

<b>IDENTIFIER</b>	HOUSE	<b>Citation No</b>	PW03
<b>Other name/s</b>		<b>Melway ref</b>	58 J12
<b>Address</b>	30 Aroona Road CAULFIELD NORTH	<b>Date/s</b>	1963 1999 (additions)
<b>Designer/s</b>	Michael R E Feldhagen (1964) Edmond & Corrigan (1999)	<b>Builder/s</b>	Unknown (1963) KH Contractors Pty Ltd (1999)



Photographs by Built Heritage Pty Ltd, October 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
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<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 30 Aroona Road, Caulfield North, is a two-storey flat-roofed brick house in the post-WW2 modernist style, with a projecting upper storey that, supported on paired struts, forms a ground level undercroft. It incorporates expansive windows, two corner balconies with timber-lined eaves and a range of decorative finishes including rock-faced marble chips to the first floor spandrel, projecting brick courses at the lower level, feature stone cladding and concrete breeze block screens to the side elevations. Erected in 1963 for Czechoslovakian-born husband-and-wife clothing manufacturers, the house was designed by German-born architect Michael R E Feldhagen. The significant fabric is defined as the exterior of the house, and the crazy paved-stone driveway.

#### *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 modernist residential architecture of the early 1960s. While the expression of a two-storey house with an upper level projecting over a recessed lower level is a recurring motif in modernist architecture (represented by many examples in what is now the City of Glen Eira), this one is outstanding for its more distinctive and idiosyncratic articulation, which includes a subtle concave curve to the street façade, pairs of angled strut-like supports, corner balconies (rather than a full-width balcony) and an uncommonly varied application of decorative surface treatments that include rock-faced marble strips, feature stone cladding, projecting brick courses, concrete breeze block screens and a crazy paved driveway. With the house owned by its original family for many years, its exterior remains remarkably intact to the period, and is a striking element in the streetscape (*Criterion E*)

The house is historically and architecturally significant as one of the most outstanding examples of the work of German-born architect Michael R E Feldhagen, a former employee of Dr Ernest Fooks who, reportedly at the urging of Fooks' clients, left to commence his own practice in 1963 and soon became sought-after as a designer of high-end residences, mostly for fellow European émigrés. While Feldhagen is said to have been notably active in Caulfield in the 1960s and '70s, few of his buildings have been conclusively identified therein. This standout example, with its uncommonly lively and virtually unaltered exterior, remains as his best known residential project. (*Criterion H*)

### **History**

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

The house at 30 Aroona Road, Caulfield North, was erected in 1963 for a Czechoslovakian-born couple who were clothing manufacturers, to a design by German-born architect Michael R E Feldhagen. They were both born in the western part of Czechoslovakia that, after WW2, became part of Ukraine. The couple was living in Bratislava (present-day Slovakia) by the late 1940s, shortly before migrating to Australia and settling in St Kilda. In the early 1950s, the couple established their own clothing company, also based in St Kilda. The family later moved to Elwood and then, in June 1963, acquired the title to the present site at 30 Aroona Road, Caulfield North. At the time, the site was occupied by a modest pre-war dwelling, which the family intended to demolish so that they might build a grand new family residence. To design it, they commissioned German-born architect Michael R E Feldhagen.

Born in Breslau (now Wrocław, in western Poland), Michael Richard Ernest Feldhagen studied architecture at the *Universität der Künste Berlin* and, after graduating, worked for a city architect. Concerned by the political instability that would later bring about the erection of the Berlin Wall, Feldhagen and his wife Helga migrated to Australia, arriving in Melbourne in September 1958. He initially found employment with the Housing Commission of Victoria, but, around 1960, joined the private practice of Austrian-trained architect Dr Ernest Fooks. Around 1963, reportedly at the urging of some of Fooks' clients, Feldhagen resigned to establish his own practice. Disinclined to become registered as an architect in Victoria, he practised thereafter as an "architectural designer". Initially focusing on individual residential commissions, Feldhagen began to embrace larger-scale apartment blocks from the later 1960s. He remained in practice well into the 1980s (latterly in partnership with his son Oliver) before retiring to Queensland in the 1990s.

Michael Feldhagen's working drawings for the new house in Aroona Road, which are undated, proposed a flat-roofed split-level dwelling on the sloping site, with an H-shaped plan form that comprised a double-storey front wing with a single-storey rear wing connected by a hexagonal lobby/stairwell space. The front wing provided a rumpus room, living room and laundry at the lower level, with three bedrooms and a study upstairs. To the rear was the kitchen, "breakfast nook" and three interconnecting living spaces (sunroom, living room and dining room) that all opened onto an expansive rear terrace. Demolition of the existing house on the site was already underway by May 1963, when a newspaper advertisement drew attention to second-hand roofing tiles for sale at 30 Aroona Road (Age 04/05/1963:48). Construction of the new residence was in progress by August, when a second advertisement sought bricklayers (noting "New Australians welcome") for a building site at the same address (Age 28/08/1963:38).

