

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



164

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).

1. Name of Property

historic name Fox Wilshire Theatre
other names/site number Wilshire Theatre, Saban Theatre

2. Location

street & number 8440 Wilshire Boulevard not for publication
city or town Beverly Hills vicinity
state CA code CA county Los Angeles code 037 zip code 902011

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,
I hereby certify that this X nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide X local

[Signature] 15 FEB 2012
Signature of certifying official Date
State Historic Preservation Officer California State Office of Historic Preservation
Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official Date

Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register ___ determined eligible for the National Register
___ determined not eligible for the National Register ___ removed from the National Register
___ other (explain): _____

[Signature] 4.3.12
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- Private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		district
		site
		structure
		object
1		Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/theater

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/theater

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT/Art Deco

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: CONCRETE
walls: CONCRETE

roof: ASPHALT
other: Marquee/STEEL
Entry Floor/OTHER/terrazzo

Summary Paragraph

The Fox Wilshire Theatre is located on a .6 acre rectangular corner parcel in an urban area. The contributing building is a reinforced concrete theater and office tower built in 1930 along Wilshire Boulevard in the city of Beverly Hills. The building is designed in the Art Deco style and still retains almost all of the Art Deco architectural and decorative elements, both inside and outside. The building itself is large and imposing, combining a 2,000 seat auditorium and full stage along with retail storefronts and an eight story office tower. The location and setting retain a high degree of historical integrity – the building still commands a large corner lot on the main commercial street of Beverly Hills. Its innovative use of poured concrete decoration which is integral to the building still distinguishes it from earlier commercial buildings which used applied terra cotta ornamentation. Since it continues to be used as a theater it retains all of the feeling and association with entertainment and public assembly. The Fox Wilshire Theatre continues to be an active and irreplaceable link to the vanishing past of a wealthy and fast-growing city which has done little to preserve its theatrical and commercial history.

Narrative Description

The Fox Wilshire Theatre is located on Wilshire Boulevard, the main east-west commercial thoroughfare through the city of Beverly Hills. The building is situated on the south side of Wilshire near the eastern border separating Beverly Hills from the city of Los Angeles. The corner lot is rectangular with the smaller frontage of the building on Wilshire and the longer portion of the building along Hamilton Drive. The entire building is aligned to Hamilton Drive, with only the main frontage on Wilshire Boulevard angled to conform to Wilshire Boulevard. Wilshire crosses this portion of the city of Beverly Hills at an angle from southeast to northwest. Since all the lots along Wilshire are oriented along the north-south side streets, every Wilshire Boulevard frontage in this area is angled.

The majority of the lot is taken up by the theater building, a five-story rectangular poured concrete building encompassing two levels of seating and a full stage with fly loft. This theater portion of the building is set back from Wilshire Boulevard, leaving a smaller triangular area on which is situated a two-story poured concrete commercial block spanning the entire Wilshire Boulevard frontage and encompassing the theater entrance and two storefronts on the first level with offices on the second level. Above this is a smaller office tower rising six more stories at the wider end of the triangular lot. The third and fourth floors of the office tower maintain a small piece of the triangular corner on the Wilshire Boulevard frontage, which then ends as a triangular balcony at the fifth floor. The office tower is only as deep and wide as the west side storefronts and backs up to the rear of the auditorium. From the street corner to the end of the theater frontage, the depths of the storefronts decrease by almost twenty feet.

All portions of the building are constructed of steel-reinforced poured concrete. Art Deco ornamentation was cast into the concrete exterior as the building was built. Wide pilasters on the first floor of the theater building gradually narrow towards the parapet, with cast ornament capitals above the second level on the front and west side of the building. Pilasters and capitals echo classical Greek and Roman designs but have been stripped down to basic geometric forms of chevrons and simple volutes. The grain of the wood forms used to contain the concrete pour can also be seen in the finished walls. Windows in the building are steel casement windows more commonly seen in industrial buildings. There is ornament on almost every surface, even large walls and parapets of the auditorium.

The ground level frontage on Wilshire Boulevard is dominated by the theater marquee and exterior lobby, flanked by storefronts on each side. The east side storefronts are set in a concrete frame along the entire width of the façade. Below

this is a band of three transom windows in each storefront, with leaded glass in a herringbone pattern. Below this are plate glass show windows on each side of inset entrance doors. The bottom two feet below the windows is composed of square tiles painted black. The west side single storefront below the office tower curves around the corner using five individual glass windows set at increasing angles to form the curve. Like the other storefronts, these are composed of an upper transom window, a center glass panel and a lower black tile panel. The east storefronts have modern aluminum and glass entrance doors, while on the west storefront, the entrance is a pair of stainless steel doors reminiscent of those of an Art Deco New York diner. At the far eastern end of the Wilshire Boulevard frontage was a double doorway which originally served as an additional emergency exit for the auditorium. With the 1979 reconfiguration of the lobby and the rear main floor seating, this door has been repurposed as an additional exit from the second floor. The office tower entrance is a small doorway on the west side on Hamilton Drive which is covered by a simple canvas awning. Inside this lobby are the small elevator and an interior stairwell serving the upper floors of the office tower.

The office tower is a rectangle with chamfered corners above the second floor. Three sides of the tower have bands of windows separated only by narrow concrete piers and spandrels. On the east and west sides are six windows, with four on the north side. The south side of the tower has a small unadorned block containing the stairwell and elevator. Small cast concrete balconies connected by metal stairs are set in this southwest corner as an exterior fire escape. A later steel exterior fire escape is attached to the northwest side of the tower. The final finish of the building exterior is painted concrete. On the roof of the office tower is a block of mechanical equipment covered in metal siding designed to imitate the concrete walls below.

