

MITCHELL HOUSE



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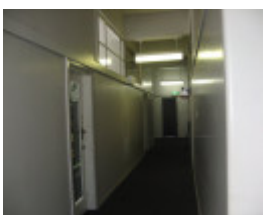
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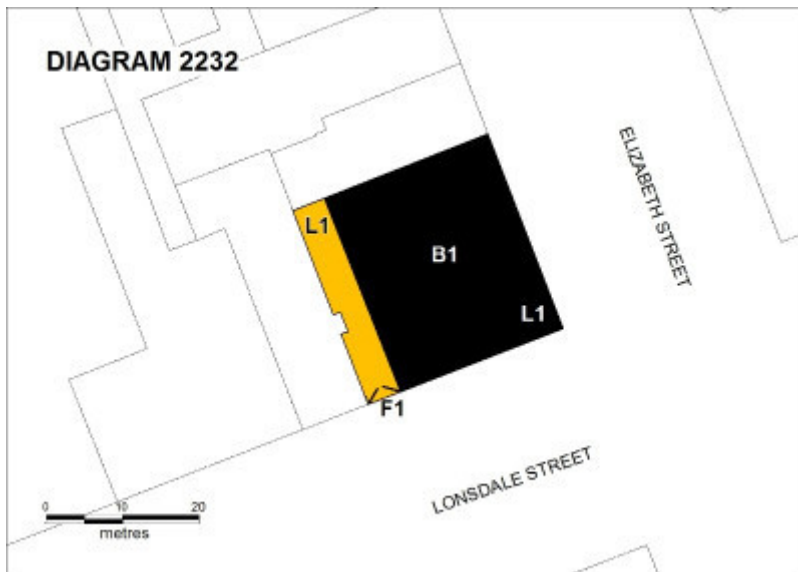
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Mitchell house plan

Location

352 - 358 LONSDALE STREET MELBOURNE, MELBOURNE CITY

Municipality

MELBOURNE CITY

Level of significance

Registered

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H2232

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO715

VHR Registration

July 8, 2010

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - November 29, 1996

What is significant?

Mitchell House was designed by the architect Harry Norris and built in 1936-37. It was built for Thomas Mitchell & Co, a leading and long-established local firm of brushware manufacturers. The company had owned land in Lonsdale Street since the 1890s and acquired the adjacent site of the Commonwealth Hotel on the corner of Elizabeth and Lonsdale Streets in c1912. In 1936 the company commissioned Norris, then Melbourne's leading designer of modern, large-scale commercial and retail buildings, to design a new ten-storey building, rising to the then height limit of 132 ft (40 metres). Only six storeys were built, with three storeys proposed for a future stage. There were elevated links to connect the building to the company's original premises on the other side of Mitchell's Lane, whose facade would be remodelled at a later date. The contract price for the building was £25,000 and it was built by Hansen & Yuncken in only five months. Mitchells had their showroom on the second floor of the new building, and the other floors and the shops on the ground floor were tenanted. They vacated the building in 1940 for use by the cartographic section of the Australian Survey Corps, and Mitchells never moved back. The building was sold in 1970 and the Mitchell Company was dissolved in 1986.

Mitchell House is a six-storey reinforced concrete commercial building in a Streamlined Moderne style, with a matching two-storey section to the north on Elizabeth Street. The main building has a dominant horizontal emphasis, typical of the style, with alternating bands of steel-framed windows and incised spandrels across both frontages and wrapping around the corner. On each of the street frontages is a contrasting vertical element in the form of an off-centre bay defined by a pair of fluted piers enclosing recessed windows. Prominent signage appears as a decorative feature on the building. The name Mitchell House appears on the Elizabeth Street parapet in moulded letters, and also in projected steel lettering along the second floor spandrel on each elevation, and on the second floor balconette is a moulded escutcheon with the words 'The Victor' in a wreath, the company logo of Mitchell's leading brand. Across the end of Mitchell lane to the west of the building is a pair of ornate Art Deco wrought iron gates, also with 'The Victor' logo. The ground floor shopfronts all retain at least some of their original fabric, including tiled spandrels and copper-framed shop windows with matching highlights. The entrance foyer is notably intact, with the original doors, mottled green faience tiling, inlaid terrazzo floors in a pink and green striped pattern and with the initials MH, a striking plastered barrel-vaulted ceiling and the original tenants' directory. One of the two lifts is original, the other has been replaced. The lift lobbies at the upper levels are

similar in appearance, though some have been altered. The office areas are more utilitarian in appearance, with rooms opening off corridors defined by simple partitions with steel-framed highlight windows above. The individual office spaces have largely been altered to suit changing needs.

This site is part of the traditional land of the Wurundjeri people.

How is it significant?

Mitchell house is of architectural significance to the state of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

Mitchell House is of architectural significance as an outstanding and intact example of a Streamlined Moderne commercial building. The striking Moderne character is enhanced by the retention of the original signage and the original finishes in the entrance foyer and lift lobbies. It is significant as the best example of the prominent architect Harry Norris's work in the Streamlined Moderne style, of which Norris was one of Victoria's best-known exponents.

