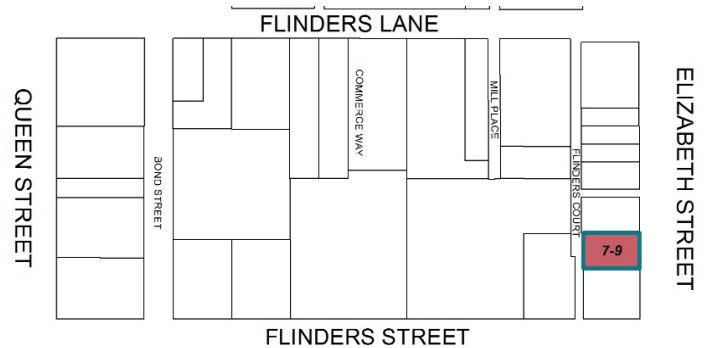


STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE: Shops, café and office (7-9 Elizabeth Street, Melbourne), April 2022

Heritage Place: Shops, café and office



PS ref no: HO1328



What is significant?

7-9 Elizabeth Street, Melbourne, a two-storey retail building built in 1933 to a design by architect Harry A Norris.

Elements that contribute to the significance of the place include (but are not limited to):

- The original built form and scale
- The original rendered reinforced concrete façade to Elizabeth Street and the pattern of fenestration, including large central recessed bay with vertically proportioned modules of narrow window openings and solid panels, moulded decorative motifs and parapet with recessed Art Deco/Jazz Moderne motifs
- The original rear elevation with exposed concrete finish to Flinders Court and the pattern of fenestration.

Later alterations made to the Elizabeth Street facade, including the aluminium frame shop front, are not significant.

How it is significant?

7-9 Elizabeth Street, Melbourne, is of local historic, representative and associative significance to the City of Melbourne

Why it is significant?

The two-storey shop, office and cafe building at 7-9 Elizabeth Street is historically significant for the evidence it provides of an important phase in Melbourne's retail and office development. During the economic depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s, government tariffs on imported goods brought locally manufactured products to the fore, which aided Melbourne's recovery. The building at 7-9 Elizabeth Street was occupied immediately by small businesses associated with retail, café and financial services. Building owner, tobacco retailer G Damman & Co, occupied part of the building for around 40 years, from 1933 to at least 1974. The tobacco business of G Damman & Co was founded on the Victorian goldfields by Danish migrant brothers George and Gustave Damman. They opened their first tobacco and pipe retail store in Melbourne in 1854. Another occupant was the Parthenon Café from 1933-65, established by Greek immigrant Vasile Vlasopoulos. Vlasopoulos had a longer connection to the site, in 1919 having established a dining room in the previous building at 7A Elizabeth Street. Opened in 1933, the Parthenon Café was one of the earliest Greek cafes established in Melbourne, which were uncommon before the increased arrival of Greek migrants after World War Two. The building at 7-9 Elizabeth Street is also significant for its direct association of 15 years with the Young Men's Hebrew Association of Australia who occupied the first-floor office space in the subject building from c1945-60. The Young Men's Hebrew Association of Australia (YMHA) was founded in Sydney in 1929, with a Victorian branch established by late 1933, to perpetuate Jewish ideals, contribute to the social development of the community, and to create a cultural Jewish life by means of a religious, educational, social, philanthropic and recreational program. The role of the YMHA during its tenancy of 7-9 Elizabeth Street is likely to have taken on particular importance in the course of Melbourne's and Victoria's Jewish history in the immediate postwar years. (Criterion A)

The building at 7-9 Elizabeth Street is significant as a relatively intact example of a two-storey shop and office building constructed in the later interwar period and designed by Harry A Norris. The building is characteristic of the modestly scaled and fine-grained retail expansion in central Melbourne during the widespread economic depression of the later 1920s and early 1930s. Its use of the Moderne style in such a low scale building is not common. The style was in vogue at the time for much more substantial (especially commercial) buildings rather than low scale retail buildings, which tended to be more stylistically conservative and restrained. The primary façade to Elizabeth Street retains its original fenestration, including large central recessed bay with vertically proportioned modules of narrow window openings and solid panels, moulded decorative motifs and parapet with recessed Art Deco inspired motifs. (Criterion D)

7-9 Elizabeth Street is significant for its direct association with one of the earliest-established Australian tobacconists G Damman & Co. Built for the company in 1933, the building was occupied by G Damman & Co for over 40 years through to the 1970s. In 1954, the company celebrated its centenary, and was noted as being the oldest tobacconists in Australia. The company established three stores in Melbourne, and the subject building at 7-9 Elizabeth Street is the only surviving physical evidence of their business in central Melbourne for over 120 years. (Criterion H)

Primary source

Hoddle Grid Heritage Review (Context & GJM Heritage, 2020) (updated March 2022)