

Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture

RSTCA No: R131

Name of Place: Mijuscovic House

Other/Former Names:

Address/Location: 61 Sullivan Crescent Wanniassa
Block 10 Section 227 of Wanniassa

Listing Status:	Registered	Other Heritage Listings:	
Date of Listing:	2010	Level of Significance:	National
Citation Revision No:	0	Category:	Residential
Citation Revision Date:		Style:	Late Twentieth-Century Organic

Date of Design: 1980 Designer: Enrico Taglietti

Construction Period: 1980 - 1983 Client/Owner/Lessee: Zarco & Angela Mijuscovic

Date of Addition: Builder: Zarco Mijuscovic

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

The house at 61 Sullivan Crescent, Wanniassa exhibits a high degree of creativity by the architect Enrico Taglietti. He planned its interlocking internal spaces, at different levels, to allow circulation from entry to study and bedrooms, living, dining and kitchen, while arranging each space to function well. Advantage has been taken of the view, which was used as a starting point in the design of the house, in particular the fenestration of the study and the living area.

The internal and external form of the house has been designed in an aesthetically pleasing manner. The choice of materials, colours and finishes has added to the high aesthetic quality of the house. The walled garden provides an attractive transition from the garden into the house, the entry foyer has a dramatic impact on visitors and the central living space is an appropriate environment for residents and guests either to mix socially or rest and contemplate. The aesthetic impact of the view from the study and from the living space is considerable. The free, asymmetrical massing, the horizontal roof planes, horizontally-boarded fascias, highlight windows and the complex, angular geometry complementing nature are indicators of the Late Twentieth-Century Organic style (1960-) of which Enrico Taglietti is considered a key practitioner.

This place has strong associations with its architect Enrico Taglietti, who played an important role in the history of architecture in Canberra. It is one of his most significant houses.

DESCRIPTION

The two-bedroom brick house has a steel-framed structure sitting over the natural terrain, allowing surface water to be channelled underneath down the site which slopes from the street to the south-west. The garden has mature native trees and is well planted with shrubs. The external brick walls are rendered and painted white. They blend with the white steel roofing and contrast with the dark-stained horizontally-boarded fascias of tallowwood, eaves soffits and decking and the brown western red cedar joinery. The vertically wedge-shaped portion of the house soaring over the study and entry foyer is complemented by the adjacent roof pitched in the opposite direction over the living space. Roofs over the bedrooms, carport, utility room and kitchen are virtually flat, with deep timber fascias, and is cantilevered over the front courtyard and rear verandah.

The main entry is along a curved path in the thickly-planted front garden, into a screened courtyard garden along the north-east front of the house. The original intention was to screen the courtyard outside the

bedrooms from the space outside the entry, but a longer entry courtyard has been created, which gives a satisfactory sense of arrival through a wooden gate between a brick garden wall and a brush fence.

The house was carefully planned to achieve a complex flow of internal space. In the entry foyer a mirror wall opposite the double-leaf front door provides visitors with a surprise, as does the height of the space lit by a high-level window under the raked ceiling. Beside the foyer is a toilet containing a shower with ruby-red glass in a small window, to add more drama. Uninterrupted space flows from the vestibule into the study, dominated by its floor-to-ceiling external wall of glass, in metal-ribbed narrow panes raked back mid-height, taking full advantage of the south-west view, but shaded only by trees. Stairs lead off the vestibule up a half level to the bedrooms, both of which have generous windows facing north-east along the walled garden courtyard. A bathroom opens off the main bedroom. The living area is a half level down from the vestibule, and consists of a sitting space under a raked timber-boarded ceiling, and a dining space under a matching flat ceiling. The roof is pitched above this space to allow clerestory lighting from the north-east. The kitchen, with a parquet floor, is beside the dining area, but partly screened from it by a wall with a splayed-sided opening.

A long glazed wall and a verandah, well protected by a wide roof overhang, allows the view of the valley and the Brindabella Mountains to be fully appreciated. Originally, the verandah balustrade was solid horizontal boarding, but it is now more open, with thin steel cables below a narrow rail on posts. An external spiral staircase allows access from the verandah to the back garden. From the kitchen a doorway leads into a utility room and a large store under the carport. The car port, for two cars, is accessed by a staircase from the utility room.

