

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property



historic name The Wilshire Theatre
other names/site number The Saban Theatre

2. Location

street & number 8440 Wilshire Boulevard not for publication
city or town Beverly Hills vicinity
state CA code CA county Los Angeles code 037 zip code 902011

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,
I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.
In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:
___ national ___ statewide ___ local

Signature of certifying official Date

Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official Date

Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:
___ entered in the National Register ___ determined eligible for the National Register
___ determined not eligible for the National Register ___ removed from the National Register
___ other (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- Private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

Category of Property
(Check only **one** box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		district
		site
		structure
		object
1		Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/theater

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/theater

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT/Art Deco

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: CONCRETE

walls: CONCRETE

roof: ASPHALT

other: Marquee/STEEL

Entry Floor/OTHER/terrazzo

Narrative Description

See Continuation Sheets

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

Period of Significance

1930

1959

Significant Dates

September 19, 1930

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Lee, S. Charles

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Period of Significance (justification)

See Continuation Sheets

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

See Continuation Sheets

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria)

See Continuation Sheets

Narrative Statement of Significance (provide at least one paragraph for each area of significance)

See Continuation Sheets

Developmental history/additional historic context information (if appropriate)

See Continuation Sheets

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been Requested)
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .61
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage)

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	<u>11</u> Zone	<u>373120 m</u> Easting	<u>3770152 m</u> Northing	3	<u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing
2	<u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing	4	<u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing

Verbal Boundary Description (describe the boundaries of the property)

Los Angeles County Assessor's ID No. 4333-029-018

TRACT # 4988 LOTS 552,553,554,555 AND N 40 FT OF LOT 556

Boundary Justification (explain why the boundaries were selected)

This is a city lot retaining its original property lines.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Edward J. Kelsey

organization Historic Theater Services LLC

Date August 10, 2011

street & number P. O. Box 555163

telephone 213-216-1004

city or town Los Angeles

State CA

zip code 90055

e-mail edk@historictheaterservices.com

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.

- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property:

City or Vicinity:

County:

State:

Photographer:

Date Photographed:

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

1 of ____.

Property Owner:

(complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO)

name Temple of the Arts

street & number 8440 Wilshire Blvd. telephone (323) 658-9100

city or town Beverly Hills State CA zip code 90211

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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7. NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

Summary Paragraph

The Wilshire Theatre is located on a .6 acre rectangular corner parcel in an urban area. The contributing structure is a reinforced concrete theater and office tower built in 1930 along Wilshire Boulevard in the city of Beverly Hills.

Narrative Description

The Wilshire Theatre is located on Wilshire Boulevard, the main east-west commercial thoroughfare through the city of Beverly Hills. The building is situated on the south side of Wilshire near the eastern border separating Beverly Hills from the city of Los Angeles. The corner lot is rectangular with the smaller frontage of the building on Wilshire and the longer portion of the building along Hamilton Drive. The entire building is aligned to Hamilton Drive, with only the main frontage on Wilshire Blvd. angled to conform to Wilshire Blvd. Wilshire Boulevard crosses this portion of the city of Beverly Hills at an angle from southeast to northwest. Since all the lots along Wilshire are oriented along the north-south side streets, every Wilshire Blvd. frontage in this area is angled.

The majority of the lot is taken up by the theater structure, a five-story rectangular poured concrete building encompassing two levels of seating and a full stage with fly loft. This theater portion of the building is set back from Wilshire Blvd., leaving a smaller triangular area in which is situated a two-story poured concrete commercial block spanning the entire Wilshire Blvd. frontage and encompassing the theater entrance and two storefronts on the first level with offices on the second level. Above this is a smaller office tower rising six more stories at the wider end of the triangular lot. The third and fourth floors of the office tower maintain a small piece of the triangular corner on the Wilshire Blvd. frontage, which then ends as a triangular balcony at the fifth floor. The office tower is only as deep and wide as the west side storefronts and backs up to the rear of the auditorium. From the street corner to the end of the theater frontage, the depth of the storefronts decrease by almost twenty feet.

