

# **Attachment A1**

**Modern Residential Flat Buildings:  
Targeted Heritage Study (GML Heritage)**





# City of Sydney Modern Residential Flat Buildings

## Targeted Heritage Study

Stage 2 Report

Prepared for City of Sydney Council

November 2024

**GH**  
HERITAGE



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## **Cultural warning**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that this report may contain images or names of First Nations people who have passed away.

## Report register

The following report register documents the development of this report, in accordance with GML’s Quality Management System.

Project	Issue No.	Notes/Description	Issue Date
24-0178	1	City of Sydney Modern Residential Flat Building Targeted Heritage Study Draft Report	October 2024
24-0178	2	City of Sydney Modern Residential Flat Building Targeted Heritage Study Final Report	November 2024

### Quality management

The report has been reviewed and approved for issue in accordance with the GML quality management policy and procedures.

It aligns with best-practice heritage conservation and management, *The Burra Charter: the Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance, 2013* and heritage and environmental legislation and guidelines relevant to the subject place.

### Indigenous cultural and intellectual property

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### Cover image

Southern elevation of Aquarius, 50–58 Roslyn Gardens, Rushcutters Bay. (Source: GML Heritage)

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

City of Sydney Council (Council) engaged GML Heritage Pty Ltd (GML) to undertake a targeted heritage study of 18 modern residential flat buildings that are located within the Sydney Local Environmental Plan 2012 C20 Elizabeth and Rushcutters Bays Heritage Conservation Area (HCA) and C51 Potts Point HCA.

The heritage study has comprised three stages:

- Stage 1: Preliminary research and assessment.
- Stage 2: Heritage significance assessment.
- Stage 3: Stakeholder consultation.

Of the 18 properties, three were excluded from further research in Stage 1. The location of all the properties and the extent of the study area is indicated below in Figure 1.1.



Figure 1.1 Map of Potts Point Heritage Conservation Area (HCA) and Elizabeth and Rushcutters Bays HCA showing 18 properties identified for this study. (Source: Nearmap 2024 with GML overlay)

The following table outlines the 18 properties that were identified by City of Sydney Council for this study with their architect and completion year.



Table 1.1 Properties identified by City of Sydney Council for this study.

No.	Name	Address	Architect	Year
1	Gateway	3 Wylde Street, Potts Point	Douglas Forsyth-Evans	1960
2	Denison	15 Wylde Street, Potts Point	Hugo Stossel & Associates	1965
3	Gemini	40–44 Victoria Street, Potts Point	Hugo Stossel & Associates	1961–1969
4	St Ursula	5 Onslow Avenue, Elizabeth Bay	Hugo Stossel	1954
5	Oceana	108 Elizabeth Bay Road, Elizabeth Bay	Theodore Fry	1961
6	International Lodge	100 Elizabeth Bay Road, Elizabeth Bay	Harry Seidler and Associates	1970
7	The Reef	19 Ithaca Road, Elizabeth Bay	Henry Divola and Associates	1967
8	Ithaca Gardens	12 Ithaca Road, Elizabeth Bay	Harry Seidler and Associates	1960
9	Bay Apartments	80 Elizabeth Bay Road, Elizabeth Bay	HP Oser, Fombertaux & Associates	1965
10	Ercildoune	85–91 Elizabeth Bay Road, Elizabeth Bay	Harry Seidler and Associates	1966
11	Bayview	41–49 Roslyn Gardens, Elizabeth Bay	Hugo Stossel & Associates	1961
12	The Tor	51–59 Roslyn Gardens, Rushcutters Bay	Hugo Stossel & Associates	1966
13	Aquarius	50–58 Roslyn Gardens, Rushcutters Bay	Harry Seidler and Associates	1965
14	Roslyn Gardens	74–76 Roslyn Gardens, Rushcutters Bay	Douglas Snelling	1964
15	1–5 Clement St	1–5 Clement Street, Rushcutters Bay	Ancher, Mortlock, Murray and Woolley	1975
16	Habitat formerly Mowbray	1 McDonald Street, Potts Point	Rudder Littlemore & Rudder	1964
17	Deepdene	110–110B Elizabeth Bay Road, Elizabeth Bay	Stuart Murray with Ancher, Mortlock Murray and Woolley	1970
18	Serendipity	3–5 St Neot Avenue, Potts Point	Ian McKay and Partners	1975



## 1.2 Scope of works

Key tasks for each stage of the heritage study included the following.

### Stage 1: Preliminary research and assessment

Stage 1 includes preliminary assessments of 18 properties including:

- research the study area’s postwar development, including an overview of its social and historical context;
- provide an overview of all buildings, including a brief preliminary condition assessment, outline of modifications and significance assessment;
- initial site visits (external) where required; and
- preparation of a shortlist of properties for progression to Stage 2.

### Stage 2: Heritage significance assessment

Stage 2 includes detailed assessments of 15 properties including:

- historical research and an analysis of the extent of change (eg subdivision, alterations and additions to the building’s form or context);
- site visits to the exteriors and interiors of buildings (where possible);
- physical analysis of each property;
- comparative analysis to determine whether the property is rare or representative;
- significance assessment based on the NSW Heritage Office’s guidelines *Assessing Heritage Significance: Guidelines for Assessing Places and Objects against the Heritage Council of NSW Criteria* (2023);
- recommendations for the future management of the item; and
- preparation of inventory sheets for each property.

### Stage 3: Community consultation

Stage 3 includes consultation with stakeholders and presentation of key findings during and after the public exhibition period.

## 1.3 Methodology

The approach, methodology, assessment procedures, criteria and recommendations of the report have been prepared in accordance with key statutory and best-practice guidelines and legislation, including (but not limited to) the Heritage Council of NSW’s *Assessing Heritage Significance* (2023) and *The Burra Charter: The Australian ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance, 2013* (the Burra Charter).

## 1.4 Limitations

This heritage assessment was subject to the following limitations:

- Where internal inspections were not possible, properties were only inspected from the public domain or equivalent. In some instances, views from the public domain were limited.
- No assessment of social values was undertaken as part of this report process.
- The project did not include an assessment of archaeological or Aboriginal cultural values.

## 1.5 Authorship

This report was prepared by Linda Phung (Heritage Consultant), Shikha Swaroop (Senior Heritage Consultant), Leonie Masson (Associate and historian) and Rebecca Hawcroft (Head of Heritage Places) from GML, and Charles Pickett (independent historian).

## 1.6 Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge City of Sydney Council for providing background information, documentation and historical resources to assist in this project, in particular:

- Adele Zubrzycka, Senior Specialist Planner Heritage.
- Tim Wise, Manager State Planning Projects.
- Matt Devine, Senior Specialist Planner Heritage.

## 2 Residential flat buildings in Potts Point and Elizabeth Bay 1945–1975

### 2.1 The City of Sydney

Potts Point and Elizabeth Bay were the areas in Sydney most associated with apartment living during the 1920s and 1930s. The City of Sydney hosted by some distance the most flats during those decades, yet it was not the most densely built with flats, because these were concentrated in the study area rather than throughout the local government area (LGA).

Between the completion of the Astor in 1923 and the Park Regis in 1968, few apartment buildings were constructed in Sydney's central business district (CBD) or in most of the inner suburbs within the City of Sydney. Flats were concentrated in 'the most thickly populated, and certainly the most noisily infested, square mile of the metropolis', Potts Point, Elizabeth Bay and Darlinghurst, popularly known collectively as Kings Cross, or simply 'the Cross'.<sup>1</sup>

Most of the statistical analysis which follows is based on Australian Census records of LGAs, especially the City of Sydney. For most of the twentieth century the City of Sydney LGA consisted of the CBD and the Rocks plus East Sydney, Potts Point, Elizabeth Bay, Darlinghurst, Pyrmont, Camperdown, Haymarket and the northern parts of Surry Hills and Paddington. The exceptional period was from 1949 to 1968, when much of South Sydney was added, including Glebe, Alexandria, Newtown, Redfern, Waterloo and the southern part of Paddington.

Of the suburbs added in 1949 only Glebe and Paddington hosted significant numbers of flats: 3,095 flats compared to the City of Sydney's 10,328. In addition, the Housing Commission of New South Wales built numerous flats at Surry Hills, Glebe and Waterloo during the 1950s and 1960s. These additions inflated the 1961 Census records.





Figure 2.1 Looking east with Elizabeth Point and Elizabeth Bay in the foreground, Sydney. Photograph by Frank Hurley, pre-1962. (Source: NLA, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-160105877>)

## 2.2 The postwar boom

In 1947 the City of Sydney was home to 7,937 self-contained flats; there were also 2,391 tenements, defined as dwellings with kitchens but shared bathing facilities. Combined these totalled 53.8 per cent of the LGA’s 19,194 private dwellings, which also included 2,321 boarding house rooms.

Thanks to the expanded City council area, the City LGA’s flat percentage fell markedly at the 1961 Census. The added areas brought many more private houses—25,665 in total—to the LGA; this total fell back to 7,493 in 1971, by which time the City of Sydney boasted many more flats than houses.

In 1961 the established flat areas of North Sydney, Woollahra and Waverley municipalities hosted similar numbers of flats but higher percentages, as their populations and total number of dwellings were less.

