

# City of Port Phillip Heritage Review

**Place name:** House  
**Other names:** -

**Citation No:**  
2420

**INSERT MAP**



**Address:** 101A Hotham Street, Balaclava

**Heritage Precinct:** Not applicable

**Category:** Residential: House

**Heritage Overlay:** TBC

**Style:** Postwar: Functionalist

**Graded as:** Significant

**Constructed:** 1950

**Victorian Heritage Register:** No

**Designer:** Kurt Popper

**Amendment:** TBC

**Comment:** New citation

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## Significance

### *What is significant?*

The single-storey house, designed by Kurt Popper and constructed in 1950, at 101A Hotham Street, Balaclava is significant.

Contributory features include the original L-shaped form and curved projecting bay/wing, flat roof, timber soffit, rendered walls, clinker-brick plinth (overpainted), steel-framed windows, and recessed porch. The slate-clad 'crazy paving' front fence, including metal pedestrian gate, concrete front garden path and side driveway, also contribute to the significance of the place.

Alterations and additions are not significant. The current paint colour scheme is not significant.

### *How is it significant?*

The house at 101A Hotham Street, Balaclava is of local historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Port Phillip.

### *Why is it significant?*

It is historically significant as a refined modernist design by Kurt Popper, a distinguished Viennese-Jewish architect, noted for his contribution to the propagation of modernism in Melbourne over the 1950s and 1960s. The property emerged from the breakup of a sizable late 19th-century holding ('The Nook'), a typical circumstance in area, with the allotment acquired by husband and wife, Leon and Esther Tabatznicks, both first-generation Jewish-Australians. Their commissioning of Popper is illustrative of the important connection that formed between the locale's growing Jewish community and émigré designers over the

post-Second World War period; a relationship that proved integral in the manifestation of modernism in the municipality. (Criterion A)

It is of aesthetic significance as a distinctive and generally intact example of Popper's oeuvre, much of which is related to flats and apartment blocks. The house's bold, rationalist and flat-roofed form was comparatively novel at its time of construction in the municipality, a testament to the European training and experience of its designer. Simultaneously, Popper's employment of streamlining to the façade by way of incised 'speedlines', prominent band of steel-framed windows and the projecting curved bay/wing, while modern, also reference the well-accepted Functionalist (Moderne) style. The resolved built character of the place is enhanced by its original 'crazy paving' front fence and the geometric rear-situated garage. (Criterion E)

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## Thematic context

### Victoria's framework of historical themes

6. Building towns, cities and the garden state: 6.3 Shaping the suburbs, 6.7 Making homes for Victorians

### Port Phillip thematic environmental history

5. Buildings and cultural landscapes: 5.2 Shaping the suburbs (5.2.2 Private development), 5.3 Diverse Housing (Émigré architects)

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## History

### Contextual history

The development of St Kilda began following the first land sales in 1842 and by 1854 there were over two hundred houses. The plans compiled in 1855 by James Kearney shows that most of these were situated to the west of Brighton Road (later High Street and now St Kilda Road). The St Kilda East and Balaclava areas by comparison, were largely undeveloped, particularly east of Chapel Street. Improvements to public transport including the opening of the railway station at Carlisle Street, and the establishment in the late 1880s of cable tram routes along High Street (St Kilda Road) and Chapel Street encouraged development during the land boom, however, this remained sporadic and ground to halt during the economic depression of the 1890s.

There was almost no increase in St Kilda's population in the decade from 1891 to 1901. However, as development recovered in the early twentieth century the number of residents in St Kilda almost doubled between 1901 and 1921 rising from 20,500 to 38,500 as land was highly sought-after by a new generation of homeowners seeking smaller detached dwellings, duplexes or flats. Whole new streets of neat brick cottages and villas appeared, however, in St Kilda East this largely remained a period of consolidation and infill on vacant land within the established residential areas, rather than expansion into the still largely undeveloped areas east of Hotham Street, although development did begin to creep along the length of Dandenong Road, following the route of the new electric tram introduced in 1911.

