

Dunstan Residence

Prepared by: GML Heritage

Address: 17 Yandilla Street BALWYN

Name: Dunstan Residence

Survey Date: December 2021

Place Type: Residential

Architect: Robin Boyd

Grading: Individually Significant

Builder: Unknown

Extent of Overlay: To title boundaries

Construction Date: 1949-50
1951, 1963 (additions by Boyd)



Figure 1 South elevation of house facing Yandilla Street. (Source GML 2021)



Figure 2 West elevation of house facing Carrungal Street. (Source: GML 2021)

Historical Context

The area of Yandilla, Balwyn, is on the traditional Country of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung.

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

9.3.2 Designing fine buildings

Balwyn is a residential suburb situated 10 kilometres east of central Melbourne. To its south are Canterbury and Surrey Hills and to the north is Balwyn North, which is separated from Balwyn by Belmore Road. Deepdene, historically forming part of south-west Balwyn, became a separate suburb in 2008.

In the late 1940s, the Housing Commission of Victoria acquired land at the south-west corner of Balwyn and Belmore roads, which was developed into an estate of 200 detached and semi-detached red brick dwellings. Many of these houses were dedicated as public housing for war widows. A small group of shops at the corner of Hilda Street and Tivey Parade was also built to serve this new neighbourhood.

From 1947, Balwyn (and the new suburb of Balwyn North) were acknowledged not only as epicentres for the Small Homes Service but also for modern-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. Several new churches were also constructed, extended or rebuilt in the postwar period to provide for burgeoning congregations (Built Heritage 2015: 12). This included new Catholic churches at Deepdene and 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 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. The period from the late 1940s to the early 1950s, when 17 Yandilla Street was built, is associated with the emergence of post-war homebuilding



in Balwyn. Large parts of Balwyn and Balwyn North had remained notably underdeveloped until 1938, when the extension of the electric tram route to Doncaster Road spurred a significant residential boom. This, however, was soon cut short by the onset of the Second World War, and it would not resume until the later 1940s. Even then, private homebuilding was still hampered by restrictions on labour and materials that had been imposed during the War. As a result, the initial burst of post-war homebuilding in the suburb was relatively modest compared to the massive influx that took place from the early 1950s, when wartime restrictions were finally relaxed.

History

The land at 17 Yandilla Street, Balwyn North, originally formed part of Elgar's Special Survey Crown purchased and surveyed by Henry Elgar in 1841 (CT V6838 F528).

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.

David Kenny, farmer, purchased 35 acres of Elgar's land in 1904. Kenny owned the property until 1928, when ownership was transferred to Carrington and Co Pty Ltd and the land was subdivided into suburban lots in 1929, the subject site becoming lot 93 of the 'Kenny's Hill Estate'. The estate contained 32 allotments located between Union and Belmore Roads, Balwyn (CT V6838 F528 *Herald*, Percy & Batten 1929; 20 November 1929:19).

