Field Report

Is the Migrant House in Australia an Australian Vernacular Architecture?

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This report seeks to understand the meaning of the migrant house in Melbourne, Australia. Following a discussion of the Australian vernacular house, it asks what it is that makes the migrant house a unique category, different from other, nonmigrant houses in Australia. Reporting on research on seventeen migrant houses in the suburbs of Melbourne, it then shows how three architectural elements — the facade, the terrace, and the back yard — differentiate these houses from other examples of the Australian vernacular. Finally, it argues that, through their different "migrant aesthetics," the three architectural elements illustrate how socio-spatial features have facilitated and eased the adaptation of migrants to life in Australia.

Much has been written in the past two decades on the concept of the migrant home. The subject has been discussed extensively in disciplines ranging from sociology and anthropology to geography and urban studies. For example, notions of the fixed nature of home have been contested to propose that the home is dynamic and mobile;[1] the migrant home has been linked to ideas of transnationalism and belonging;[2] and it has been interpreted through the lens of materiality.[3] However, the migrant house as an architectural typology remains a vague concept that has mostly been discussed anecdotally. Exceptions may be found in the work of Mirjana Lozanovska and others.[4] But writing on the migrant house has tended to define it by highlighting ethnic "markers" or "identifiers" which generalize and reduce its meaning to its most apparent visual features.

In Australia, despite a long history of migrant settlement, the migrant house has been almost completely excluded from architectural discourse, including the extensive literature on the Australian house as a form of vernacular architecture. Our research attempts to open up categories of vernacular architecture to incorporate the migrant house into this discourse. Through a careful study of seventeen migrant houses in Melbourne,

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we tried to understand what it is that makes the migrant house (and not the home) a unique category, different from other, nonmigrant houses. Specifically, using methods of socio-spatial analysis, we examined three architectural elements frequently cited in scholarly literature and public discourse as indicative of the migrant house in Australia: the facade, the terrace, and the back yard.

Each of these architectural elements represents a long-established stereotype in the popular imagination in Australia. However, we carefully investigated the factual basis for these impressions and considered the social significance and meaning of each element in migrant lives. Our research revealed that these architectural elements, while appearing in some migrant houses, are not always present. Nevertheless, each plays a special role in migrant life and its spatial character carries meanings that have facilitated the adjustment of migrants to life in a new country. Together (in their various manifestations), they construct the migrant house as an Australian vernacular — not because of their architectural qualities or their materials, but because of the significance they hold for the migrants.

THE AUSTRALIAN VERNACULAR HOUSE

In his introduction to *The Encyclopedia of Vernacular Architecture of the World*, Paul Oliver explained that a number of attempts have been made to define vernacular architecture, but that all of them have been unsuccessful because the term encompasses an immense range of building types, forms, traditions, uses and contexts.[5] In another context, however, Oliver observed that a distinction can be made between formal, architect-designed dwellings, and informal, nonarchitect-designed ones.[6] In a similar vein, Amos Rapoport has referred to vernacular buildings as a "folk tradition," which is "the direct and unselfconscious translation into physical form of a culture, its needs and values — as well as the desires, dreams, and passions of people."[7] Rapoport then listed a number of characteristics of vernacular building: lack of theoretical or aesthetic pretensions; working with the site and microclimate; respect for other people and their houses, and hence for the total environment; and working within an idiom with variations within a given order.[8] Most commonly, however, vernacular architecture simply means dwellings (as the majority of buildings in the world are dwellings). And in most of the world, dwellings are still built by their owners, by communities that pool resources, or by local specialized builders and craftsmen.[9]

According to the philosopher Ivan Illich, the vernacular "is homemade, homespun, homegrown, not destined for the market-place."[10] One becomes a vernacular builder the same way one becomes a vernacular speaker — by growing up, living, and dwelling in a particular place at a particular time. As so defined, however, Carl Mitcham has contended that the vernacular house is vanishing as a result of changes

in science and technology and their relationship to housing production. It has likewise often been assumed that the vernacular must be native or unique to a specific place, produced without the need for imported components and processes, and possibly built by the individuals who occupy it.[11] But as culture and tradition become less place-rooted and more information-based, these particular attributes, too, need to be reassessed. All things considered, the vernacular should today be understood with a focus on its dynamic nature, as change is inherent to vernacular traditions.[12] And when examining the vernacular, it is important to show and understand how traditions change and adapt to cultural and environmental challenges.

An extensive body of literature exists on the Australian house, including a significant amount on nonarchitect-designed dwellings.[13] In general, the term "Australian house" refers to a kind of house built since the first British settlement, in 1788.[14] The first British house in Australia was actually imported from London by Arthur Phillip, the commander of the First Fleet and the first governor of the new settlement. It was erected on the eastern side of Sydney Cove on January 29, 1788.[15] Ever since, many authors have tried to enumerate the historical styles of Australian domestic architecture. These lists have tried to specify the formal styles that have influenced the work of established architects (though different authors have sometimes named the styles differently).[16] Some literature has further discussed aspects of building methods, the arrangement of rooms, decor and furnishing, exteriors and gardens, and specific architectural elements such as terraces, fencing, or cast-iron railings.[17]

