

Spitzer House (former)

Prepared by: GML Heritage

Address: 9 Tormey Street BALWYN NORTH

Name: Spitzer House (former)	Survey Date: December 2021
Place Type: Residential Building	Architect: Peter McIntyre
Grading: Individually Significant	Builder: Horner & Dodson
Extent of Overlay: To title boundaries	Construction Date: 1958–59



Figure 1 9 Tormey Street, Balwyn North (Source: GML 2021)



Figure 2 9 Tormey Street, Balwyn North. (Source: GML 2021)



Historical Context

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

6.3.4 Suburban infill after Second World War

9.3.2 Designing fine buildings

Balwyn North is a residential suburb about 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 Balwyn North (called North Balwyn at that time). 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, including some who had served in the Second World War. The suburb developed as quintessentially middle class, with a high proportion of brick homes and a notable absence of industrial activity. The ridge along Doncaster Road was an advantage for 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 tramway from East Kew to Balwyn North 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 Balwyn North 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 North Balwyn, 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, 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, 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 North Balwyn.

Since the 1990s a significant influx of new residents into the area has seen the extensive replacement of interwar and 1940s homes with new residential development. The suburb of North Balwyn today is



favoured by many new home-owners for access to Balwyn High School—a co-educational government secondary school with nearly 2000 students. The period from the mid-1950s to the early 1960s, when the Spitzer House was built, represented something of a heyday of postwar homebuilding in Balwyn North. This phase followed on 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 hard to come by.

History

The land at 9 Tormey Street, 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.

John Towt (or Tout) purchased Sections 6B, 7B and 18A in the Parish of Boroondara from A.W. Dyce in 1857. Towt's block was bounded by Doncaster Road to the north, Greythorn Road to the east and Belmore Road (originally Ewart's Road) to the south. Following the death of Towt in 1891, and later the deaths of his son-in-law Charles (in 1898) and son John (in 1900), the land was subdivided and sold. A newspaper report of the sale of Towt's estate reveals that all 279 acres of the estate were sold at auction in 20 and 30 acre blocks in December 1902. Ferdinand Finger purchased 114 acres, one rood and 17 perches of Towt's original land, including Lot 2, on 2 February 1920. The Finger family were early settlers in the district and owned extensive fruit orchards and a homestead, 'Tannenwald', in Doncaster. Finger had also purchased part of Towt's estate when it was originally auctioned in 1902. Finger's land appears to have been subdivided in several instalments, commencing in 1919.

The subject site became Lot 16 of a subdivision that created the eastern end of Tormey Street in 1948. Lot 18 was purchased by Stanley Comben in 1950. Comben retained the vacant lot until he sold it to Romanian-born company director Victor Spitzer (b.1924) and his wife Fleur in October 1958. Spitzer had migrated to Australia with his family, arriving in Melbourne, in 1939 (Built Heritage 2014).

At the time, Fleur Spitzer worked in the administration office of the School of Architecture at The University of Melbourne and, through this connection, engaged architect Peter McIntyre (then employed there as a lecturer) to design their new house in Balwyn North (Built Heritage 2014).

McIntyre's working drawings for the Spitzer House, dated June 1958, depicted a strikingly unusual house expressed as an elevated square-planned box, clad externally in pre-cast concrete panels with a low pyramidal roof. On 18 February 1959 the City of Camberwell issued a building permit for what was described as a 'seven roomed concrete and brick veneer' house, for a cost of £8,000. Construction, carried out by Horner & Dodson of East Oakleigh, commenced in March and was completed at the end of October (Built Heritage 2014).

The Spitzers lived in the house for almost 30 years, during which they made several alterations to the undercroft area. In 1968 the lower level of the central core was extended to create a larger laundry. Three years later, following the death of Spitzer's mother in 1970, the covered area to the west of the central core was partially infilled to create a self-contained flat for her husband, Geza Spitzer. When



he decided not to move in, the flat (which had its own street entrance) was adapted as a study. In 1977 architect David Pincus was engaged to undertake a number of alterations that included the conversion of the ground floor study into another bedroom and the provision of a separate study area at the front, extending outwards to a point in line with the front wall of the main house above (Built Heritage 2014).

The Spitzers sold the house in 1986. The property was sold again in 2002 and 2015.

