Toorak Park Towers, 7-8 Sydney Street, Prahran

Heritage Place: Toorak Park Towers
Address: 7-8 Sydney Street, Prahran

HO Reference: HO779
Citation status: Final
Date Updated: 5 April 2024

Designer: Sol Sapir
Builder: Martin Sachs & Associates

Year of Construction: 1968



Photograph of 7-8 Sydney Street, Prahran (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).



Location map and extent of 7-8 Sydney Street, Prahran.

Heritage Group: Residential buildings
Heritage Type: Flat

Key Theme: Building suburbs
Key Sub-theme: Apartment development in the post-war era

Significance Level: Local

Controls:					
	☐	External paint controls	☐	Internal alteration controls	☐ Tree controls
	☐	Include on Victorian Heritage Register	☐	Incorporated Plans	☐ Outbuildings and fences not exempt
	☐	Prohibited uses may be permitted	☐	Aboriginal Heritage Place	■ Solar energy system controls

Statement of Significance

What is significant?

The property at 7-8 Sydney Street, Prahran (also known as Toorak Park Towers), is significant.

Later alterations and additions to the property are not significant.

How is it significant?

Toorak Park Towers is of local historical, representative, and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

Toorak Park Towers is of historical significance as a high-rise flat associated with proliferation of medium and high-rise flat buildings in the former City of Prahran in the post-war era. Higher density living became increasingly common in inner Melbourne in the 1960s and 1970s in response to the housing crisis of the post-war years, and the ensuring flat developments were increasingly influenced by the Modernist style tendencies associated with the new wave of post-war European émigré architects. As such, 7-8 Sydney Street, Prahran not only forms a tangible link to this period but is also characteristic of its associated style of European inspired Modernist architecture. (Criterion A)

Toorak Park Towers is of representative significance as a substantially intact and characteristic example of a Modernist style flat. The building not only retains a high degree of integrity with its refined form, siting, and materiality, but also exhibits key architectural features of the post-war Modernist era. Its setting along a residential street and key orientation towards the Orrong Romanis Reserve, illustrates the principal elements of high-density, middle class, suburban living which were popularised in the mid to late twentieth century. (Criterion D)

Toorak Park Towers is of aesthetic significance as a substantially intact and visually striking high rise flat that exemplifies the post-war stylistic turn towards European Modernism in flat development. Its notable style features include its rectilinear form, lack of ornamentation, gridded façade, raised structure, balconies with recessed fenestration and use of precast concrete panels, steel, and glass. Further aesthetic interest is created by its cantilevered corners which provide a sense of lightness. These features along with its siting, orientation, and placement of balconies to maximise views towards Orrong Romanis Reserve, combine to create a fine Modernist apartment block. (Criterion E)

HERCON Criteria Assessment

A	*Importance to the course, or pattern of our cultural or natural history*	Toorak Park Towers is of historical significance as a high-rise flat associated with proliferation of medium and high-rise flat buildings in the former City of Prahran in the post-war era. Higher density living became increasingly common in inner Melbourne in the 1960s and 1970s in response to the housing crisis of the post-war years, and the ensuring flat developments were increasingly influenced by the Modernist style

		tendencies associated with the new wave of post-war European émigré architects. As such, 7-8 Sydney Street, Prahran not only forms a tangible link to this period but is also characteristic of its associated style of European inspired Modernist architecture. (Criterion A)
B	*Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history*	This place does not meet this criterion.
C	*Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history*	This place does not meet this criterion.
D	*Important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments*	Toorak Park Towers is of representative significance as a substantially intact and characteristic example of a Modernist style apartment block. The building not only retains a high degree of integrity with its refined form, siting, and materiality, but also exhibits key architectural features of the post-war Modernist era. Its setting along a residential street and key orientation towards the Orrong Romanis Reserve, illustrates the principal elements of high-density, middle class, suburban living which were popularised in the mid to late twentieth century.
E	*Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics*	Toorak Park Towers is of aesthetic significance as a substantially intact and visually striking high rise flat that exemplifies the post-war stylistic turn towards European Modernism in flat development. Its notable style features include its rectilinear form, lack of ornamentation, gridded façade, raised structure, balconies with recessed fenestration and use of precast concrete panels, steel, and glass. Further aesthetic interest is created by its cantilevered corners which provide a sense of lightness. These features along with its siting, orientation, and placement of balconies to maximise views towards Orrong Romanis Reserve, combine to create a fine Modernist apartment block.

