EDELSTEIN RESIDENCE

Address	13 Seymour Road, Elsternwick
Significance	Local
Construction Dates	1974
Period	Post-WWII
Date Inspected	Late 2019

Statement of Significance

What is Significant?
The Edelstein Residence at 13 Seymour Road, Elsternwick, is significant to the City of Glen Eira, including its exterior, front fence and wall and general landscaping.

How is it Significant?
The Edelstein Residence at 13 Seymour Road, Elsternwick, is of historical and aesthetical significance to the City of Glen Eira.

Why is it Significant?
The Edelstein Residence at 13 Seymour Road, Elsternwick, is of historical significance as a fine example of a Modernist house constructed in 1974 to the design of Kenneth H Edelstein. It illustrates the continued presence of progressive architecture in the municipality across the post-WWII period, which forms a condensed but important layer of development for the suburb, as well as the sustained attraction of Seymour Road for high-end residential design. (Criterion A)

The Edelstein Residence at 13 Seymour Road, Elsternwick, is of aesthetic significance as a fine and highly intact example of 1970s Modernist architecture with a purposefully discreet streetscape presence. Low lying and cuboid in form, it exemplifies the shift in Modernist approach during this period towards a more subdued presence due to its restrained material palette and

articulation. Its modulated configuration cannot be readily appreciated from the public realm due to its largely concealed presentation to the street, including the low garden fence and high garage courtyard wall, both constructed from relatively small exposed concrete blocks. These elements combined with the screening effect of the front garden, form important elements of its overall design. (Criterion E)

Description

The single storey and low-scale house is situated on a moderately sized (approx. 737m^2) and flat allotment. Indicative of Modernist designs, the residence's streetscape presence is purposefully muted, with sight lines to the building obscured by a high front wall and landscaping. As such, this description relies partly upon the submitted floor plans, contemporary aerial photographs and other documentary material.[1]

The house is well setback from Seymour Road with a rectangular footprint in the main and an overall cuboid form. It has a flat roof clad in metal sheeting with a low horizontal profile, wide timber fascias and concealed gutters. Walls consist of full height glazing alternating with square concrete blocks. The location and configuration of glazed walls as well as internal spaces is dictated by its south facing orientation so that there are no windows to the street. Its side elevations (not visible from the public realm) have full-height sliding windows and doors with a distinct vertical emphasis.
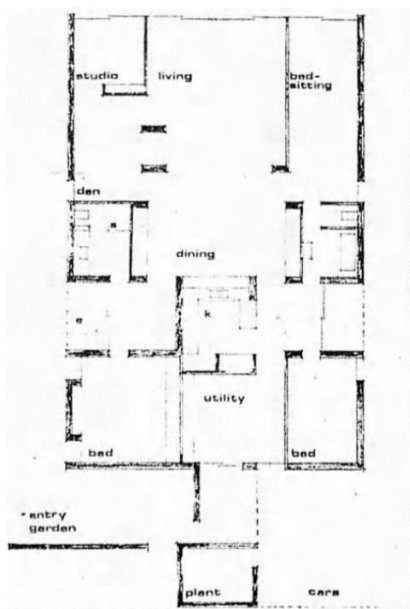
Conceptual plan for 13 Seymour Road
Note configuration of internal spaces
(Source: *Age,* 24 June 1974, p13)

The elements of the subject building which are indicative of the Modernist style are the use of cubic/geometric forms and fully glazed walls, reinforcing the relationship between the exterior and interior of the building.[2] Internally, an open-plan configuration and flexible living spaces are evident. By the 1960s, local architects such as Edelstein had adopted a more subdued approach to Modernism, and softer textured surfaces and a sense of privacy from the street were fundamental to residential Modernist architecture.[3] This group of architects included Neil Clerehan, Guildford Bell and David McGlashan, who all worked in a similarly refined mode, often for affluent clients. As noted by Philip Goad, 'Common to all was skill in meticulous detailing, a quest for

---

1   '13 Seymour Road', circa 2019, realeaste.com.au, accessed 12 August 2019
2   Modernism was inspired by the declarations of the *Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne* (international congress of modern architecture, CIAM), an organisation of prominent architects – dominated by Le Corbusier – active in Europe between 1928-56. Adopted internationally (hence, often referred to as the International Style in Australia), it was originally characterised by the rejection of historical associations, employment of planar forms and embracement of non-traditional materials. Several strands evolved. By the late 20th century, it could also refer to design that referenced historic examples of modernism.
3   Philip Goad (curator), *Notable and Modern: Postwar Domestic Architecture in the City of Glen Eira*, catalogue [exhibition held at Glen Eira Art Gallery], 2001. The Edelstein was featured in this exhibition.

