

# FENNER HOUSE



Fenner House exterior Sept 2016



Fenner House detail of entrance Sept 2016



Fenner House interior 1 Sept 2016



Fenner House interior 2 Sept 2016



Fenner House interior 3 Sept 2016



45041 Fenner House South Yarra Aug 08 2



45041 Fenner House South Yarra Aug 08 3



45041 Fenner House South Yarra Aug 08 4



45041 Fenner House South Yarra Aug 08 7



Architecture in Australia Oct 1967, p 826.jpg

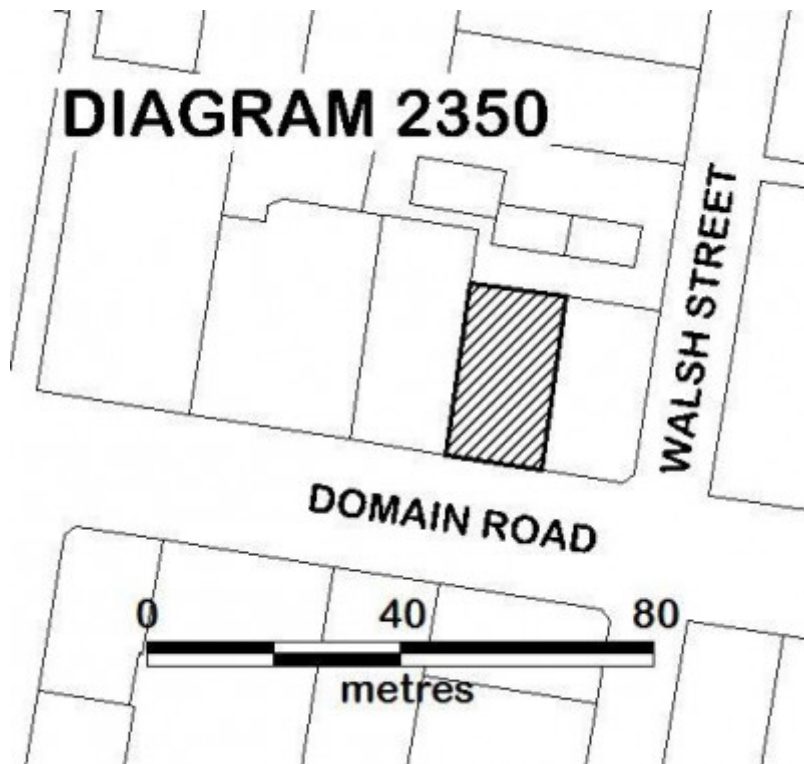


Diagram 2350

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### **Location**

228 DOMAIN ROAD SOUTH YARRA, MELBOURNE CITY

### **Municipality**

MELBOURNE CITY

### **Level of significance**

Registered

### **Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number**

H2350

### **Heritage Overlay Numbers**

HO6

### **VHR Registration**

February 11, 2016

### **Heritage Listing**

## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - February 8, 2016

What is significant?

The place, consisting of a single storey concrete brick house with garage below and associated landscaping.

### *History Summary*

The Fenner House, South Yarra was designed by architect Neil Clerehan in 1964 as a townhouse for retired pastoralist Mr Clive Ross Fenner and his wife. Melbourne architect Neil Clerehan was selected to design a single storey, light-filled and spacious house with a small garden, on a confined site in a densely settled area. At this time Clerehan was well known through his regular articles written in newspapers and journals, his modern house designs built from the early 1950s and as the director of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects (RVIA) Small Homes Services from 1954 to 1961. One of the most successful periods of Clerehan's professional career coincided with the design of the Fenner House, which has been described as a prototype for the successful townhouse type in Victoria. The Fenner House won the RVIA Victorian Architecture Medal in 1967 and featured in many professional journals and popular publications. Clerehan has continued to design large numbers of modern houses, both in partnership and as a sole practitioner, for over 60 years.

