

Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture

RSTCA No: R088

Name of Place: Northbourne Flats

Other/Former Names:

Address/Location: 110 Northbourne Avenue BRADDON & TURNER

Block Section of

Listing Status:

Date of Listing:

Citation Revision No:

Citation Revision Date:

Other Heritage Listings:

Level of Significance:

Category:

Style:

Date of Design:

Construction Period:

Date of Additions:

Designer:

Client/Owner/Lessee:

Builder:

Statement of Significance

The Northbourne Flats, located on both sides of Northbourne Avenue in Braddon and Turner, is an example of significant architecture and as such is an educational resource. The housing precinct is a good example of the Post-War International Style (1940-1960). The design incorporates all of the features which are specific to the style including cubiform overall shape, structural frame expressed, large sheets of glass and curtain wall.

The stairs, unifying repetition of fenestration, plain smooth wall surfaces, cantilevering slabs, contrasting texture, detail and external finishes, site planning and urban scale are design features that are of additional significance.

The architecture of this housing precinct may contribute to the education of designers in their understanding of Post-War Architectural styles and urban design.

Description

The Northbourne Flats were designed by the Department of Works, Canberra, in Association with Budden, Nangle and Michael, in 1956 and construction was completed in 1959. The buildings are an example of the Post-War International Style (1940-60) with their cubiform overall shape, structural frame expressed, curtain wall and large sheets of glass.

The earliest notable Australian examples built in the style date from the late 1940's including, 'Windy Dropdown' (Farley House), North Curl Curl, 1946-48 (the first house in NSW that did not require a parapet to hide the flat roof), four individual houses at Maytone Avenue, Killara, 1948-51, the English House, 1949-50, St Ives (now demolished) all by Sydney Ancher, houses by Harry Seidler including the Rose Seidler House, Wahroonga, 1948-50, the Stanhill Flats, by Frederick Romberg, Melbourne, 1948 and the Weston Electronics building (formerly Boots Pure Drug Company) by Stafford, Moor Farrington & J Torzillo, Roseville, 1954.

Other examples of this style in Canberra are individual houses; the 'Bowden House', by Harry Seidler, 1952 and the 'Benjamin House', by Alex Jelinek, 1956, (a contrasting curvilinear form), both in Deakin, the Northbourne Housing Precinct, by Ancher Mortlock & Murray, 1959-63 and the Currong, Allawah & Bega Flats, Department of Works, 1956-65.

The innovative planning of the Northbourne Flats provided the first high density housing project on Northbourne Avenue. The only other modern public housing in Canberra at the time was the 16 three storey walk up flats at Bega and Allawah Courts, by the Department of Works in Civic along

Ballumbir Street and Ainslie Avenue 3. The Currong Apartments were built a little later than the Bega and Allawah Courts. The apartments overwhelm and have little sympathy with the low level courts. The flats exhibit some of the architectural elements of the Post War International Style including cubiform overall shape and large sheets of glass. The two Courts and the Apartments appear to be influenced by British public housing apartment buildings.

The Northbourne Flats were designed as public housing in an innovative style as part of the housing program to overcome then-current housing deficiencies. The housing would be considered medium density today.

The two types of buildings consist of 248 good quality one, two and three bedroom flats in 20 three storey 4 blocks on the flat site on two sides of the Avenue with play areas and concealed drying areas. The site has an area of approximately five hectares 4. Vehicle access is from the secondary rear streets to undercroft parking to the three bedroom flats and the further most two bedroom flats from the Avenue. The buildings containing the two bedroom flats are set slightly staggered in pairs and are perpendicular to the Avenue with a northerly aspect. The adjoining flats are mirrored in plan. Behind and connected via a fully glazed communal stair are the one bedroom flats with laundries at ground level. The three bedroom flats are parallel with the Avenue and set back to be placed between the other units to create semi enclosed large public open landscaped spaces in a loosely formed repetitive "H" site plan.

The buildings are all uniformly detailed and finished with an expressed horizontal line of the exposed suspended floor slabs, providing some sun control, between end walls of face brick. The long facades have a pleasing staggered pattern of infill panels alternating precast, with exposed river aggregate, and aluminium framed windows with lower spandrels of flat sheet aluminium. The load bearing brick party walls are extended externally as rendered vertical elements between the adjoining unit's glazing. In addition and along the same principle, circular steel columns are located in front of the precast panels expressing the divide between flats. The concrete framed undercroft parking supports the brick party walls over. Below the one bedroom flats at ground level the laundry walls have precast panels with exposed granite aggregate. The roofing was originally pressed metal built-up roofing which has now been replaced with galvanised metal deck roofing to some flats. The roof is punctuated by brick incinerator flues.

