



**HERITAGE
COUNCIL**
OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES – ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council in November 1996 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

PRINCIPAL AUSTRALIAN HISTORIC THEME(S)

- 2.4.5 Changing the face of rural and urban Australia through migration
- 3.14.1 Building to suit Australian conditions
- 8.12 Living in and around Australian homes
- 8.14 Living in the country and rural settlements

HERITAGE COUNCIL OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA THEME(S)

- 101 Immigration, emigration & refugees
- 104 Land allocation & sub-division
- 107 Settlements
- 112 Technology & technological change

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE

Round House, Mount Barker is a sophisticated and well resolved example of the Post-War International style in regional Western Australia*. The building is simple, light and elegant, dominating elements being the plain round walls punctuated with expanses of glazed French doors, wide overhanging eaves and decorative curved pattern to the balustrading, which softens and individualises the building. (Criterion 1.1)

Round House, Mount Barker is important for its innovative design concepts, particularly that of rotating according to the position of the sun, and also the rondiform shape of the house, an innovative concept in Western Australia at the time. The house is an unusual example of the tradition of the designer-owner-

* For consistency, all references to architectural style are taken from Apperly, R., Irving, R., Reynolds, P. *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture. Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*, Angus and Robertson, North Ryde, 1989.

For consistency, all references to garden and landscape types and styles are taken from Ramsay, J. *Parks, Gardens and Special Trees: A Classification and Assessment Method for the Register of the National Estate*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1991, with additional reference to Richards, O. *Theoretical Framework for Designed Landscapes in WA*, unpublished report, 1997.

builder in Western Australia, demonstrating Van der Volk's aesthetic sensibility and his considerable skills in design and metal fabrication. (Criterion 1.2)

Round House, Mount Barker, of novel design in its open landscape setting, had a notable landmark quality on Albany Highway, Mount Barker, until the view was obscured by tree plantings in the late twentieth century. (Criterion 1.3)

11. 2. HISTORIC VALUE

Round House, Mount Barker is an early example of the evolution of a large farming property on the outskirts of a rural town to a small acreage used for residential and or business purposes, which became a more common trend in the late twentieth century. (Criterion 2.1)

At the time of its construction, *Round House, Mount Barker* was recognised by the community of Mount Barker and the Shire of Plantagenet for social, cultural and aesthetic reasons as a unique building in the region, becoming a landmark on Albany Highway and appearing in promotional material for the area. (Criterion 2.1)

Round House, Mount Barker was built by a Dutch immigrant in the early 1960s, a period in which numerous post-war European immigrants, having established themselves in Australia, pursued the ideal of home ownership. (Criterion 2.2)

Round House, Mount Barker was designed and built by engineer Hubertus Johannes Van der Kolk, well known in Mount Barker as a business owner, as his family residence. Later occupiers and owners also included other well known local business proprietors, draper Brian John Aiden Allen, and his wife, Vera May Allen, and, at a later date, Robert William Broun, and his wife, Patsy Elaine Broun. Robert Broun also operated his contracting business from the place. (Criterion 2.3)

Round House, Mount Barker is an uncommon example in Western Australia of the Post-War International design style, incorporating the unique innovation of being mounted on a revolving base intended to enable the circular residence to revolve through 180 degrees to follow the sun. (Criterion 2.4)

11. 3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

Round House, Mount Barker has the potential to be utilized as a teaching and benchmark site in the design of regional housing in Western Australia and in the innovative materials. (Criterion 3.1)

Round House, Mount Barker is a good example of passive design to utilize sunlight, an aspect of architecture that was developing in Australia in the post-World War Two period, in which the orientation and features of a building were designed in a manner specific to its location in order to make the best use of sunlight for the local climate. (Criterion 3.2)

Round House, Mount Barker demonstrates a high level of technical achievement in residential development in Australia and an innovative concept for its time, for although the idea of a revolving house has been considered in modern architecture it has rarely been achieved. The inclusion of plumbing within the revolution also demonstrates a high level of technical achievement. (Criterion 3.3)

11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

Round House, Mount Barker is a rare example in Australia of a revolving house. No other examples being found in Internet research and a search of the Heritage Council of Western Australia database. (Criterion 5.1)

The place is rare as a residence designed to a rondiform plan, using steel and lightweight construction materials (Criterion 5.1)

Round House, Mount Barker is of exceptional interest to the State as a rare example of a small regional residence designed in the Post-War International style. While local architects were working in the International style and adapting it to the region in which they were working, these examples were usually located in Perth or were important regional buildings such as Broomehill Shire Offices and Kojonup Police Station. (Criterion 5.2)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Round House, Mount Barker demonstrates the principal characteristics of the Post-War International Style of architecture as utilised for the design of a small residential development in regional Western Australia.