The three-sided, sheet metal marquee over the theater lobby entrance forms a trapezoidal entrance canopy. It is accented with Art Deco designs and colored neon. The marquee fills the space above the entrance up to the bottom of the second floor windows. A vertical section rises from the center of the marquee with Art Deco forms imitating the cast concrete pilaster at the fifth floor of the office tower. There are illuminated plastic reader boards on each side of the marquee with changeable letters to advertise events. Above this, the name "Saban Theatre" appears in neon on all three sides. The marquee was installed in 2009 and replaces an earlier one installed in 1959. Underneath the marquee is an open vestibule with ticket sales windows on one side and poster cases on the opposite wall. The outer entry is framed by wide pilasters with bands of half-round vertical ornament. Large glass poster cases are centered on each pilaster. At the rear of this exterior vestibule are four sets of wooden double doors with inset zigzag sunburst windows above each set of double doors. The current owners have uncovered and restored the original ceiling in this area which had been covered by a dropped ceiling since 1959, as well as installing a new terrazzo floor in the vestibule which emulates the colors and designs of the original outer lobby décor.

Inside the front doors is a simple one-story inner foyer leading into the main two-story lobby rotunda. The dramatic rotunda features two wide curvilinear staircases leading to an upper mezzanine lobby which wraps around three sides of the lobby below. Two-story columns decorated in a bas-relief diamond pattern are capped by Art Deco capitals. Original Art Deco wrought hand railings line the staircases on each side and then wrap around three sides at the second level. The dome above features decorative bands of plaster ornament springing from the capitals to the center of the dome, where a glass and metal Art Deco chandelier hangs. This is the original chandelier, although modified in the late 1940s with additional sheet metal ornamentation. All original plaster ornamentation remains intact in the rotunda and the newer lobby area.

On the west side staircase ascending to the upper level, what was originally an open lounge area on a mid-level landing was enclosed in 1979 and now serves as offices for the theater. On the upper level of the rotunda are the main restrooms for both men and women, situated on each side of the central balcony entrance. The restrooms are tucked under the rise of the balcony overhead. Like many theaters of its era, the balcony extends up and over the front lobby. The men's room still retains its original floor plan. The ladies' room, originally composed of an outer powder room and an inner restroom, was combined to form one large restroom in 2010.

The lobby rotunda is the first real indication that the simple Art Deco restraint of the exterior is much more elaborate inside the theater. There are bands of zigzag ornament defining the tops of the first and second levels, and the columns of the rotunda are fluted vertically on the first level and feature a dimensional pattern of diamond relief on the second level. The area over the exit doors is dominated by a huge freestanding sunburst of cast plaster set atop three levels of horizontal zigzag bands. On each side of this sunburst between the next two columns are smaller abstract plaster sculptures with the same zigzag base. Proceeding past the rotunda, towards the auditorium, the lobby widens and reverts to one story in height. This area was originally the rear of the main floor seating, and still features wide Art Deco pilasters on the side walls. It was converted to lobby space in the 1979 renovation which converted the former movie theater into a home for Broadway plays and musicals. On one side of the reconfigured rear lobby is a large storage room, while the other side has two single handicapped restrooms. The center of this area has a large octagonal built-in bar, with a ceiling canopy surrounded by Art Deco zigzag molding. The south wall of the rear lobby is covered with mirrored glass capped by a band of zigzag crown molding. Both the bar and the glass were added in 1979. Four sets of double wood doors lead into the four seating aisles.

Entering the rear of the main floor seating area, there is a plaster soffit just above the doors which encloses the air conditioning ducts. This soffit forms an arch as the enclosed ducts rise from floor to ceiling at each end of the back row of seats. The side walls of the rear section of the auditorium are dominated by wide Art Deco pilasters topped by decorative capitals. In the center of each capital is an original lighted sconce composed of vertical pieces of white glass edged in metal. In between the side wall pilasters, the walls are upholstered in non-original red velvet cloth. The rear wall is covered by a red velvet drape. Bands of zigzag crown molding top the walls under the balcony. A plain ceiling under the balcony is accented by shallow plaster bands running front to back which define the beams supporting the balcony.

Emerging from under the balcony overhang, the ceiling rises dramatically to a height of over forty feet. The Art Deco pilasters seen under the balcony continue here and rise to meet the ceiling, which angles up from the top of the walls. At the second level of the side walls between the edge of the balcony and the organ screens is an unusual original backlit leaded glass false window on each side featuring frosted green and white glass panels in a riot of geometric patterns.

By far the most dramatic ornamentation is reserved for the walls and ceiling flanking the proscenium. Here the walls and ceiling form a continuous curve as they narrow in at both the sides and top to meet the actual proscenium opening of the stage. The plaster walls are cast in a basket-weave pattern pierced by diamond-shaped voids. In reality, only the area in front of the original organ pipe lofts is actually open. The remaining diamond-shaped voids are painted black to give the illusion of an open basket-weave. Fronting the organ grilles are back-lit Art Deco tree sculptures in cast plaster. A large

golden sunburst of cast plaster tops the center of the proscenium over the stage. The rectangular proscenium arch is framed in a continuous band of geometric triangles.

