

## River House Statement of Significance June 2021

<b>Heritage Place:</b>	River House 2 Hodgson Street, Kew	<b>PS ref no:</b>	HO72
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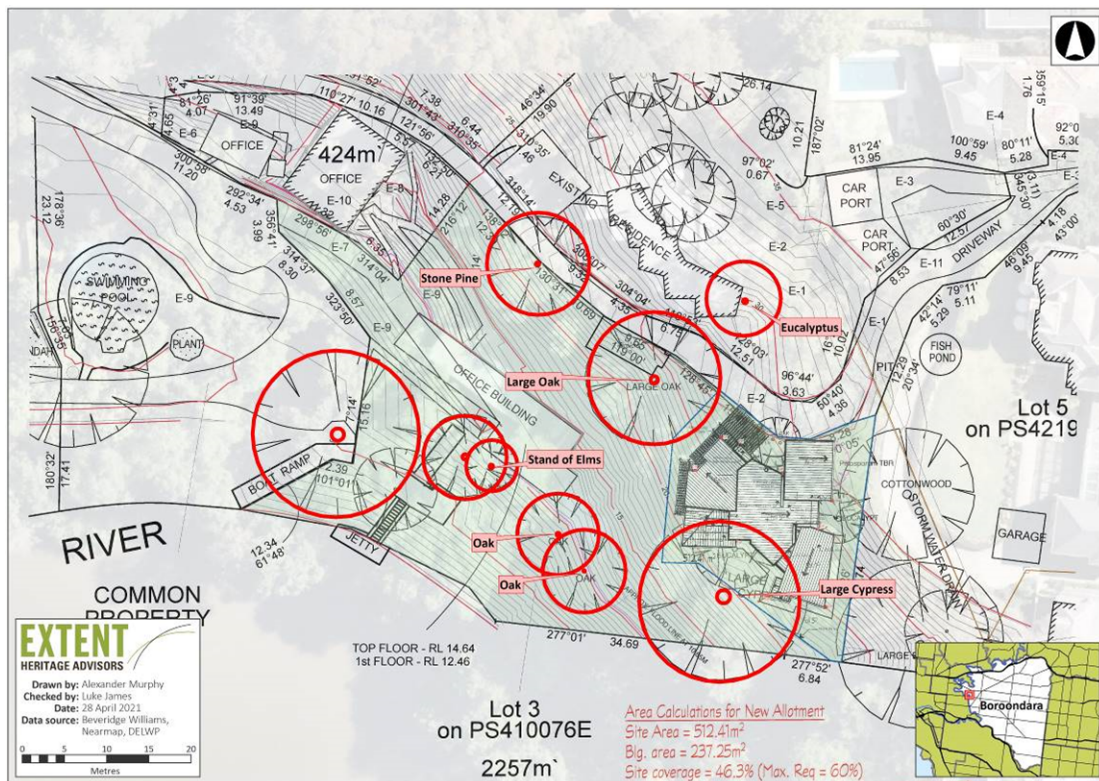


### What is significant?

The house at 2 Hodgson Street Kew (River House) is significant to the City of Boroondara. Its original or early interior elements, and its external (original and 1960s) and original internal colour scheme are significant, as is the landscape setting, particularly the trees that provide the backdrop and deciduous screen to the River House including the stand of elms and oaks between the building and the river, the large cypress to its south east, the large oak to its north east and the stone pine to its north (see Tree control map below). Also significant is the boat jetty, the landing structure, and original or early hard landscaping elements including the sandstone steps to the river.

Features that do not contribute to the significance of this place include non-original or early alterations, and the 1960s annex, which although also designed by Peter McIntyre, was a pragmatic response to accommodate family needs. While it is not an intrusive element, its removal would clarify the structural expression of the eastern cantilever.

## Tree control map<sup>1</sup>



## How is it significant?

River House is of local historical, aesthetic, technical and associative significance to the City of Boroondara.

## Why is it significant?

The River House is important to the City of Boroondara's cultural history as an early, well known and radical exemplar of the influence and development of architectural modernism in the post-war period. Emerging from a period of austerity associated with World War Two, the River House represented a distinctive departure from conservatism and stylistic restraint. The River House also anticipated—by nearly half-a-century—contemporary approaches to development on the Birrarung/Yarra river that emphasise its landscape amenity. (Criterion A)

Replete with comparisons to a Paul Klee butterfly, the distinctive form, finish and siting of the River House has evoked strong aesthetic responses in the architectural and broader community. The structural form literally embodies a tension between forces, enabling the majority of the building to appear incongruously suspended against a lush and steep riverside landscape. Its aesthetic effect incorporates theatricality through being revealed and hidden in turn by a curtain of deciduous

<sup>1</sup> Map incorporates data from Beverage Williams and Co Pty Ltd '2 Hodgson Street and 25 Swinton Avenue Kew, Plan of Existing Conditions' dated 4 May 2007; Nearmap aerial imagery (2021) and Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP).

foliage, within and against a backdrop of endemic and introduced vegetation. Its use of strong geometrical elements, particularly triangles, is a leitmotif that emblematises the building at each level of scale, from its overall structural form down to its constituent elements, and most notably its fenestration. (Criterion E)

The River House demonstrates a very high degree of creative and technical achievement through its structural innovation that enabled an otherwise unusable site to accommodate a family home. The structural system designed in conjunction with advice from engineer Bill Irwin harnesses a counterbalancing of forces via an A-frame double cantilevered truss, enabling it to be physically possible to build on a sharply constrained site. This structural system for River House was in development prior to, and in fact influenced, the structural system for the 1956 Olympic Pool which was a critical part of the winning competition design, enabling the Olympic Pool design to use 1/3 of the steel than would otherwise be the case. (Criterion F)

The River House is synonymous with the early careers of Peter and Dione McIntyre, whose work individually, in collaboration and as part of the McIntyre Partnership has resulted in influential and award-winning architecture within the municipality and throughout Victoria. Among other prizes and awards, River House won the 2014 Australian Institute of Architects Victorian Architecture Award for 'best enduring architecture'. (Criterion H)

### **Primary source**

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*River House - Heritage Citation, Extent Heritage, June 2021*