

Australian Institute of Architects ACT Chapter
Register of Significant Architecture

RSA No: R 124
Name of Place: Urambi Co-operative Housing
Other/Former Names: Urambi Village
Address/Location: Crozier Circuit KAMBAH 2902

Block 1 Section 149 of Kambah

Listing Status:	Registered	Other Heritage Listings:	
Date of Listing:	September 2005	Level of Significance:	Local
Citation Revision No:	1	Category:	Residential
Citation Revision Date:	May 2016	Style:	Sydney Regional

Date of Design:	1973	Designer:	Michael Dysart & Partners
Construction	1976-77	Client/Owner/Lessee:	Urambi Co-operative
Date of Additions		Builder:	Stocks & Holdings

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

The Urambi Co-operative Housing is a well-preserved example of the move towards the introduction of diverse housing types procured through communal and co-operative processes for the purpose of demonstrating a socially responsible residential alternative and environmentally sensitive form of housing.

The housing group is a relatively rare and well-preserved example of 1970's housing. The place exhibits the principle characteristics of modern residential architecture in a National Capital Development Commission planned neighbourhood suburb; appropriate human scale and functional domestic planning. The housing is notable for being situated within a natural bushland setting and the relatively intact landscaping surrounding the buildings. The setting and the architecture combine to produce a precinct of integrity, illustrative of modern architecture and site planning.

The Urambi Co-operative Housing is the first of two examples of medium density housing designed by Michael Dysart & Partners in Canberra. Michael Dysart AM LFRAIA is one of Australia's notable architects and he believes that Urambi Co-operative Housing is an important milestone in his career.

The housing exhibits creative and artistic excellence as an entity possessing an architectural theme of modern architecture in the Late Twentieth-Century Sydney Regional style (1960-). Urambi Co-operative Housing, design beginning in 1973 and constructed in 1977, is of significance as an excellent example of the style. The building incorporates key elements of the style including asymmetrical massing; tiled skillion roofs (courtyard houses), and stained or oiled timber. The housing is aesthetically significant for its massing reflecting function and landform, juxtaposed with fine detailing, all expressed in the textural and tactile qualities of natural materials.

The place has been acknowledged for many years as a distinctive example of architecture by professional bodies. The Urambi Co-operative Housing was awarded the RAI A ACT Chapter C.S. Daley Medal in 1982 and subsequently received the RAI A ACT Chapter Twenty-Five Year Award in 2002. It continues to fulfil its original purpose and its planning remains innovative and sound.

Description

The group of 43 split-level houses and 29 courtyard houses incorporated in fifteen separate clusters was designed by Michael Dysart & Associates, in 1972, construction being completed in 1977.¹ The group is an example of the Late Twentieth-Century Sydney Regional style (1960-) with its asymmetrical massing, tiled skillion roofs (courtyard houses) and stained or oiled timber.²

The group housing complex was planned around the curve of the northwest crest of the low hill forming an inverted "L". Now set between a golf course, built post the planning, and the elbow street corner formed by Crozier Circuit the residential groups are approached off pedestrian circulation 'paths' and the car accommodation is accessed off the Circuit via five evenly spaced entry roads. The site has a mature native landscape of trees and shrubs that has been enhanced with native planting since development.

The Murrumbidgee Country Club golf course forms the north and west edge of the site and is linked to the Canberra Nature Park. The land slopes to the north and west with westerly views across to the Brindabella Mountains.

The dwellings were situated within an existing bush-land setting. Further planting of Australian natives within the public areas has re-enforced the 'naturalness' of the setting. The split-level dwellings are located closest to the circuit and are arranged in groups or clusters of three to seven dwellings placed to form parallel rows of terraces. The four southern clusters face west to the mountain views across the golf course while the remaining clusters have a northerly aspect. The clusters are serviced by six car parking areas comprising a mix of carports and garages, and visitor car parking spaces; the two end parking areas being relatively small, and all but one that is adjacent to the communal facilities, are directly adjacent to the street entries. Extending around the north and northwest edge of the site facing onto the golf course are 29 "L" planned single story courtyard houses, in clusters of three to seven, placed to form enclosed and partly enclosed private courtyards for each dwelling.

