Liner House

13-15 Bridge Street, Sydney, NSW, 2000

Bunning & Madden (Charles Madden)

1959 Designed, 1960 Completed

The narrow 14m wide site was purchased in 1958 by the Wilh. Wilhelmsen Agency Pty Ltd, a Norwegian shipping organisation. Designed as a six storey office building it was completed in approximately 49 weeks. The building utilised the maximum floor area for the site, but did not exploit the height permitted. The design brief was 'to build a house for Wilh. Wilhelmsen's own use rather than construct a tall narrow building to exploit the site for its maximum financial return'. When the building opened in 1960 the Agency was by then Norway's largest shipping organisation & it occupied the first three floors.

The simple aluminium curtain wall façade, with horizontal sun control louvers, is set back one metre & comprises eight bays with black metal-spandrels. The top floor is further set back forming a terrace. The recessed entry foyer is marked by a cantilevered awning which opens into a double height lobby to the ground floor shipping chamber. The lobby’s volume is expressed in the façade & features a spiral stair up to the mezzanine level, & a large mural screen by the artist Douglas Annand. The screen was considered by the Society of Sculptors as a considerable artistic advance in commercial building & public sculpture.

The firm of Bunning & Madden are acclaimed for their consistent integration of art in architecture exampled in the now demolished Anzac House, Sydney, 1957, & the National Library of Australia, Canberra, 1968. Liner House was awarded The Sulman Award of 1961 & is considered to be Charles Madden’s most important work. Madden died in the year of its completion.

Liner House has been altered internally however the double height lobby is extant. The design of Liner House owes much to the four-storey Manufacturers Hanover Trust Building, New York, by Gordon Bunshaft for S.O.M., 1953, which Madden is understood to have visited.

(Refer NSW SHR database #5045700)

Liner House is an outstanding example of modern architecture incorporating an early type of curtain wall construction by one of Australia’s notable architecture firms. The building is exceptionally well detailed & has been recognised for its consistent honesty in design and good taste with a strong civic consciousness. The place has further significance as it demonstrates exceptionally well the integration of art in architecture with the Douglas Annand mural screen.

Criteria Applicable

N1. Significant heritage value in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class or period of design
N3. Significant heritage value in establishing a high degree of creative achievement
N5. Having a special association with the life or works of an architect of significant importance in our history