

# SECTION A

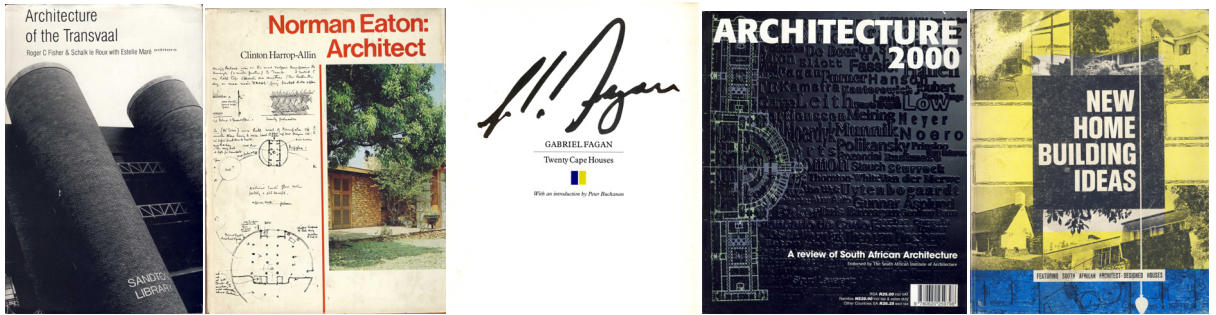
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## PRELUDE

**This section introduces the study, its constituent parts and describes the methodology for the assessment of Fagan's domestic architecture**

# Chapter 1

## INTRODUCTION AND PROPOSAL



*Architecture of the Transvaal* (Fisher et al. 1998). *Norman Eaton: architect* (Harrop-Allin, 1975). *Twenty Cape houses* (Fagan, 2005). *Architecture 2000* (Prinsloo, 2000). *New Home Building Ideas* (Wale, c. 1964).

**This chapter sets the scene for the study:**

The architect Gawie Fagan will be introduced.

The context of the problem will be outlined.

The problem statement will be set.

Assumptions will be stated.

The research strategy will be argued.

Delimitations will be justified.

Terms will be explained.

The importance of the study will be motivated.

## 1.1 Introduction

The domestic architecture of Gabriël (Gawie) Fagan, an architect based in Cape Town, South Africa, is a unique heterotrophic<sup>1</sup> synthesis of the principles of Cape vernacular architecture<sup>2</sup> and Modern Movement<sup>3</sup> (see Fig.1.1) attitudes to function and space making, following a 'regional-modern'<sup>4</sup> architectural education. It forms a new architectural language that expresses mediated typological transformations of its informants.



**Figure 1.1.** Left: Cape vernacular architecture (Fagan, 2012b). Right: Villa Savoye (1928) at Poissy by Le Corbusier representing the epitome of Modern Movement expression (Author, 1989).

It is not architecture at rest. It does not rely on a homotopic<sup>5</sup> formality or a rigid reinterpretation of vernacular or Modern Movement typologies. It is suffused with tensions, contradictions and syntheses and expresses a formal hybridity. Fagan's architecture represents a unique synthesis, a quality rarely encountered in the history of South Africa's built environment.

An analysis and critique of Fagan's domestic architecture is necessary to bring to the fore the unique contribution that he has made to the discipline of architecture in South Africa.

## 1.2 Problem context

Gabriel (Gawie) Fagan was born in Newlands, Cape Town, South Africa on 25 November 1925.

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- <sup>1</sup> In a biological sense, heterotrophic organisms have to make use of partially synthesized ingredients from other simpler organisms to build up their body constituents (Bullock & Stallybrass, 1986:47). See Chapter 2 for a more detailed explanation.
  - <sup>2</sup> See Chapter 3.
  - <sup>3</sup> See Chapter 4 for more detail on this definition.
  - <sup>4</sup> The architecture school at the University of Pretoria was established in 1943, and developed a regionalist stance to architectural teaching in contrast to the orthodox modernist teachings of the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) architecture school in Johannesburg.
  - <sup>5</sup> Porphyrios (1982:2) defines homotopia as "establishing the frontiers of an uninterrupted continuity".

He has been a practising architect for more than sixty years<sup>6</sup>, has a portfolio of over five hundred projects and has received more than twenty-five awards for his work<sup>7</sup>. His work has also been widely published both nationally and internationally.