F	*Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period*	This place does not meet this criterion.
G	*Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of the continuing and developing cultural traditions*	This place does not meet this criterion.
H	*Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history.*	This place does not meet this criterion.

Description

- ### Physical Analysis

Toorak Park Towers consists of a seven-storey Post-war Modernist flat. It presents a square footprint and massing, resulting in a simple extruded square form. The apartment block fronts Sydney Street to the north, overlooking the Orrong Romanis Reserve. The concrete structure is finished with white precast spandrel panels and a flat roof clad with corrugated sheet metal. The roof is accessible via a central circulation zone and elevator shaft.

The main ground level entrance is centred and located on the front façade. Surrounding the main central circulation zone, the remainder of the ground level consists of an undercroft parking area, with rectilinear posts. Mirrored white parapet walls extend outward past the front entrance and the left wall includes contemporary metal lettering reading '8 sydney street'.

The upper six levels consist of residential flats. Recessed fenestration and detailing are arranged proportionally across the four elevations, with slight differences in balcony locations creating a rhythmic and formalised building envelope. Each of the six upper levels are divided into five bays, visually demarcated by vertically arranged steel beams. Full length window bays and balconies consist of metal framed glazing and doors. Balconies are located on the second and fourth bays along the front elevation, and on the second bay from the rear along both the side elevations. The rear elevation does not include any open balconies.

The flat is set back from the street allowing for a wide, open, and landscaped front yard. It includes a centred concrete pathway, flanked by two grassed open areas with inground garden beds edged with bluestone blocks and rubble. A return driveway along the sides of the front boundary provides access to the undercroft and rear parking. Narrow side garden beds along the eastern and western boundary are planted with shrubs and some mature trees and are partially edged with rubble.

Its original massing and form remain intact. While there are some fenestration additions and enclosing of balconies, the alterations appear sympathetic to existing windows and are not readily noticeable when viewing the building from the public domain. Fenestration additions do

not detract from the established rhythmic and formalised arrangement of the building envelope. Thus, 7-8 Sydney Street is overall in good condition and is of high integrity.

- Alterations and Additions
  - Infilling of some open balconies with glazing that appears sympathetic to existing windows.
  - Rear parking structure added.
  - Relandscaping of the front yard including new pathway and removal of some mature trees (by 2009).
  - Front parapet walls flanking the main entrance added (by 2009).

History

- Historical Context

The area presently known as Stonnington is the traditional home of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Bunurong peoples of the East Kulin Nation. Formerly characterised by pre-contact plains, grassy woodland, and floodplains on the banks of the Yarra River (Birrarung), Gardiners Creek (Kooyong Koot) and Hawksburn Creek (now channelised), this once thriving habitat provided Traditional Owners access to a range of water, plant and animal resources integral to their way of life. The onset of colonialism not only saw the transformation of these landscapes, but also Woi wurrung and Bunurong displacement through violence and land dispossession, as is evident in the establishment of George Langhorne's Aboriginal Mission Station Reserve along the southern banks of the Yarra River in present day Prahran and Toorak. Operating under the guise of 'protection', this reserve ultimately became a focal point for segregation, dislocation, and colonial control of Aboriginal people's lives (Context Pty Ltd 2009, 31).

Despite decades of ongoing dispossession, the rich cultural heritage of Traditional Owners in Stonnington has an enduring presence to this day. Through continued resistance and the passing down of Indigenous knowledge, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Bunurong people maintain an ongoing connection to, and care for Country.

European settlement in what would become the suburb of Prahran grew gradually following the 1849-1850 Crown Land Sales, which saw the subdivision of land bounded by present day Toorak Road, Orrong Road, Dandenong Road and Punt Road into fifty-one allotments (Context Pty Ltd 2009, 39). George Langhorne, the Commissioner of an 1837 Aboriginal mission in the area south of the Yarra River around Punt Hill, called this area 'Pura-ra-ran', a compound of two Bunurong words believed to mean land partially surrounded by water (O'Callaghan 1922, 54). In 1840 the name was changed to Prahran for official use.

