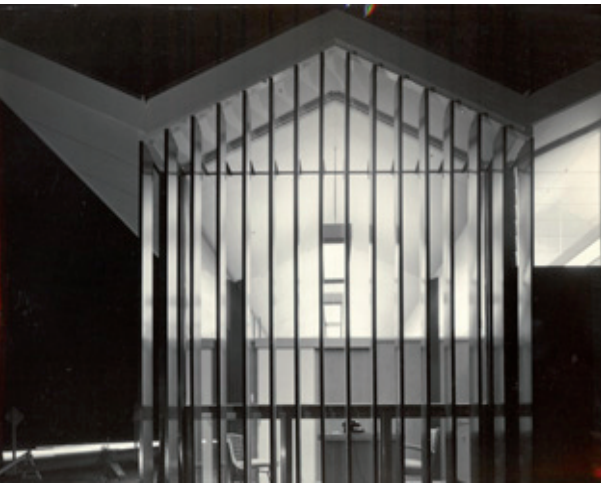




- Document title: H. McKenzie Home Improvement Centre, Rhodes, NSW.
- Author/s: Ross Thorne,
- Summary / abstract: Timber importing and milling company, H McKenzie Ltd had its saw-mill and joinery works on the Parramatta River adjacent to the Ryde Bridge. A vacant back-lot next to Concord Road (that led to the bridge) seemed an obvious site to build a showroom for the non-timber products for which the company was agent. It wished to use as many as, and preferably only, the products that it sold: timber, fibre-cement sheeting, cane fibre-board, hardboard, plasterboard, vinyl floor tiles. The principal exceptions were glass, steel and cement. The company also wanted a building that would "attract attention from the passer-by". In discussion with the structural engineers, Longworth and McKenzie, it was decided that a simple post structure without bracing could support a zig-zag roof that was framed in timber and sheeted in corrugated fibre-cement. Each roof plane is a tilted timber truss, with two tied together and supported on one row of posts. The posts made up of four pieces of timber were designed as "vertical cantilevers", prevented from falling over by being held firm by steel shoes, each anchored onto a large block of concrete. The rainwater downpipes from the box gutters between each pair of sloping roof planes were hidden by taking them down through the posts (surrounded by the four pieces of timber. The structural system allowed the spaces between posts and roof to be left uncluttered-- clear for only glass -- except for the door-head height opaque walls to the toilets. The company had a sign company produce a street advertising sign. It was so crass and ugly and like every other crass sign shouting for attention that I asked if I might make a design. It was simple with very readable white letters on a black ground, the white letters, at night, seeming to float in a dark sky.
- Key words: Architecture; Commercial premises design; Architectural history.
- Illustrations: By Clive Kane for the completed building
- Publications: *The Australian Journal of Architecture and Arts*, VIII, 98, December 1961.
- Copyright owner: Ross Thorne for design, 1959.



### H. McKenzie Property Improvement Centre, Rhodes.

*Top left: The structure showing the posts that were "vertical cantivers" so as to avoid any diagonal bracing, and impediment to the view of the interior. Above: The tilted trusses are in timber, held at the correct angle by adjustable tie-rods above. The roofing was corrugated fibre cement (that the company also sold) with box gutters in the valley between the pitches. Water from the gutters flowed out through downpipes built into the middle of the composite timber posts.*

*Left: Specially designed and fabricated adjustable timber louvres outside of the glass of the office on the western side of the building. Below: The front elevation showing a central showroom for the full depth of the building, two offices, one each side of the showroom, and toilets beyond (each office). The showroom displayed all the products that the company sold, having become a distributor for most building products as well as its own timber products.*





*Above: Side rear view that shows the central showroom that extends beyond the side facilities in the building*



*Above and Left: The transparency of the building as a "jewel box" is obvious without the impeding view of diagonal bracing. The glass, where possible, was butt jointed to maintain complete transparency to the interior. The florescent light fittings were also especially designed as timber boxes to "throw" light upwards as well as down through diffusing grids. Since the company was also an agent for plywoods, it was decided to use waterproof acoustic ply on the underside of the front "awning" splay of the roof in order to reduce reflections of noise into the building from the busy road nearby.*



*Above: All fittings and reception desk were designed by the architect; the floor was a combination of materials sold by the company. Below: Side view with illuminated sign designed by the architect (instead of the kitsch multi-shaped, multi-coloured sign designed by the lighting supplier).*

