

CITY OF BOROONDARA

AMENDMENT C368boro

**[Former] Withers House,
32 Corby Street, Balwyn North**

STATEMENT OF EXPERT EVIDENCE

Prepared for
The City of Boroondara
9 September 2022



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A: INTRODUCTION

A1 BACKGROUND & BRIEF

This Statement of Expert Evidence (hereafter referred to as “this Statement”) was commissioned by the City of Boroondara (hereafter abbreviated as “the Council”), for the Independent Panel appointed to consider submissions received in response to the exhibition of *City of Boroondara Planning Scheme Amendment C368* (hereafter referred to as C368boro).

This amendment proposes to apply a heritage overlay to the former Withers House at 32 Corby Street, Balwyn North, designed in 1962 by Alistair Knox, who was retained for further minor works in 1963 and 1964. The house was originally identified as a potential heritage place in the *City of Boroondara Balwyn & Balwyn North Heritage Study* (2012-13), and was subsequently the subject of an individual citation prepared by Context Pty Ltd in 2021.

I have been briefed to outline my methodology for identifying and assessing this place and to provide responses to specific issues raised by submitters who do not support the inclusion of this property in C368boro.

A2 STATEMENT OF QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

My name is Simon Reeves and I am the Director and Principal of Built Heritage Pty Ltd, a firm of architectural historians and heritage consultants based in Emerald, Victoria. I am an architecture graduate, holding the degrees of *Bachelor of Planning & Design* and *Bachelor of Architecture (Hons)* from the University of Melbourne, conferred respectively in 1994 and 1998.

Since 1998, I have worked full-time as an architectural historian and heritage consultant, initially with Allom Lovell & Associates (1998-2002) and then with Heritage Alliance (2002-2009). In January 2009, I established my own practice, Built Heritage Pty Ltd, to specialise in twentieth century heritage and, particularly, the heritage of the post-WW2 era.

Since commencing my own practice in 2009, I have been commissioned to undertake numerous large-scale heritage projects for municipal councils, notably the *Shire of Bass Coast Heritage Study (Stage 2): Post-Panel Implementation* (2009), the *City of Boroondara Thematic Environmental History* (2011), the *Balwyn & Balwyn North Heritage Study* (2012-13), the *City of Whitehorse Post-1945 Heritage Study* (2013-14), the *Frankston City Post-War Heritage Study: Stage 2* (2014-15), the *City of Maroondah Heritage Review* (2017; in progress) and the *City of Glen Eira Post-War & Hidden Gems Review* (2019-2020). I have also worked in association with Heritage Alliance on two other major heritage reviews, in which I primarily focused on the identification and assessment of post-WW2 places: the *Shire of Mornington Peninsula Heritage Review: Area 3 – Blairgowrie, Sorrento & Portsea* (2017-2021) and the *City of Moonee Valley Heritage Review 2020* (in progress).

I have also completed one-off heritage assessments (or other small-scale heritage projects) for the Cities of Ballarat, Bayside, Boroondara, Brimbank, Frankston, Glen Eira, Greater Dandenong, Maribyrnong, Melbourne, Port Phillip and Whittlesea, as well as the Shire of Mornington Peninsula. My experience in dealing with heritage issues in local government also encapsulates stints as regular heritage advisor to the Rural City of Swan Hill (2002-2009), Shire of Gannawarra (2002-2009), City of Brimbank (2003-2004) and Shire of Bass Coast (2002-2012). At various times, I have also provided casual or locum heritage advice to the Cities of Maribyrnong, Moreland and Maroondah (in the last case, as recently as 2018-2020).

I have appeared as an expert witness in heritage matters on many occasions, including at VCAT hearings, registration hearings before the Heritage Council, and independent panel hearings for planning scheme amendments for the Cities of Bayside, Boroondara, Glen Eira, Maroondah, Melbourne, Port Phillip, Whitehorse, Wyndham and the Shire of Mornington Peninsula.

In addition to this involvement with local councils, I have also been commissioned to undertake heritage projects by Heritage Victoria, the National Trust of Australia (Victoria), the Art Deco & Modernism Society, Beaumaris Modern, and for property owners.

I am currently a member of ICOMOS International, and have, at various other times, been a member of DoCoMoMo Australia, the National Trust of Australia (Victoria), the Society of Architectural Historians of Australia & New Zealand (SAHANZ), the Art Deco & Modernism Society of Victoria, the Walter Burley Griffin Society, the Australian Garden History Society and the Robin Boyd Foundation.

A full *Curriculum Vitae* is included as in Appendix A of this statement.

A3 STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

This Statement, and the component tasks of historical research, fieldwork and analysis that underpins it, represents the work of Simon Reeves. There have been no other significant contributors to this statement. With the exception of those whose work or opinion has been quoted and referenced in the text to support my own viewpoint, no other persons have carried out any tests, experiments or investigations upon which I have relied.