The house has clear architectural indicators of the Late Twentieth-Century Organic Style (1960-). Key indicators are the free, asymmetrical massing and the retention of the natural setting. A broad characteristic is that the building appears to grow from the site. Other indicators of the style are complex angular geometry complementing nature; horizontal roof planes; horizontally-boarded fascias; highlight windows. In the two parallel streams of modern architecture, the 'functional' attracted followers of Le Corbusier, while the 'organic' appealed to architects such as Taglietti. The authors of the authoritative study *Identifying Australian Architecture* noted "the more dramatic and spectacular aspects of organic architecture were to be seen in the idiosyncratic designs of Enrico Taglietti." ¹ These aspects are seen to great effect in this house.

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

In 1970 Canberra consisted of the original inner city and the partly-developed towns of Woden-Weston Creek, and Belconnen. A new district in the magnificent setting of the Tuggeranong valley south of Woden, forming the stem of the National Capital Development Commission's Y-plan, was planned. Instead of neighbourhoods serving 4,000 people a new concept – the "territorial unit" – which might vary from 10,000 to 30,000, was adopted. Natural boundaries such as ridges and watercourses defined the units. ² By 1978, Sullivan Crescent had been laid out along a contour high in the east of the suburb of Wanniasa and blocks in it were offered for sale. Canberra had an oversupply of serviced land and it was not until February 1980 that a lease agreement for Block 10 Section 227 Wanniasa was executed for Zarco and Angela Mijuscovic. The major asset of the block was the view of the valley and the Brindabella mountains from its high vantage point. As Mijuscovic, a restaurateur, had been a wartime RAF pilot, he must surely have likened this prospect to aerial vistas. His architect, Enrico Taglietti of Enrico Taglietti and Maddox Pty Ltd submitted plans for a residence in May 1980 to the Department of the Capital Territory for approval, which was given one month later. Mijuscovic immediately applied for an owner-builder permit. As the project, estimated to cost \$48,000 was quite complex for an unlicensed builder, the permit was issued in July 1980 on condition that a consulting engineer, J.B. Dickson, would supervise the work. Construction progressed, with approval of minor alterations to the plans, until the house was completed in October 1983. The property was sold in 1986 to John and Jill Peck, who had a spiral staircase built in 1988 for access to the back garden from the verandah. A staircase was on the original plans but not constructed initially. ³ The present owners are Robert Worley and the glass artist Judi Elliott. ⁴

Twentieth-Century Organic Architecture and Influences on Taglietti's Architecture

Organic architecture is imbued with the principles and teachings of Frank Lloyd Wright. Wright is one of the most important figures in modern architecture and influenced architects throughout the world during the 20th Century. His 'Prairie' style of the first twenty years of the 20th Century emphasized the horizontal, using cantilevered forms, wide roof overhangs and open free planning with large areas of glazing, often crafted with leadlight designs. The use of geometric forms and extensive cantilevers, while based on Wright's work, is also a theme in modern Italian architecture and can be seen in the work of Valle, Sartago and Moretti. ⁵

Enrico Taglietti

Taglietti (1926-) studied architecture between 1947 and 1953 and graduated with a *Laurea* (Doctorate) degree from the Milan Polytechnic, where architectural training methods were basically in the Bauhaus tradition, an approach to design whereby art and craft were united. The teachers included such prominent architects as Gio Ponti, Franco Albini, Marco Zanuso, Bruno Zevi and Pier Luigi Nervi. Observers suggest that it was Zevi's vision of American architect Frank Lloyd Wright's organic architectural style that appears to have most influenced Taglietti's architectural development. ⁶

Enrico Taglietti established his architecture practice in Canberra in 1956 and has constructed some of Canberra's most dynamic buildings including the Town House Motel, 1961, (demolished); Cinema Center, Civic, 1966; ACMA Conference Centre, Barton, 1967; Dickson Library, 1969; Flynn Primary School, 1972; Giralang Primary School, 1976; Apostolic Nunciature, Red Hill, 1977 and the Australian War Memorial Annex, Mitchell, 1979. Other than this house, his most significant houses include the McKeown houses, Watson, (1965 & 1995); Dingle house, Hughes, 1966; Paterson house, Aranda, 1970 and Evans house, Cook, 1971. ⁷

