

(Landmarks)

DESIGNATING ALHAMBRA THEATER AS LANDMARK NO. 217 PURSUANT TO ARTICLE 10 OF THE CITY PLANNING CODE.

Be it ordained by the People of the City and County of San Francisco:

Section 1. The Board of Supervisors hereby finds that the Alhambra Theater located at 2320 - 2336 Polk Street, Lot 22 in Assessor's Block 548, has a special character and special historical, architectural and aesthetic interest and value, and that its designation as a Landmark will further the purposes of, and conform to the standards set forth in Article 10 of the City Planning Code.

(a) Designation: Pursuant to Section 1004 of the City Planning Code, Chapter II, Part II of the San Francisco Municipal Code, the Alhambra Theater is hereby designated as Landmark No. 217. This designation having been fully approved by Resolution No. 14005 of the City Planning Commission, which Resolution is on file with the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors under File No. 90-95-3 and is incorporated herein and made a part of hereof as though fully set forth.

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SUPERVISORS BIERMAN, HIGDEM, TENG, LEAL

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

(b) Required Data:

(1) The description of the location and boundaries of the Landmark site is the Alhambra Theater at 2320 - 2336 Polk Street, being Lot 22 located within Assessor's Block 548.

(2) The characteristics of the Landmark which justify its designation are described and shown in the photographs and other materials on file in the Planning Department Docket No. 95.410L and the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board's Case Report contained in Docket No. 95.410L.

(3) The particular features that should be preserved are those shown in the photographs on file in Department of City Planning Docket No. 95.410L and described in the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board's Case Report in Section A, entitled "Architecture," Subsection No. 4, "Design" and in Section D, "Integrity," Subsection No. 13, "Alterations" said photographs and Case Report are incorporated in this designation ordinance as though fully set forth.

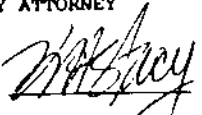
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BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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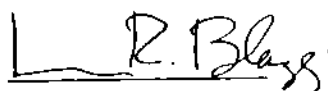
APPROVED AS TO FORM:

LOUISE H. RENNE  
CITY ATTORNEY

BY   
Deputy City Attorney

RECOMMENDED:


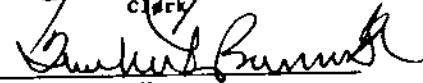
CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

BY   
Lu Blazej  
Director of Planning

Board of Supervisors, San Francisco

Passed for Second Reading	§	Finally Passed
January 16, 1996	§	January 22, 1996
	§	
Ayes: Supervisors Alioto Amiano	§	Ayes: Supervisors Alioto Amiano
Bierman Hsieh Leal Migden Shelley	§	Bierman Hsieh Kaufman Leal Migden
Teng	§	Shelley
	§	
Noes: Supervisor Kennedy	§	Noes: Supervisor Kennedy
	§	
Absent: Supervisor Kaufman	§	Absent: Supervisor Teng

I hereby certify that the foregoing ordinance was finally passed by the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco

  
Clark  
  
Mayor

File No.  
90-95-3

FEB 2 1996  
Date Approved

File No. 95.410L  
Alhambra Theater  
2320 - 2336 Polk Street  
Lot 22 in Assessor's 548

SAN FRANCISCO  
CITY PLANNING COMMISSION  
RESOLUTION NO. 14005

WHEREAS, A proposal to designate the Alhambra Theater located at 2320-2336 Polk Street, being Lot 22 in Assessor's Block 548, pursuant to provisions of Article 10 of the City Planning Code; and

WHEREAS, The Landmarks Board prepared a final Case Report on the subject property, considered public testimony on the Case Report and recommended an intent to designate the Alhambra Theater located at 2320 - 2336 Polk Street as Landmark No. 217 at its Regular Meeting of June 7, 1995; and

WHEREAS, The City Planning Commission, after due notice given, held a Public Hearing on September 21, 1995 and continued the item to their Regular Meetings of October 19 and November 9, 1995 to consider the proposed designation and the Case Report of said Landmarks Board; and

WHEREAS, This City Planning Commission believes that the proposed Landmark has a special character and special historical, architectural and aesthetic interest and value; and that the proposed designation would be in furtherance of and in conformance with the purposes and standards of the said Article 10;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, First, That this City Planning Commission does hereby recommend APPROVAL of the designation of Alhambra Theater at 2320 - 2336 Polk Street, Lot 22 within Assessor's Block 548

Second, That the special character and special historical, architectural and aesthetic interest and value of the Landmark is set forth in the photographs and other materials on file in Planning Department Docket No. 95.410L which is incorporated herein and made a part thereof as though fully set forth;

Third, That the particular features that should be preserved are those shown in the photographs on file in Planning Department Docket No. 95.410L and described in the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board's Case Report, in Section A, entitled "Architecture," Subsection No. 5, "Design" and in Section D "Integrity," Subsection No. 13 "Alterations," said photographs and Case Report are incorporated in this designation ordinance as though fully set forth.

CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

File No. 95.410L  
Alhambra Theater  
2320 - 2336 Polk Street  
Lot 22 in Assessor's 548  
Resolution No. 14005  
Page 2

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the City Planning Commission hereby directs its Secretary to transmit the proposal for designation, with a copy of this Resolution, to the Board of Supervisors for appropriate Action.

I hereby certify that the foregoing Motion was ADOPTED by the City Planning Commission on November 9, 1995.

Linda Avery  
Commission Secretary

AYES: Commissioners Boomer, Fung, Levine, Lowenberg, Prowler, and Unobskey

NOES: None

ABSENT: Commissioner Martin

ADOPTED: November 9, 1995

VFM:Resoluti



# LANDMARKS PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD

1660 MISSION STREET, 5TH FLOOR, SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94103  
TEL. (415) 558-6345 • FAX. (415) 558-6426



FINAL CASE REPORT

DATE: June 7, 1995

**HISTORIC BUILDING NAME:** Alhambra Theater

**OWNER:** Consolidated Theaters

**ADDRESS:** 2320-2336 Polk Street  
east side between Union and Green Streets

**BLOCK & LOT:** 548/22

**POPULAR BUILDING NAME:** Alhambra Theater

**ZONING:** Polk Street Neighborhood  
Commercial District (N.C.D.)

**ORIGINAL USE:** Motion Picture Theater

**ARCHITECT:** Timothy L. Pflueger

**CURRENT USE:** Motion Picture Theater

**CONSTRUCTION DATE:** 1926

**STYLE:** Spanish Eclectic/Moorish Revival

**LANDMARK NO:** 217

**NUMBER OF STORIES:** 2

**EXTERIOR MATERIALS:** Plaster, marble  
and glass storefront

**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:** The Alhambra Theater is a fine example of 1920's theater design and represents the work of one of San Francisco's most important architects, Timothy L. Pflueger. The Alhambra was built by one of San Francisco's oldest movie-business families, the Nassers, and in 1973 leased by another San Francisco movie dynasty, the Blumenfelds. The Alhambra was aptly named for the Citadel - Palace of Granada, an expression of the last flowering of Spanish Islam and completed in the 14th Century.

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VFM:mj:RevisedA.Cas

**CRITERIA****A. ARCHITECTURE**

1. **STYLE:**  
Significance As An Example Of A Particular Architectural Style Or Convention
- Spanish Eclectic/Moorish Revival (E). The popularity of this style began with the Panama-California Exposition held in San Diego in 1915 and it quickly replaced the Mission style. The ornament is derived from Mexican sources which had interpreted the original from Spanish sources. The Castro Theater, Landmark No. 100 (also owned by the Nasser Family) and Mission High School are well known examples of this style. (E)
2. **CONSTRUCTION TYPE / USE CATEGORY:**  
Significance As An Example Of A Particular Period in San Francisco History
- Reinforced concrete and steel with unprotected steel truss. (VG)
3. **DATE BUILT:**  
Significance As An Example Of A Particular Period In San Francisco History
- 1926 (G)
4. **ARCHITECT:**  
Designed Or Built By An Architect Or Builder Who Has Made A Significant Contribution To The Community, State Or Nation
- Timothy L. Pflueger (1892-1946) was educated at the Beaux Arts Institute of Design. He began working with James R. Miller in 1910, and after World War the architects formed a partnership.
- In this association, Pflueger worked on several movie theaters, including the Spanish Colonial Revival Castro Theater, Landmark No. 100 (1922); the Moorish Alhambra (1926); the Royal (1920); and the El Rey (1931) in San Francisco. He also designed movie theaters in the Bay Area including the Art Deco masterpiece the Paramount, listed on the National Register of Historic Places (1931); the Alameda (1932) in Alameda; and the Tulare (1928) in Tulare, California.
- Miller and Pflueger created many of the San Francisco area's notable buildings. These works include the remodeling of the Livingston Brothers Department at 100 Grant Avenue, a Category IV Contributory Building (1920); the Jefferson High School (1922); the Alamo School (1924); the Pacific Telephone Building at 134 New Montgomery Street, Category 1 Significant Building (1926); the Medical-Dental Office Building at 450 Sutter Street, Category 1 Significant Building (1929-30); the Cogswell College (formerly the Metropolitan Life Building) at 600 Stockton Street, Landmark No. 167 and a Category 1 Significant Building (1929); the Pacific Coast Stock Exchange Building and Exchange Club at 301 Pine Street, Category 1 Significant Building (1930); and the Roosevelt Junior High School at 460 Arguello Boulevard (1928).
- Practicing under his own name after 1938, Pflueger designed the cocktail lounge of the Mark Hopkins Hotel (1939); the I. Magnin Department Store at 233 Geary Street (1946-7); 45 Grant Avenue (1940); the George Washington High School at 600 32nd Avenue (1932); the Science Building and Gymnasium for the San Francisco Junior College (City College of San Francisco); and the Union Square Plaza and Parking Structure (1942).

