

Register of Significant Architecture

RSA No: R134

Name of Place: Apostolic Nunciature

Other Name: Embassy of the Holy See

Address/Location: 2 Vancouver Street, Red Hill ACT 2603
Block 5 Section 4 of Red Hill

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| Listing Status: | Other Heritage Listings: | Commonwealth Heritage List |
| Date of Listing: 2014 | Level of Significance: | Regional |
| Citation Revision No: no | Category: | Diplomatic |
| Citation Revision Date: no | Style: | Late Twentieth Century Organic |

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| Date of Design: | 1976 |
| Designer: | Enrico Taglietti |
| Construction Period: | 1976-78 |
| Client/Lessee: | The Holy See, Vatican City |
| Builder: | S.D.C. Kennedy & Bird Pty Ltd |

Statement of Significance

The Apostolic Nunciature has significant heritage value for the way it demonstrates a high degree of creative achievement. As the Embassy of the Holy See the building has four roles: administration and reception; accommodation for staff; a convent and a place for worship. For a large structure it presents a relatively low profile, with a pyramidal form made up of a series of horizontal sheltering roofs, one of which is prominently cantilevered over the entrance. This and the adjacent cross built into the front of a chapel symbolise the embracing nature and presence of the Catholic Church in Australia. The harmonious relationship of the brick and terracotta tiled building with the landscaped character of a developed area of Canberra is particularly noteworthy. The building has high quality detailing and construction and has continued to serve its users and society well since 1978.

The Apostolic Nunciature has significant heritage value also for its associations with its architect Enrico Taglietti, who has made a significant contribution to Australia's architectural history. He considers it to be the equal of any of his important buildings. He was the Australian Institute of Architects Gold Medallist for 2007. This, the highest honour the Institute can bestow, recognises architects who have produced buildings of high merit, or who have produced work of great distinction resulting in the advancement of architecture. The building is a notable example of the Late Twentieth-Century Organic style 1960–, of which Enrico Taglietti is a key practitioner. The indicator peculiar to the style is the building's free, asymmetrical massing, which appears to grow from its site. Other indicators of the style are the horizontal roof planes and the horizontal emphasis of the brick walls around the building and in the garden.

Description

A brick building with three main levels, designed by Enrico Taglietti and completed in 1978. The formal entrance from Vancouver Street facing north has a prominent cantilevered terracotta tiled roof resembling a porte cochere over a semi-circular driveway. This roof is linked towards the west to a prominent ribbed metal cross built into the front of a chapel, while terracotta tiled roofs in four layers cover the remainder of the building. They have wide eaves and the upper floor has encircling balconies. At the rear of the grounds is a c1950 brick residence.

The formal entrance is to a long vestibule, illuminated by a skylight above the first floor recreation room, through a central rectangular opening in its floor. At the front are general offices and a reception room/library, while further on is an area for functions on one side and a formal 24-seat dining room on the other, aligned along a cross-axis. Near the formal dining room are a breakfast room and a dining room for residents, which open off a kitchen area. At the front, the main chapel is approached internally via a small courtyard serving as a place of contemplation. This chapel, which seats about 40 people, can also be entered from outside the

building. Space inside the chapel rises to a skylight, lined with timber boarding. Originally a wooden crucifix with the figure of Jesus crucified upon it was located on that boarding above the altar, but it has been moved to the southern wall. An altar faced in marble has replaced the original smaller and more open altar. Behind the sanctuary is a stained glass window with vivid colours. At the rear of the vestibule a staircase leads to the upper floor, housing a communal recreation room, a small apartment for the head of mission, offices and three study-bedrooms for the staff, and another for guests. A balcony encircles this level, providing seclusion as well as an outlook. Below the main floor at the lower ground level is a convent for the four sisters of St Joseph, who assist with staffing the Nunciature. It has a small chapel, a walled garden and garages.

Condition and Integrity

The integrity of the building is high, the only changes being the relocation of the crucifix and the replacement of the altar in the main chapel.

Background/History

The 2 acre block 5 section 4 on the south-west corner of Monaro Crescent and Vancouver Street, Red Hill dates from the 1924 subdivision, but was not developed until a two-storey brick house was built with a 28 Monaro Crescent address about 1950. From 1952 until 1966 John Carew Eccles (1903-97 was Professor of Physiology of the Australian National University and he and his family were living in that house. ⁱ In 1928 he had married Irene Frances Miller and there were four sons and five daughters. In 1958 he became a Knight Bachelor. The Nobel Prize in Physiology was awarded to Sir John Eccles, Alan L. Hodgkin and Andrew F. Huxley in 1973. ⁱⁱ

In 1914 an Apostolic Delegation to Australia was established in Sydney, which became an Apostolic Nunciature in 1973 when diplomatic relations were established between Australia and the Holy See. ⁱⁱⁱ Enrico Taglietti was approached by a delegate in 1975 to design a building to accommodate diplomatic representatives of the Holy See, to be known as the Apostolic Nunciature, in Canberra. As its function was slightly different from that of traditional embassies, the block occupied by the Eccles family home in Red Hill, being outside the established diplomatic area, was chosen as a suitable site. The National Capital Development Commission approved the choice of site and it was purchased for the project. ^{iv}

