

City of Port Phillip Heritage Review

Place name: Saret
Other names: House

Citation No:
2066



Address: 31 Mitford Street & 4 Mitford Place, St Kilda

Heritage Precinct: St Kilda Botanical Gardens & Environs

Category: Residential: House and garage

Heritage Overlay: **HO7**

Style: Interwar: Mediterranean

Graded as: Significant

Constructed: 1930, 1933

Victorian Heritage Register: No

Designer: Laurence A. Holzer

Amendment: TBA

Comment: Revised citation

Significance

What is significant?

Saret, a substantial and well-detailed two-storey, inter-war, Mediterranean-style villa designed by Laurence A. Holzer, and constructed in 1930 for Raymond Ellison, at 31 Mitford Street, St Kilda is significant.

Contributory elements include the brick gateposts and their wrought iron gates, and brick paving at the pedestrian entry; the flagstone path and low stone wall leading to the entry; and the former chauffeur's quarters and garage at 4 Mitford Place.

Non-original alterations and additions are not significant.

How is it significant?

Saret at 31 Mitford Street, St Kilda is of local historic and aesthetic significance to the City of Port Phillip.

Why is it significant?

Saret, with its associated chauffeur's quarters and garage, is historically significant as it demonstrates the continuing desirability of St Kilda as a middle and upper-class residential area in the early to mid-twentieth century. (Criterion A)

Saret is of aesthetic significance as a fine, intact and substantial example of an inter-war house in the Mediterranean style. It has massing, materiality and detailing that is synonymous with this style, including its cuboid form and hip roof massing in an asymmetrical composition, and materiality of rendered walls and unglazed terracotta tile roofing, all evocative of the villas of the Mediterranean. Detailing further reinforcing

the vernacular housing of Southern Europe includes its projecting first floor balcony with wrought iron railing, arched entrance porch, and formal gateway flanked with Roman bricks and a wrought iron gate, and the flagstone path. The former chauffeur's quarters and garage are situated adjacent to the rear garden at 4 Mitford Place. This is a small two-storey building with a hip tile roof. The walls, including the lower section of the chimney, have been refinished in smooth render. The chauffeur's quarters and the house have multi-pane windows with timber shutters, and these assist in providing a visual relationship between the two buildings. (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 Brunnings Estate subdivision in Ripponlea.

Saret

The area surrounding the St Kilda Botanic Gardens has been a desirable residential neighbourhood since the Gardens were first established in 1860 and by the end of the nineteenth century Blessington, Tennyson, Dickens and Herbert streets were lined with substantial villas, and mansions set in large grounds.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Mitford Street between Barkly and Dickens streets was partially developed and contained several villas (MMBW). However, the economic depression of the 1890s halted development for over a decade and development only recommenced following the opening in 1906 of the electric tramway from St Kilda Station to Elwood and Brighton Beach via Mitford Street and Broadway. Development was slow at first but improvements to the route including progressive duplication from 1913 stimulated development and encouraged the building of new houses and flats, many of which replaced the older houses.

Saret was constructed in 1930 for Raymond Ellinson and his family. It is likely that Laurence A. Holzer was the architect, as he designed the chauffeur's garage and quarters that was added in 1933 (*The Age*, 1 February 1933, tender notice), as well as the additions to that building in 1958 when Ellinson was still the owner. The chauffeur's garage and quarters was designed in a complementary style to the house that included 'American Spanish T.C. tiles' (T.C. presumably Terra Cotta) for the roof (BP).



Prior to moving into this house, the Ellinson family had lived at no.13 Mitford Street for some years. The Ellinson family attended the St Kilda Hebrew Congregation Synagogue in Charnwood Road where Raymond was President in 1940-42.