### *Description Summary*

The Fenner House is a small three bedroom house, orientated to the northern rear of the block, with an asymmetrical, balanced arrangement of blank concrete brick walls facing the street front. Positioned close to the front of the block with no front garden, the ground floor is raised half a flight above street level to enable the placement of a double carport below. Walls are of exposed concrete brickwork throughout and ceilings and joinery are of exposed timber. Conventional planning is reversed with bathrooms and a walk-in cloak room with delivery hatch lining the windowless front facade, and an entry passage leading to the living room at the rear of the house. The simple plan includes two small internal courtyards and a small rear garden. This eliminates the need for side windows and enables all main rooms, including bedrooms, dining room, living room and kitchen, to receive north light via full height sliding aluminium doors. Roof domes light bathrooms and passages, while concealed fluorescent strip lighting is placed along door heads in some rooms. Original finishes, including carpet, laminate and external mosaic tiles; joinery, including doors and cupboards; and some original plantings have been retained.

This site is part of the traditional land of the Kulin Nation.

How is it significant?

The Fenner House is of architectural and historical significance to the State of Victoria. It satisfies the following criterion for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register:

#### Criterion D

Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places and objects.

#### Criterion H

Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Victoria's history.

Why is it significant?

The Fenner House is significant at the State level for the following reasons:

The Fenner House is architecturally significant as one of the most celebrated of the modernist houses built in Melbourne in the post-war period. Neil Clerehan, the architect, considers it to be his most important work of this

period. It is an outstanding example of the innovative residential designs produced in Melbourne in the 1960s and is notable as an early and highly influential townhouse design on a confined suburban site. The Fenner House design brought together characteristics such as an emphasis on privacy, restrained detailing and the use of minimal building materials and finishes. The Fenner House won the RVIA Architectural Medal in 1967 and featured in many contemporary publications. [Criterion D]

The Fenner House is historically significant as an outstanding example of the design of architect Neil Clerehan, one of the most influential architects working in Melbourne during the post-war period. He has received a number of awards for his work and made significant contributions to the architectural profession in Victoria for a long period from the 1940s to the present day, through design (particularly the suburban house), publishing, writing and community work. In 2008 he was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Architecture from the University of Melbourne for significant contributions made to the community. [Criterion H]

## 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:

It should be noted that Permit Exemptions can be granted at the time of registration (under s.42(4) of the Heritage Act). Permit Exemptions can also be applied for and granted after registration (under s.66 of the Heritage Act)

#### General Condition 1

All exempted alterations are to be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place or object.

#### General Condition 2

Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of works that original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the place or object are revealed which relate to the significance of the place or object, then the exemption covering such works shall cease and Heritage Victoria shall be notified as soon as possible.

### General Condition 3

All works should be informed by Conservation Management Plans prepared for the place. The Executive Director is not bound by any Conservation Management Plan, and permits still must be obtained for works suggested in any Conservation Management Plan.

### General Condition 4

Nothing in this determination prevents the Heritage Council from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions.

### General Condition 5

Nothing in this determination exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the relevant responsible authority, where applicable.

### Specific Exemptions:

#### Exterior

- . Minor repairs and maintenance which replace like with like.
- . Removal of non-original items such as air conditioners, pipe work, ducting, wiring, antennae, aerials etc and making good in a manner not detrimental to the cultural heritage significance of the place.
- . Installation or removal of external fixtures and fittings such as hot water services and taps in a manner not detrimental to the cultural heritage significance of the place.
- . Repair and replacement of fences and gates in a manner not detrimental to the cultural heritage significance of the place.
- . Installation or repair of damp-proofing by either injection method or grouted pocket method in a manner which does not affect the cultural heritage significance of the place.

#### Interior

- . Installation, removal or replacement of hooks, nails and other devices.
- . Removal of non-original book shelves.
- . Installation, removal or replacement of ducted, hydronic or concealed radiant type heating provided that the installation does not damage existing skirtings and architraves and that the central plant is concealed, and is done in a manner not detrimental to the cultural heritage significance of the place.
- . Installation, removal or replacement of electrical wiring provided that all new wiring is fully concealed and any original light switches, pull cords, push buttons or power outlets are retained in-situ.
- . Installation, removal or replacement of bulk insulation in the roof space.