A4 DECLARATION

I have made all the inquiries that I believe are desirable and appropriate and no matters of significance which I regard as relevant have to my knowledge been withheld from the Panel.



9 September 2022

B: METHODOLOGY

B1 BALWYN & BALWYN NORTH HERITAGE STUDY (2012-13)

B1.1 Project overview

In August 2012, the office of Built Heritage Pty Ltd (hereafter referred to as “the consultant”) was engaged by the City of Boroondara to undertake the *Balwyn & Balwyn North Heritage Study*. This was conceived as a Gap Study to review those two suburbs (incorporating the areas known as Deepdene and Greythorn), which were then considered to be under-represented on the heritage overlay schedule. Completion of such a study had been identified as a high priority under the Council’s 2012 Heritage Action Plan.

The heritage study was to include the following components:

- Preparation of a chronological overview of development of the study area;
- A windscreen survey (street-by-street) of the entire study area;
- Review and re-assessment of 45 places in the study area that had previously been identified and assessed in Graeme Butler’s *Camberwell Conservation Study* (1991) but which had not yet been added to the heritage overlay schedule;
- Identification of new places and areas of potential significance via desktop research and consultation with stakeholders including the Balwyn Historical Society, the National Trust of Australia (Victoria), the Art Deco Society and the Robin Boyd Foundation;
- Preparation of a master-list of places and areas of potential heritage significance, with each place or area given a preliminary score out of twenty that was calculated from sub-scores for physical integrity, rarity, vulnerability and potential significance at face value;
- Preparation of two-page appraisals (referred to as ‘outline citations’) for the top fifty places and areas, of which approximately half would be selected for more detailed assessment
- Preparation of full citations for a combined total of 25 places/precincts

In November 2012, the consultant submitted a draft report with ‘outline citations’ for seven places identified in the *Camberwell Conservation Study* and a further 43 places that were newly identified by the consultant and had scored the highest (generally, 17 or more out of 20) in the masterlist.

After discussion with Council officers, full citations were ultimately prepared for 26 individual places and four small precincts. These formed the basis of the draft version of the study, which was submitted to Council in February 2013 and then twice re-issued, with minor revisions and reformatting, in May and June of that year.

B1.2 Project outcome

In early 2015, the Council undertook preliminary consultation with property owners. There were 137 submissions received, of which 94 (ie, 68%) were opposed to the proposed heritage overlays. The submissions were reviewed by Council officers and the consultant, and a number of minor revisions were consequently made to the report. Officers recommended that the Urban Planning Special Committee (UPSC) adopt the updated study and seek authorisation from the Minister for Planning to prepare and exhibit a planning scheme amendment.

At a meeting of the UPSC in September 2015, there were fifteen speakers in opposition to the officer’s recommendation and only two speakers in support of it.¹ As a result, the motion was carried that the UPSC resolved to:

1 City of Boroondara Urban Planning Special Committee Minutes, 7 September 2015, pp 8-9.

- *Not proceed with the Balwyn and Balwyn North Heritage Study (incorporating Deepdene and Greythorn):*
- *Remove all identified individual properties and precincts identified in the Balwyn and Balwyn North Heritage Study (incorporating Deepdene and Greythorn) from Council's list of possible heritage properties.*

Notwithstanding the second resolution, the study has not been entirely abandoned and has since been subject to several subsequent phases of re-visitation:

- In 2016, the consultant was commissioned to prepare an additional six citations for selected pre-WW2 places that had been identified as higher priorities in the masterlist;
- In 2017, Context Pty Ltd was engaged to undertake a peer review of the *Balwyn & Balwyn North Heritage Study*, which encapsulated the additional citations prepared in 2016. Stages 1 and 2 of this peer review focused on pre-WW2 places. The outcome of the peer review underpinned Amendments C276boro and C318boro.
- A third stage of the peer review, focusing on post-WW2 places, has since commenced. As of August 2022, a number of draft citations have been prepared and subject to internal review, but have not yet been placed on public exhibition.

B2 32 CORBY STREET, BALWYN NORTH

B2.1 Initial identification (2012)

The former Withers House at 32 Corby Street, Balwyn North (hereafter referred to as “the subject property”) was one of the many places identified during the windscreen survey for the *Balwyn & Balwyn North Heritage Study*. Undertaken over a series of non-consecutive days between 5 October and 13 November 2012, this survey covered every street within the study area.

It was on 8 October 2012 that the consultant drove along Corby Street and first noted the subject property at No 32. The house appeared to be a standout within its immediate context of more generic post-WW2 dwellings, and was the only house in Corby Street to be noted as a potential heritage place. Three photographs of the house were taken that day. At the time, the designer of the house was not known; it was noted simply because it appeared, at face value, to be an above-average example of a post-WW2 modernist dwelling. It was added to the consultant’s master-list of places of potential heritage significance.

