

PRESERVING LOS ANGELES ARCHITECTURE FROM ART DECO TO 'GOOGIE'

On the sixth floor of Los Angeles City Hall is the Office of Historic Resources (OHR) which coordinates the city's historic preservation activities, including the first comprehensive program to identify significant historic resources throughout the city. Designated SurveyLA, the citywide project will begin this spring and span three years. During the project, historic resources dating from 1865 to 1980 will be identified by survey consultant teams that meet professional qualification standards as historians and architectural historians. The survey is partially funded by a \$2.5 million grant from the J. Paul Getty Trust and coordinated by the OHR.

The OHR definition of historic resources includes "buildings, sites, structures, objects, cultural landscapes and natural features, as well as areas and historic districts (groupings of resources). These places may reflect a broad range of themes significant in the city's history such as architecture, city planning, landscape design, ethnic heritage, residential development, politics, industry, transportation, commerce, entertainment, and others. Examples of individual historic resources include theaters, religious buildings, social halls, canals, and bridges while examples of historic districts include residential neighborhoods, commercial centers, industrial complexes, and college campuses."

Los Angeles currently has more than 900 buildings and sites that have been declared "Historic-Cultural Monuments" under the city's Cultural Heritage Ordinance. Among the city-declared monuments are examples of art deco architecture such as The El Ray Theater located on Wilshire Boulevard in the heart of the Miracle Mile, which is one of Los Angeles' preserved art deco districts. The theater is listed as one of the city's architectural treasures by the Art Deco Society of Los Angeles, along with the Eastern Columbia Building on Broadway, which is also listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In north central L.A., city-declared monuments represent a diversity of styles such as the Los Angeles Union Station on Alameda Street, which the *Los Angeles Times* described as "one of the finest examples of California mission-style architecture and one of the last of America's great

rail stations." Construction of the station in the 1930s resulted in the relocation of Los Angeles' Chinatown and the development of Central Plaza, which was one of the first pedestrian malls in the U.S. Spanning the entrance to Chinatown is the city-declared monument known as the *Twin Dragon Towers Gateway*, which is 25 feet high and designed to symbolize luck, prosperity and longevity. Last year, the gateway was recoated with a tie-coat of Tnemec's Series L69 Hi-Build Epoxoline II, a low volatile organic compound (VOC) epoxy, and a finish coat of Series 1070V Low VOC Fluoronar, a high-solids fluoropolymer coating in Chilean Red. The recoat was required after the existing acrylic polyurethane coating system on the gateway started to fade.

Fifty years ago this month (April), construction started on one of the most visible city-declared historic-cultural monuments – the Theme Building at Los Angeles Airport – which has been described as the "cathedral" of the architectural style known as Googie. According to the Googie Architecture Web site, "Googie began in Southern California, and although it spread (in numerous forms) across the nation, its heart always remained in its birthplace. Los Angeles and Orange County, California remain some of the best places to see what remains of the style." The Web site describes features of Googie architecture as upswept roofs, large domes and sheet glass windows, boomerang, flying saucer and amoebae shapes, and starbursts. "Like obscenity, Googie is hard to define, but we know it when we see it," the Web site explained.

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In his book *Googie Redux: Ultramodern Roadside Architecture*, Alan Hess labeled the futuristic Googie style as “a sub-category of Midcentury Modern that is bolder, more exaggerated in forms.” Other examples of Googie architecture that are listed as city-declared monuments in Los Angeles include the Chemosphere House on Torreyson Drive, which was described by *Encyclopedia Britannica* as “the most modern home built in the world”; and Capitol Records Tower on Vine St., considered one of the most distinctive landmarks in Hollywood.

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