

SurveyLA

Los Angeles Historic Resources Survey

LOS ANGELES CITYWIDE HISTORIC CONTEXT STATEMENT

Context: COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT, 1850-1980

Theme: Commercial Development and the Automobile, 1910-1970



Prepared for:

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



August 2016

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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 commercial development and the automobile. Refer to www.HistoricPlacesLA.org for information on designated resources associated with this theme as well as those identified through SurveyLA and other surveys.

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INTRODUCTION

Los Angeles has long been known as a city dominated by the automobile. The "Commercial Development and the Automobile" theme examines building types which reflect the city's predilection for the passenger car and whose forms were directly shaped by the needs of the car. This shaping occurred in two ways. First, the design of these buildings took on features which identified them as catering to, and often celebrating, the automobile. Second, site layouts accommodated the auto's need to maneuver. These design and spatial adaptations led to clear differentiations between the older pedestrian-oriented commercial buildings and the newer auto-based forms. Significant examples of these building types are indicative of Los Angeles' flourishing car culture, particularly during the 1940s to 1960s.

This theme covers four sub-themes and their associated property types:

- The Car and Car Services, which includes gas/service stations, car showrooms, car repair facilities, parking structures, and car washes
- The Motel
- Commercial Drive In/Drive Thru, which includes drive-in restaurants and drive-thru facilities of varying commercial building types
- Programmatic/Mimetic, which includes various commercial building types, but particularly food service-related

Evaluation Considerations

The theme “Commercial Development and the Automobile” may have some overlap with other SurveyLA themes as follows:

- Properties significant for their architectural quality may also be eligible under themes within the “Architecture and Engineering” context such as Spanish Colonial Revival, Art Deco, Streamline Moderne, Mid-Century Modern, Googie and other styles discussed in the narrative below.
- Signs may be identified as character-defining features of property types in this theme. They may also be identified individually as significant under the “Commercial Signs” theme.
- Properties evaluated under this theme may also be significant under the “Commercial Identity” theme for their association with well-known and long-term businesses.
- For a historic context on properties associated with Route 66, see the National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form: *U.S. Highway 66 in California*.
<http://ohp.parks.ca.gov/pages/1054/files/us%20route%2066%20mpdf.pdf>
A Route 66 theme was not developed as part of the citywide historic context statement.
- Resources relating to automobile parts and production are covered under the “Automobile Production” theme of the “Industrial Development” context.
- Related topics, including Drive-in Markets, are discussed in the “Neighborhood Commercial Development” theme of the “Commercial Development” context.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

The Automobile and Los Angeles

Reyner Banham noted in *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* that, “like earlier generations of English intellectuals who taught themselves Italian in order to read Dante in the original, I learned to drive in order to read Los Angeles in the original.”¹ It is impossible to understand Angeleno architecture of the twentieth century without considering the impact of the automobile. This impact can best be seen in those buildings created to provide for the needs of the car. Beginning in the early 1900s, there emerged new building types – from gas stations to drive-in restaurants – which served the motorist.

These new building types led to new relationships with the street and surrounding building. Earlier urban buildings had been part of a greater whole. Set adjacent or close to each other, they formed a visually solid street wall. Only the occasional monumental building, such as a library or a church, broke with the street wall and stood apart. But the automobile produced buildings that all stood alone, each surrounded by its own driveway and parking lot. The idea of a wall of unified background buildings, broken in places by a foreground building sitting in isolated splendor, no longer fit the increasingly auto-oriented city. In its place came a line of separate buildings, each putting itself forward as a monument.

Given this new relationship, designers of auto-related architecture took one of three approaches. Each approach drew from the designer’s attitude toward the passenger car and the street it created. The first approach was the utilitarian. To utilitarian designers the automobile and the roadside landscape it produced were neither good nor bad. They simply were. These designers accepted the car as a given and tried to devise building forms that directly served its needs. They had little concern for architectural flourish or the larger urban setting. At its best, the utilitarian approach resulted in well-proportioned and crisply detailed industrial-style structures. At its (more common) worst, utilitarian designers produced box-like sheds whose signs were the most memorable elements.

The second architectural approach was the celebratory. To celebratory designers the automobile was unquestionably good and the roadside it produced an opportunity for the imagination. The celebratory first appeared in the 1920s with Programmatic/Mimetic buildings, those structures shaped like non-architectural objects from derby hats to chili bowls. It continued into the 1930s with the Streamline Moderne, best exemplified by the circular drive-in restaurants of the day, surrounded by cars like spokes on a wheel and awash at night in neon and indirect lighting. Its high point was the Googie style of the 1950s, with structures such as car washes with their expansive roofs and slender pylons extending into the sky like so many tail fins. Regardless of its form, the celebratory approach accepted the idea of the free-standing structure and transformed it into a type of identifying sculpture, with the customer’s car as an integral part.

¹ Reyner Banham, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 23.

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The third architectural approach was the tasteful. To the tasteful designers the automobile was at best a necessary evil and the roadside landscape it produced a disgrace. These designers sought to tame the influence of the car and to bring to the roadside the harmony of the earlier pedestrian city. In essence they tried to separate the building from the car, physically and psychologically. Purveyors of tasteful design initially used revivalist domestic and commercial forms to clothe structures serving the automobile, and tried to maintain the spatial arrangement of the earlier city by hiding parked cars at the rear of their buildings or in separate garages. Later designers accepted the visible parking lot as inevitable, but tried through landscaping to distance the building from the car, covering their structures in so-called natural materials so as to combat the mechanistic ambience of the highway.



Gas Station, circa 1920 (Los Angeles Public Library)

These three approaches have done battle from the beginning of the car's widespread use. The utilitarian was the first to emerge in structures such as early service stations, and its influence has been more or less steady ever since. By the mid-1920s the tasteful approach gained favor as it tried to fit the ever-increasing number of cars into the existing architectural and spatial arrangements of the pre-automobile city. From the early 1930s through the middle of the 1960s the celebratory approach became dominant, as auto-oriented sprawl and individualistic architecture to match became the acceptable norm for both professional designers and the public at large.

But by the late 1960s the auto-based roadside came into question on environmental grounds, and the celebratory architecture it encouraged was denounced as unacceptably ugly. A new era of the tasteful had begun.

The Passenger Car, 1900-1930

The sprawling nature of greater Los Angeles was actually the product of an earlier system of transportation, the interurban railroad. The development of the interurban, beginning in the late 1800s and reaching its peak with the Pacific Electric network in the early 1900s, allowed the residents of the city and its surrounding suburbs to spread out over the flatlands. Yet this was still a settlement pattern of clusters around interurban stops. Large expanses of vacant land sat between these settlements. It was the automobile that allowed Angelenos to fill in the expanses.²

² Ibid., 80-83.

The widespread use of the automobile came in the years just before the United States entered the First World War in 1917. Up until that time the passenger car was a luxury item. In 1906, Woodrow Wilson, then president of Princeton University, maintained that “possession of a motor car was such an ostentatious display of wealth that it would stimulate socialism by inciting envy of the rich.”³ The Automobile Club of Southern California, organized in 1900, at first represented this well-off class of motorists, and by 1910 had a membership of 2,500.⁴

Ten years later, in 1920, Automobile Club membership had risen to 30,320, a twelve-fold increase that reflected the changing nature of auto ownership during that decade. Overall, auto registration in Los Angeles County, less than 20,000 in 1910, exceeded 100,000 by 1920. The increase in popular ownership came about through the development of an affordable car, specifically the Ford Model T. There were other manufacturers of cars intended for the masses but none could come close to challenging Henry Ford. Built using assembly-line techniques, the Model T – commonly known as the Tin Lizzie – was durable, easy to operate, economical to maintain and simple to repair.⁵

The Model T was first introduced in 1908. A year later Ford stopped manufacturing all other models and concentrated on it alone, and by 1911 Ford had become the largest single automobile manufacturer in the country. In the process of increasing volume he continually lowered the price. In 1908 the touring car cost \$850 and less than six thousand were made. By 1912 the price had fallen to \$600 and over seventy-eight thousand were produced. By 1916 a new touring car could be had for \$360 and well over half a million were built. By the end of the First World War, in 1918, Ford had half the market for automobiles in the United States, and by 1920 every other motor car in the world was a Model T.⁶

In great part because of the Model T, the 1920s were the years during which the motor car became the dominant mode of transportation in Southern California. Registration of passenger cars in Los Angeles County went from a bit more than 100,000 in 1920 to almost 800,000 by 1930. This growth was aided by the fact that prices for new cars continued to fall during that decade. The average price of all passenger cars in 1919 was \$1,157. By 1929 it was \$818. A new Model T could be bought in 1926 for \$290, seventy dollars less than what it cost ten years earlier. Also there had developed by the early 1920s a used-car market, which provided the less well off with an even cheaper car. Finally, adding to the affordability of autos was the emergence of buying on credit. By 1925 three-quarters of all sales, new and used, were made with some form of a time-payment plan.⁷

³ Quoted in John B. Rae, *The American Automobile: A Brief History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 29.

⁴ Scott L. Bottles, *Los Angeles and the Automobile: The Making of the Modern City* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 54; Howard J. Nelson, *The Los Angeles Metropolis* (Dubuque IA: Kendall-Hunt Publishing Company, 1983), 276.

⁵ Robert M. Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850-1930* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967 [1993]), 92; Nelson, *The Los Angeles Metropolis*, 276; Rae, *American Automobile*, 59.

⁶ Rae, *American Automobile*, 38, 59-62, 66-67.

⁷ Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis*, 92; Rae, *American Automobile*, 79-80, 87-88, 200.

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By the mid-1920s the dominance of the Model-T began to fade. The growing popularity of the self-starter, and the shift in preference from open to closed cars, made the cloth-topped Ford, with its crank-dependent engine, increasingly unattractive. General Motors introduced the Chevrolet as a slightly more costly but much more stylish alternative, and devised the annual model change as a means to stimulate the market. Henry Ford's concept of a durable car built for long use became unfashionable. Ford responded in the late 1920s with the Model A as an updated substitute for the Model T. By the end of the decade the Tin Lizzie may have vanished as a new product, but it had accomplished its purpose of making the car an affordable element of everyday life.⁸

The City Street, 1900-1930

The increasing presence of the car after the First World War caused Los Angeles to rethink the nature of its street system. There were some major early thoroughfares laid out by both the city and the county, particularly after the Board of Supervisors issued \$3.5 million in bonds for road construction in 1909. But typically streets had been created by subdividers, with the higher-priced developments having some kind of hard surface provided. Otherwise, property owners created improvement districts of their own to finance the grading and surfacing of their streets.⁹

Yet in spite of this generally haphazard system, between 1904 and 1914 Los Angeles was able to improve nearly 500 miles of streets. These included hundreds of residential lanes and such north-south and east-west arteries as Central Avenue, Vermont Avenue, Adams Boulevard and Pico Boulevard. These routes were generally thirty to fifty feet wide and topped by a firm surface. By 1915 all of the main thoroughfares had paving of some sort.¹⁰

But these improvements were soon overwhelmed by the increase in car ownership during the early 1920s. This increase prompted community leaders to press for studies as to how the street system could further be improved. Both the Automobile Club of Southern California in 1921 and the City's Traffic Commission in 1922 prepared plans for upgrading street layouts. The Board of Supervisors created a Los Angeles County Regional Planning Commission, also in 1922. But these were all less than comprehensive in coverage and findings.¹¹

In 1924 community leaders hired the firm of landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted to prepare a survey of existing conditions and make recommendations for the improvement of the city's streets. This study, entitled *A Major Traffic Street Plan for Los Angeles*, covered what was then the extent of

⁸ Rae, *American Automobile*, 74, 79-80, 106.

⁹ Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis*, 94-95; Nelson, *The Los Angeles Metropolis*, 278.

¹⁰ Bottles, *Los Angeles and the Automobile*, 58; Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis*, 92-94.

¹¹ Bottles, *Los Angeles and the Automobile*, 97; Todd Gish, "Challenging the Myth of an Unplanned Los Angeles," in *Planning Los Angeles*, edited by David C. Sloane (Chicago & Washington DC: American Planning Association, 2012), 25; Frederick Law Olmsted, Harlan Bartholomew and Charles Henry Cheney, *A Major Traffic Street Plan for Los Angeles, Prepared for the Committee on Los Angeles Plan on Major Highways of the Traffic Commission of the City and County of Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Traffic Commission of the City and County of Los Angeles, 1924), 5.

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settlement. It reached to the south as far as Hyde Park and 110th Street, to the west as far as Beverly Hills, and to the southwest as far as Culver City.¹²

Some of its recommendations followed older City Beautiful models. It suggested that Crenshaw Boulevard south of Wilshire Boulevard and Wilshire west of Crenshaw be developed as traditional parkways such as those constructed a generation earlier in Boston and Chicago. At the same time, the plan was foresighted enough to recommend parkways along the Arroyo Seco to Pasadena and through the Cahuenga Pass to the San Fernando Valley, which would serve both as pleasure drives and traffic arteries. Both the Arroyo Seco and the Cahuenga Pass Parkway proposals would find their way into later plans for the city's freeway system.¹³

But of more immediate importance was the plan's differentiation between local and arterial streets. Local streets were those that served neighborhood residents and businesses, while arterial streets were those which the report called major distribution streets. These were the streets that allowed traffic to move from one neighborhood or district to another. The plan stated that the primary need was the designation and improvement of these arterial streets for through traffic. These major distribution streets were to be widened and, where necessary, relocated to eliminate intersections at which they did not directly align. The plan realistically identified these distribution streets to be those that were already being used for through traffic, and thereby made implementation of its recommendations more likely.¹⁴

During the next six years Los Angeles worked to carry out the widening and straightening recommended by the Olmsted Plan. Within a year of the plan's publication the city's voters had approved a five million dollar bond issue and later accepted a special property tax for street improvements. The result was that, by the first years of the Great Depression of the 1930s, most of the arterial routes south of the Santa Monica Mountains had been identified and reconfigured as major distribution streets.¹⁵

These improved arterials were also designated as locations for commerce. For this, Los Angeles relied on its zoning power. The first comprehensive zoning ordinance was drafted in 1925. Business was relegated both to its traditional downtown district and to the major distribution streets identified in the plan. Thoroughfares such as Santa Monica Boulevard and Vermont Avenue extended for block after block as "C-Zone – Commercial-Business Uses." While these streets were often already sites for scattered businesses based on earlier streetcar lines, their designation in the zoning code discouraged other uses and led to their becoming predominantly commercial.¹⁶

¹² Olmsted, *A Major Traffic Street Plan for Los Angeles*, *passim*.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Bottles, *Los Angeles and the Automobile*, 114-115, 169; Gish, "Challenging the Myth of an Unplanned Los Angeles," 25; Nelson, *The Los Angeles Metropolis*, 277-278.

¹⁶ Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis*, 254-256.



Pig Stand Drive-In, circa 1930 (Los Angeles Public Library)

This blanket designation made available more commercially-zoned land than was justified by demand. The result, by the time construction came to a halt in the early 1930s, was spotty development. Isolated commercial structures stood interspersed among vacant lots. One historian has described this as the creation of business "shoestrings" with development "in an uneconomical, disorderly, and unattractive fashion."¹⁷ At the same time, the relatively large amount and low cost of this commercial space along arterial streets allowed an automobile-centered architecture to emerge.

Taming the Automobile, 1920-1930

The growing number of cars, and the apparently disorganized streetscape that resulted, led professional designers to search for some kind of order. The first reaction was to make the car fit into the familiar land arrangements that predated it. One response was to turn to the older Garden City model. In 1926 the Los Angeles City Club reported that decentralization was inevitable and that Los Angeles should become a "harmoniously developed community of local centers and garden cities."¹⁸

Perhaps the best known of these local centers within the city limits was Westwood, laid out between 1926 and 1929. It was designed as a self-contained commercial district to serve the planned campus for the southern branch of the University of California (today's UCLA) and the surrounding upper-middle class residential neighborhood. Westwood was deliberately set back a block from Wilshire Boulevard, and commercial development was originally banned along that thoroughfare as it passed by the community. The new district consisted of a series of commercial streets much like a pre-industrial village, all equal in importance and none serving as a path for through auto traffic.¹⁹

As appealing as it was architecturally, Westwood failed to serve as a model for commercial development in the automobile age. Its lack of an arterial path through the center made auto circulation difficult and its shortage of parking quickly became a problem. An alternative approach to Westwood's concentrated layout was to accept the shoestring commercial strip as a given and to find some way to make it more attractive. The concept that emerged was that of placing commercial structures directly on the street, in the pre-automobile pattern, and then locating parking in the rear. In this manner the traditional

¹⁷ Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis*, 257.

¹⁸ 1926 report quoted in Bottles, *Los Angeles and the Automobile*, 159.

¹⁹ Richard Longstreth, *City Center to Regional Mall: Architecture, the Automobile, and Retailing in Los Angeles, 1920-1950* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 163-165.

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street wall of solid attached buildings along a boulevard could be maintained and the parked car hidden away.²⁰

This concept of rear parking appeared first in Hollywood in 1923, when I. Magnin constructed a luxury women's store with parking in back and valet service. But the best-known and most influential example was Bullock's Wilshire, completed in 1929; today the site is Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument (HCM) #56 and listed in the National Register. It was directly adjacent to the street, allowing for the maintenance of a continuous wall of buildings. At the same time, it had an expansive and easily accessible parking area to the rear that occupied two-thirds of its site, and an entrance from that area into the store which was as imposing as that fronting on the street.²¹

Bullock's Wilshire was significant for roadside commercial architecture in a second way. While maintaining the street wall with its façade, it featured a tower that extended above the street wall and became a free-standing three-dimensional object easily seen by passing motorists. This led to other commercial structures along Wilshire, such as the Wilshire Tower of 1929 (HCM #332) and the Pellissier Building of 1930-1931 (HCM #118 and listed in the National Register), which combined the older boulevard ideal of the solid street wall with the newer highway-based concept of building as sign through the use of a tower.²²



Historic-Cultural Monument Nos. 332 (The Wilshire Tower), 386 (Chapman Park Market), and 566 (May Co. Department Store)

The arrangement of front building and rear parking remained influential, particularly in elite neighborhoods, for the next decade. It was used for the Chapman Park Market of 1928-1929 (HCM #386), one block off Wilshire on Sixth Street, and for the May Company Department Store of 1938-1939 on the northeast corner of Wilshire and Fairfax (HCM #566). As late as 1941, the Los Angeles County Regional Planning District still called for future commercial construction to be concentrated in business centers at major intersections in which the buildings were set hard against the street and parking placed in the rear.²³

²⁰ Longstreth, *City Center to Regional Mall*, 174.

²¹ Ibid., 97, 114-115.

²² Ibid., 106, 114.

²³ Longstreth, *City Center to Regional Mall*, 139, 197, 290-291; Richard Longstreth, *The Drive-In, the Supermarket, and the Transformation of Commercial Space in Los Angeles, 1914-1941* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 140-142; A Comprehensive Report on the Master Plan of Highways for the Los Angeles County Regional Planning District – Volume I, *The Plan and its Preparation* (Los Angeles: Regional Planning Commission, 1941), 54-55.

The Architecture of the Auto, 1910-1930

So what were these roadside buildings that so appalled the traditionalists? The most numerous were gas stations. Individual purveyors of fuel, in buildings of their own and separated from their neighbors by expanses of paving, began appearing in the years before the First World War. By the late 1920s they had become one of the most common building types in the city and, for better or worse, established the formula of an auto-oriented architecture that was free-standing and acting as an advertisement for itself.

The service station of the 1920s came in all sizes and styles. It could be a simple shed with a single pump, or a large enterprise with a phalanx of pumps in front and a collection of service buildings to the rear. It could be housed in the simplest of utilitarian designs, or clothed in one of the many historical forms typical of the era. But regardless of its size or architectural elaboration, it broke the rules of traditional urbanism.

Along with the service station came other building types housing services for the automobile. They included the auto repair shop and the car wash. Originally, these had been part of the service station, housed in structures located to the rear of the pumps. But by the late 1920s they had emerged as separate building types of their own.

