





# RUSHALL PARK

**Independent living units:  
designing for aging with dignity  
MGS Architects**

**MGS Architects**  
Architecture, Interiors  
and Urban Design

**Client**  
Abound Communities  
(formerly Old Colonists'  
Association of Victoria)

**Awards**  
**2021**  
Victorian AIA Architecture  
Commendation  
for Residential Architecture —  
Multiple housing

**2020**  
World Architecture News  
(WAN) Shortlist

Creating environments that cater to the aging population in health and residential design presents unique challenges and opportunities. At MGS Architects, we are privileged to partner with organisations like Abound Communities to deliver dementia-friendly housing solutions that meet the practical needs of aging residents and enrich their lives by fostering community and well-being. One of our recent projects at Rushall Park in Melbourne exemplifies this approach.

**The development epitomises the essence of a village – it is unique, designed for social interaction, functional, has its own atmosphere and sense of place. It was designed specifically for the needs of older people and incorporates stepless access throughout, enabling people to age in place. The design actively supports independence and wellbeing.**

## **A legacy of care**

Abound Communities, founded in 1869 through an Act of Parliament, is one of Victoria's oldest retirement village organisations. Its history of providing housing for those in need has remained true to its philanthropic mission for over 150 years. A key feature of the organisation is its unique residency model, which offers housing to residents regardless of their financial status. Approximately 50% of residents enter at no cost, while the other 50% contribute via a means-tested donation.

Residency at Abound Communities is structured as a 49-year lease with no exit fees, and residents are encouraged to personalise their living spaces, fostering a sense of ownership. The organisation's commitment to dementia-friendly care is paramount, with staff checking in daily with each resident as part of their holistic care approach. Abound Communities' philosophy recognises that the need for social and emotional support extends beyond financial means, acknowledging that every resident, regardless of their financial situation, deserves to live in an environment that nurtures both physical and emotional well-being.

## **Rushall Park: site and context**

Rushall Park, located just 5 kilometres northeast of Melbourne's CBD, is a significant site that blends heritage and community. The village is listed on the Heritage Victoria Register for its historic buildings and exotic landscape. The new development, situated on one of the last remaining undeveloped strips of land on the northeastern edge, provides an exciting opportunity to extend the existing village while enhancing its sense of place.



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The design lends itself to the existing built landscape of the village and promotes strong connection with neighbours and the wider village community. The project incorporates quality design principles that recognise the needs of older people.

The new buildings foster a social sustainability with light filled lobbies, resident art, places to sit, pause and mingle with neighbours and tend to plants in shared corridors. The design balances the desire for being around others with the importance of solitude and retreat.



## The design for Rushall Park's Independent Living Units reflects a deep connection to the village's heritage while introducing contemporary elements to create a sense of home for today's aging residents.

The project site sits within an Aboriginal Cultural Heritage overlay, and the challenge was to design a development that was both respectful of the site's rich history and responsive to the needs of aging residents. The surrounding community, including the nearby railway station and Merri Creek bike trail, was an important consideration in our design, ensuring that the new development would integrate seamlessly into the existing urban fabric.

### **Dementia-friendly design principles**

In 2017, Abound Communities made a public commitment to becoming a dementia-friendly organisation, recognising the growing importance of creating environments supporting individuals with dementia. This commitment was incorporated into our design approach at Rushall Park, where we focused on principles of safety, accessibility, and human scale. Key principles for the project included:

- 1\_\_\_ Safety and ease of movement: Ensuring that residents can navigate their environment safely, with easy access to key areas of the site and their homes.
- 2\_\_\_ Human scale: The development's massing and form were designed to feel intimate, with a modular approach that reflects the scale of the existing duplexes in the village.
- 3\_\_\_ Comprehensibility: Creating an environment that is easy to understand and navigate, reducing confusion for residents.
- 4\_\_\_ Personal health and well-being: Supporting mobility and providing spaces for physical activity.
- 5\_\_\_ Future adaptability: Designing with flexibility, allowing residents to personalise their living spaces or make necessary adjustments as health needs change.

### **Architectural response: connecting heritage and modernity**

The design for Rushall Park's Independent Living Units reflects a deep connection to the village's heritage while introducing contemporary elements to create a sense of home for today's aging residents. The development is organised into three buildings (A, B, and C) arranged along a narrow site. Each building is paired with breaks in the form, reflecting the rhythm of the existing duplex units and offering views into the surrounding landscape.

