



SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

HEARING DATE: April 5, 2017
CASE NUMBER: 2016-011052DES
PROJECT ADDRESS 1970 Ocean Avenue
BLOCK/LOT 3280/018
TO: Historic Preservation Commission
FROM: Shannon Ferguson
Preservation Planner, 415-575-9074
REVIEWED BY: Tim Frye
Historic Preservation Officer, 415-575-6822
RE: Landmark Recommendation Resolution

1650 Mission St.
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CA 94103-2479

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On January 18, 2017, the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) adopted Resolution No. 841 to initiate Article 10 landmark designation of 1970 Ocean Avenue, known historically as the El Rey Theater. Under Article 10, initiation and recommendation are two distinct steps of the landmark designation process which require separate hearings and resolutions.

Attached is a draft Resolution to recommend approval to the Board of Supervisors the designation of 1970 Ocean Avenue as a San Francisco landmark under Article 10 of the Planning Code, Section 1004.1. 1970 Ocean Avenue is significant as one of the only remaining movie theaters originally designed in the Art Deco style by master architect Timothy Pflueger. The property meets two of the Historic Preservation Commission's priorities for designation: the designation of underrepresented Landmark property types including landscapes and the designation of buildings located in geographically underrepresented areas.

The Planning Department (Department) recommends adopting this Resolution.

ATTACHMENTS:

Draft Resolution
Draft Landmark Designation Report
Designation Ordinance
January 18, 2017 Case Report
Resolution 841



SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Historic Preservation Commission Resolution No. XXX

HEARING DATE APRIL 5, 2016

RESOLUTION TO RECOMMEND TO THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS ARTICLE 10 LANDMARK DESIGNATION OF 1970 OCEAN AVENUE (AKA EL REY THEATER), LOT 018 IN ASSESSOR'S BLOCK 3280, AS LANDMARK NO. XXX

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1. WHEREAS, on August 17, 2016, the Historic Preservation Commission added 1970 Ocean Avenue Street (aka El Rey Theater), to the Landmark Designation Work Program; and
2. WHEREAS, Historic Preservation Consultant Christopher VerPlanck, who meets the Secretary of Interior's Professional Qualification Standards, prepared the Landmark Designation Report for 1970 Ocean Avenue (aka El Rey Theater) on behalf of the Art Deco Society of California, which was reviewed by Department Staff Shannon Ferguson and Tim Frye, who meet the Secretary of Interior's Professional Qualification Standards, for accuracy and conformance with the purposes and standards of Article 10; and
3. WHEREAS, the Historic Preservation Commission, at its regular meeting of January 18, 2016 reviewed Department staff's analysis of 1970 Ocean Avenue's (aka El Rey Theater) historical significance per Article 10 as part of the Landmark Designation Case Report dated December 7, 2016 and initiated Landmark designation process through Resolution 841; and
4. WHEREAS, the Historic Preservation Commission finds that the 1970 Ocean Avenue (aka El Rey Theater) nomination is in the form prescribed by the Historic Preservation Commission and contains supporting historic, architectural, and/or cultural documentation; and
5. WHEREAS, the Historic Preservation Commission finds that 1970 Ocean Avenue (aka El Rey Theater) conveys its architectural significance as an embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of the Art Deco style and represents the work of master architect Timothy Pflueger; and
6. WHEREAS, the Historic Preservation Commission finds that 1970 Ocean Avenue (aka El Rey Theater) meets two of the Historic Preservation Commission's priorities for designation which are the designation of underrepresented Landmark property types including landscapes; and the designation of buildings located in geographically underrepresented areas; and
7. WHEREAS, the Historic Preservation Commission finds that 1970 Ocean Avenue (aka El Rey Theater) meets the eligibility requirements per Section 1004 of the Planning Code and warrants consideration for Article 10 landmark designation; and

8. WHEREAS, the Historic Preservation Commission finds that the boundaries and the list of exterior and interior character-defining features, as identified in the Landmark Designation Report, should be considered for preservation under the proposed landmark designation as they relate to the building's historical significance and retain historical integrity; and
9. WHEREAS, the proposed designation is consistent with the General Plan priority policies pursuant to Planning Code sections 101.1 and 302; and furthers Priority Policy No. 7, which states that historic buildings be preserved; and
10. WHEREAS, the Department has determined that landmark designation is exempt from environmental review, pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15308 (Class Eight - Categorical); and

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Historic Preservation Commission hereby recommends to the Board of Supervisors approval of landmark designation of 1970 Ocean Avenue Street (aka El Rey Theater), Assessor's Block 3280, Lot 018 pursuant to Article 10 of the Planning Code.

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was adopted by the Historic Preservation Commission at its meeting on April 5, 2017.

Jonas P. Ionin
Commission Secretary

AYES:

NAYS:

ABSENT:

ADOPTED: April 5, 2017



SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Landmark Designation Case Report

Hearing Date: December 7, 2016
Case No.: **2016-011052DES**
Project Address: 1970 Ocean Street
Zoning: NCT – Ocean Avenue Neighborhood Commercial Transit
Block/Lot: 3280/018
Property Owner: Ricci Ventures LLC
Greenpoint Land Co.
1970 Ocean Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94127
Staff Contact: Shannon Ferguson – (415) 575-9074
shannon.ferguson@sfgov.org
Reviewed By: Tim Frye – (415) 575-6822
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PROPERTY DESCRIPTION & SURROUNDING LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT

1970 Ocean Avenue, historically known as the El Rey Theater (1931), sits on the north side of Ocean Avenue between Lakewood Avenue and Fairfield Way. The building occupies approximately 75 percent of the rectangular parcel measuring approximately 183 x 192 feet (APN 3280/018). The lot slopes uphill toward the north in the direction of Mt. Davidson Manor, a 1920s era streetcar suburb of single family dwellings. The El Rey Theater is located near the west end of the Ocean Avenue commercial district, which is dominated by a combination of older, small-scale commercial buildings and much later mixed-use developments containing commercial storefronts on the ground floor and residential units above. To the east of the El Rey Theater, on the opposite side of Fairfield Way, are several one-story commercial buildings constructed between 1928 and 1939. To the west of the El Rey Theater, on the opposite side of Lakewood Avenue, is a one-story strip mall constructed in 1980. On the south side of Ocean Avenue is Ingleside Terraces residence park, a streetcar suburbs constructed between the First and Second world wars.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The case before the Historic Preservation Commission is the consideration of the initiation of landmark designation of 1970 Ocean Avenue, historically known as the El Rey Theater as a San Francisco landmark under Article 10 of the Planning Code, Section 1004.1, and recommending the Board of Supervisors approve of such designation.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW STATUS

The Planning Department has determined that actions by regulatory agencies for protection of the environment (specifically in this case, landmark designation) are exempt from environmental review, pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15308 (Class Eight - Categorical).

GENERAL PLAN POLICIES

The Urban Design Element of the San Francisco General Plan contains the following relevant objectives and policies:

- OBJECTIVE 2: Conservation of Resources that provide a sense of nature, continuity with the past, and freedom from overcrowding.
- POLICY 4: Preserve notable landmarks and areas of historic, architectural or aesthetic value, and promote the preservation of other buildings and features that provide continuity with past development.

Designating significant historic resources as local landmarks will further continuity with the past because the buildings will be preserved for the benefit of future generations. Landmark designation will require that the Planning Department and the Historic Preservation Commission review proposed work that may have an impact on character-defining features. Both entities will utilize the *Secretary of Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* in their review to ensure that only appropriate, compatible alterations are made.

SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING CODE SECTION 101.1 – GENERAL PLAN CONSISTENCY AND IMPLEMENTATION

Planning Code Section 101.1 – Eight Priority Policies establishes and requires review of permits for consistency with said policies. On balance, the proposed designation is consistent with the priority policies in that:

- a. The proposed designation will further Priority Policy No. 7, that landmarks and historic buildings be preserved. Landmark designation of 1970 Ocean Avenue, historically known as the El Rey Theater, will help to preserve an important historical resource that is architecturally significant as one of the only remaining movie theaters originally designed in the Art Deco style by master architect Timothy Pfluger.

BACKGROUND / PREVIOUS ACTIONS

The El Rey Theater was added to the Landmark Designation Work Program on August 17, 2016. The landmark designation report was prepared by VerPlanck Historic Preservation Consulting at the request of the Art Deco Society of California. A final draft of the report was submitted to the Department on October 18, 2016.

OTHER ACTIONS REQUIRED

If the Historic Preservation Commission adopts a resolution to initiate designation of the subject property as an Article 10 landmark at its December 7, 2016 hearing and directs staff to finalize the landmark designation report, a second Historic Preservation Commission hearing will be scheduled for the

Commission's recommendation of approval of the designation. At the second hearing, if the Historic Preservation Commission recommends approval of the designation, its recommendation will be sent by the Department to the Board of Supervisors. The nomination would then be considered at a future Board of Supervisors hearing for formal Article 10 landmark designation.

APPLICABLE PRESERVATION STANDARDS

ARTICLE 10

Section 1004 of the Planning Code authorizes the landmark designation of an individual structure or other feature or an integrated group of structures and features on a single lot or site, having special character or special historical, architectural or aesthetic interest or value, as a landmark. Section 1004.1 also outlines that landmark designation may be initiated by the Board of Supervisors or the Historic Preservation Commission and the initiation shall include findings in support. Section 1004.2 states that once initiated, the proposed designation is referred to the Historic Preservation Commission for a report and recommendation to the Board of Supervisors to approve, disapprove or modify the proposal.

Pursuant to Section 1004.3 of the Planning Code, if the Historic Preservation Commission approves the designation, a copy of the resolution of approval is transmitted to the Board of Supervisors and without referral to the Planning Commission. The Board of Supervisors shall hold a public hearing on the designation and may approve, modify or disapprove the designation.

In the case of the initiation of a historic district, the Historic Preservation Commission shall refer its recommendation to the Planning Commission pursuant to Section 1004.2(c). The Planning Commission shall have 45 days to provide review and comment on the proposed designation and address the consistency of the proposed designation with the General Plan, Section 101.1 priority policies, the City's Regional Housing Needs Allocation, and the Sustainable Communities Strategy for the Bay Area. These comments shall be sent to the Board of Supervisors in the form of a resolution.

Section 1004(b) requires that the designating ordinance approved by the Board of Supervisors shall include the location and boundaries of the landmark site, a description of the characteristics of the landmark which justify its designation, and a description of the particular features that should be preserved.

Section 1004.4 states that if the Historic Preservation Commission disapproves the proposed designation, such action shall be final, except upon the filing of a valid appeal to the Board of Supervisors within 30 days.

ARTICLE 10 LANDMARK CRITERIA

The Historic Preservation Commission on February 4, 2009, by Resolution No. 001, adopted the National Register Criteria as its methodology for recommending landmark designation of historic resources. Under the National Register Criteria, the quality of significance in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, feeling, materials, workmanship, and association, and that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history;

or that are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or properties that have yielded, or may likely yield, information important in prehistory or history.

PUBLIC / NEIGHBORHOOD INPUT

There is no known public or neighborhood opposition to designation of 1970 Ocean Avenue as an Article 10 landmark. The Department will provide any public correspondence received after the submittal of this report in the Historic Preservation Commission's correspondence folder.

PROPERTY OWNER INPUT

Staff met with the property owners on October 18, 2016 and shared the landmark designation report with them. A site visit was conducted on November 18, 2016 with the property owners present at the meeting.

STAFF ANALYSIS

The case report and following analysis was prepared by Department staff. The Department has determined that the subject property meets the requirements for Article 10 eligibility as an individual landmark. The justification for its inclusion is outlined below under the Significance and Integrity sections of this case report.

The subject building appears to meet two the Historic Preservation Commission's priorities for designation which are:

1. *The designation of underrepresented Landmark property types including landscapes*
There are five landmarked movie theater buildings built during the same time period as the El Rey Theater (1931). They are Alhambra Theater (2320 Polk Street, 1926, Moorish Revival style, Landmark No. 217), Castro Theater (429 Castro Street, 1922, Beaux-Arts style, Landmark No. 100), El Capitan Theater (2353 Mission Street, 1928, Mexican Baroque, Landmark No. 214), Metro Theater (2055 Union, 1924, Spanish Colonial Revival/Art Deco remodel in 1941, Landmark No. 261), and New Mission Theater (2550 Mission Street, 1916, Beaux-Arts/Art Deco exterior remodel 1932, Landmark No. 245). The Castro, Alhambra, and New Mission Theaters were also designed by Timothy Pflueger. However, the El Rey is the only theater in San Francisco by Pflueger originally designed in the Art Deco style.
2. *The designation of buildings of Modern design*
The subject building is not a Modern style building; rather it is an Art Deco style building.
3. *The designation of buildings located in geographically underrepresented areas*
There is only one other existing landmark located nearby at 90 Cedro Avenue. It is Landmark No. 213, the Joseph Leonard/Cecil F. Pool House, a single family Craftsman style home constructed by builder Joseph A. Leonard in 1911 and later occupied by Judge Cecil F. Poole, the first non-white property owner in Ingleside Terrace. As an Art Deco style movie theater building, 1970 Ocean Avenue is a very different property type from 90 Cedro Avenue.

4. *The designation of properties with strong cultural or ethnic associations.*

The subject building does not appear to have specific cultural or ethnic associations.

SIGNIFICANCE

Significant architecture

The El Rey Theater is architecturally significant as one of the only remaining movie theaters originally designed in the Art Deco style by master architect Timothy Pflueger.

The Art Deco style emerged on the world stage at the 1925 *Exposition des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes* in Paris. Art Deco style was inspired by a variety of sources, in particular the ancient ziggurat-building cultures of the pre-Islamic Middle East, including Assyria, Babylon, and Persia. Signature details of the style included geometric shapes, including chevrons, zig-zags, diagonal rays, stylized papyrus leaves, pulvinated moldings, and horizontal “speed lines” The Art Deco style evolved in a different direction in California than it did in Europe or on the East Coast. In California, architects and designers relied on the pre-Columbian architecture of Mexico and Central America instead of Middle Eastern or African sources. With its stepped, soaring tower, horizontal speedlines at the parapet, and Mayan inspired entrance grille and metal and cast plaster interior ornament, it embodies the distinctive characteristics of the Art Deco style.

The building is also significant for its association with master architect Timothy Pflueger, one of San Francisco’s top architects of the twentieth century and the leading practitioner of the “Mayan Deco” style in Northern California. Pflueger defied the dominant conservative aesthetic of the *École de Beaux Arts* by embracing a daring modernist aesthetic all his own, an aesthetic that relied in part on exotic architectural styles, in particular Mayan, Aztec, and other Meso-American traditions. He also embraced technology and modern materials and used them to make his buildings seem more richly appointed than they actually were. Pflueger is best known for his theater designs, including the Castro (1922), Alhambra (1926), and New Mission (1932) theaters in San Francisco; the Paramount Theater(1931) in Oakland; and the Alameda Theater (1932) in Alameda. Other notable designs by Pflueger include the Pacific Telephone & Telegraph Building (1925), Medical-Dental Building (1929), and San Francisco Stock Exchange (1930). Pflueger also designed Roosevelt Junior High School (1930) and George Washington High School (1936).

PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE

The El Rey Theater has a period of significance of 1931, the year it was completed.

INTEGRITY

Despite alterations to the storefronts and main entrance, the El Rey Theater retains sufficient integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, setting, feeling, and association to convey its significance.

CHARACTER-DEFINING FEATURES

Whenever a building, site, object, or landscape is under consideration for Article 10 landmark designation, the Historic Preservation Commission is required to identify character-defining features of the property. This is done to enable owners and the public to understand which elements are considered most important to preserve the historical and architectural character of the proposed landmark.

As described in the Landmark Designation Report, the following is a list of exterior and interior character defining features of the El Rey Theater.

The character-defining *exterior* features of the building are identified as all exterior elevations, including but not limited to form, massing, structure, architectural ornament, and materials. In the case of the former El Rey Theater, its character-defining features are:

- The building's T-shaped footprint and four-part massing and volume consisting of the central gable-roofed theater, 146'-9"-high tower, and two flanking one-story retail wings.
- The building's primary façade facing Ocean Avenue, including its cement stucco finish, cast-concrete grille, incised speed lines, zig-zag ornament, raised parapet (retail wings only), gable outlined with red clay tile (theater volume), and pylon-capped tower.
- East and west (secondary) façades, including their general massing and articulation with deeply recessed "blind" openings, and painted board-formed concrete walls. The windows on the west wall of the west retail wing are also character-defining, though they are missing their original metal screens.
- The tower, including its height, massing, and surviving cast cement ornament.
- The building's combination gable (theater volume) and flat (retail wings and stage area) roof.

At the time of designation, non-character-defining exterior features include all post-1931 alterations, including the folded-plate canopy, all storefronts, and infilled fenestration on the south and east façades. None of these features has gained significance in their own right.

