

ART DECO
LOS ANGELES

ART DECO LOS ANGELES



The Los Angeles Conservancy

• The Search for a Moderne Image



2

Wiltern Theater



During the 1920's, Los Angeles was a modern city on the move, a tolerant city with room to breathe and room for experimentation. Oil, real estate, and the movie industry had brought a huge influx of people and capital to the region, resulting in a phenomenal building boom. Local architects began to design in the new Art Deco style as a means of capturing the vitality and aspirations of the city. Concurrently, a rise in middle class consumerism led to a growing infatuation with the automobile. Buildings sprouted towers to act as signposts for motorists in an increasingly fast-paced world.

The Art Deco style bloomed in Los Angeles, leaving us with a legacy of outstanding designs both in architecture and the decorative arts. The style emerged from a search for a new expression of a modern aesthetic. This was the people's modern—an unthreatening, yet appealing, break from tradition. It was a joyous rebellion from the limitations of Beaux-Arts classicism. Architects experimented with new design sources, often turning to exotic cultures. From Egyptian, Assyrian, and Pre-Columbian art came the chevron (zigzag) and the ziggurat (stepped pyramid)



designs which would Desmond's

become the hallmarks of Art Deco. Highly lacquered surfaces in bold color revealed Oriental influences while African primitivism could be seen in sculpture of the period.

At the same time, creative innovations in European art brought fresh perspectives. The sinuous plant forms and other organic motifs of Art Nouveau were now rendered in a more rigid, symmetrical fashion. Cubism sparked an interest in the power of line, angle, and geometric abstraction while the Fauvists used brilliant color for dramatic effect. A fascination with the machine age saw the use of dynamic motifs to convey the energy of the times, like bolts of electricity.

Art Deco began initially as a form of decoration applied to furniture, jewelry, and handicrafts. The 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris was a major showcase of the new style. American architects quickly adopted the "zigzag moderne" as an appropriate form of decoration for another emerging symbol of the modern age—the skyscraper.

From Manhattan to Seattle, lofty towers were being designed as a unified whole, free of the strict tripartite division of the squat Beaux-Arts business block. Though Louis

Sullivan had earlier pioneered the Chicago highrise, the prototype for the 1920's American skyscraper was Eliel Saarinen's 1922 entry for the Chicago Tribune competition. Its soaring height, inspired by Gothic ideals, was accentuated by recessed vertical strips of windows between unornamented piers. Instead of terminating in an overhanging cornice, the building featured multiple setbacks which drew the eye skyward. This feature responded to popular zoning laws requiring setbacks for high rises in order to allow light to reach the street.

Although Los Angeles had a 13-story height limit set by a 1904 ordinance, setbacks were still used here extensively as a device to convey the skyscraper image. Inspired by new design concepts derived from Paris and New York, local architects also absorbed regional influences. Frank Lloyd Wright's concrete block houses and Bertram Goodhue's proto-modern Los Angeles Public Library (1922-26) showed how simple concrete masses and richly symbolic ornamentation could be brought into calm and orderly harmony.



Oviatt Building

The Goodhue-esque Los Angeles City Hall (1926-28) was an eclectic presursor to the Art Deco skyscraper in Los Angeles. While moderne designs in brick are commonplace

on the East Coast, the warmer Southern California climate allowed for the widespread use of stucco and terra cotta to sheath the exterior of buildings, often in a novel blaze of color. In homage to Hollywood, kleig lights and shooting stars became popular decorative motifs.

As you will see throughout this guide, Art Deco in Los Angeles is a unique blend of historicism and modernism. Its popularity proved that the spirit of the times did not neccesitate the banishment of ornament, as the Bauhaus had claimed. But rather,



Wilton Theater

decorative motifs needed simply to be updated to keep in step with the Machine Age.

Ironically, the glorious indulgences of Art Deco would also be the last hurrah for lavish ornamentation—a brilliant fireworks display cut short by the Depression and the rise of the International Style.



Hollywood Citizen News



One Bunker Hill

- Daniel Hoye
Director of Education
Los Angeles
Conservancy

Oviatt Building

617 S. Olive near 6th Street
1927-28, Albert Walker & Percy Eisen, architects;
Feil & Paradise with Saddier et fils, interiors

James Oviatt was the co-owner of Alexander & Oviatt, an exclusive clothing store housed in its own Italian Romanesque skyscraper, complete with a neon-lit clock tower and Normandy chimes. Perched atop the building is Oviatt's 10-room penthouse - a monument to his sophisticated Parisian taste. To showcase 1920's French decorative arts and craftsmanship, the penthouse was decorated by the Paris firm of Saddier et fils whom Oviatt and his store designer Joseph Feil commissioned during their extended visit to the 1925 Paris Exposition. The living room features a marble fireplace, geometric patterned floors inlaid in exotic woods, and padded moire taffeta walls. A powder room furnished in satin-finish burl maplewood, including a hidden commode, is only outdone by the exquisite master bath with tropical scenes carved into the red lacquer walls. Frosted Lalique glass windows, skylights, lamps, and fixtures abound.

Every morning at 7:30 AM, a carved oak elevator would transport James Oviatt down thirteen stories to the open forecourt lobby. There he could admire the molded Lalique glass elevator doors embossed with oranges, symbolizing Los Angeles. In what was reputed to be his largest single commission, Rene Lalique also created both colored and etched glass panels for the entrance marquee and the lobby's faceted, illuminated ceiling (now replaced by a modern facsimile). The famed designer's genius is equally evident in the mailboxes, directories, frames, and other fittings made of burnished silver mallechort, a new alloy of copper, zinc, and nickel named for its French inventors Malliot and Chiorier.

Across marble floors and past the lobby staircase (with iron grillwork inspired by the work of Edgar Brandt), Oviatt would enter his elegant haberdashery through brass sunburst doors. He would undoubtedly approve of the store's reincarnation as the elegant Rex il Ristorante. This sympathetic transformation, and the restoration of the building, was done by Levin and Associates.

Garfield Building

403 W. 8th Street at Hill Street
1928-29, Claud Beelman

Claud Beelman, one of the city's best and most prolific architects during the 1920's and 30's, is surprisingly little known. Arriving in Los Angeles in 1921, Beelman went into partnership with Aleck Curlett, the son of a prominent local architect. Curlett and Beelman designed many significant commercial and public structures including the Barker Brothers Building, the Pershing Square Building, Foreman and Clark, the "Goodhue-esque" Elks Building, and across the street from the Garfield Building, the Union Bank Building where they maintained their offices. In 1929, the partnership was dissolved over divergent design philosophies - Curlett opting for more traditional styles and Beelman trying his hand at the moderne, beginning with this building.