Ultimately, the family would occupy the house for over three decades. After the widow sold the property in the late 1990s, it was acquired by a lighting designer who engaged his friend Peter Corrigan (with whom he had previously worked on stage design productions) to undertake internal alterations. The office of Edmond & Corrigan remodelled a bathroom and the kitchen, converting the existing breakfast nook into an informal living space identified as the "kitchen family room". In what was clearly a theatrical approach befitting the professional association between architect and client, the renovation was conceived in a lively Post-Modernist mode, later lauded for its "quirky, colourful and humorous elements" with the power to "conjure up multiple interpretations, not least Howard Arkley inspirations, to produce a theatre stage for family living" (Architect, 2000:23). The bold refurbishment went on to receive an Award of Merit in the interiors category at the 2000 RAI (Victorian chapter) Awards.

Subsequently, this house was one of several modernist houses that were selected for inclusion in *Notable & Modern*, an exhibition of post-war domestic architecture in the City of Glen Eira that took place at the Glen Eira Art Gallery in July 2001.

## Description

The house at 30 Aroona Road, Caulfield North, is a two-storey flat-roofed brick house in the post-WW2 modernist style. It is expressed in a characteristic European Modernist manner, where the upper storey (containing the principal living areas) is given emphasis over a recessed lower level (containing carport, entry foyer and subsidiary spaces). The street façade is slightly concave and symmetrical, with the projecting upper level comprising a central glazed bay flanked by two open balconies with window walls and timber-lined ceilings. A continuous brick spandrel, clad in rock-face marble, forms a balustrade wall to each of the balconies. At street level, the projecting upper level is supported on four pairs of angled strut-like steel columns, which rise from low flower boxes enlivened with stone cladding. Beneath this undercroft, a centrally-placed recessed front entry porch is flanked by elongated window bays with face brick spandrels below. The two side elevations of the house also incorporate large areas of feature stone cladding, as well as concrete breeze block screens to the first floor windows.

The front undercroft, which also functions as a double carport and *port cochere*, has a crazy paved stone finish, which extends to the street in both directions to form a circular driveway.

As an interior inspection has not been undertaken, the current status of the award-winning Edmond & Corrigan internal renovation remains unknown.

## Comparisons

Although Michael Feldhagen's son has stated that his father was extremely prolific as a designer in the Caulfield area, relatively few examples of his work have yet been conclusively identified there, or anywhere else in what is now the City of Glen Eira. Research to date has located only two other houses confirmed to have been Feldhagen's work: one at 17 Sycamore Street, Caulfield South (1968) and another at 19 Morrice Street, Caulfield (c1970).

Both have much in common with the house in Aroona Road, in that they were similarly conceived as two-storey flat-roofed brick dwellings with a glass-walled upper storey that is visually emphasised above an understated lower storey. While neither of these two houses has the same bold expression of a projecting upper storey supported on angled struts, each has some specific elements in common with the Aroona Road house. The house in Morrice Street has broad projecting eaves with varnished timber lining boards, and a cantilevered first floor balcony with an eye-catching panelled balustrade wall that gives way to horizontal railings at one end. The house in Sycamore Street, with its wide panelled fascia and large first floor windows, otherwise recalls the Aroona Road house in its use of the same rock-faced white marble cladding to the spandrels at the upper level, and a stone-clad feature wall to the side.

At the time of writing, the only other confirmed examples of Feldhagen's work in the study area is a two-storey block of flats on a corner site at 34 Elizabeth Street, Elsternwick (1969). With its stepped façade, flat roof with wide fascia, tall window bays and varied expression of projecting and recessing balconies with solid balustrade walls, the building is somewhat evocative of the designer's individual residential commissions, albeit lacking the lively decorative embellishments. Another block of flats by Feldhagen, expressed more conventionally in brown brick with corner balconies, still stands on Dandenong Road. However located on the north side of the street (at No 205), it is just outside the boundaries of the City of Glen Eira.

## References

Certificate of Title, Volume 8424, Folio 158, created 21 June 1963.

Michael R E Feldhagen, "Proposed residence at Aroona Road, Caulfield, for Mr & Mrs [redacted]", working drawings, undated [c1963]. City of Caulfield Permit No 29,538.

Built Heritage Pty Ltd, "Michael R E Feldhagen (1932-2013)", *Dictionary of Unsung Architects*, [www.builtheritage.com.au/dua\\_feldhagen.html](http://www.builtheritage.com.au/dua_feldhagen.html)

"Interior Architecture: Award of Merit", *Architect*, June 2000, p 23.

"In profile: [redacted] House, North Caulfield, Victoria, 1999", *Houses* No 28 (2002), p 103.

Conrad Hamann, *Cities of Hope Re-Membered: Australian Architecture by Edmond & Corrigan, 1962-2012* (2012), pp 70-73.

## Identified by

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