

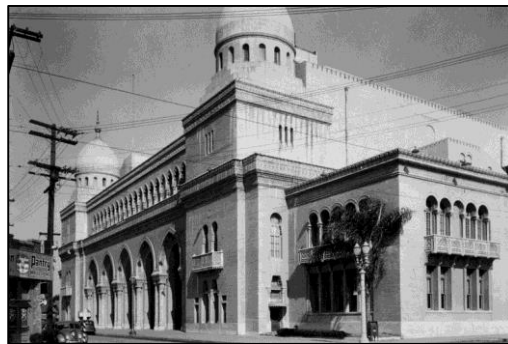
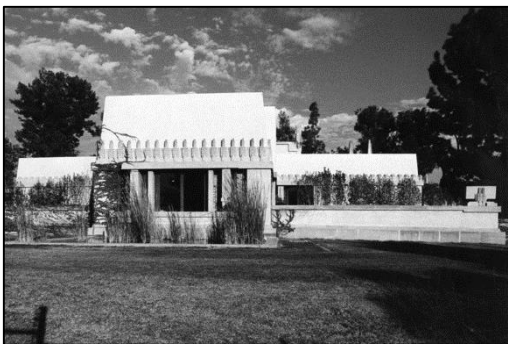
SurveyLA

Los Angeles Historic Resources Survey

LOS ANGELES CITYWIDE HISTORIC CONTEXT STATEMENT

Context: ARCHITECTURE AND ENGINEERING

Theme: Exotic Revival, 1900-1980



Prepared for:

City of Los Angeles
Department of City Planning
Office of Historic Resources



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PREFACE

This theme is a component of Los Angeles' citywide historic context statement and provides guidance to field surveyors in identifying and evaluating potential historic resources relating to Exotic Revival architecture. Refer to www.HistoricPlacesLA.org for information on designated resources associated with this theme as well as those identified through SurveyLA and other surveys.

CONTRIBUTORS

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INTRODUCTION

The theme of "Exotic Revival, 1900-1980" examines a collection of six sub-themes: Mayan Revival, Egyptian Revival, Byzantine Revival, Moorish Revival, East Asian Eclectic, and Tiki/Polynesian. Exotic Revival styles drew their inspiration from the built environment of different world cultures to a variety of ends. Some architects used the styles to express their heritage or create a sense of community, others were embracing new aesthetics, and still others were pushing the boundaries of architectural creativity and exuberance.

Several of the styles within this theme enjoyed more than one period of popularity, with the second, and usually more flamboyant, occurring in the early twentieth century. This resurgence is typically attributed to a number of factors, including archaeological discovery, popular media, and accessibility of travel. As such, the majority of Exotic Revival architecture in Los Angeles dates from the relatively short period of time between World War I and World War II, with a concentration the 1920s. The cultural climate of Los Angeles during this period was particularly receptive to these striking and sometimes outlandish styles, which often went hand-in-hand with the creative energy of the budding film industry. The film industry itself is thought to have been a source of inspiration for many local architects.

Exotic Revival styles are generally rare in Los Angeles, and with a few exceptions, architects seldom designed Exotic Revival style buildings with regularity; often, there is just one example of an exotic-inspired building among a more "traditional" portfolio. The showy styles were more appropriate for larger-scale buildings, such as civic buildings or theaters. On residential buildings, Exotic Revival architecture is frequently limited to decorative motifs applied to a more popular, or more practical, mode of architecture. The lack of practicality was one reason Exotic Revival styles began to wane, especially as the country entered the Great Depression and new construction nearly came to a halt. After World War II, Exotic Revival architecture was able to provide an appropriate level of escapism for the emerging middle class, but soon gave way to the clean lines of Modernism. The exception to this

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trend was the East Asian Eclectic style that continued to be employed by groups of immigrants from the region throughout the twentieth century.

Evaluation Considerations

The theme Exotic Revival, 1900-1980 may overlap with other SurveyLA themes as follows:

- Properties may also represent an important association with an ethnic/cultural group or groups in Los Angeles.
- Commercial examples of the style may also be significant in the context of Commercial Development under several themes and associated property types.
- Early residences constructed in the styles may also be significant in the context of Early Residential Development and Suburbanization and the theme Early Residential Development.
- Institutional properties may also be significant in the context of Public and Private Institutional Development under several sub-contexts including Religion and Spirituality and Social Clubs and Organizations.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

The Origins of Exotic Revival Architecture

The term ‘Exotic Revival’ encompasses a wide variety of styles influenced directly by the cultures that developed them such as ancient Egypt, the eastern Roman Empire, and the islands of Polynesia. While Exotic Revival architecture is generally rare, it had two separate periods of popularity.¹ The first occurred in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, when European colonialism and imperialism was the source for some of these exotic motifs. Elements of indigenous architecture were adapted from the areas under European rule.² It was also during this time that archaeology was emerging as a legitimate academic field. New discoveries and ancient sites were being unearthed and became the subject of press releases, journal articles, lectures, and museum exhibits, revealing new aesthetics that captured the public’s imagination. This new imagery would soon be incorporated into art and architecture.³

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, America was struggling to field criticism from the European continent that the comparatively young country lacked a strong national identity, refinement, or culture. American artists and architects were frustrated with the idea of being considered “lacking” in their fields, secondary to major art centers in Europe such as France, Germany, and England, where many new trends originated.⁴ To counter these ideas, architects strived to establish an identity for themselves while developing a distinctly American aesthetic. Without an existing built heritage that held the pedigree of those in Europe, Americans had the unique opportunity to fashion their own “chronology of development” by adopting cherry-picked elements from ancient civilizations, such as Egypt, that they thought were best.⁵ Rather than relying on styles with a European precedent, such as the Classical or Renaissance periods, American architects were looking for new, untapped sources of inspiration. The recently discovered “lost” pre-Columbian civilizations of South America, for example, provided a new reference point and were deeply rooted in American soil.⁶ Other sources of inspiration, such as ancient Egypt, were deeply symbolic. The resulting designs, such as the Egyptian-inspired Washington Monument, set the tone. These buildings and monuments served as major focal points and began to form a national identity.⁷

¹ “Exotic Revival Style,” Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission, accessed October 13, 2015, http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/mid-19th_century_period/2386/exotic_revival_egyptian_revival_style/293445.

² Henry Stolzman and Daniel Stolzman, *Synagogue Architecture in America: Faith, Spirit & Identity* (Victoria, Australia: Images Publishing Group Pty Ltd., 2004), 109.

³ Joy M. Giguere, *Characteristically American: Memorial Architecture, National Identity, and the Egyptian Revival* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2014), 33.

⁴ Ruth Anne Phillips, “‘Pre-Columbian Revival’: Defining and Exploring a U.S. Architectural Style, 1910-1940” (PhD diss., The City University of New York, 2007), 21-22.

⁵ Giguere, 2-3.

⁶ Phillips, 21-22.

⁷ Giguere, 98.

While other Americans were trying to develop this new identity, ethnic groups wanted to express their own unique heritage in the country they now called home. As people immigrated to the United States, they typically formed enclaves. The built environment of their communities, especially religious buildings, was a way for them to articulate their respective cultures to the larger city around them. At times, these ethnically-inspired styles were embraced and became fashionable in mainstream American design.⁸

The use of Exotic Revival architecture decreased for a period during the mid-nineteenth century as other styles, such as Gothic Revival, became popular.⁹ However, during the first part of the twentieth century, there was a resurgence of the exotic. The colonialism and imperialism that had first introduced Western architects to a variety of cultures and building forms was giving way to more widespread civilian travel.¹⁰ Travel by boat, and later by plane, was becoming financially possible for more people, making visits to foreign countries more accessible to the average American.¹¹ Even those who could not travel had a chance to be captivated; where previously these ideas had only been available to those affluent and educated enough to attend a lecture, see a museum exhibit, or peruse an academic journal, they began to spread through the mass media in popular novels, magazines, and motion pictures.