While higher ground overlooking the Yarra to the north of Prahran was quickly acquired and settled by the colonial elite following the 1840 Crown Land Sales, the majority of present-day Prahran, being of poorly drained low-lying land characterised by wetlands, was primarily purchased by land speculators. These areas were subsequently re-sold for farming, industry and housing the working classes. The high level of natural deposits of alluvial clay in the area meant that pockets of low-lying land were used as brickyards (Context Pty Ltd 2009, 17). By 1856, the land encompassing Prahran was primarily characterised by a scattered series of timber and brick workers cottages set on narrow allotments to the west of Williams Road, while land to the east and south remained undeveloped or in use as paddocks (Surveyor-General's

Department 1856). The area was also distinguished by its strong market garden character during this period, with much of the land awaiting development being used for cultivation during the 1850s and 1860s (Malone 1983, 12).

The area underwent a period of rapid change following the 1880s land boom, which spurred the replacement of many small, mid-nineteenth century cottages with more ornate, single-fronted Victorian and Edwardian style terraces that could house the influx of factory workers as part of the area's growing brick manufacturing, food processing and textiles industries around Chapel Street and Commercial Road. Additionally, upper-middle class enclaves and mansion estates in the formerly undeveloped area of eastern Prahran were also developed to house the wealthy settling adjacent to the suburb of Armadale (Malone 2000, 20). Comprising higher ground with no major drainage problems, this area attracted comparably wealthier residents (Malone 2003, 1). These transformations were also compounded by the construction of impressively detailed shops along Chapel Street, solidifying the strip as a popular retail and commercial centre by the late nineteenth century (Allom Lovell 2000, 45).

Pockets of the suburb continued to be used as a centre for small-scale manufacturing into the early- and mid-twentieth centuries. Although business restructuring and trade liberalisation in the late twentieth century ultimately resulted in the closure and demolition of many of these factories, built remnants of this era can be seen at the c.1910 Former Kia-ora Cordial factory chimney at 181-187 High Street, Prahran and at the former milliner factory at Grattan Street, Prahran (Context Pty Ltd 2009, 95). Today, Prahran's working-class history is best represented through the relatively modest late nineteenth and early twentieth century single fronted cottages and dwellings that dominate the suburb's building stock. Meanwhile, traces of late nineteenth century middle-class residential development are best seen in the grand Victorian dwellings adjacent to Armadale along Grandview Grove.

- ## Modernism in flat design in Melbourne

Following the Second World War there was a major demand for housing in and around Melbourne. The housing crisis precipitated numerous innovations in the market including the introduction of prefabrication, used extensively by the Housing Commission of Victoria, across the new high-rise inner-city housing estates, evident in Prahran, South Yarra, Windsor, and more*;* experimentation with new methods and materials; and medium-high density residential living with the introduction of the 'own your own flats' policy and the introduction of strata title legislation (Heritage Alliance 2008, 22-23).

Frederick Romberg, a prominent architect of the era, is recognised for introducing European modernism to Victoria, in particular its application to flat construction (Context 2009, 146). These developments inevitably led to the increase in construction of high-rise buildings, although tall buildings in Melbourne overall ended up being less successful than their European and American counterparts. Other prominent post-war architects who specialised in apartment building included Roy Grounds, Robin Boyd, Yuncken Freeman Architects, Ernest Fooks, Kurt Popper and Mordecai Benshemesh.

- ## Place History

Toorak Park Towers is located on land that formed part of the Crown Portion 47 (Surveyor General's Department 1849). The north end of Portion 47 contained high quality clay and was

leased out to brickmakers. At the time Sydney Street was known as Glew Street, named after John Glew, who operated a brickyard, and the adjacent A'Beckett Street was known as Pohlman Street (refer Figure *1*). The quarry was hollowed out and the clay exhausted by 1880, following which the site was used as a rubbish tip. It was redeveloped in the late 1880s and the land was levelled to form Orrong Park, Sydney Street, A'Beckett Street, Molesworth Street and later, Woodfull Street (Malone 2003, 15). Over time many of the attached and semi-attached houses on A'Beckett Street and Sydney Street have been replaced by flats.

