

## Withers House

Prepared by: Context

**Address:** 32 Corby Street, Balwyn North

<b>Name:</b> Withers House	<b>Survey Date:</b> May 2021
<b>Place Type:</b> Residential	<b>Architect:</b> Alistair Knox
<b>Grading:</b> Significant	<b>Builder:</b> Alistair Knox
<b>Extent of Overlay:</b> To title boundaries	<b>Construction Date:</b> 1962



Figure 1. 32 Corby Street, North Balwyn. (Source: Context 2021)

## Historical context

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

### *1940s and postwar development*

There had been a scattering of new housing development in the area north of Belmore Road from the late 1930s, but this area was developed significantly from the early 1940s as the new suburb of North Balwyn. Occupied with orchards and small farms, this was the one of the last remaining expanses of undeveloped land relatively close to the city. 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 that ran along Doncaster Road was an advantage to house blocks in the adjoining streets, providing sought-after views to the distant ranges and encouraging the building of often grandiose double-storey homes. Public transport was provided with the extension from the electric tram from East Kew to North Balwyn in 1938, along High Street and Doncaster Road. A large shopping centre, known as North Balwyn Village, developed along Doncaster Road.

In the 1950s, the potential for large-scale residential development in North Balwyn was recognised by a private company, A.V. Jennings Pty Ltd, which proposed the Trentwood Estate on a large tract of land off Doncaster Road (Built Heritage 2015:12). From 1947, Balwyn and 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, located in Balwyn North, opened in 1954, followed by Greythorn High School in 1959. Several new churches were constructed, extended or rebuilt to provide for burgeoning congregations (Built Heritage 2015:12). This included new Catholic churches at Deepdene, Balwyn and Balwyn North.

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 North today is favoured by many new home-owners for access to Balwyn High School—a co-educational government secondary school with nearly 2000 students.

## **History**

The subject site is located on what was Lot 101 of the 'Rookwood Estate', which was subdivided into 66 villa allotments and created Corby Street and Rookwood Street ('Rookwood Estate', 1927). For 40 years prior to the subdivision sale, the block of land at the corner of Doncaster and Balwyn roads, Balwyn North (then within the City of Camberwell), had been owned by William Patterson Vettler, a farmer and veteran rifleman, who died in 1926 (*Weekly Times* 27 November 1926:88).

Following the 1927 subdivision, large tracts of Rookwood Estate remained unsold. In 1946 Lot 101 (the subject site) was purchased by Phyllis Rose Maillard. The site remained vacant, changing ownership twice until it was purchased by Alfred Percy Withers, proprietor of Pioneer Tourist Services, and his wife Gwendoline Marion Withers in 1961.

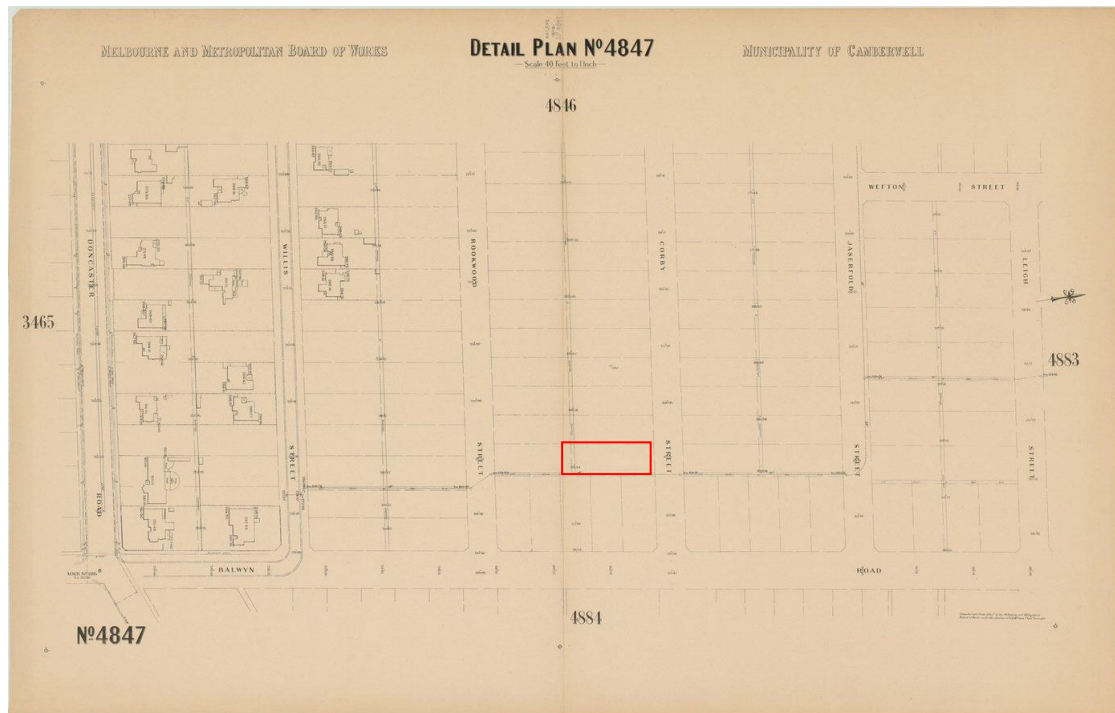


Figure 2. Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works, Detail Plan No. 4847, Municipality of Camberwell, 194-, showing No 32 Corby Street as a vacant lot outlined in red. (Source: State Library Victoria).

