
Name	<i>R G Lawrence House and Flats</i>	Reference No	
Address	13 Studley Avenue, Kew	Survey Date	16 August 2005
Building Type	Residence	Grading	A
Date	1966	Previous Grading	B



Extent of Overlay

To title boundaries.

Intactness ☒ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Poor

Heritage Status ☐ HV ☐ AHC ☒ NT ☐ Rec. BPS Heritage Overlay

History

This complex, consisting of a residence and two flats, designed by architect Robin Boyd for a steeply sloping site, was commissioned by R G Lawrence in 1966. Prior to the mid 1950s the west side of Studley Avenue between Studley Park Road and Stawell Street consisted of only three properties nos. 5, 9, and 15. 15 Studley Avenue, a neo-Georgian brick house, was constructed in c.1956 for a member of the Dunlop family, who were the owners of 9 Studley Avenue. The next year, a new house to the immediate south of the subject property - no. 11 - was under construction.¹ In 1963, 13 Studley Avenue, a new brick residence, still extant and to the immediate north of the subject property, was in the process of being built for L Rosenberg. By 1966, no. 13 had become 13a, and by 1969, the subject property, 13 Studley Avenue, described as flats, was listed in the *Sands & McDougall Directory of Victoria* for the first time.²

This complex was classified by the National Trust of Australia in 1991 as regionally significant: 'Built in 1966 and designed by eminent Australian architect and author Robin Boyd of the firm Romberg and Boyd, the Lawrence House and Flats are architecturally significant, at a regional level, as a mature example of his structural pier and infill manner, one of several design themes which appear in Boyd's distinguished repertoire of Melbourne houses of the 1950s and 1960s. The complex of the house and two flats is also remarkable for the graphic expression of its constituents parts, a composition of four free-standing rectangular boxes (one a carport) elegantly capped by floating flat roofs with dark recessed fascias and all connected by a covered walkway that forms a spine down the block'.

An enquiry in the building file (40/408/23086 1) notes that no permits were granted in the ten years preceding May 2003.

(G Butler & Associates, Kew B-graded buildings study (draft), 2001, additional research by Lovell Chen, 2005)

Description & Integrity

The property referred to as the *RG Lawrence House and Flats*, at 13 Studley Avenue, Kew, comprises a group of three separate residences, a house and two flats, designed in late twentieth century modern style. The complex is a composition of four separate modules (one being a carport) constructed in a pier and infill system of face brown brick which step across the site and are linked by a covered way which connects the buildings like a spine. Viewed from the street, the carport is sited to the south and the flats to the north with the centrally located link leading to the house which is at the rear and spans the width of the site.

The double carport with brick wing walls and flat galvanised steel deck roofing was originally open to the street (east) and west, however a garage door has been fitted. The three level flat building has a cuboid form and comprises an undercroft garage with two flats above. A flat ribbed galvanised steel deck roof appears as a floating plane by virtue of recessed fascias and box gutters. The elevations are divided into irregular bays by full height vertical bands of fenestration containing timber-framed fixed and awning sash windows. The façade contains a similarly proportioned opening which provides access to a concealed flight of stairs which access the first floor level. The house continues the general construction and detail of the flat building and comprises a two-storey structure of two cuboid forms which are split by the covered link.

The driveways are concrete paved, whereas the paths are brick paved. The front garden is terraced with basalt retaining walls and contains the original timber letterboxes.

Historical Context

Studley Avenue contains a broad array of housing types of various periods and distinction, ranging from significant Edwardian Queen Anne villas to postwar architect-designed houses, which reflect the subdivision of many of the Studley Park villa estates in the 1950s.

Comparative Analysis

The *R G Lawrence House and Flats* have been noted as the last distinguished work in Robin Boyd's exploration of the pier and infill method of construction.³ Earlier Boyd-designed domestic examples of this type are generally located outside the municipality in Toorak (*Brett House*, 1955), South Yarra (*McNicoll House*, 1959-61), and Ivanhoe (*E H L Burgess House*, 1962). The *Bewley House* which was designed for a site in Kew was not constructed. Of these examples, the *Lawrence* property is unusual for its discrete combination of house and flats within the one complex.

