

ULTRA

Positions and Polarities Beyond Crisis

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Image: Michaelmore, Roeger & Russell, *Chester House*, Belair 1966, State Library of South Australia BRG 346/28/6/2.

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The Sleepout

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Keywords

Sleepout
Sleeping porch
Regional tradition
Housing shortage

Abstract

Going to bed each night in a sleepout—a converted verandah, balcony or small free-standing structure was, for most of the 20th century, an everyday Australian experience, since homes across the nation whether urban, suburban, or rural, commonly included a space of this kind.

The sleepout was a liminal space that was rarely a formal part of a home's interior, although it was often used as a semi-permanent sleeping quarter. Initially a response to the discomfort experienced during hot weather in 19th century bedrooms and encouraged by the early 20th century enthusiasm for the perceived benefits of sleeping in fresh air, the sleepout became a convenient cover for the inadequate supply of housing in Australian cities and towns and provided a face-saving measure for struggling rural families. Acceptance of this solution to over-crowding was so deep and so widespread that the Commonwealth Government built freestanding sleepouts in the gardens of suburban homes across Australia during the crisis of World War II to house essential war workers. Rather than disappearing at the war's end, these were sold to homeowners and occupied throughout the acute post-war housing shortage of the 1940s and 1950s, then used into the 1970s as a space for children to play and teenagers to gain some privacy.

This paper explores this common feature of Australian 20th century homes, a regional tradition which has not, until recently, been the subject of academic study. Exploring the attitudes, values and policies that led to the sleepout's introduction, proliferation and disappearance, it explains that despite its ubiquity in the first three-quarters of the 20th century, the sleepout slipped from Australia's national consciousness during a relatively brief period of housing surplus beginning in the 1970s. As the supply of affordable housing has declined in the 21st century, the free-standing sleepout or studio has re-emerged, housing teenagers of low-income families.

Introduction

1. Les Murray, *Selected Poems* (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2007), 78-9.

The practice of sleeping on the liminal space of a verandah began during Australia's early colonial period, because of a shortage of housing, and continued with the recognition that it frequently offered a more comfortable space than a bedroom to sleep in warmer weather. Poet Les Murray invoked the pleasures, comforts, discomforts, and fears of the experience in "The Sleepout" which begins 'Childhood sleeps in a verandah room, in an iron bed close to the wall, where the winter over the railing swelled the blind on its timber boom'.¹



Figures 1: McBriar family home with verandah sleepout on left, sectioned off by hessian, nd., collection of the State Library of Victoria.



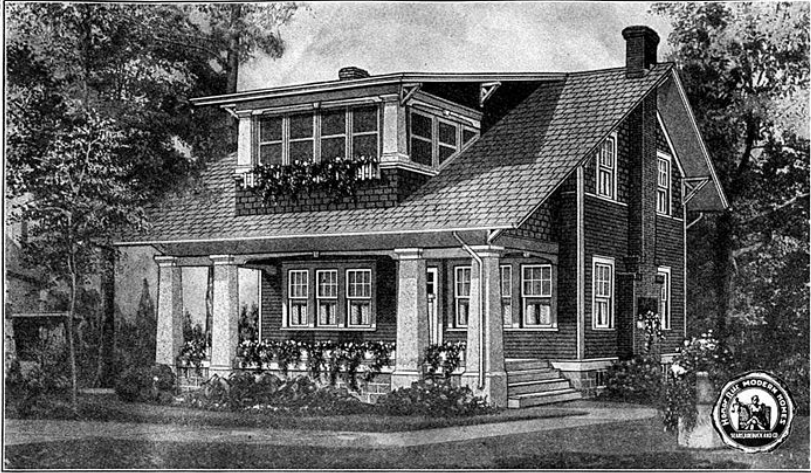
Figures 2: Detail of Figure 1.

2. Charlie Hailey, "From Sleeping Porch to Sleeping Machine: Inverting Traditions of Fresh Air in North America", *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 20, 2, (2009): 31.

3. Eve Kahn and Walter Jowers, "Night Moves: The Sleeping Porch from a Health-Conscious Era", *Chicago Tribune* 3 August 1986. Online at <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1986-08-03-8602260419-story.html> (accessed 18 October 2021).

In the United States "sleeping porches", most often second storey verandah-style sleepouts in middle-class homes, had been celebrated by early adopters, notably author Harriet Beecher Stowe in 1869², and commonly used from the late 19th to the mid 20th century. Understood as allowing more comfortable and healthy sleeping conditions and facilitating a closer relationship with nature, the heyday of the US sleeping porch was between 1900 and 1925.³

FIVE ROOMS AND SLEEPING PORCH

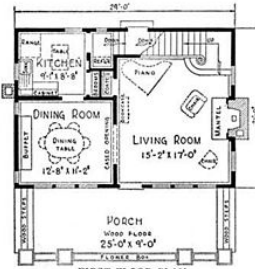


See Description of "Honor Built" Houses on Page 7.

Honor Built
The Sunbeam
 No. 3194. "Already Cut" and Fitted.
\$2,425⁰⁰

At the price quoted we will furnish all the material to build this five-room bungalow, consisting of mill work, medicine case, flooring, porch ceiling, siding, finishing lumber, screens for sleeping porch, buffet, building paper, eaves trough, down spout, sash weights, hardware, mantel, ironing board, kitchen cabinet, painting material, lumber, lath and shingles, and Fire-Chief Roofing for roof over sleeping porch. We guarantee enough material to build this house. Price does not include cement, brick or plaster.

