



Harold Krantz OAM

(Photo 1964 courtesy David Krantz)

Abraham Harold Krantz (1906-1999) was born 15 February 1906 in Adelaide to Russian Jewish parents. After qualifying in architecture at the age of 20, Harold Krantz initially worked in Adelaide for Woods, Bagot, Jory & Laybourne-Smith. Employment became limited in SA and in 1927 Krantz accepted an invitation from his uncle, Harold Boas, to travel across to Perth and work at the firm Oldham, Boas & Ednie-Brown. Although registering as an architect 15 July 1929 (reg. no. 128), Krantz operated a commercial art business from 1929 to 1931. While operating this business Harold honed the principles of economy through mass production. As he stated in a 1981 interview, *'... I realised that you just had to find ways of getting cost down without spoiling the quality, and that was really how I was able to start in the architectural field.'*

Krantz returned to architecture in 1931 with simple designs that strove for cost efficiency. He described his philosophy in relation to architecture as follows: *'And so when I got back into architecture I started off with the design. It had to be as functional as possible with no frills, no decoration, the use of colour and materials, good planning, no waste of space, no passages and no breaks and funny shapes. The objective was to study every element in the building from the skirting, from the foundations, up to the top of the roof. Is there a better way of doing it for the same money, or a better job for less, or just as good a job for less money.'*

In the mid to late 1930s, after a number of small projects for friends and business associates, Krantz, together with associate architects Margaret Pitt Morison and John Oldham, began to design small blocks of flats and flat conversions. Some of these early two storey flats such as Winthrop, Varsity

and Melleray, Nedlands, resembled enlarged houses while in the city some of the first multi storey blocks such as Oddfellows, Arbordale and Riviera represented a new type of flat construction.

In 1939 Viennese born and educated Jew, Robert Schläfrig (1908-1968) started working with Krantz. Schläfrig had left Europe to escape the worsening political situation and persecution under Hitler. On arrival in Fremantle, Schläfrig approached Krantz for some casual work as he was planning to travel on to the eastern states. However Schläfrig stayed on, and in 1946, he sat and passed a special examination of the Architects Board of Western Australia and shortly after changed his name to Sheldon. The firm of Krantz and Sheldon was formed later that same year. Krantz and Sheldon went on to become a major employer of architects in the post war period, particularly those who emigrated from Europe. The firm made a significant contribution to the architectural history of Western Australia, pioneering European-influenced style as opposed to the English and USA derivatives that had dominated Perth prior to that time.

As the firm grew Krantz took on a more managerial and entrepreneurial role. He organised friends, family and business colleagues into syndicates who would pool their resources to finance new building projects, particularly flats. These syndicates allowed small investors direct access to property investment. Significantly as the syndicates were primarily for investment Krantz and Sheldon was able to pursue design ideas without the restrictions of individual preferences. The philosophy of functionalism was still paramount in the firm with minimum of wastage and mass production being key concepts. From the late 1930s the firm began to dominate the design and building of flats in Perth. Flats were still subject to criticism in the popular press, with claims that the 'flats of today are the slums of tomorrow'. In 1941 Harold produced an article for *The Architect* magazine defending the sociological and economic aspects of flats. His response rested on the premise that 'slums are low return propositions; whether small cottages, large luxury residences or flats of any kind'.

In the late 1930s the Nedlands Tennis Club was fortunate to have Harold Krantz among its members. Krantz designed a new club-house in functionalist style, which fitted well with the Inter-War art-deco styles that were predominant in the suburb and which included his own residence in The Avenue. Tenders

for the club-house were advertised in January 1938, and the contract was awarded to a local contractor for a price of nearly £1,600.

From the late 1930s until the 1960s, Krantz's firm became synonymous with the design of flats, or apartment blocks, and is reputed to have designed and built around 90% of all the flats constructed in Perth during that period. Building flats allowed Krantz the opportunity to more fully develop and apply the principles he had already established in his work on houses, that being an: *'Emphasis on reducing each dwelling unit to a minimum, achieved by tight planning rather than smaller spaces; conventional construction combined with rigorous detailing to maximise structural strength of building materials and minimise waste; and the bulk ordering of standard building materials, fixtures and fittings to achieve economies of scale.'*

Opened in 1956, the well-known Wandana Apartment Block is a complex of three apartment blocks in Subiaco, designed by Krantz and Sheldon for the State Housing Commission of WA. At its peak, between the 1940s and 1960s, the firm designed up to 1,000 home units a year. Harold Krantz's son, David eventually joined the partnership, and other partners were Robin Arndt, John Silbert, George Sheldon and Lourens West. In the 1950s, the firm extended into larger buildings such as shopping centres and car parks. Robert Sheldon died in 1968 and Harold Krantz continued practising until his retirement in 1972.

