

Camberwell Conservation Study 1991
BUILDING CITATION

**House,
666 Riversdale Road, Camberwell**



Historic Buildings Register R
Australian Heritage Commission:
National Trust of Australia (Class/Rec.):
Classified

NTA File Number: 5801
Study Grading: A
Construction Date: 1947-
First Owner: Boyd, Robin G P
Architect: Boyd, Robin G P
Builder: Murphy & Green

History

A building permit was granted to R.S. Whitehead on 4 September 1945 for Lot 5, an irregularly shaped block¹ when the address was 158 Riversdale Road². Whitehead, however, had difficulty in sinking foundations in the front of the property because of the steep, unstable land and so canceled the permit on 12 December 1946 and sold the land cheaply to architect Robin Boyd, who bought it sight unseen³. The real estate agent had said that no one could see how it could be built on⁴. On 13 December 1946 a building permit was issued to Boyd⁵.

Robyn Gerard Penleigh Boyd, commissioned the building firm, Murphy & Green, to erect a residence to his own design, in 1946-47⁶. The original plan was dated 11 March 1946⁷.

The house is considered to be of great architectural

importance as virtually the prototype of the post-war Modern Victorian house⁸. The property abutted the Wandin Creek and the house was built on a long, narrow shelf along the top of a minor cliff to the creek bed⁷. Estimated to cost £1450, the brick veneer and timber dwelling planned as four rooms with an area of 1124.6 square feet¹⁰.

As Boyd's family grew (he had three children) the residence was extended, in 1951, to the south adding a bedroom and to the north with a new living-sitting room and guest room¹¹. These three rooms added an area of 742 square feet, costing £1,000¹². John Murphy was again the builder. The 1975 two-storey brick additions comprised 1024 square feet and cost \$15,000¹³.

Boyd lived at this address until 1959 when it was sold to David Ferrier, share clerk, and Heather Stickland⁴. In 1962 R. Davis was the occupier of this property and in January 1973 Arumugam Eajendran, a civil engineer, and his wife, Maria, became the owners².

Glen Iris builder and artist, John Murphy, was born in Melbourne in 1917 and became a builder immediately after the Second World War forming a partnership with Frank Green for several years³. Murphy was introduced to Robyn Boyd through Arthur Boyd, a close friend of Murphy's⁴. Other houses built by Murphy include the other Boyd house at Walsh Street, South Yarra and Browne's residence, Toorak Road, Malvern⁵.

Robyn Boyd was born in 1919, the son of Penleigh Boyd, a well-known painter and member of one of Australia's most distinguished families of artists⁶. Educated at Malvern Church of England Grammar School he served his articles with prominent architects, A. & K. Henderson and Partners while studying architecture at Melbourne Technical College and the Atelier at Melbourne University⁷. On return from service in World War II he passed the R.V.I.A. examinations and was admitted as an Associate in 1946.

Boyd formed a partnership with Kevin Pethebridge and Frank Bell during 1945-47 and became a tutor at Melbourne University⁸. In 1946 he became the inaugural director of *The Age* Small Homes Service which was run by the R.V.I.A. in conjunction with *The Age*⁹.

1 NTA F.N. 5801
2 ibid.
3 ibid.
4 ibid.
5 ibid.
6 ibid.; BA 1946, 19152
7 NTA F.N. 5801

8 ibid.
9 ibid.
10 BA 1946, 19152
11 ibid.; NTA F.N. 5801
12 ibid.; BA 1951, 7010
13 ibid.
1 BA 1958, 22858; NTA F.N. 5801
2 ibid.; D1962
3 NTA F.N. 5801
4 ibid.
5 ibid.
6 NTA F.N. 5801
7 ibid.; WWA 1968, p.113

8 NTA F.N. 5801
9 *The Age*, 12.11.1969, p.6

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Leaving the Small Homes Service in 1953, Boyd joined architects Roy Grounds and Frederick Romberg in a partnership that continued until 1962, when Roy Grounds left the partnership¹⁰.

During this time he designed many innovative buildings throughout Australia, including the Richardson house, Blackfriars Close, Toorak, the Foy house, Beaumaris and the Wilson house, Kew. Melbourne then was virtually the capital of Modern architecture in Australia, and Grounds, Romberg and Boyd were the undoubted focus¹¹.

In 1965-67 Boyd was the Visiting Professor of Architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, U.S.A.¹². He was the designer of the Australian displays at World Expo Montreal (1967) and Osaka (1970). In 1969 Boyd was awarded the Gold Medal of the Australian Institute of Architecture and the following year became president of the RAIA¹³.

