

Plotkin House (former)

Prepared by: GML Heritage

Address: 47 Mountain View Road BALWYN NORTH

Name: Plotkin House (former)

Survey Date: December 2021

Place Type: House

Architect: CONARG Architects (Grigore Hirsch)

Grading: Individually Significant

Builder: Fulton Constructions Pty Ltd

Extent of Overlay: To title boundaries

Construction Date: 1966



Figure 1 47 Mountain View Road, Balwyn North. (Source: GML 2021)





Figure 2 47 Mountain View Road, Balwyn North. (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

9.3.2 Designing fine buildings

Balwyn North is a residential suburb about 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 Balwyn North (called North Balwyn at that time). Occupied with orchards and small farms, this was the one of the last remaining expanses of undeveloped land relatively close to the city. Balwyn North 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 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 tramway from East Kew to Balwyn North 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 Balwyn North 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 Balwyn North 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 Balwyn North, 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, 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 Balwyn North.

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

The mid-to late 1960s, when the former Plotkin House was built, represented part of a broader boom in suburban residential development that had resumed after a lull caused by a brief recession in the early 1960s. In Balwyn and (especially) Balwyn North, new and established subdivisions had already significantly filled out by that time, and, by the mid-1960s choice vacant allotments were starting to become more difficult to obtain. By the early 1970s there were very few left.

History

The land at 47 Mountain View Road, 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.

Joseph Shilton and Thomas Brown purchased 200 acres of Edgars Special survey in 1875. Thomas Brown died in 1878, leaving his share of the land to his widow Mary. Joseph Shilton died in 1878, leaving his share to his widow Fanny. Mary Brown transferred her portion of the land to Fanny Shilton in 1881. Fanny Smith retained the land until she sold it to various members of the Smith family as joint proprietors in 1918 (CT V767 F215; CT V1320 F808).

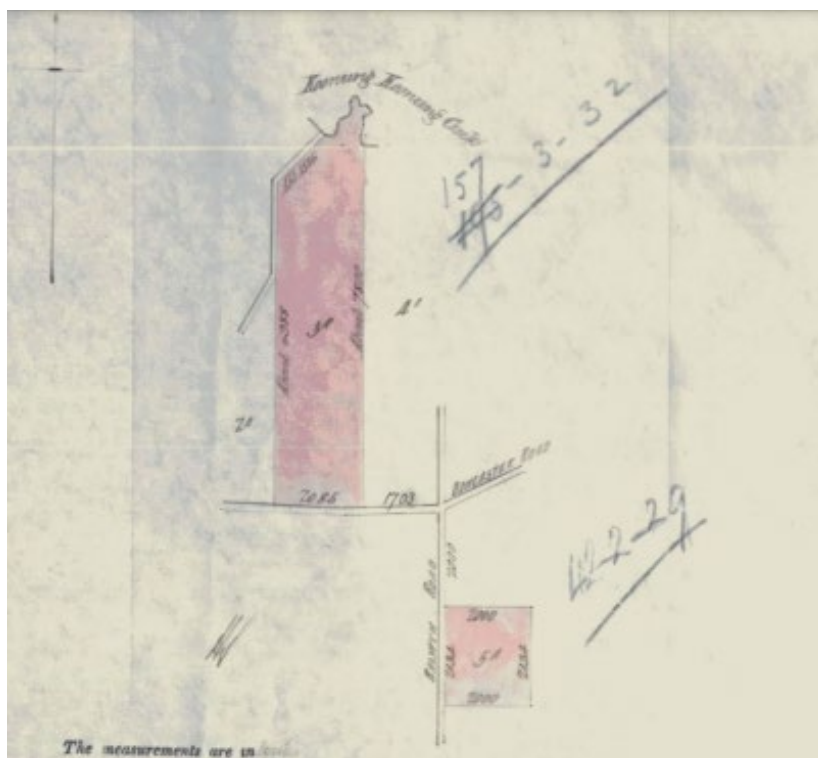


Figure 3 Detail from the certification of title showing land (shaded red) owned by Joseph Shilton and Thomas Brown in 1875. (Source: CT V767 F215)

In 1928 the land was purchased by Camberwell City Heights Pty Ltd and subdivided into residential allotments as part of what became known as the Camberwell City Heights Estate (CT V05438 F462).

