

KARL LANGER (1903 – 1969)



Left: *Langer house at 396 Swann Road, St Lucia, c.1950.* [Image no. 6523-0001-0593.](#)

Right: *Lennon's Hotel Broadbeach, Queensland, 9 September 1962.* Donald Finlay. [Image no. \[R115\] lbp00198.](#)

Karl Langer was born in Vienna in 1903 where he studied architecture at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts under pioneer modernist Peter Behrens. After graduating in 1928, Behrens employed him to head his architectural atelier in Vienna during which time Langer gained his civil architect's qualification as well as a doctorate in art history, where he met his future wife Gertrude, a fellow art history doctoral candidate.

Langer established his own practice in 1934, but the rise of Nazism saw he and his Jewish wife flee, travelling to Australia from Greece in 1938. With little demand for avant-garde modernist architects in Sydney, Langer took a temporary job with architects Cook and Kerrison in Brisbane, where he and Gertrude settled. Under wartime manpower regulations Langer was soon transferred to a mundane job as a draftsman with Queensland Railways. Karl and Gertrude's modernist credentials and European sophistication saw them develop a youthful literary and artistic circle around them, contributing significantly to Brisbane's cultural life. Karl lectured part-time in architecture at the University of Queensland whilst closely studying the local landscape and conditions. In 1944, he published his influential 'Sub-Tropical Housing', a short guide to designing passive homes for Queensland's hot, humid climate. Meanwhile Gertrude gave public lectures for the Queensland Art Society fund and later became the long-time art critic for *The Courier-Mail*.

Also in 1944 Brisbane City Council offered Langer the position of assistant town planner. However, a political storm erupted when it was revealed he was selected in preference to a returned serviceman. His release from the railways was blocked for the remainder of the Second World War. The publicity, however, saw Langer attract an impressive waiting-list of commissions, including revising the town plan for the city of Mackay for his friend Senator Ian Wood, also Mayor of Mackay and advising on a site for a civic centre in Perth.

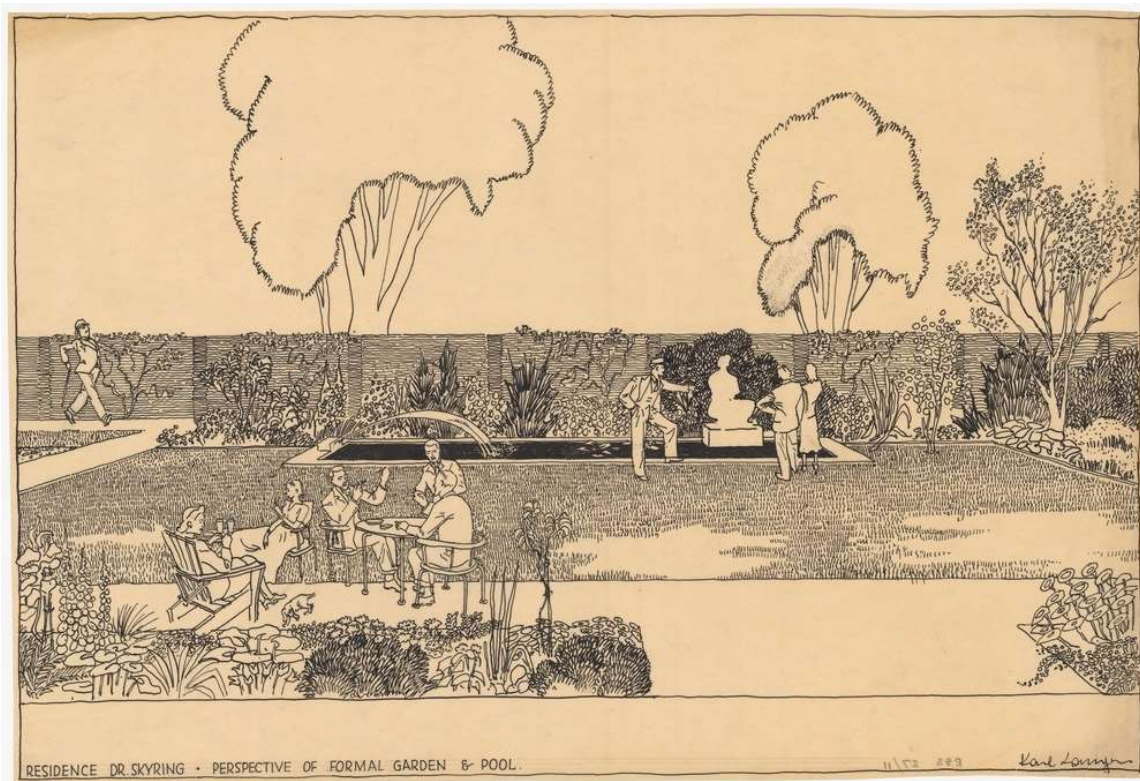
In the late 1940s Langer consulted for Cumberland County Council, the planning authority for Sydney, and recommended replacing the tram depot at Bennelong Point with an opera house. Throughout the 1950s, he undertook projects for Darwin, Ingham, Toowoomba, Kingaroy and Mt Isa as well as for the National Capital Development Commission in Canberra where he advocated strongly for the work of Walter Burley Griffin to be preserved.

