

HERITAGE CITATION REPORT

BUILT HERITAGE PTY LTD

Name	House (originally <i>Jutoru</i> , later <i>Jutorua</i>)		
Address	4-6 Rannoch Avenue, MOUNT ELIZA	Significance Level	Local
Place Type	House	Citation date	19-6-2013



Recommended Heritage Protection

VHR: No **HI:** No **PS:** Yes

History and Historical Context

Locality History

The history of the Ranelagh Estate at Mount Eliza is well documented in several sources, and will only be summarised here to provide a broad context for the construction of this architect-designed post-war holiday house.

In September 1922, 146 acres of farmland on the south side of Boundary Road (now Canadian Bay Road) at Mount Eliza was acquired by Sequoia Pty Ltd, a development company that had been formed earlier that year by John Taylor and John Sharp (managing directors of John Sharp & Sons, timber merchants, of South Melbourne) in conjunction with their solicitor, J W McComas. Early the following year, the company acquired a further 285 acres that included an existing house, *Nyora* (1888) and its outbuildings. Further land was purchased in 1924, bringing the total holdings to 770 acres.

Sequoia Pty Ltd subsequently engaged architects Walter & Marion Griffin, in conjunction with surveyor Saxil Tuxen, to prepare a subdivision plan for the land. As they had done in several similar estates, the Griffins proposed a series of curving roadways that closely followed the contours of the land, thus allowing each block to have a view of the bay. Many of the residential allotments opened at the rear onto communal recreation reserves, and there was also an area set aside, at the entrance to the estate, for retail and commercial development. Marketed as a "miniature seaside garden city", the new estate of 795 allotments was released for private sale in 1924. The promoters initially offered a house-and-land package, which would include a house erected by Sharp & Taylor and, often, designed by architect Harold Desbrowe-Annear. A potent selling point was that each resident would automatically become a member of the Ranelagh Club, which was incorporated in July 1926. The club would serve as the community focus for the entire estate, and also as the controlling body for recreational reserves and other common property. Its facilities included a polo ground and tennis courts as well as a clubhouse.

With land sales proving slow, the original concept was altered in 1928. Over the next decade or so, until development was curtailed by the Second World War, many houses were erected at Ranelagh, albeit concentrated towards the north-eastern or seaside end of the estate. These were designed in a range of fashionable historicist architectural styles of the era, and, in some more prominent cases, even represented the work of noted society architects such as Percy Meldrum. Although this *retard-etaire* approach continued into the early post-war period, it was accompanied – then overtaken – by the parallel emergence of progressive modernist architecture. This dates back to 1933, when two pioneers of local modernism – architect Roy Grounds and the partnership of Seabrook & Fildes – each designed a house at Ranelagh.

The onset of the Second World War, and specifically the associated government-imposed restrictions on labour, materials and the size of private houses, significantly curtailed residential development from the early 1940s, and holiday houses at Ranelagh were no exception. When construction resumed towards the end of the decade, there was initially a tendency towards a more conservative approach to architectural design; it was not until the early 1950s that the first truly modern post-war houses appeared at Ranelagh. A number of architects, including Robin Boyd and the firm of Plaisted, Warner & Brendel, designed weekenders on the estate, typically using a comparable expression: elevated dwellings of simple rectilinear forms with low skillion roofs, broad eaves, vertical timber cladding, large windows, balconies and open undercrofts below. Others, such as Esmond Dorney and Mockridge Stahle & Mitchell, designed smaller single-storey counterparts, with generous north-facing glazing opening onto ground-floor sun-decks.

By the mid-1950s, such was the extent of modern residential architecture in this part of Mount Eliza that, in a slender architectural guidebook published for visitors to the Melbourne Olympic Games, it was stated that “the Ranelagh Estate at Mount Eliza is commonly credited with being the birthplace of Melbourne's modern movement”. However, towards the end of that decade, there had already been a decisive shift at Ranelagh as the construction of holiday houses began to give way to dwellings for permanent year-round residence. While more architect-designed holiday houses appeared there in the later 1950s and 1960s, the pattern was less widespread than it had been before. The new wave of permanent residents at Ranelagh included several architects, including Duncan Carporn, John H Butler, James & Karina Webb, Hub Waugh and Phillip Pearce (three of which lived in houses of their own design).

Place History

The property now known as 4-6 Rannoch Avenue was erected in 1954 as a holiday house for Melbourne businessmen Walter Dikstein (1905-1987). Born in Vienna, Dikstein had migrated to Australia with his parents in 1939 and, the following year, married Eileen Took (1916-2006), a nurse from Wagga Wagga. The couple initially lived in Toorak before moving to a large house in Malvern Road, East Malvern, where they (and their four children) lived for more than two decades. Identified in electoral rolls as a “manufacturer”, Dikstein was in fact the managing director of a soft drink company, Ecks Ltd, which was on the verge of collapse when he took over in 1946. He not only rescued the company but steered it to success, finally selling out to rivals Tarax in the early 1960s.

