

Article

The Formal Recognition of Scent as a Cultural Value in Australasian Heritage Registers

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Abstract

Cultural heritage arises from the interactions of people and the connected environment, manifesting in both tangible and intangible forms. Standard management aims to identify and register heritage assets, with subsequent conservation preserving identified values. Australian and New Zealand/Aotearoa heritage-specific legislation enshrines distinct ascribed values, formed in response to charters presenting heritage philosophies. Recent shifts towards greater acceptance of intangible heritage and emerging scholarly attention towards sensorial aspects (smells and sounds) demonstrate trajectories of change and a broader understanding of heritage theory. How this is exemplified in real-world management is rarely discussed. Taking Australasia as an example, this paper aims to survey values as enshrined in heritage legislation, examine aesthetic value definitions, and investigate recognition of olfactory sensorial aspects in heritage registers. We find that despite aesthetic, historic, and scientific values being commonly presented in the legislation, aesthetic olfactory attributes are largely absent, being recorded in only 0.18% across all heritage entries. Of these, a quarter were attributed significance or value, with the majority of entries being associated with offensive smell mitigation. We find this incongruent with recent scholarly work, and discuss potential reasons thereof, finding there is significant room to develop identification/assessment of olfactory aesthetic heritage.

Keywords: aesthetic value; heritage values; heritage legislation; intangible cultural heritage; olfactory attributes



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1. Introduction

In a broad sense, cultural heritage arises from the interactions of people, both among themselves and with the environment in which they live. The outcome of these processes can manifest itself in several forms. Intangible cultural heritage is the result of people's interactions with each other and finds its expression, for example, in skills, language, folklore, practices and customs. People's interaction with the environment in which they live manifests itself in tangible form, such as the built and constructed environment, cultural modifications to landscapes, refuse, resource, and extraction sites, as well as in a range of moveable objects and artefacts of varied sizes and materials. What differentiates these interactions as heritage are the cultural values that a community attaches to these [1,2], with the desire to maintain these tangible and intangible manifestations for the benefit of the present community [3–5] and, purportedly, for future generations [6].

Early heritage conservation management was based on principles set out in Athens Charter of 1931 and Venice Charter of 1964. While the aesthetics of environmental setting loomed large in the Athens Charter of 1931 [7], the aesthetic and historic values of heritage places were placed at the centre of conservation efforts in the Venice Charter of 1964 [8].

The US National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 [9] is focussed on the management of cultural significance; its implementation refers to “sites, structures and objects of historical, architectural or archaeological significance” [10]. The aim of the standard cultural heritage management is the identification and registration of heritage assets and their subsequent conservation with the aim of preserving the identified heritage values [11–15]. This ‘authorised heritage discourse’ [16] considers heritage as innate, fragile and finite, where experts function as largely objective stewards on behalf of the people, which, on reflection, is both illusory [17] and ignores the roles of the ‘experts’ [18,19], their generational limitations [20] and the epistemology of their knowledge [21].

Traditionally, intangible heritage has focussed on cultural expressions of language, crafts and skills, as well as rituals and other culturally modulated behaviour and social practice [22]. Recent research has extended this by expanding intangible heritage from activities to include immerse participation in local events and at places that are central to social practice [23]. Here, participation and cultural expression [24] may result in sensory experiences from any of the five standard senses (including sight, sound, smell, taste and touch), either solo or in conjunction, that may manifest as cultural heritage.

Sensory perception is driven by neural processing [25], being a combination of sensory detection and perceptual processing, with individual human parameters of physiology, culture and mental focus being primary influences [26–28]. Both sensory and multisensory perception have been well researched in museology, including utilising touch to (re)acquaint visitors with heritage objects [29], to express intangible heritage of languages [30], through engaging non-traditional heritage attributes to connect personal sentiments [31], and through immersive museum experiences for educative purposes [31–33].

Tangible heritage sites have also been the focus of sensory expression through sound and light shows [34,35], as well as through the naturally occurring sensory attributes which are extant on-site within or surrounding heritage sites or places. Examples include aural heritage components such as acoustic properties of heritage sites [36], individual soundscapes of cultural places [37–39], and locally specific musical heritages [40,41]. Elements of tactile heritage include locally distinct authentic food production [42], and gustatory heritage comprise taste authenticity [43] and elements of unique flavour within individual geographic locales [44]. Research into heritage odorous components has included both individual and localised historic smells, as well as sustained smells being iconic of a place [45–48]. Additionally, sensory experiences at the intersection of two individual sense modalities may manifest as novel multisensory heritage, with examples including visual and olfactory elements of back country huts in New Zealand [49] or the multisensory experience of European Christmas markets being considered manifestations of socially significant cultural heritage [50].

Whilst contemporary research promotes the understanding of non-visual heritage theory in both museology and outdoor sites, and while principal guidance documents, such as Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter make reference to sensory significance beyond the visual element (see below), an examination of management process and practice suggests that the determination and assessment of non-visual heritage is currently limited. In view of the emergence of scent-centred heritage theory [51,52], there is a need to formally examine the *status quo*, both in terms of the formal guidance that is provided to heritage practitioners and in terms of actual site listings that go beyond the visual component (e.g., Figure 1). When considering the four senses other than visual, in the Australasian region limited work

has been carried out on aural heritage, focussed on church bells in New South Wales [53] as well as the Australia-wide silencing of these during the COVID-19 pandemic [54–58]. So far, no systematic heritage-related research has been carried out in the senses of smell, taste, and touch. To our knowledge, no research systematically examines the inclusion of olfactory criteria in heritage policy and guidance documents, nor examines their inclusion in the listings of any jurisdiction.



Figure 1. Sewer vent (NSW064 SHR_01641), St Leonards NSW. Part of the original North Sydney sewerage system built between 1891 and 1898 and still operating to mitigate offensive smell emanation from the sewer network (Photo: M Parker 2026).

This paper seeks to investigate the parameters of managing olfactory heritage within all states and territories of Australia and New Zealand. This paper will (i) survey the cultural heritage values as enshrined in the Australasian heritage legislation as well as their iterations over time; (ii) examine the definitions of aesthetic value in Australasian heritage legislation and associated policy documents; and (iii) investigate the recognition of scent as a cultural value in Australasian heritage listings/registers that have administrative implications.

2. Background to the Heritage Legislation in Australasia

2.1. Australia

The Commonwealth of Australia is a federated nation which was formed in 1901 by the union of all former British colonies on the Australian continent, including Tasmania. As this was a voluntary agreement, the individual colonies surrendered only a minimum of powers to the newly formed Commonwealth government that was sufficient to allow it to function, to represent Australia's interests on the world stage and to control immigration

by making laws pertaining to race [59]. All other powers were retained by the colonies (now states). In consequence, the Commonwealth could pass legislation with respect to Indigenous Australian Heritage under the race powers provision of the Australian Constitution, as well as establish World Heritage Sites (under the foreign affairs power) [60]. At Federation, all individual states and territories maintained the right to regulate their own land management and planning regimes, which includes the management of cultural heritage sites.

While during the 1960s heritage conservation and preservation was a topic of legislation and charters in Europe and the USA [8,9], Australia lagged behind. Australian heritage legislation finds its roots in the 1974 Inquiry into the National Estate ('Hope Report'), which assessed the parlous state of management and protection of Australian natural and cultural heritage [61]. The findings of the report were given effect with the Australian Heritage Commission Act which was passed the following year and which established the Australian Heritage Commission as well the Register of the National Estate, which was a list that was to encompass "those components of the natural environment of Australia or the cultural environment of Australia, that have aesthetic, historic, scientific or social significance or other special value for future generations as well as for the present community" [62]. While the Register of the National Estate was shaped on the example of the US Register of Historic Places [9], it had a much greater remit as it covered both the natural and the cultural environment (covering both Indigenous Australian and settler-colonialist/European places).

Given the provisions of the Australian Constitution, however, the Commonwealth's role with regard to heritage assets other than Indigenous Australian place was limited to items on Commonwealth-owned or -controlled land. Heritage management at the state and local level was the prerogative of the individual states. Consequently, the Register of the National Estate had a largely educative and informative role without any legal effects. On the other hand, it was inconceivable that an item deemed to be of sufficient merit to be included in the Register of the National Estate would also not be formally protected at least at the state level.

