

Brisbane's traditional fencing styles

A GUIDE TO BRISBANE'S TRADITIONAL FENCE STYLES



Traditionally, fences reflected the style and period of the house, and extended its design details to the front boundary. (Image courtesy of State Library of Queensland)

A fence is important to the authentic presentation of traditional houses and streetscapes and should complement the house style and period.

This fact sheet covers:

- traditional housing fence principles
- how to identify the architectural style of a house
- key details of fence styles for Queensland architectural periods.

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Approvals

Works to Local heritage places

Some fencing projects may require a development approval.

Brisbane Local heritage places are protected under the Heritage overlay of the local planning scheme, [Brisbane City Plan 2014](#) (City Plan).

If your property is a Local heritage place, you may require approval. Works that will have more than a minor impact on the cultural significance of a heritage place require development approval.

Minor works that have no impact, or no more than a minor impact, on the cultural significance of a heritage place may be eligible for an exemption certificate.

Before starting a project, visit brisbane.qld.gov.au and search 'heritage properties' and 'heritage exemption certificates' or call Brisbane City Council on 3403 8888 and ask to speak with a Planning Information Officer.

For more information about heritage places and their values search [Local Heritage Places online](#).

State heritage places

The Queensland Government is responsible for assessing and approving works on State heritage places, which are places identified in the Queensland Heritage Register and are important to Queensland. For more information, visit qld.gov.au and search 'changing or developing heritage places'.

General principles for traditional fences

While traditional fences typically corresponded to the period and style of the house, the following principles may apply to a variety of traditional fencing styles.

Front fences

- More decorative than side and rear fences.
- Could be see-through to show off front gardens.
- Usually included pedestrian and vehicle gates.
- Painted to improve aesthetics and material protection.
- Painted in the same colour as external house joinery or in pale colours.
- The top of picket or palisade panels could be straight, concave, convex or shaped.

Side and rear fences

- More utilitarian than front fences.
- Constructed of chain wire or timber palings.
- Chain wire fences had timber framing and were typically 1200 mm in height.
- Timber paling fences were usually 1500 mm in height.

Pedestrian and vehicle gates

- Matched fencing material and form but could include more detail.
- Timber picket fences had timber-framed gates with the same picket details.
- Palisade fences had gates with the same metalwork details.

Sloping property boundaries

- Timber and chain wire fences usually follow the boundary slope.
- Masonry (brick, stone) and concrete fences were usually stepped down boundary slopes.

'Timber and tin' houses

- Timber pickets or metal mesh supported by timber posts and rails.
- Fence posts slightly taller than the picket or mesh.
- Gateposts and corner posts thicker and taller with decorative tops.
- Common picket top shapes included gothic (pointed arch), pointed (45° and 60°), rounded or acorn.

Masonry houses

- Often of the same material and finish as the house, e.g. face brick or render.
- May have a low, solid masonry base with a fence above.
- Grand fences were metal palisade panels between masonry piers.
- Panels were either cast iron rods with decorative spearheads or fleur-de-lis tips or wrought iron segments with decorative scrollwork.

Key elements of traditional fencing

Identifying the style and period of a house can help with the selection and design of its complementary fencing.

House period and style

Brisbane has many traditional house styles from different periods. Identifying the period (historical timeframe) and style (architectural characteristics) of traditional housing is the first step to selecting an appropriate fencing style. Each period is characterised by different architectural style elements such as building forms, materials and details and there can be an overlap of architectural styles across periods. For example, in Brisbane, colonial style houses were built during the Victorian period.

Brisbane's traditional housing periods were:

- Victorian (1840s–1890s)
- Federation (1890s–1910s)
- Interwar (1915–1940).

Original fence style and form

Original fence styles are the most authentic and some investigation may be required to determine the original design. Generally, highly detailed or well-proportioned houses had carefully considered fences.

To help understand the original house:

- search for photographic evidence of early fencing details
- excavate the fence line to search for original fencing remnants
- seek guidance from an experienced heritage consultant about appropriate fencing design.

Fence design, height and details

A new fence should not be more elaborate than the house period and style. Maintaining a traditional fence height will complement the house scale and ensure an authentic outcome.

A traditional front fence should be between 1200 mm and 1500 mm in height depending on the house period and style. Side and rear fences may be higher than the front fence.

Planting behind the fence line could provide additional screening for privacy and security. Read 'Choosing the right fence' below for design guidance.

Footings

Picket fencing has discreet footings that are less likely to impact the root systems of mature trees near property boundaries or fences. Modern picket fence footings comprise of treated posts secured with concrete into ground holes, with the concrete footing finished with a slight fall to prevent water collection. Palisade fence footings are typically masonry and may need to be designed by an engineer, especially if the fence is to retain the soil behind it. Seeking advice about suitable footings from an appropriately qualified contractor is recommended.

Paint

Traditional timber fences should be painted in the light colour used for house timber joinery, such as the balustrade and other verandah elements.

Unless the elements were unpainted stone or brick, the pier and base of palisade fences were also typically painted the same light house joinery colour. The metal panels were painted a deep colour such as bronze, green or black.

Identifying the house architectural style

Identifying the architectural period of traditional housing is the first step in identifying a fence style that is complementary to your home.

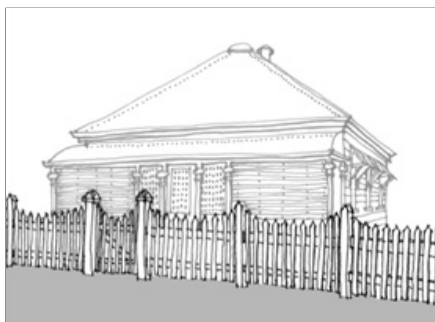
Illustrations below show typical examples of Brisbane's traditional housing styles during each architectural period.

For further guidance on identifying traditional house architectural periods and styles, visit brisbane.qld.gov.au and search 'heritage properties'.

Victorian period (1840s-1890s)



Gable-roofed cottage with front verandahs



Pyramid roof



Hip-roofed house with encircling verandahs



Simple masonry house

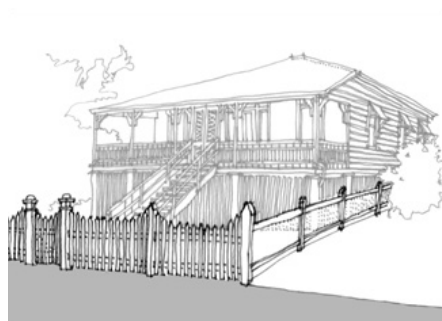


Multi-storey masonry and timber house

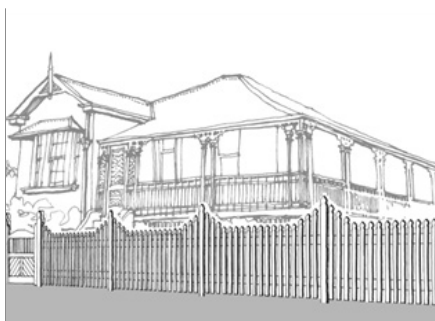


Multi-storey masonry house

Federation period (1890s-1910s)



Bungalow



Asymmetrical bungalow



Queen Anne style

Interwar period (1915-1940)



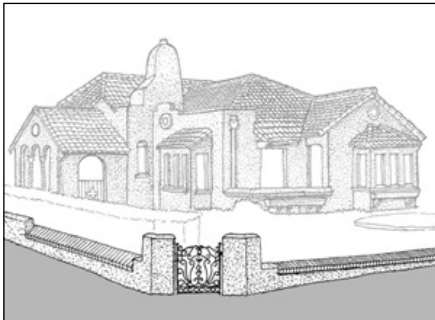
Porch and gable



Multi-gable house



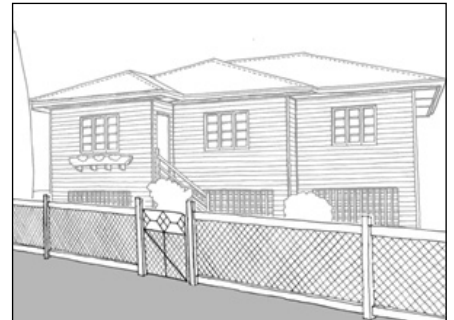
Californian Bungalow



Spanish Mission



Old English/Tudor Revival



Conventional hip-roofed house



Art Deco



Functionalist

Choosing the right front fence

Victorian period (1840s-1890s)

Most Victorian period fences were timber and impressively customised with a variety of picket and post top shapes, gate designs and paint colours. In Queensland, timber was readily available and affordable during this period, and fencing designs complemented the typical 'timber and tin' house style. Some palisade fences fronted more elaborate houses in Brisbane and typically featured cast iron or wrought iron panels between rendered brick piers.

Common features

- Simple houses had simple fences; elaborate houses had elaborate fences.
- Front fences were between 1200 mm (most common) and 1500 mm in height.
- Fence bays were 2400 mm long.
- Fences had 2 timber rails of 100 mm square hardwood, rip-cut diagonally along the length.
- Timber pickets were 75 mm.
- Gaps between pickets were 50 mm.
- Picket top lines were straight, curved, stepped or angled up to posts.
- Intermediate posts were 75 mm wide and 100 mm deep.
- Square posts for gates and corners were 150 mm wide.
- Decorated and shaped square corner posts were 300 mm wide.
- All gate posts were thicker and taller than intermediate posts.
- Most front fences were painted.
- Side and rear fences were usually unpainted.

