

Place name:	Cameron Residence (former)
Address:	43 Woolart Street, Strathmore
Place typology:	Residential
Construction date range:	1965
Architectural style:	Post-War Modernist
Assessment:	Built Heritage Pty Ltd, May 2022
Recommendation:	To be included in the schedule to the heritage overlay

Photos of place:



43 Woolart Street, Strathmore. Photographs by Built Heritage Pty Ltd, May 2022

Statement of Significance:

What is significant?

43 Woolart Street, Strathmore, is a two-storey flat-roofed post-war modernist clinker brick house on an elevated site, with an integrated garage at the lower level. It was erected in 1965 for Iain and Jillian Cameron, to a design by architect Ian F Napier.

The significant features of the house include:

- The stark expression of bold rectilinear massing and chunky piers in clinker brickwork
- The full-height window bays opening onto a cantilevered balcony with timber plank balustrade

How is it significant?

43 Woolart Street, Strathmore, is of local architectural significance to the City of Moonee Valley.

Why is it significant?

43 Woolart Street, Strathmore, is significant as an excellent and intact example of an architect-designed modernist house of the mid-1960s. Its bold rectilinear massing, its broad-eaved flat roof, stark brick walls and large windows are all characteristic of that style and period. Unusually at the local level, the house also demonstrates the pervasive influence of Frank Lloyd Wright in its use of chunky brick piers and a horizontal timber plank balustrade to the balcony. The exterior of the house remains in a substantially intact state, with a modest rear addition that is not visible from the street. (Criterion E)

Description:

The former Cameron Residence at 43 Woolart Street, Strathmore, is a post-war modernist dwelling on a sloping site, with a partial lower level to the right (north) side. The house is of clinker brick construction and has a flat roof with wide eaves and a plain timber fascia. The street facade is asymmetrical, dominated by a wide projecting mass of windowless brickwork, containing a fireplace. This off-centre element is flanked on the left (south) side by a narrow brick bay with a full-height window and on the right (north) side by a wider bay with a recessed wall of horizontal timber boards, containing glazed double doors that open onto a balcony with a prominent balustrade of black-painted timber planks. The main entry to the house is on the north side, set into a deeply recessed alcove at the lower level.

Set back from the street on its elevated site, the house is enhanced by its setting which includes an excavated concrete-paved driveway with retaining walls of volcanic rock. There is a lower retaining wall, of coursed bluestone blocks along the front property line, and a plinth-like letter box of red brick construction.

History:

Contextual History

City of Moonee Valley occupies part of the Traditional lands of the Wurundjeri-willam clan of the Woi-wurrung people. Many sites in the area now known as City of Moonee Valley show evidence of Woi-wurrung activities and spiritual connections. Fish were trapped in the rivers and creeks, stone was quarried from the river edges, murnong daisy was collected and kangaroos hunted across grassland areas, and bark was harvested from trees in the river valleys. This relationship between the Woi-wurrung and the land, water, animals and plants, continues to this day (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.29).

The first Europeans to explore the area known as Moonee Valley was a surveyor, Charles Grimes in 1803. In 1836, settlers moving from Van Diemen's Land crossed the area in the hope of finding empty, cheap and plentiful land for sheep. By 1842, surveyors had created the first map of the Parish of Doutta Galla and then Woi-wurrung lands were offered for sale by the British Crown to Europeans (noting that the land was never ceded). The Wurundjeri were moved

off their land which had a profound impact on their culture, health and language. By 1860, the entire parish was sold (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.32-33).