Lots 741 and 742 of this estate were purchased in 1939 by Leonard Archbold Gray, who built a house on the land (now 45 Mountain View Road) (CT V6331 F073). In 1948 the property was sold to Marjorie Walker, who subdivided the land in 1963. The boundary for the new allotment had to be stepped around the existing house in an L shape, resulting in a narrow street frontage of 50 feet (15 metres) widening to 80 feet (24 metres) at the rear (CT V8458 F113)

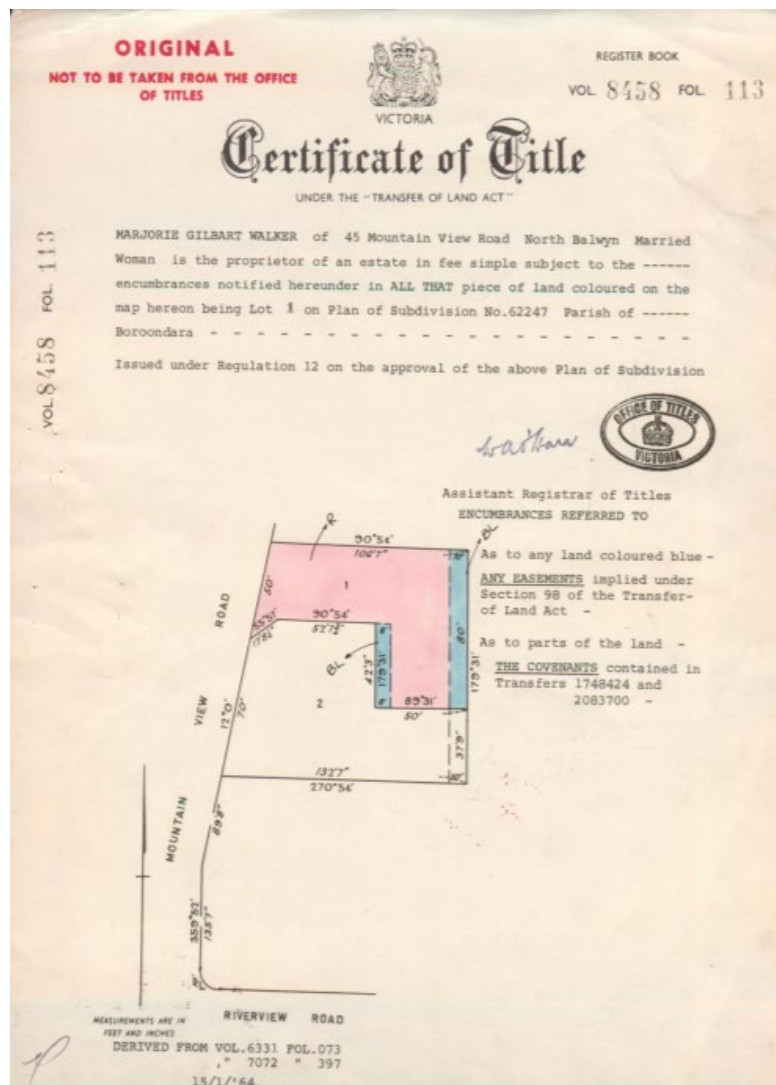


Figure 4 Certificate of title showing Lot 1 after Marjorie Walker subdivided her land in 1963. Bernard and Mira Plotkin purchased this lot in 1964 and built the subject house. (Source: CT V8458 F113)

Solicitor Bernard Plotkin and his wife Mira purchased the newly formed block of land in October 1964.

The Plotkins initially had plans prepared by two different architects: Harry Ernest and Grigore Hirsch of CONARG. They eventually opted for the design by Grigore Hirsch, a Rumanian émigré and highly respected designer whom Mira Plotkin knew through a family connection. According to her, Hirsch



disliked private residential commissions and only undertook them on a very selective basis (pers. comm).

