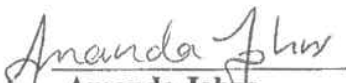


Lonsdale House
269-273 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne

Heritage Council Registrations Committee
Hearing – 10 October 2008
Members – Ms Amanda Johns (Chair), Ms Helen Lardner, Prof. William Logan

DECISION OF THE HERITAGE COUNCIL

After considering a recommendation and the submissions and conducting a hearing into those submissions, pursuant to Section 42(1)(d)(i) the Heritage Council has refused to register Lonsdale House and refers the recommendation and submissions to Melbourne City Council for consideration for an amendment to the Melbourne Planning Scheme.


Amanda Johns
(Chair)

Helen Lardner

Prof. William Logan

Decision Date – 24 October 2008

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APPEARANCES

Executive Director, Heritage Victoria

The Executive Director was represented by Dr Kerry Jordan.

Ms Frances O'Neill was available for questions by the Committee.

Nominator

Mr Robin Grow, President, Art Deco Society Inc.

Owner

Colonial First State Property Management on behalf of NB Lonsdale Pty Ltd was represented by Mr Jeremy Gobbo QC, instructed by Mallesons Stephen Jaques. Mr Gobbo called Mr Peter Lovell of Lovell Chen Architects & Heritage Consultants as an expert witness.

INTRODUCTION

The Place

- 1 Lonsdale House is located at 269-273 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne. The place is a five storey, asymmetrical, streamlined Moderne style commercial office building with cement-rendered facade, steel-framed windows and a prominent crystalline tower element. The place was created through the conversion of two 19th century warehouse buildings, to a design prepared in two stages (1934 and 1936) by architect IG Anderson.

Nominations

- 2 The place was nominated by Mr Robin Grow, President, Art Deco Society Inc, on 18 January 2008. The nomination documentation states that the place 'is one of Victoria's best examples of the application of the Moderne style to a multi-storied commercial premise'.

Recommendation of the Executive Director

- 3 The Executive Director has recommended that the place not be included in the Heritage Register. The Executive Director has recommended that the place be referred to the relevant planning authority for individual inclusion in the Heritage Overlay of the Melbourne Planning Scheme.

Site Inspection

- 4 The Registration Committee conducted a site inspection on 16 September 2008. Both the exterior and interior were inspected.

SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED

The Executive Director

- 5 The Executive Director's recommendation is that the place is not of significance to the State of Victoria and does not warrant inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register. The Executive Director believes that the place has architectural and historical significance at the local level and has recommended that it be referred to the City of Melbourne for individual listing in the Heritage Overlay of the Melbourne Planning Scheme.
- 6 Dr Kerry Jordan provided a PowerPoint presentation that included a brief history of the site's development, an explanation of the key architectural features of the building and a brief comparative analysis against other multi-storied Moderne style buildings in Melbourne (*McPhersons Building* – VHR H0942; Mitchell House; Yule House and Newspaper House).
- 7 Dr Jordan explained that the place was created through the conversion of two earlier 19th century buildings – the Ullathorne & Company building at 269 Lonsdale Street and the Wertheim/Levy Bros building at 271-273 Lonsdale Street – in two stages (1934 and 1936). Architect Illiffe Gordon (IG) Anderson was first

commissioned to prepare the design for the remodelling of 271-273 Lonsdale Street. Subsequent to this, 269 Lonsdale Street was purchased and Anderson expanded his design to incorporate the second building, requiring a solution that accommodated the differing heights and floor levels of the two buildings. The façade of the resulting structure (Lonsdale House) was designed in the Moderne style, the fashionable style for city commercial buildings in the 1930s.

