BUILDING *SISTEMAZIONE* ABROAD: MEANINGS OF HOME IN VENETO MIGRANTS' HOUSES IN BRISBANE

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This study investigates how cultural meanings of home are produced, negotiated, and associated with domestic space among Italian migrants from the Veneto region who settled in Brisbane, Australia. Using qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews conducted in Australia and Italy and a focus-group discussion in Brisbane, the research explores how migration trajectories, settlement decisions, and everyday domestic practices shape migrants' understandings of "home." Findings show that respondents conceptualize home as both "there" and "here": the hometown in Italy remains a primary symbolic reference, while the current Brisbane house functions as the present locus of dwelling and belonging, making home simultaneously multi-scalar and pluri-local. Earlier Australian dwellings were largely excluded from the category of home and remembered as provisional, instrumental accommodations with limited emotional value. In contrast, the current house was narrated as the definitive material outcome of permanent settlement and interpreted through the culturally resonant concept of sistemazione, linking home to stability, family formation, and secure employment. Respondents also framed the house as the "fruit of toil," condensing decades of intensive labour undertaken within Queensland's expanding economy and reflecting a work ethic shaped by rural and wartime childhoods in Italy. The home further emerged as a site for expressing pride in Italian cultural identity, while also carrying traces of earlier experiences of assimilationist pressure and intolerance. Finally, domestic spaces—especially the living room and kitchen—were central to maintaining family unity, and the house symbolized security both as a robust structure and as an owned asset that provides reassurance in old age. Overall, the findings position migrants' houses as culturally dense artifacts through which settlement, identity, labour, and family relations are materially organized and continually reaffirmed.

INTRODUCTION

Although homes constructed by migrants in Australia carry clear cultural value within a multicultural society, there has been limited direct investigation of how far Italian migrants' cultural meanings are materially expressed in their houses. This study therefore examines the cultural importance and layered, complex meanings that Italian migrants—particularly people from Italy's Veneto region who moved to Australia in the 1950s and 1960s—associate with the homes they built in their new country. Accordingly, the study aims to (1) review scholarship on the meanings migrants attribute to homes in host societies, (2) examine how Veneto migrants in Brisbane describe and interpret the houses they built during settlement, and (3) clarify how cultural meanings are articulated through building practices, material choices, and socio-spatial organization as recounted by residents. The analysis is intentionally grounded in participants' narratives and domestic practices rather than in a full architectural survey, and therefore treats "form" primarily as it is made meaningful in talk and everyday use.

The empirical material was collected in 2009–2010 and is presented here as a historically situated account of a first-generation, post-war cohort who migrated in the 1950s–1960s and are now in later life. This temporal framing is analytically important: it captures long-term settlement outcomes and retrospective evaluations of "home" after decades of residence in Australia, while also requiring careful attention to memory, reconstruction, and the changing policy climates (assimilationism to multiculturalism) through which participants interpret their experiences.

To frame "home" as a symbolic and meaningful place for older migrants living abroad, the authors draw on theoretical and empirical discussions of home from Europe (Gram-Hanssen and Bech-Danielsen, 2007; Lewin, 2001), the United States (Becker, 2003), and Australia (Baldassar, 2001; Hage, 1997; Levin, 2010; Pulvirenti, 1996, 2000; Supski, 2007; Thompson, 1994, 2005). Gram-Hanssen and Bech-Danielsen (2007) also note that "home" can differ substantially in meaning for refugees—those compelled to leave their country—and migrants—those who relocate by choice. The present research concentrates only on migrants (Faggion and Furlan (2018)).

In addition, the category "migrant" can be refined further. Portes et al. (1999:219) describe transnational migrants as individuals whose economic, political, or sociocultural work depends on ongoing, sustained cross-border social ties, typically involving frequent and regular travel (for instance, monthly or several times per year). While the participants in this study do return to Italy, their travel is not sufficiently intensive or economically oriented to align with Portes et al.'s definition; they typically visit primarily for family reunions, around three to four trips over a decade. For this reason, they are better understood not as transnational migrants but as elderly migrants—people who originally migrated mainly for economic reasons and were approximately 80 years old at the time of the research (Baldassar, 2001; Levin, 2010; Pulvirenti, 1996, 2000).

