

City of Port Phillip Heritage Review

Place name: Alcazar
Other names: Maisonettes, Flats, Trees

Citation No:
327



Address: 3 Glen Eira Road, Ripponlea

Category: Residential: Flats

Style: Interwar: Spanish Mission

Constructed: 1929

Designer: P.J. Brunning Pty Ltd

Amendment: C29, C160

Comment: Revised citation

Heritage Precinct: Brunnings Estate & Environs

Heritage Overlay: HO372

Graded as: Significant

Victorian Heritage Register: No

Significance

What is significant?

Alcazar, designed and built by P.J. Brunning Pty Ltd in 1929, at 3 Glen Eira Road, Ripponlea is significant. Alcazar is a two-storey, rendered brick, block of six maisonettes and two single-level flats, designed in the Spanish Mission-style, arranged around a garden courtyard. The brick boundary fence and wrought iron entry gate, and the Bull Bay magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*) within the courtyard are contributory features.

Alterations and additions are not significant.

How is it significant?

Alcazar at 3 Glen Eira Road, Ripponlea is of local historic, representative and aesthetic significance to the City of Port Phillip.

Why is it significant?

Alcazar is of historical and representative significance as the earliest known maisonette development in Port Phillip, and an early example of courtyard planning for residential flats in the municipality. It demonstrates the improvements made to flat design in response to issues with early flats including the poor relationship of flats to the external space, a lack of privacy and the unsuitability of flats for families. Maisonettes, built over two levels and with a separate entrance and private internal stairs, provided an attractive alternative to conventional flats, as they were larger, but without the cost and upkeep commonly associated with detached housing. Here, the use of maisonettes has been combined with a courtyard plan to provide an

attractive landscape setting for each unit, as well a greater level of privacy and communal outdoor space to its residents. (Criteria A & D)

Alcazar is of aesthetic significance as a fine and well detailed example of residential flats in the Spanish Mission-style. Notable details and features include the segmental arched and semi-circular arched wall openings, with clinker brick detailing on reveals, barley twist columns supported by corbels to wall openings, and the hood elements, supported by timber brackets, above ground floor entrances. The Glen Eira Road elevation is well-composed, with canted bay windows, its projecting chimney flanked with small leadlight glazed windows, and the *Alcazar* wrought iron signage fixed to the chimney. The setting of the flats is enhanced by the mature Bull Bay magnolia, and the front fence and gates. (Criterion E)

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)

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. 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).

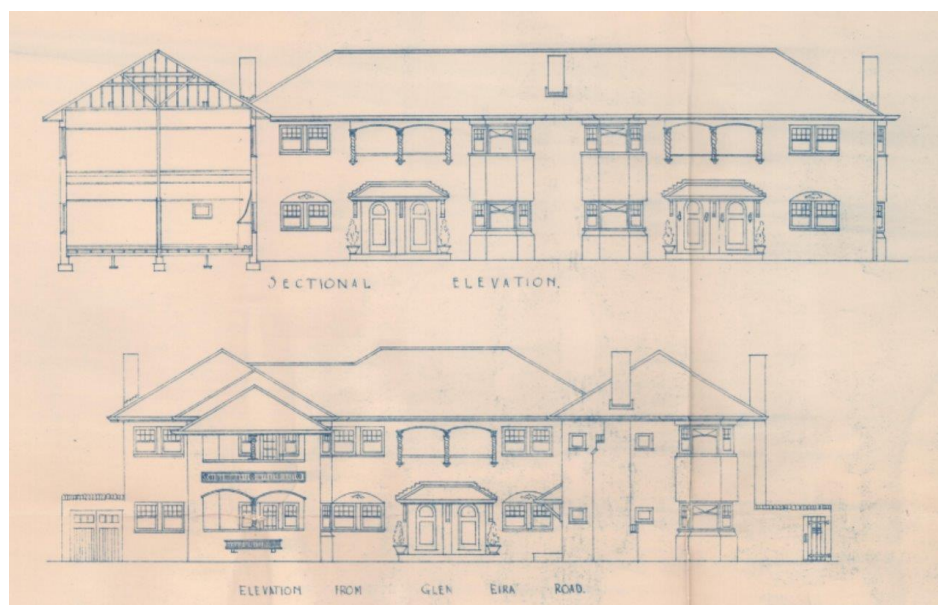
Alcazar

Land to the north and south of Glen Eira Road between Brighton Road and the Sandringham railway was subdivided and offered for sale during the land boom of the late nineteenth century. However, by 1904 only eight villas had been constructed, including five along the south side (MMBW), as the economic depression of the 1890s halted development and it was not until the Ripponlea railway station was opened in 1913 that building recommenced. A shopping centre was rapidly established along Glen Eira Road between the railway and Hotham Street and most of the shops were constructed from 1913 to 1918. The centre was almost fully developed by 1923 and served the growing residential areas developed on the vacant land to the north and new estates including the Quat Quatta and Erindale subdivisions to the south of Glen Eira Road.

