

HERITAGE ASSESSMENT

BIDURA CHILDREN'S COURT 357 GLEBE POINT ROAD, GLEBE NSW 2037



The south-western facade of Bidura Children's Court, taken just after the building was completed (Feb 1983).
Source: Government Printing Office Collection, State Library of NSW.



View of the Bidura Children's Court as it appears today, taken from the southern end of Ferry Lane.
Used with permission from the photographer, Sarah Rowlands.

February 2016

BIDURA CHILDREN'S COURT BUILDING

Previous Names of the Building: NSW Children's Court and Metropolitan Remand Centre

Year of Construction: 1980–1983

Year Opened: 1983

Designer/Architect: NSW Department of Public Works Government Architect's Office, led by J.W. (Ian) Thomson; Project Architect Andrew Milcz.
Consultant Architect/Engineer: John Ritchie from Behne Ritchie and Hart

Builder: (Ken) Hutchinson Builders

Structural Engineer: John Talty, Lehmann & Talty Pty Ltd

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

This Heritage Assessment has been prepared to assist City of Sydney Council in determining the local heritage significance of the building known as Bidura Children's Court. The building is currently under threat of demolition due to a Development Application that seeks Stage 1 approval for the building envelope of a new residential development on the site. The DA proposes to: demolish the existing Bidura Children's Court with associated site works and tree removal; remove the pocket park on Avon Street; further excavate the site and construct a new two-level basement carpark with vehicle access from Ferry Lane; and construct a new residential development totalling 96 new residences housed in two tower blocks and 10 terrace-style townhouses. It is the author's view that the building should be given local heritage listing and protection.

1.2 REPORT OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this Heritage Assessment is to evaluate the heritage significance of the existing Bidura Children's Court in relation to the provisions established by the City of Sydney Council, and by the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage.

1.3 AUTHORSHIP

This report was prepared by Jenna Reed Burns, B.Ed. (Arts), Dip. Hort (Landscape).

1.4 NOMENCLATURE

In this HIS the 1980s building behind Edmund Blacket's house shall be referred to as Bidura Children's Court — a name and function it maintains today. Blacket's house will be referred to as 'Bidura'.

1.5 METHODOLOGY

This report has been prepared with reference to the NSW Heritage Office's (now Branch) publications *Assessing Heritage Significance* (2001 update) and *Statements of Heritage Impact* (2002 update), and with reference to the Council planning documents *Sydney Local Environmental Plan 2012* and *Sydney Development Control Plan 2012*.

Site visits (exterior only) were carried out in November 2015 and February 2016. As the Children's Court is still in operation in the building it was not possible for the author of this Heritage Assessment to gain access to the interior of the building. However, the author interviewed the project architect, Andrew Milcz, in November 2015 to learn about the process of the design and construction of the building. Unless otherwise stated, the photographs in this report were taken by the author in late 2015/early 2016.

1.6 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

1.6.1 Historic Photographs & Floorplans

- B/W photographs of Bidura Children's Court, taken by either John Lugg or Pieter Stroethoff in February 1983, from the Government Printing Office Collection, State Library of NSW.
- Colour photographs, taken by project architect Andrew Milcz, 1983. Private Collection.
- Original floorplans, private collection.

1.6.2 Heritage Listing Sheets

- Bidura, No.357 Glebe Point Road, Glebe. State Heritage Inventory Database No: 2427867.
- Glebe Point Heritage Conservation Area, State Heritage Inventory Database No: 2425381.

1.6.3 Planning Documents

- *Sydney Development Control Plan 2012*
- *Sydney Local Environmental Plan 2012*

1.6.4 General References

- Brooks, Graham, and Associates, *Statement of Heritage Impact and Conservation Management Plan*, September 2015.
- Reed Burns, J., *Heritage Impact Statement for Bidura Children's Court*, December 2015.

1.7 SITE LOCATION

No. 357 Glebe Point Road, Glebe, is located on the north-eastern side of Glebe Point Road, between Ferry Road and Forsyth Street. The site is identified as Lot 1 DP 64069.

1.8 REPORT LIMITATIONS

This report is limited to an analysis of significance and value of the 1983 Bidura Children's Court building, which stands at the rear of the site behind the 1860s house designed and resided in by colonial architect Edmund Blacket.

2.0 BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SITE SINCE 1920

The Bidura site was purchased by the NSW state government in 1920 for use as accommodation for wards of the state. It was then called the Depot for State Children. It was the first place children were housed after removal from their families and all foster children in the state transited through 'Bidura'. In 1925 a new building, called the Metropolitan Girls' Shelter, was erected fronting Avon Street. At this point the facilities housed a total of 46 children, but rising admissions meant that by 1976-77 it was proposed to redevelop the site.

Following the closure of 'Bidura' and the demolition of the Metropolitan Girls Shelter in 1978, design work commenced on a new remand centre and Children's Court facility on the site. The work was undertaken by the NSW Dept of Public Works under John Whyte (Ian) Thomson, the then government architect, with Andrew Milcz as the project architect. Milcz designed the building after extensive consultation with the local community (which resulted in the building's stepped form), and oversaw its construction.

The building's original purpose was to operate as the Children's Court and a juvenile remand centre. While it ceased functioning as a remand centre two years after opening (due to research which showed the ineffectiveness of incarceration of young people in large institutions), it has continued to operate as the Children's Court — with all the facilities associated with that purpose (magistrate's rooms, interview rooms, juvenile justice and Family and Community Services administration offices, etc) — up to the present day. The court will continue operating at the Glebe site until June 2017 when the Children's Court is to return to Albion Street, Surry Hills.

3.0 SITE ASSESSMENT

3.1 THE SITE

The entire site (which comprises Edmund Blackett's house 'Bidura' and the Bidura Children's Court) measures 5556sqm, with frontages to three roads: Glebe Point Road to the south-west (boundary length 39.725m); Ferry Lane to the south-east (147m); and Avon Street to the north-east (21.785m). The site is relatively narrow, with the majority of it being just under 40m in width. The rear boundary fronting Avon Street is narrower than the front boundary due to a rectilinear parcel (measuring approximately 19x33.5m, or 636sqm) having been subdivided from the north-west corner of the original property. Bidura Children's Court is situated behind Blackett's 'Bidura' (built c.1860) and occupies approximately 3987sqm of the total site area.

