

19 July 2020

General Manager
North Sydney Council 100 Miller Street
NORTH SYDNEY NSW 2060

Dear Sir,

**Demolition of the MLC Building, 105 Miller Street, North Sydney
DA 147/20**

Objection:

Docomomo Australia objects to the proposal to demolish the current heritage-listed MLC Building. The MLC Building has been an important part of the history and streetscape of North Sydney for over 60 years and remains one of the few buildings in the North Sydney CBD possessing any good civic or aesthetic qualities.

Docomomo Australia considers that the MLC Building is at least of State significance and, because of the size, quality of the design, early date of construction and the national attention it drew upon opening (being opened by the Australian Prime Minister) it is of National importance in the development of Modernist architecture in Australia.

The building is a heritage item, currently listed as having Local significance but which has been recognised as having at least State, and possibly National, significance. Demolition of heritage items can only be justified in the most exceptional circumstances and every effort must be made to find compatible uses for heritage items and to apply re-use and refurbishment strategies. One has only to regard examples such as the Queen Victoria Building in the Sydney CBD to find an example of a development that worked with the building to find a suitable modern, viable use.

The evidence presented in the development application for the replacement of the MLC Building does not demonstrate in any detail that alternative strategies to demolition have been pursued with any rigor.

Significance:

Statutory:

The MLC Building has been listed as an item of environmental heritage on the various iterations of the North Sydney Local Environmental Plan since 1989.

The LEP listing's Statement of Significance states:

The first high rise office block in North Sydney and the largest for a number of years after its construction, the MLC Building in North Sydney is a seminal building on subsequent highrise design in Sydney and utilised construction and structural techniques not previously used in Australia. With the first use of a curtain wall design and the first use of modular units in Australia, its use of exceptional modernist building materials in the curtain wall facade and terracotta glazed bricks are representative of the Post-War International style of architecture that predominated in these early commercial high-rise buildings. The architect, Walter Osborn McCutcheon's desire for his buildings to integrate modern art within the fabric of the design is demonstrated by the inclusion of significant artists such as Andor Mészáros and Gerald Lewers. As a result, and despite subsequent modifications, the interior, exterior and landscape setting are of high aesthetic, technical and representative significance. The building is also of historical, associative and aesthetic significance as an important work by a significant firm of architects Bates Smart and McCutcheon, and master builders Concrete Constructions, and as a landmark site at North Sydney which signified the transformation of the centre of North Sydney from Nineteenth Century town to the second commercial hub of metropolitan Sydney from the late 1950s.

Whilst the building has been listed as being an item of Local significance on the North Sydney LEP the analysis of its significance under the State Heritage Register criteria in that SHI listing ascribes a higher level of significance to the building. Under Criterion (a) (Historical Significance) it is stated that the building is “significant on a local and state level as it was marked as beginning the transformation of North Sydney from [a] low-scale commercial town to the high-rise second CBD of Sydney”. Under Criterion (c) (Aesthetic Significance) it is stated that “The building is a key building in the development of high-rise buildings and is considered to be one of the first true high-rise buildings in Australia, making the MLC Building of national significance.”

Non-statutory/professional – Docomomo:

Docomomo Australia, using Docomomo International’s assessment criteria, considers the MLC Building to have technical, social, aesthetic and iconic significance.

Docomomo Australia concurs with the NSW SHI listing assessment of the building being of at least State significance and probably of National significance and listed the building on the Docomomo Register in 2004 (copy of the listing fiche is attached). It should be noted that Docomomo strives to list the buildings in Australia that have a national resonance and importance and that the fiches prepared by the various national branches of Docomomo International (of which there are currently 72) together comprise the International Register of Docomomo. It is a summary of the important buildings of the Modern Movement around the world, of which the MLC Building is one.

Docomomo Australia’s listing fiche states that the building is recognised as the first high-rise building in North Sydney and a building that represents a number of Australia’s firsts:

- first freestanding office building;
- first office building incorporating two office slabs separated by a services tower, with a podium, pilotis and roof gardens;
- first example of a deliberately decorated curtain wall;
- first large-scale commercial office development in the International Modern style, incorporating, at all levels from conception through finishes to furniture, the contemporary architectural influences of the USA and Europe;
- first large-scale commercial office development utilising large areas of glazed curtain walls in association with large capacity, sophisticated-control air conditioning for comfort conditions.

