



Samuel Rosenthal in the 1920s and with son Ken c.1936 (courtesy Kim Rosenthal)

**Samuel Rosenthal** (1888-1967) was born 19 September 1888 at Hastings, England, the only son of six children born to Polish parents Marks (1853–1938) and Ellen Rosenthal (1861–1925). Samuel moved to South Australia with his parents at three years of age. His father was a cantor in the synagogue at Kent Town, Adelaide. Sam was educated in Adelaide and in 1904 articled to architect Herbert Jackman of the firm Garlick and Jackman. He first came to Perth in 1914, at the invitation of fellow Jewish architect and former South Australian Harold Boas (1883–1980). However in January 1915, Samuel enlisted with the First World War (1914-1918) Australian Imperial Force, serving at Gallipoli and on the Western Front, before working for a short period spanning 1919-1920 in London. He returned to Perth in April 1920 to work with Boas again, then established his own practice and in August 1921 won second prize (£15) in a competition for the design of the Subiaco Soldiers' Clock Tower. Samuel Rosenthal registered (no.17) with the Architects Board of Western Australia in May 1922, and was the Secretary of the Royal Institute of Architects of Western Australia in 1925.

Samuel was married to nurse Minna Jean Simpson (1894-1971) at St Mary's Church West Perth in 1923. The couple's first child Kenneth George was born in October 1923, followed by two daughters, Maxine Helen in 1924 and Ann Yvonne in 1928. When Ken was born, his parents were living at Barker Road in Subiaco, and when Ann arrived they were at 233 Thomas Street Subiaco. It appears the Rosenthals favored Subiaco, from 1935-1946 they were at 14 Campbell Street Subiaco, and then at 139 Coghlan Road Subiaco from 1947-1953.



Merthyr House and Leith House, 220-222 St George's Terrace Perth, at left shown in the 1930s and at right shortly before demolition in January 1967 (SLWA 280147PD, SLWA 113231PD).

Sam Rosenthal's earliest major commission in Perth was the two-storey professional office building in St George's Terrace, named Leith House (at no. 220) and Merthyr House (at no. 222). Completed in early 1923, the offices were a good example of his simple, classically symmetrical-style.



Cable Station Cottages of 1926, shown as the McCall Centre in 1987 (SLWA 319279PD).

In late 1925, Rosenthal called tenders for a Submarine Telegraph Station and Quarters – later known as the Cable Station at Cottesloe, and more recently as the McCall Children's Centre on Curtin Avenue. Unified by their colour and hipped tile roofs, the three masonry buildings which comprise the Cable Station have been a landmark feature in the coastal landscape for nearly a century. The Cable Station itself dominates the group of 1926 buildings, with its imposing and arcaded facade and heavily rusticated basement.

Other commercial designs by Rosenthal at the end of the decade included a 'Film Exchange Building' at William Street Perth for the Famous Lasky Film Service in 1927, business premises at 76 King Street in Perth for Wenz and Co wool buyers in 1929, and a two-storey hotel at Muntadgin for the Swan Brewery in 1930.



Premises at 76 King Street Perth for Wenz and Co of 1929 (HCWA, Google Maps 2022)



Hotel at Muntadgin of 1930 (Google Maps 2022); Merlin Court flats of 1934 - at left of photo - 236 St George's Terrace Perth, shown in 1951 (SLWA 235609PD).

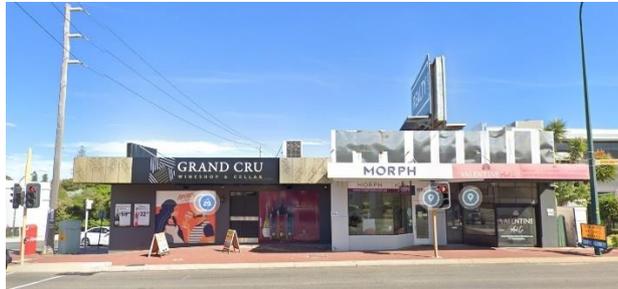
Sam Rosenthal demonstrated his design versatility with the Merlin Court flats at the west end of St George's Terrace Perth in 1934; and a substantial residence for Ben Prevost at 66 Johnston Street, Mosman Park. Built around 1936, and long since demolished, Wilmar House illustrated the broad characteristics of the Inter War (1915-1940) Mediterranean style. Yet in its dignified simplicity, it hints at the functionalist architecture which would appear in Western Australia towards the end of the decade.



