



LOS ANGELES CITYWIDE HISTORIC CONTEXT STATEMENT
Context: Commercial Development, 1850-1980
Theme: Commercial Signs, 1906-1980



Prepared for:

City of Los Angeles
Department of City Planning
Office of Historic Resources



July 2016

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	1
CONTRIBUTOR	1
INTRODUCTION	1
HISTORIC CONTEXT	3
SUB-THEMES	24
Rooftop Signs, 1906-1980	24
Marquees, 1900s-1980	27
Projecting Blade Signs, 1906-1980	30
Pylons, Poles, Stantions, and Billboards, 1920-1980	33
Facades Signs, late 1800s-1980	38
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	42

PREFACE

The theme “Commercial Signs” is a component of Los Angeles’ citywide historic context statement and provides guidance to field surveyors in identifying and evaluating commercial signs as potential historic resources. Refer to www.HistoricPlacesLA.org for information on designated resources associated with this theme as well as those identified through SurveyLA and other surveys.

CONTRIBUTOR

Catherine Gudis, Ph.D., is Associate Professor of History and Director of the Public History Program at the University of California, Riverside. Ms. Gudis earned her doctoral degree in American Studies from Yale University and has more than twenty years’ experience in art and history museum curation as well as a consulting practice in the field of historic preservation. Ms. Gudis has edited and contributed to several written works concerning the relationship between advertising and the built environment including *Lions and Eagles and Bulls: Early American Inn & Tavern Signs* (Princeton, 2001) and *A Forest of Signs: Art in the Age of Representation* (MIT, 1989). In 2004, Ms. Gudis authored *Buyways: Billboards, Automobiles, and the American Cultural Landscape* (Routledge, 2004). During her work with SurveyLA Ms. Gudis served as a consultant to ICF International.

INTRODUCTION

The significance of signs in Los Angeles rests first and foremost on the fact that the city grew in tandem with two simultaneous developments – mass use of the automobile and mass advertising and consumption. The architectural, social, economic, and environmental impact of these developments is global. Its historical trajectory can be traced from the streets and structures of Los Angeles, especially its signs and signage. Los Angeles leads the nation in the quantity, quality, and concentration of extant incandescent and neon signs (1920s-1940s); modernist exuberance of oversized, exaggeratedly modernist forms and colors oriented to the automobile strip and utilizing the mixed media of its era (1950s-60s); and use of signs and symbols to turn mere surfaces—facades—into Hollywood-styled stage sets (1920s-1980). These historic signs still laud today all of the fantasy, spectacle, and diversity of cultural influences that has for so long characterized the Los Angeles urban consumerist experience.

This theme covers five sign types presented here a sub-themes:

- Rooftop Signs
- Marquees
- Projecting Blade Signs
- Pylons, Poles, Stantions, and Billboards
- Façade Signs

Evaluation Considerations:

- For SurveyLA, signs were generally evaluated under local Historic-Cultural Monument criteria only as they do not appear to meet significant thresholds for listing in the National and California Registers.
- This context and associated eligibility standards are used to identify and evaluate individually significant signs. However, it also provides guidance for identifying sign types that may be significant character-defining features of buildings or structures.

- Googie style signs may also be evaluated as excellent examples of the style under the Googie sub-theme within the Postwar Modernism theme of the Architecture and Engineering context.
- Programmatic/Mimetic buildings are evaluated under that sub-theme within the Commercial Development and the Automobile theme.
- Inscribed fascia, cornice, and cornerstone signs are discussed in this theme under Façade Signs and may apply to commercial and institutional buildings. These sign types would rarely be individually identified for significance since they are integral to the building.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

The words, symbols, pictures, and structural components that comprise historic signs and signage convey to an inestimable extent a sense of time and place. Though they are an integral part of the built environment and cultural landscape, they are often overlooked or undervalued as architectural elements and cultural expressions worthy of preservation. The initial role of commercial signs may have been to mark a site for way-finding purposes and to identify or advertise a business. Signs also served to endow buildings and the businesses advertised with qualities beyond the mere use value of the goods or services sold within. Today, commercial signs as well as those found on public institutions (schools, government buildings, and even churches) serve all of those purposes and more. They have also become memory markers that keep multiple pasts present within the seemingly ephemeral commercial



Circus Liquor at 5600 Vineland Avenue in North Hollywood (SurveyLA)

embroidery of images, words, and objects adorning cities, streets, and highways. They can mark different passages in the life of a building, street, and community; become an important icon for a neighborhood's residents and visitors; and serve as a palimpsest, in which specters of a seemingly erased past appear through the multilayered remnants for us to read and experience today.

Sometimes, signs and signage comprise the most dominant, unifying, or symbolically expressive features of a building or arrangement of built and natural forms. Stylized design elements—from typography to projecting or stand-alone signs—can transform buildings into stage sets or tableaux that re-enact the myths, personae, and regional associations of an historical epoch, while a façade can front as a screen or scrim upon which to project an imagined place identity. Or a sign can serve as a building (and vice versa) in ways that span the entire history of modernist and vernacular design. Most of all, commercial signs are among the most populist means of

expressing the lived experiences of one of the most important eras in Los Angeles—and American—history: the age of the automobile and mass consumption. (Mass consumption here is meant to include advertising, marketing, and entertainment of all sorts aimed towards or engaged by large and diverse audiences.)

Signs and signage are markers of the architectural, social, cultural, and economic history of all cities. However, they are of particular significance in Los Angeles. The rapid development of Los Angeles in the era of the streetcar, the first decades of the automobile, and the post-World War II decades of development coincide with the largest growth of advertising, mass media (including entertainment and recreation), and consumer culture in the United States.¹ In a period of less than fifty years the field of

¹ The impact of other forms of mass media—film, radio, television—on both advertising and architecture is significant, and apparent not just in the role played by spectacular signs for movie theaters or illuminated radio towers, but in the ways architects and designers began to treat the facades of structures. On the design of commercial facades and revitalization during times of financial difficulty in particular, see for instance, Gabrielle Esperdy, *Modernizing Main Street: Architecture and Consumer Culture in the New Deal* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2008); Alison Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); M. Jeffrey Hardwick, *Mall Maker: Victor Gruen, Architect of an American Dream* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

advertising grew exponentially, professionalized, became seen as integral to business, and sought status as art. This was especially true of outdoor advertising, which had always been oriented to mobility of all sorts (literal and metaphorical) and to consumption. Mass media—from film to radio and then television—grew simultaneously with and through advertising as an important form of commerce that affected not only social consciousness and relationships but also buildings and the urban fabric. And by as early as the first decades of the twentieth century, nowhere was better known for its bombast and ballyhoo in the arena of commercial, automobile-oriented advertising and consumer culture than Los Angeles, whose stars and starlets lit up the big screen just as neon and atomic blasts of spectacular signs lit up the city’s rapidly decentralizing city streets. The boosterist promotional spirit and speculative drive that developed the city at the start of the twentieth century thus became physically incarnate in architectural forms of advertising unique to or having originated in Los Angeles, from hot dog stands in the shape of a dog to the famously noir neon sign districts popularized by Raymond Chandler and genre film to the skyward reaching starbursts and stantions of exaggeratedly modernist or “Googie”-styled signage.²



Rooftop Sign on Beverly Boulevard
(CRA Survey)

In the outdoor advertising industry, signs are categorized in terms of on-premise, or those within the legal property lines of the businesses being advertised, and off-premise, referring to those signs for businesses and vendors located elsewhere (for the purposes here, the latter refers mostly to billboards and painted signs). These forms of advertising in the outdoors have frequently been subject to great public scrutiny and outcry.³ In some cases, the use of new technologies and design approaches and the employment of architects and artists to integrate signs as architectural elements became ways in which to better comply with restrictive sign ordinances. These were also ways that businesses and those promoting them sought to assert the legitimacy of outdoor advertising signs as economic and aesthetic assets to the built environment.⁴ The use of advanced promotional strategies—thanks in part to technologies ranging from neon to Plexiglas to metal

alloys—also allowed businesses to communicate more loudly, in larger numbers, and across greater distances as streetcars and automobiles enabled the spatial diffusion (and then re-densification) of commercial arenas.

² See Catherine Gudis, *Buyways: Billboards, Automobiles, and the American Landscape* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004); William Brevda, “The Double Nihilation of the Neon,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 41 (Spring 1999), 70-103; Jim Heimann and Rip Georges, *California Crazy: Roadside Vernacular Architecture* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1980); Chester Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins, 1995); Alan Hess, *Googie Redux: Ultramodern Roadside Architecture* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2004); Thomas Hine, *Populuxe* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990).

³ A survey of Los Angeles sign ordinances over various periods of time and localities would be useful for better understanding periods of significance and technical restrictions for the creation of signs and would be a valuable element to include here if further research can be undertaken.

⁴ See, for instance, the trajectory of reportage in the *Los Angeles Times* regarding both on-site signage restrictions, especially pertaining to projecting signs and the height of rooftop signs in the 1900s through 1920s. For instance: “Sign Ordinance Causes Some Debate,” 5 Dec. 1899, 1; “Fence Out Daylight with Galvanized Iron: Billboard Wilshire’s Successors Have a New ‘Idee,’” 29 Mar. 1902, 7; “Electric Signs,” 26 Sept. 1903, A4; “Electric Signs,” 21 Oct. 1906, II6; “Doom of Billboards: Women Say They Must Go,” 17 May 1908; “Mayor Vetoes New Sign Bill,” 10 Jan. 1908, II2. Also see Gudis, *Buyways*, 163-230.

Yet opposition remained. Whether it was the clubwomen in the 1900s to 1930s or Five Man Electrical Band in the 1970s, often the refrains were shared: “Sign, sign, everywhere a sign / Blocking out the scenery, breaking my mind.” Such outcries and the rise of planning as antidote to the ad hoc commercialism of the cityscape, not to mention waves of urban renewal, drew attention to another kind of symbolic order represented by advertising outdoors: commercial blight. As zoning and sign ordinances have sought to regulate different parts of the city, alternative strategies of advertising and sign design—and a counter-battle against the detractors of ad hoc commercialism—have emerged along with policies geared towards their preservation. But the struggles for preservationists only amplify, as the economic forces of advertising revolve around speed and novelty, replacing the old with the new. This also informs deeply engrained assumptions held by many regarding the ephemeral nature of popular culture as expressed through advertising signs and signage: it is aimed towards mass appeal, it is of its moment, and it is geared towards consumption (something that is *spent* not *saved*).

Yet it is also what frequently holds a dear place in the minds, hearts, and memories of Angelenos. In a place like Los Angeles, where glitz and glamour, boosting and bombast, have been a mainstay of its heritage—or at least its historical branding of itself—and where advertising and architectural innovations have found fertile ground, especially when oriented towards automobility, the preservation of even the most omnipresent and mass reproducible objects in the landscape—signs—becomes all the more important. This is made more notable when so many of these signs have been removed, replaced, or demolished with hardly a legal step to delay their erasure from public view. (Note, too, that relatively few Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monuments specifically name the signs as monuments, even for buildings whose historic character includes the signs and signage.) Given that sign restrictions have often been related to the ways that signs project their messages into public space, their preservation ought also to consider the same public whose memories and experiences are affected.



