

# Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture

**RSTCA No:** R050

**Name of Place:** Northbourne Housing Precinct, Dickson & Lyneham

**Other/Former Names:**

**Address/Location:** both sides of Northbourne Avenue, between Murdoch Street and Macarthur Avenue LYNEHAM ACT 2602 and between Morphett Street and Wakefield Avenue DICKSON ACT 2602

Block Section of

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Listing Status:	Registered	Other Heritage Listings:	
Date of Listing:		Level of Significance:	National
Citation Revision No:		Category:	Residential
Citation Revision Date:	July 1994	Style:	Modern

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Date of Design:	1959-60 (62)	Designer:	Sydney Ancher
Construction Period:	1960-62	Client/Owner/Lessee:	ACT Housing Trust
Date of Additions:		Builder:	AV Jennings

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## Statement of Significance

The Northbourne Housing Precinct, located on both sides of Northbourne Avenue in Dickson and Lyneham, is an example of significant architecture and an educational resource. The housing precinct is a very good example of the Post-War International Style (1940-1960). The design incorporates all of the features which are specific to the style including cubiform overall shape, structural frame expressed, large sheets of glass and a simplified form of curtain wall.

The overhang for shade, cantilever, contrasting non-rectangular shape, internal planning with the glazing located along the edge of the wall at the corner of rooms, unifying repetition of fenestration, pergolas, detail and external finishes, site planning and urban scale are design features that are of additional significance.

The housing precinct is Canberra's, and it appears Australia's, first and only true architectural example of the rationale of the Bauhaus principles used for public housing, based on the important example of the Weissenhof Siedlung in Stuttgart, Germany. The Bauhaus, located in Germany, was the most important school of architecture and applied arts of the twentieth century. Its teachings and principles are fundamental to the International Style. The Northbourne Housing Precinct still exhibits all of these principles making it a significant example of architecture.

The complex was designed and built to provide a gateway or entry point into Canberra, at a time when the city had no architecturally significant urban structures along the main entry route to the city.

The architecture of this housing precinct may contribute to the education of designers in their understanding of Post-War Architectural styles and urban design.

The housing precinct is significant for the strong and special association with the architect Sydney Ancher. Ancher is recognised as one of Australia's leading architects of the modern movement. Ancher's output was not extensive and this project was his only large medium density housing design.

Professor Denis Winston is recognised as one of Australia's most important planners in the post war period.

The involvement in the Northbourne Housing Precinct of Professor Denis Winston CBE, Professor of Town and Country Planning at Sydney University and Sydney Ancher, RAI Gold Medalist 1975 and at the time considered to be the leading domestic architect in Sydney, has resulted in a unique project that holds an important place in the architectural history of Australia.

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## Description

The Northbourne Housing Precinct was designed by Ancher, Mortlock & Murray for the NCDC starting in 1959 **1** and construction was completed in 1962 **2**. Sydney Ancher was the Director in charge and the Design Architect and Stuart Murray the Project Architect **3**. The buildings are an example of the Post-War International Style (1940-60) with their cubiform overall shape, structural frame expressed, curtain wall and large sheets of glass **4**.

The earliest notable Australian examples built in the style date from the late 1940's including, 'Windy Dropdown' (Farley House), North Curl Curl, 1946-48 (the first house in NSW that did not require a parapet to hide the flat roof), four individual houses at Maytone Avenue, Killara, 1948-51, the English House, 1949-50, St Ives (now demolished) all by Sydney Ancher, houses by Harry Seidler including the Rose Seidler House, Wahroonga, 1948-50, the Stanhill Flats, by Frederick Romberg, Melbourne, 1948 and the Weston Electronics building (formerly Boots Pure Drug Company) by Stafford, Moor Farrington & J Torzillo, Roseville, 1954.

Other examples of this style in Canberra are individual houses; the 'Bowden House', by Harry Seidler, 1952 and the 'Benjamin House', by Alex Jelinek, 1956, (a contrasting curvilinear form), both in Deakin.

