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Waratah mills.

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Architects' statement The driving design concept of the project was to adapt the existing heritage buildings into residential apartments, which reinforced the integrity of the strong building form and preserved the robust industrial aesthetic of the site.

Maintaining the purity of the cylindrical forms of the silo building was paramount to the success in preserving the historical character of the site. Balconies fan out from within the silo structure alternatively, creating a play of light upon the existing curved walls. Internally, the contrasting linear zones to the service/wet areas enhance the circular spaces. The contemporary roof addition, and penthouse level, is setback from the building edge to minimise the dilution of the silo form.

The historic brick fabric of the mill and annex buildings were conserved, with sympathetic elements of apartment design. Modifications included the introduction of recessed balconies and frameless glass balustrades behind the facade, the construction of a steel and glass lobby under the annex awning and brick addition, repeating the rhythm and form of the existing envelope. Internally, existing structure and feature brickworks remain exposed to contrast the clean lines of the new apartment finishes.

The interplay of the three-dimensional elements of the new hopper building suggests a machine-like structure. The composition of which reflects the growth and evolution of the buildings on the site. The materials reflect the industrial aesthetic of the site and together allow the building to have its own notional historic presence.

The unique nature of this project is reflected in the diverse range of structural, construction, material and service applications implemented in the development.



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FORMED DURING THE WHITE HEAT¹ OF SIXTIES progressive politics, the writings of Reyner Banham contained an innate suspicion of words such as conservation and heritage. It is therefore a faint irony that his enthusiasm for American industrial building of the twenties, whose impact on the future of European modernism is well charted, forms an inevitable background to today's aestheticising of an industrial aesthetic. For it is just such a popularly conceived notion of warehouse chic that is currently saving so many abandoned inner-urban industrial sites from the bulldozer. However, this apparent causality needs a little unpacking. Certainly the 'machine aesthetic' of Detroit's Ford factories and the grain silos of the mid west played a seminal part in the evolving modernist canon (upon which any 'minimal' factory conversion continues to be marketed). But this relationship between industrial engineering and early modernism is often misconstrued. For Banham, it is a correspondence not on the level of building technology or formal aesthetics, but "... as a form of allegory. The appearance of industrial resemblances in non-industrial buildings was construed... a promise that these buildings would be as functionally honest, structurally economical and above all, as up-to-the-minute as any of the American factories that Le Corbusier hailed as 'the first fruits of the New Age'². Indeed, as promissory architecture, what better image of a well-fed future than an imposing stack of grain silos, despatching its produce by the trainload to the nation's bread-makers.

Somewhat diminutive in scale to the huge agro-towers of Minnesota, Waratah Flour Mill in Sydney's Dulwich Hill nevertheless attests to the same image of productive pragmatism. Built without pretensions in the twenties and joining a string of flourmills that hug the north-west goods railway line of Sydney, Waratah Mills has, since its construction, stood out as an industrial beacon in an otherwise flat expanse of single-storey pitched roof, brick homes. Recently however, with the same economic expediency that marked its construction, the mill owners Goodman and Fielder, have been forced to relocate out of the city. In its place, Nettleton Tribe Architects have transformed this brownfield site into a residential project that marries efficient design solutions with a successful, commercially viable residential redevelopment. Given that the client is housing giant CPG, and this is Dulwich Hills, not Surry Hills, this is no mean achievement.

The site is divided into three parts: the concrete silo and red brick mill, both retained and adapted, and the hopper building, demolished and rebuilt to the same approximate volume. While the heritage controls added significant cost to the construction (amongst a range of interesting engineering challenges, the retained small bungalow on site had to be entirely lifted on stilts while the foundations for the hopper building was poured), these were more than offset by the opportunity to build to the existing height and overall envelope, allowing a significantly increased density to what is otherwise a typically low density suburb. In all, 84 apartments were located on this site, bound by small suburban roads to north and south, railway to the east and a stand of mature trees separating the development from the only near neighbours to the west.