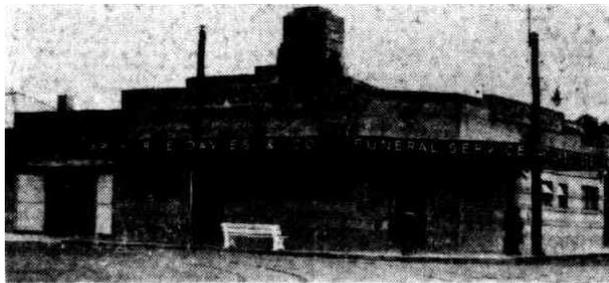
Prevost Residence Johnston Street, Mosman Park (*The West Australian*, 5 June 1937, p.4).

In mid 1935, Rosenthal's fit out work at London House, two-storey offices in Murray Street Perth, for Australian Mines Management – de Bernales Group was praised in a newspaper article titled 'Use of Jarrah'. Again working with the Inter War Mediterranean style, it was Rosenthal who was responsible for the later 1930s panelling of the ballroom interior, external garden walls and balustrading

in Claude de Bernales' remodeling works at Overton Lodge in Broome Street, Cottesloe (later the Cottesloe Civic Centre). In late 1936 Sam invited tenders for shops on the corner of Rockton Road and Stirling Highway Claremont, and it is likely these are the premises that remain on the south-west corner.



1936 shops at cnr Rockton Road and Stirling Highway Claremont (Google Maps 2022).



The building that was recently completed at the corner of Bulwer and Beaufort streets, Perth, for Messrs. Arthur E. Davies and Co., funeral directors, at a cost of £3,700. The architect was Mr. S. Rosenthal.

Funeral Directors' premises cnr Bulwer & Beaufort Streets Perth (*The West Australian*, 22 May 1937, p.8).

Continuing with modest multi-residential work, in April 1938 Sam called tenders for the conversion of a residence and three new flats at 21 Bagot Road Subiaco; and in June 1938 for three flats on the corner of Guildford Road and Stanley Street in East Perth. Rosenthal has been credited with the design of Bellevue Mansions at 16 Bellevue Terrace, Kings Park, West Perth. A further example of his versatility was shown in the design in early 1939 of new buildings, extensions and alterations at the Home for the Aged Blind in Sunbury Road, Victoria Park.



1938 conversion of residence and three new flats 21 Bagot Road Subiaco (Google Maps 2022).

In addition to these impressive commercial and domestic works, as the 1920s progressed Rosenthal was a prolific cinema architect in Western Australia, specializing in designs that permitted the showing of movies in both hardtop venues and outdoor picture gardens. Contemporary newspaper advertisements and reports describe Rosenthal as the architect for numerous theatre projects, and he has more recently been credited for the design of the Rosemount Theatre that was opened in January 1923. The theatre closed in 1960 and was converted to WA's first ten-pin bowling rink with shops along the street frontage.



Rosemount Theatre of 1923 at 464 Fitzgerald Street, North Perth (Google Maps 2022).

In October 1925, Rosenthal called tenders for a cinema theatre at James Street in Guildford for George Hall. The Regent Picture Theatre and Gardens at Guildford was commissioned as a low budget operation in times of relative economic hardship. Rosenthal's simple frontage for the Regent reflected the financial constraints of the project.



Regent Picture Theatre and Gardens of 1926 at 129–133 James Street Guildford – later known as Slovenian Hall (Google Maps 2022).

In June 1926, Rosenthal called tenders for another cinema theatre at Leederville. The cinema was designed in the Interwar Art Deco style. The two storey facade is embellished with stucco decoration, thus the theatre enlivens the intersection, although the side and rear facades are functionalist in character.



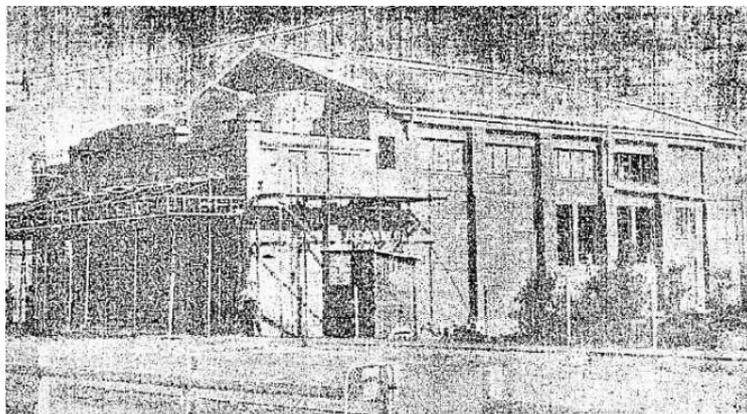
Luna Cinema of 1926 at the corner of Oxford and Vincent Sts Leederville (Google Maps 2022).

