

SUBMISSION TO THE CITY OF STONNINGTON IN RELATION TO THE INCLUSION IN  
AMENDMENT L40 TO THE STONNINGTON PLANNING SCHEME OF

**10 BLACKFRIARS CLOSE  
TOORAK**

Prepared for

**CLAYTON UTZ**

on behalf of

**JOSHUA AND KAREN LIBERMAN**

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## 1.0 Introduction

This submission has been prepared on behalf of Joshua and Karen Liberman, the owners of the property at 10 Blackfriars Close, Toorak. In December 1997, the property was included in Amendment L40, which sought to include buildings identified as being of individual significance in the Stonnington Planning Scheme. The owners of the property having objected to the listing of 10 Blackfriars Close, the Minister was requested to appoint a panel to consider the owners' submission. Subsequent discussions have been held between the owners' solicitors, Clayton Utz, and Council officers and have addressed the possibility of introducing a site-specific control over the property.

This submission has been prepared in support of a proposed site-specific control which would provide for an appropriate level of protection over the significant elements of the building and site.

## 2.0 History and Assessment of Significance

The property at 10 Blackfriars Close has been the subject of a conservation report prepared by Council's consultant, Bryce Raworth, who has provided an account of the history of the subdivision of Blackfriars Close and the development of the subject site.

In 1907 a large residence was designed by prominent Melbourne architect, Walter Butler, was constructed near the corner of Robertson Road and Orrong Road. At this time, apart from Warrawee, and the earlier residence, Quissisana, which faced onto Grange Road, the block bounded by Struan Street to the north, Orrong Road to the east, Robertson Street to the south and Grange Road to the west, still lay vacant. A steep gully and creek (noted as a 'drain' on an early twentieth century MMBW plan of the area, see Fig. 1) ran generally east-west across the block. The creek and gully formed part of Warrawee's extensive grounds, in which one of Australia's earliest native gardens was reputedly developed.<sup>1</sup>

In the mid-1950s, under a private street scheme, the western part of the Warrawee garden was subdivided and the cul-de-sac Blackfriars Close created.<sup>2</sup> A number of houses were constructed at the northern end of Blackfriars Close in the years that followed. These were generally set into the slope and surrounded by native gardens.<sup>3</sup>

No. 10 Blackfriars Close was designed for Mr and Mrs G A Richardson in 1953-4 by architect Robin Boyd, of the practice Grounds, Romberg and Boyd.<sup>4</sup> The house was constructed by contractor A Clissold Ltd.<sup>5</sup>

Unusual in terms of both its shape and topography, the Richardson house site was divided by a dry creek bed which was also a designated Board of Works drainage and sewerage easement. The house, therefore, had to be designed to allow access to the easement. The site itself also sloped quite steeply away from Blackfriars Close. As Raworth has noted, rather than viewing these site constraints as limitations on his design, Boyd allowed them to provide the catalyst for an extraordinary design solution.<sup>6</sup>

With engineering input from Bill Irwin, Boyd designed the house so as to span the creek bed. The house was suspended from steel lattice arches set at a slight angle to one another, and giving the house a wedge-shaped plan form.<sup>7</sup> A working drawing held by the City of Stonnington and dated January 1954 (see Figs 2-4)<sup>8</sup> shows a portal framed structure with glass infill sections and a flat aluminium-clad roof suspended from the steel arches. The eastern section of the house (the apex of the wedge) was designed as a large balcony area, enclosed by fly wire screens, while the main body of the residence