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

European and American Studies

In European scholarship, Lewin (2001) approached "home" largely as a theoretical construct and argued that studies focusing on older migrants in a host society should treat them as a distinct group because their understandings of home can differ markedly from those of older non-migrants. Lewin emphasized that migrants' meanings of home are shaped by factors such as gender, age, lived experience, and social as well as cultural background. For example, migrant women may conceptualize home differently than migrant men, and older migrants may attach different meanings to home than younger migrants. Lewin further suggested

that social background is particularly useful for micro-level analysis, while cultural background helps interpret meanings at the broader macro level (ibid.).

Working in Denmark, Gram-Hanssen and Bech-Danielsen (2007) advanced a similar set of explanatory variables and examined home meanings among three migrant groups—Turks, Iraqis, and Somalis. In their case, Turkish migrants were generally long-settled (often three to four decades), whereas the Iraqi and Somali participants were more recent arrivals as refugees. Their findings indicated that, for many Turkish migrants, feeling "at home" in Denmark was closely tied to family presence: home was understood primarily as the place where one's family is, with proximity to children and grandchildren valued above other considerations.

Comparable themes appear in Becker's (2003) study of older immigrants in northern California, focusing on Latino, Filipino, and Cambodian groups. Becker highlighted that crowded living arrangements were common and argued that "overcrowding" carried multiple meanings. While participants frequently reported discomfort with congestion, they often continued living this way not only due to limited financial resources but also because such arrangements aligned with cultural norms rooted in their countries of origin, where extended-family households were typical. Where relatives were present in the United States, it was common to find several people sharing a small apartment, with older family members sometimes sharing rooms with grandchildren or sleeping in makeshift spaces within common areas. For those without close kin nearby, friendship networks often substituted for family, leading to shared rooms or shared facilities in basements or boarding-style settings. Although some informants expressed dissatisfaction, many valued these arrangements for the everyday companionship and social interaction they provided—interaction that helped replace the extended-family environment left behind. In this sense, the meaning of home in the host country was strongly anchored in co-residence, family-like ties, and the social life produced through shared living.

Australian Studies

Australian scholarship often highlights different meanings of "home" than the strongly family-centred emphasis found in some European and North American studies (Baldassar, 2001; Hage, 1997; Levin, 2010; Pulvirenti, 1996, 2000; Supski, 2007; Thompson, 1994, 2005). Thompson argues that for Arabic, Greek, and Vietnamese migrant women in Sydney, home can be a source of agency in an unfamiliar environment, a way to manage migration's emotional costs, and a public marker of achievement, with the domestic sphere enabling safe expression of cultural difference (language, décor, gardens) even when wider acceptance is uneven despite multicultural ideals (Thompson, 1994, 2005). In this view, home can also atone for migration-related losses while symbolizing success earned through sacrifice and sustained labour, shaped by migration histories, origin-culture practices, and recognition within dominant norms (Furlan, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2016; Furlan and Faggion, 2015a, 2015b, 2016a, 2016b), complicating feminist accounts that treat home mainly as oppressive (Thompson, 1994, 2005). Hage similarly offers an affective account of home as a "feeling" or mode of being (cf. Hollander, 1991), proposing that "making home" involves cultivating four linked feelings—security, familiarity, community, and possibility—through empowered control of space, practical spatial competence, mutual recognition grounded in shared symbols and language, and openness to personal and social "advancement" (Hage, 1997:102–103).

Building on this framework, Levin (2010) examined Italian and Chinese migrants' understandings of home in Melbourne and argued that each group tended to prioritize one of Hage's four feelings more strongly than the others. For the Italian participants, Levin identified familiarity as especially prominent. She suggested that familiarity was produced through material and visual cues—furniture, paintings, photographs of childhood homes in Italy, collections and ornaments, and even everyday objects such as refrigerator magnets bearing Italian imagery and symbols. Such items evoke the place of origin and help generate a lived sense of familiarity within Australian domestic space. Levin also argued that differences between groups' home meanings were

influenced by factors including ethnic background, the historical and socioeconomic context of migration, age, and class position.

