



Agenda Report

August 15, 2022

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council

FROM: Planning & Community Development Department

SUBJECT: APPLICATION TO DESIGNATE THE I. MAGNIN & COMPANY
BUILDING LOCATED AT 475 SOUTH LAKE AVENUE AS A
LANDMARK

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the City Council:

1. Find that the designation of a historic resource is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines Section 15308, Class 8, pertaining to Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment and that there are no features that distinguish this project from others in the exempt class, and therefore, there are no unusual circumstances; and
2. Find that the I. Magnin & Company Building located at 475 South Lake Avenue meets Criterion "C" as a landmark pursuant to Pasadena Municipal Code (PMC) Section 17.62.040.D.2 because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a Mid-Century department store property type, a locally-rare example of the Late Moderne architectural style, the Post-WWII development period and poured-in-place concrete method of construction, and exemplifies the work of an architect, Harold C. Chambers, whose work is of local significance to the City;
3. Adopt the resolution approving a Declaration of Landmark Designation for 475 South Lake Avenue, Pasadena, California;
4. Authorize the Mayor to execute the Declaration of Landmark Designation for 475 South Lake Avenue, Pasadena, California (attached to the resolution); and
5. Direct the City Clerk to record the declaration with the Los Angeles County Recorder.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:

On May 3, 2022, the Historic Preservation Commission recommended that the City Council approve the designation of the I. Magnin & Company Building located at 475 South Lake Avenue as a Landmark under Criterion "C" of PMC Section 17.62.040.D.2.

BACKGROUND:

The Site

The property is located on an "L-shaped" lot on the west side of South Lake Avenue, approximately mid-block between East Del Mar Boulevard to the north and East California Boulevard to the south. The surrounding context includes single and multi-story commercial buildings along South Lake Avenue.

Exterior Features of the Building

The two-story commercial I. Magnin & Company Building is a prime example of the Late Moderne architectural style. The front façade is symmetrical in design with a centered ground-level aluminum storefront entry flanked by two full-height windows. The second level of the front façade features a symmetrical arrangement of six slightly less-than full-height window openings, two above the ground-floor entry and the other four located in direct alignment above the ground-floor windows. Overall the concrete building is largely devoid of ornamentation, however it does have detailed, rounded corners with a reveal edge, and a black marble frame surround at the ground floor entrances.

Documented Changes to the Property

The exterior of the I. Magnin & Company Building remains largely intact and retains significant character-defining features. However, the building has undergone some alterations. In 1957, a projecting second story entrance bay, with rounded corners, was added to the center of the west (rear) façade in conjunction with the construction of the abutting parking structure that served both this building and the Bullock's store to the north.

I. Magnin & Company¹

The company was founded in Oakland, California as a specialty woman's and infant wear brand by Mary Ann Magnin in 1876, who named the business after her husband, Isaac. The immediate success of the company resulted in rapid expansions throughout the Bay Area, with additional expansions in large downtown stores to other cities including Los Angeles, Hollywood, Santa Barbara, Seattle, and Chicago. Many of these I. Magnin buildings still stand today. For further information regarding the I. Magnin & Company, please refer to Attachment A.

¹ ASM Affiliates, Inc., Historic Landmark Nomination Continuation Sheet, 2022; pp. 6-12

Harold C. Chambers²

Harold C. Chambers was born in Nebraska in 1885, and moved with his family to Los Angeles. In 1907, he began to work as a draftsman for Myron Hunt and Elmer Grey, where he contributed to significant firm projects. In 1920, Chambers and Hunt partnered to form Hunt and Chambers, which became a prominent and prolific local firm until Myron Hunt retired in 1947. Hunt and Chambers designed the Pasadena Public Library (1925-1927), local residential projects, hospitals, and universities. After Hunt's retirement, Chambers continued his practice independently before partnering with Lester Hibbard. The I. Magnin & Company Building at South Lake Avenue was one of Chamber's first independent commissions. For further information on Harold C. Chambers, refer to Attachment A.

Post-War II Commercial Development and South Lake Avenue Location³

Before the onset of Post-War II development, South Lake Avenue was primarily a residential street. After WWII, South Lake Avenue began to transition to its current form as a commercial corridor, reflective of the decentralized shift in retail from urban downtown centers to new suburban locations. This was reflected in the construction of the new Bullock's Pasadena in 1947, and the I. Magnin & Company Building, constructed in 1948.

Late Moderne Architecture Style and Stand-Alone Retail Subtype

The stand-alone retail subtype was popular as a commercial retail idiom between the 1930s and 1970s, particularly for its accommodation of the automobile and the onset of suburban developments. The stand-alone prototype typically featured a dedicated surface parking lot on one or more sides of the building, which was often set back from the street, and located in front of the building, surrounding the building, or behind the building. The I. Magnin & Company Building is a prime example of the Late Moderne architectural style. Late Moderne incorporates elements of both the Streamline Moderne and International Styles. The style began to appear in the late 1930s, with its apex of popularity in the late 1940s and 50s on large-scale commercial and civic buildings. Other excellent examples of this style within Pasadena are the Bullock's Pasadena (1947) designed by architects Wurdeman & Becket, and Robinson's Pasadena (1957) designed by Pereira & Luckman.

