

IDENTIFIER	HOUSE	Citation No	PW01
Other name/s		Melway ref	58 K10
Address	335 Alma Road CAULFIELD NORTH	Date/s	1968
Designer/s	Robert Rosh	Builder/s	Unknown



Photograph by Built Heritage Pty Ltd, October 2019



Location map and extent of HO

Heritage Group	Residential building (private)	Condition	Excellent
Heritage Category	House	Intactness	Excellent

Thematic context	6.7	Making homes for Victorians
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Recommendation	Include on heritage overlay schedule as an individual heritage place		
Controls	<input type="checkbox"/> External Paint	<input type="checkbox"/> Interior Alteration	<input type="checkbox"/> Trees

Statement of Significance

What is significant?

The house at 335 Alma Road, Caulfield North, is a two-storey flat-roofed beige brick house in the post-WW2 modernist style, with white marble cladding at the upper level, mosaic tiled columns and stone-clad dwarf walls. Erected in 1968 for a Polish-born clothing manufacturer and his wife, it was designed by Czech-born Robert Rosh.

The significant fabric is defined as the entire exterior of the house as well as the contemporaneous brick boundary wall, letterbox and stone-clad dwarf walls to the front garden.

Why is it significant?

The house satisfies the following criteria for inclusion on the heritage overlay schedule to the City of Glen Eira planning scheme:

- Criterion E: Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics

How is it significant?

The house is aesthetically significant as a particularly unusual example of modernist residential architecture of the 1960s. The work of a Czech-born émigré designer who, while professionally qualified, did not become registered as an architect in Victoria, the house exhibits an idiosyncratic strain of modernism where the trademark rectilinear massing, balanced façade and generous fenestration is relieved by decorative embellishments that include mosaic tiled columns, concrete breeze block screen, stone-clad dwarf walls and, most strikingly of all, white marble cladding to the upper level of the street façade. Occupied by the original residents for nearly fifty years, this virtually unaltered house remains an eye-catching element in the streetscape (*Criterion E*)

History

Note: Identifying details of property owners and their families have been deleted as per Council direction

The house at 335 Alma Road, Caulfield North, was built in 1968 for a Polish clothing manufacturer and his wife, to a design by Czech-born Robert Rosh. Born in southern Poland in the late 1910s, the future owner of the house moved to Germany in 1940, where he met and married a fellow Pole. Subsequently declared stateless, the couple migrated to Australia in the early 1950s. Initially, they resided briefly in Fitzroy, Brunswick East and Brunswick West, before settling more permanently in Thornbury by the mid-1950s. The man, who cited his occupation as tailor on his immigration form, found related work here and, by the time he and his wife were naturalised in 1956, he was employed by a lingerie manufacturer in Northcote. The couple remained living in Thornbury, albeit relocating to a larger house in another street. Towards the end of the 1960s, they acquired land in Alma Road, Caulfield North, as a site for a new house, and commissioned Robert Rosh to design it.

A Czech émigré and Holocaust survivor, Robert Rosh (*ne* Reichenbaum, 1909-1982) was born in Moravská Ostrava, and took the degree of *Diplom-Architekt* from an as yet unconfirmed university. During 1941, he was confined to an *Arbeitslager* (labour camp) at Vyhne, Czechoslovakia, but was residing in Prague by the next year, when he married Tola Zaks (1914-2016), a Polish merchant's daughter. Two years later, the couple was sent to Sosnowitz, a sub-camp of Auschwitz, but managed to escape. Rosh's older brother Arthur was not so fortunate; he perished at Dachau in December 1944. In 1946, Robert and Tola migrated to Australia with their young daughter and Tola's brother. The family settled in Parkville, where another daughter was born. By the time that Rosh became a naturalized citizen in 1952, he had already commenced private practice. Disinclined to become registered as an architect in Victoria, he was obliged to style himself (for legal reasons) as an 'architectural designer'. Initially, he focused largely on small-scale non-residential work, such as retail fitouts and hotel alterations, but, from the mid-1950s, designed an increasing number of houses, mostly for fellow European emigre clients. This enduring link saw him design a few high-profile projects for the Jewish community, most notably a synagogue on Nepean Highway, Moorabbin (1963).

