

<b>IDENTIFIER</b>	HOUSE	<b>Citation No</b>	PW10
<b>Other name/s</b>		<b>Melway ref</b>	67 K2
<b>Address</b>	2 Edinburgh Avenue CAULFIELD	<b>Date/s</b>	1962-63
<b>Designer/s</b>	Bernard Slawik	<b>Builder/s</b>	J P Hammond Pty Ltd



Photograph by Built Heritage Pty Ltd, June 2019



Location map and extent of HO

<b>Heritage Group</b>	Residential building (private)	<b>Condition</b>	Excellent
<b>Heritage Category</b>	House	<b>Intactness</b>	Excellent
<b>Thematic context</b>	6.7 Making homes for Victorians		
<b>Recommendation</b>	Include on heritage overlay schedule as an individual heritage place		
<b>Controls</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> External Paint	<input type="checkbox"/> Interior Alteration	<input type="checkbox"/> Trees

## Statement of Significance

### *What is significant?*

The house at 2 Edinburgh Avenue, Caulfield, is a two-storey butterfly-roofed brick house in the post-WW2 modernist style, expressed as a stark rectilinear volume (with continuous window wall and full-width balcony), elevated on columns to form an open undercroft below. Built in 1962-63 for a Polish-born clothing manufacturer and Holocaust survivor, the house was designed by architect Bernard Slawik, also a Polish émigré and Holocaust survivor, and a resident of Caulfield.

The significant fabric is defined as the exterior of the entire building.

### *How is it significant?*

The house satisfies the following criteria for inclusion on the heritage overlay schedule to the City of Glen Eira planning scheme:

- Criterion E: Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.

### *Why is it significant?*

The house is aesthetically significant as an exceptional example of high-end modernist residential architecture of the early 1960s. Boldly articulated as a stark rectilinear volume, raised on columns to form an open undercroft, with a low butterfly roof, uncommonly broad timber-lined eaves and a continuous full-height window wall opening onto an expansive front balcony, it represents a particularly bold and confident distillation of European Modernism. It must also be considered as a truly authentic example, being designed by a Polish-born architect (who had worked in Europe, including a stint in Sweden) for a well-heeled compatriot couple who would have been familiar with such progressive architecture in pre-war Europe. (*Criterion E*)

### **History**

*Note: Identifying details of property owners and their families have been deleted as per Council direction*

The house at 2 Edinburgh Avenue, Caulfield, was built in 1962-63 for a Polish clothing manufacturer and his wife, to a design by compatriot architect Bernard Slawik. Born in south-east Poland in the late 1920s, the future owner of the house was the son of a window-fitter who was arrested and sent to the Buchenwald concentration camp, where he died in 1940. Two years later, when Jewish residents of the town were detained, the future owner of the house was separated from his mother and siblings. After two years of forced labour in a steel mill, he was sent to a labour camp and then spent six months at Auschwitz before being transferred to Buchenwald, where he remained until the camp was liberated in April 1945. Subsequently, he was sent to Switzerland as part of a group of orphaned Jewish adolescents. In September 1948, shortly after his 21st birthday, he left Europe for Australia. Settling in Melbourne, he initially resided in a hostel at Camberwell run by the Jewish Welfare & Relief Society, which sponsored his passage.

Soon after arriving, the future house owner found work as a tailor in Flinders Lane, then the centre of Melbourne's Rag Trade. By 1951, he had started his own clothing company, in association with his brother (who had joined him to Australia in 1949) and two other émigrés. Based in Lygon Street, Brunswick East, the company thrived. In 1953, the future house owner met and married a fellow Pole whose family had hidden in the Ukrainian forest during WW2 before settling in Berlin, where her mother died in 1946. She then lived in Bavaria before migrating to Australia in 1952, living with relatives in Elwood. After their marriage, the couple continued to reside in Elwood into the early 1960s, during which time the family increased with the birth of two sons. These changes in personal circumstance, coupled with the rising success of their clothing business, may have hastened the decision to build a grand new family residence in Caulfield. In February 1961, the couple acquired the title to a block of land at 2 Edinburgh Avenue, which formed part of a 34-lot subdivision that was laid out in 1957 on the south-east corner of Glen Eira Road and Kooyong Road. To design their new house, the couple turned to architect Bernard Slawik, a fellow Polish émigré and Holocaust survivor, and himself a Caulfield resident.