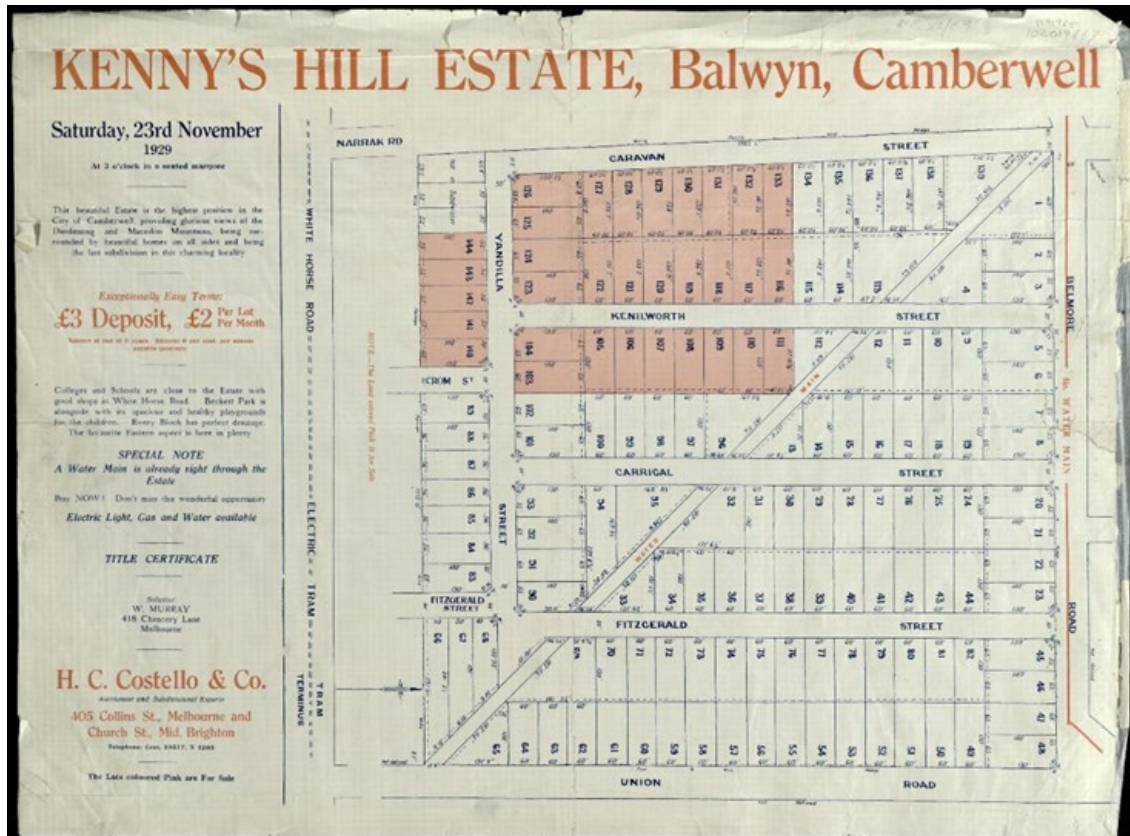


Figure 3 Kenny's Hill Estate, Balwyn plan of subdivision. Lot 93 is outlined in red. (Source: Batten & Percy Pty Ltd 1929, State Library of Victoria, with GML overlay)

Richard Dunstan, lawyer acquired the subject site in 1946 (CT V6838 F528). To design their new house, they turned to architect Robin Boyd, whom they knew of through his weekly Small Homes Service column in the *Age* newspaper (Lee 2008). The couple were inspired by Boyd's desire to provide modern, liveable and affordable housing solutions at a time when materials and labour were in short supply due to wartime restrictions. The Dunstans met with Boyd and chose an existing design from the Small Homes Service range (Lee 2008). Boyd suggested that the couple contact furniture designer Grant Featherston to discuss their needs, and, when doing so, Featherston urged them to abandon the Small Homes Service design and engage Boyd to design an entirely new house (Lee 2008). The Dunstans visited Boyd in his own house at Camberwell, which he had designed in 1946, and indicated they wanted one just like it (Lee 2008).

Boyd had completed working drawings in early 1949. At a time when the size of new houses was restricted to a maximum of ten squares, Boyd came up with a scheme that would allow for future expansion when these restrictions were lifted (Lee 2008). A building permit was issued by the City of Camberwell for construction of the house in May 1949 (BP 2993). As Boyd himself was overseas for much of that year, he arranged for the project to be supervised by his friend and former partner Kevin Pethebridge (Lee 2008).

