



National Trust of Australia (Victoria)

Facadism Discussion Paper 2023



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Cover image: Former row of shops now the Swinburne Advanced Manufacturing & Design Centre, Swinburne University, Burwood Road Hawthorn, 2013 Peter Garnick.
Right image: Labassa entrance.

Obtaining independent legal advice

This publication is intended only to provide a summary and general overview of relevant matters. It is not intended to be comprehensive nor does it constitute legal advice. While care has been taken to ensure the content is current, we do not guarantee its currency. You should seek legal or other professional advice before acting or relying on any of the content. Produced and published by the National Trust of Australia (Victoria)

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About the National Trust of Australia (Victoria)

The National Trust of Australia (Victoria) (National Trust) is the state's leading independent heritage advocacy organisation. We advocate for the recognition, protection, and celebration of our diverse natural, cultural, social, and Indigenous heritage in our cities and regions.

The National Trust's vision is for our diverse heritage to be protected and respected, contributing to strong, vibrant and prosperous communities.

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Left image: Waller house collection. Right image: NTV's involvement in saving the Curtin Hotel. Bottom image: Rippon Lea mansion, by Simon Fazio.

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Victoria and recognise their continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures; and to Elders past and present.



Introduction

The National Trust, as a matter of principle, does not support facadism as an acceptable heritage practice.

In the last 15 years, there has been an increase in the number of redevelopments which only retain the external faces of a heritage building while demolishing the remainder. This has resulted in the unacceptable loss of significant heritage places.

This discussion paper aims to build awareness and understanding of why facadism is an unacceptable heritage practice, and to provide clear guidance for planners, developers, tradespeople, and property owners to avoid facadism. By doing so, we hope that any proposed changes to our heritage places will ensure the ongoing protection, promotion, and celebration of their unique heritage values.

What is Facadism?

Facadism is defined as the superficial retention of only the exterior face(s) of a building and the demolition of the remainder.

Why is Facadism an issue?

Demolishing everything but the external face(s) of a building removes all evidence of how a building was used, its layout and arrangement, and the methods and materials of its construction – all of the things that made that building a lived place.

The National Trust strongly believes that the heritage significance of a place is associated with that place as a whole. It is evident in the bricks and mortar, but also in its internal spaces, which provide evidence of its former use and story. It does not rest only in the facade, even if this may appear to be a building's most notable feature from the street level.

If everything but the facade of a building has been demolished, it is no longer a building, and most of its heritage significance has been lost. Facadism should therefore not be considered an acceptable heritage outcome in the redevelopment of a heritage place.

Furthermore, this loss of significance cannot be mitigated through a token setback of a new development only a few metres from the facade. Enough original fabric must be retained to ensure that the heritage place can be appreciated and understood.



The Former Victoria Car Park (1938) in Little Collins Street was included on the Victorian Heritage Register in 2002 for its historical significance as the first multi-storey commercial car park in Melbourne.

Now, only the facade has been retained. The lower floor levels and concrete ramps have been removed. These physical elements contributed to an understanding of the place's former use as commercial car park, and its importance in the history of motoring in Victoria.

Image by Rohan Storey.



Victorian shop, 599 Swanston St, Carlton, 2019.

Image by Rohan Storey.



Former Pfeiffer Engineering factory/warehouse (c.1920) Argyle Street, Fitzroy, 2019.

Image courtesy of REA Group.

How did we get here?

In Victoria, the debate over facadism began in the 1970s, when heritage protection was sought for whole streetscapes in addition to individual places. This form of protection aimed to recognise the aesthetic and historic significance that groups of buildings contribute to the broader urban context. This was particularly an issue in the Melbourne CBD, where redevelopment pressure was increasing. As a result, some developers sought to retain only the facade of a building so that a new development, usually in the form of a high-rise building, could be constructed behind the facade.

In 1978, the National Trust published the *Collins Street Report* which stated that if a city building was primarily important for its streetscape value, the depth of at least one or two rooms (approximately 10m) should be retained. It also stated that if a new development was to be constructed higher than the original facade, it must be set back even further.

At this time, the National Trust adopted a general policy that facadism was not an acceptable heritage practice, and strongly objected to development proposals which would result in facadism. Examples included the infamous preservation of the facade of the Ackmans Department Store at 243-247 Smith Street, Fitzroy, to make way for a supermarket in the 1980s. The facade now stands propped up above the supermarket, concealing the above ground carpark behind it. In 1987, only the facades of the former Strachan, Murray & Shannon Woolstore and the Electricity Lighting and Traction Co. buildings in Geelong were retained, to make way for a shopping centre.

