

A New Commercial Centre

As the 1880s drew to a close so too did the famous boom period of 'Marvellous Melbourne'. The newly established Victoria Dock was enticing warehouses and shipping activity down river, away from the city centre. Patrick McCaughan, entrepreneur and developer, acted quickly and purchased a large parcel of land on Collins Street, between William and King Streets.

McCaughan and established Melbourne architect William Pitt had grand plans for this large portion of land – it would be Melbourne's new commercial district. Pitt designed the Olderfleet and Rialto buildings in 1890 as state of the art office buildings. The adjacent Wool Exchange, later renamed the Winfield building, was designed by architects Charles D'Ebro and Richard Speight Junior the following year.

Both the Rialto and Winfield buildings were designed to facilitate the new style of commercial enterprise emerging at the time. They offered tenants the very latest in modern technology, with street level shop fronts, overhead offices and basement warehouse space.

Named after the commercial district in medieval Venice, the Rialto building was one of the finest examples of nineteenth century Gothic architecture and a symbol of commercial modernity. With a unique adjoining laneway connecting the Rialto and Winfield buildings, these two buildings were perfectly designed for the new commercial centre of Melbourne.



'New Premises: The Rialto', drawing by architect William Pitt for Patrick McCaughan, c. 1890. Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria



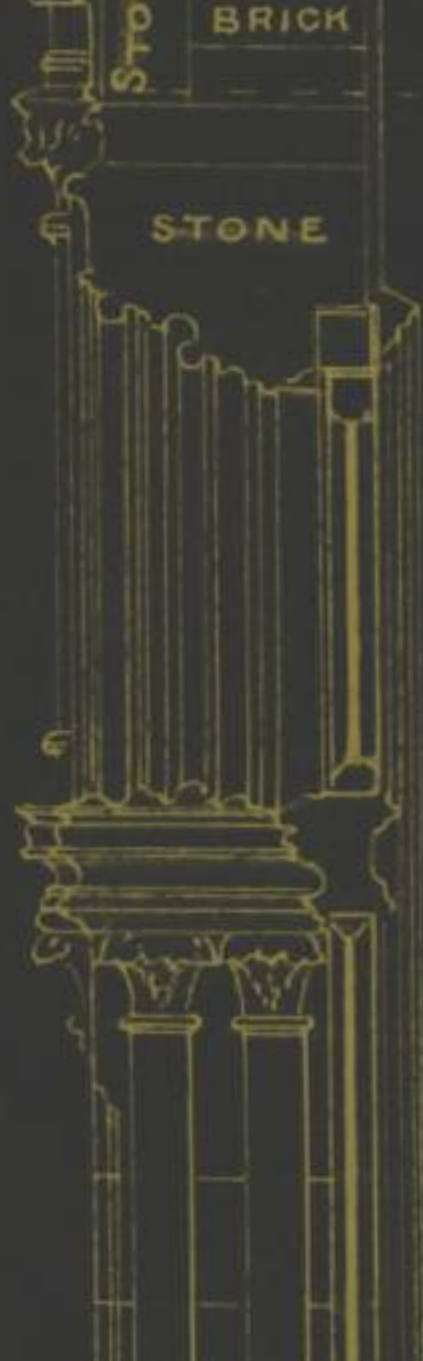
View of Collins Street, 1853. Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria



Collins Street featuring the Olderfleet, Wool Exchange and Rialto buildings, c. 1892. Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria

After Continental Melbourne The Rialto





Half section
of
Tower and Spire
Half-inch scale



Tenants Over Time

The Rialto and Winfield buildings rapidly became the busy commercial hub that McCaughan had envisaged. These two modern office buildings were the commercial home of a long and varied list of individuals, businesses and organisations.

The Wool Exchange, which was renamed the Winfield building in the 1920s, was the centre of Melbourne's growing wool trading industry. Early tenants included wool brokers and merchants, skin merchants, grain brokers, engineers, solicitors, shipping companies, printers, publishers and even the Melbourne Chilled Butter Company.