Pulvirenti (1996, 2000) likewise explored meanings attached to home among Italian migrants in Melbourne, focusing particularly on first-generation migrants, many originating from southern Italy, and the significance of homeownership. She described homeownership as carrying multiple, concrete meanings: security (including protection from eviction and a safeguard in situations such as unemployment or widowhood), independence (reducing reliance on others for financial support), privacy (avoiding shared living), autonomy (the ability to renovate without seeking permission), control (freedom to manage the domestic environment), success (pride and satisfaction in achievement), and responsibility (the obligation to maintain and care for the dwelling). Pulvirenti linked these meanings to the Italian concept of sistemazione—settling or establishing oneself—and argued that these migrants left Italy with a strong intention to build a stable future for themselves and their descendants in Australia. In her account, achieving sistemazione in Australia was a moral imperative that shaped their determination to own a house and invest it with the meanings listed above, rather than maintaining a primary orientation toward return (Pulvirenti, 2000). Pulvirenti's interpretation contrasts with Baldassar's (2001) discussion of sistemazione among Italian migrants in Perth, where migration is framed more explicitly as an economic strategy pursued to achieve sistemazione that would ultimately be realized in the homeland.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This section explains the study's qualitative approach and knowledge claims, focusing on how migration and house-building in Australia shape what "home" means for Italian migrants from the Veneto region now living in Brisbane; Veneto was chosen to study one regional cohort (rather than Brisbane's wider pan-Italian community) because research on this specific group in South East Queensland is limited (Baldassar and Pesman, 2005) and because regional identity strongly structures Italian language, culture, social life, and architectural traditions (Mangano in Krase, 2006; Mecca and Iozzi, 2000; Pascoe, 1987). Data come from one focus group in Australia and in-depth interviews in both Australia and Italy, allowing participants to give detailed narratives about building practices, materials, and domestic space, which is well-suited to interpreting culturally embedded meanings in dwellings (Chapman, 2005). The project is exploratory, using a small purposive sample to generate hypotheses and interpretive insights rather than test fixed propositions.

Interviews in Australia (January–August 2009) involved ten Veneto-born migrant families (20 individuals), all born in Italy between 1920–1930 and arriving in Australia in the 1950s–1960s, recruited via Italian national/regional clubs, school associations, and Catholic parishes. To contextualize these accounts, interviews in Italy (June–September 2010) were conducted with five non-migrant Veneto families (10 individuals) who were friends of the Brisbane participants; these were used as a comparative backdrop to situate shared regional memories and clarify emic concepts, not as an independent validation sample. All interviews took place in participants' homes, and analysis was further informed by a focus group at the Italian Club in Newmarket, Brisbane. Because recruitment relied on clubs, parishes, and associations, the sample likely favors socially connected migrants and under-represents less institutionally engaged individuals, so it should be read as illustrative of an older first-generation Veneto cohort rather than representative of all Italians in Brisbane.

All interviews were conducted and transcribed in Italian to better capture culturally specific meanings that are most fully expressed in a native language (Cresciani, 2003). In Australia, interviews started with open discussion of migration histories, community relationships, and early settlement experiences, then shifted to targeted questions on three themes: the house's location, its planning/construction, and what the built form meant to participants; many interviewees were re-interviewed to develop fuller life histories, and transcripts (including the focus group) were coded using these themes. Analytic trustworthiness was strengthened through a three-stage coding process—open coding to identify recurring emic terms (e.g., *sistemazione*) and motifs,

development of a shared, iteratively refined codebook with clear rules, and synthesis into case-by-theme matrices to test patterns and identify negative cases—supported by an audit trail documenting decisions from transcript to claim. Because the study was bilingual, translation was treated as interpretive: excerpts were translated into English by the first author, checked by the second for semantic and idiomatic equivalence, and culturally dense Italian terms were retained and glossed when needed (e.g., *sistemazione*).

Ethical approval was obtained through the authors' institutional human-research ethics processes, with participants receiving study information, giving informed consent, retaining the right to withdraw, and having their confidentiality protected through anonymized quotations, minimized identifying detail, and secure storage of audio files and transcripts. The authors also addressed positionality via reflexive memoing: their architecture training and lived experience across Italian and Australian contexts supported rapport and interpretation but risked "insider" assumptions, so they sought disconfirming evidence and returned preliminary interpretations to participants for member checking. Interpretation was deepened through hermeneutic analysis grounded in prior migration-and-place scholarship, with findings again validated by participants; this approach follows Armstrong's (2000, 2003, 2004) argument that such concepts are layered and benefit from hermeneutic interpretation, and it draws on a phenomenological mode associated with Madison (1988) (Table 1).

Table 1: Criteria used to evaluate the interpretive account (after Madison, 1988; summarized by Plager, 1994).

