

## Heritage Citation – Individual Place

**Heritage Place:** Shere

**Address:** 1 Theodore Court, Toorak

**HO Reference:** HO734

**Citation status:** Final

**Date Updated:** 24 October 2023

**Designer:** Grounds, Romberg and Boyd (Roy Grounds)

**Year of Construction:** c.1958

**Builder:** Unknown



Photograph of 1 Theodore Court (source: Extent Heritage, 2021).



Location map and extent of 1 Theodore Court.

**Heritage Group:** Residential buildings

**Heritage Type:** House

**Key Theme:** Building suburbs

**Key Sub-theme:** Functional, eccentric and theatrical – experimentation and innovation in architecture

**Significance Level:** Local

**Recommendation:** Recommended for the Heritage Overlay as an individual place.

<b>Controls:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> External paint colours	<input type="checkbox"/> Internal alterations	<input type="checkbox"/> Tree controls
	<input type="checkbox"/> Victorian Heritage Register	<input type="checkbox"/> Incorporated Plans	<input type="checkbox"/> Outbuildings and fences exemptions
	<input type="checkbox"/> Prohibited uses may be permitted	<input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal Heritage Place	

## Statement of Significance

### *What is significant?*

The property at 1 Theodore Court, Toorak, (otherwise known as Shere), is significant. The form, scale, fenestration and materiality of the Post-war Modern house is of local significance, along with the original garage and front boundary wall. The landscaping and later alterations and additions to the property are not significant.

### *How is it significant?*

Shere is of local aesthetic and representative significance to the City of Stonnington.

### *Why is it significant?*

Shere is of representative significance as a discernible example of innovative experimentation with pure geometric form in residential design that typified the peak of the Modernist movement in Australia. This is most evident in its form, particularly its projecting roof with exposed overhanging eaves, which achieves visual boldness while simultaneously remaining lightweight in massing and scale. (Criterion D)

Shere is of aesthetic significance as an intact, visually distinct and well-articulated example of Post-war Modern residence designed by prominent architect Roy Grounds. Attributes that contribute towards its aesthetic significance include its incorporation of geometric forms as demonstrated in its striking diagonally projecting roof exposing timber clad eaves and fenestration, clear lines, symmetry, visual relationship between the interior and exterior, and finely balanced proportions. These features, along with its emphasis on form and pared back ornamentation, combine to create a bold yet timeless architectural character. (Criterion E)

## HERCON Criteria Assessment

A	<i>Importance to the course, or pattern of our cultural or natural history</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.
B	<i>Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.
C	<i>Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.
D	<i>Important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments</i>	Shere is of representative significance as a discernible example of innovative experimentation with pure geometric form in residential design that typified the peak of the Modernist movement in Australia. This is most evident in its form, particularly its projecting roof with exposed overhanging eaves, which achieves visual boldness while simultaneously remaining lightweight in massing and scale.

<i>E</i>	<i>Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics</i>	There is of aesthetic significance as an intact, visually distinct and well-articulated example of Post-war Modern residence designed by prominent architect Roy Grounds. Attributes that contribute towards its aesthetic significance include its incorporation of geometric forms as demonstrated in its striking diagonally projecting roof exposing timber clad eaves and fenestration, clear lines, symmetry, visual relationship between the interior and exterior, and finely balanced proportions. These features, along with its emphasis on form and pared back ornamentation, combine to create a bold yet timeless architectural character.
<i>F</i>	<i>Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.
<i>G</i>	<i>Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of the continuing and developing cultural traditions</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.
<i>H</i>	<i>Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history.</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.

## Description

### • Physical Analysis

There is a single storey Post-war Modern residence designed by Roy Grounds. It comprises a white bagged brick structure laid with a stretcher bond and is distinguished by a winged gable roof clad with corrugated sheet metal. The roof extends over the structure forming a deep overhang on the front façade, while the eaves are clad with timber (subsequently overpainted in white) and flank the open gable form of the main structure. This diagonally projecting roof creates a visually prominent built form and a sense of movement that is reinforced by the exposed timber eaves. A single open face cream brick chimney with an unadorned rectilinear form also extends from the main roof.

The front façade overlooks Theodore Court and is characterised by a symmetry stemming from the fenestration and roof line. Centred on the façade is the main window wall that further informs the form of the projecting eave. The fixed windows are set within a grid-like timber frame with a centred double door, while a full-length casement window and glass door that extends up to the eaves flanks the central windows.