By the early post-war period most of the available land had been built upon and new residential building was limited to the remaining pockets of vacant land or as redevelopment of older properties.

### House, 101A Hotham Street

The subject land derives from Crown Allotment 214B of the Parish of Prahran, described as part of a belt of 'Red Gum Flats' at its survey in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. This approximately 1.6-hectare allotment at the south-western corner of Beach Road (now Carlisle Street) and Hotham Street was purchased by S Dunovan and M Gallagher during the 1850s (PP).



By the late 1880s, this holding had been subdivided and accommodated various high-end villa properties, a development pattern characteristic to Carlisle Street and Balaclava Road. At this stage, the subject land was part of a generous corner property that comprised 313 and 315 Carlisle Street as well as 101 and 101A Hotham Street. By circa 1890, this allotment was occupied by a residence known as 'The Nook' (Figure 1), which was situated at a deep setback from Carlisle Street within a formally laid out garden. Archibald Yulie, a 'salesman', was the first owner and occupant of The Nook, and his family remained at the property into the mid-1940s (SM) (CT v.1763 f.413). At its rear was 'East St. Kilda grammar school', which operated out of a modest structure between the 1870s and early 1900s (SM).

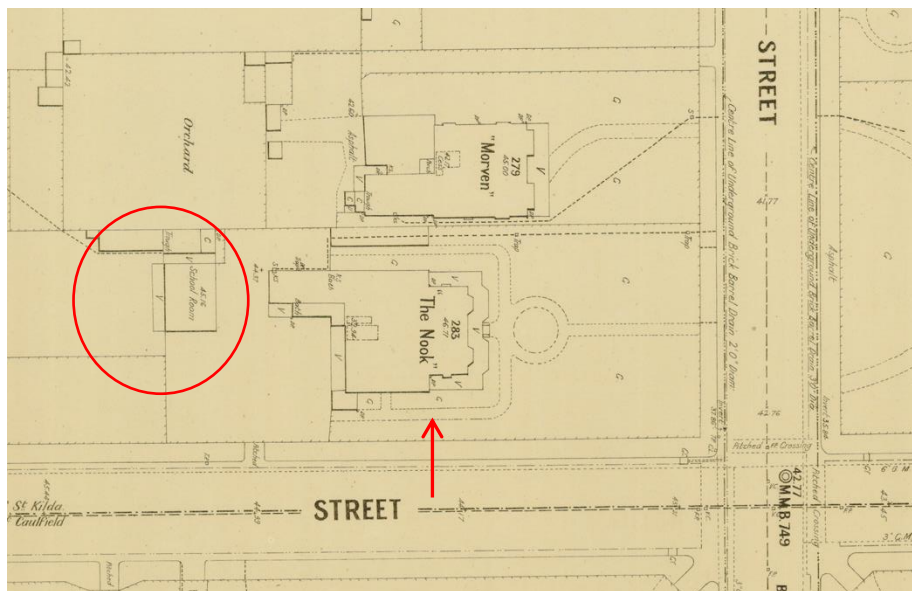


Figure 1 - Extract from MMBW Detail Plan no. 1438 (1898) showing development at the south-west corner of Carlisle and Hotham streets. The 'East St. Kilda grammar school' is circled.

Over the late 1940s, The Nook itself was demolished and the property subdivided, mainly under the watch of the new owners, the Sackvilles – a Anglo-Polish Jewish family (CT v.6815 f.948). In mid-1950, the subject allotment was transferred to Esther Essie (née Sackville) (1923-93), the wife of Leon Tabatznick (sometimes anglicised as 'Tab') (1913-85) (CT v.8007 f.008). Also of Jewish descent, Leon's father had immigrated from Russia to Melbourne around 1910 and set up a jewellery store along Sydney Road, Brunswick, an enterprise later run by the son (A, SM).

