

Historic Heritage Evaluation

Dobson House (former)
61 Hankey Street



March 2023

Historic Heritage Evaluation

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Acknowledgements

With thanks to the current owners of the Dobson House (former) in March 2023.



Contents

Contents	3
Executive Summary	4
Summary Statement of Significance	4
Purpose.....	5
Scope.....	5
Heritage Inventory Report	6
Site Detail.....	6
Historical Summary	7
Photographs and Images	16
Chronologies and Timelines.....	17
Timeline of events, including modifications	17
Occupation history	17
Biographies	18
Plans and Elevations.....	20
Physical Description.....	20
Comparative Analysis Summary	23
Evaluation Criteria	24
Recommendations	29
Other recommendations:.....	29
Extent of the Place	30
Sources and References.....	30
Appendices	34
Appendix 1 Comparative analysis	35
Appendix 2 Wellington Thematic Heritage Study 2013	39



Executive Summary

The Dobson House (former) at 61 Hankey Street was identified by its owners as having significant heritage values. Their submission on the proposed district plan in 2022 noted that the house was awarded an NZIA Wellington Branch Enduring Architecture Award in 2004, and was identified in the Council's pre-1930 Character Area Review (2019) as worthy of consideration as a scheduled heritage building.

The following report includes research and an evaluation of the building against the Wellington City Council heritage assessment criteria.

Overview

The Dobson House (former) at 61 Hankey Street is a Modernist house designed by architects Bill Toomath and Derek Wilson in 1958. It was constructed on a steeply sloping site subdivided from Anderson House (SCHED1 item 142) in 1945. The house was constructed for Douglas and Olive Dobson in 1959. Douglas was a public servant and returned serviceman, and Olive was an accountant and teacher. The Dobson family owned the house until 1989. The house is one of the first known projects designed by important Wellington architects, Toomath and Wilson.

The design of the house is an elegant response to a difficult site. The front (northern) portion of the house is cantilevered on beams supported by posts, while the rear of the house is built on a traditional system with a basement perimeter wall and piles. The overall effect is that the house appears to float, suspended above the trees. Overall, the house is an elegant and simple box, suspended on slender posts, pared back to the essentials, and focused to frame the remarkable views across Te Aro to the harbour.

Recommendations

The Dobson House (former) at 61 Hankey Street has significant heritage values and is recommended for inclusion as a heritage building in the Wellington District Plan. The extent includes the entire external building envelope and unenclosed basement, it does not include the modern fence, gate, and pergola at the entrance to the property from Hankey Street.

Summary Statement of Significance

The house has **significant historic value** for its design by important Wellington architects, Toomath and Wilson. It is an early and notable example of their work and has been recognised as such with an NZIA Wellington Branch Enduring Architecture Award. It has **significant architectural value** as a fine Modernist house and has been well-cared for by its owners over the past 60+ years. The house has remarkable



and **significant integrity** with few changes since the time it was built. It is a **rare** example of an immaculate mid-century house and is a **good representative example** of its type.

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to consider the Dobson House (former) located at 61 Hankey Street against Wellington City Council's criteria for evaluation of historic heritage.

The document has been prepared by The Heritage Practice on the specific instructions of our client, Wellington City Council. It is intended solely for the use by Wellington City Council in accordance with the agreed scope of work.

Scope

This report is a desktop study. The evaluation includes the exterior of the building and although the interior was visited, it was not assessed.

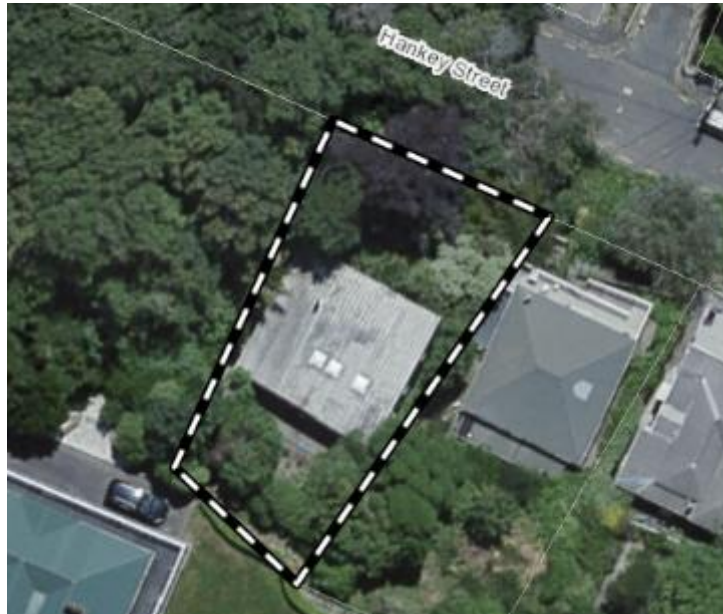


Heritage Inventory Report

Site Detail	
Site address or address(es) and/or location	61 Hankey Street, Mount Cook
Property Name	Dobson House (former)
Other names	
Legal Description(s) and Record of Title identifier(s), Deeds register and/or Gate notice information	WN568/167 Lot 4 Deposited Plan 13007
NZTM grid reference	
District Plan Reference Number	
Sites of significance to Māori	Near - Ngā Kumikumi Ngakinga; Puke Ahu - Ngā Tapuae o Kāhui Maunga; Te Rau Karamu Marae.
WCC Heritage Area	
HNZPT listed	
HNZPT category	
Archaeological site (Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014, Section 6)	
New Zealand Archaeological Association (NZAA) site record number(s)	R27/270 Wellington central
Constructed	1958-60
Significant alterations or additions	
Architect	Toomath and Wilson
Builder	Patterson & Puddick Ltd
Former uses	House
Current uses	House
Earthquake-prone Building Status at the date of assessment.	



Extent: WCC Onemap [date]



Historical Summary

The Wellington area of Aotearoa New Zealand is generally considered to have been first explored by Kupe. Kupe set off from his homeland Hawaiki in pursuit of a giant octopus, Te Wheke-o-Muturangi, and Kupe finally caught the creature in Raukawakawa (the Cook Strait). Kupe named many places along the way, including the islands of Arapāoa, Mana, Matiu (Somes Island) and Mākaro, before returning to Hawaiki. These names were preserved as later iwi came to settle the whenua.

The first permanent settlers in the Wellington Region trace their origins to the subsequent arrival of the Kurahaupō waka. Some traditions name Whātonga as the captain of the waka. He later explored the North Island from Māhia to Wellington, naming the harbour Te Whanganui a Tara, after his son Tara. Descendants include Ngai Tara, Rangitāne, Muaupoko, Ngati Apa and Ngati Ira.