Upon completion of the desktop research and windscreen survey in October 2012, the master-list comprised several hundred places. In order to prioritise those for more detailed research and assessment, each place was given a preliminary score out of twenty, calculated according to its physical integrity, rarity, vulnerability and its potential significance at face value (ie, without the benefit of further research or comparative analysis). Places that scored 17 or more out of 20 were designated as Priority One: “highly likely candidate for individual HO, pending further research”. The subject property scored 16 out of 20, which designated it as Priority Two: “possible candidate for individual HO, pending further research”.

More detailed investigation continued in November and December 2012, focusing on the places designated as Priority One, as well as some of the higher-scoring places designated as Priority Two. The former City of Camberwell building permit archive, held by the City of Boroondara, was considered as a key source of archival material, especially when researching places for which an architectural attribution was not confirmed. The subject property was one place for which such documentation was sought. The pertinent material was duly located and provided to the consultant, confirming for the first time that the house was designed by Alistair Knox.

B2.2 Assessment by Other Consultants (2021)

During 2021, an individual citation for the subject property was prepared by Context Pty Ltd. The citation, which was 21 pages long and included a survey photographs taken in May 2021, concluded that the place met the threshold for an individual heritage overlay, being “of local representative and aesthetic significance to the City of Boroondara”. The citation erroneously stated that the place had been originally identified by Context Pty Ltd in 2021, rather than being shortlisted by Built Heritage Pty Ltd back in 2012.

A second heritage assessment, undertaken by Bryce Raworth in May 2021, was commissioned by the then-owners of the subject property (which was sold to the current owners in April 2021). This concluded that the building did not reach the threshold for an individual heritage overlay.

B2.3 Assessment by Built Heritage Pty Ltd (2021-2022)

In June 2021, the consultant was engaged by the City of Boroondara to review the two reports prepared by Context Pty Ltd and Bryce Raworth, with a view to providing a third opinion on whether the place met the threshold for local significance. If the preliminary appraisal did indeed arrive at that conclusion, then the consultant would proceed to prepare a full and detailed assessment of the subject property.

In providing a preliminary assessment and peer review, the following tasks were undertaken:

- (a) A basic read-through of each of the two existing assessments;
- (b) A brief consideration of the contents of each report, including identifying any factual errors or apparent shortcomings in their respective assessments, arguments or conclusions;
- (c) Additional historical research as deemed appropriate to address any shortcomings;
- (d) Additional comparative analysis as deemed appropriate to address any shortcomings;
- (e) A consolidation of the finding of the above tasks, with a statement as to whether the subject property is considered by to be of heritage significance at the local level.

The preliminary appraisal was conceived as a wholly desktop exercise. Rather than undertaking a dedicated site visit, the consultant relied on images in each of the two reports, and the larger set of interior and exterior photographs commissioned at the time of the property’s last sale in April 2021, which were then still available for online view.

Historical material was drawn from standard primary sources in the public domain, such as land ownership and subdivision records, directory listings and electoral rolls. Copies of the working drawings and building permit application card were sourced from the former City of Camberwell building permit archive, held by the City of Boroondara. During research, it was discovered that two different sets of drawings (both undated) had been prepared by Knox. The drawings sourced from the website www.alistairknox.org pertained to an earlier scheme with a double-fronted facade and integrated side carport, while the drawings held by Council’s building permit archive related to the house as built, with triple-fronted facade and wide sub-floor garage.

The building permit card also noted that, following completion of the house, Knox was retained for two follow-up commissions that, based on the costs cited, were minor works. However, the working drawings pertaining to these minor works could not be located at that time, either in Council’s archive or through the website www.alistairknox.org.

Comparative analysis was informed by reference to the documentation of Knox’s work at www.alistairknox.org, and my own extensive knowledge of modernist houses in the study area, drawing from my prior involvement as author of both the *Balwyn & Balwyn North Heritage Study* (2012-13) and the *City of Boroondara Thematic Environmental History* (2010).

Completed and issued on 25 June 2021, the preliminary appraisal spanned fifteen pages, of which approximately one third was devoted to detailed comparative analysis that considered the subject property in a number of different contexts as follows:

- (a) Post-WW2 architect-designed houses already included on the HO Schedule;
- (b) Similar post-WW2 architect-designed houses that had been fully assessed in the *Balwyn & North Balwyn Heritage Review* but had not yet been included on the HO Schedule;
- (c) Similar post-WW2 architect-designed houses that had been flagged as potential heritage places in the *Balwyn & North Balwyn Heritage Review* but had not yet been fully assessed;
- (d) Buildings designed by Alistair Knox within the City of Boroondara;

The appraisal concluded that the subject property did meet the threshold for local significance, and that Mr Raworth's report did not provide a compelling argument to the contrary. While concurring with Context Pty Ltd that application of an individual heritage overlay was appropriate, it was noted that the earlier citation contained minor omissions in its history and description, and a major gap in its comparative analysis. If anything, the citation tended to understate the importance of the place, both in terms of its relevance within the broader context of Knox's work in the municipality, and ascribing significance merely as a representative example of modernist residential architecture rather than as a more outstanding example.

