

'Bel-Air'

Prepared by: Context

Address:

113 Yarrbat Avenue, Balwyn

Name: 'Bel-Air'	Survey Date: October 2018
Place Type: Residential	Architect:
Grading: Significant	Builder: C F Wheatland
Extent of Overlay: To title boundaries	Construction Date: 1938; altered 1965, 1988



Figure 1. View of 113 Yarrbat Avenue, Balwyn. (Source: Context, August 2017)

Historical Context

Balwyn is a residential suburb situated 10 kilometres east of central Melbourne. To its south are Canterbury and Surrey Hills and to the north is Balwyn North, which is separated from Balwyn by Belmore Road. Deepdene, historically forming part of south-west Balwyn, became a separate suburb in 2008.

Interwar development

A number of small farms and orchards in Balwyn were carved up for suburban housing in the late 1920s and 1930s. Many new home-buyers erected affordable detached timber bungalows during this period under the credit foncier scheme provided by the State Savings Bank of Victoria. Californian Bungalows, English Revival and other interwar styles, which were built to designs provided in the State Bank pattern books, predominated across large areas of Balwyn, including

that bounded by Whitehorse Road, Belmore Road, Burke Road and Balwyn Road. An elevated area on the north side of Whitehorse Road was developed in the 1930s as the prestigious Reid Estate. The wealthy retailer Oliver Gilpin built the mansion home 'Idylwylde' in Balwyn in the 1930s (now Connaught Aged Care); its extensive grounds included lavish sunken gardens, an ornamental lake, a swimming pool and a private zoo.

The interwar period saw significant expansion of Balwyn and Deepdene. There was extensive commercial development, including shops and banks, along both sides of Whitehorse Road in Balwyn. A shopping strip developed along Whitehorse Road, Deepdene, while smaller strips appeared along Burke Road (at Belmore Road, and later at Doncaster Road), and near the junction of Bulleen and Doncaster roads. Other new churches appeared during this period, while some of the older existing church buildings were entirely rebuilt to cater for enlarged congregations, notably the Balwyn Baptist Church on Whitehorse Road (1937), and the Frank Paton Memorial Presbyterian Church on Burke Road in Deepdene (1941) (Built Heritage 2015:11). Fintona Girls' School, which had opened in Hawthorn in 1896, relocated to David Syme's former mansion 'Tourmont' in Balwyn Road in 1936. The Anglican Mission of St James and St John opened a large babies' home on Whitehorse Road, Balwyn, in 1934. Hotels were prohibited in Balwyn and Deepdene following the Local Option vote of 1920, a reflection of the strong temperance views of the local population, but other opportunities for leisure included three picture theatres that operated in Whitehorse Road in the 1930s and 1940s, one of which (the Balwyn Theatre) survives. Beckett Park was well patronised as were the adjacent Maranoa Gardens. There was limited industrial development in Balwyn; an exception was the Oslo Bakery in Deepdene. The textile company Holeproof Ltd established a large factory in Whitehorse Road, Deepdene, in the early 1940s.

Postwar development

In the late 1940s, the Housing Commission of Victoria acquired land at the south-west corner of Balwyn and Belmore roads, which was developed into an estate of 200 detached and semi-detached red brick dwellings. Many of these houses were dedicated as public housing for war widows. A small group of shops at the corner of Hilda Street and Tivey Parade was also built to serve this new neighbourhood.

From 1947, Balwyn (and the new suburb of Balwyn North) were acknowledged not only as epicentres for the Small Homes Service but also for modern-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. Several new churches were also constructed, extended or rebuilt in the postwar period to provide for burgeoning congregations (Built Heritage 2015:12). This included new Catholic churches at Deepdene and Balwyn.

Since the 1990s, a significant influx of new immigrants into the area has seen the extensive replacement of modest interwar homes with new residential development. The suburb of Balwyn today is favoured by many new home-owners, especially Chinese buyers, for access to Balwyn High School – a co-educational government secondary school with nearly 2000 students.

History

The subject site originally comprised lot 7 of section 13 in the Canterbury Park Estate residential subdivision.

