SurveyLA
Los Angeles Historic Resources Survey

LOS ANGELES CITYWIDE HISTORIC CONTEXT STATEMENT
Context: Commercial Development, 1850-1980
Theme: The Rise of Corporations and Corporate Types
Subtheme: High-Rise Corporate Office Buildings, 1945-1975

Prepared for:

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

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PREFACE

This theme of "The Rise of Corporations and Corporate Types" is a component of Los Angeles's citywide historic context statement and provides guidance to field surveyors in identifying and evaluating high-rise corporate office buildings. Refer to HistoricPlacesLA.org for information on designated resources associated with this theme as well as those identified through SurveyLA and other surveys.

CONTRIBUTOR

Daniel Prosser is a historian and preservation architect. He holds an M.Arch. from Ohio State University and a Ph.D. in history from Northwestern University. Before retiring he was the Historic Sites Architect for the Kansas State Historical Society.

INTRODUCTION

This theme examines high-rise corporate office buildings constructed between 1945 and 1975. A corporate high rise is one that associates the building with a single company. The company typically has its headquarters in the upper floors and, if appropriate to its purpose, a client branch on the ground floor. It also has its name or logo conspicuously displayed on the exterior.

The corporate high rise is significant in three ways. First, it shows how architects combined the modernist styles of the postwar period together with advances in construction technology to produce a distinct building type. Second, it illustrates the importance of both locally based businesses and regional branches of national companies in the development of office structures. Third, it points out the role played by zoning, building height regulations, and urban development programs in shaping the architecture of the city's commercial districts.

The Historic Context begins with a look at the clients and the architects of these buildings. The clients were typically oil companies, insurance companies, banks, and, in one notable case, a phonograph record company, seeking to place their brands on examples of significant architecture. Their patronage varied from full funding and occupancy of a building to being the largest leaseholder in a building constructed by others.

Like their clients, the architects were large corporate entities. They had experience with complicated zoning and site planning requirements. They could undertake the complex task of high-rise design, with its structural, mechanical, plumbing, and electrical engineering needs. They also shared the business-oriented, budget-minded culture of their clients.

The Historic Context then moves on to the buildings themselves. It looks first at resources constructed under the 150-foot height limit in force until the late 1950s. Most of these office buildings made use of Late Moderne forms, but with innovations that hinted at the later Corporate International style.

There were two types of locations for these early postwar resources. One was the Downtown central business district, where new office buildings were much like their prewar predecessors in their simple rectangular massing which filled the entire site. The other consisted of the outlying commercial districts, specifically Wilshire Boulevard and Hollywood, where these buildings became complex, free-standing objects, separate from their neighbors and intended to be seen in three dimensions from a distance.

The elimination of the height limit in the late 1950s led to new kinds of office structures, typically in the Corporate International style. The Downtown buildings took the form of free-standing towers. Those on Wilshire Boulevard, in contrast, assumed a tower and podium format. The towers of the Wilshire resources resembled those built Downtown, but were set on podiums that allowed for street-adjacent shops and plazas which continued the tradition of the Boulevard as a linear retail corridor.

The period after the late 1950s also saw two new kinds of outlying areas emerge as settings for corporate high rises. One was the concentrated district of Century City, which marketed itself as an automobile friendly alternative to Downtown. The other was the neighborhood commercial district, particularly in the San Fernando Valley, which had previously been limited to small-scale business blocks. Here, relatively short high rises could stand out in low-rise settings as symbols of local banks and other such enterprises.

The boom in office construction which followed the lifting of the height limit came to an end by the mid-1970s. Overbuilding lessened demand for new space at the same time as the national economy declined into recession. The office structures that appeared a few years later, once the economy recovered and the vacant space had been absorbed, belong to the 1980s and its styles. But there were a few office buildings, dating from the early 1970s, which made use of Sculptural/Glass Skin style popular in the later decade and so served as a preview of what was to come.

Evaluation Considerations:

As a result of the City of Los Angeles Adaptive Reuse Ordinance (1999, rev. 2003), a number of high-rise corporate office buildings have been reused for housing and other purposes. They retain their significance so long as they meet the Criteria for Corporate Office Buildings.

The theme of Corporate Office Buildings may overlap with other SurveyLA themes within the Architecture and Engineering and Commercial Development contexts as follows:
- Related themes of LA Modernism: Related Responses to Modernism/Late Moderne; Postwar Modernism/Corporate International, and Late Modernism/Sculptural (Glass Skin)
- The subtheme of Banks within the Neighborhood Commercial Development theme.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

The corporate high rise is the office building as advertisement. It combines innovation in architecture together with a distinct company identity. Los Angeles has a history of such structures. Perhaps the best known from before the Second World War was the now-gone Richfield Building. Constructed in 1929, the oil company's headquarters was faced with black and gold terra cotta and was topped by a steel-framed tower with "RICHFIELD" in large neon letters.[1]

Richfield Building, 1929
Demolished 1968-1969
(Los Angeles Public Library)

But these prewar corporate office buildings were limited in two ways. First, they could be no taller than 150 feet, which in practice confined them to thirteen stories. Second, tradition restricted them to Downtown, where they fit the common pattern of the compact business block set tightly against the street and adjoining structures. There were similar office buildings in Hollywood and a few, associated with retail stores or theaters, along Wilshire Boulevard. But they were typically not homes to corporations. The city's banks and oil companies preferred to remain Downtown.

Two things changed after the end of the Second World War in 1945. First, companies began to build corporate headquarters in outlying areas such as Wilshire Boulevard and Hollywood, and in the process

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[1] Paul Gleye, *The Architecture of Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Rosebud Books, 1981), 121-122, 125.

experimented with forms that varied from the compact Downtown business block. Second, in the late 1950s, the City repealed its height limit. Now corporations could build true high rises in both Downtown and outlying areas.

Postwar Corporate Clients and their Architects

Corporate clients in Los Angeles had historically been limited to locally based banks and oil companies. The city had few manufacturing enterprises, other than the oil companies, which needed headquarters. Nor was it home to large national insurance companies. Patronage for postwar corporate high rises continued the historic reliance on local banks, oil companies, and the occasional entertainment business. Joining them were regional headquarters for banks or insurance companies based elsewhere.

In the public mind the corporate high rise, to which a client attached its name, belonged to the client. But the reality was often more complicated. In a few cases, the corporation, on its own, financed, built and occupied most, if not all, of the building.[2] More typically a company worked with a developer or outside financier during construction, and later with a rental agent to find tenants for the leftover space it did not occupy.[3] Also typical was the arrangement involving a developer who built the structure and a corporation which committed to lease a significant block of space. In return, the developer named the building after the leaseholder.[4]

Nor did ownership and tenancy remain stable. Developers sold buildings to each other, occasionally during construction, and the initial major leaseholders left and were replaced by others. This accounts for the frequent changes in the names of many corporate office buildings over the years. (Note: the Historic Context identifies buildings by their names when they were completed and, if there have been changes, includes mention of current names.) [5]

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[2] The Prudential Building of 1949 is an example. A variation is the General Petroleum Building, also of 1949. During its construction, in 1948, General Petroleum sold the building to New York Life Insurance Company and then leased back the entire structure. See *Los Angeles Times,* May 17, 1948.

[3] The United California Bank Building of 1973 is an example. It was a joint project of the UCB and the Equitable Life Assurance Society. See *Los Angeles Times,* September 30, 1973.

[4] The Union Bank Plaza of 1968 is an example. It was financed and built by the Connecticut General Life Insurance Company. Its name came from the fact that the Union Bank was its primary tenant. See *Los Angeles Times,* February 4, 1964 and January 4, 1966.

[5] The Atlantic-Richfield (Arco) Plaza of 1972 is an example of changing financing and major tenants. Originally, it was a cooperative venture of Atlantic Richfield and developers Cushman and Wakefield (*Los Angeles Times,* August 10, 1967). The Bank of America soon joined in financing and occupying space, and thereby gained naming rights to one of the two towers (*Los Angeles Times,* May 26, 1967). Then Kaiser Industries joined on the same basis and took naming rights to the other tower (*Los Angeles Times,* September 19, 1968). Four years later Kaiser sold its interest to Atlantic Richfield and Bank of America, and what was to be the Kaiser Tower became the Arco Tower (*Los Angeles Times,* January 20, 1972). All this occurred before the project was completed. Since then ownership and names have changed. It is now known as the City National Plaza, and the central pavilion, once occupied by Bank of America as it primary Downtown branch, is currently the offices of the Gensler architectural firm.

The architectural firms responsible for the design of these buildings were, like their clients, major
corporations. Four firms dominated. They were A. C. Martin, Welton Becket (initially Wurdeman and
Becket), and Pereira and Luckman, which by 1958 had become two separate firms, that of William
Pereira and that of Charles Luckman.

