

Heritage Citation – Individual Place

Heritage Place: Santosa
Address: 33 Albany Road, Toorak

HO Reference: HO741

Citation status: Final

Date Updated: 16 October 2023

Designer: Guilford Bell

Year of Construction: 1961-1965

Builder: Unknown



Photograph of Santosa (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Location map and extent of 33 Albany Road, Toorak.

Heritage Group: Residential buildings

Heritage Type: Flat

Key Theme: Building suburbs

Key Sub-theme: Developing higher density living
 – architect designed apartments

Significance Level: Local

Recommendation: Recommended for the Heritage Overlay as an individual place; fence controls recommended in relation to the boundary wall.

Controls:	<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 checked="" 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 33 Albany Road, Toorak (otherwise known as Santosa) is significant. The built form, materiality, siting, orientation and fenestration of the Post-war Modernist flat building is of local significance, along with the brick boundary wall, pedestrian entrance path and integrated undercroft car park. Later alterations and additions to the property are not significant.

How is it significant?

Santosa is of local historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

Santosa is of historical significance as an architect designed luxury apartment building designed by Guilford Bell and constructed in the post-war period. An outcome of the growing popularity of higher density living and population increases in the post-war era, Santosa reflects the growth of architect designed luxury apartments in Toorak between the 1940s and 1960s. While the emergence of architect designed apartments has its roots in the interwar period, whereby local opposition to flat development saw developers employing noted architects to design apartments and maisonettes that emulated interwar style mansions, the post-war period saw the incorporation of Modernism into flat design and construction amongst leading architects. Santosa therefore forms a tangible link to this period of suburban development in Toorak. (Criterion A)

Santosa is of aesthetic significance as an intact and fine example of Post-war Modernism in flat design by virtue of its monumental qualities, repetitive detailing and considered composition. Key features contributing to its aesthetic value include its large rectilinear form built in brick, balanced in scale by the use of a shallow skillion roof and undercroft, minimal use of ornamentation, recessed floor-to-ceiling glazing, tiled entrance stairs and brick boundary wall. The use of an undercroft carpark featuring thin pilasters achieves a lightness and floating effect for the upper storey, generating a design that, when set back behind mature plantings, appears both luxurious and monumental. (Criterion E)

HERCON Criteria Assessment

A	<i>Importance to the course, or pattern of our cultural or natural history</i>	Santosa is of historical significance as an architect designed luxury apartment building designed by Guilford Bell and constructed in the post-war period. An outcome of the growing popularity of higher density living and population increases in the post-war era, Santosa reflects the growth of architect designed luxury apartments in Toorak between the 1940s and 1960s. While the emergence of architect designed apartments has its roots in the interwar period, whereby local opposition to flat development saw developers employing noted architects to design apartments and maisonettes that emulated interwar style mansions, the post-war period saw the incorporation of
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		Modernism into flat design and construction amongst leading architects. Santosa therefore forms a tangible link to this period of suburban development in Toorak.
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>	This place does not meet this criterion.
E	<i>Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics</i>	Santosa is of aesthetic significance as an intact and fine example of Post-war Modernism in flat design by virtue of its monumental qualities, repetitive detailing and considered composition. Key features contributing to its aesthetic value include its large rectilinear form built in brick, balanced in scale by the use of a shallow skillion roof and undercroft, minimal use of ornamentation, recessed floor-to-ceiling glazing, tiled entrance stairs and brick boundary wall. The use of an undercroft carpark featuring thin pilasters achieves a lightness and floating effect for the upper storey, generating a design that, when set back behind mature plantings, appears both luxurious and monumental.
F	<i>Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.
G	<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	<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.
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Description

• Physical Analysis

Santosa is a three-storey, masonry flat building in a Post-war Modernist style. The structure presents as a large rectilinear form with a simple rectangular plan and shallow skillion roof clad with corrugated sheet metal. The roof is obscured from view behind the flat parapet and flush wall of the structure. The residence is set into a sloped site and includes an undercroft car park, accessible from an asphalt laid driveway.

