



# Modernist Houses in the Australian Capital Territory

Thematic Heritage Study



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HERITAGE

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## Report register

The following report register documents the development of this report, in accordance with GML's Quality Management System.

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### Quality management

The report has been reviewed and approved for issue in accordance with the GML quality management policy and procedures.

It aligns with best-practice heritage conservation and management, *The Burra Charter: the Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance, 2013* and heritage and environmental legislation and guidelines relevant to the subject place.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

The National Trust of Australia (ACT) (referred to as 'the Trust') is seeking to increase public awareness and education about **Canberra's** many significant houses that were designed during the post-World War II period, a time of prosperity and aspiration for a better life. This work will promote their protection and appreciation among the community.

The Trust has engaged GML Heritage Pty Ltd (GML) to prepare a thematic heritage study on mid-century modernist houses in the ACT. The term 'mid-century modern' implies a timeframe of c. 1940–1960, as implied by various architectural style guides, **and is more constrained than 'modernism'**. To capture the full **story of Canberra's modern development**, this study covers a longer time frame, reflecting development that coincides with the Australian **Government's** decision to re-commence designing, developing and building the national capital after the disruption of World War I, the Great Depression and World War II.

Two government organisations of particular importance in the post-World War II period **of Canberra's development** were the National Capital Planning and Development Committee (NCPDC) and the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC). Their

roles were to grow, expand and develop the national capital. The NCDC had greater executive power and successfully achieved the goals of developing and populating Canberra. To that end Canberra is unique as a major Australian city that has a substantial number of buildings, including houses, built in the middle of the twentieth century, often of exceptional design and quality.

The broader term '**modernism**', used to describe both an architectural style and a timeframe (approximately 1945 to 1988), is used in the study. This concept captures a greater number of significant houses designed in the NCDC period that would otherwise not be covered by the shorter 'mid-century **modern**' period.

By identifying significant historical themes relating to Canberra's development and defining architectural styles and housing types, this thematic study will help promote the recognition of modernist houses in the ACT.

In the context of population growth and increasing housing demands, new development pressures in **Canberra's** older suburbs, and the loss or major alteration of houses from this **period, it is important to understand the value of Canberra's**

**modernist residences.** Canberra’s modernist housing is unique, and irretrievable once lost. Robust information on its history and significance will guide informed decision-making about protection and conservation, and support the sensitive management of change to these houses. This will ensure the **ACT’s cultural** history and identity can be celebrated alongside growth to deliver the contemporary needs of the ACT.

The study provides a framework to assist the Trust, the ACT **Government and the community to appreciate Canberra’s** modernist houses, and support future heritage assessments and nominations of significant places to the ACT Heritage Register.

### 1.1.1 Key objectives

The key objectives of this thematic study are as follows:

- Document the principles of modernism that influenced architectural design in the context of Australia generally and in Canberra in the post-World War II period.
- Identify historical themes that help reveal the patterns and forces that shaped the development of Canberra’s housing in the growing national capital.
- Define the house types, architectural styles and indicators to be used in the identification and assessment of significant modernist architecture in Canberra.

- Inform future stages of research including a possible Territory-wide or suburb-specific heritage study (i.e. an audit or survey), which could result in nominations to the ACT Heritage Register.



## 1.2 The study timeframe

The period covered in the thematic study is the postwar period from approximately 1945 through to 1988, when self-government in the ACT commenced and the NCDCC's role in the growth of the city, as a place to live, had largely been implemented. The identifiable peak of residential construction in Canberra occurred in the 1950s–1970s.

As is common in architecture, styles are influenced by existing and previous styles and extend beyond fixed periods of time. Important for this study is the international influence of architectural modernism emanating from Europe and North America from the early twentieth century. Following strict government controls on building during World War II, in the postwar period the situation started to improve for the prospective homeowner, for the building industry, and for the architectural profession in Australia.<sup>1</sup>

This thematic study covers the ACT. It considers a broad range of residential housing, developed by government funds, private enterprise and individual citizens.

## 1.3 What is a thematic heritage study?

A thematic heritage study provides a broad historical context for understanding the patterns and forces that shaped an area or place over time. It provides a framework through which the development of a type of place or area can be understood by using historical themes, which are identified by research and analysis. Research and identification of themes can relate the specific history of areas or items to a wider context, providing comparative information on their relative importance. The study can then be used to provide a framework for investigating and identifying heritage items.

A thematic study also serves the following functions:

- to tie together pieces of historical information into a meaningful structure;
- to identify important patterns and developments across time periods;
- to provide a clear and meaningful context for changes in the physical and social fabric of a place or area over time; and
- to guide future heritage-related work for a particular place or area—for example, understanding the heritage significance of a place or precinct; heritage interpretation; and place-making and place-naming.

A theme can unite a variety of actions, events, functions, people and dates. Using themes helps to prevent overemphasis on a particular type of item, period or historical event.

Thematic studies are a well-recognised tool in heritage practice. They are used to provide a structured and systematic approach to assist in the evaluation and management of individual elements and are especially useful when analysing repeated groupings of similar elements. Historical and typological themes can be used at the national, state or local level and across similar and related types of places.

This thematic study is not intended to be a detailed account of all aspects of the modernist history of Canberra, nor to replace the extensive local, scholarly or published histories that provide detailed historical accounts focused on specific subjects and utilise extensive primary historical sources.

This report aims to help readers understand and appreciate why modernist residences in Canberra developed into their current form. It identifies and explains a selection of distinctive themes that help to understand the area and its historic physical fabric.

## 1.4 Methodology

The methodology for this thematic study followed the detailed approach established by GML Heritage in May 2023 for the Trust, as a precursor to preparing this report (**‘Research methodology—**

Thematic Study of Mid-Century Modernist Houses in the ACT, **May 2023’**).

**In summary, GML’s methodology has involved conducting** historical research to develop an understanding of the modernist movement internationally, nationally and in Canberra. Findings of this research informed the development of historical themes, which were also supported by input from industry bodies and subject matter experts. Following the identification of themes, building typologies and case studies have been identified, and a comparative framework developed to assist further assessments.

Guidelines that have informed the development of themes include *The Twentieth-Century Historic Thematic Framework: A Tool for Assessing Heritage Places* (Getty Conservation Institute, 2021), the *Heritage Assessment Policy* (ACT Heritage Council, 2018), and other key documents that have been referred to where relevant.

### 1.4.1 Historical research

GML has undertaken primary and secondary historical research as part of this report.

Primary sources include archival records from the 1950s onward, such as NCDC and Department of Works records, files of individual architects or building companies, plans, photographs, architectural drawings and other documents. These records have

been accessed through libraries and archives including the ACT Heritage Library, ACT Archives, National Archives of Australia, National Library of Australia and Australian Institute of Architects Library.

Secondary sources have also been used, including local, national and international publications.

### **1.4.2 Stakeholder consultation**

Stakeholder consultation was completed in accordance with the Engagement and Communications Plan prepared by GML in May 2023. Engagement was undertaken with Kenneth Charlton OAM, Amy Jarvis, Martin Miles and Peter Freeman OAM on 14 February 2024.

## **1.5 Limitations**

The focus of this report is modernist residences in Canberra, constructed from 1945 to 1988. These include single-dwelling, multi-residential, medium-density and townhouse developments.

During the research period numerous public, commercial or non-residential modernist buildings were constructed in Canberra that are also recognised or likely to have a high degree of cultural significance. Public, commercial and non-residential buildings are not within the scope of this thematic study—they should be the subject of a separate investigation.

This report is not intended to provide a comprehensive list or audit of modernist residences in Canberra that may be suitable for heritage listing, or to assess the significance of specific buildings. A subsequent detailed audit could be completed using this study as the basis for identification of significant buildings.

## **1.6 Acknowledgements**

GML gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the Trust in preparing this report. The assistance of staff from the ACT Heritage Library and ACT Archives is acknowledged, in particular Antoinette Buchanan, Assistant Director, ACT Heritage Library.

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- Kenneth Charlton OAM;
- Martin Miles;
- Peter Freeman OAM; and
- Amy Jarvis, on behalf of Canberra Modern.

## 1.7 Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Apperly, R, Irving, R and Reynolds, P 1989, *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1988 to the Present*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, p 211.

# Historical background—Canberra before modernism

## 2 Historical background—Canberra before modernism

This section provides a **historical overview of Canberra’s development as Australia’s national capital** and its early residential development.

### 2.1 Country of the First Australians

Aboriginal Australians have inhabited the Canberra region for at least 25,000 years.<sup>1</sup> The ecological zone to the east of the Murrumbidgee River was characterised by rolling grassy woodlands, peppered with old growth eucalyptus trees. Prior to the introduction of European farming practices, the large areas of grassy woodlands in the landscape were tended to by Aboriginal people through the use of **‘cool burning’ or ‘firestick farming’**, which was used to manage the landscape. The grassy woodlands and grasslands were a favourable location for hunting.

The Aboriginal people of this region travelled along seasonal routes in response to the availability of natural resources.<sup>2</sup> Evidence from hundreds of camp sites has been found across the ACT, and large quantities of artefacts have been recorded along parts of the Molonglo River floodplain (prior to the inundation that formed Lake Burley Griffin), as well as on the foothills of

Black Mountain, Mount Ainslie and Capital Hill.<sup>3</sup> These areas were important meeting places, of ceremony and social activity.



Canoe Scar Tree at Lanyon Homestead, Tharwa Drive. (Source: National Trust, [www.trusttrees.org.au/tree/ACT/Tharwa/Tharwa\\_Drive](http://www.trusttrees.org.au/tree/ACT/Tharwa/Tharwa_Drive))

Numerous local records written by white settlers refer to the continuing importance of the Molonglo River to the Aboriginal groups who coexisted with white settlers during the early pastoral phase of land use.<sup>4</sup> However, in a little over 50 years

following the initial contact, there was rapid depopulation and a marked disintegration of traditional ways of life.<sup>5</sup> This was substantially accelerated by the impact of European diseases.<sup>6</sup> By the 1850s the traditional Aboriginal economy had been largely replaced by an economy based on European commodities and supply points. Reduced population, isolation from the most productive grasslands, and the destruction of traditional social networks **meant that gradually the region's Aboriginal culture and economy was centred on white settlements and properties.**<sup>7</sup>

Despite late-nineteenth-century reports of the reduction in Aboriginal population numbers, the Ngunawal and Ngambri people of the Canberra region have continued to live in the area and maintain strong cultural connections to their land. The Aboriginal community have not ceded sovereignty over the lands in the ACT region. The Ngunawal people are widely recognised by ACT Government agencies as the Aboriginal occupants of the land, while the Ngambri people maintain that their traditional occupation of this area is attested to in the adaptation of the name Canberra from the word *Kamberri*, which in itself was likely derived from Ngambri.

## 2.2 Canberra's early establishment

### 2.2.1 Early European arrivals

The first official Europeans to visit the area of the present-day city of Canberra were James Vaughan, Joseph Wild and Charles Throsby in December 1820, who were led by Aboriginal guides.<sup>8</sup> **The area was dubbed the 'Kamberri Plains' or 'Limestone Plains'** and, by 1823, cattle were being grazed on a nearby station at Bungendore..<sup>9</sup>

Various land claims were made in the 1820s including by Joshua John Moore for 800 hectares on the site that would become Canberra. Robert Campbell claimed a vast portion of land for his estate Duntroon at Pialligo and a steady stream of other settlers claimed land in the area, including George Thomas Palmer at Ginninderra, and Henry Donnison at Yarralumla..<sup>10</sup>

Despite the increasing number of land claims, the area continued to be sparsely inhabited by Europeans, and the few who did reside there were mostly convicts and workers who guarded their **employers' stock.**<sup>11</sup>

## 2.2.2 Establishing the federal capital

During the late 1890s, there was much debate over the location of the seat of government for the new Commonwealth of **Australia. It was eventually decided that the future capital's** location would be selected by the new Parliament following Federation in 1901..<sup>12</sup>

In 1908 the final site selection was made; the region of Yass-Canberra was nominated for the federal capital by surveyor Charles Robert Scrivener. When Scrivener was sent out to examine and survey potentially suitable sites, he was directed by Hugh Mahon of the Commonwealth Parliament that:

The Federal Capital should be a beautiful city, occupying a commanding position with extensive views, and embracing distinctive features which lend themselves to the evolution of a design worthy of the object, not for the present but for all time..<sup>13</sup>

**Scrivener's choice was an elevated site straddling the Molonglo River,** with mountains and hills to the northwest, northeast and south. The shape of the territory was largely determined by access to water..<sup>14</sup>

In 1909, 911 square miles of land were transferred to the Commonwealth to form the territory, with approximately 35,500

hectares of land compulsorily acquired by the Commonwealth from NSW.



PL Sheaffe, surveyor, determining the second peg on the survey line through Canberra, 1913. (Source: National Archives of Australia [NAA], Item 8357551)



A group of surveyors, 1910. Seated, from left to right, are FJ Broinowski, A Percival, CR Scrivener, and PL Sheaffe. (Source: NAA, Item 11321847)

## 2.2.3 Designing the national capital

An international competition to design the new city commenced in 1911—the Australian Federal Capital Competition. In May 1912, after considerable debate and 137 entries, two Chicago architects—Walter Burley Griffin and his wife and business partner Marion Mahony Griffin—won the competition.

The Griffins planned Canberra so that separate urban functions or activities were conducted in different centres. They placed the functions of the federal government in the National Triangle area south of the Molonglo River, and this area took precedence over all other functional centres.<sup>15</sup> When preparing the design, Walter Burley Griffin stated:

Avenues connecting the two municipal centres with each other and with the executive apex of the federal group form together a triangular circuit connecting the Government departments and recreation groups and connect the Capital, University and Military Groups.<sup>16</sup>

The Griffins' plan drew on two of the prominent town planning theories of its time. The **'City Beautiful' philosophy sought to** import European-style beautification and monumental grandeur into the city environment, **while the 'Garden City' urban planning style** conceived of communities surrounded by green parklands.

Despite their differences, both the City Beautiful movement and the Garden City movement shared the physical planning ideals of circular and linear avenues, radiating boulevards and separated land uses that are evident in Canberra.<sup>17</sup> Relating closely to **Canberra's** natural setting, their vision for the city celebrated the creation of the Australian nation—with both monumental ceremonial national areas and attractive local residential

precincts to provide people with places to celebrate, commemorate, work and live.

By 1918, Walter Burley Griffin, in his role as Federal Capital Director of Design and Construction, had developed the scheme into a city plan that could be implemented. In 1920, the Australian Government established a Federal Capital Advisory Committee (FCAC) to ensure its timely execution. Griffin did not approve of the FCAC's appointment, and this, along with ongoing tension between Griffin and other staff and governmental departments, led to Griffin leaving his position for the building of Canberra in 1920 when his government employment contract was terminated.<sup>18</sup>

The **FCAC's** primary task was to develop Canberra to enable the relocation of Parliament from Melbourne and the transfer of departments and federal public servants to the new capital by 1927. Although details of the FCAC are well documented, we highlight the role of Charles Studdy Daley, because an ACT Chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects award for residential architecture is named after him (refer to Section 3.5.4). In 1921 Daley became Secretary of the FCAC, and worked closely with Sir John Sulman, who served as the Chairman of the FCAC from 1921 to 1924. Daley's family moved to Canberra in 1926, where they lived at 20 Balmain Crescent,

Acton. He **remained active in Canberra’s** planning and social activities.

Daley became Civic Administrator in 1930. He was described as **remaining** ‘true to the principles of the Griffin plan and fiercely defended a development ban on the city’s hills’.<sup>19</sup>

## 2.3 First phase of residential development

The first phase of **Canberra’s development** involved more than just government administration buildings. Suburban residential development commenced at the same time; this was foundational work for creating a liveable city.



A 1928 aerial image of Hotel Canberra (now the Hyatt Hotel) on Commonwealth Avenue, showing recent plantings to a design by Charles Weston. (Source: NAA, Item ID: 3238612)

The Federal Capital Commission (FCC) replaced the FCAC in 1925 and moved away from a vision of built-up avenues to a stronger emphasis on the Garden City style, with buildings in large, landscaped plots. The Parliamentary Zone was extensively landscaped, and Chief Commonwealth Architect John Smith Murdoch and Charles Weston, Director of City Planning and Superintendent of Parks and Gardens, influenced the design of the landscape and gardens.

### 2.3.1 Suburban planning and planting

Weston was influential in the landscape design of Canberra through his planting work in a series of government positions. He oversaw large-scale structural planting in Canberra, and informed the adoption of **the FCAC's** early objective that **the 'protection and beautification of the residential areas on each side of the City where initial settlement' was to occur, and that garden treatments, without fences, were to be an essential feature of residential development.**<sup>20</sup> Between 1921 and 1926 Weston oversaw planting schemes in Ainslie, Braddon, Reid, Kingston, Barton, Manuka, Forrest, Red Hill, Griffith, Yarralumla and Deakin. **Weston's work in both the Parliamentary Zone and** areas designated for suburban residential development was fundamental to turning Canberra from a sparsely vegetated sheep paddock into a city.

The suburbs of the inner north and inner south of Canberra were the first residential areas to be constructed. The FCAC considered brick to be more suitable for permanent buildings than the timber of the temporary barracks and cottages used as the initial residences for the vanguard of public servants who arrived c1912.

In 1923, the FCAC advertised a competition seeking designs for **residences for Canberra's new suburbs. The FCAC sought designs**

for houses that were 'compact and easily worked, of durable character and suitable for the climate, at a minimum cost'.<sup>21</sup>

Canberra houses constructed in the 1920s were on large lots with setbacks that showcased front gardens, reflecting the Garden City approach for the new suburbs. The townscape was characterised by curving roads, with hedges along front boundaries instead of fences. The government supplied and maintained these hedges, as no front fences were allowed, and the treelined nature strips. All services were located at the rear of the blocks.

In 1926 it was decided that all central office staff of the public service would be transferred to Canberra, and the FCC accelerated efforts to construct houses. Much of the first-phase housing development was undertaken by, or on behalf of, the FCC Architects Department and consisted of single-storey brick cottages. A pattern book of house types was issued to public servants illustrating 22 different cottage types. The FCC cottages are known as the Federal Capital style of architecture and displayed elements of Georgian Revival, Mediterranean, Spanish Mission, Tudor, and Arts and Crafts architectural styles. They were generally detached, freestanding houses.<sup>22</sup>

Today, through various heritage precinct listings, including *Alt Crescent, Barton, Blandfordia 5, Braddon, Corroboree Park, Forrest, Kingston/Griffith, Red Hill, Reid* and *Wakefield Gardens*

*Housing Precincts*, we have an appreciation of Garden City principles that were built into these suburbs.

The early planning philosophy in the 1920s included a highly ordered layout and aesthetic unity of the precincts. Blocks and dwellings within each precinct have differing sizes, to accommodate the hierarchical social classes and government employees.

In addition to the 1920s FCC pattern book dwellings, with their limited number of designs in these precincts, heritage precincts demonstrate that the interwar period saw a move away from the ornamentation of the previous Victorian and Federation periods, towards minimal decoration, either as building materials and trades were in short supply, and/or as a precursor to architectural modernism.<sup>23</sup>

By 1927 the FCC had constructed cottages in the suburbs of Ainslie, Griffith, Deakin, Reid, Forrest, Eastlake (Kingston) and Westridge (Yarralumla).<sup>24</sup>

The FCC cottages for middle and senior public servants were designed in Georgian Revival and Mediterranean architectural styles. The same FCC department, under the direction of the first Commonwealth Architect John Smith Murdoch, designed four hostels for lower-ranked Commonwealth public servants.



FCC cottage types 3, 4, 8 and 9, clockwise from top left, William Mildenhall, c1920s. (Source: NAA, A3560, 4138; A3560, 3996; A3560, 4761; A3560, 4139)

Most houses from the first phase of Canberra’s **development** were government-built for public servants and their families. However, during the 1920s–1940s some architectural exemplars, designed by a variety of architects, stood out among the new suburbs. The standard house designs in Blandfordia (now Manuka and Forrest) are the work of Melbourne firm Oakley and

Parkes, led by Percy Oakley and Stanley Parkes, who designed houses for private citizens in the new capital city. Their typical house design was a detached single-storey brick villa with an influence of Georgian Revival and Mediterranean elements. Oakley and Parkes obtained commissions from William George Woodgers and John Deans in 1925, John Henry Calthorpe in 1926, and Henry John Sheehan and Martin Charles Boniwell in 1927, all on Mugga Way.<sup>25</sup> In addition to houses in Blandfordia, Oakley and Parkes designed The Lodge, located on National Circuit and Adelaide Avenue, in 1925.



Calthorpes House, designed by Oakley and Parkes. (Source: ACT Historic Places, <https://www.historicplaces.com.au/calthorpes-house>)

Kenneth Oliphant was the supervising architect for many of the Oakley and Parkes houses. Oliphant transitioned to become an independent practitioner, and designed many Canberra houses over his approximately 40-year career. These included The Alcorn House in Forrest (1928), the Fraser House in Manuka (late 1920s), the Dial House, Red Hill (early 1930s), and Inter-War Functionalist-style houses at 14 Arthur Circle, Forrest (1939), and 13 Evans Crescent, Griffith (1939), both now altered.<sup>26</sup>

Another architectural firm practising in the 1920s–1940s was Moir and Sutherland. Malcolm Moir moved to Canberra in 1927 to work in the Architects Department of the FCC. He established a private architectural practice in 1931, and designed his own house at 43 Melbourne Avenue, Forrest, in that time. From 1935 he worked closely with architect Heather Sutherland (later his wife) and they designed several Functionalist houses for Canberra public servants, including a group on Evans Crescent in Griffith.<sup>27</sup> These Inter-War Functionalist style houses of the 1930s and 1940s demonstrated an early influence of modernist style architecture in Canberra.

**Canberra’s development continued at a slow pace during the 1930s and early 1940s, caused by the Great Depression and World War II.**



Front view of 43 Melbourne Avenue, Forrest, designed by Malcolm Moir.  
(Source: GML Heritage)



Front view of 11 Evans Crescent, Griffith, an inter-war functionalist/International style house designed by Malcolm Moir and Heather Sutherland. (Source: [Canberrahouse.com.au](http://Canberrahouse.com.au))

The second major phase of Canberra’s suburban and residential development and construction occurred from 1958. Coinciding with post-World War II optimism, and with a federal government injection of funds to build and populate Canberra, this phase is discussed in later sections.

## 2.4 Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Osbourne, T 2020, 'New dating shows 25,000 years of history at Birrigai rock shelter in ACT', ABC News, 4 April 2016, updated 5 May 2016, accessed 5 May 2024 (<https://www.abc.net.au/news/specials/curious-canberra/2016-04-04/new-research-shows-human-occupation-in-act-extends-25,000-years/7288132>).
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# Thematic history of modernism in Canberra

## 3 Thematic history of modernism in Canberra

### 3.1 Introduction

This section presents a thematic history of architectural modernism in Canberra. Research has been used to identify the themes that reveal the story of modernism in Canberra. A thematic, rather than chronological, approach to the history of modernism in Canberra has been adopted because it provides context and linkages between people, places and stories, both in the development of an overall history and for use in future heritage planning for the area, including interpretation.

Following Griffin's departure from the role of Federal Capital Director of Design and Construction in 1920, **Canberra's** development as the national capital was government funded; the Australian Government had a clear mission to construct the national capital. Over the decades different government departments took charge of **Canberra's** development. Broadly, this is represented as follows:

- **Australia's** Federal Capital Competition, 1911–1913;
- intensive building development and tree planting, led by the FCAC and FCC (including Griffin and Weston), 1913–1920s;
- slowed development, due to the Great Depression, under the NCPDC, 1930s–1940s; and

- major development led by the NCDC, 1958–1988.

The two most significant phases of government-driven programs with residential development as a major requirement are as follows:

1. The first phase under the FCC, approx. 1920–1938; and
2. The second phase under the NCDC approx. 1958–1988.

The second development and building phase is the focus of this thematic study. The Australian Government was proud of its progress in the intensive city building endeavours, as demonstrated through multiple tourist and public information brochures.

In relatively few years Canberra has been transformed from vacant land\* to a thriving, progressive city. This publication is intended to give some idea of progress in the development of **Canberra as a National Capital worthy of Australia's growing** importance in world affairs. With faith in the future of our country and a sense of responsibility to the people as a whole, we continue with the work. – Gordon Freeth, Minister for the Interior, *Canberra Pictorial*, Commonwealth Government Printers, by authority of A.J. Arthur, c1959.

\*Today we acknowledge that the land was not vacant. It was never ceded by First Nations custodians of Country.

Six historical themes are discussed in this section, as follows:

Theme 1: The growth of global modernism;

Theme 2: A new government vision for Canberra—the NCDC;

Theme 3: Postwar residential growth in Canberra;

Theme 4: Architecture fit for a capital;

Theme 5: The bush capital—building for the environment; and

Theme 6: Liveability and building community.

## 3.2 Theme 1: The growth of global modernism

While the time period to which modernism relates is open to debate, in architectural terms it is primarily a twentieth-century style, born out of new industrial and technological evolutions and emerging in Europe before spreading across the world. The movement emerged as:

a physical response to changes in technology and society, modernist architecture is demarcated by a reduction in ornamentation, general rejection of classical forms and a rational use of materials with, in many cases, the use of new materials or traditional materials in new ways.<sup>1</sup>

The modernist movement was inspired by a belief that new technologies applied rationally to architecture and urbanism could contribute to a better world.<sup>2</sup> The advances in the production of materials like steel, iron and glass from the nineteenth-century industrial revolution made new materials available for architecture.

Early and leading practitioners included Le Corbusier in France, Frank Lloyd Wright in the USA, and German-born architects from the Bauhaus School including Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer, and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (to name a few). The Bauhaus School closed in 1933 due to the rise of Nazism; founding members of the school emigrated to the USA, and strongly influenced modernism in North America and elsewhere, including Australia.<sup>3</sup> From 1937, Gropius and Breuer taught at the Harvard Graduate School of Design in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Mies van der Rohe at the New Bauhaus of the Art Institute of Chicago. Within the modernist movement are a variety of sub-styles, such as Bauhaus, Brutalism, Functionalism and Internationalism.

Modernism was not only an architectural style; it was expressed through other disciplines including urban planning, landscape architecture, interior design, art and fashion. Modernist landscape architecture embraced the use of new materials and **form over function, using 'familiar materials in unconventional ways' and** aiming for low maintenance. It focused on creating a link between the house and garden, to extend living spaces outdoors, and often used irregular forms and asymmetry.<sup>4</sup> Japanese gardens were a frequent inspiration. Modernist town planning was driven by similar principles of rationalist order, with functionality and zoning used as tools to deliver distinctive city elements for living, working and travel. An early expression of **this was Le Corbusier's** 1925 Plan Voisin, a theoretical vision for Paris (never implemented) where large sections of medieval and nineteenth-century buildings would be replaced with skyscrapers set in a landscape of roads and parks. This model was a reaction to the **economic segregation and dense urbanisation of Paris's** slums and cities like New York, and aimed to create a modern, more liveable city. At the time the modernist visions of urban planning were contentious, and critics alleged they sought to **impose an 'inhuman orderliness'**.<sup>5</sup>

The modern movement and modernism in architecture emerged in Australia during the 1930s, as a reaction to the Great Depression. Following a hiatus in during World War II, the construction and architectural industry gained momentum during

the 1950s and 1960s, which were prosperous years of full employment. The popularity of the style spread from Europe and North America to Australia, and gradually became visible in Australian homes, and later in public and commercial buildings.<sup>6</sup>

In Australia, modernism gained a following among the new architects of the postwar era. Architects such as Harry Seidler (a student of Gropius), Sydney Ancher, Robin Boyd and Roy Grounds have become known for the legacy of their modernist designs, and all of these architects worked in Canberra in the postwar period. Large numbers of returned servicemen enrolled in Australian schools of architecture from 1946, entering the profession in the 1950s. Apperly, Irving et al described them as 'ardent modernists determined to help make a better world by applying their cherished theories of "rational" and "functional" **design to everything from cities to cutlery'**.<sup>7</sup> Postwar migration to Australia also meant that several prominent architects migrated to Australia from overseas. They brought with them their life experience, perspectives and exposure to modernism in overseas practice, in some cases including direct work experience with leading international modernists.

Local modernist styles and trends emerged around Australia. The most well-known of these are the regional styles developed by the so-called '**Sydney School**' and Melbourne Regional style. In NSW, architects responded to the needs of their upper-middle class clientele and the local setting, often on sloping, tree-filled

blocks, to develop a style of domestic architecture that reflected its context. After their departure from Canberra, the Griffins worked on masterplanning and early residential projects in Castlecrag, Sydney, and this area retains many houses in the modernist style. Common features of the Sydney School style include split levels descending down sites; use of sloped, skillion roofs; use of natural materials such as timber, bricks and tiles; and informal landscaping with Australian flora.<sup>8</sup> Roofs were often dark toned and walls made of clinker bricks or painted. Notable practitioners included Ken Woolley, Philip Cox and Ian McKay, among others.<sup>9</sup> Construction companies such as Pettit + Sevitt commissioned architects to design demonstration homes that could be replicated for their clients.<sup>10</sup> In Melbourne, architects such as Robin Boyd, Roy Grounds and Peter McIntyre adapted modernism to a regional style with low, single-storey, linear plan houses. They often had low gabled roofs of corrugated asbestos cement, wide eaves and slim barge boards.<sup>11</sup> Vertical timber-framed windows became a common feature, and the houses were typically designed to take advantage of natural sunshine and shade. Regional variations were also seen in Queensland, where the traditional Queenslander style gave way to new modernist variations guided by the climate and postwar shortages of materials. In Perth, features similar to those of the Sydney School style were also seen on larger, institutional

buildings, and in other cities around Australia modernism also took on a regional Australian aspect.



Maley House by Andre Porebski, 1971, included on the *Willoughby Local Environmental Plan 2012* as a heritage item. (Source: Max Dupain, all rights reserved)



The Australian Institute of Architects headquarters in Red Hill, Canberra, is an example of the Sydney School of modernism. It was built as an office and residence. (Source: GML, 2013)



Fenner House in Red Hill, Canberra, designed by Robin Boyd, exhibits characteristics of the Melbourne Regional style (date unknown). (Source: [Canberrahouse.com.au](http://Canberrahouse.com.au))

The timing of the modernist movement's expansion coincided neatly with the rapid expansion of Canberra in the postwar era. **Modernism's popularity became reflected** in the new buildings, both residential and commercial, that were being constructed in the city. The confluence of need, opportunity, funding and architectural trends resulted in many of these buildings being designed in the modernist style. Architects travelled or moved to Canberra from around Australia to undertake projects for government and private clients. In doing so, the features of global modernism and its variations arrived in Canberra and were expressed in the new city. The constrained growth that had occurred prior to World War II (see Section 2.3) meant that Canberra was a small city with limited housing stock. The earliest

houses built after the establishment of the federal capital dated to approximately 1911. This meant that there was only one previous existing wave of residential development in Canberra, mainly in the Federal Capital architectural style, and no large areas of residential development from earlier periods—for example, suburbs of Georgian, Victorian, Federation or colonial-style houses. Modernism was therefore expressed in proportionately greater numbers and more visible within **Canberra’s** residential landscape.