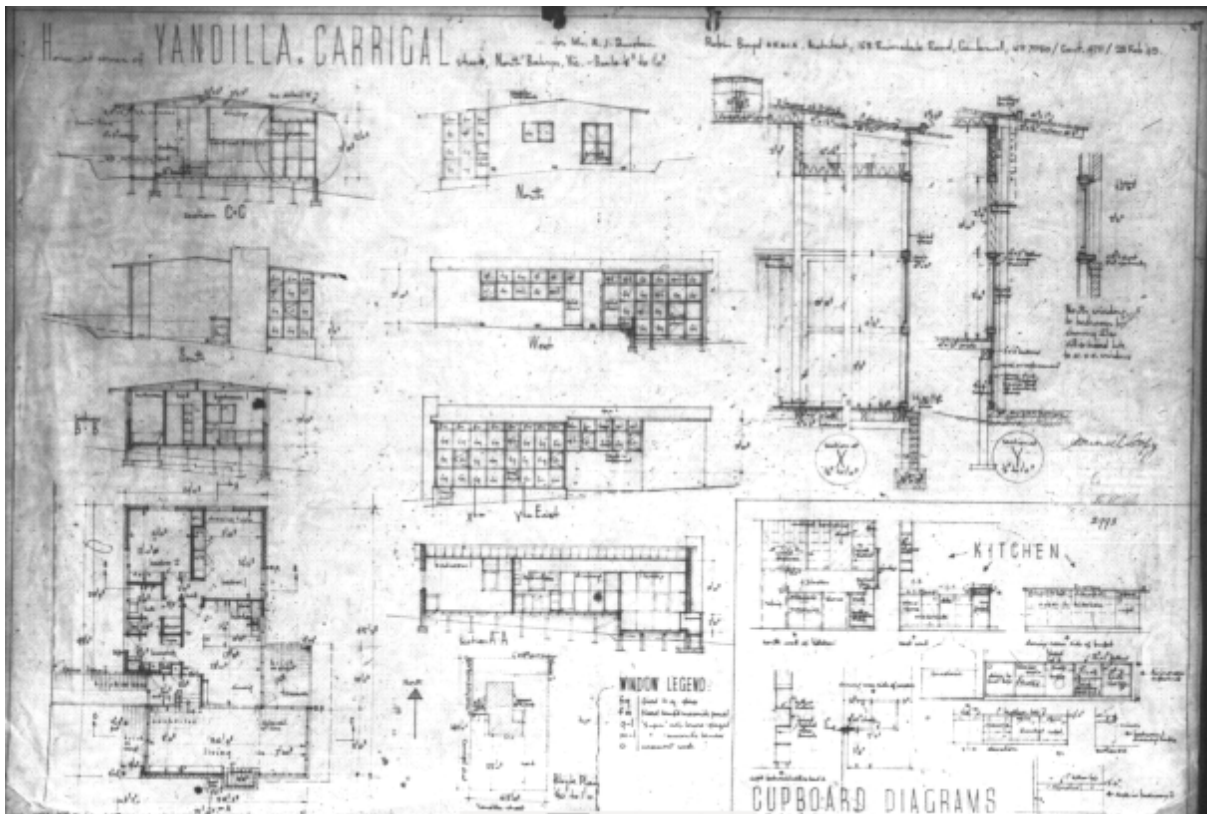


Figure 4 Working drawing sheet showing original house as designed and built in 1949. (Source: BP 2993)

In 1950 the first phase of Dunstan House was complete. At that time, it was virtually the only house in the immediate area, and the Dunstans recall that its minimalistic design provoked a certain amount of local comment: some referred to it as ‘the chook shed’ and others asked whether it was a house or a chemist’s shop – a reference to a modern pharmacy recently built on Doncaster Road, also designed by Boyd (Lee 2008). In October 1951, the house was profiled in popular home magazine *Australian House & Garden*. It was described therein as ‘a modern house - modern because it was designed for people with a contemporary outlook, people who are unafraid to live according to the pattern of today, preferring to overcome new problems rather than offer a futile and stubborn resistance’ (Stahle 1951).



Figure 5 Dunstan House, showing the original colour scheme. Photograph not dated, c1950. (Source: Docomomo Newsletter August 20, 2020)

House building restrictions were relaxed in 1951 and, that year, the Dunstons engaged Boyd to design the second stage of construction: the addition of a small, attached garage at the south end of the existing house. Stepped down to accommodate the slope of the site, the addition was otherwise conceived to match the original, with a low gabled roof, painted brick walls and a grid-like window bay.