A second category of buildings came to join the gas station and its offspring as typifying the auto strips of the 1920s. These were the restaurants. There were two forms. One was the drive-in. This was a descendent of the roadside food stand. By the mid-1920s the food stand had migrated to the center of the lot and was surrounded by parking. The car hop provided service to the customers in their parked cars.

The other restaurant form that came to characterize the strip used the architecture of fantasy. Specifically this was the practice of employing non-architectural forms, from giant hats to miniature mountains, to house commercial enterprises. Historians have called this giant-object architecture Programmatic/Mimetic, with the architecture reflecting the name of the restaurant, the type of food served, or both. To be sure, other kinds of businesses used the Programmatic/Mimetic, but the vast majority consisted of restaurants.

Finally, there was the emergence of the motel as a distinct auto-oriented form. It first made its appearance as a cluster of cabins within the auto camps found at the outskirts of the city. By the late 1920s, the motel was a separate building type, consisting of collection of simple cabins, arranged along the lines of the earlier bungalow courts, with parking adjacent to each unit.

What characterized these 1920s types – the motel, the gas station, the drive-in, and the giant object restaurant – was a variety of style that verged on anarchy. Motorists driving along one of the arterials became accustomed to seeing a gas station, housed in a simple industrial structure, next to a hot dog

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stand in the shape of a giant frankfurter in a bun, followed by a cluster of tourist cabins in rustic bungalow style, and then by a second gas station outfitted in elaborate Spanish Colonial Revival dress. Each sat in isolation on its individual lot, displaying its uniqueness in three dimensions.

To be sure, not all automobile-related architecture of the 1920s was that of the open road. Some forms remained rooted in the older central business districts. In doing so, they adopted the historicist styles and the relationship to the street of the commercial structures that surrounded them. These forms were the automobile dealership and the parking garage. The dealership chose to remain where it could share in the prestige of a downtown location, as well as be accessible to potential customers who did not yet own cars. The parking structure by its very nature was a product of the compact downtown core and would remain so even when the auto dealership later fled for the strip to join the other car-related building types.

In addition to new transportation infrastructure, proliferation of the automobile in the 1910s and 1920s also spawned a commercial enclave to the south and west of the central business district that was oriented around the sale, repair, and maintenance of cars. Capitalizing on the enhanced role that auto travel played, particularly in Southern California, several automobile manufacturers erected large, new showrooms and repair facilities along Figueroa and Flower Streets in what is now known as the South Park neighborhood. By the 1910s, the term “auto row” appeared in local newspapers and was used to describe the cluster of showrooms and associated businesses in the area.²⁴ Throughout Downtown, multi-story “auto parks” were weaved into the central business district as early as the 1920s, providing patrons of department stores and other businesses with a convenient place to park their car while shopping. To entice motorists, many of these garages offered on-site services in addition to parking stalls. Some touted a rather robust menu of amenities including “a repair department manned by experts, a lubrication department, and a washing and polishing department ... a complete accessory and tire department with direct factory representation ... [and] a finely appointed ladies’ lounge.”²⁵

²⁴ The terms “auto row” and “automobile row” first appear in *Los Angeles Times* articles from the early 1910s.

²⁵ “New Garage Has Features for Car Service,” *Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 13, 1925.



Herbert's Drive-In Restaurant, circa 1940 (Los Angeles Public Library)

The Streamline Moderne of the 1930s

The Depression of the 1930s was devastating for commercial construction. Land remained vacant and its value dropped. The excess of commercially-zoned lots was still an issue as late as 1941. A study commissioned by the Los Angeles County Regional Planning District that same year maintained that the problems of "the overabundance of so-called business lots on major highways – the miles of vacant business properties – are well known," and blamed them in large part on the liberal use of commercial zoning.²⁶

At the same time the Depression apparently had little effect on the widespread ownership of cars. The proportion of Angelenos owning autos remained generally the same from the mid-1920s through the early 1940s. There had been 8.2 residents per automobile in 1915, 3.6 in 1920, and 1.8 in 1925. At this point the ratio stabilized, with 1.5 residents per automobile in 1930, 1.6 in 1935 and 1.4 in 1940. Automobile registration actually increased by some 300,000 in Los Angeles County between 1930 and 1940 as migrants to the southland brought their cars with them.²⁷

This combination of abundant cheap land and continued car use led architects and planners to embrace the roadside architectural model of the isolated building surrounded by parking. The little commercial construction that did take place was almost exclusively on those abundant, low-cost commercially-zoned plots where businesses could stretch out and make sure that their auto-born customers had plenty of space. The result, according to critic Douglas Haskell writing in 1937 in the *Architectural Record*, was a city that "appears to the casual view as a series of parking lots interspersed with buildings."²⁸

A few planners had begun, before the onset of hard times, to accept the roadside arrangement of a commercial building with parking in front rather than hidden in the rear. In 1927 the Board of City Planning Commissioners for the City of Los Angeles presented a "Suggested Treatment for Local Business Centers at the Intersection of Main Thoroughfares." It was published in the journal *American*

²⁶ *A Comprehensive Report on the Master Plan*, 67-68.

²⁷ Bottles, *Los Angeles and the Automobile*, 93; Longstreth, *City Center to Regional Mall: Architecture*, 99.

²⁸ Quoted in Chester H. Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985 [1995]), 15.

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City in February of 1928. The suggested treatment showed an intersection on which all four corners contain rows of stores set back from the street and fronted by parking. No landscaping or other amenities were recommended, simply the building and the parked cars. It was in essence the modern strip mall.²⁹

The first major commercial building that accepted the idea of the freestanding building adjacent to visible parking was the Sears Roebuck Store and Mail Order House of 1926-1927 (HCM #788). Its location at Olympic Boulevard and Soto Street, a commercial area surrounded by industrial uses near railroad connections, allowed it to ignore having to fit into an existing architectural setting. It was a huge multi-story edifice of 450,000 square feet, topped by a tower containing the water tank for its fire-suppression sprinkler system. It was clothed in what would become known as Public Works Administration (PWA) Modern garb, consisting of simplified classical forms such as those used by Bertram Goodhue in the Los Angeles Public Library of 1922-1926. Its setting, with large parking lots on either side, allowed it to stand as a roadside advertisement for itself, and fit a pattern followed by other Sears stores of the period.³⁰

The auto-oriented architecture of the Depression years followed from the Sears store, in both its acceptance of the parking lot as a visual entity and in its treatment of the building as a free-standing form to be viewed in three dimensions from the passing car. Sears was also influential in its rejection of overtly historicist garb. But rather than use its stripped classicism, roadside architecture adopted a less monumental and more playful style commonly known as Streamline Moderne.

Streamline Moderne was actually a collection of decorative devices that first made its appearance in the late 1920s. Its direct ancestor was the Art Deco ornament that was used with great success on Bullock's Wilshire. Streamlining differed from the angular Art Deco approach in its smoother, more rounded, generally more horizontal lines. Streamline also differed from Art Deco in that it was more willing to break with traditional architectural principles such as symmetry and balancing of masses, and experiment with asymmetric arrangements appropriate to a free-standing building being viewed from a moving automobile.³¹

Streamline Moderne was, in essence, a variety of Programmatic/Mimetic architecture. In place of more specific images of non-architectural objects, Streamline Moderne buildings provided an abstract image of movement. This image was seen as particularly appropriate for an auto-related architecture. The association with movement was due to Streamline Moderne's use in the industrial design of modes of transportation. The rounded forms appropriate for aircraft were used for locomotives and for automobiles such as the Chrysler Air-Flow of the mid-1930s. It was, as well, relatively inexpensive to build compared to historicist and Art Deco forms, particularly given the wood-frame-and-stucco

²⁹ Illustrated in Longstreth, *The Drive-In, the Supermarket, and the Transformation of Commercial Space*, 155.

³⁰ Longstreth, *City Center to Regional Mall*, 119-121.

³¹ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 53-57.

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construction of Los Angeles. Streamline Moderne also adapted itself well to innovations in exterior lighting, particularly neon and indirect.³²

Along with the popular Streamline Moderne style were occasional examples of the International Style. This style was identified with experimental European designs of the 1920s, particularly that of the Bauhaus movement in Germany. Bauhaus was generally more respectable in the eyes of academically-trained architects, having been legitimized by an exhibit at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1932. It was characterized by flat roofs, asymmetry, clean right angles, expanses of undivided glass, and an absence of ornament. Only lettering in modernist fonts was allowed as a means of giving some relief to the spare forms. The International Style was particularly well suited to the steel framing and porcelain panel systems characteristic of prefabrication at that time.³³

The Streamline Moderne provided architectural unity to auto-oriented building types. The 1920s had been characterized by a cacophony of styles. The near-universal adoption of the Streamline Moderne for the few structures that were built during the 1930s went far to lessen it. All building types to one degree or another used it. The service stations of the era were the first, with the oil companies standardizing their designs around an International Style box adorned with Streamline detailing. The few auto dealerships built during the era migrated to the Strip and followed the lead of service stations. Even motels experimented with grafting Streamline Moderne architecture onto their more urban locations.

Perhaps the most vivid use of the Streamline Moderne came in the drive-in restaurant. By the mid-1930s a circular form had become common, with the cars parked around the restaurant like spokes extending from the hub a wheel. The drive-in made use of the latest in abstraction, with a delicate cantilevered canopy extending like a disc out over the cars and a slender pylon reaching upward. The drive-in looked best at night, when the use of neon and indirect lighting converted it into something from the science fiction films of the era. The 1930s drive-in was in its abstract way as much an element of fantasy as the earlier more literal Programmatic/Mimetic creations.

³² Paul Gleye, *The Architecture of Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Rosebud Books, 1981), 130.

³³ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 58.

Coming of the Freeways, 1933-1965

During the 1930s there was a general halt to new subdivisions and street construction. Only toward the end of the decade did the infusion of federal funds for defense generate a resumption of growth. Much of this occurred within the Los Angeles city limits in the southwest areas around Westchester and the airfield that became Los Angeles International Airport. Arterials such as Sepulveda Boulevard were improved and acquired new structures to serve the needs of the local defense workers.³⁴



Hollywood Freeway at the Cahuenga Pass, 1940
(Los Angeles Public Library)

More significant during the 1930s was the work done in planning for what would later become known as freeways. The first step was the scheme for a network of parkways that had been put forth as early as the Olmsted Report of 1924. In 1937 the Automobile Club of Southern California proposed what it called Motorways, divided highways without grade crossings at intersections. Unlike similar schemes at the time for other cities, this plan recognized that auto travel around Los Angeles was random and not focused solely on entering and leaving the central business district. The Auto Club proposal included north-south and east-west routes that followed the lines of major arterial streets, as well as radial routes linking downtown to outlying areas.³⁵

The 1937 Auto Club report became the basis for the official freeway plan. In 1939 the mayor appointed a Los Angeles Transportation Engineering Board which issued its own plan calling for Express Highways that generally followed the routes of the Auto Club's Motorways. Both the County Regional Planning Commission and the City Planning Department adopted the plan in 1941 with only minor changes and thus made it official.³⁶

Construction of parts of the proposed system actually preceded the acceptance of the plan. Between 1933 and 1935 the City built a four-mile stretch of what was then called Ramona Boulevard, northeast of the city center. It consisted of an initially undivided stretch of multi-lane road with nine overpasses in place of intersections. (It eventually was improved to become the western-most section of the San Bernardino Freeway.) Closer to the modern form of the freeway were two other early projects, both

³⁴ Greg Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth Century Metropolis* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins Press, 1997), 143.

³⁵ Bottles, *Los Angeles and the Automobile*, 206, 216-217.

³⁶ *City Planning in Los Angeles: A History* (Los Angeles: Department of City Planning, 1964), 43; Bottles, *Los Angeles and the Automobile*, 219-220, 223; Nelson, *The Los Angeles Metropolis*, 281.

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begun under the supervision of the State Highway Department; these were the Pasadena Freeway and the initial portion of the Hollywood Freeway.³⁷

The Pasadena Freeway began as the Arroyo Seco Parkway, long under consideration as a part of the 1924 Olmsted Plan. It linked the central business district with what was considered the premier suburb of the city. Planners envisioned it as a parkway in the traditional sense, closed to commercial vehicles and treated as a landscaped thoroughfare to be enjoyed rather than a commuter run to be endured. The state surveyed the route in 1934, began construction in 1936, and completed the first six miles by 1940. The finished Parkway opened in 1942.³⁸

The Hollywood Freeway began as the Cahuenga Pass Parkway. This also was proposed by the 1924 Olmsted Plan and was long sought as a means of opening the San Fernando Valley to increasing settlement. By December of 1940 the first section through the pass, two lanes of divided highway with no intersections, was completed. A second section, extending two more miles, opened in 1942.³⁹

The years following the end of the Second World War in 1945 saw the implementation of the 1941 freeway plan, which was updated in a Master Plan in 1947. Auto registration in Los Angeles rose from 1.2 million in 1946 to 2.6 million by 1956. The plan and the funding it required were justified to the public as the best way to accommodate this increasing number of cars. State funding was secured during the 1940s and by 1956 the Interstate Highway Act allowed for the use of federal funds.⁴⁰

With these funding sources in place, Los Angeles proceeded to complete its freeway system. Work on the four-level interchange in downtown, connecting the Pasadena, Harbor, Hollywood, and Santa Ana-San Bernardino Freeways, was completed in 1948. The Hollywood Freeway reached north from Cahuenga Pass to Barham Boulevard in 1949, and by 1953 extended south to connect to the interchange. Construction on the Hollywood proceeded during the 1950s, including the addition of a third lane in each direction, and the exchange with the Golden State Freeway was finished in 1968.⁴¹

³⁷ Bottles, *Los Angeles and the Automobile*, 219-220; Nathan Masters, "L.A.'s First Freeways," at www.kcet.org/updaily/social_focus/history/la-as-subject/las-first-freeways.

³⁸ David Gebhard and Harriette Von Breton, *Los Angeles in the Thirties, 1931-1941*, Second Edition, Revised and Enlarged (Santa Monica CA: Hennessey + Ingalls, 1989), 280-281.

³⁹ Gebhard and Von Breton, *Los Angeles in the Thirties*, 23; Nelson, *The Los Angeles Metropolis*, 281.

⁴⁰ Bottles, *Los Angeles and the Automobile*, 232-233; City Planning in Los Angeles, 42-43; Nelson, *The Los Angeles Metropolis*, 281-282.

⁴¹ Charles A. Bearchall and Larry D. Fried, *The San Fernando Valley Then and Now: An Illustrated History* (Northridge: Windsor Publications, 1988), 47-48; Kevin Roderick, *The San Fernando Valley: America's Suburb* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Times Books, 2001), 119, 122.

By 1955 most of the Santa Ana and San Bernardino Freeways were done. By 1960 the Ventura Freeway had been extended westward from the Hollywood Freeway, the Long Beach Freeway was complete and the Harbor well under way. The Ventura was completed by 1962. The San Diego Freeway was extended over the Sepulveda Pass that same year. Both the San Diego and the Golden State Freeways were finished in 1963. By the mid-1960s the freeway system of Los Angeles, first envisioned a quarter century earlier, was well on its way to completion.⁴²



Ventura Boulevard, circa 1927 (Los Angeles Public Library)

The Opening of the San Fernando Valley, 1920-1965

For the development of roadside architecture the most important result of the freeway system was the opening of the San Fernando Valley. Its arterial streets, zoned “C-Zone – Commercial-Business Uses,” were now accessible, and these arterials became the setting for a new generation of auto-oriented design. The widespread ownership of the passenger car and the relative scarcity of existing commercial building stock made the San Fernando Valley the center for roadside architecture in postwar Los Angeles.

Before 1940 the Valley was overwhelmingly agricultural. The Los Angeles Aqueduct arrived in 1913 and the Valley was annexed to the city in 1915. But it was not commonly considered part of the metropolis. The Valley was reached by a winding road and the Pacific Electric line through the Cahuenga Pass. Only the eastern end, around Burbank and San Fernando Road, had major settlement. In 1920 the population of the entire valley was perhaps 20,000.⁴³

Although sparsely settled at this time, the Valley was laced with north-south and east-west roads. While perhaps only dirt or gravel, they established the arterial routes that would be the setting for later roadside structures. As early as 1917 the Automobile Club of Southern California called out auto-accessible roads that included the state highway of Ventura Boulevard, and the less improved Sherman

⁴² Banham, *Los Angeles*, 88; Bearchall and Fried, *The San Fernando Valley Then and Now*, 48-49; Nelson, *The Los Angeles Metropolis*, 281.

⁴³ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 176; Richard L. Preston, “The Changing Landscape of the San Fernando Valley Between 1930 and 1964,” in *The California Geographer*, Volume VI (1965), 61.

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Way, San Fernando Road, Lankershim Boulevard, Reseda Avenue, Canoga Avenue, and Santa Susanna Pass Road (now Devonshire Street).⁴⁴

Ventura Boulevard, as the state highway, was the premier site for roadside commerce during the 1920s. A portion of Sherman Way that ran north and south, today's Van Nuys Boulevard as it passes through Van Nuys, also became a commercial center because of its Pacific Electric stop. But both Ventura Boulevard and the Van Nuys business districts were exceptions; the rest of the valley remained overwhelmingly rural. By 1930 the Valley's population had grown to something over 50,000, concentrated primarily along its southern rim of Ventura Boulevard and its eastern quarter from the edge of Burbank to Van Nuys and North Hollywood.⁴⁵

Fortunately several of the Valley's thoroughfares were designated U.S. or State Highways, thus enabling their improvement with government funds. Ventura Boulevard, already a state highway, became U.S. 101; San Fernando Road became U.S. 6 and State Route 99; Sepulveda Boulevard became State Route 7; Devonshire Street became State Route 118, and Lankershim Boulevard became State Route 159. By the mid-1930s an improved arterial road was constructed through the Sepulveda Pass, providing a much-needed point of entry to the western end of the Valley.⁴⁶

The Valley's population had reached around 112,000 by 1940. Settlement was primarily in the eastern section, drawn by the growth of the defense plants such as Lockheed in Burbank, as well as in the small communities of Canoga Park, Chatsworth, Reseda, and Tarzana. The *Comprehensive Report on the Master Plan of Highways* of 1941 specifically identified arterial routes in the Valley. They included Ventura, Devonshire, Parthenia, and Vanowen as east-to-west routes, as well as Victory and Burbank east of Sepulveda. North-to-south routes included Topanga Canyon-Canoga, Reseda, Sepulveda, Van Nuys, Laurel Canyon, and Lankershim. When the freeway system made the more distant parts of the Valley accessible to settlement in the 1950s and 1960s, a grid of arterial roadways, waiting to be lined with roadside commerce, was already in place.⁴⁷

The opening of the early Hollywood Freeway through the Cahuenga Pass, together with the expansion of the defense related industries, caused the Valley to reach a population of between 150,000 and 175,000 by the end of the war in 1945. In the late 1940s General Motors opened an assembly plant between Van Nuys and the new planned community of Panorama City, and other companies followed in

⁴⁴ Roderick, *The San Fernando Valley*, 60.

⁴⁵ Gebhard and Von Breton, *Los Angeles in the Thirties*, 22; Roderick, *The San Fernando Valley*, 58; "Van Nuys Boulevard" (Order Number 00024963), Photo from the Security Pacific National Bank Collection, Los Angeles Public Library. Gebhard and Von Breton, *Los Angeles in the Thirties*, 22, places the population at 54,217 in 1930 while Roderick, *The San Fernando Valley*, 103, places it at 51,000. Roderick, *The San Fernando Valley*, passim, otherwise gives higher numbers for all the decades, but my assumption is that he is including all cities in the valley. I have used the smaller numbers.

⁴⁶ Roderick, *The San Fernando Valley*, 104-106, 108.

