

**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 *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. 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 entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

Historic name Westlake Theatre
Other names/site number Westlake Theatre Building

2. Location

Street & Number 634-642 South Alvarado Street Not for Publication N/A
City or Town Los Angeles Vicinity N/A
State California Code CA County Los Angeles Code 039
Zip Code 90057

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 nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official _____ Date _____

State or Federal Agency or Tribal government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title _____ Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:	Signature of Keeper	Date of Action
<u> </u> entered in the National Register <u> </u> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<u> </u> determined eligible for the National Register <u> </u> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<u> </u> determined not eligible for the National Register	_____	_____
<u> </u> removed from the National Register	_____	_____
<u> </u> other (explain): _____	_____	_____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)	Category of Property (Check only one box)	Number of Resources within Property Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	1	___ building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	___	___ sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-state	<input type="checkbox"/> site	___	___ structures
<input type="checkbox"/> public-federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	___	___ objects
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	___	___ total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Name of related multiple property listing N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: <u>RECREATION AND CULTURE</u> <u>COMMERCE/TRADE</u> _____ _____	Sub: <u>Theater</u> <u>Specialty Store</u> <u>Business</u> _____ _____
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Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: <u>RECREATION AND CULTURE</u> <u>COMMERCE/TRADE</u> _____ _____	Sub: <u>Theater</u> <u>Specialty Store</u> <u>Business</u> _____ _____
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7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

COLONIAL - Spanish Colonial (Churrigueresque exterior detail, Adamesque interior)

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation	<u>Concrete</u>
roof	<u>Spanish tile</u>
walls	<u>Concrete</u>
walls	<u>Cast stone</u>
other	_____

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Please see Section 7 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.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

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

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)
Architecture

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)
N/A

Period of Significance
1926-1935

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Significant Dates
1926
1935, renovation

Architect/Builder
Bates, Richard D. Jr., architect
West Coast Langley Theatres, contractor
Lee, S. Charles, renovation architect

Narrative Statement of Significance
Please see Section 8 Continuation Sheets.

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Please see Section 9 Continuation Sheets.

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: City of Los Angeles, Historic Cultural Monument # 546

10. Geographical DataAcreage of Property N/A

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	11 S	382303.28	3769362.28	3		
2				4		

 See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Please See Continuation Sheets.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

Please See Continuation Sheets.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/Title	Meghan Potter, Elizabeth Weaver, Barbara Lamprecht, and Christopher Hetzel				
Organization	ICF Jones & Stokes	Date	October 2008		
Street & Number	811 W. 7 th Street, Suite 800	Telephone	213-627-5376		
City or Town	Los Angeles	State	CA	Zip Code	90027

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

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

Photographs

Representative photographs of the property.

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

Name	Cecilia Estolano, Chief Executive Officer				
Organization	Community Redevelopment Area of the City of Los Angeles	Telephone	213-977-2633		
Street & Number	Mid-City Corridors, Pico Union 1 & 2, Westlake & Wilshire, Center/Koreatown 3055 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 520				
City or Town	Los Angeles	State	CA	Zip Code	90010

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. 470 et seq.). A federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to range from approximately 18 hours to 36 hours depending on several factors including, but not limited to, how much documentation may already exist on the type of property being nominated and whether the property is being nominated as part of a Multiple Property Documentation Form. In most cases, it is estimated to average 36 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form to meet minimum National Register documentation requirements. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, 1849 C St., NW, Washington, DC 20240.

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*Westlake Theatre—Los Angeles
Los Angeles County, California*

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SUMMARY

The Westlake Theatre, located at Alvarado 634-642 S. Alvarado Street, Los Angeles, California, occupies a prominent location facing MacArthur Park, historically one of the most fashionable retail, residential, and entertainment communities of pre-World War II Los Angeles. It is approximately one mile to the west of downtown Los Angeles. The two- and three-story theatre occupies a rectangular parcel on a city block bounded by Wilshire Boulevard on the south; South Alvarado Street to the west; South 6th Street to the east; and Westlake Avenue, a small side street, to the north. The Westlake Theatre's primary facade is oriented west towards Alvarado Street, which is bounded by a concrete curb and a broad sidewalk. The theatre's larger urban setting, the Westlake area, is characterized by a mix of buildings of age, scale, and use, including early twentieth century high-rise buildings, hotels, apartment houses, and retail businesses occupying and reusing one-, two-, and three-story buildings. A surface parking lot, which surrounds a one-story fast food business fronting Wilshire Boulevard, is located south of the building, and a three-story condominium immediately stands to the theatre's north. The once-upscale area is targeted for revitalization by the City of Los Angeles and the theatre is a key prospective Community Redevelopment Agency project.

Opened on September 22, 1926 as a gala Hollywood event, the 1,949-seat, 18,673-square foot Westlake Theatre was executed in the Mission/Spanish Colonial Revival Style with Churrigueresque (Spanish Rococo)¹ detailing on the exterior and Renaissance and Adamesque² references on the interior. It was designed by architect Richard M. Bates and constructed by the West Coast-Langely Theatres for \$750,000 (about \$8,800,000 today).³ Its auditorium includes the striking, extant mural by nationally acclaimed Dutch-born muralist, Anthony Heinsbergen, and another slightly-damaged mural in the theatre's mezzanine, likely also rendered by Heinsbergen. In 1935, portions of the exterior were updated in the Art Deco style by S. Charles Lee, a renowned Art Deco and Art Moderne theatre designer and successful postwar Modern architect, who altered portions of the theatre's entrance areas, including the ticket booth, marquee, and the interior foyer.

The two- and four-story building originally functioned as motion picture theatre, but provided secondary uses as a live entertainment venue (the primary space comprising the auditorium and stage), office, and retail use. After a 65-year run as a movie theater, it closed in 1991. Today the auditorium houses a swap meet, although the other original spaces, the offices and front retail spaces, maintain their original function.

On September 24, 1991, the theatre was locally designated as City of Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument #546 and is situated near several other locally designated historic resources, including the General Douglas MacArthur Park (City of Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument #100), listed in 1972.

EXTERIOR

The Westlake Theatre has a monumental symmetrical massing and a ground floor arrangement that together convey the building's design as a theatre with additional programmatic functions. The theatre is a large two- and four-story building with two separate basements, one on the west side, below Alvarado street, and the other servicing the stage on the east end. The

¹ *Churrigueresque* is that school of ornament based on Renaissance and influenced by the Counter Reformation, most exuberantly celebrated in Spanish America, Mexico). It is also known as *Spanish Baroque* or *Spanish Rococo*.

² *Adamesque* refers to the NeoClassical and Palladian 18th century architect Robert Adam (1728 -1792), known for his clear, unambiguous plans and for, personal approach to Classical detailing, demonstrated by the school of ornament he developed that he named grotesque: exaggerated, idiosyncratic, and playful. He used a colorful palette, typically in contrasting colors, and slender, non-monumental proportions; both of these attributes are abundant in the Westlake Theatre.

³ *Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 18, 1926.

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structure's massing consists of a rectangular footprint seven bays wide, measuring 182'-6½" x 115'-6." Its structural system of poured and reinforced concrete appears to be robust, having weathered every earthquake since its completion with very little damage despite its wide interior spans.

The overall parti consists of three major pieces. Offices and retail spaces occupy the two-story westernmost volume along South Alvarado Street. This volume's exterior (west elevation) is partially dressed in decorative cast stone and is articulated on the ground floor as a foyer with flanking arched, ornamented openings. The second component is the capacious auditorium, which is essentially four stories in height overall. The theatre's principal space, the auditorium features an angled roof in longitudinal (east-west) section. This roof is partially concealed by the west elevation's parapet wall. The easternmost portion of this roof angles down, denoting the interior proscenium containing the Heinsbergen mural described below. The auditorium's upper area is defined by a two-story façade that steps back about 30' from the front facade, standing another two stories behind a parapet wall. The building's third volume, which is also the tallest with a height of approximately 162 feet, contains the stage and "flywall" or "fly loft" area for changing background scenery and is located at the theatre's far eastern end.

The two-story volume that fronts South Alvarado Street at the west elevation is devoted to office/retail spaces, and was originally designed for this use. The volume's ground floor contains the theatre's large, symmetrically centered entrance foyer. A decorated three-sided marquee steps out and over the sidewalk in front of the foyer, sheltering its wide opening. The ticket booth is centered within this opening. The booth's outer edge is aligned with the setback of the theatre's west elevation. The foyer is flanked by two retail spaces to the north, two smaller retail spaces to the south, and a staircase at the façade's far north side. The staircase leads to a single-loaded second-floor corridor that provides access to a series of wide office spaces. The flat roof of the theatre's western volume supports a huge steel frame with a three-story-tall neon roof sign that reads "WESTLAKE THEATRE." Occupying the center of the roof, the sign faces southwest and is visible from a considerable distance.

West (Primary) Elevation

The Westlake Theatre's main entrance is located on the building's west elevation, facing Alvarado Street. The ground floor features the wide, centrally located foyer opening that is the most ornately detailed and decorated part of the primary façade. It is here that the use of the Churrigueresque school is most evident. While fairly Classical in hierarchy, the façade blends other schools of ornament, including Assyrian, which is then infused by the architect's own theatrical whimsy.