Moving up to the balcony level, entrance is gained through a sloped center aisle leading up into the lower level of the balcony. Beyond the double wooden doors from the lobby the slope ends at a cross aisle which separates the lower mezzanine seating from the upper balcony seating. Farther up the balcony seating there are two more exit stairways, one on each side at a second, higher cross aisle. These lead back down to the mezzanine rotunda lobby and connect directly with the curved stairways leading down to the main lobby.

The balcony of the theater follows a traditional pattern of loge seating in the first five rows, followed by a wide cross aisle and then rows of smaller balcony seating rising almost to the back wall above the lobby. The present seats are a combination of some original 1930 seats, many seats in a 1940s streamline design, and some later seats from the 1959 and 1979 renovations. At the top of the balcony is a projection booth and storage rooms which end at the rear wall of the auditorium. Small exterior windows in these rooms face Wilshire Boulevard. The simple layout and décor of these rooms is essentially unchanged.

At the proscenium arch, an orchestra pit separates the main floor seating from the stage. A removable cover is now in place to add several extra rows of seating over the pit. The orchestra pit is the only part of the building which has a basement level, accessed by a stairway in the stage right dressing room area. The pit itself is intact, although the original railing was removed in 1979 to allow the cover and seating to be installed.

The stage house is typical of theater stages of the early 20th century. A rectangular fly tower rises to a height of almost eighty feet, so that drapes and scenery could be raised completely out of sight of the thirty foot high proscenium opening. Near the top of this fly tower is a steel grid designed to support the weight of scenery, drapes and lights as they are raised and lowered on steel cables and sheaves, with counterweights off stage right. An original pair of large Kalamein doors (wooden doors covered in sheets of tin for fireproofing) in the southwest corner of the stage open out to Hamilton Drive to allow stage scenery and equipment to be loaded in and out.

All dressing rooms and offices for the stage are located on the southeast side of the stage block. Originally there were seven dressing rooms on the main level in this area. Over the past twenty years these have been expanded to include a green room as well as additional dressing rooms where the air conditioning equipment was formerly located. Some dressing rooms are either recent additions or have been extensively remodeled over the years. However, some original stage level dressing rooms do still retain their original floor plan, walls, and doors.

The office tower features a large second floor which has the same footprint as the lobby and storefronts below it, covering the entire Wilshire Boulevard frontage, with a depth that varies from forty feet at the street corner to twenty feet at the east end. Above the second floor the tower narrows to a rectangle which is oriented north and south and is located in the northwest corner of the building at the intersection of Wilshire and Hamilton. Due to the limited height (eight floors) and small square footage of each floor, it is probable that the tower was built primarily as a means of drawing attention to the theater. Fox West Coast, the theater lessee, had recently begun to add towers or one kind or another to almost all of its new theaters around the time this building was constructed. Fox West Coast had taken a twenty year lease on the theater

portion of the building from the owners, Wilshire Hamilton Properties, Inc.¹ Since the owners of the building were constructing for retail and office space as well as the theater, the Fox Wilshire became one of the few Fox theaters of this period in which the tower contained actual usable building space. Nonetheless, one of the primary purposes of the tower was most likely to support the rotating neon FOX sign above it.

One of the striking original features of the tower was a fully finished penthouse apartment on the eighth floor. Photos show a modern Art Deco home with extensive use of wood paneling, built in bookcases, ziggurat doorways, and stepped coved ceilings. Most of this interior decoration was removed many years ago and what remains are the plaster walls, original steel casement windows, and some molded plaster decoration.

The Fox Wilshire Theatre and office tower retain a high degree of integrity, with almost all of its original exterior features and the majority of its original interior. The first renovation in 1959 mainly affected the seating and the outer lobby, replacing the original seating arrangement with a new, more spacious plan (wider spacing between rows). It was the 1979 conversion to a live theater which brought the most noticeable changes to the theater portion of the building. Besides the expansion of the lobby into the rear of the auditorium which was described earlier, that change also necessitated a new raked floor in the orchestra seating area to compensate for the leveling of the new lobby area. This, in turn, prompted the elevation of the stage floor level as well as the elimination of the original orchestra pit railing and wall.

Over the years, the theater interior has been repainted many times. Recent tests have revealed that most of the original painted patterns remain under later layers of paint. The current owners have begun a phased restoration of the original colors and patterns. The proscenium was restored in 2008 to its original silver and black. More recently the lobby rotunda columns were restored, as was the exterior lobby ceiling. Plans have been drawn up to restore the walls and ceiling of the auditorium as budget permits. Almost all of the original plaster ornament is still intact in the lobbies and auditorium.

Except for the inevitable re-paintings which have occurred over the years, the theater interior is surprisingly unchanged from 1930. The exterior is equally intact and evocative of 1930s Art Deco glamour, made all the more striking by the contrast with its modern glass and steel high-rise neighbors.

Integrity Evaluations

Location and Setting:

The Fox Wilshire Theatre building retains a high degree of integrity of location and setting. It still occupies its original property boundaries, still retains all of its original construction and ornamentation, and still has its original layout of storefronts flanking a main theater entrance. The building and theater still retain their original functions of a commercial theater, office space, and retail store space.

Design:

The theater building retains a high degree of integrity of design. It was designed to be extremely modern both inside and outside, marking a deliberate departure from the Beaux Arts design which had dominated commercial high-rise buildings

¹ ERECTION OF PLAYHOUSE UNDER WAY, *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*; Dec 15, 1929 ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1987) pg. D12

in Southern California for the previous two decades. Except for alterations to the theater marquee and ticket entry, very little has been changed on the exterior of the building. It still retains its original form and concrete decoration at all levels. Even the changes to the marquee and ticket entry have been updated recently to echo the Art Deco style of the original. The original rooftop revolving sign which spelled out the word FOX on two sides was removed years ago and has not been replaced. A duplicate of this sign remains in place nearby at the Fox Theatre in Pomona, meaning that an exact copy could be made sometime in the future.