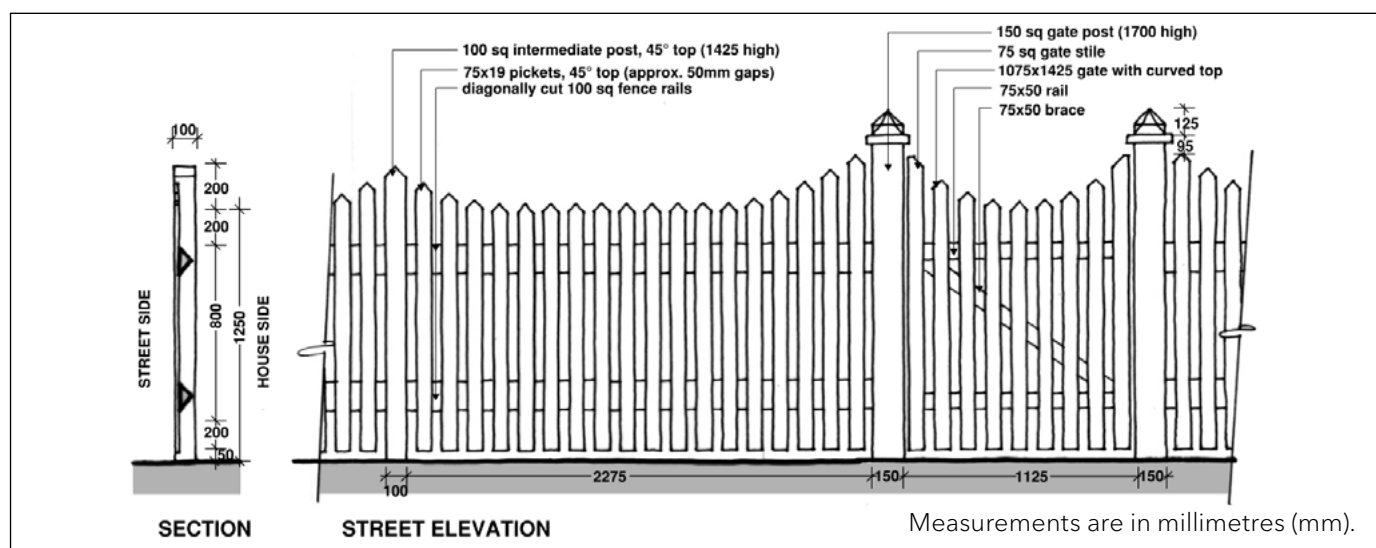


A simple timber picket fence in front of a workers cottage. (Image source: Brisbane City Council)

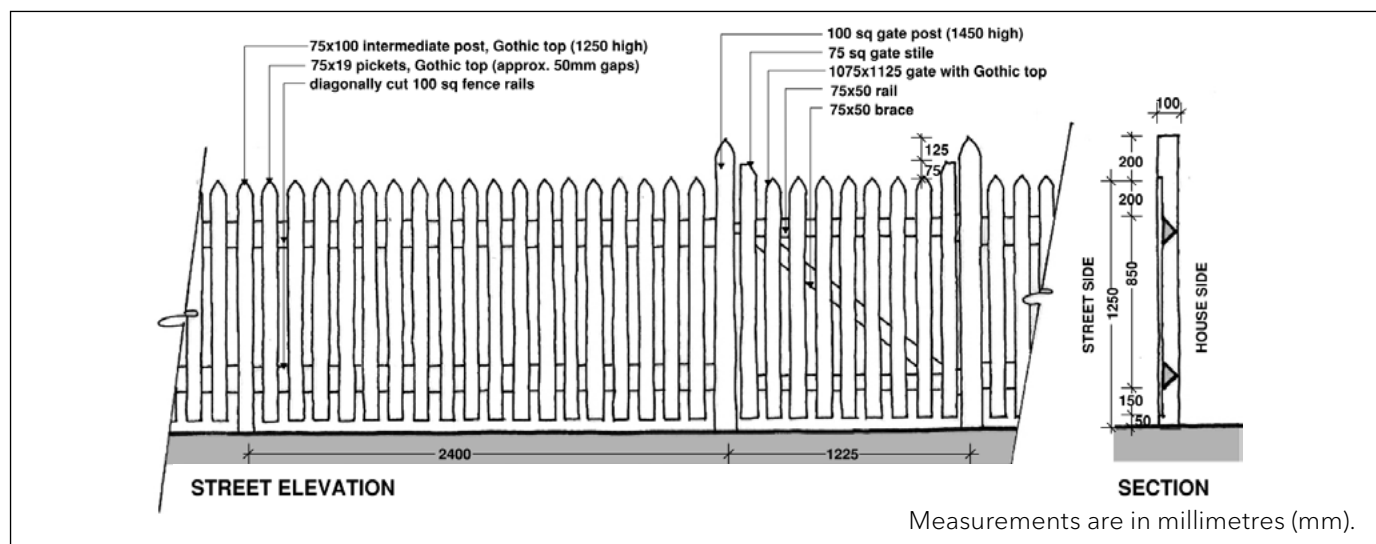
Below: A timber fence with decorated posts and draped pickets in front of a house in New Farm. (Image courtesy of State Library of Queensland)



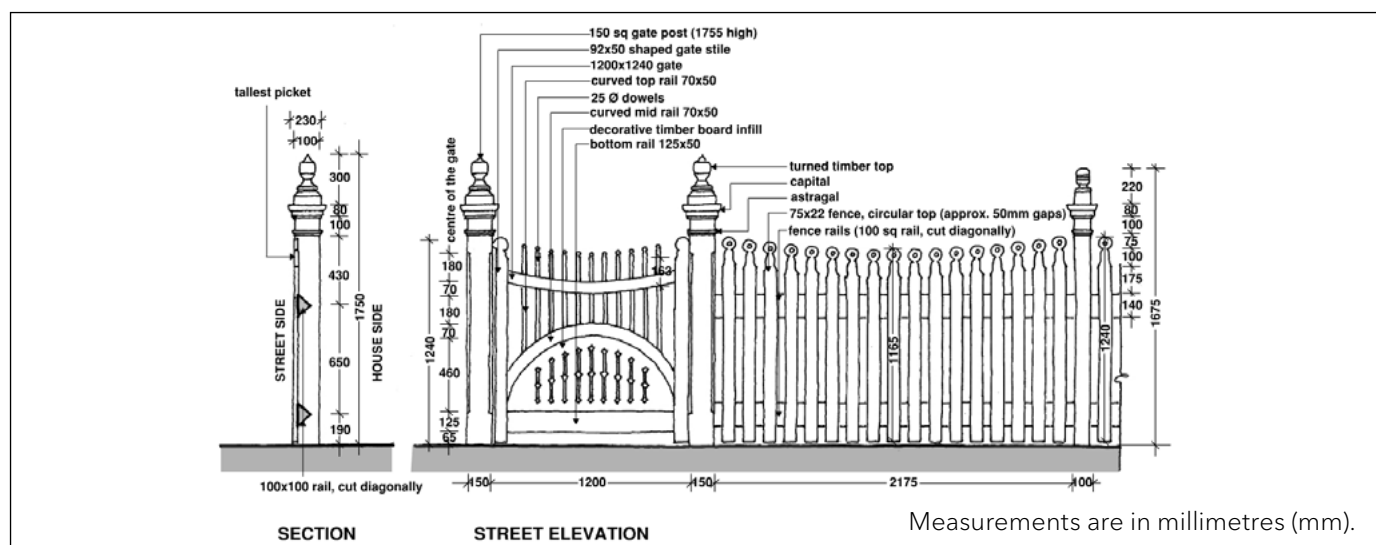
Timber fences elevations and sections



A 45-degree angle top picket fence, draped picket top-line with picket gate and larger decorated posts.

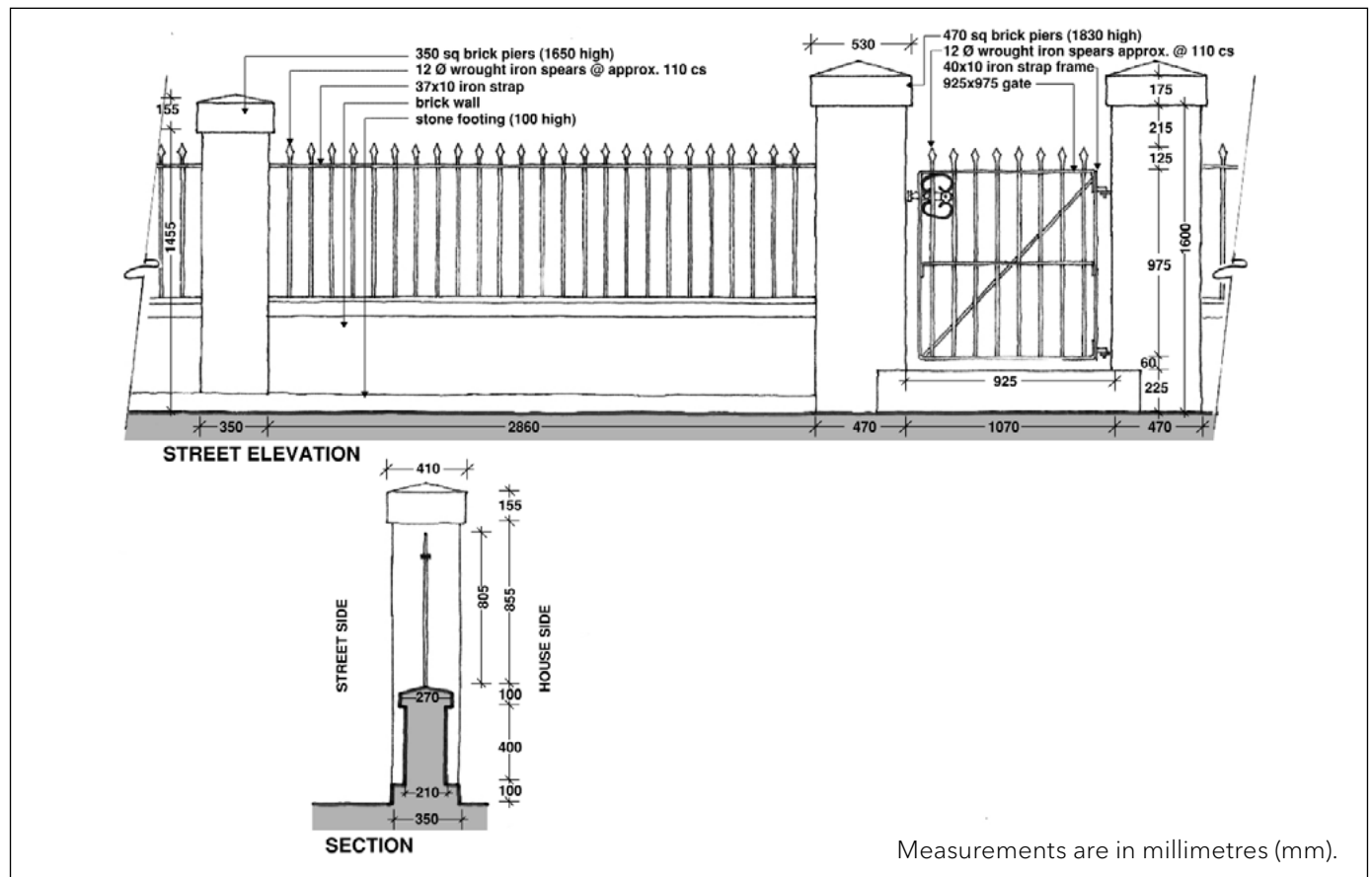


A 'Gothic' top picket fence, straight picket top-line, and picket gate.