Within this body of literature, the nonarchitect-designed Australian house has generally been considered a form of vernacular architecture.[18] According to Ian Evans, "[in Australia] vernacular housing, the architecture of necessity, coexisted with the formality of the Georgian and Regency styles, and with the variety of styles that appeared during Victoria's lengthy reign; Italianate, Gothic, High Victorian and Federation."[19] Concurring, Robert Irving has asserted, "[e]ven the most unstylish vernacular eighteenth-century houses gained from the reservoir of Georgian style."[20] Comments such as these indicate some of the contradictions inherent in any definition of vernacular architecture. Yet, in contrast to Oliver, who excluded from the definition what has often been termed twentieth-century vernacular (that is, suburban development — and in particular, suburban houses built in the towns and cities of the developed world since the Second World War), we argue that the suburban house is a distinct vernacular form in Australia. It is also a well-defined and well-known form, since the majority of housing in Australian cities is suburban.[21]

In Australia, the aspiration to live in a detached house in the suburbs is referred to as the Great Australian Dream. It has been discussed extensively since the Second World War; but it was also discussed before that time.[22] Thus, Robin Boyd, in his historical account of Australian domestic archi-

tecture, explained how British settlers brought with them an English taste for privacy, a taste which influenced subsequent generations of homebuilding. But, in contrast to English towns and cities, land seemed to be limitless in Australia, and so "[t]he nation was built on the principle that for every family there should be a separate house and for every person there should be a separate room."[23] It seems that from its inception, Australian culture has always been obsessed with its houses and their identity.[24]

Driven by growing population and prosperity during the first decades after the Second World War, suburban living became a common way of life for Australians. Magazines such as *Home Beautiful* flourished to promote this idea, while government policies favored homebuyers.[25] Yet, because of housing scarcity, many young couples pursuing this dream had no choice but to build their own homes. Perhaps a quarter of all houses constructed in the decade after the Second World War were owner built. Indeed, since the 1950s, about one-third of all housing in Australia has been self-built (the peak coming in 1954 when it represented more than 40 percent of the country's total).[26] At this time, building one's home became part of the life-cycle of many young Australians — as it did for many of the immigrants flooding into the country.[27] The cream-brick-veneer house, in particular, came to be identified as that era's archetypal form.[28]

During the postwar suburban boom of the 1950s and 1960s Melbourne provided a classic case of the trend among Australian cities to expand outward and not upward. Unlike cities in other nations (Britain, for example), more and more suburbs were built on Melbourne's periphery, facilitated by a surge in automobile ownership.[29] In addition to self-developed housing, some of this construction was the work of developers — thus some of it may not meet the academic definition of the vernacular. Nevertheless, most of it was not designed by architects, and so it conforms to the distinction between architect-designed and nonarchitect-designed dwellings. As we have argued elsewhere, the Australian suburban house, whatever its origins, represents a vernacular tradition.[30]

What seems to have been ignored by mainstream discussion of this vast expansion of Australian vernacular housing is the special status of the migrant house. Many authors have acknowledged that the roots of most formal architectural styles in Australia originated in England (although some came from other British colonies, other European countries such as Italy, or North America). But they have failed to mention how immigrants, who mostly arrived from such countries as Italy, Greece and Yugoslavia after the Second World War, brought previous knowledge of building methods and materials, their own decorative styles and aesthetics, and divergent everyday life practices. Thus, the impact of migration, the ways of life of the new migrants, and their tastes and traditions derived from cultures other than those of the British Isles are barely noted in most discussions of the Australian vernacular house.[31]

There are a few exceptions. One is the study guide *Housing in Australia* from the 1980s. But its social perspective exemplifies values associated with the height of Australia's multicultural policies.[32] *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1788*, by Richard Apperly, Robert Irving, and Peter Reynolds, is another volume that provides some recognition. Specifically, it contains a two-page spread describing a style called "Late Twentieth-Century Immigrants' Nostalgic."[33] However, this animated description of the migrant house, with its balustrades and arches, is directly preceded by two pages on another style, "Late Twentieth-Century Australian Nostalgic," which refers to a resurgence of "colonial" styles associated with earlier homestead architecture. By making this distinction between "Australian" and "Immigrant" architecture, the authors unwittingly reveal the unspoken foundation of an Australian aesthetic constituted prior to and against a so-called immigrant aesthetic.[34] As generated by the heritage movement in Australia in its classification of buildings of the first half of the twentieth-century, this involves the association of "good taste" with an aesthetic heritage that originated primarily in England, and secondarily with house styles imported in the 1920s from America.

A critical issue here is the idea of "migrant aesthetics." This came to public attention most notably through the case of Earlwood, an inner-west suburb of Sydney, where postwar migration led to the transformation of older houses. This social trend caused a number of hybrid styles to appear — in particular, one described as "Mediterraneanization."[35] Older residents of the area, however, objected to these transformations as "inappropriate" and "unsympathetic," and they formed a historical society to maintain the "heritage," cultural uniqueness, and authenticity of their neighborhood.

