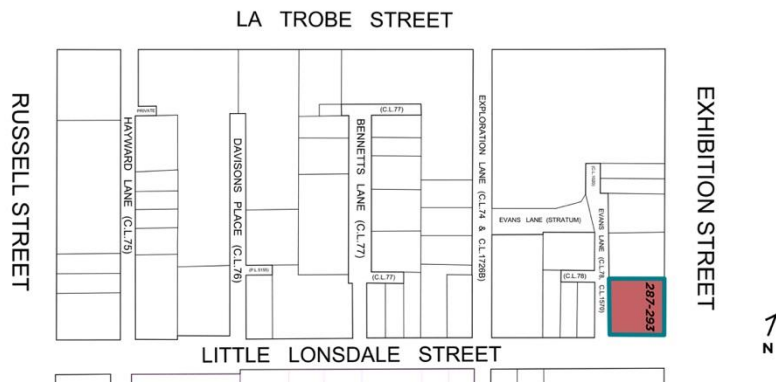


SITE NAME	Former Exhibition Towers [also known as Exhibition Apartments (current name)]
STREET ADDRESS	287-293 Exhibition Street, Melbourne
PROPERTY ID	103609



SURVEY DATE: October 2019

SURVEY BY: GJM Heritage

HERITAGE INVENTORY No

EXISTING HERITAGE OVERLAY No

PLACE TYPE Individual Heritage Place

PROPOSED CATEGORY Significant

FORMER GRADE Ungraded

DESIGNER / ARCHITECT / ARTIST: Kenneth McDonald & Associates

BUILDER: Not known

DEVELOPMENT PERIOD: Postwar Period (1945-1975)

DATE OF CREATION / MAJOR CONSTRUCTION: 1969-1971

THEMES

ABORIGINAL THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Research undertaken in preparing this citation focused on the postwar history of the site and did not address associations with Aboriginal people or organisations	Aboriginal Themes (Hoddle Grid Heritage Review, Stage 2 Volume 3 Aboriginal Heritage, March 2019) have therefore not been identified here
POSTWAR THEMES	DOMINANT SUB-THEMES
1 Shaping the urban landscape	1.8 Expressing an architectural style 1.9 Beyond the curtain wall
5 Living in the city centre	5.1 Housing and lodging

LAND USE

THEMATIC MAPPING AND LAND USE	
1890s	Retail, Hairdresser, Workshop
1920s	Retail
1960s	Café/Restaurant, Retail, Workshop, Manufacturer, Carrier

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommended for inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Melbourne Planning Scheme as an individual heritage place.

Extent of overlay: To extent of property boundary

SUMMARY

The Former Exhibition Towers, a multi-storey building on the north-west corner of Exhibition and Little Lonsdale streets was designed by architect Kenneth McDonald & Associates, for owners Danbry Pty Ltd. The building was constructed in 1969-1971. It was initially designed and advertised as residential apartments but opened as the Courtesy Inn Motel in 1971.

CONTEXTUAL HISTORY

The period from 1945 to 1975 was one of radical transformation for Melbourne; from the low-rise city that still reflected its colonial origins to a bustling international centre of commerce and culture. The surviving buildings from this period are evidence of the evolving economic and social conditions in Melbourne at the time and demonstrate the city's transition from its nineteenth century manufacturing origins to its current banking, office and service industry focus. These buildings reflect the increasing commercial and cultural role of Melbourne in the international context of globalisation and postwar optimism as well as a radically altered economic environment which saw an influx of foreign capital and ideas. Collectively, these buildings represent a transformative period in the life of the city; a period that is categorised by significant change, growth and evolution across all aspects of life – social, political, economic and cultural.

Expressing an architectural style in the postwar period

Multi-storey commercial buildings made a significant contribution to postwar Melbourne, particularly from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s. With the resumption of building construction in the 1950s after the hiatus of World War II, the advent of curtain wall construction – enabling the application of a non-load bearing skin to the face of a building – radically altered the appearance of the modern city commercial building.

Constructed predominantly for the financial and business sectors, there was an eagerness amongst clients to establish a dominant city presence and to project a modern, progressive and prestigious approach to commercial building design. The resulting Post-War Modernist style of multi-storey buildings, influenced particularly by steel and glass office tower design in the United States, were in stark contrast to the pre-war city buildings in central Melbourne and presented architects of the day with a completely new design challenge.

