

Attachment A15

**Heritage Assessment - 85-91 Elizabeth Bay
Road, Elizabeth Bay - Ercildoune**

Name			
Ercildoune			
Address	85–91 Elizabeth Bay Road, Elizabeth Bay	Lot number	Part Lot 1 DP 83374, Lots 1–74 SP 12106
Architect	Harry Seidler & Associates	Construction date	1965
Builder	Horwitz Corporation (owner) Peter Cussel (builder)		
Listings	<p>Sydney Local Environmental Plan 2012: Within the Elizabeth and Rushcutters Bays Heritage Conservation Area (C20), identified as detracting on the Sydney Development Control Plan building contributions map.</p> <p>Australian Institute of Architects (NSW Chapter) Register of Significant Architecture.</p>		

Historical overview

The Cadigal people of the Eora nation have lived in the Sydney area for thousands of years and have shaped its landscape and nurtured its plants and animals. Before the arrival of the European settlers the Potts Point area was known as Kurrajeen (or Curageen) and Yarrandabbi. Governor Lachlan Macquarie set aside land near Elizabeth Bay, Potts Point and Woolloomooloo as a 'model fishing village' for Aboriginal people in 1820. At this settlement, known as Elizabeth Town, several huts were built, a patch of land was cleared for a garden, and boats were provided for use by the Aboriginal people who lived there. John Palmer's estate at nearby Woolloomooloo Bay was also an important gathering place for local Aboriginal people, and was the location of a corroboree in 1831 attended by Bungaree's son, Young Bungaree (City of Sydney 2013, 'Aboriginal People and Place').

The subject site formed part of the original 54-acre property granted to the Alexander Macleay, Colonial Secretary of New South Wales, by Crown grant in 1831. In 1839 Macleay constructed a stone mansion named Elizabeth Bay House on the property, as well as extensive stables, museums, and a large garden featuring interesting plants, specimen trees, an orchard and an orangery. Financial trouble forced Alexander Macleay to submit to the foreclosure of his mortgage to his son William Sharp Macleay in 1845. When William died in 1865, the property passed to his brother George. George arranged for the subdivision of the property and sold leaseholds of portions of the estate between 1865 and 1882.

The subject site was formerly the site of the house Ercildoune that was built for John Gilchrist in the 1880s but was later converted to flats. The site was later subdivided.

In November 1956 Duncan & Hendel submitted a development application (DA) to the City of Sydney council for Ercildoune Gardens Pty Ltd to erect two new flat buildings, of four and six storeys respectively. This application was approved in October the same year. This approved development was amended to comprise a single building of six floors. However the owner was having difficulty obtaining the vacant premises for demolition purposes, so in the meantime the architect proposed to erect a seven-storey building of flats at the front of the site for which council approval was granted.

In 1958 the property was sold to Ercildoune Gardens Pty Limited though the proposed 10-storey apartment building did not progress at this time. The following year the site was sold to Chevron Sydney Ltd, then constructing the Chevron Hotel at Macleay Street. The director of the company indicated the house would likely be demolished and a building with more accommodation erected in its place, for which development approval existed.¹ An extension of time was granted in June 1959 but no work commenced and in 1960 the DA and building application lapsed.

¹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 December 1959, p 4.

Historical overview

In May 1963 Harry Seidler submitted a development application on behalf of Horwitz Corporation Pty Ltd for a building containing 77 bachelor and one-bedroom units in two blocks (five-storey and eight-storey respectively) estimated to cost £163,000. The DA was granted in May 1963. At this date Seidler requested Council put a hold on the DA pending an amended application. In June, in response to height restrictions and requirements for on-site carparking, Seidler submitted the amended DA reducing the number of flats from 77 to 74 and reducing the height of the lift tower. The application was approved.

Horwitz Corporation, a subsidiary of publishing house Horwitz Company, owned and developed several properties in the area. Harry Seidler designed its headquarters 'Horwitz House' in 1954 on Sussex Street. Horwitz Corporation was also responsible for developing Victoria Towers (later Gemini, 1961–1969), also designed by Seidler, in Potts Point. Horwitz was the publisher of *Houses, Interiors, Projects*, the first book about Harry Seidler's work, in 1954 as well as *Architecture for the new world; the work of Harry Seidler* in 1973. Seidler had designed the interiors and deck layout for the Horwitz family yacht.

In May 1964 Harry Seidler & Associates lodged a revised building application to erect two blocks of six and eight storeys respectively, with carparking, comprising six one-bedroom flats and 68 bedsitting room flats (studios) for the cost of £150,000.² The application was approved pending an appeal by the architects regarding ventilation in flats. Seidler was strongly advocating for permission to build bathrooms and kitchens that were mechanically ventilated, without external windows. During these court proceedings, work on the property commenced with site excavation and early construction works. City of Sydney Council approved amended plans of proposed mechanical ventilation systems to bathrooms in March 1965.

As completion approached in late 1965, Horwitz Corporation Pty Ltd advertised luxury apartments to rent for 12-month lease in the new Ercildoune building. The new building was described as having transport at the door and being within easy reach of the city proper, fully furnished and carpeted, with a bed sitting-room, separate kitchen, bathroom, automatic garbage disposal, press-button defrost refrigerator, elevator and swimming pool.³

In 1977 Ercildoune was strata titled and its apartments were offered for sale rather than rent.

Harry Seidler & Associates

Harry Seidler (1923–2006) was born in Vienna to Jewish parents. Following the Nazi occupation of Austria in 1938, Seidler relocated to England where he attended Cambridge Polytechnic, before being deported to Canada in 1940. He was awarded a Bachelor of Architecture in Canada in 1944. He won a scholarship to study at the Graduate School of Design, Harvard University, where Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer were teachers. He then studied at Black Mountain College, under Josef Albers, before working with Breuer in New York City (1946–1948) and briefly with Oscar Niemeyer in Rio de Janeiro, on his way to Sydney in 1948.

