A faster taste: Red Rooster and the architecture of Australian fast food

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Abstract

The late 1960s saw the emergence of the fast food industry in Australia led by American chains McDonald’s, Burger King, Kentucky Fried Chicken and Pizza Hut. The arrival of these chains and their rapidly multiplying locations illustrated the suburban side of the widespread internationalisation of Australian cities more glamorously depicted in the new cafes, hotels and nightclubs of the 1960s. These global restaurant chains transformed the country’s relationship to food, bringing with them a distinctly American style dining experience: quick, efficient, and standardised service bolstered by progressive marketing strategies. Typically housed in instantly recognisable ‘ranch’ style buildings these chains offered an easily digestible piece of Americana, perfectly suited for a country which was increasingly looking to the United States for inspiration. In response to the international chains there was a small but concerted effort to produce an Australian fast food industry led by companies like Red Rooster, Mr Chips and Chicken Treat. But despite the enormous impact on the Australian cultural and built environment, the Australian fast food restaurant is yet to be acknowledged as a site of historic importance. This paper sets out to chart a history of fast food in Australia and the key role that design played in the development of this industry using Red Rooster, the most successful of the Australian chains, as a case study. Through an examination of this pioneering chain, this paper argues for the significance of the fast food restaurant as an architectural type and explores its place as an important but difficult heritage site which emerged amidst the international recasting of the Australian city.

Introduction

The arrival of American fast food chains in Australia in the late 1960s irrevocably altered our relationship with food. Bringing with them an unfamiliar style of food, service and marketing, these odd looking stand-alone restaurants were soon a familiar sight on the nation’s highways. Since the arrival of the first American chain, Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) in Sydney in 1968 the fast food industry in Australia has experienced extraordinary growth. KFC was followed by a series of major international chains, most notably McDonalds, Hungry Jack’s (Burger King) and Pizza Hut, taking advantage of Australia’s rapidly expanding suburban developments, rising motor car ownership, and a new wave of prosperity. By the early 1970s the stage was set for the widespread expansion of fast food chains across the country. And in the 50 years since KFC arrived in Australia, fast food has become the most popular and most populous form of dining in Australia making up over 40% of dining revenue across the country (Intermedia Group 2017). Yet despite the dominance of the sector, scholarship on the impact of the fast food industry within the Australian cultural and built environment is difficult to locate. Rather, the enormous impact that fast food chains have had on Australian society has been assessed predominantly in terms of their health and detrimental societal issues (Anaf et al. 2018; Wellard et al. 2017).
In the United States there is now a considerable body of literature dealing with the culinary, cultural and spatial impact of the fast food restaurant (Anderson 1991; Hess 1986, 2004; Langdon 1986; Jakle & Sculle 1999), which has culminated in the recent inclusion of key fast food sites being added to the National Register of Historic Places, like the last remaining single arch McDonald’s sign in Arkansas. But fast food in Australia remains a surprising omission in the diverse and now rapidly developing body of literature focussed on Australian food culture spread across a range of cultural study fields. An exception remains Michael Symons One Continuous Picnic (1982) which eminent food historian Colin Bannerman has identified as still the ‘dominant historical account of eating in Australia’ (Bannerman 2011, p. 54). Despite its brevity, Symons highlights the existence of a local fast food culture, and he notes two local restaurant chains, Mr Chips and Pizza Inn, who attempted to challenge the American chains through adopting their food systems approach (Symons 1982, p. 204-205). But while fast food remains an understudied area in general culinary history, there are now a range of survey texts and the broad field of Australian culinary history which provide important context to situate the emergence of an Australian fast food industry. Two recent cross-cultural studies, Dining on Turtles and Culinary Distinctions, a special issue of Journal of Australian Studies, demonstrate the potential of using food culture as a lens for a series of new interpretations of the past by offering ‘new paradigms, new perspectives, new avenues of understanding.’ (Kirkby & Luckins 2007, p. 8).