In the mid-1950s he designed the first canal developments on the Gold Coast as well as the iconic Lennon's Hotel, set in sand dunes between the highway and the beach at Broadbeach, followed later by island resorts in the Whitsundays. Langer undertook residential commissions and had an interest in using economical materials where he could. He campaigned strongly for Brisbane to embrace its river as a civic asset and for Queen Street to be turned into a pedestrian mall. Many of his ideas were outright rejected and when they were later adopted, Langer's reserved nature meant others took credit for them.

Amongst his favourite buildings was the chapel he designed at St Peter's Lutheran College. After he died in Brisbane in October 1969, a service was held for him there. Karl Langer was cremated at Mt Thompson crematorium, another of his buildings. Gertrude survived him by 15 years, passing away in 1984. They had no children, but many of Langer's buildings survive.

Collection resources

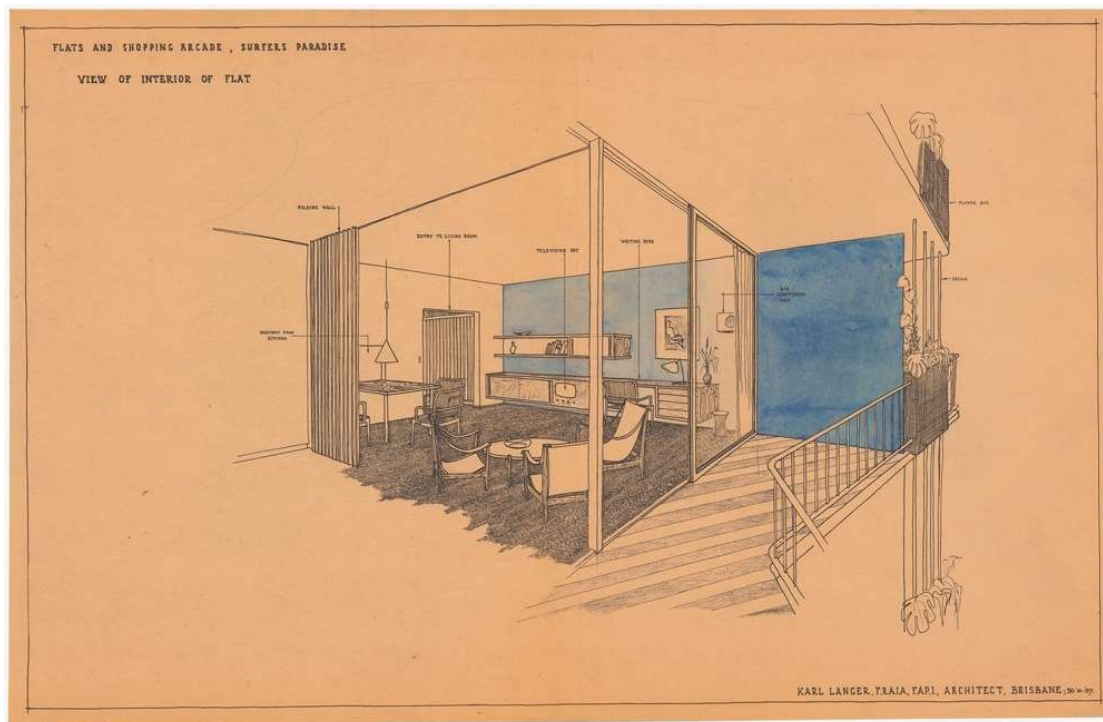
- [R83 Karl Langer Architectural Plans](#)
This collection consists of approximately 437 rolls of architectural drawings for buildings and residences all over Queensland, and includes designs for stained glass windows and coats of arms. Only a few have been digitised – these are accessed via the Collection Guide (bottom of record).
- [32806 Karl Langer house at Sherley Street, Brisbane 2018](#)
A series of photographs taken by Richard Stringer of the Karl Langer-designed house at 28 Sherley Street, Moorooka.
- [27333 Val Vallis residence photographs 2009](#)
Photographs taken by Reina Irmer of the home of Queensland poet and academic Val Vallis. In 1958, Val Vallis approached Karl Langer to design a 'cheap' house. Langer, in accepting the commission, set out to prove he could design and construct a house for a lower cost than the homes that were being constructed by the Queensland Housing Commission. After the 1974 flood, the house was raised a level, but Vallis remained in this home for the rest of his life.
- [Sub-tropical housing](#), 1944. Karl Langer. Call no. S620.006
Langer's seminal publication was widely circulated amongst the architectural fraternity in Brisbane at the time, influencing many.
- **Images** of Langer buildings from [6523 Royal Australian Institute of Architects photographs and plan:](#)
 - [West's Furniture showroom](#), Wickham Street, Fortitude Valley, c.1953
 - [Ryan House](#) in Bardon, date unknown
 - [Sugar Research Institute](#), West Mackay
 - [Sunbathers at Lennon's Hotel, Broadbeach](#), 1958
 - [Langer House](#), 396 Swann Road, St Lucia, 1950



Dr Skyring's residence [formal garden and pool], Rockhampton, n.d. Karl Langer. [Item no. R83-27-11-1](#)

State Library blogs

- [Karl Langer Architectural Plans](#)
- [Housing a growing state](#)



Surfers Paradise arcade and flats [interior view of flat], 1957-1958. Karl Langer. Item no. [R83-6-7-2](#)