

Former McClune House

18 Marcus Road, Frankston South



Heritage Assessment

February 2009

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1.0 Introduction

This report was commissioned by the Frankston City Council. Its purpose is to provide an assessment of the cultural heritage significance of the dwelling at 18 Marcus Road, Frankston South (former McClune House) and to comment on the appropriateness of a heritage control for the place.

2.0 Sources of Information

The analysis below draws upon an external and internal inspection of the building and a review of the original architectural documentation held in the Grounds Romberg and Boyd archive at the State Library of Victoria. In addition, I have reviewed the *Transition Special Issue: Robin Boyd*, (ed. Harriet Edquist) and the *City of Frankston Heritage Study Stage 1* (Graeme Butler and Associates, 1995).

3.0 Listings and Controls

Frankston City Council

The former McClune House is currently not subject to a heritage overlay control either as an individually significant building or as part of a precinct. Nor was it identified as a significant place in the *City of Frankston Heritage Study Stage 1* (Graeme Butler and Associates, 1995).

Heritage Victoria

The site is not included on the Victorian Heritage Register.

National Trust of Australia (Victoria)

The site is not included on the National Trust Register of classified places

Australian Heritage Council

The site is not included on the Register of the National Estate as administered by the Australian Heritage Council.

4.0 History & Description

The house at 18 Marcus Road, Frankston South, was designed in 1967 by architect Robin Boyd for university lecturer Ian McClune and his wife.¹ The McClunes assumed the role of owner builders, subcontracting out most of the trades.² Completed in 1968, the house was described in Boyd's own book of his work *Living in Australia*:

It has a big parasol roof of steel and fibreglass sheeting in the shape of a square doughnut, supported on steel-braced timber posts independent of the structure of the rooms. These follow a comparatively free plan beneath a raised roof, avoiding the central open square where a garden court receives the rain. The rooms are conventionally framed as flat-roofed boxes lined externally and internally with off-sawn pressure-treated pine boards, stained grey³

A c1968 floor plan shows the rooms of the house arranged as pavilions around a central open courtyard (refer figure 1 below). The courtyard functions as a circulation hub linking the front carport entry to various living spaces. Smaller fenced courtyards along the south and east sides conceal most windows from the street and give the house an introspective quality. Larger areas of glazing are found on the north side of the house where the living spaces open onto the informal native garden.

The pavilions encircling the central courtyard are built on a series of concrete slabs which step down the gently sloping site. External walls and most internal walls have pine board lining. Mountain Ash was used for the window joinery.⁴ Ceilings are lined in 'Woodtex' fibre board panels, over which was fixed a waterproof polyethylene sheet membrane. The 'parasol' roof which sits over the house was built with Oregon beams, supported on regularly spaced timber posts with diagonal steel bracing. Above the courtyard, the roof was partly clad in translucent 'Vinlon' vinyl sheet and left open at its centre.

As it stands today, the former McClune House remains substantially intact to its original 1967 design. Aside from a small store room which was erected in the front courtyard there have been few changes to the exterior. The interior also appears to be highly intact to its original state although it is not especially remarkable for an architect designed house of the period.

It is understood that the current owner recently had the building refurbished, including an upgrade of electrical and plumbing fixtures and replacement of decayed timber fabric.⁵ The property has also been subdivided to create a second lot, although this has not had any immediate negative impact on the setting and character of the house as it has been retained in a bushland setting on relatively generous allotment.

¹ Harriet Edquist (ed.) *Transition No.38 Special Issue Robin Boyd*, p. 233. *Abode*, Issue 15, 2008, p.143.

² Robin Boyd *Living in Australia* p.105.

³, Robin Boyd *Living in Australia* p.105.

⁴ Specification. Grounds Boyd Romberg archive. SLV M11774 Box 99.

