

Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture

RSTCA No: R069

Name of Place: Law Courts of the ACT Precinct

Comprising: R 69A Law Courts of the ACT Building
R 69B City District Police Station
R 69C Reserve Bank of Australia

Address/Location: 11 Knowles Place & 16 - 22 London Circuit
Canberra City ACT 2601
Block 16 Section 63 and Blocks 1, 4 & 6 Section 18 City

Listing Status:	Registered	Other Heritage Listings:	
Date of Listing:	1986	Level of Significance:	Territory
Citation Revision No:	3	Category:	Government
Citation Revision Date:	Dec 03	Style:	Stripped Classical
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Date of Design:	1962-4	Designer:	Various
Construction:	1962-6	Client/Owner/Lessee:	NCDC
Additions:		Builder:	Various

Statement of Significance

The precinct is significant as a comparatively rare and successful example of twentieth century civic design incorporating three buildings which differently express the Late Twentieth-Century Stripped Classical style, to a National Capital Development Commission masterplan and control drawings.

The contribution of the precinct to Canberra's townscape is noteworthy and the siting of the buildings gives due prominence especially to the Law Courts of the Australian Capital Territory building which closes the vista along University Avenue at City Hill. There are other examples of civic composition from this period in Canberra, particularly Civic Square and Hobart Place, but in formal terms the Law Courts Precinct represents the most controlled and unified of the three compositions, providing a successful and elegant pedestrian space.

The most architecturally significant building in the precinct is the Law Courts of the ACT building, and the Reserve Bank of Australia also has architectural significance, while the City District Police Station is only significant as part of the civic design of the precinct. However, all the buildings contribute to the scale and proportions of the square, and provide unity in use of materials and detailing. Works of art, in the form of sculpture in Knowles Place and the Reserve Bank, add to the aesthetic value of the precinct.

Background / History

In 1962 the National Capital Development Commission began planning an area Walter Burley Griffin designated for "municipal courts" west of City Hill with a masterplan and control drawings for a harmonious grouping of buildings around a square off London Circuit at the termination of University Avenue. Although University Avenue had been laid out as wide as Northbourne Avenue by Griffin its width had been halved by the time the masterplan was prepared, throwing its axis slightly to the north and off the original centreline to City Hill. The square, Knowles Place, was appropriately named after Sir George Knowles, Commonwealth Solicitor-General from 1932 to 1946.

The Law Courts of the Australian Capital Territory building, originally for two Supreme courts and four Magistrates courts, was designed in 1962 by Roy Simpson of Yuncken Freeman Architects and opened in May 1963 by Prime Minister Menzies. In 1992 the Supreme Court of the ACT was transferred from the Commonwealth to the ACT Government.

The Governor of the Reserve Bank, Dr H. C. Coombs departed from the tradition of giving all commissions to the Commonwealth Works Department and endorsed a national competition in 1962 for the design of the Reserve Bank of Australia. It was won by Perth architects Howlett and Bailey and the building was completed in 1965.

A headquarters building for the ACT Police was designed in about 1964 by Adelaide architects Hassell, McConnell & Partners and completed in 1966. It has since become the Australian Federal Police City District Station and the interior was extensively altered in 1995.

Description of Place

See individual citations for descriptions of the buildings.

The precinct is a group of three two and three-storey Late Twentieth-Century Stripped Classical style buildings: the Law Courts of the ACT building, flanked by the Reserve bank of Australia and the City District Police Station, around a square, Knowles Place, off London Circuit at the termination of University Avenue.

There is a cast bronze figure "Dreaming" by Milan Vojsk installed in 1973 on a rock in the pool in Knowles Place, a gift commissioned by the Reserve Bank of Australia in 1964.

Condition and Integrity

The condition of the precinct as a whole is good.

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

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

The precinct is significant as a comparatively rare and successful example of twentieth century civic design incorporating three buildings which differently express the Late Twentieth-Century Stripped Classical style. The contribution of the precinct to Canberra's townscape is noteworthy.

