectural fraternity realized that aspects of orthodox modernism were not appropriate for the South African climate:

A rapid development of domestic architecture followed, culminating in Casa Bedo, Johannesburg (1936 by Cowin & Ellis), a free plan form and Miesian spatial organisation adapted to local conditions by wide eaves and a hipped roof reminiscent of Herbert Baker<sup>169</sup>. Easily replicated by developers and speculative builders, it was also a model for many houses of the next two decades (Prinsloo, 1995:27).

These new directions created a unique synthesis of mediated Modern Movement ideals, a waning colonialist neo-Classicism and the influence of the enduring qualities of local climate and materials.

---

– <sup>169</sup> In the author's opinion the Casa Bedo roof displayed the influence of Lloyd Wright rather than that of Baker.

#### 6.2.4.1. Educational context

The first school of architecture in South Africa was established at the Witwatersrand University in 1921 under the guidance of professor Geoffrey Pearse (McIntosh, 1956:22). Soon thereafter part-time classes, taught by private practitioners and architects from the Public Works Department, also commenced at the Pretoria Technical College. In 1927, the Architects and Quantity Surveyors' "Private" Act was passed, which laid down regulations for education (McIntosh, 1956:22). When the Department of Architecture and Quantity Surveying was established at the University of Pretoria in 1931, an agreement was struck with Wits to allow Pretoria students to obtain a diploma in architecture from the Johannesburg institution. A fully fledged Pretoria school of architecture was established in 1943, when professor Adriaan Meiring (1904-1979) was appointed as its first chair. Part-time diploma and full-time degree courses commenced in March 1943 in the extramural building of the University, located in Vermeulen Street next to the State Library (Nation, 2008:1). A regional influence could already be detected in the type of staff professor Meiring appointed. Meiring (1967:18) recalls:

When I started the School of Architecture in 1943 and had to look for fellow architects to assist me, I appealed in the first instance to Eaton. He willingly agreed, giving us a great deal of his precious time and soon became an inspiration to both students and staff.

#### 6.2.4.2. The academic environment

In retrospect, Pretoria had a very new broom and was untrammelled by ingrained prejudice or established tradition. Then there was the liberal choice of lecturers from a wide range of those who were acknowledged to be the leaders in their field. But probably the inevitable post-war feeling of sudden freedom and promise of an end to shortages and the development of Industry contributed most of all towards the creation of an inventive and innovative School. It was hardly surprising, in these circumstances that the first few graduates reached, in their turn, the top ranks of the profession (Nation, 2008:11).

The academic environment in Pretoria was very different to that of Cape Town. The language difference played a small role but the intimacy of the small classes and the friendships Fagan developed were instrumental in his developing passion for architecture. He notes (1996:5) that there were only six students from his first-year class of thirty-six (Nation, 2008:1) who finally graduated, and that the small classes had allowed them to receive intensive attention from the staff members of the department. Shelagh Nation (one of Fagan's classmates) describes her recollection of him as a student:

One of the older and luckier students was Gawie Fagan ... He had, in 1947, just switched from engineering to architecture and had a little Adler sports car that seemed

to be made rather like a Tiger Moth, out of canvas stretched over timber ribs. During the University rag period, in the small hours of the morning, I recall being driven in the Adler the wrong way round and round Church Square, hoping fervently that all the traffic officers were safely at home in bed. We were fortunate to have Gawie with us in the class because he set a really high standard for us all to compete with (Nation, 2008:8).

The students learnt a lot from each other and also devoured any new publication on architecture. Johan Jooste<sup>170</sup> suggests that there was a culture of exploration and enthusiasm at the university, so much so that students located and shared information on the latest architecture (Jooste, 2008a). Fagan's library at Die Es in Camps Bay still contains many of these publications, including the *Oeuvre Complète* by Le Corbusier. His relationship with Karl Jooste<sup>171</sup> (1925-1971) (see Fig. 6.12) is particularly important in this regard as they shared a common love of the 'master's' work, as did most students at the time.

We considered Moerdijk's work 'way-out', we knew his churches and obviously the library but thought we knew much more than him. We did not appreciate him. We were revolutionary and Le Corbusier was our hero (Van Kerken).<sup>172</sup>



**Figure 6.12.** Karl (Karel) Jooste probably in his mid forties (Photo courtesy of his son Johan Jooste, 2012).

Karl Jooste met with Le Corbusier three times and Johan Jooste (2008a) recalls that each time his father returned he was even more of a disciple. This influence as well as Jooste's working stint with Eaton must have rubbed off on Fagan. Johan Jooste recalls that his father and Fagan (after they had qualified) would visit each other regularly and spend long evenings discussing architecture, in particular Le Corbusier and Niemeyer (Fagan, 2011a). Karl would smoke his pipe and both would drink whiskey (Jooste, 2008a). Their long lasting friendship ended after Jooste's untimely death in a car accident in 1971 at the age of forty-five (Jooste, 2008b:5).

---

– <sup>170</sup> Johan Jooste is the son of Karl Jooste, a close classmate of Fagan.

– <sup>171</sup> Karl was in his third year when Fagan arrived.

– <sup>172</sup> Henry van Kerken completed his diploma in architecture at the University of Pretoria in 1957.

### 6.2.4.3. The lecturers

Professor Meiring continued with his appointment of architects with a seemingly regionalist bias. Basil South (1915-1952), Cole Bowen (1904-1976) and Hellmut Stauch (1910-1970) played the largest roles in Fagan's education.

#### 6.2.4.4.1. Basil South

It is uncertain when Basil South (1915-1952) (see Fig. 6.13) was appointed in the department (Steenkamp, 2003:5), but he died from the effects of tick bite fever while still a lecturer. Steenkamp notes (Nation, 2003:6) that he was a gentle giant and that the students could relate to him easily. He was knowledgeable and theoretically inclined, but with a definite pragmatic bias that distilled a design to its purest form.



**Figure 6.13.** Basil South. Photograph taken by Fagan presumably on the student trip to Cape Town c.1947 (Fagan archive, undated).

He emphasized the importance of context in all its guises and the importance of architecture as part of the arts and in fact craft, it seems, as he got students to help him build his boats (Nation, 2001). He taught through pointed and critical comment as he strolled through the studio, praising where he felt it was deserved (Nation, 2008:6 and Fagan, 2008a). Fagan (2008a) notes that he learnt the most from South and that he respected him more than any of the other lecturers. Nation (2008:20) recalls that she lived in

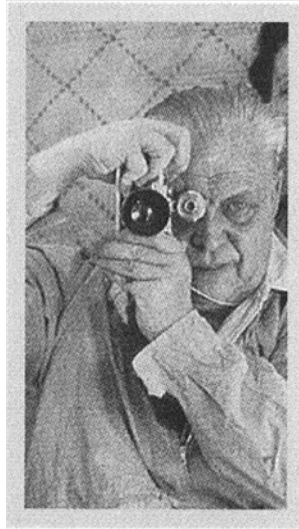
... Springbok Flats in Park Street, a three-storied block designed by Basil South. It was compact and comfortable and had a small balcony with French doors opening onto it and a view of a lovely old orchard. The building was well detailed and very easy on the eye, for he had designed it with successively decreasing floor heights, a subtle and effective device and one which few architects would have used.

#### 6.2.4.4.2. Cole Bowen

R. E. Cole Bowen, a creative designer of individuality and great sensibility, worked with a clear and simple rationale and in his work and particularly his dynamic teachings at the school of architecture, introduced an adventurous attitude of independent, if less academic, thought (Anon, 1965:45).

Robert Edward Cole (Coley) Bowen (1904-1976) (see Fig. 6.14) taught at the University of Pretoria between 1946 and 1953.

