

RESIDENCE - ID 00106

8 Kellys Road, Oratia



Figure 1: 8 Kellys Road, Oratia (Auckland Council, 2012)

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

This review assesses the heritage values of the residence at 8 Kellys Road to determine whether it continues to meet the thresholds for scheduling in Schedule 14.1.

As part of its Strategic Vision, the Heritage Unit identified reviewing the schedule as a priority, aligned with the 10-year target of ensuring Schedule 14.1 is robust.

Background

Constraints

This is a review based on the information contained in property files held by Council's Heritage Unit. The information in the files is not exhaustive and additional research may yield new information about the place.

This review does not include an assessment of archaeological values or an assessment of the importance of the place to Mana Whenua. This review does not include a structural evaluation or condition report. The historical research has been undertaken by Beth Maynard.

Since the building has been relocated to the current site and there are building consent records demonstrating the house has been altered extensively, a site visit considered unnecessary.

SCHEDULING INFORMATION

Schedule ID	ID 00106
Place Name/and/or Description	Residence
Verified Location	8 Kellys Road, Oratia
Verified Legal Description	PT LOT 13 DP 10987
Category	B
Primary feature	
Known Heritage Values	F
Extent of Place (Refer to Figure 2)	Refer to Figure 2
Exclusions	Interior of building(s)
Additional Controls for Archaeological Sites or Features	
Place of Māori Interest or Significance	



Figure 2: Extent of place for ID 00106 (Auckland Council GeoMaps)

Planning background

8 Kellys Road was included in the 1995 Waitakere City Council District Plan schedule as a Category II item, General Design Guidance. It was rolled over into Schedule 14.1 of the Auckland Unitary Plan (AUP) as a category B item.

HISTORICAL SUMMARY

Land

8 Kellys Road was originally part of the approximately 200-acre farm property of early Oratia settler Andrew Kelly. The scheduled extent of place for the relocated two storey villa covers an area close to the original site of Kelly's homestead as marked on 1906 map A5063.

Kelly died in 1907, leaving his estate to his wife. After her death, the property was passed to his daughter Jane Cox and her husband Thomas Robert Cox.¹ The Coxes sold the property in 1915 when it was brought under the Land Transfer Act. It was then sold to Herbert Hingley in August 1918, before being transferred to South Auckland-based farmer John Augustus Kelly in August 1921.² Kelly does not appear to have lived on the land. He was not a descendant of Andrew Kelly.

Kelly sold parts of the property to various purchasers through the 1930s and 1940s. The lot on which the house is located was sold to returned soldier Mervyn John Ross in November 1948. Ross sold the smaller eastern section of the lot, the current boundaries of 8 Kellys Road, to his father (or stepfather) James Ross in April 1949.³

Mervyn John Ross was described as a military pensioner in 1948. He had enlisted in 1940 and served as a gunner before being captured in Crete in 1941 and spending four years as a prisoner of war.⁴ James Ross, his father, was already resident in Oratia.

House

The house at 8 Kellys Road, Oratia, was shifted from 139 Wellington Street in Freemans Bay in early 1969. The house was likely built around 1900. It is visible in a 1908 map of the central city. Situated at the top of Wellington Street, near the junction with Franklin Road, it was one of a block of four two-storey houses.⁵ Like many large inner-city properties, the house was run as a boarding house in the early 20th century, with a landlady offering room and board to single male boarders.⁶ An extended family (the Shannons) were living there by the early 1930s.⁷

The house was relocated to Oratia by Glen Eden fibreglass manufacturer Stanley Kelvin Lane in early 1969, with the application process primarily taking place in 1968. Debates over the relocation of the house were representative of competing public attitudes to Victorian housing in the 1960s. Lane stated in permit applications to the Waitematā County Council that his reason for shifting a villa was to *“achieve a Colonial influence within the framework of existing by-laws.”*⁸

An inspector for the council attempted to have the relocation of the house blocked, refusing a permit on the grounds that the house was infested with borer and was generally unattractive and inappropriate due to its age. The justification for refusal went on:

*“Recommendation: That as the building concerned has already stood for a lifetime in the Auckland City and is not the type of structure which should be encouraged in the Waitemata County, the application be refused.”*⁹

¹ Probate – Kelly, Andrew, 1907. BBAE 1569 R21448784, Archives New Zealand

² NA282/19

³ NA924/200;

⁴ *Auckland Star*, 4th November 1941, p.4. <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19411104.2.27> *Manawatu Standard*, 31st May 1945, p.8. <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/MS19450531.2.87>

⁵ 1908 City of Auckland Map, Auckland Council Archives 252211

⁶ *New Zealand Herald*, 1st June 1910, p.1. <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19100601.2.3.7>

⁷ *Auckland Star*, 8th May 1931, p.1. <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19310508.2.6?>

⁸ Auckland Council Property File – Letter to Waitemata County Council Clerk re: Building Permit no. 4827, 27th November 1968

⁹ Auckland Council property file, Waitemata County Council, 2858/68 Re-erection of old dwelling

Lane disputed the decision to the council itself, which overturned the original refusal. The house was transported in two pieces, with the floor levels separated. Relocation had been completed and the top floor reattached by March 1969.¹⁰

Physical Description

The house was originally a simple two-storey weatherboard kauri villa with a hipped corrugated iron roof and double hung sash windows. It has been extensively altered, since it was relocated, and the building's footprint extends far beyond the original villa. Windows and French doors have been added to the front and sides of the house, and the internal layout of the ground floor is no longer original. In 1971, two bedrooms were added to the first floor.¹¹ In 1976, an internal access garage and spare room were added to the ground floor.¹² Extensive additions were made across both floors in 1993.¹³ An upstairs ensuite bathroom was added in 2011.¹⁴

Other structures within extent of place

An early settler's cottage on the site predates the relocation of the Freemans Bay house. It is not known if this cottage is original to the site or has been relocated there. The 1940 aerial is unclear, and, although there appears to be a building on the site, it is difficult to determine whether this is the cottage. The 1968 plans for the relocation of the Freemans Bay house and development of the Oratia site include plans to relocate the existing cottage, which was to be altered and converted for use as a garage.¹⁵ The 1968 plans show a small gabled square box-cottage with a rear lean-to on the western side and vertical weatherboarding. The cottage was shifted and has been modified and by 2015 it was being used as a studio/office space.¹⁶

The site

Much of 8 Kellys Road is covered by mature native bush. The area in which the house sits was cleared in the late 1940s or early 1950s. A swimming pool was added to the property in 2001.¹⁷

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

Historical

The place reflects important or representative aspects of national, regional or local history, or is associated with an important event, person, group of people, or with an idea or early period of settlement within New Zealand, the region or locality.

The house at 8 Kellys Road Oratia has no known historical significance. Originally a simple two-storey villa located at 139 Wellington Street, Freemans Bay, the house was relocated to its current site in 1969. The house has no association with the early development of Oratia. Moreover, there is also no evidence of any strong associations in its original location in Freemans Bay. While the house may have once contributed to the early development of Freemans Bay, the significance of this historic value is lost following the relocation.

There is no identified association of the cottage at 8 Kellys Road, with the early development of Oratia and it is not clear whether it was built on the site or relocated there.

¹⁰ Auckland Council property file, Letter to S K & B Lane re: Building permit no. 4827, 14th March 1969

¹¹ BPM-1971-15420

¹² BPM-1976-5189

¹³ ABA-1993-3498

¹⁴ ABA-2011-646

¹⁵ Auckland Council property file, Waitemata County Council, 2858/68 Re-erection of old dwelling

¹⁶ Bayleys Listing no. 1600120

¹⁷ COM-2001-2317

The place is not known to be associated with a person or group of people that have made a significant contribution to the history of the locality or beyond. It is not associated with an important idea and is not an example of a rare or endangered heritage place.

The place is considered to have **no known** historical value.

Social

The place has a strong or special association with, or is held in high esteem by, a particular community or cultural group for its symbolic, spiritual, commemorative, traditional or other cultural value.

