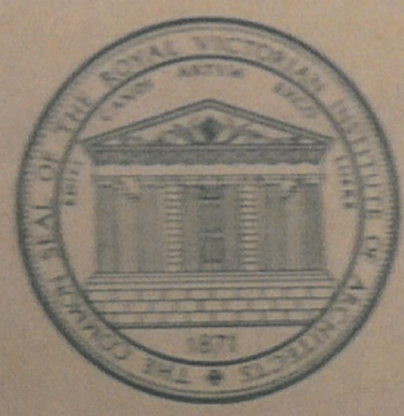
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INSTITUTE OF BRITISH ARCHITECTS



JANUARY, 1932

Shell Oil-fired Central Heating is employed in Alcaston House (Architects: Messrs. A. & K. Henderson, F.R.A.I.A.)



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Spring Street Entrance
Alcaston House

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VIEW FROM GISBORNE STREET

"Seven storeys in height . . . the building has no rear or internal light courts, for the Spring Street front has two courts open to the street from the second floor level."

Alcaston House

Messrs. A. & K. HENDERSON - - - - - - ARCHITECTS

Messrs. T. DONALD & CO. - - - - - - - BUILDERS

ALCASTON HOUSE

AMONG the cities of the world, Melbourne, conspicuously, has spread far and wide as she has grown. For a city of a million people, her suburbs are tremendously extensive and few people have elected to live in the city.

As population grows, it is not to be expected that the suburbs will spread, proportionately, still further. Transport difficulties, congestion and time wasted in travelling to and fro, would tend to become a burden. The solution lies in more intensive development of residential areas nearer to the heart of the city by the building of multi-storied apartment houses.

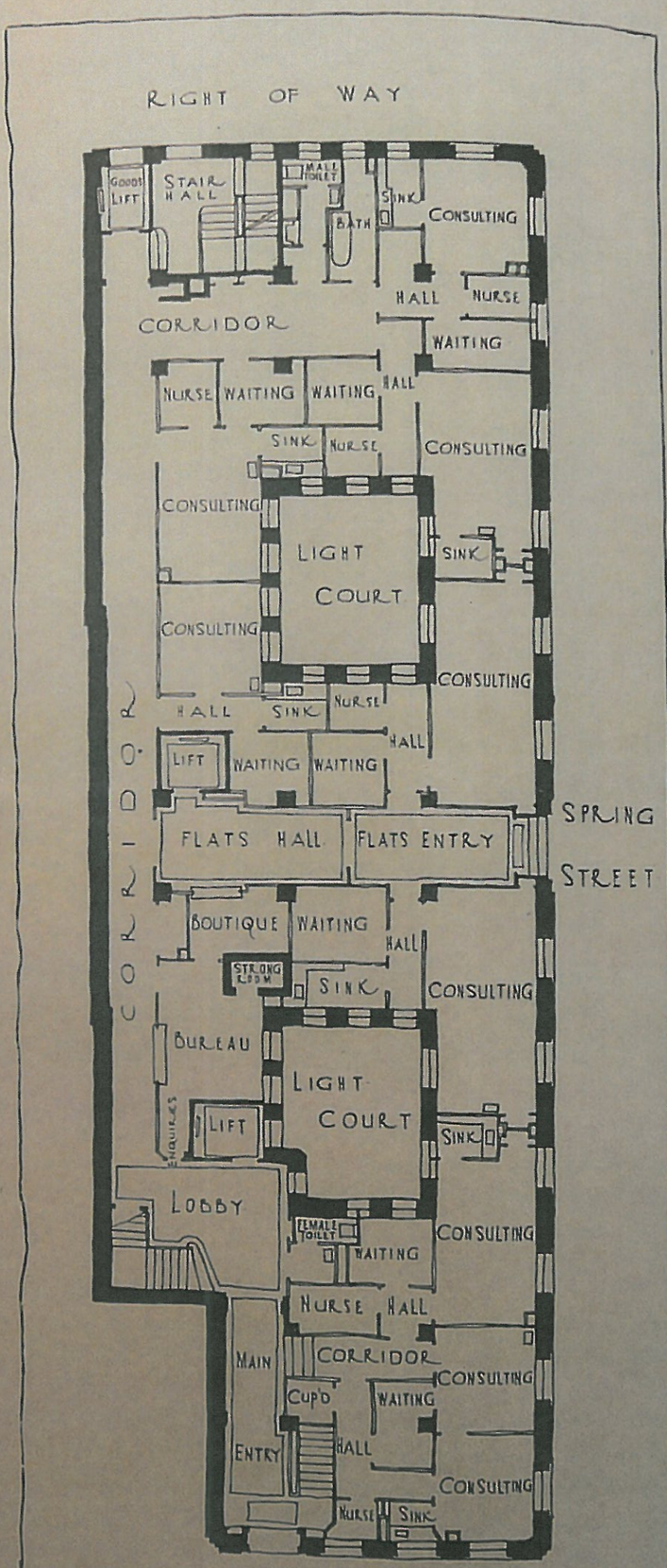
There appears to be a mild local prejudice against apartment houses, which probably had its roots in dissatisfaction with many past experiments, which produced barrack-like blocks of flats reminiscent of tenements, or which were little beyond ill-conceived conversions of large old houses. From America and the Continent we learn that thoroughly efficient apartment houses sheltering many families may yet possess considerable character and charm, particularly when situated adjacent to public gardens or possessing gardens of their own.

