

City of Port Phillip Heritage Review

Place name: House
Other names: -

Citation No:
893



Address: 6A Dickens Street, St Kilda

Category: Residential: House

Style: Post-war: Moderne

Constructed: 1954

Designer: Leslie J.W. Reed

Amendment: TBA

Comment: Revised citation

Heritage Precinct: St Kilda
Botanical Gardens & Environs

Heritage Overlay: **HO7**

Graded as: Significant

Victorian Heritage Register: No

Significance

What is significant?

This Moderne-style, two-storey, brick house, designed by Leslie J.W. Reed, and built in 1954 for Mr. and Mrs. J. Rubenstein, at 6A Dickens Street, St Kilda is significant.

Alterations and additions are not significant.

How is it significant?

The house at 6A Dickens Street, St Kilda is of local aesthetic significance to the City of Port Phillip.

Why is it significant?

This house is of aesthetic significance as a fine and intact example of a dwelling designed in the Streamline Moderne-style. It is a relatively late example of this style, which demonstrates the plainer Modern aesthetic that became more popular in housing in the Post-war period. It adopts a considered approach in its composition, which is a series of curved volumes, with these volumes interconnected by the curved brick balustrade of the first-floor balcony and its curved concrete hood that extends above the window at right. This first-floor balcony forms the porch over the entrance, and timber double doors, each with glazed panels, access the porch and the first-floor balcony. The curved streamline Moderne aesthetic is reinforced with the steel frame windows which also have a curved form, most notably the large semi-circular window on the projecting bay at left, and curved glazed panels at their corners. Other detailing on the façade of note includes a wrought iron balustrade, with a restrained waved-pattern, on the balcony, and the street number 6A fixed to the wall beside the porch. (Criterion E)

Thematic context

Victoria's framework of historical themes

6. Building towns, cities and the garden state: 6.3 Shaping the suburbs, 6.7 Making homes for Victorians

Port Phillip thematic environmental history

5. Buildings and cultural landscapes: 5.2 Shaping the suburbs (5.2.2 Private development), 5.3 Diverse Housing (5.3.3 Suburban bungalows)

History

Contextual history

Private development in the City of Port Phillip began from the time of the first sales of Crown land in the 1840s and 1850s. The gradual development of infrastructure, including roads, public transport networks and utilities, paved the way for increasing development of private land. Private subdivision within the broad framework set out by Hoddle's survey saw neighbourhoods in the City of Port Phillip grow into populated, thriving communities.

Significant population growth after World War I created a demand for housing, leading to the subdivision (or re-subdivision) of the remaining pockets of vacant or underdeveloped land in the City of Port Phillip. This included vacant land previously thought to be unsuitable for housing, such as in Fishermans Bend, as well as the re-development of the remaining mansion estates. Apart from the mansion estate subdivisions, there were two major interwar subdivisions at either end of the City of Port Phillip: The 'Garden City' estates in Port Melbourne and the Brunings Estate subdivision in Ripponlea.

By the early post-war period most of the available land in Port Phillip had been built upon and new residential development was limited to the remaining pockets of vacant land or as replacements of older houses.

House, 6A Dickens Street

The development of the St Kilda Botanic Gardens from c.1860 led to the surrounding area becoming a desirable residential neighbourhood. By the end of the nineteenth century Blessington, Tennyson, Dickens and Herbert streets were lined with substantial villas, and mansions set in large grounds. Dickens Street was almost fully developed in 1895 and in the early twentieth century additional building lots were created by the subdivision of some of the original mansion estates.

In 1897 there were only three houses on the north side of Dickens Street between Brighton Road and Tennyson Street. They were a villa at no.6 (which still exists today – see Citation 323), another substantial villa at no. 10 and Pladda, a mansion, which occupied a large allotment at the corner of Tennyson Street (MMBW).