Round House, Mount Barker demonstrates the ways in which skilled European Immigrants utilised their earlier experiences and intellectual understanding of the arts and modern architecture in adapting and taking advantage of their new environment in regional Western Australia and is a good example of the tradition of the designer-owner-builder in Western Australia.

12. 3 CONDITION

Round House, Mount Barker is in fair condition overall although leaking from the roof has destroyed introduced ceiling fabric and is causing damp to affect other fabric.

The building has not been occupied for about three years and there has been no maintenance during this period. The wide overhanging eaves have protected much of the external fabric such as windows, doors and wall cladding, although the metal balustrading requires treatment and repainting.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

Round House, Mount Barker has a high degree of integrity. It was originally constructed as a residence and continued to be such until it was vacated. Attention to the leaking roof and restoration of the ceilings would enable the place to be inhabited again. The rotation system ceased to operate early in the life of the building.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

Round House, Mount Barker has a high degree of authenticity. The external form of the building and internal layout remains intact and many original elements are extant. While the rotation of the building ceased early in its life, the apparatus is extant. Ceilings have been replaced, as have kitchen elements. A bathroom has been introduced in a former bedroom. The original windows and external doors

remain. External cladding appears authentic as does flooring. Some original cabinetwork remains in one of the bedrooms. Some minor elements that have been altered are easily reversible.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentation for this place is based on the heritage assessment completed by Robin Chinnery, Historian, and, David Heaver & Associates, Architects with amendments and/or additions by HCWA staff and the Register Committee.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Round House, Mount Barker is a single storey residence in the Post-War International design style. It was designed and built by engineer Hubertus Johannes Van der Kolk in c. 1956-58, as his family home. In the mid 1970s the place was refurbished and fixed in its position.

In the 1840s, the Perth-Albany Road, which later became Albany Highway, was opened up. Passing through the Mount Barker district, it provided a stimulus to further development. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, this district proved highly suitable to fruit growing, especially apples. The industry was already established by the late 1880s, when the opening of the Great Southern Railway to Albany brought improved transport to the port, enabling further expansion of the export trade. The Mount Barker district also proved suitable for production of fine merino wool.¹ Through the twentieth century, fruit growing and wool production continued in the Mount Barker district. However, potato growing, which had been notable in the pre-World War One period², was curtailed. In the 1920s, Mrs. Julia Wall owned Plantagenet Location 443, 100 acres in area, which included the future site of *Round House, Mount Barker*.³

During World War Two, overseas markets were effectively lost to Australian fruit producers. War-time shortages of labour and timber fruit packing cases further affected the industry. In the 1940s, the Commonwealth Government purchased apple and pear crops at a considerable loss, and the Apple and Pear Marketing Board continued to assist the industry during the war period. New tree plantings in the apple growing areas, including Mount Barker, almost ceased. In the post-war period, from the late 1940s, overseas markets were gradually re-established in the United Kingdom, Sweden, Singapore and Ceylon.⁴

On 15 November 1956, Hubertus Johannes Van der Kolk, engineer, of Mount Barker, was registered as the proprietor of portion of Plantagenet Location 443, Lot 2 on Diagram 21285, one acre 39 and five tenths perches in area, the future site of *Round House, Mount Barker*.⁵ He operated a business in Mount Barker, trading as HV Engineering,⁶ and was recorded in Rate Books for the Shire of

¹ Battye, J. S. *The Cyclopedia of Western Australia* The Cyclopedia Company, Perth, 1912-13, Facsimile Edition Hesperian Press, Victoria Park, Western Australia, 1985, Vol. 2 p. 779.

² *ibid.*

³ Plantagenet Rate Books

⁴ Crowley, F. K. *Australia's Western Third: A History of Western Australia from the first settlements to modern times* Macmillan & Co. Ltd., London, 1960, p. 301.

⁵ Certificate of Title Vol. 1197 Fol. 130.

