

# AFT House (Formerly Delfin House & Bank of New South Wales)

**Address**

16-18 O'Connell Street, Sydney, 2000

**Practice**

Charles Bruce Dellit

**Designed**

1935-1938

Completed

1940

**History & Description**

AFT House was originally a branch for the Bank of New South Wales which occupied the ground & mezzanine floors. During its design the increasing value of the site influenced the owners to extend the building to the maximum permissible height of 50 metres & delete the residential accommodation planned for the Bank Manager, Caretaker & staff, so that all floors could be tenanted as commercial space. Similar to Dellit's earlier commercial building Kyle House (1931) the building's four-storey high entry has an assertive, polished Red Tarana granite arched portal, 18m high. The building is an excellent example of the Art Deco style. Recessed within the bold roll of the arch reveals is an extensive bronze framed glazed wall featuring chevron motifs, set above a granite portico. The portico is complete with carved stone bas relief frieze incorporating the narrative *Sunrise Over The Pacific & a Land of Plenty*. *Building* magazine, 24 July 1940, explains the bas relief symbolism; 'The vertical radial fluting represents the rising sun & the water-wave horizontal lines bespeak the Pacific'. The bas relief work of the solid bronze sliding banks doors & the side gate, by the sculptor, H. T. Worrall, continues the symbolism featuring an aeroplane carrying 'Torches of Progress'; an electric battery & wireless valves; a diesel engine, & radiating wireless waves & cloud formations symbolising space. Above the portal rises the main tower expanse of Bondi sandstone with its repetitive fenestration emphasising the building's verticality. The ratio of glazing to masonry is greater than earlier examples of Art Deco commercial buildings in Sydney & suggests an affinity with the Inter-War Functionalist style of architecture. The stepped pinnacles at the top of the building together with the powerful vertical elements & massive red granite arch epitomise the dynamic modernity which Art Deco sought to express.

The decorative extravagance is continued in the design of the interior of the banking chamber, a double height space with an Egyptian inspired vaulted ceiling & detailing. Daylight into the interior is modified by the opaque glass of the entrance glazing & partition bronze framed glass screens, such that the chamber's interior lining of travertine which acquires a warm glow. Indirect lighting is provided by bronze framed glass pendants & uplights. The design of the interiors artfully integrated its decoration with the zoned air conditioning system. The Banking Chamber & 2<sup>nd</sup> floor were altered in 1964 & other alterations were done in 1987.

Dellit is recognised as one of the key practitioners of the Art Deco style in Australia & this is considered to be his most notable office building.

**Statement of Significance**

AFT House is an excellent example of Art Deco architecture which displays a balanced composition, fine detailing & the application of non-historic ornament. In the bold simplicity of its forms, including the arched podium & the stepped massing of its crown, & in the extensive use of glazing particularly the large bronze framed screen of the arched portal, the building culminates the departure in Australia, in the 1930s, from retrospective architectural styles & the adoption of new forms of expression & adaptation of modern building technologies. It demonstrates an outstanding integration of art in architecture; the symbolic decorative relief is of high quality. Dellit was amongst a group of architects who pioneered the Art Deco style in Australia & this is his finest commercial building.

**Criteria Applicable**

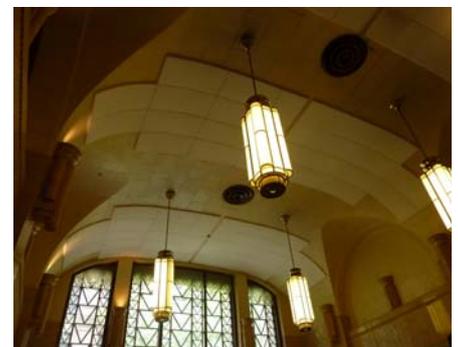
**N1.** Significant heritage value in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class or period of design  
**N5.** Having a special association with the life or works of an architect of significant importance in our history



AFT House facade  
(Source: Art Deco Society)



Facade detail of the bas relief above the entrance  
(Source: Art Deco Society)



Interior view of the former banking chamber  
(Photo: M Desgrand 2010)