He was a big man with an even bigger personality. He'd lost a leg to a landmine in North Africa a couple of years earlier and it seemed to us that he'd lost his good humour with it. The prosthesis clearly was a source of pain and irritation so we didn't expect gentle treatment, but hardly anticipated what came next. The words were forceful. "...Don't expect an easy ride... You'll work your backsides off ... I'll be teaching you Building Construction..." Then came some cautionary phrases, designed to cut down to size anyone who still felt the satisfaction of completing the school years and making it to University. Then he turned on the four of us<sup>173</sup>, his face flushed. "And as for you bitches," he said, and the four of us goggled "you don't belong in architecture. Women don't. I suppose you're here for the ride... so sit down and shut up..." (Nation, 2008:introduction).



**Figure 6.14.** Cole Bowen behind his camera (Steenkamp, 2003:4).

The descriptions given (1953:36) in the SAAR of Cole Bowen's series of courtyard houses built between 1950 and 1951 give insight into his way of working and possibly his way of instruction. He notes that the needs of the family are paramount, while climate and materials act as the other design informants. In his houses, living and sleeping spaces are all orientated north with roof overhangs carefully calculated to keep the sun out in summer. As the clients were not wealthy, an

---

— <sup>173</sup> Nation is referring to the fact that there were only four women in the class of thirty-six.

economical and efficient layout had to be designed. Entrance halls are done away with and services are combined to allow the

... alleged 'machine for living' to function on 'tick-over' and 'full-revs' without a sticky trail of services stretching embarrassingly in front of family living and entertainment (Anon, 1953:37).

Nation (2008:9) notes that Cole Bowen was a practical architect and insisted on students knowing exactly what it was they were drawing, so much so that items of clothing had to be measured so that shelf sizes could be designed accordingly. Fagan (2008a) criticises Cole Bowen's meticulous detailing and fastidious knowledge of housewives' cutlery collections as this approach limits flexibility and orders people's lives too much.

#### 6.2.4.4.3. Hellmut Stauch (1910-1970)

Hellmut Stauch (see Fig. 6.15) was born in Germany, studied design at the Ittenschule and thereafter at the Technische Hochschule Berlin, and emigrated to South Africa in 1935 (Steenkamp, 2003:3). He joined the department in 1943 (Steenkamp, 2003:4) and taught there for five years. He was well liked and respected by the students. He was a perfectionist (Steenkamp, 2003:6) in functional terms and, probably due to the economic circumstances of the time and his Modern Movement training, believed that nothing must be wasted, least of all space. He taught, not by discussion, but through his 6B pencil.



**Figure 6.15.** Hellmut Stauch (Garden and Home, May 1969).

Fagan recalls that Stauch was his third-year studio master and that he taught through example:

*Hellmut Stauch, my derdejaar ateljeemeester (en vir wie ek terloops bowendien bewonder het oor sy seilvernuf), het sekerlik vir ons deur sy voorbeeld eerder as deur self-waarneming probeer leer: Ek voel steeds dat sy klein dubbel-afdak huisies, altyd op die 3'- 4½" standaard staalvenster-module, klassieke voorbeelde van 'n vindingryke streeksboukuns was (Fagan, 1996:8).*



Fagan admired Stauch not only for his architectural abilities but also for his sailing prowess (Fagan, 1996:8) and indicates (2008a) that he was on a very good footing with Stauch because of this common sporting connection. Fagan was particularly taken by Stauch's small double-pitched houses on the standard steel window module of 'three foot, four and half inches' and regards them as classic examples of an inventive regionalism.

Nation<sup>174</sup> (2003:2) mentions that Stauch preferred the angled roof with no ceiling as it limited wasted space and added to the drama of the room. Peters (1998:176) describes Stauch's houses of the 1930s as having attenuated rectangular plans with north orientation, Miesian structure and space and an interior-exterior connection. The economical use of space and the direct relationship between building and landscape must have inspired Fagan. Stauch's later interpretations of his experiences in Brazil fostered a more haptic and organic feel in his architecture, particularly evident in his own house Hakahana. Fagan recalls the value of teachers like Stauch:

[S]o many lessons are still to be learned from work by architects like Eaton (Fagan, 1991a:8),

and

... Eaton for having learned from Frank Lloyd Wright's Prairie houses and Hellmut Stauch (I had the privilege of having both these men as studio masters) who brought with him the discipline of the Bauhaus and later the intoxicating South American forms after his visit to Brazil (Fagan, 1991b:10).

#### 6.2.4.4.4. Norman Eaton (1902-1966) (see Fig 6.16)

Norman Eaton, a graduate of the University of the Witwatersrand and protégé of Gordon Leith, although an adherent of the contemporary school, retained his sensitive appreciation of materials and detail, and displayed an independence in his attitude towards design which he has described as an endeavour to achieve visual quality and character which bears reference to the general 'feel' if not the actual form of man-made things, peculiar to the African continent (Anon, 1965:45).



**Figure 6.16.** Norman Eaton (<http://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/archframes.php?archid=450&countadd=0>) [Accessed: 12/04/2012]).

---

– <sup>174</sup> Nation worked for Stauch, eventually becoming a partner in his firm.

Norman Eaton was a lecturer<sup>175</sup> during Fagan's tenure (Fagan, 1996:5), but Fagan also learnt about his buildings through classmates like Felix Viljoen and Karl Jooste who worked for Eaton for a number of years. He also remarks (2008b) that he probably did not appreciate Eaton's work even though they saw Greenwood House evolve through its construction process. Fagan describes him as a 'moelike ou stront' [a difficult old shit].

Nation (2008:10) notes that

... we were fortunate in having Norman Eaton also still living and working in Pretoria, and the masterful use of materials in his buildings impressed and influenced us. We always hoped that he would become one of our lecturers but he had no interest in students and turned down all approaches from the University.

#### **6.2.4.4.5. Gordon McIntosh (1904-1983)**

Gordon McIntosh, second graduate of the Witwatersrand School of Architecture and one of the original three protagonists of the modern movement, retained a firm belief in the logic of functionalism in its broadest sense, and combined his unique ability in structural design with a dignified restraint in architectural design and a sensitive use of material (Anon, 1965:45).

Prinsloo (1995:27) notes that McIntosh was one of the first proponents of the international and orthodox Modern Movement style in South Africa. House Munro in Pretoria exemplified the spatial and formal characteristics of Mies van der Rohe's and Walter Gropius's work. Nation indicates (2008:15) that he was a quiet man and did not inspire the students in the school much as he was not flamboyant enough. She also describes that "the 'form follows function' principle dominated and this married very well with the frugal approach thrust upon us all by general post-war shortages".

McIntosh taught theory of structures and was associated with the University of Pretoria's engineering department in 1929 as a part-time lecturer, but was later closely involved with the establishment and organization of the school of architecture.

#### **6.2.4.5. The course**

The architecture course at the Pretoria School was driven by technology and function with little theoretical investigation (Fisher *et al*, 2003:69). The history of architecture was important but Nation (2003:1) notes that very few students enjoyed it. According to Johan Jooste the course included a

---

– <sup>175</sup> Harrop-Allin (1975:57) notes that Eaton taught design classes on a part-time basis but stayed only for one year thereafter, acting as an external examiner only.

substantial focus on the Renaissance, as he was handed down a large collection of books on the art and architecture of this period (Jooste:2008). Fagan (1992a:2) recalls that Sir Bannister Fletcher's *History of Architecture on the comparative method* was his bible. Steenkamp (2003:8) observes that

... there was little appreciation for 'old' architecture ... Herbert Baker's work was thought outdated and over designed. Moerdijk, who had been instrumental in establishing the school, was considered too traditional.

It was the Modern Movement architects Le Corbusier and Niemeyer that the students found most inspiring. Fagan (Fagan, 2011a) notes that Niemeyer differed in his modernist approach from Le Corbusier as he was not a "slave to the right angle". Steenkamp notes (2003:8-9) that Mies van der Rohe's work was also admired but that Frank Lloyd Wright's work was seen as too fussy. Fagan remembers that when they (as students) saw Ronchamp for the first time it was as if they had been hit by a ton of bricks.