In September 1966, when the Plotkins' recently completed dwelling was profiled in the property column of the *Herald* newspaper, it was dubbed the 'luxury house on a problem site' and praised for the way in which it 'demonstrates some of the important advances in domestic architecture in recent years'. A catalogue of rarely seen innovations was cited, including the fully automatic air-conditioning system (with its own plant room), laundry chute, ducted vacuum system and a front door with panoptic spyhole, remote-controlled release and intercom connection to the kitchen. The Plotkins lived there for almost 40 years. During that time, they made virtually no changes to the house, except to replace the original laminate kitchen benches with granite counterparts shortly before they sold the property in 2000. The house was sold again in 2020. Council building cards record no alterations or additions to the property since 1963.

CONARG

CONARG, a contraction of Contemporary Architecture Group, was founded in 1953 by Romanian émigré architect and town planner Grigore Hirsch (1906–1987). He trained at the University of Bucharest, receiving his Diploma of Architecture in 1930. He immediately commenced private practice in Bucharest, but in 1933 became an in-house architect to a subsidiary of the Shell oil company. Aware of the changing political situation in Europe, Hirsch and his family opted to emigrate to Australia in 1941. On the way they stopped in India, where they remained until 1949. In India Hirsch practised as an architect in Bombay (now Mumbai), where he completed houses, flats and commercial projects. In 1946 he won first prize in a competition for the design of the Bengal Central Bank in Calcutta (now Kolkata) (Built Heritage 2020).

The Hirschs moved to Australia in 1949, and Grigore worked initially in the office of Frank Heath, a leading Melbourne architect, whose practice (unusually for the time) also included town planning. Hirsch established his own firm in 1953. In what was an unusual move at the time, its title did not reference any personal names; instead it was simply the Contemporary Architecture Group, subsequently styled as CONARG. According to a former client, Hirsch was disinclined to accept residential commissions, and consequently relatively few houses were completed during his career. Hirsch reportedly converted to Catholicism from Judaism while in India, which might explain why CONARG completed several ecclesiastical commissions, including churches, denominational schools and a convent (Built Heritage 2020).

Description

The house at 47 Mountain View Road is a two-storey, flat-roofed Modernist residence of grey concrete brick construction. Many of the interior walls of the house are constructed with a slimmer version of the same concrete brick. Set well back on an L-shaped site that slopes down west to east from the street, the house was deliberately designed so that its principal frontage was to the rear (with easterly views of the Dandenong Ranges) rather than to the street. Consequently, the overall form of the house is difficult to interpret from Mountain View Road. Broadly following the shape of the block, the house has an L-shaped plan spread across three levels. The carport, entrance hall and plant room are at street level; the hall opens onto a mezzanine stairwell that leads upstairs to the bedroom level and downstairs to the living areas.

When viewed from the street, a flat-roofed double carport occupies about two-thirds of the frontage. The house, which sits behind the carport, is seamlessly integrated into its garden setting by a slightly projecting walled courtyard standing in front of the main entrance, and other low, retaining and taller structural walling in matching concrete brick. The driveway, paved in rectangular concrete slabs, is flanked by retaining walls (in narrower slab-like concrete bricks), which are stepped to create a series of terraced garden beds, and a single wide, concrete brick pillar gateway feature that incorporates a recessed letterbox. A recent screen created from evenly spaced heavy timber posts returns along the street frontage, enclosing the front yard.