Arriving in Sydney, his first commission was to design a house for his parents (Rose Seidler House, 1948–1950). Seidler gained Australian citizenship and in 1958 married Penelope Evatt, who was to be a significant partner in his career. By the 1960s Seidler's practice began to receive significant commissions including Blues Point Tower (completed 1962) and Australia Square (1960–1967). The latter, designed with engineer Pier Luigi Nervi, became a 'type-model' for Seidler's urban tower designs throughout his career. From the 1970s Harry Seidler and Associates was commissioned for significant large-scale commissions across Australia and overseas. These included the Australian Embassy, Paris (1973); MLC Building, Sydney (1978); Riverside Centre, Brisbane (1984); Shell Headquarters, Melbourne (1988); and QV1, Perth (1992).

Throughout his career, Seidler wrote about architecture and taught at various universities around the world, as well as advocating planning reform in Australia. He was awarded numerous honours throughout his career including being made an Honorary Fellow of both the American Institute of Architects and the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA awarded him the Royal Gold Medal in 1996); and a Life Fellow (1970) of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (receiving 50 awards including five Sulman Medals, four Wilkinson Awards and the Gold Medal

² City Building Surveyor's Department, Building Application Files, 91 Elizabeth Bay Rd, Elizabeth Bay, Block of flats, No 832 Year 1964, City of Sydney Archives.

³ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 September 1965, p 63.

Historical overview

[1976]). He was also awarded an Order of the British Empire (1972). His impact and the work of his firm were a major cultural influence, applying uncompromising Bauhaus-inspired modernist architecture and principles in Australia.

Description

An external-only site visit from the public domain was undertaken by GML in September 2024 and a site visit of the interiors on 8 October 2024.

Setting and context

Ercildoune is located on the eastern side of Elizabeth Bay Road at the intersection with Elizabeth Bay Crescent, opposite Macleay Reserve. The land slopes downwards to the east along Elizabeth Bay Crescent.

The building lot is roughly square with a change in ground level on the site of almost 7 metres. Ercildoune is made up of two linear blocks perpendicular to each other linked by circulation bridges, with a stair, lift and incinerator chimney core where the two blocks join. Each block aligns to the higher and lower portions of Elizabeth Bay Crescent. An open area of carparking makes up the site's southern area adjacent to Elizabeth Bay Road.

The site is located within the Elizabeth and Rushcutters Bays Heritage Conservation Area. The immediate vicinity is characterised by interwar flat buildings and multistorey postwar and contemporary apartments that are generally comparable in design and scale to Ercildoune. The carparking and entry from Elizabeth Bay Road detracts from the character of the area, but remnant sandstone walls and the planted setback to Elizabeth Bay Crescent to the north provide a green landscaped softening to the uncompromising form of Ercildoune.

Physical description

Ercildoune consists of two blocks—one six-storey (north) and one eight-storey (east)—containing 68 studios and six one-bedroom units. The building is constructed of a reinforced concrete frame with blonde face brick infill walls. The brickwork is cantilevered 20mm from the supporting slab edges, creating a band of shadow. Board-formed concrete slabs and beams are exposed externally. The building is repetitious in construction and rigorously economical in materials with concrete slabs being as thin as possible and single skin brickwork used in stairways.

Northern building

The northern building is a six-storey block, aligned north-south on the lot and containing five units per floor, including two one-bedroom split-level apartments per floor.

Apartments are served by an open access corridor every second floor. From the open gallery access corridor, a half-stair leads up or down to two apartments. Units with an additional bedroom have an internal stair leading to the projecting cuboidal bedrooms along the southern side. The access corridor level is halfway between floor level so that one southern kitchen window cannot be overlooked due to its height while the alternate one is located just above access corridor level. The lower kitchen windows are sliding in operation with translucent glass for privacy. Ground floor units have direct access to a private courtyard.

The design is based on Housing Type F1 developed by the Standardisation Department at Stroykom RSFR, an office for the development of standardised housing established in the USSR in 1928 and led by the architect Moisei Ginzburg and adopted by Bauhaus architects and others in the modern movement. Seidler developed this housing type further with the addition of the expressed bedroom volumes to the south.

The north-facing façade is relatively flush with a subtle rhythmic contrast between the full-height glass sliding doors to the balconies of one-bedroom apartments and the lower, flusher sliding windows and fixed glass of the studio apartments. Seidler had developed a window type for studio apartments: full-height glazing consisting of two large sliding panels to the top, a wide transom and fixed panels of Georgian wired glass below. Studio windows have blue coloured fabric roller blinds set within a recess behind the concrete downturned beam. Some balconies have retained their original pre-cast concrete handrail and woven wire mesh balustrades. Balconies are tiled and windows have tiled sills (which have been painted).

Description

The southern façade is highly modelled and highly ordered, a matrix of boxes cantilevering from the slab form, with horizontal concrete accessways threaded between making up the bedrooms of the one-bedroom apartments (two per floor).

The units are oriented so that the living areas face the light and views. Bathrooms are internal with a service core and the kitchens on the south have high narrow ribbon windows for ventilation.

Eastern building

The eastern building is eight storeys, with a simplified plan of stacked studios, six per floor, and an external circulation gallery on the western elevation every second level. A half-stair leads up or down to two apartments from the open gallery.

The eastern elevation is a uniform arrangement of the window type preferred by Seidler for studio apartments (as described above) together with the characteristic blue sun shades (of which only a few remain operable).