⁵ www.boydbakerhouse.com.au/media.html

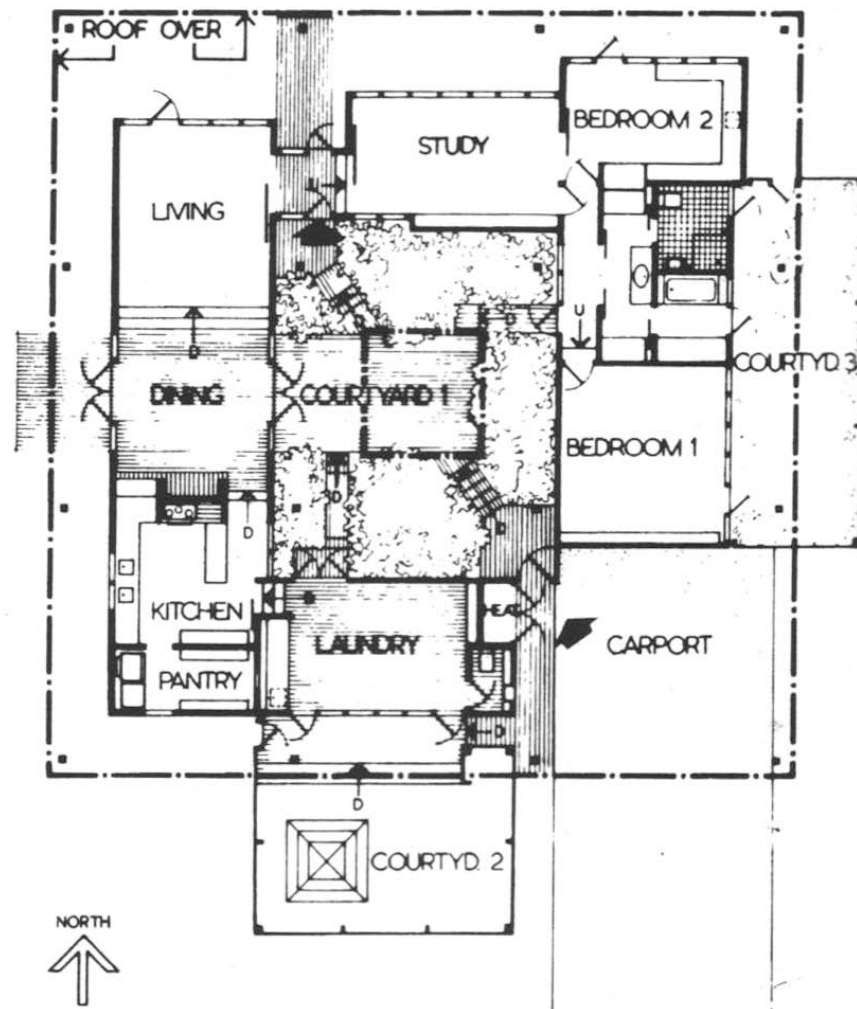


Figure 1 Former McClune House, section. Source: Reproduced from 'Living in Australia'

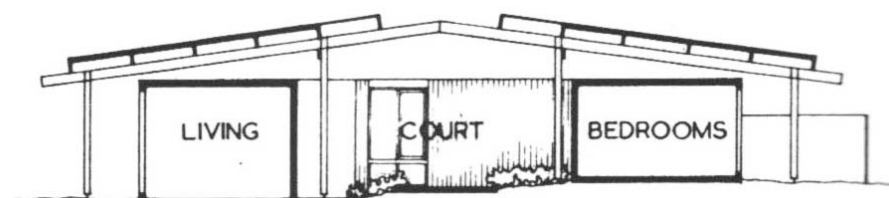


Figure 2 Section through the former McClune House. Source: Reproduced from 'Living in Australia'



Figure 3 *South (Marcus Road) elevation*



Figure 4 *North elevation*



Figure 5 *Courtyard (source: [www. realestate.com.au](http://www.realestate.com.au))*

5.0 Robin Boyd

Robin Boyd was one of Australia's most public architectural figures and foremost advocate of modern architecture. He was born in Melbourne in January 1919 and educated at the Malvern Church of England Grammar School.⁶ Boyd later attended evening classes at the Royal Melbourne Technical School while serving articles in the vast offices of A&K Henderson. From 1938, Boyd was a student at the University of Melbourne Architectural Atelier where he developed an interest in architectural writing, editing the Victorian Architectural Students Society (VASS) broadsheet, *Smudges*, from 1939-1942. On his graduation, Boyd was elevated to President of the VASS and worked briefly with Roy Grounds before departing for military service in New Guinea in 1942.⁷

After war service, Boyd registered as an architect and formed an association with Kevin Pethebridge and Frank Bell designing new residences and domestic alterations and additions throughout Melbourne's eastern suburbs. Boyd expanded his activities into the realm of architectural criticism with his first book, *Victorian Modern*, was published in 1947. In the same year, Boyd became director of the RVIA Small Homes Service producing regular weekly articles for the *Age* newspaper. He established his own architectural practice which attracted a steady stream of commissions for residential projects both around Melbourne and in outer suburban and bushland localities.

