

Australian Institute of Architects ACT Chapter

Register of Significant Architecture

RSA No: R146

Name of Place: Wood House

Other/Former Names:

Address: 43 Mayo Street WEETANGERA ACT 2612

Block 18 Section 17 of Weetangera



Listing Status:	Listed	Other Heritage Listings:	None
Date of Listing:	20/6/2022	Level of Significance:	Territory
Citation No:	1	Category:	Residential
Citation Revision Date:		Style:	Organic
Date of Design:	1970	Architect:	Dr Enrico Taglietti
Construction Period:	1971-2	Client/Owner/Lessee:	Dr & Mrs Don Wood
		Builder:	

Statement of Significance

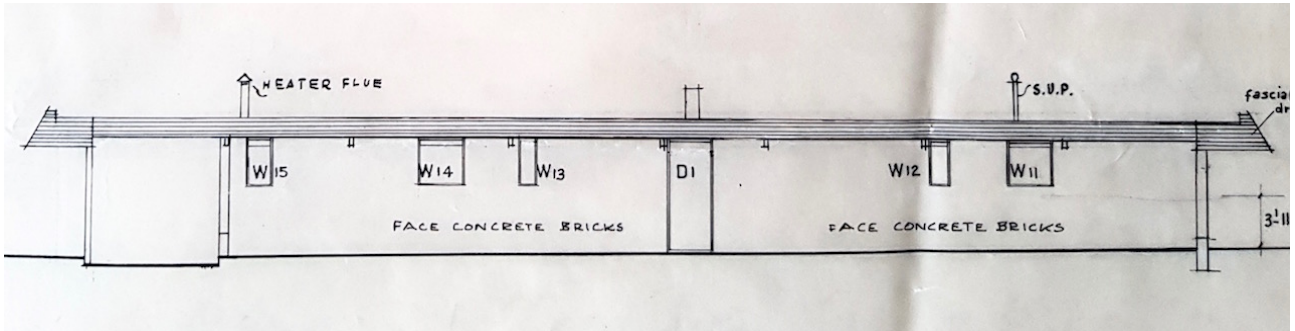
The Wood House is a significant example of the domestic architecture of the celebrated Canberra architect Dr Enrico Taglietti AO LFRAIA (1926-2019), who was awarded the Gold Medal of the RAIA, its highest honour, in 2007. He was posthumously made an Officer of the Order of Australia in 2020.

The house, designed by Taglietti in 1970 in the Late Twentieth-Century Organic style and completed in 1972, has considerable privacy and is integrated with its secluded well-treed garden on a battle-axe block. The carefully-planned experience of arrival begins at the narrow driveway and leads indirectly to the front door. After entry it reaches a climax in the lower-level central hall, centred around a fireplace, for living, study, dining and the kitchen. This interlocking series of internal spaces, ranging from open to intimate, each being in accord with its particular function, is another attribute which adds to the house demonstrating a high degree of creative achievement.

The way Taglietti took advantage of the slope of the site to plan the house on two levels followed his concept of space flowing vertically as well as horizontally, which he first experienced seeing underground rock-hewn medieval churches in Ethiopia and developed when he studied the principle Frank Lloyd Wright had introduced to the United States as "A new sense of space."