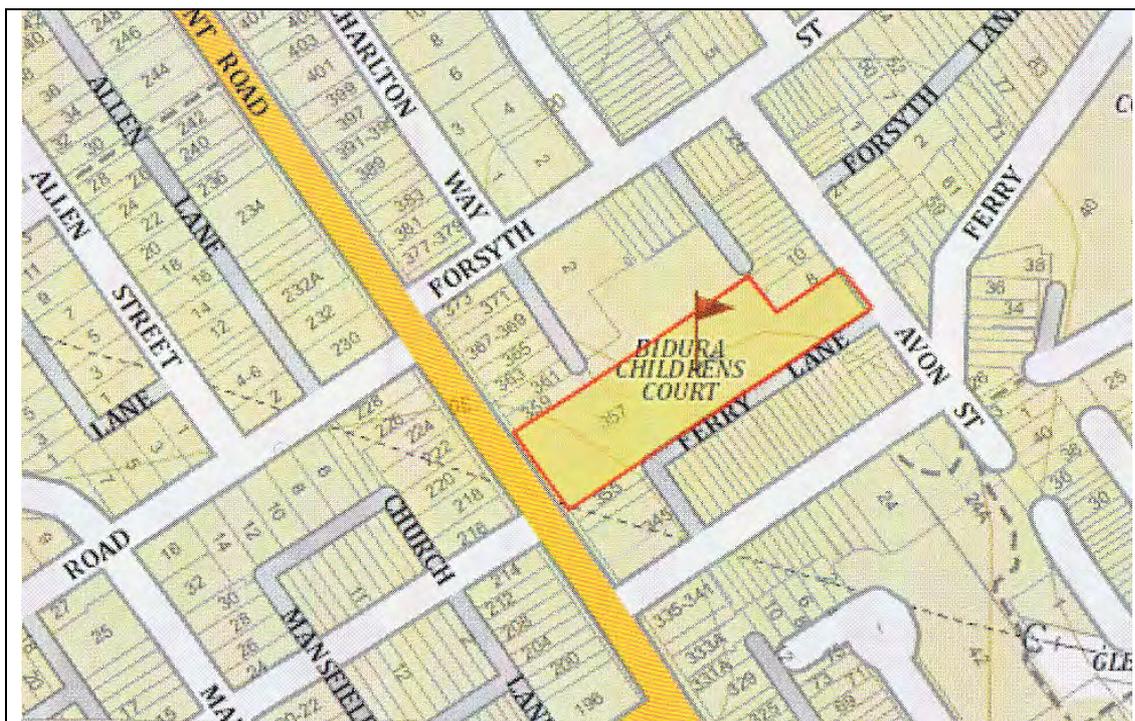


FIGURE 1: Site map. NSW LPI, Six Maps.

Behind 'Bidura', the site has a moderate slope to the north-east. A single-lane driveway runs from Glebe Point Road along the north-western side of 'Bidura's' front garden down to the upper level of the two-storey basement carpark under Bidura Children's Court. There is another driveway entry into the basement carpark leading off Ferry Lane.

There is a landscaped garden area between 'Bidura' and the Bidura Children's Court, and at the NE end of the site — where the Metropolitan Girls' Shelter once stood — is a pocket park that fronts Avon Street and is accessible to the public. Behind it, a tall masonry wall separates the pocket park from the Bidura Children's Court property and an in-ground swimming pool that was originally built for the remand centre detainees.

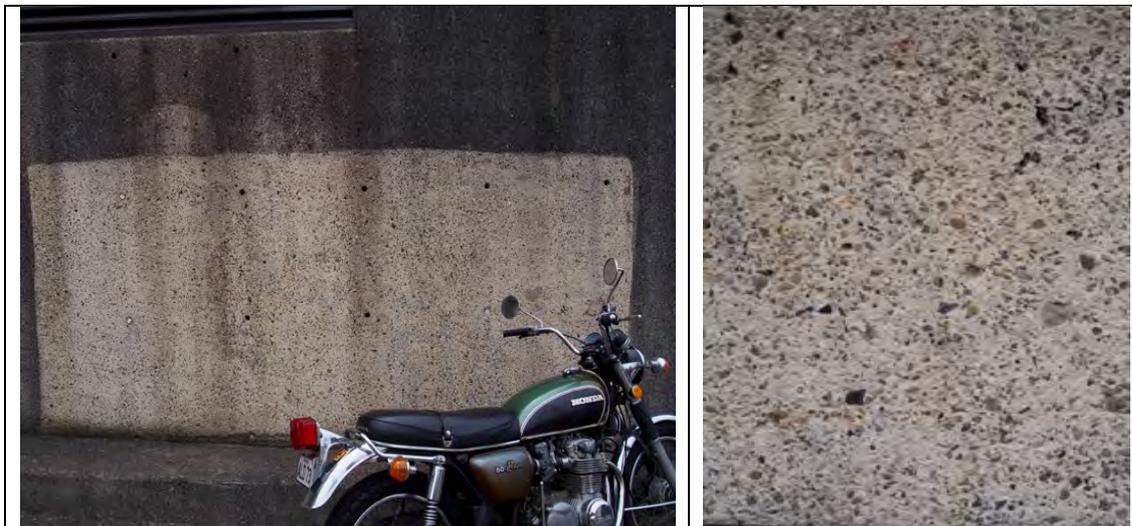
2.2 THE BUILDING — Exterior

The Bidura Children's Court is a multi-storey, reinforced concrete building in the late 20th-century Brutalist style.

The building sits on a podium (which was originally landscaped) with two levels set below the ground. The upper levels step back from three of the site's boundaries — from 'Bidura' to the south-west, Ferry Lane to the south-east, and Avon Street to the north-east. Expressing each level are wide, cantilevered terraces edged with reinforced concrete balustrades and metal tubular railings painted dark green. Juxtaposed against the floating horizontal terraces are several semi-cylindrical vertical elements that express stairwells.

Planter boxes, designed to accommodate landscaping, run along the inside edge of each terrace, however the planting that was done soon after the building was completed has died and not been replaced.

The building's exterior and many of its internal walls are constructed in white off-form concrete with a 'bush-hammered' finish to expose a mixture of blue metal aggregate and brown river pebble. The building has been badly neglected, but along the Ferry Lane exterior there are several recently cleaned test patches that reveal the original finish. See Figures 2 & 3.



FIGURES 2 & 3: Recent test patches on the exterior walls fronting Ferry Lane have revealed the original white colour of the off-form concrete and its mix of grey and brown aggregate.

Salient features of the building's exterior include:

- white off-form concrete with bush-hammered finish, exposing grey and brown aggregate

- strong juxtaposed shapes (linear terraces, semi-cylindrical elements), boldly composed
- large areas of unbroken wall surfaces
- stepped form, sitting on a podium (that was originally landscaped)
- two subterranean levels that reduce the building's visible scale and mass
- wide, cantilevered terraces (with loads transferred), edged with planter boxes

The following three photographs (Figures 4–6) were taken soon after the building was completed. They show the building as the architect intended, with its crisp, white, off-form concrete exterior, and newly planted landscaping in the planter boxes that edge the terraces.



FIGURE 4: The south-west facade of the Bidura Children's Court building soon after completion (viewed from beside the annex to 'Bidura'). The newly-planted landscaping on the terraces is evident in this photograph. *Source: Government Printing Office collection, State Library of NSW*



FIGURE 5: The building soon after completion viewed from Ferry Lane. The circular element at ground level shelters an entry to the basement carpark. The metal gates lead into a large forecourt.

Source: Government Printing Office collection, State Library of NSW



FIGURE 6: The building soon after completion, viewed from the then-newly planted pocket park on Avon Street. The large white tower block to the west is No. 2A Forsyth St.

*Photographer: Andrew Milcz.
Source: Private Collection.*

The following photographs (Figures 7–21) have been taken recently and illustrate the building as it appears today — that is, with a discoloured (dirty) concrete exterior and an absence of landscaping on the terraces.

As the author of this report did not have access to building, some of the following photographs have been taken from the SHI and CMP documents included in the Stage 1 DA, and are attributed as such. Those photographs without attribution were taken by the author of this report.



FIGURE 7: View of the south-east elevation of the Bidura Children's Court building from the southern end of Ferry Lane.



FIGURE 8: North-east facade viewed from the terrace.

Source: Graham Brooks & Associates



FIGURE 9: West-facing view from the rear terrace towards the adjacent 1970s tower apartment block at 2A Forsyth St.

Source: Graham Brooks & Associates



FIGURE 10: View of the building from the pool deck.

Source: Graham Brooks & Associates



FIGURE 11: View of the entry to the Bidura Children's Court ground floor reception area.

Used by permission of the photographer, Sarah Rowland.



FIGURE 12: View of the rear facade of 'Bidura' and the SW face of the Children's Court building from the southern end of Ferry Lane.

Used by permission of the photographer, Sarah Rowland.



