

6. Comparative analysis

6.1 INTRODUCTION

When determining what the unique or, at least, special qualities of Napier's Art Deco precinct are, it is useful to make comparisons with other cities possessing similar concentrations of buildings from a comparable period. Because World Heritage, by definition, transcends the value attached to heritage at a purely national level, it is essential to assess a site such as Napier against comparable international examples. In selecting comparative sites to assist in defining the significance of Art Deco Napier, I have focused on three principal themes. These are, in order of importance:

1. Unified urban environments constructed in the third and fourth decades of the 20th century that possess significant numbers of buildings in the Art Deco, Moderne, Spanish Colonial Revival or related styles.
2. Urban environments that possess groups of Art Deco buildings of outstanding architectural quality.
3. Unified urban environments, irrespective of the period in which they were constructed, that resulted from reconstruction following a catastrophic earthquake.

In the past, Napier has been compared with other cities possessing unified townscapes. The most often quoted comparison is that made by Sir Neil Cossons, former head of English Heritage, who stated in 1985 that 'Napier represents the most complete and significant group of Art Deco buildings in the world, and is comparable with Bath as an example of a planned townscape in a coherent style. Napier is, without doubt, unique' (DOC 2006: 17). I have not chosen to follow Sir Neil's lead because I do not feel the comparison with Bath is helpful in defining the distinctive characteristics of Napier. Bath, like other planned cities of the 18th century, developed over a much more extended period of time and its character is defined by a series of large-scale architectural ensembles constructed from local stone of uniform colour that have a scenographic quality that is quite different from the mosaic-like effect created by Napier's much smaller, individual Art Deco buildings. In addition, Bath and other architecturally unified cities such as St Petersburg and the New Town of Edinburgh were designed and built at a time when Classical architecture was universally accepted within European culture as the only appropriate style for building on this scale. Napier, in contrast, was rebuilt during a period when fundamental issues of architectural style were being re-examined and a wide range of stylistic options were available to architects.

Although Napier is quintessentially a 20th-century city, comparisons have not been restricted to the last century, since a deeper understanding of the nature of Napier emerges when the choices made by peoples in the past are juxtaposed with the approach adopted in this New Zealand city.

In the case of both the United Kingdom and Australia, comparisons have been drawn at a national level, rather than focusing on specific towns or cities. While neither of these countries had a significant influence on the development of Art Deco Napier, close relations existed between New Zealand and both the

United Kingdom and Australia. Therefore, some discussion of the adoption of Art Deco in these countries seemed warranted to clarify the position of Napier among cities within the then British Empire.

6.2 SANTA BARBARA, USA

As a Pacific Rim city that suffered a major earthquake in 1925, Santa Barbara, California, provides the closest parallel to the new Napier that was built following the earthquake of 1931. Comparisons between Napier and Santa Barbara were made as early as February 1931 and have continued to be made since that time. The Santa Barbara earthquake, at 6.3 on the Richter scale, was less severe than that suffered by Napier, damage to the city was less extensive and loss of life, at 13, was much smaller.

Prior to the earthquake, the Spanish Colonial Revival style had been widely adopted in Santa Barbara and the neighbouring suburb of Montecito, and there was a widespread acceptance of this as an appropriate regional style as a result of the educational work of the Better Homes Committee and the Plans and Planting branch of the Community Arts Association. The 1925 earthquake provided the opportunity to extend this stylistic unity to the central city, and State Street was rebuilt with strict supervision from the Architectural Review Board set up by the Santa Barbara City Council. This pioneering exercise in architectural design control and the resulting urban landscape of buildings that are unified in scale, style and materials remains unique in the USA. The continued vigilance of the Architectural Review Board has ensured that the unified architectural character of the city has not been eroded (Staats 1990: v).

Santa Barbara's architectural character is usually defined as Spanish Colonial Revival or Mediterranean. This stems from the presence in the city of buildings dating from the Spanish colonial presence in California, in particular the Santa Barbara Mission, founded in 1786. The revival of this style was a means of expressing local identity, as it makes a direct connection with the city's early history. By emphasising a sense of continuity with the earliest buildings constructed in the area by Europeans, the new buildings in the Spanish Colonial Revival style were perceived as belonging to an authentic Californian architectural idiom.



Figure 23. Santa Barbara County Courthouse, Santa Barbara, CA, built 1925–29.

Although central Santa Barbara is remarkably uniform in style, several public buildings stand out, particularly the Public Library (1916–17), the County Court House (1925–29) (Fig. 23), and the Fox Arlington Theatre (1929–31). The scale and wealth of detail lavished on these buildings exceeds anything found in Napier, reflecting the different economic circumstances pertaining in the two cities at the time of reconstruction.