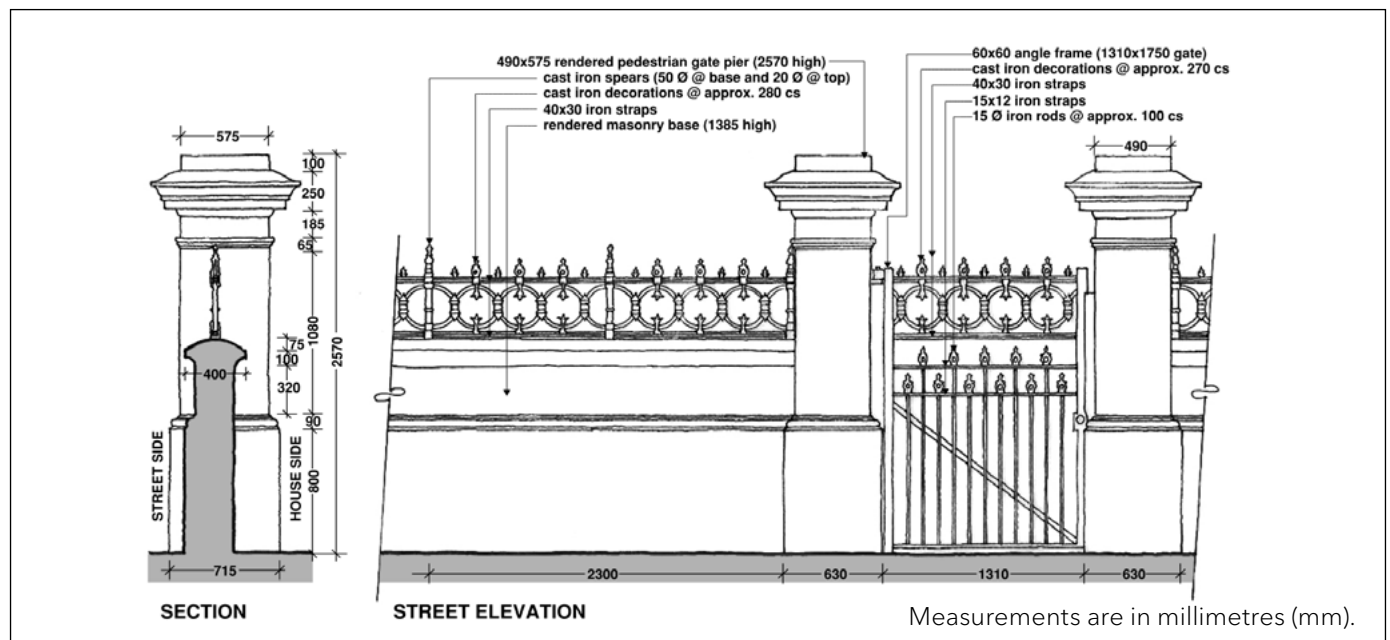


A more elaborate, decorative round-top picket fence, draped picket top-line, and a joinery gate.

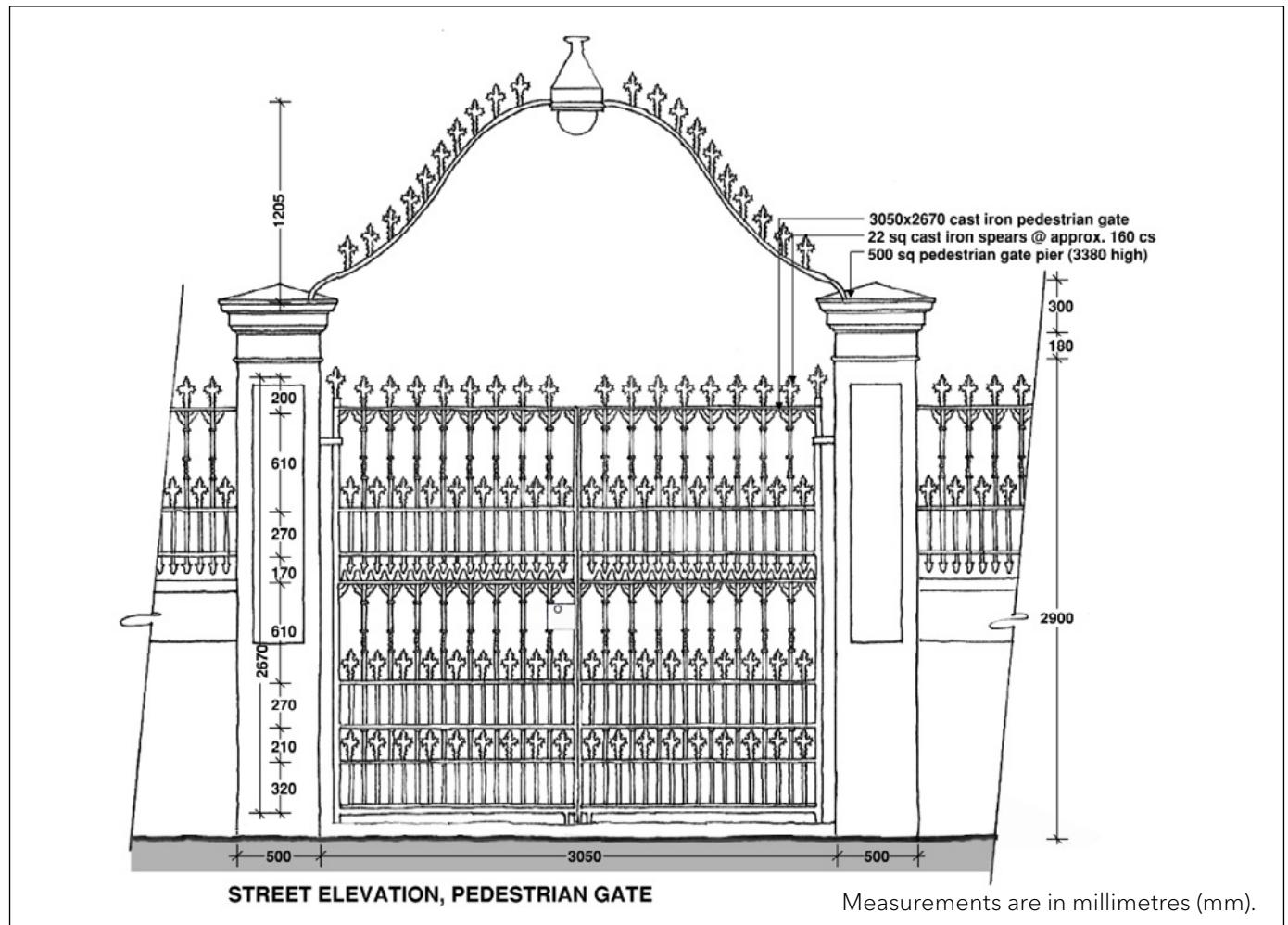
Masonry fences elevations and sections



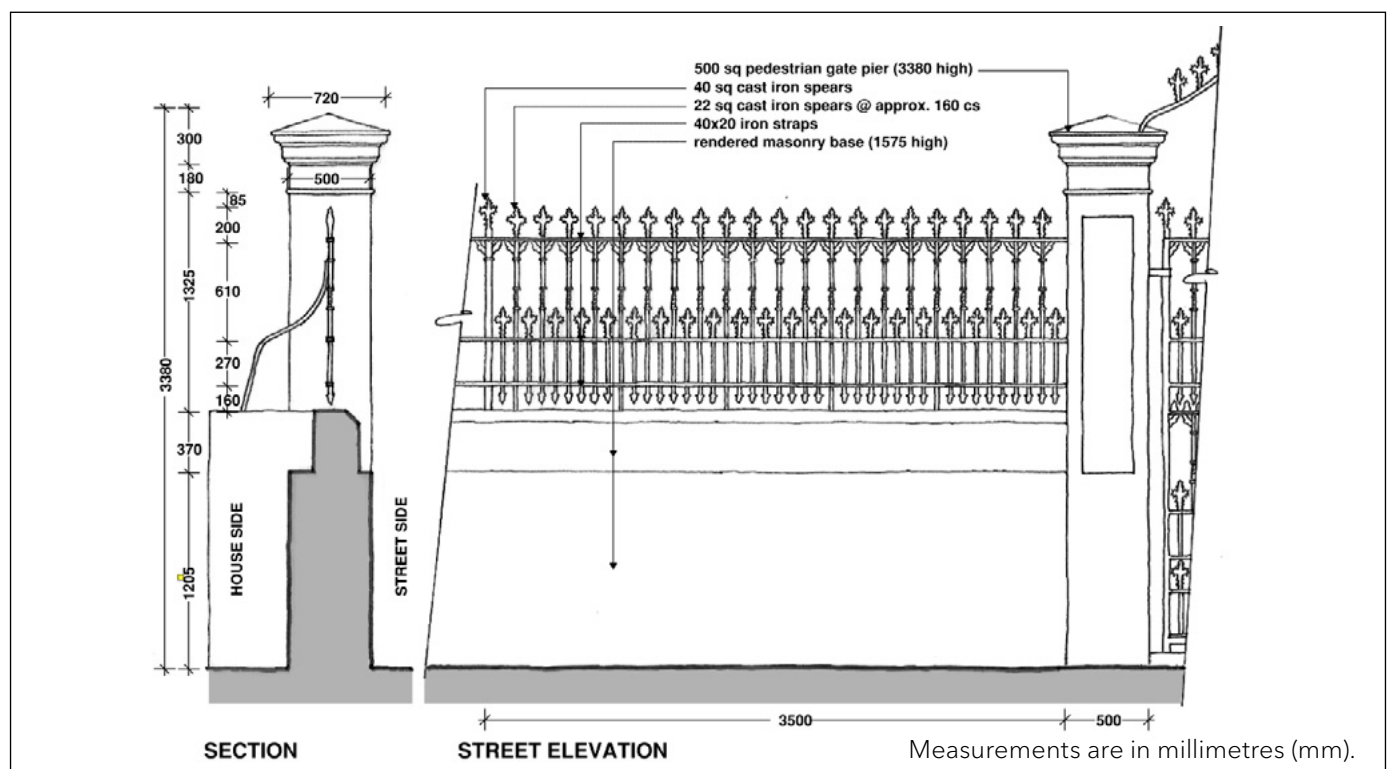
A simple wrought iron palisade fence with bagged brick piers.



An intermediate cast iron palisade fence with rendered brick piers.