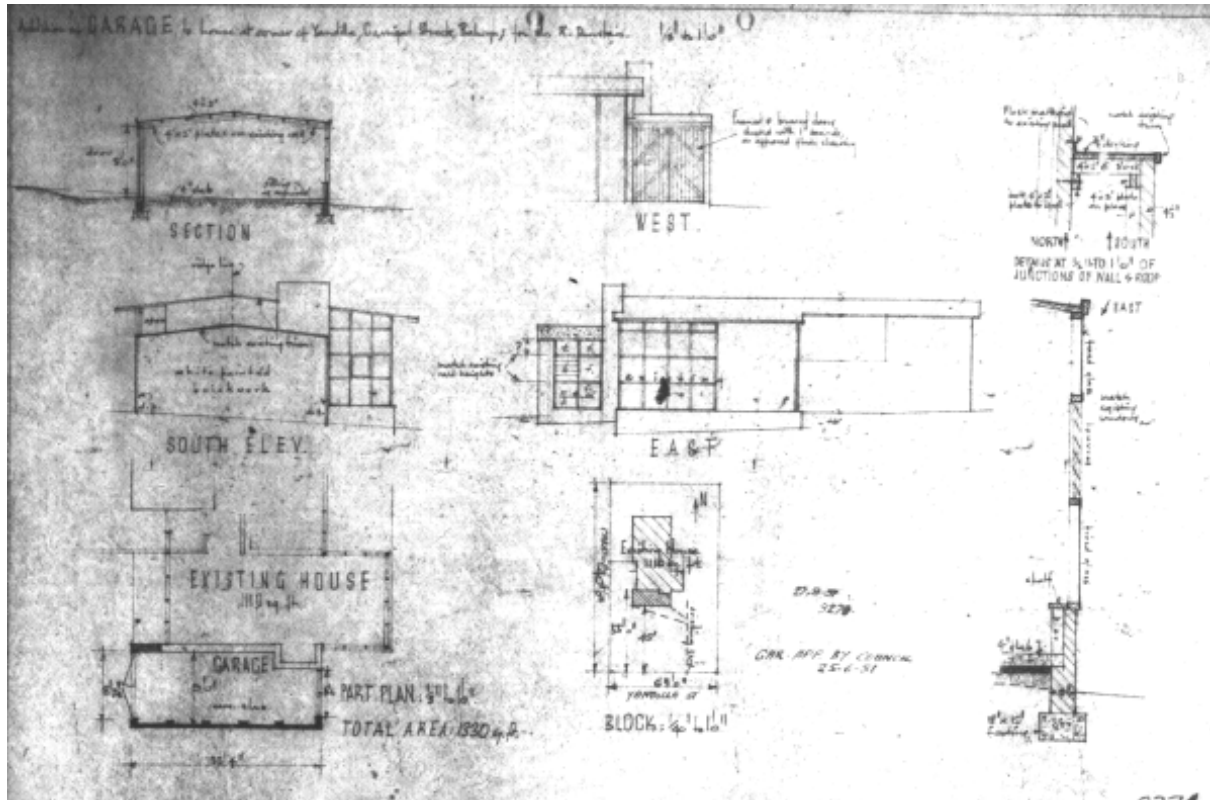


Figure 6 Building application plan showing the proposed garage addition. (Source: BP 1951)



Figure 7 Dunstan House, showing the attached garage on the right. Photographed by Peter Wille, 1951. (Source: State Library Victoria, Accession no: H91.244/705)

