

National Trust of Australia (Victoria)

SUBMISSION CONCERNING
OAKLEIGH MOTEL
1650 DANDENONG ROAD
OAKLEIGH
TO THE
HERITAGE COUNCIL OF VICTORIA

The National Trust of Australia (Victoria) submits that
the building known as the Oakleigh Motel,
1650 Dandenong Road, Oakleigh is of both historical and architectural
significance sufficient to warrant its inclusion in the *Victorian Heritage Register*.

4 March 2009

Report prepared on behalf of the National Trust by
Simon Reeves
Built Heritage Pty Ltd

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 National Trust Statement of Significance

How is it Significant?

The Oakleigh Motel, designer unknown, and completed in 1957, is historically, architecturally important at the State level.

Why is it Significant?

Historically, this is the first motel to be built in Victoria. Influenced by the American experience, the motel represents the vanguard of a new type of building that came to dominate the travelling and holiday experience in the 1960s, and is still popular today. Motels were one of the new building types that developed in response to the boom in car ownership in post-war Australia, and the consequent development of a car-based urban culture and travelling patterns. Along with the shopping centre, the Drive-in, and of course the freeway, set among an endless carpet of suburban housing, the motel is one of the major icons of the most profound change in the development of cities in the 20th century. This change is particularly seen in Melbourne's vast suburban south-east, where early and major symbols congregate, such as the south-eastern freeway, the Chadstone shopping centre, Monash University, Waverley football park, and the Oakleigh Motel.

Architecturally, the Oakleigh Motel is possibly the best example in Victoria of the colourful, eye-catching roadside architecture seen as typical of the 1950s. Strongly derived from American models it is designed to be visually striking, and is dominated by a huge billboard style sign, illuminated at night. The various angles and lightweight structure of the buildings are designed to impress with their modernity. The entry canopy is angled and supported by zig-zag struts, while the restaurant has a window wall angled out towards the passing traffic. The rooms behind are angled, in order to provide some privacy from each other, as well as an exiting [sic] zig-zag effect. The building, with its prominent signage, is a local landmark.

1.2 Summary of Findings

New research undertaken for this report, mostly drawn from a forthcoming typological study of Australian motels by Simon Reeves, has revised the significance ascribed to the Oakleigh Motel. This research concluded that:

- The Oakleigh Motel is of outstanding historical and architectural significance to the State of Victoria as the oldest surviving motel in the state;
- The Oakleigh Motel is of outstanding historical and architectural significance to the State of Victoria as the only surviving example of a motel erected in the Melbourne metropolitan area in the late 1950s, and, moreover, one of a very small number of surviving examples from that period known to survive across the entire state;
- The Oakleigh Motel is of considerable aesthetic significance as a rare, early and substantially intact example of the American Google style of commercial architecture;

2.0 HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

2.1 The Emergence of Motels in Australia

The 1940s: Australia's First "Motels"

In Australia, the term "motel" was first applied to basic roadside accommodation in the tradition of early twentieth century American motor courts. The West End Motel at Ballina in New South Wales, which has been cited as the first local example to use the term, consisted of four self-contained units with cooking and bathing facilities, but without private toilets.¹ Somewhat more reliably documented is the Penzance Motel at Eaglehawk Neck in Tasmania, which is often described as the first in Australia. This was established in either 1939 or 1949 (sources differ) by Donald C Richardson, who had reportedly travelled to the USA and taken his inspiration from the original "motel" that opened in San Ospidado, California, in 1925.² The Penzance Motel, described as "an American type motel with scattered units in chalets", soon gained a reputation as a place of retreat, popular with authors, senior members of the judiciary (who would sequester themselves there to prepare their judgements), and business executives on leadership seminars.³

Another early local example was the Wilpena Pound Motel in South Australia, which was established by the State Government in 1945 and was again described in contemporary sources as chalet-style accommodation.⁴ However, there were virtually no comparable developments for another decade, with the exception of a few that appeared, predictably enough, in the burgeoning post-war tourist mecca of Queensland's Gold Coast. The first of these was the Tarzana Travelotel at Coolangatta (1949), followed by Bernie Elsey's Skyriders Motel at Main Beach (1952).⁵