Percentage of flats to all private dwellings per LGA	1961	1971	1981
<b>North Sydney</b>	51.7	70.5	73.7
<b>Sydney</b>	27.1	67.2	64.8
<b>Waverley</b>	45.6	58.7	61.2
<b>Woollahra</b>	56.6	56.8	53.6
<b>Manly</b>	40.4	50.3	51.2
<b>Randwick</b>	32.1	50.0	51.2
<b>Mosman</b>	33.7	53.6	49.6
<b>Ashfield</b>	25.6	48.5	49.0

Succeeding decades saw the City of Sydney have the greatest increase of flats as a percentage of all dwellings: 37.7 per cent during the two decades from 1961. By 1971, with the City of Sydney returned to its smaller boundaries, flats formed two thirds of its dwellings; the number of private houses in the area declined considerably during these decades.

The other established flat areas had much smaller increases; Sydney was followed in this ranking by suburban flat booms at Randwick, Mosman, Ashfield, Canterbury, Lane Cove, Ryde and elsewhere.

## 2.3 Boom decade

Postwar flat building in the City of Sydney occurred in three phases:

**1954 to 1961:** 882 new flats in 50 new buildings were completed in the City of Sydney, eight per cent of the total.

Thanks to shortages of materials and labour, private building activity did not rebound from the wartime shutdown until the mid-1950s. The credit squeeze of the early 1960s slowed this mini boom.

**1964 to 1974:** During these 11 years 250 apartment buildings were completed in the LGA, a total of 5,450 new dwellings. This was the height of the boom.

**1975 to 1984:** Following the property crash of 1974 only 82 flat blocks were built during 1975 to 1984.

## 2.4 Titles

Strata title was legislated in 1961 in New South Wales (NSW). Seven of the apartment buildings in this study had strata plans registered before 1974, a higher proportion than in the City of Sydney overall, where only 78 strata plans were registered in this time.

An increase in strata plans took place from 1975, with 154 strata plans registered in the City of Sydney between 1975 and 1980. Five of the study buildings were converted from Torrens to strata title between 1976 and 1979, presumably the result of a new, 1973 version of the *Strata Titles Act* which addressed a failing of the 1961 Act, that home units were rated on the same basis as free-standing houses. The remainder continued as company-owned Torrens titles.

Nonetheless, individual ownership of flats increased substantially. Across Sydney individually owned flats increased from seven per cent of the total in 1947 to 20 per cent in 1961. This was despite the activities of the Housing Commission, Sydney's major builder of rental flats during the 1950s.

In the City of Sydney, flats with owners or purchasers increased from less than one per cent in 1947 to 18 per cent in 1971, 1,570 flats with owners or purchasers compared to 6,965 rented flats, although this was substantially less than NSW's 29 per cent of individually owned flats.

## 2.5 Owners and renters

The 1950s' increase in individually owned flats in the study area and across Sydney was partly due to wartime changes to rent control laws which effectively tied rents at their 1939 levels. As a result, many landlords retitled their buildings with companies as owners rather than individuals and sold flats as company shares to their tenants. Several apartment buildings in the study area were retitled including the Macleay Regis, the 10-floor 'King of Macleay Street'.<sup>2</sup>

Australia's largest apartment building when completed in 1939 the Macleay Regis was company titled in 1955:

'Eighty-nine flats in Macleay Regis, Macleay Street. Potts Point have been sold as home units for an undisclosed price. This is believed to be the largest home unit conversion of a block of flats so far in Australia. Most of the flats were bought by tenants and the rest by outside purchasers for their own use when present tenants leave'.<sup>3</sup>

Similar sales took place in prominent apartment buildings including Birtley Towers, the Wintergarden and Wychbury.



Although many of the company-titled flats were in older buildings, most of the new flats built during the 1950s and 1960s also accommodated renters. The NSW rent control laws were relaxed in 1954, and rental properties regained popularity with investors and landlords. The study area remained predominantly a rental area. Eight of the buildings of interest in the current study were built for rental rather than individual ownership.

### **Ercildoune**

Ercildoune was constructed a site formally occupied by and named for an 1880s mansion converted to flats when purchased in 1958 by Ercildoune Gardens Pty Ltd. The property was sold the following year to Chevron Sydney Ltd, then constructing the Chevron Hotel at Macleay Street. The company's director stated that Chevron's 'plans were not final, but Ercildoune probably would be demolished and a building with more accommodation erected in its place'.<sup>4</sup>

Construction does not seem to have commenced until 1964, when the property was purchased by Horwitz Corporation. As completion approached, Ercildoune was offered as rental apartments:

#### HARBOUR VIEW APARTMENTS FOR RENT. ERCILDOUNE

65 Elizabeth Bay Road. New building near completion. Transport at door and within easy reach of the city proper. Fully furnished and carpeted bed/sitting-room, separate kitchen, bathroom, automatic garbage disposal, press-button defrost refrigerator, elevator.

#### SWIMMING POOL.

12 months' lease is available. References required. Rents from £1/1/10 to £15.<sup>5</sup>

In 1977 Ercildoune was strata titled and its apartments were offered for sale rather than rent. However as in other strata-titled buildings, individual owners and investors let many of these flats.



Figure 2.2 Ercildoune, owned by the Horwitz Corporation was constructed in 1964 as rental accommodation. (Source: GML 2024)

## 2.6 The tenants

The baby boom years of the 1950s and 1960s famously saw an increase in affluence, marriages, births and home ownership. By 1971 more than half of Australian households owned or were purchasing a home, but in the cities this statistic applied to houses rather than flats.

By 1971 only 13.5 per cent of metropolitan Sydney's 81,983 private houses were rented. In contrast, 64.3 per cent of the 114,332 privately owned flats were rented. A major reason for this discrepancy was the speedy formation of new households, which increased even faster than the population. In a rapidly growing economy most young people could afford to leave their parents' home well before they could afford a mortgage. The average age of flat-dwelling households plummeted.<sup>6</sup>

By 1971 almost 80 per cent (79.8%) of Sydney apartment tenants were younger than 35 years; the baby boomers had reached their 20s and 30s and were living the flat life. More than half of the under-35 household heads in Sydney lived in flats, but only 4 per cent of this group owned or were purchasing a flat. The new generation of flat dwellers was not only younger but more likely to be single and childless. Before 1945 the demographic profile of apartment and cottage dwellers was broadly similar; married

couples predominated in both residential formats. After 1945 a demographic split—a generation gap—emerged between cottage and flat.<sup>7</sup>

The most obvious architectural consequence in the study area was the profusion of bachelor flats in the postwar period. In 1947 2,125 of City of Sydney flats had only one or two rooms, 26 per cent of the total. By 1971 this number had increased to 4,376, 47 per cent of all flats.<sup>8</sup>

Bachelor flats emerged during the prewar decades, when they were widely regarded as an affordable escape from boarding houses and tenements. In the postwar world they were presented as glamorous and ambitious, as advertised for Victoria Towers (later named Gemini):

**POTTS POINT: BACHELOR APARTMENTS FOR YOUNG EXECUTIVES...** Tastefully furnished Bed-sitting room with wall-to-wall carpet, concealed lighting, fully equipped bathroom, kitchen with electric stove, refrigerator, stainless steel sink, ample cupboard space. Also, elevator, automatic garbage disposal each floor and car park. Telephone. Rents: Remaining Apartments £11/11/ to £13 per week, fully furnished.<sup>9</sup>

'Business bachelors' and 'young marrieds' were also popular tenant descriptions.

The other significant flat tenant demographic was the overseas born, especially those from Europe, newly accepted in large numbers. In 1971 overseas born people formed 37 per cent of the City of Sydney's 62,470 population; Greece was by some way the most common birthplace of European arrivals, followed by Italy. Sydney's Greek community had been concentrated in the City of Sydney since the 1800s; Australia's first Greek Orthodox church was consecrated in Surry Hills in 1899, while the Greek Consul-General was located at Bayswater Road by 1930; the Jewish War Memorial Hall was nearby. In 1952 the All Nations Club opened to welcome new arrivals.

However, the 1971 figure represented a high point in the City of Sydney's postwar migrant population. The City's Greek Australian population was already in decline as this community began to disperse to suburbs in Sydney's inner south and west; a similar trend occurred among Italian Australians.<sup>10</sup> This movement suggests that the flat boom displaced at least as many new migrants as it attracted; the generally low economic and employment status of these communities was presumably a factor in this movement away from the study area.

Since the 1920s flats had rented for more than houses. New constructions with modern facilities and generally well located, flats were able to demand higher rents than many inner-city crumbling terrace houses. By 1971 the previously considerable gap had narrowed but City of Sydney weekly flat rentals averaged \$24.48 compared to \$21.03 for houses. Part of the appeal of flat living had long been newer and superior kitchen and bathroom facilities, an advantage still evident in 1971 when many Sydney houses remained unsewered.



