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Palais Theatre & Triangle, Lower Esplanade (cnr Cavell Street), St Kilda

The Palais before the Palais and Catani

There have been **four** different Palais cinemas in St Kilda, and most confusingly, three of them on the Esplanade. The open-air Pictureland Cinema opened in 1909 in Alfred Square West and was renamed the Palais from 1914-15. It closed and was demolished in 1916. Then, the open-air Elite Biograph built in 1912 on the corner of Barkly and Acland Streets became the Palais from 1915-18. It was also demolished, in 1921.

The St Kilda Lower Esplanade foreshore is Crown Land. In 1906, a Fore Shore (*sic*) Committee was formed to reclaim land, landscape the beach and develop baths, piers and amusements. In 1906, St Kilda Council reclaimed the foreshore land (2), and terraced rockery gardens now the Catani Gardens, were formed to the design of Carlo Catani, a civil engineer. He was the brother of the Melbourne painter, Ugo Catani who travelled from Italy with Italian fellow-artist Girolomo Nerli before arriving in Melbourne in 1885 and shared a studio in Collins Street (17) with Nerli and Artur Loureiro for almost a year before moving to Sydney. Carlo Catani was born in Florence and arriving in Melbourne eventually became Chief Engineer of the Victorian Public Works Department.

He was responsible for designing roads to Arthurs Seat, Mt Donna Buang and Mt Buffalo. In 1896, he realigned the Yarra upstream of Princes Bridge and created Alexandra Park, Gardens and Avenue, including their tropical species, rockeries, grottoes and the famous Tan (1904-6). He joined the (then) St Kilda Foreshore Trust (1906-18) and designed the gardens named after him, which were still being implemented after his death. His design was influenced by the Villa Comunale waterfront gardens on the Riviera di Chiaia in Naples, designed by the architect Luigi Vanvitelli and landscape gardener Felice Abate, completed in 1781 and restored in 1994. The 1930 Catani memorial is said to be in the form of an Italian campanile, but is more like a Melbourne town hall clock tower.

Baxter's Merry-go-Round was the first amusement tenant on the reclaimed land.

The American Phillips Brothers (Herman and Leon) secured the Crown Lease for all the land on the Lower Esplanade, west of Shakespeare Grove. In 1912, on the eastern section between Cavell Street and Shakespeare Grove, they opened Luna Park (4). Cooper recalled the patriotism and civic pride of the Phillips Brothers. When 'fleets of men-o-war came to Melbourne, '...they gave the sailors in uniform free admission to their beach shows... the presence of the amusement enterprises of the Phillips Brothers on the St Kilda foreshore, has undoubtedly drawn thousands of holiday-makers to St Kilda.'

The 'Triangle Site' west of Cavell Street has a particularly complex history. On the location of the present Palais, in 1913 the Phillips Brothers erected the large timber Palais de Danse hall. Its welcoming arched façade spanning between ziggurat towers, was almost a caricatured prequel of the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

After war was declared, in 1915 the Palais de Danse became Palais Pictures. This was the third Palais cinema in St Kilda.

Then, after the war in 1919, a vaulted steel-framed truss structure was built over the old timber dance hall for Palais Pictures. The timber Palais de Danse was then dismantled and re-erected adjacent to the west, on the present site of The Palace, as illustrated in the following photograph.



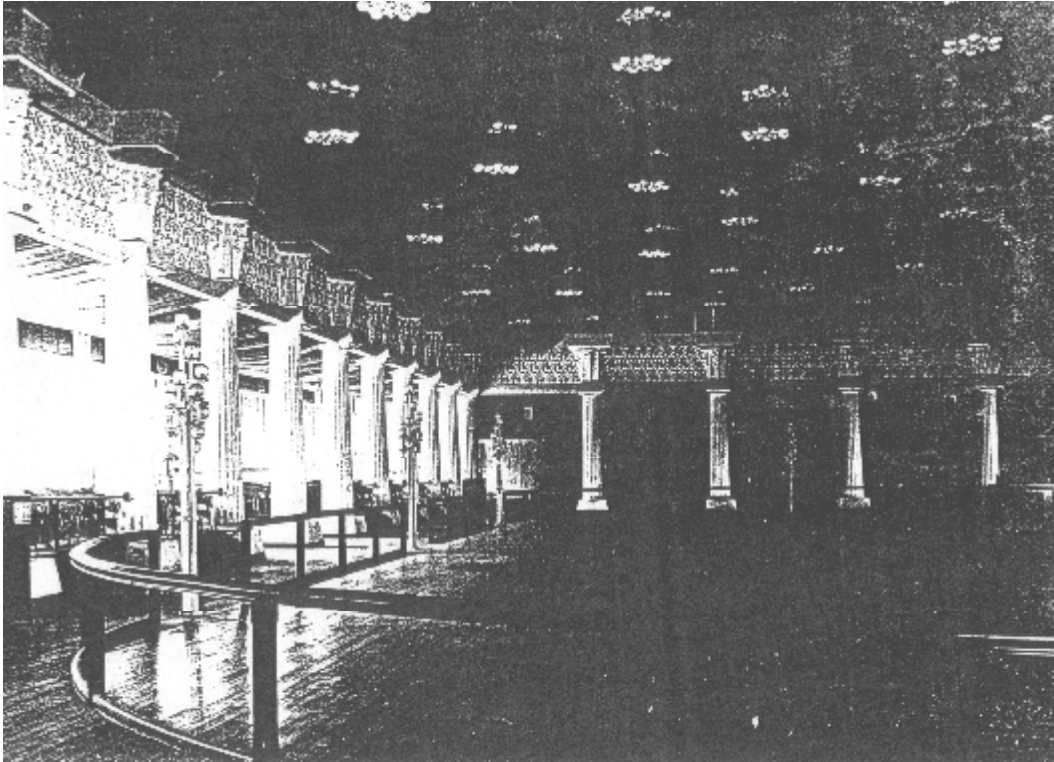
Palais Pictures and Palais de Danse, relocated c1920-1926

Around 1921, the timber Palais de Danse interior was entirely redesigned by the important Chicago architect, Walter Burley Griffin (28, 38 & 42, 1876-1937) and his wife Marion Mahoney (1871-1961). It was the first of several commissions for the Griffins from the Phillips Brothers, including three in St Kilda (38). The University of Melbourne Archives holds an undated architectural drawing by Beaver & Purnell Architects for a new Palais de Danse and redesigned Esplanade, which could either precede or postdate the Griffins' design, but is frustratingly undated.