Figure 5 Letter box at 47 Mountain View Road, Balwyn North, constructed of concrete bricks to match the house and garden walls. (Source: GML 2021)

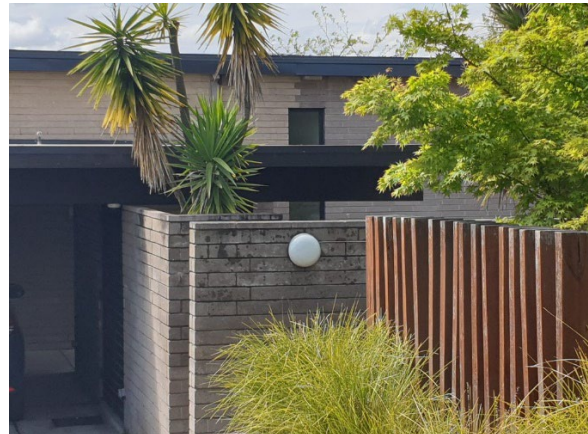


Figure 6 Concrete brick garden walls (integral to the original design) and timber fencing (recent) at the entry screening the front door from the street and creating an entry court. Note the integration of the carport roof over the top of the walls to give shelter to the front door. (Source: GML 2021)

The principal elevation of the house faces east, overlooking the rear garden. Two storeys in height, the rear wall of the house has a recessed upper balcony at its southern end and a projecting eaves overhang that is supported by a wing wall at its northern end and a rectangular pier at its southern end. The deep concrete floor of the balcony cantilevers past the pier, which is detailed with a vertical dentil course. Windows are the original timber-framed units and are typically floor to ceiling; those opening onto the balcony are fitted with oversized sliding doors, providing a seamless integration between indoors and out.

As the interior of the house was not inspected for this project, it could not be determined whether any of the luxurious internal finishes and features, noted in contemporary write-ups, are still in place.

Integrity

47 Mountain View Road, Balwyn North, is highly intact; very few changes are visible to the original or early fabric. The house retains its original built form, flat roof with concealed gutters, walls of unpainted concrete brick, pattern of fenestrations, and door openings and joinery. It is distinguished by its sophisticated integration of the house into its unusually shaped site and the retention of original concrete brick boundary walls, retaining walls, pillar with integrated letterbox and courtyard fencing. It is further distinguished by the use of a slimmer version of the external concrete bricks for many of its interior walls.



Overall, the house is of 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 a push for new housing and services in the suburbs of Melbourne.

Despite various subdivisions in the late 1800s and the early twentieth century, the vast majority of the housing stock in Balwyn North was built in 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, and many used 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 the postwar styles offered at the time, many of which were simply scaled-down versions of 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 to spend on housing was scarce.

Landscaping adopted a distinct aesthetic relationship to architecture in this period, when house design was increasingly informed by the topographic setting. Many modern houses were designed as integral components of the landscape; for example, on platforms terraced in relationship to a sloping site. This created a sense of living within the landscape rather than being removed from it (Goad 2002:253).

Departing from the traditional concept of the house as an isolated object bound by a polished front garden and more utilitarian backyard, the postwar period started to see many suburban gardens take on a less cultivated appearance. Changes to established landscaping techniques included the loss of the boundary fencing and greater tendency to leave plantings in their natural shape. Yards became zoned for outdoor living, largely focusing on comfort and leisure.

Although Grigore Hirsch is said to have eschewed private residential commissions, his firm, CONARG Architects, is known to have designed houses in various parts of the metropolitan area, including Heidelberg, Doncaster, Vermont and Mornington. Within Boroondara there is only one other known surviving example of CONARGs residential work; 118 Glen Iris Road, Glen Iris (HO897). Three other examples of CONARGs residential commissions previously identified in the City of Boroondara have since been demolished: 6 Goldthorns Avenue, Kew (1952), demolished by 2017; 16 Riverview Road, Balwyn North (1958), demolished in 1988; and a house in Simpson Street, Kew (1958), demolished at an unknown time.



Figure 7 '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.

Built ten years earlier, Hirsch's own home and office at 118 Glen Iris Road, Glen Iris (HO897) compares well to the subject site in the way that both house provided a sophisticated design response to complex sites. In both cases Hirsch's subtle use of materials embeds a textural quality and warmth to the design which maintains his design philosophy of European modernism, skilfully adapted to their Melbourne context.