In the 1920s, people were in the “mood” for the exotic.¹² The resulting second “wave” of Exotic Revival architecture was generally more flamboyant and imaginative than the first, and was more often applied to grander, larger-scale civic buildings,¹³ or altogether new building types like movie theaters and skyscrapers.¹⁴ The trend gathered momentum, especially in major metropolitan areas like New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles.¹⁵ However, it would never become as widely used as other concurrent styles, especially in residential architecture. Many of the exotic styles were lacking practicality in a modern application. For example, one of the primary characteristics of both the Mayan and Egyptian Revival styles is solid walls with few window openings, making it an unappealing choice for a residence.¹⁶ Exotic Revival styles were more successfully applied to larger-scale buildings that could carry the monumentality and romanticism that came with the style.

Exotic Revival elements were often used in conjunction with other, more formal styles. Moorish Revival motifs are often seen in Spanish Colonial Revival buildings—a natural pairing, as the Moorish style originated in Spain.¹⁷ The ornamentation and massing of styles like Egyptian and Mayan Revival may

⁸ Stolzman and Stolzman, 46.

⁹ Giguere, 3.

¹⁰ Stolzman and Stolzman, 109.

¹¹ James Teitelbaum, *Tiki Road Trip: A Guide to Tiki Culture in North America* (Santa Monica: Santa Monica Press, 2007), 11.

¹² David Gebhard, *Robert Stacy-Judd: Maya Architecture and the Creation of a New Style* (Santa Barbara: Capra Press), 60.

¹³ “Exotic Revival Style,” Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission.

¹⁴ Giguere, 210.

¹⁵ Phillips, 16.

¹⁶ Phillips, 70.

¹⁷ Paul Gleye, *Architecture of Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Rosebud Books, 1981), 106-108.

have led to more mainstream movements, like Art Deco, especially in their use of geometric ornament, bright colors, and abstracted nature motifs.¹⁸

Along with other similarly theatrical architectural styles, Exotic Revival began to fall out of favor at the beginning of the Great Depression. Few buildings were constructed during these economically trying times, and garish, opulent designs seemed especially inappropriate. During and after World War II, public taste and necessity shifted popular architectural trends towards functionality and the modern movement, signifying the end of the Exotic Revival heyday.¹⁹

The Exotic Revival in Los Angeles



Yamashiro, n.d.
(Los Angeles Public Library)

As a relatively young city, Exotic Revival architecture did not arrive in Los Angeles until its second period of popularity during the twentieth century. While still rare, the imaginative environment of Los Angeles nurtured the style, resulting in some of the city's greatest landmarks.

One of the first examples of Exotic Revival architecture in Los Angeles was the opulent, feudal Japanese-inspired estate, Yamashiro ("Castle on the Hill"), completed in 1914. It was designed by architect Franklin M. Small for the eccentric Bernheimer brothers, Adolf and Eugene.²⁰ The Bernheimers were from a wealthy merchant family that imported a number

of dry goods through New York. The brothers were exposed to Asian art, antiques, and silks as they imported goods from Asia to sell stateside, eventually amassing a huge collection of Asian artifacts. In order to house their collection, they built the Yamashiro estate on a twelve-acre site in the Hollywood Hills. The rumor at the time was that hundreds of Asian craftsmen were responsible for its construction. Yamashiro was a private home until the Bernheimers sold it in 1924. It would later be the headquarters of an exclusive social club, and was not accessible to the public until the 1930s.²¹ Yamashiro was listed as LAHCM #921 in 2008 for its architectural and historical significance.

While it was not the first exotic building in Los Angeles, the first to truly capture the collective imagination of Los Angeles was Grauman's Egyptian Theater (LAHCM #584). It opened on October 18, 1922 at the premiere of *Robin Hood* starring Douglas Fairbanks. The theater design was based on that of

¹⁸ Gleye, 120.

¹⁹ Marjorie Ingle, *Mayan Revival Style: Art Deco Mayan Fantasy* (Layton: Utah, Peregrine Smith, 1984), 71-72.

²⁰ Gleye, 106.

²¹ Hadley Meares, "Yamashiro: A Feudal Fortress in the Hollywood Hills," KCET: Lost Landmarks, accessed October 14, 2015, <http://www.kcet.org/socal/departures/columns/lost-landmarks/yamashiro-a-feudal-fortress-in-the-hollywood-hills.html>.

an Egyptian temple—fronted with a long, elaborate forecourt decorated with Egyptian murals, it hardly appeared to be a movie theater at all, and it had Angelenos transfixed.²²



*Moviegoers at the Robin Hood premiere, 1922
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

The architectural firm of Meyer & Holler was responsible for the glamorous and outlandish Egyptian Theater. It is possible that they were influenced by archaeological discoveries in Egypt, but they may have looked closer to home for inspiration. Early Hollywood films were especially preoccupied with faraway lands, forgotten cities, and exotic landscapes. For example, D.W. Griffith constructed a massive set—the largest ever built at that time—featuring an amalgamation of architectural elements loosely based on the Persian and Babylonian empires for his infamous three-hour film, *Intolerance*. The set, in all its grandeur, remained for years along Sunset

Boulevard.²³

Meyer & Holler delighted the movie-going crowd again in 1927 with the completion of Grauman's Chinese Theater (LAHCM #55), a whimsical temple in the "Chippendale Chinese" style. The design was not necessarily accurate to Chinese architecture, but rather was an extravagant reimagining of an English interpretation. The theater was highly ornamented, down to the dragon-shaped water faucets in the lavatories. Another of Los Angeles' fanciful theaters was Morgan, Walls & Clements' Mayan Theater (LAHCM #460), also completed in 1927.²⁴ Smaller-scale, residential buildings with elements of Exotic Revival styles began to spring up across the city in reaction to these types of buildings, concurrent with the fantasy of Period Revival styles that drew its inspiration anywhere from French castles and English fairytales.

The synthesis of several different styles, including Exotic Revival, resulted in some of the most iconic and unique buildings in the city. John Parkinson, Albert C. Martin, and John C. Austin were awarded the commission for Los Angeles City Hall (LAHCM #150) in 1925. They collaborated on the design: Parkinson spearheaded the architectural concept, Martin was responsible for structural engineering, and Austin created the working drawings and managed the project. Architect Austin



*Grauman's Chinese Theatre, 1927
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

²² Gleye, 106.

²³ The *Intolerance* set also served as the larger-than-life inspiration for the Hollywood & Highland tourist hub and shopping center that was completed in 2001, just a few blocks away from the original; Gleye, 106.

²⁴ Gleye, 106.

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Whittlesey was retained for the interior design. The design intent for the building was to combine many different styles to create a “hybrid” that did not necessarily correspond with an existing style or era.²⁵ Completing the project in 1928, the architects blended elements of the classical and exotic; the building features monumental columns and high-style symmetry as well as a lavish, Byzantine-inspired rotunda at the third floor, and a stepped “ziggurat” at its apex, mimicking the overall form of an Egyptian obelisk.

Another downtown Los Angeles landmark is the Los Angeles Central Library (LAHCM #46). Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue began the design for the library in 1921; after he passed away in 1924, Carleton Winslow supervised its completion. Like City Hall, the library is a composite of classical and exotic



*Los Angeles Central Library, n.d.
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

elements—including those derived from Moorish/Islamic, Egyptian, Byzantine, and Roman architecture—that resulted in a building that is both monumental and symbolic. The building is centralized around a Byzantine Revival rotunda and topped by a pyramidal shape clad in an intricate mosaic. The exterior is embellished with sculptures of symbolic figures, some of whom are represented as Greeks or Egyptians, and the grounds that surround it referenced those in the Mediterranean. Despite the wide range of influences, the various styles were integrated into the design in a formal, disciplined way, creating an aesthetic that was simultaneously new

and singular, while evoking a sense of the traditional.²⁶

The exuberance of the Exotic Revival was possible because it had no basis in architectural dogma. It was not bound by tenets or theories, and it did not come about through necessity, academic exploration, or as a reaction to what came before it. Exotic Revival was pure fantasy and expression, a new level of creativity and imagination that was both embraced and allowed to blossom in one of the most architecturally diverse periods in the history of Los Angeles.²⁷

²⁵ “Los Angeles City Hall,” Los Angeles Conservancy, accessed October 14, 2015, <https://www.laconservancy.org/locations/los-angeles-city-hall>.

