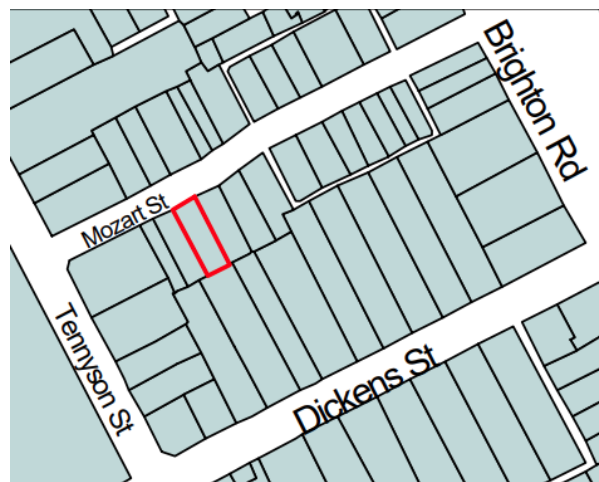


# City of Port Phillip Heritage Review

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

**Citation No:**  
**744**



**Address:** 21 Mozart Street, St Kilda  
**Category:** Residential: House  
**Style:** Federation/Edwardian: Bungalow  
**Constructed:** 1915  
**Designer:** F.W. Thomas, Monolyte Pty Ltd  
**Amendment:** Cxxx  
**Comment:** Revised citation

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

**Heritage Overlay:** HO7

**Graded as:** Significant

**Victorian Heritage Register:** No

## Significance

### *What is significant?*

The Monolyte Concrete House designed by F.W. Thomas and constructed by Monolyte Pty Ltd in 1914 at 21 Mozart Street, St Kilda is significant.

Alterations and additions are not significant.

### *How is it significant?*

The Monolyte Concrete House at 21 Mozart Street, St Kilda is of local historic, architectural and aesthetic significance to the City of Port Phillip.

### *Why is it significant?*

It is significant as an early and intact example of a reinforced concrete house and one of the first in Melbourne to use the Monolyte system of construction, which was the first fully standardised formwork system in Australia. It demonstrates the experimentation with different concrete house construction techniques and systems that occurred in the early twentieth century, which led it to become a more accepted construction method by the interwar period. (Criteria A & D)

As one of the earliest surviving examples of the Monolyte system the house has research potential to provide further understanding about the development of this system. (Criterion C)

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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 (5.3.3 Suburban bungalows)

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## History

### Contextual history

Private development in the City of Port Phillip began from the time of the first sales of Crown land in the 1840s and 1850s. The gradual development of infrastructure, including roads, public transport networks and utilities, paved the way for increasing development of private land. Private subdivision within the broad framework set out by Hoddle's survey saw neighbourhoods in the City of Port Phillip grow into populated, thriving communities (TEH).

During the peak of Melbourne's building boom in the 1880s, almost all the remaining land in Port Phillip (except for the Elwood Swamp and the Fishermans Bend area) was subdivided and offered for sale. Prosperity saw land speculation intensify across the suburbs during that period in areas such as Elwood, Balaclava, Ripponlea, St Kilda East that were remote from transport and services. When one of Elwood's oldest estates, Chiverton, was subdivided in 1885, it created 85 allotments. Despite the eager subdivision of land and colourful advertising, however, the actual building of homes in these remote subdivisions was slow. With the onset of the 1890s economic depression, many estates failed and remained undeveloped for a decade or more (TEH).

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 homebuilders seeking smaller detached dwellings, duplexes or flats.

Most of the development that occurred during the Federation/Edwardian period occurred on subdivisions laid out during the 1880s boom period, as well as in the continuing subdivision of mansion estates in St Kilda, Elwood, Balaclava and Ripponlea. The exception is the low-lying parts of Elwood, which were subdivided and development following completion of the Elwood Swamp reclamation project in 1910 (TEH).

### Monolyte Concrete House, 21 Mozart Street

The eastern section of Mozart Street off Brighton Road was established in the late nineteenth century and terminated in a dead-end at the rear of the Corinella mansion estate, which faced Tennyson Street overlooking the St Kilda Botanical Gardens. In 1897 the only building in the street was the pair of two-storey houses at nos. 2 & 4 (MMBW).

The c.1909 subdivision of the Corinella Estate, which included the demolition of the 50-room mansion enabled the extension of Mozart Street through to Tennyson Street. In May 1912, the prominent demolition company 'Whelan the Wrecker' was offering all the building fabric of the mansion including 50,000 bricks, doors, sashes, and timber boards (Age 25 May, 1912, p.10) and by August of that year, 'building blocks' were being offered for sale (Herald 16 August 1912 p.6). Almost all lots in Mozart Street were built on by the end of World War I.

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This house was constructed in 1915 on the south side of the western extension of Mozart Street. Designed by architect F.W. Thomas it was built by concrete house specialists Monolyte Pty Ltd of Queen Street, Melbourne for the owner, Victor Tartakover, as his own residence (BP).