Selected mid-century architects and Canberra houses. <sup>12</sup>	
Harry Seidler	Bowden House, 11 Northcote Crescent, Deakin (1951–52) <b>12 Yapunyah Street, O’Connor (1956)</b> Campbell Group Housing, Blamey Crescent, Campbell (1964) Garran Housing, Gilmore Crescent, Garran (1968, demolished) Lakeview, 127 Hopetoun Circuit, Yarralumla (1982)
Roy Grounds	Forrest Townhouses, 3 Tasmania Circle, Forrest (1959) 42, 44 and 46 Vasey Crescent, Campbell (1960) <b>144 Dryandra Street, O’Connor (1961)</b> 24 Cobby Street, Campbell (1963–64) 4 Cobby Street, Campbell (1969–70)
Robin Boyd	Manning Clark House, 11 Tasmania Circle, Forrest (1952)

Selected mid-century architects and Canberra houses. <sup>12</sup>	
	Fenner House, 8 Monaro Crescent, Red Hill (1952–53) 4 Bedford Street, Deakin (1954) 204 Monaro Crescent, Red Hill (1963) 12 Marawa Place, Aranda (1968–69)
Sydney Ancher	Northbourne Housing Group, Northbourne Avenue, Lyneham and Dickson (1959, demolished)—with Ancher, Mortlock and Woolley
Ken Woolley	Northbourne Housing Group, Northbourne Avenue, Lyneham and Dickson (1959, demolished)—with Ancher, Mortlock and Woolley Pettit + Sevitt homes in Pearce, Hawker, Aranda, Farrer and other suburbs
Enrico Taglietti	19 Downes Place, Hughes (1965) McKeown Houses, 109 Irvine Street, Watson (1965 and 1994) 7 Juad Place, Aranda (1970) Apostolic Nunciature, 2 Vancouver Street, Red Hill (1977)

### 3.3 Theme 2: A new government vision for Canberra—the NCDC

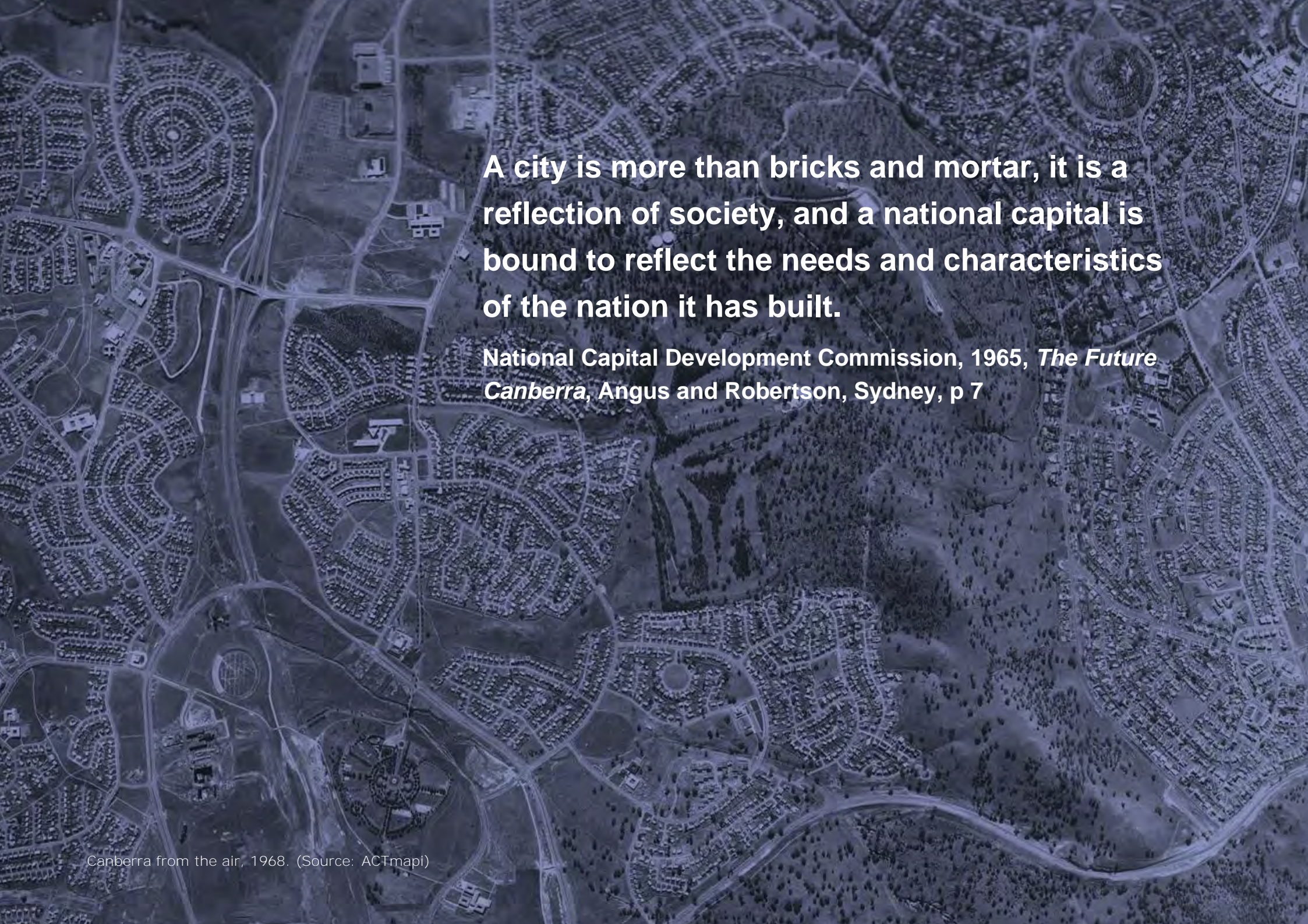
Following the Great Depression and World War II, the growth of Canberra had stagnated. In 1938, the population was made up of approximately 7,000 people spread across a handful of suburbs.<sup>13</sup> Postwar Australia had a growing sense of its own independent national identity; however, the first decade of **Canberra’s growth as a city following the war was characterised by poor management. The NCPDC was increasingly ignored; development occurred without reference to the Griffins’ plan and cheap, temporary buildings were constructed to house public servants.**<sup>14</sup>

In 1949 Robert Menzies was elected Australian Prime Minister and took an active interest in the development of Canberra as ‘a worthy capital’, personally intervening in the stalled planning process to push completion of Lake Burley Griffin. In 1957 Menzies canvassed the celebrated British town planner Sir William Holford to become an expert consultant on the issue of Canberra’s development, and as a result of his recommendations the NCDC was established in 1957 as a single planning body for the development of Canberra, with John Overall as the Commissioner.

The NCDC was established in 1958 with sweeping powers to plan, develop and construct the national capital. Faced with the slow progress of development and a critical housing shortage, in part due to responsibility for delivering housing having been spread across several departments, legislation was passed to allow the NCDC to control capital works in Canberra. The NCDC was responsible for four principal tasks:

- 1 To complete the establishment of Canberra as the Seat of Government by providing the facilities necessary for the smooth functioning of the parliamentary body.
- 2 To further the development of Canberra as the administrative centre of the nation by facilitating the transfer of Commonwealth public servants from Melbourne.
- 3 To give Canberra an atmosphere and individuality worthy of the National Capital through provision of monumental buildings and suitable special features.
- 4 To further the growth of the National Capital as a place in which to live in comfort and dignity.<sup>15</sup>

The NCDC had strong design intentions to develop a modern city with an atmosphere worthy of the national capital. In 1965 the NCDC stated the following in *The Future Canberra*:



**A city is more than bricks and mortar, it is a reflection of society, and a national capital is bound to reflect the needs and characteristics of the nation it has built.**

**National Capital Development Commission, 1965, *The Future Canberra*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, p 7**



NCDC officers at work in the field, Canberra, 1982. (Source: NAA, Item ID: 11761937)

The NCDC encouraged every well-known architect, engineer, town planner and landscape architect at the time to design major developments for the expanding city. These professionals either worked directly for, or were engaged by, the NCDC, driving a steady stream of design and construction work through to the 1980s. As stated by Robin Boyd in 1961:

It was evident that the Parliament, which for thirty years had been divided and doubtful whether the whole experiment of a bush capital should not be abandoned, had finally decided it

was there to stay and was concerned about the state it was in.<sup>16</sup>

As the 1950s progressed there was a related drive to consolidate federal administration into one place. In response to World War II and the Cold War the Australian Government wanted all departments—particularly Defence and the Army, Navy and Air Force—based in one place.<sup>17</sup> As part of facilitating the transfer of public servants and establishing the national capital the need for more accommodation was recognised as an ongoing issue.<sup>18</sup>

An existing housing shortage in Canberra had increased dramatically after World War II when public servants increasingly moved to Canberra from Melbourne and servicemen were demobilised. Consequently, the waiting list for housing of 600 in 1945 swelled to 1445 in 1947, and then doubled again to over 2900 in 1950, and to about 3000 in 1955.<sup>19</sup>

During the 1960s, Canberra’s **population** more than doubled, from 50,000 in 1960 to around 140,000 in 1970, increasing again to 155,000 in 1972. With the push to expand Canberra and embed it as the heart of federal government under the NCDC in the 1950s and 1960s, the agricultural land on the edges of South Canberra and in the Woden Valley was acquired by the government for new suburbs. Two key planning documents, *Future Canberra* (1965) and *Tomorrow’s Canberra* (1970),

articulated the NCDC’s vision for the form and location of development in Canberra for the next 30 years.

In Canberra’s suburbs, the NCDC adapted the Griffins’ vision for Canberra to a **growing city through the adoption of the ‘Y-Plan’** in 1967. The Y-Plan set out a strategy for expanding Canberra to a city of one million people. Objectives included maintaining the integrity of the Griffin Plan and protecting the Central National Area from traffic congestion, in response to a period of rapid population growth..<sup>20</sup>



The Y-Plan as drawn in the NCDC’s 1969 ‘Strategy for Metropolitan Growth’. (Source: *Tomorrow’s Canberra*, NCDC 1970, p 226)

Under the plan, development was to occur along central lines in the shape of the letter Y. New town centres were to be established and linked by peripheral roads, diverting traffic from passing through adjacent town centres or the Central National Area. The newly planned districts of Belconnen and Gungahlin would form the upper arms of the Y, while Tuggeranong would form the base. The Y would be developed in stages: Woden Valley from 1964, Belconnen from 1966, Weston Creek from 1969, Tuggeranong from 1974, and Gungahlin from the early 1990s. **The plan's** key principles included that growth should be contained within valleys, leaving the hills free from development—giving Canberra its characteristic suburbs distributed among natural hills as topographic landmarks.<sup>21</sup>

When the NCDC was established in mid-1958, only 16% of homes in Canberra had been built by private enterprise.<sup>22</sup> To increase the development of new housing, the NCDC focused on standards of design, diversification of housing styles, the range of quality of housing units and the possibilities of more low-cost housing. In conjunction with government housing the NCDC also instituted policies to encourage private enterprise development **and ultimately to 'divert to the extent possible the responsibility for providing housing and flat units from the shoulders of the government to private enterprise'.**<sup>23</sup>

By October 1959 private housing construction had outstripped government housing and was increasing annually. According to

NCDC Commissioner John Overall private enterprise development **was of 'great importance in the business of providing the increasing domestic requirement of a rapidly growing Canberra'.**<sup>24</sup>

**The NCDC's work was fundamental to shaping** Canberra's urban design and architecture from the late 1950s onwards. It was established to oversee the rapid expansion of Canberra and under its management residential development greatly expanded, particularly private construction. As well as facilitating the growth of Canberra from a small, ad hoc city to a cohesive urban area embedded in its setting, the NCDC is responsible for elements of Canberra that are now recognised as key features of its identity as a city. These include the Y-Plan layout, the location and layout of subdivisions and neighbourhoods, the use of town centres as urban design focal points, the planting schemes of newer suburbs, and the spread of consistent housing types under the Homes Advisory Service (HAS).

### 3.4 Theme 3: Postwar residential growth in Canberra

After World War II, Canberra had not only a severe housing shortage, but also a shortage of materials and a lack of strong government direction on development. The shortage was particularly severe because the national capital had few existing houses of any kind.

Canberra's development also suffered from divided administrative control, and the NCPDC, established in 1938, was generally ignored.

Canberra's growth resumed in the late 1940s, and not only due to the sudden Australia-wide population growth resulting from postwar immigration and the 'baby boom'. In 1945—the pre-NCPDC period—there were less than 2,500 houses and flats in total, and a waiting list of 600, and as public servants returned from temporary transfer and from war service, the list grew to 1,445 by 1947, doubling again to more than 2,900 by 1950.<sup>25</sup> By June 1946 the ACT had only met 30% of its housing target, and there was an increase in medium and high-density housing to attempt to address the shortfall.

Government was the main provider of housing. The shortage of labour and building materials did little to assist the Australian Government in supplying much-needed accommodation.

Although, initially, making do involved transporting former military buildings and inexpensive 'experimental' prefabricated and demountable housing for use as residences.<sup>26</sup> These were often considered temporary, and used a range of materials including **steel, 'no-fines' concrete,**<sup>27</sup> monocrete, recycled timber and fibro. Examples of this experimental housing include the Beaufort prefabricated steel house in Ainslie, erected in 1947 and in O'Connor there is a precinct of relocated wartime air station sleeping huts called the 'Tocumwal' houses, and prefabricated demountable houses in Narrabundah. Many of these buildings are extant.

Most public housing was allocated to government employees, but there was some concern that senior government employees had better access to more desirable houses and suburbs than those on lower wages, due to a variety of issues including better connections, knowledge of the system, and more expensive rents in new outer suburbs.<sup>28</sup> Between 1948 and 1952 typical government housing, designed by in-house architects in the Commonwealth Department of Works and Housing, included **Canberra's first blocks of flats**—the Griffith Flats, and flats in Braddon, Reid and Ainslie.<sup>29</sup>



Griffith Flats, constructed 1948. (Source: ACT Heritage Council, Heritage Register Nomination: Background Information)



Prefabricated 'monocrete' houses in O'Connor, 1951. (Source: ACT Heritage Library, Ref ID: 001296)

The housing shortage in Canberra continued into the mid-1950s, and existing residences were a combination of the earlier Federal Capital style homes, temporary buildings, stand-alone houses and medium and higher-density housing. By 1954 the population had reached 28,000. In 1955:

there were 4773 government dwellings in Canberra ... there were 1891 privately owned dwellings, but about 700 of these had been built by the government and sold to tenants. Government guest-houses and hostels operated by the Department of the Interior housed 1613 people and the Department of Works operated two hostels for construction works, housing 1307. There were 3014 people on the waiting list for government housing..<sup>30</sup>

### 3.4.1 Filling the housing gap

In Canberra the planners and architects are being presented with opportunities unparalleled in Australia. They are creating housing on a large scale on virgin soil..<sup>31</sup>

From 1958, the NCDC, with Australian Government backing, took the lead on providing public housing. Unlike other cities, where the main focus of public housing was to provide a minimum level of accommodation as a welfare provision, as noted previously, the Department of Works (and its precursors) provided housing (hostels, hotels, flats, detached residences, and duplexes) for those of all standings in society..<sup>32</sup>

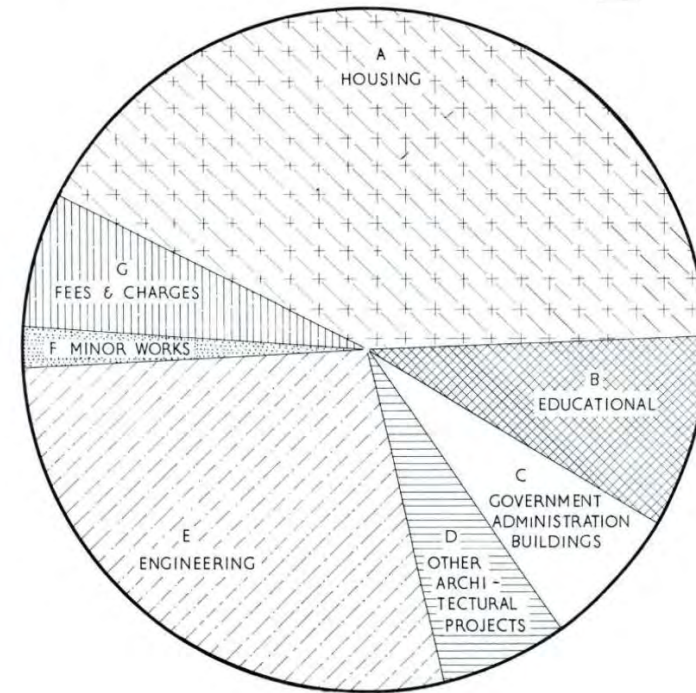
In 1959–1960, houses and flats were the largest source of capital expenditure by the NCDC, and housing continued to be a major source of expenditure over the next decade or more. It was not until 1972 that the number of privately built dwellings surpassed the number built by the government..<sup>33</sup>

Refer to the discussion of government architect-designed housing in Section 3.5.1.

**COMMISSION'S PROGRAMME OF CAPITAL WORKS**

Particulars of expenditure by the Commission during the year 1959–60 are detailed in the annual accounts attached and were—

	£'000.
Housing and flats .. .. .	4,617
Education .. .. .	1,036
Commonwealth Administration .. .. .	738
Other architectural projects .. .. .	677
Engineering Services .. .. .	3,050
Minor works and furniture and fittings .. .. .	197
Fees and charges .. .. .	731
	<u>11,046</u>



Graphic showing NCDC expenditure on capital works in 1959–1960. (Source: Third Annual Report for the period 1st July 1959 to 30th June 1960)

## The ‘govvies’

The NCDC commissioned a variety of designs for single-family government houses, referred to as ‘govvies’, with reviews and test builds to ensure they were designed appropriately to suit the Canberra landscape. Materials used in the govvies included clay and concrete bricks, timber, asbestos sheeting and brick veneer.<sup>34</sup>

Govvies were a priority type of public housing that became common across the city. Govvies were built in matching designs from a selection of series, intended to be suitable for families while remaining consistent with the design character of the city.

The govvies filled up, often with young families moving to Canberra for government jobs.

The government houses were constructed in large numbers in the inner north, areas of the inner south like Deakin, and in the new suburbs of Woden like Curtin and Hughes. These areas filled up with new arrivals from overseas or elsewhere in Australia, including transferred public servants.

The Department of Works undertook designs for government housing that it regarded as liveable and suitable for the cityscape. For example, in 1961 the Department reviewed the 400 series designs of government housing to determine whether **they were ‘suitable for contribution to Garden City architecture in**

**Canberra’s development’.**<sup>35</sup> However, the government was constrained by cost and high demand for new buildings, which in some cases led to the construction and design of houses that **were not as well adapted to Canberra’s conditions as hoped.**<sup>36</sup>

The 400 series was of brick veneer instead of double brick, and in 1961 the Department of Works noted that the goal of creating variety in government house designs within a constrained budget was difficult, and instead, one or two basic plans should be used with minor variations.<sup>37</sup> The Department of Works acknowledged that the greatest design constraint was cost, which led to the **designs’** small size.



Department of Works analysis of a 400 series design government houses, 1961. (Source: Housing review 196: 400 series designs, Department of Works, ACT Heritage Library)

Type 39A. Reasonably successful but could be improved if steps ran parallel to house. Fenestration pleasing. Blamey Crescent, CAMPBELL.

## Bachelor flats for Canberra

Canberra’s residents included single men and women moving to the city for work. These groups had different housing needs than families. In response to the undersupply of housing, the NCPDC had attempted in the 1950s to increase dwelling numbers by constructing blocks of flats, which demonstrated a changed perception of this style of higher-density housing. Flats had previously been considered a cause of congestion and unhealthy conditions—suddenly they were in favour..<sup>38</sup> Under the direction of architects Richard Ure and Ian Slater in the Department of Works, the Bega and Allawah Flats on Ainslie Avenue and Cooyong Street, Braddon, were constructed. Allawah Court was completed in 1956 followed by the Bega Flats a year later. The nearby Currong Apartments were finalised in 1959. This was **Canberra’s largest housing development and comprised eight three-storey flats and six eight-storey buildings.** The eight-storey buildings contained 212 flats.

Many of the flats were allocated to Defence personnel transferring from Melbourne. **‘16 delighted people’ moved into their single flats in the eight-storey block in February 1959. The top three floors were reserved for Defence personnel. ‘Fair Flat Policy’ wrote:**

No one could doubt the joy and satisfaction of the Canberra people in at last having obtained a place of their own, with the

prospect of peace and quiet after second class communal living..<sup>39</sup>



Civic Centre showing the three-storey and eight-storey buildings of the Bega and Allawah Flats, and a shopping area in the background, 1963. (Source: NAA, A1200 L42963)

The NCDC followed on from the 1950s flat developments by the NCPDC, to foster greater diversity of housing. Its building program expanded to include bachelor flats to relieve pressure on hostels due to the housing shortage.

Between 1959 and 1977 the NCDC completed several apartment complexes including Gowrie Court in Narrabundah (1959), Lachlan Court in Barton (1959), Stuart Flats in Griffith (1959),

Condamine Court in Lyneham (1960), the Red Hill Housing Precinct (1961), the Northbourne Housing Precinct (1962), and Kanangra Court (1965) and Jerilderie Court (1977) flats, both in Reid.



Flats at Braddon at night, 1961. 'The buildings are of reinforced concrete, slanted to get the full benefit of the sun, and flats are fitted with built-in furniture so that tenants need to buy little for themselves'. (Source: NAA, A1200, L37371)

Lachlan Court was constructed on Brisbane Avenue, Barton, to the design by the Department of Works. The *Canberra Times* reported that the new bachelor flats would employ a novel **building method, the 'no-fines' technique**, in place of typical load-bearing brickwork.<sup>40</sup> The complex consisted of 118 bedsitters across four separate buildings, one single-bedroom caretaker's cottage, a restaurant, a central laundrette and 41 garages.



Lachlan Court, Barton, 1960. (Source: NAA, A1200, L34165)

During this period the NCDC began to engage private architects to design government housing flats for couples and families. In 1975 Leith & Bartlett prepared proposals for groups of two-storey flats in several neighbourhoods in Canberra, Belconnen and

Weston Creek. These were based on the flats at A'Beckett Court, Watson, but planned differently to improve entry to each unit, provide northerly orientation to the living area and both bedrooms, rearrange the living, dining and kitchen spaces to allow for a formal dining area, design the furniture and fittings in accordance with the standards labelled 'Space in the home' and provide an interesting architectural form and carefully considered siting arrangements. Other private firms engaged to design government housing flats were Ancher, Mortlock, Murray and Woolley (Northbourne Housing Precinct, now mostly demolished); Collard, Clarke and Jackson (Kanangra Court); and Philip Cox and Partners (Jerilderie Court).



Block of flats at Hughes, 1966. (Source: NAA 1500 K15959)

### **Medium density: a housing alternative**

In the 1960s the NCDC, influenced by demographic changes in the growing population, shifts in housing preferences and other factors, embarked on less-orthodox government housing developments. These included medium-density subdivisions, and groups of houses, townhouses, and courtyard houses of one, two and sometimes three storeys. The NCDC also encouraged private developers to provide medium-density housing.

### The NCDC's Red Hill housing group was touted as a:

new type of housing project for Canberra and reflects the objective of grouping together a number of different types of accommodation to meet the varying needs of the community.<sup>41</sup>

Notable medium-density experiments in Canberra in the period include Swinger Hill by Ian McKay Architects (Bert Read supervising architect); Fisher Housing Group by Cameron, Chisholm and Nicol; Jerilderie Court by Philip Cox and Partners; Campbell and Garran Housing Groups by Harry Seidler and Associates; and Urambi Village and Wybalena Grove, both by Michael Dysart + Associates.

Medium-density housing projects were often related to a larger vision of town planning and how it could shape community relationships in Canberra. This topic is discussed further at Theme 6: Liveability and building community.

## 3.4.2 Private residences

### Building blocks and suburban estate development

The government realised that despite the increase in public housing construction, private investment was also needed to help address **Canberra's** housing needs into the long term. For

residents of the new city, this meant obtaining land to build on, and designs to build.

Canberra is unique in Australia in that all land in the territory is leasehold and owned by the Commonwealth. This was the policy established in 1911 to ensure the Commonwealth retained the benefit of gains of future land valuations. Building blocks were sold as 99-year leaseholds, usually offered through a series of auction sales each year; the first sales took place in 1924.

By the 1960s there were calls to modify the system due to rising **prices and 'allegations that the supply of land was deliberately restricted to maximise profits'**.<sup>42</sup> One correspondent, 'Tree Dweller', claimed there were many disappointed prospective private home builders who were unable to obtain blocks because of the high prices at auctions. Further, speculative builders were seemingly purchasing land at cheaper prices direct from the Department of the Interior.<sup>43</sup>

In 1971 the system changed from the land rent system to a reserve price system. Land auctions were arranged by the Department of the Interior, and later the Department of the Capital Territory.

The auction sales were well-attended and there was keen competition for residential allotments. In total 424 residential leases in the Woden Valley and Belconnen were offered for sale

at a four-day auction sale at the Canberra Theatre commencing on Monday 11 December 1967..<sup>44</sup>

The auction sale on 31 July 1973 at the Albert Hall was **'overflowing with prospective buyers'**. **One retired couple, Mr and Mrs PR Reardon of Mittagong, successfully bid for a block of land at Spence, 'one of several they had their eyes on'.**

But when the bidding rose so steeply this morning we wondered if stood a chance of getting a bid on any one of the sites of our choice..<sup>45</sup>



Land auction at Albert Hall, Canberra, 14 July 1970. (Source: NAA A7973, INT1142/2)



Construction of the suburb of Isaacs, 1987. (Source: ArchivesACT: 6724)

The NCDC was responsible for providing the sites for both Commonwealth and private enterprise housing and the necessary infrastructure associated with municipal development such as roads, water supply, sewerage, schools, and sites for shopping centres, parks and recreational areas.

New land releases were created progressively throughout the older established neighbourhoods and in new towns in the

surrounding valleys. The NCDC planned the location of new subdivisions and the layout of streets and new neighbourhoods for detached house blocks and areas suitable for medium-density housing. Building blocks were then handed over to the Department of the Interior for sale, generally to the highest bidder.

### Help for the home builder

A key initiative of the NCDC to foster private home building was the establishment of the HAS in late 1958. The service provided free expert advice to prospective home builders along similar lines to the Small Homes Services of New South Wales and Victoria. Notable architect Robin Boyd had established the Victorian Small Homes Service in 1947 and attracted progressive architects to design cost-efficient, modern homes as an alternative to suburban mass construction. The Canberra version retained the numbering system of the previous versions; for example, the Monaro T355 was a Victorian design, whereas Tallara (S/B301), Goodradgibee (S/T622) and the split-level Booroomba (S/T643) were all from New South Wales.<sup>46</sup>

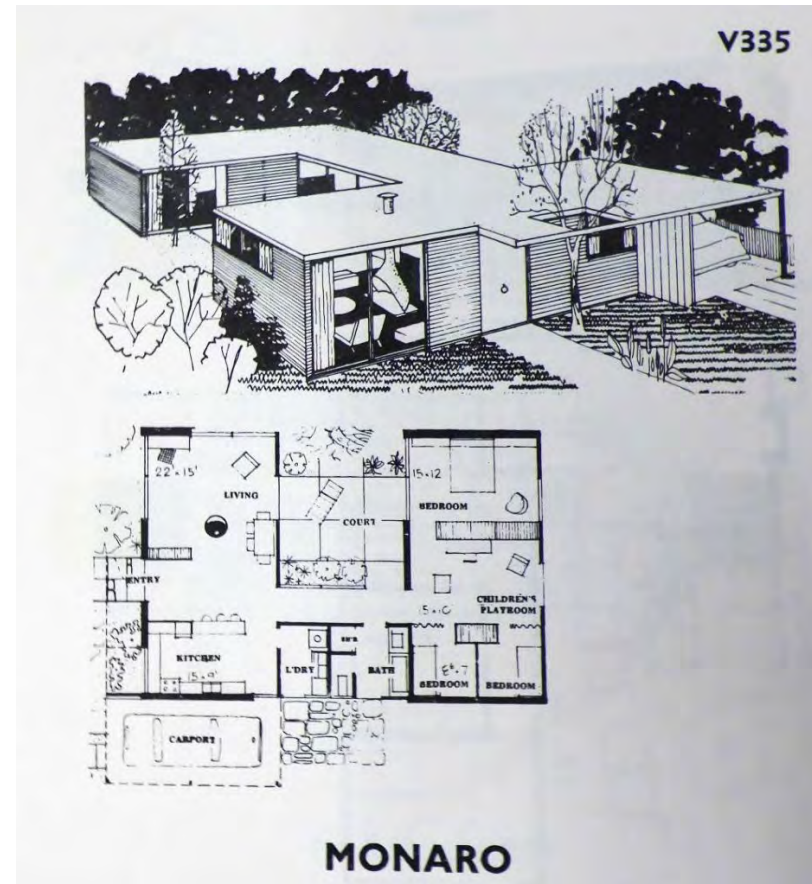
Canberra's HAS had numerous plans available, drawn by architects:

These plans are made available to the Homes Advisory Service in Canberra under agreements with the Small Homes Services

of Victoria and New South Wales and are obtainable at £8 a set of three including specifications.<sup>47</sup>

In the first year of operation the NCDC reported that the HAS had sold house plans to the value of £625,000 and the service **'has been especially of value to new residents of the National Capital as all information on home building, land and finance can be obtained from one source'**.<sup>48</sup>

In 1958 the HAS published *30 Home Plans for Canberra Conditions*, which were based on designs from the NSW and Victorian services. This booklet contained a selection of plans available for inspection at the HAS offices in Ainslie. In conjunction with the HAS the *Canberra Times* published the 'Garden City Homes' series each Friday showcasing a home design from the HAS portfolio, featuring an exterior sketch and floor plan, short description and cost to build in brick, brick veneer or timber. This series ran to 1968.



Plan of the Monaro house design, one of the Victorian designs used in Canberra. (Source: *30 Home Plans for Canberra Conditions*)

An inaugural Building Materials Exhibition held at Albert Hall by the NCDC in 1959 was visited by more than 10,000 people over

10 days. So successful was this initiative that the NCDC held this event annually until about 1967.