These firms practiced a large-scale corporately-organized form of architecture and engineering which
allowed them to undertake projects of the scale of the high-rise office building. Each of these firms also
maintained a design staff, often separate from head of the firm, which was responsible for the
architecture of a project. Because of this, attribution of a building must consider which member of the
design team took the lead.[6]

The firm of A. C. Martin, still in existence, predates the postwar period. It was a member of the
consortium responsible for design of the Los Angeles City Hall in the 1920s (L.A. Historic-Cultural
Monument No. 150). Perhaps the best-known of the firm's postwar projects is the Department of
Water and Power Building, completed in 1965 (L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 1022).[7]

The director of design after the war was Albert C. Martin, Jr., whose slogan was "The firm is not a single
individual." He saw his role as coordinator of the ideas of his team. Among the firm's Downtown high-
rise corporate projects are the Union Bank Plaza of 1968 and the Security Pacific Plaza of 1974, which
were the first two significant structures in the Bunker Hill redevelopment area, and the Atlantic-Richfield
Plaza of 1972, which provided a public space and underground shopping arcade in what was becoming
the city's new financial district.[8]

Newer, but ultimately the largest of the postwar corporate firms, was the office of Welton Becket,
initially known as Wurdeman and Becket. Becket moved to Los Angeles from his native Seattle in 1933
and first gained attention with the design for the Pan Pacific Auditorium in 1935 (the site of the west
façade of which is L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 183). Becket's first major postwar commission,
in partnership with William Wurdeman, was the Bullock's Pasadena store of 1947.[9]

Following the success of the store came two commissions that same year which were significant in the
development of the postwar office building, the General Petroleum Building (L.A. Historic-Cultural
Monument No. 766), also known as the Mobil Building, and the Prudential Insurance Company Building.
William Wurdeman died in 1948, and the firm became Welton Becket and Associates.[10]

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[6] William Dudley Hunt, Jr., *Total Design: Architectural of Welton Becket and Associates* (New York: McGraw-Hill,
1972), 11-66, provides a description of how a large-scale architectural firm from the early 1970s was organized.
[7] Gleye, *Architecture of Los Angeles*, 103.
[8] Thomas Hines, *Architecture of the Sun: Los Angeles Modernism, 1900-1970* (New York: Rizzoli, 2010), 654.
[9] Ibid. 662-664
[10] Ibid., 660, 664-665.

Becket next made news with the cylindrical Capital Records Building of 1956 (L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 857). After that, commissions were plentiful. By the 1960s Welton Becket and Associates had five hundred employees and branch offices In Houston, New York, and San Francisco. The *Los Angeles Times* counted that by 1962 the firm had designed twenty-five major structures along Wilshire Boulevard, from Downtown through the Miracle Mile, Beverly Hills, Westwood and Santa Monica.[11]

Resembling Becket in origin was William Pereira. Pereira came to Los Angeles from his native Chicago in 1938 after working on the 1933 Century of Progress fair and on several theater projects. His first work in California was as a motion picture photographer and art director. This studio work led to the design of the Motion Picture Country Home in 1941. Additional commissions after the war encouraged Pereira to propose a partnership with one of his classmates at the University of Illinois, Charles Luckman.[12]

Luckman, although a registered architect, had pursued a career in business. As president of Lever Brothers in the late 1940s he was responsible for the construction of the Lever House in New York, completed in 1949. Designed by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill partner Gordon Bunshaft, it was a pioneer example of the Corporate International style. Luckman lost his position in a power struggle shortly thereafter and accepted Pereira's offer to join in a new firm in Los Angeles to be known as Pereira and Luckman.[13]

Pereira and Luckman practiced together from 1951 through 1958. Specializing in planning and carrying out large-scale projects, the firm had over four hundred employees, including designers such as Gin Wong who would later become significant as heads of their own firms. In addition to corporate office projects, most notably the Union Oil Building of 1958, Pereira and Luckman are perhaps best known for CBS Television City and the University of California Santa Barbara campus. Their largest project was the master plan for the new Los Angeles International Airport.[14]

The firm split in 1958. The two resulting companies, William Pereira and Associates and the Charles Luckman Partnership, were both significant in corporate office design. Luckman continued the earlier partnership's preference for large-scale planning and development projects, such as NASA's Manned Spacecraft Center in Houston and the new Madison Square Garden in New York City. Luckman's corporate office buildings in Los Angeles include what was for years the city's tallest, the United California Bank Building of 1973.[15]

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[11] Hines, *Architecture of the Sun,* 671-677; *Los Angeles Times,* June 3, 1962.
[12] Hines, *Architecture of the Sun,* 678-680.
[13] Ibid.*,* 681.
[14] Ibid.*,* 682, 689.
[15] Ibid.*,* 693-694.

Pereira and Associates focused more on institutional projects, such as the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the master plan and first eight buildings for the University of California Campus in Irvine. Nonetheless, Pereira designed several notable corporate high rises, including the Occidental Center of 1961, the Crocker Bank Building of 1967 and the Mutual Benefit Life Plaza of 1970.[16]

In addition to these four, a fifth architect, Claud Beelman, was an important designer of corporate office buildings until his death in the early 1960s. Like A. C. Martin, Beelman was active during the late 1920s and was responsible for such well-known resources as the Eastern Columbia Building of 1930 (L. A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 294). Among his postwar corporate office works are the Superior Oil Company Building of 1955 (L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 686), the California Bank Building of 1960, and the Occidental Petroleum Building of 1961.[17]

The nature of Beelman's office needs additional research. It appears that Beelman himself was responsible for design and associated himself as needed with others for construction documents and engineering. Beginning in the late 1940s and into the 1950s he made use of Herman Spackler as an associated architect on most of his larger projects. Beginning in the early 1950s, the firm was officially referred to as Claud Beelman and Associates. In 1961 Kent Attridge became a partner. Attridge had been a member of Welton Becket and Associates and at the time of his hiring was head of Becket's New York office. Beelman died in early 1963 and in April of that year the office was renamed Kent Attridge and Associates.[18]

Downtown Height Limit Buildings, 1945-1959

Los Angeles had limited the heights of its buildings since 1905. The limit had been based on concerns for the safety of tall buildings and, among some, a desire to maintain an appropriate scale along Downtown streets. In 1903 a committee of prominent architects wrote a draft code which was issued as law in 1904 and placed in effect in February of 1905. It allowed for Class "A" buildings of steel or concrete frame to be up to 130 feet tall. In 1911 voters approved an amendment to the City Charter that raised the limit to 150 feet, which in practice worked out to thirteen stories. Only City Hall was permitted to exceed it.[19]

The height-limit postwar buildings constructed Downtown were much like their prewar predecessors, in both their massing and their use of the site. Each was a compact business block that filled its plot and maintained the traditional street wall. They differed from the older buildings in two ways. One was the

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[16] Hines, *Architecture of the Sun,* 694-706; *William Pereira,* edited by James Steele (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Architectural Guild Press, 2002), *passim.*

[17] "Claud Beelman," at https://www.laconservancy.org/architects/claud-beelman, accessed January 2018.

[18] *Los Angeles Times,* February 29, 1948; March 27, 1949; September 9, 1949; February 11, 1951; December 1, 1951; March 16, 1952; October 31, 1954; February 20, 1955; April 10, 1955; September 3, 1955; October 23, 1955; April 8, 1956; February 2, 1963; April 21, 1963.

[19] Gleye, *Architecture of Los Angeles*, 97-98.

use of Late Moderne forms for their facades. The other was compliance with the City's recently enacted parking requirement of one place for every one thousand square feet of office space by providing a nearby garage or parking lot.

Three resources, all designated, illustrate the characteristics of these buildings. The first is the Mirror Building of 1948 (listed on the California Register), on the northwest corner of Second and Spring Streets. It is part of a complex that includes the Los Angeles Times Building, designed by Gordon Kaufmann and completed in 1935 (also listed on the California Register).[20] The new building was constructed by the Times Company to house the staff of the *Mirror,* its afternoon tabloid. The first edition of the paper came out on the day that the new building was dedicated in October of 1948.[21]

Mirror Building (upper left), 1948
View from the north, with the Los Angeles Times Building in the center foreground
(Los Angeles Public Library)

The Mirror Building is ten stories tall with three levels below grade. The exterior has been described by David Gebhard and Robert Winter as a mellow version of the PWA Moderne and by Paul Gleye as a blending of vertical Moderne and horizontal International style elements. The architect, Roland Crawford, had been a member of Gordon Kaufman's firm during the 1930s and had worked on the

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[20] Both buildings are listed in the California Register as a result of the Section 106 review process and determinations of eligibility for listing in the National Register.

