

## Heritage Citation



**Embassy Hotel**

### Key details

<b>Addresses</b>	At 178 Edward Street, Brisbane City, Queensland 4000
<b>Type of place</b>	Hotel (pub)
<b>Period</b>	Interwar 1919-1939
<b>Style</b>	Commercial Palazzo
<b>Lot plan</b>	L25_RP178618
<b>Key dates</b>	Local Heritage Place Since — 1 January 2009 Date of Citation — January 2008
<b>Construction</b>	Walls: Face brick

**People/associations** A. J. Dickinson (Builder);  
John Patrick (Jack) Donoghue (Architect)

**Criterion for listing** (A) Historical

The Embassy Hotel was built in 1928 during Brisbane's interwar building boom. It is one of eight remaining pre-World War II corner hotels in Brisbane's Central Business District (CBD), and the only one erected during the interwar period. Designed in the Interwar Commercial Palazzo style, the building is an unusual example of architect Jack Donoghue's work and, along with Invicta House and Pioneer House, provides the south side intersection of Edward and Elizabeth Street with a distinct interwar presence.

## History

In 1928, the licensee of the Ulster Hotel, Mrs. Katherine Ahern acquired the building rights to the corner block diagonally opposite her hotel and contracted architect John (Jack) Patrick Donoghue to design a new modern hotel for the site.<sup>1</sup> Another source suggests that Ahern was the licensee of the Savoy Hotel at this time. Donoghue was born in Tenterfield, New South Wales in 1895.<sup>2</sup> He was employed by the Sydney architects Hennessy & Hennessy & Co (later Hennessy, Hennessy, Keesing & Co) around 1912. In 1925, Donoghue became the firm's Brisbane partner (thus Hennessy, Hennessy, Keesing & Co and J.P. Donoghue). At the time that he took the hotel contract, Donoghue was known mainly for his designs for Catholic Church buildings, most notably the Holy Spirit Church at New Farm.

The existing buildings on the site, built around 1885 and known at one time as the Hayes Buildings, had to be demolished. Previously the corner site was occupied by the Criterion Hotel, which was built in 1865. Builder A. J. Dickinson of Old Cleveland Road, Coorparoo, won the tender to remove the old buildings and erect the new hotel. An application to construct the hotel was submitted to the Brisbane City Council for approval on 5 June 1928, with the estimated cost of the project being £28,000. Construction of the Hotel Embassy commenced soon thereafter.

The progress of construction for this new, modern hotel was followed by *The Architectural & Building Journal of Queensland*. On 10 December 1928, after providing a floor-by-floor description of the building, the journal reported that the hotel expected to be ready to serve and accommodate customers by early January 1929. The hotel was built with two entrances, with the main entrance in Edward Street. The ground floor contained a bar, while the first floor contained a public lounge and a two-bedroom private suite. The third and fourth floors were devoted to guests' bedrooms and the flat roof was laid out as a garden for visitors to enjoy.

The 1920s was a period of economic prosperity in Queensland and this was reflected in the building program occurring in the state's capital, particularly its CBD. As a result, many of the CBD's hotels were refurbished and remodelled, including the Victory Hotel and the Exchange Hotel further along Edward Street. The importance of providing Brisbane with modern hotels at this time was explained in *The Architectural & Building Journal of Queensland*:

banks and hotels are among the chief reflectors of civic enterprise, success and stability. In the last five years, Brisbane has enlarged its business scope to an extent that finds due expression in the proportions of its new buildings.<sup>3</sup>

The Hotel Embassy was specifically mentioned as one of the new buildings that reflected Brisbane's success. Indeed the construction, across from the Hotel of Invicta House in 1923 and nearby Pioneer House in 1924, gave the south side of the Edward and Elizabeth Street intersection a very modern appearance as a result of the CBD's interwar building boom.

The Hotel Embassy opened for business on 25 February 1929. It was described as a credit to both Donoghue and Dickinson in that the building's construction "leaves nothing to be desired".<sup>4</sup> According to J. J. Donnelly in his c1964 thesis *Hotels of Brisbane*, at least four new pubs were built in the CBD during the interwar period. They were Hotel Brisbane (Ann and Wharf Streets corner), Hotel Daniel (Adelaide and George Streets corner), Hotel Majestic (George Street) and the Hotel Embassy. The first Lennon's Hotel (later to become U.S. General MacArthur's domicile from 1942-44) was constructed in Queen Street. As well, the private Atcherley Hotel in Queen Street, (with a bar available only to the hotel's patrons) and the Canberra Hotel in Ann Street (a temperance, therefore no-alcohol establishment) were also constructed in the CBD at this time. Of these, only the Hotel Embassy is extant.

As would be expected of a business that has to stay abreast of ever changing trends in hotel patronage, the Hotel Embassy has undergone a number of makeovers throughout the years. The main changes occurred after Brisbane's major brewery Castlemaine Perkins acquired the hotel in 1939. In 1958, a shop was added to the Edward Street side of the hotel site. Alterations and additions were made in 1951, 1953, 1963, 1968, 1970, 1977 and 1981, resulting in the gradual removal of all of the original ground floor interiors. In 1979, Castlemaine Perkins removed the roof garden to add a fifth floor to the hotel. In 1999, a \$1.5 million refurbishment occurred that was designed to "reinstate the pub's 1970s reputation as the place to be".<sup>5</sup>

Corner pubs within the CBD became familiar landmarks by which the public could easily identify a particular intersection. However, the pressure of commercial development on CBD corner sites, the change in drinking habits caused by the state government's drink driving campaigns and the spread of off-licence beer, wine and spirits shops throughout Brisbane's suburbs have all contributed to the demise of corner hotels in the CBD. Of the 33 hotel sites identified in 1951, only 8 remain in their original form. The return to inner city living in the last decade may see the remaining corner hotels once again become 'the local' to scores of residents moving into the new inner city apartment towers.