The Docomomo listing fiche states that the North Sydney MLC building has iconic/canonical significance because it is:

Australia's first large-scale commercial office development embodying the sleek, modern, recognisable, rectangular glazed prism so recently embraced by US corporations, as exemplified by the UN Secretariat and Lever House, [both in New York];

And because it is:

the largest and the best one of a series of buildings around Australia constructed by the MLC insurance company to project a modern image and to house its workers in open plan, modern office buildings with up-to-date facilities for work and leisure.

Non-statutory/professional – Australian Institute of Architects:

The importance and significance of the building to the development of architecture in Australia is also recognised by its listing on the Australian Institute of Architects’ *Register of Nationally Significant 20th Century Architecture* as item 105.

Non-statutory/academic – Jennifer Taylor (University of Sydney & Queensland University of Technology):

Jennifer Taylor’s seminal 2001 book on high-rise buildings in Australia, *Tall Buildings Australian Business Going Up: 1945-1970*, devoted much of the chapter on the MLC buildings in Australia to the MLC Building at North Sydney. Taylor states: “the first fully developed lightweight, freestanding, modern modular office block does not appear until 1957 with the completion of the MLC Building, North Sydney, by Bates Smart & McCutcheon (in association with Hennessey and Hennessey)” (page 22) and “Leaping ahead of its predecessors, the MLC Building, North Sydney, was a fully developed and committed work with a level of contemporaneity and excellence in design comparable to most buildings of this type throughout the world.” (page 48) Taylor also explores the design of the building in terms of height (ie not attempting to use the landscaped setback to Miller Street in order to gain additional height) and also the effect of daylight penetration into the offices on the width of the office floors.

The importance of the MLC Building at North Sydney to the development of the modern high-rise office building in Australia cannot be overstated.

Non-statutory/academic – Philip Goad (University of Melbourne):

Philip Goad, in his 2004 book on the architectural firm, Bates Smart, wrote of the firm's projects for insurance company, MLC that they "represented the aesthetic and technological development of a new typology. ... BSM in effect attained the status of an Antipodean Skidmore Owings and Merrill (SOM), the corporate architectural firm par excellence." (page 162) and "Of all the projects, it was MLC in North Sydney that was to be the most impressive exposition of BSM's newly acquired expertise. ... the Sydney building was at the time the largest office building in Australia. Presenting a huge façade to the street (almost 100 metres in length, the building was completely integrated in its design from interiors, external landscaping and modular construction to the tinted glass and ribbed aluminium spandrel panel curtain wall that appeared like a vast weightless mosaic." (page 164)

The MLC Building is also cited as an important development of post-war office buildings in the essay "Work & War" (pages 84-91) by Noni Boyd & Scott Robertson in the book edited by Hannah Lewi & Philip Goad, *Australia Modern: Architecture, landscape & design* (2019).

Summary of Significance:

The MLC Building is the most significant large office building dating from the 1950s in Australia. The ICI Building in Melbourne, also designed by Bates Smart & McCutcheon, is recognised as a building of importance to the people of Victoria and Australia by virtue of its listing on the Victorian State heritage Register. The MLC Building at North Sydney, completed the year before the ICI Building is of at least equal importance to the ICI building in terms of its design and historical importance and should be listed on the NSW State Heritage Register. The importance of the building was recognised at the time of its completion by being opened by the Australian Prime Minister and its aesthetic significance, historical significance as well as its rarity is beyond question.

The proponent's Statement of Heritage Impact (HIS) & DA Report options:

The HIS by the RPS Group, dated 28 November 2019, in our view, does not follow either the NSW Heritage Council guidelines for the preparation of Statements of Heritage Impact or the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter process for managing places of cultural significance with respect to the North Sydney MLC Building.

The HIS fails to address the significance of the MLC Building. There is no attempt to assess its significance as an important component in the development of North Sydney, the streetscape or its seminal role in the development of the Modern high-rise office building in Australia. On page 51 there is simply a reiteration of a very small part of the Statement of Significance associated with the SHI listing and no examination of the significance of the building under the various State Heritage Register criteria. There is more discussion of the archaeological potential of the site than there is on the heritage item itself, which is to be expected given that the primary qualification of the report's authors is archaeology.

On page 55 there is a one line statement on the impact of the proposal on the heritage item ("a direct major adverse impact") because of its demolition and then nine lines of how the proposal "mitigates" the impact including a "reinterpretation of the philosophy of the MLC Building". In our opinion this is nonsensical (aside from the improbability of an inanimate building having a philosophy). Examples of this nonsensical mitigation approach are the statements that the use of an "expressed lightweight structure" and the proposed building is a "landmark building form" are examples of this reinterpretation of the existing building. The proposed building could not be further from the existing building in form/shape. The ordered, modular nature of the existing building is replaced with a bulbous building of no apparent structuring order, the façade of the new building is a flat glass curtain wall compared to the existing building's highly modulated and textured aluminium and glass curtain wall. The MLC Building has been an important defining wall of the only civic space in the North Sydney CBD at the junction of the Pacific Highway, Millers Street and Mount Street for over 60 years and the proposed replacement building, with its glass façade, will not replicate the blue-grey solidity of the MLC Building at this important civic juncture.