The Tabatznicks promptly engaged Kurt Popper, a Viennese-Jewish architect of increasing profile, to design a new house for the lot. This sleek and modernist two-bedroom dwelling was submitted to the City of St Kilda in September 1950 (Figure 2) and appears to have been constructed later that year.

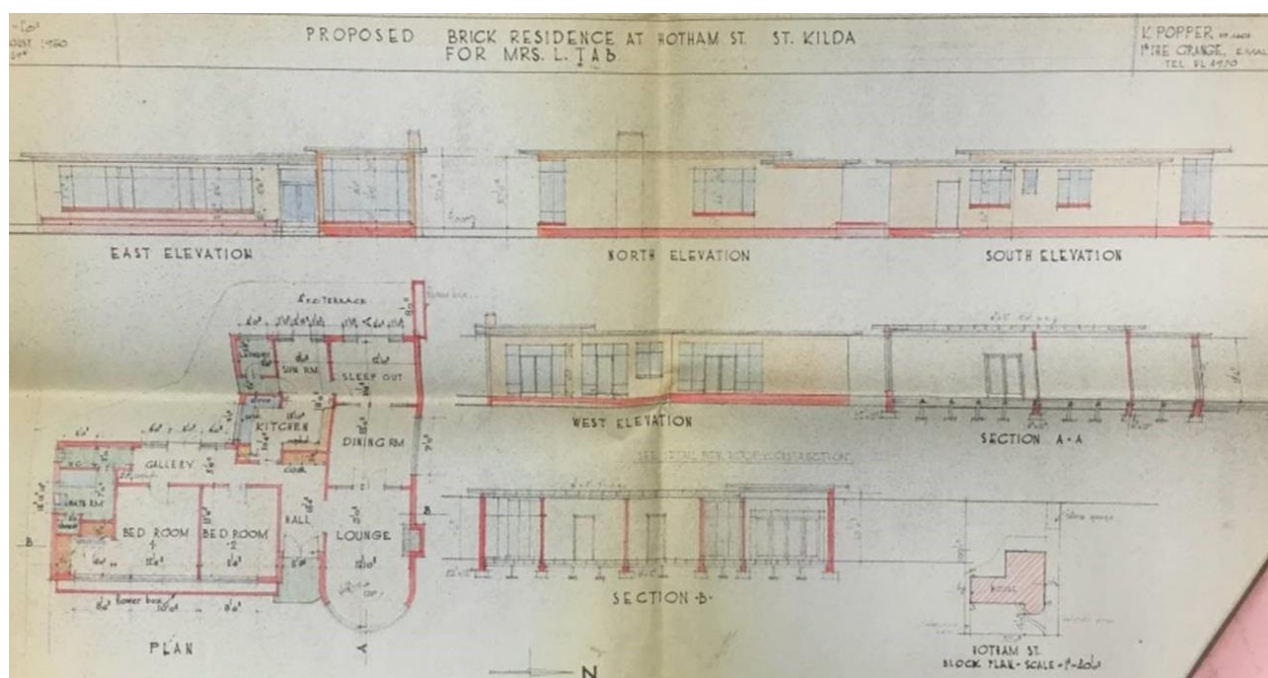


Figure 2 – Extract from the St Kilda Council Building Permit, No. U927 & U929 (dated 12 September 1950). Popper is identified as the responsible architect in the top right of the drawing.

It appears that Popper was also responsible for the design of three houses immediately south of the Tabatznicks (101, 103 and 105 Hotham Street), likely for other members of the Sackville family. These Popper outputs were more standard for the time and, in two cases (nos. 101 and 105), have since been unsympathetically modified.