Alfred and Gwendoline Withers commissioned Alistair Knox to design and build a six-roomed brick veneer house on the subject site in 1962 for a cost of £7550 (BP). In August 1963 Knox added a workshop to the Corby Street house and in October 1963 he built an additional workshop and a fowl shed (BP). Knox also designed a path and garden layout presumably shortly after the house was built, however the drawing is undated (Alistair Knox Foundation). It is possible that this was drawn by prominent landscape designer Peter Glass who was working as Knox's only employee around 1961 as a draftsman (RMIT Design Archive Journal).

Knox and the Withers appear to have altered the original scheme for the house. Entry to the house is originally shown on the western side with the living room extending closer to the street and a carport located along the eastern boundary. The current arrangement, with the entry projecting forward and entered from the east off a deck that runs across the front of the living room and garaging underneath, is shown on the garden plan, also designed by Knox.

Alfred Percy Withers was born on 8 December 1898 in Elmore, Victoria. His father Albert Withers was founder and managing director of Pioneer Tourist Coaches Pty Ltd, and proprietor of motor tourist buses and the inter-urban coach services. Albert Withers worked in the coach and transport business in Gippsland from 1888. In 1907 Albert Withers started a coach and transport business under the trading name of Withers and Sons. He formed the business into a proprietary company in 1914 of which he was managing director. He resigned

in 1918 and purchased the first motor car of the Pioneer Motor Company's fleet. On the return of his three sons from World War I, they were taken into partnership and in 1923 their business was registered as the Pioneer Tourist Coaches Pty Ltd. After World War II, Withers Transport Industries under the ownership of Alfred Withers established a network of services in Box Hill, Doncaster, Templestowe and Warrandyte, which offered direct routes to Melbourne. These routes were acquired by the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramway Board in 1961.

Alfred Withers commissioned Knox to design extensions to their business premises, bus repair depot and offices on the corner of Victoria Street and Doncaster Road, Doncaster, in 1958–59. Knox also designed a shop and a proposed subdivision for Withers Transport Industries in 1958 although this drawing includes no identifying address (Alistair Knox Foundation).

The Withers sold 32 Corby Street in 1971 to barrister Paul Willee and his wife Barbara. Willee took silk in 1991. The Willee's remained at the property until 2006 at which time it was sold to the current owners.

Council building cards record no alterations or additions to the property since 1963.

### **Alistair Knox**

Alistair Knox (1912–1986) was a designer and builder who designed over 1000 houses and a number of churches, schools and other buildings between 1946 and 1986. Of 1266 design projects, he built approximately 350 of them. Knox is best known for his mud brick output of about 300 buildings, which were built in two periods: before 1955 and after 1964, but mostly after 1970. Over the years, he developed a recognisably regional 'Eltham Style' of architecture and landscape practice' (Alistair Knox Foundation; Peterson and Kusyk 2014:5-6).

In 1946 Knox commenced a Diploma of Architecture and Building Construction at the Melbourne Technical College but left after two years (Peterson and Kusyk 2014:9). After visiting the Justus Jorgensen's Montsalvat artists' colony in Eltham in 1947, Knox moved to Eltham in 1949 with his wife Mernda Clayton and their three children (Woollard 2016:145-46). Knox had left his job as a bank clerk in 1948 and established his business, Knox Building Service, in Eltham (Age, 19 July 1954:10; Peterson and Kusyk 2014:10).

The development of his signature style and is explained in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*:

*His developing architectural style was showing the influence of Frank Lloyd Wright, the inspiration of Francis Greenway and Walter Burley Griffin (including the latter's preference for planting indigenous flora) and his admiration for the modernist work of Robin Boyd and (Sir) Roy Grounds. Buildings, landscape and environment began to merge in his work; as Bruce Mackenzie noted, a Knox house 'grew in the landscape in the way that trees adapted ... to inevitable forces'. In landscape design he was particularly impressed by the work of Ellis Stones and Gordon Ford, whose espousal of 'bush gardens' he helped to promote.*

*Knox's career evolved over three distinct phases. In the first, from the 1940s to the 1960s, he followed Wright in embracing simple building structures. Notable houses from this period include the Ball, Busst and Le Gallienne-Downing houses. The more*

*sophisticated designs of the second phase, until the late 1970s, incorporated the use of mud, stone and timber, as evident in the Coller (1974) and Huggett (1975) homes. A final phase came in the 1980s, when a Knox house was widely sought.*  
(Woodhouse 2007)

Between 1958 and 1962, in the second phase of his career, Knox developed a modular style of architecture that he was to continue using until the end of his career. During which time he designed 45 Modernist houses on the Hillcrest Estate in Donvale. These houses, and others built during this period, predate the development of his 'Eltham Style' and are important in understanding the development of Knox's career. During this period Knox fine-tuned his skill in designing in the Modernist idiom. After this time Knox began to fuse ideas from his earlier mudbrick houses that were influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright with the Modernist architecture of Robyn Boyd to create his own distinctive regional style.