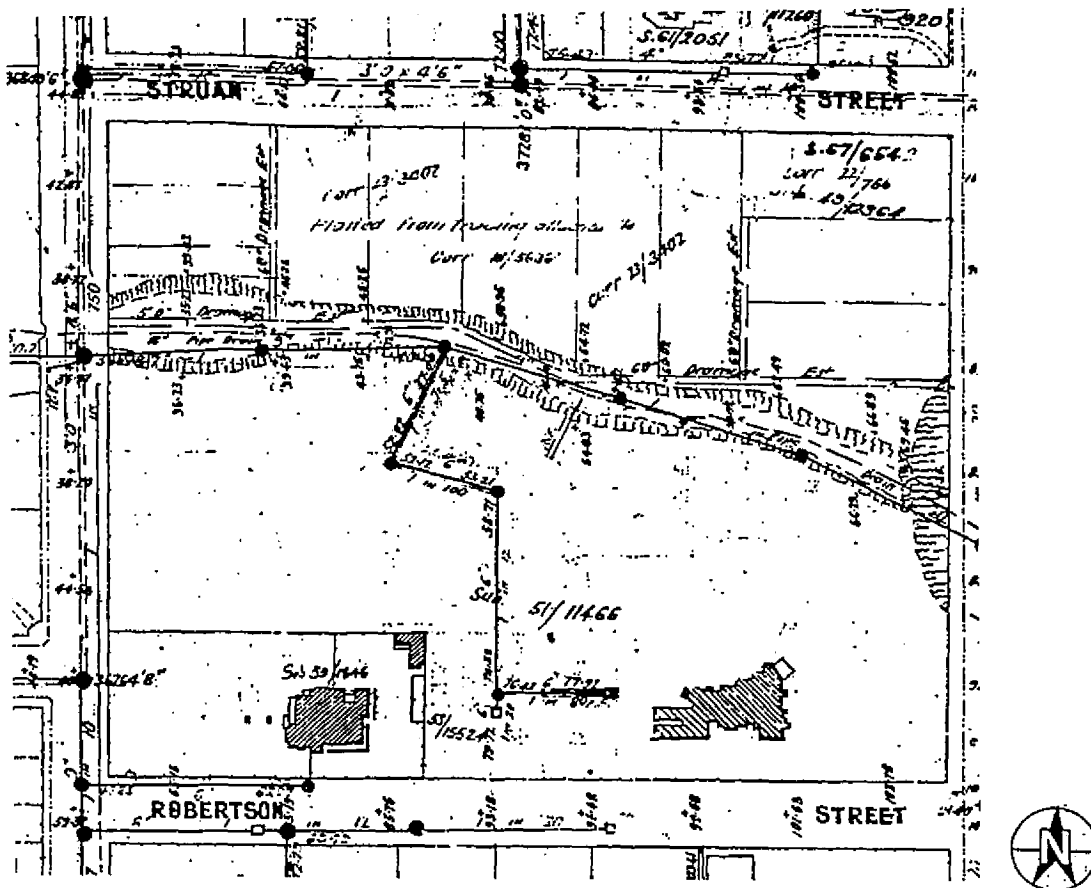


Figure 1 Undated MMBW plan, showing the location of Warrawee and Quissisana.

comprised two bedrooms, with a dressing room between, kitchen, bathroom, bar and dining room.<sup>9</sup> The drawing shows the front door as accessed from a carparking area on the south side (closest to Blackfriars Close) via a small timber and steel bridge. Parking spaces were eventually located beneath the house itself, which effectively formed a carport structure.<sup>10</sup> A second door was located on the west side of the house and was accessed via a walkway leading from Blackfriars Close. The walkway continued some distance westward, and led to a small detached laundry building and a clothes hoist. The working drawing indicates that significant landscaping works were undertaken as part of the project, with the natural fall of the land being cut away and levelled or otherwise altered in a number of areas.

In 1982, major alterations and extensions were made to the house. These alterations were designed by Melbourne architect, Peter Crone. Changes to the original Boyd house included the construction of a new entry ramp on the south side of the house, and a new steel-framed balcony with external access stair on the north side. Extensive modifications were made to the interior, including the replacement of the floors and ceilings, although a general feeling of openness was maintained in the internal planning. Crone also designed a large three-storey (basement plus two-storeys) addition which was constructed on the west side of the original building, (replacing the original laundry, walkway and clothes hoist) and was connected to the original house via a single-storey hallway. The addition incorporates a swimming pool, sauna and bathroom at ground floor level and bedroom, bathroom and dressingroom accommodation on the upper levels.