Rosenthal was responsible for the remodelling of West's Picture Palace in Subiaco in 1927: These works were completed in the early part of 1928, and in August 1928, the proprietors of the Rosemount Theatre, During and Parker, took out a 10 lease on the property.



1927 remodelling of West's Picture Theatre 440 Hay Street Subiaco, first designed by Thomas Anthoness in 1911 (John Taylor Architect, Heritage Assessment, West's Picture Theatre, 2021)

Rosenthal's design for the Gaiety Theatre, South Perth (1927, closed 1960 and converted to business premises) presented the solid, functional appearance of a late Victorian music hall, the restrained facade concealing the functional gable roofed hall behind.

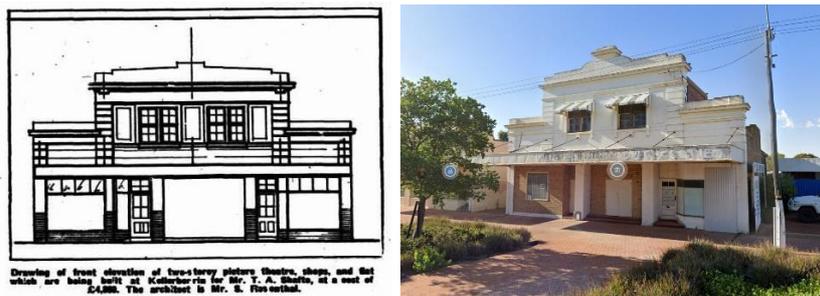


The Gaiety Theatre was at 65 Angelo Street South Perth (*Daily News*, 2 February 1927, p.5).

Rosenthal's adherence to classical symmetry is noticeable in two early picture theatres dating from 1927. The Broadway Theatre, Victoria Park (later refurbished by William G. Bennett in 1938 and now demolished) and the Theatre Royal at Forrest Street in Collie, demonstrate the monumental proportioned designs of some of his earliest works. Another rural theatre at 54 Massingham Street Kelleberin for T.A. Shafto was opened as the Bijou Theatre in 1930.



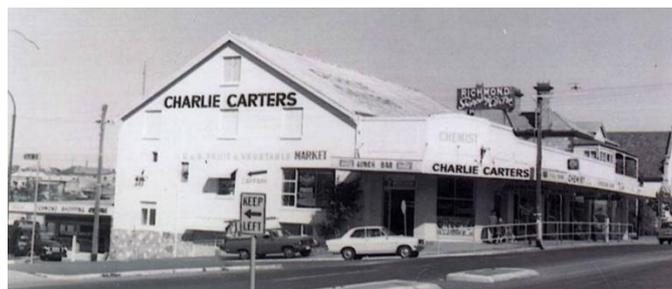
Sketch of Theatre Royal at Collie from 1927, and picture from 1970 (*The West Australian*, 26 November 1927, p.6; <http://cinematreaasures.org/theaters/53277>)



Drawing of front elevation of two-story picture theatre, shops, and flat which are being built at Kelleberin for Mr. T. A. Shafto, at a cost of £4,500. The architect is Mr. S. Rosenthal.

Bijou theatre, and shops at 54 Massingham Street Kelleberin (*The West Australian*, 13 July 1929, p.10, Google Maps 2022)

The Richmond Theatre and Gardens was opened at the corner of Canning Highway and Silas St, East Fremantle in 1934. It closed as a cinema in 1961, and was converted for use as the Richmond Shopping Centre, featuring Charlie Carters grocery. The building was demolished 1979. Rosenthal's plan for the Richmond was an early example of the integration of outdoor projecting.



Richmond Theatre of 1934 at East Fremantle, shown after 1961 conversion to shopping centre (<https://fremantlestuff.info/cinemas/richmond.html>)

The Hurlingham Theatre designed by Sam Rosenthal in 1934 was built on the corner of Fremantle Road (now Canning Highway) and Hovea Terrace, South Perth and opened in May 1935 (closed 1963, demolished 1970s). In December 1935 *The West Australian* newspaper noted that the busy Rosenthal was calling tenders for a theatre at Geraldton, had prepared sketches for a theatre at Canning Road Palmyra, and had plans in hand for picture gardens at Nicholson Road in Shenton Park. He called tenders in August 1936 for picture gardens at Fitzgerald Street in Northam for Goldfields Pictures Ltd, and it is possible that drawings and photos of all these theatre projects might be procured through the State Records Office public buildings files.

Although Rosenthal had perhaps pioneered the use of stylised motifs in WA with his design for the Hurlingham Theatre, his symmetric design for the facade of the 1937 Radio Theatre at Geraldton reflected a concern for three-dimensional massing and stylised decoration which became important to cinema design. These include an emphatic vertical fin, a stepped skyline, and a concentration of ornament on the upper part of the building.



