

Heritage Citation



San Remo

Key details

Addresses	At 240 Vulture Street, South Brisbane, Queensland 4101
Type of place	Flat building
Period	Interwar 1919-1939
Style	Composite
Lot plan	L1_SP102637; L2_SP102637; L3_SP102637; L4_SP102637; L5_SP102637
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 14 September 2018 Date of Citation — February 2015
Construction	Roof: Terracotta tile; Walls: Masonry - Stucco

People/associations EP Trewern (Architect)

Criterion for listing (A) Historical; (B) Rarity; (E) Aesthetic

The set of flats, originally known as 'San Remo', was built in 1933 for Robert Smith and Elsie Catherine O'Sullivan as an investment property. At the time, the design of the flats was very modern and is attributed to respected Brisbane architect, EP Trewern. San Remo flats are important in demonstrating Brisbane's development pattern in the interwar period, in particular in South Brisbane, and the way in which ideas about acceptable forms of housing were changing.

History

As the Great Depression progressed in the late 1920s and into the 1930s a marked deficit of housing in Brisbane emerged. This was the period in which the multi-unit dwelling began to emerge as an alternative to the traditional Brisbane house and yard. Prior to this in larger Australian cities such as Sydney and Melbourne this style of 'modern' living, in blocks of flats, had become a stylish alternative to living in the traditional house.

In the early 1930s to cater for the housing shortage as well as to generate income many home owners in the inner-city suburbs converted houses into tenements, where tenants would share bathrooms, toilets and kitchens. This led to community concerns of overcrowding and increased hygiene problems. A fashionable and more sophisticated alternative to this form of accommodation was the purpose built block of self-contained flats. Marketed mainly at single people and childless couples the earliest self-contained flats in Brisbane were generally conveniently situated close to trams, trains and shopping facilities in inner-city suburbs such as Spring Hill, New Farm and Fortitude Valley.

The Brisbane City Council, in 1930, defined the flat as "a fully self-contained dwelling, with private kitchen, bathroom and water closet". The flat was designed to be an independently functioning dwelling. Although seen as a sophisticated lifestyle, flat living was fairly uncommon in Brisbane in this period, with only 8.4% of Brisbane residents living in flats. This low percentage may be due to the economic constraints of the time as well as the perceived novelty of this style of living. Most interwar flats in Brisbane were architecturally designed and constructed from good quality brick and timber.

In 1932 Robert Smith, mechanic, and Elsie O'Sullivan a shop assistant and wife of Edmund O'Sullivan, purchased the thirty two perch block of land along Vulture Street. It is unclear what their relationship was. In October 1933 the *Register of New Buildings* records RJA Smith applying to construct a set of flats on Vulture Street. They were to be designed by respected Brisbane architect, EP Trewern and were estimated to cost £4600. Prior to this, Trewern had called for Tenders and in May 1933 awarded the contract to building firm, Tealby and Crick.

Victorian trained Eric Percival Trewern established his Brisbane architectural practice in 1920 at an address in Queen Street, Brisbane. The practice continued until Trewern's death in 1959. The height of his design success occurred in the interwar period and he is renowned for his innovative designs incorporating the Spanish Mission and the Old English/Tudor revival style in residential and commercial architecture. Amongst his finest residential

designs is the New Farm house “Santa Barbara” that is considered the best example of the Spanish Mission style in Brisbane. Trewern designed many commercial buildings in central Brisbane many of which no longer exist. One important extant building is the Inchcolm Professional Chambers on Wickham Terrace. Trewern was an active member of many prestigious architectural societies in the pursuit of improving professional architectural standards in Queensland.

At the time, the construction of purpose-built, architect-designed flats in South Brisbane was not as popular as it was on the other side of the river in inner-city suburbs such Spring Hill and New Farm. According to the Sunday Mail, however, apartment living was becoming an alternative to the traditional house in the South Brisbane area. In a feature article from June 1934, San Remo flats were heralded as “Modern Suburban Apartments”. The benefits of living in suburban flats, rather than inner city ones were discussed, “We have now in Brisbane improved transit conditions, new roads, and park spaces, and the ever-increasing use of the automobile. These and other factors have all helped to create the desire to live in the suburb” (*The Sunday Mail, June 1 1934, p10*).

Design features of the new flats provided each flat:

“with its own main entrance, and each with its allotted garage... The roof of the garages is flat, advantage having been taken of the treatment to provide a roof garden ... attractive tile bathrooms, with constant hot and cold water; fittings in chromium finish, incinerators, refrigeration; the well-appointed kitchens, linen and garbage chutes, trade boxes, each belonging to the several apartments. Genuine fireplaces have been provided to the lounge of each flat, while polished floors of fancy timbers are installed throughout (*The Sunday Mail, June 1 1934, p10*).

When first built, San Remo flats commanded a prominent position on the hill above the South Brisbane wharves and over-looking the city. Views to the city remain from San Remo, however, its prominence on the hill has been diminished by the large, late twentieth-century apartment blocks which now dominate this part of South Brisbane.

Description

San Remo is a two-storey masonry and timber framed block of flats with original garage plinth fronting Vulture Street, South Brisbane. Designed in an eclectic Spanish and Mediterranean interwar style, the exterior is rendered in rough-cast stucco; it has face-brick window sills and the roof is clad with terracotta tiles. Highly intact, the building features a prominent octagonal tower entry containing a clear-finished decorative timber stair. The building retains original casement windows and shutters and the windows of the tower have leaded glass and decorative breezeblocks. The interior flats retain original layouts and have many original interwar features, including fireplaces and joinery. The building has a highly attractive street presence and has views to and from the Brisbane River.

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

for the evidence it provides of the pattern of construction of purpose built flats in South Brisbane during the 1930s and as a reflection of the growth in popularity of the multi-unit dwelling in Brisbane.

Rarity

CRITERION B

The place demonstrates rare, uncommon or endangered aspects of the city's or local area's cultural heritage

as an architect-designed set of 1930s flats in South Brisbane.

Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

as a highly attractive set of stucco brick interwar flats situated on the hill overlooking the Brisbane River and the city.

References

1. *The Sunday Mail*, June 1 1934, p10
2. *Architectural and Building Journal of Queensland*, March 10 1933, p22
3. *Architectural and Building Journal of Queensland*, March 10 1933, p23
4. Brisbane City Council Minutes, 1935-36, p.764 & 918 and 1938, p.605

5. Brisbane City Council Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board, Detail Plans
 6. Brisbane City Council, 1946 aerial photographs.
 7. *Certificates of Title*, Department of Environment and Resource Management
 8. Surveyor-General's Office. *McKellar's Official Map of Brisbane and Suburbs*. Brisbane, 1895
 9. Queensland Post Office Directories
 10. Queensland Electoral Rolls
 11. *Register of New Buildings*, Brisbane City Council, October 1933
 12. *The Courier Mail*, 13 October 1933, p7
-

Copyright Brisbane City Council

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.

Citation prepared by — Brisbane City Council (page revised September 2020)



Dedicated to a better Brisbane