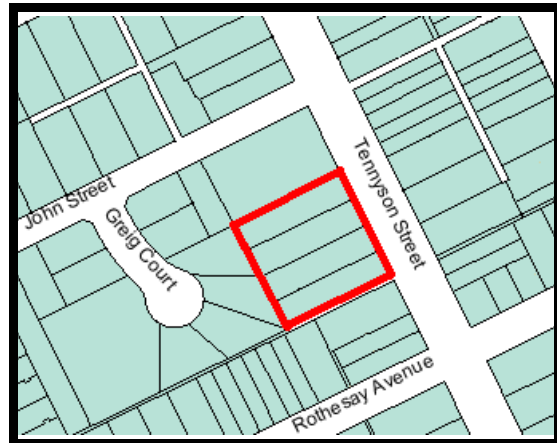


Identifier Flats
Formerly unknown



Not within a HO area

Address 63-69 Tennyson Street
ELWOOD
Constructed 1959-60
Category Residential: apartment
Designer Unknown

Significance

What is Significant?

The four blocks of flats at 63-39 Tennyson Street are of cream brick construction with skillion roofs, each comprising a three-storey rear portion with a double-storey front portion incorporating ground floor carpark. The front portions have broad window bays, parapet walls and side balconies, and the rear portions similar windows, open stairwells and narrower balconies. The flats were erected 1959-60 on part of the site of *Caenwood*, one of the last extensive mansion estates to survive in mid-twentieth century Elwood.

How is it Significant?

The flats are of aesthetic and architectural significance to the City of Port Phillip.

Why is it Significant?

Aesthetically and architecturally, the flats are significant as a fine, intact and unusual example of late 1950s apartment design. They exhibit a number of characteristics that stand out, both individually and collectively, from the countless contemporaneous flats that dominate the suburb: a notably elongated street frontage, relatively low-rise scale, symmetrical siting, and highly atypical massing and composition. The flats are enhanced by their setting, with landscaped spaces between the paired blocks, pathways edged with planted boxes, and the survival of some of the original letter boxes. With their broad frontage and unusual design, the flats remain as a prominent and distinctive element in the streetscape.

Description

The 28-unit development at 63-39 Tennyson Street comprises a row of four discrete but identical blocks of cream brick flats, in two symmetrical pairs. Each block comprises a three-storey rear portion (containing six flats), and a double-storey front portion with a single flat raised on concrete columns above an open carparking area. These front wings have skillion roofs, sloping from left to right, and wide bays of timber-framed windows with spandrel panels and, alongside, a solid brick panel that rises to form a parapet. To one side is a narrow balcony and to the other, a broad terrace, both enclosed by mild steel railings.

The flat-roofed rear wings barely register from the street, their principal elevations being to the side, where they overlook the common pathway between each pair of blocks. Each wing is expressed as two separate volumes (containing three flats) with an open stairwell between; the stairwell has a projecting concrete landing, while the flanking flats each have a full-height timber framed window opening onto very narrow concrete slab balcony with metal railing.

The pathways between each pair of blocks extend back to the street, lined with planter boxes in matching cream brick. Those blocks at Nos 67 and 69 retain their original pole-mounted timber letterboxes, in a continuous row with sloping lids.

History

The site on the south-west corner of John and Tennyson Street was formerly occupied by *Caenwood*, one of Elwood's last surviving mansion estates. Occupied by John Booth from the mid-1890s, the mansion was converted into a guest house after his widow's death in 1943, but otherwise retained a notably substantial curtilage. The vast Tennyson Street frontage was finally subdivided in the late 1950s, creating four large allotments. The first (now No 63) was gazetted in November 1959, followed by three others (Nos 65-69) in July 1960. These developed quickly, with new flats appearing in the *Sands & McDougall Directory* for 1961. The block at No 63, the first to be completed, was listed in the directory with three occupants, while the remaining three blocks were listed simply as 'flats'. The following year, however, the directory listed the names of four residents at No 63, and six residents each at Nos 65, 67 and 69. Of some interest is the fact that exactly half of the 22 tenants listed at that time were married (or widowed) women.

The *Caenwood* mansion, meanwhile, remained on a reduced (but still generous) allotment at the rear of the new flats, now with its principal frontage to John Street. It was finally demolished in 1966 and the grounds carved up to form Grieg Court - Elwood's only 1960s subdivision. The original stables were initially retained on Lot 4 (No 6), but were subsequently demolished during the 1970s for a large block of flats.

Comparative Analysis

Amongst the countless 1960s flats in Elwood and St Kilda, there are those that are well-considered designs, obviously the work of talented architects, and there are others that are more utilitarian, less well resolved, or the work of lesser designers or speculative developers. The example at 63-69 Tennyson Street stands out amongst the many mediocre examples for its unusually elongated street frontage and highly atypical form. While it has no directly comparable examples within the municipality, but can be broadly compared with a number of other architect-designed low-rise flats with similarly elongated street frontages and an unusual articulation of balconies and fenestration. Some notable examples in East St Kilda included *Rocklea Gardens* at 46-50 Hotham Street (identified in the City of Port Phillip heritage study as a building of individual significance) and 22 Orange Grove (identified as a contributory building within the proposed Orange Grove precinct).

Recommendations

recommended inclusions:

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

References

Sands & McDougall Directory. 1960 onwards.

Lodged Plans Nos 50909 (November 1959), 51840 to 51842 (July 1960)