



PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

STAFF REPORT

DATE: MAY 3, 2022

TO: HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

FROM: DAVID M. REYES, DIRECTOR OF PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

SUBJECT: APPLICATION FOR DESIGNATION AS A LANDMARK
475 S. LAKE AVENUE (FORMER I. MAGNIN AND CO. BUILDING)

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Historic Preservation Commission:

1. Find that the designation of a historic resource is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Section 15308, Class 8 pertaining to Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment such as designation of historic resources;
2. Find that the original stand-alone former department store building for I. Magnin and Co., constructed in 1948 and located at 475 South Lake Avenue, meets Criterion "C" for designation as a landmark pursuant to Pasadena Municipal Code (PMC) Section 17.62.040(D)(2) because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a mid-century department store property type, a locally-rare example of the Late Moderne architectural style, the Post-War II development period, and method of construction. The building also exemplifies the work of an architect, Harold C. Chambers, whose work is of local significance to the City.
3. Recommend that the City Council approve the designation of the I. Magnin and Co. Building at 475 South Lake Avenue as a Landmark.

BACKGROUND:

On February 3, 2022, property owner Yuval Chiprut, submitted an application for Landmark Designation of the commercial retail building constructed for the former I. Magnin and Co., located at 475 South Lake Avenue. City staff evaluated the property according to the criteria in Title 17 of the PMC and determined that the building qualifies as a landmark.

DESCRIPTION:

Property Data

- Address: 475 South Lake Avenue (AIN: 5734-031-004)
- Location: West side of South Lake Avenue, approximately mid-block between East Del Mar Boulevard to the north and East California Boulevard to the south.
- Date of Start of Construction: 1948 (source: Original Building Permit)
- Date of Construction Completion: 1949 (source: Original Building Permit)
- Period of Significance: 1948 (beginning of construction) and 1957 (Alterations for new parking structure)
- Original Architect: Harold C. Chambers (source: Original Building Permit)
- Original Builder: Wm. Simpson Construction Company (Source: Original Building Permit)
- Original / Present Use: Commercial Retail Department Store / Conversion into Multi-Tenant Commercial
- Property size: 19,345 square feet (source: County Assessor)
- Building size: 40,764 square feet (source: County Assessor)

Architectural Description:

The Site

The property is located on an “L-shaped” lot on the west side of South Lake Avenue, approximately mid-block between East Del Mar Boulevard to the north and East California Boulevard to the south. To the immediate west of the building, and directly attached to its west façade, is a multi-story parking structure constructed in 1957. When the building was constructed in 1948, its immediate adjacencies included single- and multi-family residential to the west and south, and surface parking to the north and northwest. The current surrounding context includes a double-height commercial building constructed in 1954, with an addition constructed in 1977 immediately south of the subject building. To the immediate north is a two-story commercial building constructed in 2003, which resulted in the partial demolition of the parking structure along South Lake Avenue that was constructed in 1957 to serve the I. Magnin Building and the Bullock’s Department Store. To the immediate east, across Lake Avenue is a service station that was constructed in 1961.

The property was portioned from the Samuel Stratton’s Subdivision of the Lake Vineyard Land And Water Association Lands.

The site is relatively flat with a landscaped front yard setback of approximately 24 feet, a zero-foot setback along the rear/west elevation and the south side elevations. To the north, a partially-landscaped side yard setback varies in width from approximately seven feet to 23 feet.

Exterior Features of the Building

The two-story commercial I. Magnin Building is a prime example of the Late Moderne architectural style and was constructed in 1948 to a design by architect Harold C. Chambers. The building massing is composed of a simple rectangular volume constructed in concrete with a partial subterranean basement and flat roof with parapet. When constructed, the building was approached from the rear/west surface parking lot and the drive aisle to the north; south of the building were low-scale residential developments. With the construction of the parking structure directly abutting the building's west façade, and the commercial building directly to the south, the building's prominently visible facades are now the front/east and the north elevations.

