

Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture

RSTCA No: R103

Name of Place: House at 4 Cobby Street Campbell

Address/Location: 4 Cobby Street, CAMPBELL ACT

Block 5 Section 40 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 residence at 4 Cobby Street, Campbell, is an example of significant architecture and an educational resource. The house is a good example of the Post-War International Style. The design incorporated some of the principal design features which are peculiar to the style including cubiform overall shape and large sheets of glass. The residence also displays elements of the Post-War Melbourne Regional Style including widely projecting eaves and long unbroken roof line.

The architecture of this building may contribute to the education of designers in their understanding of post-war architectural styles.

Sir Otto Frankel was recognised internationally as Australia's pre-eminent Geneticist and was a member of the executive of the CSIRO. A significant part of his work after his retirement, which was considered to be his most productive time, was undertaken in the residence. The design of this as his own residence highlights the significance of this house for its association with him.

Description

The three bedroom residence was designed by Roy Grounds, with Theo Bischoff as the project architect, in 1969-70 for Sir Otto and Lady Frankel and construction was completed in 1970-71 1.

The building is a late example of a combination of two styles:

the Post-War Melbourne Regional Style (1940-60) with its widely projecting eaves (at the rear only) and long, unbroken roof line and;

the Post War International Style (1940-60) with its cubiform overall shape and large sheets of glass 2.

There is another example of the combination of these two styles in Canberra at 24 Cobby Street, Campbell, 1963-64, also by Roy Grounds.3

There are other examples of the individual styles in Canberra including:

The Post-War Melbourne Regional Style (1940-60) Forrest Townhouses, 1959, Corner of Arthur Circle and Tasmania Circle, Forrest; three houses, 1961, Numbers 42, 44 & 46 Vasey Crescent Campbell, all by Roy Grounds; Fenner House, 8 Monaro Crescent, Red Hill, Manning Clarke House, 1952, 11 Tasmania Circle, Forrest, both by Robin Boyd and 73 National Circuit, 1958, by E J Scollay.

The Post War International Style (1940-60) 11 Northcote Street, Deakin, 1951-52, by H Seidler and Associates; Birch House, 3 Arkana Street, Yarralumla, by Noel Potter of Bunning and Madden and 10 Gawler Crescent, Deakin, 1956, by Alex Jelinek 4.

The residence at 4 Cobby Street has a simple 'rectangular' plan that has been slightly curved in form being set out concentrically with the front curved boundary and street. It is located forward of centre on a double block, with the major part of the house on the western block. The concave curve of the front of the house has a terse appearance with all windows obscured by open brick grilles. The entry is recessed with a simple timber veneered door. The attached double garage is on the west side as a continuation of the curved form. The house backs onto the Ainslie Park, part of the Canberra Nature Park system, and has bush to the east as well.

The entry opens into a small lobby off the open plan living room. There is a door to the left which opens into the laundry and on into the kitchen. Both of these rooms face the street to the south. The living room is partially divided from the dining area by a central brown brick fireplace with a narrow white rendered chimney with joinery to both sides. Both rooms open out to the north east rear brick paved terrace and onto the garden via large full height aluminium sliding glazed doors. The rooms are fully lined with timber veneered plywood sheets to the walls and spaced boards to the ceilings. The wall panelling was installed prior to the ceiling and there are no skirtings and cornices. The joinery around the fireplace includes low level shelving and cupboards, a veneered bench top and two posts, one of which hides the structural column. The joinery along the wall with the kitchen includes a servery and shelving. All the joinery matches the timber veneered wall sheeting.

An internal sliding door in the west wall of the dining room opens directly into the double garage where a utility room is located to the north end of the garage.

The bedrooms, wet areas and study extend to the south east off the curved central passage. Each internal wall is set out on the radius of the curve. The two north east facing bedrooms have central aluminium windows and built-in cupboards. The study is located at the end of the passage and is a large room of about 25sqm. There is an external door to the south east from the study with access to the garden via a suspended concrete stair. The third and smallest bedroom is to the south; the street facing window is set behind a brick-grille and there is a normal window in the south east wall. The walls to these rooms are timber veneered plywood panels similar to the living room and the ceilings are plaster.

Along the south west side of the passage are two bathrooms lit by skylights and brick grilled windows.

The house is predominantly brick-veneer construction with the wet areas and the north east wall of the living/dining areas in cavity brick. The floor structure is reinforced concrete.

Externally the brickwork is a medium brown colour. The flat metal deck roof has a 450mm high metal fascia that extends out 450mm past the longer north east and south west walls and 1800mm over the north east living/dining and utility external terraces. The aluminium windows have a brown painted frame. All the windows facing the street except the third bedroom window are to utility rooms. It appears that the brick grille detail has been incorporated in the design to disguise all of these smaller, irregular windows in the street facade.

The rear garden with its original curved brick wall and native plants is relatively well maintained. It is believed that Frankel was very involved in the garden planting and maintenance.

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

- cubiform overall shape,
- large sheets of glass,

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

- overhang for shade,
- plain, smooth wall surfaces.

The major architectural elements that are specific to the Post War Melbourne Regional Style (1940-60) and that are displayed by this building relate to the external forms. They are:

- widely projecting eaves,
- long, unbroken roof line,

The other architectural element of this style displayed by the building that relates to the external forms are:

- steel roofing.

The major architectural elements listed above place this building primarily in the Post-War International Style (1940-60) and secondarily in the Post-War Melbourne Regional Style (1940-60) 5.