Born in Gliniany in southern Poland, Zygmunt Bernard Slawik (1904-1991) completed architectural studies at the Lviv Polytechnic School in 1930. Little seems to be recorded of his career during the next decade, prior to being interred in the Jalowska concentration camp, on the outskirts of Lviv, in late 1941. Managing to escape, Slawik was reunited with his wife and daughter after WW2, and the family settled in Sweden, where he worked as an assistant to the Town Architect of Gävle. Migrating to Australia, the Slawiks arrived in Sydney in October 1948 and travelled thence to Melbourne, settling in Essendon. After gaining further professional experience in the office of architect/town planner Frank Heath, then in the PWD under Percy Everett, Slawik commenced private practice in 1953. Around the same time, he and Alma took up residence in Bambra Road, Caulfield, where they lived for almost forty years. Concentrating mostly on residential projects (many commissioned by fellow European émigrés), Slawik undertook a considerable amount of work in the Caulfield area, as well as in South Yarra, Toorak, Hawthorn, Kew and Ivanhoe.

The house that Bernard Slawik designed in Edinburgh Avenue, for which working drawings are dated August 1962, was a butterfly-roofed double-storey dwelling expressed as a floating rectilinear volume elevated above an open undercroft. The main living areas, located at the upper level, included three large bedrooms, a kitchen with “breakfast nook”, a garden court, and full-width living area (designated as dining/living/sunroom) opening onto a balcony to the street. Downstairs, the undercroft provided carparking space, a playroom, workroom, maid’s quarters and central stair lobby. The design of the house seems to have responded to some quite specific client needs, hinted at in a memoir written by one of their sons. The vast living areas, ideal for entertaining, evidently reflected his father’s “unquenchable instinct for sociability”, while the open planning and expansive glazing addressed his mother’s anxiety towards enclosed spaces (“my mother despises houses without windows”, he wrote). The owner’s own concerns for personal safety, which clearly sprung from his heinous wartime experiences, saw the house incorporate sophisticated security systems such as pressure-triggered floor alarms (which, his son recalls, were tested daily) and a front door with electric lock and intercom system.

The house, erected by builders J P Hammond Pty Ltd, was still under construction in early 1963, when it was profiled in the property column of the *Herald*. It was praised for incorporating “a number of unusual features” such as the reinforced concrete slab floor (designed so that no beams were visible) and supporting structure of “specially designed reinforced concrete columns” (*Herald* 11/04/1963:16). Attention was drawn to the low butterfly roof, with steel deck and insulation of double-sided aluminium-coated building paper, and to the interior fitout that included natural stone feature walls, parquetry floors and a french-polished stair handrail.

In residence for nearly thirty years, the original owners sold the house in 1990. A decade later, it was one of several local houses to be included in *Notable & Modern*, an exhibition of post-WW2 domestic architecture in the City of Glen Eira, held at the Glen Eira Art Gallery in July 2001.

## Description

The house at 2 Edinburgh Avenue, Caulfield, is a double-storey orange brick house in the post-WW2 modernist style, with a low-pitched butterfly roof that extends to form expansive eaves. The house is expressed in a characteristic European Modernist manner, where the upper level (containing principal living areas) is given emphasis over a recessed lower level (containing carport, entry foyer and subsidiary spaces). The symmetrical street façade has fully glazed window walls to each level, with continuous bays of wide full-height windows and glazed doors. At the upper level, the window wall opens on to a full-width cantilever balcony with simple metal balustrade and Castlemaine slate cladding. At the lower level, the wall is set back to form the rear of the double carport, supported on a grid of white-painted columns. The front entrance is located off-centre, to the right side of the carport, and contains a wide glazed door. The ceiling of the carport area, formed by the underside of the concrete floor slab above, incorporates rows of projecting cylindrical metal light fittings.

## Comparisons

A Caulfield resident for more than thirty years, Bernard Slawik is known to have designed several buildings in his local area. His earliest known project in Caulfield (and the only non-residential one identified to date) was the Stanmark Reception Centre at 444 Inkerman Road (1957). The brainchild of a Jewish entrepreneur, it rapidly established itself as Melbourne’s pre-eminent venue for Jewish events such as weddings and *bar mitzvahs*. The building, which incorporated a sculpted mural by émigré artist Karl Duldig, was acquired by the City of Caulfield in 1974 and converted into a community arts centre. This function (and the Duldig mural) was relocated to the Caulfield Town Hall in the 1990s. The former Stanmark Reception Centre was subsequently redeveloped and rebadged as a boutique hotel/conference facility, which still operates today.