In the Statement of Significance prepared by Context Pty Ltd, local significance was ascribed by invocation of Criteria D and E: the former relating to the way in which the house was considered representative of the post-WW2 modernist architecture, and the latter for the way in which it demonstrated Knox's work in the mainstream modernist style. While concurring with the application of Criterion E, I considered that the discussion should focus more specifically on the house as a manifestation of the 'mature modern' style, while the association with Knox was more appropriately considered by invocation of Criterion H.

As such, it was recommended that a new citation be prepared by Built Heritage Pty Ltd, with additional historical material, description and comparative analysis, along with an expanded Statement of Significance, to address the perceived shortcomings of the Context Pty Ltd citation.

In expanding the preliminary appraisal into a detailed assessment, the following tasks were undertaken:

- (a) A brief site visit, to inspect and photograph the exterior of the house from the street;
- (b) Additional research into the history of the place, examining sources that had not been consulted for the two reports prepared by others (including contact with the Withers family), in order correct minor factual errors and to fill any gaps in the story;
- (c) Investigation of the archive of landscape designer Peter Glass, in order to confirm whether or not he was responsible for preparing the unattributed garden layout plan;
- (d) Preparing a written description of the building and its landscaped context;
- (e) Additional comparative analysis, expanding on material that had previously consolidated for the preliminary assessment (including consideration of the subject property in the context of similar houses that Knox designed outside the City of Boroondara);
- (f) Completing the other standard components of a heritage citation, namely the Assessment by Criteria and Statement of Significance.

Additional research undertaken including sourcing a historical aerial photograph of the subject property, and, most notably, tracking down David Withers, the last survivor of Percy and Gwen Withers' three children. Now living in Sydney, Mr Withers kindly provided further information via email, including answers to a number of specific questions about the property.

The detailed assessment reproduced all of the archival images included in the earlier report, as well as some additional material such as the undated landscaping scheme plan (sourced from www.alistairknox.org) and an aerial photograph from 1969, which showed the extent of actual landscape development by that time.

In early July 2022, the consultant was informed by Council that copies of working drawings for Knox's follow-up works in 1963 and 1964 had finally been located in Council's archive. This documentation pertained to two different schemes for a modest outbuilding in the south-west corner of the back yard. Comparison of historical and recent aerial photographs confirmed that an outbuilding did indeed exist, and still remains, in the location indicated, although it has not been confirmed if the current structure corresponds to Knox's design. Given that it cannot be seen from the street, and that Knox's drawings depict a building of utilitarian form and little architectural merit, it was concluded that, even if the outbuilding was indeed designed by Knox, it would not be considered of any heritage significance. Nevertheless, the consultant deemed it appropriate, in the interests of historical completeness, to update the citation to include mention of Knox's two schemes for the outbuilding, and to reproduce the newly-rediscovered drawings.

The updated citation, expanded to a length of 21 pages, was issued to Council on 6 July 2022.



C: DETAILED RESPONSE

C1 SUBMISSION 1 (TRETOWAN ARCHITECTS)

C1.1 Comparative Analysis

Submitter's issue

For post-WWII houses, the heritage assessment identifies five properties in Balwyn and Balwyn North that are currently included in the Schedule to the HO... The heritage assessment concludes that: "Both chronologically and aesthetically, none of these houses is directly comparable to the subject building". As such, the report has failed to demonstrate that the subject site meets the threshold set by post-WWII places already covered by an HO in Balwyn and Balwyn North.

Consultant's Response

In developing a comparative framework for significance at a local level, the first step is to compare the place with others of similar type, form and/or era already included on the HO Schedule. In this case, attention was drawn to the fact that the schedule included only five post-WW2 places in Balwyn and Balwyn North, all of which dated from an earlier period (from 1948 to 1955) and were demonstrative of the prevailing architectural styles of that earlier period. This observation was considered adequate to demonstrate that architect-designed 1960s houses in Balwyn and Balwyn North were unrepresented on the HO schedule, as was the subset of 1960s houses in the Mature Modern style. Having established this basis fact that there are no truly comparable buildings on the schedule, there is no value in attempting to demonstrate how the subject property meets the threshold set by other already on the schedule.