Million Article Thompson sign on Vermont Avenue at 89th Street in South Los Angeles (SurveyLA)

CHRONOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as the heart of commercial Los Angeles grew up and outward from El Pueblo along commercial arteries (Spring Street, Main Street, and Broadway, for instance) signs were primarily hand-painted on glass windows and transoms, walls, wooden and varnished metal plaques, and billboards adorning the buildings and streetscapes of downtown.⁵ The sides and tops of commercial buildings in the first decades of the twentieth century seemed to serve more as pages of oversized display advertisements than mere bricks and mortar, as painted signs and printed billboards populate the landscape. Oriented to streetcars, pedestrians, and horse and carriage riders at the start and then cars in its early years, the profusion of painted and printed signs in the urban core and along access routes in and out of the city (sometimes painted or posted directly onto trees, rocks, or hillsides) garnered attention—and much of it out of concern for the fate of a city whose picturesque nature would be destroyed by commerce (or at least its signs).

⁵ Michael J. Auer, “The Preservation of Historic Signs,” Preservation Briefs – 25 (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1991); John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle, *Signs in America’s Auto Age: Signatures of Landscape and Place* (Iowa City: University of Iowa, 2004), 5, 20.

Engraved Fascia and Painted Signs

For some, however, the signs of commerce had stability, were heraldic, and marked a personal stake in the development of the city. These were the permanent inscriptions of owners' names and sometimes the year of a building's completion, carved into the fascia of a building and integrated into its architectural design. Inseparable from the building and lasting well beyond the lifespan of their namesake, these were an enduring combination of advertisement and cornerstone and today sometimes serve as the only record of a building's earliest history (and usually a regal one, at that). (See, for instance, Douglas Building; Los Angeles Trust and Savings Bank; Cahuenga, Vermont Square, and Felipe de Neve Branch public libraries.) These are especially resonant when seen in combination with other layered remnants of social and commercial history: the ghosts of painted signs that emerge decades after their original creation on the sides of brick and masonry walls—especially in commercial, mixed use, and industrial areas of the city undergoing renovation. Since sign painters until the 1930s often used what was known as “white lead” as a base for the colors they mixed, the wall signs that were a copious and constant reminder of commercial expansion from the early years of the century have been known to last decades (up to a hundred years, even) after their original use.⁶ While such signs advertising former on-site businesses or off-site products might not be fully visible or easy to date and may stand beside contemporary advertisements, they serve as clues to an otherwise silent and invisible past.

Los Feliz denizens today, for instance, might enjoy sidewalk bistro dining at Café Figaro with the ghost of Lena Luckwenbach, whose name is inscribed beneath the cornice of a 1922 building at 1802-06 Vermont Avenue. She is joined by a forgotten tailor whose vertically projecting neon and incandescent blade sign tells us that he also imported cloth and a whiskey vendor whose brand can't be read but whose outlined painted “ghost” sign still bedecks the north-facing brick-and-mortar wall. Alongside these a painted proclamation in block letters indicates “Apartments” within.



The former Teatro California on S. Main Street shows layers of painted signage history, 1990 (Los Angeles Public Library)

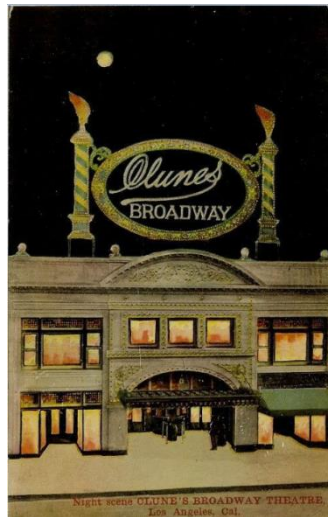
In some cases, especially residential hotels and apartments in the Hollywood and downtown areas, painted on-site signs remain intact—whether recently refreshed, as in the case of the Dover Hotel – today, residential apartments – on Beverly Boulevard, or leftover from decades prior to remind us of the “Barclay Hotel formerly the Van Nuys \$1 and up” (on the south side of 4th Street downtown) or the Hotel Baltimore (501 S. Los Angeles Street). These ghost signs may not have been included within or as

⁶ Wm. Stage, *Ghost Signs: Brick Wall Signs in America* (Cincinnati, OH: Signs of the Times Publications, 1989), 52-53, 71, 92.

independent nominations for Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument status, but they are referenced in the historic sign ordinances of other parts of the state and nation.⁷

Incandescent Signs, 1900s-1920s

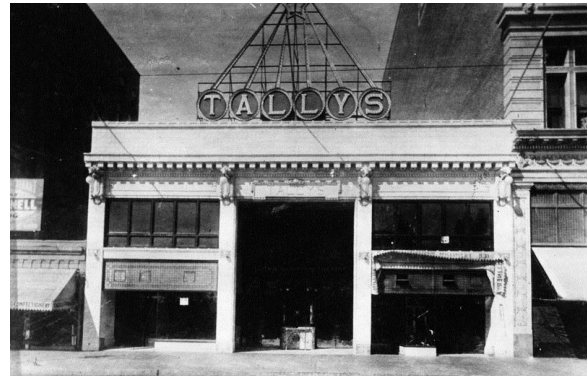
By the 1900s and 1910s, painted and printed signs came to seem like humble emissaries as both the skyline and the city's streets, avenues, and boulevards became transformed by the technology of electrical illumination. Los Angeles' "Great White Way" offered up the Broadway, Spring, and Main streets of downtown, for instance, as a commercial and entertainment center in which variety theaters outlined their offerings and sponsorship in white



Early Clune's Postcard, c. 1910s

incandescent bulbs that stretched along thin

vertically oriented signs mounted perpendicularly to the façade.⁸ These reached even wider and higher from rooftops, where they were propped up by elaborate, unenclosed metal scaffolding that silhouetted the night sky with "Clune's Broadway...the Time the Place" (today, an electronics retail shop) or "Tallys" (demolished in 1929) spelled out in circles with lines radiating to a central star at the top.⁹ (See Clune's postcard and Tallys' photograph.) "Crowds Pack for Blocks," reads the *Los Angeles Times* headline of March 3, 1907, for the opening of Bullock's elaborate two-faced, nine-foot-high, lettered sign on its 7th story garden rooftop at Broadway and 7th Street. An unnamed business at 7th and Main a year earlier employed moving lights to spell out its name, and was claimed to be the first of its kind in the nation.¹⁰ By 1914—and still standing as one of the earliest extant incandescent signs in the city, though some of the bulbs have since been replaced with neon—flashing, colored bulbs added to the



Tally's Theater at 833 S. Broadway, Undated
(Los Angeles Public Library)

⁷ Though twenty years old, an excellent synthesis of the significance of historic signs and analysis of historic sign ordinances, included appendices with the ordinances employed by Pasadena and Portland, among others, is George H. Kramer, "Preserving Historic Signs in the Commercial Landscape: The Impact of Regulation," Master's Thesis, University of Oregon, December 1989.

⁸ On early electrical signs nationally: Charles Louis Henry, *The Story of Signs: An Outline History of the Sign Arts from the Earliest Recorded Times to the Present "Atomic" Age* (Boston: A. MacGibbon, 1954); Tama Starr, *Signs and Wonders* (New York: Currency Books/Doubleday, 1998); Jakle and Sculle, *Signs in America's Auto Age*; *Signs of the Times: A Century of Excellence*. Supplement to *Signs of the Times*, Vol. 228, Centennial Edition (Cincinnati, OH, 2006). Locally: *Los Angeles Times* coverage in the 1920s and later, Nathan Marsak and Nigel Cox, *Los Angeles Neon* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer, 2002).

⁹ Although Clune's sign violated much-debated city ordinances that restricted the height of signs to twenty feet above the firewall, it was not alone in its violation. "Issues Ruling on High Sign; Theater Proprietor Must Submit to Trial," *Los Angeles Times*, 19 Feb. 1911, 116. Also see Marsak postcards for street view from the 1910s, pages 13, 17. One reason why some of the projecting, vertically oriented signs attached perpendicularly to the facades were narrow may be due to sign ordinances, which even the Municipal Art Commission agreed to revise in 1904. However, the Mayor continued to reject proposals lifting of height and width of projecting signs through the 1910s.

¹⁰ "Crowds Pack for Blocks," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 Mar. 1907; "Novel Electric Sign," *Los Angeles Times*, 31 Mar. 1906: "A unique advertising sign will make its appearance tonight over a building at seventh and main. It is nearly fifty feet long and contains a multitude of incandescents. The sign starts just like a person writing, spells out the name of a firm, makes a flourish underneath, and then puts in the punctuation. It is said to be the only one of the kind in the United States and was designed by R. W. W. Grigsby." The first mass-produced electric signs equipped with on-off flashers to create a sense of movement is said to date to 1909 (see <http://www.americansignmuseum.org/a-brief-history-of-the-sign-industry/>).

urban spectacle with signs for such establishments as the “New Million Dollar Hotel Rosslyn” boasting “Fire Proof Rooms” and “Popular Prices,” sentiments stressed by a red pulsing bulb-outlined heart enclosing the message; several years later it was doubled across the street when a second Rosslyn and another grandiose rooftop sign were erected.¹¹ By 1912, the most prominent downtown merchants, including some of the city’s earliest and renowned users of incandescent signs – Hotel Lankershim (demolished), Hamburgers Department Store, Orpheum, etc. – would band together to insist upon increasing the permitted height of what they described as electric signs as “city beautifiers” and proof of “progress and enterprise.”¹²

By the late 1910s, downtown’s emergence as the center for theatrical entertainment, residential apartment buildings and hotels, and department stores was illuminated through incandescent electrical advertising signs that reached higher and extended further than ever before. These signs became a portent—and exemplar—for what was to come as downtown decentralized first along streetcar lines then through the mass use of the automobile. For instance, as Sunset Boulevard developed in the 1910s its commercial establishments were well endowed with similar electric signs. Perhaps the biggest and best existing example, employing over 700 electrical sockets, 1300 red, green, and white bulbs, and dating from 1919 is the animated bowler who scores a strike and announces Jensen’s Recreation Center (restored in 1999).¹³ This is among the remaining restored and operating incandescent signs in the city, joining the 1924 Highland Theatre, whose 1200 green bulbs outlining its name blazed after restorations in 1999 and ca. 2005, seen along what would have then been called Pasadena Avenue (today, Figueroa). While the incandescent rooftop sign for the 1925 Superba Apartments can’t boast the same reconditioning, it’s rusting metal suitcase, channel letters, and electric sockets nevertheless reveal the once prominent use of electrified signs in Wilshire Center. Such signs also fortify the argument that Los Angeles promoted itself not just as a suburban idyll but also as an ideal locale for the urban density of mixed use, multifamily residential life.¹⁴ Electrification was a way to promote the city, in all its incarnations. As the trade journal the *Signs of the Times* boasted, in 1912, Los Angeles had 33 electric signs; by 1922, it had 7,000, including the world’s largest, for Hollywoodland, the 50-foot letters of which were encircled within 4,000 incandescent bulbs.¹⁵

¹¹ Marsak, *Los Angeles Neon*, 23; “Greatest of City Hotels: New Rosslyn Is Open with a Birthday Party,” *Los Angeles Times*, 8 Nov. 1914.

¹² “Higher Electric Signs Wanted in this City,” *Los Angeles Times*, 14 Nov. 1912, II5.