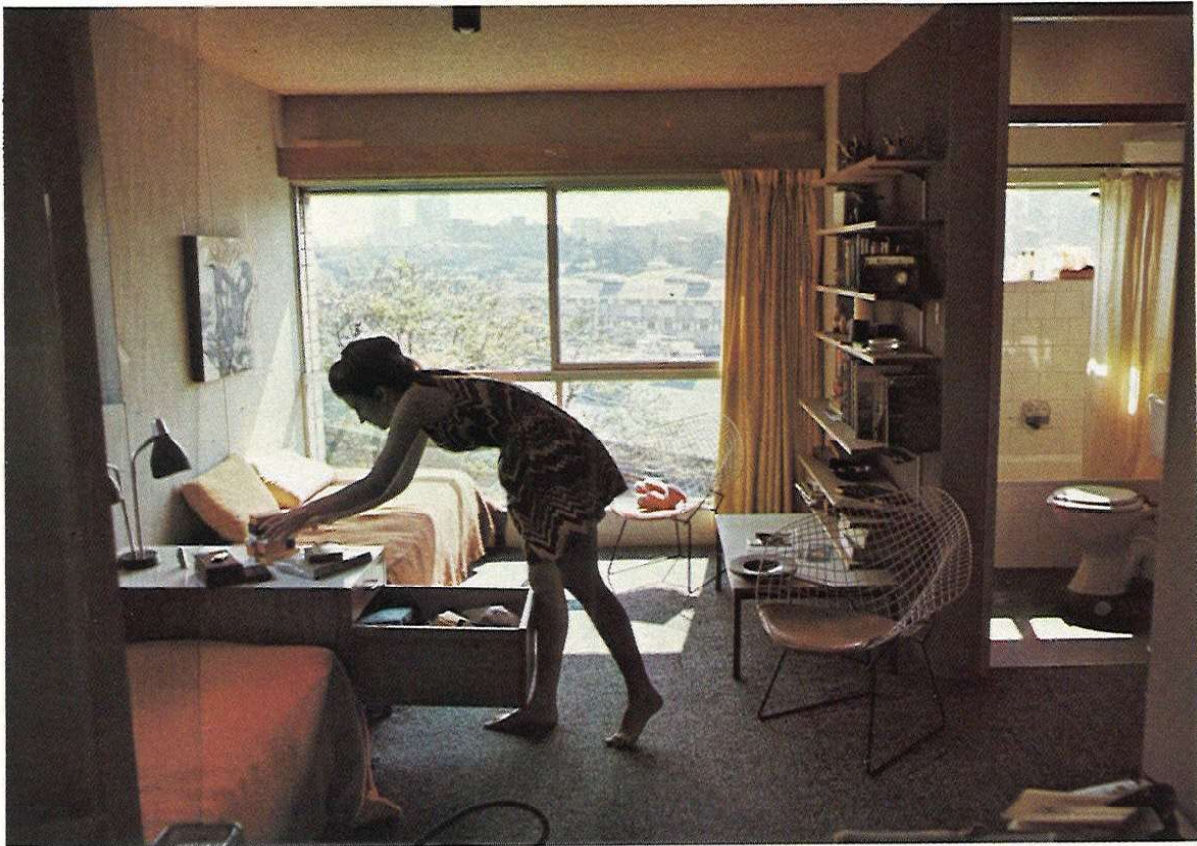


Figure 2.3 David Moore’s photograph of Deidre Gunner in her apartment in Gemini, commissioned for the publication *Living and Partly Living* (1971 p. 182).

## 2.7 The mecca

The Potts Point and Elizabeth Bay area have long been simultaneously magnets for nonconformists and creatives, conveniently located suburbs for workers, the wealthy and professionals as well as Sydney’s main entertainment district. The area’s residential density and apartment lifestyle, itself a signifier of difference and individuality for much of the twentieth century, has been crucial to these diverse roles.

The entertainment function overlapped with illegality and corruption; the 20s and 30s saw nightclubs, cafes and restaurants spring up but the onerous restrictions of the *Liquor Act* limited their appeal and forced them to deal with the sly-grog industry and corrupt police. At this time the district was primarily residential, featuring numerous boarding houses and flats offering cheap rents for writers and other ‘bohemians’, as recorded in Robin Dalton’s memoir *Aunts Up the Cross*.<sup>11</sup>

The postwar period saw new forms of entertainment and social life appear. The 1940s advent of the modern espresso machine set off an 'espresso craze' in the Cross, aided by the influx of European born migrants. The same demographic also vastly increased the variety of dining experiences on offer.

The end of early hotel closing in 1955 allowed nightlife to boom as never before. In 1959 Abraham Saffron's Staccato Club became the first of many strip clubs lining Darlinghurst Road, although some nightclubs continued to offer entertainers and cabaret, notably Les Girls, founded in 1963.

The Cross became a drawcard for both Sydney suburbanites and for both domestic and International tourists, a development which peaked with the Vietnam R&R (rest and recreation) era from 1967 to 1971 when the Texas Tavern and the Bourbon & Beefsteak joined the restaurants and strip clubs. The sale of illegal drugs and sex formed the ugly background to this era while unlawful casinos also flourished, their addresses known to all except, apparently, the police.

Sydney's CBD fell behind the Cross as a tourist destination, its hotels out of date, its cinemas, theatres and department stores closing, replaced by a profusion of new office towers or vacant building sites. Simultaneously, a modern tourist infrastructure developed at the Cross with a succession of new hotels featuring a higher standard of design and amenity than their city rivals; the Chevron-Hilton, the Sebel Townhouse, the Top of the Cross, the Crest and the Gazebo opened during the 1960s.

The Top of the Cross and the Gazebo opened as motels, two of a dozen operating in the area by 1970 including two of the study buildings, Habitat and Aquarius, which for a time offered 'Motel Units and Serviced Apartments'.<sup>12</sup> With self-contained units, parking space, courtyards and pools, these city motels were aimed at visitors rather than travellers, offering weekly and longer rentals; several were later transformed into apartments or hotels.<sup>13</sup> The new hotels and motels brought cocktail bars and lounges to the Cross, more welcoming and stylish than the old-school pubs. At the same time locals resented that they replaced 'the little coffee shops, the corner deli, and the interesting little shops and specialty restaurants .... We've got enough sex shops to be going on and we are pretty well fixed for strip clubs and blue movies' one noted in 1973.<sup>14</sup>

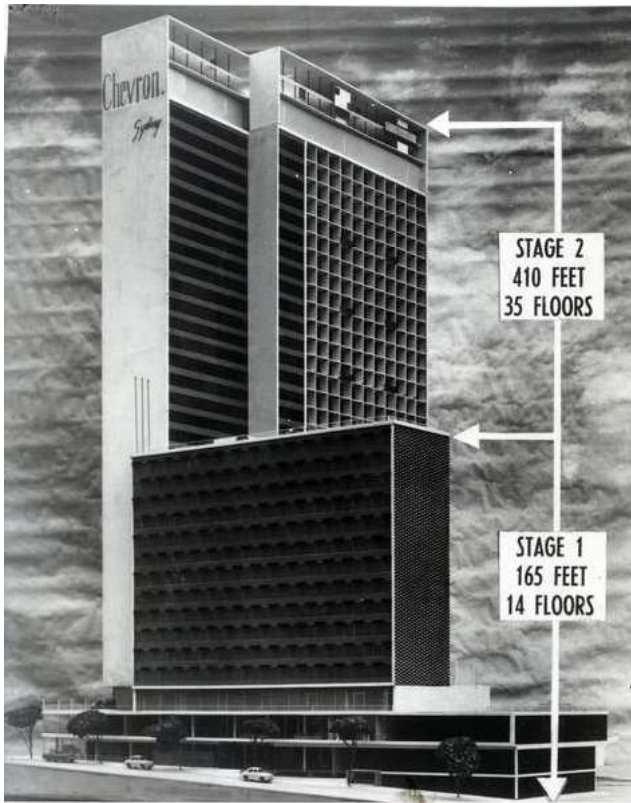


Figure 2.4 Prospective design for Chevron Hilton Hotel, Macleay St, Potts Point, NSW. Architect: Donald Crone & Assoc. published in *Cross-Section*, no. 98, Dec 1960. (Source: University of Melbourne)



Figure 2.5 Rennie Ellis's photograph "Generation Gap, Kings Cross 1970–1971." (Source: Rennieellis.com.au)

The tourist and nightlife precinct was mainly confined to a few streets near the William Street intersection and did not seriously threaten the residential appeal of the area or postwar investment in new and improved residential infrastructure. Potts Point and Elizabeth Bay in many ways formed a different world to 'the Cross' but the two worlds collided during the redevelopment of Victoria Street, a project driven by investors with interests in both residential and entertainment property.

Resident resistance to both forms of investment, especially where they threatened established low-cost housing, was answered with violence and thuggery; the postwar boom ended in acrimony and despair, signalling a pause in the district's headlong development and renewed focus on its life as a community rather than a destination. The 1960s had seen progress in this direction including the Village Centre café and shopping centre, the Reverend Ted Noffs' Wayside Chapel and the expansion and improvement of Fitzroy Gardens; the 1970s' completion of the Kings Cross Road tunnel and the Eastern Suburbs Railway were also significant.

The hotel boom peaked with the opening of Kingsgate in 1973; built on the former site of the Pink Pussycat strip club, the Kingsgate and the Kings Cross Centre coincided with a downturn in both the nightlife and property economies.

