

# Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture

**RSTCA No:** R098

**Name of Place:** House at 43 Melbourne Avenue Forrest

**Other/Former Names:**

**Address/Location:** 43 Melbourne Avenue FORREST 2603

Block 3 Section 2 of

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Listing Status:	Registered	Other Heritage Listings:
Date of Listing:		Level of Significance:
Citation Revision No:		Category:
Citation Revision Date:		Style:

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Date of Design:	Designer:
Construction Period:	Client/Owner/Lessee:
Date of Additions:	Builder:

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## Statement of Significance

The residence at 43 Melbourne Avenue, Forrest, is an example of significant architecture and an educational resource. The house was built when the Inter-War Functionalist Style (1915-1940) was new in Australia. The design incorporated nearly all of the principal design features which were peculiar to the style including asymmetrical massing, simple geometric shape, ribbon windows, roof concealed by parapet and metal-framed windows.

The residence is most likely Canberra's best example, and otherwise a very good example of the Inter-War Functionalist Style.

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

Malcolm Moir is recognised as one of Canberra's leading architects of the mid-nineteenth century. The design of this as his own residence and later as his office and residence highlights the significance of this house for its association with him.

With the passage of time many architecturally innovative buildings have been lost or have been significantly altered to their detriment. Significant buildings at 24 Arthur Circle, Forrest, and Evans Crescent, Griffith, by K Oliphant are two such examples. This gives greater significance to the residence at 43 Melbourne Avenue, Forrest.

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## Description

The four bedroom residence was designed by Moir as his own house in 1935 and construction was completed in 1937 1. The building is an early example of the Inter-War Functionalist Style (1915-1940) with its asymmetrical massing, simple geometric shape, ribbon windows, roof concealed by parapet and metal-framed windows 2.

There are other examples of the Inter-War Functionalist Style in Canberra including the Evans Crescent Precinct, Griffith, 1938-40, by Moir & Sutherland and the former Forrest Fire Station Precinct, Forrest, 1938, by E H Henderson 3.

The residence is located centrally on the deep block, elevated from the street, and is approached across the front of the block from the paved driveway and front landscaped garden past a deep

ornamental pond. The stepped elongated multi-level plan extends along a north/south axis with a slightly off centre entry. A dominant feature of the front facade is the extensively glazed upper level where the glazing extends up to the underside of the roof without eaves overhang.

The entry to the residence is subdued and one is drawn to it by a few steps set between low brick retaining walls up to the northern end of the front terrace. The terrace is partially covered by a concrete roof hood and balcony over, which extends across the front of the lounge room and up to the dining room. The slightly recessed front door opens into a small entry lobby on the main level with the lounge room to the right and the hall extending past to the bedrooms and bathroom.

The 'L' shaped lounge room has a recessed central fireplace framed by small bricks on end surrounded by mosaic tiles and with a timber surround and shelving over. Well proportioned built-in joinery surrounds the fire place and extends to both sides. The cupboard doors have light timber vertical paneling. There is extensive metal framed glazing to the north west which turns the corner of the room opening the room out to the front garden. The casement openable windows have internal vertical sliding fly-screens. Under this glazing and along its length is located timber built-in seating. The ceiling is plaster. The room still contains some of the original loose furniture and light fittings including a spun aluminium conical up light stand.

Adjoining the lounge room diagonally to the west is the dining room which opens out onto the north west front terrace via french doors on its narrow side. The dining room still has its original built-in and loose furniture, including the dining table which can be reduced by one third with the dismantled section of table able to be installed as a fixed side table adjacent to the main dining table.

The main bedroom is to the left of the entry with the a north west corner window. The joinery including the bed are original, designed by Moir, with one chest of drawers possibly not being part of the original design due to it's different style. The joinery items are all in light timber and have rounded corners and flush doors. The vertical timber handle rail to the wardrobes is repeated on the small chest of drawers where each drawer's handle is aligned so that when closed they mirror the wardrobe vertical rails. The dresser bench and stool are part of the suite.

These three rooms facing onto Melbourne Avenue have been maintained in a relatively original condition and still have the original door hardware, electrical fittings, light switches and joinery (both loose and built-in), designed by Moir.

In addition to these front rooms there are three other bedrooms, two bathrooms, a kitchen, two informal living areas and an internal accessed garage with its original 'zig-zag' patterned door.

To the rear of the main level are located two bedrooms, a bathroom and the galley kitchen. The kitchen extends through to an informal eating/living area which opens to the east via aluminium glazed sliding doors.

The lower level to the south contain what was a maids quarters and the garage.

The upper levels are approached by a stair to the south off the passage between the kitchen and the dining room. The large living room on the south side has south and west glazing including corner windows. This room can also be entered externally via an open tread concrete stair that turns around a brick blade wall that has curved bricks to its ends. The stair, located to the south west, arrives at a narrow balcony with a balustrade formed by two pipe rails. It extends across the front of the southern brick vertical mass which protrudes from and dominates this area of the house. The entry door is set between the two upper rooms, under the southern most end of the extensive glazing to the upper levels.

The top level bedroom is entered from the upper level entry passage up some steps on the west front side. This room has extensive glazing to three walls. The size of the room is smaller than one expects from first viewing it from the outside due to the high glazing extending over the stair.

Externally the brickwork jointing has been left unstruck with the uneven mortar recessed from the face of the light coloured bricks. The down pipes are large diameter copper pipes with rain water heads.

The front garden with its original sandstone and brick paving, pond and walls is well maintained.