Other iwi who made a home in the region include Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāi Tahu and Ngāti Māmoē.¹

Te Ātiawa, Ngāti Tama, Taranaki, Ngāti Ruanui, and Ngāti Mutunga migrated south from Taranaki in the early nineteenth century and the harbour has been held by Taranaki iwi since 1832. Today Taranaki Whānui ki te Upoko o te Ika is the collective name for the Taranaki iwi whose ancestors migrated to Wellington in the 1820s and 1830s, and signed the Port Nicholson Block Deed of Purchase in 1839.²

Māori kāinga and pā located near Hankey Street include the Ngā Kumikumi Ngakinga. Ngā Kumikumi Ngakinga is associated with Te Aro Pā³ and was a “cultivation clearing in the bush on the present line of Nairn Street.”⁴ The name refers to the ‘beards’ of the mamaku tree fern.

Te Aro Pā was one of the largest settlements in the Wellington Region and was established before the 1820s. By the 1840s, the settlement near Taranaki Street included about 2 hectares, along with approximately 60-80 acres of cultivated land. It was established by Ngāti Mutunga in the 1820s. When they left for the Chatham Islands in 1835 it was ceded to Ngāti Tupaia and Ngāti Haumia.⁵ It is also associated with Taranaki Whānui ki te Upoko o te Ika, particularly Ngāti Ruanui who settled at the western end.

In 1839 the New Zealand Company bought land in the Wellington Harbour area. They laid out plans for a new town, and settlers began to arrive in 1840. Hankey Street was named after Thomas Alers Hankey, a London banker with connections to the New Zealand Company.⁶ Thomas Alers Hankey remained in London, and

¹ With thanks to Wellington City Council Heritage Team; *HNZPT list entry report for List No. 9024 (Thomas King Observatory)*; Greater Wellington Regional Council website [Māori history of the Greater Wellington region | Greater Wellington Regional Council \(gw.govt.nz\)](#) Accessed November 2021.

² *Taranaki Whānui ki te Upoko o te Ika*, Te Puni Kōkiri website accessed June 2022, <https://tkm.govt.nz/iwi/taranaki-whanui-ki-te-upoko-o-te-ika/>, Accessed March 2022

³ Raukura Consultants, *Cultural Impact Report: Prince of Wales Reservoir*, Wellington Tenth Trust & Port Nicholson Block Settlement Trust. 2016 pages 7 & 8

⁴ George Leslie Adkin, *The Great Harbour of Tara: traditional Maori place names and sites of Wellington Harbour and environs - a revision*, Wellington: Whitcombe & Tombs Ltd, 1959, Page 46

⁵ Ballara, A., 1990, ‘Te Whanganui-a-Tara: phases of Maori occupation of Wellington Harbour c.1800-1840’ in Hamer, D. and R. Nicholls (eds.), *The making of Wellington 1800-1914*. Victoria University Press, Wellington. Page 29

⁶ F.L. Irvine Smith, *The Streets of My City, Wellington New Zealand*. Part two: chapter two. Directors and friends of the company. <https://wcl.govt.nz/heritage/streetspart2chap2.html>



the business of Hankey & Co. later merged with others to form the Royal Bank of Scotland.⁷

The street appears to have been designed (on paper) to connect Taranaki Street with Thompson and Nairn Street, but without regard to topography. In practice the road is too steep for vehicles, and the top and bottom of the street is connected by one of Wellington's many sets of zig-zag steps.

Anderson House (SCHED1 item 142)

Town Acres 679 and 680 are the two large triangular sites adjoining the town belt to the south of the Nairn Street Park. The sections were owned by David Anderson, a merchant who arrived in Wellington in 1849 and opened a grocery and spirit store on Lambton Quay. Anderson House at 67 Hankey Street was constructed on Town Acre 679 in c.1875. David Anderson (senior) died in 1889, and the house passed to his son David Anderson (II) and wife Sarah Spinks. When David II and Sarah died in 1918 and 1914 respectively, the house was inherited by David Anderson (III) and wife Nellie. David III died in 1935.⁸

Anderson House was used by the army during WW2, and was returned to the Anderson family in 1946. In August 1945, the family subdivided Town Acre 679. Four of the sections face the zig-zag steps which connect the east and west sections of Hankey Street. The only relatively flat section was retained as drive-on access for Anderson House. The remaining three sections were relatively steep with only pedestrian access.

The estate was sold in 1977, and since then the large house at 67 Hankey Street has been owned by the Wellington Commercial Travellers' Association, the Royal Foundation for the Blind, and since 1993, by Te Kohanga Reo National Trust Board.

61 Hankey Street

Of the four subdivided sections created by the 1945 subdivision of Town Acre 679, only Lot 4 was sold and developed. It was purchased in 1951 by journalist

⁷ "Hankey & Co." Natwest Group website, accessed March 2023, https://www.natwestgroup.com/heritage/companies/hankey-and-co.html?q=hankey&brand=NATWESTGROUP_COM§ion=heritage&enginekey=KMC4iXzhoghqGWug1xWC

⁸ Wellington City Council, *Anderson House, 63-69 Hankey Street*, heritage inventory report <https://www.wellingtoncityheritage.org.nz/buildings/1-150/142-anderson-house?q=>



and Wellington representative cricketer⁹ Ronald McKenzie Murray, and was sold by his estate in 1955 to Douglas and Olive Dobson.¹⁰

Olive Jean Russell (1909 – 1964) graduated from Victoria University in 1932 with a B. Com. She was an accountant and taught at the correspondence school.¹¹

Douglas Ellis Dobson (1911 – 2004) was a public servant. He was born in Yorkshire in 1911, and the family moved to New Zealand in 1921.¹²

Olive and Douglas married in 1940, and Douglas served as a clerk and warrant officer in WW2.¹³ His address before enlistment in both 1940 and 1941 is recorded as Mrs O.J Dobson, 5 Maurice Terrace, Wellington. Although they attempted to divorce in 1946,¹⁴ the couple appear to have reconciled. When Olive prepared her will in 1948, both were living at 8a Buller Street,¹⁵ and from 1949 - 1954 (before they purchased the land at Hankey Street) Olive and Douglas lived in Titahi Bay.