Can be BUILT COMPLETE with high grade warm air heating plant, plumbing, electric wiring and lighting fixtures, including ALL material and ALL labor, for \$5,343.00. See page B in front of book.



FIRST FLOOR PLAN.

are five-cross panel design yellow pine with trim of clear yellow pine to match. Stairs leading to second floor are within arm's reach of either bedrooms or bathroom. Each bedroom has door leading to sleeping porch. A linen closet in hall.

We furnish our best "Quality Guaranteed" mill work, shown on pages 118 and 119, in beautiful grain and color. Windows are made of clear California white pine, with good quality glass set in with best grade of putty.

Paint for three coats outside, your choice of color. Varnish and wood filler for interior finish. Chicago Design hardware, see page 120.

Flooring Clear maple for kitchen and bathroom, clear oak for balance of first floor; clear yellow pine for second floor, and clear edge grain fir for porch.

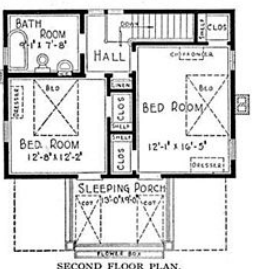
Built on a concrete foundation, excavated basement under entire building. Frame construction and first story sided with clear cypress bevel siding. Gables sided and main roof covered with best grade thick cedar shingles. All framing lumber is No. 1 yellow pine.

Basement has concrete floor. Basement, 7 feet high from floor to joists. First floor, 9 feet from floor to ceiling. Second floor, 8 feet 2 inches from floor to ceiling.

A FIVE-ROOM modern bungalow with open air sleeping porch.

First Floor The large living room has Colonial stairs and mantel, and stairs to basement which can be reached from the kitchen or from the outside. See modern kitchen with handy kitchen cabinet, broom closet providing storage for brooms, mops, pails, scrub brushes, table leaves, etc. Notice the built-in folding ironing board, also space for refrigerator just outside of kitchen door, handy to the iceman and away from the stove. Dining room has buffet facing the cased opening with a window on each side. We furnish two-panel yellow pine doors on the first floor with clear yellow pine trim to match.

Second Floor We furnish our Franklin front doors leading to the sleeping porch. Inside doors on second floor are within arm's reach of either bedrooms or bathroom. Each bedroom has door leading to sleeping porch. A linen closet in hall.



SECOND FLOOR PLAN.

This house can be built with the rooms reversed. See page 3.

OPTIONS

We will furnish Sheet Plaster and Finish instead of lath for \$185.00 extra. See page 114.

Storm Doors and Windows. \$78.00 extra.

Screen Doors and Windows. black wire, \$58.00 extra; galvanized wire, \$63.00 extra.

If Mantel is not wanted, deduct \$65.00.

This house can be built on a lot 36 feet wide.

For prices of Plumbing, Heating, Wiring, Electric Fixtures and Shades see page 115.

Our Guarantee Protects You—Order Your House From This Book.

Price Includes Plans and Specifications

Page 72.

SEARS, ROEBUCK AND CO.

Figures 3: House with sleeping porch from the United States company Sears, Roebuck and Co. 1923 catalogue.

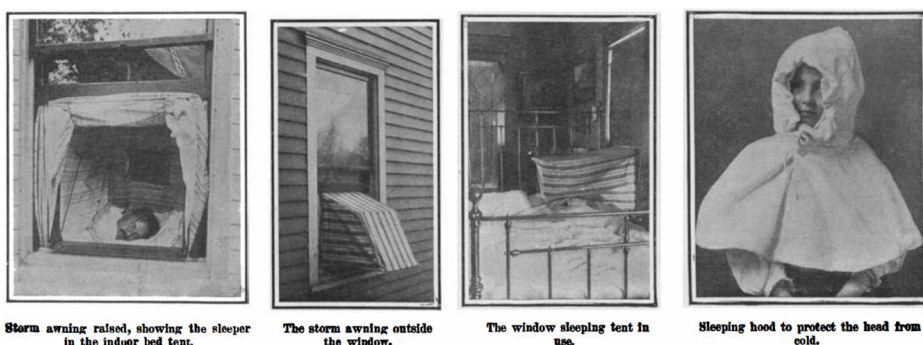


Figures 4: Bedroom interior with attached sleepout space from *Country Life in America* magazine, May 1909.

4. "Sleeping Out Porches, An American Idea", *Herald* (VIC) 21 April 1910, 3.

5. 'Immanuel', "Various Verses", *Evening News* (Sydney, NSW) 14 October 1911, 11 and *Daily Advertiser* (Wagga Wagga, NSW) 25 October 1911, 4.

From 1906 Australian newspapers reported the trend for sleeping porches as health-giving and a home treatment and means of isolating family members suffering from chronic illness, tuberculosis being meant, but rarely mentioned. A 1910 article in the *Melbourne Herald* noted that while this "American habit" had taken root in Australia, it was mostly in the form of sleeping in tents in the garden unlike the more permanent open-air bedrooms found in the United States.⁴ Not everyone bought into the sleepout habit—a satirical verse titled "The Fresh-Air Brigade" syndicated in Australian newspapers during 1911 described the members of a family as sleeping in a range of locations including a roof, porch and in a room with a 'window tent', a device for allowing a sleeper to remain indoors while their head was exposed to the outside⁵ (Fig. 5).



