



THE GRIFFINS' CASTLECRAG LEGACY

Introductory Note: Information on the design, formation and development of Castlecrag is readily available in many books, magazines, journal articles and documentaries. For recommended reading see the site's Books & Media section. These works have been produced mostly by academics, heritage bodies and other Griffin experts. It is therefore useful to have the more general information below which was developed by the Castlecrag Progress Association, a long-established body with a broader perspective on the suburb. For access to its website see the site's Links section.

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When they arrived in Australia, the Griffins were enraptured by its flora and rapidly became advocates for conservation. Walter strongly believed in designing for nature - subordinating houses to the landscape - by preserving access to, and views of, native bushland and by being sensitive to natural features such as escarpments, creeks, rocky outcrops and established trees. Willoughby City Council has signposted and publicised many walking tours of the Castlecrag Estate. These reveal the following prominent aspects of the Griffins' legacy:

Griffin houses. Many Griffin-designed residences have been altered, but are still distinctive with their walls being made of local sandstone blocks, having flat roofs to minimise their impact on others' views and being of organic design, i.e. they are a part of, not perched on, their land and designed to be part of the landscape.

Street layout. The curvilinear roads follow the contours, unlike the regular grid pattern of neighbouring suburbs. There are many bush-covered "islands" at street corners and in culs-de-sac.

Street names. Griffin probably called the suburb "Castlecrag" to relate it to the already named spine road along the peninsula, Edinburgh Road. Its name, in turn, was probably inspired by the crenulated profile of the capping sandstone of the peninsula's highest point. Accordingly, roads are named after parts of a castle and reflect their positioning on the estate, for example The Outpost, Rampart, Parapet, Bastion and Citadel.

Reserves and pathways. Griffin planned a system of recreation reserves located behind the neighbouring houses. These were connected by a network of pathways, designed to allow residents to ramble while staying off the roads. Again, natural features suggested appropriate castle names, e.g. Tower, Buttress, Turret and Lookout Reserves.

Community facilities. The Griffins' creativity and contribution to society extended well beyond architecture. They wrote, lectured, invented, created wonderful artworks and laid the groundwork for a community with strong civic values. Public facilities which still exist include children's playgrounds, community centre and tennis courts. Marion Mahony Griffin was the driving force in establishing the Haven Amphitheatre in a natural valley in The Barricade, chosen for its acoustics and seating potential. It is still a popular venue for performances and gatherings.

Accessible waterfront. Griffin showed amazing foresight by keeping some seven kilometres of continuous foreshore as a reserve. It sets this large segment of Sydney Harbour apart from all others and its creation, without government coercion was, and remains, unique.