Heritage Citation – Individual Place

Heritage Place: Revell	**HO Reference:** HO342
Address: 9 Toorak Avenue, Toorak	**Citation status:** Final
	Date Updated: 17 March 2022
Designer: Edward Fielder Billson	**Year of Construction:** 1920
Builder: Unknown	



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



Location map and extent of HO342.

Heritage Group: Residential buildings	**Key Theme:** Building suburbs
Heritage Type: House	**Key Sub-theme:** Creating Australia's most 'designed' suburbs – houses as a symbol of wealth, status and fashion

Significance Level: Local

Recommendation: Retain as an individually significant place on the HO.

Controls:	☐	External paint colours	☐	Internal alterations	☐ Tree controls
	☐	Victorian Heritage Register	☐	Incorporated Plans	☐ Outbuildings and fences exemptions
	☐	Prohibited uses may be permitted	☐	Aboriginal Heritage Place	

Statement of Significance

What is significant?

The property known at 9 Toorak Avenue (otherwise known as Revell), is significant. Specifically, the form, scale, fenestration and detailing of the Arts and Craft Prairie style dwelling is of local significance. The front boundary wall, swimming pool, driveway and later alterations and additions to the property are not significant.

How is it significant?

Revell is of local aesthetic and representative significance to the City of Stonnington, and is associated with the well-known architect Edward Fielder Bilson as well as the renowned architectural pioneer of the Prairie style in Australia, Walter Burley Griffin.

Why is it significant?

Revell has representative value as a highly intact and articulated example of the Prairie style in the municipality. This is readily exemplified in its low pitched hipped roof with a wide, low chimney on the ridge line, its boxed eaves with exaggerated overhangs, vertical piers across the front façade, and simple repetition of casement windows that create a wide, horizontal character common in most Prairie School designs. (Criterion D)

Revell has associative significance as a house designed by the well-known architect Edward Fielder Bilson. It is also linked to the prominent architect Walter Burley Griffin, who is particularly recognised for pioneering the Prairie style in Australia. Griffin was Bilson's employer at the time of Revell's erection and his stylistic influence on the dwelling is clear. (Criterion H)

HERCON Criteria Assessment

A	*Importance to the course, or pattern of our cultural or natural history*	This place does not meet this criterion.
B	*Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history*	This place does not meet this criterion.
C	*Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history*	This place does not meet this criterion.
D	*Important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments*	Revell has representative value as a highly intact and articulated example of the Prairie style in the municipality. This is readily exemplified in its low pitched hipped roof with a wide, low chimney on the ridge line, its boxed eaves with exaggerated overhangs, vertical piers across the front façade, and simple repetition of casement windows that create a wide, horizontal character common in most Prairie School designs.

E	*Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics*	This place does not meet this criterion.
F	*Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period*	This place does not meet this criterion.
G	*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*	This place does not meet this criterion.
H	*Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history.*	Revell has associative significance as a house designed by the well-known architect Edward Fielder Bilson. It is also linked to the prominent architect Walter Burley Griffin, who is particularly recognised for pioneering the Prairie style in Australia. Griffin was Bilson's employer at the time of Revell's erection and his stylistic influence on the dwelling is clear.

Description

- ### Physical Analysis

Revell is a two-storey residence design in an Arts and Crafts Prairie style. The masonry structure is rendered in a white roughcast stucco. The structure has a robust form with a low-pitched hipped roof clad in unglazed cement tiles. The hipped roof has a flat centre clad in sheet metal. There is a low chimney at the centre of the roof ridge on the street front that appears like a flat parapet. The chimney, fenestration and façade detailing exaggerate the overall horizontality of the façade which is a characteristic of the Prairie style.

The façade presents asymmetrically with a slightly recessed upper level, projecting front hipped bay. The main entrance four panel timber door is located in the centre of the façade is located under the second level projection. The ground level includes single and paired windows, and the upper level consists of four banks of paired windows. The single pane casement windows have a simple form and white time frame. The upper-level windows sit above the expressed level course that forms a windowsill. The upper-level windows terminate under the projecting boxed eaves. The eaves have an exaggerated overhand and clad in white timber panels. Expressed piers modulate the façade faces.

The north elevation is modulated with two wide bays flanking the entrance door and opens onto a raised patio. The patio leads down to the backyard which includes a swimming pool on the north east corner of the property and an extensive pergola structure. The main structure is set back from the street with a wide front yard. The street front boundary is demarcated by a low flat wall consisting of stacked

slate tiles. There is a low black metal gate and tiled walkway leading to the main entrance. There is a short concrete clad driveway leading to a sheltered parking area off the east side of the house.

The front garden consists of two large garden beds that are slightly raised behind low retaining walls clad with slate tiles on the house side. The garden beds include native plantings, including an extensive bank of low growing *banksia* shrubs. A distinct feature of the garden is the mature *wisteria* vine that is trained along the front of the house and over the parking space. There are mature trees located on the property in the backyard and along the east and west boundary fences.

Revell is located on Toorak Avenue close to the junction with Merriwee Crescent. Revell is currently used as a private residence. It is considered to be in good condition and with moderate integrity.