Robert Peter McIntyre AO (b.1927)

The son of an architect, Robert Peter McIntyre grew up in Kew and, after graduating from The University of Melbourne in 1950, opened his own architectural office. He achieved early fame as co-designer (with Kevin Borland, Phyllis and John Murphy, and engineer Bill Irwin) of the prize-winning entry in the competition for Melbourne's new Olympic Swimming Pool (1952–56). Concurrently, interest in his work burgeoned as he completed a string of suburban houses (some co-designed with his architect wife, Dione) in an exuberant Modernist style that meshed unusual plan forms with expressive façades, bold colours and geometric decorative effects. By the end of the decade McIntyre's style had matured to a more serene and formalised strain of Modernism. His career continued to thrive in the 1970s and 1980s, when he embraced larger commercial and town planning projects, winning accolades for the Knox City Shopping Centre (1977) and Dinner Plain Alpine Village (1982–87). In 1982 McIntyre was awarded the honour of Officer of the Order of Australia for service to architecture and to urban planning. He is still practising after more than 70 years (McIntyre Partnership 2022).

Description

The house at 9 Tormey Street, Balwyn North, is a two-storey Modernist house designed on a square plan. As originally conceived in 1958, it was expressed as a rectilinear volume raised up on a grid of steel pipe columns, and a small central core enclosing a stairwell and laundry area. This lower area, which served as an open undercroft/carport, was partly infilled in the early 1970s, leaving only the east (left) portion open. This has not overtly impacted on an understanding of the original design intent of the house as an elevated box hovering above the site.

The elevated house has a low pyramidal roof and external walls in textured pre-cast concrete panels, which are supported on an expressed steel frame of pipe columns and I beams. This creates a modular rhythm to the elevations and allows for regular fenestration. On the street façade, full-height panels alternate with shorter panels that incorporate awning sash windows above, which extend to the eaves line. Windows to the side and rear elevations are similarly arranged in repetitive and symmetrical bays. At the edges of the façade the concrete panels are slightly recessed from the corner, creating a distinctive stepped effect.

At the lower level, the eastern half of the former undercroft is used as a carport, and one of the original brick spur walls (now painted pale grey) is still apparent. The central circulation and service core, as well as the infill to the west side, are both largely concealed from the street by an elevated garden bed and dense planting.

The rear north elevation of the house has large window walls of glass that are divided by regularly spaced timber mullions. An upper timber deck at the elevation's western end is supported off steel columns that run past the deck's floor to balustrade height.



The house is set behind a garden planted with an informal band of specimen eucalypts, a native frangipani tree, introduced and Australian native shrubs which partially screen the undercroft, and an understorey of grasses. The planting scheme creates filtered views of the principal elevation of the house from the street. A mature tea-tree of unknown age stands at one side of the garden. There is no front fence, which was typical of garden settings to Modernist houses. A row of boulders defines each side of the driveway, transitioning to a bluestone retaining wall forming an apron along the front of the house. Most of the plantings appear to be relatively recent. However, the tea-tree, boulders and bluestone retaining wall closer to the house may be part of an early garden scheme.

Integrity

9 Tormey Street, Balwyn North, is largely intact, although some changes are visible to the original or early fabric. The original built form of the house remains legible as a rectilinear volume raised above the ground with a central ground level core enclosing a stairwell. The house retains its textured pre-cast concrete walls, low pyramidal roof and modular rhythm of openings along its south, east and west façades and large window walls of glass to the north.

Alterations include the enclosure of the western end of the undercroft area in the 1970s to create further accommodation. The alterations are fairly unobtrusive and do not overtly impact on an understanding of the original design intent of the house. The expressed structural system of steel beams supported off steel pipe columns remains visible from the street giving the house the appearance of hovering above the site. The protrusion of an evaporative air conditioning unit from the low pyramidal roof is intrusive, but this unit could be easily removed.

The front garden setting, while mostly relatively recent plantings, is sympathetic to the Modernist design ethos of using natural organic forms in landscape, in contrast to the stark Modernist architecture.

Overall, the place has 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 a suburban lifestyle resulted in the push for new housing and services in the suburbs of Melbourne.

Despite various subdivisions in the late 1800s and early twentieth century, the vast majority of the housing stock in North Balwyn was built in 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, and many used 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 the postwar styles offered at the time, many of which were simply scaled-down versions of 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 to spend on housing was scarce.

Peter McIntyre grew up in Kew and has carried out many commissions in what is now the City of Boroondara. These include a celebrated house he built for himself on a site overlooking the Yarra River at 2 Hodgson Street, Kew (the McIntyre House, HO72), as well as two other houses built on the same land; Sumer House and Cliff House (HO937). During the early 1950s he designed two other houses in North Balwyn that were both written up in the local architectural and popular housing press: Stargazer House (1952) at 2 Taurus Street (HO188) and the Hudson House at 14 Orion Street (now demolished) (VHR).

