



Heritage Citation



Tower Mill Motel

Key details

Addresses	At 239 Wickham Terrace, Spring Hill, Queensland 4000; At 55 Bartley Street, Spring Hill, Queensland 4000
Type of place	Hotel (accommodation)
Period	Late 20th Century 1960-1999
Style	International
Lot plan	Common property_BUP13764; Common property_SP247681; L1_BUP13764; L2_BUP13764; L3_BUP13764; L5_BUP13764; L6_BUP13764; L7_BUP13764; L8_BUP13764; L9_BUP13764; L10_BUP13764; L11_BUP13764; L12_BUP13764; L13_BUP13764; L14_BUP13764; L15_BUP13764; L16_BUP13764; L17_BUP13764; L18_BUP13764; L19_BUP13764; L20_BUP13764; L21_BUP13764; L22_BUP13764; L23_BUP13764; L24_BUP13764; L25_BUP13764; L26_BUP13764; L27_BUP13764; L28_BUP13764; L31_BUP13764; L32_BUP13764; L33_BUP13764; L34_BUP13764; L35_BUP13764; L36_BUP13764; L37_BUP13764; L38_BUP13764; L39_BUP13764; L40_BUP13764; L41_BUP13764; L42_BUP13764; L43_BUP13764; L44_BUP13764; L45_BUP13764; L46_BUP13764; L47_BUP13764; L48_BUP13764; L49_BUP13764; L50_BUP13764; L51_BUP13764; L52_BUP13764; L53_BUP13764; L54_BUP13764; L55_BUP13764; L56_BUP13764; L57_BUP13764; L58_BUP13764; L59_BUP13764; L60_BUP13764; L61_BUP13764; L62_BUP13764; L63_BUP13764; L64_BUP13764; L65_BUP13764; L66_BUP13764; L67_BUP13764; L68_BUP13764; L69_BUP13764; L70_BUP13764; L71_BUP13764; L72_BUP13764; L73_BUP13764; L74_BUP13764; L75_BUP13764; L76_BUP13764; L77_BUP13764; L78_BUP13764; L79_BUP13764; L80_BUP13764; L81_BUP13764; L82_BUP13764; L83_BUP13764; L84_BUP13764; L85_BUP13764; L86_BUP13764; L87_BUP13764; L88_BUP13764; L89_BUP13764; L90_BUP13764; L91_BUP13764; L92_BUP13764; L93_BUP13764; L94_BUP13764; L95_BUP13764; L96_BUP13764; L97_BUP13764; L98_BUP13764; L99_BUP13764; L100_BUP13764; L101_BUP13764; L102_BUP13764; L103_BUP13764; L104_BUP13764; L105_BUP13764; L106_BUP13764; L107_BUP13764; L4_SP247681; L29_SP247681; L30_SP247681
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 29 November 2019 Date of Citation — August 2018
People/associations	Stephen Trotter (Architect)
Criterion for listing	(A) Historical; (B) Rarity; (E) Aesthetic; (F) Technical; (G) Social; (H) Historical association

The Tower Mill Motel is an innovative and rare design that reflects the convict-built windmill tower opposite.

Designed prior to 1963 by architect Stephen Trotter the cylindrical building incorporates elements of sub-tropical design which he was influential in developing and teaching to architecture students in the late twentieth century. This early modernist international hotel was the site of historic civil rights demonstrations in 1971, and is rare in remaining a functioning hotel since it was opened in 1966.

History

Spring Hill is Brisbane's oldest suburb containing many of Brisbane's oldest structures. Opposite the site of the Tower Mill Motel is the convict-built windmill tower dating from 1828 and nearby the town's first purpose-built reservoirs dating from 1866.

Being close to the town centre, Spring Hill developed as the town developed with fashionable, more expensive houses on the ridgeline above Brisbane Town and cheaper housing on the lower slopes and gullies. As the town spread in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, newer suburbs further out attracted development and Spring Hill was, by the early twentieth century, crowded, a bit run-down and cheap. In the postwar era, as prosperity returned in the 1950s and 1960s, a wave of new development swept the city. Young professionals and artists were attracted to Spring Hill as it was close to the city centre and the suburb experienced somewhat of a revival and the beginnings of gentrification.

The increased frequency and affordability of international travel also had an impact as Australia became a destination and new international style hotels were built. In Brisbane, the traditional corner hotels lacked the facilities and accommodation standards required by the growing modern tourist market. In the 1960s a number of new hotels were built, with the Tower Mill Motel being one of the first and an outstanding example of the new modern international style.

The site of the motel was previously occupied by a doctor's surgery in-keeping with the development of Wickham Street over time as the location of private hospitals and specialist clinics. The site was purchased by Chacewater Pty Ltd who applied in November 1964 to build a seventy unit motel designed by architect, Stephen Trotter, estimated to cost £285,000.