The presence of the Tabatznicks at the site (into the late 1950s) and their connection with Popper offer a microcosm of the notable period shift of Melbourne's Jewish population from the Carlton area to the inner southern suburbs, particularly St Kilda and Elwood (previously the domain of a smaller affluent Anglo-Jewish group). This trend commenced in the interwar years but accelerated in the wake of the Second World War, propelled by an influx of Central and Eastern European Jewish refugees, including Holocaust survivors. Within the growing St Kilda-Jewish community were many individuals interested in recreating familiar lifestyles or with an eye to property development (chiefly flats/apartments), which often incorporated a modernist ethos. To facilitate such aims, they regularly turned to compatriot designers (O'Hanlon, 2014, *passim*).

Consequently, during the post-war period a relatively small group of Jewish émigré architects – Popper, Dr Ernst Fuchs/Ernest Fooks (1906-1985), Frederick Romberg (1913-1992), Herbert E Tisher (1915-1998), Mordechai Benshemesh (1911-1993), etc. – were responsible for a prolific number of houses, flats and apartment blocks in the district; in the process 'reshaping streets, occupation patterns and community areas' with an injection of European-influenced modernism (Edquist, 2002 p9).

### Kurt Popper (1910-2008)

Popper belonged to a small number of émigré designers, generally Jewish, who left Vienna for Melbourne and Sydney from the late inter-war years; a relocation precipitated by Austria's annexation by Nazi Germany in 1938. While part of an influx of Europeans conversant in modernism who arrived as part of Australia's post-war non-British immigration drive, the specific cultural influences of the Viennese immigrants proved influential (Edquist, 2019, *passim*).

Born in Vienna, at the tail end of the *Wiener Moderne* cultural era, Popper attended the *Kunstgewerbeschule Wien*, an art and craft school, in his late teens before completing his education at the *Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien* (Academy of Fine Arts Vienna). Steeped in the principles of an academic modernism, Popper



carried out a handful of commercial commissions and theatre set designs in Vienna before fleeing in the face of the *Anschluss*. Within a year he disembarked in Adelaide, after time in France, Switzerland and London. Architectural work in the office of Evans, Bruer & Hall and a stint as a wartime engineer for the Allied Works Council followed (Edquist, 2002, p11).

By 1945, Popper had married and was in Melbourne, having taken up a design position at the Housing Commission of Victoria. However, when the *Australian Home Beautiful* published the plans of his first private Melbourne engagement – a flat-roofed courtyard dwelling in East Malvern (*Shermann House*) – on the cover of its April 1946 edition, the ensuing publicity enabled Popper (then in his mid-30s) to launch a solo practice (Edquist, 2002, p12).

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Popper's reputation as a gifted modernist architect flourished, fueled in a large part by the commissions of Jewish clients in St Kilda, Toorak, Caulfield, and South Yarra. His output was chiefly domestic, ranging from high-end detached homes (about 30 in number) to flats and high-rise apartments (over 80). In the design of the latter, Popper was considered an early expert. He was also closely involved in the development of several Jewish institutional sites, including the Elwood Talmud Torah (1957, 1973) (Townsend, 2018). Popper lived at 61-63 Gordon Street, Elsternwick – personally designed – from 1956. He retired in 1975 (Edquist, 2002, p12).

## References

Ancestry.com (A), various records

Edquist, Harriet, *Kurt Popper: from Vienna to Melbourne, architecture 1939-1975*, RMIT University, School of Architecture and Design, 2002

Edquist, Harriet, "'Vienna Abroad'", *Viennese interior design in Australia 1940-1949*, *RMIT Design Archives Journal*, Volume 9, No 1, 2019, pp6-35

Heritage Alliance, *Elwood Heritage Review*, 2005

Certificate of title (CT)

O'Hanlon, Seamus, 'A Little Bit of Europe in Australia: Jews, Immigrants, Flats and Urban and Cultural Change in Melbourne, c.1935-1975', *History Australia*, Volume 11, Issue 3, pp116-133

Parish Plan - at Elwood, Parish of Prahran, P81-13 (PP)

*Port Phillip Thematic Environmental History* (TEH), February 2021

Sands & McDougall's street directories (SM)

St Kilda Council Building Permits (BP) No. U927 & U929, dated 12 September 1950

Townsend, Catherine, *Making modern Jewish Melbourne: Schools, synagogues, aged care facilities and community buildings 1938-1971*, 14<sup>th</sup> Australasian Urban History Planning History Conference, 31 January – 2 February 2018, Melbourne

## Description

The single-storey house occupies the majority of the allotment, having been constructed to its southern boundary with a moderate setback from Hotham Street. A narrow concrete driveway runs the northern perimeter of the property.