Research to date indicates that the residence has no known social values. It was relocated to the area and is not known to be held in high esteem by a particular community or cultural group. Furthermore, it does not play a role in defining the communal identity.

The place has **no known** social value.

Mana whenua

The place has a strong or special association with, or is held in high esteem by, mana whenua for its symbolic, spiritual, commemorative, traditional or other cultural value.

8 Kelly's Road is not identified in the AUP Schedule 12 Sites or Places of Significance to Mana Whenua (**Schedule 12**). This place has been evaluated primarily for its built heritage values.

Council has a process for assessing sites and places of significance to Mana Whenua. The first step in this process is for iwi to nominate sites. If a site or place is evaluated as significant to Mana Whenua against the factors set in the AUP, it will be considered for inclusion in Schedule 12 and/or, if it has additional values, Schedule 14. No nomination has been received by iwi for this place for its inclusion in Schedule 12.

The place specifically is unlikely to have value to Mana Whenua in accordance with the factors or criteria set out in the AUP. However, this is not to say that the place does not have value to Mana Whenua or that the site or landscape may not be nominated by iwi at a future time. Mana Whenua are required to be consulted during the preparation of any future plan change to consider the addition of this place to the AUP. If / when Mana Whenua values are identified this evaluation will be amended.

The residence has **no known** Mana Whenua value.

Knowledge

The place has potential to provide knowledge through scientific or scholarly study or to contribute to an understanding of the cultural or natural history of the nation, region or locality.

Because the villa at 8 Kellys Road has been relocated and the cottage has been considerably altered, their potential to provide useful information has been compromised.

The place has **no** knowledge value.

Technology

The place demonstrates technical accomplishment, innovation or achievement in its structure, construction, components or use of materials.

The techniques used to construct the original elements of the house and cottage are typical of the time period and are readily understood through other places and sources.

The place has **no** technology value.

Physical attributes

The place is a notable or representative example of a type, design or style, method of construction, craftsmanship or use of materials or the work of a notable architect, designer, engineer or builder.

The villa has retained some of its original architectural features despite several alterations. These features include some of the timber joinery, the roof pitch and its original form is still legible. However, extensive alterations have compromised the integrity of the house. Originally a simple two storey villa, alterations undertaken over the decades since it was relocated have converted it into a much larger and grander version. Large extensions to the southern side, including the addition of an attached double garage, along with extensions to the rear, have compromised the architectural values of the earlier simplicity of the residence. The house is no longer a good representative example of its type.

The cottage on the site has been altered with extensions and window modifications and is no longer a significant example of its type.

The place has **little local** physical attributes value.

Aesthetic

The place is notable or distinctive for its aesthetic, visual, or landmark qualities.

Although the villa and the cottage contain some features that represent a past aesthetic taste, most of the aesthetic values have been lost due to relocation and substantial modification.

The place has **little local** aesthetic value.

Context

The place contributes to or is associated with a wider historical or cultural context, streetscape, townscape, landscape or setting.

The relocation of the house to a different part of Auckland has totally compromised its historical context. The house does not contribute to the wider historical or cultural context of its current location. Although there is a cottage on the site, it is unknown if it is original to the area.

The place has **no** context value.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The house at 8 Kellys Road, Oratia was relocated from Freemans Bay in 1969 and was originally a two-storey villa dating from around 1900. The house has retained some of its original features, including the roof form, sash windows, and remains of its early form, which provide some legibility of its original villa style. However, its relocation and subsequent alterations has diminished its heritage value. There is no identified association of the cottage on the site with the early development of Oratia and it is not clear whether it was built or relocated there.

A desktop reassessment of the residence under the AUP criteria concludes that the residence does not meet the threshold for scheduling as a historic heritage place.

TABLE OF HERITAGE VALUES

Significance Criteria (A-H)	Value	Context
A- Historical	No known	NA
B- Social	No known	NA
C- Mana Whenua	No known	NA
D- Knowledge	No	NA
E- Technological	No	NA
F- Physical Attributes	Little	Local
G- Aesthetic	Little	Local
H- Context	No	NA

RECOMMENDATION

8 Kellys Road, Oratia does not meet the threshold for scheduling as a Historic Heritage Place. It is recommended that the place is deleted from Schedule 14.1.

ID	Place name and/or description	Verified location	Verified legal description	Category	Primary features	Heritage values	Extent of place	Exclusions	Additional rules for archaeological sites or features	Place of Maori interest or significance
00106	Residence	8 Kellys Road, Oratia	PT LOT 13 DP 10987	B		E	Refer to planning maps	Interior of building(s)		

Planning maps

Delete the Historic Heritage Overlay from 8 Kellys Road, Oratia.

Evaluator

Megan Walker, Specialist Historic Heritage

Peer Reviewer

David Bade, Senior Specialist – Built Heritage, 5 July 2022

Managerial Sign-Off

Megan Patrick, Team Leader – Heritage Policy, 6 July 2022

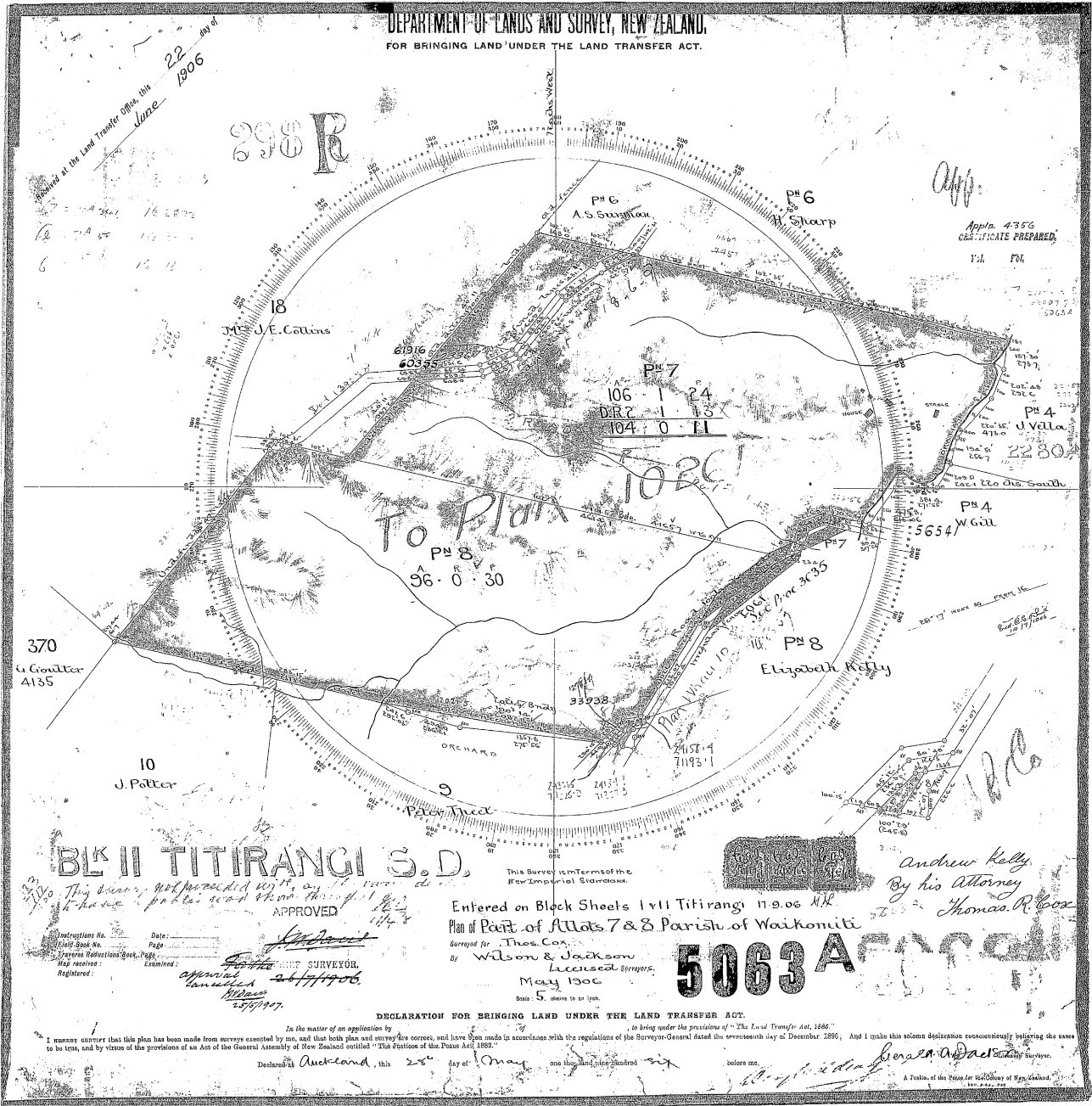


Figure 3: Map A5063



Figure 4: DP 10987



Figure 5: site in 1940. While there is a small clearing of trees, there is no building on site. LINZ (1940) SN147 97/14