Aside from his professional work, Krantz was a dedicated philatelist, had a great interest in horse-racing and was an active patron of the arts. He married Dorothy Hope Powell, a well known actress in Perth, in December 1933. Their son David was born in 1935 and a daughter Toby (Manford) in 1936. Krantz was a founding member of Australia's first permanent, professional theatre group 'Company of Four', which later became the WA National Theatre Company, and he designed and built the Playhouse Theatre in Pier Street, Perth as an outlet for the company's productions. In 1998, Harold Krantz was named Citizen of the Year by the City of Perth and also in the same year was elevated to Life Fellow of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects. He was nominated for the Order of Australia but died on 8 March 1999, before the awards had been signed by the Queen, and David accepted the medal on his behalf. Dorothy had passed away in 1994.

References:

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Colin Nichol, 'Remembering Dorothy Krantz', first published in the *Western Review*, February 1995, accessed 4 April 2015 at <http://watvhistory.com/2012/06/remembering-dorothy-krantz/>

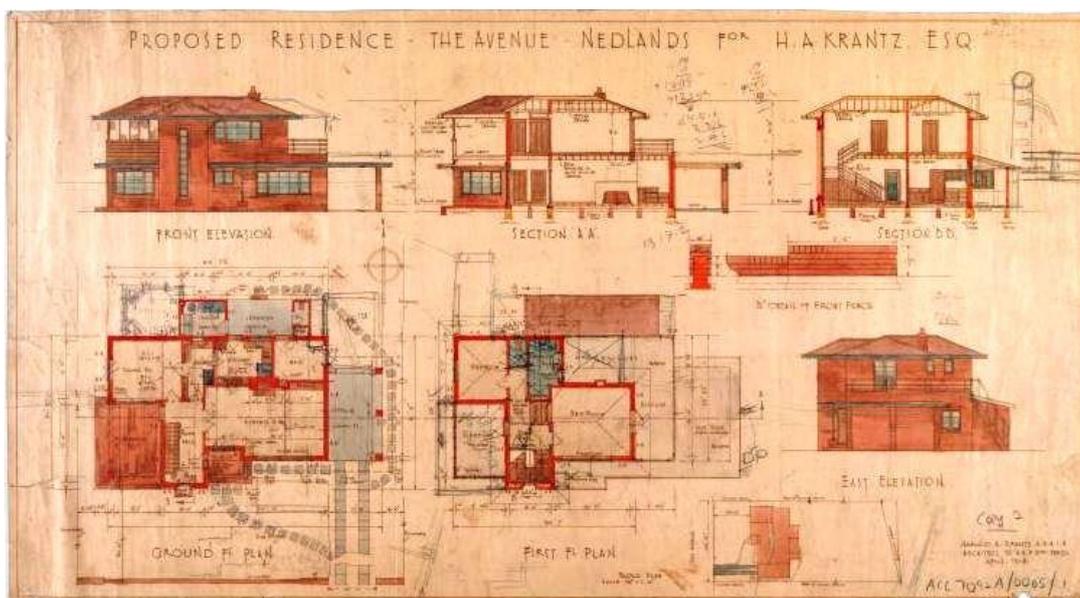
Pers coms, David Krantz, Nedlands, 26 January 2015, 8 April 2015.