The block is raised on columns with the ground level open for carparking, accessed from Elizabeth Bay Crescent. A communal laundry is also located in this area. A low zigzag concrete retaining wall forms the eastern boundary.

Communal areas

The small foyer is located between the two blocks, above ground level, accessed by stairs. The lift surrounds are clad in vertical boarding painted black. The original door handles, PVC and steel handrails, and polished aggregate wall finish remain in the common stair.

Balustrades to the open access galleries are pre-cast concrete elements with a brown river stone as a washed aggregate top layer. The projecting bedrooms of the one-bedroom apartments have membrane roofs with a ballast of brown river stones. Corridors and communal areas retain their black rubber floor finish.

The rooftops of each block are linked by a bridge and are common outdoor spaces. The eastern building has a small, raised swimming pool accessed by stairs.

Landscaping

The landscaping of the site is limited. Some mature trees along Elizabeth Bay Crescent provide visual screening to the building.

Modifications/integrity

The original exposed board-formed concrete surfaces have been painted beige.

A Council record indicates that internal alterations to a unit, including removal of internal walls and installation of new bathroom and kitchen, were approved in 2010.

An incinerator flue was being removed at the time of inspection and balustrades were undergoing repair. DA no. P/2024/181 and D/2021/1116

Condition

A series of modifications have led to cracking of pre-cast concrete balustrades that requires stabilisation.

Areas of exposed and corroded reinforcement are visible.

Comparative analysis

Ercildoune is a good representative example of the 1960s works of Harry Seidler & Associates when the firm was prolific in the design and development of residential flat buildings.

Comparable examples include Ithaca Gardens, Elizabeth Bay (1960); Diamond Bay, Dover Heights (1965); Aquarius, Rushcutters Bay (1965); and NSW Housing Commission Apartments, Rosebery (1964–1967). Each of these had linear planned apartments, some with the complex split-level planning found in Ercildoune.

Although each of these projects responded to its site and context, as a group they can be seen as evolving structural and planning prototypes. Seidler noted in relation to this group of

Comparative analysis

apartments 'the aim of their design is the development of prototypes incorporating a system, both of planning and construction'.⁴

Ercildoune, with compact studio and one-bedroom apartments, is a representative example of this group of projects completed in the 1960s, a time when economically planned flats on smaller sites were a particular focus. Ercildoune displays the same materials and expressed structure as these projects, as well as systematised construction methods, with repeated layouts and segregated vertical access cores.

Ercildoune has representative significance as an example of Seidler's 1960s apartment projects, which as a group have an exceptional level of significance for their ability to demonstrate the architect's evolving planning and construction prototypes. Seidler's architecture of this period was extremely influential, widely published and highly awarded. It can be seen to have made a major contribution to the development of modern architecture in Australia and is highly regarded internationally.

Ercildoune has particular technical and creative significance as one of only three projects where Seidler explored split-level planning and as the only design where two blocks are placed perpendicularly, rather than parallel as in Village Towers (Arlington), Edgecliff (1965–1966); and NSW Housing Commission Apartments, Rosebery (1964–1967).

The site layout of Ercildoune is less effective than comparable examples. Although Ercildoune does not follow the street alignment and appears as a freestanding object in space, the building forms appear squat compared with the linear arrangement of Aquarius. They also lack the sculptural qualities, and contrast between site and built form, evident in Gemini, for example. When compared to other Seidler-designed apartments of this period Ercildoune is not considered to be as successful in scale, setting and realisation. The building's current condition issues contribute to this overall impression. Furthermore, the result of this site planning is that a number of apartments suffer from a lack of light or privacy to their rear elevations.

Ercildoune was not as widely published in the architectural media or in Seidler's own publications as other projects of this period.

Overall Ercildoune can be seen as a good representative example of Seidler's architecture in this period, which is well represented in the local area, but is not considered to be an exceptional example in its own right.

⁴ Harry Seidler, architects' statement in *Living and Partly Living: Housing in Australia*, Ian McKay, 1971, p 186.

Comparative analysis



Figure 1 Aquarius (1965), Rushcutters Bay, was the first and most comprehensive project where Seidler explored split-level planning, as found in the northern building of Ercildoune. (Source: GML)

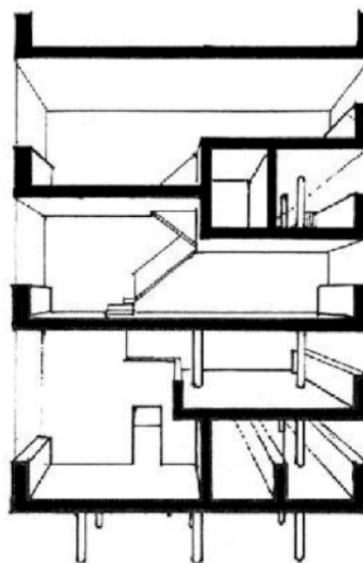


Figure 2 Housing Type F1 developed by the Standardisation Department at Stroykom RSFR, an office for the development of standardised housing established in the USSR in 1928 and led by Moisei Ginzburg. (Source: Wikimedia)

Assessment of significance

Criterion A (Historic significance)

Ercildoune is an example of a modern mid-rise residential flat building and reflects the changing development, built environment and demographic of the Potts Point and Elizabeth Bay areas through the mid-twentieth century along with others of its type in the area. However, independently, the building is not a key example of these changes.

Ercildoune does not have cultural significance at a local or state level under this criterion.

Criterion B (Historical association)

Ercildoune is a good and representative example of the work of Harry Seidler, one of the most significant modernist architects in Australia, who has made a notable contribution to the development of Sydney's cultural environment, in particular residential flat buildings in the Elizabeth Bay and Potts Point area. However, Seidler was prolific in this period and Ercildoune is not considered to have strong, unusual or extraordinary associations with the architect for this reason.