#### Landscape:

- . The process of gardening, including bedding displays, removal of dead shrubs and replanting the same species or cultivar, disease and weed control, and maintenance to care for existing plants.
- . The removal or pruning of dead or dangerous trees to maintain safety. If the tree is identified as being of primary or contributory cultural heritage significance, the Executive Director must be notified of these works within 21 days of them being undertaken.
- . Replanting of removed or dead trees and vegetation with the same plant species to conserve the significant landscape character and values.
- . Management of trees in accordance with Australian Standard; Pruning of Amenity Trees AS 4373-1996

. Management of trees in accordance with Australian Standard; Protection of Trees on Development Sites AS 4970-2009.

. Subsurface works involving the installation, removal or replacement of watering and drainage systems or services outside the canopy edge of significant trees in accordance with .AS4970 and on the condition that works do not impact on archaeological features or deposits.

. Removal of plants listed as noxious weeds in the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994.

. Vegetation protection and management of possums and vermin.

## Theme

6. Building towns cities and the garden state 9. Shaping cultural and creative life

Construction dates 1964,  
Architect/Designer Clerehan, Neil,  
Heritage Act Categories Registered place,  
Hermes Number 45041  
Property Number

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## History

### CONTEXTUAL HISTORY

#### Architecture of the 1950s

An awareness of changing principles of design developed after World War II and in the early 1950s traditional architecture began to be challenged by architects in Australia. This coincided with the development of new methods of construction, together with the opportunity for using new types of materials. By 1955 a building boom was beginning in Australia and a shortage of housing, together with size and material limitation due to government restrictions at the time, allowed architects such as Robin Boyd, Peter McIntyre, Guildford Bell, Neil Clerehan, John and Phyllis Murphy, Ray Berg, John Mockridge and Kevin Borland to provide 'fresh and robust new visions for living in Australia'. A contemporary style of architecture emerged with inventive architects constantly introducing new and untried materials and seeking a lightness of structure and sparseness of detail. The resulting move away from traditional solidity was in some ways a reflection of the wartime culture of austerity.

Contemporary style in domestic design, as described by Neil Clerehan in his introduction to the 1955-1970 period in *Melbourne Architecture* (P Goad, 1999, pp174-77), was a popular discussion topic from the 1950s. Newspapers and magazines such as the *Women's Weekly*, included regular articles on domestic architecture, and its practising architects, and the new developing style became instantly recognisable in the landscape dominated by typical hip-roofed villas. Flat or skillion roofs, new and untried materials, lightness of structure, minimal detail, geometric forms and contrasts in texture and colour were all features of this period.

#### Architecture of the 1960s

The modernist vocabulary of the 1950s was extended in the 1960s with architects maturing modern house design in Melbourne. A sense of visual taste and a lack of structural experiment characterised their work. These mature modern architects understood the rigours of the post-war International Style - efficient structural means, a reduced palette of materials, generous amounts of glass, and elegantly simple details. They understood the limitations of the open plan of the 1950s and introduced private retreat spaces and revived the entry hall. Garden and house were integrated through the use of courtyards and full height glazed doors. Exposed timbers and brickwork, and stained rather than painted finishes, were used to show the essential qualities of building materials. The planar wall was emphasised and historic detail and form rejected.

In *The Modern House in Melbourne 1945-197*, Philip Goad states that 'Neil Clerehan, Guildford Bell, Bernard Joyce, David McGlashan and John Adam are five consistent producers of Melbourne's most elegant and urbane architect designed houses'. He claims that 'In many respects these sophisticated houses represent the high point of modern architecture in Melbourne'.

### *Neil Clerehan and his work*

[This section is based on various descriptions of Clerehan's work, including an entry in *The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, 2012 & H Edquist & R Black, *The Architecture of Neil Clerehan*, 2005]

Neil Clerehan (1922-) was born in Melbourne and commenced architectural studies at the Melbourne Technical College (later Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology) in 1940. He transferred to the University of Melbourne in 1946 and graduated in 1950. He edited the student broadsheet *Smudges* from 1946-49 and collaborated in the production of Robin Boyd's book *Victorian Modern* (1947). After establishing his own business in 1949, Clerehan went to the United States in 1952 to work and travel for a year. Returning in 1953 Clerehan resumed private practice, took over from Boyd as director of the RVIA Small Homes Service (1954-61) and wrote weekly articles for *The Age* newspaper. In his Small Homes Service role he designed vast numbers of sample house plans and *The Age* 'Dream Home' (1954-55) that was built in Surrey Hills (demolished) and visited by hundreds of Melburnians. Meanwhile Clerehan's private practice produced modernist, conveniently planned houses, with generous glazing and discreet privacy from the street. Clerehan designed his own family house in Fawkner Street, South Yarra in 1958.

