

WOOD HOUSE (FORMER)

Prepared by: Simon Reeves, Built Heritage Pty Ltd

Address: 12-14 Tannock Street, Balwyn North

Name: Wood House (former)	Survey Date: 2 November 2020
Place Type: House	Architect: Robin Boyd (1948-49) Grounds Romberg & Boyd (1959) Romberg & Boyd (1971)
Grading: Significant	Builder: H H Miles (1948-49) B V Moore (1959); Frederick M Essing (1971)
Extent of Overlay: To title boundaries	Construction Date: 1948-49; (extended in 1959 and 1971)



Historical Context

Dating back to 1948-49, this house is associated with the emergence of post-war homebuilding in Balwyn North – that is, the period from the late 1940s to the early 1950s. Large parts of that suburb 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 Balwyn North was relatively modest compared to the massive influx that took place from the early 1950s, when these wartime restrictions were finally relaxed.

History

This house was built for pharmacist Don Wood, to the design of architect Robin Boyd. Born in Lilydale, Donald Charles Wood (1920-1987) was living in Kew with his wife, Lilian Mary "Joan" Wood (1923-2008) by September 1942, when he enlisted to serve in the Second World War. Attached to the 2/7 Field Regiment, he was discharged on 8 November 1945 with the rank of Lieutenant. Barely three weeks later, Wood (identified as a "student") acquired the consolidated title to two adjacent blocks of land in Balwyn North. Located on the west side of Tannock Street, these comprised Lots 422 and 423 of a huge subdivision. The Woods, however, did not develop the land immediately. According to electoral rolls, they lived in Morang Road, Hawthorn in 1949, by which time Wood's occupation was definitively recorded as "chemist". Directories confirm that his business premises were located at 235 High Street, Kew.

To design their new house, the Woods turned to architect Robin Boyd (1919-1971). Following a high-profile period as an architectural student in the late 1930s (during which he gained attention and notoriety as founding editor of the broadsheet *Smudges*), Boyd had enlisted with the Australian Army and served with the 3rd Field Survey Company alongside fellow architectural students including Neil Clerehan, Kevin Pethebridge and Frank Bell. After WW2, Boyd went into partnership with Pethebridge and Bell under the name Associated Designers (later, Associated Architects), undertaking mostly residential commissions in the eastern suburbs, including houses in Camberwell and Kew, and a small factory in Hawthorn. In late 1947, Boyd left the partnership due to his appointment as director of the new Small Homes Service, a joint initiative of the *Age* newspaper and the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects. While employed by the service on a full-time basis, Boyd retained the right of private practice, effectively designing a number of houses under his own name.

Already well-known in Melbourne's tightly-knit architectural fraternity, Boyd was still some years away from his more celebrated partnership of Grounds, Romberg & Boyd, and honing his craft as an astute critic and architectural writer that, within a decade, would make him a household name. According to Donald Wood's daughter, her father became aware of Boyd through a newspaper article that profiled him as a returned serviceman and up-and-coming young architect. Wood, himself an ex-serviceman, was keen to support others in a similar position and thus engaged Boyd to design his house. At the time, Boyd had only completed one other independent commission (for the White House in Mentone, 1947-48) but had a few others in progress, such as the Jope House in Bayswater and perhaps also the Nichol House in Warrandyte.

The working drawings for the Wood House, with a title block bearing Boyd's residential address in Riversdale Road, Camberwell, are dated November 1948. They depict a two-bedroomed gable-roofed brick house on a stepped L-shaped plan that stretched across the double block; the street frontage was dominated by the projecting living room with vast window wall (made up of a single sheet of plate glass) and timber-panelled tool shed integrated into the subfloor space below. A building permit was issued by the City of Camberwell in February 1949. Construction, undertaken by builder Herbert Miles of Glen Iris, was completed later that year.

In October 1950, the house was belatedly published in the *Australian Home Beautiful*. The author noted that "free planning in this unusual small house in Balwyn North takes full advantage of space and outlook and most of the work out of housework". Attention was drawn to the split-level planning (still unusual at that time), the projecting living room with huge north-facing plate glass window, and the subtle but effective colour scheme of olive yellow, amethyst grey, pale grey-blue and off-white. The interior was described in detail: raked ceilings with exposed rafters and knotty pine lining boards, a painted brick chimney, built-in furniture and a modern lighting scheme that included wall-mounted lamps in spun aluminium, and pendant lights with tulip-shaped glass shades.