¹³ Kevin Starr, “Landscape Electric: A program that renews the city’s urban spirit by relighting Philip Marlowe’s neon L.A.,” *Los Angeles Times*, 4 July 1999, Home section, p. 1; <http://www.historicechopark.org/id97.html>, accessed 12/20/09.

¹⁴ Todd Gish, “Building Los Angeles: Urban Housing in the Suburban Metropolis, 1900-1936,” Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 2007.

¹⁵ *Signs of the Times*, 52; Marsak, *Los Angeles Neon*, 24.



An array of neon signs looking north on Vine Street from Selma Avenue, 1960
(Los Angeles Public Library)

Neon Signs, 1920s-1940s

In 1923 car dealer Earle C. Anthony flipped a switch and turned on America's first display of the uniquely patented Claude Neon. It was a show—and traffic—stopper. Located near the corner of 7th and Flower streets, thirty-foot orange-red letters spelled out "Packard," outlined in brilliant blue.¹⁶ Los Angeles was soon the epicenter of the production and consumption of neon – in fact, the city has designated a number of buildings and their neon signs as City Historic-Cultural Monuments – with local companies challenging the Claude Neon patent and monopoly to distribute neon nationwide.¹⁷ By

1928, the trade journal *Signs of the Times* claimed that California was home to the largest number and variety of neon signs.¹⁸ The colors and production methods were varied: bent, vacuum glass tubes might be clear, colored, or coated and contain a mixture of gases (for commercial signs, usually argon and neon) to produce piercing colors—from the orange-red and mercury blue most commonly found to greens and yellows—when connected through electrodes at each end to high voltage electrical power.¹⁹ By the late 1930s, fluorescent-coated tubing exposed to ultraviolet rays created a glow that enabled the addition of another range of possible colors, though it was not widely used until after the war (when it joined other forms of illumination before displacing neon, which required greater training and skill to employ).²⁰

¹⁶ Starr, "Landscape Electric," 1; Bob Pool, "Neon Lights," *Los Angeles Times*, B2; Marsak, *Los Angeles Neon*; <http://www.americansignmuseum.org/a-brief-history-of-the-sign-industry/>, accessed June 23, 2009.

¹⁷ See for instance "Sign Companies Looking Ahead," *Los Angeles Times*, 28 Jan. 1927, and various display advertisements in the *Los Angeles Times* for "genuine Claude Neon," by Nealite (31 Jan. 1927), Electrical Products Corporation (27 Sept. 1927), and Pig and Whistle (24 Jan. 1928).

¹⁸ "Fifty Years of Electric Sign," *Signs of the Times*, May 1956, 29, 25; Starr, "Landscape Electric"; Rudi Stern, *Let There Be Light* (New York: Abrams, 1979), 19, 24.

¹⁹ Auer, Preservation Briefs - 25; Al Ridenour, "Rough 'n' Radiant: Los Angeles' Museum of Neon Art," *Los Angeles Times*, 31 May 2001, F6.

²⁰ <http://www.americansignmuseum.org/a-brief-history-of-the-sign-industry/>; also see Marsak, *Los Angeles Neon*; Jakle and Sculle, *Signs in America's Auto Age*; *Signs of the Times*.

Neon was frequently used in tandem with incandescent bulbs, both of which might outline letters and images painted on the steel suitcases that had been holding signs since the turn of the century.²¹ While incandescent bulbs offered “points of light,” neon provided penetrating color and illumination (five times that of a bulb) at low operating costs.²² Soon neon was used solo, either over flat painted fascia letters (Formosa Cafe, the Bear Pit Bar-B-Q (see image at right), Sun



Bear Pit Bar-B-Q Sign, Mission Hills neighborhood (SurveyLA)

Lake Drugs), contained within metal cutout channel letters (the Desmond in downtown Los Angeles), freely mounted to create motion (Jack Stephan Plumbing), or attached to rooftop scaffolding as freestanding letters (Ravenswood, El Royale Apartments, “Jesus Saves” at the Ace Hotel) backed in reflective metal or presented billboard style (Arwyn Manor Apartments, Hotel Barbizon).

The phenomenon of neon, unto itself, was a spectacle that advertisers could capitalize on. It was a sign of modernity, too, and by the late 1920s and 1930s was employed as an architectural element, outlining the zigzags of deco, streamlines of moderne, or fascia of newly modernized store facades. Movie theaters built in previous decades added neon bedecked marquee and vertical blade signs and by the 1930s planned for it as an integral part of both design and modernization schemes (see the Tower, Palace, Los Angeles, Orpheum, and Wiltern theaters for existing examples of blade and marquee signs). At the same time, however, a depressed economy often meant that by the late 1930s broken glass tubing or bulbs weren’t replaced and the lights went dark. Then, in 1942, wartime materials restrictions on metals (including the copper used for wiring) reduced the production of neon signs while fears of enemy attack led to formal prohibitions: nighttime blackouts. In some cases, signs were extinguished for not just the duration of the war but for decades as they fell into disrepair and were not turned on again.²³

By the time of the blackouts, however, Los Angeles had become renowned for its sign districts. Broadway theaters and hotels near the entering rail lines downtown were early adopters of neon rooftop and projecting pylon and marquee signs, and in 1930 Bendix Aviation Corporation trumped all with its 150-foot tall neon letters at Maple and 13th Streets. In Hollywood—where The Broadway Hollywood department store sign could be seen for miles (see image on next page)—one could glance down Vine and find far more than today’s sole remaining original blade sign for the Taft Building²⁴ (though if traveling south from the Taft today, past Melrose Avenue one can find the Ravenswood and the El Royale blazing brightly). Driving north and south of Hollywood boulevards and venturing into the

²¹ Lisa Mahar, *American Signs: Form and Meaning on Route 66* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 2000) and Michael F. Crowe, “Neon Signs: Their Origin, Use, and Maintenance,” *APT Bulletin* (Association for Preservation Technology) 23, 2 (1991), 30-37.

²² Wagner, *The Story of Signs*, 43; Mahar, *American Signs*, 46; Crowe, “Neon Signs,” 30.

²³ Starr, “Landscape Electric”; *Signs of the Times*; Marsak, *Los Angeles Neon*.

²⁴ Marsak, *Los Angeles Neon*, 39.

Westlake-Wilshire area today still yields a bumper crop of existing rooftop neon: Ancelle Apartments, DuBarry Apartments, Fontenoy Apartments (see image below), Gaylord Apartments, Hotel Chancellor, Piccadilly Apartments, Trianon Apartments. Still, the views that frame all, as if drawn from Raymond Chandler's *Little Sister* or another of his 1930s novels, are from Wilshire Boulevard around Lafayette and MacArthur Parks, where the Asbury, Ansonia, Bryson, Park Wilshire, Wilshire Royale, and Westlake Theatre are still silhouetted against the night sky.



The BroadwayDepartment Store and its neon signwere declared Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument No. 664 in 1999 (Los Angeles Public Library)



The Fontenoy, designated Historic-Cultural Monument No. 882 in 2007, is located in the Hollywood community (City of Los Angeles – Office of Historic Resources)

By the time of the blackouts more than rooftop crowns blazed regally—almost every big theater in town had a marquee, projecting signs, towers, and rooftops gleaming and animating the land of “inexhaustible material dreams,” as Kevin Starr puts it. So did a full variety of other commercial establishments. Egalitarianism seemed to reign, as the 1939 WPA Guide to California suggests in this description of Hollywood: “At night thousands of names and slogans are outlined in neon, and searchlight beams often pierce the sky, perhaps announcing a motion picture premiere, perhaps the opening of a new hamburger stand.”²⁵ In 1935, the slogan that perhaps best highlighted the hopes and dreams of the promised land was “Jesus Saves,” the set of two orange-red neon signs erected by the Bible Institute of Los Angeles at 5th and Hope, moved in 1988 to Dr. Gene Scott’s Los Angeles University Church atop United Artists Theater at 933 S. Broadway (now the Ace Hotel, the sign was preserved and is located on the back side).²⁶ Perhaps its huge scale was intended as redemption for the smaller storefront neon that, by the 1940s, was a commonplace announcement for liquor stores, bars, and dance halls throughout the city (not to mention dry cleaners, markets, and eateries).

Decentralization and Advertising Signs, 1920s-1960s

As commerce directed its attention by the 1920s and 1930s to audiences in motion—streetcar riders as well as motorists—the size and quantity of projecting signs, marquees, and fascia signboards, especially along taxpayer strips, grew. The scale of advertisements paralleled the increased verticality of the historic urban core and rising commercial centers *as well as* the horizontal growth of the city along developing arterial streets and highways. The designs and quantity of off- and on-premise signs corresponded to the decentralization of the city, the rise in mass consumer durables and new sites of

²⁵ Quoted in William Brevda, “The Double Nihilation of the Neon,” 22.

²⁶ Cecilia Rasmussen, “Oilman’s Legacy Lives on in LA,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 Mar. 2008.

mass consumption and entertainment, and the growth of the professional advertising industry. It didn't hurt that the outdoor advertising and film industries enjoyed a symbiotic relationship. Indeed, movie theaters, electrical spectaculars, billboards, and other signs grew together up and out onto the sidewalks and commercial streets.

Billboards

Los Angeles was dominated by the billboard company Foster and Kleiser (later incorporated into Clear Channel Communications), which held a virtual monopoly on the West Coast. They were closely linked to the film industry, even locating their plant in Los Angeles for proximity of studio access. Foster and Kleiser became known for their modernist designs and novel three-dimensional approaches to outdoor advertising. In the 1920s, their low-slung, horizontally spanning billboards occupied entire vacant lots and, in an effort to appease critics, were sometimes made of pilaster frames that sported neoclassical columns and other sculptural elements (urns, Grecian figures/caryatids; see Lachman Bros "sign park" in Los Angeles, ca. 1920s, with multiple neoclassical billboards).²⁷ In the 1930s, the company made extensive use of the "Streamliner," which had characteristics including white porcelain-enameled steel with stainless steel trim, rounded corners, streamlining stripes, and beveled edges; often the same look was attempted through the use of wood and metal.²⁸

Foster and Kleiser Company dominated the market and was considered by many to be at the forefront of architectural and graphic design innovation at various historic moments. However, there were numerous other companies—large and small—that leased space throughout the city and created advertising that was spectacular in its own right. They too employed the rounded curves of the Streamliner, streaming horizontal bands or latticework at the bottom of billboards, and other variations. Indeed, variations on the Streamliner continued into the post-World War II period, when the shape was modified—set askew and then punched outward and upward with three-dimensional abstract and geometric forms bursting from the borders of the frame. By the 1950s and 1960s, the scale of this outburst was enlarged, with cutout and molded plastics, moving lights, rotating tri-panel screens, and objects (clocks, three-dimensional shapes to represent what was being advertised) set askew to exaggerate a sense of implied motion, as if to compete with other media (such as television) and the speed of turbo-charged cars of the day.

Notably, in 1946 renowned industrial designer Raymond Loewy was hired by the national outdoor advertising trade organization to create a more aerodynamic billboard frame that became the new industry standard (barely changed for decades thereafter). It included a slender beveled 19-inch molding, border of pearl gray, angled gold stripe, and white enameled surface.²⁹ This design was altered in 1949-50 to be lighter stainless steel. Despite the adoption of this as an industry standard, many companies produced wood versions (or employed a combination of metal and wood) that employed rounded corners and curved molding, a look that was employed through the 1960s, when it was abandoned in favor of the squared rectangle "royal face" still used today.

