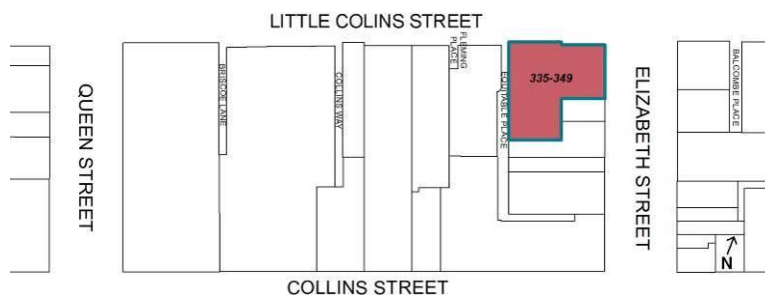


STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Heritage Place: Equitable House



PS ref no: HO1350



What is significant?

Equitable House, at 335-349 Little Collins Street, Melbourne, comprising two structures, one built in 1925 and the other built in 1968, is significant.

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

- Original form and scale of both buildings;
- Original composition of façades comprising multiple narrow precast concrete panels with aluminium windows (1968 building);
- External configuration of facades demonstrating aspects of the interwar Commercial Palazzo style and wall surfaces of painted cement render (1925 building); and
- Original steel framed windows on the Equitable Place façade (1925 building).

Later alterations, particularly at street level, are not significant.

How it is significant?

Equitable House at 335-349 Little Collins Street is of historical and representative significance to the City of Melbourne.

Why it is significant?

Equitable House, comprising two structures, one built in 1925 and the other built in 1968, is historically significant for the evidence it provides of two waves of retail and office development in Melbourne in the 1920s and post-World War Two. The building reflects the growth and progress in the city in the 1920s and 1960s that resulted in architecturally designed, company-named buildings being

erected. The 1925 component of the building at 335-349 Little Collins Street, McEwan House, is historically significant for its long association with wholesale and retail ironmongery business James McEwan & Company Ltd (1852-1965). The business commenced in Melbourne at the corner of Elizabeth and Little Collins streets supplying goods to storekeepers on the Victorian goldfields, and it retained a presence there for some 113 years. The company prospered and, by the 1970s, McEwan's had become one of the largest merchants of its kind, specialising in hardware and builders' supplies, with 23 stores in Victoria, five in Queensland and two in the Australian Capital Territory. McEwan's was acquired by Bunnings in 1993. (Criterion A)

The building fronting Little Collins Street, constructed in 1925 to a design by architects Stephenson & Meldrum, is significant as a relatively intact example of interwar commercial development in central Melbourne, in the interwar Commercial Palazzo style. Along with the Chicagoesque style, the Commercial Palazzo style characterised this interwar wave of development within the Melbourne CBD. The 1925 building demonstrates key characteristics of the style. This includes a strong vertical emphasis resulting from projecting pilasters and mullions, the pilasters dividing the façade into four vertical bays sitting above a strong rusticated base, a substantial cornice, and large horizontally proportioned windows separated by articulated spandrels at each floor. It is unusual in that it is asymmetrical, with a vertical element at the eastern end that is defined by a pair of pilasters, terminating in a decorative pediment above the cornice level. (Criterion D)

The building fronting Elizabeth Street, constructed in 1968, is significant as a largely intact example of postwar commercial development in central Melbourne, which utilised the Post-War Modernist style that characterised this new wave of development. Buildings designed in this style represented the new modernism in their modular, industrial aesthetic incorporating features such as external sun shades, consistent access to daylight, open floor plans, air conditioning and centralised lift and service cores to meet new standards for commercial office accommodation. (Criterion D)

The façade of Equitable House with multiple narrow precast concrete panels with no formal corner element, which are of particular interest as they are three dimensional with a sloping hood and vertical fins at each end for solar protection and which create repetitive patterns of light and shade across the façade, a characteristic of the Brutalist style. Although the designer of the 1968 building is not known, it is an important 1960s Post-War Modernist building demonstrating a sophisticated and well-detailed resolution to the challenges posed by postwar commercial design. (Criterion D)

Primary source

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