Defining the foyer entrance, the bay is rectangular in character and protrudes in height above the two-story roofline of the office/retail frontage spaces. The very low slope of this roof is characterized by red Spanish tile which can be seen at the roofline. The large central bay is flanked on both the north and south sides by three bays, each originally defined by ornamented semi-circular arches. The arches spring from semi-circular engaged composite columns defining each smaller bay, forming a short colonnade on either side of the foyer. While the series of three bays are physically intact, they have been covered by reversible panels attached to the building on the south, but are still visible on the north. Below the arches, which are now in-filled with plywood, extant large plate-glass windows designate each retail space. Original photographs show that these arches also contained glass divided into four pie-shaped segments.

Each column is capped with cast stone ornamentation. The ornamentation consists of a composite Corinthian capital supported with an unusual "pediment," an overt reference to the unique Persian (Assyrian) capitals found at Persepolis.⁴ The sides of the shallow, triangular-shaped pediment are softened by cyma recta ogee curves. Each pediment also contains a round medallion in its center. In turn, the series of pediments support an entablature on either side of the central bay that is comprised of an

⁴ In Persia, now Iran. The distinctive capitals are unique to 5th Century b.c.e. Assyrian architecture, which was the "Post-Modern" school of ornament in its day in its appropriation and reinterpretation of many schools of architecture, including Egyptian, and then creating something unique. Persepolis and its compelling architecture was a popular source in the early 20th century for revival styles.

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architrave and frieze. This ornamented entablature consists of a flat cast stone architrave that features a symmetrically distributed series of round medallions below a more ornate and slightly larger cast stone frieze above it. This frieze employs a triglyph/metope rhythm of alternating cast stone shields that feature castle turrets surrounded by curving acanthus plant motifs and round medallions containing busts, whose side-profiled heads of soldiers are crowned with Persian-style helmets. These two alternating elements are separated by a series of small, stylized, articulated engaged pilasters with identical bases, whose sharp orthogonal corners and lines are sustained throughout the entire frieze. A series of contemporary security lights, one centered above each bay, have been mounted to the frieze.

Above this entablature, again on either side of the central bay, is a flat area characterized by three double-hung, wood, nine-pane casement windows, which are widely but unevenly distributed. The southern and northernmost windows are distributed closer to the ends of the façade. On the south, these windows have been covered by a large rectangular panel, probably plywood, occupying the entire façade on this side of the central bay. All these windows denote the upstairs office space.

Centered underneath the marquee but aligned just inside the building's footprint stands the colorful Art Deco ticket booth/kiosk, designed by S. Charles Lee. Its primary materials are bright, red-painted metal, unvarnished aluminum, and glass. Its roof is an eccentric curve in red metal best described as a flattened wave curling over the top of the glass, stopped by an angled plane of flattened Egyptian-inspired figuration. The booth's oval base is composed of applied, small light-yellow tiles. The floor of the central bay is composed of beige and yellow terrazzo designed in a sunburst pattern that extends well into the sidewalk pavement.

The angled and ornamented marquee, also designed by Lee, projects west in a symmetrical trapezoid. Each of the three sides has a large rectangular thin metal frame that once containing the names of the shows playing at the theatre. Currently each frame contains the words "SWAP MEET." Above these frames, each side has an abstract and identical Moderne banquette of neon lights, rendered as possibly sun (or crown) and cloud (or mountain) imagery. Below this prominent imagery, also occurring on each of the three sides are the words "WESTLAKE" in red neon lights. These lights stand against fields of a white painted backdrop and neon lights. Underneath and mounted to the marquee is a random distribution of uncovered fluorescent tube lights, alarm bells, electrical runs, and security lights.

Above the marquee and partially concealed by the marquee ornament is a rectangular area of cast stone decoration. This is an important character-defining feature of this primary elevation. Here, Spanish Baroque, or the Churrigueresque ornament of floral patterns, cartouche relief, and variously shaped medallions flood the entire field. This area is divided into two sections. The lower section, symmetrically divided, features seven arched original windows within the cast stone, four of which have been infilled by plywood. Two narrow blind niches, one on each side, flank this series of seven windows. Between and above the windows, a broad area devoted to spandrels and decoration continues up to an articulated concrete cornice. Above this is the most ornamented area of the theatre's overtly frontally exterior (e.g., oriented to MacArthur Park.) Here ten smaller arched blind niches punctuate this field of opulent figuring. Eight niches are evenly distributed while the last niche on either side is located directly above an identical blind niche on the lower portion of this area, below the articulated cornice. At the roofline, between each niche, small pinnacles, shaped like urns that feature curling ogee-shaped arms with flanking capitals shaped like elongated pineapples, protrude beyond the crenellated rooflines, unusual in that the ogee curves create a curvaceous, non-orthogonal appearance different than more typical crenellation. An articulated cornice, comprised of rows of cast stone including dentil molding and a series of tiny blind arches, separates the urn series above and a series of floral-patterned cast stone panels between each blind niche below. The deep interiors of these niches feature large-scale cast stone pieces curved to fit the niche.

North and South (Side) Elevations

The side elevations are simple flat walls of poured reinforced concrete. The cornice line does not continue on these elevations. However, it is readily visible that the cornice line on the west elevation is a stepped parapet. Fire escape staircases with metal

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doors and steps lead from the theatre's interior balconies on both elevations. Both elevations also contain concrete stairs leading to the basement. The south elevation faces a parking lot. The north elevation faces a three story apartment building with ground floor retail; a narrow alley separates the two parcels.

East (Rear) Elevation

The rear, east, elevation also is composed of a three-story poured concrete wall. This utilitarian elevation serves as the stage wall. The elevation is completely devoid of doors, fenestration, or other features. The elevation faces the back service alley that separates the theatre and other buildings along South Alvarado from multiplex housing and parking and commercial structures.

Roof

The roof of the front elevation is flat and composed of reinforced concrete. The secondary roof appears flat but behind the parapet it is slightly pitched, where the taller elevation is highlighted by a prominent steel frame three-story neon sign that reads "WESTLAKE THEATRE" that occupies the center of the roof and faces southwest. The sign is easily visible from a considerable distance, especially from MacArthur Park. Its frame and letters are original, although the original sign also included smaller letters which read "WEST COAST" above "WESTLAKE THEATRE." The original sign also included much more animated flat surface ornament including abstracted star bursts and a more elaborate crown.

INTERIOR

Significant interior public spaces within the Westlake Theatre include the foyer, the lobby, the mezzanine, the auditorium, the proscenium, and the balcony seating.

Theatre Foyer and Lobby

The foyer floor, open to the sidewalk, is finished with multi-colored terrazzo designed by S. Charles Lee that displays a sunburst pattern and stars. The foyer itself is finished with plaster walls and high plaster ceilings that continue the floor's decorative theme with large, intricate gold medallions. As one enters the foyer from the street, the ornamentation in the semi-public foyer changes to that featured in the lobby. The transition is manifest in a dramatic shift in style from the Spanish Baroque style on the exterior to light Classical and Adamesque styles on the interior. The shallow lobby, accessed from the one-story foyer, was designed as one long rectangular space on the ground floor with a north-south orientation. The foyer walls are angled out and open into the lobby, linking the two spaces in plan.

The foyer's principal character-defining decorative feature is a large "modillion" mounted on the relatively low ceiling. The modillion resembles a large, flat, filigreed, gold-painted brooch, approximately 5'-6" in diameter, adorned with a series of red, egg-like ovoids. The design, and its placement on the ceiling, confers the lively sense of a merry-go-round in the foyer. Functionally, it may have acted as a foil for a mechanical system, such as heating or cooling air. The modillion appears to be virtually unchanged since its installation, presumably as an original feature of the 1926 construction.

A series of doors separating the foyer and the lobby were removed when the theatre was converted to use as a swap meet in 1991. A second set of walls and doors, further east, that separated the lobby from the auditorium, were also removed at that time.

The size of the lobby space equals nearly the full width of the theatre's west elevation, along South Alvarado Street. The lobby's central space is composed of a double height atrium, integrating the ground and upper floors and originally dedicated to gathering and transition for theatre-goers. Two broad, 180-degree-return staircases, one on each side of the lobby, lead with a generous rise and run to the upstairs promenade area and balcony.

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The stairwells are curved at their north and south elevations, and like the lobby floor, the stairs are composed of concrete. The walls have a plaster finish that feature a decorative wainscot with geometric patterned design. The pattern consists of circles within rectangles and continues along the walls as a higher positioned band that ends against the flooring of the second floor lobby. The rest of the wall emulates large scale paneling, which is highlighted with yellow and pink. There are two slightly projecting columns that contain gold floral ornaments that rise from the wainscoting to the ceiling. The molding along the stairwells is heavy with layers of small and large bands of acanthus leaves, as well as projecting brackets. A restroom is located below each stair landing, accessed through a door near to and east of each stairwell.