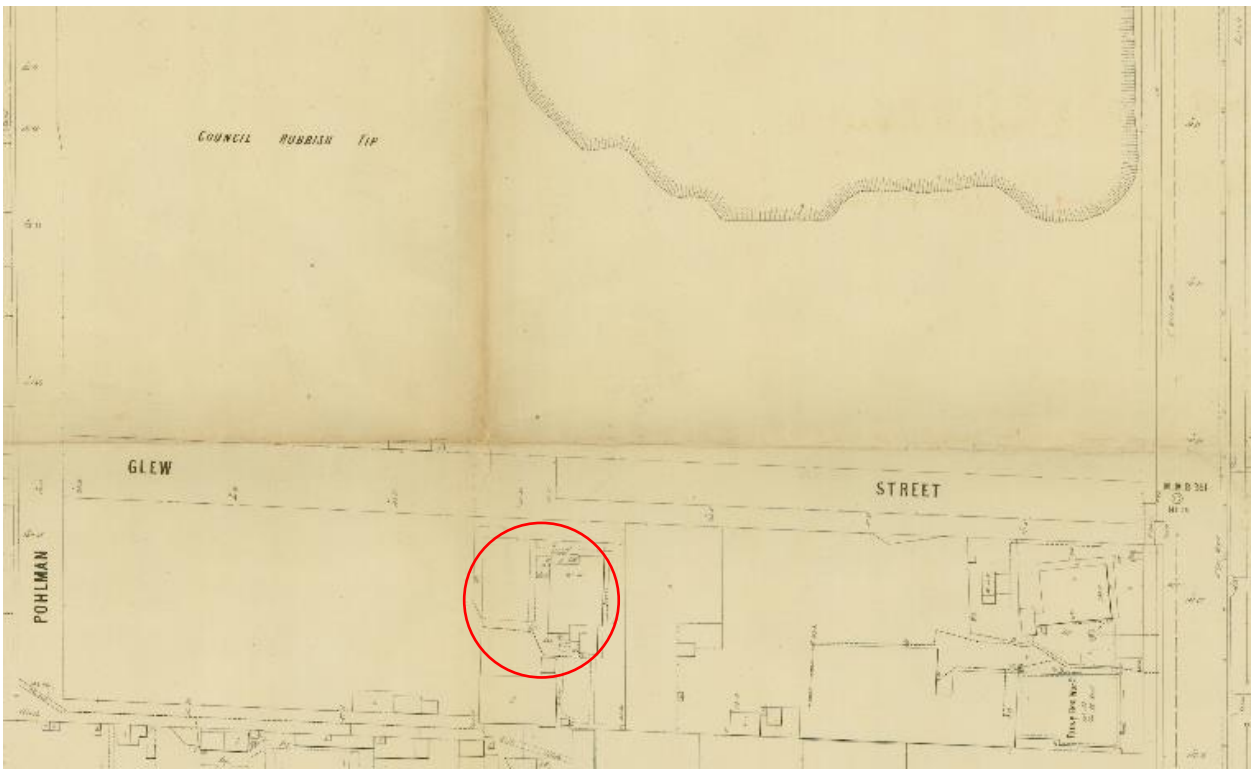


Figure 1. 1900 MMBW map showing approximate location of 7-8 Sydney Street (circled in red), Glew Street (now Sydney Street) and the adjoining Council rubbish tip. *Source*: State Library of Victoria.

The existing building at 7-8 Sydney Street was designed by Architect Sol Sapir in 1968. The builders were Sapir's longtime collaborators Martin Sachs & Associates, and the 7-storey apartment tower was constructed for clients Wingate Homes Pvt Ltd (Building Permit no. 2694). The estimated cost of construction was $250,000 and the apartment block was scheduled to include 23 flats (Building Permit no. 2694). The two brick houses and shed on the site were demolished to build the flats (Plan of Survey 1968) (refer Figure 2).