A raised square stone paved driveway extends from the street along the east boundary to a garage with a counterweight door. A secondary wing is located above the garage at the southeast corner of the main residence. It features a similar but smaller roof form that overlaps the main roof. It leads to an open balcony above the garage. While the nature of its design suggests that this secondary wing is either original or built later to a design also by Grounds, this has not been verified during archival research. The concealed main entrance is raised up a set of steps with thin black metal balustrades, and is accessible from the driveway along the east elevation of the residence.

The street front boundary is demarcated by a medium height white rendered brick wall currently covered with ivy (*Hedera helix*) that extends along the south elevation of the main structure. Notably, the form of the wall mirrors the projecting form of the house. It also includes a non-original precast lion bust and incised name plate beside the main entrance, as well as a set of double palisade gates. The front wall creates an enclosed front courtyard with shrub planting along the perimeter and a pink Magnolia (*Magnolia sp.*) tree. As with other Modernist designs from the era, the internalised front courtyard enables both a visual and spatial relationship between the outdoor and indoor spaces. A smaller backyard space is located along the south side of the residence.

Overall, Shere embodies Post-war Modernist design ideals, including an emphasis on form, clean lines, large windows, an open floor plan as well as an absence of ornamentation. Notably, its striking roof form is a departure from the favoured flat roof planes typical of the style.

Shere is located on Theodore Court, a short cul-de-sac street extending from the west of Heyington Place close to Heyington Railway Station. It is currently used as a residential property and is considered to be in good condition and exhibits high integrity.

### • Alterations and Additions

- Structure rendered and painted.
- Front boundary wall painted.
- Driveway gate added.
- Precast lion bust and incised name plate added on front boundary wall.

- Exposed timber clad eaves overpainted.
- Services added to the roof.
- Secondary wing roof clad with Colorbond.

## History

### • Historical Context

For thousands of years preceding European colonialism, the area now known as Stonnington was the traditional home of the Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung people of the Eastern Kulin Nation. This environment would have provided Traditional Owners with access to pre-contact plains, grassy woodland, and floodplains on the banks of the Yarra River (Birrarung), Gardiners Creek (Kooyong Koot), and Hawksburn Creek (now channelised), in a rolling landscape on the northern shore of Port Phillip Bay. It is important to note that the rich cultural heritage of Traditional Owners in Stonnington did not end with colonialism—it has a rich presence to this day.

Following the establishment of Melbourne in 1835, squatter John Gardiner and many others like him sought out land in what would become present day Toorak and surrounds on account of its densely timbered landscape, undulating terrain and proximity to water. By 1840, crown land sales marked the area's transition to pastoral settlement, and later in 1851, with the purchase of land in Hawthorn by Thomas Herbert Power, the surrounding environments gradually became a place where the early merchant and squatter elite of Melbourne built their homesteads. In Toorak, this is best represented by the purchase of lot 26 by James Jackson, associate in Jackson, Rae & Co. soap and candle merchants. Jackson was described by politician William Westgarth as 'Melbourne's greatest merchant of this early time' (Forster 1999, 10). It is only fitting that his house, called Toorak House, would be the namesake of what would become arguably the most affluent suburb in Melbourne. Following the discovery of gold in the 1850s and the wealth this produced for ancillary trades, the Toorak area drew in Melbourne's newly wealthy. Today, over a century later, Toorak still has connotations of wealth and prestige as best represented in its history and built environment (Forster 1999, 5–26).

### • Modernism in Toorak

Toorak's wealthy clientele and strong culture of patronage has long provided architects with the space to explore ideas and innovation in design and construction (Context 2009, 138). While this was taking place from as early as the interwar period, this phenomenon soon paved way for Modernist expression in residential design by the 1940s.

