
Summer House and Cliff House

Location

25 and 3/2 Swinton Avenue and Hodgson Street KEW, BOROONDARA CITY

Municipality

BOROONDARA CITY

Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO937

Heritage Listing

Boroondara City

Hermes Number 208937

Property Number

Physical Description 1

Summer House and Cliff House are perched higher on the same overall site as the River House, overlooking Birrarung/Yarra River from more expansive positions. Both are multilevel, timber clad buildings which are entered at grade from a driveway at the highest level, with levels descending over and down the site toward the river, an arrangement that is particularly distinctive across the three-storey equivalent of the aptly named Cliff House. Both Summer House and Cliff House include two levels of main residence and a further, self-contained space (in the Summer House this is dubbed the 'Tea House', a pavilion adjoining main residence by walkway, and in the Cliff House, it is the undercroft bedroom and kitchenette). In plan, both houses show adaptations in response to the unique topography—like River House, too steep for conventional

suburban residential building techniques and economies to apply—but also the natural environment. Sited to take full advantage of the established vegetation, the southern elevation of the Cliff House is shaped to accommodate a large cypress tree nearby, while the Summer House sits above a stone pine and large and very old oak which frame its views along the river corridor. Both houses employ extensive cantilevered timber balconies with light balustrading and glazing, further providing opportunities to sit and live among the natural environment. The timber cladding is coloured similarly to the River House's current shade of Brunswick Green tinted with creosote, making the buildings deliberately recessive in relation to the landscape.

From the exterior, both houses more closely resemble McIntyre's alpine architecture than the structural geometries of the River House. Notably, they reverse the approach to site, beginning high on the site and tumbling down into ever small living spaces rather than, as at the River House, beginning at the foot of an incline and spreading high above.

However geometry remains a concern; there are few if any right angles at play both in exterior and internally. Unlike the River House, both buildings used conventional construction techniques for their era: Summer House being a conventional timber frame on a concrete portal, although like the River House, not using a crane but rather constructed largely by hand; Cliff House used reinforced concrete with timber cladding, across a site that incorporates three stories of height difference.

In keeping with McIntyre's stated design philosophy for this later stage of his career, both buildings are best appreciated as they relate to their internal occupants, and in particular, how they provide opportunities to appreciate the river corridor landscape in foreground and middle-distance, and its views and flora and fauna, via placement of large, retractable single pane windows that transform living rooms into balcony-like spaces. These transition to an internal orientation for the spaces further away from the river, reflecting a 'zoning' approach that provides for spaces for retreat from the elements according to season and time of day. The spaces appear to reflect a lifetime of lived experience of the site, its particular orientation and needs, bookending a relationship to the site that began with radical youthful experimentation and ultimately a return to incorporate all that was learned subsequently on that site and far beyond.

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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