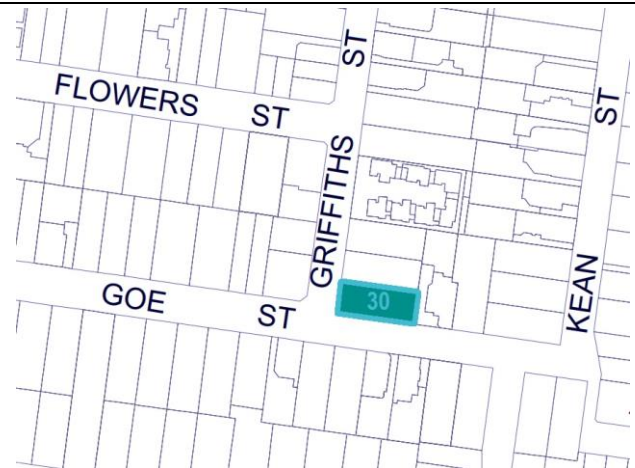


IDENTIFIER	HOUSE	Citation No	PW13
Other name/s		Melway ref	68 C5
Address	30 Griffiths Street CAULFIELD SOUTH	Date/s	1977-78
Designer/s	Leon Fink	Builder/s	K Fink Pty Ltd (Leon Fink, constr. manager)



Photograph by Built Heritage Pty Ltd, October 2019



Location map and extent of HO

Heritage Category	Residential building (private) House	Condition	Excellent
		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 30 Griffiths Street, Caulfield South, is a two-storey orange brick dwelling of unusual sculptural form. Occupying a corner site, it is laid out on an irregular plan (based on a rotated 45-degree modular grid), extruded to form two contrasting and mostly blank street elevations with projecting wing walls, half-round stairwell bay, a Diocletian window and an asymmetrical roofline of separate skillions with flat or raked parapets. The house was erected in 1977-78 as a speculative project for Karl Fink's construction company, and was designed by his architect son, Leon Fink.

The significant fabric is defined as the exterior of the entire house, including various brick walls that project from the house and extend along the street boundaries.

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 distinctive example of modernist residential architecture of the late 1970s, showing the pervasive influence of the so-called Chamfer style that was popular for much of that decade. Its highly sculptural appearance is the result of a modular plan that was rotated by 45 degrees to respond to the corner site, then extruded into a series of irregular forms. The two street elevations, starkly and differently expressed, incorporate splayed corners, tapered wing walls, projecting half-round stairwell and an irregular skillion roofline with flat and raked parapets. The starkness is softened by the use of pale orange brick (rather than the concrete block or rendered finish more typically associated with the Chamfer style), and relieved by quirky details such as the projecting downpipes and Diocletian window to Goe Street, which hint at the influence of the emerging Post-Modernist style. Virtually unaltered since completion in 1978, the house remains an eye-catching element in a predominantly pre-war residential streetscape.

(Criterion E)

History

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

The house at 30 Griffith Street, Caulfield South, was erected in 1979 as a speculative project for a construction company operated by Polish-born Karl Fink, and was designed by his architect son, Leon Fink. Karl Fink (*ne* Kalman Funckenstejn) (1917-1993) and his wife Feiga (*nee* Rotszylad) (1918-2015) were both born in Włocławek, and were still living there at the time of their marriage in 1938. During WW2, the couple resided in Russia but returned to Włocławek afterwards, where son Leon was born in 1946. Declared stateless, the Funckenstejns were accommodated in a Displaced Persons' Camp in Munich before obtaining passports in Frankfurt in July 1947, enabling them to migrate to Australia. Arriving in Sydney in August 1948, they travelled thence to Melbourne and settled in Parkville. In 1951, Karl applied to have his surname shortened to Fink but was refused. He subsequently took the surname Finksten, which had been suggested as an alternative, but had adopted the name Karl Fink by the end of that decade. Originally a painter and decorator by trade, he established his own construction business in Melbourne, which was formalised in July 1960 as K Fink Pty Ltd.