It appears that there were no comparable developments in New South Wales and Victoria during this period, although there was certainly a burgeoning interest in the motel as a potential commercial venture. It is recorded, for example, that Melbourne architect Brian O'Connor began a special study of modern motel architecture as early as 1949.⁶ The following year, a group of Sydney businessmen announced the formation of a new company, Hi-Way Motel Limited, which proposed "to built motels on highways between capital cities, providing accommodation and garage service".⁷ In early 1954, the General Secretary of the Victorian Automotive Chamber of Commerce returned from a seven-month tour of the USA, full of enthusiasm for the modern motel. Campaigning for local adoption, he pointed out that

*Clearly, with its population fast approaching the 10,000,000 mark, and a certain amount of rapid growth by migration, Australia must sooner or later enter the motel business on a by no means meagre scale. No country is more suited to holidaying by motor car than in Australia, with its far flung distances, wide open spaces and tourist attractions of multitudinous variety*⁸

¹ J Davidson and P Spearrit, "Love 'em and leave 'em", *Weekend Australian*, 3-4 November 2001, p R22.

² V C Davis, 'Let's talk Motels', *Australian Motel Magazine*, Vol 2, No 1 (1959), pp 7-8. According to this account, the motel opened in 1939, while more recent secondary sources cite the year as 1949. The latter is evidently confirmed by electoral rolls, which record Donald Clarence Richardson, farmer, as a resident of Eaglehawk Neck from 1949.

³ V C Davis, 'Let's talk Motels', *Australian Motel Magazine*, Vol 2, No 1 (1959), pp 7-8

⁴ Susan Marsden et al, *Twentieth Century Heritage Survey - Stage 1: Post Second World War (1946-1959) Overview History*, p 36.

⁵ "Gold Coast History: 1941 to 1960", www.goldcoast.com.au/about-gold-coast/gold-coast-history-5.html, sighted 25 Feb 2009.

⁶ J M Freeland, *The Australian Pub*, p 187.

⁷ "Motel company formed", *Building & Construction*, 5 September 1950, p 33.

⁸ "Motel system for travellers by automobile", *Clay Products Journal of Australia*, February 1954, pp 23, 25.

The Mid 1950s: The First “Modern” Motels

However, it was another company, Cosy Cabins Ltd, that was responsible for Australia's first truly modern American-style motel, which opened at Bathurst in New South Wales in 1954.⁹ This was soon followed by the first example in Surfers Paradise, established by Greg Graham and Bill Reichelt in 1955 and known simply as the Surfers Paradise Motel.

In March 1955, the *Clay Products Journal of Australia* reported the formation of the country's first motel chain company, Accommodation Australia Ltd, noting that, “the belief, long fostered in the columns of [this journal], that Australia is a land suited to the introduction of the motel system on a substantial scale, has at last found practical expression”.¹⁰ By the end of that year, the company had acquired sites for motel development at Toowoomba, Glen Innes, Armidale, Grafton, Canberra, Yass, Gundagai, Albury, Dimboola, Melbourne and Mount Gambier.¹¹ As noted by architect and historian J M Freeland: “toying at first with the idea of employing an architect on salary, the company eventually engaged Melbourne architect Brian O'Connor in a normal capacity to design a motel that would compare with the best and latest in America”.¹² O'Connor, as mentioned previously, had begun to study modern motel architecture as early as 1949. The first AA Motel, located on Northbourne Avenue in Canberra, was of brick construction, with 46 guestrooms arranged in discrete blocks around a courtyard, with a central roadhouse and a car service station.¹³

When the new AA Motel at Canberra opened in May 1956, the property columnist for the *Herald* newspaper in Melbourne simply stated that “motels have hit New South Wales and will soon be expected in Victoria”.¹⁴ However, there had already been a number of vague murmurings by that time. As early as January 1955, it was reported that a motel was proposed to be erected in Victoria on the Mornington Peninsula. Details are sketchy, but this presumably referred to the Mount Martha Motel, which stood on the Esplanade opposite Birdrock Beach. This significantly early motel complex was certainly in operation by October 1959, although it has not yet been established if it was actually under construction as early as January 1955.