The house has an L-shaped form, with a projecting bay defined a pronounced curve. A flat roof – still, in 1950, a relatively novel element in the suburbs readily associated with the modern movement – is clearly expressed, clad in metal sheeting and with a wide fascia. The roof of the projecting bay is slightly higher than that of the rest of building creating a dynamic relationship between the two sections. Eaves are wide and the soffit is of dark-stained/painted timber. The chimney (north elevation) detailed on the submitted drawings (Figure 2) is no longer extant.

The rearmost section of roof (west elevation), situated below that of the primary roof, and timber pergola are both later additions.

The house is constructed of white-painted, rendered brick with a brick plinth (overpainted). It is likely that the base-course of the projecting bay was always rendered. Its middle band comprises a large, recessed curved window and incised 'speedlines'. The drawing (Figure 2) suggests that the original colour scheme was a face brick plinth with light coloured rendered walls above.

The front entrance is formed by a recessed porch framed by a moulding with 'speedlines', as well as inner rusticated edge. It is enclosed by a metal security grille, possibly original, with a geometric pattern (similar to those that had been used to the pedestrian and vehicular gates (removed, evident on GSV). Whether the original front door (shown as double-glazed doors on the submitted plans, Figure 2) remains is unclear.

The majority of original openings are intact. Only those to the south (now a pair of window slits) and, possibly, the rear elevations (originally large glazed doors surrounded by windows) appear to have been modified. Of the remaining, all have steel frames – a material celebrated at the time as an expression of modernity – and comprise a repeated configuration of a central glazed pane flanked by awning windows with fixed toplights. The extent of glazing to the façade, including both the curved window and elongated strip of three bays divided by rendered mullions, is a principal aspect of the residence, heightening the overall horizontality of the design.

At the level of the freestanding home, Popper's commissions could range from typical/conservative styles to varying intensities of modernism, as demonstrated by the cluster of his examples along Hotham Street. Popper's more noted domestic designs reflected mid-century academic and rationalist European modernism. This approach is clear at the subject place with its reductive form, flat roof, expansive glazing, planar walls, horizontal emphasis and contrasting brick/rendered/slate finishes. In post-war Melbourne, this design approach is classifiable as the Functionalist style, which is a continuation of the inter-war Moderne aesthetic as indicated by the streamlining - 'speedlines', band of window – and projecting curved bay.

The original front fence is clad in Castlemaine-slate 'crazy paving' – a hallmark of mid-century modernist design – with two central narrow bands of white/pink stone (possibly marble) and a similarly narrow coping. The concrete of the front winding pedestrian path and the vehicular paving are likely original. The front yard includes a hedge behind the front fence, perimeter garden beds with various shrubs, and some trees and a central area of lawn.

In the north-west corner of the block is a small rectangular garage, whose footprint is evident on the original drawing. It has a rendered front wall with a parapeted roof.

