

GENTEEL ART DECO: An easy Berea walk

Architect **Kirk White** will guide us on a short tour of several interesting buildings located on the classy north end of Musgrave road. We shall encounter contrasting Art Deco styles followed by a time warp into the serene tranquility of a beautifully-restored haven in Berea and Union Period styles.

1 Cheviot Court

676 Musgrave Road cnr Poynton Place
W S Payne & E O Payne, 1934

This well-maintained six-storey apartment block, is a stylish Art Deco *Streamline Moderne* building with notable flagpole and crest motifs. There is a semi-circular pavilion form to the southwest, and horizontal sunshades above the windows. The entrance is flanked with columns constructed using curved bricks of the time. During the 1930's, under the increasing influence of more functional Modernism, applied decoration became further limited in favour of overall streamlined appearance. Either way we look at it - this is where the Art Deco style overlaps the Modern Movement, or, where pure modernism still found it fashionable to embrace Art Deco. Cheviot Court, in Morningside, is one of Durban's finest examples of such architectural artistry where the celebration of the straight line is enhanced by rounded corners, making the structure appear as though it is slipping through the air – *Art Deco in motion*. The streamlined form of the building evokes thoughts of the ocean liners, automobiles and fast cars of the period.



Cheviot Court



Inside stairs



Foyer



Entrance & curved brick

2

St Aubyn Court

**Corner of Musgrave and Cochrane Roads
1935**

The curved protruding balconies of this building have been enclosed at some time in the past. Horizontal lines are emphasised by string course windowsills and “eyelids” over the windows. The building is well maintained. The foyer has wood veneer panelling and the original bench. The wood panelling is “framed” by bright green Perspex. The entire stairway is terrazzo. The flats have parquet flooring with a wide stepped skirting. The milk niches have a little hatch type door with a latch.



Foyer with original bench



St Aubyn Court



Porte-Cochère

There is an old boiler in the basement which would have been used to heat the water for the building. The original meter boxes have not been removed from the electrical panel which is accessed through a door at the back of one of the garages on the street.

3

Ainsdale

687 Musgrave Road

This building has recently received a fresh new paint job which emphasizes its features. The two wings are each symmetrical about their own centre-lines, and are copies of each other, with a variation in spacing. Only the entrance on Sandile Thusi Road differs in that it is omitted on the Musgrave Road side, where the same location is similarly embellished but with an upper “Romeo & Juliet” balcony. Portholes and a series of horizontal lines decorate the ends of each of these two wings. String courses below the central windows again take up the horizontal emphasis, whilst the facades are modulated by symmetrical steps in the wall line.



Ainsdale

The foyer has wood panelling. The light fittings are the original. There is a box attached to the entrance door for newspapers and mail, that can be opened from the inside of the foyer. The floor of the foyer is black and white tiling. The white tiles have a terrazzo look and the black tiles are matt black. The first set



Foyer

of stairs are white marble. The entrance to each apartment has a ziggurat arch and a niche for milk delivery.

4

Gleneagles & a new take on Art Deco *c/r Musgrave and Sandile Thusi Roads*

Gleneagles is a very plain version of Art Deco, probably from after 1940 when the Modern Movement was becoming significant. It's plain lines lack of symmetry and low height are indicative of the International Style. There is no emphasis of the entrance but "eyelids" run all the way along over the windows and balconies (which have been enclosed).



Gleneagles



Hertford

Further down Musgrave Road towards Mitchell Park are a couple of new buildings which mimic some Art Deco features – big curved bay windows, ships railings and capping on the skyline. The angular juxtaposition of balconies and asymmetry are similar to Gleneagles.

Musgrave Mansions

690 Musgrave Road

W.H. Hobbs ?, 1922 ?

In Brian Kearney's "Revised Listing of the Important Places and Buildings in Durban", Musgrave Mansions is rated highly and described as "A significant example of the Berea Style applied to residential flats of the Union Period, two storied with hipped tiled roofs, modulated 'pavilion like' forms, arched balconies and loggias and appropriate detail; townscape role".

The building was originally designed as "Bellevue Mansions" for Mrs W.T. Gatenby, with an earliest date of 22 August 1922 visible on drawings (Architect & Surveyor-14 Mercury Lane). By November, 1925, when W.H. Hobbs signed off a garage addition, it was known as Musgrave Mansions. Hobbs himself was born in Mauritius in 1880, and practised in Durban around 1930. Around 1934 he entered into partnership with F.P. Bonieux (Hollywood Court, Jubilee Court). Hobbs lived at 29 Robarts Road and died in Durban in 1948.

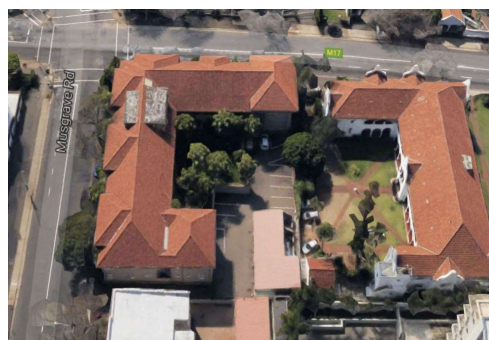
After the building of Musgrave Mansions, the complementary building "Springfield Mansions" was built across the courtyard by a Mr Nelson. This building with its Cape Dutch gable reflects the Union period.

Notable features of Musgrave Mansions are its courtyard garden with cloistered walkways, its double-volume entrance with its magnificent staircase banister, and its arched balconies (now enclosed). You might be aghast that the ground floor balconies originally all provided entrance from the street - recall that those were sedate and gentlemanly times !

On 28 February, 1999, an electrical fire broke out in the Springfield (Sandile Thusi) Road wing of Musgrave Mansions, destroying the roof and three flats, with 7 more damaged by smoke and water. Fortunately, the insurers, SA Eagle, made this a showpiece of restoration at a cost of R1.8m, with Musgrave Mansions winning a conservation award from the council. We see Musgrave Mansions today after its 2024 meticulous renovation, with 60% of its residents having decided on white. This is a sectional title building where owners clearly take pride in their custody of this grand old lady – example: no air-conditioners !



Springfield Road wing



Musgrave & Springfield Mansions



Courtyard