²⁶ Richard Oliver, *Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), 226-234; “Los Angeles Central Library,” Los Angeles Conservancy, accessed October 14, 2015, <https://www.laconservancy.org/locations/los-angeles-central-library>.

²⁷ Gleye, 109.

SUB-THEMES ASSOCIATED WITH EXOTIC REVIVAL, 1900-1980

Sub-theme: Mayan Revival, 1910-1950

Mayan Revival is an architectural style that drew its inspiration from pre-Columbian, Mesoamerican sites constructed by the ancient Maya. The Maya inhabited the Yucatan Peninsula, including areas of Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador. Separate Maya “cities” in this region were interrelated through a common language, calendar, and ritual practices.²⁸



*Cordova Hotel, n.d.
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

The ancient civilization emerged in approximately 400 BC and its height, referred to as the Classic Period, was between 250 AD and 900 AD.²⁹

Like many aesthetic movements, pre-Columbian art and architecture first captured the public’s imagination at major expositions. Maya art and architecture, including partial reconstructions of several Maya buildings, were displayed prominently at the 1893 World Columbian Exposition in Chicago; exhibits at the 1900 Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo and the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St.

Louis would follow.³⁰ Interest in the culture grew, fueled by the discoveries made in the emerging academic discipline of archaeology. Books and articles on the subject were published, especially in popular magazines such as *National Geographic*, and this fascination was one of several factors that contributed to the development of the Mayan Revival style in the early twentieth century.³¹ During this time, American artists and architects were eager to distance themselves from their European counterparts and to establish a distinctly American style to set themselves apart.³² To achieve this, many architects suggested that rather than turning to European, Old World precedent for inspiration, American architects should reference these indigenous cultures that were rooted in American soil.³³

²⁸ The terms “Maya” and “Mayan” are not used interchangeably. According to the Open School of Ethnography and Anthropology, “Maya” is the appropriate adjective when describing the culture, calendar, society, peoples, and so on. The word “Mayan” is only correct when describing the language that the Maya speak. There is one exception to this rule, however: the term “Maya language” refers to one very specific Mayan dialect. “Maya or Mayans? Comment on Correct Terminology and Spellings,” The Open School of Ethnography and Anthropology, accessed October 12, 2015, http://www.osea-cite.org/program/maya_or_mayans.php.

Author Marjorie Ingle acknowledges that the term “Mayan Revival” is technically incorrect, but that the term has become a generalized reference to many pre-Columbian or Mesoamerican influences, including the Mayas, Aztecs, Toltecs, and Mixtecs, and chose to continue using the term to describe the architecture for the sake of brevity and consistency. Ingle, vi.

²⁹ Phillips, 24-25.

³⁰ Gebhard, 61.

³¹ Gebhard, 62-63.

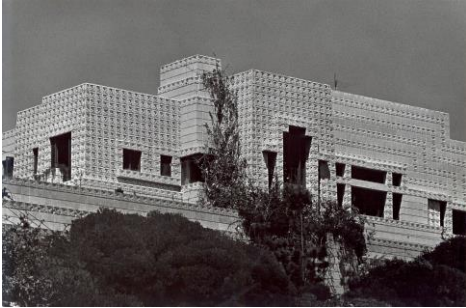
³² Gebhard, 65.

³³ Phillips, 22.

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Architects like Alfred Bossom and Francisco Mújica promoted the use of these motifs,³⁴ but one of the most vocal proponents for the use of Maya imagery in American architecture was the eccentric English-born architect, Robert Stacy-Judd. After immigrating to Canada and eventually settling in California, he became fascinated by the culture that would go on to impact his life's work. He wrote dozens of articles for magazines and newspapers worldwide, promoting proposed projects using the style. He published several books on the ancient culture and sent dramatic press releases home to America from his expeditions to Mexico.³⁵



Ennis House, n.d.
(Los Angeles Conservancy Archives)

One of the earliest buildings in the United States to incorporate Maya imagery was the Pan-American Union Building in Washington, D.C. The building, designed by Paul Cret and Albert Kelsey, was completed in 1910. Pre-Columbian decorative bands and motifs, likely inspired by Kelsey's travels to the Yucatan peninsula, were added to the otherwise classically-styled building, garden, and patio.³⁶ In Los Angeles, the four-story Cordova Hotel was completed in 1912. Designed by the architectural firm of Otto H. Neher and Chauncy F. Skilling, the two street-facing facades of the since-demolished hotel were adorned with geometric detailing and imagery of pre-Columbian masks.³⁷

The trend continued to gather momentum during the 1920s, concentrated primarily in large cities like New York and Chicago, but peaked in Southern California, where Latin American influences were especially fashionable and relevant.³⁸ Many aspects of pre-Columbian architecture, such as geometric ornament, abstracted representations in cut relief, blocky massing, and stepped forms, provided inspiration for the more mainstream Art Deco aesthetic, where they were stylized and incorporated with machine-age motifs.³⁹ The Art Deco movement was also concerned with establishing a new American aesthetic, in line with the theories presented by architects like Bossom, Mújica, and Stacy-Judd.⁴⁰

The most prominent architects to work in the Mayan Revival style were Frank Lloyd Wright and his son Lloyd Wright, both of whom practiced in Los Angeles. The elder Wright first began to abstract and incorporate Maya imagery into his work in 1915 with the design for the A.D. German Warehouse in Wisconsin.⁴¹ This experimentation would go on to be the basis for his early work in Southern California, beginning with Aline Barnsdall's Hollyhock House (LAHCM #12) in Hollywood, which was completed in

³⁴ Phillips, 14.

³⁵ Ingle, 24-28.

³⁶ Gebhard, 67-68.

³⁷ Gebhard, 67

³⁸ Phillips, 15-16

³⁹ Gleye, 120.

⁴⁰ Gleye, 121.

⁴¹ Gebhard, 73.

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1921.⁴² After the Hollyhock House was completed, Wright discovered that pre-cast, hollow concrete blocks could be reinforced with steel. He felt that the reinforced blocks were not only sturdy enough to serve as the structural system, but could be richly textured or perforated with pre-Columbian inspired patterns. Further exploring Maya elements, he applied this new material to several houses, including the 1923 Storer House (LAHCM #96) in Los Angeles and the 1923 Millard House in Pasadena. One of the best-known—and perhaps the most successful—examples of residential Mayan Revival architecture is Wright’s 1924 Ennis-Brown House (LAHCM #149). Wright used the same textured concrete block throughout the interior and exterior of the stepped, monolithic design, which was perched on top of a steep slope to further the effect of an ancient and imposing Maya temple.⁴³

Frank Lloyd Wright’s son, Lloyd Wright, moved to Los Angeles around 1915 to continue his landscape architecture career, and to help supervise the construction of some of his father’s projects. However, by 1920, the younger Wright’s career transitioned away from landscape to architectural design. His work often had an emphasis on the interrelationship between natural and man-made spaces. His stylized designs for the 1926 Sowden House (LAHCM #762), the 1928 Samuel-Navarro House (LAHCM #130), and his own home in West Hollywood—also completed in 1928—have dramatic, Maya-inspired exteriors.⁴⁴



*Morgan, Walls & Clements' Mayan Theater, 1938
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

Another notable example of the style in Los Angeles is downtown’s Mayan Theater (LAHCM #460). Designed by Morgan, Walls & Clements with the assistance of Francisco Cornejo, the theater received mixed reviews upon its completion. While some found it “grotesque,” others thought it to be a welcome departure from the ubiquitous Classical and Renaissance styles of the era. The design for the theater was not based on an existing Maya structure. Instead, the firm designed the building to meet contemporary specifications, then divided it into “modules,” to which Cornejo applied Maya ornamentation.