Within the field of planning and urbanism studies there has been a growing interest in the potential significance of the local fast food industry, particularly through commissioned heritage studies echoing the American interest. Much of this recognition stems from the fast food restaurant’s position as one of a series of roadside typologies developed in response to the transformation of Australia’s postwar urban environment. Graeme Davison describes this as a new ‘Automobilised Landscape’, one enabled by rising motorcar ownership and domestic wealth and shaped ‘by the new tyrannies of fast food, parking meters and traffic congestion’ (Davison 2004, p. 77). A comprehensive survey of these types as potential sites for heritage significance was carried out in 2008 by Heritage Alliance for Heritage Victoria and a number of early examples of fast food restaurants including Pizza Hut and KFC outlets were identified as having aesthetic and historical significance (Heritage Alliance 2008). Other postwar roadside typologies have made appearances on formal heritage registers across Australia including motels, drive-in cinemas, service stations and even significant signs, like the Starlight Drive-In Theatre Sign in Canberra which was registered as ‘evidence of a distinctive custom of the drive-in theatre era which is no longer practiced in the ACT’ (ACT Heritage Council 2012). The recognition of roadside types as objects of architectural significance is also reflected in the growing body of literature which outlines the role that a series of well-known architects like Enrico Taglietti, Robin Boyd and Peter Muller played in their development, but the fast food restaurant remains on the fringes of these studies (Goad 2016a, p. 10; Connors 2015; Spearritt 1995). There is also a small body of literature which looks specifically at the relationship between fast food and planning which provides the most useful context for this article (See: Nichols & Taylor 2016; Taylor 2015; Harvey 1980; Abd-Malek 1972).

Building off recent heritage discourse and a wider culinary scholarship this article seeks to chart the emergence of an Australian fast food industry against broader historical themes, primarily relating to the internationalisation of the Australian city in the postwar period. Using Australia’s most successful fast food chain Red Rooster as a case study, this paper looks at the first decade of the company to explore how architecture and design were used to establish the brand in order to define an identity distinct from the international chains. Through an examination of this pioneering Australian chain, this paper ultimately argues for the significance of the fast food restaurant as an architectural type and explores its place as an important but difficult heritage site which emerged amidst the international recasting of the Australian city.¹

The Australian food landscape

The arrival of fast food in Australia coincides with the country’s internationalist turn—a gradual move away from Britain to America for inspiration. Due in part to a series of complex political shifts which followed the signing of the 1951 ANZUS treaty, the postwar period saw the rise
of an increasingly conspicuous alliance between America and Australia, well-illustrated by the Australian involvement in the Vietnam war and the construction of American military bases at Exmouth, Pine Gap and Nurrungar (Goad 2016b, 357). This close involvement with American politics coupled with generally increasing levels of prosperity led to what Philip Goad has described as an ‘enthusiastic embrace’ of American culture, manifest in the arrival of motels, bowling alleys and drive-ins (Goad, 2016b, 358). Australian architectural critic Robin Boyd would describe this embrace as ‘Austerica’ a place he suggested was found ‘on no map… found in any country, including parts of America, where an austerity version of the American dream overtakes the indigenous culture… and it flourishes best of all in Australia’ (Boyd 1960, p. 81). The embrace of American culture was widespread in Australia by the late 1950s but there was a lagging interest in American food culture.

By the 1960s there was a well-established and diverse dining culture in America which spanned fine-dining establishments to an extensive network of roadside food stalls, diners and drive-in restaurants. The Australian restaurant scene of the immediate postwar period was relatively conservative in comparison and much slower to develop. Typical restaurants of the early 1960s included European coffee houses, formal dining rooms, pubs and neighbourhood take-away restaurants serving fish and chips or Chinese food, but dining out remained an unusual activity. It was not until the late 1960s that the dining scene really began to develop which coincided with the arrival of the first American fast food chains. This is documented in an article published in The Sydney Morning Herald which announced ‘The Dining Out Boom’ which author Margaret Jones declared ‘probably the biggest thing which has happened to Australia recently outside uranium shares’ (The Sydney Morning Herald, 5 September 1970, p. 2). An interest in ‘dining out’ can be clearly seen in the emergence of the restaurant column and critic in the national newspapers from the late 1960s (Harper 2012; Vincent 2017). The Age began its ‘Epicure’ column in 1974 led by Claude Forrell and Leo Schofield began to document the local dining scene in The Sunday Australian in 1971, as the number of restaurants in New South Wales almost doubled between 1960 and 1970s (Vincent 2017, p. 503). However, this growth was largely restricted to a narrow group of restaurants, predominantly the French bistro or small Italian and Middle-Eastern restaurants (Harper 2012, p. 49). A casual food scene remained undeveloped and roadside or drive-in restaurants were virtually unheard of. A promotional video distributed by Kentucky Fried Chicken to potential franchise owners in Australia in 1971 identified the enormous opportunity to augment this general dining boom:

> The Kentucky Fried Chicken concept of marketing was unknown and foreign to the Australians. When we arrived in Sydney, there were only five drive-in restaurants in a city where the population exceeds 2.5 million people. There were 80 store-front rotisserie barbecues, but there were no free-standing chicken take-homes. (KFC in Australia 1971)

KFC’s assessment proved correct – there was a clear appetite for fast casual dining options. By 1970, marked by a visit to Australia by the Colonel himself, KFC had already opened 38 stores at a rate of one per week (The Sydney Morning Herald, 11 August 1970, p. 17). KFC was followed by Pizza Hut, opening a store in Belfield, NSW in 1970, McDonalds in Yagoona, NSW in 1971, and Burger King (renamed Hungry Jack’s due to the Burger King name already in use) opened in Innaloo, Western Australia also in 1971. Other major brands attempted to enter the market including Hardee’s, rebranded locally as Hartee’s, in Earlwood, NSW in 1970 as part of partnership with Kellogg Food Products which aimed to capitalise on McDonald’s imminent but slow entry into the market (Wayne 2012).

The Sydney Morning Herald, having announced the ‘dining boom’ in 1970 followed up with a report on the transforming restaurant industry in Sydney documenting the rise in take-away or fast-food restaurants (The Sydney Morning Herald, 1 October 1972, p. 41). The article charts the rapid rise of the convenient and pre-prepared food market, and it notes that the number of take-away restaurants went from 13 in 1967 to 177 in 1972. The report further asserts that this shift was closely related to the changing social situation in Australia, describing the restaurants as ‘Fine for the nervous cook faced with entertaining the boss for dinner, the newlywed, the bachelor. Or even an over-worked mum who wants a night off’ (The Sydney Morning Herald, 1 October 1972, p. 41).
Morning Herald, 1 October 1972, p. 41). The article provides a detailed list of the range of these new restaurant types which were operating within this market – a useful indicator of the developing restaurant scene and the market that the American chains were entering. The majority of restaurants listed, despite having up to 10 stores, bear little resemblance to the fast food chains developed in America defined by their standardised service, corporate branding and big marketing strategies. Most still served typical restaurant fare in take-away format like the bain-marie based outlet Tiffany’s, which then had 10 stores in Sydney serving dishes including ‘curried prawns and curried chicken through to sweet and sour pork, Bengal bread, and chicken Mexicana’ (The Sydney Morning Herald, 1 October 1972, p. 41)

There had been casual dining options in Australia before the arrival of KFC in 1968, however unlike the sophisticated organisation seen in the USA, the Australian examples were much more ad-hoc and transient manner. A range of caravans, carts and street vendors were common to Australia’s capitals like Bernie’s hamburger caravan established in Perth in 1940, and Harry’s café de wheels, a popular Sydney fixture established 1938. These carts were particularly successful with a young crowd enthused by a taste for a new American cuisine most likely developed following alliances formed during the First World War (Symons 2007, p. 147), but they remained on the fringes of dining culture.

