

# Boomerang Residence, Birrarung Residence, Outbuilding, Landscape Features and Riverside Hut Ruin



195 Laughing Waters Rd  
Birrarung 1.jpg



195 Laughing Waters Rd  
Birrarung 2.jpg



195 Laughing Waters Rd  
Boomerang 2.jpg



195 Laughing Waters Rd  
Boomerang 3.jpg



195 Laughing Waters Rd  
Studio.jpg



195 Laughing Waters Road  
Boomerang 1.jpg

## Location

195 LAUGHING WATERS ROAD ELTHAM, NILLUMBIK SHIRE

## Municipality

NILLUMBIK SHIRE

## Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO111

## Heritage Listing

## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - June 24, 2018

### What is significant?

The property at 195 and 200 Laughing Waters Road including the riverside hut ruin, the Boomerang residence and the Birrarung residence, outbuilding, water feature and rock landscaping in a bushland setting either side of Laughing Waters Road, Eltham.

### How is it significant?

The house and landscape complex in a bush setting at 195 and 200 Laughing Waters Road, Eltham is historically, aesthetically and socially significant to the Shire of Nillumbik.

### Why is it significant?

The property incorporating 195 and 200 Laughing Waters Road is of historical significance for its purchase and settlement in 1950s marking the beginning of a distinctive style of living and design now known as the 'Eltham-style'. At this time Montsalvat, an artists colony in Eltham that thrived after WW2, was in its early days and the group of artists, writers and builders all helped each other with establishing their homes. As well as Gordon Ford, the property was associated with a number of other pioneering designers and artists who worked in the Shire such as Alistair Knox, Graeme Rose, Sue Ford and Matcham Skipper. These artists and builders played a pivotal role in establishing the 1950s and 1960s culture of the area and the development of the 'Eltham-style' of architecture, design and living. It is also evocative of the Eltham lifestyle for its association and use by the local artist community, which has continued through the Artists in residence program into the 21st century. (Criterion A)

The three buildings and ruin are of historical significance for demonstrating the 'Eltham-style' of architecture, which primarily uses mud brick or adobe wall construction coupled with the use of exposed timber structural elements such as posts and beams and timber and/or recycled doors and windows. Birrarung is typical of the owner builder mud brick houses around Eltham as inspired by the buildings at Montsalvat with their English cottage style using exposed beams and steeply pitched, dominant roof forms. Boomerang demonstrates typical Modernist style elements of an Alistair Knox design including the curved floor plan, mud brick walls with exposed timber beams, northern aspect for living spaces and near flat roof.

The property is aesthetically significant as a collection of buildings, landscape elements and infrastructure set amongst a protected bushland setting, which illustrate several characteristics of 'Eltham-style' architecture including the use of mud brick and recycled materials, construction in stages, close involvement of the owner in the process, rock and water feature landscaping by Gordon Ford and metal windows crafted by local artist Matcham Skipper. The fountain and rock wall adjacent to Birrarung is aesthetically significant as an example of Gordon Ford's landscape design with the key water feature and carefully placed rocks and boulders fitted into the bush landscape. (Criteria D & E)

The property is of local significance for its associations with Gordon Ford who owned and built on the property from the mid 1950s until he sold the property in 1999. The property and in particular Boomerang is also of local significance for its associations with Gordon's second wife, Sue Ford (nee Winslow). Sue was an influential Australian artist of photography, film and multimedia and one of the first women photographers to establish an independent art practice.

The property is also significant for its association with a number of other prominent designers and artists, who worked in the Shire and played a significant role in the 1950s 60s and 70s culture of the area and the development of the Eltham style of architecture, design and living. Such people include Matcham Skipper, Alistair Knox, Graeme Rose, landscape painters Neil Douglas and Jenni Mitchell, and filmmaker David Baker. The later rental of the houses into the 1990s continued this fostering of artist endeavours as did the Artist in Residence program run by Parks Victoria and Nillumbik Shire Council between 2001 and 2012. (Criterion H)

Heritage Study/Consultant	Nillumbik - Shire of Eltham Heritage Study, David Bick, 1992;
Construction dates	1969,
Other Names	Ford House,
Hermes Number	63476
Property Number	

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## Historical Australian Themes

DISTINCTIVE ELTHAM BUILDING STYLES

EMERGENCE OF AN ELTHAM LIFESTYLE

PROMINENT RESIDENTS (GORDON FORD - LANDSCAPE DESIGNER AND BUILDER)

3.14.2 Using Australian materials in construction

8.10.4 Designing and building fine buildings

8.12 Living in and around Australian homes

## Physical Description 1

Style Eltham style.

Design one-off.

Plan basically L-shaped.

Single and double storeyed.

Walls adobe (mud brick) and timber stud construction, timber board clad.

Roof pitched.

Features are the design of the building, its part two storey planning, projecting room with pools around it and the construction and detailing.

## Usage/Formal Usage

Original and Later Use: House

## Physical Description 2

Description

The complex consists of three adobe houses set in native forest, the one room or pump house by the river at 200 Laughing Waters Road, the main house across the road and up a track at 195 and the associated 'boomerang house' nearby, over a small hill.