In any case, it is not always practicable, or appropriate, to assess a place against the thresholds set by places already on the HO Schedule, particularly when they were assessed in the distant past, prior to improved methodologies and standardisation of assessment criteria. It is relevant that four of the five post-WW2 houses cited in the first sub-section under heading 2.4.1 of my report were very early additions to the HO schedule, having been identified in Graeme Butler's original *Camberwell Conservation Study* (1991). Mr Butler's citations for these houses were relatively brief, with discussions of significance that cited no criteria, and comparisons in the form of a list of addresses of broadly contemporaneous comparators without further analysis of how they related to the subject building. While this approach was typical and wholly adequate for that time, it does not equate with the current industry standard, where a Statement of Significance has a distinct tripartite format that cites the HERCON Criteria, and comparative analyses are expected to be far more considered. As such, it is hardly a valid criticism that the subject property was not assessed using the methodologies and thresholds that were considered acceptable thirty years ago.

Submitter's issue

The heritage assessment concluded that two of these houses have "very little commonality with the subject building". The other two are noted to have broad characteristics in common such as: broad eaved flat roofs, plain brick walls, horizontal strip windows and stepped volumetric massing. However, these features are common across properties from many periods and are not particular characteristics of post-WWII houses as a class of place. As such, the heritage assessment has not adequately demonstrated that the subject site has particular aesthetic qualities that compare favourably against similar properties.

Consultant's Response

In cases where there are no truly pertinent comparators on the HO schedule, the next step is developing a comparative framework for local significance is to consider similar places that have been fully assessed and/or recommended for inclusion on the schedule but which, for whatever reason, have not yet been included thereon.

In this case, this was achieved by reference to my own *Balwyn & Balwyn North Heritage Study*, which included full citations for numerous post-WW2 houses that, due to Council's abandonment of the study, had never found their way onto the HO Schedule. Amongst these places were four houses dating from the 1960s, which, in solely chronological terms, represented the most pertinent comparators to the subject property. Reviewing these four citations, it was immediately apparent that two of the houses were demonstrative of the Mature Modern style (and thus were the most pertinent comparators to the subject property), while the other two were stylistically different (and thus less pertinent comparators to the subject property). Again, this methodological approach was deemed to be appropriate to demonstrate that few 1960s houses in Balwyn and Balwyn North had been flagged as places of potential local significance, and fewer still in the Mature Modern style.

In suggesting that the defining characteristics of the Mature Modern style "are common across properties from many periods and are not particular characteristics of post-WWII houses", the submitter seems to be relying only a briefly summarised list of characteristics in Section 2.4.1 of my citation, overlooking the more detailed discussion in the following Section 2.4.2. The latter, in turn, was drawn from an even more comprehensive discussion in Dr Philip Goad's near-definitive PhD thesis on stylistic diversity in post-WW2 Melbourne houses. In his introduction to a chapter entitled "The Maturing of the Modern House in Melbourne, c.1960-1975", Goad explained:

Each of these mature moderns had a different source of influence. Common to all was a skill in meticulous detailing, a quest for restraint and simple sparse furnishings, and a delight in the essential qualities of building materials. The open plan, and intimate connection with interior and exterior, the planar wall and its space harnessing qualities, the full height glass sliding door, the flat roof, the return wall to suggest mass where required, gracious spatial dimensions to give grandeur and excitements to revive the impressive entry hall of the neo-Georgian houses of the 1920s, were all part of the mature modernist repertoire. These architects did not adhere dogmatically to the idea of the machine-made house of the 1950s. Natural timbers, exposed brick, stained finishes and frank but sophisticated craftsman detail, combined with a lack of structural experiment superseded the deterministic structural gymnastics of the previous decade.²

Goad's characteristically confident summary of the defining qualities of the Mature Modern (which resonate strongly with the style of the subject property) would refute any suggestion that these qualities lack distinction or could be considered "common across properties from many periods and are not particular characteristics of post-WWII houses".

Submitter's issue

Several properties are identified a 'mature modern' in Boroondara, some of which have been demolished. Only three are then determined as pertinent comparators to the subject site. ... Each of these houses have [sic] been flagged for potential significance, but are not yet within an HO. The comparative analysis does not detail in what way each of these houses demonstrates the particular aesthetic characteristics of the 'mature-modern' sub-style. Concluding that it is not a question of which one is superior to any of the others. No direct comparison is made between the subject site and the identified comparators, nor with other examples identified within Boroondara. The heritage assessment has not demonstrated that the subject site has particular aesthetic characteristics related to 'mature modern' houses.

Consultant's Response

It is unclear on what basis it might be concluded that my assessment does not demonstrate that the characteristics of the Mature Modern sub-style are evident either in the subject property or in the three houses identified as the most pertinent local comparators. Visual evidence alone (ie the images reproduced in my assessment as Figures 8, 9 and 12) demonstrates the extent of stylistic similarity between the subject property and the contemporaneous architect-designed houses at 67 Hill Road, 47 Mountain View Road and 41 Campbell Road.

