

Preliminary Heritage Assessment: 207 Eastern Road, Wahroonga : September 2020

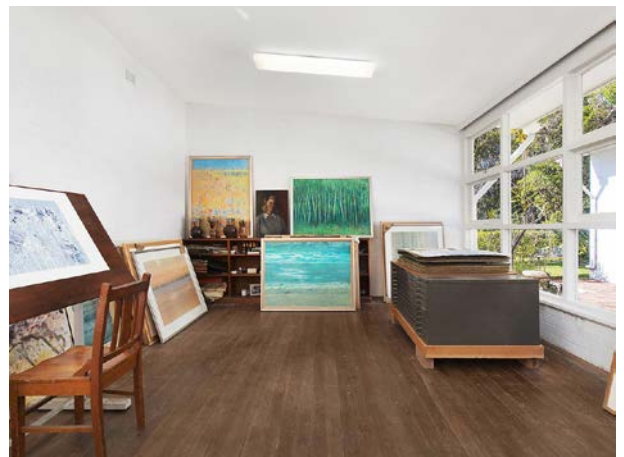
Description

Lot B DP414327

Zoned R2 under KLEP2015

207 Eastern Road, Wahroonga (also known as Laverty House) is a c1952 single-storey Modernist style residence designed by renowned Modernist architect Sydney Ancher.

The house was originally designed as a compact 10-square home for the newly married Mr Peter Laverty and Mrs Ursula Laverty, both prominent artists. The original modular footprint of the house— consisting of a living room, bedroom, bathroom and kitchen separated from a studio by a courtyard – was designed to expand over time to accommodate the need for more accommodation, required as a result of the birth of the Laverty's' three children, all of whom are now artists.



August 2020 real estate images from: <https://www.realestate.com.au/property-house-nsw-wahroonga-134130998>

History of the site

This land was part of an early crown grant of 2000 acres to John Terry Hughes in 1842. As the subdivision of this land was formalized in the 1880s and 1890s, the land containing the subject site became known lot 10, section 4 of the Big Island Estate. In May 1919, Philip Frederick Buwiss of Waitara, Railway Employee, obtained a 2 acre 2 rood portion of lot 10 containing the subject site. In February 1924 he transferred his property to Hardy Edmund Bird of Coogee, Painter. In February 1926, the property was transferred to Albert Edwin Farley of Coogee, Retired Merchant.

In October 1943, he transferred the land to Albert Edwin Farley of Griffith, farmer (assumed son). The 1943 aerials clearly indicate the subject site as empty, but show increasing development around the site.



In May 1946, the property was transferred to Thomas Ellis of Wahrenonga, Clerk. In November 1951, the property passed via an application by transmission to Edith Elizabeth Ellis of Wahrenonga, widow. Ellis began the process of subdividing the land, transferring a 3 rood, 18 $\frac{3}{4}$ perch portion of this land – representing the subject site – to Ursula Airlie Nathan of Killara, Spinster in October 1952. Shortly after, Ursula married Peter Phillip Laverty. The couple, both artists in their own right, had met whilst studying at the Winchester School of Art in Southampton after the war. Ursula had returned to Australia with her family in 1949, with Peter emigrating in 1951. Peter taught at the National Art School from 1954, becoming Head of the School in 1971. From 1971-1977, he was Director of the Art Gallery of New South Wales. In addition to these roles he served on committees like the International Society of Art Critics and the Sydney Biennale Committee, was a member of Sydney Printmakers and the Australia Watercolour Institute, a writer for art journals and judge on many competitions. Ursula, alike, was a Foundation and Life member of Sydney Printmaker, contributing to exhibits regularly from 1961 to 1986. Ursula designed the Station of the Cross Mosaics for the new Catholic Church in Pymble in 1992, published a book of her poetry in *Dreawings* in 1993, and curated the Hornsby Bestowed Collection in 2005.

An application (#841) was lodged by P Laverty in late 1952 for a brick dwelling in Eastern Road, Turramurra. A small, modernist home with skillion roof, floor-to-ceiling windows and a large studio was designed on the site for the Lavertys by prominent architect Sydney Ancher.

The house was featured in the Sunday Herald of 20 September 1953 (page 21) in an article titled "When Two Artists Plan A Home." The house is described in the article as "one of the most attractive small houses along Eastern Road, Wahroonga... [a] 10-square contemporary white brick home" that served as a "both a livable home and working studio for the Lavertys, a young couple who both paint in all their spare time."

