
Richardson House

Location

10 Blackfriars Close TOORAK, Stonnington City

Municipality

STONNINGTON CITY

Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO360

Heritage Listing

Stonnington City

Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

The Richardson House is of state architectural and historical significance. It represents a landmark in the career of notable Melbourne architect, Robin Boyd and offers a significant insight into the architecture of Melbourne during the 1950s. Boyd is generally regarded among Australia's leading post-war architectural figures for his work as a designer, a commentator and as a prominent figure among Melbourne's structural expressionist architects. The house is a fine example of Boyd's domestic work and is of enhanced significance by virtue of its unusual and elegant structural system.

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| Heritage Study/Consultant | Stonnington - City of Stonnington Heritage Overlay Report (Stages 1-5) 1998, Bryce Raworth P/L, 1998; Stonnington - Prahran Conservation Study Identification of Buildings & Areas of Major Significance, Nigel Lewis & Associates, 1983; |
| Construction dates | 1954, |
| Architect/Designer | Boyd, Robin, |
| Other Names | 10 Blackfriars Close, Toorak, |
| Hermes Number | 31544 |

Physical Description 1

10 Blackfriars Close is located at the head of a small residential *cul de sac* in Toorak. It occupies an unusual site divided by a dry creek bed. The house was designed by the renowned Australian architect, Robin Boyd, who allowed the limitations of the site to provide the catalyst for an extraordinary design solution. At the time of construction, in the 1950s, the creek bed doubled as a Board of Works drainage easement.[1] In order to safeguard his building against the possibility of enforced future demolition, Boyd proposed a house suspended above the creek bed to allow access to the easement. Boyd's bridge house was designed in conjunction with the well known Australian engineer, Bill Irwin, who advised on the structural feasibility of this radical design.[2] The Craig Elwood design, entitled 'Bridge House over a ravine, L.A.', is sometimes mistakenly cited as the inspiration for this design. In fact 10 Blackfriars Close predates the Elwood design by ten years. 11 The house was built in 1954[3] by A.Clissold Pty Ltd,[4] for Mr and Mrs G.A. Richardson, and is known today as the Richardson House.

A preoccupation with geometry is evident throughout the Richardson house, from the wedge shaped arrangements of the plan, to the elliptical, steel bridge trusses which support the two longitudinal walls of the house.[5] Boyd's concern for geometry in this building compares with that of his partner, Roy Grounds, for whom geometry was a lifelong obsession.[6] Bold geometric form and structural daring characterise the most notable works of Boyd and other post-war modernists in Melbourne. The brave design of the Richardson house reflects the atmosphere of confidence and enthusiasm that typified post-war Melbourne, and peaked with the 1956 Olympic Games.

The living areas of the house are hung from the elliptical bridge trusses and are constructed in a manner found rarely in residential construction of the time. The house is a portal framed structure with glass infill sections and a flat concrete roof.[7] The elevated location of the house places it high amongst the canopy of long established trees as well as in the midst of a more recently planted rainforest setting.[8] A small timber and steel bridge leads to the front door in a manner that recalls Boyd's South Yarra House. A steep driveway leads to three car parking spaces under the house,[9] which utilise the suspended house as an economical carport.[10] Extensive modifications were carried out on the house in 1982 by Rauras Pty Ltd for Mr and Mrs Harper,[11] however Boyd's original concept has been respected and left largely intact. The house was predominantly open plan from its first conception, and retains many free-flowing areas. The front door opens directly to a timber floored dining room which leads to a semi-circular steel framed balcony, accessed by full height glass doors.[12] The modifications of 1982 included the addition of a three storey extension to the west side of the house and a hallway to connect the old section of the house to the extension. The new area contains four bathrooms and four bedrooms. It is said that the Richardson house was once on Melbourne's tourist bus route because it is so unusual.[13] However, a hedge of bamboo and a high paling fence currently shield the house, almost completely obscuring it from the street.

References

[1] Norman Day, *Heroic Melbourne: architecture of the 1950s*, p 7.

[2] Geoffrey Serle, *Robin Boyd: a life*, p 185.

[3] Philip Goad, review of *Heroic Melbourne: Architecture of the 1950's*, see *Architecture Australia*, 85, no. 3, p 34.

[4] R. Boyd, *Living in Australia*, p 129.

[5] *Prahran City Council Data Sheet- 10 Blackfriars Close*.

[6] Context Pty Ltd, *City of Prahran Conservation Review*, Vol. 3, p 16.

[7] J.M. Freeland, *Architecture in Australia*, p 276.

[8] Context Pty Ltd, *op cit*, Vol. 3, P 16.

[9] 'A modern gem for the collector', *The Age*, 19/6/1996.

[10] *Ibid*.

[11] Boyd, *op cit*, P 129.

[12] Prahran Council Building Permits.

[13] 'A modern gem for the collector', *The Age*, 19/6/1996.

[14] *Ibid*.

Local Historical Themes

8.4.2 Functional eccentric and theatrical - experimentation and innovation in architecture

This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.

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