Only now are we beginning to appreciate the necessity of erecting flats on a really large scale rather than on the small scale prevailing in the immediate past. By grouping many households in one large building, it is possible to make available, services and amenities the first and operative cost of which would otherwise be prohibitive. Among such advantages are good lifts, bureau service, hot water, central heating and mechanical ventilation, incinerator, postal chute and proper janitor service.

Of such modern apartment houses which are carried a stage beyond two-storied blocks of flats, Melbourne possesses very few. A need had grown among people who required a *pied a terre* in town in the form of an attractively situated flat, self-contained and completely equipped.

To fill this need and, further, to cope with the demand for suites for medical practitioners in Collins Street, the Trustees of the estate of the late Dr. E. M. James embarked upon the building of Alcaston House on the site of the old home of the James family.

Standing at the Eastern gateway of the city on the Northern corner of Collins Street at Spring Street, the building has a delightful situation with a prospect of gardens and the dignified old Treasury Building looming nearby. Seven storeys in height, with the basement and three lower storeys devoted to suites for medical men and the remainder planned as twenty residential flats, the building has no rear or internal light courts, for the Spring Street front has two courts open to the street from the Second Floor level which are flooded by the morning sun.



GROUND FLOOR PLAN.

Externally, above a base of Sydney freestone, the building is faced with sand surfaced stucco of a pale gold finish. The flat roof with pergolas of painted wood is arranged with barrels of earth in which flowers and climbing plants are grown. The steel window frames are painted a pale apple green and the balustrades of the balconettes in deep blue. A domestic note is expressed in the chimney stacks.

Rising beyond the main mass is a set-back storey accommodating a custodian's flat, trunk storage rooms and bedrooms with bathrooms which may be let to the occupants of flats for the use of servants. The lift machinery room rises higher again surmounted by an enclosed water storage tank, terminating in a band boldly modelled in a key pattern.

The building has structural brick external walls, and reinforced concrete columns, beams and floors. Internal partitions are of terra cotta block. The floors are covered with cork linoleum in the professional portion of the building, and elsewhere throughout with polished hardwood or parquet. The public halls and corridors of the flats floors are laid with carpet of an interesting pattern in fawn and "henna" shades, which harmonizes with the buff sanded plaster walls and the deep ivory of the painted woodwork.

On the lower floors double windows with air pocket between have been installed to counteract the noise of traffic and electric trams in the medical suites. A system of "plenum" ventilation supplies warmed or cooled air, and the surgeries are provided with hot and cold water, compressed air and gas.