- 8 Dr Jordan submitted that Lonsdale House is an accomplished and early example of a streamlined Moderne style commercial building and is a fine example of the work of IG Anderson. However, it was contended that the place is not of sufficient architectural significance for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register. Dr Jordan stated that the place is not well preserved with significant changes to the ground level encroaching on the once spacious foyer. It was further contended that other, better examples of the Moderne style exist – some of which are included in the Victorian Heritage Register (e.g. *McPherson's Building*, H0942) and others which have not yet been assessed for inclusion (e.g. Mitchell House and Yule House, both of which also have well preserved foyer entrances).
- 9 It was stated that IG Anderson was a prolific architect who was best known for his residential work including Ostend Flats in Brighton and numerous apartment complexes in East Melbourne. Dr Jordan contended that Anderson was a good architect, not a great one, and that his works represented the popular architectural styles of the time. One Anderson-designed building is included in the Victorian Heritage Register – the *Fmr. Brunswick Market* (H1307) – which has been registered for its architectural, historical and social significance to the State of Victoria. It was submitted that the association of Lonsdale House to IG Anderson does not make the place of State-level significance.
- 10 Dr Jordan submitted that Lonsdale House has had a long connection with the neighbouring Myer Emporium, with Myer occupying tenancies within Lonsdale House since the 1930s. Although it was originally submitted that Lonsdale House was owned by Myer from the 1930s, it has subsequently been revealed that Myer only purchased the building in 1982. Notwithstanding this, Dr Jordan contended that while there is a clear historical connection between Lonsdale House and Myer, it is not an association that is of State level historical significance.
- 11 It was submitted that the Executive Director's recommendation is supported by several independent heritage assessments of the building made during the last twenty years and the fact that the place is not included in Prof. Philip Goad's *Melbourne Architecture* publication, which (as stated in the Executive Director's submission) 'is considered to be an almost definitive selection of the best of Melbourne's buildings'.
- 12 In conclusion, Dr Jordan submitted that Lonsdale House did not meet the threshold for State significance either historically (through the association with Myer or IG Anderson) or aesthetically. It was submitted that the place is significant at the local level and that it warrants inclusion in the Heritage Overlay on an individual basis in recognition of its significance.

Nominator

- 13 Mr Robin Grow, President of the Art Deco Society Inc., made a submission opposing the Executive Director's recommendation on the following grounds:
- 13.1 The Executive Director's report states, in support of the recommendation, that the architect was considerably constrained in his design by the fact that the building was a conversion of two existing warehouses. Mr Grow submitted that this does not recognise the considerable skill required to produce a design that met client requirements while resolving problems associated with differing floor levels. Mr Grow supported this view with the following quote from Prof. Miles Lewis' assessment of the place in 1987,
- 'The fact that it is an ad hoc patch-up and cosmeticisation of two earlier structures increases rather than reduces its interest, and doubtless reflects the phase of emergence from the Depression and of optimistic modernism engendered by the Victorian centenary celebrations of 1934';*
- 13.2 Historically the building represents an important trend in the commercial life of Melbourne. The design of the building, with its prominent tower – a key IG Anderson device and important feature of the style – was important in attracting commercial tenants. In addition, the Moderne design of Lonsdale House was a sharp contrast to the revivalist nature of architecture in Melbourne in the preceding decade;
- 13.3 The Executive Director's report and submission states that there are better examples of Moderne style commercial buildings in Victoria, some of which are included in the Heritage Register and others that are not. Mr Grow submitted that no information has been provided to substantiate this opinion;
- 13.4 The Executive Director's report states that IG Anderson is best known for his domestic commissions. Mr Grow submitted that while these commissions are numerous, Anderson also designed many commercial buildings including the *Fmr Brunswick Market* (H1307), garages, local government offices, shops, cinemas and factories. As the only extant commercial example of Anderson's work in the Melbourne CBD, Mr Grow stated that Lonsdale House is a rare example of a commercial building designed by Anderson; and
- 13.5 It is inappropriate for the Executive Director to rely on the findings of previous heritage assessments to support the recommendation for local significance. Mr Grow submitted that it was not the scope of the previous heritage assessments prepared by Prof. Miles Lewis and Allom Lovell & Associates (1992) to assess whether Lonsdale House was of State level significance. Mr Grow read a quote provided by Prof. Lewis supporting this position. Mr Grow further substantiated his view by noting that appreciation of Inter-War architectural styles had increased since the studies were completed and other Myer buildings had not been assessed as

having State level significance but had now been included in the Victorian Heritage Register. Similarly, Mr Grow submitted, the fact that Lonsdale House is not noted in Prof. Philip Goad's publication does not indicate a lack of significance. Mr Grow noted that many places are included in the Register for aesthetic significance but are not included in this publication.