All portions of the building are constructed of steel-reinforced poured concrete. Art Deco ornamentation was cast into the concrete exterior as the building was built. Wide pilasters on the first floor of the theater building gradually narrow towards the parapet, with cast ornament capitals above the second level on the front and west side of the building. Pilasters and capitals echo classical Greek and Roman designs but have been stripped down to basic geometric forms of chevrons and simple volutes. The grain of the wood forms used to contain the concrete pour can also be seen in the finished walls. Windows in the building are steel casement windows more commonly seen in industrial buildings. There is ornament on almost every surface, even large walls and parapets of the auditorium.

The ground level frontage on Wilshire Blvd. is dominated by the theater marquee and exterior lobby, flanked by storefronts on each side. The east side storefronts are set in a concrete frame along the entire width of the facade. Below this is a band of three transom windows in each storefront, with leaded glass in a herringbone pattern. Below this are plate glass show windows on each side of inset entrance doors. The bottom two feet below the windows is composed of square tiles painted

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black. The west side single storefront below the office tower curves around the corner using five individual glass windows set at increasing angles to form the curve. Like the other storefronts, these are composed of an upper transom window, a center glass panel and a lower black tile panel. The east storefronts have modern aluminum and glass entrance doors, while on the west storefront, the entrance is a pair of stainless steel doors reminiscent of those of an Art Deco New York diner. At the far east end of the Wilshire Blvd. frontage was a double doorway which originally served as an additional emergency exit for the auditorium. [With the 1979 reconfiguration of the lobby and the rear main floor seating, this door has been repurposed as an additional exit from the second floor.] The office tower entrance is a small doorway on the west side on Hamilton Drive which is covered by a simple canvas awning. Inside this lobby is the small elevator and an interior stairwell serving the upper floors of the office tower.

The office tower is a rectangle with chamfered corners above the second floor. Three sides of the tower have bands of windows separated only by narrow concrete piers and spandrels. On the east and west sides are six windows, with four on the north side. The south side of the tower has a small unadorned block containing the stairwell and elevator. Small cast concrete balconies connected by metal stairs are set in this southwest corner as an exterior fire escape. A later steel exterior fire escape is attached to the northwest side of the tower. The final finish of the building exterior is painted concrete. On the roof of the office tower is a block of mechanical equipment covered in metal siding designed to imitate the concrete walls below.

The three-sided, sheet metal marquee over the theater lobby entrance forms a trapezoidal entrance canopy. It is accented with Art Deco designs and colored neon. The marquee fills the space above the entrance up to the bottom of the second floor windows. A vertical section rises from the center of the marquee with Art Deco forms imitating the cast concrete pilaster at the fifth floor of the office tower. There are illuminated plastic reader boards on each side of the marquee with changeable letters to advertise events. Above this, the name "Saban Theatre" appears in neon on all three sides. The marquee was installed three years ago and replaces an earlier one installed in 1959. Underneath the marquee is an open vestibule with ticket sales windows on one side and poster cases on the opposite wall. The outer entry is framed by wide pilasters with bands of half-round vertical ornament. Large glass poster cases are centered on each pilaster. At the rear of this exterior vestibule are four sets of wooden double doors with inset zigzag sunburst windows above each set of double doors. The current owners have uncovered and restored the original ceiling in this area which had been covered by a dropped ceiling for many years, as well as installing a new terrazzo floor in the vestibule.

Inside the front doors is a simple one-story inner foyer leading into the main two-story lobby rotunda. The dramatic rotunda features two wide curvilinear staircases leading to an upper mezzanine lobby which wraps around three sides of the lobby below. Two-story columns decorated in a bas-relief diamond pattern are capped by Art Deco capitals. Original Art Deco wrought hand railings line the staircases on each side and then wrap around three sides at the second level. The dome above features decorative bands of plaster ornament springing from the capitals to the center of the dome, where a glass and metal Art Deco chandelier hangs. This is the original chandelier, although modified over the years with additional sheet metal ornamentation. All original plaster ornamentation remains intact in the rotunda and the newer lobby area.

On the west side staircase ascending to the upper level, what was originally an open lounge area on a mid-level landing is

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now enclosed and serves as offices for the theater. On the upper level of the rotunda are the main restrooms for both men and women, situated on each side of the central balcony entrance. The restrooms are tucked under the rise of the balcony overhead. Like many theaters of its era, the balcony extends up and over the front lobby. The men's room still retains its original floor plan. The ladies room, originally composed of an outer powder room and an inner restroom, has been combined to form one large restroom.