The post-1925 rebuilding of Santa Barbara provided a model for Napier, not

only in terms of the decision to adopt a planning approach that emphasised architectural unity, but also in the identification of Spanish Colonial Revival as one of the contemporary architectural idioms to be employed. There is, however, a fundamental difference between the use of Spanish Colonial Revival in Santa Barbara, where it emphasised historical continuity and regional identity, and in Napier, where it was an imported style that had no connection with the early history or architectural character of the place. Expressions of local identity in Napier's architecture, such as they are, derive mainly from the use of Māori decorative patterns on both the exterior and interior of some of the city's Art Deco buildings.

In summary, Santa Barbara has an architecturally unified urban centre that has been maintained by strict design and appearance controls since 1925. It was, like Napier, reconstructed following an earthquake, but the choice of architectural style is closely related to the history of the place rather than one adopted from elsewhere. Application of a unifying style is more consistent than in Napier and the city possesses buildings that are more architecturally ambitious than those found in Napier. Furthermore, Santa Barbara provided an important model for the rebuilding of Napier, a factor that lessens the individual significance of the New Zealand city.

6.3 MIAMI BEACH, USA

The South Beach section of Miami Beach, Florida, is one of the best-known and probably the largest concentration of Art Deco architecture in the world. The Miami Beach Historic District was added to the United States National Register of Historic Places in 1979 and comprises 960 buildings in an area of 5750 acres. The area includes buildings from the early 20th century, but is marked by a concentration of Art Deco and Streamline Moderne hotels, apartments and houses, concentrated in the areas of Ocean Boulevard and Collins Street. Although there are examples of Art Deco in Miami Beach dating from the 1920s and early 1930s, the boom in construction occurred from 1934 to 1941 to accommodate the surge of winter visitors who flocked to Florida during this period.

Comparisons between Napier and Miami Beach have frequently been made in the past. However, there are significant differences between the two cities. Miami is primarily a resort in which the provision of services for visitors was paramount, whereas Napier is essentially a working town with a full range of building types and functions. The slightly later date of Miami Beach's Art Deco buildings combined with the greater affluence of the United States in comparison with New Zealand in the period from 1931 to 1933 accounts for the more exuberant forms and greater architectural sophistication of Miami's Art Deco architecture. Miami's buildings are both larger in scale and possess more opulent decoration than those of Napier. Miami has many buildings of three storeys or more, including a group of 'sky-scraper' hotels, the Ritz Plaza, Delano and National, all located in Collins Street. As a consequence of the 1931 earthquake, as well as the depressed state of the economy, buildings of more than two storeys are rare in Napier.

When compared with Miami, Napier's Art Deco precinct can be summarised as considerably more modest, confined to a more restricted area and built within a narrower time frame.

6.4 SAN FRANCISCO, USA

Like Napier and Santa Barbara, San Francisco is also a Pacific Rim city that has experienced a devastating earthquake, although this occurred earlier in 1906. San Francisco and the San Francisco Bay area contain outstanding examples of Art Deco architecture dating from the 1920s. These include large office towers, such as Miller and Pflueger's Pacific Telephone Company Building (1926), and the same firm's Paramount Theatre in Oakland (1931). The city also contains important and extensive groupings of smaller scale commercial and residential architecture in the Art Deco style. Concentrations of Art Deco buildings can be found in the mainly residential Pacific Heights area and in the predominantly commercial area south of Market Street.

Probably the most significant area for comparison with Napier is the concentration of buildings in the Marina district, an area of reclaimed land that was redeveloped following the 1915 Pan-Pacific International Exhibition. The area of Chestnut Street between Divisadero and Filmore Streets possesses concentrated groupings of single- and double-storey commercial buildings, while the streets running at right angles to Chestnut Street, clustered around Filmore and Webster Streets, have large numbers of Art Deco apartments (Crowe c. 1995). Although this was not the product of a major natural disaster, as was the case with Napier, the redevelopment of the Marina district of San Francisco from around 1930 to the end of the decade provides a close parallel with what occurred in the New Zealand city.

San Francisco's Marina district provides an important comparison with Napier in terms of scale of development, although it was constructed over a longer time span. It differs in that it includes a high proportion of residential buildings, in contrast with Napier's predominantly commercial architecture. However, it is a district within a large, cosmopolitan city rather than an individual urban centre in its own right, making a direct comparison with Napier more problematic.

6.5 ASMARA, ERITREA

The Eritrean city of Asmara has been compared to Napier, as a city largely built during the 1930s. Constructed as a colonial city during the period of Italian rule in East Africa, Asmara was a planned city of mainly Rationalist, Stripped Classical and Futurist-inspired buildings. Following the termination of Italian colonial rule in 1941, the region stagnated. Only after Eritrea gained independence in 1993 was the architectural and urban significance of Asmara recognised. The city is notable for its wide streets lined with buildings that are strikingly consistent in style and architectural quality. Particularly impressive is the Fiat Service Station, designed by Giuseppe Pettazzi in 1938, with its Futurist central tower and daringly cantilevered canopies. The influence of contemporary Italian design philosophies, which combined a simplified classicism with the sleek lines of modernism, is everywhere apparent. Apart from the use of minimalist classical details, the 1930s buildings of Asmara are virtually without decoration (Denison et al. 2003).