Permit Exemptions

General Exemptions:

General exemptions apply to all places and objects included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR). General exemptions have been designed to allow everyday activities, maintenance and changes to your property, which don't harm its cultural heritage significance, to proceed without the need to obtain approvals under the Heritage Act 2017.

Places of worship: In some circumstances, you can alter a place of worship to accommodate religious practices without a permit, but you must **notify** the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria before you start the works or activities at least 20 business days before the works or activities are to commence.

Subdivision/consolidation: Permit exemptions exist for some subdivisions and consolidations. If the subdivision or consolidation is in accordance with a planning permit granted under Part 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and the application for the planning permit was referred to the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria as a determining referral authority, a permit is not required.

Specific exemptions may also apply to your registered place or object. If applicable, these are listed below. Specific exemptions are tailored to the conservation and management needs of an individual registered place or object and set out works and activities that are exempt from the requirements of a permit. Specific exemptions prevail if they conflict with general exemptions.

Find out more about heritage permit exemptions [here](#).

Specific Exemptions:

General Conditions: 1. All exempted alterations are to be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place or object. General Conditions: 2. Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of works that original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the place or object are revealed which relate to the significance of the place or object, then the exemption covering such works shall cease and Heritage Victoria shall be notified as soon as possible. General Conditions: 3. If there is a conservation policy and plan endorsed by the Executive Director, all works shall be in accordance with it. Note: The existence of a Conservation Management Plan or a Heritage Action Plan endorsed by the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria provides guidance for the management of the heritage values associated with the site. It may not be necessary to obtain a heritage permit for certain works specified in the management plan. General Conditions: 4. Nothing in this determination prevents the Executive Director from amending or rescinding all or

any of the permit exemptions. General Conditions: 5. Nothing in this determination exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the responsible authorities where applicable. Minor Works : Note: Any Minor Works that in the opinion of the Executive Director will not adversely affect the heritage significance of the place may be exempt from the permit requirements of the Heritage Act. A person proposing to undertake minor works may submit a proposal to the Executive Director. If the Executive Director is satisfied that the proposed works will not adversely affect the heritage values of the site, the applicant may be exempted from the requirement to obtain a heritage permit. If an applicant is uncertain whether a heritage permit is required, it is recommended that the permits co-ordinator be contacted. Exterior: In accordance with the permit policy there are no exempt works

Interior: In accordance with the permit policy the following works are exempt:

1. All non-structural internal works to the ground floor shops other than where they impact on original shop fronts;
2. All non-structural internal works to the upper floors including partition wall removal or replacement other than in the entry foyer, lift lobbies and main stair;
3. All signage located within shop fronts.

Construction dates	1936,
Architect/Designer	Norris, Harry A,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Hermes Number	2662
Property Number	

History

The architect: Harry Norris (1888-1966)

Harry Norris was born in Hawthorn, was articled with the architectural office of Ward & Carleton, and from c1907 was a Senior Draftsman under Alfred Carleton, after which he set up his own practice. His first project was a Masonic Temple in Bell Street, Preston, and later many other projects in Melbourne's north and north-east suburbs, including houses in Preston, Northcote and Heidelberg, a motor garage in Clifton Hill, a factory in Brunswick, RSL clubrooms in Preston and Northcote, and another Masonic Temple in Northcote. His first major city building (1923) was the Tattersall's Club, now Curtin House, in Swanston Street.

Two major clients of Norris's, who would provide him with countless commissions, were retailer G J Coles and pharmaceutical manufacturer Alfred Nicholas.

HISTORY OF PLACE

[information taken from the nomination report written by Simon Reeves of Built Heritage Pty Ltd for the Art Deco and Modernist Society]

The site on the north-west corner of Lonsdale and Elizabeth Streets was acquired in 1846 by Hugh Glass, who five years later built a hotel, known as the Family Hotel until 1852, when the lease was transferred to William Hockin and the building was renamed the Commercial Hotel. The following year Hockin purchased the site from Hugh Glass and, after acquiring additional land along Lonsdale Street, erected the so-called Assembly Rooms alongside the hotel in 1858. Although the hotel underwent several changes in name, becoming Hockin's Hotel and later the Commonwealth Hotel, it remained in Hockin's ownership (and later that of his estate) for the next six decades.

Thomas Mitchell (1856-1926) commenced the manufacture of brushware in 1876 in a modest factory in Graham lane, off Little Bourke Street. By the early 1890s he had relocated to nearby premises at 357 Lonsdale Street. In

1901 he acquired a larger property on the opposite side of the street at no 360, west of Hockin's Hotel, and transferred a portion of the business there, and a year later purchased no 362 Lonsdale Street. More than a decade later he finally acquired the hotel on the corner from the Hockin Estate, with plans to expand in that direction some time in the future, but he died before the planned new building on the site was commenced. By 1929 the business had grown to require a factory covering three and a half acres.

