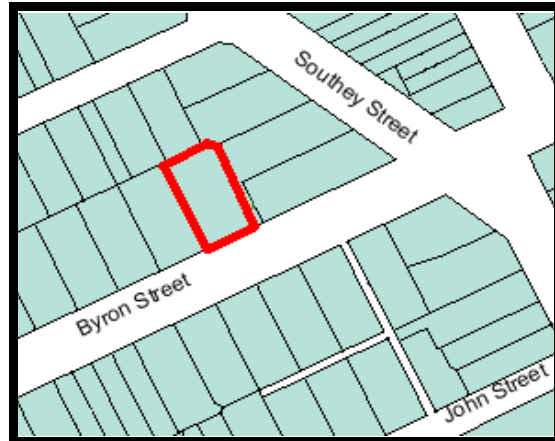


Identifier House
Formerly Les Erdi House



Not within a HO area

Address 32 Byron Street
ELWOOD
Category Residential: detached
Constructed 1962
Designer Kurt Popper

Significance

What is Significant?

The house at 32 Byron Street is a single-storey double-fronted brick villa in the typical modern style of the early 1960s. It was designed in 1962 by *émigré* Austrian architect Kurt Popper for hotel developer Les Erdi, who lived there for 25 years.

How is it Significant?

It is of architectural and aesthetic significance, and historic interest, to the City of Port Phillip

Why is it Significant?

Architecturally, the house is significant as a rare example in Elwood of the small-scale domestic work of Kurt Popper, a noted Austrian post-war *émigré* architect. Although he designed numerous houses in Brighton, St Kilda, Elsternwick and elsewhere, Popper's work in Elwood was more frequently manifest as high-rise apartment blocks (of which he was a pioneer in Melbourne) or religious buildings. More broadly, the house also rare as is one of a relatively small number of detached post-war houses in Elwood designed in an evocative contemporary style.

Aesthetically, the house is a fine and intact example of contemporary residential architecture of the early 1960s, characterised by stark volumetric form and flat roofs, enlivened in this instance by a Castlemaine slate feature wall and ornate metal grilles and handrails.

Historically, the house is of some interest as the home of Les Erdi, Hungarian *émigré* and prominent Melbourne hotelier in the 1960s and '70s. It also demonstrates an early connection between developer Erdi and architect Popper, who subsequently worked together on such projects as the Château Commodore Hotel in Lonsdale Street (1969-70)

Description

The house at 32 Byron Street is a single-storey double-fronted brick villa, each half having a discrete skillion roof with narrow timber-panelled eaves. The wider left half, which projects forward, has a continuous bay of six timber-framed windows, while the right half has a similar bay of three. A Castlemaine slate feature wall on the side of the projecting wing extends into a recessed entry porch, screen by a mild steel grille. The highly polished black front door has a central doorknob of spun aluminium, and glazed sidelights. The porch opens onto a crazy-paved concrete terrace, with matching slate cladding and mild steel handrail. A flight of steps lead down from the terrace to the street boundary, which is marked by a low brick wall. The terrace includes two distinctive shaped concrete planters on metal tripods, which are sympathetic to the era, if not actually original. The attached flat-roofed garage, with steel roller shutter, is original.

The house is externally intact, although the face brickwork has been painted grey.

History

This site was formerly occupied by a Victorian brick villa, one of several built in this part of Byron Street in the 1880s, which was occupied by the Chapman family for almost fifty years from 1914. In 1962, the site was acquired by Les Erdi, a Jewish *émigré* from Hungary who became a prominent Melbourne hotel developer. He commissioned local architect Kurt Popper, with whom Erdi would maintain an ongoing professional association, to design a new house for the site. According to the *Sands & McDougall Directory*, the house was completed by 1965. Erdi remained living there until he moved to Caulfield in the late 1980s.

Kurt Popper (born 1910), also an *émigré* Jew, trained as an architect in Austria before arriving in Melbourne (via Adelaide) in 1940. After working briefly with the Housing Commission, he began his own practice in 1946, concentrating on residential design and, particularly, multi-storey apartment blocks. A resident of Elsternwick, Popper designed many buildings in his local area: examples in Elwood includes the synagogue in Dickens Street, blocks of flats in Mitford, Tennyson and Dickens Street, and Les Erdi's house in Byron Street. Popper's association with Erdi culminated in a design for the Château Commodore Hotel in Lonsdale Street (1969-70).

Comparative Analysis

Amongst the many post-war *émigrés* who settled in Melbourne's southern suburbs in the 1940s and '50s, there were a number of talented architects (including Kurt Popper, Ernest Fooks, Anatol Kagan, and others) who went on to design many buildings in that area. While these architects designed many individual houses in suburbs such as Caulfield, East Brighton and Elsternwick, their work in Elwood was largely limited to multi-storey apartment blocks. Ernest Fooks, for example, designed several blocks of flats in Tennyson Street (No 56 in 1955; No 96 in 1956) but apparently no individual dwellings. Popper's work in Elwood also includes several blocks of flats (eg in Dickens Street, 1959, and Southey Street, c.1960) and some buildings for the local Hebrew congregation in Dickens Street (including synagogue, school and kindergarten buildings between 1956 and 1973). The Les Erdi house in Byron Street is the only currently recorded example of Popper's small-scale domestic work in Elwood. Stylistically, it has elements in common with some of the individual houses that Kurt Popper designed outside Elwood. Particularly pertinent comparison can be made with Popper's own house at 61-63 Gordon Street, Elsternwick (1956), one of several that he designed in this street, just outside the present study area in the adjacent City of Glen Eira.

Recommendations

recommended inclusions:

Schedule to the Heritage Overlay Table in the City of Port Phillip Planning Scheme

References

Sands & McDougall Directory. Various.

Harriet Edquist. *Kurt Popper*. Exhibition catalogue, 2002.

Harriet Edquist. *Ernest Fooks: Architect*.