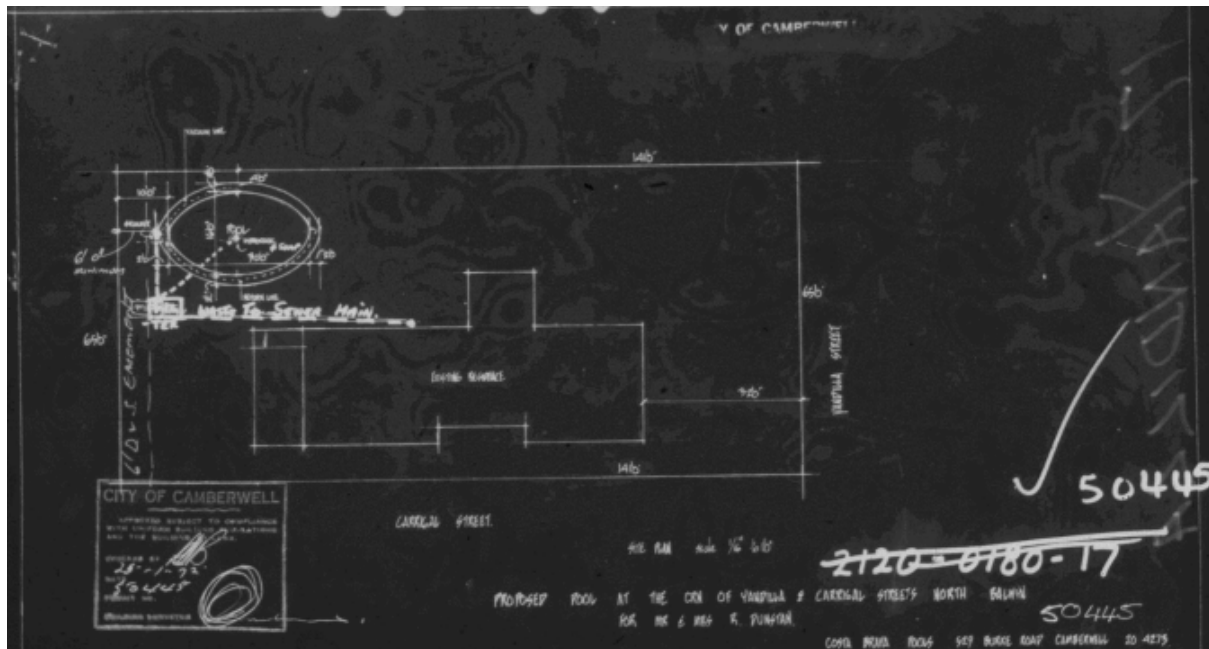


Figure 9 Drawing showing oval swimming pool added in 1972 and filled in in 2020 (Source: BP 50445)

No further alterations or additions appear to have been made to the property and it remains in the Dunstan family (CT V6838 F528).

Robin Boyd

Robin Boyd was a highly influential architect, architectural historian, critic and educator. He trained at the University of Melbourne and was articled to A & K Henderson. He became active in architectural writing, editing the influential Royal Victorian Institute of Architects Students' Society journal, *Smudges*, in 1939 before publishing Victoria's first history of modern architecture, *Victoria Modern*, in 1947 (Goad 2009:290).

Boyd was a leader in Melbourne's Modern Architecture movement and a visionary in Australian urban design. His design promoted interaction between the built and natural environments, contemporary lifestyle and Australian identity (Serle 1995:i). Boyd was the Director of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects Small Homes Service after World War II and gained a public reputation through this work. Boyd, more than any other architect at the time, provided the drive for the Small Homes Service to succeed, by bringing the best of what architects had to offer to the average Australian family who needed to build a home in the economically austere times immediately after World War II when there were shortages of building materials and labour.

Boyd went on to design many early Australian project homes, and in 1953 formed a highly influential practice with Frederick Romberg and Roy Grounds. Grounds, Romberg and Boyd (Romberg and Boyd by 1962) went on to become an influential and leading practice in Melbourne, although each of the principals tended to operate independently within the office and there were clear differences between the work of the three (Goad 2009:291; Goad 2012:102).

For a period in the late 1950s, Boyd taught at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston, USA. In 1969, he was awarded the RAI Gold Medal and in January 1971 he was made CBE (Commander, Order of the British Empire). He continued to practice until his sudden death on 16 October 1971 (Goad 2012:102).

Description

Dunstan House occupies a narrow corner allotment that slopes downward to the north. The house is built to the street boundary on its Carrigal Road frontage and is substantially setback from Yandilla Street.

The house is a single-storey early Modernist house of brick construction (with a bagged and painted finish) and a low gabled roof, now clad in metal tray decking. As outlined in the history, it owes its current form to three discrete phases: the original house of 1949-50, a small addition to the south of 1951 and larger additions to the north and south of 1963 (which partly enveloped the 1951 addition). Occupying a gently sloping corner allotment, the house has an elongated and slightly irregular rectilinear plan, which is stepped to follow the topography of the site.

Viewed from its principal (Carrigal Road) frontage, the house has an elongated and asymmetrical facade with a continuous low gabled roof that extends from north to south that envelops the original house and the double carport at the north end (added in 1963). The corresponding 1963 addition at the opposite (south) end is set at a lower level, with a separate but matching low gabled roof. The original house has generous windows to Carrigal Road, expressed in half- or full-height bays of small rectangular panes; a similar expression, but on a more limited scale, is echoed in the adjacent 1963 addition. The south facade of this addition, facing Yandilla Street, has five bays of full-height glazing. The original timber window frames on the southern and western elevations have been retained. The short, wide chimney of the original house remains evident at the right (east) side of its former end wall, partly concealed by the 1963 addition.

On the Yandilla Street side, there is a substantial lawned yard with a tall gum tree and medium and sized shrubs. A low, stepped brick retaining wall lines the Yandilla Street boundary.



Figure 10 Detail from Yandilla Street showing full height glazing. (Source: GML 2021)



Figure 11 Detail from Carrigal Street showing glazing. (Source: GML 2021)

Integrity

17 Yandilla Street, Balwyn is highly intact with very few changes to its original and extended built form. The house was built in three successive phases spanning 13 years with architect Robin Boyd designing each stage of its development. Personal communications have revealed that Boyd



designed the first phase of Dunstan House to allow for later additions once post Second World War building restrictions eased. The additions were partially realised in 1951 with the addition of the attached garage. This element was later integrated into the more substantial additions fronting Yandilla Street made in 1963.