The prominent architect Harry Norris was commissioned to design a new city headquarters for Thomas Mitchell & Company in 1936, the year of the company's diamond anniversary. Norris was at that time Melbourne's leading modern designer of large-scale commercial and retail buildings. The proposed design was for a ten storey office block, rising up to the 132 foot (40 metre) height limit that had been imposed in central Melbourne since the 1920s. In order to lure prospective tenants a publicity brochure was prepared that included a perspective drawing of the proposed ten storey tower. Titled 'Mitchell House - the Heart of the City', this document proudly outlined the building's appearance and superlative modern appointments:

Each floor has complete natural lighting on three sides . no city building has such perfect natural lighting. In place of the conventional window apertures in the upper storeys, Mitchell House has transparent glass enclosed in frames of steel, extending along the full width of the building in both Lonsdale and Elizabeth streets. The interior lighting is therefore perfect throughout the day. There are no dark corners and there is no necessity for artificial lighting till after sunset.

The whole building from top to bottom is centrally heated on a new and ingenious plan known as hydraulic heating. Each tenant controls his own hydraulic radiator, and thus can adjust the temperature of his part of the premises to suit himself. The architects had as their constant aim, a bright healthy well-ventilated building and this they have more than succeeded. The most modern, silent, smooth-running automatic electric lifts are installed.

Never before have so many natural advantages been grouped in one building in the heart of the City of Melbourne.

Designed almost entirely in reinforced concrete, steel and glass, the building included input from leading structural engineer Clive S Steele, who had worked with Norris on a number of earlier projects, including the new G J Coles store in Bourke Street and the house Burnham Beeches in Sherbrooke.

The final drawings submitted to the MCC show that the building had been reduced to six storeys, with three additional levels indicated as a proposed future stage. The Elizabeth Street frontage had also dropped down to two storeys at the northern end. The drawings also indicated a series of elevated links that connected the new building to the company's original premises at no 360, on the other side of Mitchell's Lane. Its facade would be remodelled at a later time. A building permit was issued by the MCC in June 1936 and demolition of the old Commonwealth Hotel on the corner began in September 1936. The contract price for the new building was £25,000 and it was built by Hansen & Yuncken in only five months.

Mitchell House appears in the *Sands & McDougall Directory* for the first time in 1938, listed at both 271-281 Elizabeth Street and 354-8 Lonsdale Street. The company had its showrooms on the second floor, while other tenants included a blouse manufacturer on the first floor, a vacuum cleaner supplier on the third floor, a commercial artist on the fourth floor and the offices of United Artists on the top floor. The shops on Elizabeth Street were occupied by a shoe shop (no 273-5), a vacuum cleaner showroom (no 277), a tobacconist (no 279) and the Spot Cafe (no 281), and those on Lonsdale Street by Mrs Gillooly's boot repairs (no 354), A L Campbell & Coy (no 356) and a cake shop (no 358). Thomas Mitchell & Co was still listed at nos 3602, as 'wholesale brush and broom manufacturers, hardware and tank merchants, nail and barbed wire manufacturers'.

Mitchells spent only a brief time in the building. In 1940 they vacated their showroom on the second floor for use by the cartographic section of the Australian Survey Corps as a drawing office, and Mitchell's never moved back. The firm was until the late 1960s one of the five largest brush manufacturers in Australia, but it declined after the abolition of tariffs for imported products. The building was sold in 1970 to the prominent property developer Henry Krongold, and the Mitchell company was dissolved in May 1986.

Plans were prepared by Krongold's company in the 1980s for the redevelopment of the site, with Mitchell House to be retained and a high-rise building constructed on the remainder of the block, to the west and north of Mitchell House, but this never went ahead.

Plaque Citation

This outstanding and intact Streamlined Moderne style commercial building was designed by the prominent Melbourne architect Harry Norris and built in 1936-7 for the brushware manufacturers Thomas Mitchell & Co.

Assessment Against Criteria

- a. Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history
- b. Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Victoria's cultural history.
- c. Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Victoria's cultural history.
- d. Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places or environments.

Mitchell House is an outstanding and intact example of an inter-war Streamlined Moderne style commercial building. The striking Moderne character is enhanced by the retention of the original signage and the original finishes in the entrance foyer and lift lobbies. It is significant as the best example of the prominent architect Harry Norris's work in the Streamlined Moderne style, of which Norris was one of Victoria's best-known exponents.

- e. Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.
- f. Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.
- 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.
- h. Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Victoria's history.

Mitchell House was designed by Harry Norris, one of Victoria's most important inter-war architects, who designed several of Melbourne's most important commercial buildings in the inter-war period, especially those for G J Coles and the Nicholas family.

Extent of Registration

1. All the land marked L1 on Diagram 2232 held by the Executive Director, being part of the land described in Certificate of Title Volume 11144 Folio 561 and part of the land described in Certificate of Title Volume 6104 Folio 761.
2. All the building marked B1 on Diagram 2232 held by the Executive Director.
3. The feature marked F1 (the wrought iron gates) on Diagram 2232 held by the Executive Director

This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.

For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>