The case of Earlwood shows how fear and resentment could cause the migrant house to be perceived as unattractive and undesirable. In reality, many houses in which migrants lived could barely be differentiated from the typology of other houses built in Australia. Nevertheless, in Australian culture they came to be perceived as very different from the norm. For the migrants, the house was an important mode of assimilation. It represented a new way of life, as evoked in Robin Boyd's "pioneering cult" and as intrinsically determined by the suburban paradigm.[36] Yet writings on immigration and housing at the time routinely expressed fear that immigrants would compete for housing and drive up prices.[37] Fear may also have developed concerning the emergence of a different Australia, one produced through a proliferation of diverse aesthetic values and ways of life. All of this made the notion of the Australian house contested terrain in relation to immigration.[38]

Outside Australia, literature on the impact of migration on vernacular housing has taken a number of forms. James Michael Buckley and William Littmann, exploring migrant housing in the small Latino town of Parlier in California's Central Valley, contended that investigating migrant ver-

nacular architecture is challenging because it often involves circumstances that are changing and subjects who fear researchers and officials visiting their homes and asking questions.[39] Yet, in another context, Lynne Dearborn discussed how Hmong immigrants in Milwaukee have transformed old dwellings to support their cultural needs. She argued that Milwaukee's decayed urban fabric provided an example of how landscapes support various modes of inhabitation by different cultural groups.[40]

Another important study is that by Sarah Lynn Lopez of remittance houses in villages in northern Mexico.[41] Built with money sent by migrants to the U.S., these houses have challenged traditional methods of building. In the past, housing in these village was constructed by nonprofessionals, and the whole community participated in the process. But contemporary remittance houses require professional knowledge, materials, and methods imported from the U.S. Their aesthetic, strongly influenced by American suburban houses, also contrasts profoundly with an otherwise dense, one-story continuous vernacular built fabric. Moreover, the houses embody an inherent contradiction in the migrants' bifurcated lives. While they are able to build extravagant houses in Mexico, they cannot afford to live in them, because, if they were to leave the U.S., they would no longer be able to pay for and maintain them.

Another relevant study is that by Christien Klaufus of new houses in the canton of Cuenca, Ecuador, also built by transnational migrants with remittance money from the U.S.[42] She observed how these opulent structures, which involve architects as well as other professionals in their design and construction, created tension with the local community, which perceived them to be in "bad taste" — especially in relation to the local vernacular, which is perceived to be more suitable and appropriate to the place. Nevertheless, Klaufus considered these migrant houses to be part of the local popular architecture. And she argued that the distinction made by Oliver — that only architecture without architects can be considered vernacular — should be abandoned.[43] Sometimes architects are involved in house-design processes in otherwise unplanned environments, and it is difficult to draw a clear line between two kinds of architecture, Klaufus observed. Strictly speaking, these remittance houses were not vernacular; yet she called for a more flexible view of popular architecture, one that might include professional involvement, to advance discussion on the merits and drawbacks of new popular styles.[44]

MELBOURNE AS A RESEARCH SITE

From the time white settlement began, Australia has been an immigrant society and a product of conscious social engineering.[45] Since the first settlers and convicts arrived at the end of the eighteenth century, most immigrants to Australia have come from the British Isles. During the 1880s, fear that a flood of immigrants would lower working conditions and wages combined with attitudes of racism and xenophobia to produce a system of immigration controls. It also brought a policy known as White Australia, which prohibited immigration from non-British countries.

The Second World War provoked a reversal of these policies as postwar leaders realized that without a larger population, the country would appear underdeveloped and vulnerable.[46] The postwar government thus began a drive to expand the population through propaganda, policies of assisted passage, and other incentives.[47] Initially, many of the new migrants were displaced persons from European refugee camps. But the effort was later expanded to reach out to the populations of southern Europe. Initially, the Australian government insisted that the new migrants assimilate to Australian culture. But by the late 1960s this policy became increasingly untenable, as many non-British migrants refused to give up their culture and language.[48] Finally, in 1972 a new policy of multiculturalism was declared, and support was given to efforts by ethnic minorities to preserve their cultural identities.

Recently, the 2006 Census revealed that those born overseas form around 29 percent of the total Australian population.[49] Government statistics further reveal that Melbourne and its surroundings have provided a major gateway for immigrants, with 35 percent of its residents in 2006 born overseas.[50] During the postwar decades, the major source of migrants to Melbourne was southern Europe, with Italy, Greece and Malta, and later Yugoslavia, supplying the largest numbers.[51] As already mentioned, there was a severe housing shortage after the war. Thus, like native Australians, many of the new migrants assumed the task of building their own homes.[52] As a result, southern European migrants had a prominent impact on the new suburban landscapes of Melbourne.

This report draws on two different research projects in the Melbourne area. The first explored houses of migrants who had emigrated to the city from Italy during the 1950s and 1960s.[53] Conducted at the beginning of 2008, it examined ten houses mostly spread around the eastern and northern middle suburbs of the city. The second project explored a migrant enclave in one of Melbourne's northern inner suburbs. Conducted in 2009, it examined seven houses of migrants from southern Europe who arrived in Australia during the 1950s and 1960s.[54] Similar methods were used in the two research projects. These included in-depth interviews with the residents of the houses, tours of the houses and their yards, and photographic and architectural documentation.

