

IDENTIFIER	HOUSE	Citation No	PW05
Other name/s		Melway ref	58 G12
Address	64 Balaclava Road ST KILDA EAST	Date/s	1951-54
Designer/s	Ernest Fooks	Builder/s	Unknown



Heritage Group	Residential building (private)	Condition	Excellent
Heritage Category	House	Intactness	Excellent
Thematic context	6.7 Making homes for Victorians		
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 64 Balaclava Road, St Kilda East, is a two-storey skillion-roofed cream brick house in a stark post-WW2 modernist style, with asymmetrical street facade incorporating a wide stone-clad chimney, large windows and north-facing sun decks. Designed in 1951 by Austrian-trained architect Dr Ernest Fooks, the house was commissioned by a compatriot who was a successful canned fruit magnate, and whose family occupied it for three decades.

The significant fabric is defined as the exterior of the entire house, along with the matching brick garden wall and boundary walls (with metal gates) along both street frontages. The garage to the rear, which occupies the footprint indicated on Fooks' drawings, is not considered significant.

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.

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 above a columned undercroft. Atypically large for its time, this grand two-storey residence, occupying a prominent corner site at the junction of two major roads, remains a conspicuous element in the streetscape. (*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 house is one of Fook's two oldest surviving buildings in the study area (along with another at 16 Cantala Avenue, 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

This house was built in 1951-53 for an émigré couple, to a design by Dr Ernest Fooks. The future owner was born in Poland in the early 1900s but later settled in Austria, where he married. By the early 1940s, they had already left Europe and were living in Shanghai. Migrating to Australia, the family arrived in Sydney in the late 1940s and promptly moved on to Victoria, where the future owner (who cited his profession as "canning expert" on his migration form) formed a partnership with a fellow émigré to start a fruit canning business in Shepparton (*Age* 03/12/1949:14). Such was its success that the family, which had hitherto resided in a modest house in Essendon, could build a new and grand residence for themselves. In February 1951, the couple acquired the title to a corner block in St Kilda East, and engaged architect Dr Ernest Fooks to design a new house.

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 several major projects for the Jewish community including schools, kindergarten and synagogues.

A blueprint of Fooks' working drawings for the Balaclava Road house, submitted to the City of Caulfield with a building permit application (and retained in the City of Glen Eira's archives), is dated April 1951 and identifies a delineator with initials LAA. This was Lindsay Alfred Anderson, who studied at the Melbourne University Architectural Atelier in the early 1940s but was not registered as an architect until 1961. The plans proposed a two-storey brick house on a stepped rectilinear plan with large windows and north-facing terraces, stone-clad feature walls and a matching solid stone wall along both street boundaries. The site plan indicates a detached "future garage" to the rear. The floorplans of the house show an entry foyer with grand curving staircase, a large living/dining area, kitchen, three downstairs bedrooms and another three upstairs, including a master suite with capacious *en suite* bathroom, dressing room and private balcony.

Construction of the new house evidently took some time. The unfolding project happened to catch the eye of Robin Boyd who wrote a letter in October 1952 to colleague Neil Clerehan (then visiting the USA) that mentioned Fooks' "latest", with a rough but unmistakable sketch of its distinctive curvilinear balustrade. In the City of Caulfield Rate Book for 1953-54, dated 8 December 1953, the site is still described as vacant land owned the fruit canner and his wife, late of Essendon West. A handwritten amendment, added prior to compilation of the next year's rate book, listed the couple as owner/occupants of a nine-roomed brick house with a Net Annual Value of £375. During 1953, while work was still underway on the house, the fruit canner retained Fooks to design a cool store extension to his factory in Shepparton.

Based on its current appearance, it appears that the house was built entirely in accordance with Fooks' scheme, although a plain cream brick boundary wall was erected in place of the more ornate solid stone wall shown on the drawings. A flat-roofed detached garage also exists in the position where Fooks had indicated. The fruit canner and his family were to occupy the house for three decades, until the early 1980s.

Description

The house at 64 Balaclava Road, Caulfield, is a two-storey skillion-roofed cream brick house on a corner site. Its principal facade, to Balaclava Road, is elongated, asymmetrical and double-fronted, with a slightly projecting bay at the left side balanced by a wide slab-like chimney to the right side. The chimney is clad with Castlemaine slate, which extends along the side of a projecting front terrace. There are large windows at both levels, with steel-framed sashes and brick tile sills. The windows to the projecting bay partially return down the side elevation. The central window bay at the upper level opens onto a narrow balcony with a simple metal balustrade of sinuous form, and there is a matching balustrade to a widow's walk on the roof. The rear elevation of the house, partially visible from Orrong Road, incorporates a recessed porch with round columns and large recessed circular lights. At the second floor, large window bays open onto an expansive north-facing sun terrace with matching metal balustrade, a pergola and a staircase leading up to the widow's walk at roof level.

A low boundary wall, in matching cream brick with edge capping and contrasting orange Roman brick stringcourse, extends along the two street frontages. It incorporates two pedestrian gateways on the Balaclava Road side, with metal gates detailed to match the balustrades of the house. The front and back yards are separated by a taller brick wall incorporating rows of concrete pipes.

The garage to the rear of the property is a flat-roofed structure on a rectangular plan, erected of cream brick that appears to match that of the main house. Although it occupies a position that was indicated for a garage on Fooks' drawings, and may well have been designed by him, it is a utilitarian structure of little architectural interest in its own right.

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 on Balaclava Road, for which working drawings are dated April 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 a house at 16 Cantala Avenue, for which drawings are dated May 1951 - only a month later. 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

Dr Ernest Fooks, "A brick residence for [redacted], esquire, corner Balaclava and Orrong Roads, Caulfield", working drawing, dated 4 April 1951. City of Caulfield Permit No 12,548.

Letter, Robin Boyd to Neil Clerehan, undated but circa mid-October 1952. Formerly in Clerehan's possession; now in private collection, Melbourne.

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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