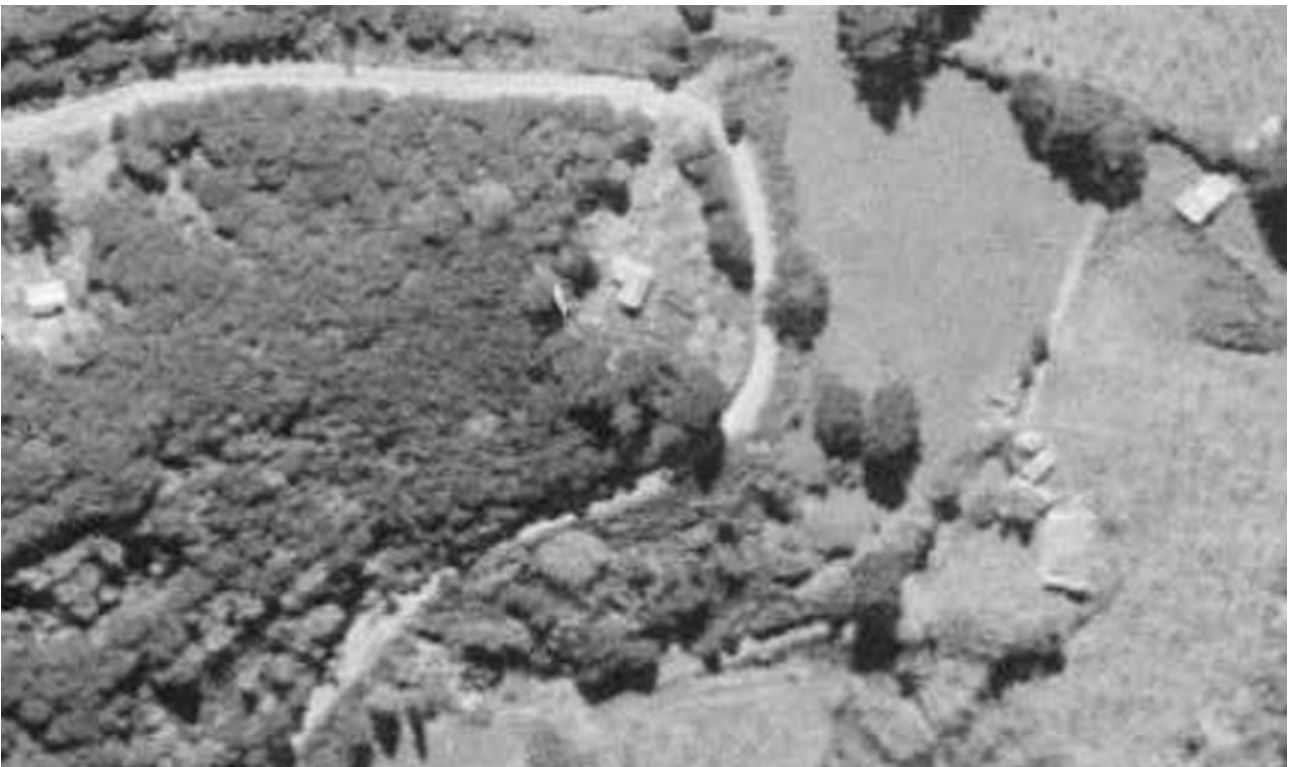


Figure 6: site in 1955. Site has been cleared and James Ross' cottage is onsite. LINZ (1955) SN853 1920/117

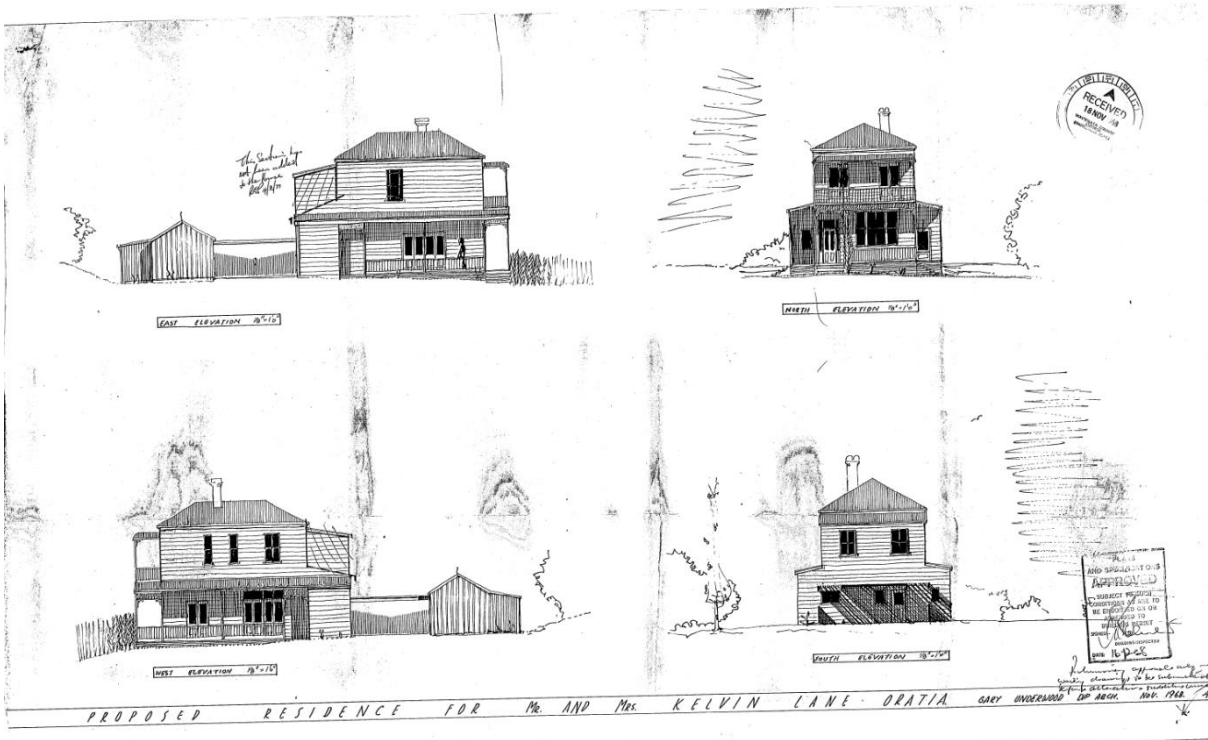


Figure 7: Plans for house after relocation (Auckland Council property file, ABA-1968-4827)



Figure 8: Rear of house showing layers of additions: yellow 1976, red 1993, blue 2011.



Figure 9: Side view of house. 2015. Bayleys Listing no. 1600120



Figure 10: Cottage which predates relocation of villa. 2015, Bayleys Listing no. 1600120

Donner House, including studio - ID 00252

50 Kohu Road, Titirangi



Figure 3:
Donner House.
(Paul Jenkin, May 2022)

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

This review assesses the heritage values of Donner House, including studio at 50 Kohu Road, Titirangi, to determine whether it meets the Auckland Unitary Plan (Operative in part) (**AUP**) threshold for scheduling as category A, category B or a historic heritage area, and also provides recommendations on refining the management of the place based on its identified heritage values.