The theater is extremely ornate, with both the interior and exterior featuring extensive Maya decorative motifs, including serpents, figures, and geometric designs.⁴⁵

While Stacy-Judd created renderings for dozens of proposed projects using the Mayan Revival style, few were ever built; however, one of the latest examples of the style in Los Angeles is Stacy-Judd’s Masonic Temple in North Hollywood, which was designed in 1948 and completed in 1951. Considered to be one of his most successful designs, it is more understated and logical than his previous work, including the infamously flamboyant 1925 Aztec Hotel in Monrovia.⁴⁶

⁴² Gebhard, 73.

⁴³ Gleye, 141.

⁴⁴ Gleye, 141.

⁴⁵ Ingle, 46.

⁴⁶ Ingle, 70.

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Summary Statement of

Significance: A resource evaluated under this sub-theme is significant in the area of architecture as an excellent example of the Mayan Revival style and exhibits quality of design through distinctive features.

Period of Significance: 1910-1950

Period of Significance

Justification: The period of significance encompasses the known examples of Mayan Revival architecture in Los Angeles, which date from 1912 to 1948. The majority of examples were constructed during the 1920s when the public was in the "mood" for the exotic. However, one of the primary proponents of the style, Robert Stacy-Judd, continued to practice past World War II.

Geographic Location: Although rare, Mayan Revival style architecture may be found citywide.

Area(s) of Significance: Architecture

Criteria: NR: C CR: 3 Local: 3

Associated Property Types: Residential - Single-Family Residence
Commercial - Theater
Institutional - Lodge
Institutional - Infrastructure - Tunnel

Property Type Description: Associated property types in Los Angeles are generally single-family residential buildings, but may also include commercial or institutional examples such as theaters and lodges.

Property Type Significance: Resources significant under this sub-theme are excellent examples of the Mayan Revival style of architecture in Los Angeles.

Eligibility Standards:

- Exhibits quality of design through distinctive features
- Is an excellent example of Mayan Revival architecture
- Was constructed during the period of significance

Character Defining / Associative Features:

- Retains most of the essential character-defining features from the period of significance
- Corbelled arches and/or vaults
- High relief decor
- Large columns
- Mayan motifs (including Mayan gods and mythical creatures and frequent illustrations of snakes)
- Mosaics
- Open courtyards or quadrangles
- Pyramids (stepped or smooth-sided)
- Rectilinear plan
- Steep walls and/or staircases
- Stone/concrete masonry
- Stucco decorations

Integrity Considerations:

- Should retain integrity of Design, Workmanship, Materials, and Feeling

Sub-theme: Egyptian Revival, 1920-1940

The first phase of Egyptian Revival architecture in the United States took place during the nineteenth century. Popular interest in Egyptian civilization grew following Napoleon’s campaigns in Egypt between 1798 and 1802. Upper and middle class Americans were introduced to the culture through museum exhibits, lectures, popular literature, and even public “mummy unwrappings,” where an ancient Egyptian mummy was unwrapped both for entertainment and research purposes.⁴⁷



*King Tut's Funerary Mask at LACMA in 1978
(Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection)*

It was also during this time that America was under fire from Old World critics, such as writers Charles Dickens and Frances Trollope, for its lack of perceived culture and refinement, and as a relatively young country, the lack of a “meaningful past.” Because of this, the country’s elite sought to create a sort of national heritage based on the great civilizations from antiquity.⁴⁸ Alongside Greek and Roman influences, Egyptian culture and forms—especially the obelisk—were incorporated into public monuments. One of the most famous examples is the Washington Monument.⁴⁹ The commemorative use of Egyptian motifs progressed towards personal memorials. A culture with such elaborate funerary practices and reverence for the dead was a natural source of inspiration for commemorative monuments. One of the earliest examples of

this Egyptian influence on the design of American cemeteries was the entry gate to Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The cemetery was designed largely by Henry Alexander Scammell Dearborn with assistance from Jacob Bigelow. Bigelow was a physician who believed that crowded cemeteries in urban centers promoted the spread of disease, and developed the idea of a landscaped, rural cemetery outside the city limits. Bigelow’s cemetery inspired a new phase of cemetery design, and its gate inspired an American trend of adapting Egyptian motifs, such as obelisks, pyramids, winged orbs, and mastabas, into funerary architecture.⁵⁰

While the incorporation of Egyptian imagery into cemetery markers and monuments continued uninterrupted throughout the nineteenth century, general interest in the culture and its use in architecture waned at times, especially with the rising popularity of medieval Gothic Revival beginning around 1850.⁵¹ However, a second wave of “Egyptomania” was brought on by the introduction of cinema and the development of mass consumer culture. Where previously learning about ancient Egyptian civilization was only accessible to the upper classes, who might have the income or leisure time

⁴⁷ Giguere, 17-18.

⁴⁸ Giguere, 2.

⁴⁹ Giguere, 7.

⁵⁰ “Mount Auburn Cemetery,” National Park Service: Massachusetts Conservation, accessed October 14, 2015, http://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/massachusetts_conservation/mount_auburn.html; Giguere, 70.

⁵¹ Giguere, 3.

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to attend a lecture or visit a museum, popular films and novels introduced an entirely new group of people to the idea of ancient Egypt.⁵² Another spike in interest immediately followed Dr. Howard Carter's exhilarating discovery of King Tutankhamun's tomb outside of Luxor in 1922.⁵³



*Grauman's Egyptian Theater Courtyard, c. 1923
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

To go hand in hand with popular films of the day, Egyptian Revival architecture was perfectly suited for the new movie theater building type, creating spectacular and imaginative exteriors. One of the earliest and most famous of these Egyptian movie houses in the United States—actually completed just weeks before Carter's discovery—was Grauman's Egyptian Theater in Hollywood (LAHCM #584).⁵⁴ The theater was designed by the Los Angeles firm of Meyer & Holler, who were thought to have been inspired by movies like D.W. Griffith's *Intolerance*.⁵⁵

Much like Mayan Revival, Egyptian Revival also lent itself well to the emerging Art Deco movement, and may have been a source inspiration for some Art Deco elements such the use of vibrant color, stepped forms, abstracted nature motifs, and geometrical ornament.⁵⁶ The Egyptian Revival style was being applied to a much wider variety of buildings than during the first iteration in the nineteenth century. It was seen in everything from zoos to department stores, rather than being restricted to memorials and monuments.⁵⁷ In Los Angeles, the style was even applied to a scattering of residential properties including apartment buildings, bungalow courts, and single-family residences, but would never become pervasive.⁵⁸

One of the only known architects to repeatedly use the style was John Manley (J.M.) Close. Close was primarily active between 1910 and 1935, designing and constructing apartments and bungalow courts. He was very in tune with what was popular and exotic, and would design his residential buildings based on the latest trends. Inspired by the archaeological discoveries in Egypt, Close designed at least four Egyptian Revival style apartment buildings, including the Karnak Apartments (1925) and the Ahmed Apartments (1926) in Hollywood, the Osiris Apartments (1928) in Westlake, and a fourth apartment building in Hollywood that was completed in 1930.⁵⁹ With its flat roofs and solid walls with small window

⁵² Giguere, 33.

⁵³ Giguere, 210.

⁵⁴ Giguere, 210.

⁵⁵ Gleye, 106.