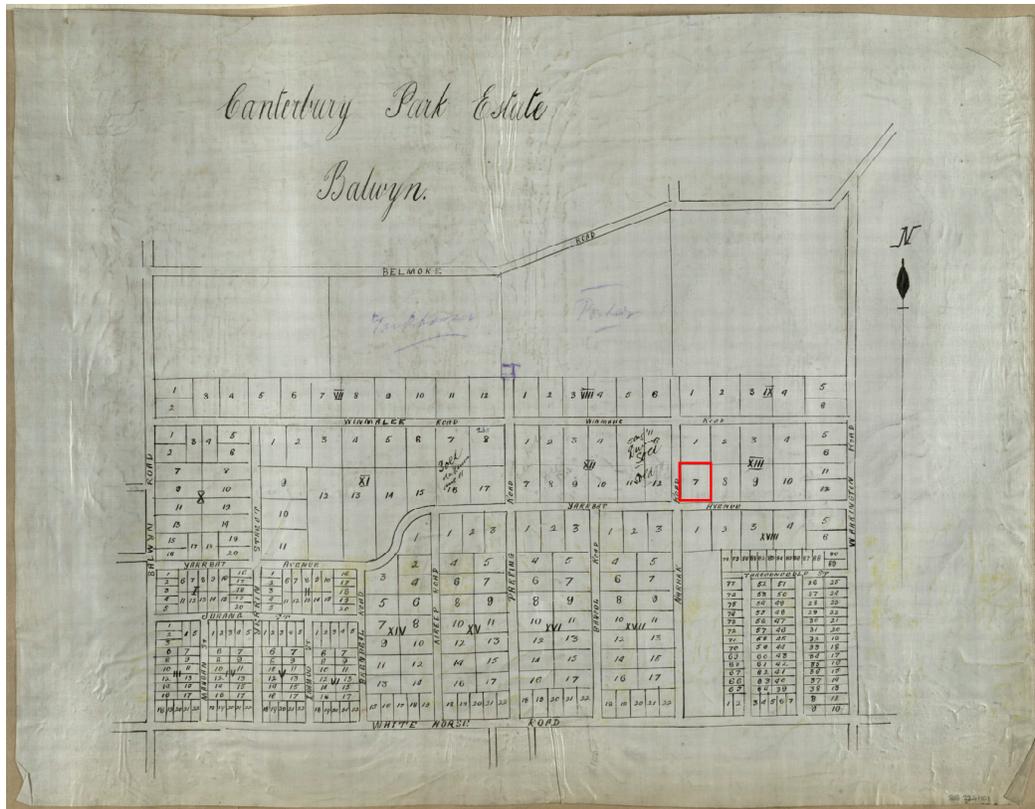


Figure 2. 'Canterbury Park Estate Balwyn' 190- residential subdivision with subject allotment outlined in red box. (Source: State Library of Victoria)

As noted above, following Elgar's survey the surrounding area was used predominately for agricultural purposes until the 1880s, when subdivision of land to form residential estates began taking place, spurred on largely by the Outer Circle Line proposed in 1876 (*Argus* 30 May 1876:6; *Age* 22 June 1888:2). Canterbury Park Estate's first subdivision sale was held in 1883 (*Herald* 4 April 1883:4). Building activity on the estate was slow because of the economic depression of the 1890s. At a 1910 subdivision sale of Canterbury Park Estate, 20 lots were sold with prices ranging from 17s to £2 per foot (*Evening News* 10 October 1910:10). Allotments on the Canterbury Park Estate continued to be advertised through the 1920s (*Age* 3 April 1925:4).

C F Wheatland built the two-storey cream brick residence, 'Bel-Air', at 113 Yarrbat Avenue, Balwyn, for Crawford Leslie Johnston Wilson in 1938 at a cost of £2,600 (BP 10142/1938; S&Mc 1940). The original building plans were not signed by an architect, suggesting that Wheatland was the designer as well. The prominent corner position of the residence, its fashionable modern features and generous gardens, allude to the financial security and status of Wilson. Wilson served in World War Two as a soldier but by 1958 was recorded as a company director (*ER* 1954; *Age* 22 August 1958:16).