[21] David Gebhard and Robert Winter, *An Architectural Guidebook to Los Angeles,* Revised Edition (Salt Lake City: Gibbs-Smith, 2003)*,* 251; *Los Angeles Times*, October 9, 1948; October 12, 1948; January 3, 1949.

design of the Los Angeles Times Building. Crawford established his own firm in 1938 and produced other notable works such as the 1947 Sears, Roebuck and Company Store in Santa Monica.[22]

The second Downtown resource is the General Petroleum Building of 1949 (L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 766), also known as the Mobil Oil Building. Although it maintained its original name, the General Petroleum Company had been acquired by the Mobil Oil Company, then known as Socony, in 1926. This acquisition accounts for the eventual installation of Mobil's name and its "Pegasus" logo on the top of the building. The building is now the Pegasus Apartments.[23]

When the project was announced in November of 1946, it was cited as the first height-limit building to be constructed in Downtown since the beginning of the Great Depression. It was also the first to have an associated garage. Work began in July of 1947 on what was referred to as the largest office building in the city. The dedication took place in April of 1949 and was attended by both Los Angeles Mayor Fletcher Bowron and California Governor Earl Warren.[24]

General Petroleum Building, 1949
Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument No. 766
(Los Angeles Public Library)

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[22] Gebhard and Winter, *Architectural Guide to Los Angeles,* 64, 251; Gleye, *Architecture of Los Angeles*, 148; *Los Angeles Times*, January 3, 1949; Wikipedia entry for "Rowland Crawford," https://Wikipedia.org, accessed January 2018.
[23] "A Brief History of Major Oil Companies in the Gulf Region,"12, http://www.virginia.edu/igpr/APAG/apagoilhistory.html, accessed January 2018.
[24] *Los Angeles Times*, November 1, 1946; July 12, 1947; December 14, 1947; April 2, 1949.

The thirteen-story General Petroleum Building occupies an entire half block, extending along the east side of Flower Street from Wilshire Boulevard to Sixth Street, with retail at street level and offices above. Its form resembles that of older buildings, with two open courts allowing for sunlight and ventilation to reach interior offices. The architects, Wurdeman and Becket, produced a façade that is a good example of the Late Moderne, characterized by bezel framing around the horizontally grouped windows flanking the vertically-finned center of the upper stories.[25]

The associated garage, also designed by Wurdeman and Becket and located on the northwest corner of Flower and Eighth Streets, is significant as well. The reinforced-concrete structure made use of a spiral interior, with a four-percent continuous grade around a central core, in place of traditional levels connected by ramps. The result was equivalent to six levels which could accommodate 446 cars.[26]

Superior Oil Company Building, 1956
L.A. Historic Cultural Monument No. 686
(L.A. Office of Historic Resources)

The third Downtown height-limit resource is the Superior Oil Company Building of 1956 (L. A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 686), now the Standard Hotel. It is just north of the General Petroleum Building, at 550 South Flower Street. Its footprint is smaller, occupying one-quarter rather than one half

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[25] Gleye, *Architecture of Los Angeles*, 148, 152; Hines, *Architecture of the Sun,* 664-665; *Los Angeles Times*, November 1, 1946. For building footprint with light courts, see Sanborn Map 49, Volume 1, 1906/1950.
[26] *Los Angeles Times*, February 13, 1948 and October 3, 1948.

of a block, and it stands at twelve rather than thirteen stories. It also had a surface parking lot, directly to the east, rather than a garage.[27]

The architect was Claud Beelman. He employed a classical version of the Late Moderne, consisting of a continuous pier and recessed spandrel design, with enlarged corner piers. This became his signature style and was used in his two later projects of note, the California Bank Building of 1960 and the Occidental Petroleum Building of 1961.[28]

Outlying Height Limit Buildings, 1945-1959

The height-limit buildings in outlying districts, in contrast to those Downtown, were designed as free-standing objects, intended to be seen in three dimensions. Each sat on a site that was large enough to provide separation from both the street and from surrounding structures. In place of the traditional single mass they made use of interlocking forms.

Three resources, one of them designated, illustrate this variety. The first is the Prudential Building, completed in 1948. It is at 5757 Wilshire Boulevard and is now known as Museum Square. The site spans two city blocks, and its layout follows that first used in 1928 by Bullocks Wilshire (L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 56). The building extends along Wilshire, while a parking fills the rear of the site.[29]

Prudential Building, 1948
5757 Wilshire Boulevard
(Los Angeles Public Library)

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[27] *Los Angeles Times*, January 30, 1955; December 25, 1955; March 15, 1957.
[28] *Landmark L.A.*, Jeffrey Herr, editor (Los Angeles: City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department, 2002), 476.
[29] *Los Angeles Times,* March 8, 1950.

Plans for the building were unveiled in March of 1947 when the Prudential Insurance Company announced that it would build a west coast headquarters. Architects Wurdeman and Becket produced a design that consists of a linear height-limit office block of thirteen stories perpendicularly bisected by a solid mass housing elevators and services. The office block sits on a split base of retail space, which came to include a popularly priced department store and a drug store, as well as more upscale specialty merchants such as a hatter and furrier.[30]

In style the Prudential Building is a combination of the Late Moderne and the emerging Corporate International. The east façade (not visible in the photograph) features horizontally grouped windows with bezel frames set in a solid wall. But the north and south walls are largely glass protected by horizontal sunscreens, a form that previews the curtain wall which is a characteristic of the Corporate International style.[31]

In addition to its stylistic innovations, the Prudential Building is significant for two reasons. First, it established Wilshire Boulevard as an acceptable location for corporate office buildings. Second, it was the first to make use of the retail podium and office tower format which become the norm for the Wilshire Boulevard high rise.

The second resource is the Capitol Records Tower of 1956 (L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 857) in Hollywood at 1750 Vine Street. As with the Prudential Building, its form consists of a tower on a base or podium. Studio and recording facilities occupy the podium and company offices the floors above. Also, as with the Prudential, it places the base along the street front and the parking in the rear. [32]

Dominating the design is the cylindrical shape of the tower. The architect was Welton Becket and Associates, with Louis Naidorf as the project designer. When asked about the circular form, the architects maintained that it was chosen for efficiency rather than symbolism.[33] Yet commentators maintained that the cylinder represented a stack of records, a resemblance that the company did not deny. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, "Capitol figures this unusual style of architecture will be worth half a million bucks in advertising."[34] The symbolism was enhanced by a ninety-two-foot tall spire, asymmetrically placed, which was inevitably compared to a phonograph needle.[35]

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[30] *Los Angeles Times,* March 20, 1947; October 3, 1948; September 7, 1949; March 5, 1950; March 8, 1950.

[31] Gleye, *Architecture of Los Angeles*, 152, 205; Hines, *Architecture of the Sun,* 665.

[32] *Los Angeles Times,* August 24, 1954 and February 13, 1956.

[33] Hines, *Architecture of the Sun,* 667; *Los Angeles Times,* June 19, 1955 and December 4, 1955.

[34] *Los Angeles Times,* October 4, 1954.

[35] *Los Angeles Times,* April 7, 1956.

Capitol Records Tower, 1956
Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument No. 857
(Los Angeles Public Library)

Capitol, a local firm, was by the early 1950s – along with RCA Victor, Columbia, and Decca – one of the country's four largest phonograph record companies. Capitol was founded by Glenn Wallachs, owner of the Music City record store on the corner of Sunset and Vine. His decision to locate his building in Hollywood, rather than Downtown or Wilshire Boulevard, was based on its proximity to the local radio station studios.[36]

The third resource is the Union Oil Center of 1958, now the Los Angeles Center Studios. It differs from the Prudential and Capitol Buildings in that it is a complex rather than a single structure. The site is bounded by Fifth Street, Maryland, Bixel, and Beaudry Avenues, and occupies nearly five acres. Located just to the west of Downtown and separated from it by the Harbor (110) Freeway, the site's elevation permitted the central thirteen-story office building to stand higher than City Hall.[37]

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[36] *Los Angeles Times,* March 21, 1953.
[37] *Los Angeles Times,* July 7, 1955; June 21, 1956; April 1, 1958.

The Union Oil Company, later known as Unocal, was a locally based enterprise that dated from 1890. It began in Santa Paula, where its original headquarters is a California Historical Landmark (No. 996). The name came from the fact that it was a merger, or union, of three smaller companies. Unocal lasted as a major producer and marketer of petroleum products until 2005, when it became a subsidiary of Chevron.[38]

The Center was designed by Pereira and Luckman, with Gin Wong as the project architect. It consists of three elements: the height-limit office building, a front pavilion of two stories, and a rear courtyard flanked by two office wings, one two stories high and the other three. A three-level underground garage provides parking. The primary office building takes the form of a flattened hexagon, with a bisecting perpendicular mass housing services on the west face.[39]

Union Oil Center, 1958
415 South Beaudry Avenue
(Los Angeles Public Library)

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[38] Wikipedia entry for "Unocal Corporation," https://Wikipedia.org, accessed January 2018.
[39] *Los Angeles Times,* July 7, 1955 and April 1, 1958; Charles Luckman, *Twice in a Lifetime: From Soap to Skyscrapers (*New York: W. W. Norton, 1988), 313.

