Place name:	Harrison Residence (former); *Taradale*
Address:	16 Nairn Avenue, Ascot Vale
Place typology:	Residential
Construction date range:	1947
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:



Photograph by Built Heritage Pty Ltd, May 2022

Statement of Significance:

What is significant?

16 Nairn Avenue, Ascot Vale, is a single-storey flat-roofed early post-war modernist cream brick house. It was erected in 1947 for Nathan and Adelaide Harrison.

The significant features of the house include:

- The flat roof, expressed as stepping planes with projecting eaves and wide fascias
- The tripartite façade oriented to the corner, with a central curved bay flanked by projecting wings
- The large multi-paned window sashes
- The wrought iron cursive lettering, spelling out the name *Taradale*
- The matching cream brick front fence and corner entry with planter boxes and wrought iron gate

How is it significant?

16 Nairn Avenue, Ascot Vale, is of local architectural and aesthetic significance to the City of Moonee Valley.

Why is it significant?

16 Nairn Avenue, Ascot Vale, is significant as a highly unusual and substantially intact example of an early post-war modernist house. Designed and built at a time when wartime restrictions on private homebuilding were still enforced, with shortages of labour and materials, the house evokes an uncommonly high degree of architectural sophistication. Its distinctive tripartite façade, with a central curved bay oriented to the corner and flanked by projecting wings with corner windows, is more evocative of small-scaled non-residential architecture of the later 1930s and early 1940s, while the flat roof, expressed as a series of stepping planes with projecting eaves and wide white-painted fascias, is a particularly unusual feature. Such a bold articulation of a flat roof, in contrast to the parapetted flat roofs of the late 1930s, would not become widespread in modernist residential architecture until the later 1950s. As such, this is considered to demonstrate a high degree of creative achievement at the time (Criterion E, Criterion F)

Description:

Taradale, at 16 Nairn Avenue, Ascot Vale, is a single-storey flat-roofed cream brick house in a Streamlined Moderne style. Occupying a corner site, the house is oriented diagonally so that it presents a symmetrical frontage to the corner, with a central curved bay flanked by two projecting rectilinear wings with slightly lower rooflines (but all with matching panelled timber fascias). The curved portion has a central upstream vent (somewhat evocative of the flagpole of a contemporaneous civic building) flanked by two tall window bays containing double-hung sashes that are divided horizontally into separate panes. To the right side, the front door is set into a recessed porch with a projecting concrete slab canopy. The two projecting rectangular wings each have corner windows, similarly detailed (the bay to the east, fronting James Street, has a corner windows to both sides. Two of the street facades have small rectangular vents in vertical rows of three. The street façade incorporates some wrought iron cursive lettering (apparently contemporaneous with the house) that spells out the name *Taradale*

Along the James Street side, the eastern end of the property is dominated by a row of flat-roofed brick garages with four separate entrances. Closest to the house, in matching cream brick, is what appears to have been the original garage, which was subsequently extended further east (in slightly paler brickwork) to provide two additional parking bays, with separate and taller garage, slightly set back, at the far end. The two street boundaries are otherwise marked by a dwarf wall in matching cream brickwork, with stepped and angled capping creating a castellated effect. There are two pedestrian gateways: one at the corner, flanked by curved planter-boxes, and at the far end of the James Street frontage, between plinth-like letterbox and the first garage.

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, G*ap 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 16 Nairn Avenue, Ascot Vale, was erected in 1947 for Nathan and Adelaide Harrison.

Born in Sheffield in England, Nathan Harrison (1897-1951) hailed from Jewish European émigré stock: he was the fourth child of German-born tailor Jacob Harrison and his Polish-born wife, the former Annie Treggor, who married in Sheffield in 1891. The family, eventually comprising four sons and two daughters, migrated to Australia in two stages. Jacob arrived separately from Annie, who arrived in 1911 with their five youngest children, including eleven-year-old Nathan. The Harrisons settled in Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, where Jacob worked as a tailor until his death in September 1918, aged 48 years (*Argus*, 30 October 1918, p.1). By then, his oldest son Maurice had already wed and second son Nathan followed suit in 1921, when he married Adelaide Beatrice Alice Donovan (1894-1977).

Nathan and Adelaide Harrison initially resided in Footscray, where their first child Jack was born in 1921. By the next year, the Harrisons had moved to Bairnsdale, where Nathan ran a business as a dyer and drycleaner. Over the next few years, the family grew with the arrival of two more sons, Matthew and Brian. Returning to Melbourne by 1931, the Harrisons settled again in Footscray, moving into a two-storey residential shop at 214 Barkly Street from which Nathan resumed business under the name of N S Dyers & Drycleaners. In 1940, the business was reconfigured as a limited liability company, with Nathan and Adelaide is co-directors (*Herald*, 8 October 1940, p.5). Business evidently boomed and, following the Second World War, the Harrisons opted to build a new house for themselves in Ascot Vale while continuing to operate their dry cleaning business from Barkly Street.

In April 1947, the couple acquired the title to a vacant block of land at the corner of Nairn Avenue and James Street, which constituted Lot 397 of an expansive pre-war residential subdivision (Certificate of Title, 6983/532). Construction of a new house had commenced by November of that year, when builders A R P Crow & Sons advertised for bricklayers to work on "Harrison's job, at corner of James Street and Nairn Avenue, Ascot Vale" (*Argus*, 28 November 1947, p.9). One of Melbourne's leading master builders, A R P Crow & Sons was founded in the 1890s by Scottish-born Archibald Ray Peterson Crow (1856-1927). During the inter-war era, the Yarraville-based firm's reputation rose through a series of high-profile projects that included the Footscray Town Hall, Melbourne's original Olympic Pool in Batman Avenue, and numerous suburban hospitals and factories. At the time that A R P Crow & Sons were involved with the Harrisons' house in Ascot Vale in late 1947, they were also building a factory in Hawthorn and working on the Newport power station.