⁶ Ms D. Baesjou, Manager Development Services, Shire of Plantagenet, conversation with Robin Chinnery, 1 April 2004.

Plantagenet as the owner and occupier of the workshop at Lot/Subdivision 6/79 in Mount Barker in the late 1950s.⁷

Born and raised in Holland, Hubertus 'Hughie' Van der Kolk, an engineer by trade, had worked in a German engineering business during World War Two, under the war-time forced labour program, which took various people from occupied countries to work in Germany. After the war, he returned to Holland, before immigrating to Western Australia in 1950, with his wife, Anne, her sister, Mary, and her husband, who was also Hughie's long term friend, G. J. Grooters, a baker. They were seeking a new life and new opportunities in Australia⁸, in common with other Dutch immigrants who had arrived in Australia in the post-World War Two period, when changes in Australian immigration policy led to increased European immigration. Having established themselves in Australia, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, many European immigrants then pursued the ideal of home ownership.

In 1950, the Van der Kolks and Grooters went to Kendenup, where they established their respective businesses, the former building chimneys and undertaking other engineering type work. After about three years, the two families moved to Mount Barker to establish businesses in the larger town. The Grooters later moved to Perth, where they established a new bakery business in the western suburbs. Through the 1950s and into the early 1960s, Hughie Van der Kolk's engineering business at Mount Barker grew and became well known in the town and the district, providing services to the private and public sectors, including Pardelup Prison Farm.⁹

In the 1950s through into the 1960s, Shire of Plantagenet Rate Books record details of owners and/or occupiers, but no information about residences on any lots. The Shire has no record of building licence applications granted in the late 1950s, 1960s or 1970s, and holds no plans of new buildings erected or plans of alterations or additions to existing buildings.¹⁰ Thus it has not been possible to ascertain specific details of the date of construction of *Round House, Mount Barker*, or specific information about its design, which appears to have been strongly influenced by the principles of the Modern Movement in Europe. The house also reflects many of the features of a house designed by Roy Grounds, who was responsible for the designs of 'a series of pure geometrically formed buildings' in Victoria.¹¹

Hughie Van der Kolk designed and built the house which became known as *Round House, Mount Barker* at Lot 2 over a period of time from c. 1956 to 1958.¹² Anne Van der Kolk was 'a sun-worshipper'¹³, and in his design for their family home Hughie sought to optimise natural light to all rooms and to enable the building to revolve to face the sun. He designed and custom made all the necessary steel work for the building, along with every other part utilised in the unique construction and all built-in furniture. He was assisted in its construction

⁷ Shire of Plantagenet Rate Books, Townsite, 1957 to 1960.

⁸ G. J. Grooters, telephone conversation with Robin Chinnery, 31 May 2004.

⁹ *ibid*; and Elizabeth O'Rourke, Hughie Van der Kolk's niece, telephone conversation with Robin Chinnery, 30 May 2004.

¹⁰ Ms D. Baesjou, Manager Development Services, Shire of Plantagenet, conversation with Robin Chinnery, 1 April 2004.

¹¹ Apperly, Richard, Irving, Robert, and Reynolds, Peter *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1878 to the Present* Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1989, p. 220.

¹² G. J. Grooters *op. cit.*

¹³ Elizabeth O'Rourke *op. cit.*

by Bill Croft, foreman and later partner in the engineering business. After Van der Kolk departed for Perth in the early 1960s, Croft would continue to operate the business as Mount Barker Engineering until his death in 1968.¹⁴

The concept of calculating architectural design to maximise sunlight in cooler months and shade buildings, especially windows, in warmer months, was being formulated more formally in the post World War Two period. In 1948, the Department of Housing and Constructions, and Experimental Building Station, published a basic manual to guide passive design suitable for Australia's climate, *Sunshine and Shadow in Australasia*. The book outlines the precise science of calculating the angle of the sun throughout the year, which is dependant on latitude, season, time of day and orientation of the building. Issues to be taken into account for passive design include self-shading of the building, sun penetration through glass, shadowing from adjacent structures and methods for shading windows.¹⁵ This book has continued to be the definitive resource for designing to accommodate sun angles, and is in its sixth edition.¹⁶