Findings from both projects raise questions about the migrant house in relation to present uses of the term in Australia. In the following sections we will discuss several supposed characteristics of the migrant house and consider their validity as "markers" or "signifiers." We will also show how these elements preserve special meanings for migrants,

as they intertwine with stories of migration, belonging, and memories to facilitate everyday life and mediate between homeland and host land.

We should note that our use of the term "migrant house" includes only housing commissioned, owned or built during the 1950s and 1960s by migrants from non-British countries. Our choice limits investigation to migration after Australia had already established itself as a British nation.[55] It also reflects the reality that housing built before that era mainly conformed to the mainstream of British-influenced architecture.

STORIES OF MIGRATION FOLDED IN PHYSICAL FORMS

Stereotypically, suburban Australian houses usually considered to be nonmigrant are modest in form, of only one story, and faced with cream brick. They do not have front verandas, and many feature floor plans composed of two identical blocks, one protruding more than the other, as in the accompanying image (FIG. 1). These cream-brick-veneer structures were commonly built by Australia-born suburbanites pursuing their Great Australian Dream during the 1950s and the 1960s.[56]

After leaving their initial inner-city dwellings, many migrants soon conformed to this practice of building their own suburban dream homes.[57] But writing about the migrant house has typically focused on differentiating it from its nonmigrant counterpart. Thus Apperly, Irving and Reynolds explained that when southern European immigrants were in a position to build houses for themselves, they wanted them to express two things: "the fact that they had 'made' it in a new country and a recollection of the culture from which they had come." Part of this strategy involved making loose references to the architecture of southern Europe:

The typical house was two-storied and symmetrical, with a central external stair and veranda edged with bulbous Baroque balusters of precast concrete. The front elevation featured walls of buff or brown face brickwork pierced by large arched openings.[58]

As this passage makes clear, general appearance was more important than specificity of detail. Allan Willingham has agreed, providing an account of what he dubbed "The Mediterranean Idiom":

The Mediterranean idiom or sub-style in housing in Melbourne is characterized firstly by the heavily modified facades of suburban housing in the inner suburbs, and then by the grandiose pseudo-Italianate villas erected on standard building lots in the outer suburbs in the late twentieth century.[59]

Such comments expressed a common view among architectural critics and the general public.[60] This was that houses of southern European migrants could be easily identified by a number of characteristic architectural elements (FIG. 2).

From the migrant perspective, however, it is important to note how the process of building the house may perhaps have held greater significance than its appearance. As was the case with many "native" Australian households at the time, most of the construction was done by the principal male householder. But, in the case of migrants, what help was needed (for example, when pouring concrete floors) was provided by the community.[61] Julia Church has described how such occasions became a kind of festivity for Italian migrants in Melbourne. On Saturday and Sunday everybody came to the house, and while the men worked together from sunrise to sunset, the hostess, assisted by other wives, cooked, served,

FIGURE 1. *The stereotypical image of the nonmigrant "cream-brick-veneer house," 2012. Photograph by Iris Levin.*

FIGURE 2. *The stereotypical image of the Australian "migrant house," 2009. Photograph by Iris Levin.*

and kept everything in order. The following weekend the participants would gather again to help another family.

Most of the northern Italians worked as laborers for Italian contractors, so they had some practical knowledge of construction.[62] Thus the situation in some ways resembled vernacular methods of building in villages in northern Mexico as described by Lopez, where the whole community would participate in the building process without the help of professionals.[63] However, in contrast to Mexican (and other) vernacular dwelling traditions, the migrant house in Australia has never been recognized as part of the vocabulary of Australian architecture, vernacular or otherwise.

Lozanovska's publications on the migrant house have discussed how particular elements — such as grand scale, ornamentation of eagles and lions, geometric order, and control of nature — have been perceived by the host culture. Lozanovska has also examined how the house provides a spatial enclave for practices of other cultures and the mixture of cultures and languages.[64] Yet the migrant house has hardly ever been studied in detail as a typological form. And its links to architectural references overseas have never been adequately explored or verified.

THE FACADE

In Melbourne, the facade has long been a symbol of the migrant house. It is popularly considered an emblem of migrant domestic architecture — probably because it is the most recognizable feature of the house and can be viewed from the street by passersby.

It is typically believed that houses of southern European migrants can easily be identified by certain characteristic facade elements. However, the majority of houses examined in this research did not include these elements, as described above. None had "large arched openings," and not all of them were grand or two-storied (eleven out of seventeen). Rather, our research revealed that relatively minor adjustments and additions to a facade could communicate a similar message. Through what we called "migrant aesthetics," these houses distinguished themselves as a sub-category of the Australian typology as a whole.

One example is Laura's house, built in 1956 by her late husband in one of Melbourne's middle-ring eastern suburbs.[65] It has a timber structure, an orange brick-veneer, and rectangular windows. Laura, who migrated from Italy in the early 1950s, believes her house is a "real" Australian house because at the time of its construction such houses were fashionable. She and her husband actually saw the same house elsewhere, and built a copy with the help of the Italian community (FIG.3). But when the house was completed, they also constructed a low wall around their lot with a black wrought-iron gate. The wall is made of bluestone that Laura's husband brought from the inner-city construction site where he worked as a laborer (FIG.4).[66] According to Laura, the use of bluestone for such a wall was a common practice in northern Italy.