Character-Defining Features of I. Magnin & Company Building⁴

The I. Magnin building retains significant character-defining features reflective of its Late Moderne architectural style with variations based on classical influences. These character-defining features include:

² ASM Affiliates, Inc., Historic Landmark Nomination Continuation Sheet, 2022; pp. 14-15

³ ASM Affiliates, Inc., Historic Landmark Nomination Continuation Sheet, 2022; pp. 4-6, 12-13

⁴ ASM Affiliates, Inc., Historic Landmark Nomination Continuation Sheet, 2022; p. 14

- Horizontal emphasis through horizontal bands of fenestration
- Symmetrical façade
- Exposed concrete construction
- Unadorned facades
- Flat roofline
- Large, glazed entrances with glass sidelites and transoms
- Steel sash windows
- Rounded building corners

ANALYSIS:

The I. Magnin & Company Building is eligible for designation as a landmark under Criterion "C" of PMC Section 17.62.040.D.2, which states:

[The property] embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, architectural style, period, or method of construction, or represents the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose work is of significance to the City or possesses artistic values of significance to the City.

Under Criterion "C", the I. Magnin & Company Building is significant because it is a locally significant, intact example of the Late Moderne architectural style, and the work of a locally significant architect, Harold C. Chambers. The building was previously evaluated utilizing the *Cultural Resources of the Recent Past Historic Context Report* (2007) and was determined eligible as a landmark. The applicant has provided a historic resource evaluation report by ASM Affiliates to affirm the building's eligibility as a landmark under Criterion "C", see Attachment A. The building has a high level of architectural integrity (its ability to demonstrate why it is significant) through its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association as follows:

- Location: The building and other site features are in their original locations.
- Design: The building retains its original form, massing and exterior configuration. The building retains clearly discernable character-defining features of the Late Moderne style, including a flat roof, rounded corners, horizontal bands of fenestration, and steel sash windows.
- Setting: The building was constructed during the transitional period of South Lake Avenue from a residential enclave to the commercial corridor that exists today. In many ways, the I. Magnin & Company Building and its related company building, Bullock's Pasadena, were the catalysts of transforming South Lake Avenue into a conglomeration of commercial businesses. The building remains intact, and still evokes the era of suburban retail, automotive progression, and the stand-alone retail subtype; a setting paradigm that is still found on South Lake Avenue.

- **Materials**: The building is composed of exposed concrete, with steel sash window fenestrations. These materials are extant today with compatible modifications to the storefront entries.
- **Workmanship**: The building retains a significant amount of its original exterior finishes, and retains its overall form. The high-design is reflective in its high-level of construction that has stood against vast changes to the retail industry, changing surroundings, new ownerships, and long periods of vacancy. The building's workmanship remains intact.
- **Feeling**: The building retains significant integrity criteria, and therefore still evokes the feeling of grandeur associated with high-end retail spaces, and the characteristics of the Late Moderne architectural style, the transitional period of South Lake Avenue, and the progression of the automobile and suburban Post-World War II era.
- **Association**: The I. Magnin & Company Building retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and feeling, and therefore, continues to convey its association with the commercialization of South Lake Avenue, the transition of the retail industry to a suburban model, and the influx of the automotive influence on development in the Post-World War II era in Pasadena.

Based on the above, the I. Magnin & Company Building retains sufficient integrity to qualify for designation as a landmark under Criterion "C" as a prime example of an architectural style, Late Moderne; the work of a significantly local architect, Harold C. Chambers; and the period of Post-World War II development of decentralized retail, the transition of South Lake Avenue into a commercial corridor, and the influence of the automobile. For further, more detailed information on the history and significance of the I. Magnin Building, please refer to the staff report for Historic Preservation Commission, dated May 3, 2022, in Attachment I.

COUNCIL POLICY CONSIDERATION:

The General Plan Land Use Element – Guiding Principle 2: "Pasadena's historic resources will be preserved. Citywide, new development will be in harmony with and enhance Pasadena's unique character and sense of place. New construction that could affect the integrity of historic resources will be compatible with, and differentiated from, the existing resource;" and Goal 8: "Preservation and enhancement of Pasadena's cultural and historic buildings, landscapes, streets and districts as valued assets and important representations of its past and a source of community identity, and social, ecological, and economic vitality."

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

The proposed designation qualifies for a categorical exemption pursuant to Section 15308, Class 8 of the CEQA Guidelines. Class 8 exemptions consists of actions taken

by regulatory agencies, as authorized by state or local ordinance, to assure the maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of the environment where the regulatory process involves procedures for the protection of the environment.

FISCAL IMPACT:

In some instances, owners of designated historic properties may apply to the City for a Historic Property Contract (Mills Act), which allows an alternative and often lower property tax assessment. The City Council reviewed the projected loss of property tax revenue from this program in 2002 when it adopted the local Mills Act ordinance. As a result of this program, the reduced property tax amount which comes out of the City's local share amount from the State, is a small fraction of the City's overall property tax revenue.

Respectfully submitted,



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Attachments: (9)

- A. Application and Historical Documentation
- B. Vicinity Maps
- C. Tract and Parcel Maps
- D. Sanborn Maps
- E. Building Description Blanks & Archive Building Permit Records
- F. Historical Photographs
- G. Current Photographs
- H. Effects of Historical Designation
- I. Historic Preservation Commission Staff Report (May 3, 2022)