The subject place is currently scheduled in the interim category A*, which was created during the development of the AUP to address the disparity among the ways top tier scheduled historic heritage places were managed across the different legacy councils¹⁸. Category A* is effectively a holding pattern for some of the region's most significant scheduled places until they can be reviewed to confirm their category.

As part of its Strategic Vision, the Auckland Council Heritage Unit identified the A* reviews as a priority, aligned with the 10-year target of ensuring AUP Schedule 14.1 Schedule of Historic Heritage is robust.

¹⁸ AUP, D17.1 Background

Background and constraints

Information on the history of the place and a physical description are sourced from the Auckland Council Heritage Unit's property files and any other sources as noted. The information in the files is not exhaustive and additional research may yield new information about the place.

This review does not include an assessment of archaeological values or an assessment of the importance of the place to Mana Whenua. This review does not include a structural evaluation or condition report.

A site visit was conducted on 25 May 2022.

SCHEDULING INFORMATION

Schedule ID	00252
Place Name/and/or Description	Donner House, including studio
Verified Location	50 Kohu Road, Titirangi
Verified Legal Description	LOT 46 DP 19360
Category	A*
Primary feature	Residence
Known Heritage Values	A, F, H
Extent of Place (Refer to Figure 2)	Refer to planning maps
Exclusions	Interior of building(s)
Additional Controls for Archaeological Sites or Features	
Place of Māori Interest or Significance	



Figure 2: Historic Heritage Overlay Extent of Place (EOP) for ID 00252 (Auckland Council GeoMaps)

HISTORICAL SUMMARY

Planning background

Donner House, including studio, was originally scheduled in the Waitākere City District Plan as a category I item for the house and category II item for the studio. The studio referred to in that plan is the one located to the north-east of the property (there are two studios on the property). It was identified in the Waitākere plan as “Dwelling and north-eastern studio.”

Through the creation of the AUP, each historic heritage place identified in the Historic Heritage Overlay was either “rolled over” from a legacy plan and/or introduced through the Proposed Auckland Unitary Plan (**PAUP**) process. The Historic Heritage Overlay contains over 2,200 scheduled historic heritage places, identified in Schedule 14.1 Schedule of Historic Heritage and the GIS viewer/planning maps.

The place was rolled over from the Waitākere City District Plan to be included in the AUP as a category A* place as “Donner House, including studio”. The place is also subject to the Waitākere Ranges Heritage Area Overlay.

The place is identified in the Auckland Council Cultural Heritage Inventory as Donner House and north- eastern studio, Donner House, and Donner House and studios (ID 3692).

History of the house

Donner House was designed by Auckland architect, Tibor Donner, for himself.

In 1941, Donner joined fellow architect, Anthony Bartlett, to enter and win a competition to design the memorial to former Prime Minister Michael Joseph Savage, who died in office in 1940.¹⁹ The design included the gardens around the memorial, which were implemented, unlike the statue they had designed, which was replaced by an obelisk. In 1942, Donner reportedly used the prize money to purchase the land at 50 Kohu Road²⁰, Titirangi, to build a home for himself, his wife, and his daughter.²¹

Designing the house in the early 1940s, the place was completed in 1947.²² In addition, Tibor landscaped the property, terracing the sloping site to create a garden. A garage was built into the landscape under a terrace on the north-eastern side of the house. A building permit issued in 1961²³ indicates the studio was built then, but the permit may have been issued retrospectively. Earlier reports imply the studio was built in the mid to late 1950s. The 1959 aerial is unclear, and it is difficult to determine whether the studio had already been built at this time. The studio sits on the north-eastern slope. In the design of the studio, Donner experimented with different materials, particularly glass, to create texture and colour in his designs. He later used the studio as his home office.

¹⁹ Schedule 14.1 Savage Memorial UPID 01569

²⁰ Then known as View Road.

²¹ Bill McKay (2013) ‘Donner house’ in Jeremy Hansen (ed) *Modern: New Zealand homes from 1938 to 1977*, p21; Paul Jenkin (2008) ‘Donner House’ in Julia Gatley (ed) *Long Live the Modern*, p47

²² <https://rwponsonby.co.nz/blog/2019/september/12/labour-of-love/> accessed 27 May 2022;

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/auckland/local-news/western-leader/3638729/Future-assured-for-historic-house> accessed 27 May 2022

²³ Auckland City Council building permit 16454 issued 29 March 1961

A building permit issued in 1963²⁴ resulted in a second studio; a loft-like building on the north - western rise of the property's front slope. In the building consent application²⁵ this studio was labelled as a 'lunchroom and gardeners tool shed'. It was undoubtedly given that name for the purpose of resource consent as a building permit had already been issued to add the first studio on the property. At the time it was necessary to give new structures on the same site different functions, in order to obtain consent from the council.

Donner lived in the house during the most influential years of his career, at a time that he was responsible for the design of some of the most significant mid-century civic structures in Auckland. Donner and his wife, Margaret, remained in the house until they both died within months of each other in 1993. Before they died, Donner and Margaret were no longer able to manage the house and garden and both were in poor condition at the time of their death. The place was passed onto their daughter, also called Margaret. She sold the house in 1994, after which time it changed hands a few times until 1997 when it was purchased by Paul Jenkin.²⁶

Jenkin set about restoring the property, prioritising a severely leaking roof. Buckets hanging from the ceilings on the first floor were needed to catch the rain coming through holes in the roof. The original roof had been largely experimental, made up from cement mixed with smashed coloured-glass bottles to create large roof tiles. The tiles were laid onto tar which was not as robust as the waterproofing materials we have today, and eventually failed. Jenkin tells the tale that 'Donner had asked all his staff to bring in their empty wine bottles, which he then smashed and mixed together with cement to create large, biscuit-like tiles that covered the entire surface of the roof.'²⁷ Donner tried to resolve the issue by painting over the roof several times concealing the glass chips, the roof was never made waterproof. Jenkin resolved the problem by laying a rubber membrane.

Jenkin also restored the terraced garden, which was overgrown when he purchased the property. Jenkin later changed the garage on the property into a sleepout and it is now used as an office/workshop.

The house, under Jenkin's care, has been the subject of much architectural interest in articles and books on mid-century homes. The place has also been open for the Heroic Garden Festival and many Auckland Heritage Festivals.

In 2013, the house was used by Australian comedian and television presenter, Tim Ross, for his comedy show *Man About the House*. Ross took the show to iconic homes combining comedy with architecture, in an effort to raise awareness of the plight of mid-century architecture. The audience was able to explore the house and grounds during the show's interval. Ross stated in an article 'I've always been passionate about mid-century modern

²⁴ Auckland City Council building permit 4205 issued 16 December 1963

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ NA7/263, NA439/55, NA 487/106, NA794/136 and NA93C/310

²⁷ John Williams (September 2019) Labour of love. Retrieved from <https://rwponsonby.co.nz/blog/2019/september/12/labour-of-love> 23 November 2021

architecture and *Man About the House* lets people experience buildings in a way they would never normally be able to, while enabling me to explain in a tangible way why this architecture should be protected,”²⁸. In Australia, the show had received the prestigious National Trust Heritage Award, in 2014, for its role in raising awareness about the importance of conservation of heritage.

In 2016, an article, ‘*Brown bread and sugar cube: a story told two ways*’, celebrating 80 years of New Zealand’s ‘Home’ magazine, listed the house as the best architecturally designed ‘*sugar cube*’ house built in New Zealand during the 1940s²⁹. The article included a list of the best New Zealand homes designed over eight decades and was compiled by Auckland University School of Architecture’s Associate Professor, Julia Gatley, and Professor Andrew Barrie. Rather than choose a single home for each decade, they decided to highlight two important strands of New Zealand’s architectural history. Gatley and Barrie nominated two types of architecture for each decade: ‘*brown bread*’, referring to the creosoted timber Modernist house designs adapted for the local context creating a distinctive New Zealand architecture and ‘*sugar cube*’, referring to the white box-like Modernist houses that followed the path of International Modernism, seen in Europe, North and South America.