While Napier and Asmara share consistently designed modernist streetscapes, Napier has no buildings of architectural sophistication or structural daring to compare with those found in Asmara. This factor reflects Asmara's status as an assertive statement of Italy's colonial presence in northeast Africa in comparison with Napier's position as a reconstructed provincial city in Depression-era New Zealand. The two cities represent contrasting rather than comparable approaches to contemporary architectural design philosophies. The construction of Asmara was carried out over a longer time span than that of Napier, although the two cities are comparable in the consistency and concentration of their 1930s architecture.

6.6 NEW YORK CITY, USA



Figure 24. Chrysler Building, New York City, NY, built 1930.

In the period before the Wall Street crash of 1929, New York City, and especially mid-town Manhattan, was probably the most influential location for the development of Art Deco architecture in the world. The Chanin building (1927-29) helped to define the new style and William van Allen's Chrysler Building (1930), which was, for a short period, the tallest building in the world, gave it unprecedented visibility (Fig. 24). The Rockefeller Center (1931-40), an innovative exercise in large-scale, corporate urbanism, gave it cultural respectability. Gebhard (1996: 41) argued that 'New York became the undisputed center for the "smart" Art Deco style. The Empire State Building, the Chrysler Building and the Rockefeller Center complex were the style setters of their time and even today our view of the Art Deco conjures up these and other New York monuments of the time'.

New York's canonical Art Deco buildings are, however, embedded within an urban matrix of many different architectural styles. This contrast of styles is epitomised by the juxtaposition of the Beaux Arts New York Public Library (1911) and the adjacent Art Deco tower at 500 Fifth Avenue, a building that is, in turn, contemporaneous with the Empire State Building (1930-31). Buildings such as the Chrysler and Empire State epitomise the wealth and competitive spirit of American corporate capitalism,

while their smaller contemporaries exemplify the optimism and frenetic exuberance of the 'Jazz age'.

In terms of size, architectural innovation and sophistication, decorative richness and invention, New York's Art Deco architecture makes Napier's contemporaneous buildings seem insignificant in comparison. Art Deco buildings were constructed in New York City throughout the 1920s and 1930s, unlike Napier, where building was concentrated in the few years immediately following 1931. These very contrasts, however, serve to accentuate the homogeneity of Art Deco Napier in comparison with New York City.

6.7 LOS ANGELES, USA

According to Gebhard & Winter (1985: 21), 'next to New York City, Los Angeles exhibits, even today, more examples of the Art Deco (Zigzag) Moderne than any other part of the country'. Outstanding buildings such as Bullocks-Wilshire Department Store (1928) and the Pan Pacific Auditorium (1935–38) are among the best-known examples of the style internationally, but the city also boasts a large number of other high-quality buildings that helped to define the style. However, redevelopment has resulted in the loss of some significant examples, including the outstanding Richfield Building (1928–29). Surviving buildings are primarily found as individual structures within the mosaic of the city rather than within areas of concentrated development such as exist in Miami Beach and Napier.

Los Angeles' Art Deco architecture was the product of the city's rapid growth during the 1920s, and although it suffered from economic stagnation in the 1930s, the economic stimulus provided by the entertainment industry, especially film, ensured that there was continuing construction during the 1930s, particularly of cinemas. However, the Art Deco architecture of Los Angeles formed only part of a diverse architectural culture that evolved as part of the normal dynamics of the city's urban development. While, in many ways, Art Deco and the Moderne came to epitomise the Los Angeles of the 1920s and 1930s, the city was too large and too various to be characterised by these styles alone.

As is to be expected in one of the largest cities of the USA, the scale of buildings, opulence of materials and richness of decoration that characterises the Art Deco and Moderne architecture of Los Angeles far exceeds anything to be found in Napier. Chronologically, Los Angeles boasts examples that are significantly earlier than those found in Napier, while construction of Moderne designs extended into the early 1940s, well after the period by which central Napier's reconstruction had come to an end. Unlike Napier or Miami Beach, Los Angeles' Art Deco architecture is scattered across the city, rather than being concentrated in a single precinct. Comparison with Los Angeles, like that with New York City, emphasises the compactness, small scale and consistent character of Napier's Art Deco architecture.