The innovative planning and mixed housing in the Northbourne Housing Precinct provided the first high-density housing project commissioned by the NCDC. The only other modern public housing in Canberra at the time was the 16 three-storey walk up flats at Bega Courts and Allawah Courts, by the Commonwealth Department of Works in Civic along Ballumbir Street and Ainslie Avenue, 1956 **5**. The Currong Apartments were built a little later than the Courts and overwhelm and have little sympathy with the low-level courts. These flats exhibit some of the architectural elements of the Post War International Style including cubiform overall shape and large sheets of glass. The two Courts may have been influenced by pre-war Scandinavian architecture with their medium sized square windows and coloured walls while the Apartments appear to be influenced by British highrise public housing apartment buildings.

The Northbourne Housing Precinct, designed for the then recently formed NCDC, were the first buildings to be built north of Turner and Braddon along Northbourne Avenue and were designed with the intention of providing "an entrance to the city on Northbourne Avenue"**6**, a "Gate Way Entry"**7**. "It was public housing in an innovative style characteristic of work done by contemporary architects elsewhere in the world"**8**. It was part of the housing program the NCDC began "in an effort to overcome then-current housing deficiencies"**9**. The housing would be considered medium density today.

The precinct consists of five types of housing on the flat, originally treeless, site on two sides of the Avenue with areas of 2.64 and 1.98 hectares. The client requirements were; "Community housing of specified types limited to one, two and three storeys (specifically no multi-storey buildings) with a unifying expression of town scale and character to conceal existing building sprawl of average suburban development each side of the highway...Car entry from highway forbidden and concealment of drying areas requested...Specific nature strips and building lines 25ft (7.6m) required."**10**

The precinct provided good quality residential design, with open spaces, landscaping, pedestrian links, road loops and cul-de-sacs with off street parking. The five types are all uniformly detailed and finished with a fine aggregate 'Tyrolean' render to the external walls, flat metal roofs and timber framed glazing with aluminium sashes all combined to provide the desired urban character. The repetitive fenestration where the glazing extends the full height of the buildings to the under

side of the roof fascia is common throughout. The housing types are as follows:

- four storey bedsitter flats raised one level above the ground on a concrete frame,
- two storey pair houses with extensive use of terraces and pergolas,
- three storey 'maisonettes' raised one level above the ground on a concrete frame,
- single storey courtyard garden flats with a communal central courtyard,
- three storey flats.

#### Bedsitter Flats

The four storey bedsitter or bachelor flats are located at the northern end of the precinct on both sides of the avenue, one on the west side and three on the east. The entry foyers, stairs and laundries are at the ground level each with a curved rendered wall addressing the Avenue, recessed under the level above.

They are constructed in concrete frame to the first floor, loadbearing masonry walls and suspended concrete slabs to the upper levels. The glazing is in vertical full height panels, in slender curtain wall like sections. The landscaping consists of large timber planter boxes, external benches, concrete paths and paved areas. The original 'linking' pergolas are no longer present.

There are two flats to each level with living rooms facing north. Across the centre on a north south axis lies the central stair and service ducts separating each unit. The kitchens and bathrooms extend along the south of each unit with a separate store between.

The design of these units may have been influenced by Walter Gropius' design of the student residential flats at the Bauhaus, Dessau, Germany, 1926, without the individual balconies. The curved walls of the ground floor levels which address the avenue would appear to be a reference to Le Corbusier's residential designs of the late 1920's and early 1930's such as Maison Cook, Paris, 1926, the Weissenhof House, Stuttgart, 1927 and Villa Savoye, Poissy, 1929-31.

#### Pair Houses

The eleven blocks of two storey pair houses, each containing one pair of semi-detached and two single houses, are located to the west of the avenue with two thirds facing north perpendicular to the avenue and the others parallel to and addressing the avenue.

