

Kramer House (former)

Prepared by: GML Heritage

Address: 7 Milfay Court BALWYN NORTH

Name: Kramer House (former)	Survey Date: December 2021
Place Type: House	Architect: Unknown
Grading: Individually Significant	Builder: H Alexander
Extent of Overlay: To title boundaries	Construction Date: 1956



Figure 1 Principal facade facing northeast to Milfay Court. (Source GML 2021)



Figure 2 Detail of principal facade. (Source: GML 2021)

Historical Context

This place is associated with the following historic themes taken from the *Boroondara Thematic Environmental History* (2012):

6.3.4 Suburban infill after Second World War

6.7.2 Making homes for the middle classes

North Balwyn is a residential suburb situated 10 kilometres east of central Melbourne. To its south is Balwyn, which is separated from Balwyn North by Belmore Road. It is bounded on the north by Koonung Creek and the Eastern Freeway. The suburb was formerly part of the City of Camberwell and from 1994 has been part of the City of Boroondara.

1940s and postwar development

There had been a scattering of new housing development in the area north of Belmore Road from the late 1930s, but this area was developed significantly from the early 1940s as the new suburb of North Balwyn. Occupied with orchards and small farms, this was the one of the last remaining expanses of undeveloped land relatively close to the city. North Balwyn became the suburb of choice for many young married couples building new homes in the 1940s and 1950s (a proportion of which included returned servicemen). The suburb developed as quintessentially middle class, with a high proportion of brick homes and a notable absence of industrial activity. The ridge that ran along Doncaster Road was an advantage to house blocks in the adjoining streets, providing sought-after views to the distant ranges and encouraging the building of often grandiose double-storey homes. Public transport was provided with the extension from the electric tram from East Kew to North Balwyn in 1938, along High Street and Doncaster Road. A large shopping centre, known as North Balwyn Village, developed along Doncaster Road.

In the 1950s, the potential for large-scale residential development in North Balwyn was recognised by a private company, A.V. Jennings Pty Ltd, which proposed the Trentwood Estate on a large tract of land off Doncaster Road (Built Heritage 2015:12). From 1947, Balwyn and North Balwyn were acknowledged not only as epicentres for the Small Homes Service but also for Modernist architect-



designed homes in general. A number of notable architects, including Robin Boyd, designed Modernist homes in Balwyn in the 1950s and 1960s, particularly in the streets east of Balwyn Road, including the elevated area around Beckett Park.

This new residential expansion in North Balwyn, which included the Greythorn area in the 1950s, in turn brought commercial development. Several local retail strips appeared in the north of the study area, including in Bulleen Road at Dorado Avenue, in Balwyn Road between Lucifer and Echo streets, and, most notably, the prominent strip on Doncaster Road, just down from the Trentwood Estate. In 1960, G.J. Coles opened a large store on the corner of Doncaster Road and Burke Road, which was Melbourne's first American-style self-service drive-in supermarket complex. New schools and churches also appeared during this period of development. Balwyn High School, located in Balwyn North, opened in 1954, followed by Greythorn High School in 1959. Several new churches were constructed, extended or rebuilt to provide for burgeoning congregations (Built Heritage 2015:12). This included new Catholic churches at Deepdene, Balwyn and North Balwyn.

Since the 1990s, a significant influx of new immigrants into the area has seen the extensive replacement of interwar and 1940s homes with new residential development. The suburb of North Balwyn today is favoured by many new home-owners for access to Balwyn High School—a co-educational government secondary school with nearly 2000 students.

History

The land at 7 Milfay Court, Balwyn North, originally formed part of Elgar's Crown Special Survey purchased and surveyed by Henry Elgar in 1841.

Elgar did not reside on the land as he was based in the West Indies, employing an agent to manage his investments in Australia. The survey was subdivided into small farms and grazing runs and leased out for several years. After financial difficulties forced Elgar to sell his land, the majority was purchased by a shipowner named Brooks, while a third of the survey remained in the possession of Mrs Dyce, the widow of one of Elgar's business partners.

