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## ART DECO TRUST INFORMATION SHEET 21

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# PRESERVATION CASE STUDY

## THE TARADALE HOTEL AND McDONALDS

### 1996



*The Taradale Hotel, 1994*

### PRESERVING THE RECENT PAST

***Historic Preservation is now a part of our lives, as the value of old buildings for heritage reasons and for tourism is more widely appreciated. However, advocacy for the preservation of buildings of the recent past (between 20 and 60 years old) presents a special challenge for several reasons.***

- Evaluation of the quality of recent buildings is affected by taste prejudice, unlike older buildings, which most people will agree have value. The response of some people to a building of the 1930s will simply be "Oh, I hate Art Deco", whereas a Victorian building, although not to their taste, will be acceptable because it has acquired an aura of antiquity.
- A younger building which is at risk will have had little or no scholarly research done on it, and will not usually have been added to the register of the New Zealand Historic Places Trust. A building erected since 1950 will only be registered if it is of exceptional quality, and at risk. No buildings erected since 1970 are on the register.
- A younger building will often be in a style that seems neither new and stylish, nor old and interesting, but just out-dated. Not only will a business find it unattractive as a potential premises. but the community may think that it will give the town or suburb an image of being stagnant, unstylish, and unattractive to potential businesses or residents. The building may

even be in a style that has been decried in past preservation conflicts as inferior to older 'heritage' styles, and the issue can therefore be portrayed as against traditional preservation values.

- Whereas old buildings may be in locations which are not subject to commercial pressures, more recent buildings often are. Commercial interests will see their interests as being threatened, and will marshal greater resources to fight their case than the preservation group can muster.
- Recent buildings can easily be made the subject of ridicule, can be dismissed by 'experts' as having no architectural or historic value, not unique or not being the first, the best or the only example of their kind.

***But there is sound precedent for preserving buildings of the recent past:***

- The basic premise of historic preservation - that each generation has a duty to pass on significant evidence of history - is as applicable to recent buildings as to older ones.
- The value of adding recent artefacts to museum collections is widely accepted, and so should be the practice of adding recent buildings and historic places to the national heritage collection.
- Recent buildings are more at risk than old ones, not only at risk of demolition but of alteration. Important examples should be preserved while they still exist.
- The buildings used by ordinary people are just as worthy of preservation as those used by the great, but are at more risk of loss.
- As change accelerates, the time lag between the creation of a building or artefact and its acquisition of historic value diminishes. The preservation movement should recognise this.

## **THE TARADALE HOTEL**

Three hotels have operated on the same site in Taradale. The first was built in 1869 and destroyed by fire in 1904. Its successor, with the Taradale Town Hall across the road, formed the hub of the township until they were both destroyed in the Hawke's Bay Earthquake of 1931. The replacement hotel building of 1932 was designed by E A Williams, architect of some of Napier's most valued inner city reconstruction buildings, including the Daily Telegraph, the Criterion Hotel and the Hotel Central, Harstons Building, Masson House and the Hawke's Bay Chambers. It was designed in what was called the 'Free Spanish Style', which we would now call the Art Deco style with a Spanish influence. Williams also designed the new (1932) Taradale Town Hall opposite, also in the Art Deco style (refurbished in 1993 and 1995) and these two buildings today form a mini Art Deco precinct at the crossroads which form one end of the Taradale Shopping Centre.

The Hotel was not registered by the NZ Historic Places Trust, not because it did not deserve to be registered, but because the registration process is not up to date. The Art Deco Trust recognised the value of the building when it published its Art Deco Tour Guide in 1988, including it on the route. From its inception in 1989, the Art Deco Weekend House Tour was designed to pass the hotel, and in 1994 and 1995, the Hotel Hop which was a feature of the Art Deco Weekend programme included the Hotel. The book 'Art Deco Napier', first published in 1987, included a photograph of the hotel.

