

**JOHANNESBURG METROPOLITAN MUNICIPALITY**

**HERITAGE ASSESSMENT SURVEYING FORM**

Compiled by: Dr JJ Bruwer, 2002-07-29

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**NAME OF PLACE: AROP HOUSE**



Photograph: Catharina JM Bruwer.

Previous/alternative name/s :  
:  
:

**LOCATION:** Street : corner Kerk and Von Brandis  
Street number : 69 Kerk  
: (69 Kerk; 71, 73 Von Brandis)  
Stand Number : 1087, 1088  
Previous Stand Number: 1363, 1364  
Block number : AU  
Suburb : Johannesburg  
GIS reference :

**ZONING:** Current use/s :  
Previous use/s :

## DESCRIPTION OF PLACE:

Height :  
Levels above street level : eleven  
Levels below street level : one  
On-site parking :

"...Arop House was a symmetrical statement of the modern functional office block. A sensitive design intelligence was evident in the balcony projections with their horizontal wrought-iron balustrades and in the cantilevered pavement canopy supported on elegant stepped and rounded reinforced-concrete brackets. But what caught the observer's attention when the building was in good shape was the complex spandrel decoration with three dimensional right-angled sculptural forms that were reminiscent of De Stijl geometry or the compositions of the Belgian painter Georges Vantongerloo. Decorative fluting provided the merest hint of an Art Deco impulse."  
(Chipkin, C.M.: Johannesburg Style; Architecture & Society...).

"A variation of the form of the balconies of *Peter House* and *Hotpoint House* was applied only twice in contemporary buildings, for instance *Arop House (1935-6)*, 69 Kerk Street. This was no more than a cliché in an otherwise a historical design with a vertical structure."  
(Van Der Waal, G-M.: From Mining Camp to Metropolis...)

## CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS:

Walls: reinforced concrete frame, plastered brick  
Roof: flat, concrete  
Windows: steel casements

## SITE FEATURES:

### ALTERATIONS:

Alterations to shop front.

### INTEGRITY:

### INSCRIPTION:

### ARCHITECT:

Kallenbach, Kennedy & Furner A. R. I. B. A.

(Johannesburg, Durban, Pretoria & Cape Town)

(Address: 72 Sackes Building, Joubert Street, Johannesburg)

'...The partnership between H KALLENBACH, AM KENNEDY and AS FURNER in Johannesburg from 1928. Late in 1928 Furner resigned his post as lecturer at the School of Architecture at the University of the Witwatersrand and joined Kallenbach and Kennedy as a junior partner. The firm built up an extensive practice throughout South Africa. According to Herbert (1975:48), *'the predominant influence in ... the office was undoubtedly Teutonic'* which Herbert attributes to both Kallenbach's origins and Furner's admiration of German and Austrian architects. There were also two Austrian draughtsmen in the office, Fritz BERGE and Werner WAGNER, who assisted in the design of the Plaza Cinema and who surely added to this influence. According to Wagner (1990), Kallenbach was the head of the office and saw that work came in; Kennedy was the technical man and Furner the architect. The 1930s were a productive era for the partnership, the boom in the economy coinciding with Furner's arrival; Furner has been credited with the new and more modern image of the firm. In the Rand Daily Mail Exhibition (1934) the firm was responsible for transforming the Hall of Transport into an 'Ideal Village.'

Many South African architects worked at one time or other in the office of Kallenbach, Kennedy & Furner. Among these were TO DUNCAN (around 1934); CR FRIDJHON (in Durban from around 1931), BS COOKE (part-time from 1928 to 1931, W Wagner and Fritz Berge. In about 1929 RD MARTIENSSEN worked there briefly. The early records of the office of Kallenbach, Kennedy & Furner have not been kept...'

(Architects In South Africa 1780 - 1940; Draft manuscript, J Walker & G M van der Waal, 1992, HSRC, Pretoria.)

**BUILDER:**

**CONSTRUCTION DATE:**

Date on plans : 4 March 1932  
Approval of plans :  
Completion date :

**BUILDING STYLE:**

Art Deco - Exhibition Style. 1930s

Architectural Merit, Artwork of Merit: "A very impressive art deco building."  
(Johannesburg Building, Space & Urban Feature Classification, 1998: Inner City).

"Decorative fluting provided the mere hint of an Art Deco impulse."  
(Chipkin, C.M.: Johannesburg Style; Architecture & Society...).

