

Raftopolous House (former)

Prepared by: GML Heritage

Address: 69 Sylvander Street BALWYN NORTH

Name: Raftopolous House (former)	Survey Date: 18/10/21
Place Type: Residential Building	Architect: Unknown
Grading: Individually Significant	Builder: Unknown
Extent of Overlay: To title boundaries	Construction Date: 1962



Figure 1 Principal facade of 69 Sylvander Street, Balwyn North, facing west. (Source: Context 2021)



Figure 2 Oblique view of principal facade. (Source: Context 2021)

Historical Context

This place is associated with the following historic themes taken from the *Boroondara Thematic Environmental History* (2012):

2.5.2 Migrating to create opportunity

6.3.4 Suburban infill after Second World War

6.7.2 Making homes for the middle classes

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.

This house is associated with what might be termed the heyday of post-war homebuilding in Balwyn North – the period from the mid-1950s to the early 1960s. This phase emerged from the more tentative settlement of the area in the late 1940s and early 1950s, subsequently burgeoning at such an intense rate that, by the mid-1960s, vacant allotments in Balwyn North were already becoming much becoming harder to come by.

More specifically, the house must also be seen in the historical context of Greek migrant settlement in Balwyn North in the later 1950s and '60s. The massive influx of post-war homemakers in that suburb included a significant proportion of migrants from southern Europe, including not only Greece but also Cypress, Malta and elsewhere. For much of the 1950s, listings of Balwyn North residents in the *Sands & McDougall Directory* included few surnames that were anything other than Anglo-Saxon. By the end of the decade, a number of Greek families had settled in the area, and this trend burgeoned significantly during the 1960s. By the mid-1970s, such was the local migrant population that a Greek Orthodox congregation was established, holding services in a defunct Congregational Church in Macedon Avenue that had ceased to operate in 1973. The church has since been rebuilt and is known as The Presentation of Our Lady to the Temple Greek Orthodox parish North Balwyn.

A number of Greek businesses also operate in the Balwyn North area, including restaurants and a funeral parlour. Balwyn High School also commenced Greek language course in the late 1990s. (Built Heritage 2015).

Place History

The land at 69 Sylvander Road, Balwyn North, originally formed part of Elgar's Crown Special Survey purchased and surveyed by Henry Elgar in 1841. Elgar did not reside on the land as he was based in the West Indies, employing an agent to manage his investments in Australia. The survey was subdivided into small farms and grazing runs and leased out for several years.

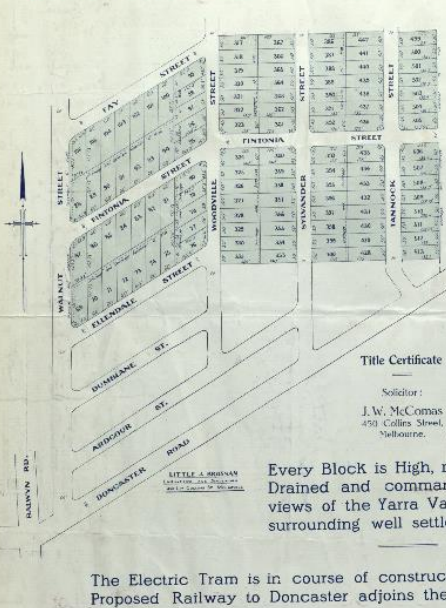
After financial difficulties forced Elgar to sell his land, the majority was purchased by a shipowner named Brooks, while a third of the survey remained in the possession of Mrs Dyce, the widow of one of Elgar's business partners.

Frederick Mummery and Albert Mummery both farmers purchased 133 acres of Elgar's special survey in 1913. Part if this land was laid out for subdivision in 1924 as the Highland Estate of Camberwell creating Sylvander Street.

Electoral rolls reveal that, by the late 1940s, Stathis Raftopolous (identified as a "film exhibitor") was living in Madden Street, Kew East, with his father Spiro and sister Loula. Not long afterwards, in October 1950, the elder Raftopolous acquired the title to an allotment of vacant land in nearby Balwyn North located on the east side of Sylvander Street, this block comprised Lot 379 of the Highlands of Camberwell subdivision (CT V7544 148).