Tibor Karoly Donner

Born in Szabadka, Hungary in 1907, Tibor Donner emigrated to New Zealand with his parents and siblings in 1927. They were escaping the persecution of ethnic (Hungarian) minorities in Romania³⁰ after parts of Hungary had been secured by Romania following World War I. He studied architecture at the Auckland University College, where he was awarded a number of prizes, before graduating in 1933. He worked in private practice until 1937 when he joined the Public Works Department. It was during his time at the Public Works Department that he collaborated with fellow architect Anthony Bartlett to win the Michael Savage Memorial Design competition in 1941.

In 1947, Donner established the architectural office at the Auckland City Council and was the chief architect there until his retirement in 1967. His direction and influence in this role was clear and he was responsible for a number of significant, innovative and ground-breaking buildings. Keeping informed of technological advances and developments overseas he created state-of-the-art buildings in Auckland. Donner’s designs included the Parnell Baths completed in 1954 (with the mural being added in 1957)³¹, for which he won a New Zealand Institute of Architects’ (NZIA) Gold Medal in 1957; the Pioneer Women’s and Ellen Melville Memorial Hall completed in 1962³² and the Civic Administration Building, which was designed in 1954 and completed in 1966.³³ He also completed private residential commissions during this time.

²⁸ <https://www.domain.com.au/news/tim-ross-invites-audiences-into-australias-iconic-homes-20151106-gksnnc/> accessed 1 July 2022

²⁹ <https://homemagazine.nz/best-new-zealand-homes-past-eight-decades/> accessed 14 June 2022

³⁰ Leonard Bell, *Strangers Arrive*

³¹ AUP Schedule 14.1; ID 1708

³² AUP Schedule 14.1; ID 1960

³³ AUP Schedule 14.1; ID 2723

To inform his design for the proposed Civic Centre, which was to include the Civic Administration Building, Donner undertook a study tour of Europe along with North, Central and South America in 1956. His designs indicate he was highly influenced in his design by the International Style of architecture emerging in North America during the 1920s and 1930s and the Modernism practised in Mexico and Brazil. His visit to Mexico City exposed him to the use of colourful mosaic panels in Mexican buildings, and this prompted him to experiment with similar techniques for embedding glass in plasterwork and concrete. He cultivated the mosaic technique of embedding coloured glass in plaster panels which he used for the design of the mural for the Parnell Baths.

Donner continued to work on private commissions following his retirement from Auckland City Council, with some of his time being devoted to designing buildings for the Kindergarten Association. The space beneath his studio was used as a glass and etching workspace by Donner.³⁴ Some of his artworks can be found in Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections and Auckland Art Gallery.³⁵

³⁴ Waitemata City Council (pre-2010) Resource consent application. PR2010_0001931_003 - REPORT. - PRE-2010-15 PLAN CHANGE 28 PROPOSED HERITAGE LISTING.tif

³⁵ Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections 3-2270; Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki 1950/12

Physical Description

Site

Donner House is situated on a steep site high above the road within a bush setting in Titirangi. The site is landscaped with terraced gardens to combat the slope and to provide a plateau where the house is situated. The approach from the street is defined by a number of landscaping features. The steep driveway consists of 'crazy paving' in stone cut-offs (sourced from the building sites connected to some of Donner's designs in the city), including marble, granite, terrazzo, and sometimes surprising specks of glass. The driveway leads up to more 'crazy paving' on a series of steps that lead up to the house. Brick retaining walls, consisting of highly textured brick (seconds from the New Lynn brickworks) line the pathway.

Two studios, one on either side of the driveway, add colour and interest to the landscape. The double height studio on the north-western side (labelled 'workshop' in Figure 2 below) is particularly dominant from the road and driveway. Beyond the studios and adjacent to the approach to the steps, a plateau beneath the house (north-eastern side) provides car parking next to a former garage embedded into the hillside. The roof of the garage provides a tiled courtyard platform to enjoy views over the garden and beyond.



Figure 4: Site plan (Drawing by Kuhu Gupta, 2007, *Long Live the Modern*, p 47)



Figure 5: Looking down from the house to the courtyard roof platform above the former garage. The wide stone paved steps that wind their way up to the house are shown above the platform. Another roof deck viewing platform seen in the centre (slightly concealed by trees and behind the shade sail) is the roof of the first studio. (Auckland Council, May 2022).

The house itself is built on a level plateau, looking out on a flat grassed area bordered in more 'crazy paving'. The first floor of the house steps out and up onto another level to the rear. Beyond the house, the section continues to rise and has been terraced to manage the terrain.

A number of native trees on the site, some planted by Donner, provide a lush bush setting.

The House

Tibor Donner was influenced by the International Style of architecture, which is as obvious in his civic and commercial designs as it is in his residential. The house at 50 Kohu Road is a distinctive form of the International Style, but it moves away from the traditional boxy form through the use of the elegant curves of its walls and furniture. In this way the house is truly unique.

Exterior

The house is a flat roofed vertical tongue and grooved timber (rimu) home. The overall design aesthetic follows the Modernist architectural principle of form following function. The front façade is curved in a gentle concave across the length of the house. Large, fixed, timber-framed windows feature across most of the ground floor of the front façade and have a combination of awning and casement openings. A glazed door on the western side and of the same height of the windows provides entry to the garden. The first-floor windows span the same length as the ground-floor windows. Doors on the first floor lead out onto a small

balcony, which is supported by slim steel columns and has a steel railed balustrade. Donner introduced an asymmetric aesthetic with another unit of slimmer glazing on the north-eastern corner at both levels, separated from the large, fixed-pane windows by a section of vertical timber wall. This area identifies the entry to the house at ground level. A large, curved balcony, supported on slim steel columns on the north-eastern corner of the first floor provides cover for the ground floor entry. The overhanging eaves of the roof have a series of cut-outs allowing more sun into the house whilst creating reflective patterns on the walls and the ground as added interest to the design.



Figure 6: The gently curved front façade (north elevation) of the house featuring large amounts of glazing and access to the front north facing garden. (Paul Jenkin, May 2022)

The features of the eastern side of the house include a spiral steel staircase which leads up to a roof-top sun deck from the first-floor curved balcony.



Figure 7: The curve of the balcony on the first floor converges with the opposing curve of the front façade (Paul Jenkin, May 2022)

The curved wall of the southern elevation (rear of house) is punctuated with small windows indicating that part of the house is not living space. A shelter on the roof deck that rises above the roof-top is more obvious from this side of the house.



Figure 8: The southern elevation (Paul Jenkin, May 2022).



The western elevation also has fewer window penetrations, similarly, reflecting that this part of the house is more of a service area.

Figure 9: The western elevation (Paul Jenkin, May 2022).

The roof deck is an additional outdoor living space of the house. As previously mentioned, it is accessed by the spiral staircase from the first-floor balcony. The roof, once a glittering mosaic surface, is now covered in a rubber membrane. A steel rail surrounds the edges of the roof line. A central timber shelter on the southern side surrounds the chimney in a curved encasement which houses the hot water unit and a small



service cupboard.

Figure 10: The spiral staircase and **Figure 11:** showing the roof overlooking the back garden with a central service unit. In this image are small remnants of the original roof, circled in red. (Auckland Council, May 2022).

Interior

The floor plan is simple but effective, with a front door entry at the ground level into an open plan living space with a dining area and lounge. The kitchen and pantry are located in a separate room in the south-eastern corner of the house and include a door accessing the

rear yard. Although the kitchen cupboards have been replaced, the form of the rooms has not been altered, and original door handles still feature. A powder room is located on the southern side of the main living/dining area. The southern wall of the lounge area is clad in a stone veneer and includes a central fireplace. The remainder of the walls are clad in plywood. The curved northern wall is mainly glazed, providing views out to the garden and to Auckland City beyond. Details on the windows include elegant, curved timber mullions and a curved pelmet. Built-in furniture includes a bar hidden behind a curved wall in the lounge, making clever use of negative space. The floor is cork.



Figure 12: Lounge area on ground floor. The L shape at the end conceals a staircase behind the plywood wall and a storage cupboard with original shelving. Built-in shelving can be seen within the L shape. (Auckland Council, May 2022).