*Op vakgebied presteer Gawie Fagan in veral drie opsigte: as vernuwer met gewaagde nuwe ontwerprigtings; as aanpasser van nuwe ontwerpe by bestaande bouwerk, en as hersteller van behoudenswaardige geboue (Biermann, 1975:1).*

[Fagan excels in his profession in three areas particularly: as an innovator of new and risky design directions; as an adapter of new designs to existing buildings; and as a restorer of conservation worthy buildings].

In a newspaper report<sup>8</sup> Fagan's wife Gwen (see Chapter 6.2.2) noted (with reservations) that Peter Buchanan<sup>9</sup> regards Fagan's own house in Camps Bay, Die Es (1965) (see Fig 1.2), as being one of the best buildings of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After a visit to Die Es with his University of Cape Town students in 1970, Lindsay Falck (1970:1), now professor of architecture at the University of Pennsylvania, remarked as follows:

For me it is always a breath of fresh air- and a jog - to my conscience to come out and see what you have achieved, I would have to go a very long way to see a finer main living space or standard of individual craftsmanship in such smaller things as the closet doors, etc.



**Figure 1.2.** Die Es, Camps Bay, Cape Town (1965): street and garden views (Author, 2009).

Buchanan (2006:48) notes that Fagan's architecture

... belongs to the Cape more profoundly than that of any other architect. Informed by his deep knowledge and love of the Cape, it grows from its landscapes, climate, history and culture. His own home, Die Es in Camps Bay, is a masterful

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– <sup>6</sup> Fifty of these years in his birthplace, Cape Town.

– <sup>7</sup> See Appendix C.

– <sup>8</sup> Die Burger, Friday 25 July 2008.

– <sup>9</sup> An international author and critic for the Architectural Review worked for Fagan after completing his studies at the University of Cape Town.

demonstration of just this and, as a convincing synthesis of modernity and local tradition, is an exemplar for others to follow.

Fagan's work is certainly internationally recognized, as witnessed in his 2008 trip to Boston to receive honorary membership of the American Institute of Architects<sup>10</sup>, and the numerous articles that have been published in international journals like *Casa da Arbitare*<sup>11</sup>, *The Architectural Review*<sup>12</sup>, *AV Monographs*<sup>13</sup>, *Architektur, Innenarchitektur*, and *Technischer Ausbau*<sup>14</sup>. In the 1985 UIA International Architect publication on Southern Africa, Beck (1985:48) noted that Fagan's Camps Bay house

... relies on a poetic reading of the site and a feeling for the vernacular which is abstracted in a sensitive modern manner without any hint of kitsch or pastiche in the white stuccoed walls and Cape Dutch chimney.

Architecture South Africa, the official journal of the South African Institute for Architecture, supports this view:

Like so many gifted architects, he has certainly been regional, yet enjoys an international esteem (Pretorius & Raman, 2006:50).

Fagan's architecture is firmly rooted in time and place. It does not attempt to self-consciously create a regional South African architecture, but presents a new understanding and interpretation of Cape vernacular architecture together with Modern Movement attitudes to function and space making.

The architect is among those attempting to create South African architecture which understands historical vernacular without duplicating it, responds to the site and the particular environment generated by the climate, light, etc., and develops the free plan – an appropriate form to the casual way of life (Beck, 1985:48).

### 1.3 Problem Statement

The main problem entails a critical analysis of Fagan's domestic architecture so as to define its uniqueness in the South African architectural landscape, and the contribution the architect has made to the establishment of a place-specific architecture that is nationally and internationally recognized.

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– <sup>10</sup> Die Burger, Saturday 3 May, 2008; see Appendix D for letters of nomination.

– <sup>11</sup> April 2004, p. 98-109.

– <sup>12</sup> March 1995, p. 79-81.

– <sup>13</sup> Issue 108, July/August 2004, p. 34-37.

– <sup>14</sup> Issue 1-2, 2007, p. 140-144.

South Africa has produced few architects who have achieved international prominence or have produced seminal work that has been published internationally. Similarly, there are few published examples of critical evaluations of the body of South African architects' work and

... much of the historiography needs urgent revision to bring it in line with current discourses of space (Fisher *et al*, 2003: 74).