At the time that Van der Kolk built *Round House, Mount Barker*, a large shed with a concrete floor was erected to provide a workshop area, toilet and laundry facilities. This shed was demolished in 2009. The base for the house was a circular brick wall, eight courses high, on which a circular steel rail was fixed. The house was mounted on a steel wagon wheel type structure, and designed to rotate through 180 degrees so that it could follow the sun as desired. The design principle that enabled the house to revolve was similar to a pinion, with a motor propelled mechanism to turn the house. There was a separate, fixed, central core to accommodate essential services, including drainage and sewerage, water and electricity supplies. Where the rooms joined at the central point, concertina style slides were fitted to divide the rooms, and there were concertina style doors from each of the bedrooms. All fixtures and fittings, including built-in cupboards and the kitchen sink, were curved, reflecting the circular shape of the house. The striking bathroom featured black and yellow tiles. The walls of the house were of masonite, curved to the desired shape, with full length glass windows and/or doors opening from each room to the encircling verandah, beyond which there was a fixed iron-work balustrade which followed the circumference of the verandah. At the south-east, there was a short flight of stairs, with a matching balustrade. From the drainage pipe in the central core, water run-off from the roof ran to an underground tank and thence to the dam at the west, from which water was pumped as required to supply the property. On completion, the house was painted pink, with the exterior timber work painted in contrasting white, and Van der Kolk took up residence.¹⁷

Distinguished by its novel design and colour, the place became a well recognised landmark on Albany Highway on the outskirts of Mount Barker.¹⁸ An early, undated photograph, captioned 'MOUNT BARKER W. A. - SCENE REVOLVING SOLAR HOUSE', shows *Round House, Mount Barker* in an open landscape

¹⁴ ibid; G. J. Grooters op. cit.; and Doreen Croft, telephone conversation with Robin Chinnery, 28 May 2004.

¹⁵ R.O. Phillips, *Sunshine and Shadow in Australasia: a study of the principles involved in finding the extent and direction of sunlight and shadows on buildings, together with a series of charts for different hours and seasons for the latitudes of Australia, New Zealand, New Guinea and the adjacent islands*, Australia, CSIRO, c.1992 (6th edition), p.5.

¹⁶ <http://www.cumberlandgroup.com.au/Documents/Development-Seminar-2002-Session-3.htm>

¹⁷ John Rowe, telephone conversation with Robin Chinnery, 20 April 2004.

¹⁸ Keith Hulcup and Terry Proctor, conversations with Robin Chinnery, 31 March and 1 April 2004, respectively.

setting, with a kerbed circular flower bed that follows around the circumference. This bed is planted with low growing shrubs other than at the north side, where some are of medium height. Farther to the north, there are semi-mature trees. Lawns have been established to each side and the front, whilst what can be seen of the area to the rear appears less developed.¹⁹ The place became more widely known, and an article about it was published in the *Australian Women's Weekly*, with particular mention of the unique concept of turning the house to follow the sun as desired.²⁰

The revolving mechanism proved troublesome from early on. When it failed, Van der Kolk used a tractor to pull the house around to the desired position.²¹

Problems with roof drainage were resolved by diverting the water outside.²²

On 18 June 1962, Lot 2 was mortgaged to the Commonwealth Trading Bank of Australia²³, possibly to secure funds towards Van der Kolk's establishment of an engineering business in Perth.²⁴ In the early 1960s, he and his wife left Mount Barker to operate his new engineering business at Redcliffe. He retained ownership of *Round House, Mount Barker*, which was let to tenants.²⁵

In 1964, Rate Books recorded Brian John Allen, mercer, and Vera Mary Allen as the rateable owners of *Round House, Mount Barker*, which had an unimproved capital value of £15. In 1966, the unimproved value had increased to £75, and the Allens continued to occupy the place.²⁶ They ran the drapery business in Mount Barker for some years, and were well known in the town.²⁷ It appears that they leased *Round House, Mount Barker* through into the early 1970s, as no transfer of ownership from Van der Kolk was registered on the Certificate of Title until early 1972.²⁸

In 1971, when the Shire of Plantagenet celebrated its centenary, it published a commemorative booklet. This included a photograph of *Round House, Mount Barker*, with the caption 'An unusual circular modern home at Mount Barker'.²⁹

Van der Kolk's engineering business at Redcliffe did not prove successful in the long term, and, when he 'went broke', he sold his Mount Barker home.³⁰

On 21 February 1972, the transfer of the place to Brian John Aiden Allen, draper, and his wife, Vera May Allen, both of Harington Estate, Denmark, as joint tenants, was registered.³¹ This address indicates *Round House, Mount Barker* had ceased to be their principal place of residence by this date.