During 1955, the viability of motels in Melbourne was further mooted in the context of the accommodation crisis associated with the impending Olympic Games. In August of that year, a newly-formed motel company, South Pacific Motels, announced its intention to build no fewer than seven motels throughout the metropolitan area, all to be completed in time for the Olympic Games in November 1956.¹⁵ The first of these was to be erected in Canterbury Road, Ringwood, to a design prepared by architects Bernard Evans & Associates. However, the project did not proceed. Two months later, in October 1955, Accommodation Australia Ltd announced that they had acquired a site for a “motor hotel” on the corner of Queens Road and Arthur Street in South Melbourne.¹⁶ This building, “designed along American lines”, would provide 100 bedroom suites in a multi-storey tower. The firm's managing director, F M Felton, helpfully pointed out to the press that a motor hotel was a high-rise vertical building, while a “motel” was a low-rise horizontal development. Although it was stated that the building would be completed in time for the Olympic Games, it, too failed to materialise.¹⁷

⁹ V C Davis, 'Let's talk Motels', *Australian Motel Magazine*, Vol 2, No 1 (1959), p 7.

¹⁰ “Australia to have chain of modern motels”, *Clay Products Journal of Australia*, March 1955, p 5

¹¹ “Motor Hotels soon”, *Herald*, 1 December 1955, p 6.

¹² J M Freeland, *The Australian Pub*, p 187.

¹³ “New Motel at Canberra”, *Architecture & Arts*, March 1956, p 17.

¹⁴ “Here's the Motor Age Inn – the Motel”, *Herald*, 18 May 1956, p 18.

¹⁵ “Firm plans seven motels for Games guests”, *Herald*, 4 August 1955, p 5.

¹⁶ “City to get motor hotel”, *Herald*, 7 October 1955, p 1.

¹⁷ Although this project failed to materialise, Queens Road subsequently became a noted motel precinct in Melbourne in

Yet another local businessman who announced his intention to build a motel in time for the Olympic Games was former car salesman Cyril Lewis, who went on to establish the Oakleigh Motel on Dandenong Road. While he admittedly met with more success than the starry-eyed developers mentioned above, his project was nevertheless fraught with sufficient difficulties to delay the opening of the motel until after the games had finished in late 1956.

The Late 1950s: The Start of the Motel Boom

Australia's eastern states subsequently underwent a motel boom in the late 1950s. An article in the second issue of the *Australian Motel Magazine* noted that the number of high-quality motels in this country had increased from just one in 1954 (at Bathurst) to seven in 1955, thirteen in 1956, 26 in 1957, 45 in 1958, and 80 by the end of 1959.¹⁸ Many of these were independent developments, while others represented local franchises. American Motels, which had taken over the motel at Bathurst soon after it opened in 1954, went on to establish others at Dubbo, Tamworth and Wollongong. The Accommodation Australia (AA) franchise, which had been responsible for Canberra's first motel in 1956, followed suit with branches at Albury, Coffs Harbour, Glen Innes, Goulburn and Gundagai. Not surprisingly, however, it was the Gold Coast that became the country's epicentre for motel development in the late 1950s. Notable examples included the Hi-Ho Motel at Broadbeach (1958), the Jubilee Motel at Southport (1958), and, at Surfer's Paradise, the Californian, the South Pacific and the fabled El Dorado.

The first motel in regional Victoria, opened in early 1958, was the Mitchell Valley Motel in Bairnsdale.¹⁹ This was followed, in October of the same year, by the first example in inner suburban Melbourne: the Caravilla de Ville in Royal Parade, Parkville.²⁰ Both were architect designed: the former by the leading modernist firm of Mockridge, Stahle & Mitchell, and the latter by Peter Jorgenson, who went on to become a motel and hotel design specialist. The Mitchell Valley Motel was particularly noted for its simple modern design, distinguished from its counterparts by "its lack of ostentation and eye-catching frippery [*sic*] which seems to be the hallmark of commercial venture".²¹

The first RACV motel guide, which was issued in October 1959 as a simple mimeographed and stapled typescript, provides a useful overview of the extent of local motel development by that time. It listed five motels in the Melbourne metropolitan area, which were located at Braybrook, Craigieburn, Oakleigh, Parkville and St Kilda West. Of these, only two (at Oakleigh and Parkville) were designated as members of the Motel Federation of Australia (MFA). The directory also listed fourteen motels in regional Victoria, at Bairnsdale, Benalla, Hamilton, Jamieson, Lakes Entrance, Mildura, Mount Martha, Nhill, Nowa Nowa, Swan Hill, Warrnambool and Wodonga. Again, only a small proportion of these – three in total – were members of the MFA.