Another example of the migrant aesthetic is Otto's house, built in the mid-1960s in one of Melbourne's middle-ring eastern suburbs. Otto, who emigrated from Italy, was a carpenter (he is now retired) who built a number of other houses before his own (FIG.5). His house conforms to
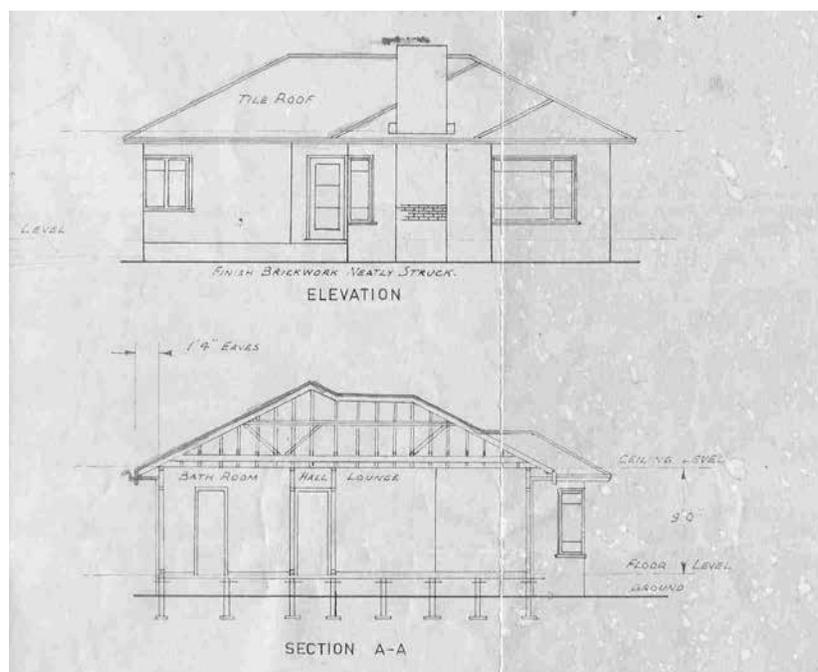

FIGURE 3. *Building permit for Laura's house, 1956. Source: Laura's private collection.*

FIGURE 4. *The bluestone wall and the wrought-iron gate in Laura's house, 2008. Photograph by Iris Levin.*

the common stereotype of southern European houses: it is double-storied and is faced with orange bricks. Although it is not symmetrical, a staircase leads to a front terrace, and both the staircase and the terrace are surrounded by a white wrought-iron balustrade. A further typical feature is the concrete floor near the entrance, which occupies the space where a lawn edged with roses might typically be found in Anglo-Australian houses.[67]

Unlike the case of Earlwood in Sydney, where local residents resisted the transformation of houses by southern European immigrants (and dubbed them "Mediterranean-ized"[68]), such house features have not generated as much reaction in Melbourne. In Otto's case this may be because his was a new suburb, and neither his nor the neighboring houses involved the transformation of an existing structure.

Many participants in our studies also noted that relationships in the neighborhood have always been good, regardless of an individual's ethnic origins. But Otto also explained that many houses on his street were owned by southern European migrants like himself.

One striking difference between migrant and nonmigrant houses, which Apperly, Irving, and Reynolds also mentioned, is the color of their bricks.[69] The cream-brick-veneer suburban house has been adored in popular culture as well as in academic discourse.[70] Many migrants built their houses using orange or darker brown bricks as a facade material. In the migrant enclave examined, seven houses used an orange or brown shade of brick, while the only house with a cream brick veneer was built by a nonmigrant household.

A third house in our study, however, provided an example of how the facade of a migrant house may bear no relation to the stereotype. In an established middle-ring suburb, Loretta's house is faced with weatherboards and has a classic Anglo-Australian front yard of flower beds, rose bushes, and a paved footpath that corresponds perfectly with its setting (**FIG. 6**). She and her late husband purchased this house more than sixty years ago and have never remodeled it. This house defies all stereotypes concerning the migrant house: it does not use brick veneer; it is only one story high; and it does not have any arches, balustrades or ironwork.

As revealed by the research, the meaning of the facade in the migrant house is clearly complex. In some cases it is indeed a signifier of migrant identity, but in others this is not the case. Of course, "pseudo-Italian villas," as described vividly by Willingham, do exist in Melbourne's suburbs.[71] But do they really represent Italian villas? This question has never been explored adequately, and yet the migrant house has been so labeled and stamped. In any case, such houses present only extreme examples of what is usually a modest suburban house that tries to assimilate into the landscape but

FIGURE 5. *Otto's house with its typical migrant architectural "markers," 2008. Photograph by Iris Levin.*

FIGURE 6. *Loretta's front facade, 2008. Photograph by Iris Levin.*

at the same time distinguish itself through subtle exterior modifications. As Fiona Allon has argued, it was through "Mediterraneanized" houses that "[the migrant] residents evoke[d] their translated identities and multiple belongings"; thus, they were an essential part of the settlement process.[72] As will become evident in the discussion of Loretta's back yard, however, expressions of the migrant aesthetic are often hidden in the rear of the house.