Ercildoune does not have cultural significance at a local or state level under this criterion.

Criterion C (Aesthetic/creative/technical achievement)

Ercildoune shows innovations in planning and construction that make it a noteworthy example of a 1960s modernist apartment building.

Assessment of significance

Ercildoune displays typical elements of the work of architect Harry Seidler during the 1960s. It shares aesthetic characteristics with some of Seidler's most notable projects including Ithaca Gardens (1960) and Aquarius (1965), which demonstrate distinctive attributes in form and composition. Ercildoune also has unique aspects in its design and construction that demonstrate Seidler's creative and technical innovation and achievement.

In its construction, planning and detailing it demonstrates Seidler's application of design prototypes, applied across multiple projects. Its expression of structure, its regular façade arrangement, its use of raw materials and spare planning with a concern for natural light, sun shading, and ventilation are all typical of Seidler's highly acclaimed architecture. Ercildoune is a noteworthy example of the work of an important designer.

Ercildoune **has** cultural significance at a local level under this criterion.

Ercildoune does not have cultural significance at a state level under this criterion.

Criterion D (Social, cultural and spiritual significance)

Ercildoune is listed on the Australian Institute of Architects (NSW Chapter) Register of Significant Architecture, indicating that it has importance to architects and the design community more generally.

Ercildoune **has** cultural significance at a local level under this criterion.

Ercildoune does not have cultural significance at a state level under this criterion.

Criterion E (Research potential)

Ercildoune is not considered to have the potential to yield significant further or new information not available elsewhere.

Ercildoune does not have cultural significance at a local or state level under this criterion.

Criterion F (Rare)

Ercildoune is a good representative example of the work of Harry Seidler in this period, particularly in the context of the many projects completed in the Elizabeth Bay and Potts Point area during the 1960s. It is not considered a rare example of its type in the local area.

Ercildoune does not have cultural significance at a local or state level under this criterion.

Criterion G (Representative)

Ercildoune is considered to have representative significance as one of a group of 1960s apartment projects designed by Harry Seidler & Associates in the local area and more widely, which are collectively highly significant.

Other examples in the Elizabeth Bay and Potts Point area include Ithaca Gardens, Aquarius, Gemini and International Lodge. These projects were widely published and featured in the multiple surveys of Harry Seidler's career.

Ercildoune displays key characteristics of this significant group of apartment projects and is an important representative example of Harry Seidler's long-term innovation and engagement with construction innovation and planning efficiency.

Ercildoune **has** cultural significance at a local level under this criterion.

Assessment of significance

Ercildoune does not have cultural significance at a state level under this criterion.

Statement of significance

Ercildoune is a good representative example of the 1960s work of Harry Seidler & Associates when the firm was prolific in the design and development of residential flat buildings. It shares aesthetic characteristics with some of Seidler's most notable projects including Ithaca Gardens (1960) and Aquarius (1965), which demonstrate distinctive aesthetic attributes in form and composition.

It has aesthetic significance for its technical and creative innovations in design and planning, particularly as one of only three projects where Seidler explored split-level planning and as the only design where two blocks are placed perpendicularly, rather than parallel as in Village Towers (Arlington), Edgecliff (1965–1966), and NSW Housing Commission Apartments, Rosebery (1964–1967). Ercildoune is therefore a noteworthy example of the work of an important designer.

Ercildoune has local heritage significance as an important representative example of Harry Seidler's long-term engagement with construction innovation and planning efficiency.

Recommendations

Ercildoune meets the threshold for local heritage significance under the aesthetic, social and representative criteria.

Due to the representative value of the place and its condition issues, it is recommended to be managed as a contributory item within the existing Heritage Conservation Area rather than through individual heritage listing on the Sydney Local Environmental Plan.

The building should be retained and conserved. A Heritage Impact Statement should outline any original features and their proposed management prior to any major works being undertaken.

Information sources

Type	Author	Title	Year	Repository
Site inspection (external)	GML		2024	GML
Written	<i>Sydney Morning Herald</i>	'Elizabeth Bay property sold'	23 Dec 1959	Sydney Morning Herald Archives 1955–1995, State Library of NSW
Written	City Building Surveyor's Department	Development Application Year 1956 No. 728	1956	City of Sydney Archives
Written	City Building Surveyor's Department	Development Application Year 1963 No 313	1963	City of Sydney Archives
Written	City Building Surveyor's Department	Building Application No 832 Year 1964	1964	City of Sydney Archives

Information sources

Written	<i>Sydney Morning Herald</i>	'Elizabeth Bay luxury apartments for rent Ercildoune'	1 Dec 1965	Sydney Morning Herald Archives 1955–1995, State Library of NSW
Publication	Peter Blake	<i>Architecture for the new world: The work of Harry Seidler</i> , pp 204–205	1973	

Image caption	Site plan submitted to Council in DA 313/63.				
Image year	1963	Image by	Unknown	Image copyright holder	Unknown

