

McPherson's building

Address 546-566 Collins Street, Melbourne 3000

Practice Reid & Pearson in association with Stuart P Calder

Designed 1935 Completed 1936

History & Description The former McPherson's building was designed by Stuart P. Calder, and Reid and Pearson (architects in conjunction), and constructed in 1935-6, as a warehouse, office and showroom for the hardware empire headed by Sir William McPherson. The building is a four storey (plus basement) reinforced concrete structure with a column-free facade featuring alternating broad horizontal bands of glazing (originally Vitrolite) and light brown faience along the full 160 feet of its length. The horizontal emphasis is punctuated by a stair tower at the western end, which projects above the roof line to give access to the flat roof which originally accommodated a tennis court.

It was designed in the then innovative Streamline Modern style. Although often linked to Erich Mendelsohn's work, it is more probable that British examples were influential such as H Victor Kerr's Commerce House, London (1934). Using modern industrial products : glass, stainless steel, faience and concrete, reflected an interest in more dynamic materials and a move away from traditional, stultifying wood and plaster and brick and render construction techniques, and constitute a major and innovative use of such materials. Of particular note was the employment of reinforced concrete structure, with columns set back from the glazing to achieve an uncluttered, column-free facade. The emphasis on functionalism was translated into the idea of architectural design as integral to merchandising. The striking facade, with its highly visible display areas, reflected the need to catch the eye of passing motorists, as well as pedestrians.

Statement of Significance The Former McPherson's building is of significance as an important early example of the Streamline Moderne style used in a retail and commercial context. Its polished execution helped to introduce a new style of architectural expression to commercial architecture in Australia.

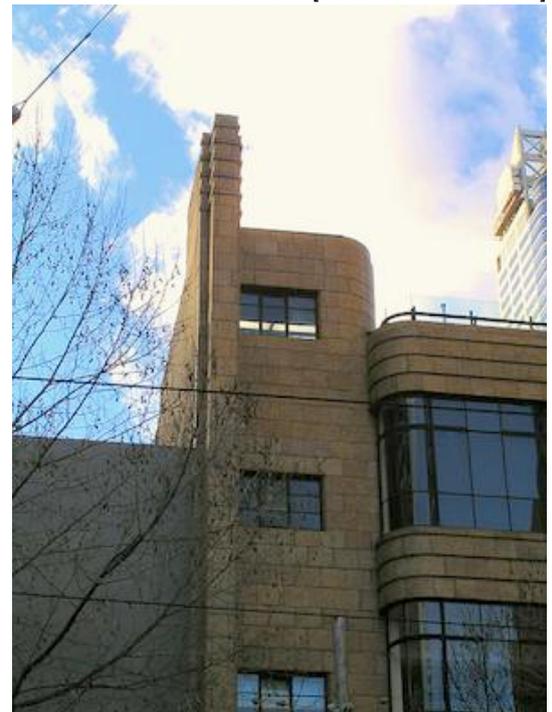
References:

Citation to Victorian Heritage Register #H0942
Donald Leslie Johnson, *Australian Architecture 1901-51*, pp.141, 145.
Architectural Drawings held by SLV.

Criteria Applicable N1 - Significant heritage value in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class or period of design.
N2 - Significant heritage value in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.
N3 - Significant heritage value in establishing a high degree of creative achievement.



View in ca 1937 [thecollectormm.com.au]



Detail of recessed stair tower & curved glazing



Collins Street facade 1981 photo by John Collins [SLV]



Detail of curtain-wall glazing, photo by Sean Fishlock