The NCDC organised the first Modern Homes Exhibition at Kernot and Marsden Streets in Dickson in May and June 1960. Featuring 13 homes and four garages at various stages of construction, the exhibition was presented by eight local and interstate builders as an example of what could be built at a reasonable price in Canberra. Over 35,000 people visited the exhibition and boosted enquiries at the HAS from prospective home builders by over 50 percent.<sup>49</sup>

The success of the inaugural Modern Homes Exhibition led the NCDC to hold two more exhibitions in 1961 and 1963. The 1961 exhibition showcased 15 houses in Raymond Street and Raymond Place, Ainslie. The 1963 exhibition comprised 50 houses in the new suburb of Hughes. Two of the houses were built by private firms from their own plans and specifications while 28 were built by private firms to plans available from the HAS. Other houses were built by private firms for the NCDC.

Coinciding with the third homes exhibition the NCDC published a **booklet for private home builders entitled 'Building your home in Canberra'**. It outlined lease conditions, sale conditions, site selection, design, plan approval, building regulations and finance options. Design and building regulations were aimed at

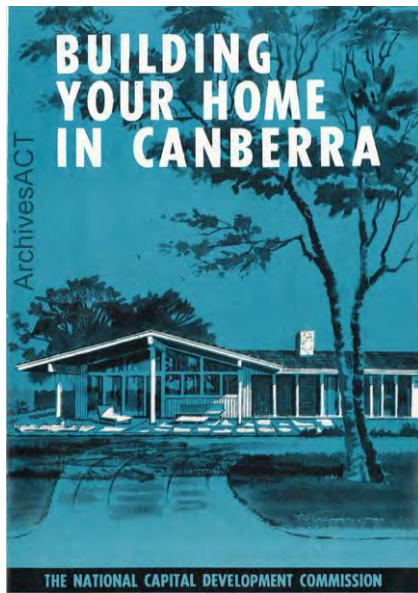
preserving residential amenity, a degree of privacy and preserving the garden appearance of Canberra.

Although the home is planned to meet your specific design and **requirements it should also be a "good neighbour"**. In other words, it should be sited in relation to and harmonize [sic] in design and colour with the adjoining homes. This will achieve a pleasing street elevation in addition to the good individual design..<sup>50</sup>

The NCDC required front setbacks of at least 25 feet (7.6m) from the street boundary, and on main avenues 35 feet (10.6m). Side setbacks of a minimum of 9 feet (2.7m) allowed for tree and shrub planting and **'reasonable breaks between homes'**. Front fences and walls were generally prohibited throughout Canberra and special approval was required by application. Likewise no structures were to be erected in front of the house.

In 1964 the *Buildings (Design and Siting) Ordinance* was introduced. The following year the Design and Siting Review Committee was established to consider appeals from applicants for whom the NCDC had refused permission. The committee consisted of representatives from the NCDC and the Royal Australian Institute of Architects. One such appeal was considered in March 1967 when Patricia Croft of Loftus Street, Yarralumla, lost her appeal to erect a two-storey addition to the side of her one-storey house at the corner of Loftus and Gunn streets..<sup>51</sup>

In April 1971 the committee reversed **10 of the NCDC's** building application decisions and upheld another seven refusals.<sup>52</sup>



Two versions of a booklet for home builders published by the HAS in the 1960s. (Source: Archives ACT)

The HAS operated under the NCDC until 1974–75 when it was merged with the Land Sale Office. The HAS offered a choice of over 300 architect-designed house plans. To help home builders, the Department of the Capital Territory published a leaflet titled **'Let's Talk Building Homes'** to help with the planning and construction of privately owned buildings in the ACT.

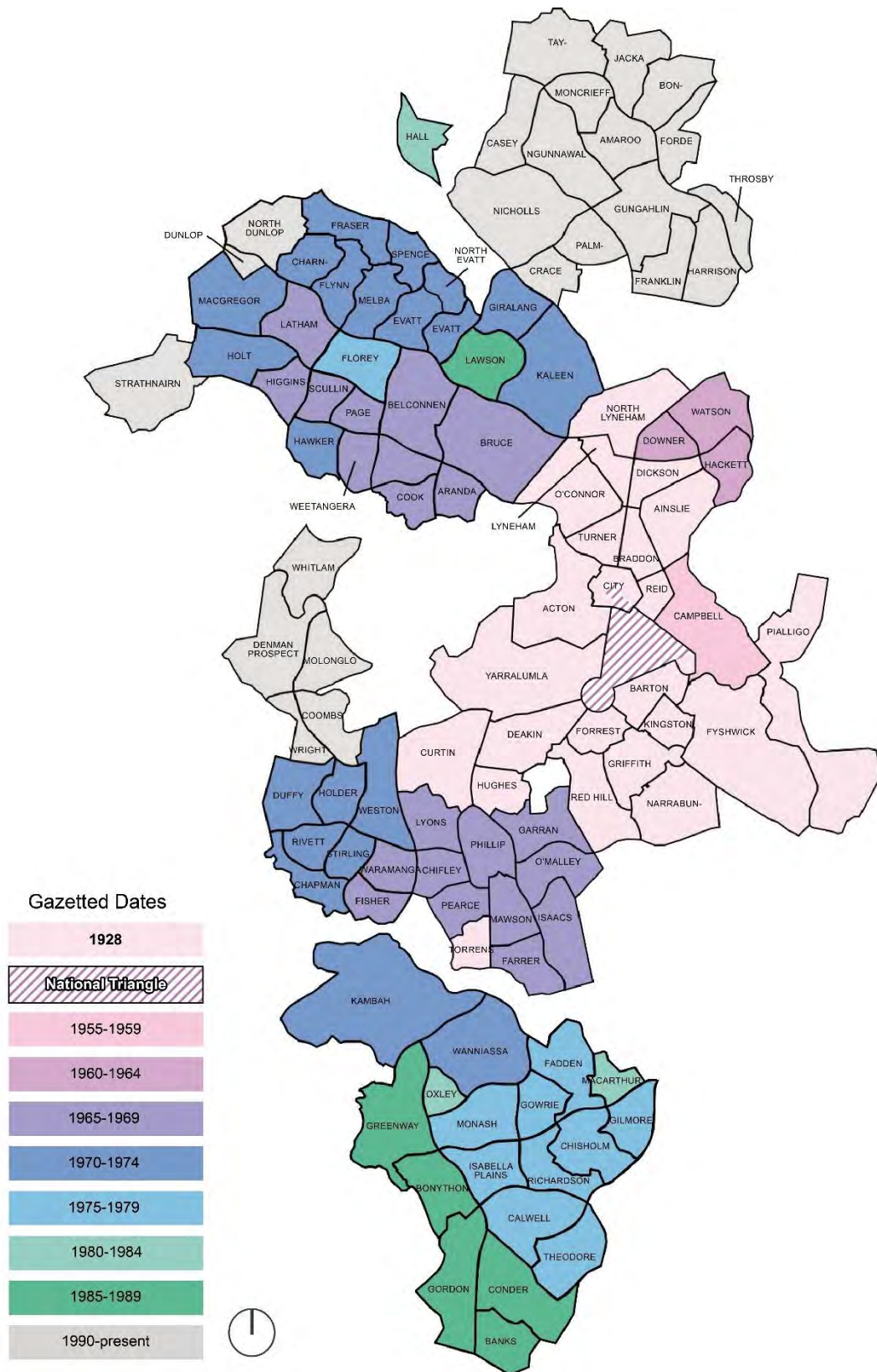


Leaflet published for home builders by the Department of the Capital Territory, 1975. (Source: ACT Heritage Library, Call Number H 2019 00313 [<https://librariesact.spydus.com/cgi-bin/spydus.exe/ENO/WPAC/BIBENO?SETLVL=&BRN=208204>])

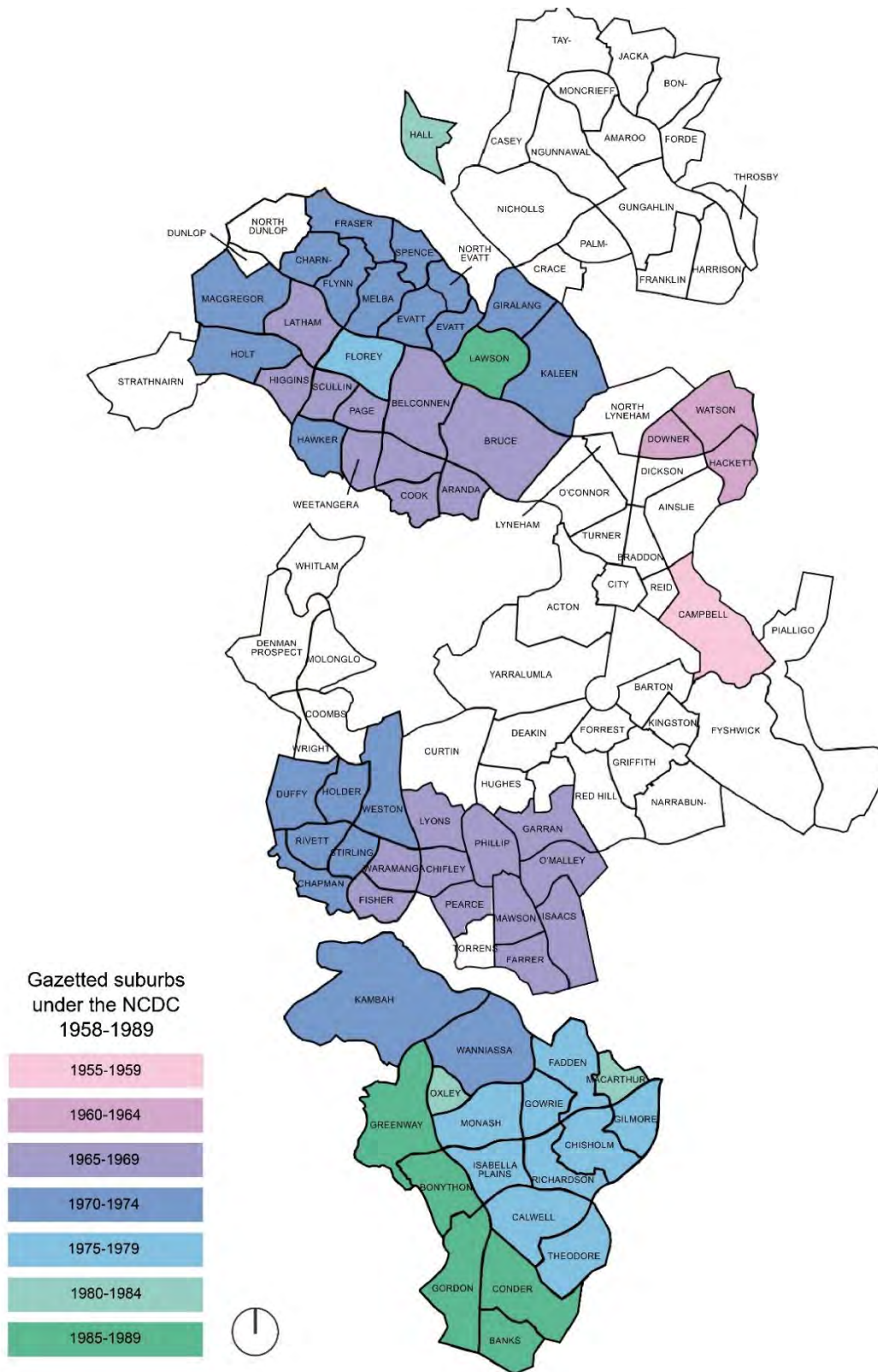
Building applications were submitted to the Building Section of the Department of the Capital Territory. However, approval of the plans was required in the first instance from the NCDC (external design and siting) and other Commonwealth authorities

as required; for instance, electricity, water and sewerage, health and the fire brigade. The approval process for new houses generally took three to four weeks.<sup>53</sup> Following approval, the Federal Capital Authority issued the building permit, undertook site inspections during construction and issued the final occupancy certificate.

From this time onward the NCDC focused on the provision of new suburban estates and associated infrastructure for new building blocks. The NCDC continued to build and maintain public housing in the territory and, although the commission still had a staff of over 20 architects, the team was responsible for commissioning work, approving designs, commissioning private contractors and assuring delivery of new public housing in the community. In 1988 the NCDC was abolished with the introduction of self-government in the ACT, and its functions were distributed between the new ACT Government and a new National Capital Planning Authority.



Periods, and locations, of development in Canberra. (Source: GML, with gazettal data from Archives ACT and based on pre-existing ACT Government suburb basemap)



The suburban development areas during the period of study, roughly 1955–1989, noting that no suburbs were gazetted between 1928 and 1955. (Source: GML, with gazettal data from Archives ACT and based on pre-existing ACT Government suburb basemap)

## 3.5 Theme 4: Architecture fit for a capital

During an afternoon in September many years ago – the wattle and prunus in bloom, the mountains sprinkled with snow – I reached the city of Canberra in a Fiat 500. A city without towers, without golden domes, without cathedrals, a city without a past. It was the dream of any modern architect. There was nothingness: the silence, the music, the clean slate, the end of an exploration, maybe the destination, and the invisible city.

Enrico Taglietti, quoted in Tadi, M, 'The Search for Infinity: The architecture of Enrico Taglietti between eternity, utopia and dream' (<https://www.enricotaglietti.com/home/the-invisible/background>)

Canberra's status as a relatively young, undeveloped city that was rapidly expanding in the postwar era created opportunities for architects. Architect-designed public buildings were being constructed by the NCDC to meet the vision of Canberra as the 'City Beautiful'. But architects were also designing private residences in the growing suburbs of Canberra for its booming population. The confluence of timing, need and opportunity resulted in many notable examples of architect-designed modernist homes being constructed in Canberra during the study period of 1958–1988.

### 3.5.1 Architect-designed houses for the masses

From the outset the NCDC employed staff with extensive architectural and planning backgrounds. John Overall, the first Commissioner of the NCDC from 1958 to 1972, was a trained architect who had been Chief Government Architect in the Department of Works in 1952.<sup>54</sup> Overall built a team of experts around him and within 12 months the Executive Architect, John Goldsmith, was appointed to the Department of Works. This role was later renamed Assistant Commissioner for Architecture.



Architects from the Department of Works, 1966. (Source: NAA, Item ID 11765591)

In the early years, design and construction supervision of the **NCDC's construction program was provided** by the Department of Works. By the mid-1960s there was repeated criticism about the design and quality of the houses built in Canberra, as in 1966 when ACT Advisory Council Chairman Jim Harold Peard called for **'new architects to design better looking houses [as there] is no imagination in them'**. He also decried the monotony and repetitiveness of the houses erected in Canberra.

It was during this period that, owing to the explosion in its work and the expansion of the new towns of the Woden Valley and Belconnen, the NCDC began to engage private architects to design a range of buildings, including government housing, for Canberra. The NCDC was the largest employer of private architects (agent architects) in Canberra during its years of operation.

The Commission does not undertake the detailed design of individual building. The policy of operation by the use of agents for this purpose enables it to select and use the best architectural resources available to it as effectively as possible in the development of the city..<sup>55</sup>

Agent architects carrying out works for the NCDC were issued **guidelines in March 1963, 'Notes for Agent Architects'**. The practice of employing agent architects produced a variety of exciting and innovative projects by notable local and interstate practitioners.

**Outstanding examples include Jerilderie Court, a 'group housing project of high delivery' designed in 1979 by Philip Cox and Partners, and the government housing group in Pilbara Place, Fisher, designed by Cameron, Chisholm and Nicol in 1971, receiving the CS (Charles Studdy) Daley Medal that year.** The NCDC also set out medium-density housing subdivisions for private investment development to support its mandate to

increase housing in the city. Architect Dirk Bolt prepared plans for non-standard housing at Section 37 Hackett for the NCDC in 1966. The *Canberra Times* labelled the development at the corner of Madigan and Grayson streets a ‘radical project for Canberra’. The first leases for patio housing in this development, built around a common garden area, were offered for auction in March 1966.<sup>56</sup>



The government housing group in Pilbara Place, Fisher, designed by Cameron, Chisholm and Nicol in 1971. (Source: GML Heritage)

### 3.5.2 Affordable architectural design

Early on, the NCDC adopted a policy of encouraging private investment and building in Canberra to boost the housing stock for the burgeoning population of the National Capital.

Not every prospective home builder was interested in engaging their own architect, nor did they want to wait months for their house to be completed. The HAS of the NCDC provided an alternative solution whereby prospective home builders could purchase a standard design sourced from the Small Homes Services in NSW and Victoria, prepared by well-known architects and emerging professionals. While the HAS remained popular for many years, its services changed over time as prospective homeowners turned to project home builders. Although not generally associated with excellence in architecture, there were notable exceptions among the project home companies that commenced operations in Canberra. Pettit + Sevitt and Lend Lease were synonymous with building ‘architect-designed’ project homes that were modern and cost-effective to build.



Pettit + Sevitt Lowline, Duffy. (Source: [www.canberrahouse.com.au](http://www.canberrahouse.com.au))

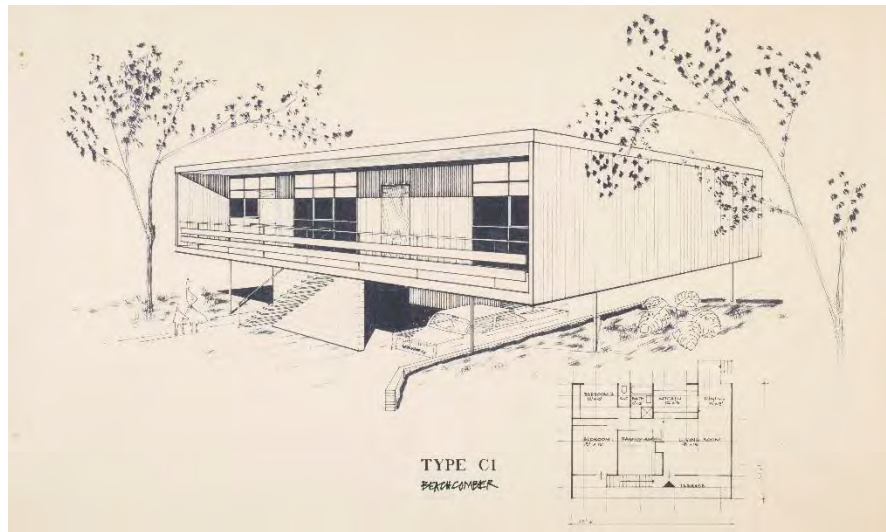
Pettit + Sevitt constructed over 3500 project houses during the 1960s and 1970s across Australia; approximately 500 were built in Canberra from 1966 to 1978.<sup>57</sup> The *Canberra Times* reported in 1966 that the firm, 'noted for the originality of its architect designed homes [Pettit + Sevitt] has commenced operations in Canberra',<sup>58</sup> with designs by Ken Woolley and Russell Jack, both winners of the Wilkinson and Sulman awards. The Lowline and the split-level Mark One models, winners of the inaugural Project Home Design Award for 1967, were built in Munro Street, Curtin, in 1967 and in Parkhill Crescent, Pearce, the following year. Pettit + Sevitt offered a 'five-point service plan which lays equal stress on top-flight architectural design even in low-budget homes, plus a much closer association between client and builder throughout construction'.<sup>59</sup>



Townhouse at Cabarita Terrace, O'Malley, designed by Willemsen's development group. (Source: GML Heritage)

In 1972 designer/builder Gary Willemsen established a business for the design and development of residential buildings.<sup>60</sup> Although Willemsen was not an architect, his houses expressed many architectural features typical of the modernist style and their architectural era, with expansive glass, timber and open plan spaces. Willemsen's company was closely associated with architect Albert Jesse (Bert) Read, who had offices in Willemsen's building and provided input to the building designs.<sup>61</sup> Willemsen developments include a group of 10 townhouses at Cabarita Terrace, O'Malley (designed by Read), Macquarie Court in Barton,

and a complex in Marr, Pethebridge and Biddlecombe streets, Pearce, known as Willemsen Close. The complex won the NSW Master Builders Association Award for Excellence in Housing in 1980.<sup>62</sup>



**Nino Sydney’s design for the Beachcomber (Type C1), 1961.** (Source: State Library of NSW, Nino Sydney Archive)

Lend Lease Homes employed the services of architect Nino Sydney from 1961 to 1973. Born Hrvoj Oskar Ninoslav Pleminiti Somogji, Nino studied architecture at the University of Zagreb and worked in Europe. He emigrated to Australia from Croatia in 1955 and, after renewing his training in Sydney, he became

Chief Architect for Lend Lease Homes in 1961. He promptly designed the famous modernist Beachcomber, Pan-Pacific, and Golden Key designs. Lend Lease entered the home building business in Canberra in 1962. The company boasted ‘highly qualified architects, engineers and production men’.<sup>63</sup> In 1967, another project home designed for Lend Lease Homes, the split-level Casa Blanca, costing \$9,999, won an award at the NSW Institute of Architects annual awards.

### 3.5.3 Outstanding architecture in private homes

In 1959, architect Ian McKay wrote:

In Canberra, where every opportunity is present, we should be putting such an effort into the design and layout of all types of development, and they should be of such excellence that they will demand acclaim from the public and from the profession. Most particularly in our National Capital in the city all Australians look to for leadership and inspiration in so many fields, the standards must be high.<sup>64</sup>

**McKay, however, gave a mixed review of Canberra’s architecture, considering many buildings a missed opportunity by Australian architects to create ‘great architecture’.**

Under the NCDC, Canberra set a high standard for itself, and the organisation engaged many leading Australian and international architects. By this time there was a growing community of architects in the Canberra area, and Sydney and Melbourne firms established offices in the city. Architects had a significant impact on the delivery of experimental and innovative modern government and institutional housing developments. Modernism was the most prominent architectural movement of the day; however, architects who are now recognised as having worked in the modernist style did not necessarily think of themselves as **designing 'modernist' houses at the time. Rather, they sought to** construct unique, functional houses that met the needs of their client and expressed their vision.

These architects worked on both government and private projects, and alongside the large-scale works of public institutions and government offices, their private and residential designs are spread throughout the suburbs of Canberra. The private commissions for these leading architects such as Robin Boyd, Harry Seidler, Theo Bischoff and Alex Jelinek usually came from wealthier or more prominent Canberrans such as senior public servants, doctors or academics. **Canberra's growing** population in the mid-twentieth century included an expanding scientific and intellectual community after the Australian National University (ANU) was established in 1946 and the CSIRO was

renamed and expanded in 1949. Members of these institutions were among the frequent commissioners of architects.

The architect-commissioned homes of many academics and researchers demonstrate an attention to detail in both art and science.<sup>65</sup> Former architect Milton Cameron suggested that the curiosity, intellectualism, rationalism and modernism of **Canberra's academic and scientific communities** helped drive their particular contribution to the construction of modernist homes in the region, including in the South Canberra suburbs.<sup>66</sup>

In Deakin the Round House, also called the Benjamin House, was designed by Alex Jelinek for Bruce and Audrey Benjamin. Bruce was a philosopher from the School of General Studies at the ANU, and the house was based on a Pythagorean spiral.<sup>67</sup> Awarded Australian House of the Year in 1958, it has a complex geometric design that radiates out from a central glass-walled pool, forming asymmetrically varying rooms. It is built of concrete, timber and steel. The Australian Institute of Architects has recognised the building as having national importance, and it is also included on the ACT Heritage Register.<sup>68</sup>



Benjamin House, viewed from northwest. (Source: GML Heritage)

The Fenner House in Red Hill was designed by Robin Boyd for the ANU Professor of Microbiology Frank Fenner and built in 1953/54. Its design reflects a rationality consistent with its scientist resident, featuring a diurnal and nocturnal block for use depending on the time of day.<sup>69</sup> The Fenner House was a marker of new architectural style not just in Canberra but nationally; in 1952 Boyd had published *Australia's Home*, an analysis of Australian housing, **and been particularly critical of Canberra's** housing landscape. Fenner House set a new tone for the city.<sup>70</sup>



Fenner House, viewed **from northeast**. (Source: 'House at Red Hill, Canberra', Architecture and Arts, 14 August 1954)

Boyd also designed the Manning Clark House in Forrest for one of **Australia's most** eminent historians, and the Philip House in Campbell for leading physicist John Philip. The Philip House and two other houses designed by the firm of Grounds, Romberg and Boyd were all on Vasey Crescent. Seidler designed the **Zwar House in O'Connor for CSIRO scientist** John Zwar, and Theo Bischoff designed the Gascoigne House in Pearce for artist Rosalie Gascoigne and her astronomer husband Professor Sidney (Ben) Gascoigne. In 1969 Roy Grounds designed a new home for Sir Otto Frankel, the internationally renowned plant geneticist—it

was the Frankels’ **third architect**-designed home, after one in New Zealand (now heritage listed), and another in Acton that had been demolished in a project to widen Nicholson Crescent..<sup>71</sup> In Yarralumla, the Birch House by Noel Potter for Professor Arthur Birch, discussed in Theme 5: The bush capital—building for the environment, was another example of an outstanding privately commissioned building.

Those architects who came to Canberra for projects sometimes stayed. Enrico Taglietti (1926–2019) was a leading practitioner of the modernist style who gave distinction to Canberra through his designs. Originally contracted to identify a location for the Embassy of Italy in Canberra, Taglietti saw the opportunity associated with the new city and settled here, opening a practice in 1956..<sup>72</sup> He designed many distinctive houses across Canberra. One of the most well-known of his commissions is the wedge-shaped house of Mr and Mrs WJ McKeown at 109 Irvine Street, Watson, which he designed in 1965.

The Tagliettis’ **own house in Durville Crescent, Griffith**, was a **former ‘Govvie’** transformed into a spacious Italian villa. They purchased a conventional 13-square house and added another 14 squares (one square = 100 square feet), put in central heating and closed in the gardens with high walls to make three sheltered garden patios. It was painted bright white..<sup>73</sup>



Enrico Taglietti in his Canberra home, 1971. (Source: NAA, A12111, 1/1971/29/31)



McKeown House, Watson, 1965. 'One of Taglietti's "avant-garde" house designs'. (Source: NAA, A12111, 1/1965/29/13)

## Houses on show—open homes

By the mid-1960s Canberra had a significant number of contemporary architect-designed houses commissioned by private home builders. Some of these houses were opened for public inspection to raise funds for the Canberra Art Club for the ACT Council of Cultural Societies Establishment Fund. The initial open day in March 1965 included nine contemporary houses as follows:

- 18 Cobby Street, Campbell, designed by David Bow;
- 18 Godfrey Street, Campbell, designed by Roger Pegrum;
- 46 Vasey Crescent, Campbell, designed by Roy Grounds;
- 2 Clunies Ross Street, Acton, designed by Noel Potter;
- 109 Irvine Street, Watson, designed by Enrico Taglietti;
- 7 Canterbury Crescent, Deakin, designed by Philip Sargeant;
- 87 Stonehaven Crescent, Deakin, designed by Ian Slater; and
- 8 Jansz Crescent, Griffith, designed by Peter Courtney.<sup>74</sup>

The Canberra Art Club was pleased with the attendance and takings during the 1966 event. In total 757 people visited Dr AJ **Tow's two**-storey house on Vasey Crescent at Campbell, the busiest of the eight homes open to the public on the day.<sup>75</sup>

The event was held annually until 1969 and each year **represented a range of different modern designs by the who's** who of local and interstate architects. The final year of the event in 1969 featured open inspections of houses designed by Roger

Pegrum, Eggleston, MacDonald and Secomb, Rudi Krastins, Dirk Bolt, Theo Bischoff, Derek Wrigley, Robin Boyd and Noel Potter.



Interior of the Wrigley House at 14 Jansz Crescent, Griffith, designed by Derek Wrigley in 1958. This house was one of the homes open for inspection in 1969. (Source: [www.derekwrigley.com](http://www.derekwrigley.com))



Original living room in the Wrigley House. (Source: [www.derekwrigley.com](http://www.derekwrigley.com))

## INSPECTION OF ARCHITECT DESIGNED CONTEMPORARY HOMES

Sunday, April 13, 2-5 p.m.



Arranged by the Canberra Art Club for the A.C.T.  
Council of Cultural Societies, Griffin Centre.

- 28 Araba Place, Aranda — C5 Designed by Roger Pegrum.
- 8 Garsia Crescent, Campbell — K8 Designed by Eggleston, MacDonald and Secomb.
- 22 Holmes Crescent, Campbell — L9 Designed by R. Krastins.
- 3 Arkana Street, Yarralumla — F10 Designed by Noel Potter (Winner of C. S. Daley Medal)
- 5 Fuller Street, Deakin — E12 Designed by Dirk Bolt.
- 86 Morgan Crescent, Curtin — C12 Designed by Theo Bischoff.
- 14 Jansz Crescent, Griffith — H13 Designed by Derek Wrigley.
- 204 Monaro Crescent, Red Hill — H13 Designed by Robin Boyd.

Letters and numbers after district refer to Canberra tourist map.

Tickets \$1 available at David Jones, Bouchiers, Griffin Centre, or at houses on day of inspection.  
No children under 12 — No high heels.

### NOTE

Children can be left at the Griffin Centre, Bunda Street, in charge of trained staff — 20 cents per child. Babies must be in baskets. Toddlers in pushers. Please bring toys and change.

Event advertisement. (Source: *Canberra Times*, 11 April 1969, p 12)

### 3.5.4 Award-winning architecture

In recognition of the present 'extent of private architectural practice in Canberra and the growing importance of office architects stationed in Canberra',<sup>76</sup> a local chapter of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA, now Australian Institute of Architects) was formed in December 1951. The office bearers of the division at inception included Malcolm J Moir, Grenfell Ruddock, Rosina Mary Edmunds, FC Hargrave, Heather Kier, RM Taylor, Kenneth Henry Oliphant and Bruce Litchfield. By 1961 the committee of the ACT Chapter was composed of Grenfell Rudduck, Malcolm Moir, BAJ Littlefield, John Scollay, Theo Bischoff, FA Hargrave, Peter Firman Harrison and JF Yuncken. The RAIA was instrumental in lobbying for architectural education in the ACT.

In 1956 the ACT Chapter of the RAIA initiated the Canberra Medallion, which was awarded to Robin Boyd for the Fenner House. The 1956 medallion was confined to single family houses erected in the preceding six years; the Red Hill house was one of 15 entries. In awarding the medallion the judges praised the **design for the 'great imagination ... throughout with regard to the plan and design of the interior and exterior' as well as the 'sensitive use of colour and texture of materials'**.<sup>77</sup>

The Canberra Medallion was next held in 1959. Entries excluded single family houses, with the award going to the Shine Dome. For the 1962 Canberra Medallion, 15 houses were nominated, all of which had been erected in the last five years. McConnel, Smith and Johnson, a Sydney firm, took out the 1962 award for **Mr and Mrs DR Mackie's house at 41 National Circuit, Forrest** (now demolished), **which the jury chose for its 'exceptional merit in architecture'**. Overall, the jury was impressed by the standard of nominated houses, each of which demonstrated design skill and **'featured excellent characteristics in one or more respects'**.<sup>78</sup> The 1964 Canberra Medallion excluded housing and was awarded to Downer Public School.

