



# Architectural Projects<sup>1</sup>

1812 – 75-77 Pitt St, Sydney  
Interpretation Strategy  
April 2020 Amended

# Architectural Projects

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## 1812 – 75-77 PITT ST, SYDNEY – INTERPRETATION STRATEGY

### Document Control

Version	Date	Status	Author	Verification
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
	1.1. PROJECT DESCRIPTION.....	1
	1.2. LOCATION OF SITE AND DESCRIPTION.....	1
	1.3. AUTHORSHIP.....	1
	1.4. METHODOLOGY.....	1
	1.5. PUBLIC ACCESSIBILITY.....	2
<b>2.</b>	<b>DEFINING THE KEY THEMES FOR INTERPRETATION</b> .....	<b>3</b>
	2.1. EXISTING RESOURCES.....	3
	2.2. DEFINING THE KEY THEMES FOR INTERPRETATION.....	3
	2.3. HISTORICAL CONTEXT.....	3
	2.4. RELEVANT HISTORICAL THEMES.....	4
	2.5. DESCRIPTION OF THE BUILDING.....	4
	2.6. SIGNIFICANT PHASES.....	4
	2.7. CONSERVATION CONSTRAINTS.....	4
<b>3.</b>	<b>INTERPRETATION STRATEGY</b> .....	<b>5</b>
	3.1. OBJECTIVES FOR INTERPRETATION.....	5
	3.2. OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERPRETATION.....	5
	3.3. POLICY FOR INTERPRETATING THE REMAINING FABRIC.....	5
	3.4. PREFERRED LOCATIONS.....	5
	3.5. INTERPRETATION PANELS/INSTALLATIONS.....	5
	3.6. SIGNAGE TEXT.....	6
	3.7. OTHER.....	7
	3.8. CONCLUSION.....	7
	3.9. INTERPRETATION STRATEGY COMMITTEE.....	7

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This Interpretation Strategy was prepared by Architectural Projects Pty Limited, Architects for RH Contracting Pty Ltd on behalf of Wilshire International in March 2020. This Interpretation Strategy was prepared to fulfil a Development Application D/2019/1018 to fulfil Condition 52

The purpose of this Interpretation Strategy is to identify the most appropriate way of making the significance of the place understood.

The Heritage NSW, Department of Premier and Cabinet defines an Interpretation Plan as a document that provides the policies, strategies and detailed advice for interpreting a heritage item. It is based on research and analysis and plans to communicate the significance of the item, both during a conservation project and in the ongoing life of the item. The plan identifies key themes, storylines and audiences and provides recommendations about interpretation media. It includes practical and specific advice about how to implement the plan. An Interpretation Policy consists of clauses and guidelines that provide an intellectual and conceptual framework for communicating the significance of an item. Policies may deal with fabric, setting, history, archaeology audiences and other people, contents, related places and objects, disturbance of fabric, research, records.<sup>1</sup>

### 1.2. LOCATION OF SITE AND DESCRIPTION

This document relates to the site 75 – 77 Pitt Street, Sydney, defined by Lot 1 DP 186488, which is listed as a Heritage Item (I1917).

### 1.3. AUTHORSHIP

The Interpretation Strategy was prepared by Jennifer Hill Elizabeth Gibson and Sakia Ahmed of Architectural Projects Pty Limited.

### 1.4. METHODOLOGY

The Interpretation Strategy meets the specific requirements of the Heritage NSW, Department of Premier and Cabinet. Methodology for the Interpretation Strategy is based on the Heritage NSW, Department of Premier and Cabinet for Interpreting Heritage Places and Items, and Heritage Interpretation Policy, 2005:

“Best practice in the interpretation of all types of heritage (Aboriginal, built, movable and natural) will include each of the following ingredients.

1. Respect for the special connections between people and items.
2. Understand the item and convey its significance.
3. Good research is at the heart of effective interpretation.
4. Use existing records of the item, research additional information, and make the records and research publicly available (subject to security and cultural protocols).
5. Explore, respect and respond to the identified audience.
6. Make reasoned choices about themes, ideas and stories.
7. Stimulate thought and dialogue, provoke response and enhance understanding.
8. Research and understand the physical, historical, spiritual and contemporary context of the item and related items; and respect local amenity and culture.

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<sup>1</sup> NSW Heritage Office, Heritage Interpretation

9. Develop interpretation that strengthens and sustains the significance of the item, its character and authenticity.
10. Integrate interpretation in conservation planning, and in all subsequent stages of a conservation project.
11. Include interpretation in the ongoing management of an item; provide for regular maintenance, evaluation and review.
12. Involve people with relevant skills, knowledge and experience.
13. Collaborate with organisations and the local community.