Criterion (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.

Because of their architectural significance, the buildings in this precinct are valuable educational resources for architects and designers. The way the precinct is laid out makes it a valuable educational resource for planners and civic designers.

References

1. Law Courts of the ACT Library folder *History of the Law Courts of the ACT*.
2. Richard Apperly, Robert Irving, Peter Reynolds, *Identifying Australian Architecture - Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*. Angus and Robertson, 1989, p 229.
3. *An Architectural Guide to Australia's Capital Canberra*, RAlA, 1982, p 4.
4. J. R. Conner, *A Guide to Canberra Buildings*, Angus and Robertson /RAIA, 1970, p 27.
5. Andrew Metcalf, *Canberra Architecture*, Watermark Architectural Guides, 2003, p 54-6.
6. National Capital Development Commission *Works of Art in Canberra*, 1980. p 36, 52, 61.
7. *Architecture in Australia*, RAlA journal, Vol 51 No 3, Sept 1962, p 117-9.
8. *Architecture in Australia*, RAlA journal, Vol 53 No 1, March 1964, p 70-3.

Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture

RSTCA No: R069A

Name of Place: **Law Courts of the ACT Building**
Part of the Law Courts of the ACT Precinct

Address/Location: 11 Knowles Place, Canberra City ACT 2601
Block 16 Section 63 City

Listing Status:	Registered	Other Heritage Listings:	
Date of Listing:	1986	Level of Significance:	Territory
Citation Revision No:	3	Category:	Government
Citation Revision Date:	Dec 03	Style:	Stripped Classical

Date of Design:	1962	Designer:	Yuncken Freeman
Construction:	1963	Client/Owner/Lessee:	NCDC
Additions:		Builder:	Clements Langford

Statement of Significance

The Law Courts of the Australian Capital Territory Building is architecturally significant as a fine early example of the Late Twentieth-Century Stripped Classical style. It is a free standing monumental building in a formal setting, with all the indicators and characteristics of its style - symmetrical facades, regular bays with height exceeding width (the two key indicators), repetitive rhythm of colonnades echoing classical peristyles, a horizontal skyline, a broad roof edge recalling a classical entablature, and central front and rear entrances. Because of its architectural significance, this building is a valuable educational resource for designers.

The contribution of the building to Canberra's townscape is noteworthy and its siting on an eminence and closing the vista along University Avenue at City Hill gives it due prominence.

Description

A two-storey building in the Late Twentieth-Century Stripped Classical style, designed by Roy Simpson of Yuncken Freeman Architects and completed in 1963. The monumental building is free standing in a formal setting, with all the indicators of its style - symmetrical facades, regular bays with height exceeding width (the two key indicators), colonnades echoing classical peristyles, a horizontal skyline, a broad roof edge recalling a classical entablature, and central front and rear entrances.

The front entrance is approached from Knowles Place up steps onto a podium and the rear entrance from Vernon Circle is at ground level owing to the slope of City Hill. Each of the identical front (north-west) and rear (south-east) facades is faced in polished light grey Wombeyan marble up to a continuous band of clerestorey glazing. This glazing continues along the side facades, which are also faced in the same marble, but also have a ground-floor vertically-proportioned windows, one in each bay on the north-east and a group of four on the south-west. There is a hand-forged and gilded wrought iron Coat of Arms of the Commonwealth, designed by Roy Simpson, over each of the two entrances.

Each entrance leads up a flight of stairs to the large central public vestibule surrounding a circular glazed garden courtyard. The six courtrooms, the Sheriff's office and other rooms are entered from the vestibule. The two Supreme Court rooms are in the west and south corners, while the 'Inferior Court' rooms are on the north-east of the vestibule. A feature of the courtrooms is the use of timbers donated by and representative of the six States of the Commonwealth - Red Cedar (NSW), Mountain Ash (Vic), Jarrah (WA), Silky Oak (Qld), Red Gum (SA), Blackwood (Tas). On the first floor are Judges' chambers, office space and a library overlooking a garden on the flat roof the vestibule.