Over time, the various Australian states and territories enacted their own heritage legislation. The first state to do so was New South Wales, which in 1977 enacted the *Heritage Act* which established the Heritage Council of NSW, as well as the State Heritage Register. This was followed by the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act* in 1979, which regulated heritage management at the local government level [63,64]. With the exception of South Australia, which passed its own heritage legislation in 1978 [65], the other states managed heritage concerns as part of planning legislation.

At this juncture, the Australia chapter of the International Commission on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) refined the Venice Charter of 1964 [8] and in 1979 adopted a set of guidelines for the conservation of places of cultural significance ("Burra Charter") [66], which were based on the four key values (aesthetic, historic, scientific and social) defined in the Heritage Commission Act 1975 [62]. Prior to the Burra Charter, some states had chosen their own wide interpretation of values. The New South Wales Heritage Act of 1977, for example, recognises "historic, scientific, cultural, social, archaeological, architectural, natural, aesthetic" values [63], while the South Australian Heritage Act of 1978 recognises "aesthetic, architectural, historical, cultural, archaeological, technological, scientific" values [65]. While the Burra Charter had no legally binding powers, it was authored and agreed upon by leading heritage professionals of the day and thus found rapid adoption [13]. When the remaining Australian states and territories eventually passed their own heritage legislation, the four core values were also recognised (with the exception of Victoria in 1987 [67], but included in revision [68]).

Today, the Commonwealth has carriage over items on Commonwealth-owned or -controlled land (Commonwealth Heritage List) as well as items of ‘outstanding’ heritage value to the nation (National Heritage List) [69]. Except for the Australian Capital Territory, which comprises only a single local government area, all states and territories maintain a two-tiered register of heritage assets of state and of local significance. These are managed based on state and local planning controls as enshrined in state heritage and planning legislation[®]. The National Trust of Australia, with branches in each state and territory, also maintains a register of significant or notable places, some of which the Trust owns. As the National Trust functions as an advocacy body, its listings have informative, but no legally binding value.

2.2. New Zealand/Aotearoa

In the Australasian setting, New Zealand/Aotearoa was the earliest jurisdiction to recognise heritage items as worth protecting when, in 1954, it passed “an act...for the preservation and marking of places and things of national or local historic interest and the keeping of permanent records in relation thereto” [70]. At present, the key legislation governing the use, development and protection of historic heritage in New Zealand/Aotearoa includes: the Resource Management Act 1991 [71], the Historic Places Act 1993 [72], the Conservation Act 1987, the Environment Act 1986 [73], the Local Government Act 2002 and the Reserves Act 1977. The Historic Places Act 1993 (Section 23) gives direction for assessing significance [72].

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Australasian Heritage Legislation and Policy Documents

The corpora of legislation of the Australian states and territories as well as New Zealand/Aotearoa were systematically searched (via the keyword ‘heritage’) for acts pertaining to heritage protection. Excluded from the analysis were acts that focus on Indigenous Australian heritage protection, as these encompass different assessments of cultural heritage significance outside the standard planning framework. The cultural heritage values listed in each Act were extracted, as were any specific definitions related to aesthetic value in the official guidance documents. Each Act and guidance document was checked to identify any predecessor acts that were repealed and document versions that were superseded. All versions were assessed.

Also searched for and assessed were official national and state-based policy guidance documents issued by the respective jurisdictions relating to the identification and interpretation of heritage significance and values. The process entailed searches via Google, both general searches as well as domain-specific searches (e.g., nsw.gov.au, sa.gov.au or govt.nz), as well as searches on online databases (e.g., NSW heritage digital library heritagensw.intersearch.com.au). Where the resulting documents indicated the existence of earlier and now obsolete versions or editions, these were also searched for and assessed.

3.2. Australasian Heritage Registers

Systematically searched were the (national) Australian Heritage database, which includes the National and the Commonwealth heritage lists; the heritage registers of the Australian States and territories, which include both state and local government level listings; as well as Rārangī Kōrero (New Zealand Heritage List) (Table 1).

The search terms comprised the following four adjectives: ‘odour,’ ‘olfactory,’ ‘scent’ and ‘smell.’ The keyword searches covered ‘all fields’ with the exception of the Commonwealth database, where the search was confined to description, place history and statement of significance [74], and New South Wales, where the search options were lim-

ited to the fields of historical notes and significance description [75]. Three databases (Australian Capital Territory, Northern Territory and Queensland) did not provide a full text of keyword search option. For these, a Google search was substituted with the search logic “[term] site:URL.” The URL to be searched was a truncated version of the standard database link to a heritage-listed item with the ID number excluded (e.g., <https://apps.des.qld.gov.au/heritage-register/detail/> (accessed on 27 February 2026) for the Queensland database). For each of the three databases, the validity of the chosen substitution approach was tested with search terms known to be commonplace (e.g., ‘house’). While there were methodological differences in the data collection, we consider this not to be a limitation that impacts the validity of the data collected.

To provide a general benchmark, a similar search was carried out for the keyword ‘aesthetic’. To provide comparative data on another non-visual sense, the overall representation of aural was also tested, using the keywords ‘sound,’ ‘aural,’ ‘auditory’ and ‘acoustic*’. All entries were checked to exclude those listings where the adjective ‘sound’ was used as a geographic term, as an attribute of a historical action (‘sound decision’) or to describe the structural integrity of an item. The New Zealand/Aotearoa register was omitted from the capture of ‘aural’ because ‘sound’ is a very common geographic term in that country (‘sound’ occurred in 2006 records).

Because their listings have only informative, but no legally binding value, the now defunct Commonwealth-based Register of the National Estate [76,77] as well as the state registers maintained by the National Trust of Australia [78] were excluded from investigation. The searches in the Victorian Heritage Database [79] also returned items that were only listed by the National Trust. These were excluded in the data cleaning exercise (see below). All database searches were carried out on 27 February 2026.

The database searches returned a combined 244 entries (Table 1), which were individually assessed and evaluated. Excluded were items only listed on the National Trust Register (Victoria only), which is a body without statutory power (39 entries), as well as items where a reference to ‘smell’ or ‘odour’ referred to environmental conditions prior to the item being created and unrelated to the item’s creation (56 entries). Also excluded were entries where the search term ‘scent’ was related to Lemon-scented gum trees (*Corymbia citriodora*) or Scented satinwood (*Ceratopetalum apetalum*) that were included in plant lists (31 entries). Minor exclusions were due to other uses of the search terms (4) and blank records (2). These exclusions resulted in a total of 112 entries remaining for inclusion in this study. These included entries were subsequently manually searched for the original search terms to determine text source within each entry, being considered as part of the item’s significance, description, and/or historic context, and whether any values were attributed.

Table 1. Details of search mechanisms utilised and frequency of resulting search terms in the registers. Abbreviations: D—Description; H—History; S—Discussion/Statement of Significance.

Jurisdiction	Search		Search Terms				Register Entries		Ref.
	Mode	Coverage	‘Smell’	‘Odour’	‘Olfactory’	‘Scent’	All Scent	Total	
Commonwealth (Cth)	Keyword	D, H, S	—	—	—	—	—	626	[74]
Austr. Capital Ter. (ACT)	Google	all fields	—	—	—	—	—	305	[80]
New South Wales (NSW)	Keyword	H, S	30	42	—	18	88	38,237	[75]
Northern Territory (NT)	Google	all fields	1	—	—	—	1	681	[81]
Queensland (Qld)	Google	all fields	7	3	—	4	11	1798	[82]
South Australia (SA)	Keyword	all fields	—	—	—	2	2	9943	[83]
Tasmania (Tas)	Keyword	all fields	—	—	—	1	1	4936	[84]
Victoria (Vic)	Keyword	all fields	23	5	1	58	85	102,133	[79]
Western Australia (WA)	Keyword	all fields	16	11	—	1	28	20,466	[85]

Table 1. Cont.