By the early 1950s, Boyd had developed an a measure of notoriety, partly as the author of polemic architectural works such as, *Modern Houses* (1951) and *Australia's Home* (1952) and partly as a designer of experimental and visually daring Modern houses.

In 1953, Boyd joined forces with Roy Grounds and Frederick Romberg. Grounds Romberg & Boyd combined the talents of three of Australia's most successful architects. However, the three tended to design separately within the office and Boyd's work remains unmistakably his own. During this time, Boyd produced an extraordinary series of housing concepts which were daring in both form and structure and contributed to the growing body of structural-functionalist works being produced in Melbourne. Boyd's own house of 1957 had a draped catenary curved roof while the Richardson House (1953-4) in Blackfriars Close, Toorak was constructed as a bridge spanning a gully.

In 1959, with the awarding of the National Gallery of Victoria and Cultural Centre to Roy Grounds, relations between the three partners became strained. In 1962, Grounds resigned from the firm taking the Gallery project with him. Romberg and Boyd remained in partnership and continued to produce innovative residential designs including the Featherstone House (1967-9), perhaps the pinnacle of the series of housing concepts commenced over a decade earlier. In 1969, Boyd was awarded the Gold Medal of the RAIA and, in 1971, received the CBE. Robin Boyd died in Melbourne in October 1971 aged 52.

⁶ Unless noted otherwise biographical material is drawn from, Architecture in Australia, *Robin Boyd Retrospective*, February 1972.

⁷ Dr Philip Goad, *The Modern House in Melbourne*, p.296.

6.0 Comparative Analysis

Robin Boyd Houses

Phillip Goad has described Boyd's houses of 1959-1971 as 'idea' houses.⁸ That is to say the house designs are based on a conceptual theme or 'controlling idea' and, as Goad writes:

The house is transformed in most cases to successfully to accommodate that theme. The Featherston House, 1967, satisfies the clients' desire to live in a courtyard with platforms of living space suspended above an internal garden. In the Burgess House, 1962, the theme of platforms and brick piers is employed to deal with a difficult sloping site. The McClune house, 1967, is a series of freely arranged platforms under an all embracing and partly transparent parasol. Boyd avoids stylistic and representational reference by the application of metaphor. The house is a bridge, a series of platforms, or a shading hat from the summer sun.⁹

Goad also identifies eight thematic approaches to house design in Boyd's domestic work of the 1960s. These are: the courtyard house; platforms within a shed; the urbane or pier and infill house; the colonial homestead/Georgian allusion house; the house as an expression of timber construction; the stepped plan house; the collected sheds house; and the free form house. Regardless of the thematic group, Boyd houses of the period display a frank structural expression, typically limited to traditional domestic construction materials and techniques.

The former McClune House is quite clearly an example of the 'courtyard house'. This theme had been explored by Boyd in early house designs, such as the Halford House, Ivanhoe (1956) but reached its fullest expression in the Baker House, Bacchus Marsh (1965). The Baker House is a square plan building with walls of local stone built around a central courtyard. Around the perimeter of the house are a series of cylindrical stone structures which conceal water tanks and storage spaces. Like the McClune house, the Baker House is covered by a low pitched, hipped roof which has an open frame over the centre of the courtyard. However, the Baker house has a stronger and more rigidly geometric plan form.

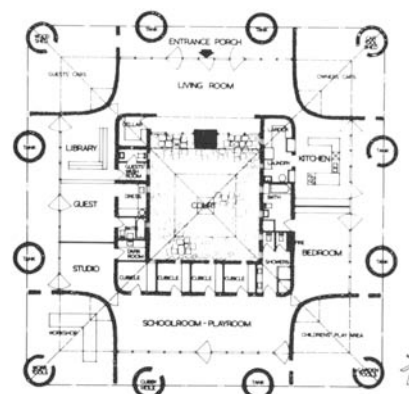


Figure 6 (left) Baker House.

Figure 7(right) Baker House floor plan. Source: Reproduced from Transition.

⁸ Phillip Goad, 'Robin Boyd and the Design of the House 1959-1971', *Transition no.38: Robin Boyd*, p. 165.

⁹ Phillip Goad, 'Robin Boyd and the Design of the House 1959-1971', *Transition no.38: Robin Boyd*, p. 165.