A grand cast iron palisade fence and gate with rendered brick piers.



A grand cast iron palisade fence with rendered brick piers.

Federation period (1890s-1910s)

Federation period fences mirrored the simplification of house detailing at this time. Simple picket fences to enclose relatively plain houses were favoured over the more elaborate picket and palisade fences of the Victorian period, but these also remained popular. Queen Anne and other elaborate house styles were likely to have elaborate picket fences with substantial yet simply decorated posts.

Common features

Most Victorian period fence details continued to apply in the Federation period, with exceptions including:

- timber rails were 100 mm high x 38 mm wide
- square top rails were sometimes fixed on the diagonal (rotated 90°).

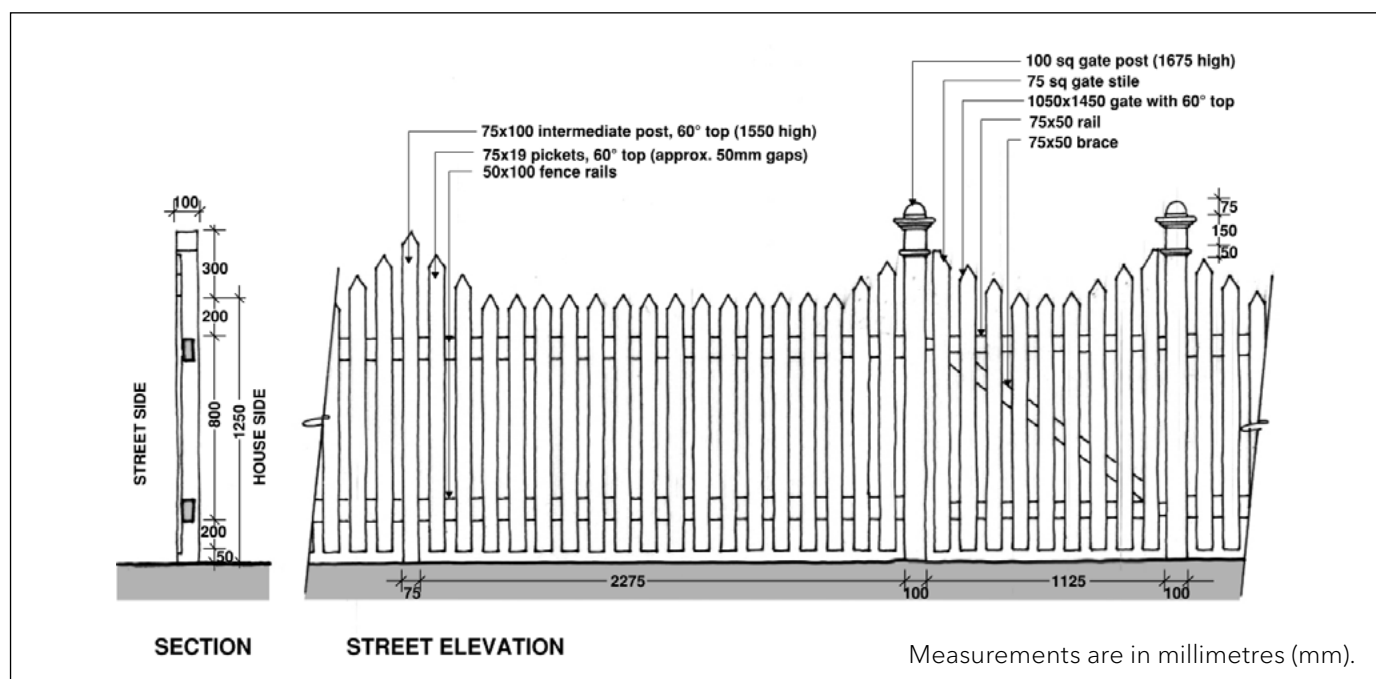


A simple picket fence with a top line stepped up to posts fronting a Bungalow. The front fence is painted, and the side fence is unpainted. (Image source: Brisbane City Council)

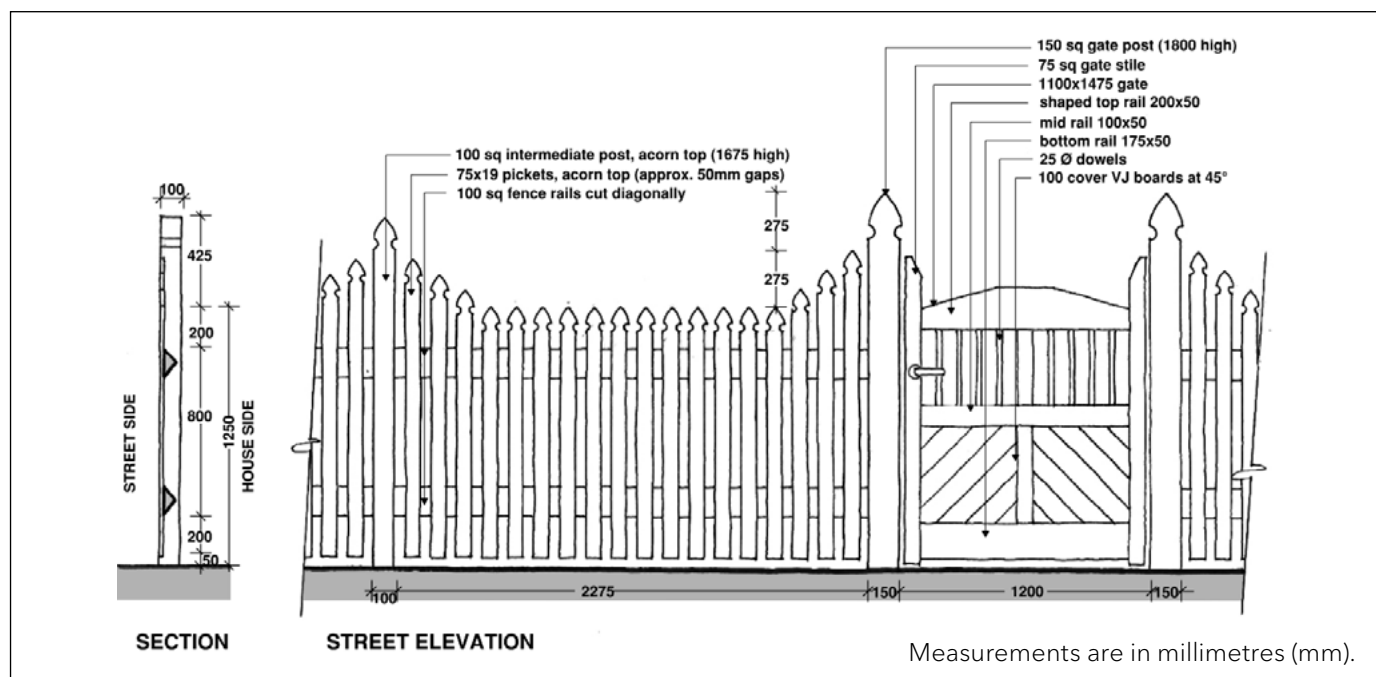
Below: An elaborate fence fronting a large and more complex Federation house in Hamilton. (Image courtesy of State Library of Queensland)



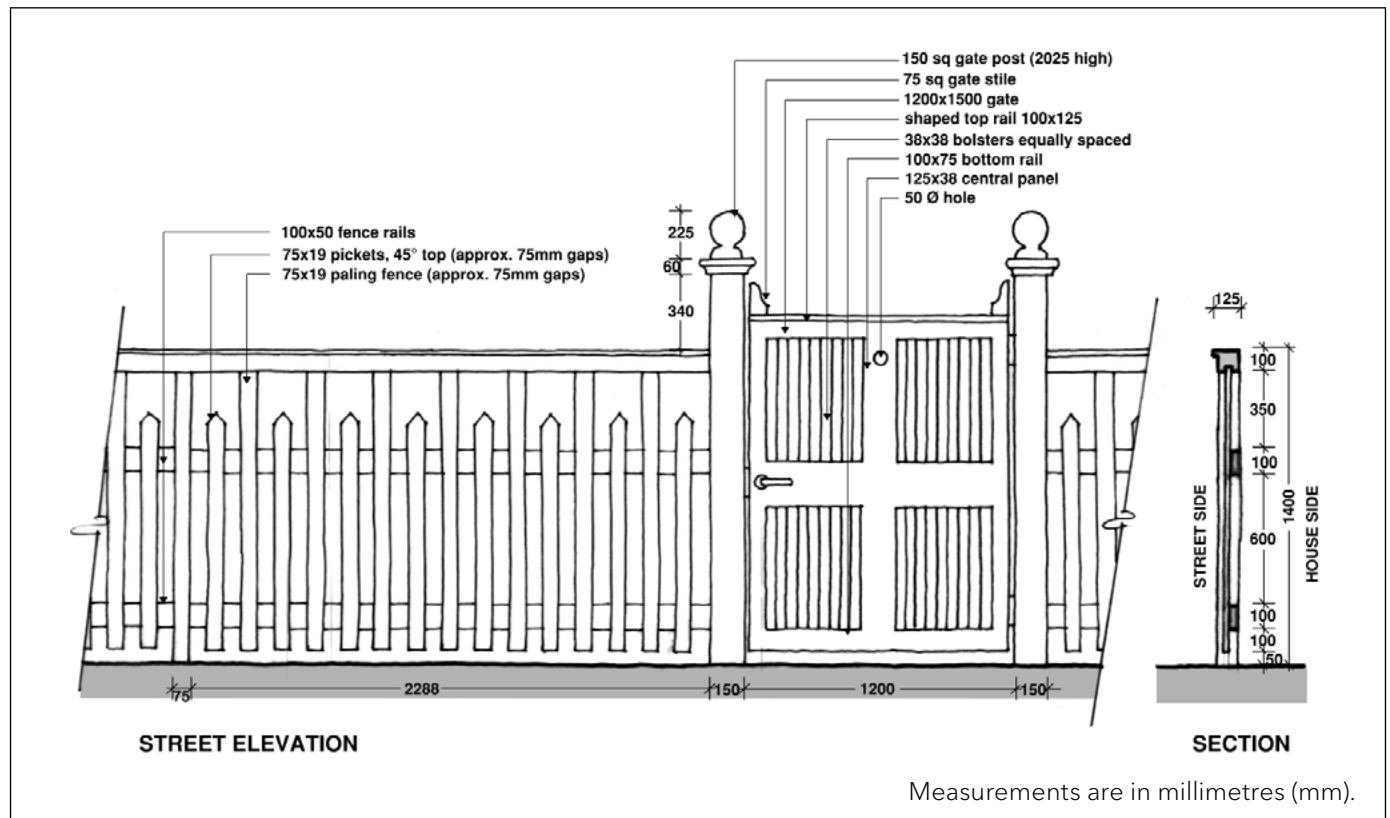
Timber fences elevations and sections



A 60-degree angle top picket fence, picket top-line stepped up to posts, picket gate and larger decorated posts.