Jurisdiction	Search		Search Terms				Register Entries		
	Mode	Coverage	‘Smell’	‘Odour’	‘Olfactory’	‘Scent’	All Scent	Total	Ref.
New Zealand/ Aotearoa (NZ/A)	Keyword	all fields	27	2	—	1	28	5843	[86]

Notes: The figure of items included in the register for Victoria was comparatively high as it also includes individual properties in heritage conservation areas. Register Entries for ‘all scent’ may be lower than the combined total of search terms as some Entries included multiple terms.

4. Results

4.1. Heritage Values as Enshrined in Australasian Heritage Legislation

The first legislative reference to Australasian heritage protection was the 1945 amendment to the New South Wales (NSW) Local Government Act 1906, which gave local councils the power to develop planning schemes that could include, *inter alia*, “the preservation of places or objects of historical or scientific interest or natural beauty or advantage” [87]. At the time, the meaning of these values was deemed self-evident. During the 1960s–1970s, development boomed, and potential heritage assets, including places of iconic value were lost [88]. While the protection of Indigenous Australian heritage, championed by the (then) Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies founded in 1964 [89], was formalised as early as in 1965 in South Australia (SA) [90], in 1967 in Queensland [91], and in 1969 in NSW [92], legislation related to the protection of settler colonialist and more recent heritage items lagged behind. New Zealand, on the other hand, had legislated protection as early as 1954 with “historic, archaeological, scientific, educational, architectural, literary, [and] other special interact” being considered [70]. Noteworthy is the inclusion of ‘educational’ and ‘literary.’

The first formal mention of Australian heritage values occurred in the report to the 1974 Inquiry into the National Estate, which found “elements of the cultural-and natural environment which are . . . of aesthetic, historical, social and cultural, ecological, or other special value to the nation or part of it [61].” The inclusion of social value makes this assessment highly significant, being the first time that this suite of cultural values were articulated. The findings of the report were given effect through the creation of the Register of the National Estate in 1975, listing “those places . . . that have aesthetic, historic, scientific or social significance or other special value for future generations as well as for the present community” [62].

Following the formation of the Australian Heritage Commission, individual states enacted their own heritage protection legislation, which included their own definitions of heritage significance (Table 2). The first state to do so was New South Wales in 1977, which listed (in that order) “historic, scientific, cultural, social, archaeological, architectural, natural, [and] aesthetic significance” [63]. South Australia followed a year later, drawing on “aesthetic, architectural, historical, cultural, archaeological, technological, [and] scientific interest” [65].

Table 2. Formal heritage legislation in Australasia and the cultural values enshrined therein.

Jurisdiction	Enacted	Original Act	Enacted	Current Act	Refs.
		Values Enshrined		Values Enshrined	
Cth	1975	aesthetic, historic, scientific, social, other special	1999	aesthetic, historic, scientific, social, other special	[62,69]
ACT	2004	aesthetic, creative/technical, social, spiritual, cultural, historical	—	—	[93]

Table 2. Cont.

Jurisdiction	Enacted	Original Act	Enacted	Current Act	Refs.
		Values Enshrined		Values Enshrined	
NSW	1977	historic, scientific, cultural, social, archaeological, architectural, natural, aesthetic	—	—	[63,94]
NT	1991	prehistoric, protohistoric, historic, social, aesthetic, scientific	2011	aesthetic, historical, scientific, social	[95,96]
QLD	1992	aesthetic, historic, scientific, social, other special	—	—	[97]
SA	1978	aesthetic, architectural, historical, cultural, archaeological, technological, scientific	1993	creative, aesthetic, technical, cultural, spiritual, historical, [scientific]	[65,98]
Tas	1995	historical, creative, technical, social, spiritual, aesthetic	—	—	[99]
Vic	1987	scientific, aesthetic, architectural, historical, special cultural	2017	aesthetic, archaeological, architectural, cultural, historical, scientific, social	[67,68,100]
WA	1990	aesthetic, historic, scientific, social	2018	aesthetic, historic, scientific, social, spiritual	[101,102]
NZ/A	1954	historic, archaeological, scientific, educational, architectural, literary, other special	2014	aesthetic, archaeological, architectural, cultural, historical, scientific, social, spiritual, technological, traditional	[70,72,103,104]

The assessment of heritage significance in New Zealand / Aotearoa commenced with the Historic Places Act of 1954, which covered “*places and objects and things... of historic... archaeological, scientific, educational, architectural, literary, or other special... interest*” (§3) [70]. The 1980 version defined a historic place as an entity that “*provides evidence of any cultural, traditional, aesthetic, or other value of the past*” (§2[b]) [104]. This was widened in 1993 by recognising “*aesthetic, archaeological, architectural, cultural, historical, scientific, social, spiritual, technological, or traditional*” values for the assessment of significance (§23[1]), including the “*technical accomplishment or value, or design of the place*” (§23[2][g]) [72]. In its most recent version, the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act of 2014 includes significance of “*the technical accomplishment, value, or design of the place*” (§66[3][g]) [103].

Additional definitions of values in NZ are included in land management and planning legislation, such as the Resource Management Act 1991 [71]. Although these do not define ‘heritage’ and ‘heritage values’ *per se*, but in defining the purposes of heritage orders (s 189), the act states that they include protecting “*place(s) of special interest, character, intrinsic or amenity value or visual appeal, or of special significance to the tangata whenua for spiritual, cultural, or historical reasons; and... a place may be of special interest by having special architectural, historical, scientific, ecological or other interest*” [71]. Likewise, the Environment Act 1986 defines ‘Environment’ to include “*those physical qualities and characteristics of an area that contribute to people’s appreciation*

of its pleasantness, aesthetic coherence, and cultural and recreational attributes” (§17) [73]. Moreover, the authorities are to have regard to, *inter alia*, “areas, landscapes, and structures of aesthetic, archaeological, cultural, historic, recreational, scenic, and scientific value” (§32) [73]. Beyond the nationwide legislation, regional and local authorities (city and district councils) also provide guidance through criteria in their district plans.

Given the wide range of individual approaches towards non-Indigenous Australian heritage, the Heritage Chairs and Officials of Australia and New Zealand (HCOANZ), a collaborative network dedicated to the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage in both countries, resolved in 1998 to standardise the heritage criteria in all jurisdictions [105]. This standardisation, effected in 2008, referred to the minimum types of included criteria, but did not limit these to a common set of eight (Table 3), nor did it provide interpretive guidance for these.

Table 3. HCOANZ common minimum set of criteria for the assessment of cultural significance.

No.	Criterion
A	Importance to the course, or pattern, of [a state’s] cultural history.
B	Possession of uncommon, rare, or endangered aspects of [a state’s] cultural history.
C	Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of [a state’s] cultural history.
D	Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places and objects.
E	Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.
F	Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.
G	Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural, or spiritual reasons.
H	Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in [a state’s] history.

4.2. Definitions of Aesthetic Value in Australasian Heritage Legislation and Policy Documents

All formally identified items of Australasian heritage legislation (Table 2) were examined for the inclusion of, and definitions for, aesthetic value. In addition, a systematic search was carried out for national and state-based policy documents. These are discussed below (Table 4). In the following section, we will examine 13 acts and executing regulations, 27 government guidelines and policy documents as well as eight documents produced by Australia and New Zealand ICOMOS. The bulk of the legislation was passed before the year 2000, while the majority of guidelines and policy documents are more recent.

Table 4. The cultural values enshrined in heritage legislation in Australasia. Abbreviations: EPBC—Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation; HNZPTA—Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act.

Act	Jurisdiction	Year	(a)									
			Historical	Aesthetic	Scientific	Social	Cultural	Spiritual	Archaeological	Architectural	Technical	Other Special
Historic Places	NZ/A	1954	x		x				x	x		x

Table 4. Cont.