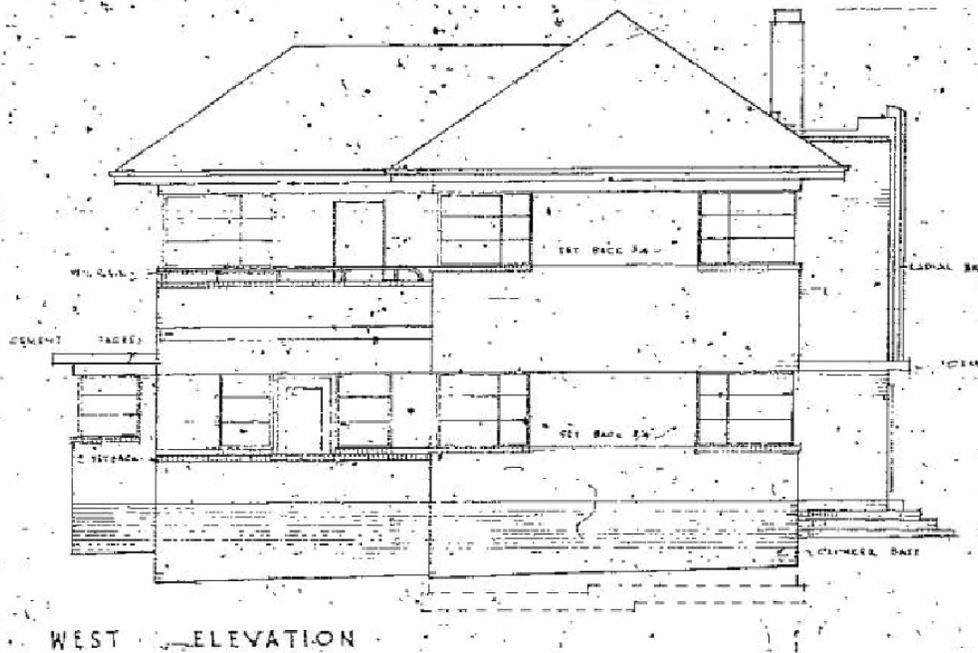


Figure 3. The west elevation, facing Narrak Road from the original house plans. (Source: City of Boroondara Building Permit 10142, dated 11 August 1938)

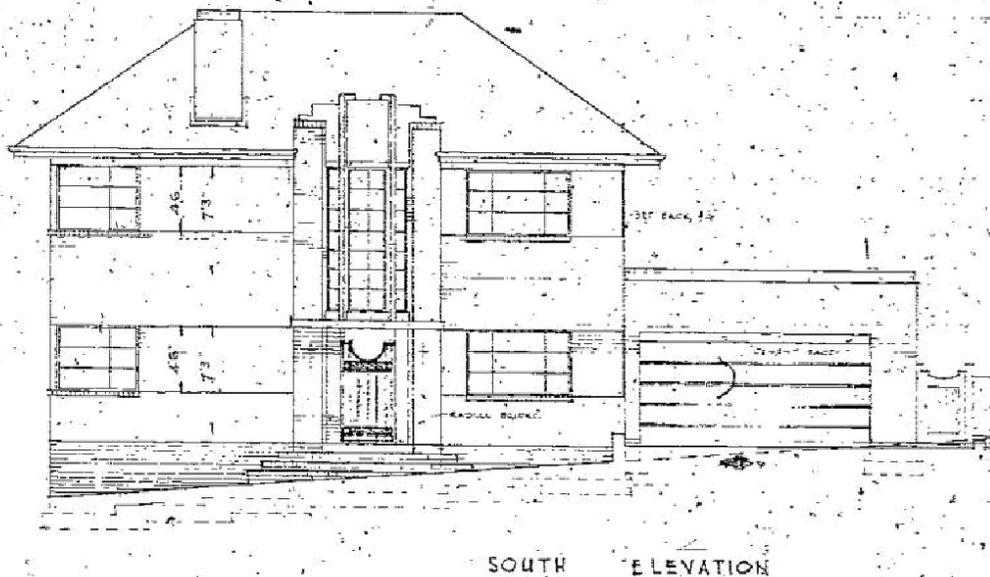


Figure 4. The south elevation, facing Yarrbat Avenue from the original house plans. Note the single-storey form of the garage. (Source: City of Boroondara Building Permit 10142, dated 11 August 1938)