Early development of the area began with the goldrush period of the 1850s which saw Mount Alexander Road used as a thoroughfare to the diggings with over 30,000 people estimated as moving along the dirt road each week. Businesses and shops sprang up providing sustenance, transport and accommodation to service the passing gold rush trade. Some very early wayside hotels and shops still survive from this period (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p. 51-54). After the heady days of the goldrush, the 1860s saw Essendon, Ascot Vale, Moonee Ponds and Flemington develop into permanent townships. The development of railways by private companies gave huge impetus to suburban development of the area with the opening of the Essendon railway in 1860. The government purchased the line in 1868. Suburban trains terminated at Essendon and it wasn't until 1889 that Ascot Vale, Moonee Ponds and Newmarket stations were completed. By 1893 stations opened at Strathmore and Pascoe Vale and in 1922 Glenbervie Station opened. The railways provided an enormous boost to residential development along the line and those who had previously moved to areas without trains, now clamoured for them (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.59).

By the 1880s Essendon had become a Borough and by 1891 had a population of 14,411. Many subdivisions occurred during the land boom of the 1880s and many failed to eventuate due to the depression of the 1890s. In the interwar period a boom in subdivision and residential infill occurred in Travancore, Essendon, Ascot Vale, Strathmore and Moonee Ponds, which was focused on new transport routes along the tram lines, first established to Essendon in 1905. In 1919 the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board was formed and lines were extended and improved. The tram lines saw development occur either side of Maribyrnong Road, further along Mt Alexander Road, Buckley Street and Keilor Road (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.65-68, p.115).

Education was an important consideration in the development of the municipality, with schools having been established in Essendon and Flemington in the 1850s. The development of State schools in the area reflects the major phases of education and includes a number of 'firsts'; the first non-denominational school in Victoria was set up in Essendon in 1850, the first purpose-built infants school in the state was set up in 1902, and Essendon High School was the first purpose-built high school in the Melbourne metropolitan area. Denominational schools were also set up in the area in the early 1850s, with more private schools established during the boom period of the 1880s. Residents wanted a better life than the one most had left behind in Britain, including a good education for their children (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.157-161).

In the three decades after the Second World War, Melbourne's suburbs ballooned outward to cater for post-war migration, the baby boom, an increasing need for new housing, and a more car-centred economy. Areas to the north of Essendon had been open paddocks in 1945, but by 1950 the Shire of Keilor found themselves with a developing suburb with no name. It was later called Niddrie. Similarly, Airport West was developing quickly with houses being built before the roads. By 1964 it was claimed that Airport West had the cheapest cream brick veneers in Melbourne (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.120-121). Many houses in these post-war areas were austere weatherboard or brick veneer bungalows, with a few scattered architect-designed or project homes on new blocks, particularly along the Boulevard in Aberfeldie. These post-war housing areas were car-centred communities located close to industry along Keilor Road, Matthews Avenue around Essendon Airport and East Keilor. By 1960 Airport West had its first hotel, the famous Skyways Hotel and then in the 1970s the first shopping centre, owned by Westfield, was begun (heritage ALLIANCE, *Gap Heritage Study*, 2005: p.28-30).

Post-war housing pressure also saw a huge investment by the Housing Commission of Victoria who developed 150 bungalows in concrete, weatherboard and brick in Aberfeldie. They then began an ambitious estate of houses and flats on a 77 acre site at Ascot Vale in 1949. These low-rise walk-up flats eventually gave rise to the high-rise flats of Flemington which opened in June 1965 (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.123).

Many post-war migrants bought or built houses in the outer areas of the municipality, close to employment and industry and where new, cheaper housing was readily available. These developments and public housing in Aberfeldie, Ascot Vale and Flemington have had a long-lasting effect on the nature of the Moonee Valley community which today is one of the most diverse and vibrant in Melbourne (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.124).

Place history

The house at 43 Woolart Street, Strathmore, was erected in 1965 for Iain and Jillian Cameron, to a design by architect Ian F Napier.