Built for the Sun Realty Company, the Garfield Building has a relatively sober terra cotta exterior. A third floor setback creates a U-shaped plan for the upper stories which terminate in a small, arched tower. Stylized floral ornament accents the vertical window strips. The peaked entrance canopy is a reconstruction from the original. Its underside is inlaid with a bright marble sunburst which echos the terrazzo sidewalk below. The florid decoration of the open grillwork and the flag mast above the canopy fuses the sinuous organic lines of the Art Nouveau with the geometric symmetry of Art Deco.

The lobby creates an atmosphere of unrestrained luxury in black and purple marble. Polished Benedict nickel frames with grapevines surround display windows in the entrance hall gallery. Gothic-Deco chandeliers in tones of silver and gold hang from the 20-ft high plaster ceiling, finished in low relief. Long thought to be gold leaf, recent restoration work revealed that the ceiling had actually been painted with gold-colored paint by a previous owner. The elevator doors are modern replicas of a period design.

Eastern Columbia

849 S. Broadway at 9th Street
1930, Claud Beelman

On September 12, 1930, after nine short months of construction, the resplendent Eastern Columbia Building opened its doors - a symbol of faith and commitment in the future despite emerging hard times. This was the largest department store in Los Angeles at the time and one of the last major buildings constructed in downtown until after World War II. Adolph Sieroty, a Polish immigrant, had helped to establish the Eastern Outfitting Company, specializing in household furnishings and appliances, and in 1912 the Columbia Outfitting Company, a clothing outlet. Now both of his business interests could share a mutual home under the same general management.

The building's original floor plan reflected its dual tenancy. Both Eastern and Columbia maintained separate entrances and display windows in the former pedestrian arcade through the center of the ground floor. The spectacular two-story main entrance gleams with a sunburst stippled in gold leaf.

This quintessential Art Deco skyscraper rises 264 feet in fluted vertical piers from a vivid terrazzo sidewalk. The brilliant exterior terra cotta sheathing is a rhapsody in blue, green, and gold. Since the Sieroty family business began as the Eastern Clock Company, it is not surprising to see the tower outfitted with an enormous four-sided clock and chimes. Above the neon illuminated numerals and roofsign, a crown of copper flying buttresses support a central smokestack. The clock tower contains the boiler room, electrical and mechanical equipment for the building. Claud Beelman placed them here rather than in the basement, thus allowing the tower to exceed the city's 150' height limit.

The Ninth and Broadway Building across the street is another fine Art Deco design by Claud Beelman (1930). The grapevine decoration is reminiscent of the famous Barclay-Vesey Building in New York City.

William Fox Building

608 S. Hill Street near 6th Street
1930-32, Samuel Tilden Norton

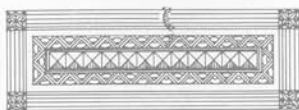
William Fox, the Chicago film producer whose Fox Studios merged with Twentieth Century Pictures, is best remembered for making Tom Mix a household word and Theda Bara a vamp. He also had a career as a successful film distributor and theater operator. In downtown Los Angeles, he devised a two-phase theater/office complex for adjoining lots on Hill and Broadway: The William Fox Building (Norton, 1930-32) and the Los Angeles Theater (S. Charles Lee, 1931).

Built at a cost of \$600,000, the William Fox Building rises thirteen stories, uninterrupted by the usual setbacks typical of the period. The off-white terra cotta facade has unusual mauve tile spandrels adorned with shields and chevrons. Above the flattened-arch entry are cast reliefs of curvilinear design which spread onto the flanking piers in great curlicue flourishes. Triangles, flowers, zigzags, and waves crowd the distinctive bronze frieze above the glass entrance doors, which have retained their original pressed metal frames and octagonal handles. Like a work of art, the building is signed. Chiseled into the polished black granite baseboard on the lower left of the main entry is the inscription: S. Tilden Norton - Architect.

The high ceiling lobby is richly appointed in alternating bands of green and purple marble. The elevators, with their green and red terrazzo thresholds, are each capped by unusual bronze eagles. A door along the back wall is a fantastic example of Art Deco marquetry in exotic woods.

The sparkling jade green building across the street at 629 S. Hill is the former Sun Realty Building, (Claud Beelman, 1930). The remodelled lobby retains some of this city's most inventive moderne designs - diamond shaped elevator doors embossed with highly-stylized birds, fishes, and plants. Next door, the Gothic-cum-Deco Fur Mart Building (Curlett & Beelman, 1925) once housed the Harris and Frank Clothiers.



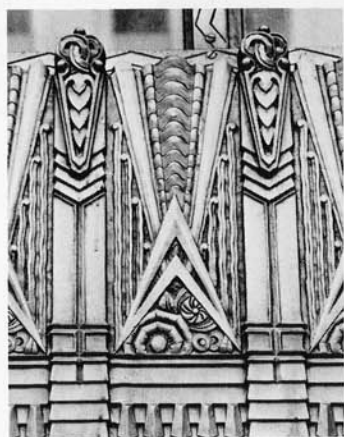
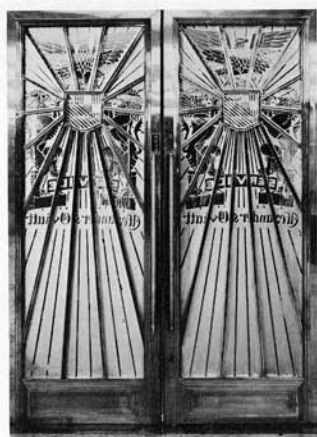


Eastern Columbia

Oviatt Building

William Fox Building

Garfield Building



Title Insurance & Trust

(Design Center)

433 S. Spring Street near 4th Street
1928-29, John & Donald Parkinson,
architects; Herman Sachs, interiors

Prompted by the financial panic of 1893, attorney Henry O'Melveny consolidated two rival title companies to form the Title Insurance & Trust Company. From their offices in the Rowan Building (Parkinson & Bergstrom, 1910) at the NE corner of 5th and Spring, the company relocated to its new headquarters across the street. The massive 12-story office building, dubbed "The Queen of Spring Street", was designed by John and Donald Parkinson. Donald, an MIT graduate who joined his father's practice in 1921, brought an appreciation for the latest design trends to the once-conservative Parkinson firm. This famous team designed some of the city's finest buildings: Bullocks Wilshire, Union Station, and City Hall (with J. Austin & A.C. Martin). The Parkinsons moved their architectural offices to the Title Insurance & Trust Building upon its completion.

Clad in pale buff-colored terra cotta, the building is lightly ornamented with incised floral motifs and swirling Assyrian patterns. Especially noteworthy are the heavy balconies, elaborate window grilles, and three 4x8' tile murals by Hugo Ballin over the entrance. An ornate exterior vestibule features lacy bronze gates, original lamps, and a beautiful ceiling of arabesque tile. The lobby, richly appointed in marble, ebony, and gold leaf, was designed by artist Herman Sachs whose long association with the Parkinsons resulted in the Bullocks Wilshire fresco, City Hall interiors, and the color scheme for Union Station. Don't miss the spectacular bronze elevator doors – classics of the period.