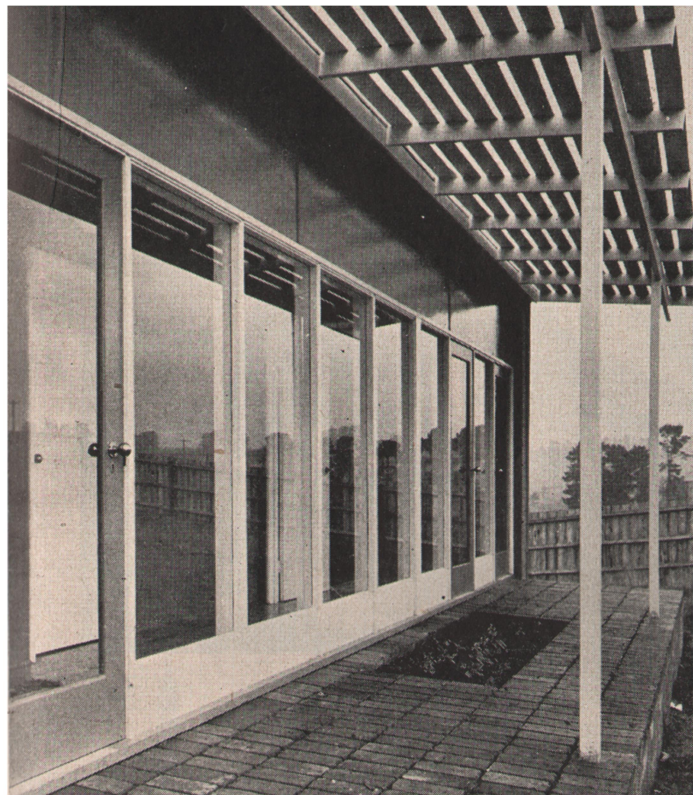
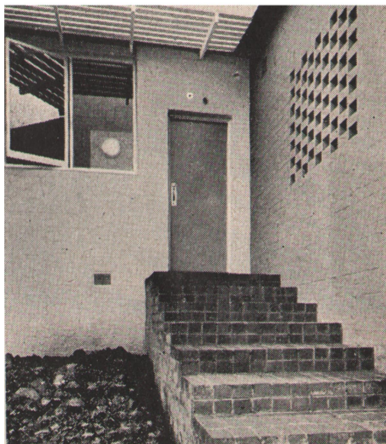
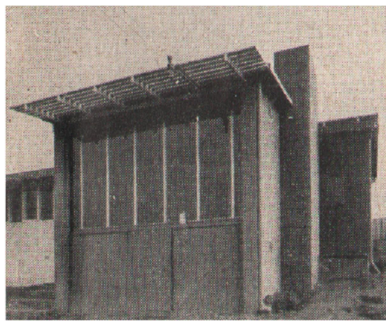
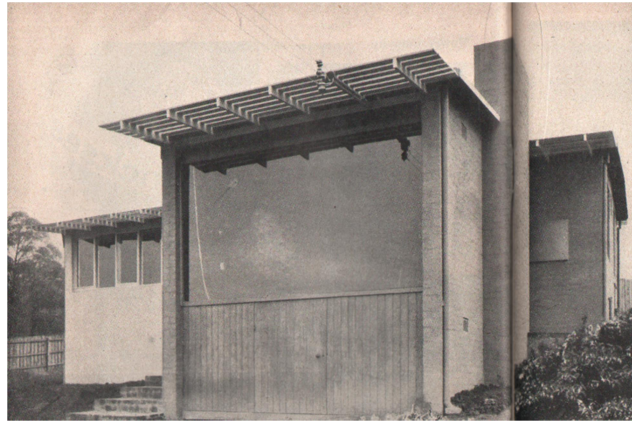
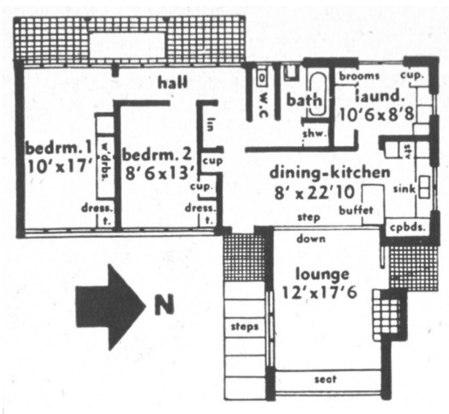


Figure 1: Indicative floorplan of original house (top left) and various early photographs
Source: Australian Home Beautiful, October 1950

The Woods were sufficiently pleased with their architect that, over the next two decades, they engaged him four more times – rendering them as Boyd's most frequently recurring private clients. In late 1953, Wood commissioned the architect (by then, newly in partnership as Grounds Romberg & Boyd) to design his new pharmacy in the developing commercial strip along Doncaster Road, at the foot of Tannock Street. With its boldly angled glazed façade and built-in fittings, the premises (also built by Herbert Miles) attracted much publicity as benchmark in modern retail design. In 1962, Wood engaged Boyd again to undertake further alterations to the shop.