Mezzanine and Atrium

The lobby's principal feature is the centered atrium that overlooks the lobby from the second floor mezzanine above. It is one of building's most ornate interior elements and bisects two adjacent and identical mezzanine areas leading from the top of each staircase. The atrium's second story is formed by a four-sided colonnaded loggia containing four arched bays on each side. The loggia, which gives the appearance of a colonnaded peristyle around an open court, is characterized by a feeling of Adamsesque lightness, delicacy, and openness. A centered, shallow, cantilevered balcony, with a flattened curve and exaggerated returns in the Baroque manner, extends into the atrium from the east side of the arcaded loggia. It is slightly rounded and it continues the gold band of ornament along the low wall.

The arcaded loggia has slender, relatively short and arched columns, turned and carved, which rest on a wood and plaster balcony wall approximately three feet tall. This wall is decorated on both sides and can therefore be seen from the lobby and mezzanine floors. The loggia's interior wall consists of a low plaster and wood wall with a gold-and-white painted pattern that alternates between a shield motif, formed by a shield placed within a circle inside a rectangle whose corners are decorated with gold filigree, and a slightly projecting abstract column with gold ornament.

Above each of the column bases, each of the carved and fluted columns has a gold Ionic capital, and the column shafts thicken at the center. The column's ornamentation is further emphasized by the placement of a gold acanthus leaf decoration set against a red background. The column capitols are connected by a series of articulated arches. These arches contain gold filigree and moldings identical to those used at the stairwells.

The loggia approximates the proportions of a square of roughly the same size as the spaces defining the volumes of the flanking staircases. Likewise, each of the three ceilings in these spaces is approximately the same size, conferring a sense of symmetry and balance. Each ceiling is elaborately coffered, in contrasting red and white, at the junction of the wall and ceiling planes. The coffering consists of Classical filigree with bands of egg and dart, dentils, and floral leaves, and occurs on both sides of the arcaded loggia. As a design element, it has an effect of softening an otherwise abrupt transition between the wall and ceiling planes.

The ceiling of the atrium was once painted in a Classical mural, quite likely by muralist Heinsbergen. However, little of the mural now remains visible, as much of it has been painted over. Throughout the rest of the second floor mezzanine a paint scheme of contrasting paint colors, now red and ivory, suggests an Adamsesque stylistic influence. Contemporary newspaper articles report that paints in a purple range were originally applied. The mezzanine's walls and ceiling are clad with plaster, and have been fit with non-original fluorescent light fixtures.

The original restrooms on the second floor mezzanine level were located east of the southern staircase, just beyond an existing, original office, and in a similar location east of the northern staircase. The southernmost restroom remains spatially intact. However, the northernmost restroom has been converted for use as a kitchen, a renovation which displaced an original wall. The restroom on the south is entered through a door leading to a long, narrow passageway flanking the existing office. Somewhat damaged, the existing walls contain tall wainscoting of original subway tile with fine joint lines. The restroom stalls were

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originally finished in Carrera marble. All but a couple original monolithic marble pieces separating the toilet stalls remain, and those that do have been painted or replaced with substandard separation panels.

Retail Spaces, Ground Floor

Various commercial retail tenant spaces are located in 1,794 square feet on the ground floor at the west elevation. These spaces retain their original function. Contemporary businesses include a doctor's office, a cellular phone company, jewelry store, immigration income tax service, and a general retail store. Over the years, the tenant spaces have been remodeled and modernized. Their structural spatial layout, defined by load-bearing walls, has not been altered. For the most part, the typical finishes within these remodeled tenant spaces include carpeted floors, gypsum board and/or wood panel partition walls, and acoustical ceilings with fluorescent lighting. The northern tenant spaces retain their original arched openings and exhibit original finish materials on the exterior.

Offices

Offices are located on the theatre's second floor, above the retail spaces where they overlook South Alvarado Street and MacArthur Park. The offices occupy approximately 2,000 square feet of the existing building and are accessed by stairs located within the northern most bay of the primary façade. The offices are comprised of eight rooms each of approximately the same size. A hallway runs along a north-south axis, providing access into each office, ending at the last and largest office space. Existing restrooms are located west of the stairwell at the beginning of the hallway corridor.

Auditorium

The Westlake Theatre features an immense, majestically styled auditorium. The auditorium has a slightly sloping concrete floor, and a tall interior space characterized by an elliptical and coffered ceiling. Its design classifies the Westlake Theatre as a "proscenium theater," due to the large archway (the proscenium arch) located above the stage, at the auditorium's eastern end. The theatre's original seating, which has been removed, ended below the level of the stage. In addition to the proscenium arch, deep ceiling bands help to distinguish the auditorium from the stage. A sweeping balcony level occupies the auditorium's western end.

The auditorium's ceiling is divided into three principal parts: a plain, uncoffered area above the balcony, a coffered ceiling in the middle, and a large mural that defines the upper regions of "theatrical" space, a technique meant to distinguish the performance space from the "real" space and time occupied by the audience. The middle portion consists of a coffered ceiling that features a larger pattern of primary and secondary beams. Within the beams is a smaller pattern of decorative coffers.

The ceiling's large, prominent beams have extant floral decorations stenciled on the bottoms of the beams and are oriented on an east-west axis. A shallower, secondary series of short beams, oriented north-south, are positioned between the deeper, larger beams, forming a nearly square space that contains a repetitive series of identically, decorated, articulated, and painted coffered wood and plaster lozenges. The ceiling's original colors, which appear to remain intact, consist of rich, dark tones complemented by brighter primary and pastel shades for the stenciling and reliefs. The paint scheme appears to be medieval or early Renaissance in tenor, and must have been quite colorful at one time.

The coffered ceiling extends from the balcony to an arched section before the proscenium arch. The north and south walls blend with the ceiling ornamentation in which there is a painted fleur-de leaf frieze and a band of colored roping. Below the frieze is a series of arches with small supporting floral brackets. Where the wood beams meet the walls, larger ornamental brackets are positioned onto painted pilasters that extend downwards. The pilasters contain vertical bands of roping on each side and a central applied shield. The north and south walls, along with the east elevation, are composed of poured-in-place concrete.

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The ceiling leading up to the proscenium, known as “the front of house,” is composed of an arched band that contains a pattern of small scrolled elements flanked by a small modillion. A large decorative soffit and arched beam, which defines the middle coffered section, acts as a boundary for the auditorium’s large mural. The mural is painted within a large, elliptically shaped vault that serves as the “canvas” for the huge work of art. The artwork is a delicate, brilliantly colored pastel mural by Anthony Heinsbergen, and occupies the entire eastern third of the auditorium’s curved ceiling. The mural depicts a series of classical female figures in robes within the clouds, possibly portraying Thalia, the Greek muse of comedy, amidst other muses and graces enacting a famous Classical play. Since western theater and plays originated in Greece, the connection between the building and the mural would act to emphasize the Westlake Theatre’s association with these older sources and traditions.

The mural’s ceiling extends down on each side of the orchestra pit to include two large, secondary semi-circular arched vaults inset deeply beyond the ceiling, one on each side. Their inset depth creates a small interior ceiling inside each vault, expressed on the lower parts of the larger mural ceiling as pointed arches. These small ceilings are painted in blue, recalling similar ceilings popular in the Renaissance, Baroque and Rococo periods, seen in theatres or churches. The central portions of these arched vaults, below the strong blues of their ceilings, contain a two-story large arched ornamental grillwork with a central applied metal shield. The top of the arch contains a band of scrollwork, which is stopped by heavy wooden crown molding that has a band of egg and dart decoration. Beneath the molding is a pair of Ionic pilasters that are painted and extend down the wall. Above the arched grillwork, the soffit of the arched wall contains painted stars.

In the front of the stage, where the mural actually meets the prominent proscenium arch, the arch is particularly treated. The entire arch is articulated as a series of bands. The bands include: a course of braided molding; a wide course of repeated decorative circles within a floral scroll encircling two bands of decorative gold acanthus leaves; and a course of gold filigree surrounding a series of red small oval cartouches, which resemble the egg-shaped ovoids at the edge of the foyer modillion. From the middle of the arch, the extant and original fire curtain is drawn partway down. This fire curtain is boldly painted with the word ASBESTOS surrounded by scrollwork. This word, while alarming today, was reassuring to the audiences of the early 20th century. It means “inextinguishable” in Greek, and would act to prevent the spread of a fire from behind the stage, an area typically filled with wood theater sets and chemicals, and therefore prone to fires. Above the label, the curtain’s ornament is broken by a horizontal band of decorative shields intertwined with scrollwork and bounded by guilloche and dog-eared bands.

The auditorium’s original sloping floor remains intact. However, prior to its 1991 conversion to a swap meet, all the theatre’s seats and Art Deco chandeliers were removed.⁵ A new steel structure with wood framing and a lightweight concrete topping was installed to create a flat floor flush with the original stage floor, for the purposes of the existing tenants. This installation is reversible. A basement located below the stage is accessible via a trap door in roughly the middle of the floor.