In the basement are stores, plant rooms and two cells adjacent to a police room, a garage for the prisoners' van and corridors for accused to be taken directly to stairs emerging in the dock of the Supreme Courts or to doors to two of the other courts. There is also a separate judges' entrance and garage in the

basement with stairs to a retiring room and private passages off which is a ground floor entrance for judges and doors to the court reporting room and direct to the benches of the Supreme Courts.

Condition and Integrity

The condition is good. The slender columns along each facade were originally black, but are now light grey and so they stand out less markedly from the light grey marble facades than they did originally. The basement cells believed to be not normally in use.

Background/History

The National Capital Development Commission began implementing Griffin's plan for a legal precinct west of City Hill in 1962 with a masterplan and control drawings for a harmonious grouping of buildings around a square off London Circuit at the termination of University Avenue. The Law Courts of the Australian Capital Territory building, originally for two Supreme courts and four Magistrates courts, was designed in 1962 by Roy Simpson of Yuncken Freeman Architects and opened in May 1963 by Prime Minister Menzies. All proceedings in the courts 1 to 5 were originally stereo tape recorded, linked to a transcript centre in Hobart Place. The system was the first of its type in the Australian courts.

There is a gallery in the vestibule of the Law Courts of the ACT Building of portrait photographs of former Judges of the Supreme Court of the ACT, hung on 1 July 1992 to mark the transfer on that date of the Court from the Commonwealth to the ACT Governments. The Magistrates courts moved into the adjacent ACT Magistrates Court building in 1997 and the Federal Magistrates Court of the ACT in Childers Street in 2003.

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

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

The building is architecturally significant as a fine early example of the Late Twentieth-Century Stripped Classical style. It is a free standing monumental building in a formal setting, with all the indicators and characteristics of its style - symmetrical facades, regular bays with height exceeding width (the two key indicators), repetitive rhythm of colonnades echoing classical peristyles, a horizontal skyline, a broad roof edge recalling a classical entablature, and central front and rear entrances. The contribution of the building to Canberra's townscape is noteworthy and its siting on an eminence and closing the vista along University Avenue at City Hill gives it due prominence.

Criterion (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.

Because of its architectural significance, this building is a valuable educational resource for designers.

References

1. *Architecture in Australia*, RAIA journal, Vol 53 No 1, March 1964, p 70-3.
2. Richard Apperly, Robert Irving, Peter Reynolds, *Identifying Australian Architecture - Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*. Angus and Robertson, 1989, p 229.
3. *An Architectural Guide to Australia's Capital Canberra*, RAIA, 1982, p 4.
4. J. R. Conner, *A Guide to Canberra Buildings*, Angus and Robertson in association with RAIA, 1970, p 27.
5. Andrew Metcalf, *Canberra Architecture*, Watermark Architectural Guides, 2003, p 54-6.
6. National Capital Development Commission *Works of Art in Canberra*, 1980, p 52.
7. Law Courts of the ACT Library folder *History of the Law Courts of the ACT*.

Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture

RSTCA No: R069B

Name of Place: **City District Police Station**
Part of the Law Courts of the ACT Precinct

Address/Location: 16 -18 London Circuit, Canberra City ACT 2601
Block 4 Section 18 City

Listing Status:	Registered	Other Heritage Listings:	
Date of Listing:	1986	Level of Significance:	Territory
Citation Revision No:	3	Category:	Government
Citation Revision Date:	Dec 03	Style:	Stripped Classical

Date of Design:	1964	Designer:	Hassell McConnell
Construction:	1966	Client/Owner/Lessee:	NCDC
Additions:		Builder:	

Statement of Significance

The City District Police Station is significant for the contribution it makes to the civic design of the Law Courts of the Australian Capital Territory Precinct. The Late Twentieth-Century Stripped Classical style exterior, while not being of great architectural merit, ensures that it blends effectively with the other buildings of the Precinct. It is a free-standing monumental building in a formal setting, which exhibits the major indicators and broad characteristics of the Late Twentieth-Century Stripped Classical style: symmetrical facades, regular bays with height exceeding width (the two key indicators), a repetitive rhythm of column-like elements, reminiscent of classical intercolumniation, and a horizontal skyline.