"This was no more than a cliché in an otherwise a historical design with a vertical structure, in fact, the International Style as such was used in only two other buildings."  
(Van Der Waal, G-M.: From Mining Camp to Metropolis...)

**BUILDING TYPE:**

This is a shop to street and residential building. (CJMB)

**ENVIRONMENT:**

The area surrounding the building is neglected and forgotten by the owners and the fathers of the city. This neglected building impacts negatively on the image of the City of Johannesburg as it is a neighbour of the *Johannesburg Supreme Court*, which receives regular media attention. (CJMB)

**CONDITION:**

As one of Johannesburg’s Top 20 Art Deco Buildings this building is in an extreme state of neglect and does not justify such a prestige title. The owners should be requested to rectify this condition. Apexhi Prop Ltd. owns the following buildings situated on Block AU:  
*Arop House* (AU-3) - (Registration Date: 2003-02-04).  
*Tower House* (AU-4) – (Registration Date: 2003-02-04).  
*Astor Mansions* (AU-5) – (Registration Date: 2003-02-04).  
The three-abovementioned buildings are extremely neglected and after three years of ownership the situation have not been rectified in any way. (CJMB)

**URGENT ACTION:**

The owners should be informed of the heritage status of the building, and requested to maintain the building. (CJMB)

**SAHRA RECORD REGARDING ALTERATIONS, RENOVATIONS, RESTORATION:**

**PROTECTION STATUS:** (under National Heritage Resources Act, 1999)

General protection:	Section 34(1) structure/s	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Formal protection:	provincial heritage site	<input type="checkbox"/>
	national heritage site	<input type="checkbox"/>
	provisional protection	<input type="checkbox"/>
	heritage area	<input type="checkbox"/>
	listed in provincial heritage resources register	<input type="checkbox"/>

Relevant Gazette Notice:

Gazette description:

**FORMER PROTECTION STATUS:** (under National Monuments Act, 1969)

**NOTES:**

**DEEDS INFORMATION:**

Stand No. 1089

Original ownership: C B D Kerk Street (Pty) Ltd.  
Document: T1453/1935  
Amount:

Ownership: Pangbourne Prop Ltd.  
Document: T54663/2002  
Amount: R4774 034.00

Ownership: Apexhi Prop Ltd.  
Registration Date: 2003-02-04  
Document: T5684/2003  
Amount: R24308 146.00

Stand No. 1087

Ownership: Arop House CC  
Registration Date: 1981-05-06  
Document: T12479/1981  
Amount:

Ownership: Fidelity Nominees Ltd.  
Document: B48805/1992  
Amount: R

Stand No. 1088

Ownership: Arop House CC  
Registration Date: 1981-05-06  
Document: T12479/1981  
Amount:

Ownership: Fidelity Nominees Ltd.  
Document: B48805/1992  
Amount: R

**PRE-HISTORY OF SITE:**

**HISTORY:**

**GENERAL NOTES:**

Estimated cost of building :  
Estimated cost of drainage :  
Accommodation approved :  
Valuation at completion :  
Occupied :

**PREVIOUS TENANT/S:**

By 1954:  
71 Von Brandis – Maxwell Pharmacy.  
73 Von Brandis – Shelly Shoe Shop.  
73a Von Brandis – G. Storino (Pty) Ltd, watchmakers and jewellers (home address – 16 Rollo Street, Cyrildene).  
73b Von Brandis – Kelly’s Music Saloon.

69a Kerk – Classique Modes.  
69b Kerk – Jackson Outfitters.  
(The Rand-Pretoria Directory 1954 (Comprising Complete Alphabetical And Trades Directories of Johannesburg, Pretoria And Reef Towns), Cape Times Limited, Cape Town, 1954.)

**CURRENT TENANT/S:**

Surgery- Dokotela  
Clara's Fashions  
Maghal Kashmir Trading  
Madina Shop  
Hyper Meat  
Pie City

"President Huang Qing Nan (黄庆南); 201 - 206 Arop House 73; Von Brandis Street; Johannesburg 2001; Republic of South Africa".  
(<http://www.asiawind.com/forums/read.php?f=1&i=5419&t=5417&v=t>)

**SOURCES:**

**Published Sources**

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Architects In South Africa 1780 – 1940; Draft manuscript, J Walker & G M van der Waal, 1992, HSRC, Pretoria.  
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Van Der Waal, G-M.: Die Boukuns van Johannesburg, 1886 – 1940, unpublished doctoral thesis, RAU, November 1984.  
Rand Township Registry Johannesburg.