Stairs on the western end of the living area lead up to first floor, which contains the hall off which there are two bedrooms that have large north-facing windows and access to the balcony. A study at the end of the hall has northern and eastern windows with a door leading out on to the large, curved balcony. Original built-in cupboards in the bedrooms make use of negative wall space. A study has built-in shelving and curved cupboards along with a built-in desk. The long, curved hall off which these rooms are entered has curved corners and a laundry centred on the southern side. A bathroom is located at the eastern end of the hall. The walls are covered in hessian and are painted. The floors are tongue and groove rimu boards.

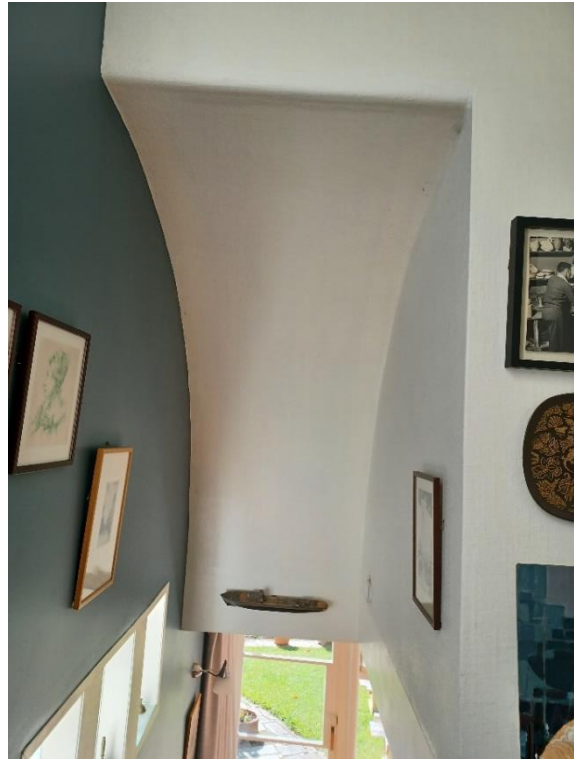


Figure 13 (left): Curved plywood balustrade and cork staircase and **Figure 14 (right):** Curved ceiling above staircase (Auckland Council, May 2022).



Figure 15 (left): The curved hall with curved corners features small windows letting in light; and **Figure 16 (right):** Original built-in furniture in the study. (Auckland Council, May 2022).

The Studios

North-east Studio

Constructed of concrete, brick and steel, this structure has a flat platform viewing roof. Large picture windows on the north, east and west walls provide views over the Waitākere Ranges and back to the city. Mosaics and a built-in worktop feature inside the studio³⁶. The studio is accessed at ground level from the southern side. The studio cantilevers over a small courtyard area. Behind the courtyard and under the studio is a small bathroom. The roof has a pebble-dash finish, with small cut-outs on its overhang, like the main house, providing light into the studio. Donner experimented with texture, materials and form as well as his love of crushed glass, colourful mosaics and patterned stonework both on the studio walls and in the surrounding landscape. Parts of the exterior walls are covered in colourful mosaics,



particularly around the windows. A small pond adjacent to the basement level is lined in colourful tiles with more colour in the crazy paving of its floor.

Figure 17: Donner's Studio (Auckland Council, May 2022).

³⁶ Refer to Appendices



Figure 18 and Figure 19: Glass chips embedded in concrete in the landscaping around the studio and colourful crazing paving of granite and marble on a path next to the studio (Auckland Council, May 2022).



Figure 20: Beneath the studio a small patio is laid in crushed stone, with colour added in embedded tiles. (Auckland Council, May 2022)



Figure 21: A small pond

adjacent to the studio with a floor of various stones in 'crazy paving' and concrete sculptures covered in a pattern of tile cuts. (Auckland Council, May 2022).



Figure 22: Interior of Donner's first studio showing built-in worktops, mosaic tiles beneath the worktops (Auckland Council May 2022).

North-west Studio

The second studio, which is labelled a ‘gardener’s lunchroom and tool store’ in the council building consent application, is anything but a tool shed.

This building is a double height structure built of brick and steel with large, glazed panels. A steel ladder inside the studio provides access to a mezzanine. The column sculptures surrounding the studio, referencing the trunks of Nikau trees, are made of Crum brick and ceramic glazed pipe, stacked and filled with concrete. They once supported steel framing (now rusted away) that helped reinforce the central line of this building.

The structural integrity of this building has been the subject of debate over many years. The above-mentioned support framing has now disappeared, and the building is on a lean. This is one of Donner’s experimental structures and was built on a steep slope with no geotechnical input. Compared to the house and the first studio, this structure is less successful, and would require engineering intervention to correct its problems and to make it a safe building. While the review is not assessing the structural condition of this structure, this is a matter of consideration, moving forward. While the structural condition does not alter the heritage values of this studio (which is a valuable example of Donner’s work on this site and an insight into his experimentation in design, construction and use of materials and the history of this site, all of which are inextricably linked to



Donners’ history), the structural condition is a factor that should be considered as part of any planning assessment relating to this place.



Figure 21: The 'gardener's lunchroom and tool store' studio. (Auckland Council, May 2022).

Figure 23: An earlier image demonstrating the steel framing supported by the 'nikau trunks. Seen to be rusting in this photo, this steel framework has since been removed. (<https://mrbigglesworthy.co.nz/inspiration/186/tibor-donner-house-1947>).

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

Historical

The place reflects important or representative aspects of national, regional or local history, or is associated with an important event, person, group of people, or with an idea or early period of settlement within New Zealand, the region or locality.

Donner House and studios have considerable historical value for its direct association with renowned mid-century architect, Tibor Donner. Designed by Donner for himself and his family, the house was built at the time Donner was establishing the first architectural department at Auckland City Council. As the council's chief architect for twenty years, the practice he developed was considered by the architecture community as the most advanced

and innovative in Auckland, with ground-breaking designs winning gold and silver NZIA architecture awards in the 1950s.

Donner is undoubtedly one of the most influential New Zealand architects of the mid-twentieth century. He aimed to create state-of-the-art buildings and kept abreast of technological advances and developments abroad and, as a result, his designs made an indelible mark on the Auckland landscape. This approach is reflected in his design for his house at 50 Kohu Road.

Tibor Donner and his wife lived in the house from 1947 until his death in 1993.

Donner House and studios have **considerable local** and **regional** historical value.

Social

The place has a strong or special association with, or is held in high esteem by, a particular community or cultural group for its symbolic, spiritual, commemorative, traditional or other cultural value.

Donner House and studios are held in very high public esteem. The house is highly valued by, and has an enduring association within, the architecture community and beyond. The house has been opened for the Auckland Heritage Festival and, at an international level, has hosted the comedy performance *'Man about the House'*, presented by renowned Australian entertainer and Mid-Century architecture enthusiast, Tim Ross. Donner House has also been the subject of articles and chapters in books on Modern architecture such as *'Modern'* (2013), edited by Jeremy Hansen, and *'Long Live the Modern'* (2008), edited by Julia Gately (which identified 180 of New Zealand's most important Modern buildings that still exist). In 2016, the house was the chosen top International Style Modernist House of the 1940s in an article *'Brown bread and sugar cube: a story told two ways'*.

The house is considered iconic in architectural and art circles for its uniqueness and importance as one of New Zealand's earliest International Modern examples, which is today seen as radical and still contemporary in its design.

Donner House and studios have **considerable national** social value.

Mana whenua

The place has a strong or special association with, or is held in high esteem by, mana whenua for its symbolic, spiritual, commemorative, traditional or other cultural value.

Donner House and studios are not identified in the AUP Schedule 12 Sites or Places of Significance to Mana Whenua (**Schedule 12**). This place has been evaluated primarily for its built heritage values. Council has a process for assessing sites and places of significance to Mana Whenua. The first step in this process is for iwi to nominate sites. If a site or place is evaluated as significant to Mana Whenua against the factors set in the AUP, it will be considered for inclusion in Schedule 12 and/or, if it has 7 additional values, Schedule 14. No nomination has been received by iwi for this place for its inclusion in Schedule 12.