As shown on Figure 1, this property formed part of the grounds of the house at no.10. Redevelopment of the site began in the interwar period when Strand Court, the block of flats now numbered 8A, was constructed along the western edge in 1933 (*The Argus*, 16 November 1933, p.12 'Designing flats. Beauty and convenience. Importance of appearance'). Two years later, the original house was demolished and replaced by the present house at no.8. Archibald Ikin was the architect for both buildings. It appears this site remained part of the grounds of no.8 until 1954 when the present house was constructed for Mr. & Mrs. J. Rubenstein. Leslie J.W. Reed was the architect (BP). The Rubenstein family were still the occupiers in 1970 (SM).

The Rubenstein family were active in the local community. During the late 1950s and early 1960s they hosted fund raising events here including suppers, dances and concerts for Jewish community organisations

including the South Judean League Women's Auxiliary (*The Australian Jewish News*, 8 February 1957, p.6) and the 3rd St Kilda (Dangelow's Own) Scout Group (*The Australian Jewish News*, 22 May 1959, p.8).

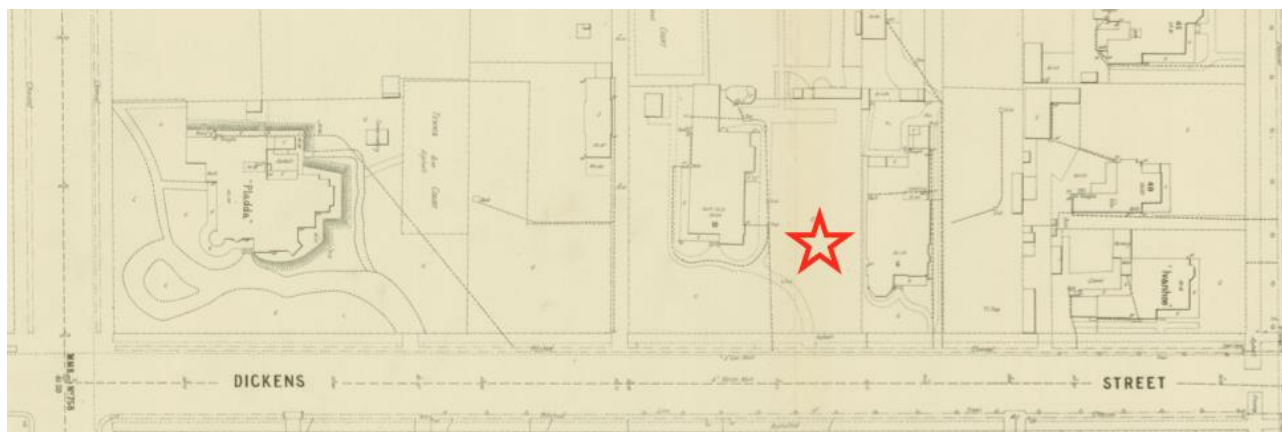


Figure 1: Detail of 1897 MMBW plan, with the location of the present house indicated by the red star

Leslie J.W. Reed

Leslie J.W. Reed (1893-1964) commenced practice in about 1914 and became registered as an architect in 1923. Like many of his contemporaries, Reed designed in a range of popular historical revival styles including Spanish Mission, Mediterranean, Georgian and Tudor/Old English before finally embracing Modernism by the postwar period. Most of his work was residential comprising houses and flats, as well as some small industrial and commercial projects. Reed continued to practise into the early 1960s until shortly before his death in 1964 at the age of 71 years (Built Heritage PL).

Leslie J.W. Reed's career in Port Phillip is represented by several houses and flats, and at least one commercial development spanning three decades. In 1925 he designed a house in Westbury Street but it has been demolished. His earliest extant work is the Spanish Mission style house at 11A Charnwood Road, St Kilda (Citation 873) which was constructed in 1928 and his last known project in Port Phillip was a pair of apartment blocks at 31-33 Pine Avenue, Elwood (Citation 2339), built in 1959-60. Perhaps his most notable work in Port Phillip is Mid Mar, the Moderne style duplex at 48 & 48A Brighton Road, Balaclava (Citation 303), built in 1937, which features distinctive patterned brickwork and is complemented by an original low brick front fence.