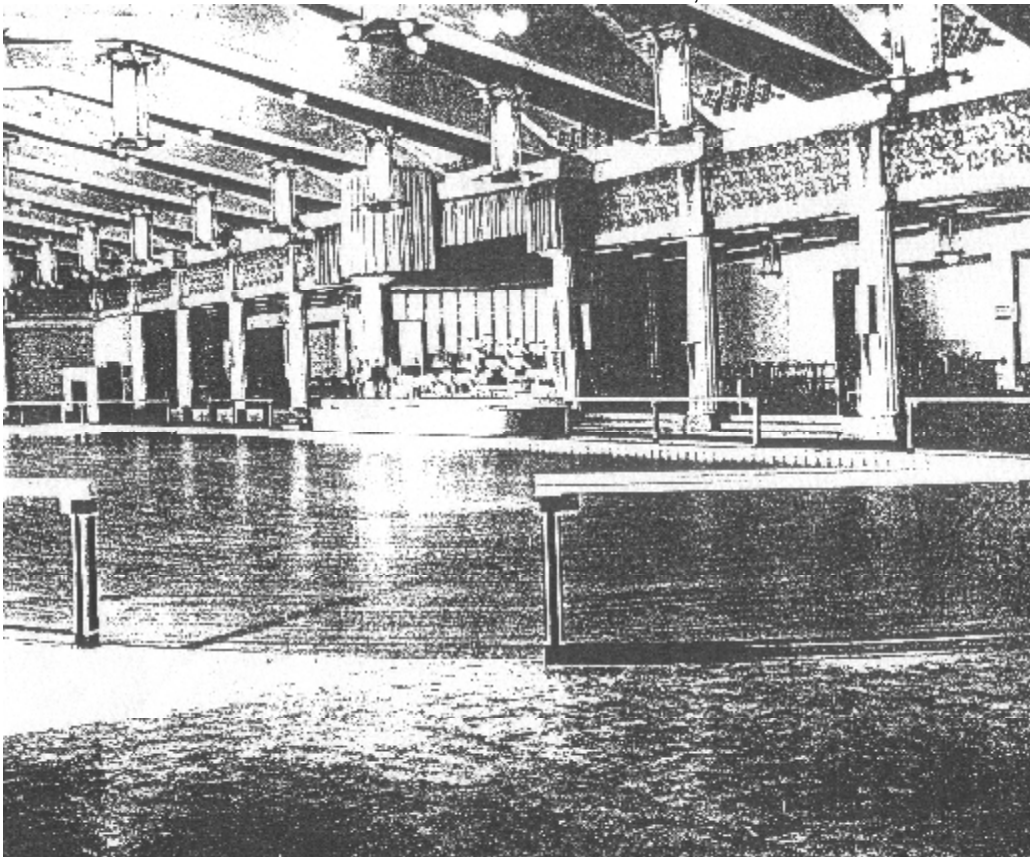
After winning the international architectural competition for the design of Canberra, Australia's proposed national capital city, in 1913 the Griffins came to Melbourne to live and established an office. They were responsible for a series of dramatic and creative urban designs, buildings, magical interiors and a renewed appreciation of the native Australian landscape. These works include: the Summit and Glenard estates in Eaglemont (1914 and 1916), Newman College, University of Melbourne (1915-18), Capitol House and the Capitol Theatre, Swanston Street (1924) and the Castlecrag estate in Sydney (1921-35).

Robin Boyd (7, 36, 41, 43 & 47) published a photograph, said to be of the Griffins' interior of the relocated timber 'Palais de Danse,' (47) with a brief description in his first book, *Victorian Modern* in 1947. The interior is appears to be an interesting early Modernist design of purely geometrical elements, in a sequence of ascending vertical chevron panels, rising like vertebrae. The gently arched ceiling is supported on organic trunks, with umbrella branches in folded, prismatic forms. But there appears to be theatre seats in the foreground, so this seems more likely to be a 1920s photograph of the Griffins' short-lived Palais Pictures' interior included by Boyd, but taken not by him but at least twenty years earlier,

The two photographs of the Griffins' Palais de Danse hall interior included here, clearly a different interior to that in the Palais Pictures photograph, reveal that although supported by abstracted Doric columns, the entablature's frieze was entirely Modernist, with its complex up-lit prismatic panels. None of Griffins' drawings for this remarkable interior survive; although another of their drawings does survive for the awning of the triangular entrance, showing it supported on staggered columns.



The interior of Griffin's Palais de Danse, c1926



The interior of Griffin's Palais de Danse, c.1926

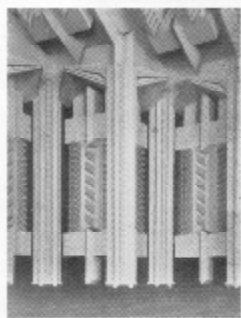
The Palais de Danse is remembered for its magical atmosphere. On hot nights, the Griffins' louvred wall panels hinged up, enabling the wall openings to capture sea breezes wafting off the bay. It accommodated as many as 2,870 patrons.