The postwar influx of young residents of diverse origins continued, adding a more varied nightlife and entertainment culture to the tawdry mainstream:

The old people move tentatively in the great stream of youth that has discovered Kings Cross. Thousands and thousands of them, the bearded and the hippies, the mini-skirted and the studious, the runaways and the out-of-step, they have marched on the Cross with a determination to make it their headquarters, to find in it their Mecca...<sup>15</sup>

The commercial celebration of youth was evidenced in the musical *Hair*, running at the Metro Theatre for two years from 1969. More significant was the 1963 opening of *Surf City* in the venerable Kings Cross Theatre pioneering a succession of new music venues culminating in the Manzil Room; meanwhile, Club Castello became one of the first bars to openly welcome the area’s gay community. In 1959 the Terry Clune Gallery opened on Macleay Street providing a focus and frequently a home for young artists; in 1970 it became the Yellow House. Next door was Patric and Christine Juillet’s Le Café, best known of a new generation of fashionable and casual eateries, signifiers of a new sophistication.

## 2.8 Investors and developers

Sydney’s postwar flat boom resembled that of the 1920s and 1930s in many respects, but there were also some novel factors at work, evident particularly in the financing and management of flat construction. As well as changes in the demographics of those renting or buying flats, demographic change was evident in the people designing, building and financing new flats.

Between the wars, building societies and credit unions loaned small amounts for building houses, but insufficient for apartment construction. Ownership of apartment buildings was largely restricted to wealthy individuals able to qualify for mortgages from trading banks and insurance companies. These people held the titles of many flat buildings, often living in one flat of their building and renting out the others. Many builders and investors formed themselves into limited companies so that they could attract capital via the sale of shares.

With the entry of the retail banks into home lending during the 1960s home buyers could access larger mortgages than those offered by credit unions and most building societies. This effect was increased by strata title; retail banks were willing to lend on a property with its own title, but reluctant to lend on a share in a company. Whereas rented flat buildings could take years to repay their capital costs, a strata-titled block offered quick returns when its flats were sold, allowing investors to move on to other projects.



This change encouraged the creation of companies managing the design, construction and marketing of apartment buildings. Many 'mum and dad' investors and small-scale builders entered the apartment industry during the postwar decades, but the large-scale end of the industry was dominated by a generation of new property companies.

## Lend Lease

In most histories of Australian domestic architecture, the companies Civil & Civic and Lend Lease are identified as pioneers of corporate design and construction. This is true regarding the Lend Lease campaign for strata title in NSW; the 1961 legislation was drafted by a lawyer engaged by the company.

The high historical profile of Lend Lease is partly due to its association with Harry Seidler. As is well known, Seidler came to Sydney from the USA solely to design a house for his parents intending to return to his work with Marcel Breuer and other modernist notables. The public acclaim for Rose Seidler House and the resulting commissions persuaded him to stay, but despite his success Seidler was frustrated by an inability to secure backing for larger projects.

In 1951 Seidler's brother Marcell purchased land at Elizabeth Bay; Harry designed an apartment block for the site but was unable to finance the project until 1957 when Marcell proposed it to Lend Lease's founder and CEO Gerardus Jozef 'Dick' Dusseldorp, an engineer who had come to Australia from the Netherlands in 1951 to work on the Snowy Mountains project. Both Dusseldorp and 'well-known architect Mr Harry Seidler' were high-profile advocates for their projects, demonstrated by the *Australian Women's Weekly's* competition for a unit in the new building.<sup>16</sup> As a result, Ithaca Gardens, like Blues Point Tower completed at McMahons Point in 1962, became one of the most-publicised apartment buildings ever built in Sydney.

Lend Lease's ambitions in the apartment industry were thwarted by the early 1960s credit squeeze: flats sold slowly at Blues Point Tower, one of the first strata-titled buildings in Sydney, and the company closed its Home Unit Display Centre at Circular Quay and avoided the flat market until 1968, then focusing on flats in the suburbs rather than the inner city. Harry Seidler quickly found other patrons for his flat designs which were prolific during the 1960s.



Figure 2.6 Dick Dusseldorp (right) with Dutch comedian Max Tailleir in a display centre in Sydney for various large home unit blocks being built by Lend Lease. 1959. (Source: NAA< A12111, 1/1959/23/10)

## Arcos Industries

Australia was one of several nations to welcome refugees from fascism and antisemitism before and after the European war of 1939 to 1945. These included numerous artists, writers, designers and others who contributed greatly to Australian life and culture; among these were many architects and their patrons. Not every member of this vast diaspora was Jewish; among gentile refugees were Mies van der Rohe and Walter Gropius as well as Frederick Romberg, who migrated to Melbourne in 1938.

However, this forced influx of European talent and ambition was predominantly Jewish in faith and heritage. They included architects Hugo Stossel, Theodore Fry, Hans Peter Oser and Harry Seidler. The majority of the buildings in this study were designed by these four architects.

The patrons of these architects were similarly notable for their diaspora origins and connections.

Social and practical connections flourished among the new arrivals and Sydney's existing Jewish community; a new network of architects, designers, investors and clients formed with speed, collectively transforming Sydney's built environment.

Moses Eisner came to Australia from Poland in 1939; during the war most of his family were killed by the Nazis. An engineer, Eisner by 1945 had founded a steel welding company in Sydney called Arcos. Promoting the use of steel to solve the post war housing shortage, in 1946 Arcos constructed a series of demonstration prefabricated steel houses for the Housing Commission of NSW, designed by Hugo Stossel. During 1948 Stossel designed one of Australia's first modernist European influenced houses at Warrawee for Eisner and his wife Gisela. In 1955 Stossel and Eisner cooperated in the design and construction of a factory at Artarmon; the same year Eisner's company financed and constructed a block of 18 flats at Wolseley Road, Point Piper, designed by Theodore Fry, with the Eisner's themselves living in the penthouse.<sup>17</sup>

By this time Arcos had become a major construction company, gaining NSW government contracts including the construction of the Vales Point Power Station. In 1958 Eisner purchased a harbourside site at Elizabeth Bay, the following year retitling his property as Oceana Apartments Limited and raising capital by selling shares in the building and managing it on completion. Oceana was advertised as:

'Home units.... ARCHITECT DESIGNED, constructed by ARCOS INDUSTRIES. 208ft WATER FRONTAGE. SWIMMING POOL. All Units have NE aspects which cannot be built out. Oceana Apartments Limited remains Oceana's owner'.<sup>18</sup>

Arcos built more apartments during the 1960s but as concrete construction came to dominate, its focus moved primarily to civil engineering.

## Parkes Developments

Paul Strasser studied law in Budapest and practised as a commercial lawyer. Hungary allied with Germany during the European War and was invaded by the Soviet Union in 1943; Strasser was deported as a forced labourer by the Soviets; despite many hardships he avoided the subsequent Nazi occupation of Hungary and transport to the death camps.

Strasser attempted to resume his legal career in Budapest after 1945 but migrated to Australia in 1948 with his wife and son. In Sydney Strasser abandoned the law, starting various businesses notably Parkes Developments Pty Ltd. Parkes built many apartments, aimed at different levels of the market. At the lower end was the suburb of Eastlakes, new streets of low-rise walk-ups built from 1961 onwards on a disused racecourse site.

However, Parkes also left a legacy of quality apartments, mostly designed by Hugo Stossel.

By 1970 Parkes was one of Australia’s largest private companies, with the largest Sydney land holdings. Strasser’s 1973 knighthood provoked controversy regarding his association with the NSW government of Robert Askin; Strasser was described as one of the ‘Askin knights’ or the ‘Hungarian mafia’.<sup>19</sup> Worse was to come in 1977 when Parkes Developments collapsed into liquidation, the largest corporate victim of the 1970s property crash.

## Horwitz Corporation

In 1921 Israel and Ruth Horwitz, who had migrated to Sydney from England, founded Horwitz Publications. Initially publishing trade and sporting journals, Horwitz became the most prolific Australian publisher, its output including comics and fiction as well as paperback novels—thrillers, romance, war, science, detective; Horwitz was a pioneer of pulp fiction, its Carter Brown paperbacks becoming international best sellers.

Stanley Horwitz worked for his parents’ business from 1945, becoming director in 1956; he introduced major US publishers to the local market and worked successfully to gain independence for Australian publishers from their foreign competitors, who had held first rights to Australian authors. Stanley Horwitz also published illustrated books featuring Australian artists, designers and the local ‘cultural vernacular’.

In 1954 Horwitz published the first study of Seidler’s work, *Houses, interiors and projects: Harry Seidler*. At the same time Seidler was commissioned to design a new company headquarters, his first commercial project. Horwitz House on Sussex Street is notable for its three-floor façade of aluminium louvres designed to provide protection and control of light and heat. In 1973 Horwitz published the lavishly illustrated *Architecture for the new world: the work of Harry Seidler*; co-published in New York and Stuttgart this was the first international monograph featuring an Australian architect; the book features several of Seidler’s projects in the current study.

By this time Stanley Horwitz was furthering Seidler’s career in more immediate ways, forming Horwitz Corporation Pty Ltd to purchase property and commission Seidler to design apartments and other residential buildings. The success of this partnership is evident in the study area with Ercildoune and Gemini developed by the company.

## Mainline Corporation

Mainline was founded in 1960 as an apartment builder by project manager and estimator Richard Baker and builder Laurie O’Neil. The new company was ambitious, employing high-profile architects on its suburban projects, and by 1965 was also constructing major CBD buildings including Gold Fields House and the Bridge Street AMP Centre. Mainline was one of Australia’s major property and construction companies by 1971, building Denison, The Reef, Mowbray and others in the study area.