In 1959, when the Woods sought to extend the Tannock Street house to accommodate their growing family, they naturally turned to Boyd. He proposed a large addition to the south end (providing two more bedrooms and a recreation room) and a new flat-roofed garage that projected from the living room, below the sill of the huge window. With the original designer at the helm, the additions were conceived in a wholly sympathetic fashion, with brickwork, fenestration and low-pitched roofs that seamlessly connected to the existing fabric. Just over a decade later, in 1971, they commissioned Boyd to further enlarge the house. This time, he proposed an addition across the street frontage (at a slightly lower level so that the original windows remained exposed), and enlarged the garage by extending its north wall. Again, these changes were carefully detailed to match the original building, forming a smooth integration between the old and the new. The working drawings for these additions are dated June 1971, and a building permit was issued in August. According to one account, Boyd gave some instructions for the project from his hospital bed on the night before he died on 19 October (Age, 16/12/1985:27).

Notwithstanding Boyd's death in 1971, the house would have one further and final link with his practice: four years later, when the Woods required some landscaping works, they turned to architect Berenice Harris (1925-2008). A member of Frederick Romberg's staff from 1949, Harris transferred to the new partnership of Grounds, Romberg & Boyd in 1953, and would remain associated with the firm for over two decades. A director from 1962, Harris took control of the practice after Boyd's death in 1971 and saw a number of his unfinished projects to completion. In 1975, when engaged by the Wood family, she had recently left what remained of the firm and had started her own sole practice.

When the Woods finally sold their house in late 1985, the estate agent labelled it as "timeless", noting that "when you enter the house, you find it very hard to believe that it was built 36 years ago. It is an outstanding work of contemporary design". The couple subsequently moved to Ringwood, where Don Wood died in 1987. His widow retained a soft spot for the work that Boyd had done for them, and, in 1993, donated a collection of memorabilia relating to the house and chemist's shop (including photographs, drawings, press cuttings and ephemera) to the State Library of Victoria.

Description & Integrity

The house at 12-14 Tannock Street is a split-level gable-roofed early modernist house, of brick construction with a bagged and painted finish. Occupying a double width allotment, the house has an elongated rectilinear plan that spreads out across the entire block. As originally built in 1949, the house had a slender L-shaped plan form, with a long north-south portion and a projecting east wing at the north end. Two subsequent phases of expansion in 1959 and 1971 have increased the length and width of the north-south portion, and extended the east wing by the addition of a flat-roofed double garage. Designed by the original architect, these additions are sympathetic in scale, form and materials. While they can, to some extent, be perceived as later additions (due to the stepping of floor and roof levels), they otherwise closely follow the fabric of the original house in their detailing and finishes. The overall plan form still remains generally L-shaped, albeit with some smaller projecting elements to the north and west.

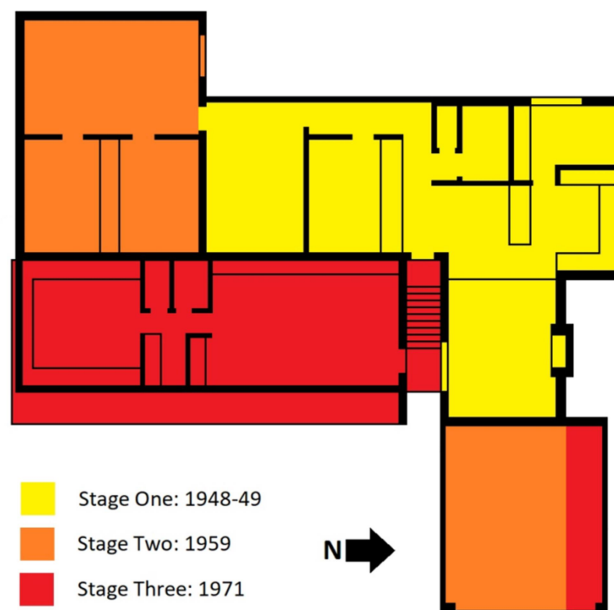


Figure 2: Diagram showing the three phases of construction of the Wood House
 Source: Drawn by Built Heritage Pty Ltd, based on working drawings for each stage