A series of Boyd's thematic concerns converge in this building, and the fusion is well resolved and pleasantly textured.

The design reflects Boyd's increasing exploration of a monumental form in architecture, seen here in the suggestions of a townscape in its stepped and battered brick piers, and in the reinstatement of the solid wall in preference to his earlier window wall designs.

The *Lawrence House and Flats* also has parallels with another of Boyd's thematic groups, the Alan Wynn-Featherston Currey designs of 1952-67, for Hawthorn and Ivanhoe respectively, where Boyd planned the houses as boxes enclosing open ground and foliage below, with the rooms as platforms positioned at various levels inside or as blisters opening from the boxes. The *Lawrence House and Flats* is in part suggestive of this theme, with tongues of garden running between the masses and being predicated on being an assemblage of boxes.

Boyd's increasing gravitation toward a multiple box stemmed in part from his interest in Louis Kahn's concept of served and servant spaces, and in the vertically proportioned concrete architecture of Paul Rudolph. Elements of Kahn's repeated box designs are suggested here, as is Rudolph's concrete pier and beam designs, as with the Yale Art and Architecture building of 1961-4. Considered in the context of Boyd's work, the *Lawrence* design has counterparts in the second Richardson house of 1960-1 at Barwon Heads (multiple box-pavilions) and the President Motor Inn and Carnich Tower designs of 1968-70.⁴ If anything the spatial changes and shifts in this building are made with greater ease and sophistication than was common in Boyd's planimetry, which generally tended to be diagrammatic.

The themes of monumentality and visual complexity also have sources in Boyd's growing interest in the architecture and ideas of Charles Moore and Robert Venturi in the United States.⁵ The *Lawrence*

house effectively redirects Boyd's earlier aim of achieving significant form through a powerful shape, as in the Haughton James house at 82 Molesworth Street, a kilometre away, (q.v., B-graded and recommended to be upgraded to A as part of this review).

Assessment Against Criteria

Amended Heritage Victoria Criteria

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.

13 Studley Avenue is a prominent and externally highly intact example within a group of innovative and exploratory houses designed by architects in the Studley Park area between 1951 and c. 1968. Both within this group and in the wider context, the design reflects the change of approach evident in the work of Boyd and others during the later 1960s, where their structurally expressive and skeletal designs of the 1950s were supplanted by more consciously solid and almost town-like assemblages of solid massing.

13 Studley Avenue is one of Robin Boyd's most accomplished designs, and one where an unusual concentration of his concerns converges. He reconciles these with grace and eloquence here, in a plan which flows unusually well for Boyd's box form designs and which projects urbanity and a vital complexity in its exterior.

Statement of Significance

The *R G Lawrence House and Flats* at 13 Studley Avenue, Kew, is of local historical and municipal architectural significance. The complex is a prominent and externally highly intact example within a group of innovative and exploratory houses designed by architects in the Studley Park area between 1951 and c.1968. Both within this group and in the wider context, the design reflects the change of approach evident in the work of Boyd and others during the later 1960s, where their structurally expressive and skeletal designs of the 1950s were supplanted by more consciously solid and almost town-like assemblages of solid massing. 13 Studley Avenue, Kew, is one of Robin Boyd's most accomplished designs, and one where an unusual concentration of his concerns converges. He reconciles these with grace and eloquence here, in a plan which flows unusually well for Boyd's box form designs and which projects urbanity and a vital complexity in its exterior.

Grading Review

Upgrade to A.

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 *Sands & McDougall Directory of Victoria*, various years between 1938 and 1960.

² *Sands & McDougall Directory of Victoria*, 1969-1974.

³ Classification Report, National Trust of Australia (Victoria).

⁴ These concerns of Boyd's are discussed in various articles by Conrad Hamann, including 'Unpublished work by Robin Boyd: a basis for reappraisal', in D Saunders, ed., *Architectural Papers* 1976, Art Association of Australia, Sydney, 1977, 'Against the dying of the light', *Transition*, tenth anniversary issue, 1989.

⁵ See esp. Hamann, 'Against the dying of the light', above, for a discussion of Boyd's reaction to Kahn, Rudolph, Venturi and Moore.