

# MURRAY GRIFFIN HOUSE



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SOHE 2008



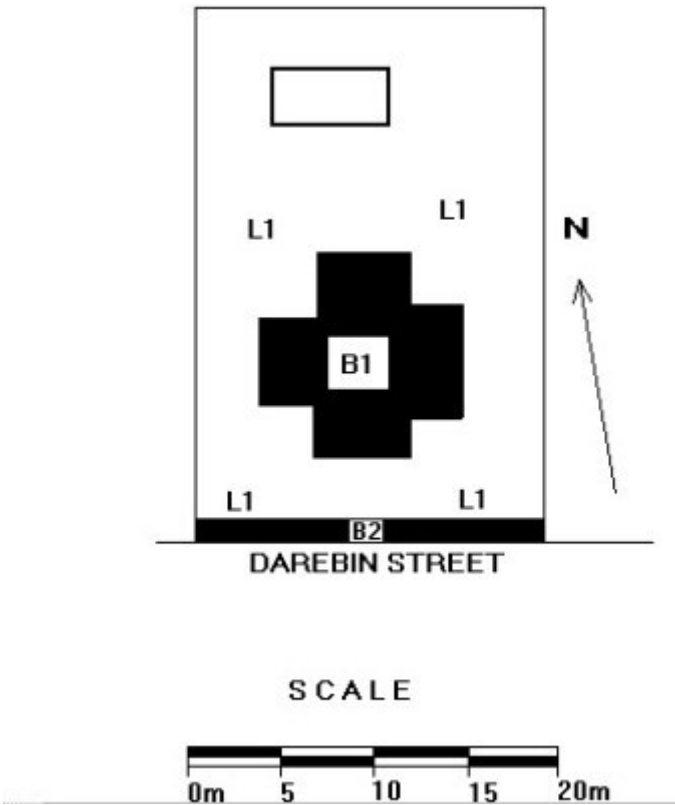
MURRAY GRIFFIN HOUSE  
SOHE 2008



1 murray griffin house  
heidelberg side view dec1996



murray griffin house  
heidelberg East facade of  
shed



murray griffin house heidelberg plan

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## Location

52 DAREBIN STREET HEIDELBERG, BANYULE CITY

## Municipality

BANYULE CITY

## Level of significance

Registered

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H1324

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

H024

## VHR Registration

June 19, 1997

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - May 13, 1999

The Murray Griffin House is a six roomed residence designed by Walter Burley Griffin c.1922 for the family of artist Vaughan Murray Griffin (no relation). The house was built using Griffin's patented knitlock system and conformed to WB Griffin's principles regarding segmental architecture; the building required no veneer of tiles, plaster, textile, paper, enamel or paint. The house is set on a cruciform plan with pyramid shaped roofs, clad with Marseilles tiles. The house is substantially intact although recent painting works pay little tribute to the architectural merit of the place. The house was occupied by the noted war artist Murray Vaughan Griffin from 1922 to 1939.

The Murray Griffin House is of architectural significance to the State of Victoria.

The Murray Griffin House is architecturally important as a substantially intact and rare surviving example of Walter Burley Griffin's segmental architecture. The house is an excellent example of both Griffin's knitlock system and his domestic oeuvre and it remains as one of the most resolved examples of Griffin's work. The building exists as a representative example of Griffin's domestic designs from the 1920s and has many of the features found in other Griffin-designed knitlock structures: low pitched roof, over-hanging eaves, distinctive casement windows set between pilasters and a modular plan form. The house is also important for its intact and original fibrous plaster light fittings, which were designed to compliment the internal spaces.

The V G Griffin house is architecturally important for its ability to describe the profound intentions of Walter Burley Griffin in devising the knitlock system. Segmental architecture was an excellent way of providing a technical

solution to a social problem at a time when there was a shortage of affordable, quality housing. Griffin's knitlock system reduced the cost of housing yet allowed architectural innovation. Griffin was resolute in his intention to build a quality house for the 'average man' and the Murray Griffin house documents some of the devices used by Griffin to minimise expenditure. The knitlock blocks were inexpensive to manufacture and required no additional materials such as paint or plaster, and they allowed flexibility in design, form and plan. The building's position on the block articulates WB Griffin's regard for the relationship between building and landscape and this is further illustrated by the low stone fence at the front of the property.