²⁷ Gudis, *Buyways*, 202-204.

²⁸ Ibid. 144-46.

²⁹ C. D. McCormick, *Advertising and Selling* 40 (February 1947), 60; see blueprints and patent applications for the Loewy billboard frame, OAA/Duke. Gannett Outdoor Advertising Company made one of the first notable changes to the Loewy panel, introducing the "Trim Panel," which replaced the foot-wide curved frame with a mere 1-1/2-inch border. James Fraser, *The American Billboard: 100 Years* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1991), 157.

In 1993, one neon Coca Cola sign that had glowed brightly atop the Newberry building in the 6500 block of Hollywood Boulevard since the 1930s was removed, to the chagrin of Hollywood boosters and preservationists, and it is uncertain if others remain (likely not).³⁰ Indeed, examples of the “special bulletins” or spectacular billboards from the 1920s through 1960s are hard to come by in Los Angeles and when they are found, they may have lost their luster but not their significance. Examples suggest that extant historic off-premise advertisements (billboards) are likely to have changed function, serving today as on-site signage instead.

Sign as Building, Building as Sign

Each of these dramatically stylized billboards transformed the two dimensions of the poster or painted advertisement into three-dimensional architectural space. As both billboards and store fronts increasingly relied upon the use of neon embellishments in the 1930s to spell out the brand or store name and to activate the front of their structures, their visual similarities increased. The front of the store was a “living billboard,” one journalist wrote of a Los Angeles drive-in market of the 1930s. This same concept was embodied by retail shops, supermarkets, and gasoline stations whose one-story, horizontally stretching buildings included a high-reaching facade of stucco or porcelain-enameled sheet metal on which the cutout or painted letters were arranged, poster like. A&P supermarket, for instance, had a 100-foot-long façade of light-colored stucco that sported little more than a sign.³¹ Industrial designer Walter Teague arranged all of the architectural features of one of his store fronts – from the doorway to windows to signage – as if they were visual elements of a “two-dimensional poster design,” according to Jeffrey Meikle, creating a streamlined, unified façade that would read easily in one swift glance.³² Teague’s approach, integrating all elements of architecture and advertisement within one harmonious yet dramatically simple design, was advocated by many architects, industrial designers, and sign-makers, whose work was in great demand, given that between 1924 and 1938, according to a survey by *The Architectural Record*, “three-quarters of the nation’s commercial establishments conducted face-lifting operations.”³³ They were aided at the federal level after the 1933 New Deal Modernization Credit Plan began to offer businesses financial aid for their “face lifts.”³⁴

In their quest to create stylish exteriors that would be apt containers for what was held within, many designers employed materials the public would perceive as “modern,” such as glass and metal veneers, plastic laminates, rounded edges, and bold graphics. Sometimes this impulse to mold the storefront façade as a package for the product within became literal, a programmatic packaging, as was the case on Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles when Marcus Miller “inserted an eight-foot tall camera of black Carrara, plate glass, and metal trim into the façade of the Darkroom photography shop.”³⁵

³⁰ Amy Wallace, “Removal of Coke Sign is ‘Classic’ Blunder, Preservationists Say,” *Los Angeles Times*, 31 Jan. 1993, Home ed., 1.

³¹ Richard Longstreth, *The Drive-in, the Supermarket, and the Transformation of Commercial Space in Los Angeles, 1914-1941* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: The MIT Press, 1999), 48, 62-63, 105-106; Hardwick, *Mall Maker*, 62-65; Jakle and Sculle, *The Gas Station in America*, 146.

³² Jeffrey Meikle, *Twentieth-Century Limited: Industrial Design in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979), 119.

³³ “Main Street, U.S.A.,” *The Architectural Forum* 70 (February 1939), 85; Horace Ginsbern, “In Store-Front Displays,” *Signs of the Times* 77, no. 3 (July 1934), 11; Morris Lapidus, “Where the Sign Begins...,” *Signs of the Times* 78, no. 1 (September 1934), 11; William F. Rooney, “Electrical Displays,” *Signs of the Times* 73, no. 2 (February 1933), 10.

³⁴ See Esperdy, *Modernizing Main Street*, 55-58 and Jakle and Sculle, 27.

³⁵ Esperdy, *Modernizing Main Street*, 168-70.



*Lincoln Heights Municipal Light, Water, and Power, 1996
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

Greater attention to graphic art and comprehensive design—in which a company’s logo, packaging, and use of typography correspond—were apparent in modernized storefronts and reflected the growing influence of the Bauhaus, International Style, and machine-age industrial or applied design as émigré artists and designers came from Europe to make Los Angeles their home and studio. Commercial and public signage during the 1930s and 1940s, for instance, dramatically employed sans-serif and other Bauhaus influenced typography as a means to unify the building as sign, soon melding into a style that some would call “PWA” or “WPA,” after the acronyms for New Deal public projects to build schools, libraries, and other municipal buildings. The best example of utilizing modern materials and a machine-age typeface integrated into the façade is the landmarked Lincoln Heights Municipal Light,

Water, and Power Building designed by S. Charles Lee in 1936; the nearby Fire Station Number 1 offers another variation of streamline moderne façade with metal letters in the Bauhaus style. Department of Water and Power buildings similarly have utilized typefaces that express their architectural derivation during the period of the New Deal. These are significant stylistic elements, since oftentimes today we discern the date of a building by its signage, and usually by its sans serif typographic cutout letters or metal type, which might perch above the entry or be attached with small metal rods to a smooth stucco expanse.

Yet there were widely disparate approaches to how a business might capture in a single moment, with a singular image or idea, the attention of passing motorists. Though many proprietors still followed the basic designs of downtown, with buildings fronting the street and signs tacked on as an afterthought, others moved their buildings back to allow auto access and parking, and embellished the structures with more flamboyant decorations, pylons, towers, and illuminated and neon signage.³⁶ The pylons and towers of Art Deco and Streamline commercial buildings, for instance, were advertisements unto themselves and usually bore an additional typographic or symbolic image. The 1924 Los Feliz Small Animal Hospital, for instance, uses a wide white pylon topped by a disc framed with an abstract image of a cat and a dog, encircled, while cutout sans-serif block letters span horizontally across the facade. With its various architectural and symbolic and typographic elements unified by a stylistic consistency, the building thus functions as sign and emblem of the period of its original construction.

In the post-World War II period, another wave of modernist comprehensive design came into use, likely an outcome of increased opposition to the blizzard of signs and signage that accompanied economic expansion of the era. Integrating signs and signage as part of the building, especially through the use of letters and logos as architectural elements, became the antidote prescribed by modernists (many of

³⁶ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 40. Liebs traces the development of roadside architecture from the nineteenth-century commercial strip to the 1980s. Also see Longstreth, “Don’t Get Out: The Automobile’s Impact on Five Building Types in Los Angeles, 1921-1941,” 32-56 and *City Center to Regional Mall; The Drive-In, the Supermarket*.

whom also were advancing Miesian styled corporate modernism).³⁷ Structures such as Piller's, a family owned and run department store on Colorado Boulevard in Eagle Rock (now Renaissance Arts Academy charter school), and other late modern commercial office buildings and banks, sought to read clearly yet without additional symbolic or metaphoric meanings expresses: the free floating graphic elements state the name and draw necessary attention as the main architectural features.



*CBS Television City at 7800 Beverly Boulevard, Undated
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

Other office and studio complexes, such as for CBS Television, also incorporated signage into the overall corporate identity, as early adopters of simple graphic logos. In the case of CBS, the corporate “eye” designed by art director William Golden peered down omnisciently from the sharp-edged west-facing wall of William Pereira’s 1952 modernist icon; the eye moved walls but persisted over the years. Yet just as corporate modern design was making inroads into even non-corporate sponsored architecture, so were metaphorical references populating the

Strip and the city in Los Angeles, tapping the reputation of the region as a stage set with little behind its false front, all surface and no depth. Artist Ed Ruscha took humorous note of this in paintings, photographs, and books *Some Los Angeles Apartments* (1965) and *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (1966) in which he took the ordinary and repetitive features of the built environment, framed them, and called them art. Some photographs from *Los Angeles Apartments*, for instance, depict the antithesis of the internationally renowned California Case Study House program of the 1940s and 1950s. Instead of pristine steel-and-glass cubes, Ruscha gives us boxy beige stucco, dingbat apartments built right over their parking. Their main features are exotic names typographically scripted, carved from thin plywood, and stuck on to stucco facades, which almost mock residents’ tired dreams of mobility, leisure, and California’s Mediterranean idyll life: the Capri, Algiers, St. Tropez, Fountain Blu (sic). Even while Ruscha’s images were bereft of people, they seem to acknowledge the role of the graphic emblem in creating place-based imagery and mental maps to the city. Signage for multi-residential dingbat and courtyard apartments like the Corsair or Capri, both on Harvard in Hollywood, or the Hausr (on Hauser) are dominant means by which their buildings gain identity, and refract regional history.³⁸

³⁷ For instance, in 1961, Mildred Constantine and Egbert Jacobson published a book that accompanied an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, entitled *Sign Language for Buildings and Landscapes* (New York: Reinhold, 1961, with a preface by Henry Russell Hitchcock), proposing a clean-up of city signs and signage by integrating graphic logos into corporate modernist architecture. Also at this time, critic Peter Blake published his *God’s Own Junkyard: The Planned Deterioration of America’s Landscape* (New York: Henry Holt, 1964), an excoriating attack against outdoor advertising as commercial blight.

³⁸ On the design and significance of the dingbat graphic elements, see John Chase with John Beach, “The Stucco Box,” in *Glitter Stucco & Dumpster Diving: Reflections on Building Production in the Vernacular City* (New York and London: Verso, 2000) and Clive Piercy, *Pretty Vacant: The Los Angeles Dingbat Observed* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2003).

Programmatic Architecture

Also tapping the mythos of Los Angeles as a place of fantasy and the fanciful were the roadside giants that sold what they pictured (or at least alluded to). Amusing and attention getting, aimed to lure motorists—and their cash—to the side of the road, no piece of roadside architecture loomed larger on the landscape and in the public imagination.

Who could resist

stopping at the Jumbo Lemon, Giant Orange, or The Big Cone for a refreshment?³⁹ Or how about visiting the papier-mâché owl lettered “I-Scream” (selling ice cream), a smiling pig with orange neon teeth with tamales inside, or giant donut, hot dog, or chili bowl selling just what they promised? This was architecture as advertisement. It was part of “The Great American Roadside,” the glorious marketplace unveiled by James Agee, in an article for *Fortune* in 1934, in which he explained that “The Eye is Quicker than the Brain.”⁴⁰ Agee had it right – this was not about deep thinking or pondering the meaning of the architectural symbolism. One glance revealed all. It was advertising, straight from P.T. Barnum’s handbook. And it was perfect for the roadside strip, where land was cheap, parking was ample, and a flamboyant idea was the biggest investment required to catch the attention of passing motorists.