This RACV directory further reveals that Victoria lagged behind the other eastern states in terms of early motel development, particularly outside the capital cities. At that time, there were only three motels in central Brisbane, but no fewer than 37 in regional Queensland. Seven motels in the Sydney metropolitan area were supplemented by a staggering 72 others throughout regional New South Wales.

the early 1960s, with such examples as the Commodore Motel at No 4 (1960), the Palm Lake Motel at No 52 (1961), the President Motel at No 63 (1965) and the John Batman Motor Inn at No 69 (1962),

¹⁸ V C Davis, 'Let's talk motels', *Australian Motel Magazine*, Vol 2, No 1 (1959), p 7.

¹⁹ "Motels test architects", *Herald*, 20 December 1957, p 13.

²⁰ "First Motel in City", *Herald*, 24 October 1958, p 27

²¹ "Motel", *Architecture & Arts*, October 1959, p 63

The western states, however, lagged even further behind. Another early directory reveals that there were only three MFA-standard motels in all of South Australia (located at Seaton, Edwardstown and Mount Gambier), while the first in central Adelaide, the Travelodge Motel on South Terrace, did not open until early 1960. The first motel in Western Australia, the Narrows Motel in the Perth suburb of Como, opened around the same time.

The early 1960s saw even more intense expansion of motels throughout the entire country. Another motel guidebook, published in October 1963, listed no fewer than 22 motels in inner Melbourne, and well over one hundred in regional Victoria. The era of the modern motel in Australia had well and truly arrived.

2.2 Comparative Analysis: Early Surviving Motels in Victoria

As a surviving example of its type, the Oakleigh Motel must be seen in the context of other motels that were erected in Victoria during the initial motel boom of the later 1950s. As mentioned already, the first RACV motel guide, dated October 1959, listed only five examples operating in the Melbourne metropolitan area and another fourteen in various regional centres throughout Victoria.

Early Surviving Motels in the Melbourne Metropolitan Area

Aside from the Oakleigh Motel, the five examples in inner Melbourne included the Caravilla Motel de Ville at 461 Royal Parade, Parkville, and the Pan American Motel in Canterbury Road, St Kilda West. Both were of brick construction, expressed in a fairly conventional modernist idiom, with flat roofs and solid walls alternating with generous full-height windows. The former, designed by architect Peter Jorgenson, was a single-storeyed courtyard development. Originally erected with 26 units, it was expanded to the rear in 1959 to provide an additional 33 units, making it one of the largest motels in Australia at the time.²² The contemporaneous Pan American Motel in St Kilda, designed by Bernard Evans & Associates, provided twenty sound-proofed suites spread over two storeys.²³ Unfortunately, neither the Caravilla Motel de Ville in Parkville or the Pan American Motel in St Kilda still exist, as both were razed in relatively recent times for new medium-density housing developments.

The two other early Melbourne motels cited in the 1959 directory, located at Braybrook and Craigieburn, are rather less well-documented. The Braybrook Motel (as it was known) was described as being located in Ballarat Road, although contemporary post office and street directories have failed to confirm this. The Braybrook Motel, which was also not a member of the MFA, is also conspicuously absent from other early motel directories of the late 1950s and early 1960s. The Motel Melbourne was located on the Hume Highway, north of Patullos Road, at Craigieburn (sometimes listed as Somerton). The complex has also since been demolished, and its site is now occupied by various industrial buildings.

With the confirmed demolition of the four early motels at St Kilda, Parkville, Craigieburn and Mount Martha, and the suspected demolition of the one at Braybrook, the Oakleigh Motel not only stands out as the oldest remaining motel in Victoria, but also an exceptionally rare (and perhaps even unique) survivor of the initial boom of motel development in the Melbourne metropolitan area between 1955 and 1959. Although there are certainly some notable survivors from the early 1960s, such as Parkville Travelodge (now Ramada Inn) at 539 Royal Parade (Peter Jorgenson, 1960) and the California Motel in Barkers Road, Kew (Bernard Evans & Associates, 1960), it can nevertheless be concluded that the Oakleigh Motel remains as the only surviving 1950s motel in the Melbourne metropolitan area.

