

Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture

RSTCA No: R092

Name of Place: House at 10 Gawler Crescent Deakin

Other/Former Names:

Address/Location: 10 Gawler Crescent DEKAIN 2600

Block 6 Section 9 of South Canberra

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|-------------------------|------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Listing Status: | Registered | Other Heritage Listings: | |
| Date of Listing: | | Level of Significance: | |
| Citation Revision No: | | Category: | Residential |
| Citation Revision Date: | | Style: | Post War International |

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|----------------------|------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Date of Design: | 1956 | Designer: | Alsx Jelinek |
| Construction Period: | 1958 | Client/Owner/Lessee: | |
| Date of Additions: | 1968 | Builder: | Ross Loosley & Sons |

Statement of Significance

The residence at 10 Gawler Crescent Deakin, although slightly altered, is a highly individual example of significant architecture and an educational resource. The house was built when the Post-War International Style (1940-1960) was relatively new in Australia. The design incorporates features which are peculiar to the style including structural frame expressed and large sheets of glass.

The radiating design, originating from the central pool and forming asymmetrically varying rooms, has created a technically complex achievement which allows the play of forms and shapes in a geometric masterpiece.

By being the first truly modern sophisticated complex geometric design the house is arguably one of Canberra's two most significant Post-War International Style residential buildings and is of national significance. It is a sculpturally vital building and is comparable in significance with the 'Bowden House' Deakin 1955, by Harry Seidler.

The architecture of this building may contribute to the education of designers in their understanding of post-war architectural styles. The handcrafted furniture could contribute to the education of furniture designers and the general appreciation of design as all inclusive.

Description

The four bedroom house was designed by Alex Jelinek for Mr and Mrs Bruce Benjamin in 1956 and construction was completed in 1958¹. The building is an example of the Post-War International Style (1940-1960) with its structural frame exposed and large sheets of glass².

The house is an excellent example of an individual modern design. It has a circular split level plan taking advantage of the sloping site and is designed around a radiating grid. The radiating structure and walls define the spaces. There are nominally sixteen radiating segments set at 22½° defined by the mahogany lined exposed roof beams, with three segments deleted to form the north west courtyard off the living areas.

At the centre of the plan is a 1400mm diameter pool surrounded by full height curved glass supported by, but set in from, four expressed circular steel posts which support the steel ring beam

that takes the radiating structural roof frame. The roof slopes to this central structure where the pool acts as the roof storm water outlet.

The radiating form is further expressed at the roof edge where the 570mm deep perimeter mahogany clad fascia is supported by mahogany clad radiating 'beams', the depth of the fascia, and by three slender circular steel posts. This perimeter fascia is reduced in depth around the bedrooms thus expressing the hierarchy of the internal spaces.

A dominant radiating wall extends into the landscape defining the entry. The same wall axis cuts through the house to form the division between the dining room and the living room and courtyard. The original plan showed that this wall axis extended to the north forming a covered walkway to a guest wing which was not built. The west balcony to the living room cuts at a tangent to the outer circle of the house forming a white cantilevered rectilinear mass that contrasts with the curved and diagonal axial forms.

The entry is to the south, at ground level and defined by the axial wall. The glazed entry lobby leads to an angled stair that cuts across the diagonal axial wall and rises up to the main level between the dining room and the living room, adjacent to the central pool, thus arriving at the centre of the house.

The living room is asymmetrical and occupies three segments. The north east wall is half glazed with a large sliding timber framed glass door. The glazed sliding door extends from a solid hinged door next to the central pool and slides into the cavity wall. The blockwork cavity wall is constructed internally of dark grey 'dura-crete' blocks with a 1000mm high purpose made 'dura-crete' sculpture support that cantilevers from the wall 225mm with a cast-in pipe to support a sculpture. The south wall is set on the 'Y' axis and divides the room from the upper level study which is located over the entry. This reinforced concrete wall has a quartz rendered finish. At the end of the wall but central to the room is a half cylinder suspended concrete fire place with a quartz rendered finish which mirrors the geometry of the central pool's curved glazing. The materials, however contrast; solid with clear, smooth with textured. The continuation of the concrete wall forms the angled wall between the entry stair and study. This wall and the low wall surrounding the stair are unified by the use of the same quartz rendered finish. The room is open to the west views out over the balcony through full height faceted glazed walls, each facet set on the grid.

The dining room is located beyond the pool on the opposite side to the living room and is defined by a curved wall set 3.8m from the centre of the pool. This concrete block wall, now tiled with marble, divides the wet areas and bedrooms from the living areas. An ancient Chinese water colour 'scroll' is framed and fixed to the wall and extends approximately three segments. The scroll was an art work owned by the client and appears to have been an important element in the form and design of the room³. The room occupies six segments with an outlook to the courtyard through a large cavity sliding timber framed glazed door.