Thirty major city buildings were completed in Melbourne in four years alone from 1955 to 1958 and 22 were office buildings within, or on the fringes of, the CBD (Saunders 1959:91). Largely influenced by the American skyscraper, the earliest office buildings of the 1950s utilised innovative curtain walling, formed from continuous metal-framing filled principally with glass. The curtain wall is described by Miles Lewis as 'essentially a continuous, non-bearing skin on the face of a building' and is one of the 'leitmotifs of modernism, both in Australia and overseas' (Lewis 2012:185). The curtain walled 'glass box' aesthetic was embraced by the local architects, and many buildings followed to the extent that high-rise office buildings with curtain walling became a defining characteristic of the new buildings in the latter half of the 1950s (NTAV 2014:5-6).

Amongst the first curtain walled buildings to be constructed in Melbourne was the 13-storey glass-fronted Gilbert Court at 100 Collins Street (J A La Gerche 1954-56), which was built to the height limit of 132 feet (40m), and – perhaps the most influential – the free-standing ICI House, 1 Nicholson Street (Bates Smart & McCutcheon 1955-58). Located on the outskirts of the Hoddle Grid, ICI House was clad on all four facades with glass curtain walling and exceeded the well-established maximum building height within the Hoddle Grid. Large numbers of similarly designed city commercial buildings followed, often displaying bold horizontal contrast between alternating rows of glazing and coloured spandrels.

Beyond the curtain wall

The dominant glass box design of the late 1950s was challenged in the 1960s as the shortcomings of the fully glazed curtain wall became apparent – in particular its poor thermal performance – and new technologies became available. Advances in concrete technology, including the development of precast concrete, impacted greatly on both the appearance and structure of the commercial tower form from the 1960s onwards.

By the mid-1960s, architects were experimenting with a range of solid cladding materials for tower buildings including precast concrete, stone, reconstituted stone, tile and brick, as well as various metals for cladding, screening and detailing. A number of buildings continued to adopt true curtain wall construction; however, a different aesthetic was created by the use of solid external cladding in place of the typically glazed spandrels of the 1950s. This aesthetic is evident in a number of existing buildings in the city centre including the Guardian Building at 454-456 Collins Street (1960-61), with its stone-faced precast concrete panelled facades.

Concrete advances saw an increase in the use of reinforced column and slab construction in 1960s multi-storey building design, however concrete-encased steelwork also continued to be used. Some buildings incorporated structural elements in their main facades (for example load-bearing precast concrete panels or structural mullions) so were therefore not of true curtain wall construction. The structural nature of these facades was not necessarily apparent to the observer and the buildings continued to display the well-established repetitive characteristics of the true curtain wall façade, such as at Australia-Netherlands House, 468-478 Collins Street, designed by Peddle Thorp & Walker in association with Meldrum & Partners (c1968-70).

A broad range of design approaches became apparent in multi-storey commercial buildings of the 1960s and early 1970s. The horizontality of curtain walling was often balanced by the addition of vertical elements such as façade columns, strips or fins, which introduced textural patterns and visual strength to the facades of a number of buildings. Other multi-storey towers clearly expressed their structure externally with grid-like facades which clearly reflected the internal trabeated structural system. Sun screening provided additional patterning to facades, either as a repetitive decorative motif across the façade, as an expression of the window frames (such as at Royal Mail House, 253-267 Bourke Street designed by D Graeme Lumsden, 1961-63), in the form of balconies (as at the Melbourne Office of the Commercial Banking Company of Sydney building, 251-257 Collins Street, 1971-73), or occasionally as an entire screen attached to the exterior face of the building.

Buildings also varied with towers set within plazas or on dominant podiums. The State Savings Bank of Victoria at 45-63 Swanston Street, designed by Buchan Laird & Buchan (c1974), is one example of a building constructed with a dominant podium. Buildings were sometimes set back from the street line behind public plazas – a strategy adopted to gain council approval for additional building height and evident in the Bates Smart McCutcheon designed Commonwealth Banking Corporation Building at 359-373 Collins Street (c1972-1975) – while others were built within larger plaza spaces, such as the AMP Tower & St James Building Complex (1965-69), designed by US-based firm Skidmore Owings & Merrill (SOM).

Housing and lodging

The provision of accommodation has always been a major function of Australian city centres, and has included the establishment of hotels, hostels, boarding houses and serviced apartments, as well as terraces, flats and medium-density housing. Since the 1950s, the market sought by inner-city

developers has moved to an almost exclusively middle- to higher-income group. New forms of accommodation from the 1950s replaced older buildings with high-cost, high-rise buildings for a restricted range of users (Marsden 2000:53).