Another key Boyd house of the 1960s is the Featherston House, Ivanhoe (1968). It has a highly original and unique interior conceived as a series of free floating platforms above an internal garden. The whole of the living space was roofed in translucent fiberglass.



Figure 8 (left) The Featherston House interior

Figure 9 (right) Detail of a 'platform' in the Featherston House

Modernist Architecture in Frankston

Robin Boyd, writing in *Australia's Home*, identified an inventive, informal Mornington Peninsula architecture influenced by the region's tradition of holiday houses, light-weight timber construction and beachside setting:

*A bent isosceles triangle extending for some fifty miles, with the southern fringe of Melbourne's suburbs as its base, the Peninsula was the principal holiday resort for all classes of Melbourne's population for nearly a century. Its western foreshore to Port Phillip was also a testing ground for the most progressive moves in domestic building in Victoria. Nearly every architect of note who worked in Melbourne built a house there at some time, and in most cases allowed themselves to experiment, to be freer and easier than was their custom in the city...*¹⁰

The *City of Frankston Heritage Study* elaborates on this theme:

The building of holiday houses many of them designed by innovative architects continued in Frankston between the wars. The number of these houses increased in the 1950s and 1960s when the firm of Chancellor & Patrick designed several experimental modern holiday homes (and permanent homes) in Frankston but more especially in Mt. Eliza...

*...These modern holiday homes are amongst the truly distinctive buildings in Frankston. They are important for their links to innovative designers and to the established figures for whom they were often built.*¹¹

¹⁰ Robin Boyd, *Australia's Home*, 1961. pp.201-202.

¹¹ <http://www.frankston.vic.gov.au/fhs/stage1-vol-2/wavethree.htm>

Of the extant post-war modernist houses in Frankston Roy Ground's iconic Henty House is often regarded as the most significant and is recognised as being of state significance. The c1953-54 Chancellor house at 1 Gulls Way (HO18) is another important example. This house has an innovative design with inward sloping walls to maximise the floor area and entry of natural light. Also on Gulls Way is the Chancellor and Patrick designed *Tilba Tilba* (HO19). Arguably one of the most important examples of the firm's domestic work, this 1956 house has been unsympathetically altered by a relatively recent first floor addition.

The influence of Chancellor and Patrick is clearly evident in the somewhat derivative 1961 house design at 6 Handley Court Frankston (HO20) by architect John E Rouse. Like *Tilba Tilba*, its appearance has been marred by modern additions including a carport.



Figure 10 (left) *Henty House, c1952. Source: State Library of Victoria*



Figure 11 (right) *Tilba Tilba, c1960. Source: State Library of Victoria*

The 1961 *Angliss House* in Frankston South (HO32) by architects Perrot, Lyon Timlock & Kesa has a box like 'classical' Modernist expression distinct from the ground hugging forms adopted by Chancellor and Patrick and many other Peninsula architects. The Angliss house has a substantial modern double-storey additions which appears to be broadly sympathetic to the original design.



Figure 12 (left) *House, 6 Handley Court, Frankston*



Figure 13 (right) *Angliss House, Mount Eliza. Source: domain.com.au*

Robin Boyd is known to have contributed only two designs to this collection of modernist domestic architecture in Frankston: the former McClune house and the Kaye House, Nepean Highway, Oliver's Hill. Designed in 1965 and completed in 1966, the Kaye house clearly expresses its structure with massive timber beams supporting a deep cantilevered balcony.



*Figure 10 (left) The Kaye House as viewed from the Nepean Highway, c1966
Source: State Library of Victoria*



*Figure 11 (right) The cantilevered balcony at the rear of the Kaye House, c1966.
Source: State Library of Victoria*

Conclusion

The former McClune House exhibits many of the principle characteristics of Boyd's late domestic work, such as the notion of the 'controlling idea' and the frank expression of timber construction. However, it is not amongst the most innovative or important works in Boyd's oeuvre – it is a representative example rather than a ground breaking design.

Within the context of Frankston, the former McClune House forms part of an important group of modernist holiday homes and residences designed by leading architects of the 1950s and 1960s. It is also one of the most intact examples of this group surviving in Frankston and one of only two Robin Boyd house designs known to exist in the municipality.

7.0 Statement of Significance

What is Significant?

The former McClune House at 18 Marcus Road, Frankston South, was designed in 1967 for Mr and Mrs Ian McClune by architect Robyn Boyd and completed in 1968. It is a single-storey, timber-framed dwelling planned as a series of pavilions around a central courtyard. The entire house sits under a low-pitched hipped roof, which is structurally independent of the rooms below and open over the courtyard.