Balcony

At the auditorium’s west end, the balcony seating is accessed through the second floor mezzanine. The balcony entrance is centered in the auditorium’s western wall at the mezzanine level. The balcony is constructed of reinforced concrete and positioned on a diagonal slope so that members of the audience could see the stage. The seats have been removed but the base is composed of a series of banked concrete “steps” approximately 16 feet tall; wooden steps of standard rise and run are used for access. Evenly distributed heaters with a metal grills are regularly placed along the concrete banks. The wall that separates the balcony from the second floor lobby is composed of plaster and is unadorned. The low wall marking the lower, eastern end of the balcony has a plaster finish with wood trim. The existing ceiling above the balcony does not contain any decoration.

Basements

The stage basement, approximately 2,500 square feet in size, is one story deep and divided into four bays of different sizes

⁵ *Los Angeles Times*, August 5, 1991.

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ranging from 707 to 591 square feet each. Its walls are unfinished, consisting of unfinished poured concrete. One of the basements can be accessed from the trap door described above. The large room has a trap opening, providing access to the stage above, as well as what was originally and demolished orchestra pit.

Integrity

The principal character-defining architectural features of the Westlake Theatre remain intact and the building retains its integrity. The monumental massing, low pitched clay tile roof and flat roof with parapet, and cast stone decoration clearly convey the building's Spanish Colonial Revival style and Churrigueresque ornamentation. Almost all of the principal character-defining features with their distinctive elements of its design, materials, and workmanship remain intact. The covering of the original store frontage with lightweight plastic or wood boards and boarding up of the second floor windows on the primary façade, leaving the frame and detailing undisturbed, do not compromise the building's overall integrity. Other alterations include the marquee replacement in the 1940s have become character-defining features in their own right. Portions of the roof sign text and decoration were removed; in addition, retail signage on the primary façade has been installed.

The significant interior spaces, including the main lobby, foyer, auditorium, balcony, fly loft, stage and mezzanine, retain their integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, demonstrated by their retention of historic spatial relationships, detailing, and original finishes. While some of the interior fabric has been damaged or is deteriorated, to a surprising degree much of it is intact. Over time, modifications have been made to some of the secondary interior spaces, primarily the insertion of non-structural partition walls and changes to finishes in individual retail spaces, as well as changes to the bathrooms, both in spatial layout and in finishes, although as earlier noted, much historic fabric remains there. These changes are reversible and do not affect the overall integrity of the building.

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Summary

The Westlake Theatre is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C at the local level of significance. The periods of significance for the theatre are its original construction in 1926 and 1935, when significant renovations occurred. The Westlake Theatre is eligible under Criterion C for its well articulated resolution of the Spanish Colonial Revival style with Churrigueresque and Adamesque ornamentation and for its designed spatial layout, which demonstrates an adroit response to changing cultural norms. Opened in 1926 and operating as a movie theatre until 1991, the theatre was designed by architect Richard M. Bates, Jr. Bates designed several important hotel and civic structures in Los Angeles, but the Westlake Theatre was his only highly accomplished theater project. Renowned theatre architect S. Charles Lee is credited with several notable Art Deco style renovations in 1935.

The Westlake Theatre's exterior is a well-executed example of the Spanish Colonial Revival style of architecture with Churrigueresque (Spanish Rococo)⁶ and Adamesque ornamentation. It demonstrates the successful layering, if not integration, of these disparate historic styles into one exuberant entertainment palace. This layering reflected a range of architectural responses to changing cultural conditions in the early twentieth century, including different stylistic expressions on the exterior and interior of the building. The Westlake Theatre's interior is designed in high-spirited, delicate Palladian and Adamesque detailing that stands in sharp contrast to its monumental Spanish exterior. The contrast was purposeful, with both the exterior and interior designed and built simultaneously by one architect. In addition, another layer of eclecticism exists in the extant 1935 Art Deco renovations by renowned theatre architect S. Charles Lee. Lee's designs demonstrate the desire of the theatre's owner, West Coast Theatres Inc., to sustain audience appeal by staying *au courant* with the latest popular trends. The contributions of muralist Anthony Heinsbergen, whose firm was responsible for two fine, large murals (one intact, the other damaged) are also important elements of the theatre's design. Heinsbergen is considered the foremost mural artist and designer of North American movie theatre interiors and his contribution to the Westlake Theatre, original and intact, is substantial.

The Westlake Theatre's existing original interior spatial layout is also significant in its accommodation of different uses, demonstrating a thoughtful response to new forces in American culture. Constructed at a transitional period in entertainment history, the theatre's design provided for the production of both live vaudeville acts with troupes of actors requiring generous stage and back stage areas, as well as the screening of big-screen films that actually required no stage at all. This dual purposed design foreshadowed changes in the entertainment industry that occurred in America between the 1920s and the 1940s. In its two periods of significance, 1925 and 1936, the Westlake Theatre bore witness to the 20th century evolution of the movie theatre.

The finding that the building is eligible for inclusion in the National Register under Criterion C is substantiated by its previous designation as a City of Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument, dated June 25, 1991 and prepared by John E. Miller. Miller found that the building was locally significant for its architecture under the theme of Arts and Leisure. He states that "This is one of few [West Coast Theatre] not designed by Louis A. Smith, and employed an architectural style inside that was totally unlike any other West Coast Theatre, relying more on the British Adams then prevalent on the east coast of the United States than the Mediterranean styled interiors usually favored by West Coast Theatres."

History and Development of the Westlake/MacArthur Park area

The Westlake Theatre is one of several prominent structures that overlook what was originally established as Westlake Park, now MacArthur Park, in 1886. Once a swampy dumping ground "to be avoided as ugly to the eye and poisoning to the lungs," an expensive civic effort in 1891 transformed the park into a lush, landscaped and manicured oasis with a lake and a boathouse with adjacent pavilion. In the manner of the late nineteenth century Parks and Boulevards movement and landscape design promoted by Frederick Law Olmsted, Westlake Park was intended to be pastoral setting, creating a subtle contrast to the growing

⁶ *Churrigueresque* is a flamboyant school of ornament based on Renaissance and influenced by the Counter Reformation, most ambitiously celebrated in churches in "Spanish America," i.e., in Mexico). It is also known as *Spanish Baroque* or *Spanish Rococo*.

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metropolis. “The wisdom and good taste” of the Park Commission and lake-side property owners “caused them to leave the natural irregularities in Westlake Park so there are no rigid straight lines bordering it.”⁷

Spurred by the extensive park improvements, land speculators and real estate developers promoted the benefits of the land surrounding the park for residential development. The effort was so successful that in 1893, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that the “spacious and handsome public park” was “certainly becoming one of the most popular resorts within easy distance of the city.” In 1899, the *Los Angeles Times* again reported that “The most popular of the city parks is Westlake, thirty-five acres in area, near the western city limits... during the past few years the section around Westlake Park has become the most popular residence part of the city, hundreds of costly and artistic homes of pleasing architecture having been erected and surrounded by beautiful grounds.”⁸ The park increasingly became important as a place of quiet pleasure amidst urbanity. A 1921 advertisement in the *Los Angeles Times* reflected on the importance of the pavilion and entertainment to the upscale community around Westlake Park. The ad encouraged the public to “Dine with Movie Stars” from Universal Studios’ production of *Foolish Wives* at the Westlake Park Pavilion.⁹

In the 1880s and 1890s, streetcar development accelerated the development of residential neighborhoods west, away from the city center. The Westlake Park area was a beneficiary of this trend. It was served by several lines of the Los Angeles Railway by 1889, including lines that ran west on 7th Street from downtown to Westlake Park and on Alvarado Street and Bonnie Brae Street. The 7th Street Cable Car line, for example, widened near its terminus to 100 feet and was lined with pepper trees, creating a picturesque entrance to the park for its many visitors that contrasted with the more “urban” Bunker Hill and downtown areas.

The bucolic image of the Westlake Park area continued well into the twentieth century. The early decades through the 1930s constituted a period of sustained growth, and Westlake Park emerged as an important center for recreation and entertainment during this time. Between 1900 and 1909, many new residents settled in the neighborhoods surrounding Westlake Park, and the area grew in stature as a fashionable and upscale area in which to live. Los Angeles Times editor Colonel Harrison Gray Otis and Los Angeles Express editor Edwin T. Earl, for example, both built mansions overlooking the park.¹⁰ A news article touting a new Mission style hotel meanwhile, likewise stated that the “location of the hotel is an exceptionally fine one, being just opposite Westlake Park, and at an elevation that commands an excellent view of the park and the surrounding country.”¹¹

Between 1910 and 1920, the population in Southern California increased by nearly 80 percent. In the 1920s it further increased by over 100 percent, for a total of over one million arrivals to Los Angeles County in that decade alone. As the population continued to increase, multiple family residential housing, apartment buildings, and commercial and residence hotels increased the density and altered the character of the Westlake Park neighborhoods. As real estate grew more valuable, “magnificent fire-proof apartment houses” replaced single-family homes in the areas around the park. In 1912, the Los Angeles Times reported: “The certainty that the district in the vicinity of Westlake Park is to become to Los Angeles what Riverside Drive and Central Park West are to New York City, a section of great caravansaries and high-class apartment houses, is made more and more apparent as the months roll by.”¹² Apartment hotels around the park included the San Jacinto Dwellings and the Park Plaza Hotel. The San Jacinto was described as a “beautiful and modern building” for its Churrigueresque ornamentation, an early precedent for the Westlake Theatre.