¹⁹ Photograph courtesy Patsy Broun. Note: On the back is a handwritten note stating 'Built about 1958.'

²⁰ John Rowe and Patsy Broun, telephone conversations with Robin Chinnery, April-May 2004. Note: To date, Mrs. Broun has been unable to locate her copy of the article.

²¹ Claude Drage op. cit.

²² G. J. Grooters op. cit.

²³ Certificate of Title Vol. 1197 Fol. 130.

²⁴ Claude Drage op. cit.

²⁵ G. J. Grooters op. cit.

²⁶ Shire of Plantagenet Rate Book, North Ward, 1964 and 1966.

²⁷ John Rowe op. cit.

²⁸ Certificate of Title Vol. 1197 Fol. 130.

²⁹ *Welcome to ... MOUNT BARKER and Shire of Plantagenet THE BIG STATE'S GARDEN* Issued by Shire of Plantagenet, 1971.

³⁰ G. J. Grooters and Elizabeth O'Rourke op. cit. Note: In all, Van der Kolk established three engineering businesses at Redcliffe, each of which failed. (G. J. Grooters *ibid.*)

³¹ Certificate of Title Vol. 1197 Fol. 130.

On 13 August 1973, the transfer of the place to John Albert Rowe, waterside worker, of Albany, was registered.³² By this period, the revolving mechanism had long-ceased to operate, and the place was in need of repairs and maintenance. The roof had deteriorated considerably, and water leakage had caused some damage to the tongue and groove flooring which had been used for the roof lining. The new owner obtained a plumber's report on the problem, but the estimated cost of repairs was too expensive for his means. Consequently, he did not occupy the place, and sought to sell it, advising potential buyers of the existing problems.³³

On 2 April 1974, the transfer of the place to Robert William Broun, bulldozer contractor, and his wife, Patsy Elaine Broun, as joint tenants, was registered.³⁴ The property was well suited to their needs, with an existing workshop and garage and sufficient area for Robert's equipment.³⁵ However, the house was 'more-or-less wrecked', and they did not immediately take up residence at the place.³⁶ During the period in which renovations were undertaken, the Allen family moved to the property, initially living in a caravan on the site, before fitting a stove etc. at the western side of the northern portion of the shed to provide a kitchen and dining/living area. The overall area of the shed was increased with an addition at the west. Over an extended period, doing most of the work themselves, the Allens stumped the house where required to fix it in position, replaced the flooring in the lounge and kitchen areas, replaced cupboards etc. where required, converted a small bedroom to a bathroom, replaced broken windows, and re-roofed the house. To distinguish the lounge area, its interior walls were clad. To better define different areas in the open plan living area a breakfast bar was built between the kitchen and dining areas, and to provide privacy to the bedroom areas some partitioning was introduced. As the position of the house was now fixed, further steps were built from the verandah to ground level. A builder was employed to extend the verandah at the south side, near the kitchen area, and the roof was similarly extended. The exterior of the house was painted green, and the interior was also re-painted.³⁷

On 7 September 1984, it was noted on the Certificate of Title that the correct address of the proprietors was Albany Highway, Mount Barker³⁸, indicating they were resident at the place by this date. Under the Allens' ownership, the garden was developed further, retaining the mature pine trees at the north and establishing lawn areas. There was a low brick fence at the front boundary, and the place continued to be highly visible from the highway.³⁹ Family photographs show the interior as it was after the renovations, including the new fit out to the kitchen, the new breakfast bar, and timber paneling in the lounge area. Photographs show the exterior of the house after it was painted pale green with the exterior timber work in a deeper shade of green. There are mature tree plantings to the north and north-west of the house, and a mixture of mostly low and medium height plantings in the bed at the front of the house, with a well

32 Certificate of Title Vol. 1197 Fol. 130.

33 It is believed that the capacity to revolve was discontinued due to unspecified problems. (Rob Stewart, CEO, Shire of Plantagenet, to Stephen Carrick, Manager Conservation and Assessment, Heritage Council of Western Australia, 3 February 2004.)