The alternative development options for the site as listed in the DA Report by Bates Smart in Section 5.1 do not include a section or assessment criterion regarding heritage impact and the HIS does not assess each of those development options with respect to the heritage significance of the existing MLC Building. This should have been a priority for the HIS.

The primary motivation for the redevelopment of the site is the increase in lettable floor space and the removal of the existing and potential overshadowing of Brett Whiteley Place. Brett Whiteley Place is the closed-off section of Mount Street between the Pacific Highway and part of the way down Mount Street towards Walker Street. When the MLC Building was constructed Mount Street was a traffic-carrying road and became a primary access road to the Sydney Harbour Bridge after the construction of the Warringah Freeway. Whilst solar access to public spaces is an ideal to be achieved, the sacrifice of a

heritage item of such importance is not an adequate trade-off. It should be noted that Brett Whiteley Place is already partly overshadowed by the existing building. The shadow diagrams in the DA report should have differentiated between existing and additional shadows as well as differentiating between the shadows from buildings on the subject site and shadows cast by the approved development over the Victoria Cross Metro Station.

The emphasis on Brett Whiteley Place as an urban open space is not matched by a meaningful discussion about the utility of the landscaped area to the west of the MLC Building along the Miller Street frontage. That landscaped area is designated a Special Area under the North Sydney LEP and offers the chance of creating a sun-filled open public space. Brett Whiteley Place can remain a shaded place for Summer and the area to the west could serve as the sun-filled Winter open public space.

The issues stated in the Australia ICOMOS Practice Note: *Heritage and Sustainability 1: Built Heritage* are also not addressed in the HIS. The major environmental impact of the loss of the embodied energy in the existing MLC Building and the cost and impact of either dumping or recycling the demolished materials should have been canvassed in the HIS. The embodied energy of the MLC Building is greater than most buildings constructed of "traditional" building materials because of the large area of aluminium façade units that required a large input of electricity in their refining and manufacture. The DA Report illustrates several overseas refurbishment projects that successfully conserved the heritage significance of high-rise office buildings; notably Lever House in New York.

Conclusion:

The importance of the MLC Building at North Sydney to the development of the modern high-rise office building in Australia cannot be overstated. The building is recognised by North Sydney Council, the Australian Institute of Architects, Docomomo Australia and academics around Australia as a rare, surviving, seminal work of Modern Australian architecture that should be retained for future generations.

Docomomo Australia fully supports the upgrading of heritage buildings to adapt to new requirements and technology. The MLC Building itself has already been the subject of such an adaptive upgrade at the beginning of the 21st century and it is possible to upgrade the MLC Building sensitively to provide office accommodation of a high standard in such an important and convenient location. There are numerous international examples of adaptive re-use of significant heritage buildings such as the conversion of Van Nelle factory in Rotterdam, The Netherlands to provide world class office and studio accommodation, or the retention of 1950s and 1960s high-rise buildings in Dallas, USA with refurbished original facades and important interiors.

The proposal to demolish the building should be refused and alternative refurbishment strategies explored in detail.

The building should be listed on the State Heritage Register as a minimum step in preserving the building and consideration should be given to listing it on the National Heritage List.

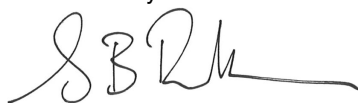
An update of the 20 year old Conservation Management Plan should be undertaken before any decisions are made regarding the building's future.

North Sydney Council should, as an urgent priority commence negotiations with the NSW Government for:

- Listing on the State Heritage Register
- Commencing a Heritage Floor Space Scheme for the sale of heritage floor space similar to the scheme operated by the City of Sydney. This would provide funding for the building's conservation and refurbishment

Such a dual-pronged approach would preserve the building by giving the owners financial incentives to upgrade and conserve the building and capitalise on unused floor space as well as adding further protection for this exceptional, important building and ensuring its retention for future generations.