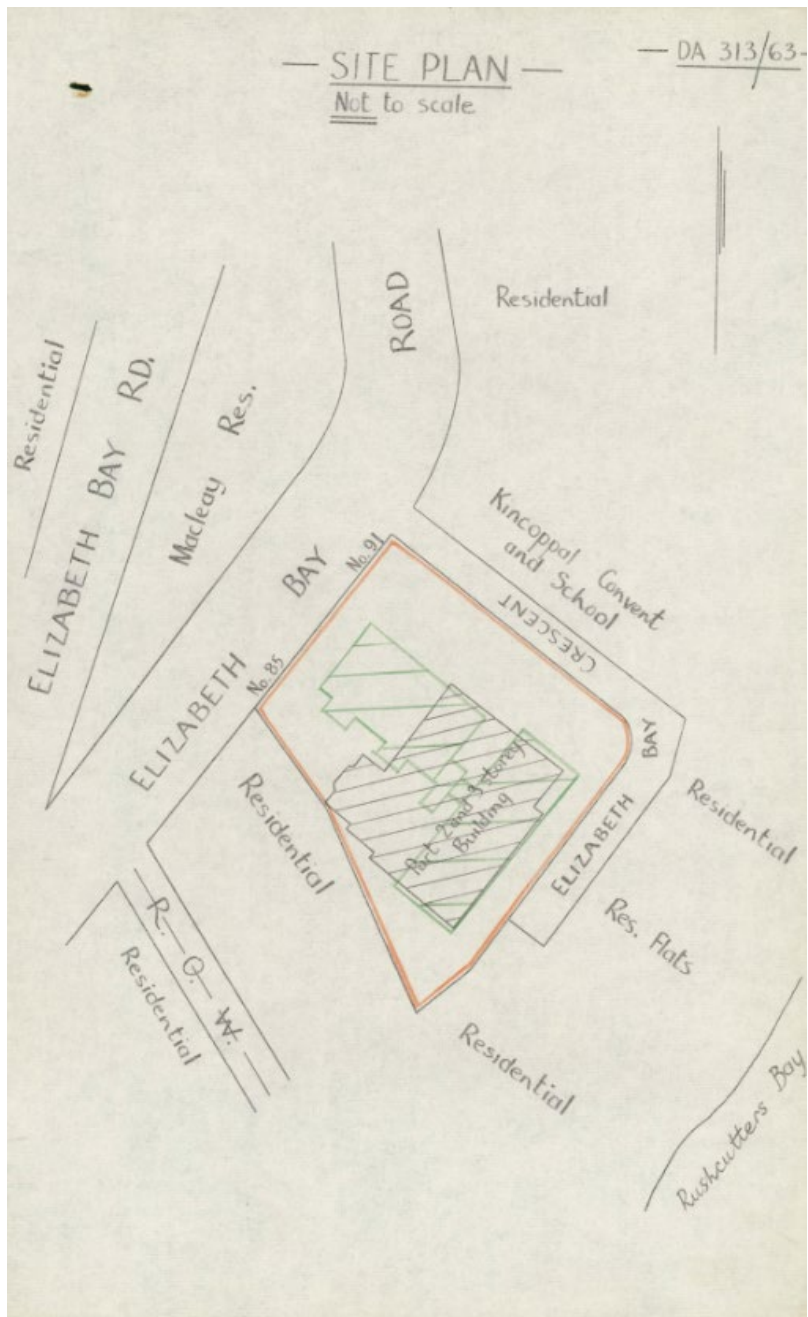


Image caption	Site and typical floor plan for Ercildoune, 1963.				
Image year	1963	Image by	Harry Seidler Architect	Image copyright holder	Harry Seidler & Associates Architects