The dining room furniture was specifically designed for this curved space by the Melbourne cabinet maker Schulim Krimper⁴. The timber table is built-in with two cast-in steel post supports and is curved on a radius of 2210mm from the central pool. The 'wedge' shaped cabinet is perpendicular to the table and is placed in the radiating grid forming a divide from the 'passage'.

The floor to the dining and living rooms was originally tallowwood but is now carpeted.

The study, over the entry, is a small asymmetrical room with the west external concrete wall spanning over the entry glazing. It looked out over the rear terrace which formed the roof to the large carport. This terrace has since been enclosed to form one large room. The car accommodation below has a separate covered entry stair into the entry lobby.

The breakfast room, kitchen and play area are set linearly to the south of the dining room and east of the original terrace. These rooms have been renovated. They are located within two segments, with part of the north segment borrowed by the main bedroom for wardrobe space.

The bedrooms and wet areas are located to the east and up three steps, each bedroom occupying one segment. The corridor curves round between the bedrooms and the internally located bath room, shower and WC. The bedrooms have full width glazing. The wet areas are lit by highlights.

The house is set centrally on the large block, which slopes from the rear down to the street. It is constructed of concrete blockwork, reinforced concrete walls and suspended slabs, timber framed floors, steel and timber roof framing with a membrane roof. The blockwork was originally exposed internally and externally, however it is now rendered and painted in most locations.

The garden originally had a small number of established native trees but now has a well established garden.

The major architectural elements that are peculiar to the Post-War International Style (1940-1960) and that are displayed by this building relate to the external forms⁵. They are:

- structural frame expressed,
- large sheets of glass.

Other architectural elements of this style displayed by the building that relate to the external forms are:

- overhang for shade,
- plain smooth wall surfaces,
- cantilever,
- contrasting non-rectangular shape,
- contrasting texture.

There are external elements which are associated with the Post-War Melbourne Regional Style (1940-1960)⁶. These are:

- widely projecting eaves,
- long unbroken roof line,
- unpainted horizontal boarding.

The major architectural elements listed above place this building in the Post-War International Style (1940-1960).

There are internal elements that are important to the integrity of the building. These are: the radiating structure expressed by the timber lined beams and steel ring beam over the central curved glass and pool, the fire place and associated quartz rendered walls, the cavity sliding glazed doors, the sculpture support, the dining room circular wall and Chinese scroll, the open planning with the interiors spreading out into the landscape, the split level division of living, study and sleeping areas, and the detail and type of finishes.

The two pieces of handcrafted dining room furniture are integral to and are major elements of the house's interior being specially designed by one of Melbourne's fine furniture makers of the 1940's and 1950's.

Condition and Integrity

The guest room facilities that were originally designed to the north east along a covered walkway were later located to the east. The guest facilities were also designed by Jelinek but do not include the planned covered walkway. The residence was altered in 1968, by architects Moir and Slater, renovating the kitchen and enclosing the south terrace to provide a family room⁷. A timber pergola has been placed over the north west balcony.

Recent alterations by the present owner have been minor and usually involved surface treatment. The present owner has rendered and painted the external blockwork walls, painted the white quartz rendered balcony concrete walls, clad the external walls of the entry with polished granite and added granite copings. Internally a granite hearth has been added to the fire place and the dining room curved blockwork wall has been tiled with marble.

Background/History

The design of the residence is impressive; it uses geometric forms in a most dramatic plan and incorporates a high degree of achievement in its technical and creative solutions to design problems.

It was awarded the 'House of the Year for 1957' by the editors of the 'Architecture and Arts' magazine who considered it a; "very advanced house, well executed ... through to the smallest detail." Other finalists were distinguished architects of the time including Harry Seidler, Robin Boyd, Sydney Anchor and Peter Muller⁸.

Alex Jelinek was a Czechoslovakian educated architect who came to Australia in 1950 and practised in Melbourne⁹.

Schulim Krimper was an Austrian born and trained cabinet-maker who emigrated to Victoria. An exhibition of his furniture was held at the National Gallery of Victoria in 1959¹⁰.

The builder was Ross Loosley and Sons¹¹.

Analysis against the Criteria specified in Schedule 2 of the Land (Planning and Environment) Act 1991

(i) a place which demonstrates a high degree of technical and/or creative achievement, by showing qualities of innovation or departure or representing a new achievement of its time

The design of the residence in 1956 in the Post-War International Style (1940-1960) represented a relatively new architectural style in Australia at that time. The earliest notable Australian examples built in the style date from the late 1940's, including the Rose Seidler House Turrumurra 1948, by Harry Seidler and the Stanhill Flats Melbourne 1948, by Frederick Romberg¹².