Divorce in the 1940s

In the early twentieth century, marriages that ended in divorce were relatively uncommon, and a divorce was only granted when one partner was found guilty of an act such as adultery, desertion, and drunkenness. Divorce was seen as a punishment, and courts were required to refuse a divorce if the applicant was found to be at fault.¹⁶ Husbands retained any property acquired during the marriage,¹⁷ and (at a time when wives were often financially dependent on their

⁹ “Fall from Fire Escape, Man’s Death at Hamner Springs, Inquest Concluded”, *Press*, Volume LXXXVII, Issue 26435, 31 May 1951, Page 3

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/CHP19510531.2.14>

¹⁰ WN568/167

¹¹ Annetta Karam, “Olive Jean (Russell) Dobson (1908-1964)” *WikiTree* website accessed March 2023 <https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Russell-24047>

¹² Annetta Karam, “Douglas Ellis Dobson (1911-2004)” *WikiTree* website accessed March 2023

<https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Dobson-4729>

¹³ “Douglas Ellis Dobson”, *Cenotaph Record, Auckland Museum* website accessed March 2023

<https://www.aucklandmuseum.com/war-memorial/online-cenotaph/record/172480?n=douglas+ellis+dobson&from=%2Fwar-memorial%2Fonline-cenotaph%2Fsearch&ordinal=0>

¹⁴ “Dobson, Olive Jean v Dobson, Douglas Ellis” *Archives New Zealand* website accessed March 2023

[https://collections.archives.govt.nz/en/web/arena/search#/entity/aims-](https://collections.archives.govt.nz/en/web/arena/search#/entity/aims-archive/R26074610/dobson%2C-olive-jean-v-dobson%2C-douglas-ellis?q=douglas+dobson&source=aims-archive)

[archive/R26074610/dobson%2C-olive-jean-v-dobson%2C-douglas-](https://collections.archives.govt.nz/en/web/arena/search#/entity/aims-archive/R26074610/dobson%2C-olive-jean-v-dobson%2C-douglas-ellis?q=douglas+dobson&source=aims-archive)

[ellis?q=douglas+dobson&source=aims-archive](https://collections.archives.govt.nz/en/web/arena/search#/entity/aims-archive/R26074610/dobson%2C-olive-jean-v-dobson%2C-douglas-ellis?q=douglas+dobson&source=aims-archive)

¹⁵ “The last will and testament of Dobson, Olive Jean; dated 8.12.48”, accessed from Archives NZ in March 2023 https://ndhadeliver.natlib.govt.nz/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE57937768

¹⁶ Megan Cook, 'Divorce and separation - Growth in divorce: 1898–1979', *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/divorce-and-separation/page-2> (accessed 21 March 2023)

¹⁷ Megan Cook, 'Divorce and separation', *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*,

<http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/divorce-and-separation> (accessed 21 March 2023)



husbands) women had to prove that their former husband was the guilty party to obtain maintenance or a widow's benefit.¹⁸ Divorce records are sealed for 100 years to protect privacy¹⁹ – but it is possible that, in the case of Olive and Douglas, that the court found neither party to be at fault, and did not grant the divorce.

Divorce rates peaked immediately after WW2 with approximately 5.5 marriages per 1000 ending in divorce in 1946.²⁰ By the mid-1950s this dropped to as low as 2.9 for every 1000 marriages, before climbing to peak in the early 1980s at 17.1 divorces for every 1000 marriages. This followed changes to the law that allowed for “no fault” divorces, based on “irreconcilable differences”, and for the distribution of property between former spouses. Today the rate of divorce is about 6.2 per 1000 marriages,²¹ and fewer people are choosing to marry.

The Dobson House

The Dobson House was designed by Toomath and Wilson for Olive and Douglas Dobson. It is one of the earliest known projects by the new architecture practice that was formed by Bill Toomath and Derek Wilson in 1957. The earliest plans for the Dobson House are signed William Toomath and date from August of the same year, while the later plans from 1958 are signed Toomath and Wilson.²²

Preliminary schemes from April and May 1958 show the house as a two-storey three-bedroom dwelling, with an entry at basement level and internal stairs up to what is now the ground floor accommodation.

The design was finalised in June 1958 to the current configuration, with a single-storey two-bedroom house raised on posts above the steeply sloping section. The reasons why the amendments were made is unknown. Olive and Douglas Dobson – now a married couple in their late-forties – may not have needed a third bedroom. And the amendments may have been made to save on construction costs.

¹⁸ Megan Cook, 'Divorce and separation - Maintenance and the division of property', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/divorce-and-separation/page-4> (accessed 21 March 2023)

¹⁹ “Divorce Files”, *Archives New Zealand* website accessed March 2023
<https://www.archives.govt.nz/find-a-record/divorce-records#1-what-divorce-files-contain>

²⁰ Megan Cook, 'Divorce and separation - Growth in divorce: 1898–1979', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/graph/29832/divorce-rate-1939-2017> (accessed 21 March 2023)

²¹ “Marriages, civil unions, and divorces”, Stats NZ website accessed March 2023
<https://www.stats.govt.nz/topics/marriages-civil-unions-and-divorces>

²² “Toomath & Wilson, architects :Proposed house, Hankey Street Wellington for Mr and Mrs O J Dobson. Job. no 63. [1957-1958].” Alexander Turnbull Library, Plans-2005-057-0063



The builder, Patterson & Puddick Ltd, applied for building consent in October 1958 for work to an estimated value of £5,500, and the house was completed by about 1960.

Bill Toomath said of the Dobson house that:

The scheme for this steep site followed that of the 1957 Bailey House with its rear-anchored braced platforms on stilts, but with a mono-pitch roof. Thus both floor and roof acted as anchored braced planes, enabling the front wall to be fully glazed from end to end. The house was centred on the pianist owner's cherished baby grand in the lounge corner.²³

While Derek Wilson said:

Another of those often well-treed steep sites, in this case overlooking city and harbour. A single level was required. Bill Toomath planned the house and I detailed it. An all-glass front capitalised on the view, while three large sky-domes added light and sun to the interior. Very little has changed. The original Royal Doulton handbasins remain. Two much appreciated features are the cedar and fibreglass sliding screens between the two living spaces, and the exposed flue and concrete surround which radiates heat into the main bedroom.²⁴

The New Zealand Modern

Modernist architecture in New Zealand started with the publication of texts, drawings and photographs from the 1930s to the 1950s. It is said that:

There has been no comparable period since for any such an array of interesting, productive and polemically charged documents. Collectively they shaped the discourse about architecture in this country in a way that in many respects pertains today.²⁵

This period was “a flux of displacement”²⁶ with refugees from Europe arriving in New Zealand, New Zealanders departing for (and returning from) military service, and New Zealand architects who worked overseas returning home. With them came new ideas, and overseas books and publications. Which in turn prompted

²³ *4 architects 1950-1980: William Alington, James Beard, William Toomath, Derek Wilson*, New Zealand Architectural Publications Trust, Auckland, 2010. Page 153

²⁴ *4 architects*. Page 191

²⁵ Justine Clark and Paul Walker, *Looking for the Local: Architecture and the New Zealand Modern*, Victoria University Press: Wellington, 2000, page 12.

