

FINDINGS AND DETERMINATION
OF THE LANDMARKS COMMISSION
OF THE CITY OF SANTA MONICA IN THE MATTER OF
THE DESIGNATION OF A LANDMARK

DESIGNATION OF THE SEARS MAIN BUILDING
LOCATED AT 302 COLORADO AVENUE AS A LANDMARK
AND THE REAL PROPERTY, COMMONLY KNOWN AS
302 COLORADO AVENUE, AS A LANDMARK PARCEL

LC-04-LM-004

SECTION I. An application was filed by the Landmarks Commission of the City of Santa Monica on July 13, 2004, to designate the property (Sears Main Building) at 302 Colorado Avenue as a City Landmark. The Landmarks Commission, having held Public Hearings on October 11, 2004 and December 13, 2004 hereby designate the Sears Main Building at 302 Colorado Avenue as a Landmark and the real property, commonly known 302 Colorado Avenue, as a Landmark Parcel based on the following findings:

- (1) It exemplifies, symbolizes, or manifests elements of the cultural, social, economic, political or architectural history of the City.

When it opened its doors in 1947, Sears Department Store (Sears Main Building) became the largest and most prominent department store in the City of Santa Monica, strongly contributing to the economic development of the Central Business District in the postwar years. Sears remains the sole surviving large retail establishment of the early postwar years operating in the City. As such, its presence manifests and exemplifies elements of the City's economic history. One aspect of this was the relatively new concept of granting primary consideration to automobile accommodation, which in this case included provision of a 200-space parking lot and a service station (later modified to the present-day Garden Center). This commercial development trend both reflected and encouraged the focusing of family life on growing consumerism within American culture, fueled by expanding selections of novel, affordable items made available by innovative materials and technological advances.

Thus, the Sears Main Building holds additional significance due to its uninterrupted association with Sears-Roebuck and as a local symbol of the nationally significant "event" of postwar auto-oriented department store development, with its extensive influence on post-World War II American life. In addition, the Sears Main Building exemplifies a particular and short-lived stylistic phase in the architectural history of the City, the Late Moderne. Character-defining features of the Sears Main Building that are indicative of the Late Moderne style include horizontally-patterned corner striations and elongated window bands, smooth concrete exterior surfaces incised with a grid-like pattern, curving canopies, and stylized decorative bas-relief sculptures.

- (2) It has aesthetic or artistic interest or value, or other noteworthy interest or value.

Given its relative isolation from surrounding buildings, the Sears Main Building manifests a strong iconic presence and form, especially when approached from the west on Colorado Avenue but also as an important anchor as viewed from all directions. The subtlety of the Sears Main Building's decorative elements, such as the horizontal striations and grid-like patterns rendered in concrete, and the pair of stylized bas-relief sculptures gracing the north elevation, further emphasize the building as an aesthetic object. The subject property stands out from other subsequent Sears outlets due to its pedestrian orientation, downtown location and the attention to architectural design. Therefore, as an excellent local example of the Late Moderne architectural style as applied to a commercial structure, the Sears Main Building possesses sufficient aesthetic and artistic value necessary for designation under this criterion.

- (3) It is identified with historic personages or with important events in local, state or national history.

The iconic Sears Main Building, built for the substantial sum of \$300,000 in 1946-7, is associated with the postwar transitional development period of Sears-Roebuck, one of the oldest department store chains in the country. The Janss Investment Corporation owned the subject property and developed it for the Sears department store. A prominent developer of many communities in Southern California, the Janss Investment Corporation is best known as the developer of Westwood Village and portions of its surrounding residential areas, and for their sale of land to accommodate the UCLA campus. The Janss Investment Corporation has been involved in the development of numerous areas in the region over the decades as well as more recent work in the City Of Santa Monica including development that revitalized the Third Street Promenade in 1989. The Sears Main Building is also associated with its prominent Beverly Hills architect, Rowland Crawford. As such, the property represents an era in which leading national companies competed, hiring talented architects to design "landmark" department store buildings that would attract newly mobile, automobile-owning families to shop as a form of recreation. The Sears development is identified with regionally-significant developer Janss Investment Corporation and with prominent architect Rowland Crawford and therefore satisfies this criterion.

- (4) It embodies distinguishing architectural characteristics valuable to a study of a period, style, method of construction, or the use of indigenous materials or craftsmanship, or is a unique or rare example of an architectural design, detail or historical type valuable to such a study.

