

# Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture

**RSTCA No:** R107

**Name of Place:** Campbell Group Housing

**Other/Former Names:**

**Address/Location:** 69-73 Blamey Crescent & 2-12 Edmondson Street CAMPBELL 2612  
Block 15 Section 9 of Campbell

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Listing Status:  
Date of Listing:  
Citation Revision No:  
Citation Revision Date:

Other Heritage Listings:  
Level of Significance:  
Category:  
Style:

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Date of Design:  
Construction Period:  
Date of Additions:

Designer:  
Client/Owner/Lessee:  
Builder:

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## Statement of Significance

The Campbell Group Housing has a special association with Harry Seidler, who is one of the most important architects of the late twentieth century in Australia. It is the most effectively laid-out and most intact of the major medium density residential projects he completed in Canberra.

The group of buildings is a good example of the Post-War International style architecture of Harry Seidler. The buildings exhibit some of the particular architectural elements specific to that style, including expressed structural frames, plain, smooth wall surfaces and large sheets of glass. They also display other architectural elements of this style in the fenestration, overhangs and other sun-control devices. The facades of the apartment blocks have roots in the European art movements of the 1920s and 1930s and are carefully composed to give abstract, balanced patterns.

The group was carefully planned to create good spatial relationships between the buildings, to achieve a non-repetitive character and to form a lively pattern across the site. The buildings are in remarkably intact condition externally and mature trees on and around the site add to the aesthetic quality of the group.

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## Description

The group of 42 apartments and 32 attached houses in seven rooms was designed by Harry Seidler and Associates in 1964 for The Australian National University and construction was completed in 1968. The group is a late example of the Post-War International Style (1940-1960) with its cubiform overall shape, curtain wall and large sheets of glass. The apartments mostly have a central corridor

Split-level planning allows, with a minimum of cut and fill, level access to rear private patio gardens on the uphill sides of houses, and car access into the fronts of houses and some apartments.

Most houses and apartments have a view-side recessed balcony above the road level for privacy. The group has four types of house and three types of apartment, in blocks of different length staggered to create spatial relationships between them. The usual repetitive character of terrace housing has thus been avoided.

There are pairs of houses, each pair in blocks 1, 3, 5 and 7 having a type A house (three bedroom) and a type B house (two bedroom). Blocks 2 and 6 each have two mirror-reversed pairs of type C houses (two bedrooms at the front without balconies) and block 4 has three mirror-reversed pairs

of type D houses (two bedrooms). Because of the varied accommodation in their planning, the skillion roofs of these different blocks are sloped to the west and to the east alternately, forming a lively pattern across the site.

Each apartment building is six units wide, apartment types being E (two bedrooms), F (one bedroom) and G (bachelor). The plan arrangement is comparable with that of the houses, with covered car spaces at road level and the split-level planning maintained to result in a minimum of internal public access space and the location of all main living areas on the view side. A single corridor in each block, entered from a completely glass-walled central stair hall, serves all aboveground apartments. Half-flights of steps lead either up or down into the two-bedroom apartments. Within each apartment an internal half-flight connects its living and sleeping portions. The one-bedroom apartments, communal laundries and stores open directly from the corridors. Although the facades are long, they are broken up on the western side by recessed balconies and projecting sunshades to give contrasts of light and shade.

All blocks are constructed of yellow textured face-brick walls, concrete floors, steel deck skillion roofs with similar roofs to skylights, lightweight steel infill walling painted white and fixed slatted aluminium awnings, also white. Additional sunshading is provided by blinds of bold black and white fabric. All these materials combine to provide further visual contrasts. The scale of the buildings is maintained by the pattern of the floor edges, dividing walls and staggered split-levels. The buildings are in remarkably intact condition externally and mature trees on and around the site add to the aesthetic quality of the group.