Two-storey building recently completed at the corner of Marine-terrace and Fitzgerald-street, Geraldton, for the West Australian Trustee, Executor and Agency Co., Ltd., and the T. G. Kitching children's trust at a cost of £13,000. It contains a theatre, service station, motor show-rooms, shops, and flats. The architect was Mr. S. Rosenthal.

Radio Theatre on Marine Terrace Geraldton (*The West Australian*, 1 May 1937, p.6).

Five months after the completion of the Geraldton picture theatre, another modern cinema opened on the corner of Wray Avenue and Hampton Road, South Fremantle. In his design for the Beacon, Rosenthal displayed a keen concern for the sculptural massing which was one of the major characteristics of the Inter War Art Deco style. The architect successfully combined vertical and horizontal elements and for the first time used strong streamlined effects, triple banding and geometric curves to help articulate the individual components of the building.



Beacon Theatre of 1937 at corner of Wray Avenue and Hampton Road, South Fremantle  
(<http://perthartdeco.net.au/beacon-theatre-2/> accessed 3 August 2022).

The Wembley Theatre and Gardens of 1937 at Cambridge Street Wembley was a rendered brick and iron structure with a distinctive curved facade and horizontal banding, with a vertical stepped feature typical of the Art Deco style.



Wembley Theatre of 1937 at 202 Cambridge Street Wembley (Google Maps 2022).

The Mayfair Theatre, Bunbury was Rosenthal's last cinema completed in WA and the last to be constructed during this prolific pre-war period in the State's architectural history. It was said to be the architect's finest and most distinctly modern. Situated in the heart of Bunbury, the Mayfair Theatre was hailed at the time of its opening as "A Tribute to the South West", but was demolished in 1971.



1939 Mirror, 29 July 1939, p.5 Mayfair Theatre opening Stephen Street Bunbury

Samuel Rosenthal was a prominent architect of the inter-war era and was known as a cinema specialist. Sam continued his sole practice until 1941, when the interruptions of the Second World War (1939-1945) brought virtually all private work to a halt. With the war, Samuel joined the Commonwealth Department of Works, where he remained until his retirement in 1965. He died 25 January 1967 at Nedlands, aged 78 years, and Jean passed away at Subiaco on 30 May 1971, at 77 years of age. Ken Rosenthal, initially articled to his father, later co-founded the architectural practice Parry and Rosenthal, still in existence in Perth.

Samuel Rosenthal's design work has been described as demonstrating a 'refreshing simplicity of unadorned form allied to classical principles of composition, dignified but relaxed'. His comprehensive portfolio of prominent designs from c.1920 to 1940 in Western Australia could inform a significant future architectural undergraduate or post-graduate thesis.

References:

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- 'Hotel for Muntadgin', *Bruce Rock-Corrigin Post*, 17 October 1930, p.4 (for Swan Brewery).
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- 'Entertainments', *The West Australian*, 13 May 1935, p.10, (Hurlingham Theatre South Perth).
- 'Use of Jarrah', *The West Australian*, 29 June 1935, p.4 (at London House, 2-storey offices Murray Street Perth Australian Mines Management – de Bernales Group).
- 'Theatre, shops and flats', *The West Australian*, 21 December 1935, p.4 (theatres at Geraldton, Canning Road Palmyra, and Nicholson Road Shenton Park).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 1 August 1936, pp.4, 26, (Picture Gardens Fitzgerald St Northam for Goldfields Pictures Ltd).
- 'A £4,000 Residence', *The West Australian*, 24 October 1936, p.8 (two storey residence Johnston Street Mosman Park).
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NAA: A9301, 415593: ROSENTHAL KENNETH GEORGE : Service Number - 415593 : Date of birth - 14 Oct 1923 : POB - PERTH WA : POE- PERTH WA : NOK - ROSENTHAL SAMUEL.

NAA A6769: ROSENTHAL MAXINE HELEN : Service Number - WR/1205 : Date of birth - 08 Oct 1924 : POB - PERTH : POE - FREMANTLE : NOK - ROSENTHAL SAMUEL

'Commemorating the works of pioneer cinema architect Samuel Rosenthal 1888 – 1967', Art Deco Society of Western Australia, November 2006, copy sourced at HCWA August 2022.

John Taylor Architect, 'Heritage Assessment, West's Picture Theatre (former, 1912), 440 Hay Street Subiaco', for the City of Subiaco, May 2021.

Pers comm. Kim Rosenthal August 2022.

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