

Heritage Citation – Individual Place

Heritage Place: Residence

Address: 60 Washington Street, Toorak

HO Reference: HO742

Citation status: Final

Date Updated: 30 March 2022

Designer: Yuncken Freeman Bros. Griffiths and Simpson

Year of Construction: 1951-52

Builder: Unknown



Photograph of 60 Washington Street (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Location and map extent of 60 Washington Street, Toorak.

Heritage Group: Residential buildings (private)

Heritage Type: House

Key Theme: Building suburbs

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

Significance Level: Local

Recommendation: Recommended as a new individually significant place on the HO; external paint controls recommended in relation to the original colour scheme which is still evident.

Controls:	<input checked="" 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

The residence at 60 Washington Street, Toorak is significant. The built form, scale, fenestration and materiality of the Post-war Modernist house is of local significance. The landscaping and later alterations and additions to the property are not significant.

How is it significant?

60 Washington Street, Toorak is of representative significance to the City of Stonnington. The site also has associative significance as a residence designed by the prominent Modernist architectural firm Yuncken Freeman Architects and as the personal residence of Roy Simpson, notable architect and partner in the firm.

Why is it significant?

60 Washington Street, Toorak is of representative significance as a discernible example of innovative experimentation in geometric form and materials in residential design that typified the peak of the Modernist movement in Australia. This is most evident in its built form, particularly its flat roof with exposed overhanging eaves paired with a double storey construction and glazing to the upper storey, which achieves visual boldness while simultaneously remaining lightweight in massing and scale. The emphasis of lower ground garage conveys a bunkered weight, coupled with the sheer unornamented façade providing a sense of design restraint. (Criterion D)

60 Washington Street, Toorak has associative significance as an intact residential design by the highly distinguished architectural firm Yuncken Freeman Bros. Griffiths and Simpson (later Yuncken Freeman Architects) who became 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 Masterplan (1964). What is more, the dwelling was designed and constructed as the personal residence of architect and partner in the firm, Roy Simpson. (Criterion H)

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>	60 Washington Street, Toorak is of representative significance as a discernible example of innovative experimentation in geometric form and materials in residential design that typified the peak of the Modernist movement in Australia. This is most evident in its built form, particularly its flat roof with

		exposed overhanging eaves paired with a double storey construction and glazing to the upper storey, which achieves visual boldness while simultaneously remaining lightweight in massing and scale. The emphasis of lower ground garage conveys a bunkered weight, coupled with the sheer unornamented façade providing a sense of design restraint.
E	<i>Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.
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>	60 Washington Street, Toorak has associative significance as an intact residential design by the highly distinguished architectural firm Yuncken Freeman Bros. Griffiths and Simpson (later Yuncken Freeman Architects) who became 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 Masterplan (1964). What is more, the dwelling was designed and constructed as the personal residence of architect and partner in the firm, Roy Simpson.

Description

• Physical Analysis

60 Washington Street, Toorak is a single storey residence built in the Post-war Modernist style. The structure is set into a raised landscape above the street level and includes a lower ground floor garage accessible from Washington Street via an open driveway. The brick structure is laid with a stretcher bond with a bagged finish in grey paint; the paint scheme appears to be original based on historic

photos (refer to Further Images below). The flat roof is clad with a corrugated sheet metal and overhangs the residence with boxed eaves. Sections of the original Decramastic tiling has been retained on the east section of the roof.

The front façade addresses Washington Street. Most of the structure is obscured from street view as it is located above street level and behind dense tree and underplanting. The right hand side of the façade is open to the street and includes a double sliding door garage and two white aluminium casement windows on the upper level. A set of concrete laid stairs lead up to the upper paved courtyard and main entrance. A second concrete paver laid courtyard is located off the south elevation. Full length white aluminium sliding doors provide access to the courtyards. A set of stairs lead down from the rear courtyard to a smaller side garden that is accessed via a side entrance gate right of the garage.

The street front boundary is demarcated by the level change and a low course bluestone retaining wall. The driveway is laid with white aggregate. A secondary entrance up a set of bluestone edged concrete steps and a timber gate is located at the left extent of the front boundary. The front and rear yard spaces are heavily planted. A large mature tree is located in the rear yard and overshadows the three-storey apartment block located next to the property along the southern boundary. The front yard includes a mature peppercorn (*Schinus molle*) and Jacaranda (*Jacaranda mimosifolia*) tree.

60 Washington Street is located close to the roundabout junction with Grange Road. It is currently used as a residential property. It is considered to be in good condition and has high integrity.

- [Alterations and Additions](#)

- Skylights added to the roof.
- Roof tiled removed and roof reclad with corrugated sheet metal.
- Trim painted on garage door.

