



THE GRIFFINS' CASTLECRAG LEGACY

When they arrived in Australia, the Griffins soon were enraptured by its flora and became advocates for conservation. Walter wrote in the *Wildlife Preservation Society Journal* that the landscape should be “*accorded the respect due to a highly developed and perfected living organism*”. By the time he began developing Castlecrag he 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. A walking tour of the Castlecrag Estate will reveal his legacy.

Griffin houses. Many Griffin-designed residences have been altered, but are still distinctive with their walls made of local sandstone blocks, flat roofs to minimise their impact on others' views and organic design - they are a part of, not perched on, their land and designed as 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, road names are parts of a castle and reflecting 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. The 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 many children's playgrounds, a 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 to put aside some seven kilometres of continuous foreshore as reserve. It sets this large segment of Sydney Harbour apart from all others and its creation, without government coercion was, and remains, unique.

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Note: This information was adapted from material on the Castlecrag Progress Association website. Willoughby City Council provides maps and information on walking tours in Castlecrag which disclose much of Griffin's legacy. For access to either body, see the [Links](#) section.