The agreed approach to the building's design was for priority to be given to the spiritual aims of the inhabitants, and for it to be a symbol of a universal need for protection and guidance. The architect reflected on his impression of the Catholic Church being plainly visible and self asserting. He found inspiration in an encyclical by the then Pope Paul VI about art extracting signs and perceptible form from the mysterious world of being. ^v He said one of the fascinating aspects of designing this building had been to incorporate the four roles for which it would be used; as an embassy with administration and reception areas; accommodation for staff; a convent and an area for worship. ^{vi} By June 1976 Taglietti had designed the building, with the aid of the structural engineer Keith Sellick, and tenders were called. ^{vii} The successful builders were S.D.C. Kennedy and Bird Pty Ltd. Construction, costing \$850,000 was completed to coincide with the 15th anniversary of the commencement of the pontificate of Pope Paul VI, 30 June 1978. ^{viii}

The Apostolic Nunciature was entered in the RAI (ACT) awards in 1979, and received a Certificate of Merit. The jury commended the building for the "calm repose expected of its function, whilst still maintaining a harmonious relationship with the landscaped character of a developed area of the city". ^{ix} When it was entered in the 1980 awards, it was highly commended and received another Certificate of Merit. The judges were not unanimous in the selection of a winner of the Canberra Medallion and reported that Dr Taglietti was unfortunate that the Nunciature was competing against the High Court of Australia, which was awarded the Medallion. ^x In the 1981 awards, the Canberra School of Art won the Canberra Medallion, while the Apostolic Nunciature was considered worthy of mention for "the quality of its detailing and construction." ^{xi}

Pope John Paul II awarded a Knighthood of St Gregory the Great to Enrico Taglietti, which was bestowed on him in recognition of his design of the Apostolic Nunciature by the Apostolic Pro-nuncio in June 1980. The knighthood was normally awarded by the Pope for religious service. ^{xii} While visiting Canberra in 1986, the Pope stayed overnight, then received diplomats in the functions room next morning. ^{xiii}

The building was featured in the RAI journal *Architecture Australia* in 1981 with a descriptive "Architect's Statement" which also explained his approach to the design. ^{xiv} The architectural historian and critic Jennifer Taylor wrote in 1990 of the Apostolic Nunciature in her *Australian Architecture Since 1960* and noted that "The spreading forms project a comfortable, relaxed mood akin to that of Wright's Prairie Houses." In his 2003 guide *Canberra Architecture*, Andrew Metcalf included the Apostolic Nunciature, writing that it is "classic Taglietti, almost at his most pure" and "composed, but spatially fluid and meticulously crafted at the

same time.”^{xv} The RAI(ACT) published a monograph on Taglietti in 2007 which included a report on the building, illustrated by his concept sketches.^{xvi} The Apostolic Nunciature has been on the Register of the National Estate and is on the Commonwealth Heritage List.

Enrico Taglietti (1926-) studied architecture between 1947 and 1953 and graduated with a *Laurea* (Doctorate) degree from the Milan Polytechnic, where architectural training methods were basically in the Bauhaus tradition, an approach to design whereby art and craft were united. Observers suggest that it was American architect Frank Lloyd Wright’s organic architectural style that appears to have most influenced Taglietti’s architectural development. He established his architecture practice in Canberra in 1955, and he set about finding a site for an Italian Embassy. A residence for the Italian Ambassador was built there according to Taglietti’s working drawings in 1967, but it had been designed in the Italian State Department of Works. With commissions for motels and several houses he was able to demonstrate his design ideas. His stylish buildings used what he called a “calligraphy” of elements, such as long horizontal flat roofs and balconies casting deep shadows, sloping fascias and balustrades, battered walls, often incorporating sloping window reveals, and unpainted surfaces for texture and low maintenance. His desire to provide beautiful forms and satisfy the needs of the people who will use his buildings was always critically important.

After about ten years in Canberra, larger buildings emerged from Taglietti’s practice, which gave him the opportunity to show his Italian heritage in the free use of concrete. His domestic work also made use of that material for great dramatic impact. Concrete also enabled his houses to blend beautifully with natural bush settings. Prominent weathered timber fascias and boarding added to that fusion of buildings and landscape. Interiors remained important to his approach to architecture. He maintains that many of his buildings were designed from the inside, but he invariably produced external forms with satisfying complexity and grace. His work in the 1970s shows these attributes, particularly his schools, where his enthusiasm for providing fun and excitement in environments for primary-aged children came to the fore. His concentration on arranging the flow of space, throughout the school at Giralang in particular, seemed to extend to many of his later buildings.

