
John E Guest House



B7258 John Guest House

Location

4 Maltravers Road,, EAGLEMONT VIC 3084 - Property No B7258

Municipality

BANYULE CITY

Level of significance

Regional

Heritage Listing

National Trust

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - July 4, 2008

The house at 4 Maltravers Road was built in 1939-1940 for John E Guest, a leather goods manufacturer. It was designed by Edgar Gurney and built by A V Jennings on his Beauview Estate, one of several large housing estates developed by Jennings. Gurney usually designed more conservative revival style houses for Jennings, though he did design a number of Moderne houses. The Guest House was inspired by the Dutch modernists whose work was highly influential in Melbourne during the 1930s.

The house is two-storey, and constructed in cream brick above a red brick base. It is asymmetrically composed of intersecting rectilinear masses, with a flat parapeted roof and steel framed windows. The house is substantially intact, and retains original interior fittings, including built-in kitchen cupboards and seating.

How is it significant? The Guest House at Eaglemont is significant for architectural and historical reasons at a Regional level.

Why is it significant? The house is architecturally significant as an excellent and intact example of the Moderne style and of the work of its architect Edgar Gurney. It is significant also for its intact interior.

The house is historically significant as part of the Beauview subdivision of A V Jennings, as well as a part of Walter Burley Griffin's earlier Mount Eagle Estate. It is also significant for its connection with A V Jennings, a pioneer in the construction of private housing estates in Melbourne.

Classified: 28/02/2005

Hermes Number 71604

Property Number

Physical Description 1

The Guest house backs on Maltravers Park and has a modest footprint on its large lot, allowing the vegetation to extend from the rear parkland down to the road. A path from the road to the park passes alongside the block. The house is of two storeys, of cream bricks above a red brick base. It is asymmetrically composed of overlapping rectanguloid masses, with a parapeted flat roof and corner steel frame windows. The cubic shapes are intersected with the curves of the hall, porch and small balcony, these curves being repeated in the line of the cantilevered concrete hood that protects the door to the roof deck and in the circular porthole windows in the doors. The setback of the upper floor, the red brick base courses and window-sills and the line of Insulux glass bricks next to the front porch result in a horizontal emphasis to the elevation. There is a detached garage in similar style and materials to the west of the house.

There is little decoration externally, not even a porthole in the masonry as in some designs at Beaumont, and the windows have no pattern of glazing bars. The living room chimney on the front elevation has a discreet feature panel, a ladder of salmon-coloured brick, and this, with the string courses on level with the heads and sills of the windows, are the only examples of applied decoration.

The interior:

The interior finishes are also simple. The walls are finished with a sand texture and cornices are simple stepped profiles. Doors have no architraves and are of the flush-panel type. The lighting trough in the twinned reception rooms is the only elaborate feature. Even the fireplaces are modest, save for a little Art Deco 'sand engraving' (as described by Jennings) on the mirrors. The change in fashion in the short period from 1934 to 1939 is shown by the shift from the rich, dark French-polished woods of the interiors of the houses on the Beaumont estate to the use of light stains and painted trims on the modern interior of the Guest house.

On the ground floor are an open dining and living room area, one bedroom (or study), a kitchen, a bathroom and a laundry, as well as a sunroom on the north side.

The living and dining areas are separated by the merest remnants of a dividing wall, an open plan prefiguring the post-War norm. Fire places with mirrored panels above face each other at opposite ends of these rooms, and the ceiling has recessed lighting troughs set in Art Deco plasterwork. Jennings liked sandblasted art glass, with Silverwood & Beck Pty Ltd of Collingwood advertising in his promotional booklet.

The kitchen opens directly from the dining room. It has retained the original built in cupboards along two walls and a meals area in one corner with built-in seats and cupboards. The layout of the kitchen, with its built-in fittings, is not unlike those in the larger Jennings homes on the Beaumont Estate.

The hall has a horizontal line of glass bricks lighting it from the south, while in the north wall these are in the form of two vertical slits lighting the stairs. Jennings praised the use of this 'most intriguing advancements in modern home construction' (in Beauview Homes) and included a few panels of Insulux glass bricks in many of his designs.

The bathroom is an intact version of a typical Jennings' design, and is not unlike those of many other builders' bathrooms of the time, with a toilet, bath, basin and shower recess. The walls have cream tiles with a thin black dado, the bath and basin are in glossy black enamel, a colour scheme typical of the period. The floor is blue-green terrazzo floor with a black border. As with many houses on the Beaumont estate, the toilet opened off the

bathroom. The pedestal basin sat between steel casements with a mirrored cabinet in between 'for the man of the place to keep his toilet requisites'. The towel rails were heated (see Beauview Homes).

The first floor has only two bedrooms, but no bathroom. Above the living and kitchen areas is a large roof deck covered with asphalt and white reflective gravel. The obsession with making the roof a usable space is a hallmark of the era. The roof could be used for sleeping out or sun bathing, both health fashions of the time, or it could be used as a garden. Le Corbusier popularised the notion to such an extent that it became a touchstone of modern architecture. True flat roofs are rare in suburban Melbourne. This is partly for practical considerations, as they tended to leak and were considered a risky undertaking compared to the tried and true pitched Marseilles tiled roof.

Intactness

The house is remarkably intact, with almost no alteration to the exterior or the interior and its built-in fittings, including those in the kitchen. The exterior has not been painted or rendered over and the sunroom is the only alteration visible. There is some water damage to the plaster in the living room caused by a roof leak. The garden also shows something of the original plantings, featuring the architect's favourite pencil conifers.

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