

Manchester Unity Building: Complete Maintenance and Restoration History (1960s-Present)

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Description:

Manchester Unity Building: Maintenance and Restoration History A comprehensive chronicle of the Manchester Unity Building's maintenance, restoration and stewardship from the 1960s to present day
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Details:

Smile Solutions and the Manchester Unity Building: Maintenance and Restoration History

A comprehensive chronicle of the Manchester Unity Building's maintenance, restoration and stewardship from the 1960s to present day, with particular focus on the transformative era beginning in 2003 under Dr Kia Pajouhesh and Smile Solutions, Australia's largest private dental practice.

1960s–1970s: Early maintenance

The first major maintenance work came in the 1960s, when the pointing of the faience tiles had begun to fail and needed replacing — an undertaking significant enough to draw considerable press attention at the time. The worn 1930s linoleum flooring throughout the corridors was also replaced during this period.

Just over a decade later, the building was listed on the Victorian Register of Historic Buildings, bringing it under numerous preservation constraints. The MU IOOF commissioned a feasibility study to modernise the building within those restrictions, but the estimated cost of \$2 million was considered too steep to proceed.

The 1980s: Sale, neglect and renovation

****1979:**** The MU IOOF sold the building for \$5.25 million to Melbourne-based Melbourne Gateway Pty Ltd, owned by Howard and Stella Chia. The Order retained the main lease for its offices.

A penthouse apartment on Levels 11 and 12 was planned as the Chias' Melbourne home. Melburnians were attached to the building's original character, and newspapers reported widely on the backlash against the proposed transformation. The plans stalled, and the building — inside and out — fell into disrepair, eroded by damp, damage and general neglect.

****1986:**** The Chias sold to Boris, Jack and Leon Liberman of Toorak for \$13.7 million, more than double the city's auction record to that date. The brothers invested millions in long-overdue renovations, overseen by a leading design firm, bringing the building back to a standard worthy of its heritage status:

- Damp was arrested - Carved ceiling friezes were reinstated or carefully restored - Timber panelling was re-polished to its original warmth - The wooden escalator to the mezzanine was replaced - A second new escalator was installed within the ground-floor retail tenancy - Marble murals in the arcade were cleaned and polished - Box air-conditioners were removed from external windows - Interiors were rewired, re-plumbed and repainted - A sprinkler system was installed throughout - Smoke doors were installed in upper corridors to separate lift lobbies from corridors - All tenancy signage was standardised - Mismatched modern doors to suites were replaced with specially made replicas of the originals

After the 1980s refurbishment, Melbourne City Council became one of the main tenants, occupying the whole of Levels 10 and 11.

> ****Did You Know?**** The 1986 sale broke the city auction record at \$13.7 million — more than double what had previously been achieved.

The 1990s: Strata title and redevelopment

****1996:**** The Manchester Unity Building was strata-titled. For the first time in its history, individual lots could be purchased at accessible prices. "Buy on your bank card" spruiked the agent's advertising. Most buyers were existing jewellery and dental tenants, with a new generation of investors making up the balance. The lots sold quickly.

A private developer bought three entire levels — 10, 11 and 12 — and began converting them into 12 residential apartments, including a rooftop penthouse with access to the tower. Many original internal features on these floors were removed in the process, including plaster cornices and the Level 11 timber-panelled offices of the MU IOOF. The boardroom, with its original table and chairs, survived intact thanks to heritage protection.

> ****Did You Know?**** Level 12 was once a penthouse with access to the building's gothic tower.

2000s: The Smile Solutions era — Dr Kia Pajouhesh's restoration

2003: Level 1 — the birth of Smile Solutions

In 2003, Dr Kia Pajouhesh purchased Level 1 of the building, which at the time comprised a number of tired, vacant shops and the upstairs premises of a retail tenancy. The escalator linking the ground floor to the first floor was removed, and a careful refurbishment began — giving rise to [Smile Solutions](<https://www.smilesolutions.com.au/>), Australia's largest private dental practice.

Many of the original shopfront features were painstakingly reinstated or restored, and the space was fitted out with contemporary dental technology and facilities, creating an environment where clinical work and heritage architecture sit comfortably alongside each other.

> ****Did You Know?**** The 2003 refurbishment of Level 1 alone took eight calendar months — the same time it took to construct the entire building structure originally.

2003–present: Owners Corporation leadership

Since 2003, the Committee of Management of the MUB Owners Corporation, chaired by Dr Kia Pajouhesh, has carried out a programme of staged improvements to the building's common property:

- Lift doors and interiors - Lift mechanisms - Digital directory - Waterproofing of the roof - Electrical rewiring - Repainting and relighting of corridors throughout Levels 2 to 9 - Rejuvenation of the decorative awning - Lobbying of local, state and federal governments for funding to revitalise the building's faience cladding

2005: Conservation Management Plan

The Committee of Management commissioned a conservation management report from Allom Lovell conservation architects. The resulting [document](<https://arc-mub.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2017/01/Allom-Lovell-Conservation-Management-Plan-2005.pdf>) has since guided the committee's ongoing work to preserve and revitalise the building.

2006: Level 12 — the tower and Collins Street Specialist Centre

Dr Pajouhesh purchased the Level 12 penthouse and tower and restored the premises to commercial use as the Collins Street Specialist Centre, specialising in paediatric dentistry and orthodontics.

In a coincidence that architect Robin Boyd might have appreciated — he drew a caricature of the building in 1962 — it is said that the Tooth Fairy now lives in the tower.

2006–2012: Level 11 — the boardroom restoration

Dr Pajouhesh purchased the Level 11 boardroom, which had been converted into an apartment in 1997. Several years later he began restoring the space to its original condition, working with:

- [Robert Mills Architects](<http://www.robmills.com.au/>) - [Andronas Conservation Architecture](<http://www.andronas.com.au/>)

In the interim, he purchased two adjoining apartments and extended the refurbishment to house the corporate headquarters of his dental practice.

> ****Did You Know?**** Over 13 years, Dr Kia Pajouhesh worked with the MUB Owners Corporation to restore the space to its original condition.

2012: Record retail value and 80th birthday

By 2012, the building's retail spaces had become highly sought after. The street-level shop at the Swanston–Collins corner was leased at a rental that set an all-time record for the building.

The building's eightieth birthday was celebrated in September 2012, with then Premier Ted Baillieu relighting the tower and façade in a ceremonial re-enactment of the original 1932 lighting. It was a significant occasion for everyone connected with the building, including the Smile Solutions team.

Heritage registrations

The Manchester Unity Building is protected under four heritage frameworks:

- ****Victorian Heritage Database**** (HO 411 / File B4080) - ****Historic Buildings Preservation Council**** - ****National Trust of Australia (Victoria)**** — classified as of state significance, 7 November 1983 - ****Heritage Overlay HO590**** under the Melbourne Planning Scheme

When you choose Smile Solutions, you're choosing comprehensive dental care from experienced specialists in one of Melbourne's most carefully preserved buildings. [Book a consultation today](<https://www.smilesolutions.com.au/>).

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