



## ***Wellington Architecture: A Walking Guide***

John Walsh and Patrick Reynolds  
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John Walsh, arguably New Zealand's leading writer specialising in architecture, and Patrick Reynolds, one of New Zealand's finest architectural photographers, have once again formed a dream team, this time publishing a visually sumptuous guide to 120 of Wellington's most interesting buildings.

Titled *Wellington Architecture: A Walking Guide*, the book is arranged into five great walks. Each of the routes is presented in its own uniquely colour-coded chapter. Every building is numbered on an easy-to-follow map and – most importantly – every building is awarded a full-page colour photograph opposite a full page of descriptive text that introduces us to its architect, its history and its transformative role in Wellington's identity. This guidebook takes us along the braided threads of Wellington's architectural heritage, telling us tales of survival and reconstruction, and revival and relocation, along the way. Walsh's writing unites the buildings through their common themes, contrasting styles and shared histories, while delightfully alerting us to cafés and coffee shops along the routes.



Imagery: Patrick Reynolds.

John Walsh is the consummate storyteller, guiding us through an array of architectural styles spanning three centuries and capturing our attention at every turn. On Route 1, the Harbourside Walk, we learn how the 1860s saltwater baths that once inhabited the site of today's Freyberg Pool were surrounded by barriers to protect swimmers from the 'visits of sea monsters'. On Route 2, the Te Aro Flat Walk, we learn about 'Ma Hallam',

who rented out rooms in the Albemarle Hotel by the hour and saved her better rooms for police officers. On Route 3, the Central Spine Walk, we learn that the black-and-white brick arches of the former Mount Cook Police Station, built by prisoners from prisoner-made bricks, were meant to resemble the cuffs of the historic police uniforms. On Route 4, the CBD Walk, we learn that the Old Government Building on Lambton Quay did not add

women's bathrooms until 20 years after it was completed. On Route 5, the West Side Walk, we learn that the Dominion Observatory was built atop the remains of a gun battery dating back to the 1885 'Russian scare'. And we learn how Edmund Anscombe's submission for his remarkable design of the 1938 Franconia multi-unit social housing scheme on The Terrace was dismissed by the government, with cabinet minister and future prime minister Peter Fraser saying, "frankly, I do not like flats" and "I think they are alien and foreign to the country".

The sumptuous photographs by Patrick Reynolds portray each building almost anthropomorphically, like a timeless inhabitant living upon its site. On Route 1, Porter & Martin's modernist Clifton Towers building (1963) on Oriental Parade appears to have brazenly rotated its position, in its longing to gaze directly out to the harbour. On Route 2, James Bennie's eclectic Albemarle Hotel (1906) on Ghuznee Street takes on Miss Havisham-like qualities. Her frayed veils and weathered creases define her, even while she stares outward and defiant. On Route 3, Charles Tringham's Carpenter Gothic-style Plimmer House (1874) on Boulcott Street appears like a poised sentinel gazing seductively across the street. On Route 4, John Campbell's Public Trust Building (1909) on Lambton Quay – a delightful mélange of Edwardian Baroque granite and brick – appears like a living figure positioned upon the very fulcrum of the city's twisting grids. And on Route 5, the Ministry of Works' modernist Freyberg Building (1979) on Aitken Street appears to bare its innermost soul, as its interior becomes slowly illuminated at dusk.

There are serious lessons to be learned throughout this book. Walsh tells us harrowing stories of stunning heritage buildings that were almost demolished because they did not align with the styles of the time. He reminds us of the challenges incurred by building on reclaimed land and driving piles into the seabed at a time when construction technologies were far more basic than they are today. When I finished reading this book, I felt as though Wellington's heritage buildings had become



members of my own extended family, ranging in age across many generations. The book reads like an album of sometimes cherished, sometimes harrowing and occasionally momentous family memories. Binding them together as one, this book makes us reflect deeply about the ways in which an earthquake or a government mandate can decide a building's fate. ❶

**Daniel K Brown**

**ABOVE,  
CLOCKWISE  
FROM TOP  
LEFT** Clifton  
Towers in  
Oriental Bay;  
Plimmer House;  
Public Trust  
Building; Freyberg  
Building.

**PREVIOUS  
PAGE,  
CLOCKWISE  
FROM TOP  
LEFT** Albemarle  
Hotel; Mount  
Cook Police  
Station; Old  
Government  
Building;  
Dominion  
Observatory.