In other cases, developers agreed to retain at least 10m of a building when undertaking a new development, as envisioned in the *Collins Street Report*. A high-profile example of this was the construction of an office tower at No. 1 Collins Street from 1981-1984. The new building was designed by the emerging firm Denton Corker Marshall and was set back behind the retained frontages of the Victorian terraces at 5-7 and 9 Collins Street, and the 1877 Campbell House on the corner of Spring and Collins Streets.

The 1980s saw an increase in protection for heritage precincts and streetscapes across inner Melbourne, particularly for residential terrace houses in suburbs such as Carlton, Fitzroy, and South Melbourne. As gentrification increased in the inner city, it became almost standard practice to retain only the front portion, usually the depth of two rooms, and demolish the rear wings, to allow for modern extensions. In 1987, the Australian Heritage Commission adopted a policy on facadism, which formed the basis for a National Trust policy adopted in 1992. The National Trust policy identified facadism as a political compromise between demolition and preservation, and considered the practice to be a final attempt to retain a fraction of the heritage significance of the building. The policy concluded that facadism was not a conservation process. In 2001, The National Trust revised its policy to provide more detailed guidance on how much of a building should be retained, and how high or far back a new development should be. At this time, retaining only the facade was relatively rare.

From 1996 to 1999, the 'New format' planning schemes were introduced based on the updated Victorian Planning Provisions (VPP). This update introduced Overlays into the planning scheme, such as the Heritage Overlay (HO). The HO is applied to places which are included in the 'Schedule



Melbourne's first Telephone Exchange was built in Wills Street in 1884. In 2002, a planning permit was issued allowing the demolition of all but the facade of this building, and about 12m of side wall. It permitted the construction of a tower, setback only 3.5m behind the facade, the creation of a cut-out in the facade, and the construction of new floor levels. This was among the first of many similar examples of facadism that the City of Melbourne approved at this time.

Image by Rohan Storey

to the Heritage Overlay', and within the schedule, local government can note if the HO applies to significant interior fabric. While at the time this was considered to be a positive move, identification and protection for interiors has rarely been applied under the HO, and the planning scheme has instead contributed to uncertainty regarding what is actually protected.

Because significant interiors are not usually identified under the HO, property owners, developers, and even planners, have increasingly misinterpreted this control to mean that *only* the exterior is protected, meaning complete demolition of all but the exterior walls are seen as 'allowed'. This appears to have contributed to the increase in cases of facadism across Victoria which we see today.

Facadism in other cities

First emerging in the 1980s as a by-product of the surge in urban redevelopment around the world, facadism has become an increasingly common phenomenon. This is despite the considerable disquiet around this approach, with most heritage professionals decrying the practice.

Facadism has usually been permitted by planning regimes as an unhappy compromise between conservation and development. The public is often appalled by the results, though the sentiment that 'something is better than nothing' is common. It is rarely specifically banned, but some regimes tend toward the preservation of the whole building rather than just a facade; this is the case in New York, and Sydney, which was once littered with examples from the 1980s, but where the practice of facadism is now rare. Perth has a number of shocking examples, but practice is improving, while in Brisbane often only facades are retained, although usually handled sensitively.



Toronto Stock Exchange, developed into office tower in 1992.

Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.



St George's Hall in Perth (1879), demolished in the 1980s and the District Court Building was constructed behind the facade in 2008.

Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Overseas, Canada has tended to accept facadism ('facadectomy') as a given, with Toronto possibly sporting the most egregious examples, and arguably the largest number in the world. In Washington DC, facadism compromises mean large office buildings loom above whole blocks of row-house frontages.

The UK has a number of terrible examples, many in London, all the result of local authorities seeking a compromise, but most in recent years these have been treated more sensitively, such that the retention of only a facade is not apparent. This is usually how facadism is handled in other European cities, including Paris and Madrid, while Belgium is notorious within Europe for both the number and insensitivity of examples.

If Facadism isn't acceptable, how much should be retained?

In the first instance, the aim should be to retain as much significant heritage fabric as possible, and any changes to a heritage place must be guided by an understanding of its assessed values.

Heritage conservation and management in Australia is guided by *The Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance* (Burra Charter). The Burra Charter was first adopted in 1979 and has undergone several revisions as our understanding of cultural heritage theory and practice has developed and changed.

According to the Burra Charter, an understanding of a place's heritage significance must be established prior to making decisions regarding its management. While heritage fabric can be changed or altered, it must not result in the loss of any identified heritage values.