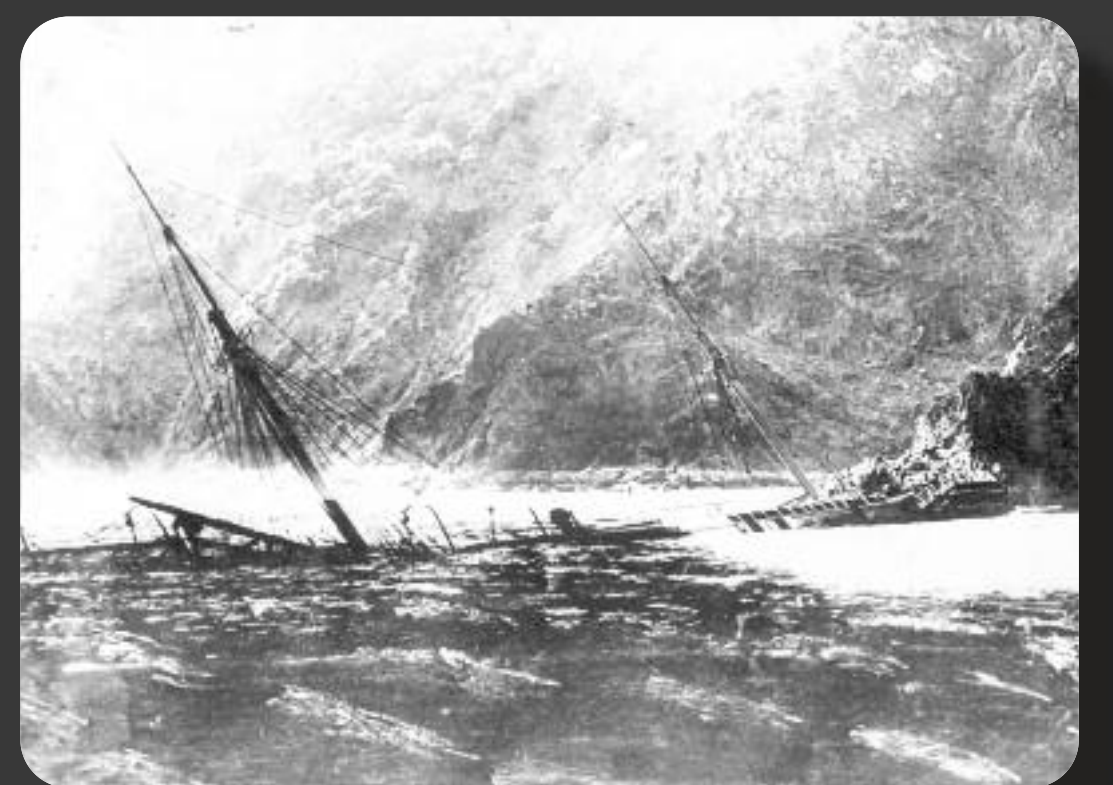
The Rialto building also had a colourful list of tenants. Building contractors Comely and Guillam, who actually built the Rialto, were early tenants, along with solicitors Fink, Best and Phillips. In 1892 the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works moved into the Rialto. The Melbourne Tramways Trust was another occupant. Later, the Victorian Government's patents and statistician's offices also operated from the Rialto, as did the Commonwealth Defence Department from 1939-45.

By the 1970s the Rialto's penthouse apartments were being used as studios for artists and photographers. However, the modern conveniences that had attracted tenants in the early days had begun to fade. The majestic building was hovering somewhere between the grandeur of the past and the potential of the future.



Workers of the Australasian United Steam Navigation Company, tenants of the Rialto, c. 1890.

Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria



Joseph Chaley of Chaley, Fisher & Co. East India Merchants, a tenant of the Rialto, was one of the few survivors of this shipwreck, off the coast of New Zealand, in 1894.

Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria



Winners of the Austral Wheel race, 1891. The organisers were Rialto tenants.

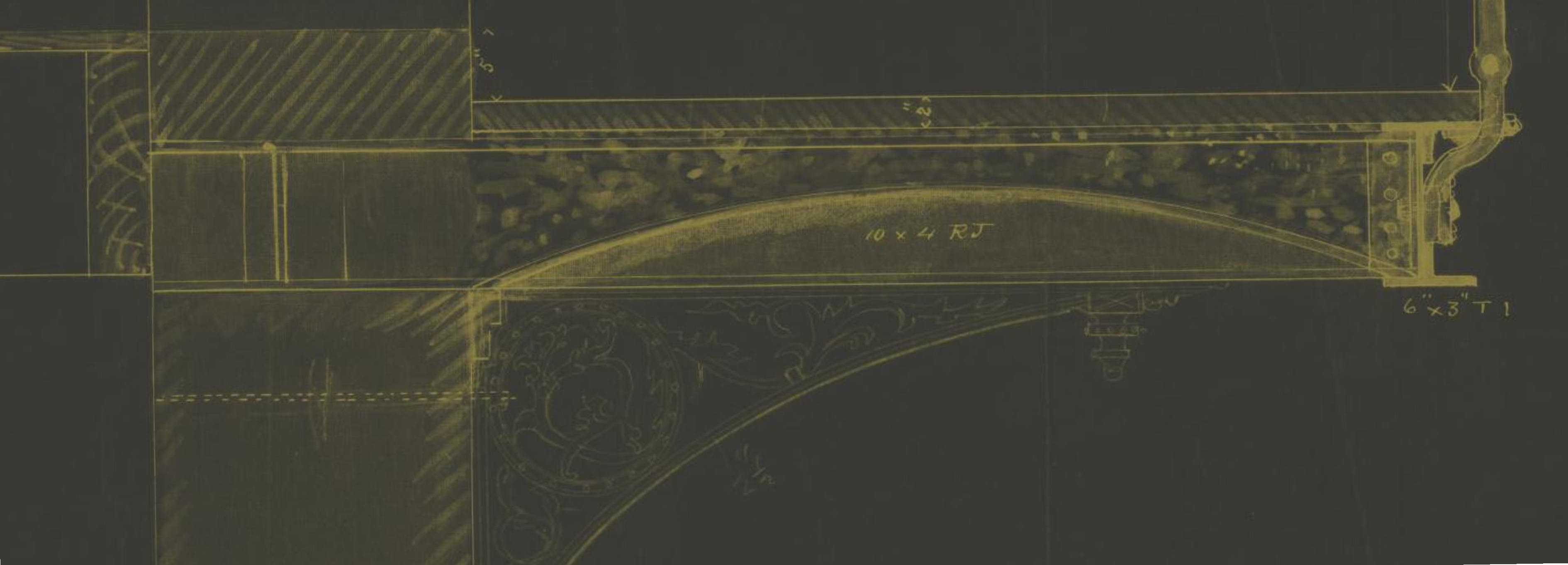
Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria

503 THE RIALTO—

Vacant offices

- 507 Haughton, Wm. & Co, agents, factors & importers
- McComas & Co, water lifter manufacturers
- Cobram East Saw Mill Co
- 515 Turnbull, Phipps, & Co, merchants
- Hawthorn, H., & Co, tea importers
- 519 Cushing & Co, shipping commission merchants
- 521 Groom, S. R., timber broker
- Robison Bros Campbell & Sloss
- 525 Huddart, Parker and Co Ltd, shipowners

Inter-Continental Melbourne The Rialto



Faces of the Rialto and Winfield

Just a Continental Melbourne The Rialto

Rialto Land Owner: Patrick Kinney McCaughan (1844-1903)

Patrick McCaughan, a 'muscular Irish-man of fine physique', arrived in Victoria in 1866. He worked at the National Bank before being taken under the wing of pastoralist and land owner William 'Big' Clarke – one of the wealthiest men in Australia.

Late in the 1870s, McCaughan began investing in property. Realising the potential of Collins Street west, he purchased the land on which the Olderfleet, Rialto and Winfield buildings would eventually stand. Known as 'a great lady killer', with his top hat and twirling moustache, McCaughan was as flamboyant as the Gothic façades of his buildings.

Rialto Architect: William Pitt (1855-1918)

Melbourne-born architect William Pitt commenced his practice in 1879, winning first prize for his design of the Melbourne Coffee Palace. Pitt's career peaked during the land boom of the 1880s and his work exemplified the extravagance of 'Marvellous Melbourne'.

Towards the end of the 1880s boom Pitt designed a series of office buildings on Collins Street, including the Rialto building. The Rialto's Gothic Revival style could be seen in Pitt's other buildings around Melbourne, such as the Federal Coffee Palace, the redesigned Princess Theatre, the Melbourne Stock Exchange and the Olderfleet building adjacent to the Rialto.

Winfield Architect: Charles D'Ebro (1850-1920)

London-born civil engineer and architect Charles D'Ebro designed many buildings in Melbourne, including the Prahran Town Hall (1890), Stonington Mansion (1890) and the Winfield building (1891). D'Ebro was renowned for his abilities and in 1890, with William Pitt, he designed the People's Coffee Palace on the corner of Flinders and Spencer Streets, also for developer Patrick McCaughan.

Winfield Architect: Richard Speight Junior

Architect Richard Speight Junior designed the Winfield building (former Wool Exchange) in 1891 with Charles D'Ebro. Speight commenced practice in 1886 and a year later designed the Hotel Victoria in Albert Park. After designing the Wool Exchange, Speight occupied offices in the building from 1891-95.



Prahran Town Hall in 1872, the appearance of which was later influenced by architect Charles D'Ebro.