Storm awning raised, showing the sleeper in the indoor bed tent.

The storm awning outside the window.

The window sleeping tent in use.

Sleeping hood to protect the head from cold.

6. Katherine Louise Smith, "Indoor Bed Tents", *Scientific American*, 4 December 1909, 416-7.

Figures 5: The window tent, a device to facilitate sleeping in the fresh air, from a 1909 issue of *Scientific American*.⁶

Verandah and Balcony Sleepouts

7. "Out-of-Door Sleeping. For Children", *The Catholic Press* (Sydney, NSW) 2 September 1915, 10.

8. "Sleeping Out", *Sydney Morning Herald* (NSW) 20 January 1915, 5.

9. "The B.S.'s Letter Bag", *Spectator and Methodist Chronicle* (Melbourne, Vic) 13 March 1914, 443.

10. "Trinity Grammar School: Extensive Additions", *Age* (Melbourne), 25 November 1925, 13.

11. Catriona Quinn, e-mail message to author, December 5, 2021.

A converted verandah or balcony was regarded by many Australians as a healthier environment for children during the early twentieth century. This view signified the popular acceptance of modern germ theory and abandonment of the long-held belief that miasma was the cause of most disease. A 1915 article in the *Catholic Press* argued that '[o]ut of door sleeping, particularly during the summer, is advisable for children of any age' with the proviso that 'in cold weather [it] is not best for a child under two and a half to three years old'.⁷ It was nevertheless common for city and regional orphanages, hospitals and boarding schools from the early 20th century to accommodate children all year round on the verandahs of the converted Boom period mansions that they often occupied. The perceived value of sleepout accommodation for children is evident in the fact that the Children's Home in Burwood, Sydney in 1915, had balconies 'specially built for the children's beds'.⁸ *The Spectator and Methodist Chronicle* of Melbourne noted in 1914 that glass louvres enclosing a verandah in a Methodist orphanage will allow it to be used as a playroom and sleepout for infants.⁹ This was not only characteristic of living conditions considered sufficient for wards of the state and children suffering from diseases like tuberculosis, Melbourne's Trinity College housed boarders, the sons of affluent families, in sleepout accommodation from the 1920s.¹⁰ At Riverview School (St Ignatius College) in Lane Cove, New South Wales, verandah sleepout accommodation was popular among boarders until the late 1990s.¹¹



Figure 6: Child at Dalwood Children's Home, Seaforth, NSW, 1920s, 11417WJ1. Photographer Sam Hood, State Library of New South Wales. The presence of mosquito netting above the bed suggests the room is a sleepout.



Figure 7. Balcony sleepout, Maffra, NSW, 1966. Photographer John T Collins. Collection of State Library of Victoria.



Figure 8. Photograph (by author) of balcony sleepout in Nicholson Street, Fitzroy, Melbourne, 2021.

12. "Sleeping Out", *Sydney Morning Herald* (NSW) 20 January 1915, 5.

13. "Sleeping Out", 5.

14. "Sleeping Out", 5.

Advice about the benefits for children in sleeping out of doors was contradicted by occasional grisly stories, like a 1915 one about a Perth child occupying a verandah sleepout who had been found with her head 'battered in'.¹² The article warned that '[p]eople who are given to this healthful habit are apt to make a fetish of it and sacrifice several other considerations'.¹³ Nevertheless, the author goes on to claim that sympathy for soldiers on active service for sleeping in the trenches is misplaced since 'a generation that sleeps out knows it to be no actual hardship'.¹⁴ This author's assertion conveys not only a startling degree of ignorance about the climate of northern Europe and conditions on the Western Front during World War I, but more importantly, the widely held belief that sleepout accommodation was part of the process of producing tough healthy colonial subjects suited to soldiering, frontier life and other requirements of the nation and the British Empire. The tendencies for rural families to be large, for farm incomes to be unreliable and the costs of home renovation to be expensive, resulted in sleeping out on verandahs being the norm on Australian country properties in the early 20th century, especially for boys and young men. After the practice of sleeping out as a healthy alternative was normalised in cities and towns during the interwar period, it took some of the pressure off state governments in dealing with housing shortages.



Figure 9: View of the back of a farmhouse with sleepout, 1910-18, Albert Jones, photographer, collection of the State Library of Victoria.



Figure 10: Verandah sleepout at the rear of Perth house constructed of timber and flywire, 1925. Collection of State Library of Western Australia, BA1271/251.

15. "Week-enders", *Sydney Morning Herald* (NSW) 26 September 1917, 5.