William Wilson, fruit grower, purchased twenty-one acres of Elgar's land in 1906 (CT V3157 F364). Wilson held the land until 1949 at which stage it was sold to Frank Armstrong Broussard, orchardist. Broussard sold the land in 1952 to the Metropolitan Land Investment Company Pty Ltd who subdivided the land creating Gardenia Road, Koonung Street, Dale court, Ailsa Court, and Milfay Court. The subject site is located on what was Lot 19 of this subdivision (CT V7746 F023).

Franz Krammer (later known as Francois Kramer) acquired the subject site in 1956 (CT V8143 F220). In April the same year the City of Camberwell issued a building permit for Krammer's new residence, described as a six-roomed timber house costing £3,000 (BP 18189). No architect is named on the index card, and working drawings, which would have accompanied the application, have not survived in council archives.

Electoral rolls reveal that Francois Kramer lived in at 7 Milfay Court with Lilly Maria Kramer, receptionist (ER1957). The Kramer's remained living there for over a decade.

In 1972 the house sold to Lloyd McMahon, a solicitor and Ngaere Jennifer McMahon (CT V7746 F023). The McMahon's engaged a design and drafting service to enlarge the house, adding a carport

and two-storey rear addition that comprised a rumpus room below and a dining room above (BP 51676, 52129). The original butterfly roof has been replaced with a flat metal roof at some stage.

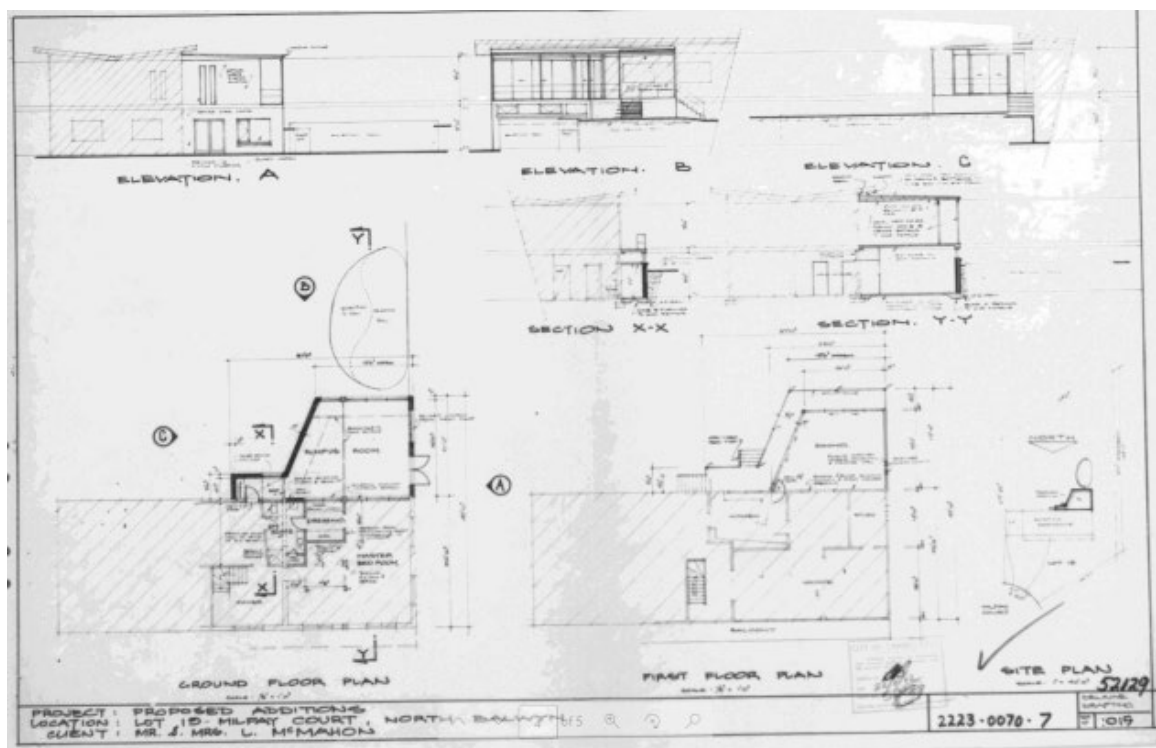


Figure 3 Working drawing of rear extension undertaken in 1972 adding a rumpus room and dining room. (Source: BP 52129)

