

2.15 George Street, no. 28a: Vigor Brown House

Name: Vigor Brown House

Name: Charles and Mary Vigor Brown House

Schedule number: **NCC Heritage Group:**

Heritage New Zealand List number and category (if applicable): N/A

Type of site: Historic place

Address: 28a George Street

Legal Description: LOT 1 DP 14972 (CT G4/573)

Construction date: 1915



Figure 128 28a George Street, view from the road. Source: Photographer: Chris Cochran, April 2019.



Figure 129 View from below. Source: Photographer Chris Cochran, April 2019.



Figure 130 Extent of 28sa George Street, Source: Napier City Council property on-line



Figure 131 Location of Charles and Mary Vigor Brown House, 28a George Street. Source: <https://www.gis.napier.govt.nz>

Architect: James Augustus Louis Hay

Builder: J W Wolfe

Original function/use: House

Original owner: Charles and Mary Vigor Brown

Current use: Residence

Current owner:

Significance: Aesthetic, architectural, cultural, social.

Summary: The house has strong historic values for its commissioning by a well-known Napier family, Charles and Mary Vigor Brown, Charles' father having been mayor of the city, and Mary an assistant to the architect of the house, J.A. Louis Hay. Louis Hay is himself an architect of great regional, and indeed national importance, known for some beautiful buildings that derive their inspiration from the Arts and Crafts movement. This house is a very good example of Hay's domestic work and is among the most accomplished of the Arts and Crafts style houses being built in New Zealand at the time.

History: The Vigor Brown house (1915) was designed by Louis Hay for Charles and Mary Vigor Brown. Charles (1889-1963) was a son of John Vigor Brown, Napier's mayor from 1907-1917, then 1919-1921, and again between 1927-1933.

Mary Watt (1888-1953) worked for Louis Hay as a typist from 1912 until 1915, when she and Charles married on 5 June that year in St Paul's Presbyterian Church, Napier.¹ A building permit was issued for a six-room dwelling with a WC, worth £860, on 26 March 1915. The builder was J.W. Wolfe.²⁵⁶

Mary Vigor Brown had a daughter on 18 April 1917.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁶ Index of Building Permits, P.H.E. Bloomer papers.

²⁵⁷ *Hastings Standard* 19 April 1917

As Mary and Louis Hay were work colleagues, the architect had considerable free rein with the design, resulting in an experimental house which Peter Shaw calls “Hay’s most interesting... [and] adventurous bungalow”.² Stained glass windows, tiles and repeating motifs feature throughout the house, referencing European Art Nouveau – especially the admired Scottish architect and designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh.

Louis Hay’s first known works in Napier were the many houses he designed in the period before and after World War 1. He clearly took as his models the houses of the American and English architects who were influenced by William Morris’s Art and Crafts movement. The linking figure between the English School of Arts and Crafts and the Chicago School of architects was C.R. Ashbee who had established contacts between the two schools in 1886, the year Frank Lloyd Wright had designed the magazine *The House Beautiful*.²⁵⁸

Mary Vigor Brown was very involved with the arts and crafts movement in Napier. She was one of the people who contributed to the success of the Hawke’s Bay Museum and Art Gallery.²⁵⁹ There is an annual art award in her memory.

Notable people: Mary and Charles Vigor Brown, J.A. Louis Hay

Architectural style/description: The Vigor Brown House is notable (especially in its public aspect), for the magnificent sweep of its tiled roof; the roof is gable-ended, of low pitch, and has wide overhanging eaves and gable ends. It is an all-encompassing roof, interrupted only by a small raised portion that shelters the front door on the road (south-eastern) side, and another on the garden (north-western) side. There are several smaller ‘lean-to’ roofs which shelter bay windows. The tiles are a rich burnt orange, contrasting strongly with plain white walls, which are finished in a heavily textured stucco. A whimsical touch is provided by four green tiles set in a diamond pattern high in the gable end walls.

The house has a strong Arts and Crafts influence, exemplified in the use of natural materials, and the close integration of house and site. The interior is described by Peter Shaw in ‘Louis Hay, Architect’, (Unitec, 1998) as follows:

‘At its heart is a large inglenook fireplace which dominates an open-planned dining room, sitting room and sunporch extending its entire length. This time Hay did not compromise on planning, providing his clients with an interior which combined recessed intimacy with an expansive relationship to the spectacular view north to the Pacific coast. Here Hay’s familiarity with the designs of Charles Rennie Mackintosh is clearly evident. The dining room has elaborate Art Nouveau stained glass windows dominated by red roses, green leaves and long sinuous stems while other similar glass panels in the hall doors let light into what would have been dark passages.’

Unusually, the townscape value of the house is restricted to the roof, as it sits below the road and little else of the building is visible, but the roof nevertheless makes a startling impression of colour and texture in the street.