Verandah and balcony sleepouts were also used in Australia from the early 20th century to provide affordable holiday accommodation on farms, at guesthouses and hotels. Since the tourism industry was in its infancy, small family businesses were relied upon to provide accommodation rather than commercial hotel chains. A 1917 article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* by a young widow with a large country house, offered advice for other women, explaining how she both rented out rooms on weekends and holidays and provided up to ten beds for male boarders on a sleepout verandah.¹⁵

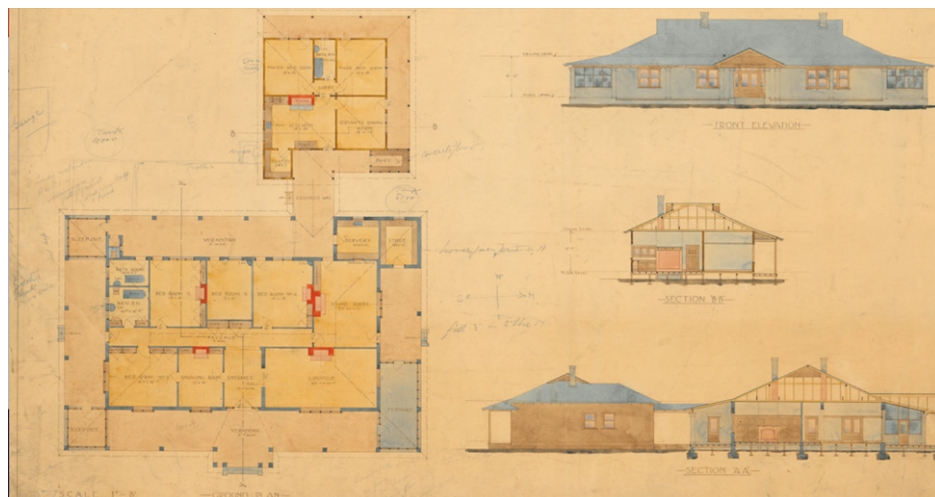


Figure 11: Detail of plan and design of house showing two enclosed verandah sleepouts for use by the affluent Ross family, by architect Albion Henry Walkley, 1924-30, collection of the State Library of Victoria.

Plans for modest middle-class homes in the 1920s often featured a sleepout room as a cost-effective overflow bedroom for an expanding family or as a space for the whole family to sleep on hot nights and a playroom throughout the year. Sitting beneath the home's roof in the manner of the American sleeping porch, they were cheaply enclosed with flywire stretched over timber frames or in other cases, merely marked out with a low perimeter wall of timber or brick to waist height. A 1929 house plan by Stephenson and Meldrum (Fig. 13) shows a sleepout adjoining the second bedroom, its position, access and twin beds suggesting its double use as a playroom and place for two children to sleep in warm weather.



Figure 12: Stephenson and Meldrum design for a "Spanish Type" house with sleepout, *Australian Home Beautiful*, April 1929.

Figure 13. Stephenson and Meldrum plan of "Spanish Type" house with sleepout, *Australian Home Beautiful*, April 1929.

Uncertainty about employment from the mid-1920s into the Depression years of the early 1930s meant that young people often delayed marriage, remaining at home longer or brought their new husband or wife to live in the family home. As a result, young adults and children would find themselves occupying sleepouts to make room for married siblings, members of extended family who needed support, or boarders. Author George Johnston who was born in 1912, describes in his autobiographical novel *My Brother Jack*, how he and his brother were turned out of their room to make space for paying guests; invalids

of World War I who had been discharged from the military hospital in Melbourne where their mother worked as a nurse. For years the brothers slept in

16. George Johnston, *My Brother Jack* (London: Fontana Books, 6th ed., 1967), 11.

a make-shift bed on the floor of a sleepout, which really was only a section of the back verandah partitioned off by flywire screens and a lot of damp ferns. But there must have been a great deal of this sort of thing at that time—being turned out of beds and sleeping in provisional rooms, I mean. Not only in our house or our suburb, but everywhere.¹⁶

17. David Gruen and Donald Clark, 'What Have We learnt? The Great Depression in Australia from the Perspective of Today', 19th Annual Colin Clark Memorial Lecture, Brisbane, 11 November 2009. Online at: https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-03/03_Colin_Clark_speech.pdf (accessed October 25, 2021).

18. Australian Government, *Australian Yearbook* 1953, 40, 553.

As unemployment rose during the Depression and the amount spent on housing halved,¹⁷ the number of people occupying all kinds of sleepouts continued to grow. While the 1933 Australian Census did not record the members of households occupying sleepouts, it counted almost 38,000 Australians living in entire dwellings whose walls were made of calico, canvas or hessian, 72,000 with walls of iron or tin and 17,000 of "other materials". These statistics didn't include the housing of Indigenous Australians,¹⁸ who because of gross inequality and resulting low incomes, often improvised shelter from whatever materials were to hand, within and on the fringes of towns and cities. They also made use of verandah sleepouts in rural, regional and urban settings.

Free-Standing Sleepouts

City and townsfolk often commissioned the construction of small free-standing sleepouts in suburban back yards during the 1920s, both for family members and to offer much-needed low-cost rental accommodation like the examples in Figs. 14 and 15. As Australia's economy improved from the mid-1930s the capital cities saw a modest growth in the construction of fashionable apartment buildings, duplexes, and houses for the middle-class, but few homes were built for working-class families. The failure of housing supply to keep up with population growth, especially in Sydney, Adelaide and Melbourne, kept city rents high and discouraged landlords from making improvements. *Australian Home Beautiful* published its first article offering plans and instructions for a free-standing sleepout in 1939 (Fig. 16) suggesting continued acceptance of this solution to the housing shortage.



Figure 14: Freestanding sleepout at a homes in Plenty Road, Heidelberg c. 1925, The Biggest Family Album in Australia collection, Museums Victoria, MM7528.