⁵⁶ James Stevens Curl, *The Egyptian Revival* (London: George Allen & Unwin Publishers Ltd., 1982), 200.

⁵⁷ Giguere, 237.

⁵⁸ Gleye, 106.

⁵⁹ R. Daniel Foster, "Osiris Apartments: A bit of Egypt in L.A.," July 6, 2011, Los Angeles Times: L.A. at Home, accessed September 28, 2015, http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/home_blog/2011/07/osiris-apartments-a-bit-of-egypt-in-westlake.html; R. Daniel Foster, "Karnak Apartments: Live like an Egyptian," June 22, 2011, Los Angeles Times, L.A. at Home, accessed September 28, 2015, http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/home_blog/2011/06/karnak-

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openings, the Egyptian Revival style was neither practical nor functional for residential buildings, and thus did not have a wide appeal, contributing to its decline in popularity.⁶⁰

Summary Statement of

Significance: A resource evaluated under this sub-theme is significant in the area of architecture as an excellent example of the Egyptian Revival style and exhibits quality of design through distinctive features.

Period of Significance: 1920-1960

Period of Significance

Justification: The period of significance encompasses the known examples of Egyptian Revival architecture in Los Angeles, which date from 1919 to 1961. The majority of examples were constructed during the 1920s when the public was in the "mood" for the exotic. The style was never widespread, and its popularity began to wane during the 1930s when the public became more focused on the economy and modernity.

Geographic Location: Although rare, Egyptian Revival style architecture may be found citywide.

Area(s) of Significance: Architecture

Criteria: NR: C CR: 3 Local: 3

Associated Property Types: Associated property types vary, but include residential, commercial, and institutional examples.

Residential - Single-Family and Multi-Family Residence
Commercial - Theater
Institutional - Church and Lodge

Property Type Description: Associated property types are predominately residential buildings, though the Egyptian Revival style was also used for institutional buildings, and less frequently, commercial buildings. Most residential buildings are multi-family residences, but single-family residential examples exist as well.

apartments-hollywood.html; R. Daniel Foster, "Ahmed Apartments: Call the Style Pyramid Modern," June 29, 2011, Los Angeles Times: L.A. at Home, accessed September 28, 2015, http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/home_blog/2011/06/ahmed-apartments-hollywood.html.

⁶⁰ Phillips, 70.

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Property Type Significance: Resources significant under this sub-theme are excellent examples of the Egyptian Revival style of architecture in Los Angeles.

Eligibility Standards:

- Exhibits quality of design through distinctive features
- Is an excellent example of Egyptian Revival architecture
- Was constructed during the period of significance

Character Defining / Associative Features:

- Retains most of the essential character-defining features from the period of significance
- Monolithic massive, solid walls
- Emphasized geometrical ornamentation
- Battered walls
- Free-standing pillars
- Thick columns or pilasters with Lotus/Papyrus capitals
- Flat, low-pitched roof
- Cavetto cornice (Egyptian gorge)
- Large window spaces
- Corbelled openings
- Rolled moldings (often decorated with wrapped ribbon lineation)
- Courtyards
- Egyptian decorative motifs (hieroglyphics, scarab, pharaoh, winged orb, palm decor, cobras/lotus)
- Obelisks
- Pyramids (stepped or smooth-sided)
- Statuary

Integrity Considerations:

- Should retain integrity of Design, Workmanship, Materials, and Feeling

Sub-theme: Byzantine Revival, 1926-1965

The term “Byzantine” refers to the eastern portions of the Roman Empire; the architectural style that was developed in these areas by late Romans and early Christians in the fifth century would go on to influence church building in countries like Greece and Italy, among others, for thousands of years.⁶¹ In the mid-nineteenth century, a British group called the Palestine Exploration Fund began to investigate parts of ancient Israel and the eastern Mediterranean, sparking a series of discoveries that would influence modern synagogue architecture. One such example, the ancient Byzantine synagogue at Bet Alfa that was discovered in the mid-1920s, inspired the construction of Byzantine Revival synagogues across America. The use of this style for synagogues had historical precedent and symbolism, whereas stylistic choices were previously made based on preference or popularity.⁶²

Byzantine Revival is a fairly rare architectural style for Los Angeles; it is almost exclusively seen in religious resources associated with Eastern European and Middle Eastern faiths. The most prominent examples of the style in Los Angeles are the Wilshire Boulevard Temple (LAHCM #116) and the Saint Sophia Greek Orthodox Cathedral (LAHCM #120).



*Wilshire Boulevard Temple, c. 1940
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

The Wilshire Boulevard Temple was completed in 1929 for the B’nai B’rith congregation. Congregation B’nai B’rith, made up of about forty families, established their first Los Angeles temple in 1873. The congregation continued to grow into the twentieth century, organizing and fostering other community efforts along the way, such as a Jewish cemetery, women’s and youth groups, and affiliating themselves with the Union of Hebrew Congregations. In 1922, they broke ground on their third synagogue at the corner of Wilshire and Hobart Boulevards.⁶³ Funded in part by powerful film industry moguls, the Wilshire Boulevard

Temple was designed in the Byzantine Revival style by Abraham M. Edelman, S. Tilden Norton, and David C. Allison.⁶⁴ The temple was built by the Herbert M. Baruch Corporation and features murals by Hugo Ballin. Edelman, Norton, Baruch, and Ballin were among the most prominent Jewish architects, builders, and artists working in Los Angeles during the early part of the twentieth century, and the temple was the highlight of their careers.

⁶¹ Francis D.K. Ching, *A Visual Dictionary of Architecture* (Hoboken: Wiley and Sons, 1996), 131.

⁶² Stolzman and Stolzman, 45.

⁶³ “Our History,” Wilshire Boulevard Temple, accessed October 5, 2015, <http://www.wbtla.org/pages/the-temple-pages/our-history>.

⁶⁴ Gebhard and Winter, 223.

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The temple was dedicated in 1929, and its monumental domed roof quickly became a Los Angeles landmark. In addition to Ballin's murals, the interior features extensive black marble and rare wood, inlaid gold, and intricate mosaics. In 1937, the name of the congregation was changed from Congregation B'nai B'rith to Wilshire Boulevard Temple, which it still goes by today.⁶⁵



*Saint Sophia Greek Orthodox Cathedral, n.d.
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

Construction on the Saint Sophia Greek Orthodox Cathedral began in 1951 for the Los Angeles Greek Community. The Los Angeles Greek Community was a religious group made up of Greek immigrants who settled in the city in the twentieth century. By 1890, a few hundred Greeks had settled in the area. This population was made up primarily of single men, who made their livings doing labor intensive work like building railroads, laying utility lines, selling produce and flowers, or working in hotels and restaurants.

In 1908, the Los Angeles Greek Community was incorporated. Membership was open to adult males of Greek birth or parentage, who together aspired to create a place of Greek Orthodox worship, form a program to teach new generations of children the Greek language, and establish other community necessities, such as a Greek Orthodox cemetery. Through fundraising and membership dues, the community was able to build their first church in 1912 on San Julian Street, which is no longer extant. As the congregation grew and Greek Orthodox priests rose in the ranks of the California diocese, construction began on the Sophia Cathedral.⁶⁶

The cathedral was designed by the architectural firm of Walker, Kalionzes & Klingerman. The firm was formed in 1941 and was made up of Raymond Walker, Gus Kalionzes, and Charles Arthur Klingerman.⁶⁷ Walker was best known for his work with his earlier partner, Percy Eisen, as the firm of Walker & Eisen; the last major project before his retirement was Saint Sophia.⁶⁸ The building has a highly ornamented interior and is characterized by its cruciform (cross-shaped) plan, domed roofs, and elaborate decoration featuring extensive inlaid gold and murals.

Fully realized examples of the style like the Wilshire Boulevard Temple and the Saint Sophia Greek Orthodox Cathedral are few and far between. However, Byzantine-inspired features and details such as domed roofs and mosaic murals can be seen in institutional and commercial buildings.