HIGHLANDS OF CAMBERWELL ESTATE

AUCTION : ——— SATURDAY, 1st NOVEMBER, 1924 on the Ground at 3 o'clock, in a Seated Marquee



Extract from "Herald" 10/9/24.

BIG RAILWAY MOVE
Kew to Doncaster Line

Plans and estimates are being made for the construction of a big metropolitan railway line from Kew to Doncaster, the route of which has been fixed by the Government. It will cross the whole of the estate and will be a great benefit to the district.

The Suburban Planning Committee has advised that the departmental estimates for the construction of the line will be completed in the near future. It is expected that the line will be completed in the near future. It is expected that the line will be completed in the near future.

Lot 379
In a more than probable that the lot from here will be the one to be developed. It is a very good lot and is a very good lot. It is a very good lot and is a very good lot.

Title Certificate
Solicitor:
J.W. McComas
459 Collins Street,
Melbourne.

Every Block is High, magnificently Drained and commanding superb views of the Yarra Valley and the surrounding well settled localities.

The Electric Tram is in course of construction and the Proposed Railway to Doncaster adjoins the Estate.

Absolutely the Highest Point in this Elevated Suburb.

This Estate is without doubt the Finest building land in the District. Buy before the Rise as with the completion of the Electric Tram which is now being constructed along High Street, with a view to the Early Extension along Doncaster Road, the District must soon be thickly populated and big enhancements take place in values.

PURCHASE LAND IN PROGRESSIVE CAMBERWELL AND ENSUE HEALTH AND HAPPINESS FOR YOUR FAMILY.

NO INVESTMENT IS AS GOOD AS REAL ESTATE.


Remarkable Terms :

NO
DEPOSIT

£1 PER LOT
PER MONTH

Balance in 5 Years with Interest at 6 per Cent.

FREE MOTORS and BUSES
will run from Gas Co.'s Office, Flinders St.; East Kew Tram Terminus and corner of Whitehorse and Balwyn Roads from 1.45 p.m.



ARTHUR TUCKETT & SON

Subdivisional Auctioneer

58, QUEEN STREET, MELBOURNE

MEMBREY & DEANE

Auctioneer & Estate Agents

17 QUEEN ST., MELBOURNE

Figure 3 Subdivision plan for the Highlands of Camberwell Estate showing Sylvander Street and the subject lot 379. (Source: State library of Victoria *Highlands of Camberwell Estate* (1924). [Melbourne : s.n.].)

Six years later, ownership of this land was transferred to Spiro's son Stathis who, in the intervening years, had married. However, a few more years passed before Stathis and his new wife, Kaciani, decided to build a house for themselves on the block. Working drawings for a "proposed solid brick residence for Mr S Raftopolous at Sylvander Street, Balwyn North" had been completed by early 1962. These plans, although clearly drafted to a professional standard, do not include any information to identify an architect, builder or designer. They depict a modest hip-roofed house on a compact rectangular plan, elevated above street level with a full-width front porch, entry steps and flanking flower boxes to create the effect of a terraces garden. An attached garage, at street level, had a flat roof that merged with the front porch to create a generous north-facing L-shaped sundeck, enclosed by an ornate metal railing. This detail, however, was subsequently amended; the garage roof was closed off, and the railing limited only to the front porch area.

A building permit for the house, which was to cost £6,000, was issued by the City of Camberwell in February 1962 (Figure 4). Construction commenced in early March, and the house had reached lock-up stage by mid-October. A photograph of the building around the time of its completion, held by the National Archives, shows that the porch railing was realised in a simpler form than shown on the plans. As built, however, the house otherwise incorporated several key elements that had not appeared on the drawings at all, including a striking pair of classical columns flanking the entry porch, a decorative screen of concrete breeze-blocks along the garage parapet, and a tall, rendered retaining wall, with matching metal railing, along the front property boundary.