FIGURE 13: View of the carpark entry from Ferry Lane.

Used by permission of the photographer, Sarah Rowland.

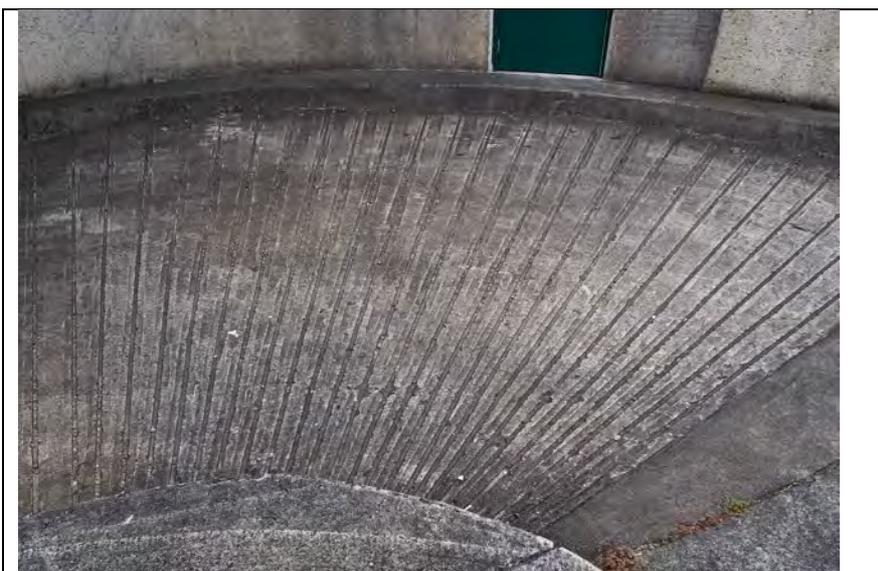


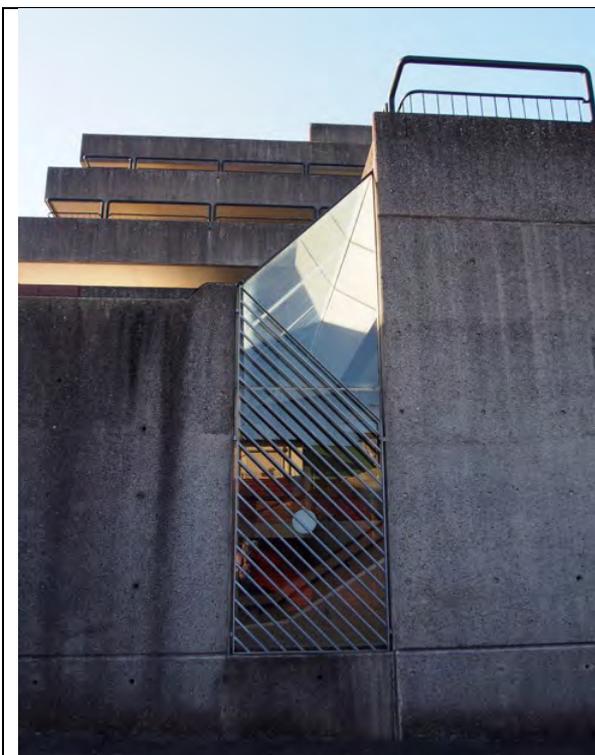
FIGURE 14: View of the driveway into the basement carpark from Ferry Lane. The striations in the concrete complement the curve of the terrace above the driveway entry.



FIGURE 15: View of the building from the forecourt or loading dock.



FIGURE 16: View of the building from Ferry Lane.



FIGURES 17 & 18: Glazed openings on Ferry Lane are fitted with diagonal security grilles. They and the raked line of the skylights are contrasting diagonal elements with the building's strong horizontals (terraces) and verticals (semi-cylindrical stairwells). The raked skylights wash the internal walls with light and lightly separate vertical elements.



FIGURE 19: View of part of the SW elevation of the Children's Court, as seen from the rear of 'Bidura'.

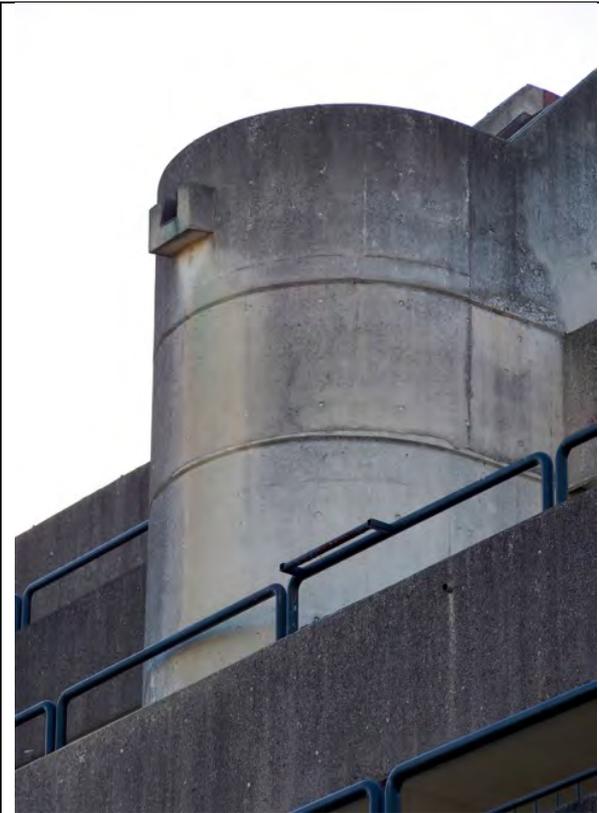


FIGURE 20: Detail of SE elevation, facing Ferry Lane.

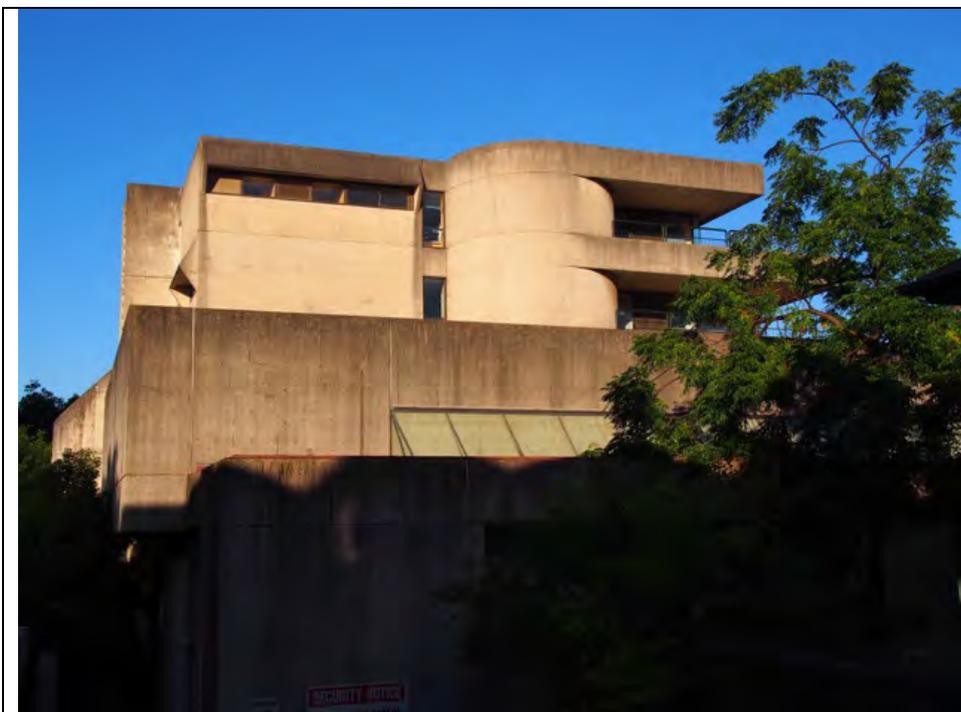


FIGURE 21: View of the SW elevation, as seen from the driveway leading to the basement carpark from Glebe Pt Rd.