34 Certificate of Title Vol. 1197 Fol. 130.

35 John Rowe and Patsy Broun op. cit.

36 Patsy Broun *ibid.*

37 *ibid.*

38 Certificate of Title Vol. 1197 Fol. 130.

39 Patsy Broun op. cit.

established lawn in the foreground. A photograph of the outbuildings shows the original bathroom and laundry of timber framed fibro clad construction, with the adjoining carport area and the more recent small aluminum shed.⁴⁰

On 25 July 1990, Robert William Broun died. His widow, who became sole proprietor by survivorship, continued to reside at *Round House, Mount Barker* for about a year, before deciding to sell it and move into the town.⁴¹ On 24 June 1991, transfer of the place to Roy Stanley Spark and Alice Helena Bessie Spark, both of Albany, as joint tenants, was registered.⁴² It has not been ascertained whether they or the subsequent owners planted numerous trees in the front garden, which by the early twenty-first century, almost obscured the view of the place from the highway. Similarly, it has not been ascertained which owners fitted new cladding to the outbuilding. On 2 March 1994, the transfer of the place to Rodney Malcolm Batty and Susan Doreen Batty, as joint tenants, was registered. They were the last owner/occupiers of *Round House, Mount Barker*.⁴³

On 20 March 2001, the 'Notice of Intention to Take for the designated purpose of Construction of the Mt Barker Bypass (Muir's Highway)' was recorded on the Certificate of Title.⁴⁴ In early April 2001, *Round House, Mount Barker* was valued at \$105,000.⁴⁵

On 15 August 2001, the transfer of the place to the Commissioner of Main Roads was registered.⁴⁶ The place has been left vacant since that date, and it has been vandalised. A number of openings where the glass windows and doors have been broken have been boarded up, and padlocks fitted to the main doors. No maintenance appears to have been carried out under the ownership of Main Roads other than grass cutting to limit fire hazard.⁴⁷

On 23 September 2003, a motion was put at a meeting of the Municipal Inventory Advisory Committee of Mount Barker as follows:

That in acknowledging that the building known as the Round House (Lot 2 Albany Highway Mount Barker) is presently on land required for the Mount Barker Northern By-Pass, the Council endorses the concept of retention of the structure through relocation and will advise Main Roads WA and the Heritage Council of such support.⁴⁸

Following an amendment to delete the words 'and the Heritage Council of such support' the motion was carried.⁴⁹

The Mount Barker Historical Society expressed to the Shire of Plantagenet their concerns about the possible future of *Round House, Mount Barker*.⁵⁰

In early February, the Chief Executive Officer of the Shire of Plantagenet notified the Heritage Council of Western Australia that consideration of *Round House*,

40 Photographs, no dates, courtesy Patsy Broun.

41 Certificate of Title Vol. 1197 Fol. 130.

42 Certificates of Title Vol. 1197 Fol. 130 and Vol. 1904 Fol. 467.

43 Certificate of Title Vol. 1904 Fol. 467.

44 Certificate of Title Vol. 1904 Fol. 467.

45 Valuation Report, 6 April 2001.

46 Certificate of Title Vol. 1904 Fol. 467.

47 Site visit, Robin Chinnery and Lynne Farrow, 1 April 2004.

48 Municipal Inventory Advisory Committee, Ordinary Council Meeting Minutes, Shire of Plantagenet, 23 September 2003, p. 17.

49 *ibid.*

50 Hazel Rutter, Mount Barker Historical Society, conversation with Robin Chinnery, 1 April 2004.

Mount Barker would be put before the Shire of Plantagenet Council 'when next the Municipal Inventory is to be reviewed.'⁵¹ In autumn 2004, the place remains vacant.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Round House, Mount Barker comprises a small single storey circular house with a flat roof in the Post-War International style. It was constructed in c. 1958.

The building is a detached structure in a large residential block of 5046 sq. m. on the Albany Highway at the northern edge of Mt. Barker, a small country town in the Great Southern Region of Western Australia. The nearest neighbouring building is a small cottage called Avoca, about 100 metres to the north. The building is set roughly central within the depth of the block but close to the north-west side boundary. There is a simple garden storage shed behind the building constructed of galvanized aluminium with a shallow pitched gable roof.

The rear section of the block is fenced off with a super six fence and may have contained animals or a vegetable garden. Four large pines on the north-west (side) boundary were planted when the building was first constructed. A dense planting of fast growing native trees between the house and the Albany Highway was planted within the past 20 years.