6.8 HAVANA, CUBA

Between the turn of the 20th century and 1929, the Cuban capital of Havana doubled in population from around 250 000 to over 500 000 inhabitants. The city's growth was fuelled by increasing sugar prices, the result of increased consumption stimulated by the First World War. The Art Deco style arrived in Havana in 1927 with José Antonio Mendigütia's design for the Francisco Argüelles house in the suburb of Miramar. By 1930, large office buildings, such as the Edificio Bacardi in Centro Habana, had established the legitimacy of the new style as a reaction against historicism and the Spanish Renaissance style, although leading architects such as Morales y Compañía and Govantes y Cabarrocas designed buildings simultaneously in Art Deco and historical styles (Alonso et al. 2007).

Although Havana possesses outstanding examples of the Art Deco style, these are dispersed across the urban fabric rather than concentrated in a single area, as a result of systematic rebuilding of a particular locale or the construction of new sections of the city. In this regard, Havana's Art Deco has more in common with that of New York City and Los Angeles than with Napier. Thus, while Napier does not possess buildings that can rival the scale, lavish use of materials and rich decoration to be found in Havana, the Cuban city cannot rival the consistent but more modest scale nor the concentration of examples that resulted from the reconstruction of central Napier.

6.9 NOTO, SICILY

The reconstruction of the Sicilian city of Noto following the earthquake of 1693 provides an instructive contrast to the events that unfolded in Napier in 1931. Unlike Napier, Noto was rebuilt on a new site on the coastal plain below the former medieval hilltop town of Noto Antico. The specific reasons for this decision are not recorded. The rebuilt Noto Nuovo presented a marked contrast to the organic form of the former city, with the new city having been planned according to the ideal urban planning concepts of the Baroque period. A grid plan with strong axes and dominant central and secondary piazzas were key features of the new town, and in this pre-modern architectural era there seems to have been no debate over the appropriate architectural style to be used; Noto was rebuilt using the accepted architectural language of the time, the late Baroque. The result was a city of unusually consistent style and form that remains more or less intact to the present day (Tobriner 1982).

Noto's significance as a point of comparison with Napier lies not only in its difference—a post-earthquake reconstruction on a new rather than the original site—but also in its similarities across a time span of over 200 years. In both cities, the decision was made to embrace a new vision of urban form and architectural style rather than recreate the city in its former image, and there is a comparable unity of appearance. Understandably, because of the differences in date of the two cities, the architectural styles of Noto and Napier are entirely different. In human terms, however, Noto illustrates a shared characteristic with Napier—the desire to create a better urban environment in the wake of a natural disaster.

6.10 ART DECO IN THE UNITED KINGDOM AND AUSTRALIA

Prior to the 1930s, New Zealand drew its primary architectural influences from the United Kingdom. Although American architectural influences had had an impact on New Zealand architecture since the 19th century, the reconstruction of Napier was the first occasion when American architectural ideas were adopted on such a large scale, producing an urban environment that was consciously more American than British in its origins. For this reason, it is important to examine Art Deco architecture in the United Kingdom to assess whether any meaningful comparisons can be made with Napier.

Similarly, New Zealand had close architectural relations with Australia during the 19th century, but following Federation in Australia, these links diminished. Because Australia is New Zealand's nearest neighbour, it is worth assessing Art Deco in Australia to determine the extent to which developments there can be compared with Napier.

6.10.1 United Kingdom

The relatively slow acceptance of Art Deco in British architecture in the 1930s is of significance for New Zealand, insofar as the ready acceptance of the new decorative vocabulary that occurred in Napier following the 1931 earthquake represents a marked shift in this country's acceptance of the USA as the trend setter for cultural, and especially architectural, influences. Widely seen as the most progressive, technologically sophisticated and up-to-date society in the world, the USA began to eclipse the UK as a source of architectural and design ideas during the 1930s (McEwan 2001). Examples of Art Deco in British architecture are limited to relatively few, prominent examples, the best known of which is Wallis, Gilbert and Partners' Hoover factory, London (1931-32). The limited penetration of Art Deco in Britain is reflected in the complete absence of any discussion of Art Deco architecture in the landmark 1979 Arts Council exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, *Thirties: British art and design before the war* (Arts Council of Great Britain 1979), although a number of buildings that would now be considered to be Art Deco in style were included.

The most significant British examples of Art Deco are often interiors, frequently cited examples being Owen Williams' foyer of the Daily Express Building (1932) and Oliver Bernard's foyer of the Strand Palace Hotel (1930-31), now in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum (Benton et al. 2003). A concentration of 1930s buildings can be found on the south coast of England in the vicinity of Brighton, but Art Deco buildings by no means dominate, and many of the most notable buildings of the period, such as Embassy Court in Brighton (1934) and the De La Warr Pavilion in Bexhill-on-Sea (1935), are Modernist rather than Art Deco, although they are sometimes included within a very broad definition of Art Deco. Most of the buildings in this area post date those to be found in Napier.

