

BHP House (former)

Address 140 William Street, Melbourne 3000

Practice Yuncken Freeman Architects Pty Ltd

Designed 1967

Completed 1972

History & Description

When constructed, BHP House heralded a new aesthetic in high-rise buildings, with the replacement of 1950s and 1960s banded curtain walls and externally - expressed service cores with a new all-embracing sheer glazed curtain wall. BHP House was designed, like similar earlier buildings of Mies van der Rohe, to be viewed as a three dimensional sculptural monument separate from the surrounding cityscape. The open plan, fully glazed, ground floor plaza, which raises the bulk of the building to the first floor level, increases the sense of distinction. The building was an outstanding architectural expression of corporate image, especially through its innovative and extensive use of BHP's steel technology. Many of the fundamental ideas informing the layout and arrangement of BHP House were retained as standard features of high rise office buildings in subsequent decades. The building was also innovative in its adoption of a new energy efficient 'total energy system', generating its own electricity using BHP natural gas. New techniques were employed for the foundations, which were comprised of a concrete raft poured in a single continuous action. The composition of the floor structure, which was of steel decking and lightweight concrete over steel beams encased in asbestos rather than concrete to reduce weight, was also innovative. This flooring acted as a stiffening element in the overall structural design of the building, along with the cap and belt trusses, allowing the structural loads to be carried down through the outer skin of steel and the central services core. This produced open floor plans, devoid of internal columns and increasing the flexibility of internal space.

Statement of Significance

The former BHP House is significant as one of the most elegant steel framed high-rise buildings constructed during early 1970s. With its flush glazing, expressed structural bracing and minimalist interiors it was considered to be at the cutting edge of office design at the time. It is generally considered by the architectural profession as being the best work by Barry Patten and the Melbourne practice of Yuncken Freeman Architects. The firm designed many multi-storey office buildings in the Melbourne CBD from the 1950s through to the 1970s, including Norwich Union Insurance (1957), Eagle House (1971), Estates House (1976) next door to BHP House, the Sidney Myer Music Bowl (1959), and the master plan and various buildings at La Trobe University. The former BHP House is technically important for its innovative structural application of steel and concrete, and also for its adoption of the concept of 'total energy system'.

Criteria Applicable

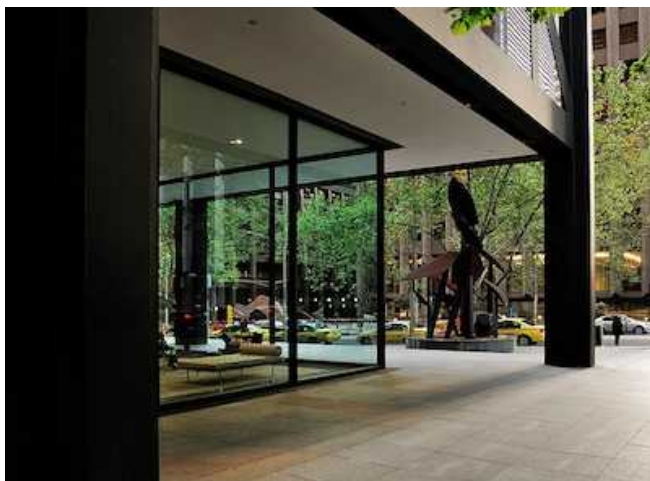
- N1 - Significant heritage value in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class or period of design.
- N5 - Having a special association with the life or works of an architect of significant importance in our history.
- N6 - Significant heritage value in demonstrating a high degree of technical achievement of a particular period.



Photo by Wolfgang Severs, 1973 [NLA]



Photo by Wolfgang Severs, 1973 [SLV]



Corner detail & view through to Bourke St, photo by alpsorrell, Flickr.com



Plaza level & entrance foyer, photo by Wolfgang Severs, 1973 [NLA]