The heyday of these thematic and colossal works of vernacular commercial architecture was from the late 1920s through the mid-1930s, with Southern California as central locus, hosting an estimated 90 such structures.⁴¹ After the war, it was still a viable structural form—after all, they cost little to produce and could be easily moved—and giant hot dogs (such as Tail of the Pup, image above, removed from the site in Los Angeles), donuts (the most well-known being Randy’s, which is actually in the city of Inglewood, not Los Angeles), and tamales continued to punctuate the Strip. Today, these roadside attractions and statuary—such as the black fiberglass steer used to entice motorists to get a steak at the



*Tail of the Pup restaurant at 300 N. La Cienega Boulevard, Undated
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

³⁹ Heimann and Georges, *California Crazy & Beyond: Roadside Vernacular Architecture*, is devoted to this genre of architecture. In the 1930s, giant oranges were built in Florida, California, and even upstate New York (J.J.C. Andrews, *The Well-Built Elephant and Other Roadside Attractions* [New York: Congdon & Weed, 1984], 32). The Big Cone was a 25-foot high upside-down ice cream cone built in 1928 in Santa Ana, California (Andrews, *The Well-Built Elephant*, xi). One teapot in Tacoma, Washington, served something else in its teacups -- it was a speakeasy for a while (Andrews, *The Well-Built Elephant*, 63). Jakle and Sculle, *Gas Station in America*, 194, 199; Karal Ann Marling, *Colossus of Roads: Myth and Symbol Along the American Highway* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 74; Daniel Vierya, *An Architectural History of America's Gas Stations* (New York and London: Collier MacMillan Publishers, 1979), 18-19; Andrews, *Well-Built Elephant*, 2.

⁴⁰ “The Great American Roadside,” 172. On the attribution of this article to James Agee, see Judith Keller, “Evans and Agee: ‘The Great American Roadside,’” *Fortune*, 1934; *History of Photography* 16 (Summer 1992), 170-71.

⁴¹ David Gebhard “Introduction” in Heimann and Georges, *California Crazy*, 5, 15.

Pacific Dining Car on Sixth Street (image below) or My Brothers Bar-B-Q in Woodland Hills (until 2015, see image below) or the colossal Carpeteria genie (see image below) advertising a chain of rug stores—are hard to find in Los Angeles. Though the Brown Derby’s “Eat in the Hat” advertisements still resonate for many, there is only a remnant of the original hat remaining on Wilshire Boulevard, shorn from its original site and now in the corner of a strip mall in Koreatown.



A long-time restaurant in Westlake, the Pacific Dining Car has been in continuous operation since 1921; originally constructed at 7th Street and Westlake, the building was moved to its current site in 1923 (SurveyLA)



The Carpeteria sign in North Hollywood (SurveyLA)



My Brother's Bar-B-Q sign; the establishment closed in 2016 (SurveyLA)

Remaining examples include the luxuriously clad black glass exterior complete with lens cap of the Darkroom on Wilshire, which originally sold cameras; Kindles Donuts, the oversized glazed drive through on Normandie and Century where motorists have placed orders since 1953; The Bucket, where burgers are flipped in Eagle Rock now; the chili bowl where you can buy Mr. Cecil's Ribs;⁴² and the tower where, in 1946 and today, a café operated (now named Cafecito Organico instead of Tower Café).



*Chili Bowl King, now Mr. Cecil's California Ribs
(SurveyLA)*

Acrylic Plastic, Fluorescent Lighting, and Pylons, 1940s-1980



Ship's in Westwood, 1978 (Los Angeles Public Library)

By the late 1940s, new translucent, colored plastics, Plexiglas acrylic, fluorescent tubing, and backlighting began to dominate signs and signage and to displace neon as a singular material. By the 1950s and 1960s (the design era dubbed "Populuxe" by Thomas Hine), signs using these new materials (or newly advanced materials, in the case of fluorescent, which had been around) began to grow exponentially in size, scale, symbolism, and exuberance. They

employed a broader range of colors, with shapes bursting outside of the frame of the marquee, blade, or rooftop structure—the better to read from faster moving cars and arterial highways or bustling boulevards. Businesses that had begun to dot the commercial landscape in the 1920s and 1930s with aerodynamic shapes and extruding signage—roadside restaurants, drive-ins, gas stations, hotels and motels, franchises, supermarkets—now grew in number and the amount of real estate they occupied,

⁴² Steve Harvey, "The Chili's All Gone But a Few Bowls Remain," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 Aug. 2009, A32. Between 1931 and 1941, Art Whizin constructed 22 Chili Bowls in Southern California; four survive today but only one of them is located in Los Angeles.

with both integrated and freestanding pylon and pedestal signs and a rainbow of color and imagery serving as architectural accouterments to what in some cases were otherwise indistinct single-story stucco or traditional buildings.⁴³

Modernist commercial architecture that was stylistically exaggerated enough that the buildings themselves seemed to take flight, as was the case with what has now become known as “Googie” architecture—inspired by late 1950s coffee shop architecture of Googie’s downtown (demolished), Ship’s in Westwood (demolished; see image on previous page), and Wich Stand on Slauson (altered), among others—fed a fascination for the technologies of the atomic age, the speed of space



Pann’s Coffee Shop and Sign (SurveyLA)

travel, and a lust for Cold War culture’s conspicuous consumption. Boomerangs, diagonals, cantilevers, biomorphic abstractions, zig-zags, parabolas, industrial “Swiss cheese” I-beams, and tapering pylons are among the glossary of “Googie” architectural style⁴⁴ that can still be seen (in varying condition) in extant signs and signage across Los Angeles, from the gloriously tilted typography of Pann’s Coffee Shop on La Tijera Boulevard to Johnie’s (formerly Romeo’s) scripted illumination (with electric bulbs and neon) on Wilshire Boulevard to Norm’s trademark diamond-shaped pennants in orange and white neon and Plexi stacked atop an I-beam on La Cienega, Sherman Way, and Pico Boulevards. “Googie gurus” Armet and Davis designed all three of these coffee shops, integrating pylons and signage into the architecture for visual, structural, and promotional purposes.⁴⁵

⁴³ Signs serving as the decoration for what architects Steven Izenour, Robert Venturi, and Denise Scott Brown famously called the “decorated shed” of the commercial vernacular roadside environment was explored in their *Learning from Las Vegas* studio and publication of the late 1960s (*Learning from Las Vegas* [Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 1972]). They mark the contrast between the “duck,” which for Los Angeles would be the donut or the hot dog stand in the shape of what they sell and the “decorated shed” as a way to address the role of symbolism expressed in different ways along the roadside. Both are legitimated in their discussion and in subsequent scholarly attention to it. So is the ad hoc commercialism of billboards, corporate signs and signage, and the advertisements produced for small businesses highlighted as worthy of attention and architectural emulation as expressions of living commercial history. See Aron Vinegar and Michael J. Goec, eds., *Relearning from Las Vegas* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009) and Aron Vinegar, *I Am a Monument: On Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008).

⁴⁴ Hess, *Googie Redux*.

⁴⁵ John Eng and Adriene Biondo, *Southern California Eats* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer, 2009), 46-47, 54-57.



Corbin Bowl in Tarzana (SurveyLA)

The excesses of architectural and consumerist expressions were articulated through signs soaring, often with constellations of starbursts or atomic particles in multi-colored hues spun from or wrapped round poles or posts to shout out or literally—through repeated diagonals and arrows—point the way to the businesses just beyond street’s edge (see, for instance, the Liquor Deli sign for Beverly Mart Liquors on Beverly Boulevard, Hollywood Downtowner Motel, Corbin Bowl, image at left, on Ventura Boulevard). As automobility increased decentralization patterns—and cars moved faster than ever before—larger expanses of land were devoted to roadside shops and restaurants, and parking areas were connected visually by monumental ground signs or freestanding pole signs with easy-to-erect modular components and metal alloy that allowed scaling greater heights at low cost. While through the 1940s, many roadside signs adhered to tradition: thin vertical signs attached to the façade or an armature at the roof, by the late 1940s and 1950s they were divorced from the buildings, set off on their own, often with horizontally oriented signs favored over the vertical,⁴⁶ or with some combination thereof, as can be seen in the neon topped pole signs in front of the Apple Pan (see image below) in Westwood and the motel and coffee shop signs on the stretch of Route 66 along Colorado Boulevard in Eagle Rock.

The late 1940s and 1950s roadside sign was also more expressionistic, both in their forms and other graphic typographic elements. Angles, curves, slanted or handwritten script typography, unusual novelty, and asymmetry were among the graphic elements employed to suggest energetic composition, and incandescent gained favor again as a way to create animated displays of chasing lights to accentuate feelings of speed and dynamism.⁴⁷ In some cases, thematic tableaux were created through this combination of moving lights, shapes, and other imagery, as in the House of Spirits postwar update to a 1924 building. It is a folksy scene in which a picket-fence-enclosed cottage puffs smoke from its chimney in a Technicolor blaze and a blue neon cocktail stands as tall as a tree. While not necessarily the hand of a master designer, this is a work of art that has found a place in the hearts of many Angelenos, certainly those who frequent this neighborhood. Its values are tangible insofar as the sign is architecturally innovative. However, its significance also rests on the larger associative values of commercial culture expressed in populist terms.



The Apple Pan sign (SurveyLA)

⁴⁶ Mahar, *American Signs*, 96, 33, 66, 67.

⁴⁷ Mahar, *American Signs*, 96, 121, 126.

Corporate Signs and Signage, 1950s-1980

More questions arise regarding significance when the signs fall within the period under consideration but have been mass-produced by corporate chains. For instance, in 1952 Holiday Inn laid the corporate groundwork for sign-bearing stantions as primary architectural elements unto themselves with their “Great Sign” of green and yellow electric lights and neon pulsating across broad curvilinear planes with a pole stuck through, topped with a golden star.⁴⁸ Now extinct (produced from roughly 1952-82), the “Great Sign” was mimicked by other roadside establishments that sought distinction through homogeneity: one glance at the sign was all that was needed to let motorists know that a standardized product was available on the grounds. Though once seemingly ubiquitous, the Great Sign has been sorely missed by those who wax nostalgic for the heyday of commercial roadside culture, its references to standardization and its dismissal of the original or the unique notwithstanding.⁴⁹ The Great Sign serves as an object lesson, as we see other corporate signs fade (or nearly fade) from view if not for public outcry by those for whom the image of the city relies upon corporate as well as vernacular commercial expression.⁵⁰

The dominance of national and international corporations and corporate chains by the 1960s and 1970s dramatically altered the scale and appearance of Los Angeles’ built environment. Street scenes of Wilshire Boulevard from 1970, for instance, are dotted with corporate signs atop the high-rise office towers, the backlit Plexiglas letters sharply punctuating the boulevard with their block forms spelling “Tishman,” “IBM,” “Texaco.” In the case of roadside establishments, the molded letters and shapes perch high atop poles, with those no longer in production, such as the orange ball with “76” written in blue (which once rotated) or KFC’s Plexiglas bucket with the Colonel smiling down upon passersby, winning a place in the hearts of consumers. Indeed, when the orange balls, designed in 1962, were replaced by red and blue monument signs in 2005, Conoco Phillips heard about it. The outcry was international, and the company ultimately responded by installing red and blue balls instead, some of which can be seen in Los Angeles instead of their original forebears.⁵¹ National chains like Arby’s, with its big cowboy hat and flashing electric bulbs, references a commercial frontier long gone—as are most of these ca. 1960s “Great Hat” signs, replaced over the last few years by more lightweight plastic and fluorescent signs and a revised logo that is more oven mitt than hat.⁵² Prototypes of signs for these and regional chains—such as Pioneer Chicken’s



An iconic Arby's sign, erected in 1969, in the Mission Hills neighborhood (SurveyLA)

⁴⁸ <http://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=2765>

⁴⁹ http://www.salon.com/entertainment/masterpiece/2002/04/29/holiday_inn

⁵⁰ The best known example of this is Boston's Citgo sign. See Wm. Stage, "Saving Signs of Past Times," *Christian Science Monitor*, 14 Feb. 1989, 12.