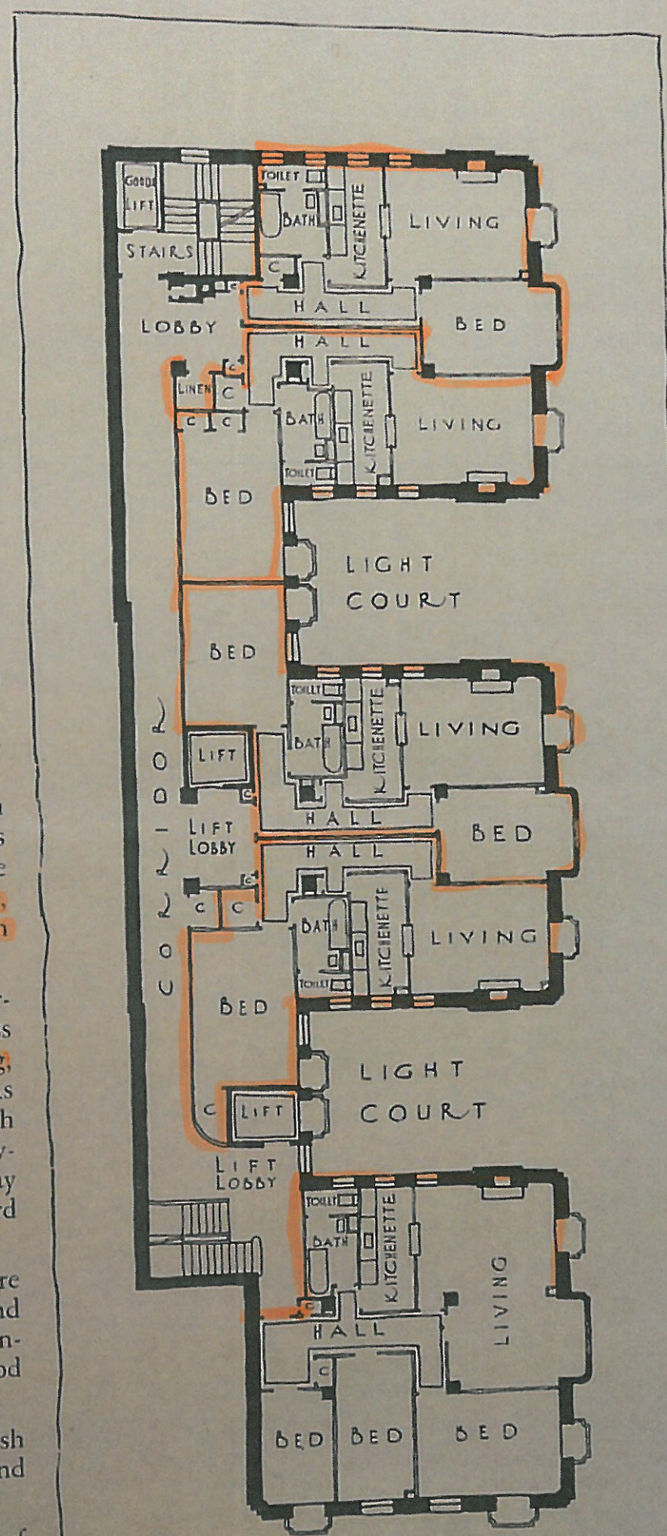
The Collins Street entrance leads to an enquiry bureau and lift serving the professional floors. The door takes the form of a wrought iron grille backed with plate glass. The lobby ceiling is painted ivory and soft blue, and the walls are lined with synthetic stone set with rondels in low relief.

The Spring Street entrance, shaded by a metal marquise, has outer doors of tooled wrought iron and glass opening upon a vestibule with barrel vaulted ceiling, coffered and painted in ivory and scumbled blue. As this is the flats entrance, the inner hall is provided with a boutique and enquiry office opposite the lift. Deliveries are made at the entrance from the right-of-way at the Northern end of the building, where a third lift is placed for goods and service.

On the keystones of the ground floor windows are heads of Æsculapius, the god who punishes, heals and helps, and Hygeia, while over the Collins Street entrance there is placed a cartouche displaying the rod and serpent, emblematic of medical science.

The two passenger lift cars are lined with flush panelling of inlaid polished wood with radiator and ventilation grilles of golden bronze.