Materials and Workmanship:

The building retains a high degree of workmanship and original materials. The entire building was poured concrete with steel reinforcement. Art Deco motifs were cast into the concrete forms and all of those designs remain in place on the exterior. Most windows are still the original steel casement windows. Storefront glass and doors have been somewhat altered over the years but retain their original layout.

Inside the theater most of the original decorative elements remain. Most plaster ornament and decorative railings are still in place, although they have undergone a series of paint schemes which leave almost none of the original color finishes. A restoration program began a few years ago which has so far brought back the original black and silver colors to the proscenium area around the stage opening. Some original doors remain, and new doors have begun to be installed using the same original Art Deco wood designs.

Lighting has been updated on the interior over the years, with recessed spot lights supplementing and/or replacing many of the original frosted glass fixtures. Original fixtures still remain in the lobby rotunda and on pilasters along the side walls of the auditorium. A pair of unusual leaded glass windows still flanks the sides of the auditorium at the front edge of the balcony. These false windows are laid out in zigzag designs using two shades of frosted glass which is back-lit.

Some original seats remain in the balcony, and other seats are a combination of different eras of the theater's history. The original black and silver stage drapes were destroyed in a fire in 1932 and were not replicated. New carpeting was installed a few years ago using an actual 1930 Art Deco carpet pattern from the Mohawk Carpet Company's archives. Though not the same as the theater's original solid pink carpet, the new pattern was used by Mohawk in other Art Deco theaters of the same period.

Association:

The Fox Wilshire Theatre and building retain a high degree of association with live theater, film exhibition, and entertainment in Beverly Hills and Los Angeles. Since the theater has repeatedly adapted over its history to changing film exhibition patterns, new film technologies, live Broadway-style shows, concerts, and community events, it has continued to be a place where the public experiences memorable and important events. Because of its size and location it was often used first to host the world premiere of a major film and then to present an exclusive run of the same film. This meant that many theater-goers associated the Fox Wilshire with the excitement of seeing an important new film for the first time.

Feeling:

In a city which has always embraced modern commercial design, the Fox Wilshire Theatre and building still evoke the era in which they were constructed. In conjunction with the surrounding residential neighborhood to the south which also

Fox Wilshire Theatre
Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA
County and State

retains many apartments and duplexes from the same era and the commercial building across Wilshire Boulevard to the north which is an intact 1920s Spanish style building, the Fox Wilshire and its immediate neighbors provide a glimpse of an architectural past which is fast disappearing in Beverly Hills . In contrast, less than a block away on either side of the theater one will find large modern high-rise buildings constructed from the 1960s through the present decade.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

Period of Significance

A: 1930 to 1959

C: 1930

Significant Dates

1930, 1959

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Lee, S. Charles

Period of Significance (justification)

During its first few years of operation, the Fox Wilshire Theatre was known as "America's Most Distinctive Theatre." The interior of the theater was visually arresting, with black and silver décor on the walls and ceiling and pink carpet throughout the house. The lobby was always decorated with fresh flowers, and a second pipe organ entertained waiting customers in the lobby. The theater featured the best first run films, preceded by stage shows, organ solos and matinee fashion shows. There were special midnight shows as well as raucous "kiddie matinees" on weekends. Ushers were chosen for their resemblance to popular film stars. The theater quickly became one of the most successful in the entire

Fox chain. Even after budget cuts during the Great Depression forced the elimination of the fresh flowers, the lobby entertainment, and the regular stage shows, the Fox Wilshire continued to exhibit some of the most popular first run films and produced consistently high box office numbers all the way through the 1950s.ⁱⁱ

In 1959 the theater underwent a substantial renovation designed to position it as one of the leading "road-show" theaters in Los Angeles. Seating was reconfigured to provide more comfortable spacing and larger seats. The best wide screen and surround stereo equipment were installed. A new marquee and entrance lobby was constructed on Wilshire Boulevard to make the theater appear modern and up-to-date. Subsequent to this renovation the theater hosted many large film premieres and long running "road-show" engagements – exclusive area bookings of a major film, often with reserved seats sold in advance.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

Criteria Consideration A: Religious Properties. The Fox Wilshire Theatre is currently owned by a Jewish congregation – The Temple of the Arts, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. The theater is operated by a separate non-profit organization, the Beverly Hills Performing Arts Center. The congregation is made up of people involved in the arts and entertainment, and their aim is to operate the theater as a place for the performing arts. The congregation only uses the theater for services a few days per month, and only when it does not interfere with other arts and entertainment uses. The Fox Wilshire Theatre meets National Register Criteria Consideration A because it derives its primary significance from its architectural distinction and its historical importance to the city of Beverly Hills and Southern California in general as a movie palace emblematic of its era.