Initially explored in Europe between 1905 and 1917, and subsequently disseminated, translated and transformed worldwide over the next fifty years, the Modernist idiom was primarily defined by abstraction in built form, restraint in ornamentation, clean architectural lines, open plans, a connection between indoor spaces and outdoor spaces, and the incorporation of new materials like concrete, steel and glass (Goad and Willis 2012, 464). In Toorak, a combination of patronage, post-war boom time economy and suburban growth enabled leading Australian Modernist architects to adapt this style to the country's specific climate. What emerged was a Modernist aesthetic rooted in experimentation with geometric forms, raised structures and indoor-outdoor spaces. Architects like Robin Boyd and Roy Grounds were creating innovative and experimental Modernist designs to fit with the difficult topography or otherwise constrained nature of sites. For instance, Boyd's Richardson's House at 10 Blackfriars Close (1953) comprises a bridge-like structure suspended above a creek bed, while Grounds'

own house at 24 Hill Street (1950s), celebrated as an architectural experimentation in pure geometry, has been noted for its defining circular glass walled courtyard set within a square of solid brick walls.

Bold, innovative and above all experimental, architects practicing within the Modernist idiom established new forms of creative and technical expression, ultimately challenging the formal and decorative assumptions that dominated the architecture of the 19th and early 20th century.

- **Place History**

The dwelling Shere at present day 1 Theodore Court was erected in c.1958 after the creation of Theodore Court in the postwar period. While the land formerly comprised several substantial late Victorian era mansions fronting Torresdale Road and Heyington Place, the rising labour costs after World War I made the cost of maintaining these estates prohibitive (MMBW 1905; Context Pty Ltd 2009, 124). This precipitated a pattern of subdivision and residential development in Toorak from the 1920s that last well into the postwar years.

The designs for Shere were finalised in around 1957 by the renowned architect Roy Grounds of the firm Grounds, Romberg and Boy Architects. From as early as the interwar period, Toorak's strong culture of patronage provided architects with the space to explore ideas and innovation in design and construction (Context 2009, 138). It should come as no surprise that the ascendancy of the Modernist movement following World War II would also find expression in the suburb.

A leading Australian architect of the Modernist design mode, Grounds' had experimented with radical regionally responsive house plans that fused living and dining areas from as early as the mid 1920s (Hamann 2007). After World War II, he became known for incorporating geometric forms into his designs, as evident in the triangular Leyser House at 11 Hume Street, Kew (1951), the circular Henty House at 581 Nepean Highway, Frankston (1951-52), and the circular courtyard Roy Grounds House at his own residence in 24 Hill Street, Toorak (1951-52). He later formed what was arguably the most important architectural partnership in Melbourne with other leading architects who practiced in the Modernist idiom, including the Swiss-trained emigree architect Frederick Romberg, and renowned proponent of the International Modern Movement, Robin Boyd (Hamann 2007). Together, the firm was responsible for numerous Modern buildings around Australia, including the Australian Academy of Science in Canberra (1956-59) and Boyd House II in South Yarra (1957-58) (Goad 1999, 250-251). Other noted designs by Grounds outside of the partnership include the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne (1968) and Robert Blackwood Hall at Monash University in Clayton (1971) (Lewi & Goad 2019, 144-45, 156, 175).

Sketches of Shere's interior and exterior from 1957 indicate that the house was designed for an individual named Mr. M. Smith (Wallace 1957). As per the original sketch and images from 1958, the original house, then known as Shere, was defined by its face brick materiality (Willie 1958). While the dwelling has since been rendered and painted over, it retains its original form and much of its original detailing. Comprising a striking diagonally projecting roof form, large glass windows and an open floor plan, Shere not only exemplified the Modernist design features that were taking shape after World War II, but embodied Grounds' signature experimentations with geometric forms and symmetry in house design.



It is likely that the original occupant, Mr M. Smith, retained ownership of the dwelling until its sale in 1978. According to property records, the dwelling was last sold in 1979. These changes in ownership have since resulted in several changes to the dwelling, including its renaming to Karong, as well as several minor alterations and additions to the front boundary wall and main residence.

### Comparative Analysis

With its strong geometric lines and striking expression of Modernist design elements, Shere is one of Grounds' more distinctive and experimental residential designs, particularly by virtue of its visually prominent diagonally projecting roof exposing timber clad eaves. While there are several comparable heritage protected works attributed to Grounds within the municipality, Shere is also reminiscent of Grounds' key works outside of the municipality. The following comparative analysis therefore draws from examples from within the City of Stonnington, as well as additional examples elsewhere in Victoria.