2.3 THE BUILDING — Interior

Public access to the building is via a pebblecrete paved walkway between 'Bidura' and its ballroom. Steps lead down to an octagonal paved seating area where a plaque commemorates the building's opening. Another set of steps lead down from this paved area to the public entry, situated at the south-eastern corner of the building. (See Figure 11 above.)

Due to the nature of the building, which still operates as the Children's Court, it was not possible to gain access to the interior, and so the following descriptions have been gleaned from original working drawings, photographs and discussions with the project architect.

Lobbies, stairwells and other circulation areas feature walls of exposed aggregate. The remaining internal walls are timber-stud with plaster finishes. The floors are carpeted. The semi-circular wall of the lobby ramp features a mural painted on the fresh plaster by another government architect at the time, John Di Giorgio (see Figures 22–25). Planter boxes edging the ramp were originally filled with indoor plants (visible in Figure 22).

All floors are split into two levels. On the ground floor level (noted on the plans as Levels E & F) there are two courts, two magistrate's rooms and two large administration offices. Along the north-eastern side of this floor are a succession of offices, two interview rooms and a clinic area. There is also a large room originally designated for craft activities, and in the north-eastern corner were 12 girls bedrooms, dating from when the building was used as a remand centre. These rooms open onto a large outdoor terrace.

Levels H & I above contained multiple numbers of boys' bedrooms and were accessed by a circular staircase (see Figures 26 and 27).

On the floor below ground level (Levels C & D) are 20 carparks, accessed via the driveway from Glebe Point Road, a police office and interview rooms, a plant room, washrooms and showers for both children and staff, locker rooms, and a duty officer's room.

The basement (Levels A & B) accommodates carparking for a further 33 vehicles, as well as a large plant room, substation, workshop, several storerooms, and a large multi-purpose hall or auditorium with a coffered concrete ceiling and a sprung timber floor that can also be used as a sports court (see Figures 31 and 33).

The hall opens out to a paved pool deck and in-ground swimming pool. There is also access from this hall to external stairs leading up to Ferry Lane.

Salient features of the interior include:

- walls, ramps and balustrades in white off-form concrete with exposed aggregate
- a frescoed mural, painted by another government architect John Di Giorgio, which wraps around the semi-circular ramped entry
- large circular skylights
- semi-circular seating areas with custom-built seating
- a large circular stairwell connecting the three upper levels
- feature pendant lightfittings suspended through circular apertures
- banks of raked skylights washing internal walls with natural light and lightly separating vertical elements

Following are original photographs of the interior (Figures 22–32), taken soon after the building was completed in 1983.



FIGURE 22: The entry ramp, which curves around the stairwell.
Photographer: Andrew Milcz.



FIGURE 23: A circular skylight illuminates a semi-circular seating area at the top of the entry stairs.
Photographer: Andrew Milcz



FIGURE 24: John Di Giorgio, another NSW government architect, completed the mural that wraps around the curved ramp.
Government Printing Office collection, State Library of NSW.



FIGURE 25: Another view of a semi-circular seating area with custom-made seating.
Source: Government Printing Office collection, State Library of NSW.



FIGURE 26: View of the main internal staircase, looking up.
Source: Government Printing Office collection, State Library of NSW.



FIGURE 27: View of the main internal staircase, looking down. *Source: Government Printing Office collection, State Library of NSW.*



FIGURE 28: Another semi-circular seating area, illuminated by a pendant lightfitting suspended through a circular aperture. *Source: Government Printing Office collection, State Library of NSW.*



FIGURE 29: A reception area (possibly to the Child Protection Service offices).
Source: Government Printing Office collection, State Library of NSW.



FIGURE 30: One of the administration areas (possibly Youth & Community Services, now Family & Community Services). *Source: Government Printing Office collection, State Library of NSW.*



The following photographs (Figures 33–37) have been taken recently and illustrate the parts of the interior of the building as it appears today.

As the author of this report did not have access to building, some photographs have been taken from the Brooks' CMP and SHI documents, and are attributed as such. Those photographs without attribution were taken by the author of this report.



FIGURE 33: View, facing west, of the ground-level auditorium/sports hall. *Used with permission of the photographer, Sarah Rowland.*



FIGURE 34: The atrium, which originally allowed light and air into the top two floors of the building, housing the boys' bedrooms, has been roofed over. *Source: Graham Brooks & Associates*



FIGURE 35: Corridors running alongside the atrium. *Source: Graham Brooks & Associates*



FIGURE 36: View of the split level entry area. *Used with permission of the photographer, Sarah Rowland.*

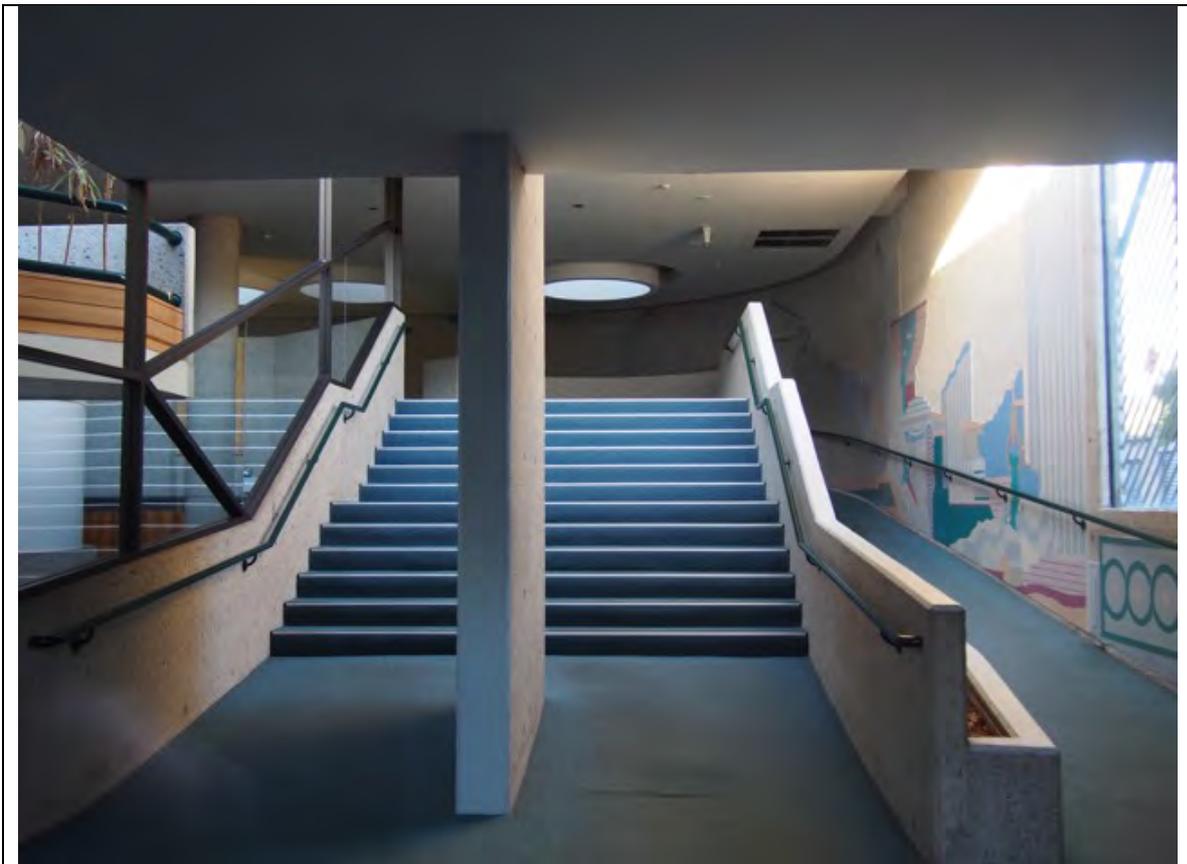


FIGURE 37: View into the ground-floor entry lobby and stairwell/ramp.