Council building cards record no further alterations or additions to the property since 1972.

Description

7 Milfay Court is a two-storey Modernist house built in 1956 on a long rectilinear plan, with a shallow flat roof, full-width balcony at the upper level and an integrated double garage at the lower level. Originally rectangular in plan form, a small rear addition (added in 1972) now gives it an overall asymmetrical T-shaped footprint. The low-pitched roof has unusually deep eaves with exposed rafters. The elongated street facade has random coursed Castlemaine slate cladding at ground level, and vertical timber boarding to the first floor. The cantilevered balcony, with exposed beams that echo the exposed rafters of the eaves, has a simple metal railing. Fenestration is balanced without being symmetrical, comprising regular bays of tall, paired windows or French doors at each level, with white-painted joinery. At ground level, the main entrance is set into the central bay, which has a pair of panelled timber doors. At the far (west) end of the balcony, there is a much wider window bay with sliding glass doors. To the left (side) of the ground floor is the double garage with its metal sheet tilt-up door. There is also a skillion-roofed carport attached to that side, which is not original, but dates from 1972.

The house is set back at an angle on its unusual wedge-shaped block, so that it is not symmetrical to the street frontage. This creates a generous front garden, which incorporates a lawn, narrow garden



beds edged with volcanic rock, and a single smooth-barked mature gum tree (*Corymbia* sp) alongside the concrete paved driveway.

Integrity

7 Milfay Court, Balwyn North is largely intact with some changes visible to original or early fabric. The house retains its original built form, deep eaves with exposed rafters, cantilevered balcony with exposed beams, paired full height window/doors, window wall with large sliding doors, vertical boarding (first level) and Castlemaine slate cladding (ground level).

Alterations include the replacing of the original low pitched butterfly roof with a flat roof and a two-storey rear addition to the south west corner of the house and a single carport at the eastern end of the house. The replacing of the original low pitched butterfly roof with a flat roof has had little impact on the original appearance of the house. The original roof was very low pitched with its butterfly form only visible from side (secondary) elevations. The original roof overhang and exposed rafter ends all appear to remain. When viewed from the street the house still presents as originally intended. The rear addition is not visible from the street and does not impact on the integrity of the house. It is probable that the garage door has been added (but not recently) and that the garage was originally an open carport. The carved front door may also be a later addition. The integrity of the place is enhanced by its setting which includes the orientation and setback of the house, and single mature gum tree (*Corymbia* sp) alongside the concrete paved driveway.

Overall, the place has high integrity.

Comparative Analysis

Throughout the middle decades of the twentieth century there was rapid suburban growth around the fringes of metropolitan Melbourne. Increased access to the motor car, growing prosperity in the postwar period, and the desire for the suburban lifestyle resulted in the push for new housing and services in the suburbs of Melbourne.

Despite various subdivisions in the late 1800s and in the early twentieth century, the vast majority of the housing stock in Balwyn North was not built until the postwar period. The area north of Belmore Road, where large tracts of land were taken up with orchards and small farms, was one of the last remaining areas of extensive undeveloped land close to the city. Balwyn North became the suburb of choice for many young married couples in the 1950s and 1960s with many using architects to design their homes. Many of these architects were influenced by the International style that had emerged in Europe between the wars. They approached house design with optimism and innovation, despite the material shortages and other restrictions that had been imposed during the war years. Modernism offered an alternative to many of the postwar styles offered at the time, many of which were simply scaled-down versions of the 1940s prototypes. The informality of open floor plans, and the relationship between interior spaces and the landscape setting, fitted comfortably within the Australian context, and this, coupled with a simplicity of structure and minimisation of decoration, worked at a time when demand for housing was high, building materials were in short supply, and money short to spend on housing.