The new house at Ascot Vale was completed by 1949, when electoral rolls first listed Nathan and Adelaide Harrison in residence, along with their son Jack and his new wife, the former Iva Merle Clark, whom he married the previous year. The occupations of all four individuals were recorded as directors, suggesting that Jack and Iva had become involved in the family drycleaning company alongside Nathan and Adelaide. In March 1951, Nathan Harrison succumbed to colon cancer but his widow and family continued to reside in Nairn Avenue for over a decade. In 1966, Adelaide Harrison moved to another house in Ascot Vale, overlooking the Maribyrnong River off Wood Street. The new owners of her former residence at 16 Nairn Avenue were butcher Leslie Beer and his wife Phyllis, late of Kensington. Nathan Harrison's business, NS Drycleaners, continued to operate from its original address at 214 Barkly Street into the 1970s. Later-renamed as Dymara Pty Ltd, the company ceased operation in 1983 (Company File No. 22895).

Sources:

Primary sources

"New company application", *Herald,* 8 October 1940, p.5.

"Situations vacant", *Age,* 28 November 1947, p.9.

"N S Dyers & Drycleaners Pty Ltd", Company File No 22895. VPRS 932/P1. PROV, North Melbourne.

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 early modernist houses in the City of Moonee Valley from 1946 to 1953, which are either confirmed or strongly suspected to have been architect-designed:

- Brooke Residence, 1 Noble Avenue, Strathmore (Ernest Fooks, 1946-48) – *included in this study*
- Harrison Residence, 16 Nairn Avenue, Ascot Vale (designer unknown, 1947) – *included in this study*
- Residence, Langs Road, Ascot Vale (Plaisted, Warner & Brendel, 1947) – *unlocated; presumed demolished*
- Stuckey Residence, 40 Carnarvon Road, Strathmore (Bain-Jackson & Associates, 1947) – *demolished*
- Harrison Residence, 142 The Boulevard, Aberfeldie (designer unknown, 1952-53) – *identified in previous study*
- Residence, 5 Langs Road, Ascot Vale (Walter Mason, 1953) – *demolished*
- Residence, 15 Valencia Street, Essendon West (McPherson, Longmore & Associates,1953) – *extant*

It is noted that none of the surviving examples listed above is currently protected by the Heritage Overlay (HO).

Consequent to the impact of the Second World War, and specifically the government restrictions imposed on private construction (which were not lifted until the early 1950s) coupled with shortages of building materials and labour, there are few pertinent comparators of architect-designed houses from the late 1940s. Of the four examples listed above, the apparently demolished house at Langs Road, Ascot Vale is most comparable to 16 Nairn Avenue, with its triple-fronted facade and curved corners that hark back to the Streamlined Moderne idiom of the later 1930s. However, the broad-eaved flat roof of the subject building represents a sharp contrast, not only from the conventional hipped roofline of the Langs Road example but also from earlier counterparts of the late 1930s, where the low-pitched roofs were typically concealed behind parapets rather than expressed with projecting eaves. This use of an expressed flat roof is a house of the 1940s is certainly uncommon in the Ascot Vale area and most likely on a broader municipality-wide level.

The contemporaneous but demolished house at 40 Carnarvon Road, Strathmore with its elongated stepped plan, recessed entry porch and low gabled roof with integrated pergolas, was rather more progressive in style, comparable to the ground-breaking work being done at the time by Robin Boyd and others. This would only become more widespread from the early 1950s, typified by the example on The Boulevard, with its C-shaped plan, skillion roof, tall windows, egg-crate pergola and slate feature walls. The house at 1 Noble Avenue, Strathmore is somewhat hybrid, in that it deftly combines conventional forms such as a gabled roofline with more progressive fenestration and detailing. The same can be said of the two other early 1950s houses listed above, at 5 Langs Road, Ascot Vale (demolished) and 15 Valencia Street, Essendon West (extant), combining a conventional gabled roofline with the large windows, integrated sun terraces and open planning associated with the maturing modernist style.

Early flat-roofed modernist houses in the City of Moonee Valley

In the absence of truly pertinent comparators from the late 1940s and early '50s, the architectural context of the subject building can be broadened to consider later modernist dwellings that share key similarities and particularly the distinctive roofline: a flat roof with stepped planes and projecting eaves. The following is a list of examples that have been identified from the later 1950s and into the early 1960s, by which time such flat rooflines had become more widespread (and would remain so well into that decade, as represented in the study area by countless examples in Strathmore Heights, Airport West and Avondale Heights dating from the mid-to-late 1960s). This serves only to underscore that the house at 16 Nairn Avenue was demonstrably ahead of its time in this regard.

- Barden Residence, 269 Napier Street, Strathmore (A K Lines, MacFarlane & Marshall, 1957) – *included in this study*
- Robertson Residence, 31 Alfred Road, Essendon (Norman Brendel, 1958) – *included in this study*
- Bourke Residence, 31 Brewster Street, Essendon (Smith & Tracey, 1960) – *included in this study*
- Residence, 38 Brewster Street, Essendon (circa 1961; architect unknown)

- Residence, 2 Grammar Street, Strathmore (circa 1962; architect unknown)
- Residence, 4 Woods Street, Ascot Vale (circa 1963; architect unknown)

Recommendation:

That the whole of 16 Nairn Avenue, Ascot Vale, 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	Yes (brick fence)
Prohibited Uses	No
Aboriginal Heritage Place	No