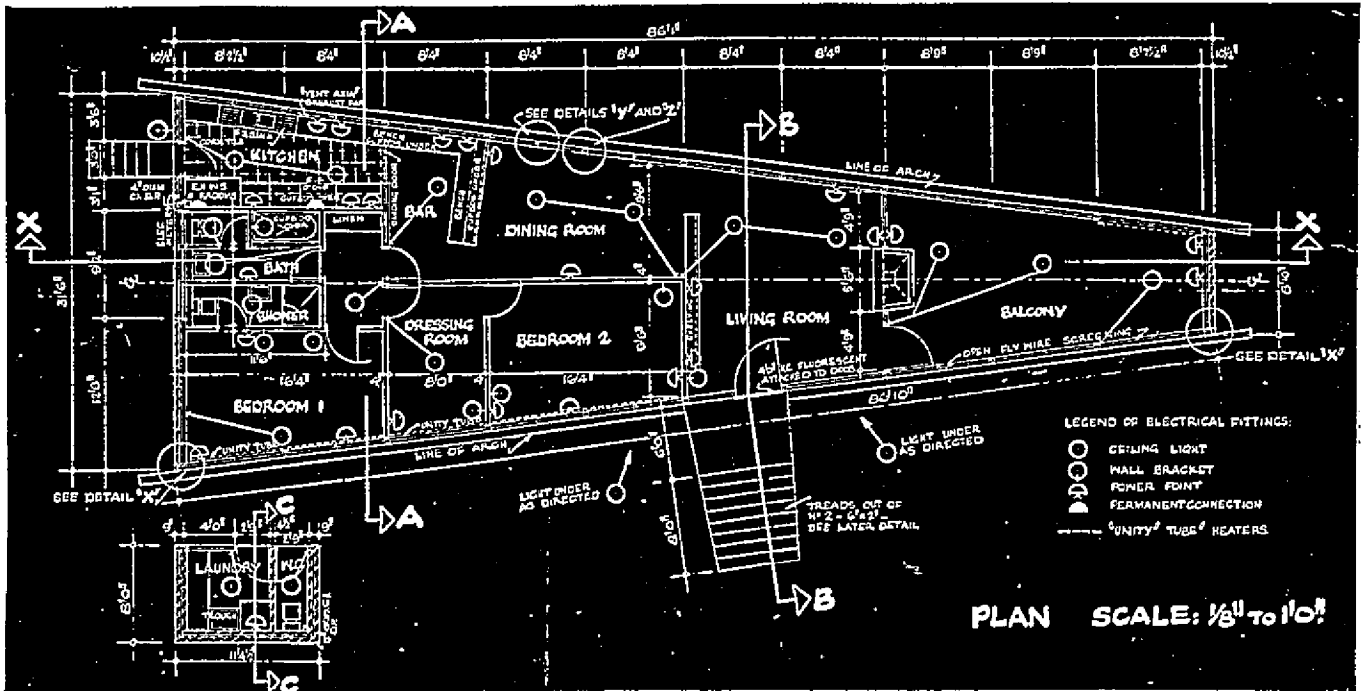


Figure 2 Plan, Richardson House, 1954

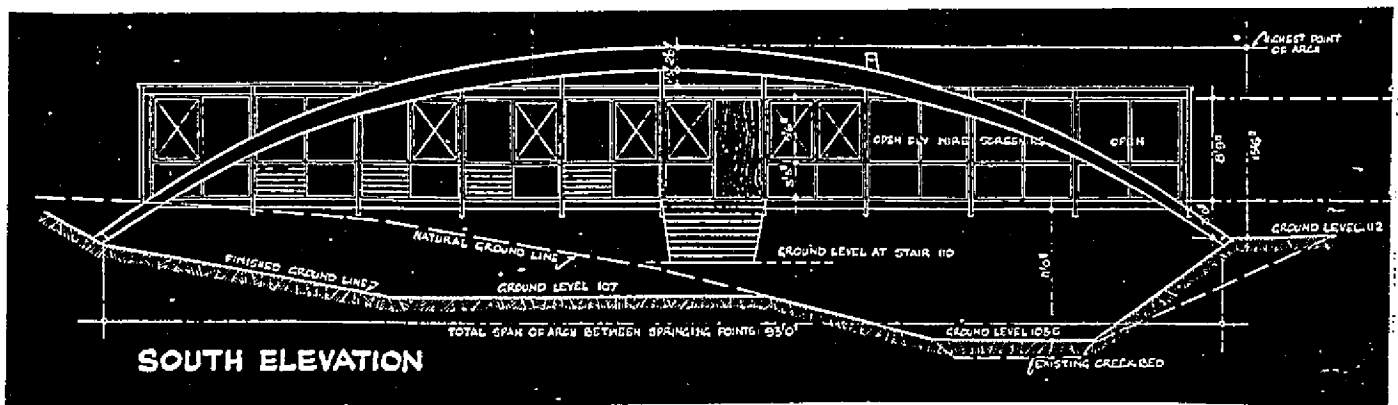


Figure 3 South elevation, Richardson House, 1954.