² Philip Goad, 'The Modern House in Melbourne', Ph D Thesis, University of Melbourne, September 1992, p 6.56.

Submitter's issue

The heritage assessment states that: clearly, none of the other houses that Knox designed in the City of Boroondara are directly comparable to the subject building. The subject site stands out as an anomaly within Knox's oeuvre, and therefore cannot be said to "exhibit particular aesthetic characteristics" of Knox's work within Boroondara.

My assessment does not ascribe significance to the subject property for the way it "exhibits particularly aesthetic characteristics of Knox's work in Boroondara". The only discussion of aesthetic characteristics is in the context of the building's expression of the Mature Modern style. Its significance as an example of Knox's work is acknowledged under Criterion H (ie, associative significance) rather than Criterion E (ie, aesthetic significance). This associative significance is informed by the fact that the subject property demonstrates an early phase of Knox's career that is not otherwise well represented in the City of Boroondara.

Any building that is an outlier in its architect's body of work could be dismissed as an anomaly, even when those same qualities might bolster a case for historical rarity or aesthetic distinction. To illustrate this, one might refer to the Castles House at 2 Taurus Street, Balwyn North (Peter McIntyre, 1952), which has long been included on the heritage overlay schedule as HO189. The house is considered significant for its highly unusual form, dominated by a steep but distinctively offset A-framed roof. However, given that McIntyre never designed another house like this one, it could just as easily be dismissed as an "anomaly" within his work.

C1.2 Application of Criterion E

Submitter's issue

The VHR Criteria & Threshold Guidelines (April 2019) are regularly referred to for local level listings and are an appropriate reference in this case.

Consultant's Response

I do not agree that the VHR Criteria and Threshold Guidelines are widely accepted as an appropriate reference when considering heritage significance at the local level. In my opinion, Heritage Victoria's flow-chart of thresholds and exclusion guidelines was developed specifically for assessing places of significance at the state level and should not be extrapolated to the local level.

The application of the VHR Criteria and Threshold Guidelines at the local level has been the subject of some heated debate at planning panel hearings in recent years. Invariably, the VHR guidelines are invoked only by those parties seeking to oppose a proposed heritage listing, rather than those who support it. The following are some pertinent excerpts from panel reports:

Boroondara Planning Scheme Amendment C318 (2020)

The Heritage Council's Victorian Heritage Register Criteria and Threshold Guidelines provide practical guidance about assessing Criterion B which is not found in Planning Practice Note 1. The Heritage Council guidelines are intended for assessing places of state significance so applying them at the local scale may result in a distorted outcome.³

Shire of Mornington Peninsula Amendment C262: Part 2 (2021)

The Panel acknowledges that the VHR Guidelines are designed for the assessment of places of state significance. The Panel agrees with Boroondara C318 Panel that applying them as a basis for the assessment of local significance could lead to a distorted outcome. However, this does not mean that they should not be used to assist in assessing significance.

³ Boroondara C318boro (PSA) [2020] PPV 42 (10 June 2020), p 24.

The Panel notes that all planning schemes have a section that contains state policy that is meant to inform local policy. The Panel views the VHR Guidelines in much the same light where they can help inform the significant elements in a local assessment. Consequently, the panel accepts that the VHR Guidelines can assist but should not form the basis of an assessment as Boroondara C318 and Glen Eira C182 concluded.⁴

City of Melbourne Planning Scheme Amendment C387 (2021)

To the extent that a number of submissions and expert seek to rely upon the VHR Guidelines, it must be borne in mind that the VHR Guidelines explicitly state their purpose is to outline the key considerations in determining state level cultural significance for places and objects that could be included on the VHR. Accordingly, their use and application in the process of assessing places of local significance needs to be approached with caution and with appropriate adjustment.

In this regard it is worthy of note that the heritage Council of Victoria report, *State of Heritage review – Local Heritage 2020*, records the importance of preparing local threshold guidelines, similar to those for state heritage, as an immediate priority., the plain inference being the VHR Guidelines are not an appropriate substitution when seeking to assess local significance.

Accordingly, while a number of panels have noted that the VHR guidelines may provide assistance in assessing significance, they also refer to risks such as distortion if considering the VHR Guidelines. There is no mandatory requirement to use the VHR Guidelines and if they are used, they should be used with caution and they should not be used as a basis for evaluating significance.

The Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning provides educative materials about Local Heritage Protection on its website. The Department explicitly sets out PPN1 to help local Councils use and apply the Heritage Overlay and makes no such claim in respect of the VHR Guidelines.⁵

These remarks underpin a consensus that, while the VHR Threshold Guidelines might conceivably be of some value in understanding criteria at the local level, the guidelines themselves should not rigorously applied in an effort to define (much less to refute) a basis for local significance. More particularly, the exclusion guidelines should never be invoked at the local level, as they are clearly intended to assist in filtering places of potential state significance.

