

Heritage Citation – Individual Place

Heritage Place: Kilpara Flats
Address: 703 Orrong Road, Toorak

HO Reference: HO743
Citation status: Final
Date Updated: 1 November 2023
Year of Construction: 1971

Designer: Yuncken Freeman Architects
Builder: Prentice Brothers



Photograph of 703 Orrong Road (source: Extent Heritage, 2021).



Location and map extent of 703 Orrong Road, Toorak.

Heritage Group: Residential buildings (private)

Heritage Type: Flat

Significance Level: Local

Key Theme: Building suburbs

Key Sub-theme: Developing higher density living

Recommendation: Recommended for the Heritage Overlay as an individual place; tree controls recommended in relation to the mature Norfolk Island Pine (*Araucaria heterophylla*) tree

Controls:	<input type="checkbox"/> External paint colours	<input type="checkbox"/> Internal alterations	<input checked="" 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 703 Orrong Road, Toorak, otherwise known as the Kilpara Flats, is significant. The height, built form, scale, fenestration and materiality of the luxury post-war modernist flats is of local significance, along with the mature Norfolk Island Pine (*Araucaria heterophylla*) tree on the western elevation. Later alterations and additions are not significant.

How is it significant?

The Kilpara Flats are of local historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington. The flats also have associative significance as a residential apartment block designed by notable architect Barry Patten of Yuncken Freeman Architects, who resided in the building for thirty-four years.

Why is it significant?

Kilpara Flats is historically significant as an apartment building constructed during a surge in luxury, modernist high-rise living within the municipality in the post-war years. The mature Norfolk Island Pine (*Araucaria heterophylla*) tree is historically significant as forming part of the earlier landscaping of the Aberfeldie Estate and, later, the original landscaping of the Kilpara Flats. (Criterion A)

Kilpara Flats is of aesthetic significance as a notable example of Yuncken Freeman Architects' innovative experimentation with pure geometric form and structure in residential design, an approach that typified the peak of the post-war modernist movement in Australia. This is most evident in its bold rectilinear form and massing, and the gridded façade which was a departure from the popular sheer curtain wall method of high-rise construction of the previous decade. It has a paired back approach to detailing – simply using steel, concrete and glass – which allows the building to appear as visually stark whilst conveying a sense of refined luxury at the same time, owing to the generous window and balcony sizes. The mature Norfolk Island Pine (*Araucaria heterophylla*) tree, which formed part of the original landscaping, also contributes to the intended landscape setting and aesthetic of the place. (Criterion E)

Kilpara Flats has associative significance as an intact residential flat design by the highly distinguished architectural firm Yuncken Freeman Architects, one of Melbourne's most important architectural firms of the 20th century for their significant role in re-shaping the city from the 1960s and 1970s. They were responsible for important designs such as the Former BHP House (1972), Estates House (1976), Sidney Myer Music Bowl (1959) and La Trobe University. Yuncken Freeman Architects designed a number of buildings in the City of Stonnington, and their creative and technical contributions to architectural design reflects the strong culture of patronage and stylistic innovation in the municipality. Kilpara Flats also has special association with Barry Patten of Yuncken Freeman Architects, who resided in the penthouse with his family for thirty-four years. (Criterion H)

HERCON Criteria Assessment

A	<i>Importance to the course, or pattern of our cultural or natural history</i>	Kilpara Flats is historically significant as an apartment building constructed during a surge in luxury, modernist high-rise living within the municipality in the post-war years. The mature tree is historically significant as
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		forming part of the earlier landscaping of the Aberfeldie Estate and, later, the original landscaping of the Kilpara Flats.
<i>B</i>	<i>Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.
<i>C</i>	<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.
<i>D</i>	<i>Important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.
<i>E</i>	<i>Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics</i>	Kilpara Flats is of aesthetic significance as a discernible example of Yuncken Freeman Architects' innovative experimentation with pure geometric form and structure in residential design, an approach that typified the peak of the post-war modernist movement in Australia. This is most evident in its bold rectilinear form and massing, and the gridded façade which was a departure from the popular sheer curtain wall method of high-rise construction of the previous decade. It has a paired back approach to detailing – simply using steel, concrete and glass – which allows the building to appear as visually stark whilst conveying a sense of refined luxury at the same time, owing to the generous window and balcony sizes. The mature Norfolk Island Pine (<i>Araucaria heterophylla</i>) tree, which formed part of the original landscaping, also contributes to the intended landscape setting and aesthetic of the place.
<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.