## One room or pump house

The construction of the one-room house is, as its name suggests, basic: mud ' brick walls, recycled timber windows mainly facing the river and double ledge &braced boarded doors, two layers of corrugated iron sheeting to a skillion' roof which projects over the front as a form of porch and a squat mud brick chimney at. one comer. A small room is connected on the south-east corrier where currently a hot water service is located.

## Main house

The main house is a designed after a veranda hed English medieval cottage style using steeply pitched roof forms, exposed hand hewn beams, general natural finishes whether the pressed red brick flooring (over concrete slab), stained timber or mud plastered walls. Only the added waterfall viewing room (a skillion off the main gabled form added by Ford to his own design) detracts from the character of the house but only subtly. Evidently the designer, Rose, ,did not appreciate the addition. Next to this addition is the Ford waterfall of " large piled stones next to a small pond, the water coming from an outlet at the top of the pile pumped from the Yarra River from a pump located near the' one-ro'om .house.

The main entry is via the kitchen which has bench tops and pantry: flanked by an alcove for the refrigerator. Opposite is one for the stove. From here there is a study off the south-west corner down a few steps, the living area at the north west corner and the master bedroom at the north east. The bedroom has an en-suite and built in robe (now houses HWS); there are French doors to the verandah.

The living area fronts a large organic shaped fire place integral with the wall, its mud-plastered bellied form spilling out onto a brick hearth. A simple shelf trims around the semi-circular plan. The area also opens to the garden on the west. .

Set over the living room is a timber sleeping platform or mezzanine which is approached by a retractable ladder, operated by a rope and pulley system. A bathroom is off a small passage to the south, as is another bedroom. On the north is the waterfall viewing room which faces the stone pile and pond while accessing' paved areas via the French door as used elsewhere. The large garage located on the approach track to the house is similar in form and materials, with a two level structure attached descending the hill side.

## Physical Description 3

### Description

The complex consists of the Birrarung residence and outbuilding and the Boomerang residence, all on the north side of Laughing Waters Road (195 Laughing Waters Road) and the ruin of a mud brick shack on the south side of Laughing Waters Road (200 Laughing Waters Road). All buildings are set in native bushland.

### Mud Brick Shack ruin

Originally this was a one room house with mud brick walls, recycled timber windows mainly facing the river, double ledge and braced boarded doors, corrugated iron sheeting to a skillion roof which projected over the front to form a porch. It also had a squat mud brick chimney at one corner. There was also small room connected on the south east corner containing the hot water service. Following the 2015 fire, Parks Victoria made the building safe and removed the walls to a save level that can now be used for seating. Apart from the low sections of walls, there are also remnant stairs beside the building set into the slope. The original small footprint of the building is evident and its close proximity to the river and remnant diving platform alludes to its use by locals as a bathing shed.

### Birrarung

Birrarung is designed in an English medieval cottage style using steeply pitched roof forms, exposed hand hewn beams, general natural finishes whether the pressed red brick flooring (over concrete slab), stained timber or mud plastered walls. Only the added waterfall viewing room (a skillion off the main gabled form added by Ford to his own design) departs from this English Cottage style with its glazed walls. Next to the addition is the Ford waterfall of large piled stones next to a small pond, the water once coming from the outlet at the top of the pile pumped from the Yarra River via a pump originally located near the mud brick shack.

The main entry to the house is via the kitchen, which has bench tops and pantry flanked by an alcove for the refrigerator. Opposite is an alcove for the stove. There is a study off the south west corner down a few steps, the living area at the north west corner and the master bedroom at the north east. The bedroom has an ensuite and built in robe. There are French doors to the verandah.

The living area fronts a large organic shaped fireplace. A simple shelf trims around the semi-circular plan. The area also opens on to the garden on the west.

Set over the living room is a timber sleeping platform or mezzanine, which is approached by a retractable ladder, operated by a rope and pulley system. A bathroom is off a small passage to the south, as is another bedroom. On the north is a waterfall viewing room, which faces the stone pile and pond while accessing paved areas via the French door as used elsewhere. There is a tree growing through the northern verandah, which may have been a later addition.

The carport and storage building located on the approach track to the house is similar in form and materials, with a two level structure built into the hillside.

### Boomerang

Boomerang located over a hill from Birrarrung further away from Laughing Waters Road. It is a long curved residence forming an arc floor plan. The inner curve is considered the back of the house with the entry through the centre. The tall Matcham Skipper metal grill type windows puncture this wall. It has mud brick walls with the outside curve being mainly glazed, with sliding glass doors or a series of French doors providing outlook from the rooms onto the bushland setting. The skillion roof, clad in corrugated iron extends over this elevation forming deep eaves and a shallow verandah area. There is an unroofed cylindrical porch entry to the centre of the outer curve with the cylindrical walls extending beyond the roof. The curved wall to the front extends to be freestanding and set back from the house on the east side creating a long courtyard between the house and the wall. This wall is punctured by relatively evenly spaced long windows with the Matcham Skipper grills of welded round metal elements.

*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/>*