The character-defining features of the interior of the former El Rey Theater include:

- Main lobby, auditorium, balcony, stairs, and mezzanine volumes,
- All extant sheet metal and cast-plaster Art Deco ornament in the lobby, auditorium, balcony, and mezzanine.
- All extant doors, hardware, and light fixtures in the lobby, auditorium, balcony, and mezzanine.
- Potentially extant murals at auditorium ceiling and mezzanine as shown in historic photographs but currently overpainted.

At the time of designation, non-character-defining interior features include all spaces affected by extensive post-1931 alterations, including the remodeled bathrooms and interior of retail stores, and all utilitarian interior spaces, including the basement, tower, backstage area, former projection room, offices, and storage.

INTERIOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION

According to Article 10, Section 1004(c) of the Planning Code, only those interiors that were historically publicly accessible are eligible for listing in Article 10. Article 10, Section 1004(c) of the Planning Code states,

(c) The property included in any such designation shall upon designation be subject to the controls and standards set forth in this Article 10. In addition, the said property shall be subject to the following further controls and standards if imposed by the designating ordinance:

- (1) For a publicly-owned landmark, review of proposed changes to significant interior architectural features.
- (2) For a privately-owned landmark, review of proposed changes requiring a permit to significant interior architectural features in those areas of the landmark that are or historically have been accessible to members of the public. The designating ordinance must clearly describe each significant interior architectural feature subject to this restriction.

The interior of the lobby and auditorium was historically publically accessible to the public; therefore it is eligible for protection under Article 10 of the Planning Code.

BOUNDARIES OF THE LANDMARK SITE

The boundaries of the landmark site encompass all of and are limited to lot 018 in Assessor's Block 3280.

PLANNING DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION

Based on the Department's analysis, the El Rey Theater is individually eligible for Article 10 Landmark designation as it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction; and was designed by a master architect. The El Rey Theater is architecturally significant as one of the only remaining movie theaters originally designed in the Art Deco style by master architect Timothy Pflugger. Designation of the El Rey Theater also appears to meet two of four of the Historic Preservation Commission's priorities for designation. Staff recommends approval of the proposed landmark designation of the El Rey Theater.

The Historic Preservation Commission may recommend approval, disapproval, or approval with modifications of the proposed designation of 1970 Ocean Avenue as a San Francisco landmark under Article 10 of the Planning Code to the Board of Supervisors pursuant to Planning Code Section 1004.1. If the Historic Preservation Commission approves the designation, a copy of the motion of approval is transmitted to the Board of Supervisors, which holds a public hearing on the designation and may approve, modify or disapprove the designation (Section 1004.4). If the Historic Preservation Commission disapproves the proposed designation, such action shall be final, except upon the filing of a valid appeal to the Board of Supervisors within 30 days (Section 1004.5).

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Draft Landmark Designation Report
- B. Draft Motion initiating designation



SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Historic Preservation Commission Resolution No. 841

HEARING DATE JANUARY 18, 2017

RESOLUTION TO INITIATE DESIGNATION OF 1970 OCEAN AVENUE (AKA EL REY THEATER), LOT 018 IN ASSESSOR'S BLOCK 3280, AS ARTICLE 10 LANDMARK.

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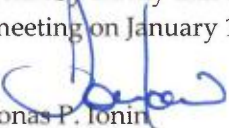
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1. WHEREAS, the Historic Preservation Commission, at its regular meeting of August 17, 2016, added 1970 Ocean Avenue (aka El Rey Theater), Lot 018 in Assessor's Block 3280, to the Landmark Designation Work Program.
2. WHEREAS, Historic Preservation Consultant Christopher VerPlanck, who meets the Secretary of Interior's Professional Qualification Standards, prepared the Landmark Designation Report for El Rey Theater on behalf of the Art Deco Society of California, which was reviewed by Department Staff Shannon Ferguson and Tim Frye, who meet the Secretary of Interior's Professional Qualification Standards, for accuracy and conformance with the purposes and standards of Article 10; and
3. WHEREAS, the Historic Preservation Commission, at its regular meeting of January 18, 2017, reviewed Department staff's analysis of 1970 Ocean Avenue's (aka El Rey Theater) historical significance per Article 10 as part of the Landmark Designation Case Report dated December 7, 2016; and
4. WHEREAS, the Historic Preservation Commission finds that 1970 Ocean Avenue (aka El Rey Theater) nomination is in the form prescribed by the HPC and contains supporting historic, architectural, and/or cultural documentation; and

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Historic Preservation Commission hereby initiates designation of 1970 Ocean Avenue (aka El Rey Theater), Assessor's Block 3280, Lot 018 as a Landmark pursuant to Article 10 of the Planning Code.

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was adopted by the Historic Preservation Commission at its meeting on January 18, 2017.


Jonas P. Ionin
Commission Secretary

AYES: Wolfram, Hyland, Hasz, Johnck, Matsuda, Pearlman

NAYS: None

ABSENT: Johns

ADOPTED: January 18, 2017

[Planning Code - Landmark designation of 1970 Ocean Avenue (aka El Rey Theater)]

Ordinance amending the Planning Code to designate 1970 Ocean Avenue (aka El Rey Theater), Lot 018 in Assessor's Block 3280, as a Landmark under Article 10 of the Planning Code; affirming the Planning Department's determination under the California Environmental Quality Act; and making public necessity, convenience and welfare findings under Planning Code Section 302, and findings of consistency with the General Plan and the eight priority policies of Planning Code Section 101.1.

NOTE: Unchanged Code text and uncodified text are in plain Arial font. Additions to Codes are in *single-underline italics Times New Roman font*. Deletions to Codes are in *strikethrough italics Times New Roman font*. Board amendment additions are in double-underlined Arial font. Board amendment deletions are in ~~strikethrough Arial font~~. Asterisks (* * * *) indicate the omission of unchanged Code subsections or parts of tables.

Be it ordained by the People of the City and County of San Francisco:

Section 1. Findings.

(a) CEQA and Land Use Findings.

(1) The Planning Department has determined that the proposed Planning Code amendment is subject to a Categorical Exemption from the California Environmental Quality Act (California Public Resources Code section 21000 et seq., "CEQA") pursuant to Section 15308 of the Guidelines for Implementation of the statute for actions by regulatory agencies for protection of the environment (in this case, landmark designation). Said determination is on file with the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors in File No. _____ and is incorporated herein by reference.

(2) Pursuant to Planning Code Section 302, the Board of Supervisors finds that the proposed landmark designation of 1970 Ocean Avenue (aka El Rey Theater), Lot 018, in Assessor's Block 3280, will serve the public necessity, convenience and welfare for the

1 reasons set forth in Historic Preservation Commission Resolution No. _____,
2 recommending approval of the proposed designation, which is incorporated herein by
3 reference.

4 (3) The Board finds that the proposed landmark designation of 1970 Ocean
5 Avenue (aka El Rey Theater), Lot 018, in Assessor's Block 3280 is consistent with the San
6 Francisco General Plan and with Planning Code Section 101.1(b) for the reasons set forth in
7 Historic Preservation Commission Resolution No. _____, recommending approval of
8 the proposed designation, which is incorporated herein by reference.

9 (b) General Findings.

10 (1) Pursuant to Section 4.135 of the Charter of the City and County of San
11 Francisco, the Historic Preservation Commission has authority "to recommend approval,
12 disapproval, or modification of landmark designations and historic district designations under
13 the Planning Code to the Board of Supervisors."

14 (2) On August 17, 2016, the Historic Preservation Commission added 1970
15 Ocean Avenue (aka El Rey Theater), Lot 018 in Assessor's Block 3280, to the Landmark
16 Designation Work Program.

17 (3) The Designation report was prepared by experts and reviewed by Planning
18 Department Preservation staff. All preparers meet the Secretary of the Interior's Professional
19 Qualification Standards and the report was reviewed for accuracy and conformance with the
20 purposes and standards of Article 10.

21 (4) The Historic Preservation Commission, at its regular meeting of
22 _____, reviewed Department staff's analysis of 1970 Ocean Avenue's historical
23 significance per Article 10 as part of the Landmark Designation Case Report dated
24 _____.

1 (5) On _____, the Historic Preservation Commission passed Resolution
2 No. _____, initiating designation of 1970 Ocean Avenue (aka El Rey Theater), Lot 018
3 in Assessor's Block 3280, as a San Francisco Landmark pursuant to Section 1004.1 of the
4 San Francisco Planning Code. Such motion is on file with the Clerk of the Board in File
5 _____ and incorporated herein by reference.

6 (6) On _____, after holding a public hearing on the proposed designation
7 and having considered the specialized analyses prepared by Planning Department staff and
8 the Landmark Designation Case Report, the Historic Preservation Commission recommended
9 approval of the proposed landmark designation of 1970 Ocean Avenue (aka El Rey Theater),
10 Lot 018, in Assessor's Block 3280, in Resolution No. _____. Such resolution is on file
11 with the Clerk of the Board in File No. _____.

12 (7) The Board of Supervisors hereby finds that 1970 Ocean Avenue (aka El Rey
13 Theater), Lot 018, in Assessor's Block 3280, has a special character and special historical,
14 architectural, and aesthetic interest and value, and that its designation as a Landmark will
15 further the purposes of and conform to the standards set forth in Article 10 of the San
16 Francisco Planning Code.

17
18 Section 2. Designation.

19 Pursuant to Section 1004 of the Planning Code, 1970 Ocean Avenue (aka El Rey
20 Theater), Lot 018, in Assessor's Block 3280, is hereby designated as a San Francisco
21 Landmark under Article 10 of the Planning Code.

22 ///

23 ///

24 ///

25 ///

1 Section 3. Required Data.

2 (a) The description, location, and boundary of the Landmark site consists of the City
3 parcel located at 1970 Ocean Avenue, Lot 018, in Assessor's Block 3280, in San Francisco's
4 Ingleside neighborhood.

5 (b) The characteristics of the Landmark that justify its designation are described and
6 shown in the Landmark Designation Case Report and other supporting materials contained in
7 Planning Department Case Docket No. 2016-011052DES. In brief, 1970 Ocean Avenue (aka
8 El Rey Theater), Lot 018, in Assessor's Block 3280, is eligible for local designation under
9 National Register of Historic Places Criterion C (as it embodies distinctive characteristics of a
10 type, period, or method of construction and represents the work of a master architect).
11 Specifically, designation of the former El Rey Theater is proper given it is one of the only
12 remaining movie theaters originally designed in the Art Deco style by master architect Timothy
13 Pflueger.

14 (c) The particular features that shall be preserved, or replaced in-kind as determined
15 necessary, are those generally shown in photographs and described in the Landmark
16 Designation Case Report, which can be found in Planning Department Docket No. 2016-
17 011052DES, and which are incorporated in this designation by reference as though fully set
18 forth. Specifically, the following features shall be preserved or replaced in kind:

19 (1) All exterior elevations, form, massing, structure, roofline, architectural
20 ornament and materials of 1970 Ocean Avenue, identified as:

21 (A) T-shaped footprint and four-part massing and volume consisting of
22 the central gable-roofed theater, tower, and two flanking one-story retail wings;

23 (B) Primary façade facing Ocean Avenue, including its cement stucco
24 finish, cast-concrete grille, chimney with incised zig zags, raised parapet with incised speed
25

1 line, any extant transom windows (retail wings only), gable outlined with red clay tile, and
2 tower with incised speed lines and pylon;

3 (C) East and west (secondary) elevations of the theater, including the
4 painted board-formed concrete walls and the deeply recessed "blind" openings;

5 (D) East and west (secondary) elevations of the retail wings, including
6 the cement stucco finish and window openings filled with six light, wood sash awning windows
7 and pilasters with incised capital between window openings;

8 (E) The tower, including its height, massing, and surviving cast cement
9 ornament; and

10 (F) The building's combination gable (theater) and flat (retail wings and
11 stage area) roof with skylights.

12 (2) The character-defining interior features of the building are those associated
13 with areas that have historically been accessible to the public, and are depicted in the floor
14 plans or photos the Landmark Designation Report dated _____, including:

15 (A) Lobby, lobby stairs, mezzanine, auditorium, and balcony volumes;

16 (B) All extant sheet metal and cast-plaster Art Deco ornament in the
17 lobby, auditorium, balcony, and mezzanine, including decorative sheet metal ventilation
18 system at auditorium and balcony ceilings;

19 (C) All extant doors and hardware in the lobby, auditorium, balcony, and
20 mezzanine;

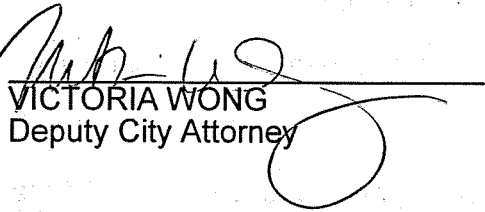
21 (D) Metal aisle and restroom signs in the lobby; and

22 (E) Potentially extant murals at auditorium and balcony ceilings, and
23 mezzanine walls as shown in historic photographs but currently overpainted.

1 Section 4. Effective Date. This ordinance shall become effective 30 days after
2 enactment. Enactment occurs when the Mayor signs the ordinance, the Mayor returns the
3 ordinance unsigned or does not sign the ordinance within ten days of receiving it, or the Board
4 of Supervisors overrides the Mayor's veto of the ordinance.

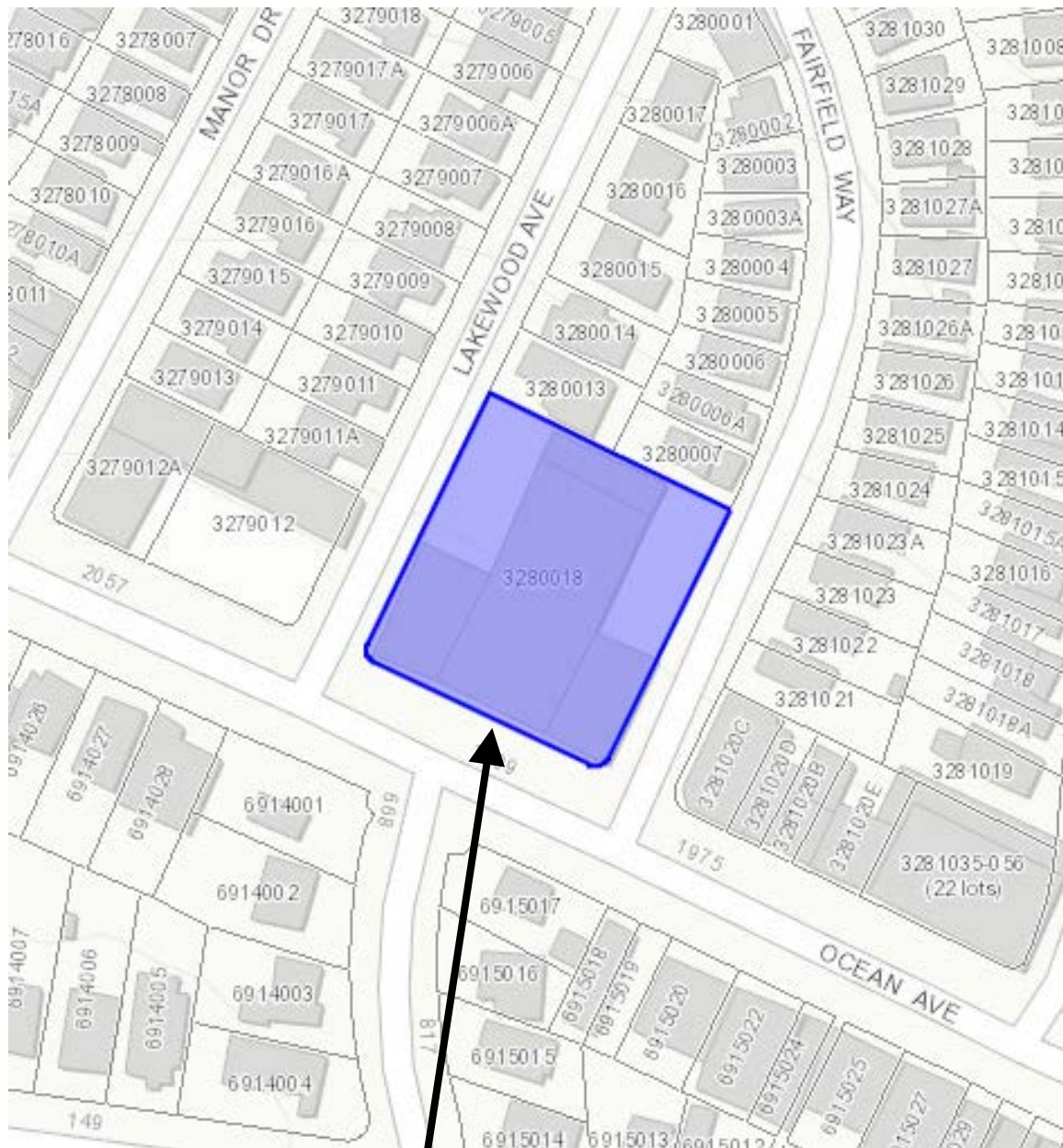
5
6 APPROVED AS TO FORM:
7 DENNIS J. HERRERA, City Attorney