List of Canberra Medallion winners, houses built during the study period.<sup>79</sup>

Year	Place	Architect
1956	Fenner House, 8 Monaro Crescent and 1 Torres Street, Red Hill	Robin Boyd
1962	Mackie House, 41 National Circuit, Forrest	McConnell, Smith & Johnson
1965	Cater House, 145 Mugga Way, Red Hill	Allen, Jack & Cottier

Following the death of Charles Studdy Daley, a prominent early Canberra public servant, in 1966, the Chapter introduced a new

annual award in 1968 known as the CS Daley Medal, for a completed house, or housing project, of outstanding architectural merit. The inaugural medal was awarded to Noel Potter for the home of Professor and Mrs Birch in Arkana Street, Yarralumla (discussed further below). The following table gives the list of known medal winners until 1987; the medal was not awarded every year.

List of known CS Daley Medal winners, 1958–1987.<sup>80</sup>

Year	Place	Owner/client	Architect
1968	Birch House, 3 Arkana Street, Yarralumla	Professor and Mrs Birch	Noel Potter of Bunning and Madden
1969	McCawley House and Davidson House, 13 and 15 Furphy Place (joint award)	Miss R Davidson and Mrs R McCauley	Anthony Pegrum of Scollay, Bischoff and Pegrum
1971	Government Housing Group, Pilbara Place, Fisher	NCDC	Cameron, Chisholm and Nicol
1974	Wilson House, 38 Mirning Crescent, Aranda	Dr and Mrs PH Wilson	Roger Pegrum
1977	Swinger Hill Stage 1, Barnett Close, Swinger Hill	NCDC	Ian McKay and Partners (Bert Read)

Year	Place	Owner/client	Architect
1979	Jerilderie Court, Ainslie Avenue, Reid	NCDC	Phillip Cox and Partners
1980	De Mar House alterations and additions, 5 Sorell Street, Forrest	Mr and Mrs HR De Mar	Leith Bartlett & Partners
1981	'300 Series' Government House, Gynea Street, Narrabundah	–	Department of Housing and Construction
1982	Urambi Co-operative Housing Group, Crozier Circuit, Kambah	–	Michael Dysart
1987	Kambah government housing, Burrundulla Gardens, <b>O'Halloran</b> and Ashby circuits, Kambah	–	Addison Associates (Rex Addison)

One of the highest honours for architects presented by the ACT Chapter of the AIA is the Sir Roy Grounds Award for Enduring Architecture. Originally known as the 25 Year Award and later the ACT Award for Enduring Architecture, it has been awarded annually since 1995. Among its recipients are Enrico Taglietti, Michael Dysart, Dirk Bolt, Anthony and Roger Pegrum, and Grounds, Romberg and Boyd, who were all recognised for their

outstanding housing projects built in the 1960s and 1970s as follows:

Winners of the ACT Award for Enduring Architecture for houses built during the study period..<sup>81</sup>

Year	Winner	House type/address
1995	Dirk Bolt	Butler Residence, 44 Beauchamp Street, Deakin (1965)
1996	Roy Grounds of Grounds, Romberg and Boyd	Forrest Townhouses, 3 Tasmania Circle, Forrest (1958)
1997	Malcolm Moir	Moir House, 43 Melbourne Avenue, Forrest (1937) *This house is an example of the Inter-War Functionalist style, which was an early expression of modernism in Canberra.
1998	Grounds, Romberg and Boyd	Vasey Crescent houses, 42, 44 and 46 Vasey Crescent, Campbell (1961)
	Sydney Ancher of Ancher, Mortlock and Murray	Northbourne Housing Precinct, Dickson and Lyneham (1962)
1999	Ian Mackay & Partners	Swinger Hill Housing Precinct, Barnett Close, Swinger Hill (1971)
2000	Dirk Bolt	Bahr House, 1 Astley Place, Garran (1967)

Year	Winner	House type/address
2001	Allen, Jack & Cottier	Cater House, 145 Mugga Way, Red Hill (1965)
2002	Michael Dysart	Urambi Village Housing Cooperative, 81 Crozier Circuit, Kambah (1977)
	NCDC	Woden residential areas of Hughes, Curtin and Lyons (1960–62)
2004	Bowe & Borrows	House, 25 Colvin Street, Hughes (1960)
2005	Roger Pegrum	Wilson House, 38 Mirning Crescent, Aranda (1972)
	Philip Cox and Partners	Jerilderie Court, Ainslie Avenue, Reid (1978)
2006	Enrico Taglietti	Paterson House, 7 Juad Place, Aranda (1970)
2008	Anthony Pegrum	McCawley House, 13 Furphy Place, Garran (1967)
2016	Laurie Virr	Rivendell, 17 Meredith Circuit, Kambah (1975)
2017	Harry Seidler and Associates	Lakeview, Yarralumla (1984)
2019	Michael Dysart	Wybalena Grove, Kambah (1974)
2020	Ian Slater	Greenwood House (1975)
2022	Robin Boyd	Manning Clark House (1952-53)

## 3.6 Theme 5: The bush capital—building for the environment

### 3.6.1 A designed city in the landscape

Canberra is located in the valley of the Molonglo River, and is surrounded on all sides by hills which provide splendid views from all parts of the city. Canberra has always been conceived as a garden city, and extensive landscaping work has been carried out for many years. For these reasons, it is considered that a fundamental principle in the design of buildings in Canberra, is that they should be outward looking building, to take the maximum advantage of the unusually fine environment.<sup>82</sup> Canberra, as a city in the landscape, is shaped by the Griffins’ ‘City Beautiful’ vision expressed in their 1911 competition entry. **At the cityscape level, Canberra’s design included topography and nature at its core—a cultivated landscape in an idyllic setting.**<sup>83</sup> The Griffins’ plan for the national capital was based on a geometry dictated by the landscape rather than the principal points of the compass.

This initial philosophy laid down by the Griffins permeated all levels of design and planning in Canberra, progressing from the location and layout of the city, views to the inner hills, the design of streets and

suburbs, to the architecture and garden design of individual residential blocks and houses.



Canberra from Black Mountain lookout, 1970. (Source: NAA, Item ID 11720377)

Garden City principles were adopted by the FCC in the 1920s. The FCC’s focus was on orderly development and residential design based around five principles:

- subdivisions by through roads;
- one-tenth of subdivisions be left for open space (parks, playgrounds and public gardens);
- suburban subdivisions were to offer thoughtful arrangements of dwellings and avoid congestion. Emphasis was placed on the importance of low-density development, defined by detached or duplex houses as opposed to high-density terraced developments;
- dwellings were to be located on spacious private allotments facing landscaped roadways with access to ample public open space; and
- emphasis was placed on the arrangement of dwellings into self-contained communities, each forming their own identity.

The early suburbs of Canberra had large blocks with detached single-storey houses and private gardens, situated within landscaped settings with public open spaces and integrated with community services and facilities.<sup>84</sup>

To achieve the Garden City ideal, a massive tree planting program was undertaken across Canberra. **To match the Griffins’** vision, and following Weston’s **implementation of** extensive planting and landscaping work that commenced in 1913, planting

the landscape of the city was taken up by successive government superintendents and nurserymen Alexander Bruce, John Hobday, Lindsay Pryor and David Shoebridge. **By 1950 much of O’Connor, Ainslie, Griffith and Narrabundah** were planted with street trees, and Pryor reported that the planting program was the largest for many years, **given the hiatus of Canberra’s development during the interwar years.**<sup>85</sup>

By 1958 over 3,000,000 trees and shrubs were planted in the city area alone.<sup>86</sup> This was carried out by the Departments of Works and of Parks and Gardens, under Lindsay Pryor, the Superintendent from 1944 to 1958.

### 3.6.2 Landscape and urban amenity

The work during the NCDC’s development period was considered the largest single landscaping project in Australia and possibly the largest in the world during the 1960s.<sup>87</sup> At a civic, city-wide level, the NCDC’s Y-Plan was all-encompassing; the landscape character and street layout of Canberra’s new suburbs formed an integral component of the plan.

The NCDC continued the design philosophy of a city within a landscape, although the Garden City principles were filtered through the commission’s own interpretation. As stated by the NCDC in 1965:

**'the garden city' concept has been successfully expressed in the older Canberra suburbs and must be continued in the new districts and suburbs. This involves planting the street verges and incidental open spaces, school grounds, playing fields and shopping centre sites in sympathy with the material growing in private gardens. Such planting will produce a mixed character of greater interest.**<sup>88</sup>

Money for landscaping was rarely identified separately. Landscaping was planned, coordinated, designed and constructed as part of each land development program. All aspects were **brought together into a single approach. 'It allowed the landscaping of the city, which if it had been subtracted and added up, nobody would've ever agreed to spend that money.'**<sup>89</sup>

The planting of trees, especially of local eucalypts, was **entrenched 'as essentials to the design of Canberra, and the resultant landscapes have probably created a greater impression on those first visiting Canberra than has the architectural structure of the city'**.<sup>90</sup> Trees were **an integral part of Canberra's impressive engineered landscape.**<sup>91</sup>

The challenge for the NCDC was to take the essential elements of the garden city concept, develop them according to the needs of a modern city, and then give that city a uniquely **Australian character.**<sup>92</sup>

Peter Harrison, the first Director of Planning (Chief Planner) of the NCDC, appointed in 1959, was a key driver and defender of

the Griffins' Garden City principles, and he developed the Y-Plan for the future suburban layout, adopted by the NCDC in 1967 (noted in Section 3.3).<sup>93</sup>

Richard Clough, landscape architect at the NCDC from 1959, was another key player; he pursued a policy of linking open spaces and developing windbreaks and bushland areas as buffers between suburbs and within them, in anticipation of the proposed future suburban development.<sup>94</sup>

The NCDC also confirmed the significance of natural features as essential parts of the urban design. The **'regions', the hills and watercourses** conceived by the Griffins as a background to the capital were explicitly recognised in the 1984 Metropolitan Canberra: Policy Plan, Development Plan as the National Capital Open Space System (NCOSS).<sup>95</sup> It was a **'system of linked open space, street tree planting, protection of river corridors and drainage easements [that] complemented by householders' own gardens has created an urban amenity of great beauty.'**

Woden was the first specific area where the landscaping plan was **developed concurrently with urban amenity. The 'spine'** of Woden is Yarralumla Creek, the waterway in the centre of the valley with stormwater drains running into it. Water formed a basic element in design and construction, not only for lakes but also the orientation of new suburbs to natural watercourses and runoff.<sup>96</sup>

### 3.6.3 Suburban ideals

Australia's capital city Canberra became the nation's fastest-growing city in the 1960s. For many, it was the suburban ideal, designed around the family home with large garden in a peaceful setting, imbued with a sense of community - an 'Australian way of life' worth having.<sup>1</sup>

The NCDC continually reviewed its landscape policies, to reflect changing community attitudes. As appreciation for the Australian environment grew, native flora, mixed with exotics, was used more frequently from the 1970s. The landscape development of Woden, Belconnen and Tuggeranong reflected these policies, and changing ideas to suburban and residential planting. As a result, each district has a different, yet distinct, landscape character reflecting the 1960s, 1970s through to 1980s.

Further, the environmental benefits of shade from evergreen trees, or deciduous trees for greater shade, vulnerability to pests and the cost of maintenance, was an ongoing consideration by the NCDC. It experimented with different species of street plantings and retained existing natural landscape areas as part of new suburbs.

Mixed plantings on nature strips of residential streets were introduced by the NCDC to give the effect of a front garden extending to the kerb.

### 3.6.4 Home and garden

The NCDC's design philosophy continued the theme of a city within a landscape, filtered through **the commission's** own interpretation. As stated by the NCDC in 1965:

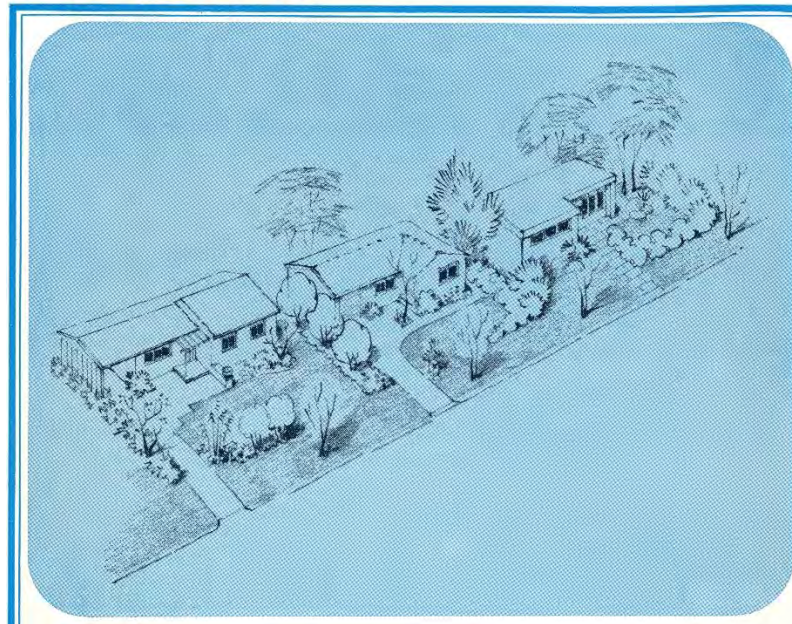
**'the garden city' concept has been successfully expressed in the older Canberra suburbs and must be continued in the new districts and suburbs. This involves planting the street verges and incidental open spaces, school grounds, playing fields and shopping centre sites in sympathy with the material growing in private gardens. Such planting will produce a mixed character of greater interest..<sup>97</sup>**

Free plants, grown at the Yarralumla Nursery, have been issued to householders and new residents of Canberra since 1930, as a method of enabling residential blocks to contribute to the holistic Garden City concept. Lindsay Pryor continued the Plant Issue Scheme in the immediate post-World War II period to stimulate private citizens' interest in gardening, thereby increasing the plant coverage and **enhancing the suburbs'** aesthetic character. The scheme also had the advantage of controlling the species being planted to ensure suitability for **Canberra's** soil types and climate.

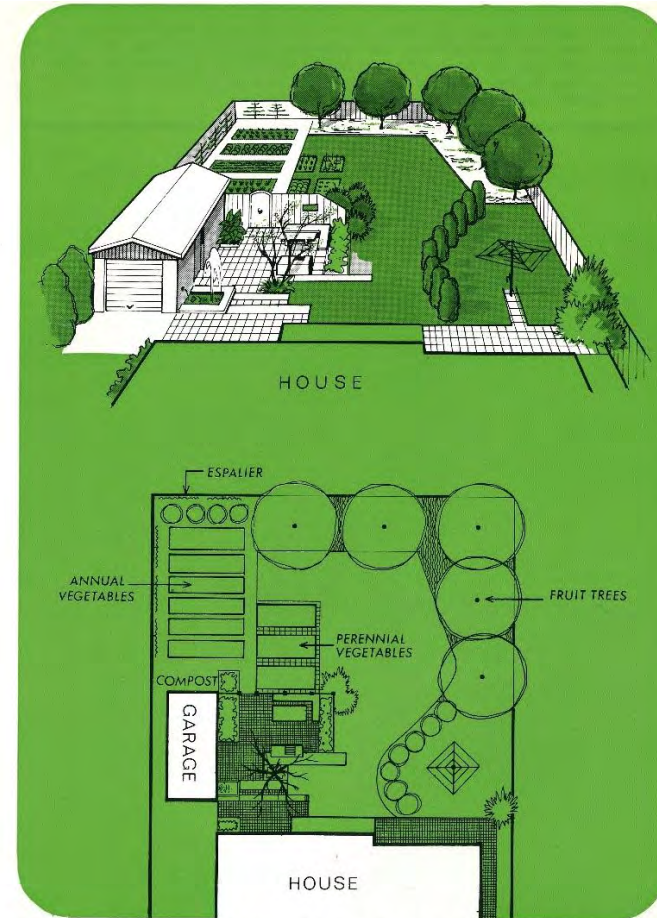
The scheme of issuing free plants for new houses was reduced in 1959 and again in 1960 to 10 trees and 40 shrubs. Today the scheme has a value of approximately \$200 worth of trees for

each household. Like the HAS, the Department of the Interior and the Department of the Capital Territory published advice for Canberrans during the NCDC period. Their publications, such as *Landscaping your Canberra Garden* (1969) and *Planning your Canberra Garden* (1971), provided gardening and landscaping advice to help residents plan their gardens with their new plants.

## The Front Garden



An illustration showing the front yards that could be achieved with considered planting and landscaping. (Source: *Landscaping your Canberra Garden*, 1969)



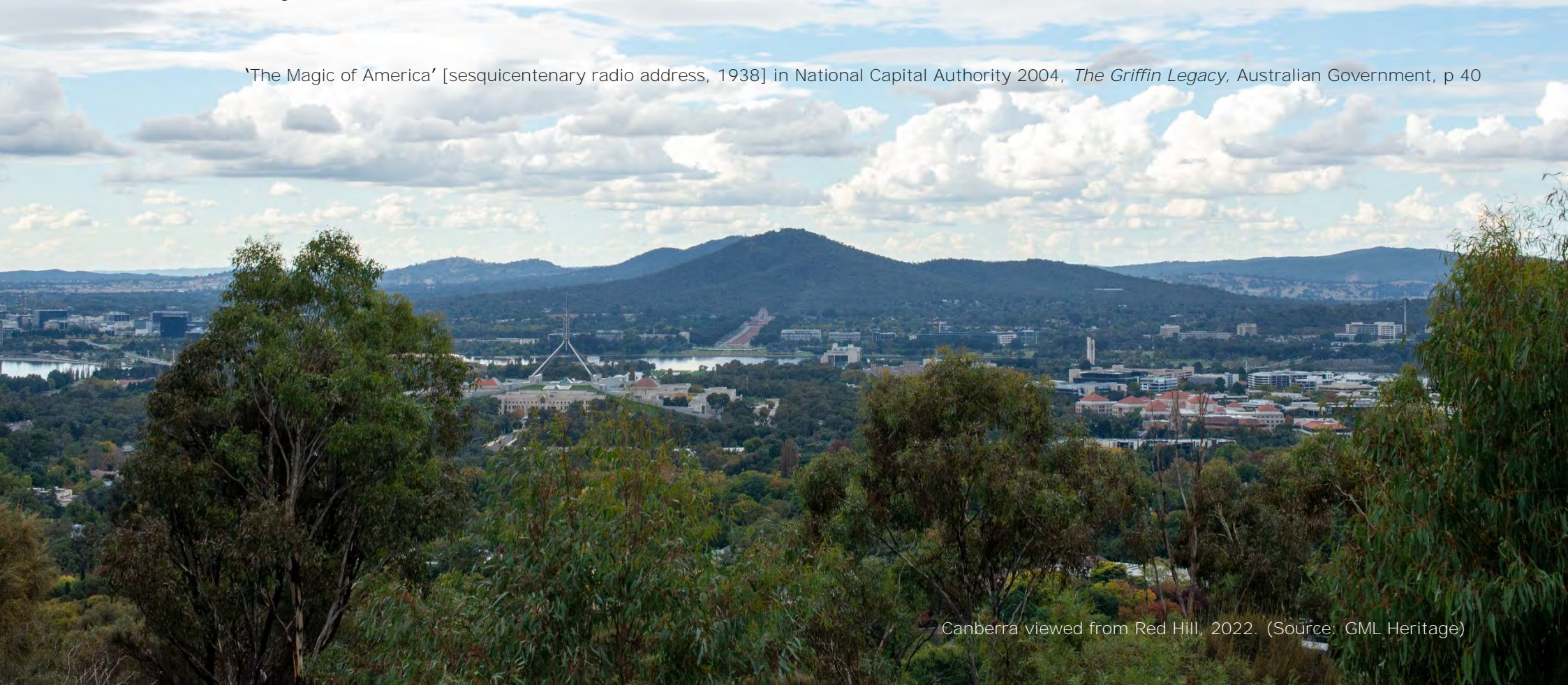
*The plans shown here illustrate the use of espalier, the placement of fruit trees and vegetable plots, and the use of shrubs to mark off a separate service area.*

An illustration of the suggested landscaping for a rear garden in Canberra. (Source: *Planning your Canberra Garden*, 1971)

**City planning, as founded by Mr Griffin, was not a mechanical drafting board affair, imposing on the earth, destroying whatever got in the way ... Such architecture does its share not towards keeping the earth alive, but toward killing it – this seems to be the only way in which human egos express themselves ... In planning Canberra, every detail of the natural conditions were studied ... to preserve them ... so that the city could be a living healthy and growing thing.**

**Marion Mahony Griffin, 1938**

'The Magic of America' [sesquicentenary radio address, 1938] in National Capital Authority 2004, *The Griffin Legacy*, Australian Government, p 40



The NCDC carefully studied the topography when planning new suburban areas. In 1961–62 the NCDC reported that roads ‘run with contours in undulating sites’ to preserve views, allow for air and water drainage and protection from prevailing winds, and provide for the convenience of pedestrians. The new towns of the Woden Valley and Belconnen were exercises in planning and subdivision design to suit the physical environment.

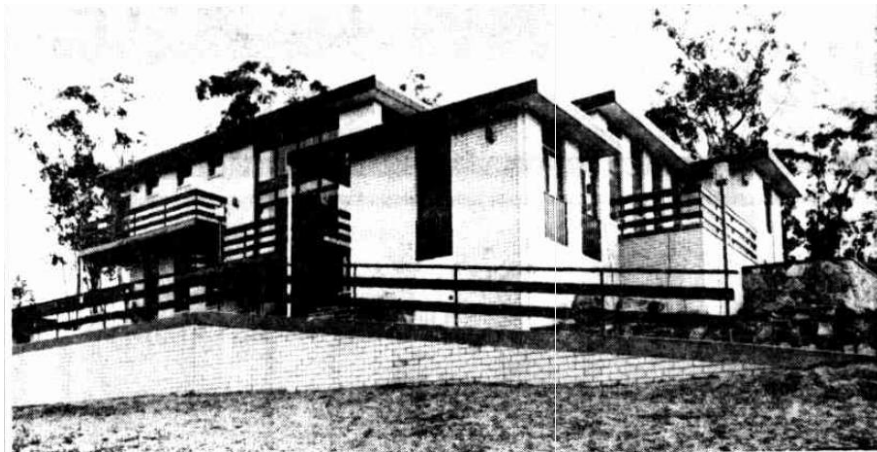


The Woden Valley—the first of Canberra’s new districts—nearing completion. It was predicted to ultimately have a population of about 60,000. (Source: Department of the Interior, *Canberra Past Present and Future*, 1972, p 12)

Once they had selected and purchased land, private home builders planned their house to suit the topography of their block. The architects who came to Canberra looking for work made choices about how their house designs would integrate with the landscape, which helped **shape Canberra’s modernist** houses from the 1950s onwards. Response to the landscape was particularly visible in the influence of the Sydney School of modernist architecture being expressed in Canberra at the time.

The four-storey house at Aranda owned by Mr and Mrs Genys in 1971 was designed by Mr Genys, Managing Director of ACT Builders Pty Ltd. The *Canberra Times* reported that the new house was:

sited on steeply falling, rocky land overlooking a reserve and the slopes of Black Mountain, with glimpses of Tarcoola Reach on Lake Burley Griffin by day and the city lights at night, the house is built on four levels and has brick and stone walls to define boundaries and support terraces which are a feature of the landscaping scheme..<sup>98</sup>

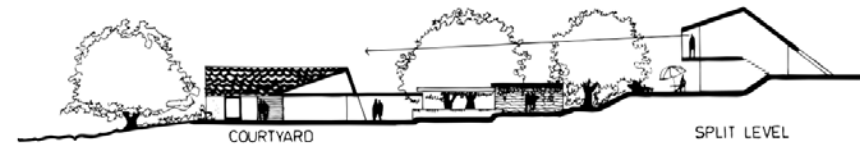


The Genys's four-storey house and its sloping site, Aranda. (Source: *Canberra Times*, 20 July 1971, p 11)

The Urambi Co-operative Housing development (or Urambi Village) in Crozier Circuit, Kambah, is an excellent example of building within the landscape. The co-operative was formed by a group of public servants who wanted to establish a style of housing with a better environment than a single-block residence.<sup>99</sup> The Crozier Circuit development was designed by Michael Dysart in 1974 and comprised 29 single-storey courtyard houses and 43 three-storey houses set in a natural bush setting.

The sloping nature of the site provides the opportunity for single storey courtyard houses on the low side of the spine and

split level or two storey houses above. As can be seen from the cross section, both housing locations have views.<sup>100</sup>



Section of site of Urambi Co-operative Housing development. (Source: *A special plan: Urambi Village at 40*, 1986, p 3)

For this project Michael Dysart was awarded the CS Daley Medal in the residential category of the Architectural Awards of the ACT Chapter of the RAlA in 1977. The judges were full of praise for the housing development as Dysart had **'related the houses to their site with such minimal interference to the natural hillside location that they have the impression of being almost natural, rather than man-made'**.<sup>101</sup> Dysart also designed the Cook Housing Cooperative development at Wybalena Grove, Cook, which was similarly embedded in a bushland setting.<sup>102</sup>



House in Urambi Village. (Source: GML Heritage)

Harry Seidler designed Lakeview, made up of 11 medium-density townhouses at 127 Hopetoun Circuit, Yarralumla, between 1982 and 1984 to enjoy uninterrupted northerly views of Lake Burley Griffin and Black Mountain. Each house **'fans out'** from a central landscaped garden and all have private-entrance courtyards. The townhouses are set into the natural slope of the site and designed to suit the **suburb's** landscaped setting.<sup>103</sup> Promoted as **'some of the most luxurious and best-sited** townhouses in

**Canberra'**, they were offered for sale in November 1984 for \$325,000 each.<sup>104</sup>

In Yarralumla, the Birch House was designed by Noel Potter of Bunning and Madden in 1967 for Professor Arthur Birch, the Dean of the Research School of Chemistry at the ANU, and his wife Jessie.<sup>105</sup> In the 1950s Birch was living in Manchester, and one of his conditions for moving to Canberra was that he could **obtain a 'decent house'**. **Birch and his wife selected the site** location in Yarralumla for its views of the Brindabella Ranges. The topography of Canberra, and the position of the house on its block, shaped its architectural design. The building was constructed in the Post-War International style with large expanses of glazing and panoramic views of the Brindabellas.<sup>106</sup> The modernist spirit of the house was captured by Max Dupain, **one of Australia's leading photographers, in 1968.**



The Birch House, Yarralumla, designed by Noel Potter of Bunning and Madden. (Source: [Canberrahouse.com.au](http://Canberrahouse.com.au))

### 3.6.5 Climate and comfort

In April 1971 Doreen Hungerford, a regular correspondent on housing in the *Canberra Times*, advised prospective home builders to take care in choosing the site for a house that would be cool in summer and warm in winter as:

... there are three months of blustery, chilly spring, three months of hot and usually dry weather, three months of blissful but at times chilly autumn and three months of bitter cold.<sup>107</sup>

Prior to deciding on a house design, she recommended the home builder and designer study the site to observe where the sun rises and sets, the direction prevailing winds blow and the effect that adjoining buildings have on the site.

Canberra's climate was emphasised by the NCDC in numerous publications and in-house manuals from 1958. 'Building your home in Canberra', published for prospective home builders and designers in 1961, set out in detail the following design considerations for new houses pertaining to climate:

With Canberra weather conditions in mind, certain features are important and if incorporated in the original plan, do not add greatly to the cost.

Plan your home to obtain the maximum amount of sun in the winter months ... insulate your home with an approved type of insulation suitable to the construction.

Install the most efficient heating system possible. Slow combustion stoves of the solid fuel type are possibly the most efficient in relation to economy of operation.

Avoid having doors opening to the prevailing winds.

Try to ascertain the siting and design of the houses being erected on either side, in order to achieve privacy and best use of window space.

For summer conditions, try to allow for good cross ventilation, so that the best use can be made of any cool breeze, and the air can be kept circulating as much as possible.<sup>108</sup>

The NCDC *Standard Practice Manual: Architectural Division* in 1963 cited **Canberra's clear air, strong sunlight and lack of pollution** as factors to be considered when either designing new

buildings or **issuing instructions to 'agent architects' designing** housing for Canberra. One architect who designed houses to suit the climatic factors was Robert G Warren of Robert G Warren and Partners. In 1963 he designed a house in Gawler Crescent, Deakin, for Lionel Phillips, Australian High Commissioner to Nigeria. Warren placed the entrances to the house on the north, south and east. All major rooms faced east and north to protect them from the hot summer sun, with wide overhangs. Warren also installed an oil-fired hot water heating system in the basement.<sup>109</sup>

Also, in 1963 Warren worked with builder Ansahomes to design two new houses in La Perouse Street, Red Hill **'with an eye to the peculiarities of the Canberra climate'**.<sup>110</sup> The kitchen was placed in the middle of the house with light and ventilation from above. Likewise, the bathrooms and toilets, traditionally cold rooms, were also positioned in the centre of the house so that they could be warmed in winter by the **house's** central heating system.

The clarity of the atmosphere, the strong sunlight, and the absence of smoke generating industry, are all factors of which advantage may be taken in the design of buildings, and the precise detailing and modelling of the facades to provide interesting shadow effects is considered desirable.

An unusual factor in Canberra, resulting from the extreme clarity of the atmosphere, is that the apparent distance between objects is

reduced. Visually this has the effect of binding the parts of the city together. The extent of the plan on the ground is such however, that the actual density of the buildings is very much less than in other cities. For this reason buildings should be designed to be seen from a distance, as well as from nearby, and particular consideration should be given to the scale and proportion of the main elements. The arrangement of fenestration, when seen from a distance, is important from this point of view, and generally an easily comprehensible rhythm is desirable.