²⁶ Clark and Walker, page 7



questions about a national identity, and for New Zealand architects, a search for a local modern style of architecture.

Writing about architecture was perhaps prompted by the difficulties in constructing new buildings. The depression years of the 1930s saw less finance available for construction projects, the war meant that less materials and labour were available for non-essential domestic projects, and the manufacturing industry was slow to recover in the post war period. A further prompt for architectural writing was the idea of nationhood, highlighted by the centenary of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1940.²⁷

Changes began to occur in the years after WW2. The Architectural Centre in Wellington, and the Group in Auckland were both established in 1946. Building materials became available, people were released from military service into their usual occupations, and New Zealand architects “became fixated with the design of the small, modern house.”²⁸ Some of these architects include the European emigree such as Helmut Einhorn, Heinrich Kulka, Friedrich Neumann, and Ernst Plischke, while others include local architects including Cedric Firth, John Scott, Bill Toomath, Bill Alington, James Beard, and Derek Wilson.

These latter architects looked to create a modern architecture that was influenced by international publications, but “inflected by the peculiarities of the place”.²⁹ These local buildings responded to the unique local topography and physical and cultural environment, and were influenced by simple and local vernacular buildings including whare and baches. They were generally built from standard local materials and clad in timber.

Houses on piles and poles

Wellington has a long history of houses built on steeply sloping sites with little or no direct access from the road. Most of the surrounding houses on Hankey Street are built in the local vernacular styles of late nineteenth and early twentieth century villas, bungalows, and English Domestic Revival style houses. A defining feature is that the walls of these traditional vernacular styled houses, very generally, extend to the ground. Any basements are usually enclosed, and the ground floor is supported on timber piles, set into the ground at regular intervals.

²⁷ Justine Clark and Paul Walker, page 8.

²⁸ Julia Gatley (ed), *Long Live the Modern: New Zealand's New Architecture 1904 – 1984*, Auckland University Press: Auckland, 2008, page 1.

²⁹ Gatley, page 4



The piles support timber beams, called bearers, which in turn support the floor joists onto which the timber floorboards are laid.

The Modern Movement in architecture explored new technologies and construction techniques. It established an “International Style” of architecture that set aside local vernacular styles. The villa Savoye in Poissy, France is a well-known example of a modernist house built on tall concrete posts.³⁰ It was designed by Swiss French architect Le Corbusier (and cousin Pierre Jeanneret), and completed between 1928 and 1931. The house is part of the Architectural Work of Le Corbusier World Heritage Site.

Closer to New Zealand, Austrian-Australian architect Harry Seidler designed a house for his parents in 1948 in the Modernist style. Like Bill Toomath, Harry Seidler attended the Harvard Graduate School of Design under Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer – Seidler in 1945/46 and Toomath in 1952. The Rose Seidler House is now a house-museum.³¹ Although constructed in concrete, it is similar to the Dobson House in that it is a single storey, cantilevered over an open basement so that it appears to float above the ground. Like the Dobson House, the Rose Seidler House has a grid-like glazed screen as its street façade, and again this is framed by the roof, walls and floor.

Before the Dobson House, Bill Toomath and Derek Wilson had both independently designed houses built on innovative foundation systems. Derek Wilson designed the Maunsell beach house on concrete piles that secured the house above shifting sand dunes at Riversdale in 1956. While Bill Toomath designed the Bailey House in Roseneath in 1957. This is said to be the first house that Toomath designed on an “impossible” site.³² Like the Dobson House, the Bailey House is a single storey of accommodation, partly raised and cantilevered from tall timber posts.

Other, later, New Zealand architects developed innovative solutions for tree-clad steeply sloping sites. Some, like Peter Norton in the 1970s, developed “pole houses” using treated timber power and utility poles for the vertical structure.³³ BRANZ now publishes guidance on the construction of pole houses, noting that

³⁰ “Villa Savoye à Poissy”, *Centre des Monuments Nationaux* website accessed March 2023
<https://www.villa-savoye.fr/en/>

³¹ “A new way of living”, *Museums of History New South Wales* website accessed March 2023
<https://mhns.wa.gov.au/stories/general/a-new-way-of-living/>

³² *4 architects*. Page 131

³³ ‘Pole house in Titirangi’, URL: <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/media/photo/pole-house> (Ministry for Culture and Heritage), updated 15-Jul-2013



they are suited to steep sites, require little excavation, and generally disturb less ground than traditional foundations. Their design is complex, and generally require input from a structural engineer.³⁴

Joint Family Homes Act 1950

The electoral rolls in 1960, and 1963 show that Olive and Douglas were living together at 61 Hankey Street after the construction of the house was complete. The couple chose to settle 61 Hankey Street under the Joint Family Homes Act³⁵ in November 1964, just a few days before Olive died.

New Zealand legislation has allowed for the protection of the family home from unsecured creditors and death duties since the 1890s. The Joint Family Homes Act of 1950³⁶ was intended by the National Party government of the day to “reinforce Christian family values”.³⁷ It allowed for the family home to be owned by either spouse, or by both as joint tenants. The advantage of registration as a joint family home was that it:

- Saved on death duties on a transfer between spouses.
- Protected the home against unsecured creditors.
- Allowed for a spouse to be a co-owner (even if they were not named on the title).
- Simplified financial planning, and the transfer of an estate to the surviving spouse.

Olive’s share of the house transferred to Douglas in January 1965, and Douglas owned the house until 1989.

Other owners

Douglas Dobson sold the house to a structural engineer who is said to have added structure to support the cantilevered beams.³⁸ These are the new diagonal bracing elements under the north elevation.

³⁴ BRANZ, Bulletin Issue 597: Timber Pole House Construction

<https://www.branz.co.nz/documents/4022/BU597-Timber-pole-house-construction.pdf>

³⁵ WN568/167

³⁶ Law Commission Te Aka Matua o Te Ture, *Report 77: The Future of the Joint Family Homes Act.*

<https://www.lawcom.govt.nz/sites/default/files/projectAvailableFormats/NZLC%20R77.pdf>

³⁷ Law Commission Te Aka Matua o Te Ture, *Report 77: The Future of the Joint Family Homes Act.*

<https://www.lawcom.govt.nz/sites/default/files/projectAvailableFormats/NZLC%20R77.pdf>

³⁸ Catherine Wells, “Past Perfect” *New Zealand Home & Entertainment*, Oct/Nov 2004. Page 30



The house was sold to art conservator Rose Evans and architect Ken Davis in 1997.³⁹ Davis describes the house as “our Rose Seidler house”; it’s a little gem and a privilege to own.”⁴⁰

Ken Davis designed and built the entrance gate and pergola, following discussions with Bill Toomath, who is said to have suggested that the design should have a “Japanese architectural feel”.⁴¹

The house sold to new owners in 2021.

