

FORM/DESIGN

Deco charm

Daniella Casamento revisits the Rivoli Cinema, one of Camberwell's historic favourites

Daniella Casamento

The Art Deco features of the Rivoli Theatre evoke the glamour of the Golden Age of Hollywood. Originally designed by architects Taylor and Soilleux and built in 1940, the Rivoli Theatre is considered to be 'of architectural, technical and historic significance at the State level' by the National Trust of Australia.

Robin Grow, president of the Art Deco and Modernism Society, describes the Rivoli as "a great example of Art Deco design." The geometry and shapes of the building's façade, the polychromatic banded brickwork and striking vertical fin with red neon sign and canopy signage of individual letters all add to the atmosphere and promise of an evening of entertainment. "The interior was innovative in its design, with the auditorium consisting of two levels, an open-air roof garden, concealed lighting, and an extensive lounge."

Grow describes the Rivoli Theatre as a significant example of Taylor and Soilleux's pioneering work in the field of acoustic engineering. "The Rivoli featured the latest ideas in the management of its acoustics". The theatre is structurally significant because the ceiling and walls of the original auditorium were built independently of the base building. "Perhaps its greatest significance lay in what it represented which was a suburban theatre, in the latest style, with the latest in engineering standards, close to public transport, showing the latest releases and with an attached milk bar."

Village Roadshow understood the historical and social significance of the Rivoli Theatre and the growing popularity and diversity of the Camberwell and Hawthorn area. Prior to undertaking the refurbishment and extension works between 1999 – 2000, the Village Roadshow design team, lead by architect Chris Johnstone, liaised with Grow and ADMS' Heritage Officer, representatives from the City of Boroondara and a heritage consultant. "We were well aware of the unique position the Rivoli occupied in terms of building history as well as in the cinema industry and movie going public."

The late interior designer Tibor Hubay was employed to develop the concept for the refurbishment of the Rivoli following his work on the Jam Factory Village Cinema complex in Chapel Street in the early 1990s. Johnstone explains, "For this most unique of buildings, to implement Tibor's vision, we pulled together a team of architects, specialist heritage and planning

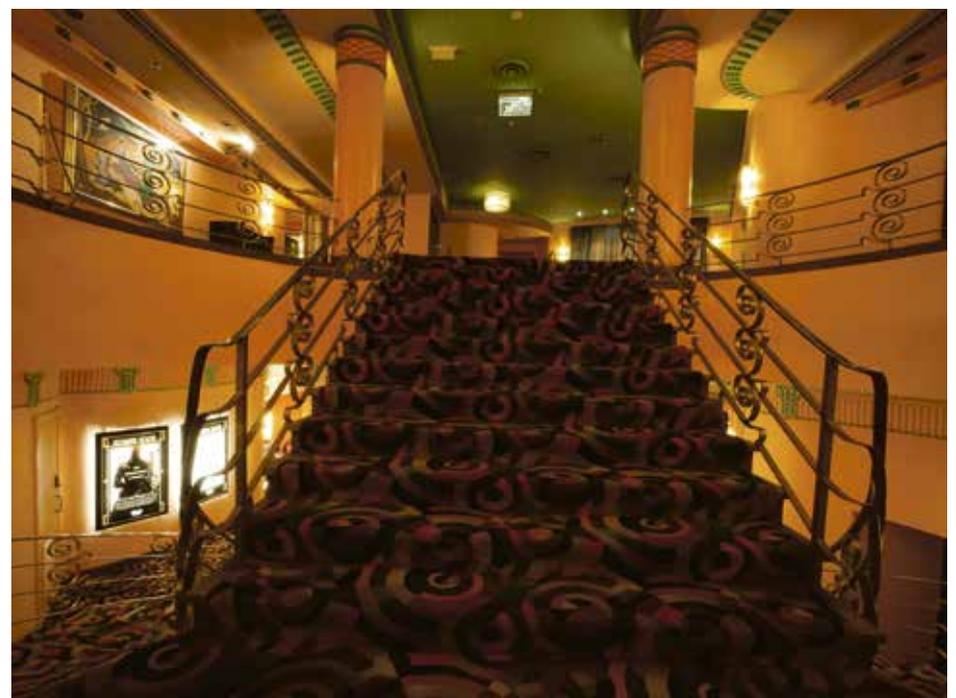


consultants and key stakeholders including directors. To take a building which retained many of the Art Deco era elements, described generally as a combination of Jazz Moderne and Streamlined Moderne, and which was confined on all boundaries and of irregular shape, was the most challenging design project we have been involved with."

Consideration was given to the massing and scale of the extension which combines geometry and shapes of the Art Deco era in a contemporary way. The glazed semi-circular atrium facing the roof top garden softens the elevation and is a reference to the curved brick form on the original facade. The continuation of the horizontal brick pattern works to minimise the bulk of the extension and directs focus to the original building. The orange and cream tiles below the canopy are close to the original tiles in design and colour and replaced brown mosaic tiles which were added in the 1970s.

Of the extensive interior refurbishment Johnstone says, "Extending sympathetically the design elements of the restoration through to the newer development was a unique challenge, restoring and retaining the original building elements was even more difficult." The two level theatre had been divided below the balcony into an upper and lower cinema in 1968 and these were retained as Cinema One and Two.

The most significant interior Art Deco features that were restored include the decorative plaster cornices and plaster wall and ceiling features in Cinema One and the timber veneer balustrade, the grand staircase and polished metal balustrades, light fittings, interior doors with veneer inlay and the



original finishes in the public toilets. The decorative terrazzo floor in the lobby required some restoration and was initially to be carpeted over.

The custom designed carpet on the grand staircase and throughout the theatre was inspired by the work of artist Sonia Delaunay known for her brightly coloured and abstract paintings of the early 1900s. The polished chrome signs at the ticket booth and noticeboard and the veneered entry doors to the new cinemas including the custom door handles and polished chrome stepped architraves are also sympathetic to the Art Deco style.

Colour consultants, trades people and artists provided their skills, preservation and restoration advice on a range of finishes and interior details. Johnstone noted that "it was surprisingly easy to find specialist trades persons to work on the project, as it was such a landmark project that invited attention. Everyone wanted to be involved."

The Rivoli Theatre, located at 200 Camberwell Road, Hawthorn East, remains a popular suburban cinema complex in the retail and commercial hub of Camberwell Junction.