Criterion	What it requires in this study
Coherence	The interpretation forms a unified account; tensions and contradictions are acknowledged and made intelligible as far as the data allow.
Comprehensiveness	The account keeps the "whole" in view, preserving participants' situatedness and temporality while addressing variation across cases.
Penetration	The interpretation engages and clarifies the central problematic the study seeks to illuminate.
Thoroughness	All guiding questions and relevant strands of the material are examined; no major line of inquiry is left untreated.
Appropriateness	Interpretive questions and emphases arise from the text itself rather than being imposed externally.
Contextuality	Historical and contextual features of participants' accounts are retained, avoiding decontextualized or abstracted claims.
Agreement	The interpretation remains faithful to what the text says, while still indicating where reinterpretation is possible and where prior readings may be limited.
Suggestiveness	The account generates new questions and directions that can stimulate further interpretive work.
Potential	The interpretation is extendable over time, offering insights and possibilities that can remain illuminating beyond the immediate study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section opens with two points of clarification. The first concerns where participants located the idea of "home"—as both "there" and "here." The second addresses how respondents remembered (or, more accurately, did not meaningfully remember) the earlier houses they occupied after arriving in Australia. The discussion then turns to the home as a deliberately constructed material artifact, with particular attention to how cultural meanings are narrated and, in some cases, associated with spatial arrangements, materials,

and aesthetic decisions. Because the study does not include measured drawings or a systematic architectural survey, references to "built form" are limited to features that participants highlighted in their accounts and to the socio-spatial practices through which those features became meaningful.

First clarification: Does "home" refer to the hometown or the current house?

During the final interview, when respondents were invited to describe what "home" meant to them, most immediately sought to the question, asking variations of: "Do you mean home as in my town of origin—the place where I grew up—or do you mean this house?" This reaction is revealing because it indicates that, for many migrants, the term "home" is first anchored in the native village, and only secondarily connected to the dwelling in which they currently live. In this sense, home was initially fused with the hometown "there," a place associated with roots and kinship ties that remain active through contemporary communication (telephone, email, post, and video calling; e.g., Skype at the time of fieldwork). At the same time, home was also understood as "here," namely the Brisbane house that frames everyday life in the present.

These dual associations align with existing scholarship. For Relph (1976), the hometown functions as home because of the deep attachment people often feel to their birthplace and to the remembered landscapes of childhood. From a broader Western historical perspective, Gram-Hanssen and Bech-Danielsen (2007, quoting Moore, 2000) and Burnett (1978) note that, particularly in the nineteenth century, "home" was frequently understood as the country of origin rather than as a private dwelling, and that only later did the domestic house become the dominant referent. In the present study, participants' accounts suggest both a geography and a spatial extension of home. Using the terms proposed by Lucas and Purkayastha (2007), home for this group can be described as *multi-scalar* (at once a town and a house) and *pluri-local* (located in both Italy and Brisbane).

Second clarification: Earlier houses in Australia carried little emotional weight

A further pattern emerged when the interviews moved into the material realm of home. Photographs of the first houses occupied in Australia were largely absent from the family albums shown by respondents. Across all interviewed families, only three photographs of those earlier dwellings appeared, and one of these was incidental, serving merely as a backdrop rather than as a meaningful subject. This absence was striking in itself.

The issue was then raised during the focus-group discussion. When asked directly about the first houses inhabited upon arrival in Australia and what those dwellings might have meant, the question was initially met with silence. Even after rephrasing, responses tended to dismiss the premise: "What would you like to know? Those houses were not ours!" when referring to rentals, or, where a house had been owned, it was described as neither "ideal" nor "final accommodation," but rather as an "economic investment" that was not equated with home. One participant summarized the prevailing view clearly: "Now home is my village and my home in Brisbane," a statement that effectively excludes earlier Australian dwellings from the category of home. Many others expressed the same position in different words.

Taken together—the scarcity of photographs, the silence surrounding the topic, the framing of rentals as not belonging to them, and the portrayal of early owned properties as provisional and purely financial—these cues were interpreted as evidence of emotional distance from the first dwellings and as an indication that those places carried limited affective significance.

Meanings of home

Sistemazione and the "definitive" house

Many respondents connected their Brisbane houses to the idea of a long-imagined "dream house" in their place of origin, bringing into view the Italian concept of *sistemazione*, a term also discussed in studies of Italian migration to Australia (Baldassar, 2001; Pulvirenti, 1996, 2000). In respondents' explanations, *sistemazione* referred in practical terms to a stable family life, a house, and secure employment (typically for the husband). This interpretation resonates with Baldassar's (2001) discussion of *sistemazione* as oriented toward "back home." Baldassar (2001:56) also notes that, for long-term Veneto migrants abroad, remaining overseas could be justified only if one could establish a *sistemazione* abroad that exceeded what could realistically be achieved in the hometown.