Donner House specifically is unlikely to have value to Mana Whenua in accordance with the factors or criteria set out in the AUP. However, this is not to say that the place does not have value to Mana Whenua or that the site or landscape may not be nominated by iwi at a future time. Mana Whenua

are required to be consulted during the preparation of any future plan change to consider the addition of this place to the AUP. If / when Mana Whenua values are identified this evaluation will be amended.

Donner House and studios have **no known** Mana Whenua value.

Knowledge

The place has potential to provide knowledge through scientific or scholarly study or to contribute to an understanding of the cultural or natural history of the nation, region or locality.

Unique in design and build, Donner House and studios have value providing knowledge on early International Modernism in New Zealand and in communicating Donner's design process. The clever use of negative space, the innovative curved walls, along with the experimental use of materials all provide knowledge on how Donner worked. Although much of this has been written about, the place has potential to offer first-hand experience to architecture students, architectural historians and other interested people. As a private residence, this information can be provided by invite only. Participating in heritage or architectural festivals is a means of delivering this information.

Donner House and studios have **considerable regional** knowledge value.

Technology

The place demonstrates technical accomplishment, innovation or achievement in its structure, construction, components or use of materials.

Tibor Donner was an experimental architect and used many unconventional techniques in his designs. The failure of the inventive embedded glass mosaic roof was a setback in Donner's experimentation. The curved walls of Donner House were an innovative design for their time, a technical construction achievement, particularly given the complexity of curvature of the glazing on the northern walls. The most significant achievement is the engineering of the house, without the assistance of any geotechnical advice, which would be mandatory today on terrain like this. Built into a steep hillside and exposed to the elements, the house has withstood extreme weather events and adverse conditions over a period of almost 80 years, without failing.

Donner House and studios have **considerable local** technology value.

Physical attributes

The place is a notable or representative example of a type, design or style; a method of construction, craftsmanship or use of materials; or the work of a notable architect, designer, engineer or builder.

Donner House and studios has outstanding physical attributes value. The house is one of the finest early International Modernist houses built in New Zealand. It is exceptionally unique in form in its use of subtle curved walls. The sophistication of the design and detailing is ground-breaking for its time and is an enduring form of architecture.

The house is an excellent example of the Modernist philosophy of form following function, with every detail of the exterior reflecting the use of the interior spaces. The use of varying sizes of windows is one way this has been achieved, with the main living space, bedrooms and study being highly glazed.

The large open plan living area, that, although radical for its 1947 construction, is entirely contemporary today. The unique use of curves is demonstrated everywhere, softening the edges of walls and built-in furniture. With all rooms opening up to the north, the layout of the place was planned to take advantage of the sun and engage with both the garden and views of the city beyond. Circulation spaces are limited to the edge of the interior indicated on the exterior by small windows in the passage and the stairwell. Using negative spaces in the walls for storage demonstrates Donner's clever use of space.

Although Donner was more renowned for his civic work, he also undertook commissions for residential design. The house he built for himself in Kohu Road, possibly because it was more experimental than his other domestic commissions, is undoubtedly the finest example of his residential designs.

The studios in front of the house are full of experimental elements which reflect the use of materials Donner employed in his designs throughout his career. Design ideas such as glass and stone chips mixed with concrete or plaster are incorporated in his first studio. The studios are also unique in their design and demonstrate Donner's imagination, versatility, and forward thinking. They are rare examples of the few surviving purpose-built mid-century studios in Auckland and beyond.

Donner House and studios have **outstanding regional** physical attributes value.

Aesthetic

The place is notable or distinctive for its aesthetic, visual, or landmark qualities.

Donner House and studios have significant aesthetic value for many reasons. The house itself has strong visual appeal with its elegant, gently curved glazed walls focusing on the views of the garden and beyond to the city. The curved walls of the interior and built-in furniture and the use of a variety of materials on the surfaces provide a sensory experience within the house.

Rich with native trees and plants, the terraced garden creates a picturesque setting for the house. The 'crazy paved' driveway, paths and steps around the house are laid in a variety of stone cut offs and, along with the use of rough-edged brick seconds and stone and glass chips mixed in concrete to create retaining walls, add extraordinary colour and texture to the garden.

Within the garden, the two studios, each of which provide their own beauty, use colour and texture to blend in and enhance the surrounds. Both look out on and engage with their immediate setting. Like the house, they are both highly glazed providing striking views towards Auckland. The studios have value in the way they complement the cleaner lines of the house with their more bohemian aesthetic.

The place exemplifies a particular aesthetic taste, both past and present, and the philosophy that informed that aesthetic, demonstrating the International Style of design of the time which has endured and is still very relevant today.

Donner House and studios have **outstanding local** aesthetic value.

Context

The place contributes to or is associated with a wider historical or cultural context, streetscape, townscape, landscape or setting.

Donner House and studios are part of a collection of Donner's residential work in Titirangi. A known survivor of his domestic designs in Titirangi is Atkinson house in Rangiwai Road. Together they represent an important body of the architect's work. The place is also part of a broader body of work associated with Donner's time as Chief Architect for Auckland City Council. These include the City Council Administration Building, the Parnell Baths and the Ellen Melville Hall.

The place also contributes to a wider collection of mid-century homes in Titirangi designed by various contemporaries of Donner. Following World War II, many Modernist houses were constructed in Titirangi up until the end of the 1970s. Many were designed by architects for themselves as the area attracted creative people into its community.

Donner House and studios have **considerable local** and **regional** context value.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Designed by Tibor Donner for himself and his family, Donner House at 50 Kohu Road, Titirangi is an outstanding example of International Modernist architecture in New Zealand. Built in 1947, the house is one of the first Modernist houses constructed in Titirangi and the greater Auckland area. The subtle elegant curves of the house were an innovative shift in terms of Modernist design and contribute to the unique qualities of the place. The curves are also experienced in the interior of the house, not only with curved walls but also cleverly designed built-in curved furniture. The sleekness of the house sits in contrast to the more bohemian studios, also designed by Donner, sited in the garden below. 'Found' or leftover fabric from his city jobs were used for the studios and the garden paving and walls, creating a colourful and richly textured landscape. The house and the studios all engage with the garden and boast views beyond the city to the Hauraki Gulf.

As one of New Zealand's most influential architects, Tibor Donner left an enduring mark on the Auckland landscape. Donner was employed by Auckland City Council in 1946 to set up the first architecture office for the council, where he remained for the following 20 years. At the council he developed a practice considered to be the most advanced and innovative in Auckland, winning NZIA gold and silver medals with some of the most state-of-the-art architecture of the day, including the Civic Administration Building, the Parnell Baths and the Pioneer Women's and Ellen Melville Hall. He was best known for his International Modernist designs, which included furniture as well as buildings.

Today the house is highly revered by those in the architectural community and beyond. Books, magazines and newspapers describe Donner House as one of the best examples of International Modernist architecture in New Zealand.

TABLE OF HERITAGE VALUES

Significance Criteria (A-H)	Value	Context
I- Historical	Considerable	Local and regional
J- Social	Considerable	National
K- Mana Whenua	No known	NA

L- Knowledge	Considerable	Regional
M- Technology	Considerable	Local
N- Physical Attributes	Outstanding	Regional
O- Aesthetic	Outstanding	Local
P- Context	Considerable	Local and Regional

CATEGORY RECOMMENDATION

Donner House at 50 Kohu Road, Titirangi meets the thresholds for scheduling as a Historic Heritage Place. It is recommended that the place is included in Schedule 14.1 as a category A place.

REFINING MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATION

- Change of name to read “Donner House and studios”.
- Based on the evaluation outlined above, addition of the heritage values of B,D, E, and G.
- It is recommended that the interiors should be included in the scheduling of this place, apart from the interior of the 1963 studio, the interior of the kitchen and all bathrooms and laundry, except for floor plan, as they contribute largely to all of the values specified, particularly to the physical attributes, technology and the aesthetic values of the place.