Architect Ragnar Qvale bought the building in 1979 after Title Insurance & Trust (now TICOR) moved to the Wilshire District. Successfully converted to the Design Center, the building now houses "to the trade" showrooms.

The historic Spring Street Financial District is home to other fine examples of Art Deco by the Parkinsons:

Pacific Coast Stock Exchange

618 S. Spring Street near 6th Street (1929-30), Samuel Lunden, architect; John & Donald Parkinson, consulting architects

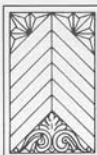
E.F. Hutton (Premiere Towers),

623 S. Spring Street near 6th Street (1931)

Banks Huntley Building,

632 S. Spring Street (1931)

Bartlett Building (Union Oil Building),
215 W. 7th Street near Spring Street,
(1911), Parkinson and Bergstrom; 1930's
remodelling



Title Insurance & Trust



One Bunker Hill

One Bunker Hill

605 5th Street at Grand Avenue
1930-31, John & David Allison

A massive limestone office tower on a sloped site at the edge of Bunker Hill, the Southern California Edison Building was the first all electrically heated and cooled building in the western United States – an appropriately modern image for a public utility. The stark exterior rises amidst multiple setbacks to a short square tower once lit with neon "EDISON" signs. Above the main octagonal entry on the corner, three carved limestone panels by sculptor Merrell Gage depict allegorical figures for hydroelectric energy, light, and power. Overlapping bands of classical moldings and the original chandelier adorn the entry ceiling.

The lobby interior is a symphony of details – an Art Deco interpretation of classical architecture. Colorful fretwork, dentils, rosettes, egg and dart, and chevrons glisten on the 30-ft high coffered ceilings. From multicolored marble floors rise square Sienna travertine columns, incised with floral capitals to retain the smooth surfaces. Metal grilles on windows and vents whirl with sinuous tendrils. The frame of the building directory is capped with lightning bolts of electricity. Through the pale colored-glass windows, a soft glow permeates the room.

At the far end of the lobby is a mural by Hugo Ballin entitled *Apotheosis of Power*. William Gilbert (The Father of Electricity) and Benjamin Franklin with his kite are among the shadowed figures dwarfed by the almighty hand of the Edison Company from whom water and power flow. Brought to Los Angeles as an art director in 1921 by Samuel Goldwyn, Ballin also directed over 100 silent films. In 1929, he returned to painting and is best remembered for his murals at the Wilshire Boulevard Temple and the Griffith Park Observatory.

The elevator lobby is also highlighted by murals. On the west wall are allegorical scenes by noted artist Conrad Buff which closely resemble those on the east wall by Barse Miller. Their respective signatures can be found painted amongst the gears of the pictured machinery.

Allison and Allison, who moved their architectural offices here from the Braly Block on Spring Street, are best known for their church and school designs such as Royce Hall at UCLA.





Title Guarantee & Trust

411 W. 5th Street at Hill Street
1929-31, John & Donald Parkinson

The Title Guarantee & Trust Company was founded on October 28, 1895 by two ambitious real estate entrepreneurs - Edwin Sargent and L.C. Brand - who both helped to establish local policies for certificates of title. Leslie Brand is best remembered as the flamboyant developer of Glendale where his Saracenic-style estate is now the Brand Library.

In 1931, as the company's operations expanded, Title Guarantee & Trust built their fourth home at 5th and Hill, a site formerly occupied by the original California Club Building. The growing company occupied almost half of their new headquarters: trust department (2nd Floor), escrow offices (3rd Floor), operations (4th & 5th Floor), and executive suites (6th Floor). Eventually, Title Guarantee & Trust was absorbed by its biggest competitor - Title Insurance & Trust - on December 19, 1942.

Best seen rising above Pershing Square, the 12-story skyscraper has a smooth exterior facing of mat glaze terra cotta. The soaring verticality is attenuated by sleek vertical piers and the handsome corner tower. For added drama, spotlights originally lit the tower setbacks with their stylized Gothic buttresses. In lieu of gargoyles, ceramic drainspouts jut from the parapet.

On the ground floor, rippling floral brackets support a pair of balconies over large display windows framed in pressed metal. Over the main entrance on 5th Street are sculptured symbolic representations of truth and commerce. The lobby vestibule has a lustrous polychromatic ceiling of molded tile. But the real treasure lies in the elevator lobby. Marble walls and inlaid floors along with exquisite elevator doors help to provide the perfect setting for six murals by Hugo Ballin. These scenarios of local history depict 1) The La Brea Tar Pits, 2) Rancho Days, 3) The Signing of the Treaty of Cahuenga, 4) Lt. E.O.C. Ord and his 1849 Survey, 5) The Coming of the Railroads, and 6) The Modern City Rising to Power - depicting the Title Guarantee & Trust Building looming high above the scene.



Title Guarantee & Trust



Los Angeles Times

Los Angeles Times

202 W. 1st Street at Spring Street
1931-35, Gordon Kaufmann

When Harry Chandler commissioned Gordon Kaufmann to design a new \$4 million newspaper plant for the Los Angeles Times, he simply stated "Let it be fireproof and earthquake proof and let it be a monument to the progress of our city and of Southern California." In accord with Louis Sullivan's edict "Form Follows Function", Kaufmann designed a monumental moderne structure which conveys its strength, grandeur and efficiency.

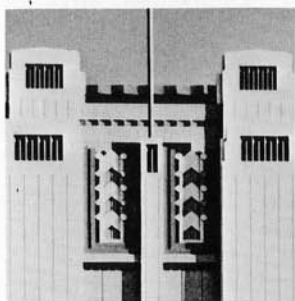
Clad in Indiana limestone, granite, and bronze trim, the plant's steel frame carries the great weight of heavy printing equipment. Massive buttresses add strength and carry air-conditioning ducts. Aluminum spandrels provide a flexible tie between the stone piers in case of earthquakes. Setbacks create outdoor terraces for an 800-seat auditorium on the 5th floor and the large roof sign encloses mechanical equipment, thus freeing valuable space in the basement for paper storage.

The building's exterior is refined by symbolic sculptural detail. American eagles, the insignia of The Times, decorate the entry, central piers, and corner setbacks. High above First Street, three 9-ft limestone figures carved in place by Merrell Gage represent Father Time (Truth), Spirit of The Times (Knowledge), and Gutenberg (History). Two red-neon telechron clocks and blue-neon roofsigns dominate the tower. The polished red granite around the main entrance is engraved with didactic company mottos: *Liberty Under The Law* and *True Industrial Freedom*.

The circular lobby centers on a revolving 6-ft aluminum globe by Mary Sheridan which symbolizes the worldwide scope of The Times. Mounted on a sculptured marble base with bronze bas reliefs, the globe is ringed by a band of zodiac symbols and crowned with a stylized Zeus and a barbed finial. Embedded in the multicolored marble floors are more inscriptions and a giant compass. Two 10x27' murals by Hugo Ballin, depicting the production and influence of a newspaper, are hidden behind sheets of aluminum siding on the rotunda walls - victims of an unfortunate 1960's remodeling.