THE TERRACE

The terrace is another architectural element described as typical of the migrant house. Apperly, Irving and Reynolds identified the "verandah, edged with bulbous Baroque balusters of precast concrete" as one of the most important features of the migrant house.[73] The terrace is also often characterized as employing concrete expanses (sometimes replacing the front lawn) and tile or terrazzo paving.

Most of the houses explored in our research did have a front and/or a back terrace, whose use is incorporated into the social/familial activities of its residents. One example is Tanya's house, located in one of Melbourne's northern middle-ring suburbs. Tanya, who emigrated from Italy, bought this house in the early 1970s and renovated it to create a more habitable dwelling. Before, she claimed, "it was a pigsty!" and stated that all the changes were made by necessity, rather than for the sake of beautification. For example, soon after purchasing the house she and her husband changed the wooden window frames to aluminum and replaced the weatherboard siding with bricks. The reason was to reduce maintenance. But they also chose to employ building practices that were familiar to them from Italy. After moving into the house, the couple also built a terrace, just next to the native bottlebrush in the front garden, of which Tanya is very proud. When their two boys were young, the family would use the terrace for family dinners and gatherings (**FIGS.7,8**).

Otto's house has a similar front terrace, which is not bordered by "bulbous Baroque balusters of precast concrete," but by a white wrought-iron railing. His terrace also serves as a location for outdoor furniture to facilitate the occasional moment outdoors (**REFER TO FIG.5**).

A front terrace appears in almost all the houses in the migrant enclave in the inner-city suburb. The only non-migrant house is the one without a terrace. For example, Giovanni's house, built in 1967, has a typical terrazzo terrace fenced with a white wrought-iron railing, similar to Otto's. To enter the house, a visitor must approach on a concrete footpath and climb three terrazzo steps to the front terrace (**FIG.9**). Giovanni emigrated from Sicily in 1951, and after owning another house in an adjacent suburb, he bought his current house in 1975.

A neighboring house has a similar terrace, with the same terrazzo floor and white iron railing. Built in 1965, it

FIGURE 9. *Giovanni's front terrace, 2009. Photograph by Mirjana Lozanovska.*

FIGURES 10 AND 11.
The front terrace and back veranda of George's house, 2009. Note the close proximity to the neighboring house. Photographs by Mirjana Lozanovska.

is owned by George, who emigrated in 1951 from a village in Cyprus, Greece **(FIGS.10,11)**. The adjoining terraces allow George and Giovanni to be in close proximity to each other, spatially and visually. In contrast, Australian houses built with British tastes emphasize privacy.[74] But migrants from southern Europe have generally wanted their houses to engender links with neighbors and encourage social encounter **(FIG.12)**. As can be seen in the accompanying photos, the house contains many semi-private spaces, such as terraces and verandas, which make the experience of living there a less isolated, more communal experience.

Bruno's house provides quite a different example. Bruno and Anna live in a double-storied Victorian terrace house in an inner-city suburb. Although the house has a distinguished British architectural style and its front facade has not been remodeled in any way, Bruno and Anna have created a small front yard with pots of flowers, brown tiles, and two lemon trees **(FIGS.13,14)**. The appearance of the house is

Victorian, but it is hard to miss these Italian-inspired adaptations at the front entrance.[75] Bruno explains that when he purchased his house, many fellow immigrants from Italy lived in the area, but they have all since moved to the suburbs.

Yeah, first Italians in two-story house over there, another one across here, another one in what they called from Trieste one, another one over there . . . we stay here, first and last.

In summary our research revealed that the meaning of the terrace in the migrant house is embedded in its semi-public nature. Being open and inviting to the public gaze, it allows neighbors and pedestrians access to the lives of the residents. The separation between private and public, strictly kept in Anglo-Australian houses, is blurred in the migrant house through spaces that bridge the public and the private.
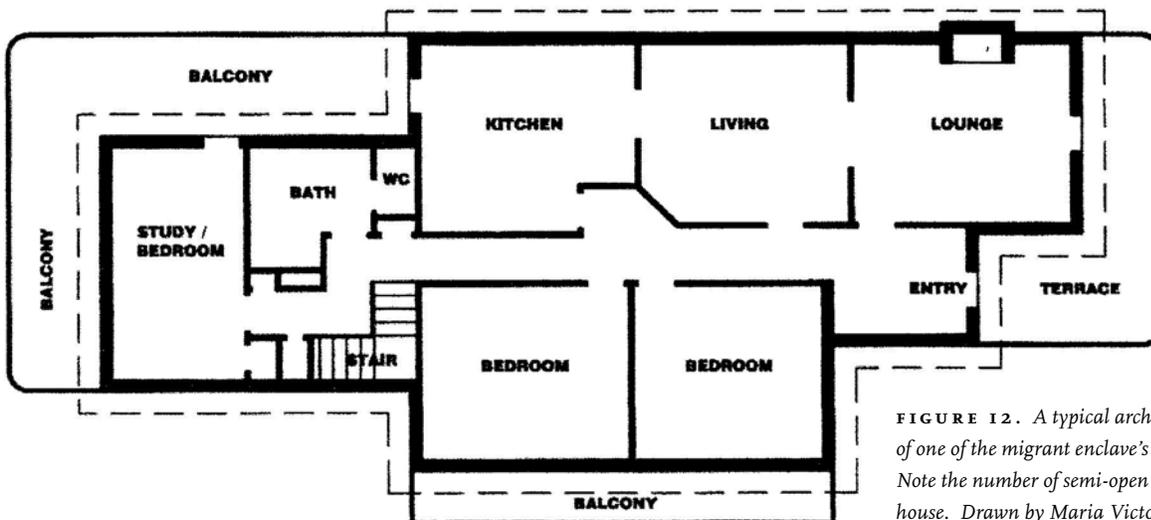
FIGURE 12. *A typical architectural scheme of one of the migrant enclave's houses, 2009. Note the number of semi-open spaces around the house. Drawn by Maria Victoria Gantala.*