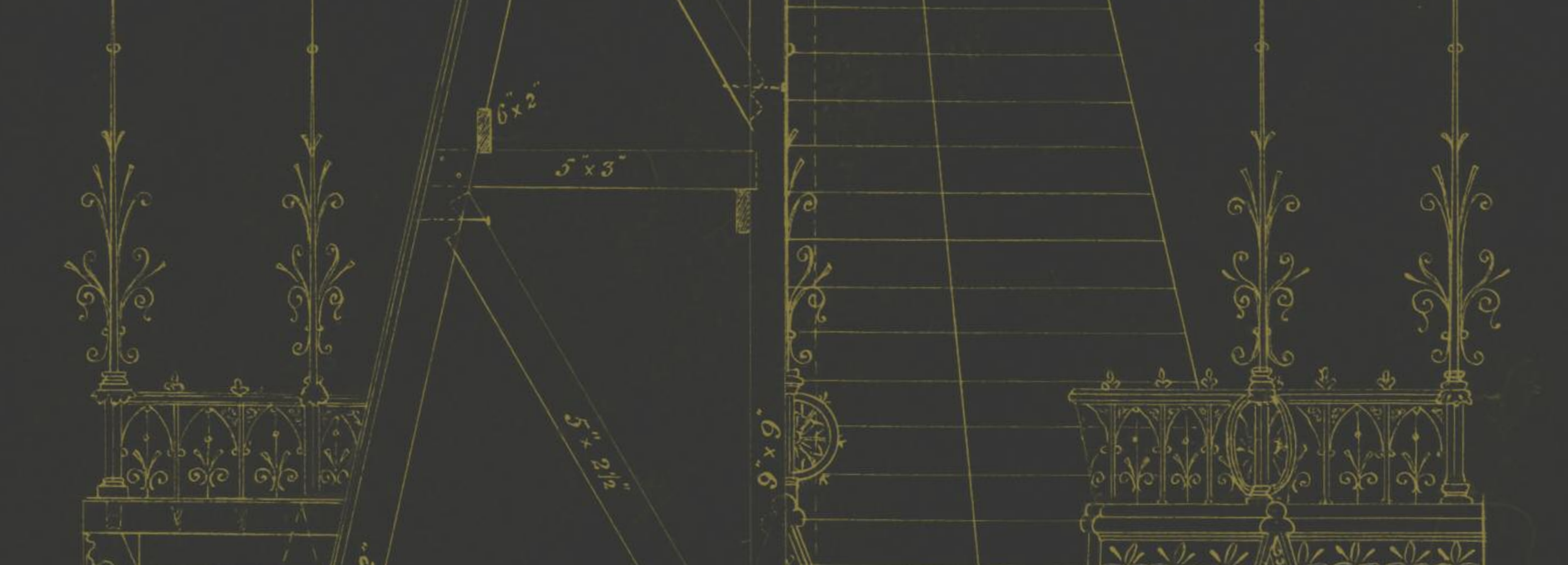
Photographer: C Goulter. Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria



Hotel Victoria in Albert Park, designed by architect Richard Speight Junior, c. 1920.