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## Comparative analysis

Kurt Popper was responsible for the design of an array of buildings in the City of Port Philip, particularly in the locale of Elwood, where he benefited from commissions generated by the post-war flat 'boom' and Jewish contacts. The chief domestic output of his small architectural office was modernist flat blocks. Some examples of Popper's work include:

- 32 Byron Street, Elwood, built 1960 (Citation no. 2326, HO412). The only other single residence by Popper that is included in the heritage overlay. Built in 1960 for Les Erdi, a Jewish-Hungarian émigré hotel developer, this face brick (overpainted) residence has timber-framed windows and is indicative of the contemporary Modernist aesthetic as it had developed over the ensuing decade since 101A Hotham Street. Castlemaine slate has been extensively employed to the stair and raised garden beds. Together these two houses however demonstrate Popper's sustained interest in a restrained approach though with juxtaposing materials/finishes.
- Rajon Flats, 3 Tennyson Street, built 1950 (Contributory within the St Kilda Botanical Gardens and Environs precinct). U-shaped, cream-brick, steel-framed windows and with a flat roof, though with a parapet and also indicative of the Functionalist style.

- Flats, 124-126 Alma Road, 1954 + 47 Westbury Street, St Kilda, 1956 (both Contributory within HO6). Similar, adjacent blocks in a Functionalist mode. Cream brick (one on red brick plinth), with parapeted roof, steel-framed windows, some with concrete framing, and balconies with concrete decks and metal railing.
- Flats, 22A Acland Street, St Kilda, 1957 (Contributory within HO5). Three storey, rectangular footprint with corner balconies with metal balustrading with diamond pattern (to the front). Cream brick with panels of large, pale blue tiles to the façade. It however has a tile clad, hipped roof.
- Flats, 17 & 17A Burnett Street, St Kilda 1958-59 (Contributory within HO5). More conventional with a hipped roof clad in tile in two mirror-image blocks. Distinguished by the expressed rendered frame to the corner windows.

More broadly, the subject place stands apart from other post-war modernist houses in the municipality affected by a Heritage Overlay as a notably early example of European-infused modernism. Comparable properties include:

- 48 Westbury Street, St Kilda East, built in 1947 (Citation no. 957, HO277). A late example of the Moderne style in cream brick. The façade's streamlined treatment was a continuation of a popular interwar design mode, while the presence of the tile-clad hip roof behind the parapet reveals the staying power of traditional elements. In contrast, 101A Hotham Street, constructed three years later, reflects a more defined example of contemporary modernism.
- 25 Eildon Road, St Kilda, built 1949-50 (Contributory within HO5). Built around the same time as the subject place, this boldly massed and geometric design by Slovakian-émigré architect Dr Ernest Fooks has a tile-clad hipped roof; another example of modernist design combined with an entrenched suburban trope. Functionalist style with variegated salmon brick, large steel-framed windows, some set in a concrete frame.
- 6A Dickens Street, Elwood (Citation no. 893, St Kilda Botanical Gardens & Environs Precinct). A two-storey, flat-roofed late rendition of the streamlined Moderne/Functionalist style house, constructed in 1954 by the long-lasting, style-shifting architect Leslie J W Reed. Its sweeping interlocking curved volumes create an effect referred to as the 'Waterfall front'. A good example of a popularised 'modern' design, but less rigorous than the subject place.
- 19 Lindsay Street, Elwood, built c.1964 (Citation no. 2334, HO422). A two-storey mature, modernist example (flat-roofed, geometric volume, reductive) constructed in salmon brick with some stone cladding and large windows with a glazing bar pattern suggesting de Stijl influence by a building/design firm for Frank Olah, a Hungarian émigré jeweller.

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## Assessment

This place has been assessed in accordance with the processes and guidelines outlined in the Australia ICOMOS *Charter for Places of Cultural Heritage Significance* (The Burra Charter) 2013, using the Hercon criteria.

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## Recommendations

Add to the Heritage Overlay as an individual place.

In the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay apply:

- external paint controls (to ensure complementary colour schemes are employed and/or encourage restoration of the original paint colour or rendered finish and face brickwork [to plinth]).
- fence controls (original front fence)

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## Primary source

RBA Architects & Conservation Consultants, *H07 Elwood St Kilda Balaclava Ripponlea Precinct heritage review Stage 2*, 2021

## Other studies

- Andrew Ward & Associates, *Port Phillip Heritage Review*, 1998

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## Other images





## Area to be included in HO

