

Heritage Citation



Osmaston

Key details

Addresses	At 598 Lower Bowen Terrace, New Farm, Queensland 4005
Type of place	Flat building
Period	Interwar 1919-1939
Style	Art Deco
Lot plan	L2_RP58985
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 29 November 2019 Date of Citation — December 2017
Criterion for listing	(A) Historical; (D) Representative; (E) Aesthetic

Osmaston is a two storey, face brick block of flats with a tiled roof and a central entry. It features casement windows, and extensive timber joinery including the central staircase, window seats, plate rails and doors. This building is one of a pair of masonry flats constructed in 1935 for Albert George Silvester, a “company director”. At this time, modern flats were becoming a popular new form of accommodation in New Farm and other inner city suburbs.

History

Osmaston is a two storey, masonry block of flats in Lower Bowen Terrace, New Farm. It is one of a pair of flat buildings constructed by Albert George Silvester, a company director and former photographer.

Osmaston and its neighbour, Repton, were built at a time when purpose built flats were becoming a common and fashionable feature of New Farm. Contributing factors to this wave of a new type of development included a growth in Brisbane’s population, a housing shortage which increased demand for accommodation and changing attitudes to different types of housing. The conversion of large houses into flats had already emerged in Brisbane and other Australian cities during the 1910s, amid concerns about morality, the rise of slums and the suitability of flat living for families. However, there was growing recognition that flats of high quality could provide an answer to Brisbane’s need for increased accommodation, particular for “bachelors” and single, working women. For those with the necessary skills and finances, the construction of purpose built flats could be a lucrative investment.

New Farm was divided by the Crown into large portions of land and sold during the early days of free settlement in the 1840s. Much of the land was purchased by investors and those wealthy residents with the means to establish fine homes on large estates. From the 1880s, another wave of development saw these estates gradually carved up for housing developments – usually “villas” on generous allotments. A third wave of

residential development occurred in New Farm during the interwar years as further subdivisions occurred and fashionable, high quality homes and blocks of flats were built.

The area of New Farm to the south of the major thoroughfare of Brunswick Street was a prestigious locality (formerly home to Merthyr, the estate of successful politician, Sir Charles Griffiths) with tree lined streets and elegant houses. In 1907, Gustave Gottlieb Muller acquired seven allotments (measuring over 120 perches) [? Square meters] between Brunswick Street and Lower Bowen Terrace. Three of these were later transferred to Albert George Silvester in November 1934. No evidence has been found to date of any buildings on the site at this time. The land is shown as vacant in a 1925 Brisbane City Council plan although most of [Lower Bowen Terrace was occupied by substantial houses with generous grounds.

Silvester, a former photographer, subdivided the property in half in May 1935 and constructed two masonry blocks of flats – Repton, at 600 Lower Bowen Terrace and Osmaston at 598 Lower Bowen Terrace. In November 1935, an advertisement in the Telegraph announced that the “just completed, modern unfurnished Flats” with “all modern conveniences” were available to let.

Electoral rolls indicate that Silvester and his family were living next to Osmaston, in Repton by 1936. He retained ownership of Repton until 1942 but kept Osmaston until 19???. While the two buildings are of similar scale and type and share a common front boundary wall of rendered and face brick, they differ in their use of materials, details and number of storeys and flats. Both buildings have exterior staircases at the rear.

It is likely that a building of this quality was architect designed. No conclusive evidence has been found of an architect for Osmaston however a tender notice for Brisbane architect, C.E. Plant for two flat buildings at New Farm in 1935 [check dates and wording] suggest Silvester may have commissioned Plant to design both Repton and Osmaston.

Both Osmaston and Repton are similar to many of the fashionable, purpose built flats built in New Farm and other inner city suburbs such as West End and Ascot/Clayfield during the interwar period. These buildings were usually masonry, (or a combination of masonry, timber and fibrous cement) single blocks of six to eight flats on two or three stories. They were often architect designed in the latest styles such as Spanish Mission, Art Deco, and Mediterranean and featured ornate interiors with leadlight windows, decorative plaster ceilings and extensive timber joinery such as plate rails, doors and window seats. The latest flats also usually featured modern conveniences such as incinerators, built in kitchens and bathrooms, garbage shutes, garages, telephones and hot water systems.

Silvester retained title to Osmaston until 1942 when the building on 18.5 perches of land was acquired by James Young. (check occupation). The property remained in the hands of the Young family until 1957 when it was transferred to Charles Freeleagus who acquired the neighbouring Repton flats in 1943. Osmaston has remained on a single title.

Description

“Osmaston” is a three-storey block of Interwar Art Deco flats located on a leafy, residential street in New Farm. Sitting adjacent to a second block of similarly detailed art deco flats, the two properties create a stately pair.