The building retains its 1950 and 1963 built form, low gabled roof and elongated plan that partly steps down the sloping site. It retains original detailing, joinery and fenestration, including the generous windows expressed as various permutation of square timber-framed sashes. While the low brick retaining wall fronting Yandilla Street appears to be a later addition, it does not diminish the legibility of the design nor the setting. The integrity of the place is enhanced by its setting which includes a substantial garden to the west towards which much of the house is orientated.

Overall, the place has very 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 the section of Balwyn east of Narrak Road and Caravan Street was not built until the postwar period. Similarly 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. This part of Balwyn/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 to spend on housing.

Within this context, Robin Boyd was one of the key architects designing houses in Balwyn and Balwyn North. Resuming private architectural practice after the Second World War, Boyd designed a house for himself and his wife in Riversdale Road, Camberwell (1946) and subsequently undertook several commissions in the suburbs that now constitute the City of Boroondara. In an early partnership with Kevin Pethebridge and Frank Bell (1945-47), he designed two houses in Kew and a factory in Hawthorn.



Figure 12 'Robin Boyd House I', 664-666 Riversdale Road, Camberwell, designed by Robin Boyd in 1947 (VHR H0879; HO116). (Source: National Trust of Australia (Victoria))

Opening his own office in 1948, Boyd designed several houses in the developing Balwyn/Balwyn North area.

The Dunstan Residence in Yandilla Avenue (1948-49) was the first of these, soon followed by a house for the architect's cousin, J P Boyd, at 46 Fortuna Avenue (1948-49), the Wood House in Tannock Street, HO928 (1949-50) and the Gillison House in Kireep Road, Balwyn, HO177 (1952). After entering into partnership with Roy Grounds and Frederick Romberg in 1953, Boyd maintained his connections with Balwyn North, designing the Richard Latchford House at 72 Longview Road and the Alan Brown House at 39 Woodville Street (both 1953-54) and, over a period of years, undertaking several phases of addition to all three of his earlier pre-partnership houses there. Of these houses three are included in the Heritage Overlay.



Figure 13. 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 14. Gillison House, 43 Kireep Road, Balwyn, designed by Robin Boyd in 1952 (HO177). (Source: *Docomomo Journal* 65, 2019 copyright)

'Gillison 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 15. 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.

Today, six Boyd houses in the Balwyn/Balwyn North area survive in varying degrees of intactness. The Brown House, 39 Woodville Street (1953-54), has been substantially altered to the effect that its original design legibility has been lost. Latchford House, 72 Longview Road (1953-54) has similarly been subject to unsympathetic alterations. The J P Boyd House, 46 Fortuna Avenue (1948-49), has been enlarged on three occasions: twice to Boyd's design (in 1955 and 1966) and, more recently, by others resulting in a loss of integrity.

By contrast, the Dunstan Residence and the Wood House (HO928) at 12-14 Tannock Street (1949-50), are highly intact: neither has any significant post-Boyd additions, and both stand out for the clarity in which the original buildings, and their subsequent phases of addition, can be clearly interpreted. Although of similar date, the two houses are markedly different in their composition: while the Dunstan Residence is a low-cost compact brick dwelling with broad gabled roof and large multi-paned window walls, the Wood House has an elongated spreading plan with skillion roof, continuous window bays and huge single-pane picture window.

The Dunstan Residence is one of few surviving examples of residential commissions from the early phase of Boyd's career, prior to his celebrated partnership with Roy Grounds and Frederick Romberg. Compared with the examples above, the subject building is distinguished by its high level of integrity and intactness. Along with the Gillison House, 43 Kireep Road, Balwyn (1951), and Wood House, 12-14 Tannock Street, the subject building 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.

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).

17 Yandilla Street, Balwyn, is of local historical significance for the evidence it provides of Boroondara as a locus for fine, public and private buildings from the 1850s into the postwar period that were designed by leading architects. Designed by noted Melbourne based architect and critic, Robin Boyd in 1949-50 and built in three stages in 1950, 1951 and 1963, Boyd designed this house early in his career just after completing his own home in Riversdale Road. Boyd has incorporated many similar features within both houses including an open, site-responsive split-level plan and extensive walls of glazing, elements that would be much copied by other architects in the coming decades. Profiled in popular home magazine *Australian House & Garden*, in 1951, the house exemplifies the large concentration of architect-designed Modernist houses built in Balwyn and Balwyn North during the 1950s and 1960s.