The group of buildings is a good late example of the architecture of Harry Seidler in the Post-War International style (1940-1960). The major architectural elements displayed in these buildings that are specific to the style relate to the external forms.<sup>2</sup> They are:

- cubiform overall shapes,
- large sheets of glass,
- structural frame expressed.

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

- plain, smooth wall surfaces,
- external sun-control devices,
- overhangs for shade,
- Corbusian motif horizontal strip windows.

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## **Condition and Integrity**

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## **Background/History**

Harry Seidler arrived in Australia in 1948 after studying under and working for some of the leading architects of the modern movement, such as Gropius, Breuer, Albers and Niemeyer. He is recognised as one of Australia's leading architects and the first architect in Australia to express fully the principles of the Bauhaus. According to the American architectural critic Peter Blake, "Seidler is, without doubt, one of the best architects of his generation, anywhere." He was awarded the Royal Australian Institute of Architects Gold Medal in 1976 and the Royal Institute of British Architects Gold Medal in 1996.

In Australia he has designed important residential and commercial buildings including the Rose Seidler House, Sydney, 1949, Blues Point Tower, Sydney, 1962, Arlington Apartments, 1966, Edgecliff, Sydney, Australia Square, Sydney, 1967, MLC Centre, Sydney, 1978, Grosvenor Place, Sydney, 1988 and Riverside Centre, Brisbane, 1986. Overseas he has designed Condominium Apartments, Acapulco, Mexico, 1970, the Australian Embassy in Paris, 1977, the Hong Kong Club, Hong Kong, 1983 and recently a mixed use and public housing scheme in his native Vienna.<sup>3</sup>

The Campbell Group Housing is one of Seidler's major medium density residential projects in Canberra, others being in Garran (being demolished in 1999) and Yarralumla.

The ANU has disposed of the houses and apartments to individual owners, and they are now under the control of a body corporate.

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### **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 group of buildings is a good example of the Post-War International style architecture of Harry Seidler. The buildings exhibit some of the particular architectural elements specific to that style, including expressed structural frames, plain, smooth wall surfaces and large sheets of glass. They also display other architectural elements of this style in the fenestration, overhangs and other sun-control devices.

Comparable apartment blocks by Seidler in Sydney include the Arlington Apartments completed in 1966 at Edgecliff. According to the architectural historian Jennifer Taylor, "the facades of Seidler's apartment blocks have roots in the European art movements of the 1920s and 1930s. The structural frames, infill panels, penetrations and sunshields are carefully composed to give abstract, asymmetrical, balanced patterns related to the geometry of Mondrian's rectilinear paintings." The concept of a corridor serving the aboveground apartments was based on similar planning in Europe by Le Corbusier and others, but was new to Australia.<sup>3</sup> The composition of the Campbell apartment blocks has more symmetry than that of the Arlington apartment blocks.

In Canberra the group is comparable with the Seidler's group of 101 courtyard houses erected at Garran, in 1964-68 for the ANU, but it had less variety of dwelling types than at Campbell. The demolition of the Garran houses has increased the rarity and heritage value of the Campbell houses.

The group was carefully planned to create good spatial relationships between the buildings, to achieve a non-repetitive character and to form a lively pattern across the site. The buildings are in remarkably intact condition externally and mature trees on and around the site add to the aesthetic quality of the group.

*(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*

Harry Seidler played a significant role in Australia's architectural history. He is one of the most important architects of the late twentieth century in Australia and the first architect in Australia to express fully the principles of the Bauhaus. The Campbell Group Housing, the most effectively laid-out and most intact of Seidler's major medium density residential projects in Canberra, has a special association with him.

*(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*

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### **References**

- 1 Peter Blake, *Architecture for the new world. The work of Harry Seidler*, Horwitz Australia, 1973.
  - 2 Richard Apperly, Robert Irving, Peter Reynolds. *Identifying Australian Architecture – Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*. Angus and Robertson, 1989, p 216.
  - 3 Jennifer Taylor, *Australian Architecture since 1960*, RAIA, 1990.
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### **Other Information Sources**