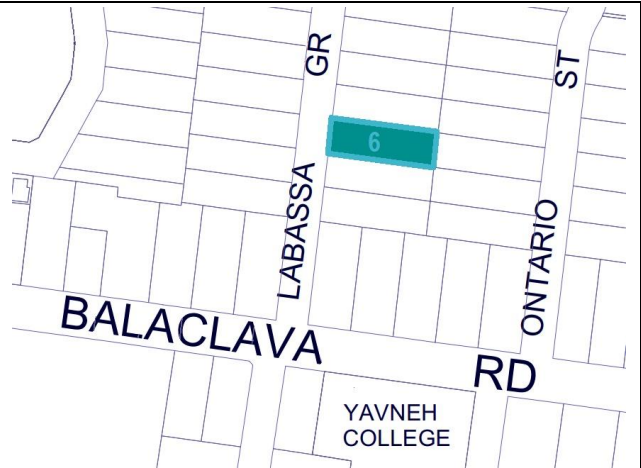


IDENTIFIER	HOUSE	Citation No	PW17
Other name/s		Melway ref	58 J11
Address	6 Labassa Grove CAULFIELD NORTH	Date/s	1963-64
Designer/s	Bernard Slawik	Builder/s	Unknown



Photograph by Built Heritage Pty Ltd, June 2019



Location map and extent of HO

Heritage Group	Residential building (private)	Condition	Excellent
Heritage Category	House	Intactness	Excellent

Thematic context	6.7 Making homes for Victorians
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Recommendation	Include on heritage overlay schedule as an individual heritage place		
Controls	<input type="checkbox"/> External Paint	<input type="checkbox"/> Interior Alteration	<input type="checkbox"/> Trees

Statement of Significance

What is significant?

The house at 6 Labassa Grove, Caulfield North, is a single-storey flat-roofed brick house in the post-WW2 modernist style, with a double-fronted asymmetrical façade that incorporates an expansive window wall, paved terrace and top-lit entry porch with stone feature wall and metal grille screen doors. Designed by Polish-born architect Bernard Slawik, the house was erected in 1963-64 for a Slovakian émigré couple, who would remain living there into the twenty-first century.

The significant fabric is defined as the entire exterior of the house, as well as the original pebbled concrete front path and driveway, and the original letterbox.

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 a highly distinctive example of modernist residential architecture of the early 1960s. Designed by a Polish-born architect who trained in Lviv and worked in Sweden, the house demonstrates many of the defining characteristics of international modernism, such as the flat roof with broad eaves, stark planar walls and expansive full-height windows. The starkness of the composition is relieved by some more idiosyncratic details and decorative finishes such as the skylit porch roof, slate feature wall, metal grille screens, terrazzo terrace and pebbled concrete path and driveway. Owned by the same family for over forty years, the house demonstrates an uncommon degree of physical integrity, including its front garden setting with path, driveway and original letterbox. (*Criterion E*)

History

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

The house at 6 Labassa Grove, Caulfield North, was erected in 1963-64 for husband-and-wife Slovak manufacturers, and was designed by Polish-born architect Bernard Slawik. The son of a retailer, the future owner of the house was born in the early 1900s in eastern Slovakia (later Czechoslovakia) and was still living there when he married in the mid-1930s. With political instability in Czechoslovakia during and after WW2, followed by a Communist coup in 1948, the family sought to emigrate. In January 1950, the husband and wife (and his widowed mother) were all issued with refugee cards by the Vienna branch of the American Jewish Distribution Committee, which noted their intent to re-settle in Australia. Departing from Italy, the three family members reached Fremantle on 4 October, travelling thence to Melbourne.

In Melbourne, the family initially resided in a maisonette in Balaclava. Before the end of the year, they had purchased an existing house at 6 Labassa Grove, Caulfield, which dated back to 1917. At the time of the auction, it was advertised as a “charming red brick villa comprising sun porch, spacious lounge, dining room, three bedrooms, fully equipped kitchen... modern bathroom, laundry, two garages” (*Argus* 04/11/1950:21). The Certificate of Title, confirming the couple’s acquisition of the property in 13 December, cites the owner’s occupation as clothing manufacturer, although no further details of his professional activity have yet been unearthed. The couple still occupied their “charming red brick villa” in February 1958, when they became naturalized citizens (*Comm Gazette*, 18/09/1958:3090). Five years later, they decided that it was time to replace the ageing bungalow with a new and modern counterpart on the same site, and they engaged architect Bernard Slawik to design it.