8 By:

9 
VICTORIA WONG
Deputy City Attorney

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Parcel Map



SUBJECT PROPERTY



Article 10 Landmark Designation
Case Number 2016-011052DES
 El Rey Theater
 1970 Ocean Avenue

Zoning Map

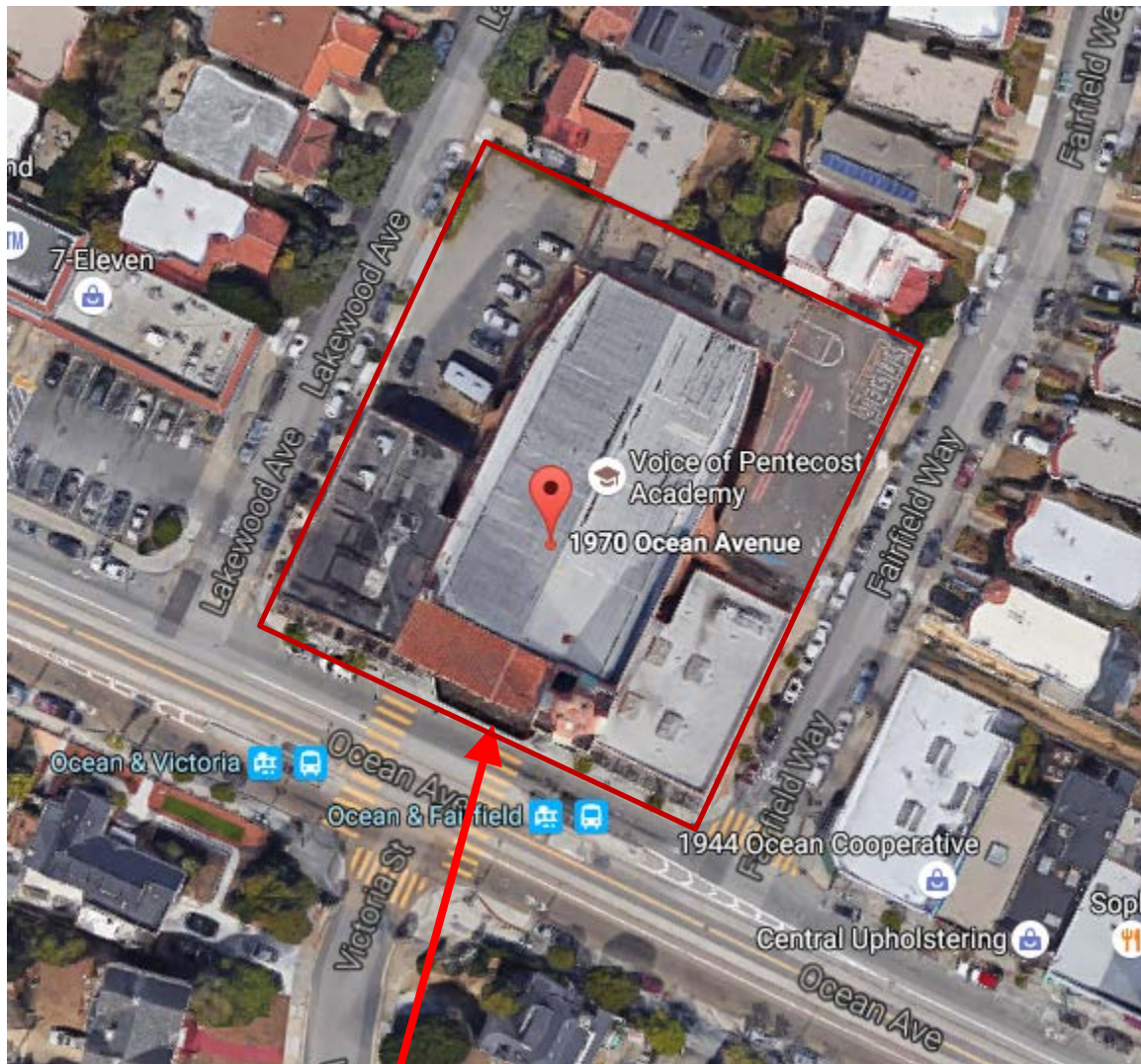


SUBJECT PROPERTY



Article 10 Landmark Designation
Case Number 2016-011052DES
El Rey Theater
1970 Ocean Avenue

Aerial Photo

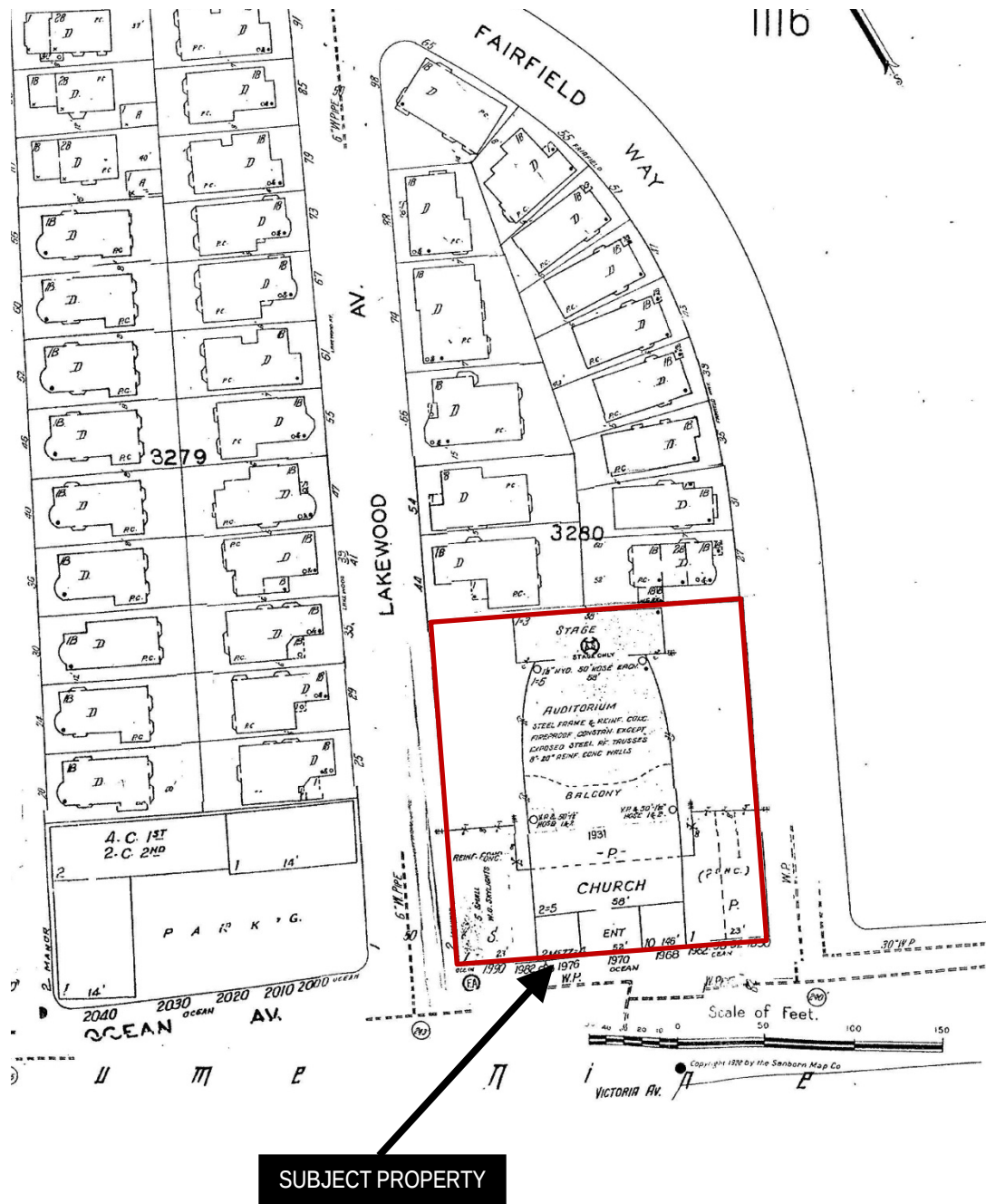


SUBJECT PROPERTY



Article 10 Landmark Designation
Case Number 2016-011052DES
El Rey Theater
1970 Ocean Avenue

Sanborn Map*



*The Sanborn Maps in San Francisco have not been updated since 1998, and this map may not accurately reflect existing conditions.



Site Photo



Article 10 Landmark Designation
Case Number 2016-011052DES
El Rey Theater
1970 Ocean Avenue



LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT



El Rey Theater 1970 Ocean Avenue

Draft Report, October 2016

Landmark No. XXX

El Rey Theater

1970 Ocean Avenue

Built: 1931

Architect: Miller & Pflueger

OVERVIEW

The former El Rey Theater, located at 1970 Ocean Avenue, is individually eligible for Article 10 Landmark designation as a 1930s-era neighborhood theater that embodies the distinctive characteristics of its type, period, and method of construction. Designed in the Art Deco style by master architect Timothy Pflueger, and built in 1931 by San Francisco movie theater *impresario* Samuel H. Levin, the 1,800-seat El Rey Theater is one of San Francisco's only Art Deco movie theaters and the biggest in the West of Twin Peaks area. The stepped, 150-foot tower, originally capped by an aircraft beacon, soars above the low-rise development that characterizes much of the surrounding Oceanview/Merced Heights/Ingleside (OMI) district. Named El Rey – “The King” in Spanish – the former theater, which has been in use as a church since 1978, continues to be the neighborhood's foremost visual landmark. Timothy Pflueger, the architect of El Rey, is one of San Francisco's top architects of the twentieth century and the leading practitioner of the “Mayan Deco” style in Northern California. His firm designed and remodeled approximately 10 movie theaters in Northern California between 1922 and 1933, including the Castro, Alhambra, Royal, El Rey, and New Mission Theaters in San Francisco. El Rey is one of only three in the city that retains its original Pflueger-designed auditorium – the others being the Castro and the Alhambra. Built to serve the new residence parks and streetcar suburbs of the fast-growing West of Twin Peaks area, El Rey was perhaps the grandest of all the so-called “neighborhood theaters” that proliferated along major commercial corridors in the city's outlying neighborhoods between the First and Second World Wars.

BUILDING DESCRIPTION

Context

The former El Rey Theater occupies approximately 75 percent of its rectangular parcel measuring approximately 183 x 192 feet (APN 3280/018). The property is located near the west end of the Ocean Avenue commercial district, which extends from Phelan Avenue on the east to Manor Drive on the west. The property slopes uphill toward the north, in the direction of Mt. Davidson, San Francisco's highest peak. The former El Rey Theater is one of a handful of non-commercial properties in Mt. Davidson Manor, a 1920s-era streetcar



Figure 1. Houses along Fairfield Way, looking southeast.

Source: Christopher VerPlanck

suburb/residence park bounded by Ocean Avenue to the south, the properties on the east side of Keystone Way to the east, Monterey Boulevard to the north, and the properties on the west side of Westgate Drive to the west. To the north of the former El Rey Theater are the winding residential streets of Mt. Davidson Manor, which are lined by dozens of largely identical single-family dwellings built between 1926 and 1930 – most of which are designed in the Mediterranean style (**Figure 1**).

The Ocean Avenue commercial district is dominated by a combination of older, small-scale commercial buildings – commonly known as “taxpayer blocks” – and much later, mixed-use developments containing commercial storefronts on the ground floor and residential units above. To the east of the former El Rey Theater, on the opposite side of Fairfield Way, are several one-story commercial buildings constructed between 1928 and 1939 (**Figure 2**). Most of these buildings are of a



Figure 2. Commercial buildings located on Ocean Avenue east of Fairfield Way.

Source: Christopher VerPlanck

non-descript appearance, though there is a notable “Storybook” style commercial building located at 1938-40 Ocean

Avenue. To the west of the former El Rey Theater, on the opposite side of Lakewood Avenue, is a one-story strip mall constructed in 1980 (**Figure 3**).



Figure 3. Strip mall on Ocean Avenue west of Lakewood Avenue.
Source: Christopher VerPlanck

To the south of the former El Rey Theater, on the opposite side of Ocean Avenue, is the Victoria Street entrance to the Ingleside Terraces residence park, one of the most fully developed streetcar suburbs constructed in the West of Twin Peaks area between the First and Second world wars. The entrance is marked by two pairs of rusticated concrete pylons emblazoned

with the name of the subdivision (**Figure 4**).



Figure 4. Victoria Street entrance to Ingleside Terraces, looking south.
Source: Christopher VerPlanck

Exterior Description

The former El Rey Theater is two-story, steel-frame, reinforced-concrete, combination retail and assembly building containing a movie theater – most recently used as a church – and two retail wings containing what were originally eight commercial storefronts (**Figure 5**). Built in 1931, the approximately 35,209-square-foot building has a small basement containing mechanical equipment and a partial mezzanine containing what was originally a lounge and a massive balcony. The building's most notable element is its 146' 9"-high tower. The pylon-like concrete tower structure had (and has) no practical function other than advertising the theater to the thousands of local residents

who could see it from their homes and providing a backdrop for the neon signage that was originally affixed to its east and west walls. As previously mentioned, the tower was originally capped by a beacon that helped guide aircraft into Mills Field, now SFO. Befitting its original use, the exterior of the building is almost entirely windowless, with its north, east, and west façades articulated only with recessed niches, or “blind” windows. The primary façade, which faces Ocean Avenue, originally had more windows, including above the original storefronts. The storefronts, as was common for most commercial buildings of the time, were incrementally remodeled and replaced to keep pace with changing fashions and new tenants; today nothing remains of the original storefronts. The interior of the former El Rey Theater is largely (and remarkably) original, retaining its original floor plan and the majority of its original materials and decorative finishes.



Figure 5. Overall view of El Rey Theater, looking east along Ocean Avenue.
Source: Christopher VerPlanck

South Façade

The south (primary) façade of the former El Rey Theater faces Ocean Avenue, a four-lane artery carrying both vehicular and light rail traffic. This façade is massed as four primary volumes, with the gable-roofed theater lobby at the center, flanked by two flat-roofed retail wings to the east (right) and to the west (left). The central gable-roofed volume steps up to a larger gable-roofed volume behind it – where the auditorium is located. To the right of the gable-roofed volume, the square tower rises almost 150 feet into the sky. Aside for an Art Deco concrete grille at the center of the primary façade, as well as some incised zig-zag and speed-line moldings on the building’s parapets and

chimneys, the primary façade of the former El Rey Theater has little applied ornamentation, relying instead on its size and picturesque massing for visual interest (Figure 6).

Beginning at the west end of the primary façade, near Lakewood Avenue, is the flat-roofed west retail wing, which until 1977 contained a grocery store. Made of board-formed concrete finished in cement plaster, the south façade of the west retail wing has a recessed entrance (1990 Ocean Avenue) containing a non-historic wood-panel door. To the right of the entrance is a band of painted steel industrial windows added in 1979. Below the windows is a bulkhead clad in imitation fieldstone, also added in 1979. Another entrance (1982 Ocean Avenue) is located toward the right side of the west retail wing. This entrance contains a pair of non-historic wood-panel doors added ca. 1979. Above the storefronts is a folded-plate canopy added in the early 1960s (Figure 7). Above the canopy, the upper section of the retail wing was originally fenestrated with a row of six wood hopper-sash windows enclosed behind decorative metal grilles; these were removed in the early 1960s. The west retail wing terminates with a plain stucco frieze and a parapet ornamented by a single horizontal speed-line.

The center section of the primary façade, which corresponds to the main lobby, comprises a gable-roofed volume punctuated by a decorative concrete grille depicting an Art Deco geometric pattern (Figure 8). The ground floor has a recessed entry vestibule with a floor finished in marble, added 1993, and walls clad in imitation fieldstone, added



Figure 6. Primary façade of El Rey Theater, looking west.
Source: Christopher VerPlanck



Figure 7. South wall of west retail wing, looking north.
Source: Christopher VerPlanck

in 1979. The metal doors accessing the lobby were added ca. 1960. Above the entrance is a projecting canopy, which shares the overall shape of the original marquee, though it appears to have been covered in fabric or some other lightweight material. The vestibule is flanked by two non-historic storefronts added in 1979 (1976 and 1968 Ocean Avenue); they, like the rest of the remaining storefronts, have bulkheads clad in imitation fieldstone, painted metal industrial windows and wood-panel doors (**Figure 9**). The central volume, which steps outward a few inches to either side of the grille, concludes with a blank frieze and a raking cornice outlined with red clay tiles. A chimney, which rises above the gable-roofed volume at the left side, terminates with a band of incised zig-zag ornament.