Yours faithfully



Dr Scott Robertson
BSc (Arch), BArch (Hons), MBEEnv (Blg Conservation), PhD
President
Docomomo Australia

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International working party for
documentation and conservation
of buildings, sites and neighbourhoods of the
modern movement

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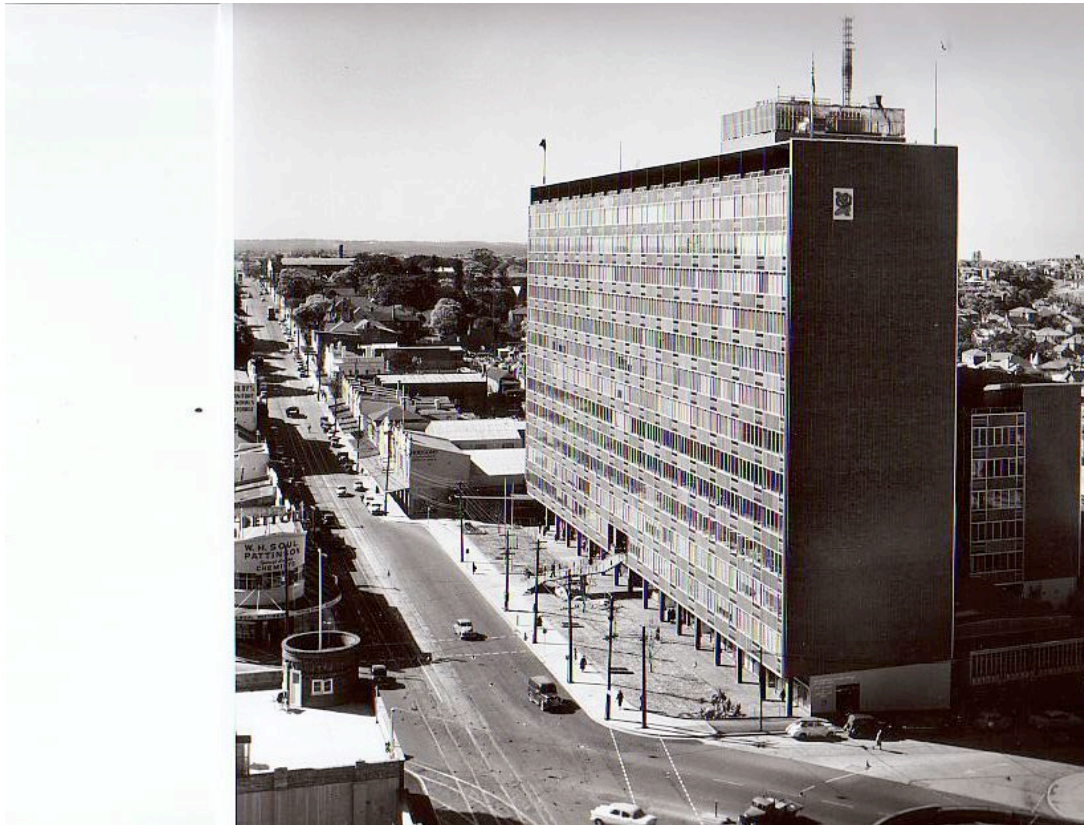
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composed by working party of: Australia

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|---|--|----------------------------|
| 1 | Identity of
building/group of
buildings/urban
scheme/
landscape/garden | MLC Building, North Sydney |
|---|--|----------------------------|



View of the MLC Building from south-west (September 1957)
Photo: Max Dupain & Associates

1.1	current name of building	MLC Building
1.2	variant or former name	n/a
1.3	number & name of street	105-153 Miller Street
1.4	town/suburb, city	North Sydney, Sydney
1.5	state	New South Wales
1.6	post code	2060
1.7	country	Australia
1.8	national grid reference	AMG: 3 34 E, 62 54 N
1.9	classification/typology	Office building & shops
1.10	protection status & date	North Sydney Local Environmental Plan NSW Heritage Council – State Heritage Inventory RAIA NSW Chapter – Register of 20 th Century Buildings of Significance National Trust of Australia (NSW) - Register

2 History of building

2.1 original brief/purpose Background

The MLC Company originated in 1886 in New South Wales and Queensland, and it prospered to the extent that in 1935 it held a National Architectural Competition for a new headquarters building to be erected in the place of its existing building in Martin Place within the Sydney CBD. The competition was won by the Melbourne architects Bates Smart and McCutcheon. The building still stands, considerably altered, now opposite Harry Seidler's 68 storey MLC Centre completed in 1978.

After World War 2 the MLC Company made strategic use of new buildings designed in the International Modern Style as a means of publicly projecting its own modern corporate philosophy. Between 1952 and 1958 it erected 18 such office buildings throughout Australia, most of which were designed by Bates Smart and McCutcheon. The flagship building was the new Head Office in North Sydney.