The east façade is symmetrical in design with a centered ground-level aluminum storefront entry flanked by two full-height windows. The second level of the front façade features a symmetrical arrangement of six slightly less-than full-height window openings, two above the ground-floor entry and the other four located in direct alignment above the ground-floor windows. The windows are constructed of steel, and are slightly inset into the concrete walls with no casement or ornamentation. The aluminum storefront is composed of two centered swing doors, flanked by glazed sidelites and capped by three vertically aligned panes of transom glass. The front of the building is entered through a centrally-aligned concrete walkway that leads to concrete steps, and a concrete entrance terrace that fronts the entire width of the front façade. A metal railing runs along the terrace edge and down the concrete steps.

The ground level of the north elevation features an off-centered aluminum storefront entrance that is consistent with the design of the primary front entry, only slightly smaller in width, with double swing doors, flanked by two sidelites and three upper transoms. The secondary entry is flanked by solid walls that are punctuated by four windows towards the westerly end. At the upper-floor, the window openings run the length of the façade, with variations of three sizes that retain an overall rhythm in pattern and alignment with openings at the ground-level.

The ground level of the west elevation became obstructed with the construction of the abutting parking structure, and the upper-floor along this elevation was modified to provide a new entry directly from parking structure. At the second level, an aluminum storefront entry is set off-center within a centrally-aligned, projecting concrete bay that extends above the parapet walls. South of the bay are two windows consistent with the design of the windows found on the other facades. To the north of the entrance bay are two projecting aluminum-framed storefront windows that appear to be non-original. At the southwest corner is a taller enclosed volume that serves as a stair and elevator penthouse, with abutting concrete walls with large porthole windows to screen the roof-mounted mechanical equipment.

A majority of the ground level of the south façade is obscured by the commercial building directly abutting it, while the remaining façade plane is composed of solid concrete. Along this elevation the parapet is stepped.

The building is largely devoid of ornamentation, however it does have detailed, rounded corners with a reveal edge. This detail is also found on the rear second-floor entrance bay. Additional details include a black marble frame surround of the front and side entrances.

Landscape Design¹

Ruth Patricia Shellhorn was enlisted as the landscape architect for the new Bullock's department store located north of the yet-to-be built I. Magnin Building in 1947. She designed the surrounding parking lots and grounds to be reflective of the emerging suburban identity of commercial retail. Ms. Shellhorn was also commissioned to design the surrounding landscape and vegetation of the surface parking lot for the I. Magnin Building when it was constructed in 1948/49 to tie into the Bullock's site to the north. When the parking structure was constructed in 1957, Ms. Shellhorn was again commissioned as the landscape architect for the larger Bullock's department store campus consisting of the I. Magnin Building, the Bullock's department store, and the parking garage. Due to substantial alterations to the parking structure, and surrounding landscape in 1977, the original landscape design of Ms. Shellhorn was subsequently lost.

Documented Changes to the Property

The exterior of the I. Magnin Building remains largely intact and retains significant character-defining features. However, the building has undergone some alterations. In 1957, a projecting second story entrance bay with rounded corners was added to the center of the rear/west façade in conjunction with the newly constructed abutting parking structure that served both this building and the Bullock's store to the north. During this time, the existing building basement was expanded westward 95' and comprised 78 feet of the 92 foot-width of the building. Additional undocumented alterations may have occurred at the west façade at the ground level and upper floor in conjunction with the garage construction, or at a later unknown date. These alterations may include two projecting storefront display windows north of the second-floor entry, and a modification to the storefront entry bay with an infilled solid wall resulting in an off-center storefront arrangement.

Remaining known exterior alterations include modifications to the storefronts when Borders Bookstore occupied the building in the late 90s/early 2000s. These existing alterations include non-original wall sconces, and suspended metal awnings over the storefront entries.

The original interior design and materials were also demolished when Borders assumed control of the building. The landscaping was altered in 1977, and the existing ADA ramp at the front landscape zone was added in 2002.