In 1995, the McDonalds restaurant chain purchased the Hotel with a view to demolishing it and replacing it with a new, standard-type restaurant building.

## **THE PRESERVATION CAMPAIGN**

The Art Deco Trust first learned of McDonald's plans in January 1996, from a local hotel historian at the Hawke's Bay Museum Library. The Trust immediately recognised the seriousness of the loss of the building, and the potential advantages for McDonalds of retaining and reusing it rather than erecting a new one. Based on the Trust's policy of promoting the use of Napier's Art Deco buildings as viable commercial properties, a letter was sent to McDonald's Napier franchise holders,

welcoming the proposal, acknowledging McDonald's record of using heritage and local character buildings as restaurant premises, pointing out that reusing the building could have tourism spin-offs, and enclosing a copy of the Trust's Preservation Policy which states that the Trust wishes first to work constructively with property owners and developers to create a situation in which both they and the community can benefit economically from the preservation of any building at risk, and that a public preservation campaign will only be conducted when efforts to achieve that have failed.

A friendly telephone acknowledgement was received, in which it was stated that no final decisions would be made until February. At this stage, the Trust made no efforts to publicise the issue, preferring to pursue it directly with McDonalds.

On 6 March, Mark McDonald (no relation) phoned the Trust to say that he had heard that the Hotel was to be demolished and that he believed that it should remain as the Taradale Hotel. On the following day, the Courier Leader contacted the Trust, having themselves been contacted by Mark McDonald, to ask for the Trust's position on the proposal. The Trust released brief details of its own position, which was that it had no views on the use of the building but believed that the building itself should be retained.

Further efforts were made to find out from McDonalds what its plans were. The local franchise holders were again contacted and they referred the Trust to a contact at McDonald's head office in Auckland. Efforts to contact that person by letter, fax, office phone and mobile phone failed to achieve a response. The Trust knew that a plan showing a new building had been lodged with Council, and although this did not necessarily mean that the decision had been made, the Trust would have been naive to wait until it was too late before taking action. Requests by the press for more information followed and the time seemed appropriate for the Trust to make the issue a public one.

A meeting of the Trust's Preservation Sub-Committee was called at which it was unanimously agreed that this case was so clearly one in which preservation was a practical and worthwhile option that the Trust would make every effort to convince McDonalds that preservation was the most desirable outcome.

The Napier City Council's Planning Department was consulted about the situation and the advice received was that the Council had had preliminary discussions with McDonalds and would have no grounds for refusing planning consent for a new building provided that it complied with normal requirements. Because Council's policy is to encourage the preservation of Art Deco buildings, it was made clear that the Art Deco Trust had Council's support in its efforts to dissuade McDonalds from demolition but that Council could itself do little.

***In March the campaign was launched with the following strategies being used -***

- A meeting was requested with the local franchise holders.
- A general Media Release was issued.
- A Preservation Alert was initiated. This is a procedure operated by ICADS, the International Coalition of Art Deco Societies, whereby member societies can fax details of a preservation issue to the ICADS Facilitator in Boston, USA, and he will in turn fax all member societies who may then respond by faxing the owner of the building at risk, making a plea for preservation.
- The Art Deco Trust mailed a notice to all of its members urging them to write to McDonalds and to the Daily Telegraph, Napier's daily newspaper. The Trust's magazine, 'Newest City News' carried a front page item about the issue.
- Letters requesting support were sent to the Mayor of Napier, Taradale Ward City Councillors, the Taradale Shopping Centre Association, and the General Manager of Hawke's Bay Tourism.