²² "Biggest motel here soon", *Herald*, 29 July 1959, p 17.

²³ *Cross Section*, No 78 (1 April 1959) p 2.

Early Surviving Motels in Regional Victoria

Comparisons, however, should also be drawn with pre-1960 motels in regional Victoria. As mentioned, the 1959 RACV directory identified no fewer than fourteen examples. Only three of these, however, were of sufficiently high standard to permit membership of the MFA. These three motels were the Mitchell Valley Motel at Bairnsdale, the Sunkist Motel at Mildura and the Club Motel at Wodonga. All three are confirmed as demolished.

The Mount Martha Motel, which might have been built as early as 1955 and may therefore even pre-date the Oakleigh Motel, is also known to have been demolished for a new housing development.

Other early motels in regional Victoria evidently remain in operation, although their original 1950s buildings (often of timber construction) have clearly been replaced by more robust brick buildings in the 1960s and 70s. This is certainly the case with the former Benalla Motel (now Top of the Town) in Bridge Street, Benalla, the Motel Wimmera in Victoria Street, Nhill, and the Arch Motel in Sturt Street, Alfredton (Ballarat). Amongst those regional motels that are known to retain at least some of their original 1950s built fabric are:

- Mildura Park Motel (formerly Motel Mildura), 250 Eighth Street, Mildura
- Koala Motel, Princes Highway, Pirron Yallock (near Colac)
- Paddle Steamer Motel (formerly Planet Motel), Murray Valley Highway, Swan Hill
- Gardenview Lodge Motel (formerly Motel Wangaratta), Wangaratta
- Meeniyan Motel (formerly Meeniyan Motor Hotel), Meeniyan.

On this basis, it can be concluded that the Oakleigh Motel is significant as one of a relatively small number of early (pre-1960) motels that survive, in various states of intactness, across the whole of Victoria.

Although the Oakleigh Motel is indisputably the earliest motel built in the Melbourne metropolitan area, there is some evidence to suggest that it was not actually the first in Victoria, as it may have been predated by an earlier example at Mount Martha. The latter motel, however, has since been demolished, so it remains that the Oakleigh Motel is significant as the earliest *surviving* motel in Victoria.



Figure 1: The Penzance Motel at Eagleshawk Neck, Tasmania (1949?)
(source: Motel Directory for Australia)



Figure 2: The Wilpena Pund Motel in South Australia (1945)
(source: S Marsden, 20th Century Heritage)

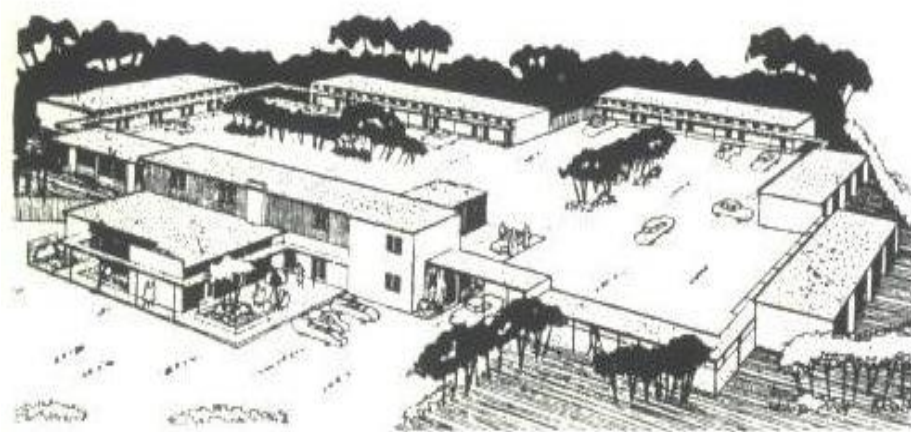


Figure 3: The AA Motel (later Rex-Astor Motel) in Northbourne Avenue, Canberra (1956)
(source: Architecture & Arts, March 1956, p 17)



Figure 4: : The Mount Martha Motel, The Esplanade, Mount Martha (c.1956?)
(source: Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria)



