

Heritage Citation



Gubar Residence

Key details

Also known as	Meek house
Addresses	At 19 Corsica Street, Moorooka, Queensland 4105
Type of place	House
Period	Postwar 1945-1960
Style	Brisbane Regional
Lot plan	L73_RP77898
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 1 December 2017 Date of Citation — March 2014

Construction	Walls: Face brick
People/associations	Greg Meek (Architect)
Criterion for listing	(B) Rarity; (G) Social; (H) Historical association

This two storey brick house was designed in 1953 by Brisbane artist and architect, Greg Meek (born Grigoriy Mekhonoshin), for his brother-in-law, Basil Gubar and his wife, Paula. The two families were an integral part of the Russian émigré community in Brisbane from the 1920s which was centred around the St Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church in Vulture Street. Greg Meek, who arrived in Brisbane in 1926, made some significant contributions to the architecture of interwar and post war Brisbane. Working as a draftsman and builder while studying architecture, he designed the St Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church (1936) and Comino's Arcade (1940-42) in Redcliffe. He was also involved in the design of the iconic Cloudland Ballroom and funicular railway at Bowen Hills. Around 1950, Meek designed his own house at Bardon, a picturesque A-framed house highly valued by the local community and known to many as "The Fairy House". He registered as an architect in Queensland in 1951.

History

This cavity brick, two storey home was built in 1953 for Paula and Basil Gubar, Russian immigrants who settled in Brisbane in the late 1920s. It was designed by Basil Gubar's brother-in-law, Gregoriy Mekhonoshin, who also immigrated to Brisbane from Russia. Mekhonoshin, anglicised his name to Greg Meek soon after arriving in Brisbane in 1926.

The site of the house was part of a large parcel of land included in the estate of James O'Neil Mayne which was subdivided for residential development from 1953. Paula Gubar purchased an allotment in Corsica Street of just over 26 perches in July 1953. At this time, Mrs Gubar also applied to the Brisbane City Council to build a home on the site.

Paula Gubar and her husband were confident that Meek would design them a modern house that would meet their requirements. Paula Gubar was fond of the Art Deco style and wanted an environmentally friendly house with sunlit rooms that would be warm in winter. Meek's design featured a front façade with curved corners and a curved brick staircase adorned with geometric iron railings. The house's design also catered to the specific needs of the Gubar family with a bedroom and study for their daughter, and a large "ladies' work room" for Paula Gubar who was a seamstress.

The house was carefully designed to take advantage of the movement of the sun to the south during winter and the cooling north east breezes in summer. Casement windows allowed the breezes into the house during the hottest part of the year while the front of the house, including the main bedroom, received the maximum amount of sunshine in the winter months. The 1950s saw a renewed interest amongst Brisbane architects, such as Charlie Fulton and the firm of Hayes and Scott, in designing buildings that would suit the city's subtropical climate.

The severe shortages of labour and building materials which followed World War II caused a crisis in both rental housing and the construction of new homes in Brisbane and other Australian cities. Many families resorted to makeshift housing arrangements such as living with relatives, or in temporary accommodation such as 'tent cities' and hastily adapted former military buildings. To make matters worse, the shortages caused the costs of renting, labour and materials to skyrocket. For many, becoming an owner/builder was the only way to acquire a house. An additional complication was the stringent building restrictions (lifted in 1952) introduced by the government, for example a maximum allowable floor area was imposed for new houses. As a result, a new "post-war austerity" style of housing emerged, producing homes that were modest in size, materiality and detail as builders struggled to acquire the necessary materials. In a typical demonstration of the closeness of the Russian community in Brisbane, the floors of the Gubars' house were built from high quality hardwood timber sourced from the Morjanoff furniture factory at Woolloongabba. Paula Gubar's sister, Betty, had married into the Morjanoff family. The Gubars' house is unusual for the high quality of its construction and finishes at a time when builders generally struggled to acquire superior building materials. Other high quality elements evident in the building include the combination of struck and flush joints in the brickwork, the number and size of windows incorporated and the use of terrazzo for the front patio floor slab.