Apart from his career in building design and construction, Knox served as an Eltham Shire councillor in the period 1972–75, and as its president in 1975. He became a consultant to activist community groups across Melbourne, fighting inappropriate subdivisions and the alienation of public space (Peterson and Kusyk 2014:14-15). Knox published three books on housing and the environment, wrote for newspapers, spoke on radio, and hosted 'open houses' to demonstrate his building and landscaping theories. Although academically unqualified, he was a founding member (1967) and fellow (1983) of the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects, and a frequent lecturer on environmental design, architecture, building and landscape. Knox received an honorary doctorate in architecture from the University of Melbourne in 1984 (Woodhouse 2007). He died in 1986.

## **Description**

32 Corby Street, Balwyn North, is a single-storey brick veneer dwelling constructed in 1962. Positioned on an elevated allotment that falls south to north, no. 32 is the first house on the south side of Corby Street as you enter off Balwyn Road. Taking advantage of the natural fall of the site, the house is elevated above street level, creating open car accommodation underneath. A mature deciduous tree in the front yard contributes significantly to the setting of the place.

Constructed in beige bricks with a flat roof, the house is cut into the site so that the rear section of the house sits on a concrete slab-on-ground that cantilevers at the front supported by concrete beams and a pair of slender steel posts. The house is built using a post and beam system, with the beams and rafters left exposed. These run through to a 13 3/4 inch (approx. 350mm) fascia board that conceals the gutters.

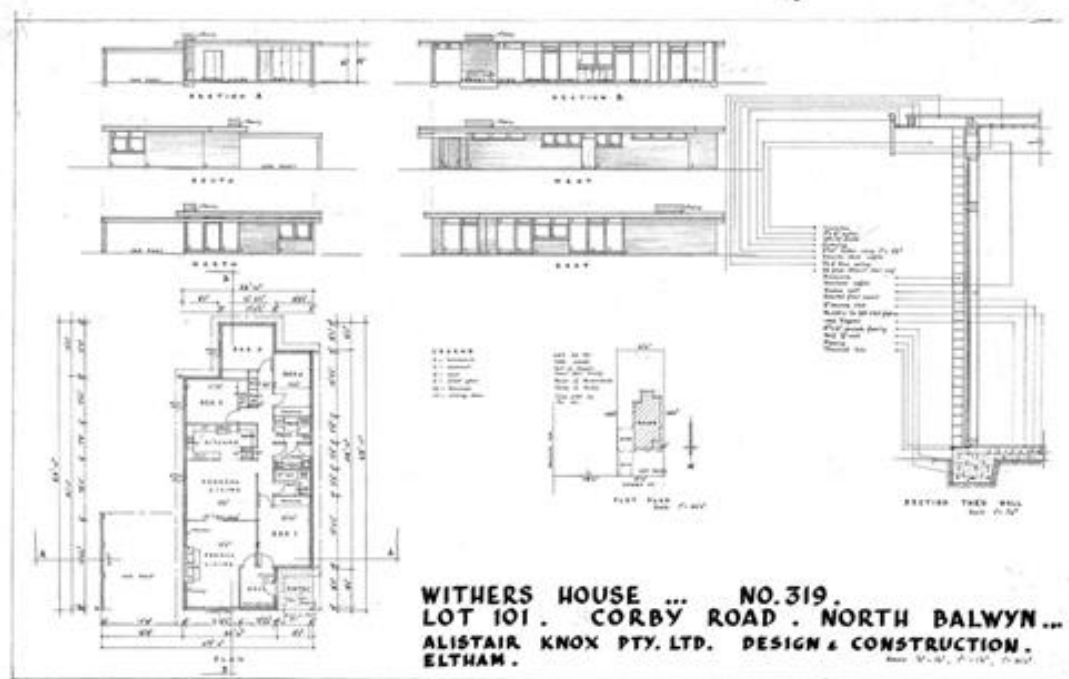


Figure 3. Original working drawing sheet for the Withers House, Corby Road, North Balwyn. (Source: A Knox, Job No 319, Alistair Knox Foundation)

The house is designed with two principal elevations. The street-facing north elevation is elevated above the ground level, with car accommodation and two store rooms beneath. Access to the house is via concrete and timber steps that lead off the driveway on the eastern side of the property. These lead to a front deck, which has a simple metal rod balustrade and natural timber handrail. The balustrade runs across the front of the main living room and terminates at the house's entry which projects forward towards the street. To the west of the entry the house steps back again. A window wall runs across the front of the living room and is divided into four equal panes, three of which are of fixed glass and one fitted with a large, glazed sliding door. As is typical for all window joinery throughout the house, narrow highlight windows sit between the upper window mullion and the structural roof beams. The protruding entry has clerestory windows to its northern and western elevations. The front door is off the deck at its eastern end and is an unpainted vertically clad timber door with side and overlights. The recessed main bedroom to the west of the entry has a single double-paned window with signature overlights.