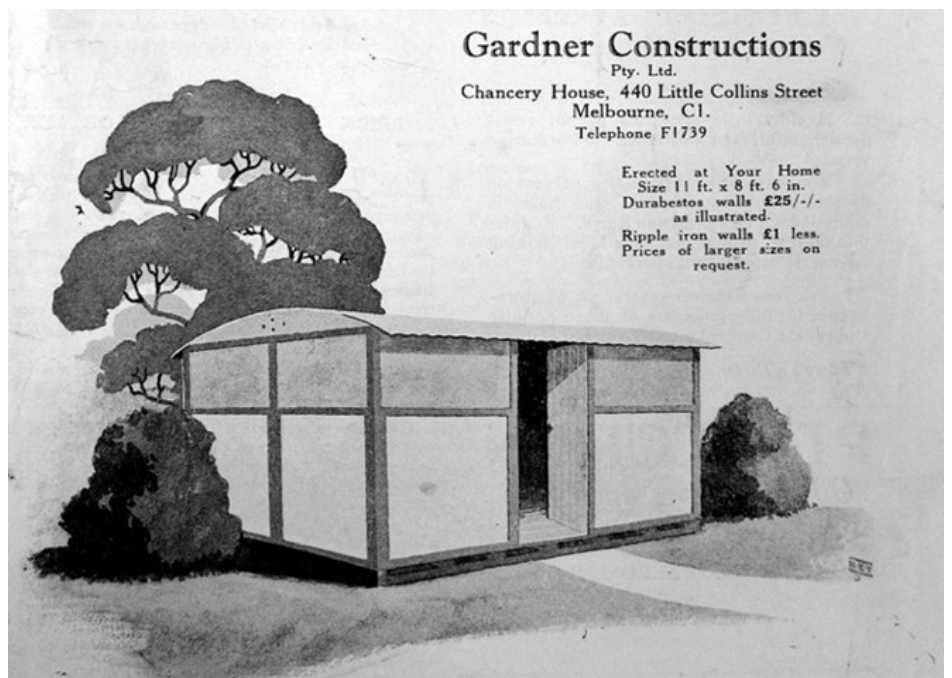


Figure 15: Advertisement from *Australian Home Beautiful*, March 1928.

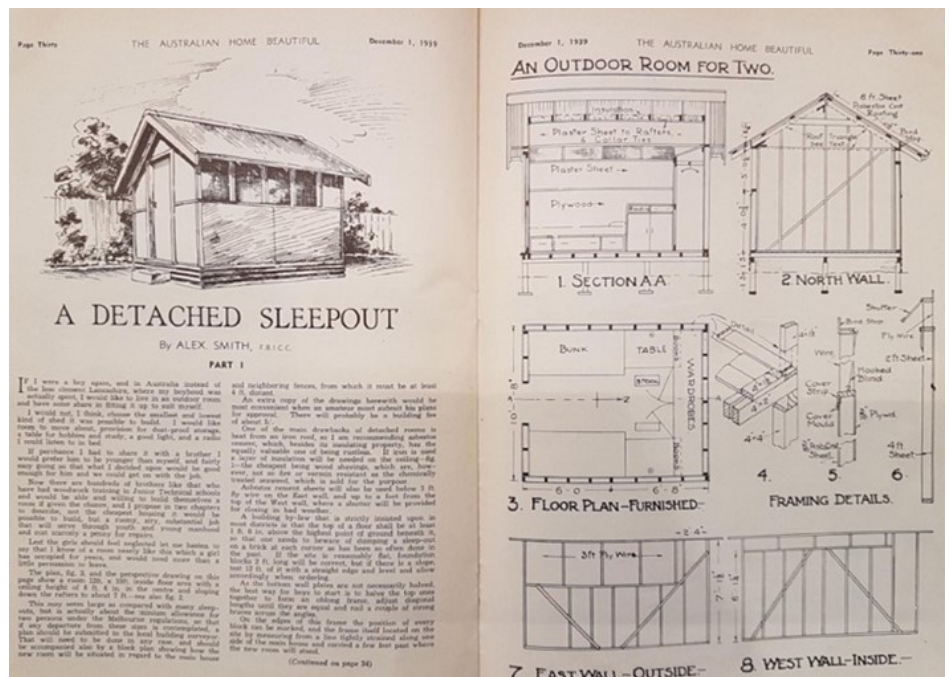


Figure 16: The first of a series of articles on how to build a sleepout in *Australian Home Beautiful*, December 1939.

19. Kate Darian-Smith, *On the Home Front: Melbourne in Wartime: 1939-1945* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2nd ed., 2009), 50.

The outbreak of World War II in September 1939 exacerbated a housing crisis that would have been inevitable with the end of the Depression. While those who joined the armed forces were provided with accommodation, others who moved to the cities to take up war work found it difficult to find a place to live. The expanding manufacture of weapons, munitions, vehicles and aircraft created a significant growth of employment in state capitals and higher wages were deemed necessary to attract employees. This drew unemployed and underemployed men and women and their families from surrounding regions.¹⁹

20. "Shortage of Homes: 30,000 Needed in Sydney", *Sydney Morning Herald* (NSW) 7 November 1941, 6.

21. Darian-Smith, *On the Home Front*, 86.

22. Susan Marsden, "Housing the Workers in South Australia during World War Two", first published as "Housing the Workers", *Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia*, 16, 1988. Online at <http://www.sahistorians.org.au/175/documents/housing-the-workers-in-south-australia-during-worl.shtml> (accessed 29 November 2020).