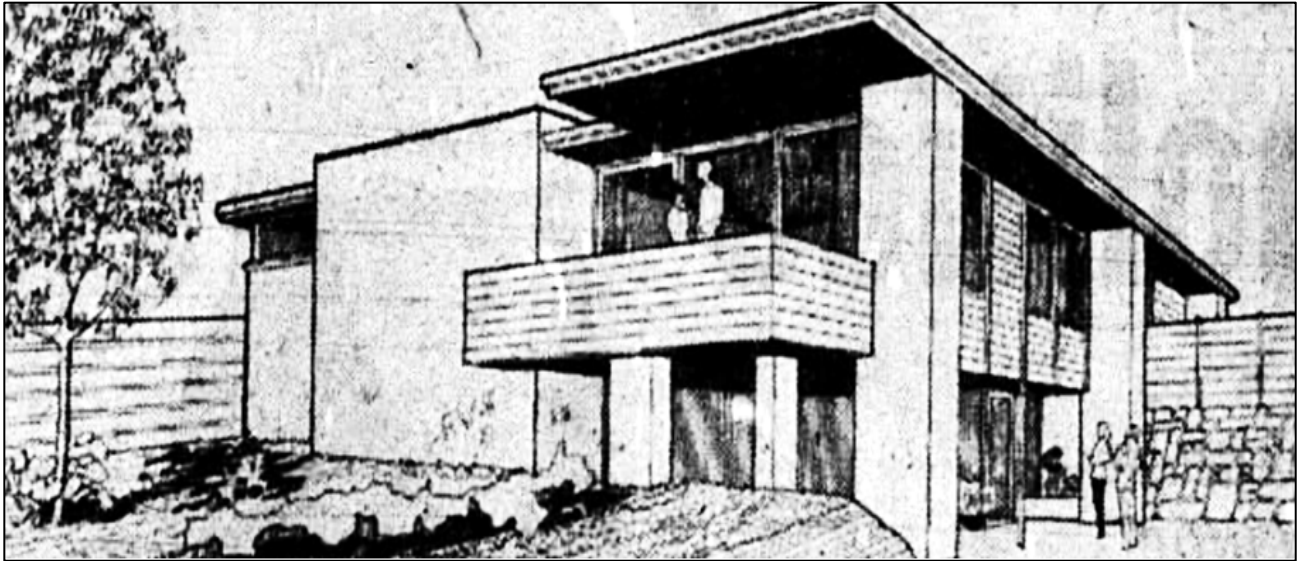
An industrial chemist by profession, Iain Cameron resided with his parents in Williamstown prior to his marriage to Jillian Fay Mason, a builder's daughter from Essendon. In August 1964, some time prior to the wedding, the couple acquired the title to a vacant block of land in Woolart Street, Strathmore, on which they intended to build their new marital home (Certificate of Title, 8425/590). The sloping and somewhat awkward-shaped block constituted Lot 49 of a large residential subdivision, the *Strathmore Heights Estate*, which had been developed and sold off in several stages from 1962, when it was loftily (if inaccurately) promoted as "the only remaining subdivision in the metropolitan area" (*Age*, 16 February 1962, p. 9).

To design their new house, the Camerons turned to architect Ian Napier, who was Jillian Cameron's brother-in-law. Napier (born 1938) had studied at RMIT and the Melbourne University Architectural Atelier in the 1950s, but did not graduate. As a student, he worked for several architectural practices including Richard Berryman, Oakley & Parkes and the office of J Dale Fisher. In the early 1960s, Napier commenced practice under his own name, although did not become registered as an architect until 1965. By then, he had already completed several commissions, including his own house in Ringwood North and another for his father-in-law, builder A D Mason, in Essendon. The later 1960s saw Napier design a string of houses that were published in newspapers and magazines. During the 1970s and '80s, Napier embraced other types of work, including office buildings and small shopping centres. He gradually withdrew from architectural practice to become a well-known painter, exhibiting frequently from the late 1980s to the present day.

