Albert Victor Jennings, champion rifle shot, dental mechanic and former estate agent launched himself and two associates into the housing development market of 1932.¹

Edgar Gurney, an architectural student at the Melbourne Workingmen's College and a builder, William Vine were with Jennings, the core of the A.V. Jennings Construction Company Pty. Ltd. which was formed in that year. Jennings' brother-in-law, Horrie Amos was to provide the real estate outlet for the company's product; Jennings having a twelve year apprenticeship with Amos prior to forming the company.²

Housing styles had never been as diverse as at that time. Indian, Californian or plain American bungalow designs had been lauded by the growing number of illustrated magazines prior to and during the First World War.³ It seemed predictable that, after the saturation of the Federation or Queen Anne style earlier in the century, that this architectural homogeneity would continue into the next decades in a bungalow form. However, the War, the proliferation of architectural magazines and the Great Depression were all factors which determined otherwise.

Domestic architecture, overseas and local, was almost exclusively illustrated in for instance, the new publication The Real Property Annual (1913-1921) and its successors, Australian Home Builder (1922-25) and Australian Home Beautiful (1926-). Australian Homes was published from 1927 and the Sydney magazine Building had been circulating in all states since early in the century. The Salon (1913-37), the RVIA Journal and Proceedings and Architecture in Australia were all periodicals which dealt at least in part with housing. The photographs they offered and the new styles they paraded were persuasive to architect and home seeker alike.
The Great War had enabled young soldier-architects to see European architecture both old and new, and after the war to study in the major European cities. Some at this period studied in North America.4

Hence the 1920s were a diverse period within the architectural oeuvre, when house design was able to express immediately the new concepts obtained from abroad. The bungalow shared popularity with the Italian and Spanish villa and their associated formal gardens, and neo-Tudor and neo-Georgian houses began to appear.

After architects returned from their Depression-inspired tours of Europe and the United States, travel which was brought about by the dearth of work in Australia, other European styles began to penetrate the local consciousness.

From 1933 onwards, architects such as Mewton, Grounds, Calder and Hopkins were designing flat-roofed, rectanguloid houses with corner or strip windows and none of the romantic eclecticism of the previous decade. Northern Europe was their inspiration and a new kind of eclecticism had begun.

Edgar Gurney, the Jennings company architect, had not taken the almost obligatory overseas trip during the Depression. Instead, he and Jennings were entrepeneuring their first housing estate at Hillcrest Avenue, Caulfield South. This was both sides of one street and consisted of brick houses designed in the Italian and Spanish mode and reputedly all were sold before completion.
The philosophy of the company was to ensure smooth marketing progress. From the initial negotiations with the relevant municipality ensuring that the street and road construction proceeded, they evolved a home package seductive enough to convince a home buyer to outlay a deposit and obtain finance prior to seeing the finished house.  

Another attraction was that because of this form of financing, a brick house could be built, it was claimed, for the equivalent price of a timber one. The houses were 'architect-designed' and elaborately illustrated. They were also fitted out to an unusual degree for the period, and regarded as 'quality'. All this tended to reassure the bank financiers.

Later estates such as Beauview in Ivanhoe were launched with brochures which underscored this successful marketing process. Thus earlier estates were used as examples of the established value-for-price of the Jennings' house.

Their second gambit, the Beauville Estate (1934-35), did not have the benefit of a brochure, only a display home financed by the Colonial Gas Association. This was a guarantee of quality and by then the threat of the Depression had faded. Beauville consisted of sixty four brick houses grouped around Beauville Avenue, Murrumbeena. A social club, shops and tennis courts were included in the promise to prospective buyers. These were built on nearby Murrumbeena Road, guaranteeing access to passing trade.

Cul-de-sacs were not new to Victoria. The pre-war bungalow courts of the North American West Coast, such as those in Pasadena, California had popularised communal front gardens, low fences as well as the grouping of houses around a cul-de-sac. Rothesay Avenue, Brighton (1927) was a popular Melbourne subdivision.

