

HERITAGE CITATION REPORT

Name	CASA PANZO	
Address	89 ALEXANDRA AVE SOUTH YARRA	Significance Level A2
Place Type	Flat	
Citation Date	2013	



Casa Panzo

Recommended Heritage Protection	VHR - HI - PS Yes
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Architectural Style	Interwar Period (c.1919-c.1940) Spanish Mission
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Maker / Builder	Varley, RW
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History and Historical Context

Thematic context

This place is associated with the following themes identified by the *Stonnington Thematic Environmental History* (2006; Update 1, 2009):

8. Building suburbs

8.6 Developing higher density living; 8.6.2 Developing apartment living

Developing apartment living

The building of apartments or residential flats began in Melbourne in the first decades of the twentieth century and gathered momentum after World War I. The war affected patterns of living and social life within Australia and the population boom that followed led to a shortage of housing. Terrace houses were becoming increasingly unpopular, few houses had been built during the war and the building of flats was seen as one solution to the problem.

A particular impact of WWI upon what is now the City of Stonnington was the difficulty of retaining domestic staff, which meant that many of the older mansions in suburbs such as Toorak and Malvern could no longer be maintained as workable houses (Sawyer, 1982:33). Financial considerations were also an imperative. Wilde (1999:62) cites an article from the 18 October 1919 edition of the *Prahran Telegraph*:

It was held to be no longer necessary to labour with a house and all the domestic drudgery that entailed when by borrowing Continental ideas, people who could afford it could live in flats. Land has become so valuable the villa of the Victorian days, in a crowded thoroughfare, no longer shows anything like an adequate return of interest on the land's present capital value. It is more profitable to pull the house erected thereon down, and to erect flats.

In the early twentieth century the municipalities of Prahran and Malvern therefore possessed many sites ripe for flat development. Generally speaking, they were near to public transport and shops, in an area of 'character or atmosphere' and preferably enjoying views. Public transport, in particular, was viewed as crucial to the success of a development and this caused flat developers to pay particular attention to the 'well established boulevards of St Kilda Road and Dandenong Road' (Sawyer, 1982:36)

The conquering flat - 1925-45

By the late 1920s there was a boom in flat building as the last of the remaining big estates began to succumb to what Wilde (1999:40) describes as 'the combined pressures of probate, depression and profit'. For example, after the subdivision of the Trawalla Estate in Toorak four blocks of flats were built in the period from 1931 to 1934.

One of the largest residential flats development was built by architect/property developer, Howard R. Lawson, on part of the old *Avoca* estate bounded by Punt and Domain roads, Alexandra Avenue and the South Yarra railway bridge. In 1922 Lawson began designing California Bungalow-style maisonettes capable of conversion to flats, some of which remain in the area. After the Depression Lawson began building multi-storey blocks, including *Beverley Hills*, which was set in landscaped gardens with a swimming pool. By 1935 Lawson had built 175 flats in his subdivision, and local residents were beginning to object to further development. Lawson subsequently limited his blocks to three storeys. According to Tibbits (1983:37-38), Lawson's subdivision is a unique precinct of apartment blocks integrated with well-landscaped sites.

The extent of flat development during the inter-War period is demonstrated by the population growth in Toorak Ward of Prahran Council; between 1920 and 1940 the population of Prahran municipality increased by 12.5% and over three-quarters of that was in Toorak where the population nearly doubled. By 1934-35 there were 570 flats in Toorak ward, as many as in South Yarra and Windsor Wards combined. This growth continued until the late 1930s and by the outbreak of WWII there were almost as many flats in Toorak ward as houses (Wilde, 1999:64-68).

However, the boom in flat building eventually led to resident protests about flats destroying the character of South Yarra and Toorak and so in 1933 Prahran Council passed a by-law that placed controls over site coverage and building height, and construction standards in certain areas. Some new housing estates also introduced covenants prohibiting flat development.

While this slowed the rate of flat development - according to one article the number of approvals dropped by half in a single year - it did not stop it and approvals continued to increase year by year in the late 1930s (*The Argus*, 14 November 1934).

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The most lasting impact was in the design of flats, which from 1933 until the post-war era were limited to two storeys in height and set within generous gardens. The effect of this change can be seen in the contrast in scale between the 'Trawalla Court' (built in 1931) rising to four storeys and covering most of its site and nearby 'Grange Lynne' (1933), two storeys with garden setbacks to both frontages.