⁴⁷ *Comprehensive Report on the Master Plan*, 31; Gebhard and Von Breton, *Los Angeles in the Thirties*, 22; Preston, "The Changing Landscape of the San Fernando Valley," *The California Geographer*, 61, 63; Roderick, *The San Fernando Valley*, 108.

establishing facilities in various sections of the Valley. By 1950 the population increased to well over 400,000. During the fifties, tracts of housing filled the still-vacant land west of Van Nuys and Pacoima and north of Ventura Boulevard. The population approached three-quarter of a million in 1960. With the completion of the Ventura, San Diego, and Golden State Freeways in the sixties, the valley reached maturity as the premier middle-class residential district of Los Angeles.⁴⁸

At first roadside development was limited. In 1949 Ventura Boulevard, the most important thoroughfare, had a strip that included two Herbert's Drive-Ins, one at Laurel Canyon and one at Sepulveda.⁴⁹ Geographer Richard Preston noted that, aside from "commuter-oriented buildings" along Ventura Boulevard, commercial development in the early 1950s "was confined mainly to concentrations at the major intersections of each valley community." Only in the older, denser southeastern section were "ribbon-like forms" of commercial development typical.⁵⁰

But by 1965 what Preston called commercial "string development" became common along the arterial routes. "It appears that a constantly improving highway system, an abundance of open and relatively cheap land, a fairly small population, and the prolific development of dispersed communities greatly assisted the rapid spread of an automobile-oriented suburban landscape."⁵¹

Preston saw a danger in this pattern. He maintained that, by the early 1960s, the older commercial development was facing competition from both shopping centers and newer strips. The result was "a serious vacancy problem in the strip-shopping districts, especially the older ones." He attributed it to an over-supply of commercially-zoned land, "approximately four times as much commercial zoning in the valley as the population can reasonably be expected to support."⁵² Yet it was precisely this abundance of roadside land that allowed the auto-oriented architecture of the era to flourish.

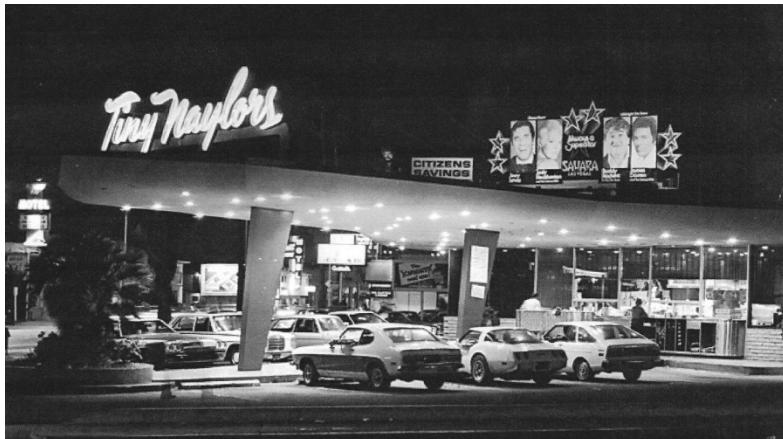
⁴⁸ *City Planning in Los Angeles*, 33, 51; Preston, "The Changing Landscape," 67; Roderick, *The San Fernando Valley*, 113, 122.

⁴⁹ Alan Hess, *Googie Redux: Ultramodern Roadside Architecture* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2004), 42.

⁵⁰ Preston, "The Changing Landscape," 67.

⁵¹ Ibid., 65.

⁵² Ibid., 72.



Tiny Naylor's Drive-In, 1980 (Los Angeles Public Library)

Googie, 1945-1965⁵³

All private commercial construction ceased during the Second World War from 1941 to 1945. In the immediate postwar period, the Streamline Moderne style of the 1930s continued to be used for roadside architecture. But by the late 1940s a freer, more extravagant style took hold. It was characterized by structural exhibitionism,

dominant signage, and vast amounts of glass which made the buildings seem transparent at night.⁵⁴ This was auto-oriented architecture at its most raffish. As historian Thomas Hines noted in *Populux*, "The strip was conceived just at the edge of respectability. Only very rarely did it offer beauty. Far more often there was humor. But always there was vitality."⁵⁵

This style has been called Googie, based on its use with the coffee shops of that name. It draws primarily from the late work of Frank Lloyd Wright and his son Lloyd Wright. It shows as well the influence of 1950s-era structures ranging from Eero Saarinen's TWA Terminal at New York's Kennedy Airport to the Miami Beach hotels of Morris Lapidus. Auto-oriented Googie architecture took characteristics from all these sources.

Most obvious was dramatic expression of structural elements. This included elongation and distortion of roofs, extension of beams and columns as protruding spear-like objects, and meandering of walls beyond the boundaries of the building. It also included the mixing of materials and colors. Wood, stone, brick, metal, and stucco were all placed adjacent to each other; interiors featured the newly evolved plastics, laminates, and vinyls in the brightest of hues. All this was composed in rigorously asymmetric fashion.⁵⁶

Particularly notable was the expansive use of glass. The concept of transparency was important in appealing to the passing motorist. One historian has called this the "visual front."⁵⁷ The use of glass had long been a staple of auto-oriented architecture, dating back to the early showrooms and pre-fabricated service stations. But through the achievement of wide spans available with new construction techniques and devices such as cantilevering, architects were able to create an apparently unbroken

⁵³ This style is examined fully in the Postwar Modernism theme within the Architectural and Engineering context.

⁵⁴ Thomas Hine, *Populuxe* (New York: MJF Books, 1986 [1999]), 10-11; Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 60-63.

⁵⁵ Hine, *Populuxe*, 153.

⁵⁶ Alan Hess, *Googie: Fifties Coffee Shop Architecture* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1985), 47, 61-62; Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 62-63; Hine, *Populuxe*, 156.

⁵⁷ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 61.

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expanse of window that extended the width of the building. The passerby was presented with a low wall of stone or brick, a continuous sheet of glass above it, and an apparently weightless roof of fanciful form hovering on top. This ensemble was most effective when lit at night.⁵⁸

Finally there was fantasy applied to signage. Generally, the sign was an integral part of the building. Asymmetric composition allowed for a wall or a set of columns to be extended upward to form the face of the sign. As with glass, this integration of the sign into the building mass was used earlier, particularly with the drive-in restaurants and supermarkets of the 1930s. But the freedom permissible with Googie architecture allowed for a much greater variety in shape and material. Added to this were playful lettering and the occasional use of space-age related images such as rockets and satellites, spread on angular and amoeboid-shaped backgrounds.⁵⁹

Many of these forms can be first found in the work of the Russian Constructivists of the 1920s, particularly in their use of dramatic structural elements and mammoth signs. Closer to home, Lloyd Wright's 1928 Yucca-Vine Market in Hollywood featured plate-glass walls, a prominent roof, and a pylon-like sign. But the first postwar structures to feature the style are generally considered to be the coffee shops of Douglas Honnold and John Lautner. Their Googie's Restaurant of 1949, on Sunset Boulevard at Crescent Heights, was the pioneer. Also influential, particularly for drive-ins, was the work of architects Louis Armet and Eldon Davis. Armet and Davis established their firm in 1947 and were responsible for Denny's, Norm's, and later Bob's Big Boy outlets.⁶⁰

The drive-in restaurant, in fact, was one of the auto-oriented building types that made the best use of the Googie style. As with the Streamline Moderne drive-ins of the 1930s, Googie drive-ins of the postwar period created an environment of fantasy and excitement. The postwar drive-ins were also, as with their pre-war antecedents, most creative in tying the car to the building. Extended free-form canopies sheltering the cars were the dominant architectural element, to the point that without cars parked in front the buildings looked incomplete.

But there was a second building type that perhaps surpassed the drive-in in its use of Googie. This was the car wash. By the mid-1950s there emerged the standard form of a linear open pavilion topped by a flat plane of a roof. Protruding from this roof was a structural fantasy that could take many forms. It might be a series of spear-like pylons like so many lined-up tail fins. It might be a series of A-frames that gave the car wash a resemblance to a modernist church of the era. Or it might be a series of lopsided inverted U's that provided an asymmetric image typical of Googie design.

The other auto-oriented building types – the gas station, the showroom, the auto-parts outlet, and the motel – were more limited in their use of Googie. In most cases, it was a matter of grafting Googie forms onto an existing structural type that had proven economically successful. For the service station,

⁵⁸ Hine, *Populuxe*, 153.

⁵⁹ Hess, *Googie*, 35-36; Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 62-64.

⁶⁰ Hess, *Googie*, 21-22, 61-72. 81.

this meant an extravagant canopy added to the standard 1930s-era box. For the motel this required the use of Googie detailing added to the façade of a functional if undecorated structure that extended toward the rear. For the showroom and the auto-parts outlet, Googie consisted primarily of the use of large expanses of glass and the construction of a mammoth, often detached, sign.

But regardless of the extent of its use, Googie became the characteristic architecture of the postwar auto strip. But by its very openness to originally and its relatively large scale, it brought to the strip the variety – some would say the anarchy – of the roadside architecture of the 1920s. The result was an inevitable reaction.

The Conservative Reaction, 1965-1980

Beginning in the mid-1960s, good taste tamed the roadside. Architectural forms became quieter and featured natural materials, actual or apparent. Neon gave way to backlit plastic. Encouraging this conservative move was the rise of the franchise and the fading of the independent merchant trying to make a statement. Emblematic was the shift of McDonald's in 1968 from its pair of oversized parabolic arches to its mansard roof.

There had always been distaste for roadside architecture. Some critics, beginning in the 1920s, preferred the more sedate look of the pre-automobile city and the traditional residential suburb. Others, firmly committed to the modernism of the International Style, found roadside architecture to be unacceptably vulgar. In all of this criticism was a disdain for popular culture in general, and for that produced by the automobile in particular.

Added to this by the early 1960s was a growing environmentalist movement. Traditional concern for preserving wilderness areas was broadened to include land newly conquered by the highway. In the mind of many, the cluttering of the roadside landscape with uncontrolled and unsightly construction was an environmental crime. In 1964 Peter Blake published *God's Own Junkyard*, in which he charged that a once pristine landscape had been "crisscrossed by highways lined with billboards, jazzed-up diners, used-car lots, drive-in movies, beflagged gas stations, and garish motels."⁶¹

Soon there emerged the push for Beautification. A 1965 White House Conference on Natural Beauty made this movement official. Lady Bird Johnson, the wife of then President Lyndon Baines Johnson and a leader of the movement, called for "pleasing vistas and attractive roadside scenes" to replace "endless corridors walled in by neon, junk and ruined landscape."⁶² Even Ray Kroc, the head of McDonald's, at least publicly echoed the sentiment and linked the problem directly to Googie. "How can we go into these towns and propose to put up these slant-roofed buildings, which are absolute eyesores?"⁶³

⁶¹ Quoted in Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 65.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., 66.

At the same time, the strip itself declined. Auto-oriented Googie of the 1950s was an architecture of the boulevard. It confronted motorists without reticence as an object to be admired during a casual cruise. As the freeway became dominant the architecture became mute. Buildings retreated from the passing car and were mere abstract shapes in the middle of massive parking lots. Only the signs, made familiar through incessant advertising, identified the contents.

Just about all auto-related building types succumbed to this conservative wave. As a result, the celebration of the car through its incorporation into the architecture of the building disappeared. The drive-in restaurant gave way to the fast-food franchise outlet with only the drive-up window retaining the link to the car. The dealership retreated to the rear of its site and the passing motorist was left with a view of row upon row of new parked cars and a mammoth corporate sign. The motel, with its direct link between the car and room, was replaced by the multi-storied double-loaded corridor building that was simply a hotel surrounded by parking. Even the car wash, the high point of auto-oriented Googie, was displaced by less exuberant linear forms that eventually gave way to the stationary automated box.

Conclusion

Automobile-related commercial architecture had its high point in the decades between the mid-1930s and the mid-1960s. It was during this time that the celebratory attitude toward the automobile was most prevalent. The result was an acceptance of the car as part of the architecture. Today intact examples of auto-related resources from this period are scattered citywide but are becoming increasingly rare.

Sub-Theme: The Car and Car Services, 1920-1970

Resources included in this sub-theme are those designed to serve the needs of the automobile:

- They provide services, such as gasoline, repairs, sales, cleaning, storage, and/or parts, for the automobile.
- They show accommodation to, and celebration of, the automobile in their design through the use of features such as canopies, show windows, and wide passageways, which link the building to the car.
- They contain spatial arrangements in their site layouts to allow for maneuvering of the automobile, thereby differentiating them from pedestrian-oriented commercial structures.

Property sub-types included in this sub-theme include:

- Gas/Service Station
- Car Showroom
- Car Repair
- Parking Structure
- Car Wash

Property Type: Gas/Service Station, 1920-1970

In the early 1900s general stores supplied gasoline and motor oil. At first, gasoline came in cans purchased like kerosene. By 1905, crude gasoline pumps that used rubber hoses made their appearance. In urban settings these pumps were often placed at the curb, near the entrance to a vendor of auto-related products. The sidewalk pump and a store-mounted sign were often the only indications that the structure was intended for servicing the automobile.⁶⁴

By the time of the First World War it was evident that this ad-hoc solution was inadequate. The traffic-clogging line of cars and the obvious fire danger led to the removal of curbside gasoline pumps in all but the most rural of locations. Also, by the early 1920s, the Visible Measure Pump became common. This was a tall, column-like device topped by what was called a Glass Graduate. The attendant pumped the desired amount of gasoline into the Glass Graduate and then released the contents of the Graduate into the car by gravity.⁶⁵

The result of the need to serve a large number of cars in a safe manner off the street, and the creation of an effective standardized pump, led to the emergence of the service station as a free-standing structure. Historian Richard Longstreth has noted the significance of this emergence, “Despite its mundane purpose, modest size, and utilitarian appearance, the filling station was a revolutionary work

⁶⁴ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 40, 95-96.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 40, 96.

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that gave birth to the drive-in concept, whereby providing space for cars became the principle determinant of the setting, configuration, and sometimes even the internal layout of the facility.”⁶⁶

The most important force behind the emergence of the free-standing service station was the oil industry. As early as 1905 some oil companies began experimenting with free-standing stations that sold only their brand of gasoline. Soon local investors constructed buildings and then contracted with the oil companies. By the First World War stations were being opened across the country at the rate of 1,200 per year.⁶⁷

The National Supply Station chain operated what were perhaps the first of the detached stations in Los Angeles. By 1913 the chain had outlets at Grand and Washington, Vermont and Washington, Wilshire and Mariposa, Pico and Alvarado, Seventh and Westlake, and Vermont and Hollywood. The common building was a utilitarian box with a shed roof porte-cochere and a single pump.⁶⁸

The National Supply Station form became the standard for the service station of the early 1920s. It consisted of a small office housed in a single room, a driveway with a pump or two in front, and a roof that often extended to shelter the driveway with its pump. These stations were positioned on the site so as to allow the customer to drive through without backing up.⁶⁹



Tepper Tire Service Station on Gardena Boulevard, 1922 (SurveyLA)

Perhaps the earliest intact gas station building in Los Angeles that retains much of its integrity dates from 1922. It is located at 762 West Gardena Boulevard, at the southeast intersection with Menlo Avenue. It is a simple wood frame structure, set diagonally on the corner to allow equal access from both

streets. A low-pitched gable fronts the corner and extends out to cover the car and the location of the now-vanished pump. Plain posts with knee braces support the extended gable much as they would a porch on a modest Craftsman bungalow. Its only ornament is a surface of vertical boards in the area where a gable-end attic vent would be located, in contrast with the horizontal siding that covers the rest of the building. Currently the building stands vacant but intact.

⁶⁶ Longstreth, *The Drive-In, the Supermarket, and the Transformation of Commercial Space in Los Angeles*, 8.

⁶⁷ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 97-98.

⁶⁸ Longstreth, *The Drive-In, the Supermarket, and the Transformation of Commercial Space in Los Angeles*, 8.

⁶⁹ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 97-98.

Another early example is the Marquez Filling Station in Pacific Palisades (HCM #800). The building was constructed by Perfecto Marquez in 1924 as part of a small camping resort that he operated in Santa Monica Canyon, and remained in the hands of his descendants until the early twenty-first century. Its plan is the same as the Gardena Boulevard building, with an office fronted by a sheltered parking space. But its design is less domestic and more commercial. It is clothed in stucco and its roof is a simple parapet that uniformly covers both the office and the parking space. Slender unadorned pipe columns support the canopy. Currently the Marquez Filling Station has been stripped of its detailing and signage, but a historic photo shows how it once appeared.⁷⁰



*Historic-Cultural Monument No. 800, Marquez Filling Station, 1924
(City of Los Angeles – Office of Historic Resources)*

These early 1920s utilitarian forms soon began to give way to outlets of more elegant appearance. The general approach was to treat the service station as a small domestic structure. In many parts of the country this meant converting the canopy into a hipped roof supported by two columns at the front corners where it sheltered the pump. The result was a service station that resembled vaguely a classical or prairie-style bungalow.⁷¹

This form could be found in Los Angeles, particularly in those stations that were produced by prefabrication. Often the oil companies themselves created the prefabricated units in order to provide a uniform appearance to all their stations. The result was a more industrial look coupled with elements of domesticity. Factory sash provided large multi-paned windows for the office and metal panels made up the walls. At the same time, these stations often featured traditionally-sloped roofs of standing seam metal or imitation tile.⁷²

More specific regional forms could also be found in Los Angeles. Most common as the 1920s progressed was the all-prevalent Spanish Colonial Revival style. Soon stations covered in white stucco and topped with mission tile roofs were a common sight in all parts of the city. Even during the difficult Depression

⁷⁰ See “Samuel Calvert Foy Residence” (Order Number 00061645), Photo from the Security Pacific National Bank Collection, Los Angeles Public Library. Photo from 1919 shows the intersection of Seventh and Figueroa with a Standard Oil Company station on the northwest corner.

⁷¹ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 100-101.

⁷² Ibid., 99-100.

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years of the 1930s elegant Spanish Colonial Revival style stations continued to be built in elite neighborhoods. One such late example is the gas station at 110 South Barrington Avenue in Brentwood. It was designed by architect Raymond Stockdale and completed in 1939. It is Historic-Cultural Monument #387.⁷³

During the 1920s a larger and more functionally varied form, known as the superstation, became popular. Vendors evolved from simple suppliers of gasoline into multi-purpose stops for all automobile needs. Superstations combined supplying fuel with oil changing and lubrication, sales of tires and batteries, and – in some cases – minor repairs and car washing. The first of these in Los Angeles, Service Town on Western Avenue, appears to have been in existence as early as 1914. It consisted of a six-bay filling area in the front, and a paved court in the rear surrounded by buildings providing various auto services.⁷⁴

By the mid-1920s a common layout characterized these superstations. The gasoline pumps and the accompanying small office sat at the front of the site with the other services in a separate building or buildings behind. The two entities were divided by a paved space ample enough for customers to maneuver their cars. Most commonly the ensemble would occupy a corner so that the service buildings formed an L behind the gasoline station. If the site were mid-block, a U-form might be used. If the site was tight, a simple I-form would do.⁷⁵



*Historic-Cultural Monument No. 387, Brentwood Gas Station, built 1924
(City of Los Angeles – Office of Historic Resources)*



Service Station at 7205 Beverly Boulevard, 1927 (SurveyLA)

An example remaining from 1927 provides a vivid example of a superstation in a historicist form. It is located at 7205 Beverly Boulevard in the Wilshire area. This corner-lot establishment originally included car repair and washing among its offered services. But most architecturally significant is its gasoline dispensing area that consists of a five-bay structure in

⁷³ *Landmark L.A.: Historic-Cultural Monument in Los Angeles*, Jeffrey Herr, editor, (Los Angeles: City of Los Angeles, 2002), 376, 452; Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 44-50.

⁷⁴ Longstreth, *The Drive-In, the Supermarket, and the Transformation of Commercial Space in Los Angeles*, 9-10.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 14-15, 18.

SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

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which two covered service bays on each side flank a central office. This structure is outfitted in Moorish style, complete with a dome covering the office portion. The establishment has been converted to an auto-repair facility and though it has lost some of its original detailing, the Moorish flavor is still apparent.⁷⁶

The popularity of the superstation in Los Angeles can be attributed to the city's high rate of auto ownership, the large role of the petroleum companies in the region's economic life, and the mild climate that made the open-air arrangement practical. Superstations became so common by the late 1920s that the manufacturers of prefabricated offices serving the pumps also offered an entire range of auxiliary buildings. They also led to variations such as the combination of a gasoline station with a drive-in market. These markets became popular during the 1920s and consisted of elongated buildings open to the front that sold produce, dairy products, meats, and grocery items. The arrangement often followed that of the superstation with the market taking the place of the automobile services.⁷⁷

The number of gasoline stations of all types in Los Angeles increased from about 170 in 1920 to almost 700 by 1925, and to more than 1,500 by 1930. The result was that, by the end of prosperity in 1930, Los Angeles had an oversupply. Many did not survive the Great Depression. Nonetheless, the modest filling station had established itself as the dominant form of automobile-derived architecture. Its relationship to the street and to other structures, as a free-standing entity in a sea of paving, became the model for other auto-oriented commercial building types.⁷⁸

The Depression resulted in a change in service station design. The service station was one of the first architectural types to adopt the Streamlined Moderne and the International Style. Oil companies felt the need for an updated station image as competition increased for the dwindling income of customers. Particularly useful was a look that stressed efficiency and cleanliness. At the same time an increase in the variety of car-related products called for changes in design. Hard times brought a need to market items other than gasoline. Tires, batteries, and other accessories (known as TBA among services station owners) needed space to be displayed and possibly seen from the outside as customers filled their tanks. This meant a need for larger offices and windows.⁷⁹

The result, according to one historian, was a set of prototypes that "spawned a generation of gas stations designed to showcase everything from tires to motor oil, provide better service bays, and above all to present a fresh and modern corporate image to the traveling public."⁸⁰ The goal of each oil company was to have "building, pumps, and sign together form a distinctive company trademark that would be instantly recognizable both day and night."⁸¹

⁷⁶ Sanborn Map for Los Angeles, Volume 20, Sheet 2094.

⁷⁷ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 102; Longstreth, *The Drive-In, the Supermarket, and the Transformation of Commercial Space in Los Angeles*, 9, 54.

⁷⁸ Longstreth, *The Drive-In, the Supermarket, and the Transformation of Commercial Space in Los Angeles*, 10.

⁷⁹ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 104-105.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 104.

⁸¹ Ibid., 105.

SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Context: Commercial Development/Commercial Development and the Automobile



Service Station at 407 W. Bernard Street, 1930 (SurveyLA)

The common type, in its most basic form, was the white enameled oblong box with a parapeted flat roof. In a single entity it included an office with large display windows, restrooms, service bays and auxiliary spaces. The box itself, often prefabricated, favored the austere International Style. The station at 407 West Bernard Street in the Chinatown area is the form in its most abstract. Built in 1930, it has been stripped of detailing and, as such, has been reduced to its white International Style essence.

Each of the oil companies then treated this basic entity with detailing to provide identity. Industrial designers, such as Walter Dorwin Teague at Texaco, grafted onto the box subtle Streamline Moderne ornament in the form of banding and lettering to soften the design. The companies offered various models of their prototypical stations with differing numbers of bays and sizes of offices. The canopy became optional. The pumps themselves were often the new so-called Computer Type, which allowed for a low profile that could be stylized. But all models, with or without a canopy, shared the same Streamline Moderne detailing and all were topped by the company's identifiable logo.⁸²

There is a surviving Streamline Moderne gas station that is a designated resource. This is the Gilmore Gasoline Service Station in Hollywood (HCM #508). It dates from 1935 and was designed by engineer R. J. Kadow for the Gilmore Oil Company. Its layout varies from the standard forms in response to its site. Its office section is a half-octagon, set diagonally on the corner site, with two canopies extending out at forty-five degree elbows perpendicular to the two streets. The detailing is pure Streamline Moderne.⁸³



*Historic-Cultural Monument No. 508, Gilmore Gasoline Service Station, 1935
(City of Los Angeles – Office of Historic Resources)*

⁸² Ibid., 105-107.

⁸³ Landmark L.A, 214, 462.

SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Context: Commercial Development/Commercial Development and the Automobile

Construction of service stations came to a halt during the Second World War. Most of the postwar stations continued the styles of the 1930s, particularly those identified with specific brands. The demand for gasoline was so great in the years following the war that there was little competition among the oil companies for customers. The earlier, relatively inexpensive, forms seemed to produce more than adequate revenue.⁸⁴

By the mid-1950s, however, the market was less friendly. Saturation led to increasing competition among the oil companies; independents with lower prices were beginning to attract customers. The most common architectural response was to emphasize the canopy. It took on the dress of the Googie style, projecting in a dramatic way, and angled or sloped to shelter the pumps, incorporating the identifying sign. Roofs might also extend as overhangs from the sides of the building, with downlighting under the eaves. But the station itself remained essentially the 1930-era box.⁸⁵

A good example of a Mid-Century Modernist service station is located in Tujunga at 7545 West Foothill Boulevard. It dates from 1959 and is now an auto repair shop. The essence of the building is the basic rectangular white box from the 1930s, with office, restrooms and service bay. Grafted onto the front is a dramatic Googie-style prow-shaped canopy that is canted slightly upward as it reaches toward the street. Its blunted end is supported by a single column.



*Service station on West Foothill Boulevard in Tujunga, 1959
(SurveyLA)*

⁸⁴ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 110-111.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 111.

By the mid-1960s a widespread disillusion with the landscape produced by the automobile was accompanied by a conservative move toward more restrained architectural forms. Service stations were universally condemned as the foremost contributors to the roadside wasteland. *National Petroleum News* warned its readers in 1964 that stations had become “objectionable aesthetically because – in the public eye – there are too many of them and they are gaudy, cluttered, and made of unattractive materials,” and it predicted a “blizzard” of zoning and design regulations unless action was taken by the oil company designers themselves.⁸⁶

Two opposite approaches were used by these designers. One was to soften the commercial appearance of the station by making it more domestic. This was a form of reversion to the stations of the early 1920s. The canopy remained but it became a low-pitched gable reminiscent of the ranch houses of the 1950s. White porcelain gave way to imitation wood, brick, or synthetic stone. Stations without canopies grafted mansards onto their parapets to appear a bit more homelike.⁸⁷

The other approach was to adopt a more reticent Mid-Century Modernism in place of Googie. This was best shown with the prototype that Eliot Noyes produced for Mobil in 1966. This prototype took the 1930s box of Walter Dorwin Teague and redressed it in Miesian attire: a crisp brick rectangle alternated solid walls with voids that allowed access to the office and repair bay. No decoration was permitted except for a single circular logo. The pump islands were marked by free-standing mushroom-like circular canopies, each supported on a single slender column. The station’s identifying sign was a clean-cut back-lit rectangle that simply spelled out “Mobil” in san-serif lettering. Only a contrasting colored “o” in the name provided a playful note.⁸⁸

Despite these efforts at visual updating the traditional service station would soon be a relic, replaced by a different form altogether. The basis of the traditional station was the concept of gas pumped by the attendant. This meant that the number of pumps, and therefore the size and layout of the station, was limited by the number of attendants. But beginning as early as the late 1940s independent vendors experimented with self-service, allowing customers to pump their own fuel. An independent named George Urich had about twenty-five such self-service outlets in the Los Angeles area by 1948.⁸⁹

Interestingly, the oil companies and others involved in the service station business were not totally opposed. There was abundant gasoline during the 1950s and the companies saw the independents as an outlet for their surplus. The independents were also an additional market for the manufacturers of gasoline pumps, tanks, and other machinery. Thus the multi-pump, self-service station gained a foothold, small but significant, by 1960.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Quoted in Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 111.

⁸⁷ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 111-112.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 112-113.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 108.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 108-109.

Because of its nature – a great number of pumps and no repair bays – the self-service outlet reverted to the architectural form of the beginning days of the gas station. This was the small office and the canopy. At the same time, due to the large number of pumps, the canopy became the dominant element and extended as far as needed. As early as 1949 fabricators such as California Cornice Steel and Supply Corporation were selling prefabricated stations to independents which consisted of a small boxlike office structure and a gigantic steel canopy that covered the multiple banks of pumps.⁹¹

The self-service movement killed the traditional gas station. Along with elimination of the need for attendants to pump gas came the death of the service bay. Cars required less frequent maintenance and at the same time became more complicated; eventually including on-board computers necessitated specialized attention. Discount outlets such as Walmart joined older car servicers such as Sears and the many tire and muffler franchises to provide what the service stations, without attendants, could no longer offer.⁹²

The oil companies inevitably followed the path of the self-service independents. They opened multi-pump stations with only a cubicle in which a single attendant acted as cashier. The process became more detached from service once the pumps became able to accept credit and debit cards.

Architecturally the independent form of a vast canopy covering a sea of pumps and a cashier's box became the norm. Eventually the box migrated from under the canopy to its side and became larger to include a mini-mart.⁹³ Extant examples are now rare.

⁹¹ Ibid., 110.

⁹² Ibid., 113.

⁹³ Ibid., 114.

PROPERTY TYPE: Gas/Service Station, 1920-1970

Summary Statement of Significance: Gas/service stations evolved as facilities for providing fuel, and often parts and services, for the automobile. A gas/service station evaluated under this sub-theme is significant in the area of Commerce; some examples may also be significant in the area of Architecture. They illustrate the evolution of the gas/service station as a significant commercial building type related to the automobile and Los Angeles' flourishing car culture. They show how a building type's design and site layout are shaped by accommodation to the needs of automobile as well as the stylistic and economic trends of the day. Extant, intact examples are now rare from the 1920s-30s and are becoming increasingly rare from the 1940s-1960s.

Period of Significance: 1920-1970

Period of Significance Justification: The 1920s is the date of the earliest extant gas/service station in Los Angeles. By this time automobile ownership was great enough to generate specific building types designed around its needs. By 1970, the end date, the basic components of the property type were not only fully developed, but also standardized by petroleum industry corporations. Also by 1970, car culture began to decline as driving became a means of getting from one place to another as opposed to a leisure activity. Although clearly there were still car enthusiasts, the impact of the car on the built environment was merely a continuation of a trend that began decades beforehand.

Geographic Location: Citywide, along arterial roads and highways

Area(s) of Significance: Commerce; Architecture

Criteria: NR A/C CR 1/3 Local 1/3

Associated Property Type: Commercial/Auto-Related – Gas/Service Station

Property Sub-type Description: Facility for selling gasoline, and often additional parts and services, for the automobile.

Property Sub-type Significance: Extant buildings illustrate the evolution of the gas/service station as a significant commercial building type related to the automobile. They show how a building type's design and site layout are shaped by accommodation to the needs of a particular mode of transportation as well as the stylistic and economic trends of the day.

SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Context: Commercial Development/Commercial Development and the Automobile

Eligibility Standards:

- Was designed and historically used to provide gasoline, and sometimes additional services, to automobiles
- Demonstrates convenient automobile access from the street
- Is an excellent example of the property type
- Contains design and site layout features that reflect the influence of, and accommodation to, the automobile
- Was constructed during the period of significance

Character-Defining/Associative Features:

- Retains most of the essential character defining features of the type
- May be of a style or mixture of styles typical of the period of construction such as Spanish Colonial Revival, Streamline Moderne and Googie styles
- May also be significant within a theme under the Architecture and Engineering context
- May reflect corporate design associated with particular oil companies and/or architects/designers (e.g. Texaco and Walter Dorwin Teague)

Integrity Considerations:

- Should retain integrity of Design, Location, Feeling, Association and Materials
- Should retain as much design integrity as possible, including overall massing, significant features (e.g. canopy), and identifying details such as trim and signage
- Some original materials may have been altered, removed, or replaced, particularly for early examples which are rare
- Should retain as much of the original relationship to the street and to adjacent buildings as possible so as to establish the importance of accommodating the building to the spatial needs of the automobile
- If use has changed, adaptation to new use should allow for maintenance of as much of the original design and site layout as possible
- Site layout should retain original relationship to the street

Property Type: Car Showroom, 1920-1970

Buying an automobile was first done through a livery stable, carriage dealer, or bicycle shop. These early car vendors were businessmen who obtained a license to sell a particular brand of auto. Once purpose-built automobile dealerships began to appear, just before the First World War, they fit into the existing pre-automobile streetscape. They were essentially storefronts on a commercial street with a large entrance door and windows to show the product.⁹⁴

Unlike the service station, the showroom retained throughout the 1920s a central business district location and a traditional relationship to the street. The auto manufacturers chose to remain urban and to adopt the historicist styles that characterized the elite architecture of the city. Most potential customers did not yet own cars and therefore relied on public transportation to reach a dealership; the impressive revivalist architecture assured them of a reputable vendor.

The auto manufacturers first experimented with building what one historian has referred to as “object-lesson” salesrooms in certain cities to show locally-owned dealerships what could be done. These corporate-sponsored buildings were designed to resemble banks and first-class office buildings, clad in traditional styles. “Exteriors often sported bas-reliefs, grand ornamental cornices, and entrance porticos, while inside cars were sold in elegant surroundings in large, opulent sales salons.”⁹⁵

During the early twenties these urban dealerships began combining auto servicing and repair with sales. To fit onto their city sites they constructed multi-storied buildings complete with ramps and auto-sized elevators for access to the upper levels. The facades sported historicist detailing; generally the only feature on the street front that identified the building as an auto-service facility was the use of factory sash for the large windows on the upper floors. Unfortunately, these 1920s era center-city behemoths have almost vanished from Los Angeles.⁹⁶ In Downtown Los Angeles several automobile manufacturers erected large, new showrooms and repair facilities along Figueroa and Flower Streets in what is now known as the South Park neighborhood. As early as the 1910s the term “auto row” appeared in local newspapers and was used to describe the cluster of showrooms and associated businesses in the area.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 75-76.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 79.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 77-84.

⁹⁷ The terms “auto row” and “automobile row” first appear in *Los Angeles Times* articles from the early 1910s.

SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Context: Commercial Development/Commercial Development and the Automobile

Along with the multi-level downtown dealerships, the car companies built smaller outlets in outlying business districts. These more suburban showrooms continued the traditional pattern of being set hard against the street and of clothing themselves in historicist garb. The common façade composition consisted of an elaborate center entrance and symmetrically flanking show windows. These smaller showrooms were in essence single-story versions of the multi-story central business district dealerships, and maintained a footprint much like that of the earlier livery stable. An example is the one-time showroom located at 1925 North Wilcox Avenue in Hollywood. Built in 1925, it features the Spanish Colonial Revival dress popular at the time, along with the standard three-bay façade composition.⁹⁸



1050 S. Hope was constructed as an auto showroom and service center for the Willys-Overland Company in 1916. The showroom remained in operation until 1932. (SurveyLA)



*Former Car Showroom in Hollywood, 1925
(SurveyLA)*

By the mid-1930s, the auto showroom adopted the Streamline Moderne. In an attempt to encourage flagging sales during the Depression, some of the older downtown showrooms replaced their historicist ornament, at least at the showroom level, with abstract lines, curves, and circles. More important, however, was a rethinking of location for those few new dealerships that were built in the 1930s. Most potential customers already owned cars, so there was no need to be close to streetcar lines. Now ease of auto access and adequate parking were needed.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ The three-bay form of center vehicle entrance and flanking windows, placed directly on the street without setback, was shared by three building types in the 1920s: the showroom, the auto repair shop and the garage. It is difficult at times to determine the original purpose by visual inspection of the façade alone. Many have been used for several of the purposes during their history.

⁹⁹ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 86-88.

SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Context: Commercial Development/Commercial Development and the Automobile

The auto showroom moved to the strip. Instead of remaining on a tight lot in the central or local business district, it placed itself on an arterial road that allowed it to spread horizontally. The common arrangement was a showroom in the front, complete with large expanses of glass, service bays to the rear, and adequate parking alongside for used cars and customer circulation. The showroom itself, with its expanses of glass, maintained its position directly on the street, without a setback. It was dressed in Streamline Moderne detailing, with an integral sign featuring the name and emblem of the brand sold within.¹⁰⁰



An excellent example is the British European Auto Showroom in San Pedro. It is located at 1525 South Pacific Avenue, well outside the port community's old central business district. Constructed in 1938, it consists of a curved exhibit space along the front, all in glass and sheltered by a thin curved canopy, and joined by an integral wall-like pylon sign set perpendicular to the street. Behind this are the service bays reached by a drive to the right of the showroom.

*British European Auto Showroom in San Pedro, 1938
(SurveyLA)*

Though construction of new dealerships ceased during the Second World War, anticipating a surge of new car customers, the auto companies studied the problem of designing attractive facilities. As early as 1944, before the end of the war, there appeared *Post-War Housing and Facilities for Studebaker Dealers* by that now vanished brand. In 1945 Ford published *Plans for New and Modernized Sales and Service Buildings*. That same year General Motors held a “Design Competition for Dealer Establishments” and three years later issued *Planning Automobile Dealer Properties* based on the submissions to the competition.¹⁰¹

These planning manuals carefully considered issues of location and design. Not only should dealerships be placed along arterials on large plots of land, a common practice since the 1930s, manuals decreed, but they should sit on the far side of an intersection on the homeward-bound side of a commuter route. Potential customers could have full view of the showroom while waiting for red lights and then, with free time after work, pull in and inspect the autos on display. There should be a procession of visual delights to greet customers: first the new cars, seen through a glare-free expanse of glass, and then the service wing, providing potential customers with the assurance of care in the future. The final element should be the used car lot, arranged with the best models in front.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 88.

¹⁰² Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 88-89.

SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Context: Commercial Development/Commercial Development and the Automobile

Much of this advice came from studying the few dealerships that were built in the 1930s. But there were a number of subtle and not so subtle changes. A subtle change was the shrinking size of the showroom, with just a few of the best looking models on display, and the growing respectability of the parts and service department, with attractive counters and waiting areas. A not so subtle change was in the dealership's primary identifying sign. The sign in the 1930s, while an important design element, tended to be integrated into the architecture. By the 1950s the sign often detached itself from the building and became a free-standing, and increasingly dominant, element.¹⁰³



*Casa de Cadillac Dealership in Sherman Oaks, 1949
(SurveyLA)*

During the first years of construction, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, auto showrooms were typically subdued Mid-Century Modern designs, with flat roofs and plain surfaces. The mammoth glass windows showing off the cars provided character. The Casa de Cadillac at 14401 Ventura Boulevard in Sherman Oaks is a well-known example from the early postwar era. It was designed by

Randall Duell and Phillip A. Conklin and completed in 1949. Its form is essentially an updated rectangular version of the 1938 dealership in San Pedro. Its primary feature is a vast expanse of glass that encloses the showroom and is covered by a projecting flat roof. A wall-like sign, perpendicular to the street, rises asymmetrically at one end.¹⁰⁴

Over the next fifteen years the most important design development was the separation of the sign from the structure. The detached sign occasionally took on Googie-like extravagance to attract attention, but generally the need to exhibit the brand emblem and name had precedence. The detached sign, enormous by earlier standards, was generally limited to serving as a giant billboard for the corporate logo.

This reticence extended to the showroom structure itself. The Googie style could occasionally be seen in an exaggerated roof line or a canopy extended over the service drive but this was relatively rare. The point was to call attention to the cars on sale and not to the architecture. The same was true when New Formalism, with its classicizing proportions and details, began to appear in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Again, the architecture was secondary to the merchandise and thereby kept subdued.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 88-90.

¹⁰⁴ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 90-91; Los Angeles Conservancy Website (www.laconservancy.org).

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Context: Commercial Development/Commercial Development and the Automobile

From the mid-1950s onward the most common architectural approach was to treat the showroom as a minimalist Mid-Century Modern container. This can be seen at the Pollard Ravenscroft Chevrolet Dealership at 6001 Van Nuys Boulevard in Van Nuys. It was described at its completion in 1964 by the *Los Angeles Times* as “clean, precise and dramatic in design.”¹⁰⁵ The east façade, fronting directly on Van Nuys Boulevard, is a pristine glass box with the thinnest of mullions under the horizontal line of the flat roof. The south side facing the parking lot contains the entrance – simple glass doors set flush with the window wall – and a partial set of vertical louvers act as sun shades. Of interest as well is the rear service building that contains parking on its roof.