Stathis and Kaciani Raft, who had two children, lived in the house for the next forty years. During that time, the most significant alteration that they made was the addition of a small projecting rear wing, containing a family room in 1973. The couple were still living in the house at the time of Raft's death in 2003. His widow subsequently retained ownership until it was sold to the present owner in 2008 (CT 11029 F181).

E 69 SYLVANDER ST 145' S ORAVEL LOT No. **379**

Owner or Occupier	STANLEY RAFTOPULOS			Permit No.	Date		
Builder	TO BE NOTIFIED			30459	14	2	62
Remarks	Space Heater - Grey Hens Tinter 857 8111			43715	21	6	68
Remarks	Sun Room - J GOUTZOUZAS			53610	10	8	73
Remarks	HEATING :- DAVID COUPER			53826	13	9	73

Structure	Area	Cost	Remarks	Structure	Area	Cost	Remarks
Dwelling	2270	6000	7 R. B.	Ferries etc.			
Shop & Dwell.				Public Bldgs.			
L. U. Shop				Warehouse, etc.			
Sleepout				Hoardings, etc.			
Garages	360	—	(30459) 8	Space Heater		235	43715
Altrs. & Adds.				Sun Room	276	2850	53610
Wash House				HEATING		2000	53826
Work Shop							
Sheds							
Fowl House							
Stable							

2M—3/59

NE

Figure 4 Building Permit Card for 69 Sylvander Street, Balwyn North, showing construction of the property and later modifications. (Source: BP)

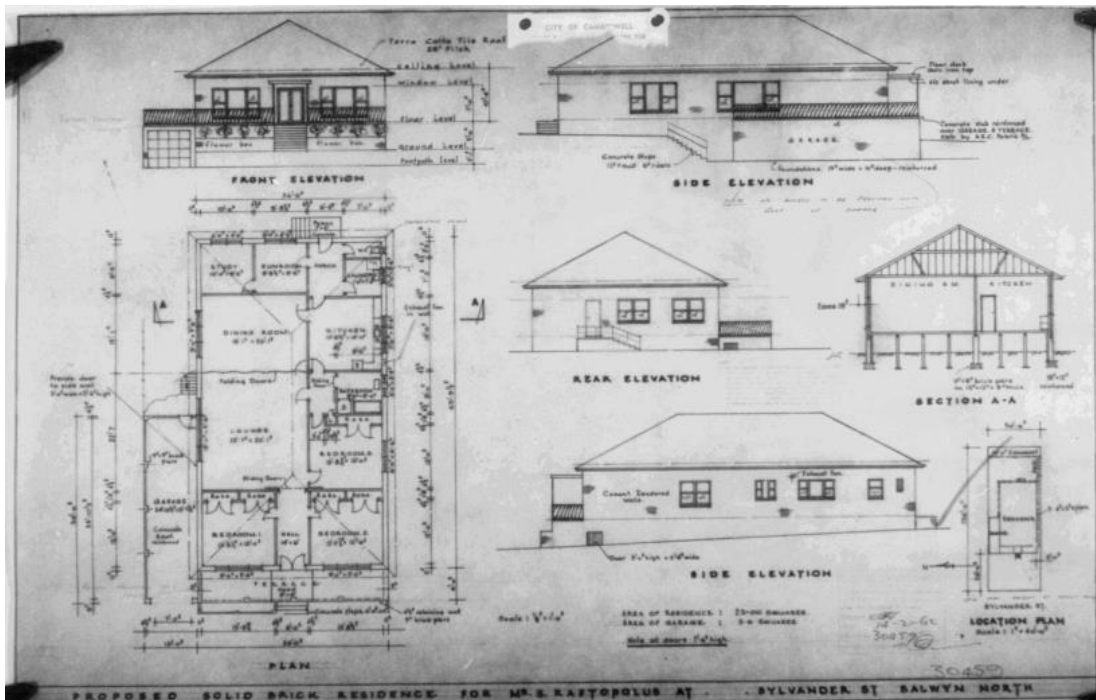


Figure 5 Original working drawings showing design for 69 Sylvander Street, Balwyn North. (Source: BP 30459)