Submitter's issue

Per the Guidelines, Criterion E is likely to be satisfied if: the physical fabric of the place/object exhibits particular aesthetic characteristics. The Guidelines explain that a place should be excluded if certain conditions apply, including: Lacks distinctiveness:.... Poor, indirect or unproven recognition:

Consultant's Response

While the consensus of the aforementioned panel reports was that Heritage Victoria's criterion threshold guidelines can potentially be of some value in informing (but not rigorously defining) a case for local significance, the discussion did not extend to the exclusion guidelines, which do not appear to have been specifically invoked in any of those hearings.

A review of the exclusion guidelines indicates that most of them are geared very specifically to a case for state significance, which is reason enough for them not to be invoked when considering places of local significance. This is illustrated by the Criterion E exclusion guideline for "poor, indirect or unproven recognition", which holds that a place should be excluded if its aesthetic qualities have "only received limited public or disciplinary recognition".

While it is reasonable to expect that a post-WW2 architect-designed building of state significance should have achieved such recognition, through receipt of awards or wide acknowledgement in primary or secondary sources, this cannot be extrapolated to the local level. Most places of local significance have not been subject to wide "public and disciplinary recognition".

⁴ Mornington Peninsula C262morn Part 2 (PSA) [2021] PPV 19 (6 April 2021), p 29.

⁵ Melbourne C387melb (PSA) [2021] PPV 89 (10 November 2021), pp.7-8.

There are many post-WW2 architect-designed houses already on local HO schedules (including the City of Boroondara) that have not generated “public and disciplinary recognition”, yet they are still considered to be of local significance. To routinely apply this exclusion guideline at the local level means that only the best-known, award-winning and/or much-published post-WW2 houses would become candidates for inclusion on the HO schedule.

C1.3 Application of Criterion H

Submitter's issue

For this criterion to be met, the subject property should show special association with the life and/or work of Alistair Knox. And, Knox should be a person of importance to the history of the City of Boroondara. Neither of these benchmarks has been achieved within the heritage assessment.

Consultant's Response

I have assessed many post-WW2 architect-designed buildings for local heritage studies, and have routinely invoked Criterion H for associative value between a building and its designer, especially in cases of well-known practitioners. This is not contingent on the extent of work that a designer may have done in a given study area, nor whether he or she had any professional or personal association that might be deemed of special import (eg, as a long-time resident of the study area). I do not concur that Criterion H should only be invoked where an architect or designer has some specific link to the study area itself. Certain architects and designers are well-known to the extent that they may be considered household names, recognisable even to a layperson. Alistair Knox is one such individual. As Knox is considered important in a statewide context, it follows that examples of his work are important across the state. In other words, because Knox is important to the State of Victoria, he must also be considered important to the City of Boroondara.

To illustrate this point, I cite the example of *Nanga Gnulle*, a mud-brick house in Bendigo designed by Alistair Knox in the 1970s, for which I was commissioned to prepare a heritage assessment in 2017. Research and comparative analysis demonstrated that this was one of only three houses that Knox designed in what is now the City of Greater Bendigo, of which only two (*Nanga Gnulle* in Strathdale, and a later house in Junortown) were actually built. While Knox had previously designed and built a mud brick homestead in nearby Tarnagulla, this was located just outside the municipal boundaries, in the adjacent Shire of Loddon.

While my citation never suggested that Knox himself had any particularly significant connection with Bendigo or environs, it was deemed appropriate to invoke Criterion H. As Knox is important to the State of Victoria, he should be considered important to the City of Greater Bendigo. To that end, the Statement of Significance for *Nanga Gnulle* noted:

The house is significant as an excellent and notably intact example of the work of Alistair Knox, an important and influential figure in the development of post-war residential architecture in Victoria (and beyond), specifically for his role in promoting mudbrick construction, self-building and the integration of architectural salvage, all of which became widely popular in the 1970s. One of only three houses that Knox designed in what is now the City of Greater Bendigo, *Nanga Gnulle* is one of only two that were built, and stands out as the earliest, largest and best example of this work in the municipality (*Criterion H*).

At the panel hearing (City of Greater Bendigo C234), there was some debate on proposed extent of curtilage, and whether other criteria might be invoked. However, my application of Criterion H was never disputed. Ultimately, the panel upheld my recommendation for an individual heritage overlay and, while it was suggested that the Statement of Significance might be expanded to cite Criteria A and D as well as Criteria E and H, the above quoted paragraph for Criterion H was endorsed without suggested changes.⁶ The house remains included in the schedule as HO915.

⁶ Greater Bendigo C234 (PSA) [2020] PPV 54 (12 June 2018), p 47.