Background/History

A headquarters building for the ACT Police was designed in about 1964 by Adelaide architects Hassell, McConnell & Partners and completed in 1966. It was the last of the buildings of the National Capital Development Commission's implementation in 1962 of a masterplan and control drawings for a harmonious grouping of three buildings around a square off London Circuit at the termination of University Avenue, in accordance with Griffin's plan for a legal precinct west of City Hill.

The building has since become the City District Police Station, of the Australian Federal Police. The building was extensively altered internally in 1995. The work included alterations to the entrance.

Description

A free-standing three-storey Late Twentieth-Century Stripped Classical style building entirely surrounded by facades which are symmetrical and divided into regularly-spaced vertically-proportioned structural bays, the two key indicators of the style. The only interruptions to the pattern are the projecting plant wing on the south-east side and the 1995 entrance, with a ramp and a roof projecting at an acute angle from the facade. There is a projecting service enclosure below the ground floor on the south-west side. The structural frames correspond in number and size to those on the upper floors of the Reserve Bank of Australia opposite, and are faced with the same light-grey Wombeyan marble as the Law Courts and the Reserve Bank buildings. The bays on the ground floor have concrete block sunscreens all round the building except the two bays of the front entrance. The walls set back from the structural frame on the upper floors are dark grey split-concrete masonry with aluminium-framed windows. The interior was extensively altered, as was the entrance, in 1995. The interior, due to the extensive alterations, has not been inspected.

Condition and Integrity

The interior was extensively altered, as was the entrance, in 1995.

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

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

The City District Police Station is significant for the contribution it makes to the civic design of the Law Courts of the Australian Capital Territory Precinct. The Late Twentieth-Century Stripped Classical style exterior, while not being of great architectural merit, ensures that it blends effectively with the other buildings of the Precinct. It is a free standing monumental building in a formal setting, which exhibits the major indicators and broad characteristics of the Late Twentieth-Century Stripped Classical style: symmetrical facades, regular bays with height exceeding width (the two key indicators), a repetitive rhythm of column-like elements, reminiscent of classical intercolumniation, and a horizontal skyline.

References

1. Richard Apperly, Robert Irving, Peter Reynolds, *Identifying Australian Architecture - Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*. Angus & Robertson, 1989, p 229.
2. J. R. Conner, *A Guide to Canberra Buildings*, Angus & Robertson in association with RAIA, 1970, p 27.
3. Andrew Metcalf, *Canberra Architecture*, Watermark Architectural Guides, 2003, p 56.

Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture

RSTCA No: R069C

Name of Place: Reserve Bank of Australia
Part of the Law Courts of the ACT Precinct

Address/Location: 20 -22 London Circuit, Canberra City ACT 2601
Block 1 Section 18 City

Listing Status:	Registered	Other Heritage Listings:	
Date of Listing:	1986	Level of Significance:	Territory
Citation Revision No:	3	Category:	Government
Citation Revision Date:	Dec 03	Style:	Stripped Classical

Date of Design:	1962	Designer:	Howlett & Bailey
Construction:	1963-5	Client/Owner/Lessee:	NCDC
Additions:		Builder:	

Statement of Significance

The Reserve Bank of Australia is an architecturally significant building which exhibits the major indicators and broad characteristics of the Late Twentieth-Century Stripped Classical style. It is a free standing monumental building in a formal setting, with symmetrical facades, regular bays with height exceeding width (the two key indicators), a repetitive rhythm of column-like elements, reminiscent of classical intercolumniation, and a horizontal skyline. The interior has a banking chamber remarkable for the fine proportions of its full-height space and outstanding wall sculpture.