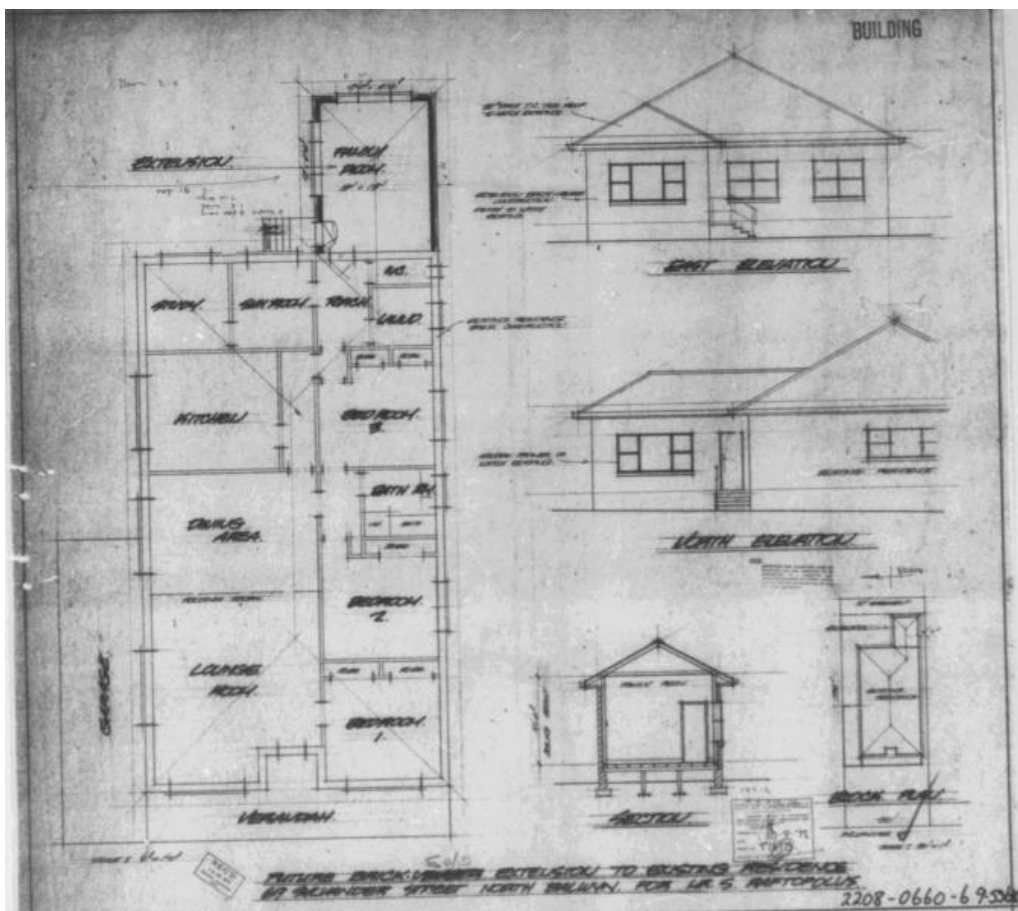


Figure 6 Working drawing for addition of a family room dated 1973 (Source: BP 53610)

Stathis Raftopolous (1921-2003)

This house was erected in 1962 for Stan Raft (1921-2003), a Greek migrant who started his career in his father's cafe and subsequently carved out a successful career for himself as a showman, entrepreneur and cinema magnate. Born Stathis Raftopolous, his family had migratory connections dating back to the 1860s, when three brothers left the island of Ithaca to seek their fortunes in Australia. Other family members came and went over successive generations, with Raft's grandfather and father arriving in Victoria, respectively in 1895 and 1922. The family settled at Merbein, near Mildura, and by the time that twelve-year old Raft joined them in 1933, had already become well established with varied business interest including cafes, fruit shops and real estate. In 1937, the family moved to Melbourne and settled in Abbotsford, where they ran a milk bar and fruit shop. Over the next few years, a teenaged Raft nurtured an interest in the performing arts, creating a magic act ("Rafto the Magnificent") that later toured the wartime theatrical circuit. In 1949, he imported the first Greek-language film into Australia and, after successful screenings in a city church hall, established a travelling film distribution company. In 1958, he formed a syndicate, Cosmopolitan Motion Pictures, to purchase cinemas that had been rendered defunct by the recent arrival of television, and used them to screen Greek language films. At its peak, Raft's company operated twelve cinemas across Melbourne, including two in Richmond and one each in St Kilda, Northcote, Brunswick, Yarraville, Oakleigh and Albert Park (Built heritage 2015).

