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| IDENTIFIER | HOUSE | Citation No | PW09 |
| Other name/s | | Melway ref | 68 B10 |
| Address | 14-16 Clee Street McKINNON | Date/s | 1962-63 |
| Designer/s | Holgar & Holgar | Builder/s | Unknown |



Photograph by Built Heritage Pty Ltd, October 2019



Location map and extent of HO

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

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| 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 14-16 Clee Street, McKinnon, is a flat-roofed post-WW2 modernist house starkly expressed as a glass-fronted box-like volume that, occupying a sloping site, incorporates an undercroft carport to one side, where the land falls away. The house was erected in 1962-63 for a Polish businessman and his wife, and was designed by the compatriot husband-and-wife architectural partnership of Holgar & Holgar.

The significant fabric is defined as the exterior of the entire house, and the detached cabana that was later designed for the original owners, by architect Theodore Berman.

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.
- Criterion H: Special association with the life or works of a person, or groups of persons, of importance in our history.

Why is it significant?

The house is aesthetically significant as an exceptional example of high-end modernist residential architecture of the early 1960s. Built across a sloping site, the house is boldly articulated as a stark rectilinear volume that appears to hover above the ground at one end, incorporating an undercroft carport. With its bold massing, broad eaves and continuous window wall, it represents a particularly confident distillation of European Modernism. It must also be considered as a truly authentic example, being designed by Polish-born architects for a well-heeled compatriot couple who would have been familiar with such progressive architecture in pre-war Europe. (*Criterion E*)

The house is historically and architecturally significant for associations with the Polish-born husband-and-wife architectural partnership of Holgar & Holgar, which was notably active in Caulfield and environs in the 1960s, '70s and '80s. Dating from 1962, this house was one of the partnership's first major private residential commissions in what is now the City of Glen Eira after their prize-winning scheme for the Herald Ideal Home (moved to Bentleigh after being displayed at the 1957 Ideal Home Show) that prompted the couple to commence private practice. A grand and luxurious residence for a successful Polish-born manufacturer, this house was the first of many such palatial houses that Holgar & Holgar would design in the study area (invariably, for similarly well-off émigré clients) over the next quarter-century. With at least twenty examples recorded in the former City of Caulfield, this house stands out as the only in the former City of Moorabbin (excluding the couple's Herald Ideal Home in Bentleigh East, which technically predates the formalised partnership of Holgar & Holgar). (*Criterion H*)

History

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

The house at 14-16 Clee Street, McKinnon, was erected in 1963 for a Polish émigré couple, to a design by the compatriot husband-and-wife architectural partnership of Holgar & Holgar. The future owner was born in the early 1920s and, by the late 1940s, was working as an electrical/radio technician in Krakow. Following two failed attempts to establish their own business in that field, he and his older brother opted to migrate to Australia. After obtaining a passport in 1947, he and his brother arrived in Melbourne in late 1948. The following year, he married a fellow Polish emigre who had arrived in 1946 (*Herald* 19/09/1951:3).

In 1950, the two brothers started their own business to manufacture plastic and electrical products (*Age* 30/06/1970:14). Initially operating from a site in Carnegie, the business duly expanded and, in the later 1950s, moved to larger premises on Dandenong Road. The venture continued to thrive into the 1960s, securing lucrative government contracts to supply electrical insulators for the Postmaster-General's Department (*Commonwealth Gazette* 12/03/1964:1064). The two brothers ultimately sold the business in 1970, when they accepted a multi-million dollar takeover offer from a rival plastic moulding company.

It is perhaps indicative of the family's growing wealth that, having initially made their home in Elsternwick, the couple had already moved to South Yarra by the mid-1950s, taking up residence in a prestigious Georgian-style block of flats. Around 1960, presumably to be closer to their firm's factory on Dandenong Road, they relocated to a relatively modest dwelling in Murrumbeena. However, as the business thrived, the couple decided that it was time to build a grand new residence for their growing family. In April 1962, the couple acquired the title to a large allotment in Clee Street, McKinnon, and duly engaged architects (and fellow Polish émigrés) Holgar & Holgar to design their new home.

John Holgar (*ne* Władysław Aleksander Janusz Holgar-Ptaszyński) (1922-2006) and his wife Helen (*nee* Helena) (1923-2012) were both born in Poland, fleeing separately during WW2 and meeting for the first time while both were studying architecture in Rome. Moving to London in 1947, they married, completed further studies and gained professional experience before migrating to Australia in 1952, where they worked separately for various Melbourne practices including Godfrey Spowers, Arthur Purnell, Brian Lewis and D F Cowell Ham. In 1957, after the couple won first prize in a high-profile competition for an exhibition house, John began private practice under his own name, with an office in Swanston Street. Eighteen months later, he was joined by Helen, who was latterly employed by Grounds, Romberg & Boyd. Circa 1963, the practice was rebadged as Holgar & Holgar, relocating to Collins Street. It soon fostered a reputation as designers of large-scale houses for fellow European migrants, initially working in a strict modernist style before embracing a more eclectic and idiosyncratic approach characterised by unusual forms and luxurious materials and finishes. High-end residential projects of this nature would continue to sustain their practice well into the 1990s.