A 1941 survey showed a shortage of 30,000 homes in Sydney²⁰ and in Melbourne, where the majority of Australia's munitions would be made, the shortfall was conservatively estimated at 25,000 homes.²¹ Adelaide added 14,000 new factory workers to produce arms and other machinery for the war between 1939 and 1941 and after armament production began, added another 26,000 creating a severe housing shortage.²² Nevertheless, the Commonwealth Government's commitment to war effort led it to impose a series of restrictions on domestic construction that became absolute from 1941 under the National Security (Building Operations) Regulations. After this time only state governments were allowed build new homes to address crucial needs, mostly for war widows, soldiers and their families classed as totally disabled and the elderly, while the Commonwealth's meagre wartime building program for civilians was devoted to housing war workers, mostly hostels and both permanent and temporary homes for married essential war workers and their families.

23. Darian-Smith, *On the Home Front*, 90.

The public was urged by governments to rent their spare rooms to war workers to help with the wartime housing crisis.²³ Speculators leased larger houses then sublet individual rooms. Many landlords kept their costs low by ignoring repair orders that housing authorities were slow to enforce, given the undersupply of building materials. Some

24. Editorial, *Advertiser* (Adelaide, SA), 10 July 1943, 7.

25. "District Housing Denounced", *Newcastle Sun* (NSW), 21 January 1941, 3.

26. "Sleep Outs", *Cairns Post* (Qld), 29 March 1944, 2.

27. "Sleepouts to Let", *Advertiser* (Adelaide, SA), 25 March 1942, 8.

householders converted their verandahs and balconies into sleepouts to rent. The author of a letter seeking advice on building a sleepout in the 'Homemaker Queries' column of the *Adelaide Advertiser* in 1943 was advised that constructions costing over £20 required a permit and that householders should approach timber merchants as soon as an application was lodged, since supplies were limited.²⁴ Both homeowners and tenants with space in their back yards built free-standing sleepouts, often re-using materials from existing sheds and outdoor structures such as laundries. This may not have produced quality accommodation, but the housing shortage was so critical that families were squatting in railway carriages and shanties made from flattened oil cans in Melbourne's western suburbs and in Newcastle NSW it was reported that people were living in drainpipes, viaducts and tunnels.²⁵

By 1942 the Commonwealth Government's War Workers' Housing Trust (WWHT) developed a scheme to supply standardised sleepouts for erection in suburban back yards that could be shared by two war workers. These sleepouts were rented to householders for 15 shillings a month unfurnished, or 18 shillings furnished, with the Trust requiring homeowners to allow tenants access to the family bathroom and kitchen.²⁶ Constructed with a timber frame, covered with asbestos cement sheets and roofed with corrugated asbestos cement sheets, the walls and ceilings were often lined with Caneite and their floors covered with linoleum. Initially, they came in two sizes, 9 x 9 ft (2.74 m) and 9 x 12 ft (2.74 x 3.65 m), although the smaller size was soon discontinued.²⁷



Figure 17: Sleepout of fibrous cement sheet, roofed in corrugated cement sheet and lined with Caneite in Brunswick, Victoria, possibly a WWHT sleepout. Photograph from a private collection.

28. "Sleepouts to Let", 8.

29. Marsden, "Housing the Workers in South Australia during World War Two", unpag.

30. "Control of Sleepouts with Agents", *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane, Qld), 30 September 1943, 4.

Because Australia had not yet developed a modern tourism industry prior to World War II, one of the roles of state tourism organisations was to provide a register of acceptable private accommodation for interstate and country visitors.²⁸ With less to do during wartime, the South Australian Director of Publicity and Tourism took on the administration of the sleepout scheme²⁹ while in Queensland it was administered by the Real Estate Institute.³⁰

There was spirited opposition to the quality of the WWHT sleepouts

31. "Overcrowding", *Singleton Argus* (NSW), 28 June 1944, 2.

32. "Sleep outs", *Windsor and Richmond Gazette* (NSW), 5 July 1944, 1.

33. "Not Relaxing Home Limit", *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane, Qld), 25 May 1944, 3.

34. "Sleep-Out Scheme", *West Australian* (Perth, WA), 25 October 1943, 2.

and to the scheme in general. New South Wales politician W. Davies scornfully referred to them as 'fowl houses', which in their size and materials they resembled.³¹ Local government bodies and councillors criticized them as creating slums and argued that once they were erected, it would be difficult to have them removed.³² Yet there was no shortage of applications from householders to obtain them. The head of the Accommodation Branch of the War Housing Division of the Labour and National Services Department reported in 1944 that more than 500 sleepout applications had recently been approved in Melbourne and other cities reported hundreds of applications.³³ In order to calm the concerns of local government, the Trust gave assurances that it would retain ownership of the sleepouts until the end of the war and householders would only be allowed to purchase them at that time, if they complied with local building regulations.³⁴

The Sleepout in the Post-war Era

35. Alastair Greig, *The Stuff Dreams Are Made Of: Housing Provision in Australia 1945-1960* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1995), 1.