*Pollard Ravenscroft Chevrolet Dealership in Van Nuys, 1964
(SurveyLA)*

As with other auto-related building types, the auto showroom underwent a change after the mid-1960s in response to both growing conservatism and, more importantly, the changing nature of the automobile industry. To be sure, the showroom remained the place to purchase and service a car but increasingly as a structure showrooms retreated from the road, behind parking lots, and became less visible. Instead, motorists were greeted by row upon row of new cars parked outside, displayed like cans of soft drinks on a supermarket shelf.

This mode of selling required great amounts of space. Most of the existing dealerships simply were not large enough. The result was the abandoning of locations that, in 1950, seemed quite adequate for vast lots on the outskirts of development. This was accompanied by a massive reduction in the number of dealerships as American-made brands disappeared and those few remaining consolidated facilities. The showroom and the service bay took on a utilitarian form and only the dealer sign, free-standing and standardized for the brand, attracted attention.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ *Los Angeles Times*, September 13, 1964.

¹⁰⁶ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 90-93.

SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context StatementContext: Commercial Development/Commercial Development and the Automobile

PROPERTY TYPE: Car Showroom, 1920-1970

Summary Statement of Significance: The showroom is a building type that evolved as a facility for exhibiting, selling, and often servicing automobiles. A car showroom evaluated under this sub-theme is significant in the area of Commerce; most examples are also significant in the area of Architecture. They illustrate the evolution of the car showroom as a significant commercial building type related to the automobile and Los Angeles' flourishing car culture. They show how a building type's design and site layout are shaped by accommodation to the needs of automobile as well as the stylistic and economic trends of the day. Extant, intact examples are now rare.

Period of Significance: 1920-1970

Period of Significance Justification: The 1920s is the date of the earliest extant car showroom in Los Angeles. By this time automobile ownership was great enough to generate specific building types designed around its needs. By the late 1960s the auto showroom underwent a change. They were placed further back on their lots and surrounded by parking lots; the cars themselves became the dominate feature from the street.

Geographic Location: Citywide, along arterial roads and highways

Area(s) of Significance: Commerce; Architecture

Criteria: NR A/C CR 1/3 Local 1/3

Associated Property Type: Commercial/Auto-Related – Car Showroom

Property Sub-type Description: Facility for exhibiting, selling, and often servicing automobiles

Property Sub-type Significance: Extant examples illustrate the evolution of the showroom as a significant building type related to the automobile. They show how a building type's design is shaped by accommodation to the needs of a particular mode of transportation, as well as the stylistic and economic trends of the day.

- Eligibility Standards:**
- Originally constructed to sell, and often provide servicing for, the automobile
 - Demonstrates convenient automobile access from the street
 - Is an excellent example of the property type
 - Contains design and site layout features that reflect the needs of selling and servicing the automobile

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Context: Commercial Development/Commercial Development and the Automobile

- Was constructed during the period of significance

Character-Defining/Associative Features:

 - Retains most of the essential character defining features of the type
 - Of a style or mixture of styles typical of the period of construction such as Spanish Colonial Revival, Streamline Moderne, and Mid-Century Modern styles.
 - Typically also significant within a theme under the Architecture and Engineering context.
 - Of the design and layouts typical of adapting to the needs of selling and servicing the automobile during the period of significance (e.g. showroom close to the street with large expanses of glass, service bays accessible to the customers' cars, prominent signage)
 - Typically reflects corporate design associated with particular car companies and architects/designers

Integrity Considerations:

 - Should retain integrity of Design, Location, Feeling, Association, and Materials
 - Should retain as much design integrity as possible, including overall massing, significant features (e.g. showroom with display windows), and identifying details such as trim and signage
 - Some original materials may have been altered, removed, or replaced
 - Should retain as much of original relationship to the street and to adjacent buildings as possible, so as to establish the importance of accommodating the structure to the spatial needs of the automobile (e.g. service door directly adjacent to street in 1920s structures, front showroom and rear service bays in 1930s-1960s structures)
 - If use has changed, adaptation to new use should allow for the maintenance of as much of the original design and site layout as possible
 - Site layout should retain original relationship to the street and adjacent structures

Property Type: Car Repair, 1920-1970

Before the First World War livery stables, bicycle vendors and blacksmiths also repaired cars. During the 1920s two other auto-related building types commonly housed repair facilities. One was the gasoline/service station in the form of the superstation. The other was the new car dealership. The few stand-alone repair shops that existed were typically housed in simple industrial buildings or in buildings abandoned by other uses, such as old livery stables and bankrupt auto showrooms.



*Car Repair Shop in Hollywood, 1928
(SurveyLA)*

There are, however, buildings dating from the 1920s that appear to have been built specifically for auto repair. They are of a form similar to the smaller auto showroom with a central entrance and flanking windows set flush to the street with no setback. A good example is located at 5168 West Fountain Avenue in Hollywood. Dating from 1928, it is essentially a parapeted box with the central entrance bay slightly recessed. Its

ornament is restricted to four medallions along the parapet but the proportions are rigidly classical. Another good example of a purpose built auto repair building is Dahlia Motors in Eagle Rock (HCM #692).



*Built in 1931, Dahlia Motors Building is Historic-Cultural Monument No. 692.
(City of Los Angeles – Office of Historic Resources)*



*Today, the property serves as a restaurant in Eagle Rock.
(@2015 Google StreetView)*

The auto body/repair shop assumed a somewhat different character during the 1930s. Earlier, parts such as tires and batteries had been sold through service stations or new car dealerships; but with the coming of the Depression some parts manufacturers experimented with opening outlets of their own.

SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Context: Commercial Development/Commercial Development and the Automobile

The tire companies were particularly active. They produced a handful of retail outlets that resembled smaller versions of the Streamline Moderne dealership with a show window for products facing the street and a path for customers' cars to access the service bays along the side or to the rear.

One of these suppliers was the Firestone Tire Company. This vendor left a landmark structure from this period, the Firestone Tire Company Building at 800 South La Brea (HCM #1020). It was built in 1937 and is a prime example of the type and the Streamline Moderne style. It features a curved, stepped cantilevered canopy that extends to shelter the entire ensemble. Underneath the canopy are a showroom and a broad entrance to the service area. The showroom, on the corner facing two streets, is curved to match the canopy and is marked by a vast expanse of plate glass. It is a notable piece of architecture that compares well with the auto showrooms of the day.



Historic-Cultural Monument No. 1020

Firestone Tire Company, 1937

(City of Los Angeles – Office of Historic Resources)

As with auto dealerships, the auto parts outlet during the 1950s and 1960s was of a generally restrained Mid-Century Modern with an occasional Googie touch. The glass show window and the sign were the most significant elements. A good example is the Firestone Tire Company outlet at 18051 West Sherman Way in Reseda, constructed in 1955. It is a linear form, perpendicular to the street, with a glassed-in showroom for its products in front, service bays stretching toward the rear, and a shed roof with a slight Googie flair covering the entire entity.



Firestone Tire Company in Reseda, 1955

(SurveyLA)

Auto repair facilities continued to recycle car-related forms built for other purposes. Independent auto body and repair shops from the 1960s onward tended to be housed in nondescript buildings. At the same time the increasingly omnipresent chains specializing in auto parts utilized sparingly detailed standardized boxes dominated by their signs featuring the corporate logos.

PROPERTY TYPE: Car Repair, 1920-1970

Summary Statement of Significance: The car repair shop is a building type that evolved as a facility for repairing and servicing automobiles, and to supply auto parts such as tires and batteries. A car repair facility evaluated under this sub-theme is significant in the area of Commerce and most examples are also significant in the area of Architecture. They illustrate the evolution of the car repair shop as a significant commercial building type related to the automobile and Los Angeles' flourishing car culture. They show how a building type's design and site layout are shaped by accommodation to the needs of automobile as well as the stylistic and economic trends of the day. Extant, intact examples are now rare from the 1920s-30s and are becoming increasingly rare from the 1940s-1950s.

Period of Significance: 1920-1970

Period of Significance Justification: The 1920s is the date of the earliest extant car repair facility in Los Angeles. By this time automobile ownership was great enough to generate specific building types designed around its needs. By the mid to late 1960s independent auto repair shops as well as chain locations were typically located in non-descript buildings.

Geographic Location: Citywide, along arterial roads and highways.

Area(s) of Significance: Commerce; Architecture

Criteria: NR A/C CR 1/3 Local 1/3

Associated Property Type: Commercial - Auto Related – Car Repair

Property Sub-type Description: Facility for repairing and selling parts for the automobile.

Property Sub-type Significance: Extant structures illustrate the evolution of the car repair facility as a significant building type related to the automobile. They show how a building type's architecture is shaped by accommodation to the needs of a particular mode of transportation, as well as the stylistic and economic trends of the day.

Eligibility Standards:

- Was originally designed and historically used to repair and provide parts for the automobile
- Demonstrates convenient automobile access from the street

- Is an excellent, early, or rare remaining example of the property type
- Contains design and site layout features that reflect the influence of, and adaptation to, the automobile
- Was constructed during the period of significance

Character-Defining/Associative Features:

- Retains most of the essential character defining features of the type
- Of a style or mixture of styles typical of period of construction such as Spanish Colonial Revival, Streamline Moderne, Mid-Century Modern, and Googie styles
- Typically also significant within a theme under the Architecture and Engineering context
- Of the layouts typical of adopting to the needs of the automobile (e.g. showroom for parts sold, service bay entrances as dominant façade features, space to maneuver and park automobiles undergoing repair/servicing)
- May be associated with particular companies and/or architects/designers (e.g. Firestone)

Integrity Considerations:

- Should retain integrity of Design, Location, Feeling, Materials, and Association
- Should retain as much design integrity as possible, including overall massing, significant features, and identifying details such as trim and signage
- Some original materials may have been altered, removed, or replaced
- Should retain as much of original relationship to the street and to adjacent buildings as possible so as to establish importance of accommodating the structure to the spatial needs of the automobile
- If use has changed, adaptation to new use should allow for maintenance of as much of the original design and site layout as possible
- Site integrity should retain original relationship to the street

Property Type: Parking Structure, 1920-1960

The parking structure emerged in the attempt to fit the automobile into the existing business districts of the 1920s. The problem of handling the passenger car in a commercial core, laid out for mass transit and pedestrian movement, was obvious well before 1920. By the First World War the demand for downtown surface parking was such that it was profitable to purchase older structures, demolish them, and then charge for parking on the vacant land. Five such lots existed in Los Angeles between First, Eleventh, Figueroa and Wall Streets in 1915. The number increased to more than forty by 1920 and more than one hundred by 1925.¹⁰⁷

One response to the problem of housing cars was to include underground parking in new buildings. The J. W. Robinson Company Department Store in its downtown facility of 1914-1915 included a basement parking garage with an elevator to the upper floors. But underground parking was most common for office buildings. Since basements were restricted at that time to a maximum of two stories for technical reasons, this meant parking only for a selected few in the office block.¹⁰⁸



*Historic-Cultural Monument No. 398
Pacific Mutual Building, 1920
(City of Los Angeles – Office of Historic Resources)*

The Pacific Mutual Life Insurance Company, Historic-Cultural Monument #398, at Sixth and Grand includes underground spaces for two hundred cars in its 1920-1921 building. The company built an above-ground garage over the existing parking structure to augment its underground parking in 1926. The parking structure was designed by Schultz and Weaver, it is included as part of the site's designation as a City monument.¹⁰⁹ At least eight other office buildings followed, generally with underground space for around 120 cars each. The largest is the Roosevelt Building of 1926-1927 on Seventh Street (HCM #355 and listed in the National Register), which can hold as many as 350 autos.¹¹⁰

More common was the multi-story above-ground parking garage. Throughout Downtown, multi-story "auto parks" were woven into the central business district as early as the 1920s, providing patrons of department stores and other businesses with a convenient place to park their car while shopping. To entice motorists, many of these garages offered on-site services in addition to parking stalls. Those that remain are the earliest examples of the property type in Los Angeles.

¹⁰⁷ Longstreth, *City Center to Regional Mall*, 45.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 31-32, 51-52.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 49-52.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 31-32, 51-52.

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Some were constructed by office buildings and department stores for use by their tenants and customers. One of the most impressive was that built for the Hamburgers Department Store (which later became the May Company and is Historic-Cultural Monument #459) in 1926. It is a six-story structure located at Ninth and Hill, less than a block away from the store on Broadway, and is Historic-Cultural Monument #1001.



Historic-Cultural Monument No. 1001

May Company Parking Garage, 1927

(City of Los Angeles – Office of Historic Resources)

Others were independent and open to the general public. The largest independent parking structure was one of the earliest. This was the Grand Central Garage of 1920, unfortunately no longer extant. Located at Fifth and Grand, it had eight levels and storage space for one thousand cars. It included a gas station, repair facilities, a car wash, and a chauffeurs' lounge. Six other multi-level garages were built between 1923 and 1928, housing up to five hundred cars each.¹¹¹



Historic-Cultural Monument No. 748, 1924
(Los Angeles Public Library)

The parking garage of the 1920s took on the historicist garb of the surrounding business blocks and department stores, at least for the street front. Typical is the garage at 816 South Grand Avenue, listed in the National Register and Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument #748. It has been converted to apartments under the name of the South Park Lofts. It is an eight-story building with a Beaux-Arts façade designed by Curlett & Beelman. It opened in 1924 and served the customers of nearby Bullock's Department Store.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Longstreth, *City Center to Regional Mall*, 46.

¹¹² Longstreth, *The Drive-In, the Supermarket, and the Transformation of Commercial Space*, 5-6.

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Built in 1925, the parking structure at 742 S. Hope in Central City is an example of a 1920s parking structure in Downtown Los Angeles, exhibiting essential characteristics of the property type and one of the earliest examples of the property type in the city.

The garage included a “finely appointed ladies’ lounge” and catered to the predominantly-female clientele of nearby department stores, who could have their cars serviced and washed while they were shopping nearby. (SurveyLA)



This same use of historicist forms to blend in with adjacent buildings characterized the smaller parking garages that appeared in outlying shopping districts. The building at 646 North Beachwood Drive is a prime example. Built in 1925, it is has been converted into offices. The one-time garage is a good example of the Spanish Colonial Revival style dominant during the period. It is a two-story stucco structure topped by a gabled tile roof. The façade composition is that of a tasteful apartment building of the time, with asymmetrically arranged windows in the Andalusian manner. Only the large, garage-size opening in the center hints at its original purpose.

The construction of parking garages followed the demand for office and retail space in built-up commercial districts. As this demand disappeared during the Depression years of the 1930s and the war years of the early 1940s so too did the need for parking structures. It was not until resumption of downtown office building construction after the Second World War that the garage made a comeback.



Former Parking Garage on Beachwood Drive, 1925 (@2016 Google StreetView)

Unlike its predecessors from the 1920s, the postwar parking garage featured a bit of modernist flair. Most of this flair, however, was related to innovative structural systems. By its nature, the parking garage remained a blocky, compact entity. There was little opportunity for the sprawling asymmetric assemblies or flashy materials typical

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Googie. Nor did Googie seem appropriate for a downtown setting. Instead, design focused on creative uses of reinforced concrete and how these uses could be expressed on the exterior.

In 1946 the City of Los Angeles passed an ordinance that required new commercial buildings to provide parking. The regulation specified one spot for each one thousand square feet of office space. This included new structures in the central business district where surface parking was impossible. A clause that permitted the parking to be provided in a separate structure within 1500 feet of the parent building encouraged the construction of garages.¹¹³



*General Petroleum Company Garage, 1948-1949
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

The first garage constructed under this ordinance was the parking structure for the General Petroleum Company, completed in 1949 by architects Walter Wurdeman and Welton Becket. Located at Flower and Eighth Streets, the garage held almost five hundred cars on seven levels. It featured remnants of the Streamline Moderne in its detailing but its form was shaped by its structural system. As such it established the pattern for postwar parking garage.¹¹⁴

Parking for the general public, not linked to a particular office structure, was also a problem to be solved if downtown were to revive. One approach was to go underground. Pershing Square Parking Garage was built in 1951-1952. It contained spaces for 1,500 cars and was the first large-scale downtown parking facility for the general public since the 1920s. In the following decades, underground parking, built as part of office and public buildings, also served the general public when space was available.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Longstreth, *City Center to Regional Mall*, 214-215.

¹¹⁴ Longstreth, *City Center to Regional Mall*, 214-215; "General Petroleum Garage" (Order Number 00095728), Photo from Herald Examiner Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.

¹¹⁵ Longstreth, *City Center to Regional Mall*, 213-214.



At left, Councilman Ed Roybal (arrow) speaks during the dedication for the Pigeon Hole Parking Garage;

At right, a man demonstrates the Pigeon Hole's automobile lift elevator, 1953 (Los Angeles Public Library)

There were also a few attempts to find new modes of above-ground multi-level parking. One interesting variation was the Pigeon Hole Parking Garage at 644 South Flower Street. It featured an automated system whereby cars were placed in an elevator. The elevator lifted them to the upper levels and stored them in “pigeon holes” to await the return of the owners. Then City Councilman Ed Roybal spoke from a bunting-draped stage at its 1953 dedication.¹¹⁶

Otherwise, the parking garage from 1950 onward employed the sloped floor-ramp form in reinforced concrete as used in the General Petroleum Company structure. Only the façade surface appliquéd would change, from the vague Streamline Moderne of Wurdeman and Becket to the more rectilinear forms of Mid-Century Modernism. Eventually Brutalist, Post-Modern and Deconstructivist devices would be grafted on but the underlying essence of structural determinism remained.

¹¹⁶ “Downtown Pigeon Hole Parking Garage Dedicated” (Order Number 00070234) and “Pigeon Hole Garage Car Elevator” (Order Number 00070248), Photos from Herald Examiner Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.

PROPERTY TYPE: Parking Structure, 1920-1960

Summary Statement of Significance: The parking structure is a building type that evolved as a facility for storing parked cars in a compact fashion. A parking structure evaluated under this sub-theme is significant in the area of Commerce; most examples are also significant in the area of Architecture. They illustrate the evolution of the parking structure as a significant commercial building type related to the automobile and Los Angeles' flourishing car culture. They show how a building type's design is shaped by accommodation to the needs of automobile as well as the stylistic and economic trends of the day. Extant, intact examples are becoming increasingly rare.

Period of Significance: 1920-1960

Period of Significance Justification: The 1920s is the date of the earliest extant parking structure in Los Angeles. By this time automobile ownership was great enough to generate specific building types designed around its needs. By the 1960s, the basic components of the property type were not only fully developed and standardized by using the sloped floor-ramp form in reinforced concrete.

Note: Parking Structures that post-date this period of significance may be significant under Criterion C for themes within the Architecture and Engineering context.

Geographic Location: Citywide, but primarily Downtown Los Angeles

Area(s) of Significance: Commerce; Architecture

Criteria: NR A/C CR 1/3 Local 1/3

Associated Property Type: Commercial/Auto-Related – Parking Structure

Property Sub-type Description: Facility for storing cars in a compact manner, generally multi-story in form, and located in a densely-populated area where surface parking is economically prohibitive and/or spatially impossible.

Property Sub-type Significance: Extant structures illustrate the evolution of the parking structure as a significant building type related to the automobile. They show how a building type's architecture is shaped by accommodation to the needs of a particular mode of transportation, as well as the stylistic and economic trends of the day.

