

Statement of Significance: Popper House & Gordonlea Flats, 61-63 Gordon Street, Elsternwick

Date of Statement: August 2020

Address:	61-63 Gordon Street, Elsternwick	Name:	Popper House and <i>Gordonlea Flats</i>
Place Type:	Residential building (private)	Grading:	Significant
PS ref no:	HO227	Constructed:	1956



Photograph by Built Heritage Pty Ltd, October 2019

What is significant?

The residential complex at 61-63 Gordon Street, Elsternwick, comprises a two-storey dwelling (No 63) and an adjacent two-storey L-shaped block of flats (No 61), consistently expressed with stepped façades, plain cream brickwork, low skillion roofs and large window bays. It was designed in 1956 by Austrian émigré architect Kurt Popper to provide a residence for his own family, with the adjacent flats as an investment.

The significant fabric is defined as the exterior of both buildings and the brick boundary wall.

How is it significant?

The complex satisfies the following criteria for inclusion on the heritage overlay schedule to the City of Glen Eira planning scheme:

- Criterion E: Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.
- Criterion F: Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.
- Criterion H: Special association with the life or works of a person, or groups of persons, of importance in our history.

Why is it significant?

The house and flats are aesthetically significant as a distinctive example of post-WW2 modernism. Considered as a cohesive single development, the two components display a consistent modernist expression of stark volumetric massing, planar walls, wide window bays and low skillion roofs with broad timber-lined eaves. At the same time, undue repetition is avoided, so that the house and the flats remain readily interpreted as two related but separate buildings. While the entire complex is characterised by a minimalism that hints at the architect's European background, the single dwelling to the north, which was his own residence, is granted emphasis with eye-catching feature walls of random stonework and dark-coloured brick. (*Criterion E*)

The house and flats are architecturally significant for their innovative design and planning. Described on the working drawings as a "maisonette and six flats", this unusual combination of a large but compact single family dwelling with an attached block of lettable flats represented a major departure from established traditions of multi-unit living in Melbourne. Slightly predating a building of similar concept at 218 Kooyong Road, Caulfield (Winston Hall Associates, 1957-59), this distinctive residential development represented a hybrid typology that was rarely seen in the study area the 1950s and remained uncommon even into the 1960s. (*Criterion F*)

The house and flats are historically significant for associations with Austrian émigré architect, who conceived them as a residence for his own family with a lettable investment property alongside. Popper, who began private practice in Melbourne in 1946, became sought-after as a designer of residential projects for fellow European émigré clients, and is acknowledged as a leading exponent of higher-density living in Melbourne (ultimately designing some of the first highrise apartment blocks in the CBD and inner suburbs). His own house in Gordon Street, where he lived for more than four decades before his death in 2000, provides evidence of the significant local presence of a resident architect who undertook a notable amount of work in what is now the City of Glen Eira (and especially Caulfield and Elsternwick), while the adjacent *Gordonlea* flats represents one of Popper's earliest (of many) multi-unit projects in the municipality. (*Criterion H*)

Primary sources

Heritage Citation PW12, *City of Glen Eira Post-war & Hidden Gems Heritage Review 2020, Stage 2: Citations*, prepared by Built Heritage Pty Ltd.