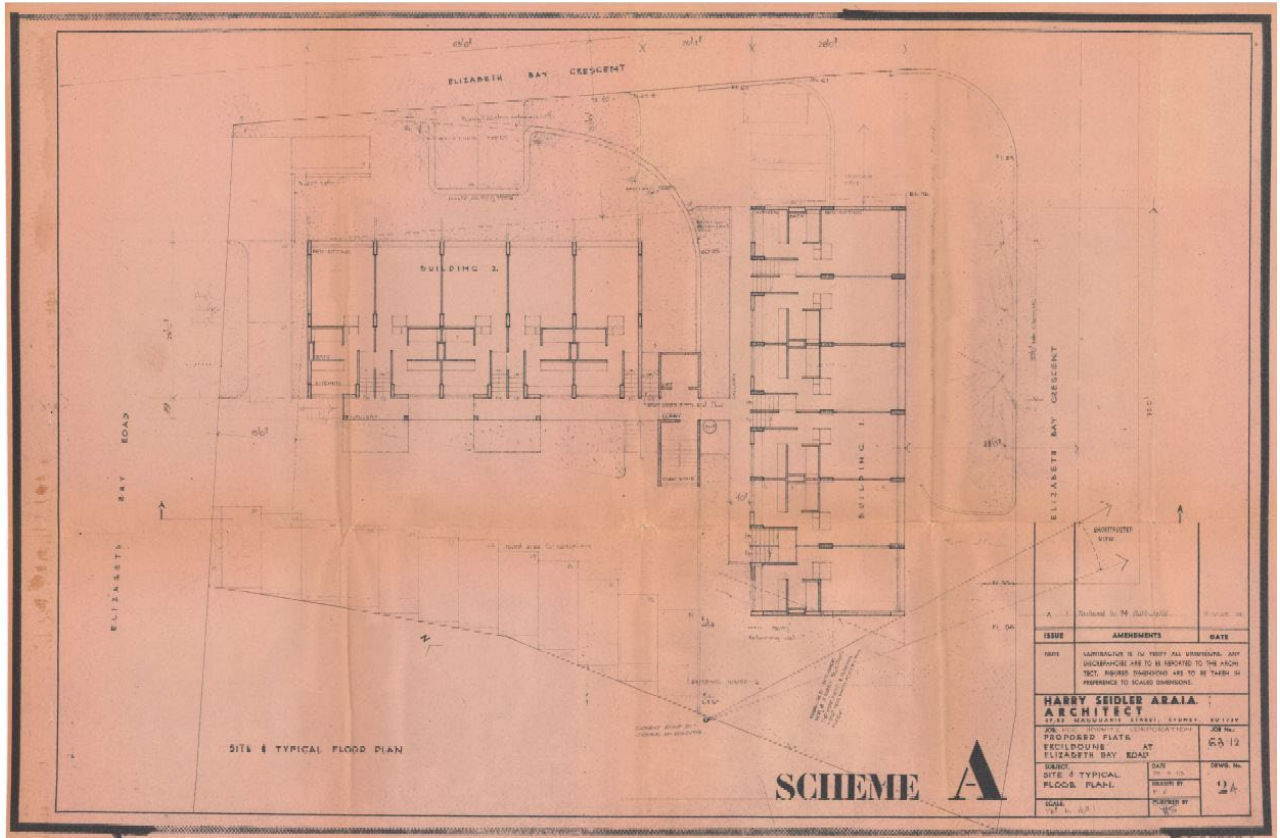


Image caption	Northeastern elevation, showing arrangement of balconies for one-bedroom units and full-height glazing for studios. Also shown is the separate linking circulation structure.				
Image year	1963	Image by	Harry Seidler Architect	Image copyright holder	Harry Seidler & Associates Architects

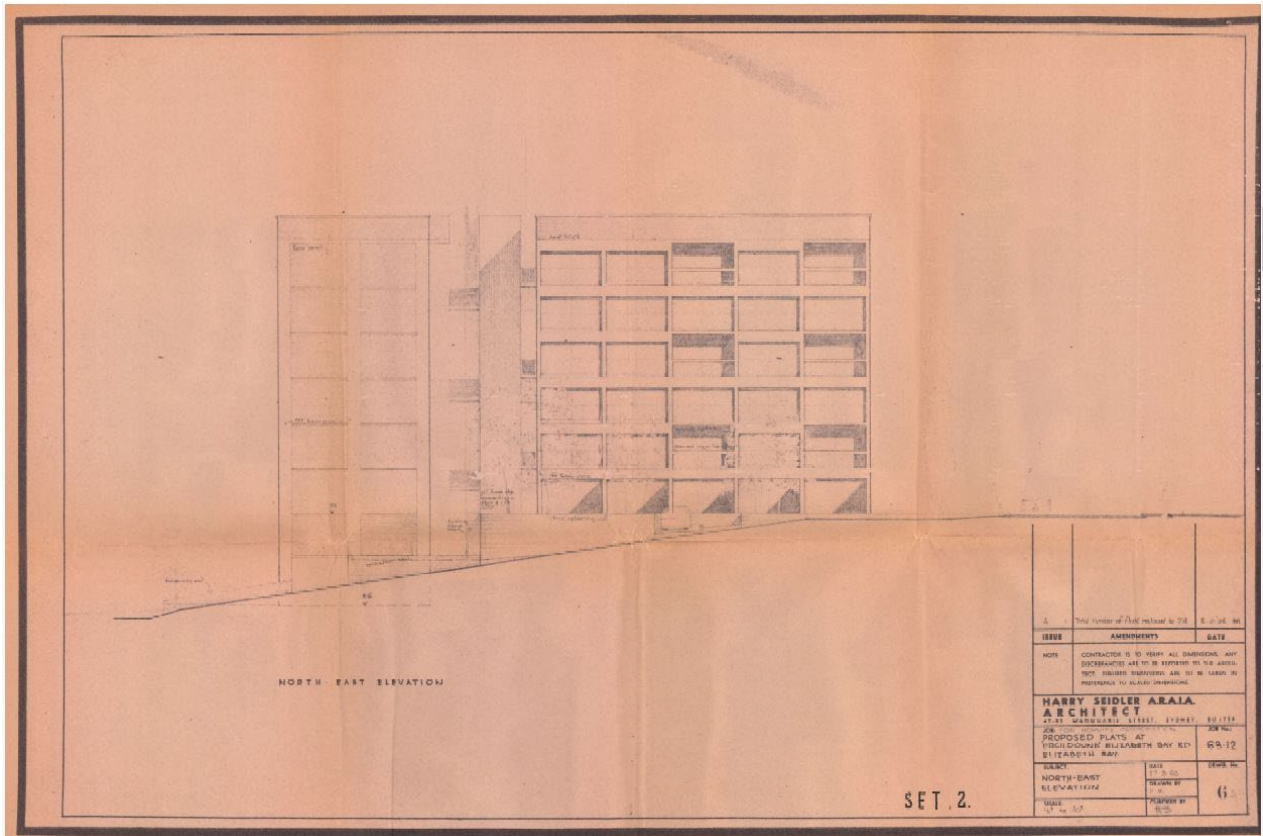


Image caption	Southeastern elevation showing full-height glazing for studios.				
Image year	1963	Image by	Harry Seidler Architect	Image copyright holder	Harry Seidler & Associates Architects