Jennings' Beaumont estate (1935-) had four cul-de-sacs opening on to a spine (Melcombe Road). Anticipating the growing popularity of Neo-Tudor style houses, particularly in the picturesque domain of nearby Eaglemont, Jennings named his courts Hampton, Tudor, Surrey and Lincoln. However, the display home and site office for the estate (Hylsbroke) and the corner buildings which signposted each of the courts, were wholly Modern in their
styling, in the manner of Mewton and Grounds' work of four years previous. Flat roofs of cellular block precast concrete units, rectanguloid forms and corner metal-framed windows were the common elements of these key buildings. The Jennings' brochure commented:  

In the moulding of today's group home scheme, the designer should see that no one home is planned as a single unit, but as a part of the whole ... that each home blends harmoniously. This allows for an almost endless variety of original and exclusive designs to be incorporated in the scheme, which adds to the general appearance ... The last few years have witnessed a steady decline in the mass-production row of suburban homes, with uniform allotments and uniform design ... it is anathema to the eye and has no place where grace and beauty count.

Here at Beaumont however the Northern European Modern design was placed with unnerving proximity to a Tudor-based design, of clinker bricks and worse, large expanses of clinker cement-tiled roofs. The flat roofs, in some cases did allow a view to the taller Tudor stock behind, but this unlikely combination possessed more forethought than that. There was a similarity to the Modern manner in the juxtaposed masses seen under the stylised Tudor ornament. The ornament itself had little in common with the originals or the earlier fifteenth-century based designs of eclectic architects such as Desbrowe Annear (also at Mount Eagle).  

Edgar Gurney, the designer of this architectural smorgasbord, saw his role, in retrospect, as an attempt to reconcile elevational massing and planning with the prevailing architectural styles. These styles which were being popularised by the architectural press, consequently appeared desirable to the informed house buyer. Each of his designs, whether using the Northern European Modern style or the same region's style from 500 years earlier, received the same attention to balanced but asymmetrical massing and the same client-led adjustments to a basic plan-type. The internal-corner porch would still lead to a front lounge-living-kitchen area, on one side of a short entrance hall balanced by a bedroom wing on the other, regardless of the presence of stylistic distractions as diverse as Insulux glass bricks or clinker burnt heelers.  

The policy of catering for everybody has applied to all estates handled by A.V. Jennings Construction Company ... The smallest house on this estate is constructed with the same care and precision as the largest home ... there is no risk of slap-dash,
mass production builders dotting the estate here and there with mass-production houses ... A.V. Jennings' Construction Company is in complete control.

[Hence] the purchaser should tackle his new home with a mind entirely free of any set intention ... he must look upon it as a new venture, in which there are new inventions and styles. [Meanwhile] there are folk who contemplate building a new home and who spend their weekends touring the suburbs, noting a chimney in one place which takes their fancy; in another they see a porch that 'is nice', and so they proceed to patch up their 'Ideal Home' ... it is obviously a plan that ends in chaos.\textsuperscript{12}

Jennings could offer them a rational resolution of their scattered dreams, clothed in a style to suit their personal taste, but always tempered by the contemporary concerns of architectural design.

This limited bipartisan approach to design was to become increasingly unpopular with architects. Whether this was from the pervasion of the unilateral International Style or the post-Second World War enthusiasm for its adaption into an Australian domestic style, each successive style would be stated as being founded on functionalism and devoid of wicked eclecticism. Each style would place increasing restrictions upon the freedom of the designer and as the Walter Butlers and Marcus Martins of Victorian domestic architecture passed away, so did their romantic eclecticism.\textsuperscript{13}

Edgar Gurney and Victor Jennings can be then seen as representative of this ability to adapt both revial and modern styles and to attractively clothe a house package within an estate package. All this would be then clothed in the necessary framework which would guarantee the prevailing level of amenity.