A more elaborate acorn top picket fence, picket top-line stepped up to taller posts and a joinery gate.



A more elaborate Federation period timber fence style.

Interwar period (1915-1940)

Interwar period timber houses generally featured simple timber fences, and styles used in Victorian and Federation periods were still built in this period. More elaborate fences are suitable for Interwar timber houses with roughcast piers or walls.

This period was influenced by the introduction of the California Bungalow house style and the ready availability of timber. The predominant picket fence style became a 3-rail design.

A variety of architecturally designed houses, frequently of brick or rendered brick with terracotta tiled roofs, appeared in Brisbane during the Interwar period. Styles included the Spanish Mission, Old English/Tudor Revival, Art Deco (mainly flats), Functionalist and Conventional hip-roofed houses and flats with varied complementary fence styles.

Common features

- Front fences were typically 1200 mm in height.
- Fence bays were 2400 mm long.
- Fence rail sizes varied depending on location (see typical elevations and sections).
- Infill panels were chain wire or timber battens between 2 rails.
- Intermediate posts were 75 mm wide and 100 mm deep.
- Square gate and corner posts were 150 mm wide.
- Corner, vehicle and pedestrian gate posts were thicker and taller than intermediate posts.
- Most front fences were painted.
- Side and rear fences were usually unpainted but may have been oiled.

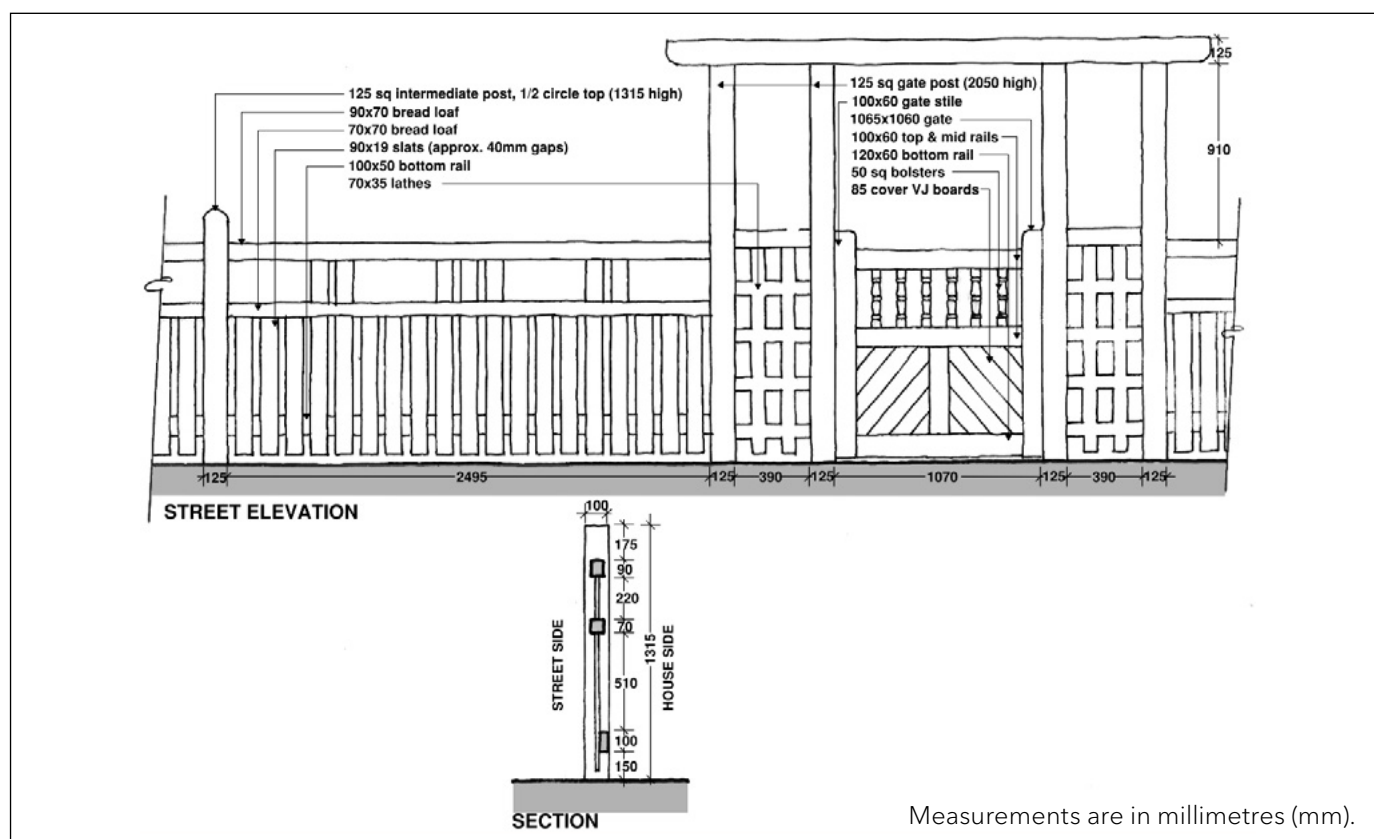


A 3-rail timber fence in front of an Interwar period Bungalow house in Kedron, c. 1921. (Image courtesy of State Library of Queensland)

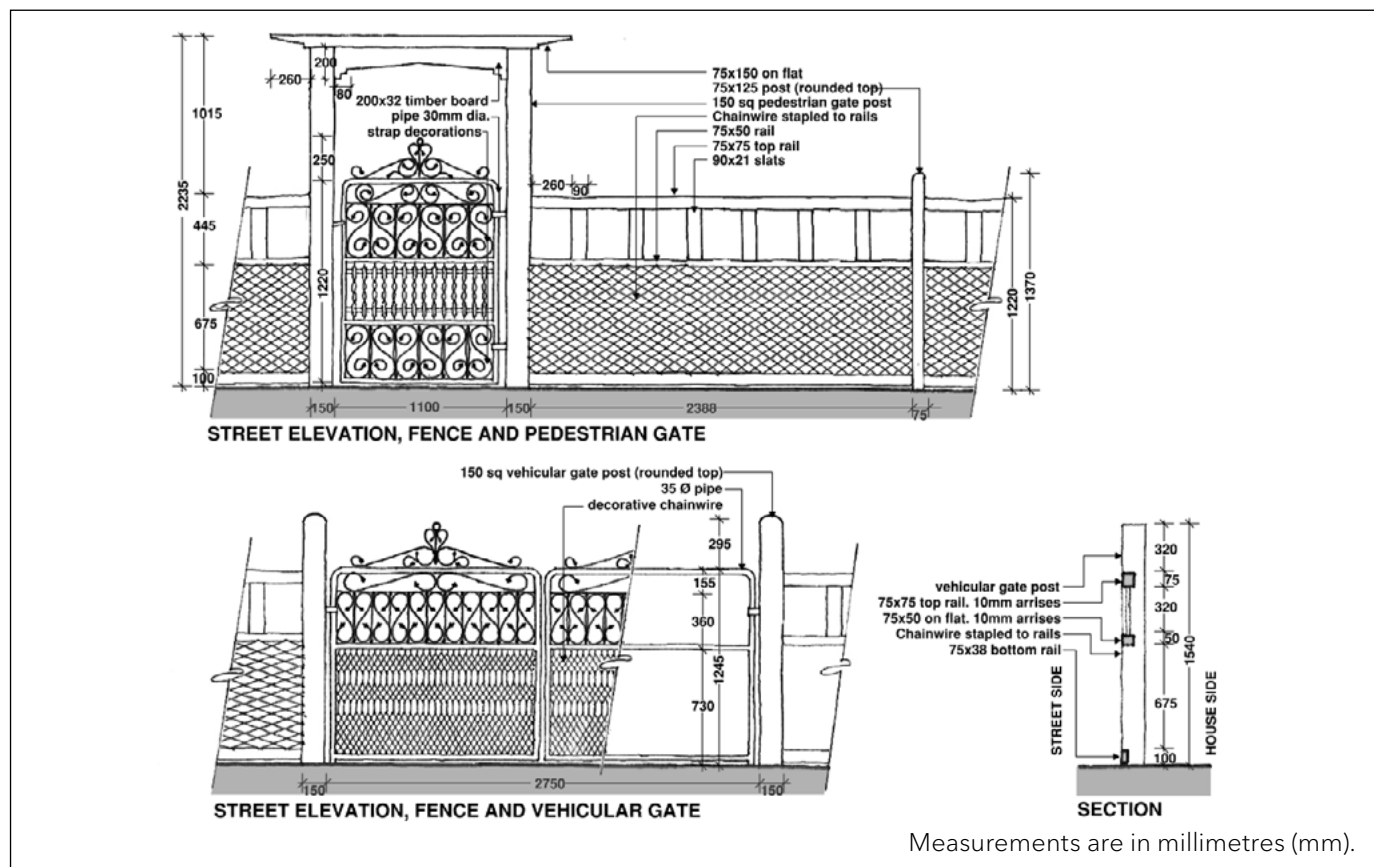
Below: A low-height fence with roughcast render, face brick and metal gate in front of a Spanish Mission style house in New Farm c. 1929. (Image courtesy of State Library of Queensland)