Figure 8. Concrete grille above main entrance.
Source: Christopher VerPlanck



Figure 9. Main entrance and canopy.
Source: Christopher VerPlanck

To the right of the main entrance is the tower. The tower, which rises 146' 9" above the surrounding landscape, is, like the rest of the south façade, made of concrete finished in cement plaster (**Figure 10**). Windowless, each of the tower's four facets is articulated by a vertical band of molded cement plaster. Painted a contrasting color, these bands, in combination with horizontal speed lines at the 103' datum line, form large crosses. These vertical bands continue above the intermediate parapet at the 103' datum line. At this point, the tower walls step in to form a decorative pylon/lantern, revealing four outdoor roof decks at each corner. Metal doors on the exterior of the tower provide access to these decks. The decks originally served as platforms for painted sheet metal ornaments, which were removed at an unknown date. The lantern, which forms the uppermost part of the tower, is composed of a series of stepped volumes with curved "shoulders" that converge as a single pylon at the apex of the tower.



Figure 10. Tower.
Source: Christopher VerPlanck

To the right of the tower is the east retail wing. This flat-roofed section, which matches the west retail wing in regard to height, massing, and materials, originally contained four narrow storefronts, which were over time consolidated into two storefronts (1950 and 1966 Ocean Avenue). Like the west retail wing, the east retail wing has cement plaster-finished walls, a folded-plate canopy, and non-historic storefronts added in 1979 (**Figure 11**). Similar to the west retail wing, the east retail wing originally featured a band of six rectangular windows protected behind decorative grilles. These were removed ca. 1960 when the canopy was built.



Figure 11. East retail wing, looking west.
Source: Christopher VerPlanck

East Façade

The east façade of the former El Rey Theater is divided into two parts: the east wall of the east retail wing and the east wall of the theater auditorium. The east wall of the east retail wing is finished in cement plaster and ornamented solely by an incised speed line extending along the parapet (**Figure 12**). Originally articulated by a band of eight hopper-sash wood windows separated by pilasters capped by horizontal speed lines, only two windows remain today. The rest of the windows were encased within wood framing and stucco ca. 1960. A non-historic door protected behind a steel security gate is located toward the north end of the east retail wing. The east wall of the auditorium, which is set back about 40 feet from the sidewalk along Fairfield Avenue, is made of painted board-formed concrete (**Figure 13**). It faces an asphalt-paved parking lot enclosed within a chain-link fence. Articulated by nine niches, or “blind” window openings, at the basement and first floor levels, the east wall of the auditorium curves inward toward the north end of the building, giving this otherwise utilitarian façade a feeling of dynamism and movement characteristic of the Art Deco style.



Figure 12. East wall of east retail wing, looking southwest. Source: Christopher VerPlanck



Figure 13. East wall of auditorium, looking southwest. Source: Christopher VerPlanck

North Façade

The north (rear) façade of the former El Rey Theater is composed of three parts: the rear walls of the east and west retail wings and the rear wall of the auditorium. Not visible from Ocean Avenue, the north façade was originally (and remains) entirely utilitarian in character. The north wall of the east retail wing is unchanged from its original design, with an expanse of board-formed concrete punctuated by four large, steel-industrial sash windows (**Figure 14**). The parapet features an incised speed line matching the primary façade. The north wall of the auditorium abuts the adjoining properties in Mt. Davidson Manor, with the result that only a small portion of it is visible from public streets. The visible portion is a windowless expanse of painted, board-formed concrete. The north wall of the west retail wing is virtually identical to its counterpart on the east side of the building; it is an expanse of board-formed concrete punctuated by a band of four steel industrial windows (**Figure 15**).



Figure 14. North wall of east retail wing, looking south.

Source: Christopher VerPlanck



Figure 15. North wall of west retail wing, looking south.

Source: Christopher VerPlanck

West Façade

The west façade of the former El Rey Theater faces Lakewood Avenue. Like the east façade, it is composed of two sections: the west retail wing and the auditorium. The west wall of the auditorium is an expanse of painted, board-formed concrete articulated by nine bays of “blind” windows at the basement and first floor levels (**Figure 16**). Miller & Pflueger’s decision to articulate the otherwise windowless walls of the auditorium in this manner may have been a concession to adjoining residential neighbors; nonetheless, it is unusual to see any significant attention paid to the otherwise utilitarian rear and side elevations of most movie theaters from this era. The west wall of the auditorium faces an asphalt-paved parking lot that is enclosed within a chain-link fence. Meanwhile, the west wall of the west retail wing, which adjoins the sidewalk along Lakewood Avenue, is concrete finished in cement plaster and articulated by a band of nine wood, hopper-sash windows separated by pilasters capped by horizontal speed lines (**Figure 17**). Like the rest of the publicly visible façades, the west wall of the west retail wing is capped by an incised horizontal speed line.



Figure 16. West wall of auditorium, looking southeast.
Source: Christopher VerPlanck



Figure 17. West wall of west retail wing, looking south.
Source: Christopher VerPlanck

Interior

The interior of the former El Rey Theater still retains the bulk of its original materials and features, as well as its original floor plan. The building has a very small basement level containing a storeroom, boiler room, and mechanical room. The first-floor level, which occupies the entire footprint of the building, contains the lobby, auditorium, men's and women's restrooms, an office, and the retail stores that were gradually consolidated into four storefronts, and then converted into classrooms and offices by the Voice of Pentecost Church that has occupied the building since 1977. The mezzanine occupies a portion of the building's footprint above the lobby; this area contains men's and women's restrooms and a lounge. Above the mezzanine is the balcony level, which originally contained the projection room, generator room, fan room, as well as the auditorium's large balcony. The fan room on the balcony level is located in the tower, and above it are five additional floor levels reached by a steep metal ladder. No functions are assigned to these rooms on the original plans, suggesting that they were not used.

The interior photographs provided in this nomination were taken by Tom Paiva 2006–07 for Therese Poletti's book, *Art Deco San Francisco: The Architecture of Timothy Pflueger* (**Figures 18–24**).¹ The photos show the appearance of the lobby, auditorium, and bathroom – the vast majority of the building's interior – at that time. They do not show the basement or any of the other back-of-house spaces, which contain no character-defining features or materials. The author of this report was able to view the publicly accessible portions of the interior of the building while it was open to the public as a polling place in June 2016. He was able to confirm that the photographs below accurately depict interior conditions.

¹ The author requested official permission to survey the interior of the former El Rey Theater, but the building's tenant did not respond to repeated verbal or written requests.



Figure 18. Main Lobby, looking west.

Source: Tom Paiva

The publicly accessible areas of the former El Rey Theater demonstrate a remarkable degree of integrity, with the majority of the original plaster wall surfaces and ornament remaining throughout the lobby and the auditorium. The ornamental detailing, including the pulvinated door surrounds, pilasters and capitals, friezes, ceilings, and cartouches and plaster moldings are still extant and in good condition, though there are areas where the plaster ceiling has failed, likely due to water intrusion. The original seating in the auditorium and the balcony has been removed, though the tiered flooring is still extant. Though we were unable to view the basement or the mezzanine, a visual inspection of the restrooms and the storefronts along Ocean Avenue reveal greater changes than to the public areas such as the lobby and the auditorium. The restrooms on the first floor retain their original marble partitions but have been otherwise altered with 1990s-era tile flooring, wainscoting, contemporary cabinetry, and fixtures. Likewise, the storefront interiors along Ocean Avenue have all been rebuilt/refinished after 1977.

Historic photographs taken of the interior of El Rey Theater indicate that there were several murals or frescoes, including ceiling murals in the auditorium and at least one mural in the mezzanine. These murals were probably painted over by the building's current occupant, or possibly earlier. Testing by a qualified art conservator would be required to determine whether the murals still exist and what would be necessary to restore them.



Figure 19. Detail of plasterwork in the lobby.
Source: Tom Paiva



Figure 20. Original signage in lobby.
Source: Tom Paiva



Figure 21. Overall view of the auditorium, looking north from the balcony.
Source: Tom Paiva



Figure 22. Detail of Auditorium walls and ceiling, looking east
Source: Tom Paiva



Figure 23. Balcony, looking southwest.
Source: Tom Paiva



Figure 24. Sheet metal light fixture on ceiling of auditorium, looking north.
Source: Tom Paiva

HISTORIC CONTEXTS

Construction History: 1928–1931

The construction of El Rey Theater was extensively covered by the local press, in both newspapers and local design and building journals. San Francisco neighborhood theater impresario Samuel H. Levin's San Francisco Theatres, Inc. developed El Rey Theater on five vacant lots Levin had purchased from Fernando Nelson & Sons, the developer of Mt. Davidson Manor, on April 17, 1928. Levin, who already operated the (old) Balboa Theater on Ocean Avenue, did not immediately plan to construct a theater on the property, instead banking the land for future development. In 1928, shortly after acquiring the land, Levin sold three of the six theaters he owned in San Francisco's Richmond District, including the Coliseum, Alexandria, and New Balboa Theaters. Pocketing more than one million dollars, Levin invested some of the profits in building a northern California theater "circuit."

In early 1930, Samuel Levin hired the prominent architectural firm of Miller & Pflueger to draw up plans for a large neighborhood theater and retail store complex on Ocean Avenue, between Lakewood Avenue and Fairfield Way. The announcement in the July 12, 1930 edition of *Building & Engineer* mentioned that the \$250,000 complex would be a steel-frame, reinforced-concrete building containing a 1,800-seat theater and six or eight stores along the 182 feet of frontage on Ocean Avenue.² Levin, who was also a real estate developer, usually included a retail component with his neighborhood theaters, which were always built on transit corridors in growing residential neighborhoods. Miller & Pflueger solicited construction bids in September 1930. By the fall of 1930, the grading contract went to Sibley Grading and Teaming of San Francisco and the construction contract to H. L. Peterson of San Francisco. Subsequently, Golden Gate Iron Works won the contract to supply the structural steel. Grading got underway in the fall of 1930.³ By the end of November, additional contracts had been awarded to various subcontractors, including Malott & Peterson (tile and composition roofing), Aetna Sheet Metal Works (Sheet Metal), Progress Glass Co. (glass, glazing, and copper windows), Michel & Pfeffer (ornamental iron and steel sash), Sunset Lumber Co. (millwork), Wm. J. Forster Co. (plumbing), Concrete Engineering Co. (rebar, wire mesh, and joist pans), Christensen Lumber Co. (lumber), and Golden Gate Atlas Materials Inc. (concrete).⁴

Construction of El Rey Theater began in early 1931, continuing through the spring, summer, and fall of 1931. Articles published in San Francisco's four major dailies – the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *San Francisco Examiner*, *The Call-Bulletin* and the *San Francisco News* – stoked interest in the upcoming opening of a major new movie theater in San Francisco's growing West of Twin Peaks district. Described as "San Francisco's Theater Moderne" in an article in the November 12, 1931 edition of the *San Francisco Examiner*, the building gained attention both for its "modernistic design and its colossal size." The article goes on to describe El Rey Theater:

² "Theatres," *Building & Engineering* (July 12, 1930), 14.

³ "Theatres," *Building & Engineering* (November 8, 1930), 17.

⁴ "Theatres," *Building & Engineering* (November 29, 1930), 18.

Modernistic throughout, El Rey yet maintains dignity of design due to its simplicity and splendid proportions. Its tower stands sentinel-like in the midst of a new business block surrounding the theater. This tower is destined to become a landmark by day and beacon star by night. It is surmounted by an officially recognized revolving airplane beacon and directional light pointing to San Francisco Airport at Mills Field, fifteen miles southeast.⁵

The article continues on to describe El Rey as being representative of “the type of metropolitan theater which graces the outlying districts in such larger cities as New York and Chicago,” meaning that it was essentially a downtown “movie palace” built in a suburban location.

El Rey Theater opened as scheduled on November 14, 1931. Costing \$500,000 to build and outfit – twice as much as originally estimated – articles touted the theater’s “unmatched beauty,” “luxurious comfort,” and “modernistic design.” The program for opening night included a screening of *The Smiling Lieutenant*, starring Maurice Chevalier, as well as several other short features.⁶ Many articles mentioned that El Rey Theater was the first major movie theater constructed West of Twin Peaks, where several new residence parks were then under construction on the south and west slopes of Mt. Davidson, including St. Francis Wood, Ingleside Terraces, Balboa Terrace, Mt. Davidson Manor, Merced Manor, and several other middle-class and upper-income streetcar suburbs.⁷

On opening night, the *San Francisco Examiner* published a lengthy article on El Rey Theater. The article mentioned that the half-million-dollar theater “is destined to take a high place among San Francisco’s most important theaters . . . by offering a theater worthy of a down town location, though it is located in a residential district.”⁸ The article provided an extensive description of “San Francisco’s largest neighborhood theater.”

With its gay trimming of Neon green and red lights which outline the lofty tower, El Rey has the appearance of being the first 1931 outdoor Christmas tree in the West of Twin Peaks region. Topped by the giant, flaring beacon, its architectural details bathed by floodlights and illuminated throughout in brilliant fashion, El Rey will add new beauty to San Francisco’s night line of skyscrapers.⁹

⁵ “Chevalier opens El Rey Saturday,” *San Francisco Examiner* (November 12, 1931), 13.

⁶ “Chevalier Film to Open El Rey,” *San Francisco News* (November 13, 1931), 15.

⁷ “El Rey Opens Tonight,” *San Francisco Examiner* (November 14, 1931), 8.

⁸ “El Rey, New West of Twin Peaks Theater,” *San Francisco Examiner* (November 14, 1931), 6.

⁹ *Ibid.*

The article then provides an extensive description of the theater's technology, including its "automatic" heating and ventilation system, uniform indirect lighting, costly sound system, large screen, and "richly toned" interior appointments, including a "gallery of mirrors" extending the height of the side walls, and "luxurious smoking rooms and cosmetic salons and other conveniences for modern patrons of fastidious temperament."¹⁰ Advertisements in the local newspapers contain several idealized renderings of El Rey Theater on opening night (Figure 25). These renderings illustrate the same building that stands today, minus its signage, storefronts, and some ornament. The renderings indicate that the west retail wing was occupied by El Rey Food Shop, a supermarket, and the east retail wing housed a pharmacy called El Rey Drugstore.

Other articles accompanying the feature on the opening of El Rey Theater in the *San Francisco Examiner* touted the growth of Ocean Avenue from a country lane into a busy commercial artery, with new businesses opening nearly every month to meet the needs of the fast-growing population West of Twin Peaks.¹¹ The Ocean Avenue Commercial Club and the West of Twin Peaks Boosters' Club took out several advertisements welcoming El Rey to the neighborhood. As stated in the ads, the opening of El Rey Theater marked the emergence of Ocean Avenue from relative obscurity into a thriving neighborhood commercial district serving the West of Twin Peaks area.

Figure 25. Rendering of El Rey Theater.

Source: *San Francisco Examiner* (November 14, 1931)

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ "Twin Peaks Tunnel Builds up District," *San Francisco Chronicle* (November 14, 1931), 6.

Alteration History: 1956–2006

Permit History¹²

The earliest alteration permit application for the former El Rey Theater, which dates to May 1956, entailed the replacement of the neon signage on the west side of the tower. The applicant was United California Theatres. One month later, in June 1956, the same applicant applied for a permit to repair fire damage in the rear of the coffee shop at 1962 Ocean Avenue. In September 1961, Western Theatrical Co. applied for a permit to remove a canopy above the storefront at 1950 Ocean Avenue. Nine years later, United Artists Theatre Circuit applied for a permit to remove the internal partition separating the storefronts at 1950 and 1962 Ocean Avenue and to complete other interior work for a new retail tenant, The Gap, Inc. In July 1969, Donald Fisher, the proprietor of Gap, Inc., applied for a permit to install dressing rooms and enclose the windows along the east side of the east retail wing.

After buying the property in 1977, Voice of Pentecost (now A Place to Meet Jesus) began making a series of changes to the former theater to convert it into a church. Initially, Voice of Pentecost confined its work to the storefronts and other parts of the primary façade but it gradually expanded its focus to the interior of the theater and the adjoining storefronts. The following permitted changes are presented below in chronological order:

- In February 1978, Voice of Pentecost applied for a permit to remove the screen and remodel the backstage area.
- In August 1978, Voice of Pentecost applied for a permit to complete mechanical, plumbing, and electrical work and convert the former supermarket space at 1990 Ocean Avenue into a Sunday school. This work resulted in the removal of the original storefronts on the west retail wing.
- In January 1979, Voice of Pentecost applied for a permit to apply imitation stone to the storefronts along Ocean Avenue.
- In June 1988, Voice of Pentecost applied for a permit to construct a small enclosure within the sanctuary for the “reduction of noise from infants.”
- In March 1993, Voice of Pentecost applied for a permit to resurface the floor beneath the marquee in marble and perform miscellaneous dry-rot repairs within the interior.
- In August 1993, Voice of Pentecost applied for a permit to perform about \$40,000 of interior work, including removing dropped T-bar ceilings, re-carpeting the interior, replacing drinking fountains, and remodeling the bathrooms.
- In February 1994, the church applied for a permit to reinforce the building’s parapets in compliance with the City’s parapet strengthening ordinance.