The lobby rotunda is the first real indication that the simple Art Deco restraint of the exterior is much more elaborate inside the theater. There are bands of zigzag ornament defining the tops of the first and second levels, and the columns of the rotunda are fluted vertically on the first level and feature a dimensional pattern of diamond relief on the second level. The area over the exit doors is dominated by a huge freestanding sunburst of cast plaster set atop three levels of horizontal zigzag bands. On each side of this sunburst between the next two columns are smaller abstract plaster sculptures with the same zigzag base. Proceeding past the rotunda, towards the auditorium, the lobby widens and reverts to one story in height. This area was originally the rear of the main floor seating, and still features wide Deco pilasters on the side walls. On one side of the reconfigured rear lobby is a large storage room, while the other side has two single handicapped restrooms. The center of this area has a large octagonal built-in bar, with a ceiling canopy surrounded by Deco zigzag molding. The south wall of the rear lobby is covered with mirrored glass capped by a band of zigzag crown molding. Four sets of double wood doors lead into the four seating aisles.

Entering the rear of the main floor seating area, there is a plaster soffit just above the doors which encloses the air conditioning ducts. This soffit forms an arch as the enclosed ducts rise from floor to ceiling at each end of the back row of seats. The side walls of the rear section of the auditorium are dominated by wide Art Deco pilasters topped by decorative capitals. In the center of each capital is an original lighted sconce composed of vertical pieces of white glass edged in metal. In between the side wall pilasters, the walls are upholstered in non-original red velvet cloth. The rear wall is covered by a red velvet drape. Bands of zigzag crown molding top the walls under the balcony. A plain ceiling under the balcony is accented by shallow plaster bands running front to back which define the beams supporting the balcony.

Emerging from under the balcony overhang, the ceiling rises dramatically to a height of over forty feet. The Art Deco pilasters seen under the balcony continue here and rise to meet the ceiling, which angles up from the top of the walls. At the second level of the side walls between the edge of the balcony and the organ screens is an unusual original backlit leaded glass false window on each side featuring frosted green and white glass panels in a riot of geometric patterns.

By far the most dramatic ornamentation is reserved for the walls and ceiling flanking the proscenium. Here the walls and ceiling form a continuous curve as they narrow in at both the sides and top to meet the actual proscenium opening of the stage. The plaster walls are cast in a basket-weave pattern pierced by diamond-shaped voids. In reality, only the area in front of the original organ pipe lofts is actually open. The remaining diamond-shaped voids are painted black to give the illusion of an open basket-weave. Fronting the organ grilles are back-lit Art Deco tree sculptures in cast plaster. A large golden sunburst of cast plaster tops the center of the proscenium over the stage. The rectangular proscenium arch is framed in a continuous band of geometric triangles.

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Moving up to the balcony level, entrance is gained through a sloped center aisle leading up into the lower level of the balcony. Beyond the double wooden doors from the lobby the slope ends at a cross aisle which separates the lower mezzanine seating from the upper balcony seating. Farther up the balcony seating there are two more exit stairways, one of each side at a second, higher cross aisle. These lead back down to the mezzanine rotunda lobby and connect directly with the curved stairways leading down to the main lobby.

The balcony of the theater follows a traditional pattern of loge seating in the first five rows, followed by a wide cross aisle and then rows of smaller balcony seating rising almost to the back wall above the lobby. The present seats are a combination of some original 1930 seats, many seats in a 1940's streamline design, and some later seats from the 1959 and 1979 renovations. At the top of the balcony is a projection booth and storage rooms which end at the rear wall of the auditorium. Small exterior windows in these rooms face Wilshire Blvd. The simple layout and décor of these rooms is essentially unchanged.

At the proscenium arch, an orchestra pit separates the main floor seating from the stage. A removable cover is now in place to add several extra rows of seating over the pit. The orchestra pit is the only part of the building which has a basement level, accessed by a stairway in the stage right dressing room area. The pit itself is intact, although the original railing was removed in 1979 to allow the cover and seating to be installed.