While many buildings may be identified as significant for their architectural or aesthetic values, these values are not solely reflected in the facade. They are reflected in the building as a whole place. For example, internal decorative features can demonstrate styles and design trends, room arrangements indicate former use and history, and construction materials provide evidence of how and when it was built. These features add depth and understanding of the significance of a place. Therefore, permanent changes must not be made without thorough consideration for how all identified heritage values will be impacted.

Local Government Heritage Policy

Local Councils in Victoria have a responsibility under the *Planning and Environment Act (1987)* to protect heritage places within their municipality through the application of the HO in the Planning Scheme.

Local Council Planning Schemes usually also include a heritage policy which provides guidance on making changes to a property covered by a HO. This includes applications to demolish or partially demolish a place, or to build an extension or addition.

In recent years, some Councils have revised their heritage policies to specifically deter facadism, however these revisions have generally lacked clear and detailed guidelines. While a policy may specify the retention of the 'three-dimensional form', this has often resulted in keeping only the facade and a small portion of the side walls, which only serves to achieve the appearance of the three-dimensional form.

Some policies specify that a new development must retain the depth of two rooms. While this has previously been a practical guide for most Victorian or Edwardian homes, it is less useful for other types of places such as pubs and hotels or former industrial and commercial buildings. There is also a lack of guidance regarding how new developments should respond to the retained heritage building in terms of scale, bulk, setbacks, and materiality.

We are now seeing a huge rise in the number of applications for new developments affecting these types of places. These new developments are often for large scale residential apartment projects, and it is clear that there is an urgent need to provide detailed guidelines to avoid facadism.

National Trust of Australia (Victoria) Guidelines & Policy



The following guidelines outline the National Trust's recommended minimum retention requirements for the redevelopment of a heritage place. As noted above, a comprehensive assessment of the place's heritage significance must also be undertaken prior to making any decisions.

Terrace houses and shops

Terrace houses typically consist of a front section that is at least two rooms in depth, and sometimes includes stairs. Shops may be 10 or more meters in depth, with a narrower rear wing behind.

The rear wings can generally be demolished while retaining the front section of at least two rooms, or at least 10m in depth for shops.

For places that are on a corner where the rear wing is built on the street boundary and forms part of the streetscape, the whole building should be retained.

Detached houses

The front of a detached house is typically defined by the main roof form. In some circumstances, a house may have more than one primary roof form. Retention of all primary roof forms is strongly preferred.

Some houses have more complex plans and roof forms, including a return verandah, projecting side bays, or more than one significant elevation. In these cases, a larger area should be retained.

In the case of larger houses, such as mansions and homestead complexes, the whole building should be retained.

Pubs and Hotels

Pubs and hotels can often be the most prominent historical building in their urban streetscapes. They are often located on street corners and are two or more storeys high.

While the interior of many pubs and hotels have been substantially altered at the ground level, they often retain beams and wall sections illustrating the original room layout, and usually a staircase up to the typically unaltered bedrooms.

At the very minimum, the main roof structure, and sufficient fabric to identify the original internal layout should be retained.

Multi-storey office buildings

Historic multi-storey office buildings include internal spaces such as foyers, corridors, and stairs which are essential to understand their significance, and so retention of the whole building is strongly preferred.

Public buildings

Public building, such as churches, schools, court houses, theatres, cinemas, and hospitals generally include internal spaces and arrangements that are essential to understand their significance.

These places should be retained in their entirety and new spaces can be achieved through sensitively designed additions.

Industrial Sites

Small industrial buildings

Small industrial buildings, such as warehouses, are often simply four walls and a roof, supported by trusses or beams, with a more elaborate front wall.

At least one full structural bay, with roof cladding, or at least 10 metres in depth, whichever is greater, should be retained. Any visible sidewalls should also be retained.

Large industrial buildings

Though similar to a small industrial building, the amount retained should reflect the original size of the building.

At least 30% of the depth of the building should be retained. This may represent two structural bays, with roof cladding.

Where the building is on a street corner, or where a side is visible, the whole of the side wall and at least a 10m depth should also be retained.

Often there is a separate front office portion, which should also be retained.

Large industrial complexes

A heritage assessment should be undertaken to identify major phases of development and significant features which explain the sites' function, such as silos and chimneys. All significant features should be retained.

If there is a large main factory area, with most external walls visible, it is strongly preferred that this be completely retained to allow a meaningful understanding of the place's former function.

Large multi-story industrial buildings

If located in a low-density area where the whole building is visible, it is likely to be a local landmark, and the retention of only a part would destroy this significance. Retention of the whole exterior and a large portion of the interior structure is strongly preferred.