Rose Stereograph Co. Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria





Conflict and Controversy

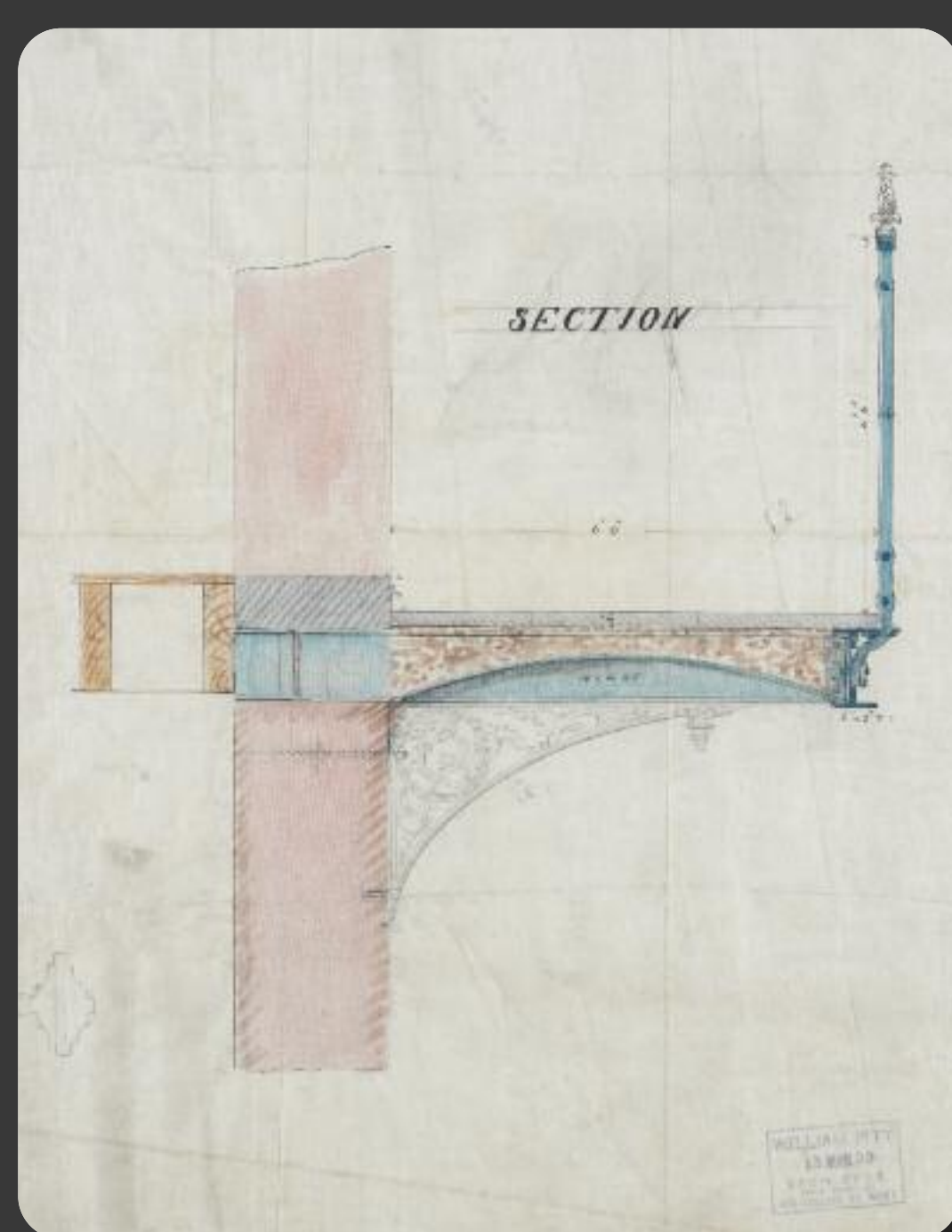
After Continental Melbourne The Rialto

By the 1970s, the elegant stretch of nineteenth century buildings along the western end of Collins Street had slipped into decline. The years had begun to chip away at the grandeur of their striking and detailed façades. Interestingly, there was nothing in place to protect these Melbourne icons from modernisation and development.

The National Mutual Life Company had purchased the Winfield and Rialto buildings by the early 1970s. Partial demolition of each of these historic buildings was central to its plans to rejuvenate the west end of Collins Street.

Public outcry in response to National Mutual's plans stalled the redevelopment. The passing of the *Historic Buildings Act* in 1974 meant that the buildings became protected from demolition. Developers, conservationists and the government were in a state of gridlock as the future of both the Rialto and Winfield buildings remained uncertain.

The 1970s gave way to the 1980s with no resolution in sight. Exhausted and defeated, National Mutual bowed out. The entire site was put on the market. Developer Bruno Grollo emerged with a bold and unique vision that merged the heritage of the past with optimism for the future. His \$300 million redevelopment proposed the construction of a daring two-tower building. The Rialto and Winfield buildings would be restored, renovated and converted into a first class hotel. It was Grollo who breathed new life into this historic part of Melbourne.



William Pitt's architectural plan of the balcony section, Rialto building, 1890.

Architectural Drawings Collection, State Library of Victoria



The rear of the Rialto building from Robbs Lane, 1969.

Photographer: KJ Halla. Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria



The rear of the Rialto building, view from Flinders Lane featuring the controversial iron urinals, 1977.

J T Collins Collection, La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria





The Meeting of Old and New

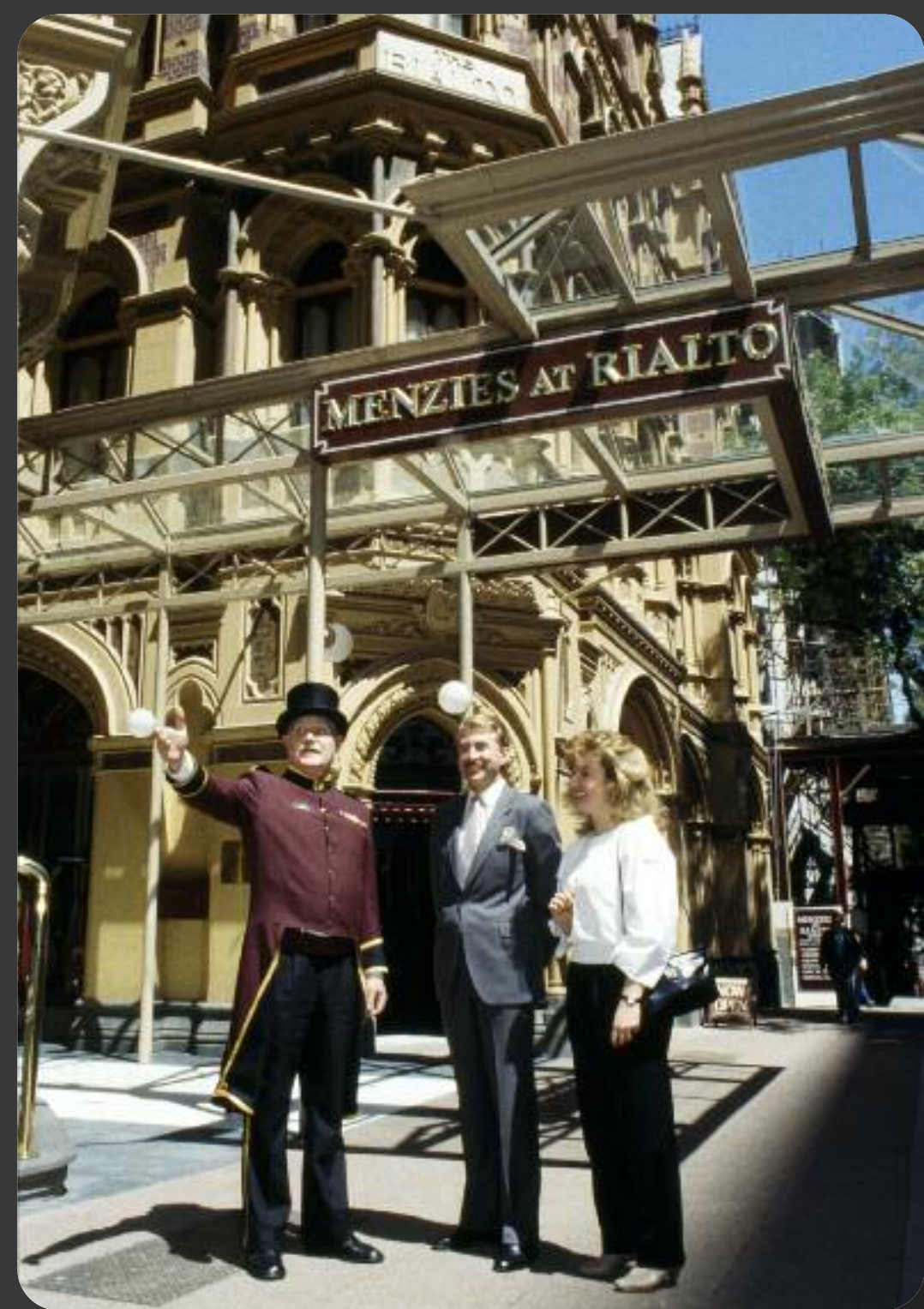
InterContinental Melbourne The Rialto

After standing for almost 100 years on the west end of Collins Street, a new chapter in the history of the Rialto and Winfield buildings was about to be written. Bruno Grollo's redevelopment plan swung into action. Two towers, the tallest in Melbourne at the time, were constructed on the site of what had been the Olderfleet building.

Immediately next door, the Rialto and Winfield buildings were in the process of being converted into a first class, luxury hotel. The façades were painstakingly restored, the interiors stylishly redeveloped, and the two buildings were connected. It was expensive work – the exterior restoration alone cost \$8 million. By October 1984 the Menzies at Rialto Hotel – whose rooms were the refurbished and rejuvenated offices of what had been the Rialto and Winfield buildings – was open for business.

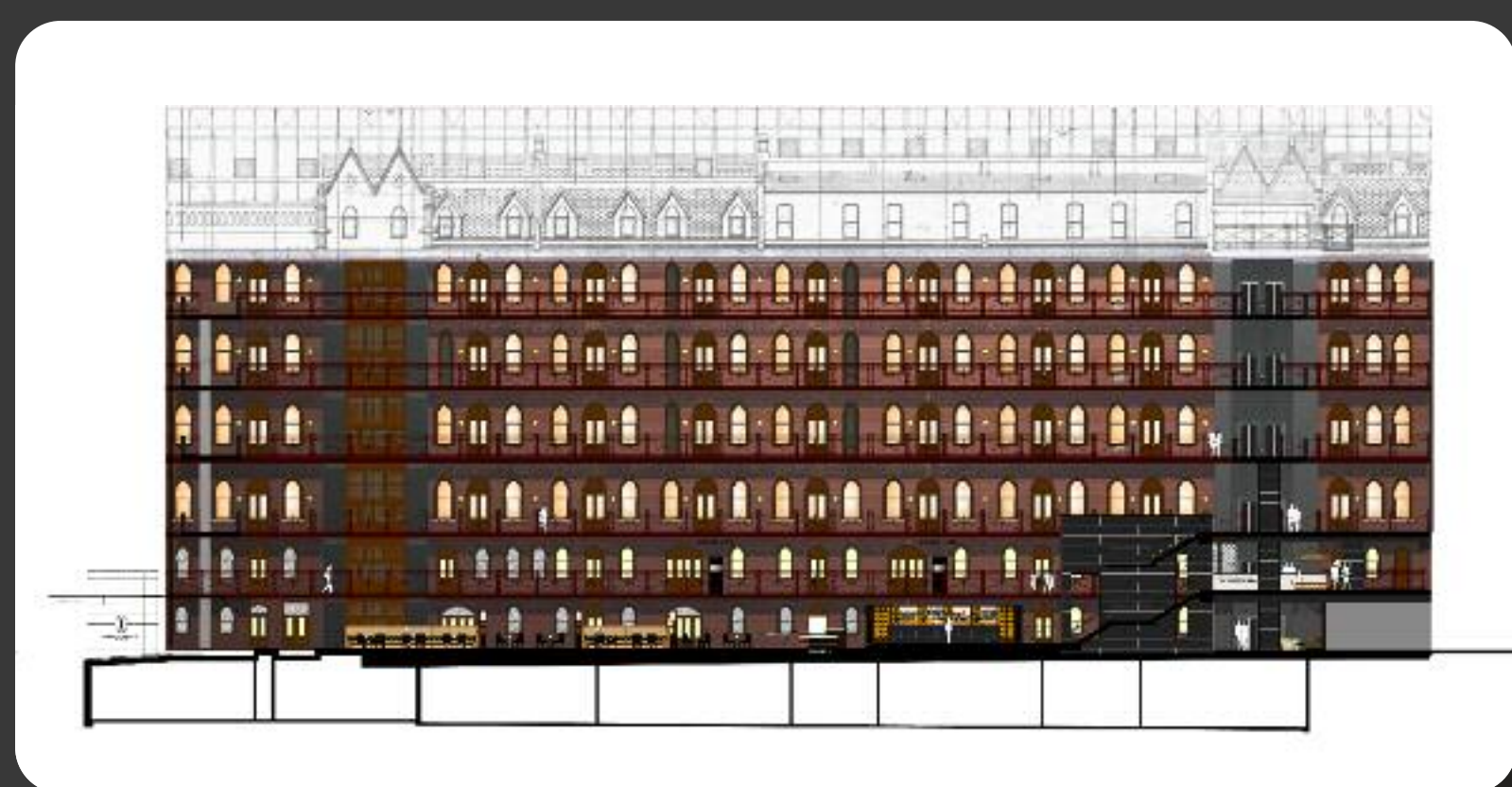
Grollo breathed new life into the Rialto and Winfield buildings. However, it was in 2006, when InterContinental Hotels & Resorts took over management of the buildings, that the elegance and majesty of times past was finally united with the decadence and style of the modern hotel experience.

