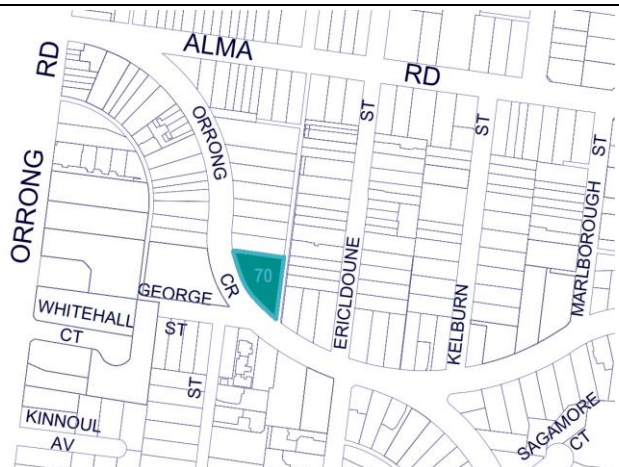


<b>IDENTIFIER</b>	FLATS	<b>Citation No</b>	PW21
<b>Other name/s</b>	<i>Fountain Court</i>	<b>Melway ref</b>	58 J10
<b>Address</b>	70 Orrong Crescent CAULFIELD NORTH	<b>Date/s</b>	1967-68
<b>Designer/s</b>	Holgar & Holgar	<b>Builder/s</b>	Elie Litvak



Photographs by Built Heritage Pty Ltd, October 2019



Location map and extent of HO

<b>Heritage Group</b>	Residential building (private)	<b>Condition</b>	Good
<b>Heritage Category</b>	Flats	<b>Intactness</b>	Good
<b>Thematic context</b>	6.7 Making homes for Victorians		
<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?

*Fountain Court*, at 70 Orrong Crescent, Caulfield North, is a flat-roofed three-storey block of flats on an elongated curved plan, extruded upwards to create two storeys of flats above an open undercroft. It has a varied but symmetrical façade of full-height window walls, brick spandrels and projecting or recessed balconies, with textured concrete block screen walls, mosaic-tiled columns and glass-walled lobbies at ground level. Erected in 1967-68, the flats were designed by the Polish-born husband-and-wife architectural partnership of Holgar & Holgar.

The significant fabric is defined as the entire exterior of the building.

### How is it significant?

*Fountain Court* 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 F: Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.

### *Why is it significant?*

*Fountain Court* is aesthetically significant as highly distinctive and idiosyncratic example of post-WW2 modernism. The concave plan, adopted as a specific design response to the challenging convex curvature of the street frontage, has resulted in a building of unusually striking form and bold streetscape presence. Although a number of Melbourne architects in the 1950s and '60s were intrigued by such applications of pure geometry, relatively few actual examples were realised; this concave-planned building has virtually no true comparators in the City of Glen Eira and is rare even on a broader metropolitan scale. Its external treatment, while adopting a standard modernist vocabulary of stark walls, full-height windows and *pilotis*, has introduced an uncommon degree of complexity in its varied fenestration and alternating projecting/recessed balconies, its use of contrasting texture (eg stack bond brickwork and concrete block screen walls) and evocation of luxury (eg gold mosaic tiling, anodized aluminium and marble flooring). (*Criterion E, Criterion F*)

### **History**

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

The flats at 70 Orrong Crescent, Caulfield North, were built in 1967-8 to a design by architects Holgar & Holgar. The site, then known as 88-94 Orrong Crescent, was hitherto occupied by a brick shop (No 88) and timber dwelling (No 94). Dating from circa 1909, the house was erected as a local builder's own dwelling. A few years after his death in 1911, his widow added the shop, which the family operated as a grocery business. After the widow died in the late 1930s, her son continued to live in the house (while renting out the adjacent shop to others) until his own death in May 1965. The following year, the combined property of the house and shop were jointly offered for sale as "an outstanding development site" (*Age*, 21/08/1966:23).

By the mid-1960s, a major boom of apartment construction was well underway in what was then the City of Caulfield. Orrong Crescent, close to public transport and retail hubs, and characterised by allotments of slender proportion, soon became an epicentre. The large site at No 88-94, tightly held by the same family for half a century, indeed represented an "outstanding development site". However, any prospective purchaser would have to deal with the fact that, while the site offered an uncommonly expansive street frontage of 227 feet (70 metres), this curved to follow the form of Orrong Crescent. As a result, the oddly-shaped block (geometrically speaking, a quadrant), was only about 50 metres deep at its longest point. To develop such a site for apartments, an ingenious design solution was required. To that effect, the new owners of the block turned to the husband-and-wife architectural partnership of Holgar & Holgar, well known in the Caulfield area with several local houses (and apartment blocks) already under their belt.

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.

Responding to the awkward site at 88-94 Orrong Crescent, the Holgars chose an elongated plan, described as “a segment of a circle”, curving in the opposite direction to the street frontage. This concave form was extruded upward to form a ground level undercroft carpark, with two storeys providing eight apartments. As was later reported, “the curved design gives the building the best perspective for the site and a sweeping drive to serve all entrances; it also provides off-street parking for visitors and plenty of space between the building line and the street for a front garden with a thirty-foot eye-shaped lily pond and fountain” (*Herald* 09/08/1968:19). The geometry was reflected in the internal planning: “all rooms are irregularly shaped, and cross walls follow radials converging from the centre”. The flats, with two or three bedrooms, were atypically grand and luxurious. Larger units had a separate dining room, while smaller ones had a combined living/dining room and a study that could be adapted as a third bedroom. Kitchens, described as “above average size”, included innovations seldom seen in Melbourne at that time, such as wall ovens, bench hotplates, double-bowl stainless steel sinks with waste disposal units, and an alcove for a dishwasher. Ground floor foyers, with Italian marble floors, carpeted stairs and mica wallpaper, included entry doors that could be remotely unlocked from the units upstairs. It was also noted that the undercroft carpark area included storage units for each flat and an area “of about fifteen squares... designed for community outdoor entertainment”.

