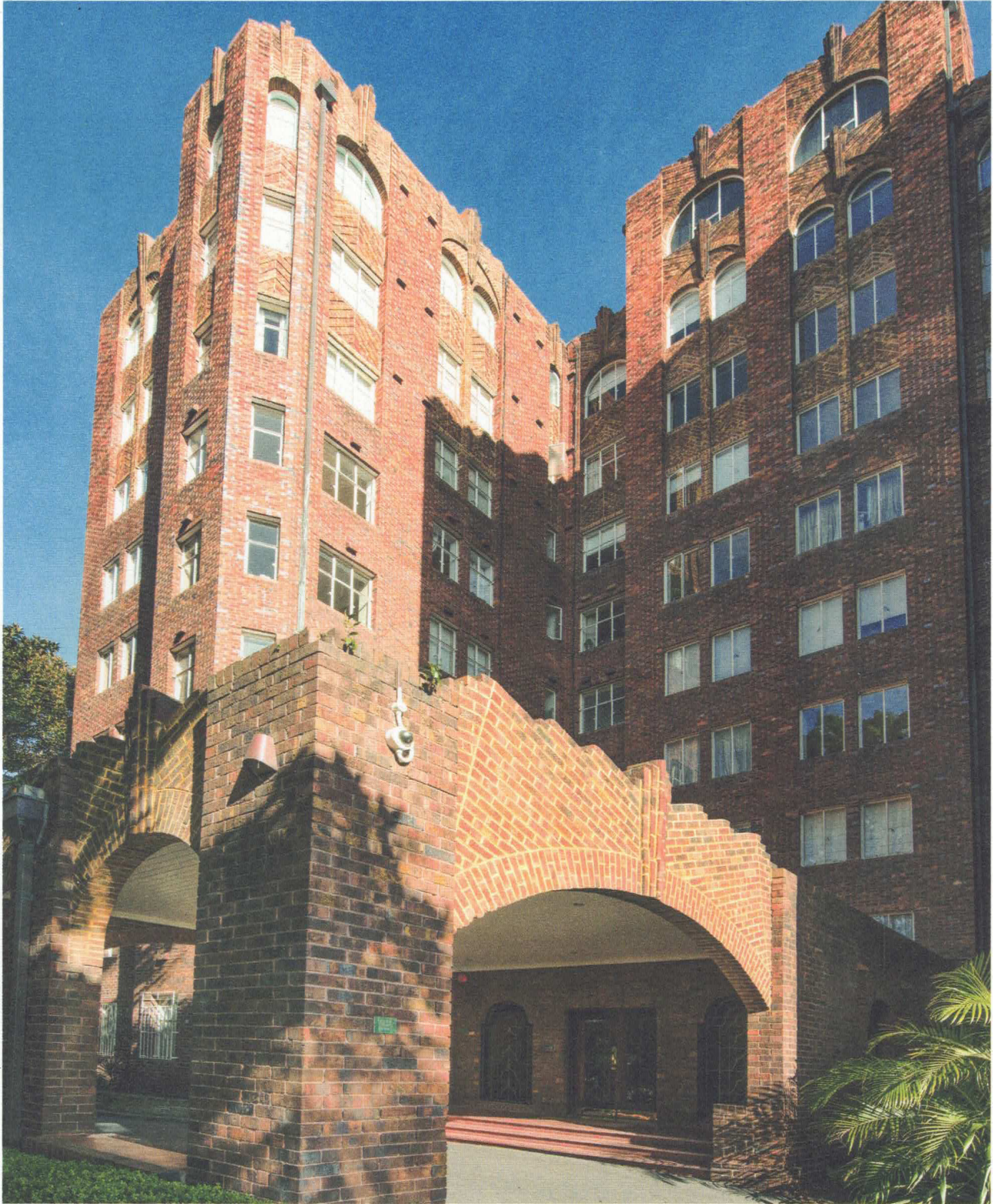


NATIONAL TRUST NEW SOUTH WALES

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The Iconic Twentieth Century Architecture of Potts Point

BY DR PETER SHERIDAN AM, CHAIR, POTTS POINT PRESERVATION GROUP

The tiny precinct of Potts Point, Elizabeth Bay and Rushcutters Bay is unique in Australia for its exceptional heritage, location and cultural and social history. Resident Dr Peter Sheridan takes us on a tour of its architectural masterpieces, many of which will soon be added to the National Trust Register.