There are very few postwar houses in the Balwyn/ North Balwyn area that survive with such high integrity so as to potentially evoke the prevailing tastes and fashions of 1950s residential architecture. As was widely promulgated in the pages of the popular housing press of that time (that is, in

magazines such as *Australian Home Beautiful*, *Australian House & Garden* and the *Australian Homemaker*, smart contemporary housing – which need not necessarily have been architect-designed – was characterised by the use of large windows, low-pitched roofs with deep eaves, and outdoor living areas such as terraces, sun-decks and balconies. A simple palette of materials was preferred, with vertical timber boarding being especially popular – often stained or painted in deep earthy colours, with window joinery, fascias and other trim emphasised in a pale colour. A contrasting eye-catching element (such as an area of crazy stonework, Castlemaine slate cladding or a screen of timber louvres, slats or concrete breeze block) created a ‘feature’.

As North Balwyn was one of Melbourne's epicentres for postwar residential architecture, these sorts of houses once proliferated across the suburb. Five decades later, however, many striking examples have disappeared – either demolished, or substantially remodelled in reflect changing tastes.

The house at 7 Milfay Court, Balwyn North can be compared broadly to a number of contemporaneous houses in the locality that exhibit a similar use of volumetric massing, flat or low-pitched roofs and full-height glazing. These include:



Figure 4 300 Balwyn Road, Balwyn North designed by Robin Boyd in 1949 (HO616) (Source: GML 2022)

‘Bunbury House’, 300 Balwyn Road, Balwyn North is of local historical, architectural, aesthetic and social significance. It represents a significantly early and intact example of modernist architecture by prominent Australian architect, theorist, author and critic Robin Boyd. ‘Bunbury house’ displays clear associations in its design and detailing with the designs of Robin Boyd that were developed as part of the Small Homes Service, an initiative that sought to provide cost effective, architecturally designed homes to a wider audience. ‘Bunbury house’ incorporates design elements that are recognisable and important in Boyd’s design work, including the design of efficient floor plans, floor to ceiling glazing, projecting eaves and suspended sun shading devices constructed from timber slats.



Figure 5 Gillson House 43 Kireep Road, Balwyn designed by Robin Boyd in 1952 (HO177) (Source: Docomomo Journal 65,2019)

'Gillson House', 43 Kireep Road, Balwyn is of local historical and architectural significance. Architecturally its design epitomizes Boyd and other Melbourne Modernists' approach to design, with a minimalist external cuboid expression adorned only by 'structural decoration' as implied by the triangular bracing to windows. Like the nearby 'Stargazer house', (designed by Peter McIntyre architect in 1951-52) at 2 Taurus Street, Balwyn North, it also took the form-follows-function dictum to a visual extreme, in the design of the writer's study.



Figure 6 12-14 Tannock Street, Balwyn North designed by Robin Boyd in 1948-49 with alterations by Boyd in 1959 and 1971 (HO928) (Source: Built Heritage 2020)

12-14 Tannock Street, Balwyn North is of local architectural and technical significance. Architecturally, the house is an early and notably intact example of the work of the eminent designer and writer Robin Boyd. It remains as one of relatively few surviving examples from this seminal phase of Boyd's career, prior to his celebrated partnership with Roy Grounds and Frederick Romberg. Along with the Gillison House in Kireep Road, Balwyn (1951), and the Dunstan House in Yandilla Road (1950), it is one of three outstanding early and substantially intact houses by Robin Boyd in the area. Considered collectively, these provide rare and valuable evidence of the innovation, boldness and fresh design approaches of a young architect on the cusp of an illustrious career.