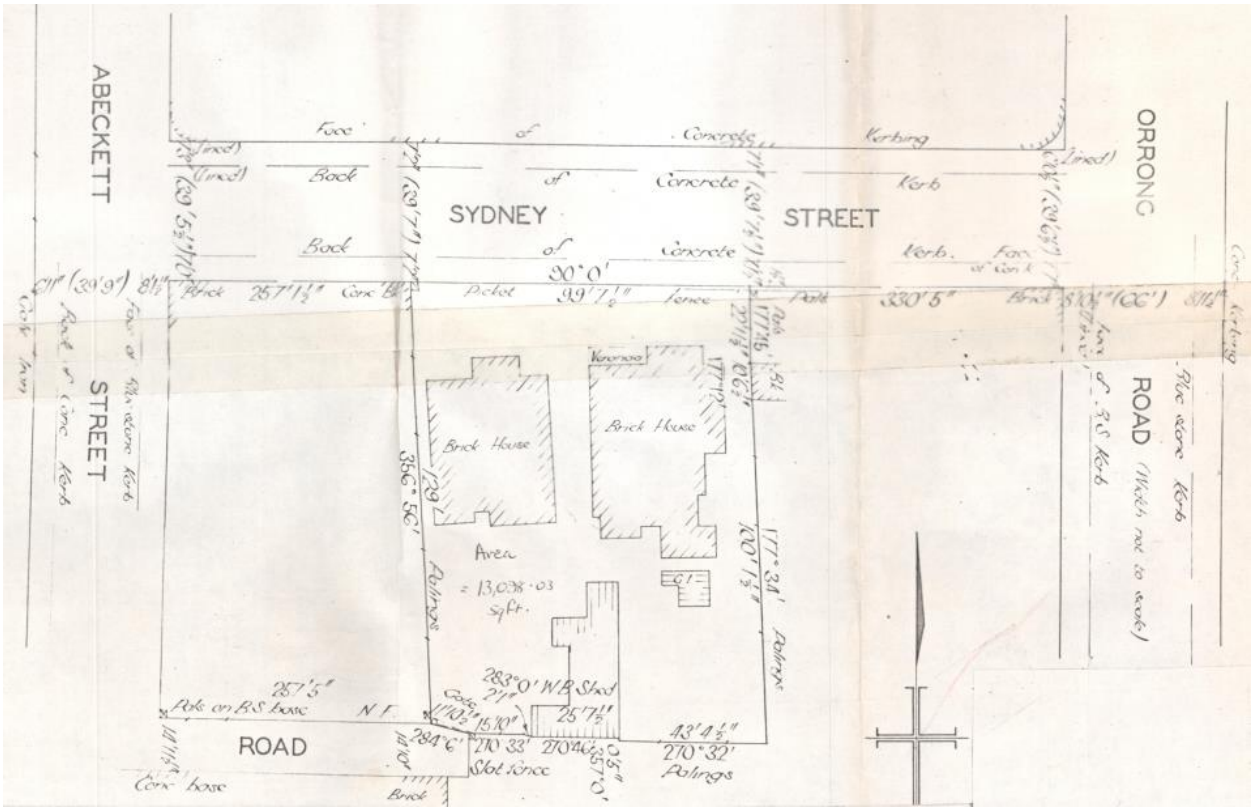


Figure 2. 1968 Plan of Survey showing location and existing buildings on site. *Source*: City of Prahran.

Also known as 'Toorak Park Towers,' the flats were extensively advertised under the 'Own Your Own Flats' typology. A 1969 newspaper advertisement describes the flats as:

> *'TOORAK PARK TOWERS. View right to the bay! 8 Sydney Street, Armadale. Right on Toorak Park, you can choose a spacious one or two bedroom home unit that gives you superb views around the compass and around the clock! Shops, schools, train, tram and bus all within 200 yards! From only $3000 deposit, $12,000 full price!'* (The Age 1969, 37)

An early photo of the flats can be seen in another advertisement from 1969 (refer Figure 3). The building is listed in the 1970 Sands & McDougall directory as 'Flats.' The flats remain in use today as private residences or rentals.



Figure 3. Advertisement showing photo of 7-8 Sydney Street. Source: The Age 1969, 38.

