

**HISTORY:** The Baker House was designed by the most influential Australian Modern architect, Robin Boyd (1919-1971). It is one of his last houses. Boyd came from the extraordinary family of artists, craftsmen and writers which included his uncle, the writer Martin Boyd and Australia's pre-eminent painter, Arthur Boyd. Between 1953 and 1961 he operated within the firm Grounds, Romberg and Boyd. He is significant as the designer of numerous small, innovative houses, as a prolific writer, critic and television personality and founder of the extraordinarily successful Age Small Homes Service, which continues today as the RAlA Architects' Housing Service. His books, such as *Australia's Home* (1952) continue to be relevant today.

The Michael Baker house was designed in 1964 and built over 1965 and 66. Boyd designed the Dower House for Baker's mother-in-law Elizabeth Stricklen in 1966. It was completed on site in 1968.<sup>1</sup>

These houses were designed at a time when he was designing very few houses and seeking much larger work.<sup>2</sup> They are unlike his other domestic work in their Classical formality and unsophisticated use of local materials. Boyd said that: "Somehow it was like designing a building for Robinson Crusoe. This would be the only man-made thing to disturb the primeval calm of the bush. So, despite the roughly romantic materials, a classic or closed formality seemed called for in the form of the building".<sup>3</sup>

Philip Goad observed that: "Boyd's houses fit their clients like a suit of clothes".<sup>4</sup> Perhaps here lies an explanation for this inimitable and environmentally sensitive design.

**VISUAL DESCRIPTION:** The site in the Longforest Mallee area is "... a wild, lonely hilltop near the middle of a 200 acre (81 ha) property..." There was no reticulated water nor initially, electricity. The entirely symmetrical formal plan forms a low pyramidal-roofed square, 90 feet (27.4m) square with walls of local brown slate. There are 12 cylindrical water storage tanks (a few have other functions), punctuating the perimeter and supporting the edge of the roof. Service rooms and the children's sleeping cubicles, form an inner ring around the courtyard. Larger service areas intervene at corners, with glazing as timber window-walls between these. In the centre is a square courtyard, visible only from the living room and the cubicles. The living room fireplace, has a substantial pylon chimney. Corners to the masonry walls are all rounded.

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<sup>1</sup> *Transition* 38, pp.160, 162, 227 & 231. The architectural drawings are held by Monash University Main Library, Rare Book Section. Richard Overall, Librarian (tel: 905 2689) conversation with RP, 23 January 1995.

<sup>2</sup> Conrad Hamann, Roy Grounds 1905 -, Frederick Romberg 1913 - and Robin Boyd 1919 - 1971, Howard Tanner, Ed., *Architects of Australia*, Macmillan, South Melbourne 1931, p.137.

<sup>3</sup> Robin Boyd, *Living in Australia*, Pergamon Press, Ruchcutters Bay, NSW, 1970, p.117. RNE ref: 95138.

<sup>4</sup> Philip Goad "Pamphlets at the Frontier. Robin Boyd and the Will to Incite an Australian Architectural Culture", Karen Burns and Harriet Edquist, *Robin Boyd. The Architect as Critic*, Transition Publishing, Melbourne 1989, p.14.

The separate Dower House, located a short distance below, was built later, of similar stone, for a separate member of the extended family. It has a less formal plan, an assemblage of similar elements: cylindrical stone tanks, wing walls and shallow hip roof.<sup>5</sup>

**COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS:** There are five 1960s houses in Bacchus Marsh (also refs: 113, 198, 217 and 303) and also three 1970s domestic buildings (refs: 111, 112 and 123). Of these, this is the most significant. Of Boyd's domestic work, nothing is quite comparable. The small Visitor Centre (former Natural History Museum) Tower Hill, Koroit, designed: 1961, completed: 1971, is also symmetrical, geometrical and built of natural stone with broad eaves. "Silver Mist" the F.V. Mannerheim House at 134 Centre Road, Blackburn designed: 1958, completed: 1959 also has walls of natural stone. Other houses such as his own house at Walsh Street, South Yarra, designed: 1957, completed: 1958 (and Roy Grounds own house also at Hill Street Toorak, 1952-53) are also inward looking.

It should be noted that the floor plan and roof form are closely related to Andrea Palladio's Villa Capra, La Rotonda at Vicenza (1565/6-69).

**SIGNIFICANCE:** A large Modern house complex, designed by the eminent architect Robin Boyd in 1964 and built of local slate over 1965-66. A nearby smaller house was designed in 1966 and completed in 1968. When built, the site in the Long Forest Mallee, was remote and wild.

The complex is of State architectural significance as an innovative and extraordinary late domestic design by Robin Boyd which has survived relatively intact and in the same ownership. It is of state historical significance as an extraordinary embodiment of a particular way of life and its adherent social values, which crystallises some perhaps romantic aspirations of the period of the mid to late 1960s.

**INTACTNESS:** Understood to be intact and still in the original ownership, but occupied intermittently.

**CONDITIONS & THREATS:** Not recently inspected.

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<sup>5</sup> Illustrations: Boyd, op.cit., pp.122&123.