The postwar era saw the introduction of apartments and flats in the well-established inner suburbs of South Yarra and St Kilda, spreading to Caulfield, Malvern, Camberwell, Hawthorn and Prahran. Victoria's first block of 'own-your-own' or 'OYO' flats were built in Hawthorn in 1949 and the subsequent introduction of strata title legislation by architect and Lord Mayor Bernard Evans led to the proliferation of this housing type from the early 1950s (Heritage Alliance 2008:23).

The apartment boom reached the inner city in the late 1960s, facilitated by the *Conveyancing (Strata Titles) Act* of 1961. An Australian innovation, the legislation allowed each lot or apartment to have its own title deed (Stent 2018). Many émigré architects, who were experienced in higher density living in Europe, specialised in apartment design. Viennese-born architect Kurt Popper, for example, built two blocks of residential flats in central Melbourne – Park Tower, 199-207 Spring Street (1969) and 13-15 Collins Street (1970) (Heritage Alliance 2008:21).

Although marketed as a glamorous and convenient lifestyle, high-rise city apartment living was not popularly embraced. Exhibition Towers, an 11-storey residential building located at the north-west corner of Exhibition Street and Little Lonsdale Street, was designed and built as a residential and commercial building. Constructed in 1968-69 to a design by Kenneth McDonald & Associates, the building was an endeavour to provide 'OYO' flats in the city centre. 'High prices, high bills and Melbourne's conservative living style' contributed to difficulties in finding buyers for the units and the building was converted to the Courtesy Inn Motel in 1971 (*Age* 17 February 1971:3). It was also reported in 1971 that Park Tower was using its tenants' car spaces as a public car park and the flats were being let on short-term leases. Similarly, the two-month-old 13-15 Collins Street apartments contemplated filling its lower four floors with shops, offices and medical practices (*Age* 17 February 1971:3, Figure 8).

In 1974, the MCC introduced a policy to encourage residents back to the city through the construction of a variety of residential typologies. However, because development was market driven, it was predominantly offices and retail spaces that were constructed in the city centre (Marsden 2000:54, 112).

SITE HISTORY

The multi-storey building on the north-west corner of Exhibition and Little Lonsdale streets was designed by architect Kenneth McDonald & Associates, for owners Danbry Pty Ltd. The building was constructed in 1969-1971, initially designed and advertised as flats. The consulting engineers were John Connell & Associates (BAP).

Architectural drawings for the project, dated June 1968 and entitled 'Flats at 287-293 Exhibition Street,' show the key elevations (Figure 1). One drawing dated June 1968 had an annotation that the 11-storey building was intended to have shops on the ground floor and a total of 55 flats comprising 44 one-bedroom units and 11 bachelor units. Later floor plans dated October 1970 show the layout of the ground floor with a reception area and dining room, and a typical floor plan comprising five units (Figure 2 & Figure 3) (BAP).

The City of Melbourne received a building permit application for the multi-storey building in March 1969 (with an estimated total value of \$600,000) (BAI). During the construction phase, the building

was advertised in newspapers and listed in the Sands & McDougall Directories as 'Exhibition Towers' (the directory annotated with 'Flats being built' in 1970) (S&Mc; *Age*, 7 Mar 1970:39). One advertisement described 'Exhibition Towers' with:

magnificent town units, designed for luxury living. Superb kitchen, fully laminated cupboards, ultra mod. bathrooms, separate laundry. Huge lounge and bedroom. From only \$10,000 (*Age*, 7 Mar 1970:39).

A photograph of the building under construction was published in May 1970 (Figure 4) with an advertisement entitled "'Exhibition Towers" O-Y-O (own your own) Flats in the heart of Melbourne,' with one-bedroom units priced from \$15,900 (*Age*, 2 May 1970:39).

In February 1971, *The Age* reported that the Exhibition Street development had changed from private flats to a motel use, opening as the Courtesy Inn Motel in February 1971. While the article stated that high-rise developers had difficulty finding buyers for highly-priced city units, it also quoted D J Ryan, the developer of the site, as saying, "I didn't convert this into a motel because the flats wouldn't sell, I turned it into a motel because a feasibility study shows that it would be more profitable as a motel' (*Age*, 17 Feb 1971:3).

