

## 762 Orrong Road, Toorak



### History and Description

This 10-roomed 2-storey Spanish Mission style mansion was designed in 1924 by the architects Irwin and Stevenson for Mrs. Ethel M. Larking.<sup>320</sup> It was listed previously as 234 Orrong Road<sup>321</sup> The designing architects were well-known in the inter-war period for their designs of hospitals, other public buildings and residences throughout Melbourne and its suburbs.<sup>322</sup> The style they adopted for the Orrong Road building, Spanish Mission, was derived from the American south-west coast and, to a lesser extent, from Spain and the Mediterranean. However, most suburban examples were less grand than this house and were often no more than a standard double fronted bungalow with a rendered surface and an arched loggia instead of a verandah or porch.<sup>323</sup>

The two storey residence is located on raised foundations with northern aspect addressing Orrong Road and the facade shaded by a large oak. Terracotta Cordova roof tiles contrast with the white rendered walls and the blue painted detailing. A sloping driveway and steps lead to the cubic form of the entrance porch and balcony containing two round arches with typical Spanish Mission jamb frieze and honeycomb tracery in the highlight. The arches are repeated in the side verandah to the rear of the house. The windows are simple multi-paned casements complete with folding shutters. The facade closest to the street has double doors opening out onto a small balcony which is evocative of Mediterranean architecture. The interior was described

320. 15 December 1924, p.16.

321. Prahran Valuers records, Toorak Ward Book 14T.

322. Miles Lewis, *Australian Architectural Index*.

323. Bryce Raworth, *Our Inter-War Houses*, pp. 16-17.

recently as mainly English Club style, however details such as the black and white tiled floor and jarrah floorboards in the dance room suggest typical Spanish features.<sup>324</sup> Overall, this residence and its garden setting create a superb example of the colourful and romantic fascination with Spanish Mission architecture which reflects the influence of the Arts and Crafts movement in domestic architecture and also the desire to imitate the glamour of American stylistic trends in the 1920s.

Mrs. Larking died in December 1952, when the property was transferred to Shirley Isabel Blackwell, who also owned a 14-roomed brick house in Orrong Road.<sup>325</sup>

An article published in *The Age* of 20 November 1992 at the time of an auction of the property told a more romantic story, which it has been impossible to verify despite searches of rate books, directories and other records. This writer claimed that the house originally belonged to a Judge one of whose daughters married the artist, Sir Russell Drysdale. According to this account, the Judge and his family lived in the house until the 1950s. Elizabeth Stephen was Drysdale's first wife<sup>326</sup> but no mention has been found of the Stephen family owners of the property in the records checked. The article also claimed that the 1924 house designed by Irwin and Stevenson was one of the earliest in Melbourne using the Spanish Mission style.

The garden is regarded as of importance for a specimen of *Quercus robur*, which is thought to survive from an earlier 19th century garden.<sup>327</sup>

## Significance

This 2-storey 1924 Spanish Mission residence, designed by the architects Irwin and Stevenson, has state architectural significance as a luxurious example of the use of the work of this firm and of the residential application of this style which became popular in Melbourne during the inter-war period. The house has design significance illustrating the variety of building styles found within the City of Prahran. The oak tree in front of the house possibly dates from an earlier period and contributes to the setting.

## Sources

*Age*, 20 November, 1992.

*Australian Home Beautiful (AHB)*, 15 December 1924, p.16.

City of Prahran Rate Books, Toorak Ward.

City of Prahran, *Significant Tree and Garden Study*.

City of Prahran Valuers records, Toorak Ward.

Lewis, Miles, *Australian Architectural Index*, Univ. of Melb., 1990.

MMBW House Cover No. 60730.

Raworth, Bryce, *Our Inter-War Houses*, 1991.

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324. *The Age*, 20 Nov 92.

325. Prahran Rate Book 1951-52 Toorak Ward Nos. 2338, 2341.

326. Dulton, *Russell Drysdale*, p. 18.

327. City of Prahran, *Significant Tree and Garden Study*.

## Analysis & Recommendations

It is recommended that this property be retained at A1 level.