References

Built Heritage Pty Ltd, 'Leslie J.W. Reed', *Dictionary of Unsung Architects*, www.builtheritage.com.au (viewed 29 March 2021)

Melbourne & Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) Detail Plan no.1382, dated 1897

Port Phillip Thematic Environmental History (TEH) **Version 1, July 2020**

St Kilda Council building permit (BP) no. U.1842, 10 March 1954

Sands & McDougall Directories (SM) 1925-1970

Description

This house is a late example of the Streamline Moderne style. It is significant for its distinct plan, expressed in the form of the building, and, in particular, its façade that is a series of curved volumes. These volumes are interconnected by the curved balustrade of the first-floor balcony and its curved concrete hood, which extends above the window at right. The balcony forms the porch over the entrance, which has timber double doors, each with glazed panels, and another pair access the first-floor balcony.

The Streamline Moderne aesthetic is reinforced by the steel frame windows which also have a curved form, most notably the large semi-circular window on the projecting bay at left. The windows have curved panels

of glazing at their corners. Contributing to the Moderne aesthetic is a wrought iron balustrade with a restrained waved pattern on the balcony, and the wrought iron street number 6A fixed to the wall beside the porch. The cream face brick is plain for the exception of a string course of manganese brick towards the parapet.

The house has a relatively deep set back from the street. Much of this setback is paved in concrete. A rendered brick fence with a curved profile, and with vehicle entries at each end, extends along the street boundary. The vehicle entry at left leads to a drive to the side of the house. Visible at the end of the drive is a single storey building that is faced in cream brick.

The house is in good condition and has a very high degree of external intactness.

Comparative analysis

Streamline Moderne emerged in the early 1930s and quickly became a popular style for flats because of its modern and progressive image. Streamline Moderne buildings generally have a horizontal emphasis, sometimes with an emphatic vertical 'anchor' (often stairwells or chimneys) to balance the composition. Further horizontal lines could be added by roof parapets (partially concealing the ubiquitous hip roof), and even window muntins. Windows were often located at corners and there is frequent use of curved balconies and building corners. Ornamentation is stripped down, and metal elements such as balcony railings are quite simple with clean lines. Smooth render and clinker bricks were popular at this time, though more avant-garde architects were already turning to cream and apricot bricks by the 1930s. The later, or more 'advanced', examples also had steel windows, and show a transition to the International ('Modern' or 'Functionalist') style.

The house at 6A Dickens Street, St Kilda is a fine and intact example of the Streamline Moderne-style. It is a relatively late example of this style, which demonstrates the plainer Modern aesthetic that became more popular in housing in the post-war period. It is notable for the considered approach in its composition, which is a series of curved volumes, with these volumes interconnected by the curved brick balustrade of the first-floor balcony and its curved concrete hood that extends above the window at right.

It compares favourably with other post-war Moderne houses included in the HO in Port Phillip:

- 48 Westbury Street, St Kilda East (1947) (Citation 957, Individual HO277)
- 25 Eildon Road, St Kilda (1949-50) Dr. Ernest Fooks, architect (No citation, Contributory within HO5 Precinct)
- 101A Hotham Street, St Kilda East (1950) Kurt Popper, architect (Citation 2420).

Assessment

This place has been assessed in accordance with the processes and guidelines outlined in the Australia ICOMOS *Charter for Places of Cultural Heritage Significance* (The Burra Charter) 2013, using the Hercon criteria.

Recommendations

Retain in the Heritage Overlay with paint controls.

Primary source

Peter Andrew Barrett, *HO7 Elwood St Kilda Balaclava Ripponlea Precinct heritage review Stage 2: Review of existing heritage citations, 2021*

Other studies

Andrew Ward & Associates, *City of Port Phillip Heritage Review*, 1998

Robert Peck von Hartel Trethowan, *St Kilda 20th century architectural study*, Volume 3, 1992

Other images

