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International working party for  
**documentation and conservation**  
of buildings, sites and neighbourhoods of the  
**modern movement**

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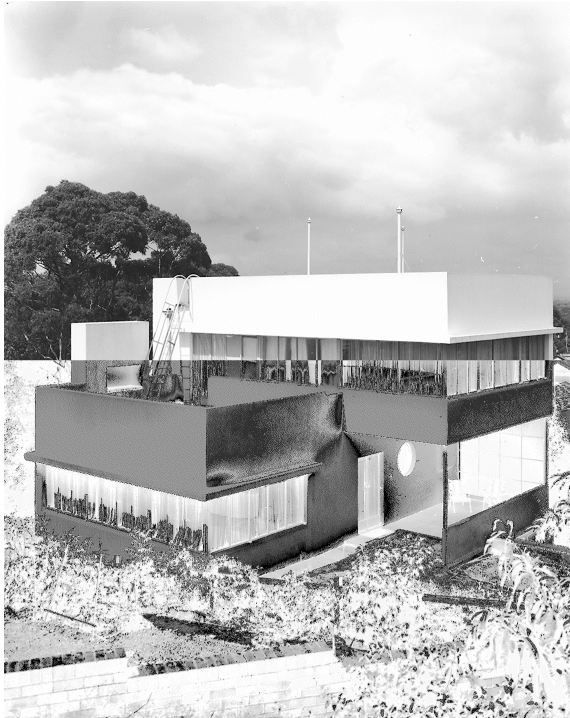
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**composed by working party of: Australia**

- 1 Identity of Hillman House, Roseville**  
**building/group of buildings/urban**  
**scheme/**  
**landscape/garden**



Max Dupain photograph of Hillman House from north-east (1949)  
Source: Max Dupain and Associates

|      |                          |   |
|------|--------------------------|---|
| 1.1  | current name of building | N/A   |
| 1.2  | variant or former name   | N/A   |
| 1.3  | number & name of street  | 40 Findlay Avenue   |
| 1.4  | town/suburb, city        | Roseville, Sydney   |
| 1.5  | state                    | New South Wales   |
| 1.6  | post code                | 2069  |
| 1.7  | country                  | Australia   |
| 1.8  | national grid reference  | AMG: 3 31 E, 62 59 N  |
| 1.9  | classification/typology  | Single residence  |
| 1.10 | protection status & date | Willoughby Local Environmental Plan<br>RAIA NSW Chapter – Register of 20 <sup>th</sup> Century Buildings of<br>Significance |

## **2 History of building**

### **2.1 original brief/purpose History of house**

The house was designed in 1948 for tailor Chaim Hillman and his wife Florence in the leafy, hilly northern Sydney suburb of Roseville. Roseville was a suburb laid out and developed in the years around the turn of the Twentieth Century and the majority of the houses in the street are very large Federation Style mansions or large California Bungalows constructed in the years between World War 1 and World War 2.

The house was constructed in the years immediately following World War 2 during the period of restrictions on building materials and restrictions on the size of new houses. Mrs Hillman recounted how she and the architect would scour Sydney for buildings materials such as bricks so that construction could commence and also how the architect railed against what he considered as outmoded building regulations which stipulated the sewerage pipes and stacks had to be exposed on the outside walls of the house in case of failure.

The house remained in the ownership of the Hillman Family from its completion in 1949 until 1995 when Mrs Hillman entered a nursing home.

#### **Henry Epstein (1909-1968)**

Henry Epstein was born in 1909 in Hungary as the second son of Russian Jewish tailors who had fled persecution in Tsarist Russia. They were regarded as aliens by the Hungarian government and as such, Henry was not eligible for unpaid tuition and so Henry studied

architecture in Vienna.

After completing his course Henry worked for an insurance company specialising in property interests. It was here that Henry met his future wife, Ruth Steinbach, the daughter of one of his employers. They married in 1936 and eighteen months later Hitler annexed Austria causing them to seek refuge overseas. Australia accepted them and the Epsteins arrived in Melbourne, Australia in 1939. Later in 1939 they moved to Sydney where Henry found work with a neon sign manufacturer. Henry designed the signs and, because of his engineering training in Vienna, he was able to engineer the structures supporting the signs. During the war he worked for a manufacturer of steel furniture and also designed industrial products such as wireless radios.

In 1946 Henry set up practice as an architect and his first project was a new home for his family which caused consternation with the Local Government Authority in that the houses was constructed on a concrete slab laid directly on the ground, contrary to the regulations which required the floor to be above the ground to enable underfloor ventilation.

Epstein collaborated with well-known sculptor, Lyndon Dadswell, in a competition for a memorial to King George V and King George VI. After a controversial proposal for a tall cigar-shaped monolith in the Royal Botanic Gardens was rejected the two finally constructed a memorial garden in Hyde Park in 1946.

Henry Epstein also pioneered a co-operative form of development when he collected a group of doctors to act as the client and tenant for a high-rise building of doctors' consulting rooms opposite the Royal North Shore Hospital in 1959. The building was developed by a Dutch immigrant Henry Dusseldorp whose company, Lend Lease, went on to create many of Sydney's and Melbourne's high-rise buildings such as Australia Square by Lend lease's favored architect, Harry Seidler.

Henry Epstein was interested in new inventions and appeared on a national television program showcasing new Australian inventions.