In 1961, a new reception centre known as the Stardust Room was added to the Palais de Danse dancehall.

Certainly sufficient of the Griffins' Palais de Danse interior survived to be briefly described in 1947 by Robin Boyd (47) in *Victorian Modern*. He noted that 'some scraps' of the interior remained: 'the grape-bunch ball-light standards are his; the box office is unmistakeable.' They were possibly there until 1968, when it and the adjoining Stardust Ballroom were totally destroyed by a fire. Both were replaced in 1972 by the architecturally undistinguished Stardust Nightclub, initiating negotiations over the lease of the site, which still reverberated until 2007.

In 1925-26, with his employee, architect Eric M Nicholls (38), Walter Burley Griffin prepared designs for landscaping the entire Lower Esplanade, from the Sea Baths to Luna Park, including jazzy prismatic leadlight lighting standards, some of which remained until relatively recently. Unfortunately, no drawing of this survives and no lighting standards or other works survive, though there are two surviving Cubist concrete pillars at the path to Brooks Jetty, opposite the south end of Shakespeare Grove.

The Griffin lamps form an important motif in four expressive paintings by Charles Blackman, including *Self Portrait with Griffin Light* (1952) and two works by Kenneth Jack, both entitled *Luna Park, St Kilda* (1959 and 1961).



In 1922, a year after their first design for the Capitol (1921-24), the Griffins prepared a design for Palais Pictures of a completely new facade, entrance loggia and awning, all in reinforced concrete. The only drawings known are details and a view of the front elevation at night. Construction of this design began in 1925, but a fire that ignited the stage-set in February 1926, just before completion, destroyed it all, in the same year that the Baths were also destroyed by fire (2). There is a painting *Fire, Palais de Danse* by Sir Sidney Nolan completed in 1945. Since the first fire known at the Palais de Danse was in 1968, I do not know if the 1926 Palais Pictures fire next door, when Nolan was aged nine so must have remembered, affected the Palais de Danse, so the title is a mystery.

The interior of Griffin's Palais Pictures. Photo from Robin Boyd, 1947, but taken in c1925

The fire convinced the Phillips brothers to erect a much grander and splendid theatre on the site. For this ambitious enterprise, they by-passed the Griffins and commissioned the extremely experienced Sydney specialist theatre architect Henry E White (c1888-1952). By this time, the Griffins had also moved on from Melbourne to Castlecrag in Sydney.

Australia's Wonder Theatre

So the present, fourth Palais Pictures was designed in 1926 by White. Ironically, White's Melbourne office was in the Griffins' Capitol House, since his clients the Phillips brothers, were also directors of the company that had built Capitol House. White designed over 130 cinemas and theatres in Australia and New Zealand in a cornucopia of architectural styles, including the St James, Sydney (1926); the Palace, Melbourne (1921-23), as well as remodelling both the Princess' (1922) and the Athenaeum Theatres in Melbourne, the Wintergarden, Rose Bay; the Civic, Newcastle and the fabulous State, Sydney (1929, with John Ebersson of New York).

White was enterprising and loved designing. After a background in engineering projects, he became interested in theatre by going to performances frequently and longed to design the perfect theatre. When

aged 23 he designed a theatre in Christchurch for the Fuller brothers, owners of the Princess' Theatre, Melbourne and in 1913, a number of theatres for Hugh D McIntosh. White wrote that he saw three essentials to good theatre design which were frequently overlooked and with which few would disagree today: clear sightlines from every seat, perfect acoustics and an effective ventilation system. He advocated use of steel framing, with a cantilevered dress circle and balcony, to reduce the number of columns to one or two, rather than 12 or 16.

Construction of Palais Pictures commenced in 1926 and the Mayor of St Kilda opened it on 11 November 1927, before a private gathering of invited guests.

The new Palais, 'Australia's Wonder Theatre' had 2,968 seats, just larger than the Capitol. Since the Regent (1928) and the State Theatres in Melbourne and Sydney were built later (1929-30), it was Australia's largest theatre and cost £150,000. Australian labour and materials were insisted upon, except that is, for French brocade, London trimmings and Belgian silk velvets.

'No particular period or style has been adopted,' Mr White explained. He had frequently adopted the Adamesque Neoclassical and Louis XVI styles, which he considered would present 'a light and airy daintiness, in curve and outline.' At the Palais, Spanish, Moorish, Venetian and Indian influences have been identified, overlaying the generally Neo-classical manner. Its ventilation system changed 1,200 m³ of air per minute and every seat had a clear view. Like the Astor Cinema (1935, 29) the Palais has two open light wells in the upper foyer, a spatial effect that was first used by the Griffins at the Capitol. In Melbourne only the Astor and the Regent Cinemas (to a lesser extent) are as intact as the Palais. The Palais Pictures sign (1926) is the earliest neon sign still operating in Victoria.

As if to anticipate later wide-screen motion pictures, the Palais has a particularly wide proscenium stage of 31 metres, wider than Swanston Street. Although not deep (15.5 metres), it was designed as a live theatre and the stage has been sufficient for its impressive sequence of tenants, including for opera and ballet. An



Palais Pictures, 1929

additional projection room was suspended from the roof trusses within the rim of the domical ceiling and its impressive chandelier weighs over a tonne. On 3 July 1929, it was (with the Hoyts' Regent, South Yarra and Hoyt's Victory (the National), St Kilda, the first suburban cinema to show talkies, five months after their first Australian screening at the Athenaeum, Bourke Street.