Almost 15,000 people live in Potts Point, Elizabeth Bay and Rushcutters Bay, which has a combined footprint of just one square kilometre. With no super-high-rise buildings, it's the ideal template for low-rise, high-density, affordable living. Located a couple of kilometres east of the CBD, this is one of Sydney's best-known areas, treasured for its architecture, amenities, tree-lined streets and the enduring diversity of its residents.

The three suburbs represent Sydney's architectural styles from colonial to mid-century. Grand 19th century houses and Victorian terraces sit alongside more than 100 important interwar Art Deco (1930 – 1940) and post-war Modernist (1960 – 1970) apartment buildings, with wonderful examples from the best architects of the time.

Take a tour

Emil Sodersten designed six apartment blocks in the area including Birtley Towers (1934), which was styled on American skyscrapers and was the largest apartment block in Australia at the time. It has an elegant port-cochère, a garden setting and a majestic harbour aspect.

The grandest Art Deco apartment block is the Macleay Regis, completed in 1939 and one of the last to be built before World War II. With 87 apartments for a wealthy clientele, it contained all the modern conveniences such as centralised refrigeration and hot water, elevators and a kitchen to supply meals to residents. It also included a live-in concierge, a maid service and an internal telephone system that connected occupants to the pharmacy, cobbler, hairdresser and florist, all located

on street level. These shopfronts still exist and today house a florist, jeweller and antiques dealer.

Bruce Dellit, who designed the ANZAC Memorial in Hyde Park, was the original architect for the Metro/Minerva Theatre (1939), the most significant streamlined Art Deco theatre remaining in Sydney and one of only two commercial Art Deco buildings in the area. The theatre has a long association with the nightlife of Kings Cross and Sydney's stage and screen world. Although State Heritage-listed, the Metro/Minerva was destined to be a façade for a new hotel but construction did not proceed, in part due to resident pressure. Philanthropist Gretel Packer recently bought the building and it will hopefully be returned to a live theatre.

17 Wylde Street (1951) is a wonderful transition from Art Deco to Modernism, designed by Aaron Bolot. It was the first curved building in Sydney and graciously fills an awkward corner site. The east- and north-facing façade of glass windows in horizontal bands provides harbour panoramas, natural light, winter sun and ventilation. The building was also unique in that it had no name and was sold under a community cooperative model (an early form of strata title).

Post-war apartment buildings in the 1960s offered small apartments and – for the first time – strata title, allowing many people a chance to own their own home or find affordable renting. Harry Seidler's Aquarius in Rushcutters Bay (1965) is barely seen from the street and entry is via a dramatic skywalk bridge; the building is angled to provide its aspect to the harbour. Seidler incorporated European design parameters to create

Left

Entry to Harry Seidler's Aquarius (1965) is via a skywalk bridge.

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The Metro/Minerva Theatre (1939) is one of the area's few commercial Art Deco buildings.

small, affordable apartments and maximise every millimetre of space in the original 60 bedsits and 20 one-bedroom apartments.

Oceana (1961) overlooks Sydney Harbour and the tranquil Beare Park, one of the green spaces that add to the area's liveability. Designed by émigré architect Theodore Fry, Oceana was one of the first modern high-rise apartment blocks to appear on the Elizabeth Bay skyline in the early 1960s, with seven one- and two-bedroom apartments on each of the 13 floors. Adding elegant decoration are the closed sections of verandas, ranging from light blue at the top to dark blue on the lower floors.

Heritage under threat

This precinct is currently losing housing stock and affordable accommodation as older but functional 20th century apartment blocks full of studios and one-bedders are targeted for purchase by developers, to be demolished or consolidated into larger luxury apartments. Long-term residents are being forced out of the area, undermining the community's diversity and character.

The Potts Point Preservation Group shares with the National Trust an appreciation for the significance of early-to-mid 20th century architecture in this area. Together we're collaborating on updates to the National Trust Register to include a number of important Art Deco and Modernist buildings, drawing on our database and research materials. Recognising and embracing the historic fabric of this area is a vital part of safeguarding Sydney's legacy for future generations and we're proud of the work we can achieve together.

Find out more

To find out more about the Potts Point Preservation Group visit
pottspointpreservation.org



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Birtley Towers (1934) is known for its elegant port-cochère; 17 Wylde Street (1951) demonstrates the transition from Art Deco to Modernism (all photography by Peter Sheridan).