For participants in this study, such "superiority" was most often expressed through self-employment or well-paid work for the breadwinner, alongside improved opportunities in Australia for their children. These perceived advantages were frequently cited as a key reason for staying in Australia rather than returning to Italy. Respondents further linked *sistemazione* in Australia to the construction of their current (and often described as final) Brisbane house. Building this house followed their decision to settle permanently, and the dwelling came to stand as the visible, material sign of *sistemazione* achieved in the host country. In this way, an Italian cultural concept provided the symbolic lens through which the meaning of the Brisbane home was articulated.

The house as the "fruit of toil"

Respondents said they came to Australia primarily to work, often expecting to labour intensely for a short time and then return to Italy, with "working hard" recalled as sustained, physically demanding effort—sometimes across multiple jobs—aimed at achieving a clear life goal; these memories also align with Queensland's long period of population and industrial expansion that supported relatively wide access to paid employment, especially from the 1950s to the 1990s in agriculture and service-related work (Ellis and Christine, 2010). Their narratives repeatedly pointed to two drivers: a moral work ethic learned in wartime Veneto peasant households (often with fathers and grandfathers as *mezzadri*), where survival depended on manual labour and schooling was limited, and the contrast between post-war Italian scarcity and an Australia remembered as offering opportunity. Many stressed that the "temporary" plan became decades of work, often framed with gratitude toward the host country, and that this prolonged labour ultimately enabled them to build their Brisbane homes—dwellings that symbolized both the effort invested in Australia and the enduring imprint of their social origins, early-life discipline, and the economic conditions of the period.

Respondents' pride in Italian culture was often expressed through their Brisbane homes, but many recalled that in earlier decades such pride was not warmly received, with intolerance producing shame and humiliation that shaped how they understood "home," so their accounts were situated within Australia's shifting migration politics. Anti-migrant sentiment intensified in the 1950s amid a major post-war migration program (Douglass, 1995) designed to grow the labour force and population (Jordens, 1995; Jupp, 1996; Murphy, 1993), while public reassurance that most newcomers would be British sustained the "white Australia" ideal (Castels et al., 1988); when British intake fell short, recruitment expanded to Northern European and Mediterranean migrants and assimilationist propaganda stressed rapid cultural absorption (Murphy, 1993). Many respondents arrived in the Assimilationist period (1947–1963), when migrants were expected to abandon prior practices to fit an Anglo-Celtic norm (Jordens, 1995; Jupp, 1996; Murphy, 1993), captured by a 1950 *The Sun-Herald* line: "What we want is for these migrants to become absorbed into the Australian community, not to bring their own

habits with them" (quoted in Hage, 1997:113). They then lived through the Integration period (1964–1972) and the Multicultural period (1973–present), which respondents generally described as bringing increasing acceptance and public celebration of diversity, with conditions for migrants improving over time (Jordens, 1995; Jupp, 1996; Murphy, 1993).

Identity, assimilation, and pride

These reflections point to a psychological movement in respondents' accounts—from early experiences of shame and humiliation toward a more confident pride in Italian identity—shaped by shifting political climates. In many narratives, pride was explicitly tied to the home and to external aesthetic choices made during construction. The resulting houses can be read as material expressions of pride in Italian architectural culture, while still carrying faint traces of earlier negative experiences that had once constrained how openly difference could be displayed.

When describing what their Brisbane homes meant, some respondents used explicitly symbolic language. One compared the house to a "nest" for the family: a comfortable place where relatives could always return for food, rest, and welcome. Another referred to the home as a "headquarters." Such metaphors evoke well-known interpretations of home as shelter (Sommerville, 1992) or as a refuge from the outside world (Després, 1991), supporting aspects of existing literature.

Family unity and socio-spatial practices

However, respondents' narratives repeatedly returned, often indirectly, to a deeper social dimension: family. Many spoke at length about family members, family activities, and the size and continuity of their kin networks, emphasizing both Italian and Australian branches. This aligns with scholarship that sometimes equates home with family (Mallett, 2004), while also resonating with perspectives that understand home as more expansive than the household as such (Blunt and Dowling, 2006). In the present study, respondents did not primarily define home through the family of origin (parents and siblings in the hometown), but through the nuclear family (the respondents as parents and, where relevant, children living at home) and the extended family (children and their families). This social sphere parallels Becker's (2003) framing of home as encompassing both nuclear and extended relations.

Starting from this social emphasis, the analysis returns to the house itself to examine socio-spatial relations and emotions tied to specific interior settings, particularly the living room and kitchen.