Current Conditions, Use, and Proposed Plans

The exterior of the building is largely intact as evidenced by historical photographs and remains in good condition. The building has sat mostly vacant since 2011 when Borders Bookstore closed, other than seasonal retail use. The building was recently purchased by a new owner with plans to convert the interior into a multi-tenant commercial space, primarily occupied by the grocery retailer, Erewhon. Planned alterations include removal of the non-original suspended metal canopies, replacement of the non-original wall sconces, replacement of the storefront entry systems, a marginally-visible penthouse addition at the northwest rear corner, and upgraded landscaping to provide outdoor seating and dining areas. These proposed alterations are currently undergoing design review. The building was surveyed as an eligible historical

¹ ASM Affiliates, Inc., Attachment A; pp. 15-16

landmark in 2000 in conjunction with a historic resources survey of the Central District Specific Plan area.

Historical Overview:

I. Magnin and Company²

The company was founded by Mary Ann Magnin in 1876, who named the business after her husband, Isaac. Originally from Europe, the couple immigrated to Oakland, California in 1875, where Mary began to sew baby clothes and lingerie as a home-based business. She quickly became known as a purveyor of high-quality goods, resulting in a rapid expansion and the opening of an Oakland storefront in 1876. Soon the company expanded to a succession of larger shops in San Francisco, and by 1888, the company operated out of a three-story building on Market Street. The company continued to expand into larger buildings in the city, and a large downtown store at Grant and Geary streets was completed in 1909.

The company's success can be attributed to Mary's high standards and guidance of her three sons to operate the business and ensure the quality of apparel for women and babies was evocative of high-end retail, with stores to match that sense of design and quality. The company expanded to hold a presence in other cities with large downtown stores located in Los Angeles, Hollywood, Santa Barbara, Seattle, and Chicago, and continued expansions in San Francisco. Many of these I. Magnin stores still stand today.

The company utilized a variety of retail experiences that included resort stores consisting of small boutique shops in high-end hotels, branch stores, and the large downtown parent stores. Resort stores were located in the Ambassador and Biltmore Hotels in Los Angeles, and in Pasadena in 1913 at the Hotel Maryland. The success of the Pasadena location led to the company opening up a three-story building at 555 East Colorado Boulevard in 1927, designed by Myron Hunt.

The company continued to expand in the Pre-and Post-War II periods, even after Mary Ann Magnin died in December 1943. After her death, her sons sold the company to Bullock's with an agreement that the I. Magnin stores operate independently. Eventually, the retail industry became less of a regional operation, and more of a globalized enterprise through a succession of mergers and acquisitions within the industry. In 1964, Federated Department Stores acquired Bullock's and I. Magnin. In 1988, Federated was acquired by Campeau, based in Canada, with Bullock's and I. Magnin being sold to R. H. Macy & Company. In 1992, R. H. Macy filed for bankruptcy and began to close I. Magnin stores, leaving the most profitable stores open. In 1994, R. H. Macy was acquired by Federated, and as part of the merger, all I. Magnin stores were to be closed with operations ceasing in January 1995.

Post-War II Commercial Development and South Lake Avenue Location³

Before the onset of Post-War II development, South Lake Avenue was a residential street consisting of single-family residences. After WWII, South Lake Avenue began to transition to the commercial corridor that is known as today, reflective of the decentralized shift in retail from

² ASM Affiliates, Inc., Attachment A; pp. 6-12

³ ASM Affiliates, Inc., Attachment A; pp. 4-6, 12-13

urban downtown centers to new suburban locations before the indoor shopping mall became the defacto retail prototype.

In concurrence with Post-War development and demographic shifts, along with the increase of disposable incomes, the American retail industry had to transition to reflect the cultural changes occurring with the explosive Post-War II growth of Southern California. The decentralization of living and commerce brought on by the automobile and the construction of highways and improved road systems led to a retreat from downtowns by the middle-class for new or expanding outlying suburbs.