A rear deck was added to the house in 1958. The front of the house is largely intact but the rear has been altered in recent years and the kitchen moved to rear corner from its former position in the centre of the house.

The Russian community in Brisbane was a close network of families and friends which developed a Russian "quarter" around the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian Hall near the Woolloongabba Five Ways. Following the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, thousands of "White Russians" fled into Manchuria before making their way to Europe, America or Australia. Members of the Russian community faced a degree of prejudice from some sections of Brisbane society owing to a perceived communist threat. This led to violent demonstrations and clashes between Russian emigres and trade unionists, police and returned servicemen. These hostilities culminated in a serious riot in Merivale Street in March 1919 when around 8,000 ex-servicemen attempted to attack the Russian Hall.

By 1930, Queensland's Russian population numbered around one thousand. Members of Brisbane's Russian community assisted new arrivals by lending them money, helping with cheap accommodation and finding employment. The Orthodox Church built by the Russian community in Brisbane in 1936 was named after Nicholas, the last Tsar, and designed by Greg Meek. By the 1950s, when the Gubars' house was built in Moorooka, Brisbane's numbers of European migrants had increased sharply as the displacement caused by World War II brought a new wave of refugees. The West End/Woolloongabba area continued to be a centre of continental European settlement.

Greg Meek was born in the Russian city of Astrakhan in 1897. He studied art at Moscow University before serving as an officer in the cavalry of the Tsar's White Russian Army. After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, he fled to Manchuria to avoid persecution by the Communists and taught art in a secondary school to support his new wife, Catherine and young daughter, Nina. In 1926, the three Mekhonoshins arrived in Brisbane aboard the Japanese freighter, the Mishimu Maru. According to Meek's daughter, he anglicised his name to Greg Meek soon after arriving in Brisbane for ease of spelling and pronunciation and he and his wife became Australian citizens as soon as they were eligible to do so.

Greg Meek began painting houses to support his family and soon became a building contractor, employing other Russian immigrants and often taking them in as boarders. He established an office in Albert House, Ann Street, and began drafting plans for domestic and commercial buildings. Meek was a qualified draftsman. At this time there was no qualification called 'architect' in Russia. Meek set his sights on qualifying as an architect in

Australia and completed a Junior High School Certificate before studying architecture at the Central Technical College. He registered as an architect in Queensland in 1951.

Prior to registering as an architect, Meek designed several Brisbane buildings. In the mid-1930s, he designed and drew up the plans for the Russian Orthodox Church in Vulture Street before handing them to the architectural firm of Cavanagh and Cavanagh for final preparation. Meek also supervised the construction of the church. The Meek family and other members of Brisbane's Russian community raised funds to build the new church, holding concerts, dances and plays at the Russian Club as well as donating money. St Nicholas' is still a centre for Brisbane's Russian community and has been entered on the Brisbane City Plan Heritage Register.

In the mid-1930s, Meek worked on the plans for the proposed Luna Park amusement centre at Bowen Hills, which included the large Cloudland ballroom (1940) and a rollercoaster. Meek also designed the cable car or funicular railway which was used to ferry guests up and down the steep hill. The rollercoaster was destroyed by a storm before the ballroom opened and the "Alpine Railway" was dismantled in 1967. The Cloudland Ballroom was controversially demolished in 1982. According to his niece, Yvonne Webb (nee Gubar), Meek also designed a large rollercoaster type slide on the foreshore near the Redcliffe jetty.

Meek also designed (in partnership with Shaw) Comino's Arcade (1940-42) in Redcliffe for Greek businessman, Arthur Comino. This was a three storey, brick building which housed a dance hall, café, shops and serviced accommodation. The design of the entertainment complex featured a stark face brick street elevation, plain parapet and cantilevered concrete window shades which foreshadowed post-war modernist architectural style. The building has been entered on the Queensland Heritage Register (602692). Its modernist style and clean lines would later find an echo in the design of the Gubars' residence at Moorooka.