¹² All building permit applications for the El Rey Theater are archived at the Records Management Division of the Department of Building Inspection. We searched for permits for all known addresses of the property, including 1950-52, 1958-62, 1966, 1968, 1970, 1976, 1982, and 1990 Ocean Avenue. The applications are attached within the Appendix of this case report.

- The last permit application by Voice of Pentecost dates to 2006, when it applied for a permit to re-roof the building and demolish interior partition walls within the stores.

Unpermitted Alterations Observed

The vast majority of the visible changes made to the former El Rey Theater are recorded in the building permit applications on file at the Department of Building Inspection. Post-1956 alterations not reflected in the building permit record include the replacement of the original flat canopy with a folded-plate counterpart, which likely occurred circa 1960, and the removal of the sheet metal ornament and signage from the tower, which probably occurred after Voice of Pentecost bought the building in 1977. There is also no permit application on file for the existing non-historic aluminum doors and steel windows on the primary façade. The aluminum doors appear to date to early 1960s, but the windows were probably added in 1979 when the imitation stone siding was added to the bulkheads.

Sanborn Maps and Aerial Photographs

We consulted Sanborn maps and aerial photographs to provide information on the historical development of the former El Rey Theater. Due to the lack of development along this part of Ocean Avenue, this block is not depicted in the 1886–93, 1900, nor the 1913–15 Sanborn maps. The property first appears on the 1928 Sanborn maps, as Mt. Davidson Manor was being developed. This map shows the subject property as consisting of five lots, including four rectangular house lots (two on Lakewood Avenue and two facing Fairfield Way) and a large commercial lot on Ocean Avenue.

El Rey Theater first appears on the 1938 Aerial Photographs, eight years after it was constructed (**Figure 26**). These photographs indicate that, at least from the air, the building looked essentially the same now as it did then, with a roughly rectangular auditorium at the center of the lot, flanked by two flat-roofed retail wings to the east and west, and a lower gable-roofed volume and a tower to the south. Visible in the photograph to the north of the auditorium is a lower volume corresponding to the backstage area. The unbuilt portions of the property facing both Lakewood Avenue and Fairfield Way were paved and in use as customer parking lots. Incidentally, the 1938 aerials indicate that the surrounding residential tract of Mt. Davidson Manor was substantially built-out, though several vacant commercial parcels remained on Ocean Avenue.



Figure 26. 1938 Aerial showing El Rey Theater (outlined in blue); north is up.
Source: Collection of David Rumsey

The earliest Sanborn maps to show El Rey Theater were published in 1950. A paste-up of the 1928 series, the 1950 Sanborn maps provide little legible detail on the building, except for its footprint, which is as it remains today: a roughly T-plan concrete structure with a central auditorium, two flanking retail wings, and a rear backstage area (**Figure 27**). The only legible notes on the 1950 Sanborn maps indicate that there was a restaurant at 1950 Ocean Avenue. By this point, the original eight storefronts still appeared to remain intact, including 1950, 1952, 1958, 1962, 1966, 1976, 1982, and 1990 Ocean Avenue.



Figure 27. 1950 Sanborn maps showing El Rey Theater (outlined in blue).

Source: San Francisco Public Library

The ca. 1990 Sanborn maps updated by the San Francisco Planning Department provide a great deal more information than the 1950 Sanborn maps published four decades earlier (**Figure 28**). These later maps show the footprint of the building as it is now: a two-story, steel-frame, reinforced-concrete assembly building with an auditorium and balcony at the center, two retail wings to either side, and a stage at the rear of the lot. The ca. 1990 Sanborn maps indicate that the original eight retail storefronts had been consolidated into five, though by this time all seem to have been occupied by church-run functions.

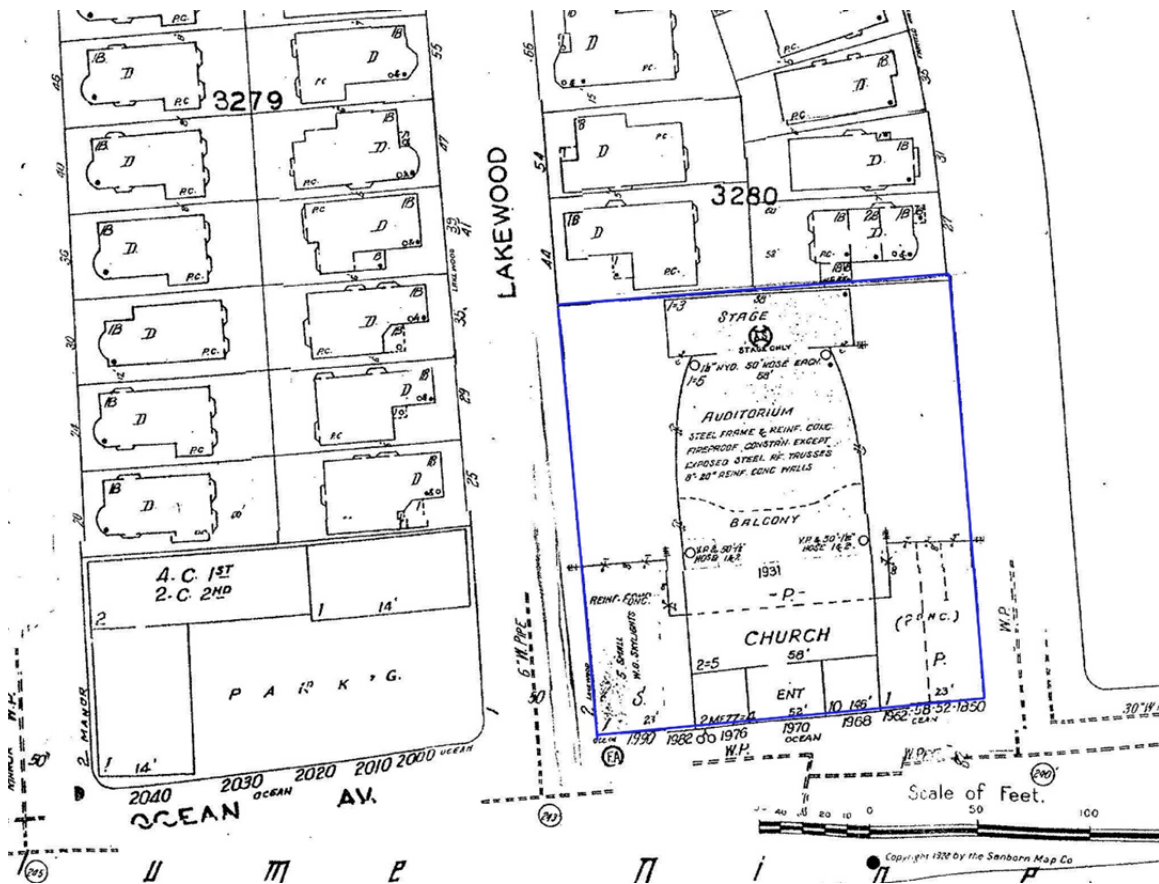


Figure 28. Ca. 1990 Sanborn maps showing the former El Rey Theater (outlined in blue).

Source: San Francisco Public Library

El Rey Theater History: 1931–2016

San Francisco Theatres, Inc. owned El Rey Theater for seven years, selling it to El Rey Enterprises on December 29, 1938.¹³ Not much is known about El Rey Enterprises, a real estate holding company directed by a man named J. R. Saul. El Rey Enterprises hired a series of theater managers to run the theater, having little to do with the day-to-day operations. The theater, which remained the most prominent visual landmark on Ocean Avenue, served as an informal community-gathering place. The theater's management let various business and fraternal organizations, including the local PTA club for Aptos Elementary School, and other social welfare groups, use it for their monthly meetings. The theater was occasionally used for live music performances, talent shows, and fashion shows.¹⁴

El Rey Enterprises does not appear to have undertaken any major changes to El Rey Theater until the early 1960s. Photographs taken of the building in 1942 show it looking much as it did when it opened in 1931 (Figures 29–32). Nonetheless, El Rey Enterprises continued to periodically upgrade the theater's technological systems, including

¹³ San Francisco Office of the Assessor-Recorder, Sales Records for APN 3280/018.

¹⁴ "Winners Announced in Second Series of Amateur Auditions," *San Francisco Chronicle* (August 4, 1936), 23.

installing an improved sound system and Cinemascope projection in 1958.¹⁵ El Rey Enterprises likely completed periodic facelifts to the building's storefronts, signage, and interiors, though no permits survive for this work. The theater's owners and management did not have to make many changes, mainly because it was the only theater in the immediate neighborhood. El Rey, with its seating capacity of 1,800, remained the only major neighborhood theater in the OMI district from 1931 until 1971, with its nearest competitors in West Portal and the Outer Mission districts. This changed in 1971 with the opening of United Artists' Stonestown Cinema. Originally known as UA Cinema Stonestown, United Artists converted it into a two-screen theater in 1973, renaming it the UA Stonestown Twin.¹⁶ This suburban-style theater, located next door to the popular Stonestown Shopping Center (now Stonestown Galleria) likely siphoned off much of El Rey's trade, much as the opening of the shopping center in 1952 also later hurt the locally owned stores along Ocean Avenue.

The opening of UA Stonestown Cinema coincided with the beginning of a sustained period of disinvestment and abandonment in the OMI district and its Ocean Avenue commercial district. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, many African Americans in search of single-family homes in non-racially restricted areas began moving into the Ingleside, Oceanview, and Merced Heights neighborhoods. Unscrupulous real estate agents exploited the influx with an illegal practice called "block-busting," creating a panic among many white homeowners in the OMI district. White flight took hold in the early 1970s. As long-time residents departed for the suburbs, many older businesses on Ocean Avenue folded. By 1976, Ocean Avenue was in deep trouble. Newspaper articles from that time talk about grocery stores closing down and liquor stores opening up where hardware stores, clothing stores, and coffee shops once existed. With businesses closing and blight increasing, crime (or fear of it) created a vicious circle of continued disinvestment.¹⁷ Though residential white flight never took hold in the neighborhoods on the north side of Ocean Avenue, including Westwood Park, Mt. Davidson Manor, and Balboa Terrace, many longtime, local residents began avoiding Ocean Avenue altogether, taking their business to Stonestown and the large new shopping centers opening in nearby San Mateo County.¹⁸

¹⁵ "A Gala 'Cinema Fantasy,'" *San Francisco Chronicle* (November 16, 1958), 17.

¹⁶ "Stonestown Twin," <http://cinematreaasures.org/theaters/5530>, Accessed June 13, 2016.

¹⁷ Marshall Kilduff, "Tide May Turn on Ocean Avenue," *San Francisco Chronicle* (September 15, 1976), 5.

¹⁸ Mike Mahoney, "Segregation as a Way of Life," *San Francisco Chronicle* (May 2, 1967), 4.



Figure 29. El Rey Theater, looking east from Lakewood Avenue, 1942.

Source: San Francisco Historical Photograph Collection, San Francisco Public Library, Photo ID No. AAA-8687



Figure 30. El Rey Theater Lobby, looking southeast, 1942.

Source: San Francisco Historical Photograph Collection, San Francisco Public Library, Photo ID No. AAA-8688



Figure 31. El Rey Theater Mezzanine Lounge, looking east, 1942.

Source: San Francisco Historical Photograph Collection, San Francisco Public Library, Photo ID No. AAA-8689



Figure 32. El Rey Theater Auditorium, looking south, 1942.

Source: San Francisco Historical Photograph Collection, San Francisco Public Library, Photo ID No. AAA-8690

El Rey Theater was badly affected by the downturn in business along Ocean Avenue. Competition from Stonestown did not help, causing it to close down for a few months in 1976. It reopened for a short time in the latter half of 1976,

this time run by United Artists, the owner of the nearby Stonestown Cinema. However, on a good night the theater was only being filled to one-third capacity.¹⁹ The last known commercial films shown at the theater took place in early 1977, when COYOTE, a prostitutes' organization, presented the second International Hookers' Film Festival at El Rey (Figure 33). The event, which lasted from March 28 to March 31, featured more than 40 films from Japan, Germany, France, Italy, and the U.S. The festival included a keynote speech by Margo St. James, the founder of COYOTE, and a Queen of Hearts Ball.²⁰ El Rey Theater closed unceremoniously after the Hookers' Film Festival, and on September 14, 1977, El Rey Enterprises sold the property to Voice of Pentecost, the evangelical Protestant church that has occupied the building ever since.²¹

Hookers' Festival — 40 films in 4 days

COYOTE, the prostitutes' organization, will present the second International Hookers' Film Festival from Monday, March 28, through Thursday, March 31, at El Rey Theater.

The festival, showing over 40 films in afternoon and evening sessions, includes movies from Japan, Italy, France, Germany and the United States that deal with prostitution.

Margo St. James, the founder of COYOTE, will be the keynote speaker and will host the festival's finale, a Queen of Hearts Ball, on Friday, April 1, at 8:30 p.m. at the Galleria, 101 Kansas St. For more information about films and schedules, call Angela Coppola at 546-6050.

Figure 33. Article mentioning Hookers' Festival in March 17, 1977 *Examiner*.

Reuse of neighborhood theaters by churches became common in San Francisco during the 1970s and 1980s, with several large neighborhood churches undergoing this transformation in the city's Mission, Portola, Fillmore, and OMI districts.²² With urban neighborhood theaters declining in the face of competition from television and video rentals, their large size, thousands of seats, banks of bathrooms, and lounges suitable for social rooms, were ideal for large religious congregations, particularly fast-growing evangelical congregations.

Marilynn Gazowsky founded Voice of Pentecost in San Francisco in 1966. Natives of Detroit, Gazowsky and her husband Victor, came to San Francisco in the 1960s at the height of the Summer of Love to bring the Pentecostal faith to wayward hippies and other "lost souls." Pastor Gazowsky ministered to her flock in various locations across the city, outgrowing each venue until deciding to purchase the vacant El Rey Theater in 1977. The building's large 1,800-seat auditorium was more than sufficient for the church's growing congregation, which at its high point numbered around 1,000 members. In addition, the adjoining retail wings provided ample space for the church's school, Sunday school, administrative offices, and printing office. In 1988, Marilynn Gazowsky turned over the church to her son,

¹⁹ Marshall Kilduff, "Tide May Turn on Ocean Avenue," *San Francisco Chronicle* (September 15, 1976), 5.

²⁰ "Hookers' Festival — 40 Films in 4 Days," *San Francisco Examiner* (March 17, 1977), 29.

²¹ San Francisco Office of the Assessor-Recorder, Sales Records for APN 3280/018.

²² Examples of San Francisco neighborhood theaters converted into churches include the Fillmore's Harding Theater, the Mission District's Tower Theater, and the Portola's Avenue Theater.

Richard Gazowsky, who continues to operate Voice of Pentecost, which he recently renamed “A Place to Meet Jesus.” Marilynn Gazowsky died on November 17, 2015.²³

During the 1990s and 2000s, Pastor Gazowsky mortgaged the former El Rey Theater to pay for upgrades to the building, as well as to make a never-completed science fiction film called *Gravity: The Shadow of Joseph*. The film, described by Pastor Gazowsky as “the Ten Commandments meets Star Wars,” effectively bankrupted the church, leading to a lawsuit by the San Francisco City Attorney to recover \$425,000 in unpaid rent for a soundstage that Gazowsky had rented at Treasure Island. This, in turn, led to the church defaulting on its mortgage and its creditors foreclosing. The former El Rey Theater was then sold at public auction on November 25, 2015 to Ricci Ventures, LLC and Greenpoint Land Ventures Co. for \$1,060,000.²⁴ Despite the sale, Voice of Pentecost still occupies the building.

El Rey Storefronts History: 1931–2016

In addition to the theater at 1970 Ocean Avenue, the former El Rey Theater has five (originally eight) adjoining retail storefronts at 1950, 1962, 1966, 1976, and 1990 Ocean Avenue. Samuel H. Levin, the neighborhood movie theater mogul who built El Rey Theater, was also a real estate developer, and as long as he had enough space, he always built retail stores as part of his theater projects. In the case of El Rey Theater, he had enough frontage along Ocean Avenue to build a pair of freestanding retail wings to house the majority of the stores, with the two remaining stores flanking the lobby. Until El Rey closed in 1976, the storefronts were almost always filled, with some storefronts containing the same business or the same type of business for decades, including 1990 Ocean Avenue, which was always home to El Rey Supermarket; 1976 Ocean Avenue, which was always a beauty shop; 1966 Ocean Avenue, which was a dress shop for most of its history; and 1962 Ocean Avenue, which was a soda fountain/confectioner’s shop. Other categories of business that occupied various storefronts over the years included several pharmacies, a photo studio, a realtor’s office, a print shop, and a furniture store. A full inventory of all known retail tenants of the storefronts is provided in the **Appendix**. The most notable occupant of the building between 1931 and 1976 was The Gap, Inc., which opened its first retail store at 1950 Ocean Avenue in 1969.