The materiality of the Plotkin House links it closely to one of Grigore Hirsch's largest and most long running projects: the Sandringham and District Memorial Hospital, commenced in the mid-1950s to plans by Tasmanian architect (and former Sandringham resident) Esmond Dorney, and completed during 1964. Both projects used modular concrete bricks and notched corners, recessed headers and interlocking volumes expressed in the brick walling, to striking effect. In both projects Hirsch was responsible for the completion of all contract documentation, the design and detailing of elevations, most of the internal planning, and the site landscaping. The polygonal-planned hospital building was built of modular blockwork, with notched corners, and incorporated garden walls and piers articulated as massive interlocking volumes — a clear precedent for the similar detailing seen in the Plotkin House.

The house at 47 Mountain View Road, Balwyn North, can be compared more broadly to a number of contemporaneous houses in Balwyn and Balwyn North that exhibit a similar use of volumetric massing, flat roofs and full-height glazing. Despite the dominance of houses built in the years

following World War II, Heritage Overlay coverage of postwar houses in Balwyn is limited. Comparable examples include the following:



Figure 8. 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 9. 43 Kireep Road, Balwyn, designed by Robin Boyd in 1952 (HO177) (Source: GM 2022)

'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 10. 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.

Postwar houses on the Heritage Overlay in the broader Boroondara context that are comparable to 47 Mountain View Road, Balwyn North, include the following:



Figure 11. 'Robin Boyd House I', 664-666 Riversdale Road, Camberwell designed by Robyn 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 12. 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



Figure 13. The Guss House, 18 Yarra Street, Kew, designed by McGlashan & Everist in 1961. (Significant within HO530)
(Source: Hermes)

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.

The Guss Residence at 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 house 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 14 Dickie House, 6 Fairview Street, Hawthorn, c.1961–64 (HO784). (Source: Context 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 15 Cukiernan Residence, 29 Leura Grove, Hawthorn East, designed by Hayden & Associates (attributed to Anthony Hayden) in 1966 (HO857). (Source: Context with Trethowan 2018)

The Cukiernan Residence at 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.

47 Mountain View Road, Balwyn North, exhibits key elements of the postwar Modernist housing typology, most notably in its response to its site, informality in planning, flowing spatial arrangements and innovative use of materials. Typical of other postwar Modernist residential architecture, it exhibits a simplicity of structure and a sparseness of detail, rectangular planning, and low box-like forms with a horizontal emphasis. Its flat roof clad with lightweight sheeting, integrated carport prominently placed at the front of the house, and recessed entry concealed from view were also characteristic of postwar Modernist houses.

47 Mountain View Road is comparable to the earlier (1947) 'Robin Boyd House 1' (VHR H0879; HO116) which is widely recognised as the prototype for postwar modernist 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.

As also seen at Hirsch's own home in Glen Iris (1954-55, HO896), 47 Mountain View Road embraces the typical characteristics of architect-designed Modernist houses, including a sophistication of design and planning that reflects the skill of its architect. In response to its irregularly shaped and sloping block, the architect designed a house and landscape setting that is integrated into the landscape. The house is linked to its site through a series of interlocking boundary walls, creating courtyards that provide privacy as well as structure for the carport. Following the natural topography of the site, split levels are used to zone living and sleeping areas, and the living areas open seamlessly through walls of glass to the garden.

47 Mountain View Road is comparable to the works of other notable Modernist architects, including Ernest Milston (6 Reeves Court, Kew), McGlashan & Everist (18 Yarra Street, Kew, 1961) and Hayden & Associates (Cukiernan Residence, 29 Leura Grove, Hawthorn East). Similar characteristics across all these houses include a flat roof, an expressed structural modularity in the design with an integration of the house into its site through the use of large walls of glazing that



connect the interior with the exterior, simple unadorned planar wall surfaces and a simple rectilinear planning, and landscape design that was integral to the design of the house.