- 14 In proposing that Lonsdale House be included in the Heritage Register, Mr Grow advanced the position that the place meets criterion A, B and E of the 1997 Heritage Council criteria (see Attachment 1) by stating in his written submission:

Lonsdale House is a large, multi-storied landmark that results from the conversion of a number of existing 19th C warehouses to a modern facility, finished in the latest Art Deco (or Moderne) styling. The design was by the prolific interwar architect, IG Anderson. Among Anderson's work, it represents the largest and most prominent example which was often characterized by extreme towers. It is the only remaining building by Anderson in the City centre. It also demonstrates Anderson's skill in converting adjoining buildings with different floor levels to a coherent whole. The building derives further significance from its association with the Myer Department Store, being constructed by Myers in 1935 and occupied by Myers advertising department for many years. It is significant as a major contributor to the development of the shopping precinct. It was also significant as a place occupied by many small tenancies that serviced customers of Melbourne's department store, such as milliners, furriers, manufacturer's agents, showrooms etc.

- 15 Mr Grow submitted that the Executive Director had failed to address all of the Heritage Council criteria in the assessment of the place and suggested, therefore, that the Committee should require a reassessment.

Owner

- 16 Mr Jeremy Gobbo QC who called Mr Peter Lovell supported the Executive Director's recommendation that the place not be included in the Victorian Heritage Register.
- 17 In relation to the Executive Director's recommendation that the place be referred to the Melbourne City Council for inclusion in the planning scheme, Mr Lovell noted that while Lonsdale House is considered to be of a level of significance that warrants the application of the Heritage Overlay, the place has been deliberately included in a precinct-based Heritage Overlay (Post Office Precinct, HO509). Mr Lovell submitted that this level of recognition and statutory control appropriately reflects the nature and level of significance of the place and there is no need to refer the nomination to the City of Melbourne for further individual listing.
- 18 Prior to commencing his presentation to the Committee, Mr Lovell addressed Mr Grow's point regarding reliance on previous heritage studies to determine the level of significance of the place. Mr Lovell stated that he had not relied on the 1992 Allom Lovell assessment of Lonsdale House in preparing his evidence for this hearing, acknowledging that this is a separate process for a different purpose.

- 19 Mr Lovell provided the Committee with a detailed PowerPoint presentation that included the developmental history of the place, a discussion of comparative buildings and details of other places designed by IG Anderson.
- 20 Mr Lovell argued that the original 1934 proposal for the remodelling of the Wertheim/Levy Bros building was a singular, complete, symmetrical and well-resolved design that compared well with Yule House and others. In 1936 a strong vertical, art deco element – with crystalline tower – was introduced to incorporate the eastern building at 269 Lonsdale Street into the design. While acknowledging that there are differing opinions within the historical architectural profession about whether the final design was successful, Mr Lovell submitted that it was his view that the result was an awkward arrangement that internally gave no sense of the place being an integrated complex. Mr Lovell contended that the place is interesting because it is “quirky” and “idiosyncratic”, not because it is a well-resolved example of its type or because it played a role ‘in moving the style along’.
- 21 Mr Lovell acknowledged that Inter-War architecture is still under-appreciated and under-represented in the Heritage Register, despite the recent shift in views towards this architectural period. Notwithstanding this, Mr Lovell contended that there are better examples of the Moderne style that either are in the Heritage Register or could be considered for inclusion. These include:
- *Fmr United Kingdom Hotel*, Clifton Hill (H0684)
 - Melford Motors Showroom, Melbourne
 - Yule House, Melbourne
 - Beehive Building, Melbourne
 - Newspaper House, Melbourne
 - Fmr Commonwealth Motors Showroom, Melbourne
 - *McPherson's Building*, Melbourne (H0942)
 - Presgrave Building, Melbourne
 - Carlow House, Melbourne
 - Mitchell House, Melbourne
- 22 Mr Lovell further submitted that IG Anderson’s residential work, including the Ostend Flats in Brighton and several apartment complexes in East Melbourne, are also very good examples of the Moderne style.
- 23 In relation to historical associations, Mr Lovell acknowledged that Lonsdale House has had a long association with Myer; Myer being a long time tenant of the building prior to acquiring the property in 1982. Mr Lovell contended however that this was not a relationship that could be considered to be of State significance.
- 24 Mr Lovell submitted that Lonsdale House meets criterion A, D, E, F and H of the 2008 Heritage Council criteria (see Attachment 1) but at the local level – not at the State level.