Gawie Fagan's reaction sums it up: "Ons dog die ou is die kluts kwyt" (We thought the man had lost his grip on reality) (Steenkamp, 2003:8-9).

But the progressive aspects of Modernism were not lost. New ways of thinking about space and advancements in technology still played a major role in the new architectural direction, and a synthesis was achieved between international trends, modern ways of living and local contextual requirements.

To this day Fagan stresses the importance of initial sketches that express the essence of a design. His archives are a testament to this approach as there are hundreds of A4 pages (quite often recycled ones) covered with tiny explorations in client files. This discipline was inculcated in the Pretoria students:

Thumbnail sketches and proportional systems were pushed as Johan Jooste elaborates: "Jooste and his associates spent most of their professional lives developing proportional systems based on classical ratios and the work of Hambidge and Le Corbusier (Jooste, 2008a:1).

#### 6.2.4.6. Fagan's student work<sup>176</sup>

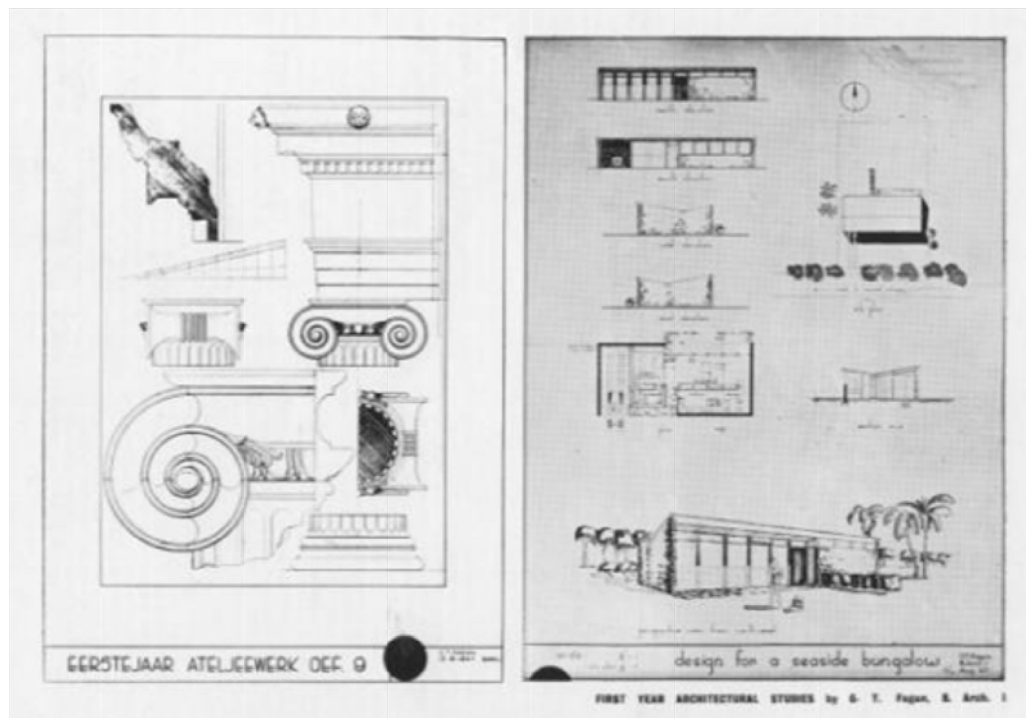
Only three of Fagan's first-year projects have survived. Two were published in the SAAR<sup>177</sup>, which attests to the high regard the lecturers had for his work. The first (a midyear drawing) is a meticulously drafted construction of classical details (see Fig. 6.17). The second, dated August 1947, is a design for a seaside bungalow (see Fig. 6.17), which demonstrates a close affinity with the work of Stauch through its use of the butterfly roof and modular organization. Although the plan shows a

---

– <sup>176</sup> See Appendix G for more images of Fagan's student work.

– <sup>177</sup> Volume 32 of 1947 p.284.

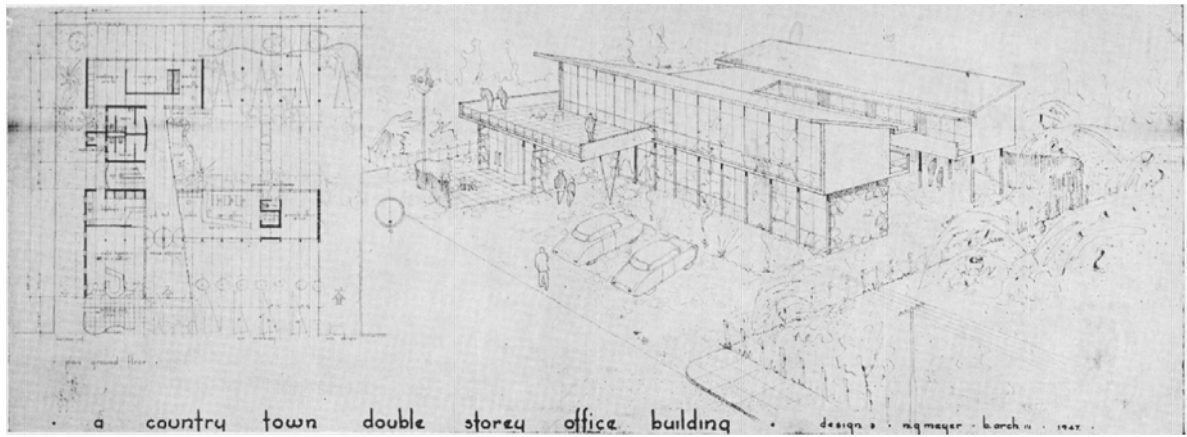
Miesian control of space through connected planes, there is a definite regional inflection in the use of stone walls and roof overhangs. The projects also demonstrate excellent draughting skills and a mediated Modern Movement architecture more aligned with Marcel Breuer<sup>178</sup> (through the influence of the bi-nuclear plan) (see Fig. 9.17) and the regionalist leanings of Le Corbusier in houses such as the Villas Mandrot and Le Sextant in France (Tzonis, 2001:119) or Villa Errazuris in Chile (Tzonis, 2001:116). Meticulous attention is paid to planning, probably due to the influence of Cole Bowen and Stauch.



**Figure 6.17.** First year architectural studies prize to G.T. Fagan (Anon, 1947:284).

The beginnings of an attenuated plan are also visible and a third-year project by N.G. Meyer in the same issue of SAAR (1947:285), a double storey office block for a country town, is telling in its similarities to Fagan's bungalow. A rigid grid, mono-pitch roofs and stone walls form the architectural palette (see Fig. 6.18). The influence of the teaching staff and mediated Modern Movement responses were already clearly visible in the student work.

— <sup>178</sup> See Appendix J.



**Figure 6.18.** Third year architectural design prize to N.G. Meyer for his country town office building (Anon, 1949:285).

