

Willis House Statement of Significance

Heritage Place: 10 Gruyere Crescent, Ivanhoe East	PS ref no: HO209
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What is Significant?

Willis House at 10 Gruyere Crescent, Ivanhoe East is significant. The area remained essentially rural well into the 20th century and the site derives from the Charteris Estate subdivision of 1939, which was mostly developed after WWII. The extant house was constructed in 1950 as a family home for and likely by Albert Alexander Willis, to a design by the architect Robin Boyd, then in solo practice as well as directing the Small Homes Service. Albert and his wife, Rosalind, a singer, remained in residence into at least the late 20th century.

The significant elements are its cuboid form, including painted brick walls with extensive section of grille ('hit and miss') brickwork to the lower level of the façade, screened entry, stained timber boards to the entry canopy, large timber-framed windows, and timber front door. The small laundry block to the rear is also original and significant.

The cream-brick garage with concrete lintel, associated wall and timber pedestrian entry to the rear boundary along Gruyere Lane and cypress trees to the front west boundary both likely date to the late 1950s. These elements contribute to the significance of *Willis House*, as do key landscaping elements in the front gardens, such as the lava rocks – to both low retaining walls and garden bed edging – and random stone paving.

How is it Significant?

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

Why is it Significant?

Willis House is of historical significance as an early postwar design by Robin Boyd, one of postwar Australia's foremost architect and design commentators. Its 1950 construction in the southern reaches of Ivanhoe East foreshadowed the emergence of this locale – which had remained sparsely developed farmland into the postwar period – as a notable concentration of architect-designed modernist residences over the mid-to-late part of the 20th century. The circumstances of *Willis House*'s construction demonstrate the high cost and/or difficulty to procure labour in the years immediately following

the Second World War as it was likely constructed by its owner Albert Alexander Willis, a (former) Master Builder who at the time of purchase of the land in 1948 was employed as a leather merchant. (Criterion A)

Willis House is of aesthetic significance as a fine, earliest modernist house in the municipality. An array of its elements, such as its cuboid form, near-flat roof, partly screened entry, unusually extensive areas of glazing (near fully glazed band to the main level), restrained articulation and lack of decoration, represent a dramatic break with the mass of pre-war suburban housing characterised by pitched roof forms and elaborately detailed exteriors. The design also takes considered advantage of its site and location – a prerequisite of good modernist design – in that, while south-facing, there are large windows with minimal framing divisions to the front living areas that capture fine views of the river valley opposite. (Criterion E)

Primary source

Banyule Heritage Study 2020 (RBA Architects & Conservation Consultants)