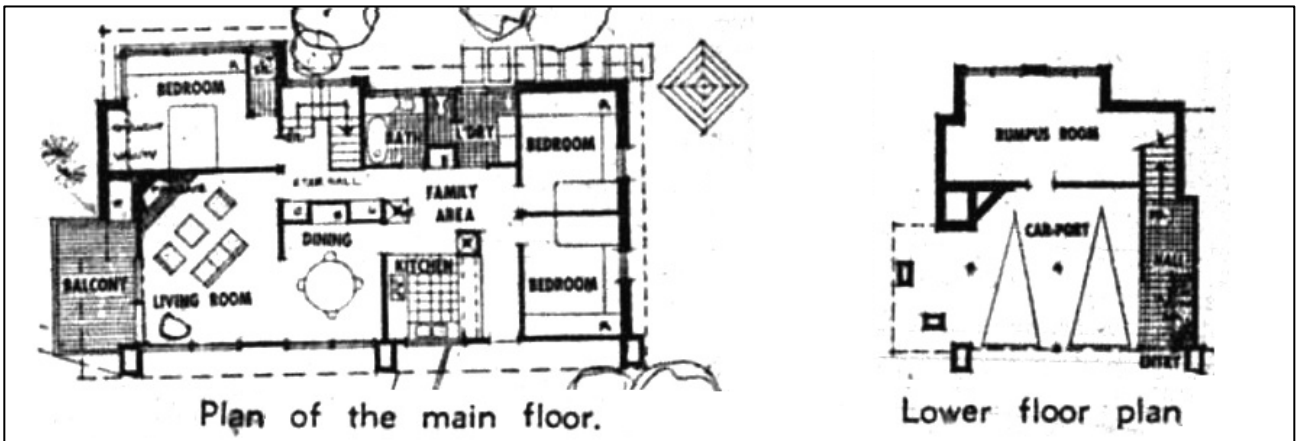
According to a contemporary write-up, the Camerons' house at Strathmore was designed "for future family usage", with three bedrooms, a large "family area" and an even larger rumpus room at the lower level (*Herald* 03/10/1965:24). Not surprisingly, the house was constructed by Jillian's father (and Napier's father-in-law), local builder A D Mason. Arthur Dudley Mason (1909-1984) had settled in Essendon around the time of his own marriage in 1937 and initially worked as a carpenter before rebranding himself as a master builder. At the time that he built his daughter's house in Strathmore, Mason had already built at least two other houses designed by his architect son-in-law, and he would go on to build several more.

While the Camerons' house was still under construction, Jillian completed a Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Melbourne. Graduating in early 1966, she became a psychologist. Despite the fact that the house had been designed for "future family usage", the couple lived there for only a short period. Planning to relocate to Western Australia, they offered the house for sale in early 1970. Promoted as an "outstanding modern home", it was further noted to be "architect designed for today's home living, this master-built home offers you many special features".

The next owners were airline pilot Ronald McCrystal and his wife Barbara, who lived there for a decade. In 1980, the property was acquired by sales manager Peter O'Connor and his wife Cheryl, who went on to undertake some renovations. Working drawings, prepared by a local drafting firm and dated April 1988, proposed a rear addition with two bedrooms. Modest in scale and simple in form, the addition echoed the low-pitched roofline and face brick construction of the original house.



Architect's original perspective drawing of the Cameron Residence. Source: Herald, 3 October 1965.



Sketch plans of the Cameron Residence. Source: Herald, 3 October 1965.

Sources:

Primary sources

Harry Perrott, "Carport under house front", *Herald*, 3 October 1965.

Interview with Ian Napier, March 2022.

Thematic Context:

City of Moonee Valley Thematic Environmental History, 2012

6.0 Building towns, cities and the garden state

6.7 Making homes for Victorians

Comparative Analysis:

The following are some notable architect-designed modernist houses in the City of Moonee Valley from 1960 to 1965:


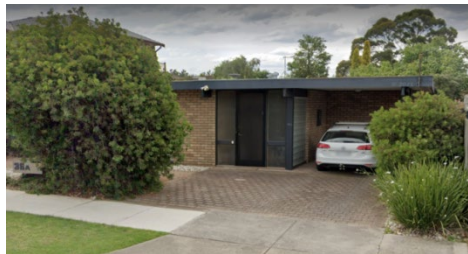

- Bourke Residence, 31 Brewster Street, Essendon (Smith & Tracey, 1960) – *included in this study*
- Abbey Residence, 33 Bournian Avenue, Strathmore (Earle & Bunbury, 1961) – *demolished circa 2019*
- Seligman Residence, 146 The Boulevard, Aberfeldie (David Pincus, 1961) – *identified in previous study but no HO*
- Holland Residence, 2-4 Oriana Court, Flemington (Brine Wierbowski, 1963) – *included in this study*
- Richardson Residence, 14 Brewster Street, Essendon (Graeme Gunn, 1963) – *existing HO165*
- Cuthbertson Residence, 53 Willonga Road, Strathmore (Albert W Ross, 1963) – *demolished circa 2018*
- Summerton Residence, 13 Alfred Road, Essendon (Ivan Anderson, 1964-66) – *included in this study*
- Cameron Residence, 43 Woolart Street, Strathmore (Ian Napier, 1965) – *included in this study*
- Woods Residence, 21 Brewster Street, Essendon (Clarke, Hopkins & Clarke, 1965) – *included in this study*

It is noted that only one of these examples is currently protected by an individual heritage overlay (HO).

While broadly comparable in date, these houses vary in their form, expression and finishes. The examples that are most comparable to the subject building are those in what might be described as the more conventional strain of International Modernism that continued from the late 1950s, characterised by a dominant horizontal expression, stark walls of face brick, broad-eaved flat roofs, and generous glazing, typically as full-height windows and sliding doors. This is evident in the examples at 53 Willonga Road (demolished), 146 The Boulevard (identified in previous study), 21 Brewster Street (identified in this study) and 31 Brewster Street (identified in this study). While the subject building is broadly comparable to these houses, it also displays some influences of Frank Lloyd Wright, such as the expression of chunky brick piers and a horizontal timber plank balustrade, that are rather more uncommon at the local level. One of its few recorded comparators in this regard was 33 Bournian Avenue, which evoked Wrightian tendencies in a different way, through its polygonal modular planning. That house has since been demolished.

Other examples cited above tend to be more idiosyncratic at the local level, such as 2-4 Oriana Court (identified in this study), with a broad gabled roof rather than the characteristic flat roof, and 14 Brewster Street (HO165), with stark concrete block walls that hint at the emergence of the Brutalist style.

Other local examples of the work of Ian F Napier

<p>House, 42 Thomson Street, Essendon (c1965)</p> <p>This single storey house was the first of two designed for the architect's father-in-law, local builder A D Mason. With its simple rectilinear plan, low gabled roof and grey textured concrete block walls, it is a simple and relatively conventional example of 1960s modernist architecture. It has relatively little in common with the larger, grander and more architecturally sophisticated example at 43 Woolart Street.</p>	 <p>Source: Google Streetview 2022</p>
<p>House, 36a Forrester Street, Essendon (1968)</p> <p>This single storey house was the second of two designed for the architect's father-in-law, local builder A D Mason. With its simple rectilinear plan, flat roof and brown brickwork, may have more in common with the house at 43 Woolart Street, but is still a somewhat simpler and more conventional design.</p>	 <p>Source: Google Streetview 2022</p>
<p>House alterations, 21 Woolley Street, Essendon (1967)</p> <p>The only other known example of Napier's work in the City of Moonee Valley is this residential alteration project, with involved a new brick façade, entry foyer and double carport to an existing weatherboard house. Its flat roof and exposed beams are typical of the architect's work at the time, but the house at 43 Woolart Street is demonstrably a superior example.</p>	

	Source: Google Streetview 2022
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Recommendation:

That the whole of 43 Woolart Street, Strathmore, be included in the Heritage Overlay schedule.

Schedule:

External Paint Controls	No
Internal Alteration Controls	No
Tree Controls	No
Solar Energy Controls	Yes
Fences and Outbuildings	No
Prohibited Uses	No
Aboriginal Heritage Place	No