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## Alexandra Avenue Area



Maritama at the intersection  
of Darling Street and  
Alexandra Avenue

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### Location

Alexandra Avenue Corner Punt Road SOUTH YARRA, Stonnington City

### Municipality

STONNINGTON CITY

### Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

### Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO122

HO122

### Heritage Listing

Stonnington City

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### Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

*What is significant?*

The Alexandra Avenue precinct is a residential area constructed on escarpments and swampy terrain made available through the reclamation of land along the Yarra bank and the subdivision of the Avoca Estate. The

greater part of the graded buildings in the precinct are constructed to exotic designs by architect and developer Howard R Lawson although a number of buildings by others, such as flats at 56 Darling Street and at 53 and 55 Alexandra Avenue and a small group of earlier dwellings in Domain Road also contribute to the character and significance of the area. The setting, arising from the land form and from plantings within the individual developments and along the Yarra Bank and Darling Gardens provides a dramatic context for the precinct. The whole development is without equal for the period in Melbourne.

Elements which contribute to the significance of the precinct include:

"The high degree of intactness of the early buildings to their c.1940 state. Building stock survives largely intact and the area is notable for the general absence of prominent additions and alterations. Original detailing typically survives throughout the area;

"The general uniformity of character achieved through consistent use of materials such as face brick or rendered wall surfaces with Marseilles or other tiled, pitched roofs;

"The range and quality of interwar buildings including blocks of flats, duplexes and interwar maisonettes coexisting with a smaller number of slightly earlier detached villas;

"The predominantly two and three-storey scale of built form within the precinct which allows the landmark Lawson buildings such as Beverley Hills and Stratton Heights to remain the pre-eminent developments in this locale;

"The landscaped settings derived from the Darling Gardens, the Yarra River bank environs and the undeveloped front and side setbacks to individual properties;

"The absence of prominent, modern car parking facilities in most sections of the precinct;

"The low numbers of prominent modern infill buildings.

How is it significant?

The Alexandra Avenue precinct is of local social, historical and aesthetic significance.

Why is it significant?

The Alexandra Avenue precinct is of local historical significance. Developed on difficult terrain above reclaimed sections of the Yarra bank (2.1.3 *Making Roads and Railways*) the area illustrates the earliest phases of the surge of apartment development which took place in Toorak and South Yarra following the subdivision of large Victorian-era properties in the early twentieth century. (8.1.3 *The end of an era - mansion estate subdivisions in the twentieth century*). This pattern of settlement transformed the built environment and social character of the area by replacing the spacious mansions of the wealthy with modest suburban villas and higher density, lower income housing (*Historic Theme: 8.6.2 Developing apartment living*). The significance of the area is enhanced by its association with notable architect, Howard Lawson.

The Alexandra Avenue precinct is of aesthetic significance as a particularly intact and cohesive grouping of flats, many of which adopt a unique and exotic architectural character. Predominantly designed by Howard Lawson (*Historic Theme: 8.6.3 Architect designed apartments*), the individual blocks of apartments vary in detailing and display divergent architectural influences including Bungalow, Spanish Mission and Moderne styles. Nonetheless, they exhibit a high degree of consistency in terms of their overall form, materiality and character. Other buildings in the area such as the flats at 56 Darling Street and others at 53 and 55 Alexandra Avenue were not part of Lawson's oeuvre but, nonetheless, contribute to character and significance of the area. The theatrical setting arising from the topography and landscaped areas along the river and across the escarpment more generally contribute to the character and the aesthetic significance of the precinct.

The Alexandra Avenue precinct is of social significance for the extent to which it illustrates the introduction of new architectural typologies which changed the social mix of the area. The introduction of flats and apartments provided new forms of accommodation and additional freedom for families but particularly for single men and women (*Historic Theme: 8.6.2 Developing apartment living*).

Heritage Study/Consultant	Stonnington - Prahran Conservation Study Identification of Buildings & Areas of Major Significance, Nigel Lewis & Associates, 1983;
Other Names	Centred on Alexandra Avenue, Darling Street, Domain Road & Punt Road,
Hermes Number	30700
Property Number	

## Local Historical Themes

3.3.1 Crown land sales 1840-1850 8.4.1 Houses as a symbol of wealth, status and fashion 8.6.2 Developing apartment living 8.1.3 The end of an era - mansion estate subdivisions in the twentieth century

2.1.3 Making Roads and Railways

8.1.3 The end of an era - mansion estate subdivisions in the twentieth century.

*8.6.2 Developing apartment living.*

*8.6.3 Architect designed apartments.*

## Physical Conditions

The Alexandra Avenue Precinct comprises a section of South Yarra Hill occupying the entire escarpment to the River Yarra between Punt Road and the Yarra River Railway Bridge.

The Darling Gardens and flats at 56 Darling Road form the easternmost elements within the precinct. To their west, a small group of late-nineteenth and early twentieth century dwellings in Domain Road are among the earliest developments to the north of Domain Road. The substantial Italianate dwelling at 280 Domain Road is of some individual significance. To their north, the early group of bungalow flats at 49-53 Darling Street comprises some of the earliest work in the precinct by architect and developer Howards Lawson. Two blocks of flats on the adjacent sites date from c.1970s and contribute to the area through their scale and typology. 59 Darling Street, constructed for Lawson's son, Ernest was demolished in 2010 and replaced by a multistorey development. At 61-63 Darling Street is Beverly Hills, the most prominent of Lawson's flats. The development comprises two tall blocks around a swimming pool surrounded by established palms and a massive Morton Bay Fig Tree. The development draws its inspiration from images of Hollywood popularised by contemporary magazines. Its importance is recognised by its A1 grading. More modest Lawson developments survive in the lower sections of Darling Street. *Santoy*, at No 65 is realised in bungalow style. No 67 Darling Street is a simple block of three flats dating from c.1922. No 69 Darling Street is another block of flats constructed c.1932. 'Maritama', constructed c.1940 at the corner of Darling Street and Alexander Avenue is a landmark development in a Moderne mode. It forms the easternmost element in a succession of highly graded flats along Alexandra Avenue, many of which can be attributed to Lawson. These typically occupy elevated sites and adopt simple block-like forms enlivened by rendered detail recalling Spanish Baroque sources. They include: 'Narooma' at No79 (c.1934); 'Kildare' at No77 (c.1935); 'York House' at No75 (c.1934); and 'Dorrington House' (c.1933) at the intersection with Caroline Street. In adjacent sections of Caroline Street and Lawson Grove, a number of individually significant flats by Lawson survive. These include: 'Devonshire House' at No122 Caroline Street, 'Durham Hall' at No124 Caroline Street, 'Warwick Lodge', at 1 Lawson Grove (c.1935); 'The Manor', at 2 Lawson Grove (c.1935); and 'Berkley House' at 3 Lawson Grove (c.1935). To the west of Caroline Street, Alexandra Avenue is dominated by Lawson's 'Stratton Heights' at 63 Alexandra Avenue. It adopts a sprawling Moderne design, occupying a commanding site, high above the street. More modest flats by Lawson and others survive in this section of the precinct. Some, such as those at Nos 53 and 55 can not be attributed to Lawson. However, their scale, architectural expression and period of construction provide a useful contribution to the character and significance of the precinct. Further to the west, a cluster of five California bungalow-inspired designs by Lawson occupy an island site bounded by Punt Road, Alexandra Avenue and Dobson Street. They are all highly-valued buildings.

As noted in the citation for this area prepared as part of Prahran Conservation Study, 1983, 'The whole development is without equal for the period in Melbourne'.

*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/>*