(a)												
Act	Jurisdiction	Year	Historical	Aesthetic	Scientific	Social	Cultural	Spiritual	Archaeological	Architectural	Technical	Other Special
Austr. Heritage Commission	Cth	1975	x	x	x	x						x
Heritage	NSW	1977	x	x	x	x	x		x	x		
South Australian Heritage	SA	1978	x	x	x		x		x	x	x	
Historic Places	NZ/A	1980	x	x			x					x
Environment	NZ/A	1986	x	x	x		x		x			
Planning and Environment	Vic	1987	x	x	x	x	x					
Heritage of Western Australia	WA	1990	x	x	x	x						
Heritage Conservation	NT	1991	x	x	x	x						
Resource Management	NZ/A	1991	x		x		x	x		x		x
Queensland Heritage	QLD	1992	x	x	x	x						x
Historic Places	NZ/A	1993	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Heritage Places	SA	1993	x	x	x		x	x			x	
Heritage	Vic	1995	x	x	x	x	x		x	x		
Historic Cultural Heritage	Tas	1995	x	x		x		x			x	
EPBC	Cth	1999	x	x	x	x						x
Heritage	ACT	2004	x	x		x	x	x			x	
Heritage	NT	2011	x	x	x	x						
HNZPTA	NZ/A	2014	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
Heritage	Vic	2017	x	x	x	x	x		x	x		
Heritage	WA	2018	x	x	x	x		x				
Frequency			21	19	18	15	12	7	8	8	6	6
(b)												
Act	Jurisdiction	Year	Creative	Natural/Ecological	Prehistoric	Protohistoric	Educational	Literary	Traditional	Scenic	Recreational	Reference
Historic Places	NZ/A	1954					x	x				[70]
Austr. Heritage Commission	Cth	1975										[62]
Heritage	NSW	1977		x								[63]
South Australian Heritage	SA	1978										[65]
Historic Places	NZ/A	1980							x			[104]
Environment	NZ/A	1986								x	x	
Planning and Environment	Vic	1987										[67]
Heritage of Western Australia	WA	1990										[101]
Heritage Conservation	NT	1991			x	x						[95]
Resource Management	NZ/A	1991		x								

Table 4. Cont.

Act	Jurisdiction	Year	Creative	(b)								Reference
				Natural/Ecological	Prehistoric	Protohistoric	Educational	Literary	Traditional	Scenic	Recreational	
Queensland Heritage	QLD	1992										[97]
Historic Places	NZ/A	1993							x			[72]
Heritage Places	SA	1993	x									[98]
Heritage	Vic	1995										[100]
Historic Cultural Heritage	Tas	1995	x									[99]
EPBC	Cth	1999										[69]
Heritage	ACT	2004	x									[93]
Heritage	NT	2011										[96]
HNZPTA	NZ/A	2014							x			[103]
Heritage	Vic	2017										[68]
Heritage	WA	2018										[102]
Frequency			3	2	1	1	1	1	3	1	1	

4.2.1. Commonwealth

To reach the threshold for inclusion in the National Heritage List (NHL), a place must possess ‘outstanding’ heritage value to the Australian community. The criterion relevant to this paper requires that “(e) the place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place’s importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by a community or cultural group” [106], with criterion informed by text of Criterion E of the former register of the National Estate, which assessed an item’s “importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by a community or cultural group” which were interpreted as aesthetic characteristics held in high esteem or otherwise valued by the community” [76]. Criteria for the Commonwealth Heritage List are identical to those of the NHL except that they only apply to items owned or controlled by the Commonwealth [107].

In the explanatory notes, the guidance document for the NHL states that “the grounds on which a place may satisfy criterion (e) ... through ... features of beauty, or features that inspire, emotionally move or have other characteristics that evoke a strong human response” [106]. This is further elaborated by noting that this response “can be evoked by visual or non-visual elements but is predominantly visual and related to the concept of beauty. It can include related to this, emotional responses, sense of place, sound, smell, or any other factor having a strong impact on human thoughts, feelings and attitudes” [106]. This text is an edited version of the definition of aesthetic value that had been developed for the Comprehensive Regional Assessment of National Estate values in the 1990s: “Aesthetic value is the response derived from the experience of the environment or particular natural and cultural attributes within it. This response can be to either visual or non-visual elements and can embrace emotional response, sense of place, sound, smell and any other factors that have a strong impact on human thought, feelings and attitudes” [108].

Another response to the Hope Report was the founding of the Australian national chapter of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) in 1976 [109]. Australia ICOMOS approved the 1979 Burra Charter [66], which provided a conceptual set of guidelines for the conservation of places of cultural significance. This document was taken into consideration by Australia’s state heritage bodies when developing their own policies. The Burra Charter in its initial version [66], as well as its revisions [110–113], does not go beyond listing aesthetic value as one of the core values for assessing significance.

The first set of guidelines to the charter, issued in 1988, elaborates by noting that *“aesthetic value includes aspects of sensory perception for which criteria can and should be stated. Such criteria may include consideration of the form, scale, colour, texture and material of the fabric; the smells and sounds associated with the place and its use”* [113].

That formulation was maintained in the 1999 edition [111]. Accompanying the 2013 revision of the Burra Charter [112], Australia ICOMOS issued a ‘Practice Note’ that elaborated on the Charter, noting that *“aesthetic value refers to the sensory and perceptual experience of a place—that is, how we respond to visual and non-visual aspects such as sounds, smells and other factors having a strong impact on human thoughts, feelings and attitudes. Aesthetic qualities may include the concept of beauty and formal aesthetic ideals. Expressions of aesthetics are culturally influenced”* [114]. When considering aesthetic value, the practice note asks whether a place exhibits *“compositional or uncommonly attractive qualities involving combinations of colour, textures, spaces, massing, detail, movement, unity, sounds, scents?”* [114]. The emphasis of this, as well as that of the other elaborations (‘inspirational’; ‘symbolic for its aesthetic qualities’), is firmly placed on the positive aspects of aesthetics.

As noted earlier, the national heritage convention of chairs of State heritage council and directors of heritage (HCOANZ) resolved in 1998 to standardise the criteria for non-Indigenous Australian heritage in all jurisdictions. A formal set of eight criteria was agreed upon in 2008 and subsequently adopted by all Australian jurisdictions [99,115–117]. The systematic survey of formal guidelines and other guidance publications by the state heritage offices resulted in 21 documents, two of which predate the standardisation: the NSW Heritage Manual of 1996 [118] and the Heritage Regulations for the Northern Territory of the same year [119]. The latter only repeat the relevant assessment criterion (§5[n]), with ‘smell’ (and aural/auditory) not mentioned anywhere in the document. The NSW Heritage Manual expands on criterion 2 (aesthetic significance) by noting, *inter alia*, that an item can be *“significant for strong visual, or sensory appeal or cohesion”* or is *“aesthetically distinctive”*. While a ‘sensory appeal’ is mentioned, all text and examples point to visual interpretation.

Australian Capital Territory

While the ACT Heritage Act §10(e) considers the *“importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by the ACT community or a cultural group in the ACT”* [93], the ACT guidelines are internally inconsistent. On one hand, they note that *“aesthetic characteristics include artistic excellence, and a range of aesthetic forms including all sensory perceptions”* and that *“places and objects considered under this criterion include features that inspire, emotionally move or have other characteristics that evoke a strong human response”* [117]. This was expanded by acknowledging that *“aesthetic qualities are the visual or other qualities of a place or object that invite judgement against the ideals of beauty, picturesqueness, evocativeness, expressiveness, grotesqueness, sublimeness and other descriptors of aesthetic judgment”* [117]. Yet at the same time, these guidelines apply as a ‘basic test’ whether *“particular aesthetic characteristics are evident in the physical fabric of the place or object”* [117], implying that a tangible manifestation is necessary for listing rather than an emotive response. Moreover, *“a place can be considered for its aesthetic value in relation to view/s to or from the place”* [117]. All subsequent commentary as well as examples related to the criterion exclusively focus on the visual qualities of a place.

New South Wales

The guidelines for assessing heritage significance produced in 2000 as well as those produced in 2001 focus on an *“association... with creative or technical innovation or achievement,”* an *“inspiration for a creative or technical innovation or achievement,”* *“aesthetically distinctive”* attributes as well as *“exemplifying a particular taste, style or*

technology” [120,121]. The guidelines clearly focus on visual values such as “distinctive aesthetic attributes in form or composition” and architectural styles [120]. Non-visual senses are not mentioned, let alone considered. The companion text on investigating heritage significance, however, only mentions that heritage items “may be exceptional for their aesthetic qualities” but does not provide any further guidance [122].