It was in February 1954 that Walter Dikstein acquired the title to two adjacent vacant blocks, Lots 58 and 59, on the Ranelagh Estate at Mount Eliza. These two lots, fronting Rannoch Avenue, had originally been acquired by Alfred Aubery, company director of Caulfield, in 1930. Ownership passed to Leopold Sprung (1947) and thence to Harry Moody (1951), neither of whom made any improvements to the property. Intending to build a holiday house for himself and his large family, Dikstein engaged leading architect Dr Ernest Fooks who, like Dikstein himself, was a European *emigre* from Vienna and had migrated to Australia in 1939. Fooks' working drawings, dated May 1954, proposed a skillion-roofed two-storey house with an open undercroft at one end, an L-shaped return balcony and vertical timber lining boards that contrasted with feature stone cladding. Construction evidently took some time, with rate books revealing that the property's Net Annual Value increased steadily from £60 (1954) to £85 (1955) to £300 (1956). The builder was Arnolds [sic] Karelis, a Latvian-born *emigre* from Mornington. In early 1957, the newly-finished house was written up in the *Herald* newspaper, in which it was lauded for the way that it encapsulated five “musts” that, according to Fooks, “form an important part in the planning of every summer residence in Australia”: namely, the consideration of views, cross-ventilation, storage, protection (from sun, winds and insects) and outdoor living areas.

The house was originally named JUTORU – an acronym from the names of the Diksteins' three children (Judith, Tony, Ruth). An “A” was later added after the birth of a fourth child, Andrew. Dikstein sold the house in 1964, around the time that he and his wife Eileen were divorced. The property was subsequently acquired by Frank Elliott, managing director of a company specialising in drafting equipment, who retained ownership until his death in 1981 (during which time the house remained virtually unaltered). A number of changes have been made by subsequent owners.

Dr Ernest Fooks, architect

Ernst Leslie Fuchs (1906-1985) was born in Bratislava, Czechoslovakia, but his family soon moved across the border to Vienna in Austria, fifty kilometres away. He studied at the Technical University of Vienna, completing a degree in architecture (1929) and a doctorate in town planning (1932) before starting his own practice. Over the next few years, he not only undertook many commissions (some of which were published) but also entered design competitions and exhibited paintings. Migrating to Australia in 1939, he gained employment with the newly-formed Housing Commission of Victoria as an assistant town planner. His expertise in that field – unusual in Melbourne at the time – saw him publish articles and give lectures on the topic; in 1944, he was appointed as the first lecturer in Town & Regional Planning at the Melbourne Technical College and, two years later, published an influential town planning book, *X-Ray the City*.

Becoming an Australian citizen in 1945, Ernest Fooks (as he anglicised his name) opened his own architectural office three years later. One of only a handful of *emigre* architects in Melbourne who could boast of extensive private practice in Europe, Fooks was also, for many years, the only architect to practice in Melbourne with a doctorate qualification. His output largely comprised private residential commissions, which were often published – the first in the *Australian Home Beautiful* in 1949, several others during the 1950s, and many more in the 1960s (including quite a few in international journals). Fooks drew his clientele from Melbourne's thriving post-war community of European migrants, and as a result designed many houses in *emigre* hotspots such as Caulfield, Elwood and Kew. With many of these post-war migrant settlers being already familiar with European-style apartment living, Fooks also made a significant contribution in the design of modern blocks of flats in Melbourne, designing over forty examples between 1950 and 1980.

Fooks' reputation as one of Melbourne's most pre-eminent Jewish architects of the post-war period was fostered in small-scale retail and commercial projects for migrant clients, commissions from synagogues and Jewish welfare groups, his appointment in 1953 (with Anatol Kagan) as co-designer of the Mount Scopus War Memorial College in Burwood East, and culminated when he was engaged to design the National Jewish Memorial Centre in Canberra (1971) and its Melbourne counterpart, the *Chevra Kadisha* in St Kilda (1979). Well known in both Jewish and architectural circles during his own lifetime, Fooks not only lectured and exhibited during his lifetime but, since his death in 1985, has attracted posthumous attention, including two further exhibitions in 1989 and 2001, the latter accompanied by a slender biographical publication providing an overview of his life and career.