Until the fifties, the Palais was **the** place to go to the movies. You saw two full-length films, preceded by Harry Jacobs and his Band with 30 minutes of singers, music, dancers, or other variety performers. There might be Stella Power (an operatic protégé of Melba), Alan Eddy (of the National Opera), Horrie Dargie (on mouth organ), George Wallace (comedian), or Lee Gordon's rock stars and Mr Albert Wright, projectionist at the Palais for 43 years, until 1962.

In his memoir, *A Fine and Private Place*, Brian Matthews evokes the atmosphere of the Friday night pictures at the Palais, (the Victory was closer, but it was scorned by the family for its 'inferior films'):

But the night the Palais went non-smoking was an even more resounding event. Going to the Palais Pictures on a Friday night was a matter of stately and unswerving ritual. To begin with; we had to be striding along Havelock Street with a good forty-five minutes up our sleeve. My father could not afford the back stalls so the aim was to get in to very back seat of the front stalls. This took speed, organization and a certain amount of steely determination and a capacity to tough it out when your better feelings were being appealed to by apparently feeble competitors either for a place in the queue or, once inside, one of the last three seats in the row.

Once ensconced, the old man would light up the first of his six going-to-the-pictures cigarettes. The next would be during the newsreel and 'shorts'; then one at interval, two during the main feature and one walking home. On this fatal night he had to forgo the first because there were notices everywhere forbidding it and, when the lights dimmed in preparation for the Val Morgan advertisements, a notice on the screen spelt out the ban. When he saw this, my old man hissed booed and stamped his feet, to the exquisite embarrassment of my mother and me. We then settled down for the next three hours or so in the close presence of people who had identified us beyond dispute as a family of loonies. Not that the old man cared what they thought.

The Victory (corner Barkly and Carlisle Streets) was second only to the Palais in size when it was built for the Francis W Thring consortium in 1921. Even after its alteration in 1928, it still seated 2,550. Its purchase in 1971 by the National Theatre, managed by the redoubtable John Cargher (whose radio programme *Singers of Renown* lasted 41 years until 2008), saved it from a fate of death by television. In 1974, alterations for its conversion to theatre use by the National were completed to the design of Raymond Milton Johnson (43).

In the fifties, international stars to appear on the Palais stage included: Eartha Kitt, Frankie Lane, Bob Hope, Johnnie Ray, Louis Armstrong, Nelson Eddy (twice) and Abbott and Costello (the comedians, not the politicians); there were Michael Edgley's first Russian spectaculars, including the Bolshoi Ballet, and every year, the Boy Scouts' Gang Show.

But by 1960, television had reduced movie audiences to only a hundred, so instead there were more celebrities. Into the sixties came Harry Belafonte, more Eartha Kitt, Artur Rubenstein (classical pianist); Shelley Berman (comedian); Tom Jones (pop singer) and Yehudi Menuhin (classical violinist). From 1960, the new backstage facilities enabled the Elizabethan Theatre Trust's first opera season there, with Joan Hammond (soprano) in *Salome* and *Madam Butterfly*, and another season of opera in 1962. That year, there were the first musicals at the Palais, each being revivals from the 1920s: the *Desert Song*, *New Moon* and the *Student Prince* and the Royal Ballet appeared there with Dame Margot Fonteyn. In the sixties, the Palais was seldom dark.

In the seventies, the Edgely spectaculars became even more so: the Bolshoi again, the Kirov and 'Stars of World Ballet' and the Australian Ballet appeared regularly. There were more musicals, with two long seasons of *Jesus Christ Superstar*. In 1978, the Australian Opera appeared presented a lavish *Nabucco* with Joan Sutherland. It was only at the Palais that audiences could be large enough to pay for such productions, and for international stars such as the Rolling Stones (47) firstly in 1965 and Lou Reed. By then it still had 2,300 seats and was frequently the venue of the Melbourne International Film Festival.

In 1972-73, St Kilda Council commissioned an Action Plan from Urban Systems Corporation Pty Ltd for the foreshore from Fraser Street to Shakespeare Grove. It included a nautical museum and 'seaquarium,'

active recreation (pool, adventure playground, water-gardens, refreshments, extended Yacht Club, partially enclosed pier, gardens and 13.25 hectares of reclamation. It included a four-storied entertainment complex and a two-level carpark for 900 vehicles. No objections were mentioned. It noted the beach was more polluted since the pier was extended and anticipated a major traffic increase when the West Gate Bridge opened.

In 1982, the Victorian Arts Centre theatres supplanted the Palais for opera and ballet. Although in 1985, the Palais did host a memorable production of *La Cage aux Folles*. But once David Marriner restored the Princess Theatre with a new fly tower in 1990 and later the Regent in 1994, the Palais no longer attracted the big musicals. It was then mostly a venue for rock groups and international performers such as Bob Dylan.

At Michael Hutchence's death aged 37 on 22 November 1997, it was reported that despite INXS being overtaken by edgier bands such as You Am I and 'past their best,' they boasted that they had a sold-out show booked at the Palais for the following evening. The Palais still counted.

In 1985, the Stardust Nightclub, operated by Bradto Pty Ltd, became the Palace Nightclub, a 1,880-capacity standing-room rock and electronic/techno music band venue, with raves such as Chemistry 3 in 1991, and killer rock bands such as Nirvana, the Pixies, Prince, Silverchair, Placebo, Muse, the Ramones and the Shins. The promoter Michael Gudinski was one of its seven founding investors.

The Triangle

In 1998, the government was reported as threatening to sell the Triangle site.