**Internet sources**

<http://www.environment.gov.za/EnviroInfo/sote/citysoe/johannes/Virtual/CSOE/csoe/html/NonJava%20Site/Conservation/built/State.htm>  
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[http://www.joburg.org.za/citichat/2003/feb24\\_citichat.stm](http://www.joburg.org.za/citichat/2003/feb24_citichat.stm)  
<http://www.asiawind.com/forums/read.php?f=1&i=5419&t=5417&v=t>

**ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE:**

**Historic Value:**

- Associated with historic person, group or organisation
- Associated with historic event or activity

**Architectural/Aesthetic value:**

- Important example of building type
- Important example of a style or period
- Fine details, workmanship or aesthetics
- Work of a major architect or builder

Social/Spiritual/Linguistic value:

- Associated with social, spiritual, linguistic, economic or political activity
- Illustrates an historical period

Scientific/Technological value:

- Example of industrial, technical or engineering development/achievement
- New, rare or experimental building techniques

**RECORDED BY:**



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Photographs (unless otherwise indicated) by Johann J Bruwer and Alezea Bruwer.

## 'Joburg Art Deco Buildings 2 - "The Top Twenty"

Neil Fraser

February 24, 2003

The 'Compagnie Generale Transatlantique', better known as "The French Line" was established in 1912 and by the 1920s had become one of Europe's leading travel companies. The French Line built its name on 'speed amidst luxury'. Its first liner, the 'France', was a veritable floating palace with its interior modelled on the splendours of Versailles. But in 1927 the company changed direction in regard to interior design - its 'Ile de France' of that year was appointed as lavishly as its predecessors but in a thoroughly modern style.

The French Line's vessels became a showcase for the leading designers of the Art Deco movement. Apart from the interiors themselves, beds, chairs, cutlery, in fact anything of note, was in Art Deco style. The SS Normandie, launched in the '30s represented the epitome of modern high-speed luxury travel. It captured the Atlantic Blue Riband in 1935 and again in 1937.

Europe's finest Art Deco artists and designers were entrusted with the ship's interior design - Jean Dupas who designed a glass mural depicting the History of Navigation, the silversmith Jean Puiforcat, the ceramicist Jean Luce, the furniture designer Jean Dunand and the glassmaker Rene Lalique transformed the Normandie into a floating palace dedicated to the Art Deco aesthetic. The liner came to an ignominious end when it sank in the New York Harbour in 1942!

What on earth has this to do with Johannesburg? Well, it is just one of the many fascinating stories that provides substance to Joburg buildings. Sadly, stories that are being lost and quickly forgotten. You see, we have a Normandie Court (designed by Leopold Grinker & Skelly) on the corner of Kerk and Delvers Streets the rounded corners of which were described in the Star in April 1938 "like the prow of a gigantic liner".

According to Chipkin, the "effect" it continued (as recorded by Clive Chipkin) "was inescapably nautical." Chipkin goes on to say; "when Normandie Court was new there was a white hexagonal mosaic floor incorporating blue inset movement lines in the entrance foyer, abstract marble inlays derived from ship imagery on the walls, and a cast aluminium relief sculpture depicting the SS Normandie.

Sandblasted onto the glazed entrance doors in Kerk Street was a shorthand depiction of the liner, reduced with a Mendelssohnian flourish to three funnels, a ship's prow and a swirl of smoke. The building's nautical climax occurs in the superb service tower, here repetitive rows of porthole windows, one metre in diameter are set flush with the walling to form deep interior reveals. And the rounded roof canopy suspended above the roof garden has an aerodynamic profile like the wing of a contemporary Supermarine aircraft."

Joburg's doyen of city heritage, Flo Bird, says; "For years now we have been taking tours into Normandie Court to show people the lift lobby - a replica of the one on the ship. And for years they have been thrilled to find the lifts still boasting the chromium plated motifs of that beautiful French Transatlantic liner."

Normandie Court is one of the 'top twenty' Art Deco examples in the city. So is Anstey's Mansions in Jeppe Street - it vied with the now demolished Escom House to be considered the highest modern building on the African continent and amongst the highest reinforced concrete structures in the world at that time!