The eastern elevation addresses Albany Road, with the primary elevation facing south within the site. The structure is revealed on the street facing elevation and includes the central main entrance to the building, set behind the carpark and accessible via a set of stairs from the street which emphasise the elevated position of the structure above the street level. The stairs and path are finished with square tiles laid in neat rows and flanked by the front wall and heavy shrub planting. A single row of windows are positioned to the right of the entrance and is the only fenestration located on the elevation. The internal walls are visible from the main entrance opening and are lined with a white timber panel.

The southern (side) elevation is primarily characterised by the fenestration of the apartment units. Each unit bay is flanked by projecting party walls that extend from the square columns on the carpark level below. The party walls support the projecting stepped awning lined with timber soffit boards. Each bay includes three recessed steel framed windows. Some windows have been replaced over time.

The northern (side) elevation consists of the window bays extending over three levels. The upper two levels include three windows set above fibre cement boards, many with timber shutters on the interior. Some windows have been replaced over time. Expressed brick piers run vertically up the elevation separating the windows. The ground level includes a centred door to the enclosed private courtyard of the ground level unit. Each courtyard is paved on the building side and includes a lawn area forming the north boundary of the property.

The driveway runs along the south boundary and the western extent of the property consists of a lawn tennis court. The street front boundary is partially demarcated by a tall brick wall. The wall is laid with a stretcher bond and is painted a charcoal colour. The wall includes the letter boxes beside the front steps and forms part of the enclosed courtyards of the units. There is one secondary access door through the wall on the right side.

Santosa is located at the junction of Albany Road and Whernside Avenue. It remains in use as a multi-unit residential apartment block. The structure appears to be in good condition. Santosa appears to be relatively intact and has high integrity overall.

- [Alterations and Additions](#)

- Structure painted from off-white to light grey (2018).
- Front wall painted from off-white to charcoal (2018).
- Skylights added to the roof.
- Some windows replaced.
- Shutters added to interior of some windows.

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 land on which Santosa presently sits formerly comprised the substantial grounds of pastoralist Hartley Williams' large Victorian mansion Kenley Estate (MMBW 1902; Foster 1999, 46-47). Erected in the 1874, its land was later subdivided in 1938, paving way for residential development in the area (Beauchamp Brothers 1938). 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 had been taking place before this period, rising labour costs following World War I made the cost of servants and other workers 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. In the case of Kenley Estate, subdivision resulted in the creation of Kenley Court and twenty-two generously sized allotments fronting Kooyong Road, Albany Road and Kenley Court (Beauchamp Brothers 1938).

Several interwar dwellings were erected on these new allotments following subdivision, with 1945 aerial photography showing what appears to be a courtyard of an interwar house on present day 33 Albany Road (Adastra Airways 1945). It was not until the post-war period in 1965 whereby the Santosa Flats were erected in 1961-1965 to designs prepared by the leading Post-war Modernist architect Guilford Bell. An outcome of the rise of high density living and population increases in the post-war era, Santosa reflected the growth of architect designed luxury apartments in Toorak between the 1940s and 1960 (Context 2009, 146). While this trend stemmed from the interwar period, whereby local opposition to flat development saw developers employing noted architects to apartments and maisonettes that emulated interwar style mansions, the 1940s saw the incorporation of Modernism into flat design (Context 2009, 146). Further, Toorak's strong culture of patronage had long provided architects with the space to explore ideas and innovation in design and construction (Context 2009, 138). By the post-war period, this tradition culminated in the ascendancy of Modernism by leading architects in Toorak, particularly as applied to flat construction.

Born in Brisbane and part of the prominent pastoral Bell family of rural Queensland, Guilford Bell registered as an architect in 1936, before travelling to London to work for the noted British architect Albert E. Richardson (Pixley 1979; Goad and Willis 2011, 77). After returning to Australia and working as an architect for Ansett Australia in 1946, Bell commenced private practice in Melbourne in the 1952, with a focus on residential work for a wealthy and influential client base. It was during this period in

which he developed several architectural characteristics that would become hallmarks of his approach to residential design – extreme privacy, anonymous street frontages and highly ordered plans (Heritage Victoria 2021). Epitomised in the use of blank walls to the street, pavilion carports, symmetry and aesthetic austerity in his designs, Bell’s design approach, which combined Modernist ideals with Classical notions of order, anonymity and retreats from the city, was considered radical for the 1950s and out of step from mainstream Melbourne architects who were committed to an open and free approach to form and structure (Goad and Willis 2011, 78).