In 1952, an additional chimney was built in matching cream brick to service a new fireplace in the study at the east end (BP 1952). In 1957 the residence was listed for sale, and then occupied by Richard Clinton Gutch, a medical practitioner, the following year (*Age* 5 February 1958:35). In 1965 Gutch added a second storey room above the garage in a matching style and brickwork to the original building (BP 1965). Further alterations and additions were made in 1988 including a rear extension to the south-eastern corner and modifications to the garage parapet (BP 1988). As with

the 1965 addition, the 1988 extension was designed to blend in with the original design. This is consistent with past approaches to heritage conservation which sought to achieve seamlessness between new additions and original fabric.

Description & Integrity

'Bel-Air' at 113 Yarrbat Avenue is a substantial two-storied brick dwelling constructed in 1938. Built in the Moderne style, the house is positioned on an elevated allotment, gently sloping from east to west, on the north-east corner of Yarrbat Avenue and Narrak Road. Constructed in cream brick, the terracotta tiled hipped roof has exaggerated eave overhangs lined with narrow timber lining boards laid lengthwise. The house demonstrates subtle detailing to all four elevations that typifies the Moderne idiom. Of note, in this respect, is the projection of every third brick course to create a shadow line and the use of corner windows. These elements emphasise the horizontality of the elevations.

'Bel-Air's' southern elevation, facing Yarrbat Avenue, provides both pedestrian and vehicle access. It is dominated by a double storied semi-circular entrance porch-cum-stairwell, which divides this elevation in two. The principal section to the front/west contains the main double storey section of the dwelling under a hipped roof, whilst to the east/rear is the garage with (later) rooms above are under a skillion roof concealed by a parapet. Vertical concrete framing elements either side of the curved fluted glass stairwell window continue upward through upper wall and parapet, creating fins. (This motif was copied for the first-floor extension above the garage as well.) The entrance tower and these fins provide a contrast to the restrained horizontality of the rest of the façade. A decorative mild steel gate to the entrance porch introduces a subtle 'jazz' element to the elevation and provides a decorative overlay to the otherwise streamlined treatment. This blending of sleek horizontal lines and jazz ornamentation characterises the Moderne style in Australia (Raworth 1991: 20), particularly the earlier examples. Horizontal steel framed casement windows are set into shallow reveals in the brickwork. The use of horizontal glazing bars further emphasises the width and shallow depth of the windows. The steel-framed curved glass windows positioned on the southwest corner of the house are another popular though costly device in Moderne architecture emphasising horizontal lines as they wrap around the corner. A simple stepped topped chimney, breaking through the roof line, completes this elevation.

The western elevation, facing Narrak Road, is also fully expressed as a principal façade and continues the horizontal expression of the design. An asymmetrical layout consists of a wide protruding bay with large curved glass windows at each level wrapping around to the southern elevation and rectilinear steel framed corner windows to the north. A cantilevered balcony with slim metal rails and curved end is positioned adjacent to this bay. The northern elevation features a steel framed corner window in the upper western corner with a distinctive curved wall below. The original mild steel nameplate spelling out "Bel-Air" in a modern sans serif font with a double-curved hyphen, is fixed centrally to the elevation on the background of two horizontal fixings.

The property is bound on its western and southern sides by a simple low stepped clinker brick wall with a protruding stringer course below a header course. Brick piers either side of a mild steel gate on Yarrbat Avenue mark the residence's main pedestrian entry.

'Bel-Air' is of relatively high integrity with very few changes visible to original or early elements of the place. The house retains its original building form, roof forms and fenestration. Whilst the integrity of the building is slightly diminished by the 1965 extension above the garage this has been designed in a style that matched the original design and is considered as contributory to the overall place. Later additions made to the rear of the property in 1988 are not visible from the street and therefore have little impact on the integrity of the building.