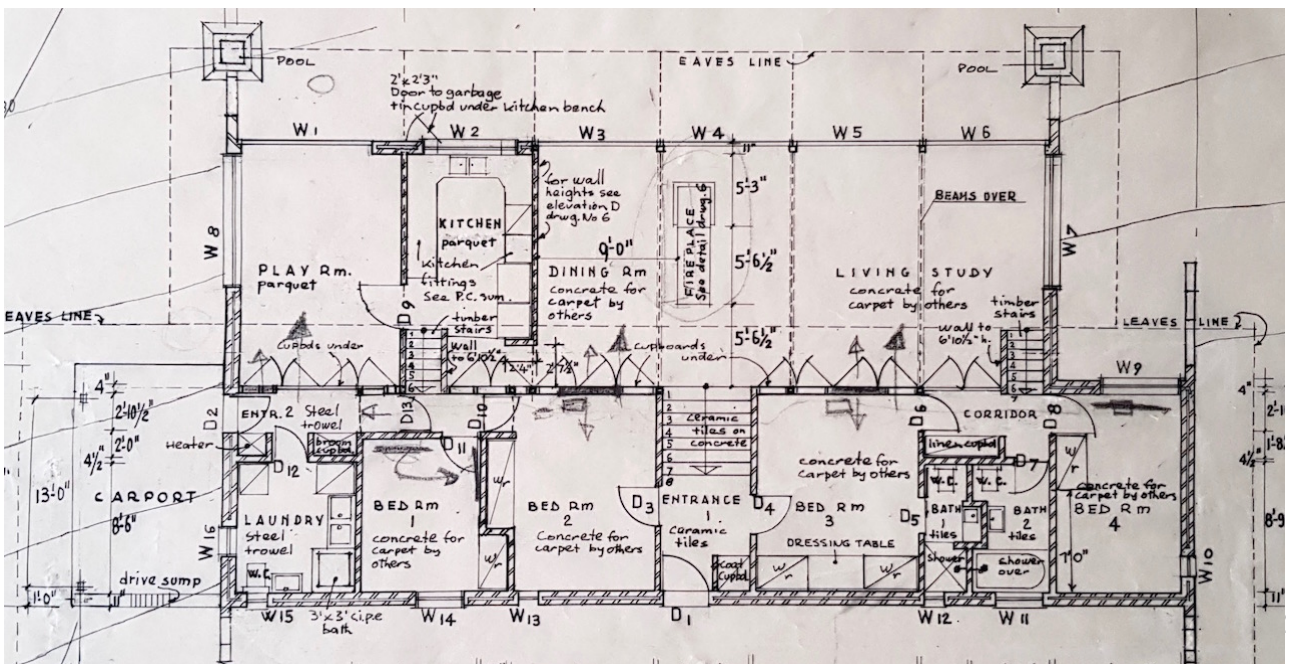
Description and Condition

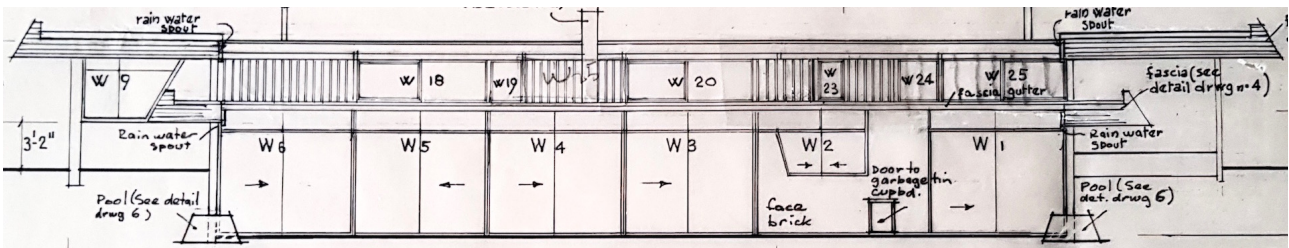
The Wood House is a single-storey, four-bedroom home, arranged on two levels integrated with its garden, which is a forest of trees. The concrete brick walls are unpainted and the steel deck roofs form long horizontal planes. They have wide eaves with deep sloping fascias on the ends and shallow fascias on the long sides, all clad in horizontal weathered timber boarding. The ends of side walls are battered and there are some sloping window reveals. Rainwater spills from spouts into small pools each end of the terrace. All these design features, which Taglietti called a "calligraphy" of elements, are characteristic of his domestic architecture. The house is a good example of the Late Twentieth-Century Organic style, of which Enrico Taglietti was a key practitioner.¹