[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'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 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 encompassing present day 60 Washington Street formerly comprised Lot 14 during the first 1840 Crown Land Sales. Situated along the desirable higher ground adjacent to the Yarra River, the area was immediately established as a desirable place for settlement (Context Pty Ltd 2009, 37). Initially purchased by R. A. Balbirnie, Balbirnie commenced subdivisions on this substantial portion of land from as early as the 1850s (Davis c.1853). While smaller allotments along the newly created Washington Street were put on sale in c.1853, the land bounded by Washington Street to the north and Grange Road to the east, which would later become the site of 60 Washington Street, comprised the substantial grounds of the Victorian era Merne House (c.1860) (MMBW 1900). Notably, the map also labels the land directly west of Merne House as 'Chinese Garden', indicating that it was used as a Chinese market garden at the turn of the century, an occurrence that is highly atypical for this area (MMBW 1900).

However, rising labour costs after World War I ultimately made the cost of maintaining larger mansion estates prohibitive, which alongside growing suburban expansion, precipitated a pattern of subdivision and residential development in Toorak from the 1920s that lasted well into the post-war years. Within this context, Merne, along with the neighbouring mansion Altadore (c.1854), were subdivided and eventually demolished by the post-war period. 60 Washington Road was subsequently constructed

between August 1950 to February 1952 to designs prepared by Australian Modernist architect Roy Simpson, principal of the noted architectural firm Yuncken, Freeman Brothers, Griffiths and Simpson (Yuncken Freeman Architects 1952). 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). The ascendancy of the Modernist movement following World War II also found its expression in the suburb.

Established in 1933 by Otto 'Rob' Yuncken, John and Tom Freeman and William Balcombe Griffiths as Yuncken, Freeman Brothers and Griffiths, and later joined by Roy Simpson in 1938, the firm primarily focused on Modernist hospital design and practiced in the refined modern Georgian idiom during the initial years (Goad 2012, 781). By the post-war period, the firm's work expanded to include houses, apartments, and urban office buildings. Following Yuncken's death in 1951, Barry Patten and John Gates joined the partnership and oversaw the expansion of the commercial side of the practice. Celebrated for their high quality designs, innovative use of materials and ongoing commitment to modernism as expressed through high-rise office buildings, the firm became one of the largest in Australia by the late 1960s (Goad 2012, 781). The best known works by the firm that were specifically led by Roy Simpson include large scale projects such as the ACT Law Courts (1963), LaTrobe University Masterplan (1964) and the Cardinal Knox Centre (1971).

Designed as Roy Simpson's own personal residence, early images of 60 Washington Street depict a well-resolved pavilion style Modernist brick residence oriented around internal courtyards (Wille 1951-52; Yuncken Freeman Architects n.d.). Defined by its brick materiality, bold rectilinear form, large glass windows fronting the courtyard and ornamental restraint, the residence embodied Simpsons' signature application of high-quality brick, as well as his appreciation of the regularity of a single geometric form (Halik 1987, 1). With the exception of the garage door, the colour scheme evident now is also present in early photographs of the building. Roy Simpson resided at 60 Washington Street until 1972, and by 1974, K. F. Cox is listed as the official occupant (Sands & McDougall 1974). The property was last sold in 2010, and continues to be used as a private residential building.

Comparative Analysis

Distinguished by its bold rectilinear form, flat roof with exposed overhanging eaves, double storey construction, stepped roof form, glazing to the upper storey, ornamental restraint, tall aluminum framed casement windows, and incorporation of internal courtyards, 60 Washington Street clearly articulates the key design features that typified the Post-war Modern style. While there is currently a dearth of Post-war Modernist style residences on the municipal Heritage Overlay, those that are listed are compare well to 60 Washington Street in terms of design quality and intactness. These include:

- **Richardson House, 10 Blackfriars Close, Toorak (HO360).** Designed by Robin Boyd, the Richardson House was constructed in 1954-55 and comprises a rhombus-shaped pavilion suspended over a creek bed. Described as a 'fine example of Boyd's domestic work and is of enhanced significance by virtue of its unusual and elegant structural system', this residence is a more innovative and more structurally expressive example the Post-war Modern Style. Although emblematic of radical experimentations with geometric form as opposed to the tempered Modernism displayed at 60 Washington Street, the house nevertheless observes several analogous design features. These include a preoccupation with strong geometric lines, open floor plans, an absence of ornamentation, and restrained materiality. Unlike 60 Washington Street, Richardson House has since undergone

several substantial alterations and additions to the exterior and interior, including a large three-storey addition on the west side of the original building. It is thus considered less a less intact example of the Post-war Modern style.

- **35 Larnook Street, Prahran (HO645, currently under review as part of Stonnington Amendment C304).** Recommended by Bryce Raworth Pty Ltd as an individually significant place on the City of Stonnington Heritage Overlay, 35 Larnook Street is comparable to 60 Washington Street as a striking Post-war Modernist design that observes a distinct rectilinear form, brick materiality, clean lines, restraint in ornamentation, an integrated carport and street facing windows. Constructed in 1959 by noted European émigré architect Bernard Slawik, this property is more reminiscent of the European Modernist design tradition, particularly with respect to its raised sitting on pilasters and first floor window wall with repetitive modules and opaque blue glass spandrels.