H	<p><i>Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history.</i></p>	<p>Kilpara Flats has associative significance as an intact residential flat design by the highly distinguished architectural firm Yuncken Freeman Architects, one of Melbourne's most important architectural firms of the 20th century for their significant role in re-shaping the city from the 1960s and 1970s. They were responsible for important designs such as the Former BHP House (1972), Estates House (1976), Sidney Myer Music Bowl (1959) and La Trobe University. Yuncken Freeman Architects designed a number of buildings in the City of Stonnington, and their creative and technical contributions to architectural design reflects the strong culture of patronage and stylistic innovation in the municipality. Kilpara Flats also has associative significance as the home of Barry Patten of Yuncken Freeman Architects, who resided in the penthouse with his family for thirty-four years.</p>
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Description

• Physical Analysis

Kilpara Flats is a late 20th century high-rise residential development designed by Yuncken Freeman Architects in the modernist style. The steel, concrete and glass structure houses twenty-seven units over eight floors and an undercroft carpark level. The structure is characterised by a gridded façade which was a departure from the popular sheer curtain wall method of high-rise construction of the previous decade. Each elevation of the building consists of eight bays. Most of the balcony openings on the top level have been infilled with aluminium-framed glazing. Conversely some original windows have been removed to create additional open balconies within the apartments.

The flat roof of the structure is clad with corrugated sheet metal and houses services and a plant room. Two square openings puncture the roof along the west side of the structure with a large, enclosed balcony space below it on the top floor. The northern opening is uncovered and contains a small tree in the centre. The southern opening is covered with a hipped steel and glass roof structure. The overall roof form is hidden behind the flush façade and flat parapet, reinforcing the geometric massing of the structure.

The southern elevation addresses Toorak Road and the eastern elevation faces Orrong Road. The main entrance to the building is located under a projecting portico on the eastern elevation, accessible via a return driveway. Access to the underground carpark ramp is from Orrong Road between the building and the north boundary of site. The structure is set back from Toorak Road and separated by a tall rendered terraced wall with topiary hedges forming a barrier between the building's lower levels and the busy thoroughfare. The ground level apartments have access to an enclosed private courtyard.

A raised open communal space over the undercroft parking area is located to the west of the building. It includes a small swimming pool and outdoor function spaces set around brick edged raised garden beds. There are several tall mature trees within Kilpara, some reaching heights as tall as the structure. This includes a mature and significant Norfolk Island Pine (*Araucaria heterophylla*) tree planting adjacent to the western elevation, a willow tree (*Salix* sp.) adjacent to the southern elevation, an oak (*Quercus* sp.) tree adjacent to the north elevation and a fig (*Ficus* sp.) tree which is located along the southeast corner of the property and set within a raised bluestone edged garden bed.

Kilpara Flats is visually prominent within the streetscape owing to its height, austere massing, repetitive fenestration and balanced form. Kilpara Flats remains in use as a multi-dwelling residential apartment. It is considered to be in good condition. There has been some infilling and removal of the original fenestration. While this creates some variation to the intended visual aesthetic of the place, the gridded façade is still clearly evident today. Kilpara Flats has high integrity overall.

- [Alterations and Additions](#)

- Top-floor balcony openings have been enclosed.
- Some original apartment windows have been removed to create balconies.
- Communal outdoor function space re-landscaped.

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.

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 explore, translate and adapt this rising aesthetic against 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 of the sites. For instance, Boyd's Richardson 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 this modernism established new forms of creative and technical expression, ultimately challenging the formality and symmetry that dominated the architecture of the 19th and early 20th century.

- **Place History**

The land on which the Kilpara Flats are presently situated formerly comprised the substantial grounds of the Victorian era Aberfeldie Estate and neighbouring Trawalla Estate (MMBW 1905). The Aberfeldie Estate appears to have historically occupied land originally assigned to the Trawalla Estate. The Trawalla mansion was erected in 1864 and the estate was sold in 1930 for subdivision. This process reflected the wider pattern of subdivision and development that was taking place across Toorak during the interwar period. While the subdivision of large estates was taking place as well before this period, rising labour costs following World War I made the cost of servants and other works to maintain the estates prohibitive (Context Pty Ltd 2006). This resulted in intense urban character changes in the area, particularly in the form of grand architect designed homes situated on generous allotments.

Several interwar era dwellings were erected on these new allotments, as best represented by the structures present on Lascelles Avenue. The flats formerly located at 14 Lascelles Avenue were named 'Aberfeldie', likely paying homage to the Victorian house the grounds of which the flats were located.

The Kilpara Flats were completed in 1970 to designs prepared by Barry Patten of Yuncken Freeman Architects, who were commissioned in 1968 to design the apartment block (Clerehan, 2003). The apartment block was comprised of 28 apartments, designed to be spacious and exude modernist luxury which was desirable in the post-war years. Upon completion of the flats, Patten resided in the penthouse apartment occupying the entire top floor. In 1971, Wolfgang Sievers, pre-eminent mid-century photographer, captured extensive photos of the newly completed Kilpara Flats and site

landscaping, including the mature Norfolk Island Pine (*Araucaria heterophylla*) tree which is still extant today (see Further Images below).

