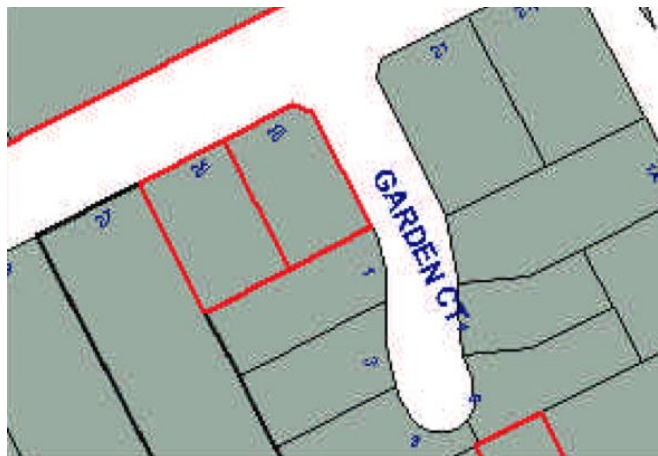


# City of Port Phillip Heritage Review

**Place name:** Flats  
**Other names:** -

**Citation No:**  
**894**



**Address:** 25 Dickens Street, Elwood

**Heritage Precinct:** St Kilda Botanical  
Gardens & Environs

**Category:** Residential: Flats

**Heritage Overlay:** **HO7**

**Style:** Interwar: Moderne

**Graded as:** Significant

**Constructed:** 1938

**Victorian Heritage Register:** No

**Designer:** I.G Anderson

**Amendment:** TBA

**Comment:** Revised citation

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## Significance

### *What is significant?*

The flats, designed by I.G. Anderson and built in 1938, at 25 Dickens Street, Elwood are significant. This is a three-storey block of inter-war Moderne flats, with a hip roof clad in terracotta tiles: the roof partially concealed by two bays at front that extend up to form a parapet at the northeast corner presenting as a flat roof.

Alterations and additions are not significant.

### *How is it significant?*

The flats at 25 Dickens Street, Elwood are of local aesthetic significance to the City of Port Phillip.

### *Why is it significant?*

The flats are of aesthetic significance as a fine and intact example of a late inter-war block of flats designed in a Moderne-style. The front and east elevation has a strong horizontal emphasis, expressed in continuous rendered bands with a ribbed detail, across projecting and recessed forms of square and curved massing. Brickwork provides relief to both the expanses of render and the horizontality with vertical elements, the one at front of particular note with its prominent chimney. Brickwork consists of clinker brick and Roman brick varieties. The materiality, massing and detailing make as a sum a fine architectural composition that show a transition from purely Moderne-styling towards aspects of a Modern aesthetic. (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 (5.3.5 Higher-density housing)

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## History

### Contextual history

The early twentieth century saw a marked decline in the viability of large mansions across Melbourne's suburbs in general, but it was particularly felt in the more affluent inner southern suburbs such as St Kilda and Brighton, where land was highly sought-after by a new generation of homebuilders seeking smaller detached dwellings, duplexes or flats. The trend toward higher-density living in St Kilda began with the conversion of mansions and terrace houses into boarding houses in the early 1900s and continued with the first purpose-built flats that appeared at the beginning of World War I. A 1919 newspaper article noted:

*It was held to be no longer necessary to labour with a house and all the domestic drudgery that entailed when by borrowing Continental ideas, people who could afford it could live in flats... Land has become so valuable the villa of the Victorian days, in a crowded thoroughfare, no longer shows anything like an adequate return of interest on the land's present capital value. It is more profitable to pull the house erected thereon down, and to erect flats. When the flat became popular in England the experiment was made in St Kilda, and it did not take long to discover there was a genuine demand for flats (Pahran Telegraph, 18 October 1919, p.4)*

Higher-density housing in the form of boarding houses paved the way to flat development. Flats first appeared in Melbourne around 1906 and slowly spread to the suburbs. They followed a strong pattern of development, appearing close to transport routes, particularly along or within walking distance of tram routes, to allow easy travel to the city. With their proximity to the beach and parklands, good public transport networks and seaside character, the suburbs of St Kilda and Elwood were especially popular locations for flats. Flats became a dominant characteristic of St Kilda and Elwood, and still make up a high percentage of dwellings in those areas. They include some of the earliest surviving flats in Melbourne, some of the best examples of architectural styles and types of flats, and as a group demonstrate the increasing popularity of the lifestyle of flat living from the early twentieth century (TEH).