36. Greig, *The Stuff Dreams Are Made Of*, 36.

Towards the end of the war, many of the people who had put off marrying and having children delayed no longer. The rapid rate of family formation and the subsequent baby boom put further pressure on housing supply. The Commonwealth Department of Postwar Reconstruction commissioned a report on the nation's housing, delivered in 1943, which estimated a shortage of 300,000 homes at the end of the war.³⁵ The 1947 Census recorded that over 10 per cent of Australian dwellings were shared by more than one family and 80,000 people were 'sleeping out', meaning that they were homeless.³⁶

37. Ruth Cracknell, *Ruth Cracknell: A Biased Memoir* (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin, 1997), 1-2.

38. Colin Fraser, "Home in Three Squares", *Australian Home Beautiful* 27, July 1948, 24-5, 76.

The post-war housing crisis meant many Australians in capital cities and regional centres continued to use and construct new sleepouts. Actor Ruth Cracknell reported in her memoir that her newly married sister and husband Bill, who had just returned from war service, took the second bedroom of the family home in Chatswood leaving her to sleep in a 'part-enclosed side verandah [which] sat in the treetops'.³⁷ A 1948 article in *Australian Home Beautiful* described the conversion of an interwar sleepout five years earlier by Bet Olsen in the backyard of her husband's family home in the Melbourne suburb of Heidelberg. The so-called 'Sleepout flat' (Fig. 8), was praised as a 'compact self-contained' home with a 'distinctive atmosphere of friendliness and informality'.³⁸ That this young middle-class couple were still living in such cramped circumstances three years after the war's end and that the magazine was publishing this story as a useful 'how-to' story indicates the depth of the housing crisis and the continued importance of the sleepout as a means of dealing with it.



Figure 18: This sleepout converted into a flat in 1943 was still in use in 1948, *Australian Home Beautiful*, July 1948.

39. Graham Holland, Emoh Ruo: *Owner Building in Sydney* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1988), 230.

40. "Ban Suggested", *Argus* (Melbourne, Vic) 3 August 1950, 5.

Because Australia had not yet developed a modern tourism industry in the early post-war era many Australians who were unable to obtain a builder, even when they had accumulated sufficient wartime savings to pay for one, began building their own homes. An average of thirty per cent of Australian homes in the 1950s were owner-built.³⁹ Some local councils made life difficult for owner-builders while others were keen to see the transformation of greenfield sites into new suburbs. Melbourne's Box Hill Council, for instance, encouraged owner builders by allowing them, once the house frame was erected, to build a sleepout on the house block to live in while their house was being finished. The council believed its generosity was abused when some owner-builders failed to progress their home-building past the framing stage or once the home was completed, moved in, and then rented the sleepout to another family rather than demolishing it or repurposing it as a shed or garage as was the council's stated plan.⁴⁰



Figure 19: Timber sleepout used by Mrs Eager (pictured) while her sons David and Will slept in the tent on the right as they built a house for David and his fiancée Daphne in Wandin, Victoria 1947-8. Photograph collection of the Eager family.

41. Ian Burnley, *The Impact of Immigration on Australia: A Demographic Approach* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001) 102 and Greig, *The Stuff Dreams Are Made Of*, 5.

42. "Preying on Migrants Here", *The Evening Advocate* (Innisfail, Qld), 3 January 1950, 3.

43. "Open Your Homes the Governor Said...", *Argus* (Melbourne, Vic) 3 March 1955, 1.

44. Housing Commission Victoria, 1964, *Twenty Sixth Annual Report for the period 1 July 1963, to 30 June 1964*, 9.

The shortage of labour holding back Australia's overall economic development and the supply of housing and commodities, encouraged bi-partisan support for the post-war mass-migration program. While migrant labour helped overcome the worst of the housing crisis by the mid-1950s, in the short term, from the late 1940s and into the 1960s it strongly impacted the lives of those newly arrived.⁴¹ Non-British migrants were discriminated against in both the private rental market and in obtaining public housing and therefore had fewer choices in the kind of space they could rent. Newspapers frequently reported exploitation of recent European migrants by landlords charging them unreasonable rents for sleepout accommodation.⁴²

Building approval applications to local governments in the 1950s show that sleepouts continued to be built, both as free-standing structures and partly enclosed sections of verandahs. As they had during the war, many post-war local councils resisted the construction of freestanding sleepouts and sought to remove those already built. In one case, Melbourne's Chelsea Council pursued a landlord who was renting eleven 'sub-standard' sleepouts in the Supreme Court to have them demolished. Despite the demise of their reputation, sleepouts that had become vacant in the early 1950s were used once again in Melbourne, to provide accommodation for visitors to the 1956 Olympic Games.⁴³

Verandah sleepouts were such an accepted form of habitation that state governments continued providing them in post-war public housing. Victorian Housing Commission (HCV) concrete homes of the 1950s for example, came in three sizes, two bedrooms, three bedrooms and for larger families, three bedrooms with a back verandah sleepout. Between 1963-4 older HVC homes with sleepouts were updated with solid walls at tenants' requests.⁴⁴



Figure 20: Concrete homes produced by Housing Commission Victoria (HCV), Olympic Village, Heidelberg, Victoria.

Figure 21. Concrete homes produced by HCV came in three sizes, the largest was three bedrooms with a rear sleepout.