The integrity of the house is greatly enhanced by the high level of intactness of these main elements, which includes details such as the terracotta roof tiles, cream brick walls with raised banding, chimneys, exaggerated eaves overhang with narrow timber slatted soffits, distinctive semi-circular entry porch-cum-stairwell with fluted glass window, rendered vertical and horizontal

elements and mild-steel gate, steel framed windows including curved glass to some corner windows, cantilevered balcony with slim metal rails and mild-steel name plate.

The integrity of the place is enhanced by the low clinker brick fence with mild steel gate which appears original or early along the Yarrbat Avenue frontage but of a later date along Narrak Road.

Comparative Analysis

The Moderne style was to architecture what Art Deco was to the decorative arts - a modern break from past styles, escapist rather than intellectual, inherently decorative rather than stridently functional.

The Moderne style straddled the Depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s, when simple lines held the promise of reduced cost and decoration was an achievable form of home improvement, an economical sentiment that carried through to the years of World War II.

Moderne architecture favoured geometric forms, especially sheer wall planes, curved corners and copings, interpenetration of volumes and surfaces, and a beguilingly brisk articulation of forms, often emphasising horizontal, vertical, or diagonal lines in a pleasing blend of fluidity and starkness.

Frosted and opaque glass, chromium or nickel plating, decorative mild steel, colourful accents of glazed tapestry bricks or tiles, contrasting colours and patterns were all part of the Moderne architectural vocabulary.

In Australia, whilst initially taken up for use on commercial buildings, the Moderne idiom started to be adopted by a number of architects for use on residential commissions in the early 1930s. By the mid-1930s the style was becoming more widely embraced by the wider community gaining popularity amongst middle-class home owners. As demonstrated by 113 Yarrbat Avenue, Balwyn many adopted a two-storey form with a basically rectilinear plan but with the introduction of curved and streamlined elements.

The various styles and idioms of the interwar period, of which Moderne is one, are well represented in the Heritage Overlay in Boroondara. Currently only four Moderne-style places are identified as being individually significant in Balwyn/Balwyn North. The values expressed in these buildings suggest a confident and progressive modernity, representing the unique nature of the area as a new affluent suburb.

Displaying a high level of intactness and integrity, contributory example with the Heritage Overlay display a consistency of built form and a cohesive garden suburb character enhanced by original low front fences and associated outbuildings. Individually significant examples include detached houses, duplexes and flats.

The following places are of the interwar Moderne style and are of individual significance within the City of Boroondara Heritage Overlay and can be compared to 113 Yarrbat Avenue, Balwyn.



HO419 136 Whitehorse Road, Balwyn (1938)
(Source: Lovell Chen Architects & Heritage Consultants)

136 Whitehorse Road, Balwyn is of local historical and architectural significance as a relatively intact example of a Modern Movement house design as it appeared in Camberwell in the late interwar period. Historically, it relates to the Modern Movement's early 1930s 'popular revolution' as Robin Boyd described it. Though it has a hipped, rather than flat, roof, the building features geometric massing and modern devices such as corner windows with the new standard metal window fittings. Alterations and additions are relatively minor and sympathetic in their design.



HO170 6 Bulleen Road, Balwyn North (1951)
(Source: Google Maps)

6 Bulleen Road, Balwyn North is of historical and architectural significance as an architecturally superior residential example in the Moderne style. The house is of local significance.

The design utilises all of the Moderne stylistic trappings, including curves, layered massing, flat roofs, nautical imagery, patterned brickwork and steel-framed window joinery. It is also related to the nearby Riverside and Camberwell City Heights estates.



HO385 177 Glen Iris Road, Glen Iris, (1935)
(Source: Lovell Chen Architects & Heritage Consultants)

The Roy Newton House, 177 Glen Iris Road, Glen Iris, is of historical and architectural significance at a municipal level as a two-storey prototype for what is now known as the 'Postwar Vernacular' housing that dominated Australian suburbs after World War II. It is one of the earliest and key examples within Boroondara which demonstrate the adoption of this new direction in suburban housing style. Architecturally, the Newton house design is skilled in balancing the inherent weight of tile and brick cavity wall construction with a series of robust details and solid scaling. The design shows a sense for the richness of its contemporary materials and exploits this in a vivid manner.