REASONS

- 25 The role of the Committee is to assess whether the place is of such cultural heritage significance as to warrant registration in the Victorian Heritage Register. At the time of the Executive Director's recommendation an assessment was made using the Heritage Council's criteria for assessment of cultural heritage significance adopted on 6 March 1997 (Attachment 1). On 7 August 2008 the Heritage Council adopted new criteria (also at Attachment 1). Both sets of criteria were referred to in submissions. The Committee has considered both sets of criteria in reaching its decision. In particular it considered criteria A, B and E of the 1997 criteria and criteria A, D, E, F and H of the 2008 criteria to be relevant. The Committee based its assessment on all the material before it.
- 26 The Committee is satisfied that the place is of cultural heritage significance; however it considers the significance to be at a local level, rather than at State level.
- 27 The Committee did not consider that the place was of State significance for its use by Myer and its relationship to the Myer department store business. Although Myer was a long-term tenant and owner from 1982, the building did not form an integral part of the department store, nor was it central to the history or function of that business. The Myer department store business and its historical role in Melbourne is effectively represented by inclusion of *Myer Melbourne (Fmr Myer Emporium)* (H2100) in the Heritage Register.
- 28 The Committee did not consider that the building is of State significance due to it being designed by the architect IG Anderson or as a representative example of the Moderne style of architecture. The Committee considers that Lonsdale House is not an outstanding example of its type, nor does it appear to have had an impact on the development of the Moderne style in Victoria. Its styling and the amalgamation of the two 19th century buildings does not exhibit a rarity that warrants registration. The Committee is of the view that there are better, more significant examples of this style of architecture in commercial office buildings in Victoria, for example Yule House, Melbourne and Mitchell House, Melbourne. The Committee is also of the view that there are better examples of Anderson's work that could be considered for inclusion in the Heritage Register, for example Ostend Flats, Brighton.
- 29 The Committee is of the strong view that the cultural heritage significance of Lonsdale House warrants its inclusion in the Heritage Overlay in the Melbourne Planning Scheme on an individual basis.
- 30 The Committee is also of the view that consideration needs to be given to the nomination of more buildings from the Inter-War period (including in the Moderne style) for inclusion in the Heritage Register. In this regard the Committee notes the comments made by Dr Jordan, Mr Grow and Mr Lovell in evidence regarding other buildings which may warrant inclusion in the Heritage Register.

CONCLUSION

- 31 The Committee finds that Lonsdale House does not reach the threshold for State significance in relation to any of the Heritage Council's 1997 or 2008 criteria for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register. The Committee refers the recommendation and submissions to the City of Melbourne for consideration for an amendment to the Melbourne Planning Scheme to include the place within the Heritage Overlay on an individual basis.
- 32 The Committee wishes it to be noted that this was not a unanimous decision. One Committee member was of the view that the place was of sufficient significance to warrant inclusion in the Heritage Register.

ATTACHMENT 1

Criteria for assessment of cultural heritage significance, adopted by the Heritage Council on 6 March 1997 pursuant to Sections 8(1)(c) and 8(2) of the *Heritage Act* 1995.

CRITERION A:

The historical importance, association with or relationship to Victoria's history of the place or object.

CRITERION B:

The importance of a place or object in demonstrating rarity or uniqueness.

CRITERION C:

The place or object's potential to educate, illustrate or provide further scientific investigation in relation to Victoria's cultural heritage.

CRITERION D:

The importance of a place or object in exhibiting the principal characteristics or the representative nature of a place or object as part of a class or type of places or objects.

CRITERION E:

The importance of the place or object in exhibiting good design or aesthetic characteristics and/or in exhibiting a richness, diversity or unusual integration of features

CRITERION F:

The importance of the place or object in demonstrating or being associated with scientific or technical innovations or achievements.

CRITERION G:

The importance of the place or object in demonstrating social or cultural associations.

CRITERION H:

Any other matter which the Council considers relevant to the determination of cultural heritage significance.

HERITAGE COUNCIL CRITERIA FOR ASSESSMENT OF PLACES OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

CRITERION A	Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history
CRITERION B	Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Victoria's cultural history.
CRITERION C	Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Victoria's cultural history.
CRITERION D	Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places or environments.
CRITERION E	Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.
CRITERION F	Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.
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.
CRITERION H	Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Victoria's history.

These were adopted by the Heritage Council at its meeting on 7 August 2008, and replace the previous criteria adopted by the Heritage Council on 6 March 1997.