- ## Architect Sol Sapir

Sol Sapir was a Melbourne born architect of émigré parents. He completed his architectural studies at RMIT; however he did not complete the requisite office experience and therefore never became a registered architect. Identifying as an 'architectural designer,' he commenced practice in 1963 (Built Heritage). Sapir practiced extensively in many inner suburbs of metropolitan Melbourne including the contemporary municipalities of Melbourne, Boroondara, Stonnington, Port Phillip and Glen Eira in the 1960s and 70s. Specialising in mid-range high rise flat development, Sapir openly embraced the changing attitudes towards higher density inner city living. He had a decade long partnership with commercial builder Martin Sachs and real estate agent Nathan Beller and together they completed in the order of thirty towers in inner Melbourne (Clerehan 2014, 29).

A select list of Sapir's work include the residences at 2 Rosslyn Street, Hawthorn East, 1A Avalon Road, Armadale and 79-81 Buckingham Drive, Heidelberg; and the blocks of flats at 14 Lansell Road, Toorak, 546 Toorak Road, Toorak, 60 Clowes Street, South Yarra (City of Melbourne, HO6, Contributory), 283 Domain Road, South Yarra, 7-8 Sydney Street, Prahran, 197 Canterbury Road, St Kilda West (City of Port Phillip, HO444), 189-191, 195-196, 313 and 325 Beaconsfield Parade (City of Port Phillip, HO444), 333 Beaconsfield Parade (City of Port Phillip, HO287), 3 Alfred Square, St Kilda, 8-10 & 13 Esplanade, St Kilda (City of Port Phillip, HO5), 480 Glenferrie Road, Hawthorn (City of Boroondara, HO149, Non-contributory), and 314 Orrong Road, Caulfield North. By the mid-1970s, Sapir was known as 'Melbourne's best-known high-rise specialist' and over

the course of his career most likely completed over a hundred blocks of flats (Built Heritage). Sapir continued to practice into the 1990s, although he was less prolific in his later years.

- ### Builder Martin Sachs

Builder Martin Sachs also belonged the European émigré community and moved from Poland to Melbourne in 1949. Sachs identified as a 'self-employed builder' and worked with Modernist architect Harry Ernest in the 1950-60s, designing some of his most prominent residences (GJM Heritage 2021, 1476). 1 Sara Avenue, Brighton East (City of Bayside, HO847) is an example of this partnership. In 1964, he formed Martin Sachs & Associates Pty Ltd where he acted as designer and builder and some examples of his buildings include houses in Bellaire Court, Beaumaris (City of Bayside, HO853, interim control) and 27 Ormond Road, Elwood (GJM Heritage 2021, 1476). By c.1965 he joined Sapir and Beller in constructing a number of multi-storey apartment buildings in the suburbs of St Kilda, Elwood, Albert Park, Middle Park, Prahran and South Yarra (GJM Heritage 2021, 1476).

Comparative Analysis

During the interwar and post-war periods, the pro-development Prahran Council encouraged the development of flat buildings. The arrival of both émigré architects and clients following the rise of 1930s antisemitism and World War II not only created a distinct Modern design aesthetic that built upon and diversified existing trends, but also encouraged the development of taller and denser flat buildings (Context 2009, 138; Goad and Willis 2012, 32). While the affluent suburbs of Toorak and South Yarra became the site of prominent and grand scale architect designed flats such as Ernest Fooks' 2 Theodore Court, Toorak (HO700, interim control) and Yuncken Freeman Architects' Kilpara, 703 Orrong Road, Toorak (HO708, interim control), medium and high-density development in other areas of the municipality, including Prahran and Windsor, were often more modest in character and varied significantly in scale.

The theme of the rise of post-war high rise residential buildings in the inner suburbs of Melbourne, often influenced by the influx of émigré architects, is well-recognised, particularly in the neighbouring municipalities of Melbourne and Port Phillip. To date this theme has been less recognised in heritage controls in the City of Stonnington.

Architect Sol Sapir's flat buildings in Stonnington vary in height and scale and are largely emphasised through brick and reinforced concrete construction and include properties such as 14 Lansell Road, Toorak and 283 Domain Road, South Yarra. Sapir started to employ prefabricated concrete panels in his designs from the late 1960s as evident at 546 Toorak Road, Toorak and 7-8 Sydney Street, Prahran.