The 2002 guidance to local governments focusses on the fabric of the place and emphasises “major work(s) by an important designer or artist. . . [such as] an important early (seminal) work of a major architect”, “positive visual or sensory appeal or landmark and scenic qualities” or “exemplifying a particular taste, style or technology” [123]. Non-visual senses are again not mentioned.

The updated 2023 version of the guidelines for assessing heritage significance makes reference to “sensual qualities that can be judged to be of significance against various ideals including beauty, picturesqueness, evocativeness, expressiveness, landmark presence, streetscape contribution, symbolism or some other quality of nature or human endeavour” [124]. The measures against which the criterion can be assessed, however, are focused entirely on visual characteristics. Its companion text also narrows its attention to the visual aspects, noting that “aesthetic relates to the aesthetic characteristics and creative achievement of the item including its architecture, interiors, landscape and other designed or natural elements” and that the expertise to assess these aspects “might include archaeology/rock art, architecture, interior design, landscape architecture and fine arts” [125].

Northern Territory

While the Northern Territory Heritage Act §11(e) includes ‘aesthetic characteristics’ in its set of criteria [96], they are not addressed at all in the regulations of any guidance documents [126].

Queensland

The Queensland Heritage Act contains ‘aesthetic significance’ as its criterion e (§23[1][e]) but also for creative achievement via its criterion f (§23[1][f]) [97]. According to the guidelines, both criteria relate to the aesthetic or architectural (criterion e) or aesthetic, architectural or other (technological) significance (criterion f) of a heritage place [127]. While criterion f is mainly to be used for ‘artistic value’, criterion e includes “*beautiful, natural aesthetic, picturesque, evocative and expressive attributes*” as well as symbolic meaning [127].

The Schedule accompanying the Queensland Heritage Act 1992 defines ‘aesthetic significance’ to “include its visual merit or interest” [128] but does not otherwise elaborate. Yet, the current Queensland guidelines make clear reference to non-visual attributes. “A place may have aesthetic significance if it has qualities that affect the senses of the viewer or observer. While this is most often expressed in terms of visual qualities, aesthetic significance may be judged also in terms of the auditory, olfactory or tangible aspects of a place” [127]. Making reference to the 1988 Guidelines to the Burra Charter [113] as well as other sources [129], the Queensland guidelines define aesthetic significance as “*sensual qualities that can be judged against various ideals including beauty, picturesqueness, evocativeness, expressiveness, landmark presence, symbolism or some other quality of nature or human endeavour*” [127]. The guidelines also note that “*aesthetic significance may be derived from responses to both visual and non-visual aesthetic qualities. . . non-visual aesthetic qualities include sound, smell, taste, touch, feel, sense of place, symbolism, or some other quality of a place that impacts on our senses and draws an aesthetic or emotional response*” [127]. While non-visual measures figure prominently, the document did not provide any guidance on how to research or assess these qualities.

In its 2020 revision of the guidelines, the Queensland Department of Arts and Heritage continues with their definition but then limits its applicability to “*merit, originality, accom-*

plishment, inventiveness or creative adaptation in a variety of fields of human endeavour including but not exclusive to art, engineering, architecture, industrial or scientific design, landscape design, construction, manufacture, craftsmanship, or some other technical field" [130]. Any reference or discussion of sound, smell, taste, touch, and feel has been omitted in the guidelines, while visual qualities are discussed in a detailed and elaborate section [130].

South Australia

The South Australian Heritage Act §16(e) references aesthetic value, but embeds this firmly as tangible output: "high degree of creative, aesthetic or technical accomplishment or is an outstanding representative of particular construction techniques or design characteristics" [98]. Consequently, in its first set of guidelines, the SA Heritage Council focusses on and emphasises the physical fabric and visible physical evidence and also requires "merit... in medium such as songs, poetry, literature, painting, sculpture, publications, print media, etc." [131]. The guidelines of 2020 again focus on how the physical fabric demonstrates these visual attributes and notes that these aesthetic, technical or creative characteristics of the place need to be 'critically recognised' "within a relevant art, design or technological discipline as an outstanding example within South Australia" [132]. Non-visual senses are not mentioned at all. The latest 2024 version of the guidelines recasts the same approach, albeit in varied wording [133]. The most recent set of guidelines even more strongly focus on the visual by stating that "aesthetic characteristics are the visual qualities of a place that invite judgement against the ideals of beauty, picturesqueness, evocativeness, expressiveness, sublimeness and other descriptors of aesthetic judgement" [133]. Again, senses other than visual are not considered.

Tasmania

Tasmania did not consider aesthetic value as one of its criteria of the Heritage Act of 1995 [134] until amendments in 2013 [116] when §16(2)(h) was added, including a criterion of "exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristic" [99]. Until then, aesthetic value was peripherally addressed under criterion d with a focus on 'aesthetic composition' (§16[2][d]), and criterion e (creative or technical achievement) 'artistic excellence' (§16[2][e]), where aesthetic significance was assessed as to whether a "*place exhibits sensual qualities that can be judged against various ideals including beauty, picturesqueness, evocativeness, expressiveness, landmark presence, symbolism or some other quality of nature or human endeavour*" [134]. The measures mentioned in the document were focussed solely on visual characteristics.

The revised guidelines of 2025 contain a section on criterion h, which uses the definition of aesthetic value developed for the Comprehensive Regional Assessment of National Estate values in the 1990s [135]. While non-visual aspects are listed, the set of measures and examples still strongly focus on the visual, when focussing on "*particular aesthetic characteristics of an identified style or fashion,*" and "*a place's aesthetic qualities in inspiring artistic or cultural responses, represented in art, photography, literature, folk art, folk lore, mythology or other imagery or cultural arts*" [135]. Even the measure "*aesthetic characteristics which are inspirational or which evoke strong feelings or special meanings*" is focussed on sensory perceptions other than olfactory (and even auditory) as it stipulates that a place "*inspires or creates a strong evocative response [such as] a sense of awe, wonder, astonishment, reverence, reflection, pleasure, tranquility, peacefulness, seclusion or remoteness*" [135].

Victoria

The current Victorian Heritage Register Criteria and Threshold Guidelines, which have seen little modification since their original formulation in 2012 as far as aesthetic value is concerned [136], use a version of the definition of aesthetic value developed for the Comprehensive Regional Assessment of National Estate values in the 1990s [137]. The

guidelines note these aesthetic qualities “*may relate to the concept of beauty*” may be “*the result of the conscious design*” or may be “*the outcome of the way in which a place or object has evolved and been used over time*” [137]. Importantly, the guidelines note that “*aesthetic values tend to be specific to a time and cultural context*” [137]. In terms of implementation, however, non-visual aspects are not considered. Emphasis is on the physical fabric of the place/object, the aesthetic values of which need to find “*critical recognition of the aesthetic characteristics of the place/object within a relevant art, design, architectural or related discipline within Victoria*” and find “*wide public acknowledgement... expressed in publications, print or digital media, painting, sculpture, songs, poetry, literature, or other media*” [137]. Most of the reference measures relate solely to visual aspects. One of the measures queries whether the heritage item has “*qualities which are inspirational or which evoke strong feelings or special meanings*” [137], which might be construed as applicable to non-visual characteristics. None of the examples or other explanatory text, however, makes any reference to non-visual aesthetic values.

Western Australia

The Heritage Act of Western Australia includes the “*importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by any group or community*” (factor F) [138]. The Western Australian guide to assessing cultural heritage values uses an abbreviated version of the definition of aesthetic value as developed for the Comprehensive Regional Assessment of National Estate values in the 1990s, but then also note that “*aesthetic qualities tend to be specific to a time and cultural context*” [139]. As with the Victorian guidelines, this text has been taken from Comprehensive Regional Assessment of National Estate values.

In its reference tool section, the guide uses the measure whether the “*place [has] special compositional or uncommonly attractive qualities involving combinations of colour, textures, spaces, massing, detail, movement, unity, sounds, scents*” [139]. Yet, it then limits this by noting that “*the physical fabric of the place clearly exhibits particular aesthetic characteristics*”, predisposing interpretation towards the visual sense. The test also requires a “*wide public acknowledgement of the aesthetic characteristics of the place... including its landmark qualities, expressed in publications, print or digital media, painting, sculpture, songs, poetry, literature, or other media*” [139]. The emphasis on visual characteristics is more strongly evident in more abbreviated publications issued by the Heritage Council of WA. In its explanation of factors for significance, the Council notes that “*aesthetic characteristics may relate to the concept of beauty, or may be characteristics associated with good design*” and that “*aesthetic qualities may inspire awe or fear*” [138]. In its guidance to local councils, it focusses purely on visual manifestations of architectural form, streetscapes, gardens, plantings and cultural landscape settings [140]. Other senses are not mentioned.