APPENDIX: CURRICULUM VITAE

SIMON REEVES

Qualifications

- 1996-97 Bachelor of Architecture (Hons) (University of Melbourne)
- 1991-93 Bachelor of Planning & Design (University of Melbourne)

Full-time Professional Experience

- 2009- Director and principal, Built Heritage Pty Ltd
- 2002-2009 Architectural historian and heritage consultant, Heritage Alliance, Melbourne
- 1998-2002 Architectural historian, Allom Lovell & Associates, Melbourne

Other experience

- 2013-2017 Sessional lecturer, *Architectural History & Theory 2: Australian Architecture*
School of Architecture & Design, RMIT University
- 2011 Tutor, *Architectural History & Theory 2: Australian Architecture*
School of Architecture & Design, RMIT University
- 2010 Tutor, *Modern Architecture: MoMo to PoMo*
Faculty of Architecture, University of Melbourne
- 2010 Guest editor, *Architect Victoria* (Journal of RAIA Victorian Chapter)
Special issue on post-WW2 Heritage Places (Autumn 2010)
- 2000 Research assistant to Dr Philip Goad (Post-War Sydney Housing Project)
Faculty of Architecture, University of Melbourne
- 1999 Archivist and curator of architectural drawings (Walter Burley Griffin Collection)
Newman College, University of Melbourne
- 1998 Architectural historian [Stephenson & Turner Archive Project]
State Library of Victoria
- 1998 Tutor, *History of Building Construction*
Faculty of Architecture, University of Melbourne
- 1995-1998 Assistant to the Building Project Co-ordinator
State Library of Victoria
- 1995 Teaching assistant to Jeffrey Turnbull
Faculty of Architecture, University of Melbourne
- 1994 Research assistant to Jeffrey Turnbull & Peter Navaretti (Griffin Catalogue Project)
Faculty of Architecture, University of Melbourne

Current (*) and former affiliations

Australia ICOMOS*

DoCoMoMo Australia

National Trust of Australia (Victoria) – also member and chair of Buildings Committee, 2010-2011

Society of Architectural Historians of Australia & New Zealand (SAHANZ)

Art Deco & Modernism Society of Victoria*

Walter Burley Griffin Society

Australian Garden History Society

Robin Boyd Foundation

Selected published work

Books:

[with Fiona Austin]. *Beaumaris Modern 2*. Melbourne: Melbourne Books, 2022. [forthcoming]

[with Fiona Austin & Alison Alexander]. *Beaumaris Modern*. Melbourne: Melbourne Books, 2018.
- winner of Bates Smart Award for Architecture in Media, AIA (Victoria) Awards, 2020

Gentle Modernist: The Nine Lives of Anatol Kagan. Fremantle [WA]: Vivid Publishing, 2014.

Conference papers:

“Paradise Lost/Regained/Lost: The Uneven History of Melbourne’s Tiki Restaurants”,
Hungry Town: 2019 Labour Day Symposium. Australian Centre for Architectural History,
Urban & Cultural Heritage (ACAHUCH), University of Melbourne, 11 March 2019.

“Downtown by DeLorean: A road trip through some drive-in typologies, 1955-1985”, in Harriet
Edquist and Helen Stitt (eds), *Autopia: The Car and the Modern City. Proceedings of
Automotive Historian Australia*, Vol 2 (2018).

“Gold-Plated Doors If You Want Them: Holgar & Holgar and the Architecture of Opulence,”
in AnnMarie Brennan and Philip Goad (eds), *GOLD: Proceedings of the Society of
Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand*, No 33 (2016), pp 568-577.

“Pacific Modern: The Life and Work of Haydn Phillips” in Miles Lewis (ed),
The Pacific Connection: Trade, Travel and Technology Transfer. Proceedings of a seminar
at the University of Melbourne, 19-22 February 2009. pp 220-226.

Articles:

“Revisited: Porter House”, *Houses*, No 131 (March 2020), pp 130-135.

“Meadmore Originals”, *RMIT Design Archives Journal*, Vol 5, No 2 (2015), pp 4-23.

“From Hotel to Motel to Boatel”, *Australian Motel Owners’ Journal*, December 2011, pp 8-10.

“Googie goes Australian”, *Australian Modern*, Vol 1, No 1 (2012), pp 12-15.

“The Walmsley House at Royal Park: La Trobe’s ‘other’ cottage”, *La Trobeana: Journal of the
C J La Trobe Society Inc*. Vol 7, No 3 (November 2008), pp 12-19.

“Roy Prentice: Centenary Architect”, *Spirit of Progress*, Vol 7, No 3 (Winter 2006), pp 7-9.

“Heritage Overlooked”, *Architect Victoria*, Autumn 2005, pp 22-25.

“Millie Gibson blooms again”, *La Trobe Journal*, No 65 (Autumn 2000), pp 4-16.