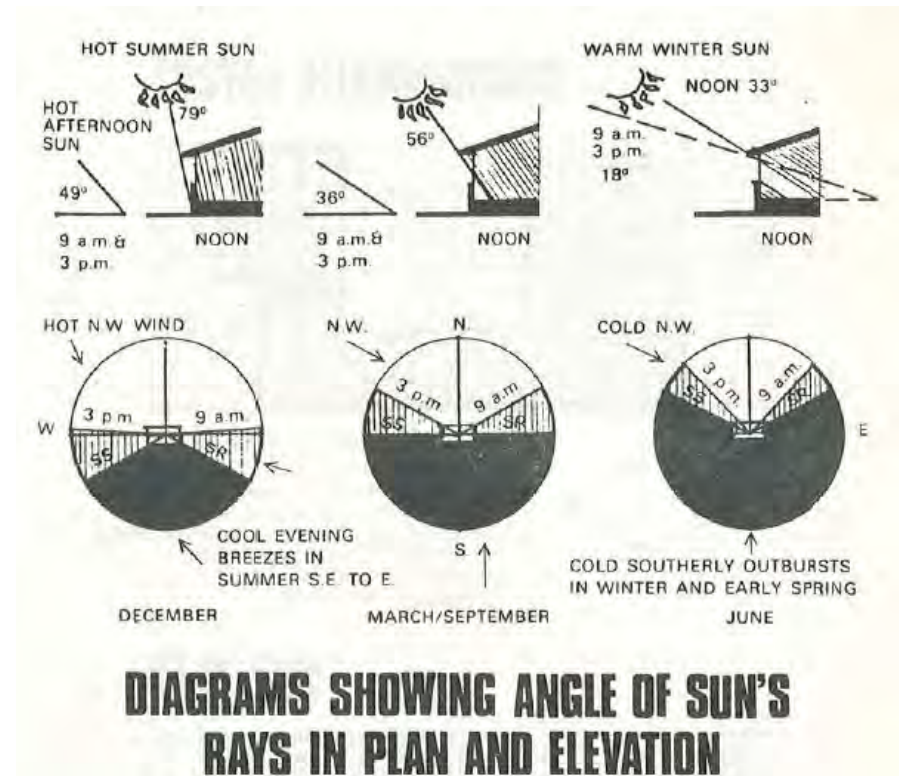
The selection of facing materials, roof finishes and colours is an important consideration. In this respect the predominantly verdant quality of the scenery, which will provide the background to the buildings, should be recognised. The general facades should be light in colour and the roofs finished in a dark, non-reflective material; it is appreciated that economics is a governing factor in the choice of materials but, where possible natural materials are preferred.

*NCDC Standard Practice Manual: Architectural Division, 1963, p 24 (ACT Archives)*

In the 1970s the NCDC issued explicit directives for the design of **housing built for Canberra's climate. The 1974 brochure 'An Introduction to Courtyard Lots' was produced for a meeting** between the NCDC and the Master Builders Association to promote proper planning, design and landscaping to capitalise on the natural features of the site, the useability of the open spaces,

desirable sunlight to courts and dwellings, and privacy (both visual and noise).

*The Planners Design Guide for Courtyard and Cottage Blocks* issued by the NCDC in the 1970s contained a section entitled 'Brief analysis of seasonable requirements for desirable sunlight to house and courtyards'. An associated document, 'Design and Siting Controls: Cottage Blocks', set out in detail the performance standard and qualitative standards to achieve good-quality design, including guidelines to maximise privacy and northern winter sunlight, and to provide private open space.



'An Introduction to Courtyard Lots', NCDC, 1974. (Source: Archives ACT)

B5.2 Brief analysis of seasonal requirements for desirable sunlight to house and courtyards.

WINTER Winters cold with limited outdoor living activities. Maximise sunlight to living areas of dwelling in preference to outdoor living space. It is beneficial for service courts to receive sunlight and wind to facilitate clothes drying.

SPRING Warmer weather with increased outdoor activity. Reduced sunlight to dwelling and increased sunlight to outdoor living spaces.

AUTUMN

SUMMER Hotter weather. Outdoor activity. Minimum sunlight to dwelling with shaded courtyards are beneficial for comfort.

street with fences orientated about 25 degrees east or north to provide the longest possible array of solar windows.<sup>111</sup>

Planners’ design guide for courtyard and cottage blocks, compiled by the NCDC, 1970s. (Source: Archives ACT)

One house that epitomises a considered approach to siting, planning, construction and landscaping for **Canberra’s climate** was the low-energy passive solar house designed and built in 1971 by civil engineer AJ Bonham at Farrer. He described in detail in 1977 the decisions he made in selecting the site, house design and materials used in construction. Of choosing the site he wrote:

The site was chosen because the continuous range of hills provided shelter from south, east and west against cold winds. A hill slope was chosen with contours falling due north to obtain maximum solar radiation. The block is midway up the hill to avoid wind convergence at the crest and frost hollow effects at the foot of the hill. The block is on the low side of the

### 3.7 Theme 6: Liveability and building community

The Commission seeks, in its land use planning, to make Canberra a good city in which to live. It creates an environment and, within the limits of control offered by its responsibilities for land use and design and site of structures, it can seek to ensure that good manners prevail in the community life. It attempts to set a model for effective, efficient neighbourhood planning based on three principles – convenience, safety and pleasantness.<sup>112</sup>

As the city was built so was the community of Canberrans, whose lives and needs have shaped the place alongside the designs of governments and town planners. The early suburbs of the inner north and south were added to with a new wave of growth into the Woden Valley as the NCDC brought new suburbs into existence.

Ensuring Canberra was a pleasant, liveable city was a goal of the NCDC and was consistent with its overarching purposes, in particular to ‘give Canberra an atmosphere and individuality worthy of the National Capital’ and to grow the city ‘as a place in which to live in comfort and dignity.’ The NCDC’s approach to achieving this goal was influenced by modernist approaches to town planning, which sought to deliver a new, modern way of

living based on rationality and new technologies—a rational reorganisation of the urban form. Unlike in other cities where existing communities and urban landscapes became threatened by a desire to impose a new, rational order via urban design, Canberra offered a relatively blank slate to test these visions.<sup>113</sup> **Canberra’s new** suburbs were the designed spaces for the new residences to be designed and built for the booming population.

The Department of Works was responsible for building new housing that would still meet **the needs of Canberra as the ‘City Beautiful’**. This was in contrast to the pre-war years, where despite much building and architectural design, circumstances forced many Canberrans into temporary or sub-optimal housing, and implementation of city planning had been limited.

The residents of Canberra who arrived in the postwar era entered an environment that was both physically and socially building itself into a new form. The NCDC targeted public servants moving to the territory through brochures, videos and advertising that **promoted Canberra, from the Commonwealth Film Unit’s 1958 ‘Guide to Canberra’ to the of-its-era ‘Come Join Us in Canberra’** following the lives of three working women for a week in the city in 1973.<sup>114</sup> New Canberrans had to make connections as they settled into the city, which, although designed for liveability was still in the process of building major infrastructure. Barbara Browning, who moved to Curtin in 1964 to work as a teacher,

was the first single woman to obtain a government loan for the construction of her home, and recalled having to travel to Manuka for the post office and Fyshwick for garden supplies.<sup>115</sup> Barbara would take her dogs and the children of neighbouring families on her walks around the suburb.

Each of the families that I took one toddler [on a walk] had a baby; the little ones were so happy to be able to run and make as much noise as they pleased.<sup>116</sup>

**The NCDC's town centres and community services provided a focal point for these interactions, as did traditional places of connection like schools and churches. Over time a sense of local identity and place developed.**

The urban design of Canberra and its houses was regarded as an important tool for community-building. Many young families moved to the rapidly expanding suburbs of Canberra and found connection with those on their street or block. The NCDC delivered a variety of neighbourhood designs informed by different and often innovative town planning philosophies.

### **3.7.1 Housing diversity of types**

The NCDC found the suburban pattern created by the FCC, with large blocks primarily focused on detached, single-storey houses, unsuitable and not adaptable to current conditions. The NCDC

introduced changes to the plan of Canberra, which included allotments within new subdivisions to accommodate a diversity of housing types including apartments and groups of units, and simultaneously to allow for smaller blocks of land for more modest detached houses for private home builders. This changed approach impacted how new residential developments integrated with the landscape.

**To support the new vision for Canberra's continuing growth and development, the planning of sites and landscape features was a crucial element of the commission's suburban planning work in this period.**

The Red Hill housing group (completed in 1961, now demolished) comprised 144 units in groups of two-bedroom flats in three-storey buildings, three-bedroom flats in two-storey buildings, and single bachelor accommodation in grouped single-storey buildings, all set in landscaped gardens. This was a departure from the previous government housing strategy, which had a greater focus on detached homes, and became the model for subsequent subdivisions and housing construction, with landscape 'front and centre' as a key feature of site planning.<sup>117</sup>



Red Hill Housing Group, 2014. (Source: ACT Heritage, *Background Information: Red Hill Public Housing Precinct*, October 2015)

### 3.7.2 Radburn design housing

Although Radburn housing was first used in Australia in 1942 at the Commonwealth Munitions Factory at St Marys in Sydney (a housing estate for workers), the NCDC was an early adopter of this form of housing estate planning. Radburn housing involved building neighbourhoods where houses had two frontages—one towards a road for vehicle and service access, and one towards a

parkland for communal living and pedestrian access. This parkland path provided community access without the need to cross roads..<sup>118</sup>

In the annual report of 1961/62 the NCDC wrote:

The commission has recently endorsed an experiment in design based on the Radburn system, for one of the new neighbourhoods in the Yarralumla Creek Valley. This will further emphasize the convenience, safety and pleasantness. The feature of the Radburn system is that all of the houses are placed in a green belt setting with road access to the backs of houses instead of to the front..<sup>119</sup>

Canberra was considered a leader in the field of this form of housing estate planning. Radburn housing was implemented by the NCDC in four Canberra suburbs: Garran, Curtin, Charnwood and a small section of Hughes.

The Curtin development commenced in 1964 using existing NCDC house designs and some houses designed and built by private builders. The NCDC engaged architects, engineers and town planners Leith & Bartlett Pty Ltd to develop the Radburn housing at Curtin.

The reception from the community was generally positive. In one NCDC report the commission referred to a letter received in 1969 from an:

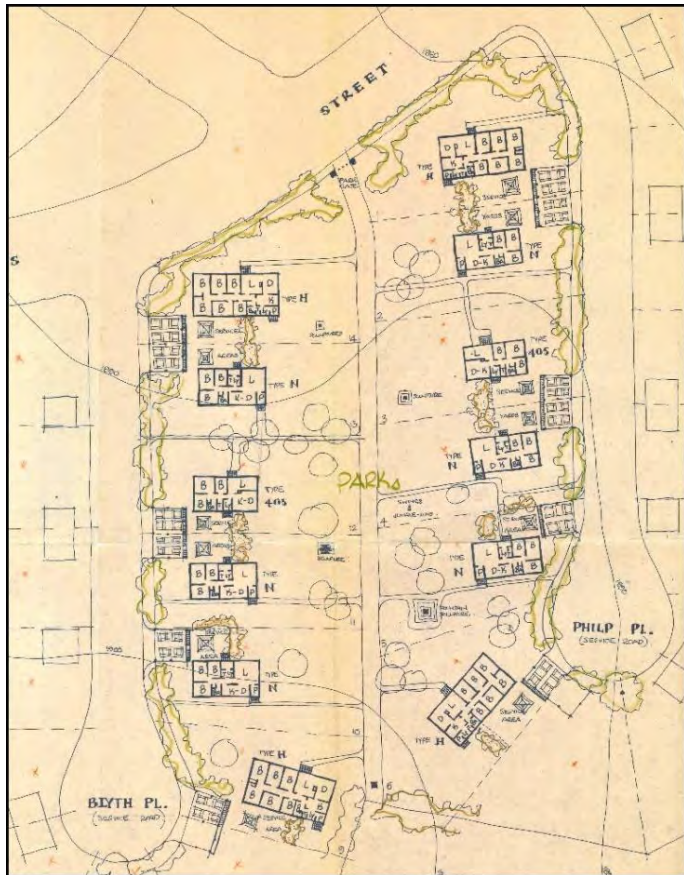
occupant of one of the Radburn housing units for which Leith and Bartlett were the architects for the houses. He expressed considerable enthusiasm for the scheme, stating he had bought a four bedroom house from the Government, including land, for about \$12,400 and that the general amenity of the area and the social contacts and the traffic free arrangements were very successfully operating...<sup>120</sup>



North Curtin Preschool, Ayers Street and the Radburn area, Curtin, 1968. (Source: ACT Archives, Reference number: HMSS 0306\_00001)



Main circle path running through Curtin, 1975. (Source: ACT Archives)



Plan of Blyth and Philip places, showing intended house sitings, internal plans, placing of carports and Hills hoists (date unknown). (Source: ACT Archives)

In 1970 the NCDC engaged architects Cameron, Chisholm and Nicol to design a Radburn housing group in Pilbara Place, Fisher. The 24 government houses were erected as a prototype for a more complete Radburn design neighbourhood in Belconnen. Four of the houses in Pilbara Avenue were opened to the public on 9 May 1971.<sup>121</sup> The architects were awarded the CS Daley Medal in 1971 for this development by the ACT Chapter of the RAIA.



Cameron, Chisholm and Nicol-designed home in Pilbara Place, Fisher, 2024. (Source: GML Heritage)

Sites for a Radburn development and an experimental design and siting housing project in Flynn were offered at a group lease auction in November 1972 (Blocks 1–6, Section 34). The successful bidder was required to develop the scheme in consultation with the NCDC. The commission anticipated development of Sections 33 and 82 at Flynn in a similar manner in the future, while it planned for the Belconnen suburb of Charnwood to be built entirely on the Radburn plan with about 60% by private enterprise.<sup>122</sup>

Charnwood was a less successful Radburn venture, and the NCDC had difficulty selling some of the elevated blocks. The *Canberra Times* stated in December 1976 that **there was 'little demand'** and all but three passed in. A member of the Charnwood Community Action Group complained that the suburb had an image problem and noted the delays in realising the full scheme of landscaping, fundamental to the success of this type of development.<sup>123</sup>

### 3.7.3 Innovative medium-density neighbourhoods

Harry Seidler's Garran group housing for families of the ANU fellows and research scholars was completed between 1964 and 1968 (demolished 1999). It featured staggered rows of pairs of

house units with small, private, enclosed patios placed along the sloping contours of the site, alternating roof slopes, and cul-de-sac streets, allowing children to avoid crossing traffic and providing privacy and safety to residents of the complex.



Town houses at Garran constructed for the NCDC, c1975. (Source: NCDC, *Housing in Canberra*, 1975, p 1)

Shortly after the Garran Group was completed the NCDC and National Capital Planning Committee decided to develop a single higher-density suburban unit at Phillip called Swinger Hill. According to Peter Funda, Assistant Commissioner for District Development (NCDC):

Among many people there is a greater sense of gregariousness these days, a desire to increase social intercourse and to walk about in their neighbourhood free from motor traffic..<sup>124</sup>

The commission engaged Ian McKay and Partners to design the first stage of this medium-density housing scheme, representing a **'new kind of living'**..<sup>125</sup> The commission also invested in a film, *A Different Way of Living*, to promote the new development planned at Swinger Hill.

McKay and Partners, with Bert Read as the supervising architect, created 10 house types for potential inclusion at Swinger Hill, including a courtyard house, row house, atrium house, stepped house and terrace house. The NCDC selected three types to be used in the development: courtyard house, atrium house and terrace house. The *Canberra Times* judged the project a **'calculated, managed gamble'** while Robin Boyd praised the plan, writing:

Section 51 and 52 Phillip offer more than the promise of the sort of housing Canberra has always been looking for. They are essentially therapeutic. They should offer a popularly acceptable substitute to help the Australian public to withstand the withdrawal symptoms as it is dragged out of the suburban dream to face the realities of cities in the last part of the 20th century..<sup>126</sup>

The first 39 houses were built to test **McKay's design principles**, as a demonstration for private enterprise and to win public acceptance for the new concept. Some early visitors to the precinct were critical, **labelling it 'slums of tomorrow', 'disaster area' and 'unliveable'**, while others saw the medium-density house as the answer to suburban loneliness and also praised the design as imaginative and practical..<sup>127</sup> The first tenant and prospective buyer took up residence in October 1972. The first houses cost between \$21,000 and \$27,500, while rents would range from \$20.65 to \$27.70 a week.

A decade on, John Pomeroy, a former resident of Swinger Hill and owner of a townhouse, commented that the residents still living there were happy, did not want to move, and found it a successful development that fulfilled their expectations..<sup>128</sup> The architectural community agreed, and the ACT Chapter of the RAIWA awarded the CS Daley Medal to Ian McKay and Partners in 1977.

According to the NCDC:

It can be concluded that in properly designed medium-density housing with planned and private entertainment areas directly related to the dwelling; with adequate carports, service areas, storage facilities and gardens provided, and with the accumulated surplus areas allocated for communal purposes,

a desirable living environment with many advantages over traditional development can be achieved...<sup>129</sup>

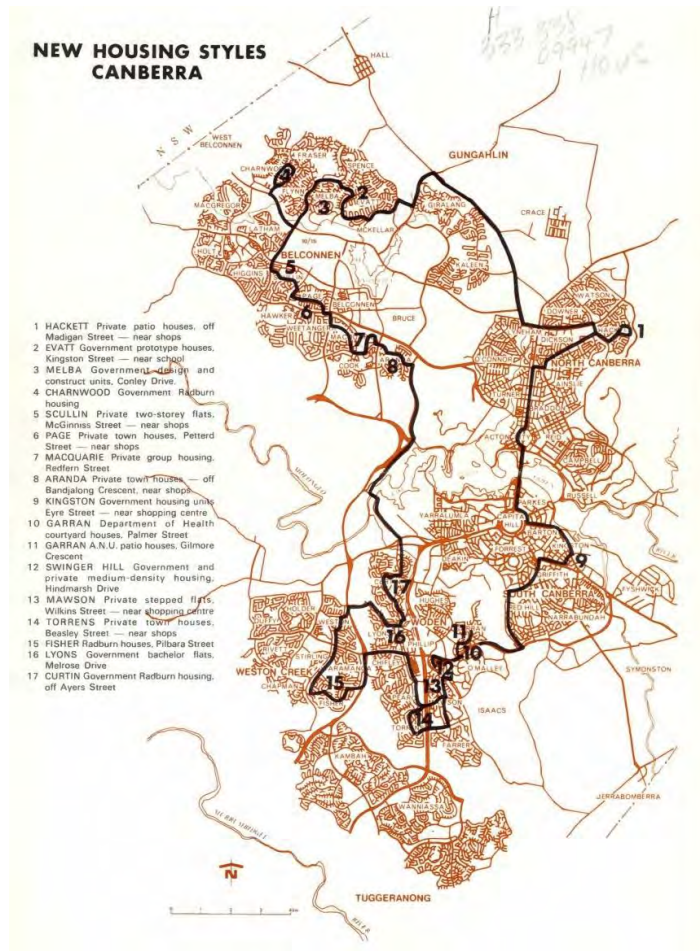


An isometric view of Group IB, the first stage of the medium-density housing scheme at Swinger Hill, designed by Ian McKay and Partners. (Source: [www.canberrahouse.com.au](http://www.canberrahouse.com.au))

In 1977 the NCDC began a campaign to promote medium-density houses as offering an alternative lifestyle to traditional flats and detached houses. The commission had prepared a booklet on courtyard housing and was preparing **one on townhouses**.

The *Planners Design Guide for Courtyard and Cottage Blocks* was published by the commission to assist planners and agents to design and coordinate their responsibilities for courtyard and

cottage block subdivisions with a degree of standardisation. These new forms of housing, it was believed, would offer a mix of homes with proximity to public transport, small local centres, educational facilities, recreational areas adjacent to local parkland and close to or within an attractive landscaped area, thereby catering to a variety of demographics such as the elderly, single people and families. The ongoing promotion of and increase in medium-density housing provided a new type of residence for architectural styles to continue to flourish.



Map from 'Housing in Canberra' publication by NCDC, 1975. (Source: ACT Heritage Library, BRN 237625)

## 3.8 Endnotes

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# Definitions: house types and architectural styles

## 4 Definitions: house types and architectural styles

### 4.1 Introduction

To identify significant examples of modernist houses in Canberra, it is necessary to understand the key elements of modernist design, and the types of houses where they can be found.

This section explains the overarching elements of modernist architectural styles most commonly found in Canberra, and the style indicators that can be referred to when identifying expressions of modernist architecture.

This section has informed by the thematic history in Section 3, which explains where modernist houses are located based on **Canberra's historical development**.

### 4.2 Defining modernism

Modernism was the most notable new style arising in architecture and design in the twentieth century. **Modernism was 'associated with an analytical approach to the function of buildings, a strictly rational use of (often new) materials, structural innovation and the elimination of ornament'.**<sup>1</sup> **'Form follows function' was a driving principle in the movement, which was part of a wider growth of modernism across disciplines such as art, literature,**

music, fashion and philosophy that rejected tradition and sought newer means of cultural expression in an increasingly industrialised, urbanised and technically advanced world.

It has been said that the modernist movement introduced exciting design concepts to an otherwise bland architectural period. The bold geometric shapes and creative use of building materials were thought to enliven previously bland and repetitive suburban landscapes under the modernist **philosophies of 'form follows function' and 'truth to materials'.** **Those trained in the Bauhaus theory of 'total design' could see the role of architecture as a component, integrated seamlessly with landscape, interior, graphic, and industrial design as well as art and craft. The modernist movement had a core belief that design should be defined by function, specifically by how it could improve people's lives, and with the advent of mass production, industry could also be recruited to this cause.**<sup>2</sup>

There is a myriad of modernist styles in architecture. In this study, we have adopted the approach that architectural modernism emanates from two main styles developed in the first half of the twentieth century. In brief these are described as:

- the International style, from the European tradition of the **Bauhaus School and Le Corbusier's work, the architecture of the machine age, pure and minimalist;** and

- the Organic style, primarily influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright and other 'Prairie School' architects in the United States. A style that is a harmonious union of architecture, art and nature.

Modernism encompasses these two main styles, with many variations of other architectural styles including Stripped Classical, Art Deco, Moderne, Brutalist, New Formalist, and Prairie School amongst others. Each country, city and individual architect interpreted modern design in their own way.

Despite the wide variety, there are features in modernist architecture that are universally recognised to identify examples of modernist architecture. Key characteristics of modernism include:

- Minimising decoration and reduced colour and material palette, to strip away extraneous ornament from the structure, blurring of interior and exterior spaces, and the exposure rather than concealment of buildings' construction using modern industrial materials such as steel, concrete and glass.
- Functional designs with asymmetrical compositions with the use of geometric forms, often with flat roofs and broad roof overhangs; an emphasis on horizontal lines, rectangular, cylindrical and cubic shapes and asymmetrical compositions;

visual expression of the structure rather than concealment of structural elements.

- Use of modern materials and technological advances in construction, such as reinforced concrete, steel frames, curtain walls and ribbon windows; generous use of glass and natural light; attention to sun movement and use of shading to enhance comfort.
- Open plan interiors, with a feeling of spaciousness, and rational and efficient uses of space; relationships between interior spaces and setting.<sup>3</sup>
- Sympathetic and well-integrated with a site, where the setting become part of a unified, interrelated composition.



Bowden House by Harry Seidler (1954), a significant International style house in Canberra, with cubiform asymmetrical massing, overhanging eaves for shade, plain smooth wall surfaces, interesting textures and expanses of glass. (Source: Architecture AU, Max Dupain, copyright Penelope Seidler)

### 4.3 Modernist architectural styles

Modernism is an overarching approach to design that is embodied in a variety of styles and variations. All of the styles recognised in this section are sub-styles of architectural modernism.

An architectural style exists when several buildings exhibit similar traits, but not necessarily identical, sets of traits.<sup>4</sup> These traits, or characteristics, are a result of how the elements of a building—the shape, scale, structure, material choices, textures, colours and ornamentation (or lack thereof), etc—respond to each other. Classification of an architectural style is about understanding the architectural language (or traits), as well as understanding that there could be a blurring of the edges around the completeness or consistency of an architectural style.

Styles often build on earlier or traditional architectural styles. They can ebb and flow and depend on the designer and multiple other influences, such as the period, client brief, cultural requirements, budget, function, topography and landscape setting. As this thematic study demonstrates, the inputs required to build a house rarely result in a clear-cut style, but rather in a confluence of styles or one which indicates particular characteristics.

In other words, style is not a benchmark or list of rules that must be met to characterise a building or to determine significance, **rather it is an 'indicator' that helps identify buildings.**

It is important to note that while modernism was a principle that could guide the approach to architecture and design, the architects who are now recognised as having worked in the modernist style (or any of the sub-styles listed below) did not **necessarily think of themselves as designing 'modernist' houses** at the time. Rather, they sought to construct unique, functional houses that met the needs of their client and expressed their vision.

To ensure consistency with already-defined Australian architectural styles, and their indicators, this study refers to the those recognised in *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture*, by Richard Apperly, Robert Irving and Peter Reynolds. Here, the styles relevant to the housing stock in Canberra have been included. Other styles that are relevant to the mid-century time period, such as Brutalist, are seen in **Canberra's commercial and cultural** buildings yet are not present in residential design.

House styles that are seen in Canberra from 1945 through to the end of twentieth century are listed as follows, and described in Section 4.3.1 Style indicators .

- Post-War International;
- Organic; and
- regional styles: Melbourne Regional and Sydney School.

### 4.3.1 Style indicators

Typical architectural styles and their characteristics can be interchangeably **applied to all of Canberra's house** types.

A residence that demonstrates any, or a combination of the style indicators described in this section is a modernist style house. However, a house does not necessarily need to exhibit all style indicators to be considered modernist.

The following sections provide a discussion of the typical architectural styles, and characteristics and practitioners of these styles.

The case studies in Section 6 demonstrate how an architectural style is applied to a potentially significant modernist house in the ACT.

### 4.3.2 International style

The International style emerged in Australia in the intensive building programs of the postwar boom, a similar design inspired by Bauhaus School.

Ideals of rational and functional design were embraced enthusiastically by Australian architects. New material and construction technologies allowed for greater flexibility in design and were used in residential and public architecture in the 1940s–1960s. The style continued into the later into the twentieth century, when it was mainly used in public architecture, because of technological advances and engineering efficiencies in materials such as steel, glass and concrete.

#### *Characteristics*

- Steel and reinforced concrete frames supporting glazed curtain walls.
- Areas of expansive glazing.
- Plain smooth walls with sections of contrasting textures.
- Contrast between non-rectangular shapes and rectangular shapes.
- Load-bearing walls, often of curvilinear form and contrasted with more regular shaped walls.
- Overhang for shade and external sun control devices.
- Cubiform overall shape.

- Linear bands of windows.

#### *Key practitioners*

In Australia, Ancher, Mortlock, Murray and Woolley; McConnel, Smith and Johnson (Peter Johnson); Harry Seidler; Peddle, Thorp & Walker; Yuncken Freeman (Roy Simpson); Bunning and Madden (Noel Potter). The key practitioners from these firms who worked in Canberra include Sydney Ancher, Bryce Mortlock, Roy Simpson and Noel Potter.



The Birch House, Yarralumla, by Noel Potter of Bunning and Madden, an example of International style in Canberra with low-profile, horizontal form, expanses of glazing and structural crossbeams to create large open plan internal spaces and a courtyard. (Source: Max Dupain and Associates Archives, all rights reserved)

### 4.3.3 Organic style

In contrast to the sleek, clean lines of the International style, the Organic style of architecture was represented by an earthy structure of natural stone and timber set within an untouched, natural landscape. Wide eaves and roof planes responded to the line of the horizon, and the connection to nature was evident. It was largely a style for domestic architecture where the houses appeared to grow from the surrounding landscape.

**Frank Lloyd Wright's work in the United States** from the early to mid-twentieth century inspired architects around the world. In Australia, practitioners **were influenced by Wright's evolving 'Organic' architectural style, including the Prairie and Usonian styles**, and a fundamental shift from traditional and heavily decorative houses of the late nineteenth century to an appreciation of the natural environment and ample windows to **gain more light inside the house. Wright's designs generally used exposed bricks, stone and timber.** Australian architects generally took inspiration from Wright rather than imitating his style, and were implementing an **'organic'** approach to house design; distinguishing it from the International style of hard edges, and the straight lines of the more industrial Bauhaus style of modernism. For example, in Canberra, architect Laurie Virr was unapologetically influenced by Wright, having taught architecture in America in the postwar era.

From the 1970s, architects and their clients were increasingly dedicated to environmentally sustainable design, trialling solar passive techniques, such as orientation and natural ventilation, and avoiding non-renewable resources and mechanical heating/cooling.

#### *Characteristics*

- Retention of the natural setting.
- Free, asymmetrical massing of building form.
- Complex, angular geometry, or curves complementing nature and the natural environment.
- Earth covering.
- Clearly expressed timber structure.
- Horizontal emphasis in roof plane, timber boarded fascia and balustrades.
- Highlight windows.
- Mud brick walls.
- Close relationship between indoors and outdoors.

#### *Key practitioners*

In Canberra, Enrico Taglietti and Laurie Virr. In Australia, Peter Muller, Alistair Knox, Robert Mair, Bruce Rickard are recognised by Apperly, Irving and Reynolds as practising in this style, but they are not represented in Canberra.



Paterson House at 7 Juad Place, Aranda, 1970, designed by Enrico Taglietti, in his unique sculptural Organic style with a flat roof, and banded fascia for horizontal emphasis. (Source: GML Heritage, 2016)



Rivendell, 1975, Laurie Virr's Organic style shown through the use of complex, angular geometry, deep roof overhang and energy efficient design. (Source: GML Heritage, 2016)

### 4.3.4 Regional styles

Regional versions in domestic architecture evolved in Australia, despite, and in addition to, the prevalence of the International style of modernist architecture. Characteristics were more Organic in style, developed in Melbourne and Brisbane in the postwar period, and Sydney, Perth, Adelaide and tropical regions, from the 1960s onwards.<sup>5</sup> The influence of Melbourne and Sydney regional styles was prevalent in Canberra from the 1960s (rather than Perth, Adelaide regional styles).

#### Melbourne Regional style

In Melbourne, architects such as Robin Boyd, Roy Grounds and Peter McIntyre adapted modernism to the local palette of materials, that respond to the natural environment and local surroundings.<sup>6</sup>

The model Melbourne Regional style of house was being built in outer, undeveloped suburbs, with bush or seaside settings; for example in the Beaumaris area of Melbourne. The residences were single-storey and narrow and linear in plan and form, and were simple and light with a restrained elegance.

Common features of the Melbourne Regional style included low-pitch gable roofs (originally often of corrugated asbestos cement), wide eaves and slim barge boards. Vertical timber-

framed windows became a common feature, and the houses were typically designed to take advantage of natural sunshine and shade.

The emergence of this regional style in the 1950s has been attributed to the movement to Canberra of Melbourne academics and public servants, who often engaged Melbourne architects for their new house in Canberra. **An example is Robin Boyd's 1953/54 Fenner House in Red Hill for ANU Professor of Microbiology Frank Fenner.** Fenner House is a significant example of Melbourne Regional architecture.