British Art Deco is distinguished from Napier's Art Deco by its differences rather than its similarities. British examples are primarily isolated structures that are larger in scale with more elaborate decorative programmes than are to be found in Napier. This contrast is highlighted by comparing the modesty of the Napier Daily Telegraph building with the sleek sophistication of London's Daily Express building. Whereas the Daily Telegraph stands out among its smaller scale Art Deco neighbours in Napier, the Daily Express is an isolated example of Art Deco in the City of London. Comparisons with British Art Deco confirm the fact that Napier's architecture drew its inspiration from American rather than British sources. No British city possesses an area of focused 1930s architecture that can be directly compared with Napier.

6.10.2 Australia

As Lumby has pointed out, Art Deco had its greatest impact on Australian architecture in the later part of the 1930s, as building activity recovered following the worst effects of the Depression in the early part of the decade (van Daele & Lumby 1997). Early manifestations of the style can be found from the late 1920s, the building most often cited being the ANZAC Memorial (1929-34) in Hyde Park South, Sydney, which was designed by the architect C. Bruce Dellit in conjunction with the sculptor Rayner Hoff (van Daele & Lumby 1997; Ferson & Nilsson 2001) (Fig. 25).

Australia possesses a number of high-quality Art Deco buildings, such as Emil Sodersten's CML Building (1936) in Sydney (again with sculpture by Hoff), and it



Figure 25. ANZAC Memorial, Hyde Park South, Sydney, built 1929-34.

has been suggested that the Sydney Harbour Bridge is also an expression of Art Deco, both on account of the sculptural modelling of its piers and through its role as a symbol of the 'triumph and optimism of modern technology' between the wars (van Daele & Lumby 1997: 154). Also of outstanding significance is the Capitol Theatre, Melbourne (1924), designed by the architect Walter Burley Griffin. Although the building has been significantly modified and the description of it as Art Deco is contentious, its cubistic and crystalline decorative programme certainly has much in common with the spirit of Art Deco.

Nevertheless, as Menz has acknowledged, 'architectural essays in Art Deco in Australia were limited to individual buildings, notably cinemas, office buildings, department stores and hotels, where it was important to project an image of modernity' (Menz in Benton et al. 2003: 416).

Although there are individual Art Deco buildings of significance in Australia, there is no concentrated urban area of buildings in Art Deco or related styles to compare with the Art Deco precinct of Napier. However, none of Napier's individual buildings can compare in scale, architectural sophistication or richness of materials employed with those found in Australia.

6.11 SUMMARY OF COMPARATIVE EVALUATION

A comparative evaluation of Napier's Art Deco precinct indicates that a range of visually unified urban environments can be found internationally that are either slightly earlier than or of a similar date to Napier. Santa Barbara presents an extensive, highly consistent townscape in a different architectural style, but one particularly suited to its history and location. Miami Beach contains a much larger precinct of Art Deco buildings that are both larger and more richly decorated than those of Napier, although, on the whole, of a slightly later date. San Francisco also possesses, in its Marina district, an extended area of Art Deco buildings, although that area has a higher proportion of residential buildings when compared with the predominantly commercial nature of the Napier precinct. The city of Asmara, although slightly later in its development than Napier, has buildings that are more overtly Rationalist and Modernist in style, and the overall architectural aspirations of the city are more ambitious.

In comparison with cities such as New York City, Los Angeles or Havana, which contain Art Deco buildings that helped to define the style or are regarded as canonical examples of Art Deco architecture, Napier is architecturally undistinguished. What those cities do not possess is the localised concentration of Art Deco buildings that can be found in Napier.

As a city destroyed by earthquake and rapidly reconstructed on an improved plan in the architectural idiom of the time, Napier is not unique, as the example of Noto demonstrates. Unlike Noto, which was reconstructed on a new site with a radically different plan, Napier was rebuilt on its original site with a modified and improved plan. In this regard, Napier can be considered as a less radical response to destruction by earthquake than that seen at Noto.

When compared with the United Kingdom, the traditional source of New Zealand's architectural influences, Napier illustrates a more thorough response to Art Deco than can be found in that country. The decision of Napier's architects to embrace American sources and ideas marks a significant shift in New Zealand architectural history. The response by New Zealand's nearest neighbour, Australia, to Art Deco is marked by a concentration of large scale, often monumental structures, rather than the modest structures to be found in Napier.

In adopting Art Deco, Napier was following a lead already established in major metropolitan centres in the USA and elsewhere, but in the context of the spread of Art Deco, Napier's buildings belong to the early phase of the style's international dissemination. Napier's remoteness from centres of architectural innovation emphasises the precociousness of this response. By rejecting the dominant British architectural culture that had shaped the city destroyed by the earthquake, Napier's architects were also expressing their independence from the past. By celebrating newness and Americanness, Napier was, implicitly, celebrating its New Zealandness. By adapting indigenous Māori motifs to fit the decorative vocabulary of Art Deco, Napier's architects further emphasised the relevance of the new style.