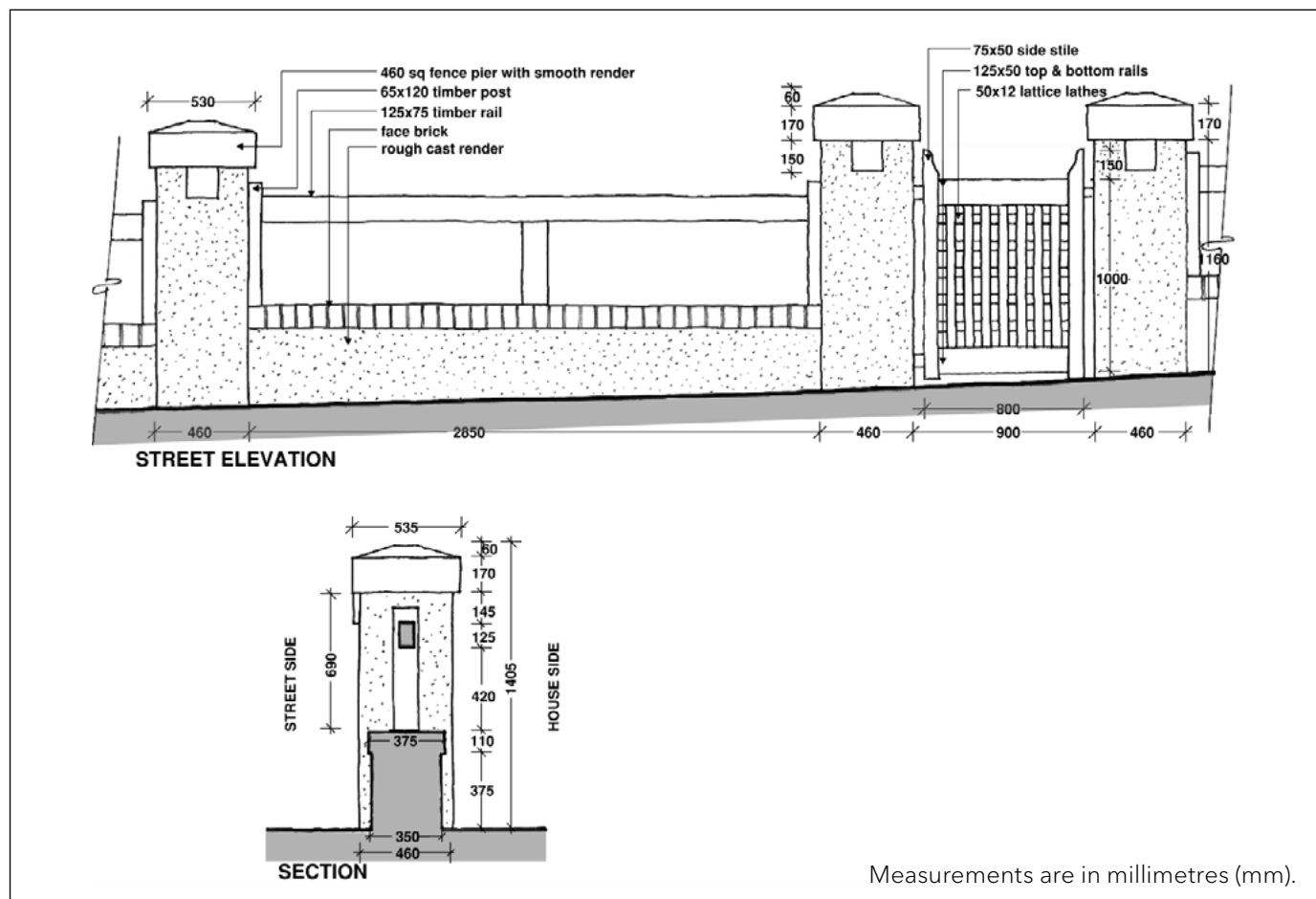
Timber fence elevations and sections



A 3-rail Interwar period timber fence style with spaced palings, rounded post tops and pergola frame with joinery gate.

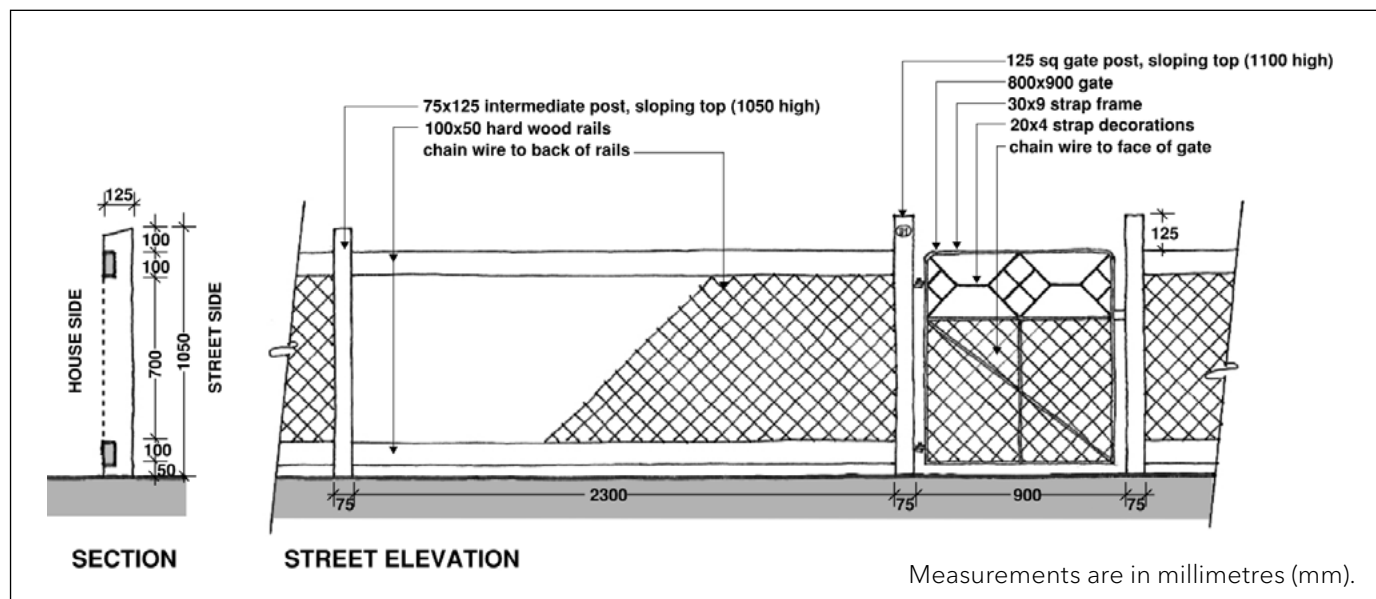


A 3-rail Interwar timber fence with chain wire infill, rounded post tops, pergola frame around wrought iron pedestrian gate and paired vehicular gates.



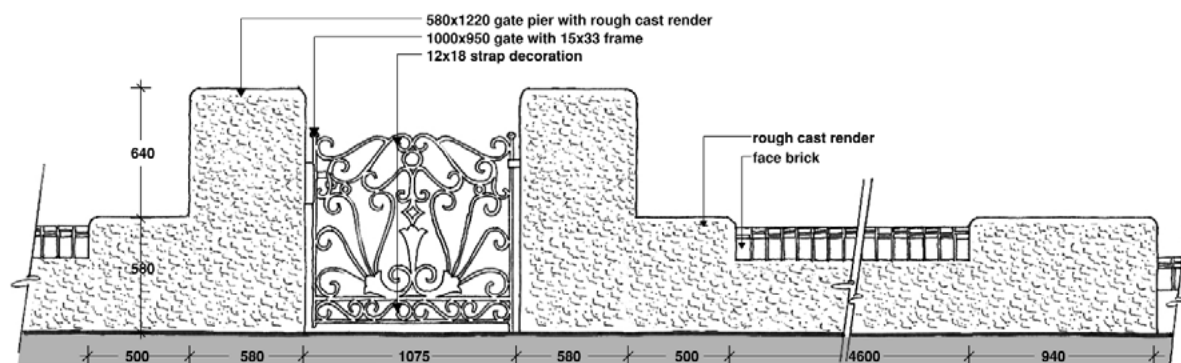
A more elaborate fence with roughcast and render piers, and base wall with timber rail infill and joinery gate.

Conventional hip-roofed house timber fence elevations and sections

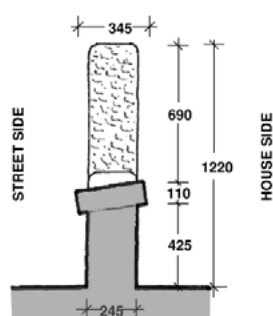


A conventional house style timber fence.

Spanish Mission style house masonry fence elevations and sections



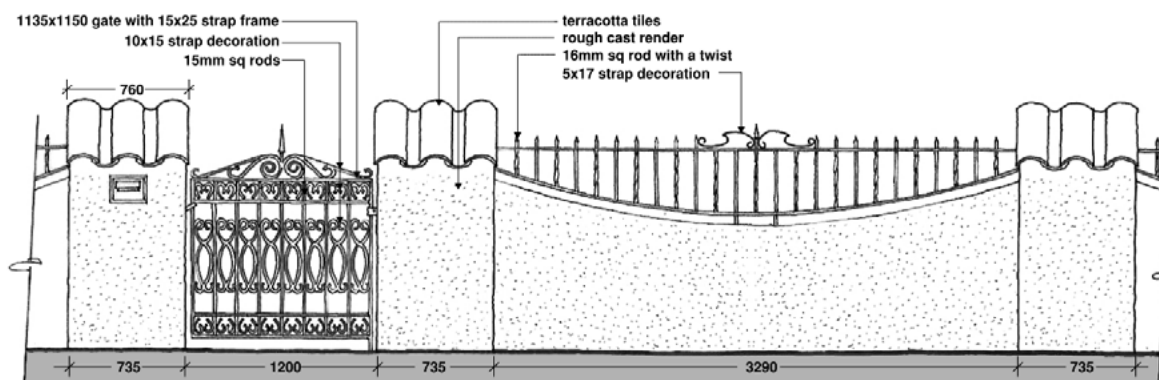
STREET ELEVATION



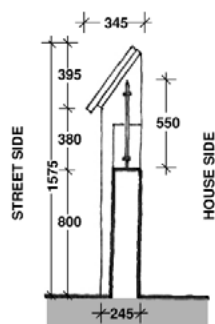
SECTION

Measurements are in millimetres (mm).

A rough cast render brick fence for a Spanish Mission style house.