⁵¹ See <http://www.savethe76ball.com/>

⁵² Peskin Sign Co. in Ohio designed the original hat logo for Arby's, which was founded in 1964 and expanded greatly in the 1970s; Peskin continues to make and install Arby's signs today. See <http://starbeacon.com/local/x546366498/HATS-OFF-TO-ARBY-S>

cartoonish wagon pictured on backlit plastic box—have a place on the commercial strip and not just in a museum. More research needs to be done to date originals and to preserve a selection of these and the spate of multi-lingual plastic and hand-painted signs (such as the backlit plastic façade sign for GW Market in Chinatown), which also narrate the commercial, urban, and social developments of the city.

The year that concludes the period considered by SurveyLA – 1980 – makes sense in the context of signs and signage. Many in the outdoor advertising industry use that as a benchmark for the end of an era, when signs that used to be hand-designed gave way to computer generated and mass reproducible vinyl, plastic, and metal cutouts.⁵³ Yet it was also at this moment that Los Angeles became home to the highest concentration of artists and designers dedicated to revitalizing a lost art that had been refined for the purposes of commercial communication: neon.

⁵³ See, for instance, <http://business.highbeam.com/industry-reports/food/signs-advertising-specialties>

Conclusion



*Chinatown Gate West, Historic-Cultural Monument No. 825
(City of Los Angeles – Office of Historic Resources)*

In the 1980s, the Cultural Affairs Department of the City of Los Angeles, under Adolfo Nodal, began to support the refurbishing and relighting of neon signs in the MacArthur Park area. The project continued as LUMENS (Living Urban Museum of Electronic and Neon Signs), overseen by the Museum of Neon Art since 2000, and has refurbished electrical signs in different parts of the city. These include the relighting of the Los Angeles and Palace movie marquees (600 S. Broadway block) and gates to Chinatown (see image at left) along with the Bendix Tower, Plaza Hotel, Broadway Hollywood, KRKD tower, and Californian Hotel signs.⁵⁴

Outright preservation such as LUMENS is not the only way in which historic signage may be saved. Recognizing that the symbolic and nostalgic value of historic signs also translates into financial profit, many commercial establishments keep old signs even when they don't light up, are not in pristine condition, or reflect businesses long gone and unrelated to the current enterprise. For instance, the sign for Sarno's (see image at right) —though its bulbs and tubing are missing—still serves as a personal landmark for many in Los Feliz, while the diminutive La Perlita Bakery plastic box sign on Sunset Boulevard marks an earlier commercial era than that of the business now located at the site. These signs serve as memory markers, or what French critic Pierre Nora has called “realms of memory,” physical reminders of collective histories that we would otherwise lose track of or forget entirely.⁵⁵



*Sarno's at 1712 North Vermont Avenue, 1987
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

⁵⁴ *A Guide to Neon Lights Along the Wilshire Corridor* (Los Angeles: Cultural Affairs Department and California Institute of the Arts, ca. 1999), available at http://www.publicartinla.com/neon_signs/neon_guide.html, accessed June 20, 2009; Starr, “Landscape Electric”; Pool, “Neon Lights.”

⁵⁵ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Memoire*,” *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989), 7-25.

SUB-THEME: Rooftop Signs, 1906-1980

Summary Statement of Significance:	Rooftop signs are significant in the areas of commerce and social history for their association with the commercial, cultural, and urban development of Los Angeles in which advertising, mass consumption, mass entertainment, and transportation came to define, collectively, both the unique international identity and visual appearance of the city. Los Angeles has one of the largest numbers of extant incandescent and neon signs in the nation, adding to its important regional, symbolic association with promotional culture and popular entertainment of all sorts.
Period of Significance:	1906-1980
Period of Significance Justification:	1906, beginning of prominent use of incandescent electrical signs and professionalization of sign industry in Los Angeles; 1970 marks the concluding year for most “Googie” or exaggeratedly modernist signs and is incorporated; 1980 marks not only the end date of SurveyLA, but the rise of mass generated, standardized plastic signs and corporate logos (for which prototypes should be identified)
Geographic Location:	Concentrations downtown, Hollywood, Wilshire, Westlake; commercial arteries citywide; historic Route 66; and multi-use neighborhood nodes and commercial and entertainment districts citywide
Area(s) of Significance:	Commerce, Social History
Criteria:	NR A CR 1 Local 1 In some cases, rooftop signs may also be significant under Criterion C/3/3 depending on the design quality
Associated Property Type:	Commercial Signs—Rooftop
Property Sub-type Description:	Any sign erected upon, against, or directly above a roof or on top of or above the parapet of a building.
Property Sub-type Significance:	Rooftop signs are significant for their association with the commercial growth and prosperity of Los Angeles, the development of the city in association with transportation (streetcars and automobiles), and its reputation as a center for advertising, entertainment, and recreation.

Eligibility Standards:

- Originally constructed to advertise the name of the establishment or on- or off-premise goods, services, or other promotional, directional, or didactic messages
- Erected upon, against, or directly above a roof or on top of or above the parapet of a building
- Evokes iconic cultural associations with period- or regionally specific commercial establishments, personae, or multiple-family residential properties, and/or is an excellent example of an architectural style or promotional technique from its period

Character-Defining/Associative Features:

- Retains most of the essential character-defining features of its type
- May serve as a prototype for mass-produced corporate or chain-store logos
- Signs erected upon, against, or directly above a roof or on top of or above the parapet of a building
- Metal scaffolding, towers, pole/s attached to the rooftop to support freestanding letters, billboards, sheet metal or metal and plastic boxes (in varying shapes), or sculptural objects (such as statuary)
- Letters and images or other symbolic forms mounted to rooftop scaffolding or pole/s may be comprised of: incandescent bulbs, neon tubing, and/or fluorescent tubing outlining or accenting painted letters or images on metal and/or plastic sheet or box; channel letters containing one or more rows of tubing and/or bulbs; metal or plastic cutout, recessed, back-lit, or overlaid letters, images, or other shapes
- Neon and fluorescent tubing may be overlaid (one raised above another) or used freeform and set on timers to create moving images
- Incandescent bulbs may be set on timers to create moving images
- Metal, glass, or wood letters or channel letters containing or outlined by neon, fluorescent, or bulbs and supported against or above the parapet by metal rods, screws, pins, braces, and/or guy wires
- Illumination may be internal: a glass or plastic panel set in front of a series of parallel light sources (fluorescent, incandescent, or neon)
- Illumination may be external: metal signs with exposed bulbs, tubing, and electrical sockets; reflective metal surfaces illuminated by lighting either attached to the structure or aimed towards it from afar
- Signs may rotate or contain sequential, flashing, or intermittent lights

- Oriented towards major thoroughfares, often at an angle, sometimes not corresponding to the current formal street address or main entrance
- Signs may be two-, three-, or four-faced, attached to one another but oriented to different directions of street traffic
- Evokes commercial ethos of its period through typography, materials, and/or imagery

Integrity Considerations:

- Should retain integrity of Location, Design, Setting, Materials and Association
- Tubing and bulbs may be broken or missing, with only electrical sockets for electrodes remaining
- Painted letters or images may be faded
- Sheet metal box may be rusted or nicked or porcelain coatings damaged if some elements of original remain
- Sign may have been moved within the property lines of the building
- For local preservation, sign may have been moved off site to avoid demolition, for parallel use elsewhere, or for artistic display
- Billboard originally used to advertise off-premise goods and services may now serve as on-premise advertisement
- Some letters or other elements of the sign may have been removed or illegible, if the general meaning or associations remain
- Bulbs may have been replaced by neon if such alteration was within the period of significance
- Replacement of electrical bulbs and neon are acceptable if they follow the contours and basic materials of the sign (evident by sockets, wiring, remnants of tubing or gases, or painted images) and remain within the period of significance
- Replacement of transformers, switches, timers or other mechanisms for the control of voltage, dimmers, and flashing mechanisms is acceptable to meet contemporary safety and maintenance standards
- Retains the relationship between the building and the street, even if surroundings have altered the visibility of the sign

SUB-THEME: Marquees, 1900s-1980

Summary Statement of Significance:	Marquee signs are significant to the commercial, cultural, and urban development of Los Angeles in which advertising, mass consumption, mass entertainment, and transportation came to define, collectively, both the unique international identity and visual appearance of the city. The city has one of the largest numbers of extant historic theaters employing incandescent and neon marquee signs in the nation, adding to its important regional, symbolic association with promotional culture and popular entertainment.		
Period of Significance:	1900s-1980		
Period of Significance Justification:	1900s, beginning of prominent use of permanent marquees used to draw audience attention; 1980, marks the end of SurveyLA period of consideration, and the widespread use of computer generated, mass produced marquee		
Geographic Location:	Concentrations in commercial and entertainment centers, especially downtown Hollywood, Westwood; commercial arteries citywide and multi-use neighborhood nodes and commercial and entertainment sites citywide		
Area(s) of Significance:	Commerce, Social History		
Criteria:	NR A/C	CR 1/3	Local 1/3
Associated Property Type:	Commercial—Marquee, 1900s-1980		
Property Sub-type Description:	A permanent architectural canopy or awning used visually as an advertising, directional, or promotional tool and physically as a means of capturing the attention of potential customers (especially, in latter period, motorists), leading them into the building, and protecting them from natural elements.		
Property Sub-type Significance:	Marquee signs are significant for their association with mass entertainment and commerce, the development of the city in association with transportation (streetcars and automobiles), and its reputation as a center for advertising, entertainment, and recreation.		
Eligibility Standards:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Originally constructed to draw the attention of passersby to a building, to advertise the name of the establishment and its offerings (on-premise goods and/or services)• Projects over the sidewalk or apparent entranceway (even		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">if not in current use) or driveway• Evokes iconic cultural associations with period- or regionally specific commercial establishments, personae, or multiple-family residential properties, and/or is an excellent example of an architectural style or promotional technique from its period• Remains in situ
Character-Defining/Associative Features:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Retains most of the essential character-defining features of its type• Permanent architectural canopy or awning projecting over the sidewalk or driveway, sometimes attached after the original construction of the building• Generally triangulates on two sides facing opposing traffic with a central panel parallel to the street (though sometimes semicircular)• Frequently includes ornate stylized adornments and towers or pylons attached to the marquee, all of which may be outlined or ringed in neon and/or fluorescent• Usually the name of the establishment is outlined in various colors and shapes of neon and/or fluorescent and located in multiple places: sides, center panel, towers• Sometimes rows of incandescent bulbs line the underside or the upper or lower edges of the marquee• Incandescent bulbs and neon or fluorescent may be set on timers to create sequential, flashing, or intermittent lights• Oriented towards major thoroughfares, often at an angle, sometimes not corresponding to the current formal street address or main entrance.• Evokes commercial ethos of its period through typeface, materials, and/or imagery
Integrity Considerations:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Should retain integrity of Location, Association, Materials and Feeling• Tubing and bulbs may be broken or missing, with only electrical sockets for electrodes remaining• Marquee may have been added after the initial construction of the building or altered during modernization within its period of significance• Some letters or other elements of the sign may have been removed or illegible, if the general meaning or associations remain• Bulbs may have been replaced by neon if such alteration was within the period of significance• Replacement electrical bulbs and neon are acceptable if they follow the contours and basic materials of the sign (evident by sockets, wiring, remnants of tubing or gases, or

painted images) and remain within the period of significance

- Replacement of transformers, switches, timers or other mechanisms for the control of voltage, dimmers, and flashing mechanisms is acceptable to meet contemporary safety and maintenance standards
- Remains an integral part of the fabric of the building

SUB-THEME: Projecting Blade Signs, 1906-1980

Summary Statement of Significance: Projecting signs are significant to the commercial, cultural, and urban development of Los Angeles in which advertising, mass consumption, mass entertainment, and transportation came to define, collectively, both the unique international identity and visual appearance of the city.