Many respondents identified the more informal ground-floor living area, along with the downstairs kitchen, as the preferred gathering space: warmer, more private, and less formal than the upstairs living room. Because family reunions and everyday interactions concentrated in these spaces, the Brisbane house for some respondents acquired the meaning of a focal point through which family unity could be sustained. In this sense, the sociocultural meaning of home became more layered than the initial framing of the house merely as shelter or refuge.

Security, material robustness, and ownership

For all respondents, the present Brisbane home was strongly associated with security, understood in both physical and financial terms. Given the hazards that can threaten houses and, by extension, family wellbeing

Table 2: Domestic features emphasized in participants' narratives and the meanings attached to them.

Narrated feature / practice	Interpretive meaning in the accounts
Dual living areas (more formal upstairs vs. everyday gathering downstairs)	Negotiation between public respectability and intimate family life; differentiation between "hosting" and daily togetherness.
Kitchen and informal living area as primary gathering space	Family unity and continuity; the house as a social anchor for children and extended kin.
Robust construction (reinforced concrete and brick)	Physical security against environmental hazards; confidence in the dwelling as protective infrastructure.
Homeownership	Ontological and financial security in later life; reassurance regarding future housing needs, especially in narratives attentive to widowhood and aging.
External aesthetic choices during construction	Pride in Italian cultural identity and architectural sensibilities, expressed more openly as assimilationist pressures eased over time.

in Queensland, respondents often linked the idea of home to the assurance provided by a protective structure. While this may appear similar to earlier images of the house as refuge, the emphasis differs. In the discussion of shelter and family, the focus fell on the home as a social haven. Here, attention shifts toward the dwelling as a built structure that produces security through its material resilience.

Most respondents argued that a house should be solidly built—typically in reinforced concrete and brick—in order to withstand environmental threats. This meaning appeared especially frequently in men's accounts, likely reflecting their closer involvement in the building process. For some, security emerged primarily from construction and structural strength; for others, it derived from ownership itself. The certainty of owning the dwelling provided confidence about the future. This second emphasis was particularly common in women's narratives, where the prospect of widowhood and the recognition that women often outlive men made homeownership feel like a stabilizing foundation. In this way, ownership offered peace of mind, especially regarding the basic questions of where to live and how to maintain oneself over time.

CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that for these Veneto migrants in Brisbane, "home" is not a single place or merely the current dwelling, but a dual, pluri-local experience spanning "there" (the Italian hometown) and "here" (the Brisbane house), as shown by participants' instinct to ask which "home" was meant and by the continuing emotional primacy of origin sustained through kin ties and communication. Within Australia, however, respondents drew sharp boundaries: earlier rentals and even some first owned homes were framed as provisional and emotionally distant—rarely photographed, seldom discussed, and treated as instrumental steps—whereas the present Brisbane house was narrated as the definitive endpoint of permanent settlement. Its meaning was interpreted through culturally specific moral idioms, especially *sistemazione*, with the house understood as embodied proof of having "settled properly" through work, family, and long-term security, condensing life histories of hardship and decades of demanding labour into a durable marker of achievement and mobility. Homes also acted as cultural statements, expressing Italian identity through aesthetics while reflecting a historical shift from shame under assimilationist pressures to greater openness as policy discourse moved toward multiculturalism, making the domestic sphere a controllable space for heritage. Finally, the Brisbane home functioned as a social and existential anchor—organizing family gatherings around key rooms, and symbolizing security both as a sturdy shelter against perceived hazards and as owned property offering

financial reassurance, especially in relation to ageing and the future.

Limitations and transferability. This study focuses on a purposively bounded cohort (Veneto-born migrants who arrived in the 1950s–1960s and were interviewed in later life) and therefore does not claim statistical generalizability to all Italian Australians or to younger migrant generations. Accounts are retrospective and may be shaped by memory, subsequent life events, and changing policy contexts. In addition, because the analysis is grounded primarily in interviews and a focus group rather than in a systematic architectural survey, material and spatial claims are limited to features participants themselves foregrounded (e.g., everyday use of the kitchen/living areas, robust masonry construction, and selected aesthetic choices). These constraints are also analytically productive: they make visible how migrants narrate settlement and belonging over the long term, and they indicate where future work could integrate ethnography with measured documentation of dwelling form.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that the migrants' houses are not merely functional dwellings but culturally and emotionally dense artifacts through which settlement, work, identity, family, and security are materially organized and continually reaffirmed.

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