HO370 2 Beatrice Street, Glen Iris (1940)
(Source: Lovell Chen Architects & Heritage Consultants)

2 Beatrice Street, Glen Iris, is of local historical and architectural significance as a good example of a Moderne house of the late interwar period. The asymmetrical massing of forms takes advantage of the prominent corner siting to address both frontages, a context which sets it apart from the more traditional planning and form of the neighbouring properties. While the integrity of the building has been compromised to a degree by the alterations to windows and a door, the overall composition remains unaltered.



HO279 1205 Burke Road, Kew (1939) (Source: Lovell Chen Architects & Heritage Consultants)

1205 Burke Road, Kew, is of local historical and architectural significance. It is one of a number of houses constructed in the Boroondara area and elsewhere in the late 1930s and early 1940s which fused modern movement architectural imagery with more standard building techniques. This is an interesting example which simultaneously demonstrates an intense and particular care and direction in its construction, the machine aesthetic, and the new, unornamented or relatively unornamented modern architecture.



HO189 15 Walbundry Avenue, Balwyn North, Individually significant in Riverside Estate and Environs (Source: Google Maps)

15 Walbundry Avenue, Balwyn North is of local significance. The house is a superb streamlined Moderne stuccoed two-storey house with corner steel-framed windows, port holes, window slits, a curved flat-roofed porch and a vertical feature on its east elevation. The roofline is both parapeted and hipped with tiles to the pitched section. The fence is part of the design, and notable, and the landscaping is empathetic to the period.



HO192 19 Maleela Avenue, Balwyn, Individually significant in Reid Estate (Source: realestate.com.au)

19 Maleela Avenue, Balwyn is of local architectural and historical significance demonstrating key stylistic elements of the Moderne style. It incorporates a blend of layered asymmetrical massing, a distinctive curved corner band of ribbon windows, defined slab edge, and an open upper terrace. Largely sitting under a hipped tiled roof, the flat roofed upper terrace breaks up the hipped roof form into a combination of both hip and parapeted elements.

Discussion

'Bel-Air' at 113 Yarrbat Avenue, Balwyn, compares well to the above examples. It demonstrates key design elements of the Moderne style. This includes a layered geometric massed form, a strong horizontal emphasis, open upper terraces and the use of contemporary materials such as corner and steel framed windows.

It compares particularly closely to 1205 Burke Road, Kew, 2 Beatrice Street, Glen Iris, and 6 Bulleen Road, Balwyn North. Although differentiated from the two latter examples by its use of a hipped roof, it demonstrates a simplicity of detail that is representative of the style emphasising clean lines and functionalism. (The incorporation of a visible hipped roof with contrasting parapeted elements was characteristic of most Moderne houses of the 1930s, as illustrated by the selection above. Only later were roofs hidden wholly behind parapets for greater horizontal effect.) Similar design elements to these examples include the use of a layered massing of planar surfaces, flat roof and parapet to the entry porch, defined slab edges and curves and intact architectural details such as the steel framed window, curved glass and mild steel gates and balustrade. Distinctive details include the hipped roof with exaggerated eave overhang, reminiscent of Frank Lloyd Wright's Prairie style, the sophisticated detailing in the brickwork, projecting every third brick course to emphasize the horizontal, curved glass panes, fluted glass and the dramatic semi-circular entry porch-cum-stairwell introducing a strong contrasting vertical element in the otherwise streamlined horizontal treatment of the façade. This distinctive entry detail is similar to that used at 'Mon Reve' 35 Hampden Road, Armadale (Stonnington HO136).