In 1974 a combination of soaring interest rates and declining property prices saw its major creditor ANZ Bank call for the appointment of a receiver. Mainline was liquidated with debts of \$60 million, though its property holdings sold for more than \$86 million when auctioned in 1975.

## **Sydney Fischer**

The older guard of wealthy investors was still a force in the postwar world. Syd Fischer was one of these. Mostly remembered as Australia's most successful racing yachtsman, Fischer emerged from a tough Depression childhood in Marrickville, starting his building career enclosing verandahs to make an extra room for struggling families and their lodgers. With a sharp eye for undervalued property Fischer quickly moved through speculative houses into apartment investment and construction. Fischer purchased the Gateway site in 1956, about the same time that he discovered sailing and bought his first yacht. His Australian Development Corporation would later build the striking Gazebo Hotel.

## **2.9 The architects**

In 1945 the architectural profession in Australia was peopled mainly by men whose family had been sufficiently wealthy to pay for their indenture—apprenticeship—to an established architect. Due to this narrow pathway most Australian architects were drawn from a privileged social sphere, attending the same few private schools and gaining qualifications from Sydney's only public architecture schools at Sydney Technical College and Sydney University.

Several Sydney architects travelled and worked in Europe and the United States (US) during the Depression years, yet architecture remained an insular profession in Sydney. The influx of a generation of European born and educated architects quickly diversified and upskilled the Australian profession, as occurred across the Western world, despite the refusal of architect registration to many qualified and practised applicants.

During the 1950s many first wave postwar migrant architects were joined by architects fleeing socialist regimes of central and eastern Europe. Many of these were Hungarian. Hungarian architects Gergely and Pinter and Frank Hoffer contributed significant buildings to the study area and firms like Hugo Stossel & Associates employed these younger graduates of Australian and European universities. Notable examples in the study area include Nado Milat working for Douglas Forsyth Evans on Gateway and Croatian architect Nino Sydney (Somogy) employed by Theo Fry.

Recent experience in Europe and elsewhere dramatically shortened the distance between architectural cultures and sped acceptance of new ideas and techniques.

## Theodore Fry

Theodore Fry (1908–1968), architect of Oceana, was born Teodor Freiwilg in Poland. Fry studied design at the Lviv Polytechnic, escaping Poland in 1939 and travelling through several countries before arriving in Australia in 1948. Fry designed flats for Moses Eisner and others including the NSW Housing Commission. Fry’s first project with Eisner was a block of 18 flats at 25 Wolseley Road Point Piper, designed in 1952. Apart from Oceana, his prominent apartment projects include Rushcutters Court (now Bayside), a 12-floor block at 85 New South Head Road, Edgecliff, and Orana, an eight-floor block at Rose Bay completed in 1963, owned and built by Arcos Industries.<sup>20</sup>

Fry employed Croatian architect Nino Sydney (Somogy) shortly after his arrival during the 1950s; Sydney worked with Fry on the Knoll Laboratories at Arncliffe, completed in 1968 shortly after Fry’s death, with Sydney taking over the practice.

## Hugo Stossel

Hugo Stossel (1905–2002) was born in Hungary but studied design in Rome and Vienna between 1926 and 1932 before working in Bucharest, Romania, designing theatres, apartments and commercial buildings. Stossel left Europe in 1939, spending most of the war in Sydney working for a construction company on government projects.

From 1946 Stossel designed a series of houses for fellow European emigres, as well as St Ursula (completed 1953), an apartment building on a vacant site adjacent to Elizabeth Bay House owned by Suzanne Sedgewick, a Jewish medical practitioner; in 1957 the property was titled to St Ursula Pty Ltd and remains so. From 1957 Stossel designed Broadwaters, for the new development company Civil & Civic. This was followed by numerous other apartment and commercial developments completed over the next decade, more than seven in the Elizabeth Bay area alone.

Stossel completed numerous other projects for Parkes, including Boomerang Apartments at 10 Barncleuth Square, Elizabeth Bay, and Parkes House, the company’s Kent Street head office. Other projects in the study area include The Chimes apartments at Macleay Street and Denison at 15 Wylde Street. The 20-storey Eastbourne Tower (1968), Darling Point, cemented Hugo Stossel and Associates position as one of the major contributors to Sydney’s burgeoning apartment scene.

Stossel formed H Stossel & Associates and was joined by fellow Hungarian George Buda, who became a partner in 1960. By 1970 Stossel retained only a remote involvement in the firm, which continued under Buda’s and the other partner’s leadership.

## Harry Seidler

The odyssey of Harry Seidler (1923–2006), child refugee from Austria to England, deportee to detainee and student in Canada to achievement in the USA and Australia is both remarkable and typical of the modern world of prejudice, displacement and migration. Seidler brought the uncompromisingly functional modernism of central Europe to Sydney, filtered via the US and Brazil: ‘Flats of the future. Maximum of light; minimum of housework. Healthful in-and-outdoor living’.<sup>21</sup> No architect has had a greater impact on Sydney both in output and polemic, embodying the ambition and energy of his diaspora generation.

Sydney’s natural gifts and surging population combined with its struggling, small-scale building industry presented Seidler and his contemporaries with vast opportunities; Sydney gained a new ambition and worldliness, resisted in many quarters but ultimately triumphant. The Sydney of 1975 was barely recognisable from that of 1945.

## Oser Fombertaux

Hans Peter Oser (1913–1967), like Hugo Stossel, arrived in Sydney as an accomplished designer and architect. Born into a Viennese family of furniture and interior designers, he studied architecture at the Vienna Technical University; before and after his 1936 graduation Oser worked for the offices of Peter Behrens and Josef Hoffmann, supervising projects in Budapest and Paris.

Following the Nazi takeover of Austria, Oser migrated to Sydney with his wife Herta; he immediately found architectural employment, but this was terminated in 1941 when private building ceased. However, in 1944 Oser became chief architect of the newly formed Housing Commission of NSW. Moving into private practice in 1946 Oser established a glowing reputation for his modernist houses designed for prominent clients including fellow refugees restaurateur Walter Magnus and clothing manufacturer Frank Theeman.

Oser’s architectural and social networks continued to provide opportunities following his 1960 partnership with Jean Fombertaux.

Born in Nice, Fombertaux spent much of his childhood in France’s Asian colonies due to his father’s role in the French Foreign Service before arriving in Australia in 1937. After working briefly for Samuel Lipson, Fombertaux studied architecture at Sydney Technical College; after graduating he travelled and worked abroad for almost a decade before partnering with Hans Peter Oser. As well as the Bay apartments, Oser Fombertaux designed at least three other small scale apartment blocks in the study area including 68-72 Roslyn Gardens, Elizabeth Bay, 51–57 Bayswater Road, Rushcutters Bay and the widely publicised bachelor flat block at 40 Bayswater Road, Potts Point.<sup>22</sup>

Fombertaux continued the practice following Oser's death in 1967. Fombertaux himself died in 1975 and the firm evolved into Fombertaux Rice Hanley.

## Harry Divola

Harry Divola (1913–1970), born Henry Laurence Thomas Divola, studied architecture at Sydney Technical College, founding his own practice in 1938. During the Pacific War Divola enlisted in the Engineering Corps but had already established a sufficient reputation for his modernist small houses to be employed by the Australian Legion of Ex-Servicemen's Credit Union as 'a soldier-architect, Corporal H. Divola, to design model types of homes for ex-servicemen and their families'.<sup>23</sup> During the following decade Divola became one of Australia's best-known architects, his designs featuring regularly in *Truth* newspaper as well as the popular home-making magazines.<sup>24</sup>

From 1955 Divola concentrated on his own practice, designing hotels, clubs as well as less budget-conscious houses in Canberra as well as Sydney. Divola designed flats early in his career, but *The Reef* (19 Ithaca Road, Elizabeth Bay of 1966-1967) was a rare excursion into this field among his later work.

## Rudder Littlemore & Rudder

In contrast to the postwar wave of younger modernists, the partnership founded by Roy Dyson Rudder (1897–1975) in 1925 was one of the longest-standing practices to design an apartment building in the study area. With founding partner Reginald Grout, Rudder & Grout became well-known during the 1930s for their hotel designs as well as the first modern public swimming pools built in Sydney, at Enfield, Bankstown, Granville and North Sydney.

In 1957 the practice gained international recognition for Qantas House, one of the first curtain wall office buildings completed in Australia, project architect Felix Tavener. By this time Reg Grout had been succeeded by David Littlemore, who went on to be part of the architectural triumvirate to complete the design of Sydney Opera House.

Rudder Littlemore & Rudder designed few apartment buildings but had recently designed the Astor Hotel-Motel at Woolloomooloo, the first of several up-market city motels the practice designed for the Astor chain. The Mowbray (1 McDonald Street, Potts Point of 1975) was a similar project, initially proposed as a private hotel, built as apartments but quickly renamed the Florida Motel Apartments, offering 'a variety of accommodation to suit the comfort of The Holidaymaker, The Honeymooners and The Businessman'. Flats were let nightly, weekly or longer.<sup>25</sup>



## Douglas Forsyth Evans

An architect decidedly not of the establishment, Eric Douglas Forsyth Evans (1899–1968) first attracted attention in 1938 for his design of Marton Hall, a tower of 143 bachelor flats at Margaret Street, Wynyard.