restraint and simple sparse furnishings, and delight in the essential qualities of building materials.'[4] At the subject site, this approach is evident in the use of exposed concrete block - but here articulated as smaller square blocks than the standard rectangular size - and screen walls to the front of the site, which also reflect the influence of another contemporary strand of modernism – Brutalism – in which concrete (and/or brown or tan bricks) was favoured in conjunction with bold forms and often extensive areas of blank wall.

Although the interior of the subject place has not been investigated and internal heritage controls are not proposed, its original spatial arrangement, circulatory pattern and various details are acknowledged as integral to the design of the house.

The floor plan is for the most part symmetrical and revolves around a central living area that comprises a kitchen, studio, dining area and living room. The north elevation is fully glazed and opens on to an outdoor area to the rear of the site. The outdoor space is comprised of paved and grassed areas and a pool in the north-west corner of the site. Bedrooms, bathrooms and a study are located to the east and west sides of the central living area.

The internal wall configuration enables the central living area to function as a flexible space. Strategically placed partition walls, create smaller activity spaces while maintaining sightlines to indoor as well outdoor living space. Visual connectivity and a continuity of space is maintained throughout the building, reinforced by the use of exposed concrete block for both the external and internal walls. The overall effect has been described as 'a subtle and sophisticated design, with a feeling of quiet repose'.[5]

Similar to the house, the high front boundary walls and lower fence all are of concrete block, with square relatively small blocks and a narrow coping block. There is also a slatted timber pedestrian gate to the fence and wide solid/sliding gate to the wall, which leads to an enclosed courtyard. A paved pathway leads to the informal entry at the north end of the high screen wall, and the formal entry to the west side of the building.[6] The high front wall returns to intersect with a small utility room, and delineates the extent of the paved courtyard area in the south-east corner of the site. The metal-clad roof of the utility room cantilevers to form the double carport.

The originality or otherwise of front garden landscaping is not known. However, contemporary coverage of the design notes the presence of a 'native' garden that was intended to 'soften' the purposeful starkness of the house.

Street elevation
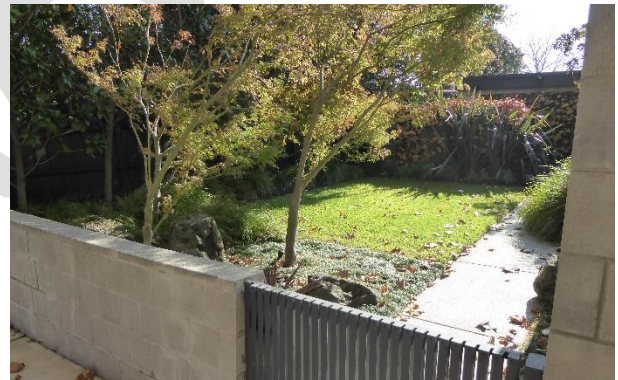
Street facing entry and garden

---

4   Philip Goad, 'The Modern House in Melbourne 1945-1975', PhD thesis, University of Melbourne [Dept of Architecture and Building], 1992, chpt 6, p56
5   P Goad (curator), *Notable and Modern: Postwar Domestic Architecture in the City of Glen Eira*, catalogue [exhibition held at Glen Eira Art Gallery], 2001, np
6   Goad, *Notable and Modern: Postwar Domestic Architecture in the City of Glen Eira*, np

Street facing entry garden and high concrete screen

High wall to garage courtyard and view over flat roofs

A recent and sympathetic addition has been constructed to the rear north-west corner of the building, extending the building and roof towards the east boundary.[7]

History

The subject place formed part of Crown Allotment 262 of the Parish of Prahran, its 19 acres (approximately 7.6 ha) granted to John Mullaly by 1857.[8] This area was located immediately south of Glen Eira Road – one of the earliest established thoroughfares in the district, increasingly referred to as 'Elsternwick' from the 1850s[9] – on land that was described in early surveys as 'heath'.[10]