The stage house is typical of theater stages of the early 20th century. A rectangular fly tower rises to a height of almost eighty feet, so that drapes and scenery could be raised completely out of sight of the thirty foot high proscenium opening. Near the top of this fly tower is a steel grid designed to support the weight of scenery, drapes and lights as they are raised and lowered on steel cables and sheaves, with counterweights off stage right. An original pair of large Kalamein doors in the southwest corner of the stage open out to Hamilton Drive to allow stage scenery and equipment to be loaded in and out.

All dressing rooms and offices for the stage are located on the southeast side of the stage block. Originally there were seven dressing rooms on the main level in this area. Over the years these have been expanded to include a green room as well as additional dressing rooms where the air conditioning equipment was formerly located. Most dressing rooms are either recent additions or have been extensively remodeled over the years. However, the original stage level dressing rooms do still retain their original floor plan, walls, and doors.

The office tower features a large second floor which has the same footprint as the lobby and storefronts below it, covering the entire Wilshire Blvd. frontage, with a depth that varies from forty feet at the street corner to twenty feet at the east end. Above the second floor the tower narrows to a rectangle which is oriented north and south and is located in the north west corner of the building at the intersection of Wilshire and Hamilton. Due to the limited height (eight floors) and small square footage of each floor, it is probable that the tower was built primarily as a means of drawing attention to the theater. Fox West Coast, the theater lessee, had recently begun to add towers or one kind or another to almost all of its new theaters around the time this building was constructed. The Wilshire was one of the few of these Fox theaters in which the tower contained actual usable building space. Nonetheless, the primary purpose of the tower was most likely to support the rotating neon FOX sign above it.

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One of the striking original features of the tower was a fully finished penthouse apartment on the eighth floor. Photos show a modern Art Deco home with extensive use of wood paneling, built in bookcases, ziggurat doorways and stepped covered ceilings. Most of this interior decoration was removed over the years and what remains are the plaster walls, original steel casement windows and some molded plaster decoration.

The Wilshire Theatre and office tower retain a high degree of integrity, with almost all of its original exterior features and the majority of its original interior. The first renovation in 1959 mainly affected the seating, replacing the original seating and arrangement with a new, more spacious plan. It was the 1979 conversion to a live theater which brought the most noticeable changes to the theater portion of the building. Besides the expansion of the lobby which was described earlier, the change also necessitated a new raked floor in the orchestra seating area to compensate for the leveling of the new lobby area. This, in turn, prompted the elevation of the stage floor level as well as the elimination of the original orchestra pit railing and wall.

Over the years, the theater interior has been repainted many times. Recent tests have revealed that most of the original painted patterns remain under later layers of paint. The current owners have begun a phased restoration of the original colors and patterns. The proscenium was restored three years ago to its original silver, gold and black. More recently the lobby rotunda columns were restored, as was the exterior lobby ceiling. Plans have been drawn up to restore the walls and ceiling of the auditorium as budget permits. Almost all of the original plaster ornament is still intact in the lobbies and auditorium.

Except for the inevitable re-paintings which have occurred over the years, the theater interior is surprisingly unchanged from 1930. The exterior is equally intact and evocative of 1930's Art Deco glamour, made all the more striking by the contrast with its modern glass and steel high-rise neighbors.

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8. NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Wilshire Theatre has been both a significant cultural and an architectural landmark for Los Angeles and Beverly Hills since its opening in 1930. It was designed to be a major film presentation house, even including a stage for live musical acts before the films. The theater is located on Wilshire Boulevard, the one of the most important and prestigious east-west thoroughfares in the city, running from downtown Los Angeles through Beverly Hills and ending at the beach in Santa Monica. The iconic exterior of the building with its simple Art Deco ornamentation and central office tower is one of the first buildings seen by pedestrians and drivers entering the eastern boundary of the city of Beverly Hills. Over its 80 year history, the Wilshire has been the site of numerous film premieres, exclusive first-run film engagements, live concerts and touring Broadway shows. Despite several renovations, the largely intact interior of the theater continues to delight and amaze theater-goers with its columned two-story rotunda lobby, spacious orchestra and balcony level seating for 2,000, and its breath-taking silver, gold and black proscenium and organ screens. The connection with architect S. Charles Lee, a long-time resident of the city of Beverly Hills, make the Wilshire significant also as a virtually intact example of Lee's transition from the French Regency style of the Tower and Los Angeles Theatres to the nascent Art Deco style that would come to dominate movie palace architecture in the 1930's.