Description

The house at 69 Sylvander Street is a single-storey rendered brick house with a hipped roof clad in terracotta tiles. As the site slopes steeply upward from the street, the frontage of the property is expressed as a series of stepped terraces. A tall, rendered retaining wall along the street boundary creates an elevated front garden. Set further back is a plinth-like base (incorporating a partial habitable lower level) on which the house proper, set slightly further back to form a full-width sun-deck, is situated. To the left (north) side of the house is a flat-roofed garage, which is located at street level so that its parapet aligns with the floor level of the main house.

The street facade is symmetrical in a manner that recalls late Victorian villas rather than typical mid-twentieth century residential architecture: that is, a central front door, flanked by windows. The front door is set into a recessed alcove which opens onto a small flat-roofed porch, supported by a pair of fluted Corinthian columns. This, in turn is flanked by a pair of metal coach lamps, and by a small timber plaque bearing the house name ITHACA. The two front windows are large and contain operable and fixed metal-framed sashes. In the centre of the front terrace, which has a terrazzo finish, a long flight of concrete steps (also with a terrazzo finish) leads down to the street, with landings at the garden and street levels. This frontage of the house makes extensive use of wrought iron railings, which extend around three sides of the recessed porch, across the front and sides of the terrace, down both sides of the flight of steps, along the front and return of the retaining wall, and to the gate at the foot of the steps. The railing has a simple rectilinear pattern of square section pipes (some twisted to create a Solomonic effect) with scrolled arabesques at regular intervals.



Figure 7 Detail showing window frames and entrance screen. (Source: GML 2021)



Figure 8 Detail showing entrance stairs and door.
(Source: GML 2021)

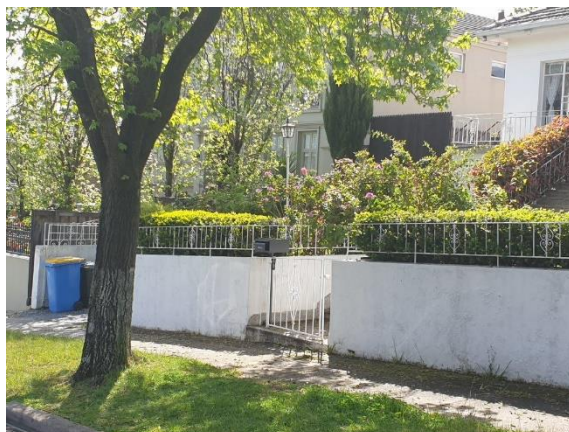


Figure 9 Detail showing fence. (Source: GML 2021)

Integrity

69 Sylvander Street, Balwyn North is highly intact with very few changes visible to original or early fabric. The house retains its original built form, roof form, rendered brick walls, steel framed windows and projecting entrance porch with fluted Corinthian columns. The house also retains its original front garden layout which includes a terraced front yard intersected by a flight of terrazzo steps, rendered front fence with mild steel balustrading and gate and integrated recessed garage.

Changes include the addition of a family room in 1973 which is not visible from the street.

Overall the house has very high integrity.