Repeal of the Height Limit, 1955-1957

By the mid-1950s Los Angeles was ready to reconsider its 150-foot height limit. Developers and advocates for Downtown saw the restriction as an impediment to making the city into a regional commercial center along the lines of Chicago and San Francisco. But the removal was not without controversy when it was first proposed.

In December of 1955 the City Council entertained a motion to eliminate the limit. At first, the *Los Angeles Times* opposed the move. It maintained that "the pattern of the city" was a product of the limit, and that to eliminate it would be "unjust to the owners of existing buildings," and would lead to increased traffic, more parking problems, and overloaded utilities. "Los Angeles was intentionally built on a plan of dispersal; we have plenty of room for horizontal expansion and there is no need for vertical expansion."[40]

Architects, businessmen, and city planners proceeded to discuss the idea. The City Planning Commission recommended that in place of the old limit there should be a site area ratio. A building could rise as high as it wished, so long as its total square footage did not exceed thirteen times the area of the site. This was based on the reality that a thirteen-story building was the tallest feasible under the 150-foot limit. Under the new rules, the square footage would be the equivalent of a building under the old rules built out to the limits of its site as was permitted in Downtown.[41]

This was presented as a means of preventing what was described as overdevelopment if the height limit were to be abolished. It was also seen as an aesthetic improvement, leading to "tall, spiral-like buildings which can permit more light and air in the adjacent street space or abutting properties, as well as eliminate visual barriers which now result from groupings of lower solid block type buildings."[42]

Professional opinion was receptive to the idea. The Dean of the School of Architecture at the University of Southern California expressed his approval. Encouragement came from the Chamber of Commerce and the Los Angeles Realty Board. In August of 1956 the City Council voted 12 to 2 to place the proposal on the November ballot. Along with the floor-area ratio came a continuation of the existing requirement that there be one parking space per one thousand square feet of office area.[43]

Support for the ballot measure came from all quarters. The Chief of the Los Angeles Fire Department and the President of the Structural Engineers Association of Southern California attested to the safety of taller buildings. The president of the Downtown Business Men's Association noted that buildings spaced further apart, with room for landscaping and parking, would command higher rents.[44] The president of

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[40] *Los Angeles Times,* December 6, 1955.
[41] *Los Angeles Times,* February 24, 1956.
[42] Ibid.
[43] *Los Angeles Times,* May 23, 1956; June 15, 1956; August 2, 1956.
[44] *Los Angeles Times,* October 23, 1956.

the Southern California Chapter of the American Institute of Architects asserted that it "will make Los Angeles more of a city" as well as "increase the architect's freedom of design."[45] The *Times* withdrew its earlier opposition and urged a yes vote.[46]

In November of 1956, by a vote of 21,164 to 6,801, the measure was approved. It eliminated the old height limit and in its place put a site area ratio to govern the size of new buildings. But it was well into 1957 before the City building department completed the regulations that would govern designs under the new rules. Eventually, what were commonly called skyscraper zones were put into effect in Downtown, along Wilshire Boulevard, and later in other locations.[47]

Downtown High Rises, 1960-1975 – Towers

With repeal of the height limit Downtown Los Angeles gained a skyline. A vista which had previously been dominated by City Hall now featured several towers competing for attention. Because they were completed within a relatively short fifteen-year period and used the Corporate International style, their forms were similar. Only their heights varied.

Most of these new corporate high rises were single towers, either placed directly on the sidewalk or set within plazas. Three of the towers discussed in the Narrative – the California Bank, the Crocker Citizens Bank, and the United California Band (UCB) – were built on standard urban sites surrounded by existing structures. The other two – the Union Bank and Security Pacific – were in the Bunker Hill redevelopment district and included innovations in site planning.

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[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] *Los Angeles Times,* November 7, 1956; April 30, 1957; July 12, 1957; July 25, 1957.

Downtown looking south from Civic Center, photo circa 1982
From left: Crocker Citizens, UCB, Atlantic Richfield (twin towers), Security Pacific, Union Bank
(Los Angeles Public Library)

The first Downtown tower to exceed the repealed height limit was the California Bank Building, proposed in 1958 and completed in 1960. It is unique among all the postwar high rises in that it was built in the historic financial district along South Spring Street. it still stands, on the southeast corner of Spring and Sixth Streets, but has been altered in its conversion into apartments.[48]

The California Bank was proposed as the first post-height limit building in February of 1958. The architect was Claud Beelman, the designer of the Superior Oil Company Building to which the California Bank Building bears a strong resemblance.[49] It rises nineteen stories over a four-level basement, three levels of which provided parking. Most striking was the three-story windowless podium on which the tower sat. This podium filled the entire site and, while maintaining the traditional street wall, broke in a dramatic way with the street's rhythm of door and window openings.[50]

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[48] *Los Angeles Times*, February 23, 1958. Its Certificate of Occupancy was issued on August 1, 1960, at ""Search Online Building Records," at http://www.ladbs.org, accessed January 2018. The building is within the Spring Street Financial National Register Historic District.
[49] *Los Angeles Times,* February 23, 1958.
[50] Certificate of Occupancy, "Search Online Building Records," at http://www.ladbs.org, accessed January 2018.

California Bank Building, 1960
600 South Spring Street
(Los Angeles Public Library)

Far exceeding the California Bank Building in height was the Crocker Citizens Bank Building (now known as 611 Place). It sits on the northwest corner of Sixth and Grand Streets, in what was becoming a new financial district on the west side of Downtown. It was originally proposed in 1964 to be at least 34 stories. By December of 1965, it was extended to 42 stories, and, at 620 feet tall, would be the city's tallest building. Of note was its cruciform shape, which, according to its architect William Pereira, would allow more light into offices than was permitted with a rectangular plan. The west wall was left solid to provide a place for the bank's name and logo.[51]

The structure was dedicated in September of 1968. As with the California Bank Building, the Crocker Citizens tower sat on a podium that occupied the entire site. But this four-story podium was fenestrated to match the tower, and on the Grand and Sixth Street sides the podium and the arms of the tower align, giving the impression of a continuous wall from grade to top. The ground level contained shops, and escalators connected grade to a second level banking hall. Parking was provided on seven levels, three in the podium and four below grade.[52]

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[51] *Los Angeles Times,* October 31, 1964; December 16, 1965; January 16, 1966.
[52] *Los Angeles Times,* December 16, 1965; March 4, 1968; September 8, 1968.

Crocker Citizens Bank Building, 1968
611 West Sixth Street
(Los Angeles Public Library)

The tallest tower of the period was that for the United California Bank (UCB), now the Aon Center. It
was described by its architect, Charles Luckman, as a single square shaft with the sides slightly tapered.
The corners are indented and covered with marble, to contrast with the dark glass of the windows and
make the building seem taller. Dark horizontal bands at one-third points break up the vertical expanse
of glass. The flat cornice originally featured an off-center corporate logo in place of a sign. At 62 stories,
it was the tallest structure west of the Mississippi River at the time of its design.[53]

The UCB building is on the northwest corner of Wilshire Boulevard and Hope Street. Construction began
in September of 1971 and was completed two years later in September of 1973. The tower is set back
from Wilshire Boulevard by a plaza. The ground floor contained the banking hall, while escalators led
from the street to a second-floor elevator lobby. Parking is below grade and across Hope Street in a ten-
story garage connected to the tower by an underground passage. The first level of the garage contains
retail and office space opening to the street.[54]

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[53] Luckman, *Twice in a Lifetime,* 366-367.
[54] *Los Angeles Times,* June 7, 1970; February 22, 1973; September 30, 1973.

United California Bank (UCB) Building, 1973
Northwest corner of Wilshire Boulevard and Hope Street
(Los Angeles Public Library)

Two other resources are in the Bunker Hill redevelopment district, located a few blocks north of the
Crocker Citizens and UCB buildings. Bunker Hill renewal dated from 1948, when the City Council created
a redevelopment agency for the area bounded by the Harbor (110) Freeway to the west, First Street on
the north, Hill Street on the east, and Fourth and Fifth Streets on the south. By 1955 the agency
approved a master plan that called for demolition and clearing of the district, followed by grading and
street improvements. The vacant sites were then sold to developers. Sections of the district had been
cleared and prepared by the early 1960s and were ready for new construction.[55]

Of the major projects on Bunker Hill, the Union Bank Plaza was the first. Located at what was
considered a prestige site on the northwest corner of Fifth and Figueroa Streets, it began in February of

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[55] Gleye, *Architecture of Los Angeles*, 177; Project Area Map, http://www.CRA/LA.org/internet-
site/Projects/Bunker_Hill, accessed January 2018.