⁷ *Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 8, 1890.

⁸ “Our Park System.” *Los Angeles Times*. Jan 1, 1899.

⁹ At the time, it was the most expensive film ever made and almost bankrupted the studio. Gonzalez, Ed. “Foolish Wives.” Film Review. Slant Magazine. <http://www.slantmagazine.com>. Accessed on July 1, 2008.

¹⁰ Davis, Margaret Leslie. *Bullocks Wilshire*. Los Angeles: Balcony Press, 1996.

¹¹ “Another Fine Hotel for the Westlake District.” *Los Angeles Times*. Jun 28, 1902.

¹² “Apartments to Front on Park.” *Los Angeles Times*. Aug 18, 1912.

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Along with this growth was a need for commercial services and entertainment. The Westlake Theatre was one of several developments to fill this role. During the 1920s, the area surrounding Westlake Park was built up with expensive high rise apartment hotels, medical buildings, and offices, while maintaining the park atmosphere and both recreational and entertainment opportunities. By the late 1920s, for example, the blocks immediately surrounding the Westlake Theatre were populated by a mix of medical laboratories, medical professional buildings and associated retail, various clinics, and high density apartment houses and courts.

Early Theatres

The business of movie theatres and live entertainment districts began to develop in major American cities as early as the 1890s in the form of vaudeville theatres, playhouses and penny arcades. These areas were often defined by a mix of theatres and retail establishments and were located close by or among established commercial retail and office centers. The earliest films were typically “actualities,” short motion pictures of actual current events, and were viewed through a peephole in an arcade’s motion-picture machine or projected onto a screen.

By the turn of the twentieth century, vaudeville was the most popular of the variety theatres that served the working population. The physical design that shaped the turn-of-the-twentieth-century entertainment district was inspired by a combination of amusement parks and contemporary architectural revivals of classic styles such as Greek, Roman and Beaux Arts, as well as contemporary high-class entertainment theatres.¹³ Many of the large vaudeville entertainment “palaces” from the late 1890s onward offered multiple levels of seating, separated by price. Theatres were marketed as a respectable entertainment venue for working women and a community gathering place that was safe for everyone. Laborers who could pay the least sat on the floor, downtown office workers sat in the upper balcony, and upper-class theatergoers had the best seats directly in front of the stage on the main floor. Thus, these theatres brought a broad representation of the community into the performance atmosphere.¹⁴

The first dramatic film with an extended narrative, *The Great Train Robbery* by Edwin S. Porter, debuted in 1903. In 1905, motion pictures shifted from a by-product of a vaudeville or arcade offering to its own entertainment with the 5-cent theatre. These “nickelodeons” were located in little more than storefronts. As more space became necessary, theatre owners used vaudeville and live theatres as models for movie venues.¹⁵ Storefronts gave way to legitimate houses with amenities by 1908. The ornamentation that was standard in vaudeville houses began to appear in motion-picture theatres. Even at this early date, snack bars, candy stores and cafes located near the theatres, precursors of the snack bars that appeared more than 20 years later. Nickelodeons soon created separate and unusual identities with iconographic images, such as the 40-foot-tall illuminated Statue of Liberty at the Liberty Theatre in Seattle. Other theatres incorporated “butterfly” motifs or exhibited Greek and Moorish temple-designs.¹⁶

Going to the cinema was extremely popular in the 1920s, and theatres were constructed everywhere from big city downtowns to small town main streets. In the cities, magnificent theatres were constructed in urban downtown core areas. In addition, simple vernacular theatres were built on main streets in small towns throughout America. There were an estimated 23,000 theatres in 1929, and an average of 90 million Americans out of a total population of 122 million went weekly to the movie theatre.¹⁷ During the 1920s, most theatres still followed the form of European theatres designed for live stage shows, but during the 1930s, American designers began casting off stages along with historical styles in favor of modern Art Deco and Streamline motifs with particular emphasis on building facades, now increasingly brightly lit at night to compete with the increasing number of

¹³ Forsher, James. pp 24.

¹⁴ Forsher, James. pp 25.

¹⁵ Forsher, James. *The Community of Cinema: how cinema and spectacle transformed the American downtown*. Westport, Conn: Praeger Publishers, 2003. pp 20.

¹⁶ Forsher, James. pp 22.

¹⁷ Forsher, James. pp. 64.

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automobiles.¹⁸ However, the film industry and movie palaces could not escape the effects of the Great Depression and attendance dropped off dramatically. Theatres, which were overbuilt in the early 1920s, started to close their doors across the country.¹⁹ To get audiences into theatres, theatre owners employed a variety of new techniques used to entice audiences into theatres. Ornate and well-lit entrances at the finer theatres, demonstrated in the Westlake Theatre, were “the brightest spots in town,” advertised with cut-outs and banners. Special giveaway nights with coupons, cash, plates, games and other themes were also popular.²⁰

Post-war trends of suburbanization and the emptying of downtown commercial districts hurt the movie palaces. Theatergoers increasingly chose local suburban theatres and drive-in screens, accelerating the movie palaces’ demise.

Growth of the Los Angeles Movie Theatre

Between 1910 and 1931, years of rapid theatre development nationwide, movie palaces were constructed throughout Los Angeles. The city’s first entertainment district was located downtown, centered on Broadway between First and Eighth Streets. By 1931, Broadway had 12 vaudeville and movie palaces with a combined total of over 21,500 seats. Until the end of World War II, the Broadway theatre district was the central destination for tens of thousands of Angelinos who came from all over the city and surrounding counties for an evening at the movies, shopping, and dining.²¹

Los Angeles’ early commercial, office, and retail district began on Main Street and in the 1890s and expanded to Broadway and Spring Street by the early 1900s. Large retailers including A. Hamburger and Sons and the Broadway built outlets in 1887 and 1896, respectively, at Spring and Fourth streets and Broadway and Fourth Street. In the next decade, Broadway became a vibrant retail district. Hamburger and Sons constructed another outlet at 801 Broadway in 1908 and Arthur Letts, owner of the Broadway, financed the construction of the Bullocks Department Store at 7th and Broadway. Because Spring Street and Main Street were already busy, theatre mogul Alexander Pantages also chose Broadway for the site of its planned theatre. The Pantages Theatre, opened on September 26, 1910, was the first theatre constructed on Broadway, and it was shortly followed a month later by “Clune’s Broadway,” a nickelodeon which was later named the Cameo Theatre. Over the next two decades, several other large theatres were built within five blocks of each other.²² These richly decorated theatres include the Orpheum, Tower, State, Belasco, Mayan and Roxie theatres. Contemporaneous theatres in Hollywood and surrounding areas included the El Capitan, Roxie and Chinese theatres. The Tower Theatre, for instance, featured a combination of Moorish, Spanish, Italian and French decorative elements executed in marble, bronze, carved wood, and murals.²³ The success of this entertainment core worked synergistically in cementing the centralized business district, with financial institutions located one block east on Spring Street. Vaudeville and other live acts shared performance space with film well into the 1920s, so theatres were designed to accommodate both live acts and film.

As stated earlier, cheap land, combined with the Pacific Electric system of streetcars and later the private automobile, facilitated the settlement of people in a linear fashion throughout the city and surrounding areas. Movie palaces sprang up in to meet demand in these growing regional centers, including the Wiltern on Wilshire Boulevard (1931), the Village Theatre (1931) in Westwood and Grauman’s Chinese Theatre (1927), the Egyptian (1922) and the El Capitan (1926) in Hollywood.

¹⁸ Mills Act Historical Property Contract Application. Hollywood-Western Building, 5500 Hollywood Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA.

Prepared by ICF Jones & Stokes architectural historian Erica Kachmarsky. June 25, 2007.

¹⁹ Forsher, James. pp 64.

²⁰ Forsher, James. pp 65-66.

²¹ Forsher, James. pp 87.

²² Forsher, James. pp 90.

²³ Stephen M. Silverman. 1997. *The Last Remaining Seats: Movie Palaces of Tinseltown* Glendale, CA: Balcony Press..

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Soon after 1920, the retail market grew prodigiously in the suburbs, especially in western Los Angeles. In 1928, apartments accounted for 53 percent of new construction in Los Angeles. The apartments, many now built for single persons, were so concentrated as to raise the densities of communities such as Hollywood and on thoroughfares like Wilshire Boulevard. Between 1923 and 1931, the population within 10 miles of the Central Business District expanded by 50 percent. Concurrently, multiple factors including traffic congestion, decentralization of commercial and industrial activities, and the rapid expansion of outlying suburban residential areas contributed to slower growth of the Central Business District. Despite the many multi-story apartment houses in neighborhoods such as Westlake Park, the increasingly horizontal dispersal of industrial, commercial, and residential properties contributed to an urban form in Los Angeles unique to the United States in 1930.