Karl and Feigla's eldest son, Leon, studied architecture at the University of Melbourne; while still a first year student, he was already involved with his father's firm, supervising the construction of speculative factory projects in the inner suburbs. In 1967-68, Leon and fellow undergraduate Michael Kauffman travelled to London for further professional experience. Both obtained work with George Wimpey & Company, a venerable building firm that had long specialised in housing estates. By time that Fink and Kauffman arrived there, the firm had embraced highrise apartment blocks for local authorities. Fink recalls working on a number of such projects in Scotland, noting that, while they were not particularly notable architecturally, provided him with valuable experience in how a large construction company operated. Outside of work, Fink and Kaufmann furthered their professional knowledge by visiting buildings by well-known British architects such as James Stirling and Denys Lasdun. They also travelled to the Continent to see icons that included Le Corbusier's Chapel at Ronchamp and Joern Utzon's own house near Copenhagen.

Returning to Australia, Kaufman and Fink completed their studies at the University of Melbourne and, after graduating in 1972, entered into partnership together. This proved a relatively short-lived venture, with both men embarking on sole practice (Kaufman was to die, prematurely, in 1974). Fink became increasingly involved in his father's construction business, working in the twofold capacity of in-house designer and construction manager, overseeing speculative projects that mostly consisted of apartment and townhouse developments in suburbs such as Box Hill, Northcote and Thornbury. In parallel, Fink also maintained a modest private practice, mostly undertaking smaller-scaled residential alteration work for friends and family.

In May 1977, one of Karl Fink's companies, K Fink Nominees Pty Ltd, acquired the title to a site at the corner of Griffiths and Goe Streets in Caulfield South, on which to build a large family house as a one-off speculative project. As was later reported, "the house was not designed with a specific client in mind, but was intended to have wide market appeal" (*Age* 01/01/1979:11). Leon recalls that, as it represented a departure from the bread-and-butter medium density housing that he and his father mostly undertook at that time, it offered a rare (and welcome) opportunity for bolder architectural expression. Responding to the corner site in a fresh way, Fink proposed a two-storey house on a plan rotated 45 degrees, with two contrasting street elevations that blurred preconceptions of "front" and "side". The modular plan, generated by a 960mm grid, allowed walls to be placed accurately without the need for fully dimensioned drawings, and created a flexible open-planned interior. Externally, the building's significant bulk was de-emphasised by a stepping down the roofline towards the two street frontages, with the sole non-orthogonal element at the junction: a projecting half-round stairwell that formed a windowless tower-like feature.

Not surprisingly, given the unusual form and detailing of the proposed house, Fink's twofold role as designer and construction manager came to the fore during realisation of the project. He recalls: "some of the things were a bit tricky... working out how to do the roof over the staircase, which was circular... getting the skylights arranged over those lightwells that dropped down. It was something that we had to make sure worked on site because I was actually building it. I had to work it out myself, so it was interesting in that way". He adds that construction required more than the usual amount of site supervision, with sub-contractors mystified by some of the details. The bricklayer, for example, was unfamiliar with laying the specially-cut squint bricks (ie splayed at a 45 degree angle) until Fink advised him to purchase a cheap plastic set-square from a newsagent (although, as the architect wryly recalls, the bricklayer initially came back on site with a 60/30 degree set square). Fink was also responsible for designing the garden setting around the house, which was implemented by landscape contractor Mario Mariani.

In early 1979, the newly-completed house was profiled in the weekly property column of the *Age* newspaper as a "House of the Week". The article lauded its distinctive external expression, with contrasting elevational treatments resulting in "a building that acknowledges both street frontages with a form that offers relief from the rigid streetscape". There was also praise for its modular and carefully-zoned internal planning, creating "a series of flexible interlocking spaces that could be furnished in a variety of ways". Two months later, when the property was offered for sale, it was subject to a second write-up, which referred to it as "the place that looks like a fortress" (wryly noting, "what better way of dealing with traffic noise, sticky beaks and fumes?"). The article went on to state that, despite its forbidding exterior, the inside of the house was spacious and well-lit, with a subtle colour scheme and timberwork "that contributes to a light, airy atmosphere". The house failed to sell at auction, but, by the end of the year, had been acquired by a European émigré couple from Glen Huntly.