2022 ACTPLA Aerial photo; 2006 photo. Working drawings dated 16/12/70 courtesy of Taglietti archive

Being on a battle-axe block, the house cannot be seen from the street, but as one proceeds along the narrow driveway, a carport at the northern end of the house comes into view, then the long western wall of the house. The timber front door is centrally located in that wall, which has small windows arranged asymmetrically each side of the doorway. The entrance vestibule, between bedrooms, leads down ceramic-tiled steps to the central hall for living, study, and dining, which is open to the kitchen. There is a large concrete brick fireplace with a sloping side above a seat-height wood box, while bookshelves screen the living area from the study. A half-height concrete brick wall separates the kitchen from the dining space, which has a parquet floor. The kitchen has a door to a play room and timber steps up to the bedroom/bathroom/laundry level. Similar steps provide access up from the study to the third and fourth bedrooms. Advantage is taken of the space between floor levels to provide storage cupboards. The ceilings are unpainted warm-toned fibreboard. Large sliding glass doors, in a floor-to-ceiling glazed wall along the entire length of the study/living/dining space, open onto a terrace, as does the play room. Extensive glazing allows an outlook into the secluded well-treed garden. The house remains in unaltered condition.





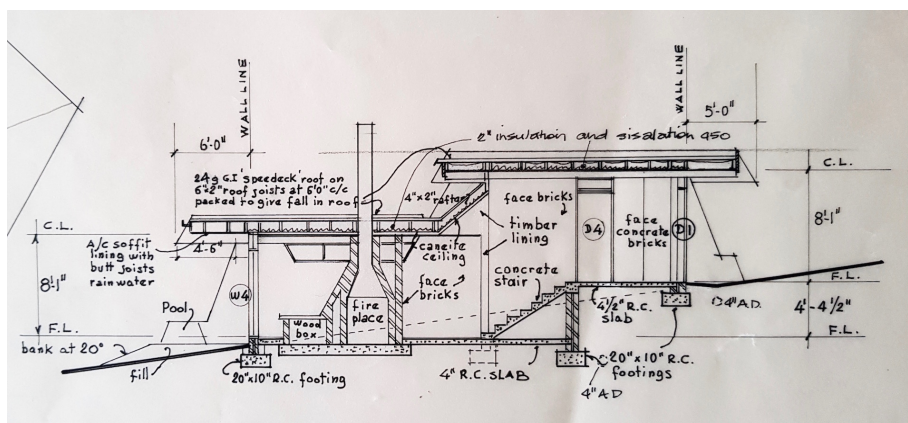
Working drawings dated 16/12/70 courtesy of Taglietti archive

2006 photos by Ken Charlton.

Background/History

Don and Betty Wood were avid bushwalkers who, having admired the organic style houses designed by the architect Enrico Taglietti, engaged him in 1970 to design a house to have privacy on their secluded battle-axe block, formerly an orchard, sloping eastwards down to a reserve.²

Taglietti was born in Milan in 1926 and moved with his family in 1938 to Asmara in Eritrea. While there, he visited the underground rock-hewn medieval churches of Lalibela in Ethiopia.³ The impression made on him as a youth seeing those churches deep below ground remained when he returned in 1946 to Milan. He graduated from the *Politecnico Di Milano* with a *Laurea* Degree in architecture in 1953. In his studies, Taglietti learnt about the principle of space flowing vertically as well as horizontally, which Frank Lloyd Wright had introduced to the United States as "A new sense of space." Later, in designing the Sant'Erasmo theatre (1954) in a basement, he followed that principle, with the horizontal plane forced by gravity to slope down towards the stage.⁴ The use of underground space can be seen in Canberra to great effect in Taglietti's Cinema Center (1966) and ACMA Conference Centre in Barton (1967).⁵ It was in his mind while planning the Wood House.



This section shows the flow of space down from the entrance to the central hall.