3.0 ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

3.1 EXISTING HERITAGE LISTINGS AND CITATIONS FOR THE SITE

NSW HERITAGE ACT 1977

Neither 'Bidura' nor the Bidura Children's Court are listed as heritage items by the Heritage Council of NSW under the auspices of the NSW Heritage Act 1977. (It is believed that the National Trust is currently lobbying the Minister for Environment & Heritage to have 'Bidura' given state heritage listing.)

CITY OF SYDNEY

The Bidura Children's Court:

- is not listed as a heritage item by Schedule 5 Part 2 of the Sydney LEP 2012 (however the house 'Bidura', including interiors, former ballroom and front garden, is listed as a local government heritage item).
- is located within the Glebe Point Road Conservation Area as defined by Schedule 5 Part 2 of the Sydney LEP 2012.
- is identified as a contributory item within the Glebe Point Road Conservation Area by the Building Contributions Plan, Sydney Development Control Plan 2012 (Sydney DCP 2012). (See Figure 38.)

The listing sheet for 'Bidura' included on the State Heritage Register references the Bidura Children's Court building in the description of the site ('In the area of the rear garden of Bidura, a seven-storey Concrete Brutalist style Children's Court and Remand Centre was built in 1980.') It also lists the building in its Assessment of Significance, which will be discussed below.



3.2 VIEW CORRIDORS

As noted in the CMP contained in the Stage 1 DA documents, Bidura Children's Court is largely obscured from Glebe Point Road by 'Bidura' and its ballroom, as well as established trees in the front garden. Part of the south west-facing facade of the building can be viewed from the driveway that runs from Glebe Point Road.

The north east-facing facade of the building is visible from several locations in Avon Street, but these views are filtered by vegetation in the pocket park. The clearest views of the building are afforded from Ferry Lane, which is a C-graded street in the area. The building is not visible at all from Ferry Road.

The terraced platforms on three sides of the building afford views across the district to the south and east, and to the city, Pyrmont and Blackwattle Bay to the north. The two neighbouring 1970s towers at 2 and 2A Forsyth Street block much of the view to the west.

3.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SITE

3.3.1 Statement of Significance

As measured against criteria established by the New South Wales Heritage Office (now the Heritage Division of the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage)

Bidura Children's Court is of local heritage significance because it was the first high-rise residential juvenile remand centre built in NSW and sought to provide children with an enriched environment, in line with the socially progressive views about juvenile incarceration that were emerging at that time. (Criteria A & G.)

Bidura Children's Court also contributes to the historical significance of the entire Bidura site by continuing the site's unbroken 95-year long association with child welfare in NSW, which began in 1920 when 'Bidura' was sold to the state government for use as a children's home. Bidura Children's Court has operated as a court with associated family services offices since its opening in 1983. The site is also of undoubted social significance for Aboriginal and European communities whose children have passed through the shelter, remand centre and court. (Criteria A & D.)

The building has further aesthetic significance as a fine example of the Brutalist style and an accomplished example of the work of the NSW Public Works Department's Government Architect's Branch. The building was constructed at a time when the Government Architect's Branch was undertaking major projects across the state. Its architectural quality, successfully fulfilling a challenging brief, was recognised when the building was completed in 1984 (in an article published in SMH, 25 June 1984, by Professor John Haskell, professor of architecture at UNSW and the SMH's architecture critic). There are few examples of this important architectural idiom within the City of Sydney, which has seen the attrition of many notable buildings of state and even national architectural significance that were designed and constructed during the second half of the twentieth century. (Criteria B, C & G.)

How the building is measured against each criteria is discussed in depth below (see Section 3.3.8).

3.3.2 Comparative Buildings

As influences for the design of the Bidura Children's Court, the court's project architect Andrew Milcz cites the Sulman award-winning Dee Why library designed by Edwards, Madigan & Torzillo; John Andrews' King George Building; and Frank Lloyd Wright's 'Falling

Water'. He also mentions the Newcastle Police Station, which was designed by Project Architect Anthony Taussig (a colleague of the designer of the Bidura Children's Court, Andrew Milcz) for the NSW Department of Public Works under the guidance of J.W.Thomson. Arguably though, the Bidura Children's Court has a more graceful and interesting form than the Newcastle Police Station.

Bidura Children's Court also bears favourable comparison with outstanding Brutalist works in the City of Sydney such as the Sydney Police Station (1987) in Surry Hills, which was also designed by the Government Architect's Branch under Ian Thomson. Like the Sydney Police Station, Bidura Children's Court (which preceded it by 4 years) has some floors below ground to reduce the building mass, a terraced form to maximise light penetration to all floors, and features interior gardens and landscaped spaces. Other buildings in the City of Sydney that share some of the Bidura Centre's outstanding architectural qualities include the Sydney Masonic Centre in Goulburn Street, designed by Joseland & Gilling Sirius apartments in The Rocks, which is currently under consideration for inclusion on the State Heritage Register and is classified by the National Trust of Australia (NSW), and the former Reader's Digest Building in Surry Hills, with its green roof, which is listed as a heritage item by the City of Sydney.

3.3.3 Condition of Fabric

The existing Bidura Children's Court has been neglected but the building is in reasonable condition. According to the Brooks' documents there is some evidence of minor water leaks around internal skylights. Investigations appear to have recently been carried out along the Ferry Lane frontage and suggest that there is also evidence of some superficial 'concrete cancer' or spalling, which is treatable with a variety of modern methods.

3.3.4 Archaeological Potential

With regards to the site's archaeological potential, the 1983 court building replaced several outbuildings and the Metropolitan Girls Shelter fronting Avon St. Due to the court building's size and excavated basement levels, archaeological potential in this part of the site is considered to be low.

3.3.5 Integrity/Intactness

The existing building is a substantially intact example of a Brutalist building that has undergone only minor alterations over the three decades since it was built. It has suffered from a lack of maintenance and neglect over the years. Despite this, the building is in reasonably sound condition and its integrity overall is excellent.

3.3.6 Contribution the Building Makes to the Conservation Area

Bidura Children's Court is located behind 'Bidura', on a part of the site that is surrounded on three sides by the Glebe Point Conservation Area. It has been part of the streetscape of that conservation area since it was built in the early 1980s.

The building is Brutalist in style and, as such, it is undeniably different to the predominant Victorian and Federation character of the Glebe Point Road and Glebe Point Conservation Areas. However, unlike the other multi-storey apartment buildings dating from the 1970s in the conservation area (which are all deemed detracting in the Sydney DCP Building Contributions map), Bidura Children's Court building is not blocky and does not have sheer walls rising to three, or — as is the case of the buildings on the adjacent Forsyth St allotment, and the two towers proposed in the current Stage 1 DA — eight storeys in height.