Place history

This property at 89 Alexandra Avenue, South Yarra was originally part of the Tivoli Estate, which dated from the 1840s and was one of several large estates with a mansion overlooking the Yarra River. The estate, which extended from the Toorak Road through to the river, was progressively subdivided from the late nineteenth century onwards. A 1926 subdivision created Copelen Street and the construction in the early 1930s of Alexandra Avenue from Chapel Street to Williams Road enabled the further subdivision of lots facing Copelen Street to create new lots facing toward the river. (Raworth)

One of the lots in Copelen Street (Now No.9 Copelen) was owned by Montague and Regina Glover, who lived in a Spanish Mission style house. Following the creation of Alexandra Avenue the land was subdivided and in 1934 they constructed two flats known as *Casa de Rio* on the new lot (Now No.95 Alexandra Ave) which was first building constructed between River Street and Williams Road. As the name implies it was also in the Spanish Mission style (Raworth).

This property at No.89 was also owned by the Grovers and by the end of 1934 they erected *Casa Panzo*, another pair of Spanish Mission style flats. The flats at No.89 were constructed by (and possibly designed by) R.W. Varley, a local builder and contractor (MMBW).

R.W. Varley

Little is known about R.W. Varley. (Please refer to comparative analysis).

Sources

Context PL & Lesley Alves, *Stonnington Thematic Environmental History* (2006; Update 1, 2009)

Melbourne & Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) Plan of Drainage No. 194570, dated 16/11/34

Raworth, Bryce, '95 Alexandra Avenue, South Yarra', (n.d.) prepared for Stonnington Planning Scheme Amendment L40A

Sands & McDougall Directories (SM), 1933-36

Sawyer, Terry, 'Residential Flats in Melbourne. The development of a building type to 1950', 1982

Wilde, Sally, *The history of Prahran Volume II, 1925-1990*, 1999

Description

Physical Description

Casa Panzo is a striking two-storey pair of flats at the corner of Alexandra Avenue and River Street, overlooking the Yarra River. It is set back behind a tiny garden planted, appropriately, with citrus trees, and surrounded by low, original wall which shares its tooled stucco finish and Cordoba tiles (on the gatepost) with the house. Close examination of the concrete Cordoba tiles indicates that they originally had a terracotta red paint finish. There is a simple two-car garage at the rear with the same tooled stucco finish, which may be original, but has been altered.

The flats building itself was designed to look like a single-family dwelling, as was common in South Yarra and Toorak during the interwar period. Its bulk is broken up by expert massing, with two, staggered gables to the Alexandra Avenue elevation. These, and other gables, rest on simple timber brackets. The most striking feature of the building is the tower facing River Street, which provides entrances to the upper and lower flats. It is here that many distinctive Spanish

Mission details are grouped. They include the arched parapets to the top of the tower (with the name 'Casa Panzo' in raised script), projecting vigas below the parapet, arched door and window openings, wrought-iron stair balustrade and entry gates, a rustic lantern lighting the external stairs to the first floor, and blind decorative cast-concrete grilles between the floors. In addition, the tooled stucco finish, the roof with exposed rafter ends and Cordoba tiles, original tiled panels to the side of the stairway and within the first floor entry porch, and the gabled ('dovecote') chimneys add up to a skilful and classic use of the Spanish Mission style. Another original feature is the small patio at the front opening off the front room on the ground floor, which is enclosed by a low rendered wall with wrought iron detailing.

Alterations to the flats include the infilling of the arched opening to first-floor porch with a window, the replacement of one of the front ground floor windows with an aluminium frame, and the creation of sunrooms at the rear of the building. The high front and side fences are not original. The garage doors have been replaced with modern roller doors.

Comparative Analysis

The Spanish Mission style was quite popular in South Yarra in the 1920s and '30s. Examples include faithful interpretations of this style imported from California, and those that are influenced by the style but are more eclectic overall. Typical features include a tooled stucco finish, Cordoba roof tiles, gabled chimneys, timber shutters, decorative wrought-iron and turned timber screens, twisted columns, and vigas (roof beams which project beyond the wall). In a 1998 report on 95 Alexandra Ave, South Yarra, Bryce Raworth notes that the style 'had gained popularity in the architect designed work of the 1920s but had been consolidated as a builders' mode popular for flats and houses alike by the 1930s'.