²⁵⁸ Peter Shaw “Louis Hay Napier and the Chicago School.” <https://www.art-newzealand.com/Issues31to40/napier.htm>

²⁵⁹ Hull, Helena. 1970. Poster about the founders of the Hawke’s Bay Museum & Art Gallery.

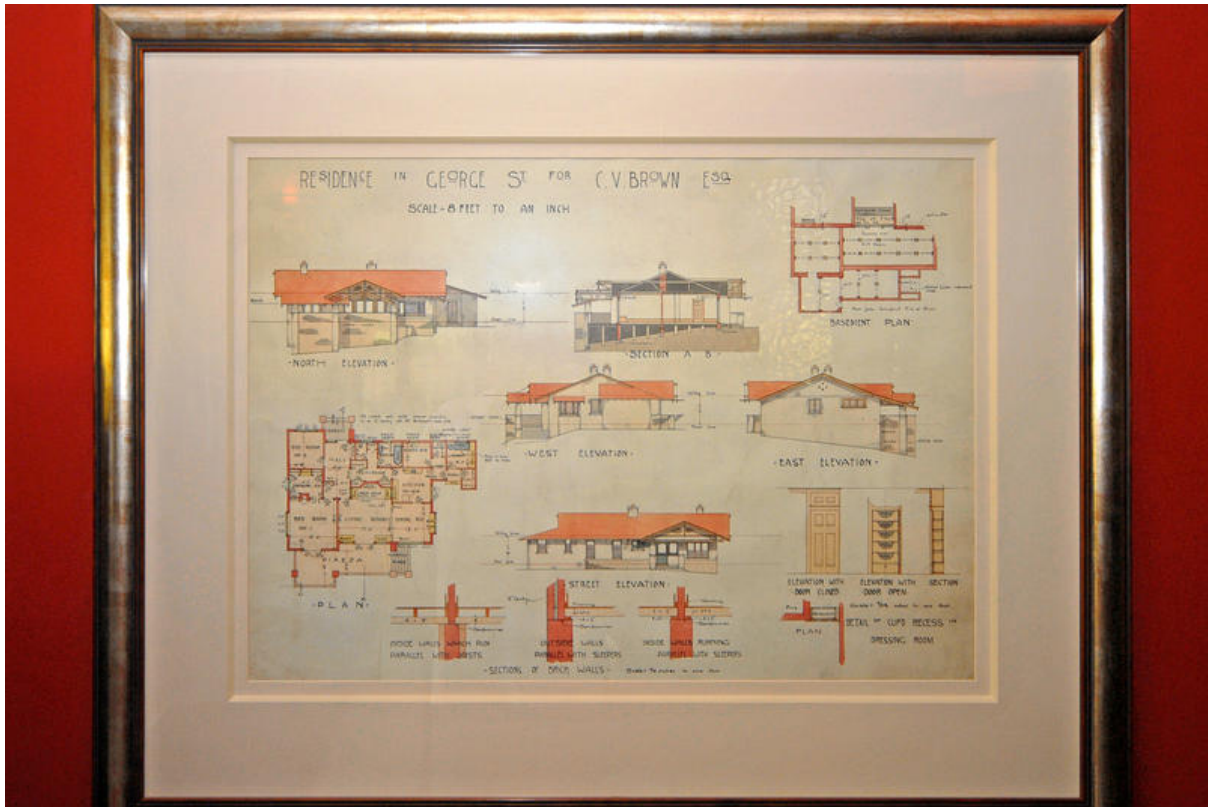


Figure 132 Louis Hay's architectural plans for Charles and Mary Vigor Brown House. Accessed 23.4.2019 via <https://www.nz.open2view.com/properties/244206> under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License](#)

Alterations: Not known. The carport at the south-eastern end is presumably an addition.

References:

Bloomer, P.H.E. Index of Building Permits

Hull, Helena. 1970. Poster about the founders of the Hawke's Bay Museum & Art Gallery, MTG Hawke's Bay object nos. 2009/69, 55970

Shaw, Peter. 1999. *Louis Hay Architect*. Napier: Hawke's Bay Cultural Trust, 1999.

Shaw, Peter. 1984-5 "Louis Hay Napier and the Chicago School." Originally published in *Art New Zealand* vol. 33. <https://www.art-newzealand.com/Issues31to40/napier.htm>

<https://www.nz.open2view.com/properties/244206>

<https://www.qv.co.nz/property/28a-george-street-hospital-hill-napier-4110/662332>

Theme: Culture and the Arts

Hapu/Iwi:

Cultural connections: The house has links to architecture and the arts through Mary Vigor Brown.

Recommendations: Schedule as significant