Comparative Analysis

While it is difficult to chart the development of a Greek community in Balwyn North, directory listings provide clues to a pattern of migrant settlement from the late 1950s. A notable epicentre seems to have been the area north of Doncaster Road and east of Balwyn Road, which includes Sylvander Street. Interestingly, directories reveal that Stan Raft was not actually the first Greek migrant listed in Sylvander Street – at the time that his house was being built, hairdresser Stephen Katerelos already occupied a shop at No 1, while Leo Kostos lived at No 21 and George Petalas at No 75. Neither of these two houses, however, was purpose-built for its *emigre* resident. The tendency for Greek migrants to build new houses for themselves became more pronounced as the decade wore on.

Architectural historian Allan Willingham discusses what he calls the 'Mediterranean Idiom' in Peter Yule's, *Carlton: A History*. He states that this style is an identifiable and distinctive sub-style in the history of post-war Australian architecture. He notes that it is most commonly manifest as either renovated terrace houses, where the facade of the house have been extensively re-modelled or as

'grandiose pseudo-Italianate villas' in the outer suburbs. Houses in this idiom are typically characterised by the bold and often unconventional use of materials (eg terrazzo, marble, mild steel grilles and slate) and architectural details (balustrading, balconies, etc) that nostalgically (if somewhat inaccurately) recall their owner's country of origin.

There are no houses in the Mediterranean Idiom style in the Heritage Overlay in Boroondara. Further afield only one house could be found that is included in the Heritage Overlay in the style; Mirabella House 38 Henry Street, Keilor East built in 1966 for prominent Italian businessman Paolo Mirabella to a design by architect Ermin Smrekar (HO333) (Source: VHR).



Figure 10 Mirabella House 38 Henry Street, Keilor East built in 1966 for prominent Italian business Paolo Mirabella to a design by architect Ermin Smrekar (HO333) (Source: Hermes)

Historically, the Mirabella House is significant for its associations with post-war immigration in Melbourne, being a representative and early example of the distinctive type of houses that Southern European migrants built for themselves at that time.

Aesthetically, the Mirabella House is significant for its highly unusual form and detailing. It is a fine and remarkably intact example of the so-called Mediterranean idiom, a bold and deliberate nostalgic sub-style that characterised the houses of Southern European migrants in the post-war period. With its double-storey scale and eye-catching integration of materials such as terrazzo, wrought iron, textured render and face brick with deeply raked joints, it stands out from the conventional brick veneer houses that proliferate in this part of East Keilor. It remains as a prominent element in the streetscape, forming a minor landmark on this large corner site near Milleara Road.

Two houses that demonstrate the style have been assessed as significant in Moreland City however neither house have been included in the Heritage Overlay. These are:



Figure 11 223 Victoria Street, Brunswick, constructed c1905 (HO598—Interim Control City of Moreland).
(Source: Hermes)

223 Victoria Street, Brunswick is of local historical significant and representative value. The 'Mediterranean idiom' style of the building is significant, specifically the rendered and painted brickwork, simplified parapet with the removal of decorative Victorian era features, curved concrete porch cover that narrows to an 'eave' as it extends across the facade, laminated edge to the eave to appear like stone, decorative steel rail atop the porch roof, and face brick front boundary fences with brown glazed tiles and steel inserts.

The dwelling is historically significant as evidence of southern European migration to Brunswick after World War Two and the migrant tradition across Melbourne of heavily modifying earlier facades, in this case Victorian era residences, with the 'Mediterranean idiom' style. (Criterion A)

The dwelling demonstrates key characteristics of the post-war 'Mediterranean idiom' style dwellings which were adapted from earlier Victorian residences, specifically through facade alterations that are in keeping with the postwar era and associated migrant influences. (Criterion D)



Figure 12 227 Victoria Street, Brunswick, constructed c1905 (HO598–Interim Control City of Moreland).
(Source: Hermes)

The dwelling at 227 Victoria Street, Brunswick is of local historical significant and representative value. The 'Mediterranean idiom' style of the building is significant, specifically the rendered and painted brickwork, simplified parapet with the removal of decorative Victorian era features, curved concrete porch cover that narrows to an 'eave' as it extends across the facade, decorative steel rail atop the porch roof, and face brick front boundary fences with brown glazed tiles and steel inserts.

