

Wellington City Council District Plan New Listings (Felicity Wong)

Modernist listings

Since 1999 Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga has been listing the 20 most significant New Zealand Modern movement buildings identified by ICOMOS/DOCOMOMO.

The District Plan has now added to its heritage schedule a number of those modernist buildings after more than 10 years of work to identify gaps in its heritage listings.

In 2013 the Council undertook a thematic heritage study noting the significance of post-WWII European emigre architects and the Modernist movement.

After WWII 12,000 state houses were being built annually to address the severe housing shortage. The repetitive English Cottage Style led to a demand for something different and to use architects for more individual style homes. Modern materials of concrete, steel and glass were used by modernists to create light filled, open plan interiors. Ornamentation was spurned and strong linear forms favoured.

European emigre Ernst Plischke was a leading proponent of International Modernism and the architect of two of the eight modernist houses added to the WCC heritage Schedule this year:

49 Waiapu Rd (Hirschfield House HNZPT listed category 1, Ernst Plischke);

57 Trellisick Cres (HNZPT listed, Ernst Plischke);

60 Homewood Cres (HNZPT listed Category 1, Bill Alington);

117 Campbell St (1940s by Czech architect Henry Kulka);

210 Sutherland St (by Austrian Erwin Winker);

7 Fortification Rd (1974 Des Britten house by Roger Walker)

61 Hankey St (by Bill Toomath & Derek Wilson) <https://homemagazine.nz/architectural-treasure-hidden-high-wellington-treetops/>

17 Makara Rd (Architecture Students' demonstration house, summer 1948-49)

Demonstration House

Just after Plischke designed the 1948 Henry Lang house (previously listed by WCC), Auckland University architecture students built a Demonstration House in Karori during the summer vacation. The lecturers and students believed that a fresh approach was needed in housing to demonstrate to the New Zealand public.

Eight groups of students, with the help of tutors, competed in designing the house. Their greatest challenge was the difficult site—it sloped away on three sides. The demonstration target family was “a well-educated and open-minded family free from preconceived ideas on

houses”¹ The house, like the family, was “not necessarily the minimum accepted [at that time], but rather the minimum that should be accepted in a wealthy country like New Zealand.” The main structural features were a reinforced concrete slab with parquet flooring, unconventional timber framing, and a flat roof.

In reaction to the past, modernists were non-conformists that offered modern open-plan living, and also unusual features, like murals, windows or sculptures.

Winkler & Eisenhofer reflected contemporary American precedents for clients wanting homes of individuality, internationality and modernity. A number of architectural practices sought to develop a distinct New Zealand architectural style.

Freyberg Pool /St Francis de Sales Church

Modernists were interested in telling a story about the economic and social forces that produced their buildings. And about how society projected its image into the future.

Freyberg Pool is on the site of the 1900s Te Aro outdoor baths. It is an outstanding piece of modernist architecture, completed in 1963. It was designed by Jason Smith (a partner with the Wellington based architecture firm King and Dawson) and named as a memorial to prominent New Zealander Cyril Bernard Freyberg who died the same year. The striking reinforced concrete building has an asymmetrical butterfly roof, curtain glass walls and clean lines. It is also listed as a Category One building by HNZPT.

Jason Smith also designed the 1965 Island Bay church St Francis de Sales. The exterior building material is ferro-concrete and the design is fan-shaped. The interior converges towards a central altar, dominated by a large striking mosaic of Christ on the cross, made from 135,000 pieces of ceramic glass and plastic tiles. An innovative feature of the porch is a coloured window of the patron saint of the parish, St. Francis de Sales. Although seemingly glass, the mosaic is made of vividly stained pieces of polyester resin.

Commercial buildings

Four large commercial buildings were also added to the Wellington District Plan Heritage Schedule: Former PSIS; Wool House; Manchester Unity Building and the Meteorological Office in the Botanical Gardens.

While Bill Alington was with the Ministry of Works he designed the Meteorological Office in Kelburn (built 1967-8). Bill Alington died recently and was New Zealand’s last great Modernist architect. His death “represented the close of a chapter not only for architects in Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington, but nationally. Bill was an exceptional architect, one of Aotearoa’s greatest modernists, a hugely influential and inspiring teacher and mentor to many throughout his life,” said Judi Keith-Brown, past President of Te Kāhui Whaihanga New Zealand Institute of Architects.

Other local buildings designed by Bill Alington include the Victoria University School of Music, the Upper Hutt Civic Centre and Wellington High School.