1964 as a proposal by the Connecticut General Life Insurance Company. Construction commenced in March of 1965. In September of that year the Union Bank announced that it was contemplating a move to Bunker Hill for its head office, and early January of 1966 the bank leased fourteen floors in Connecticut General's project. This gained naming rights, with Union Bank spelled out in bold letters along the cornice. The building was dedicated in November of 1966 and opened in December.[56]

Union Bank Plaza, 1966
Figueroa Street between Fourth and Fifth Streets
(Los Angeles Public Library)

The Union Bank Plaza stands at 42 stories and was designed by A. C. Martin in association with Harrison and Abramovitz of New York. The use of the east coast firm apparently came from Connecticut General's involvement. Paul Gleye cites it as a good example of what he calls the structural-expressive period of the Corporate International style, with contrasting colors calling out the pier and spandrel frame from the bay-filling windows.[57]

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[56] *Los Angeles Times,* February 4, 1964; July 1, 1964; September 21, 1965; January 4, 1966; April 8, 1966; November 17, 1966; December 22, 1966; January 1, 1967; March 9, 1967; June 11, 1970.
[57] Gleye, *Architecture of Los Angeles*, 151; *Los Angeles Times,* January 16, 1966.

Its site planning is as significant as its architecture. The Union Bank tower covers only a small portion of its plot, with the remaining three-plus acres as landscaped plazas below which there is parking.[58] In June of 1967 the Central City Association referred specifically to the Union Bank in describing what it saw as a new trend in "ground-level beautification," with "a new generation of tower structures growing out of the bases of plazas and squares."[59]

The second of the major Bunker Hill projects fits with the concept of a tower surrounded by open space. It is the Security Pacific Plaza (now the Bank of America Center). The architect was again A. C. Martin. It was first proposed in October of 1970 and the banking facility was opened in May of 1975. It was at that time the largest of the Bunker Hill redevelopment project's office buildings and, at 55 stories, second only to the UCB tower as the city's tallest[60]

In form the Security Pacific resembles the other towers, including the bank's asymmetrically placed logo on its flat cornice. Only the building's diagonal position on its site, rotated forty-five degrees from the grid, differentiates it. As with the Union Bank, the Security Pacific occupies a large plot surrounded by open space. There is a significant slope to the plot, bounded by Third, Fourth, Hope and Flower Streets, which allows the tower to rise from "a series of park-like plazas" which "serve as a bridge between the upper and lower levels of Bunker Hill."[61] These terraces permit city views, accompanied by fountains and an Alexander Calder sculpture.[62]

Security Pacific Plaza terrace with Alexander Calder sculpture, 1975
Block bounded by Third, Fourth, Hope and Flower Streets
(Los Angeles Public Library)

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[58] *Los Angeles Times,* April 8, 1966 and March 4, 1968.
[59] *Los Angeles Times,* June 19, 1967.
[60] *Los Angeles Times,* October 22, 1970; April 15, 1973; August 12, 1973; May 4, 1975.
[61] *Los Angeles Times,* February 1, 1971.
[62] *Los Angeles Times,* December 8, 1975.

Downtown High Rises, 1960-1975 – Ensembles

Not all Downtown corporate high-rises were single towers. A few followed the example of the Union Oil
Center and made use of ensembles, consisting of towers interspersed with lower buildings on the same
site. Two resources illustrate variations on this concept. The Occidental Center of 1961 consists of a
single taller tower and a lower connected structure. The Atlantic Richfield Plaza of 1972 is made up of
two matching towers separated by a low rectangular element, arranged symmetrically on the
surrounding open space.

The Occidental Center (now AT&T Center) occupies a site well to the south of the other new corporate
high rises, along the north side of Twelfth from Hill to Olive Streets. This location came about because
the developer of the ensemble, the Occidental Life Insurance Company, was located one block to the
east, on the northwest corner of Twelfth and Broadway, and already owned the site. The Santa Monica
(10) Freeway, a few blocks to the south, was under construction and would provide convenient
automobile access.[63]

The Occidental Life Insurance Company was a subsidiary of the Transamerica Corporation of San
Francisco. Occidental first expressed a desire for additional space Downtown in 1959. By February of
1961 it announced plans to build a complex of three buildings to the west of its existing headquarters. A
high-rise office tower would be joined by a lower structure along Twelfth between Hill and Olive, and a
parking garage would be built west of Olive. William Pereira and Associates were to be the architects of
all three.[64]

Work began on the lower building, an eleven-story structure to house the company's electronic data
processing equipment, in September of 1961. Plans for a 32-story tower, with a restaurant on the top
floor and connected by a bridge to the eleven-story data processing center, were approved in January of
1963.[65] Work began in February on what the *Los Angeles Times* described as the "largest non-
government, non-civic complex in Los Angeles," the tower of which "will dominate the downtown area
from the surrounding freeway loop."[66]

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[63] *Los Angeles Times,* September 13, 1959 and February 3, 1961.
[64] *Los Angeles Times,* July 7, 1959; September 13, 1959; February 3, 1961.
[65] *Los Angeles Times,* September 15, 1961 and January 25, 1963.
[66] *Los Angeles Times,* February 7, 1963.
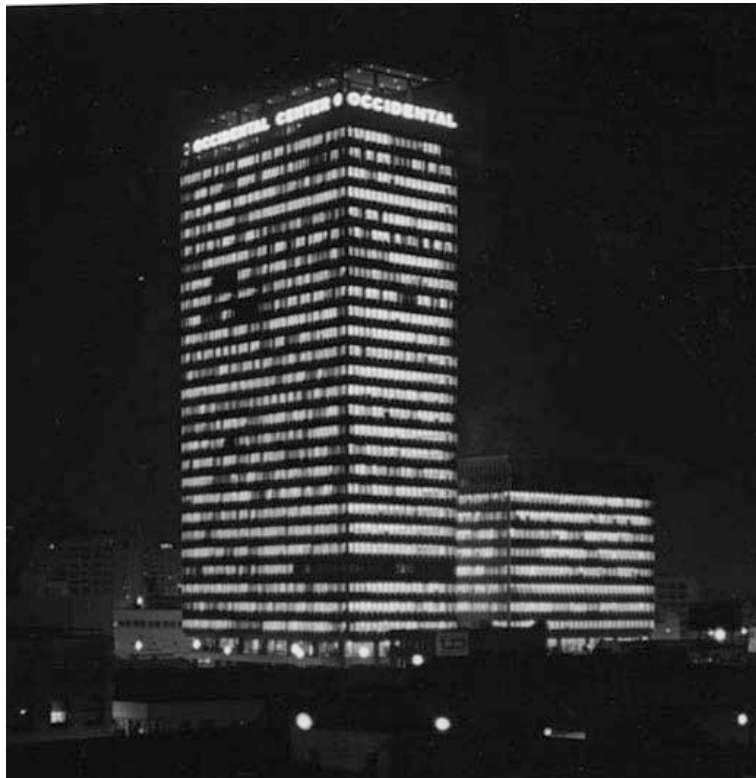
Occidental Life Center, 1965
Twelfth Street between Hill and Olive Streets
(Los Angeles Public Library)

The complex was completed in 1965.[67] Its design was applauded but its location remained controversial. An Opinion piece in the *Time*s supported the company's faith in the future of its southern location. "Occidental's decision to build in the downtown area virtually assured the future of the strategically important southern section."[68] But the construction of other new towers well to the north and the draw of vacant sites in the Bunker Hill redevelopment district left Occidental Center an isolated enclave.

The second ensemble, the Atlantic-Richfield, later Arco, Plaza (now the City National Plaza) is more conventional in its location. It sits on a full block, bounded by Flower, Fifth, Figueroa, and Sixth Streets. The Richfield Oil Company of California had merged with the Atlantic Refining Company of Philadelphia in 1966. The purpose of the Plaza was to provide a new western headquarters for the combined firm on the site of the old Richfield Building. A. C. Martin was hired in early 1968, with Robert Davis as the project designer.[69]

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[67] *Los Angeles Times,* March 3, 1965.
[68] *Los Angeles Times,* February 21, 1965.
[69] Hines, *Architecture of the Sun,* 654; *Los Angeles Times,* January 28, 1968; January 7, 1972; September 3, 1972.

