

Commonwealth Bank of Australia Building

Address 48 Martin Place, Sydney, NSW, 2000

Practice H E Ross & Rowe

Designed 1922 Completed 1928

History & Description Originally designed as the Government Savings Bank of New South Wales the Commonwealth Bank of Australia, designed in the Inter-War Beaux-Arts style of architecture, provides an important civic presence to the northern side of Martin Place with its strongly expressed base; façade recessed behind a colonnade of giant order of ionic columns & enriched cornice. During the early twentieth century the Bank experienced a considerable degree of expansion & acquired a number of properties in the block between Elizabeth Street & Castlereagh Street on Martin Place (formerly Moore Street), as the site of its new headquarters building. At the time of its completion the building was the most expensive in Australia, having been constructed at a cost of £1,500,000. The Bank continued to prosper & by 1929 it was the second largest savings bank in the British Empire. The Bank suffered heavy losses as a result of the Great Depression & in 1931 amalgamated with the Commonwealth Bank of Australia.



48 Martin Place after completion, 1928
Source: National Library of Australia

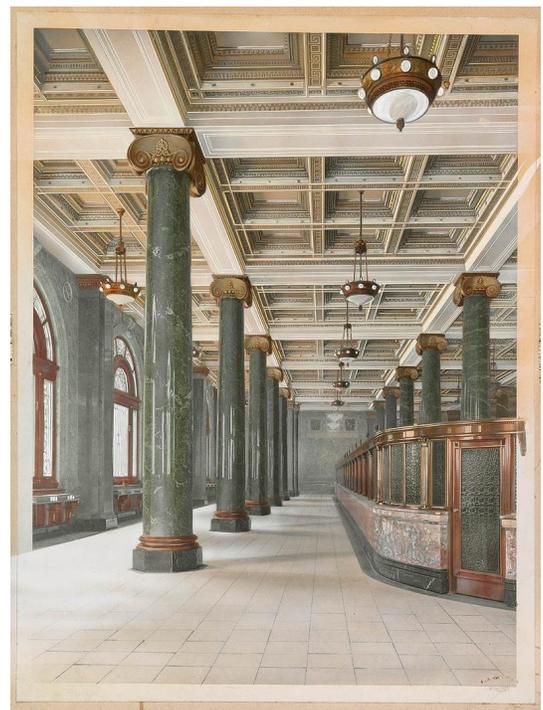
Of steel frame & reinforced concrete construction, the ten-storey building has a red granite base & above this it is clad in purpose made faience (tile) & bronze. The large & impressive double height banking chamber, comprising marble, scagliola & bronze finishes, is located on the ground floor.

Between 1984 & 1990 the building was the subject of a comprehensive programme of conservation & refurbishment: the conservation of the banking chamber & exterior, & the complete refurbishment of the upper floors & a rooftop addition. The original central light well, which provided natural light to the banking chamber's original ceiling & upper level offices, was converted to an atrium with a glass roof located at the main roof level.

(Adapted from Commonwealth Bank 48 Martin Place, Conservation Management Plan 2011 q Tanner Architects)

Statement of Significance

The Commonwealth Bank of Australia building at 48 Martin Place is an excellent example of the Inter-War Beaux-Arts style of architecture in Australia with its sculptural quality of the symmetrical façade consisting of a strongly expressed base, portion of façade recessed behind giant order of ionic columns & enriched cornice. The building has important civic presence on Martin Place, & the extensive use of fine materials including faience, bronze, marble, scagliola & quality craftsmanship throughout demonstrates well the prosperity & confidence of the era prior to the Great Depression.



Interior of the banking chamber, 1928
Source: Commonwealth Bank Archive.

Criteria Applicable

N1. Significant heritage value in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class or period of design.