

WORD OF THE MONTH

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Fonzie flat

– *noun*: a self-contained dwelling usually above a garage.

THE STORY BEHIND THE WORD OF THE MONTH

On 2 January 2007, a news headline in the Brisbane *Courier-Mail* read: 'Fonzie flats plan to ease rental crisis'. Similar articles in Queensland newspapers over subsequent months continued to mention these **Fonzie flats** as a solution to the lack of affordable housing in the State. The first evidence for **Fonzie flat** is from 2007 and for several years the term is found predominantly in Queensland sources. The issue of housing affordability is a nationwide problem, however, and the term is now increasingly being found in use across the country. But where did this term come from and is it Australian?

The term **Fonzie flat** derives from the character name *Fonzie* – Arthur Herbert Fonzarelli, known as 'the Fonz' or 'Fonzie', played by Henry Winkler – who appeared in the US television comedy series *Happy Days* from 1974 to 1984. In *Happy Days*, Fonzie lived in rooms situated over the Cunningham family's garage. Fonzie was a particularly popular character in the show.

We might expect such a term to be American rather than Australian but the evidence is fairly clear. The first evidence for **Fonzie flat** is Australian; we then see this term being used many times in Australian newspapers and real estate advertising. Later the variant *Fonzie apartment* also appears. Although we should note the use of American *apartment* rather than the Australian and British *flat*, the first evidence for *Fonzie apartment* is found in Australian sources. Hence **Fonzie flat** is definitely Australian; *Fonzie apartment* may be American, but at present Australia can claim the earliest uses of this variant.

The use of **Fonzie flat** points to the way in which urban issues and housing are shaping the language. Real estate language reflects the needs and trends in housing, and the increasing use of a term such as **Fonzie flat**, referring to a self-contained flat, suggests the great demand for housing, as well as the developers' eye for commercial opportunities.

Here is a sample of the newspaper evidence for the term:

Queensland developer Devine believes its '**Fonzie flat**' can help meet the state's population growth. The 114 sq m, two-bedroom, two-bathroom apartment, built over a garage, is officially named 'Beachport'. (*Caboolture Northern Times*, 2 February 2007)

Above the garage is the **Fonzie flat** – a studio with bathroom that can be used as an office, retreat, teenager's pad, guest area or rented out. (*Sydney Sunday Telegraph*, 12 June 2011)

In most of the sources a **Fonzie flat** is presented as a relatively cheap alternative for accommodating renters on lower incomes, providing housing for children or ageing parents, or as a means for mortgagees to earn extra income.

The evidence for **Fonzie flat** in Australian sources makes this term a candidate for inclusion in the second edition of the *Australian National Dictionary*.