The residence at 10 Gawler Crescent Deakin demonstrates a high degree of technical and creative achievement by combining the qualities of complex geometry, innovative technical resolution of design and structure, and the division of living and sleeping areas into split level asymmetrical spaces creating a residence of architectural excellence.

(ii) a place which exhibits outstanding design or aesthetic qualities valued by the community or a cultural group

The house exhibits the particular architectural elements peculiar to the Post-War International Style (1940-1960) including structural frame expressed and large sheets of glass.

The open planning, detail and finishes, cantilevered balcony, contrasting non-rectangular shape, central pool with surrounding curved glass, contrasting textures, fireplace and large sliding glazed doors are design features that are of additional significance.

It is considered a very good example of the style even though it is predominantly circular in form and not cubiform.

The complex geometric design exhibits outstanding design qualities which were valued by the community at the time as reflected in this house being awarded the 'House of the Year for 1957' by the editors of the 'Architecture and Arts' magazine.

The residence is Canberra's first example of a truly modern complex geometric designed building¹³. Other similar but less complex examples of this geometric design aesthetic in Canberra are a house at 204 Monaro Crescent Red Hill 1963, by Romberg and Boyd, and the Carousel Restaurant Red Hill Lookout 1964, by M Jaki¹⁴. Nationally, a similar but less complex example is the Henty House Frankston 1952, by Roy Grounds¹⁵. This and the Monaro Crescent House are however in the Post-War Melbourne Regional Style and are not Post-War International Style buildings.

The residence is exceptionally well detailed and well built and is valued by the RAIAs as a very good example of this style of architecture. It is comparable in significance with the 'Bowden House' Deakin 1955, by Seidler and the 'Fenner House' Red Hill 1953 by Boyd, the latter being a Post-War Melbourne Regional Style building.

(iii) a place which demonstrates a distinctive way of life, taste, tradition, religion, land use, custom, process, design or function which is no longer practised, is in danger or being lost, or is of exceptional interest

(iv) a place which is highly valued by the community or a cultural group for reasons of strong or special religious, spiritual, cultural, educational or social associations

(v) a place which is the only known or only comparatively intact example of its type

(vi) a place which is a notable example of a class of natural or cultural places or landscapes and which demonstrates the principal characteristics of that class

(vii) a place which has strong or special associations with person, group, event, development or cultural phase which played a significant part in local or national history

(xi) a place which demonstrates a likelihood of providing information which will contribute significantly to a wider understanding of natural or cultural history, by virtue of its use as a research site, teaching site, type locality or benchmark site

Through its architectural style and furniture design this building is a valuable educational resource for designers. Its external architecture is characteristic of the Post-War International Style (1940-1960). Its play of contrasting non-rectangular shapes and forms against less dominant cubiforms are important themes but less common in this style of architecture. This residence is a sculpturally vital building which contrasts with the Post-War International Style 'Bowden House' at 11 Northcote Street Deakin 1955, by Seidler.

The well designed and crafted dining room furniture are good examples of work by Schulim Krimper, a recognised 1940-60 Australian cabinet maker, located in the residence for which it was designed¹⁶. This may contribute significantly to a wider understanding of the craftsman's work in its architectural setting

References

- 1 Department of the Environment, Land and Planning (DELP). Building File for Block 6 Section 9 Deakin.
- 2 Richard Apperly Robert Irving Peter Reynolds. Identifying Australian Architecture Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present. Angus and Robertson 1989.
- 3 Conversation with present owner Mr C Galafassi.
- 4 Peter Cuffley. Australian Houses of the Forties and Fifties. The Five Mile Press Pty Ltd 1993
Transition Discourse on Architecture. No 24 1988. Department of Architecture RMIT.
- 5 Richard Apperly Robert Irving Peter Reynolds opcit..
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 DELP opcit.
- 8 Peter Cuffley. Department of Architecture RMIT opcit.
- 9 Department of Architecture RMIT opcit.

- 10 Ibid.
 - 11 DELP opcit.
 - 12 Donald Leslie Johnson. Australian Architecture 1901-51 Sources of Modernism. Sydney University Press 1980.
 - 13 J R Conner. A Guide to Canberra Buildings. Angus and Robertson 1970.
 - 14 Ibid.
 - 15 Donald Leslie Johnson opcit.
 - 16 Peter Cuffley. Department of Architecture RMIT opcit.
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Other Information Sources