RECOMMENDATION BASED ON HERITAGE VALUE

ID	Place name and/or description	Verified location	Verified legal description	Category	Primary features	Heritage values	Extent of place	Exclusions	Additional rules for archaeological sites or features	Place of Maori interest or significance
00252	Donner House, and studios including studie	50 Kohu Road, Titirangi	LOT 46 DP 19360	A* A	Donner House Residence and - studios	A, B, D, E, F, G, H	Refer to planning maps	Interior of building (e) Interior of 1963 brick studio; interior of kitchen, all bathrooms and laundry, except for floor plan		

Planning maps

No change recommended.

Evaluator

Megan Walker
Historic Heritage Specialist

Peer Reviewer

Rebecca Freeman, Senior Specialist Historic Heritage
June 2022

Managerial Sign-Off

Megan Patrick, Team Leader Heritage Policy
5 July 2022

Appendices

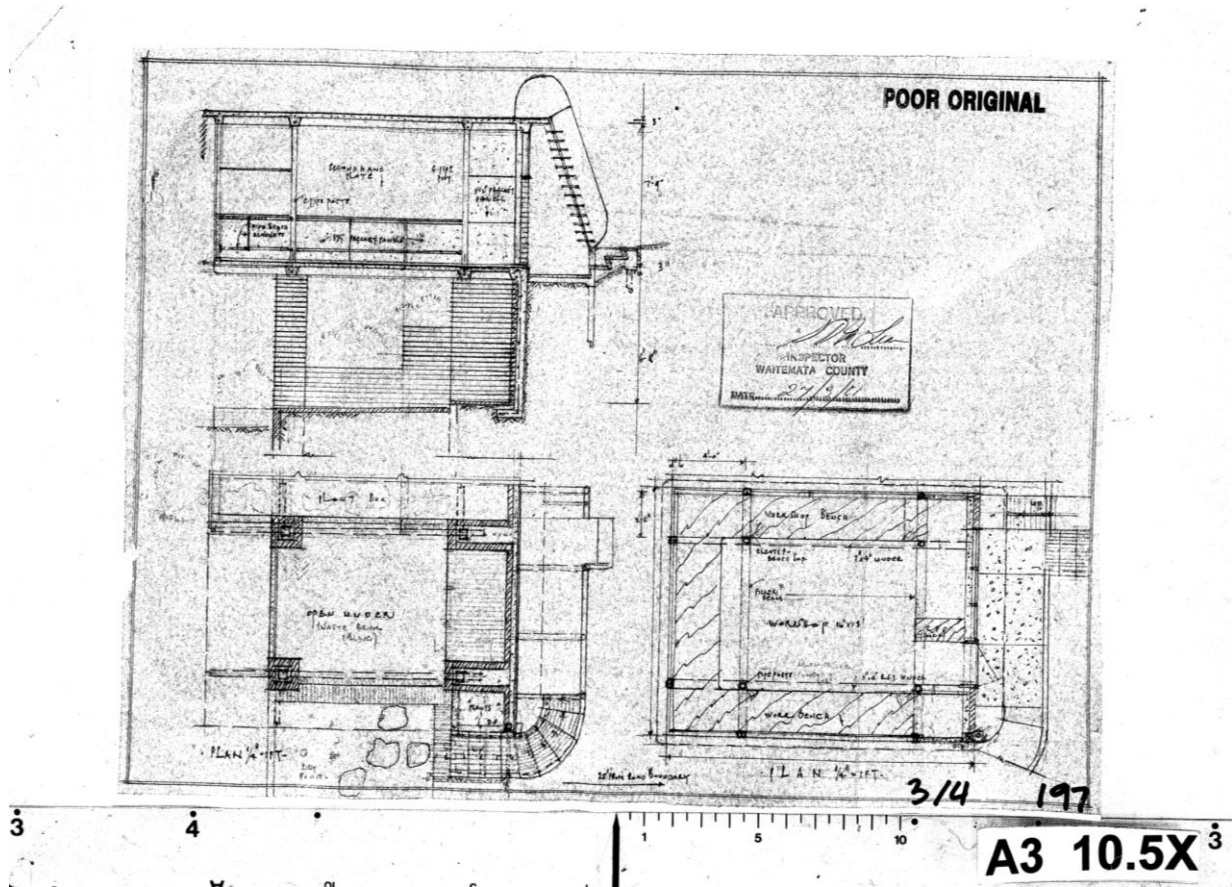


Figure 24: Drawing for first studio (Auckland Council Property files)

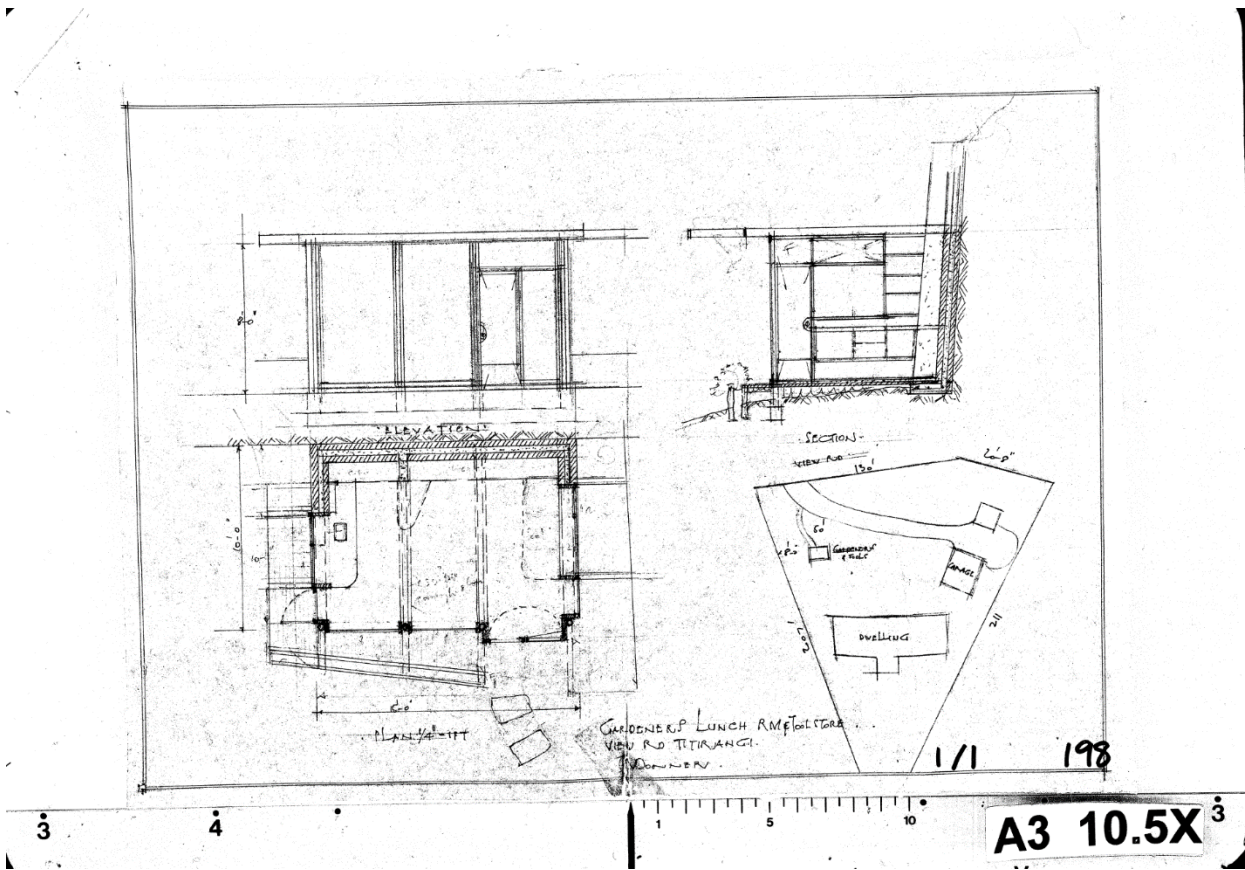


Figure24: Tibor Donner's drawing for 'gardener's lunchroom and tool shed' to be used as his workshop. This is close to what was eventually built, although it is a slightly larger version. (Auckland Council Property Files)