

Remote Outback Chapel

The Musterers' Quarters Chapel is located in the rugged, hot and sunburned landscape of a remote cattle station in North Western Australia. An ancient sand dune arches around the back of a cattle station homestead and dug into the dune are twelve accommodation apartments for transient mustering workers, which follow the crest of the dune and fan out towards the view of the white ghost gum trees scattered along the distant river bank. On the highest point of the dune a Chapel dominates the Musterers' Quarters.

The Chapel is like a seashell; a simple oval plan with a skewed conical Cor-Ten steel roof that provides protection from the scorching sun. The cone apex, truncated at an oculus opening, much like the Pantheon of Rome, provides a solar meridian on the floor. A gold anodised aluminium ceiling and a sacred verse inscribed on the ring beam of the roof are subtle spiritual components that do not attempt to rival the intrinsic spirituality of the landscape and the small family cemetery at the bottom of the hill. Though planned as a multi-purpose space, the chapel is principally a place of worship, imbued with the sacred aura of the place, beginning with the indigenous caretakers of the site to the graves of the first settlers at the bottom of the hill. The aerial view of this landscape and the rammed earth zigzagging structures are reminders of the aboriginal traditional paintings and their representation of the mythical history of the land.

The dominant features of the local landscape and harsh environmental and climatic constraints served as a great foil for the imagination when developing this project; and the remote and isolated location of the site also required a practical solution for sourcing materials locally.

Using rammed earth made perfect sense as the raw materials – the iron rich sandy clay, pebbles, gravel and water - could all be sourced on site. Additionally, the clay component of the walls has hygroscopic characteristics, and airflow along them draws moisture from it through evaporation. This evaporative cooling reduces the temperature of the walls in the same way sweat cools the body. Designed according to these thermal mass principles the chapel and the accommodation below it represents a new approach to remote North Western Australia architecture, moving away from the sun baked, thin corrugated metal shelters to naturally cooled architectural earth formations.

Originally conceived as an open structure, the chapel's curved sliding doors are cyclone rated and were added to provide protection from the dust storms that can whip up on the area. The conical Cor-Ten steel roof was manufactured off site, transported in sections and assembled in a few days. The embryonic form of the chapel floor inclined floor plan is a result of the intersection of pure form

conical roof with the hearth plane. The cone is the shelter from the harsh sun that hovers over the land while allowing its contemplation.