Figure 4. Internal image of rear bedroom showing typical full height window detail with overlight and clerestory windows. Note the stone retaining wall (seen through the window) that forms part of the houses original landscape design. (Source: Jellis Craig 2021)

The eastern elevation of the house steps back in three sections. The northern most section is the eastern wall of the main living room and is a sheer brick wall with a simple rectangular chimney protruding above the roof line. The middle and rear sections are almost entirely glazed with large floor-to-ceiling window and door modules all with signature overlight, opening out to a crazy paved courtyard.



Figure 5. The eastern elevation steps in as you move down the block with living and bedrooms opening onto a crazy paved courtyard through large, glazed sliding doors. Note the use of overlights and clerestory windows throughout the house. (Source: Jellis Craig 2021)

The southern and western elevations are simply detailed with sheer wall planes of face brick and clerestory windows. These windows allow light to flood into the bedrooms and service area of the house without compromising privacy.



Figure 6. Although simply arranged with sheer brick wall plains and clearstory windows for privacy, the southern elevation is carefully detailed as is typical of modernist buildings where building are designed to sit in the landscape and be viewed from all angles. (Source: Jellis Craig 2021)

Internally, the house retains its original rock-faced brick fireplace, timber parquetry floors, unpainted window and door joinery, unpainted exposed ceiling rafters, beams and timber-lined ceilings. The house also retains much of its original cabinetry.



Figure 7. Main living room across the front of the house, which faces north. Note the large window wall that opens onto the front deck, rock-faced brick fireplace, exposed timber ceiling and joists, and original parquetry floors. (Source: Jellis Craig 2021)



Figure 8. One of the bedrooms showing use of clerestory windows and large window walls with typical joinery detail with overlights above. Note the integration of outdoors with inside even for secondary bedroom spaces. (Source: Jellis Craig 2021)

Externally, the house retains features of Knox's original garden layout. These include the distinctive curved form of the drive, stone retaining walls in both the front and rear yards, and stone garden edging. Although not shown on the landscape drawing the brick letter box appears contemporaneous with the house. It is also possible that the crazy paving to the eastern side of the house was part of Knox's design as it is a signature element of many of his landscapes with the paving often being laid by his artist wife, Margot, or landscape designer Peter Glass. This, however, cannot be verified.

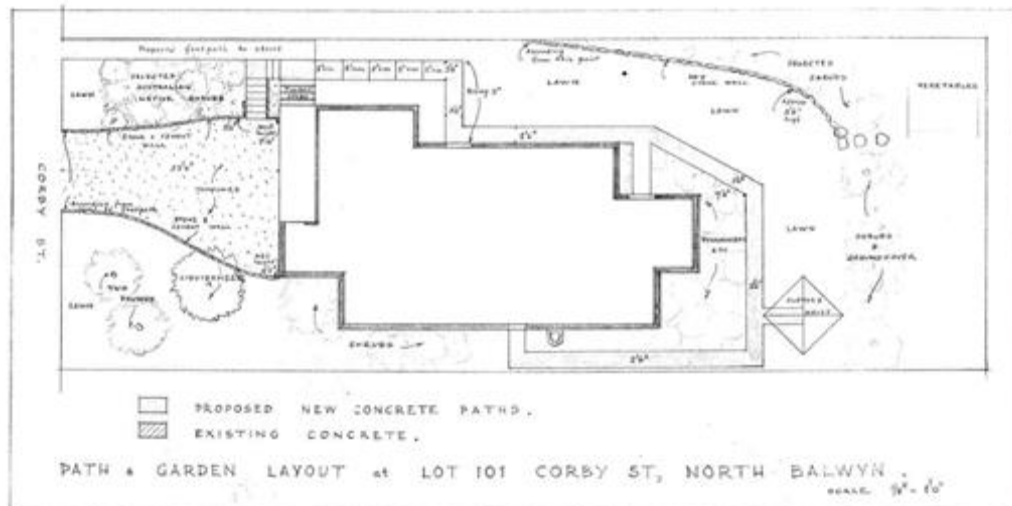


Figure 9. Original garden layout showing drive shape, timber and concrete steps to the entry deck and stone retaining walls. (Source: A Knox, Job No 319 undated (Withers Garden), Alistair Knox Foundation)



Figure 10. Early brick letter box and stone retaining wall the later of which is shown on the original landscape design by Knox. (Source: Context 2021)