In 1952, Bates Smart and McCutcheon was the oldest and one of the two largest architectural practices in Australia. It traced its origins back to 1852 when Joseph Reed migrated from England and commenced practice in Melbourne. Reed quickly established a dominant position within the profession and over the next 40 years largely shaped the Victorian character of Melbourne. In the years after World War 2 the driving force in the practice was Osborn McCutcheon who had joined as a partner in 1926. After service

during the War as Chief Architectural Consultant to the US Army in Australia, then as advisor to the Australian Government, McCutcheon undertook study trips to Scandinavia, then to the USA where he worked in the New York office of Skidmore Owings and Merrill.

In the post-war period the Bates Smart and McCutcheon office was in the forefront of technical innovation, a philosophy which saw it produce modernist multi-storey office buildings throughout Australia for major corporate clients including ICI, AMP, Prudential Assurance, NZI and MLC.

In 1971, the noted Australian architectural critic and writer, Robin Boyd, nominated McCutcheon on a list of the 10 most influential Australian architects along with Harry Seidler, John Andrews, Peter Johnson and Colin Madigan.

Planning And Design

Design of the MLC North Sydney building commenced early in 1954 and by mid-1955 Council approval had been obtained for an office building that comprised a 15 storey high west office block, an 8 storey high east office block and an interlinking services tower. The two long thin office blocks rose from a one storey high podium, and with a gross area of 450,786 ft² (41,880m²), it was on completion the largest office building in Australia.

Both office blocks are set back from the street boundaries, creating an open public landscaped space along Miller Street, the principal street frontage. Shops were provided within the building on two of the street frontages; staff amenities, a cafeteria and recreational facilities were incorporated at ground floor level; and extensive carparking was incorporated in the lower ground floor.

In a letter to North Sydney Council, McCutcheon compared the disadvantages of the traditional approach to design of office buildings to the advantages of his proposal.

The traditional design *"would have been to cover the whole site with a building.....with no special contribution to town planning development"*; the building would have an inefficient and confusing floor plan, *"be subject to street noise"*, and *"two thirds of the office space would look into light areas (wells)"*. By contrast, the preliminary form of building he outlined, based upon precedents in New York, London and elsewhere, would have:

- setbacks from boundaries resulting in open garden and public park at ground floor level, and *"upper floors..... (that) could..... never be built out"*, *"have a high standard of outlook"*, and a high standard of *"natural light and ventilation"*;
- *"shops.....within the main building.....on the Miller and Mount Street frontages"*;
- staff amenities, restaurant and recreation facilities at the rear of the ground floor;
- underground car parking.

Overall, the quality of the *"office space (would be) equal to any in Sydney."*ⁱⁱ

The design owes its origins to the Berlin projects of Mies van der Rohe (Freidrichstrasse, 1921 and Reich Bank competition, 1933), and le Corbusier, in particular Centrosoyus in Moscow (1928-33) and

the Ministry of Agriculture in Rio de Janeiro (1936-42). Characteristic of these buildings were the office slabs on a pilotis, with glazed curtain walls on the long facades terminated by narrow masonry-faced end walls, all set within landscaped open space.

In addition, during his work in the office of Skidmore Owings and Merrill, McCutcheon would undoubtedly have come into contact with two of the most influential and widely publicised New York office buildings of the time, both of which directly involved partners of Skidmore Owings and Merrill, namely the UN Secretariat (Louis Skidmore-1950) and Lever House (Gordon Bunshaft-1952).

The MLC North Sydney building adopted prefabricated, lightweight construction both for speed of erection and for cost saving. Its fully rigid steel frame with hollow steel pan flooring was designed in-house at Bates Smart and McCutcheon by structural engineer Harvey Brown; this aspect assured economy of structural design and facilitated integration of services and fire protection systems. Layers of vermiculite plaster rather than heavy concrete encasing were used to fireproof the steel structure and flooring system. McCutcheon worked with the Commonwealth Experimental Building Station to develop and test innovative, lightweight fire protection measures, often drawing upon North American experience.

The office blocks were clad on their east and west elevations with lightweight, anodised aluminium and glass curtain walls. To deal with the heat load and to make internal working conditions tolerable, two skins of glass were provided with adjustable venetian blinds in the air gap between, together with a zone-controlled, fully ducted airconditioning system. The scale and complexity of the airconditioning installation made it a milestone in the development of sophisticated systems for high-rise office buildings in Australia. The outer faces of the blades of the venetian blinds were finished in a peach colour, chosen by McCutcheon to complement the green colour of the outer skin of heat absorbing glass.

