

Vale

Iris Rossen

9 May 1928 – 17 December 2018

Iris Rossen was born on the 9th May 1928 “Vivian Iris Patricia Raymond” on Cephalonia in the Greek Ionian Islands where she spent her childhood.

In 1938 she moved with her family to the neighbouring island of Corfu where they lived until 1940 at which time they were evacuated by fishing boat via the mainland to Crete and then under fire from Crete to Alexandria and on to Cairo.

In 1942 at the age of 14 she was evacuated again from Cairo with her mother and brother on a British troop carrier to Cape Town, South Africa where she attended an English school for 18 months and won a scholarship to study Architecture at the University of Cape Town, under Professor Thornton White. In 1949, she graduated with 1st Class Honours and a distinction for her thesis and gained admission to the Royal Institute of British Architects. Iris was multilingual being proficient in Greek, Italian, French, German, English, Attic Greek and Latin and had a broad and diverse cultural, literary, and historical reference.

In Cape Town under the influence and teaching of the Jesuits she developed a deep Christian faith and commitment to the Catholic Church. This was reflected in her family, public and professional life.

In 1949 Iris married fellow student and Architect, Ernest Rossen and shortly afterwards they moved to Salisbury Rhodesia where she worked as an Architect with Parker and Parker Architects.

In 1959 they chose to leave Africa with their 5 children settling first in Vancouver Island, Canada and then Laguna Beach, California, USA.

In 1962 Iris and Ernest and their 7 children emigrated again and arrived by ship (The Canberra) in Perth, Western Australia where they settled finally and embraced the Australian lifestyle and opportunities.

In 1968 Iris' collaborated with Ernest and Fr Chris Ross on the design of St Denis' Catholic Church in Joondanna, a minimalist modern building. The building has been recognised by the West Australian Institute of Architects as one of the significant modern buildings of Perth.

A number of prominent Western Australian artists collaborated on the artworks which form part of the liturgical functions of the church.

1973 Iris opened the practice; Iris Rossen and Associates Architects providing architectural services to a wide range of Public, Institutional, Community, Church and private sector clients. Works included: educational, community, health care, aged care, church, monastic, residential, master planning, project and event planning and heritage projects.

In practice she completed many projects including, 32 Churches, 28 schools and 6 monastic buildings.

In 1972 she was appointed a founding member of the Western Australian Liturgical Committee which saw her actively contributing to the discussion on the role of art and architecture in church liturgy. In this role she delivered seminars, forums, and workshops in churches and parishes throughout Western Australia.

For many of her works Iris designed the furniture and fittings in collaboration with artists and artisans. Every part of Iris's buildings including furnishings was conceived with careful consideration for function and design. She was an accomplished artist working across a variety of media. Her drawings, stained glass and textile works were integrated into many of her public buildings. Iris's work was informed by a modernist philosophy.

She commissioned many liturgical art works from West Australian artists and craftspeople. These works were exhibited in the inaugural Liturgical Art Exhibition in 1972.

In 1986 Iris was part of a team managing the Papal Visit to Perth. Iris transformed the Ascot racetrack to accommodate a congregation of over twenty-five thousand people for the Papal mass, designing the layout for crowd movement, control and safety, and designing the backdrop, sanctuary, furnishings and vestments for Pope John Paul II.

Iris was also commissioned to design a series of churches for communities throughout the remote Pilbara and Kimberley regions by Bishop Muston the Anglican Bishop for the North West. The Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Robert Runcie visited Western Australia in 1990 to open and consecrate these churches in a tour of the North West which Iris remembered fondly.

Throughout her years in practice Iris's work was carefully briefed, well designed, thoroughly detailed and documented, collaboratively managed in construction and delivered on time and on budget. She developed lasting working relationships with clients, consultants, builders, sub-contractors, artists, the trades and craftsmen. Iris was known for her fairness, collaboration and good management and was admired and respected by those she worked with.

Iris was supported in her practice by her Associate Noel Ryan and a team of young architects and graduates for whom the practice was a learning studio. A generation of practicing architects have had the advantage of practical experience gained under her and Noel Ryan.

Iris received national and state architectural awards for housing works, aged care and education buildings.

In 1998 she was awarded the Architects Board Award for "her outstanding contribution to the profession through her work and in the community".

In 1999 she was awarded a "Life Fellowship" from the Australian Institute of Architects and in the same year she was awarded a Life Fellowship from the Royal Institute of British Architects.

In retirement Iris wrote "Golden Threads" a book about her childhood in Greece. She enjoyed time with her extended family, the leisure to contemplate life and walk on the beach, which she so loved.

Iris led quite an extraordinary life; surviving World War II, travelling the world, having a family and running a successful architectural practice for a quarter of a century. She leaves behind her architectural works, nine children, fifteen grandchildren and two great grandchildren, her broader family, friends and her community.