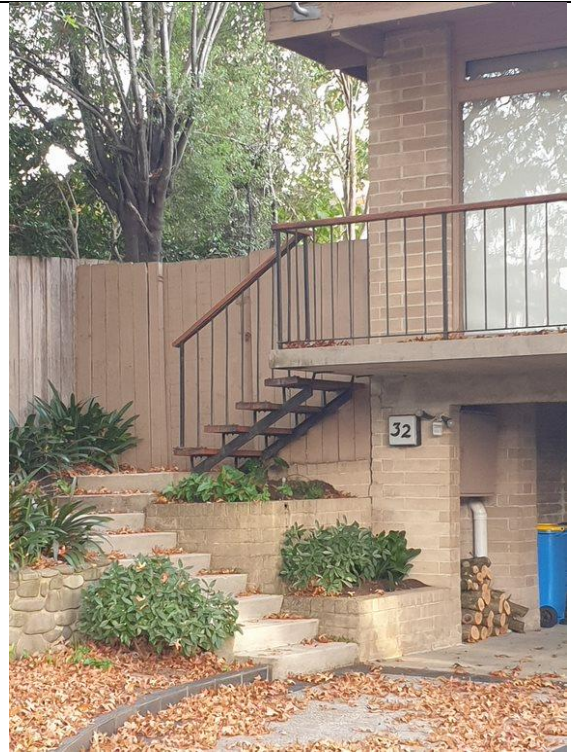


Figure 11. Details of entry steps and planters leading to the front deck with metal rod balustrade and unpainted timber handrail. Note the early light with No. 32. These steps are shown on the original garden layout. (Source: Context 2021)

## Integrity

32 Corby Street, Balwyn North, is largely intact with very few changes visible to original or early fabric. The building retains its original built form, roof form and fascia detail, beige brick walls and window and door openings and joinery. Original details include its structural post and beam system with exposed ceiling rafters and beams, concrete slab floor that cantilevers towards the street creating car accommodation underneath and large walls of glazing with overlights and clerestory windows.

The integrity of the place is enhanced by original or early landscape elements including the curved form of the drive, stone retaining walls in both the front and rear yards, stone garden edging and concrete and timber steps to the front deck. The brick letterbox and crazy paving also reinforce the design aesthetic of the landscape. The highly intact interior including the rock-faced fireplace, parquet floors, unpainted timber lined ceilings and joinery enhance the integrity of the place. 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 Balwyn North was not built until the postwar period. The area north of Belmore Road, where large tracts of land were taken up with orchards and small farms, was one of the last remaining areas of extensive undeveloped land close to the city. Balwyn North became the suburb of choice for many young married couples in the 1950s and 1960s with many using architects to design their homes. Many of these architects were influenced by the International style that had emerged in Europe between the wars. They approached house design with optimism and innovation, despite the material shortages and other restrictions that had been imposed during the war years. Modernism offered an alternative to many of the postwar styles offered at the time, many of which were simply scaled-down versions of the 1940s prototypes. The informality of open floor plans, and the relationship between interior spaces and the landscape setting, fitted comfortably within the Australian context, and this, coupled with a simplicity of structure and minimisation of decoration, worked at a time when demand for housing was high, building materials were in short supply, and money short to spend on housing.

Despite the dominance of houses built in the years following World War II, Heritage Overlay coverage of postwar houses in Balwyn North is limited. There are also few postwar houses on the Heritage Overlay in the broader Boroondara context. Comparable examples include:

**'Robin Boyd House 1' 664-666 Riversdale Road, Camberwell 1947,**  
(VHR H0879, H0116 City of Boroondara)



Figure 12. 'Robin Boyd House 1', 664-666 Riversdale Road, Camberwell, 1947. (Source: National Trust of Australia (Victoria))

Architecturally, 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 is of architectural significance in that it 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

**18 Yarra Street, Kew, 1961 (Significant within HO530 City of Boroondara)**



Figure 13. Side views of 18 Yarra Street, Kew. Note the large gum tree central to the design ethos of the site. (Source: McGlashan Everist Pty. Ltd)

now become common.

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

**Krongold House, 25 Studley Road, Kew, 1959 (HO343 City of Boroondara)**



Figure 14. Krongold House, Kew, 1959. (Source: realestate.com 2012)

Krongold House was designed by architect Theodore Berman in 1959. Original drawings indicate that the flat roof was clad with bituminous felt roofing laid on stramit decking with minimal eaves overhang, deep timber fascia and concealed box gutters. The double-fronted facade is partially screened by a projecting carport, which displays sections of strata stonework to the adjoining front elevations and piers with light brown face brickwork elsewhere.

**12-14 Tannock Street, Balwyn North, 1948-49, 1959, 1971 (Recommended as an Individual Significance place City of Boroondara)**

Architecturally, the house at 12-14 Tannock Street, Balwyn North, is significant as 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



Figure 15. 2-14 Tannock Street, Balwyn North, 1948-49, 1959, 1971.  
(Source: Built Heritage 2020)

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.

32 Corby Street, Balwyn North, compares favourably to the above examples and exhibits key elements of postwar housing typologies; most notably in its response to its site, informality in planning, flowing spatial arrangements and innovative use of materials. Knox is known to have been influenced by the work of Robyn Boyd, particularly in his mid-career houses before he refined his mudbrick 'Eltham style'. Robin Boyd House 1 1948 (VHR HO879, HO116 City of Boroondara) is widely recognised as the prototype for Post-War modern homes, in its adaptation to the topography of the site and use of new ideas on the spatial flow between inside and out.