The dignified elevator lobby has survived virtually intact. Green marble walls and silver elevator doors framed in bronze rise to a stainless steel cornice where indirect lighting illuminates the silver leaf ceiling. Bronze plaques in the floor commemorate the former homes of The Times. Don't miss the telephone room with its 1930's signage and an original "Long Distance" booth.





Pacific Telephone

Los Angeles Pacific Telephone Company

(Tim Walker & Associates)
716 S. Olive Street near 7th Street
1911, Morgan & Walls;
1930, remodelled by Morgan,
Walls, & Clements

Many older buildings were remodelled in the new Art Deco style to update their image (as well as that of their owners). Designed in 1911 by Morgan and Walls, the city's oldest architectural firm, the Pacific Telephone Building was remodelled in 1930 by the same firm, though Stiles O. Clements, a

major advocate of the moderne, had since joined the firm.

Clad in unglazed terra cotta resembling stone, the building has a sculptural quality with pure lines and very sparse ornamentation. Six wide piers, incised with thin flutes and rectangular capitols, are reduced in number to four at the prominent 4th-floor setback. Thin piers run between the recessed vertical strips of windows which terminate in simple chevron reliefs. A colorful terrazzo stoop graces the main entrance while overhead the building address is incised in period lettering. A 1979 renovation by Timothy Walker & Associates for their offices revealed the original marble and wrought iron staircase in the lobby. The beautiful paint job highlights the period details both inside and out.

Next door at 740 S. Olive is the Southern California Telephone Company Building (John and Donald Parkinson, 1930), rehabilitated in recent years for senior citizen housing.

Bullocks Wilshire

Bullocks Wilshire

3050 Wilshire Boulevard at
Westmoreland Avenue
1929, John & Donald Parkinson

When the Bullocks Department Store decided to expand with a second location, P.G. Winnett conceived of a unique specialty store comprised of international boutiques. He envisioned a monument to modernism – the product of a collaborative effort between architects and artists, much like he had seen at the 1925 Paris Exposition. Hailed as the nation's first suburban department store, Bullocks Wilshire opened on September 29, 1929 – one month before the Great Stock Market Crash. Nonetheless, "Winnett's Folly" proved to be enormously successful and remains the city's best example of high-art French Moderne.

The asymmetrical setback massing of the exterior, sheathed in tan terra cotta with decorative copper spandrels, is marked by a distinguished landmark tower and finial. The street entrance bears the inscription "To Build A Business That Will Never Know Completion" along with figurative reliefs by George Stanley, best known for his fountain sculptures at the Hollywood Bowl. Reflecting the burgeoning importance of the automobile, the store's main entrance is via the rear parking lot through ornate Art Deco gates and a porte cochere (now enclosed). Here, an abstract ceiling fresco by Rumanian artist Herman Sachs immortalizes the era's fascination with transportation.

The sumptuous interiors were



fashioned by local artists, many of them recent European emigres, hired by New York interior decorator Eleanor Lemaire. Her principal designer was the German-born architect Jock Peters, who displays the Bauhaus aesthetic in the copper, gun metal, and bronze elevator doors. His design for the central Perfume Hall features incandescent light panels, flush with the rose marble walls, which bend around corners to accentuate the pure lines and form of the space. In the sportswear department, an avant-garde mural by Serbian artist Gjura Stojano entitled "The Spirit of Sports" mixes exotic woods, silver and gold leaf, mirrors, and splashes of color.

Other works of art include a variety of moderne clocks, saddle shop bas reliefs by German sculptor Eugene Maier-Kreig and Parisian landscapes in the Fur Salon by George de Winter. The menswear shop features textured walls inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright's local concrete block houses.

I. Magnin, the classical moderne at 3240 Wilshire, was designed in 1939 by Myron Hunt and H.C. Chambers of Pasadena with interiors by Timothy Pfleuger of San Francisco.

Wiltern Theater

8440 Wilshire Boulevard at Western Avenue
1930-31, Morgan, Walls, & Clements, architects;
G. Albert Lansburgh, theater architect

In 1929, real estate developer Henry de Roulet decided to build on the cornerstone property of his Pellissier Square subdivision. To honor the "world's busiest intersection" at Wilshire and Western, architect Stiles O. Clements placed a 12-story office tower and theater diagonal to the corner. One of the flanking 2-story wings of retail storefronts, enlivened by bands of chevrons and scallops, terminates in a squat octagonal turret. The facade is clad in a specially designed shade of green glazed tile, since known as Pellissier green. The small lobby interior glistens with marble and cut glass.

Famed San Francisco theater designer G. Albert Lansburgh designed the corner movie palace for Warner Bros. This was

the last theater of Lansburgh's noted career and his only Art Deco design ever to be built. The fantasy here begins with a spectacular plaster sunburst over a silver ticket booth overgrown with stylized ferns. Playful terrazzo floors lead to carved mahogany entrance doors framed with pressed aluminum flourishes. Inside, the complex lobby features Malibu tile drinking fountains, flowery reliefs in cast plaster and metallic leaf, and abstract murals by A.B. Heinsbergen, whose vision of the heavens graces the 2-story oval rotunda ceiling. The tiered oval chandeliers of etched glass are particularly beautiful.

The auditorium features two massive Egyptian-inspired columns which frame the stage. The fire curtain is embellished with a pastel Art Deco landscape by Heinsbergen. Plaster reliefs and grilles of floral design line the walls and dramatically project out over the audience at the roofline. The gorgeous ceiling depicts a chevron sun setting on a stylized skyline of skyscrapers against a golden orange sky.

Saved from demolition by the Los Angeles Conservancy, the Wiltern was converted to a live performing arts center in 1985 by Ratkovitch/Bowers Inc., after a meticulous restoration by Levin & Associates.

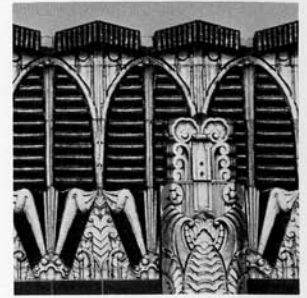
Selig Retail Store

(LA Video)
273 S. Western Avenue
at 3rd Street
1931, Arthur Harvey

A veritable masterpiece of the period, this 60 x 140 ft retail building was scaled down from a 2-story structure to a single story because of the Depression. Built for Alvin C. Selig at a cost of \$30,000, Stuart Hall Clothiers was to have been the original major tenant. A bank branch eventually occupied the building until very recently.

Arthur Harvey's design is comprised of 5 storefronts, graced with beautiful metal grilles, which run along 3rd street ending in a broad sweeping curve onto Western Avenue. Accentuating the corner entrance is a wall of glass blocks, a popular building material first invented in 1902 by the Corning-Steubens Glass Company. The translucent bricks came into vogue in the early thirties.