The new buildings are designed to interact with the wider community, while also providing residents with the opportunity for privacy and retreat. This is achieved through strategic placement and detailed planning, emphasising human-scale design and visual access to the surroundings. The buildings are organised around key principles: the 'Row House' (Duplex Villa), the 'Hedge' (Foreground Landscape), and the 'Composition' (Ornamental Façade), each of which responds to the village's unique architectural and natural context.

The 'Row House' typology considers the massing, scale, and rhythm of existing housing, fostering a sense of neighbourhood. The 'Hedge' draws inspiration from the site's exotic landscape, integrating planting and textured brickwork to extend the village's historic narrative. Finally, the 'Composition' approach reflects the heritage buildings' ornamental patterns, offering a contemporary interpretation that connects the old with the new.















Multiple residential  
Rushall Park  
Independent Living  
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Trees and Associates

Construction team  
Manresa Constructions

Photographers  
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## Details matter: human-centered design

The interiors of the units at Rushall Park prioritise simplicity, functionality, and comfort. Neutral colours, generous spaces (ranging from 65m<sup>2</sup> to 80m<sup>2</sup>), and thoughtful design elements like subtle grab rails and low-contrast flooring create a safe and welcoming environment. The goal was to design spaces that reduce over stimulation while providing opportunities for personal expression, allowing residents to make their apartments feel like home.

Each building has clear visual cues, like decorative brickwork motifs marking entrances, and features like communal spaces and open-air courtyards encouraging interaction between neighbours. These spaces foster social sustainability, providing places to pause, engage with others, or retreat into solitude when desired.

Importantly, the design allows for future adaptability. As residents age or face health challenges, home modifications—such as the installation of Geo-tracking devices or changes to bathroom fittings—can be made in partnership with Abound Communities to ensure ongoing comfort and care.

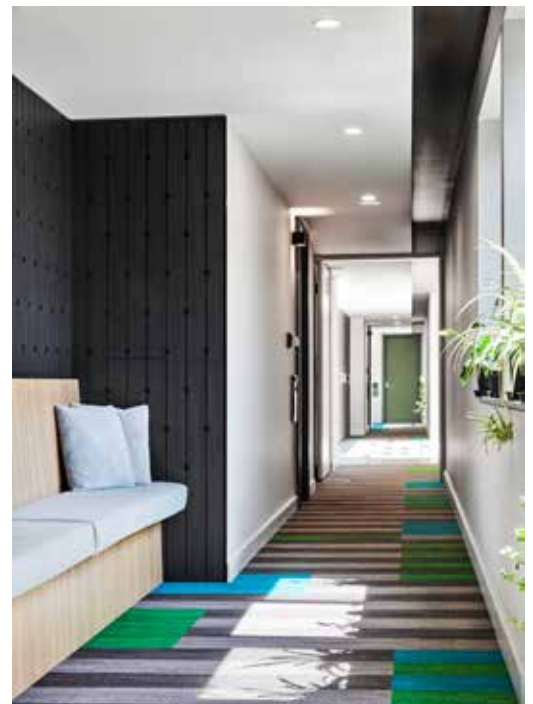
## Conclusion: a home for all

Rushall Park represents a forward-thinking approach to aging and dementia-friendly design. By honouring the legacy of Abound Communities' commitment to care and community while embracing contemporary design solutions, this project ensures that aging residents are safe, supported and connected to the wider world around them.

As we look toward the future, projects like Rushall Park exemplify how thoughtful, well-considered architecture can create spaces that nurture both the body and the spirit, ensuring that residents feel truly at home—always surrounded by a caring community.

**There has been lots of positive feedback from residents. One said, 'It was the right time for us. That first week we met so many people, caught up with old friends, made new acquaintances... we knew we had arrived.'**

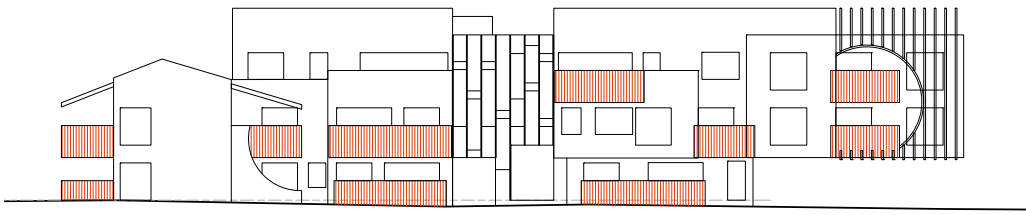
**'Every apartment is beautiful inside and also has a balcony, offering a lovely outdoor area, with an enviable view of native trees and gardens.'**  
Tim, resident.



