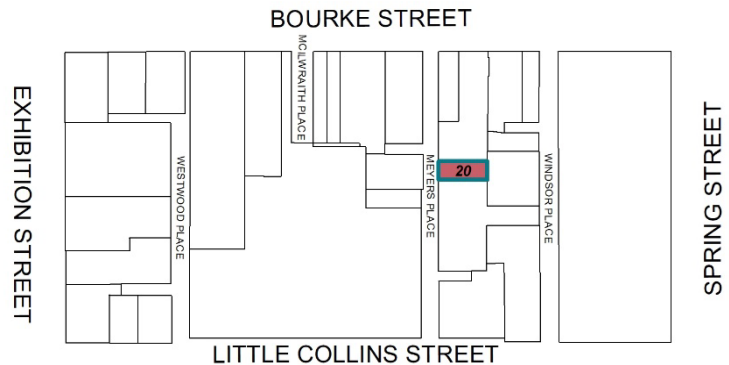


**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE: The Waiters Restaurant (20 Meyers Place, Melbourne), April 2022**

**Heritage Place:** The Waiters Restaurant



**PS ref no:** HO1364



**What is significant?**

20 Meyers Place, Melbourne, a two-storey warehouse built in c1886-87.

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

- The original building form and scale
  - The pre-1995 Waiters Restaurant painted sign on the northern side wall; Its continuing presentation as a casalinga style Italian restaurant, with a continuity of Sabbadini ownership over three generations
  - Its continuing presentation as a casalinga style Italian restaurant, with a continuity of Sabbadini ownership over three generations
  - The traditions and stories associated with the restaurant which are 'legendary' within Melbourne.
- More recent alterations made to the street level façade are not significant.

**How it is significant?**

20 Meyers Place, Melbourne, is of local historic and social significance to the City of Melbourne.

**Why it is significant?**

20 Meyers Place is historically significant for its long-standing and direct connection with Melbourne's café and restaurant industry from the early post-World War Two period to the present, demonstrating the influence of the Italian community on Melbourne's restaurant and café culture. It is associated with

the Italian Waiters Club established in the building in c1947, a business that continues today as the Waiters Restaurant. Italians have been highly influential in the development of Melbourne's restaurant scene from the late nineteenth century through to today; the scene was dominated by Italians in the 1920s-30s. After the Second World War, which was a difficult period for Italians living in Australia, Italian cafes such as the Italian Waiters Club, Pelligrini's (1954) and several others in Lygon Street (Carlton) were established, each serving a particular clientele and with their own style. The Italian Waiters Club specialises in a *casalinga* style of cuisine – in essence home-cooking – and this is a recognised part of its attraction. The Sabbadini family, owners since the 1970s, have continued this tradition across three generations, serving dishes from the northern Italian Friuli-Venezia-Giulia region. (Criterion A)

The Italian Waiters Club is of social significance for its strong and enduring associations as a Melbourne eating institution, made famous by its 'secret' location, unlicensed drinking, the *casalinga* style of cooking and as a place to see many renowned Melburnians – politicians, journalists and sometimes underworld figures. It is an important place of informal social congregation for Melburnians, initially created as an informal club by waiters seeking a place to socialise after work, but soon becoming a highly desirable place to those 'in the know', with its anonymity forming part of the attraction. Its social significance is evidenced by its regular, long-term and continuous use as a *casalinga* style restaurant and informal meeting place for around 55-60 years, and longer if the early club period is included. (Criterion G)

The Italian Waiters Club has become a Melbourne institution over the course of its 72-year operation and colourful history. For its iconic status and long-standing operation as a restaurant, it is comparable with the nearby Florentino's and Pellegrini's, both located on Bourke Street. While established later than both these examples, it is distinguished by its different role in Melbourne's café and dining culture because it was established as a place for waiters, mainly of Italian, Spanish and Greek backgrounds, to come together and eat, drink and play cards after finishing work at their respective restaurants, at a time when selling alcohol after 6.00pm was illegal in Melbourne. The Italian Waiters Club remains a Melbourne legend: knowing how to find it, recalling the wine served in cups or 'vegemite' jars and 'legendary brusque waiter Paolo', are part of being a Melburnian. Its early painted sign on the northern side wall is tangible evidence of its long-term use as and occupation by the Waiters Restaurant, an institution within Melbourne's café culture. (Criterion G)

### **Primary source**

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