¹ Quotes from this article: https://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-Arc01_04DesR-t1-body-d5.html

His own private residence in Karori is also regarded as a key work in his Modernist oeuvre and is a Category 1 HNZPT listed historic building, recognised as one of NZ's most important modern movement buildings by DOCOMOMO. The Alington House was the culmination of mid 20th century post-and-beam pavilion style domestic NZ architecture, and has survived as a relatively rare and pure example of this form of building.

Alington designed the house for his family as a private job while working for the Ministry of Works immediately after he returned in the late 1950s from his overseas experience with a noted British architectural firm and studies at the University of Illinois. He built the house himself with the assistance of local carpenter George Nicholls, in 1962. This was also recently included in the WCC heritage schedule.

Hannah Playhouse

Designed by James Beard, in the 1960s the Hannah Playhouse is in the 'brutalist' category, which refers to the raw concrete that features in both the exterior and interior of the building.

Noted architectural historian Christine McCarthy said: "It asserts itself ... by adopting a sculptural, asymmetric roof form that addresses the corner site; and by taking its lead from brutalism's uncompromising, anti-bourgeois spirit, typified by the enthusiasm for unpainted off-form concrete."

Oriental Bay Apartments

Three large Oriental Bay apartment buildings were added to the Heritage Schedule. Olympus (1939) has an earlier "Moderne" style by Edmund Anscombe, who dominated Wellington apartment design just before WWII. It has a streamlined format of Art Deco with intact outside and inside flats, built for the Wilkinson Estate.

The Wharenui apartments were built in 1958 and designed by Keith Cooper of Strutron Group. The early modernist building has an unusual wing plan and repetitive windows.

Broadwater apartments were also designed by Keith Cooper and Lavelle of the Strutron Group) and built in the early 1960s. (Keith Cooper also designed the Racing Conference Building in Wakefield St.)

Colonial and Early C20th listings

In preparation for completing the review of the Wellington District Plan, WCC heritage staff considered over 600 proposals for listings. It's Thematic Heritage Study of 2013 helped to identify special proposals and gaps in the city's recognised historic listings. There were several themes and 26 sub-themes including Māori; whalers and flax merchants; early colonists 1840-69; Vogel assisted migrants 1871-82; and late 19th & early 20th century migrants.

Twelve houses were added to the Heritage Schedule and four residential heritage areas in Mount Victoria.

Six older houses (outside Mt Victoria) were added. They included the colonial era 1853 house at 17 Parkvale Rd², Karori; Granny Cooper's cottage at 30 Ascot St; and the Brown family farmhouse at 294 Main Rd Tawa. Those were each strongly supported by their local historical groups. The owners of the early Newtown bakery and stables at 259 Mansfield St, Newtown were sponsors of its listing.

Cliff House

Two seaside wooden houses were added to the list:

110 Oriental Pde, a two-storey wooden accordion shaped house; and Cliff House at 1 Milne Tce, Island Bay.

Built in c.1907 Cliff House is an imposing large building over a number of levels located near the beach. It housed a tea kiosk, accessed at the Milne Terrace level and also provided accommodation.

In 1908, Katherine Mansfield, aged 20, travelled to Island Bay and wrote of visiting Cliff House: 'Oh, what a glorious day this is. I shall stay here until after dark - walking along the beach - the waves going over my feet - drinking a great deal of tea - and eating a preposterous amount of bread and apricot jam at a little place called the Cliff House.'

Ten notable community buildings were also added to the Heritage Schedule. Among them was the Thorndon Pool; Khandallah Town Hall; Makara School House; Mansfield St Gospel Hall; Johnsonville Masonic Hall; Berhampore Kindergarten and the Former Primitive Methodist Church.

Former Primitive Methodist Church

The present church was built in 1907, and an earlier 1880's schoolhouse sits behind it. The church is of gothic design and originally had octagonal towers each side of its gable. In 1922 the church was sold to the Freemasons and in 1979 it was sold to the Chinese Baptists. The original manse cottage sits next door.

Joanna Newman, Convenor of the Mt Victoria Historical Society then spoke about the new listings in Mt Victoria: three residential heritage areas (Elizabeth St; Moir St and Porritt Ave); several houses in Brougham St (no's 64, 70, 71, 87, 89, 91 & 111); no's 89 & 140 Austin St & 64 Majoribanks St; 56 Pirie St; 1 Queen St (former Mt Victoria Café).

Angus Hodgson then spoke about his Modernist Toomath and Wilson designed house at 61 Hankey Street, Mt Cook.

² <https://wellington.govt.nz/-/media/your-council/plans-policies-and-bylaws/district-plan/proposed-district-plan/files/hearing-streams/03/statements-of-evidence/heritage-assessments/historic-heritage-evaluation-willow-grove-17-parkvale-road-2023.pdf>