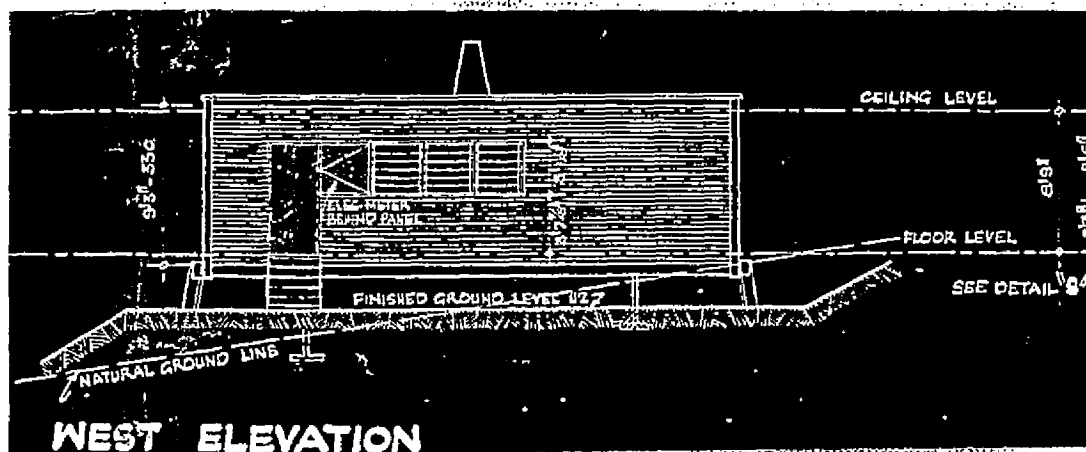
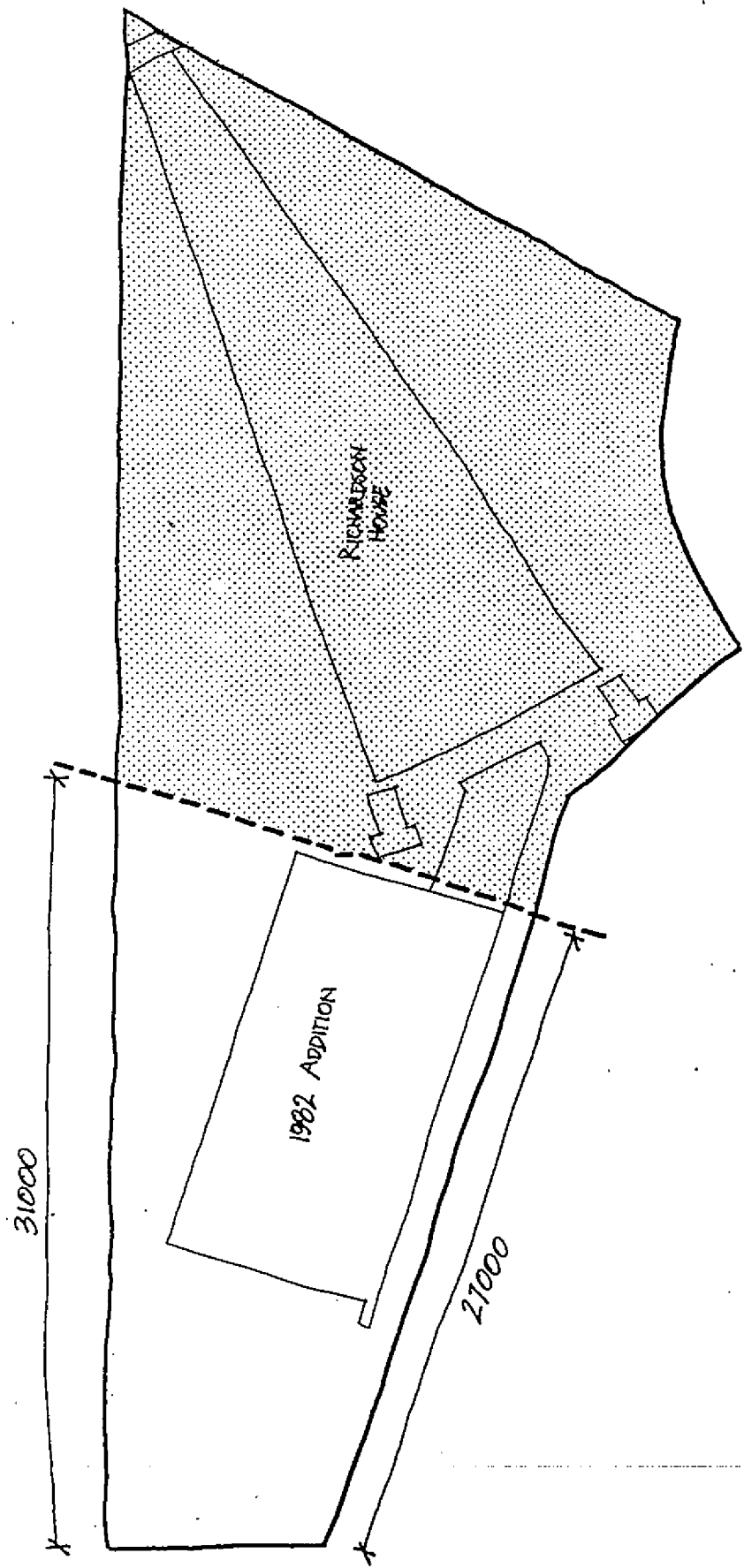


Figure 4 West elevation, Richardson House, 1954

#### Assessment of Significance

The 1954 Richardson House is architecturally significant as a relatively intact and unusual example of Robin Boyd's domestic works and, in the wider context, as an innovative and unusual example of 1950s residential design in Melbourne and Victoria.