Robyn Boyd first introduced the concept of a regional Melbourne style in 1947 calling for an architecture that was simple, light and fresh and unpretentious. Apperly, Irving and Reynolds describe the typical characteristics of the style as a house with a flat or low-pitched roof with wide eaves, long unbroken roof lines with exposed rafters or joists, vertical or horizontal boarding and large areas of glass with regularly spaced timber mullions (Apperly 1989:221). These innovative design features can be observed in Knox's Corby Street house.

32 Corby Street is particularly comparable to 'Krongold House' 25 Studley Road, Kew, built in 1959 to a design by Theodore Berman (HO343 City of Boroondara). Both houses use flat roofs, eave overhangs with exposed rafters, deep timber fascias and concealed gutters and natural toned light brown bricks. The neutral palette of Krongold House is a move away from bright colours sometimes employed in many mid-1950s Melbourne houses. For Knox, these neutral tones are indicative of his earlier period of earth houses in Eltham. 32 Corby Street demonstrates aspects of the use of natural building materials and tones combined with stylistic elements of the Modernist movement.

In the City of Boroondara there are only two other known examples of Knox's work — Cooke Residence, 2 Barnsbury Court, Balwyn, 1970–71 (now demolished), and 4 Norbert Street, Balwyn, 1982. Both of these houses are later examples of Knox's work and built using

recycled materials and mudbrick walls typical of Knox's 'Eltham Style'. As such, they are not good comparisons to the Corby Street house.

For this reason it is deemed appropriate to look outside the City of Boroondara for comparable examples of Knox's work.

While Knox's early homes of the late 1940s and early 1950s used building forms and materials that would inform his later 'Eltham Style' mudbrick houses, during the late 1950s and into the early 1960s he developed an 'experimental house' that saw Knox designing in a purer Modernist idiom. Built on his property in Eltham to enable him to rent out the rest of the buildings on the site during a slump in his building business, Knox described the experimental house as *a rectangle placed on a concrete slab, roofed with Stramit supported on exposed dressed oregon beams which ran from a large section Oregon beam running the length of the building...* The exterior walls were floor to ceiling window frames with timber or brick infills. (Alistair Knox Foundation).

In 1958 Knox designed 45 houses based on the experimental house in the Hillcrest Estate in Donvale. It is these houses and other private commissions during the late 1950s to early 1960s that are most comparable to the subject place, particularly those along Lisbeth Avenue, Donvale.

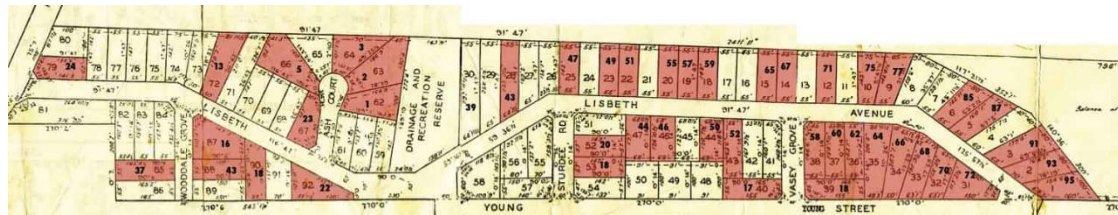


Figure 16. Site plan for Hillcrest Estate, Donvale. Lots in red represent Alistair Knox houses. (Source: Alistair Knox foundation)

To follow are three typical examples of houses Knox designed for the Hillcrest Estate. Each house was designed by Knox after the client had purchased the lot and was customised to the client's needs and the topography of the site.