Pflueger was a member of the architectural committee for the Golden Gate Exposition of 1939, and designed the Court of the Pacific exhibition among other fair buildings. He also served as chair for the Bay Bridge Architectural Commission and was largely responsible for its simple but elegant design. He was closely associated with both the San Francisco Art Institute and the San Francisco Art Museum. (E)

5. DESIGN:  
Quality Of Composition,  
Detailing And Ornament  
Measured In Part in  
Originality, Urban Design,  
Craftsmanship Or  
Uniqueness

A fine example of theater construction from the 1920s, the theater is lavishly ornamented inside and out, with exotic Moorish details including twin corner minarets, ogee arches, ornate plaster, back light geometric patterns along the cornice line, and decorative street lights, designed to cast light back onto the building. The design and construction of the building is so sound that even with the extensive ornamentation, the building passes today's earthquake standards. (E)

6. INTERIOR:  
Interior Arrangement,  
Finish, Craftsmanship,  
And/Or Use Detail Is/Are  
Particularly Attractive Or  
Unique

The Alhambra's interior is representative of the fanciful ornamentation of movie theaters built in the 1920s. It was decorated in over 20 colors by Arthur F. Mathews, who was known for his murals at the State Capital and the Mechanics Institute at 57 Post Street, a Category I Significant Building. The Alhambra was the first West Coast theater to be decorated inside and out in a Moorish theme. The centerpiece of the Alhambra's interior is a domed ceiling 50 feet above the floor, ornamented with gold-leaf plaster star bursts against a Moorish plaster backdrop, and illuminated by over 2,000 colored light bulbs. The stage has a massive proscenium arch decorated with masks and plaster tassels. The walls are decorated with gilded arches containing giant gold urns. Over the lobby exit doors are plaster cast, illuminated peacock tails. (E)

## B. HISTORIC CONTEXT

7. PERSONS:  
Associated With The Life  
Or Activities Of A Person,  
Group Or Institution That  
Has Made A Significant  
Contribution To The  
Community, State Or  
Nation

The Lebanese born Nasser family is typical of many early movie theater entrepreneurs, who migrated to America and realized early on the potential profitability of the motion picture industry. Originally the family operated a candy store in Eureka Valley.

In 1908, Abraham Nasser opened a Nickelodeon at 18th and Collingwood, which was reportedly one of the first silent picture theaters in the City. In 1910, they upgraded to a 400 seat theater at 485 Castro. The Nasser family constructed numerous theaters around San Francisco, including the Castro and the Alhambra. In 1949 the family acquired the General Services Studios in Hollywood. This "B" movie studio, under the direction of Abraham's sons, opened the door to television production and launched early television classics such as "I Love Lucy" and "Burns and Allen." The family is still active in the movie theater business.