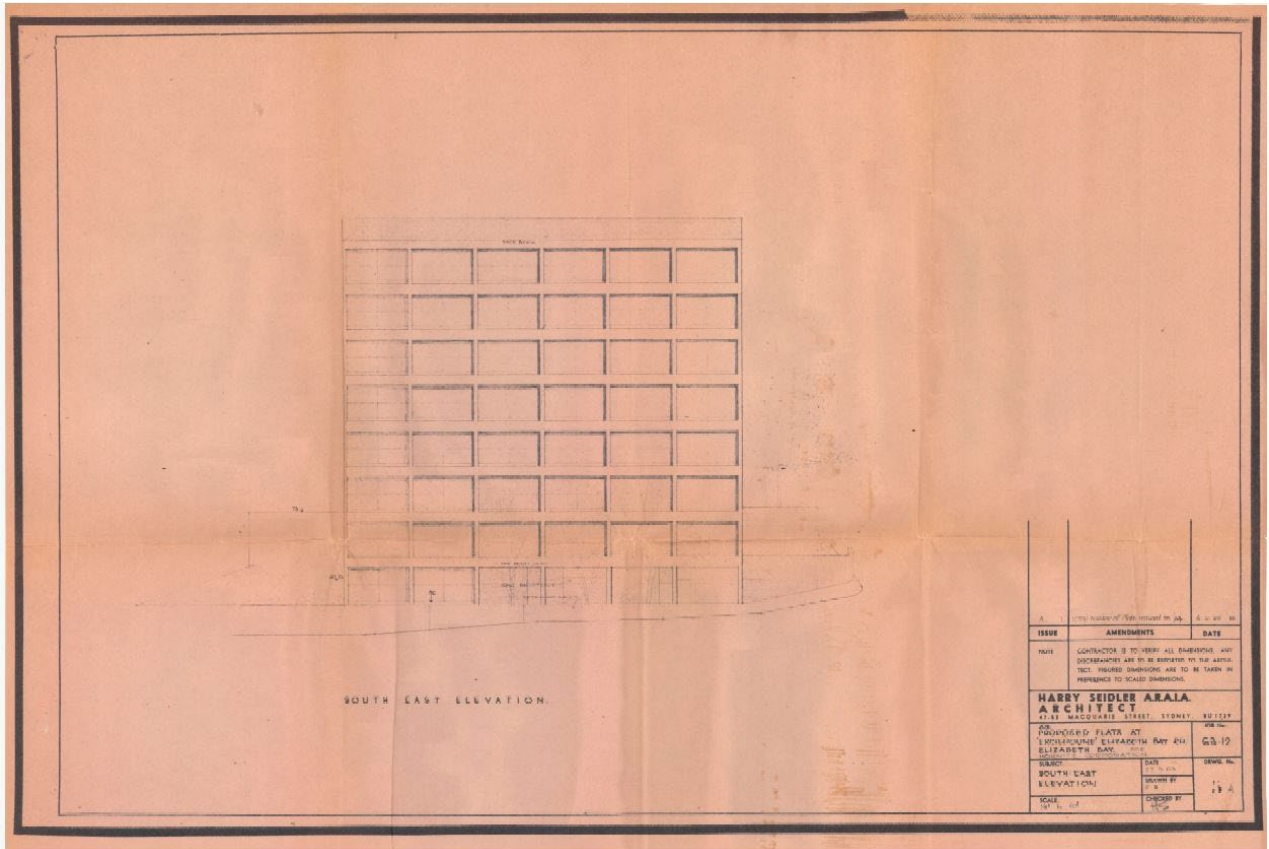


Image caption	Section and elevation showing cantilevered rooms.				
Image year	1963	Image by	Harry Seidler Architect	Image copyright holder	Harry Seidler & Associates Architects

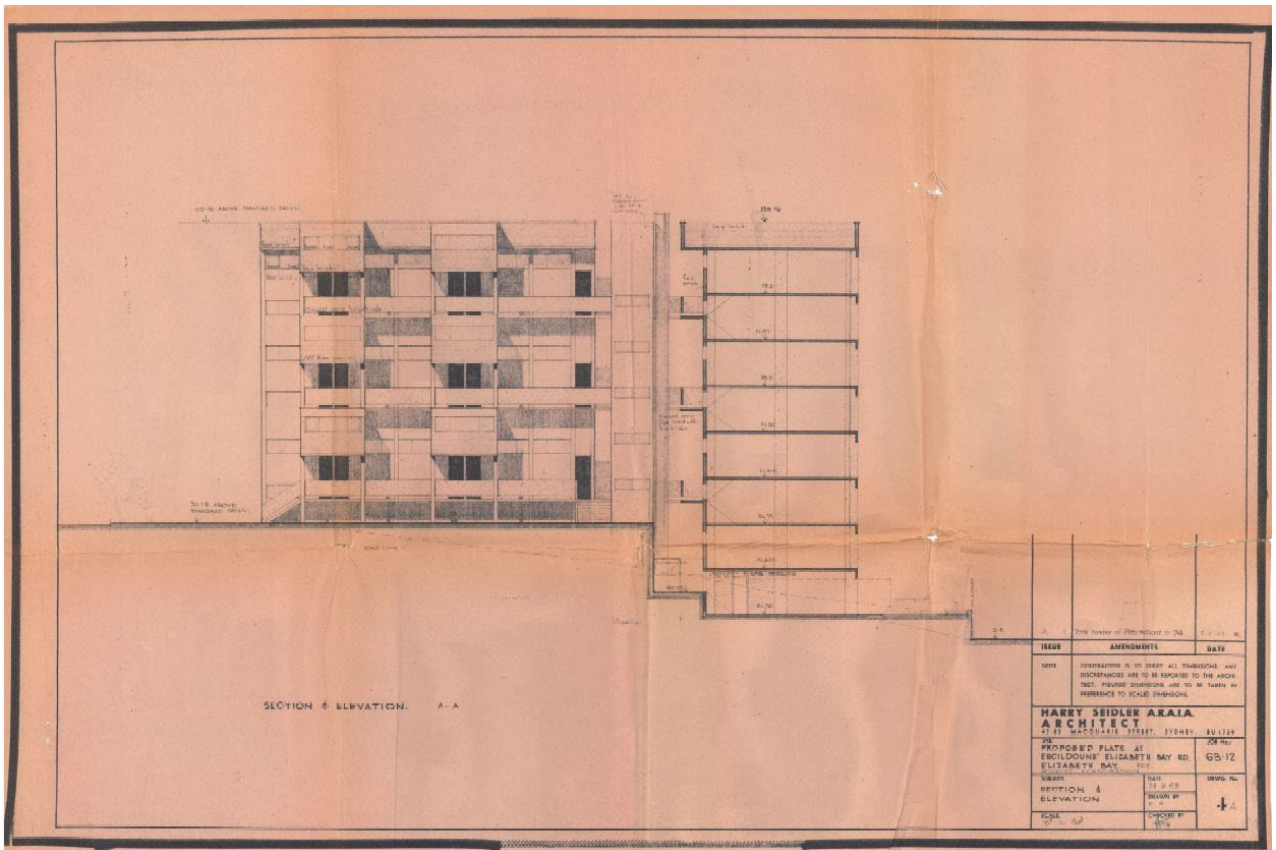


Image caption	Detailed floor plan of Building 2.				
Image year	1963	Image by	Harry Seidler Architect	Image copyright holder	Harry Seidler & Associates Architects