The chains arrive

The American fast food outlets which arrived in Australia from the late 1960s were fine-tuned internationally franchised versions of a series of restaurants which had developed from individual road-side stalls to multinational corporations over a period of decades. These chains arrived with new service models, sophisticated marketing campaigns, identifiable branding and, of interest to this paper, their own complete architectural language. The architecture of American fast food restaurants was one developed over a period of decades, carefully calibrated to the shifting economic and cultural advances in the postwar period. The first wave of American fast food restaurants were often developed along a type best illustrated by McDonalds with their now iconic 1953 candy-striped building design (Figure 1). Designed in collaboration between Richard and Maurice McDonald and architect Stanley Meston, this McDonalds became the archetypal road side fast food chain restaurant design (Hess 1986a). A small rectangular building with giant yellow arches and a roof which sloped up towards the street, the building looked ‘as if it were poised to leap towards the highway’ (Langdon 1986, p. 90). With its neon signs, bold colour scheme and angular design aimed at passing motorists, the McDonalds building symbolised the exuberance and excitement of a growing postwar American culture.

Figure 1: Stanley Meston designed McDonald’s, Massachusetts. C2012. (photo by Anthony92931, Wikimedia Commons)
The bold architecture of American roadside diners continued unquestioned until the mid-1960s, when a change in consumer tastes led to what Philip Langdon has called ‘The Browning of America’ which was the result of a fast food restaurant backlash ‘whose flamboyant 1950s-style designs were running up against increasing community resistance’…[and] began yielding to public pressure for a less brash appearance’ (Langdon 1986, p. 139). Jakle & Sculle (1999, p. 59) note that this backlash came during a period of social reform and newfound affluence in America which prompted a shift towards more family focussed, comfortable, dine-in restaurants. Debuting in 1969, the new standardised McDonald’s restaurant designed by Donald E. Miller and initiated by Ray Kroc illustrates this shift and was a complete refiguring of the Meston design approach. The new McDonald’s were low slung, brown brick buildings complete with extensive indoor dining areas and introduced the new company signature: a double mansard roof clad in slate or brown ceramic tiles. The browning of American fast food restaurants in the late 1960s was widespread and most chains underwent similar rebranding exercises parallel to the taste making waves of McDonald’s. Burger King, Wendy’s, Denny’s and Pizza Hut all soon incorporated a modified version of the double mansard roof in their designs and replaced their angular shapes and bright colours with muted browns and oranges. This was the new era of American fast-food. The brash teenage hangouts were gone—replaced by dine-in family restaurants with significant corporate clout, capital backing and marketing nous honed over several decades. Closely related to this shift in approach was the emergence of nostalgia driven fast food chains like Red Barn and Chock Full‘O Nuts which moved further into the territory of kitsch romantic Americanised styling (Langdon 1986, p. 100). Curiously it was these nostalgic, and ‘browned’ versions of the fast food chains that were brought to Australia, resulting in a curious mix of cultural values and nationalist imagery severed from its original context.

The arrival of these stand-alone restaurants located in prominent positions along the nation’s highways stood in stark contrast to the traditional, low-key Australian take-away restaurants. All the major chains imported their standardised building designs which were now integral to their brands international recognition. KFC brought over their current building type designed in 1963 in Atlanta – small square buildings topped with a striking tent like roof painted in bold red and white stripes, complete with a Colonel Sanders weather vane on top (Langdon 1986, p. 99). Pizza Hut brought over the standard ranch house building type developed by architect Richard D. Burke in Wichita, Kansas in 1964, and the brown tiled double mansard roofs of McDonald’s were soon a familiar sight. A leading proponent of the nostalgia American fast food movement, Red Barn, only managed to accumulate seven stores in Victoria before being bought out and closed in 1972 but it provided one of the more memorable examples (The Age, 10 November 1972, p. 17). Designed as a cartoonish version of an American barn and coloured bright red, the restaurants came complete with an exaggerated and over scaled mansard barn roof and stylised ‘western’ saloon fonts. A success in America, the image of wild west barns marooned along the highway made an uneasy but lasting impression in Australia.

In response to this American invasion a number of Australian fast food chains entered the market hoping to claim part of this growing industry. Notable early examples include Mr Chips (1968), a seafood franchise based in Sydney which had seven stores across Sydney by 1972, and Henny Penny Country Fried Chicken established in 1968 by Steggles who were expanding their fresh poultry business into the restaurant arena. While many of these early chains aspired to rival the American chains, in reality they were often little more than franchised versions of traditional take-away restaurants with none of the marketing, branding, or efficient operation strategies found in the American chains. However, Australia did produce a local chain which would provide a significant challenge to these global examples, Red Rooster, which opened its first store in the Perth suburb of Kelmscott in 1972.