While initially situated on the periphery of suburban Melbourne, beyond the more settled environs of Prahran and St Kilda, the ready availability of considerable allotments in Elsternwick and the early private establishment of its railway station (1859) proved attractive to the genteel and affluent. Alongside dairies and market gardens, a patchwork of prestige estates, 'private houses of a superior character standing in pleasure grounds',[11] were erected from the 1860s. The government takeover of the railway line (1878), which improved services, and speculative activities of the land boom stimulated a more intensive phase of subdivision and development in the suburb over the 1880s. Along the major roads and across the former grounds of handsome mansions, rows of generally high-quality detached houses multiplied and dedicated shopping strips emerged. Following the general building hiatus of the 1890s Depression, a decidedly middle-class suburb consolidated with little unused land available by the early 1930s.[12] While infill and redevelopment was relatively limited in post-WWII period Elsternwick, where it did occur it often reflected the contemporary Modernist aesthetic, which is a noteworthy subtheme in the development of the municipality.

In 1882, the entire Crown Allotment was acquired by the National Land Company and in September of that year consolidated with Allotment 263 (also previously owned by Mullaly), establishing a large stretch of property between Orrong and Kooyong Road. A few years later, the subject allotment was demarcated from several lots and purchased by the Royal Permanent Building Society in 1885.[13] By 1900, this section of Seymour Road had consolidated into a streetscape of high-quality Italianate style villas, including the substantial residence of *St Lawrence* (demolished/now part of Harleston Park). In line with this development, a freestanding brick house had been erected at the subject allotment in by the late 1880s.[14] Its footprint is depicted below in the 1902 MMBW plan.

---

7   Stephen Crafti, *Elsternwick House*, Berton Design, 2019
8   Irish-born, Mullaly had immigrated to Melbourne in 1840, eventually becoming a senior officer within Customs House as well as establishing his own firm: 'Mullaly and Byrne'. ('Shipping', *Age*, 5 March 1867, p4; and 'Government Land Sale', *Herald*, 17 September 1868, p3); and *Part of the Parish of Prahran*, Department of Crown Lands and Survey, 1857, SLV, <http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/123955>, accessed 17 June 2019
9   The designation of 'Elsternwick' likely derives from the combination of either a local creek (now Elwood Canal) and/or the name of an early cottage – *Elster* (the German word for magpie) – with the Old English word for village, *Wick*; a reference to the survey of a township in 1856 near the corner of Glen Huntly Road and the Nepean Highway. (Jill Barnard, 'Elsternwick', *eMelbourne*, School of Historical & Philosophical Studies, The University of Melbourne, July 2008, accessed <http://www.emelbourne.net.au/biogs/EM00436b.htm>, accessed 17 June 2019)
10   *Plan of portions marked in the Parish of Prahran*, Melbourne, Surveyor General Office, 1853, SLV
11   Andrew Garran, *Picturesque atlas of Australasia*, Sydney, Picturesque Atlas Publishing Company, 1888, p148
12   Peter Murray and John C Wells, *From sand, swamp and health: a history of Caulfield*, Blackburn, J & D Burrows for City of Caulfield, 1980, p110
13   Certificate of Title, vol. 1396, folio 140; and Certificate of Title, vol. 1388, folio 499
14   Review of *Sand and McDougall Directory editions*, 1885-90
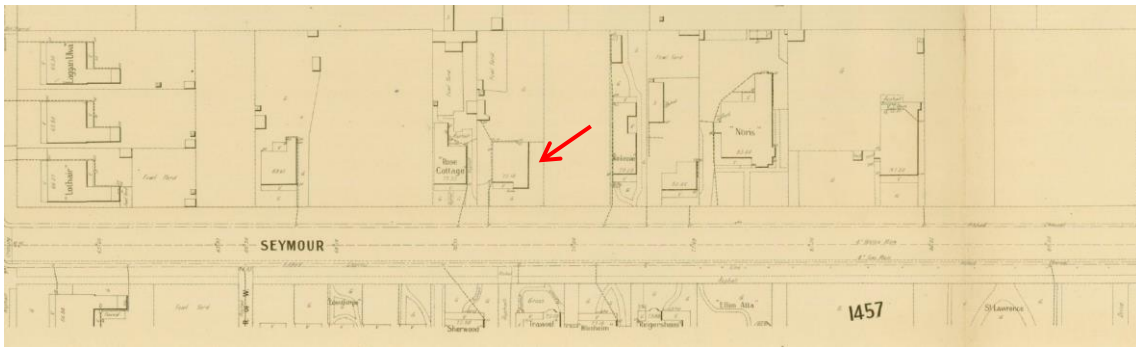
MMBW detail plan no. 1456, Caulfield
Seymour Road as developed by 1902, subject site is indicated
(Source: SLV)

