

IDENTIFIER	HOUSE	Citation No	PW07
Other name/s		Melway ref	58 K9
Address	16 Cantala Avenue CAULFIELD NORTH	Date/s	1951-53
Designer/s	Ernest Fooks	Builder/s	Unknown



Photograph by Built Heritage Pty Ltd, October 2019



Location plan 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 16 Cantala Road, Caulfield North, is a two-storey skillion-roofed white-painted brick house in a stark post-WW2 modernist style, with asymmetrical street facade incorporating expansive windows and sundecks. Designed in 1951 by Austrian-trained architect Dr Ernest Fooks, the house was commissioned by a Polish-born businesswoman for her own investment company.

The significant fabric is defined as the exterior of the entire house and attached garage, along with the stone-paved front terrace, stone retaining walls, steps and original balustrade railings.

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 early and unusually substantial example of post-WW2 modernist residential architecture. Designed by an architect who trained and even practiced in Austria before migrating to Australia in 1939, the house represents a confident and authentic articulation of the International Style, with its bold rectilinear massing, stark planar walls, broad-eaved skillion roof, expansive windows and sundeck. Built on an elevated site, the split-level dwelling (with attached garage at a lower level) is enhanced by its original setting, which includes a crazy paved patio and terraced front garden defined by stone-clad retaining walls with matching steps and pathways with low black-painted metal balustrades. (*Criterion E*)

The house is historically significant for associations with Austrian-trained architect Dr Ernest Fooks, who started private practice in Melbourne in 1948 and soon became sought-after as a designer of residential projects for fellow European émigré clients. Notably prolific in the former City of Caulfield (where he himself resided, in Howitt Street, from 1966 until his death), Fooks maintained a long personal and professional association with what is now the City of Glen Eira, including several art exhibitions held at the Caulfield Town Hall. Dating from 1951, the Cantala Avenue house is one of Fook's two oldest surviving buildings in the study area (along with another at 64 Balaclava Road, also 1951) that, together, provide rare and significant evidence of the early presence of an architect whose work re-shaped the Caulfield area. (*Criterion H*)

History

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

The house at 16 Cantala Avenue, Caulfield North, was erected in 1951 for a Polish émigré couple, to a design by Dr Ernest Fooks. The family migrated to Australia in the late 1920s. Initially working in an umbrella factory, the husband gravitated to the textile industry and, by the mid-1930s, had become a director of woollen mills at Abbotsford. The family, which had originally settled in Carlton North, relocated to St Kilda East in the early 1940s, where they resided in a large Moderne-style block of flats.

In August 1946, the wife acquired the title to a vacant block in Cantala Avenue, which formed part of an ambitious pre-war subdivision created from the fourteen-acre grounds of Septimus Miller's eponymous *Cantala* mansion. The family's decision to purchase land here may have been swayed by the fact that three of the husband's co-directors at the woollen mills had recently built houses in nearby Findon Avenue. Occupying elevated sites, all three houses were grand in scale and progressive in style. In October 1950, ownership of the land in Cantala Avenue was transferred from the wife's name to that of the family's company, which had been formed in June 1948 as a generic investment company, to engage in activities that included (but were not necessarily restricted to) property development. To design their new house, the couple turned to architect and fellow European émigré Ernest Fooks, who, around the same time, was also designing a house at Charles Street, Kew, for the couple's daughter and son-in-law.

Ernest Fooks (*ne* Fuchs; 1905-1986) was born in Bratislava but his family soon moved to nearby Vienna, where he studied architecture at the *Technische Hochschule* and completed a doctorate in town planning. After further professional experience (included a reputed stint with Le Corbusier), he commenced private practice in Vienna in 1932. Migrating to Australia via Canada (where he married his wife Noemi), Fuchs arrived in Melbourne in 1939 and, on the strength of his town planning credentials, secured a position with the Housing Commission of Victoria. In 1948, he left to open his own office. From the onset, Fooks principally drew his clientele from Melbourne's thriving post-WW2 European émigré community, and this would become an enduring and significant association for the remainder of his career. He not only designed numerous houses for Continental compatriots, but also retail fitouts, factories and a several major projects for the Jewish community including schools, kindergarten and synagogues.

The Ernest Fooks Collection, held by RMIT Design Archives, contains various material pertaining to the house in Cantala Avenue. The earliest appears to be an undated bounded presentation folio (identifying the project as “proposed residence in Cantala Avenue”, citing also the husband’s name) with sketch plans, coloured perspective drawings and explanatory text. This proposed a two-storey house on a compact stepped plan (containing living areas, including a playroom at the upper level) with an attached garage and canted single-storey rear wing (containing bedrooms). In his accompanying text, Fooks referred to the concept as “the Patio Plan”, noting that it was “widely used in parts of America and Europe, where climatic conditions allow outdoor living”. He went on to explain that the key features of the design included separation of living/social areas and sleeping quarters, an appropriate relationship between rooms and outdoor space, placement of sun terraces and large windows to exploit views and sun, and the consolidation of plumbing to ensure that pipework remained exposed only to the rear.