The curved plan of the residence is important to the integrity of the building.

There are internal elements that are important to the integrity of the building: the open planning with the interiors opening out into the landscape, the radiating set out of the walls, the timber sheeting and paneling and the joinery, the detailing and type of finishes.

The building is well maintained and is in good condition.

Condition and Integrity

Background/History

The residence is one of a few detached private residences Grounds designed in Canberra. It exhibits elements of his work that combined rational and economic planning with the use of natural materials and is an example of his interest in geometric forms. "Grounds combined the circle and square in some of his 1950's work."6 During this period he was at the forefront of Melbourne modern architecture where "Functionalism combined with structural and geometric determinism fashioned the architecture of the decade 7."

Sir Roy Grounds (1905-81) established his practice in Melbourne in 1932 after travelling in Europe and America. He stopped practising in 1937 but later worked on defence buildings during World War II and in 1954 formed the practice of Grounds, Romberg and Boyd Architects.8 He was recognised as one of Melbourne's and Australia's leading architects of the modern movement and awarded the RAIA Gold Medal in 1968 and Knighted in the same year.

Grounds designed many other residential and public buildings in Melbourne and some in Canberra. The buildings in Canberra with which he was associated are the Australian Academy of Science, 1958, Town Houses in Forrest, 1960, (in the design of Le Corbusier's Maison Citrohan), Holy Trinity Lutheran National Memorial Church, 1961, Turner, three houses in Vasey Crescent, 1961, Campbell and 24 Cobby Street, Campbell, 1963-4. ANU Botany Building, 1968

Theo Bishoff was a prominent Canberra architect in the 1960s.

The only owner of the house, Sir Otto Frankel (1900-98), was Australia's pre-eminent Geneticist who "advanced agricultural science...as head of the CSIRO's plant industry division from 1951 to 1961. In his retirement," (for which this house was specifically designed,) "he was able to undertake some of his greatest work, arguing the cause of biodiversity; the preservation of the genetic pool rather than individual species, long before it became fashionable."

"In 1962, he was elevated to the executive of the CSIRO, and on retirement in 1966 he returned to plant industry as an honorary research fellow, continuing his cytogenetic research..until he was 90. At 95, he published his last book, "The Conservation of Plant Biodiversity,...."

"His major achievement on the world stage took place after his formal retirement. He became involved in the genetic resources issue through the International Biological Program of UNESCO. 9"

Frankel became acquainted with Grounds during the design of the Australian Academy of Science Building as he was a member of the Committee and Grounds was the design architect. From this friendship Grounds was later to design Frankel's own house for his retirement.

Otto Frankel was knighted in 1966.

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 exhibits some of the particular architectural elements specific to and is a good example of the Post-War International Style (1940-60) including cubiform overall shape and large sheets of glass.

It also exhibits some of the particular architectural elements specific to the Post-War Melbourne Regional Style (1940-60) including widely projecting eaves and long, unbroken roof line,

The following design features are of additional significance:
externally; the steel roofing, overhang for shade, plain, smooth wall surfaces, the curved planning of the residence,
internally; the open planning with the interiors opening out into the landscape, the radiating set out of the walls, the timber veneered plywood sheeting and panelling and the joinery, the detailing and type of finishes.

The house is unaltered and is a good example of Ground's work where he was successful in combining the regional content of Melbourne architecture with the international style. The residence can be contrasted with the residence at 24 Cobby Street and the three residences in Vasey Crescent, all in Campbell.

The residence is valued by the RAI A as a very good 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

Sir Roy Grounds played a significant role in Australia's cultural history. In 1968 he was awarded the RAI A Gold Medal and was knighted for services to architecture. There was insufficient information to ascertain whether this residence had a major association with Ground's life other than as a normal architectural commission.

Sir Otto Frankel, for whom the house was specifically designed as a retirement residence and who has been the only owner of the house, was Australia's pre-eminent Geneticist who advanced agricultural science as head of the CSIRO's plant industry division from 1951 to 1961. In his retirement, he was able to undertake some of his greatest work, arguing the cause of biodiversity; the preservation of the genetic pool rather than individual species.

In 1962, he was elevated to the executive of the CSIRO, and on retirement in 1966 he returned to plant industry as an honorary research fellow, continuing his cytogenetic research until he was 90. At 95, he published his last book, "The Conservation of Plant Biodiversity".

His major achievement on the world stage took place after his formal retirement. He became involved in the genetic resources issue through the International Biological Program of UNESCO.

Frankel became acquainted with Grounds during the design of the Australian Academy of Science Building as he was a member of the Committee and Grounds was the design architect. From this friendship Grounds was later to design Frankel's own house for his retirement.

Otto Frankel was knighted in 1966.

The residence was specifically designed by Ground's for Frankel as his retirement house where a significant part of his study and writing took place during a productive and internationally recognised time of his life.

(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 this building is a valuable educational resource for designers. Its external architecture is characteristic of the Post-War International and the Post-War Melbourne Regional Styles (1940-60). 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.

References

- 1 Original working drawings.
 - 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 Ibid
 - 5 Richard Apperly Robert Irving Peter Reynolds opcit
 - 6 Jennifert Taylor. Australian Architecture Since 1960. RAIA 1990.
 - 7 Ibid.
 - 8 Peter Cuffley. Australian Houses of the Forties & Fifties. The Five Miles Press Pty Ltd 1993.
 - 9 Obituary in the "Australian" Newspaper
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Other Information Sources