The South Lake Avenue location of the I. Magnin Building was the result of continued success at the East Colorado Boulevard store, and the purchase of the company by Bullock's resulting in a new retail operation type. This new operation type led to the transition of a suburban model pairing brand operations to capture disposable incomes of suburbanites, with a stand-alone full-service Bullock's located adjacent to the more specialized offerings of a stand-alone I. Magnin building set within a tranquil, landscaped setting. The buildings were meticulously designed along with surrounding landscaping that served as harbingers of the high-end retail inside the building's walls. The first development of this prototype was the Bullock's Pasadena, constructed in 1947, and the I. Magnin building constructed in 1948 and located just south of the new Bullock's flagship store.

Late Moderne Architecture Style and Stand-Alone Retail Subtype

The stand-alone retail subtype was popular as a commercial retail idiom between the 1930s and 1970s, particularly for its accommodation for the automobile and the onset of suburban developments made possible by the expansion of roadways and the proliferation of the automobile. The stand-alone prototype typically featured a dedicated surface parking lot on one or more sides of the building, which was often set back from the street, with surface parking fronting the building, surrounding the building, or located behind the building. Common purveyors of this subtype included banks, grocery stores, coffee shops, and retail department stores. Common architectural styles associated with this development included Streamline Moderne, Late Moderne, Mid-Century Moderne, Googie, and New Formalism.

The I. Magnin and Co. Building on South Lake Avenue is a prime example of the Late Moderne architectural style. Late Moderne incorporates elements of both Streamline Moderne and International Styles. The style began to appear in the late 1930s, with its apex of popularity in the late 1940s and 50s on large-scale commercial and civic buildings. A common identifiable feature of the style is the use of a beveled window, where horizontal groupings of windows are outlined in a protruding bezel-like flange, often in a material and color that contrasts with the surrounding wall plane. Excellent examples of this style within Pasadena are the Bullock's Pasadena (1947) designed by architects Wurdeman & Becket, and Robinson's Pasadena (1957) designed by Pereira & Luckman. The Late Moderne style was further influenced by forms and compositional motifs of modern art to convey a sense of the progressive age. Geometric shapes, tall pylons, soffits, and canopies in biomorphic forms often punctuated with cut-out circles are typical of the style. The expression of this style is present in the I. Magnin Building with added classical influences of symmetry and simplicity.

Character-Defining Features of I. Magnin & Co. Building⁴

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

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

Harold C. Chambers⁵

Harold C. Chambers was born in Nebraska in 1885, and moved with his family to Los Angeles sometime prior to 1910. He began to work as a draftsman for Myron Hunt and Elmer Grey in 1907, and by 1910 was the head draftsman for Hunt. Chambers married in 1917 and had a son that was born in 1918. While working for Hunt, he contributed to significant firm projects including the San Marcos Building in Santa Barbara (1913), and, locally, the Huntington Library in San Marino (1919). In 1920, Chambers and Hunt partnered to form Hunt and Chambers, which became a prominent and prolific local firm until Myron Hunt retired in 1947. The firm designed the Pasadena Public Library (1925-1927), local residential projects, hospitals, and universities. They were also commissioned to design several I. Magnin stores in California. Chambers became a fellow of the American Institute of Architects in 1943. After Hunt's retirement, Chambers continued his practice independently before partnering with Lester Hibbard. The I. Magnin Building at South Lake Avenue was one of Chamber's first independent commissions.

Chambers continued his prolific practice in partnership with Hibbard, designing the general plans for U.C. Riverside and Valley College (1950), and Hoag Memorial Presbyterian Hospital in Newport Beach (1950). During this period, I. Magnin continued to commission him for their new stores. Harold Chambers died at 85 in 1971.