4.2.2. New Zealand/Aotearoa

The revised New Zealand/Aotearoa heritage legislation of 1980 included, for the first time, the concept of aesthetic value (§2[b]) in the evaluation of historic places [104], which was continued in the 1993 (§23[1]) and 2014 (§66[1]) revisions [72,103]. It appears, however, that there are no formal guidelines issued by the heritage authorities on the interpretation of the definition as well as any criteria that may derive therefrom.

ICOMOS New Zealand passed its charter in 1993, which included the standard mention of aesthetic value (§22) but did not provide any guidance [141]. The 2010 revision of the charter expanded the definition of cultural heritage value to also include “*other... intangible values, associated with human activity*” (§25), again without providing guidance [142]. The Resource Management Act 1991, which guides heritage orders, includes ‘visual appeal’ among the values (§189), but does not otherwise consider aesthetic value [71]. The Envi-

ronment Act 1986 also focusses on the “characteristics of an area that contribute to people’s appreciation of its pleasantness, aesthetic coherence, and cultural and recreational attributes [73].” Some modicum of guidance can be found in a document produced by Auckland Regional Council, which offers commentary on aspects of aesthetics in terms of architectural design as well as cultural context. For the latter, it refers to “visual amenity, or aesthetic value (past or present beauty)”, but is silent on manifestations of senses other than visual [143].

4.3. Representation of Scent-Related Terms in the Various Registers

The size of the state registers ranges from relatively small, such as the Northern Territory with 681 entries, to very large, as in the case of Victoria, which has in excess of 100,000 individual properties on the state registers as well as the local government heritage overlays (Table 5). As highlighted in the methodology, 112 individual register entries referred to an olfactory-related attribute within parameters of significance, description, and/or historic context, including those with value attribution. Whilst over two-thirds of these were designated the term ‘smell’ (67.9%), ‘odour’ accounted for 27.7% of the valid entries, and ‘scent’ 11.6% (Table 5). While some registers contained zero entries containing olfactory-related terms, the remainder comprised a very low proportion (average = 0.18%)—noteworthy considering the comparatively high proportion of ‘aesthetic’ representation across most registers (average = 25.6%). Similarly, low representation was noted for the other non-visual sensory attribute of sound (0.07%).

Table 5. Number of validated entries and their proportional representation in the registers.

Jurisdiction	Search Term				Register Entries		Listings (%) with		
	‘Smell’	‘Odour’	‘Olfactory’	‘Scent’	All Scent	Total	All Scent	‘Aesthetic’	All Aural
National	—	—	—	—	—	626	—	28.12	1.28
ACT	—	—	—	—	—	305	—	46.56	0.66
NSW	22	15	—	7	42	38,237	0.11	1.91	0.09
NT	1	—	—	—	1	681	0.15	0.73	0.15
QLD	7	2	—	2	9	1798	0.50	72.30	0.72
SA	—	—	—	—	—	9943	—	26.15	0.00
Tas	—	—	—	0	0	4936	0.00	0.45	0.16
Vic	11	4	—	3	16	102,133	0.02	25.74	0.05
WA	14	8	—	—	22	20,466	0.11	36.74	0.14
NZ/A	21	2	—	1	22	5843	0.38	16.93	—

Notes: The figure of items in the register for Victoria includes individual properties in heritage conservation areas. Register Entries for ‘all scent’ may be lower than the combined total of search terms as some Entries included multiple terms.

Additionally, higher proportions of the term ‘aesthetic’ did not necessarily correspond to increased olfactory term reference within registers, as exemplified by jurisdictions of NZ and NSW having limited aesthetic interpretation, yet higher proportions of entries containing olfactory terms.

In the valid entries, references to building smells, food smells, manufacturing smells and scented plants were reasonably well represented; however, the majority referred to offensive smells and mitigation thereof (average = 58.9%) (Table 6). Reference proportion of offensive smells was not uniform between the jurisdictions, however, being higher in Victoria, Queensland, and NSW (81.25%, 77.78% and 64.29% respectively), and significantly lower in NZ (31.82%). Likewise, references to other olfactory attributes were non-uniform; NZ data revealed a comparatively high proportion of building smells (22.73%), WA for manufacturing smells (22.73%), and both NSW and Victoria for scented plants (14.29% and 12.50% respectively). Most importantly, the majority of valid entries referred to an olfactory attribute solely within an item’s historic context or description, notably so for

those pertaining to manufacturing smells (84.62%), scented plants (81.82%) and offensive smells (80.30%) (Table 7 and Appendix A). Only a quarter of valid entries referred to any significance or attributed value of an olfactory attribute (24.11%, $n = 27$), with this subset of entries forming the data for the remainder of our analysis.

Table 6. Aggregated olfactory attributes by state listing.

Olfactory Attribute	NSW	NT	QLD	Vic	WA	NZ/A	Total
Building smell	1				1	5	7
Ethnic Smell					1	1	2
Food-type smell	4				2		6
Human smell			1				1
Manufacturing smell	3			1	5	4	13
Nature smell	1				1	1	3
Non-defined						3	3
Offensive	27	1	7	13	11	7	66
Scented plants	6		1	2	1	1	11
Total	42	1	9	16	22	22	112

Table 7. Aggregated olfactory attributes by point on mention in the assessment. Abbreviations: D—Description; H—History; V—Values discussion; S—Discussion/Statement of Significance.

Olfactory Attribute	D	D&H	H	V&H	V,S&H	V&S	S&H	S	Total
Building smell			3	1		3			7
Ethnic Smell			2						2
Food-type smell		1	5						6
Human smell				1					1
Manufacturing smell	1		10	2					13
Nature smell			1			1		1	3
Non-defined						3			3
Offensive	6	3	44		1		4	8	66
Scented plants		4	5			1		1	11
Total	7	8	70	4	1	8	4	10	112

Reference to Olfactory Attributes with Significance or Attributed Value

For the data subset, the NZ register revealed the greatest number of heritage items ($n = 10$), followed by Victoria ($n = 9$), NSW ($n = 7$) and Queensland ($n = 1$). Offensive smells again formed the bulk of the data (48.15%), followed by building smells (14.81%) and those non-defined (11.11%). Twenty-three entries placed olfactory terminology within significance criteria, including categories of historic ($n = 10$), aesthetic ($n = 7$), scientific ($n = 1$), historic and research ($n = 1$), educational ($n = 1$), and social ($n = 1$). Another two entries placed terminologies both within significance criteria and the Statement of Significance, with criteria being historic and aesthetic ($n = 1$), or social ($n = 1$), and an additional four attributed value to olfactory attributes within historic context (but not specifically within significance criteria).

All seven entries which referred olfactory attributes solely to aesthetic significance were found in the NZ register. These included: Defiance Hut, whereby “*the hut’s appearance, sounds, smell and feel combine to evoke a sense of place*” [144]; Napier Prison (Former), recognising that the “*lingering musty smells (. . .) are a confronting reminder of the harsh conditions faced by inmates at the prison*” [145]; Ōtamahua/Quail Island Historic Area, whereby the “*historic area combines evocative sights, sounds, smells and feel*” [146]; Wellington Botanic Garden with

“the scents and smells together help to create the character and ambience of the garden” [147]; as well as Te Matatiki Toi Ora The Arts Centre, Addington Cemetery and Te Whare Waiutuutu Kate Sheppard House, in which multisensory facets (including smells) appeal to one’s senses and create a sense of place. Another NZ entry, Tangiwai Historic Reserve, recognised the multisensory assault of knowing (including visual, sound, smell, touch, and taste), which forms a powerful source of memory and therefore enhances potential for public education of the place.