The building is raised approximately 800 mm off the ground and originally rotated. However the building is now static and has been fixed since the late 1970s. The rotation system is extant and consists of a steel track constructed on top of a face brick wall, located under the external wall of the house. The external wall then rotated on a series of small steel wheels on the track. The joists radiate from a central ring beam to the supporting track under the external wall and cantilever past the track to provide support for the verandah floor. Jarrah bearers and stumps have been installed subsequently under the living area floor, possibly because of structural failure of the floor system.

The building is surrounded by a verandah with a wrought iron balustrading. The verandah pivoted with the house but the balustrading remained static. The balustrading is steel, formed into a delicate scrolled pattern and supported on slender metal posts. The verandah floor is lined with pine decking. There are three sets of stairs, two original sets, one near the front door and one near the kitchen. At the rear door, the verandah has been widened. Additional flooring, a triangular section of roof and an additional set of steps have been constructed at this point.

The eaves are boxed and are a dominating horizontal element that cantilevers to the edge of the verandah. The eaves lining appears to be asbestos cement sheeting. The eaves fascia is colorbonded. The roof is a very shallow pitch and slopes inwards towards a core at the centre of the building where the stormwater is collected.

The large areas of smooth painted masonite on the external walling give the house the appearance of a drum. 12 mm semicircular battening covers the joints of the masonite. The bedroom and service section of the house has a wider circumference than the living areas. At the change of circumference a tight curve in the wall is an Art Deco touch. The walling is punctuated by a large bank of French doors to the living areas and a set of French doors to each of the two bedrooms. The kitchen and bathrooms have standard windows with sills at waist

⁵¹ Rob Stewart, CEO, Shire of Plantagenet, to Stephen Carrick, Manager Conservation and Assessment, Heritage Council of Western Australia, 3 February 2004.

height. The front door appears to be the original timber veneer and has three small panes of glass inset.

The internal layout of the building consists of a large living/dining/kitchen area, two bedrooms and a bathroom. A central rectangular core in the centre of the building contains downpipes for roof runoff and services. While the house appears to be circular, the external wall of the living area is inset from the rest of the house, providing a larger verandah outside (1800 mm wide where it is 1200 to the rest of the house). The diameter of the house is approximately 11 metres.

The front door opens straight into the living area. This area also contains a large bank of glazed doors and the walls are clad in a dark imitation hardwood lining. A tile fire is extant between the front door and the glazed doors. A further external door opens into the kitchen. The bathroom is adjacent to the kitchen and the two bedrooms are located between the bathroom and the front door. The bathroom and second bedroom are wedge shaped, with the external wall being curved. The main bedroom has a curved section of wall adjacent to the front door containing the elements of a dressing table, which appears to have been part of the original fit-out. The bathroom and bedrooms are of modest size.

The original battened ceiling at a height of 2.560 m is extant in the main bedroom and bathroom. The ceiling in the living areas has been replaced and is at the lower height of 2.420 m.

The walls are framed, but it could not be discerned whether they are framed in timber or steel. Steel is likely as the top and bottom plate would be easier to form and because of Van der Kolk's expertise in this area. The roof framing is visible through areas where the ceiling is missing and is constructed of steel r.h.s. radiating between a central ringbeam at the core and the edge of the building. The floor is constructed of jarrah boards which are covered with carpet in the living and bedrooms, vinyl sheeting in the kitchen/dining areas and cork tiles in the bathroom.

Kitchen and bathroom fittings and finishes appear to have been upgraded in the 1980s or 1990s. The original concertina doors have been replaced with flush panel doors and no authentic hardware remains. The built-in dressing table in the main bedroom appears authentic. The built-in wardrobes in the bedrooms have been introduced.

Trims are minimal, cornices and skirtings are round timber, architraves are painted flat jarrah.

The condition of the building is sound apart from water penetration from the (almost) flat roof which has destroyed some ceiling fabric and may be affecting other fabric such as steel.

A large proportion of fabric is authentic. Elements that have been altered include the kitchen and bathroom fitouts, ceiling fabric in the living areas, verandah flooring, light fittings, internal doors and door furniture. Wardrobes to the bedrooms have been introduced and some wall fabric altered to enable them to be installed. The imitation hardwood lining to the living areas and pine partition to the kitchen was introduced in the c.1970s.