⁶⁵ "Our History."

⁶⁶ "History of the Greek Community of Los Angeles."

⁶⁷ "Famed L.A. Architect Albert R. Walker Dies: Designed Many of Southland's Best Known Business, Theater Buildings," *Los Angeles Times*, September 18, 1958, B1; "Gus Kalionzes, 75; Noted L.A. Architect," *Los Angeles Times*, September 15, 1984, D7.

⁶⁸ "Famed L.A. Architect Albert R. Walker Dies."

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Summary Statement of

Significance: A resource evaluated under this sub-theme is significant in the area of architecture as an excellent example of the Byzantine Revival style and exhibits quality of design through distinctive features.

Period of Significance: 1925-1965

Period of Significance

Justification: The period of significance encompasses the known examples of Byzantine Revival architecture in Los Angeles, which date from 1928 to 1964. The style was never widespread, but endured as a popular choice for religious groups that trace their origins to Eastern Europe or the Middle East.

Geographic Location: Although rare, Byzantine Revival style architecture may be found citywide.

Area(s) of Significance: Architecture

Criteria: NR: C CR: 3 Local: 3

Associated Property Types: Commercial – Office Building
Institutional - Church and Temple

Property Type Description: Associated properties are almost exclusively religious buildings; however, Byzantine Revival influences can be seen in the design of other institutional buildings and commercial buildings.

Property Type Significance: Resources significant under this sub-theme are excellent examples of the Byzantine Revival style of architecture in Los Angeles.

Eligibility Standards:

- Exhibits quality of design through distinctive features
- Is an excellent example of Byzantine Revival architecture
- Was constructed during the period of significance

Character Defining / Associative Features:

- Retains most of the essential character-defining features from the period of significance
- Arches

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- Colonnades
- Cruciform plan
- Decorative brick and stonework
- Domed roofs using squinch or pendentive devices
- Elaborate decoration (marble columns and inlay, mosaics, inlaid stone pavements, inlaid gold)
- Frequent use of angular bays
- Onion domes
- Symmetrical emphasis

Integrity Considerations:

- Should retain integrity of Design, Workmanship, Materials, and Feeling

Sub-theme: Moorish Revival, 1895-1940

Like many Exotic Revival styles, Moorish Revival is a fairly rare architectural style for Los Angeles. It was sometimes applied to large-scale institutional or commercial buildings, but can also be seen—usually as ornament—on residential property types. The term “Moor” refers to the North African Muslims who invaded Spain in the eighth century and occupied the region until 1492; Moorish architecture is seen in



*Alhambra Palace, 2007
(UNESCO World Heritage)*

North Africa and the areas of Spain that they occupied, typically in the form of large mosques and fortress-like palaces.⁶⁹ One of the prime examples of Moorish architecture dating from their occupation in Spain is the Alhambra. The Alhambra is a medieval, Islamic palace perched high on a plateau overlooking the city of Granada. The palace began in the ninth century as a small fortress before it was expanded and converted to a royal residence by a succession of Moorish rulers. It features extensive ornament including muqarnas, round-headed arches, mosaic tilework, carved stone, engraved bronze, and stained glass.⁷⁰

As the Spanish began to establish missions throughout the state of California during the eighteenth century, the decorative elements applied to the buildings themselves, such as geometric ornament, arches, and bulbous domes, were heavily influenced by the Moorish architecture of Spain, like the Alhambra.⁷¹ The style was also being revived in Europe in the early nineteenth century as European architects began to apply the style to large civic buildings. It was popularized in America by the Crystal Palace, constructed for the New York World’s Fair in 1853. The majestic building featured a prominent dome, minarets, tracery, and arabesques.⁷²



*Mooers and Booth Residences, n.d.
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

The style was widely used for synagogues in America and Europe during the nineteenth century, when colonialism and imperialism exposed more architects to non-Western building forms and new cultures. The Moorish Revival style in particular resonated with the Jewish community in Europe and was almost universally favored. While the style was historically relevant for the Sephardic Jews

⁶⁹ Ching, 131.

⁷⁰ Robert Hillenbrand, *Islamic Architecture: Form, Function and Meaning* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 452-456.

⁷¹ Gleye, 106-107.

⁷² Stolzman and Stolzman, 46.

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from Spain, Portugal, North Africa, and the Middle East, it was the Ashkenazi Jews of Eastern Europe that most enthusiastically embraced Moorish Revival. In a way, the style was able to convey different aspects of the Jewish social experience. The use of Eastern influences served as a proud allusion to their



Cline Residence and Museum, n.d.
(HistoricPlacesLA)

origin that set them apart. At the same time, the use of the fashionable style at the height of its popularity served as a “bridge” between their heritage and mainstream American society.⁷³

During the late nineteenth century, the architecture of residential buildings in Los Angeles began to shift from the vernacular cottages of the first American settlers who arrived after statehood to Late Victorian era houses that were more elaborate. Some of these houses display Moorish influences in their design, the most notable being the Frederick Mitchell Mooers House (LAHCM #45) and the Cline Residence and Museum (LAHCM #854). The Frederick Mitchell Mooers House in the Westlake area was named for its historically significant third owner and completed in 1894. It is an excellent example

of a Queen Anne residence featuring Gothic and Moorish Revival details; the Moorish influence is most clearly seen in the bulbous roof dome. The house was designated as LAHCM #45 in 1967 for its architecture and association with Mooers, who discovered the famous Yellow Aster gold mine in Kern County.⁷⁴ The Charles B. Booth Residence (LAHCM #491) next door also features a prominent, Moorish-inspired roof dome. The Cline Residence and Museum in the Arlington Heights area was constructed in 1903 for the Clines, a family that included prominent members of Los Angeles government and business. The house was designed by the firm of Dennis & Farwell and features intricate Moorish Revival tracery.⁷⁵

After a lull, the style re-emerged in the 1920s. This second wave was more imaginative and whimsical, and may have been inspired by the fantastical sets of popular films like *The Thief of Bagdad* (1924).⁷⁶ In the mid-1920s, aviation pioneer Glen Curtiss developed an entire town in Opa Locka, Florida with an *Arabian Nights* theme. Over one hundred Moorish Revival buildings, including a hotel, a zoo, and a train station, lined streets with names like Sharazad [sic] Boulevard, Ali Baba Avenue, and Aladdin Street.⁷⁷ In

⁷³ Stolzman and Stolzman, 45-46.

⁷⁴ Dr. Robert W. Winter, “National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Frederick Mitchell Mooers House,” 1975.

⁷⁵ The summary statement of significance for the Cline Residence in the Los Angeles Historic Resources Inventory (HistoricPlacesLA.org) suggests that Mission Revival is the more correct style for the house, rather than Moorish Revival. However, as discussed above, the Spanish Missions that inspired the Mission Revival style were imitating Moorish architecture in Spain, which would suggest that Moorish Revival is also an appropriate descriptor; “Motion: Cline Residence and Museum,” City of Los Angeles Cultural Heritage Commission Council File 06-0089, 2006.

⁷⁶ Gleye, 108.

⁷⁷ “City of Opa-locka History,” Opa-Locka Florida, accessed October 14, 2015, <http://www.opalockafl.gov/index.aspx?NID=229>.