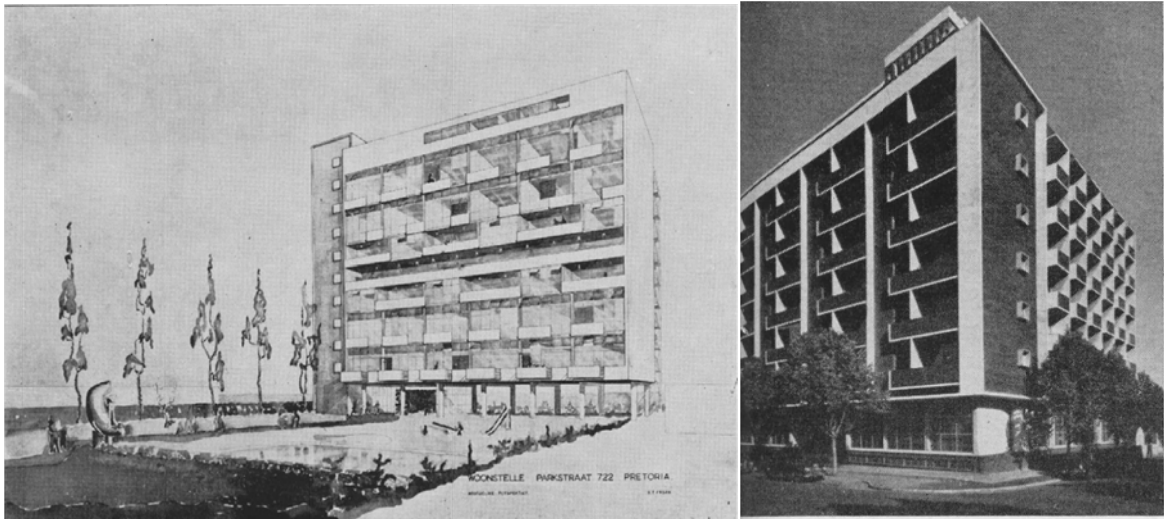
The third first-year project has survived in Fagan's archives only as a photograph of a model. The attenuated plan of a seaside (lakeside perhaps) cabin with mono-pitch roof exhibits many of the previously described influences (particularly the extended deck and ramp reminiscent of Breuer's houses), but the dialectic of the tectonic and floating upper floor and of the grounded basement walls set the scene for many of the architectural devices that Fagan would use in his later career.



**Figure 6.19.** Model of Fagan's bungalow (Fagan archive, undated).

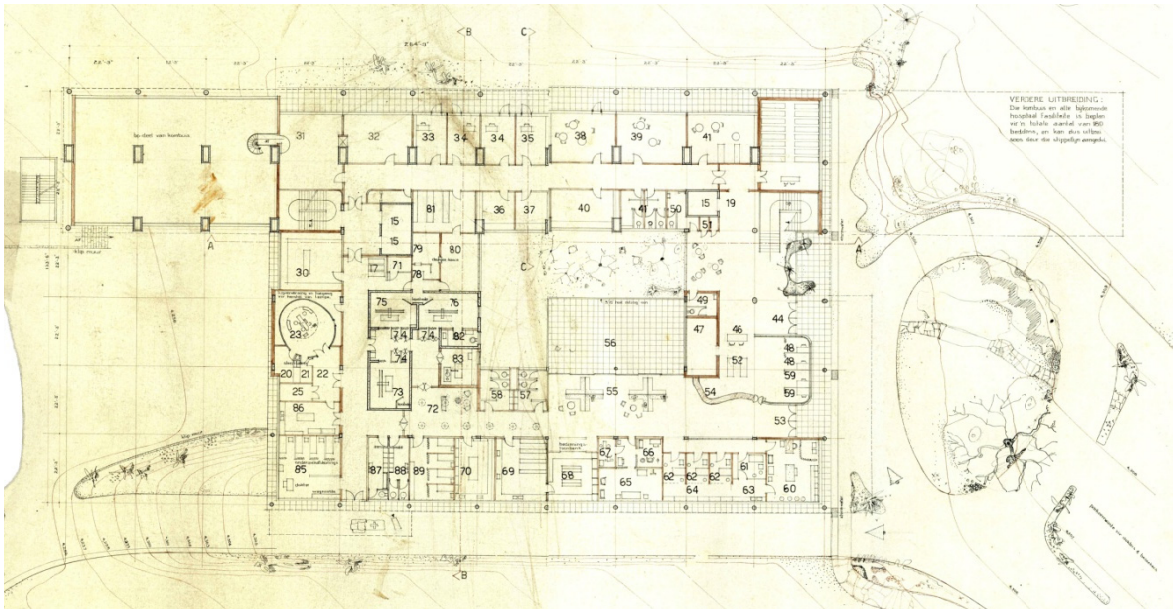
Fagan's third year project for a block of flats in Pretoria (see Fig. 6.19) displays a more subtle regional inclination in its use of materials and balcony sun screening. It is reminiscent of Fassler and Cooke's and Hanson, Tomkin and Finkelstein's reinterpretations (Chipkin, 1993:170-171) of projecting Modern Movement balconies, and of Harold Le Roith's<sup>179</sup> (1906 to ?) Cranbrooke Hotel in Johannesburg (Fassler, 1956:178) (see Fig. 6.20).

— <sup>179</sup> See Appendix J.



**Figure 6.20.** Left: Fagan's third year project for a block of flats in Pretoria (Anon, 1949:240). Right: Cranbrooke Hotel Johannesburg by H. H. Le Roith (Fassler, 1956:178).

Only one university project remains as a complete set of drawings in Fagan's archives, namely his final-year project (see Fig. 6.21). A 120-bed children's hospital for Pretoria represents a mediated Modern Movement response but does not reflect a particularly regionalist approach. It is reminiscent of Breuer's Whitney Museum in its panelled facade treatment and limited number of windows, but the roof garden and entrance porticoes are closer to Niemeyer's reinterpretations of Le Corbusier's Dom-ino system.



**Figure 6.21** Plan of Fagan's thesis project (Fagan archive, undated).

Fagan's university designs display experimentation with both the orthodoxy and vernacularism of Le Corbusier's oeuvre, and mediations of the work of other Modern Movement architects such as Breuer internationally and Stauch locally. The projects mediate between Modern Movement canon and local conditions albeit in a very limited way. In the hospital project, there is little plasticity to be

noted save for the entrance counter, the X-ray room and roof garden elements reminiscent of the Unité d'Habitation. It is interesting to note that Jooste's early built work was also made in an orthodox Modern Movement way and Johan Jooste notes (2008a) that it was only really in the 1960s that his father's work began to take on a vernacular feel with organic forms, probably influenced by local rondavels and materials of an earthy quality. Fagan's house for his parents, designed in 1951 when he was a final-year student, certainly exhibits a formal regional response to the Cape vernacular, but still closely follows Le Corbusier's work in terms of organization and movement. One singular moulded element peeps out of the east-facing living room wall (see Fig. 6.22). Was this a hint at the plastic vernacular manipulations that were to follow?



**Figure 6.22.** East edge of living room at House Keurbos (1951) (Photo courtesy of Leon Krige photographer, 2010).

#### **6.2.4.7. Fagan the student**

Fagan lived in Rondegeluk opposite the Union Hotel in Church Street, accommodation that was paid for by his parents who financed his life and studies fully while he was studying in Pretoria (see Fig. 6.23). During this period of intensive academic exploration, Fagan's creativity in terms of music and mechanical technology took a back seat.



**Figure 6.23.** Fagan as student in Pretoria at Tiny Town after an attack by burglars c.1946 (Fagan archive, undated).

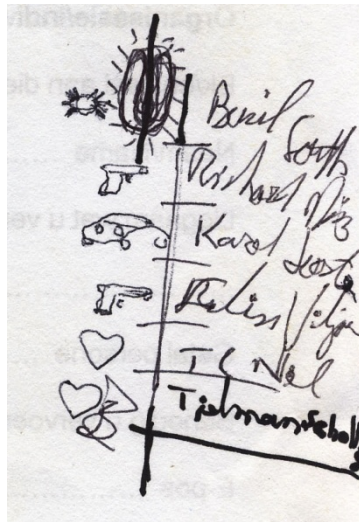
His new-found passion was all consuming (Fagan: 2010a) and he got good marks as he was interested in the course. But a constantly developing and inventive pragmatic bias still lurked in his architectural life:

Drawings were prepared with a T-square and a set-square on a board propped up on bricks on trestle tables. Parallel rulers became available but were generally too expensive; Gawie Fagan made himself one and many students followed suit (Nation, 2003:8).