How is it Significant?

The former McClune House is of aesthetic and historical significance to the City of Frankston.

Why is it Significant?

Aesthetically, the former McClune House is significant as a fine and notably intact example of the residential work of Robin Boyd, one of the leading practitioners of modern architecture in post-war Melbourne. The house clearly demonstrates some of the major design themes in his late work, including the strong controlling idea of the dwelling as a series of pavilions under a parasol roof and the clear expression of its timber structure.

Historically, the former McClune House is significant for its associations with architect Robin Boyd who is well known as one of the most important and innovative Australian architects of his generation. The house is of additional historical significance as one of the architect designed dwellings which figure prominently in the post war development of Frankston.

8.0 Recommendations

It is recommended that the former McClune House at 18 Marcus Road, Frankston South, be added to the schedule of the Heritage Overlay under the Frankston Planning Scheme. The extent of the Heritage Overlay should comprise all of the land on the existing title. It would not be appropriate for the heritage overlay schedule to provide internal controls, external paint or tree controls for this place.

It is further recommended that a heritage assessment be prepared for the Robin Boyd designed Kaye House in order to determine the appropriateness of a heritage overlay control.

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Bryce Raworth has worked with issues relating to heritage and conservation since the mid-1980s, and has specialised in this area since establishing his own consultant practice in 1991. **Bryce Raworth Pty Ltd, Conservation•Urban Design**, provides a range of heritage services, including the assessment of the significance of particular sites, preparation of conservation analyses and management plans, design and/or restoration advice for interventions into significant buildings, and detailed advice regarding the resolution of technical problems relating to deteriorating or damaged building fabric.

Since 2004 Raworth has been a member of the Official Establishments Trust, which advises on the conservation and improvement of Admiralty House and Kirribilli House in Sydney and Government House and The Lodge in Canberra. As a member of the former Historic Buildings Council in Victoria, sitting on the Council's permit, planning and community relations committees, Raworth has been involved with the registration and permit processes for many registered historic buildings. In 1996 he was appointed an alternate member of the new Heritage Council, the successor the Historic Buildings Council, and in 1998 was made a full member. At present he provides regular advice to architects and private owners on technical, architectural and planning issues relative to the conservation and adaptation of historic buildings, and is occasionally called upon to provide expert advice before the VCAT. He is currently the conservation consultant for the cities of Melbourne and Stonnington and conservation consultant to the Melbourne Heritage Restoration Fund.

Bryce Raworth Pty Ltd is an office comprising four experienced staff plus support that has prepared conservation plans for a number of registered historic buildings, including Walter Burley Griffin's Essendon Incinerator. The company's experience with institutional buildings has led to preparation of conservation plans for the Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, Castlemaine Gaol, J Ward, Ararat, the former Russell Road Police Headquarters, Ballarat State Offices, Camberwell Court House, Shepparton Court House and the Mont Park asylum precinct.

With respect to historic precincts, the company has provided detailed advice towards the resolution of heritage issues along the Upfield railway line. The company is currently contributing to redevelopment plans for the former Coburg Prisons Complex (comprising Pentridge Prison and the Metropolitan Prison) and the former Albion Explosives Factory, Maribyrnong. In 1993 Bryce Raworth led a consultant team which reviewed the City of Melbourne's conservation data and controls for the CBD, and in 1997 **Bryce Raworth Pty Ltd** revised the former City of South Melbourne Conservation Study with respect to the area within the present City of Melbourne. The firm is currently undertaking heritage studies on behalf of the cities of Melbourne and Kingston and is completing documentation for significant heritage places and areas in the City of Stonnington

In recent years **Bryce Raworth Pty Ltd** has also provided documentation and advice during construction on the restoration of a number of key registered and heritage overlay buildings, including the Ebenezer Mission church and outbuildings, Antwerp, the former MMTB Building, Bourke Road West, Melbourne, the former Martin & Pleasance Building, 178 Collins Road, Melbourne, and the former Uniting Church, Howe Crescent, South Melbourne. At present the office is documenting substantial restoration works to the MOMA at Heide, Templestowe Road, Bulleen, to the Church of the Sacred Heart, Grey Road, St Kilda, and to the Coburg Prisons Complex (including the Pentridge Prison entry buildings and walls to Champ Road).