The plan has a simple cubic form with the living, kitchen and dining areas at ground level. The dining and living areas are separated by the centrally located stair up to the bedroom level. Both the living and dining areas have external access to the landscaped areas. The kitchen and separate laundry are located behind the stair at the carport side. The upper level has three bedrooms and a bathroom. At the top of the stair is the access to the upper level terrace, emphasising the continuation of the 'journey' through the house, an important planning theme of modern domestic architecture. The glazing to each bedroom is located along the edge of the wall at the corner of each room which allows the light to wash the surface of the adjacent wall perpendicular to the glazing, thus illuminating the room. The location of the glazing this way was an important planning ideal in much of modern architecture. The first floor terraces are divided from neighbours by central glazed screens and have metal balustrades. The double carports between the units that address the east and west of the site have curved masonry walls placed below the terraces providing privacy and a form contrasting with the cubic massing.

These buildings feature many of Ancher's design elements that he developed throughout his architectural work in Sydney, in the late 1940s and 1950s. Ancher's architectural philosophy can clearly be seen in these houses where the forms of the buildings are unified by the repetition of fenestration, pergolas, balconies, detailing and where the buildings are simple and well proportioned.

#### Maisonettes

The five blocks of three storey maisonettes, each with six houses, are placed lineally along the avenue on the east side, south of the Visitor Information Centre. These buildings appear to be directly influenced by Le Corbusier's maisonette houses of the late 1920s such as Maison Cook and the Weissenhof house, both derivations of his 'Maison Citrohan' where the living areas are raised one level off the ground, 'piano nobile', to allow entry and parking directly under the house, and in this particular case storage and laundry facilities as well. The placement of the living levels

and front balconies on the first level takes advantage of views and the cooling breezes which are greater above ground level. The planning of the main level provides a full width and depth living room with a kitchen to the east. The glazing to the east is located along the edge of the wall at the corner of the room, the same as the Pair Housing. This feature is repeated in the bedrooms on the upper level.

The west facade of these buildings faces onto the Avenue forming a rhythmic play of cubic forms with their recessed verandahs, full height glazing and wall surfaces. The cantilevered structure with the slim structural columns set back from the front facade acknowledges the importance of the street facade. These are truly delightful examples of modern architecture.

### Courtyard Houses

The single storey courtyard housing is located east of the maisonettes. These buildings, including 16 flats of one and two bedroom types, are an impressive solution to the client requirements. Each flat has a north facing living room, a courtyard entry and separate carport set behind and punctuating the common bounding walls. Each flat's kitchen and laundry open to a shared central inward focusing courtyard. This courtyard is the full width and depth of the housing group along a north/south axis providing a protected sunny communal space. Rooms within the units have full height glazing looking out towards the courtyard or to the perimeter. Some units still have their original cast iron gates.

The courtyard housing appears to be influenced by the designs for courtyard housing by Mies van der Rohe in the 1930s, notably the design for the 1931 Building Exhibition in Berlin, which Ancher visited, and the Ulrich Lange House project, Krefeld, 1935 (not built).

### Three Storey Flats

The three storey flats are located to the south of the pair housing on the west side of the avenue. The four buildings, each containing 12 flats of one or two bedroom types, all face north, set perpendicular to the avenue with each flat being the full depth of the building.

Each unit has balconies or access to the ground level. The balconies and roof overhang provide shade in summer. There are curved brick walls to the laundry areas.

These flats may have been influenced by European modern housing such as Mies van der Rohe's Weissenhof units, Stuttgart, 1927; though it would appear in these units the money was not available to provide roof terraces. The internal stair halls are expressed on the north facade with three storeys of full height glazing in a curtain wall like structure, reminiscent of Hoffmann's Werkbund Siedlung, Vienna, 1932.

The interior of the precinct housing has plaster walls constructed with 100mm SHS and ceilings plastered with marble dust mixed with white cement.