#### *Characteristics*

- Low-pitch gable roof.
- Steel roofing.
- Widely projecting eaves.
- Long, unbroken roofline.
- Narrow edge to roof.
- Exposed rafters and joists.
- Verandahs with timber posts.
- Simple timber balustrade.
- Unpainted vertical boarding/cladding.
- Unpainted horizontal boarding/cladding.
- Glass walls with regularly spaced timber mullions.
- Brick chimney expressed as simple block.

*Key practitioners*

Robin Boyd, Roy Grounds, Roy Simpson. They influenced architects who migrated to Canberra including Theo Bischoff.



13 Waller Crescent, Campbell, 1962 designed by Theo Bischoff, demonstrates Melbourne Regional style characteristics through the low-pitch gable roof, long, unbroken roofline and narrow edge to roof. (Source: Peter Blackshaw)



Manning Clark House, 11 Tasmania Circle, Forrest, 1952, designed by Robin Boyd, demonstrates Melbourne Regional style characteristics through the low-pitch gable roof, wide projecting eaves and large areas of timber-framed glazing. (Source: GML Heritage, 2016)

## **Sydney Regional style or Sydney School**

The Sydney School style of modernist architecture took inspiration and direction from the qualities of the site—typically sloping, rocky, heavily treed properties around Sydney Harbour—and houses would be designed to descend over the block with split-level planning to suit.

In Canberra, without the harbourside sites, the sloping bushland blocks of suburbs such as Aranda and Red Hill were perfect places to transplant the Sydney School typology.

Taking inspiration from a combination of Brutalism, Arts and Crafts, traditional Japanese architecture and the Organic principles of Frank Lloyd Wright, Sydney School houses were imbued with warmth from textured and tactile finishes, such as unpainted timber, clinker bricks and untouched building sites.

Common features of the Sydney School style include split levels descending down sites; sloped, skillion roofs; use of natural materials such as timber, bricks and tiles; and informal landscaping with Australian flora.<sup>7</sup> Roofs were often dark toned and walls made of rough, or clinker bricks or white painted brick.

Construction companies such as Pettit + Sevitt commissioned architects to design demonstration homes that could be replicated for their clients.<sup>8</sup>

### *Characteristics*

- Asymmetrical massing.
- Roofs following the slope of the site, typically skillion roofs or flat roofs.
- Tiled roofs.
- Clerestory windows.
- Little concern for the façade as a presentation front.
- Timber post and beam construction.
- Exposed rafters, exposed roof beams.
- Timber deck.
- Clinker brick walls, or bagged/painted white masonry walls.
- Boarded stud walls.
- Stained or oiled timber.
- Timber awning sash windows.
- Slatted timber screens.

### *Key practitioners*

Ancher, Mortlock, Murray & Woolley; McConnell Smith and Johnson (Peter Johnson); Allen, Jack & Cottier; Ian McKay; Michael Dysart; Anthony and Roger Pegrum; Dirk Bolt; and other architects working for Pettit + Sevitt.



Cater House, 145 Mugga Way, Red Hill, 1965, designed by Sydney School architect Russell Jack of Allen, Jack & Cottier. There is little concern for the façade as a presentation front. Flat roofs, stained timber windows, exposed beams, painted white masonry are all used. (Source: ArchitectureAU <https://architectureau.com/articles/cater-house/#img-7>)

## Canberra style

The ideals and principles of modernism that were embodied in the styles identified here emerged in Canberra in outstanding architecture that reflects the local conditions.

Modernism in architecture was most successful when the principles were adapted to place and the various conditions and factors of the project, such as the building type, landscape setting, property block features and climate. Rather than the creation of a **formal 'Canberra School' or Canberra regional** style of architecture, in the postwar era the ideals of the global modernist movement, with all its variety, were applied to the Canberra conditions in innovative and exceptional ways by local and interstate practitioners. This is clearly evident in the housing stock from this period.

## 4.4 House types

This section of the report demonstrates that the modernist style and its various style indicators were not dictated by the type of residence. Rather, the modernist approach and how it was embodied in the fabric (indicators or traits) could be expressed in all building types—to meet the size, format, budget **and client's** brief for example.

In this report we refer to the types of residences, or houses, as follows:

- detached houses, single dwellings;
- duplex houses (single-storey, double-storey, etc);
- townhouses;
- flats and apartments;
- courtyard housing;
- terrace housing; and
- atrium housing.

All these house types include both privately owned and architect-designed residences, and residences that were originally government-owned and designed in-house.

### Detached houses

#### *Description*

A detached house is a single dwelling on a block of land established with a private garden.

Detached houses in Canberra were constructed by different entities, generally categorised as follows:

- public housing led by the Commonwealth Department of Works, designed by in-house architects;
- public and private housing led by the NCDC, which engaged agent architects to design housing;
- private housing, led by individual citizens who had a range of options to choose from:
  - engaging their own architect to design their home
  - purchasing plans from the HAS
  - purchasing a developer-designed home, for example by Pettit + Sevitt or Lendlease.

#### *Commentary*

The rapid, mid-century growth of the city, a government that needed more home builders, and clients with budgets for well-designed houses provided the perfect environment for architects to realise their modernist ideals.

The design of many of the detached houses from the period responded to the site conditions and considered siting,

orientation and sun gain as key characteristics. Some turned their back on the street to provide private sanctuaries for occupants, and others responded to the surrounding character and siting of neighbouring properties. With the encouragement of the NCDC, private architects were able to construct unique, functional houses that met the needs of their client and expressed their vision.

New land releases in the older established neighbourhoods and in new towns in the surrounding valleys allowed for home builders to engage architects or private builders for the design and construction of single-family dwellings. **Some of Canberra’s** outstanding residences from this period are detached houses and garnered attention at the national stage.

As an initiative to encourage the construction of single-dwelling detached homes, the NCDC established the HAS and Modern Homes Exhibitions. These houses reflected the desires of the contemporary market such as open plan layouts, indoor/outdoor living and up-to-date services. The houses had skillion or butterfly roofs, expansive walls of glass, restrained palettes, organic materials and asymmetrical massing.

As an alternative to the HAS, by engaging a progressive home builder such as Pettit + Sevitt or Lendlease, Canberrans could build modern, cost-effective homes featuring clean lines, wide

overhanging eaves, flat or low-pitch roofs, exposed beams that were ‘a cut above the [project home] usual offerings’.<sup>9</sup>



44 and 46 Vasey Crescent, Campbell, designed by Roy Grounds, 1960, in the Melbourne Regional style with long, unbroken rooflines, narrow edge to roof, and glass walls. (Source: NAA, ID Number 11296144)

## Detached government houses

As a sub-category of the detached house type, the NCDC constructed a large number of detached houses as public housing for the increasing population. More often than not, due to cost constraints these designs **didn't** employ modernist qualities. However, those designed by agent architects on behalf of the NCDC at times exhibited characteristics of modernist architecture. The notable local and interstate practitioners engaged by the NCDC provided a higher quality and more innovative residence.

Examples of this include the Fisher Government Housing Group in Pilbara Place, Fisher, designed by Cameron, Chisholm and Nicol, which are well-designed and planned to relate to adjoining garden and service areas, built within extremely tight cost limits.<sup>10</sup> The group of 12 Woden Special Housing on Kent Street in Hughes, designed by John Taylor of Leith & Bartlett for the NCDC, were modest houses with simple proportions and massing but with fine detailing and have characteristics of the Melbourne Regional style of architecture.



Woden Special Housing, Kent Street, Hughes, 1963, by John Taylor of Leith & Bartlett has simple proportions and massing and characteristics of the Melbourne Regional style of architecture. (Source: GML Heritage)

## Duplex houses

### *Description*

- A duplex house (also known as a semi-detached) is a residential building containing two mirror image homes that share a common central wall.
- **Canberra's** collection of duplexes includes single and double storey buildings. Duplexes have been constructed in Canberra since the 1920s.

### *Commentary*

In response to the undersupply of housing for the growing population in the early to mid-twentieth century the planning departments in Canberra used the duplex house type to efficiently increase dwelling numbers while reducing urban spread and infrastructure needs.<sup>11</sup> Various styles of duplexes were constructed under the direction of the FCC, NCPDC and the NCDC.

The first two-storey duplex houses built in Canberra were in the Blandfordia 5 housing precinct (now Griffith) and Reid housing precinct in the late 1920s and are typical of the FCC style with terracotta tiles and white-painted, rendered roughcast.

Later red brick versions were erected in the 1940s and 1950s under the NCPDC elsewhere in Reid and in Campbell, Narrabundah, Turner and Yarralumla.

Duplex houses in Canberra do not typically exhibit modernist design characteristics. However, the Northbourne Housing Group consisted of five types of housing, including two-storey pair housing, or semi-detached duplexes.

## Townhouses

### *Description*

In Canberra, townhouses are typically single or double storey, share one- or two-party walls with neighbouring houses, have their own entrance and exhibit a consistent design language across the block.

### *Commentary*

An example of medium density housing in Canberra, townhouses were constructed by private citizens, for public housing and through public initiatives lead by the NCDC.

As a speculative venture in 1959, to test the market for medium-density housing, Roy Grounds designed his only townhouses in Canberra at 3 Tasmania Circle, Forrest. These townhouses are an exceptional example of postwar Melbourne Regional style in Canberra, characterised by their 'long unbroken rooflines, widely projecting eaves and glass walls with regularly spaced timber mullions'.<sup>12</sup>

In the 1960s, the NCDC began to promote townhouses as a medium-density housing alternative to traditional flats and semi-detached houses. It commissioned architects such as Dirk Bolt and Associates to prepare plans for townhouses in the new suburbs of Aranda (Jalanga Crescent), Torrens (Beasley and Basedow streets) and Farrer (Marshall Street and Beasley Street).<sup>13</sup>

For off-site student accommodation, the ANU engaged Harry Seidler to design the Campbell Group Housing (1964) that included 32 townhouses.

Later examples include blocks of townhouses constructed by Gary Willemsen in the 1980s at Cornish Place, Holder, and Lakeview at 127 Hopetoun Circuit, Yarralumla, which was designed by Harry Seidler between 1982 and 1984.



**Roy Grounds's** townhouses at 3 Tasmania Circle, Forrest, have characteristics of the both the Melbourne Regional and International styles. (Source: GML Heritage)

## Flats and apartments

### *Description*

- High-density housing in Canberra is typified by the blocks of flats that commenced under the NCPD. They are multistorey buildings with regular design language.

### *Commentary*

From its commencement in the late 1950s, the NCDC introduced changes to the plan of Canberra, which included allotments

within new subdivisions to accommodate a diversity of housing including higher density living—apartments and groups of units.

This change was done in response to the influx of single people moving to Canberra for public service employment. The NCDC understood that the status quo of duplexes and single, detached houses was not always appropriate for the growing population and did not help in slowing urban sprawl. To provide alternative houses for single and small family units, the NCDC turned to blocks of flats as the answer. Though multistorey blocks of flats had been derided as unsanitary and a cause of congestion internationally and elsewhere in Australia, by this time they were seen as a suitable approach for high-density housing in Canberra.

**Canberra’s** first high-density public housing scheme was the Northbourne Avenue housing group, constructed in 1962 to the design of Ancher, Mortlock and Murray. The complex consisted of five types of housing including four-storey blocks of bedsitter flats and was considered a fine example of the postwar International style of architecture. The Bega and Allawah Flats, on Ainslie Avenue and Cooyong Street, Braddon (now demolished), were constructed in the late 1950s. Architects Richard Ure and Richard Slater created comfortable living quarters and a harmonious and well-proportioned complex. Indicators of the Post-War International style included large

sheets of glass providing natural light, plain and smooth wall surfaces, and structural cantilevered and overhanging elements that provided shade to outdoor areas..<sup>14</sup>



The now-demolished Allawah Court had characteristics of the Post-War International style of architecture. (Source: ACT Heritage)

## Courtyard and atrium houses

### *Description*

- Courtyard or atrium houses can be detached houses, semi-detached duplexes, or townhouses with access to a private courtyard or common garden area.
- Atrium houses gain natural light through a central atrium.

Courtyard and atrium housing was generally constructed through government initiatives lead by the NCDC such as at Urambi Village, Wybalena Grove, Swinger Hill, Jerilderie Court, etc.

#### *Commentary*

The first courtyard houses in Canberra were the Forrest Townhouses designed by Roy Grounds in 1961 (refer to Townhouses) and a section of the Northbourne Housing Precinct in Lyneham and Dickson by Sydney Ancher of Ancher, Mortlock and Murray in 1962.<sup>15</sup>

Courtyard housing had been tested in the modernist era by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Alvar Aalto in the 1930s and later by Jørn Utzon in Sweden and Denmark in the 1950s and 1960s.

The need for well-designed, medium-density housing in Canberra was raised by architects within and external to the NCDC from the 1950s.<sup>16</sup> While the NCDC provided high-density housing for singles and small families, a suitable medium-density housing option was missing. The prospect of extensive urban sprawl and Canberrans' preference for detached houses and gardens were of growing concern.

The first introduction of large-scale courtyard housing developments in Canberra was in 1966 in Hackett by architect Dirk Bolt for the NCDC. The courtyard house was seen as an alternative to the detached house—one that supported

**Canberra's suburban lifestyle** by providing outdoor space and **gardens but didn't** add largely to urban sprawl.

Shortly after, Swinger Hill in Phillip confirmed the courtyard house as a successful medium-density dwelling type in Canberra. At this site, the 39 dwellings constructed in Stage 1 and 2 offered three typologies of house—the courtyard, atrium and terrace house. The courtyard house was a single-level dwelling with access to two private courtyards. The atrium house featured the two courtyards and a central atrium courtyard to provide natural light.

At both Hackett and Swinger Hill the space planning and materials created a connection between indoors and outdoors. Characteristics of the Sydney School style such as materials, colours, detailing and landscaping can be seen in both examples,<sup>17</sup> particularly at Swinger Hill where the houses were set into the natural slope of the group and rooflines followed the slope.

Various other examples of courtyard housing have been constructed in Canberra, including detached houses like the Birch House (3 Arkana Street, Yarralumla), where the house was 'folded in' on itself to provide the clients with privacy and a strong connection to the outdoors.



- D CH 48 COURTHOUSE:** Area 1,522 sq ft.  
Similar design to the CH4A type, but has four bedrooms. The house is designed so that all rooms look out onto a garden courtyard.
- E CH 3 COURTHOUSE:** Area 1,655 sq ft.  
A three-bedroom house incorporating a study, with the additional feature of an open fireplace as well as the standard gas heating.

Floor plan of type E courtyard house at Swinger Hill. (Source: ACT Heritage, Credit: NLA Npf 728.312099471 S978)

## 4.5 Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Royal British Institute of Architects, 'Modernism in Architecture', accessed 24 May 2024 (<https://www.architecture.com/explore-architecture/modernism>).
- <sup>2</sup> Jarvis, A 2018, *Celebrating the past, in the present, for the future. Heritage advocacy, engagement and tourism models for modernist places and spaces*, report prepared for 2018 Churchill Fellowship, p 11.
- <sup>3</sup> Royal British Institute of Architects, 'Modernism in Architecture', accessed 24 May 2024 (<https://www.architecture.com/explore-architecture/modernism>); Jarvis, A 2018, *Celebrating the past, in the present, for the future. Heritage advocacy, engagement and tourism models for modernist places and spaces*, report prepared for 2018 Churchill Fellowship, pp 12, 13.
- <sup>4</sup> Irving, R 2001, *Twentieth Century Architecture in Wollongong*, published by Wollongong City Council.
- <sup>5</sup> Apperly, R, Irving, R and Reynolds, P 1989, *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1988 to the Present*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, p 240.
- <sup>6</sup> Canberra House, 'Post-War Melbourne Regional Architecture', accessed 24 May 2024 (<http://www.canberrahouse.com.au/pw-melbourne.html>).
- <sup>7</sup> Apperly, R, Irving, R and Reynolds, P 1989, *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1988 to the Present*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, p 240.
- <sup>8</sup> Apperly, R, Irving, R and Reynolds, P 1989, *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1988 to the Present*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, p 240.
- <sup>9</sup> Reeves, T and Roberts, A 2013, *100 Canberra Houses: A Century of Capital Architecture*, Halstead Press, Braddon, p 147
- <sup>10</sup> Australian Institute of Architects (ACT Chapter), Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture, Fisher Government Housing Group, accessed 24 May 2024 ([www.architecture.com.au/wp-content/uploads/r041\\_fisher\\_government\\_housing\\_group\\_rstca.pdf](http://www.architecture.com.au/wp-content/uploads/r041_fisher_government_housing_group_rstca.pdf)).
- <sup>11</sup> ACT Heritage Council, 'Background Information, Narrabundah Duplexes', accessed 24 May 2024 ([www.environment.act.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/1186407/BI-Narrabundah-Duplexes.pdf](http://www.environment.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/1186407/BI-Narrabundah-Duplexes.pdf)).
- <sup>12</sup> Canberra House, 'Forrest Townhouses, 3 Tasmania Circle, Forrest (1959)', accessed 24 May 2024 (<http://www.canberrahouse.com.au/houses/forrest-townhouses.html>).
- <sup>13</sup> Graeme Trickett and Kenneth Charlton, *Repose, The Contribution of Dirk Bolt to Canberra's Architecture and Planning*, 2013.
- <sup>14</sup> Canberra House, 'Bega and Allawah Flats, Braddon (1954)', accessed 24 May 2024 (<http://www.canberrahouse.com.au/houses/bega-allawah-flats.html>).
- <sup>15</sup> Graeme Trickett and Kenneth Charlton, *Repose, The Contribution of Dirk Bolt to Canberra's Architecture and Planning*, 2013, p 123.
- <sup>16</sup> Reeves, T and Roberts, A 2013, *100 Canberra Houses: A Century of Capital Architecture*, Halstead Press, Braddon, p 168
- <sup>17</sup> Canberra House, 'Swinger Hill Stage 1 and 2, Barnett Close Phillip (1969)', accessed 24 May 2024 (<http://www.canberrahouse.com.au/houses/swinger-hill.html>).

# Framework for heritage assessments in the ACT

## 5 Framework for heritage assessments in the ACT

### 5.1 Nominating a place

To be included in a heritage register, a place should be found to be significant—significant places have heritage value. As stated in the ACT Heritage Council *Heritage Assessment Policy*, the goal of a heritage assessment is to identify places that demonstrate significance in some way which makes them ‘out of the ordinary’.<sup>1</sup>

To determine whether a place is significant, comparison with other similar heritage places is helpful. Applying the historical themes in Section 3, defining the house type and architectural style as described in Section 4, and undertaking a comparative analysis can reveal whether a place has value that is out of the ordinary—i.e. whether it is a rare or a representative example of its type. For modernist heritage places in Canberra, comparative analysis helps determine whether a place is a particularly good example of modernist architecture and its various styles.

This section provides a framework to help identify whether a house or residence is significant. It is not intended to be a definitive assessment of whether a place associated with modernism has heritage value; modernist places may also be significant for other reasons outside the scope of this report. This

framework should be read alongside other guidance documents such as the *Heritage Assessment Policy* and the *Burra Charter: the Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance, 2013* (the Burra Charter) and its Practice Notes.

It is important to note that the significance or heritage value of a place may change over time. New information may become available, new associations may arise, or the context may change so a place could become increasingly notable or rare as time passes. Heritage significance is not static, and values should be assessed and reassessed at important decision-making points to ensure an up-to-date understanding.

### 5.2 ACT heritage criteria

In the ACT, places may be included in the ACT Heritage Register if they are of Territory-level significance:

A place or object is of Territory-level significance if its heritage values contribute to our understanding and appreciation of the **broad pattern and evolution of the ACT’s history and heritage.**<sup>2</sup>

Numerous themes have shaped the broad pattern and evolution of the **ACT’s history and heritage.**

In addition to the six historical themes for modernist houses in Section 3, reference to the **ACT Heritage Council’s *Heritage Assessment Policy*** can be made. The themes in the *Heritage Assessment Policy* provide an ACT-wide context for the significant identity and character of the ACT.

The thematic history in Section 3 supports and reveals where the history of modernist housing in Canberra intersects with the history of the evolution and development of the ACT. Other themes that are relevant more generally to Australian history may also be significant to the ACT, such as domestic housing, technical and creative innovation, and excellence in design.

A place is likely to be significant if it expresses or demonstrates historical themes. To determine whether a place has heritage value, heritage assessment criteria have been established.

At the national level, the Australian Government implemented in 2000 the nine National Heritage Convention (HERCON) criteria.<sup>3</sup> These criteria have generally been adopted by states and territories for state, territory and local heritage lists. In the ACT, a place or object has heritage significance for the following reasons:

- (a) **importance to the course or pattern of the ACT’s cultural or natural history;**

- (b) **has uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of the ACT’s cultural or natural history;**
- (c) potential to yield important information that will contribute **to an understanding of the ACT’s cultural or natural history;**
- (d) importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or objects;
- (e) importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by the ACT community or a cultural group in the ACT;
- (f) importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement for a particular period;
- (g) has a strong or special association with the ACT community, or a cultural group in the ACT for social, cultural or spiritual reasons;
- (h) has a special association with the life or work of a person, or people, important to the history of the ACT.<sup>4</sup>

## 5.3 Thresholds and comparative analysis

When assessing whether a place meets the ACT Heritage Register criteria (or other significance criteria, e.g. those in the Burra Charter or the National Heritage criteria), a variety of

indicators can be used to understand whether the place meets the criteria thresholds.

For example, a place is likely to meet the significance threshold if it expresses historical themes in a way that is important, uncommon, rare, representative or an outstanding example of a style or type of place, is exceptional, has a strong or special association with individuals or communities, has good intactness or integrity, or is notable in some other way.

Comparative analysis against other places can be used to help identify the level of significance of a place, i.e. whether it meets the threshold of a significance criterion. For example, to identify whether a place is rare or uncommon, it is necessary to investigate whether there are many other examples of that type of place. To determine whether a place is a good representative of an architectural style, it should be compared to other places of that style and their characteristics.

Comparative analysis does not mean that only the single most outstanding heritage place can have heritage value. As stated in the ACT *Heritage Assessment Policy*, **'more than one place can be important in the context of any criterion.'**<sup>5</sup>

## 5.4 Undertaking a heritage assessment

This section of the report provides a framework to help identify whether a modernist house could meet one or more of the ACT Heritage register criteria. This advice, together with the historical themes, can be used in assessments to help determine whether a place has heritage value at the Territory level and is worthy of a nomination to the ACT Heritage Register.

To determine whether a modernist house has heritage significance, it must be assessed against the criteria. To be significant, a modernist house should meet the threshold against at least one of the criteria.

The general process is as follows:

1. Identify whether the modernist house expresses the historical themes or aspect of significance that each criterion covers.
2. Assess the place against the criteria that are relevant to the place.
3. Assess whether the modernist house meets the threshold for each criterion, through comparative analysis, consideration of threshold indicators, and understanding of its history and context.

### 5.4.1 Pre-assessment checklist

Before commencing the assessment, some useful questions to consider that may help reveal whether a modernist house has potential to be significant are:

- When was the house built? Was it built during the period generally known for modernist architecture?
- Is the house in a modernist architectural style? Which features are modernist, and/or which modernist style does the place represent? (Refer to Section 4.3)
- Does the place exhibit many of the typical characteristics and style indicators of modernism? (Refer to Section 4.3)
- Is **the house’s** modernist style rare in the Canberra context, or unique to Canberra?
- Is this modernist house associated with a significant architect?
- Does this modernist house have a high degree of intactness or integrity?
- Is the place an unusual, groundbreaking, technically impressive or unique expression of the modernist style?
- Is the house strongly recognised or appreciated by the community for its architectural style or association with modernist historical themes (refer to Section 2)?
- Does the house reveal information about modernism in the ACT through its design, fabric and history?

### 5.4.2 Assessment guidance

#### **Criterion (a) — importance to the course or pattern of the ACT’s cultural or natural history**

##### Basic test

A residence in Canberra may be relevant to this criterion if it has a clear association with the historical themes, phases or processes related to modernism in ACT history discussed in Sections 2 and 3—for example (but not limited to):

- **Canberra as the nation’s capital;**
- Canberra as a planned environment;
- Garden City and City Beautiful;
- the bush capital;
- the NCDC and its works;
- lodging people and government housing;
- the growth of global modernism, as expressed in the ACT;
- postwar population growth in Canberra;
- architectural innovation and achievement in the ACT; or
- liveability and building community in Canberra.

AND the association of the house or residence to the theme or process, and its architectural style, can be understood through the physical fabric or intangible elements of the house or residence, and/or in documentary resources, oral history or other sources.

Meets threshold if

A house, or residence, is likely to meet the threshold of significance under this criterion if it is of importance in the course or pattern of one of the themes, events or historical processes identified above.

The following threshold indicators may apply to places and objects being assessed against this criterion:

Indicator	Example
Representativeness	The residence is representative of a certain architectural style (e.g. it has many of the style indicators outlined at Section 4.3, Modernist architectural styles), or representative of <b>a phase of Canberra’s development, an urban planning or design movement associated with modernism.</b>
Distinctiveness	The residence is a clear or distinctive demonstration of the processes or themes outlined above.
Exceptionality	The residence is an exceptional expression of a story, moment or trend in the story of modernism, design or urban planning in the <b>Canberra context, Canberra’s growth or development, living in Canberra, etc, as themes that have significantly shaped the ACT’s development.</b>
Extensiveness	The residence (or residences) is part of an extensive collection of modernist buildings that

Indicator	Example
	reveals part of the story of the themes identified above.
Intactness/integrity	The residence is a particularly intact or high-integrity example of the type of place associated with the themes above, e.g. it is a largely unaltered, architect-designed modernist house, or an NCDC project with high integrity.
Rarity	The residence is the only one or among few of its type that can demonstrate one of the historical themes, phases or processes above (NB: rare or uncommon types of places may be better assessed against criterion b).
Seminal or early influence	The residence may be the first one or a place of origin of its house type, or architectural style, or may have been an early influence on the direction of the architectural style, process or phase in the ACT.
Length of association	The residence has been associated with one of the above themes or processes for a long time. For example, it may have been used as government housing for a long period.
Influence of association	<b>The residence’s association with one of the themes above has been influential on the development of that theme, process or phase.</b>
Demonstrated extent or degree of community	The residence is recognised or supported by the community for its association with the themes, processes or phases above, eg for its association with the NCDC development period, the development of Canberra as the bush

Indicator	Example
association or interest	capital, the growth of modernism in the Canberra context, etc.

### Places that may not meet threshold

A residence may not be significant under this criterion if:

- It only has a tenuous, unsubstantiated or incidental association with the historical themes, processes and phases identified above.
- Compared to other places, it does not particularly well demonstrate the historical themes, processes, phases and events identified above, i.e. due to lacking the threshold indicators to a good standard.
- The residence has been so altered that it can no longer provide evidence of the important theme, process, phase or event it is associated with, e.g. modernist architecture in Canberra, modernism and its association with the NCDC, postwar population growth, designing for the bush capital, etc.

Helpful language <sup>6</sup>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>closely associated with...</i></li> <li>• <i>contributes significantly to our understanding of...</i></li> <li>• <i>contributes to contextual information...</i></li> <li>• <i>important as the site of...</i></li> <li>• <i>important early evidence of...</i></li> <li>• <i>important in illustrating...</i></li> <li>• <i>important surviving evidence of...</i></li> <li>• <i>level of knowledge...</i></li> <li>• <i>part of the evolution/development of <b>the ACT's</b> history...</i></li> <li>• <i>tangible evidence of...</i></li> </ul>

**Criterion (b) — has uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of the ACT’s cultural or natural history**

Basic test

The residence should have an association with an aspect of the **ACT’s cultural history** that has made a strong, notable or **influential contribution to the ACT’s society or environment**. For the purposes of **modernist residences, these aspects of the ACT’s cultural history** are similar to the themes, processes, phases and events identified under criterion a, ie:

- **Canberra as the nation’s capital;**
- Canberra as a planned environment;
- Garden City and City Beautiful;
- the bush capital;
- the NCDC and its works;
- lodging people and government housing;
- the growth of global modernism, as expressed in the ACT;
- postwar population growth in Canberra;
- architectural innovation and achievement in the ACT; or
- liveability and building community in Canberra.

Simply possessing an uncommon, rare or endangered aspect of **the ACT’s cultural history** does not mean a place is significant under this criterion. The importance of the aspect of cultural history demonstrated by the place must be established. This thematic study establishes that the aspects of cultural history

associated with modernism in the ACT’s history, above, are important.

Meets threshold if

A residence is likely to meet the threshold of significance under this criterion if it exhibits the primary threshold indicators of being uncommon, rare or endangered.

In addition, a place may be likely to meet this criterion if it can establish the following threshold indicators:

Indicator	Example
Intactness/integrity	The residence has a notable degree of intactness and integrity, for example retaining many unaltered style indicators of modernism or its substyles, to the degree that it is a rare or uncommon example of its type because no other residences are as intact, or exist.
Uniqueness	The residence is unlike any other comparable places of its type, for example it is the only place associated with a prominent architect, the only residence built during a certain time period or the only place demonstrating an important design or architectural achievement, in a way that is associated with an important <b>aspect of the ACT’s cultural history</b> .

Indicator	Example
Distinctiveness	Among other places of its type, the residence is distinctive enough to be rare or uncommon. For example, the residence could be the only residence constructed in a certain sub-style, or demonstrate unusual interpretations of common modernist style indicators.
Exceptionality	The residence is an exceptional example of its type, and this exceptionality is what makes it rare. For example, the residence may retain a large number of original architectural elements, fixtures and fittings, more than other comparable sites, or it may be exceptional as an uncommon example of how modernism intersected with significant themes <b>in the ACT’s cultural history, for example a one-of-a-kind modernist house that was adapted to its Canberra setting, climate and community.</b>
Extensiveness	The residence or residences are uncommon for the degree of extensiveness of the place, for example as a group of modernist houses (detached homes, townhouses, medium-density housing etc) which were not, or are no longer, found together to that extent.

Types of places that may meet this criterion include:

- a place that is the only, or only remaining, example of a modernist architectural style or some of its key style

indicators, either because few were originally constructed or those that were have been lost;

- a modernist residence with unusual intactness, authenticity or integrity; and
- a place with an unusual or rare history in the story of the **ACT’s cultural significance**, e.g. the only or one of few works of a prominent architect, or residences that demonstrate an **aspect of the ACT’s cultural history which is now rare or obsolete.**

It is important to know about the distribution and abundance of the relevant category of residences in the ACT. The rare or uncommon category will be defined by considering similar places. For example, if a place could be rare as one of the only houses of an architectural style, the number of other buildings in that style should be determined. If it could be rare as the work of a prominent architect, the number of residences by that architect should be identified.