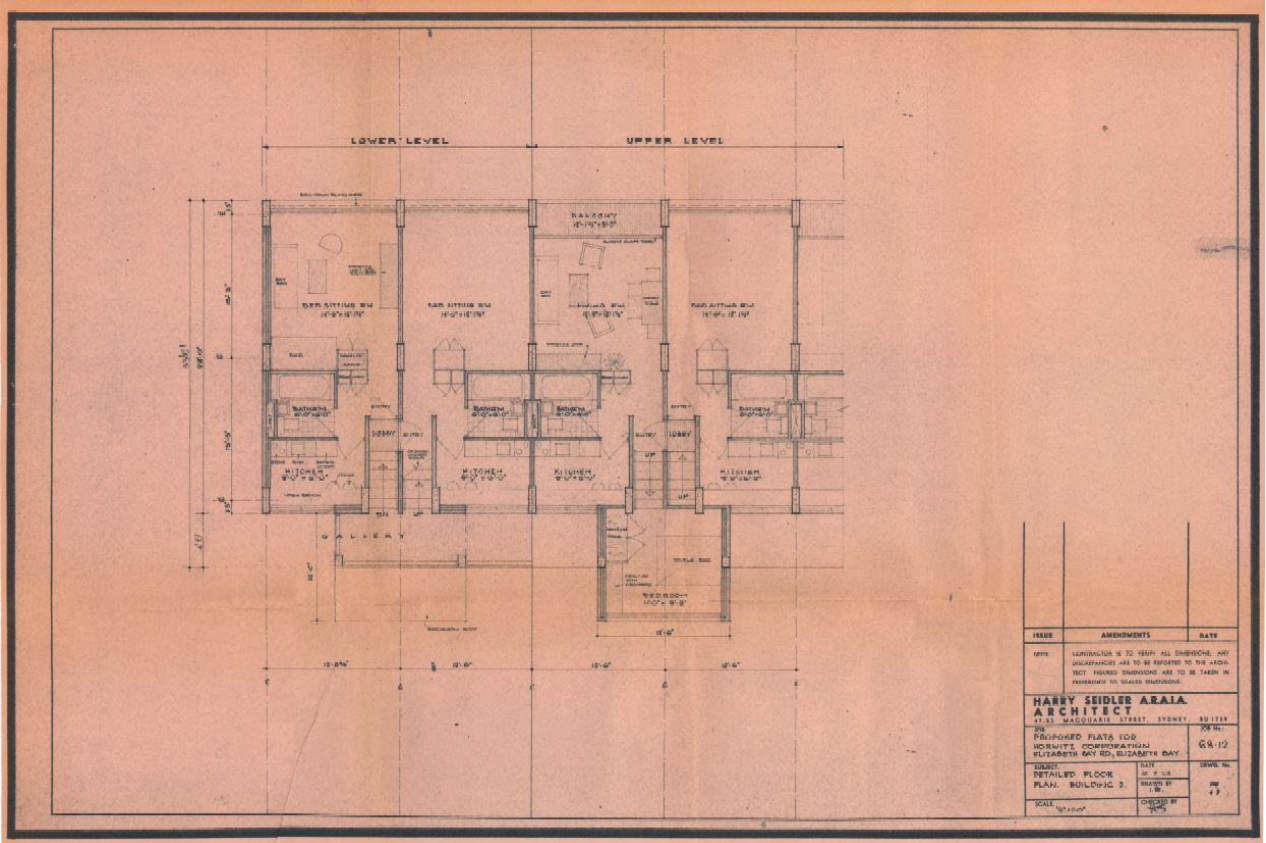


Image caption	View of Ercildoune from Elizabeth Bay Road showing the main entrance to the buildings.				
Image year	2024	Image by	GML	Image copyright holder	GML



Image caption	Oblique view of northern elevation from Elizabeth Bay Road.				
Image year	2024	Image by	GML	Image copyright holder	GML



Image caption	View of Ercildoune from Elizabeth Bay Crescent (north) showing concrete frame and cream brick infill walls.				
Image year	2024	Image by	GML	Image copyright holder	GML



Image caption	View of Ercildoune from Elizabeth Bay Crescent (east).				
Image year	2024	Image by	GML	Image copyright holder	GML



Image caption	View of the entrance lift lobby.				
Image year	2024	Image by	GML	Image copyright holder	GML



Image caption	View of Ercildoune from the southern access corridor with rubber floor finish and cast concrete balustrades.				
Image year	2024	Image by	GML	Image copyright holder	GML



Image caption	View of split-level access to apartments off the circulation gallery.				
Image year	2024	Image by	GML	Image copyright holder	GML



Image caption	View of the stairwell and lobby entrance located in the circulation core between the two apartment blocks.				
Image year	2024	Image by	GML	Image copyright holder	GML



Image caption	View of area between the circulation core and the eastern apartment block, showing the shared corridor and cast concrete balustrades with exposed aggregate.				
Image year	2024	Image by	GML	Image copyright holder	GML