Rather, Bidura Children's Court is stepped in form, with two floors set below the street level to further visually reduce massing and scale. The tallest and narrowest portion of the building is centred on the site, sitting on what was originally a planted podium and sited

well away from heritage-listed 'Bidura', but also a distance from both Avon Street and Ferry Lane.

In this regard the building is well-mannered towards the surrounding conservation area, deferring to Blacket's 'Bidura' and limiting opportunities for overlooking and overshadowing the properties that back onto Ferry Lane. The only aspect it turns its back to is the west, because of the adjacent, tall 1970s towers.

The building should not be judged on its neglected and rundown appearance today. When it was first erected, the building's form was softened by extensive landscaping on each of its terraces, which, when mature, would have allowed the building to sit harmoniously in the conservation area and present a predominantly green backdrop to 'Bidura'.

Following are two black and white photographs of the model made of the building, which show how the building was designed to sit in the conservation area, respectful towards both 'Bidura' and the Victorian terraces of the conservation area. See Figures 39 and 40.

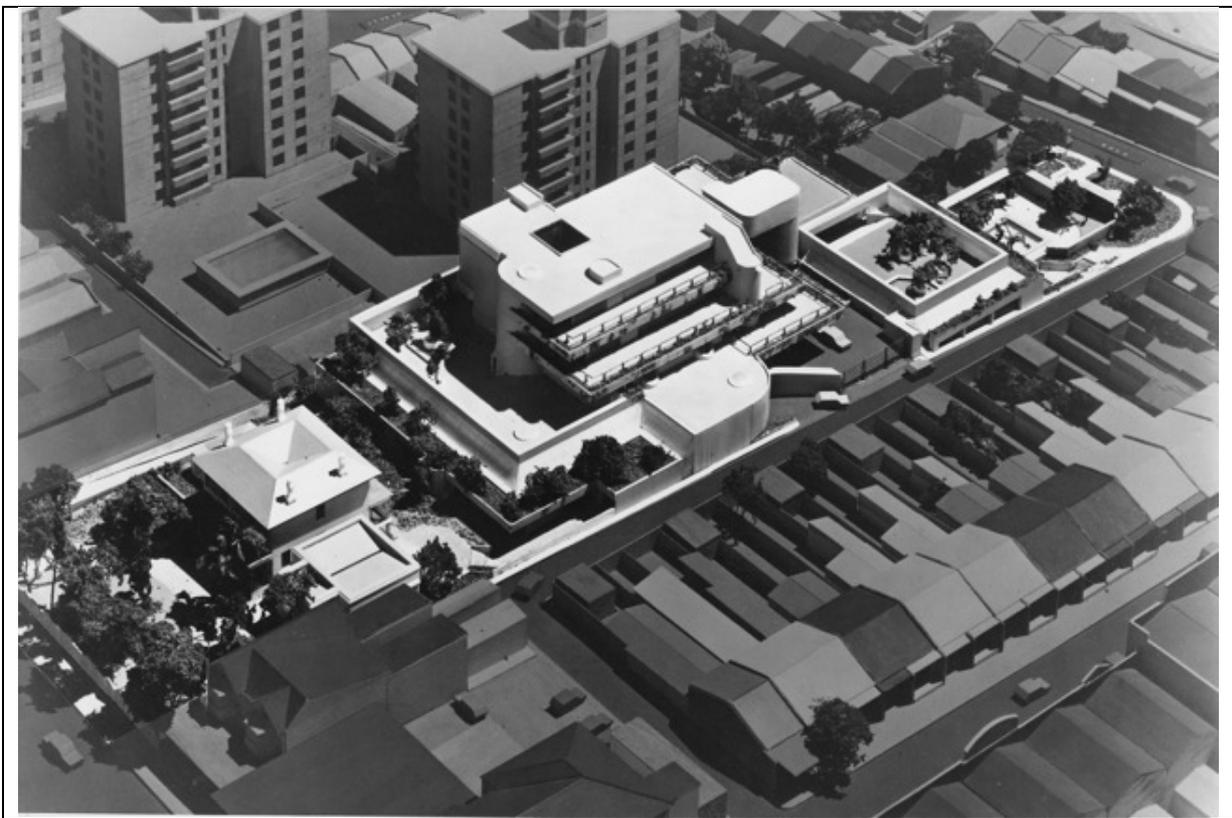


FIGURE 39: Photograph of the model made of the Bidura Children's Court, viewed from the south-east.
Source: Government Printing Office Collection, State Library of NSW.

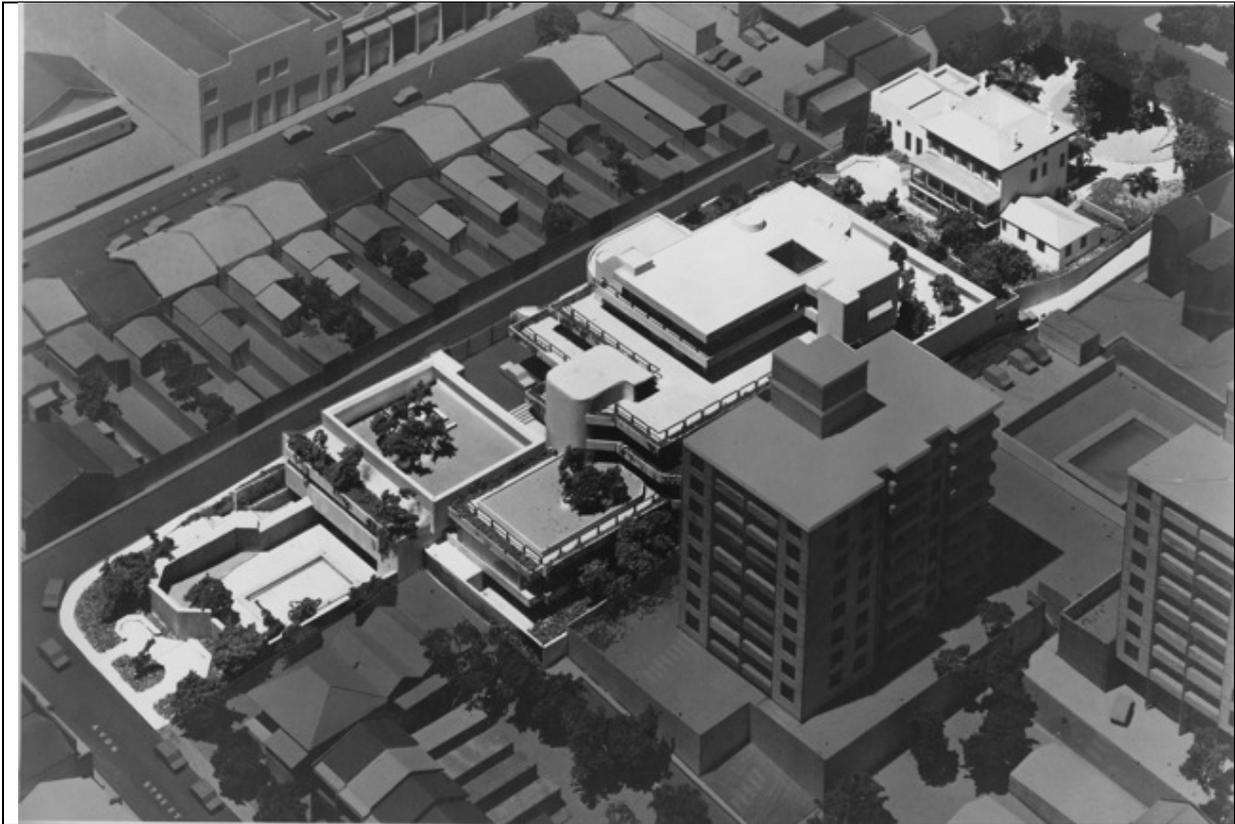


FIGURE 40: Photograph of the model made of the Bidura Children's Court, viewed from the north-west. The building deliberately turns its back on the large 1970s white tower blocks at 2 and 2A Forsyth Street.
Source: Government Printing Office Collection, State Library of NSW.