Seen from the street, the house has an elongated, asymmetrical and stepped facade. To the rear, the original north-south wing (with 1959 addition at one end) is partly concealed by the 1971 addition, set down at a lower level. Both parts have continuous bays of timber-framed sash windows with slatted timber eaves. At the north end, the living room has a huge plate glass window with slatted timber eaves. To the left is the present front entrance, which formed part of the 1971 works. Set back into an alcove defined by a wing wall, it has a timber door with tall fanlight that aligns with the big living room window. The double garage, projecting forward from the sill of the living room window, is expressed with a single tilt-up panel door between brick piers, with and another slatted eave. A retaining wall of volcanic rocks extends across the front property line and up the driveway. This incorporates an angled flight of steps with timber sleepers, also dating from 1971. The concrete path and driveway shown on the 1971 plans have been replaced by brick paving.

Externally, the house remains notably intact to the extent of its original Boyd fabric – that is, the 1949 house and subsequent phases of addition in 1959 and 1971. The additions, made by the original architect, cannot be considered unsympathetic or intrusive; rather, they add an additional layer of significance for the way in which they demonstrate how Boyd, at various later stages of his career, approached the problem of extending one of his earliest houses.

Comparative Analysis

Resuming private architectural practice after the Second World War, in partnership with Kevin Pethebridge and Frank Bell, Robin Boyd undertook a number of commissions in the suburbs that now constitute the City of Boroondara. Chief amongst these was his own house at what is now 666 (formerly 158) Riversdale Road, Camberwell (1946-47). As originally built, this was a single-storey gable-roofed brick dwelling on an elongated plan, with raked window wall. The house was extended to Boyd's design in 1951-52, and he remained living there he designed and built his celebrated second residence in Walsh Street, South Yarra, in 1958. Classified by the National Trust in 1987, his former home in Camberwell was subsequently added to both the City of Camberwell's heritage overlay schedule [HO116] and the *Victorian Heritage Register* [VHR H0879].



Fig 3: Boyd's own house [HO116]
666 Riversdale Rd, Camberwell
(Associated Architects, 1946-7)
Source: VHD



Fig 4: Pettigrew House [HO337]
21 Redmond Street, Kew
(Associated Architects, 1946)
Source: Tony Lee



Fig 5: Dainty Frock factory,
114-116 Church St, Hawthorn
(Associated Architects, 1946)
Source: VHD

Associated Architects was also responsible for several houses in Kew, but only one is known to have been built: the Pettigrew House at 21 Redmond Street (Fig 2). Completed in 1946, it was enlarged in 1950 with a second storey addition by Pethebridge & Bell (ie, remaining in partnership after Boyd's departure), with further changes made in 1967 by Pethebridge (by then in sole practice). Originally given an A/B-grading in Graeme Butler's *Kew B-Graded Buildings Study* (2001), the house was reviewed and re-assessed in Lovell Chen's *Boroondara Heritage Review B Graded Buildings* (2005), which upheld a B-grading. The property, still occupied by the Pettigrew family at that time, has since changed ownership and been subject to a sympathetic refurbishment by award-winning interior designers, Flack Studio. The only other realised project by Associated Architects in what is now the City of Boroondara was the former Dainty Frock factory at 114-116 Church Street (1946; Fig 3). This was much altered in the 1980s by architect Peter McIntyre, who remodelled the street façade and added a second storey. In 2005, the building was classified by the National Trust, only to be demolished the following year.

In the few years between the end of Associated Associates in 1947 and the formation of Grounds, Romberg & Boyd in 1953, Boyd designed several houses in what is now the City of Boroondara, all located in Balwyn and Balwyn North. The Wood House at 12-14 Tannock Street, for which working drawings are dated November 1948, was one of the first of these, closely followed by a house for the architect's brother, J P "Pat" Boyd, at 46 Fortuna Avenue (December 1948; Fig 6), the Dunstan House at 17 Yandilla Street (February 1949; Fig 7), and the slightly later Bunbury House at 203 Doncaster Road (1949-50; Fig 8) [HO616] and Gillison House at 43 Kireep Road, Balwyn (1951-52; Fig 9) [HO177]. After entering into partnership with Roy Grounds and Frederick Romberg in July 1953, Boyd maintained his early connection 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 three of his four earlier pre-partnership houses there.