Raymond Ellinson was the manager director of Ellinson Bros Pty Ltd., established with his brother Louis just prior to World War I, which manufactured clothing. Originally located in Queensberry Street, the firm established a new factory near the south-west corner of Swanston and Grattan streets in 1923. Additions were made in 1926 and again in 1928. Laurence Holzer designed the 1928 additions and may have designed the original factory and 1926 addition (*The Argus*, 14 July 1928, p.4). In 1933 when the factory was extended (Holzer was again the architect) Mr. Ellinson entertained the firm's 350 employees and friends at a supper and dance. The addition enabled the employment of at least 200 extra people, and it was their 'proud boast' at the time that not one of their employees had lost a day's work throughout the Depression (*The Age*, 3 April 1933, p.8). During World War Two the firm began making military uniforms for the Defence Department and in 1943 opened a new factory at Sale exclusively for this purpose (*Gippsland Times*, 25 November 1943, p.1; *The Age*, 4 November 1944, p.3). A 1954 company advertisement for Sandhurst Sports Coats advised they were manufactured from Australia's finest tweed (*The Herald*, 16 March 1954, p.15).

Laurence A. Holzer

Little is known about the architect Laurence A. Holzer (R. Arch, R.A.) whose address in 1933 was 144 A'Beckett Street, Melbourne. In 1958 his (presumably residential) address was 21 Trafalgar Road, Camberwell. Holzer was active during the interwar period and until about 1921 was employed by the firm of Grainger, Little and Barlow and during his time there he designed a new school for the Sacred Heart Parish at Sandringham (*Advocate*, 27 January 1921, p.15). After establishing his own practice in about 1922 he designed a range of commercial and residential buildings including a brick and tile residence in 'The Ridge', Camberwell (1922), a brick shop at Riversdale Road, Glenferrie (1926), conversion of picture theatre and brick additions in East Brunswick (1926), extensions to a Cereal Factory at Brunswick (1926), a Hosiery Mill at Carlton (1931, in association with Peck & Kemter), flats at South Yarra (1934), additions to a furniture store in Camberwell Road, Auburn (1935), and Maisonettes in Pleasant Road and flats in Eddlington Road, Hawthorn (1940).

The only other building in Port Phillip known to have been designed by Holzer is the St Colman's school and hall in Carlisle Street, Balaclava (Citation 2078).

References

- Lewis, Nigel & Aitken, Richard, *City of Malvern Heritage Study. Appendix 1: Architects of Malvern*, 1992
Melbourne & Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) Detail Plan no.1380, dated 1897
Port Phillip Thematic Environmental History (TEH) Version 1, July 2020
St Kilda Council building permit (BP) nos. 7746, dated 9 May 1930 (house), no. 8223, dated 1933 (chauffeur's garage and quarters); 57/327, dated 7 July 1958
Sands & McDougall Directories (SM) 1930, 1935, 1940

Description

Saret is a fine and substantial, two-storey, inter-war, Mediterranean-style villa, with a hip roof clad in unglazed terracotta Cordoba tiles and walls finished in a textured render with an ogee profile moulding around the top at the eaves.

The façade of the house is asymmetrically composed. A bay projects towards Mitford Street off centre on the elevation, and this has on its first floor a tall double-hung sash window opening to a small projecting balcony with a wrought iron balustrade. The balcony is supported by scrolled consoles, and the base of the balcony forms a hood to a tall double-hung sash window on the ground floor. To the right of the projecting bay is a patio. A shallow projecting bay, capped with unglazed terracotta Cordoba tiles, forms a backdrop

to the patio, and has a broad central double-hung sash window, flanked by narrower double-hung sash windows. The first floor has three double-hung sash windows and there is another window in the side of the projecting bay, above a multi-pane timber door with a shallow bracketed hood. All the windows on the front elevations are multi-paned on the upper and lower sashes and most have louvered timber shutters.

The parapeted entrance porch is to the left of the projecting bay, and this contains an arched opening that is enclosed with a wrought iron gate. The arched opening is reached by two steps and is detailed with a moulded architrave around the opening, and on the upper walls circular motifs. This porch is on axis with the original pedestrian gateway on the Mitford Street boundary. Above the porch is a single double-hung sash window with timber shutters, and to right of the porch in the side of projecting bay are double-hung sash windows on the ground and first floors on either side of the plain chimney, one of several on the building.