The building served as the Courtesy Inn Motel and was occupied by the Lazy Leprechaun Restaurant in 1974 (S&Mc). In 1974, the high-rise units were again advertised for sale via strata title (*Age*, 14 Dec 1974:77). In 2019 the building is called Exhibition Apartments (CoMMaps).

Kenneth McDonald & Associates, architects

Kenneth McDonald (1927-1996) studied architecture at the University of Melbourne, during which period two of his student designs were published in the *Australian Home Beautiful* magazine. Following completion of his studies, McDonald gained employment in the Department of Works & Housing, at which time he also designed his own house in Balwyn North (1951). The residential design incorporated the innovative butterfly roof, not seen before in Melbourne, which was profiled in and popularised by a number of newspapers and magazines (Reeves).

In early 1953 McDonald published an article in the *Argus* that argued for the provision of modern hotels in central Melbourne, accompanied by his own scheme for a multi-storey hotel in Collins Street. Later in 1953 McDonald became advertising director of the influential Melbourne-based architecture magazine *Architecture & Arts*, and was Editor from 1953 to 1963 (Reeves).

McDonald continued his private architectural practice, with an interest in modern hotel architecture, designing Hotel International in Potts Point, Sydney (1956) and a holiday resort in Currumbin, Queensland (1960). One of his later designs was Exhibition Towers at 287-93 Exhibition Street, Melbourne, (1969-71), which opened as the Courtesy Inn Hotel. Other commissions in the 1950s and '60s primarily comprised residential projects and shopping centre developments (Reeves).

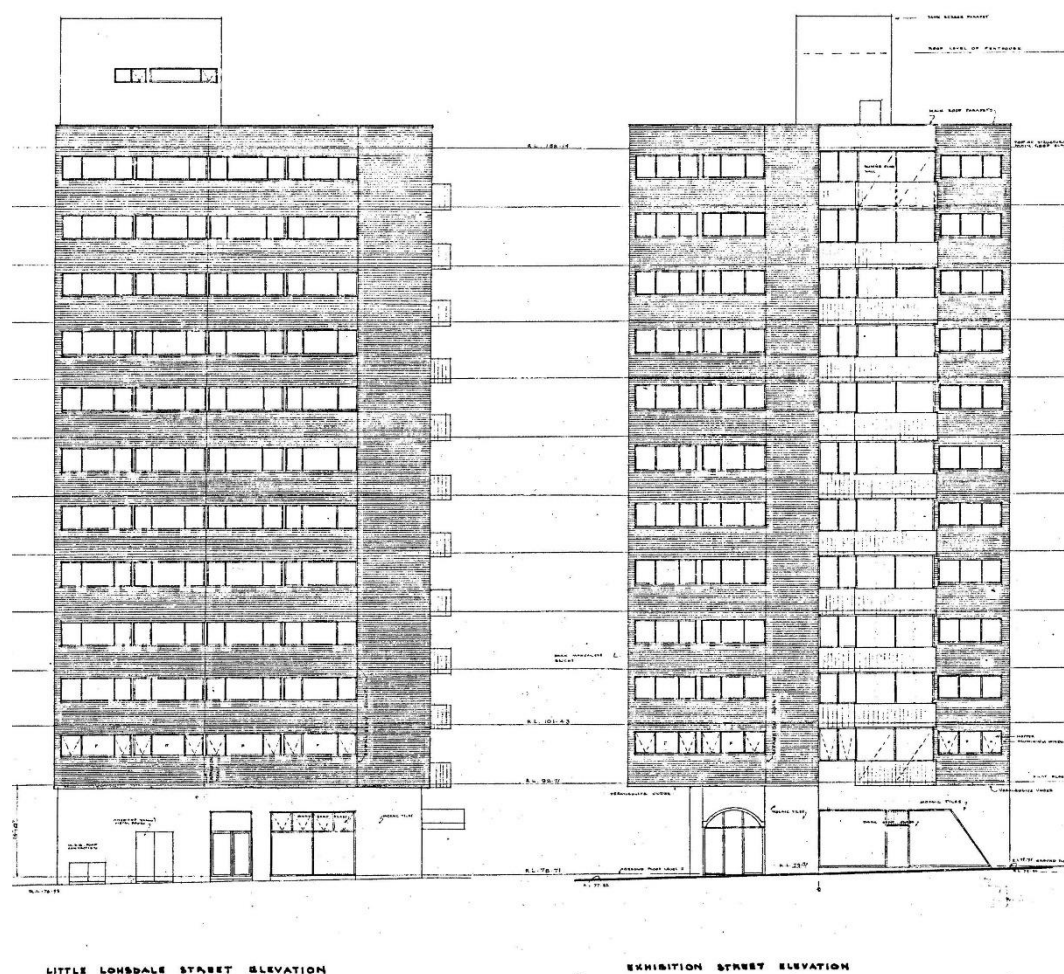


Figure 1. South elevation to Little Lonsdale Street (left) and east elevation to Exhibition street (right). Drawings by Kenneth McDonald & Associates, dated June 1968 (BAP).