• Alterations and Additions

- Retractable awnings added to the north elevation.
- Front yard relandscaped (after 2018).
- Concrete clad driveway added.
- Original timber fence removed.
- New slate tile front wall added.
- Façade roughcast finish repainted white.
- Flat section of the main roof reclad in sheet metal.

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).

- Place History

The land on which the dwelling was developed following the 1913 Moonga Estate subdivision. While the subdivision of grand old estates was taking place from the 19th century, rising labour costs, particularly after World War I, made the cost of domestic workers to maintain the estates prohibitive (Context 2009, 124). Moonga Estate was thus subdivided, creating several roads in the process, such as Toorak Avenue. Generous allotments were put up for auction, and houses were subsequently erected over the next several years (Ham 1913).

Designed by Edward Fielder Bilson, Revell at 9 Toorak Avenue, was erected in 1920 for E. H. Pearce (Malvern Building Plan 2238). Bilson is best known for his working association with renowned architect Walter Burley Griffin, who, along with his office employees J. F. W. Ballantyne, Eric Nichols and Bilson himself, pioneered the Arts and Craft related Prairie School architectural style (Goad 2012, 297-300). Bilson first entered Griffin's office as an assistant in 1916, and ultimately worked there until 1922. Following this period, he built up an independent practice of Griffin-inspired domestic architecture, before shifting to interwar stylistic eclecticism in the 1930s (Goad 2012, 82-83). Notable works by Bilson include the residence Tintara at 20 Lyndon Street, Ripponlea (1923), the duplex Banks house at 17/17A Iona Avenue, Toorak (1927), the Woodlands Golf Club at Mordialloc (1925-29), as well as additions to the Kooyong Lawn Tennis Club (1928).

While Revell was first owned by E. H. Pearce, a search of directories indicates that he did not occupy the house (Sands and McDougall 1920-1935). A search of both Pearce and the dwelling in historical databases does not reveal any records, thus making the initial history of Revell following its erection difficult to ascertain. Furthermore, the initial listing of the house (potentially 5 Toorak Avenue) has not been verified and as a result, the names of occupants gained through directory searches cannot be substantiated. More recent property records do, however, indicate that the property was sold several times during the late 20th century in the years 1975, 1987 and 1999.

Comparative Analysis

With its low pitched hipped roof, boxed overhanging eaves and casement windows, Revell exemplifies the key elements of the Prairie style of architecture that was being led by Edward F. Bilson's employer Walter Burley Griffin. The style is also particularly indicative of the interwar stylistic innovations that were taking place in the area as a result of the strong culture of patronage (Context Pty Ltd 2009, 138-139). The following comparative analysis draws from Prairie style designs in the area designed by both Edward F. Bilson and the architects of Walter Burley Griffin's office.

Comparable examples include:

- **Wooragee (28 Clendon Road, Toorak) (HO302).** Constructed in 1918-19 to designs by Edward F. Bilson, Wooragee is a two-storey bungalow that incorporates both Prairie, Moderne and contemporary Bungalow styles. Despite its incorporation of several design idioms, several features are directly comparable to Bilson's design at Revell. These include its wide boxed eaves with exaggerated overhangs, strong geometric emphasis, and an articulation of piers at the front façade. Defining features that differ from Revell include its semi-circular front patio, which appears to anticipate a modern, streamlined aesthetic. Although a less orthodox example of the Prairie style when compared to Revell, it has a strong sense of character.

- **Yately (3 Yar Orrong Road, Toorak) (HO346).** Designed by George Ballantyne, or potentially J. F. W. Ballantyne in 1919, Yately is a restrained Georgian Revival form with clear Prairie style influences. It is analogous to Revell in terms of its strong horizontal emphasis, although derived from projecting hood moulds and window sills as opposed to overhanging boxed eaves, its roof form and restrained use of ornamentation. While it is a less discernible example of the Prairie style when compared to Revell, it is noted for being one of the earliest examples of the Georgian Revival idiom.
- **Clendon Lodge (83 Clendon Road, Toorak) (HO22/VHR H0561).** Designed by the office of Walter Burley Griffin in 1927, this Prairie style derived two-storey, brick rendered bungalow is comparable to Revell in terms of its low pitched roof, deep overhanging eaves, and its strong horizontality set window arrangement. While the precise architect within Griffin's office has not been substantiated, the imprint of his style is obvious. Key differences include its unique T-shaped form and rusticated stone piers. Clendon Lodge is of state significance, owing to its extreme individuality in form and style. It is a noticeably more distinguished and unique example of the Prairie style when compared to Bilson's Revell.

Overall, Revell is a fine example of the Prairie idiom as designed by Edward F. Bilson. It is not only one of the few surviving examples of Griffin's influence within the municipality but also holds importance as a particularly articulated representation of the Prairie style when compared to the synthesized nature of similar designs in the area.

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



View of front façade (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



View of front façade and landcaped front yard (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Detail of roof and chimney (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Detail of upper floor fenestration and overhanging boxed eaves (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).

Authors

Former citation prepared by: Nigel Lewis and Richard Aitken Pty Ltd, 1992.
Updated citation prepared by: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022.