There are also several postwar houses on the Heritage Overlay in the broader Boroondara context that are comparable to 7 Milfay Court, Balwyn North. Examples include:



Figure 7 'Robin Boyd House I', 664-666 Riversdale Road, Camberwell designed by Robin Boyd in 1947 (VHR H0879; HO116) (Source: National Trust of Australia (Victoria))

'Robin Boyd House I', 664-666 Riversdale Road, Camberwell is of local historical and architectural significance. The house is considered by Boyd's contemporaries as the prototype Post-War Modern house which took up new ideas about spatial flow, both inside and outside the building, revealing in the minimalism required by the war's materials conservation program and the challenges posed by the near impossible site. It extended the leading architecture of its time and strongly influenced an emerging group of architects. The house demonstrates innovative design with regard to response to site, informality in planning, flowing spatial arrangements, innovative use of materials and incorporation of built-in features. These are all aspects of domestic design which have now become common.



Figure 8 'former Hirsch House and Office' at 118 Glen Iris Road, Glen Iris, designed by Grigore Hirsch (CONARG Architects) in 1954-55 (HO897) (Source: Trethowan Architecture 2018)

The former Hirsch House and Office is of local historical, architectural, aesthetic and associative significance. The building and its response to the landscape and climate demonstrates the contemporary approach to local conditions favouring good orientation and functionalist planning. The residence is an intact example of a post-war Émigré architect's house and office and illustrates European Modernism as it was translated into a Melbourne context. The double-storey dwelling of the 1950s illustrates the Post-War Melbourne Regional style, demonstrating key characteristics of the style in the simplicity of the forms, low-pitch butterfly roof, textured clinker brick cladding and large areas of glass to the north. The bold forms are further expressed through the delineation of materials across the upper (clinker brick) and lower (concrete tile) levels and exposed steel structure. More broadly, the use of steel frame construction throughout, further allows the illusion of the upper level to dominate the architectural composition.



Figure 9 6 Reeves Court, Kew designed by Ernest Milston in 1955 (HO822) (Source: Trethowan 2017)

'Milston House', 6 Reeves Court, Kew is of local historical, architectural, aesthetic and associative significance. The house is a lightweight, timber framed house designed by architect Ernest Milston. The plan is formed of two rectangles reflective of the zones; the kitchen and living area are aligned with the street and run across the slope, while the bedrooms, bathroom and laundry are at right angles. Each wing has a separate skillion roof sloping to the other wing, creating an asymmetrical butterfly roof. A concrete driveway leads up from street level to a garage and studio, connected with the house by a pergola-covered path. A separate open pergola covers the entry. The building features extensive modular timber framed glazing. Horizontal awnings provide shade to the north, echoed in the open timber framing over the windows to the south that allow light penetration.



Figure 10 18 Yarra Street, Kew designed by McGlashan & Everist in 1961 (Significant within HO530) (Source: Hermes)

18 Yarra Street, Kew (Significant within HO530) is a good example of the inventive, spare, and environment-responsive designs of McGlashan & Everist. Built in 1961, the Guss residence consists of three pavilion forms around a central courtyard staggered up the sloping site. Utilising thin steel framing and light materials to reduce the bulk of the pavilions, glazed walls float above the driveway and provide views down the site.



Figure 11 Dickie House, 6 Fairview Street, Hawthorn c.1961-64 HO784 (Source: Context in association with Trethowan 2017)

'Dickie House', 6 Fairview Street, Hawthorn is of local historical, architectural and aesthetic significance. The house is representative of the post-war design ethos, sense of optimism and architectural modernisation pioneered by Robin Boyd and others. The high-quality house-design features honesty of structure and material, clean lines, deep eaves and an overall sense of innovation in design. The integration of the house with the landscape, with its 'floating' appearance over the banks of the Yarra is characteristic of Modernist integration of architecture with natural context.