Have a look at the Art Deco grilles in the ground floor entrance foyer Another 'top twenty' is Astor Mansions, corner Jeppe and von Brandis - as with many other buildings in the city of the 1920s/30s, the name exemplified its New York connections, referring to the wealthy New York Astors, a real estate family of note. The distinctive twin spires on top of the building were a 'plastered interpretation of the stainless steel pinnacles of New York's then highest skyscraper, the Chrysler Building of 1928-30" to quote Chipkin again. Today Astor Mansions is one of Joburg's abused gems.

There are numerous "Mansions" amongst the top twenty - Castle (89 Eloff Street); Manners (Jeppe and Joubert); Stanhope (Plein Street) and Dorchester Mansions (73 Rissik Street). This latter building boasted the name of the luxurious London hotel being built at that time, the name being actively marketed as an enticement to prospective tenants as was its elaborate façade decorations.

The list contains one "Chambers" being Dunvegan Chambers (Pritchard and Joubert); one "house", *Arop House* (von Brandis and Kerk) - the relief patterns on the spandrels of which reflect the links between Art Deco and cubism; two hotels, Federal (181 Commissioner corner Polly) and Dawson's (corner von Brandis and President).

The balance of the list includes:

□ 44 Main Street (1937-9) which broke away from the skyscraper vogue of the time - Chipkin says; "This low building, unnamed with English reticence, is the seat of finance capital in South Africa, and no signage is needed to inform you of this." The building exhibits many aspects of Art Deco, entrance screens; bronze entrance door decoration (by the man responsible for the gates at Buckingham Palace, Walter Gilbert) and the superb shallow-relief animal sculptures the plaster models of which were done by Gilbert's son, Donald Gilbert.

□ Grosvenor Motors in Eloff Street

□ the Aegis Building, 34 Loveday Street and

□ Broadcast House in Commissioner Street - from where the first radio-broadcasting service in South Africa was implemented. The reference point for this monolithic structure was Broadcast House in Langham Place London, the headquarters of the BBC. The sculptural spandrel panels and that above the main entrance clearly have their origins in the London building of the same name as did the dummy transmitter aerial.

□ Gallo Africa Limited (161 President and? Troye) - "the juke-box design was thought appropriate for a major record distribution company"

□ the SA Mutual Building (Harrison and Commissioner)? and the SA Perm (Commissioner corner Simmonds) - "1930s statements of financial power";

□ the Union Castle Building (Loveday and 93 Commissioner) - look for? the "plaster panels representing Industry" and, finally

□ His Majesty's in Commissioner Street - a major theatre and chambers for the legal profession. The architect's inspiration was derived from the Rockefeller Centre in New York - bestowing "a powerful image of metropolis on Commissioner Street."

The late '20s and 30s, an age when these very buildings provided a quantum leap from mining town to metropolis. Chipkin refers to Sarah Gertrude Millin who in 1926 said of passengers who alighted at Park Station from the Union Express that they would take a brief look at Johannesburg and pronounce: "This is a city, now this feels like a city."

These are just twenty of scores of Art Deco buildings in the inner city, many, certainly not all, in a parlous state. Yet the buildings that they were modeled on, by and large not only still exist but have become icons both in their own cities and internationally.

The buildings that provided inspiration to local architects in New York and London and elsewhere have continued to provide inspiration and engender pride in millions of people. Yet here their fading facsimiles generally add to the blight of the cityscape and reinforce the negative perceptions of the city that still abound. Just a coat of paint or a scrub down and some basic TLC would be a good starting point for these buildings to emerge from the drabness and greyness into which they have been allowed to disappear.

Look how Long Street in Cape Town has been rejuvenated by its brightly coloured historic buildings! What about a series of articles in the media tracing the history of each of our top fifty historic buildings with photographs of then and now, and when 'now' reflects neglect and apathy, let's have a picture of its current owner or board and his/her or its balance sheet!

As I mentioned last week, it is only a tiny group of people who care sufficiently to provide their personal time to research and promote and to fight for preservation of our built heritage. Hampered by a complete lack of funds, unpaid, unsung and often reviled because they believe that a sense of place is ultimately linked to a sense of continuity and a sense of history, and is worth fighting for.

Place, continuity and history - the unique competitive assets of any city, the differentiation of one city from anywhere else.

"The trip from someplace to anyplace and the trip from anyplace to no place is far shorter than many would like to admit". If we are to avoid being 'anyplace', ultimately leading to 'no place', we need to restore pride in the city and a good starting place is celebrating its unique assets - it's not too late!

([http://www.joburg.org.za/citichat/2003/feb24\\_citichat.stm](http://www.joburg.org.za/citichat/2003/feb24_citichat.stm))