

Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture

RSTCA No: R102

Name of Place: House at 3 Wilmot Crescent Forrest

Other/Former Names:

Address/Location: 3 Wilmot Crescent FORREST 2603

Block 9 Section 47 of

Listing Status:		Other Heritage Listings:	
Date of Listing:		Level of Significance:	
Citation Revision No:		Category:	
Citation Revision Date:		Style:	Inter-War Functionalist

Date of Design:	1936	Designer:	Malcolm Moir
Construction Period:		Client/Owner/Lessee:	
Date of Additions:		Builder:	Simmie & Co P/L

Statement of Significance

The house at 3 Wilmot Crescent is a good early and intact example of the Inter-War Functionalist Style (1915-1940). Key features of the style displayed by the building include its asymmetrical massing, simple geometric shapes and metal-framed windows. The other features of significance are the use of corner windows, light-toned face brickwork, curved chimneys and some Art Deco style details.

The design of the house reflects an important aspect of the taste of the period immediately following the Depression, by demonstrating the way traditional architectural styles were being eschewed in favour of modernism. The house compares with Moir's own house constructed in 1936 at 43 Melbourne Avenue, Forrest, the Evans Crescent Precinct, Griffith, 1938-40, by Moir & Sutherland and the former Forrest Fire Station Precinct, Forrest, 1938, by E. H. Henderson.

The house is valued by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects as a good early example of the Inter-War Functionalist Style of architecture.

Description

The two-storey brick residence was designed by Malcolm Moir for W. H. B. Dickson. The date of the building permit was 28 August 1936 and the builder was Simmie & Co Pty Ltd.¹ The building is an early example of the Inter-War Functionalist Style (1915-1940), with its asymmetrical massing, simple geometric shapes and metal-framed windows.² The other feature of the style displayed is corner windows.

Other examples of the Inter-War Functionalist Style in Canberra include Moir's own house constructed in 1936 at 43 Melbourne Avenue, Forrest, the Evans Crescent Precinct, Griffith, 1938-40, by Moir & Sutherland and the former Forrest Fire Station Precinct, Forrest, 1938, by E. H. Henderson.

The house is sited facing Wilmot Crescent to the west, with a curved driveway entered from the north and south of the frontage. The ground floor is entered via an ante-room (added in 1946) leading to the entrance stair hall. This opens to the north into the living room, which opens into a dining room enlarged into the space originally occupied by the kitchen. On the western side is a kitchen converted from the original maid's room, a shower room converted from the original laundry and water closet, and a family room converted from the original attached double garage.

Its original zig-zag boarded doors have been replaced by windows. On the first floor are three bedrooms, a study, bath room, shower and water closet. Except for the ante-room and family room, which have wooden windows, there are steel-framed windows with horizontally-proportioned sashes.

The most significant rooms are the living room, with its corner window and large fireplace of narrow textured cream bricks, and the main bedroom. Both have unusual V-jointed Caneite ceilings recessed above smooth plaster borders. Other interior features of the house are timber floors (now polished), concrete stairs, picture-mould cornices and built-in wardrobes and cupboards on the first floor. Notable features of the exterior are the light-toned face brick walls, rounded chimneys, the green terracotta tiled roof, and the Art Deco style zig-zag diagonal-brick course around the upper parapets. The two-leaf door from the stair landing to the cantilevered balcony has chevron-like sloping glazing bars which is another Art Deco motif.

The ante-room was added at the front in 1946 for the then owner P. R. Wilkins to a design by the architect Kenneth Oliphant with brickwork matching the original walls, wooden windows and a flat roof behind parapets. A boiler room has been added in the south-east corner. Two small windows of the bath room have been replaced by one larger steel window. The wrought iron railing of the stair balcony has been replaced crudely by iron pipes.