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Wilshire Theatre is a significant architectural landmark due to its style, location and purpose. The Art Deco style which began to flourish around 1929-1930 along Wilshire Boulevard was cut short by the advent of the Great Depression. Only a few large commercial buildings were constructed in this style in Beverly Hills. Only one other Art Deco theater was built along Wilshire Blvd. in Beverly Hills – the Warner Theatre, demolished in the 1980's. The only other large movie palace in Beverly Hills, the Beverly Theatre, was severely remodeled into a bank in the 1990's and then demolished a few years ago. This leaves the Wilshire Theatre building as the only remaining movie palace in the city and one of the few remaining intact Art Deco commercial buildings in the city. Wilshire Boulevard in Beverly Hills has come to be dominated by modern glass and steel office buildings and stores, leaving the Wilshire Theatre as one of the few reminders of an earlier bustling theater and shopping district at the eastern end of the city.

By the time that theater construction resumed in the latter part of the 1930's, both styles and needs had evolved and the large movie palaces were being supplanted by smaller movie houses without stage facilities or lavish amenities. The end result is that the number of true movie palaces built in the Art Deco style is dwarfed by the much larger number of 1920's theaters decorated in more classical or historical styles. The Wilshire Theatre is therefore one of only a small number of movie palaces built in the Art Deco style around the country before the era of the movie palaces was cut short by the Great Depression.

In Los Angeles and around the country, there was a definite hierarchy of movie palaces. The major studios and exhibitors would build the largest palaces in the downtown commercial districts, with smaller, less ornate theaters scattered around the remainder of the city. In Los Angeles this construction took something of a different turn. By the late 1920's the population had already spread out to many outlying areas of the county, including Hollywood, Beverly Hills, Long Beach, and Pasadena. Thus, instead of building extremely large theaters with seating capacities of 4,000 to 5,000 or more as was done in other major cities, the Los Angeles area ended up with a whole collection of lavish movie palaces all with seating around 2,000.

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This meant that a theater the size of the Wilshire was given the budget and attention to make it a true luxurious showplace. Fox West Coast was already the dominant exhibitor in Southern California by the time they decided to build the Wilshire Theatre. They had the money and the muscle to dictate where and when films would be exhibited, and therefore were able to justify a second major theater in the city Beverly Hills, just a few miles from the lavish movies palaces of Hollywood Blvd.

The result was an incredibly lavish movie and stage theater with a seating capacity equal to most of the other major theaters in Southern California. Design, decoration, furniture and equipment were all first rate. If there was any aspect that was not the equal of earlier movie palaces it was perhaps the size of the stage. By 1930, everyone knew that vaudeville was on the way out, and therefore the thirty foot deep vaudeville stage was an expensive luxury. The Wilshire got a stage with a depth of twenty five feet, still respectable but not the equal of the downtown and Hollywood theaters. The other major difference at the Wilshire was actually an accident of geography. The area of Beverly Hills where the theater was built had always had a high water table and basements were somewhat problematic and difficult to maintain. Except for the orchestra pit, the theater was built without a basement. This meant that it did not have the lavish lounges and extra public rooms of some other theaters.

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Wilshire Theatre is a significant cultural landmark due to its location in the city of Beverly Hills which has been the residential home of many people involved in the motion picture industry over the last hundred years. Actors, directors, producers, writers, composers and film executives have always made the city of Beverly Hills one of their prime choices to live and work. As such, the Wilshire Theatre has been a preferred location for film premieres, long running film engagements and live theatrical performances due to its central location in the city of Beverly Hills. From early talking pictures accompanied by stage shows, through major road show film engagements, lavish movie premieres and, most recently, Broadway plays and musicals, the Wilshire has always been a key entertainment venue for the city of Beverly Hills and the west side of Los Angeles.