There are very few up-to-date publications on South African architecture available (Fisher *et al*, 1998:74).

Gilbert Herbert's doctorate and subsequent book on the work of Rex Martienssen<sup>15</sup> (1905-1942) and Clinton Harrop-Allin's record of the work of Norman Eaton<sup>16</sup> (1902-1966)<sup>17</sup> are the only non-autobiographical sources that attempt to investigate the life and work of seminal South African architects. These publications date from the 1970s and little in the same vein has been written subsequently, save for a self-publication by Revel Fox<sup>18</sup> (1924-2004), an Italian publication on the work of Roelof Uytendogaardt<sup>19</sup> (Vio, 2006) and a 2010 publication by Jo Noero<sup>20</sup> on his own work. A very recent monograph on the work of Adèle Naudé Santos (1938-) and Antonio de Souza Santos<sup>21</sup> is a welcome contribution, specifically to the legacy of Modern Movement influence in South Africa. In this publication the architects describe their intentions in an introductory essay, and prof. Lucien le Grange<sup>22</sup> provides a limited contextual summary. However, the descriptions of the houses are limited in their critical content.

There are also few architects in South Africa that have consistently won awards for their work and fewer even that have managed to do so for over fifty years. Fagan<sup>23</sup> is one such architect. His work is not well researched and although a self-publication, *Twenty Cape Houses*, was released in 2005, it contains a limited descriptive text that does not contextualise or critique his domestic architecture. It also does not tell us about the life of this seminal architect or his influences and philosophies.

All the architectural ideas, theoretical positions, inspirations, influences and

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– <sup>15</sup> See Appendix J.

– <sup>16</sup> See Appendix J.

– <sup>17</sup> Herbert's book is more critical in its evaluation while Harrop-Allin's is more descriptive.

– <sup>18</sup> See Appendix J.

– <sup>19</sup> See Appendix J.

– <sup>20</sup> See Appendix J.

– <sup>21</sup> See Appendix J.

– <sup>22</sup> Prof. Le Grange was a member of staff of the Department of Architecture at the University of Cape Town

– <sup>23</sup> Fagan has received sixteen Awards of Merit and a Gold Medal from the South African Institute of Architects, as well as four Gold Medals from other national bodies, a State President's Gold Award, two honorary doctorates, honorary membership of the American Institute of Architects, and three sports awards, amongst others. See Appendix C for a full summary of awards.

contemporary reassessments are left for the reader to speculate about. The book does not give interpretation, it asks for it (Wolff, 2006:5).

The book makes light of questions of his identity, glossing over the rich biographical opportunities to critically contextualize his background and strongly held social, cultural and political convictions (Murray, 2006:57).

Indeed, Fagan (1983c:50) has himself noted that “I have seldom bothered to document my own finished work – nor has anybody else”.

This study will attempt to address the lack of critical enquiry into Fagan's work through an analysis of the dichotomies, tensions and mediations that exist in his architecture. It will demonstrate that there are heterotrophic and typological tendencies present in the domestic oeuvre and that they represent a unique synthesis of the local Cape vernacular and aspects of the Modern Movement. It will attempt to provide a clear understanding of the man and his philosophies and through this process will add to the critical debate on South African architecture.

Fagan's work will firstly be contextualized, after which an analysis will be undertaken to determine how external and internal influences have impacted on the design of his houses and how these have contributed to the development of a unique South African architecture.

## **1.4 Assumptions**

1.4.1 The first assumption is that no current critical analysis of Fagan's domestic architecture exists.

1.4.2 The second assumption is that Fagan's domestic architecture has not yet been accurately analysed in relation to international and South African architectural history.

1.4.3 The third assumption is that Fagan's domestic architecture has not yet been analysed as an entire body of work. This process would be important in order to identify trends, patterns and developments.

1.4.4 The fourth assumption is that the current limited publications on Fagan's domestic architecture are not critical, do not clearly identify influences nor explain the development of a seminal architectural vocabulary.

## 1.5 Research Strategy

The study will employ both descriptive and normative approaches. It will be descriptive in the sense that it will "gather knowledge about the objects of study but avoid trying to bring about any changes in the objects"<sup>24</sup>.