The Richardson house demonstrates a number of Boyd's interests during this period of the early to mid-1950s. In terms of both its form and design, the house reflects Boyd's concern, as expressed in his 1952 *Australia's Home*, that architects and clients embrace their landscape, environment and climate.<sup>11</sup> Just as the overall form of the house addressed the landform on which it was built, its large areas of glazing and wire netted balcony looked very much to the outdoors. Like his Foy House, in Beaumaris, also designed in 1953, and the Ctesiphon House and Shop for W Wood in Ashburton (1952-4), the Richardson House also reflected Boyd's interest in structural experimentation, an interest which he shared with a group of Melbourne's younger architects in the early to mid 1950s. Other well known examples of this interest in the relationship between structure and form were the Olympic Swimming Pool (Borland, McIntyre and John & Phyllis Murphy, 1965-56), the Sidney Myer Music Bowl (Yuncken, Freeman Brothers, Griffiths & Simpson, 1959), and the Academy of Science Headquarters in Canberra (Grounds, Romberg & Boyd, 1958). Residential works of the early to mid-1950s which were variations on this theme of structural expressionism included Roy Grounds' *Leyser House* in Kew (1951), Boyd's *Pelican* at Mount Eliza (demolished), Kevin Borland's *Rice House* at Eltham (1952) and Dione and Peter McIntyre's *McIntyre House* at Kew (c.1954).



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 PROPOSED EXTENT OF  
 HERITAGE OVERLAY CONTROL

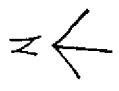


Figure 5 Proposed extent of Heritage Overlay Control

## Level of Significance

The significance of the Richardson House has been compromised to some extent by the 1980s alterations and additions. Though these alterations have been executed in a manner which is broadly sympathetic to Boyd's original conception, it is not considered now that the building is of such a level of significance and intactness as to warrant addition to the Victorian Heritage Register. It is, however, considered to be a building which warrants statutory protection under the provisions of the local planning scheme as a building of particular architectural merit. Like a limited number of buildings in Stonnington and elsewhere, the significance of the Richardson House does not relate particularly to its contribution to the character and appearance of the surrounding area and/or streetscapes. Rather its significance relates to a very specific issue of innovative design directed by unusual siting.

### 3.0 The Proposed Amendment

The site-specific control which is proposed for 10 Blackfriars Close has been developed in order to more accurately reflect the nature and significance of the property as a whole. 10 Blackfriars Close is now a property which has been significantly altered by the construction of a substantial addition and most recently the acquisition of land to the west of the site. While intentionally designed and sited in a manner which does not impact greatly on an appreciation of the design of the original house, neither the Crone addition to the west nor the connecting passage, are of any significance in their own right.

Given this situation it is proposed that Heritage Overlay controls should apply to the Boyd house and the land immediately related to that house, excluding the extension and the land on which it stands, as shown in Fig. 5. Under this control, a permit would be required for any external alterations to the original house (to the extent that they change its external appearance, and excluding routine maintenance and repairs) and for the construction of any new buildings on that part of the site identified on the plan. Such approval would not be required for works to the 1982 building. Council would, however, retain control over any proposal to subdivide any part of the property.

This approach is one which would result in an appropriate level of protection for the significant elements on the site.

## Endnotes

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- 1 B Raworth. 10 Blackfriars Close, Toorak. [Prepared for the City of Stonnington,
- 2 B Raworth. 10 Blackfriars Close, Toorak. p. 2.
- 3 B Raworth. 10 Blackfriars Close, Toorak. p. 2.
- 4 Grounds, Romberg & Boyd. Proposed House for G A Richardson Esq., at Blackfriars  
S.E.2, Preliminary Sketch (October 1953), Grounds, Romberg & Boyd. Residence  
Esq., at Blackfriars Close, Toorak, S.E.2 (January 1954). Drawings held by the C
- 5 R Boyd. *Living in Australia*, p. 129, quoted in B Raworth. 10 Blackfriars Close,
- 6 B Raworth. 10 Blackfriars Close, Toorak, p. 3.
- 7 G Serle. *Robin Boyd: A Life*. Miegunyah Press, Melbourne, 1995. p. 185.
- 8 Grounds, Romberg & Boyd. Residence for G Richardson Esq., at Blackfriars Clos  
(January 1954).
- 9 Grounds, Romberg & Boyd. Residence for G Richardson Esq., at Blackfriars Clos  
(January 1954).
- 10 B Raworth. 10 Blackfriars Close, Toorak. p. 3.
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