The Interpretation Strategy also addresses the following questions in Part 8 Interpretation & Education in the Conservation Management Plan (CMP) Assessment Checklist:

1. Is the CMP for an item that will be actually or virtually accessible to the Public?
2. Does the CMP include policies for the interpretation of the site; and/or provide for the preparation of an interpretation plan or strategy?
3. Do the interpretation policies address all significant phases and/or themes in the item's development and occupation?
4. Have issues of protocols, confidentiality, intellectual property, copyright and/or moral rights been addressed and resolved?
5. Is the plan to be published or otherwise launched and made publicly accessible?
6. Has a leaflet or other educational material been prepared or proposed?
7. Should the CMP be referred to any other person or body with interpretation expertise for further review?
8. General comments on interpretation and education.

1.5. PUBLIC ACCESSIBILITY

Location and commercial history of the site have resulted in easy public accessibility to the ground floor and limited public access to the upper floors.

Public access to the ground floor is readily available. Access to the upper level commercial floors has limited access for tenants and their visitors.

The target audience is therefore members of the general public, with a particular focus on those in the immediate vicinity, who are the main users of the building. The interpretative materials should be concentrated in areas of public access and located away from significant spaces preferably in service areas and limited public access to the upper floors.

**2. DEFINING THE KEY THEMES FOR INTERPRETATION**

2.1. EXISTING RESOURCES

Architectural Projects Pty Ltd prepared a Conservation Management Plan in August 2019 and Heritage Impact Statement for the site in September 2019 for Wilshire International.

2.2. DEFINING THE KEY THEMES FOR INTERPRETATION

The various sections of the CMP have assisted identify potential areas for interpretation including Building Timeline, Building History, Description of Building, Significance, and Significant Phases. The Conservation Constraints are also included as they identify appropriate locations where interpretation panels could be provided.

2.3. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

YEAR	DESCRIPTION
1860	Tank Stream covered over
1865	First structures built between Hamilton and Pitt Streets. Three storey building “National Mutual Life Assurance and Sayers Coal Agent, and Chatfields Stock Broker Co.” on site
1910c.	British Dominion co Central and Commonwealth Bank Co. occupy the site
1936 April	Working drawings for Royal Exchange Assurance Office Building prepared by Seabrook and Fildes, Architects
1936 July	Contract awarded to John Grant and Sons, Builders
1937	Amended Plans approved by Council
1937 May 31	Building officially opened by Premier Mr Stevens
1953	Plans for refacing the building and replacement of windows prepared by Kenneth McConnel
1965	Alterations to lower façade and interiors by Michael Powerey Smith
1973	Major upgrade of interior and new awning
1979, 1982	Internal alterations
1986	Thai Airways purchased the building
1990	Modification to lower façade and interior

2.4. RELEVANT HISTORICAL THEMES

The Heritage NSW, Department of Premier and Cabinet have prepared historic themes

Australian theme (abbrev)	New South Wales theme	Local theme
Economy-Developing local, regional and national economies	Commerce-Activities relating to buying, selling and exchanging goods and services	None

2.5. DESCRIPTION OF THE BUILDING

The facade of the building, originally fully clad in vitrolite panels, has been rendered and the three storey base incorporating the double height assurance chamber originally lined with a concrete screen and glass blocks, has been replaced by new glazing and ceramic tiles. The facade presents its minimalist arrangement of horizontal spandrels in contrast to the verticality of the southern office windows which are topped by a tower incorporating the caretakers flat with a flagpole above. The glass is flush with the spandrel panel and provides a glazed corner detail to the office space on the upper levels. The original windows to the facade above the third level were replaced in 1953 with bronze glazing of a similar design. These remain in place. Internally the office space has been refitted although the original finishes to the stairs and remnants of floor finishes in the basement remain.

Ceramic tiles and the setback to the glazing to the façade are intrusive. The roof level former caretakers flat retain the curved glass to the southern facade of the tower element.

Internally the office space has been refitted on all levels, but the original stairwell remains intact. Below level two the stair features a terrazzo floor, terrazzo panelling and original glass blocks to the north and south. Remnants of the original beige and caramel linoleum exist at the basement level. The mezzanine space is retained but has been refitted. The former caretakers flat retain the curved glass to the southern facade of the tower element.

2.6. SIGNIFICANT PHASES

- The development of the site occurred in two major phases in 1937 and 1953.
- Interpretation of these phases provides an opportunity to interpret the important role of the building as an iconic modernist building and the first full glass façade building in Sydney.
- Because of its continuity of use as the evidence of the phases of building can be interpreted in the building today.
- Key aspects of the building history would be identified in these two phases.

2.7. CONSERVATION CONSTRAINTS

Potential location for interpretation panels/displays are identified in Fig.

Interpretation panels should be located outside of the main view of the significant elevation or significant spaces of the building as an iconic modernist building and the first full glass façade building in Sydney.

### 3. INTERPRETATION STRATEGY

#### 3.1. OBJECTIVES FOR INTERPRETATION

The purpose of the Interpretation Strategy is to identify the most appropriate way of making the significance of the place understood to the target audience. 75 – 77 Pitt Street is significant to the local community for its associations with people and events prominent in the development of Sydney in the Interwar period. 75 – 77 Pitt Street has aesthetic significance as the first full glass façade building in Sydney.

