

Purcell House Statement of Significance

Heritage Place: 17 Hartlands Road, Ivanhoe East

PS ref no: HO210



What is Significant?

Purcell House at 17 Hartlands Road, Ivanhoe is significant to the City of Banyule. It was designed as a family home for Noel Brian Purcell and Margaret Therese Purcell in 1962 by Guilford Bell, then in partnership with Neil Clerehan (Bell & Clerehan). The house, carport and eastern boundary wall were constructed in 1963. At this time, Gordon Ford designed and laid out the front garden. Bell later designed the rear courtyard, including pool and changeroom, and east elevation canopy above the entrance when in solo practice in 1971.

The elements of significance are the H-shaped plan, the west-facing internal courtyard, flat roof and steel decking cladding, boxed eaves, timber-lined soffit, brick chimney, skylights, box gutters and concealed downpipes, walls of unpainted Monier Besser concrete blocks, timber pergola, all timber-framed external openings (sliding doors, fixed glazing), entrance door and cantilevered canopy, white painted/vine-covered brick wall to the east perimeter, and rear carport.

The original layout is generally significant, as are some internal finishes and elements – specifically mountain ash ceilings and walls of exposed concrete blocks or vertically laid timber boarding, and a coverable fireplace in the living room.

Also significant is the layout of the bush style front garden – namely, the arrangement of lawn, front and side boundary plantings, rockery situated forward of the dwelling's façade, and side-situated gravelled driveway. Some specific landscape elements are significant, particularly individual or grouped weathered boulders and the Spotted Gum (*Corymbia maculata*), flanked by Lemon-scented gums (*Corymbia citriodora*) situated to the front boundary. The pair of Lemon-scented gums to the west boundary of the front garden are contributory to the setting.

The rear courtyard, including swimming pool, paving, enclosing timber screen, and change room, are complementary to *Purcell House*.

Changes instigated by designers other than Bell are not significant, including contemporary additions to the 1971 changeroom at the rear of the site.

How is it Significant?

Purcell House is of local historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Banyule.

Why is it Significant?

Purcell House is of historical significance as a noteworthy residential design by the architect Guilford Bell, the elusive, pre-eminent practitioner of an urbane 'classical' modernism over the second half of the 20th century in Australia. While the commission of the clients, Noel and Margaret Purcell, for a family home was modest, the precisely resolved design that Bell produced was important in the arc of his career – showcasing Bell's then-ongoing commitment to domestic privacy, anonymous street frontages and repose. With its courtyards, bespoke landscaping, double carport, and the later addition of a swimming pool, the well-appointed house reflects the relative prosperity of the 1960s and the new lifestyle possibilities enabled by engagement with avant-garde design. At a broader scale, *Purcell House* is illustrative of the consolidation of Ivanhoe East over the 1960s as a focal point for the modern architecture in the municipality. (Criterion A)

Purcell House is of aesthetic significance as a remarkably intact and cohesive embodiment of the personalised design approach of the designer, Guilford Bell. Its elegant visual and rigidly formal plan demonstrate his distinctive integration of classical principles with a minimalist/modern sensibility, the visual outcome of which situated Bell well outside mainstream modernism in the early 1960s (and subsequently). An array of unusual attributes – the monumental character of the house, its sense of retreat and employment of a perimeter wall and courtyards – signal Bell's atypical source material, particularly his passion for traditional Middle Eastern architecture; while the classicised symmetry and restrained material palette of *Purcell House* also hint at colonial and neo-Georgian interests in purity and decorum. Geometric walls provide a backdrop for the bold bush-style garden and the interplay of line and plane. The considered interior illuminates Bell's belief in total design and the importance of refined spatial composition. The employment of modular dimensions for all openings at *Purcell House* is also quintessential Bell, fusing the indoors and outdoors. *Purcell House* is the only instance of Bell's essentially solo work in the municipality and, in any context, evocative of his *parti*. (Criterion E)

Primary source

Banyule Heritage Study 2020 (RBA Architects & Conservation Consultants)