When existing sleepouts were not demolished or rented out in the post-war era they were used in the 1960s and 1970s for storage and by children all over the country as a play space. The notion that exposure to fresh air was beneficial to children's health continued to have currency so that sleepouts retained their use for children and adolescents while they became regarded as unsuitable for occupation by most adults. Children were still encouraged to occupy sleepouts in spells of hot weather, their lack of insulation meant they were quick to cool down

on summer evenings and they were commonly used for children's sleepover parties during school holidays.



Figure 22: Sleepout lined with Caneite, used as a play space in Brunswick, Victoria, 1993. Photograph from a private collection.

The children of the war generation, the baby boomers, were more well-educated than their parents and had grown up in an increasingly affluent society, catered to by a consumer culture that responded to their desires. The 'generation gap'—the mismatch between the values and assumptions of war generation parents and their children, created tensions that were often alleviated by the space provided by the separate sleepout for sleeping and socialising. They served throughout the 1970s as a kind of safety net for teenagers, keeping them at home while allowing some privacy and independence. Newly built sleepouts were often called 'bungalows' to differentiate them from the utilitarian, supposed eyesores of the interwar and war years.

In Australian working-class suburbs such as Melbourne's Brunswick, sleepouts have remained in continuous use, often occupied by recently arrived migrants, refugees and Australians on low incomes. Interwar sleepouts and post-war bungalows continue to provide accommodation for those unable to afford to rent an apartment, with few social connections, unable to negotiate share house accommodation and without access to social housing.

The Revival of the Sleeping Porch and the Re-Emergence of the Sleepout

45. Maggie Burch "What is a Sleeping Porch?", *Southern Living*, 7 January 2020. Online at <https://www.southernliving.com/home/porch/sleeping-porch> (accessed 20 October 2021), Donna Boyle Schwartz, "Why We Love the Sleeping Porch", Bob Vila. Online at <https://www.bobvila.com/articles/sleeping-porch/> (accessed 27 October 2021), Jennifer Zuri, "Who Doesn't Want a Summer Sleeping Porch?", *Town and Country Living*, 23 June 2021. Online at <https://town-n-country-living.com/summer-sleeping-porch.html> (accessed 28 October 2021).

The post-war availability and increasing affordability of home air conditioning led to the disappearance of US sleeping porches. Walls of flywire were replaced by solid walls and windows, turning them into ordinary rooms. New concerns about the environmental cost of air conditioning, the popular embrace of biophilic principles and interest in the effects of natural light on circadian rhythms has encouraged a recent trend in reviving the use of sleeping porches in older American homes through demolishing walls and reinstating flywire and glass.⁴⁵

46. "What We Do", Kids Under Cover. Online at <https://www.kuc.org.au/what-we-do/> (accessed June 30, 2021).

In Australia and the United Kingdom in recent years the term sleepout has come to mean a kind of event, where children and or adults sleep out of doors or undercover but without the benefit of a bed. These events are held to raise money for charities, often those supporting people experiencing homelessness and to generate awareness about the issue in cities and regional towns. Secondary schools in Australia hold sleepout events to encourage empathy in young adults, to broaden their social experience and to build community.

Kids Under Cover is a contemporary organisation addressing the issue of youth homelessness with an early intervention approach that has benefitted from these sleepout or 'camp out' events. The Melbourne-based charity has extended its reach to the ACT and Queensland, raising funds to build and administer one and two bedroom 'studios' with a bathroom (Fig. 23). It aims to provide a 'stable, secure space for a young person to grow and study while keeping them connected with their family or carer, thus reducing the risk of them being forced to leave home prematurely.'⁴⁶ These 21st century sleepouts are fully demountable so they can be re-used for a new family on a new site once they are no longer needed. They are awarded via community service organisations with links to Kids Under Cover, which works in partnership with the local government, a social worker and the family. The term 'studio' is seen as preventing the emphasis on the young person being 'out' of the home, which the organisation emphasizes is the very thing that these structures are intended to prevent.



Figure 23: A studio supplied by charity Kids Under Cover, <https://www.kuc.org.au/library/youth-homelessness-facts-statistics/>.

Conclusion

The social practice of sleeping on a verandah sleepout has lost its connection to bringing up healthy, toughened colonial subjects. Accommodating either children or adult family members on a veranda or balcony sleepout is more likely to be understood today as evidence of extreme disadvantage than a means of obtaining the perceived health benefits of fresh air. Recent research showing the positive impact of natural light on sleep patterns and the popular application of biophilic principles has facilitated a limited revival of the American sleeping porch and may do the same for the Australian sleepout.

The re-emergence of the free-standing sleepout after a gap of four decades, now renamed a studio, as a way of keeping young people out of harm's way and connected to family while providing them with a degree of autonomy and privacy is a worthy continuation of this form of regional building. Given the continued shortage of affordable housing in 21st century Australian cities and towns, improved prefabricated versions of the regional form of the freestanding sleepout might be offered even more widely than by a single charity, as a solution for people of a range of ages in seeking temporary low-cost housing, including tertiary students providing in-home care and companionship for the elderly.

The sleepout in its verandah, balcony and free-standing forms proved an economical and convenient means of dealing with a succession of housing crises, from the early years of colonial settlement to the mid 1960s. Despite a brief period of housing surplus in the late 20th century, the shortage of affordable housing and the problem of generational conflict exacerbated by household over-crowding continue to increase in most Australian cities and many towns in the 21st century. Updated freestanding sleepouts may offer a partial, temporary solution to these perennial issues as they did throughout the 20th century.