
Name	Townhouses	Reference No	
Address	76 Molesworth Street, Kew	Survey Date	12 September 2005
Building Type	Residences	Grading	A
Date	1969	Previous Grading	B; originally A ¹

Extent of Overlay

To title boundaries.



Intactness	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Poor		
Heritage Status	<input type="checkbox"/> HV	<input type="checkbox"/> AHC	<input type="checkbox"/> NT	<input type="checkbox"/> Rec.	BPS Heritage Overlay

History

The six townhouses at 76 Molesworth Street, Kew, were designed by Graeme Gunn and built in 1969 for Merchant Builders. In 1970, the design was awarded the Bronze Medal by the Victorian Chapter of the RAI, one of only four Boroondara residential projects to have ever gained this distinction. A concrete pool was also constructed in 1969.³

(G Butler & Associates, Kew B-graded buildings study (draft), 2001, additional research by Lovell Chen, 2006)

Description & Integrity

The townhouses at 76 Molesworth Street, Kew, comprise six individual residences with loosely Brutalist overtones arranged around a central driveway on an undulating site. Each townhouse is over two levels and features asymmetrical massing of cuboid forms, belying a simple elongated rectangular floor plan, with an attached single-storey garage. Each roof comprises skillion and parapeted flat sections clad with ribbed galvanised steel roof decking. The elevations are of grey concrete block construction with an essentially 'façade-less' composition, with recessed and projecting bays providing opportunities for irregular fenestration. The exceptions are those elevations facing the Yarra River, where window walls and glazed sliding doors are employed to take in the views. Windows generally contain original timber-framed fixed and sliding sashes, the exception being a small number which have been replaced with more recent aluminium-framed sashes. The west elevation of each townhouse is screened by a cantilevered off-form concrete balcony; most of which retain original stained timber balustrades and some with non-original glazed or stainless steel balustrades.

Alterations appear to be limited to relatively superficial changes such as the replacement of some window frames and balustrades, installation of canvas awning blinds and the construction of additional perimeter fences of timber and mini-orb steel construction. It is possible that some of the garages

have non-original doors. The later fences are an addition to the original concrete block fences within the complex.

The landscape appears to be contemporary with the date of construction and comprises native species of trees, shrubs and grasses to both public and private areas. The driveway retains its original bluestone paving.

Historical Context

Residential development of land adjoining the banks of the Yarra River was made possible by the construction of the Yarra Boulevard during the 1930s. In the post-war period, modern architect-designed homes began to be constructed on previously inaccessible or steeply sloping blocks above the Boulevard, in some cases replacing interwar houses, resulting in a mixed interwar and post-war character.

Comparative Analysis

Comparisons can be drawn between the townhouses at 76 Molesworth Street and other late-twentieth century residences in Kew and elsewhere, including the Purves House, 35 Molesworth Street, Kew (A-graded); a Romberg and Boyd designed house (1966, rebuilt 1970) with similarly Brutalist overtones, and Boyd's formally more complex Lawrence house and flat, 13 Studley Avenue of 1966, (q.v, B-graded but recommended for A-grading in this review). The connection between these buildings is logical; the architect Graeme Gunn had worked for Grounds, Romberg and Boyd (GR&B) in the early 1960s. The palette of concrete block and sturdy balustrading and columns in steel tube and timber planking was an extension of several other GR&B houses Gunn had worked on, such as the RR McNicoll house in Caroline Street, South Yarra and the Phillips, Griffing and Blakers houses in Vasey Crescent, Campbell, ACT, all of 1960-3. The Molesworth Street units' general form also gained impetus from Gunn's work for Merchant Builders' project housing, and from Gunn's own Richardson house at 14 Brewster Street Essendon, which won the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (Victorian Chapter) Bronze Medal of 1963. Gunn's work for Merchant Builders brought him into contact with Ken Woolley's Petit and Sevitt housing, and possibly also with Wooley's Penthouses high-density housing project in Sydney of 1965-7. Both his Merchant Builders work and work with Roy Grounds on his Hotham Gardens housing in North Melbourne during 1961-4 encouraged Gunn to look towards cluster housing of the type that would finally emerge with the Winter Park⁴ and Elliston developments at Doncaster and Rosanna, of 1970 and later, and the Molesworth Street townhouses could be considered as part of this progression in Gunn's work.

Formally, the townhouses relate to Gunn's earlier Clarke house additions at Flinders, a multiple-pavilion design of 1965-6, and an Age-Small Home Service competition design of 1965. Gunn also designed townhouses for Merchant Builders at Yuille Street, Brighton, Sorett Avenue Malvern, and 93 Grange Road Toorak, all of 1967; architectural historian Judith Trimble notes that 75 Molesworth Street was directly related to the Grange Road townhouses.⁵

With 76 Molesworth Street, Trimble notes a new severity in Gunn's Brutalist materials usage, in particular the concrete block walling with which Gunn supplanted the tan brick of his earlier designs.⁶ She also argues that in this design Gunn was effectively imaging the plans and forms of nineteenth-century terrace housing.⁷ Gunn modulated the Molesworth Street plan by turning some units round to their sides, and he made early use of the diagonal – later a 1970s architectural signature – in intersecting garden walls. The bluestone paving and concrete walls give the group an urban image – the most conspicuous ever employed in the Studley Park area, and was, according to Trimble, a reaction on Gunn's part to the danger of repetition of Merchant Builders' earlier palette of tans and browns.⁸

With the Harold Holt Pool in Malvern of 1967-9⁹ and the Pathfinder Motel at the Cotham Road-Burke Road corner in Kew, of 1968-9, 76 Molesworth Street was also early in its usage of concrete-block and heavy unplanned timber, a combination that would characterise many architect-designed houses in Melbourne over the following decade.