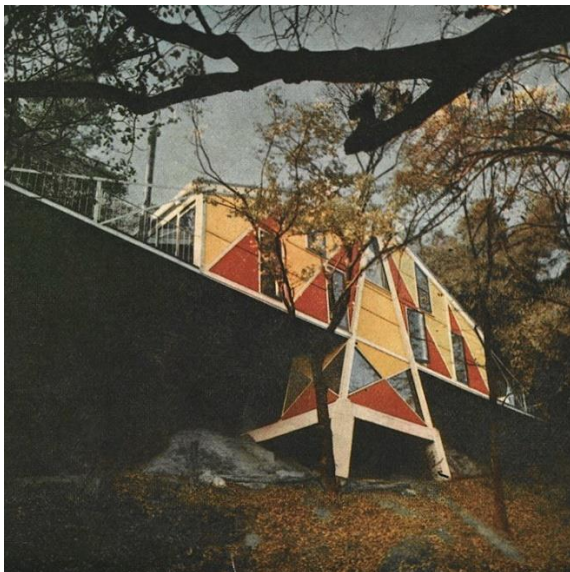


Figure 3 River House, 2 Hodgson Street, Kew, designed by Peter McIntyre in 1952 (HO72). (Source: Instagram @peter.mcintyre)



Figure 4 Stargazer House, 2 Taurus Street, Balwyn North, designed by Peter McIntyre in 1952. (HO188) (Source: GML 2021)

Commissioned in 1959, the Spitzer House in Tormey Street represented a marked departure from the more whimsical style that characterised McIntyre's earliest houses. With its centralised plan and use of pre-cast concrete panels, the project reflected its architect's developing interest in modular construction systems which, up until this time, were more commonly used in commercial architecture and the flexibility of open planning which, a few years before, he had explored in a series of standardised dwellings based on grid plans and prefabricated bow-trussed roofs, such as Grant House at 14 Pasadena Avenue, Beaumaris, built in 1956 (VHR H2392). It marked the beginning of a more formalised approach that would characterise McIntyre's work in the 1960s (Built Heritage 2014).

The use of pre-cast concrete panels in the Spitzer House was highly unusual at the time. Although this type of modular construction had been used in a number of commercial, industrial and institutional projects in the 1950s, its application to residential projects at this time had been limited to public housing (namely the structural pre-cast concrete units developed by the Housing Commission of Victoria), low-rise apartment blocks and a few experimental single dwellings (eg the Monocrete system of the early 1950s). From the early 1960s, pre-cast concrete cladding became increasingly popular in multi-storey office and apartment blocks and, by the end of that decade, in many other types of buildings as well. However, the Spitzer House remains the only known example in the Balwyn/ Balwyn North area of a 1950s house with pre-cast concrete cladding. Its nearest counterpart in the City of Boroondara seems to be a later and wholly non-residential example: the Camberwell

Civic Centre (, 8 Inglesby Street, Camberwell, designed by Mockridge, Stahle & Mitchell (1967–69, additions 1978) (HO506) (Built Heritage 2014).

The house at 9 Tormey Street, Balwyn North, can be compared more broadly to a number of contemporaneous houses in Balwyn and Balwyn North that exhibit a similar use of volumetric massing, flat roofs and full-height glazing. Despite the dominance of houses built in the years following the Second World War, Heritage Overlay coverage of postwar houses in Balwyn North is limited. The following are some comparable examples.



Figure 5. 300 Balwyn Road, Balwyn North, designed by Robin Boyd in 1949 (HO616). (Source: GML 2022)

'Bunbury House', 300 Balwyn Road, Balwyn North is of local historical, architectural, aesthetic and social significance. It represents a significantly early and intact example of modernist architecture by prominent Australian architect, theorist, author and critic Robin Boyd. 'Bunbury house' displays clear associations in its design and detailing with the designs of Robin Boyd that were developed as part of the Small Homes Service, an initiative that sought to provide cost effective, architecturally designed homes to a wider audience. 'Bunbury house' incorporates design elements that are recognisable and important in Boyd's design work, including the design of efficient floor plans, floor to ceiling glazing, projecting eaves and suspended sun shading devices constructed from timber slats.