There was huge growth in flat development in St Kilda and Elwood in the 1920 and 1930s, attracting migrants, single people, and people of diverse sexuality. 370 In 1920 there were 527 purpose-built flats in 92 blocks in St Kilda municipality. By 1925 this had increased to 884 flats in 164 blocks, including large complexes such as the Ardoch flats in Dandenong Road. By 1935, despite a slowing of development due to the Great Depression, there were more than 2,800 flats in over 500 blocks. A further 2,000 flats were added by 1940; however, the onset of World War II slowed development. Nonetheless, by 1947 St Kilda contained 5,500 purpose-built flats, a quarter of all flats in Melbourne (TEH).

### Flats, 25 Dickens Street

This area surrounding the St Kilda Botanical Gardens has been a desirable residential neighbourhood since the Gardens were first established in 1860 and by the end of the nineteenth century Blessington, Tennyson, Dickens and Herbert streets were lined with substantial villas, and mansions set in large grounds.

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With the proximity to tram routes along Carlisle Street, Brighton Road and Mitford Street, and access to the beach and public gardens and shopping centres as well as the nearby State primary school in Brighton Road, this area became a popular location for flats and some of the first flats in St Kilda were constructed here toward the end of World War I. These included Clarendon, designed by Joseph Plottel and constructed in 1915 at 26-28 Blessington Street, and two blocks by Howard Lawson at 44 (Clairvaux) and 46 Blessington Street, constructed in 1917. Some of the early mansions such as St Albans (74 Blessington Street) and Himalaya (10 Tennyson Street) were also converted to flats around this time.

This property at 25 Dickens Street was once part of a nineteenth century mansion estate known as Chesterfield, which traced its origins to 1864 when the architectural firm of Crouch and Wilson invited tenders for a villa residence for William Welchman. Chesterfield is shown on the 1905 MMBW plan of this area as a large villa near the corner of Tennyson and Dickens streets, accessed by a short driveway from the street corner with formal landscaped gardens extending to the west. By 1909 Chesterfield had been acquired by warehouseman George Tye and, after his death in 1934, his family subdivided the property. The mansion was retained on a reduced allotment and the subdivision to the west contained seven allotments, five fronting a new cul-de-sac, Garden Court, and two fronting Dickens Street, which became the present numbers 23 and 25 (Heritage Alliance, 2007:2).

The flats at 25 Dickens Street, Elwood were built in 1938 for F.S. Bennell. The builder was M. Lahor, and the architect was I.G. Anderson.

## I.G. Anderson

See Comparative Analysis.

## References

Heritage Alliance, *Heritage assessment. Nos 1, 3 & 5 Garden Court, Elwood*, 2007

O'Hanlon, Seamus, 'Home together, Home apart: Boarding house, hostel and flat life in Melbourne c.1900-1940', PhD Thesis, History Department, Monash University

Port Phillip Thematic Environmental History (TEH) **Version 1, July 2020**

St Kilda Council building permit (BP) no. 10014, 19 July 1938

Sands & McDougall Directories (SM) 1940

Sawyer, Terry, (1982) 'Residential flats in Melbourne: the development of a building type to 1950', Honours thesis, Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning, The University of Melbourne

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## Description

A three-storey, block of inter-war flats, with a hip roof clad in terracotta tiles: the roof partially concealed by two bays at front that extend up to form a parapet at the northeast corner presenting as a flat roof. The flats show a transition from purely Moderne-styling towards aspects of a Modern aesthetic.

