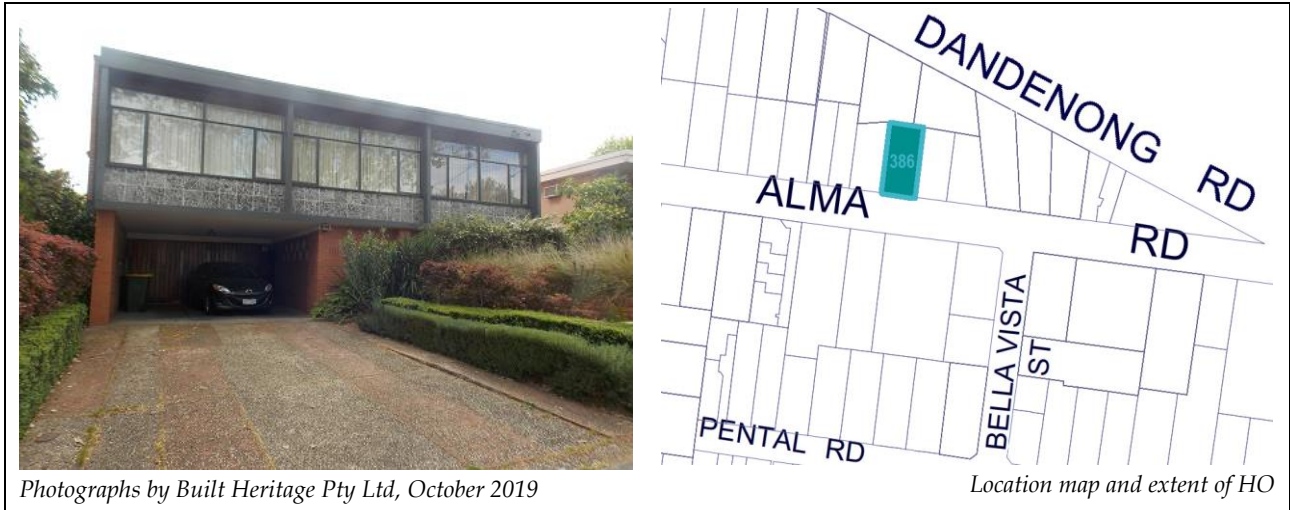


IDENTIFIER	HOUSE	Citation No	PW02
Other name/s		Melway ref	59 A10
Address	386 Alma Road CAULFIELD NORTH	Date/s	1961-62
Designer/s	Dr Ernest Fooks	Builder/s	Unknown



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 386 Alma Road, Caulfield North, is a two-storey flat-roofed orange brick house in the modernist style, expressed as a box-like upper level (containing three large window bays with terrazzo spandrels) elevated above a recessed undercroft that encloses a double carport. Erected in 1961-62 for a clothing manufacturer and his wife, the house was designed by noted Austrian-trained architect Dr Ernest Fooks.

The significant fabric is defined as the exterior of the house, the matching brick walls to the front garden, and the pebbled paving to the driveway and the front paths.

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 a particularly distinctive example of modernist residential architecture of the early 1960s. Commissioned at a time when architect Fooks was moving beyond his usual hard-edged modernism towards a more inclusive and eclectic approach, the house deftly combines the tenets of Fook's more academic style (ie the stark expression of a two-storey house as an elongated glass-fronted box, hovering above an undercroft) with a playfully decorative style fashionable at the time, conveyed by small rows of openings to the carport walls, spandrels with eye-catching rubble terrazzo finish, and a two-toned pebbled driveway. As one of the first Fooks houses to depart from his mainstream modernist style (perhaps influenced by younger employee Michael Feldhagen, whose initials appear on the drawings), the house ushered in a more eclectic approach that would characterise Fooks' work thereafter. (*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 1961, the Alma Road house is one of the most striking and intact examples of Fooks' residential work from that period, marking an auspicious start to what would become the peak decade of his professional practice in Melbourne. (*Criterion H*)

History

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

The house at 386 Alma Road, Caulfield, was erected in 1961 for a clothing manufacturer and his wife, to a design by architect Ernest Fooks. Of second generation Polish migrant stock, the owner's father had migrated to Australia in the mid-1920s and married a fellow émigré of Latvian background. During the 1930s, the couple established a clothing manufacture business that re-emerged in the post-WW2 era as a drapery firm, based in Flinders Lane. Born in the mid-1930s, the future owner of the house in Alma Road joined his father's business in the mid-1950s but, by the end of the decade, had become director of his own clothing firm. Already married by then, he and his wife initially resided with his parents in Elwood. Intending to build a house for themselves, the couple acquired a vacant block on the north side of Alma Road, Caulfield North, which comprised one of "four elevated home sites" in a "superb subdivision" that were auctioned in October 1960 (*Age* 14/09/1960:2). The following year, they engaged architect Ernest Fooks to design them 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 a number of major projects for the Jewish community including schools, kindergarten and synagogues.