Students were encouraged to work for practising architects while completing their studies. Fagan's two close friends, Felix Viljoen and Karl Jooste (see Fig. 6.24), both worked for Eaton. Fagan notes (Fagan, 2010b) that he worked for Jeff Mazureik in Pretoria during some of the university holidays as well as for Wynand Smit (Fagan, 2011a).

Practical experience played a large part in student development and most of the bigger firms tried to accommodate one or two students as trainees and general dogsbodies during the 3-month year end break. There was fierce competition for the few jobs available (Nation, 2008:11).





**Figure 6.24.** Diagram, drawn by Fagan in 2008 on the back of sketches for the unbuilt House van Zyl (2007), that describes the untimely deaths of personalities associated with Fagan at the University of Pretoria. Fagan's lecturer Basil South died of a heart attack after suffering tick bit fever, Richard Monnig committed suicide after an extramarital love affair, Karl Jooste died after an accident in his Lotus sports car, Felix Viljoen also committed suicide after being diagnosed with a fatal disease and T.C. Nel and Tielmann Scholz both died from heart failure.

Fagan finished his Pretoria University education in December 1951, the same year and time that Le Corbusier presented plans of his vacation cabin in Cap-Martin, France as a birthday present for his wife (Tzonis, 2001:172). As Le Corbusier's career waned so Fagan's was just beginning.

### **6.3. Third initiation (1952-1964): The banks – corporate expression and regional inflections**

After completing his university studies in 1951, Fagan was persuaded to join Volkskas Bank<sup>180</sup> (see Fig. 6.25) as their in-house architect by a classmate, Mike Eksteen, who was already working there (Fagan, 2001). After Eksteen left, Fagan took over as architect in charge, remaining in this position for twelve years. Clyde Meintjies<sup>181</sup>, (2005:1) describes the working conditions:

Gawie's office was on a south-facing upper floor of the old Volkskas building in Pretoria, with a good view down onto Pretorius Street. Here we worked in one quite intimate space with room only for three or four drawing boards and a few filing cabinets. It was relaxed and informal although, as Volkskas amptenare (officials), we were required to wear a jacket and tie to work. Volkskas would have liked to see Gawie in a dark grey suit (like the rest of the "grey" men in the bank) but he always wore a sports jacket and flannels, like we did, and his tie was always loose and skew.

– <sup>180</sup> For more detail about the bank see *Van Akker tot Eik, die verhaal van Volkskas 1952 – 1981 [From acorn to oak: the story of Volkskas 1952 – 1981]*, published by the bank.

– <sup>181</sup> Clyde Meintjies (1936-) (See Appendix J) joined Fagan at Volkskas in 1959 and worked there until 1961. He later worked for Fagan in Cape Town from 1967 to 1969.



**Figure 6.25.** Fagan and Dr. Hurter, who was chairman of the board of directors of Volkskas bank, at the opening of the Strand branch in Cape Town on 24 April 1975 (Engelbrecht, c.1981:286).

### 6.3.1. Brakdakke

As Volkskas expanded its branches into little country towns all over South Africa, Fagan was required to do extensive travelling. His love of and experience<sup>182</sup> in flying and his frugal nature allowed him to persuade the Bank to lend him the money to buy a plane and pay him the same rate per kilometre as a motor car. As Fagan explains,

I had an increasing amount of car travel to do as we built and adapted buildings for the fast expanding bank. Often no bank car was available, when I would use my own car for 9 pence per mile. The travel time became excessive as our building portfolio expanded, so I suggested they get me a plane. I was clearly told that even the general manager did not have one, but when I offered to buy my own one if they would pay me the same 9 pence per car mile, I bought my trusty Tri Pacer on a bank loan (4,5% staff rate). At first I kept it at Wonderboom which was about eleven crow miles from the farm, and subsequently at home after building the hangar. Gwen says our pet monkey Chika would hear the plane approaching home before they could, and would start chattering excitedly (Fagan, 2010b).

The trips across the country to visit banks under construction or investigate the possibilities for new branches brought Fagan into contact with outlying areas that would have gone undiscovered by car. Slowly he began to document these places and buildings, and through this endeavour an appreciation for vernacular architecture was developed. As Meintjies (2005:3) notes:

He often flew alone, sometimes to Cape Town, and when these trips took him over the northern Cape he would from the air identify the (then) numerous brakdak farmsteads, later to go back and record them photographically. He always used his beloved Linhoff camera with its six-by-nine centimetre format and rise and tilt movement.

---

— <sup>182</sup> Meintjies (2005:3) notes that Fagan had chalked up more than a thousand flying hours in his log book while at Volkskas.

This endeavour was encouraged by the friendship Fagan developed with Barrie Biermann who was teaching at Natal University. Fagan recalls (2008b) that Biermann visited him at the Kameeldrift farm. Their common love of Karoo architecture drew them closer and Fagan recalls (2008e) that he was about to embark on a master's degree on bank architecture, but Biermann suggested he change the subject and photograph the flat-roofed Karoo houses on his trips. Fagan finally published these images in a 2008 publication entitled *Brakdak: flatroofs in the Karoo*, dedicated to Biermann. He recalls the encouragement he received from Biermann:

One of my most treasured mementoes of those days is a copy of Barrie Biermann's 'Boukuns in Suid Afrika', bought in 1957 and inscribed by him 'sterkte met die soek na Brakdakke' (all the best with your search for the flat roof) – for it was Barrie who inspired me even in those early days to look again especially at what is probably our most moving but least known vernacular architecture – that of the Karoo, which I had grown to love from the school holidays spent there annually (Fagan, 1983b:3).

The many flying trips (see Fig. 6.26) that Fagan made not only sensitised him to the differences in our physical and built landscape but also furthered his understanding of climatic elements and their relationship to form. The sense of control and haptic qualities of sailing were now extended to flight. The experiences must have echoed the description of a plane that Le Corbusier made in *Vers une Architecture*:

What you see in the photograph is the padded edge of a powerful machine; the dials by which you know its performance; the stick by which you dominate it; the map on which you choose where you want to go; the compass by which you know where you are going. In short, the poetic experience of flying an airplane (Passanti, 1997:447).



**Figure 6.26.** Left: Fagan's Tripacer in the Karoo with Fagan and presumably a bank official c. 1950s (Fagan archive, undated). Right: Fagan's Tripacer at Wingfield in Cape Town c. late 1950s (Fagan archive, undated).

Fagan became a skilled pilot, managing to land his plane on a very small runway at the Kameeldrift farm. Fagan notes (2010a) that it was a difficult landing due to the power lines and trees. Meintjies recalls their flights from the local Pretoria airport:

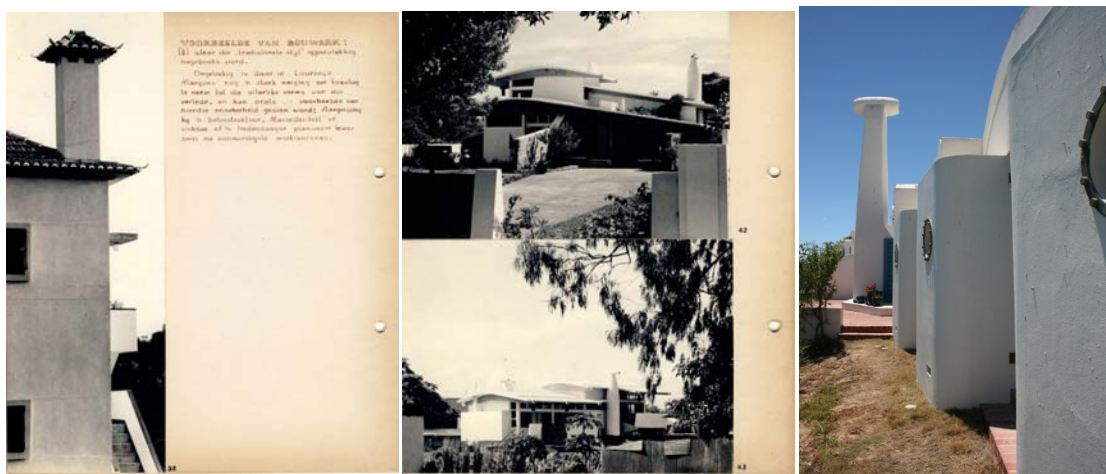
So began the period of "Zed Es Delta Golf Oscar". A call sign frequently made to the nearest flight control tower to advise that a small fabric-covered high-wing monoplane

– Gawie's four seat Piper Tri-Pacer, ZS-DGO – was in the air (the trailing wire aerial, with a little cone at its end, had been unwound). Usually from Wonderboom airport, having first done the pre-flight checks, draining any water from the carburetor (sic) or fuel tank, checking the controls and setting the gyro-compass. Then, as soon as it was possible to vaguely make out the horizon in the breaking dawn, we would take off (Meintjies, 2005:2).