**Australia, your chicken is ready**

When Red Rooster opened in the outer suburban Perth suburb of Kelmscott in 1972 the fast food industry in Western Australia was in its infancy with only a handful of KFC, Hungry Jack’s and Pizza Hut stores. McDonald’s would not appear until 1982 when the Cinema City Arcade location was opened. Unlike many other local competitors, Red Rooster was specifically
developed to emulate the success of the American chain industry, utilising standardised systems, uniform product, corporate branding and targeted marketing as the core of its business model. But while Red Rooster employed the operating structure and business logic of the American chains, the menu and store designs took a different approach (Figure 2). Rotisserie chicken was not a food common in the American fast food landscape and the store arrangement deferred from the imported trend for dine-in, family oriented, ‘homely’ restaurants. Instead the original Red Rooster outlets were comparatively spare, relying on bright signage and bold graphics to attract customers and offering a simple take-away only menu with no internal dining space.

Red Rooster was started by brothers Peter and Theo Kailis, successful businessmen from the extensive Kailis family, a Western Australian dynasty best known for their vast fishing and pearling empire. Given their background in fishing, a fish based enterprise seems the obvious choice, but at the time of Red Rooster’s conception the Kailis seafood group were already supplying the majority of fish and chip shops in the state and entering this arena would have created a potential conflict of interest. The hamburger market was comparatively well served, and therefore an opportunity was seen for developments within the fast food chicken arena (G Harler, Architect, pers comm 30 March 2018). Rotisserie chicken had many advantages in a fast food setting: it was seen as healthy alternative to fried chicken, could be reliably cooked in large numbers, and was able to be kept warm for longer periods enabling more efficient service (G Harler, Architect, pers comm, 22 May 2018). It was also a product undergoing enormous growth. The early 1970s saw significant changes in the eating habits and meat consumption of Australians and by far the most pronounced was the increasing demand for chicken. Largely driven by two factors, the rising price of red meat and the advance in poultry farming technology, the amount of chicken consumed in Australia between 1969 and 1979 jumped almost 10% to 17.1%, having been less than 5% in the 1950s (Dixon 2002 p. 61). Given these circumstances, the development of a rotisserie chicken chain by the Kailis brothers made keen economic sense.

The immediate success of the American chains in Australia and the imminent arrival of McDonald’s in Western Australia underscored the need for Red Rooster to stake out a clear position in the rapidly developing fast food market. Already differentiating itself through its menu offerings and service style, the design and branding of the stores were also important. Conceived as a series of crisp white modernist boxes with instantly recognisable branding, the first Red Rooster restaurants used architecture to both reinforce the freshness of product and efficiency of service and to distance themselves from the nostalgic ‘brown’ American chains. The design of the stores was the work of one of Red Roosters’ founding partners, Western Australian architect Graham Harler. Harler had previously become involved with Peter and Theo Kailis through working together on a series of six Holiday Inn Hotels across the Australasia

Figure 2: Red Rooster Store, Osborne Park. C1972. (State Library of Western Australia, image number 359766PD).
The hotel project was directed by Trans Australian Securities Limited (TAS Ltd), a company which Peter and Theo Kailis were directors. TAS Ltd held company board meetings every Saturday mornings and it was during one of these morning board meetings where the idea for Red Rooster was supposedly initiated. Graham Harler recalls at the end of one meeting Theo Kailis producing two silver bags containing rotisserie chickens that he had purchased from an acquaintance’s new take-away rotisserie chicken shop The Red Hen (G Harler, Architect, pers comm, 30 March 2018). Located on Wanneroo Road in the northern suburb of Tuart Hill, this was to be the first of what was to be the West Australian expansion of The Red Hen Snack Bar which had begun in 1971 in Adelaide (Red Rooster 2017). The product impressed the Kailis’ and they decided to enter into the fast food chicken shop sector, adding to their growing portfolio of business ventures.