The location of the Wilshire Theatre has been something of an anomaly compared to most movie palaces around the country. The vast majority of these lavish structures were built in downtown areas that suffered a gradual decline in the 1960's and 1970's. Many of these theaters were closed and neglected or exposed to misuse and insensitive alterations. In contrast, the neighborhood of the Wilshire Theatre has remained as prime retail and office space throughout its life, and the surrounding neighborhood has always been a desirable and well-maintained area. If the Wilshire were ever endangered it was more from demand for the valuable land on which it stands rather than the decline in property values suffered by most older theaters. In fact, its two sister movie palaces, the Beverly and the Warner, were both demolished in order to build newer and more lucrative buildings in their place.

When the Wilshire did undergo the inevitable softening of film attendance in the 1970's, instead of closure or conversion to retail or multiplex, the theater was reinvented as a live Broadway theater. This allowed a whole new generation of theatergoers to consider the Wilshire an important part of their cultural life. Countless Angelenos have fond memories of attending major Broadway plays, concerts and one man shows at the Wilshire. When combined with earlier generations who remember first run films, glittering premieres and long run roadshow engagements, the Wilshire and now the Wilshire have become part of the cultural fabric of Southern California.

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Integrity Evaluations

Location and Setting:

The Wilshire Theatre building retains a high degree of integrity of location and setting. It still occupies its original property boundaries, still retains all of its original structure and ornamentation, and still has its original layout of storefronts flanking a main theater entrance. The building and theater still retain their original functions of a commercial theater, office space and retail store space.

Design:

The theater building retains a high degree of integrity of design. It was designed to be extremely modern both inside and outside. Except for alterations to the theater marquee and ticket entry, very little has been changed on the exterior of the building. It still retains its original form and concrete decoration at all levels. Even the changes to the marquee and ticket entry have been updated recently to echo the Art Deco style of the original. The original rooftop revolving sign which spelled out the word FOX on two side was removed years ago and has not been replaced. A duplicate of this sign remains in place nearby at the Fox Theatre in Pomona, meaning that an exact copy could be made sometime in the future.

Materials and Workmanship:

The building retains a high degree of workmanship and original materials. The entire structure was poured concrete with steel reinforcement. Art Deco motifs were cast into the concrete forms and all of those designs remain in place on the exterior. Most windows are still the original steel casement windows. Storefront glass and doors have been somewhat altered over the years but retain their original layout.

Inside the theater most of the original decorative elements remain. Most plaster ornament and decorative railings are still in place, although they have undergone a series of paint schemes which leave almost none of the original color finishes. A restoration program began a few years ago which has so far brought back the original black and silver colors to the proscenium area around the stage opening. Some original doors remain, and new doors have begun to be installed using the original Art Deco wood designs.

Lighting has been updated on the interior over the years, with recessed spot lights supplementing and/or replacing many of the original frosted glass fixtures. Original fixtures still remain in the lobby rotunda and on pilasters along the side walls of the auditorium. A pair of unusual leaded glass "windows" still flank the sides of the auditorium at the front edge of the balcony. These windows are laid out in zigzag designs using two shades of frosted glass which is back-lit. Some original seats remain in the balcony, and other seats are a combination of different eras of the theater's history. The original black and silver stage drapes were apparently damaged early on in a fire and were not replicated. New carpeting was installed a few years ago using an actual 1930 carpet pattern from the Mohawk Carpet Company's archives.

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Association:

The historic Wilshire Theatre and building retain a high degree of association with theater, film and entertainment in Beverly Hills and Los Angeles. Since the theater has repeatedly adapted over its history to changing film exhibition patterns, new film technologies, live Broadway-style shows, live concerts and community events, it has continued to be a place where the public experiences memorable and important events.

Feeling:

In a city which has always embraced modern design, the Wilshire Theatre and building still evoke the era in which they were constructed. The surrounding residential neighborhood to the south also retains many apartments and duplexes from the same era. Even the commercial building across Wilshire Boulevard to the north is an intact 1920's Spanish style structure.