If located in denser urban locations where the bulk of the building is not readily visible, at least 30% of the depth of the building should be retained. This may represent two structural bays and roof cladding, whichever is greater.

Apartment buildings

While rare, there have been instances where older apartment buildings have been facaded, resulting in the loss of room arrangements, common stairs, and lobbies. It is strongly preferred that apartment buildings remain intact, including significant internal arrangements and common spaces.

Modernist places

Modernist places, from houses and office blocks to showrooms and factories, were often designed 'in the round', with as much attention to the sides and rear as the front. These designs were also often open plans rather than cellular rooms. Such places do not have a front section which can be retained and rear that can be altered, therefore it is strongly recommended that the complete place is retained. New spaces can be achieved through sensitively designed additions.

How should a new development respond to the retained heritage building?

The new development should be substantially set back behind the retained building, and be able to be read as a separate building in the urban context. The new development must maintain the prominence of the retained heritage building.

The new development should not visually dominate or overwhelm the retained heritage building or build into the air space above the retained building. This can be achieved by creating a visual break, such as a podium with the new development, which is the same scale as the retained building. This can help to clearly distinguish the old from the new.

The new development must also be respectful of the building's character, appearance, scale, materials, style, and architectural expression.

Avoiding Facadism – Examples

The following examples of new developments in a heritage context are generally in line with the above policy guidelines.

Terrace houses and shops



Holdsworth Buildings

368-384 Lygon Street, Carlton
Original development: 1871
Additions: Early-1970s

In the early 1980s, the complete demolition of these notable terrace shops was proposed to make way for the new shopping centre, Lygon Court.

Fortunately, approximately 10m depth of the terrace buildings was retained and the new shopping centre was set back behind the original buildings and completed c1986.

The ground floors are used as shops, with reconstructed Victorian shopfronts, and the upper floors of two buildings were joined together to construct a bar which is attached to the Nova Cinema.

Left images: Holdsworth Buildings, Google Maps, 2018.
Right image: Holdsworth Building 1984 by Ewan Ogilvy.



Pub



Courthouse Hotel

615 Sydney Road, Brunswick
Original development: c.1859
Additions: 2018-2019

The front section of the hotel, comprising a gable roofed area, the floor structure, and some of the interior walls has been retained, and the new taller development has been setback behind.

Top image courtesy of Harcourts.
Bottom image Google Maps, 2018.



Public Building



St Kilda Post Office

Cnr Inkerman Street and St Kilda Road, St Kilda
Original Development: Public Works Department, 1876
Additions: 2013

The new development has retained the main building and attached rear wing, which was continuous with the main facade on the side street. A later building on that side and a terrace shop on the other were demolished and built over the resulting space right up to the rear walls.

The ground floor Post Office area, which had been enlarged by the early 20th century by infilling the arcaded verandah, is now used as a shop. Part of the upper floor, which was originally part of the postmaster's residence, is an apartment. This has retained the Victorian stair, corridor, floorboards, two rooms, and one fireplace.



Top image: former St Kilda Post Office (before), Google Maps.
Centre image: former St Kilda Post Office (after), courtesy of REA Group.
Bottom image: former St Kilda Post Office (after), Google Maps.



Industrial single storey



O'Donnell Engineering

33 Batman Street, West Melbourne

Original development: Marsh & Michaelson, 1940

Additions: 2012

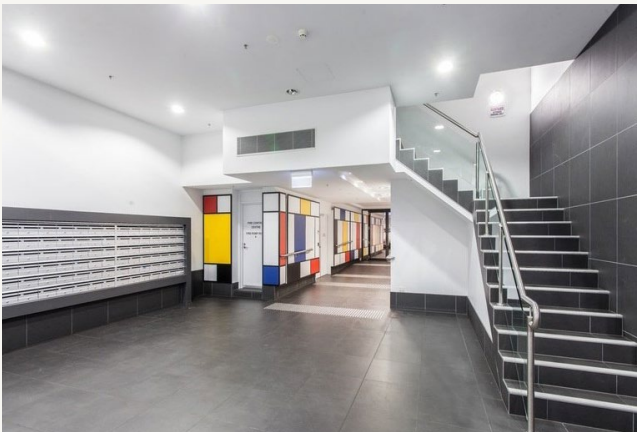
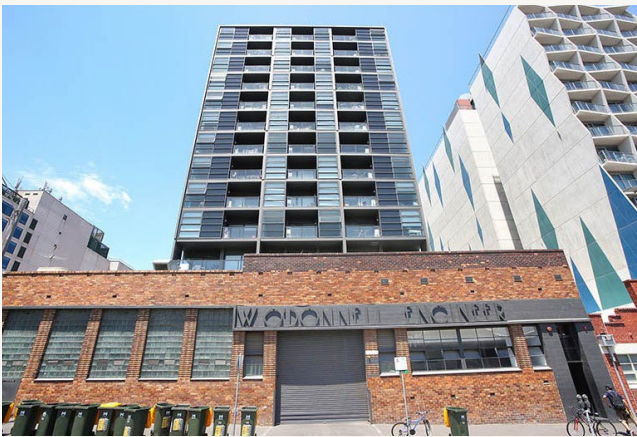
The new high-rise development has been set back behind the depth of one bay of the original building. Part of the primary roof form has been retained. This is approximately 10m in depth and was likely the front administrative offices. While no saw-tooth roof bays were kept, their form was interpreted by new pre-cast side walls, echoing the outline.