Like many refugees from Europe Henry Epstein was passionately involved in the rights of individuals and consumers. He was one of the founding members of the Australian Consumers' Association and attended many international consumer association conferences. It was while attending one such conference in New York in 1968 that he took ill. He returned home but died of blood poisoning in August 1968.

- 2.2 dates:  
commission/completion 1948/1949
- 2.3 architectural designers Dr Henry (Heinrich) Epstein

|                        |                                    |  |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| 2.4                    | others associated with building    | N/A  |
| 2.5                    | significant alterations with dates | <p>The house remained intact under the ownership of the original owner.</p> <p>In 1995 the house was sold to a connoisseur of houses who also kept intact. After 1 year the house was sold again and it was during this third and current ownership that the interior of the house was dramatically altered. The original Paul Kafka constructed built-in furniture was removed. The exterior colours of the steel-framed windows and doors were also altered from their bright blue to dark, charcoal grey.</p>   |
|                        | current use                        | Single residence   |
|                        | current condition                  | The building is in good condition  |
| <b>3.0 Description</b> |                                    |  |
| 3.1                    | general description                | <p>The house comprises three white rectangular prisms arranged one above the other and at right angles to one another. The lowest prism contains the garage and laundry, the next (middle) prism contains the entry hall Living Room, Dining Room and Kitchen and utilises the roof of the prism below to form a north-facing sun porch and a south-facing service porch leading via stairs down to the steeply sloping rear garden. The top prism contains a bathroom and the three bedrooms. The main bedroom cantilevers over the front entry forming a roof to the sun porch on the middle level. One of the smaller bedrooms opens out onto a roof terrace containing an open fireplace. From this roof terrace there is a fixed steel ladder leading to the roof of the bedroom prism, forming a secluded sunbaking terrace.</p> <p>The painted steel windows on the north and east facades are arranged in bands whereas the windows in the west and south facades are treated as small holes punched into the masonry walls. The windows on the north and east facades are protected from the rain and sun by reinforced concrete hoods.</p> <p>The concrete floor slab on the main living level is paved with timber parquetry with the exception of the kitchen floor which has been hand-painted in imitation of linoleum. The floor slab of the bedroom level has also been hand-painted in a similar manner.</p> <p>The dark stained joinery and built-in furniture were all fabricated by the well-known furniture designer and manufacturer Paul Kafka. In the main rooms the built-in furniture consisted of Kitchen cupboards, Dining Room sideboard and Living Room wall paneling an deep pelmets above the steel strip windows. There was also a Kafka drinks cabinet complete with interior mirrors and lighting. The entry hall had a built-in cloak cupboard, seat and telephone bench under a</p> |

large mirror.

The bedroom level built-in furniture consisted of beds, wardrobes and, in the main bedroom, a double sided wardrobe concealing a dressing table and mirror. All the built-in furniture was removed under the cover of darkness.

### 3.2 construction

Floors: Reinforced concrete flat plate slabs.

Walls: Double skin (cavity) brick walls, rendered inside and out.

Roofs: Roof terraces constructed as for floors with bituminous membrane over the slab and asbestos cements tiles as protective paving on top of the membrane.

Windows and external doors: Steel framed and steel casement-hung sashes.

### 3.3 context

The house is located on the south side of a suburban street in the heavily-treed western slopes of Roseville. The other houses in the street are dark brick bungalows constructed in the years between the two world wars or Federation Style mansions constructed at the turn of the Twentieth Century.

As such, the white rectangular prisms of the Hillman House are out of visual and form context with the surrounding built environment. The house is contained within a Heritage Conservation Area which, despite the fact that the Hillman House is a heritage item, would preclude the construction of similar contrasting houses in the future.

## 4 Evaluation

### 4.1

#### technical

The building is of Technical Significance:

- As an early use of reinforced concrete slab floors for single residential buildings.
- As an early example of the use of the Modernist roof terrace as a useable living area.
- For the exceptional quality of the surviving original exterior and interior finishes and fittings; this quality is supported by the existence of a comprehensive collection of photographs by arguably, Australia's foremost photographer, Max Dupain.

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The building is of Social Significance:

### 4.2 social

As an example of how the "fugitive" community in Australia prospered and afforded opportunities for newer arrivals within that fugitive community.

### 4.3 cultural & aesthetic

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The building is of Aesthetic Significance:

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- As an intact example of pure European Modernism from an architect who had first-hand experience of such “white cube” Modernism in Europe.
  - As an undiluted example of the concept of frozen movement ion architecture by the rotation of each of the three floors of the building.
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The building is now of Iconic /Canonical Significance:

4.4 Iconic/canonical As the most intact example of the work of one of Australia's “fugitive moderns” (architects who fled persecution in Europe and brought with them first-hand experience of and involvement with Modernism before World War 2.

4.5 general assessment The Hillman House is an important example of European Modernism constructed in Australia by one of the fugitive modern architects.

## 5 Documentation

### Written Sources

Lowden, Andrew, 1995, *Dr Henry Epstein*, unpublished dissertation for the degree of Bachelor of Architecture, University of Technology, Sydney.

5.1 principal references Robertson, Scott, 1996, *Exploring the Fugitive Moderns: The Work of Dr Henry Epstein*, talk given to the Architecture Society, 17 April 1996

### Photo archives

Max Dupain photos at Max Dupain & Assoc (Eric Sierins)

5.2 visual material attached

5.3 rapporteur/date Scott Robertson, September 2004