Figure 12 Cukiernan Residence, 29 Leura Grove, Hawthorn East designed by Hayden & Associates (attributed to Anthony Hayden) in 1966 (HO857) (Source: Context in association with Trethowan 2018)

'Cukiernan Residence' 29 Leura Grove, Hawthorn is of local historical, architectural, aesthetic technical and associative significance to the City of Boroondara. The residence derives its aesthetic appeal from its unusual and striking architectural composition with references to the International Style. Interest is created through the floating curved massed form fronting the street and subtle but evocative detailing of materials. The horizontal articulation of the window sets with their green mosaic tiled spandrel panels is applied with effect. Slender circular columns support the raised form, creating an open undercroft, and the use of textured cream brick is continued in the landscaping elements such as the low walls and planters

7 Milfay Court, Balwyn North exhibits key elements of postwar Modernist housing typology. It compares to the earlier (1947) 'Robin Boyd House I' (VHR H0879; HO116) which is widely recognised as the prototype for postwar modern homes, in its clever adaptation to a difficult site, use of new ideas regarding the spatial flow between inside and out and the innovative use of materials in a time of postwar austerity.

Robin Boyd first introduced the concept of a regional Melbourne style in 1947 calling for an architecture that was simple, light and fresh with an unpretentious elegance. Apperly, Irving and Reynolds (1989) describe the typical characteristics of the style as a house with a flat or low-pitched roof with wide eaves, long unbroken roof lines with exposed rafters or joists, vertical or horizontal boarding and large areas of glass with regularly spaced timber mullions. 7 Milfay Court exhibits these qualities of the style, which are also present in examples of Robin Boyd's work in Boroondara: 300 Balwyn Road, Balwyn North 1949 (HO616), 43 Kireep Road, Balwyn, built in 1952 (HO177) and 12-14 Tannock Street, Balwyn North, built in 1948-49, 1959, 1971 (HO928).



While the overall design of 7 Milfay Court is not considered to be especially innovative, it encapsulates many of the forms, elements and details that were considered highly fashionable at that time it was built, notably the use of broad eaves with exposed rafters, large windows and French doors, a balcony and vertical timber cladding. These attributes were similarly utilised by notable Modernist architects including Grigore Hirsch, CONARG Architects (118 Glen Iris Road, Glen Iris, 1954-55 HO897), Ernest Milston (6 Reeves Court, Kew, HO822), McGlashan & Everist (18 Yarra Street, Kew, 1961 Significant within HO530) and Hayden & Associates (Cukierman Residence, 29 Leura Grove, Hawthorn East, HO857). What differs at 7 Milfay Court is the use of a special 'feature' element, specifically the Castlemaine cladding to the walls of the ground floor podium which breaks up the uniformity of the materiality of the façade.

Overall, the subject house is a highly intact representative example of an early Modernist house, exhibiting key characteristics of the style.

Assessment Against Criteria

Criteria referred to in *Practice Note 1: Applying the Heritage Overlay*, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, August 2018, modified for the local context.

CRITERION A: Importance to the course or pattern of the City of Boroondara's cultural or natural history (historical significance).

7 Milfay Court, Balwyn North, is of local historical significance for the evidence it provides of Balwyn North and Balwyn as a locus for postwar Modernist houses. Although an architect has not been possible to identify, the house strongly exhibits the attributes of Modernist design applied to 1950s residential architecture in Melbourne. Built in 1956 the house represents the high concentration of fashionable Modernist houses built in Balwyn and Balwyn North during the 1950s and 60s.

CRITERION B: Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of the City of Boroondara's cultural or natural history (rarity).

N/A

CRITERION C: Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of the City of Boroondara's cultural or natural history (research potential).

N/A

CRITERION D: Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments (representativeness).