The site planning generally provides painted garden walls, play areas, landscaping, walkways and street side as well as undercover parking specifically planned with access from minor streets set away from Northbourne Avenue.

This modern housing scheme was designed along the lines of European 'Siedlung' or worker's housing. Eminent architectural historian Professor Jennifer Taylor believes that it is the "only large housing project in Australia that is so evidently directly inspired by the Weissenhof, Stuttgart scheme. This is undeniable in the characteristics, such as the white cubic massing of the units, the various 'types' of accommodation provided, and in their disposition to each other."<sup>11</sup>

The main architectural elements that are specific to the Post-War International Style (1940-60) and that are displayed by these buildings relate to the external forms. They are:

- cubiform overall shape,
- structural frame expressed,
- curtain wall,
- large sheets of glass.

Other architectural elements of this style displayed by these buildings that relate to the external forms are:

- overhang for shade,
- cantilever,
- contrasting non-rectangular shape.

The main architectural elements listed above place these buildings in the Post-War International Style (1940-60) **12**.

The internal planning with the glazing located along the edge of the wall at the corner of rooms, stairs, internal finishes, unifying repetition of fenestration, pergolas, detail and external finishes, site planning and urban scale are design features that are of additional significance.

The structural engineer was Norman Mussen and the precinct was built by A V Jennings.

The precinct has always been public housing. The buildings are structurally sound, needing some minor repairs to finishes etc. The face brick garden walls and timber fencing were not part of the original design; they were added without input from Ancher Mortlock & Murray.

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## Condition and Integrity

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## Background/History

The Northbourne Housing Precinct resulted from a limited competition held in 1959 when the NCDC invited leading Australian architectural firms to design 150 houses along Northbourne Avenue. Ancher Mortlock & Murray were selected with Sydney Ancher as the Principal Architect in charge and design architect, and Stuart Murray as the project architect. Ancher's master plan was approved by the NCDC in late December 1959 where in the letter of approval and engagement, dated 24th December 1959, Mr Robert Lansdown, then the Secretary and Manager of the NCDC, wrote to Ancher,

"The Commission is very pleased with the proposals and would like to congratulate you in achieving the atmosphere and character required for the Northbourne Avenue approach to Canberra."**13**

In 1959, 18 months after its establishment, the NCDC's policy was "backed by the Government - to introduce a structure into the Capital. Lake Burley Griffin was initiated, two bridges put to design,...and an entrance to the city on Northbourne Avenue to put to site planning and design."**14** The entrance to the city referred to here is the Northbourne Housing Precinct.

To assist in the planning of the entry to the city along Northbourne Avenue and the site planning of this precinct the NCDC also engaged Professor Denis Winston, head of the Department of Town and Country Planning at Sydney University. Professor Winston was considered by Sir John Overall as the "most important influence in planning in Australia in the post war period."**15** He was the founder of the Royal Australian Planning Institute and a member of the National Capital Planning Committee from 1964-70. Winston believed

"The welfare of the majority is more important than the welfare of the minority" and that "the Bauhaus design was his preferred style."**16**

These three men, Sir John Overall, Professor Denis Winston CBE and Sydney Ancher, had a great admiration for each other **17**. They each had an influence on Australia's architectural and urban design during the post war period. In this project they combined to create a modern housing precinct and entry to Canberra, Australia's National Capital. The common respect for each other and their agreement on the importance and correctness of the Bauhaus aesthetic resulted in the building of an important landmark in the development of modern architecture in Australia that has a particular historic and urban importance to Canberra and Australia.

The design was influenced by the German and Austrian Siedlung, workers housing, constructed prior to World War II by leading European architects. A notable example being the Weissenhof Siedlung in Stuttgart, Germany. Eminent architectural historian Associate Professor of Architecture Jennifer Taylor believes that the Northbourne Housing Precinct is the only large

housing project in Australia that is so evidently directly inspired by the Weissenhof Siedlung.