## THE RESULTS

### ***As a result of these initiatives:***

- Local newspapers carried 8 news items on the issue (including a full-page colour feature on the history of the hotels on the site), and the Herald Tribune published an editorial supporting the preservation.
- At least 15 letters and faxes were received by McDonalds from Melbourne, Los Angeles, Miami Beach, Boston, Vancouver, Toronto, London, Brisbane, and from other parts of New Zealand. This figure is based on the number of duplicate faxes received by the Trust, but probably more were sent. The Art Deco Society of Boston sent a copy of their letter to the McDonalds Corporate Headquarters in Chicago.
- 14 letters to the Editor were published by the Daily Telegraph and the Herald Tribune, including one from the Minister of Tourism. Only one was against the preservation of the building.
- Letters or statements of support were sent to McDonalds by all of the people approached by the Trust with the exception of the Taradale Business Centre Association, on the grounds that the Taradale Hotel was a member of the Association and that it was not the Association's policy to interfere with the business of members.
- Taradale Ward Councillors issued a statement supporting the Art Deco Trust's stand.

City Councillor Kathy Furlong, Council's appointee on the Art Deco Trust Committee, met with the local franchise holders. Representing both the Trust and the Council, she was able to convey to them that the preservation option was in line with Council's philosophy, and not just the Art Deco Trust's own strategy for the city.

In April, a meeting was held with the local franchise holders, McDonald's Architect/Director of Development, Art Deco Trust representatives and the Hawke's Bay Branch Chairman of the NZ Historic Places Trust. A positive mood prevailed, and the Art Deco Trust representatives stressed that they wanted to work with McDonalds to achieve a positive business result, that there was real potential for promoting the restaurant on the back of the city's Art Deco tourism promotion, and that the preservation of the building "as a viable commercial premises" did not require a purist approach and at the bottom line, may only require the retention of the outer walls. It was clear that the new owners believed that the building's unregistered status indicated that it lacked importance, but this view appeared to change when the book "Art Deco Napier" was produced, with its illustration of the hotel, reinforced by the realisation that the next edition of the book could include a photograph not of the Taradale Hotel but the Taradale McDonald's Restaurant. The meeting was followed up with a letter reinforcing these points.

In May, enquiries by the newspapers resulted in a statement by McDonalds that they were 'likely' to retain the building's facade, and in June it was announced that this would indeed happen. The Trust wrote to McDonalds, congratulating them on their decision to preserve the building, offering to assist with the decoration of the restaurant, and suggesting that an Art Deco Weekend event such as a children's 'McDecco Brekko' be held in the restaurant. This last was well received and the franchise holders booked Ronald McDonald to appear at it.

In July, the Trust was asked to supply an exterior colour scheme, and consulted on the internal finishes and colours. The Trust also made an appeal to Council to allow dispensations to their requirements concerning the placement of the main restaurant sign, the handicapped access ramp, and the access to the vehicle ordering booth, with some success.

Positive media coverage followed the announcement of the building's adaptive re-use. A press release by McDonalds to the two main local newspapers, with a colour perspective drawing of the building, gained prominent coverage. The Trust's magazine carried a second front page item about the issue, entitled "*s'Wonderful, s'Marvellous, s'McDonald's Art Deco Restaurant*". The Art Deco Trust's Executive Director was asked to write an article for "N Z Historic Places" magazine about the campaign. McDonalds has joined the Trust as a Corporate Member, and this Case Study, published for inclusion in the Trust's Education Programme, has the support of McDonalds.

Considerable publicity was generated at the time of the restaurant's opening. The Trust has begun referring journalists to the restaurant. As the Trust predicted, there is potential for using the restaurant as a focus for school projects based on Art Deco preservation.

## CONCLUSION

The Art Deco Trust and McDonalds now have an excellent working relationship, with considerable potential for joint promotional initiatives in the future.

***This preservation campaign has resulted in both parties, and the whole community, being winners.***



*McDonald's Art Deco Restaurant, 1996*

## SOURCES

***Preservation of the Recent Past***  
Historic Preservation, USA

Information Booklet No 69 of the National Trust for

***Art Deco Trust Preservation Policies***

Art Deco Trust Information Leaflet No 2

***Art Deco Trust Archives***

***Daily Telegraph feature, 6 July 199***

"End of an Era" (with Pub hotel historian John Bailey)