In 1961 after leaving the directorship of the Small Homes Service, Clerehan published *Best Australian Houses* which was a compilation of the best late 1950s architect designed houses in Australia. After a brief and productive partnership with Guildford Bell (1962-64), Clerehan resumed private practice as Neil Clerehan & Associates and entered one of the most successful periods of his professional career. He continued to produce modern houses of exceptional quality, including three of his most celebrated work, the Fenner House, South Yarra (1964) which won the RVIA Victorian Architecture Medal in 1967, his second family house in Walsh Street, South Yarra (1968) and project houses 3136 and 3138 for Sydney-based builder Pettit & Sevitt.

During this period he refined and developed his distinctive townhouse into a type that has lasted in general domestic design for forty years. The house was pushed towards the street, front gardens were largely eliminated and uniform materials were used for buildings, drives, paths and low front walls. Front elevations were classically proportioned with asymmetrical composition of wall and window - solid and void - and second storeys hovering over the garage with thin horizontal slivers of windows. Internally plans were organised around glazed courts which extended internal spaces visually and physically and created spaciousness. Undifferentiated open space, typical of 1950s house design, was replaced with defined spaces based on daily life routines.

From 1980 to 1996 Clerehan practised in partnership with David Cran, and on the death of the latter Clerehan again practised alone and continues to do so.

Clerehan served as editor of *Architect* after Boyd's death in 1971 and was president of the RAIA Vic Chapter (1975-76). In 2008 he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Architecture by the University of Melbourne. He continues to write about architecture in the popular press. He has also been actively involved in the community, appearing on numerous boards, and as councillor of the RAIA Victorian Chapter from 1953 to 1977 and President in 1974-76, President of the Council for the Historic Environment (1977-80) and member of the Historic Buildings Council of Victoria (later the Heritage Council of Victoria) from 1982 to 1999.

Throughout his long career, Clerehan has concerned himself with 'living patterns' rather than 'intriguing forms' and a substantial amount of his work has been devoted to residential design, particularly in Melbourne. Philip Goad writes in *Melbourne Architecture* that 'Clerehan's houses of the 1960s and early 1970s are understated Melbourne homes, highlighting efficient entry from car to house and a minimum of building materials and finishes.'

### HISTORY OF PLACE Design of the Fenner House

In 1964 Mr and Mrs Clive Ross Fenner commissioned Neil Clerehan to design a new townhouse to be used in conjunction with a beach house at Portsea. The retired pastoralist had previously commissioned the architect Roy Grounds to design the large house Clendon, Armadale in 1939. The clients wanted a new, smaller, single storey, light and spacious house with small garden for their south facing site in a densely settled area, close to the centre of Melbourne.

In 1984 Clerehan stated that 'I was and still am intrigued with living patterns, actual and possible, and the architectonic expression was and is to me only a frame for the patterns. Therefore I never produced intriguing forms.' This produced houses that were eminently liveable as the needs and desires of the client were ultimately addressed. It also produced some of the least expressionistic houses in Melbourne, where the tendency was to produce bold and at times provocative aesthetic projections. Taste and restraint were paramount, with open and flowing space seen in the carefully modulated architecture of Japan.

The Fenner House is located on a busy street and within a tightly confined and easily overlooked site. Clerehan created a house that faced north, away from the street, to open up rooms to the northern sun. By providing two internal courts and a rear garden, a northern orientation was given to each room, including a living room which opened onto a small paved court on the northern boundary, through full height sliding glazed doors. The two internal courtyards, landscaped by renowned landscape designer Gordon Ford (interview with Neil Clerehan, 12 October 2015), provided light and views between rooms. Finishes were uncomplicated and few in number, with exposed elongated grey concrete Besser block used both externally and internally. The raising of the ground floor half a flight above street level allowed the subtle placement of the garage below. Bathrooms were placed along the windowless front south wall and were lit by plastic roof domes. The resourceful use of space on this confined site and the engaging sequence of rooms make this an exemplary townhouse design for Melbourne comparable to the courtyard houses of American architects Mies van der Rohe, I M Pei, Eliot Noyes and Philip Johnson.