The study will be normative in the sense that it will try to bring about a change in *comprehension* of the architecture under scrutiny and will thus be qualitative in nature. Fagan's domestic architecture will be contextualised in terms of both national and international theory that specifically focuses on regional-modern standpoints, as Fagan's architecture demonstrates similar attitudes to context and form making<sup>25</sup>. The study will also be intensive in that it will limit the number of case studies to Fagan's domestic oeuvre as "houses represent a consistent scale and functional typology where patterns can more easily be discerned" (Atkins, 2008: 135), while "the individual architect-designed house is a distinct category of artistic and cultural production" (Davies, 2006:10).

The study will need to be iterative as pertinent facts might be difficult to collect until enough buildings have been analysed<sup>26</sup>. Blundell Jones remarks (1995:6) in his preface to the study on Hans Scharoun that it would be better if architectural studies moved away from a 'laws and instances' view of things towards a 'cases and interpretations' one. This study will not exclude the former but will rather try to establish a more critical connection between the two research approaches.

As Fagan's work demonstrates typological traits as well as inherent dichotomies and contradictions, an analytical strategy will be developed to explain these tendencies.

Various sub-problems have been identified (see below). These problems present hypotheses that need to be investigated and are focussed on through:

- contextualizing the architect's work within a broader international and national architectural framework;
- understanding Fagan's influences and the resultant philosophies that have created his architectural responses; and
- deciphering and describing the architectural responses.

The research strategy to be used is noted under each section stating the problem and

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– <sup>24</sup> [http://www2.uiah.fi/projects/metodi/144.htm\(6of14\)](http://www2.uiah.fi/projects/metodi/144.htm(6of14)) [Accessed 2008/07/14].

– <sup>25</sup> The connections lie in the Modern Movement attitudes towards space making and function with the resultant form responding to these concerns as well as to a contextual bias and vernacular 'sympathy'.

– <sup>26</sup> [http://www2.uiah.fi/projects/metodi/144.htm\(4of14\)](http://www2.uiah.fi/projects/metodi/144.htm(4of14)) [Accessed 2008/07/14].



hypothesis.

### **1.5.1 Problem One (Chapter 2: PREPARATION)**

#### **1.5.1.1. Problem One:**

What analytical framework will be used to describe Fagan's philosophical and architectural responses?

#### **1.5.1.2. Hypothesis One:**

Fagan's domestic architecture mediates between architectural dichotomies and relies on a typological approach that exhibits formal and spatial tensions. The architecture can be described as heterotrophic and attenuative.

#### **1.5.1.3. Research Strategy One:**

A literature review of the work of architects who have demonstrated similar architectural responses will be undertaken. Critical writings such as Peter Blundell Jones on Hans Scharoun, Dimitri Porphyrios on Alvar Aalto and David Underwood on Oscar Niemeyer, amongst others, will be analysed. A theoretical enquiry into typological architecture in history will be completed. The concept of heterotrophia as a valid way of analysing Fagan's work will be described. The possibilities for attenuative and mediative design approaches will also be described.

### **1.5.2 Problem Two (SECTION B: CONTEXTUALISATION)**

#### **1.5.2.1. Problem Two:**

How will Fagan's architecture be contextualised?

#### **1.5.2.2. Hypothesis Two:**

The domestic architecture of Fagan displays similarities to international examples of regional modernism. It exhibits linkages with post-Second World War regional-modern attitudes in South Africa as well as close similarities to a 1950s and 1960s neo-vernacular in the Cape region.

#### **1.5.2.3. Research Strategy Two:**

A literature review will define the terms 'vernacular', 'Modern Movement' and 'regionalism' and will outline the development of these approaches internationally and locally. Through argument a series of architectural responses to these approaches will be described.

### **1.5.3 Problem Three (Chapter 3: INITIATIONS)**

#### **1.5.3.1. Problem Three:**

Which aspects (personalities, activities, events) have influenced Fagan's architectural responses over time?

**1.5.3.2. Hypothesis Three:**

Important influences such as upbringing, education and experience impact on the development of philosophies or architectural approaches.

**1.5.3.3. Research Strategy Three:**

Information about Fagan's influences will be directly gleaned from interviews with the architect and an analysis of his writings. Interviews with his family, colleagues, fellow professionals, clients and staff will provide indirect information regarding his life and philosophies. The interviews will be conducted according to a consistent interview structure. The list of questions will be sent to the interviewee before the meeting and the conversations will be digitally recorded. Other indirect information will be sourced through existing written critiques of Fagan's work and the limited descriptions of his life that are available.

