
Toorak/South Yarra Branch Library

Location

338 TOORAK ROAD, SOUTH YARRA, STONNINGTON CITY

Municipality

STONNINGTON CITY

Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO174

Heritage Listing

Stonnington City

Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

The Toorak South Yarra Library, designed by Yuncken Freeman Architects and completed in 1973 is of architectural, aesthetic and technical importance at the State Level.

The Toorak South Yarra Library is one of the most notable Australian examples of the conceptual ideas expounded in the international movement of modern architecture. Specifically, it is an excellent example of the formal minimalism developed by the internationally acclaimed architect Mies Van der Rohe in the United States in the post-war years. The hallmarks of his approach are expressed in the two opposing systems apparent in the Library - a traditional classicism, expressed in the formality and monumentalism of the simple 'black box' contrasted with the expressed lightness of new technologies, expressed by the largely transparent main volume suspended above the ground.

Aesthetically, the Library is a refined black box, floating above its immediate context. The clarity of the form is not diminished by any sort of complication, and setbacks on all sides lend the building a monumentality. Located next to a busy commercial strip, the Library is a minimalist monument, symbolising the apparent victory of knowledge over commerce. Window frames, flashings, cappings and structural columns are all detailed together to form a balanced monochrome array of shadow lines and stepped sequential layers creating a homogenous skin. The skin encloses a voluminous free span internal space.

Technically the minimalist approach resulted in highly simplified detailing. The outside skin is light and transparent, and consists only of the steel column supports and large sheets of tinted glass, connected by the thinnest of frames.

Heritage Study/Consultant	Stonnington - References to National Trust of Australia (Vic) Register, National Trust of Australia, 1900;
Construction dates	1973,
Architect/Designer	Yuncken Freeman,
Other Names	340 Toorak Road, South Yarra,
Hermes Number	30850
Property Number	

Physical Description 1

A highly articulated steel framed, grey glass box housing entry, lending and children's Library, 24 study carrels and service core is located over a 'rendered masonry base containing offices, theatre, meeting room, toilets and service areas. The upper floor slab cantilevers about a metre past the supporting basement walls at the front and back but the side walls are in almost the same plane. On the upper level, 200 non universal columns set 3.0 metres apart, support solar grey glass. All steel work is painted matt black. The upper floor ceiling has a smooth white plaster finish. The original carpet was a brilliant vermilion colour. At the rear, a vehicle ramp allows access to the basement facilities, service and car parking. At the Toorak Road frontage a pair of ramps forms pedestrian links to the street. Bordered on three sides by Toorak, Cromwell and Surrey Road North the building is set between flanking lawn areas dotted with grids of trees on the east and west. Each lawn contains 36 birch trees planted to shade the glass external walls from the low morning and afternoon sun. Directly opposite over Toorak Road are Rockley Gardens adding to the spacious 'landscape setting of the Library.

Physical Conditions

The library is in generally good condition with the original spaces and functions intact. Carpet and internal colour schemes have been changed. Landscape and external car park/service areas remain broadly unchanged, but with one or two additional birch trees probably self-sown. The planting on the north side has been allowed to become overgrown, obscuring the monumental qualities of the building.

Local Historical Themes

5.4.1 The municipality of Prahran 8.4.2 Functional, eccentric and theatrical - experimentation and innovation in architecture 5.5.4 Municipal buildings and civic pride

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/>