Overall

The Dobson House (former) is a unique testament to all the people who subdivided the site, commissioned the architects, designed the house, and who have kept the place in an immaculate condition ever since. The house was awarded an NZIA Wellington Branch Enduring Architecture Award in 2004.⁴²

Photographs and Images



Early photograph of the house before the subfloor structure was added in c.1989.⁴³

³⁹ Wells. Page 27

⁴⁰ Wells. Page 30

⁴¹ Personal correspondence with owners, 27 March 2023.

⁴² *4 architects*. Page 153

⁴³ *4 architects*. Page 153





61 Hankey Street, with Anderson House (behind). Image: Thomas Seear-Budd.⁴⁴

Chronologies and Timelines

Timeline of events, including modifications

1945	Town Acre 679 subdivided.
1955	Olive and Douglas Dobson purchase Lot 4 DP 13007.
1958	Dobson House constructed.
c.1989	Structure added to subfloor to support the cantilevered beams.
2004	SR 118731 drains re-laid.

Occupation history

1958	Olive and Douglas Dobson
1989	New owners
1997	Rose Evans and architect Ken Davis
2021	New owners

⁴⁴ Thomas Seear-Budd, "An architectural treasure hidden high in the Wellington treetops", *Home Magazine NZ*, 2017 <https://homemagazine.nz/architectural-treasure-hidden-high-wellington-treetops/>



Biographies

Bill Toomath (1925 – 2014)⁴⁵

Born in 1925 in Lower Hutt, Stanley William Toomath (“Bill”) was the son of Roderick and Chrissie Toomath. In 1943, Toomath began work as an apprentice draughtsman with Crichton McKay and Haughton before moving to Auckland in 1945 to study architecture. In 1949 he gained his Bachelor of Architecture from the Auckland College of the University of New Zealand.

In response to the international Modern Movement, Toomath and his fellow students recognised that architecturally designed, easily-built vernacular Aotearoa New Zealand houses did not exist; in contrast to the plethora of state houses and borrowed styles from overseas. As early as September 1945, Toomath was publicly promoting the need for an Aotearoa New Zealand architecture. In a letter to the editor relating to the design of a new Wellington city cathedral he wrote: ‘Why indeed all this, that so studiously follows brick and stonework, and the Swedish, Spanish, Saracenic. Gothic, ad infinitum, “copybooks”. Let us, rather, we suggest, create a cathedral which will be the first great step in the founding of a contemporary and native way of building, lightly and graciously employing forms evolved directly from modern techniques. Let the building be filled with light, have all the aspiration of the Gothic, the simple directness of the Parthenon and yet be true to its materials, to its purpose, and to our day and our land’.⁴⁶ In 1946, Toomath and his fellow second-year students signed a manifesto, ‘On the Necessity for Architecture’: ‘overseas solutions will not do. New Zealand must have its own architecture, its own sense of what is beautiful and appropriate to our climate and conditions’.⁴⁷ Led by Bill Wilson, in 1949 they became the architectural firm ‘Group Architects’ and went on to challenge and develop the way New Zealanders approached architecture.⁴⁸

Gaining a Fulbright Scholarship, Toomath was one of the first Aotearoa New Zealand architects to study at Harvard’s Graduate School of Design for a Master of Architecture. He was taught by Pritzker Architecture Prize laureate I.M Pei, who designed the Louvre’s Pyramid, among other noted structures. After completing his studies, he worked with ‘European modern master’ Walter Gropius at the

⁴⁵ This repeats from the HHE report for the former Toomath House at 28 Robieson Street

⁴⁶ Auckland Star, “Correspondents’ View.”

⁴⁷ Newton, “With the Back of an Axe’: Reading the Group Architects.”

⁴⁸ Davies, “The Legacy of William Toomath”; National Library, “Group Architects (Auckland, N.Z.).”



Architects' Collaborative and then with I M Pei in New York.⁴⁹ In 1954 he returned to Aotearoa New Zealand, initially working for Bernard Johns before setting up his own practice.⁵⁰ In 1955 he married Leslie Reeves.⁵¹ In 1957, Toomath and Derek Wilson established the architectural firm Toomath and Wilson, which became Toomath Wilson Irvine Anderson in 1972.

Notable projects by Toomath included a house in Lower Hutt for his father (1949); Wool House, Featherston Street, Wellington (1955) while working for Bernard Johns; and the Toomath family home in Roseneath (1964) and Wellington Teachers' College, Donald Street, Karori (1966–1977). In 1979 Toomath became head of the School of Design at Wellington Polytechnic and a contributor of articles to the journal *Designscape*.⁵²

Toomath came to be recognised as one of Aotearoa New Zealand's leading post-war architects and a key figure in Aotearoa New Zealand Modernist architecture⁵³ and was a fellow of the NZIA. He was a founding member of the Architectural Centre in Wellington, became president in 1960, and was awarded a life membership as a mark of this continued involvement in its activities. Toomath was honoured with a retrospective exhibition at Wellington's City Gallery in 2010, where it was stated '[w]ithout the impact of Bill Toomath, Wellington would be a very different place'. Toomath was also inducted into Massey University's Hall of Fame in November 2013. After his death he was described as 'one of the last purist modernists in our country'.⁵⁴ Toomath's architectural designs continue to influence many contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand architects.⁵⁵

Derek Wilson (1922- 2016)⁵⁶

Derek Wilson was born in Havelock North in 1922 and grew up on the Tora Station in the Wairarapa where his father was farm manager. He worked as a draughtsman in Wellington for Mitchell and Mitchell and was a torpedo bomber pilot in WW2. He studied architecture at Auckland University from 1946-1949 and moved to London where he worked for Connell Ward Lucas, Sir Hugh Casson, and the London County Council.

⁴⁹ Seear-Budd, "An Architectural Treasure Hidden High in the Wellington Treetops."

⁵⁰ ArchitectureNow, "Vale, Bill Toomath"; Davies, "The Legacy of William Toomath."

⁵¹ Toomath, "Stanley William Toomath."

⁵² Dominion Post, "A Life Story: Capital Owns Much to Toomath for Preservation of Landmarks."

⁵³ Honey, "Montane Essay."

⁵⁴ Davies, "The Legacy of William Toomath."

⁵⁵ Davies, "The Legacy of William Toomath."