As a city reconstructed on its original site following a major earthquake employing a consistent, forward-looking architectural language, Napier is a significant example of 20th-century urban reconstruction. Its utilisation of Art Deco, while never aspiring to outstanding architectural quality, nevertheless attained a level

of modest consistency, with a number of buildings, such as the Daily Telegraph and the AMP buildings, rising to a higher level of achievement. Built at a time of severe economic hardship and in the wake of massive destruction and loss of life, Napier's Art Deco architecture symbolises the resilience, courage and faith in the future of the city's inhabitants, alongside the values more usually associated with Art Deco: stylishness, decorativeness, exoticness, technological sophistication and consumerism.

International comparisons indicate that, although there are many examples of more significant Art Deco buildings to be found in the world, and there are unified townscapes of a similar period, none possess the same combination of attributes as Napier.

7. World Heritage values of the site

The reconstruction of Napier following the 1931 earthquake was more than simply an achievement of architectural design and construction logistics. It represented a triumph of human courage and resilience in the face of severe adversity, a desire to look towards the future with optimism and the belief that a better world could be created from the ruins of the old. It also represented a significant shift in the world view of the city's citizens, away from a dependence on British culture and towards the modernity and exuberance of American design.

Within just over a month from the date of the earthquake, Napier's first temporary building had been opened, and by the end of July 1931 a reconstruction committee had been formed to address issues of building design and town planning. The initial hope that Napier could achieve the kind of stylistic consistency that Santa Barbara had attained following the earthquake of 1925 was frustrated by the financial constraints imposed by the depressed economy. However, the resulting mix of contemporary styles, now subsumed under the term Art Deco, produced streetscapes in which the distinctiveness of individual buildings was subservient to an overall unity that resulted from the use of reinforced concrete construction, the imposition of height limits, standardised veranda heights, a proscription on overhanging decorative elements and a commitment to contemporary architectural imagery.

As a provincial town in a country remote from centres of artistic innovation, it is hardly surprising that Napier was not rebuilt in the emerging Modernist style, even though the ruined city presented the kind of *tabula rasa* that Modern Movement architects sought. Napier's reconstruction was driven, however, as much by pragmatic goals of what was possible in the time and with the resources available, as by a desire to create a forward-looking, aesthetically pleasing, modern city. In such an environment, the utopian principles that underpinned the ideology of architectural Modernism would have found little place, even if the architects of Napier had been aware of them.

The human significance of Napier is summed up by the phrase written on the New Napier Arch on Marine Parade, built following the earthquake to the design of the Napier Borough Council Architect, J.T. Watson. The attic storey of this triumphal arch bears the inscription, 'Courage is the thing: all goes if courage goes' (Fig. 26). This phrase sustained the city's citizens during Napier's darkest hours. Paradoxically, in a city that was celebrating its newness, the designer of the arch turned to the timeless language of classicism, although in a simplified and abstracted form. The arch itself celebrates triumph over adversity as well as the enduring nature of human courage and perseverance. Over and above its architectural, aesthetic and urban values, the rebuilding of Napier is an enduring expression of these fundamental human values.

Figure 26. New Napier Arch and Colonnade, Marine Parade.



7.1 RELEVANT WORLD HERITAGE CRITERIA FOR OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE

Section 49 of the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention (UNESCO 2008) defines Outstanding Universal Value as *cultural and/or natural significance which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity. As such, the permanent protection of this heritage is of the highest importance to the international community as a whole.* This is a stringent and demanding test, and sites must meet at least one of five more specific criteria as set out in section 77. Criterion vi carries the caveat that this criterion will usually be applied in conjunction with one or other of the previous five criteria. In addition, sites must meet the standards of authenticity (sections 79-86) and integrity (sections 87-89) already discussed in section 5 above.

i To represent a masterpiece of human creative genius.

The Art Deco architecture of Napier is modest in its aspirations and was constructed rapidly under severe cost constraints. Although some buildings, such as the former Daily Telegraph and Bank of New Zealand buildings, stand out from the background of Napier's townscape, neither singly nor collectively can the city's buildings be regarded as works of *creative genius* and therefore criterion i is not applicable.

ii to exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town planning or landscape design.

Napier illustrates the very rapid adoption of a new architectural style in the period immediately following the 1931 earthquake. While Napier's architecture of the preceding decade was marked by a number of buildings that looked towards future developments, in particular those designed by Louis Hay, such as the Napier Fire Station, other pre-earthquake buildings had more conservative designs. The monumental classicism of the Public Trust building, the stripped classical design of the Napier Post Office, and the Gothic Revival idiom of the Anglican Diocesan Office and Synod Hall were all backward looking in style.