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria)

The Fox Wilshire Theatre is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A at the local level of significance for its association with motion pictures and the development of Beverly Hills as a center of the entertainment industry, and under Criterion C at the local level of significance for its Art Deco architecture designed by the regionally significant architect S. Charles Lee. It was designed to be a major film presentation house, even including a stage for live musical acts before the films. At the time of its construction the Fox Wilshire was in an area of mostly open fields on the outskirts of the city, and its presence was of paramount importance in establishing the area as a viable commercial and entertainment center. It is difficult to overestimate the influence of this theater and building in bringing in other development and cementing the reputation of the city of Beverly Hills as a separate community, even as it was surrounded by the growing city of Los Angeles. Over its 80 year history, the Fox Wilshire has been the site of numerous film premieres, exclusive first-run film engagements, live concerts, and touring Broadway shows. Despite several renovations, the largely intact interior of the theater continues to exhibit Art Deco characteristics including the columned two-story rotunda lobby, the original pilasters, beams, columns, and capitals in the auditorium, and the silver and black proscenium and organ screens.

ⁱⁱ *The Film Daily Yearbook*, Film Daily Publishing, various annual volumes 1931 – 1950.

The connection with architect S. Charles Lee, a long-time resident of the city of Beverly Hills, makes the Fox Wilshire significant also as a virtually intact example of Lee's transition from the French Regency style of the Tower and Los Angeles Theatres to the nascent Art Deco style that would come to dominate movie theater architecture in the 1930s. Lee's name became synonymous with Art Deco and later Art Moderne theater design in Southern California, and the Fox Wilshire is his earliest and most ambitious theater in the Art Deco style. At the time that Lee designed theater in the Art Deco style, it was still considered daring and somewhat *avant garde*. Lee was not content to merely dabble in Art Deco – his Fox Wilshire Theatre was a bold and unapologetic statement with its dense interior of black, silver, and pink which contrasted with a spare yet bold exterior. A newspaper report of the time described it as "the first theatre designed completely in the modern motif."ⁱⁱⁱ

Narrative Statement of Significance (provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance)

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Fox Wilshire Theatre is a significant cultural landmark due to its location in the city of Beverly Hills, which has been the residential home of many people involved in the motion picture industry over the last hundred years. Actors, directors, producers, writers, composers, and film executives have always made the city of Beverly Hills one of their prime choices to live and work. As such, the Fox Wilshire Theatre has been a preferred location for film premieres, long running film engagements and live theatrical performances due to its central location in the city of Beverly Hills. From early talking pictures accompanied by stage shows, through major road show film engagements such as "Exodus" which ran exclusively for over a year in 1960 and 1961 on a strictly reserved seat basis^{iv}, elaborate movie premieres and, most recently, Broadway plays and musicals, the Fox Wilshire has always been a key entertainment venue for the city of Beverly Hills and the west side of Los Angeles. A 1932 advertisement for the theater noted "There's a reason for the constant attendance of motion picture stars at the Fox Wilshire...you'll enjoy it just as they do."^v

The location of the Fox Wilshire Theatre has been something of an anomaly compared to most movie palaces around the country. The vast majority of these buildings were built in downtown areas that suffered a gradual decline in the 1960s and 1970s. Many of these theaters were closed and neglected or exposed to misuse and insensitive alterations. In contrast, the neighborhood of the Fox Wilshire Theatre has remained as prime retail and office space throughout its life, and the surrounding neighborhood has always been a desirable and well-maintained area. If the Fox Wilshire were ever endangered it was more from demand for the valuable land on which it stands rather than the decline in property values suffered by many older theaters. In fact, its two sister Beverly Hills movie palaces, the Beverly and the Warner, were both demolished in order to build newer and more lucrative buildings in their place.

When the Fox Wilshire did undergo the inevitable softening of film attendance in the 1970s, instead of closure or conversion to retail or multiplex, the theater was reinvented as a live Broadway theater. This allowed a whole new generation of theatergoers to consider the Fox Wilshire an important part of their cultural life. Countless Angelinos have

ⁱⁱⁱ FOX WILSHIRE TO OPEN SOON, *Los Angeles Times* Sep 7, 1930; pg. B11.

^{iv} Display Ad 61 – No Title *Los Angeles Times* Sep 8, 1960; pg. C8.

^v Display Ad 36 – No Title May 22, 1932; pg. B15.

memories of attending major Broadway plays, concerts, and one man shows at the Fox Wilshire. When combined with earlier generations who remember first run films, glittering premieres and long run road-show engagements, the Fox Wilshire, now known as the Saban, has become part of the cultural fabric of Southern California.

The earliest years of the Fox Wilshire Theatre set the tone for its future prominence. The fact that the theater opened and then thrived, even three years into the Great Depression, is a tribute to its unique design, location, and operation. While the theater was not immune from the general budget cuts that Fox West Coast Theatres instituted in late 1932, it did remain open while nearly half the theaters in California were closed by the end of 1932.^{vi} Instead of being just another neighborhood house it quickly set itself apart as a deluxe theater worth visiting from across the communities of Beverly Hills, Hollywood, and Los Angeles. The leading-edge architecture and décor may have drawn audiences in, but they returned because of the theater's attention to customer comfort, unique programming (the earliest wide screen films, fashion shows, touring symphonies, children's matinees, vaudeville acts) and amenities (fresh flowers in the lobby, two pipe organs, and ushers who resembled current stars and starlets).^{vii}

The Fox Wilshire was built and operated by the largest and most important theater chain in Southern California – Fox West Coast (FWC) Theatres. Although owned by Twentieth Century Fox Studios, FWC Theatres presented the films of most of the studios except for Paramount and Warner Brothers. This meant that a key FWC theater such as the Fox Wilshire was able to dominate the competition in its city and surrounding areas and draw a steady stream of the best entertainment and large and loyal audiences. The Fox Wilshire was a consistently successful and popular film theater in Beverly Hills.

