

# Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture

**RSTCA No:** R130

**Name of Place:** Evans House

**Other/Former Names:**

**Address/Location:** 62 Skinner Street COOK  
Block 8 Section 18 of Cook

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Listing Status:	Registered	Other Heritage Listings:	
Date of Listing:	2010	Level of Significance:	National
Citation Revision No:	0	Category:	Residential
Citation Revision Date:		Style:	Late Twentieth-Century Organic

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Date of Design: 1969 - 1970 Designer: Enrico Taglietti

Construction Period: 1970 - 1971 Client/Owner/Lessee: Donald & Gillian Evans

Date of Additions: Builder: Schenbeck

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## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

The house at 62 Skinner Street, Cook is a creative achievement of high value. The architect Enrico Taglietti took advantage of the steep slope up from the street. He skillfully choreographed the experience of arrival at the house and arranged the horizontal and vertical internal flow of space particularly well. He then moulded the form of the house and its fenestration in a way that has given it considerable character.

The house is of outstanding aesthetic value due to its commanding presence in the street, where the building appears to have grown from its site. The solidity of the exterior is not apparent from inside the living space, where light floods in from the verandah, the sides and the clerestory windows. The house is of architectural merit as a good example of the Late Twentieth-Century Organic style (1960- ) of which Enrico Taglietti was a key practitioner. The free, asymmetrical massing, the horizontal roof planes, horizontally-boarded fascias, highlight windows, the complex, angular geometry complementing nature and the retention of the natural setting are indicators of that style.

This place has strong associations with its architect Enrico Taglietti, who played an important role in the history of architecture in Canberra. It is one of his most significant houses.

## DESCRIPTION

Donald Evans wrote in 1971 "My home is on the spur of Mt Painter. It is a delightful aspect and my architect Dr E. Taglietti has achieved a perfect blend of house in environment. From my southern aspect Mt Painter rears through the trees. The house is set deep into the sharp spur from which moss-encrusted boulders surge." <sup>1</sup> Here, as in the adjacent suburb of Aranda, native trees were being retained. As was his practice, Taglietti designed the house for the precise requirements of his clients. He found the steep slope of the block a problem, but turned this difficulty into an asset by designing a house with a commanding presence and outlook, which appears to grow from its site.

The house is set back from the street slightly more than its neighbours, and rises on two levels at the front. Much of the natural setting of the house has been retained. The white-painted bagged brickwork front wall is vertical, but articulated by seven stout buttresses with an exaggerated batter which adds to the fortress character of the house. The main entrance vestibule is at a level midway between the garage and living floor levels, and is approached up the steep drive for people to experience a sense of arrival at the house. The family can also enter internally up stairs from the garage level, which includes a cellar, study and toilet. The kitchen and family room, which opens into a walled garden court to the east, is at the main entrance level.

Stairs lead up to the dining area within the living space. This has a floor-to-ceiling glazed northern wall along a narrow verandah. There is an open fireplace, a polished-timber boarded ceiling and clerestory lighting above stairs leading down to the entrance vestibule and up to a roof-top terrace. Stairs from the main entry vestibule rise to the rear bedroom wing. There are two bathrooms, a dressing room and three bedrooms, two of which have windows to the back garden.

The house has prominent flat roofs with generous overhanging eaves and deep splayed timber-boarded fascias, originally a blue-grey colour but now painted a muted red. Each side of the roof terrace over the entry/kitchen/family level is spanned by unpainted concrete balustrades, visually binding the living and bedroom wings together. Sloping elements at this level complement the sloping lines of the front buttresses.

The house has clear architectural indicators of the Late Twentieth-Century Organic Style (1960- ) of which Enrico Taglietti was a key practitioner. Key indicators are the free, asymmetrical massing and the retention of the natural setting. A broad characteristic of the style is that the building appears to grow from the site. Other indicators of the style are complex angular geometry complementing nature; horizontal roof planes; horizontally-boarded fascias; highlight windows. In the two parallel streams of modern architecture, the 'functional' attracted followers of Le Corbusier, while the 'organic' appealed to architects such as Taglietti. The authors of the authoritative study *Identifying Australian Architecture* noted "the more dramatic and spectacular aspects of organic architecture were to be seen in the idiosyncratic designs of Enrico Taglietti." <sup>2</sup> These aspects are seen to great effect in the Evans house.

## **BACKGROUND AND HISTORY**

The National Capital Development Commission, in *The Future Canberra* (1965) explained how it was forming new urban districts in the rural areas surrounding Canberra. The districts would be built in adjoining valleys and the intervening hilltops and ridges would be preserved in their natural state. Each district would be divided into neighbourhoods of about 4,000 people. <sup>3</sup> Cook was one of the first neighbourhoods to be developed in Canberra's northern satellite town of Belconnen. Mrs Gillian E. Evans was successful in bidding \$3,000 for Block 8 of Section 18, Cook at the auction in June 1968 and the lease was signed five months later. A house was required to be commenced on the site within six months and completed 12 months later. Mrs Evans and her husband may have known that Enrico Taglietti was designing the Paterson house for a similar site in the adjacent suburb Aranda. By March 1969 Taglietti "was in the process of completing plans" for them but as there were "problems associated with building on this particularly steep slope" the date for commencement was extended to June 1969. In July 1970 the lease was transferred to D.C. and G.E. Evans and the builder Mr Schenbeck commenced construction. The house was completed in November 1971. The barrister Warren Nicholl and his wife acquired the property in 1974 and resided there until they sold it in 2007. <sup>4</sup>

