

## Okalyi House Statement of Significance

<b>Heritage Place:</b> 66 Old Eltham Road, Lower Plenty	<b>PS ref no:</b> HO215
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### What is Significant?

*Okalyi House* at 66 Old Eltham Road, Lower Plenty is significant. It was designed by the architect Charles Duncan for husband-and-wife Zoltan Okalyi and Elizabeth Jane Okalyi and built between 1968 and 1970.

The significant elements are its U-shaped form, gabled roof, deep eaves, timber-lined soffit, central chimney, stained timber beams and rafters, variegated dark-brown brick walls, piers, obtuse-angled brick detailing, timber-framed and floor-to-ceiling windows, incorporated double carport, and slate-clad courtyard. The 'bushland' character of the garden, including the raised earth bank immediately east of the house, complements the overall aesthetic of *Okalyi House*.

Some original elements to the interior are also significant, specifically the pine-lined ceilings (raked and concealed), exposed brick walls, floors paved in slate, and brick fireplace,

Later addition elements are not significant.

### How is it Significant?

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

### Why is it Significant?

*Okalyi House* is of historical significance as an accomplished example of the neo-Wrightian organic design mode by the architect Charles Duncan. This approach evolved as a striking variant of Melbourne's modern movement, reflecting an aspiration among a relatively small group of architects to develop a regionalised, more humanist version of international modernism rooted in local landscapes and conditions. While Duncan was celebrated in his heyday, his role in advancing and popularising a convincing regional idiom in Melbourne is now less generally recognised. *Okalyi House*, awarded *The Age*/RAIA Citation (no 34) in 1972, provides a valuable opportunity to examine a largely intact and idiosyncratic example of Duncan's work. More broadly, the residence – with its focus on functional and flowing spaces, natural light, and enhanced indoor/outdoor relationships – reflects some of the major lifestyle shifts that defined its period. Noted landscape designer, Gordon Ford, was responsible for the original garden, and a 'bush style' character remains evident. (Criterion A)

*Okalyi House* is of aesthetic significance as a largely intact and outstanding instance of organic/regional modernism in Melbourne. Its horizontality and remarkable modular U-shaped form demonstrate the command exercised by its architect, Charles Duncan, over Wrightian principles and ability to reference 'natural' arrangements in built form and detail. The emphatic expression of load and support conveyed to the street by the cavernous carport is striking. Less noticeable, due to orientation and landscaping, is the deft contrast achieved between robustly massed and textured brick piers/return walls and expansive sections of full height windows. The ground-hugging quality of the dwelling, supported by its low gabled roof and extended eaves, and considered relationship with its landform, illustrates Duncan's desire to craft complete designs that sensitively anchored house to site – the building surfacing from the landscape rather than imposed on it. Reinforcing these aspects of the place are seamless transitions between inside and outdoor living spaces, especially the slate-paved courtyard and its limited 'earthy' material palette. (Criterion E)

### **Primary source**

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*Banyule Heritage Study 2020* (RBA Architects & Conservation Consultants)