Figure 6. 43 Kireep Road, Balwyn, designed by Robin Boyd in 1952 (HO177) (Source: GML 2022)

'Gillson House', 43 Kireep Road, Balwyn is of local historical and architectural significance. Architecturally its design epitomizes Boyd and other Melbourne Modernists' approach to design, with a minimalist external cuboid expression adorned only by 'structural decoration' as implied by the triangular bracing to windows. Like the nearby 'Stargazer house', (designed by Peter McIntyre architect in 1951-52) at 2 Taurus Street, Balwyn North, it also took the form-follows-function dictum to a



Figure 7. 12–14 Tannock Street, Balwyn North, designed by Robin Boyd in 1948–49 with alterations by Boyd in 1959 and 1971 (HO928). (Source: Built Heritage 2020)

visual extreme, in the design of the writer's study.

12-14 Tannock Street, Balwyn North is of local architectural and technical significance. Architecturally, the house is 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 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.

Postwar houses on the Heritage Overlay in the broader Boroondara context that are comparable to 9 Tormey Street, Balwyn North, include the following:



Figure 8. 'Robin Boyd House I', 664-666 Riversdale Road, Camberwell designed by Robyn Boyd in 1947 (VHR H0879; HO116). (Source: National Trust of Australia (Victoria))

'Robin Boyd House I', 664-666 Riversdale Road, Camberwell is of local historical and architectural significance. The house is 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 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 now become common.



Figure 9 'former Hirsch House and Office' at 118 Glen Iris Road, Glen Iris, designed by Grigore Hirsch (CONARG Architects) in 1954-55 (HO897) (Source: Trethowan Architecture 2018)

The former Hirsch House and Office is of local historical, architectural, aesthetic and associative significance. The building and its response to the landscape and climate demonstrates the contemporary approach to local conditions favouring good orientation and functionalist planning. The residence is an intact example of a post-war Émigré architect's house and office and illustrates European Modernism as it was translated into a Melbourne context. The double-storey dwelling of the 1950s illustrates the Post-War Melbourne Regional style, demonstrating key characteristics of the style in the simplicity of the forms, low-pitch butterfly roof, textured clinker brick cladding and large areas of glass to the north. The bold forms are further expressed through the delineation of materials across the upper (clinker brick) and lower (concrete tile) levels and exposed steel structure. More broadly, the use of steel frame construction throughout, further allows the illusion of the upper level to dominate the architectural composition.

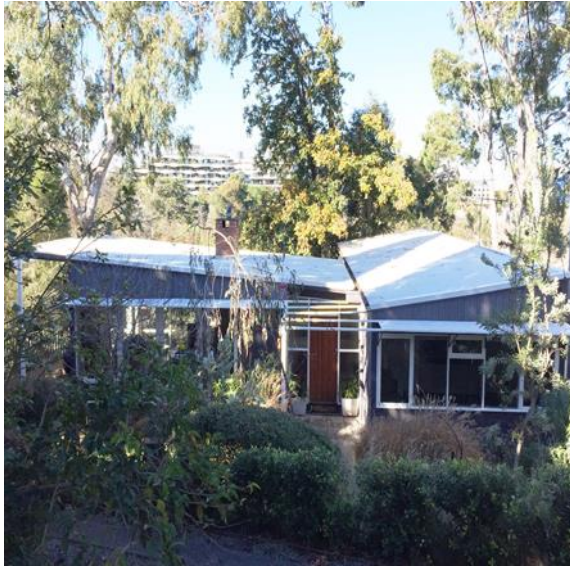


Figure 10. 6 Reeves Court, Kew, designed by Ernest Milston in 1955 (HO822). (Source: Trethowan 2017)

'Milston House', 6 Reeves Court, Kew is of local historical, architectural, aesthetic and associative significance. The house is a lightweight, timber framed house designed by architect Ernest Milston. The plan is formed of two rectangles reflective of the zones; the kitchen and living area are aligned with the street and run across the slope, while the bedrooms, bathroom and laundry are at right angles. Each wing has a separate skillion roof sloping to the other wing, creating an asymmetrical butterfly roof. A concrete driveway leads up from street level to a garage and studio, connected with the house by a pergola-covered path. A separate open pergola covers the entry. The building features extensive modular timber framed glazing. Horizontal awnings provide shade to the north, echoed in the open timber framing over the windows to the south that allow light penetration.