The glittering terra cotta ornamentation and Harvey's unique geometric patterns combine Egyptian color schemes with highly abstracted plant motifs. Black pilasters, fluted in gold, terminate in tall sparkling capitals which rise in tiers of curlicues. A frieze of ornate golden triangles, framed



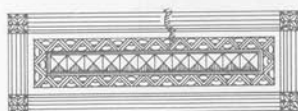
Selig Retail Store

by trumpet flowers, is surmounted by a band of reeded black panels resembling Gothic lancet windows. Additional golden terra cotta flares upward to the parapet where peaked black tiles form a serrated roofline.

Another example of Arthur Harvey's unique brand of ornamentation can be seen just south of here at the Wilshire Professional Building, 3875 Wilshire at St. Andrews. The architect maintained his offices here though the 13-story Deco skyscraper was designed for doctors and physicians.

A block south of the Selig Building, note Lester Hibbard's design for a public garage and auto showroom at 356 S. Western Avenue near 4th Street. Now known as the Mailing House, the building's 85-ft concrete tower has a slender urn set in a large niche patterned with zigzags.

Wiltern Theater



MIRACLE MILE



Desmond's



Debra Apartments



*Beverly/Poinsetta
Commercial Building*



Smith-Parsons House

Desmond's

(Wilshire Tower)

5514 Wilshire Boulevard
at Burnside Avenue
1928-29, Gilbert Stanley
Underwood

The flagship of developer A.W. Ross' Miracle Mile shopping district – "Fifth Avenue of the West" – this 2-story commercial block with a stepped 9-story office tower was home to a pair of elegant clothing stores: Desmonds and Silverwoods. The exterior features a unique combination of zigzag moderne and streamline characteristics. Lush Art Deco ornament, stylized eagles, and a pair of hollow-eyed Assyrian warriors standing sentinel over the main entry, contrast with the smooth rounded corners and curved windows – hallmarks of the aerodynamic streamline moderne style of the 1930's.

The main lobby has original chandeliers, fixtures and elevator doors incised with jungle foliage which have retained some of their original green color. The vibrant gray, black, and white terrazzo floors are a real highlight, especially at the front entry where they spear out onto the red sidewalk. A rear entry from the parking lot is framed by lacy zigzag ornament. G. Stanley Underwood is also known for his designs of the Federal Courthouse and Terminal Annex in Los Angeles and Yosemite's Ahwanhee Hotel.

A few blocks east is the striking stepped tower of the Dominguez-Wilshire Building (Morgan, Walls, and Clements, 1930) at 5410 Wilshire and Cloverdale. A year earlier, this firm designed the Security First National Bank at 5209 Wilshire near La Brea. The tall former banking hall contains skylights arranged to give the ceiling a zigzag pattern. The dazzling black and gold terra cotta exterior is a reminder of the demolished Atlantic Richfield Building by the same architects.

Debra Apartments

267-269 Mansfield Avenue
at 3rd Street
1928, Clarence J. Smale

This small duplex apartment building is a sculptured cube incised with the striking exotic ornament that characterizes Smale's work of this period. The plaster exterior has alternating smooth and textured surfaces in an ersatz stonework pattern. Floral designs decorate the spandrels between the recessed windows while the piers end in coiled spirals. Huge triangular fans jut above the rooftop which is serrated by chevrons. The battered walls and stepped arch of the entrance porch is carried through to the interior doorways. The front door to each apartment is incised with large zigzags and stained a faux copper-green patina. An ocular stained glass window has a lively rainbow pattern of kleig lights.

The building's 3rd Street facade has narrow slit windows, also executed in stained glass, while still another window has rippled amber glass and a metal grille. The north side of the building has a very unique Art Deco chimney complete with whirling volutes. At the back of the property is a free standing garage – a veritable miniature of the building with fluted walls and another huge feathered Egyptian fan.

Several blocks away stands a 4-story moderne apartment house at 364 Cloverdale near 4th Street. Designed by Smale in 1930, he lived here while maintaining an office on the Miracle Mile at the Wilshire Center Building, 5369 Wilshire. This little known architect is best remembered for his flamboyant streamline/baroque Loyola Theater (1946) in Westchester for the Fox West Coast Theater chain.

Beverly/Poinsetta Commercial

7290 Beverly Boulevard
at Poinsetta
1930, J. Robert Harris

The popularity of the automobile in the late 1920's and the resultant increase in mobility challenged architects to develop new ways of enticing potential customers to the retail buildings they designed for their clients. One device was to enhance a highly visible corner lot with a tower. In this example, designed for the La Brea Mortgage Company, a one-story plastered brick commercial building with seven storefronts is centered on a splendid 36-ft corner tower.

Set at a 45-degree angle to the intersection, the squat black-and-white tower is framed by fluted pilasters which spiral into huge coiled tendrils. Above a curved metal canopy, insets of black vitrolite glass create a bold sunburst, topped by concentric arrowpoint designs. The setbacks of the tower are finished with diamond-shaped medallions. The flanking wings of the building have a zigzag roofline, thin bands of pressed metal chevrons, and wrought iron grilles of abstracted plant designs. The storefronts are set between narrow piers and retain their original sunburst terrazzo entryways and Art Deco metal hardware. The glass doors and transoms are superb examples of moderne design. With just a few thin wooden strips set at acute angles on the glass, the architect has created a cubist composition recalling the graphics of the period.

While in the neighborhood, note the commercial building at 7221-25 Beverly Boulevard near Alta Vista. Designed in 1930 by L. Mulgreen, the fluted facade is decorated with panels of shooting stars.