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Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

PHOTO LOG

Name of Property: Wilshire Theatre

City or Vicinity: Beverly Hills

County: Los Angeles **State:** CA

Photographer: Tessa Swallow

Date Photographed: 7.1.11

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

- 1 of 14. CA, Los Angeles County, Wilshire Theatre Front Exterior looking southeast
- 2 of 14. CA, Los Angeles County, Wilshire Theatre Exterior East Side
- 3 of 14. CA, Los Angeles County, Wilshire Theatre Front Exterior looking south
- 4 of 14. CA, Los Angeles County, Wilshire Theatre Side Exterior looking west
- 5 of 14. CA, Los Angeles County, Wilshire Theatre East Storefront
- 6 of 14. CA, Los Angeles County, Wilshire Theatre Exterior Lobby Entrance Doors
- 7 of 14. CA, Los Angeles County, Wilshire Theatre Exterior Lobby Doors, Floor and Box Office
- 8 of 14. CA, Los Angeles County, Wilshire Theatre Interior Lobby Rotunda looking south
- 9 of 14. CA, Los Angeles County, Wilshire Theatre Interior Lobby Rotunda looking north
- 10 of 14. CA, Los Angeles County, Wilshire Theatre Main Floor Seating Under balcony
- 11 of 14. CA, Los Angeles County, Wilshire Theatre Auditorium Looking Northeast
- 12 of 14. CA, Los Angeles County, Wilshire Theatre Auditorium Looking North
- 13 of 14. CA, Los Angeles County, Wilshire Theatre Proscenium and East Organ Screen
- 14 of 14. CA, Los Angeles County, Wilshire Theatre Proscenium Looking South

FIGURE LOG

Figure 1: Wilshire Theatre exterior circa 1931

Figure 2: Wilshire Theatre lobby circa 1931

Figure 3: Wilshire Theatre proscenium circa 1931

Figure 4: Wilshire Theatre auditorium circa 1931

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Figure 1: Wilshire Theatre exterior circa 1931

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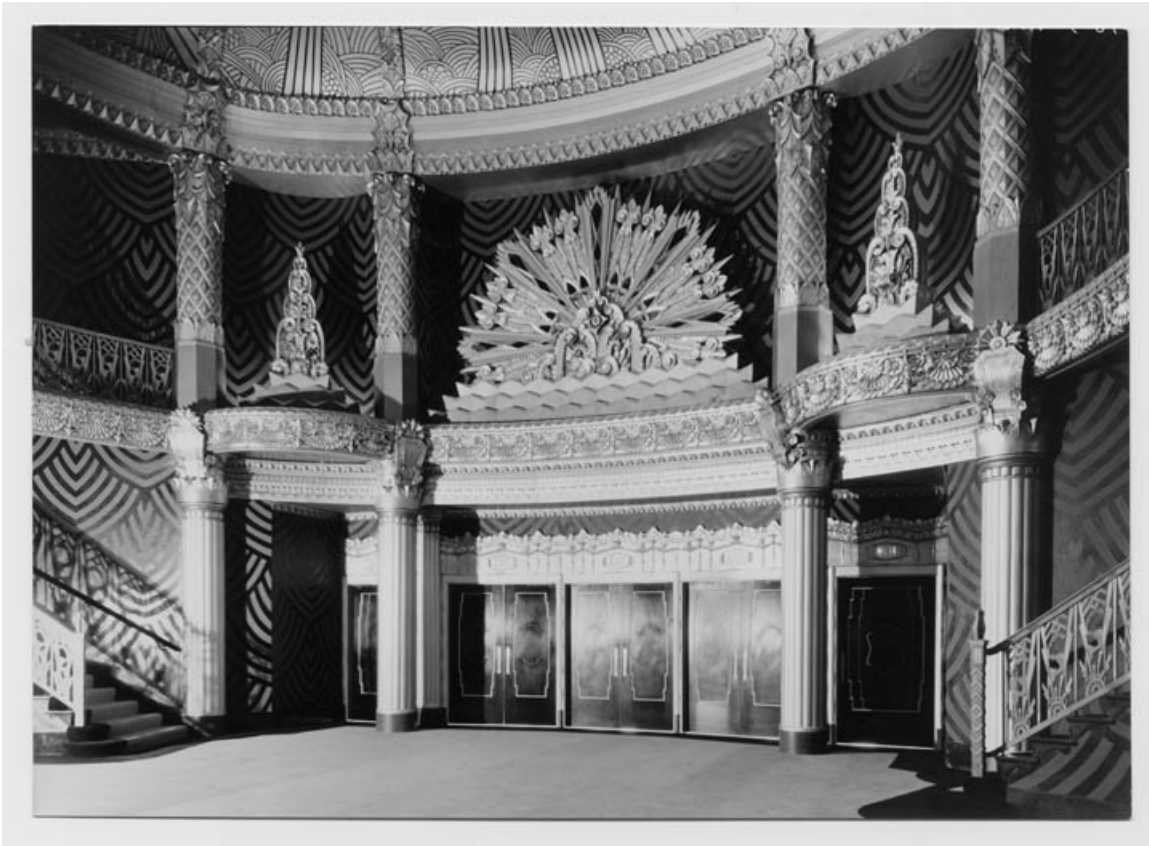


