

Historic Building Appraisal
Central Market
No. 80 Des Voeux Road, Central, Hong Kong

Built in 1939, the Central Market was designed by the Public Works Department and was said to follow the latest market design in Europe at the time.¹ It was the biggest and the most modern market in Hong Kong before the Second World War, serving residents in the vicinity and providing bulk supply to restaurants and shipping. The Central Market ceased operation in March 2003 and reopened after revitalisation in August 2021.

*Historical
Interest*

Architecturally, the design of the market displays the influences of Streamline Moderne, and the International Modern Style founded by Walter Gropius of the Bauhaus School of Architecture in Dessau, Germany, which features long horizontal continuous strip windows, streamlined facades and curved corners. The structure is composed of reinforced concrete columns, beams and slabs. The Central Market was designed with the most modern improvements at the time, especially in ventilation, and greater applications for stall spaces. It is, as described in official records, “a building of four stories with the main entrances for the public from Queen’s Road and Des Voeux Road. A passenger lift was provided at the latter entrance and the entrances for goods were from Jubilee Street and Queen Victoria Street. On the ground floor were the poultry and fish stalls, while incorporated at this level was a separate public lavatory. On the first floor were the pork and beef stalls and on the second floor were the vegetable and fruit stalls. The third floor was allotted to offices and quarters for the Sanitary Department staff.”²

*Architectural
Merit*

The Central Market was designed with a central courtyard to provide natural lighting and ventilation. The stalls were located along the sides of the central aisles and they were thoughtfully designed with different designs for different types of stalls.

The Central Market is a rare example of pre-war market buildings, displaying the influences of Streamline Moderne and the International Modern Style, and thus has definite built heritage value. The demolition and reconstruction of the original facade facing Des Voeux Road Central in the 1990s

*Rarity, Built
Heritage
Value &
Authenticity*

¹ The oldest building used as a market at the site was built in the late 1850s. The second one was built in 1895 and replaced by the current one in 1939.

² ‘Report of the Director of Public Works for the Year 1937’, *Hong Kong Administrative Reports*, 1937, from Hong Kong Government Reports Online.

due to the construction of a footbridge linking the market and the Central to Mid-Levels escalator and walkway system was the major alteration to the market building over the years. The market has undergone adaptive re-use after its closure in 2003. It was re-opened in August 2021 as a hub of retail shops, food outlets and community space for a variety of art exhibitions, performances, and cultural activities. The major architectural features, including the building form,³ structural grid with concrete beams and columns, central courtyard, grand staircases, terrazzo finishes and signage, and typical examples of the original poultry, fish, meat, vegetable and fruit stalls, are retained. The external public lavatory originally located at junction of Jubilee Street and Queen's Road Central was demolished as it had been modernised over the years.

The market was one of the focal points of the district as a major source of fresh food, and therefore has social value and local interest.

*Social Value
& Local
Interest*

The Central Market has group value with a cluster of historic buildings in the vicinity, namely Former Central Police Station Compound (前中區警署), Former Central Magistracy (前中央裁判司署) and Former Victoria Prison Compound (前域多利監獄) (all declared monuments), Pottinger Street (Grade 1) and No. 20 Hollywood Road (Grade 3).

Group Value

³ The original design of the facade on Des Voeux Road Central was modified during the reconstruction in the 1990s. The modification had disturbed the continuity and horizontality of the original design. Such continuity and horizontality has been reinstated by this revitalization through a new façade built of transparent materials in order to differentiate the new and the old.

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