Description

Physical Description

Located on a double-width allotment, the former Dikstein House is a two-storey timber residence in a striking European modernist style favoured by a number of Melbourne architects in the 1950s, and most confidently by those (like Fooks) who were European-trained *emigres*. Characteristic of that style, the house is expressed as a series of interlocking volumetric forms and planes that project and recede to evoke dynamism and a sense of weightlessness. The house has a low skillion roof with broad timber-slatted eaves (now painted blue) and is clad externally in vertical timber boards (originally varnished, but since overpainted in a pale tone) that contrast with feature areas of crazy stone cladding.

Effectively double-fronted, the asymmetrical street facade comprises two distinct bays: one (to the left) that recedes and one (to the right) that projects, separated by a stone-clad wing-wall extending to the street and defines an off-centre entry porch. A second and lower stone-clad wall, to the left of the porch, is enlivened by a recessed downpipe with circular rainwater-head, painted blue. Although neither the downpipe nor the additional stone cladding are indicated on the original drawings, the fact that they are evident on early photographs of the house (held by the Dikstein family) would suggest that they represent an early design revision and, as such, cannot be considered as an unsympathetic change. The left side of this facade originally had an open undercroft at the lower level, supported on metal pipe columns, although this has since been infilled with walling of matching vertical timber boards and new windows; upstairs, there are two narrow rectangular double-hung sash windows. The right part of the facade is dominated by a window wall at the first floor that opens onto a broad L-shaped balcony with a solid balustrade re-clad in striated cement sheeting and incorporating a half-height panel of vertical timber louvres that, although not unsympathetic to the 1950s era, is not original. This balcony is supported on steel pipe columns, forming a return verandah at ground floor. Wide bays of fixed and casement sash windows open onto the verandah, with a stone-clad dado below the sill line, matching paving and a blue-painted slatted timber ceiling. At the far left end of the verandah, a solid wall defines the recessed entry porch, with a doorway and large flanking sidelight window.

The curtilage of the house includes some slate paving around the main entrance (some of which may be original) and a tall fence of woven timber planks (which is not original) along the street frontage.

Aside from the aforementioned undercroft infill, the original house has been enlarged by the erection of a large double garage to the rear (south-west) and a smaller two-storey addition to the side (north-west) that includes a partial infill to the side portion of the ground floor verandah. Neither addition is particularly prominent when the property is viewed from the street, and, moreover, both were executed using forms and materials that echo that of the original house (ie, vertical timber panelling and skillion roof with slatted eaves). As such, these additions are considered to neither overwhelm nor detract from the character and significance of the original house.

Comparative Analysis

Research to date suggests that the holiday house that Ernest Fooks designed for Walter Dikstein on the Ranelagh Estate at Mount Eliza represents the architect's only foray into what is now the Mornington Peninsula Shire. Moreover, Fooks is only known to have designed one other holiday house anywhere else in Victoria – a similarly-scaled and contemporaneous residence at Lorne for businessman Philip Kirkwood. For the most part, Fooks rarely undertook commissions outside what (at least in the 1950s and '60s) constituted the Melbourne metropolitan area; the two holiday houses at Mount Eliza and Lorne, together with an untraced and apparently unbuilt house at Mildura, represent rare exceptions in his body of work.

Considered in the broader context of Fooks' residential commissions, the former Dikstein House falls into one of three distinct stylistic phases that can be identified in the architect's work from the late 1960s to the early 1970s. Fooks' earliest houses, were characterised by conventional forms (eg hipped roofs) and materials (eg cream brick, terracotta tiles), largely due to wartime restrictions that were not relaxed until the early 1950s. Subsequently, and for the remainder of that decade, Fooks returned to his European roots with houses designed in a stark hard-edged modernist fashion, characterised by a block-like expression, flat roofs with broad eaves, window walls, balconies and sun-decks. Later, following two stints of overseas travel in 1958 and 1960, Fooks' hard-edged style mellowed to embrace Japanese and American influences, resulting in a more urbane version of modernism defined by the use of stark planar walls, floating flat roofs, screens and colonnades. He continued to work in this mode well into the 1970s.

Stylistically, the former Dikstein House fits neatly into the second of these three phase of Fooks' residential work. With its stark volumetric expression, flat roof and generous windows, has much in common with the such contemporaneous examples as the Appel House in Balaclava Road, Caulfield North (1955), the Greenfield House in Kooyong Road, Caulfield (1956) and the Shaw House in Tyalla Crescent, Toorak (1958) – all of which also incorporate stone-clad feature walls and sun-decks of balconies. The former Kirkwood Holiday House at Lorne (1957) perhaps represents the best comparator both in terms of both function and form, with its use of vertical timber cladding and contrasting feature stonework, and a first-floor window wall opening onto an L-shaped return balcony. Outside of these two holiday houses, the use of vertical timber cladding was unusual in Fooks' residential work of the 1950s, with only one other example – the Peter House at Carrol Grove, Mount Waverley (1957) – identified to date.