The program the architects presented in September of 1968 consisted of two identical towers flanking a centrally-placed lower bank structure. Below grade would be a multi-level shopping concourse. Ground was broken in February of 1969. The Bank of America eventually joined with Atlantic Richfield in financing the project so that one of the towers was to be named for the bank and the other for the oil company. The center low-rise building was to become the bank's main Downtown branch.[70]

Atlantic Richfield Plaza, 1973
Bounded by Flower, Fifth, Figueroa and Sixth Streets
(Los Angeles Public Library)

The two 52-story towers were dedicated in January of 1973.[71] The feature attracting the most attention was the underground shopping center. What was described as the "Fanciest Basement in Town" opened in October.[72] It was said to have six and one-half acres of retail space on two levels, housing seventy stores and ten restaurants, reached by escalators on the corners of Flower and Fifth and Flower and Sixth. A large space entitled the Fashion Court in the center extended through both levels to a height of thirty feet.[73]

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[70] *Los Angeles Times,* September 19, 1968; February 4, 1969; January 20, 1972; September 10, 1972.
[71] *Los Angeles Times,* September 9, 1973.
[72] *Los Angeles Times,* October 1, 1972.
[73] *Los Angeles Times,* July 26, 1970 and October 1, 1972.

Section though Atlantic Richfield Plaza, 1973
Showing twin towers, low-rise banking structure and underground shopping levels
(Los Angeles Public Library)

Downtown High Rises, 1960-1975 – The Impact

The construction of these corporate office buildings raised two questions. The first concerned the role of the automobile in an increasingly dense Downtown. The second was the inevitable problem of over-building.

The debate over the viability of a dense central business district in a city reliant upon the auto was an old one, but construction of the new corporate towers made it more pressing. By 1968 the *Los Angeles Times* estimated that over half-a-million people regularly commuted to Downtown. Of these, two-thirds used their cars. The result was that about 350,000 automobiles entered and left each day.[74]

Some architects maintained that a Downtown of high rises dependent upon the automobile was viable. Prominent among them was firm of A. C. Martin. In 1966 partner J. Edward Martin noted the relatively car-friendly setting resulting from the relocation of the financial district westward, changes made within the Bunker Hill redevelopment district, and the requirement for garage space. "The center core is

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[74] *Los Angeles Times*, December 30, 1968.

moving toward the freeway. Broader streets are being built. We're getting built-in parking in our buildings or in adjacent facilities so that they properly relate to the automobile."[75]

Martin went further in 1968 and proposed changes to the nature of the central business district. He noted that, even with improved mass transit, most workers would still commute by car. In response to this reality he advocated a "checkerboard" approach to land use. "The checkboard would consist of parking in this block, a commercial development in the next, then parking and so on."[76]

Another partner, A. C. Martin, Jr., took a different approach. He advocated the construction of two parking structures, one at Fourth Street and the other at Ninth Street, and the banning of cars from the streets between. But, as advocates of mass transit noted, the construction of garages, whether on every other block or around the periphery, did not solve the problem of getting into and out of Downtown.[77]

Eventually concern among developers shifted from traffic to increasing vacancy rates. The commercial real estate market had always been cyclical, and it appeared that the cycle was reaching its end. As early as 1968, realtors expressed fear of a glut of office space. Of specific concern were the increasingly empty older buildings in the historic Spring Street financial district, as banks and investment firms shifted to the new financial core emerging to the west.[78]

By the early 1970s, according to architect Charles Luckman, the boom years of office construction had come to an end. In August of 1973 the *Los Angeles Times* agreed that the fifteen-year period of expansion that began with the elimination of the height limit had probably stopped. The newspaper predicted that the UCB tower, at sixty-two stories, would remain the tallest in the city for some time to come. Any future corporate construction was most likely to be in places such as Century City and restricted to more financially feasible buildings of twenty-five to forty stories.[79]

The *Times* noted that the problem was not simply one of too many buildings. It was also related to the limited nature of the city's economy. The primary clients for large blocks of office space were the banks, and most of them had completed their new buildings. Los Angeles lacked other types of clients, such as manufacturing companies, in need of headquarters. Two years later, by 1975, a general decline in the national economy simply made the problem worse, with Century City, as well as Downtown, now considered overbuilt.[80]

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[75] *Los Angeles Times*, March 4, 1968.
[76] *Los Angeles Times*, October 13, 1968.
[77] *Los Angeles Times*, September 24, 1968 and November 15, 1968.
[78] *Los Angeles Times*, March 10, 1968.
[79] *Los Angeles Times*, August 12, 1973; Luckman, *Twice in a Lifetime,* 388.
[80] *Los Angeles Times*, August 12, 1973 and January 26, 1975.

Outlying High Rises, 1960-1975 – Wilshire Boulevard

Corporate high-rise office buildings exceeding the old height limit could also be found outside of
Downtown. The most popular location was Wilshire Boulevard. In 1957 Wilshire was added to
Downtown as a skyscraper zone, in which the height limit no longer applied. By 1966, after several
corporate towers had gone up, a four-mile stretch of the Boulevard, from Union Avenue on the east to
Sycamore on the west, was dedicated as Wilshire Center.[81]

As with the Downtown towers, the Wilshire Boulevard high rises employed the Corporate International
style. This led to a uniformity of appearance resembling that found in the Center City. But the program
and site plan for high rises along Wilshire typically followed the precedent of the Prudential Building of
1948, with a separately articulated base for retail and parking in the rear.

The first to exceed the height limit was the Travelers Building, at 3600 Wilshire Boulevard (now
identified with the Bank of Hope, which occupies one of the ground floor retail spaces). Completed in
1961, it was designed by Welton Becket. The Travelers Insurance Company of Hartford, Connecticut,
announced plans for the development in July of 1959 to house the Los Angeles branch of its offices. At
the time of its completion in October of 1961, its twenty-two stories and three-hundred-foot height
made it the tallest office building in the city.[82]

Model of the Travelers Building, 1961
3600 Wilshire Boulevard
(Los Angeles Public Library)

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[81] *Los Angeles Times*, July 25, 1957 and February 20, 1966.
[82] *Los Angeles Times,* July 16, 1959 and October 13, 1961.

The site plan of the Travelers Building follows that of the Prudential Building. The project occupies the entire block between Harvard and Kingsley Streets. The tower is set back from the Boulevard. Placed directly on Wilshire are two low podium-like pavilions on either side of an open court. Behind the tower is a two-level parking structure connected to the tower by a canopy. [83]

The pavilions feature twenty-five-foot-high windows looking out onto Wilshire. The original plan called for a bank to occupy one of the pavilions and a restaurant the other. The plaza between the pavilions contains a series of fountains and a reflecting pool. Notable about the Travelers Building, in contrast to later office structures along Wilshire Boulevard, is its color. Set between the white vertical piers of the tower are spandrels of two-tone blue Venetian mosaic tile.[84]

Equitable Building, 1970
3435 Wilshire Boulevard
(Los Angeles Public Library)

Elaborating on the formula of a street-adjacent base, a set-back tower and rear parking is the Equitable Building, completed in 1970. Located at 3435 Wilshire, it too was designed by Welton Becket. Becket's plan of April 1966 provides for a single-story base of shops extending the entire block-long frontage of the boulevard and partially recessed below grade to accommodate the slope of the street. This base is broken in the center by a monumental stairway that leads to a second level plaza. Above this is an

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[83] *Los Angeles Times,* July 16, 1959.
[84] *Los Angeles Times,* July 16, 1959 and October 13, 1961.

"extra-height mezzanine" banking hall with oversized windows and connected to the plaza by escalators.[85]

What most differentiates the thirty-four story Equitable Building from Becket's earlier Travelers Building is the more subdued color palate, together with an emphasis on the vertical nature of the tower. In place of the Travelers' Venetian blue tiles Becket installed opaque bronze spandrel glass together with bronze-tinted windows. Attached to the piers are pre-cast concrete fins projecting eighteen inches and spaced every four feet eight inches. This shading device adds an additional darkening vertical shadow, hiding the expression of the steel frame that was characteristic of the Travelers Building.[86]

Mutual Life Benefit Plaza, 1970
5900 Wilshire Boulevard
(Author)

A notable variation on the standard format of tower and podium, and close to the Atlantic Richfield Plaza in composition, is the Mutual Life Benefit Plaza, located at 5900 Wilshire Boulevard. It was designed by William Pereira, with Gin Wong as the partner in charge.[87] Of significance is its location across Wilshire Boulevard from Pereira's Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The Mutual project was created in such a way as to complement the museum, by retaining, in the words of Pereira, "a comparable sense of rhythm on both sides of the boulevard."[88]

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[85] *Los Angeles Times,* April 21, 1966. Date of Completion from the Certificate of Occupancy, "Search Online Building Records," at http://www.ladbs.org; and the Los Angeles County Assessors Map. at http://maps.assessor.lacounty.org, both accessed January 2018.
[86] *Los Angeles Times,* July 6, 1967 and June 15, 1969.
[87] *Los Angeles Times,* May 26, 1968 and January 23, 1972.
[88] Quoted in *Los Angeles Times,* May 4, 1965.