In 2001, the Council's *St Kilda Foreshore Design Framework (UDF)* began the process of thinking about the future of the Triangle Site, which had been only used for car-parking since the closure of Little Luna Park. It proposed improving the Palais stage and extending dressing rooms at the rear, but this was never implemented. As well as the UDF proposals, Port Phillip's Planning Scheme Amendment C36 enabled further exciting possibilities: demolish the Palace Nightclub and create a new plaza on the sunny north-western side the theatre.

The government handed management of the site to the City of Port Philip as their agents and the Council invited submissions for a \$300 million development in a two-year tender process and 15 groups responded. The most audacious proposal was designed by architect Tom Kovac with the Omni Property Group: it appeared as beached amorphous forms of parallel ribs, and attempted to lure the Guggenheim Museum to St Kilda.

But three other submissions were short-listed: the Citta Property Group from Sydney, financiers Babcock & Brown and architects Ashton Raggatt McDougall (32 & 33); developer Andrew Rettig, restaurateur John van Haandel, Wood Marsh Architects and Mirvac; and Lindsay Fox (lessee of Luna Park) and Daryl Jackson, which was said to be the most intensively commercial proposal. These were each asked to develop their designs in detail, costing the teams \$2 million each. Both the Friends of Luna Park (led by Julia Murray) and the Esplanade Alliance (Helen Halliday) expressed concern that the zoning in the planning scheme only permitted recreation and entertainment, not retail.

The Palace's tenants Bradto Pty Ltd had claimed that their lease lasted till 2042, but on 15 November, the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) found that both theirs and the Palais's lease had expired in March 2006, enabling the government to evict them. Port Phillip's Mayor, Janet Bolitho welcomed the VCAT decision that had taken over a year to emerge.

Property multi-millionaire Jerry Pilarinos controlled Bradto and sublet to Maztan, a licensee company circuitously owned by the Palace's manager, Con Sarrou and another Pilarinos company, Illari Nominees. In opposing the tribunal's decision, Bradto claimed to have spent 'millions' on lawyers, lobbying Victoria Police at 'the highest level,' on 'a remarkably slick rock music-themed public relations campaign' and 'clearly not giving a shit about the money.'

Although Bradto was said to be ‘clearly holding out for a multi-million dollar payout:’ one of its managers, Warren Amster already had plans for a gigantic 5,000-patron club in South Melbourne and Bradto was said to have ‘backed four candidates in the 2004 Port Philip Council elections.’ Support for the Palace by the Liberal Opposition Leader Ted Baillieu in full election mode was clearly political, as The Palace’s spokesman, Alan Evers-Buckland was a Liberal Party candidate.

In December, the Fox-Mirvac-Jackson ‘mini-Chadstone-by-the-bay’ proposal was eliminated, Fox said he would not rule out suing the council and the two remaining contenders were paid to develop their designs further.

Meanwhile, Mr Pilarinos took a smaller proposal for the site to the City of Port Phillip. Designed by Darryl Jackson, it retained the face-lifted Palace, included a boutique hotel, underground car park and a single row of shops; in return, Bradto sought a 99-year lease. In mid-2005, council rejected the proposal.

By March 2007, it seemed the ARM-Citta Property-Babcock & Brown (BBC) proposal was clearly favoured over that of Rettig-van Haandel-Wood Marsh. It was a stronger design and provided more public open space, however it was revealed to have 30,000 m² of retail including a supermarket, an underground car park, cinemas, a live music venue and a nightclub. In the design, interconnected plazas lead to Catani Steps, cascading onto Jacka Boulevard. There was a large forecourt in front of the Palais and a \$35 million 100-room hotel with its wall festooned with vines and creepers and a 50-seat ‘Rainbow Room’ at the rear of the Palais.

Evers-Buckland responded by observing that: ‘no live music venue has ever survived in a shopping centre.’ On 24 April, John Lethlean revealed in *The Age* that the development might involve Maurice Terzini, who was developing a new restaurant for Crown Casino and might open a small-scale Hotel Terzini at the Triangle, Julian Gerner could open a version of his Albert Park Hotel there, Geoff Lindsay might relocate Pearl Restaurant, the Angele family may open a Brunetti’s and there might be a second MoVida tapas restaurant. Damien Hobday of Vin Cellars and Public House was interested, there could be a Melbourne version of Sydney’s jazz and blues Basement Music Club and a nightclub franchise branded as London’s Ministry of Sound.

On 17 April Justice Harper of the Supreme Court refused Bradto’s appeal, rejecting legal arguments that the Palace had a valid 60-year lease from 1982 until 2042 and ruling that no lease existed. Port Phillip CEO, David Spokes was delighted. On 20 April, Evers-Buckland, lodged fresh appeal papers with the Victorian Court of Appeal and Justice Harper stayed the eviction pending a hearing on May 11, which was the day after judgement was due in the related case for the Palais. Planning Minister Justin Madden said there had been no discussions about compensation and on 9 May, Supreme Court Justice David Harper found that Carolyn Harper’s company, operator of the Palais, was also not entitled to a lease extension.

On 11 May, Court of Appeal Justices Peter Buchanan and Alex Chernoy refused to hear an appeal by two of Jerry Palarinos’ companies, Bradto and Palais de Danse, against the earlier Supreme Court judgement and ruled that they had no further rights to the site, effectively ordering their eviction. The companies had argued that after the December 1968 fire, an exchange of correspondence between the government and leaseholder Palais de Danse Pty Ltd, had led to an order on April 15, 1969 by the then governor, Sir Rohan Delacombe which they claimed formed a binding contract with the state. Jerry Palarinos said he would apply to the High Court for special leave to appeal. The government’s barrister, Greg Garde QC revealed that the proposed development would cost about \$300 million.

