Book Review

RAY TONKIN

Ian Stapleton, *How To Restore the Old Aussie House*, John Fairfax, $9.95

George Gilbert Scott was a renowned architectural improver, who in the name of restoration turned buildings into better examples than they had ever been. This book makes a valiant effort to hold back the tide of 'G.G. Scotts' marching through the inner suburbs of Australian cities and, because of the manner in which it has been published and distributed, will probably reach more people than all the recent glossy publications devoted to old buildings and building restoration. It should also be a better starting point than many of the others, because it really is not a 'how-to-do-it' book (perhaps it is mistitled), but rather a guide to the bits and pieces that make up the Australian house. As such it provides an essential basis for any successful restoration project.

By its very nature it is a publication lacking in vast technical detail and in precision, for that matter, therefore it will undoubtedly annoy many specialists. For example: 'a Federation-style house nearly always has red tuck-pointed brickwork, terracotta tiled roof and coloured glass windows', (p 2). While I cannot speak for Sydney, Melbourne has acres of Federation-styled houses which are clad with weatherboard and which have corrugated galvanised iron roofs.

The illustrations are clear and generally excellent. Drawings such as that of the staircase (p 84) or floor construction (p 69) can never go amiss.

On the other hand, the need to simplify subjects such as interior plasterwork, cast iron lace and fences is, disturbing, as the preponderance of reproductions in these components makes it difficult for building restorers to choose the right pattern. Perhaps the only way to provide better assistance would be to produce a more comprehensive catalogue-type document, covering far more designs and the dates when they were produced, thus guiding more appropriate restoration work.

While the book purports to be a publication generally applicable to all parts of Australia, not surprisingly it shows a Sydney bias, not only in terms of product and
supplier recommendations but also in the range and design of a number of the illustrated details. There are regional differences in our architectural design and it is important that these be recognised.

My final (parochial) criticism relates to the directory. Victoria does not have a Ministry for Conservation and Planning but does have a Heritage Unit in the Ministry for Planning and Environment P.O. Box 2240T, GPO Melbourne, (03) 602 9272. It also has an Historic Buildings Council serviced by that unit.

Despite these criticisms, congratulations must go to Ian Stapleton and the Sydney Morning Herald, for writing and publishing the original articles, and for going to the trouble of assembling them in such a clean and unpretentious manner. It is a bit like finding your favourite cooking writer has published a compendium of his/her newspaper recipes, so that you can throw out all those tattered press-cuttings.

The book can be bought for $9.95 plus $2.00 postage from 'Old Aussie House', Box M3071, Strawberry Hills, Sydney, 2012 (cheques made payable to John Fairfax and Sons Ltd.)

CONTRIBUTORS

DON WATSON trained in architecture at the University of Queensland where he is now a lecturer. He has undertaken research for the National Trust in Queensland and has recently published A Directory of Queensland Architects to 1940. He is working on a biographical dictionary of architects.

GILBERT HERBERT is Mary Hill Swope professor of architecture at Technion Israel Institute of Technology at Haifa. He has taught at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, and at the University of Adelaide in South Australia, from which post the research for this paper was carried out. He has written many papers on the history and theory of architecture and planning. His four books include Pioneers of Prefabrication: the British Contribution in the Nineteenth Century (1978). This paper was based on research undertaken in association with Paul Stark, under the aegis of the University of Adelaide. (1984).

MILES LEWIS is an architectural historian at the University of Melbourne. He has written a wealth of papers on a wide range of subjects, and is the author of Victorian Primitive (1977), Don John of Balaklava (1977) and co-author of The Essential Maldon (1983).