²³ Obituary: “Marilynn Ona Gazowsky: 1922–1915,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (November 22, 2015).

²⁴ San Francisco Office of the Assessor-Recorder, Sales Records for APN 3280/018.

The Gap: 1969–1974

Of all the commercial tenants to lease space in the storefronts of the former El Rey Theater, by far the best-known is The Gap, Inc. (Figure 34). As mentioned previously, in 1969, Doris and Donald Fisher opened a clothing/accessories store called The Gap at 1950 Ocean Avenue. The store specialized in a then-unusual assortment of clothing and lifestyle goods, in particular Levi's jeans, records, and cassette tapes. Don Fisher was a real estate developer who noticed the growing popularity of informal clothing. Frustrated when he went to buy jeans at a department store and not finding



Figure 34. World's first Gap store, 1950 Ocean Avenue, 1969.

Source: Western Neighborhoods Project

any that fit, Fisher and his wife decided to open a business to cater to the tastes of the Baby Boomer generation. The name of the business was a reference to the "Generation Gap" that supposedly existed between the Baby Boomers and the "Silent Generation." The business was an immediate success. By 1970, The Gap had five stores. In addition to the flagship store at 1950 Ocean Avenue, the company had stores in Palo Alto, San Jose, Hayward, and Concord.²⁵ In 1972, The Gap became a publicly traded company, and by 1975, there were 186 Gap stores across the country with annual sales of over \$100 million.

The Fishers were widely credited with changing how America bought clothing. Contrasted with traditional old-line department stores, The Gap provided an informal shopping experience, with rock music playing in the background, groovy graphic design, and a youth-oriented product line that consisted of a relatively small number of styles and cuts carried in all sizes.²⁶ With their catchy tagline: "Fall into The Gap," the Fishers tapped into the growing decentralization of American retailing, opening most of their new stores in suburban shopping malls and abandoning most of their urban stores. Indeed, they closed their first Gap store at 1950 Ocean Avenue in 1974.

Neither the storefronts at 1950 and 1962 Ocean Avenue nor the former El Rey Theater as a whole appears eligible for Landmark status on the basis of their association with The Gap, Inc. The period of significance is still less than 50 years ago. Furthermore, the storefronts and the store interiors were heavily altered in 1978, removing most of the changes made by the Fishers in 1969 when they leased the storefronts for the world's first Gap store.

²⁵ Classified Advertisements, *San Francisco Chronicle*.

²⁶ Richard Joslin, Peter Lueck, et al, "Gap, Inc.: Has the Retailer Lost Its Style?" Website: <http://www.cengage.com/management/webtutor/ireland3e/cases/gap.pdf>, Accessed June 13, 2016.

Neighborhood Movie Theaters in San Francisco: 1906–1940

San Francisco was once a movie-going town, with several major downtown movie “palaces” along Market Street, as well as dozens of “neighborhood” theaters situated along important transit lines and in suburban commercial districts. As mentioned previously, the heyday of the neighborhood theater in San Francisco were the two decades between the First and Second World Wars, when improved technologies allowed films to be projected onto large silver screens to audiences sometimes numbering in the thousands. Movie going continued to thrive during the Depression, as it was a relatively inexpensive thing to do and suited escapist fantasies. The earliest movie theaters, which were called “nickelodeons,” appeared in San Francisco after the 1906 Earthquake. Though sometimes purpose-built, most were built within multi-purpose commercial buildings that looked like any other from the outside.

Advances in construction and film projection technologies led rapidly to the construction of much larger purpose-built theaters on the eve of the First World War. Some were hybrid theaters suitable for both live productions and films, but as motion pictures began to put vaudeville out of business in the 1920s, later theaters were constructed exclusively for films, without fly towers or large backstage areas. Movie theater construction surged across the country in the 1920s. Several architecture firms, including John Eberson, W. W. Ahlschlager, the Rapp Brothers, and S. Charles Lee, specialized in theater design. Speaking of the evolution of theater design that began in the 1920s, S. Charles Lee famously said: “The show begins on the sidewalk.”²⁷ Lee meant that the building’s exterior architecture was becoming increasingly important to catch the attention of potential customers. Fantastically ornamented façades, bright neon signs, and lightbulb-festooned marquees beckoned to pedestrians, transit riders, and motorists alike. Soaring towers, particularly those emblazoned in neon,



Figure 35. Alexandria Theater, 2004.

Source: cinematreasures.org

were very effective attention-getting devices, especially at night (Figure 35). Terrazzo flooring and large canopies extended into the sidewalk to draw people into the building. Sumptuously appointed lobbies, refreshment stands,

²⁷ Maggie Valentine, *The Show Begins on the Sidewalk* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 9.

and smoking rooms made patrons feel well taken care of, and stunning auditoriums transported customers to a dream world before the lights went down. The movie theater owner was selling experience and memory, and architecture was the packaging of the product.²⁸

As the center of a major metropolitan area, San Francisco was no different from Los Angeles, New York, or Chicago in its embrace of the urban movie theater. San Francisco had a movie theater district along Market Street, between Mason and Polk Streets. This is where the city's largest and most famous first-run theaters (many of them operated by studio chains) were located, including the Fox, Paramount, Embassy, and Strand. Mixed among them were several live-production theaters, including the Warfield and Golden Gate Theaters. These downtown theaters, most of which could accommodate around 2,000 patrons, attracted customers from all around the region, as well as shoppers, office workers, and residents of nearby inner-city neighborhoods..

In the outlying neighborhoods of San Francisco, a handful of entrepreneurs – mostly Eastern European Jewish and Lebanese Christian immigrants – including the Blumenfeld, Greenfield, Kahn, Levin, Oppenheimer, Nasser, and Naify families – began opening smaller (at first) theaters in neighborhood commercial districts and on transit lines. Most started out building nickelodeons, but as these “theater men” (and they were all men) prospered, they began building more elaborate “movie palaces” in the neighborhoods. Neighborhood theaters filled several important roles. In addition to serving local residents who did not wish to travel downtown, they served as anchors of emerging neighborhood commercial districts, attracting retailers, restaurateurs, and other commercial real estate developers. Because of their size and eye-catching architecture, many of these neighborhood theaters became symbols of their neighborhoods, such as the Castro, New Mission (**Figure 36**), West Portal, and El Rey Theaters.



Figure 36. New Mission Theater, 2015.
Source: Architectural Resources Group

²⁸ Valentine, 9.

In terms of their planning, most neighborhood theaters in San Francisco were built on streetcar lines or in pre-existing commercial districts. They were often located roughly mid-block or at one corner, with a three-sided neon marquee and/or blade sign announcing the theater's presence to pedestrians, motorists, and transit riders. Some, such as the New Mission Theater, were built on so-called "flag" lots, with the entrance and lobby located in a narrow frontage facing the street and the much larger auditorium located on a wider section toward the middle of the block. The New Mission



Figure 37. Empire (formerly Portal) Theater, 2015.
Source: Christopher VerPlanck

Theater is a classic example of this type. If sufficient frontage was available, many theater developers built retail storefronts encompassed within the theater building or attached as retail wings, such as El Rey Theater or the Empire/Portal Theater (**Figure 37**). In terms of their styling, San Francisco's remaining neighborhood movie theaters represent a variety of styles, including: Art Nouveau (Clay and Coliseum) (**Figure 38**), Renaissance/Baroque (Wigwam/Rialto), Egyptian Revival (Alexandria), Moorish/Mission (Alhambra, Amazon, Castro, El Capitan, Granada, Metro, Portal/Empire, Roxie, Victoria, and York/Brava), Venetian Gothic (Avenue, Balboa, and Harding), Art Deco (El Rey and New Mission), Streamline Moderne (Bridge, Grand, Presidio, and Vogue) (**Figure 39**), and non-descript/remodeled (Capri, Four Star, Parkside, and Tower).²⁹



Figure 38. Clay Theater, ca. 1995.
Source: cinematreasures.org



Figure 39. Vogue Theater, 2010.
Source: cinematreasures.org

²⁹ This list includes all known pre-World War II-era neighborhood movie theaters west of Van Ness Avenue and south of Market Street. It includes both operational and non-operational theaters as long as the building still stands.

Samuel H. Levin: 1886–1969

Samuel H. Levin, the local theater mogul who built El Rey Theater, was born March 15, 1886, to Yiddish-speaking Russian Jews in Petrograd (St. Petersburg), Russia. He immigrated with his parents to the United States in 1899, at the age of 13.³⁰ Not much is known about his early upbringing, aside from the fact that he was reared on New York City's Lower East Side before coming to San Francisco in 1903. He held a variety of occupations before opening the city's third "nickelodeon" after the 1906 Earthquake. Nickelodeons – so-named because of their typical admission price – were typically simple storefronts retrofitted with an entrance and a ticket sales desk on one end and a screen on the opposite wall. Upon paying their entrance fee, patrons could enjoy a series of short black-and-white "photoplays," newsreels, and other material. Usually presented without a soundtrack, nickelodeons that are more elaborate would have had a piano player improvising a score.

Samuel Levin formed a partnership with a man with the surname of Gordon ca. 1910. Gordon & Levin was listed in San Francisco City Directories as being involved with "motion pictures." That same year, he married Sadie Leah Kirschner, a native San Franciscan of Austrian-Jewish heritage.³¹ By 1915, Samuel Levin, no longer associated with Mr. Gordon, was listed in city directories as a real estate developer. Ca. 1916, Samuel Levin opened his first movie theater, the Haight Theater, at 1700 Haight Street (at Cole). In 1918, he opened the Coliseum Theater, at Ninth Avenue and Clement Street, in the city's fast-growing Richmond District. Two years later, he expanded the Coliseum with an enlarged auditorium and balcony.³² In 1922, he built the Balboa Theater, at Faxon and Ocean Avenue, the first theater in San Francisco's emerging West of Twin Peaks district (**Figure 40**). Two years later, in 1924, Levin built a combination theater and business block, consisting of the Metropolitan Theater and the adjoining Daylight Block, on Union Street, between Buchanan and Webster Streets, in Cow Hollow. By the mid-1920s, Levin was very busy, planning and building several more neighborhood theaters in San Francisco, including the Portal Theater, on West Portal Avenue (1925); the Harding Theater, at Divisadero and



Figure 40. Balboa Theater, Faxon and Ocean Avenues, n.d.

Source: Western Neighborhoods Project

³⁰ U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1910 Federal Census for San Francisco, Enumeration District 95, page 13.

³¹ Ibid.

³² "Coliseum Theater Makes Improvements," *San Francisco Chronicle* (May 8, 1920), 8.

Hayes Streets (1926); and the New Balboa Theater, at 38th Avenue and Balboa Street (1926).³³ Nearly all designed by the Reid Brothers, these theaters were built on transit lines in fast-growing but still outlying parts of San Francisco.

In 1928, Samuel Levin sold the Coliseum, the Alexandria (which he had acquired a few years earlier), and the New Balboa (now called the Balboa Theater) for \$1,000,000. With this money, he capitalized a new regional theater circuit called San Francisco Theatres, Inc.³⁴ By the end of the decade, Levin was a rich man, living with his family in the city's exclusive Presidio Terrace with Sadie and their four children: Jewel, Irving, Robert, and Richard. They also owned a weekend house in Atherton.³⁵

As mentioned above, in 1928, Samuel Levin purchased a large parcel of land at Lakewood Avenue and Ocean Avenue from the real estate development firm of Fernando Nelson & Sons. He intended to build a new and much larger theater to replace his Balboa Theater located a few blocks west at Faxon Avenue. The Stock Market Crash of October 1929 may have put his plans on hold, or he may have been waiting for the development of the residence tracts in the West of Twin Peaks district to advance further. Regardless, he did not begin planning his El Rey Theater until 1930. Assisting Levin on the El Rey project was Michael Naify (**Figure 41**), a prominent Lebanese-American motion picture executive whom Levin promoted to the position of vice president of San Francisco Theatres, Inc. in 1929. Naify likely assisted Levin, not only with the planning and construction of El Rey, but also with the reorganization of the company in 1930–31, prior to its expansion into the Bay Area



Figure 41. Samuel Levin (left) and Michael Naify (center), ca. 1948.

Source: *San Francisco Chronicle*

hinterlands and beyond. Following the completion of El Rey Theater, San Francisco Theaters, Inc. built only two more theaters in San Francisco, including the Vogue Theater, at 3290 Sacramento Street (1941); and the Coronet Theater, at 3575 Geary Boulevard (1948) – the latter of which was managed by Samuel's son, Robert Levin.³⁶

Samuel Levin moved to Palm Springs in 1948, a year after his wife Sadie died. Turning away from theaters, Levin became a general property developer. His most notable project was the Palm Springs Biltmore Hotel. Samuel Levin died in Morongo Springs, California on September 20, 1969. He was 83.³⁷

³³ "Venetian Gothic Theater Accommodates 1,500," *San Francisco Chronicle* (May 8, 1926).

³⁴ *San Francisco Chronicle* (January 9, 1928).

³⁵ U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1930 Federal Census for San Francisco, Enumeration District 38-209, page 10-A.

³⁶ "Coronet Theatre," <http://cinematreaasures.org/theaters/1612>. Accessed June 13, 2016.

³⁷ Obituary: "S.F. Theater Owner S. H. Levin, 83," *San Francisco Examiner* (September 23, 1969), 51.

Timothy Pflueger: 1892–1946

Timothy Pflueger, the lead design partner in the firm of Miller & Pflueger, is one of the most remarkable architects to have ever worked in San Francisco (**Figure 42**). In spite of several significant hurdles, including the Depression and World War II, Pflueger managed to produce an extensive and high-quality oeuvre during his relatively short career. One of San Francisco's best-known architects, dozens of his firm's buildings still stand in San Francisco and other communities throughout northern California. Coming of age in an era dominated by the conservative aesthetic of the *École de Beaux Arts*, Timothy Pflueger defied the dominant tastes of the day by embracing a daring modernist aesthetic all his own, an aesthetic that relied in part on exotic architectural styles, in particular Mayan, Aztec, and other Meso-American traditions. Pflueger was a big supporter of the fine arts, and he collaborated with several well-known sculptors, painters, light designers, and other artisans and craftspeople on many of his projects, including Diego Rivera, Ralph Stackpole, and Arthur Mathews. Pflueger also embraced technology and modern materials and used them to make his buildings seem more richly appointed than they actually were.

Early Career

Timothy Ludwig Pflueger was born September 26, 1892 in San Francisco. His parents, Ottilie and August Pflueger – both German immigrants – came to San Francisco in 1890. August Pflueger was a merchant tailor and from 1904 on, the family lived above his shop at 1015 Guerrero Street, in the city's Mission District. While not poor, Pflueger was raised in relatively humble circumstances in a multi-ethnic district comprising immigrants from Ireland, Germany, Scandinavia, Italy, and France. Many of his countrymen and relatives lived nearby, including several tradesmen that Pflueger would work with for the rest of his life. He had very little formal education, going only as far as high school. Instead, like many boys in his circumstances, Timothy worked to help his family, earn pocket money, and learn valuable on-the-job skills.³⁸ Though frugal, religious, and decidedly working-class, Timothy Pflueger's parents were cultured German immigrants, and they did not neglect their children's education in the arts, paying for piano lessons and art and/or drafting lessons for young Timothy.



Figure 42. Drawing of Timothy Pflueger in 1936 by Peter van Valkenburg.
Source: Wikimedia Commons

³⁸ Therese Poletti, *Art Deco San Francisco: The Architecture of Timothy Pflueger* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), 3–5.

Pflueger showed an early talent in drawing and painting. In fact, it seems likely that he began working as a draftsman as early as 1906 (at the age of 14), when the demand for skilled renderers and delineators surged in the wake of the 1906 Earthquake and Fire. As a teenager, he began working as a draftsman in the office of (James Rupert or J. R.) Miller & (George T. De) Colmesnil, a relatively young firm that contributed to the post-quake reconstruction of San Francisco.³⁹ The partners quickly recognized that their young hire was very talented, and they encouraged him to join the San Francisco Architectural Club, a young architects' organization that offered rigorous night classes based on the methods and pedagogy of the prestigious *École des Beaux Arts* in Paris.⁴⁰

The talented Timothy Pflueger continued to increase his skills in the employ of Miller & Colmesnil, and in 1912, at the age of 20, he was given his first solo project, a church called Our Lady of the Wayside, in Portola Valley, California. This small country church, which still stands, is designed in the then-popular Mission Revival style, combining influences from several California missions, including Mission Dolores, Mission San Gabriel, and Mission San Carlos Borromeo (**Figure 43**).⁴¹



Figure 43. Our Lady of the Wayside, Portola Valley, CA.
Source: Town of Portola Valley

Our Lady of the Wayside was greeted with rave reviews, and Miller & Colmesnil began giving Pflueger more important jobs, including as the primary designer of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company building (now the Ritz-Carlton Hotel), a Beaux-Arts-styled office building that still stands at the northeast corner of Stockton and Pine Streets on Nob Hill.⁴²

³⁹ Poletti, 8.