Later the Fox Wilshire weathered the Great Depression and World War II as one of Fox West Coast Theatres' principal first-run movie houses for Southern California. This meant that the best films would open at the Fox Wilshire along with a major downtown Los Angeles theater. The films would run exclusively for several weeks before being moved to secondary area theaters. When the industry changed in the 1950s and audiences demanded wide screen and stereo surround sound with flawless presentation, the Fox Wilshire again adapted by installing the latest equipment and renewing the theater amenities to remain a key theater for premieres and exclusive first-run film presentations.

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Fox Wilshire Theatre is a significant architectural landmark due to its style, location, and purpose. The Art Deco style which began to flourish around 1929-1930 along Wilshire Boulevard was cut short by the advent of the Great Depression. Just a few large commercial buildings were constructed in this style in Beverly Hills. Only one other Art Deco theater was built along Wilshire Boulevard in Beverly Hills – the Warner Theatre, demolished in the 1980s. The one other large movie palace in Beverly Hills, the Beverly Theatre, was severely remodeled into a bank in the 1990s and then demolished a few years ago. This leaves the Fox Wilshire Theatre building as the single remaining movie palace in the city and one of the few remaining intact Art Deco commercial buildings in the city. Wilshire Boulevard in Beverly Hills has come to be

^{vi} *Film Daily Yearbook Annual 1933*, Film Daily Publishing.

^{vii} "Wilderness Wonder – A Fascinating study of a Neighborhood Theatre that was operated on a deluxe 'downtown' policy," *Console Magazine*, The American Theatre Organ Society, July 1979.

dominated by modern glass and steel office buildings and stores, leaving the Fox Wilshire Theatre as one of the few reminders of an earlier bustling theater and shopping district at the eastern end of the city.^{viii}

By the time that theater construction resumed in the latter part of the 1930s, both styles and needs had evolved and the large movie palaces were being supplanted by smaller movie houses without stage facilities or ancillary public spaces. The end result is that the number of true movie palaces built in the Art Deco style is dwarfed by the much larger number of 1920s theaters decorated in more classical or historical styles. The Fox Wilshire Theatre is therefore one of only a small number of movie palaces built in the Art Deco style around the country before the era of the movie palaces was cut short by the Great Depression. The Art Deco style takes its name from a Paris exhibition in 1925 which highlighted the most modern trends in design, art, and architecture. Among other things it was a rejection of the neoclassical motifs of the dominant Beaux Arts and Art Nouveau schools of architecture in favor of more natural and playful design elements. At the time it was not called Art Deco, and was a gradually evolving style which manifested itself in many evolutionary ways. Only a few architects initially took the step of rejecting the classical movie palace architecture of the day in order to design an entire theater in the most modern style, both inside and out – as was the case at the Fox Wilshire Theatre. It is possible that because the Fox Wilshire Theatre was located in the same city that many in the film industry called home, the enthusiastic embrace of Art Deco by film production designers made such a bold theater design easier to accept.^{ix}

In Los Angeles and around the country, there was a definite hierarchy of movie palaces. The major studios and exhibitors would build the largest palaces in the downtown commercial districts, with smaller, less ornate theaters scattered around the remainder of the city. In Los Angeles this construction took something of a different turn. By the late 1920s the population had already spread out to many outlying areas of the county, including Hollywood, Beverly Hills, Long Beach, and Pasadena. Thus, instead of building extremely large theaters with seating capacities of 4,000 to 5,000 or more as was done in other major cities, the Los Angeles area ended up with a whole collection of large, opulent movie palaces all with seating around 2,000. This meant that a theater the size of the Fox Wilshire was given the budget and attention to make it a truly luxurious showplace. Fox West Coast was already the dominant exhibitor in Southern California by the time they decided to build the Fox Wilshire Theatre. They had the money and wherewithal to dictate when and where films would be exhibited, and therefore were able to justify a second major theater in the city of Beverly Hills, just a few miles from the large movie palaces of Hollywood Boulevard.

The result was an elaborately ornate film and stage theater with a seating capacity equal to most of the other major theaters in Southern California. Design, decoration, furniture, and equipment were all first rate. If there was any aspect that was not the equal of earlier movie palaces it was perhaps the size of the stage. By 1930, vaudeville was in decline, and therefore the thirty foot deep vaudeville stage was an expensive luxury. The Fox Wilshire got a stage with a depth of twenty five feet, still respectable but not the equal of the downtown Los Angeles and Hollywood theaters. The other major difference at the Fox Wilshire was actually an accident of geography. The area of Beverly Hills where the theater was built had a high water table and basements were somewhat problematic and difficult to maintain. Except for the orchestra pit,

^{viii} David Gebhard and Robert Winter, *Los Angeles – An Architectural Guide*, (Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, 1994), pg. 122.

^{ix} Suzanne Tarbell Cooper, Amy Ronnebeck Hall, and Frank E. Cooper, Jr., *Los Angeles Art Deco* (San Francisco: Arcadia Publishing, 2005), pg. 8.

the theater was built without a basement. This meant that it did not have the spacious lounges and extra public rooms of some other theaters.