Yuncken Freeman Architects' residential work in the Post-war Modernist style was very limited. Other than the Kilpara Flats at 703 Orrong Road, Toorak, the only other known examples are the Smith House on Hopetoun Road, Toorak (which is now demolished), and 7 Trawalla Avenue, Toorak (Recommended for inclusion in the Stonnington Heritage Overlay). In establishing the significance threshold for Yuncken Freeman Architects' designs, the following comparative analysis thus includes one of their residential works outside of the style, as well as the aforementioned 7 Trawalla Avenue, Toorak that is being recommended as part of this study:

- **4 Grant Avenue, Toorak (HO491).** Designed by Yuncken Freeman & Griffiths in c.1936, this interwar Georgian Revival style residence is noticeably different from the firm's noted Modernist designs in the post-war period. It is an elegant example of the Regency idiom, owing to its symmetrical massing, fenestration, landscape and use of classical ornament. While it is of a different design style than 60 Washington Street, Toorak, proto-modernist hints are visible in its use of sash windows without shutters and flat roof form. In addition, both buildings are comparable as the only two identified small scale private residential designs still extant that are associated with the firm Yuncken Freeman Architects.
- **7 Trawalla Avenue, Toorak (Recommended for inclusion in the Stonnington Heritage Overlay as part of this study).** Constructed in 1942-55 to designs by Yuncken Freeman Bros. Griffiths and Simpson, 7 Trawalla Avenue is an intact and well-resolved example of the firm's Post-war Modern residential work. It is directly comparable to 60 Washington Street as a pavilion style Modernist residence oriented around an internal courtyard. Other key analogous features include its distinct rectilinear form, exposed overhanging eaves paired with a double storey construction, aluminum framed street facing windows, ornamental restraint, open floor plan and the incorporation of a buried, sunken garage. Key distinctions however, include the projecting curved steel and timber awning walkway and gold leaf gliding on the main entrance door at 60 Washington Street.

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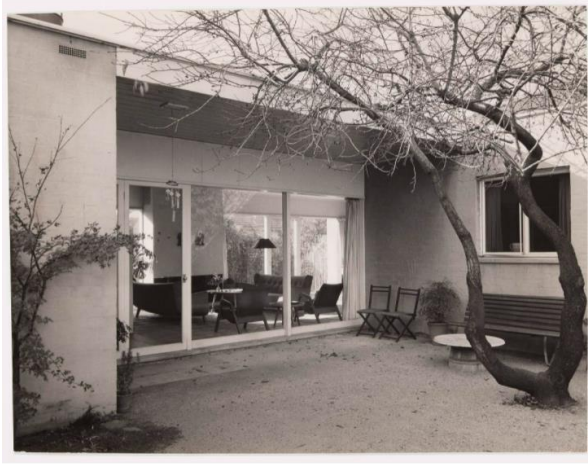
Limitations

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 façade in the c.1950s (source: Yuncken Freeman Architects, University of Melbourne).



Photograph of the internal courtyard and fenestration in c.1950s (source: Yuncken Freeman Architects, University of Melbourne).



Photograph of the primary entrance in the c.1950s (source: Yuncken Freeman Architects, University of Melbourne).



Photograph of façade in c.1951-52, shortly after construction (source: Peter Wille, State Library of Victoria, c.1951-52) .



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Photographs of façade and internal courtyard in the c.1950s (source: Yuncken Freeman Architects, University of Melbourne).



Oblique view looking southeast (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Oblique view from the northwestern corner of the block (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



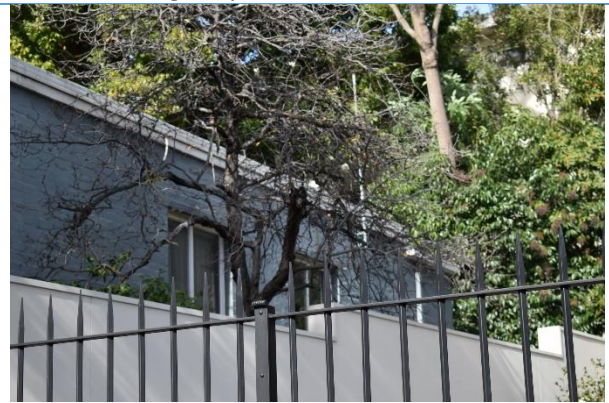
View of the façade from the driveway (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



View of the garage door and façade (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Oblique view of the western elevation (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Oblique view of the western elevation (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Oblique view of boundary plantings and gate (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Boundary gate (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).

Authors

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