

Front Fences Restoration & Replacement

Front fences are important elements in defining and presenting a property. In older suburbs like Norwood & St Peters, the boundaries of property are typically defined by fences.

Front fences were historically used to define the street boundary and denote the junction between private and public spaces. Front fences were also used to visually present a property, reinforce its amenity and status and to provide symbolic security.

Today, front fences are important streetscape elements in reinforcing the historic character of a locality. When implemented in keeping with a historic building, front fences may also increase the value of a property.

Styles of Front Fences

The style of a front fence for a property located in an historic precinct should ideally reflect the period of the building on the site. This ensures that the historic character of that property and its locality can be reinforced.

In Norwood and St Peters, the dominant character styles are Victorian, Edwardian and Interwar, including Bungalows and Tudors. The Victorian era was long and can be subdivided into Victorian (1840-1860), Mid-Victorian (1860-1880) and Late-Victorian (1880-1900). Edwardian (also known as Federation in the eastern states) was broadly 1900-1915 and the dominant Interwar styles of Bungalow (1919-1925) and Tudor (1925-1940).

Typical Front Fences

Typical front fences in the Victorian era for cottages and villas were timber picket fences in a wide range of configurations. These ranged from very simple picket fences for cottages and smaller buildings, to much more flamboyant designs for larger more opulent dwellings.

The scale and sophistication of the front fence reflected the size and quality of the building behind. Sometimes these fences incorporated sections of mini-corrugated iron or brick courses at ground level to raise the bottom of the picket fence off the ground and provide more interest. Houses from other periods, like the Federation era with its Art Nouveau influences, also had fences which reflected the period of the house.

Later fences to Bungalows often used emu woven wire product with matching gates. Tudor houses more often had low masonry fences, some with horizontal steel rods or bars.



A St Peters masonry front fence with hedge.



A St Peters masonry front fence with cast metal infill.

More Substantial Front Fences

Mansions and more substantial higher quality houses often had formal front fences, constructed of a stone or brick plinth with cast iron balustrading on top, with formal pillars at corners and gateways. These more opulent front fences would be out of place on smaller, simpler dwellings.

Reinstating a Period Front Fence

When reinstating a period fence to match your house, the first step is to identify the style or period of your house, so you can know broadly what style to make the new fence.

Working out an appropriate design can be approached in two ways:

- If there is any evidence available (eg. old photographs of the property or any remnant existing bits of the original fence), then it may be possible to create a design based on the original or even to reconstruct an exact copy.
- If no evidence is available, then a generic fence design would be appropriate. A meeting with the Council's Heritage Adviser is often a good place to start.



A typical timber picket Bungalow fence.

Scale and Formality of Front Fence

In resolving a design, it is important to have regard to the scale and formality of the situation. Is the house a small cottage or a larger villa, or a more opulent house of near-mansion quality?

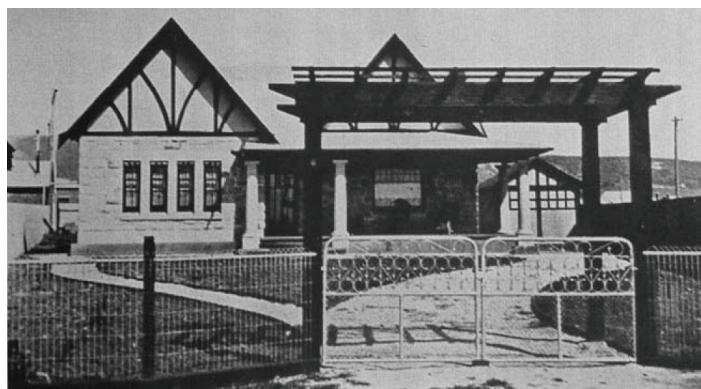
A simple picket fence would work well with a small cottage, whereas a flamboyant bluestone plinth with intricate cast metal balustrading on top would look out of place. The latter, however, would probably work well with a larger, more substantial house.

The scale and formality of what is appropriate for the building in question should always be kept in mind if a balanced and harmonious outcome is to be achieved.

Height of Front Fence

The height of a front fence is an important part of scale. For example, picket fences to smaller cottages are roughly 750mm-900mm high, while fences to typical double-fronted villas are 900mm-1100mm high. Fences much higher than this would be out of character with the historic context of the locality and could start to screen the house.

Front gardens and the front of houses have always been part of the streetscape and the public realm in historic precincts, so it is good neighbourly practice to maintain this when considering the height of a front fence. If more privacy is needed at the front, then hedges and gardens inside the front fence have historically provided for this.



A woven wire fence on a Tudor House.

Side and Rear Fences

Side and rear boundary fences were often higher for privacy, and typically used palings or corrugated iron 1800mm high. The two typical styles of fences used today for steel fencing are traditional post and rail fences, or a 'Good Neighbour' style fence where both sides are the same. Either is acceptable, though with a corrugated profile, not the flat decking profiles.

Accommodating Modern Services

When designing a new front fence, allowance should be given to including a mail box and not obstructing gas metres or stormwater drains or sumps. Mail boxes can usually be located unobtrusively behind a picket fence and can often be positioned so that mail can be inserted in-between the pickets. On larger fences with masonry pillars, intercoms and cameras are often included in the pillars as well as the letterbox slots.

Getting Approval for a Front Fence

All fences in Historic Conservation Zones need approval from the Council, including back and side fences, even for houses that do not have an individual heritage listing. All fences for Local Heritage Places and State Heritage Places need approval.

Further Reading

- *Heritage SA – Fences in South Australia* (available online)
- *Getting the Details Right – Restoring Australian Houses 1890s – 1920s*

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