The opening of the building in August 1957 by Robert Menzies, the Prime Minister of Australia, was a major news event. Thereafter its dominant position on the North Sydney skyline, projecting the power and prestige of one of Australia's most respected institutions, assured that the MLC Company was recognised as the "way of the future", perhaps best symbolised by the MLC Weather Beacon whose coloured flashing lights could be seen even from distant Sydney suburbs.

2.2	dates: commission/completion	1954/3 August 1957
2.3	architectural designers	Bates Smart and McCutcheon
2.4	others associated with building	Engineers: Bates Smart and McCutcheon Artists: Gerald Lewers [sandstone sculpture at entrance] and Andor

Meszaros [bas-reliefs]

2.5 significant alterations with dates

Since 1957 the MLC Company has remained in occupation and the building has undergone a succession of major changes many with the purpose of adapting the building to the ever-changing commercial needs of the company. Up until the mid 1990's the most significant of the changes were:

- Loss of prominence and commercial identity due to progressive envelopment by surrounding taller office developments;
- Reconfiguration of the principal Miller Street entrances, including dispersal of the sandstone sculptures by the prominent sculptor Gerald Lewers, and removal of the stepped ramped entrance bridge;
- Alterations to the Miller Street shops;
- Alterations to the Miller Street colonnade and landscaped forecourt;
- Almost complete stripout of the original fabric on all floors;
- Internal reconfiguration of the spandrel back-up walls at the curtain walls;
- Substitution of "slimline" venetian blinds for the original wide blade blinds within the glazed cavity of the curtain walls;
- Addition of intrusive awnings over the footpaths on the side and rear streets;
- Alterations to the Ground Floor staff facilities;
- Removal of the MLC Weather Beacon.

In the mid-1990's the MLC Company determined to revitalise the building. To keep the building viable as offices for the contemporary workplace substantial changes were needed to the internal spaces and facilities, communications, services, and fire safety measures. The spaces within the MLC Building proved well suited and adaptable to the requirements of the late 1990's IT- based workplace, subsequently identified as Campus MLC.

The most prominent of the changes as an outcome of the revitalisation were:

- New internal stairs that provide open links between the office floors in the west block;
- The manner of the introduction of new services and fitout into the office floors;
- Refurbishment of the toilets where "samples" of the best of the original design were retained and restored;
- Construction of a new entrance;
- Reinstatement of the Lewers sculptures at the new entrance;
- Opening-up of the forecourt, to regain some of the lost linkage between the building and its surroundings;
- Repairs to and refurbishment of the curtain walling.

current use

Office Building and shops

current condition

The building is in good condition

3.0 Description

3.1 general description

West Elevations

The West Block is set back from Miller Street by 45' (13.7m). At

ground level a pedestrian concourse is present with shopfronts being set back from the face of the office slab by 9' (2.7m). This offset exposes the structural columns thereby creating a sheltered pedestrian colonnade along the concourse adjoining the landscaped area. The columns, originally clad with Australian black granite and Italian porcelanite mosaic tiles, were reclad in 1987 in stainless steel and the shop fronts are not original.

The remainder of the elevation except for the top is clad in an aluminium framed glazed curtain wall formed into 17 bays each about 6.0m long related to the structural column grid. Within each bay the vision panels are further sub-divided into four. In order to express the column behind the spandrel, the panel is sub-divided horizontally into a top and a bottom sub-panel of opaque blue coloured glass with a mid sub-panel of ribbed anodised aluminium. Where a spandrel occurs between column centres it is clad with an anodised aluminium ribbed panel fixed vertically.

The top of the building is terminated by a thin-edged 'parasol' roof supported on fins on the same bay layout as below which forms a cover for the continuous roof terrace. The roof, called a "shelter roof" on the construction drawings, does not project over the building line below; its principal function is decorative - it terminates the sheer rise of the solid, blank end walls and it caps the glazed curtain walls.

Originally the entrance to the upper ground floor Foyer and Lift Lobby, which served as MLC's entrance, was achieved via a prestressed reinforced concrete ramped stepped bridge which spanned from the footpath to the building face. This bridge was not roofed and met the building at the Upper Ground Level; it was tiled with a pattern of Italian vitreous floor tiles. The bridge was removed as part of the major reconfiguration of the entrances in 1987.