"This is undeniable in the characteristics, such as the white cubic massing of the units, the various 'types' of accommodation provided and in their disposition to each other."**18**

The Weissenhof Siedlung, begun 1927, was designed by many of the foremost modern architects under the leadership of Mies van der Rohe who designed the site plan and some of the housing. Other architects who designed housing at Weissenhof included Le Corbusier, J.J.P. Oud, Mart Stam, Peter Behrens, Walter Gropius, Ludwig Hilbersheimer, Hans Scharoun, M. Taut and Bruno Taut, most of whom were directly associated with the Bauhaus.

The Bauhaus, 1919-1933, located in Germany, was the most important school of architecture and applied arts of the twentieth century. The aims of the Bauhaus were to stimulate a theoretically and practically sound sense of form and colour, where artists, craftsmen and architects were taught and worked together. The directors of the Bauhaus, Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe, were two of the most important modernist architects of this century, both moving to the USA prior to World War II when the German Government closed the school because of its modernist teachings. Along with Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier they dominated the International Style.

The International Style came late to Australia being delayed by the Depression and World War II.

The Northbourne Housing Precinct is Sydney Ancher's largest project, in extent and cost **19**. It is one of only two of his projects that have been built in Canberra, the other being the original ANU Students Union Building which is now the Chancellery Annex, 1964-65, which has been extensively altered internally. In 1965 he was asked to design the RAI National Headquarters Building in Canberra, however, the project was not completed to his design.

Sydney Ancher was a founding partner and the senior partner of what became one of Sydney's major architectural firms, Ancher Mortlock & Murray, now Ancher Mortlock & Woolley. He graduated from the Sydney Technical College in 1930 and won the Board of Architects of NSW Travelling Scholarship in the same year. For five years before the war he worked in London and travelled in Europe where he saw the work of Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier and others. He had not been aware through his formal education of the modern movement of architecture and this period of his life in Europe was formative in his architectural self education. He returned to Australia, designed the Prevost House, Sydney, 1937, and made another short trip to Europe prior to the war. During the war he served with the army in Palestine and Darwin. His architecture has concentrated on domestic projects, probably due to the lack of building during these times and partly due to his preference. Ancher's architecture is of white painted open plan buildings which open the interior to the landscape and incorporate verandahs and pergolas. He was a mentor to the current generation of many of Sydney's architects who associated with him in their formative years and have become design innovators themselves.

Sydney Ancher was a pioneer of the modern movement in Australia. In 1947 the Warringah Council objected to his flat roof design for the Farley House in North Curl Curl, Sydney. In a landmark decision the court ruled that the design did not have to incorporate parapets. His own house at 3 Maytone Avenue, Killara won the RAI Sulman Medal in 1945, even though the local council required restrictive aesthetic changes. At the time of the Northbourne Housing Precinct commission Sydney Ancher was considered by Sir John Overall as "the most outstanding domestic architect in Sydney"**20**.

Robin Boyd referred to Sydney Ancher's houses as "in the best Australian tradition of horizontally bleached colours and decorative shadows...a line of development, unaffected, uncomplicated and an undeviating search for simplicity"**21**.

Sydney Ancher was awarded the RAI Gold Medal in 1975.

The project architect for the housing precinct was Stuart Murray. He began as an architectural assistant to Ancher in 1947 and after travelling in Europe became a partner with Ancher and Bryce Mortlock in the 1950's. His involvement in the Northbourne Housing Precinct appears to be as a junior partner. In the design stage he developed further Ancher's designs and was the site architect for general supervision of the construction. Ancher undertook regular visits to Canberra for meetings etc. and correspondence was directed to and from him. Bryce Mortlock believes that;

"There is no doubt in my mind that the project was Syd's baby from start to finish. It was Syd's design, and I think it not unlikely that Syd did some of the drawings in his own hand - certainly the sketch plans, and perhaps some working drawings. The rest would have been done by Stuart Murray under Syd's direction, and Stuart would have handled most of the contract administration side of things.