3.3.7 Contributory Buildings

The Building Contributions Plan identifies all buildings on the site as contributory elements in the Glebe Point Road Conservation Area. 'Contributory' is defined by Section 3.9.7 of the Sydney DCP 2012 as:

'Contributory buildings are buildings that make an important and significant contribution to the character and significance of the heritage conservation area. They have a reasonable to high degree of integrity and date from a key development period of significance of the Conservation Area. They are buildings:

- from a significant historical period and are highly or substantially intact; or
- from a significant historical period and are altered yet recognisable and reversible.'

Without doubt 'Bidura' makes an important and significant contribution to the character and significance of the Glebe Point Road Conservation Area. It is a building that dates from a significant historical period, is associated with a significant architect and is largely intact. It deserves to be listed as an item of state heritage significance.

Bidura Children's Court also makes an important and significant contribution to the Glebe Point Conservation Area — an area that, while predominantly Victorian and Federation in character, does contain examples of architecture from different periods as noted in the State Heritage Register listing sheet.

The building is largely intact and it dates from a significant historical period — a period when state governments were attempting to create new environments that would have a positive impact on people passing through the juvenile justice system. The building's brief was complex as it had to accommodate a range of functions that needed to be kept separate due to security issues, and it was sophisticated in execution.

In the history of the entire site, the building is a later addition that is part of the site's evolving and ongoing use as a major component of the NSW juvenile welfare system. It is therefore an important element in the continuing story of the site. It undoubtedly has social — and it could be argued also spiritual — value for past generations of Aboriginal and European communities.

3.3.8 Assessment of Significance Against NSW Heritage Office Criteria

The following commentary discusses how each of the criteria established by the New South Wales Heritage Office (now the Heritage Division of the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage) relate to the subject site.

- **Criterion (a) – An item is important in the course, or pattern, of NSW's cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area).**

It meets this criterion of significance because it shows evidence of a significant human activity, is associated with a significant historical phase, and maintains the continuity of activity.

Since 1920 the Bidura site, of which the Bidura Children's Court is part, has been a major component of the NSW children's welfare and judicial system — an ongoing and continuous usage for 95 years.

Bidura Children's Court opened in 1983 to house the NSW Children's Court and to operate as a remand centre for 42 juvenile offenders. While the remand function ceased in 1985, the Children's Court and its associated functions have remained at the site and are still operating there today.

The building's design was a response to the changing theories regarding juvenile incarceration at the time. The brief asked for a socially innovative solution and the design architect aimed to provide the children with an enriched environment. It was the first high-rise remand centre built and all levels, including those housing the remand section of the facility, opened onto terraces affording views of the city.

- **Criterion (b) – An item has strong or special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in NSW's cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area).**

It meets this criterion of State significance because the site shows evidence of a significant human occupation, and is associated with a significant group of persons.

The site has been associated with community service institutions, namely the Metropolitan Shelter for Girls, and a Remand Centre and Children's Court for the Departments of Justice and Community Services over a period of 95 years. The site as a whole illustrates the successive re-use of original residential structures for community related activities.

The Children's Court building also meets this criterion of significance because it was designed and constructed by the NSW Dept of Public Works, led by the award-winning government architect J.W. (Ian) Thomson OAM, at a time when the government's architect's office was at its zenith in terms of staffing, output and breadth of influence. During Thomson's years (1977–88), the NSW Government Architect's office (which is one of the oldest architectural practices in the world) had a staff of 1300, making it possibly also the largest architecture practice in the world.

An obituary about Ian Thomson, written by another ex government architect Chris Johnson and published in the SMH on 8 November 2011, notes Thomson's leadership and influence. Johnson attributes Thomson with being the government architect 'during one of the golden eras of this office's output' which 'changed much of the face of Sydney'. He is described as always remaining calm 'while stimulating incredible productivity and outstanding design quality'. His 'skill was in catalysing and enthusing a generation of younger architects' (SMH 16 June 1988 – see Appendix A).

Andrew Milcz, the architect responsible for the building's design and construction, worked on a number of other projects during his tenure at the NSW Department of Public Works, including the refurbishment of Circular Quay for the Bicentenary, as well as producing masterplans for the Rozelle and Gladesville mental health facilities. As a student he documented the east, west and north foyers of the Concert Hall at the Opera House. The brushbox walls in those foyers share a similarity to the timber wall along one side of the Bidura Children's Court auditorium, which had a similar acoustic function.

While the styles and purposes of the two buildings on the site — 'Bidura' and the Bidura Children's Court — are markedly different, there is a pleasing synergy created by the fact that both were designed by the NSW government architects of their day.

● **Criterion (c) – An item is important in demonstrating aesthetic characteristics and/or a high degree of creative or technical achievement in NSW (or the local area).**

It meets this criterion of significance because it shows creative and technical innovation and achievement, is aesthetically distinctive, has landmark qualities and exemplifies a particular style.

The 1980s Children's Court and Remand Centre is a well executed and relatively intact example of late 20th-century institutional architectural design which occupies almost the entire former site of the Bidura rear garden. (State Heritage register listing sheet.)

Bidura Children's Court is a late example of Sydney Brutalism and tells the story of the evolution of architecture in this country. It is a boldly composed, expressed reinforced concrete building of strong shapes. The architects strove to visually reduce the building's bulk and scale to better fit in with the surrounding heritage streetscapes and not create the negative impacts of overshadowing and overlooking for its single-storey neighbours. They did this by setting the building on a floating, planted podium with two hidden subterranean levels and then reducing the visible building above street level by segmenting it and stepping it in from all boundaries. This has resulted in a building that is well-mannered towards both the adjacent 'Bidura' house and the conservation area surrounding the site.

The building had to address complex security issues and accommodate a wide range of functions that needed to be kept separate (such as remand accommodation and the workings of the Children's Court, etc), and it had to be contained on a site that was constrained by width. These reasons meant that the only spaces that allowed some

monumentality of scale were the lobby, the stairwell and the external forecourt loading dock. All of these areas feature large voids. In the case of the forecourt, the concept of space is enhanced by the classical use of high freestanding columns with an exceptionally deep cantilever adjacent to the doubly curved facade exit.

The building was favourably reviewed soon after its opening by Professor John Haskell, professor of architecture at the University of NSW and the architecture critic for the SMH. He makes the point in his review (SMH, 25 June 1984) that the building had to mesh together a number of diverse activities and stated 'designing within such a formidable set of constraints, it is a wonder any architecture emerged at all, let alone architecture of the calibre and distinction that is here evident... Sensible planning and sensitive design have resulted in the harmonious integration of a fine example of current architecture into a long-established neighbourhood.'

● **Criterion (d) – An item has strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group in NSW (or the local area) for social, cultural or spiritual reasons.**

It meets this criterion of significance because it is important for its associations with an identifiable group and to a community's sense of place.

The site is of social significance for its lengthy association with community service institutions since the latter decades of the 20th century. (State heritage register listing sheet.)

The subject site as a whole has been part of the NSW State children's welfare and judicial system since the 1920s and is thus generally associated with former residents and staff.