Fig 6: Pat Boyd House,
46 Fortuna Avenue, Balwyn Nth
(Robin Boyd, 1948-49)
Source: Built Heritage Pty Ltd



Fig 7: Dunstan House,
17 Yandilla Street, Balwyn
(Robin Boyd, 1948-49)
Source: Built Heritage Pty Ltd



Fig 8: Bunbury House [HO616]
203 Doncaster Rd, Balwyn Nth
(Robin Boyd, 1949-50)
Source: Tony Lee



Fig 9: Gillison House [HO177]
 43 Kireep Road, Balwyn Nth
 (Robin Boyd, 1951-52)
 Source: Built Heritage Pty Ltd



Fig 10: Clemson House [HO251]
 24 Milfay Avenue, Kew
 (Grounds, Romberg Boyd, 1957)
 Source: Built Heritage Pty Ltd



Fig 11: Wilson House [pt HO530]
 23 Dunlop Avenue, Kew
 (Grounds, Romberg Boyd, 1955)
 Source: Built Heritage Pty Ltd

Today, these seven Boyd houses in Balwyn and Balwyn North survive in varying degrees of intactness. The Bunbury House and the Gillison House remain substantially intact and, as contrasting exemplars of Boyd's maturing approach to residential design, are both included on the City of Boroondara's heritage overlay schedule (respectively as HO616 and HO177). The Brown House has been altered virtually beyond recognition, and the Latchford House similarly subject to unsympathetic alterations. Although the latter was identified in Graeme Butler's *Camberwell Conservation Study* (1991), its heritage status was subsequently reviewed and downgraded in 2005, consequent to its poor integrity. The Pat Boyd House at 46 Fortuna Avenue has been enlarged on three occasions: twice to Boyd's design (in 1955 and 1966) and, more recently, by others. When the house is seen today from the public realm, it remains more difficult to interpret its various stages of construction.

By contrast, the Dunstan House and Wood House are both notably intact: neither has any significant post-Boyd additions, and both stand out for the clarity in which the original extant, and subsequent phases of addition, can be clearly interpreted. Although of similar date, the two houses are markedly different in composition: while the Dunstan House is was 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. Both houses (along with Boyd's own house in Camberwell) can be considered as examples of what Boyd defined as the 'Victorian type' – a distinct articulation of residential design characterised by low rooflines, large windows and elongated plan forms, which recurs in many of his early commissions as well as standard plans that he prepared for the Small Homes Service. Collectively, the Dunstan House and Wood House (along with the slightly later Bunbury House and Gillison House) provide a valuable snapshot of the early solo architectural career of this eminent and influential designer prior to his more celebrated partnership with Roy Grounds and Frederick Romberg.

Boyd's later work is otherwise well represented in the City of Boroondara by numerous extant buildings from his partnerships of Grounds, Romberg & Boyd (1953-60) and Romberg & Boyd (1961-71), most of which are houses in the Kew area. These include three specimens that are individually listed on the HO schedule: the Clemson House at 24 Milfay Avenue (1957; Fig 10) [HO251 and VHR H2006], the Haughton-James House at 76 Molesworth Street (1958) [HO326] and the Lawrence House and Flats at 13 Studley Avenue (1966) [HO342]. In addition, several other post-1953 Boyd houses have been designated as significant or contributory elements within the broader *Yarra Boulevard Precinct* [HO530], namely the Wilson House at 23 Dunlop Avenue (1955; Fig 11), the Date House at 59 Molesworth Street (1957) and the Purves House at 35 Molesworth Street (1967). The Zelman Cowan House at 34 Yarravale Road (1959) still stands, but has been substantially altered and remains ungraded within the precinct.

Assessment Against Criteria

Criteria referred to in *Practice Note 1: Applying the Heritage Overlay*, Department of Planning and Community Development, September 2012, 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).

N/A

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

Rare, as one of relatively few surviving examples of Robin Boyd's brief and only period in sole practice, between his partnerships of Associated Architects (1946-48) and Grounds, Romberg & Boyd (1953-60; later Romberg & Boyd).

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).

An excellent example of early modernist residential architecture from the austere period immediately following WW2. The house expresses many characteristics associated with the emerging modernist style, such as its elongated linear plan, low gabled roofline, generous glazing and slatted eaves. These qualities also encapsulate a recurring design trope that Boyd himself described as the "Victorian type", which characterised much of his early output and manifested periodically in his later career.