S. Charles Lee, the architect of the Fox Wilshire Theatre, was a dominant influence on movie theater architecture in Southern California from the time he arrived in the 1920s up through the post-war years of the early 1950s, designing or renovating almost eighty theaters in California during that period.^x He was able to master any current style, from the lavish French Rococo of the 1927 Tower Theatre in downtown Los Angeles (still extant) through the incredibly lavish 1931 Los Angeles Theatre (still extant) which strictly adhered to the same style, even as he was designing the Fox Wilshire in a completely different idiom. He was concurrently designing another local movie palace in another style altogether – the 1931 Fox Florence (demolished) resembled a mission style rancho. After theater construction practically ceased in the early years of the Great Depression, Lee began designing renovations of earlier theaters as well as Moderne style film houses in Mexico City. When he returned to theater design in Southern California in the late 1930s his style was the more spare Streamline Moderne exemplified by the Academy Theatre in Inglewood, California. Lee continued to practice architecture from his home in Beverly Hills through the 1980s. The Fox Wilshire remains his largest and most intact Art Deco theater design.

Lee was also known for his enthusiastic embrace of new theater technologies. At the Fox Wilshire he specified the world's first installation of a special wide film screen which could accommodate Fox Studio's new Magnascope process. This was a wider film stock which produced an image of the same size as the later CinemaScope process – but twenty years before that technology. Fox only produced a few films in that format, and then had to shelve the process due to the onset of the Great Depression. Another notable Lee innovation related to this was a special black and silver curtain which was rigged in sections so that it could frame the screen for any size film presentation.^{xi} This unique curtain was destroyed in a stage fire in 1932.^{xii}

Developmental history/additional historic context information (if appropriate)

The Fox Wilshire Theatre has now had an eighty year history in which it has adapted and continued to play an important role in the entertainment and cultural life of Beverly Hills and Southern California. After weathering the Great Depression and World War II while continuing to be a first run film house, the theater then adapted to changing demographic patterns as the post-war move to the suburbs decimated attendance at other large theaters in Los Angeles. The Fox Wilshire remained a key theater for the most prestigious and popular films of each decade, and drew audiences from all over Southern California.. One of its record engagements was "The Sound of Music" which ran for ninety four weeks in 1965 and 1966. When the era of road-show films ended in the 1970s the Fox Wilshire made another major transition, becoming a live theater for concerts and Broadway shows. It was able to do this because of its location in one of the wealthiest cities in Southern California, where audiences were eager to have a local option for first-class entertainment.

^x Cinema Treasures web site, <http://cinematreasures.org/architects/71?page=3>, accessed 11/19/2011.

^{xi} "Fox Wilshire Theatre," *Motion Picture Herald*, March 14, 1931.

^{xii} "Wilderness Wonder – A Fascinating study of a Neighborhood Theatre that was operated on a deluxe 'downtown' policy," *Console Magazine*, The American Theatre Organ Society, July 1979.

After undergoing a major renovation in 1979 which enlarged the lobby, added new box office facilities, adjusted the seating on the main floor, and updated the stage facilities, the Fox Wilshire began a new life as the Wilshire Theatre. It presented a series of touring Broadway shows and became known as a key touring house in Los Angeles. A subsequent affiliation with the Nederlander producing company assured a steady supply of the best shows from New York. When disputes with the property owner threatened to sever this important connection, the Nederlanders responded by purchasing the building and theater. They were then able to program the theater so that it became known as one of the best places in Southern California to see recent Broadway shows and concerts.

During this period the theater was often rented for services by the Jewish temple which would eventually end up purchasing the building in 2005. The intention of this purchase was to allow the temple to have a permanent home which would also fulfill its mission to promote and support the arts and entertainment in Beverly Hills. Since that time the Temple of the Arts has continued to upgrade the theater and program it in a manner which would position it in the forefront of entertainment venues of its size. The temple uses one of the upper floors of the building for its offices and uses the theater for services a few days each month, depending on availability.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form)

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Fox Wilshire Theatre
Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA
County and State

"Wilderness Wonder – A Fascinating study of a Neighborhood Theatre that was operated on a deluxe 'downtown' policy,"
Console Magazine, The American Theatre Organ Society, July 1979.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been Requested)
 previously listed in the National Register
 previously determined eligible by the National Register
 designated a National Historic Landmark
 recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____

 recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

State Historic Preservation Office
 Other State agency
 Federal agency
 Local government
 University
 Other

Name of repository: Theatre Historical Society of America
archives, Elmhurst, IL

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .61
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage)

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	11	373 120	3770 152	3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2				4			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

Verbal Boundary Description (describe the boundaries of the property)

Los Angeles County Assessor's ID No. 4333-029-018
TRACT # 4988 LOTS 552,553,554,555 AND N 40 FT OF LOT 556

Boundary Justification (explain why the boundaries were selected)

This is a city lot retaining its original property lines.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Edward J. Kelsey
organization Historic Theater Services LLC Date August 10, 2011
street & number P. O. Box 555163 telephone 213-216-1004
city or town Los Angeles State CA zip code 90055
e-mail edk@historictheaterservices.com