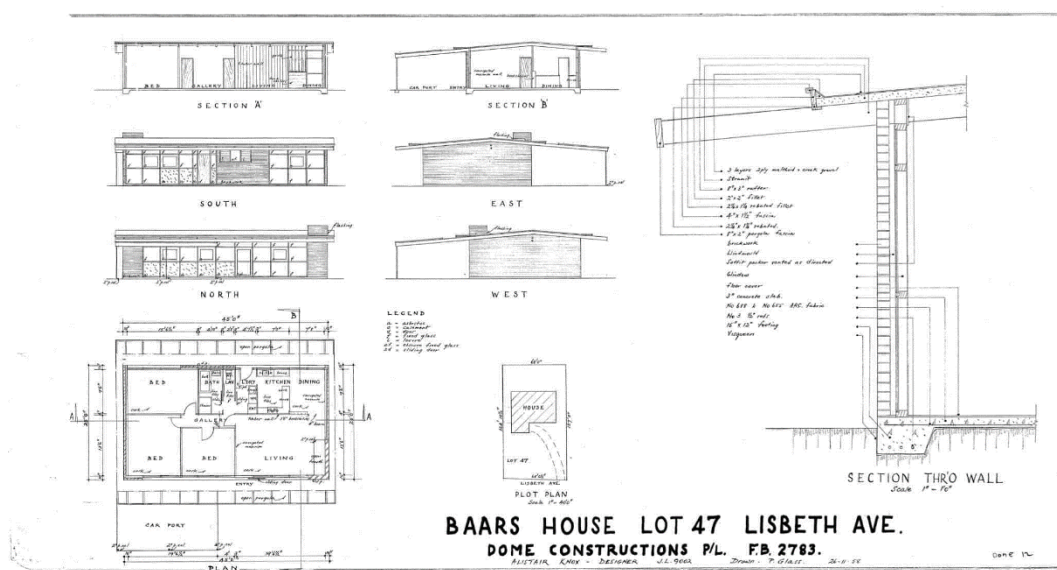


Figure 17. Working drawing sheet for Barrs House, Lot 47, Lisbeth Avenue, Donvale, 1958. Alistair Knox designer, drawn by P Glass. (Source: Alistair Knox Foundation)

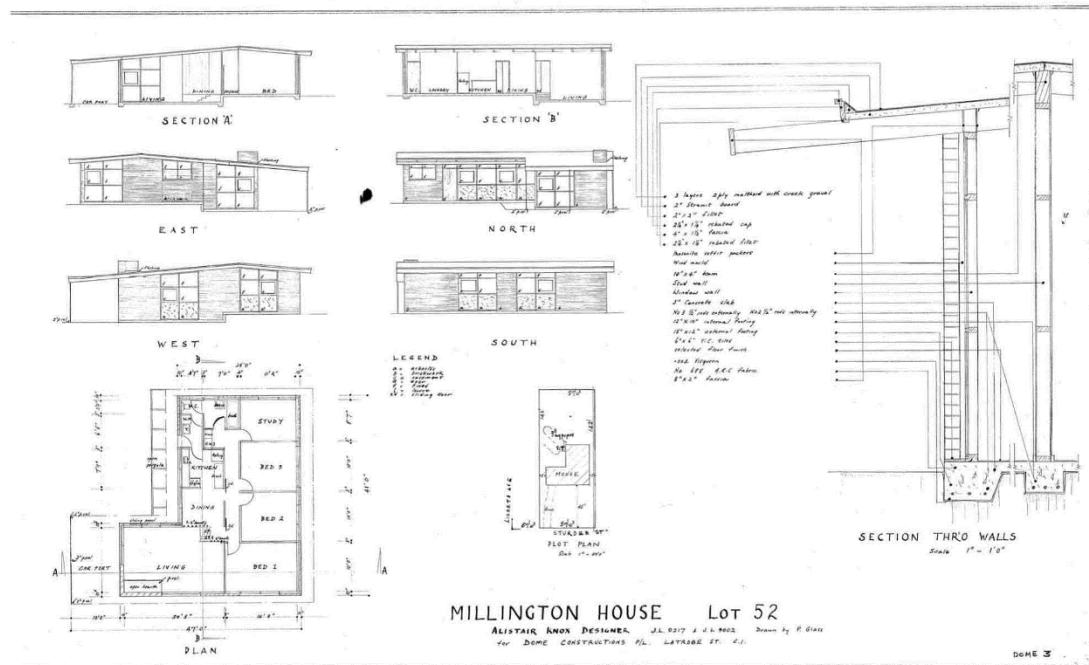


Figure 18. Millington House Lot 52 Sturridge road, Donvale [nd], Alistair Knox designer, drawn by P Glass (Alistair Knox Foundation) for Dome Construction. (Source: Alistair Knox Foundation)