Period of Significance: 1906-1980

Period of Significance Justification: 1906, beginning of prominent use of incandescent electrical signs, professionalization of the sign industry in Los Angeles, and efforts to change existing city restrictions on projecting signs; 1980 marks the concluding year considered by SurveyLA and the growth of computer generated plastic signs

Geographic Location:

- Citywide along commercial or mixed-use streets; area of high concentration of entertainment, commerce, and multi-residential buildings (e.g., Hollywood, Westwood, downtown)
- Commercial arteries throughout the city (e.g., Vermont and Western Avenues, Wilshire, Sunset, Hollywood, and Ventura Boulevards)
- All streets serving as portions of Route 66 from its founding in 1926 to its decommissioning in 1985

Area(s) of Significance: Commerce, Social History

Criteria: **NR** A **CR** 1 **Local** 1

Associated Property Type: Commercial—Projecting Blade Signs, 1906-1980

Property Sub-type Description: A projecting blade sign is an autonomous object attached perpendicularly to the façade of a building, projects over the sidewalk, is oriented to street traffic, and employs advertising strategies to capture the attention of moving audiences.

Property Sub-type Significance: Projecting blade signs are significant for their association with small and large commercial establishments and entertainment venues, the development of the city in association with transportation (streetcars and automobiles), and its reputation as a center for advertising, entertainment, and recreation.

Eligibility Standards:

- Originally constructed to draw the attention of passersby to a building, to advertise the name of the establishment and its offerings (on-premise goods and/or services)

- Projects over the sidewalk, perpendicular to the building façade, sometimes extending above the cornice, parapet, or roof
- May serve as a prototype for mass-produced corporate or chain-store logos
- Evokes iconic cultural associations with period- or regionally specific commercial establishments, personae, or multiple-family residential properties, and/or is an excellent example of an architectural style or promotional technique from its period

Character-Defining/Associative Features:

- Retains most of the essential character-defining features of its type
- Perpendicular orientation to the building façade, attached by a pole, metal brackets, and/or guy wires
- Often extends vertically above the cornice, parapet, or roofline of the building
- Frequently employs metal or metal and plastic suitcases in a variety of shapes (not always rectilinear), often two faced in orientation to traffic
- Often includes painted images on porcelain enamel, varnished metal, or plastic
- External illumination includes letters and images outlined in neon, fluorescent, and/or bulbs, sometimes encased within metal channel letters; may include freestanding neon tubing to suggest movement
- Plastic (Plexiglas) signs usually internally illuminated
- Symbolic imagery—scenes, pictures—may join lettering or words or names
- Incandescent bulbs and neon or fluorescent may be set on timers to create sequential, flashing, or intermittent lights
- May exemplify design features of Art Deco, Streamline Moderne, exaggeratedly modernist/“Googie,” or thematic architectural styles—streamlines, angularity, offset composition of intersecting forms, fanciful or programmatic pictorial illustrations
- Evokes commercial ethos of its period through forms, typography, materials, and/or imagery

Integrity Considerations:

- Should retain integrity of Location, Association, Feeling and Materials
- Painted letters and imagery may be faded but discernible
- Tubing and bulbs may be broken or missing, with only electrical sockets for electrodes remaining
- May be added after the initial design and construction of the building

- Sheet metal box may be rusted or nicked or porcelain coatings damaged if some elements of original remain
- Some letters or other elements of the sign may have been removed or illegible, if the general meaning or associations remain
- Bulbs may have been replaced by neon if such alteration was within the period of significance
- Replacement of electrical bulbs and neon are acceptable if they follow the contours and basic materials of the sign (evident by sockets, wiring, remnants of tubing or gases, or painted images) and remain within the period of significance
- Replacement of transformers, switches, timers or other mechanisms for the control of voltage, dimmers, and flashing mechanisms is acceptable to meet contemporary safety and maintenance standards
- Sign may have been moved within the property lines of the building
- For local preservation, sign may have been moved off site to avoid demolition, for parallel use elsewhere, or for artistic display

SUB-THEME: Pylons, Poles, Stantions, and Billboards, 1920-1980

Summary Statement of Significance:	Pylons, Poles, Stantions, and Billboards represent one structural type of sign significant to the commercial, cultural, and urban development of Los Angeles in which advertising, mass consumption, entertainment, and automobility came to define, collectively, both the unique international identity and visual appearance of the city.		
Period of Significance:	1920-1980		
Period of Significance Justification:	1920, beginning of prominent use of modernist and art deco pylons oriented to motorists; 1980 marks the concluding year for SurveyLA		
Geographic Location:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Areas known for 1920s-1940s modernist and streamline moderne and 1940s-1970 exaggeratedly modernist or “Googie” style buildings • Throughout the city along commercial and mixed-use streets and commercial arteries • All streets serving as portions of Route 66 from its founding in 1926 to its decommissioning in 1985 		
Area(s) of Significance:	Commerce, Social History		
Criteria:	NR A	CR 1	Local 1
Associated Property Type:	Commercial—Integrated Pylons (1920s-1970)		
Property Sub-type Description:	Any sign that is vertically oriented, integral to the architectural fabric of the building, and extends beyond the cornice, parapet, or roofline to project into space as a tower-like structure.		
Property Sub-type Significance:	Originally intended to serve as towering, architecturally synthesized advertising signs, integrated pylons, poles, and stantions are significant for their association with the commercial growth and prosperity of Los Angeles, the development of the city in association with transportation (automobiles), and the development of significant architectural styles and promotional techniques oriented to mobile audiences.		
Eligibility Standards:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Originally constructed as an integral, vertical architectural element of the building to bear advertisements to be read from a distance by moving audiences 		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May serve as a prototype for mass-produced corporate or chain-store logos• Evokes iconic cultural associations with period- or regionally specific commercial establishments, personae, or multiple-family residential properties, and/or is an excellent example of an architectural style or promotional technique from its period• Remains in situ
Character-Defining/Associative Features:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Originally constructed as an integral, vertical architectural element of the building to bear advertisements to be read from a distance by moving audiences• Retains the essential character-defining features of its type• May serve as a prototype for mass-produced corporate or chain-store logos• Evokes iconic cultural associations with period- or regionally specific commercial establishments, personae, or multiple-family residential properties, and/or is an excellent example of an architectural style or promotional technique from its period• Retains the required aspects of integrity• Remains in situ
Integrity Considerations:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tubing may be broken or missing• Painted letters or images may be faded or removed• Some letters or other elements of the sign may have been removed or illegible, if the general meaning or associations remain• The lifespan of neon is not everlasting, so replacements are acceptable if they follow the contours and basic materials of the sign (evident by sockets, wiring, remnants of tubing or gases, or painted images)• Replacement of transformers, switches, timers or other mechanisms for the control of voltage, dimmers, and flashing mechanisms is acceptable to meet contemporary safety and maintenance standards• Remains an integral part of the fabric of the building
Associated Property Type:	Commercial—Freestanding Pylons, Poles, Towers, and Stantions, 1920s-1980 [Includes early and post-WWII Rte 66, Googies, late 1960s and 70s roadside restaurants (Arby's, etc.), gasoline stations, hotels/motels, corporate chains]
Property Sub-type Description:	Any freestanding pylon, pole, tower, or stantion bearing or

serving as an advertising sign that is located within the property lines of the commercial establishment though unattached to the building.

Property Sub-type Significance:

Freestanding pylons, poles, towers, or stantions are significant for their association with the commercial growth and prosperity of Los Angeles, the development of the city in association with transportation (automobiles), and the development of significant architectural styles and promotional techniques oriented to mobile audiences.

Eligibility Standards:

- Originally constructed as freestanding support for advertisements to be read from a distance by moving audiences
- May serve as a prototype for mass-produced corporate or chain-store logos
- Evokes iconic cultural associations with period- or regionally specific commercial establishments, personae, or multiple-family residential properties, and/or is an excellent example of an architectural style or promotional technique from its period

Character-Defining/Associative Features:

- Retains most of the essential character-defining features of its type
- Usually freestanding steel poles, rectilinear stucco-faced pylons, towers, or stantions that extend vertically, separate from and usually (especially in post-World War II years) rising to a height above that of the building it advertises
- Often serves to advertise and visually link the building and parking lot to street frontage
- Pylons, poles, stantions, or towers support metal or plastic boxes (in varying dimensions and shapes), cutouts, spheres, statuary, or other three-dimensional forms
- May support a combination of backlit plastic, incandescent bulbs, neon tubing, and/or fluorescent tubing
- Often bear signs on both sides and may include other intersecting shapes and forms that jut from the primary structure at different angles
- May exemplify design features of Art Deco, Streamline Moderne, or exaggeratedly modernist or “Googie” architectural styles
- May exemplify design features of sans-serif modernism; scripted and slanted typefaces of post-World War II period; askew, exaggeratedly modernist or “Googie” styled forms and features; thematic or exotic imagery; or bubble-type, psychedelic, or hand-designed computer-esque

	<p>forms, typefaces, and colors of 1960s and 1970s stylization</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evokes commercial ethos of its period through forms, typography, material, and/or imagery
Integrity Considerations:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tubing and bulbs may be broken or missing, with only electrical sockets for electrodes remaining• Painted letters or images may be faded; plastic elements might be faded and/or segments missing• Sheet metal box or other cutout or three-dimensional shapes may be rusted, nicked, or repainted, or porcelain coatings damaged if some elements of original remain• Sign may have been moved within the property lines of the building; for local preservation, sign may have been moved off site to avoid demolition, for parallel (i.e., consistent) use elsewhere, or for artistic display• Some letters or other elements of the sign may have been removed or illegible, if the general meaning or associations remain• Bulbs may have been replaced by neon if such alteration was within the period of significance• The lifespan of electrical bulbs and neon is not everlasting, so replacements are acceptable if they follow the contours and basic materials of the sign (evident by sockets, wiring, remnants of tubing or gases, or painted images) and remain within the period of significance• Replacement of transformers, switches, timers or other mechanisms for the control of voltage, dimmers, and flashing mechanisms is acceptable to meet contemporary safety and maintenance standards• Retains the relationship between the building and the street, even if surroundings have altered the visibility of the sign
Associated Property Type:	Commercial—Freestanding Billboard (1920s-1960s)
Property Sub-type Description:	Any freestanding metal or wood scaffolding or poles supporting a metal or wood billboard frame located within the property lines of a commercial establishment though unattached to the building.
Property Sub-type Significance:	Freestanding billboards are significant for their association with the commercial growth and prosperity of Los Angeles, the development of the city in association with transportation (automobiles), and the development of significant architectural styles and promotional techniques oriented to mobile audiences.

