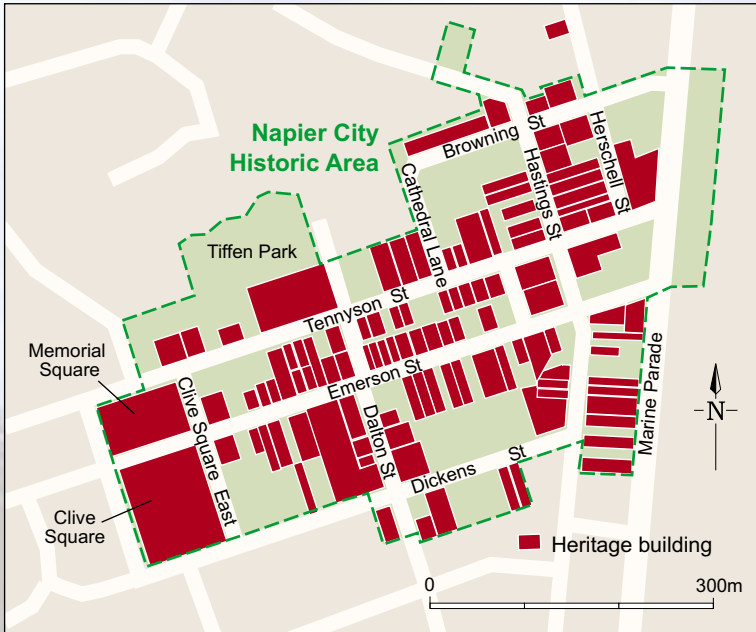


# Napier Art Deco Historic Precinct

## SITE LOCATION

In the Central Business District of the City of Napier, located between the shoreline of Hawke Bay and the coastal margin of the Heretaunga Plains, Hawkes Bay, North Island.

## SITE DESCRIPTION AND HISTORIC BACKGROUND



Napier township was originally surveyed and laid out in the 1850s. Most of the town centre was destroyed on 3 February 1931 by an earthquake (measuring 7.9 on the Richter scale) and the ensuing fires. Over 258 people died (162 in Napier), a 'high proportion of them killed by masonry falling from buildings decorated with overhanging, ornamental parapets and pediments'.<sup>1</sup> With only minor exceptions, the very few buildings which survived in the town centre were of the period 1920-31.

The central business district was reconstructed mainly over the next two years, planning decisions being made by two government-appointed commissioners and an Earthquake Reconstruction Committee.

Napier-based architects formed the Napier Associated Architects to share resources and enhance opportunities for local architects. Today, the centre of Napier City consists almost entirely of buildings and landscaping from this reconstruction period. It has been described by an American architectural historian as 'a tapestry in which all the strands of the modern movement are woven together'.<sup>2</sup>

The area included in the Napier Art Deco Historic Precinct is outlined in the map.

A Napier streetscape.  
*Art Deco Trust*



<sup>1</sup> Peter Shaw and Peter Hallet, *Art Deco Napier: Styles of the Thirties* (second edition), Napier, 1990  
<sup>2</sup> Information from Art Deco Trust submission to ICOMOS NZ, 19 September 1998

## VALUES WHICH MAY JUSTIFY CULTURAL WORLD HERITAGE LISTING



The dome and the Masonic Hotel.  
*Art Deco Trust*

Napier's Art Deco Historic Precinct has outstanding universal value as a 'historic town' because its buildings, architectural ensemble and landscape illustrate a significant period in human history. In particular, it has an architectural ensemble which illustrates:

- Early twentieth-century modernity. Predominantly Art Deco in style, the town incorporates Spanish Mission, Stripped Classical, Prairie School and Chicago style and other designs and elements, largely transmitted to New Zealand through architectural publications (for example, Frank Lloyd Wright's Wasmuth Portfolios).
- Depression era developments. The low relief architectural ornamentation and simple cubic forms of buildings are as much an aesthetic response to the limited resources available for reconstruction, as the damage caused to heavily ornamented colonial buildings.
- The adaptation and indigenous responses of colonial and post-colonial communities. Four buildings in the area incorporate Māori decorative elements, most notably Crichton, McKay and Haughton's Bank of

New Zealand building (1932) and E.A. Williams' premises for Ross and Glendinning.

- The development of twentieth-century seaside resorts as pleasure and recreation destinations (most notably Miami Beach, with which Art Deco Napier has some similarities).
- Collaborative and architecturally coherent responses to rebuilding following natural disaster, particularly earthquakes (for example, Santa Barbara, 1925).
- The building of an entire town centre during the depths of the Great Depression (1932 - 1933), as distinct from construction of a few buildings at either the beginning or the end of the depression.

### AUTHENTICITY AND INTEGRITY ISSUES

Napier's Art Deco Historic Precinct may meet the requirement of authenticity in design, material and workmanship, for few of the buildings have been demolished or unsympathetically modified.

Napier's Art Deco Historic Precinct also meets the requirement for adequate legal protection and management mechanisms to ensure its conservation. The city centre has been registered as a historic area by the New Zealand Historic Places Trust under the Historic Places Act 1993. This provides statutory recognition of the significance of the area. Protection through the Proposed City of Napier District Plan is for individual listed buildings, generally as a 'discretionary' or 'restricted discretionary activity', meaning that the Council has a capacity to decline to grant consent for demolition and modification.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> While the Council has included an Art Deco Quarter in its proposed plan, buildings in the area with no individual listings are not protected. It is understood that the Council is currently investigating expanding protection through a plan change.