⁴⁰ Poletti, 11.

⁴¹ Poletti, 26–7.

⁴² Poletti, 27.

Miller & Pflueger

Miller & Colmesnil dissolved in 1913. Pflueger continued to work for J. R. Miller for another six years, assisting him on a variety of projects. In 1917, Pflueger was drafted into the Army Corps of Engineers following the American entry into World War I. He spent the war designing training camps, first in Washington, D.C., and then in San Juan, Puerto Rico.⁴³ Upon Pflueger's return to San Francisco in 1919, Miller promoted him to the position of chief draftsman, and then in 1923, after Pflueger had received his architecture license in 1920, Miller made the young architect his

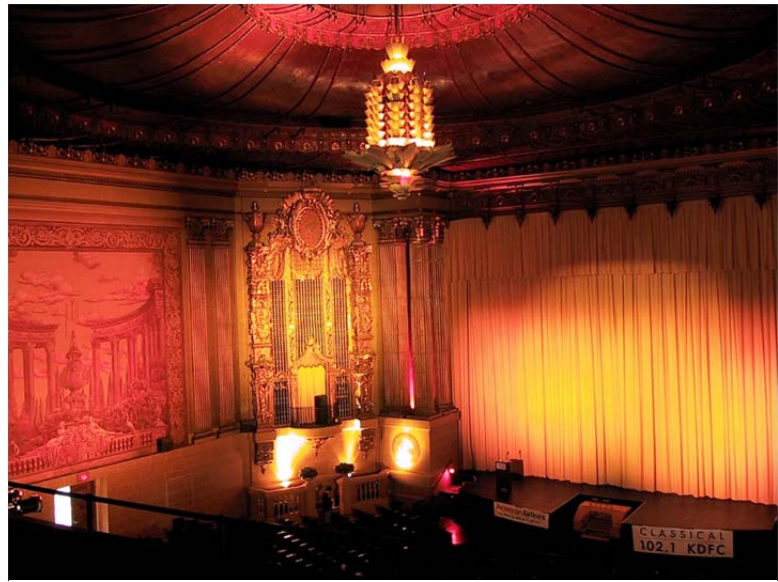


Figure 44. Interior of the Castro Theater.

Source: Flickr user SFHandyman

junior partner in the firm. With the American economy booming during the 1920s, and work abundant in the West Coast metropolis of San Francisco, Miller & Pflueger were given the opportunity to design many buildings that have since become San Francisco landmarks. The firm's work in the 1920s still largely adhered to historicist style, including the Beaux Arts/Classical Revival, Spanish Colonial, Mission Revival, and Mediterranean. Some of the firm's most famous works produced during this era include the Castro Theater (1922), at 429 Castro Street and the San Francisco Mining Exchange (1923), at 350 Bush Street. The Castro Theater is notable as Pflueger's first major movie theater, a building type that would make him famous during the 1920s and the 1930s. Though the exterior is a restrained version of the Spanish Colonial Revival style, the interior (**Figure 44**) features a fanciful blend of exotic influences that resembles aspects of a Roman amphitheater and a Middle Eastern caravanserai.

⁴³ Poletti, 30.

Theater Designs

The Castro Theater served as a springboard for the firm, gaining Miller & Pflueger several other high-profile theater commissions, mainly from the Nasser Brothers, the owners of the Castro Theater. The Nassers gave Pflueger a free hand with their theaters, allowing him to come up with fanciful interior spaces that transported moviegoers to exotic lands before the curtains even parted. The Nasser Brothers hired Miller & Pflueger to design all of their later theaters, including The Alhambra (1926) (Figure 45), at 2330



Figure 45. Alhambra Theater, ca. 2000.
Source: cinematreasures.org

Polk Street; three theaters in Tulare, Oroville, and Chico (1926–27); the Oakland Paramount (1931); the Alameda Theater (1932) (Figure 46); and the New Mission Theater, a remodel of a 1917 neighborhood theater by the Reid Brothers (1932) (See Figure 36). Miller & Pflueger collaborated with Alexander A. Cantin on several of the firm's projects for the Nasser Brothers, with Cantin responsible for the elaborate sheet metal marquees and blade signs.

Miller & Pflueger's theater designs represented some of the most fantastic buildings ever constructed in the San Francisco Bay Area. In terms of their evolution, the firm's theaters started out in a Spanish Colonial/Moorish Revival style that evoked an idealized representation of California's Hispanic/Mediterranean

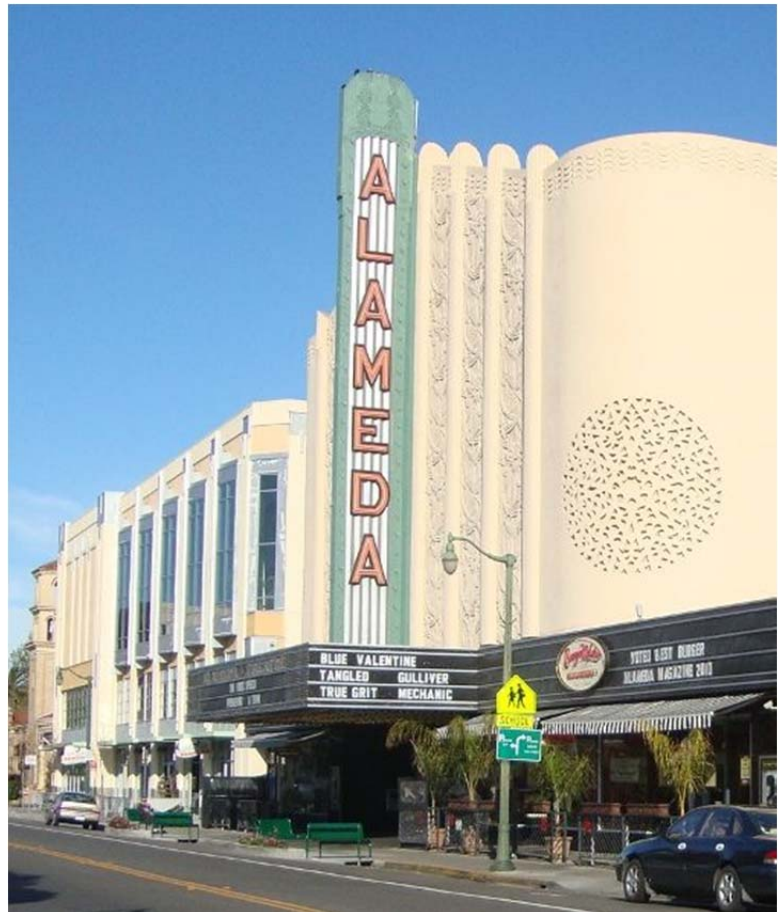


Figure 46. Alameda Theater, Alameda, California, 2012.
Source: cinematreasures.org

heritage. The Castro and Alhambra Theaters are good examples of the firm's earlier work. By the time the Depression hit, the firm had fully embraced modern European styles, including the Art Deco and the Streamline Moderne styles. Dispensing in part with the gilded stucco relief ornament of their earlier theaters, the firm moved toward bolder, geometric designs that used color and volume to express visual drama. Signage became an increasingly important part of the exteriors of their theaters, with towers and multi-story, neon blade signs becoming critical parts of the composition of the exterior. Good examples include El Rey, the Paramount, and the New Mission Theaters.

High-Rise Office Building Designs

Miller & Pflueger's theater work caught the attention of many prominent businesspeople, including the directors of the Pacific Telephone & Telegraph Company, who hired the firm to design its new high-rise office building in San Francisco's South of Market area. After securing the commission, Pflueger initially developed several traditional designs for San Francisco's first true "skyscraper." Not caring for any of his designs, Pflueger became engrossed with the recent 1922 Chicago Tribune design competition.⁴⁴ One of the entries, by Finnish architect Eliel Saarinen, revolutionized skyscraper design by dispensing with the traditional tripartite base, shaft, and capital arrangement in favor of a much more even vertical approach utilizing setbacks and vertical lines to emphasize the building's height. Pflueger's final 1923 design of the Pacific Telephone & Telegraph (Telephone) Building, which is in part based on Saarinen's ideas, was a breakthrough for the young architect, proving that he could dispense with the historicist model of the *École de Beaux Arts*.

The national architectural press took notice of Timothy Pflueger following the completion of the Telephone Building in 1925. Five years later, Pflueger would make his second major contribution to San Francisco's skyline with his Medical-Dental Office Building (1929), at 450 Sutter Street (**Figure 47**), a block north of Union Square. Along with Howe & Lescaze's PSFS Building in Philadelphia of the same year, 450 Sutter remains one of the most innovative skyscrapers built in the United States during this era. Discarding the comparatively heavy terra cotta cladding of the Telephone Building, Pflueger embraced the underlying logic of the internal steel frame and gave the Medical-Dental Building a thin terra cotta and glass skin, with delicate spandrels ornamented with Mayan-inspired ornament. The windows wrap the corners of the building, contributing to its delicate, contemporary appearance. Pflueger, a lover of the dramatic, gave 450 Sutter a richly appointed



Figure 47. Medical-Dental Building.
Source: Author's postcard collection

⁴⁴ Poletti, 61-5.

lobby finished in black marble and gilded, embossed metalwork ornamented like a Mayan temple.⁴⁵

The Medical-Dental Building was completed two weeks before the Stock Market Crash of October 1929. The ensuing Depression ushered in a period of economic stagnation in San Francisco during which comparatively little new construction occurred for almost a decade. Fortunately for Miller & Pflueger, their reputation was so great that they continued to get high-profile projects. Theaters and office buildings continued to comprise a major part of their work, with landmark projects such as the second San Francisco Stock Exchange (1930), at 155 Sansome Street; El Rey Theater (1931), at 1970 Ocean Avenue; and the Paramount Theater in Oakland (1932). Following an escapist tendency in much of Pflueger's work, the firm designed several high-style nightclubs and cocktail lounges during the 1930s, including the Bal Tabarin (now Bimbo's 365), at 1025 Columbus Avenue; Le Cirque Room, in the Fairmont Hotel; the Patent Leather Lounge, in the St. Francis Hotel; and Top of the Mark, in the Mark Hopkins Hotel. The firm's work wasn't all focused on fantasy; Miller & Pflueger designed several public buildings in San Francisco during the Depression, including Roosevelt Junior High School (1930), George Washington High School (1936), the Transbay Terminal (1937), San Francisco Junior College (now San Francisco City College – 1940), and a garage beneath Union Square (1942). Much of the firm's work from the latter half of the 1930s and early 1940s shows a gradual evolution away from the exoticism of the early part of the decade and toward a more abstract and austere vocabulary more in keeping with European modernism. Part of the change may have resulted from the retirement of J. R. Miller in 1937, after which the firm became known as Timothy L. Pflueger and Associates.

Late Career

In 1939, Timothy Pflueger was appointed to the Board of Architects in charge of designing the Golden Gate International Exposition on Treasure Island. As part of his duties, Pflueger designed the Federal Building, the California State Building, California Auditorium, and the Court of the Pacific. Much of his work for the fair continued



Figure 48. I Magnin (at center-left) and Union Square.
Source: Author's postcard collection

with his increasingly stripped-down, modernist aesthetic. During World War II, Pflueger went to work for the U.S.

⁴⁵ Poletti, 79–80.

government again, designing the U.S. Army General Depot in Ogden, Utah, and various Army transmitter buildings, broadcasting studios, and an unbuilt housing project for defense workers in California. Pflueger's final project after World War II was I. Magnin's flagship Union Square store (**Figure 48**) at the southwest corner of Geary and Stockton Streets. It was under construction when Pflueger died of heart failure on November 7, 1946 after his daily swim at the Olympic Club.⁴⁶

Art Deco Style in San Francisco: 1925–1940

The Art Deco style emerged on the world stage at the 1925 *Exposition des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes* in Paris. Rejecting European Neoclassicism in the wake of the horrors of World War I, the artists, artisans, graphic designers, and architects who developed the Art Deco style were inspired by a variety of sources, in particular the ancient ziggurat-building cultures of the pre-Islamic Middle East, including Assyria, Babylon, and Persia. Other sources included ancient Egyptian art and African textiles, as well as contemporary European Cubist and Fauvist painters and German Expressionist architects, graphic designers, and visual artists. Signature details of the style included geometric shapes, including chevrons, zig-zags, diagonal rays, stylized papyrus leaves, pulvinated moldings, and horizontal “speed lines” (parallel lines incised into the parapet of a building). The Art Deco style soon made its way across the Atlantic to the United States. Gradually, the American public embraced the “modernistic” Art Deco style, largely due to its popularity with Hollywood set designers like Cedric Gibbons. Mass-produced consumer goods, including those designed by industrial designers such as Raymond Loewy, Norman Bel Geddes, and others, disseminated the style to the farthest corners of the country.

The Art Deco style evolved in a different direction in California than it did in Europe or on the East Coast. In California, architects and designers relied on the pre-Columbian architecture of Mexico and Central America instead of Middle Eastern or African sources. Frank Lloyd Wright's earlier “textile block houses” in Los Angeles and Pasadena also display the influence of Meso-American architecture. Architects working in both southern and northern California, including Los Angeles-based Robert Stacy-Judd and San Francisco's Timothy Pflueger, mined source books on Mayan and Aztec architecture for both building forms and ornament. By the late 1920s, these various strands had coalesced into a regional school of the Art Deco style popularly known in California as the “Mayan Deco” style. One of the best examples in San Francisco is the Western Furniture Mart – now known as the Twitter Building – at 1355 Market Street. This building was designed by The Capitol Co., architects, and built in 1937 (**Figure 49**). In addition to its pylon-like massing, the exterior is clad in terra cotta embossed with Mayan and Aztec-derived ornament.

⁴⁶ Poletti, 218.



Figure 49. Western Furniture Mart, aka, the “Twitter Building.”
Source: Page & Turnbull, Inc.

Although the Mayan Deco style was more widespread in southern California, there are excellent examples in the San Francisco Bay Area – many designed by Miller & Pflueger. The firm’s design partner, Timothy Pflueger, employed the Mayan Deco style in several projects in San Francisco, including the Medical-Dental Building, at 450 Sutter Street (1929); El Rey Theater, at 1970 Ocean Avenue (1931); and the New Mission Theater remodel, at 2550 Mission Street (1932). Other good local examples of the style by other architects include the Western Furniture Exchange (now the “Twitter Building”), at 1355 Market Street (1937), by Capital Architects; the Independent Order of Foresters’ Hall (now the San Francisco Baha’i Center), at 170 Valencia Street (1932), by Harold Stoner; and the James Lick Middle School (1932), by William H. Crim (**Figure 50**). What ties this body of buildings together is a rigorous (if not entirely accurate) interpretation of Meso-American forms, including stepped massing, corbelled entrances, tapered pylon-like tower elements, and ornamentation utilizing either literal or abstract pre-Columbian decorative motifs.

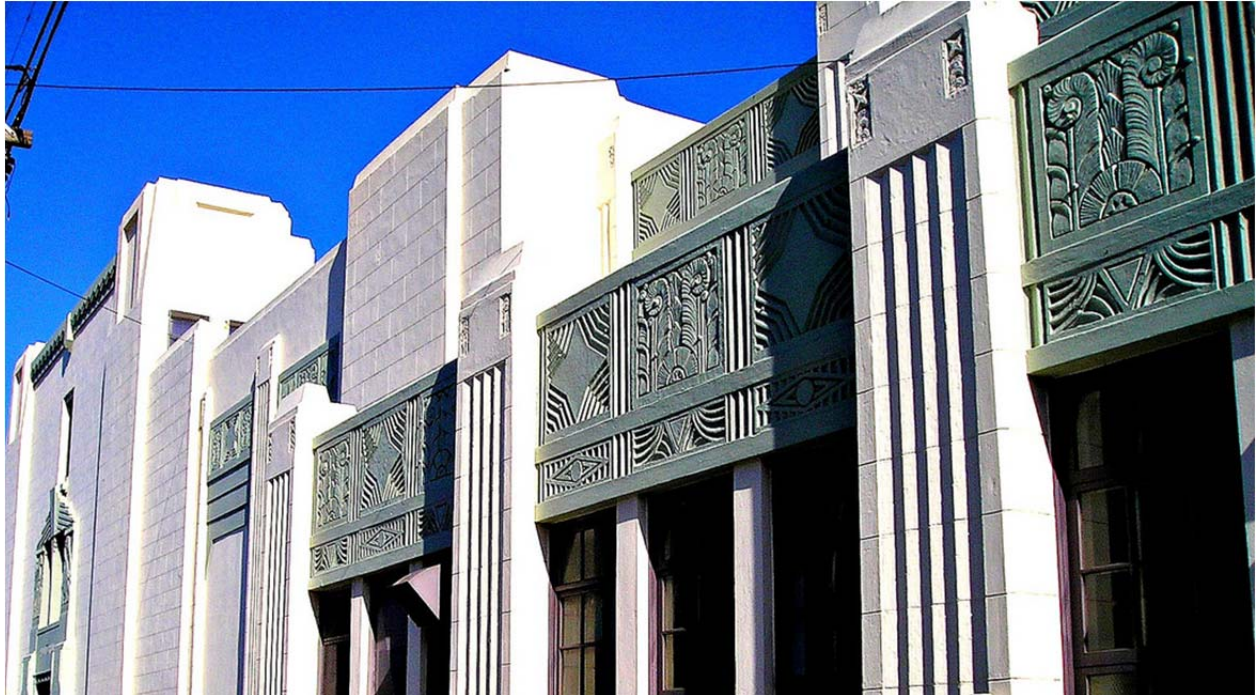


Figure 50. Detail of James Lick School, ca. 2015.

