

Victorian Heritage Database Report
Fooks House



Location:

32 Howitt Road,, CAULFIELD NORTH VIC 3161 - Property No B7157

Heritage Status / Level of Significance:

State

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number:

Listing Authority: HI

Statement of Significance:

What is significant? The residence at 32 Howitt Road, Caulfield was designed in 1964 (completed in 1966) by the Viennese architect and urban theorist, Dr Ernest Fooks, as his own house.

This house represents the most celebrated and architecturally resolved of Fooks' domestic designs, combining his analytical approach to planning with a stylistic interpretation of traditional Japanese architecture. Considered within the body of Fooks' 1960's house designs, Howitt Road epitomizes and best exemplifies premises central to Fooks' urban theory and methodology. Fooks controlled every design aspect of his residence, including custom-designed freestanding and built-in furniture, exterior sculpture walls, landscaping and plant selection, ensuring his theoretical concerns, especially those concerning integration, achieved expression in all aspects of the environment. The end product pays testimony to the design confidence and thoroughness of Dr Fooks: high quality of workmanship, uncompromising choices of materials, and cleverly resolved details are evident throughout. Howitt Road showcases the skills of the five cabinet-makers who crafted furniture and built-ins to Fooks' design requirements, including the respected furniture maker Shulim Krimper. All the specifically fabricated pieces remain as originally positioned in Fooks' layout.

The house gained broad appeal through frequent promotion in numerous 1960's and 1970's Australian home magazines. Fooks maintained his private practice until his death in 1985. Since then, the architect's house at 32 Howitt Road, and its contents have been kept intact and in excellent condition by his wife, Noemi.

How is it significant? The Fooks House is of architectural, aesthetic and historical significance at the State level.

Why is it significant? Architecturally and aesthetically, the Fooks house is a highly individual design, combining the architect's analytical approach to planning with an interpretation of many principles embedded in the vernacular of traditional Japanese architecture. The whole is an unusual and early example of interior and exterior spatial integration encompassing all elements including exterior landscaping, which is itself, unusually sculptural.

Howitt Road displays a rich array of innovative features fashioned in high quality, low maintenance finishes featuring custom designed furniture (often built-in), that create a sumptuous yet restrained effect. The house, landscaping and contents are also remarkable for their intactness, the whole remaining much as it was in 1966, with the addition of the Fooks' collection of decorative and ethnographic objects. It is a remarkable window into a very particular and fascinating time and place in Victoria's architectural and social history.

Historically, the Fooks house is important as perhaps the most celebrated, remarkably intact, and stylistically sophisticated example of an imported, innovative form of postwar domestic architecture, as practiced by a small group of émigré architects predominantly in the Caulfield precinct during the 1950's and 1960's. Fooks' local contemporaries from Central and Eastern Europe included Erwin Kaldor, Anatol Kagan, Robert Rosh, Michael.A.Feldhagen and John and Helena Holgar. These 'Caulfield modernists' produced a distinctive genre of domestic architecture grounded in the International style but delighting in rich textures and materials, such as exposed or textured brickwork, terrazzo, marble, patterned or ornamental surfaces, and custom-designed built-in timber joinery and furniture. This group of practitioners responded to emergent mid-century lifestyle considerations with entertaining areas and patio terraces in designs often distinguished by bold street facades. Many design elements intrinsic to their domestic work were subsequently adopted by mainstream building practices in suburban Melbourne.

The very popularity of the Caulfield genre influenced its reception among contemporary critical commentators, in particular Robin Boyd, who categorized Melbourne's 1960's suburban architecture as unnecessarily featurist. Since then, orthodox local architectural histories have tended to overlook the post-war domestic work of the Caulfield émigré group. With the exception of Frederick Romberg, postwar European émigré designers have generally not been the subject of serious historical or curatorial study until very recently.

Classified: 04/02/2002

Heritage Study / Consultant	
Construction Date Range	
Architect / Designer	
Municipality	GLEN EIRA CITY
Other names	
Hermes number	65641
Property number	B7157

This place/object may also be State heritage listed. Check the Victorian Heritage Database. For further details, contact the local Council or go to Planning Schemes Online