### Places that may not meet threshold

A residence may not be significant under this criterion if:

- The aspect of the **ACT’s cultural heritage the place is** demonstrating (e.g. modernism and its expression in the ACT, outstanding architectural achievement, designing for the bush capital) is not rare, endangered or uncommon.

- The type of residence, residences or architectural features are not rare, endangered or uncommon.
- The aspects of the place that are rare, endangered or **uncommon are not important aspects of the ACT's cultural history**. For example, modernist homes are important aspects of the ACT's cultural history, but modernist homes painted purple are not likely to be.

#### Helpful language.<sup>7</sup>

- *One of the few surviving examples...*
- *One of the only known examples...*
- *Rare surviving evidence/example...*
- *The last surviving example...*
- *The only known example...*

**Criterion (c) — potential to yield important information that will contribute to an understanding of the ACT’s cultural or natural history**

Basic test

The residence has evidence of research interest, which has not yet been exhausted, and is likely able to yield information about **an understanding of the ACT’s cultural history**—in particular, in relation to the history of architectural modernism in the ACT context and its association with the themes identified under the discussion in criterion a.

Potential to yield information should be embedded in the place itself (rather than archives or documents held at the place), and could be found in buildings and structures, gardens and plantings, and other elements of the residence.

It could arise from the **study of a building’s design, form, materials, engineering features, decorative finishes, fittings and furnishings**..<sup>8</sup>

Meets threshold if

A residence is likely to meet this threshold if the potential information from the place is likely to make a substantial contribution to understanding the history, process or phase of modernism in the ACT context and its associated stories and

themes. This may be the case if the residence contributes new knowledge, or leads to a greater understanding of, modernism as an aspect of **the ACT’s history**, or fills gaps in our understanding.

In addition, a place may be likely to meet the threshold if it can establish the following threshold indicators:

Indicator	Example
Earliness	The residence is an early example of the modernist style or of new technological developments or innovations in architecture that could reveal new information about the origins of the style or feature; it could be the principal surviving record of an important early <b>phase associated with modernism in the ACT’s history</b> .
Rarity	The residence is one of the few places that is able to provide new knowledge or information of substantial importance about the themes, <b>processes or phases of modernism in the ACT’s history</b> .
Representativeness	The residence or residences is representative of an architectural style, type of places, phase process or era, so information that it may yield can shed light more generally on important aspects of modernism in the ACT.
Exceptionality	By being an exceptional example of its type or in the processes, phases or themes of modernism in the ACT context, the residence reveals new information or gives new

Indicator	Example
	perspectives on <b>this aspect of the ACT’s</b> history.
Distinctiveness	The residence has distinctive features or elements, e.g. in its architectural features or history, which can be investigated to more clearly understand or reveal information on modernism in the ACT context, compared to other similar residences.
Extensiveness	The residence has extensive remnant fabric or architectural features which can together yield a more comprehensive set of information on modernism in the ACT context, for example because it exhibits a wide diversity of architectural features or style indicators, or because the relationship between a group of residences can be researched to reveal new knowledge and interpretations.
Intactness/integrity	The residence is highly intact or has high integrity, making it possible to effectively research and investigate it to yield information.
Relevance to key periods of cultural history	The residence is closely associated with important periods of ACT history.

### Places that may not meet threshold

A residence may not be significant under this criterion if:

- The information to be obtained from the residence is not important or a substantial contribution to the understanding of modernism in the ACT context.
- It was a residence that yielded research potential in the past, but all that potential has been explored and exhausted (if so, the residence may meet other criteria).
- There is little real evidence or proven potential that the place will contribute to existing knowledge or offer new knowledge of the history and heritage of modernism in the ACT context.
- The place replicates or confirms knowledge provided by other similar places, rather than providing new information or interpretations.
- The research value comes from documents or sources connected to the place rather than the attributes of the place itself.

### Helpful language<sup>9</sup>

- *period of significance...*
- *potential to contribute to our understanding of...*
- *potential to reveal knowledge or information...*
- *potential to yield further or new information...*

**Criterion (d) — importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or objects**

Basic test

The residence or residences can be identified as belonging to a **defined ‘class’ of place** that has identifiable characteristics—for example, modernist houses, Sydney School style houses, govvie houses built by the NCDC (see Section 4 for discussion of classes and characteristics of modernist houses).

The class of place that the residence belongs to must have made a strong, **noticeable or influential contribution to the ACT’s** cultural history, for example by demonstrating a way of life, an ideology or philosophy and its impact, design, style, technique or some other process, activity or achievement that is important in **the ACT’s history. In the case of modernist houses, modernism** is a practice and style that **is important in the ACT’s history** along with its associated themes, processes and phases (as discussed under criterion a).

Meets threshold if

A residence or residences are likely to meet this threshold if it is important for its demonstration of the principal characteristics of its class of place. It may be one of few places that demonstrate those characteristics, or it may demonstrate them to a

particularly good standard. The residence may show key variations or evolutions within the styles of an architectural class, may have influenced subsequent examples of its class of place, or could demonstrate the principal characteristics of modernist houses in a particularly notable or outstanding way.

The characteristics of the class of place should generally be expressed and identifiable through the physical fabric and attributes of the place.

In addition to the above, a place is likely to meet the threshold under this criterion if it can establish one or more of the following threshold indicators:

Indicator	Example
Rarity	The uncommonness of the residence makes it an important example of the characteristics of its class of place, for example if few others of the class have survived.
Representativeness	The residence is representative of all the characteristics of its class of place to a high standard—for example, it is an archetypal modernist house.
Exceptionality	The residence is an exceptional example of its class of place—it could have outstanding quality of design or workmanship, an unusual degree of intactness, or be exceptional for its ongoing use as a residence or association with a modernist architect.

Indicator	Example
Distinctiveness	The residence distinctively demonstrates the characteristics of its class of place (e.g. houses in the modernist style, government housing constructed by the NCDC, etc) in a way that is notable or unusual compared to other similar residences. It could be distinctive for showing notable variations or evolutions in the style, or be a pivotal example of its class.
Extensiveness	The extensiveness of the residence or residences could allow them to provide a comprehensive demonstration of the majority of the characteristics of a class of place.
Intactness/integrity	The residence retains or expresses the characteristic features of its class of place with high intactness or integrity, so it is able to clearly function as a representative of its class—it has not been substantially altered or renovated.

### Places that may not reach threshold

A residence may not be significant under this criterion if:

- The residence does not demonstrate the key defining characteristics of the class of place it is part of, either because it never had them or they have been lost, or it is a poor example of these characteristics.

- The residence cannot be defined as part of a larger class of cultural place, e.g. it is totally unique with no comparators (this is not common).
- The class or sub-class of place the residence is part of is not **notable or influential in the course of the ACT’s history**. For example, houses in the modernist style are influential in **Canberra’s history**, but blue houses in the modernist style are not an influential class of place.
- The residence is an average example among many representatives of its class of place; it is not an important demonstration of the style.

### Helpful language<sup>10</sup>

- *fine illustration of...*
- *good/excellent/fine example of...*
- *important in illustrating the principal...*
- *characteristics of its type/class of cultural place...*
- *period of significance...*

**Criterion (e) — important in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by the ACT community or a cultural group in the ACT**

Basic test

The residence or residences must have aesthetic characteristics that are expressed through the tangible or intangible attributes of the place—for example, its architectural design, gardens, the combination of the building and its setting, or an experience of sound, smell or some other factor. Aesthetic characteristics generate an emotional response in the viewer, for their picturesqueness, beauty, symbolism or some other quality.

These characteristics are demonstrably valued by the ACT community, or a definable community or cultural group that is identifiable by a shared background, belief system, interest or values—for example, the architectural community, migrants to Canberra, or current and former residents of a medium or high-density housing block or a suburb.

Meets threshold if

A residence or residences are likely to meet this threshold if the valuing of the residence for aesthetic reasons by a community group is important or notable in the ACT context.

Aesthetic characteristics can lie in the form, scale, setting, unity, contrast, colour, texture and material of a place. A residence may be aesthetically distinctive, be a landmark or iconic, or be part of key views to or from the place.

To meet the threshold under this criterion the valuing of the place by the community must be clearly established or demonstrated with evidence—it cannot be assumed. This could include evidence through surveys, public consultation, or looking at representations in art, literature, photography or other publications that show how the community appreciates the place.

In addition to the above, a place is likely to meet the threshold under this criterion if one or more of the following threshold indicators can be established:

Indicator	Example
Demonstrated appreciation	The residence is well represented as an aesthetic landmark or pleasing visual in many artistic forms, such as paintings, photographs, literature and publications, showing that its aesthetic characteristics resonate with viewers.
Rarity	The residence is unusual in its physical form, visuals, setting etc in a way that means it is particularly recognised and appreciated by the community.

Indicator	Example
Exceptionality	The residence has exceptional beautiful, picturesque or other aesthetic features that are valued by the community, for example fine design work or interiors.
Distinctiveness	The residence has distinctive features that are valued by the community for the aesthetic experience they create, for example unusual colours, gardens, setting or architectural elements.
Intactness/integrity	The residence has few alterations or intrusions that distract from the aesthetic features which generate a response by the community or a cultural group.
Visual setting and context	The residence is within a context—natural, designed or built—that helps create the aesthetic response in the viewer, and increases the degree of aesthetic significance. This may include the existence of important views/vistas.

### Places that may not meet threshold

A residence may not be significant under this criterion if:

- There is no community or cultural group that can be identified as valuing the place for its aesthetic characteristics, or the people who do value the place are too various or unconnected to be able to be defined as a community or group.

- While the place is visually pleasing, there is no evidence to suggest that it is specifically valued for its aesthetics by a community or cultural group.
- The aesthetic characteristics of the place have lost appeal or been degraded, for example due to alterations to the place or changes to its setting.

### Helpful language<sup>11</sup>

- *abstract qualities...*
- *architectural qualities...*
- *artistic qualities...*
- *cognitive qualities (sense of place or time)...*
- *complexity...*
- *compositional qualities...*
- *context...*
- *contrast...*
- *distinctive aesthetic qualities (size, setting, form, composition or condition)...*
- *dramatic effect...*
- *hierarchy...*
- *landmark qualities...*
- *order...*
- *particularly vivid, distinguished, uncommon or rare features or combinations of features...*
- *position/distance...*

### Helpful language<sup>11</sup>

- *relationship between the parts, including the setting, reinforce the beauty of the entire thing...*
- *scenic qualities...*
- *seclusion, remoteness...*
- *simplicity...*
- *streetscape contribution...*
- *surprise...*
- *visual merit or interest...*

**Criterion (f) — importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement for a particular period**

Basic test

The residence contains evidence in its attributes of creative or technical achievement for the period it was created, such as expressing new achievement in architectural design or styles, using new construction materials and technologies, or responding in innovative ways to the Canberra context, its climate and residents’ needs.

The residence could be an accomplishment, advancement or creative adaptation in relevant fields such as architecture, engineering, construction, landscape or industrial design or craftsmanship. It should illuminate a moment or process of human endeavour.

Meets threshold if

A residence is likely to meet this threshold if the achievement that it demonstrates is important to a high degree in the relevant field such as architecture or design. There should be evidence that the achievement is out of the ordinary—not just variation to a usual design or process, but an innovative or new achievement using or expanding on existing technology. The achievement could be an ingenious solution to a new or old problem, a

breakthrough in technology or design, a creative adaptation of available materials or technology, or an innovation that extends the limits of the field.

A place should be able to exhibit the creative or technical achievement through its attributes. For example, an innovative architectural design should remain intact so its importance can be understood.

In addition to the above, a place is likely to meet the threshold under this criterion if one or more of the following threshold indicators can be established:

Indicator	Example
Rarity	The high degree of achievement exhibited at the residence is indicated by the rarity of the creative or technical attribute. For example, it is the only place that uses construction methods or materials in a certain way because of how the residence is.
Distinctiveness	The residence is a distinctive application or expression of creative or technical practices compared to other similar types of residence, adapting or innovating practices in new ways that make it unusual or uncommon.
Exceptionality	The residence is an exceptional expression of creative or technical elements in its field—compared to other residences of its type, it expresses the architectural style, design, engineering or construction to an outstanding

Indicator	Example
	quality, with fine details, high-quality craftsmanship, and sophistication in application of techniques.
Intactness/integrity	The residence retains the features or attributes that express the creative or technical achievement in good condition, for example original interiors, construction solutions and finishes and building materials.
Seminal influence	The creative or technical achievement demonstrated at the residence was an influence on future residences, architectural or design work, because of its level of innovation, problem solving, or a breakthrough in technology, design or use of materials.
Recognition in the field	The residence has received recognition in the field where the creative or technical achievement was achieved, revealing the high degree of achievement via peer recognition, such as architectural or design awards.

### Places that may not meet threshold

A residence may not be significant under this criterion if:

- There is no evidence that the creative or technical elements of the place are important, groundbreaking or out of the ordinary.

- The creative or technical achievements at the place are relatively minor, and were not innovative or influential in their field.
- The residence is a good example of its type, but its creative or technical features do not demonstrate a particularly notable application of techniques or approaches of that type, or are only an adaptation of existing creative or technical methods.
- The residence has lost the physical attributes that were an expression of the creative or technical achievement at that place.

### Helpful language<sup>12</sup>

- *awarded...*
- *acknowledged by...*
- *breakthrough...*
- *demonstrates a high degree of creative or technical achievement...*
- *first...*
- *innovation/innovative...*
- *inventive...*
- *original...*
- *period of significance...*
- *represents an advancement...*
- *seminal...*

**Criterion (g) — has a strong or special association with the ACT community, or a cultural group in the ACT for social, cultural or spiritual reasons**

Basic test

The residence has a clear association with the ACT community or a cultural group, and the association is for social, cultural or spiritual reasons, such as the residence being a meeting place or landmark, a place of symbolism, shared memory, identity or experience for the community or group, or associated with an important phase, event or moment for the group or the life of its members, such as their early years living in Canberra.

A community or cultural group should be defined by a shared background, belief system, interest or values—for example, the architectural community, migrants to Canberra, or current and former residents of a medium or high-density housing block or a suburb. The ACT community covers the full breadth of those living in the ACT.

Meets threshold if

A residence or residences are likely to meet this threshold if the association between the community or cultural group and the residence or residences is strong or special, and is notable in the ACT context. For a strong or special association, the community or group may demonstrate a deep sense of ownership or

connectedness to the place. This connection cannot just be assumed, it must be demonstrated, e.g. through evidence of people gathering or meeting at the place for social or cultural reasons, through surveys, documentary sources or other evidence.

In addition to the above, a place is likely to meet the threshold under this criterion if one or more of the following threshold indicators can be established:

Indicator	Example
Distinctiveness	The strong or special association with the residence or residences is different, unusual or uncommon compared to how the community reacts to other similar places.
Exceptionality	The strong or special association with the residence is exceptionally strong; for example, among the communities that lived in a variety of medium-density housing developments in Canberra, one group of housing may have a community that is unusually attached to the place.
Extensiveness	The strong or special association extends across a large community or group, for example a connection with a residence or group of residences has been passed down across generations.

Indicator	Example
Intactness/integrity	A residence has good intactness/integrity, which means that the attributes and features that generate a sense of connection in the community are able to still be responded to.
Length of association	The residence has an identifiable, enduring association with the community or cultural group (for example, over 20 years), which reveals how strong and special their connection is with the place; for example, original residences of a medium-density housing estate who have lived and built connections with the place over many years.
Demonstrated extent and degree of community association	The residence or residences can demonstrate the strong sense of community association with the place, particularly if this association extends beyond the local sphere. Ways that association could be demonstrated might include regular meetings at the place by community members, activities associated with the place such as fundraisers, tours and anniversary events, petitions for protection or celebration of the place, identification in tourist information, and representation in the arts.

### Places that may not meet threshold

A residence may not be significant under this criterion if:

- There is no community or cultural group that can be identified as having a strong or special association with the place, the people who do value the place are too various or unconnected

to be able to be defined as a community or group, or only a subsection of an identifiable community or group values the place.

- **There is no evidence to suggest people’s association with the place is strong or special in the ACT context, or any evidence is patchy or partial.**
- The attributes of the place that contribute to a sense of connection and association have been lost or degraded, or connections to the place have not been maintained, e.g. due to loss of access.
- The association is a historical connection that is no longer in existence (in this case, there may be heritage value under another criterion).

### Helpful language <sup>13</sup>

- *demonstrated attachment...*
- *period of significance...*
- *strong and special association for/with...*
- *widespread community...*
- *support/association with...*

**Criterion (h) — has a special association with the life or work of a person, or people, important to the history of the ACT**

Basic test

The residence has a special association with the life or work of a person **important to the ACT’s history, and the nature of the place** relates to that important work, such as a residence that represents the important work of an architect, designer or urban planner who was important in the history of the ACT. It could also be associated with a group or organisation that is important in the history of the ACT, such as prominent employees of the NCDC or the **‘Sydney School’ of modernist architecture.**

Meets threshold if

The residence or residences are likely to meet this threshold if the association with the place is special—it is stronger or different than other places associated with the person or people. For example, the residence is particularly well-known as the work of an architect, was one of their best-regarded or most innovative designs, their first in the ACT, or has a long connection with them.

The life and work of the person or people should be important to the history of the ACT. This could be the work of an architect, designer or urban planner who was influential in the development

of the city or their field of practice, an outstanding practitioner of their work in the ACT, prominent in their field, or who exemplifies the ideas or work of an important person or group of people.

In addition to the above, a place is likely to meet the threshold under this criterion if one or more of the following threshold indicators can be established:

Indicator	Example
Importance of the person or people	The person or people the residence is associated with are important to the ACT, for example for their role in ACT history or based on community perception. They are not just one of many individuals practising in their field, without something to recommend them above others.
Degree or extent of association	The residence can demonstrate a substantial degree or extent of association with the person or people beyond the usual, for example it has attributes that are a direct result of the person <b>or people’s work</b> or the person was closely involved in the residence’s design or construction, or the connection with the place was particularly significant to the person themselves.
Length of association	The residence has been associated with the person or people for a long time, for example it has been used by the significant person or people as a residence or other place of connection with their work for many years. Alternatively, a residence could have only had

Indicator	Example
	a short-term connection with a person in time, for example while they designed the house plans, but their association with the residence could be enduring in community perception and ACT history.
Influence of association	The association of the person or people with the residence significantly influenced <b>the ACT's</b> history or society, for example because the building was influential on the design of other residences throughout the ACT.
Earliness	The residence is one of the first places associated with the person or people, giving it a particularly prominent sense of connection with their life or work.
Intactness/integrity	The attributes and features associated with the life or work of the people or persons, for example their original architectural design, exteriors or interiors, are in good condition and demonstrate the association with the residence strongly.
Exceptionality	The special association with the residence is exceptionally strong, for example because the architect personally has a strong sense of connection to the residence, because it is well-known as their work, or because it is one of the only places associated with that person in the ACT.

Indicator	Example
Distinctiveness	The special association with the residence or residences is different, unusual or uncommon compared to how the person or people is associated with other places connected with their life or work.

### Places that may not meet threshold

A residence may not be significant under this criterion if:

- The person or people the residence is associated with are not important in ACT history.
- It is associated with an important person or people, but there is no nexus between the factors which make that person important and the residence. For example, prominent academics who lived in a modernist house are important because of their scientific work, therefore places that have a special association with them may be universities where they undertook their important work, rather than their homes.
- The residence only has a passing or incidental association with an important person or people.
- The association of the person or people with the residence is no different or more notable than their association with other similar residences.

#### Helpful language<sup>14</sup>

- *associated with the work of...*
- *association...*
- *connection...*
- *involvement...*
- *period of significance...*
- *relationship...*
- *strong association...*

## 5.5 Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> ACT Heritage Council, March 2018, Heritage Assessment Policy, p 3.
- <sup>2</sup> ACT Heritage Council, March 2018, Heritage Assessment Policy, p 5.
- <sup>3</sup> Lesh, J 2024 '**Saving Heritage Policy: the past and future of conservation in the Australian city**', *Australian Urban Policy: Prospects and Pathways*, Freestone et al, ANU Press, Canberra, p 134.
- <sup>4</sup> *Heritage Act 2004* (ACT), section 10.
- <sup>5</sup> ACT Heritage Council, March 2018, Heritage Assessment Policy, p 10.
- <sup>6</sup> Adapted from Heritage Branch, Department of Environment and Heritage Protection 2013, *Assessing cultural heritage significance: using the cultural heritage criteria*, Queensland Government.
- <sup>7</sup> Adapted from Heritage Branch, Department of Environment and Heritage Protection 2013, *Assessing cultural heritage significance: using the cultural heritage criteria*, Queensland Government.
- <sup>8</sup> Heritage Branch, Department of Environment and Heritage Protection 2013, *Assessing cultural heritage significance: using the cultural heritage criteria*, Queensland Government, p 36.
- <sup>9</sup> Adapted from Heritage Branch, Department of Environment and Heritage Protection 2013, *Assessing cultural heritage significance: using the cultural heritage criteria*, Queensland Government.
- <sup>10</sup> Adapted from Heritage Branch, Department of Environment and Heritage Protection 2013, *Assessing cultural heritage significance: using the cultural heritage criteria*, Queensland Government.
- <sup>11</sup> Adapted from Heritage Branch, Department of Environment and Heritage Protection 2013, *Assessing cultural heritage significance: using the cultural heritage criteria*, Queensland Government.
- <sup>12</sup> Adapted from Heritage Branch, Department of Environment and Heritage Protection 2013, *Assessing cultural heritage significance: using the cultural heritage criteria*, Queensland Government.
- <sup>13</sup> Adapted from Heritage Branch, Department of Environment and Heritage Protection 2013, *Assessing cultural heritage significance: using the cultural heritage criteria*, Queensland Government.
- <sup>14</sup> Adapted from Heritage Branch, Department of Environment and Heritage Protection 2013, *Assessing cultural heritage significance: using the cultural heritage criteria*, Queensland Government.

# Case studies

## 6 Case studies

This section provides six case studies of modernist houses in Canberra.

The case studies provide brief, indicative heritage assessments of each place against the ACT Heritage Register criteria. Further research and assessment would be needed to formalise a nomination of any of the places. They are provided to assist the reader in applying and drawing on the research and assessment framework in previous sections of the report.

The case studies have been selected because they are informed by the six historical themes identified in Section 3. In summary these are:



Fisher Housing Group, Pilbara Place, Fisher, 1970. (Source: GML Heritage)

## Gascoigne House, 3 Anstey Street, Pearce (1967/68)

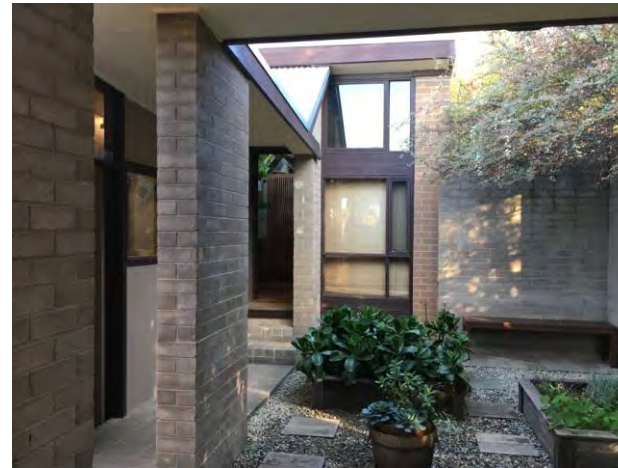
The Gascoigne House at 3 Anstey Street, Pearce, was designed by architect Theo Bischoff for the Gascoignes—Rosalie, an artist, and Professor Ben Gascoigne, a scientist employed at the Commonwealth Solar Observatory, Mount Stromlo. *House type, description and architectural style*

The house is a detached home. In response to the client brief, it was designed with high ceilings, large windows, openness and light, providing room to hang art, maximising the aspect of the house and framing views to allow for observation..<sup>1</sup>

The house is an example of the Melbourne regional style of architecture, responding to the Canberra environment. It is designed around an internal courtyard, with a bedroom wing, kitchen, living space and large hallway where art was displayed. It demonstrates modernist characteristics with its low-pitch gable roof, unpainted timber panelling, verandahs with timber posts, use of natural materials, areas of smooth walls with contrasting textures, horizontal emphasis with highlight windows, and close relationship and responsiveness to the outdoors.

### *Current physical condition*

The house appears to be in high-quality condition with good integrity. Some mainly cosmetic alterations have been made by subsequent owners, but the majority of original materials and finishes remain intact..<sup>2</sup>



Gascoigne House. (Source: GML Heritage)

Indicative heritage significance assessment	
Criteria	Indicative assessment
(a) importance to the course or pattern of the <b>ACT's cultural or natural history</b>	Gascoigne House is a significant and highly intact representative example of the modernist style and of the practice by which architect-commissioned homes were designed in Canberra for involved and visionary clients in the postwar era.
(b) has uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of <b>the ACT's cultural or natural history</b>	Gascoigne House is a rare and highly intact, original home in the modernist style from the postwar era that has not been altered. It is one of only a few houses designed by Canberra architect Theo Bischoff.  A comparative analysis is required to test this.
(c) potential to yield important information that will contribute to an understanding of the <b>ACT's cultural or natural history</b>	Gascoigne House is unlikely to meet this criterion.
(d) importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or objects	Gascoigne House is a high-quality exemplar of a modernist house as a class of place, demonstrated by characteristics of the Melbourne Regional style, with a high degree of integrity.
(e) importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by the ACT	Gascoigne House has strong aesthetic characteristics. However, it is unlikely to meet the threshold of being valued by

Indicative heritage significance assessment	
Criteria	Indicative assessment
community or a cultural group in the ACT	the entire ACT community, or a cultural group.  Formal testing would be required.
(f) importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement for a particular period	Gascoigne House may meet this criterion for the creative way its design responded to the needs of the clients to deliver a residence suitable for artistic and scientific endeavour.
(g) has a strong or special association with the ACT community, or a cultural group in the ACT for social, cultural or spiritual reasons	Gascoigne House is important for its strong associations with the arts and scientific communities of Canberra.  Formal testing would be required to confirm whether the place meets this criterion.
(h) has a special association with the life or work of a person, or people, important to the history of the ACT	Gascoigne House has a special association with artist and architect Theo Bischoff, who designed many Canberra buildings in private practice and as an employee of the Department of Works (1954–1982). The house has a high degree of integrity and is an intact and high-quality expression of his work.  The house is associated with the life and work of Rosalie and Ben Gascoigne, both important people in the cultural history of the ACT. Rosalie, an eminent Australian artist, produced art in the purpose-designed studio attached to the house.

## Roche House, 4 Bedford Street, Deakin (1954)



Roche House. (Source: Peter Blackshaw, Allhomes.com)

Roche House at 4 Bedford Street, Deakin, was designed by architect Robin Boyd, of Grounds, Romberg and Boyd, for Hilary Roche, a Canberra doctor.

### *House type, description and architectural style*

The house is a small detached private residence with one bedroom, a study and a studio/workshop. It was an early design of the architectural partnership of Grounds, Romberg and Boyd, and is in a relatively simple, economical style.

The house is built of brick veneer with timber flooring, and continuous glazing along the eastern and western elevations. A linear, single-storey building, it demonstrates many indicators of the modernist style, and particularly the Melbourne Regional style of architecture that Boyd was closely associated with. The house has a sloping roof with a long, unbroken roofline, exposed rafters, wide eaves, regular windows with timber mullions, and a timber-framed patio that brings a sense of connection with the outdoors..<sup>3</sup>

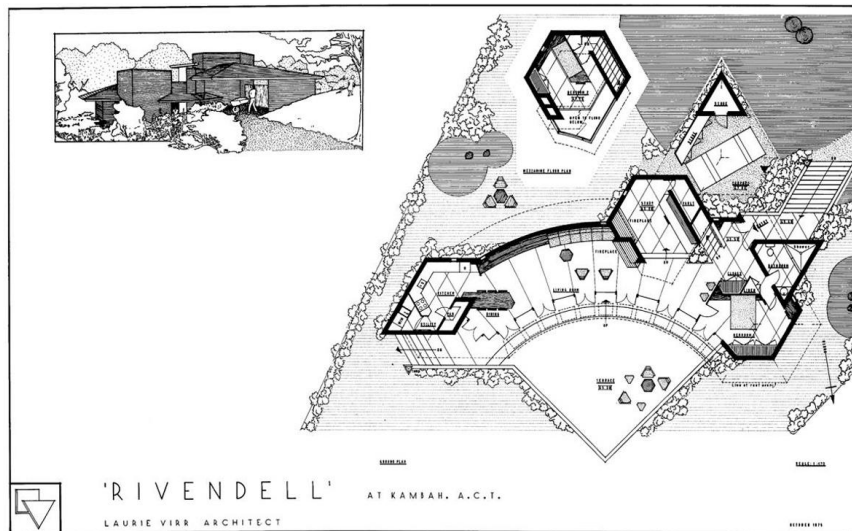
### *Current physical condition*

The house appears to be in relatively good condition. However, it is difficult to assess without closer inspection of the interior against original architectural documentation. Some alterations have been made, for example a replacement kitchen, and solar panels have been added to the roof..<sup>4</sup>

Indicative heritage significance assessment	
Criteria	Indicative assessment
(a) importance to the course or pattern of the <b>ACT's cultural or natural history</b>	Roche House is historically important as an intact representative of the modernist style and of the practice by which architect-commissioned homes were designed in Canberra for involved and visionary clients in the postwar era.  It demonstrates the breadth and depth of modernist principles expressed in a private home.
(b) has uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of <b>the ACT's cultural or natural history</b>	Roche House is unlikely to meet this criterion.
(c) potential to yield important information that will contribute to an understanding of the <b>ACT's cultural or natural history</b>	Roche House is unlikely to meet this criterion.
(d) importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or objects	Roche House is a good example of a modernist house as a class of place, with characteristics representing the Melbourne regional style.
(e) importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by the ACT	Roche House has strong architectural and aesthetic characteristics. However, it is unlikely to meet this criterion.  Formal testing would be required.

Indicative heritage significance assessment	
Criteria	Indicative assessment
community or a cultural group in the ACT	
(f) importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement for a particular period	Roche House meets this criterion as a residence that demonstrates a creative response to the needs of smaller modernist houses.  Further research is required for the assessment.
(g) has a strong or special association with the ACT community, or a cultural group in the ACT for social, cultural or spiritual reasons	Roche House is unlikely to meet this criterion.  Formal testing would be required.
(h) has a special association with the life or work of a person, or people, important to the history of the ACT	Roche House is associated with the work of Robin Boyd, a prominent Australian architect working in the ACT and around the country in the postwar period.

## Rivendell, 17 Meredith Circuit, Kambah (1975)



Rivendell. (Source: Top – GML Heritage; Bottom – Australian Institute of Architects ACT Chapter)

Rivendell, at 17 Meredith Circuit, Kambah, was designed by Canberra architect Laurie Virr for his family in 1975 and was built largely with his own hands.