Figure 5: The Caravilla Motel de Ville in Royal Parade, Parkville (P E Jorgenson, 1958)
(source: Simon Reeves Collection)



Figure 6: The Pan-American Motel in Canterbury Road, St Kilda (Bernard Evans, 1959)
(source: Motel Guide for Australia)



Figure 7: Hi-Ho Motel, Broadbeach (1958)
(source: Simon Reeves Collection)



Figure 8: El Dorado Motel, Surfers Paradise
(source: The Herald Motel Guide: 1967)

3.0 AESTHETIC SIGNIFICANCE

3.1 The Googie Style

American Antecedents

In the existing Statement of Significance, the Oakleigh Motel has been described as “possibly the best example in Victoria of the colourful, eye-catching roadside architecture seen as typical of the 1950s”. Its debt to American antecedents, and specifically the lively West Coast commercial architecture of the period, is clearly acknowledged.

In his seminal book *The Australian Ugliness* (1957), Robin Boyd coined the term “Featurism” to describe this particular style, characterised by what he perceived as the dishonest use of applied ornament and expression of non-structural elements. It has been perceptively noted that a sketch of a hypothetical Featurist motel in Boyd's book bears a striking resemblance to the example at Oakleigh, with its inward sloping walls and garish neon sign with illuminated arrow.

The deliberately eye-catching style that Boyd described as “Featurism” is generally referred to by other names in the United States, most notably “Googie”. Although Boyd never actually used that specific label in *The Australian Ugliness*, he certainly did so in one of his later books, *The Puzzle of Architecture*. Writing in 1965 on the development of modern architecture in the twentieth century, Boyd paused to reflect on the current fashion for “unfamiliar curvings and twistings”. He referred to a style whereby architects

...all used a sort of mad professor's geometry to catch the passing eye. In Britain, designers called this disreputable style 'Borax'. In America, it was sometimes called 'Googie' after a remarkable Californian chain of restaurants that liked to look as if they had been going through an earthquake. The Googie stylists made shapes for the sake of shocking²⁴

Boyd's tirade was once again accompanied by a small sketch, showing “the Googie shapes of the '40s”. His quintessential Googie building had sloping external walls with a chequerboard pattern, a canopy of sinuous wave-like form, fin-like supports penetrated by circular holes, and a jagged triangular element projecting up through the roof.

The eponymous Googie coffee shop in Los Angeles, designed by local architect John Lautner in 1949, incorporated sloping glass windows, jagged planes projecting up through the roof, and bold feature walls of rough stonework. Three years later, some of Lautner's work was published in *House & Home* magazine under the title “This is Googie Architecture”, and the use of the term as an stylistic label soon became widespread in the United States.²⁵

During the 1950s, the American Googie style became most strongly associated with certain roadside building types – namely, those commercial establishments where an eye-catching design might attract sufficient attention to lure the passerby (or more specifically, the passing motorist) away from any competitors. The style, therefore, was considered most suitable not only for coffee shops and fast-food restaurants, but also motels, shops, car showrooms and tenpin bowling alleys. Recurring motifs in the American Googie, as defined by Alan Hess in his groundbreaking study of the style, include the use of the boomerang form, the concrete shell vault (often in an undulating form), diagonal struts, the dinbat (an asterisk-like ornament), the folded eave, the folded plate roof (invariably in a zigzagging form), the hyperbolic paraboloid roof, the tapering pylon and the use of ‘cheese holes’ in steel beams.

²⁴ Robin Boyd, *The Puzzle of Architecture*, p 98.

²⁵ Alan Hess, *Googie Redux: Ultramodern Roadside Architecture*, p 68.

Australian Manifestations

The definitive study of Googie architecture in Australia has yet to be undertaken. Over the past few years, however, the present consultant has documented and photographed enough examples in this country to provide a basic context for the Oakleigh Motel. This research and fieldwork suggests that the Googie style was adopted locally in the same types of roadside commercial buildings seen in the United States, and most notably in the form of motels, car showrooms, shops and bowling alleys. However, it would appear that the style never became as widespread in this country, probably simply because certain building types that lent themselves to Googie expression, such as roadside coffee shops and fast-foot restaurants, never became as popular here (at least in the 1950s) as they did over there. Perhaps not surprisingly, local versions of the Googie style also tended to be somewhat tamer than their often eye-popping American counterparts.