The space between the two buildings – once a cobble-stoned laneway – was enclosed within a glass atrium. Offices along the Collins Street frontage gave way to shopfronts that beckoned to both hotel visitors and passers-by. Renovations to the entrance invited guests to experience for themselves this harmonious union of old and new.



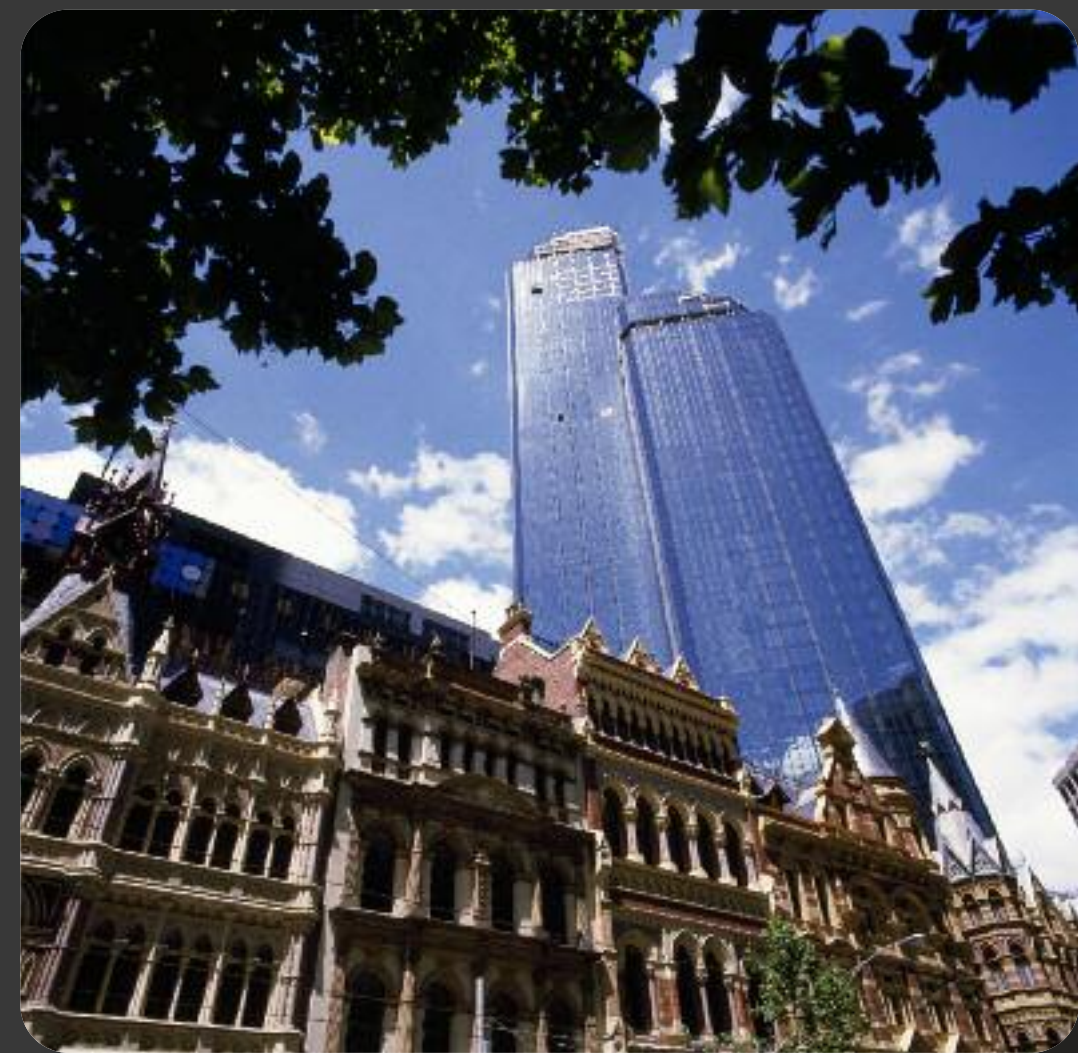
Menzies at Rialto Hotel in 1985 before it was reincarnated as InterContinental Melbourne The Rialto.