The landscaped setback to Miller Street is central to the concept of the building as it allows the form of the dominant West Block to be perceived as a freestanding 3 dimensional volume, rather than as a continuation of the street frontage. When originally completed the area was described as follows:

The landscaped area in front of the West Block is basically a couch lawn overseeded with N.Z. Browntop to improve winter colour. Six well developed plane trees (Platanus orientalis) provide focal points in the lawn. Near the centrally placed entrance ramp to the upper ground floor is a rock-garden, largely of stone outcrop with a limited amount of shrub and hardy rock plant development. This area features large units of sculptured sandstone, the work of Mr. Gerald Lewers, a sculptor of distinction, with grouped large river gravel and flat stones.

Three of the plane trees survive, but the rock-garden was removed in 1987.

The west-facing facades of the East Block are clad in an aluminium framed glazed curtain wall identical to the West Block; the curtain wall returns onto the north and south facades of the East Block.

South Elevations

From Mount Street the tri-component composition of the building is clearly evident. The West Block, built on the Mount Street boundary, is clad in 300 x 150mm blue/grey terra cotta tiles which extend to the roofline. Fixed to the top left hand corner of this facade is a bas-relief sculpture.

Set back from the Mount Street boundary by 7 bays (about 136' or 41.5m) is the Services Tower. The top storey is articulated by translucent glass sheeting through which obscure views of the structure and plant can be obtained. The remainder of the tower is clad in terra cotta tiles of the same colour as the West Block. Horizontal rows of small square windows arranged in triplets are provided on the north and south faces to provide light to the toilets and other facilities inside.

The East Block is set back from Mount Street by 4 bays (78' or about 23.8m). The end walls are divided vertically into two approximately equal width bays consisting of a solid, tiled wall and transparent glazed curtain wall, projected forward of the plane of the tiled wall. This differs from the simple arrangement on the West Block and has been done so that the geometrical proportion of the solid end wall is the same as that on the West Block. Presumably this geometrical imperative was also used to define the width of the East Block, it being 10 feet narrower than the West Block. In addition, by introducing glass on the end walls, more light and better views are provided at the corners of the floors which otherwise would only face directly the curtain wall of the West Block opposite. The zone along Mount Street contains shops with a staff amenities building and an adjoining roof garden constructed on top of the single storey high podium. The shops have been refurbished recently together with the construction of an awning over the footpath along the length of this facade; however, some of the original Italian porcelainite mosaic tiling and the Dromana granite facings remain.

East Elevations

The East Block and the podium are set back from the Denison Street alignment by 16 feet (4.9m). Carpark access, loading docks, a pedestrian entrance to the lift lobby and retail shops are located at the lower ground floor street level. The shops, associated terrace and the footpath awning are part of recent refurbishment work; however, remnants of the original porcelainite mosaic tiling and the Dromana granite facings remain.

The east elevation of the East Block consists of the office slab atop a pilotis on the podium, the office slab being terminated at its north and south ends by the rectangular boxes of the twin stairs. As originally designed, glazed aluminium-framed walls enclosed the various facilities provided for the use of MLC staff including:

- Dining Room
- Lounge
- Billiards Room
- Staff Canteen

Glazed walls partially filled the open volume between the podium and the office slab and facilitated direct connection with the two outdoor roof gardens and the covered recreation space.

Subsequent major alterations and additions have been made to these spaces.

The arrangement of the curtain walls on the east elevations of the East and West Blocks is the same as that on the west elevation of the West Block.

Large windows are provided in the east wall of the Services Tower above the roof of the East Block, each lighting the lift lobby. The wall is faced with terracotta tiles of contrasting colour to the north and south walls; a diagonal geometric pattern of projecting tiles, the same colour as the north and south walls, subtly decorates this face. The weather beacon, a major feature of the North Sydney skyline until it was enveloped by the surrounding high-rise development in the 1980's was removed from the roof of the Services Tower in 1987.

North Elevations

This elevation is essentially a mirror image of the south elevation except that at the lower levels the northern neighbour 'Tower Square' abuts the building along the common boundary.

3.2 construction

The West and East Blocks are composite framed structures with the Services Tower being constructed as a reinforced concrete shear core.

Both the West and East Blocks are composed of I-section steel beams and columns assembled by rigidly bolted connections to form a series of repeated structural bays. The West Block is 2 bays deep by 17 long; the East Block is 9 bays long by two bays deep but narrower than the West Block.

The West Block end walls are formed up as continuous reinforced concrete shear walls two bays deep. The East Block is restrained by reinforced concrete shear walls; however, they are only one bay deep. The Services Tower, being a reinforced concrete tube, serves to restrain both blocks in the middle. Many of the main floor beams have locally reinforced service penetrations. The steel columns bear directly on reinforced concrete pad footings.

