

The State Theatre and Gowings Buildings – Icons of Sydney’s history

The State Theatre Building and Gowings Building have been classified by the National Trust of Australia (NSW) and both are listed as heritages items in the *Sydney Local Environmental Plan 2005*. The State Theatre Building is also listed on the State Heritage Register.

State Theatre Building

The State Theatre Building is one of only two surviving theatres in Sydney to have been designed by the well known theatre architect Henry E. White. The other is the Capital Theatre. The State Theatre Building, constructed between 1926 and 1929, is an elaborately designed theatre mixing cinema baroque and Gothic inspired decorative features. The project was built in two stages with the theatre opening in 1929 and the nine-storey State Shopping Block above the theatre opening in 1930. The former configuration of the shopping arcades will be partly recaptured on the hotel accommodation floors.

During the 1920s Union Theatres (AHL) embarked on an ambitious program of expansion which focused on the Million Dollar Theatres concept. The State Theatre was built to be a “Palace of Dreams” and “The Empire’s Greatest Theatre”. The Art Deco style State Ballroom and Coffee Lounge were built in the mid 1930s.

Since the 1970s upper levels of the building have been occupied by contemporary partitioned offices.

Gowings Building

The Gowings Building was designed by well known department store architect Crawford H. Mackellar and constructed between 1912 and 1929. Known as the Gowings Department Store it was built by John Grant and Sons who also built the neighbouring State Theatre Building.

The building was purpose designed and built for the Gowings Bros operations of the time and the pioneering retail family owned and occupied some of the building from 1929 until they went into receivership in 2006. A major program of conservation and refurbishment works to this building was completed in 2002 and since purchasing the building in 2006 AHL has made no major alterations.

The Gowings Building was designed in the Commercial Palazzo interwar style and some of the original Gothic features have been lost over the years including the gargoyles and statuettes that once adorned the facade and were removed for safety during WWII. The remnant historic fabric including timber floors, timber partitions, timber joinery and original fire doors will be protected and conserved as part of the revival project.

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