Of the half-dozen or so Slawik-designed houses that have been identified in what is now the City of Glen Eira, one example, at 635 Inkerman Road (1964), has long since been demolished; no further information or illustration has yet been located. Of those still standing, the houses at 34 Maxwell Grove (1962) and 6 Labassa Grove (1964) are single-storey brick dwellings with asymmetrical double-fronted facades, quite different to the elevated box-like house in Edinburgh Avenue. While atypically crowned by a tile-clad hipped roof, the Maxwell Grove house has a few elements in common with the one in Edinburgh Avenue, such as the broad covered front porch (extending one side to define a *porte-cochere*), huge glass sliding doors, and a simple metal balustrade. Expansive window walls, and a front porch with similar railing, can also be seen at the Labassa Grove house; however, this house is otherwise more boldly embellished than the Edinburgh Avenue house, with a skylit entry porch, slate feature wall, pebbled cement pathways, and a metal screen door in a lively geometric pattern. Ultimately, the local example of Slawik's work that is most comparable to the Edinburgh Avenue house is a slightly later one at 52 Lumeah Road (1967), which is a pared-down revisitation of the two-storey elevated box, with full-height glazing and balcony at the upper level, and undercroft carport below.

As a modernist house in the tradition of an elevated glass-fronted box, the house at 2 Edinburgh Avenue can also be compared with the house at 1 Bickhams Court, St Kilda East (Holgar & Holgar, 1967), which was commissioned by the brother of the Edinburgh Avenue client.

### References

ARBV file for Zygmunt Bernard Slawik. Unit 13, VPRS 8838/P2 (Individual Architects Registration Files), PROV.

Certificate of Title, Volume 8160, Folio 755, created 29 May 1957.

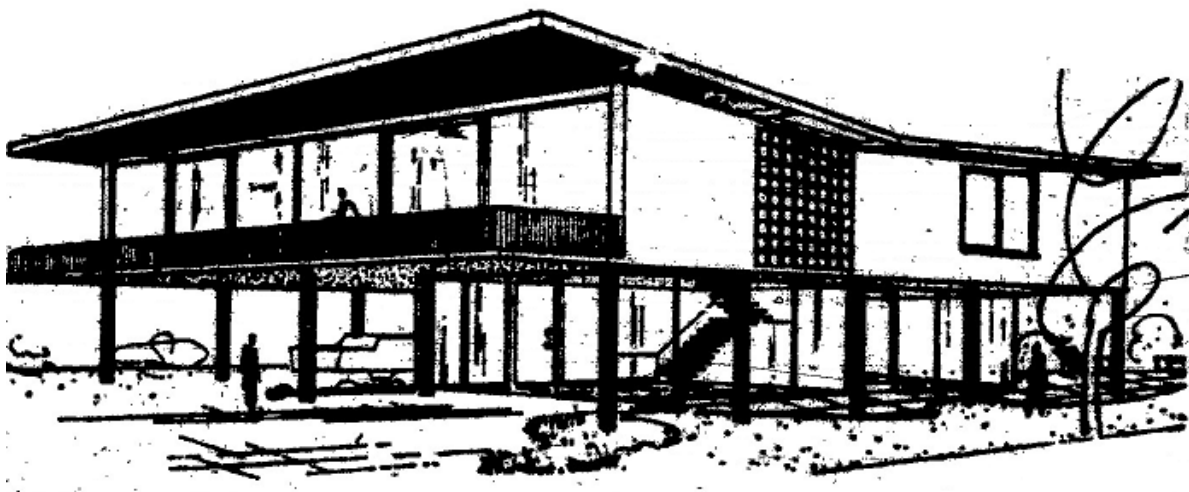
Lodged Plan No 40,844, dated 21 June 1957.

Bernard Slawik, "Proposed residence for Mr & Mrs [redacted], at Lot 17, Edinburgh Avenue, Caulfield", working drawings, dated 3 August 1962. City of Caulfield Permit No 28,541.

"Built on floor slab", *Herald*, 11 April 1963, p 16.

### Identified by

Built Heritage Pty Ltd (also flagged by Melbourne School of Design)



*Bernard Slawik's original perspective drawing of the house in Edinburgh Avenue*  
source: *Herald*, 11 April 1963