Pedestrian access to the dwellings from the parking areas is by pathways. These paths vary from narrow brick paved paths to paths that also provide access for emergency service and maintenance vehicles. The complex has communal meeting rooms, a swimming pool, a ball court, seating areas, letterboxes and garbage collection areas.

The entries to most dwellings, with their vertically panelled cedar doors, are placed seemingly without concern for a formal front façade.

All dwellings are constructed with brown cement-tile pitched roofs, brown-grey face brickwork, stained exposed timber, and western red cedar framed glazing combining to provide a distinctive aesthetic appearance of textural unity. The different designs range from two to five bedroom dwellings. Spaces within the split-level dwellings are arranged on three levels taking advantage of the slope of the site, some with clerestory glazing and skylights.

By staggering the houses the external walls of adjacent dwellings help enclose the courtyards providing additional privacy, and combined with native planting, the whole provides a perception of buildings settled in the natural landscape following the contours of the hill-side.

The builder was Stocks and Holdings.

Condition

The buildings are in remarkably good condition externally and mature trees and shrubs on and around the site add to the aesthetic quality of the group. Some dwellings have had additions, some with rooflines counter to the original forms with gabled roofs added to the courtyard skillion roof-lines.

Design Comments

Other architectural elements of the Late Twentieth-Century Sydney Regional style (1960-) displayed in these buildings that relate to the external forms are:

- clerestory windows;
- exposed rafters;
- timber decks; and
- timber awning sash.³

The following design features are of additional significance: the site planning where the clusters are staggered across the site and the native landscape setting with paths and retaining walls; the brick courtyard walls; the external finishes including the western red cedar framed glazing and panelled front doors, and face brown-grey brickwork; timber balustrades; the separate covered car parking; the split-level designs, and original detailing and finishes.

Comparative Assessment

The Urambi Co-operative Housing can be compared with Swinger Hill stages 1 and 2 housing by Ian McKay and Partners, 1971, and Wybalena Grove Housing, 1977, also designed by Michael Dysart & Partners.

Swinger Hill was designed for the NCDC as a staged development with the first two stages built as "display housing" to promote further development of the extensive site. The housing incorporated two-storey terraces and atrium housing, and single-storey courtyard housing with an "L" plan. It was constructed in similar materials to Urambi Co-operative Housing; brown brick, brown cement tiled roofs and exposed timber. Only the courtyard housing type is similar to the Urambi housing; there were no split-level houses and the roof forms to the terraces and atrium housing have a shallower pitch and are more elongated. The site planning varies. Each house in Swinger Hill is provided with individual car accommodation which required a more extensive street network throughout the site compared with Urambi which generally separates the vehicle accommodation from the housing; while the natural bush setting is not as evident at Swinger Hill.

Urambi can be compared to Wybalena where both complexes have housing set in a native landscaped site. Both incorporate split-level level terrace type housing; at Wybalena Grove this is the only housing type. Both have detached communal carports set on parking areas separate from the dwellings and both have communal facilities. The Urambi housing also incorporates "L" planned courtyard housing as well as split-level terrace type housing.

Background/History

Residential settlements such as Kambah were an integral part of the creation and planning of Canberra. The growth of Canberra in the latter half of the 20th century resulted in the development of the "Y Plan" by the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC). Peter Harrison AO as NCDC Director and First Assistant Commissioner of Town Planning from 1959-67 coordinated the design of Canberra's new low-density neighbourhood suburbs in a series of new 'satellite' towns or districts.⁴

As Paul Reid states, "The first three districts, Majura, Belconnen and Woden, were sited respectively on the outside of Griffin's 'local mountains'...Districts comprised a group of suburbs determined by primary school catchments and combined into a new town with a population of between 60,000 to 100,000. Each unit was inwardly focused to shops and work places..."⁵

The new towns of Woden and Belconnen were developed in the 1960s and 1970s; Majura has not been developed. Tuggeranong and Gungahlin were developed in the later part of the 1970s through to the 1990's.