The Fenner House won the 1967 Victorian Architecture Medal.

The Fenner House featured in a number of publications in 1967. These included:

'Victorian Architectural Awards', *Architecture Today*, May 1967, pp 21-22  
'House for Mr and Mrs Clive Ross Fenner', *Architecture in Australia*, October 1967, p 826  
'Victorian Architectural Medal Awards', *Architect*, March-April 1967, pp 20-21  
'House in South Yarra', *Architecture and Arts*, May 1967, pp 6-7  
*Cross Section*, May 1967  
*Australian Women's Weekly*, 22 February 1967, p 45

The latter three page article, headed 'This house looks in - not out House of the Week', included six photographs and a plan of the house.

Writing about the Fenner House, Goad describes it as exuding 'an image of privacy, urbanity and attention to detail. Built in grey concrete Besser block, the design is typical of Neil Clerehan's efficient planning to gain as much from the site as possible. Two internal courts and a rear garden give northern orientation to every room. Gracious entry stairs are a simple but essential addition to the sobriety of this modern home. . the careful composition of the blank front facade ensures the car slips beneath the ground floor.'

It is stated in *The Architecture of Neil Clerehan* (2005) that the Fenner House in Domain Road, South Yarra is one of the most celebrated of Clerehan's townhouses and was the first to display all its features in their maturity. It is of interest that an article on the Fenner House in *Cross Section* in 1967 stated that the Fenner House could 'well be the prototype for successful town houses'. This would certainly appear to be the case.

A large number of houses in the area followed soon after construction of the Fenner House. This included Clerehan's second family house in nearby Walsh Street in 1968, which extended the themes of the Fenner House on a slim west-facing site. It incorporated two types of design on the one block - a townhouse for his mother-in-law and an extended family house behind.

When interviewed on 12 October 2015, Neil Clerehan stated that the Fenner House was his most important work of this period.

#### KEY REFERENCES USED TO PREPARE ASSESSMENT

Interview with Neil Clerehan, 12 October 2015

H Edquist & R Black. *The Architecture of Neil Clerehan*. 2005

P Goad, *Melbourne Architecture*. Balmain 1998, p 189

P Goad. *Judging Architecture : Issues, Divisions, Triumphs, Victorian Architecture Awards 1929-2003*. Melbourne 2003



P Goad & J Willis [ed] *The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, Port Melbourne 2012 [entry on Neil Clerehan, pp 154-55]

N Clerehan. *Best Australian Houses: recent houses built by members of the RAlA*. 1961

P Goad. 'The Modern House in Melbourne 1945-1975', PhD Thesis University of Melbourne, 1992

Photographs, Peter Wille Collection State Library of Victoria, 'House, 224 Domain Road, South Yarra, c1950-c1973'

RAIA List of 20th Century Buildings

'This house looks in - not out', *The Australian Women's Weekly*, 22 February 1967, pp 45-47

'Victorian Architectural Medal Awards' *Architect*, March/April 1967, pp 20-21

*Cross Section*, May 1967

'House for Mr and Mrs Clive Ross Fenner', *Architecture in Australia*, October 1967, p 826

## Plaque Citation

Designed by prominent Melbourne architect Neil Clerehan and built in 1964, this is one of the most celebrated and influential houses of the 1960s. It is of particular note as a prototype for the town house type.

## Assessment Against Criteria

### Criterion

The Fenner House is of architectural and historical significance to the State of Victoria. It satisfies the following criterion for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register:

### Criterion D

Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places and objects.

### Criterion H

Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Victoria's history.

## Extent of Registration

### NOTICE OF REGISTRATION

As Executive Director for the purpose of the **Heritage Act 1995**, I give notice under section 46 that the Victorian Heritage Register is amended by including the following places in the Heritage Register:

Number: H2350

Category: Heritage Place

Place: Fenner House

228 Domain Road

South Yarra

Melbourne City

All of the place shown hatched on Diagram 2350 encompassing all of Lot 1 on Lodged Plan 67757.

Dated 11 February 2016

TIM SMITH

Executive Director

*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/>*