⁵⁶ 4 architects page 158

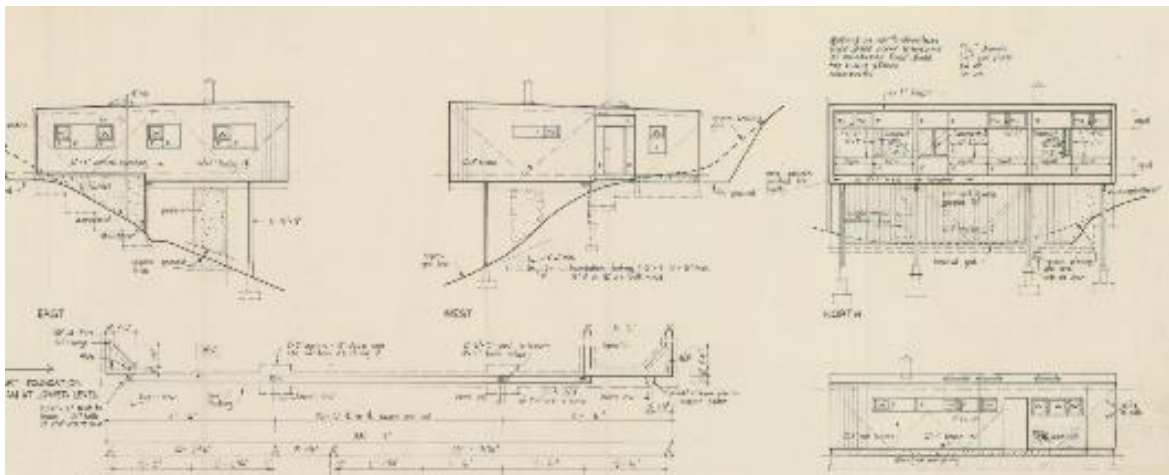


Wilson returned to New Zealand in 1955 and worked for Neil Inkster in Masterton. An early project includes the Maunsell Beach House (1956).

In 1958 Derek Wilson joined Bill Toomath to form Toomath & Wilson. They were joined by engineer Don Irvine and architect Graham Anderson in 1972 to form TWIA Ltd, and were briefly Gabites Toomath Beard Wilson and Partners. Wilson retired in 1987. Notable projects by Wilson include the Wilson House (1966), and the St Matthew's Church (1969) constructed in Brooklyn and now demolished, and the former DSIR buildings at Greta Point (now NIWA) 1970s.

Derek Wilson was a member of the Wellington Architectural Centre and served as president in 1963. NZIA awards include an NZIA Bronze Medal for the Calvert House, with Enduring Architecture awards for the NIWA facilities at Greta Point in 2001, and the Wilson House in 2002.

Plans and Elevations



Building consent drawings – elevations. Image: WCC Archives reference 00058-C3874.

Physical Description

Setting – geographical / physical context

The Dobson House (former) is located among mature trees on a steep hillside. It is accessed from a zig-zag path that connects the lower and upper portions of Hankey Street. The neighbouring houses to the south of Hankey Street all appear in outline on the 1892 Thomas Ward Map, and date from the late nineteenth century. While the houses to the north of Hankey Street include the currently



vacant site for social housing on the relatively flat site between Hopper Street and the bottom of the zig-zag steps, with the remaining houses constructed between the bottom of the zig-zag and the top of Thompson Street are shown in outline on the 1937 housing survey map, and date from the early twentieth century.

Buildings or structures

61 Hankey Street is a two-bedroom single-storey Modernist house, set on a steeply sloping site. The front (northern) portion of the house is cantilevered on beams supported by posts, while the rear of the house is built on a traditional system of a basement perimeter wall and piles. The overall effect is that the house appears to float, suspended above the trees.

The elegance of the house belies the sophistication of the design, particularly of the basement structure. To achieve a “floating” effect, the architects suspended the front of the house over four slender posts. The effect is further enhanced, as the posts are partly hidden – set back from the edges of the building by .5m from the side elevations, and by 1.5m.

The architect has described the structure at the rear of the basement as an “anchor”. The basement has rear and side concrete perimeter walls, and there is a timber framed basement wall under the rear of the main bedroom, living room, and under the dining rooms.

The exterior of the building is pared back to its essential form. The front elevation is fully glazed, with a glazed screen supported by timber posts, and set out in a grid of opening lights and fixed panes. The glazed screen is “framed” by the roof, side walls of the house, and by a “cat-walk” at the floor – together these extend about 0.4m in front of the line of the glazing. The glazed screen is divided into three sections that align with the structural grid at the subfloor, and with the room layouts behind.

The side and rear walls of the building (above first-floor level) are clad in vertical rough-sawn timber cladding with the saw-blade markings carefully retained (even though the boards have been sanded and painted). The boards are fixed over timber battens, and extend up to the roof without an eave. The roof is clad with standing seam metal roof-cladding, and with “skydome” rooflights over the gallery/hall and kitchen.

The structural grid at the subfloor also sets out the layout of the rooms above. The first structural bay to the east of the building is 3.5m wide and this is the width of the dining rooms and kitchen; the central structural bay is 4.6m wide and this is



the width the living room and bathrooms behind; while the west structural bay is 3.5m wide and this is the width of both bedrooms.

The basement structure also establishes the length of the rooms above. The grander rooms - main bedroom, living room, and most of the dining areas - are suspended above the open basement with views across the city. While the service areas - gallery (hall), kitchen, and second bedroom – are located above the enclosed basement.

Overall, the house appears to be an elegant and simple box, suspended on slender posts, pared back to the essentials, and focused to frame the remarkable views across Te Aro to the harbour.

The exterior of the house has had very few alterations over the past 60+ years, with the notable exception of the structure that was added to support the cantilevered beams at the subfloor.

Materials

- Metal standing seam roof.
- Plastic or acrylic “skydome” rooflights.
- Paint-finish, vertical rough-sawn timber weatherboards, set out in a board-on-batten pattern.
- Timber door and window joinery.
- Basement “floor” includes an area of river stones set in concrete.
- Basement timber posts.
- Basement concrete perimeter wall.
- Basement timber framed wall, clad in vertical timber weatherboards (unpainted).

Archaeological sites

Unknown, but part of NZAA R27/270 Wellington central

Setting – surroundings / site description

61 Hankey Street is elevated above a steeply sloping bush-clad section with views across Te Aro, towards Wellington Harbour.

The site is enclosed at Hankey Street by a modern timber fence, with the entrance through a modern plywood gate under a timber pergola. Access to the



front door is via a concrete path with steps. The mature planting in the front garden is a mix of tall deciduous trees and native plants in the understorey.

The basement is used as an outdoor room, and the sloping “floor” is partly made up from river stones set in concrete. There is a flat terrace with a sheltered seating area.

The rear garden includes a low retaining wall.