As we know, Syd was inclined to take a sort of wry dismissive attitude to his works once they were completed - they always fell short of his original, probably unattainable, concept - but I suspect he kept a secret place in his heart for the Northbourne project. After all, it was a major work, arguably the largest of his career."**22**

The location of public housing along both sides of the Avenue was highly significant as a social gesture being an affirmation that this was the capital of and for the people.

"The Northbourne Precinct was a commitment of the NCDC to the city as a people's city, a reinforcement of a fundamental egalitarian ethos..."**23**.

Jennifer Taylor believes that the Northbourne Housing Precinct "is a unique project that holds an important place in the architectural history of Australia, and one that contributes positively to the Canberra environment." She states that it is "its extent, the mixed housing examples it contains, and in its urban qualities as a large housing estate, that its prime contributions as an historic example and an urban element lie."

She believes that " In its location on Northbourne Avenue and its disposition on both sides of the Avenue to form an entry to the city, it is much significance in its reflection of the planning ideals of the young city.

In this it is an excellent example of the sound and far-sighted vision of the early NCDC, notably that of the outstanding Commissioner, Sir John Overall."**24**

Ken Woolley believes that "With the passage of time it can be seen as disciplined, frugal in accordance with the economics of its brief and intellectually rigorous."**25**

Harry Seidler believes that the precinct "is unique in that it assembles different types and sizes of apartments in buildings that create a serene environmental unity at an urban scale"**26**.

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### **Analysis against the Criteria specified in Schedule 2 of the Land (Planning and Environment) Act 1991**

*(i) a place which demonstrates a high degree of technical and/or creative achievement, by showing qualities of innovation or departure or representing a new achievement of its time*

The design of the Northbourne Housing Precinct in 1959-60 in the Post-War International Style represented a relatively new architectural style in Australia at that time.

The earliest notable Australian examples built in the style date from the late 1940s including, 'Windy Dropdown' (Farley House), North Curl Curl, 1946-48 (the first house in NSW to not require a parapet to hide the flat roof), four individual houses at Maytone Avenue, Killara, 1948-51, the English House, 1949-50, St Ives (now demolished) all by Sydney Ancher, houses by Harry Seidler including the Rose Seidler House, Wahroonga, 1948-50 and the Stanhill Flats, by Frederick Romberg, Melbourne, 1948 and the Weston Electronics building (former Boots Pure Drug Company) by Stafford, Moor Farrington & J Torzillo, Roseville, 1954.

The precinct was one of the first national housing developments commissioned by the early National Capital Development Commission and its design was awarded to Ancher Mortlock & Murray after a limited competition held by the NCDC among distinguished Australian architects.

The design was influenced by the German and Austrian Siedlung, workers housing, constructed prior to World War II by leading European architects. A notable example being the Weissenhof Siedlung in Stuttgart, Germany. Eminent architectural historian Professor Jennifer Taylor believes that it is the only large housing project in Australia that is so evidently directly inspired by the Weissenhof Siedlung.

"This is undeniable in the characteristics, such as the white cubic massing of the units, the various 'types' of accommodation provided and in their disposition to each other."

The Weissenhof Siedlung, begun 1927, was designed by many of the foremost modern architects under the leadership of Mies van der Rohe who designed the site plan and some of the housing. Other architects who designed housing at Weissenhof included Le Corbusier, J.J.P. Oud, Mart Stam, Peter Behrens, Walter Gropius, Ludwig Hilbersheimer, Hans Scharoun, M. Taut and Bruno Taut, most of whom were directly associated with the Bauhaus.