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 his wife 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.

Slawik's working drawings for the new house in Labassa Grove, dated October 1963, depict a single-storey flat-roofed dwelling on a stepped plan. Although providing only two bedrooms (ie, one for the couple and one for his mother), the house was otherwise large, dominated by an expansive living room with projecting dining room and study to create a U-shaped space around a semi-enclosed glass-walled court. By the time that the drawings were completed, demolition of the old house on the site was already underway: on 12 October, a newspaper advertisement offered clean second-hand roof tiles for sale, from 6 Labassa Grove, North Caulfield (*Age*, 12/10/1963:16). Construction was evidently completed in 1964.

The family would occupy the house for more than four decades. After the death of the owner's mother in the late 1960s, he and his wife remained in residence until their own deaths, a few years apart, in the early twentieth century. As such, the house appeared virtually unaltered when it was offered for sale for the first time in March 2008.

Descriptions

The house at 6 Labassa Grove, Caulfield North, is a single-storey orange brick house in the post-WW2 modernist style, with a flat roof incorporating broad timber-lined eaves. Its street façade is double-fronted and asymmetrical, dominated by an expansive full-width window wall with the front entrance set into a recessed bay alongside, in alignment with the adjacent double garage. At the corner, the flat roof extends across the porch, incorporating a large square skylight and supported at the edge by a square post. The front door set further back behind a metal security screen with a distinctive pattern of interlocking rectangles. An elevated terrace, with terrazzo finish, extends across the main part of the street frontage, with a short flight of steps leading up to the entry porch, and a simple white-painted mild steel balustrade. At some point (when the original owners reached a certain age), the left end of the steps was partially infilled to form a concrete ramp, and the original metal handrail repositioned accordingly.

The street frontage of the property otherwise retains much of its original setting. This includes the pebbled concrete driveway and parallel pathway, the dwarf wall in grey textured concrete block, the mild steel gate and even the original letterbox, in the form of a narrow and elongated timber box mounted on a metal pipe.

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 2 Edinburgh Avenue (1963) and 52 Lumeah Road (1967) are two-storey dwellings articulated in the characteristic modernist manner of an elevated glass-fronted box above an open undercroft. The former, with its low butterfly roof, oversized sliding glass doors and mosaic-tiled columns, is a standout example. As an example of Slawik's residential work, the Labassa Grove house is more directly comparable to another house at 34 Maxwell Grove (1962). Both are single-storey brick dwellings with asymmetrical façades incorporating balustrade terraces and corner porches with expansive roofs. The Maxwell Grove house, however, is a rather more conservative in its expression, with a conventional tile-clad hipped roof (rather than a flat roof), and lacks some of the more striking details evident at Labassa Grove, such as the stone feature wall and porch skylight.

More broadly, the house in Labassa Grove can be seen as a particularly sophisticated manifestation of a recurring style of single-storey post-WW2 modernist house that is (or rather was) commonly seen in the Caulfield area. Characterised by the use of face brickwork, flat roofs, large windows, feature stone cladding and balustraded front terraces, these dwellings almost always represented the work of European-trained architects or designers, and were invariably commissioned by compatriot clients. Typical examples, by as yet unconfirmed designers, include those at 384/384a Glen Eira Road (c1966) and 14 Edinburgh Avenue (c1964). The latter, with an eerily similar (if somewhat simpler) façade treatment to the Labassa Grove house, may have been designed by the same architect, Bernard Slawik.

References

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

Certificate of Title, Volume 3860, Folio 827, created 23 December 1913.

Bernard Slawik, "Proposed brick residence for Mr & Mrs [redacted] at 6 Labassa Grove, Caulfield", working drawings, dated 14 October 1963. City of Caulfield Permit No 30,369.

Identified by

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