The earliest local manifestations of the Googie style seem to date from the mid-1950s. One celebrated example, which was even published in architectural journals, was an automotive showroom for Arrow Motors at Double Bay in Sydney, designed by architects Baldwinson & Booth in 1954. A striking glass-walled building on a T-shaped plan, this had curving bay at one end, a bold raking roof with circular skylight and a mezzanine level with louvred screen. There was a roof-mounted skysign stating *ARROW MOTORS* and, the most explicitly Googie motif of all, a tall cigar-shaped spire (not unlike the Skylon at the then-recent Festival of Britain) which incorporated the word *HOLDEN* in vertical letters. Unfortunately, this fine local example of the Googie idiom, located at 361-361 New South Head Road, has since been demolished.

A number of Googie-style motor car showrooms are also known to have been built in Victoria. An early and particularly notable example was erected in Brooklyn in 1957 to the design of architect Robert Rosh. An inward sloping glass wall extended across its entire street facade, with a series of webbed struts that sloped outward to support the broad eaves of a steeply raked skillion roof. Although this building has been demolished, a somewhat similar (if somewhat later and simpler) example is known to survive in Warrnambool. Designed by noted local modernist Bruce Auty in 1964, the former Warrnambool Motors showroom at 756-767 Raglan Parade has a fully-glazed front wall, with a series of angled struts that support the eaves of a steep skillion roof.²⁶ A comparable building, albeit erected as a carpet showroom rather than a car showroom, also survives at 1360 Toorak Road, Burwood. Designed by architect John Ahern in 1960, this also has an inward sloping glass facade with outward sloping angled struts supporting wide eaves of a skillion roof.

Other local car showrooms in the Googie tradition include one at 426 Warrigal Road, Ashburton and another (the former Morris Auston Centre, dating from 1963) at 771 Nepean Highway Brighton, East. The former, which has been regrettably demolished in very recent years, was a two storeyed-building on a butterfly plan, with a notable zigzagging folded plate roof. The other example, which remains in a somewhat altered condition, comprises a single-storey flat-roofed building with an eye-catching double-storey glass-walled wing, on a polygonal plan, at the corner. Another surviving example is the former Lawford's Furniture Showroom at 690 Mount Alexander Road, Essendon (c.1955). This is another glass-walled flat-roofed building, with a bold projecting canopy that is penetrated by a fin-like frame, with angled sides and a row of vertical metal rods, which supports an elongated illuminated sign.

A notable local manifestation of the Googie style was the decorations that were installed in central Melbourne in 1956 for the Olympic Games.²⁷ Designed by a number of prominent young architects and designers of the day, these temporary structures were erected at various prominent locations around the city, and included the following:

²⁶ The author is indebted to Timothy Hubbard, of Heritage Matters Pty Ltd, for bringing this building to his attention.

²⁷ David Islip, "1956 Olympic Decorations: The Final Fling", *Fabrications*, Vol 11, No 1 (July 2000), pp 26-43.

- *Olympic Torch* (Peter & Dionne McIntyre), a massive illuminated steel-framed cone suspended by cables above the intersection of Swanston and Flinders Street;
- *Olympic Gateway* (Don Hendry Fulton), which comprised a row of cigar-shaped spires (again, strongly recalling the Skylon at the Festival of Britain);
- *Haymarket Tower* (Alan Nance), 150-foot high metal pole with strings of coloured spheres suspended from radiating arms;
- *Spinmobiles* (Richard Beck), which comprised a series of tubular steel columns upon which were impaled a series of rotating metal boxes painted in bright colours;
- *Four Wheels* (John Murphy and John Mockridge), an umbrella-like structure with a series of radiating triangular panels penetrated by circular openings;

Motels in the mature Googie idiom are somewhat unusual in Australia, as most local architects tended to adopt a more conventional International Modernist style in their motel designs, with flat roofs, face brickwork or blockwork and glazed front walls. Often, the Googie influence was restricted to a feature wall, or to garish illuminated signage mounted on the roof or walls, or expressed as a freestanding element on the street. The Club Motel at Wodonga, for example, was a fairly conventional gable-roofed building, with a front wall that was enlivened by a chequerboard pattern in a direct (if somewhat tokenistic) nod toward the American Googie tradition.