The electrification of the railway in 1919 and the extension and electrification of the tramway along Brighton Road in 1925 and its extension, by 1926 from the terminus at Brunning Street to Glen Huntly Road in Elsternwick stimulated development and almost all the remaining vacant land to the north and south of Glen Eira Road was developed during the interwar period. This included the subdivision of the vast Brunning's Nursery as a housing estate, which included creation of the new streets of Los Angeles Court and Monkstadt Avenue. A boom in flat building along Brighton Road and its environs also followed the extension of the electric tram: between 1926 and 1941 no fewer than 21 blocks were constructed in Brighton Road between Carlisle Street and Glen Huntly Road, and many more in nearby streets.

P. J. Brunning Pty. Ltd., one of the developers of the Brunnings Estate, was the owner/builder for Alcazar, which was constructed in the latter half of 1929 and replaced a Victorian era villa. The plans were drawn by K. Hooker in July 1929 (BP). Alcazar contained eight flats arranged around a semi-enclosed garden courtyard, with five garages situated in the northwest corner. Six of the flats were two-bedroom 'maisonettes' (two level flats with individual entrances and internal stairs) each with a small first floor balcony and ground floor 'court' at the rear, while the western section adjacent to the laneway contained two single level one-bedroom flats, each with a balcony. The internal planning of the maisonettes was generous, with each having a separate lounge and dining room. The single level flats also contained a separate breakfast room off the kitchen, while in the maisonettes these rooms were combined (BP).

'Alcazar', from the Arabic *al-qasr*, is the name given to palaces or fortresses built in Spain by the Moors.



Extract from original building plans showing the elevations (Source: Port Phillip Building File)

References

Melbourne & Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) Detail Plan No. 1451, dated 1904

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. 7515 granted 5 July 1929

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

Description

Alcazar is a two-storey, rendered brick, block of six inter-war maisonettes, and two single-storey flats, arranged around a central courtyard formed by the U-shape plan of the building. The wing on the west side is truncated due to the irregular-shaped block, created by the west boundary being at a diagonal. This west boundary is adjacent to a right-of-way. The courtyard is partially obscured from Glen Eira Road by a high, curved, clinker-brick fence, with a central recessed gateway with a wrought iron gate. The remainder of the street boundary fence is lower. Both parts of the fence, and the gate, look to be contemporary with the building. The courtyard has a lush garden character with original or early cement pathways, and a bird bath. A mature Bull Bay magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*) is a notable planting within the courtyard.

Alcazar has accents that are Moorish/Spanish Revival in character, with these including textured rendered exterior walls, barley twist columns supported upon corbels, and segmental arched wall openings. These formerly were wall openings to recessed balconies, that have since been enclosed with sliding sash windows, but have had little appreciable impact upon the character of the building. Cantled bay windows with multi-paned upper sashes are on both levels on elevations, and their spandrels have a hexagonal tile finish in a scaled arrangement.

Alluding to Iberian precedents, on the elevation that is adjacent to Glen Eira Road, is an arched wall opening with Cordoba tiles at its top on a wall leading to a courtyard in the side setback. Visible from Glen Eira Road, along this side setback, are a row of four rendered brick chimneys. Rendered brick chimneys of a similar style are also on other parts of the roof of the building. The chimney that is expressed on the front elevation adjacent to Glen Eira Road is flanked by small rectangular windows with leadlight glazing. Wrought iron *Alcazar* signage is fixed to the chimney.

Another notable element of the maisonettes, visible from within the courtyard, are the pronounced hood elements above entrances to flats, which are supported by timber brackets. These hoods, as is the hip roof of the building, are clad in glazed terracotta tiles. The surrounds of the entrances are detailed with clinker brick. A single, arched opening accesses a stair with a wrought iron balustrade leading to a flat on the upper level (Flat 8). On some of the entrances, porches project to their front and these have clinker brick dwarf walls.

Comparative analysis

According to Sawyer (1992:13-4) the shortage of houses and the desire for smaller, more manageable homes had been a factor in the development of flats, but a common criticism of early flat developments was the poor relationship of the building to its external space, a lack of privacy and the unsuitability of flats for families. In many early flat developments, the site coverage was very high, and the open space left over was not integrated with the building and of little practical use. In 1922 architect James H. Wardrop, a proponent of flat development argued that aggregation of open spaces in flat developments would provide '... a decent breathing space' when compared with the 'mean yard space' available to the conventional small cottage (Sawyer 1982:83).