Taglietti planned the experience of arrival at the Wood House by following his design principle that the approach to entering a house should elicit the unexpected, with a sense of mystery.⁶ A visitor's first view of the house is of its fortress-like walls, recalling those Don and Betty Wood had seen on a larger scale at Taglietti's Paterson House in Aranda (1966). The front door is then found indirectly. When people enter the vestibule, they can suddenly see how he took advantage of the sloping site to allow space to flow down and reveal the climax of their arrival – the central hall, with its wide view into the garden. The way Taglietti arranged this social focus of the house, centred around the fireplace, with the kitchen open to the dining, family and study areas, is most impressive. As part of his design philosophy, he prioritised such interlocking internal spaces, ranging from open to intimate with each being in accord with its particular function, to provide pleasure to people living in his houses.⁷

Don and Betty Wood have lived, and raised several children, in the house since it was completed in 1972. Enrico Taglietti continued to practise in Canberra, producing work of great distinction. In 2007 he was awarded the Gold Medal of the Australian Institute of Architects, the highest honour the Institute can bestow, for producing work of great distinction resulting in the advancement of architecture. He passed away in 2019 and in 2020 was posthumously made an Officer of the Order of Australia for distinguished service to architecture, particularly in the ACT.⁸

ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA IN THE HERITAGE ACT 2004

f. Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement for a particular period. The house is rated High for Criterion f.

The Wood House demonstrates a high degree of creative achievement for the way it was designed by Enrico Taglietti in his version of the Late Twentieth-Century Organic style, while being built for privacy and to be integrated with its secluded well-treed site. The carefully-planned experience of arrival begins along the narrow driveway and leads indirectly to the front door. After entry it reaches a climax in the lower-level central hall for living, study, dining and the kitchen, centred around the fireplace. This interlocking series of internal spaces, ranging from open to intimate, each being in accord with its particular function, is another attribute which adds to the house demonstrating a high degree of creative achievement.

The way Taglietti took advantage of the slope of the site to plan the house on two levels demonstrates his concept of space flowing vertically as well as horizontally. He first experienced such a flow of space at underground rock-hewn medieval churches in Ethiopia, and developed his design concept after he studied the principle that the architect Frank Lloyd Wright had introduced to the United States as "A new sense of space."

h. Has a special association with the life or work of a person, or people, of important to the history of the ACT. The house is rated High for Criterion h.

The Wood House has a special association with the life and work of the celebrated Canberra architect Enrico Taglietti, who was awarded the Gold Medal of the RAIA, its highest honour, in 2007 for producing work of great distinction resulting in the advancement of architecture. In 2020 he was posthumously made an Officer of the Order of Australia for distinguished service to architecture, particularly in the ACT. The Wood House is a significant example of his domestic architecture.

The ranking of the Wood House in Enrico Taglietti's domestic work in the ACT

In 2010 Ken Charlton, after a request by the ACT Heritage Unit to the Australian Institute of Architects, undertook a comparative study to cover the domestic body of work in the ACT designed by Enrico Taglietti. The indicative ranking of the eleven houses studied was four of Exceptional heritage value, two High value, four including the Wood House Commendable and one Low value. If the study is revised, after considering the importance of Taglietti's concept of space flowing vertically as well as horizontally, which he explained in a seminar in 2018,⁹ and the still intact condition of the house, the ranking of the Wood House would rise to High heritage value.

This citation was prepared by Ken Charlton AM LFRAIA

END NOTES

¹ Richard Apperly Robert Irving Peter Reynolds. *Identifying Australian Architecture Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*. A & R 1989, p238

² Enrico Taglietti, pers. comm. to Ken Charlton

³ In 2018 Enrico Taglietti recalled at an International symposium in his honour at the National Gallery of Australia, being greatly impressed by those churches.

⁴ Paola Favaro “Taglietti’s Design Principles” in *The Contribution of Enrico Taglietti to Canberra’s Architecture*, RAIA ACT Chapter, 2007, p. 94

⁵ Ken Charlton, *The Contribution of Enrico Taglietti to Canberra’s Architecture*, RAIA ACT Chapter, 2007, p 38 & 41

⁶ Bronwen Jones, “Houses of the Heart” in *The Contribution of Enrico Taglietti to Canberra’s Architecture*, RAIA ACT Chapter, 2007, p 9

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-e&q=officer+of+the+order+of+australia+2020>

⁹ Ken Charlton, *The Flow of Space in Enrico Taglietti’s Below-Ground Buildings*, Paper for the AIA (ACT) Heritage Committee, 2020