Comparative examples include:

- **Grounds House, 24 Hill Street, Toorak (HO60; VHR H1963).** Comprising a residence with a string of four investment units behind, the Roy Grounds house and flat was designed by Roy Grounds for himself and his wife Betty in 1953. Designed prior to his partnership with Romberg and Boyd, the house is characterised by a square form with a circular courtyard at its centre. Featuring pure geometric shapes in plan, an inward looking Japanese derived character and highlight windows, this house is seen as a hallmark of Grounds skillful handling of geometry in design. While it is more experimental and architecturally impressive than Shere, Grounds House nevertheless shares a number of key similarities. These include its striking use of clean geometric lines, projecting roof with exposed timber clad eaves, symmetry, a correspondence between the interior and exterior, and open plans.
- **McNicoll House, 19 Gordon Grove, South Yarra (individually significant in HO355 Caroline Street Precinct).** Attributed to Grounds, Romberg and Boyd, the c.1963 McNicoll House was predominantly the work of Roy Grounds prior to the dissolution of the partnership. It is a strong example of Grounds' residential work, and distinguishing features include its heavy form, brick finishes, symmetry, and Grounds' signature use of geometric forms. Although it is more imposing than 1 Theodore Court in terms of its massing, materiality and rectangular emphasis, the dwelling is directly comparable by virtue of its exposed eaves, symmetry, emphasis on form and minimalist approach to detailing. Of the two, Shere is considered to be a more visually striking design owing to its highly distinctive roof form.
- **Round House, 581 Nepean Highway, Frankston (Frankston City HO23; VHR H0966).** Also known as the Henty House, the state significant Round House was erected in 1953 to designs by Roy Grounds prior to the onset of his partnership with Romberg and Boyd. It comprises a double-storey cylinder situated on a visually prominent sloping site overlooking Port Phillip Bay. As another example of Grounds' experimentations with geometric forms during the 1950s, it shares several comparable features. Aside from the mutual emphasis on geometric lines, these include a bold built form, restrained palette of colours and materials, exposed eaves, and large glass windows emphasising natural light and a connection between the indoor and outdoor spaces.

As the above analysis has demonstrated, Shere is an important and striking experimental residential house design that is directly comparable to several of Grounds' noted works. They all exemplify his

signature and innovative use of pure geometric forms, clean lines and symmetry. It compares well to these examples as a result of its distinctive roof form evoking a sense of movement, materiality and incorporation of triangular lines across its roof, fenestration and front boundary fence. While Grounds had experimented heavily with geometric forms in domestic architecture throughout the early 1950s, Shere is distinct from these earlier designs through the execution and exaggeration of the roof form as opposed to the main body of the residence. As a result, it is illustrative of Grounds' unique design style and evolving work with geometric forms by the late 1950s.