7-8 Sydney Street, Prahran is an intact high rise apartment block with refined design, form and siting and materiality new for its time of construction. Its noted Modernist style features include its rectilinear form, lack of ornamentation, gridded façade, raised structure, balconies with recessed fenestration and use of precast concrete panels, steel, and glass. The design is a popular and successful iteration of Sapir's, with similar designs executed at 189-191 Beaconsfield Parade, Middle Park & 333 Beaconsfield Parade, St Kilda West.

Comparable examples of flats designed by Architect Sol Sapir and included in the Heritage Overlay, outside of the City of Stonnington, include:

- **333 Beaconsfield Parade, St Kilda West (City of Port Phillip, HO287).** Included in the City of Port Phillip Heritage Overlay as an individually significant place.
  The fifteen-storey apartment tower at Beaconsfield Parade is an example of a high-rise apartment building designed by architect Sol Sapir. Also constructed in 1968, the beachfront tower is very similar in design to 7-8 Sydney Street but located in the municipality of Port Phillip. Key comparable attributes include late twentieth century Modernist architectural style, rectilinear form, use of materials such as precast concrete panels, steel and glass, and a gridded façade repeated on all elevations. The Beaconsfield Parade flats take advantage of their siting on the bay to optimise sea views, similar to 7-8 Sydney Street which also utilises views towards a prominent environmental feature, the Orrong Romanis Reserve. The Beaconsfield Parade flats are however almost double in height and exhibit centred fenestration, corner balconies with cut out edges and slight detailing on railings. Both sites are in good condition and of high integrity.

The abovementioned 189-191 Beaconsfield Parade and 325 Beaconsfield Parade, Middle Park (City of Port Phillip, HO444 Middle Park and St Kilda West Precinct) are other examples with similarities in design and construction style and are subject to statutory heritage controls as contributory buildings within precincts. One other building designed by Sol Sapir is subject to individual statutory heritage controls and is also located in the City of Port Phillip. 8 Mooltan Avenue, St Kilda East (City of Port Phillip, HO302), although constructed in the same year as Sydney Street, is a two-storey brick and reinforced concrete structure, designed in a different architectural style and therefore not especially comparable.

Other comparable example of the typology, within the City of Stonnington, includes:

- **Kilpara, 703 Orrong Road, Toorak (HO708, interim control).** At the time of writing Kilpara, 703 Orrond Road, Toorak is subject to interim control in the City of Stonnington Heritage Overlay.
  The modern high-rise apartments Kilpara, on Orrong Road, Toorak were constructed in 1971, by well-known architectural firm Yuncken Freeman Architects. It is the only Modernist style high rise building currently protected by the Individual Heritage Overlay in the City of Stonnington. It is noted that Panel recommended the inclusion of this place in the Heritage Overlay on a permanent basis and the adoption of this recommendation has been sent to the department for gazettal.
  It compares to 7-8 Sydney Street in terms of its architectural style, rectilinear form, and materiality. Both sites have a raised structure with a gridded façade on all elevations. 7-8 Sydney Street exhibits cantilevered corners, giving it an almost floating effect, and a balcony for each flat, some of which have been infilled. Meanwhile Kilpara comprises a flushed façade and has also undergone infill of balconies in some flats and the removal of fenestration to create balconies in others. Both sites are in good condition and although Kilpara maintains its gridded structure, its visual intactness is more noticeably affected by the abovementioned alterations.

Other comparable examples, outside the City of Stonnington, include:

- **Fairlie, 54-60 Anderson Street, South Yarra (City of Melbourne, HO1402).** Included in the Melbourne City Heritage Overlay as an individually significant place.

Constructed slightly earlier in 1961, Fairlie at 54-60 Anderson Street, South Yarra was also designed by Yuncken Freeman Architects. The modern high-rise is comparable with 7-8 Sydney Street in terms of its rectilinear form, scale, gridded façades, and materiality. Fairlie's gridded façade however is not identical on all elevations. It observes balconies on its front façade and a flushed appearance, with fenestration running down the centre, on the other three. Furthermore, Fairlie also exhibits a raised flat roof and concrete arches on the ground floor. Both buildings are highly intact examples of Modernist residential developments.