#### 3.2. OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERPRETATION

- The historical significance is embodied in the history of the property as the first full glass façade building in Sydney. The same commercial use continues to the present. The current uses have largely retained the building with a high degree of integrity given that it has a commercial use and therefore multiple tenancy fit outs.
- This use and the importance of the glass façade can be interpreted by the building itself. The building follows a model typical of glass façades, but its early use of a modernist aesthetic is quite unique and important.
- The interpretation panels will allow the interpretation of this significance.
- The significance of the building should be interpreted.
- The entry façade is the most significant fabric within the building as it represents the most sophisticated design elements of the building. Interpretation panels should contribute to an appreciation of this aspect, while being located so as not to obscure primary views of the exterior and interior. Scope exists to locate plaques perpendicular to the façade externally.
- Internally the building fit out has been removed and the base of the building shell remains.
- Interpretation panels can be located in the interior off the foyer at each level.
- Displays could interpret the history of the building and the significance of the building as the first modernist glass façade in Sydney.
- A public art program could interpret this rich history and extends the existing public art program.

#### 3.3. POLICY FOR INTERPRETATING THE REMAINING FABRIC

- The original façade concept of the building, which was reinterpreted in new glazing and travertine cladding, is identified as the primary source of interpretation.
- The interpretation panels could include graphics that highlight the design history and history of the building and garden through drawings and original photos.
- The interpretation panels could include text that details the history of the building and history of the building occupation.
- Interpretation panels could be placed in a number of locations around and within the building. Specifically, they should be located outside of the main view of the elevation beyond the main foyer.

#### 3.4. PREFERRED LOCATIONS

Preferred locations for Interpretation Panels are identified at Figure 1.

#### 3.5. INTERPRETATION PANELS/INSTALLATIONS

Sign One and Two Exterior

- The Interpretation Panel is located beyond the main view of the primary elevation perpendicular to the entry.
- The Interpretation Panel is intended to create awareness of the significance of the building as the first modernist glass façade in Sydney.
- The Interpretation Panel provides an original photo, building history and timeline text.
- The interpretation panel is a wall mounted display made of screen printed metal.
- Refer to Appendix.



Sign One and Two Interior

- The Interpretation Panel is located beyond the main view of the foyer within the service area.
- The Interpretation Panel is intended to create awareness of the significance of the building as the first modernist glass façade in Sydney.
- The Interpretation Panel provides an original photo, building history and timeline text.
- The interpretation panel is a wall mounted display made of screen printed metal.
- Refer to Appendix.

3.6. SIGNAGE TEXT

The building was designed by Seabrooke and Fildes and was officially opened by Premier Mr. Stevens on May 31, 1937. The vitrolite paneling was replaced with travertine stone and the windows with bronze windows by 1953.

The Royal Exchange Assurance Company was an insurance company incorporated in London in 1720, taking its name from the location of its offices at the Royal Exchange, London. Trade and Navigation" was the coat-of-arms of the company.

The building was constructed by John Grant and Sons.

The façade was unique being fully clad in primrose and vitrolite panels composed in a minimalist arrangement of horizontal spandrels in contrast to the vertical southern tower with bronze glazing.

The building was extensively discussed in the media.

*"The building has been a conspicuous landmark in Lower Pitt Street because of its gaily tinted facing of yellow vitrolite tiles. The whole Pitt Street facade is now undergoing a major change, beginning with the erection of an elaborate pattern of tubular steel scaffolding. This will enable the original steel windows to be replaced with bronze, with the addition of bronze flashings and sills."*, in the Sydney Morning Herald in July.

"An ultra-modern character" Building 5<sup>th</sup> June 1936

*"The tallest known building to be faced with structural glass"*, Decoration and Glass, July 1937.

*Seabrook and Fildes had "devoted much time to the study of the psychology of colour"*, Decoration and Glass, July 1937.

*"The use of structural glass as a facing material" and the "daring colour scheme of primrose and green" had made this building a "notable contribution to the street architecture of Sydney"*, Art in Australia, November 1937.

Significant modification to the lower façade and interior occurred in 1990.

This important building was recovered by Wilshire International.

YEAR	DESCRIPTION
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1860	Tank Stream covered over
1910c.	British Dominion Co. occupy the site
1936	April, Royal Exchange Assurance Office Building designed by Seabrook and Fildes, Architects
1936	July, Contract awarded to John Grant and Sons, Builders
1937	May 31, Building officially opened by Premier Mr. Stevens
1953	Building upgrade designed by Kenneth McConnel, travertine facing bronze windows
1990	Modification to lower façade and interior

### 3.7. OTHER

- Walks, visitors guide
- Events
- Volunteers

### 3.8. CONCLUSION

Retention of the façade in a recognisable form ensures the continued interpretation of the building as the first modernist glass façade in Sydney. The interpretation signage and panels will provide a daily reinforcement of this major phase of the site's history and significance. These could also be supplemented by pamphlet guided walking tours that occur on an occasional basis.