When first proposed in 1965, the project was to consist of two identical twenty-four story towers, linked
by "a landscaped esplanade" containing "exclusive shops, galleries, and enterprises oriented to museum
goers."[89] By May of 1968 it had been reduced in scope to a single thirty-two story tower, flanked by a
pair of two-story "satellite" buildings "rising from a landscaped plaza of fountains, reflecting pools and
statuary." [90] When completed in 1970, the tower and satellites covered more than two acres above an
underground garage.[91]

Further west on Wilshire Boulevard, in Westwood, is a second line of corporate high rises. This group
differs from those to the east in that the relationship to the street is more like that found Downtown.
While including retail on the first level, the Westwood corporate buildings typically have no podiums or
pavilions. The towers rise directly from the street without setback.

Two resources are exemplary. The older of the two is the Occidental Petroleum Building on the
northwest corner of Wilshire and Westwood Boulevards (it now houses facilities for UCLA). Occidental
Petroleum, like General Petroleum and Unocal, began as a locally based company. Founded in 1920, it is
still a major participant in oil production.[92]

The building was designed by Claud Beelman. It was begun in 1960 as the Kirkeby Center and was taken
over by Occidental Petroleum before its completion in 1962. It stands 15 stories tall and features
Beelman's characteristic lighter pier and darker spandrel façade on top of a black granite base. Only its
differently fenestrated top story, acting as a cornice, separates it from his other work. [93]

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[89] *Los Angeles Times,* May 4, 1965.
[90] *Los Angeles Times,* May 26, 1968.
[91] *Los Angeles Times,* June 22, 1969.
[92] Wikipedia entry for "Occidental Petroleum," https://Wikipedia.org, accessed January 2018.
[93] *Los Angeles Times,* September 11, 1960 and August 26, 1962.

Occidental Petroleum Building, 1962
10889 Wilshire Boulevard
(Author)

The newer of the two resources is the Tishman Westwood Building, at 10950 Wilshire Boulevard.
Welton Becket and Associates was the architect. The Tishman Construction Company was a major
developer of office buildings in Los Angeles, with eleven others concentrated in mid-Wilshire and
around Los Angeles International Airport.   The 24-story Westwood building, the company's twelfth, was
its largest.[94]

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[94] *Los Angeles Times,* August 9, 1970 and February 6, 1972.

Tishman Westwood Building, 1971
10950 Wilshire Boulevard
(Author)

Completed in December of 1971, The Tishman Westwood sits on a site of 3.3 acres. The tower and its parking structure take up only sixty percent of the site, with a plaza to the rear. Retail and service outlets, including a bank, occupy the first level. In form the tower is a pier-and-spandrel rectangle similar in proportion to Becket's Travelers Building, but in a much more somber color palate of black and bronze. It rises directly from the sidewalk, set back only a few feet by a planting strip. [95]

Outlying High Rises, 1960-1975 – Century City

The second location for outlying corporate high rises, unlike Wilshire, was new. This was Century City, a cooperative endeavor of New York developer William Zeckendorf and the Aluminum Company of America, commonly known as Alcoa. The entire project was intended to be identified with Alcoa, through aluminum for building surface whenever possible.

Century City occupies a major portion of the old back lot of the Twentieth Century Fox motion picture company. Welton Becket and Associates planned the complex, with Louis Naidorf as the director of design. Laid out in the early 1960s, Century City was to include eighty-five acres of business structures, along with seventy-five acres of residential buildings and twenty acres of streets, bridges, fountains, and green spaces.[96]

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[95] *Los Angeles Times,* February 6, 1972.
[96] Hines, *Architecture of the Sun,* 675-676.

Model of Century City, looking south from Santa Monica Boulevard, 1961
Gateway East and Gateway West are the darker buildings in the center foreground
(Los Angeles Public Library)

Preliminary boundaries were Santa Monica Boulevard on the north, Pico Boulevard on the south, Fox Hills Drive on the west, and the Beverly Hills city limits on the east. Office buildings were to range in height from thirteen to twenty stories. Alcoa intended these structures to be "the greatest showcase for aluminum products in construction" in the country.[97]

Becket proposed a "city within a city" filled with Corporate International style buildings. Typical of what he had in mind were two of Becket's own designs, Gateway East and Gateway West, located on either side of the primary street, Avenue of the Stars, where it intersected Santa Monica Boulevard. Work on the Gateways began in October of 1961.[98]

The thirteen-story structures were set back from the streets to allow for rows of trees. Each would have a three-level underground garage, eliminating the need for surface parking. The reinforced concrete frames were enclosed with what was described as a novel type of aluminum curtain wall recently developed by Alcoa. According to Becket, "Each window unit will be framed in charcoal brown aluminum, and a narrow recess around each window spandrel unit will be faced with dark gray aluminum."[99]

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[97] *Los Angeles Times,* April 17, 1961.
[98] Hines, *Architecture of the Sun,* 676.
[99] Quoted in *Los Angeles Times,* October 1, 1961.

Gateway West (foreground) and Gateway East (behind), Century City, 1963
Santa Monica Boulevard at Avenue of the Stars
(Los Angeles Public Library)

The Gateways were completed in 1963 and set the pattern for later office buildings by Becket and other corporate firms such as A. C. Martin and Charles Luckman. At the same time, Becket's plan allowed for variations. This freedom was used to advantage by architects such as Minoru Yamasaki, most notably in his curving Century Plaza Hotel (L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 1060). Yamasaki also varied from the rectilinear in office structures. His Century Plaza Towers of 1973 used the Corporate International style, but in triangular configurations.[100]

Century Plaza Towers, 1973
2039 South Century Park East
(Los Angeles Public Library)

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[100] Hines, *Architecture of the Sun,* 676. Completion dates for the Gateways from the Los Angeles County Tax Assessor Map, at http://maps.assessor.lacounty.org, accessed January 2018.

Outlying High Rises, 1960-1975 – Neighborhoods

A final setting for corporate high rises in the 1960s and early 1970s was the neighborhood commercial
district. This was not an entirely new phenomenon. Some of the larger districts which served as regional
commercial centers, most notably Hollywood, had prewar multi-story business blocks. But the postwar
period saw the spread of them to more distant sections of the city.

The corporate high-rise office building in the neighborhood setting is typically not as tall as those found
elsewhere. Limits still applied in most outlying areas, and it was possible to achieve a sense of height
with a shorter building when surrounded by low-rise neighbors. The neighborhood office buildings were
also occasionally designed by lesser-known architects and smaller firms, rather than those active in high
rise work in Downtown, on Wilshire Boulevard, or in Century City.

North Hollywood Federal Savings and Loan, 1961
4461 Lankershim Boulevard
(Los Angeles Public Library)

Three examples, all in the San Fernando Valley, are illustrative. The first to be completed, and typical of
neighborhoods which still maintained older height limits, was the North Hollywood Savings and Loan
Building at 4461 Lankershim Boulevard. It was designed by the architectural firm of Allison and Rible,
about which research needs to be done. The building, at only six stories, is hardly a high rise by
Downtown standards. But when it was announced in November of 1958 it was described as the largest
building in the San Fernando Valley.[101]

Work began in January of 1960. Despite his modest height, it used standard office construction,
consisting of a steel frame and concrete floors and roof. The extensive glass was protected by sun-

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[101] *Los Angeles Times,* November 23, 1958.

controlling louvers and the entire structure was air conditioned. The building was completed in April of 1961, with parking for over 150 cars.[102] (it has been altered and is now occupied by a branch of the Chase Bank).

Panorama Tower, 1962
8155 Van Nuys Boulevard
(Los Angeles Public Library)

The second of the Valley high rises, completed a year later, was the Panorama Tower at 8155 Van Nuys Boulevard. Panorama City was a new postwar planned community with its commercial district laid out along Van Nuys Boulevard north of Roscoe Boulevard. The Panorama Tower is one block south of this planned retail center.[103]

Designed by Welton Becket and Associates, the Panorama was intended to be the first of three such towers. The original thirteen-story building, for which ground was broken in June of 1961, was to be joined later by a second of the same height and a third at twenty stories. When it was topped off in April of 1962 it was the San Fernando Valley's tallest building. The tower was completed in October of that year, with a branch of the Citizens National Bank occupying the ground floor.[104]

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[102] *Los Angeles Times,* November 23, 1958; January 17, 1960; April 2, 1961.
[103] Greg Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth Century Metropolis* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins Press, 1997), 187, 197, 199, 200, 205-206.
[104] *Los Angeles Times,* June 4, 1961; October 22, 1961; April 22, 1962; May 13, 1962; October 21, 1962.