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Eligibility Standards:

- Was designed and historically used to provide compact parking for the automobile
- Is an excellent, early, or rare example of the property type
- Contains architectural and site layout features that reflect the influence of, and adaption to, the automobile
- Was constructed during the period of significance

Character-Defining/Associative Features:

- Retains most of the essential character defining features of the type
- Of a style or mixture of styles typical of the period of construction such as Beaux Art Classicism, Spanish Colonial Revival, and Mid-Century Modern
- Typically also significant within a theme under the Architecture and Engineering context and associated with noted designers/architects
- Of the layouts typical in adapting to the needs of the automobile (e.g. multi-storied with means of transporting cars from one level to another, structure determined by the need to support load of parked cars, located in densely built-it area with little or no space for exterior auto circulation)
- May be associated with particular companies/corporations important in Los Angeles' commercial history, particularly in the Downtown area

Integrity Considerations:

- Should retain integrity of Design, Location, Feeling, Association, and Materials
- Should retain as much design integrity as possible, including overall massing, significant features, and identifying details such as trim and signage
- Some original materials may have been altered, removed, or replaced
- Should retain as much of original relationship to the street and to adjacent buildings as possible, so as to establish importance of accommodating the structure to the spatial needs of the automobile and to the dense setting
- If use has changed, adaptation to new use should allow for maintenance of as much of the original design and site layout as possible
- Site integrity should retain original relationship to the street

Property Type: Car Wash, 1950-1970



Car Wash, circa 1939 (Los Angeles Public Library)

Early car washes, or auto laundries as they were then called, were typically part of service stations or parking garages. The vehicle remained stationary in a service bay and was laundered by hand. There were, however, by the late 1920s a few experiments in stand-alone facilities with a process involving movement. The best known was El Patio Auto Laundry on Vermont. Here the cars were apparently pulled by hand through a linear structure where they were washed, dried, and polished by hand at different locations along a continuous line.¹¹⁷

There appears to have been some development of the linear form during the 1930s. The photograph above, from around 1939, shows a Streamline Moderne structure that is, in essence, the postwar car wash in a more restrained dress. The location of this facility is unknown – the curator's description that accompanies the historic photo places it somewhere in Los Angeles – and the degree to which it was mechanized is not apparent. The Streamline Moderne architecture links it to the service stations of the day. There are pumps located on an unroofed island between the car wash and the street. There also appears, barely visible to the upper left of the dark car emerging from under the canopy, the parapet of a service station office structure that may be attached to the front of the wash. One suspects that the linear pavilion in the 1939 photo was a prefabricated structure.¹¹⁸ No car washes dating from the 1920s to the 1940s appear to remain in Los Angeles.

By the mid-1950s the linear concept had emerged fully mechanized. The auto was pulled or pushed mechanically in an assembly-line manner, with mammoth mechanical washers and dryers stationed at key points along the line. Attendants were present intermittently to smooth the process. The structure housing the postwar car wash follows from the pre-war form in consisting – in essence – of no more than a linear open pavilion, with the ballet of machinery, workers and moving cars as its content. This limited program lent itself well to the use of Googie-based structural expressionism as a means of announcing its presence. Architectural critic Reyner Banham pronounced the car wash a direct descendent of 1920s Russian Constructivism.¹¹⁹ Another historian has called the car wash “the essence of the modern building; expressing both structure and advertising functions of the roadside,” and has

¹¹⁷ “El Patio Auto Laundry” (Order Numbers 00031921 and 00032778), Photos from the Security Pacific National Bank Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.

¹¹⁸ Hess, *Googie Redux*, 184-185, 192, 199-207.

¹¹⁹ Cited in Hess, *Googie Redux*, 55.

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compared it to Bernini's fountains in Rome as a symbolic representation of the practical use of water in a semi-desert environment.¹²⁰

The origins of postwar car wash design are unclear and deserve further research. In some cases, architects well known for their work on Googie coffee shops – and other creations of the period – designed car washes. The now demolished Laurel Canyon Car Wash, originally at the corner of Laurel Canyon and Ventura Boulevard, was by Armet and Davis. It is also probable that, given the amount of steel used and the common ensemble of a hovering horizontal roof and slender projecting pylons, certain fabricators offered manufactured packages of structural elements, much like the prefabricators of metal service stations in the 1920s.



Premier Car Wash in Encino, 1966 (SurveyLA)

By the 1960s car washes were located throughout Los Angeles. The 1964 telephone book for the Central Los Angeles area lists more than 120 "Automobile Washing and Polishing" facilities at that time. The most common postwar car wash form was that using a single rank of pylons. A prime example is the Premier Car Wash at 17438 Ventura Boulevard in Encino, completed in 1966. It has intact all the classic features,

with its flat roof parallel to the street supported by a row of eight pylons. Each pylon is a straight vertical line on the back – and is ever-so-slightly curved out – and then returns in on the front as it descends toward the roof. At the top of each pylon is a small triangle supporting a three dimensional starburst. The sign is a series of separated squares that contain the individual letters of "car wash" attached to the edge of the roof in rhythm with the pylons.

There were a number of variations on this form. Many were simplified versions of the Premier, with unadorned pylons. Some included extensions to the top of the pylons that gave them the appearance of a bird's head. Still others added shallow arches to the spaces between the pylons at the level of the separated sign squares. A few went so far as to take the basic pylon and turn it into a shallow boomerang with the points directed toward the street.

¹²⁰ Hess, *Googie Redux*, 55.

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A second form, less common, actually appeared earlier. It consists of pairs of pylons extending back like matched spears to create a corridor. A good example of this form is the car wash at 8220 West Foothill Boulevard in Tujunga. Built in 1954, the ruffled surfaces of the paired pylons give it a rustic, even primitive look. The corridor created by the receding pairs of pylons works well for a facility like this sitting perpendicular to the street.



Car Wash in Tujunga, 1954 (SurveyLA)



*Woodman Car Wash in Arleta, 1959
(SurveyLA)*

A third basic form can be seen in the Woodman Car Wash, at 8720 North Woodman Avenue in Arleta and dating from 1959. In place of spire-like pylons it features five inverted Vs that support the roof and give the appearance of a series of A-frames under which cars pass as they are washed. As with the pylon form, the roof is a simple thin horizontal plane and the sides are open view. As with the paired pylons, his form was particularly well suited to sites on which the structure was placed perpendicular to the primary street. The image is uncannily like that of a modernist church of the era.

A fourth and particularly interesting form is to be found at the Canoga Park Hand Wash at 21008 West Sherman Way in Canoga Park. Dating from 1960, it comes closest to the playful ideal of Googie modernism. The Canoga Park Hand Wash replaces the A's of the Woodman Car wash with six inverted U's. It fulfills the Googie preference for asymmetry by sloping the tops of the U's to one side, like a shed roof, and splaying the legs at different angles. The suspended roof is sloped to match the tops of the U's and



*Canoga Park Hand Wash, 1960
(SurveyLA)*

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extends down a portion of the longer leg. The result is a fun-house feeling of things being askew in place of church-like solemnity.



*Silverlake Car Wash, 1962
(SurveyLA)*

By the mid-1960s even the car wash succumbed to conservatism and good taste. The linear layout remained but the pylons disappeared. In their place appeared stubby columns clothed in brick, stone or stucco and topped by carriage lamps or other historically derived ornament. A preview of this growing conservatism is the Silverlake Car Wash at 210 North Virgil Avenue in the Wilshire District. Dating from 1962 it retains the open linear form but its roof profile is heavier. More significant, the slender pylons have been replaced with broad stubby piers that penetrate only slightly above the roofline like so many chimneys. Significant, too, is the use of a stone facing on the piers, predictive of the later preference for so-called natural materials.

In later years the growing conservatism went beyond reining in Googie structural expressionism. The linear car wash often retreated into a factory-like enclosed building similar to that which it had inhabited during its experimental years in the late 1920s. An even more dramatic reversal was the reemergence of the stationary car laundry as part of the gas station, now in a box of its own and totally automated. Only in the occasional do-it-yourself car wash, consisting of a row of open bays each containing a hose and wand, and constructed in a Mid-Century Modernist form of hovering roof and slender supports, did a hint of the innovative structures of the early 1960s survive.

PROPERTY TYPE: Car Wash, 1950-1970

Summary Statement of Significance: The car wash is a building type that constructed as a facility for washing cars along a linear assembly-line process. A car wash evaluated under this sub-theme is significant in the areas of Commerce and Architecture. They illustrate the evolution of the car wash as a significant commercial building type related to the automobile and Los Angeles' flourishing car culture. They show how a building type's design and site layout are shaped by accommodation to the needs of automobile as well as the stylistic and economic trends of the day. Identified car washes from the period of significance are significant examples of the Googie style. Extant, intact examples are becoming increasingly rare.

Period of Significance: 1950-1970

Period of Significance Justification: No car washes dating before 1950 are known to be extant in Los Angeles. The period of significance covers the range of time in which Googie style car washes proliferated in the city. By the late 1960s, Googie went out of fashion, and along with it, the structural expressionism of the car wash. Also by 1970, car culture began to decline as driving became a means of getting from one place to another as opposed to a leisure activity. Although clearly there were still car enthusiasts, the impact of the car on the built environment was merely a continuation of a trend that began decades beforehand.

Note: Car washes that post-date this period of significance may be significant under Criterion C for themes within the Architecture and Engineering context (e.g. Brutalism).

Geographic Location: Citywide along arterial roads and highways; a concentration in areas built up after the WWII such as the San Fernando Valley.

Area(s) of Significance: Commerce; Architecture

Criteria: NR A/C CR 1/3 Local 1/3

Associated Property Type: Commercial/Auto-Related – Car Wash

Property Sub-type Description: Facility for washing cars, with a focus on the type in which the car moves through linearly and the architecture reflects this linear movement.

Property Sub-type Significance: Extant structures illustrate the evolution of the car wash as a significant building type related to the automobile. They show

how a building type's architecture is shaped by accommodation to the needs of a particular mode of transportation, as well as the stylistic and economic trends of the day.

Eligibility Standards:

- Was designed and historically used to provide washing services for automobiles
- Demonstrates convenient automobile access from the street
- Is an excellent example of the property type
- Contains design and site layout features that reflect the influence of, and accommodation to, the automobile
- Was constructed during the period of significance

Character-Defining/Associative Features:

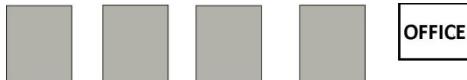
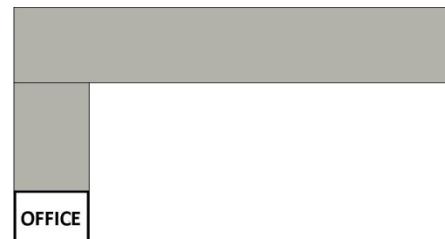
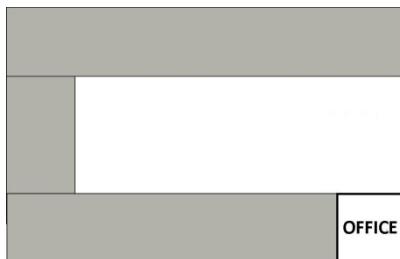
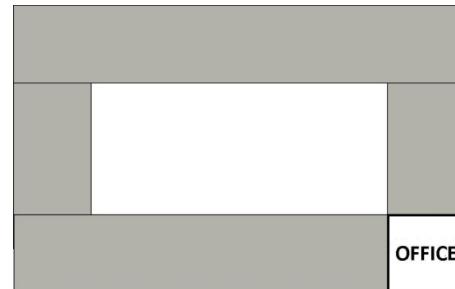
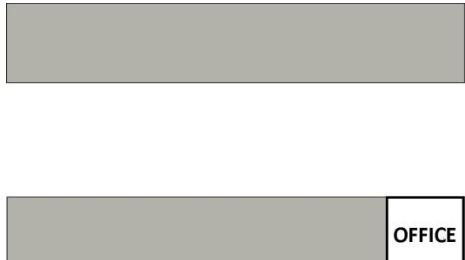
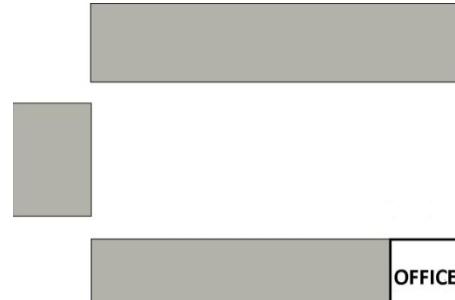
- Retains most of the essential character defining features of the type
- Significant within the Googie theme of the Architecture and Engineering context
- Of the layouts typical of adapting to the needs of the automobile, specifically the linear layout that allowed movement through different stages of the washing process
- May be associated with particular companies and/or architects/designers

Integrity Considerations:

- Should retain integrity of Design, Location, Feeling, and Materials, and Association
- Should retain as much design integrity as possible, including overall massing, significant features, and identifying details such as trim and signage
- Some original materials may have been altered, removed, or replaced
- Should retain as much of original relationship to the street and to adjacent buildings as possible, so as to establish importance of accommodating the structure to the spatial needs of the automobile
- Should retain original use, or, if not, adaptation to new use should allow for maintenance of as much of the original architecture and site layout as possible

Sub-Theme: Motels, 1920-1965

Over the years the motel has taken on a variety of layouts. The following diagrams provide an aid to understanding them. These forms are referred to throughout the Narrative Statement of Significance.

Cottage Courts*L-Shaped**U-Shaped (narrow/attached)**Courtyard**Row-on-Row (Semi-attached specific)**U-Shaped (narrow/semi-attached)*

The motel emerged as a separate building type during the 1920s. It began as a collection of modest cabins built in the private auto tourist camps that emerged in competition with municipally-run public camps. The private camps were often on property that contained a house that could offer rooms for

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rent, along with a general store and a gas station. Often as well, the camp owner would provide tents for a fee. By the late 1920s, many of these private camps had taken the next logical step and constructed crude cabins.¹²¹



*Historic-Cultural Monument No. 736
(City of Los Angeles – Office of Historic Resources)*

Northeastern Los Angeles was a popular location for these camps. This was due to its position along the automobile routes entering the city from the east. One such private park was the Monterey Auto Camp on the southern edge of Highland Park. It faced Monterey Road, at that time a primary route of entry to Los Angeles. It began as a campground in 1923 and eventually included cabins for rent. Later the site became the Monterey Trailer Park and under that name is today, Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument #736.¹²²

Two other auto parks existed a bit further south around Lincoln Park in Lincoln Heights. One was the Lincoln Park Tourist Camp at 4101 Valley Boulevard. It boasted in 1931 of 22 acres with both cottages and camping, and a community hall for socializing. The other was the Lockwood Auto Camp at 3851 Mission Road. Its cabins featured small gas stoves, ice boxes, and sinks. A separate wash house contained the toilets and bathing facilities.¹²³ Neither auto park is extant.

The first establishment to use the term “motel” appears to have been the Milestone Mo-tel in San Luis Obispo. It was built in 1926 to a design by Arthur Heineman, well known as an architect of bungalow courts. But the term “motor court” was, by the early 1930s, more common as campsites gave way to businesses that consisted of cabins alone. These purpose-built motor courts retained the domestic appearance of a collection of cottages, occasionally using historic or regional forms, but generally remaining extremely modest in scale. The pattern was set of a primary building in front, perhaps an older residence still occupied by the owner of the property, and cottages behind.¹²⁴

An example of an early stand-alone motor court is located in Lincoln Heights. It is the Luna Park Auto Court, now named the Lincoln Park Motel, at 2101 Parkside Avenue. It follows the Cottage Court layout consisting of two parallel rows of small frame cabins, with what is now covered parking between, and a

¹²¹ Warren James Belasco, *Americans on the Road: From Autocamp to Motel, 1910-1945* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979 [1997]), 130; Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 169-174.

¹²² “Monterey Trailer Park: Historic-Cultural Nomination Addendum,” HCM #736 File (Los Angeles: City of Los Angeles, Office of Historic Resources, 2002), 6-7.

¹²³ Belasco, *Americans on the Road*, 130, 135; “Lincoln Heights and More – History of Lincoln Heights” Website (www.lincolnheightsla.com), April 2015.

¹²⁴ John A. Jakle, Keith A. Sculle and Jefferson S. Rogers, *The Motel in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 18; Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 174-178.

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wood frame structure at the rear that could have been a social hall and/or restroom facility. The Los Angeles County Assessor has no date for these structures but they appear to be from the late 1920s or early 1930s. The original windows have been replaced but the openings remain unchanged. In 1940, according to the County Assessor, the front portion facing the street was remodeled in the Spanish Colonial Revival style, complete with stucco walls, tile roof, and an arch that extends over the driveway between rows of cabins.¹²⁵



Luna Park Auto Court, circa 1930
(SurveyLA)

The motor court, unlike the Downtown hotels, did not experience a collapse of new construction during the 1930s. Aided by the continuing growth of auto tourism and, by the mid-1930s, financing from the Federal Housing Administration for cottages costing less than two thousand dollars, the number of motor courts continued to grow, albeit at a

slower pace.¹²⁶ As early as 1933 the *Architectural Record* noted that “the construction of ‘shacks’ for autoists has been the single growing and highly active division of the building industry during the depression years.”¹²⁷

While most of these early depression-era motels continued using domestic styles by the late 1930s Streamline Moderne was beginning to appear. In 1935 the *Architectural Record* featured a portfolio of modern motel designs. A new trade publication directed specifically at the motel business began in 1937 with the first issue of *Tourist Court Journal*. It included on its staff a consulting architect who stressed the need to give old motels a modern look, including smooth stucco walls painted white. The goal was to create, through either new construction or remodeling, “The Motor Court Moderne.”¹²⁸

¹²⁵ “Lincoln Heights and More – History of Lincoln Heights.”

¹²⁶ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 178-179.

¹²⁷ Quoted in Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 179.

¹²⁸ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 179.

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Golden Star Motel in Venice, 1937 (SurveyLA)

An example of a Streamline Moderne establishment is the Golden Star Motel at 710 East Rose Avenue in Venice. Its original portion dates from 1937

with additions in 1938, 1940, 1941 and 1950. The right-hand section facing the street is an excellent example of the Streamline Moderne. It consists of a single-story parapeted stucco office block with a projecting horizontal canopy acting as an awning. Particularly of note is the curved corner with its casement window. The rounded corner, with the window and canopy following the curve, is a classic Streamline Moderne device. The line of rooms behind features the same continuous canopy. The units, unlike those at the Luna Park, are attached in a manner more common to the postwar period with parking in front of each. It generally follows the Row-on-Row layout.

Along with the Streamline Modern, historical and regional architecture remained popular during the 1930s, particularly in areas with a strong local vernacular. Ranch-style domestic forms, along with Pueblo and Spanish Colonial Revival styles, were popular in the southwest. Of all the auto-oriented architectural forms during the 1930s, the motel was the one most likely to maintain a historicist flavor for both new construction and remodeling.¹²⁹



*Studio City's El Royal Motel, 1937
(SurveyLA)*

An example of this is the El Royal Motel at 11117 Ventura Boulevard in Studio City. Built in 1937, it is a unified entity, apparently professionally designed and arranged in a U-Shape layout behind a wall along the street. (The wall may have been added later.) The main entrance is a break in the enclosing wall that is spanned by a sign. Like the earlier cabins at Luna Park Auto Court, the units are unattached and separated by parking. A continuous roof unites the units and the parking spaces into a single entity. The style is the ranch-cottage form used by tract housing in the years just

¹²⁹ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 179.

before and after the Second World War, characterized by stucco walls, hipped roofs and minimal detailing. Each unit has a bay window.

Motel design began the postwar period inauspiciously. One historian has noted that after the Second World War “utilitarian and functional imagery began edging out the quaint and the streamlined” as demand required rapid construction of new facilities.¹³⁰ But by the late 1950s motels had begun to place elements of Googie modernism onto their facades and signs. The buildings themselves, once past the front office with its elaborate canopy and neon detailing, were most likely to be of the most unadorned Mid-Century Modernism possible.¹³¹

The first note of change in the immediate postwar period actually affected layout. In place of separate units builders constructed attached rooms in linear arrangements thereby making the installation of heating and plumbing more practical. Parking was directly in front of the row of rooms so that the guest could move directly from the car to the unit as had been done with earlier with separate cabins. These new establishments, often using the term “motel,” were generally constructed of masonry rather than wood, contributing to their more utilitarian look. But the pre-war entrance pattern remained of the office as a dominant structure in the front, perhaps with a notable sign.¹³²

The attached linear arrangement occasionally appeared in pre-war motels but its predominance after the war was assured as motel design gained professional attention. The first serious study of this building type’s architecture was sponsored by the professional journal *Progressive Architecture* in 1955 and entitled simply *Motels*. Authors Geoffrey Baker and Bruno Funaro examined the different layouts that best fit the needs of customers and owners and then provided examples, complete with photographs and plans, from throughout the country.¹³³

Motels provided examples of layouts that carried the tendency toward linear arrangements to the next stage. These examples followed the pattern that was becoming common of creating a Courtyard in the center of the motel, surrounded by rows of units, each row one-room deep. In some of the more upscale examples cars were relegated to the perimeter and a swimming pool placed in the new central space. The room opened both to the parking lot and to the central space thereby retaining the older direct link to the car while at the same time gaining a pedestrian zone separate from the automobile.¹³⁴

Baker and Funaro also stressed the need for an image of newness and informality. This was a means of separating the postwar motel from both the dingy stuffiness of the older downtown hotel and the somewhat seedy reputation that motels had gained as settings for immoral behavior.¹³⁵ The authors

¹³⁰ Ibid., 182.