The future of the George Cinemas complex owned by Palace Cinemas, tenders for whose sale closed on 24 May 2007, was being threatened by the protracted uncertainty and potential purchasers were concerned that a cinema on the Triangle Site would siphon business from the George, whose three screens totalled 750 seats were expected to fetch \$4 million, but Palace had been part of the rejected Mirvac/Lindsay Fox Triangle bid. Later that day, Bradto abandoned its High Court appeal and ‘apologised to the people of Victoria’ for their inability to prevent the Palace closing.

On 12 June the site was handed to the state government, but the day before, several fires were lit, gaping holes appeared in the dance-floor, entire walls were destroyed and windows smashed and by 14 June, the Palace had been substantially destroyed by this vindictive vandalism. Graffiti read: 'Chadstone by the Bay – this venue will suck the soul and music from St Kilda' and 'Yuppies don't rock, they suck.' Port Phillip Mayor Janet Bolioto said the council had planned to use the building as a live music venue for another year: but this was not now possible and the public was the loser. Evers-Buckland denied responsibility for the damage, but St Kilda Police was investigating.

The Design

On 26 May, the Planning Minister launched ARM-BBC's successful scheme, to be constructed from 2008-mid-2010, by reciting Paul Kelly's 1985 song, *From St Kilda to King's Cross*: 'I want to see the sun go down from St Kilda Esplanade, Where the beach needs reconstruction, Where the palm trees give it hard. I'd give you all of Sydney Harbour, (all that land, all that water), for that one sweet promenade.'

The successful design has over 15,000 m² of open space to be managed by the Council, landscaped with 'streets, lanes and grassy slopes' 'inspired by' Carlo Catani's design; with 40,000 square metres of commercial development (including 29,000 m² retail) mostly concealed beneath decks, \$20 million refurbishment of the Palais, with a new 'big event' forecourt, repairing the old carpet and with curtains able to divide it into various spaces from 500 to the whole 2,968 seats, in increments of 500.

The Palais would take three years to return a profit, but there would be six other music venues: a 1,500-seat Triangle Band Room for 80 popular music events annually on the north corner, compared with the 20-30 currently at the Palace, for which three operators were being considered; Honky Tonks club would relocate from Finders Lane, a Modular Records (Wolfmother) recording studio, a club from Darren Thornburgh of Greville Street Club Boutique, the Ministry of Sound franchise and the Basement jazz club.

Pearl II would have a bulky but spectacular presence on the west corner and a six-screen Dendy cinema with a William Angliss TAFE campus would anchor the southeast corner, to be wrapped like an Easter egg in an evocation of Sidney Nolan's 1940 linear work *Abstract* depicting the Scenic Railway (4). 'Melbourne's prodigal son' Maurice Terzini of Icebergs Restaurant in Sydney would open a Rainbow Room and boutique hotel within a Vertical Garden by the Bay sheathing the Palais' west wall, to be designed by botanist Patric Blanc, designer of the botanical walls of Jean Nouvel's Musée Quai Branly in Paris; Frank Camorra and partners would bring MoVida II, Damian Hobday of Vin Cellars and the Argo would have a wine bar/restaurant.

There was to be a 3,200 m² basement supermarket (Coles or Safeway) the largest in inner Melbourne (Citta Group's Stephen McMillan said both had agreed not to close their Acland Street stores if they won the Triangle Site), a fish and chips shop, a Fitness First gym, a bookstore, a JB HiFi store, a pub with beer garden facing the beach on a revived south-east corner of Little Cavell Street and Jacka Boulevard and a second Linden Gallery (8) designed by Lyon Architects would be on the northeast corner; parking for 1,150 cars and 181 retail tenancies with 50% independents (defined as operating 10 or less stores) and maximum 20% of national chains. There would be 16,600 m² of open space out of the total 25,000 m². It would comply with the 2002 *Foreshore Draft Plan* guidelines and the developer would de-contaminate the land.

John Lethlean of *The Age* noted that this seemed to be a different approach from the 'build then seek tenants' model that was so problematic in Docklands. But Esplanade Alliance spokesperson Krystna Kynst complained of 'a five-storey shopping mall on St Kilda Beach,' not visible in the impressive fly-through animation of the design on the Council's web-site. St Kilda Village Traders' Association president Doug Bear protested that the Triangle development would force Fitzroy and Acland Street businesses, already with high leasehold turnover, to close. He said the car park was insufficient and 'we don't need another supermarket, we've got friggng three already,' he cried.

Although Catani Steps leads to a broad pedestrian crossing at grade, the most serious flaw of the design is that the surging traffic of Jacka Boulevard is still not under-grounded, and will continue to isolate the Triangle from the beach.

The winning tender documents included a comic strip by artist Bruce Mutard (a made-up name?) depicting an archetypical couples' day out in ARM's Triangle design, cheekily saluting a place 'obsessed with its own mythology.'

The flack

Only a week after the exciting design was revealed, the risk to the Triangle from the flooding by rising sea levels and intense storms was front-page news (4). A detailed climate-change risk-assessment over 10 km² of St Kilda was commissioned and submitted to the Council in January. Professor Ed Blakely of the University of Sydney, now leading the reconstruction of New Orleans, chaired the study and it was coordinated by Dr Peter Fisher of Central Queensland University, who said the risks could be managed if they were considered in future planning, with regular maintenance of stormwater reticulation and design for extreme storms.

On 4 June, a temporary order by Carolyn Harper, owner of Tymbook Pty Ltd, leaseholder of the Palais Theatre for a stay of the state government resuming its site was lifted and the government said it would occupy the theatre on 1 July.