## References

- Cooper, J.B., 1931, *The History of St Kilda. From its settlement to a city and after. 1840 to 1930*, Volume I  
Heritage Alliance, *Elwood Heritage Study*, 2005  
Lewis, Miles, 'Australian building: A cultural investigation. Section Seven: Cement and concrete' viewed online at <http://www.mileslewis.net/australian-building/> on 30 June 2016  
Melbourne & Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) Detail Plan No. 1382, dated 1897  
*Port Phillip Thematic Environmental History (TEH) Version 1, July 2020*  
St Kilda Council Building Permit (BP) No. 2517, 13 January 1915  
Sands & McDougall directories (SM), 1900-1920

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## Description

This is a gable fronted bungalow with a projecting gabled porch with a compressed arch supported on slender Tuscan style posts, grouped in 3 at each corner, set on low rendered balustrade. There is half-timbering to the porch gable and the eaves of the main roof are bracketed. The roof is clad in terracotta tiles with ball finials and the reinforced concrete walls are finished in textured render. The windows to the main elevation are boxed triple casements with highlights, one with a bracketed tiled hood.

The building has good external integrity. The front timber picket fence is sympathetic, but not original.

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## Comparative analysis

Reinforced concrete, using several locally developed or imported systems of reinforcement and formwork, was being used by several architects and builders in Australia from the early 1900s for commercial buildings and civil engineering structures, as well as for houses. By the early interwar period reinforced concrete had become a familiar and accepted material, rather than the province of a few specialist firms (Lewis).

The first reinforced concrete houses began to appear in Australia from c.1907 and several pioneer examples were built in Adelaide around that time by builder W.C. Torode, who developed a method of in situ concrete cavity walling. A Melbourne builder, H.R. Crawford, patented his own system in 1907, and, over the next seven years, erected concrete houses at Camberwell, Canterbury, East Malvern and Balwyn. Another important early example was that built by John Monash at 4 Ray Street Beaumaris in 1912, but unfortunately demolished in 1999. In the 1910s, S.B. Marchant of Adelaide developed the 'Monolyte' system, which was the first fully standardised formwork system in Australia (see below) and in the 1920s, A.C. Matthews developed the 'Self-Form' system, which produced cavity walls (Lewis, Heritage Alliance 2005).

Probably the most prolific designer and builder of concrete houses in Melbourne, from about 1914 until the 1930s, was the Melbourne architect Lesley M. Perrott. In 1923 with the assistance of G.W. Green Perrott published a book on the subject *Concrete Homes*. In it he explains that reinforced concrete is "the most suitable building material known to us, and that it lends itself readily to effective architectural treatment". A newspaper article about the book opines:

*Quite rightly he objects to any attempt being made to disguise concrete - that is to try to make it pass for some other material - seeing that in capable hands it has a character of its own. (The Argus, 'New Books', 17 December 1923, p.3)*

This house is one of several early concrete houses in the City of Port Phillip built in the period before 1920. The earliest appears to be the house at 4 Blessington Street, erected in 1911 (Citation 25) in the

highly unusual form of a Victorian villa, with mock ashlar façade (although this may have been constructed of concrete blocks rather than reinforced concrete). The others are:

- 226 Alma Road (Citation 2387), 1912-13.
- 2, 4 & 6 Browning Street, Elwood (PPHR citation 2325), 1912-13.
- 200 Alma Road, St Kilda East (Citation 291), Constructed in 1915, this is thought to be the only surviving example of three early concrete houses in Melbourne designed by Lesley M. Perrott. The first was his demonstration concrete house at Pascoe Vale Road, Essendon (1914, demolished 2017) and the W. Thackray house, Canterbury Road, Canterbury (1914, demolished?).
- 52 Clark Street, Port Melbourne (Citation 629), 1915.

This house is notable as one of the earliest examples of the 'Monolyte' system, and possibly the first example built in Melbourne. S.B. Marchant built his first house using this system in Adelaide in 1913 and in Melbourne in 1915 and they were said to be 'flawless' almost a decade later. The formwork panels were set up in 28 hours and the pour was carried out by a mixer and placer. The formwork was of timber and the walls of solid concrete reinforced with vertical and horizontal bars. The walls were reported to be impervious to moisture and a cavity was unnecessary. In 1926 Marchant patented an improved version of the system and by then the State Savings Bank of Victoria and the Savings Bank of South Australia had approved houses built using the Monolyte system. In 1925 the SSBV built an estate of 28 Monolyte houses at Sunshine (Lewis).

The conventional and somewhat old-fashioned design of most early concrete houses contrasts with the concrete houses designed in the 1910s by Perrott, which overlaid elements of the newly fashionable Californian Bungalow style onto verandahed Federation bungalow forms. The hipped roofed house at 200 Alma Road, and other Perrott houses of the 1920s departed further from the picturesquely gabled Federation and Californian Bungalow styles (Lewis).

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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 as a Significant place within the St Kilda Botanical Gardens & Environs precinct.

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## Primary source

City of Port Phillip, *H07 Elwood St Kilda Balaclava Ripponlea Precinct heritage review Stage 2: Review of existing heritage citations*, 2022

## 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

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