Kambah is a northern suburb in Tuggeranong. Settlement began in the mid to early 1970's and three-quarters of the dwellings are individual houses, nearly one tenth are townhouses and the remainder are flats and units. Kambah is Canberra's largest suburb with a population of over 16,000 residents.⁶

Most multi-unit development in Canberra was designed by the government architects, sometimes in association with a private firm, up until the late 1950s. After the establishment of the NCDC, in 1958, the ideal of distinctive, innovative architecture was expressed as part of the character of the new capital.

As Dr Donald Dunbar states "The newly elected Federal Labor Party established the Department of Urban and Regional Development (DURD) which explored ways to increase and diversify the provision of more socially equitable housing. Hugh Stretton's Ideas for Australian Cities (1970) placed many of these ideas into the Australian context."⁷

Some social and environmental concerns noted by Dunbar were: "the desire to provide the opportunity for the development of medium density housing projects which could involve prospective residents in the design and development process from the outset as a co-operative and communal venture; and the desire to demonstrate that medium density urban housing could be developed with an overall aesthetic that was at one with a natural Australian landscape."⁸

Dysart recalls that “the NCDC strongly opposed both planning applications (Urambi and Wybalena Grove, Cook) in 1972 and only the intervention by the (Federal) Minister (Hon Thomas Uren) allowed the co-operatives to proceed.”⁹

And that “The NCDC planners never really articulated their opposition apart from statements like ‘people won’t want to live this way’ and ‘you just don’t understand how Australians want to live’, and ‘Urambi could become a slum within 5 years’. Their opposition was mystifying because, as architects, we had designed and built over 3000 project houses and specifically the Urambi Cooperative comprised 72 clients who were prepared to live this way.”¹⁰

Dysart says he suspects “the NCDC viewed cooperatives as a threat to their planning controls and represented a freedom of choice not available in Canberra at that time.”¹¹

The NCDC did however come to see that Urambi was a successful development and as Dysart recalls he was “surprised when I discovered that the NCDC had nominated Urambi for the Daley Medal without my knowledge” in 1977.¹²

The formation of a group to develop a site at Urambi required several groups of people willing to embrace the concept of co-operative housing that was based on close proximity of the houses combined with car accommodation set well away from the dwellings, communal facilities and shared communal spaces. The Land Tenure laws needed to be varied to allow the development and the resulting sale of individual dwellings through strata title all on a non-profit basis.

Dysart recalls “Urambi, from the very beginning, had a strong leadership group including Jim Batty, John Mant, Alistair Christie, and they provided an articulate and united nucleus from which the membership expanded to 120. However membership reduced significantly when a 10% deposit was required to ensure financial commitment to the project. This was fortunate as we only had an effective planning capacity of 72.”¹³

The choice of Michael Dysart to design the group housing at both Kambah and Cook would appear to be mainly because of his pioneering project home designs in Sydney, both in his own right and in association with Ken Woolley, in Sydney, and his previous experience in the Baranbali co-operative housing in Sydney.

The site was a bush setting with low scrub and well-established eucalyptus trees. Dysart recalls “we had a choice of two or three sites. We chose the Urambi site for its trees, aspect and potential for adjoining open space. Very few trees were cleared and our planning evolved around preserving those trees in both the central space and individual courtyards.”¹⁴

The cooperative also developed a strong philosophy of native planting and bush regeneration “even to the extent of a Western Australian wild flower precinct”.¹⁵

The NCDC had a policy of retaining pockets of land in both new and existing suburbs that were progressively released by tender to developers. The co-operative’s concern was that the land to the north and west may in the future be sold by the NCDC for housing development. At the planning stage Dysart encouraged the establishment of a buffer zone with native planting as a protection against potential future developments “as the NCDC refused to commit to a plan for the adjoining area. Fortunately it eventually became a Golf Course.”¹⁶

The design brief was to “provide a sense of community by grouping dwelling units to encourage human interaction, maintain individual privacy and make communal aspects far more positive than current suburban and medium density solutions.”¹⁷ The Architecture Australia article goes on to say “the architects experimented by allowing the client group to have maximum input in the design of the houses. They found this healthy exchange of views resulted in a fully involved and committed community. The RIAA ACT Chapter Awards Jury stated in 1977 “The real achievement of Urambi lies in the way the houses have been grouped to achieve a total result which is greater than the sum of the parts”.¹⁸