Figure 2: Wilshire Theatre lobby circa 1931

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Figure 3: Wilshire Theatre proscenium circa 1931

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Figure 4: Wilshire Theatre auditorium circa 1931

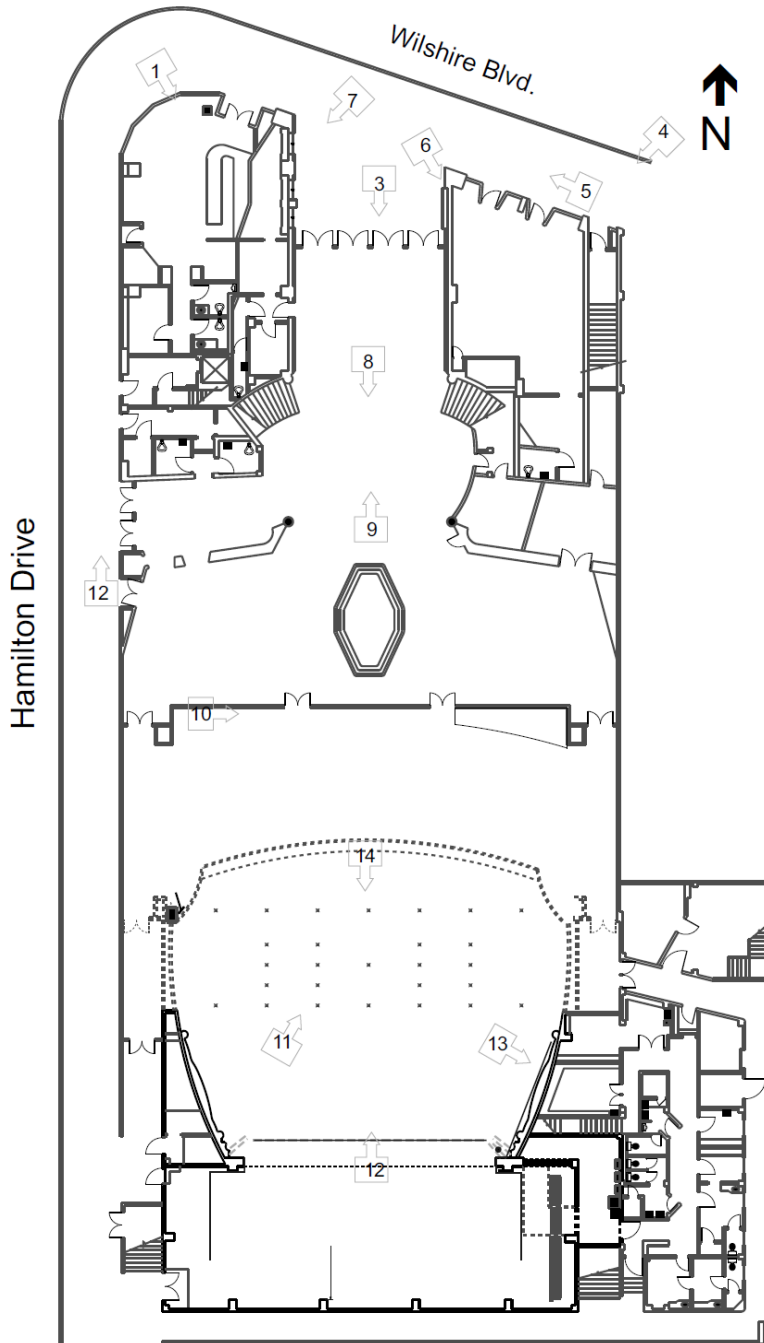
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Site Plan With Photo Location Key
Wilshire (Saban) Theatre



Site Plan