

MANCHESTER UNITY BUILDING

By Costa Rolfe

Like a towering centre-half at the heart of Sir Alex's back four, the Manchester Unity Building has marshalled Melbourne's skyline since a spectacular home debut in 1932. And whilst bigger, more expensive structures have been drafted in to shore-up the CBD in the years since, few can boast the class and physical presence of this neo-gothic icon.

Situated on the north-west corner of Collins and Swanston Streets, the building's eventual site was purchased in 1928 by the Manchester Unity Odd Fellows for £250,000, with a further £215,000 spent on securing the services of builders W E Cooper Pty Ltd. Work commenced at midnight on the 1 January 1932 and barely ceased until the grand opening on 12 December of that year, leaving 'Marvellous' depression-era Melbourne with a world-class skyscraper to be proud of.

Such speed of construction was made possible by a pioneering and strictly adhered to construction progress schedule, which demanded round-the-clock eight-hour shifts of its workers. The building's eventual might was revealed to the night sky and an awestruck public at the grand opening, when Victorian Premier Sir Stanley Argyle pressed a button and unleashed an array of hidden floodlights

strategically placed from ground level to pinnacle. The Manchester Unity Building was officially Melbourne's tallest at the time, with its tower reaching five storeys past Melbourne's 132-foot height limit.

masked protector swinging from a grappling hook!" The prominent belltower – and indeed much of the building's general aesthetic – was modelled on the Chicago Tribune Tower, itself constructed in 1924.

Much of the building's current state is owed to prominent dental practitioner Dr Kia Pajouhesh, who purchased the mezzanine in 2003 and levels 11, 12 and the tower in 2006. Pajouhesh was dismayed by a 1990s conversion to luxury apartments that had obliterated much of the upper levels' original detailing and finishing. Inspired by 1930s photographs that revealed a dazzling original interior, Pajouhesh has since painstakingly converted many rooms to their former glories, sourcing original furniture, lighting and objets d'art where possible. The lifts, by way of example, are virtually identical today to how they first were, right down to the timber finish and copper detailing.



Designed by Marcus Barlow, the Manchester Unity Building's terracotta-clad exterior and soaring ornamental spire today instantly conjure images of a shadowy Gotham City-esque underworld. Indeed, such commanding architectural style virtually screams "chisel-jawed