Beaumont, perhaps more than any estate of the time, offered amenities such as cul-de-sac planning off a non-through road to protect residents from motor traffic (even then an accepted but usually ignored problem); electrical reticulation from the rear of the sites which consequently rided the streets of power poles; a limited range of building materials and styles; low front fences and unified street planting; provision in the basic price of many previously unavailable fittings and fixtures; and an adaption of a basic plan to suit each buyer. Despite the style chosen, this gave a unified result to massing and elevational treatment.
Surrey Court, Beaumont Estate, Ivanhoe. Here repetition of vertical porch elements and general massing unify aspects of a stylistically heterogeneous streetscape.

Beaumont Estate: dining buffet and cocktail bar and the Modern calm - 'absence of ornaments and relics ... not a hunting ground for spiders ... or a paradise for the dust imp'.

(photograph: Beaview Homes)
The estate's belated excursions into modern architecture at 6, 8, 17 and 25 Melcombe Road remain, however, the most prominent of their designs due to the relative scarcity of this form of single-house architecture in Australia. Despite the professed intention to unify them with the estate, their corner siting is a tacit recognition, by their designer, of their non-conformist appearance.

Edgar Gurney's own house, at 17 Melcombe Road (1937) echoes as far back as Gropius and Meyer's Fagus factory (Alfeld-an-der-Leine, 1911). It also resembles the Stooke House by Mewton, (Halifax Street, Brighton, 1934) and the Metropolitan Fire Brigades stations by Seabrook and Fildes, especially that at Brighton (Boxhall Street, 1938).  

Beaumont Estate, 17 Melcombe Road, Ivanhoe built for architect Edgar Gurney (1937): flat concrete malthoid covered roof, steel windows from Alfred Wall of Brunswick, cream and red pressed bricks ... 'modernity and sunshine.  

(photograph: Beaview Homes)
Beaumont Estate, 25 Melcombe Road, Ivanhoe (1938): 'Modern cream brick, flat roof design'. (photograph: Beaview Homes)

Red and cream face-brick walls, combined with off-form concrete may be seen there and in Dudok's Hilversum works just as they might be noted in E.F. Billson's Sanitarium Health Food Company Complex (Warburton, 1940–).16

By comparison with these Victorian examples, derived from similiar sources, the Beaumont houses achieve current significance from their relatively original condition, their proximity to each other and the reinforcement of the surrounding estates.

Ivanhoe's Mount Eagle sheltered Jennings' next development, the Beauview Estate, which overlooked the Yarra River flood plain. Just as Burley Griffin had undertaken (1914–16) on Mount Eagle itself, the axis of Beauview was designed as a contour-clinging zig-zag which terraced the hills for house lots and promoted picturesque views around minor cliff-side corners.

However, Beaumont was not to be surpassed by its successor. Flat roofs were jettisoned and replaced by hybrid Neo-Tudor roofs which would presumably never leak and steeply-pitched hips and gables made picturesque outlines against the hillside backdrop. By the very success of its surveyed landscaping, Beauview possessed no perceivable design unity of the built-form, with the exception of the adjacent shopping centre.

The Second World War terminated house construction including that of the Beauview estate. Part of it was completed by another developer. Thus Jennings' houses were interspersed among designs from another source and another time.19

The A.V. Jennings Company then quit the private house construction field, later claiming to have been the city's if not the country's first complete estate developer. The company then entered wartime service as a constructor of army huts, camps and hospitals.20 Post-war service was to mean houses for the Housing Commission of Victoria and eventual diversification and...
Beaumont Estate, 26 Melcombe Road, Ivanhoe (1938): 'A modern version of a Spanish Mission style ... double steel doors open from the lounge onto a spacious terrace. The bedroom windows extend to the floor and give a balanced appearance to the whole structure. Cordova tiles harmonise with the fan shaped exterior plaster effect."