¹³¹ Ibid., 182-183.

¹³² Ibid., 182.

¹³³ Geoffrey Baker and Bruno Funaro, *Motels* (New York: Reinhold Publishing Company, 1955), *passim*.

¹³⁴ Baker and Funaro, *Motels*, *passim*; Jakle, Sculle and Rogers, *The Motel in America*, 45.

¹³⁵ Baker and Funaro, *Motels*, 1, 5-6.

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frankly acknowledged “the owner’s demand for loudness” of design so as to “really stop ‘em” as potential customers drove past.¹³⁶ The most common device to do this was the inclusion of a façade “developed as a billboard of distinctive shape and texture.”¹³⁷ Googie fulfilled this requirement.

Motels in Los Angeles followed this general pattern of evolution. Those constructed shortly after 1945 continued the trends of the pre-war period. This is evident in the El Patio Inn at 11466 Ventura Boulevard in Studio City. Constructed in 1946, it follows pre-war patterns with its Spanish Colonial Revival style in the then-popular ranch house form of low spreading gable tiled roofs and continuous porches. But it does accept the postwar move toward attached units and places parking in the center of a courtyard created by the resulting rows of rooms. The single-story facility is entered from the street by means of a drive-thru breezeway that allows for a continuous extension of the roof across the entire street façade.



*El Patio Inn in Studio City, 1946
(SurveyLA)*



*Motel Grand, 1947
(SurveyLA)*

A second motel, also from the early postwar period, shows the continuation of Streamline Moderne forms into the late 1940s. It is the Motel Grand at 1479 South La Cienega Boulevard. Constructed in 1947 it is in a late Streamline Moderne mode similar to the earlier Golden Star Motel in Venice. The Motel Grand is symmetric around an auto entrance passageway which is topped by a wall-like sign

¹³⁶ Ibid., 12.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 140.

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perpendicular to the street in the manner of a late 1930s supermarket. Like the El Patio, its rooms are attached to form a Courtyard and parking is in front of each unit.



*Historic postcard of the Flamingo Motel circa 1961 (top)
The Flamingo Motel today (bottom)
(SurveyLA)*

By the mid-1950s motels were taking on an increasingly schizophrenic approach to design. The façade adopted the latest in Googie-style devices as a means of attracting the attention of potential customers, while the units to the rear employed the most basic of a stripped International Style. The Flamingo Motel at 6105 North Lankershim Boulevard, constructed in 1961 is a good example.

The Flamingo is situated on a long, narrow lot, with a single two-story row of rooms extending toward the rear with cars parking in front of each room. An open balcony facing the cars serves the second floor. The architecture of this row of rooms is the most utilitarian of modernist stucco design. Only the facade, fronting the office facing the street, shows an effort to use Googie as a device to attract attention. In this case, it is an oversized cornice in the shape of rows of linked diamonds that extends over the drive as a porte-cochère. There are also metal mesh screens to give variety to the stucco façade below the cornice.

After the mid-1960s the motel declined as an innovative building type. The earlier Streamline Moderne and regionalist motels of the late forties and the Googie-influence motels of the early sixties were typically individually owned and designed. Each was different and used creative architectural elements, at least on the façade, to call out that difference. But by the late 1960s these individually owned and designed enterprises were being crowded out of the market by the chains. In 1962 fewer than two percent of the country's motels were part of a chain. By 1987 chains consisted of almost two-thirds of all motels. The remaining one-third were typically the older enterprises built before the rise of the chains.¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Jakle, Sculle and Rogers, *The Motel in America*, 150.

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The first chain to influence design was Holiday Inn, created in 1952. It was followed the next year by Howard Johnson's, of restaurant fame. These and other chains that came to dominate the market by the late 1960s developed a model of the multi-story, back-to-back block of rooms that replaced the single-story linear form. Later the chains adopted the now common interior double-loaded corridor type, again multi-storied and block-like in mass. With the interior corridor any direct link between the car and the individual room was broken. Surrounded by parking lots, these self-contained entities featured chain-standardized detailing and were identified primarily by their signs.¹³⁹



The Good Knight Inn is a rare example of an intact 1940s motel in North Hills along Sepulveda Boulevard, 1945-1958 (SurveyLA)

During this period, the motel spun off the more elaborate motor inn. As the older downtown hotels became unfashionable or disappeared entirely motor inns took over their social functions. The motor inns were larger and more luxurious than both the older independent motels and the chains that catered to a more modest market. Multiple stories in height, motor inns included full public facilities such as restaurants, lounges, banquet halls, and meeting rooms. But, like the simpler motels, they too were assemblies of standardized blocks and identified primarily by their signs.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 185-187.

¹⁴⁰ Jakle, Sculle and Rogers, *The Motel in America*, 49.

PROPERTY TYPE: Motel, 1920-1965

Summary Statement of Significance: The motel is a building type designed for temporary and/or semi-permanent lodging with a direct link between the automobile and the room. A motel evaluated under this sub-theme is significant in the area of Commerce; most examples are also significant in the area of Architecture. They illustrate the evolution of the motel as a significant commercial building type related to the automobile and Los Angeles' flourishing car culture. They show how a building type's design is shaped by accommodation to the needs of automobile as well as the stylistic and economic trends of the day. Extant, intact examples are becoming increasingly rare.

Period of Significance: 1920-1965

Period of Significance Justification: The 1920s is the date of the earliest intact, extant motel-related resource recorded in Los Angeles. By the mid-1960s the motel declined as an innovative building type. Independently owned and operated motels along highways and main arterial roads were impacted by the construction of the freeway system. As well, motel chains were becoming prevalent and developed standardized forms and layouts that broke the direct link between the car and the individual room.

Geographic Location: Citywide, along arterial roads and highways

Area(s) of Significance: Commerce; Architecture

Criteria: NR A/C CR 1/3 Local 1/3

Associated Property Type: Commercial/Lodging – Motel

Property Sub-type Description: Building designed for temporary and/or semi-permanent lodging with a direct link between the automobile and the room.

Property Sub-type Significance: Extant buildings illustrate the evolution of the motel as a significant building type related to the automobile. They show how a building type's architecture is shaped by accommodation to the needs of a particular mode of transportation, as well as the stylistic and economic trends of the day.

Eligibility Standards:

- Was designed and historically used to provide lodging for motorists and allowing for a direct link between the room and the automobile

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- Is an excellent example of the property type
- Contains design and site layout features that reflect the influence of, and accommodation to, the automobile
- Was Constructed during the period of significance

Character-Defining/Associative Features:

- Retains most of the essential character defining features of the type
- May be of a style or mixture of styles typical of the period of construction such as Streamline Moderne, Spanish Colonial Revival, Googie
- May also be significant within a theme under the Architecture and Engineering context
- Of the layouts typical of adapting to the needs of the automobile and motel patrons (e.g. rows of cabins in the late 1920s and early 1930s, units with integral carports in the late 1930s, linear arrangements with frontal parking in the late 1940s)
- Typically independently owned and operated

Integrity Considerations:

- Should retain integrity of Design, Location, Feeling, Materials, and Association
- Should retain as much design integrity as possible, including overall massing, significant features, and identifying details such as trim and signage
- Should retain as much of original layout as possible, so as to establish the link between the individual unit and the parked car of the patron inhabiting that unit
- If use has changed, adaptation to new use should allow for maintenance of as much of the original design and site layout as possible

Sub-Theme: Commercial Drive-In/Drive-Thru, 1920-1970

Buildings included in this Sub-Theme have the following features:

- They provide goods or services to customers while the customers remain in their automobiles;
- Their design highlights the interaction between the service provider and auto-borne customer;
- Their site layout provides maneuvering space for the interaction between the automobiles and the building.

There are two property types in this sub-theme, differentiated on the basis of the nature of the transaction between the service provider and the auto-borne customer:

- Drive-In Restaurant: The customer purchases the product and remains at the location to consume it. In this Sub-type the car becomes integral to the function and design of the restaurant.
- Drive-Thru Facility: The customer purchases the product or service and then departs. In this sub-type the car's time at the location is brief and the design is concerned with the movement, rather than the lingering presence, of the car.

Property Type: Drive-In Restaurant

The drive-in restaurant emerged as a variation on the roadside food stand in the early 1920s. Serving food to customers in their cars began in Texas. The Pig Stand chain, which opened its first restaurant on the highway between Dallas and Fort Worth in 1921, soon had outlets as far west as California. A standard functional arrangement emerged by the late 1920s, consisting of a free-standing food stand in the midst of a parking lot and using car hops to serve customers in their cars. The Pig Stand that once stood on the southwest corner of Sunset and Vine was a popular example.¹⁴¹

This layout continued into the 1930s. But architecturally a dramatic evolution occurred. It can be seen in the buildings of



*Night view of the Pig Stand drive-in restaurant at Sunset and Vine, undated
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

¹⁴¹ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 208-209.

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one chain in Los Angeles, Carpenter's Drive-Ins, from the late 1920s into the mid-1930s. A Carpenter's from 1929 was dressed in the Spanish Colonial Revival style, with a center portion of two large arches topped by a tiled hipped roof, and lower tile-roofed wings extending from it to form an inverted U. A Carpenter's Drive-In from around 1932 was octagonal in shape, with a three-stage stepped-back ziggurat for a roof, each face of which was an advertisement for a dish, and topped by a traditional rectangular sign on stilts. It was ungainly, to say the least. By 1935 Carpenter's had adopted a circular Streamline Moderne form with a thin canopy, a cascading roof, and an elegant fluted pylon incorporating the sign on top.¹⁴²



*Carpenter's at Sunset and Vine in 1939
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

This circular form became iconic for the Streamline Moderne drive-in in the 1930s. At the core was a round building capped by a pylon and centered in a parking lot. Around this structure customers parked their cars in an arrangement like spokes radiating from a hub. A flat cantilevered canopy reached from the building toward the cars. As the decade progressed, the building became more elegant. The canopy became thinner and more extended, and

the pylon on top more slender and abstract. Signs became fewer and the lettering more architectural. Particularly impressive was the growing sophistication of the neon and indirect lighting. By the late 1930s the drive-in looked best at night, when its lit-up form came to resemble something out of a science fiction movie of the era.¹⁴³

One architect in particular, Wayne McAllister, was responsible for the development of the circular Streamline Moderne drive-in. McAllister began as a draftsman working in San Diego and became, through his forceful personality and a series of good connections, the primary designer in the late 1920s for the Agua Caliente resort outside Tijuana. His work on this elaborate Spanish Colonial Revival style ensemble led to a growing reputation as a restaurant architect and to his hiring in the mid-1930s by the Simon's Drive-In chain. McAllister also worked for the Wich Stand, Robert's and Pig'n Whistle chains, all

¹⁴² Gebhard and Von Breton, *Los Angeles in the Thirties*, 33; David Gebhard and Robert Winter, *An Architectural Guidebook to Los Angeles*, Revised Edition (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 2003), 33, 39; Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 212.

¹⁴³ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 209-210.

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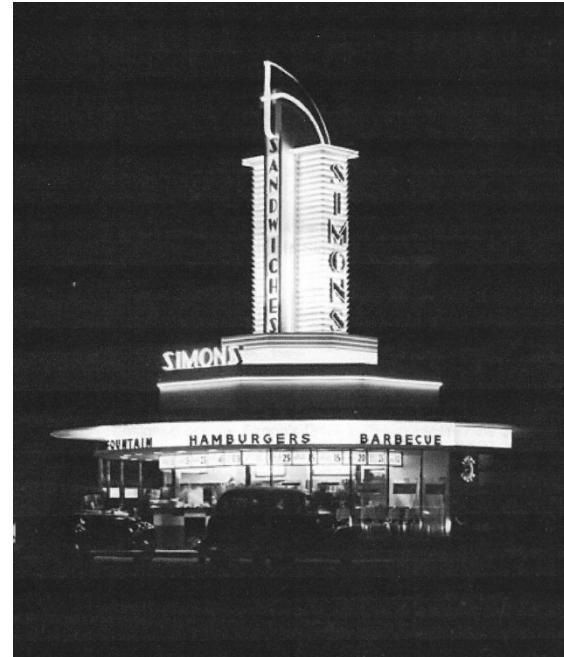
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of which employed variations on the circular form. He went on after the Second World War to design for the Bob's Big Boy chain and in Las Vegas for the Sands and Desert Inn hotels.¹⁴⁴

Simon's was a chain that flourished between 1935 and 1942. It was one of the largest and its motto was "A Simons wherever you turn." Bill Simon was an entrepreneur from Chicago who took over a chain of sit-town restaurants in Los Angeles in the 1920s. McAllister met Simon when the architect was asked to design cocktail lounges for Simon's restaurants after prohibition ended. By 1935 Simon decided to enter the apparently booming drive-in market and commissioned McAllister to come up with a prototype. A good example is the stand that once stood at 5171 Wilshire Boulevard. It showed well the use of lighting to highlight the Streamlined Modern form.¹⁴⁵

Unfortunately, none of these Streamline Moderne circular structures are known to have survived. Most sat on property that became extremely valuable after the Second World War. These buildings, with their relatively small footprints and unique shapes, were difficult to adapt to different uses and were torn down, the land used for purposes that generated higher rates of return.

After the Second World War the drive-in restaurant exchanged the Streamline Modern for Googie. The drive-in easily adapted its earlier form to the new fashion. This was done by elongating and manipulating the roof sheltering the cars. The overhanging roof might be angled or extended as fingers out from the primary structure. Along with this playfulness of the roof came the elaboration of the sign. The central spire or pylon of the Streamline Moderne was replaced with elaborate billboard-like signs featuring the space-age typography and amoeboid shapes common to Googie design.¹⁴⁶



*Simon's Drive-In Restaurant, circa 1937
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

¹⁴⁴ Chris Nichols, *The Leisure Architecture of Wayne McAllister* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 2007), *passim*.

¹⁴⁵ Nichols, *The Leisure Architecture of Wayne McAllister*, 80-84.

¹⁴⁶ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 210-211.

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*Van de Kamp's Bakery, with drive-In service, located on the corner of Fletcher Drive and San Fernando Road in Atwater, 1954
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

The role of Wayne McAllister was crucial in the transition from Streamline Moderne to Googie. It can be seen in a project he completed just before the war. In 1940 Van de Kamp's asked him to enlarge and remodel the existing shop next to their mammoth Flemish-style bakery northeast of downtown. McAllister produced a composition that consisted of two overlapping oval flat roofs, topped by a giant windmill in the Programmatic/Mimetic tradition. Although the detailing was generally Streamline Moderne, the joining of the two ovals, with roofs of different heights, gave the structure an apparently rambling, asymmetric shape that broke with the rigid 1930s circular form and pointed to the amoeboid shapes typical of the 1950s.¹⁴⁷

In the postwar period perhaps the most iconic Googie drive-in was Tiny Naylor's at Sunset and La Brea. It was designed in 1949 by Douglas Honnold who was responsible, together with John Lautner, for the



Tiny Naylor's Drive-In Restaurant, circa 1955 (Los Angeles Public Library)

restaurant that gave Googie architecture its name. Lautner, who studied with Frank Lloyd Wright and worked on several of Wright's projects in the late 1930s, was a designer in the Honnold office for most of the late 1940s. He could well have been responsible for Tiny Naylor's.¹⁴⁸

Tiny Naylor's contained all the elements of Googie. Its projecting roof was its dominant form, and

¹⁴⁷ Nichols, *The Leisure Architecture of Wayne McAllister*, 95-97.

¹⁴⁸ Alan Hess, *The Architecture of John Lautner* (New York: Rizzoli, 1999), 41-42.

when viewed directly from the front it took the shape of the delta wing found on the fighter jets of the day. Although symmetric about its length it appeared asymmetric in approach. By means of its roof, as with the earlier drive-ins, the parked cars became an integral part of the architectural image.¹⁴⁹

Googie-like gestures characterized the rest of the building. The roof over the enclosed restaurant portion was an angled shed form borrowed from Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin West, a work that was highly influential at the time. The walls of the enclosed portion were of plate glass and provided the Visual Front typical of the style. Like the circular drive-ins of the 1930s it made sophisticated use of lighting. Tiny Naylor's looked particularly good at night.

Tiny Naylor's also contained a functional feature that would become more common as the 1950s progressed: the inclusion of sit-down along with drive-in dining. But the combination of car service and the conventional coffee shop was not new; the Simon's of the 1930s included counter space inside the circular interior. Before the war McAllister experimented with a notable combination drive-in and restaurant at the corner of Wilshire and Western, linking a circular Pig'N Whistle Drive-In to a shoe-box like Melody Lane Restaurant. He then added a Starlite Room Lounge in a smaller circle to balance the composition.¹⁵⁰



A Big Boy sign, circa 1978
(Los Angeles Public Library)

The chain that became the most identified with combining the drive-in and the sit-down was Bob's Big Boy. Here again Wayne McAllister was a source of innovation. The chain began in 1936 but it became best known for its structures in the postwar period. McAllister, together with architect David Underwood, was involved in designing these structures until 1958 when architects Armet and Davis assumed responsibility. Each of the Bob's outlets contained all the facets of Googie design but the sign, with its iconographic Big Boy munching on a burger, became the identifying element. Most important for the evolution of the form, each of the Bob's was as much as coffee shop as a drive-in. By the mid-sixties the chain had for the most part eliminated car service and focused on the restaurant alone.¹⁵¹

It was, in fact, in the 1950s that the drive-in began to die. The cost of providing car hops was becoming prohibitive and the drive-ins were gaining a reputation as hangouts for disorderly teens. On one hand there were the larger institutions, such as Bob's, that shed car service and focused on the coffee shop. On the other hand there were the smaller drive-ins that eliminated car service and reverted essentially to food stands with parking lots.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Hess, *Googie Redux*, 80.

¹⁵⁰ Nichols, *The Leisure Architecture of Wayne McAllister*, 83, 88-93.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 99-107.

¹⁵² Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 211.

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One of the first to make the change from drive-in to food-stand-with-parking was the original McDonalds. In 1948 it dismissed its carhops and maintained only a walk-up window. McDonalds, as it grew in the 1950s from a single outlet to a national chain, continued its tradition of using architecture as an identifying symbol. It became associated in the public mind with its Googie-like forms of parabolic arches and suspended hovering shed roof. But its architecture eliminated any structural link to the automobile.

The only known extant example of a drive-in restaurant in Los Angeles, as defined by this theme, is the Brown Derby restaurant on West Los Feliz Boulevard. Although it is designated Historic-Cultural Monument #843, the restaurant has been altered with little evidence of the drive-thru element. Because of the lack of identified resources, no eligibility standards have been developed for this type.



*The Brown Derby, built at 4508 W. Los Feliz Boulevard in 1941, was the only location in the Brown Derby chain to incorporate a drive-in component with curb service, labeled the "Car Cafe." The building was declared Historic-Cultural Monument No. 843 in 2006.
(City of Los Angeles – Office of Historic Resources)*

Property Type: Drive-Thru Facility, 1945-1970

The drive-thru facility as a specific building type is difficult to define. Many commercial buildings, from banks to funeral homes, have attached a drive-thru feature to their basic building forms. Occasionally, the drive-thru point of contact might be marked by a small canopy or porte-cochère; more often it is merely a window in the side of the structure. The point of contact is commonly placed on the side or rear and is not meant to be an architectural feature of note.

A drive-thru facility as a specific building type differs in that the point of contact becomes a primary, even dominant, architectural feature of the building. It is placed on the façade and is announced with a dominant canopy or it shapes the layout of the building by means of a bisecting breezeway. Either way, the point of contact is celebrated and leaves no doubt as to the importance of the drive-thru purpose of the building.

