

Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture

RSTCA No: R094

Name of Place: Evans Crescent housing Precinct

Other/Former Names:

Address/Location:

Block 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 Section 38 of South Canberra

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

Date of Design:	Designer:	Malcolm Moir & Heather Sutherland
Construction Period:	Client/Owner/Lessee:	
Date of Additions:	Builder:	

Statement of Significance

The Evans Crescent Housing Precinct is an example of significant architecture and an educational resource. The houses were built when the Inter-War Functionalist Style (1915-1940) was relatively new in Australia. The designs incorporate features which are peculiar to the style including asymmetrical massing, simple geometric shapes, long horizontal balcony, roof concealed by parapet and metal framed windows.

Three of the houses have great merit since they retain their original character. These houses are on Blocks 3, 5 and 7. They demonstrate three different massing types and the growth in design confidence by the architects as consecutive designs unfolded. This is exemplified in the first designed (Block 3) with its tiled roof over the living areas, a conservative roof form that was abandoned in the later designs where the roofs are concealed by parapets.

The Evans Crescent Housing Precinct is the best Canberra example, and otherwise a very good example of the Inter-War Functionalist Style. Its external elements are more typical of the style than the only other and more restrained group of the period in Canberra, the Forrest Fire Station Precinct, 1939.

The architecture of the buildings that form the Evans Crescent Precinct may contribute to the education of designers and planners in their understanding of inter-war architectural styles.

Description

The houses were designed by the architects Malcolm Moir and Heather Sutherland (husband and wife), for the following:

- Block 2; Mr G Cusack in 1939 and construction was completed in 1940,
- Block 3; Mr H Reeve in 1938 and construction was completed in 1939,
- Block 5; Mr C Tobler in 1939 and construction was completed in 1940,
- Block 6; Mr W Rafferty in 1939 and construction was completed in 1940
- Block 7; Mrs A Cassidy in 1939 and construction was completed in 1940¹.

The buildings are examples of the Inter-War Functionalist Style (1915-1940) with their asymmetrical massing, simple geometric shapes, long horizontal balconies (Blocks 4 and 5), roof concealed by parapets and metal framed windows².

The houses form a precinct in the urban form of Griffith and Manuka with their matching materials and aesthetics, asymmetrical massing of simple geometric shapes and their exploitation of three-dimensional expression along the curve of the crescent and stepping down the slope of the land³.

BLOCK 3 (15 Evans Crescent)

This residence was the first designed and is a relatively spacious, two bedroom, split level design with extensive glazing. The living areas retain their original tiled pitched roof. The lower level, to the south, consists of a garage and storage area with an externally accessed laundry. The entry is on the mid level together with the living, dining, kitchen and sun rooms, with study, set out in a rectangular plan under the pitched roof. These rooms have large expanses of glass with all rooms except the kitchen having full height glazing. The upper level is over the garage and consists of two bedrooms and a bathroom. There is access to the parapet concealed flat roof over via a steep internal stair. Corner glazing is used extensively.

The house was built by H. Reeve, probably the owner, and is relatively unaltered.

BLOCK 5 (11 Evans Crescent)

This residence was the second designed and is an elegant tri-level structure with a generous porch at each level. All roofs are low pitched with parapet walls. The central entry is at ground level, next to the projecting garage, which opens into a wide hall with a low ceiling. A fire place separates the living room from the entry. Both the living room and the kitchen are set down three steps to the north.

The living room has glazed double swing doors that open onto the six metre long north terrace. The room above extends partially over the terrace and provides protection from summer sun. The eat-in kitchen is to the east. An externally accessed laundry and WC are located to the rear and a work room is down some steps to the south behind the garage.

A bedroom is located to the south at the mid upper level off the main stair landing.

The top level has a large bedroom, lounge room with a study opening off it and a bathroom. The lounge room has a large corner window, the only corner window in the house. A glazed double door opens out from the study onto the large terrace above the garage and entry which is surrounded by horizontal pipe railing.

The house was built by C Tobler, the owner, and is relatively unaltered. Brick supports to the upper level overhanging section of the lounge room at the north terrace have been added next to the original steel posts, possibly done in 1980. The upper level was damaged by fire around 1944. It is believed that the house has remained in the Tobler family.

BLOCK 7 (7 Evans Crescent)

This is a split level four bedroom house with an elegant plan that turns about the entry axis to address the curve of the crescent.

The entry porch is covered by a cantilevered thin concrete roof slab which is also partially supported by a single steel column. The architect's proposal to access this slab as a porch via a refined steel spiral stair was rejected by the Commissioner for Housing in 1940, C S Daley. The architects contested the decision with reference to international publications, to no avail⁴.

The house is entered on the lower level via a well proportioned entry hall with the angled and curved wall of the lobby directing visitors to the upper living level. The living room faces north and has a central fire place with the dining room in an 'L' plan to the south. The kitchen is off the dining room and the laundry is to the rear down five steps.

The lower level to the east has four bedrooms, a sun room to the south and a bathroom. This lower level has three corner windows.

The house was built by H Reeve and is relatively unaltered from the street except for the addition of decorative roof tiles to the parapet and the widening of the garage and the addition of a roller door. The rear has been altered with the addition of a bedroom and bathroom in the mid 1950's.

BLOCK 6 (9 Evans Crescent)

The original house consisted of five bedrooms, two to the rear ground level and three to the rear upper level, and was set out in a 'T' form with the top of the 'T' across the rear. The entry was centrally located on the south side with the living room facing the street. The main features were an internal curved stair expressed as a curved two storey brick wall on the south rear corner, tall brick chimneys and a long porch off both the dining and living rooms to the north.