Dysart states “the design philosophy revolved around a pedestrian street with both arms leading to a community centre, forming an agora or public space. The street was designed with continuous pergolas to provide wet weather access to the parking and the community centre with undercover play areas”; these were, however, not built. “The community centre was the hub of the village and included the usual craft activities, child minding, commercial laundry, split-level central space with fireplace and kitchen all designed in the same visual language as the cooperative generally.”¹⁹

The openness and publicly accessible nature of the housing complex was similar to earlier housing projects in Canberra including: Northbourne Housing Precinct, 1962, Lyneham and Dickson, by Ancher Mortlock and Murray; Campbell Group House, 1966, by Harry Seidler, and Hackett Courtyard housing, Grayson Street, 1966-72, by Dirk Bolt and Associates, considered appropriate at that stage of Canberra's development. The maintaining of this openness at Urambi shows a community spirit by the owners given the more permissive and less secure times in the years since construction.

The Urambi Co-operative Housing was awarded the RAIA ACT Chapter C.S.Daley Medal in 1982 and subsequently received the RAIA ACT Chapter Twenty-Five Year Award in 2002.

Dysart believes that "Urambi is an important milestone in my work and represents the culmination of many undefined architectural and social goals I was working through at the time such as:

- To further develop the Baranbali cooperative model. The creation of a real sense of place - an urban village The empowerment of the individual through the collective;
- The encouragement of communal interaction while maintaining individual privacy;
- The proposal for a third way as opposed to public and private housing, and
- The transfer of developer profit to cooperative benefit."²⁰

He believes the "social and communal aspects" at Urambi are of great importance.

International Influences are evident on both the Site Planning and the Architectural Forms at Urambi. It would appear that either directly or indirectly there were influences on Dysart from the post WWII housing schemes by Scandinavian architects such as Arne Jacobsen and Jorn Utzon. Jacobsen's 14 row houses at Klampenborg outside of Copenhagen, 1949, incorporated asymmetrical forms and pitched tiled roofs with attached chimneys and were constructed in a tan coloured brick with timber framed glazing. The dwellings were staggered across the site forming an expressive rhythm that is seen at Urambi. Dysart states that he was not aware of this work until after designing Urambi, however, Utzon certainly would have been. Utzon, while designing the Sydney Opera House, also designed two housing estates in Denmark, Kingo Housing near Helsingor, 1957-59, and the Danish Co-operative Housing in Fredensborg, 1962-65. Both schemes were for small inexpensive "L" shaped attached dwellings constructed in tan coloured bricks with pitched tiled roofs, incorporating chimneys and walled garden courtyards, with site planning that staggered the dwellings across their wooded sites.

Dysart admired Utzon's housing schemes from photographs he had seen and he recalls a three hour discussion he had with Utzon, particularly on additive architecture, that influenced his work.²¹

Dysart also believes that the courtyard schemes have many historical precedents; Roman, Chinese and Arabic models, with both open and closed courtyards some of which he incorporated into project houses.²²

Dysart also believes, like many international architects of this period, there is a strong Japanese influence in his early work. He also recalls the surprise to find Californian architectural work running parallel to the architecture in Sydney in the 60s and 70s.²³

Courtyard Housing

Dysart believes "the decision to adopt a single level courtyard form for the outer rim of Urambi was in the end a very pragmatic decision and driven by a number of issues including: the design decision to provide an internal pedestrian street which created two layers of housing, and to provide equity of view and aspect where the housing was stepped from Crozier Circuit with the split level housing near the road overlooking the single level housing fronting the open space".²⁴

The architect's initial client interviews revealed "a surprising need for individuality in planning requirements. These requirements could not be met by split-level housing with its rigid geometry allowing only 2 bedroom and 3 bedroom variations."²⁵

An investigation by the architects of various housing forms for the lower tier led to the open-ended courtyard model for the outer rim. Dysart recalls "as architects we were amazed at the variations in housing functions possible within the framework, helped to some extent by the variable length of the open ended wing".²⁶