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

The house demonstrates a high degree of creative achievement. The original dwelling was highly innovative in its design, detailing and finishes, including its split-level planning, continuous fenestration and its massive single-pane plate glass window. The fact that the house was constructed and completed in the late 1940s, when wartime restrictions on building materials, labour and resources were still in place, makes Boyd's achievement all the more remarkable. The additions, made by the same architect in two subsequent phases a decade apart, show a high degree of creative achievement in that they are sympathetic in scale, form and materials while still remaining clearly articulated as later additions.

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).

Special association as an important early work of architect Robin Boyd, who had a long and recurring association with the suburbs that now comprise the City of Boroondara (including a twelve year stint as a local resident, living in Camberwell and designing numerous other houses in Kew, Hawthorn and Balwyn/Balwyn North)

Statement of Significance

What is Significant?

The former Wood House at 12-14 Tannock Street, Balwyn North, is a single-storey gable-roofed brick house with an elongated split-level plan that spreads across its double block. Designed by Robin Boyd for chemist Don Wood and his family, the house was realised in three stages built over more than 20 years: the original modest two-bedroom house (1948-49), expanded with garage and a bedroom/playroom wing (1959) and a further addition with *en suite* master bedroom and further living area (1971).

The significant fabric is designed as the entire exterior of the house (encapsulating all three stages designed by Robin Boyd), as well as hard landscaping to the extent of the rock retaining walls, paved pathways and timber steps as shown on Boyd's drawings.

How is it significant?

The former Wood House is of architectural, aesthetic and associative significance to the City of Boroondara.

Why is it significant?

The house is architecturally and aesthetically significant as a notable achievement in modernist residential architecture. The original house was designed and built in 1948-49, when private homebuilding was still hampered by wartime restrictions on labour and building materials. Nevertheless, the house encapsulated many of the innovative ideas associated with the burgeoning modernist movement, such as open-planning, split-level design and extensive glazing (most notably in this case, with an improbably large single-pane plate glass window). Its elongated plan form, low roofline and generous glazing also articulated a distinct housing form described by Boyd as the "Victorian" type, which prominently recurs in his early output (including plans that he prepared for the Small Homes Services) as well as in later works. The original house was extended to Boyd's design in 1959 and again in 1971, providing evidence of the architect's skill and sensitivity in making additions to his own work, simultaneously demonstrating a continuity of form, finishes and details while still being readily identifiable as later accretions. (*Criterion E; Criterion F*)

The house is significant for associations with eminent architect and writer Robin Boyd. Documented in late 1948, the house was one of the first projects undertaken by Boyd after he left the partnership of Kevin Pethebridge and Frank Bell, effectively embracing sole practice whilst employed as foundation director of the Small Homes Service. The house demonstrates rarity as one of relatively few surviving examples from this brief but seminal phase of Boyd's career, prior to his celebrated partnership with Roy Grounds and Frederick Romberg. It is one of several outstanding early houses by Robin Boyd in the Balwyn and 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 B; 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 Colours <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
Victorian Heritage Register <i>Is the place included on the Victorian Heritage Register?</i>	No
Incorporated Plan <i>Does an Incorporated Plan apply to the site?</i>	No
Outbuildings and fences exemptions <i>Are there outbuildings and fences which are not exempt from notice and review?</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

Identified By

Built Heritage Pty Ltd, *Balwyn & Balwyn North Heritage Study* (2015)

References

Robin Boyd, "House at Tannock Street, North Balwyn, for Mr and Mrs D Wood", working drawings, dated 30 November 1948. (Held by City of Boroondara; copies courtesy Tony Lee, founder of Robin Boyd Foundation)

"Two level living", *Australian Home Beautiful*, October 1950, pp 14-17

Grounds, Romberg & Boyd, "Brick veneer additions to house at 12-14 Tannock Street, North Balwyn, for D C Wood, esq", working drawings, dated 3 July 1959. (Held by City of Boroondara; copies courtesy Tony Lee, founder of Robin Boyd Foundation)

Romberg & Boyd, "Additions to house for Mr and Mrs D C Wood, 12-14 Tannock Street, North Balwyn", working drawings, dated 3 June 1971. (Held by City of Boroondara; copies courtesy Tony Lee, founder of Robin Boyd Foundation)

"Boyd house sells for \$175,000", *Age*, 16 December 1985, p 27.

Transition, No 38 (1992) [Special Issue on Robin Boyd]; *passim*.

Other information provided by Tony Lee, founder of the Robin Boyd Foundation.