The Bauhaus, 1919-1933, located in Germany, was the most important school of architecture and applied arts of the twentieth century with its aims to stimulate a theoretically and practically sound sense of form and colour, where artists, craftsmen and architects were taught and worked together. The directors of the Bauhaus, Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe, were two of the most important modernist architects of this century, both moving to the USA prior to World War II when the German Government closed the school because of its modernist teachings. Along with Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier they dominated the International Style.

The International Style came late to Australia being delayed by the Depression and World War II.

The housing precinct represents the design philosophy of the International Style modified by Ancher to Australian conditions. It can be seen to be frugal in accordance with the economics of its brief and intellectually rigorous. Professor Denis Winston assisted the NCDC in the site planning and urban design to create a development which was at the forefront of urban design at that time.

Sydney Ancher was a founding partner of the firm Ancher, Mortlock & Murray which is recognised as a key practitioner of the Post-War International Style of architecture.<sup>27</sup>

*(ii) a place which exhibits outstanding design or aesthetic qualities valued by the community or a cultural group*

The housing precinct exhibits all of the particular architectural elements specific to the Post-War International Style including cubiform overall shape, structural frame expressed, curtain wall and large sheets of glass. Curtain wall, associated more with high-rise buildings, is present in a limited form where large sheets of glass extend from floor to ceiling directly above and below one another.

The individual housing 'types' exhibit particular architectural elements specific to the Post-War International Style including as follows:

Four Storey Flats (Bedsitter Flats), located at the north of the precinct forming a 'gateway' to Canberra on both sides of Northbourne Avenue:  
Cubiform overall shape, structural frame expressed and curtain wall.

Two Storey Pair Houses, located on the west side of Northbourne Avenue:  
Cubiform overall shape, large sheets of glass.

Three Storey Maisonettes, (believed to be the only maisonette housing in Australia in masonry construction), located on the east side of Northbourne Avenue:  
Cubiform overall shape, structural frame expressed, large sheets of glass.

Single Storey Garden Flats (grouped around a central communal courtyard), located to the east of the maisonettes:  
Cubiform overall shape, large sheets of glass.

Three Storey Flats, located to the south on the western side of Northbourne Avenue:  
Cubiform overall shape, curtain wall, large sheets of glass.

The internal planning with the glazing located along the edge of the wall at the corner of rooms, stairs, overhang for shade, cantilever, contrasting non-rectangular shape, unifying repetition of fenestration, pergolas, detail and finishes, site planning and urban scale are design features of the



whole precinct that are of additional significance.

The housing precinct is Canberra's first true example of medium density public housing in the International Style and is a good example of Ancher's work. Its location on both sides of Northbourne Avenue to form a gateway entry and define the street as planned, reflects the planning ideals of the early NCDC.

The housing precinct is well detailed and well built and is valued nationally by the RAIAs as a very good example of this style of architecture by a prominent Australian Architect. It is of national significance.

*(iii) a place which demonstrates a distinctive way of life, taste, tradition, religion, land use, custom, process, design or function which is no longer practised, is in danger or being lost, or is of exceptional interest*

*(iv) a place which is highly valued by the community or a cultural group for reasons of strong or special religious, spiritual, cultural, educational or social associations*

*(v) a place which is the only known or only comparatively intact example of its type*

The housing precinct is the only known large housing group in Australia that was directly inspired by the teachings of the Bauhaus exemplified by the Weissenhof-Siedlung, Stuttgart, Germany, 1927. Within the precinct is one of the few Maisonette developments in Australia and the only known example constructed in masonry and concrete, being a derivation of Le Corbusier's Maison Citrohan.

*(vi) a place which is a notable example of a class of natural or cultural places or landscapes and which demonstrates the principal characteristics of that class*

*(vii) a place which has strong or special associations with person, group, event, development or cultural phase which played a significant part in local or national history*

Sydney Ancher played a significant role in Australia's cultural history. He was one of the most important architects of the mid-century in Australia and this is a unique project in his career in terms of its size and type - group housing. It is Ancher's only large housing design and appears to be his largest work, in terms of cost and built area.