In 1986, the Hotel Embassy was included in the National Trust of Queensland's *Sailing Days Heritage Walk* and also in its *The Dream Palace Heritage Walk*. Post-Expo '88, the Brisbane Development Association marked the Hotel Embassy as one of 28 historic places to be included in a proposed Brisbane City Circle tramway linking the CBD with Southbank. The Brisbane History Group identified the Hotel Embassy as a part of Brisbane's commercial heritage in 2002, when they included it in their publication *Walking Tours – Brisbane's Commercial Heritage 1900-1940*.

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## Description

This four-storey hotel is a brick, concrete-floored, steel-framed building with basement. The original roof garden was replaced by a fifth floor in 1979.

The exterior of this Interwar Commercial Palazzo style building is light brown face brick with an emphatic cornice above the original top floor. The piers are emphasised and waving balconies feature at what was originally the top floor. The first floor features decorative keystones above the window arches. All windows are vertical. In 1958 a shop in the same face brick with a complementary façade was added to the Edward Street side of the hotel site.

The original ground floor contained public and private bars, lounges, offices and restrooms. A bottle shop was located on the Elizabeth Street side. The first floor contained a large dining room, kitchen and various offices, sitting rooms, lounges and bedrooms. The upper floors comprised bedrooms, some with private bathrooms and a lounge on each floor. Electric elevators served all floors.

A number of makeovers from 1951 caused the removal of all original ground floor interiors, changed the street-level facades and most of the pressed metal lining to the original cantilevered awning. Aluminium windows have replaced the original sashes.

In particular, the Hotel Embassy retains some of its 1928 fabric: basement entrance, private bar entrance, suspended awning, a relatively intact façade, balconettes, upper floors' metal window frames and some corridor walls.<sup>6</sup>

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## Statement of significance

### Relevant assessment criteria

This is a place of local heritage significance and meets one or more of the local heritage criteria under the Heritage planning scheme policy of the *Brisbane City Plan 2014*. It is significant because:

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#### Historical

##### CRITERION A

The place is important in demonstrating the evolution or pattern of the city's or local area's history

as a four-storey corner hotel erected during the CBD building boom of the 1920s.

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## References

1. Brisbane History Group, *Walking Tours – Brisbane’s Commercial Heritage 1900-1940*, Brisbane, Brisbane History Group, 2002, p. 54
2. Brannock & Associates, *The formerHotel Embassy – Cultural Heritage Appraisal*, (Brisbane: Brannock & Associates submission, September 2007), p 9
3. J. V. D. Coutts (ed.), *The Architectural & Building Journal of Queensland*, 10 October 1928, p.71
4. J. V. D. Coutts (ed.), *The Architectural & Building Journal of Queensland*, 11 March 1929, p.54
5. *The Courier Mail*, 9 July 1999, p.36.
6. Brannock & Associates, *The formerHotel Embassy – Cultural Heritage Appraisal*, (Brisbane: Brannock & Associates submission, September 2007), pp 14-15
7. Brannock & Associates, *The formerHotel Embassy – Cultural Heritage Appraisal*, (Brisbane: Brannock & Associates submission, September 2007)
8. Brisbane City Council, *Properties on the Web*, website, post-1946 building cards and historical records
9. Brisbane City Council, 1946 aerial photographs.
10. Brisbane Development Association, *Brisbane City Circle – tram link proposal*, Brisbane, Brisbane Development Association, c1988
11. Brisbane History Group, *Walking Tours – Brisbane’s Commercial Heritage 1900-1940*, Brisbane, Brisbane History Group, 2002
12. *The Courier Mail*, 1999.
13. Coutts, J.V.D. (ed.), *The Architectural & Building Journal of Queensland*, 1928-1929
14. Department of Natural Resources, Queensland Certificates of title and other records.
15. Donnelly, J.J. *Hotels of Brisbane*, B. Arch thesis, University of Queensland, 1967
16. Geenwood, Gordon, *Brisbane 1859-1959: A History of Local Government*, Parramatta, The Cumberland Press, 1959
17. John Oxley Library, photographic collection.
18. John Oxley Library, newspaper clippings files
19. Mahlstedt & Son, City of Brisbane Detail Fire Survey, Map No. 15,1951
20. National Trust of Queensland, *Sailing Days Heritage Walk*, Heritage Week 1986
21. National Trust of Queensland, *National Trust of Queensland Journal*, August 1987
22. *Queensland Post Office Directories*, 1868-1949
23. Watson, Donald & McKay, Judith, *A Directory of Queensland Architects to 1940*, Brisbane, Fryer Memorial Library, 1984

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**Note:** This citation has been prepared on the basis of evidence available at the time including an external examination of the building. The statement of significance is a summary of the most culturally important aspects of the property based on the available evidence, and may be re-assessed if further information becomes available. The purpose of this citation is to provide an informed evaluation for heritage registration and information. This does not negate the necessity for a thorough conservation study by a qualified practitioner, before any action is taken which may affect its heritage significance.

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