Figure 11. The Guss House, 18 Yarra Street, Kew, designed by McGlashan & Everist in 1961. (Significant within HO530) (Source: Hermes)

The Guss Residence at 18 Yarra Street, Kew (Significant within HO530) is a good example of the inventive, spare, and environment-responsive designs of McGlashan & Everist. Built in 1961, the house 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.



Figure 12 Dickie House, 6 Fairview Street, Hawthorn, c.1961–64 (HO784). (Source: Context with Trethowan 2017)

'Dickie House', 6 Fairview Street, Hawthorn is of local historical, architectural and aesthetic significance. The house is representative of the post-war design ethos, sense of optimism and architectural modernisation pioneered by Robin Boyd and others. The high-quality house-design features honesty of structure and material, clean lines, deep eaves and an overall sense of innovation in design. The integration of the house with the landscape, with its 'floating' appearance over the banks of the Yarra is characteristic of Modernist integration of architecture with natural context.



Figure 13 Cukierman Residence, 29 Leura Grove, Hawthorn East, designed by Hayden & Associates (attributed to Anthony Hayden) in 1966 (HO857). (Source: Context with Trethowan 2018)

'Cukierman Residence' at 29 Leura Grove, Hawthorn, is of local historical, architectural, aesthetic, technical and associative significance to the City of Boroondara. The residence derives its aesthetic appeal from its unusual and striking architectural composition with references to the International Style. Interest is created through the floating, curved, massed form fronting the street and subtle but evocative detailing of materials. The horizontal articulation of the window sets with their green mosaic tiled spandrel panels is applied with effect. Slender circular columns support the raised form, creating an open undercroft, and the use of textured cream brick is continued in the landscaping elements such as the low walls and planters.

9 Tormey Street, Balwyn North, exhibits key elements of typical postwar Modernist housing, most notably in its flowing spatial arrangements and innovative use of materials. It draws inspiration from the earlier (1947) 'Robin Boyd House 1' (VHR HO879; HO116), which is widely recognised as the prototype for postwar modern homes in its clever adaptation to a difficult site, use of new ideas regarding the spatial flow between inside and out, and the innovative use of materials in a time of postwar austerity.

9 Tormey Street, Balwyn North, is comparable to the works of other notable Modernist architects in Boroondara, including Grigore Hirsch, CONARG Architects (118 Glen Iris Road, Glen Iris, 1954-55



HO897), Ernest Milston (6 Reeves Court, Kew, HO822), McGlashan & Everist (18 Yarra Street, Kew, 1961, Significant within HO530) and Hayden & Associates (Cukierman Residence, 29 Leura Grove, Hawthorn East, HO857).

Similar characteristics across all these houses include the use of a flat or low-pitched roof plane, an expressed structural modularity in their design and the integration of the houses into their site-specific landscapes, large walls of glazing that connect the interior with the exterior, simple unadorned planar wall surfaces and a simple, often rectilinear planning.

9 Tormey Street, Balwyn North, falls into a subset of Modernist houses developed in the 1950s that responded to the site by hovering over the landscape on a platform. The strategy was used primarily as a means of placing houses on sloping sites and to capture views, imposing a rational solution to the irregularities of nature (London et al 2017:63). In this way the house at 9 Tormey Street is comparable to the Cukierman Residence, 29 Leura Grove, Hawthorn East, designed by Hayden & Associates (attributed to Anthony Hayden) in 1966 (HO857), Dickie House, 6 Fairview Street, Hawthorn c.1961–64 (HO784) and 39 Inverness Way, Balwyn North 1954 (assessed as significant in this study).

Together with 9 Tormey Street, all of these houses reflect the profound influence of the Modernist style, which in the 1950s became actively tested by Melbourne architects.

Overall, the subject house is a good representative example of an early mid-century Modernist house. While exhibiting key characteristics of the style it is also highly unusual for its early use of a modular structural steel system and pre-cast concrete wall panels, and is an evocative example of the experimental early work of Peter McIntyre.

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).

Spitzer House, 9 Tormey Street, Balwyn North, is of local historical significance for the evidence it provides of Boroondara as a locus for fine public and private buildings designed by leading architects from the 1850s into the postwar period. Designed in 1958–59, the house is significant as a notable example of the later 1950s work of well-known architect Peter McIntyre. Although McIntyre is best known for projects undertaken in the earlier part of that decade, which included co-authorship of the competition-winning design for Melbourne's Olympic Swimming Pool (1953–56) and a string of much-publicised suburban houses in an exuberant modern style, such as River House at 2 Hodgkinson Street Kew (1952) and Stargazer House at 2 Taurus Street, Balwyn (1952), this particular house provides evidence of his subsequent move towards a more formalised approach, reflecting his developing interest in modular planning and prefabrication. The house exemplifies the high concentration of architect-designed Modernist houses built in Balwyn and Balwyn north during the 1950s and 1960s.