## Permit Exemptions

### General Exemptions:

General exemptions apply to all places and objects included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR). General exemptions have been designed to allow everyday activities, maintenance and changes to your property, which don't harm its cultural heritage significance, to proceed without the need to obtain approvals under the Heritage Act 2017.

**Places of worship:** In some circumstances, you can alter a place of worship to accommodate religious practices without a permit, but you must [notify](#) the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria before you start the works or activities at least 20 business days before the works or activities are to commence.

**Subdivision/consolidation:** Permit exemptions exist for some subdivisions and consolidations. If the subdivision or consolidation is in accordance with a planning permit granted under Part 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and the application for the planning permit was referred to the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria as a determining referral authority, a permit is not required.

Specific exemptions may also apply to your registered place or object. If applicable, these are listed below. Specific exemptions are tailored to the conservation and management needs of an individual registered place or object and set out works and activities that are exempt from the requirements of a permit. Specific exemptions prevail if they conflict with general exemptions.

Find out more about heritage permit exemptions [here](#).

### Specific Exemptions:

Nil

Construction dates	1922,
Architect/Designer	Griffin, Walter Burley,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Other Names	VAUGHAN GRIFFIN HOUSE, VAUGHAN MURRAY GRIFFIN HOUSE,
Hermes Number	4940
Property Number	

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## History

Contextual History:History of Place:

Architect - Walter Burley Griffin

In the late nineteenth century, Chicago became the epicentre for a new school of architectural thought and practice. Emerging from under the mentorship of architect Louis Sullivan, a group of young architects, many practicing within the confines of Steinway Hall in central Chicago, exchanged and developed ideas through a network which would later become known as the 'Chicago Group'.

Walter Burley Griffin was born in 1876 in Maywood, Illinois and graduated from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1899. After graduation, the young Griffin commenced practice with Dwight H. Perkins and Robert C. Spencer at Steinway Hall and began to develop ideas and concepts linking structures to their environment. Griffin had studied both town-planning and landscape design at university and these teachings became an integral part of his growth as an architect. In 1900, Griffin joined the office of Frank Lloyd-Wright and worked alongside Wright on both joint and individual projects. Marion Mahony, a skilled draughtswoman, also worked in Wright's office on drafting projects and interior and furnishing designs for Wright. In 1905, Griffin left Wright's practice, apparently disillusioned with Wright's employment conditions and methods of payment, and again practiced at Steinway Hall, however this time in an independent office. The first product of his new practice was Griffin's 'Peters' house in Chicago (1906) which, whilst utilising some of the Wright-inspired concepts of the Prairie School, began to investigate the particular idiom of Griffin's own concepts. Expressions of central bold massing, later to become peculiar to Griffin's designs, cantilevered eaves and hipped roofs were characteristic of Griffin's work at this time.

Griffin and Mahony married in June 1911 and their union was a combining of "life and art". The two had worked on collaborative projects whilst together in Wright's office and this coalition continued throughout their married life. In 1911, Walter and Marion Griffin entered the international competition for Australia's Federal Capital and when the announcement was made that the Griffin's entry had won, world attention was focused on the Griffins and the Chicago Group. In 1912, William Greg Purcell wrote in the *Western Architect*, "...Mr Griffin is one of the two or three younger men who have been thoroughly trained for the new movement in architecture ... He has worked hard and stuck uncompromisingly to his ideals in the face of repeated discouragements". Griffin arrived in Canberra in 1913 and while his first visit lasted no more than three months, he was appointed Federal Capital Director of Design and Construction.

In May 1914, Walter and Marion Griffin arrived in Australia, accompanied by Walter's sister Genevieve and her husband Roy Lippincott, also an architect of the Chicago Group. The Griffins set up offices in both Melbourne and Sydney, although Walter was still intensely involved in the Canberra project. The year following the Griffins' arrival in Australia, G. Taylor, editor of *Building* ran a series of articles on contemporary architectural principles and theories and Marion contributed with a piece entitled "Democratic Architecture, Its Developments, Its Principles and Its Ideals".