The flats are located in the bustling suburb of New Farm, some 2km from the city centre. New Farm is a riverside inner-city suburb, known for its wealth of cafes and eateries, open spaces, rich art scene and general eclectic vibe. The suburb is primarily residential, including a blend of old and new, single residences and multi-residential developments. Lower Bowen Terrace runs from Fortitude Valley down to the river, parallel and one street to the south of Brunswick Street. The streets are wide and tree-lined and includes a mixture of units, flats, modern homes and substantial Federation and Interwar timber residences.

The subject site is a rectangular site on Lower Bowen Terrace, facing south-west, sloping away from the street. An empty allotment sits behind the site and backs onto the New Farm Bowls Club. A large jacaranda tree is located adjacent to the front footpath, screening the front of the building. Low-level shrubbery and small border planting surround the concrete paths to the front setback, with a central paved footpath leading to the entry stairs. A driveway is located along the southeast fence line providing access to the rear covered parking. An original low masonry fence to the front of the building has roughcast render to piers and plinth with face brick capping, with openings to the front entry path and side driveway. Simple chain mesh fences line the side boundaries. An open staircase providing all flats with a secondary access is located on the back facade of the building, with lightweight covered landings. The rear of the property includes a brick building for the laundry and limited car accommodation in the eastern corner, a large shade tree and grassed area in the northern corner, with a screened services area and a solid fence along the remainder of the rear boundary.

Art Deco elements were included throughout the construction of this block of flats. The expressed face brick exterior with strong vertical faceted bay windows, the named and suspended entry awning, the front fence and detail of the interior fit out all contribute to its restrained art deco style.

The three-storey flats have two flats per floor, with a central entry porch to the internal foyer and stair access to the entry and upper level flats, with the lower level flats accessed from the side. Wide face brick entry stairs lead to this mid-level entry foyer. A suspended rendered awning, with "OSMASTON" in bold relief lettering, clearly demarks and shelters the communal entry. The building is constructed of a deep red brick with contrast mortar in a standard stretcher bond. The hipped tiled roof has wide eaves and exposed roof timber details, with a small projecting front hip over the entry space. A chimney to the rear northern corner of the building is connected to a ground floor utility space and appears to originate from a water heating system or an incinerator.

The front elevation features the central entry frontispiece with suspended awning, expressed brick columns and banding to multi-panelled glazed double entry door. A faceted bay window, with concrete hipped awning roof, to both levels flanks both sides of the symmetrical front façade. Timber framed, diamond glazed leadlight casement windows feature on the front façade, with clear glazed multi-panelled casements wrapping around the remainder of the building, with timber and tile sunhoods to the northwestern side of the building. Face brick sills and lintels are consistent to windows throughout.

The interior of the flats has not been inspected. Publically available photography, including indicative floor plans, have been reviewed. The entry foyer features terrazzo floors, stately dark timber internal stairs, recessed timber mail boxes and high waisted timber panelled and glazed entry doors. The interiors of the flats include timber floors, plastered walls, detailed plaster ceilings, wide feature trims including architraves, skirting, bracketed plate rails, picture rails and cornices, and panelled timber joinery. A timber slat arch with side panels also separates the kitchen/dining space and the built-in timber bay window seat are additional features.

The single storey brick building to the rear eastern corner has a simple skillion sheet metal roof. It caters for limited car accommodations and a shared laundry space.

The block of flats are in good condition and externally appear to remain intact, with minimal intervention. Internally, the bathroom and kitchens have been updated and floor and paint finishes vary between flats.

Northeast views from the upper levels of the rear of the building look across the lawn bowl greens towards New Farm Park. Southwestern views through the bay windows to the front of the building look out into the large jacaranda tree on the street. Despite the large tree to the front of the site, the massing of the large face brick structure, particularly with the adjacent “Repton” flats, remain highly visible from the street, and more so from the bowls greens behind and New Farm Park beyond.

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:

Historical

CRITERION A

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

as a flat building built in 1935 which provides evidence of the intensive period of flat construction in New Farm and other inner city suburbs of Brisbane during the 1930s.

Representative

CRITERION D

The place is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class or classes of cultural places

as a high quality and intact Interwar masonry, purpose built flat building. It features characteristics which include (but are not limited to) a central entry, decorative face brick exterior, stepped front façade, tiled roof, diamond leadlight casement windows, internal timber joinery and external rear stairs.

Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

due to its elegant symmetrical design, stepped face brick front façade and fine detailing. The building makes an important contribution to the historic streetscapes of New Farm.

References

1. Brisbane City Council Building Cards
 2. Department of Natural Resources and Mines, Queensland Certificates of Title
 3. Queensland Post Office Directories
 4. Digitised newspapers and other records. <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper>
 5. Telegraph. 18 Nov 1935.
 6. Bennett, Helen, *Interpreting the Modern: flatland in Brisbane 1920-1941*, PhD thesis, Griffith University, 2011
 7. EHP. Queensland Heritage Register. Entry for Julius Street Flats, 601895. Retrieved 11 Dec 2017
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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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