Sources

Built Heritage Pty Ltd, "Supplementary Assessment of Significance of Dikstein Holiday House, 4-6 Rannoch Avenue, Mount Eliza", 7 March 2013.

Built Heritage Pty Ltd, "Heritage Citation Report: Ranelagh Residential Group – Modernist Style", 29 April 2013.

Shire of Mornington Rate Books (Mount Eliza Riding), VRPS 13665/P1, Units 61 (1949-54) and 69 (1955-60).

Certificates of Title, Vol 5706, Folio 199.

Telephone interview with Mr Tony Dikstein, Sydney, 20 May 2013.

Harriet Edquist, *Ernest Fooks: Architect* (Melbourne: RMIT University School of Architecture, 2001).

Harriet Edquist, "Ernest Fooks", in Philip Goad & Julie Willis (eds), *Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, pp 258-59.

Authorship

This citation was prepared by Simon Reeves of Built Heritage Pty Ltd, 20 May 2013 (revised 22 May & 19 June 2013).

Statement of Significance

What is Significant?

The house and its front and side setbacks at 4-6 Rannoch Avenue Mount Eliza, in the Ranelagh Estate, designed by Czech-born and Viennese-trained *emigre* architect Dr Ernest Fooks (*ne* Ernst Fuchs).

How is it Significant?

4-6 Rannoch Avenue is of local historical, architectural and aesthetic significance to Mornington Peninsula Shire.

Why is it significant?

Historically, the house is significant for its ability to demonstrate the ongoing development of the Ranelagh Estate (and, more broadly, Mount Eliza in general) as a significant holiday resort., which commenced in the pre-war area and boomed in the 1950s and '60s (*Criterion A*). While many holiday houses – both architect-designed and not – were erected at Ranelagh in the post-war period, this one stands out for its larger scale, befitting its status as the seasonal residence of a prominent Melbourne businessman, Walter Dikstein, managing director of Ecks Ltd, soft drink manufacturers, who otherwise occupied a large inter-war house in East Malvern.

The house is significant as an notable and early example of the work of Dr Ernest Fooks (1906-1985), the Czech-born architect who qualified as an architect in Vienna and practised there for seven years before migrating to Australia in 1939 (*Criterion H*). An elder statesmen amongst Melbourne's numerous post-war emigre architects, Fooks was one of very few to commence practice here after extensive professional experience overseas. With a post-graduate degree in town planning, Fooks was first architect in Melbourne to commence private practice with a doctorate; writing and teaching on the subject, he is acknowledged as a pioneer of modern town planning in Australia. Commencing private practice in 1948 after several years with the Housing Commission of Victoria, Fooks became a well-known figure on Melbourne's architectural scene, equally known for his fine residential projects (which frequently appeared in publications) as well as his expertise in the design of schools and multi-storey apartment blocks.

Architecturally and aesthetically, the house is significant as a large and substantially intact example of a house in the International Modern style of the 1950s, demonstrated by its block-like massing and apparent weightlessness (via the use of pipe-like columns), its low-pitched skillion roof with deep eaves and slatted soffits, full-height windows and glazed doors and contrasting wall finishes of vertical timber boarding and crazy-patterned feature stone cladding (*Criterion E*). Designed by an architect who was not only trained in Vienna but also practised there for seven years, the house can be considered as a relatively authentic example of European modernism, comparable to the contemporaneous works of fellow Melbourne *emigres* Frederick Romberg, Anatol Kagan, Walter Pollock and Taddeuz Karasinski.

The Dikstein Holiday House stands out in Fooks' body of residential work on several levels. Together with the contemporaneous Kirkwood Holiday House at Lorne, it is one of only two holiday houses known to have been designed by Fooks (*Criterion B*). These two houses were amongst only six of Fooks' residential projects to be published during the 1950s, and, furthermore, were the only two to be published in more than one source. Both designed as large seasonal dwellings for prominent Melbourne businessmen, both houses remain as outstanding examples of his residential work in this pure International Modern mode of the later 1950s, before he turned towards a more serene "mature modern" style, influenced by Japanese and other sources, that would characterise his work during the 1960s.

Recommendations 2012

External Paint Controls	No
Internal Alteration Controls	No
Tree Controls	No
Fences & Outbuildings	No
Prohibited Uses May Be Permitted	-
Incorporated Plan	-
Aboriginal Heritage Place	-

Historic images



Photographed soon after completion; note original sign stating JUTORU (*Architecture & Arts*, January 1957).



Detail of aerial photograph, circa 1966 (copy held by Mornington Peninsula Shire)