Ten entries recognised the improvement of offensive olfactory attributes as significant within historical context, with these comprising: two sewer vents which evidenced the improvement of nineteenth-century NSW sewerage schemes to efficiently disperse sewer odours; five cast iron urinals (Victoria) which serve as *“a reminder of Melbourne’s transition from a smelly disease ridden city to a healthier, cleaner and more modern metropolis”* [148]; and one underground public toilet (also Victoria) which similarly recognised urban transformation through mitigation of offensive odours. The Northern Market Reserve Wall was recognised as historically significant (in part) through protecting local residents from offensive visuals and odours of adjacent livestock, and the Carriers’ Arms Hotel with its nineteenth-century floor plan was considered historically significant through the minimising of offensive smells through the provision of detached kitchens.

Additionally, one NSW sewer vent was recognised, having historical significance in conjunction with research significance—with vent shafts being an exemplar of the development of understanding to effectively mitigate odorous gases within the sewerage system. Another NSW sewer vent was recognised both historically (in the Statement of Significance) and also through social significance criteria, with the latter made clear that as the vent shaft improved living conditions through eliminations of sewer odours, it was likely to be attributed value by the local community.

One NSW entry referred to both historic and aesthetic significance of the experienceable smells of the sea and harbour waters within the Millers Point & Dawes Point Village Precinct, in conjunction with other sensory attributes, including visual amenity of the harbour and the aural qualities of boats, ships and wharf work. Another entry recognised scientific significance of an olfactory attribute of Hopetoun Cemetery (Victoria), with the highly scented rose cultivar *Rosa La Reine* being considered of significant age. Finally, social and historic significance were both recognised concerning odour emanations from the Willoughby Incinerator (NSW), being attributed social significance as *“the building was subject to rigorous protest and objections from local residents over the smoke and smell”* through use of the incinerator operations as a garbage and sewage disposal unit [149].

In addition, four entries attributed degrees of value directly to an olfactory attribute, despite no reference to any significance criteria. The olfactory experience of a timber mill in Mount Wilson (NSW) was remembered as being *“a magical place (. . .) And there was the wonderful smell of newly sawn sassafras and coachwood logs”* [150], the multisensory experience of Nicol’s Blacksmith Shop (Duntroon, NZ) *“was well loved and evoked many fond memories of the sight and smell of smoke, the hot red glow of metal in the darkness and the sound of the hammer on the anvil”* [151], and the now demolished Carisbrook Turnstile Building (Former) (NZ) gave a feel, smell and touch that imbued the whole environment of the cricket place. Interestingly, as the only identified entry directly associated with human odour, a historic olfactory encounter at Reconciliation Rocks (Queensland) was attributed social value, whereby being smeared with human sweat was believed highly important to the Guugu Yimithirr people: *“In the old days people would go up to welcome somebody by taking [Narrrla] from under their arms and rub it all over you. And they didn’t have deodorant before! So, sweat [narrrla] was a very important thing, because that was the smell of you. So, your ancestors would recognise you.”* [152].

Further investigation revealed that only 11 entries of the subset data made reference to olfactory attributes which may still exhibit emanation (Table 8), including all of the above entries recognised as having aesthetic significance, and comprising largely of building smells, natural smells, scented plants, and, somewhat problematically, those identified as ‘non-defined’ olfactory attributes. Extant olfactory heritage attributes with attributed significance and/or value therefore account for only 9.82% of all valid entries identified through the search strategy of this study.

Table 8. Heritage entries with extant olfactory attributes (arranged by olfactory attribute).

Heritage Entry	Jurisdiction	Olfactory Attribute	Significance Criteria
Defiance Hut	NZ	Building smell	Aesthetic
Napier Prison (Former)	NZ	Building smell	Aesthetic
Te Whare Waiutuutu Kate Sheppard House	NZ	Building smell	Aesthetic
Ōtamahua/Quail Island Historic Area	NZ	Nature smell	Aesthetic
Millers Point & Dawes Point Village Precinct	NSW	Nature smell	Statement, Historical, Aesthetic
Te Matatiki Toi Ora/The Arts Centre	NZ	Non-defined	Aesthetic
Addington Cemetery	NZ	Non-defined	Aesthetic
Tangiwai Historic Reserve	NZ	Non-defined	Potential for public education
Sewer Vent	NSW	Offensive	Historical, Research
Wellington Botanic Garden	NZ	Scented plants	Aesthetic

5. Discussion

The paper has shown a disconnect between the importance that heritage theory ascribes to the multisensory elements of aesthetic value and what heritage systems actually assess and protect. *A priori*, it should be noted that our research and findings do not circumscribe the wide range of scent that is part of intangible cultural heritage practices (e.g., food production, religious rituals, festivals, market spaces, etc), but whether scent is recognised as a value attributed to heritage *places* and whether this value is expressed in olfactory terms in statutory heritage place registers.

At the theoretical level, research as well as policy documents increasingly recognise that heritage value can derive from non-visual sensory experience, including smell, sound, touch, and taste. The HCOANZ criteria, the Comprehensive Regional Assessment of National Estate values, and the explanatory notes as provided by the revised Burra Charter of 2013 clearly expand the concept of ‘aesthetic value’ beyond the visual, and explicitly acknowledge that aesthetic value can arise from both visual and non-visual experience, including smell. When considering Australasian state (and territory) guidance, however, any inclusion of this or similar formulations appears to be lip-service. They are parsimonious and, in most instances, silent on auditory or olfactory manifestations, narrowing back any definition of aesthetic value to the visible fabric, architecture, landscape, and design. New South Wales is a good example of this. Even where terms like ‘sensory appeal’ appear, the actual assessment measures remain overwhelmingly visual. Queensland is one of the few jurisdictions to explicitly mention olfactory and other non-visual qualities, yet even for that state, there is little practical advice on how those qualities should actually be researched or assessed.

At the practical level, the paper has found that while reference to aesthetic characteristics occurs in a quarter of all listings (average 25.6%), it rarely translates into explicit aural or olfactory recognition. Only very few heritage listings referred to items comprising or associated with existing sounds or with emanating odours, whether through aesthetic criteria or otherwise (average 0.18%) (Table 5). Moreover, olfactory attributes included in the listings were subsequently not clearly defined in-text, being limited simply to an ambiguous ‘smell’ or ‘scent’, which contributes to a sense of place within an important cul-

tural site/place. In most cases, smell appeared only in descriptive or historical background material, not in the formal statement of significance. Only 27 cases (24.11% of valid entries) referred to an olfactory attribute as having heritage value or significance.

New Zealand's heritage framework appears to be more capable of treating smell not just as historical context, but as an aesthetic quality worthy of recognition in its own right. There are New Zealand places, such as huts, former prisons and historic areas, where extant olfactory attributes, such as building smells, natural smells, or scented plants, are linked to aesthetic value.

Unlike visual aspects of heritage, which are there, quite literally, for all to see, olfactory aspects of heritage are transient and subject to local environmental conditions [153] as well as ephemeral. If the process that gave rise to the scent or odour is no longer practised, any olfactory triggers will have disappeared unless the odour-generating chemicals have permeated the fabric of a heritage item. Consequently, a significant proportion of those listings which positively identified odours/scents as heritage attributes comprised heritage items which no longer actually emitted odours, such as an incinerator (NSW039) (Figure 2) and a sewer vent (NSW064 SHR 01641) (Figure 1).



Figure 2. Reverberatory incinerator (NSW039), Willoughby NSW, now operating as a community art space and cafe (Photo: M Parker 2026).

It is evident that much of the identification of smell in heritage is derived from oral history or the archival or historic record. Smell enters heritage documentation mainly through the language of offence, nuisance, or pollution rather than positive meaning. Of the 112 listings that referenced smells, 58.9% were mentioned “offensive” smells. It would appear that, epistemologically, heritage professionals appear much more comfortable documenting smell when it is a problem, such as industrial emissions, sewage, smoke, or unpleasant working conditions, than when it is a positive part of place identity or memory. This bias may well be an artefact of the historic record drawn on when examining the history and significance of heritage items. For example, industrial and offensive odours were preserved in records because they generated protest, regulation, or controversy. With

any documentation emphasis being placed on historic records, it would follow that contemporary thinking and existing ascription of olfactory heritage is neglected for consideration, whether inadvertently or otherwise.