In addition to the Gubars' residence, only a handful of houses designed by Meek have been identified. These include his own residences: 22 Harriet St, West End (circa 1931 and substantially altered), a holiday home at Palm Beach, the Gold Coast (circa 1939) and his A-framed cottage at MacGregor Tce, Bardon (c 1950). The latter – known locally as "The Fairy House" has become well known for its picturesque form and the artistic statues designed by Meek and created in his office/studio that adorn the house and fence. It has been entered on the BCC City Plan Heritage Register.

Meek moved to the US in 1956 to join his married daughter. He continued to work as an architect, including for the prestigious New York firm of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill. He also had a successful art exhibition on Broadway. Greg Meek passed away in 1981. His architectural career in Brisbane was an eclectic one, which ranged from the traditional ecclesiastical form of St Nicholas' Russian Orthodox Church to minimalist commercial and domestic buildings and the whimsical design of his Bardon cottage.

Meek's achievements as a successful architect in a conservative society that often excluded non-Anglo Saxon cultures are a testament to his persistence and to the mutual support given by the Russian community to its members in the interwar and post-war periods.

Description

The house is two storey brick with a tiled roof. A streamlined chimney and plain casement windows complement the building's minimal lines. Curved corners on the front façade and a curving brick front staircase add a Functionalist element to the design of the house.

The house has floors made of hardwood timber, including red cedar.

The brickwork includes an unusual pattern of brickwork with the horizontal mortar joints raked and the vertical joints flush with the bricks. This creates the discrete effect of emphasising the horizontal lines of the brickwork.

Statement of significance

Relevant assessment criteria

This is a place of local heritage significance and meets one or more of the local heritage criteria under the Heritage planning scheme policy of the *Brisbane City Plan 2014*. It is significant because:

Rarity

CRITERION B

The place demonstrates rare, uncommon or endangered aspects of the city's or local area's cultural heritage as a rare and intact example of a high quality, architect designed brick house constructed during the post war austerity period when Brisbane experienced severe shortages of building material and skilled labour.

Social

CRITERION G

The place has a strong or special association with the life or work of a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons

as it is a rare example in Brisbane of the domestic work of Greg Meek (formerly Grigoriy Mekhonishon), a notable Brisbane draftsman and architect and a Russian immigrant who made a significant contribution to the Russian community in Brisbane between the 1920s and the 1950s.

Historical association

CRITERION H

The place has a special association with the life or work of a particular person, group or organization of importance in the city's or local area's history

as a residence designed by and for members of Brisbane's cohesive Russian community who collaborated in the

procurement of a high quality house during the post-war austerity period. The standard of workmanship and materials in this house was significantly higher than the general standard of housing in Brisbane at this time.

References

1. Brisbane City Council aerial photographs, 1946, 2012
 2. BCC building cards
 3. BCC CPHR citation for 'The Fairy House', 22 MacGregor Tce, Bardon
 4. Evans, Ray and Carole Ferrier (eds). *Radical Brisbane: an unruly history*. Carlton, Vic: The Vulgar Press, 2004
 5. Department of EHP. QHR entry for Comino's Arcade, 602692. Viewed 6 Dec 2013
 6. JOL. Gubar Family Photographs and Papers. M1375
 7. Specifications for Brick Residence for P. Gubar at New Road, Moorooka, Brisbane. (Copies held in CPHR file, 19 Corsica St, Moorooka)
 8. Proposed Concrete Terrace for Mrs P. Gubar at Corsica St, Moorooka, 1958 (Copy held in CPHR file, 19 Corsica St, Moorooka)
 9. Plan of Proposed Brick Residence for Mrs Pola Gubar at New Road, Moorooka. (Copy held in CPHR file, 19 Corsica St, Moorooka)
 10. Queensland Certificates of Title
-

Copyright Brisbane City Council

Note: This citation has been prepared on the basis of evidence available at the time including an external examination of the building. The statement of significance is a summary of the most culturally important aspects of the property based on the available evidence, and may be re-assessed if further information becomes available. The purpose of this citation is to provide an informed evaluation for heritage registration and information. This does not negate the necessity for a thorough conservation study by a qualified practitioner,

before any action is taken which may affect its heritage significance.

Citation prepared by — Brisbane City Council (page revised September 2020)



Dedicated to a better Brisbane