Theo and Peter Kailis along with Graham Harler and two heads of TAS Ltd became the five founding directors of the company, each contributing an even monetary share to develop the business (Red Rooster 2017). With the directors in place and funding secured, Red Rooster began in earnest. Peter Kailis took responsibility for company operations and three sites were quickly secured for the first stores: Kelmscott, Mosman Park, and Osborne Park. In much the same way that Victorian developer David Yencken used architects Mockridge, Stahle and Mitchell and Robin Boyd to elevate the status of the motel in the late 1950s (Davison 2004, p. 102), the Kailis brothers, working from advice from Harler, used design to elevate the fast food restaurant. The architectural program that Harler developed became a key strategy for achieving business success and widespread brand recognition.

Like Yencken’s motels, the first Red Rooster stores had a remarkable design pedigree with architect Graham Harler working alongside Melbourne graphic designer Garry Emery to establish the look and identity of the brand. Harler was a young architect known for his daring technological experiments, and is today best remembered for the instrumental role he played in setting up the 1966 Australian Architecture Students Association (AASA) conference in Perth. Harler, alongside fellow student Jack Kent had arranged to bring out a selection of the most influential international architects at the time, including Buckminster Fuller, Aldo van Eyk, John Voelcker and Jacob Bakema. This was a landmark conference, and is today still stands as one of the most significant AASA conferences ever held and a turning point for Western Australian architecture (Murray & Matthews 2015). So successful was the event that Harler was gifted by Fuller the licence to his Geodesic Dome system in the Australasian region, where he would go on to build eight across the country. Following the domes Harler went into practice with John Blake, a fellow cadet from the Western Australian Public Works Department Architectural Division. The practice, Harler and Blake, became responsible for a series of suburban shopping centres with independent second tier supermarkets as lead tenants (G Harler, Architect, pers comm 22 May 2018). This experience with retail and tenancy design would prove to be invaluable for designing the Red Rooster stores.

The homely image of Hungry Jacks and Pizza Hut alongside the carnivalesque design of KFC quickly became obvious landmarks around Perth, but Red Rooster provided a fresh, modern, and importantly a local alternative. They were developed as either standalone restaurants or added to existing shops, and consisted of a bold white facia and parapet acting as a signboard sitting above an entirely glass walled restaurant with the interior on clear display. With no dine-in space, the interiors were concisely designed with only a timber battened rear wall featuring a bright illuminated menu alongside the service counter and drinks fridge. Drawing on Harler’s previous experience with retail design and building systems, the stores were designed to be easily adapted and replicated for sites across the state. The clearly delineated box-like form of the buildings and the well-lit interiors reflected the streamlined kitchen layouts and the ordering system at the front, broadcasting an image of cleanliness and efficiency to the customers and passing motorists.

The use of consistent and recognisable branding was central to the international success of the American chains and played a key role in the early success of Red Rooster. Acknowledging the importance of strong branding, Harler approached Melbourne based graphic designer Garry Emery to complete the job. A graduate of Perth Technical College, Emery had been working...
closely with Harler for some time providing the graphics for his architectural practice. For Red Rooster he designed a distinctive mark: a red rooster on a blue background complimented by a generously spaced san serif Red Rooster logotype with red lettering and distinctive linked o’s. This modern branding was in the tradition of the Swiss typographic school and further established the chain as different: most American chains then relied on a more traditional typographic approach mostly clearly seen in Kentucky Fried Chicken and Red Barn who used a saloon style, ‘western’ font. Together, the crisp white stores and the bold red and blue graphics created a striking roadside structure and significantly provided an Australian alternative to the imported American model of fast food restaurants.