The rear yard has a swimming pool, large pool house/flat and utility buildings including garages which face onto Ord Street.

The major architectural elements that are specific to the Inter-War Functionalist Style (1915-1940) and that are displayed by this building relate to the external forms. They are:

- asymmetrical massing,
- simple geometric shape,
- ribbon windows,
- roof concealed by parapet.
- metal-framed windows.

The major architectural elements listed above place this building in the Inter-War Functionalist Style (1915-1940).

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

- cantilevered balcony or hood,
- stairs expressed by vertical elements,
- corner windows.

The major architectural elements listed above place this building in the Inter-War Functionalist Style (1915-1940) 4.

Other external elements of significance are the light toned brickwork and its joint detailing, the copper rain-water goods and the garage door.

The internal elements of significance are the total areas of the lounge room, dining room and main bedroom including their built-in and loose furniture, finishes and fixtures including the light switches and door handles.

The original house was built by W J Perry 5.

The building is well maintained and is in good condition.

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### **Condition and Integrity**

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### **Background/History**

This 1935 modern brick architecture was a new achievement at the time and was possibly the first truly modern design in Canberra. It expresses the three dimensional cubic massing of the Inter-War Functionalist Style.

This modern brick architecture may have been influenced by Australian architecture of the time or published work from Europe. In Australia this may have included work in Victoria by Geoffrey Mewton and Roy Grounds Architects in projects such as the Critchley Parker House, Upper Beaconsfield, 1933, published in the "Australian Home Beautiful" and the George Stooke House, Brighton, 1934 6.

In Europe influences may have been the brick architecture of Mies van der Rohe and his houses at Krefeld 1928, and Berlin 1932, Lois Welzenbacher's Schulz House in Westphalia 1928, and Karl Schneider's Werner House in Hamburg 1930, some of which would have appeared in publications of the time. This architecture was of face brick and not the white painted render aesthetic of much of the 'functionalist style' 7.

It would appear that the house was built prior to Moir marrying Heather Sutherland, also an architect and his future architectural partner, and that later additions were made to the upper level to accommodate their architectural office. The first of these additions was completed in 1941 with the addition of the south west stair to provide external access to the upper level where the office

was located. In 1948 minor additions were undertaken, in 1956 the top level was added as a sun room (probably part of the office) and a toilet was added in 1961 to the mid level 8. These additions have enhanced the architecture of the residence.

In 1964 the rear garage, toolshed and glass house were built, all facing Ord Street. During the 1980s the house was re-roofed, some original canite ceilings replaced with plasterboard, the kitchen and bathrooms were renovated and an aluminium sliding door was added to the east off the rear eating/living area. The more recent detached timber clad accommodation and swimming pool were constructed by the present owner and are not in the style of the original building 9.

In 1997 the RAI ACT Chapter awarded the house a 25 Year Award for architectural excellence and for standing "the test of time".

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### **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 house in 1935 in the Inter-War Functionalist Style (1915-1940) represented a new architectural style in Australia at the time. The earliest notable Australian examples built in the style date from the mid 1930's including Critchley Parker House, Upper Beaconsfield, 1933 and the George Stooke House, Brighton, 1934 both by G Mewton and R Grounds Architects, the Sanitarium Health Food Factory, Warburton Victoria, 1937, by E Billson and the Automotive Engineering Building, Sydney Technical College, Ultimo, NSW, 1938, by E Rembert.

The external architecture is an excellent example of the style. It was most likely the first, and arguably is the best example of the style in Canberra.

*(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 specific to the Inter-War Functionalist Style (1915-1940) including asymmetrical massing, simple geometric shape, ribbon windows, roof concealed by parapet and metal-framed windows.

The following design features are of additional significance: externally the front cantilevered balcony or hood, the south west open concrete tread stairs with vertically expressive brickwork with curved ends and horizontal pipe balustrade, the upper level glazing which extends to the underside of the roof without eaves overhang, the corner windows, the light toned brickwork and joint detailing, the copper rain-water goods and the garage door.

Internally the total areas of the lounge room, dining room and main bedroom including their built-in and loose furniture, finishes and fixtures including the light switches and door handles.

The residence is valued by the RAI as an excellent example of this style of architecture.

*(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*

Malcolm Moir played a meaningful role in Canberra's cultural history. His work from the mid 1930s to the mid 1950s included many modernist designs. This was designed as his own residence and subsequently, with later additions, his own office as well. The building is of significance to Canberra specifically because it was Moirs' own residence and office, its early date and its architectural expression.

*(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 Inter-War Functionalist Style, 1915-1940. The well designed and crafted built-in and loose furniture are good examples of modern furniture design of that time and are located in the residence for which they were intended. This may contribute to a wider understanding of the architect as the designer of both the building and the joinery work in its architectural setting.

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## References

- 1 PALM Building File
- 2 Richard Apperly Robert Irving Peter Reynolds. Identifying Australian Architecture Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present. Angus & Robertson 1989.
- 3 RSTCA Records
- 4 Richard Apperly Robert Irving Peter Reynolds opcit
- 5 PALM opcit.
- 6 Donald Leslie Johnson. Australian Architecture 1901-1951 Sources of Modernism. Sydney University Press 1980.
- 7 Alison & Peter Smithson. The Heroic Period of Modern Architecture. Thames & Hudson Ltd, London 1981.
- 8 PALM opcit.
- 9 Ibid and Conversation with the present owner Mr T Dalton.

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## Other Information Sources