On 8 June, architectural critic Norman Day (48) briefly commented on the design in *The Age*. He revealed that Lyons Architects, previously unrepresented in St Kilda, and local architect Grant Amon (7) would join ARM's team of architects and that ARM had proved worthy of our trust. Day mentioned the [design] challenge of popularity. He warned against providing even 1,150 car spaces: there was already an over-concentration of traffic in St Kilda; and of maintaining the height below that of the Upper Esplanade, so views were not sacrificed. He illuminatingly compared the 'beguiling' scatter of potentially iconic new buildings to the scatter of cakes on a plate in the Europa Cake Shop (5): some buried, some propped in corners, one covered in vegetation.

'Disco inferno,' screamed the *Herald Sun's* page one headline, when on 11 July, a further major fire 'ripped through' the Palace and gutted it, only weeks after police had begun investigating its vandalism and despite the Council's security patrols: 16 fire trucks and 50 firefighters fought the blaze. Local resident Andrew Thompson said the fire didn't surprise him: 'They've been chucking all sorts of things in there,' he said. Det-Sgt Rod Stormonth of the Arson Squad interviewed witnesses including the Palace's former leaseholder, Jerry Pilarinos, who had recently bought the Metro Nightclub in Bourke Street for \$9.8 million and renamed it the Palace. Over the past century, destruction by fire has become almost a tradition on the Foreshore.

Age journalist Andrew Rule revealed that Jerry's brother, Peter Pilarinos, Senior is a convicted 'drugs baron' jailed in May 2000 for serious drugs and firearms offences and for bribing police, which led to the jailing of rogue detective Kevin Hicks. In the 1980s Peter was a director of several companies now run by Jerry Pilarinos. Jerry, Peter Adrian and Valerie Pilarinos (Peter Adrian's mother), were all found guilty of perverting the course of justice in Melbourne County Court in 1997 and Jerry pleaded guilty in return for other charges to be dropped.

But the family's relationship with police continued: two serving police sergeants had operated a lucrative fast-food outlet called Shot Dogs outside various Melbourne nightclubs, an *Age* front-page headline revealed that the police's little business had been making up to \$10,000 each weekend and a sergeant was recently transferred from St Kilda after the publicity. A Shot Dogs van operated outside the Palace until the fire.

Demolition of The Palace began on 17 July 2007 and by the end of October, detailed drawings of the proposed development were displayed in Port Philip's town halls and the public were given a month to

comment. Within a week, local federal Labor MHR for Melbourne Ports, Michael Danby, who held his seat by just a 3.8% margin, scored election points by stridently opposing the development. His line was that it would be a 'security nightmare' with over 4,500 'revellers' in its nightclubs. The Esplanade Alliance was 'gravely disappointed' with the design, opposing the retail content and that 'panoramic views would be entirely obliterated.'

Tony Crabb, researcher for Savills, who are agents for the adjacent smaller Sea Baths complex, doubted that leasing 181 shops was viable, since there are only 140 shops in Acland, Barkly and Carlisle Streets now. Simon Rumbold, director of Urbis JHD, the project's retail analyst, denied to a hostile meeting of 200 objectors, that the project would cannibalise trade from street shops.

On 4 November, the Pearl Restaurant block was deleted to restore sea views. Anna Griffiths of a new group unChain St Kilda, said there was still loss of views and too many shops, bars and nightclubs: 'The whole thing stinks of an ambit claim to fool the public into thinking there has been compromise.'

The development was out for public comment until 29 November and for some time only 180 objections were received, but this suddenly swelled to 3,000, then another 2,000, causing Terzini to flee from the development in panic. The mayor said she would read every objection, including those from local stars Guy Pearce and Hollywood's Rachel Griffiths, daughter of Anna.

On 1 December, Andrew Fox of the rejected tenderers, Linfox Property demanded a re-tender because 'the St Kilda community had been locked out of the process.' Planning QC Jack Hammond advised unChain St Kilda that the development could breach the *St Kilda Triangle Act* that specifically preserves the land for 'public purposes,' since '85%' of the proposal is commercial. Elwood resident and sports icon Ron Barassi criticised blocking the views and chain store buying-power exploiting the sense of place for the 'lure of the dollar.'

In a reasoned point-form second article, Norman Day (48) explained his concerns about: lack of direct connection to the beach without braving increased traffic on Jacka Boulevard, the pressure of high-rental shops, bars and supermarkets, reduced views of the sea and that the eight-storey building behind the Palais was 'ugly,' but that it should be even higher to reduce development on the rest of the site. He proposed public funding of the Palais to enable more than 15% open space, an open-air market rather than a supermarket and more vertical gardens. He praised the circulation flow, the 'unique urban character' of pavilions and the 'Linden shard,' but felt the elegance of the competition-winning design had been compromised by avarice. Letters to the editor also criticised the lack of a pedestrian link to the beach and the potential 6,000 nightclub customers.

By 12 December, council officers proposed 28 changes to the design, but new Mayor Janet Cribbes admitted they might not go far enough and that view-lines did not comply with Port Philip's planning framework for the site: she wanted perfect bay views from the Upper Esplanade. A new report by Matrix Planning said that the objections had merit: 'The Development Plan does not provide any justification for the level of retail and commercial activity proposed.' Even former St Kilda resident RMIT Innovation Professor Leon van Schaik (11) quietly said the design was too big.

On 13 December, *The Age* ran two full pages on the development, headlined: 'Design guru blasts state inaction on triangle site' as eminent architect Nonda Katsilidis (11) revealed his radical plan for the St Kilda foreshore. Explaining with a delightful perspective sketch, site sections and an aerial photograph, he proposed constraining already heavy traffic by narrowing the Upper Esplanade and Jacka Boulevard from four to two lanes, then inserting shops under Jacka Boulevard to release more open space and opening it to the beach by isolating the Palais on an island between the two roads. Even though few seemed to take the proposal seriously, it did challenge the council to show leadership by considering the wider urban design implications.