The façade is asymmetrically composed through a stepped plan and there is a horizontal emphasis in much of the detailing of the north and east elevations. This detailing is expressed as bands of ribbed render that extend across the façade, and the sides of the front that have curved bays of windows, and curved balconies including a stairwell. On elevations there are groups of double-hung sash windows, with horizontal glazing bars, some that wrap around the bay with the curved corner. Panels of Manganese Roman bricks separate the windows of the curved corner bay at front. The horizontality at front is overlaid in part with a bay faced in brick that has a vertical emphasis in its detailing, the verticality further enhanced by narrow windows. The centre of this bay forms a chimney that projects upwards at the centre of this brick bay. A similar stepped brick element is repeated adjacent to the stairwell.

The flats are situated opposite the St Kilda Botanical Gardens, set back from Dickens Street behind a shallow garden. A concrete drive leading from Dickens Street forms the setback of the flats from the east

site boundary. A low street boundary fence of clinker and manganese bricks, rendered in places, makes reference to the materiality used on the elevations of the flats.

The building is in good condition and has a relatively high degree of external intactness.

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## Comparative analysis

Streamline Moderne emerged in the early 1930s and quickly became a popular style for flats because of its modern and progressive image. Streamline Moderne buildings generally have a horizontal emphasis, sometimes with an emphatic vertical 'anchor' (often stairwells or chimneys) to balance the composition. Further horizontal lines could be added by roof parapets (partially concealing the ubiquitous hip roof), and even window muntins. Windows were often located at corners and there is frequent use of curved balconies and building corners. Ornamentation is stripped down, and metal elements such as balcony railings are quite simple with clean lines. Smooth render and clinker bricks were popular at this time, though more avant-garde architects were already turning to cream and apricot bricks by the 1930s. The later, or more 'advanced', examples also had steel windows, and show a transition to the International ('Modern' or 'Functionalist') style.

I.G. Anderson was one of the foremost proponents of the Moderne style in Victoria and in 1934 he designed Avenue Court flats at 64-66 Victoria Avenue, Albert Park, which was one of the first Moderne flats in Port Phillip (the only known earlier example in Port Phillip is The Royal designed by Archibald Ikin in 1933 at 1 Robe Street, St Kilda). A newspaper article about Avenue Court described how it was:

*... of more than ordinary interest as indicating how deeply the machine era is impressing itself upon residential work. Chief among the characteristics of the building is a certain squareness of mass and outline, a definite emphasis on the verticals, a bareness of walls and a paucity of ornament. Actually, however, added architectural interest in this and many of the new types adopted for flat construction is obtained by combining the several structural elements to ensure the bold and lively play of light and shadow. (The Age, 1 May 1934, p.4 'Building & Architecture. The Continental Flat. Radical changes in design').*

Anderson would later design Park Gate, 352 Albert Road, South Melbourne (c.1940, no citation).

Other fine examples of the Streamline Moderne style in Port Phillip include Windermere, 49 Broadway, Elwood designed in 1936 by J.H. Esmond Dorney (which is included on the Victorian Heritage Register, Citation 311), Del Marie, 4 St Leonard's Avenue, St Kilda (1936, Stuart M. Hall, Citation 221), La Rochelle, 1A Dickens Street (1936, W.H. Merritt, Citation 2439), and Taradale 229 Brighton Road, Elwood (1936, Walter Mason, Citation 442).

The flats at 25 Dickens Street demonstrate Anderson's skill with the Moderne style and compare well to the above examples. As well as the bold massing, which establishes a tension between the horizontal and vertical elements, it is notable for fine details such as the way the rendered bands are threaded through the vertical chimney feature, and the use of Manganese bricks in the curved windows and elsewhere. The materiality, massing and detailing make as a sum a fine architectural composition that show a transition from purely Moderne-styling towards aspects of a Modern aesthetic.

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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

Retain in the Heritage Overlay with paint controls.

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## Primary source

Peter Andrew Barrett, *H07 Elwood St Kilda Balaclava Ripponlea Precinct heritage review Stage 2: Review of existing heritage citations*, 2021

## Other studies

Andrew Ward & Associates, *City of Port Phillip Heritage Review*, 1998

Robert Peck von Hartel Trethowan, *St Kilda 20<sup>th</sup> century architectural study*, Volume 3, 1992

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## Other images