Comparative Analysis Summary

The Dobson House (former) is one of several award-winning buildings designed by Derek Wilson and Bill Toomath. Both architects, and their shared architecture practice – Toomath and Wilson – won many NZIA awards including:

- Dobson House - 2004 Wellington Branch Enduring Architecture Award
- Wellington Teachers’ College – 1972 Silver Medal, and 2005 Wellington Branch Enduring Architecture Award
- Wool House – 2002 Wellington Branch Enduring Architecture Award
- Toomath House – 2007 National Enduring Architecture Award
- Wilson House – 2002 Enduring Architecture Award
- DSIR (NIWA) – 2001 Enduring Architecture Award

Of these buildings, the Wellington Teachers College (Category 1 Historic Place, but now substantially demolished) and the Toomath House which features in the book “Long Live the Modern”; in the film “Antonello and the Architect”; and in the photographs of Simon Devitt⁵⁷ are perhaps the best well-known.

The Toomath House is the only building designed by Bill Toomath that is known to have been awarded an NZIA National Enduring Architecture Award. Built as the family home, it has the strongest association with significant Wellington architect, Bill Toomath.

The Dobson House (former) has become better known in recent years, particularly due to the photographs and writing of Thomas Seear-Budd.⁵⁸ Like the Toomath House the Dobson House (former) is located on a steep bush-clad hillside and is difficult to see from the street.

⁵⁷ Simon Devitt, “Toomath House” Simon Devitt website accessed March 2023

<https://simondevitt.com/portfolio/live/toomath/>

⁵⁸ Thomas Seear-Budd, “An architectural treasure hidden high in the Wellington treetops”, *Home Magazine NZ*, 2017 <https://homemagazine.nz/architectural-treasure-hidden-high-wellington-treetops/>



The Dobson House (former) shares some similarities with the restrained and simple elegance of the Maunsell beach house at Riversdale, designed by Derek Wilson shortly before he joined Bill Toomath in partnership. The Maunsell beach house was a simple rectangular box, suspended on concrete piles, with a strip of windows and doors along the front elevation that were framed by the deck, side walls and roof. The beach house is said to be highly modified.

The Dobson House (former) shares the unusual design of its basement structure with the Bailey House in Roseneath. The Bailey House was designed as a single floor of accommodation, partly supported on tall timber posts. The Bailey House is slightly larger than the Dobson House (former), with a sloping roof and a highly articulated main façade that looks out across the harbour. In comparison, the Dobson House (former), has been pared back to the essentials – and has greater similarities to other modernist masterpieces such as the Rose Seidler House in Sydney, Australia.

Overall, the Dobson House (former) is one of the smaller and earliest of the houses designed by Toomath and Wilson. It displays elements of their typical designs – the innovative basement structure; an internal room layout that is established by the structure of the house; the typical board-over-batten cladding; and the timber glazed screen, with its mix of opening and fixed lights.

Although similar to other houses designed by the practice, the Dobson House (former) has been customised to fit the vagaries of its site, and the requirements of its clients. A couple, who in their late 40s, chose to build a new house together in the years after WW2. Unlike the Maunsell beach house, the Dobson House (former) has significant integrity, with very few changes over time.

Evaluation Criteria

A. Historic values: these relate to the history of a place and how it demonstrates important historical themes, events, people or experiences.

(i) Themes: the place is associated with important themes in history or patterns of development.



The Dobson House (former) was built on a steeply sloping site, with difficult access, but which rewarded its owners with spectacular views across Te Aro and towards Wellington Harbour. It has **some historic value** as an innovative example of a response to the topography of Wellington – which is a significant local pattern of development.

(ii) Events: the place has an association with an important event or events in local, regional or national history.

Not assessed

(iii) People: the place is associated with the life or works of an individual, group or organisation that has made a significant contribution to the district, region or nation

The house is one of the earliest known projects by important local architects, Bill Toomath and Derek Wilson who made a significant contribution to Wellington.

Bill Toomath, in particular, is widely regarded as one of the country's leading post-war architects and a key figure in Aotearoa New Zealand Modernist architecture, as an architect, writer and educator. Toomath produced an impressive body of work that has influenced many contemporary New Zealand architects and was an influential member of 'The Group' in Auckland and the Architectural Centre in Wellington. Bill Toomath made a **significant** contribution **nationally** as one of our most important Modernist architects.

(iv) Social: the place is associated with everyday experiences from the past and contributes to our understanding of the culture and life of the district, region or nation.

The Dobson House (former) at 61 Hankey Street is an example of a house built after WW2 for a middle-class family. The Dobson House (former) has **some historic significance** as a representative example of a middle-class house, occupied by a family that faced the typical issues of their time.

B. Physical values: these values relate to the physical evidence present.



- (i) Archaeological: there is potential for archaeological investigation to contribute new or important information about the human history of the district, region or nation.**

Unknown

- (ii) Architectural: the place is notable for its style, design, form, scale, materials, ornamentation, period, craftsmanship or other architectural values**

The Dobson House (former) has significant architectural value and is a notable and early example of the work of Bill Toomath and Derek Wilson.

The house is an elegant and fine example of a mid-century modern building, that is pared back to its essential elements, suspended on slender posts and focused to frame the remarkable views across Te Aro to the harbour.

The house includes typical features of the Modernist houses designed by Toomath and Wilson. These include the innovative sub-floor structure designed to address an “impossible” tree-clad and sloping site; the internal planning where the locations of walls is set out on a grid that is established by the structure of the house; the timber glazed screen at the north façade, which is set out in a grid pattern with a mix of opening and fixed lights; and the board-over-batten timber external cladding system.

- (iii) Townscape: the place is strongly associated with other natural or cultural features in the landscape or townscape, and/or contributes to the heritage values of a wider townscape or landscape setting, and/or it is a landmark.**

Not assessed

- (iv) Groups: The place is part of a group of buildings, structures, or sites that taken together have coherence because of their age, history, style, scale, materials, or use.**



Not assessed

(v) Surroundings: the setting or context of the place contributes to an appreciation and understanding of its character, history and/or development.

The surroundings of the house make a substantial contribution to an appreciation of its character. The mature trees partially obscure the basement structure of the house, and give the effect that the house is floating above the forest canopy.

(vi) Scientific: The area or place has the potential to provide scientific information about the history of the district or region

Not assessed

(vii) Technological: the place provides evidence of the history of technological development; and/or demonstrates innovation or important methods of construction or design; and/or contains unusual construction materials.

Not assessed

(viii) Integrity: the significant physical values of the place have been largely unmodified. This includes the retention of important modifications and/or additions from later periods.

The Dobson House (former) has **significant integrity** and is remarkable for being almost unmodified since it was completed in 1960, and since it was sold by the Dobson family in 1989.

(ix) Age: the place is particularly old in the context of human occupation of the Wellington region.