The property passed through a series of owners before, in July 1969, it was acquired by Ronald and Beverley Edelstein.[15]
The following year, plans for a new single storey brick house were lodged with Council (August 1970). The design was prepared
by architect Ken H. Edelstein, then resident of nearby 46 Seymour Road, and likely the young brother of the site's owner.[16] In
1974, this house (existing) was constructed by builder, G W Edwards, as per the submitted design.[17]

The son of Polish immigrants, who had arrived in Australia during the 1930s, Kenneth H Edelstein (1941–) graduated in
architecture from the Royal Melbourne Institute for Technology in 1969. Previously, he had gained experience working on design
projects for multiple architectural firms, including Romberg and Boyd (1963-64) and Bates Smart and McCutcheon (1965-66) as
well as in London.[18] By 1970, Edelstein had established a private practice, with a focus on residential work. Two of his designs
from this period – *Muller House* (Flowerdale, 1974) and *Buckle House* (Kew, 1974) – were identified soon after as exemplars of
Modernist domestic design in Melbourne.[19] Between 1978-81, Edelstein operated as a partner for Romberg and Boyd, before
again returning to private practice. His work during this time spanned the eastern seaboard, with notable projects including the
Aboriginal Museum/Bangerang Culture Centre (Shepparton, VIC, with Romberg and Boyd, 1980), *Howarth Farmhouse* (Wyong,
NSW, 1980), *Jager House* (Lilydale, VIC, 1981), Cranbourne Police Station (VIC, 1981), Cashmore Apartments (Melbourne
1999) and various works at Flemington Racecourse (Grandstand with Buchan Group, 2000). Edelstein was also the architect for
the Victorian Racing Club between 1992-2001.[20]

15   Certificate of Title, volume 6248, folio 484
16   Glen Eira Building Files, August 1970, permit no. 39689; Ronald and Ken Edelstein's birthdates ('Ronald Edelstein', *JewishGen
        Online Worldwide Burial Registry*, accessed via ancestry.com)
17   John Barker, 'The Age – RAIA Citation Award No. 28', *Age,* 24 June 1974, p13
18   Specifically, for Sir Basil Spence on The Hyde Park Cavalry Barracks in London (1967-68)
19   Norman Day, *Modern Houses Melbourne*, Armadale, VIC, Brian Zouch Publications, 1976, pp124-26
20   Goad, *Notable and Modern: Postwar Domestic Architecture in the City of Glen Eira*, np
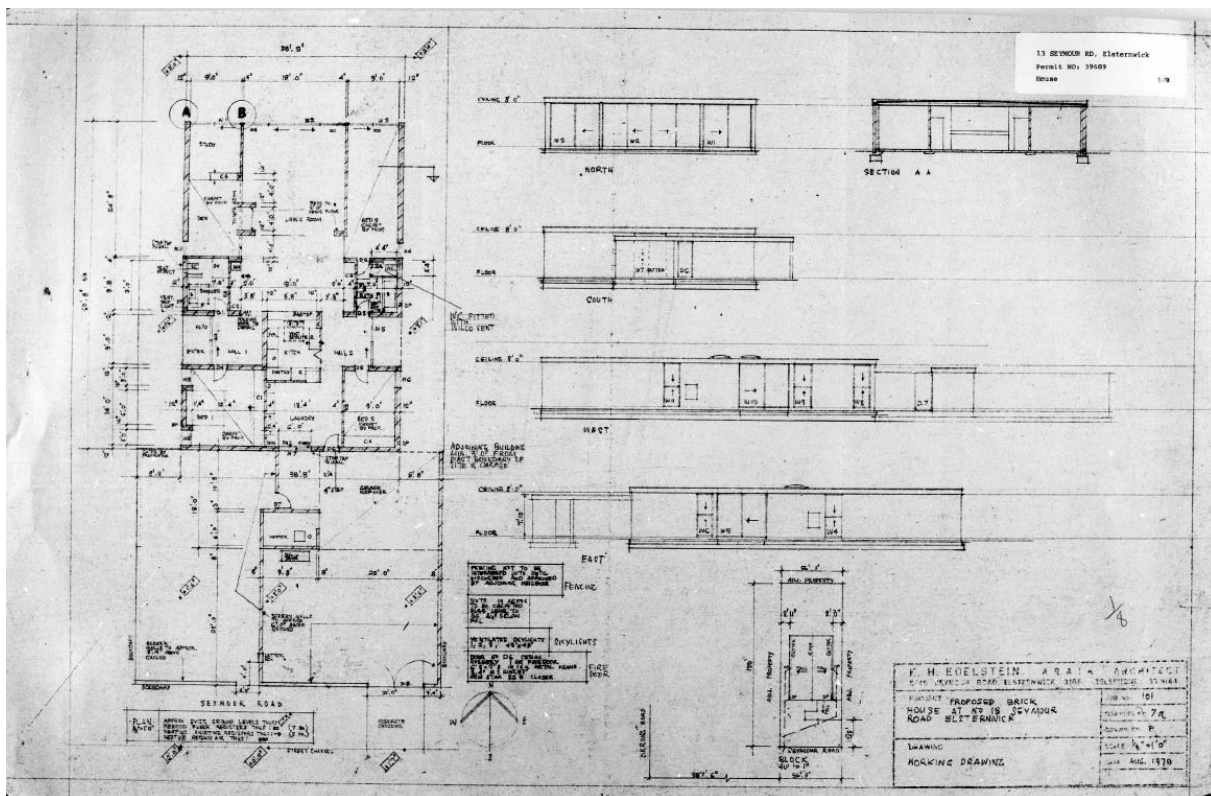
'Working drawing' – K H Edelstein
(Source: Glen Eira Building Files, permit no. 39689)