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).

N/A

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

17 Yandilla Street, Balwyn is of aesthetic significance as a notable achievement in modern homebuilding at a time when materials and labour were still scarce due to wartime restrictions. In the face of such limitations, Boyd introduced the idea of a regional interpretation of modern architecture that he first discussed in his influential 1947 publication *Victorian Modern*. Included in his basic ideas, as evidenced by this house, were such concepts as open-planning, split-levels and vast areas of glazing or window walls. These were extremely innovative concepts at the time 17 Yandilla Street was built and became design principles that would recur throughout Boyd's own career and be widely adopted by many architects working in the 1950s and 1960s.

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)

17 Yandilla Street, Balwyn has associative significance as an early and notably intact example of the work of the eminent designer and writer Robin Boyd. Documented in late 1948 and built in 1949-50, the house was one of the first projects undertaken by Boyd when he left the partnership of Kevin Pethebridge and Frank Bell to open his own sole practice. Today, 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 Wood House in Tannock Street, Balwyn North (1950), it is one of three outstanding early and substantially intact houses by Robin Boyd in the Balwyn/Balwyn North area, which, considered collectively, provide rare and valuable evidence of the innovation, boldness and fresh design approaches of a young architect on the cusp of an illustrious career.



Statement of Significance

What is significant?

The Dunstan Residence at 17 Yandilla Street, Balwyn North, designed by Robin Boyd in 1949-50 and built in three stage (1950, 1951 and 1963, is significant.

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

- Its 1950, 1951 and 1963 built form and low gabled roof
- elongated and slightly irregular rectilinear plan, which is stepped to follow the topography of the site
- pattern of fenestrations and door openings including window walls expressed in half- or full-height bays of small rectangular panes
- the 1950 chimney.

Significance of the place is enhanced by its setting which includes a substantial garden to the west and the low stepped front fence.

How is it significant?

The house is of local historical, aesthetic and associative significance to the City of Boroondara.

Why is it significant?

17 Yandilla Street, Balwyn, is of local historical significance for the evidence it provides of Boroondara as a locus for fine, public and private buildings from the 1850s into the postwar period that were designed by leading architects. Designed by noted Melbourne based architect, critic and educator, Robin Boyd in 1949-50 and built in three stages in 1950, 1951 and 1963, Boyd designed this house early in his career just after completing his own home in Riversdale Road. Boyd has incorporated many similar features within both houses including an open, site-responsive split-level plan and extensive walls of glazing, elements that would be much copied by other architects in the coming decades. Profiled in popular home magazine *Australian House & Garden*, in 1951, the house exemplifies the large concentration of architect-designed Modernist houses built in Balwyn and Balwyn North during the 1950s and 1960s. (Criterion A)

17 Yandilla Street, Balwyn is of aesthetic significance as a notable achievement in modern homebuilding at a time when materials and labour were still scarce due to wartime restrictions. In the face of such limitations, Boyd introduced the idea of a regional interpretation of modern architecture that he first discussed in his influential 1947 publication *Victorian Modern*. Included in his basic ideas, as evidenced by this house, where such concepts as open-planning, split-levels and vast areas of glazing or window walls. These were extremely innovative concepts at the time 17 Yandilla Street was built and became design principals that would recur throughout Boyd's own subsequent career and be widely adopted by many architects working in the 1950s and 1960s. (Criterion E)

17 Yandilla Street, Balwyn has associative significance as an early and notably intact example of the work of the eminent designer and writer Robin Boyd. Documented in late 1948 and built in 1949-50, the house was one of the first projects undertaken by Boyd when he left the partnership of Kevin Pethebridge and Frank Bell to open his own sole practice. Today, 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 Wood House in Tannock Street, Balwyn North (1950), it is one of three outstanding early and substantially intact houses by Robin Boyd in the Balwyn/Balwyn North area, which, considered collectively, provide rare and valuable evidence of the innovation, boldness and fresh design approaches of a young architect on the cusp of an illustrious career. (Criterion H)

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 2012.



References

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Stahle, Lesley 1951. 'Outlook for Moderns'. *Australian House & Garden*, October 1951, p16ff.

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