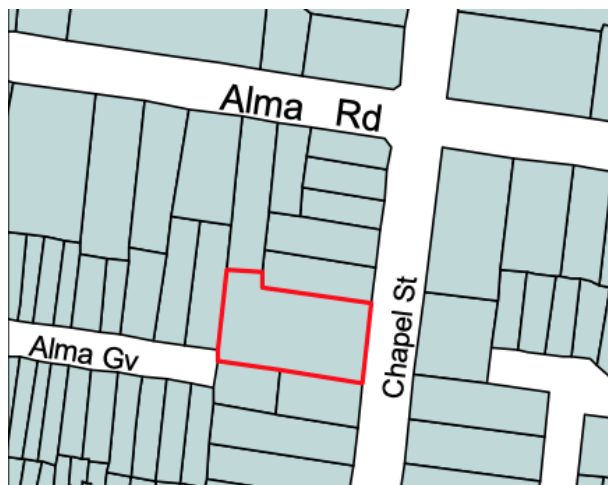


City of Port Phillip Heritage Review

Place name: Devon Court
Other names: Flats

Citation No:
460



Address: 45-47 Chapel Street, St Kilda

Heritage Precinct: Not applicable

Category: Residential: Flats

Heritage Overlay: HO351

Style: Interwar: Moderne

Graded as: Significant

Constructed: 1937, 1946

Victorian Heritage Register: No

Designer: Alder & Lacey

Amendment: TBA

Comment: Revised citation

Significance

What is significant?

Devon Court, designed by Alder & Lacey and constructed in two stages in 1937 and 1946, at 45-47 Chapel Street, St Kilda is significant. The contributory features are the three flat blocks, garages, and the low brick and render front fence and privet hedge.

Alterations and additions are not significant.

How is it significant?

Devon Court at 45-47 Chapel Street, St Kilda is of local aesthetic significance to the City of Port Phillip.

Why is it significant?

Devon Court is of aesthetic significance as a fine and intact example of a late inter-war block of flats designed in the interwar Streamline Moderne-style. Notable features include the flowing, curvilinear rendered bands extending the full length of each block and encompassing small balconies and the massive stair towers with their unusual, deep bullnose moulding over each entrance door. The large ovolo moulding at the angles and glass block panels articulate the verticality of these towers, while the contrasting bands of render and pink brickwork create a horizontal emphasis, an interplay characteristic of the Moderne style. The setting and aesthetic qualities of the flats are complemented by the front fence and hedge. (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 (5.3.5 Higher-density housing)

History

Contextual history

The early twentieth century saw a marked decline in the viability of large mansions across Melbourne's suburbs in general, but it was particularly felt in the more affluent inner southern suburbs such as St Kilda and Brighton, where land was highly sought-after by a new generation of homebuilders seeking smaller detached dwellings, duplexes or flats. The trend toward higher-density living in St Kilda began with the conversion of mansions and terrace houses into boarding houses in the early 1900s and continued with the first purpose-built flats that appeared at the beginning of World War I. A 1919 newspaper article noted:

It was held to be no longer necessary to labour with a house and all the domestic drudgery that entailed when by borrowing Continental ideas, people who could afford it could live in flats... Land has become so valuable the villa of the Victorian days, in a crowded thoroughfare, no longer shows anything like an adequate return of interest on the land's present capital value. It is more profitable to pull the house erected thereon down, and to erect flats. When the flat became popular in England the experiment was made in St Kilda, and it did not take long to discover there was a genuine demand for flats (Pahran Telegraph, 18 October 1919, p.4)

Higher-density housing in the form of boarding houses paved the way to flat development. Flats first appeared in Melbourne around 1906 and slowly spread to the suburbs. They followed a strong pattern of development, appearing close to transport routes, particularly along or within walking distance of tram routes, to allow easy travel to the city. With their proximity to the beach and parklands, good public transport networks and seaside character, the suburbs of St Kilda and Elwood were especially popular locations for flats. Flats became a dominant characteristic of St Kilda and Elwood, and still make up a high percentage of dwellings in those areas. They include some of the earliest surviving flats in Melbourne, some of the best examples of architectural styles and types of flats, and as a group demonstrate the increasing popularity of the lifestyle of flat living from the early twentieth century (TEH).

There was huge growth in flat development in St Kilda and Elwood in the 1920 and 1930s, attracting migrants, single people, and people of diverse sexuality. 370 In 1920 there were 527 purpose-built flats in 92 blocks in St Kilda municipality. By 1925 this had increased to 884 flats in 164 blocks, including large complexes such as the Ardoch flats in Dandenong Road. By 1935, despite a slowing of development due to the Great Depression, there were more than 2,800 flats in over 500 blocks. A further 2,000 flats were added by 1940; however, the onset of World War II slowed development. Nonetheless, by 1947 St Kilda contained 5,500 purpose-built flats, a quarter of all flats in Melbourne (TEH).