Source: Flickr user Bob Gorman

Thriving for less than a decade, the more effervescent iteration of Art Deco in San Francisco gradually succumbed to Depression-era austerity and the adoption of a more sober aesthetic embodied in the stripped-down public buildings financed and built by the New Deal-era Works Progress Administration (WPA) and Public Works Administration (PWA) during the latter part of the 1930s. By the end of the decade, the Moderne and the even more mechanistic Streamline Moderne styles had all but replaced the florid high Art Deco style.

ARTICLE 10 LANDMARK DESIGNATION

This section of the case report provides an analysis and summary of the applicable criteria for designation, integrity statement, statement of significance, period of significance, inventory of character-defining features, and additional Article 10 requirements.

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION

Criteria

Check all criteria applicable to the significance of the property that are documented in the report. The criteria checked are the basic justifications for *why* the resource is important.

- ☐ Association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ Association with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ Embody distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.
- ☐ Has yielded or may be likely to yield information important in history or prehistory.

Statement of Significance

Characteristics of the Landmark that justify its designation:

Significant Architecture

El Rey Theater derives its significance as a rare Art Deco-style neighborhood theater in San Francisco. It is also the work of master architect, Timothy Pflueger (Miller & Pflueger, Architects). The most ambitious neighborhood movie theater ever built in the OMI or the greater Twin Peaks area, El Rey is the foremost visual landmark in the neighborhood, much like the Castro Theater or the New Mission Theater are in their respective neighborhoods. Built with an auditorium seating 1,800, a sumptuously appointed lobby and lounge, and two adjoining commercial storefront wings, El Rey was an especially ambitious real estate project completed during the Depression in San Francisco. Visible from several blocks away in each direction, the building's 150-foot-high tower, which was originally capped by an aircraft beacon, was designed to catch the attention of local residents, workers, and commuters alike. Designed with very little applied ornament, the building relies on its boldly articulated, geometrical massing for visual interest. Converted into a church in 1977–78, the building's neon signage, primary entrance, and storefronts have been replaced. Otherwise, the exterior remains mostly unchanged. Also remarkable is the building's largely intact interior, which retains its original floor plan and sheet metal and plaster ornament. The Art Deco style is synonymous with the heyday of theater design in San Francisco. Surprisingly, El Rey is one of only a handful of Art Deco theaters remaining in San Francisco and one of only three designed by Pflueger.

Period of Significance

The period of significance for the former El Rey Theater is 1931, the year that it was completed.

Integrity

The seven aspects of integrity used by the National Register of Historic Places, the California Register of Historical Resources, and Article 10 of the Planning Code are: location, design, materials, workmanship, setting, feeling, and association in relation to the period of significance above. In summary, though the building has undergone several alterations, the former El Rey Theater retains sufficient integrity to convey its association with its original design, use, and period of construction.

Location: El Rey Theater was constructed at its present location in 1931 and it has not been moved. In conclusion, the property retains integrity of location.

Design: The former El Rey Theater retains the majority of its original design elements, including its overall height and massing, its articulation as a central gable-roofed volume (containing the theater) flanked by two lower retail wings; its stepped tower capped by a pylon-like lantern; its articulated side and rear façades; and much of its original ornament, including its cast-concrete grille, zig-zag detailing, and speed lines. It is missing its original storefronts and canopy, much of its fenestration along the south and east façades, and the sheet metal ornament and signage on the tower. The interior retains its original floor plan, its interior partition walls and ceilings, as well as the majority of its original stucco and sheet metal ornament. It is missing its original mirrored wall paneling, furnishings, and floor coverings. In addition, the original murals have been painted over. In conclusion, the former El Rey Theater retains this aspect of integrity because it retains the most important aspects of the building's design, including its overall form, massing, and its hierarchy of architectonic elements.

Materials: The former El Rey Theater retains the majority of its original materials, including its steel-framing, its concrete perimeter walls, its cement plaster exterior finishes (primary façade and retail wings only), its board-formed concrete side and rear walls, some of its wood windows (west retail wing only), and its interior cast plaster wall and ceiling finishes and ornament. In conclusion, the former El Rey Theater retains integrity of materials.

Though it has lost its original storefronts and canopy, signage, some exterior sheet metal ornament, several windows on the south and east façades, and storefront interiors, these elements are the most ephemeral of the building's otherwise extremely durable materials. Loss of original storefronts and retail interiors is common because they were designed to be remodeled once every decade or so, or when they became unfashionable. Fortunately, the original drawings and historic photographs survive, making the reconstruction of these missing elements possible.

Workmanship: Built during the Depression using largely machine-made materials, the former El Rey Theater does not embody many examples of handicraft or workmanship, especially the exterior, which has lost its original neon signage and some sheet metal ornament. The interior retains much more of its original workmanship, in particular the cast plaster and sheet metal ornament in the lobby and auditorium and possibly the murals beneath the current paint scheme. Nonetheless, because it is missing much of its original handcrafted ornament on the exterior, the former El Rey Theater does not retain the aspect of workmanship.

Setting: The setting around the former El Rey Theater has not changed greatly since the theater was built in 1931. The adjoining unbuilt areas on the east and west sides of the property were always paved and used for parking. To the north, the Mt. Davidson Manor neighborhood looks much as it did when El Rey Theater was built. The same is true for the Ingleside Terraces neighborhood to the south and the low-scale taxpayer blocks to the east along Ocean Avenue. The only nearby property that has changed since 1931 is the commercial property on the west side of Lakewood Avenue. This property, which was undeveloped when El Rey was built, was later developed with a gas station in the late 1930s. It is now a ca. 1980 strip mall. In conclusion, the former El Rey Theater retains integrity of setting.

Feeling: Feeling is the least tangible aspect of integrity. It refers to the retention of a particular aesthetic or historic sense of a property to its period of significance. Though it has undergone several alterations, the former El Rey Theater is still very much recognizable as an Art Deco theater constructed during the 1930s – both on the exterior and in the interior. In conclusion, the former El Rey Theater retains integrity of feeling.

Association: With its significance of 1931, the former El Rey Theater is most closely associated with the heyday of the Art Deco style in San Francisco in the late 1920s/early 1930s, as well as the development of the Ocean Avenue business district around the same time. In conclusion, the former El Rey Theater retains integrity of association.

In conclusion, the former El Rey Theater retains all but one of the aspects that comprise integrity: workmanship.

ARTICLE 10 REQUIREMENTS SECTION 1004 (b)

Boundaries of the Landmark Site

The site proposed for Landmark status encompasses Assessor Parcel Number 3280/018, a 35,209-square-foot parcel bounded by Ocean Avenue to the south, Lakewood Avenue to the west, and Fairfield Way to the east.

Character-defining Features

Any case report for a property proposed for Landmark status under Article 10 of the Planning Code requires an inventory of all character-defining features. This is necessary so that the property owner, Planning staff, and the public know what features and materials (elements) must be preserved in order to protect the historical and architectural character of a proposed landmark.

The character-defining *exterior* features of the building are identified as all exterior elevations, including but not limited to form, massing, structure, architectural ornament, and materials. In the case of the former El Rey Theater, its character-defining features are:

- The building's T-shaped footprint and four-part massing and volume consisting of the central gable-roofed theater, 146'-9"-high tower, and two flanking one-story retail wings.
- The building's primary façade facing Ocean Avenue, including its cement stucco finish, cast-concrete grille, incised speed lines, zig-zag ornament, raised parapet (retail wings only), gable outlined with red clay tile (theater volume), and pylon-capped tower.
- East and west (secondary) façades, including their general massing and articulation with deeply recessed "blind" openings, and painted board-formed concrete walls. The windows on the west wall of the west retail wing are also character-defining, though they are missing their original metal screens.
- The tower, including its height, massing, and surviving cast cement ornament.
- The building's combination gable (theater volume) and flat (retail wings and stage area) roof.

At the time of designation, non-character-defining exterior features include all post-1931 alterations, including the folded-plate canopy, all storefronts, and infilled fenestration on the south and east façades. None of these features has gained significance in their own right.

The character-defining features of the interior of the former El Rey Theater include:

- Main lobby, auditorium, balcony, stairs, and mezzanine volumes,
- All extant sheet metal and cast-plaster Art Deco ornament in the lobby, auditorium, balcony, and mezzanine.
- All extant doors, hardware, and light fixtures in the lobby, auditorium, balcony, and mezzanine.

- Potentially extant murals at auditorium ceiling and mezzanine as shown in historic photographs but currently overpainted.

At the time of designation, non-character-defining interior features include all spaces affected by extensive post-1931 alterations, including the remodeled bathrooms and interior of retail stores, and all utilitarian interior spaces, including the basement, tower, backstage area, former projection room, offices, and storage.

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Historic Name: El Rey Theater

Popular Name: El Rey Theater, Voice of Pentecost Church,
A Place to Meet Jesus

Address: 1970 Ocean Avenue

Block and Lot: 3280/018

Owner: Greenpoint Land Co. (50%) and Ricci Ventures,
LLC (50%)

Current Use: Church

Zoning: NCT – Ocean Avenue Neighborhood Commercial
Transit

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APPENDIX

Table 1: City Directory Listings for El Rey Storefronts

	1950 Ocean	1962 Ocean	1966 Ocean	1970 Ocean	1976 Ocean	1990 Ocean
1931	El Rey Pharmacy	El Rey Pharmacy	Marie Everitt Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	El Rey Beauty Shop	El Rey Supermarket
1932	El Rey Pharmacy	El Rey Pharmacy	Marie Everitt Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	El Rey Beauty Shop	El Rey Supermarket
1933	El Rey Pharmacy	El Rey Pharmacy	Marie Everitt Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	El Rey Beauty Shop	El Rey Supermarket
1934	El Rey Pharmacy	El Rey Pharmacy	Marie Everitt Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	El Rey Beauty Shop	El Rey Supermarket
1935	El Rey Pharmacy	El Rey Pharmacy	Marie Everitt Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	El Rey Beauty Shop	El Rey Supermarket
1936	Mission Drugs	El Rey Confectionary	Marie Everitt Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	El Rey Beauty Shop	El Rey Supermarket
1937	Mission Drugs	El Rey Confectionary	Marie Everitt Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	El Rey Beauty Shop	El Rey Supermarket
1938	Mission Drugs	El Rey Confectionary	Marie Everitt Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	El Rey Beauty Shop	El Rey Supermarket
1939	Mission Drugs	El Rey Confectionary	Marie Everitt Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	El Rey Beauty Shop	El Rey Supermarket
1940	Terra Tea Room	El Rey Confectionary	Marie Everitt Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	El Rey Beauty Shop	El Rey Supermarket
1941	Terra Tea Room	El Rey Confectionary	Marie Everitt Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	El Rey Beauty Shop	El Rey Supermarket
1942	Unknown	El Rey Confectionary	Marie Everitt Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	El Rey Beauty Shop	El Rey Supermarket
1943	Unknown	El Rey Confectionary	Marie Everitt Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	El Rey Beauty Shop	El Rey Supermarket
1944	Unknown	El Rey Confectionary	Marie Everitt Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	El Rey Beauty Shop	El Rey Supermarket
1945	Unknown	El Rey Confectionary	Cover Girl Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	El Rey Beauty Shop	El Rey Supermarket
1946	Unknown	El Rey Confectionary	Cover Girl Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	El Rey Beauty Shop	El Rey Supermarket
1947	Unknown	El Rey Confectionary	Cover Girl Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	El Rey Beauty Shop	El Rey Supermarket
1948	Ocean Inn	El Rey Confectionary	Cover Girl Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	El Rey Beauty Shop	El Rey Supermarket
1949	Ocean Inn	Vacant	Cover Girl Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	El Rey Beauty Shop	El Rey Supermarket

	1950 Ocean	1962 Ocean	1966 Ocean	1970 Ocean	1976 Ocean	1990 Ocean
1950	Ocean Inn	Vacant	Cover Girl Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	El Rey Beauty Shop	El Rey Supermarket
1951	Vacant	Vacant	Cover Girl Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	El Rey Beauty Shop	El Rey Supermarket
1952	Vacant	Robin Hood Fountain	Cover Girl Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	El Rey Beauty Shop	El Rey Supermarket
1953	Interior Designers Furniture Co.	Never-Not Fountain	Cover Girl Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	El Rey Beauty Shop	El Rey Supermarket
1954	Interior Designers Furniture Co.	Never-Not Fountain	Cover Girl Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	Yellette's Beauty Salon	El Rey Supermarket
1955	Interior Designers Furniture Co.	Never-Not Fountain	Cover Girl Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	Yellette's Beauty Salon	El Rey Supermarket
1956	Ward Industries, Vacuums	Never-Not Fountain	Cover Girl Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	Yellette's Beauty Salon	El Rey Supermarket
1957	Ward Industries, Vacuums	Never-Not Fountain	Cover Girl Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	Yellette's Beauty Salon	El Rey Supermarket
1958	Ward Industries, Vacuums	Never-Not Fountain	Cover Girl Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	Yellette's Beauty Salon	El Rey Supermarket
1959	Sales Training Co. of SF	Never-Not Fountain	Cover Girl Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	Yellette's Beauty Salon	El Rey Supermarket
1960	Gutenberg Press	Bechler Home Furnishings	Cover Girl Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	Venus Beauty Shop	El Rey Supermarket
1961	Gutenberg Press	Bechler Home Furnishings	Cover Girl Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	Venus Beauty Shop	El Rey Supermarket
1962	Gutenberg Press	Lisle Ramsey Photography	Cover Girl Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	Rickey's House of Coiffures	El Rey Supermarket
1963	Gutenberg Press	Lisle Ramsey Photography	Cover Girl Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	Rickey's House of Coiffures	El Rey Supermarket
1964	Gutenberg Press	Lisle Ramsey Photography	Cover Girl Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	Vera's Hair Stylist	El Rey Supermarket
1965	Gutenberg Press	Lisle Ramsey Photography	Cover Girl Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	Vera's Hair Stylist	El Rey Supermarket
1966	Gutenberg Press	Lisle Ramsey Photography	Cover Girl Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	Vera's Hair Stylist	El Rey Supermarket
1967	Gutenberg Press	Lisle Ramsey Photography	Cover Girl Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	Vera's Hair Stylist	El Rey Supermarket
1968	Gutenberg Press	Lisle Ramsey Photography	Cover Girl Dress Shop	El Rey Theater	Vera's Hair Stylist	El Rey Supermarket

	1950 Ocean	1962 Ocean	1966 Ocean	1970 Ocean	1976 Ocean	1990 Ocean
1969	The Gap, Inc.	The Gap, Inc.	Alma Roberson, Real Estate	El Rey Theater	Vera's Hair Stylist	El Rey Supermarket
1970	The Gap, Inc.	The Gap, Inc.	Alma Roberson, Real Estate	El Rey Theater	Vera's Hair Stylist	El Rey Supermarket
1971	The Gap, Inc.	The Gap, Inc.	Alma Roberson, Real Estate	El Rey Theater	Vera's Hair Stylist	El Rey Supermarket
1972	The Gap, Inc.	The Gap, Inc.	Alma Roberson, Real Estate	El Rey Theater	Vera's Hair Stylist	El Rey Supermarket
1973	The Gap, Inc.	The Gap, Inc.	Alma Roberson, Real Estate	El Rey Theater	Vera's Hair Stylist	El Rey Supermarket
1974	The Gap, Inc.	The Gap, Inc.	Alma Roberson, Real Estate	El Rey Theater	Vera's Hair Stylist	El Rey Supermarket
1975	OMI Head Start	OMI Head Start	Alma Roberson, Real Estate	El Rey Theater	Vera's Hair Stylist	El Rey Supermarket
1976	OMI Head Start	OMI Head Start	Alma Roberson, Real Estate	El Rey Theater	Vera's Hair Stylist	El Rey Supermarket
1977	Vacant	Vacant	Vacant	Vacant	Vacant	Vacant
1978-2015	Voice of Pentecost Academy	Voice of Pentecost Academy	Voice of Pentecost Promotion Division	Voice of Pentecost Church	Voice of Pentecost Printing Division	Voice of Pentecost Sunday School

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Photography

All contemporary photography by Christopher VerPlanck and Shannon Ferguson unless stated otherwise