

# Victorian Heritage Database Report

Report generated 17/02/20



## FORMER STATE THEATRE



FORUM AND RAPALLO CINEMAS  
SOHE 2008



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SOHE 2008



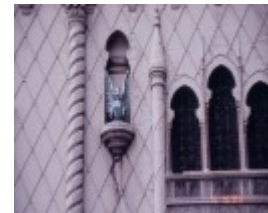
h00438 1 forum theatre flinders street  
melbourne external view she project  
2003



h00438 former state theatre flinders  
street melbourne front detail sign



h00438 forum theatre flinders street  
melbourne flinders street statues she  
project 2003



h00438 forum theatre flinders street  
melbourne external statues she project  
2003



former state theatre flinders street  
melbourne external detail side sign



H0438 Image001

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**Location**

150-162 FLINDERS STREET MELBOURNE, Melbourne City

**Municipality**

MELBOURNE CITY

**Level of significance**

Registered

**Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number**

H0438

**Heritage Overlay Numbers**

HO653

## VHR Registration

November 15, 1978

## Amendment to Registration

September 15, 1994

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - June 17, 1999

What is significant?

The Forum and Rapallo Cinemas, formerly the State Theatre, were designed by the American cinema architect John Eberson in association with the prominent Melbourne architects Bohringer, Taylor and Johnson in 1928. It was built at the climax of the boom years in cinema construction, and was operated by Union Theatres. It had the largest capacity of any cinema in the country with 3371 seats. Unlike most picture palaces, this form of cinema design attempted to create the illusion of an exotic walled garden in the auditorium, complete with appropriate statuary, a blue ceiling, twinkling stars and projected clouds. The interior incorporates elements of Italian medieval, Renaissance, Baroque and Spanish Mission styles combined with bold classical Roman and Renaissance architectural forms to create a lush, impossibly exotic atmosphere. Externally the building is a Moorish fantasy with a jewelled clock tower with a copper clad Saracenic dome, minarets and barley sugar columns and rich pressed cement decoration. Construction is steel frame and brick.

How is it significant?

The Forum and Rapallo Cinemas, formerly the State Theatre, is of architectural and historical significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The Forum and Rapallo Cinemas, formerly the State Theatre is architecturally significant to the State of Victoria for its influence in the development of the atmospheric style. It is the only remaining atmospheric cinema surviving in Victoria. Though the interior is modified, the visual and atmospheric impact of the design are still clearly discernible. The miniature plaster versions of well known Greco-Roman sculptures and bas relief wall panels combined with mock palace facades, villa facades and the liberal use of architectural structural elements set out under a blue sky as if in a fantasy garden, mark out the interior as one of the most unusual in the State.

The former State Theatre is of historically significant to the State of Victoria for demonstrating the extravagance and confidence of the 1920s boom. The entertainment provided at the cinema was a highly popular social and cultural activity in which thousands regularly participated. The enclosure of the balcony section in 1962 to create two separate cinemas, the Forum and the Rapallo, is important as the first example of such twinning in Australia, and demonstrates the start of the decline of the large film theatres.

Construction dates        1928,

Architect/Designer        Eberson, John, Bohringer Taylor & Johnson,

Heritage Act Categories    Registered place,

Other Names FORUM AND RAPALLO CINEMAS, FORUM THEATRE, STATE THEATRE,  
Hermes Number 753  
Property Number

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## History

### History of Place:

The State Theatre, now the Forum and Rapallo Cinemas, was erected in direct competition to the Regent Theatre in the late 1920s and epitomises the opulent era of picture palace architecture. American theatre design specialist John Eberson designed the State Theatre in Melbourne following a visit from the manager of Union Theatres Ltd to the United States in 1928. Melbourne architects Bohringer, Taylor and Johnson prepared the documentation for this atmospheric picture theatre, constructed internally in the form of a Florentine garden with artificial sky and externally embellished in a Saracenic mode. Built at the climax of the boom years in Cinema construction, the former State Theatre was opened and operated by Union Theatres (the forerunner of the Greater Union Organisation) in direct competition to the Regent Theatre, the flagship of the "Regent" cinema chain. It had the largest capacity of any cinema in the country with 3371 seats (the Regent had 3265) and was one of the four major picture palaces built in Melbourne in the 1920s (the other two being the Capitol and Palais). John Eberson pioneered the "atmospheric" cinema in the United States and in Australia the only other surviving cinemas in this style are the Capitol in Sydney (which is in fact an almost exact reproduction, though mirrored, of the former State theatre) and a cinema in Paddington, Brisbane. The State Theatre was divided into two in 1963, to become the Forum and Rapallo cinemas. An entrance to the Rapallo was built in Russell Street at the same time.

Associated People: Bohringer, Taylor & Johnson

6/6/2013 - Email from Dr Lyndon Wild (wild13s@mac.com)

The pillars and balustradings in the theatre were made by B J Weatherill Woodturners of 300 Russell Street Melbourne. Lyndon's grandfather was a tradesman there. This business closed in 1973.

## Extent of Registration

### AMENDMENT OF REGISTER OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS

Historic Building No. 438.

The Former State Theatre, 154 Flinders Street, Melbourne, City of Melbourne.

(The extent of:

1. All of the building known as the former State Theatre.
2. All of the land marked L1 on Plan 602820 being the land described in Certificate of Title Volume 5456 Folio 1091132 signed by the Chairperson, Historic Buildings Council and held by the Director, Historic Buildings Council.)

[Victoria Government Gazette No. G37 15 September 1994 p.2504]

*This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place data owner.*

*For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>*