During the following decade Evans became better known for his flamboyant lifestyle than his architecture, carousing with the writer Ion Idriess and other leading lights of Sydney 'bohemia'; a portrait of Evans by George Finey was awarded the 1945 Archibald Prize.

With an established pre-WW2 practice Evans recreated himself as a modernist in the post war years. The 1950s and 1960s were the most productive of Evans' career as perhaps Sydney's most prolific Sydney architect of apartment buildings. His designs include The Chilterns, Rose Bay, Glenhurst Gardens, Darling Point, Seven Seas, Kirribilli and Flight Deck, Collaroy,. His design for Gateway (1960) was commissioned by Syd Fischer, typical of the high-profile Sydneysiders who financed many of Evans' designs; similar projects included the Charles Hotel, Chatswood, for bookmaker Bill Waterhouse and the Caprice restaurant, Rose Bay for the nightclub promoter Jim Bendrodt.

## Douglas Snelling

Born to a poor family in England, Douglas Snelling (1916–1985) migrated to New Zealand with his family in 1926. Handsome and personable, Snelling travelled to Los Angeles in 1937, where talents for illustration and self-promotion saw him employed by movie studios.

Snelling moved to Sydney in 1940 and worked as a publicist. His postwar career was financed by successive marriages to wealthy heiresses, initially in interior and furniture design, including a series of modern timber and webbing chairs and sofas. Imitative of contemporary Scandinavian design, the 'Snelling Line' was an immediate success in Australia and remains a collector favourite. On a second trip to Los Angeles, Snelling admired the West Coast architecture of John Lautner, Richard Neutra and others, influencing his work in Sydney when he began designing houses and shops from 1948, although he was not registered as an architect until 1952.

Snelling gained a similar prominence to Harry Seidler in 1950s Sydney, but in contrast his house designs were large and opulent, commissioned by his wealthy social set; a 1967 Vaucluse design (Tahiti) included Australia's first 'infinity pool'. Focused on houses, retail and office buildings, Snelling was involved in the design of only two apartment buildings; the 'King size bachelor flats' designed for rental at 74–76 Roslyn Gardens, Rushcutters Bay (1964) being his only fully designed apartment project.<sup>26</sup>

Snelling's professional and social standing declined during the 1970s. Despite his early success, never having participated in professional awards or publications, Douglas Snelling's architectural work was largely forgotten until recently.<sup>27</sup>

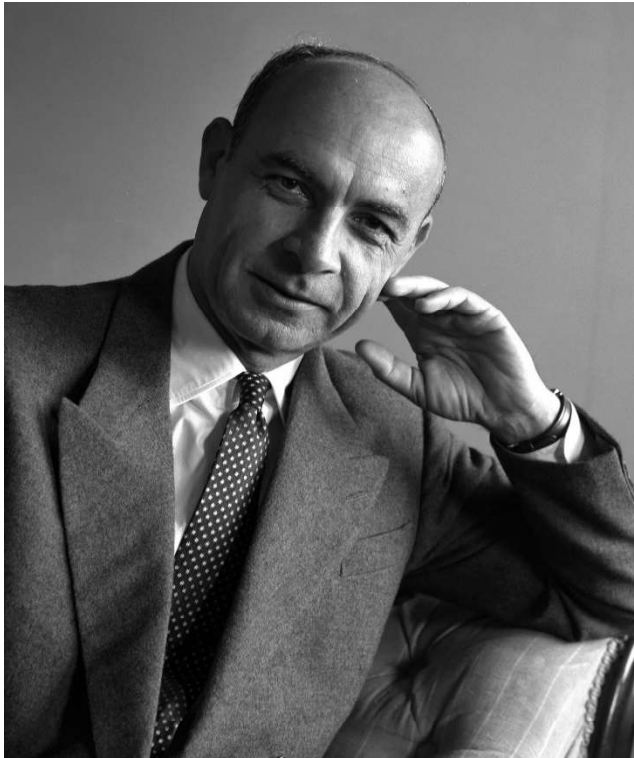


Figure 2.7 Hugo Stossel portrait by Max Dupain, c.1960. (Source: SLNSW)

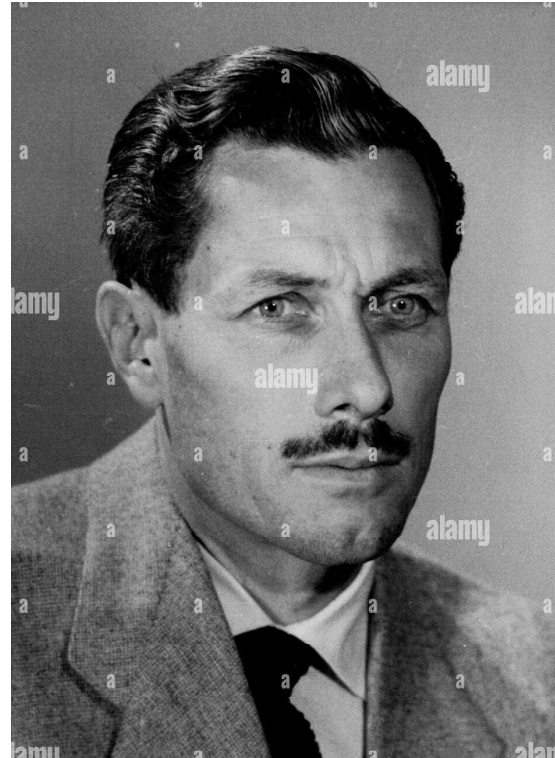


Figure 2.8 Mr. Douglas B. Snelling - Architect. August 26, 1954. (Photo by Bryan Douglas Cameron/Fairfax Media)



Figure 2.9 Chair and stool by Douglas Snelling, manufactured by Functional Products, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, c. 1952, Powerhouse collection.

## 2.10 Apartment design

The first flat-specific building regulations in New South Wales were outlined in Ordinance 71, added to the *Local Government Act* in 1921.<sup>28</sup> Under Ordinance 71 a 'residential flat building' could not occupy more than half of its site unless it was of more than three storeys or had a flat roof, in which case it could occupy two thirds of the site.

However, residential flat buildings could be built to site boundaries in many areas, or only three feet (91.4 centimetres) from boundaries in a proclaimed residential district. This meant that many interwar examples were designed with complex building footprints and floor plans to maximise wall and window space while including light wells to provide some natural illumination and air. As most large blocks were built for affluent clients or tenants the flats often resembled houses with a formal division of interior space, often including a clear demarcation between the residents' spaces and those of the servants.

A new set of rules was legislated in 1940 as the *Local Government (Regulation of Flats) Act* (NSW), Schedule 7 of which legislated building setbacks from site boundaries as well as floor space ratios by which a building's maximum permissible footprint was calculated as a percentage of its total floor space.<sup>29</sup> The increasing potential size of apartment buildings was a factor in rules designed to prevent domination of their sites.

### 2.10.1 Tower and line

The linear form that characterised most Modern apartment design was formulated in the public housing commissioned by social democratic governments during the 1920s in Germany, the Netherlands and other European nations. The central innovation was the German Zeilenbau—row house—in which apartments of identical size and amenity were sited in lengthy rows ideally orientated north-south providing equal access to sunlight and air; as well as social democracy these designs were a response to the lung disease tuberculosis, then a major health scourge.

This era also transformed the interior design of apartments towards efficient and sociable use of space; the modern labour-saving kitchen was another innovation of this time.

In the postwar era these principles were magnified in a new generation of social housing, embodied by Le Corbusier's *Unité d'habitation* completed at Marseille, France, in 1952. First published in 1923, *Le Corbusier's Toward a New Architecture* advocated for a cities of towers, towns raised on piles and concrete houses. When fully expressed in his completed projects such as the *Unité d'habitation* he provided apartment forms with interlocking spaces running the width of the building and opening to both sides; balconies, windows and sunshades are patterned to form the façades while interior 'streets' provide access and sociability. Taller than most prewar apartments, the *Unité* was constructed and finished with site-cast concrete, its raw 'béton brut' announced a new architectural aesthetic.

Innovations in public housing found their way into the private market in Australia and elsewhere. Hugo Stossel's *St Ursula* (1952) and Aaron Bolot's *Wylde Street* apartments (1951) are adaptations of the Zeilenbau principle, composed of identical, sun-facing apartments.

This was true also of Harry Seidler’s Ithaca Gardens (1960), where north-facing flats are accessed from the rear by galleries which each serve two floors of flats, creating visual and atmospheric access on both sides. This linear, interlocking format proved to be the most popular of the postwar boom in the study area and beyond.

Construction innovations sped completions and reduced budgets; notable were pre-cast concrete elements including whole floors lifted into place. Most of the study buildings feature concrete framing and floors, their façades composed of brick infill and aluminum framed windows and doors.

These innovations saw increasing numbers of apartment towers being built in the 1960s. Office and apartment towers had emerged in Chicago and New York early in the twentieth century but were slow to find acceptance elsewhere, constrained by height limits in most western cities. From 1950 the format found new popularity in public housing and influential private examples, notably Mies van der Rohe’s Chicago Lake Shore Drive apartments. In Australia towers were less common in the private apartment market than linear blocks, despite their smaller footprint. Victoria Towers (1961–1969, later renamed Gemini) are the only study examples. Regulation of building heights in foreshore areas was a factor in this outcome, with more apartment towers constructed on Darling Point during this period.