In January 1955, Fagan, after convincing Volkskas management to allow him to make a trip to Lourenço Marques, documented old and new Portuguese architectural influences. Buildings are unnamed in the little document (Fagan, 1955) but their material and technological importance is described. A number of Pancho Guedes buildings are included. The Aeroplane house (See Fig. 6.27) is well documented and must have played a role in the development of the chimney at Fagan's Paradys house in 2003 but Fagan notes (2011b) that

... Guedes was certainly also an inspiration, but hunting for a yard for our caravel in 1988, I had visited the source in the Algarve ... where these imaginative traditional chimneys are common, and from where Guedes almost certainly got his own inspiration (see Fig. 6.27).

Fagan's visit to Portugal before sailing on a reconstructed caravel from Portugal to Mossel Bay in 1988 must have sensitised him to these influences.



**Figure 6.27.** Left: Fagan describes types of construction in Lourenço Marques but the image of the 'traditional' chimney is perhaps more telling (Fagan, 1955). Middle: Guedes's Aeroplane House with exaggerated chimney which possibly inspired the chimney at Fagan's Paradys house (Fagan, 1955). Right: Chimney at House Paradys (2003) (Author, 2009).

### 6.3.2. A new architectural approach

Fagan was pressurized to provide Volkskas with a corporate image, but resisted and persuaded them to adopt a more contextual approach. The place-specific bias of his Pretoria education had made its first indelible mark.

When I was resident architect for Volkskas, Gilbert Colyn was doing all the Trust Bank buildings. He sold his clients the "corporate image" notion, an easy way to replicate his black glass facades in many a hapless 'dorp' (little town). I had to convince Volkskas that their name in classic Roman brass letters would suffice, but that the buildings should otherwise be adapted to their environs – a more difficult route but one that would not violate any particular village atmosphere. That is why Mr C. L. Engelbrecht, head of Volkskas premises department, once said my buildings say "verskoon my dat ek hier moet staan" (I am sorry that I have to be here) (Fagan, 2008e).

Fagan recalls (2005a) that Volkskas could only invest twenty-five percent of its total capital in fixed property, and with the large number of banks that had to be designed or altered they had to work extremely economically. During the thirteen years Fagan worked for Volkskas he oversaw a rapid bank expansion programme with a portfolio of over two-hundred buildings, twenty-five being new projects (Fagan, 2010a).

### **6.3.3. The banks**

Fagan's new banks were designed with the functional principles of the Modern Movement in mind. They had clear plans and well defined zones of activity. Services were grouped with a Cole Bowen inspired tightness, and the regular grid of his student work and the use of Hambidge's proportional systems could clearly be seen in the regularised fenestration. The Belfast bank's butterfly roof developed the Stauch model through its ceiling manipulation. The mediated Modern Movement approaches learnt by Fagan also developed a haptic sensibility through the manipulation of light and materials. The latter began to play a large influence through Fagan's adaptation of local conditions to make the banks straddle the dual concerns of corporate image and local appropriateness. Although the buildings had stature they avoided a classical approach and because of their low and intimate scale they merged quietly into their surroundings. In the Cape Fagan designed his second interpretation of the Cape vernacular. His parents' house had initiated a concern for expressing the plastic qualities of local architecture and Fagan extended this in the Montagu bank (See Fig. 6.28), where large painted-brickwork portico columns provide stature but extend the plasticity of Keurbos's living room walls.



**Figure 6.28.** The Montagu branch of Volkskas as it existed in 2008. The street presence and corner treatment are still strong features while some of the interiors have survived in the new commercial arrangement (Author, 2008).

#### 6.3.4. Family life

This was also a time of expansion for the Fagan family, with four children (See Fig. 6.29) being born from 1951 to 1957. Henry Allan<sup>183</sup> was the first and only son, followed by three daughters, Helena Elizabeth in 1954, Jessie in 1958 and Alida in 1957. Later the two oldest children attended the local German school.



**Figure 6.29.** **Left:** Gwen and Henry shortly after his birth in 1951. **Middle:** Gwen and the first three children Henry, Helena and Jessie at the beach c.1956. **Right:** All four children posing for yearly family Christmas card c.1963 (All Fagan archive, undated).

A smallholding in Kameeldrift, outside Pretoria, was purchased from Basil South's estate after he died from tick bite fever (See Fig. 6.30). Here Fagan started a small dairy, probably inspired by the

– <sup>183</sup> Henry Allan Fagan (named after his grandfather on Fagan's side of the family) has established himself as one of the most creative structural engineers in South Africa. He practises from a restored building right next door to his father's office and has collaborated with Fagan on many projects.

experiences of the Hopetown holiday excursions. Fagan divided his time between Volkskas projects, the family and the dairy until the latter became unviable due to time constraints and it's being a drain on their finances. It was on the farm at Kameeldrift that Fagan began his first forays into building. The first project was the construction of a hangar cum garage (See Fig. 6.31) for the ever increasing modes of transport the family acquired, and a water tower to supply farming needs. Fagan (2010b) recalls that he welded the trusses and laid a few bricks every morning before going to the office. Meintjies (2005:3) notes that Fagan built

... the hangar on the farm with its home-made post-tensioned lightweight steel roof trusses with a span of 10 metres or more [and the] circular brick water tower with corbelled courses for the flared top ... (Meintjies, 2005:3).



**Figure 6.30.** Fagan and family with their workers on the Kameeldrift farm and the Tri-pacer ZS-DGO in the background c.1958. (Fagan archive, undated).

A further addition was a new living room with slanted front walls and a stone chimney to the existing house (See Fig. 6.31). These forms were reminiscent of the living room edge condition at his parents' Cape Town house and merged into the landscape through material and colour.



**Figure 6.31. Left:** Fagan's expanding family of vehicles. From left to right in the hangar: an Allis Chalmers tractor, Fiat Multipla car, Piper Tri-pacer ZS-DGO, Peugeot 403, BMW 600 bike and an International 3 ton truck (Fagan archive, undated). **Right:** Fagan's extension to the Kameeldrift house in Pretoria (completed around 1962) as it existed in 2008. The stone chimney and splayed walls are the hallmark elements reminiscent of the only house Keurbos (1951) completed by Fagan by that date (Author, 2008).

In 1960 Fagan took his wife on an extended overseas trip, shortly before their return to Cape Town.

[We] left four children with relatives, hired a Deux Chevaux in Paris, made a straw bed in the back and travelled 6 000 kilometers through Europe armed with a "Bannister Fletcher" and two pounds a day to spend. When we arrived home with swollen gums and scurvy skins, I felt my architectural education was complete (Fagan, G.E., 1993:27).

After the untimely death of Fagan's father on 6 December 1963, Gwen and the children returned to Cape Town almost immediately, to stay with Fagan's mother in her Keurbos home. Fagan remained in Pretoria to sell the farm and wrap up his work with Volkskas. He resigned in 1964 and returned to his home town after an absence of eighteen years. The lessons of a respect for place, an economy of approach and an inventiveness of form would not be forgotten. They would, in fact, provide the basis for a new career in heritage conservation and the start of an architectural practice that would produce a seminal array of domestic buildings. It was perhaps the distance from Cape architecture for such a long period that allowed Fagan to appreciate and comprehend its subtle nuances and underlying principles more clearly than if he had had constant exposure to it.