In 1920, Griffin terminated his involvement with the Canberra project, having experienced on-going problems with Federal bureaucrats who wanted to seize control of the scheme, and began to focus more on domestic work programs. Griffin had laid out a small estate at Eaglemont in Victoria in 1915 which he had anticipated would provide him with a suitable landscape to plan his own home environment, this later became the site of 'Pholiota'. The Eaglemont project aimed to prove that "architecture and landscape should be designed together and inhabitants grouped by common interests".

In 1917, Griffin patented a new concrete block known as 'knitlock'. The knitlock blocks provided an inexpensive construction system which provided unlimited exploration of design, plan and form. In America, Frank Lloyd Wright was also exploring a concrete block system and whilst both architects argued originality, it would appear that an exchange of ideas occurred during the period of invention. Whilst both systems fundamentally explored the same concepts, Griffin's blocks used a panel and pier system and were lighter-weight than Wright's. Griffin declared that the concrete block construction method was cheaper than any other type of construction and believed it to provide a solution to the housing shortage after World War One. He did not believe it be a substitute for timber, brick or stone house, however it provided a viable alternative. The knitlock system also allowed an exploration of organic architectural forms and further applications of the Prairie style first as first developed by Wright.

Griffin's segmental system used two types of blocks, one known as the 'vertebral' and the other the 'tesseral'. The vertebral locked together to form the frame of the structure and the tesseral created the walls. The vertical sections locked together to form pillars, columns, chimneys, ducts, walls, corners, crossings and buttresses. The wall blocks interlocked to form a cellular wall with staggered internal and external joints. The size of the blocks

and the lightness of construction allowed span without lintels. Griffin himself wrote: "Such freedom to deal with the general proportion, making an articulate pile out of the smallest type of building, is the great characteristic of Segmental Architecture". Griffin's aim with knitlock was to bring quality housing within the reach of the average man and whilst he was the main proponent, other architects also employed the knitlock system; DC Jenkins was responsible for 139 Manning Road in Malvern (1919) and JFW Ballantyne designed 'Stokesay' for Arthur P Onions in Frankston.

The Griffins' own knitlock home, 'Pholiota' was constructed c.1919 and became the prototype for knitlock housing. The floor plan was based on a 3'6" module and the bungalow-style house had a shallow hipped roof. Other knitlock houses by Griffin included the S.R. Salter house in Toorak which was designed 1922-23 and completed in 1924 and the Julian S Jefferies House in Surrey Hills Victoria, (1924). The "Home of Five Rooms" was developed by Griffin in Melbourne in 1920 and its plan form further articulated some of Griffin's concerns with space and form. Set on a small square plan, the house aimed to maximise internal space while interacting harmoniously with its external surrounds.

The Griffins' time in Melbourne also culminated in other significant architectural achievements, including Newman College - Parkville, Capitol House - Melbourne and the Essendon Incinerator complex. In 1921, the Griffins left Melbourne and moved to Castlecrag on Sydney's north shore. Castlecrag was to become one of Griffin's most ambitious projects and was perhaps his definitive statement on architecture inspired by the Australian landscape.

By 1930, Griffin's practice had deteriorated and Griffin himself was suffering depression as a result of his work having been the subject of negative criticism. In 1935, the Griffins designed a scheme for Lucknow University in India and this was accepted soon after. In October 1935 Walter journeyed there to supervise the construction of the university and was later joined by Marion in February 1936. The Griffins enjoyed a re-birth in India as their arrival was heralded by the press and their ideas more favourably received. Unfortunately this was short-lived as Walter contracted peritonitis and died on 11 February 1937. Marion returned to Australia in 1937, however she departed for America's mid-west in 1938. Marion Griffin (nee Mahony) died in 1962.

Associated People: Assoc.People GRIFFIN, M

## **Extent of Registration**

1. All the buildings known as the Murray Griffin House and stone wall as marked B1 and B2 on Diagram 607503 held by the Executive Director.

2. All the land marked L1 on Diagram 607503 held by the Executive Director being all the land described in Certificate of Title Vol. 4742 Folio 250.

*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.*

*For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>*