The drive-thru function as a concept, characterized by a drive-up window, actually originated with the Pig Stand food chain in the 1920s. But it was not until after the Second World War that the drive-thru came into its own as a common building type with unique architectural features. One of the earliest documented drive-thrus in the region appears to be the original In-N-Out Burger stand. It opened in 1948 in Baldwin Park. The early In-N-Outs had a common design that placed the kitchen between two lanes of cars much like a toll booth serving a turnpike. An early photo of one shows an entity in the simplest of early Mid-Century Modern styles with flat roof that extends to cover both lanes.¹⁵³

The canopy was the dominant feature of perhaps the best known of the early drive-thru chains, the Alta Dena Dairy. The Dairy was founded in 1945 by Harold Stueve. It began in Monrovia with sixty-one cows and a milk wagon, soon moved to the City of Industry, and by the early 1960s had become one of the area's largest dairies. The Alta Dena Company built its first drive-thru branch facility in 1951, supposedly patterning it after an In-N-Out Burger stand. Counting both the company-owned outlets and associated franchises, there were at one time an estimated eighty Alta Dena drive-thru dairies in the region.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ "The History of the In-N-Out Burger," October 26, 2012, www.gearpatrol.com; "In-N-Out Burger," August 26, 2015, www.wikipedia.org.

¹⁵⁴ "Grab a Pint: Alta Dena Dairy Drive-Thrus," November 20, 2013, www.kcet.org/living/food/the-nosh; "Harold Stueve, 88; Farmer Founded Alta Dena Dairy with 2 Brothers in 1945," *Los Angeles Times*, August 10, 2006.

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Alta Dena Dairy in Granada Hills, 1961
(SurveyLA)

A relatively well-preserved example of an Alta Dena drive-thru is at 16140 West San Fernando Mission Boulevard in Granada Hills. It dates from 1961. The ensemble of drive-thru bay and retail space is covered by a flat roof with continuous parapet, much like the earliest service stations. The style could best be described as a utilitarian version of Mid-Century Modern, descended from the International Style service station prototypes of the 1930s. The facility is painted white with blue trim to signify the cleanliness of the enterprise and the healthy nature of the product.



Historic-Cultural Monument No. 1046, built 1961
(City of Los Angeles – Office of Historic Resources)

restaurant. (A mansard-like roof extension was added to make it resemble the other outlets.) It does, however, have the auto breezeway.¹⁵⁵

Of the other fast-food chains of the postwar period only Wienerschnitzel made the drive-up window an architectural feature of its basic design. This was done by use of a breezeway transversely bisecting its well-known A-frame building. Wienerschnitzel began as a hot-dog stand run by John Galardi in Wilmington in 1961. By 1968, the franchise had expanded to two hundred units. The original Wilmington Wienerschnitzel is Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument #1046. This original actually preceded the iconic A-frame shape. Instead, it is a simple flat-roofed form resembling a more modern fast-food

¹⁵⁵ John A Jackle and Keith A. Sculle, *Fast Food: Roadside Restaurants in the Automobile Age* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 61, 168; “A-Frame Chains and Other Eateries,” www.roadsidearchitecture.com, accessed August 26, 2015; “Monument: Original Wienerschnitzel Los Angeles,” www.seecalifornia.com, accessed August 26, 2015.

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Soon Wienerschnitzel made use of the standardized A-frame building with vaguely Germanic detailing that became its identifying image. Its status as a drive-thru building type stems from the breezeway in its center into which customers drive to access the drive-up window. The A-frame is a kind of Googie/Programmatic design, linking the restaurant with its supposedly Teutonic name and product through the use of a dramatic roof form. The A-frame was a common Googie device found in functions from car washes to

IHOP restaurants. The Wienerschnitzel at 5135 North Laurel Canyon Boulevard in North Hollywood is a good example of the use of the A-frame and dates from 1968.

One can occasionally find other examples of drive-thru commercial structures from the 1950s and 1960s. Generally used for services such as laundries, they were typically sole proprietorships trying to call attention to their enterprises through the use of canopies; many were often converted service stations. But these buildings began to disappear as individually-owned businesses moved from free-standing structures to strip malls. At the same time, the conservative nature of commercial design beginning in the 1960s led to the downplaying of features such as canopies and breezeways. Today there are few such properties left in Los Angeles.



*Wienerschnitzel Drive-thru Restaurant in North Hollywood, 1968
(SurveyLA)*

PROPERTY TYPE: Drive-Thru Facility, 1945-1970

Summary Statement of Significance: The drive-thru facility is a building type that evolved as a commercial structure that provides a location for the auto-born customer to pause for a short time to purchase an item or service and then drive off. A drive-thru evaluated under this sub-theme is significant in the area of Commerce; some examples may be also significant in the area of Architecture. They illustrate the evolution of the drive-thru as a significant commercial building type related to the automobile and Los Angeles' flourishing car culture. They show how a building type's design and site layout are shaped by accommodation to the needs of automobile as well as the stylistic and economic trends of the day. Extant, intact examples are becoming increasingly rare.

Period of Significance: 1945-1970

Period of Significance Justification: Drive-thru facilities were prevalent in the post WWII period but began to disappear by the late 1960s. Most extant examples in Los Angeles date from the 1950s.

Geographic Location: Citywide, primarily along arterial roads and highways.

Area(s) of Significance: Commerce; Architecture

Criteria: NR A/C CR 1/3 Local 1/3

Associated Property Type: Commercial/Auto-Related – Drive-Thru

Property Sub-type Description: Facility that allows for the purchase of a good and/or service directly from the automobile, and that requires only a short period of time to transact the purchase. Includes a variety of goods/services such as restaurants, dairies, and liquor stores. The point of contact is the primary, even the dominant, architectural feature of the building.

Property Sub-type Significance: Extant buildings illustrate the evolution of the drive-thru commercial facility as a significant building type related to the automobile. They show how a building type's architecture is shaped by accommodation to the needs of a particular mode of transportation, as well as the stylistic and economic trends of the day.

Eligibility Standards:

- Was designed and historically used to provide for the purchase of a good and/or service from the automobile
- Is an excellent, early, or rare example of the type

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- Contains architectural and site layout features that reflect the influence of the automobile
- Was constructed during the period of significance

Character-Defining/Associative Features:

- Retains most of the essential character defining features of the type
- Drive-thru features are still readable from the period of significance
- Of a style or mixture of styles typical of the period of construction such as Mid-Century Modern, Googie, and Programmatic
- Of the design and layout typical of adapting to the needs of the automobile (e.g. approach and departure drive to and from point of service, architectural differentiation of point of service)
- Typically associated with a particular company and/or architects/designers (e.g. Alta Dena Express Dairy)
- Signage may be prominent

Integrity Considerations:

- Should retain integrity of Design, Location, Feeling, Materials, and Association
- Should retain as much design integrity as possible, including overall massing, significant features (e.g. canopy over point of service, drive-thru breezeway), and identifying details such as trim and signage
- Should retain as much of the original relationship to the street and to adjacent buildings as possible, so as to establish importance of accommodating the structure to the spatial needs of the automobile (e.g. approach and departure drive)
- If use has changed, adaptation to new use should allow for maintenance of as much of the original architecture and site layout as possible

Sub-Theme: Programmatic/Mimetic, 1918-1950

Buildings included in this sub-theme are those which resemble giant or miniature non-architectural objects. They fall into one of two categories:

- *Programmatic* refers to structures which take the form directly related to the product sold
- *Mimetic* refers to structures that take on the appearance of a non-architectural object that may reflect the name or in a general way the spirit of the commercial enterprise

Programmatic/Mimetic buildings are a specific commercial architectural type common along the roadside during the 1920s and 1930s. Programmatic/Mimetic buildings are, above all, objects that need to be viewed in three dimensions and the sprawl allowed by the passenger car. Larger lots surrounded by parking made this possible. At the same time, the speed of passing vehicles gave the large-scale

advertising innate in the Programmatic/Mimetic form an advantage over the more discreet signs of the earlier pre-automobile commercial outlets.



4824 Vineland Avenue is Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument No. 977, built 1941 (@2015 Google StreetView)

In essence, Programmatic/Mimetic buildings look like giant or miniature non-architectural objects.

Programmatic refers to a structure which takes its form directly from the product sold, such as a giant frankfurter in a bun for a hot dog stand. Mimetic refers to a structure that mimics a form which is not directly related to the

product provided, but may reflect the name of the business. A prime example of this is the now vanished Brown Derby Restaurant. Its form as a giant hat had no relationship to its function, but did in a memorable way relate to what it was called. The form of the object may also reflect in a general way the spirit of the activity housed within. Such is the case with the bar Idle Hour, located at 4824 Vineland Avenue, which is housed in a giant beer barrel (and Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument #977).

These Programmatic/Mimetic roadside buildings could be found throughout the country but were particularly well-suited to Southern California. The mild climate and the resulting local tradition of inexpensive stucco-on-wood-frame construction made them easy and cheap to build. The stucco-on-wood-frame construction also allowed for a greater freedom of form than could be achieved with the masonry or clapboard exteriors typical elsewhere.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ Jim Heimann, *California Crazy & Beyond: Roadside Vernacular Architecture* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2001), 6.

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There were two other ways in which the particular nature of Los Angeles made Programmatic/Mimetic architecture popular. One was status of Southern California as a vacation destination. Programmatic / Mimetic structures had long been common in holiday resorts, from Lucy the Margate Elephant of the 1880s along the New Jersey shore to the Cabrillo restaurant-in-a-ship at Abbot Kinneys' Venice-of-America. The other was the presence of the motion picture studios. One historian maintains that film set designs greatly influenced both the Programmatic/Mimetic images presented and the construction techniques used to carry them out.¹⁵⁷

It is difficult for us to image today how popular these bizarre forms were during the early years of widespread car ownership. Gawking at them was part of the ritual of the Sunday afternoon family drive for many getting their first car. During the late 1920s and early 1930s the demand for Programmatic / Mimetic forms became so strong that a number of patents were issued to designers for particular types of structures. Many patents went to residents of Los Angeles, including a refreshment stand in the shape of a pig, an octagon-shaped tea room topped by a giant teapot, and an ice cream stand in the form of an igloo that combined the traditional ice dwelling with a glacier.¹⁵⁸



Chili Bowl Restaurant 801 N. La Brea, circa 1937
(Los Angeles Public Library)



A Chili Bowl restaurant today at 12244 W. Pico Boulevard, 1931
(SurveyLA)

Typical of Programmatic/Mimetic architecture is the Chili Bowl Restaurant chain. This was a network of restaurants in 1930s that used the form of the bowl for its small structures. The chain was founded by a 25-year old ex-boxer in 1931 who raised twelve-hundred dollars by selling his possessions, said to

¹⁵⁷ Heimann, *California Crazy*, 9, 13, 28-29; Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 49.

¹⁵⁸ Heimann, *California Crazy*, 10-11.

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include his wife's wedding ring and his own car, to build the first Chili Bowl on Crenshaw Boulevard near Jefferson Boulevard. The prototype and its offspring had no tables, simply a 26-stool circular counter.¹⁵⁹

The Chili Bowl is an excellent example of the Programmatic/Mimetic in that it fulfills the requirements of both forms. The architecture makes visual reference to both the name of the restaurant and to the product served within. Of interest is the slogan "Built Thru Merit" painted on the side, perhaps reflecting a Depression-era sentiment. There is a Chili Bowl restaurant structure still standing at 12244 West Pico Boulevard in Palms. It dates from 1931 and, while altered, retains much of its original form.



*Hollywood Flower Pot, circa 1920
(Los Angeles Public Library)*



*The Freezer ice cream parlor, undated
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

Unfortunately, the Pico Boulevard Chili Bowl is a rare remnant. Most of the city's Programmatic/Mimetic structures have vanished. Historic photos provide a hint of their abundance and variety. We have views from as early as 1920 of a florist's shop, the Hollywood Flower Pot at 1124 North Vine, in the form of a giant version of its name complete with a blooming plant protruding from its top, and of the Jail Cafe at 4242 Sunset Boulevard, housed in a fake stone penitentiary-looking building in which customers could dine in cells labeled "Speeding" and "Non-Support." From later in the decade are photos of two ice cream parlors. The Igloo, at 4302 West Pico, was a wedding of an igloo and a glacier that may well have been one of the patented designs noted above. The Freezer, also on Pico Boulevard, took the form of the bucket-shaped hand-operated ice-cream maker, complete with crank handle, which was found in many of the households of the time.¹⁶⁰

The popularity of Programmatic/Mimetic architecture continued into the early 1930s. Views from that decade show the Pup, a hot dog stand in the form of a giant Dalmatian in Venice at 12728 Washington Boulevard and the Zep Diner, at 515 West Florence, in the shape of a zeppelin or

¹⁵⁹ "The Chili's Gone But The Restaurant-Sized Bowls Remain," *Los Angeles Times*, August 2, 2009.

¹⁶⁰ "Hollywood Flower Pot" (Order Number 00042105), "Jail Cafe, Exterior" (Order Number 00042115), "Jail Cafe Customers" (Order Number 00042114), "The Igloo Ice Cream Parlor" (Order Number 00068650) and "Freezer Ice Cream Parlor" (Order Number 00008006), Photos from the Security Pacific National Bank Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.

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blimp.¹⁶¹ Perhaps the best known of all was the original Brown Derby restaurant. It was actually one of four restaurants that shared the name but was the one that most looked like a hat. It was built in 1926 in the form of a giant bowler measuring twenty-eight feet in diameter and over seventeen feet high. Originally it was located at 3427 Wilshire Boulevard and in 1937 was moved one block to 3327 Wilshire and enlarged with non-Programmatic/Mimetic additions. The Brown Derby was torn down in 1980 and replaced by a strip mall.¹⁶²



*The Brown Derby on Wilshire, circa 1957
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

The high point of Programmatic/Mimetic architecture in Los Angeles was probably between 1928 and 1934. By the mid-1930s, Streamline Moderne, itself a sort of Programmatic/Mimetic form, became the popular garb for roadside commerce of all types. Nonetheless, notable Programmatic/Mimetic structures continued to be constructed up to the early 1940s.¹⁶³ The years before the Second World War also saw the increasing use of Programmatic/Mimetic architecture for non-automobile-related uses. A well-known example is the Dark Room, an urban storefront on Wilshire Boulevard. It is Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument #451. It features a show window shaped like a single-lens-reflex camera. It was built in 1938 and designed by Marcus P. Miller, who was responsible for numerous Streamline Moderne retail outlets.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ "Pup, A Hot Dog Stand" (Order Number 00068626) and "Zep Diner" (Order Number 00068629), Photos from the Security Pacific National Bank Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.

¹⁶² "Wilshire Brown Derby Exterior" (Order Number 00068917), WPA Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.

¹⁶³ Heimann, *California Crazy*, 15.

¹⁶⁴ Gebhard and Von Breton, *Los Angeles in the Thirties*, 33; Gebhard and Winter, *An Architectural Guidebook to Los Angeles*, 211; Heimann, *California Crazy*, 13.

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Historic-Cultural Monument No. 451, the façade of the Dark Room, 1937 (Los Angeles Public Library)

Another well-known storefront-like example of the Programmatic/Mimetic is the Crossroads of the World. It, too, is a Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument, #134, designed by architect Robert V. Derrah and located on Sunset Boulevard. Built in 1937, its tower with a lighted globe functions much like a roadside piece of exotic architecture. But the Crossroads is essentially a pedestrian mall of small shops entered from a break in the streetwall of commercial storefronts. Its use of ship-like motives, together with historicist forms for the shops, can only be appreciated once the customer is out of the car and into the pedestrian precinct.¹⁶⁵



The Fleetwood Center is shaped like a Cadillac grille though the property never supported any Cadillac-related businesses, 1987 (SurveyLA)

¹⁶⁵ Gebhard and Winter, *An Architectural Guidebook to Los Angeles*, 183.

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*Historic-Cultural Monument No. 138, the Coca Cola Building, 1939
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

Two Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monuments from the years before the Second World War illustrate the use of Programmatic/Mimetic architecture for non-commercial structures. One is the Coca-Cola Bottling Company, Historic-Cultural Monument #138, from 1939 and also designed by Derrah. It is located in an industrial section on South Central Avenue and consists of a multi-story block fitted out as an ocean liner, complete with portholes and pipe railings.

The other is the Haven of Rest, Historic-Cultural Monument #897, on Hyperion Avenue in Silver Lake. Built in 1941, the building served as the headquarters for a gospel quartet known as “The Crew of the Good Ship Grace.” Its architecture combines stark International Style forms with nautical details such as curved corners and port holes.¹⁶⁶



*Historic-Cultural Monument No. 897, Haven of Rest, 1941
(City of Los Angeles – Office of Historic Resources)*

¹⁶⁶ Gebhard and Winter, *An Architectural Guidebook to Los Angeles*, 268; Date of construction for the Haven of Rest is from the Los Angeles County Assessor Map.

PROPERTY TYPE: Programmatic/Mimetic, 1918-1950

Summary Statement of Significance: Programmatic/Mimetic architecture developed in Los Angeles in response to the increasing influence of the automobile and the rise of roadside attractions. This architecture evolved between 1918 and 1950 as a device to call attention of passing motorists to a commercial building by having the building itself take the form of non-architectural objects at an altered scale – reduced or enlarged. A resource evaluated under this sub-theme is significant in the areas of Commerce and Architecture. Extant examples illustrate the evolution of Programmatic/Mimetic commercial structures as a significant building type related to the automobile. Although many of the best examples of this architecture were built in Los Angeles, few remain today.

Period of Significance: 1918-1950

Period of Significance Justification: By 1918 automobile ownership and commercial land availability in Los Angeles were great enough to generate programmatic/mimetic commercial buildings. By 1950 the commercial demand for programmatic/mimetic structures had ended.

Geographic Location: Citywide, primarily along arterial roads and highways.

Area(s) of Significance: Commerce; Architecture

Criteria: NR A/C CR 1/3 Local 1/3

Associated Property Type: Commercial/Auto-Related – Programmatic/Mimetic

Property Sub-type Description: Programmatic/Mimetic architecture is typically applied to low-scale commercial buildings, particularly those along well-traveled automobile corridors. This architecture was primarily applied to restaurants, food stands, and retail stores. Buildings take the form of non-architectural objects, enlarged and/or reduced in scale, related to the product sold (Programmatic) and/or reflective of their name or spirit of activity (Mimetic). The term does not apply to buildings that adopt a fantasy architectural style.

Property Sub-type Significance: Extant structures illustrate the evolution of Programmatic/Mimetic commercial structures as a significant building type related to the automobile. They show how a building type's architecture is shaped by accommodation to

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the needs of a particular mode of transportation, as well as the stylistic and economic trends of the day.

Eligibility Standards:

- Is a good example of Programmatic/Mimetic architecture
- Contains site layout features that reflect the influence of the automobile (e.g. placed on the lot so as to allow for three-dimensional viewing as an object by passing motorists)
- Was constructed during the period of significance

Character-Defining/Associative Features:

- Retains most of the essential-character defining features of the type
- Of the Programmatic/Mimetic form as described in the Narrative Statement of Significance
- Typically a low-scale commercial building
- Conveys an advertising message through adaptation in the building form itself
- Primarily applied historically to restaurants, food stands, and retail stores
- Of the layouts typical of adapting to the needs of the automobile (e.g. free-standing on a roadside setting to allow for viewing from the automobile)
- May be linked to particular companies and/or designers (e.g. Chili Bowl)

Integrity Considerations:

- Should retain integrity of Design, Feeling, Materials, and Association
- Extant examples of Programmatic/Mimetic architecture are rare, therefore, a greater degree of alterations or fewer character defining features may be acceptable.
- Original applied signage may be altered
- Should retain as much Programmatic/Mimetic architectural integrity as possible, including overall massing, significant features, and identifying details such as trim and signage
- Should retain as much of original relationship to the street and to adjacent buildings as possible, so as to allow for viewing of the Programmatic/Mimetic form from the passing automobile
- If use has changed, adaptation to new use should allow for maintenance of as much of the original design and site layout as possible
- May have been moved for preservation purposes

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