STREET ELEVATION

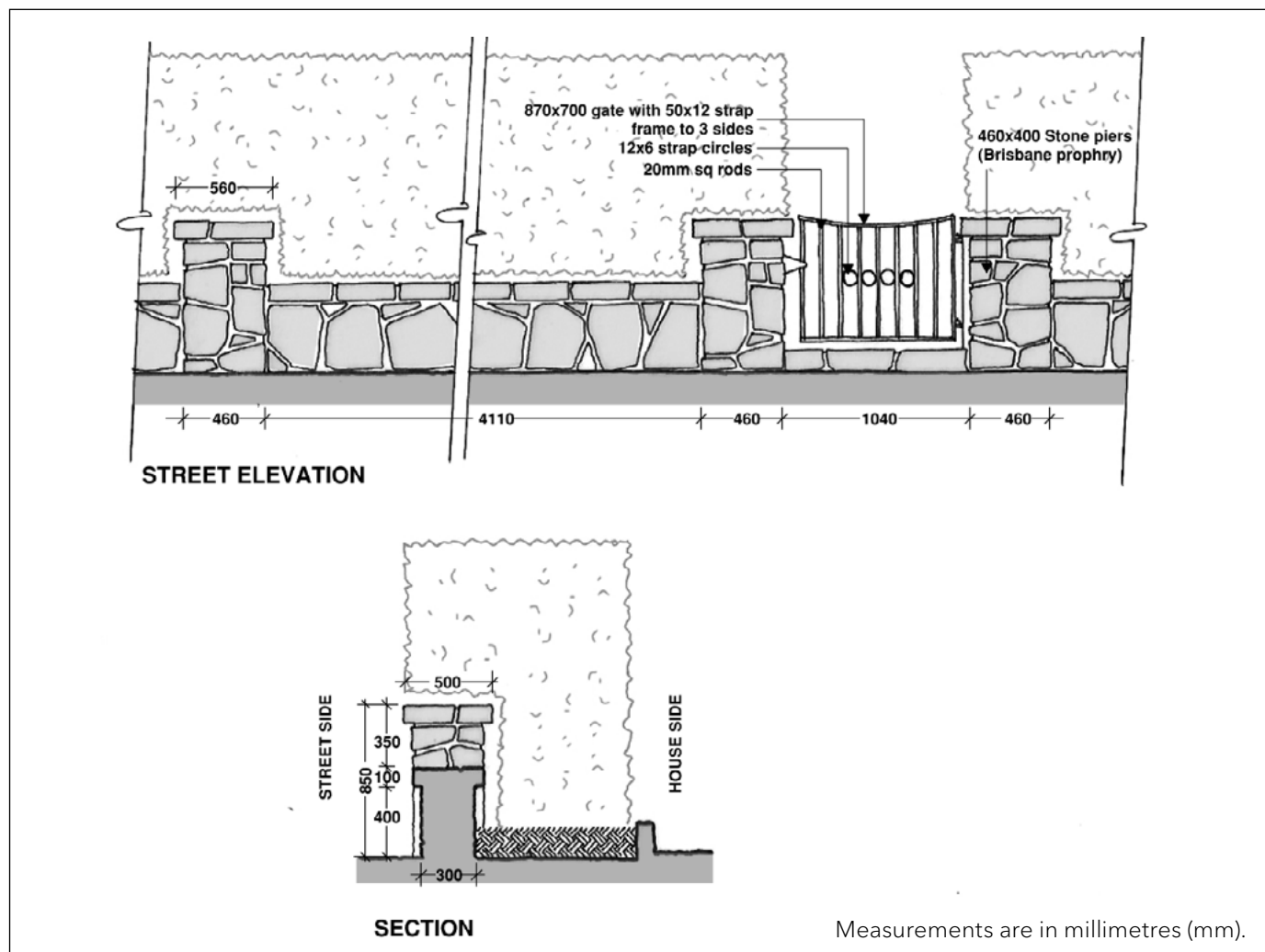


SECTION

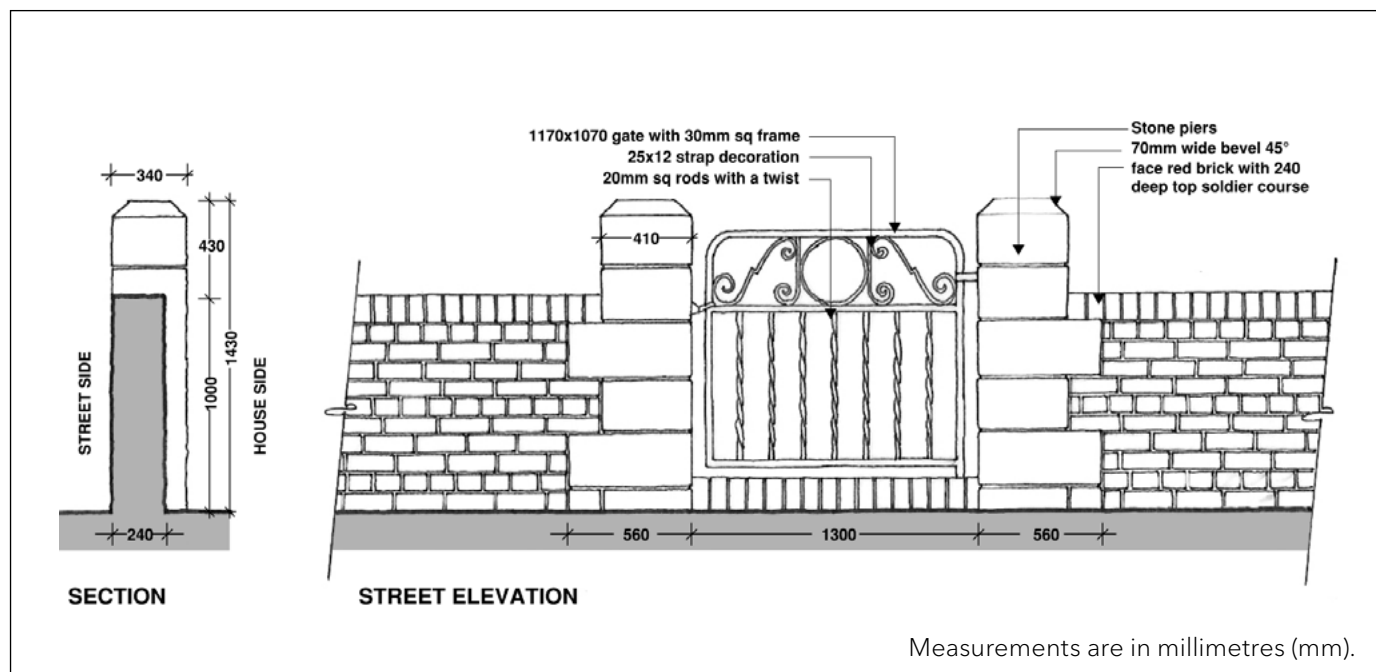
Measurements are in millimetres (mm).

A rough cast render brick fence with terracotta tiles and palisade panels for a Spanish Mission style house.

Old English/Tudor Revival house masonry fence elevations and sections

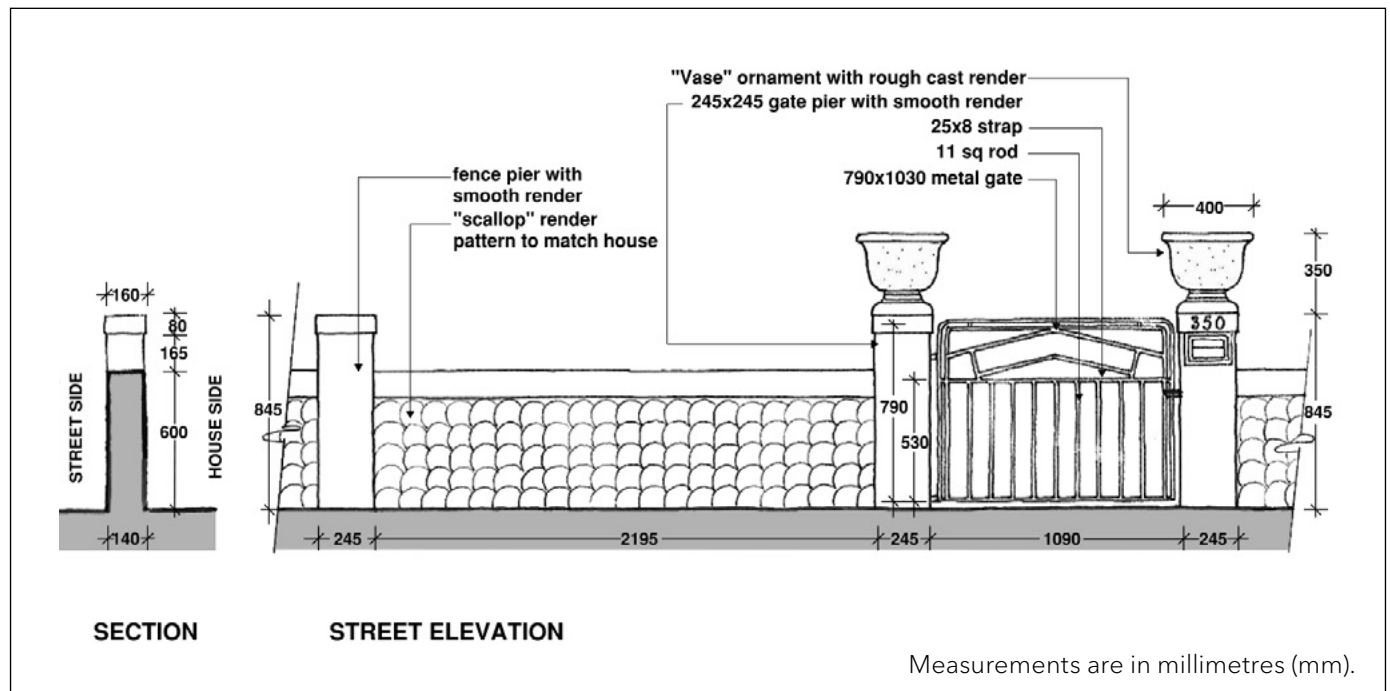


A low-height stone fence for an Old English/Tudor Revival house style.

