

Prominent Melbourne duo restored

AT A GLANCE

- ◆ **Project:** The Mutual and Empire Apartments
- ◆ **Developer:** Baycrown
- ◆ **Architect:** ClarkeHopkinsClarke
- ◆ **Builder:** Abigroup
- ◆ **Structural engineer:** Taylor Thomson Whitting
- ◆ **Site area:** 2,017sq m
- ◆ **Built area:** 18,318sq m
- ◆ **Budget:** \$46M
- ◆ **Completion date:** June 2006

By Shae Slater

MELBOURNE'S first department store and home to the Council of Adult Education for 40 years, The Mutual Store, has a prominent place in the city's heritage, despite its volatile beginnings. Established in 1872, the original building was destroyed by a major fire in 1891, but was quickly rebuilt in the same year.

Opposite Flinders Street Station and near Federation Square, the landmark building underwent a face-lift earlier this year and now features 70 refurbished one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments.

The top storey of the existing six-storey Mutual Store building was replaced with two contemporary-size floors, resulting in seven storeys of refurbished interiors, plus basement car parking. The ground floor was lowered to street-level, with provision for nine retail outlets.

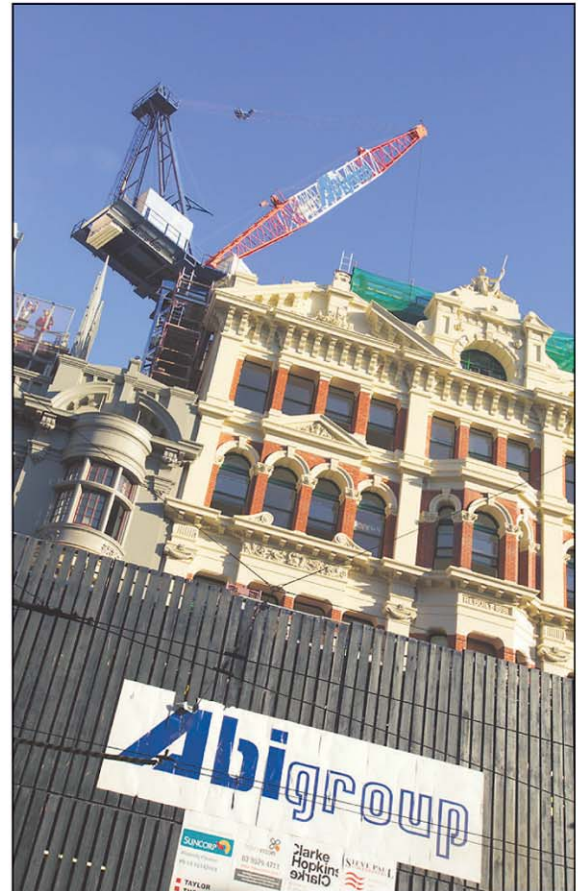
Existing lifts throughout the building were replaced, and a full fire alarm, sprinkler and smoke detection system was installed. The heritage building also boasts a fully restored facade, appropriate to the overall aesthetics of the area. Of the one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments throughout the building, those on the top two floors are double storey and a selection of others feature mezzanine levels.

All apartments facing Flinders Street have magnificent views down Flinders Street and the higher ones have views over the Yarra River and parklands beyond.

Directly next to The Mutual Store, stage two of the works, Empire Apartments, involved the demolition of the existing three-storey Empire Arcade building and the construction of a 15-storey student accommodation complex, comprising a basement car park and 306 apartments.



All of the apartments facing Flinders Street have magnificent views, while the higher floors overlook the Yarra River and parklands beyond.



The Mutual Store building boasts a fully restored facade.

"At the end of the day, it was a nightmare of a site," said Baycrown development manager Jack Horton.

"Abigroup did an incredible job, considering it was a 130-year-old building, and the fact we had to take the top and bottom floors off – right in the heart of Melbourne," said Mr Horton.

Abigroup project manager Peter Robertson said initial works involved the demolition of the ground floor and the installation of a new floor, one metre lower.

The task called for detailed works sequencing and extensive temporary propping, as existing load-bearing walls and columns were removed and replaced with new reinforced concrete columns and a suspended slab.

The roof and top floor were demolished and replaced with a new concrete floor and an additional steel-framed floor.

New window openings were formed in the 600mm-thick existing brick walls, and the existing stair and lift shaft walls were also demolished and replaced.

Both buildings' existing facades were of historical significance, so Abigroup engaged Ad Astra Stone to restore the historic facade by rebuilding mouldings, urns and features, and re-pointing all the brick work.

"The result has exceeded the expectations of the client and architect and is now a feature in the Flinders Street landscape. The project team is

very proud of the outcome," said Mr Robertson.

Built next to Flinders Street Station (which feeds 10,000 people onto the street each day), Mr Robertson said the project's close proximity to nearby shops and heavy traffic conditions required the skilled coordination of deliveries to the site, and vigilant traffic management to keep the public and works separate.

"The project is now complete, with both buildings fully occupied. The success of the project was a result of an excellent working relationship with our client Baycrown and the architect, ClarkeHopkinsClarke. Abigroup would like to thank its team and subcontractors who worked very hard under difficult circumstances to make this difficult project a success," said Mr Robertson. ■