### 3.9. INTERPRETATION STRATEGY COMMITTEE

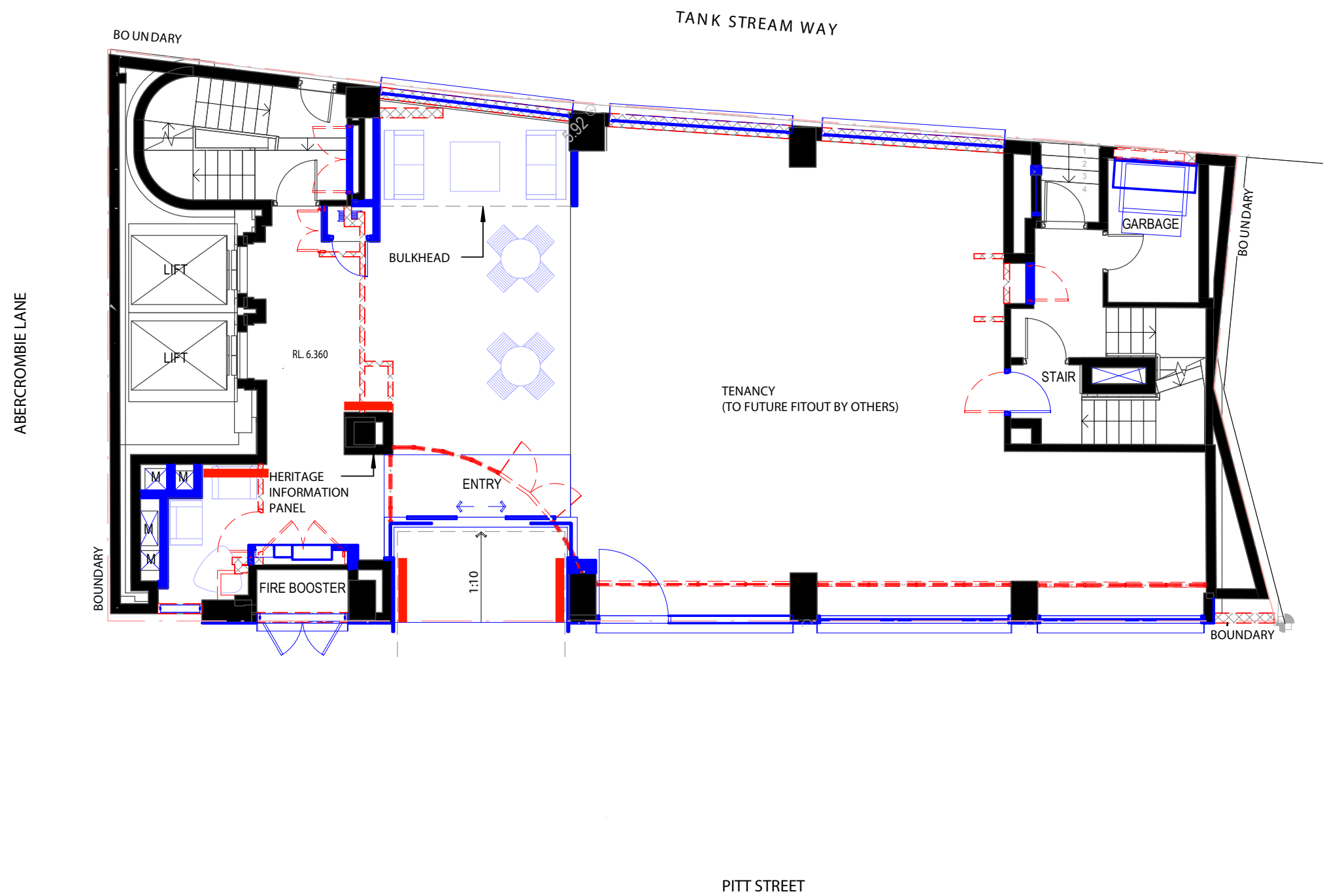
An interpretation Strategy Committee has been formed and will comprise of the following:

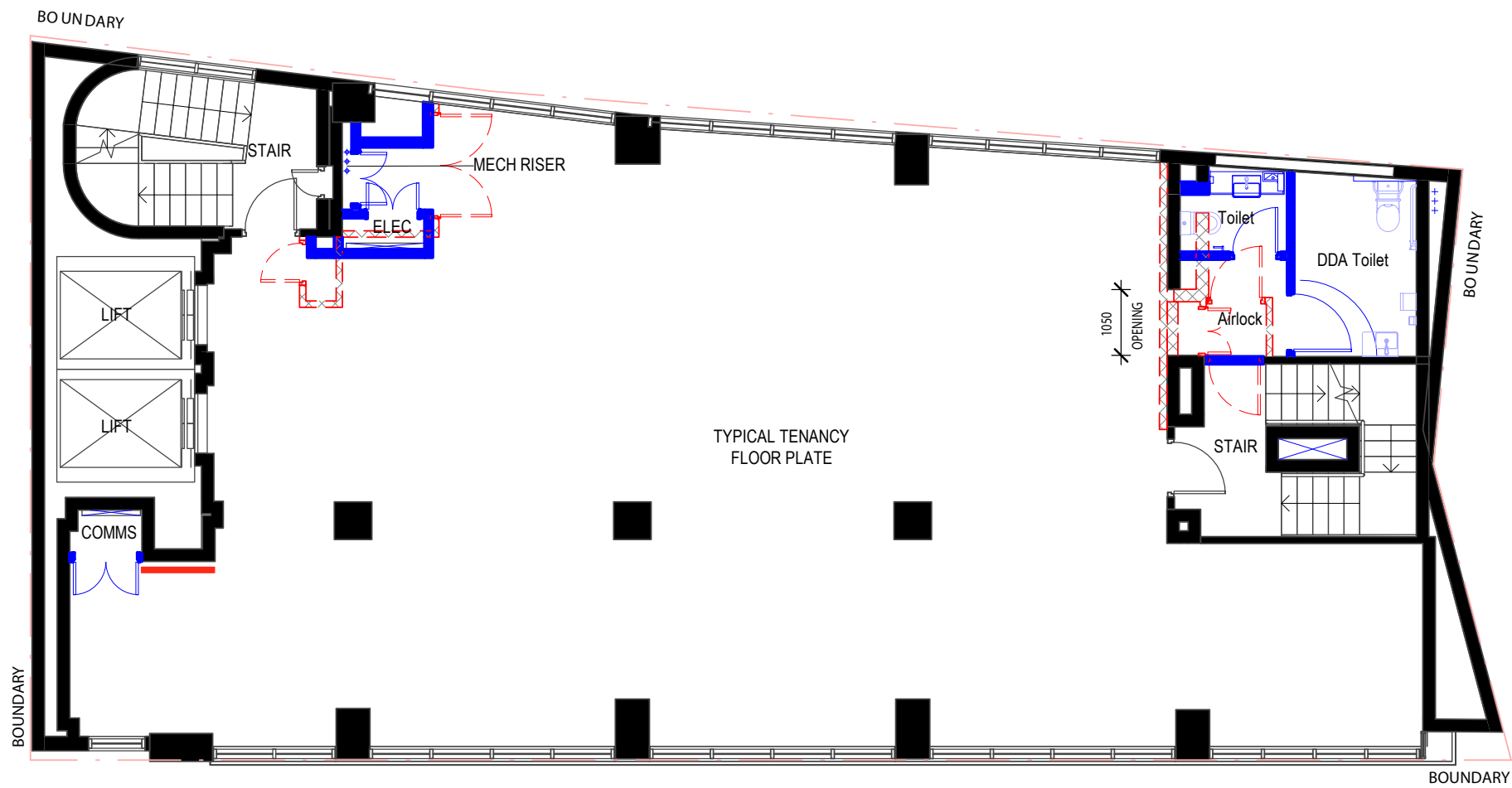
- Jennifer Hill: Architectural Projects Coordinator
- Client to advise

The committee will meet twice yearly to coincide with the bi annual talk. A program of talks will occur in the foyer.

An indicative program includes:

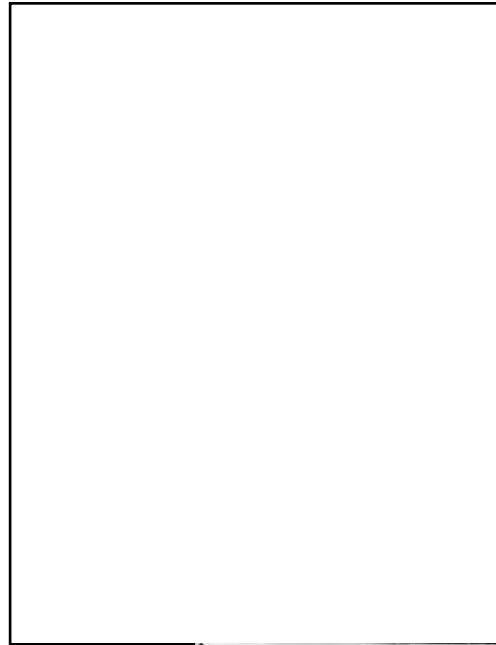
- Jennifer Hill, Architectural Projects
- Client to advise