ANALYSIS:

The I. Magnin & Co. Building located at 475 South Lake Avenue is eligible for designation as a landmark under Criterion C of PMC Section 17.62.040(D)(2), which states:

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

⁴ ASM Affiliates, Inc., Attachment A; p. 14

⁵ ASM Affiliates, Inc., Attachment A; pp. 14-15

Generally, in order to qualify under Criterion C, a property type would display most of the character-defining features of its style. It must retain integrity of design, materials, and workmanship that convey its period of construction. While most buildings undergo physical alterations over time, these alterations should not significantly change the historic appearance of the building.

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

- Location: The building and other site features are in their original locations.
- Design: The building retains its original form, massing and exterior configuration. Though a second-story entrance was added in connection to the abutting parking structure in 1957, its design is consistent with the overall character of the building, and it is related to the progression of use by the original retailer, and built within the building's period of significance and within the proliferation period of the architectural style. The building retains clearly discernable character-defining features of the Late Moderne style, including a flat roof, rounded corners, horizontal bands of fenestration, and steel sash windows.
- Setting: The building was constructed during the transitional period of South Lake Avenue from a residential enclave to the commercial corridor that exists today. In many ways, the I. Magnin Building and its related company building, Bullock's Pasadena, were the catalysts of transforming South Lake Avenue into a conglomeration of commercial businesses. When the I. Magnin Building was constructed, residences were located to the south and west of the building, a drive aisle was to the north, which led to a landscape surface parking lot at the rear of the building, and Bullock's was to the north. As time progressed, abutting residential properties transitioned into commercial buildings and the landscaped surface parking lots of the Bullock's and I. Magnin Buildings were converted into a multi-story parking structure. Though the setting has changed, the building remains intact, and still evokes the era of suburban retail, automotive progression, and the stand-alone retail subtype; a setting paradigm that is still found on South Lake Avenue.
- Materials: The building is composed of exposed concrete, with steel sash window fenestrations. These materials are extant today with compatible modifications to the storefront entries.
- Workmanship: The building retains a significant amount of its original exterior finishes, and retains its overall form and high-level of design reflective of the high-end retail establishment that was housed within its concrete walls. The high-design is reflective in its high-level of construction that has stood against vast changes to the retail industry,

changing surroundings, new ownerships, and long periods of vacancy. The building's workmanship remains intact.

- Feeling: The building retains significant integrity criteria, and therefore still evokes the feeling of grandeur associated with high-end retail spaces, and the characteristics of the Late Moderne architectural style, the transitional period of South Lake Avenue, and the progression of the automobile and suburban Post-World War II era.
- Association: The I. Magnin Building retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and feeling, and therefore, continues to convey its association with the commercialization of South Lake Avenue, the transition of the retail industry to a suburban model, and the influx of the automotive influence on development in the Post-World War II era in Pasadena.

Based on the above, the I. Magnin Building retains sufficient integrity to qualify for designation as a landmark under Criterion C as a prime example of an architectural style, Late Moderne; the work of a significantly local architect, Harold C. Chambers; and the period of Post-World War II development of decentralized retail, the transition of South Lake Avenue into a commercial corridor, and the influence of the automobile.

The period of significance for the I. Magnin Building is 1948, when construction started, and 1957, when the parking structure was constructed along with the rear second-floor entry. The contributing features to this designation only include the building itself, not the parking structure or surrounding landscape which have lost their integrity through later alterations.

CONCLUSION:

The I. Magnin and Company Building located at 475 South Lake Avenue qualifies for designation as a landmark under Criterion C as an intact, locally significant example of the Late Moderne Style, and as an example of work of locally significant architect, Harold C. Chambers.

Respectfully Submitted,



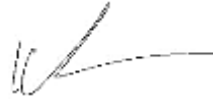
for David M. Reyes
Director of Planning & Community
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Attachments:

- A. Application & Architectural Historians Report (ASM Affiliates)
- B. Vicinity & Aerial Maps
- C. Original Tract Map and Current Parcel Map
- D. Sanborn Maps
- E. Building Description Blanks & Archive Building Permit Records
- F. Historical Photographs
- G. Current Photographs
- H. Effects of Historic Designation