Viewed from the west and north the housing shows a variety of courtyard treatments; no two courtyard houses are the same. Dysart recalls "this is what we set out to achieve, i.e. individual choice within a consistent visual language."²⁷

Split Level Housing

Dysart recalls "historically the split-level houses of the 60's and 70's evolved from exhibition houses of the 1962 Carlingford Home Fair designed by Ken Woolley and myself. This original split-level provided the genesis for many variants built by project home companies such as Pettit and Sevitt, Habitat, Program and Civic".²⁸

The original houses for Pettit and Sevitt of white walls and stained timber exhibited a Scandinavian influence however Dysart believes his later housing for both Program and Habitat "had a more earthy organic quality of clinker bricks, stained timber, copper gutters more akin to what became later termed as the Sydney School".²⁹

Dysart believes that "Urambi with its existing established tree cover was more conducive to this organic approach and the Urambi split-levels were a design synthesis of the forerunner Program & Habitat project homes".³⁰

Dysart's Involvement with Co-operative Housing

By 1970 Dysart had been involved in the designs for over 3,000 project houses and was becoming disillusioned with project housing and housing for the NSW Housing Commission due to client cynicism and indifference to good design outcomes.³¹

He believed the firm could forge a new third way. He was then tutoring at the University of New South Wales and made contact with the Credit Union to convince them to extend their cooperative charter into housing for their clients; often clerical workers and lesser academics.

While the Credit Union showed little interest, some of the Credit Union staff and Dysart formed the Baranbali cooperative, sold shares and placed a deposit on land overlooking Moore Park in Sydney. Dysart recalls "it was idealistic, unrealistic, and non-profitable and the builder went broke at the ground level, and the union declared the job black."³²

The Baranbali Co-operative project was for a 10 storey; 40-unit development and the Co-operative became the builder by default. By the completion of the development Dysart believes "the clients were generally happy and it was the fulfilment of my commitment to cooperative housing at that time".³³ The housing also included some communal facilities such as meeting rooms and a commercial laundry with profits going to the Body Corporate.

Following the initial success of Baranbali Dysart became involved in policy sessions for the Australian Labor Party and managed to have cooperative housing written into their housing policies. He also attempted to influence the Liberal Party, but as he states "theirs was a policy of market forces and they refused to listen".³⁴

Dysart believes that "no housing co-operatives had been built in Australia despite the special Co-operative legislation set up in 1930s depression. There were small self-help groups including a Department Store Cooperative in Newcastle but no housing precedents".³⁵

The cooperative structure was not dissimilar to a company structure in that individual shareholders provide funding in a collective endeavour. However, when housing is envisaged the strata legislation of relevant States became the dominant legal entity with the members effectively forming the body corporate. This meant the cooperative could not dictate or control the individual's right to sell their property shareholding in the open market, which had the potential to dilute the philosophical aims of the co-operative. Dysart however believes that "in the case of both Urambi and Cook Aranda (Wybalena Grove), the cooperative ideals have proved an attraction and the aims appear to have not been diluted".³⁶

The interest generated by Urambi prompted articles and commentary in the Canberra Press and Dysart was requested to address a public meeting in the Canberra Hotel (Hyatt Hotel). Some of the board members from the Baranbali cooperative accompanied him and he recalls, "There was an extraordinary response with an audience of many hundreds". "We gave a floorshow. We provided slides of housing we had built, explained the cooperative structure and the potential of the idea, but I remember we were at pains to point out the hard work and commitment required to make cooperatives work."³⁷

The outcome was the beginning of the Wybalena Grove Housing development; Dysart's second such co-operative housing scheme in Canberra. The proposed site was provided at the request of the new Labor

Federal Government and located in Cook, on the boundary of Cook and Aranda. The site had been pre-planned as one of the NCDC's land packages for development release.³⁸

Late Twentieth-Century Sydney Regional style 1960-

As a reaction to the architecture of the international style with its flat roofed, plain smooth wall surfaces and cubiform overall shape, some architects from the 1950s to the 1970s produced work which is now referred to as regional architecture. In Australia Melbourne and Brisbane regional styles were the first to take form in the 1950's with the other major cities in Australia taking on their regional styles in the 1960s. The styles reflected the lifestyles and climate of the various regions but had some similar influences and characteristics.