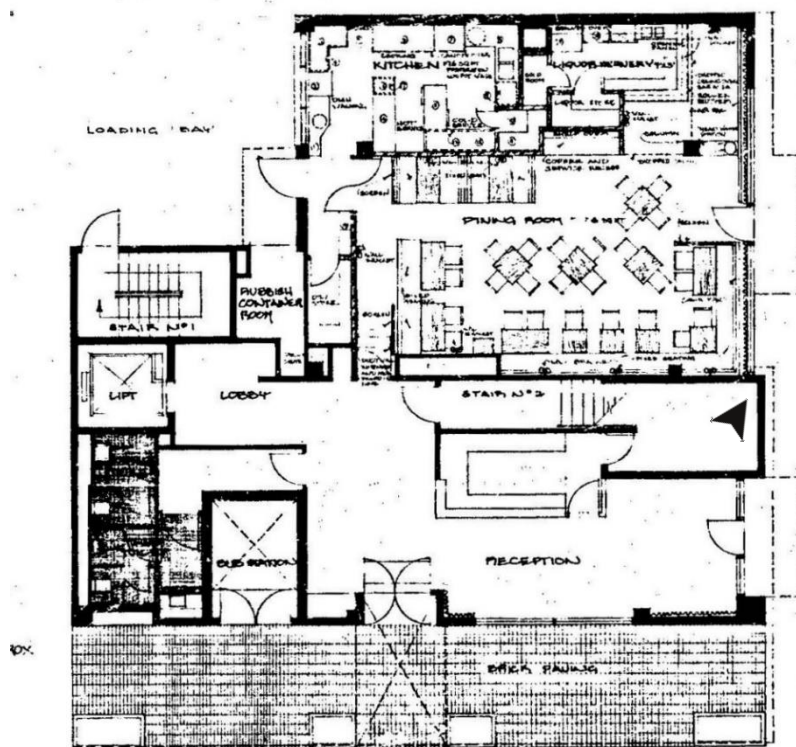


Figure 2. Ground floor plan detailing the reception and dining room areas. Drawing by Kenneth McDonald & Associates, dated October 1970 (BAP).

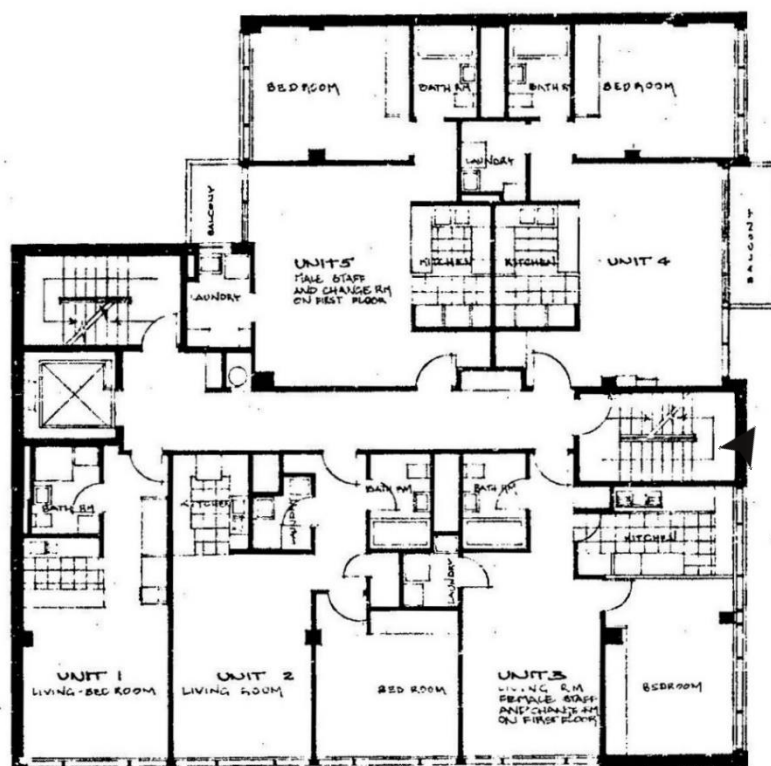


Figure 3. A typical floor plan of the residential floors, comprising five units. Drawing by Kenneth McDonald & Associates, dated October 1970 (BAP).



