



# MITCHAM'S FRONT GARDENS

## A STUDY OF CHANGING GARDEN STYLES AND PRACTICES IN POST WAR SUBURBAN ADELAIDE

by

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## ABSTRACT

From the 1960s fundamental changes in Australian society have taken place. It is hypothesised that the introduction of Australian indigenous plant material into suburban domestic gardens during that period might be viewed as a manifestation of cultural evolution within the vernacular landscape. This thesis consists of two parts.

Part I investigates ideas for garden studies through research into the history of modern gardens and a review of academic studies in related fields. Other published materials and popular influences, such as the media, are discussed for their contributions to suburban garden design, with particular reference to the recent cultivation of Australian native plants.

Part II presents two empirical studies undertaken in Mitcham, a local government area within the Adelaide metropolitan district. The study area contains residential dwellings spanning the period from 1840 to the present, set in a spatially diverse physical environment including portions of both the Adelaide Hills (Mount Lofty Ranges) and the adjoining plains. The first survey, which entailed observation and classification of over five thousand front gardens, led to the establishment of preliminary hypotheses which were investigated through a series of household interviews. Analysis and interpretation of data concluded that while some initial hypotheses were supported by the more detailed study, there was insufficient evidence to substantiate others.

Examination of the study area's physical and socio-economic characteristics revealed a distinct dichotomy between the Hills and Plains sectors. These differences were further reinforced by variations in garden styles commensurate with the dwelling construction period and the occupants' ages.

Data indicated that households established from the 1960s have incorporated an increasing proportion of Australian plant material into their gardens, paralleled with a trend towards a lower-maintenance, informal layout. Decreased areas of lawns are favoured, with some acceptance of these as seasonal features.

It was concluded that the domestic front garden remains a significant feature of the suburban landscape, generally given a high time and cost priority by owner-occupiers. It is believed that evolution of a unique Australian garden style will continue, to include a heterogeneous blend of native and exotic plant material within an informal setting.



## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that none of the material contained in this thesis has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text of the thesis. I consent to this thesis being made available for photocopying and loan if it is accepted for the award of the degree.

Elizabeth Margaret Caldicott

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