13.3 COMPARATIVE INFORMATION

The Post-War International style (c.1940- c.1960) had its early roots at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century in Europe with the development of the Functionalist and Rationalist styles of architecture, whereby the structure and function of elements was expressed honestly, without use of

decorative elements or classical proportioning. This developed into the Modern Movement, wherein a machine like architecture reflecting the structure of modern ships was developed. The Bauhaus School in Germany was an important disseminator of this style, and one of the strong influences of the Bauhaus was the De Stijl movement in Holland, where the planes of walls were used like sculptures or paintings. Within the Modern Movement an industrial approach to building design was considered to be a solution to the intensive building programs that were required to reconstruct Europe after World War Two.

At the same time the Art Deco style in the 1920s and 1930s used many of the proportions of the modern movement but used decorative elements such as curves, bands and design motifs to soften the unadorned geometry of the modern style.

Van der Kolk had worked in a steel engineering factory in Germany during World War Two before his arrival in Australia. It is likely that he would have been exposed to the principles of design and construction of modern architecture in Germany and his native Holland and used them in his house in Mt. Barker. However, it appears that the design and its realisation were his achievement alone, utilising his engineering experience to create an innovative residence.

The Post-War International Style in Australia reflected the international design trends. The basic elements of the style were interpreted according to the requirements of the various regions. Melbourne Regional design style (c.1940-c.1960) was mostly employed in the Melbourne region, but also occasionally elsewhere. In the 1950s, 'the doyen of Melbourne's modern architects', Roy Grounds, designed a series of 'purely geometrically formed buildings', such as 'a circle, an equilateral triangle, a square with a circular void in the centre'.⁵² Van der Kolk's design of *Round House, Mount Barker* incorporates a number of the design features of Grounds' circular House, Oliver's Hill, Frankston, Victoria (1952), including widely projecting eaves, a narrow edge to the roof, glass walls with regularly placed mullions, a verandah, and exposed joists.⁵³

Another Round House was constructed at 10 Gawler Crescent, Deakin in 1956⁵⁴. It was designed by Alex Jelinek, a Czechoslovakian educated architect, and is constructed of concrete blockwork and reinforced concrete walls. It too has wide box shaped eaves.

No record of any other revolving house in Australia has been found in comparative literature. Most residential examples of the Post-War International Style in Western Australia are located in Perth. No rondiform houses have been located. Regional examples of the Post-War International style are usually important civic buildings such as Broomehill Shire Offices (HCWA Database 06196, listed on Shire of Broomehill Municipal Heritage Inventory) or Kojonup Police Station (no current HCWA status) in the Great Southern Region.

A revolving restaurant was constructed at the top of a multi storey office building in St. Georges Terrace, Perth and some other state capital cities in the 1970s, after the construction of *Round House, Mount Barker*. In these instances, only the dining platform revolved, not the service areas. The incorporation of plumbing within the revolution of *Round House Mount Barker* demonstrated a high level of technical achievement.

⁵² Apperly, Richard, Irving, Robert, and Reynolds, Peter op. cit., pp. 218-220.

⁵³ ibid, p. 220.

⁵⁴ RAlA Website

The place is an unusually well resolved example of the tradition of the designer-owner-builder in Western Australia, in which the owner's considerable skills in metal fabrication, his aesthetic sensibility, his knowledge of modern European architecture and his wife's love of the sun, combined to produce a simple and elegant contemporary building incorporating the ingenious device of rotating according to the direction of the sun.

Most of the theory surrounding passive solar design in Australia assumes a hot climate that seeks shade for the summer months. *Round House, Mount Barker* is unusual in that it was designed to maximise sunlight in the house, and as such has more in common with European designs for cold climates. It is also unusual as theories of passive solar design assume that a building will be in a fixed location working with the apparent movement of the sun, where *Round House, Mount Barker* was designed to move in order to follow the sun.

So far as is known, *Round House, Mount Barker* is a unique 1950s residential building in regional and metropolitan Western Australia. The concept whereby it was intended to revolve through 180 degrees was innovative at an Australian level, as evidenced by the feature article and photograph published in the *Australian Women's Weekly*⁵⁵.

13. 4 KEY REFERENCES

No key references.

13. 5 FURTHER RESEARCH

As noted, research for this assessment, which included sources in the local history collection, Shire records, Electoral Rolls, and oral evidence from previous owners and occupiers of the place and their descendants, residents and past residents of Mount Barker, has been unable to locate any plans or specific details of its design and construction.

⁵⁵ John Rowe and Patsy Broun, op. cit.