

End of the road for retro motel, Caravilla



A rare colour image of the 1950s Caravilla Motel, now the Southern Right Motor Inn, in Warrnambool which will soon be demolished to make way for a car yard. Image courtesy of Lost Warrnambool, via 'Leonie'.

By Carol Altmann

There is a small irony in the fact that one of the earliest motels built in Warrnambool to accommodate motorists will be bulldozed to make way for a car yard.

The **Caravilla** motel, now known as the **Southern Right Motor Inn**, was one of several ultra-modern motels to spring up on the eastern entrance to Warrnambool during the late 1950s and early 60s to cater for a generation of post-war holidaymakers on the move.

Now, with the imminent demise of the Caravilla, the [Turn-In Motel](#) further along Raglan Parade will be the only Warrnambool motel from the 1950s that is still standing.



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The motel site has been bought by the Clinton Baulch Motor Group to expand its presence with a new car yard and showroom, with the property keys to be handed over in March next year.



The former Caravilla motel as it looks today with its distinctive 'Dutch hat' pitched roof.

While the budget motel has no doubt seen better days, its demolition has a particular poignancy for **Jenni DeGrandi**, the daughter of draftsman **Don Hunt** who designed the building.

"It's very sad for me to see that it's going," Jenni told *Bluestone*.

"As old as it is, I think it is still cheap accommodation for

people on a budget holiday (and) it's just another piece of Warrnambool's history going, sadly."

Don Hunt was part of the well-known architectural firm run by '[Tag' Walter](#) and **Bruce Auty** whose mid-century modern designs are now gaining a new appreciation across Warrnambool and other parts of the south-west.



The now demolished Aloha Motel Miami which has a similar high pitched roofline and expansive glazing to the Caravilla. American architects were pushing the boundaries in the 1950s and 60s and influencing styles around the world. Image: Miami Modern.

The Caravilla's reception had a distinctive 'Dutch-hat' design with a steeply pitched roofline, while the motel's 'wings' included the signature crazy paving decorative stone that typifies buildings of the era.

As *Bluestone* columnist **Clinton Krause** has written previously, it was a [period heavily influenced by trends](#) in the United States where energetic and creative designers were busting out of the stuffy confines of traditional architecture to reflect an age of space travel, relaxed home entertaining and the

automobile.

This influence can be seen in the Caravilla, which has similar lines to the now defunct and demolished Aloha Motel in Miami, Florida.



Up on the roof: the Caravilla comes to life on Raglan Pde, Warrnambool, in the late 50s. Image reproduced courtesy of Corangamite Regional Library.

English couple **Andrew and Mary McKenzie** bought the Southern Right Motor Inn just on 11 years ago, three years after it had been reinstated as a motel after serving for many years as student accommodation (Ethel Mitchell House) for the Warrnambool Institute of Advanced Education and later Deakin University.

"We had been to Warrnambool a couple of times and decided we wanted to move here, so Mary started looking for budget motels and we found this on the internet," Andrew explains.

"We've had 10 good years and most people in motels only last five, so we have done pretty well," he says.

Unlike the Turn In Motel, the majority of the original fittings and features of the Caravilla are long gone, replaced during several makeovers up until the 1980s.



A Rose Series photograph of the Caravilla in 1960 when it was one of the most modern motels in Warrnambool. Image: State Library Victoria.

As a budget motel, however, it has attracted a steady clientele.

"There are a lot of people who either don't want to or can't afford \$150-plus a night, so it has been great for them. Each year we have had it, apart from one or two years, it has got better and better," Andrew says.

The Caravilla/Ethel Mitchell House/Southern Right Motor Inn

will close in February in preparation for the March handover.

In the meantime, another of Don Hunt's buildings – a residence at 60 Jukes St, Warrnambool that was built in 1959 – has recently been given local heritage protection.



Faded glory – some of the original crazy paving at the motel. This paving is associated with so many buildings from the 50s and 60s in Warrnambool. Image: Bluestone Magazine

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Turning in to the Turn In Motel