

Obituary

Barbara Ruth van den Broek

22.8.1932-24.8.2001

compiled by Marion Pennicuik, from written contributions by Diane van den Broek, Malcolm Bunzli and Delwynn Poulton



Barbara van den Brock was a 'woman for all seasons': a registered Architect, a Landscape Architect, a Town Planner; and a person committed to lifelong learning.

Born in New Zealand, Barbara graduated with a Diploma of Architecture from the Auckland University in 1956, then moved with her first child and fellow architect husband to Brisbane, where they formed a professional practice. In 1963, three years after the birth of her fourth child, Barbara won the competition to design the grounds around Queensland University.

Architect

As a working mother, Barbara was extremely dedicated and ran an architectural and a landscape architectural office as a sole practitioner, as well as finding time to study.

In 1966, Barbara completed a post-graduate Diploma in Town and Country Planning at Queensland University, where she won the RAPI prize for the Best Graduate. In 1969, she completed a post-graduate degree in Landscape Architecture, also at Queensland University.

As a landscape student, Barbara is remembered as being very focused. She had the ability to quickly analyse problems and succinctly present a practical and imaginative solution. She argued her case positively and skilfully presented her proposal in a strong graphical style.

She also lectured at the University of Queensland and to Adult Education courses in Brisbane.

When the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) was formed in 1969, all Queensland Association of Landscape Architects (QALA) members became members. QALA had formed in 1965 and Barbara was Secretary, then President from 1973 to 1975.

Landscape Architect

In the 1970s, going it alone both professionally and privately, Barbara designed the grounds for several landmarks in Queensland and Papua New Guinea, including the Queensland Cultural Centre and Art Gallery, at South Bank, Brisbane, and the Waigani government centre and parliament building in Port Moresby. Barbara also undertook many domestic and smaller commissions, including the practical and delightful Armstrong Walk, Queensland University.



While living in Brisbane, Barbara also became involved in major development works for the Federal and State governments in Brisbane, Canberra, Sydney, Darwin, Alice Springs and Perth. Although working in various locations was considered unusual for a woman with a growing family, this was a hallmark of her drive and enthusiasm.

Artist and Designer

Barbara was a talented painter in oils, exhibiting regularly with a group of female artists in several galleries in Brisbane in the early 1970s.

Barbara had a love and understanding of the Australian landscape. She achieved this 'Australianness' in many of her designs. She was respected as an ethical designer and was at the forefront of sustainability. Her work as a landscape architect in the 60s and 70s demonstrated that, through good design solutions, destruction of the natural environment could be halted and reversed. Her work was known both nationally and internationally.

Town Planner

As a town planner, Barbara addressed equity issues, including women's rights, the disenfranchisement of our indigenous people and other underprivileged groups.

Barbara was involved in the early formation of the Women's Electoral Lobby in Brisbane and actively supported women in the building industry through Constructive Women in Sydney.

Educator

In 1982, Barbara completed a Master of Science, specialising in environmental studies, at Griffith University, then a Graduate Diploma in Education at Sydney University in 1988.

For a short spell, Barbara worked at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. During the 1980s and 1990s, she combined private practice with teaching at Ryde TAFE college, as well as publishing works on conservation and management of historic parks, urban gardens and playgrounds. In 1998, she received the Voluntary Medallion for continued service and dedication to the National Trust.

Role Model

Barbara was a keen photographer and travelled widely, both in Australia and overseas, most recently to the mountains of Borneo and Peru.

She had a wide and diverse range of friends and colleagues, respecting and understanding differing beliefs, while maintaining her own. To her female colleagues in particular, she was a role model, who inspired many to emulate her independence. She was highly regarded as a friendly, ethical, sincere, and passionate person, whose professional conduct and private relationships were exemplary.

Barbara van den Broek was very proud of the achievements of her four children and nine grandchildren, who survive her.

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge the contributions of people who contributed to this obituary, including Delwynn Poulton, Malcolm Bunzli, Jean Brodie-Hall (Verschuer), Catherine Brouwer and Barbara's daughter, Diane van den Broek. In talking to these people, it was apparent that Barbara was a highly competent and respected practitioner and person, who inspired many.

Barbara van den Broek.

University of
Queensland.

Kelvin Grove College
(Photos courtesy of
Diane van den
Broek).