Even in the early years of Broadway's growth, automobile congestion was a problem and there were too few parking spaces to meet demand. Problems with parking in the downtown retail district helped fan interest in suburban shopping districts like the Miracle Mile, Hollywood and Westwood.²⁴ Congestion, combined with overbuilding, contributed to the Broadway district's decline beginning in the early years of the Depression. The Los Angeles Theatre, for example, opened in 1932 and promptly went bankrupt.²⁵ The trend towards choosing local suburban theatres and drive-ins over downtown entertainment districts accelerated after World War II, and the Broadway and Westlake districts were no exceptions. The theatres along Broadway evolved to serve a majority African American population and then a Latino one as the demographics of the neighborhood changed. Like the Westlake Theatre, many have been converted for retail purposes in the last 25 years.

West Coast Theatres, Inc.

West Coast Theatres, Inc., the builder of the Westlake Theatre, was the largest of the early theatre companies and was headquartered in Los Angeles. In its early years, it was controlled by Michael Gore, Sol Lesser, Adolph Ramish, and A. L. Gore.²⁶ The firm was located in the Knickerbocker building at 643 South Olive Street in downtown Los Angeles and offered shares of stock that optimistically advertized dividends of 12% annually.²⁷

The chain rapidly expanded throughout Southern California, building theatres and buying up smaller chains and independent theatres. In 1922 it purchased the rights, franchises, leases and theatres held by the Turner and Dahnken Circuit, a San Francisco company that controlled forty theatres in California. The same year it also purchased the Crescent Theatre at 48th and Western, Chotiner's Theatre (which it renamed the Roosevelt) at 8th and Vermont, the Rialto Theatre, Kinema California and Plaza theatres of San Diego, and the Riverside Orpheum.²⁸

In 1923, movie producer Joseph Schenck (who was married to Norma Talmadge, one of the most popular silent film stars of the era) purchased a fifth interest in the chain, becoming a part owner and director of the holding company. At the time, West Coast controlled 100 motion-picture theatres and was said to be the largest chain of theatres in the world.²⁹

History of the Westlake Theatre

The Westlake Theatre was constructed in 1926 at 634-642 South Alvarado Street in the Westlake area of Los Angeles, on a single parcel bounded by South Alvarado Street to the west, Wilshire Boulevard to the south, South Westlake Avenue to the east, and West 6th Street to the north. Built to house two entertainment functions, including a movie theatre and vaudeville stage, it was constructed by West Coast Theatres, Inc., as one of a number of theatres in a planned "West Coast-Langley Theatre Circuit" between West Coast Theatres and a Mr. Langley (no first name was located). Mr. Langley, president of the associated company,

²⁴ Richard Longstreth, 1998, in Forsher, James. pp. 91.

²⁵ Forsher, James. pp 92.

²⁶ "Los Angeles Given Boost: Joseph Schenck Buys Share in West Coast Theatres." *Los Angeles Times*, Jan. 28, 1923.

²⁷ Display Ad 73. *Los Angeles Times*, Aug 17, 1921.

²⁸ "Many Houses Added to Theatre Chain." *Los Angeles Times*, Nov 19, 1922.

²⁹ Op. cit., "Los Angeles Given Boost."

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worked closely with the independent West Coast Theatres, Inc. and separately operated his own chain of show houses in Los Angeles, Pasadena, Altadena, South Pasadena, Glendale, Huntington Park, Taft and Riverside. The Westlake Theatre was one of a number in the West Coast-Langley Theatre Circuit, a chain of small theatres that operated from Los Angeles to Riverside.

Westlake Theatre struggled amidst the post-World War II decline of the Alvarado Street business and retail corridor. It suffered the loss of the stability of a predictable audience with a shared cultural base as those audiences migrated to suburban theatres. This trend was exacerbated by a rise in local crime rates and the loss of the area's identity as a premier residential area. It was sold in the early 1970s to the Metropolitan Theatres Corp., which unsuccessfully attempted a variety of formats, including Spanish language films and English language with Spanish subtitles.³⁰ In July 1991 it was sold again, to Mayer Separzadeh, a shopping center developer, who converted and adapted the theatre to house a swap meet (in the auditorium) and small retail ventures (more concentrated in the foyer and lobby).³¹ Two years before it closed, the Los Angeles Conservancy staged a screening at the Westlake Theatre as part of its annual "Last Remaining Seats" program of showing period movies in both unrehabilitated and restored theatres. For that occasion, Metropolitan Theatres refurbished the neon sign on the roof of the building.

One Theatre, Many Styles:

Spanish Colonial Revival, Churrigueresque, Palladian/Adamsesque, Renaissance and Art Deco

The Westlake Theatre exemplifies the layering, if not the integration, of disparate historic architectural styles by highly accomplished artists and architects into one exuberant entertainment palace of the early 20th century in Los Angeles.

Its exterior design is an excellent example of the Spanish Colonial Revival and Churrigueresque (Spanish Rococo)³² styles interpreted in a theatre building, and its interior circulation spaces a light-hearted interpretation of Palladian spatial layout and Adamsesque ornamentation. Both the interior and the exterior were designed by architect Richard M. Bates, Jr. The theatre's finely rendered, beautifully crafted proscenium mural by Anthony Heinsbergen recalls styles of painting and murals usually associated with Renaissance or Baroque churches; its Art Deco marquee, entrance and ticket booth, designed by architect S. Charles Lee, together are an unabashed quest for attention.

In contrast to Lee, architect Bates, while talented and a keen observer of historic styles (based on the evidence of the Westlake Theatre), was little published and is not well known. He moved to Los Angeles from Huntington, West Virginia, in 1925, departing the architectural firm Bates, Frampton & Bowers to establish an independent practice on the West Coast. His early Los Angeles projects included apartment houses and several public buildings, including the Palms Wilshire Hotel at 622 South Alvarado, constructed in 1925 and located a few doors north of where the Westlake Theatre was built a year later. The Westlake Theatre was Bates' only known theatre project, though the *Los Angeles Times* referred to the architect as a "theatre specialist."³³

The trend in appropriating historical styles gained momentum with Chicago's Columbian Exposition in 1893, which stressed correct historical interpretations of established European styles.³⁴ The popular Spanish Colonial Revival style predominated in Southern California during the first period of significance, 1926, along with other revival styles including Tudor Revival, Italian Renaissance Revival, and other Colonial styles. Spanish Colonial Revival structures typically have low-pitched, tiled roofs, recessed door and window openings, and decorative ironwork. Features are often mixed with northern Italian, Plateresque, Neo-

³⁰ *Los Angeles Times*, August 5, 1991.

³¹ Ibid.

³² *Churrigueresque* is that school of ornament based on Renaissance and influenced by the Counter Reformation, most exuberantly celebrated in Spanish America, Mexico). It is also known as *Spanish Baroque* or *Spanish Rococo*.

³³ John E. Miller. June 25, 1991. Historic-Cultural Monument Application, Cultural Heritage Commission, Cultural Affairs Department.

³⁴ Chateau Colline. National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. Prepared by architectural historian Theresa Grimes. July 31, 2002.

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Classical, and Moorish architectural elements. More locally, the choice of an essentially Spanish façade was in keeping with nearby buildings around MacArthur Park designed in similar styles such as Italian Renaissance and Mission Revival. Westlake Theatre also references the even more lavish Million Dollar Theatre, 1917, and the Biltmore Hotel, 1923, in downtown Los Angeles, whose exteriors also combined the Spanish and Italian styles with Churrigueresque ornamentation.

At the time of its construction, dedicated buildings for theatres, vaudeville and the movies were a very new building type. Working within the confines of the small city block, Bates created an unusual but useful combination of deep stage, very large auditorium, stage and back stage/fly loft, and shallow circulation areas (the lobby, foyer, and mezzanine.) The result was a theatre useful to both established vaudeville acts and the newer medium of film. The deep stage, for example, proved an ideal “break-in house” for elaborate vaudeville acts including those of Fanchon and Marco, who eventually went on to the Roxy in New York and a nationwide touring circuit. The Times stated, “Dedicated by its founders to the future enrichment of Los Angeles community life, this newest link in the ever-increasing chain of theatres owned, operated and controlled by West Coast Theatres, Inc., represents one of the outstanding examples of ultramodern theatrical constructions. It involves a financial outlay of approximately \$750,000, is of a Spanish architectural motif, and has a seating capacity of 2000. Experts declare it a typical example the sharpest development of American theatrical construction...”³⁵

The Westlake Theatre’s design also allowed it to straddle the borders of geography and class. While certainly highly styled, the theatre did not match the extravagance of contemporary movie palaces on Broadway and further west in the Hollywood area, some costing well over one million dollars to build, and was located between lavish apartments and hotels on Wilshire Boulevard and what quickly became dense worker housing and retail on the east side of Westlake Park.³⁶ The theatre drew attention from the Hollywood elite, with personal appearances by many motion-picture celebrities, but was also accessible to individuals from many walks of life who used the park for recreation. All of this was in contrast to the more high-style, higher cost theatres in the entertainment district of Broadway.