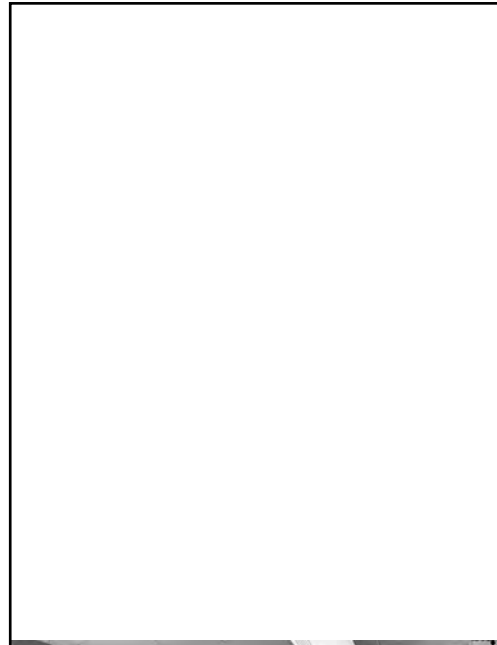




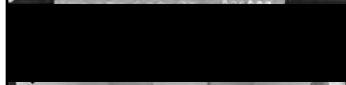
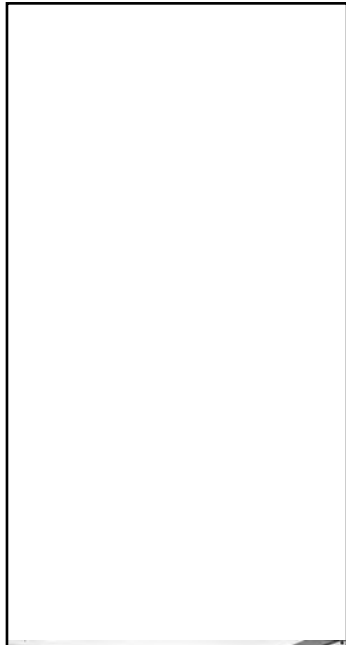
Signage 1 Exterior