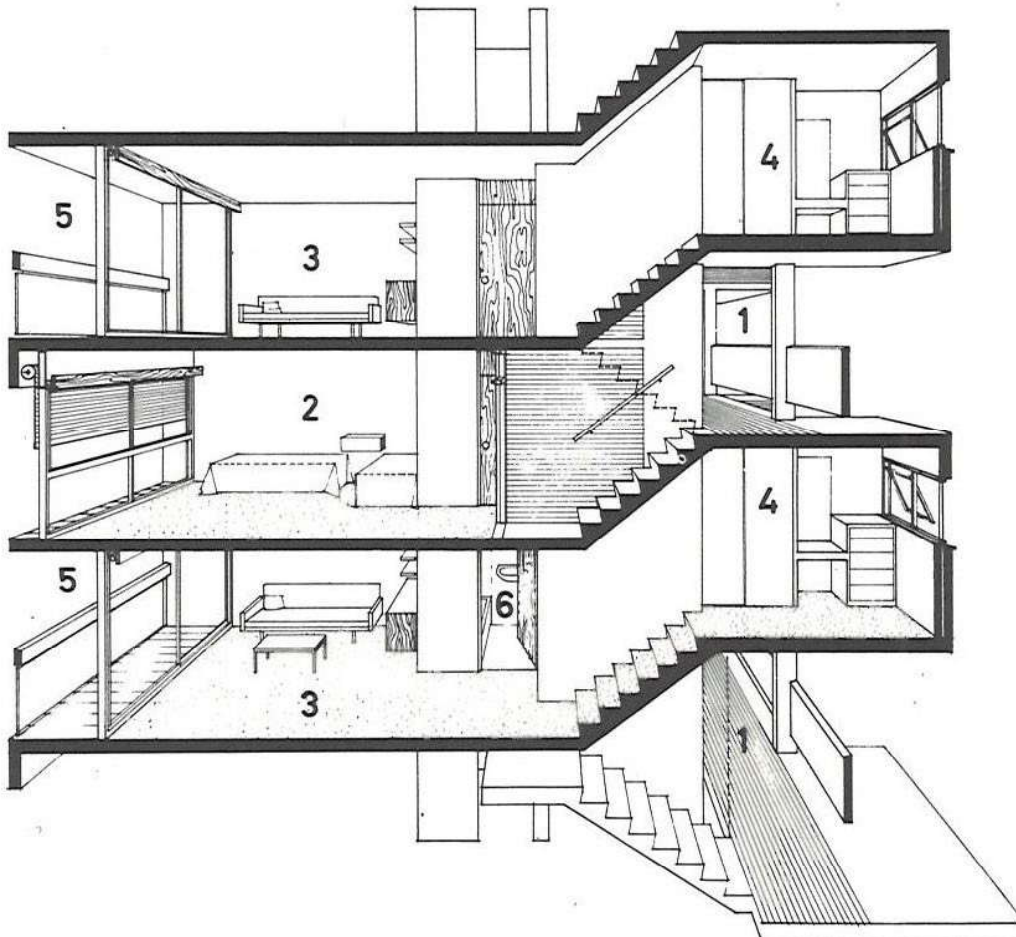


Figure 2.10 Harry Seidler’s design for Aquarius seen in section where external circulation galleries serve two floors of flats and one-bedroom units alternate with studios. (Source: *Living and Partly Living*, 1971, p.186, copyright Harry Seidler & Associates)

## 2.11 Harbour views

Across the world the modernist ideal placed linear and tower forms in street-less landscaped settings. Despite Harry Seidler’s attempt to create such a neighbourhood at McMahon’s Point, in Sydney this only occurred in public housing precincts with large scale clearing of the older neighbourhoods. In Potts Point and Elizabeth Bay the new buildings had to be located on existing allotments, conform to existing street layouts and townscapes, and most jostled for highly prized harbour views.

The tall flats built in the study area were not typical of those across Sydney; in 1981 only 4.3 per cent (45,389) of private dwellings were in flat buildings of four storeys or more. Walkups ruled across the suburbs and in 1976 the City of Sydney had the highest percentage of flats in buildings of four or more floors high—64 per cent, 10,960 flats.<sup>30</sup>

High-rise flats were concentrated in the harbourside LGAs of Sydney, Woollahra, Waverley, North Sydney and Manly partly because the price of land in these areas made the construction of low-rise flats or houses unprofitable. During the 1950s, Woollahra residents campaigned against the approval of new flat buildings potentially blocking views and access to the harbour at Darling Point.

In 1960 Cumberland County Council, then Sydney's peak planning authority, introduced an advisory code that waterside residential buildings should be the same measurement as their height from the high-water mark. However, councils found that they lacked the regulatory powers to enforce this, hence foreshore development continued largely unregulated during the 1960s.

However, councils did gain power from the County Council to declare Foreshore Scenic Protection Areas in which proposed buildings should not cause 'injury due to the obstruction of views to and from the harbour'.<sup>31</sup> The City of Sydney declared one of these areas at Elizabeth Bay, limiting buildings in the area to 100 feet (30.5 metres) in height. Several building applications were rejected or modified as a result, including applications for 50 Roslyn Gardens (Aquarius) and 80 Elizabeth Bay Road (Bay Apartments), Elizabeth Bay. However, Oceana was approved and constructed before the new regulations took effect, remaining the sole direct waterside apartment building at Elizabeth Bay.



Figure 2.11 Oceana shortly after construction. (Source: File 11: [Architecture, miscellaneous, 1930–1964]/photographed by Max Dupain at SLNSW)

## 2.12 Harry Seidler and ‘average expenditure buildings’

In a 1972 interview, Harry Seidler observed:

I had to design average consumer-type buildings but I always tried to elevate them to the level of architecture ... Economy is always used as an excuse for the dismal results, if we look around ourselves, for a square mile we see just dreariness and poor blocks of flats ...

I think that aim, to produce consumer-type buildings, average expenditure buildings and elevate them to the level of architecture, is really the greatest challenge.<sup>32</sup>

Evidence of this aim included the five buildings Seidler designed in the study area between 1960 and 1970, mostly consisting of bedsits and one-bedroom apartments.

Most harbourside apartments were designed for wealthy clients; by 1939 the neighbouring Municipality of Woollahra boasted the work of a who's who of Sydney architects, designing Sydney's largest flats for Sydney's wealthiest municipality. This monopoly of harbour views disappeared in the postwar years.

The 1950s' suburban growth attracted many critics, including the University of Sydney's Professor of Town Planning Denis Winston: 'the home has become a type of talisman, making it difficult socially, politically and even financially ... to build any other than a three-bedroom textured brick bungalow, one and a half hours from the office with a picture window to frame the view of the "septic"'.<sup>33</sup>

The promoters of the postwar apartment boom repeated these arguments; Dick Dusseldorp of Lend Lease wanted 'a better means of accommodation for the "average guy" who wanted to live close to the city, or on a transport line, but who couldn't afford a house on the proverbial quarter-acre block'.<sup>34</sup> By 1961, 'new home unit projects were sprouting at all points around the Harbour – like asparagus beginning to emerge from its bed'.<sup>35</sup>

The group of five apartment buildings designed by Seidler in the current study represent a crucial moment in Seidler's career, as he moved from his first decade of small house designs towards apartments and city towers. As Morton Herman wrote in 1964: 'Harry Seidler has advanced from mere houses into the field of very big buildings. His blocks of flats and his city buildings have all the sureness of touch and architectural skill of his domestic work'.<sup>36</sup> Seidler was the most prominent architect in Sydney pursuing a late modernism that remained committed to high density tower forms. As seen in publications from the late 1960s such as *Living and Partly Living* (1971), younger Australian architects were focused on housing, townhouse forms and idealistic low scale town plans.

Significantly, Seidler argued for flat living as a weapon against suburban sprawl and a form of social democracy, seeing his buildings as demonstrations of these benefits. In 1991, responding to criticism of Blues Point Tower, Seidler summarised his case for inner city apartments:

There was never any intention to make Blues Point Tower a luxury block ... It's got eight-foot ceilings. They are humble small apartments. It didn't have marble floors or a concierge or waterfalls or any of that stuff. It was meant to be accessible to people of average means. It just has the best views in Australia.<sup>37</sup>

Seidler's apartments in the study area embody these principles.

Seidler's first apartment block, Ithaca Gardens, set the mould for its successors, with its balcony, window and sunshade-patterned façade plus interlocking split-level flats maximising exterior wall and window space. The projecting bedrooms at Aquarius (and Ercildoune) were designed in service of this aim, 'to achieve the best possible amenity for the flats, which is to face all main rooms of the eighty units towards the harbour coinciding with the desirable orientation of north-east. To achieve this, exterior wall space is at a premium and ... has to be allocated for habitable rooms.'<sup>38</sup>

This was part of a long-running conflict between Seidler and a long-standing regulation that bathrooms should have direct ventilation from the exterior. Placing a bedroom on the side of the building facing away from the view meant that all living rooms could face the view while maintaining easy access to the split-level flats.

International Lodge and Victoria Towers (later renamed Gemini) are more orthodox, using tower formats and single-level apartments, although International Lodge is effectively two buildings—an eight-floor tower and a set of terraced apartments cascading towards the harbour. Victoria Towers make the most of a small site with four small bedsits per floor, orientating towards the eastern and western views.