Details are given of the house's original form:

"From the road, the house presents an interesting angle of two skillion roofs pitching down to the centre. The walls are white painted brick, with a yellow front door set beside a wall-screen of vertical timber boarding painted a bright blue-green.

The purpose of this screen wall is seen from the other side of the house, where a tall wattle tree grows in the centre of a completely private courtyard around which the entire house centres.

This makes a lovely sheltered place, warmed by sunlight during winter, yet cool and shady in summer because of deep roof overhangs.

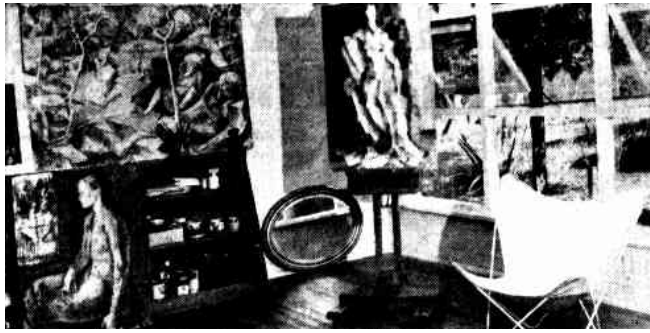
It has a pleasant view over an orchard and green paddocks, and, because it is so private, all the rooms open in to the courtyard through huge glass windows and doors...

The ten squares of the house are arranged so that maximum space is given to the living room, bedroom and studio. The utility rooms of kitchen, bathroom and laundry are small yet completely compact, and the entire house is designed to be easily and quickly care for, which is exactly as its owners wished.

The house really consists of two rectangles, joined by the timber screen wall. The main part is larger and contains the living, eating and sleeping areas; the other rectangle is given entirely to the studio..."

An original floorplan and several images of the house are printed with the article. A significant mention in the article is this: "Should the Laverty's want to add to their house, the architect [Ancher] has allowed for extra space to be built on to one wing of the house which will not alter its general appearance." Assumed to be in line with this modular design, in early 1955, P Laverty lodged another application (#662) for an "addition" to his dwelling in Eastern Road, Wahroonga.





Images from The Sunday Herald - Sun 20 Sep 1953 - Page 21: TO-DAY'S LIVING:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/18512013>

Council records also reveal BA1920/62 lodged in 1962 for a telescope shelter on the property.

In December 1958, she transferred a rear part of the lot to a new owner (lot A of current DP414327), leaving her with 2 roods and 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ perches (lot B of DP414327, the subject site. By the time her new certificate of title was issued in March 1960, she was reflected as being the wife of Peter Phillip Laverty of Wahroonga, confirming their residence in the suburb.

Mrs Laverty remains the owner of the property to the present day. Mr Peter Laverty passed away in 2013. Laverty's obituary noted of his time at the Wahroonga property: "*[Peter] enjoyed working in his bushland garden and photographing the night sky through a telescope. He also took great pleasure in designing and building furniture for the family.*"

Significance of the Architect

Sydney Ancher (1904-1979) is considered a pioneer of modern domestic architecture in Australia. Ancher's houses of the late 1940s and 1950s became examples of Ancher's innovative approaches towards architecture, focusing on functionality, subtlety, suitability to climate and the fluidity of space and lifestyle in a home. Qualifying as an architect in 1929, Ancher was awarded the Australian medallion and travelling scholarship of the Board of Architects of New South Wales the following year, allowing him to travel to London and gain significant exposure to the Modernist and International movements in Europe. Ancher returned to Australia in 1936, collaborating with Emil Sodersten and Reginald A de T. Prevost before the partnership of Prevost and Ancher was formalized in 1937. Ancher travelled to Europe again in January 1939, returning later in the year following the outbreak of WWII. He worked with the Commonwealth Government and John D Moore before being enlisted in June 1940. Ancher embarked for the Middle East in October 1940, being posted back in Australia in 1942 undertaking engineering and architectural duties. At the conclusion of the war Ancher returned to private practice, designing approximately ten houses a year until 1951, alongside other projects including hotels. In 1952, he partnered with two of his assistants forming the firm Ancher, Mortlock and Murray, working on a variety of domestic and commercial projects. In the 1960s the firm expanded to include council chambers, libraries and universities, and architect Ken Woolley joined the practice in 1964. Ancher retired from the firm in 1966, continuing to design predominately for himself.