The Blumenfeld Family leased the Alhambra from the Nassers in 1974. They were responsible for its "twinning" and its subsequent "untwinning" and restoration. The Blumenfelds have been in the movie business in San Francisco for over 70 years. Max Blumenfeld, who began his career in San Francisco as a waiter soon became an opera impresario and then a stable owner. In 1917, he opened his first theater in North Beach called The Times. At one point Blumenfeld Theaters consisted of 65 theaters in San Francisco, Marin, Los Angeles and the East Bay. Today, Blumenfeld Theaters is in its third generation and operates the following first run theaters: the Castro, The Royal, and the Regency I and II. (E)

**8. EVENTS:**

Associated With Events That Have Made A Significant Contribution To The Community, State Or Nation

In 1988 the lessees of the Alhambra, Blumenfeld Theaters, made the unprecedented move of "untwining" the theater, restoring it to a single auditorium by removing the cinder-block wall and plaster board that was suspended from the ceiling. The trend in movie theaters has been towards smaller auditoriums, because of diminished numbers of movie-goers. The Blumenfelds, however, hoped to lure people back into the theater by offering them the elegance and fantasy of the 1920s movie theater. (E)

**9. PATTERNS:**

Associated With Or Illustrative Of Broad Patterns Of City's Cultural, Social, Political Or Economic History Or Development

The Alhambra is representative of the numerous movie palaces built in the 1920s that attempted to create a fantasy environment that matched that of the movies on screen. The Alhambra's Moorish castle decor was part of a trend in movie theater design to build theaters that conjured images of romantic and far away places, such as Mayan temples, Oriental palaces, or ancient Egyptian tombs. Serving the neighborhoods of Cow Hollow, Russian Hill and surrounding areas as a neighborhood theater, the Alhambra Theater was an alternative for movie-goers to the larger and more swanky movie theaters on Market Street, but still offered its patrons fantasy and elegance.

Movies remained the number one source of entertainment throughout the Depression and World War II, but during the post-war era audience sizes diminished, due to the introduction of television. In the mid-fifties, a large cinemascope screen replaced the older screen, and concealed the massive proscenium arch. In 1974, the theater was "twinned" by dividing the auditorium in half with a cinder-block wall and painted plaster board suspended from the ceiling, covering the plaster dome. The "twinning" was an attempt to make up lost profits due to a continually shrinking audience. When this approach failed, partially because the dome could not be soundproofed, the lessee tried a different method to lure movie-goers back to the theater. In 1988, they removed the wall that divided the auditorium and carefully restored the theater's elaborate interior. (E)

**C. PHYSICAL CONTEXT****10. CONTINUITY:**

Contributes To The Continuity Or Character Of The Street Neighborhood Or Area

The Alhambra Theater has served as a neighborhood theater for over 60 years. (VG)

**11. SETTING:**

Setting And/Or Landscape Contributes To The Continuity Or Character Of The Street, Neighborhood Or Area

The theater sits mid-block in a row of complementary Mission Revival shops, and is the dominant building on the block. Apartment buildings on the hill behind look down onto the theater's twin minarets. (VG)

**12. VISUAL SIGNIFICANCE:**

Significant As A Visual Landmark To The Neighborhood, City, Region or Nation As A Whole

The Alhambra's distinctive and exotic facade is unique in the City, especially when its twin minarets glow red in the nighttime sky. This building is important in its neighborhood context as well as its City context. (E)

**D. INTEGRITY**

13. ALTERATIONS:  
The Degree To Which The  
Property Has Retained  
Original Materials From  
Which Its Significance Is  
Derived Or Which  
Characterize Its Period

Although the building received careful interior restoration in 1988, the exterior facade has been altered at the storefront level. In the 1930s, the neon sign was changed. The free standing ticket booth is now gone and the former exterior lobby is enclosed with modern glass doors. The facade on the ground level has been altered and is covered with granitized marble facing. However unfortunate these changes are, they are not irreparable. (VG)

**E. THREATS TO SITE:** NONE ( ) DEVELOPMENT (X) ZONING ( ) VANDALISM ( )  
PUBLIC WORKS PROJECT ( ) OTHER ( )

**REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS:**

- ( ) NATIONAL  
( ) STATE  
( ) LOCAL

**CALIFORNIA STATE REGISTER:** No

**HERE TODAY:** No

**HERITAGE SURVEYS:** No

**DCP 1976 SURVEY:** Rated "4"

**OTHER:**

**ENDNOTES:**

**BIBLIOGRAPHY:** See Pages 6 and 7

**EDITED BY LANDMARKS BOARD STAFF**

**BASED UPON MATERIAL SUPPLIED BY:**

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**DATE SUBMITTED** June 7, 1995