Not assessed



<p>C. Social values: these values relate to the meanings that a place has for a particular community or communities.</p>
<p>(i) Sentiment: the place has strong or special associations with a particular cultural group or community for spiritual, political, social, religious, ethnic, national, symbolic or commemorative reasons.</p>
<p>Unknown</p>
<p>(ii) Recognition: the place is held in high public esteem for its historic heritage values, or its contribution to the sense of identity of a community, to the extent that if it was damaged or destroyed it would cause a sense of loss.</p>
<p>Unknown</p>
<p>(iii) Sense of place/ continuity: the place provides evidence of cultural or historical continuity, or contributes to a sense of place for a community</p>
<p>Unknown</p>
<p>D. Tangata whenua values: the place is sacred or important to Māori for spiritual, cultural or historical reasons.</p>
<p>Not assessed</p>
<p>E. Rarity: the place is unique or rare within the district or region.</p>
<p>The Dobson House (former) is a rare example of an immaculate and unmodified mid-century Modernist house in Wellington. It is an early example of the work of Toomath and Wilson, and is one of their first known designs.</p>
<p>F. Representativeness: the place is a good example of its type, era or class it represents.</p>



The Dobson House (former) is a good representative example of a mid-century Modernist house.

Recommendations

Based on the preceding evaluation, the Dobson House (former) meets the threshold for eligibility as a Historic Heritage Building in SCHED1 of the Wellington District Plan.

The house has **significant historic value** for its design by important Wellington architects, Toomath and Wilson. It is an early and notable example of their work and has been recognised as such with an NZIA Wellington Branch Enduring Architecture Award. It has **significant architectural value** as a fine mid-century Modernist house that has been well-cared for by its owners over the past 60+years. The house has remarkable and **significant integrity** with few changes since the time it was built, and occupied by the Dobson family. It is a **rare** example of an immaculate mid-century house and is a **good representative example** of its type.

Other recommendations:

None

Heritage Assessment Criteria

A,B,E,F

A: Historic values	Significant
(i) Themes	
(ii) Events	
(iii) People	Y
(iv) Social	
B: Physical values	Significant
(i) Archaeological	
(ii) Architectural	Y
(iii) Townscape	
(iv) Group	
(v) Surroundings	Y
(vi) Scientific	
(vii) Technological	
(viii) Integrity	Y



(ix) Age	
C: Social values	
(i) Sentiment	
(ii) Recognition	
(iii) Sense of place	
D: Tangata whenua values	
E: Rarity	Significant
F: Representativeness	Significant

Extent of the Place

The extent includes the entire external building envelope and unenclosed basement.

Non-heritage fabric / exclusions

The modern gate and fence to Hankey Street are well designed modern interventions, but are non-heritage structures.

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Appendices


Appendix 1 Comparative analysis

Appendix 2 Wellington Thematic Heritage Study 2013




Appendix 1 Comparative analysis

Houses designed by Toomath and Wilson				
Place name	Address/ location/ NZTM	Heritage Listing or recognition of significance	Photographs	Analysis
William Toomath (snr) House	Waterloo, Lower Hutt		  <p>Images - Davies, "The Legacy of William Toomath."</p>	<p>Bill Toomath designed a house for his parents in 1949, which was built in 1950. The site was described as of no particular character, similar to sections through the country. Largely enclosed by other houses, flat, and with no views, it was an unremarkable section. Rather than build the house in the centre of the section, as was common at the time, Toomath set the house towards the rear of the section and designed it around a series of 'courts'. Glazed walls and living room views of the rear court, combined with dining room views of the front court, gave a clear view through the house from corner to corner of the site - 110 feet of vista through the house. The site differed markedly from Toomath's own, but elements of his architectural ethos were apparent: long sight lines, floor to ceiling glazing and open living spaces.</p>


<p>Maunsell beach house</p>	<p>Riversdale</p>	<p>Not listed</p>	 <p>Image: Derek John Wilson, Alexander Turnbull Library, Architectural Centre Collection Reference: PA12-2142-3</p>	<p>The Maunsell beach house was designed by Derek Wilson and was built in 1956. The house is a simple rectangular box with a mono-pitched roof, and clad in vertical weatherboards. The house is raised above the sand dunes on concrete piles. The house is said to be much altered.⁵⁹</p> <p>The Maunsell beach house is similar to the Dobson House (former) in the use of a cantilevered floor structure used to address a difficult site. The side and rear walls have no eaves and are clad in vertical weatherboards. The roof, floor, and walls extend from the fourth elevation to create a sheltered terrace on the Maunsell beach house. This is similar to the preliminary design for the Dobson House (former) (but was reduced to a 'catwalk' when the house was built).</p>
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⁵⁹ Ben Schrader, 'Wairarapa places - Castlepoint', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/photograph/12012/riversdale-beach-house> (accessed 21 March 2023)



<p>Bailey House</p>	<p>Robieson Street</p>	<p>None</p>	 <p>Image: William Toomath. In <i>4 architects</i>, page 131</p>	<p>The Bailey House was designed by Bill Toomath in 1957 for a steep site in Roseneath. Like the Dobson House (former) it is supported on tall timber posts, and the front of the house is cantilevered over mature trees. The two houses are clad in the same “board-on-batten” system developed by Toomath, and the windows are arranged in geometric grid formation with opening and fixed lights.</p> <p>Unlike the Dobson House (former), the Bailey House has a sloping roof with a central ridge. The north elevation is highly articulated with balconies, a central “bay” that extends the depth of bedroom 1 and the living room, and a brise-soleil that partly shades the windows. The house is slightly larger, and includes a third bedroom.</p>
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<p>Toomath House (former)</p>	<p>28 Robieson Street</p>	<p>Proposed district plan</p>	 <p>Image: D.Winder 1968, Ref: DW-3398-F, Alexander Turnbull Library.</p>	<p>The Toomath House (former) was designed by Bill Toomath as the family home in 1964.</p> <p>It is an elegant two-storey house that is clad in vertical weatherboards, with timber joinery.</p> <p>Like the Dobson and Bailey houses, the Toomath house is designed on a steep section by Bill Toomath to make the most of views across Wellington harbour.</p>
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Appendix 2 Wellington Thematic Heritage Study 2013

Refer to the Wellington Thematic Heritage Study 2013

<https://wellington.govt.nz/~media/services/community-and-culture/heritage/files/thematic-heritage-study.pdf>

	Select the themes & subthemes which apply to the place	Yes / some (add explanation)
A	MIGRATION/ IMMIGRATION	
A1.1	Maori migration	
A1.1F	Gardens	Some (near)
A3	People and the natural environment	
A3.1	Response to Topography	
A3.1B	Zig-zags	Yes
A3.1D	Houses on difficult sections	Yes