Edelstein's design at the subject place occurred within a broad and, of late, increasingly recognised theme of progressive architecture which was in operation across the municipality during the post-WWII period. While predominantly associated with Melbourne's eastern suburbs, Modernism also formed a key thread in the development of the City of Glen Eira, particularly Elsternwick and Caulfield proper, between the 1950s and 1970s. As architectural historian Phillip Goad makes clear, the district was not just a 'safe haven for the speculative house builder'. Crucial to the introduction of non-traditional design into the area was the influx of Jewish residents from the Interwar period, many of whom were immigrants and familiar with European examples of Modernism. This provided commissions for émigré architects (many of whom were themselves Jewish) as well as progressive Australian-born designers and practices. Professional and societal interests in new forms and Modernism, as well as an exploration of the small houses (underset by the longstanding fascination with the design of the 'ideal home'), underscored the emergence of a distinctive layer of architecture in the municipality, ranging from freestanding houses to walk-up flats, units and townhouses.[21]

At completion, Edelstein's design for 13 Seymour Road was presented with a 'Citation Award' (no. 28) from the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA). The accompanying article in the *Age* included an interview with Edelstein, which provides insight into his design philosophy at the subject place, as well as a description of the dwelling:

The fault with a lot of modern houses is that they have too many rooms. This is the opinion of Ken Edelstein, who believes "the trend towards providing a separate room for each activity is wasteful and not conducive to an integrated family life-style… With this degree of compartmentisation a house becomes simply a collection of small cubicles and one seldom gets the opportunity of enjoying a large space." Mr. Edelstein demonstrates what can be achieved with open planning in a house designed to take advantage of a typical suburban block.

Because the block faced south it was necessary to reverse the conventional placement of living and service areas to take advantage of the sun. The entry from the side leads directly into the large central living space opening on to an outdoor living area at the rear of the block. Smaller pockets of space including a den and a studio open off the living-dining area to create a fluid space with solid pillars of concrete blockwork acting as screening elements.

There are relatively few walls or doors in the plan and no passageways. Privacy is achieved by careful juxtapositioning of the rooms …. The house is essentially multi-purpose in its concept, allowing a flexibility of life-style and furniture arrangement. It is planned to be experienced

---

[21]   Goad comments, 'Such domestic architecture, gleaming, 'maintenance-free', and decidedly non-referential in its language and forms, must have at the time, seemed almost alien in the otherwise conventional suburban setting'. (*Notable and Modern: Postwar Domestic Architecture in the City of Glen Eira*, np)