The building was erected by Israeli émigré Elie Litvak, a qualified engineer and Caulfield resident who had previously built at least two other local buildings by the Holgars. In early August 1968, the forthcoming sale of the flats prompted a flurry of publicity including a write-up in the *Herald* property column, and advertisements for the “gala opening” of “the Pride of Caulfield”. Referred to as *Fountain Court*, the flats were promoted as a “unique sweeping semi-circular ultra-modern building featuring 200 feet of garden frontage and beautiful fountain setting”, noting such features as the “fully ducted central heating”, “enormous entertainment area opening onto sun balcony” and “unique outside living area”. Priced from \$26,000 to \$28,000, the flats evidently sold quickly. The first resident appears to have been a retired Russian-born jeweller who was already listed at the address in 1968. Several other retired European émigré businessmen were amongst the original or early residents of the flats.

## Description

*Fountain Court*, at 70 Orrong Crescent, Caulfield North, is a three-storey flat-roofed block of flats in the post-WW2 modernist style. Occupying a quadrant-shaped block with a curved street frontage, the building has a linear plan that curves in the opposite direction (ie concave not convex). It is expressed as an elongated and canted double-storey volume (containing the flats proper) elevated on concrete columns (or *pilotis*) to form an undercroft carpark. The street frontage is varied but symmetrical. At the upper levels, the concave façade is articulated as a row of faceted bays. In the centre, full-height window walls with glazed doors open onto pairs of canted balconies, divided by glazed partitions. Outer bays have smaller rectangular windows and spandrels of beige brickwork laid in stack-bond. End elevations have three bays of multi-paned window walls to each level, with the central bay recessed to form a slightly projecting balcony.

At the ground floor level, the columns are clad in bronze-coloured glass mosaic tiles and support a series of tapering concrete beams that create the effect of a low vaulted ceiling within. The carparking area is partially screened by walls of narrow textured concrete bricks enlivened with a pattern of projecting headers. There are also two entry foyers marked by paired columns, with white marble thresholds and glazed doors and sidelights windows in gold anodized aluminium, and narrow flanking alcoves containing recessed timber letterboxes. Each of the two entrances is marked by a recessed light-box bearing the name of the flats, and the numerical designation of the four individual flats accessed within. Inside, the foyers contain staircases with floating treads and simple metal rod balusters, and a full-height window to the rear.

The convex elevation to the rear of the building, fronting a laneway, is similarly but more simply detailed, with blank rendered walls alternating with window bays, most of which have matching spandrels of stack-bond beige brickwork. The undercroft level is open, with the row of concrete columns (finished in a rough-textured Spraycrete coating rather than mosaic tiled) defining individual parking spaces.

The “30-foot eye-shaped lily pond and fountain”, mentioned in early publicity, is no longer extant.

### Comparisons

The office of Holgar & Holgar was notably active in what is now the City of Glen Eira, designing many buildings in Caulfield and St Kilda East as well as a few others further afield in McKinnon and Bentleigh East. While virtually all of their local output was residential in nature, it is mostly represented by large-scale single dwellings. Apart from *Fountain Court* in Orrong Crescent, only two other examples of the Holgars’ apartment architecture have yet been conclusively identified in the study area: a three-storey block of four flats at 32 Narong Road, Caulfield North (1964), and a group of four single-storey townhouses at 9 David Street, St Kilda East (1970). The former, with the two upper storeys elevated above an open undercroft for carparking, is broadly comparable to *Fountain Court*, albeit expressed in an orthodox rectilinear fashion. While it may lack the curved geometry used at *Fountain Court*, it otherwise anticipated the latter in the scale and opulence of its internal planning and fitout, with spacious entry foyer, storerooms and larger-than-average three-bedroom apartments with separate dining rooms, central heating/air-conditioning and kitchens with waste disposal units (*Herald* 30/04/1964:26). The development in David Street, postdating *Fountain Court*, was different again, with dwellings expressed as individual (and individualistic) flat-roofed brick villa units clustered in an informal landscaped setting (*Herald* 01/05/1970:25).

Ultimately, it is the curving geometry that sets *Fountain Court* apart from other blocks of flats in the study area, including those designed by the same architects. Research to date has failed to identify another local apartment complex comparable in this regard. While a number of sites along Orrong Crescent have curved street frontages, no other building was designed to respond to this aspect in quite the same way (although one block of flats, at No 44, does have a splayed façade to follow the acute angular shape of the site). The same can be said of buildings along similarly sinuous roads elsewhere in the municipality, such as Park Crescent (Caulfield East), Murrumbeena Crescent (Murrumbeena), Chesterville Drive (Bentleigh East) and Leamington Crescent, Derby Crescent, Truganini Road, Railway Road and Toolambool Road (Carnegie). To date, the only building in the study area that is vaguely comparable in date and form is St Patrick’s Roman Catholic Church at Dalny Road, Murrumbeena (1963), which has an oval plan. After *Fountain Court*, the next building to use curved geometry as a specific site response would not appear until the mid-1980s, when an acute angled corner site at 840 Dandenong Road, Caulfield North, was redeveloped with a curved two-storey glass-walled building, reportedly commissioned by Dr Geoffrey Edelsten as a 24-hour ‘superclinic’ (but ultimately never used as such).

### References

“A new style in flats... now they are curved”, *Herald*, 9 August 1968, p 19.

“Gala opening: The Pride of Caulfield”, *Age*, 10 August 1968, p 37.

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)