The regional styles incorporated freely composed simple shapes, natural materials, dark rough (clinker) or face brickwork or painted brickwork, exposed dark stained sawn timber and large areas of timber framed glazing. Often their planning was split level, which followed the site topography and their interiors, often open planned (as was the international style), were carefully resolved. The Australian bush or a constructed native landscaping was their prime setting.³⁹

The Late Twentieth-Century Sydney Regional style of architecture, also referred to as the 'Sydney School', was the architectural aesthetic that was prevalent in the suburbs of NSW cities during the mid-1960's to the 1970's.

The international influences on the Sydney regional style were the modern architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright, Alvar Aalto, especially the Saynatsalo Town Hall, 1950-52, Finland, the post war architecture of Le Corbusier, notably the Jaoul Houses, 1954-56, Paris, and the residential architecture of the west coast of USA in the 1950's.

Individual buildings designed in the Late Twentieth-Century Sydney Regional Style are predominantly found in Sydney, however there are good examples in Canberra including the house at 145 Mugga Way Red Hill 1965, by Russell Jack of Allen, Jack and Cottier and the RAI Headquaters, Red Hill 1968, by Bryce Mortlock of Ancher, Mortlock and Woolley⁴⁰.

Michael John Dysart AM LFRAIA (1934-)

Michael Dysart won one of the small number of NSW Government Architect trainee-ships in 1955 and on graduating from the University of Sydney in 1958 he was the last to join of the four key trainees who became "part of the design office working under (Harry) Rembert".⁴¹ The other members of the design office at the Government Architects were Peter Weber, who later became the Government Architect, Ken Woolley, who later became a partner at Ancher Mortlock Murray and Woolley, and Peter Hall, who later combined with others to take over the Sydney Opera House from Jorn Utzon. Dysart remained with the NSW Department of Public Works until 1969.

The NSW Government Architects were responsible for designing public schools, amongst other buildings. During the period from 1947 to 1972 the high school student numbers in NSW grew from around 80,000 to 280,000. The "High School Programme (within the NSW Government Architects office) was a major thrust".⁴² Dysart joined the Schools Section in 1964 and was "responsible for various programs including the Secondary School Wyndham scheme, a crash program to build some 43 high schools in three years. One of the schools was highly commended in the 1967 Sulman Award and the Taree Technical College received the Blakett Award in 1965."⁴³

"Michael Dysart developed the doughnut design solution for high schools with a series of pavilions with central courtyards. (Ted) Farmer, NSW Government Architect, in reflecting on the office, believes that Dysart was one of the most productive and impressive of the designers from the Design Room."⁴⁴

Dysart, unlike many of the young modernist architects of the middle period of the twentieth century in Australia, did not travel to Europe or take up scholarships in the U.S until 1976 due to the unique design opportunities given to him by the NSW Public Works Department. His understanding of international trends was based on references in publications and not firsthand observation.

In association with Ken Woolley, Dysart designed, for the project building company Pettit and Sevitt, established in 1961, the 'Lowline' project home. This was the first architect designed project home for the company and was initially displayed at North Rocks, Sydney, in 1963.⁴⁵

Dysart's interest in project housing led to innovative housing co-operatives in Sydney as well as the two in Canberra. He has designed numerous private houses including the Masterman House in Woollahra, 1969.

Dysart has designed public buildings including the Polish Millennium Church at Marayong in 1964, Stewart House, Curl Curl, 1969, and townhouses for the Housing Commission in Woolloomooloo, 1977.⁴⁶ Dysart joined with Peter Bell to form the practice of Michael Dysart & Partners in 1970. To expand the range of projects, the firm merged with the Queensland based Davis Heather Group, creating Davis Heather & Dysart; to design hotels and resorts including the Regent Hotel in Sydney and the Hilton Hotel in Cairns and other commercial buildings in New South Wales and in Queensland. The firm subsequently was known again as Michael Dysart and Partners. By the early 1980s the firm had five Directors and a total staff of 35.⁴⁷

In Canberra there are a number of project homes he designed, mainly in Aranda, built by two housing companies, Trend and Aspect.