## References

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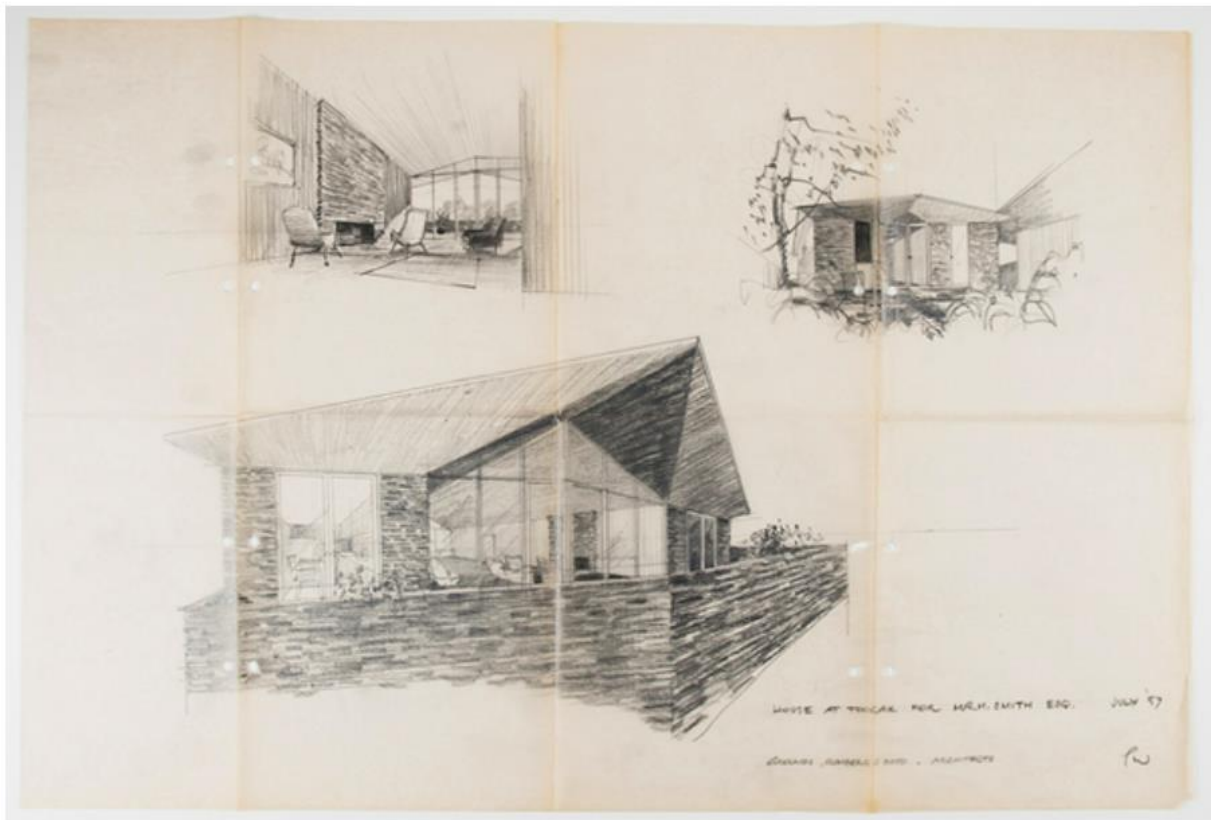
Wille, P. 1958. House. No. 1 Theodore Court. Toorak. Melbourne. Grounds Romberg & Boyd. Colour slide. Peter Wille Collection of Architectural Slides, accession no. H91.244/2822. State Library of Victoria.

Wille, P. 1958. House. No. 1 Theodore Court. Toorak. Melbourne. Grounds Romberg & Boyd. Colour slide. Peter Wille collection of architectural slides, accession no. H91.244/2821. State Library of Victoria.

### Limitations

1. Access to all heritage places was limited to a visual inspection from the public domain. The interiors of buildings and inaccessible areas such as rear gardens were not accessed as part of this heritage study.
2. Condition and site modification assessment was limited to a visual inspection undertaken from the public domain.
3. The historical notes provided for this citation are not considered to be an exhaustive history of the site.

### Further Images



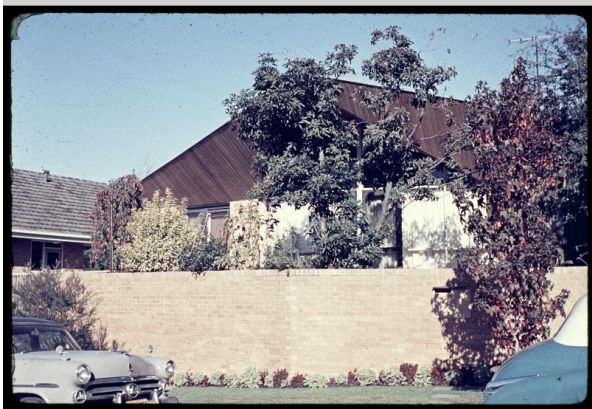
Architectural drawing demonstrating interior and exterior views of 1 Theodore Court, 1957 (source: Wallace, P. 1957. House at Toorak for Mr M. Smith Esq. Architectural drawing. Robin Boyd, Frederick Romberg Collection, accession no. 0020.2008.0030. RMIT Design Archives).



View of the eastern elevation in 1958 (source: State Library of Victoria, 1958).



South-west facing view of the façade in 1958 (source: State Library of Victoria, 1958).



South facing view of the façade in 1958 (source: State Library of Victoria, 1958).



South facing view from the street front (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



South-west facing view from the street front (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



South facing partial detail view of the façade fenestration (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).





South-west facing detail view of the roof from driveway (source: Extent Heritage Ptd Ltd, 2021).



South-east facing detail view of the exposed timber clad eaves (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).

### Authors

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**Quality assurance review conducted by:** Dr Luke James.