The Panorama Tower is unique among the resources discussed in this context in that it was not identified with a specific corporation. The major tenant was the branch of the Citizens National Bank, whose Vice President was part of the ground-breaking ceremony. This would typically have given the bank naming rights to the tower.[105]

But the developer, William H. Brownyard, decided not to follow tradition. Brownyard had once been a vice president and director of research and analysis for Welton Becket, with expertise in the economics of shopping centers. He apparently preferred to link the tower with the planned commercial district of Panorama City, one block to the north. [106]

Sherman Oaks Union Bank Plaza, 1966
15225-15255 Ventura Boulevard
(Author)

The third high rise, completed four years later, was the Union Bank Plaza at 15233 Ventura Boulevard in Sherman Oaks. It was designed by the firm of Victor Gruen and Associates, better known for its work on shopping centers. The project site covered the full block along the north side of Ventura Boulevard, extending east from Sepulveda. The tower, begun in June of 1965, was the first element built. It featured an exposed frame of reinforced concrete. Eventual plans called for two levels of underground parking. The Plaza was completed in November of 1966.[107]

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[105] *Los Angeles Times,* October 22, 1961.
[106] *Los Angeles Times,* January 1, 1956 and June 4, 1961.
[107] *Los Angeles Times,* May 23, 1965; June 13, 1965; June 27, 1965; February 6, 1966; December 29, 1966. The building permit and all the newspaper descriptions call out the building as having 13 stories. See the permit at

The Union Plaza was one of two Sherman Oaks high rises to be built in the mid-1960s, the other being the Chamberlain Tower at 14724 Ventura Boulevard, completed in July of 1967. Both took advantage of a 1962 zoning change for this section of Ventura Boulevard which allowed for taller buildings. But the Union Plaza's proximity to both the Ventura (101) and the San Diego (405) Freeways focused development around it rather than the Chamberlain Tower, located well to the east. [108]

Epilogue – The Sculptural Glass Skin

The hiatus in office construction lasted through the mid-1970s. During these fallow years, the Corporate International style lost its standing as the orthodox form for corporate offices. Once building resumed by the end the decade, there had been a change in fashion.

The Corporate International style buildings were rigidly rectilinear. They expressed structure and articulated fenestration. Some, like the Occidental Life and Travelers Insurance, were clear exposures of the pier and spandrel. Others, such as the Atlantic Richfield and Mutual Life Benefit, relied more on a pronounced definition of the individual windows. Even those employing sheer curtain walls, such as the UBC tower, broke the surface with corners of a contrasting material.

Most of the corporate high rises built after the lean years made use of a contrasting style, the Sculptural Glass Skin. It differed from the Corporate International in two ways. First it employed, as the name implies, a smooth glass skin that made it difficult if not impossible to differentiate among floors or between windows and solid surfaces.

The second feature, again as the name implies, was the treatment of the building as sculpture. Rigid rectangularity gave way to a footprint of multiple facets, containing beveled corners and numerous ins and outs. Variation in overall form replaced articulation of structure and fenestration as a means of giving buildings individual identities.

There was a handful of corporate office towers, constructed before the hiatus, which made use of the Sculptural Glass Skin and provided a preview of what was to come. Representative is the nineteen-story Century Bank Building of 1972 at 6420 Wilshire Boulevard. The architect was Anthony Lumsden, who was director of design from 1968 to 1993 in the office of Daniel, Mann, Johnson and Mendenhall (DMJM). [109]

"Search Online Building Records," at http://www.ladbs.org, accessed January 2018, as well as the various citations noted in the *Los Angeles Times.* But it appears to have been constructed as 13 floors of offices above a ground banking floor.

[108] *Los Angeles Times,* May 7, 1967; July 9, 1967; September 4, 1969.

[109] Height noted in Certificate of Occupancy Certificate for change of occupancy for basement level, dated March 12, 1974, at "Search Online Building Records," at http://www.ladbs.org, accessed January 2018.

During his early years at the firm, Lumsden worked together with fellow DMJM designer Cesar Pelli to perfect the technology of the glass skin. Its basis is the use of a thin window mullion which permits the exterior to appear to be an unbroken surface of glass.[110] The result, according to Paul Gleye, is the "angular, sculpted form" with its "smoked-glass exterior" which exemplified "the cool, quiet competence of electronic technology" that the modern corporation wished to express.[111] This took the place of the more exuberant forms of the earlier postwar high-rises, with their visible framing, articulated windows, and the company's name spelled out across the top for all to see.
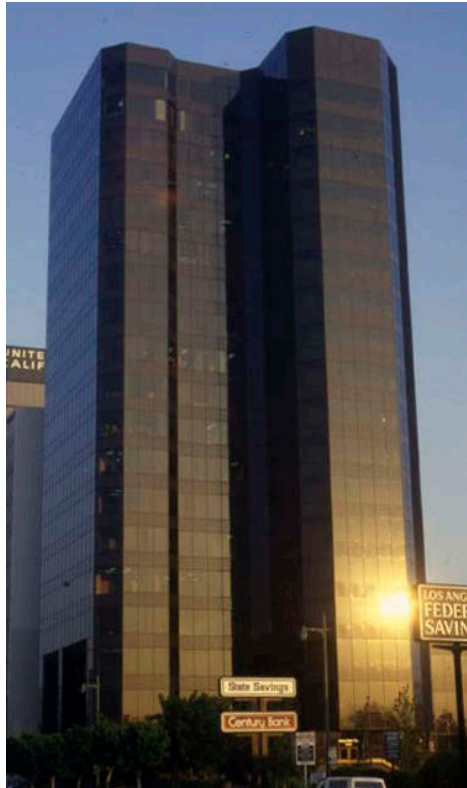
Century Bank Building, 1972
6420 Wilshire Boulevard
(Los Angeles Public Library)

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[110] "Anthony Lumsden," at https://www.laconservancy.org/architects/anthony-lumsden, accessed January 2018.
[111] Gleye, *Architecture of Los Angeles,* 159.

CRITERIA FOR CORPORATE OFFICE BUILDINGS

Summary Statement of Significance: Resources evaluated under this theme are examples of high-rise corporate offices buildings constructed after the Second World War. They are significant in the areas of Architecture, Community Planning and Development, and/or Commerce. They illustrate how changes in architectural styles and construction technology typical of the period and are often excellent examples of their styles and the work of their architects. They also illustrate the influence of zoning, height-limit regulations, and urban redevelopment programs on the form and location of office structures. In terms of commerce, they demonstrate the economic role played by oil, banking, insurance, and entertainment companies in commercial real estate development and are associated with some of the most influential firms in the city's commercial history.

Period of Significance: 1945-1975

Period of Significance Justification: The period of significance begins in 1945, with the resumption of commercial construction after the end of the Second World War. It ends in 1975, with the decline in office construction resulting from overbuilding and economic recession.

Geographic Location: In areas zoned for commercial construction in which high-rise buildings are permitted. Specifically, this includes, but is not limited to, the Center City, Wilshire Boulevard, Hollywood, Century City, and certain sections the San Fernando Valley.

Area of Significance: Architecture, Community Planning and Development, and/or Commerce

Criteria: NR: A/ C   CR: 1/3   Local: 1/3

Associated Property Type: Commercial – Office - High Rise Office

Property Type Description: Corporate Office Buildings are high-rise business structures featuring the name of a corporation as the builder and/or major tenant. They make use of the Late Moderne, Corporate

International, or Sculptural/Glass Skin style as a means of illustrating the status of the corporation.

Property Type Significance: See Summary Statement of Significance above.

Eligibility Standards:
- Developed during the period of significance
- Designed to house a major corporation as a national or regional headquarters

Character Defining/Associative Features:
- Retains most of the essential character-defining features of the type from the period of significance
- Large-scale building mass (50,000 square feet and larger) and tall enough to stand out in its setting
- Parking incorporated into the complex, either subterranean or a separate adjacent structure or lot
- Public areas such has lobbies, restaurants, and retails shops
- May be significant as a type for its association with a corporation
- Exemplifies a L.A. Modernism theme within the Architecture and Engineering context and the work of noted architects/designers
- Associated corporation/developer may be significant in the commercial history of Los Angeles

Integrity Aspects:
- Should retain integrity of Location, Design, Workmanship, Materials, Feeling, Materials, and Association
- Original plan, wall cladding, window, and door openings should be intact
- Original name and/or use may have changed (may have been adaptively reused but maintains architectural integrity)
- Some original materials may have been removed or altered

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