Red Rooster proved to be an instant success, and within several years it was quickly expanding across Western Australia. Early profits were allocated to a substantial advertising campaign including high profile TV spots which ensured the visibility of the brand among the public and safeguarded against future competitors (G Harler, Architect, pers comm 22 May 2018). Key marketing strategies also included keeping whole chicken prices low, below $2.00, in order to create strong brand allegiance with customers. After several years in operation, with McDonald’s yet to arrive in Perth, Kailis saw an opportunity to expand operations and established a hamburger restaurant, Red Bull. Also designed by Harler, Red Bull acted as a compliment to the existing Red Rooster stores and the two usually co-shared locations. After the sixth Red Rooster store was opened, Peter Kailis, then chairman of operations, bought out the remaining directors and Graham Harler’s involvement with the brand ceased. With two successful restaurants chains the brand continued to grow and in 1978 expanded into the eastern states opening two Red Roosters in Victoria, Preston and Glen Waverley. By 1981 it had become the largest Australian owned fast food company with 45 stores across Australia, including 28 Red Rooster and 5 Red Bull stores in Western Australia. At this point it was sold by Kailis to the Myer Emporium (The Sydney Morning Herald, 10 July 1981, p. 21) where the company was reshaped.

**Red Rooster as a Heritage Site**

While this account of the company relies heavily on one perspective, it nonetheless serves to demonstrate the potential value and complex networks present in the history of Australian fast food restaurants which emerged amidst the internationalising of Australian culture. The chain’s association with two major designers and its position as the only local first wave fast food chain that was able to compete on a level with the international chains denotes the first group of Red Rooster restaurants as sites of both historical, architectural and cultural significance in Australia. But given the nature of the building type traditional methods of heritage recognition present a difficult prospect. There are no extant examples of the Harler designed restaurants, there is limited archival material and only fragmented photographic records given the multiple ownership changes the brand has had. Accepting this, it is perhaps more useful to understand Red Rooster as a system, one which was developed within Australia’s increasing embrace of American culture, rather than stand-alone buildings. As Cameron Logan, Philip Goad and Julie Willis (2010) describe, there are a range of twentieth century building types which present similar challenges to traditional heritage structures, including hospitals, airports and shopping centres, all of which can be better understood as systems. They elaborate, ‘The functioning of those systems as facilities is usually what is most significant about them’ (Logan et al. 2010, p. 607).

In a 2016 paper, Elizabeth Taylor and David Nichols note that fast food restaurants exhibit an almost anonymous character and overwhelming ubiquitousness, describing them as ‘hiding in plain sight, as familiar and therefore as neutral as traffic lights of petrol stations’ (2016 p. 468). This assessment, taken with the acknowledgement of the restaurants as a system, begins to describe the inherent difficulties in identifying these restaurants as sites of cultural importance and their minor presence in the literature. The heritage significance of a restaurant chain like Red Rooster lies not just in the physical fabric of the individual stores. Rather, it is the systematised, streamlined approach applied to multiple stores, drawing on the expertise and knowledge of the designers and other key partners in the business amidst a broader internationalist turn that may be understood as the most significant aspect of the restaurants.
Conclusion

As one of the first and by far the most successful example of a local fast food chain, Red Rooster played a significant role in the development of Australian fast food culture, at a time when the entire culinary industry was undergoing transformation. This paper has shown that in the face of the international chain dominance Red Rooster established its own identity which it articulated through its strong graphic and architectural presence. Rather than adopting the brown nostalgia of American fast food with an emphasis on family dining, Red Rooster and other Australian chains utilised spare architectural motifs and primarily operated as take-away stores, as seen in chains like Henny Penny (1968), Robin Boyd’s prototype for Neptune’s Fishbowl (1970), and later Chicken Treat (1974). But while it largely rejected their formal imagery, Red Rooster embraced the service and operational model of the American chains which contributed significantly to the enduring success of the brand.

Through an exploration of the founding ideals and architectural strategies used by Red Rooster and the manner in which it established a distinct and separate identity as a local chain, this paper has identified the fast food restaurant as an alternative site for examining the recasting of Australian culture in a period of widespread internationalisation. A significant industry which developed in postwar Australia, the fast food restaurant provides an important yet difficult site for future heritage study.

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**Endnote**

1  Much of the information for this paper dealing with Red Rooster was pieced together from personal conversations held with founding partner of Red Rooster, Graham Harler. Given the difficulty in locating alternative sources, this paper relies heavily on his personal telling of the story.