From 1961 to 1964, Bell worked in partnership with Neil Clerehan, who shared with him an aesthetic concern for blank walls, privacy and discreet urbanity (Goads and Willis 2011, 77). Following this period, he returned to work as a sole practitioner in domestic architecture, and designed across Victoria, Queensland and New South Wales (Pixley 1979). His most recognised works include Purcell House at 17 Hartlands Road, Ivanhoe East (1962), Seccull House at 32 North Road, Brighton (1972), 5 Buller Terrace, Templestowe (1972-73) and Grant House at 36 Whiteside Road, Officer (1989).

Designed in the early 1960s, Santosa is one of the few apartments designed by Bell, who is best known for his work within house design. Consisting of a prominent rectilinear form with skillion roof, blank walls to the street and a highly ordered floor plan, Santosa exemplifies Bell’s signature approach to Post-war Modernist design, and is particularly noted for its ornamental restraint, monumental form, and private street frontage. Noted residents at Santosa included Ian Baillieu Ramsay, member of the prominent Baillieu family (Sands & McDougall 1974).

Comparative Analysis

Distinguished by its characteristically monumental and anonymous street presence, Santosa flats exemplifies the key elements of Bell’s oeuvre, including aesthetic restraint, facilitation of privacy, symmetry, heavy rectilinear form, and the incorporation of an integrated carport. While Bell’s other works within the City of Stonnington similarly express these features, none has yet been afforded heritage protection. Moreover, where Bell’s work has received heritage designations elsewhere in Melbourne these are related specifically to individual house designs. The following comparative analysis also draws from Post-war Modernist flat examples designed by noted contemporary Roy Grounds.

Comparative examples include:

- **Seccull House, 32 North Road, Brighton (VHR H2406).** Constructed in 1972 to designs by Guilford Bell, Seccull House is directly comparable to Santosa as encompassing Bell’s signature approach to Post-war minimalist Modernism. Although this building is a residence as opposed to flats, both structures share similar architectural qualities including the extensive use of glazing while maintaining privacy, shallow skillion roof forms and heavy rectilinear form amongst other qualities. Aesthetically, both buildings are balanced and free of ornamentation, conveying a minimalist and refined aesthetic that is both visually pleasing as well as reflecting an element of luxury. Visually concealed from the street front, Seccull House does not share Santosa’s monumental like character.
- **Clendon/Clendon Corner, 13-15 Clendon Road, Armadale (individually significant in HO130 Armadale Precinct).** The flats at 13-15 Clendon Road, Armadale, designed by Roy Grounds and constructed in 1940-41, are comparable to Santosa as a distinct example of a Modernist flat block within the City of Stonnington. Both sites share similar window designs, with recessed floor to ceiling glazing, and are constructed of brick. Key differences include the roof form, building footprint

and siting, however both sites are historically emblematic of Modernist apartment development in Stonnington, as well as being aesthetically comparable for their minimal ornamentation.

- **Quamby, 3 Glover Court, Toorak (VHR H0603,H044).** Quamby, also designed by Roy Grounds in 1941, is comparable to Santosa as an example of a Modernist flat block design with the City of Stonnington. Both buildings observe a rectilinear form, use of an undercroft, and similar floor to ceiling window design. Included in the Victorian Heritage Register, Quamby however, can be recognised as a superior example to Santosa, using a wider range of features that contribute to a more complex and unique design.

Although Santosa is not the most readily recognised nor celebrated examples of Bell's impressive body of Post-war Modernist work, it is nevertheless a key and intact design that illustrates Bell's signature style and design approach. As one of the only known few apartments designed by Bell, Santosa also provides important context and insight into his approach towards flat design in the post-war era.

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



Building entrance steps and front boundary wall (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Undercroft car park and southern elevation (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Northern elevation (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Northern elevation and front boundary wall (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Overview of the building from Albany Road (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Overview of the building from Albany Road (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Detail view of upper level fenestration along the northern elevation (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Detail view of undercroft car park (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Detail view of front boundary wall and main entrance steps (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Detail view of main entrance and main entrance steps (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).

Authors

Citation prepared by: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022 (Vivian Lu and Reuel Balmadres).

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