The Sears Main Building is an excellent example of the Late Moderne architectural style. As such, the building embodies a number of distinguishing architectural characteristics of this style including: a pronounced emphasis on horizontality expressed by the horizontal striations on the building's corners and parapets, the window bands of the third floor employee cafeteria, and the curving canopies that shade the customer entrances. Other character-defining features of the style include a grid of incised squares that center exterior elevations and several stylized bas-relief sculptures. Additionally, the steel and concrete

construction incorporating 1947 state-of-the-art “earthquake-proof construction” is a notable feature of this structure. The Late Moderne was a short-lived architectural style from the early postwar years of which few highly intact examples exist in the City of Santa Monica. Therefore, the Sears Main Building is valuable to a study of the architectural history of the early postwar period and the Late Moderne style.

- (5) It is significant or a representative example of the work or product of a notable builder, designer or architect.

The Sears Main Building and site was designed by Beverly Hills-based architect Rowland H. Crawford (1902-1973), who worked as the Supervising Architect for the Times-Mirror Company, the Brown Derby Restaurants and the owner of the subject property, the Janss Investment Corporation. Crawford is acknowledged as one of the few architects closely identified with the Late Moderne architectural style in the Los Angeles area, as expressed in several key buildings designed by Crawford including the subject property (1946), the Times-Mirror Building (1948), and the Brentwood Country Mart. Crawford was identified by noted architectural historian Paul Gleye for his achievements in the Late Moderne architectural style, citing the Times-Mirror Building as one of the style’s most important local examples. The Sears complex, constructed one year earlier than the Times-Mirror Building, is a significant example of Crawford’s work and of his mastery of interpreting the Late Moderne style in the built environment.

- (6) It has a unique location, a singular physical characteristic, or is an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or the City.

The Sears Main Building is uniquely located on a large, triangular "island" of land (approximately 462 feet by 547 feet by 586 feet (135, 472 sq. ft.)) adjacent to the Santa Monica Freeway (Interstate 10) and the Civic Center to the south, Fourth Street to the east, Colorado Avenue to the north, and Main Street to the west. In addition to the thousands of automobiles that can view the site while driving west on the Santa Monica freeway, the Sears Main Building is visible to pedestrians and automobiles approaching the site on surface streets from virtually every direction. Due to the structure’s unique form and high visibility from many vantage points in the City both historically and today, it has become a local icon and a defining feature of Santa Monica’s downtown and is clearly an established and familiar visual feature of the City.

SECTION II. Based on the above findings, the real property, commonly known as 302 Colorado Avenue located adjacent to the Santa Monica Freeway (Interstate 10) and the Civic Center to the south, Fourth Street to the east, Colorado Avenue to the north, and Main Street to the west, is designated as a Landmark Parcel to preserve, maintain, protect and safeguard the Landmark Sears Main Building.

SECTION III. The original accessory structure gasoline service station located on the Sears parcel was designed and built together with the Sears Main Building in 1946-7. Its construction was representative of the commercial development trend that catered to an emerging automobile-oriented population. The gasoline service station, now Garden Center, was originally designed to reflect and complement the architectural features of the

Sears Main Building as was applicable to a support service building. The original service station exhibited several Late Moderne stylistic elements including its broad horizontality and curving roof canopies. The original design also incorporated large plate glass expanses on each of the four elevations and two sets of large collapsible steel gates for entry and exit from the service bays. The accessory gasoline service station building has, however, undergone extensive alterations and a change in use over the years. Each of the four building elevations has been substantially altered for its reuse as a Garden Center. Some of these alterations include removal of nearly all original windows and doors on each elevation, placement of solid walls over many of these original openings, and a large addition to the building along 4th Street. Due to these extensive modifications, the accessory structure is not eligible for individual City Landmark status. However, prior to any alteration or demolition of this accessory building, a Certificate of Appropriateness must be obtained. No demolition of this building may occur unless the Landmarks Commission has reviewed and approved the replacement project for this accessory building.

Each and all of the findings and determinations are based on the competent and substantial evidence, both oral and written, contained in the entire record relating to the Project. All summaries of information contained herein or in the findings are based on the substantial evidence in the record. The absence of any particular fact from any such summary is not an indication that a particular finding is not based in part on that fact.

SECTION IV. I hereby certify that the above Findings and Determination accurately reflect the final determination of the Landmarks Commission of the City of Santa Monica on December 13, 2004, as determined by the following vote:

AYES: Berley, Fresco, Genser, Kaplan, Lehrer, Levin, Maduzia
NAYES: None
ABSTAIN: None
ABSENT: None

Respectfully Submitted
January 10, 2005

Roger Genser, Chairperson

Attest:

Roxanne Tanemori
Landmarks Commission Secretary

This Statement of Official Action detailing the findings and determination of the Landmarks Commission has been filed with the Director of Planning and Community Development on January 10, 2005, and pursuant to Santa Monica Municipal Code Section 9.36.180(b), any notice of appeal shall be filed within 10 days of such filing date.