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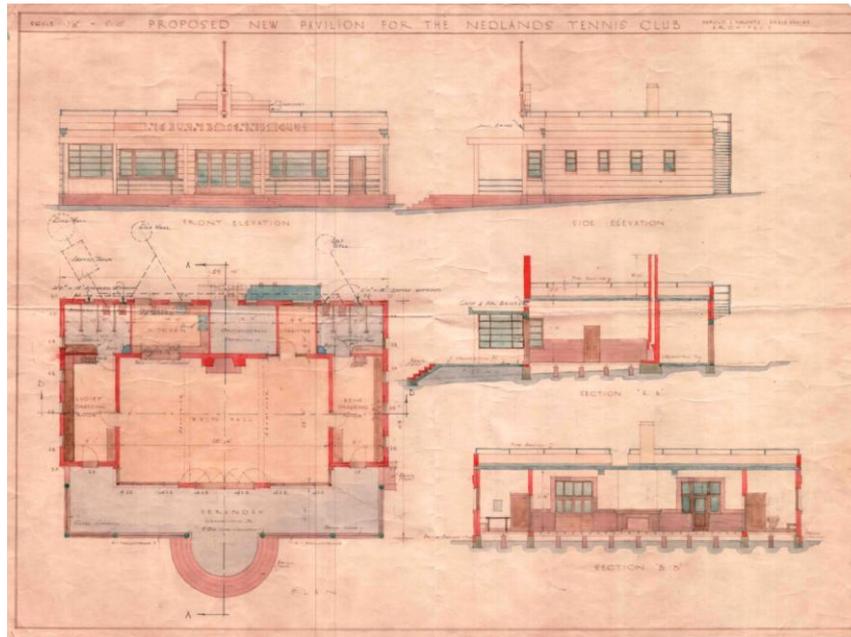
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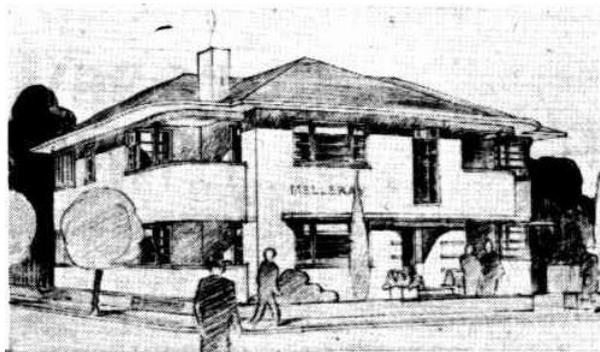
Taylor, Dr John J., 'Abraham Harold Krantz (1906-1999)', *Western Australian Architect Biographies*, <http://www.architecture.com.au/> accessed DATE.



The Krantz Residence, The Avenue Nedlands 1934 has been demolished (slwa_b2825840_2)



Krantz' design of 1937 for the Nedlands Tennis Club. The club-house was officially opened by Lieutenant-Governor Sir James Mitchell in June 1938. (courtesy Nedlands Tennis Club)



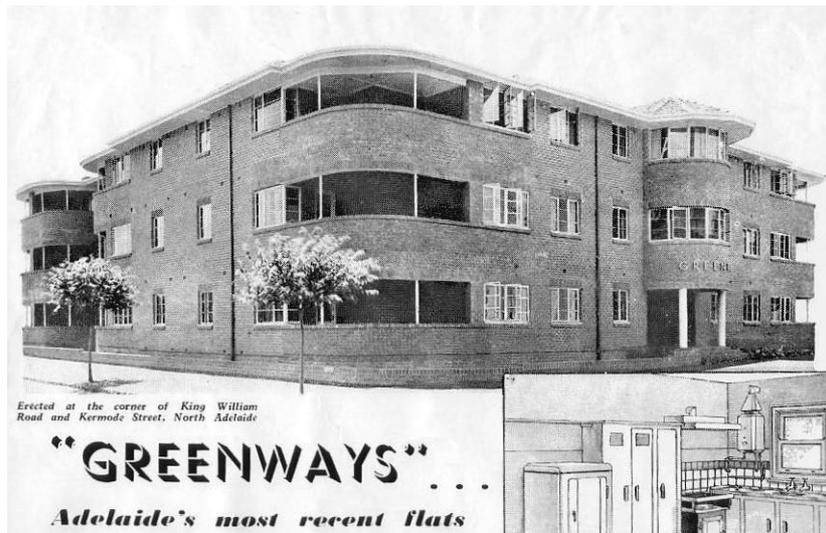
Perspective drawing of a two-storey block of four flats to be erected at the corner of Winthrop-avenue and Hardy-street, Hollywood. The architect is Mr. Harold Krantz.

'Melleray' Flats corner Winthrop Ave and Hardy Road, Hollywood (*The West Australian*, 19 March 1938, p.10)



Perspective of block of four brick flats to be built in Fairway, Nedlands. The architect is Mr. Harold A. Krantz.

Flats corner Fairway and Clark Street, Nedlands (*The West Australian*, 14 May 1938, p.4)



'Greenways' Flats, King William Road, North Adelaide (Turner's magazine Perth 1939)



'Arbordale' Flats, St George's Terrace Perth have been demolished (*The Architect*, Vol 1, No 11, December 1939, p.21)



The Playhouse Theatre, Pier Street Perth opened in 1956, and was demolished in 2012 (<http://watvhistory.com/2012/06/remembering-dorothy-krantz/>)



Mount Eliza Apartments of 1964, West Perth effectively marked the change in generation from Harold Krantz to son David (<http://watvhistory.com/2012/06/remembering-dorothy-krantz/>).