#### **6.4. Fourth initiation (1964-): Conservation work**

Architectural conservation has formed a very large part of Fagan's practice since he returned to the Cape in 1964 after his father's death, undertaking his first project La Dauphine in 1966.

So after packing our goods and chattels in Pretoria, we returned to Cape Town where I nailed a notice to a backroom door in Adderley Street. The ensuing years of practice have been fortunate in that the work has always included a fair proportion of restoration work (Fagan, 1983b:3).

Conservation work provides a counter to the new commissions that the office receives, but its influence is all pervasive and has had a major impact on Fagan's domestic architecture, as Chapter 3 has shown. Biermann (1975:2) describes Fagan's approach:

*Deur hierdie selfopgelegde dissipline het Fagan hom geskool om restourasie werk te onderneem met die geesdrif en toewyding wat gewoonlik net deur eie skeppingsdrang aan 'n kunstenaar ontlok word.*

[Through this self-imposed discipline Fagan taught himself to undertake restoration work with the enthusiasm and dedication that is usually only evoked through the personal creativity of an artist.]

Fagan describes the value of conservation work in his practice:

Let me immediately say: new design is much more exciting! But restoration also brings its rewards and through the research and work you feel part of our history (Fagan,



c.1975:8).

Fagan's conservation ethic has drawn on the contextual educational influences of the Pretoria architecture school, a design methodology of first principles instilled there, an understanding of place initiated by an upbringing in the Cape, and the twelve year stint for Volkskas where projects were undertaken in many different climatic and topographic locations and where the development of a sympathetic attitude to place and materials outweighed corporate aspirations. These influences stood Fagan in good stead for one of the first conservation projects he undertook – in the Tulbagh Main Street, the place where his father was raised. It was during this period that Fagan's wife began to play a more direct role in the office.

[I]t was to be nine years later before I was shaken out of my medical career by an earthquake and brought face to face with the practical problems and responsibilities of the architect when Gawie brought the wife he had been training for more than 20 years into his office to extend his personal role of researcher, supervisor and organizer for the restoration of 28 buildings in Tulbagh. And to assist with landscape design, a subject which had been my passionate interest since childhood (Fagan, G.E., 1993:27).

Fagan notes (2002a:1-2) that at that time there were few guidelines for conservation practice.

I have had to formulate my own ideas because, unless you want to refer back to Ruskin, or Pugin, or Kendall and Eaton closer to home, there was very little available by way of conservation guidelines in English when I received my first commission, namely the beautiful Franschhoek homestead La Dauphine in 1966 ... After all ICOMOS was only instituted in Paris in the 1960s, the York university course started in 1972 and the Australian Burra Charter was formed as recently as 1999.

But Fagan's attitude to conservation is not limited and does not result in a stagnant or singular formal solution. He approaches each problem on its own merits and as Frampton (2007) described it in a letter of recommendation for honorary membership of the American Institute of Architects:

... he has run the full gamut from an Afrikaans modernity bordering on pastiche to the hi-tech spectacular idiom that he has recently inserted into [the] traditional pitched roof fabric of Cape Town University.

The dialectics of conservation and preservation are clearly evident in Fagan's approaches to tradition, as he alternates between clearly articulated representations of the past to completely contrasting additions. The Tulbagh Main Street renovations replaced (in Fagan's view) what had been damaged in the earthquake of 1969<sup>184</sup>. At the Castle of Good Hope in Cape Town a lost complex of buildings were recreated, while at the other end of the scale additions to the Newlands Brewery, new Waterfront Clock Tower Bridge and the addition of the Infectious Diseases building at the University of Cape Town all provide stark contrasts with their existing fabric. The transformation

---

– <sup>184</sup> These were based on photograph of the town before it was Victorianised.

of the Bartolomeu Dias Museum in Mossel Bay expresses a middle ground approach.

There is another aspect of the examination of design sources which also affects the architect's approach to restoration. This is interpretive, considers the sequence of designs as a whole, and allocates the design tradition a place in the history of architecture. In the past there has been a tendency to consider the buildings at the Cape in isolation as a style in its own right, the so called "Cape Dutch Style", on the assumption that every country is entitled to its own architectural tradition and that every such tradition is the product of indigenous evolution (Biermann, 1960:24).

Fagan's career has, over the last sixty years, moved seamlessly between conservation and new work, the former providing valuable constructional and historical knowledge and the latter new inspiration. He has successfully mediated the dialectics of conservation and preservation and imitative and inventive design approaches.

## 6.5. Balance – a healthy mind and a healthy body

Now although [I have] remained passionate about Architecture (that is why we still go to the office every day) my other interests have given me a lot of pleasure, because I have also pursued them with intensity (Fagan, 2002b:2).

Two non-architectural pursuits have remained dominant in Fagan's life to this day: firstly sport and secondly, music and an appreciation of the arts.

### 6.5.1. Sailing

Sailing is Fagan's favourite sport (Fagan, 1988:1). But Fagan notes (1983d:1) that winning is not everything.

Simply because I do not regard myself as a champion or a winner at my favourite sport of sailing, in the sense of winning at all costs ... [rather that] enjoyment of the sport is the primary consideration (Fagan, 1983c:1).



Figure 6.32. Fagan and his yacht *Suidoos* which is still moored in the yacht basin of Cape Town's harbour (Author, 2010).

In preceding chapters it has been noted that the experiences of flying and sailing have heightened Fagan's contextual sensibilities and practical approach. After Fagan left the Cape his sailing exploits diminished, but he did build a canoe for his children that they used on the river near their Pretoria farm. He later purchased a Loch Fyne 3-in-1 dingy which the family sailed on the Pienaarsriver Dam (Fagan, H., 2005:2).

Fagan took his love of sport to new levels through his international sailing exploits. He bought a yacht Westwind from Fred Smithers and renamed the 12,1m sloop Suidoos (South East)<sup>185</sup> after a few conversions. Fred had taken Westwind on its first South Atlantic race in 1971, Fagan completing the same voyage in 1973 and 1976. On its fourth journey in 1982 Fagan was the winner of in his class in the Transatlantic Yacht Race from Cape Town to Bahia in Uruguay ending 3<sup>rd</sup> overall. In recognition of this achievement he received a national sporting award from the then South African President Marais Viljoen (1915–2007). But Fagan notes that it is not the winning of trophies that is important to him but the close contact with nature. The 1982 race was the first in which satellite navigation could be used but Fagan refused to employ the sophisticated system, preferring to use traditionally proven methods to maintain close contact with the elements (Anon, 1982:46).

I fully agree that satellite navigation, and especially now GPS are amazing all weather aids. But if they completely displace traditional celestial navigation, we have lost yet another link with nature. For we then place dependence on a man-made system and sever our contact with the heavenly systems – the sun, the moon and the stars – that have ruled men's lives since the beginning of time (Fagan, 1992b:2).

Fagan also exerts the same control over the yacht races as he does in his office. His daughter Helena, her brother Hennie and a young medical student accompanied him on the 1973 Cape to Rio race. She recalls (2009) that her father "respected Hennie's opinion regarding the navigational and tactical decisions and argued and discussed everything with him first, but would always give the final orders". Fagan has also made the epic journey from Portugal to Mossel Bay in a replica caravel to celebrate the 500th anniversary of Dias's arrival in the Cape in 1488 (Fagan, H., 2005:2). The vessel is now housed in the Mossel Bay museum, one of Fagan's most important restoration projects.