Yuncken Freeman Architects, formerly Yuncken, Freeman Brothers and Griffiths, was established in Melbourne in 1933 by Otto 'Rob' Yuncken, John and Tom Freeman and William Balcombe Griffiths. Barry Patten and John Gates were admitted to the partnership in 1953 following the death of Rob Yuncken in 1951. The University of Melbourne describes the significance of the firm, stating:

Key figures in the firm such as Barry Patten and Roy Simpson designed some of the most iconic Australian architectural works in collaboration with other architects at YFA which operated in a team model. Such projects included the Sidney Myer Music Bowl (Reynolds Award 1959), AON Centre (Victorian Architecture Medal 1967), Treasury Place (RAIA Victorian Bronze Medal for Excellence 1970), Eagle House (RAIA Award of Merit 1972), BHP House (RVIA Victorian Architects Award (1975) and the Master Plan for Latrobe University as well as number of significant projects in Melbourne, Canberra and abroad. Several YFA projects are listed on the Victorian Heritage Register. The evolution of YFA largely reflects that of Australian architecture in the mid-to-late 20th century. During this time, Australian designers were experimenting with materials, form and space. They were inspired by the processes of the modernist movement but sought to add their own Australian touch and to bring modernism into the home and not restrict it to just the cultural avant-garde. (University of Melbourne)

Patten and his family lived in the penthouse apartment for thirty-four years. The site is still in use as a residential apartment building today.

Comparative Analysis

The Kilpara Flats, designed by pre-eminent architects Yuncken Freeman Architects, symbolise a period of luxury, post-war modernist flat development in Melbourne. There are examples of Yuncken Freeman Architects' work included on municipal Heritage Overlays, however as the vast majority are commercial properties, their residential work appears to be underrepresented in heritage designations. No other post-war flats are included in the Stonnington Heritage Overlay other than the state significant Carlingal Flats, 3 Tahara Road Toorak (VHR H0579; HO104), with lower scale and much earlier flat designs such as Roy Grounds' 1940-41 Clendon/Clendon Corner, 13-15 Clendon Road, Armadale (individually significant in HO130 Armadale Precinct) being of limited comparative value. The following comparative analysis therefore proposes to assess Kilpara Flats primarily within Yuncken Freeman Architects oeuvre, rather than building typology.

Comparable examples include:

- **Fairlie, 54-60 Anderson Street, South Yarra (Contributory to HO6).** The Fairlie apartment block in South Yarra was completed in 1961 and is comparable to the Kilpara Flats as two high rise buildings designed by Yuncken Freeman Architects, with gridded facades and use of steel, glass and concrete. Though the Fairlie apartment block observes some breaks in pattern through the use of concrete arches on the ground floor, the site still observes a similar appearance and design intent, specifically with an emphasis on the rectilinear form, fenestration and materiality. Both buildings are highly intact examples of Yuncken Freeman's residential developments.

- **Eagle House, 473 Bourke Street, Melbourne (HO901 and VHR No. H1807).** Eagle House is comparable to Kilpara Flats as another high-rise building designed by Yuncken Freeman Architects in 1971, the same year as Kilpara Flats. Although it is taller than Kilpara Flats, Eagle House again observes a similar appearance and design intent, with an emphasis on the rectilinear form and fenestration. Eagle House, however, employs a curtain wall.
- **Toorak/South Yarra Library, 338-344 Toorak Road, South Yarra (HO174).** The Toorak/South Yarra Library was completed in 1972, two years after the completion of the Kilpara Flats. The Library is comparable to Kilpara Flats as a Yuncken Freeman Architects design with a similar gridded appearance and design intent owing to an emphasis on the rectilinear form, glazing and fenestration patterning. A difference between both buildings can be recognised in their scale, with the Library being a single storey building with a basement and Kilpara being a high rise apartment block. Both buildings are inherently different in use as well, with the South Yarra example designed to operate as a community library and Kilpara a private residential block. Both buildings, however, are still high integrity examples of Yuncken Freeman's minimal design.

The above analysis highlights the associative significance of Kilpara Flats with the highly significant Yuncken Freeman Architects, as well as its clear stylistic relation with a number of important commercial designs by the architects. Of the above examples, the building that most closely relates is the Fairlie apartment block in South Yarra due to its comparable use as a private residential block and for its comparable design and scale.

References

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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



Photograph of Kilpara Flats shortly after construction in 1971, as viewed from the street corner (source: State Library of Victoria, Wolfgang Sievers & Yuncken Freeman Architects, 1971, Kilpara flats, 703 Orrong Road, Toorak).



Photograph of the mature Norfolk Island Pine (*Araucaria heterophylla*) tree in 1971, adjacent to the western elevation (source: State Library of Victoria, Wolfgang Sievers & Yuncken Freeman Architects, 1971, Kilpara flats, 703 Orrong Road, Toorak).



Photograph of the Kilpara Flats penthouse in 1971 (source: State Library of Victoria, State Library of Victoria, Wolfgang Sievers & Yuncken Freeman Architects, 1971, Kilpara flats, 703 Orrong Road, Toorak).



Photograph of the entrance hall of the Kilpara Flats penthouse in 1971 (source: State Library of Victoria, State Library of Victoria, Wolfgang Sievers & Yuncken Freeman Architects, 1971, Kilpara flats, 703 Orrong Road, Toorak).



Southern and eastern elevations of Kilpara Flats (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Southern and eastern elevations of Kilpara Flats (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Southern elevation of Kilpara Flats (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Mature Norfolk Island Pine (*Araucaria heterophylla*) tree (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Signage (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Entrance (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).

Authors

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