- **Edgewater Towers, 12 Marine Parade, St Kilda (City of Port Phillip, HO510).** Included in the City of Port Phillip Heritage Overlay as an individually significant place. Constructed in 1960-61, Edgewater Towers at 12 Marine Parade, St Kilda is another early example of a 'high rise' apartment block. Designed by prominent émigré architect Mordecai Benshemesh, the thirteen-storey structure compares as a multi storey Modernist block with rectilinear form and massing, a gridded façade, projecting balconies and steel framed windows. Both properties exhibit balconies orientated and positioned to maximise views. Edgewater Towers being an early example has a reinforced concrete structure whereas 7-8 Sydney Street incorporates prefabricated concrete panels, a newer building system, corresponding to its later construction date. Although both buildings have balconies that have been infilled over time, the alterations at Edgewater Towers are more pronounced and reduce the effect of open, projecting balconies, characteristic of the Modernist style.

7-8 Sydney Street compares well to the existing high-rise properties under the Heritage Overlay within the City of Stonnington and surrounding municipalities. The apartment block at 7-8 Sydney Street stands out amongst Sol Sapir's works currently present in the City of Stonnington. As mentioned above, only one of Sol Sapir's high-rise buildings is currently individually listed under the Heritage Overlay (City of Port Phillip, HO287, 333 Beaconsfield Parade, St Kilda) and it is located outside the City of Stonnington. Sapir, as an individual practitioner, contributed significantly to the post-war high rise building stock in inner city Melbourne and 7-8 Sydney Street is a particularly intact and striking example of his work within the City of Stonnington.

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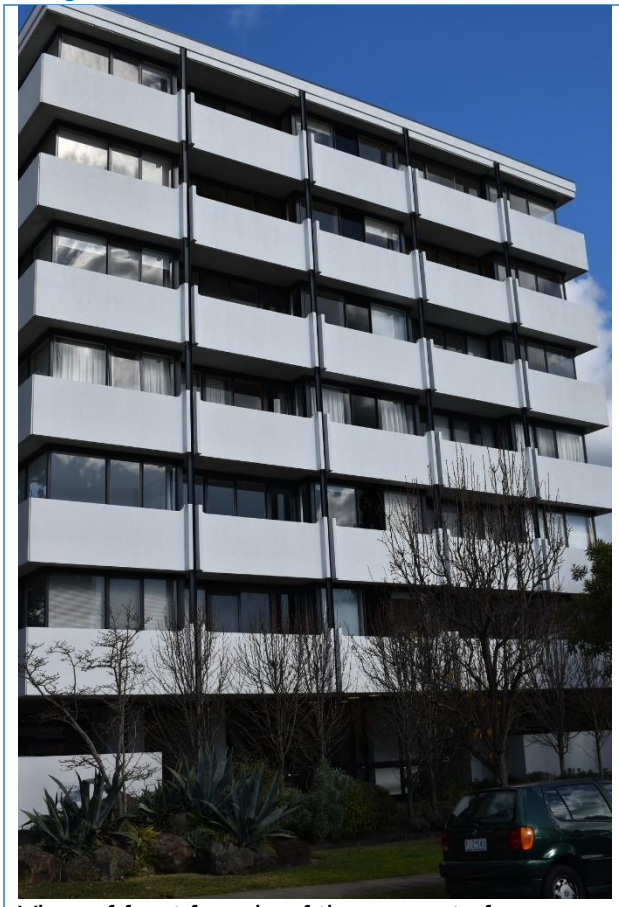
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Limitations

1. Access to all heritage places was limited to a visual inspection from the public domain. The interiors of buildings and inaccessible areas such as rear gardens were not accessed as part of this heritage study.
2. Condition and site modification assessment was limited to a visual inspection undertaken from the public domain as well as desktop resources.
3. The historical notes provided for this citation are not considered to be an exhaustive history of the site.

Images



View of front façade of the property from Sydney Street. *Source*: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022.



Detail view of balconies and window arrangement. *Source*: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022.



Detail view of front entrance. *Source*: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022.

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