Stephen Trotter was born in Brisbane in 1930 and trained in the offices of Mervyn Rylance and Fulton and Collin. He gained a Diploma of Architecture (Qld) in 1954 and became a registered architect in 1955. He started in practice as an associate of Fulton and Collin in 1958. His time with Mervyn Rylance, who specialized in Old English designs, instilled in Trotter a desire to design buildings that responded to the sub-tropical climate of Brisbane. In 1962 John Gillmour, Stephen Trotter and Graham Boys became partners in the firm.¹ Influenced by the new international styles being constructed overseas and the new engineering technologies being developed after the war, Stephen Trotter successfully applied for a Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA) Sisalkraft Scholarship in 1962. His application included the design of the Tower Mill Motel in his portfolio of works as an indication of his desire to study design responses to climatic conditions. Trotter's whirlwind three-month tour of the world resulted in a study entitled "Cities in the Sun" which identified the elements of design relating to hot, dry; hot wet, warm wet and warm dry climates in the subcontinent, Persia, Oceania, South America, North America and Europe.²

The Tower Mill Motel features a striking circular form, distinctive concrete sun-shading and a restaurant on the

top floor. The circular form and roof detailing mirror the circular form and detailing of the diminutive historic windmill tower across the road. Embracing the new design technologies of the international style, the Tower Mill Motel features expressed concrete floor plates and columns and concrete awnings shading the full height glazed walls. It is completely different from the international style hotels being built in the city at this time which, although featuring curtain walls and full height glazing, generally adhered to a rectangular footprint and identical room layouts.

Stephen Trotter remained as a partner of Fulton, Collin, Boys, Gilmour and Trotter until 1999. During this period he taught architecture at the Queensland Institute of Technology (QIT now QUT), instilling an understanding of the importance of the environment and energy efficiency in building design to a generation of architecture students. As well as lecturing at QIT for nineteen years, Trotter was involved in the Queensland Chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects for a number of years. Trotter retired from Fulton Trotter in 1999, however his sons Mark and Paul are now directors. Stephen Trotter also made an outstanding contribution to the University of Queensland residential college, International House, for over sixty years and he was made a Fellow in November 2011. Stephen Trotter passed away on 30 July 2015, aged 84.³

The Tower Mill Motel was completed in 1964 and went on to become a destination for overseas visitors. In 1971 the motel hosted the Springbok rugby union team during the Brisbane leg of their Australian tour. The Springboks were an all-white rugby union team from South Africa that symbolised the apartheid regime of the country which excluded black South Africans from all citizenship rights. The UN General Assembly had urged a sporting boycott against South Africa in 1968 which was ignored by Australian authorities. In an era when an awareness of the inequalities of race and gender was growing and the subject of civil unrest and protests, the motel became the location of civil libertarians' protests against apartheid. On the night of 22 July 400 protestors, mainly university students, lecturers and Aboriginal Australians, gathered to protest, but were confronted by 500 police who had been given State of Emergency powers suspending all civil liberties for a month, by the Bjelke-Petersen government. The subsequent brutal treatment of the protestors, who included future Queensland premiers and leading political figures such as Peter Beattie, Wayne Goss, Matt Foley, George Georges and Bill Hayden not only triggered future protests but ensured that the actual game was poorly attended.⁴

The protest at the Tower Mill Motel became a "defining moment and watershed experience" which evoked anger at the politicisation of the Queensland police service, particularly the use of Special Branch as a Joh Bjelke-Petersen's "secret army" and a determination to see blatant inequalities revoked.⁵

The outstanding innovative design of the Tower Mill Motel, not only is a unique example of a 1960s cylindrical building that is sensitively designed to respond to the site and climate, but an icon of a revolutionary era which saw established regimes questioned and the new cultural standards introduced. The hotel was subdivided for 107 strata titled units in December 2002⁶ with some being sold into private ownership and some being retained for use as hotel rooms. A recent change in ownership has seen the purchase of a number of private units to facilitate the return of the whole building to use as a hotel.

Description

The Tower Mill Hotel is a nine-storey concrete hotel and apartment tower, designed and built in the international style. The tower features a circular form, distinctive concrete sun-shading and a prominent level nine restaurant.

Spring Hill is an inner-city suburb of Brisbane characterised by its density and undulating topography. The subject area is located near the Brisbane central business district and has a mixed character with different densities of residential, a hospital precinct and pockets of commercial and light industrial areas.

The subject building has a larger setback from the street boundary than other buildings on Wickham Terrace. The Tower Mill Hotel is one of the taller buildings on the street. The irregularly shaped site slopes away from Wickham Street. The front of the property is entirely paved and concreted and provides limited parking and vehicle access. The western end of the Wickham Street frontage has a small concrete retaining wall with a steel post and wrought iron infill fence atop. At the middle of the frontage is a tall advertising sign and the eastern end has a concrete terrace with parasols covering the outdoor dining spaces. The building is built to the street boundary on the eastern side and the northern portion of the property contains access to undercover parking and has a chain link fence along the boundary.