Boyd's better known works include McCaughey Court at Melbourne University (a seven-storey flat block) and the Fletcher house at Brighton, both of which he won citations for¹⁴. Publications by Boyd include *Victorian Modern* 1947, *Australia's Home* 1952, *The Australian Ugliness* 1960, *The Walls Around Us* 1961, *Kenzo Tange* 1962, and *The Puzzle of Architecture* 1965¹⁵.

Robyn Boyd married Dorothea Madder in 1941 and had three children one of which, Penleigh, is an architect. He died in 1971¹⁶.

Description

The plans for the new painted brick-veneer house were as simple as the house itself, ruled lines on blueprint. Hugging the only available ground outside of the 30' easement and the creek channel, the plan was necessarily long and thin with split-level dining/living flanked by a servery kitchen and compact bathroom, as the centre of the first section to be built. Sensibly for sun orientation, bedroom was at the south end and, on the north, was a verandah. As with the McIntyre Orion Street house, the floor was to be partly brick paving over concrete and most of the exposed ceiling straw-like Solomit, both contributing to the show of natural materials in the dedicatedly no-nonsense architecture. Adding to these natural materials was

the display of polished copper which hovered as a hood over the fireplace.

The next addition (1951) placed another bedroom on the south end and at the north, replacing the verandah, was a study/living area and master bedroom connected via a glazed entrance hall. This presumably separated adults from children.

In 1958 Boyd applied to build a simple carport near the front boundary.

The periodical *Smudges* described the house two years after completion as their House of the Year:

Areas of the small house flow into each other. Differing activities are separated but only rarely by a solid partition. The resultant space is dynamic, its architectonic qualities limited by the designer's will. So it is with the house. Areas merge, sometimes easily, sometimes dramatically. The effect is heightened by variation of colour, texture (internal lining is, in part, Oregon, vertically)...

The description also notes cork tiles over the concrete slab in the living room (formerly confined to kitchens)², exposed face brick in some sections and the unusual sloping east window wall which extended out nearly to the gutter line. Another article compared the plan as roughly the same as a railway train and showed pictures of the suspended plywood ceiling beneath the gently gabled Malthoid and white-gravel clad roofline³.

In 1975 a two storey wing was added to the south end but has little effect on the original house.

The landscape to the east (on the easement) is mature and supportive of if not related to the house concept.

Comparative Examples

The following Camberwell sites may be compared with this site.

- 106, WHITEHORSE ROAD, 1940-1
- 1, MONTANA STREET, 1940
- 1297, TOORAK ROAD, 1940
- 91, MAUD STREET, 1940c
- 133, MAUD STREET, 1940c
- 56, RIVERSIDE AVENUE, 1940c
- 15, WALBUNDRY AVENUE, 1940c
- 417, WHITEHORSE ROAD, 1940c
- 113, YARRBAT AVENUE, 1940c
- 123, MONT ALBERT ROAD, 1941-2
- 2, BEATRICE STREET, 1941
- 6, BULLEEN ROAD, 1941

10 *ibid.*; WWA 1968, p.113
 11 NTA F.N. 5801
 12 *ibid.*
 13 *The Age*, 12.11.1969; *The Age*, 19.10.1970, p.2
 14 *The Age*, 12.11.1969
 15 WWA 1968, p.113
 16 *ibid.*, *Herald* 16.10.1971, p.1

1 *Smudges* vol. 8, no. 53, 1949
 2 also in service areas with Semtext tiles in other rooms- no brick
 3 *Architecture & The Arts* 8.1954 p.28f

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4, MAYSIA STREET, 1941
46, THE BOULEVARD, 1941
1, KELBA STREET, 1941c
666, RIVERSDALE ROAD, 1946-7
119, DONCASTER ROAD, 1948
1, KALONGA ROAD, 1948c
166, WHITEHORSE ROAD, 1951-2
2, TAURUS STREET, 1951c
32, URSIA STREET, 1951c
6, CARRICAL STREET, 1952
43, KIREEP ROAD, 1952
1, MADDEN STREET, 1952
2, CARRICAL STREET, 1954
16, CARRICAL STREET, 1954
129, WINMALEE ROAD, 1954

External Integrity

Generally original, given the above stages.

Streetscape Contribution

Unrelated to the streetscape.

Significance

Architecturally, 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, reveling in the minimalism required by the war's materials conservation programme and the challenges posed by the near impossible site: of State and national importance.

Historically, the first house designed for, and by, Australia's best known architectural critic, writer and post-war designer, Robin Boyd: of State and national importance.