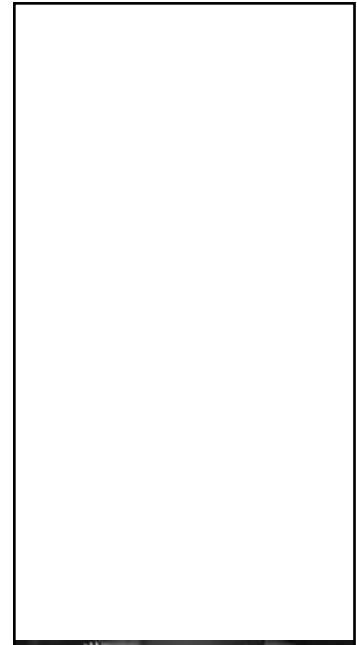
Signage 2 Exterior



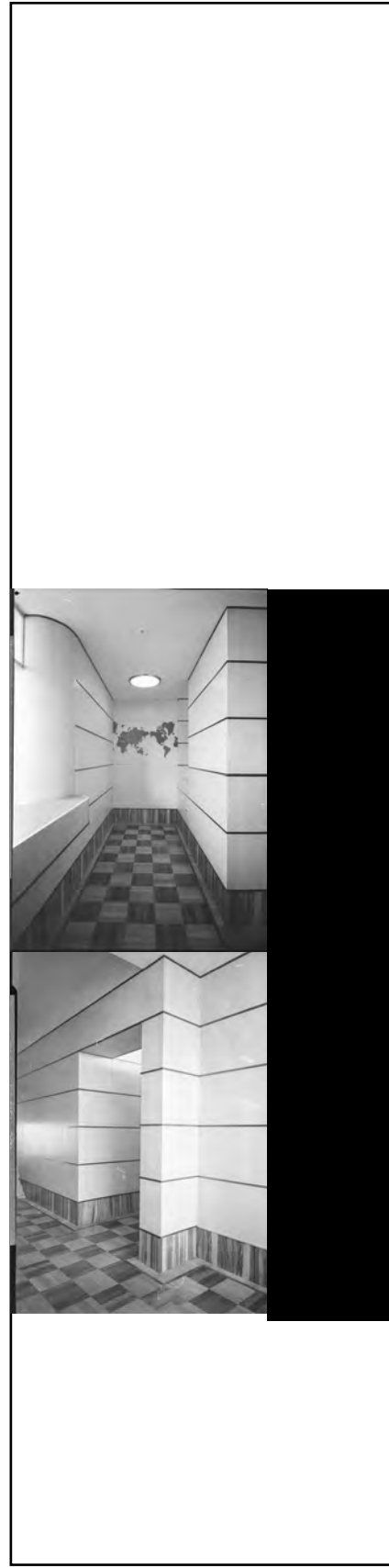
Signage 1 Ground Floor - Interior



Signage 2 Ground Floor - Interior



Signage 1 Mezzanine - Interior



Signage 1 Upper Level - Interior



Signage 1 Upper Level - Interior



Signage 1 Upper Level - Interior

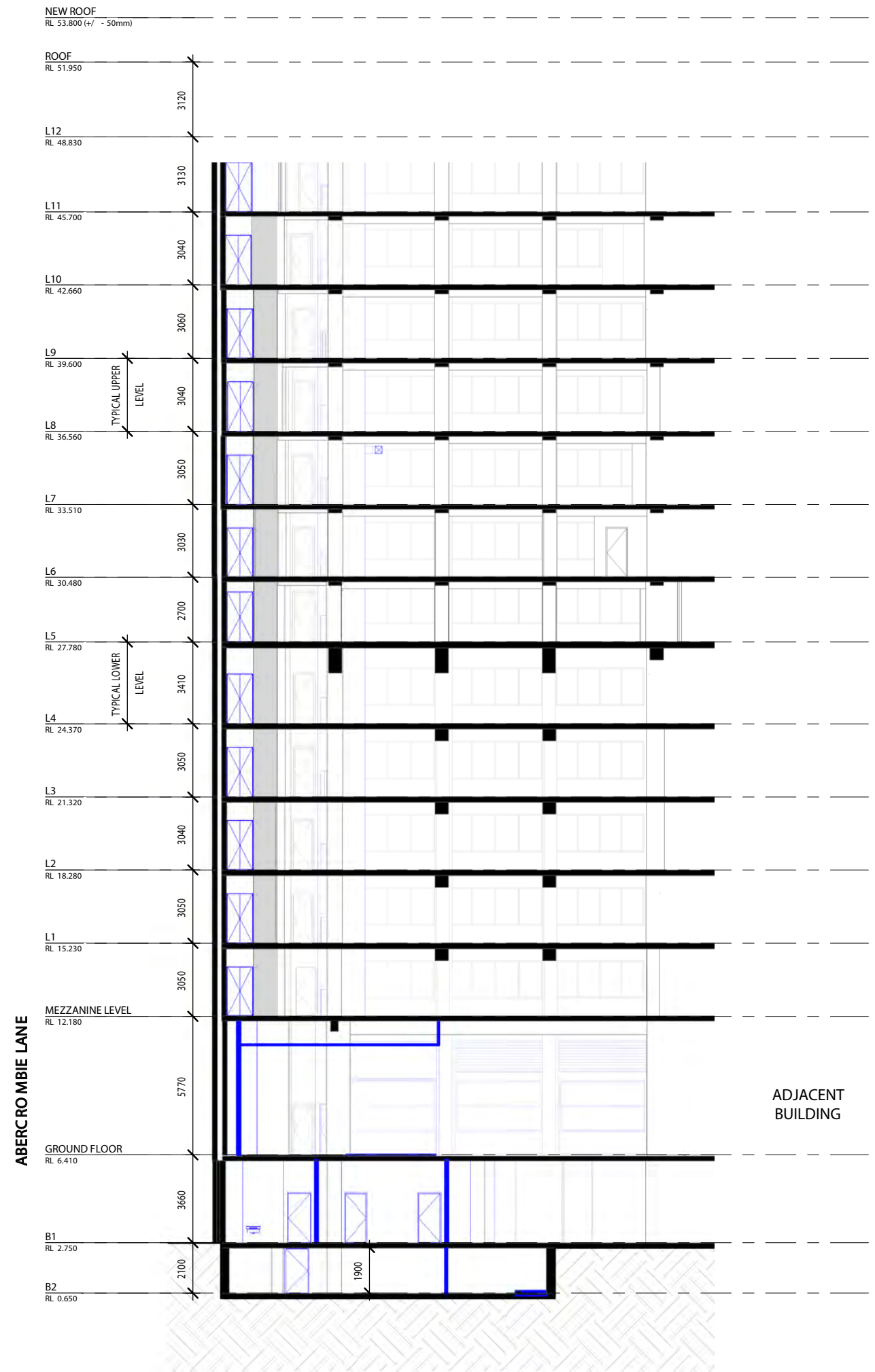


Fig 3.3.12 1937 Early Royal Exchange Assurance Building

08707 Hood  
Collection, SL NSW



Fig 3.3.13 1937 Royal Exchange Assurance Building, Oblique view of Pitt St

11151 Hood  
Collection, SL NSW





Fig 3.3.14 1937 Royal Exchange Assurance Building

08717 Hood  
Collection, SL NSW



Fig 3.3.15 1937 Royal Exchange Assurance Building, Ground floor exterior facade

11146 Hood  
Collection, SL NSW





Fig 3.3.16 1937 Royal Exchange Assurance Building, Entrance Foyer and Lifts

08711 Hood Collection, SL NSW



Fig 3.3.17 1937 Royal Exchange Assurance Building, Entrance Foyer

08722 Hood Collection, SL NSW



Fig 3.3.18

1937

Royal Exchange Assurance Building, Entrance Foyer

08712 Hood  
Collection, SL NSW



Fig 3.3.19

1937

Royal Exchange Assurance Building, Entrance Foyer

08706 Hood  
Collection, SL NSW



Fig 3.3.20

1937

Royal Exchange Assurance Building, View of main office

08723 Hood Collection, SL NSW



Fig 3.3.21

1937

Royal Exchange Assurance Building, View of main office, indicating glass lenses

08720 Hood Collection, SL NSW



Fig 3.3.22

1937

Royal Exchange Assurance Building, section of office  
with filtered light coming through glass brick facade

