



## Guerilla action to preserve heritage

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Wander the streets, courts and alleyways of Melbourne's CBD and you walk past a rich mix of Victorian, Edwardian, art deco and other unique buildings, many of which have exteriors that are heritage-protected.

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But their interiors and the architectural treasures hidden inside — floral-embossed iron lifts, gracious marble-paved lobbies and elaborate stained-glass windows — usually remain hidden from the public gaze, and the vast majority have no protection at all.

Now the city's residents and workers are being called on to engage in "guerilla heritage action", to identify and photograph the secret and hidden interiors of the buildings where they live and work.

Melbourne Heritage Action, a community-based heritage lobby group that formed in the aftermath of the demolition of Lonsdale House, is calling on the public to scour the city for unique interiors — a boardroom, a lobby, a stairwell or a set of decorative features — and upload photos on the group's website, [www.melbourneheritage.com.au](http://www.melbourneheritage.com.au).

The group has dubbed the initiative "[Melbourne Closed House](#)", a tongue-in-cheek reference to the Melbourne Open House program that runs free public tours of private buildings, and members say they hope it will spur Melbourne City Council to broaden its heritage protection.

Recently the council announced that for the first time it would extend heritage protection to 12 interiors, rather than just building exteriors, based on a report that pulled together historical surveys of notable buildings.

But Melbourne Heritage Action wants the council to go further and commit to a new, exhaustive heritage study of the CBD, to winkle out outstanding interiors and also consider including features such as street art, old signs, lamp posts, benches and horse troughs.

"We applaud what council have done and see this as a way of enhancing their work and helping them out," spokesman Rupert Mann said.

"We don't know how many hidden gems there are in the city — this is a way of getting people involved in searching this great city for their hidden interiors."

Mann said Melbourne Heritage Action was concerned about the current state of planning and heritage protection in the CBD, but insisted members were not anti-development.

"We want to put forward an alternative view to the classic 'leave everything and stymie development' argument. We're really pushing for adaptive reuse of existing buildings, using creative and innovative design and architecture," he said.

"We want to protect and preserve buildings but also incorporate them into the city's living heritage."

High on the group's wish list for interior listing are the privately-owned Palace Theatre, formerly the Metro Nightclub, which *The Age* reported earlier this year was being eyed by developers for a new 140-metre residential

skyscraper, and The Argus building, which millionaire education entrepreneur and owner Shesh Ghale has said he would turn into an education campus.

The Palace contains a "hotchpotch" of architectural eras, making it one of the most interesting theatres in the CBD, while the grand hall in The Argus has suffered water damage and small sections of it are falling away, Mann said.

The owner of the Palace, developer and club owner Jerry Pilarinos, could not be contacted.

Other notable interiors, which have no protection, include the Edwardian neo-baroque building the Chanonry on Collins Street, which has the only open-shaft style birdcage lift in Victoria, the chrome interiors of the ANZ Royal Bank Chambers on Collins Street, and the petite Block Court on Collins Street, which sits alongside its better-known cousin, the Block Arcade.

Angus said the protection of historical buildings was dependent on the whims of their owners.

"At the moment, they could simply strip that interior without requiring any permission, and then the whole city loses a significant part of its heritage," he said.

City of Melbourne councillor Ken Ong said the council remained committed to ensuring Melbourne's heritage buildings were protected, but did not say if it would consider widening its protection of interiors.

*This story was found at: <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/guerilla-action-to-preserve-heritage-20111123-1ntm8.html>*