Peter Blake wrote in 1973 that much of Seidler's work was in apartment housing, 'an area in which building costs have imposed severe limitations on space and thus on flexibility'.<sup>39</sup> Seidler's primary solution was to create variations in spatial arrangement which 'make them more liveable and much more interesting than the standard housing found in most modern cities'.<sup>40</sup> Within a few years Harry Seidler's career moved beyond these 'average expenditure' flats, expanding across every genre of public and private building including embassies, office towers, museums, shopping centres and hotels as well as more expansive private houses. A notable exception was the major Vienna social housing project Wohnpark Neue Donau (1993–1998), a spectacular return to his personal and architectural beginnings.

As with the contemporary era of architect-designed project homes, this brief flowering of innovative budget apartment modernism was largely left behind, with the buildings of this period in the study area surviving as an exemplar of progressive architecture.





Figure 2.12 Party in Victoria Towers (Gemini) by David Moore, commissioned for the publication *Living and Partly Living: Housing in Australia* (1971 p. 182).

## 2.13 Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Kenneth Slessor, 'A portrait of Sydney', *Bread and Wine*, Sydney, 1970, p 4.
- <sup>2</sup> 'Macleay Regis: Sydney's great new block of flats', *Building: the magazine for the architect, builder, property owner and merchant*, 24 April 1939, p 17, Trove, National Library of Australia, viewed 1 October 2024, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-355989324>.
- <sup>3</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 July 1955, p 11.
- <sup>4</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 December 1959, p 4.
- <sup>5</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 September 1965, p 63.
- <sup>6</sup> Richard Cardew, *Flats: a study of occupants and locations*, University of Sydney, 1970.
- <sup>7</sup> Richard Cardew, 'Flats in Sydney: The thirty percent solution?', Jill Roe and others, *Twentieth Century Sydney*, Sydney, 1980.
- <sup>8</sup> The Census count includes bedrooms, living rooms and kitchens, but not bathrooms and other service spaces.
- <sup>9</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 November 1962, p 62.
- <sup>10</sup> MT Daly, *Sydney boom Sydney bust: The city and its property market 1850-1981*, Sydney 1982, pp 179–185.
- <sup>11</sup> Robin Dalton, *Aunts Up the Cross*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 2015 (first published 1965).
- <sup>12</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 August 1965, p 24.

- <sup>13</sup> Judith O’Callaghan and others, *Leisure Space: the transformation of Sydney 1945-1970*, Sydney, 2014.
- <sup>14</sup> *Now*, 6 November 1973, p 8.
- <sup>15</sup> April Hersey, ‘The magnet of Kings Cross’, *Walkabout*, July 1968, p 20.
- <sup>16</sup> ‘Win a £7500 home unit’, *Australian Women’s Weekly*, 12 August 1959, p 13.
- <sup>17</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 January 1955, p 11; 29 May 1956, p 11.
- <sup>18</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 November 1959, p 55.
- <sup>19</sup> *NSW Parliamentary Debates*, 24 March 1977, p 5702.
- <sup>20</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 April 1963, p 19.
- <sup>21</sup> *Building*, June 1951, p 55.
- <sup>22</sup> ‘New flats at Pott’s Point. Standardisation to cut costs’, *Building*, April 1959, p 84.
- <sup>23</sup> ‘Deferred-pay homes for returned men’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 19 August 1945, p 9.
- <sup>24</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 19 August 1945, p 9.
- <sup>25</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 June 1970, p 35.
- <sup>26</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 December 1963.
- <sup>27</sup> Davina Jackson’s biography of Snelling Douglas Snelling: Pan-Pacific Modern Design and Architecture has greatly assisted in this return to prominence.
- <sup>28</sup> ‘Residential Flat Buildings’, *NSW Government Gazette* 167, 11 November 1921, pp 6414–6418.
- <sup>29</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 May 1939, p 15.
- <sup>30</sup> Thompson, *Sydney’s flats*, pp 179, 182.
- <sup>31</sup> Town Clerk, Sydney City Council to Bay Apartments Pty Ltd, 29 April 1963.
- <sup>32</sup> Hazel de Berg, ‘Interview with Harry Seidler’, 13 January 1972, National Library of Australia.
- <sup>33</sup> Denis Winston. ‘The problem’, *Architecture in Australia*, June 1962, p 56.
- <sup>34</sup> Quoted in Lindie Clark, *Finding a common interest: Dick Dusseldorp and Lend Lease*, Melbourne, 2002, p 176.
- <sup>35</sup> *Building, Lighting, Engineering*, January 1961, p 27.
- <sup>36</sup> Morton Herman, ‘Straight Lines’, *The Bulletin*, 23 May 1964, p 47.
- <sup>37</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 May 1991, p 46.
- <sup>38</sup> Seidler Associates to City Council, 16 July 1963.
- <sup>39</sup> Peter Blake, *Architecture for the new world: The work of Harry Seidler*, Sydney 1973, p 18.
- <sup>40</sup> Peter Blake, *Architecture for the new world: The work of Harry Seidler*, Sydney 1973, p 18.

## 3 Stage 1: Preliminary assessment

### 3.1 Findings

The preliminary assessment undertaken as part of Stage 1 of the project reviewed the 18 selected buildings, undertook a site analysis from the public domain and reviewed available plans and previous development applications in order to provide a preliminary condition assessment.

Research was also conducted to identify if the projects had been published in popular or architectural publications, or if they had received awards or were included in architectural summaries of the period or monographs of the relevant architect’s work.

From this analysis, it was concluded that three projects, while potentially of significance, were stylistically different in design, period of construction or purpose as to be unsuitable for inclusion in the current study. These projects are listed in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Stage 1 properties not carried into the Stage 2 assessment phase.

Building	Address	Architect	Year
Habitat formerly Mowbray	1 McDonald Street, Potts Point	Rudder Littlemore & Rudder	1964
Serendipity	3–5 St Neot Avenue, Potts Point	Ian McKay and Partners	1974
Deepdene	110–110B Elizabeth Bay Road, Elizabeth Bay	Stuart Murray with Ancher, Mortlock Murray and Woolley	1970

This is not to say that these projects do not have heritage significance. For example, they could be considered as contributory items in the future.

Stage 2 has focused on the remaining 15 projects that have been taken through to a full assessment against the NSW Heritage criteria for assessing heritage significance.

## 4 Stage 2: Heritage assessment

The following tables outline the conclusions and recommendations from the Stage 2 heritage assessment process. The tables identify properties not considered to have met the threshold of local significance; properties which met the threshold of significance and are recommended for heritage listing under Schedule 5 of the City of Sydney LEP (2012).

An assessment sheet providing a detailed assessment of each property is enclosed in Appendix A.

### Does not meet threshold for individual listing

The following six properties were assessed and based on the available information it was concluded that they did not satisfy the threshold of local significance under any of the criteria set out in the *Assessing Heritage Significance* guidelines.

These properties were generally found to have some historic and aesthetic significance and are considered to make a good contribution to their context. As identified in the recommendations, their contributory status should reviewed in the future, however they are not recommended to be listed under Schedule 5 of the City of Sydney LEP (2012).

Table 4.1 Stage 2 properties not recommended for heritage listing on the City of Sydney LEP.

Name	Address	Architect	Year
Denison	15 Wylde Street, Potts Point	Hugo Stossel & Associates	1965
International Lodge	100 Elizabeth Bay Road, Elizabeth Bay	Harry Seidler and Associates	1970
The Reef	19 Ithaca Road, Elizabeth Bay	Henry Divola and Associates	1967
Bay Apartments	80 Elizabeth Bay Road, Elizabeth Bay	HP Oser, Fombertaux & Associates	1965
Ercildoune	85–91 Elizabeth Bay Road, Elizabeth Bay	Harry Seidler and Associates	1966
The Tor	51–59 Roslyn Gardens, Rushcutters Bay	Hugo Stossel & Associates	1966

### Meets threshold for listing

The following nine properties met the threshold of local significance, satisfying at least one of the criteria set out in the *Assessing Heritage Significance (2023)* guidelines and are recommended to be listed under Schedule 5 of the City of Sydney LEP 2012.

Table 4.2 Stage 2 properties recommended for heritage listing on the City of Sydney LEP.

Name	Address	Architect	Year
Gateway	3 Wylde Street, Potts Point	Douglas Forsyth-Evans	1960
Gemini	40–44 Victoria Street, Potts Point	Harry Seidler and Associates	1961–1969
St Ursula	5 Onslow Avenue, Elizabeth Bay	Hugo Stossel	1954
Oceana	108 Elizabeth Bay Road, Elizabeth Bay	Theodore Fry	1961
Ithaca Gardens	12 Ithaca Road, Elizabeth Bay	Harry Seidler and Associates	1960
Bayview	41–49 Roslyn Gardens, Elizabeth Bay	Hugo Stossel & Associates	1961
Aquarius	50–58 Roslyn Gardens, Rushcutters Bay	Harry Seidler and Associates	1965
Roslyn Gardens	74–76 Roslyn Gardens, Rushcutters Bay	Douglas Snelling	1964
1–5 Clement St	1–5 Clement Street, Rushcutters Bay	Ancher, Mortlock, Murray and Woolley	1975



# 5 Appendices

## Appendix A

Heritage Assessment Sheets for Individual Properties