Alterations for the present owners have been the conversion of the garage into a family room with a large wooden window; conversion of the maid's room into a kitchen; enlargement of the dining room into the former kitchen, with the two windows replaced by glazed doors and the fuel stove recess retained; conversion of the laundry into a shower room with the water closet wall removed; enclosure of the rear porch by a glazed door and sidelight and the addition of a brick step with rounded ends outside the entrance to the ante-room.

Condition and Integrity

Background/History

The architect Malcolm J. Moir (1903-1971) was one of the first students of Professor Leslie Wilkinson's reign in the newly-created Chair of Architecture at the University of Sydney. He graduated in 1924, worked in the Government Architect's Branch of the New South Wales Public Works Department, then moved to Canberra in 1927 to join the Architects' Department of the Federal Capital Commission. There he was largely responsible for the design and supervision of the Institute of Anatomy, under its architect W. Hayward Morris.¹

In 1930 the Federal Capital Commission was disbanded and, with no building development during the Great Depression, Moir became manager of the Capitol Theatre in Manuka. He was commissioned for some buildings projects from 1932 onwards and in 1935 he designed the Civic Theatre, six shops to The Lawns, Manuka, two hotels and his own residence in Melbourne Avenue, constructed in 1936. His first wife died in November 1935 and Moir began working with the architect Heather Sutherland, who had also studied under Wilkinson, and had graduated in 1926. She drew the Tilyard house, one of the eight residential projects of the Moir practice in 1936. The house at 3 Wilmot Crescent, built for W. H. B. Dickson, was another of those. Later owners were P. R. Wilkins,¹ then the British High Commission (to house staff such as its agricultural attache)³ and the owners since about 1989 are Colin and Margaret Stewart.

Moir and Sutherland were married in November 1936 and practised in partnership until her accidental death in 1953. The name of the practice had changed to Moir, Ward & Slater by 1956 but by the 1960s it was Moir & Slater only. It prospered with the expansion of Canberra. Malcolm Moir died on 22 September 1971.¹

Malcolm Moir's architectural work, particularly within the period c.1933 to 1953 when he first practised alone, and then with his partner and wife Heather Sutherland, was overtly modernist and avant garde in style. During this period, when Canberra was but a young city, the general architectural styles were conservative in nature, and in the large part, derivative. Malcolm Moir

eschewed the 'politeness' of the Mediterranean, neo-Georgian and Stripped Classical styles, and built houses which were radically different from almost any being built at the time in Canberra.¹

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

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

The house is a relatively early example of the Inter-War Functionalist Style (1915-1940). The key features of the style displayed by the building include its asymmetrical massing, simple geometric shapes and metal-framed windows. The other feature of the style displayed is the use of corner windows. The house is notable for displaying the high design skill of Malcolm Moir and Heather Sutherland at the time she joined his architectural practice in the mid-1930s.

Other important elements are the rounded chimneys, Art Deco style details, and light-toned face brickwork. The design of a diagonal-brick course around the upper parapets and chevron-like sloping glazing bars in the balcony door are also of interest.

The house compares with Moir's own house constructed in 1936 at 43 Melbourne Avenue, Forrest, the Evans Crescent Precinct, Griffith, 1938-40, by Moir & Sutherland and the former Forrest Fire Station Precinct, Forrest, 1938, by E. H. Henderson.

The house is valued by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects as a good early example of the Inter-War Functionalist 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

The design of the house reflects an important aspect of the taste of the period immediately following the Depression, by demonstrating the way traditional architectural styles were being eschewed in favour of modernism.²

(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

References

- 1 Peter Freeman. Malcolm Moir: His Life and Work. Unpublished report for the Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture Committee, ACT Chapter, Royal Australian Institute of Architects, 1997.

- 2 Richard Apperly, Robert Irving, Peter Reynolds. Identifying Australian Architecture - Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present. Angus and Robertson, 1989, p187.
 - 3 Mervyn Knowles, an early resident of Forrest, personal advice.
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Other Information Sources