????The glazing is aluminium framed throughout. The communal concrete stair to the two and one bedroom flats is enclosed by a three storey curtain wall framed in SS??

One Bedroom Flats.

There are 70 one bedroom flats each with an area of 58.5 sq.m. These flats are located at the southern side of the two bedroom flats connected via the glazed communal stair and its open passage, and above the ground floor enclosed laundries. They consist of separate living, dining, kitchen, bedroom and wet areas, the later two to the south.

Two Bedroom Flats.

There are 154 two bedroom flats each with an area of 83.6 sq.m. These flats appear to be the most successful design in that they provide a northern aspect to the living room and the main bedroom. The kitchen, second bedroom and wet areas are to the south. There are three levels starting at ground level as well as sections raised one level on a concrete framed structure to allow for undercroft parking.

Three Bedroom Flats.

There are 24 three bedroom flats each with an area of 97.5 sq.m. Each level has a central communal stair within the overall building foot print which allows access to two flats at each level. They are all raised one level on a concrete frame structure to allow for undercroft parking. The flats have two bedrooms and the living room facing towards the Avenue across the park like communal areas. To the other side are the dining room, kitchen, the third bedroom and the wet areas 5.

Internally the brickwork is rendered and painted. The slab soffits form the ceilings with a skim coat render finish. There is timber paneling to the kitchens and dining areas.

The site planning generally provides play areas, landscaping, walkways and street side as well as undercover parking specifically planned with access from minor streets set away from Northbourne

Avenue.

The flats are centrally heated by a central boiler unit.

The main architectural elements that are specific to the Post-War International Style (1940-60) and that are displayed by these buildings relate to the external forms. They are:

- cubiform overall shape,
- structural frame expressed,
- curtain wall,
- large sheets of glass.

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

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

The main architectural elements listed above place these buildings in the Post-War International Style (1940-60) 5

The stairs, unifying repetition of fenestration, detail and external finishes, site planning and urban scale are design features that are of additional significance.

The flats were built by Civil and Civic 6.

The flats have always been public housing. The buildings are structurally sound.

Condition and Integrity

Background/History

The Northbourne Flats were designed by the Department of Works in association with Budden, Harry E Nangle and Michael, 7 a local Canberra firm of architects, to provide accommodation for the increasing number of public servants. The associating firm documented the building designed by the Department of Works. These buildings were some of the last buildings designed by the Department of Works prior to the National Capital Development Commission taking over the planning of Canberra and were designed and sited to enhance Northbourne Avenue. Since self government of the territory in 1989 the flats have been managed by the ACT Housing Trust.

A building in Canberra designed by Budden, Harry E Nangle and Michael is the St John Priory Headquarters, Forrest, 1967. An earlier building designed by Budden H E and Hood, the same Harry Budden, for the Federal Capital Commission, is Brassey House, Barton, 1927. This was one of the original government built hostels in Canberra 8. This building is in the Inter War Georgian Revival Style, 1915-45, and has an exaggerated but slightly compressed classical main entry to the east facing Belmore Gardens and a secondary rear entry along Macquarie Street which has an understated Palladian face brick gable. The planning has a Palladian form.

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 housing precinct exhibits all of the particular architectural elements specific to the Post-War International Style including cubiform overall shape, structural frame expressed, curtain wall and

large sheets of glass. Curtain wall, associated more with high-rise buildings, is present in the stairs to the one and two bedroom flats.

The stairs, unifying repetition of fenestration, plain smooth wall surfaces, cantilevering slabs, contrasting texture, detail and external finishes, site planning and urban scale are design features that are of additional significance.

The location of the flats on both sides of Northbourne Avenue to define the street as planned is a good example of urban planning.

The housing precinct is well detailed and well built and is valued by the RAlA as a very good example of this style of architecture. It is of local significance.

(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, planning and urban form this precinct is an educational resource for designers and planners. Its external architecture is characteristic of the Post-War International Style and the planning and massing of the buildings forms a composition that has created a pleasant urban form.

The architecture of this housing precinct and urban form may contribute to the education of designers in their understanding of Post-War Architectural Styles.

References

- 1 Architecture in Australia RAlA Sept 1965 & National Archives of Australia, Aperture Cards of Department of Works Drawings Microfilm Nos 24161-24578. ACT Housing stated that they do not have drawings.
- 2 Richard Apperly, Robert Irving, Peter Reynolds. Identifying Australian Architecture Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present. Angus & Robertson 1989.
- 3 An Architectural Guide to Australia's Capital. RAlA 1982.
- 4 Architecture in Australia opcit.
- 5 Richard Apperly, Robert Irving, Peter Reynolds opcit.
- 6 Architecture in Australia & National Archives of Australia opcit.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 An Architectural Guide to Australia's Capital opcit.

Other Information Sources