Figure 4. Image of the building under construction, published in May 1970 in a sales advertisement for the units (*Age*, 2 May 1970:39).



Figure 5. An image of the completed building, published in December 1974 as part of a sales advertisement for units (*Age*, 14 Dec 1974:77).

SITE DESCRIPTION

The Former Exhibition Towers at 287-293 Exhibition Street, is an 11-storey residential building located at the north-west corner of Exhibition and Little Lonsdale streets. The building has main frontages to both these streets and a secondary façade to Evans Lane which forms the western boundary of the site. Constructed in 1969-71 to a design by Kenneth McDonald & Associates, the multi-storey building is an example of the Post-War Modernist style.

The building occupies the majority of the square corner site with a vacant loading dock area at the north-west corner. It is a reinforced concrete column and slab structure with curtain walls of beige brick, and sits on a prominent podium base which is deeply recessed under the south side of the tower. The main facades above street level contain rows of aluminium-framed windows which alternate with rows of brick spandrels. Both the Exhibition and Little Lonsdale street facades are asymmetrical with rows of windows which terminate at either broad or narrow brick piers at the corners of the building. The Exhibition Street façade contains a prominent contrasting bay of windows with rendered spandrels and a vertical stack of projecting balconies. A similar vertical row of balconies, and associated rows of windows, is located at the northern end of the west façade, facing Evans Lane. The remainder of the west façade is of plain face brickwork with the exception of a vertical row of hit-and-miss brickwork grilles which enable ventilation to each floor.

At street level, the tower cantilevers over the street level podium on the south side, creating a protected canopy to a deep Little Lonsdale Street entry, and a projecting arched canopy provides protection to the main Exhibition Street entrance. Street level openings to both Exhibition and Little Lonsdale streets appear to date from the original construction, however mosaic tile cladding (noted on the original architect's drawings) has been removed and alterations have been made recently to the northern window and door set in Exhibition Street. An arched canopy has been added to the Little Lonsdale Street entrance with later steel fencing enclosing the verandah space.

INTEGRITY

The Former Exhibition Towers, including the original form and the detailing of the exterior of the building above street level, remains highly intact to its original construction in 1969-71. Works to the building at street level have altered the original design, although some original detailing remains.

Overall, the building retains a high degree of architectural integrity to the Post-War Modernist style in fabric, form and detail. While the building has undergone alterations at street level, these do not diminish the ability to understand and appreciate the place as a fine example of a Post-War Modernist multi-storey residential building.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The Former Exhibition Towers at 287-293 Exhibition Street is a fine and representative example of the Post-War Modernist style and clearly demonstrates the typical characteristics of 1960s to mid-1970s multi-storey residential building design. Located on a corner site, the building's solid external appearance with brick curtain walls, horizontal strips of aluminium-framed windows, prominent vertical row of projecting balconies and contrasting podium base, can be clearly observed from Exhibition Street. Despite minor changes to street-level facades, the upper facades of the Former Exhibition Towers remain highly intact to its original design.

Other Post-War Modernist residential buildings in the Hoddle Grid

The modern residential apartment building emerged as a building type in central Melbourne in the late 1960s and there are a small number of buildings in the Hoddle Grid within the City of Melbourne which were constructed in the same period and display similar characteristics to the Former Exhibition Towers. These are detailed below.



Park Tower, 199-207 Spring Street (Kurt Popper, 1969) (Interim HO1263)



Apartment Building, 13-15 Collins Street (Kurt Popper, 1970) Interim HO1265 & currently included as a Significant place in Collins East Precinct HO504



Treasury Gate, 93-101 Spring Street (Moore & Hammond, 1971) (Interim HO1262)

Analysis

As a fine and highly intact representative example of a Post-War Modernist residential building, the Former Exhibition Towers at 287-293 Exhibition Street clearly demonstrates an important phase in the architectural development of multi-storey residential buildings within the Hoddle Grid in the City of Melbourne. Similar to the three residential apartment buildings identified above and also recommended for inclusion in the Heritage Overlay of the Melbourne Planning Scheme as Individual Heritage Places, the Former Exhibition Towers clearly demonstrates this class of place.

ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA

✓	CRITERION A Importance to the course or pattern of our cultural or natural history (historical significance).
	CRITERION B Possession of uncommon rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history (rarity).
	CRITERION C Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history (research potential).
✓	CRITERION D Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments (representativeness).
	CRITERION E Importance of exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics (aesthetic significance).
	CRITERION F Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period (technical significance)
	CRITERION G Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions (social significance).
	CRITERION H Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history (associative significance).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommended for inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Melbourne Planning Scheme as an Individual Heritage Place.

Recommendations for the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay (Clause 43.01) in the Melbourne Planning Scheme:

MELBOURNE PLANNING SCHEME

EXTERNAL PAINT CONTROLS	No
INTERNAL ALTERATION CONTROLS	No
TREE CONTROLS	No
OUTBUILDINGS OR FENCES (Which are not exempt under Clause 43.01-4)	No
INCLUDED ON THE VICTORIAN HERITAGE REGISTER	No
PROHIBITED USES MAY BE PERMITTED	No
ABORIGINAL HERITAGE PLACE	No

OTHER

N/A

REFERENCES

Contextual History references contained within *City of Melbourne Hoddle Grid Heritage Review: Postwar Thematic Environmental History 1945-1975*

Building Application Index (BAI), City of Melbourne.

Building Application Plans (BAP), City of Melbourne.

City of Melbourne Maps (CoMMaps), Site Details.

Reeves, Simon, 'Kenneth McDonald (1927-1996)', in Dictionary of Unsung Architects, accessed via <http://www.builtheritage.com.au/dua_mcdonald.html>, February 2020.

Sands & McDougall Directories (S&Mc).

The Age.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

Central Activities District Conservation Study 1985	Ungraded
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Central City Heritage Review 1993	Ungraded
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Review of Heritage Overlay Listings in the CBD 2002	Ungraded
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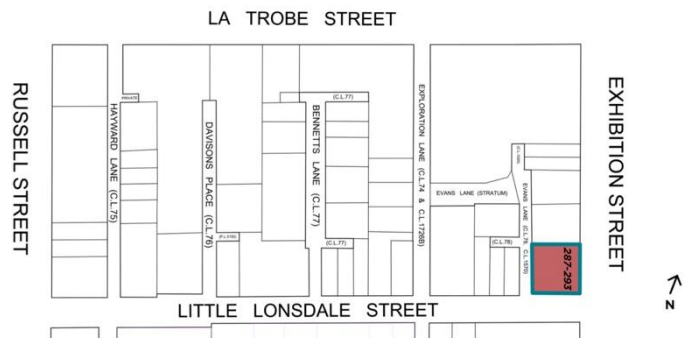
Central City Heritage Review 2011	Ungraded
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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Heritage Place: Former Exhibition Towers



PS ref no: HOXXXX



What is significant?

The Former Exhibition Towers at 287-293 Exhibition Street, a multi-storey residential building constructed in 1969-71.

Elements that contribute to the significance of the place include (but are not limited to):

- The building's original external form, materials and detailing
- The building's high level of integrity to its original design.

Later alterations made to the building at street level are not significant.

How it is significant?

The Former Exhibition Towers at 287-293 Exhibition Street is of historical and representative significance to the City of Melbourne.

Why it is significant?

Constructed in 1969-71 to a design by Kenneth McDonald & Associates, the Former Exhibition Towers has a clear association with the postwar building boom which transformed central Melbourne into a modern high-rise city. Architect designed multi-storey residential apartments were built in central Melbourne for a brief period from the late 1960s to the early 1970s and contributed to the high-rise character of the city (Criterion A).

The Former Exhibition Towers is a fine and highly intact representative example of a Post-War Modernist residential building. The building strongly reflects the style which was popular in the late

1960s and early 1970s, particularly in central Melbourne. Constructed as an 11-storey building, the Former Exhibition Towers clearly demonstrates typical characteristics of a late 1960s/early 1970s structure, including a solid external appearance with brick curtain walls, horizontal strips of aluminium-framed windows, a prominent vertical row of projecting balconies and contrasting podium base. These demonstrate important aspects of the Post-War Modernist style (Criterion D).

Primary source

Hoddle Grid Heritage Review (Context & GJM Heritage, 2020)