The contributions of Heinsbergen and Lee

The contributions of the Dutch-born Anthony Heinsbergen, who painted two fine, large murals in the Westlake Theatre (related to the first period of significance, 1926) and the renovations by renowned theatre architect S. Charles Lee (related to the second period of significance, 1935) are also important to acknowledge.

Anthony Heinsbergen, 1894–1981, is considered the foremost mural artist and designer of North American movie theatre interiors and was certainly one of the most successful. A student of the prominent Chouinard Art Institute of Los Angeles, Heinsbergen and his large firm, Heinsbergen was responsible for murals in iconic Los Angeles landmarks, including the Wiltern Theatre, the Beverly-Wilshire Hotel, the Los Angeles City Hall and the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel, among approximately 750 other commissions across the U.S. and Canada. He was also responsible for murals at the Elks Club, the Union Trust and Savings Bank, and the Los Angeles City Hall. Theatre chain mogul Alexander Pantages was a patron of Heinsbergen’s work, eventually commissioning 21 painted murals. Heinsbergen’s large and even breathtaking proscenium mural in the Westlake Theatre, where pastel colored Classical graces play against a typical Renaissance or Baroque background of gold ornament, blue sky and clouds, emphasizes Westlake Theatre’s association with the original of many theatrical influences and traditions in Greek theatre. After the golden age of movie theatres, he and his son, also named Anthony Heinsbergen (1929 – 2004), continued their work in the restoration of their own murals as well as many others across North America.

Architect and interior designer S. Charles Lee, 1899 – 1990, was far more famous, not only for his flamboyant but well laid out Art Deco and Moderne buildings, exemplified by the 1928 Hollywood & Western Building for movie mogul Louis B. Mayer,

³⁵ “West Coast Will Open New House: Elaborate Plans Made for Dedication of Westlake Theatre.” *Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 18, 1926.

³⁶ Westlake Park was renamed MacArthur Park for Army General Douglas MacArthur in 1942.

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Los Angeles County, California*

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but in also making a successful, post-World War II transition to design highly regarded Modernist buildings, a transition impossible for many other architects to bridge. Lee designed at least 250 movie theatres between 1920 and 1950 and at some counts over 400.³⁷ His work helped to define the American norm of glamour associated with movie-going during these decades, when making movies began to be one of the nation's largest industries and the American movie a major international export. Lee made "going to the movies" as theatrical and as exciting as the movies themselves.³⁸ Lee is also acknowledged as one of the first architects to respond "to the impact of the automobile" in theater design, in that his designs often incorporate the sweeping curves that are often a feature of Art Moderne design and that signify air flow and speed.

According to building permits dated March 27, 1935, Lee was the signing architect responsible for the renovation of new plaster work in the lobby and foyer, a new ticket booth, new lobby doors in the same size and location, and the yellow and white terrazzo "sunburst" paving in the foyer and continuing out into the sidewalk. Building permits dated April 24, 1935 state that the marquee was remodeled and additional advertising added to the existing rooftop sign.

Almost contemporaneously with his Westlake work, Lee also renovated the still extant but much altered Alvarado Theatre at 710 S. Alvarado Street, built in 1911. The Alvarado was much like the nearby Westlake Theatre in its Spanish and Churrigueresque façade, and also was modernized by Lee in the Art Deco style. Lee's other important and/or nearby theatres (among hundreds) include the Tower Theatre, 1927, at 802 W. Broadway; the Los Angeles Theatre, 1931, (with S. Tilden Norton), critically considered as the finest movie theatre in Los Angeles; and the Academy Theatre, 1938, at 3141 Manchester Boulevard, in Inglewood.

Conclusion

The Westlake Theatre, located at 636 ½ South Alvarado Street, is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C, a finding substantiated by its previous designation as a City of Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument. Westlake Theatre was always intended by its owners and designed by its architect to be able to accommodate different types of entertainment. It reflects its periods of significance, 1926 to 1935, in that it is an architecturally multivalent venue that could alternatively serve as a motion picture house; a venue for vaudeville acts (whose broad antics require much more room than needed to show "talkies"); a theatre/performance space, and a "moving picture" house. Thus, the building is important in demonstrating a transitional period in American and Los Angeles history: an architectural resolution in a new building type that responds to both old and new means by ably affording changing cultural norms. Its original and largely extant rooftop sign also demonstrates the need to gain attention quickly and from afar in a city known for its decentralized horizontality and for its early adoption of the automobile.

The Westlake Theatre represents the history of the Westlake area in 1920s Los Angeles during a period of high-density growth and the early movie entertainment venues during their initial period of development. The theatre also exhibits a unique display incorporating the Spanish Colonial Revival, Churrigueresque, and British Adams, and Art Deco architectural styles. It also features high quality craftsmanship and design work by two important figures in national and Los Angeles design history, muralist Anthony Heinsbergen and theatre architect S. Charles Lee.

The Westlake Theatre is eligible for individual listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C at the local level of significance, with a period of significance of 1926, the year of its construction, and 1935, the year Art Deco renovations were completed.

³⁷ Historic Resources Inventory. 1985. Christy McAvoy and Leslie Heumann for Gruen Associates. p. 3.

³⁸ Maggie Valentine. 1966. New Haven, Connecticut: *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architecture History of the Movie Theatre*, Starring S. Charles Lee."

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Los Angeles County, California*

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Los Angeles County, California*

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Section 10: Geographical Data

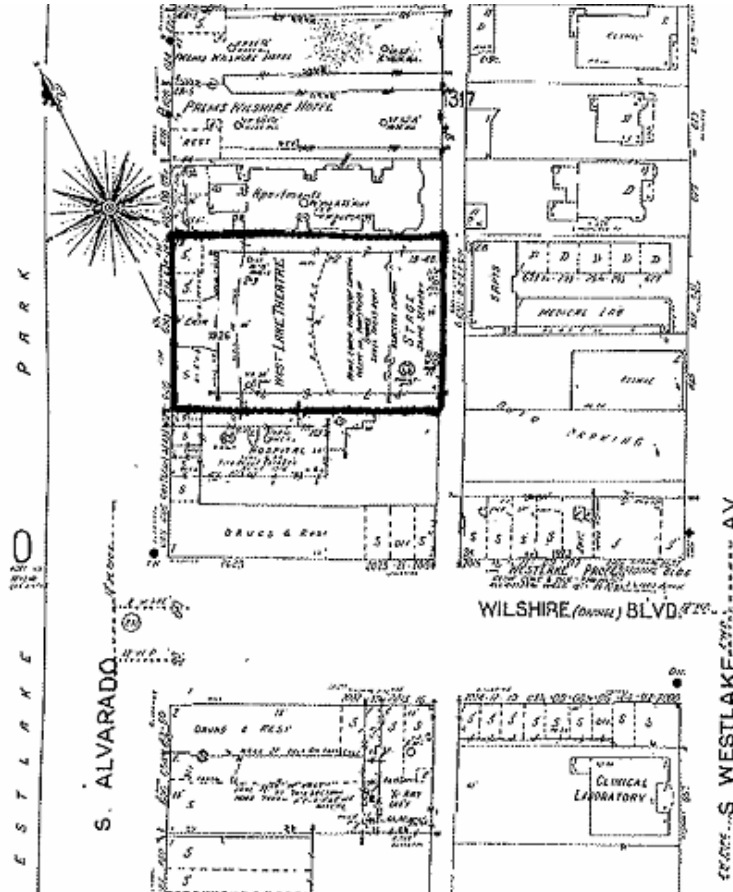
Verbal Boundary Description

The Westlake Theatre is located at Alvarado 634-642 S. Alvarado Street, Los Angeles, California, east of MacArthur Park. It is approximately one mile to the west of downtown Los Angeles. The two- and three-story theatre occupies a rectangular parcel on a city block bounded by Wilshire Boulevard on the south; South Alvarado Street to the west; South 6th Street to the east; and Westlake Avenue, a small side street, to the north. The Westlake Theatre's primary facade is oriented west towards Alvarado Street, which is bounded by a concrete curb and a broad sidewalk. The theatre's larger urban setting, the Westlake area, is characterized by a mix of buildings of age, scale, and use, including early twentieth century high-rise buildings, hotels, apartment houses, and retail businesses occupying and reusing one-, two-story, and three-story buildings.

Verbal Boundary Justification

These are the historic and current boundaries of the property.