Robin Boyd referred to Sydney Ancher's houses as:

"in the best Australian tradition of horizontally bleached colours and decorative shadows...a line of development, unaffected, uncomplicated and an undeviating search for simplicity".

It is these characteristics of Ancher's house designs which are evident in the design concept for this housing precinct.

Sydney Ancher was awarded the RAIAs Gold Medal in 1975.

Professor Denis Winston CBE, the town planning consultant for the Northbourne Avenue entry to Canberra and this project, played a significant role in Australia's cultural history. He was Professor and Head of the Department of Town and Country Planning at Sydney University, 1948-74, and Emeritus Professor from 1974 until his death in 1980. He was a member of the National Capital Planning Committee 1964-70 and the founder of the Royal Australian Planning Institute. Sir John Overall believes him to be the most important influence in planning in Australia in the post war period.

The housing precinct is of much significance to Canberra and Australia, specifically in its early date as an example of Canberra housing ideals and the sound and far sighted vision of the early National Capital Development Commission, notably that of the outstanding Commissioner, Sir John Overall.

The complex was designed and built to provide a gateway or entry point into Canberra, at a time when the city had no architecturally significant urban structures along the main entry route to the city other than the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings which are in the centre of Civic, 3km from the precinct.

The involvement in the Northbourne Housing Precinct of Sir John Overall, Professor Denis Winston CBE, Professor of Town and Country Planning at Sydney University and Sydney Ancher, RAIA Gold Medalist 1975 and at the time considered to be the leading domestic architect in Sydney, has resulted in a unique project that holds an important place in the architectural History of Australia.

*(xi) a place which demonstrates a likelihood of providing information which will contribute significantly to a wider understanding of natural or cultural history, by virtue of its use as a research site, teaching site, type locality or benchmark site*

Through its architectural style, planning and urban form this precinct is a valuable educational resource for designers and planners. Its external architecture is characteristic of the Post-War International Style and the varied planning and massing of the buildings reflects the ideals and vision of the NCDC. The whole composition creates a unique urban form.

The incorporation of Maisonettes, an important housing type in Europe, is extremely rare in Australia.

The architecture of this housing precinct and urban form may contribute to the education of designers in their understanding of Post-War Architectural Styles.

Sydney Ancher is recognised as one of Australia's leading architects of the modern movement. This housing precinct is a unique project in his career in its extent and in being group housing.

Professor Denis Winston is recognised as one of Australia's most important planners in the post war period.

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## References

- 1 Ancher Mortlock & Murray (AMM), Northbourne Housing Job File.
- 2 ACT Heritage Draft Citation. Although correspondence in Job File shows Ancher was still travelling to Canberra for work relating to the project in July 1964.
- 3 Correspondence from Ken Woolley & Bryce Mortlock, & Job File.
- 4 Richard Apperly Robert Irving Peter Reynolds. Identifying Australian Architecture Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present. Angus & Robertson 1989.
- 5 J R Conner. Guide to Canberra Buildings. Angus & Robertson & RAIA 1970. Conversation with Sir John Overall.
- 6 Correspondence from Robert Lansdown to the AHC.
- 7 Conversation with Sir John Overall.
- 8 Robert Lansdown opcit.
- 9 Ibid
- 10 Architecture Australia March 1965, p134-137.
- 11 Correspondence from Professor Jennifer Taylor 1996.
- 12 Richard Apperly Robert Irving Peter Reynolds opcit.
- 13 AMM Job File opcit.
- 14 Robert Lansdown opcit.
- 15 Sir John Overall opcit.
- 16 Canberra Times 12.2.69 p15 and Sydney Morning Herald 23.5.80 p8.
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- 19 Woolley & Mortlock opcit.
- 20 Sir John Overall opcit.
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- 22 Correspondence with Bryce Mortlock opcit.
- 23 Correspondence with Donald Dunbar.
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**Other Information Sources**