Furthermore, as stated on the Barani website, which documents Sydney's Aboriginal history (<http://www.sydneybarani.com.au/sites/bidura/>) the site (including Bidura Children's Court) has strong associations with Sydney's Aboriginal community as many detainees were Aboriginal children who had been forcibly separated from their families. 'Bidura' was one of a number of residential homes established in the 20th century for the care and controls of wards of the state in NSW. Both Bidura and 'Royalston' at 270 Glebe Point Road have significance for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children who were removed from their families and have been acknowledged in the reports 'Bringing them home' and 'Forgotten Australians'. In 1973, 'Bidura' was the site of a protest against the brutal conditions for female wards in state institution.

The Bidura Children's Court is the latest chapter in the site's 95 year history of child welfare. It cannot be viewed as a separate from Blackett's building. The court building is a later addition that is part of the site's evolving and ongoing use as a major component of the NSW juvenile welfare system. It is therefore an important element in the continuing story of the site. It undoubtedly has social — and it could be argued also spiritual — value for past generations who have passed through the site.

There is the potential for the entire Bidura site to evoke personal memories and oral histories, yet unrecorded, which could further illuminate the story of the site, reflecting the changing theories and evolution of child welfare in this state, and thus be of value to the people (staff, victims and survivors) who have been associated with it. The site is a natural choice for a memorial to victims and survivors of institutional abuse.

- **Criterion (e) – An item has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of NSW’s cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area).**

It does not meet this criterion of significance because it has little archaeological or research potential.

- **Criterion (f) – An item possesses uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of the cultural or natural history of NSW.**

It does not meet this criterion of significance because it is not the only example of its type.

- **Criterion (g) – An item possesses uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of the cultural or natural history of NSW.**

It meets this criterion of significance because it is a fine example of its type, has attributes typical of a particular philosophy, and is outstanding because of its setting.

The 1980s Children’s Court and Remand Centre is a well executed and relatively intact example of late 20th-century institutional architectural design.

It was the first high-rise residential juvenile remand centre built in the State and sought to provide children with an enriched environment, in line with the socially progressive views about juvenile incarceration that were emerging at that time.

Its design was a highly nuanced, well-mannered and innovative architectural response to both a complex brief (one that had to accommodate a variety of functions within the one building), and a site that is located in a conservation area. The building is well-mannered both towards the heritage item at the front of the site ('Bidura') and the surrounding streets of the conservation area.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The history of the entire Bidura site is divided into two distinct periods. From the time the house was built, in approximately 1860, to the time it was purchased by the state government in 1920 — a period of 60 years — the property served as a family home and the site's primary usage was purely of a domestic nature.

Since 1920 to the present date the site has been associated with state-based child welfare and the juvenile justice system — an unbroken period of 95 years.

Bidura Children’s Court opened in 1983. Like 'Bidura' it was designed by the government architect of the day, however, rather than being a family residence, Bidura Children's Court was built to provide remand detention facilities for 42 offenders, as well as to house the Children's Court and associated juvenile justice and family and community services facilities.

While the remand facility was closed in February 1985 — due to research at the time, which showed the ineffectiveness of incarceration of young people in large institutions — the Children's Court has remained operating in the building for a period of 33 years.

The Children's Court is an intrinsic part of the child welfare system; Bidura Children’s Court, as it is now known, is therefore a significant part of site's history.

Its aesthetic significance is as a largely intact example of a style of architecture that features in public and institutional buildings of the 1970s and 1980s. The building is associated with an award-winning state government architect, Ian Thomson.

As a Brutalist-style building, Bidura Children's Court also tells the story of the evolution of architecture in this city and country. Sophisticated in its execution of a complex brief, it has many of the key features of Brutalist architecture: a series of cantilevered terraces that express the building's storeys and step back from the south, eastern and northern boundaries; and semi-cylindrical vertical elements expressing internal stairwells, in marked contrast to the strong, horizontal, linear elements of the terraces. The building was an exercise in creating a reduced footprint, which is articulated by these elements. It is well-mannered towards both 'Bidura' and the terraces of the surrounding heritage conservation area.

Because of its significance, Bidura Children's Court should be listed as a local heritage item.

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

Distinguished designing for a new remand centre

ARCHITECTURE

By JOHN HASKELL

AT FIRST sight, with its restrained but frankly modern architecture discreetly sited behind the restored former home of the 19th-century architect, Edmund Blacket, Bidura in Glebe Point Road looks as if it might be the Australian headquarters of an international banking corporation, overseas insurance company or perhaps even a foreign consulate.

It is none of these things: in fact it is Sydney's new Metropolitan Remand Centre for juvenile offenders, combining the girls' shelter previously on the site, with the boys' shelter and activities formerly conducted at Albion Street Children's Court before it was closed some years ago.

When the proposal was first mooted, the residents of Glebe were understandably alarmed at the likely impact such a concentration of activities on so confined a site might have on the immediate neighbourhood, especially in building terms. They need not have worried: the scheme designed by Andrew Milcz under the NSW Government Architect, J. W. Thompson, is done so skilfully and carefully that it enhances the area, in marked contrast to two nearby blocks of flats which seem to have provoked far less hostility.

Apart from the residential accommodation in Bidura (all en-suite) for 40 children up to 18 years old, with dining-room, recreation and teaching areas, the Remand Centre contains two Children's Courts, two magistrates' chambers, a clinic, and offices for the Clerk of Petty Sessions, Police and Department of Youth and Community Services, all placed over three levels of car parking.

A certain labyrinthine complexity in the planning is inevitable in a building of this type, with its diversity of activities and mesh of interrelated functions — for instance, an internal stair directly connects the children's living areas upstairs with the magistrates' chambers below. Security and safety must also be maintained, while ensuring a kind and caring living environment within.

Designing within such a formidable set of constraints, it is a wonder any architecture emerged at all, let alone architecture of the calibre and distinction that is here evident.

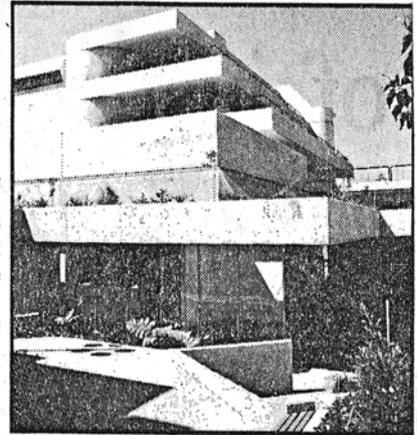
Apart from the attractively landscaped, stepped external terraces and the superb views gained by the children on the upper floors eastwards over the city skyline, two areas are especially well handled: the entrance hall, approached by ramp from between the old house and its former ballroom, is arranged on three levels, cleverly integrating in one space the different

access requirements of the Magistrates' Chambers, the Police and Youth Affairs' offices, and administration; upon its curving enclosing wall an attractive mural has been done by fellow-Government architect John de Giorgio.

The other area, also accessible to the public, is at the rear of the building, and contains the assembly hall, (doubling also as gymnasium) opening on to an attractive outdoor walled courtyard area with a full-length swimming pool.

The former Blacket residence which gives its name to the whole complex, was initially intended to accommodate the superintendent, the matron and other administrative functions, but happily is being used as part of the children's residential accommodation at the centre, providing a home-style, family-type environment for a fortunate few — and, apart from a few chips of paint, and finger-marked walls, clearly being enjoyed and respected by its lively young occupants.

Indeed, the socially integrative role of the centre is well expressed in the building, with the new complementing the old without conceding any of its modernity to the older historic context in which it is placed. Sensible planning and sensitive design have resulted in the harmonious integration of a fine example of current architecture into a long-established neighbourhood.



The new complements the old in Sydney's new juvenile remand centre (above) behind the restored 19th-century home, Bidura (below).

