

Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture

RSTCA No: R070

Name of Place: High Court of Australia

Other/Former Names:

Address/Location: Parkes Place PARKES 2600
Block 8 Section 28 of Parkes

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| Listing Status: | Registered | Other Heritage Listings: | |
| Date of Listing: | | Level of Significance: | National |
| Citation Revision No: | | Category: | Governmental |
| Citation Revision Date: | December 1990 | Style: | Brutalist |

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| Date of Design: | 1972/73 | Designer: | Colin Madigan/Chris Kringas of Edwards Madigan Torzillo and Briggs |
| Construction Period: | April 1975-May 1980 | Client/Owner/Lessee: | NCDC/HCA |
| Date of Additions: | | Builder: | PDC Constructions |

Statement of Significance

The High Court of Australia is a rare Australian/Canberra example of the Brutalist Style used for a major building, and compares with two other Canberra examples: the adjacent Australian National Gallery and School of Music. The building is important as one of the dominant elements within the Parliamentary Triangle and was the first building in the area to break away from a symmetrical design. The building is of social significance as the symbolic focus of judicial practice in Australia.

The High Court is also of interest as one of the examples of the works of Edward Madigan Torzillo and Briggs. The High Court was awarded the Canberra Medallion in 1980.

Description

The High Court of Australia building is arranged on nine floor levels and rises some 41 metres. It houses three main courtrooms, Justices chambers with associated library and staff facilities, administrative offices and public areas including a cafeteria.

The building form is almost a cube with administrative offices to the east and the vast south glass wall providing two disciplined faces - the north and west elevations being more fragmented as internal functions break out or recede into the form. The public hall has an internal volume some 25 metres high and is the central point of reference for the public areas of the building. Ramps and stairs climb through the space. The three courtrooms are all entered on different levels and arranged in plan around a single circulation core of lifts and stairs. The Justices circulation system is strictly segregated from the public circulation and travels from the underground carpark, through the intermediate courtroom levels, to Justice Chambers and library at the upper level. A roof garden is provided for the Justice's use.

The building is primarily constructed from poured insitu reinforced off-white concrete as a monolithic structure. Large areas of glazing are supported on tubular steel frame structural back-ups.

Careful attention has been paid to detailing and the use of controlled natural light in the courtrooms is noteworthy.

Internal finishes are rich yet restrained. Flooring is aurisina stone, pirelli rubber or carpet. Wall finishes are concrete, plaster or timber panelling. Ceilings are plywood panelling, timber battened, plaster or concrete.

A number of specially commissioned art works compliment the public hall as applied finishes or are integrated into the buildings detailing. Included is a water feature in the forecast designed by Robert Woodward, murals by Jan Senbergs forming an integral part of the public hall, doors at entry to Court 1 designed by Les Kossatz and George Baldessin and a wax mural by B. Maddock in the public hall outside Courtroom 1.

Condition and Integrity

Excellent. The building is well maintained and cared for.

Background/History

Analysis against the Criteria specified in Schedule 2 of the Land (Planning and Environment) Act 1991

(i) a place which demonstrates a high degree of technical and/or creative achievement, by showing qualities of innovation or departure or representing a new achievement of its time

(ii) a place which exhibits outstanding design or aesthetic qualities valued by the community or a cultural group

(iii) a place which demonstrates a distinctive way of life, taste, tradition, religion, land use, custom, process, design or function which is no longer practised, is in danger or being lost, or is of exceptional interest

(iv) a place which is highly valued by the community or a cultural group for reasons of strong or special religious, spiritual, cultural, educational or social associations

(v) a place which is the only known or only comparatively intact example of its type

(vi) a place which is a notable example of a class of natural or cultural places or landscapes and which demonstrates the principal characteristics of that class

(vii) a place which has strong or special associations with person, group, event, development or cultural phase which played a significant part in local or national history

(xi) a place which demonstrates a likelihood of providing information which will contribute significantly to a wider understanding of natural or cultural history, by virtue of its use as a research site, teaching site, type locality or benchmark site

References

Other Information Sources