



## The Duncan House Project Update

April 1990

The Walter Burley Griffin Society Incorporated was set up in October 1988 with the primary aim of acquiring the Duncan House (designed by Walter Burley Griffin and built in 1933 at Castlecrag, Sydney, Australia) for a public museum. Attached is a description of this unique house and its magical setting (see Annexure 1: The Duncan House Project). Walter Burley Griffin was associated with the Chicago School of Architecture, later known as the Prairie School, and worked in Frank Lloyd Wright's studio for some years before winning the Canberra competition and moving to Australia.

The Duncan House is possibly the best preserved of the 13 houses built by Griffin at Castlecrag. Most of the 13 houses have had substantial alterations over the years, and only two or three remain in a fairly original state.

Shortly after the Society was set up, the government informed it that monies could be available through state government departments. Thus, the Society's initial efforts were concentrated on negotiating with these departments for the \$400,000 required. It was not until the eve of the auction of the house that the state government department informed the Society that no money, not even a loan, would be forthcoming. Such late notification made it impossible to raise the money elsewhere and the house was sold to private owners (see attached press release on the day of the house's auction). The Society was bitterly disappointed. However, it remains optimistic that funds can be raised elsewhere to purchase one of the other two or three well preserved Griffin houses.

Nowhere else is Griffin's philosophy of man and nature in harmony so well exemplified as in his houses at Castlecrag. Thus, the Society believes it is of paramount importance that one of these houses is acquired for public display.

To this end the Society is continuing to raise funds in the hope of a future acquisition. The Society also hopes to commission and publish a book on Walter Burley Griffin's unique architecture and planning at Castlecrag. Such a book will create a greater awareness of the rare and unusual qualities that characterise Griffin's design. The book will act as an important record of the thirteen houses as they exist in 1990 and such a book it is hoped will generate funds which will assist in any future acquisition of a Griffin house.

All the Griffin Castlecrag houses are small, especially by today's standards, and the Duncan House is the smallest of them all. Although the government has placed a conservation order on the house, the order does not include the whole site. Thus, while a development application has not yet been lodged, the Society believes it is imminent. With such a conservation order it is possible that the integrity of this unique house will be lost forever. In just the last two months, development applications have been lodged with the local Council for another two of the Griffin houses. This only serves to highlight the importance of acquiring one of the two or three remaining well preserved Griffin houses for public display.