This feature may be influenced by the southern-Europe-an lifestyle that migrants brought with them, which encourages social interaction in the street and around the home as a part of everyday life.[76] By contrast, Philip Drew has described the Anglo-Australian interpretation of the veranda as "a kind of no-man's-land, a place for the uninvited, and a border zone or interval separating the house and its intimate private activities from the public realm of the street."[77] The terrace and veranda of the migrant house offer a very different experience. They are conceived of and constructed as spaces of interaction with neighbors and pedestrians, encouraging, rather than hindering, contact with people outside the house/household.

THE BACK YARD

Another element typically thought to distinguish the migrant house from its nonmigrant counterpart is the character of its back yard. This element has not been discussed as much as the two previous ones in architectural accounts. This may derive from the fact that migrant houses built in the 1950s and 1960s are similar to nonmigrant houses in terms of their position on suburban lots. Both have quite large back and front yards (especially compared to houses in more recent Melbournian suburban developments). Nevertheless, the quality of the back yards in migrant houses has been a noted feature of more general public discourse.[78]

Gardens have been an important feature in the formation of an Anglo-Australian national identity. They were initially invoked as part of the colonization process, seen as involving the cultivation of a hostile land.[79] Then, around 1880, the lawnmower was introduced to Australia, and suddenly the lawn became a standard feature of the Australian home.[80] South European immigrants, by contrast, are thought to use their yards differently — to cultivate vegetables, raise farm animals, and grow other produce, as they did in the villages in which they were born. Thus, at the same time that the

back yards of Anglo-Australians were moving away from productive functions, southern European migrants reintroduced such practices. This eventually became a mark of distinction between local Australians and immigrants.[81]

Unlike facades and terraces, migrant back yards in suburban Australia have been the subject of considerable academic exploration. Helen Armstrong, for example, has examined different types of gardens created by different migrant groups in Australia, including Mediterranean Europeans, eastern Europeans, migrants from the Middle East, and migrants from Asian countries.[82] Likewise, Lesley Head, Pat Muir, and Eva Hampel have explored the suburban back-yard gardens of three contemporary migrant groups (Macedonians, Vietnamese, and British-born) and a group of first-generation Australians whose parents were both born overseas.[83] This latter work highlighted the differences between the back yards of the three immigrant groups by seeking to explain them with reference to the rural background of some of them. Similarly, George Morgan, Cristina Rocha, and Scott Poynting have looked at migration stories and examined the ways that migrants use their gardens in the Fairfield municipality of western Sydney as sites of cultural practice. They asserted that many migrant gardens are places in which creative labor is expended to symbolize connections not only to a homeland, but also to Australia and other cultures.[84] The examples below support these accounts.

Tanya, who emigrated from a village in the Veneto region in northern Italy, owns a big farm sixty kilometers from Melbourne, but she also maintains a large back yard with chickens, ducks, and a vegetable garden. A small winery is set up in the granny-flat; her son produces salami in the small basement; and she would also like to keep bees, produce honey, and prepare different kinds of jams (FIGS.15,16). Likewise, Loretta has a garden in her back yard, which she has cared for since her husband passed away 25 years ago (FIG.17). Both Tanya and Loretta also have a barbecue, a symbol of "Australian" culture, in their back

FIGURES 15 AND 16. *Tanya's backyard with chickens and vegetable garden, 2008. Photographs by Iris Levin.*

yards, however. In support of the observations of Morgan, Rocha and Poynting, Tanya emphasizes the "Australian" nature of her garden alongside its "Italian" nature:

> You see those, the plants were brought here from Captain Cook, they [are] called banksia and this is bottle-brush. Those there, sometimes they put them in the stamps. Yeah, that's a real Australian. Very original. They were here. [This] banksia . . . [is] probably 80 years old. Now they are dry, but you should see when they are green — they are beautiful.[85]

Laura and her husband paved their back yard with stones, "just like in Toscana," her husband's region of origin, because it reminded him of home. In her garden, Laura followed an Italian custom and planted the azalea flower.

Michaela's house, built in 1967, is located in the migrant enclave. Coming from a village in Italy, she too tends a vegetable garden, where she has lemon, mandarin and persimmon trees. However, her husband, who passed away nineteen years ago, built a concrete barbeque (**FIG. 18**). Michaela makes tomato sauce, wine and salami, which she stores in her basement.