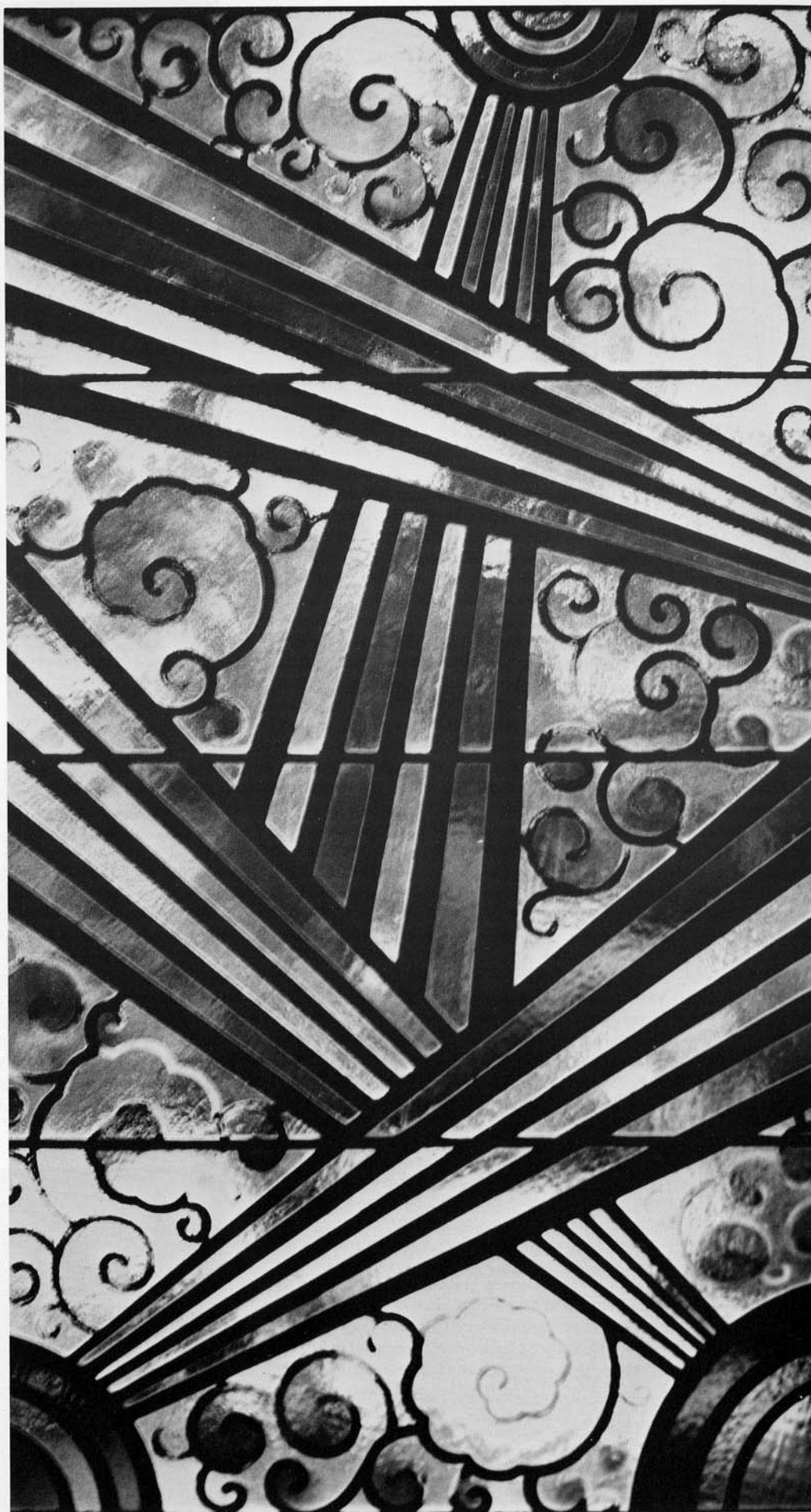


Smith-Parsons House

191 Hudson Avenue
at 2nd Street
1929-30, Clarence J. Smale

Beautifully sited on a corner lot amidst manicured hedges, green lawns, and a splendid oak tree, the Smith-Parsons House is a Parisian jewel transplanted on a California landscape – one of the country's few fully realized examples of a free-standing Art Deco house. As with the Debra Apartments, architect Clarence J. Smale has fashioned a cube articulated by blocks of smooth and fluted surfaces. The facade is embellished with corrugated spandrels, stained glass windows, and oversized geometric flourishes along the zigzagged roofline. The small engaged chimney tower and a broad port cochere grace the north side of the house. Rounded concrete steps lead up the walkway to the front entry with its scalloped lintel and bands of chevrons. The tiled porch has two magnificent stained glass windows with curlicues and shooting stars – the crowning glory of this splendid survivor from the Jazz Age.

Coincidentally, two blocks west at 181 Las Palmas and 2nd Street is the Isadora Allen Residence (Raphael Nicolais, 1935). Over a splayed doorway with a geometric frieze is an Art Deco stained glass window depicting birds and waterfalls. The wrought-iron railing of the second story balcony is also moderne-inspired on this otherwise Spanish style house.



Smith-Parsons House



Pantages Theater

6233 Hollywood Boulevard at Argyle Avenue
1929-30, Benjamin Marcus Priteca

The largest and most spectacular theater in Hollywood was built for the illustrious vaudeville tycoon Alexander Pantages – who was in jail on bogus statutory rape charges at the time of the opening. Considered one of the first Art Deco movie palaces in the country, its design had a great impact on theater styling throughout the 1930's.

The sober facade has black marble pilasters, pressed metal window frames, grillwork, lush plaster reliefs, and the original theater marquee anchored by barbed supports. Helmeted figures gaze down from the second story parapet which rises to a slender spiked finial. A height limit office tower above the building was planned but never built. To the right of the redesigned theater entrance is the intact building lobby which gives some indication of the auditorium's splendor. Notice the original hardware, frosted glass sconces, ceiling murals (which need help), and the sunburst panels over the elevators.

The ornate theater lobby has vibrant polychromatic fan vaults pulsating up onto the barreled ceiling which has lost its original star-shaped chandeliers. The drinking fountains, alcove statuary, and layered plasterwork are exceptional as is the ladies powder room with its angled mirror walls. But it is the auditorium which is considered Priteca's masterpiece. If ornament is a crime, this is unabashed decadence. Seemingly every inch of the luxurious space is embellished with geometric configurations. The original asbestos fire-curtain by A.B. Heinsbergen depicts "pterodactyls flying through a thunderstorm." The house has three stages and a particularly unique double ceiling which allows you to see the high blue ceiling through a suspended lattice of bold interlocking shapes. The enormous bronze and frosted glass chandelier only adds to the visual splendor.

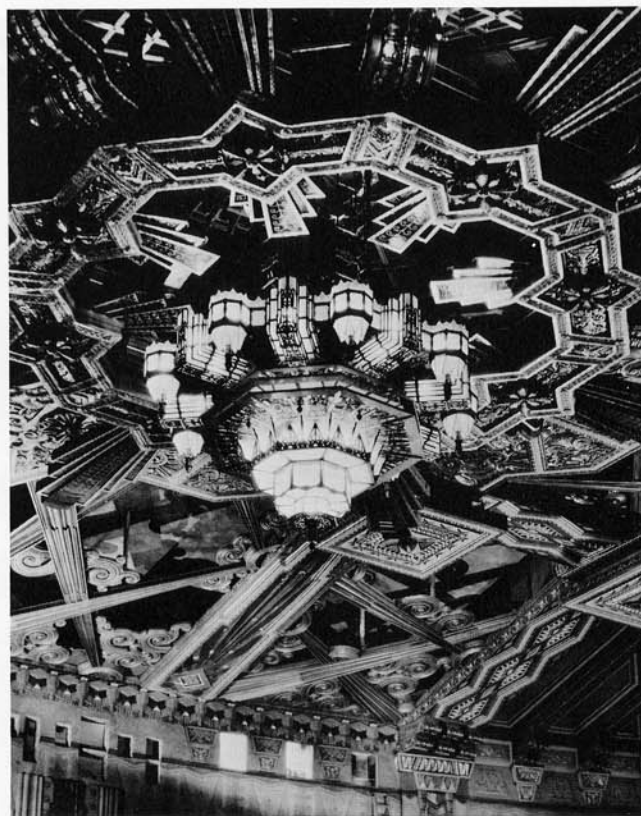
Next door to the Pantages is the moderne-Gothic Hollywood Equitable Building, (Aleck Curlett, 1929) and while in the area, visit the Vine Tower Building at Yucca and Vine (Gogerty & Weyl, 1928). The lacy curvilinear ornament blends French and Celtic influences.