The firm worked with another active housing cooperative attempting to build high-rise apartments at Braddon and Kingston. This cooperative comprised mainly retirees however this project was abandoned because funding was not available from the lending authorities.⁴⁸

Dysart designed himself or in association, projects that have received major architectural awards including: the RAIA NSW Blakett Award, 1965, for the Taree Technical College; the RAIA NSW Sulman, 1967, Highly Commended Award for the Ryde High School; the RAIA NSW Chapter Project House Design Awards, 1968; the ACT Chapter C.S.Daley Medal, 1977, and the RAIA Twenty-Five Year Award, 2002, for Urambi Co-operative Housing; and the RAIA NSW Sulman Award, 1991, for Grosvenor Place, Joint Architects with Harry Seidler.⁴⁹

Michael John Dysart was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia for his significant service to architecture in 2013. The award specifically noted that he “specialised in project housing, examples of which include Urambi Village and Wybalena Grove in Canberra”.

ASSESSMENT AGAINST THE HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

a. Importance in the course or pattern of the ACT’s cultural or natural history

Urambi Co-operative Housing, constructed in 1977, was part of a new planning movement within Canberra’s low-density neighbourhood suburbs, at first commenced by the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) and represented by the Northbourne Housing Precinct, Dickson and Lyneham, 1962; Hackett Housing, 1966-72, and Swinger Hill 1971-, to provide a low-rise alternative to the standard single housing block. It has exceptional interest as being the first in Canberra and otherwise a rare example of co-operative housing, a system originally opposed by the planning authority, the NCDC.

Urambi Co-operative Housing was the first co-operative housing built in Canberra and symbolizes a period in Canberra’s history where the collective endeavour of individuals with like-minded communal ideals facilitated a low-rise ‘village’ housing complex inclusive of communal facilities that was sanctioned by the then Federal Labor Government. It demonstrates a distinctive procurement and planning approach of exceptional interest. The housing was designed for a client based on a co-operative structure. This structure had the goals of empowering the individual through the collective to provide alternative housing as opposed to public and private housing, resulting in the transfer of developer profit to co-operative benefit. The other example is the slightly later Wybalena Grove, Cook.

The design of the complex incorporating two housing types and site planning is sound and was highly innovative at the time.

Urambi Co-operative Housing is representative of this important phase of Canberra’s development.

Consequently, it is considered that Urambi Co-operative Housing satisfies Criterion a.

b. Has uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of the ACT’s cultural or natural history

Urambi Co-operative Housing is a rare and especially uncommon well-preserved example of a relatively extensive 1970’s co-operative housing development. It is the earliest known example in Canberra, the only other example being Wybalena Grove, Cook. Wybalena Grove includes only split-level housing and does not include courtyard housing, whereas Urambi includes both. It is an excellent example of the Late Twentieth-Century Sydney Regional style exhibiting most of the principal style indicators.

Consequently, it is considered that Urambi Co-operative Housing satisfies Criterion b.

c. Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of ACT's cultural or natural history.

As Urambi Co-operative Housing was part of Canberra's growth in the 1970s and its innovative site planning and architectural style does mean it yields information that contributes to an understanding of ACT's cultural history.

Being the first and otherwise a rare and excellent example of co-operative housing in Canberra it lends itself to being of teaching and educational benefit to future architects and historians.

Consequently, it is considered that Urambi Co-operative Housing satisfies Criterion c.

d. Importance in demonstrates the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or objects

The Urambi Co-operative Housing demonstrates all but one of the principal characteristics the Late Twentieth-Century Sydney Regional style of architecture at a very high level of competence and integrity. These include asymmetrical massing, tiled skillion roofs (courtyard houses) and stained or oiled timber.

The other elements of the style that are present in the complex are clerestory windows; exposed rafters; timber decks, and timber awning sash. The housing is exceptionally well detailed and is a notable example of the style. It is notable for displaying the design skill of the architect Michael Dysart.

The housing is aesthetically significant for its massing and split-level design reflecting function and landform following the topography of the site, juxtaposed with fine detailing, all expressed in the textural and tactile qualities of natural materials.