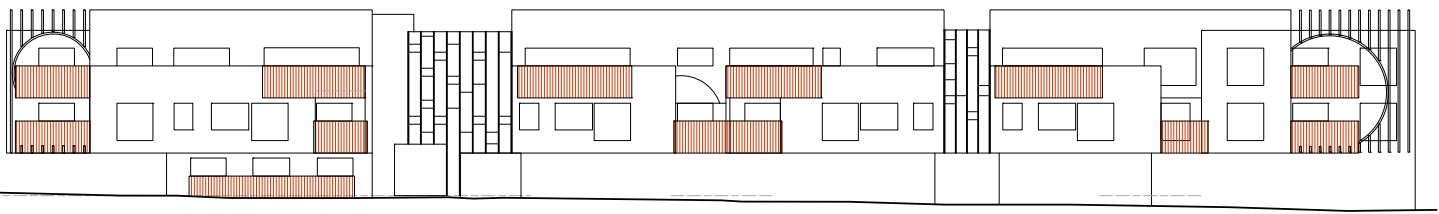




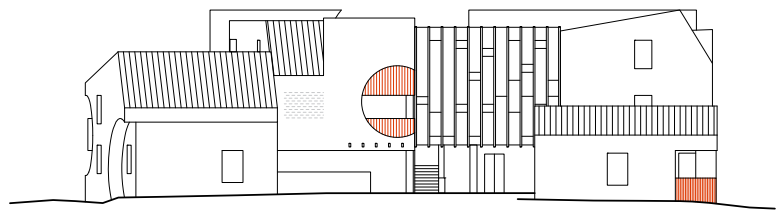
Site plan



South elevation: Building A



South elevation: Building B



South elevation: Building C



**Key people**



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For nearly four decades, MGS Architects has been at the forefront of social, community and affordable housing developments working with Government agencies, the social and affordable housing sector, NGOs, Government agencies, state and municipal authorities in an extensive list of consultation and design roles.

MGS's experience is further complemented by concurrent projects for private sector clients who seek us to guide the design and development process for a range of affordable, key worker and market housing.

Our experience with private housing development augments our knowledge and breath of experience in all the housing market sectors to the advantage of our public and private client groups.

Our work and research has increasingly involved roles in community building, place-making, urban-form design, mixed use integrated precinct planning, partnership projects, designing sustainable and vital places and design management.

These principles are underpinning new projects for state and local government and the private sector, including campus design for universities and schools, hospitals, design of new sustainable communities, large scale affordable housing projects and community projects, transport network projects including bridges and rail stations and multi-deck car parks, as well as master-plans, urban design frameworks and design guidelines.

**Clients**

- Abound Communities
- Affordable Housing Solutions
- Arts Victoria
- Australia Muslim Social Services Association
- Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute
- Bendigo TAFE & Kangan Institute
- Buxton Group
- Camberwell Girls Grammar School
- Camberwell Grammar School
- Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne
- Cedar Woods
- City of Ballarat
- City of Banyule
- City of Bayside
- City of Booroondara
- City of Casey
- City of Glen Eira
- City of Greater Bendigo
- City of Greater Dandenong
- City of Greater Geelong
- City of Hobart
- City of Hobsons Bay
- City of Manningham
- City of Melbourne
- City of Moreland
- City of Port Phillip
- City of Stonnington
- City of Whitehorse
- City of Yarra
- Community Housing Limited
- Deakin University
- Department of Infrastructure
- Department of Transport and Planning
- Development Victoria
- FKP Property Group
- Flinders University
- Frankston City Council
- Freemasons Victoria
- Glennivill
- Graduate Union of the University of Melbourne
- Growth Areas Authority
- Haven Home Safe
- Homes Victoria
- Hume City Council
- Kingswood College
- La Trobe University
- Latrobe City Council
- Launch Housing
- Lendlease
- Loreto Toorak
- Loreto Mary's Mount
- Housing First
- MAB Corporation
- Maribyrnong City Council
- Melbourne Affordable Housing
- Melbourne City Mission
- Metro Trains Melbourne
- Monash University
- NSW TAFE
- Office of Housing
- Public Transport Victoria
- Pymble Ladies College
- Riverlee
- Riverside Properties
- RMIT University
- RSPCA
- St Kilda Housing
- Swinburne University of Technology
- The Australian Ballet School
- The University of Melbourne
- Uniting Vic/Tas
- UNSW
- University of Canberra
- University of Tasmania
- University of Wollongong
- Victorian School Building Authority
- Victoria University
- VicRoads
- VicTrack
- VincentCare Victoria
- Xavier College

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Melissa Rivers  
Steve Sutedia  
Sue Buchanan

MGS Architects acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

