



An extraordinary new building in Melbourne seems certain to revive debate about the relationship of architecture to Australian culture. MICHAEL DICKINSON looks at the building's genesis.

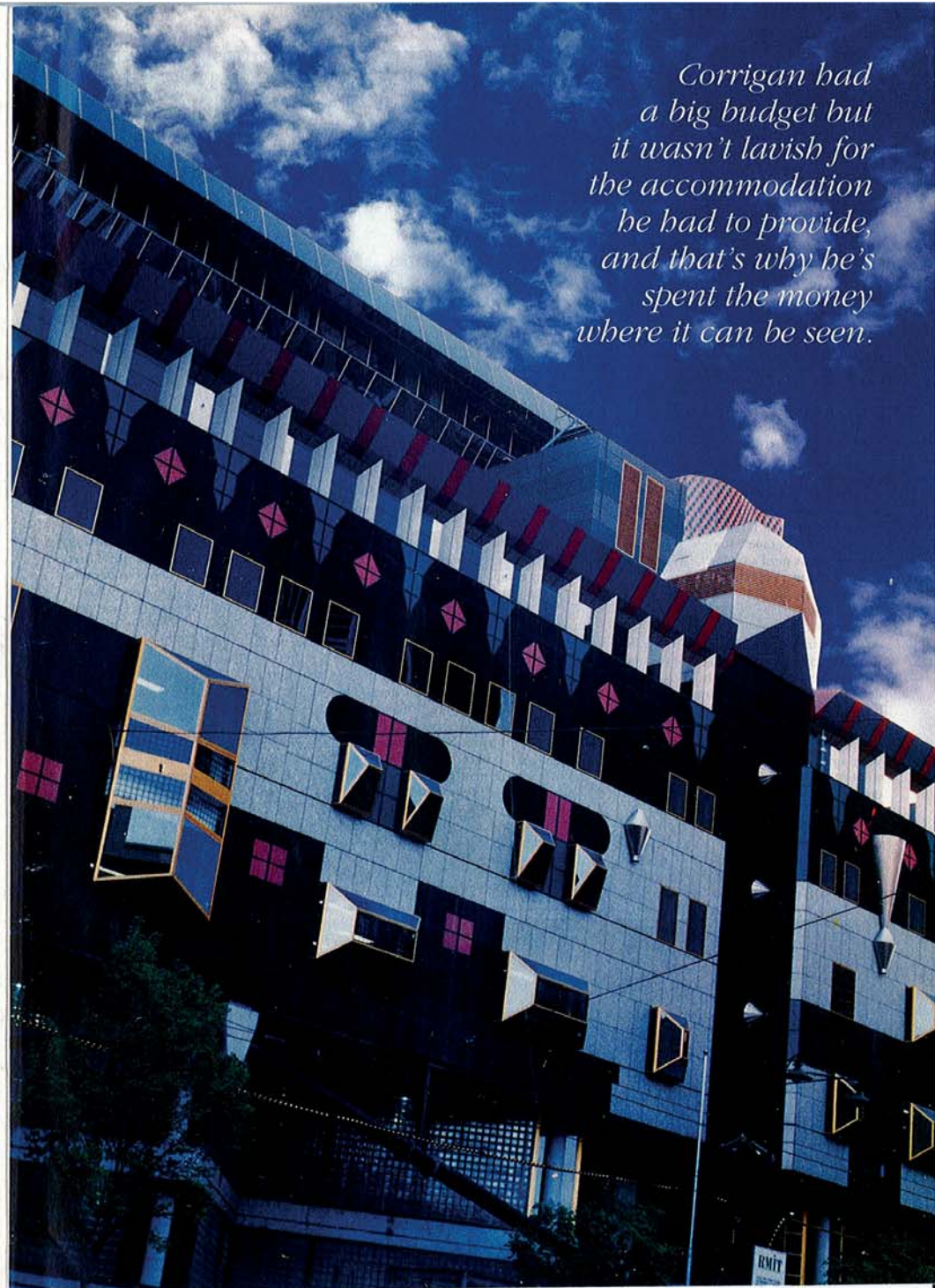
# Look at me!

■ MELBOURNE HAS A NEW MAJOR BUILDING which puts applied decoration back in paramount position. Yet, for most of this century, mainstream architecture has studiously avoided decoration.

"Less is more," said the master of the international modern movement, Mies van der Rohe, whom we can thank for the proliferation of sheer, glass-walled towers with their pedestrian plazas and abstract sculpture. In the eyes of some Bauhaus advocates, "ornament was a crime". Now Victoria has a structure, Building 8 at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, which revels in superficial appearances and quirkiness.

"This building is 50 mm thick," says architect and critic Norman Day. "It's probably the first of the new, great, decorated sheds in this country. A lot of people, including many architects, will say it's bad taste, but taste is not the issue for Peter Corrigan [designer of the building]; he's always been more interested in the reality of the street." ▶

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*Corrigan had a big budget but it wasn't lavish for the accommodation he had to provide, and that's why he's spent the money where it can be seen.*