Assessment Against Criteria

Amended Heritage Victoria Criteria

CRITERION D: The importance of a place or object in exhibiting the principal characteristics or the representative nature of a place or object as a part of a class or type of places or objects.

76 Molesworth Street, Kew, is a fine and externally relatively intact example of a townhouse development of the late 1960s.

CRITERION E: The importance of the place or object in exhibiting good design or aesthetic characteristics and/or in exhibiting a richness, diversity or unusual integration of features.

76 Molesworth Street, Kew, is an accomplished and distinctive residential design in a broadly Brutalist manner, which is characterised by a boldness in materials and skilful modulation of light and shade.

The Molesworth Street project is an important design in the development of cluster housing and townhouse projects by Graeme Gunn and others in the 1960s and 1970s, a period that saw a re-casting of suburban housing models.

It is one of two RAI A Bronze Medal winning designs by the well-known and highly successful Melbourne architect, Graeme Gunn and ranks with Gunn's best works. It one of only four Boroondara residential projects to ever receive the Bronze Medal.¹⁰

76 Molesworth Street, Kew, is a relatively early and successful example of the use of concrete-block and heavy unplanned timber, a combination that would characterise many architect-designed houses in Melbourne over the next decade.

Statement of Significance

76 Molesworth Street, Kew is of municipal historical and architectural significance. A fine and externally intact example of late 1960s townhouses, it is an important design in the progression of cluster housing and townhouse projects by Graeme Gunn and others in the 1960s and 1970s, a period that saw a re-casting of suburban housing models.

76 Molesworth Street, Kew, is an accomplished and distinctive residential design in a broadly Brutalist manner, which is characterised by a boldness in materials and skilful modulation of light and shade. The project is a relatively early and successful example of the use of concrete-block and heavy unplanned timber, a combination that would characterise many architect-designed houses in Melbourne over the next decade.

It is one of two RAI A Bronze Medal winning designs by the well-known and highly successful Melbourne architect, Graeme Gunn and ranks with Gunn's best works. It one of only four residential projects in Boroondara to ever receive the Medal.¹¹

Grading Review

76 Molesworth Street was graded A in the 1988 Kew Urban Conservation Study but was subsequently downgraded to B in a review by Bryce Raworth (the date of this review is unknown). It is recommended that the original grading of A be reinstated.

Recommendations

Recommended for inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Boroondara Planning Scheme.

Identified By

Pru Sanderson Design Pty Ltd, Kew Urban Conservation Study, 1988

References

General: Pru Sanderson Design Pty Ltd, Kew Urban Conservation Study, 1988, G Butler & Associates, Kew B-graded places study (draft), 2001.

Specific:

¹ Pru Sanderson, City of Kew urban Conservation Study, 1988, Designation A, citation 63.

² Pru Sanderson Design Pty Ltd, *Kew Urban Conservation Study*, 1988.

³ Details sourced from the City of Kew Building Index, #1176, dated 18 March 1969.

⁴ Jennifer Taylor illustrates *Winter Park* in *Australian Architecture since 1960*, RAI A, Canberra, 1990, p. 145.

⁵ Trimble, pp. 141-7.

⁶ Professor Judith Trimble notes that this materials usage was a return to Gunn's first highly publicised house, the Richardson house at 14 Brewster Street Essendon, of 1963, which had previously won the Institute of Architects' Bronze Medal and has since been heavily altered. See Judith Trimble, *Graeme Gunn: a Critical Art History*, Ph D Thesis, Monash University, Melbourne, 1986, v. 1, p. 147. Trimble outlines the architectural emphases of New Brutalism (named after *beton brut*, or off the form, 'raw' concrete) on pp. 130-135.

⁷ Trimble, p. 147. Gunn returned to this motif with institutional buildings such as the concrete-framed and fronted Plumbers' and Gasfitters' and Amalgamated Metalworkers' Union Buildings in Victoria Street Melbourne, of 1972 and 1975, and his interest in terrace form perhaps stemmed from Grounds and Romberg's admiration of terrace house form much earlier.

⁸ Trimble. P. 148.

⁹ By Kevin Borland and Daryl Jackson, both RAI A National Gold Medallists. Lovell Chen has prepared a Conservation Management Plan and full heritage report on the Holt Pool under the direction of Gina Levenspiel, 2005.

¹⁰ The others were Kevin Makin's blue-grey house in Morang Road Hawthorn, in 1979, John Wardle's Kitamura House, Kew, of 1996, and Field Consultants' Holyoake house, at Connell Street, also Hawthorn, of 2000. See Philip Goad, John Gollings, et al., *Judging Architecture*, RAI A, Melbourne, 2004, pp. 292, 304,308.

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