Our research revealed that the back yard typically plays a very important role in the lives of migrants, since it enables them to re-create familiar landscapes, restore familiar smells and tastes, and continue cooking practices that employ familiar plants and animals. This was clearly the case with Tanya and Michaela. As Armstrong claimed, creating a garden in the host country is an early stage of accepting the new country, making the unfamiliar familiar.[86] On the other hand, one of the most important characteristics of the back yard is

FIGURE 17. *Loretta's vegetable garden, 2008. Photograph by Iris Levin.*

FIGURE 18. *Michaela's concrete barbecue, 2009. Photograph by Maria Victoria Gantala.*

that it is hidden from the public view. This means that the migrant house can look like any other "ordinary" suburban home from the street. It is only when one goes out back that the house reveals its "migrant identity." The stories of Tanya, Laura, Loretta and Michaela reveal diverse everyday practices evident in garden and backyard creativity. This suburban creativity simultaneously produces symbols of homeland blended with symbols of Australia.[87]

UNRAVELLING THE VERNACULAR MIGRANT HOUSE

This report has explored the migrant house in Australia and raised the question of whether it can be understood as an Australian vernacular. The research examined houses of seventeen migrants from southern Europe who arrived in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s and built (or purchased) their own homes in suburban Melbourne. Through an analysis of three architectural elements typically associated with the migrant house — the facade, the terrace, and the back yard — we have argued that the migrant house is commonly thought to be identifiable through typical "signifiers."[88] However, in our examination, we found that some of these signifiers do not appear at all in our sample of houses, and some appeared in only a few and were not evident in the majority.

We have argued that behind these superficial stereotypes lies a contested relationship between immigrants from southern Europe and Anglo-Australian locals. Migrants to Australia in the 1950s and 1960s found a very British nation, with a strong assimilation policy, which resisted influences from other cultures. Nonetheless, they insisted on preserving their culture through their language, food, sport and homes. At the same time, local Australians wanted to distinguish themselves from these immigrants and their different "southern European" aesthetics.

We believe these conditions led both directly and indirectly to the development of a "migrant aesthetics." But it is one whose meaning is far more subtle than has typically been represented. In a different context, Ozlem Savas has described how the owners of Turkish homes in Vienna created a collective sense of home based on shared aesthetic practices and discourses.[89] Likewise, southern European migrants to Melbourne created an architectural language made up from a stock of architectural markers. In particular, the three architectural elements investigated here fulfilled the need for socio-spatial spaces that might facilitate and ease adaptation to life in Australia.

As we have discussed, each element plays a different role in the migrant house. The facade, the most obvious "marker" of the migrant house, rarely includes all the elements thought to characterize it. Yet one or two of these are usually present to hint at this character. We found brick color to be one of the most common markers in many of the houses examined. The facade was the primary tool that helped migrants dif-

ferentiate themselves from the Australian majority. It helped them belong to their community and feel part of a big crowd of "others." Yet it also served to unify them against the assimilation demands of the dominant culture, even if the marks of this attitude were often very subtle and restrained.

The role of the terrace as a marker was more utilitarian and cultural. Our research showed how the terrace and veranda have provided migrants with spaces that are neither private nor public, but somewhere in between. They represent a desire among southern European migrants to replicate the everyday social life of their homelands, where families lived in close proximity to one another and were involved in each other's everyday lives. The front terrace and the back veranda enable migrants to be part of a bigger community that extends beyond the walls of their house. Being able to greet the neighbor from the veranda was imperative to the life of this community, just as being able to greet pedestrians while sitting on the terrace acknowledged the importance of street life, even in a suburban landscape.

The back yard was also more utilitarian and cultural, serving the need for traditional food production and developing a collective social practice. But beyond this, as a space hidden from the public view, it also allowed for privacy and comfort, while enhancing the feeling of being at home.[90] The back yard is the space where migrants felt free to do whatever they liked. But that does not mean the migrant aesthetic is more apparent there. On the contrary, these back yards facilitated a mix of migrant and Australian references.[91] This was evident in our research through the presence of barbecues in the back yards belonging to Loretta, Tanya and Michaela.

These three architectural elements signify a scale of migrant aesthetics, on which they occupy different positions. If the facade is at the most obvious, visible end, the back yard occupies the least visible, most subtle end.

Considering the lack of academic literature on the migrant house in Australia, this study shows how unreliable these three architectural elements may be as indicators of it. The facade may include some of the elements typically associated with the migrant house, or none at all. The terrace is indeed a typical marker of the migrant house. The back yard, although hidden, is different from what is stereotypically imagined to be the Australian norm, but it is also different from what is imagined to be a migrant one.

Is this house an Australian vernacular? It is almost impossible to define the vernacular house.[92] Thus, it is perhaps necessary to adopt Klaufus's flexible definition that allows some houses built by professionals to also be included in the vernacular category. This is the case for some of the migrant houses explored here. Others, however, were built with the support of the migrant community, who all contributed their skills.

It is clear these migrant houses are very different from Third World vernacular houses built in an unplanned environment. Nevertheless, we assert that the meaning of the vernacular should be broadened to include different forms of

local housing. This is especially the case with suburban housing built in postwar Australian suburbs because it comprises a large portion of Australian housing, and because much of it was owner built. The vernacular should be understood through its dynamic nature.[93] And in Australia, suburban housing in the 1950s and 1960s is made up of both nonmigrant and migrant houses. Hence, we believe that the migrant house is a unique form of vernacular housing in Australia.

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