Next day, Gabrielle Baker's letter, 'Non, Nonda' asserted that Katsilidis had 'rocks in his head' and 'disgust' at the inaction from Albert Park MP, Martin Foley. *Age* journalist Katherine Kizilos interviewed the principal activists. Krystyna Kynst, of Upper Esplanade, a public relations expert, daughter of an owner

of Scheherazade (5) who has been hard at it since the Acland Street campaign fifteen years ago, explained helpfully: 'People who are drawn to 'St Kildaness' know what 'St Kildaness' is. She and unChain St Kilda, want the development 33% smaller. Reneé Geyer, Serge Thomann, Liz van Dort, graphic designer, comedian Dave Hughes, Magda Szubanski and Anna Griffiths are also unChain St Kilda activists. Colin Smith's letter to the *The Age* reasonably asked why the government poured \$35 million each year into the Grand Prix, but not once \$20 million to restore the Palais.

A noisy public meeting of 500 that evening lasted six hours and Sydney architect Don Gazzard spoke on the design's lack of connection to Luna Park (4). A report objected to potential 'drunken violence' in the 'trouble hot spot.' Fitzroy Street Traders Association president Roger Wyndham calculated that the nightclubs' capacity of 6,000 was double that of all the present bars in Fitzroy Street. Liquor Licensing Commission inspector Deborah Abbott explained that the Planning Scheme did not have the power to cap licences. At an earlier public meeting on 11 November, two elderly residents left in tears, after realising that they would be living opposite a 'Sydney-style tavern' and six nightclubs, some with 24-hour licences.

On 17 December, Council voted to decide to decide on 24 January. Former mayor Dick Gross said it was 'the most politicised decision' of his life.

On 28 December, unChain St Kilda announced donations of \$5,000 each from the Rolling Stones who remembered their seven shows there in 1965, Bruce Springsteen, Rachel Griffiths, Shannon Noll and Human Nature, who all warmly remembered performing at the Palais.

On 16 January, the Council-commissioned *SGS Economics and Planning* report was released, concluding that the development would bring \$41.1 million to St Kilda through greater tourism and the 45% of St Kilda's population who are young singles 'with lots of disposable income' and the 38% of its population aged 25-34 living in two-person households.

In February, Dimity Reed, architect, former councillor and former RMIT urban design professor, found the complex design 'incredibly difficult to grasp,' but found it 'an exhilarating new piece of St Kilda,' admired its positive response to the typological precedent of Carlo Catani's terraced foreshore gardens, its activation of Cavil Street and redesigning Jacka Boulevard as an 'old-fashioned beachfront high street' and its 'inherent loopiness, the wackiness' that St Kilda should embrace. Larry Stillman's letter responded by asserting that: '...such removed architectural connoisseurship, which lives in an elitist vacuum, is not an aesthetic for 21st-century city life.'

Former deputy mayor, David Brand said it did not comply with the Foreshore Urban Design Framework, prepared after so much public consultation. Professor Roz Hansen, project manager for the Council's St Kilda Foreshore and Environs Strategy and the Port Phillip Review of Height and Development Controls criticised several design aspects: that the site was not a designated activity centre in the *Melbourne 2030* strategy, it did not comply with the UDF and the that beach would be only visible from its southern edge.

1-2,000 shouting people marched from the Palais to the Town Hall, crammed into a council meeting and threw a pasteboard coffin on the mayoral table. Barbara Tucker (53) read a message from Jinx Nolan, Sidney Nolan's Sydney daughter, condemning the project and its Nolan building as 'ugly.' The Council reduced the nightclubs to four with 3,000 patrons; the commercial space to 19,000 m², increased the open space to 18,000 m² and voted 4-2 for the development, with councillors Gross, Logan, Bolitho and Cribbes in favour. The furious community groups promised political retribution and met planning lawyers Jack Hammond, QC, and Michelle Quigley, SC for strategic advice.

On 25 March, Police investigated the removal from the site to 2.5 m deep, over seven months of hundreds of relics, including a ceramic lid from a beautiful small pot of Mr Illife toothpaste said to be worth \$10,000.00. Council staff, police, developers and archaeologists met and said it is an offence to disturb a construction site and remove relics.

Later, in May 2008, *Age* journalist wrote a cool-headed article on the Triangle development, attempting to define the St Kilda-ness that would be purportedly be lost by the approved design, particularly the narrow

non-inclusive definition of it by the activists, seeking to disenfranchise all those who lack their particular sensibility and she welcomed the music venues to replace all those that have been progressively stifled.

Age journalist Royce Millar observed that the one constant in St Kilda is change, that 20 years ago, local politics was real-estate driven, then superseded by the Turn the Tide group swept to power in 1987 committed to affordable housing and social justice and that his year's election may be the most contested in 20 years.

Writing to *The Age*, Alex Murray conceded that St Kilda is no longer a village-like bohemian enclave. We'd all like to see architecturally stunning spaces... but [those] who can afford to live in St Kilda have little use for them.' Dr Kate Shaw, formerly of the City of St Kilda, now research fellow at University of Melbourne also set the Triangle development in the context of the gentrification of 'the playground of Melbourne' and the expectations of its more recent residents, in relation to conspicuous over-consumption and the bored yobbo culture. She felt that the problem is not the *Urban Design Framework*, which sets reasonable design objectives, nor even the *Planning Scheme Amendment* that removed public objection and appeal rights if the plan complied with the *UDF*. She warned that because this development was a Public Private Partnership, the community was expecting urban regeneration to be paid for with someone else's money, the always-fallacious lure of something for nothing. But with the lure, the community loses control.



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