At present, heritage, as it is currently perceived, appears to be an odourless construct. The underrepresentation of smell in heritage documentation, and in both site descriptions and site histories, is likely to be an artefact of a deficient process. Heritage guidance documents may include reference to sound or smell as one of the sensory criteria, but if assessors are given no criteria, no methodology, and no evidentiary model, smell will still always be overlooked or side-lined in the process, with limited practical understanding taking place.

Heritage systems typically rely on photographs, plans, fabric analysis, archival documents, and comparative description. In the heritage context, the identification of smell is made complicated by its principal attributes:

- Smell is transient. It changes by topography, season, weather, time of day, and human activity [153].
- Smell is culturally interpreted rather than universally self-evident. People experience and interpret odours differently depending on memory, culture, physiology, and context [154,155]. A smell may be comforting, sacred, nostalgic, revolting, or meaningless depending on context. Unlike visual attributes, there are, at present, no specific criteria that classify smell within the heritage domain.
- Smell is difficult to document. Built fabric can be photographed or measured; smells do not leave the same kind of direct, easily reproducible record. While they are difficult to preserve in a stable evidentiary form, they can be recorded and documented [52,156].
- Smell can disappear. Even when historically important, many smellscape no longer exist in their original form [157], making living smell heritage especially rare.

At present, heritage systems do not yet have a conservation model for smell. Even if a smell is recognised as significant, should we need to consider what exactly is being protected? Is it the material source of the smell, the activity that produces it, the environmental conditions that allow it to persist, or the memory and interpretation attached to it? For example, a historic prison's smell may depend on old building materials and enclosed conditions; a botanic garden's scent depends on living plantings and seasonal cycles; and a mill's smell may depend on an industry that no longer exists.

Some guidance on a possible conceptual approach to resolve this issue can be derived from the treatment of historical value which heritage systems recognise as one of the key criteria for the assessment of cultural significance of a place or item. The guidelines to the Burra Charter note that *"A place may have historic value because it has influenced, or has been influenced by, an historic figure, event, phase, or activity. It may also have historic value as the site of an important event. For any given place the significance will be greater where evidence of the association or event survives in situ, or where the settings are substantially intact, than where it has been changed or evidence does not survive. However, some events or associations may be so important that the place retains significance regardless of subsequent treatment"* [111].

Critical here is that the historic connection (figure, event, phase, or activity) is an intangible component that occurred in the past and that may (but not need to) have left traces that are still observable in the fabric of the place/item. The nature and context of that historic connection is purely derived from historic records (e.g., archival documents, contemporary eyewitness accounts), while the in-situ evidence may find expression in a new construction in relation to that historic connection or in a modification of an existing place or item as a result of that historic connection.

When applying the guidance to the concept of smell, the past existence of a smell can be equated to the historic event, phase or activity and thus be documented accordingly

based on archival documents or contemporary eyewitness accounts. It is the historically contemporary importance of the manifestation of the smell that matters. In addition, evidence of that past smell event or activity can be found in the equipment that once generated that smell, such as vine vats, tannery pits or coffee roasters and mills. It can also be found in places and items erected in response to mediating undesirable odours, such as sewer vents (Figure 1).

Finally, the epistemology of ‘scent’ as opposed to ‘odour’ has implications for heritage value assessments. Sensory aesthetics, be they visual, aural, or olfactory, need not be positive to be cultural significant. What is currently absent is a uniform terminology and classification of smells and smell types in heritage settings. These can then be inserted into the exemplification of the criteria for aesthetic value.

6. Conclusions and Implications

The paper has shown a disconnect between the importance that heritage theory ascribes to the multisensory elements of aesthetic value and what heritage systems assess and protect. Theoretically, policy documents increasingly recognise non-visual heritage, expanding the concept of ‘aesthetic value’ towards the non-visual, including that of smell. In practice, however, guidance is largely parsimonious towards non-visual manifestations, restricting aesthetic value definitions to visible fabric, architecture, landscape, and design.

It appears that heritage professionals principally document odours when they are problematic to society, such as industrial emissions, sewage, or smoke. Positive aspects of odour value, being part of place identity or memory, are largely overlooked. The underrepresentation of such documentation is likely to be an artefact of a deficient process. Guidance documents may include reference to smell within sensory criteria, but if assessors are given no criteria or methodology to follow, smell will still always be side-lined in the management process.

However, it is the historically contemporary importance of the manifestation of the smell that matters. We put forward that heritage systems need a conservation model for smell, which directly address unique challenges of such non-visual heritage. Even when a smell is recognised as significant of a site or place, further consideration needs to be made on what associated elements should be protected—the material source of the smell, the activity causing emanation, environmental conditions which allow persistence, and/or memory and interpretation subsequently attached.

There is a clear absence of uniform terminology and classification of smells and smell types in heritage settings. Once addressed, these can then be inserted into the exemplification of the criteria for aesthetic value, allowing recognition of olfactory heritage values similarly to that of traditional visual-based determination.

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Appendix A. Extended Data Tables

Table A1. Olfactory attributes by point on mention in the assessment. Abbreviations: D—Description; H—History; V—Values discussion; S—Statemen of Significance.

Olfactory Attribute	D&H	H	V&H	V,S&H	V&S	S	Total
Aged smell of house		1					1
Ammonia smell		1					1
Bakery smell		1					1
Beer and cigarettes		1					1
Cereal smell		2					2
Cooking smell(s)	1	4					5
Disinfectant smells		1					1
Effluent smell		1					1
Garbage and smoke smell		1					1
Garden smell		1					1
Historic smell		1					1
Horse and hay smell		1					1
Human sweat			1				1
Hut smell					1		1
Improvement of offensive smells	3	28		1		8	40
Limiting horse smell		1					1
Milk smell		1					1
Mixed human focused			1				1
Musty smell					1		1
Non-defined					6		6
Offensive drain		2					2
Offensive harbour		3					3
Offensive industry		2					2
Offensive lavatory odours		1					1
Offensive milk		1					1
Offensive morgue smell		1					1
Offensive smell		2					2
Offensive vent		2					2
Opium, vinegar smells		1					1
Putrifaction smell		1					1
Sawn log smell			1				1
Scented plants	4	5				1	10
Seaside smells						1	1
Sewer smell		2					2
Sewerage smell						1	1
Smoke smell			1				1
Soap smell		1					1
Sour milk smell		1					1
Sour smell		1					1
Sulphur smell		2					2
Tannery smell		1					1
Tarry odour		1					1
Unpleasant butter industry smell		1					1
Whale smell		1					1
Wine smell		1					1
Wood smell		1					1
Total	8	80	3	1	8	11	112

Table A2. Olfactory attributes by state listing.

Olfactory Attribute	NSW	NT	QLD	Vic	WA	NZ/A	Total
Aged smell of house	1						1
Ammonia smell						1	1
Bakery smell	1						1
Beer and cigarettes						1	1
Cereal smell					2		2
Disinfectant smells				1			1
Effluent smell					1		1
Garbage and smoke smell				1			1
Garden smell					1		1
Historic smell						1	1
Horse and hay smell					1		1
Human sweat			1				1
Hut smell						1	1
Improvement of offensive smells	16		5	9	8	2	40
Limiting horse smell	1						1
Milk smell						1	1
Mixed human focused						1	1
Musty smell						1	1
Non-defined						6	6
Offensive drain	2						2
Offensive harbour	3						3
Offensive industry	2						2
Offensive lavatory odours						1	1
Offensive milk	1						1
Offensive morgue smell	1						1
Offensive smell				1	1		2
Offensive vent	2						2
Opium, vinegar smells						1	1
Putrification smell						1	1
Sawn log smell	1						1
Scented plants	6		1	2	1		10
Seaside smells	1						1
Sewer smell			1		1		2
Sewerage smell		1					1
Smoke smell						1	1
Soap smell					1		1
Sour milk smell						1	1
Sour smell						1	1
Sulphur smell			1	1			2
Tannery smell					1		1
Tarry odour				1			1
Unpleasant butter industry smell						1	1
Whale smell					1		1
Wine smell					1		1
Wood smell					1		1
Cooking smell(s)	4				1		5
Total	42	1	9	16	22	22	112

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