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Los Angeles, a “flurry” of Moorish-inspired residences, including apartment buildings, cropped up during this time period; however, residential examples are particularly rare.⁷⁸ In residential architecture Moorish Revival is usually restricted to the use of features such as domes, arches, tile work or spires, in conjunction with another style, as seen on the Cline Residence and Frederick Mitchel Mooers House. The style was very seldom used to design an entire residence, especially during the twentieth century.⁷⁹



*Shrine Auditorium, 1926
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

The most grandiose example of the style in Los Angeles is the Shrine Auditorium (LAHCM #139), completed in 1926. The Al Malaikah Shriners had the building constructed as their headquarters, replacing an earlier building that was destroyed by fire. The Shriners are a Masonic fraternity originally called the Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine. Although the group is not connected to Islam, their buildings are often inspired by Islamic architecture, including the Moorish Revival. The huge auditorium—the largest in the world for a time—is ornamented with dramatic Moorish arches and domes.⁸⁰ Shrine Auditorium was designed by John C. Austin and Abraham M. Edelman, with interiors designed by G. Albert Lansburgh.⁸¹ John C. Austin was born near Oxfordshire, England, in 1870. He moved to San Francisco in 1890 before settling in Los Angeles in 1895. Here, he worked as an architect and engineer and became a prominent member of society. Austin’s impressive body of work also

includes Los Angeles City Hall and the Hollywood Bowl.⁸² Lansburgh began his career as a draftsman under Bernard Maybeck between 1894 and 1896, later attending the École des Beaux Arts where he graduated with honors.⁸³ He had a decades-long career, during which he was considered one of the preeminent theater architects in America. He was known for his work in major metropolitan cities across the country, including San Francisco, Chicago, and New York. In addition to the Shrine Auditorium, Lansburgh also designed the Orpheum Theater and the Pacific Theater, and collaborated with Morgan Walls & Clements on the El Capitan Theater, designing the elaborate interior.⁸⁴ Even today, Lansburgh’s works are some of the most iconic buildings in Los Angeles.

⁷⁸ Gleye, 108.

⁷⁹ Shirley Maxwell and James C. Massey, “Exotic Revivals from the Middle East: The Egyptian and Moorish Influences on American House Styles,” *Old House Journal* 22, No. 1 (1994): 44.

⁸⁰ Gleye, 108.

⁸¹ “Shrine Auditorium,” The Los Angeles Conservancy, accessed October 14, 2015, <https://www.laconservancy.org/locations/shrine-auditorium>.

⁸² “Finding Aid for the John C. Austin Papers, UCLA Special Collections: Charles E. Young Research Library,” Online Archive of California, accessed October 14, 2015, <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt838nc0xp/>.

⁸³ Suzanne Tarbell Cooper, Amy Ronnebeck Hall, and Mark Wanamaker, *Theaters in Los Angeles* (Chicago: Arcadia Publishing, 2008), 15-17.

⁸⁴ “Shrine Auditorium”; “Genius of Architect Revealed,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 15, 1926, A10.

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Context: Architecture and Engineering; Theme: Exotic Revival, 1900-1980

Summary Statement of

Significance: A resource evaluated under this sub-theme is significant in the area of architecture as an excellent example of the Moorish Revival style and exhibits quality of design through distinctive features.

Period of Significance: 1895-1940

Period of Significance

Justification: Even though fully realized examples of the Moorish Revival style are rare, its influences can be seen in the design of Queen Anne as well as Spanish Colonial Revival architecture in Los Angeles. The style was most popular during the 1920s when the expanding influence of styles inspired by the Mediterranean region was increasingly apparent in Los Angeles.

Geographic Location: Although rare, Moorish Revival style architecture may be found citywide.

Area(s) of Significance: Architecture

Criteria: NR: C CR: 3 Local: 3

Associated Property Types: Residential – Single-Family Residences
Institutional - Auditorium

Property Type Description: Associated property types are almost exclusively residential buildings, mostly two-story single-family residences. However, the style was also applied to auditoriums, which were well suited to imaginative architecture.

Property Type Significance: Resources significant under this sub-theme are excellent examples of the Moorish Revival style of architecture in Los Angeles.

Eligibility Standards:

- Exhibits quality of design through distinctive features
- Is an excellent example of Moorish Revival architecture
- Was constructed during the period of significance

Character Defining / Associative Features:

- Retains most of the essential character-defining features from the period of significance
- Courtyards
- Arches (horseshoes, crenellated, lancet, ogee) at door and window openings
- Domes
- Minarets
- Mosaic tile trim
- Muqarnas
- Stone and wood carving ornamentation with geometric and floral motifs
- Stucco exterior
- Tile cladding
- Windows with decorative crowns or grillwork
- Voussoir entrance surrounds

Integrity Considerations:

- Should retain integrity of Design, Workmanship, Materials, and Feeling

Sub-theme: East Asian Eclectic, 1920-1980

The narrative for this theme is in process as part of the Asian American historic context currently in development and will be added at a later date.

Summary Statement of

Significance: A resource evaluated under this sub-theme is significant in the area of architecture as an excellent example of the East Asian Eclectic style and exhibits quality of design through distinctive features.

Period of Significance: 1920 - 1980

Period of Significance

Justification: East Asian Eclectic architecture, a derivative and referential style that borrowed forms and ornament directly from ancient buildings in East Asia, emerged as part of the larger Exotic Revival trend in Los Angeles in the 1920s and proliferated on a large (if geographically isolated) scale with the construction of Los Angeles' New Chinatown in 1938. As it developed from the 1950s to 1980s, the East Asian Eclectic style adopted some of the design language of the Modern movement. The distinctive, sweeping upturned eaves and steep roofs of early buildings gave way to decorative upturned beams and eaves supporting flat roofs, creating more linear and boxy forms. East Asian communities continued to use the style to define neighborhoods with ethnic associations.

Geographic Location: Although rare, East Asian Eclectic style architecture may be found citywide, with concentrations in historically ethnic neighborhoods such as Little Tokyo, Chinatown, and Koreatown.

Area(s) of Significance: Architecture

Criteria: NR: C CR: 3 Local: 3

Associated Property Types: Residential – Single-Family Residence
Commercial - Bank, Office Building, Retail Building, and Restaurant
Institutional - Temple

Property Type Description: East Asian Eclectic architecture is particularly utilized in commercial buildings and as ornament on buildings owned by members of the East Asian- American community as it was a way of communicating community identity through design coherence.

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Property Type Significance: Resources significant under this sub-theme are excellent examples of the East Asian Eclectic style of architecture in Los Angeles.

Eligibility Standards:

- Exhibits quality of design through distinctive features
- Is an excellent example of East Asian Eclectic architecture
- Was constructed during the period of significance

Character Defining / Associative Features:

- Retains most of the essential character-defining features from the period of significance
- Carved brackets and rafter tails
- Flat roof with decorative post and beam supporting system
- Ornamented roof ridge
- Brightly colored tile roofs
- Elaborate surrounds on entryways and windows
- Decoratively distributed mullions on windows
- Recessed entryways
- Geometrical patterned window grilles
- For mixed use, may have second floor balconies
- For retail, neon signage in fonts evoking calligraphy
- For Chinese-influenced, may be painted red and gold
- For Chinese-influenced, ornament may include dragon or lion statuary

Integrity Considerations:

- Should retain integrity of Location, Design, Workmanship, Materials, and Feeling

Sub-theme: Tiki/Polynesian, 1940-1960

Some of the earliest appearances of Polynesian and South Seas influence in Western culture occurred during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The artist Paul Gauguin left his life in Paris to live in Tahiti, which was reflected in his late nineteenth century paintings; Picasso was, in turn, inspired both by Gauguin, and the exhibits at the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadero in Paris. Authors Jack London, Charles Warren Stoddard, and Robert Louis Stevenson all wrote extensively about the region, and events like visits to America from Hawaiian royalty and the annexation of Hawaii to the United States in 1898 helped to strengthen the connection.⁸⁵ Around 1915, a major Hawaiian music fad emerged in America, encouraged by the musicians of Tin Pan Alley, lasting through the 1920s. It was also around this time that travel by ship—and later by plane—became more financially feasible for many Americans and Europeans, and lavish trips to the South Seas became increasingly popular for those well off enough to afford it.⁸⁶



*Clifton's Pacific Seas Cafeteria, c. 1945
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