California Bank

(Precision Auto, Inc.)

5620 Hollywood Boulevard at Gramercy Place
1929, John & Donald Parkinson

Of the 56 offices of California Bank in Los Angeles County at the time, this is one of two branches designed by the Parkinsons in the moderne style, the other being at 9441 Wilshire Boulevard and Beverly



Pantages Theater (courtesy Terry Helgesen)

Drive. The Hollywood building is comprised of seven single-story bays with polished black granite wainscoting, offset by a tall, white tower. The black sidewalk breaks into bold chevrons at the building entrance. The doorway is framed by pressed metal chevrons, curlicues and a stylized doric frieze. A circular medallion overhead contains a superb moderne eagle – a symbol of strength and security, quite appropriate for a financial institution.

The solid tower rises in a series of six narrow setbacks which define its skyscraper form. It is capped by a tiered glass and metal lantern resembling a greenhouse conservatory. Handsome iron gates embellished with simple kleig light designs grace the driveway entrance.

Several blocks away is S. Charles Lee's 1928 Motion Picture Arts Building at 5504 Hollywood Boulevard and Western Avenue. Classically inspired figures on the parapet hold masks, harps, and megaphones. Ironically, this former home of the Hays Censorship office features Greco-Roman bas reliefs on the balconies depicting nude actors, movie cameras, and toga clad directors.

California Bank Building





Multicolor Labs

J.J. Newberry

6600 Hollywood Boulevard at Whitley Avenue
1928, J.J. Newberry Company Architectural staff

The brilliant polychromatic facade of this five and dime store catches the eye of the passer-by today just as it surely must have when it was first built. Above the remodelled first floor of peach vitrolite glass panels rise four turquoise blue terra cotta piers, the tops of which are pierced with checkerboard patterns in lieu of capitals. Between the first and second floors runs a decorative belt course of chevrons, stylized fleur-de-lis, and octagon medallions. Above the second story wall of glass are zigzagged gold terra cotta panels embossed with overlapping squared-off curlicues reminiscent of Southwest Indian rug and pottery designs. The parapet features bold yellow chevrons. The functional interior retains its simple ceiling and capital moldings.

Other examples of polychrome terra cotta await nearby. A small commercial building (1931) at 1648 N. Wilcox at Hollywood Boulevard

J.J. Newberry



is sheathed in fluted blue grey tiles. At 1545 N. Wilcox and Selma, the Hollywood Citizen News (Frances D. Rutheford, 1930) sparkles in blue, white, and gold terra cotta with a splendid tile mural over the entrance depicting a 1730 Gutenberg press and a 1930 roller press. Don't miss the lobby staircase with its spiderweb balustrades and colorful tile risers.

At 1655 Cherokee Avenue and Hollywood Boulevard, look for the Shane Building (S. Tilden Norton & Frederick Wallis, 1930) with its intact lobby featuring ornate grillwork and etched glass. Just north of there are the Montecito Apartments (Marcus P. Miller, 1931) at 6550 Franklin Avenue and Cherokee which have been rehabilitated as senior citizen housing. The garish red, green, and brown color scheme is the original.

Multicolor Labs

(Producers Film Center)

7000 Romaine Street between Sycamore Avenue and Orange Drive
1927-30, studio contractors

In 1930, the eccentric multi-millionaire Howard Hughes moved the offices of his Caddo Motion Picture Company to this location. Multicolor Ltd, a pioneering color film company founded by Hughes, maintained film processing laboratories, storage vaults, and editing rooms in the building. Film classics like *Scarface* starring Paul Muni, *Hell's Angels* with Jean Harlow, and *The Outlaw* featuring Jane Russell were all edited here.

This communications fortress was built with imported German cement, (Hughes didn't like the local varieties), an independent water supply from its own well, power generators, and incinerators with flue pipes disguised by the tall narrow tower. The machine shops here developed many of Hughes' famous tool patents, and in 1936, the Hughes Liquid Carbonic Company added a brewery.

In her 1967 essay on Hughes and his stronghold entitled *7000 Romaine, Los Angeles*, 38, author Joan Didion likens the structure to "a faded movie exterior, a pastel building with chipped art moderne detailing." Fortunately, a recent renovation by owner Knight Harris has returned this little known gem of the period to some semblance of its former glory. Spectacular examples of Art Deco wrought iron grillwork can be seen in the entrance gates and the railings of the lobby staircase and mezzanine. Etched sidewalks and a colorful tiled fountain in the courtyard lead to the main entrance articulated by sweeping vertical curves, cast plaster ornament, and freestanding Art Deco lampposts. Wildly jagged moldings decorate the small lobby like icing on a cake. Though the polychromatic sunburst on the floor has faded, windows etched with skyscraper motifs still bear the initial "M" for Multicolor Ltd - wonderful reminders of this building's unique place both in Hollywood and architectural history.

BEVERLY HILLS

Warner Beverly Hills Theater
(Beverly Theater)
9404 Wilshire Boulevard at Canon Drive
1931, Benjamin Marcus Priteca

An outstanding example of a neighborhood movie palace by the same architect as the Pantages in Hollywood. The exterior massing rises to a squat tower capped with a spiked finial. Note the exuberant plasterwork, the ornate moldings on the second story windows, and the pilasters outlined in neon on the facade. The storefronts preserve their chevroned grillwork as well as the ceramic tile baseboards with black and yellow geometric designs. Priteca cleverly integrated a blind staircase along the Canon Drive side.

The lobby is open to the mezzanine and features a richly carved ceiling incised with exotic jungle foliage. Marble stairs lead to the upstairs lounge where ceiling murals include Spanish flamenco dancers, their faces faceted in an almost Cubist fashion. Copper and glass light fixtures also hint of Spanish design influences and yet are clearly Art Deco. A downstairs lounge features a magnificent copper scallop-shell drinking fountain.

The auditorium ripples and pulsates with glorious geometric ornament rendered in a unique combination of plaster and stencilling. All is drama, resplendent in maroon and gold with accents of pale pink and aqua. A huge Spanish fan spreading out over the proscenium arch overlaps other patterns which crowd the ceiling and spill down the walls to the floor.