The existing vehicle entry was re-used as the car park entry, and the office entry was repurposed as the apartment entry. No original interior structure is visible, however the original front windows light the lobby.

Top image: new development behind former O'Donnell Engineering, courtesy of REA Group.

Centre image: new development behind former O'Donnell Engineering, courtesy of Harcourts.

Bottom image: interior of the former O'Donnell Engineering now used as the building lobby, courtesy of REA Group.



Industrial multi storey



PB Curtain Woolstore

660-664 Bourke Street,
John Flannagan, 1868

Dalgety & Co Motor Garage

654-8 Bourke Street,
Charles D'Ebro, 1914

Additions: 1998

These two industrial buildings, which originally extended to Little Bourke Street, were combined in 1998 and substantially demolished to allow for the development of a high rise apartment tower.

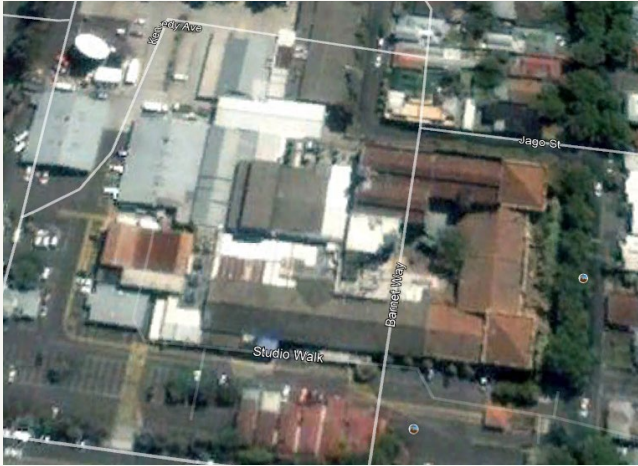
Each building had a front 'office' portion, both of which were retained. Of the large area industrial floors behind the offices, only a small section of the main timber framed, sawtooth roof and woolstore floors were retained.

An open courtyard separates the retained portions of the buildings and the high-rise development which helps to visually separate the two buildings.

Top image: PB Curtain Woolstore, courtesy of Pagan Real Estate.
Middle image: Dalgety & Co Motor Garage, view of new development separated by internal courtyard, Google Maps.
Bottom left: Top floor of Dalgety Garage sold as an apartment shell, 2006, courtesy of Pagan Real Estate.
Bottom right: Top floor of PB Curtain Woolstore sold as an apartment shell, 2006, courtesy of Pagan Real Estate.



Industrial complex



Former Wertheim Factory, later used as Heinz food factory, GTV 9 studios

Bendigo Street, Richmond
Original development: Nahum Barnet, 1909
Additions: 2012 by Kerstin Thompson Architects

The Wertheim piano factory complex was expanded and converted over many years to accommodate its change of use. Its most notable and recent use was as the Channel 9 studios from the 1950s to 2000s.

From 2012, the former industrial complex has been slowly adapted for residential apartments. The design was undertaken by Kerstin Thompson Architects in close coordination with Heritage Victoria. The original building, including the 1950s alterations, are the only buildings included in the Victorian Heritage Register listing, and have been retained to form a perimeter around the new development.

Part of the south wing, which housed Channel 9 Studios One and Two, was demolished, and the retained parts were converted into the Studio One Community Hub. The remainder of the original building has been sensitively adapted into apartments and a café.

Top image: Former Wertheim Factory (before), Google Maps.
Middle image: Former Wertheim Factory (after), Google Maps.
Bottom images: Redevelopment of Wertheim Piano Factory, courtesy of REA Group.



Resources

Further reading on the concept and practice of facadism can be found in the sources below.

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