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While there are some similarities between the subject house and the above examples, it is not as an evocative and clearly identifiable example of the Mediterranean idiom sub-style.

Being a new house, it is not directly comparable to the Victoria Street, Brunswick examples as both of these houses are heavily modified Victorian house where European Migrants have purposefully stripped the facades of all reference to the Victorian era and replaced it with details borrowed from their land of origin.

While Mirabella House is a new house, it is architect designed by Ermin Smrekar who adopted a highly idiosyncratic approach whereby stylistic allusions and building materials would be combined in an unconventional fashion. Smrekar went on to design many other houses for Italian clients in the Doncaster, Bulleen and Templestowe area. However; he noted in an interview in 2004 that these houses were far less literal in their symbolism than Mirabella House being "evocative in a stylised manner without being nostalgic".

In many ways the house at 69 Sylvander Street is a standard vernacular house of the 1960's. Its built form, hipped roof, standard window openings and mild steel balustrading are all typical of the era. While its elevated position, sheer rendered walls and open terraces evoke some sense of southern Europe, further research will need to be undertaken across Boroondara in order to bench mark if the property meets the threshold of criterion D or E as an individually significant place.



In order to satisfy Criterion A, the association of the place to an event, phase, period, process, function, movement, custom or way of life needs to be evident in the fabric of the place. As discussed above, 69 Sylvander Street, Balwyn North is in many ways a standard vernacular house of the 1960's. It is not easily identifiable as a house built for a Greek immigrant and does not possess the idiosyncratic and evocative nostalgic references of the Mediterranean sub-style

Historically, while Stathis Raftopolous appears to have been an active and highly respected member of the Greek community, his interests and area of influence were not centred in Boroondara. His business, Cosmopolitan Motion Pictures, was established in Brunswick and later moved to Abbotsford. Establishing twelve cinemas across Melbourne, notably none of them were in Boroondara. The threshold for Criterion H is not met.

As identified in Boroondara's Thematic Environmental History, there are a number of places in Boroondara that may better represent the Greek Community and theme 2.5.3 Creating migrant communities. These include the:

- Greek Orthodox Chapel, 15 Rose Street, Hawthorn East (1975) – designed by Arvanitakis, Laffin & Associates
- Greek Orthodox Chapel of St Fanouris and St Marina, 3-7 Macedon Avenue, Balwyn.

There are also a number of Greek Businesses that operated in the Balwyn North area, including restaurants and a funeral parlour that may better evidence the postwar immigration of the community.

Assessment Against Criteria

Criteria referred to in *Practice Note 1: Applying the Heritage Overlay*, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, August 2018, modified for the local context.

CRITERION A: Importance to the course or pattern of the City of Boroondara's cultural or natural history (historical significance).

N/A

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

N/A

CRITERION C: Potential to yield information that will contribute understanding 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).

N/A



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

N/A

CRITERION G: Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions (social significance).

N/A

CRITERION H: Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in the City of Boroondara's history (associative significance).

N/A



Grading and Recommendations

Not recommended for inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Boroondara Planning Scheme as an Individually Significant place.

Not recommendations for the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay (Clause 43.01) in the Boroondara Planning Scheme:

External paint controls

Is a permit required to paint an already painted surface?

Internal alteration controls

Is a permit required for internal alterations?

Tree controls

Is a permit required to remove a tree?

Outbuildings and fences exemptions

Are there outbuildings or fences which are not exempt from notice and review?

Victorian Heritage Register

Is the place included on the Victorian Heritage Register?

Prohibited uses may be permitted

Can a permit be granted to use the place for a use which would otherwise be prohibited?

Aboriginal heritage place

Is the place an Aboriginal heritage place which is subject to the requirements of the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006?

Incorporated plan

Does an incorporated plan apply to the site?

Identified by:

Built Heritage Pty Ltd (2013).



References

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Guilia dal Borgo, Alice. 'Signs of Italian Culture in the Urban Landscape of Carlton'. *Italian Historical Society Journal*, Vol 14, No 1 (Jan-Jun 2006), pp2-9.

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