**1.5.4 Problem Four (Chapter 7: DESIGN PHILOSOPHIES)**

**1.5.4.1. Problem Four:**

What architectural philosophies (theoretical or practical attitudes) has Fagan developed as responses to the inherited vernacular, the Modern Movement and regionalism?

**1.5.4.2. Hypothesis Four:**

Philosophies or attitudes lead to the development of architectural strategies and design approaches. It will be argued that Fagan has developed a fourth Cape vernacular, a reflective modernism and a relative regionalist approach in his architecture.

**1.5.4.3. Research Strategy Four:**

Literature reviews of critiques on Fagan's work, analyses of Fagan's public lectures, and published and built work will be used to explain Fagan's architectural approaches to the inherited vernacular, the Modern Movement and regionalism.

**1.5.5 Problem Five (SECTION D: EXPRESSION)**

**1.5.5.1. Problem Five:**

What is Fagan's design process? What is his approach to the development of architectural form? What have Fagan's architectural responses been over time?

### 1.5.5.2. Hypothesis Five:

Fagan's design process mediates between the polarities of intuitiveness and rationality. Fagan has developed architectural strategies to mediate formal, functional and spatial polarities generated by the principles of the inherited vernacular and modern day functional and technological requirements. He has developed a new set of architectural typologies.

### 1.5.5.3. Research Strategy Five:

A formal analysis of Fagan's houses will be undertaken to identify architectural mediations and the continuous development of new typologies. The architect will be interviewed and his writings analysed.

## 1.6 Delimitations of the study

The oeuvre of Fagan's architectural work is broad and extensive, ranging from conservation projects to new work and domestic to commercial and institutional buildings (see Fig. 1.3). The first twelve years of his career were spent as in-house architect for the then, Volkskas<sup>27</sup> Bank, designing and building new bank buildings and making alterations to existing structures. Conservation projects, including the restoration of main street Tulbagh after the earthquakes of 1969 and the Castle in Cape Town, form a large part of Fagan's work. Hostels, university architecture and commercial work are interspersed with seminal domestic buildings. These houses span Fagan's entire career and therefore present a continuum of work that can be critically analysed in terms of time-place, place-form responses (Frampton, 1992a:4) and formal and functional patterns.



**Figure 1.3.** Other Fagan works. **From the left:** Volkskas Bank in Roodepoort (1959) (Author, 2008), Men's Residence (Helshoogte) Stellenbosch University (1970) (Author, 2009), Newlands Brewery alterations and additions (1993) (Author, 2009), model of a proposed tower block for the Fagans, Bree Street (2010) (Author, 2010).

Fagan's house for his parents and his own house 'set the pace' for future formal development and experimentation. Buchanan (2006:79) notes that "architects' houses have traditionally been

– <sup>27</sup> Volkskas Bank was an Afrikaner bank founded in South Africa in 1934. It became a commercial bank in 1941.

a vehicle for critical self development”. Pretorius and Raman (2006:52) support this thesis: “... one’s own home provides the best vehicle for the representation of probity.”

Fagan’s own house, *Die Es* (1965), was designed relatively early in his career but notably twelve years after the completion of his parents’ house *Keurbos* (1951) in Bishopscourt, Cape Town. The design of *Die Es* could in fact be the result of the years of experimentation with Volkskas Bank buildings, but it certainly laid the foundation for the houses to come and has demonstrated that the ‘vehicle’ has been well ridden, tuned and looked after during the sixty year period that Fagan has been in practice.

The study will therefore concentrate on Fagan’s domestic oeuvre. Although the study will investigate regionalist tendencies in South African architecture and will locate Fagan’s work within this continuum, it will not propose strategies or possible philosophies for regional architecture.

### **1.7 Importance of the study**

The 1950s to 1960s was an important period in South African architecture. The country was recovering from the economic effects of the Second World War and was in the throes of gaining independence from the United Kingdom. Architects continued to search for an architecture appropriate to modern living conditions and the local context. The limited influence of the Modern Movement had given way to regional inflections and in the Cape a seminal neo-vernacular emerged. Very little has been written about this time and this particular context. This study will attempt to fill that gap through a study of Fagan’s domestic architecture.