The working drawings, dated May 1951, shows that this original concept had been simplified. While the overall form of the two-storey house remained the same, the rear wing was now of more conventional rectilinear form, and the interior re-planned to provide three bedrooms at ground level and three more upstairs, instead of a playroom. The drawing identifies the project as “brick residence” at the same address, but with the client now identified as the family’s company. The drawings were prepared by a delineator with the initials LAA. This is confirmed as Lindsay Alfred Anderson (1920-2019), who had studied at the Melbourne University Architectural Atelier in the 1940s and spent a year in Fooks’ office after returning from professional experience in London. Anderson’s initials appear on another drawing, dated June 1951 and identifying the client as the husband (rather than the family company), showing the proposed garden setting with flower boxes, stone paving, and matching steps and retaining walls. The latest documentation held by the RMIT Design Archives comprises an engineer’s drawing dated 2 August 1951, and a schematic diagram for the air conditioning system, dated 1 September.

In the *Sands & McDougall Directory*, the new dwelling was belatedly recorded in 1953, and again in 1954, as a “house being built” (on the east side of Cantala Avenue, between No 14 and Dandenong Road. In 1955, when it was first definitively recorded as No 16, its first occupant was not the owners and their family (who would continue to reside in St Kilda East for many years thereafter) but, rather, another individual. The Certificate of Title shows that, in July 1953, ownership of the Cantala Avenue house had indeed passed from the family’s company to another married couple, late of Kew. Like the original owner, the subsequent owner was a Polish émigré who was involved in textile manufacturer in Melbourne, which hints at a prior profession or personal link between the two families. While the new owner died in the mid-1950s, his widow continued to occupy the house in Cantala Avenue for another forty years.

Description

The house at 16 Cantala Avenue, Caulfield North, is a two-storey skillion-roofed brick house in the post-WW2 modernist style. Elevated above the street frontage, the house is expressed as a group of rectilinear masses with a stark white-painted finish, presenting an asymmetrical façade double-fronted façade with a projecting single-storey bay (forming a large sundeck at the upper level with a low black-painted metal pipe balustrade) with attached garage, set lower down at street level. The house has expansive rectangular windows with steel-framed sashes, and a recessed front entrance with metal security screen in a diagonal grille pattern. The front terrace is finished with crazy paved stonework, and there is matching stone cladding to the entry steps, path, front boundary wall and retaining walls that define the driveway and garden terraces. Some of these walls have low metal pipe balustrades, matching the sundecks.

Comparisons

With a clientele drawn primarily from Melbourne's post-WW2 European émigré community, it is not surprising that Ernest Fooks undertook a great deal of work in what is now the City of Glen Eira, and specifically the former City of Caulfield (where he himself resided, in Howitt Street, from 1966 until his death). While sources differ, Fooks's commissions in the Caulfield area numbered at least thirty (according to Edquist) and may have exceeded fifty (according to Pert). With only one confirmed exception, these Caulfield projects were residential, encapsulating new houses, blocks of flats and alteration/additions. Most date from the 1960s (the peak period of Fooks' practice), with fewer from the '50s and fewer still from the '70s.

Today, relatively few houses in the Caulfield area remain intact to provide evidence of the initial phase of Fooks' career. While he commenced practice in 1948, his earliest houses in the study area date back to the early 1950s. Several have since been demolished, notably those at 26 Ontario Road (1951) and 39 Howitt Road (1952), while two slightly later survivors at 7 Aroona Road and 1a Kooyong Road (both 1954) have both been heavily modified. While some of Fooks' local houses from the later 1950s have been demolished, including examples at 19 Leaburn Avenue (1956) and 17 Waiora Road (1958), a few more, such as 69 Gordon Street (1955) and 76 Gordon Street (1956), remain standing in relatively intact states. Generally speaking, the survival rate for Fooks houses from the 1960s onwards is much higher.

The house in Cantala Avenue, for which working drawings are dated May 1951, must be considered one of Fooks' earliest extant buildings in what is now the City of Glen Eira. Chronologically, its closest comparator would be the house at 64 Balaclava Road, for which drawings are dated April 1951 – only a month earlier. These two significantly early Fooks houses, which remain largely intact, are comparable in their grand double-storey scale, stark block-like expression, low rooflines, broad eaves and generous windows and sundecks. They contrast with Fooks' typically smaller-scaled and less prepossessing dwellings of the later 1950s, such as the two aforementioned single-storey survivors in Gordon Street, with their simple block-like form and glazed frontages.

References

Certificate of Title, Volume 6919, Folio 3669, created 26 August 1946.

Dr Ernest Fooks, "Analysis [and] sketch plans of proposed residence in Cantala Avenue, Caulfield", undated presentation folio. RMIT Design Archives.

Excerpt available online at <<<https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/program/vienna-abroad>>>

Dr Ernest Fooks, "A brick residence for [redacted], Cantala Avenue Caulfield", working drawing, dated 29 May 1951. City of Caulfield Permit No 12,615.

Dr Ernest Fooks, "A brick residence for [redacted], esquire, Cantala Avenue, Caulfield. Garden, paving and front fence", working drawing, dated 5 June 1951. RMIT Design Archives.

Harriet Edquist, *Ernest Fooks, Architect*, Melbourne: School of Architecture & Design: RMIT University, 2001.

Alan Pert, et al, *Ernest Fooks: The House Talks Back*. Parkville: Melbourne School of Design, 2016.

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