Because of its architectural and aesthetic significance, this building is a valuable educational resource for designers and sculptors.

Background/History

The National Capital Development Commission began implementing Griffin's plan for a legal precinct west of City Hill in 1962 with a masterplan and control drawings for a harmonious grouping of three buildings around a square off London Circuit at the termination of University Avenue, one of which was to be the Reserve Bank of Australia.

In 1962 the Governor of the Reserve Bank, Dr H. C. Coombs departed from the tradition of giving all commissions to the Commonwealth Works Department and endorsed a national competition for the design of the Reserve Bank of Australia. In all, 248 entries were received and the assessors were Professor H. Ingram Ashworth, Professor R. A. Jensen and Grenfell Rudduck. It was won by Perth architects Howlett and Bailey in mid 1962. The assessors commented that "The design expresses the structure and is an adequate reflection of the functions of the building.....(but)...the use of glass in the external walls is considered excessive." The structural layout was simplified and some planning details were altered from the competition-winning design, and the building was completed in 1965.

As part of the project, the Reserve Bank commissioned the sculptor Gerald Lewers, who designed the large beaten copper wall sculpture "Four Pieces" for the banking chamber before his accidental death in 1962. It was sculpted to his design by his wife Margo, better known as an artist and potter, and installed in 1965. The design features a fulcrum and two weights representing a set of scales. It symbolises the bank's role in the balance of the economy. There is a free-standing aluminium and glass figure, sculptured by Donald Brook, installed in the second-floor courtyard in 1965. In 1964 the Reserve Bank commissioned Milan Vojsk to create the bronze figure "Dreaming" which was installed in 1973 on a rock in the pool in Knowles Place.

Description

A free-standing monumental three-storey Late Twentieth-Century Stripped Classical style building entirely surrounded by glazed marble-clad structural bays, vertically-proportioned on the dominant upper floors and horizontally-proportioned on the ground floor. Public access to the banking chamber is from London Circuit via a covered entrance with two doorways. The full-height banking chamber occupies much of the building. On the cork-clad back wall of the chamber is the large beaten copper sculpture "Four Pieces" by Gerald and Margo Lewers. Behind the wall is a strong room, offices, toilets, and side entrances with stairs to the office floors above. There is a vehicular service area at the south-east rear of the building. On the second floor there is a small polygonal courtyard, surrounded by glazing, with a free-standing aluminium and glass figure by the sculptor Donald Brook.

Condition and Integrity

The condition is good. Black mesh external sun-screening has been added.

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

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

The Reserve Bank of Australia is an architecturally significant building which exhibits the major indicators and broad characteristics of the Late Twentieth-Century Stripped Classical style. It is a free standing monumental building in a formal setting, with symmetrical facades, regular bays with height exceeding width (the two key indicators), a repetitive rhythm of column-like elements, reminiscent of classical intercolumniation, and a horizontal skyline. The interior has a banking chamber remarkable for the fine proportions of its full-height space and outstanding wall sculpture.

Criterion (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.

Because of its architectural and aesthetic significance, this building is a valuable educational resource for designers and sculptors.

References

1. *Architecture in Australia*, RAI A journal, Vol 51 No 3, Sept 1962, p 117-9.
2. Richard Apperly, Robert Irving, Peter Reynolds, *Identifying Australian Architecture - Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*. Angus and Robertson, 1989, p 229.
3. *An Architectural Guide to Australia's Capital Canberra*, RAI A, 1982, p 4.
4. J. R. Conner, *A Guide to Canberra Buildings*, Angus and Robertson in association with RAI A, 1970, p 27.
5. Andrew Metcalf, *Canberra Architecture*, Watermark Architectural Guides, 2003, p 54-6.
6. National Capital Development Commission *Works of Art in Canberra*, 1980, p 9, 36, 61.