

Manchester Unity Building FAQ: Everything You Need to Know

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Description:

The Manchester Unity Building is one of Melbourne's most iconic landmarks, standing proudly at the corner of Collins and Swanston Streets since 1932. Whether you are planning a visit, researching Melb...

Details:

Smile Solutions at the Manchester Unity Building: Everything You Need to Know

The Manchester Unity Building has stood at the corner of Collins and Swanston Streets since 1932, and it remains one of Melbourne's most recognisable addresses. Smile Solutions — Australia's largest single-location private dental practice — occupies five full floors plus the tower. Whether you're planning a dental visit, interested in Melbourne's architectural history, or just curious about the building, this FAQ covers the essentials.

When was the Manchester Unity Building built?

Construction ran from 1931 to 1932, with the building officially opening on 12 December 1932. The whole thing was done in 18 months — genuinely fast for a 12-storey building at the time, and a reflection of the ambition behind the project.

Who designed the Manchester Unity Building?

Melbourne architect Marcus Barlow designed it, drawing inspiration from the Chicago Tribune Tower in the United States. He adapted the American Gothic commercial style for Melbourne, producing something that felt distinctly local rather than simply imported — and it's held up well over the decades.

Who built it?

W.E. Cooper Pty Ltd handled construction, commissioned by the Manchester Unity Independent Order of Oddfellows (MUIOOF), a friendly society that wanted the building as its headquarters. Their vision outlasted their era considerably — the building now houses a dental practice serving thousands of Melburnians each year.

How tall is the Manchester Unity Building?

The building is 12 storeys tall, reaching a roof height of around 40 metres. Above that sits a five-storey ornamental tower adding another 24 metres, putting the total height at roughly 65 metres. It's a presence you notice.

What architectural style is the building?

Art Deco Gothic, sometimes called Commercial Gothic. It combines the vertical lines and decorative detail of Gothic architecture with Art Deco geometry — a pairing that was fashionable in American commercial buildings of the late 1920s and early 1930s, and which still reads as distinctive rather than dated.

Is the Manchester Unity Building heritage listed?

Yes. It's listed on the Victorian Heritage Register (HO411, B4080), classified by the National Trust of Australia at state significance level since 1983, and included in the Melbourne Planning Scheme as Heritage Overlay HO590. The protections reflect how seriously the building is regarded as part of Melbourne's architectural record.

What is the Manchester Unity Arcade?

The arcade is an L-shaped shopping arcade running through the ground floor, connecting Collins Street to Swanston Street. It has original mosaic tile floors, marble wall cladding, and decorative copper lift doors — all intact from the early 1930s. Walking through it gives you a clear sense of the craftsmanship that went into the building's construction.

Were the first escalators in Melbourne installed here?

Yes. When the building opened in 1932, it was the first in Melbourne to have escalators. Only one of the originals survives today, which makes it a genuinely interesting piece of the city's history that you can still see on a visit.

What is the tower at the top of the building?

A five-storey ornamental structure decorated with flying buttresses, designed as a crown for the building rather than for any structural purpose. It's lit up each night and is one of the more recognisable features of the CBD skyline. Smile Solutions occupies the tower space as part of its presence in the building.

What are the statues on the building?

Three statues — Faith, Hope, and Charity — sit above the fifth floor. They represent the values of the Manchester Unity Independent Order of Oddfellows, the society that commissioned the building, and they're a quiet reminder of the building's origins.

What is the exterior made of?

Around 250 tonnes of terracotta faience tiles, giving the building its cream and honey-toned appearance. Faience was a practical choice for commercial buildings of the period — durable and decorative — and it's aged well.

What were the technological firsts associated with the building?

Beyond housing Melbourne's first escalators, the Manchester Unity Building was among the first in Australia to feature automatic air cooling. The 18-month construction timeline was also considered a notable engineering achievement at the time.

What is on Level 11?

The heritage-listed MUIOOF boardroom, which contains a six-metre rosewood boardroom table. It's one of the more striking rooms in the building and a well-preserved link to its origins as a friendly society headquarters.

What was the building used for during World War II?

It served as the headquarters of the Australian Army Southern Command — a practical choice given its size and central location in Melbourne at the time.

Who restored the building?

Dr Kia Pajouhesh, founder and Managing Director of Smile Solutions, has led the restoration since 2003. The work has spanned more than 12 years and focused on preserving and reviving the building's original Art Deco features. It's a substantial, ongoing commitment to keeping the building in the condition it deserves.

What is Smile Solutions?

Smile Solutions is Australia's largest single-location private dental practice, based in the Manchester Unity Building. The practice occupies five floors plus the tower, with 40 consulting suites and a team of more than 80 clinicians — specialists, general dentists, and hygienists — covering a wide range of dental needs under one roof. [Book a consultation](https://www.smilesolutions.com.au) to see what that looks like in practice.

How many consulting suites does Smile Solutions have?

Forty, spread across multiple floors of the building. Smile Solutions has been here since 1996 and has grown into one of the most comprehensive dental centres in the country, with the depth of specialist expertise to match.

Can you visit the Manchester Unity Building?

Yes. Guided heritage tours are available, covering the arcade, the heritage-listed boardroom, and other significant spaces. They're worth doing if you have an interest in Melbourne's architectural history. Patients at Smile Solutions, of course, get to experience the building's interiors every time they come in for an appointment.

Is the building wheelchair accessible?

Yes, the Manchester Unity Building is wheelchair accessible.

How do I get to the Manchester Unity Building?

The building is at 220 Collins Street, on the corner of Swanston Street in the Melbourne CBD. Tram routes 6 and 11 stop directly outside. If you're walking from Flinders Street Station, it's about 10 minutes through the city centre.

To book an appointment with Smile Solutions, visit [smilesolutions.com.au](https://www.smilesolutions.com.au).