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“Opposition party politics isn’t even seriously irrelevant. It’s a sick joke. It doesn’t matter how much shouting and screaming we do here, the power of the decision-making group is so great that the formal approach of challenging it, directly through politics, is useless.”

The speaker is Allan Schwarz, architect, age 29, middle son of PFP MP for Yeoville Harry Schwarz. Harry Schwarz used to practise at the bar and is still a consultant in a Johannesburg legal firm. Allan’s older brother Jonathan is an international lawyer; his younger brother Michael is studying law after qualifying as an electrical engineer and hating it.

Allan likes to think his father doesn’t approve of him. “He approves of me with a haircut, in a three-piece suit, seeing a corporate client. He doesn’t approve of me when I’m working on an obscure artistic scheme with a group of friends.”

“That’s the wrong impression,” says Harry smoothly on the telephone from Parliament. “Every father is flattered when a son wants to follow in his footsteps, but I attach more importance to job satisfaction. I never

tried to persuade Allan to become a lawyer, and I have no hangups about him not being one. I’m no more pleased with the other two than I am with Allan. I try to act the same way towards all three.”

“My father’s in Cape Town most of the time, so we get on just fine,” says Allan with a blast of manic laughs. He does this a lot, throwing enquiries aside with cavalier, off-the-cuff remarks and then chuckling wildly so there’s no risk that you’ll take him seriously. Thinking of third-world low-cost housing schemes, I ask Allan if he has a sense of social purpose as an architect. “Ooh yes — to seduce ALL the wives of ALL my clients.”

“We had endless political discussions at home,” says Harry Schwarz, “and although Allan dislikes politics, I think the value standards rubbed off on him.”

Allan says: “The people I meet are the ones who count. I couldn’t care two hoots about the great unwashed.”

Allan is also an artist, dealing, he says, with serious content through the medium of light-weight images. “It’s a coping mechanism for things which are so much bigger than you: the only way you can handle them is to sort of laugh and sidestep — and the

only way you can actually hold them is if you treat them lightly.”

He says he always wanted to be an architect. “I got a drawing board for my Barmitzvah. It was the only thing that one’s nice Jewish parents and their nice friends could take seriously.” Chuckle. “I don’t know why I wanted to be an architect. I don’t even like buildings. I only like nice buildings, and there aren’t any of those here.”

He runs a practice from a flat on Jan Smuts Avenue, where he has a secretary, two assistants, his pictures on the walls and clippings about him from magazines and newspapers stuck up near the door.

“My father never talked to me about going into law. I’d be a terrible lawyer . . . I think he knew that. Law is foreign to the way I approach things. Lawyers always seem to be dealing with things which are problems of misunderstanding.

“As an architect I deal with the nicest part of people — their fantasies, dreams and aspirations. I wouldn’t say I was an escapist. I’m not running away into a dream world, I’m trying to build a dream world.” More self-deprecating laughter.

“Allan has great family loyalty,” says his father. “When I have an election he’s my hardest-working campaigner.”

“All politicians’ best electoral officers are their wives and children,” says Allan mischievously. “Politically I’m an anarchist. If everyone did a job properly there would be no need for politicians.”

What does he enjoy about architecture? “The money. No, it’s only good money if you design ugly blue glass buildings and then run back to America to enjoy the photographs of them. It’s not if you do your job properly.”

Allan drives a Suzuki baby jeep wearing wraparound ski glasses with leather side bits. Less whimsical personalities might describe him as unusually young for his age. Probably it’s just that his eccentric style seems somehow out of place in hard-headed recession-minded Johannesburg. He says: “Just because there’s a depression doesn’t mean I have to be depressed.”

He thinks his sense of aesthetics is one of the major differences between his father and himself. “My father’s a very cerebral man . . . whatever’s around him, provided it’s not negative, is okay.” His mother is the artistic one: she paints and teaches art therapy. If he’s inherited one thing from his father it must be his optimism, and the kind of faith that functions almost independently of concrete reality.