Rosh's working drawings for the Polish couple's house on Alma Road are simply drafted; in place of a formal title block, they bear the neatly lettered text, "R Rosh & Associates, Toorak". While the original drawing date is not recorded, two amendments are dated May and June 1968. The plans depict a flat-roofed split-level brick house, with a two-storey wing facing the street and single-storey rear wing, partially elevated to allow space for a playroom below. Evidently conceived for entertaining on a lavish scale, the house had an expansive entry foyer with formal staircase and adjacent cloak room and powder room, and two large living areas, one of which opened onto a full-width rear balcony. In the front wing, three bedrooms were provided for the family. They were to occupy the house for almost fifty years, until the respective deaths of the man and his wife in the early twenty-first century.

Description

The house at 335 Alma Road, Caulfield, is a two-storey flat-roofed beige brick house in the post-WW2 modernist style. It is expressed in a characteristic European Modernist manner, where the upper level (containing principal living areas) is given emphasis over a recessed lower level (containing carport, entry foyer and subsidiary spaces). The street façade is symmetrical at the upper level, with broad eaves and three large bays of tripartite windows (each comprising narrow operable sashes flanking a central fixed sash), enlivened by spandrel cladding of white marble in random coursed slabs. At ground level, there is a matching window bay to the left side, while the remainder of the façade is given over to an integrated double carport with timber slatted ceiling and a screen wall of concrete breeze blocks. The front entry, more or less centrally located at ground level, is marked by circular column clad with glass mosaic tiles. The entry itself, set into the rear wall of the carport area, has a large and heavily panelled timber door.

The front garden incorporates some dwarf walls with stone cladding, which extend along part of the street façade and the driveway. The letterbox unit, in matching beige brick with dark glazed terracotta capping, is also evidently contemporaneous with the house.

Comparisons

As Robert Rosh never became registered as an architect in Victoria, he has not left the usual paper trail and it has been difficult to conclusively identify other examples of his work, either in the City of Glen Eira or anywhere else. His daughter, author and historian Naomi Rosh White, retains some of his records and confirms that he designed numerous houses for European émigré clients, and was notably active in the post-WW2 migrant heartland of Caulfield and St Kilda. By far his best-known project in the study area is the Kadimah Jewish Cultural Centre and National Library at 7 Selwyn Street, Elsternwick (1972). A purpose-built cultural hub for the Yiddish-speaking community, it is a large multi-purpose brown brick building in an idiosyncratic modernist style, enlivened by a facade sculpture and leadlight windows by eminent artist Karl Duldig.

To date, few of Rosh's residential projects have been identified in what is now the City of Glen Eira. The earliest of these is a house at 3 Bickhams Court, St Kilda East, designed in 1960 for a prominent émigré builder. An expansive split-level brick dwelling on a corner site, it contrasts with the more compact two-house at 335 Alma Road, but still exhibits something of the same mix of academic modernism and a more decorative approach, with slate feature walls, terrazzo paving, tinted glass and vertically striped fence. Other local examples of Rosh's work include three much later houses from the mid-1970s. One, at 1a Sidwell Avenue, St Kilda East (1973) is a compact two-storey dwelling akin to the Alma Road house, but with a full-width balcony with textured glass panels. Another, at 56 Almond Street, Caulfield South (1974) is a two-storey house of wholly different form, in dark red brick with low mansard roof and a front wall with moon gate. Another example at 66 Snowdon Avenue, Caulfield (1974) is a single-storey brick house with flat roof, broad fascias, full-height windows and ceramic tile cladding; owned by the same family until 2010, the house has since been remodelled almost beyond recognition.

The Alma Road house is eerily akin to a block of flats at 650 Inkerman Road, Caulfield North (c1965), with similar use of feature stone cladding (albeit slate rather than marble) and mosaic tiled columns; it may also be Rosh's work. Considered more broadly among 1960s houses designed by European-trained architects for fellow émigré clients, the Alma Road house is most comparable to the work of Michael R E Feldhagen (1932-1986), a German-born architect who, like Rosh, never applied to become registered as an architect in Victoria and practiced as an 'architectural designer'. Feldhagen's distinctive work is typified in Caulfield by houses at 30 Aroona Road (1963) and 19 Morrice Street (c1969), both similarly expressed as double-storeyed flat-roofed dwellings with lower levels recessed and upper levels enlivened by applied ornament. Feldhagen's hand seems evident in a house at 386 Alma Road (1961-62), designed by the office of Ernest Fooks at the time that Feldhagen was employed there.

References

Robert Rosh & Associates, "Proposed two storey split-level brick residence for Mr and Mrs [redacted] at No 335 Alma Road, Caulfield", working drawings, dated May/June 1968. City of Caulfield Permit No 36,833.

Email from Naomi Rosh White (daughter of Robert Rosh), 12 October 2019.

Identified by

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