The steel structure is fire protected by a combination of light-weight lath and plaster casings and vermiculite plaster.

3.3 context

See description above

4 Evaluation

4.1

technical

The building is of Technical Significance:

- As Australia's first building with a large lift capacity designed to cope with a high level of inter-floor traffic resulting from the head office operations of a single tenant.
 - In association with the state office buildings for the MLC in Adelaide and Perth, for the ground-breaking aspects of its
-

construction including: use of light-weight materials; materials testing leading to evolution of building regulations; prefabricated steel structural framing and flooring system; incorporation of modular design and fitout of the interiors; adoption of 'fast-track' construction methods;

- For its potential to store and reveal information about construction techniques, construction materials, internal finishes and services then being introduced into Australia, and all of which were part of a deliberate shift away from the conservative approach to construction taken before the war; this potential is supported by the existence of a comprehensive archive of construction documentation;
- For the exceptional quality of the curtain wall as scarce evidence of the best available 1950's curtain wall technology;
- For the exceptional quality of the surviving original exterior and interior finishes and fittings, which incorporate a consistency controlled by the modular concept of the design; this quality is supported by the existence of a comprehensive collection of photographs by arguably, Australia's foremost photographer, Max Dupain.

The building is of Social Significance:

- As Australia's first office building provided with major recreational facilities for the sole benefit of the building tenant's staff;
 - As a large employer of people in the post-war community, not only during construction, but also more importantly in an on-going role once it was operational.
 - As a symbol of the growth and increasing importance of North Sydney as a major commercial district.
 - As the first large-scale commercial office development built in Australia after the easing of both financial constraints and post-war materials shortages brought about by the pressing need to overcome housing shortages;
 - Because it was designed by Sir Osborn McCutcheon whose architectural practice Bates, Smart & McCutcheon was in the forefront of the introduction of large-scale commercial office developments in the capital cities and major country centres throughout Australia in the 1950's and 60's, not only for MLC but also for other major corporations.
 - For its association with a major company who chose to raise their national market profile by construction of a group of "International Modern" office buildings whose genre was recognisable different from those that preceded;
 - Because it was the "flagship" national headquarters from which MLC's purposeful expansion into its nation-wide market was directed;
 - As an essentially intact example of an office floor configuration that demonstrates a style of commercial office space that has been overtaken by the evolutionary changes in work practices, particularly those associated with the PC;
 - As a rare, essentially intact example of a commercial office development provided with large-scale social and cultural facilities for use by the staff, as part of the developing trend towards increased leisure time in contemporary society.
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4.2 social

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- Because it instigated the development of North Sydney as an acceptable and viable commercial office area, as an alternative to Sydney CBD.
 - Because, by the provision of a shopping concourse along Miller Street and shops along Mount Street, it continues the street-level retail tradition of the area;
 - As the first example of a large-scale site amalgamation for commercial purposes in North Sydney.
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The building is of Aesthetic Significance:

- As Australia's first 'freestanding' office building, with setbacks from boundaries creating landscaped spaces at street level;
 - As Australia's first office building incorporating two office slabs separated by a services tower, with a podium, pilotis and roof gardens;
 - As Australia's first example of a deliberately decorated curtain wall;
 - As Australia's first large-scale commercial office development in the International Modern style, incorporating, at all levels from conception through finishes to furniture, the contemporary architectural influences of the USA and Europe;
 - As Australia's first large-scale commercial office development utilising large areas of glazed curtain walls in association with large capacity, sophisticated-control air conditioning for comfort conditions;
- 4.3 cultural & aesthetic

The building is of Iconic /Canonical Significance:

- 4.4 Iconic/canonical
- As Australia's first large-scale commercial office development embodying the sleek, modern, recognisable, rectangular glazed prism so recently embraced by US corporations, as exemplified by the UN Secretariat and Lever House;

- 4.5 general assessment
- The MLC Building is the largest and the best one of a series of buildings around Australia constructed by the MLC insurance company to project a modern image and to house its workers in open plan, modern office buildings with up-to-date facilities for work and leisure.

5 Documentation

Graphic Sources

- 5.1 principal references
- Max Dupain and Associates (Eric Sierins) at Milsons Point, Sydney: archive of 175 (mostly 5"x4") black and white negatives of the interiors and exteriors, principally from 1957-1958.

Refer to the *Conservation Plan - MLC Building North Sydney* below.

Written Sources

Conservation Plan - MLC Building North Sydney, May 1998.

Peter McKenzie, Jackson Teece Chesterman Willis Consultants.

5.2 visual material attached
5.3 rapporteur/date

Peter McKenzie, September 2004