Some of the explicitly Googie-style motels in Victoria include the former Motel Wangaratta (now Gardenview Lodge), the former Motel Warnambool (now Southern Right Motel), and the former Motel Colac (later the Commodore). Significantly, all three were erected by the same developer, who freely admits taking his inspiration from American motels published in contemporary monographs. The examples at Wangaratta and Warnambool are of almost identical design. Each has a freestanding dining room at the front, with a distinctive cross-gabled A-frame roof – a motif blatantly derived from the Howard Johnson chain of motels in the United States. The Colac Motel, overlooking the lake, was a two-storey building with a folded plate roof of bold zigzagging form, and the word “motel” across the side walls in Googie-style cursive lettering. This striking building, located on the Princes Highway on the eastern outskirts of the town, has been demolished. The two examples at Warnambool and Wangaratta still stand, although both have been somewhat altered (the latter, for instance, by the infilling of the original glazed dining room walls with solid brickwork).

Although uncommon in Victoria, Googie-style motels otherwise proliferated in the more tourist-oriented parts of the country, notably the Gold Coast in Queensland. Some motels, such as the Seabreeze Motel at Surfers Paradise and the Kirriwina Motel at Noosaville, had brightly-coloured spur walls penetrated by circular openings of various sizes, which are known in Googie parlance as 'cheeseholes'. The Golden Sun Motel, also at Surfers Paradise, had a front wall with sloping sides and a striking cliff-like feature of rough stone cladding, along with a curving open staircase to the upper level, and a front swimming pool of irregular form, edged with variegated concrete blocks and river stones set in concrete. The New Orleans Motel at Surfers Paradise and the Reef Motel at North Rockhampton both had butterfly roofs. The former example was further enlivened by a louvred screen of angled fins and a spur wall with a chequerboard pattern.

The famous El Dorado Motel in Surfers Paradise (1958) was one of the most explicitly American-style motels ever erected in Australia. The building included an elevated block with a red-and-yellow chequerboard facade opening onto a sundeck with a red-painted metal railing. A *porte-cochere* alongside the office was made up of angled struts, in what would be described in Googie parlance as the 'structural bent'. A roof-mounted neon skysign incorporated the word 'motel' in yellow cursive lettering, with a giant arrow pointing downwards.

Unfortunately, most of these iconic 1950s Googie motels along the Gold Coast have since been demolished. Some rare survivors elsewhere in Australia, which still remain in operation as motels, include several in a row in Coffs Harbour and two particularly fine ones in Adelaide. The Regal Park Motor Inn, in North Adelaide, is a modest but notably intact example of the Googie tradition, with its undulating roof form, pebbled spandrel panels and roof-mounted neon skysign. Even more striking is the Sands Motel, on the south-eastern edge of the city, which has a canopy made up of a row of concrete shell arches, a billboard-like front wall bearing the motel's name in distinctive Las Vegas-style lettering, and a rare intact surviving illuminated signpost on the street, with angled posts and geometric shapes.

It can be concluded that the Oakleigh Motel is of considerable aesthetic significance to the State of Victoria as a rare intact surviving example of the American Googie style. Research to date suggests that the style was never widespread in Victoria as it was elsewhere in this country (eg on the Gold Coast), and certainly much less so than it was in the United States. Although a number of examples have been identified, many have been demolished. By its very nature, the 1950s Googie style soon became very dated, and intact surviving examples are now extremely rare.



*Figure 9: Arrow Motors Car showroom in Double Bay, designed by Baldwinson & Booth in 1954
(source: Architecture Australia, January 1957)*



Figure 10: Car showroom in Brooklyn, designed by Robert Rosh in 1957
(Source: Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria)



Figure 11: Former Anderson's Carpet Showroom in Burwood, designed by John Ahern in 1960
(Source: photograph by Simon Reeves)



*Figure 12: former Motel Wangaratta, 1959
(source: Simon Reeves Collection)*



*Figure 13: Motel Colac, c.1960
(Source: Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria)*



*Figure 14: Sands Motel, Adelaide, South Australia
(Source: Photograph by Simon Reeves)*