Historically, this study will contribute to a new understanding of the post-Second World War period, particularly in the Cape, and will contextualise Fagan’s domestic architecture.

Pedagogically, the study will provide an understanding of an architect’s design process and approaches which are important aspects for students of architecture.

In terms of literature, the study will contribute to the limited publications on architecture and architects in South Africa. The intention is to initiate a series of monographs on South African architects for the benefit of the architectural community, mainly locally, but also internationally.



**Figure 1.4.** No. 41 Milford Road, Plumstead (Author, 2010).

The author's interest in Fagan's architecture was sparked by a childhood experience of growing up next to a 1960s painted brickwork box house in Plumstead, Cape Town (see Fig. 1.4). The enduring tectonic qualities of rough white walls, quarry tiled floors and a display of introverted and extroverted spaces was in stark contrast to the surrounding suburban blight. A love of Cape architecture was also instilled by my mother<sup>28</sup> who pointed out buildings in the city and who took me on trips to Cape vernacular buildings, particularly in Stellenbosch and Cape Town. Here, at around 12 years old, I captured elements of this architecture on my first instamatic camera (see Fig. 1.5). These influences have remained ever present in my architecture. The enduring legacy of building and its close relationship to place and the tectonic, visual and spatial qualities of Cape vernacular architecture still, to this day, provide stimulation for new designs and research.



**Figure 1.5.** Photographs taken of Cape vernacular buildings in Stellenbosch (Author, 1973).

## 1.8 Structure of the study

The study has been divided into three sections, framed by two bookends. The first section, CONTEXTUALISATION, describes Fagan's work against the backdrop of the broader international and local architectural scene. The second section, EXPRESSION, is an analysis

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– <sup>28</sup> She was a housewife all her life with no particular creative pursuits. She did, however, instil a sense of pride and neatness in everything I did. There are also no architects in our family and only one uncle who was a script writer and researcher. It is still a mystery to me where my affinity and passion for architecture originated.

of his work, where design philosophies are explained and design typologies and mediative strategies are unpacked. The middle section, CRYSTALLIZATIONS, mediates the two bookends and explains influences on the architect. Various chapters make up the individual sections and can, effectively, stand alone as independent investigations. There is no separate literature survey section (save for a limited one in Chapter 2). Literature surveys are embedded in the content where they are most appropriately located.

## **SECTION A – PRELUDE**

### CHAPTER 1: Introduction and proposal

Introduction

Context of the problem

Problem statement

Assumptions

Research strategy

Delimitations of the study

Definition of terms

Importance of the study

### CHAPTER 2: PREPARATION

## **SECTION B – CONTEXTUALIZATION**

### CHAPTER 3: VERNACULAR VARIATIONS

### CHAPTER 4: MODERN MOVEMENT MEDIATIONS

### CHAPTER 5: REGIONALIST REINTERPRETATIONS

## **SECTION C – CRYSTALLIZATION**

### CHAPTER 6: INITIATIONS – THE MAN AS MEDIATOR

### CHAPTER 7: DESIGN DERIVATIONS

Fagan and the inherited vernacular

Fagan and the Modern Movement

Fagan and regionalism

## **SECTION D – EXPRESSION**

CHAPTER 8: THE DESIGN PROCESS

CHAPTER 9: FORMAL TENSIONS AND MEDIATIONS

CHAPTER 10: (HETERO)TYPOLOGIES

## **SECTION E – FINALE**

CHAPTER 11: CONCLUSIONS

CHAPTER 12: LIST OF REFERENCES

## **SECTION F – APPENDICES**

CHAPTER 13:

APPENDIX A: Curricula Vitae of the architect and his wife

APPENDIX B: Family tree

APPENDIX C: Awards

APPENDIX D: Motivation letters for honorary membership of the American Institute of Architects

APPENDIX E: Domestic architecture project list summary

APPENDIX F: Data sheets of individual buildings

APPENDIX G: Student work

APPENDIX H: Fagan's library

APPENDIX I: Interview questions and Fagan's responses to email questions

APPENDIX J: Précised biographies of important personalities related to the study

APPENDIX K: External examiners' comments and author's responses