Following the earthquake, Napier architects looked resolutely forward by adopting contemporary styles. Even the Spanish Colonial Revival style, which could be considered backward looking when utilised in California, had the effect of representing contemporary California when utilised in New Zealand. The exclusive use of reinforced concrete for building construction, although by no means innovative from a technological point of view, was progressive in the sense that the entire commercial district of Napier was rebuilt in what was still considered a 'new' material. By widening streets, faceting the corners of buildings to emphasise intersections and placing services underground, Napier also adopted progressive planning ideas, although these were essentially refinements to the existing urban form rather than a complete reworking of it.

The elevation of land along Marine Parade allowed the city to redefine its relationship with the sea, with the creation of a promenade, soundshell and other amenities, transforming Napier into a modern seaside resort. The rebuilding of Napier thus went well beyond addressing the utilitarian needs of the local population. It created an aesthetically unified urban environment of up-to-date design that referenced indigenous artistic traditions by drawing inspiration from Māori art, and it included buildings and amenities essential to human fulfilment, including a theatre for the performing arts, a museum for the preservation of memory, the Marine Parade promenade for recreational opportunities, and churches, including St John's Anglican Cathedral, to meet spiritual needs.

The unified, modern form of Napier, assimilated from contemporary sources in North America, represents an *important interchange of human values* in the area of *architecture... [and] town planning*, but it is difficult to argue that this is **so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries** as required by Section 49, since this kind of interchange is continually occurring as architectural influences and ideas are transmitted around the world.

Furthermore, as primarily a decorative approach to architecture, the Art Deco style did not, in itself, represent a well-defined body of ideas or values in the way that the contemporaneous Modern Movement did.

What is unusual in Napier's case is the rapidity and the completeness of the city's reconstruction following a cataclysmic disaster. However, a similar reconstruction took place in Santa Barbara in the previous decade, suggesting that such a response in itself was not unusual. Technologically, the buildings constructed in Napier after 1931 utilised known building techniques and their small scale did not pose design challenges.

iii to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared.

This criterion is not relevant to Art Deco Napier.

iv to be an outstanding example of a type of a building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history.

The reconstruction of the entire urban centre of Napier, which commenced in 1931 and was mainly completed within 2 years, created an extended and unified urban environment of buildings in an up-to-date modern idiom, although opinions will differ on how progressive the modern character of Art Deco Napier actually was. Because of the limited amount of construction occurring at this time as a result of world-wide economic depression, Napier is highly unusual, if not unique, as an expression of one aspect of the architecture of its time. The modernity of Napier is reflected primarily in the use of modern materials and the extensive use of applied decoration in Art Deco and related styles. In contemporary terms, this represented a conservative architectural approach towards creating a modern style, by changing the vocabulary of decoration rather than creating an architectural language that symbolised the machine age by avoiding decoration altogether, as advocated by contemporary European modernist architects. Nevertheless, as an example of an integrated townscape in the Art Deco style, Napier is significant, but because of the modesty of the buildings themselves it is difficult to argue that it meets the over-arching criterion of being *outstanding* as required by criterion iv.

v to be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures) or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change.

This criterion is not relevant to Art Deco Napier.

vi to be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. (The Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria.)

Napier is associated with two events of major significance, one national, although with international reverberations, and the second international. First, at a national level, the Napier earthquake was a human disaster of major significance and was reported around the world. It formed a watershed in

national attitudes towards building construction and resulted in a fundamental re-examination of building standards and codes. (A similar process had occurred in the United States following the 1925 California earthquake.) As a result, new legislation defined standards for building construction to ensure that an earthquake in New Zealand would never again cause such extensive loss of life, although the effects of economic depression hampered the implementation of these codes.

This rethinking of building standards coincided with the emergence of new techniques for analysing the structures of buildings, paving the way for a new, scientific approach to seismic engineering and a process of ongoing revision of earthquake-resistant building codes. New Zealand has subsequently become a world leader in this field of research and engineering. The Napier earthquake can potentially be seen as the catalyst for the development of these ideas, but further specialist investigation is required to determine whether this can be regarded as having *outstanding universal significance*. In my view, this dimension of the Napier earthquake is clearly of more than national significance. If it can be demonstrated by experts in the field of seismic engineering that the Napier earthquake was a seminal event in stimulating the development of modern seismic engineering, this could be one of Napier's strongest claims to World Heritage status.