Taking advantage of its prominent corner position, 'Bel-Air' has been designed with multiple primary elevations in mind. An unusual design element, for the time, is the integration of a double garage into the design. More commonly garages were free standing and positioned towards the rear of the property. Whilst the first floor over the garage is a latter addition (1965), original drawings show the garage in its current position with direct access into the house. This is reflective of the wealth and status of the owners at a time when car ownership would have been a luxury.

'Bel-Air' at 113 Yarrbat Avenue, Balwyn, is a fine representative and externally intact example of a two-storey Moderne dwelling. It is a particularly well designed and detailed example of the style that is carefully sited to take advantage of its prominent corner position. Constructed in cream brick with a roof of terracotta tiles, the house has restrained Moderne stylistic characteristics, especially emphasising horizontal and curved elements within its elevations. Of particular note is the dramatic semicircular entrance-cum-stairwell that introduces a strong contrasting vertical element to the otherwise streamlined horizontal façade. Whilst the integrity of the building is slightly diminished by the 1965 extension above the garage this has been designed in a style that matched the original design intent and is considered as contributory to the overall place. The later additions made to the

rear of the property in 1988 are not visible from the street and therefore have little impact on the integrity of the building.

Assessment Against Criteria

Criteria referred to in *Practice Note 1: Applying the Heritage Overlay*, Department of Planning and Community Development, revised 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 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).

'Bel-Air' at 113 Yarrbat Avenue, Balwyn is a fine representative and largely externally intact example of a two-storey Moderne dwelling. It is a particularly well designed and detailed example of the style that is carefully sited to take advantage of its prominent corner position. Constructed in banded cream brick with a roof of terracotta tiles, the house has restrained Moderne stylistic characteristics, especially emphasising horizontal and curved elements within its elevations. Of particular note is the dramatic semicircular entrance-cum-stairwell that introduces a strong contrasting vertical element to the otherwise streamlined horizontal façade. Whilst the integrity of the building is slightly diminished by the 1965 extension above the garage this has been designed in a style that matched the original design intent and is considered as contributory to the overall place.

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

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).

Statement of Significance

What is Significant?

'Bel-Air', 113 Yarrbat Avenue, Balwyn, built in 1938 by C F Wheatland, is significant.

Significant elements of the place include the garage and the low clinker brick fence with mild steel gate along the Yarrbat Avenue frontage. The later extension above the garage, built in 1965, is of contributory significance.

The later rear extension built in 1988 and the section of fence along the Narrak Road frontage are not significant.

How is it significant?

'Bel-Air', 113 Yarrbat Avenue, Balwyn, is of local architectural (representative) significance to the City of Boroondara.

Why is it significant?

'Bel-Air' at 113 Yarrbat Avenue, Balwyn is a fine representative and externally intact example of a two-storey Moderne dwelling. It is a particularly well designed and detailed example of the style that is carefully sited to take advantage of its prominent corner position. Constructed in cream brick with a roof of terracotta tiles, the house has subtle Moderne stylistic characteristics, especially emphasising horizontal and curved elements within its elevations. Of particular note is the dramatic semicircular entrance-cum-stairwell that introduces a strong contrasting vertical element to the otherwise streamlined horizontal façade. Whilst the integrity of the building is slightly diminished by the 1965 extension above the garage this has been designed in a style that matched the original design intent and is considered as contributory to the overall place. (Criterion D)

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 Colours <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
Victorian Heritage Register <i>Is the place included on the Victorian Heritage Register?</i>	No
Incorporated Plan <i>Does an Incorporated Plan apply to the site?</i>	No
Outbuildings and fences exemptions <i>Are there outbuildings and fences which are not exempt from notice and review?</i>	Yes—garage and front fence along Yarrbat Avenue frontage
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

Identified By

Built Heritage Pty Ltd 2015, 'Balwyn and Balwyn North Heritage Study', prepared for the City of Boroondara.

References

Age, as cited.

Argus, as cited.

'Balwyn Township Estate' 1888, State Library of Victoria (SLV) Batten and Percy Collection, accessed online 18 September 2018.

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City of Camberwell Rate Books (RB), as cited.

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Raworth, Bryce 1991, *Our Inter-War Houses*, National Trust of Australia (Victoria), East Melbourne.

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