
2 Hodgson Street



City of Kew Urban
Conservation Study 1988

Location

2 Hodgson Street KEW, Boroondara City

Municipality

BOROONDARA CITY

Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO72

Heritage Listing

Boroondara City

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - June 30, 2022

What is significant?

The house at 2 Hodgson Street Kew (River House) is significant to the City of Boroondara. Its original or early interior elements, and its external (original and 1960s) and original internal colour scheme are significant, as is the landscape setting, particularly the trees that provide the backdrop and deciduous screen to the River House including the stand of elms and oaks between the building and the river, the large cypress to its south east, the large oak to its north east and the stone pine to its north (see Tree control map below). Also significant is the boat jetty, the landing structure, and original or early hard landscaping elements including the sandstone steps to the

river.

Features that do not contribute to the significance of this place include non-original or early alterations, and the 1960s annex, which although also designed by Peter McIntyre, was a pragmatic response to accommodate family needs. While it is not an intrusive element, its removal would clarify the structural expression of the eastern cantilever.

How is it significant?

River House is of local historical, aesthetic, technical and associative significance to the City of Boroondara.

Why is it significant?

The River House is important to the City of Boroondara's cultural history as an early, well known and radical exemplar of the influence and development of architectural modernism in the post-war period. Emerging from a period of austerity associated with World War Two, the River House represented a distinctive departure from conservatism and stylistic restraint. The River House also anticipated—by nearly half-a-century—contemporary approaches to development on the Birrarung/Yarra river that emphasise its landscape amenity. (Criterion A) Replete with comparisons to a Paul Klee butterfly, the distinctive form, finish and siting of the River House has evoked strong aesthetic responses in the architectural and broader community. The structural form literally embodies a tension between forces, enabling the majority of the building to appear incongruously suspended against a lush and steep riverside landscape. Its aesthetic effect incorporates theatricality through being revealed and hidden in turn by a curtain of deciduous

foliage, within and against a backdrop of endemic and introduced vegetation. Its use of strong geometrical elements, particularly triangles, is a leitmotif that emblematises the building at each level of scale, from its overall structural form down to its constituent elements, and most notably its fenestration. (Criterion E)

The River House demonstrates a very high degree of creative and technical achievement through its structural innovation that enabled an otherwise unusable site to accommodate a family home. The structural system designed in conjunction with advice from engineer Bill Irwin harnesses a counterbalancing of forces via an A-frame double cantilevered truss, enabling it to be physically possible to build on a sharply constrained site. This structural system for River House was in development prior to, and in fact influenced, the structural system for the 1956 Olympic Pool which was a critical part of the winning competition design, enabling the Olympic Pool design to use 1/3 of the steel than would otherwise be the case. (Criterion F)

The River House is synonymous with the early careers of Peter and Dione McIntyre, whose work individually, in collaboration and as part of the McIntyre Partnership has resulted in influential and award-winning architecture within the municipality and throughout Victoria. Among other prizes and awards, River House won the 2014 Australian Institute of Architects Victorian Architecture Award for 'best enduring architecture'. (Criterion H)

Heritage Study/Consultant	Boroondara - City of Kew Urban Conservation Study, Pru Sanderson Design Pty Ltd, 1988;
Hermes Number	22348
Property Number	

Physical Description 1

The multi-level house is supported on a central steel tower rising from a 14 foot (4.27m) square concrete plinth, from which is cantilevered a steel A-frame comprising two triangular steel frames each cantilevered 40 feet (12.19m). The walls are set within this framework leaving the structure exposed, and infilled with compressed strawboard panels (a product known as Solomit). At the outer extent of the frame the walls give way to open decks. Originally externally painted tomato red and cadmium yellow in a Mondrian-inspired colour scheme devised by Dione McIntyre, the house was externally reclad in hardwood and deliberately repainted in a more inconspicuous shade of Brunswick green tinted with creosote in the 1960s (McCartney: 70).

The house was originally accessed from the ground level via a door that slides up, which remains in situ in its open position, with the entry now served by a conventionally hinged door. A further entry at level is provided via a gantry to the dining room on the mid-level. A central spiral staircase provides access between the levels, with fenestration providing

glimpses of the tree canopies with which the house draws level, and the Yarra River/Birrarung below which gives it its name. Internal walls retain their original or early finishes and evidence of the original colour scheme, with the kitchen remaining intact. The extensive, picturesque site on which the house was built is outstanding and it gives a freedom to the architectural form that would not have been possible on most suburban allotments. As noted above (see 'History') the site has undergone landscaping improvement works over the past half-century, and today stands as a combination of remnant endemic, introduced native and introduced species. A number of trees considered integral to the landscape values to which the house responds are recommended for heritage tree controls (see 'Grading and Recommendations' below). Outbuildings and ancillary structures include a landing and adjoining boat jetty. A ground level annex, also designed by Peter McIntyre, was built in the 1960s beneath the western wing. Aside from those mentioned above, there have been a series of internal and external alterations, additions and accretions over the life of the building, including enclosure of the open decking (1958; since reversed) and a reduction in the size of skylights (McCartney, 2007: 68). Many of these were in response to understanding and adapting to environmental conditions at the site and the needs of a growing family. Rather than being detrimental to the integrity of the building, such changes over time demonstrates the flexibility afforded by its radical structural design and construction, and indeed are reversible. Today the house demonstrates a high degree of integrity.

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/>