The complex is included in the AIA ACT Chapter Register of Significant Twentieth-Century Architecture being highly valued by the AIA as an excellent example of this style of architecture by a leading renowned Australian architect. It was awarded the RAIA ACT Chapter C S Daley Medallion 1977 and the RAIA ACT Chapter Twenty Five Year Award in 2002, an award given to ACT buildings over 25 years old for the design, construction and integrity, which serve their users and society well.

Consequently, it is considered that Urambi Co-operative Housing satisfies Criterion d.

e. Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by the ACT community or a cultural group in the ACT.

The Urambi Co-operative Housing is an excellent example of the Late Twentieth-Century Sydney Regional style (1960-). The buildings exhibit most of the principal architectural elements specific to that style, including asymmetrical massing, tiled skillion roofs (courtyard houses) and stained or oiled timber. It is notable for displaying the design skill of the architect Michael Dysart.

The following design features are of additional significance; the site planning where the clusters are staggered across the site, the separate covered car parking and the native landscape setting with paths and retaining walls; the external finishes including exposed rafters, the brick courtyard walls; the western red cedar framed glazing including clerestory windows, awning windows and panelled front doors, and brown-grey brickwork; the split-level as well as courtyard designs and original detailing and finishes.

The housing was carefully planned to create a relaxed and informal setting with good spatial relationships between the building groups, to achieve a non-repetitive character and to form a lively pattern across the site. The buildings are remarkably intact externally and mature trees on and around the site add to the aesthetic quality of the group.

The complex is included in the AIA ACT Chapter Register of Significant Twentieth-Century Architecture being highly valued by the AIA as an excellent example of this style of architecture by a leading renowned Australian architect. It was awarded the RAIA ACT Chapter C S Daley Medallion 1977 and the RAIA ACT Chapter Twenty Five Year Award in 2002, an award given to ACT buildings over 25 years old for the design, construction and integrity, which serve their users and society well.

Consequently, it is considered that Urambi Co-operative Housing satisfies Criterion e.

f. Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement for a particular period

The creativity of the architect Michael Dysart is apparent in the design of the Urambi Co-operative Housing, 1977, which was innovative when compared with other housing built in Canberra.

The site planning does exhibit a high degree of innovation and creative achievement where it incorporated attached groupings of both split-level and courtyard planning fitted to a sloping site, taking advantage of the mountain views and forming a residential environment as humane as it is urban. It demonstrated an innovative response to the needs of 1970's co-operative housing life style.

The housing exhibits creative design and artistic excellence by virtue of its architectural theme of modern architecture in the Late Twentieth-Century Sydney Regional style.

The complex is the first of two such co-operative housing projects designed by Dysart in Canberra, and is otherwise an accomplished Late Twentieth-Century Sydney Regional style complex in Canberra situated within an existing and enhanced natural bushland setting.

Consequently, it is considered that Urambi Co-operative Housing satisfies Criterion f.

h. Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history.

The architect Michael Dysart AM FRAIA is a notable architect of the second half of the twentieth century in Australia having played an important role in the development of public buildings in NSW, notably educational buildings, and affordable housing, specifically in the development of modern architect designed project homes and co-operative 'communal' housing in NSW and the ACT.

Dysart designed himself or in association projects that have received major architectural awards including: the RAIA NSW Blackett Award, 1965, for the Taree Technical College; the RAIA NSW Sulman, 1967, Highly Commended Award for the Ryde High School; the RAIA NSW Chapter Project House Design Awards, 1968; the ACT Chapter C.S.Daley Medal, 1977, and the RAIA Twenty-Five Year Award, 2002, for Urambi Co-operative Housing, and the RAIA NSW Sulman Award, 1991, for Grosvenor Place, Joint Architects with Harry Seidler and Associates.

He was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia for his significant service to architecture in 2013. Dysart's specialisation in project housing exemplified by Urambi village was specifically noted in the award.

Dysart considered Urambi Co-operative Housing to be milestone in his career. This demonstrates that Urambi Co-operative Housing has special association with the work of Dysart and allied with the design of Wybalena Grove, Cook, confirms he is a significant architect in the history of development of housing in the Canberra.

Consequently, it is considered that Urambi Co-operative Housing satisfies Criterion h.

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