Devon Court

The electrification in 1926 of the Chapel Street cable tram encouraged the building of flats along the route. Between 1927 and 1940 no fewer than 17 blocks of flats were built in Chapel Street between Dandenong Road and Brighton Road (BR, SM).

Plans for Devon Court were prepared in 1937 by Alder and Lacey, architects and engineers, for the then owners, Alma Estates Pty Ltd. The complex at that stage comprised two blocks arranged along a central

driveway leading to a series of lock-up garages at the rear of the site. The larger of the two blocks, to the south of the site (Block A) contained four flats (3 x two-bedroom and 1 x one-bedroom) on each of two floors. Block B to the north contained 3 x two-bedroom flats on each of two floors with two laundries on the ground floor. Garages were at the rear. The builder was F. Shillabeer & Son (BP).

In 1946 Alma Estates Pty Ltd again engaged Alder & Lacy to design a third block situated in the north west corner of the site behind Block B adjoining one of the garage blocks. This contained a further four one-bedroom flats over two levels (BP).

References

O'Hanlon, Seamus, 'Home together, Home apart: Boarding house, hostel and flat life in Melbourne c.1900-1940', PhD Thesis, History Department, Monash University

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

St Kilda Council building permit (BP) nos. 9847, 6 December 1937 and U.134, 30 April 1946

St Kilda Council building register (BR), entries for Chapel Street 1925 to 1940

Sands & McDougall Directories (SM) 1930, 1935, 1940

Sawyer, Terry, (1982) 'Residential flats in Melbourne: the development of a building type to 1950', Honours thesis, Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning, The University of Melbourne

Description

Devon Court comprises two blocks arranged along a central concrete driveway leading to a series of lock-up garages at the rear of the site, with a third block situated in the north west corner. The larger of the two blocks, to the south of the site contains four flats (3 x two-bedroom and 1 x one-bedroom) on each of two floors. Block B to the north contains 3 x two-bedroom flats on each of two floors (originally with two laundries on the ground floor). Behind Block B is the 1946 block which contains four one-bedroom flats over two levels.

Each block is constructed of pink-red brick and has a hipped tile roof with deep flat eaves and show the influence of the interwar Streamline Moderne style. This is expressed in the broad rendered band at mid-wall height with incised 'speed lines' contrasting with the brick walls that creates a strong horizontal emphasis, which is balanced by the prominent expressed parapeted stairwells that break through the eaves line. These feature unusual bulbous awnings over the entry and curved cantilevered balconies on either side of the stairwell, which has glass block glazing, chamfered corners with an ovolo profile. The Moderne style is further emphasised by the corner windows with horizontal muntins, the plain brick chimneys and the lack of ornamentation. While the smaller block to the rear is simpler, it incorporates similar details including the rendered band and curved balconies on either side of the central stairwell.

At the front of the site is an original low brick wall with expressed dwarf piers with rendered caps in front of privet hedge, which is a typical interwar planting.

The complex is in good condition and has a 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.

I.G. Anderson was one of the foremost proponents of the Moderne style in Victoria and in 1934 he designed Avenue Court flats at 64-66 Victoria Avenue, Albert Park, which was one of the first Moderne flats in Port Phillip (the only known earlier example in Port Phillip is The Royal designed by Archibald Ikin in 1933 at 1 Robe Street, St Kilda). A newspaper article about Avenue Court described how it was:

... of more than ordinary interest as indicating how deeply the machine era is impressing itself upon residential work. Chief among the characteristics of the building is a certain squareness of mass and outline, a definite emphasis on the verticals, a bareness of walls and a paucity of ornament. Actually, however, added architectural interest in this and many of the new types adopted for flat construction is obtained by combining the several structural elements to ensure the bold and lively play of light and shadow. (*The Age*, 1 May 1934, p.4 'Building & Architecture. The Continental Flat. Radical changes in design').

Anderson would later design Park Gate, 352 Albert Road, South Melbourne (c.1940, no citation).

Other fine examples of the Streamline Moderne style in Port Phillip include Windermere, 49 Broadway, Elwood designed in 1936 by J.H. Esmond Dorney (which is included on the Victorian Heritage Register, Citation 311), Del Marie, 4 St Leonard's Avenue, St Kilda (1936, Stuart M. Hall, Citation 221), La Rochelle, 1A Dickens Street (1936, W.H. Merritt, Citation 2439), and Taradale 229 Brighton Road, Elwood (1936, Walter Mason, Citation 442).

Devon Court compares well to the above examples. As well as the bold massing, which establishes a tension between the horizontal and vertical elements and especially for the stairwells. The materiality, massing and detailing make as a sum a fine architectural composition that remains highly intact and is complemented by the original front fence and early landscaping.

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

City of Port Phillip, *HO7 Elwood St Kilda Balaclava Ripponlea Precinct heritage review Stage 2: Review of existing heritage citations (Part 2)*, 2022

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