National Archives of Australia



Elevation design of the Heritage Wing at InterContinental Melbourne The Rialto.

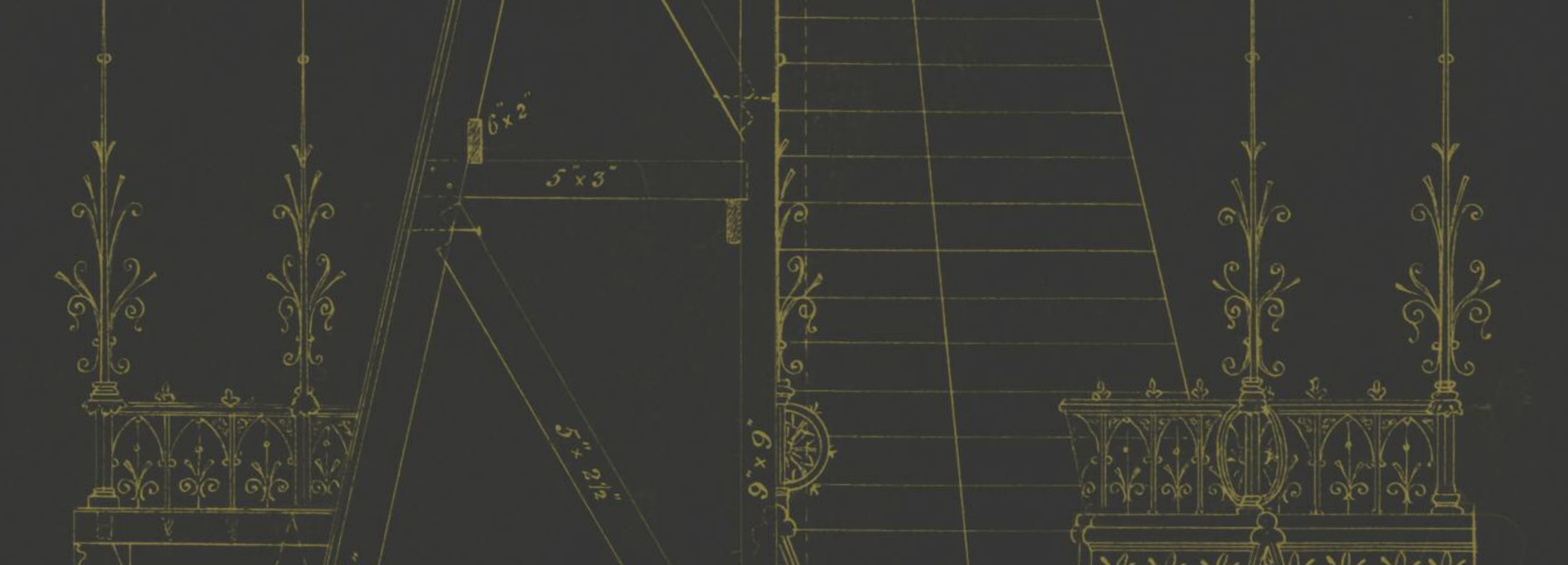
Joseph Pang Design Consultants



Blending old and new: the historic Rialto and Winfield building dwarfed by Rialto Towers in 1985.

National Archives of Australia





InterContinental Hotels & Resorts

InterContinental Melbourne The Rialto is a proud part of a series of hotels and resorts around the world. Founded in 1946 by Pan American Airlines, the InterContinental Hotels Corporation opened its first hotel a year later in Belem, Brazil. It continued to develop hotels along the airways route in Latin America, becoming the world's first international hotel brand.

InterContinental first arrived in Australia on the tail of the 1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne. It built the famous, but now demolished, Southern Cross InterContinental Hotel on the site of the old Eastern Market in Bourke Street. Opened in August 1962, the 431 room hotel was host to a number of celebrities, including Frank Sinatra, Roger Moore, Judy Garland and most memorably, The Beatles.

In the 1980s, InterContinental opened a hotel in Sydney. Housed within the historic Old Treasury Building, established in 1851, the transformation of this heritage-listed gem into a luxury five star hotel was applauded by architects, conservationists and guests alike.

InterContinental returned to Melbourne in 2006 when it took over the management of the Rialto and Winfield buildings. Eureka Funds Management invested over \$50 million to create InterContinental Melbourne The Rialto. Opening in early 2009, it has become one of Melbourne's premier hotels.

InterContinental Melbourne, The Rialto joins a string of InterContinental luxury hotels in historic buildings around the globe, including the South Tower in Chicago, the Willard in Washington and Le Grand in Paris.



Exterior of InterContinental Melbourne The Rialto, 2009.

Joseph Pang Design Consultants



Lobby at InterContinental Melbourne The Rialto, 2009.

Joseph Pang Design Consultants

InterContinental Melbourne The Rialto