08719 Hood  
Collection, SL NSW



Fig 3.3.23

1937

Royal Exchange Assurance Building, Entrance to strongroom

08709 Hood Collection, SL NSW



Fig 3.3.24

1937

Royal Exchange Assurance Building, Board Room

08710 Hood Collection, SL NSW





Fig 3.3.31

1960

Looking south along Pitt Street from the corner of  
Bridge Street

036483, City of  
Sydney Archives



Fig 3.3.32      1963      75-77 Pitt Street, Exchange Hotel

013678, City of  
Sydney Archives



Fig 3.3.33      1980s      75-77 Pitt Street

069191, City of  
Sydney Archives



Fig 3.3.34 1984 75-77 Pitt Street, Nomination Register

rt09109-22370,  
Australian Heritage  
Council



Fig 3.3.35 1989 75-77 Pitt Street Thai, Airways Building

054721, City of  
Sydney Archives





Fig 3.3.36

c 1989

75-77 Pitt Street Former Exchange Hotel, Pitt and Bridge Street

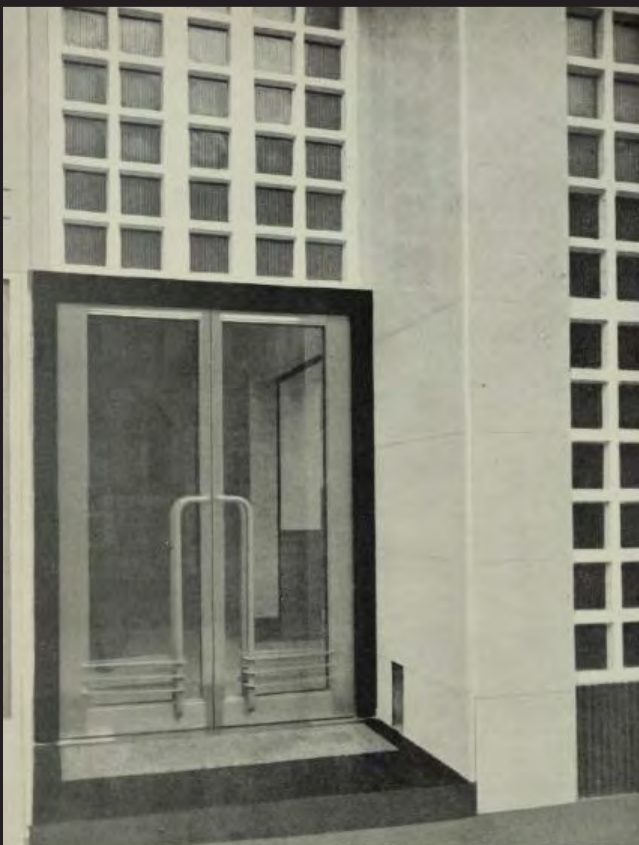
State Heritage Inventory



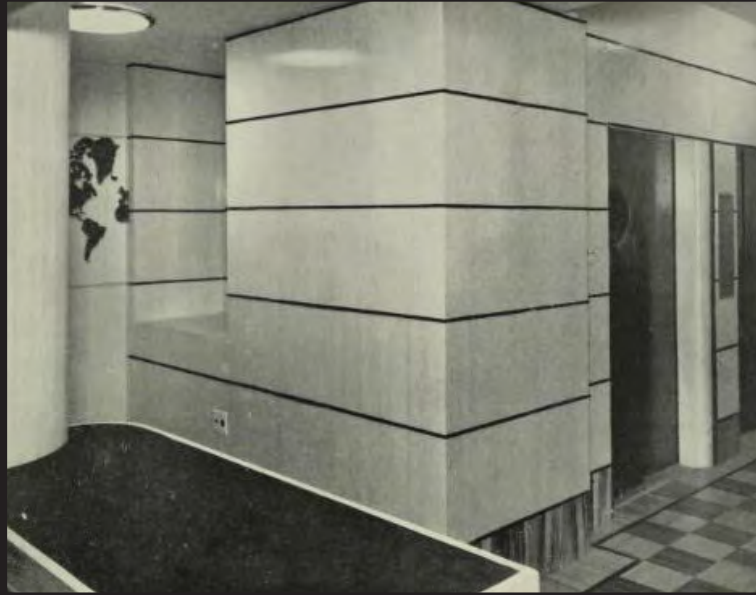




# 75-77 PITT STREET, SYDNEY











# 75-77 PITT STREET, SYDNEY

