
Julius Wachs House

Location

5 Chatsworth Avenue,, BRIGHTON VIC 3186 - Property No B7224

Municipality

BAYSIDE CITY

Level of significance

Local

Heritage Listing

National Trust

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - July 4, 2005

What is Significant? The Wachs House is a large single-storey red brick house with a flat roof and elegant minimalist facade articulated by a row of four deep brick piers. It was built in 1962 for Polish immigrants Julius and Dorothy Wachs, to the design of local architect Peter Hooks.

How is it Significant? The Wachs House is of considerable aesthetic and architectural significance at a Local level.

Why is it Significant? Architecturally, the house is perhaps the finest surviving example in the municipality of the work of important local architect Peter Hooks, who was born in Brighton, built his own house there in 1948, and remained living there until only a few years before his retirement in 1980. Hooks trained in the offices of some of the more notable Melbourne architectural firms of the 1950s, including Mussen McKay & Potter, Bates Smart & McCutcheon, and Eggleston McDonald before commencing his own practice in 1958. His residential work is characterised by a strong tendency to design from first principles, and to reflect the client rather than imposing any particularly style of his own. An undeservedly little-known architect - principally because of his own disinterest in having his work published or submitted for awards - Hooks is perhaps best known for the series of highly-regarded and atypically luxurious project houses which he designed for Leighton Homes in the second half of the 1960s.

The house is important at the local level as a particularly fine and remarkably intact example of a large architect-designed house of the type built for wealthy and urbane clients in the affluent Brighton area in the early 1960s. Once proliferating in this area, these houses are now becoming increasingly rarer, with many having already been demolished or unsympathetically remodelled. Aesthetically, the house is a very fine example of what Dr Philip Goad has codified as the 'mature modern' style of post-War Melbourne residential architecture, practiced by a relatively small group of local architects from the early 1960s including such highly regarded designers as Neil Clerehan, Guilford Bell and David McGlashan. The style is characterised by a sense of elegance, formality and minimalism, achieved through open planning, stark planar surfaces, flat roofing, the use of simple materials such as face brickwork and stained timber, and large areas of glazing to create a dialogue between the indoor and outdoor spaces.

The Wachs House can be considered as a textbook example of this 'mature modern' style, exemplified in its network of semi-enclosed courtyards, its elegant frontage with a row of brick piers supporting deep eaves over a slate-paved terrace, and its stark red brick walls alternating with full-height windows and glazed doors to create an interplay of solids and voids. This intrinsic significance as an archetypal architect-designed house of the early 1960s is enormously enhanced by its remarkable level of intactness - both externally (in terms of retaining its unpainted brickwork, and original landscaped garden setting) and internally (where original patterned wallpaper, heavy silk curtains, spun aluminium and opaque glass light fittings and built-in furniture, all remain intact).
Classified: 17/05/2004

Hermes Number 70243

Property Number

Physical Description 1

Exterior

The Wachs House is a large single-storey dwelling on a flat site; it is of face red brick construction (with raked joints) and has a flat roof with wide eaves, punctuated in the centre by a pop-up lantern above the windowless kitchen. The street front is articulated by a row of four fin-like brick piers which divide the facade into three bays. The leftmost bay contains the double garage (with panelled timber door), the right bay contains the full-glazed wall of the main living area, and the central bay contains the main entrance and the projecting bay window of the sunroom. A wide slate-paved area extends across the street frontage between the house and the row of brick piers; the flat roof, which extends beyond even the line of piers, is lined with narrow stained timber boards and is penetrated by large rectangular openings to admit light above the entrance porch and living room terrace. All four elevations have a consistency of detailing, with stark planar walls alternating with tall openings (variously infilled with full-height timber-framed windows or glazed doors) creating interplay of solid and void. The front garden retains plantings typical of the early 1960s, including Bird of Paradise.

Interior

The Wachs House is planned around a series of semi-enclosed courtyards which admit light and provide framed views of the courtyard gardens; the plan is bisected by a long and unusually wide corridor (described on the original plans as the 'gallery') which separates the main living areas on the west side (formal living room, sunroom, dining room and breakfast area) from the network of bedrooms and bathrooms to the east. At the centre of the plan is the kitchen which, landlocked by the surrounding rooms, is lit from above by the lantern roof. The principal living areas are open planned, and can be divided from each other by a series of concealed concertina doors.

The interior of the Wachs House is remarkably intact, largely due to remaining in the ownership of the same family for forty years. The hallway, for example, retains original heavy wallpaper with a repetitive curvilinear pattern in pale greens and browns, and many windows have original heavy silk drapes. Some walls (such as the lesser east-west hallway at the rear) have vertical polished timber panelling, with concealed doors. The corridor closet has bays of stained timber louvred doors, and there are also a number of distinctive full-height concertina doors (eg each side of the breakfast area) which are lined with slats of stained timber veneer. Throughout the house, most of the original light fittings are still in evidence, including cylindrical tube pendant luminaires, curvilinear white glass wall-mounted sconces, and spun-aluminium pendant and wall-mounted fittings.

The kitchen is a notable survivor, retaining original polished timber doors, tapered light fittings, and distinctive glass shelving in a tripartite full-width alcove along the north wall. All bathrooms have original terrazzo floors (with sunken shower recesses) and pale green tiling. The rumpus room at the rear of the house retains a remarkable built in bench and cupboard unit along one wall, complete with bar sink and built-in record player, and, on another wall, a special cupboard for a slide projector, which could swing out on a metal arm. The den, similarly, has distinctive built-in storage, comprising staggered bays of polished timber shelving, and matching cupboards with pyramidal panels.

Intactness

The Wachs House demonstrates a remarkably high level of overall intactness. Externally, the house retains all original finishes including unpainted brickwork, slate paving, timber joinery and timber linings to the verandah ceiling, as well as the landscaping. Its internal intactness is, as noted above, particularly fine, and presumably quite rare.

This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.

For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>