The Wickham Street level single-storey podium has a hip roof with a skillion roof projecting from the front over the lobby entrance. The exterior walls of the southern elevation contain full height glazing with automatic sliding doors for access to the lobby and restaurant. The eastern elevation features a timber framed verandah which is enclosed with timber boards below the balustrades and aluminium sliding windows above. The northern has rendered walls and is mostly covered by aluminium shading screens. The lower Bartley Street level contains the undercover parking.

The tower is circular in layout and features expressed concrete floor plates and columns. Concrete shade awnings encircle the building at above ground levels. Full height glazed walls are set back from the edge of the floor plates with sliding doors opening on to balconies.

The prominent ninth floor has angled full height glazing and a conical roof form with faceted feature at the peak. It also features a spire and eaves similar to the sun shading on levels below. This level cantilevers over the concrete exterior walls of the eighth floor which are set back further and surrounded by a rooftop terrace with simple steel balustrades.

Apartments mostly appear to be wedge shaped studio apartments with balconies at the outer most edge, bathrooms and entries at the inner most edge with living spaces between. There is very little consistency in finishes between apartments. Floors are concrete throughout with a variety of finishes including tiles and carpeting. Walls are generally plain with simple skirting boards and cornices. Hotel rooms additionally have curtains and a bulk head in the ceiling containing ducted air-conditioning.

The Tower Mill Hotel is in good condition and has had several alterations including enclosing part of the outdoor dining spaces of the ground floor restaurant, painting the exterior green instead of the original white colour and various changes in finishes and layouts of hotel rooms, lobby and apartments.

The subject building occupies a very prominent site on a curve in the ridge-top street, the building is highly visible from various places in the inner city and central business district. The elevated position of the building also allows for access to prominent views to the central business district, north over Spring Hill and the northern suburbs and west to Milton, the hills and Mt. Coot-tha.

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 the site of community protests against the South African apartheid regime when the Springbok Rugby Team stayed at the Tower Mill Hotel and the then Queensland government's use of State of Emergency powers to disperse the civil rights demonstrators in the 1970s. These events are closely associated with the civil rights movements traversing the 1960s and 1970s in Brisbane which included future influential Queensland political and community leaders.

Rarity

CRITERION B

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

as one of a few surviving examples of the rise of international standard hotels in Brisbane from the 1960s and remaining as a functioning hotel. The Tower Mill Hotel is a unique example of the modernist hotel style in the uncommon architectural circular form in Brisbane.

Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

as an outstanding well-designed multi-storey hotel in the modern international style with a unique cylindrical shape and has a landmark presence on a site of 1457m² in the cityscape. The building has many interesting architectural details including the use of sunshading and the roof which mirrors the convict-era tower mill opposite.

Technical

CRITERION F

The place is important in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technological achievement at a particular period

as a high quality, innovative design that incorporates new design technologies to produce a climatically sensitive building including overhangs. The original building was also considered creative for the elevated restaurant on the top floor.

Social

CRITERION G

The place has a strong or special association with the life or work of a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons

as the site of community protests against the South African apartheid regime and a defining moment in the espousing of community values in the civil rights movement in Queensland.

Historical association

CRITERION H

The place has a special association with the life or work of a particular person, group or organization of importance in the city's or local area's history

as an early modernist hotel designed by Brisbane architect Stephen Trotter which demonstrates his utilisation of new technologies to design an iconic building that adheres to the ideals of climate responsive design. Trotter was influential in Queensland's modern architectural development having taught at the then Queensland Institute of Technology (now QUT) for 19 years, and which now includes the Centre for Subtropical Design.

Supporting images



Unidentified photographer,
'Corner Sedgebrook Street and Berry Street - Spring Hill', 8 July 1980,
Brisbane City Council Library Services, Brisbane City Council.

Corner shop and houses backing onto Tower Mill Hotel.
(Description supplied with photograph)



Unidentified photographer,
'Diners in Copacabana Restaurant - 230 Wickham
Terrace - Spring Hill', February 1970,
Brisbane City Council Library Services, Brisbane City
Council.

The Copacabana Restaurant was on the top floor of the
Tower Mill Motel. (Description supplied with photograph)

References

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3. Queensland architect Stephen Trotter dies, aged 84. ArchitectureAu
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4. B. Miller 'One Story of Australia's Connection with Nelson Mandela' Griffith Review "Hidden Queensland".9.12.13
5. B. Miller 'One Story of Australia's Connection with Nelson Mandela' Griffith Review "Hidden Queensland".9.12.13
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8. Digitised newspapers and other records. <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper>
9. Department of Natural Resources and Mines, Queensland Certificates of Title
10. Queensland Post Office Directories
11. Trotter, M. Conversation with Carmel Black. 24 May 2018
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13. Vale Stephen Trotter <http://wp.architecture.com.au/news-media/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2015/05/Stephen-Trotter-3.8.2015.pdf> accessed July 2018.

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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.

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



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