## **Twentieth-Century Organic Architecture and Influences on Taglietti's Architecture**

Organic architecture is imbued with the principles and teachings of Frank Lloyd Wright. Wright is one of the most important figures in modern architecture and influenced architects throughout the world during the 20th Century. His 'Prairie' style of the first twenty years of the 20th Century emphasized the horizontal, using cantilevered forms, wide roof overhangs and open free planning with large areas of glazing, often crafted with leadlight designs. The use of geometric forms and extensive cantilevers, while based on Wright's work, is also a theme in modern Italian architecture and can be seen in the work of Valle, Sartago and Moretti. <sup>5</sup>

## **Enrico Taglietti**

Taglietti (1926-) studied architecture between 1947 and 1953 and graduated with a *Laurea* (Doctorate) degree from the Milan Polytechnic, where architectural training methods were basically in the Bauhaus tradition, an approach to design whereby art and craft were united. The teachers included such prominent architects as Gio Ponti, Franco Albini, Marco Zanuso, Bruno Zevi and Pier Luigi Nervi. Observers suggest that it was Zevi's vision of American architect Frank Lloyd Wright's organic architectural style that appears to have most influenced Taglietti's architectural development. <sup>6</sup>

Enrico Taglietti established his architecture practice in Canberra in 1956 and has constructed some of Canberra's most dynamic buildings including the Town House Motel, 1961, (demolished); Cinema Center, Civic, 1966; ACMA Conference Centre, Barton, 1967; Dickson Library, 1969; Flynn Primary School, 1972; Giralang Primary School, 1976; Apostolic Nunciature, Red Hill, 1977 and the Australian War Memorial Annex, Mitchell, 1979. Other than the Evans house, his most significant houses include the McKeown houses, Watson, (1965 & 1995); Dingle house, Hughes, 1966; Paterson house, Aranda, 1970 and Mijuscovic house, Wanniasa, 1983. <sup>7</sup>

Taglietti's desire to create beautiful architecture and satisfy the needs of his domestic clients was always critically important. He skillfully choreographed the experience of arrival at his houses. At times the front doors are not immediately apparent and can be difficult to find. A Taglietti house usually has a large, central space that acts as a social focus. He planned interlocked and interconnected internal spaces, including areas of differing heights, creating a variety of spaces that range from open to intimate. Walls, often extended to form enclosing courtyards, are used to shelter and to discretely reveal. <sup>8</sup>

Enrico Taglietti is considered a key practitioner of the Late Twentieth-Century Organic style in Australia. <sup>9</sup> He was made a Life Fellow of the RAI in 2001 and his career reached a climax when he was awarded the Gold Medal of the RAI in 2007, the highest honour the Institute can bestow. <sup>10</sup>

#### **ANALYSIS AGAINST THE CRITERIA PURSUANT TO S.10 OF THE HERITAGE ACT 2004:**

**(a) it demonstrates a high degree of technical or creative achievement (or both), by showing qualities of innovation, discovery, invention or an exceptionally fine level of application of existing techniques or approaches;**

The house is a creative achievement of high value. Taglietti took advantage of the steep slope up from the street. He skillfully choreographed the experience of arrival at the house and arranged the horizontal and vertical internal flow of space particularly well. From entrance, space flows through the central kitchen/family area, up through the living/dining space, out to the verandah, then further up onto the terrace. Space was also arranged to flow from the entrance up to the bedrooms. Then he moulded the form of the house and its fenestration in a way that has given it considerable character.

**(b) it exhibits outstanding design or aesthetic qualities valued by the community or a cultural group;**

The solidity of the living/garage wing gives the house a commanding presence in the street and the building appears to have grown from its site. It is of architectural merit as a good example of the Late Twentieth-Century Organic style (1960- ) of which Enrico Taglietti was a key practitioner. The retention of the natural setting and the free, asymmetrical massing are key indicators of the style. Other indicators of the style are the horizontal roof planes, horizontally-boarded fascias, highlight windows and the complex, angular geometry complementing nature. The solidity of the exterior is not apparent from inside the living space, where light floods in from the verandah, the sides and the clerestory windows. The generous use of polished timber adds warmth to the interiors. The internal flow of space can be appreciated visually as well as physically, by moving through the house.

**(f) it is a rare or unique example of its kind, or is rare or unique in its comparative intactness**

This house has a degree of rarity by virtue of being one of Taglietti's most successful houses. It is also a rare Canberra example of a c1970 house with high aesthetic and creative values.

**(h) it has strong or special associations with a person, group, event, development or cultural phase in local or national history**

This place has strong associations with its architect Enrico Taglietti, who played a significant part in the history of architecture in Canberra.

**(j) it has provided, or is likely to provide, information that will contribute significantly to a wider understanding of the natural or cultural history of the ACT because of its use or potential use as a research site or object, teaching site or object, type locality or benchmark site**

This house has some potential to be a valuable research and educational resource, particularly for students of architecture, building and design.

#### **REFERENCES**

1. ACTPLA File.
2. Apperly, Richard, Robert Irving and Peter Reynolds, 1989 *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde.
3. National Capital Development Commission 1965 *The Future Canberra*, Sydney.
4. ACTPLA File.
5. Hatje, Gerd (ed) 1965 *Encyclopaedia of modern architecture*, Thames and Hudson, London.

6. Metcalf, Andrew 2003 *Canberra Architecture*, The Watermark Press, Sydney.
7. Charlton, Ken et al 2007 *The Contribution of Enrico Taglietti to Canberra's Architecture* RAIA , (ACT).
8. Jones, Bronwen "Houses of the Heart" in Charlton, op cit.
9. Apperly, Richard et al, op cit.
10. Charlton, op cit.