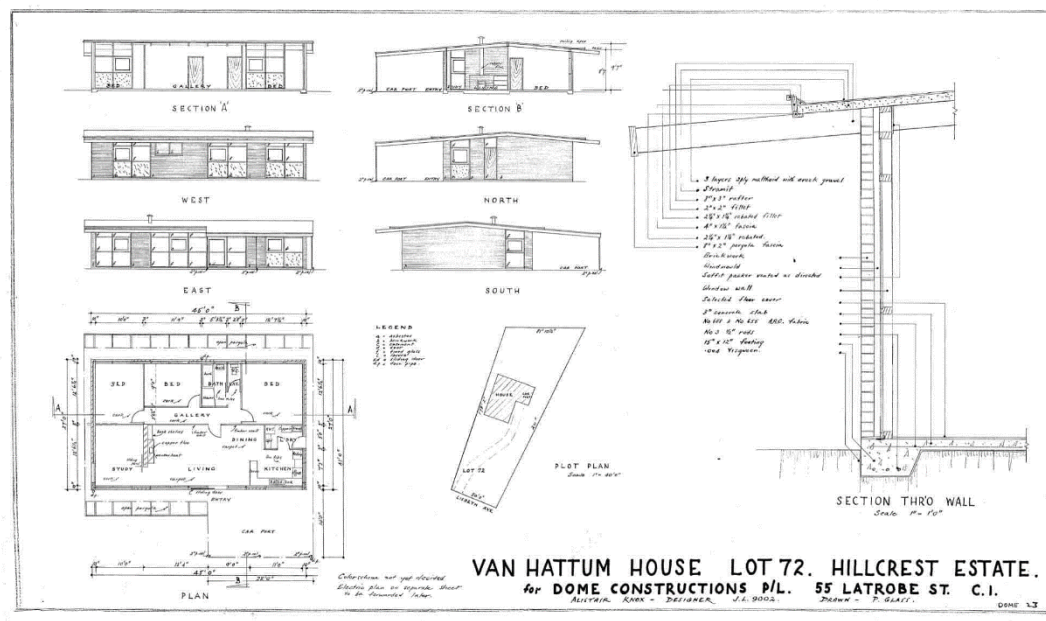


Figure 19. Van Hattum House, Lot 72, Hillcrest Estate, Alistair Knox designer, drawn by P Glass (Alistair Knox Foundation) for Dome Construction [nd]. (Source: Alistair Knox Foundation)

Foundation). To date these early Modernist homes designed by Knox have received little attention. They represent an important period in the career of one of Melbourne's most respected mid-century designers. 32 Corby Street, Balwyn North, is a refined example of the ideas developed in the experimental house. With its neutral earthy palette, Corby Street also demonstrates Knox's early experimentation with combining elements of his early mudbrick houses (influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright) with the modernist design ideals of Robin Boyd. As such it is an important representative example of the mid-career work of Knox.

Overall, the subject site is a good representative example of a mid-century Modernist house. It exhibits key characteristics of the style and is a fine example of the mid-career work of renowned designer Alistair Knox.

## 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).*

NA

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

NA

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

NA

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

The Withers House is a largely intact, highly representative example of a Modernist house with very few changes visible to the original or early fabric. Built in 1962 to a design by Alistair Knox, Withers House reflects the ideologies of Modernist residential designs, which from the 1950s was being actively experimented by Melbourne architects in attempts to achieve a regional adaptation of the international idiom. Its key design elements representative of the style includes its structural post and beam system with exposed ceiling rafters and beams, concrete slab floor that cantilevers towards the street creating car accommodation underneath, flat roof with deep fascias and concealed gutters, open floor plan that seamlessly integrates inside with outside, large walls of glazing and clerestory windows and the sophisticated integration of the house to the landscape that has resulted in the whole site being planned.

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

The Withers House is a fine example of the residential work of designer Alistair Knox. Its considered response to the site and refined detailing has resulted in a simplicity of form and a sophistication of planning. It provides a refined modernist design response with its use of plain geometry, restrained palette of materials and extensive areas of glazing. It is a sophisticated example of an important, but often overlooked period of Knox's work, where he developed his skills in designing in a purer modernist idiom. Knox later took these design skills and incorporated them with elements of his early mudbrick houses of the 1940s to create his signature 'Eltham Style'

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

NA

*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).*

NA

*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).*

NA

## Statement of Significance

### *What is significant?*

The Withers House at 32 Corby Street, Balwyn North, designed and built by Alistair Knox, is significant.

Significant fabric includes:

- original built form, roof form and fascia detail with concealed gutters,
- beige brick walls;
- window and door openings and joinery;
- structural post and beam system with exposed ceiling rafters and beams;
- concrete slab on-the ground that cantilevers towards the street creating open car accommodation underneath;
- two slender steel posts;
- curved form of the drive;
- stone retaining walls in both the front and rear yards;
- stone garden edging and concrete and timber steps to the front deck;
- crazy paving; and
- brick letterbox.

### *How is it significant?*

The Withers House at 32 Corby Street, Balwyn North, is of local representative and aesthetic significance to the City of Boroondara.

### *Why is it significant?*

The Withers House is a largely intact, highly representative example of a Modernist house with very few changes visible to the original or early fabric. Built in 1962 to a design by Alistair Knox, Withers House reflects the ideologies of Modernist residential designs, which from the 1950s was being actively tested by Melbourne architects in attempts to achieve a regional adaptation of the international idiom. Its key design elements representative of the style includes its structural post and beam system with exposed ceiling rafters and beams, concrete slab on-the-ground that cantilevers towards the street creating open car accommodation underneath, flat roof with deep fascias and concealed gutters, open floor plan that seamlessly integrates inside with outside, large walls of glazing and clerestory windows and the sophisticated integration of the house to the landscape that has resulted in the whole site being planned. (Criterion D)

The Withers House is a fine example of the residential work of designer and builder Alistair Knox. Its considered response to the site and refined detailing has resulted in a simplicity of form and a sophistication of planning. It provides a refined Modernist design response with its use of plain geometry, restrained palette of materials and extensive areas of glazing. It is a sophisticated example of an important, but often overlooked period of Knox's work, where he developed his skills in designing in a purer Modernist idiom. Knox later took these design skills and incorporated them with elements of his early mudbrick houses of the 1940s to create his signature 'Eltham Style'. (Criterion E)

## Grading and Recommendations

(eg: 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:

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

**Identified By**  
Context 2021

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