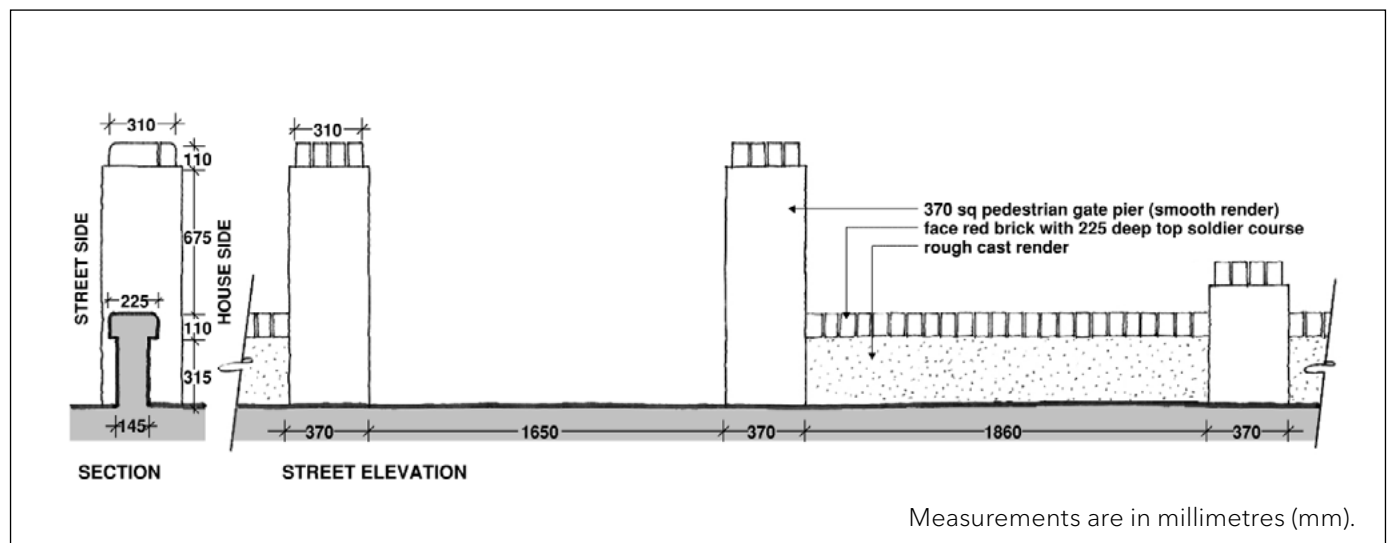


A brick fence with stone piers for an Old English/Tudor Revival house style.

Art Deco house masonry elevations and sections

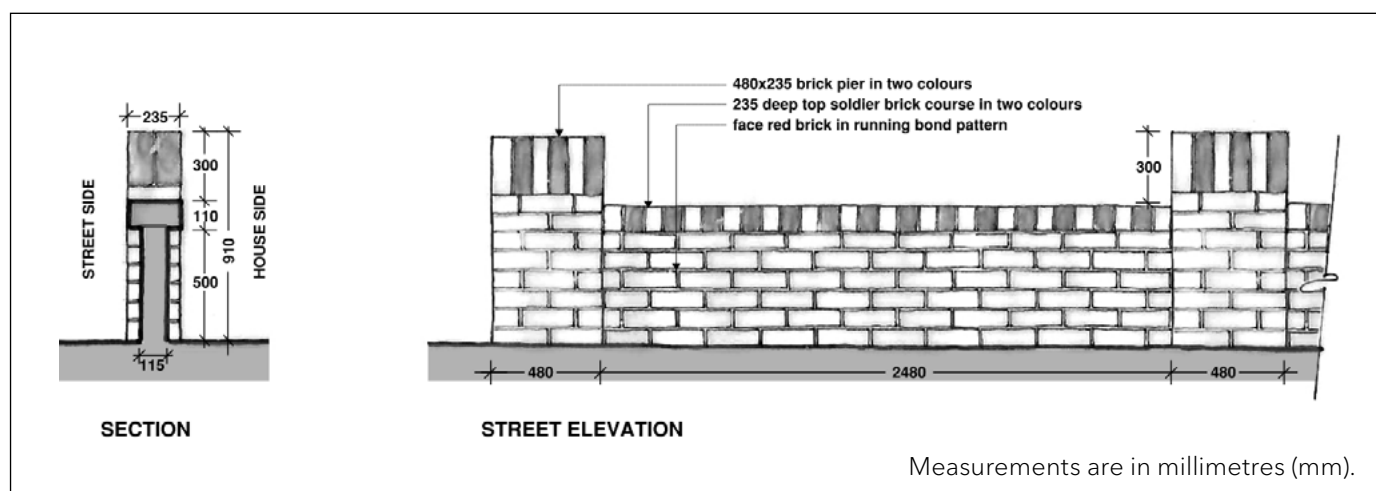


A decorative fence with scalloped render infill, smooth render posts and ornamentation for an Art Deco style house.

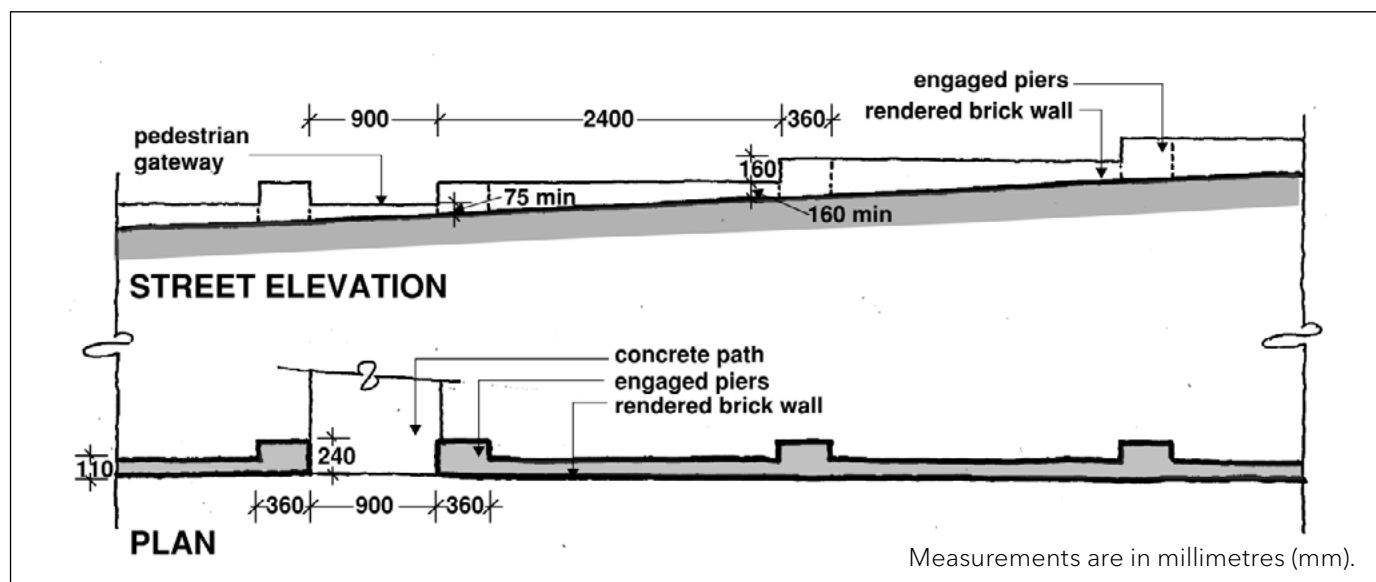


A low-height fence with rough cast render infill, smooth rendered posts and piers and brick capping for an Art Deco style house.

Functionalist house masonry fence elevations and sections



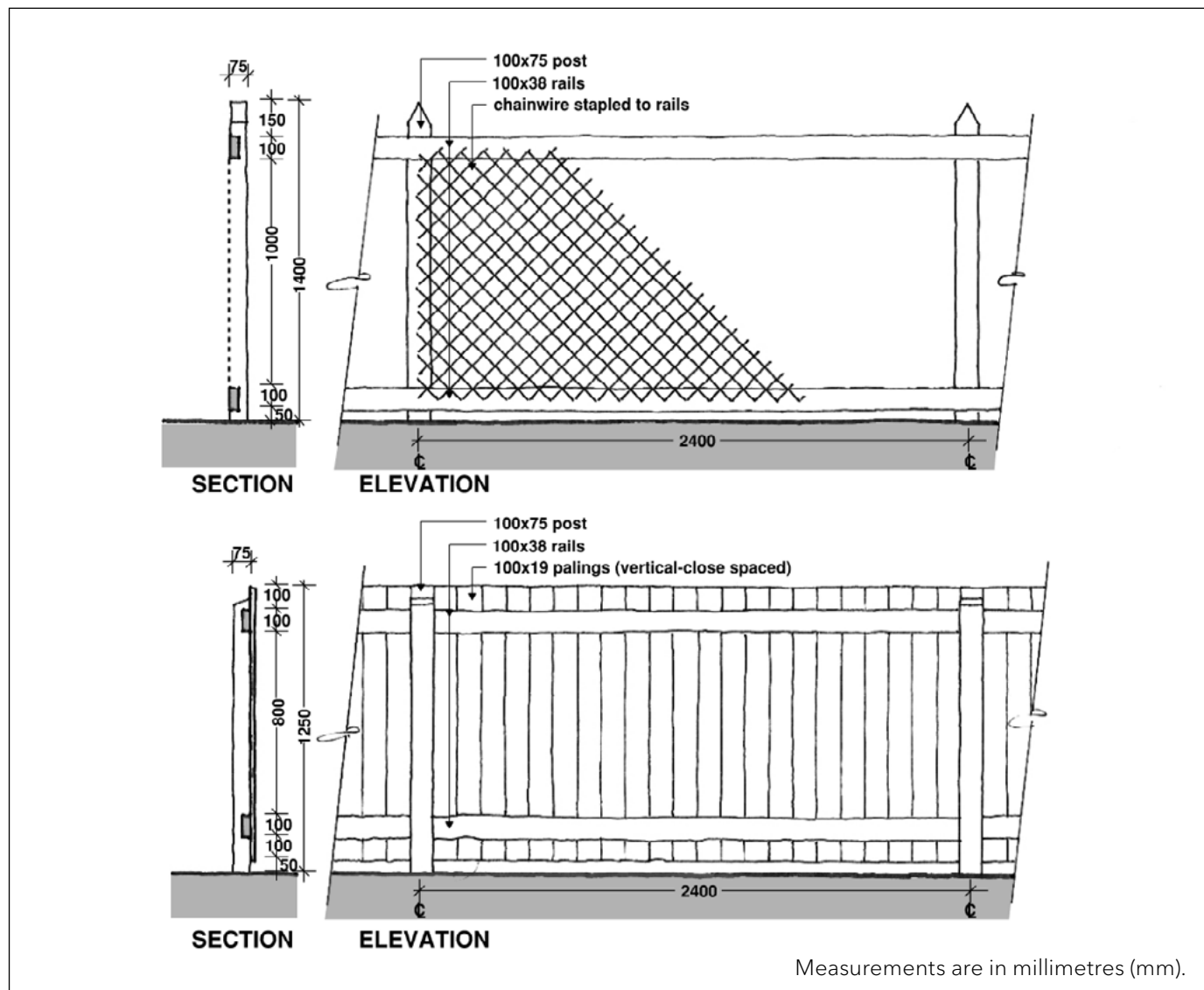
A low-height brick fence for a Functionalist style house.



A low-height rendered brick fence for a Functionalist style house.

Side and rear fences

Simple timber side and rear fences are suitable for all traditional house styles.



Side and rear fences were simpler than front fences.

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