as a whole for all major activities …. Externally the house presents a blank façade with high block walls enclosing a drying area and double carport …. From the street the flat roof-concrete-slab construction achieves a stark, low profile design softened by native landscaping in the front courtyards.[22]
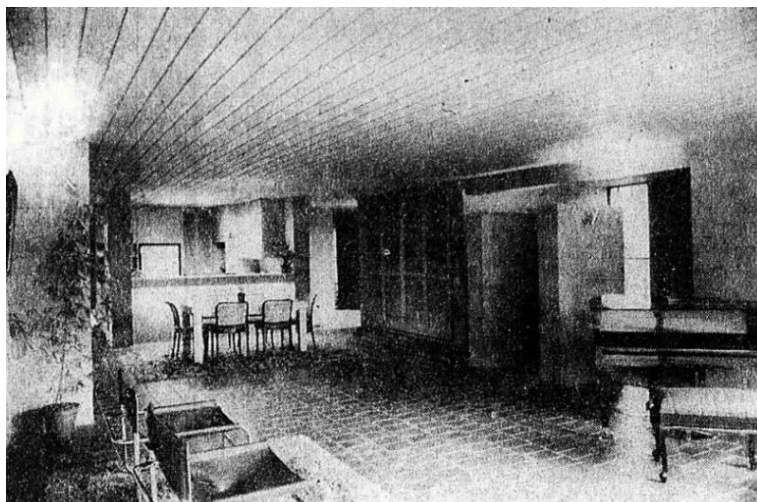
Photograph of the living room interior
Note quarry tiles and stained pine ceiling
(Source: *Age,* 24 June 1974, p13)

Extract from RAIA article
(*Age,* 24 June 1974, p13)

In the wake of Ronald's death in 1995, Beverley remained in occupation until 2001.[23]

Around 2015, new owners undertook a program of sympathetic internal additions and alterations.[24]

Thematic Context/Comparative Analysis

City of Glen Eira Heritage Management Plan – vol. 1 (Historical Background):

- Epilogue (1940s onwards)

Known comparable places in the City of Glen Eira
Only two other Modernist houses have individual overlays however a project is underway to review the heritage value of other houses built after WWII across the municipality. The Fooks house provides the closest comparison. Two others sites in the vicinity are also recommended for a heritage overlay, both of which reflect different contemporary design idioms.

- *Lind House*, 450 Dandenong Road, Caulfield North (HO155/VHR 2387) – built approximately 15 years earlier that the subject place, during 1954-55, the two storey dwelling has an undercroft part supported on piloti with a butterfly roof that extends forward with a wide soffit. Externally it is cream brick with sections of random stone cladding, vertical timber battens and navy spandrel glass panes.

- *Ernest Fooks House*, 32 Howitt Road, Caulfield North (HO150/VHR 2191) – erected five years or so earlier than the subject place, being designed in 1964 and completed in 1966. The single storey house has a blank presentation to the street with a car port to the front. The walls are of tan brick and the roof is flat with a clerestory section.

- Elevated Townhouses at 23 Seymour Road, Elsternwick (recommended for a HO) – designed in 1973 by Harold D Schaffer, the building consists of eight conjoined residences. More Brutalist in style, its dramatic design, which includes a varying series of narrow, projecting hood windows, is widely visible from the street.

---

22   John Barker (Director RAIA, Victorian Chapter, Housing Service), 'Open planning avoids waste of precious living space', *Age*, 24 June 1974, p13
23   Certificate of Title, vol. 6248, folio 484; 'Ronald Edelstein', *JewishGen Online Worldwide Burial Registry*, accessed via ancestry.com
24   Stephen Crafti, 'Elsternwick House', Berton Design, 5 March 2015, <http://bertondesign.com.au/portfolio-item/elsternwick-house/>, accessed 12 August 2019

- Three units at 38 Prahran Grove, Elsternwick (recommended for a HO) – designed in 1966 by David Godsell in a Wrightian mode with a hipped roof, these buildings are also similarly blank to the street. A long highlight window is articulated to the public/driveway zone with a series of narrow full height windows defining the courtyard elevations. Textured concrete bricks provide a rugged external expression and cantilevered carport awnings provide a restrained alternative to the typical approach to vehicular protection.

Condition
Good

Integrity
Largely intact

Previous Assessment
N grade (not significant) – Andrew Ward, *City of Caulfield Urban Conservation Study*, field survey sheet 13, 1996

Heritage Overlay Schedule Controls
External Paint Controls	No
Internal Alteration Controls	No
Tree Controls	No
Outbuildings and/or Fences	No

Extent of Heritage Overlay
The proposed extent of the heritage overlay would be the parcel of land associated with 13 Seymour Road, Elsternwick.

Recommended extent of heritage overlay
(Source: Nearmap, depicting February 2019)