When compared to other Modernist houses included in Boroondara's Heritage Overlay, 47 Mountain View Road demonstrates the principal characteristics of the style, which was an important phase in the residential development of the area. Responding to a difficult site, the architects have used a sophisticated design response which orientates the house towards the rear of the block with only the carport visible from the street. Distinctive for its low roofline, its stark and apparently windowless façade, and especially its modular concrete brickwork, which introduces almost sculptural effects through stepped planes, interlocking volumes, recessed headers and dwarf walls of contrasting narrow tile-like bricks, Hirsch has embedded a textural quality and warmth to the design while maintaining the design philosophies of European modernism, adapted to the Melbourne context.

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).

47 Mountain View Road, Balwyn, is of local historical significance for the evidence it provides of Boroondara as a locus for fine, leading architect-designed public and private buildings from the 1850s into the postwar period. Designed in 1966 by Rumanian émigré architect Grigore Hirsch, principal of CONARG Architects Pty Ltd, this house is one of relatively few private residential projects that the practice completed. Featured in the *Herald* for its sophisticated integration into its unusually shaped site it is distinctive for its low roofline, stark and apparently windowless façade, and the sculptural use of modular concrete brickwork. The house exemplifies the high concentration of architect designed 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).

N/A

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

47 Mountain View Road, Balwyn, is of local aesthetic (architectural) significance for its unusual design, expression and integration of forms (house and landscaping) and materiality. Although set well back from the street and specifically designed to address the rear of the property and capitalise on distant views east to the Dandenong Ranges, the house nevertheless remains an eye-catching



element when seen from Mountain View Road. It is distinctive for its low roofline, its stark and apparently windowless façade, and especially its modular concrete brickwork, which introduces almost sculptural effects through stepped planes, interlocking volumes, recessed headers and dwarf walls of contrasting narrow tile-like bricks. The massive, slab-like letterbox, which boldly intersects with two garden walls, is an especially prominent element on the street boundary.

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 Plotkin House at 47 Mountain View Road, Balwyn North, designed by Rumanian émigré architect Grigore Hirsch, principal of CONARG Architects Pty Ltd in 1966, is significant.

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

- sculptural split level built form of the house created through stepped planes, interlocking volumes, recessed headers and dwarf walls of contrasting narrow tile-like bricks
- pattern of fenestration and door openings with original joinery
- flat roof with deep fascia's and concealed gutters
- materials and detailing of the house and landscaping, in particular the modular concrete bricks in both standard and narrow widths
- the integral landscape design of the front garden, including walling, retaining walls, terraced garden beds and gateway feature.

The section of timber front fence is not significant.

How is it significant?

The house is of historical and aesthetic (architectural) significance to the City of Boroondara.

Why is significant?

47 Mountain View Road, Balwyn, is of local historical significance for the evidence it provides of Boroondara as a locus for fine, leading architect-designed public and private buildings from the 1850s into the postwar period. Designed in 1966 by Rumanian émigré architect Grigore Hirsch, principal of CONARG Architects Pty Ltd, this house is one of relatively few private residential projects that the practice completed. Featured in the *Herald* for its sophisticated integration into its unusually shaped site, it is distinctive for its low roofline, stark and apparently windowless façade, and the sculptural use of modular concrete brickwork. The house exemplifies the high concentration of architect-designed modernist houses built in Balwyn and Balwyn North during the 1950s and 60s. (Criterion A)

47 Mountain View Road, Balwyn, is of local aesthetic (architectural) significance for its unusual design, expression and integration of forms (house and landscaping) and materiality. Although set well back from the street and specifically designed to address the rear of the property and capitalise on distant views east to the Dandenong Ranges, the house nevertheless remains an eye-catching element when seen from Mountain View Road. It is distinctive for its low roofline, its stark and apparently windowless façade, and especially its modular concrete brickwork, which introduces almost sculptural effects through stepped planes, interlocking volumes, recessed headers and dwarf walls of contrasting narrow tile-like bricks. The massive slab-like letterbox which boldly intersects with two garden walls, is an especially prominent element on the street boundary. (Criterion E)

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>	Yes, front and side concrete brick fencing and gateway feature/letterbox
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



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