The first known example of Spanish Mission design in the City of Stonnington, and the State of Victoria, is Broome at 6 Glyndebourne Avenue, Toorak (HO264). This was designed by architect Marcus Martin as his own home in 1925. It has two-storeys, tooled render to the walls, Cordoba tiles on the roof, and louvered shutters to the six-over-six double-hung windows. These were all markers of the style. Broome has an L-shaped plan, and is quite restrained in its decoration.

Single-family homes in the Spanish Mission style in Stonnington are well represented in the Heritage Overlay, and include 762 Orrong Road, Toorak (HO90), 719 Toorak Road, Toorak (HO344), 3 Parkside Street, Malvern (HO375). There are also examples within precincts Jessamine Avenue, Prahran (HO141), and Montalto Avenue, Toorak (HO143).

Spanish Mission flats of individual significance listed on the Stonnington Heritage Overlay include:

- Beverley Hills, 61-63 Darling Street, South Yarra, of 1933 (HO122) by builder Howard Lawson. This building plays with textural and design elements of Spanish Mission, particularly Baroque aspects. These elements are brought together in a fanciful and idiosyncratic way, which goes far from its Californian roots.
- Casa de Rio, 95 Alexandra Avenue, South Yarra, of 1934-5 (HO300). This is a more purist example of the style, with all of the hallmarks (stucco, Cordoba tiles, wrought iron, gabled/dovecote chimneys, ledged shutters, etc). Unfortunately, its facade has been unsympathetically altered since heritage controls were applied.
- Duplex, 102 Caroline Street, South Yarra designed by Marcus Martin in 1924-5 (HO122). This is another purist example of the style, with most of the hallmarks as noted above. It appears to be externally intact.

A fourth block of flats with an eclectic use of Spanish Mission details is found in the Dorrington Estate Precinct (HO351, Individually Significant): San Jose, 417 Wattletree Road, Malvern. It is a large, two-storey block of flats, attributed to builder L.G. Broadbent, c.1930. The design uses clinker brick and smooth render, with the addition of classical columns and Spanish Baroque details such as twisted colonettes, corbelled balcony openings, cast-concrete screens, and cast-concrete sunburst and scroll designs. A similarly eclectic range of Spanish Mission-influenced decoration is used at Koonoona flats, 754 High Street.

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Casa Panzo, 89 Alexandra Avenue, South Yarra is an example of a purist interpretation of the Spanish Mission style, as applied to a block of two flats. It compares favourably to Casa de Rio, 95 Alexandra Avenue, which was constructed for the same client at the same time, most likely by the same builder. The two buildings share many classic features of the style (tooled stucco, Cordoba tiles, dovecote chimneys, wrought iron). Casa Panzo is far superior in its massing and skilful addressing of its corner site, and the entrance tower is a very striking feature. Moreover, with the alterations to the ground-floor facade of Casa de Rio, Casa Panzo is now far more intact externally and compares with 102 Caroline Street.

Statement of Significance

What is significant?

Casa Panzo, 89 Alexandra Avenue, South Yarra constructed by builder R.W. Varley in 1934-5, is significant. The significant attributes are the original Spanish Mission style form, materials and detailing of the flats and front gateposts and gates (excluding the c.1980s additions).

Later alterations and additions including the c.1980s rear additions to the flats and the c.1982 high front and side fences are not significant.

How is it significant?

Casa Panzo is of local architectural and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

Architecturally and aesthetically, as a high quality example of builders' Spanish Mission applied to a small block of flats. It is distinguished by the classic use of design elements typical of this style, particularly the parapeted entrance tower, skilful massing, and the intactness of its significant details. (Criterion E)

Recommendations 2013

External Paint Controls

No
No
No
Yes c.1934 tiled gateposts and wrought iron gates
No
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No

Internal Alteration Controls

Tree Controls

Fences & Outbuildings

Prohibited Uses May Be Permitted

Incorporated Plan

Aboriginal Heritage Place

Other Recommendations

Recommended for inclusion in the Heritage Overlay of the Stonnington Planning Scheme to the extent of the whole property as defined by the title boundaries with HO schedule controls as listed above.

This information is provided for guidance only and does not supersede official documents, particularly the planning scheme. Planning controls should be verified by checking the relevant municipal planning scheme.