

Obituaries

LEN VINCENT CONNELL

Left mark on city, and those lucky to know him

Architect

Born: May 31, 1925

Died: March 21, 2004

LEN Vincent Connell was a prominent East Melbourne architect who worked on many of the city's landmark buildings.

Gifted and popular, Len re-designed Melbourne's law courts, worked on the original Flower Drum restaurant and was an adviser to the National Trust.

Born in 1925, to Bernard and Eileen Connell, he grew up in Brunswick and was elder brother to Bernie and Dennis.

Len was educated at St Ambrose Primary School in Brunswick, then St Patrick's Boarding College in Sale.

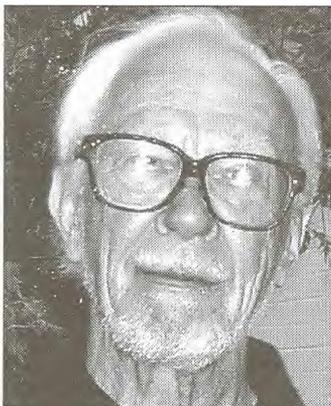
He first began studying medicine at Melbourne University, where he met a young beauty who had just won a Vivien Leigh look-alike contest.

Her name was Eileen Gleeson and they became an item for the next five decades.

Len's time at university was interrupted by World War II and a stint in the RAAF.

When he returned to study the subject was architecture and the venue RMIT.

He studied at night and worked by day as a designer for Stokes, the silversmiths.



Len Connell

Len was asked to design a silver tray to celebrate the marriage of Princess Elizabeth to Philip Mountbatten.

The State Government of Victoria presented the tray to the couple as the official wedding gift of the people of Victoria.

After qualifying as an architect, Len set up his practice in East Melbourne.

He had a large map of Melbourne on the wall of his office on which coloured pins represented churches, nursing homes, restaurants and houses which were "his".

When working on the original Flower Drum restaurant in Little Bourke St, Len searched the

second-hand timber yards for a large, heavy door. He then spent many weekends painstakingly stripping it back.

Through his many friendships with people in the Chinese Australian community and his travels in Asia, Len became very interested in Chinese architecture.

On one trip to Singapore he was fascinated by some ornate, silver soup ladles with the head of a dragon on the handle.

Impulsively he bought 100 of them for the restaurant he was working on.

On arriving in Melbourne he was quizzed by the Customs officer, who obviously thought he was a would-be importer.

Why would he need 100 soup ladles? "Ah!" he exclaimed. "Ceremonial ladles, use once! Throw away!" The officer waved him through.

Len was an adviser to the National Trust and also lectured at RMIT. He contributed articles on architecture to newspapers and magazines.

A piece of work of which he was very proud was the chapel at the Alfred hospital.

He was also pleased with his work on renovating the Law Courts, but was disappointed the floating restaurant he designed for the Yarra was never built.

Len and Eileen married in 1948. Marriage into the Gleeson fam-

ily brought with it a large Irish-Italian collection of relations.

Len enjoyed a special relationship with his father-in-law, Bernard, who taught him "everything I know about carpentry".

Eileen and Len bought and renovated a house next door to his parents in Brunswick.

Their children, Michael, Peter, Maree and Anne somewhat stretched the limits of the little house, and in the late 1950s the family moved to a large terrace house in East Melbourne where Len lived for the rest of his life.

He considered himself fortunate with his family.

Len and his brothers regularly got together for a drink and chat, and in the earlier years the family was always embarking on a renovating project for one of the kids.

Len's favourite saying was: "It's all about family, that's what's important."

In retirement Len was busier than ever. He and Eileen travelled in Europe until she suffered a stroke and died in 2001.

Len continued to be very active in the East Melbourne community where he had many friends.

Happily, he also had the love and support of his very dear friend and partner Robbie.

Len is survived by his four children, Michael, Peter, Maree and Anne, 12 grandchildren (two died), and his partner Robbie.