Priteca created other Art Deco theaters in Los Angeles including the 1930 Warner Huntington Park Theater, 6714 S. Pacific Boulevard between Gage Ave and Florence, and the 1931 Warner San Pedro Theater, now the Warner Grand, at 478 W. 6th Street near Gaffey in San Pedro.



Sunset Tower



Warner Beverly Hills Theater

WEST HOLLYWOOD

Sunset Tower
(St. James's Club)
8358 Sunset Boulevard at Kings Road
1929-30, Leland A. Bryant

This National Register landmark is especially notable for its superb design as well as its associations with famous Hollywood personalities. Swank styling, modern conveniences (outlets in every bathroom for an electric shaver!), and the spectacular views afforded by its hillside location on the Sunset Strip helped to make this 13-story apartment hotel the last word in luxury. Former residents include Howard Hughes, John Wayne, Billie Burke, Joseph Schenck, Paulette Goddard, Zasu Pitts, and gangster Bugsy Seigel (who was reportedly asked to leave).

The streamlined design was the crowning achievement of architect Leland A. Bryant who specialized in luxury apartment buildings. He designed and lived in the huge chateausque Trianon Apartments (1750 N. Serrano), one of his many buildings in the Hollywood area. In the Sunset Tower, Bryant has softened the building's stepped high-rise form by using faceted windows to accent the rounded corners. Most of the exterior is surfaced with smooth concrete, devoid of ornamentation. However, above the street entrance and along the various setbacks, plaster friezes incorporate a florid tangle of plants, animals, zeppelins, mythological creatures, even Adam & Eve. Sprouting from atop the tower are engaged pylons and a pineapple finial. On the former garage at the rear of the building, sculptured panels depict the radiator grill of a sleek 1920's automobile.

After numerous struggles in recent years to save the building from demolition, it has victoriously undergone renovation as the prestigious St. James's Club. While in the area, seek out the nearby 7-story Moffit Apartments, now known as the Hayworth Tower, at 1314 Hayworth Avenue near Fountain. The building's urbane image and period decoration have helped to also make it a West Hollywood landmark.



Our Lady of Lourdes

3rd Street at Rowan
1929, Lester G. Scherer

The soaring verticality, buttressed walls, and symbolic ornamentation of Gothic cathedrals had a great influence on the moderne style. However, Art Deco churches are rare. Perhaps the style's decadent and jazzy extravagances were deemed inappropriate for ecclesiastical structures.

Lester G. Scherer, a Hollywood architect, has grafted Art Deco onto the Spanish Colonial Revival in this unique design. The Latin-cross floor plan, central dome, bell tower, red tile roof, and smooth stucco surfaces convey a Spanish image. Closer inspection reveals Scherer's fresh reinterpretation of these details to reflect the interplay of geometry so indicative of the moderne.

The red roofing tiles over the side aisles are laid in a zigzag pattern. The arrangement of three peaked doorways, separated by thick piers, creates a rhythm of chevrons across the facade. Overhead, a statue of Our Lady of Lourdes is surrounded by cherub faces in a hexagonal niche. The bell tower, attenuated by narrow setbacks, tapers to a hexagonal crown inset with decorative panels of a cross on a florid background. The hexagon motif is also prevalent in the jagged gold mosaic cap on the tower, the honeycomb grillwork on the tower balcony, the splayed windows of the central dome, and even the dome itself.

Entering the vestibule, notice the ziggurat ceiling and the statuary niches embellished with rich orange, black, and yellow Art Deco tilework. In the sanctuary, simple yellow glass windows cast a golden light on the interior. Peaked arches zigzag between the nave and the side aisles to create a continuous line of chevrons toward the altar, a pattern which is echoed on the wooden confessionals. But the piece-de-resistance is a tile mural on the choir loft balcony bearing the inscription *Pax Vobiscum*, Latin for "Peace Be With You." Above swirling stylized clouds stands the resurrected Christ in all his moderne glory, garbed in a stunning cubist robe worthy of Erté.



Our Lady of Lourdes



Catalina Casino/Theater
(courtesy Catalina Island Museum)

Catalina Casino/Theater

Avalon, Santa Catalina Island 1928-29,
Walter Webber & Sumner Spaulding

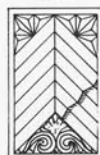
When William Wrigley Jr. purchased Santa Catalina Island in 1919, he began a concerted effort to transform the town of Avalon into a romantic Spanish village. As the centerpiece for his 10-year building program, he envisioned a large Moorish entertainment pavilion – or casino – with a ballroom over a theater, a concept suggested by his son Philip. Spaulding and Webber, designers of the lovely Malaga Cove Plaza in Palos Verdes, here devised a \$2 million circular structure with an overhanging Alhambra-esque balcony. The expansive roof covered in red Catalina tile is capped by a 25-ft neon-lit lantern. To move large crowds up five stories to the ballroom, ramps like those used at Wrigley Field were incorporated into two projecting wings.

While the Spanish leitmotif of Avalon dictated the Casino's Mediterranean exterior, the Art Deco interiors and state-of-the-art facilities were reminders that the building symbolized the island's future. Visitors first arrive at an outdoor loggia with a splendid aluminum and black glass ticket booth. Original chandeliers hang in front of nine Art Deco murals of the famous undersea gardens of Catalina, complete with stylized fish and a sinuous mermaid. Originally painted by John Gabriel Beckman, who had just completed the interiors for Grauman's Chinese Theater, the murals are currently being recreated in Catalina tile as had been originally intended.

Through a foyer panelled in black walnut beneath a painted barrel ceiling, the theatergoer enters a spectacular movie palace. A ceiling of silver leaf, embedded with twinkling stars, forms a low hemispheric dome with perfect acoustics for the new "talkies." Murals by Beckman encircling the room depict a surreal Catalina landscape replete with local Indians, Spanish galleons, hooded friars, leaping goats and indigenous flora. Botticelli's Venus and vibrant Art Deco organ grilles decorate the span of the proscenium arch. Indirect pink neon lighting illuminates the fire-curtain painting entitled *Flight of Fancy Westward* – a sleek figure and his shadow ride a cresting wave, superimposed over a 22-carat gold topographical map of Catalina Island.

As if this weren't enough, ingeniously cantilevered overhead is the ballroom with its long history of Big Band music. Spinning mirrored chandeliers cast pastel lights from the fluted ceiling over the dance floor. Ziggurat arches, French swags, frosted glass sconces, and octagonal bas-reliefs of aquatic scenes complete the opulent decor.

Wrigley's Casino is a testament to his sales slogan to lure visitors from the mainland – "In All The World, No Trip Like This."



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Courtesy the Design Center*



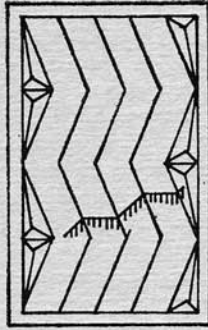
*Richfield Building, 1928-1972
(courtesy Atlantic Richfield Company)*

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