Second, the rebuilding of Napier in a contemporary style during the early 1930s, at a time when construction was restricted to isolated buildings in most cities around the world, resulted in an unparalleled concentration of architecture representative of the Depression era. Although the modest scale and low-relief decoration of Napier's buildings was a direct response to the dangers created by falling masonry during the earthquake, its dynamism, abstraction and use of colour celebrated modernity and faith in the future. The extent to which this architecture can be correlated with the progressive political, social and cultural ideas of the time is, however, less certain. The small-scale and unassuming character of Napier's Art Deco buildings are a product of both the time of their construction and the character of the town itself, a provincial centre within a small, remote and still sparsely populated country. The formative ideas that shaped the architecture of Napier were, however, derived from elsewhere, making it difficult to argue that the particular expression of these ideas found in Napier is *of outstanding human significance*.

Unlike the contemporaneous Modern Movement, Art Deco was not underpinned by a broadly based design philosophy and was only defined retrospectively as a distinct style. There is little evidence to suggest that the Art Deco style aimed at being anything more than a visually pleasing expression of contemporary culture. As a populist, commercial and short-lived style, Art Deco was conceptually unsophisticated and had little long-term impact on architecture in comparison with the profound changes brought about by 20th-century Modernism. These limitations suggest that neither Art Deco as an artistic movement, nor the particular local manifestation of the style to be found in Napier, can be regarded as *of outstanding universal significance* in terms of criterion vi.

7.2 CONCLUSION

Taking into account the specific requirements of criteria i-vi for assessing Outstanding Universal Value, alongside the criteria for authenticity and integrity set out in Sections 79–89 of the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, Art Deco Napier does not, in my view, sufficiently meet the high test of being *so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity*, as defined in Section 49. Further research, particularly with regard to the issue of seismic engineering, may reveal intangible heritage values of the site that have not been recognised so far.

Although Art Deco has achieved widespread popular recognition as a style in both architecture and the decorative arts, this has not been matched by a corresponding recognition that it has had a more fundamental impact on the art and architecture of the 20th century. This makes it difficult to claim that Art Deco itself is of *outstanding universal value*. Napier's Art Deco precinct has a strong claim to international significance as a unified townscape of early 1930s buildings, but the very modesty of its buildings presents an impediment to World Heritage consideration. Neither collectively nor individually can any of Napier's buildings be considered of sufficient architectural distinction to have *outstanding universal value*. Napier's architects were followers of architectural ideas generated elsewhere and, with the exception of the introduction of Māori motifs into the vocabulary of Art Deco design, did not contribute anything original to the development of the style. A more persuasive argument for World Heritage status might have been mounted if the entire site had remained unmodified since the 1930s, but incremental changes, including the construction of multi-storey buildings that are out of scale with the original townscape, have eroded its integrity.

Evolving international perceptions of Art Deco may, in the future, create an environment that is more receptive to consideration of Napier's Art Deco precinct as part of a serial site that incorporates buildings from the wider Hawke's Bay area as well as other buildings within Napier itself. Every effort should therefore be made to ensure that the architectural and townscape heritage values of Napier and its surrounding region are protected, maintained and enhanced. This should be done, furthermore, because the city's Art Deco heritage is of great importance at both a local and national level. There can be no better reason for protecting Napier's Art Deco heritage than the fact that it is, first and foremost, of outstanding value to all New Zealanders.

8. Acknowledgements

In preparing this report, I have received valuable assistance from a number of individuals. I would like to thank, in particular, Robert McGregor, former director of the Napier Art Deco Trust, for his hospitality during my visit to Napier in 2008 and for showing me parts of the city's Art Deco heritage that I would never have found on my own. I am also grateful to the Mayor of Napier, Barbara Arnott, for taking time to discuss the issues relating to the future of the Art Deco precinct with me, and the staff of the Planning Department of Napier City for providing me with a copy of the Council's Art Deco Inventory. A research grant from the School of Humanities, University of Canterbury, provided me with relief from teaching duties at a critical time during the final stages of completing this report.

I am also grateful to the two anonymous readers who provided valuable comments on an initial draft of this report, and to Paul Mahoney of DOC, for his helpful suggestions. Amanda Todd's contribution as editor has been invaluable. I am also grateful to Kevin Jones, formerly of DOC's Head Office, whose initial approach led to the invitation to prepare this report.

Funding for this research was provided by the Department of Conservation (Science Investigation No. 3970).

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Is Napier's Art Deco precinct of Outstanding Universal Value?

In 2006, Napier was included on the New Zealand Tentative List of cultural and natural sites for consideration for World Heritage Status. This report assesses Napier's Art Deco precinct against the criteria used to evaluate potential World Heritage sites, and compares the city with international sites that possess similar or related heritage values. It is concluded that Napier's heritage value does not meet the stringent requirement of World Heritage sites. However, Napier's Art Deco heritage is of outstanding value to all New Zealanders, and should be protected for this reason.

Lochhead, I. 2011: Art Deco Napier: an assessment of Outstanding Universal Value for the New Zealand World Heritage Tentative List. *Science for Conservation* 310. 40 p.