Sketch map



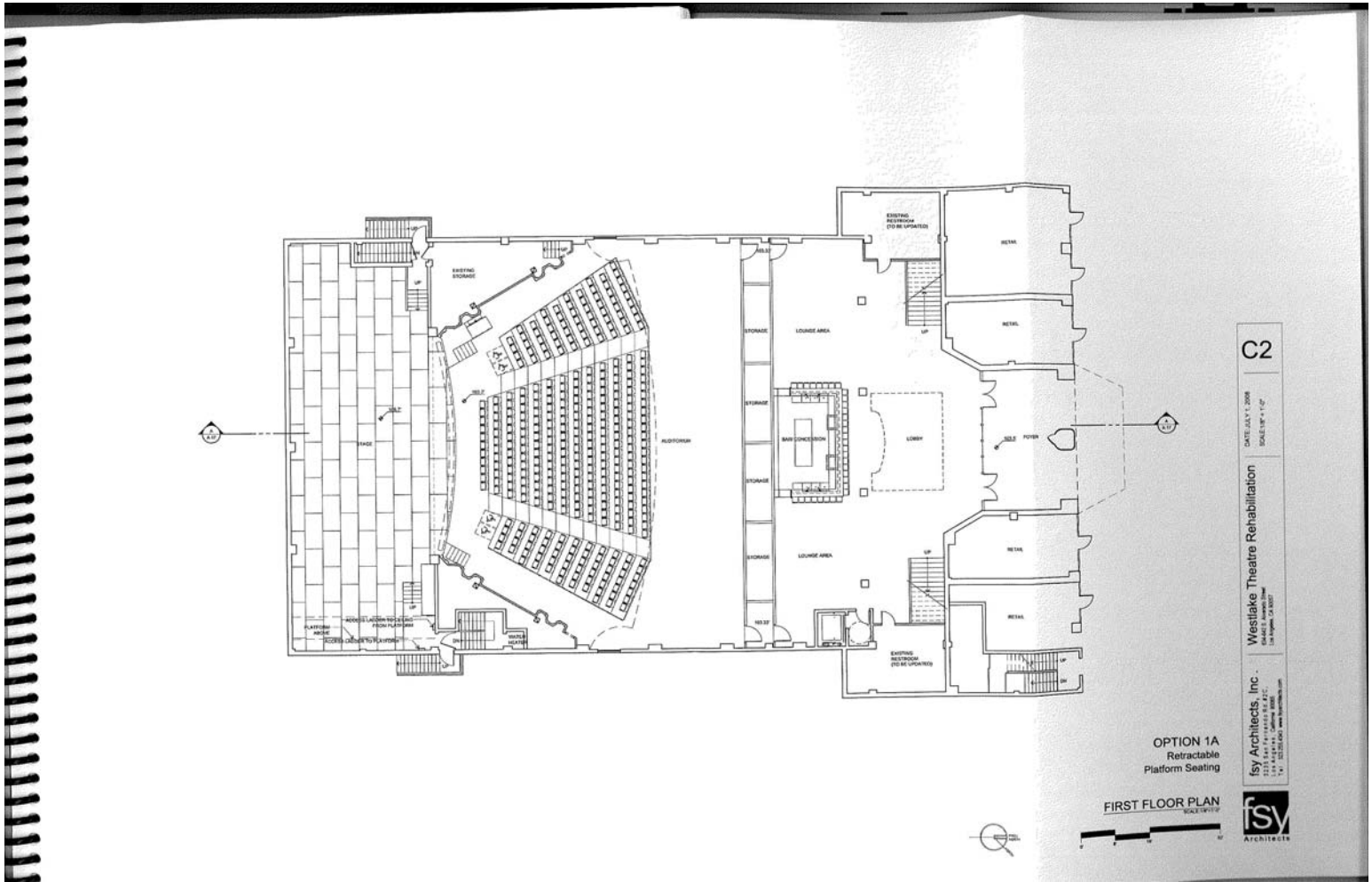
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First Floor Plan



C2

DATE: JULY 2008
SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"
Westlake Theatre Rehabilitation
1000 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 1000
Los Angeles, CA 90017

fsy Architects, Inc.
1212 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 1000
Los Angeles, CA 90017
Tel: 213.261.0000 www.fsyarchitects.com

OPTION 1A
Retractable
Platform Seating

FIRST FLOOR PLAN
SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"

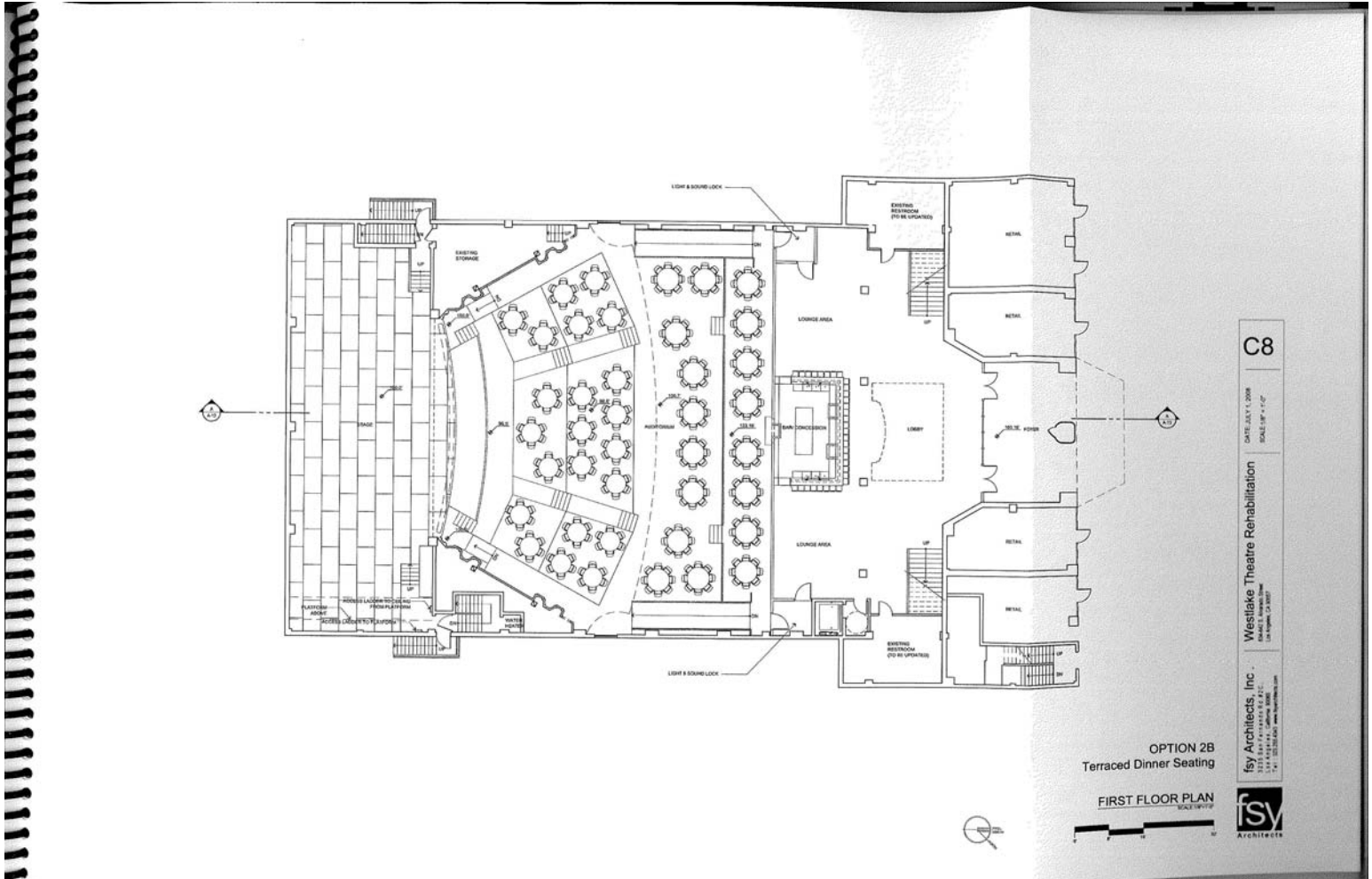


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Second Floor Plan



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Additional Documentation

USGS Map

A hard copy of the map will be submitted with the nomination form.

The Westlake Theatre is located at the center of the map at 636 ½ South Alvarado Street, Los Angeles, CA 90057.

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Los Angeles County, California*

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Additional documentation: Photographs

Name: Westlake Theatre

Location: 634-642 S. Alvarado Street
City of Los Angeles
Los Angeles County, California

Photographer: David Greenwood and Elizabeth Weaver; ICF Jones & Stokes

Date of Photographs: July 29, 2008 and May 9, 2008

Location of Negatives: ICF Jones & Stokes
811 W 7th Street, Suite 800
Los Angeles, CA 90017

1. Historic photograph of theatre in relation to MacArthur Park, view east.
2. Exterior, Historic photograph of the theatre, view northeast.
3. Exterior, Street perspective, view northeast.
4. Exterior, Primary (west) elevation, view east.
5. Exterior, Primary (west) elevation, view east.
6. Exterior, Roof signage, view northeast.
7. Exterior, Primary (west) elevation, detail of signage and second floor ornament, view east.
8. Exterior, West elevation, view northeast.
9. Exterior, West elevation, terrazzo flooring at main entrance, view north.
10. Exterior, First floor foyer, detail of modillion.
11. Exterior, Primary (west) elevation, theater foyer detail of terrazzo, view east.
12. Exterior, Primary entrance foyer, detail of marquee, view northeast.
13. Interior, Second floor mezzanine, view north.
14. Interior, Balcony, view northwest.
15. Interior, Historic theater, detail of wood beams and coffered ceiling.
16. Interior, Historic theater, detail of proscenium and front of house.
17. Interior, Historic theater, detail of proscenium and front of house.
18. Interior, First floor foyer, detail of modillion.