(photograph: Beaview Homes)

Beaumont Estate, Neo-Tudor house in Surrey Court: stylised Tudor elements (half-timbering, patterned brickwork and high pitched roofs) on a 'Functional' plan.

(photograph: Beaview Homes)
expansion back into the private housing field: but in a vastly altered form.

Fifty years of the Company's existence was celebrated recently. That first ten year period of 1932-42 was recalled with some nostalgia as Jennings' formative period, when client-management contact was a direct one and the company's image was established in the market place.

Of that period, the Beaumont Estate is outstanding, both within the Jennings' perspective and that of twentieth century housing estates in Victoria. Innovative and diverse architectural forms were placed in an novel configuration and thus achieved, by the mutual reinforcement of a defineable image, an importance which perhaps transcends that of the earlier Modern single houses in the state.

The Beaumont Estate is also a candid expression of a bipartisan design philosophy. It may also shed light on other contemporary Modern houses and the comparatively small influence of the Modern regime which dictated to and derided bilateral designers after the Second War. This movement reached a peak in the early 1950s.

Let the designer know the style required, and a few external features to obtain the best final results ... good architecture never relies wholly upon ornamentation ... always the well-designed structure is the product of the plan, the materials used, the manner in which they are used to create the desired effect and the discreet balance of the various masses ... this is known as 'Functional Architecture' and is the foundation of what is today's modern Architecture.  

Later, 'Modern' protagonists were to eschew all ornament, deny the plan as the sole determinant of the design and decry the much-loved 'vertical features' and other important elements of the two inter-war decades.

Robin Boyd's persistent cataloguing of taste helped to express and perpetuate the concept of Modernism as a continuing, pure fire from the Bauhaus. His contemporaries' witch-hunt for eclectic designers and designs, such as Arthur Plaisted and his neo-Tudor Castle Towers (Marne Street, South Yarra, 1941) ran extreme when the same criticism of excessive expression in architecture was directed at a representative of the Bauhaus itself: Frederick Romberg, for Stanhill Flats (Queens Road, 1950).
The assumption of Modernism or Functionalism was claimed to underlay a later period, notably the 1960s, despite a regression into 'functional' or 'structural' ornament following the minimalism of the late 1940s and the early 1950s. A new substyle flourished under a variety of substyle names and philosophies such as Metabolism, Post-Metabolism and Brutalism. Each architectural work, when completed, was always said to have fitted its function and contained neither ornament nor architecture for architecture's sake.

However, just as the importation of the Northern European Modern Style in the 1930s, some of which is evident at Beaumont, the philosophy which engendered it, came from far away. This too became a new wave of a locally adapted 'new' style just as the villas had been before them.

Beaumont however, possessed few of these architectural strictures. It remains as a candid and intact adaption of fashionable forms to the use and facilities demanded in the booming housing market between the wars.
Suitable for a Corner Site with sunshine in every room.

Typical design from A.V. Jennings' Beauview Homes booklet.
REFERENCES


2. ibid.


5. Refer note 1.

6. ibid.

7. Comprehensive by-laws adopted at Heidelberg Shire under the Local Government Act 1915 (as amended in 1924), and consolidated in 1926. Refer Heidelberg Shire Council Minute Book 1925-28, p.48; By-law 81.

8. *Australian Home Beautiful*, 1 July 1927, pp. 38 et seq.


12. ibid.

13. Refer to Butler's Amesbury House flats, 237-239 Domain Road, South Yarra (1921) and Martin's, 10 Seddon Street, Ivanhoe (1936-37).

15. Butler, 'Twentieth Century Architecture and Works of Victoria, 1982, prepared for Royal Australian Institute of Architects (Victorian Chapter) as a Register (approximately 500 buildings) and data sheets.

16. ibid.


20. ibid.


22. Melbourne University Architectural Students Society, Smudges (periodical) as 'Blots of the Month'.

Acknowledgement

Richard Peterson, architect of Ivanhoe, provided the brochure, Beauview Homes, from which photographs and facts have been published.