For the Clee Street site, the Holgars proposed a large and sprawling flat-roofed house expressed as a hovering horizontal mass, with the slope of the land allowing for a triple carport underneath. While copies of the original working drawings have not been located (either in the City of Glen Eira's building permit files or amongst the Holgars' own archive), photographs taken at the time of the last sale in 2010 indicate that the house (laid out on an unusual J-shaped plan) was designed to provide unusually expansive living areas, a kitchen with integrated meals area, home office, and at least three (possibly four) bedrooms. To the rear, the canted plan enveloped an open terrace area overlooking a swimming pool.

In 1970 (coinciding, no doubt, with the lucrative sale of their business that year), the family chose to upgrade their residence with a detached cabana, to be erected on the far (east) side of the existing swimming pool. For reasons as yet unconfirmed, they turned not to their original architects, Holgar & Holgar, but instead to second-generation émigré Theodore Berman, whose parents had migrated from Poland in the 1920s. Berman's drawings for the cabana, dated July 1970, proposed a substantial skillion-roofed structure on a canted plan, containing a covered deck with integrated barbeque facilities, two change rooms, toilet, store and plant room. The house would remain occupied by the family until the mid-1980s.

Description

The house at 14-16 Clee Street, McKinnon, is a single-storey flat-roofed brick house in a post-WW2 modernist style. It is starkly articulated as an elongated box-like volume, with the horizontality further emphasised by the respective lines of the roof eaves and floor slab. Occupying a sloping double-width block, house incorporates a double carport underneath, where the slope falls away at the north end, which heightens the perception of a hovering rectilinear volume. The wide street frontage is fully-glazed, with a continuous row of full-height multi-paned window bays. Otherwise asymmetrical, the façade is effectively triple-fronted, with a recessed bay to the right (south) end that incorporates an even further recessed entry porch. The porch, accessed by a wide flight of steps with a simple trabeated railing, is top-lit by a row of square skylights leading to an off-centre front door. The adjacent bay to the right, set between a pair of orange brick piers, similarly incorporates a wide skylight-like opening through the eaves, which are supported at the far end by a metal post.

The property has a concrete paved driveway to the double carport, a low retaining wall of Castlemaine slate, and a wide asphalt pathway leading up to the front entry porch.

Comparisons

One of the first houses to be designed by Holgar & Holgar (under that name) in what is now the City of Glen Eira, the house in Clee Street can be compared with several other local examples of the firm's work from the early-to-mid 1960s. Although Holgar & Holgar are known to have designed at least five houses in the City of Caulfield during those years, few of these remain intact today. A large and luxurious residence on a double-width block at 41-43 Lumeah Road, Caulfield North (1962) has been demolished in recent years, and another at 1 Wimbledon Court, St Kilda East (1963) has either been demolished or altered beyond recognition. Two other early houses in Caulfield, at 9 Helenslea Road and 32 Crotonhurst Avenue (both 1963), have been much altered. A house at 45 Aroona Road, Caulfield North (1963), while still standing and mostly intact, is wholly different in style, with a canted street façade of blank brick walls and large window bays. The Clee Street house, which seems virtually unaltered when seen from the street, is clearly the standout local example of the firm's trademark high-end residential work of the early 1960s. Certainly, some of the hard-edged modernist characteristics of the house are evident in later residential work by Holgar & Holgar, such as a block of flats at 32 Narong Road, Caulfield North (1965) and houses at 24 Langdon Street, Caulfield (1966) and 1 Bickhams Court, St Kilda East (1967).

References

Certificate of Title, Volume 865, Folio 728, created 31 May 1957.

The Office of Theodore Berman, "Proposed cabana for Mr & Mrs [redacted], 16 Clee Street, McKinnon", working drawings, dated 1 July 1970. City of Glen Eira Permit No 41,700.

Simon Reeves, "Gold-plated doors if you want them: Holgar & Holgar and the Architecture of Opulence," in Ann Marie Brennan & Philip Goad (eds), *Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia & New Zealand*. Vol 33 (Melbourne, 2016), pp 568-577.

Identified by

Built Heritage Pty Ltd (also flagged by City of Glen Eira)



Undated but contemporary photograph of the house in Clee Street, McKinnon
Source: Holgar & Holgar Archive (Private Collection, Melbourne)