Around the time Prohibition was lifted, a number of bars and restaurants with Tiki or Polynesian themes began to open in Los Angeles. In 1934, a restaurateur from New Orleans named Ernest Beaumont-Gantt opened a small, Polynesian-themed bar in Hollywood that he called Don the Beachcomber.⁸⁷ The bar was an overnight success as word of its tropical music, exotic South Seas décor, and extensive menu of rum drinks got around. It was a favorite spot among Hollywood elite like Humphrey Bogart, Bing Crosby, and Marlene Dietrich.⁸⁸ The bar was so successful that a larger location opened in 1937, and the proprietor even went so far as to legally change his name from

Ernest Beaumont-Gantt to Don Beach.⁸⁹ Don the Beachcomber was followed by the Seven Seas nightclub, opened by Ray Haller. The Seven Seas was known for its nightly artificial “rain” and full Hawaiian revue that attracted the likes of Red Skelton, Jimmy Durante, and Carmen Miranda.⁹⁰ In the meantime, the average Angeleno could get a taste of the South Seas at Clifton's Pacific Seas Cafeteria, which opened in 1931 on South Olive Street. The restaurant featured extensive tropical décor, and an entire wall made to look like a three-dimensional waterfall and mountain of lava. Another restaurateur, Victor Bergeron, made the most the childhood tuberculosis that left him with a wooden leg and adopted

⁸⁵ Kevin Starr, *Golden Dreams: California in the Age of Abundance, 1950-1963* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 49.

⁸⁶ Teitelbaum, 11.

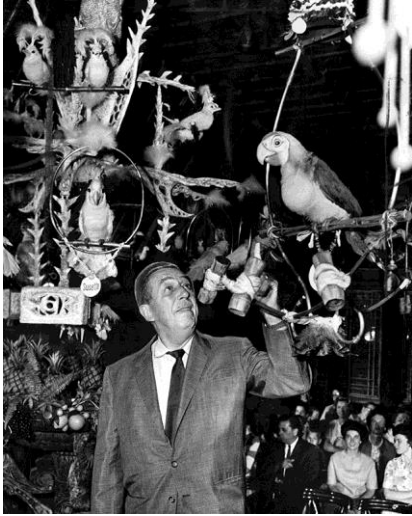
⁸⁷ Starr, 50,

⁸⁸ Gregory Paul Williams, *The Story of Hollywood: An Illustrated History* (BL Press, LLC., 2005), 233.

⁸⁹ Starr, 50.

⁹⁰ Williams, 233-234.

the salty persona of “Trader Vic.” He expanded on Don the Beachcomber’s idea of rum drinks and Tiki décor by introducing exotic cuisine. He opened a chain of Trader Vic’s restaurants and bars throughout California—later expanding internationally—starting with the original in Oakland.⁹¹



Walt Disney at the Tiki Room, 1963
(Los Angeles Public Library)

The Tiki trend might have died out as quickly as it emerged if it weren’t for a series of events following World War II. As millions of GIs returned from the South Pacific, the pop culture that emerged reflected the fact that the area had captured their imaginations. Their fond memories of the islands were romanticized through the popular fictional novel, *Tales from the South Pacific*, which was released in 1948. It won the Pulitzer Prize and in 1949 was adapted into one of the most successful Broadway musicals of all time, *South Pacific*. It was adapted again and released as an equally successful motion picture in 1958.⁹² In 1950, the English translation of another novel, Thor Heyerdahl’s *Kon-Tiki*, hit the bestsellers list. *Kon-Tiki* was Heyerdahl’s account of his three-month voyage from Peru to Polynesia on a raft called Kon-Tiki, studying the cultural link between South America and the

South Seas. The documentary on the same topic won the Academy Award in 1951. Music, films, and television shows with South Pacific themes were incredibly popular, including Elvis Presley’s 1961 film, *Blue Hawaii*. In 1963, the Enchanted Tiki Room at Disneyland first opened, featuring a brightly colored—if not entirely authentic—animatronic show of birds, flowers, chanting warriors, and a tropical “rainstorm.” In addition to the boom of postwar, Tiki-inspired pop culture, Hawaii became the 50th state in the union in 1959. This led to a surge of tourist travel to the islands that was buoyed by the widespread, newfound affluence of the postwar middle class, low-cost plane tickets, and ubiquitous all-inclusive hotel resort packages.⁹³

The idea of Tiki was associated with recreation and relaxation, and it was liberally applied to buildings like restaurants, bars, and bowling alleys. It was an acceptable level of “fantasy” for the average, middle-class American, who enjoyed the ambience and the temporary escape it provided.⁹⁴ However, the style began to fall out of fashion around mid-century and the start of the Vietnam War, as tiki bars began to close while the “political correctness” of the movement came into question.⁹⁵

The style is characterized by distinctive A-frame roofs, the application of wood or thatch on the exteriors, exposed rafters and roof beams, sweeping, curving lines, and South Pacific-inspired imagery

⁹¹ Starr, 50.

⁹² Starr, 50, 51.

⁹³ Starr, 51.

⁹⁴ Starr, 49.

⁹⁵ Teitelbaum, 13.

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such as tiki heads, torches, and birds. The dramatic forms of the Tiki/Polynesian style were parallel to other styles that emerged during the mid-century period, and the style is often compared to, or combined with, elements of Gooogie and Mid-Century Modernism. Many examples of the style have been lost, such as the Coffee Dan's restaurant on Van Nuys Boulevard; extant examples in Los Angeles are typically bar/lounges or themed residential buildings, such as Tiki Ti in Silver Lake, or The Polynesian apartment building in Canoga Park (LAHCM #1070).



*Coffee Dan's Restaurant in Van Nuys, 1956
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

Summary Statement of

Significance:

A resource evaluated under this sub-theme is significant in the area of architecture as an excellent example of the Tiki/Polynesian style and exhibits quality of design through distinctive features.

Period of Significance:

1940-1960

Period of Significance

Justification:

Bars and restaurants with Tiki or Polynesian themes began to appear in Los Angeles during the 1930s when Prohibition was lifted and the public became interested in the South Seas. The style probably would have faded if not for a series of events following World War II. As millions of GI's returned from the South Pacific, the pop culture that emerged reflected the fact that the area had captured their imaginations.

Geographic Location:

Although rare, Tiki/Polynesian style architecture may be found citywide.

Area(s) of Significance:

Architecture

Criteria:

NR: C CR: 3 Local: 3

Associated Property Types:

Residential - Single-Family and Multi-Family Residence, Trailer Parks
Commercial - Bar/Lounge and Restaurant
Commercial – Motel

Property Type Description:

Associated property types are typically commercial buildings, often bars or restaurants, though residential examples do exist. Residential examples are often trailer parks or multi-family apartment buildings with tiki or Polynesian motifs.

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Property Type Significance: Resources significant under this sub-theme are excellent examples of the Tiki/Polynesian style of architecture in Los Angeles.

Eligibility Standards:

- Exhibits quality of design through distinctive features
- Is an excellent example of Tiki/Polynesian architecture
- Was constructed during the period of significance

Character Defining / Associative Features:

- Retains most of the essential character-defining features from the period of significance
- A-frame facade, often over front door or front gate
- Borrowed stylistic motifs from cultures of the South Pacific region such as tiki heads, canoes, torches, and birds
- Steeply pitched roofs with forward-slanting, front-facing gables and sweeping or curved lines
- Materials such as thatching and wood used on exterior and roof
- Use of South Sea themed murals, petroglyphs, and carvings as decoration
- Use of beach grass, reed mats, bamboo, and carved wood as decoration
- Unique and stylized signs with Polynesian decorative elements
- Tropical landscaping such as lagoons, waterfalls, palm trees, and other plants

Integrity Considerations:

- Should retain integrity of Design, Workmanship, Materials, and Feeling
- Original landscaping may have been altered

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