1956 image of Sydney Ancher from *At Home in North Sydney*: <https://www.athomeinnorthsydney.com.au/sydney-ancher.html>

Preliminary heritage assessment against heritage listing criteria

Based on a initial assessment, the dwelling is considered to have high potential to meet the threshold for listing, based on the standard criterion for listing outlined by the Heritage Council of New South Wales. In particular, the house appears likely to have significant associational, aesthetic and social heritage values.

- a) an item is important in the course, or pattern, of NSW's cultural or natural history;

207 Eastern Road, appears likely to have historical significance for its ability to shed light on changing social and demographic patterns of the 1950s, as the house evolves over this decade from a small residence for a couple into a family home.

- b) an item has strong or special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in NSW's cultural or natural history;

207 Eastern Road, Wahroonga appears highly likely to have significant associations with the artists Ursula and Peter Laverty, Director of the Art Gallery of New South Wales from 1971-1977, and with architect Sydney Ancher, its original designer.

- c) an item is important in demonstrating aesthetic characteristics and/or a high degree of creative or technical achievement in NSW;

207 Eastern Road, Wahroonga appears highly likely to have aesthetic significance as a fine, architecturally designed representative example of 1950s modernist architecture. The modular design, construction and materials are considered reflective of modernist architecture, which Ancher and his contemporaries pioneered in this period.

- d) an item has strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group in NSW for social, cultural or spiritual reasons;

207 Eastern Road, Wahroonga appears highly likely to have social significance through its strong association with the NSW Art movement, because of its links with Peter Laverty, Director of the NSW Art Gallery and the Laverty family of artists.

- e) an item has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of NSW's cultural or natural history;

The property has the potential to yield information about cultural history in NSW, through its association with the artistic world, which is strongly reflected through the extant building fabric, arrangement and composition of elements on the site, including a purpose-built artist studio.

- f) an item possesses uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of NSW's cultural or natural history;

At this stage, it is unknown whether the subject property is a unique or rare example of either 1950s modern architecture or Sydney Ancher design. However, at the time of its commission and construction, Ancher identified the scope for additional living quarters, should an extension be required. If it can be proven that the later additions were also designed by Ancher, or at least in accordance with his intent, it may demonstrate a unique degree of foresight in design at the time.

Further information about the furniture designed by one of the commissioning owners in association with the house may also indicate a degree of rarity associated with the house.

- g) an item is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of NSW's
 - cultural or natural places; or
 - cultural or natural environments.

207 Eastern Road, Wahroonga appears likely to be significant as a representative example of 1950s modernist architecture.

The site is currently listed for sale and is not identified as a heritage item or located within a Heritage conservation area . The property is being marketed as an "opportunity to sub-divide, develop or build your dream home (STCA)" and therefore its potential heritage value is considered vulnerable to demolition and/ or harm.

Preliminary statement of significance

Recognised by the Heritage Council of NSW in their thematic study focussing on the Modern Movement of NSW, the property at 207 Eastern Road, Wahroonga has the potential to reach the threshold for a number of the NSW criterion for the listing of heritage items. The property demonstrates a level of local or possibly state cultural significance through its historic association with architect Sydney Ancher and as a high-quality and representative example of 1950s Modern Architecture, designed by a prominent Sydney architect. The dwelling also has the potential to yield social significance, with both of its commissioning owners prominent within the art movement of NSW.

Recommendation

This property has the potential as a heritage item for its architectural significance as a fine example of 1950s modernist architectural style designed by renowned architect Sydney Ancher and for its strong association with the art movement in NSW. It is recommended an Interim Heritage Order is placed on the property to provide interim protection to the site from harm/demolition/redevelopment while Council undertakes a full heritage assessment of the property to determine if it warrants a heritage listing or not.

Sources / Further reading:

Richard E. Apperly and Peter Reynolds, 'Ancher, Sydney Edward Cambrian (1904–1979)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/ancher-sydney-edward-cambrian-9348/text16413> , published first in hardcopy 1993, accessed online 7 September 2020.

An Artist driven by his passions (Obituary – Peter Laverty). Published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 September 2013.

The Sunday Herald - Sun 20 Sep 1953 - Page 21 - TO-DAY'S LIVING: When Two Artists Plan A Home: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/18512013>

'Chronology of Sydney Architecture 1945-1975' by Davina Jackson: <http://douglas-snelling.com/timeline/>

'Ursula Laverty' on *Artarmon Galleries*: <https://www.artarmongalleries.com.au/copy-of-john-henshaw-2>