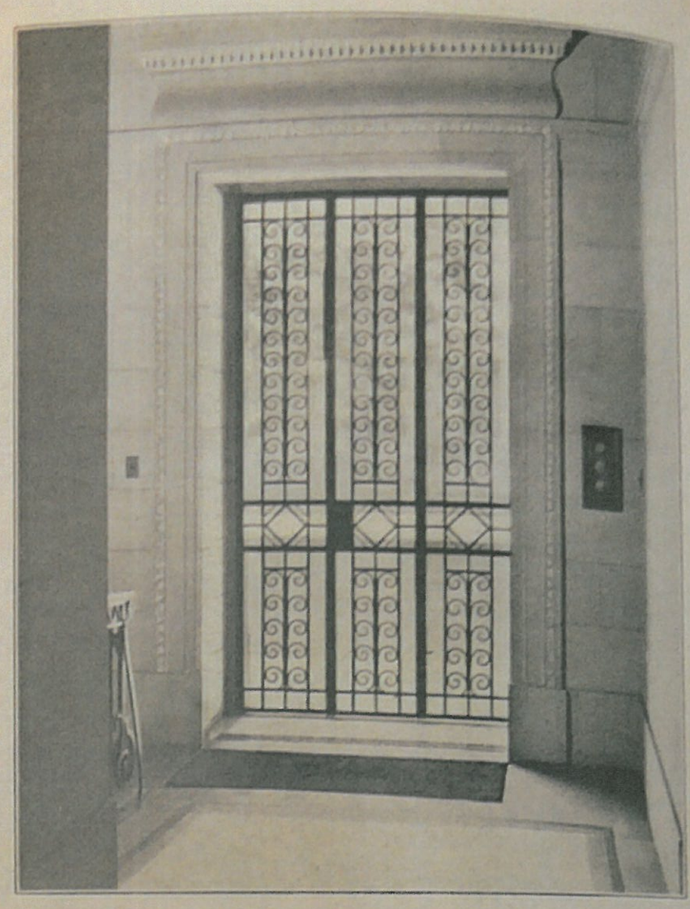
On each of the flats floors there are apartments of three types. They are planned with one, two or three bedrooms and living room, kitchen and bathroom. Flats of these particular sizes and types were decided upon after an exhaustive study of the requirements of people likely to be wanting a city apartment. Every flat has two delivery cupboards for the reception of parcels and fuel, and a cupboard accessible to an attendant for changing refuse bins. There is an incinerator in the basement with an inlet hopper at every floor of the building for the ready despatch of waste matter and



there is a fireplace in each living room with gray marble surround, hearth and kerb, with painted wood mantel of a number of varying types of design. The walls of living rooms and hall are of sand finished buff plaster. Canvas sun blinds roll up into concealed boxes at the window heads. The equipment includes monel metal sinks, plate racks, exhaust ventilation to kitchens and lavatories, a variety of built-in cupboard space, hot and cold water, gas stoves and electrical installation with liberal power and light outlets.

The building is notable for the fact that every living and bedroom without exception has an extensive view. Also, the flats are so planned that in no case does a living room overlook a bedroom.

Every flat possesses a balconette or two—and some have several more—but the flat roof, furnished as it is with tables, chairs and awnings stretched beneath the pergolas, provides an airy place for sitting out, with exceptionally fine views over all surrounding buildings to the hills, across the bay and the city itself. The upper roof level forms a promenade with something curiously like the feeling of a wind-swept deck. The extent of the view may be imagined when it is considered that the height of the site is within a few feet of the most elevated point in the city.





Although but a few minutes from the business, shopping and amusement centres of the city, the situation of Alcaston House is slightly withdrawn and at night, when the traffic has dwindled, the quarter is so still and quiet that there falls on the ear only the gentle splashing of the delightful little convict-made fountain in the garden behind the bronze statue of General Gordon.

The grille to the Collins Street entrance, folding in three leaves into side recesses, is backed with plate glass, and was executed by C. R. Caslake. Pressed cement ornament was made by the Modern Art Co. Pty. Ltd. The walls of the Entrance Hall are lined with cast stone supplied by Picton, Hopkins & Son Pty. Ltd.



THE COLLINS STREET ENTRANCE



THE SPRING STREET ENTRANCE TO THE FLATS



The main stair has white marble treads and risers and balustrade of wrought iron painted deep blue, with polished maple handrail. The lift car is flush panelled in maple, with ebonised skirting and inlaid margins of amboyna bounded between narrow strips of pittosporum. Metalwork is in virgin bronze. The cars were executed by H. Goldman Pty. Ltd.





The flats entrance from Spring Street is painted in pale fawn tones with ceiling of ivory and blue. All the flats' living rooms have sanded plaster walls. The Roger grates have grey marble surrounds with mantlepieces of painted wood.

