

BUILDING NAME:

The Don Lee Building

BUILDING ADDRESS: 1000 Van Ness Avenue

OWNER:

Fred Kohlenberg c/o Ford Leasing

BLOCK & LOT: 715/5

ZONING: C-2

ORIGINAL USE:

Auto distributorship and retail agency

CURRENT USE:

Lincoln-Mercury showroom and repairs

NO. OF STORIES: 8

LPAB VOTE: 7-0

EXTERIOR MATERIALS: Terra Cotta, glass

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

(Describe special CHARACTER, or special HISTORICAL, ARCHITECTURAL or AESTHETIC interest or value:) "Declared by all who have seen it to be the finest automobile service building in the United States."¹ Earliest of the three proposed landmarks, it was built before a motif for showrooms had evolved. Except for large ground floor windows and industrial sash on upper floors, this could be an office or bank building. In fact, the smiling California bears on their colonnettes had been proposed by the architects on their Bank of Italy design in 1919.² Over the doors the corporate Cadillac heraldry includes two classically languid nudes, the coat of arms and two 1921 Cadillac wheel options; the eight spoke traction tire and twelve spoke smooth tire.

(may be continued on back)

EVALUATION CRITERIA

A. ARCHITECTURE

1. Style: Italian Renaissance
2. Construction Type: Loft building
3. Construction Date: 1921
4. Design Quality: (LPAB ONLY)
5. Architect: Weeks & Day (Mark Hopkins Hotel, Sir Francis Drake Hotel, Brocklebank)
6. Interior Quality: (LPAB ONLY) Readily viewed through show room windows, the interior recreates Spanish courtyard paved with Spanish tile and a grand staircase and balcony of hardwood leading to the "hacienda". There is a bronze coffered ceiling.

B. HISTORY

(as building is significantly associated with specific)

7. Persons: Don Lee: West coast distributor for Oldsmobile, La Salle, Cadillac. Owned outlet for Mutual Broadcasting System. In 1924 moved station KFRC to this building; Merv Griffin broadcast live from the Don Lee Building, as well as Budda's Amateur Hour, Quiz of Two Cities, and Happy-Go-Lucky Hour.³
8. Events:
9. Patterns of History:

(cultural, social, political, military, economic or industrial)

This was built for regional automobile distributor who needed storage space for number of cars. Later dealers worked directly with auto manufacturer eliminating need for so much storage. Early auto dealers offered garaging since few houses had yet been built with garage space.

C. ENVIRONMENT

(relation to surroundings, specifically in terms of:)

10. Continuity: For most of this century, Van Ness Avenue has had the greatest concentration of auto showrooms of any city on the West coast, perhaps in the country.
11. Setting: This is one of the three most luxurious car showrooms (always on a corner for exposure and access) on two blocks of Van Ness bisected by O'Farrell.
12. Importance as a Visual Landmark: One of the largest, most imposing structures north of Civic Center on Van Ness.

D. INTEGRITY

(cite alterations and physical condition) Cornice and carved Cadillac inscription are removed, otherwise in original well-maintained condition.

RATINGS

DCP: 2

HERE TODAY: No

SPLENDID SURV.: Listed in secondary survey area.

NAT'L REGISTER: -

NAT'L LANDMARK: -

STATE LANDMARK: - 03940

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

(list sources on back)

PREPARED BY: David Hartley

ADDRESS: 100 Larkin Street
San Francisco, CA 94102

PHONE: 558-3055

DATE: November, 1981

Revised: December 10, 1981



Notes and References

1. Motorland, April, 1921; California State Automobile Association, pages 52-54.
2. Architect and Engineer, April, 1919, pages 44-45.
3. San Francisco Progress, July 29, 1979, Dick Brill, page 4.

Architect and Engineer, Irving F. Morrow, Volume XVI, October, 1921.

San Francisco Chronicle, Kern Wallace, February 17, 1976, page 2.

Splendid Survivors, Michael Corbett, 1979, page 229.

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1. Motorland, April, 1921; California State Automobile Association, pages 52-54.
2. Architect and Engineer, April, 1919, pages 44-45.
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