### *House type, description and architectural style*

The house is a detached private residence. In plan, the modest size house is a successful interpretation of the hemicycle (or semicircle), combined with triangular and hexagonal elements. The hemicycle is an architectural planning device that has been used since ancient Egypt but is not usually combined with triangular and hexagonal components.

The successful solar passive and energy efficient design was unusual in the 1970s. The modest house provided adequate accommodations for the Virr family including two small but adequate bedrooms, a studio, a kitchen, a bathroom, laundry/utility, and a carport.

The residence is an excellent representative example of the Late Twentieth Century Organic style of architecture, demonstrated by the form of the building appearing to grow from the site, the asymmetrical massing and complex angular geometry, retention of the natural setting, horizontal fascia board, highlight windows and clearly expressed timber structure.

The construction materials are predominantly face brick masonry, wood casement sash and French doors, a coloured concrete floor slab, and glass. The roof is clad in wood shingles.<sup>5</sup>

*Current physical condition*

Rivendell is in good condition, in the ownership of the Virr family, and has not been altered in any substantial way.

Indicative heritage significance assessment	
Criteria	Indicative assessment
(a) importance to the course or pattern of the <b>ACT's cultural or natural history</b>	Rivendell is a highly intact and creative example of modernist architecture in ACT history.  The house demonstrates the Organic style architecture, designed to suit the Canberra environment. It is a strong example of modernist principles and solar passive design were expressed in a private home in the 1970s.
(b) has uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of <b>the ACT's cultural or natural history</b>	Rivendell is an early example of solar passive design in Canberra, but it is unlikely to meet this criterion.
(c) potential to yield important information that will contribute to an understanding of the <b>ACT's cultural or natural history</b>	Rivendell is unlikely to meet this criterion.  Further research is required.
(d) importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or objects	Rivendell—the house and garden—in its entirety is an exemplar of the Organic style of modernist house in the ACT.

Indicative heritage significance assessment	
Criteria	Indicative assessment
(e) importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by the ACT community or a cultural group in the ACT	Rivendell has strong architectural and aesthetic characteristics.  Formal testing would be required to test if the place meets this criterion.
(f) importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement for a particular period	Rivendell is a successful achievement of a complex planning approach and solar passive design, demonstrating a high degree of creative and technical achievement in the 1970s.
(g) has a strong or special association with the ACT community, or a cultural group in the ACT for social, cultural or spiritual reasons	Formal testing of Rivendell would be required to test if the place meets this criterion.

(h) has a special association with the life or work of a person, or people, important to the history of the ACT

**Rivendell, as Laurie Virr's own family home, has a particular and special association with the architect.**

Virr was published widely, internationally, and more recently been recognised as a significant Australian architect.

## Lakeview, 127 Hopetoun Circuit, Yarralumla (1982)



Townhouse in Lakeview complex. (Source: GML Heritage)

Lakeview, 127 Hopetoun Circuit, Yarralumla, comprises 11 medium-density townhouses that were designed by Harry Seidler and Associates, between 1982 and 1984.

### *House type, description and architectural style*

The townhouse group is one of only two remaining examples of medium-density housing projects designed by eminent Australian architect, Harry Seidler, in Canberra.

The group of townhouses is an exceptional example of the International style of architecture. The fan out from a central garden and follows the slope of the site with living spaces and three bedrooms across a five-floor split-level system. Inside, curves and straight forms intersect and define the space, with a high ceiling void lit with natural light from a clerestory window. They are orientated to enjoy northern views of Lake Burley Griffin and Black Mountain, and each townhouse has a private courtyard.<sup>6</sup>

**Lakeview demonstrates many features of Seidler’s work**, such as its radiating design, large outdoor spaces, and relationship between straight and curved lines. The contrast between rectangular and non-rectangular shapes, curvilinear form, linear bands of windows, close relationship between indoors and outdoors, horizontal emphasis, asymmetrical sloping roofs and clerestory windows are all modernist features.

*Current physical condition*

The Lakeview complex appears to be in good condition. The integrity of Seidler’s overall design has been maintained, with the external and internal forms of the townhouses intact. Some alterations have been made, for example upgrades to kitchens and bathrooms, and variations in internal finishes are visible between different townhouses.<sup>7</sup>

Indicative heritage significance assessment	
Criteria	Indicative assessment
(a) importance to the course or pattern of the <b>ACT’s cultural or natural history</b>	Lakeview is an important group of townhouses, representing the outstanding work of Harry Seidler and Associates in Canberra.
(b) has uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of <b>the ACT’s cultural or natural history</b>	Lakeview may be important as a rare remaining example of a design by prominent architect Harry Seidler in Canberra. Only three residential projects by Seidler remain in Canberra, and Lakeview is distinctive as an intact design of the modernist era.
(c) potential to yield important information that will contribute to an understanding of the <b>ACT’s cultural or natural history</b>	Lakeview is not likely to be significant under this criterion.
(d) importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of	Lakeview is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of the International Style of architecture,

Indicative heritage significance assessment	
Criteria	Indicative assessment
a class of cultural or natural places or objects	representing many characteristics of the style with good integrity.
(e) importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by the ACT community or a cultural group in the ACT	Lakeview is architectural and aesthetically significant. Formal testing would be required to confirm whether the place meets this criterion.
(f) importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement for a particular period	Lakeview is a high-quality and significant expression of the International style, designed by an outstanding architect. Peer recognition has occurred by the complex receiving the Australian Institute of Architects ACT Chapter Award for Enduring Architecture.
(g) has a strong or special association with the ACT community, or a cultural group in the ACT for social, cultural or spiritual reasons	Lakeview is not likely to be significant under this criterion. Formal testing would be required.
(h) has a special association with the life or work of a person, or people, important to the history of the ACT	Lakeview is significant for its association with the life and work of Harry Seidler in the ACT context. Formal testing would be required.

## Torrens Townhouses, Beasley and Basedow streets, Torrens (1967)



Torrens Townhouses. (Source: GML Heritage)

Three blocks of townhouses at Torrens were designed by architect Dirk Bolt for the NCDC.

### *House type, description and architectural style*

The townhouses are designed in the Sydney Regional style. They are located adjacent to the Torrens neighbourhood centre and to the south of a block of courtyard housing, both of which Bolt designed. The townhouses are the only group housing development to be built substantially as designed by Bolt, because he was also engaged to prepare the working drawings.<sup>8</sup>

Two of the townhouses extend east–west and the third is on a north–south orientation. The roofline, a 90-degree asymmetrical gabled form, was designed to respond to the setting on the slopes of Mount Taylor.<sup>9</sup> The roofline, consideration of the setting, and materials chosen are indicators of the modernist style, and particularly the Sydney School style. The indicators are asymmetrical massing, timber windows, dark stained timber and bagged white brick walls.

### *Current physical condition*

The townhouses appear to be in good condition. Internal alterations may have occurred; however, their external form and fabric remain intact.

Indicative heritage significance assessment	
Criteria	Indicative assessment
(a) importance to the course or pattern of the <b>ACT’s cultural or natural history</b>	The Torrens Townhouses are significant and demonstrate the story of modernism in ACT history, as a highly intact and extensive, representative example of the modernist style. The three blocks also demonstrate the practice of the NCDC engaging notable architects to design medium-density housing as an alternative to detached and semi-detached housing.
(b) has uncommon, rare or endangered <b>aspects of the ACT’s cultural or natural history</b>	The Torrens Townhouses are known to be the only group housing development to be built substantially as designed by Bolt. <b>Bolt’s other</b> townhouse works (Aranda, Farrer, Mawson) were altered by others

Indicative heritage significance assessment

Criteria	Indicative assessment
	when they prepared the working drawings. They also may be among the first of their type in Australia. The townhouses may meet this criterion.
(c) potential to yield important information that will contribute to an understanding of the <b>ACT's cultural or natural history</b>	The Torrens Townhouses are unlikely to meet this criterion.
(d) importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or objects	The Torrens Townhouses are a high-quality example of the Sydney Regional style of architecture and medium density housing in the ACT, developed under the NCDC. The blocks are a distinctive example of this class of place as they contribute positively to the quality and lifestyle offered by the suburb. The characteristics of the modernist style remain intact and in good condition and are representative of the class of place.
(e) importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by the ACT community or a cultural group in the ACT	The Torrens Townhouses are architecturally and aesthetically significant. Formal testing would be required to confirm whether the place meets this criterion.
(f) importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or	The Torrens Townhouses demonstrate Bolt's <b>creative</b> response to the needs of

Indicative heritage significance assessment

Criteria	Indicative assessment
technical achievement for a particular period	family structures and lifestyles of the future residents. Bolt included a range of unit sizes in the complex to encourage a broad social mix with the aim of reducing social isolation. Creative space planning allowed for private courtyards and broad terraces to most units.
(g) has a strong or special association with the ACT community, or a cultural group in the ACT for social, cultural or spiritual reasons	The Torrens Townhouses would need to be formally tested, to confirm whether the place meets this criterion.
(h) has a special association with the life or work of a person, or people, important to the history of the ACT	The Torrens Townhouses are associated with Dirk Bolt, a significant architect working in the ACT during the modernist period. Bolt designed many Canberra buildings in private practice and on behalf of the NCDC. The townhouses are a particularly intact and high-quality expression of his work and the only group housing development to be built substantially as designed by Bolt.

## Pettit + Sevitt Lowline, 33 Cargelligo Street, Duffy (1962)



33 Cargelligo Street, Duffy. (Source: Allhomes)

The Lowline house at 33 Cargelligo Street, Duffy, was designed by Ken Woolley and Michael Dysart for the development company Pettit + Sevitt in 1962, for the Carlingford Homes Fair..<sup>10</sup>

### *House type, description and architectural style*

The Lowline was the most popular style of Pettit + Sevitt houses to be built in Canberra, and thought to account for at least half of all sales in Canberra from 1966 to 1978.

This house at Cargelligo Street is in exceptional, original condition. It is a four-bedroom house with a flat roof set out on a single level. The bedrooms (or private areas) are located on one side of the house and the more public living, kitchen and dining rooms to the other.

The house demonstrates characteristics of the Regional Sydney style of architecture, including its prominent horizontal boarded fascia, timber windows, expressed internal timber structure and highlight windows. The brick is unpainted.

### *Current physical condition*

The house appears to be in excellent, largely original condition.

### Indicative heritage significance assessment

Criteria	Indicative assessment
(a) importance to the course or pattern of the	The Lowline house at 33 Cargelligo Street is a significant example of housing development in the ACT. It represents the spread of modern, architect-

Indicative heritage significance assessment	
Criteria	Indicative assessment
<b>ACT's cultural or natural history</b>	designed, cost-effective project homes in Canberra.
(b) has uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of <b>the ACT's cultural or natural history</b>	The Lowline was the most popular of the Pettit + Sevitt house designs to be built in Canberra.  Further research would be required to confirm whether it is a rare example, due to its integrity and intactness.
(c) potential to yield important information that will contribute to an understanding of the <b>ACT's cultural or natural history</b>	33 Cargelligo Street is unlikely to meet this criterion.
(d) importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or objects	33 Cargelligo Street demonstrates the principal characteristics of the Regional Sydney style of architecture and is an exceptional example of a Pettit + Sevitt house.
(e) importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by the ACT community or a cultural group in the ACT	33 Cargelligo Street is architecturally and aesthetically significant.  Formal testing would be required to confirm whether the place meets this criterion.
(f) importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or	33 Cargelligo Street is not likely to be significant under this criterion.

Indicative heritage significance assessment	
Criteria	Indicative assessment
technical achievement for a particular period	
(g) has a strong or special association with the ACT community, or a cultural group in the ACT for social, cultural or spiritual reasons	Formal testing of 33 Cargelligo Street would be required to confirm whether the place meets this criterion.
(h) has a special association with the life or work of a person, or people, important to the history of the ACT	33 Cargelligo Street has an important association with Pettit + Sevitt and the local franchise holder in Canberra. It is also associated with important Australian architects Ken Woolley and Michael Dysart.

## 6.1 Endnotes

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- <sup>2</sup> Realestate.com.au, '3 Anstey Street, Pearce, ACT 2607', accessed 30 May 2024 (<https://www.realestate.com.au/sold/property-house-act-pearce-128593934>); Marshall, Bronwyn, 'A Mid-Century Modern Artist's Residence – Gascoigne House by Theo Bischoff', The Local Project, accessed 30 May 2024 (<https://thelocalproject.com.au/articles/gascoigne-house-by-theo-bischoff-project-feature-the-local-project/>).
- <sup>3</sup> Canberra House, '4 Bedford Street, Deakin (1954)', accessed 30 May 2024, (<http://www.canberrahouse.com.au/houses/4-bedford.html>).
- <sup>4</sup> Allhomes.com, '4 Bedford Street Deakin, ACT 2600', accessed 30 May 2024 (<https://www.allhomes.com.au/4-bedford-street-deakin-act-2600>).
- <sup>5</sup> Australian Institute of Architect, ACT Chapter, Australian Institute of Architects ACT Chapter Register of Significant Architecture 'Rivendell', accessed 31 May 2024 ([https://www.architecture.com.au/wp-content/uploads/R137\\_Rivendell-RSA\\_kambah.pdf](https://www.architecture.com.au/wp-content/uploads/R137_Rivendell-RSA_kambah.pdf)).
- <sup>6</sup> Canberra House, 'Lakeview, 127 Hopetoun Circuit, Yarralumla (1982)', accessed 31 May 2024 (<http://www.canberrahouse.com.au/houses/lakeview.html>).
- <sup>7</sup> Domain.com, 'Building Profile: 127 Hopetoun Cct, Yarralumla ACT 2600', accessed 31 May 2024 (<https://www.domain.com.au/building-profile/127-hopetoun-circuit-yarralumla-act-2600>).
- <sup>8</sup> Goad, P, Architecture AU, 'Graeme Trickett and Kenneth Charlton, Repose, The Contribution of Dirk Bolt to Canberra's Architecture and Planning', 2014, p 139; and Canberra House, 'Torrens Townhouses Basedow Street and Davies Place, Torrens (1967)', accessed 31 May 2024.
- <sup>9</sup> Goad, P, Architecture AU, 'Graeme Trickett and Kenneth Charlton, Repose, The Contribution of Dirk Bolt to Canberra's Architecture and Planning', 2014, p 139.
- <sup>10</sup> Canberra House 'Pettit & Sevitt Housing (1966–1978)', accessed 31 May 2024 (<http://www.canberrahouse.com.au/houses/pettit-sevitt.html>).

# Conclusions and recommendations

## 7 Conclusions and recommendations

Modernism was an international movement that spread around the globe, being incorporated into a diverse breadth of disciplines and fields of creative and technical endeavour. Modernism was a state of mind, rather than a single style, and its principles of rationality, use of new technology, innovation, experimentation and rejection of old systems were expressed through architectural design.

Modernist architecture became increasingly common in the Australian context after World War II. In Canberra, the rise of modernism nationally coincided with a rapid period of new development under the NCDC. The NCDC was motivated by the desire to build Canberra into a city fit for the nation. With its booming population and funding for development, Canberra was a place of opportunity for modernist architects. The lack of earlier construction from colonial, Victorian and Federation periods combined with the rapid growth post-World War II means **Canberra's housing stock** demonstrates a distinct tendency towards modernism in both quality and quantity of buildings. Modernist houses are more prominent and visible in comparison to other styles, and this has resulted in numerous prominent, high-quality examples of the modernism and its sub-styles.



Joad Place, Aranda, designed by Enrico Taglietti in 1970. (Source: GML Heritage)

Alongside the **NCDC's vision for Canberra and the demands of a** rapidly growing city, the high demand for new residential construction created fertile ground for architects and designers to **practise their skills. The NCDC's employment of agent architects** provided employment and opportunities for architects to deliver modernist designs in public housing. Private commissions also increased in this period, often undertaken in parallel to public contracts by Canberran architects, and bespoke designs by the NCDC with fewer constraints flourished, creating some of **Canberra's most memorable modernist houses.**

**Canberra's natural environment and landscape influenced the** construction of neighbourhoods and residences (as well as public and commercial buildings). Following the lead of the Griffins' plan, governments laid down regulations and design guidance intended to create liveable communities and houses that **responded to Canberra's topography, native** vegetation, bushland and climate. These factors also influenced individual architects, combining with other architectural design choices to inspire residences that responded to the Canberra landscape through features such as their orientation, landscaping and use of plantings, fenestration and housing levels.

Modernist styles from this era are visible throughout Canberra in many types of residences, from detached homes to townhouses to multistorey flats. **Canberra's modernist houses** are not easily defined as a cookie-cutter presentation of a fixed style, but

rather are innovative and creative expressions of modernist principles, each seeking to be uniquely responsive to its context and function. Indicators of modernist architecture can be seen in walls, doors, windows, roofs, gardens, interiors, fixtures and fittings, sometimes combining in unusual and delightful ways.

## Recommendations

Understanding the significance of **the ACT's modernist houses deepens our understanding of Canberra's history.** To protect and celebrate this history, these houses must be identified and assessed for heritage value, and systems put in place to protect them. In the context of constant change and the passage of time, modernist houses are increasingly important as **hidden gems within Canberra's suburbs. A holistic vision of Canberra's** modernist houses, their importance in the story of the ACT, their architectural features and design, and the framework required to protect and promote them are presented in this report, creating the opportunity for the ACT to celebrate its unique status as one of the most successful homes for modernism in Australia and around the world.

Rather than making them less important, the proliferation of **modernist residences in the ACT makes Canberra's modernist** legacy a unique and outstanding contribution to global understanding of this design era as well as to the identity and character of the city. The **familiarity of Canberra's modernist**

housing means at times it is at risk of being under-recognised and under-protected, and contemporary issues such as housing supply may incorrectly be considered as inconsistent with the protection of heritage. Once lost or altered beyond recognition, **Canberra’s modernist houses cannot be retrieved.** A thorough understanding of the extent, significance and management **systems for Canberra’s modernist heritage is needed to** ensure that important places are not inadvertently lost, thereby **weakening Canberra’s rich heritage** and identity. As the ACT’s population continues to grow, **recognising Canberra’s** modernist heritage will help with sensitive management of change, ensuring that the unique places and histories **which help shape Canberra’s** identity are maintained alongside the creation of new homes, places and stories.

To achieve the above goals, the following recommendations should be implemented:

- An audit should be commissioned that seeks to identify all mid-century modernist residences of potential heritage significance in the ACT. This would include places on the ACT Heritage Register and places not listed. The audit would provide a gap analysis of the current register listings and form a baseline of information for further work.
- Following the audit of modernist residences, a program of significance assessment should be undertaken to determine whether the audited places have heritage value, and

nominate and list the places on the ACT Heritage Register depending on the findings. Registrations for currently listed places, or places previously assessed, should be re-assessed to ensure they are up to date and respond to the latest information.

- **Frameworks to recognise and protect Canberra’s modernist heritage** (including its modernist residences) should be incorporated into planning regulations and policies, such as ACT Government District Strategies, Design Guides and the Territory Plan.
- The suitability of current heritage regulations to protect the **ACT’s modernist heritage should** be reviewed, for example as part of the ACT Heritage Review or other projects. This could consider whether thresholds for listing heritage places are appropriately calibrated, and how heritage listing can be integrated with the needs of a growing city.
- **A program of documenting Canberra’s modernist heritage** should be undertaken. This could include photography of identified modernist residences, collection of documentary records (e.g. architectural plans), oral history research with key people **associated with Canberra’s modernist history, and** collation of this material into an accessible database to support further research and promotion. This program could be delivered in collaboration with the ACT Heritage Library, relevant professional organisations, academic institutions,

and community groups **with existing connections with ACT's** modernist heritage.

- **Activities to promote and celebrate the story of Canberra's** legacy as a modernist, designed city should be pursued. This could include community outreach events, interpretation and grants programs, and promotion to local and international tourists.



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# Appendices

# Appendices

## Appendix A—Preliminary list of modernist houses in Canberra

This is a preliminary, indicative list of modernist houses in the ACT based on information available through desktop research. A comprehensive list of houses should be prepared through an audit program, refer to the Recommendations at Section 7.

Address	Suburb	Firm/architect	Date	Award/medal recipient	ACT heritage status
Burundulla Gardens, Government Housing, O'Halloran and Ashby Circuit	Kambah	Addison Architects	1986	Australian Institute of Architects (AIA) CS Daley Medal 1987	
Benjamin House, 10 Gawler Crescent	Deakin	Alex Jelinek	1956		Registered Place
RAIA Headquarters, 2A Mugga Way	Red Hill	Ancher Mortlock Murray and Woolley (Bryce Mortlock)	1967		Registered Place
38 Beauchamp Street	Deakin	Ancher, Mortlock & Woolley	1967		
McCawley House, 13 Furphy Place	Garran	Anthony Pegrum	1967	AIA Enduring Architecture 2008; AIA CS Daley Medal 1969	Registered Place
Davidson House, 15 Furphy Place	Garran	Anthony Pegrum	1967	AIA CS Daley Medal 1969	Rejected from inclusion in the Provisional Register by the Heritage Council
Beaufort Steel House, 23 Cowper Street	Ainslie	Arthur Baldwinson	1947		

Address	Suburb	Firm/architect	Date	Award/medal recipient	ACT heritage status
Marshall House, 25 Colvin Street	Hughes	Bowe and Burrows (David Bowe)	1960	AIA Enduring Architecture 2004	
Kingston Tower, 9 Jardine Street	Kingston	Bryan Dowling and Associates	1986		
Fisher Government Housing Group, Pilbara Place	Fisher	Cameron Chisholm & Nicol	1970	AIA CS Daley Medal 1971	
Macadie House, 13 Canterbury Crescent	Deakin	Chancellor and Patrick (David Chancellor)	1960		Rejected from inclusion in the Provisional Register by the Heritage Council
Kanangra Court, Ainslie Avenue	Reid	Collard, Clarke and Jackson	1962		Rejected from inclusion in the Provisional Register by the Heritage Council
Whitley houses	Griffith and Braddon	Cuthbert Whitley	1939		Registered Place
Solander Gallery, 10 Schlich Street	Yarralumla	Department of Works and Robert Warren	1974		
14 Jansz Crescent	Griffith	Derek Wrigley	1958		Rejected from inclusion in the Provisional Register by the Heritage Council
Butler House, 44 Beauchamp Street	Deakin	Dirk Bolt	1965		Nomination to the Heritage Register
Bahr House, 1 Astley Place	Garran	Dirk Bolt	1967	AIA Enduring Architecture 2000	Registered Place

Address	Suburb	Firm/architect	Date	Award/medal recipient	ACT heritage status
Torrens townhouses, Basedow Street and Davies Place	Torrens	Dirk Bolt	1967		
Torrens Courtyard Housing, 102–118 Batchelor Street	Torrens	Dirk Bolt	1966		
McKeown House, 109 Irvine Street	Watson	Enrico Taglietti	1965		Nomination to the Heritage Register
Paterson House, 7 Juad Place	Aranda	Enrico Taglietti	1970	AIA Enduring Architecture 2006	Nomination to the Heritage Register
Apostolic Nunciature, 2 Vancouver Street	Red Hill	Enrico Taglietti	1977		Removed from the Provisional Register by expiration of interim effect—all located on <b>'National Land'</b> under the protection of the National Capital Authority
de Quetteville Residence, 19 Downes Place	Hughes	Enrico Taglietti	1965		Registered Place
Gibson House, 12 Scarborough Street	Red Hill	Enrico Taglietti	1965		
Evans House, 62 Skinner Street	Cook	Enrico Taglietti	1971		Nomination to the Heritage Register
Mockridge Crescent Medium Density Housing	Holt	Enrico Taglietti	1973		
Wood House, 43 Mayo Street	Weetangera	Enrico Taglietti	1973		Nomination to the Heritage Register

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Mijuscovic House, 61 Sullivan Crescent	Wanniassa	Enrico Taglietti	1980		Nomination to the Heritage Register
Redmond House, 6 Womba Place	Giralang	Glenn Murcutt	1977		
J M Fraser House, 8 Daly Street	Deakin	Guilford Bell			
38 Castlereagh Crescent	Macquarie	Hancock, Refree and Associates (Neil Renfree)	1960s		
Refree House, address not known	Hawker	Hancock, Refree and Associates (Neil Renfree)	1973		
Griffith House, address not known	Forrest	Harold Guida	1987		
Schreiner House, 51 Tasmania Circle	Forrest	Harry Divola	1954		Rejected from inclusion in the Provisional Register by the Heritage Council
Campbell housing Group, 69–73 Blamey Crescent & 2–12 Edmondson Street	Campbell	Harry Seidler of Harry Seidler & Associates	1968		Registered Place
Lakeview townhouses, 127 Hopetoun Circuit	Yarralumla	Harry Seidler, Harry Seidler & Associates	1982	AIA Enduring Architecture 2017	
Bowden House, 11 Northcote Crescent	Deakin	Harry Seidler, Harry Seidler & Associates	1952		Removed from the Provisional Register by the Administrative Appeals Tribunal

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Swinger Hill Stages 1 and 2, Barnet Close	Swinger Hill	Ian McKay & Partners	1969	AIA CS Daley Medal 1977 and AIA Enduring Architecture 1999	Registered Place
Greenwood House, address not known		Ian Slater	1975	AIA Enduring Architecture 2020	
6 Somers Crescent	Forrest	John Scollay	1959		
113 Schlich Street	Yarralumla	John Scollay	Unknown		Registered Place
Pettit + Sevitt housing	Various	Ken Woolley, Neil Clerehan, Harry Seidler, Michael Dysart, Russell Jack	Various		
24 Arthur Circle	Forrest	Kenneth Oliphant	1939		Removed from the Provisional Register by the Administrative Appeals Tribunal
11 Bass Gardens	Griffith	Kenneth Oliphant	1939		
Dial House, 2 Moresby Street	Red Hill	Kenneth Oliphant	1930		
21 Furneaux Street	Forrest	Kenneth Oliphant	1929		Nomination to the Heritage Register
Andrews House, 5 Juad Place	Aranda	Laurie Virr	1969		
Rivendell, 17 Meredith Circuit	Kambah	Laurie Virr	1975	AIA Enduring Architecture 2016	
14 Fergusson Crescent	Deakin	Laurie Virr	1982		

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Woden Special Housing I, Kent Street	Hughes	Leith & Bartlett	1963		
Radburn Precinct Housing	Curtin	Leith & Bartlett Pty Ltd	1964		Nomination to the Heritage Register
43 Melbourne Avenue	Forrest	Malcolm Moir & Heather Sutherland	1935	AIA Enduring Architecture 1997	Nomination to the Heritage Register
3 Wilmot Crescent	Forrest	Malcolm Moir & Heather Sutherland	1936		Nomination to the Heritage Register
7, 9, 11, 15 Evans Crescent	Griffith	Malcolm Moir & Heather Sutherland	1939		Registered Place
3 Spencer Street	Turner	Malcolm Moir & Heather Sutherland	1946		Nomination dismissed
58 National Circuit	Deakin	Malcolm Moir & Heather Sutherland	1958		
11 Bass Gardens	Griffith	Malcolm Moir & Heather Sutherland	1939		
Urambi Village, Crozier Circuit	Kambah	Michael Dysart, Michael Dysart & Associates	1974	AIA CS Daley Medal 1982; AIA Enduring Architecture 2002	Nomination to the Heritage Register
Wybalena Grove Housing	Cook	Michael Dysart, Michael Dysart & Associates	1974	AIA Enduring Architecture 2019	Nomination to the Heritage Register
Vidovic House, 14 Beauchamp Street	Deakin	Miles Jakl	1966		

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Kennard House, address not known	O'Connor	Neville Gruzman	1961		
Rowe House, 212 Dryandra Street	O'Connor	Neville Ward	1961		
11 Waller Crescent	Campbell	Neville Ward	1967		
Birch House, 3 Arkana Crescent	Yarralumla	Noel Potter, Bunning & Madden	1968	AIA CS Daley Medal 1968	Registered Place
Hanley House	Wanniassa	Paul Hanley	1987		
Jerilderie Court Housing, Ainslie Avenue	Reid	Phillip Cox and Partners	1975	AIA CS Daley Medal 1979; AIA Enduring Architecture 2005	Rejected from inclusion in the Provisional Register by the Heritage Council
Pepper House I, 34 Fihelly Street	Fadden	Phillip Cox	1983		
Adams House, address not known	Red Hill	Richard Adams	1962		
Prefabricated Shipard House, 10 Dobson Street	Watson	Robert Warren	1965		
Manning Clark House, 11 Tasmania Circle	Forrest	Robin Boyd	1952	AIA Enduring Architecture 2022	Registered Place
Fenner House, 8 Monaro Crescent	Red Hill	Robin Boyd	1953		Nomination to the Heritage Register
Eltringham House, 12 Marawa Place	Aranda	Robin Boyd	1971		Registered Place

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Roche House, 4 Bedford Street	Deakin	Robin Boyd	1955		Nomination to the Heritage Register
Verge House, 204 Monaro Crescent	Red Hill	Robin Boyd of Romberg, Grounds and Boyd	1963		
Wilson House, 38 Mirning Crescent	Aranda	Roger Pegrum	1972	AIA CS Daley Medal 1974; AIA Enduring Architecture 2005	Nomination to the Heritage Register
144 Dryandra Street	<b>O'Connor</b>	Roy Grounds	1965		
Forrest Townhouses, Tasmania Circle	Forrest	Roy Grounds of Romberg, Grounds and Boyd	1959		Nomination to the Heritage Register
42, 44, 46 Vasey Crescent	Campbell	Roy Grounds of Romberg, Grounds and Boyd	1960	AIA Enduring Architecture 1996	Registered Place
24 Cobby Street, Campbell	Campbell	Roy Grounds of Romberg, Grounds and Boyd	1964		Registered Place
Otto Frankel House, 4 Cobby Street	Campbell	Roy Grounds of Romberg, Grounds and Boyd (Theo Bischoff)	1971		Registered Place
6 Hobbs Street	<b>O'Connor</b>	Rudi Krastins	1959		
8 Hobbs Street	O'Connor	Rudi Krastins	1961		
Cater House, 145 Mugga Way	Red Hill	Russell Jack of Allen, Jack & Cottier	1965	AIA Enduring Architecture 2001	Registered Place
Gascoigne House, 3 Anstey Street	Pearce	Theo Bischoff	1968		
86 Morgan Crescent	Curtin	Theo Bischoff	1966		

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13 Waller Crescent	Campbell	Theo Bischoff	1962		
Buchanan House, 16 Ryrie Street	Campbell	Yunken Freeman Brothers, Griffiths & Simpson (Roy Simpson)	1960		Registered Place