The house was built by C Tobler and was extended in 1980-82 to the south, extending past the original front. A copper roofed bay window faces the street and a reproduction classical column supports an entry slab edged in copper. These elements are not in character with the original house, however the brickwork and massing are sympathetic. The north terrace horizontal pipe railing has been changed to vertical balustrading.

BLOCK 2 (17 Evans Crescent)

This residence has been extensively altered with additions and alterations in 1965, 1971 and 1973. An upper level has been added and the front elevation altered. Timber elements have been added such as decks and rails. Metal curved sun shades now extend over many of the windows and some glazing has been altered to aluminium. The alterations have changed the character of the residence substantially but it can be discerned that this residence was originally of a similar design to the others. The house was built by Mr Kestel.

The major architectural elements that are peculiar to the Inter-War Functionalist Style (1915-1940) and that are displayed by these buildings relate to the external forms⁵. They are:

- asymmetrical massing,
- simple geometric shapes,
- long horizontal balcony,
- roof concealed by parapet,
- metal-framed windows.

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

- cantilevered balconies or hoods,
- corner windows,
- rounded corner.

There are further architectural elements that are important to the buildings' integrity, the light-toned face brick which is common to each house and the decks or terraces with horizontal pipe railings.

The siting of the houses on a sloping convex curved street allowed the architects to exploit both the three dimensional expression of this architectural style and the play of levels which is utilised by split level planning.

Condition and Integrity

Background/History

The residences were some of the first truly modern designs in Canberra and form an important precinct⁶. As a group they represent a major architectural urban form designed by the same

architects, in the same style within a period of two years. They express the three dimensional cubic massing of the Inter-War Functionalist Style.

The residence at Block 4 (not included in this citation), has been altered with a Cape Cod extension. It is placed in the centre of the precinct which detracts from but does not destroy the urban form. The original residence was designed by K Oliphant in 1939⁷ and was in the style of the Dutch architect Willem Dudok, similar to Oliphant's design at 24 Arthur Circle, Forrest, an Inter-War Functionalist Style residence. The house at Block 4 was completed in 1939 for Mr L Briant. The Cape Cod extension was carried out in 1978.

Oliphant's plan had a front external square stair enclosed by brick which extended up to a concrete porch over the front and entry. This design may have influenced Moir and Sutherland's aborted design for the front spiral stair to Block 7 in the following year.

This modern brick architecture may have been influenced by Australian architecture of the time or published overseas 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, 1934⁸. There is similarity in the ground floor plan of the residence at Block 6 and the George Stooke House. Grounds returned from travelling in Europe and America in 1932 and his architecture of the time was noticeably influenced by his travels⁹.

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 Schulz House (1928) and Karl Schneider's Werner House, Hamburg (1930), some of which would have been in publications of the time. This architecture was of face brick and not the white painted render aesthetic of much of the 'functionalist' style¹⁰.

Moir and Sutherland were the consultant architects for the USA Embassy in Canberra. Moir later teamed with Ward and Slater to form an architectural practice that designed the French and Philippine Chancelleries and Residences as well as commercial and civil buildings in Canberra¹¹.

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 residences in 1938 and 1939 in the Inter-War Functionalist Style (1915-1940) represented a new architectural style in Australia at that time. The earliest notable Australian examples built in the style date from the mid 1930's¹² 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 typical of the style.

The external elements are more typical of the style than other restrained examples of the period in Canberra such as the Forrest Fire Station Precinct, 1939, which do not have corner windows (there are brick columns at the corners), has differing coloured brickwork, small areas of glass in timber frames and repetitive planning and massing.

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

The precinct and houses exhibit the particular architectural elements peculiar to the Inter-War Functionalist Style (1915-1940) including asymmetrical massing, simple geometric shapes, long horizontal balcony, roof concealed by parapet and metal framed windows.

The cantilevered balconies or hoods, rounded corner, corner windows, split level planning with the houses stepping down the slope of the land, the light-toned face brickwork and the decks and terraces with horizontal pipe railings are design features of additional significance.

The buildings and precinct are valued by the RAIAs as very good examples 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

The precinct is possibly one of only two surviving relatively intact groups of detached houses of this style in Canberra (with the exception of Block 2). The external elements of the Evans Crescent Precinct are more typical of the style than the other restrained group of the period in Canberra, the Forrest Fire Station Precinct, 1939.

(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 urban form this precinct is a valuable educational resource for designers and planners. Its external architecture is characteristic of the Inter-War Functionalist Style (1915-1940) and the asymmetrical massing of the buildings stepping down and around the curve of the crescent exploits the three-dimensional expression that is characteristic of the style. The whole composition creates a unique urban form.

References

- 1 Department of the Environment, Land and Planning (DELP). Building Files for Block 2, Block 3, Block 5, Block 6, and Block 7 Section 38 Griffith.
- 2 Richard Apperly Robert Irving Peter Reynolds. Identifying Australian Architecture Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present. Angus and Robertson 1989.
- 3 This citation is based on the building plans and external reviews of the buildings.
- 4 DELP opcit.
- 5 Richard Apperly Robert Irving Peter Reynolds opcit.
- 6 J R Conner. A Guide to Canberra Buildings. Angus and Robertson 1970.
- 7 DELP opcit.
- 8 Donald Leslie Johnson. Australian Architecture 1901-1951 Sources of Modernism. Sydney University Press 1980.
- 9 Peter Cuffley. Australian Houses of the forties & Fifties. The Five Mile Press Pty Ltd 1993.

- 10 Alison & Peter Smithson. The Heroic Period of Modern Architecture. Thames & Hudson Ltd, London 1981.
- 11 J R Conner opcit.

Other Information Sources