This led architects and developers to seek alternatives such as the ‘Bungalow Court’ concept, which was introduced as early as 1916 when it was described in an article in the *Real Property Annual*. The one and two roomed units were grouped around a U-shaped courtyard in pairs with no fences or hedges between them. However, Sawyer (1992:14) concludes that ‘the old concern with lack of privacy once again surfaced and the concept does not appear to have gained a ready acceptance in Australia at this time’. Nonetheless, the ‘Bungalow Court’ concept did eventually evolve into the courtyard flat types, where flats were grouped around a semi-enclosed garden court.

The ‘garden court’ or courtyard approach to flat planning began to emerge in some better quality flat developments by the early 1920s. Sawyer (1982:82-83) identifies Joseph Plottel’s Garden Court, built c.1918 in Marne Street, South Yarra as an early attempt to integrate flats with garden areas. Garden Court is built in a shallow U-shape with the open side facing Marne Street; however, the area was small and was separated from the flats themselves by accessways or balconies. The concept of a central courtyard was developed further by Arthur Plaisted in his designs for Hampden (1919) in Barkly Street, St Kilda (Citation 405) and Hartpury Court (1923) in Milton Street, Elwood (Citation 381). At the former, a Victorian house was extended with projecting wings to create a central garden area, while at Hartpury Court an L-shaped block was placed at one side of the garden of a Victorian era mansion, which was retained on the opposite side. At Hartpury Court the flats had an unimpeded view over the gardens as the stairs and accessways were placed within the building itself (ibid).

Following on from these early precedents Hawsleigh Court, 2B Hawsleigh Court, Balaclava designed by architect Hugh Philp in 1928 appears to be the earliest example of a complete U-plan courtyard type in Port Phillip and demonstrates a conscious and deliberate approach by the architect to improve the amenity of the flats by providing direct access to and views of the outdoor space (see Citation 2010). Later examples include the two blocks of flats directly built directly opposite Hawsleigh Court in the early 1930s, as well as Camberley, 17A Milton Street, Elwood (1934-36, Citation 2063), Tudor Close, 7-9 Eildon Road, St Kilda (1940, Citation 896), and Glen Eagles, Kinross and Kinfauns, 58-60 Queens Road, Melbourne (1940-42, Citation 2226).

Maisonettes – that is, a large flat over two levels – were another solution to the issues of privacy and space. These emerged during the late 1920s and by the early 1930s had become a popular choice for wealthy residents in suburbs such as Toorak. The attraction of maisonettes was due to them being perceived as ‘complete houses in miniature’. An article in the *Australian Home Beautiful* noted that:

That, however, does not mean that the rooms are small or pokily arranged. On the contrary, the ‘maisonette’ is remarkable for its feeling of spacious seclusion – achieved by the elimination of superfluous walls and passageways. (Australian Home Beautiful, 2 October 1933)

The need for a dedicated internal staircase for each residence, however, made them more expensive than conventional flats and very few maisonettes were constructed in Port Phillip during the interwar period.

Alcazar is notable as an early example that combines maisonettes with courtyard planning to provide superior privacy and access to both private and communal space for the occupants. It is the earliest known maisonette development in Port Phillip, and an early example of courtyard planning, built only one year after Hawsleigh Court.

Other examples of maisonettes in Port Phillip include:

- Maisonette and flat (1931), 34 Tennyson Street, Elwood (PPHR citation 934, within HO7 Precinct). Maisonette with (originally) single storey flat attached.
- Sunnyside Court (1934), 331 Inkerman Street, Balaclava (Contributory within the HO392 Precinct). Six maisonettes in the inter-war Old English style on a corner site.
- Merildene (1938), 1 Victoria Avenue, Ripponlea (PPHR citation 947, within HO7 precinct)
- Duplex (c.1938), 2-3 Holroyd Court, St Kilda East (Contributory within the HO388 Precinct). Pair of maisonettes in the inter-war Moderne style.

Assessment

This place has been assessed using with the processes and guidelines outlined in the Australia ICOMOS *Charter for Places of Cultural Heritage Significance* (The Burra Charter) 2013, and applying the Hercon criteria in accordance with PPN1: *Applying the heritage overlay*.

Recommendations

Retain in Heritage Overlay with external paint and tree controls.

Primary source

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

Other studies

David Bick, *St. Kilda Conservation Study, Area 2*, 1985

Robert Peck von Hartel Trethowan, *St Kilda 20th century Architectural Study*, Volume 3, 1992

Other images