7 Milfay Court, Balwyn North is significant as a representative, largely intact and evocative example of a 1950s Modernist house. It exemplifies the style through its expression as a partially elevated lightweight box-like volume which sits above the landscape on a Castlemaine-clad podium. Although the very low pitched butterfly roof has been replaced with a flat roof, because the broad eaves and exposed rafters have been kept the original design intent of the roof form remains legible. Original walls of vertical timber cladding and large areas of glazing and a balcony facing north survive intact. The house is enhanced by its setting which is dominated by the sculptural form of the single mature gum tree in the front garden.

CRITERION E: Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics (aesthetic significance).



N/A

CRITERION F: Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period (technical significance)

N/A

Criterion G: Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions (social significance).

N/A

CRITERION H: Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in the City of Boroondara's history (associative significance).

N/A



Statement of Significance

What Is Significant?

The former Kramer House at 7 Milfay Court, Balwyn North, built in 1959, is significant.

Elements that contribute to significance of the place include (but are not limited to):

- long rectilinear plan
- deep eaves with exposed rafters
- full-width balcony at the upper level with expressed structural beams
- paired windows/doors and window wall
- vertical timber cladding and walls clad in Castlemaine slate.

The rear 1972 extension, side carport, garage door and front door are not significant.

How Is It Significant?

The house is of historical and representative significance to the City of Boroondara.

Why Is It Significant?

7 Milfay Court, Balwyn North, is of local historical significance for the evidence it provides of Balwyn North and Balwyn as a locus for postwar Modernist houses. Although an architect has not been possible to identify, the house strongly exhibits the attributes of Modernist design applied to 1950s residential architecture in Melbourne. Built in 1956 the house represents the high concentration of fashionable Modernist houses built in Balwyn and Balwyn North during the 1950s and 60s. (Criterion A)

7 Milfay Court, Balwyn North is significant as a representative, largely intact and evocative example of a 1950s Modernist house. It exemplifies the style through its expression as a partially elevated lightweight box-like volume which sits above the landscape on a Castlemaine stone-clad podium. Although the very low pitched butterfly roof has been replaced with a flat roof, because the broad eaves and exposed rafters have been kept the original design intent of the roof form remains legible. Original walls of vertical timber cladding and large areas of glazing and a balcony facing north survive intact. The house is enhanced by its setting which is dominated by the sculptural form of the single mature gum tree in the front garden.

(Criterion D)

Grading and Recommendations

Recommended for inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Boroondara Planning Scheme as an Individually Significant place.

Recommendations for the schedule to the Heritage Overlay (Clause 43.01) in the Boroondara Planning Scheme:

External paint controls	
<i>Is a permit required to paint an already painted surface?</i>	No
Internal alteration controls	
<i>Is a permit required for internal alterations?</i>	No
Tree controls	
<i>Is a permit required to remove a tree?</i>	No
Solar energy system controls apply?	
<i>Is a permit required for Solar energy systems?</i>	Yes
Outbuildings and fences exemptions	
<i>Are there outbuildings or fences which are not exempt from notice and review?</i>	No
Victorian Heritage Register	
<i>Is the place included on the Victorian Heritage Register?</i>	No
Prohibited uses may be permitted	
<i>Can a permit be granted to use the place for a use which would otherwise be prohibited?</i>	No
Aboriginal heritage place	
<i>Is the place an Aboriginal heritage place which is subject to the requirements of the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006?</i>	No
Incorporated plan	
<i>Does an incorporated plan apply to the site?</i>	No

Identified by:

Built Heritage Pty Ltd 2015



References

Apperly, R., Irving, R. & Reynolds, P. 1989. *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*. Angus & Robertson: Sydney.

Australian Electoral Commission. Australian Electoral Rolls (ER) 1903-1980, as cited.

Building permit records (BP), City of Boroondara.

Built Heritage Pty Ltd 2012. 'City of Boroondara Thematic Environmental History' Prepared for the City of Boroondara.

Built Heritage Pty Ltd 2015. 'Balwyn and Balwyn North Heritage Study'. Prepared for the City of Boroondara.

LANDATA. Certificates of Title (CT), as cited.

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR), as cited.