Description

Occupying a corner site, the building at 30 Griffiths Street, Caulfield South, is an orange brick house comprising a single-story hip-roofed portion (facing Griffiths Street) integrated with a flat-roofed double-storey portion (fronting Goe Street). Designed on a 45-degree module, the house is irregular not only in plan but also in elevation and roofline. The low hipped roof to the front is clad with slate and has a broad timber fascia to two sides and raked parapets to the other, while the flat roof to the rear is entirely concealed by horizontal parapets. The double carport, integrated beneath the hipped roof on the Griffiths Street side, is partly enclosed by a tapered wing wall that projects along the driveway. The elevation to Goe Street is stark, with a virtually blank double-height wall relieved only by a Diocletian (half-round) window at the upper level and recessed entry porch on the street, marked by an angled garden wall. On the splayed corner between the two street elevations, the stairwell projects outwards to form a windowless half-round bay.

Comparisons

By the architect's own admission, the speculative house that he designed at 30 Griffiths Street was a one-off project: a diversion from the townhouse/flat developments that then characterised the bulk of his output. Fink states that he has not designed anything else like it, either in Caulfield, the broader City of Glen Eira, or anywhere else. While Fink's parents resided in Caulfield for many years (in an existing house in Dunbar Avenue), he notes that he has undertaken little architectural work in that part of Melbourne. By his reckoning, his only other significant undertaking in the study area is a block of flats at 15-19 Alexandra Avenue, Elsternwick (1978-79). Still standing, it is a three-storey cream brick building with open carparking at ground level and two storeys of apartments above, with projecting north-facing balconies. Designed soon after the Griffiths Street house, it is larger and more conventionally rectilinear in form, but otherwise comparable for its pale brickwork, varied fenestration (with long rectangular windows placed both horizontally and vertically), and use of a contrasting curved feature (in this case, in the garden walls).

In the absence of other local buildings by Leon Fink, the house can be compared more broadly to other houses in the study area from the later 1970s and early '80s, when residential architecture in Melbourne still showed the pervasive influence of the so-called Chamfer style. Emerging in the early '70s in houses by Edgard Pirotta, Kevin Borland, Peter Crone and others, it was characterised by angular geometry in both plan and elevation. Often generated by rotated modular grids, plans typically had bold angles and splayed corners, while elevations incorporated cranked glazing, tapering walls and jagged rooflines. Several typical examples of the style are recorded in the City of Glen Eira, including houses at 17-19 Burrindi Road, Caulfield (Synman Justin Bialik, 1979), 40 Trevelyan Street, Elsternwick (Kevin Borland, 1981) and an architect's own home at 32 Keeron Street, Caulfield South (Avi Milder, 1983). All of these not only post-date Leon Fink's house in Griffiths Street but, built on standard single-fronted blocks, lack the sculptural form and bold streetscape presence demonstrated by Fink's building, so carefully conceived for its corner site.

Reference

Certificate of Title, Volume 4823, Folio 551, created 11 October 1923.

John Barker, "Design achieves harmony", *Age*, 1 January 1979, p 11.

Ray Davie, "Fortress like", *Age*, 24 March 1979, p 40.

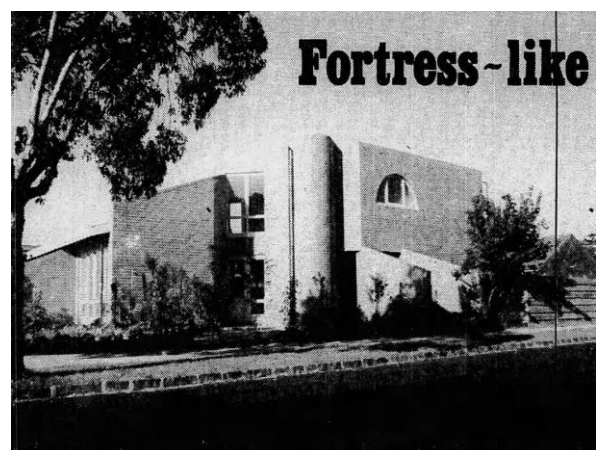
Leon Fink, interviewed by Simon Reeves, 21 December 2019.

Identified by

Built Heritage Pty Ltd



*Contemporary view from the south (Goe Street)
Source: courtesy Leon Fink, architect*



*Contemporary view from the south-west
Source: Age, 24 March 1979*