### **6.5.2. Music**

The Fagans were a musical family. My father's uncle Gideon qualified as a composer and conductor at the Royal College of Music in London and became involved in theatre music and [was] conductor of the BBC from 1939 to 1942. He then became the

---

– <sup>185</sup> This name reflects the famous and incredibly powerful south-east wind that in summer draws a 'table cloth' of clouds over Table Mountain in Cape Town.

assistant conductor of the newly formed Johannesburg City Orchestra till its disbandment in 1952 when he became director of the SABC music department where he was involved for the next ten years. After retiring to Rondebosch, he taught conducting, orchestration and composition at the SA College of Music for the next five years till he settled in Betty's Bay where he carried on working on his own compositions. Gideon's two elder sisters also qualified at the Royal Academy as music teachers and their younger brother, Johannes, was regarded to be the most promising South African composer of his time when he committed suicide as result of the sudden death of his fiancé in 1920 (Fagan, H. E. 2005:5).

Music has continued to play an important role in Fagan's family life through his inherited ability to play the piano and a learned affinity for the guitar. He has passed the gift of music and the dedication necessary to perform to all of his children who have learnt to play a musical instrument. Many an evening has been spent on the 'dining room stage' in Die Es performing for Fagan and his wife. Fagan's son Henry (2009) recalls that the family group also won an eisteddfod. A family photograph shows the close bond developed through this pursuit. One of Fagan's daughters, Helena, who started a career in architecture, switched over to music, focusing on the clarinet. But it seems as if the days of performing 'professionally' were over as Fagan's all-consuming dedication to his profession limited the pursuit of music to a family hobby.



**Figure 6.33.** The 'sound of music' at the Fagan home. c.1966 (Fagan archive, undated).

## 6.6. The man

Fagan is “a reserved, thoughtful, courteous man with a wry sense of humour” (Anon, 1991:15). One of Fagan's most long-standing employees, John Wilson-Harris, (2012) notes that "Fagan is not an

outgoing boisterous soul but he has a keen sense of humour and has great wit. I think it is partly this intelligent humour rather than gratuitous confidence, so often found in successful designers, that has allowed the design solutions that differentiate Fagan's buildings from others". The limerick below gives some insight into the mischievous side of Fagan's personality and his ability to manipulate language as well as he does architecture!

"The captain of this lugger  
He was a foul old bugger!  
He wasn't fit to shove a shit "

but this is where my wife said she didn't think this particular sea ballad suitable, since many yachtsmen were now in fact yachtswomen! Then I thought of;

"I must go down to the V&A  
To old Bertie's pub on the quay  
And all I ask are some tall beers  
And a girl to drive home for me" (Fagan, 1992b:1).

Fagan is a small man with a very large and powerful handshake. His stature belies his physical strength no doubt honed through years of sailing and other physical activity. He is incredibly fit and there have been no major concerns about his health save for an ailment that befalls most men later in their life. He shuffles slightly now, struggles to hear at times and relies on his wife to remind him about events of the past. He is "generally easy going, patient and even tempered" (Meintjies, 2012:1), but makes his feelings known when he is upset. Ex staff members such as Lourens (2008), Dodds (2009) and Serritslev (2009) have commented that he would never vent his anger in front of a client or builder but would later let everyone in the office know how he felt about a particular situation. His daughter Helena recalls (2009) Fagan's temperament.

We did not dare put a foot wrong. He was a very loving father but could get extremely angry. As little kids he would scream the car to a halt, throw us out of the car and make us walk home. There were times when poor Ma could not talk to him for days. But he taught us self-discipline and to aim for the best. Mediocre was not acceptable.

His unassuming persona is both welcoming and disconcerting. He listens intently to conversation, contributing only when necessary but making pointed, intelligent and often cutting remarks. He is vehement when he disagrees with a point of view and can argue a point convincingly. He is certainly strong minded and as Meintjies (2012) notes when commenting on their days together at Volkskas, "although open to debate and discussion, Gawie was always in design control, knew what he wanted and usually got it". This has been confirmed by Fagan's most longstanding employee Moira Serritslev (2009) who notes that although various tasks have to be performed by different staff members, Fagan makes all the decisions.

At eighty-six years old Fagan still works an eight-hour day. He, his wife and their black toy poodle arrive at 8 am in the morning, before all the staff have arrived, from their parking space in front of the old store doors, entering the restored triple storey grain house at the working level (Serritslev, 2009) (see Fig. 6.34). The left-handed Fagan sits at his desk at the head of the stair looking down on his secretary Rozelle and even farther down to the entrance stairs and front door on Bree Street (see Fig. 6.34). The Heath Robinson door closer, comprised of a stretchable rope tied to a hook, is a testament to Fagan's *boer maak 'n plan* attitude. At 1 pm Fagan and his wife leave in their car to have lunch, usually at the Royal Cape Yacht Club<sup>186</sup> in the harbour preferring to have their main meal at this time of the day (Serritslev, 2009). They return after their daily sojourn with a customary "doggie bag" and, with a higher pitched voice, Fagan lovingly dishes out morsels to his pet that retires to its basket at the feet of his wife. But this unassuming looking dog aggressively barks at any newcomer that may venture up the stairs, caringly protecting its owners.



**Figure 6.34.** **Top left:** Basement of 156 Bree Street. A partly completed plane can be seen in the background. **Top right:** The steep open tread wooden staircase leading from Bree Street to the reception area. **Bottom left:** Façade of the old grain store now Fagan's office. **Bottom right:** Reception area with piano to the left and boardroom behind the mustard coloured curtains. (All Author, 2009).

An office ritual is cake and tea on a Friday morning, when all the staff get together. On these and

— <sup>186</sup> Fagan has always been loyal to one or another restaurant over the years, preferring to frequent a chosen location for quite a while.

other mornings of the week the gathering is called together by the office assistant Bridget's tea bell. The office is usually vacated at around 5.30 pm, after the traffic has subsided (Serritslev, 2009), and Fagan makes his customary rounds to check that doors are locked and windows closed. They return home on the scenic drive to Camps Bay where Fagan reads and often walks the dogs in the nearby nature reserve. The well-worn books in Fagan's library are a testament to his prolific reading skills. The author also witnessed him devouring a modern architecture book at Paradys in 2009. He often uses little note pages for writing comments on important issues.

Fagan and his wife have both admitted that they are not very socially inclined, preferring to stay at home and read or listen to music. Fagan prefers one on one conversations with someone who has something interesting to say (Serritslev, 2009), and in this situation he is very giving and easy to commune with.

## **6.7. Summary**

Fagan's childhood experiences laid the foundation for a thorough interrogation and understanding of context. He developed an appreciation of the earth and its qualities through his tunnelling exploits in the garden, the building of shelters and the moulding of mud and clay. Initial gliding forays sensitised Fagan to the effects of air, while boating and sailing synthesised the effects of air and water on the human body. These influences allowed Fagan to develop an inventive attitude that, as time progressed, was honed into an intuitive ability to manipulate all things technological and respond to all contextual influences. Hand and mind were developed equally while natural talents seamlessly combined with creative nurturing from parents, family and friends.

Fagan's engineering training built on his natural abilities but was limiting as a creative outlet. Music, maidens and motorbikes filled this gap and led to musical ensembles, a long-standing relationship and inventive outputs. A Pretoria School architectural education heightened creative abilities and downplayed hobbies. Here Fagan reconciled a pragmatically focussed and mediated Modern Movement education with the requirements of place and new ways of living. He synthesised the orthodox architecture of his mentor, Le Corbusier, with the weighty place-based influences of his lecturers South and Cole-Bowen and practitioners Stauch and Eaton.

The twelve years at Volkskas Bank honed Fagan's contextually biased education through a developed appreciation of place as he travelled the country by air. He skilfully persuaded Volkskas to limit a corporate approach to bank design and opt instead for a sensitive approach to place. Throughout the rest of his career Fagan has moved seamlessly between the design of new buildings and conservation projects.