The working drawings for the Alma Road house bear the title block of “the Office of Dr Ernest Fooks”, and were prepared by a delineator identified by the initials MF. Without doubt, this was Michael Feldhagen (1932-2013), a young German architect who migrated to Australia in 1958 and, following a brief stint with the Housing Commission, had joined Fooks’ office by 1960. While the working drawings are undated (bearing the job number 626), an accompanying sheet of engineers’ drawings is dated November 1961. The consultant engineer on the job was Bulgarian-born Peter Stojanoff (1919-2003), a frequent collaborator of Melbourne’s European émigré architects.

For his Alma Road clients, Fooks proposed a largely split-level house on a carefully zoned C-shaped plan that was divided into two wings linked by a central entrance hall. The front wing, facing Alma Road, contained three bedrooms, two bathrooms and a maid’s room, while the north-facing rear wing containing living area, den and kitchen opening onto a terrace. At the lower level, there was a double garage to Alma Road and a stair lobby providing direct access to the upstairs foyer. Interestingly, the working drawings indicate a number of features that were revised when the house was actually built. A feature wall of random-coursed stone cladding along the side carport walls was omitted, while the front window spandrels, shown on the drawings as eight-inch square Besser blocks, were ultimately replaced by terrazzo panels with a rubble-like finish.

The family remained living in the Alma Road house for decades. During that period, the owner maintained a parallel career as an estate agent, initially working in association with a well-known St Kilda-based property developer, and later with several other leading firms. While the house appears to have remained unpublished during Fooks’ lifetime, it 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 386 Alma Road, Caulfield, is a two-storey flat-roofed orange brick house in the post-WW2 modernist style. It is expressed in a characteristic European Modernist manner, where the upper level (containing principal living areas) is given emphasis over a recessed lower level (containing carport, entry foyer and subsidiary spaces). The street façade is symmetrical at the upper level, divided into three bays that are framed by the eaves, projecting floor slab and fin-like piers. Each bay contains a full-width window (made up of fixed and operable sashes with elongated highlights above) and a spandrel of square terrazzo with random stonework. At ground level, a blank and slightly recessed brick wall extends across two-thirds of the façade, with a double carport to the left side that has timber lining boards to the rear wall and rows of small square openings along the side walls. The main entry, concealed from public view, is set into an alcove on the side (west) elevation.

The front garden incorporates matching orange brick retaining walls along the street boundary property line and the east side of the driveway, while the driveway itself is paved with pebbled concrete slabs in alternating pale-toned stripes.

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.

As with most architects in practice for several decades, Fooks' style changed over the years and several distinct phases can be identified. His earliest houses, dating from the late 1940s when wartime restrictions on building materials were still enforced, adopted conventional forms (eg hipped roofs) and materials (eg cream brick, terracotta tiles), with some concessions to modernism. From the early 1950s, he was able to confidently return to his European roots with houses in a stark hard-edged modernist fashion, characterised by a block-like expression, flat roofs with broad eaves, window walls, balconies and sun-decks. Following two stints of overseas travel in 1958 and 1960, Fooks' formerly hard-edged style mellowed to embrace other influences (from Japan, America and elsewhere), resulting in a more urbane version of modernism defined by the use of stark planar walls, floating roofs, screens and colonnades. In the early 1960s, his houses often incorporated playful embellishments, such as feature walls and decorative finishes, reflecting a then-fashionable sub-style of modernism that Robin Boyd denounced as "Featurism". As the decade progressed, Fooks' style became increasingly idiosyncratic, even expressionistic, typified by his own house in Caulfield (1966), with its slate-clad mansard rooflet and wavy timber ceilings. In the later 1960s and into the 1970s, his work drifted even further from the academic modernism of his younger days, sometimes even teetering on the brink of a post-modernist approach, with archways or other implied classical references.

Stylistically, the house at 386 Alma Road falls into Fooks' middle period, when his work was still very much in a slick modernist mode while starting to become tempered with other influences. The general expression of the house, as an elongated box elevated above a recessed undercroft, recurs in a few contemporaneous houses in Caulfield, including those at 3 Kiers Court (1961), 208 Kooyong Road (1964) and 185 Orrong Road (1964). While the last of these has a feature wall of textured concrete brickwork laid in stack bond, with matching hit-and-miss front fence, none of them reaches the degree of liveliness evident in the Alma Road house, with its terrazzo spandrels and pebbled driveway with tinted stripes. In this sense, the house perhaps has more in common with the independent work of Michael Feldhagen (who left Fooks' office in 1963 to establish his own practice), typified by a house at 30 Aroona Road, completed that year.

References

Office of Dr Ernest Fooks, "Proposed brick residence at Alma Road, Caulfield, for Mrs [redacted]", working drawings, undated. Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria.

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

"In profile: [redacted]", *Drive 'n Draw: Newsletter of the Glen Eira McKinnon Bowls Club*, November 2006.

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

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