The house has a deep setback from Mitford Street behind a garden. This deep setback, added with a high timber paling fence along the street boundary, gives the house a recessive quality from the public realm. At left the pedestrian gateway is flanked by original pillars detailed with Roman-style brick, and has an ornate wrought iron gate. Glazed illuminated panels, now damaged, with lettering 'Saret' and the number '31' are fitted to the upper parts of the pillars, which have a shallow setback paved with narrow bricks. The recess of the gateway is finished in Roman bricks. A flagstone path leads from the pedestrian gate to the entrance porch. A low stone wall along one side of this flagstone path is not original.

The former chauffeur's quarters and garage is situated adjacent to the rear garden at 4 Mitford Place. This is a small two storey building with a hip tile roof. Original features include the multi-pane window with timber shutters at first floor in the north elevation, and one plain rendered chimney, which retains the original textured render above the roof. The walls including the lower section of the chimney have been refinished in smooth render and there are additions to the east and south elevations.

Comparative analysis

Following the economic depression of the 1890s, there was concern that inner Melbourne was becoming overcrowded. Terrace houses fell out of favour, as they were perceived as being cold and dark with limited garden space. Instead, detached bungalows became the most popular form of housing from the Federation/Edwardian period onward.

This concept of a 'garden suburb' (as distinct from the consciously-planned model Garden City estates that came later – see below), comprising a reasonably spacious single-family dwelling in a secluded garden setting, became the ideal expression of urban living in the early twentieth century. Facilitated by improvements to public transport networks, particularly the electrification of the tram and railway networks, this housing defines the suburbs that developed during this era, including much of Middle Park, St Kilda East, Elwood and Ripponlea (TEH).

The Mediterranean Revival style appeared in Australia in the late 1910s in response to the temperate climate and sunlight, which were conducive to 'an architecture of simple shapes, light and shade, bleached pastel colours and accents of classical detail', according to Leslie Wilkinson, who helped popularise the style in Australia after his arrival in 1918. Through his influence, and that of architect Hardy Wilson, the style gained popularity and was first applied to domestic architecture in upper and upper-middle class suburbs. In the 1920s, many saw Mediterranean-based design as a potential basis for a future national style.

The Mediterranean style is related to the Interwar Spanish Mission style, but is intentionally designed with subtler features, in a simple yet elegant form. Details take on an austere classical or Renaissance mode, which subtly evokes a vaguely Mediterranean feel, in comparison to the more blatant and bold Iberian features of Spanish Mission architecture and shares some characteristics with the Georgian Revival. In particular, inter-war Mediterranean domestic architecture is characterised by symmetry and incorporates pergolas, balconies, arcaded loggia and a formal entrance, with sidelights and highlights, while Tuscan columns appear in verandahs and porches. The exterior is lightly bagged or cement-rendered. Large

double-hung sashes have small panes with narrow wooden glazing bars, which reflect Georgian principles, often with louvered shutters.

Saret is the finest example of an inter-war house in the Mediterranean style in Port Phillip. It is notable for its elegant proportions and fine detailing and overall high degree of integrity, which includes original pedestrian gates, and the flagstone path and low stone wall within the garden. The former chauffeur's quarters and garage is also of note as a rare surviving example, which demonstrates the status of the Ellinson family. Saret compares with 11 Charnwood Road, St Kilda (Citation 872). Designed by Lewis Levy and constructed in 1927, 11 Charnwood Road is notable for the robust massing created by the ground floor arcades that contrast with the trabeated first floor openings of the loggia. These shade-giving elements of the loggia and the deep roof eaves are important characteristics of the style.

There are relatively few other examples of houses in the Mediterranean style in Port Phillip. Of the known examples most (for example, 57 Alexandra Street, 2-4 Mooltan Avenue and 5 and 15 Wavenhoe Avenue, all within the HO391 St Kilda East: Murchison Street & Wavenhoe Avenue precinct) are single storey and less impressive than Saret or 11 Charnwood Road.

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



Original pedestrian entry gates.



Above: Flagstone path leading to entrance with low stone wall at right.

Below: former Chauffeur's quarters and garage at 4 Mitford Place.