Taglietti's desire to create beautiful architecture and satisfy the needs of his domestic clients was always critically important. He skillfully choreographed the experience of arrival at his houses. At times the front doors are not immediately apparent and can be difficult to find. A Taglietti house usually has a large, central space that acts as a social focus. He planned interlocked and interconnected internal spaces, including areas of differing heights, creating a variety of spaces that range from open to intimate. Walls, often extended to form enclosing courtyards, are used to shelter and to discretely reveal. ⁸

Enrico Taglietti is considered a key practitioner of the Late Twentieth-Century Organic style in Australia. ⁹ He was made a Life Fellow of the RAI in 2001 and his career reached a climax when he was awarded the Gold Medal of the RAI in 2007, the highest honour the Institute can bestow. ¹⁰

ANALYSIS AGAINST THE CRITERIA PURSUANT TO S.10 OF THE *HERITAGE ACT 2004*:

(a) it demonstrates a high degree of technical or creative achievement (or both), by showing qualities of innovation, discovery, invention or an exceptionally fine level of application of existing techniques or approaches;

The house exhibits a high degree of creativity by Enrico Taglietti. He planned its interlocking internal spaces, at different levels, to allow circulation from entry to study and bedrooms, living, dining and kitchen, while arranging each space to function well. Advantage has been taken of the view, which was used as a starting point in the design of the fenestration of the study and the living space.

(b) it exhibits outstanding design or aesthetic qualities valued by the community or a cultural group;

The internal and external form of the house has been designed in an aesthetically pleasing manner. The choice of materials, colours and finishes has added to the high aesthetic quality of the house. The walled garden provides an attractive transition from the garden into the house, the entry foyer has a dramatic impact on visitors and the central living space is an appropriate environment for residents and guests either to mix socially or rest and contemplate. The aesthetic impact of the view was used as a starting point in the design of the house. The impact is greatest, during summer months, from the study in the mornings, before the sun shines in, and in the evenings, but the more shaded verandah allows the view to be enjoyed from the living space in the afternoons all year round. The natural setting and the free, asymmetrical massing are key indicators of the Late Twentieth-Century Organic style (1960-) of which the architect Enrico Taglietti is considered a key practitioner. Other indicators of the style are the horizontal roof planes, horizontally-boarded fascias, highlight windows and the complex, angular geometry complementing nature.

(f) it is a rare or unique example of its kind, or is rare or unique in its comparative intactness

This house has a degree of rarity by virtue of being one of Taglietti's most successful houses. It is also a rare Canberra example of a c1980 house with high aesthetic and creative values.

(h) it has strong or special associations with a person, group, event, development or cultural phase in local or national history

This house has strong associations with its architect Enrico Taglietti, who played a significant part in the history of architecture in Canberra. It shows how his residential design matured after practicing for twenty years.

(j) it has provided, or is likely to provide, information that will contribute significantly to a wider understanding of the natural or cultural history of the ACT because of its use or potential use as a research site or object, teaching site or object, type locality or benchmark site

This house has some potential to be a valuable research and educational resource, particularly for students of architecture, building and design.

REFERENCES

1. Apperly, Richard, Robert Irving and Peter Reynolds, 1989 *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde.
2. Sparke, Eric 1988 *Canberra 1954-1980* AGPS Canberra.
3. ACTPLA File.
4. Charlton, Ken et al 2007 *The Contribution of Enrico Taglietti to Canberra's Architecture* RAlA , (ACT).
5. Hatje, Gerd (ed) 1965 *Encyclopaedia of modern architecture*, Thames and Hudson, London.
6. Metcalf, Andrew 2003 *Canberra Architecture*, The Watermark Press, Sydney.
7. Charlton, op cit.
8. Jones, Bronwen "Houses of the Heart" in Charlton, op cit.
9. Apperly, Richard et al, op cit.
10. Charlton, op cit.