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 to an understanding of the City of Boroondara's cultural or natural history (research potential).

N/A

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

N/A

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

Spitzer House, 9 Tormey Street, is aesthetically significant as a striking architect-designed postwar Modernist house in Balwyn North. It combines a number of features to produce an unusual and distinguished composition: a centralised square plan with living rooms arranged around a central circulation core, a very low hipped roof, an elevated expression (whereby the upper level, supported on wing-walls and steel posts, appears to hover weightlessly above a void below) and a stark façade of pre-cast concrete panels. With its elevated spartan façade of alternating bays of solid panels and windows, the house attracted much attention when it was built and, despite the partial infilling of the lower level, remains an unexpected and eye-catching element in a streetscape largely comprised of late interwar and more conventional contemporaneous postwar dwellings.

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

Spitzer House, 9 Tormey Street, Balwyn North, is technically significant for its unusual design—not only for its early use in residential architecture of a modular construction system but predominantly for its use of pre-cast concrete cladding. At the time the house was designed and constructed, pre-cast concrete cladding was almost unknown in small-scale domestic projects, although widely used in industrial, commercial and institutional building projects.

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



Statement of Significance

What is significant?

The former Spitzer House at 9 Tormey Street, Balwyn North, designed by architect Peter McIntyre in 1958–59, is significant.

Elements that contribute to the significance of the place include (but are not limited to):

- the centralised square plan with living rooms arranged around a central circulation core
- a very low-pitched pyramidal roof
- an elevated expression of a rectilinear volume raised above the ground on a grid of steel pipe columns which appears to hover above a continuous void below)
- a stark facade of pre-cast concrete panels with the concrete panels being slightly recessed at the buildings corners, creating a distinctive stepped effect
- the modular rhythm of openings along its south, east and west façades and large window walls of glass to the north.

The planting in the front garden, while in keeping with the Modernist design of the house, is not significant.

How is it significant?

The house is of historic, aesthetic and technical significance to the City of Boroondara.

Why is it significant?

Spitzer House, 9 Tormey Street, Balwyn North, is of local historical significance for the evidence it provides of Boroondara as a locus for fine public and private buildings designed by leading architects from the 1850s into the postwar period. Designed in 1958–59, the house is significant as a notable example of the later 1950s work of well-known architect Peter McIntyre. Although best known for projects undertaken in the earlier part of that decade, which included co-authorship of the competition-winning design for Melbourne's Olympic Swimming Pool (1953–56) and a string of much-published suburban houses in an exuberant modern style, such as River House, 2 Hodkinson Street Kew (1952) and Stargazer House 2 Taurus Street, Balwyn (1952), this particular house provides evidence of McIntyre's subsequent move towards a more formalised approach, reflecting his developing interest in modular planning and prefabrication. The house exemplifies the high concentration of architect designed modernist houses built in Balwyn and North Balwyn during the 1950s and 1960s. (Criterion A)

Spitzer House, 9 Tormey Street, is aesthetically significant as a striking architect-designed postwar Modernist house in Balwyn North. It combines a number of features to produce an unusual and distinguished composition: a centralised square plan with living rooms arranged around a central circulation core, a very low hipped roof, an elevated expression (whereby the upper level, supported on wing-walls and steel posts, appears to hover weightlessly above a void below) and a stark façade of pre-cast concrete panels. With its elevated spartan façade of alternating bays of solid panels and windows, the house attracted much attention when it was built and, despite the partial infilling of the lower level, remains an unexpected and eye-catching element in a streetscape largely comprised of late interwar and more conventional contemporaneous postwar dwellings. (Criterion E)

Spitzer House, 9 Tormey Street, Balwyn North, is technically significant for its unusual design—not only for its early use in residential architecture of a modular construction system but predominantly for its use of pre-cast concrete cladding. At the time the house was designed and constructed, pre-cast concrete cladding was almost unknown in small-scale domestic projects, although widely used in industrial, commercial and institutional building projects. (Criterion F)

Grading and Recommendations

Recommended for inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Boroondara Planning Scheme as an Individually Significant place.

Recommendations for the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay (Clause 43.01) in the Boroondara Planning Scheme:

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

Identified by:

Built Heritage Pty Ltd 2012.



References

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