As his career progressed, he began to use more abstract forms and colour imaginatively and some large buildings achieved a monumental scale. At the same time he provided intimate spaces where necessary for the comfort and aesthetic enjoyment of their inhabitants.^{xvii} Taglietti considers the Apostolic Nunciature to be the equal of any of his important buildings.^{xviii} It is one of several diplomatic buildings he designed, others being the Embassy of Italy Chancellery, Deakin, 1974, and the residence of the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Garran, 1996. About 1955 he commenced designing the Residence and Chancellery for the High Commission of Pakistan, which is due to be completed in Yarralumla in 2014.^{xix} Enrico Taglietti is considered a key practitioner of the Late Twentieth-Century Organic style in Australia.^{xx} He was made a Life Fellow of the RAI(ACT) in 2001 and his career reached a climax when he was awarded the Gold Medal of the RAI(ACT) in 2007, the highest honour the Institute can bestow.^{xxi}

Analysis against the Commonwealth Heritage criteria

- a) *the place has significant heritage value because of the place's importance in the course, or pattern, of Australia's natural or cultural history.*
- b) *the place has significant heritage value because of the place's possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Australia's natural or cultural history.*
- c) *the place has significant heritage value because of the place's potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Australia's natural or cultural history.*
- d) *the place has significant heritage value because of the place's importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of:*
 - i. *a class of Australia's natural or cultural places; or*
 - ii. *a class of Australia's natural or cultural environments.*

The building is a notable example of the Late Twentieth-Century Organic style 1960–, of which Enrico Taglietti is a key practitioner. The indicator peculiar to the style is the building’s free, asymmetrical massing, which appears to grow from its site. Other indicators of the style are the horizontal roof planes and the horizontal emphasis of the brick walls around the building and in the garden.

- e) *the place has significant heritage value because of the place's importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by a community or cultural group.*
- f) *the place has significant heritage value because of the place's importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.*

The Apostolic Nunciature has significant heritage value for the way it demonstrates a high degree of creative achievement. As the Embassy of the Holy See the building has four roles: as the Embassy of the Holy See, with administration and reception areas; accommodation for staff; a convent and an area for worship. For a large structure, it has a relatively low profile, with a pyramidal form made up of a series of horizontal sheltering roofs, one of which is prominently cantilevered over the entrance. This and the adjacent cross emblazoned onto the front of a chapel symbolise the embracing nature and presence of the Catholic church in Australia. The harmonious relationship of the brick and terracotta tiled building with the landscaped character of a developed area of Canberra is particularly noteworthy. The building has high quality detailing and construction and has continued to serve its users and society well since 1978.

g) *the place has significant heritage value because of the place's strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons.*

h) *the place has significant heritage value because of the place's special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Australia's natural or cultural history.*

The Apostolic Nunciature has significant heritage value also for its associations with its architect Enrico Taglietti, who has made a significant contribution to Australia's architectural history. He considers it to be the equal of any of his important buildings. He was the Australian Institute of Architects Gold Medallist for 2007. This, the highest honour the Institute can bestow, recognises architects who have produced buildings of high merit, or who have produced work of great distinction resulting in the advancement of architecture.

i) *the place has significant heritage value because of the place's importance as part of Indigenous tradition.*

Bibliography

Richard Apperly, Robert Irving, Peter Reynolds, *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture - Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*. Angus and Robertson, 1989, pp 236-239.

Andrew Metcalf *Canberra Architecture*, Watermark Architectural Guides, 2003, p 105.

Jennifer Taylor, *Australian Architecture Since 1960*, RAI, 1990, pp 91-92.

Ken Charlton, Bronwen Jones and Paola Favaro, *The Contribution of Enrico Taglietti to Canberra's Architecture*, RAI (ACT) 2007, pp 70-71.

ⁱ ACT Electoral Rolls.

ⁱⁱ www.nobelprize.org The Official Web Site of the Nobel Prize.

ⁱⁱⁱ www.catholic.org.au/about-us/apostolic-nunciature-in-australia

^{iv} Enrico Taglietti, pers. comm. to Ken Charlton.

^v Ken Charlton, *The Contribution of Enrico Taglietti to Canberra's Architecture*, p 70.

^{vi} *The Canberra Times*, 25 June 1978.

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- vii *The Canberra Times*, 12 June 1976.
- viii *The Canberra Times*, Nunciature Opened, 1 July 1978.
- ix *The Canberra Times*, Award to Public Housing Project, 15 December 1979.
- x *The Canberra Times*, Awards for court, tower and house, 13 December 1980.
- xi *The Canberra Times*, School of Art wins medallion, 30 October 1981.
- xii *The Canberra Times*, Pope honours architect, 3 June 1980.
- xiii *The Canberra Times*, The Pope in Australia, 26 November 1986.
- xiv "Taglietti" in *Architecture Australia* no. 70/5, November 1981, p 47.
- xv Andrew Metcalf *Canberra Architecture*, p 139.
- xvi Ken Charlton, *The Contribution of Enrico Taglietti to Canberra's Architecture*, p 70.
- xvii *ibid*, p 2.
- xviii Enrico Taglietti, pers. comm. to Ken Charlton.
- xix *ibid*.
- xx Richard Apperly, Robert Irving, Peter Reynolds, *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture - Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*, p 239.
- xxi Ken Charlton, *The Contribution of Enrico Taglietti to Canberra's Architecture*, p 2.