Inevitably the silo is the site's most distinctive element. By simply slicing through the internal circular walls separating each silo, a single space of six interlocking volumes was formed from top to bottom, which was then divided into nine floors. Windows were punched through to the north, east and west, leaving the southern elevation blank, where the silo nudges close to the newly built hopper building. Early plans to reintroduce curved walls internally, between kitchens, bedrooms and bathrooms, were abandoned to reduce unusable residual space. Aside from a series of alternating fan balconies, the exterior is left entirely undecorated, consistent with a heritage brief somewhat more rigorous than the polite domestication that recently befell Peter Dermoudy's Darwin gem³.

A quality of discrete adaptation continues in the conversion of the mill next door, where a number of significant structural changes to the building shell are accommodated with dexterity and judgment. The ground floor foyer was renovated to include reclaimed timbers from the silo next door.

The long southern wall was cut open to face a blade wall (accommodating the building's post boxes). The resultant narrow glazed folly allows increased natural light to flood into the otherwise dim low foyer. On the north-facing elevation, an existing grid of windows have been pushed back to form a series of recessed balconies and frameless glass balustrades. The annex to this building has been extended and floors and windows have been shuffled to allow improved penetration of light, without compromising the demanding heritage conditions.

The hopper building is the only entirely new building on the site and its form and materials suggest an industrial narrative. Although its aspect is less than ideal, this is compensated by fluid interiors and generous balconies with unimpeded views of the neighbourhood and city beyond. The building's machinic references are not without their problems. Though intended as sympathetic to the site's industrial character, the stacked layers of concrete, steel and zinc leans rather more heavily on themed form than on the efficacy of engineered form. Then again, even the apparent honesty of sixties optimism was not without its own unnecessary allusions.

As exemplary adaptive reuse, Waratah Mills represents a successful residential metamorphosis, walking the tight rope between commercial viability and architectural integrity. That a volume housing provider has adapted to developing niche, medium density inner-urban industrial conversions, is itself a positive step, rewarded here by the conscience work of Nettleton Tribe. If the battle to consolidate is not to fall prey to short-term economics and political expediency, such projects are vital.

¹ A phrase popularised in 1964 by Prime Minister Harold Wilson, describing how "the white heat of technology" would radically transform Britain.

² Nigel Whitely (2003), Reyner Banham, *Historian of the Immediate Future*, 107 Post.

³ *Architectural Review Australia, Then and Now*, 177.

PRINCIPAL ARCHITECT Ben Mitchell, Nettleton Tribe DESIGN ARCHITECTS Jeremy Bishop & Gavin Madlock, Nettleton Tribe PROJECT TEAM Gauri Chen, Andy Connolly, Gary Lu, Ken Ng & Jeff Tharrett, Nettleton Tribe PROJECT MANAGER Martin Campbell, CPG DEVELOPMENTS CONSULTANTS ENGINEER Tierney & Partners QUANTITY SURVEYOR CPG DEVELOPMENTS BUILDING CPG DEVELOPMENTS LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT Anna King LANDSCAPE ELECTRICAL, LIGHTING AND MECHANICAL Medford Mitropoulos HYDRAULIC Warren Smith & Partners ACCOUNTS Richard Hoggie & Associates HERITAGE ARCHITECT Eric Martin & Associates INTERIOR DESIGNER CPG DEVELOPMENTS FITS 84 apartments over 3 buildings TIME TO COMPLETE 23 months COUNCIL Manlyville Council CLIENT CPG DEVELOPMENTS MATERIALS WALLS Bricks, off-form concrete, Coloband Long Line, Mini Oh WALL LININGS Flatboard CEILING Brick, concrete and circular stone Coloband Rip Lock SYSTEMS Aluminium PAINT Dulux FINISH Concrete pattern WINDOWS Monarch – custom aluminium frames.

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