Above:
Frederick Romberg
Romberg House
Heidelberg, 1941
In 1941 Romberg purchased a section of land in Heidelberg, previously part of the Harlands Estate which had been subdivided by the architect Walter Burley Griffin. It was still just a pastiche dotted with red gums and a few sparse houses scattered around it, but with views over the Yarra valley. Romberg designed and built two houses on the corner of his family and the other for sale. At this time, it was nearly impossible to obtain tenders for private builds, so he also took on the role of builder, and hired private labour. The family moved in on completion in 1942, and lived there for fifteen years until Verena and Frederick returned in the 1950s.

The Romberg House strongly reflects his early architectural training and interest in vernacular German and Swiss rural buildings. The house negotiates the slope of the site by providing an intermediary entrance identified by a wall of meshed glass panels. The upper floor contains bedrooms and a family bathroom, reached by a narrow, short flight of stairs from the entry foyer. A second, generous flight of stairs directs, the visitor down to the lower level that contains the family living and kitchen area. The stairs is notable for its balustrade and reveals, detailing, clearly reflecting a design in metal, but probably from cost or material scarcity it was smartly made from timber. Timber-flooring, fitted wall intersections and door jambs along with more than ample natural light describe the interior volumes of the house.

From the living area opens a series of narrow French doors onto a patio partially covered by an exaggerated curved downpipes, and a roughly finished roof. French doors onto a patio partially covered by a white painted brick, detailed exposed eaves, and includes the original timber garden shed that was never sold during Romberg’s lifetime and onwards. This building is beautifully designed. It is a simple form, with a pitched roof and a gable end.

To the west, Romberg headed to Europe in May 1946 with the intention of visiting his parents, and to call upon his father-in-law Dr Sulzer, in the hope of convincing him to provide the financial support for the construction of one hundred residential units at the corner of Spring Street and La Trobe Street in central Melbourne. The site had been bought in 1941 with the backing of Nuvam Pty Ltd, the company Romberg had set up during the development of Nuvam Flats, with the intention of growing his property development portfolio.

On board the ship to Europe, Romberg’s travel companions included a former Governor of New Zealand attended by aides of high military and naval rank, a former German princess keen to reclaim her title, and war correspondent Alan Sulzer, in the hope of convincing him to provide the financial support for the construction of one hundred residential units at the corner of Spring Street and La Trobe Street in central Melbourne. The site had been bought in 1941 with the backing of Nuvam Pty Ltd, the company Romberg had set up during the development of Nuvam Flats, with the intention of growing his property development portfolio.

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Romberg's development was not an unfulfilled success. Access to the adjacent properties was difficult, as the houses were completed well in advance of dual road access. Thus, Romberg’s house shared with the adjoining property a narrow driveway, until such time as the future road was implemented by the council. Relations were strained due to the noise of the children of the family next door playing in the driveway and the arrivals and departures of numerous partygoers. The noise and smell of the brewery unnerved however the neighbors persisted in using it. Animosities thus simmered until Verena turned a hose on the neighbors wife, thereafter the driveway remained firmly in the Romberg’s side control.

With the end of the war, Romberg headed to Europe in May 1946 with the intention of visiting his parents, and to call upon his father-in-law Dr Sulzer, in the hope of convincing him to provide the financial support for the construction of one hundred residential units at the corner of Spring Street and La Trobe Street in central Melbourne. The site had been bought in 1941 with the backing of Nuvam Pty Ltd, the company Romberg had set up during the development of Nuvam Flats, with the intention of growing his property development portfolio.

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