Eligibility Standards:

- Originally constructed as freestanding support for advertisements to be read from a distance by moving audiences
- Evokes iconic cultural associations with period- or regionally specific commercial establishments, personae, or multiple-family residential properties, and/or is an excellent example of an architectural style or promotional technique from its period

Character-Defining/Associative Features:

- Retains most of the essential character-defining features of its type
- Usually freestanding metal or wood scaffolding or poles holding rectilinear wood or metal frames
- May include neon, incandescent, fluorescent, or other illumination
- May include other intersecting shapes and forms or elements such as statuary, clocks, or other three-dimensional objects
- Significant design elements may include: neoclassical columns, pilasters, or caryatids (ca. 1920s); rounded corners with beveled edges and/or streamlining stripes (1930s-1960s); irregular shapes with other objects attached (1930s-60s)
- Evokes commercial ethos of its period through forms, typography, material, and/or imagery

Integrity Considerations:

- Electrification systems (overhanging or otherwise attached fixtures and bulbs) may be missing, broken, or out of service
- Painted letters or images may be faded or omitted entirely
- Metal or wood frames and scaffolding may rusted, nicked, or repainted if elements of the original remain
- Sign may be used for on-premise advertising purposes rather than off-premise
- Retains the relationship between the building and the street, even if surroundings have altered the visibility of the sign

SUB-THHEME: Façade Signs, late 1800s-1980

Summary Statement of Significance:	Signs painted, carved, or attached to the sides of buildings represent a type of advertising sign significant to the commercial, cultural, and urban development of Los Angeles in which advertising, mass consumption, entertainment, and transportation came to define, collectively, both the unique international identity and visual appearance of the city.		
Period of Significance:	late 1800s-1980		
Period of Significance Justification:	Late 1800s, marking the extant commercial buildings bearing carved fascia signs and cornerstones; 1980 marks the concluding year for SurveyLA		
Geographic Location:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Downtown commercial areas• On public buildings (schools, utility buildings, fire stations) and ecclesiastical buildings• Throughout the city along commercial and mixed-use streets and commercial arteries, especially those developed in the period of significance		
Area(s) of Significance:	Commerce, Social History		
Criteria:	NR A	CR 1	Local 1
Associated Property Type:	Commercial and Institutional Buildings—Inscribed Fascia, Cornice, and Cornerstone Signs, late 1800s-1920s		
Property Sub-type Description:	Names of original owners and businesses and/or the date of building construction inscribed, carved, or molded in terra cotta relief on the fascia, cornice, or cornerstones of a building.		
Property Sub-type Significance:	Significant for its preservation of historical information regarding the original ownership, business, or date of a building that might not be otherwise apparent, and for its association with the commercial growth and prosperity of Los Angeles, and the development of significant architectural styles and promotional techniques.		
Eligibility Standards:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Carved, inscribed, or attached to the building as an indication of ownership, business, or year of construction• Evokes iconic cultural associations with period- or regionally specific commercial establishments, personae, or multiple-family residential properties, and/or is an		

	<p>excellent example of an architectural style or promotional technique from its period</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Remains in situ
Character-Defining/Associative Features:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Retains most of the essential character-defining features of its type• Inscribed, carved, or molded in terra cotta relief to bear name of original owners on upper part of the building or above doorways at the street level• Names may be outlined or have neon within the carved channels of the lettering• Some are formed in the sheet metal of fascia or cornices or painted above the fascia• Often located on all street-facing sides of the building• May exemplify typographic features of Gothic, classical, or modernist design• Evokes commercial or architectural design ethos of its period through its typography and/or placement
Integrity Considerations:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some letters or other elements of the sign may have been removed or illegible, if the general meaning or associations remain• The lifespan of neon is not everlasting, so replacements are acceptable if they follow the contours and basic materials of the sign (evident by sockets, wiring, remnants of tubing or gases, or painted images)• Replacement of transformers, switches, timers or other mechanisms for the control of voltage, dimmers, and flashing mechanisms is acceptable to meet contemporary safety and maintenance standards• Must remain in location and as part of the fabric of the building
Associated Property Type:	Commercial—Wall Mounted and Façade Signs, 1920s-1980
Property Sub-type Description:	Signs representing owners, businesses, or utilities mounted to the walls (façade or sides) of a building from grade to top of parapet.
Property Sub-type Significance:	Significant for its preservation of historical information regarding the original ownership and date of a building that might not be otherwise apparent, and for its association with the commercial growth and prosperity of Los Angeles, and the development of significant architectural styles and promotional techniques.

Eligibility Standards:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evokes iconic cultural associations with period- or regionally specific establishments, personae, or multiple-family residential properties, and/or is an excellent example of an architectural style or promotional technique from its period• Remains in situ
Character-Defining/Associative Features:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Retains most of the essential character-defining features of its type• Usually carved, cut, molded, and/or painted wood, glass, metal, or plastic letters or objects attached to a building by metal rods, screws, braces, wooden plaques, or within boxlike cabinets• Typographic forms, imagery, and/or objects evoke the ethos of the era of its significance• Often located on fascia, above doorway, cornice or parapet, or attached to and extending above the latter• May exemplify design features of sans-serif modernism; scripted and slanted typefaces of post-World War II period; askew, exaggeratedly modernist or “Googie” styled forms and features; thematic or exotic imagery; or bubble-type, psychedelic, or hand-designed computer-esque forms, typefaces, and colors of 1960s and 1970s stylization• Frequently illuminated by external lighting, backlit fluorescent, incandescent bulbs, or neon in-lighting (within channel letters) or outlines
Integrity Considerations:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some letters or other elements of the sign may have been removed or illegible, if the general meaning or associations remain• Some elements of the sign (i.e., the name of the building or business) may be missing, if other elements (imagery, icons) are apparent• The lifespan of neon is not everlasting, so replacements are acceptable if they follow the contours and basic materials of the sign (evident by sockets, wiring, remnants of tubing or gases, or painted images)• Replacement of transformers, switches, timers or other mechanisms for the control of voltage, dimmers, and flashing mechanisms is acceptable to meet contemporary safety and maintenance standards• Sign may have been moved within the property lines of the building; for local preservation, sign may have been moved off site to avoid demolition, for parallel (i.e., consistent) use elsewhere, or for artistic display
Associated Property Type:	Commercial—Painted Wall Signs, 1900s-1980

Property Sub-type Description:	On- and off-premise advertisements painted on the walls of commercial buildings.
Property Sub-type Significance:	Significant for its association with the commercial growth and prosperity of Los Angeles, and the development of significant promotional techniques.
Eligibility Standards:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Signs painted on the brick and mortar walls of a building that advertise on- and/or off-premise goods and services• Evokes iconic cultural associations with period- or regionally specific establishments, personae, or multiple-family residential properties, and/or is an excellent example of an architectural style or promotional technique from its period• Remains in situ
Character-Defining/Associative Features:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Retains most of the essential character-defining features of its type• Painted on bricks and mortar or stucco or other wall covering• Often includes more than one sign on the buildings, and may be for off-premise goods and services as well as on-premise• Often added to or changed over the course of the building's history• Evokes commercial ethos of its period through typographic styles or commercial imagery
Integrity Considerations:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some letters or other elements of the sign may have been removed or illegible, if the general meaning or associations remain• Signs may be "ghosts" of their originals, with portions overlaid with other signs, yet still discernible to the naked eye• Must remain part of the fabric of the building

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

American Sign Museum. Modified 2013. <http://www.americansignmuseum.org/happy-birthday-neon/>.

Auer, Michael J. "The Preservation of Historic Signs." Preservation Briefs – 25. October 1991.
<https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/25-signs.htm>.

Brevda, William. "The Double Nihilation of the Neon." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 41 (Spring 1999), 70-103.

Chase, John, and John Beach. "The Stucco Box." *Glitter Stucco & Dumpster Diving: Reflections on Building Production in the Vernacular City*. New York and London: Verso, 2000.

Constantine, Mildred, and Egbert Jacobson. *Sign Language for Buildings and Landscape*. Preface by Henry Russell Hitchcock. New York: Reinhold, 1961.

Davidson, Len. *Vintage Neon*. Atglen, PA: Schiffer, 1999.

Di Lemme, Philip. *American Streamline: A Handbook of Neon Advertising Design*. Cincinnati, Ohio: ST Publications, 1984.

Esperdy, Gabrielle. *Modernizing Main Street*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago, 2008.

Evans, Bill. *Shopfronts*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1981.

Fraser, James. *The American Billboard: 100 Years*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1991.

Gudis, Catherine. *Buyways: Billboards, Automobiles, and the American Landscape*. New York and London: Routledge, 2004.

Isenberg, Alison. *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago, 2004.

Jakle, John A., and Keith A. Sculle. *Signs in America's Auto Age: Signatures of Landscape and Place*. Iowa City: University of Iowa, 2004.

----- . *The Gas Station in America*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.

Liebs, Chester. *Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture*. 2nd ed. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins, 1995.

Longstreth, Richard. *City Center to Regional Mall: Architecture, the Automobile, and Retailing in Los Angeles, 1920-1950*. Cambridge, Mass., and London: The MIT Press, 1997.

----- . *The Drive-in, the Supermarket, and the Transformation of Commercial Space in Los Angeles, 1914-1941*. Cambridge, Mass., and London: The MIT Press, 1999.

-----, "The Forgotten Arterial Landscape: Photographic Documentation of Commercial Development Along Los Angeles Boulevards During the Interwar Years." *Journal of Urban History* 233 (May 1997), 437-60.

Mahar, Lisa. *American Signs: Form and Meaning on Route 66*. New York: Monacelli Press, 2000.

Margolies, John, and Emily Gwathmey. *Signs of Our Time*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1993.

Marsak, Nathan, and Nigel Cox. *Los Angeles Neon*. Atglen, PA: Schiffer, 2002.

Museum of Neon Art. Modified 2016. <http://www.neonmona.org/flash/>.

Piercy, Clive. *Pretty Vacant: The Los Angeles Dingbat Observed*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2003.

Signs of the Times: A Century of Excellence. Supplement to *Signs of the Times* (Cincinnati, OH). Vol. 228, Centennial Edition, 2006.

Stage, Wm. *Ghost Signs: Brick Wall Signs in America*. Cincinnati, OH: ST Publications, 1989.

Starr, Tama. *Signs and Wonders*. New York: Currency Books/Doubleday, 1998.

Stern, Rudi. *Let There Be Light*. New York: Abrams, 1979.

Wagner, Charles Louis Henry. *The Story of Signs: An Outline History of the Sign Arts from the Earliest Recorded Times to the Present "Atomic" Age*. Boston: A. MacGibbon, 1954.