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

PHOTO LOG

Name of Property: Fox Wilshire Theatre

City or Vicinity: Beverly Hills

County: Los Angeles **State:** CA

Photographer: Tessa Swallow

Date Photographed: 7.1.11

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

- 1 of 14. CA, Los Angeles County, Fox Wilshire Theatre Front Exterior looking southeast
- 2 of 14. CA, Los Angeles County, Fox Wilshire Theatre Exterior East Side
- 3 of 14. CA, Los Angeles County, Fox Wilshire Theatre Front Exterior looking south
- 4 of 14. CA, Los Angeles County, Fox Wilshire Theatre Side Exterior looking west
- 5 of 14. CA, Los Angeles County, Fox Wilshire Theatre East Storefront
- 6 of 14. CA, Los Angeles County, Fox Wilshire Theatre Exterior Lobby Entrance Doors
- 7 of 14. CA, Los Angeles County, Fox Wilshire Theatre Exterior Lobby Doors, Floor and Box Office
- 8 of 14. CA, Los Angeles County, Fox Wilshire Theatre Interior Lobby Rotunda looking south
- 9 of 14. CA, Los Angeles County, Fox Wilshire Theatre Interior Lobby Rotunda looking north
- 10 of 14. CA, Los Angeles County, Fox Wilshire Theatre Main Floor Seating Under balcony
- 11 of 14. CA, Los Angeles County, Fox Wilshire Theatre Auditorium Looking Northeast
- 12 of 14. CA, Los Angeles County, Fox Wilshire Theatre Auditorium Looking North
- 13 of 14. CA, Los Angeles County, Fox Wilshire Theatre Proscenium and East Organ Screen
- 14 of 14. CA, Los Angeles County, Fox Wilshire Theatre Proscenium Looking South

Fox Wilshire Theatre
Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA
County and State

FIGURE LOG

- Figure 1: Fox Wilshire Theatre exterior circa 1931 (provided by the Saban Theatre)
- Figure 2: Fox Wilshire Theatre lobby circa 1931 (provided by the Saban Theatre)
- Figure 3: Fox Wilshire Theatre proscenium circa 1931 (provided by the Saban Theatre)
- Figure 4: Fox Wilshire Theatre auditorium circa 1931 (provided by the Saban Theatre)

Property Owner:

(complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO)

name Temple of the Arts
street & number 8440 Wilshire Boulevard telephone (323) 658-9100
city or town Beverly Hills State CA zip code 90211

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

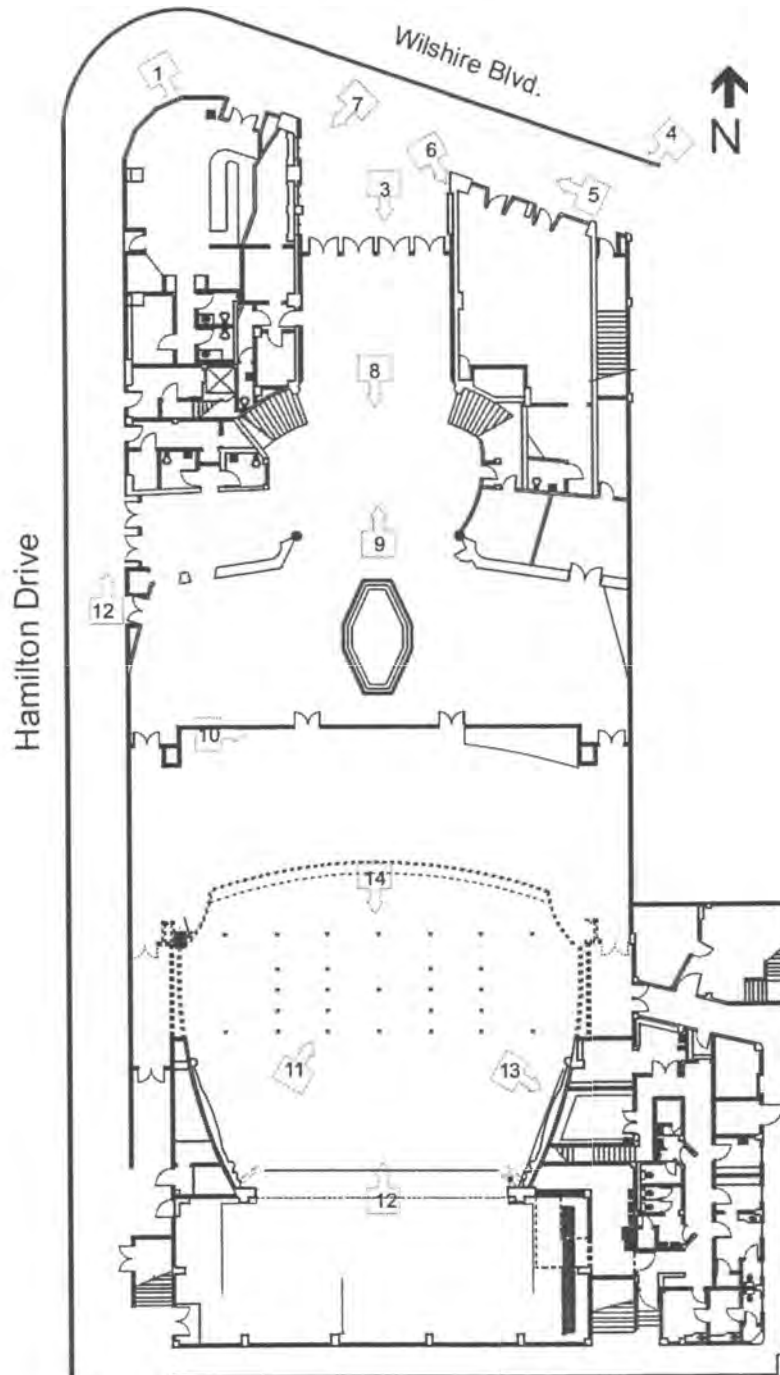
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Fox Wilshire Theatre
Name of Property
Los Angeles, CA
County and State
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation Page 1

Site Plan With Photo Location Key
Fox Wilshire Theatre



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

Fox Wilshire Theatre

Name of Property
Los Angeles, CA

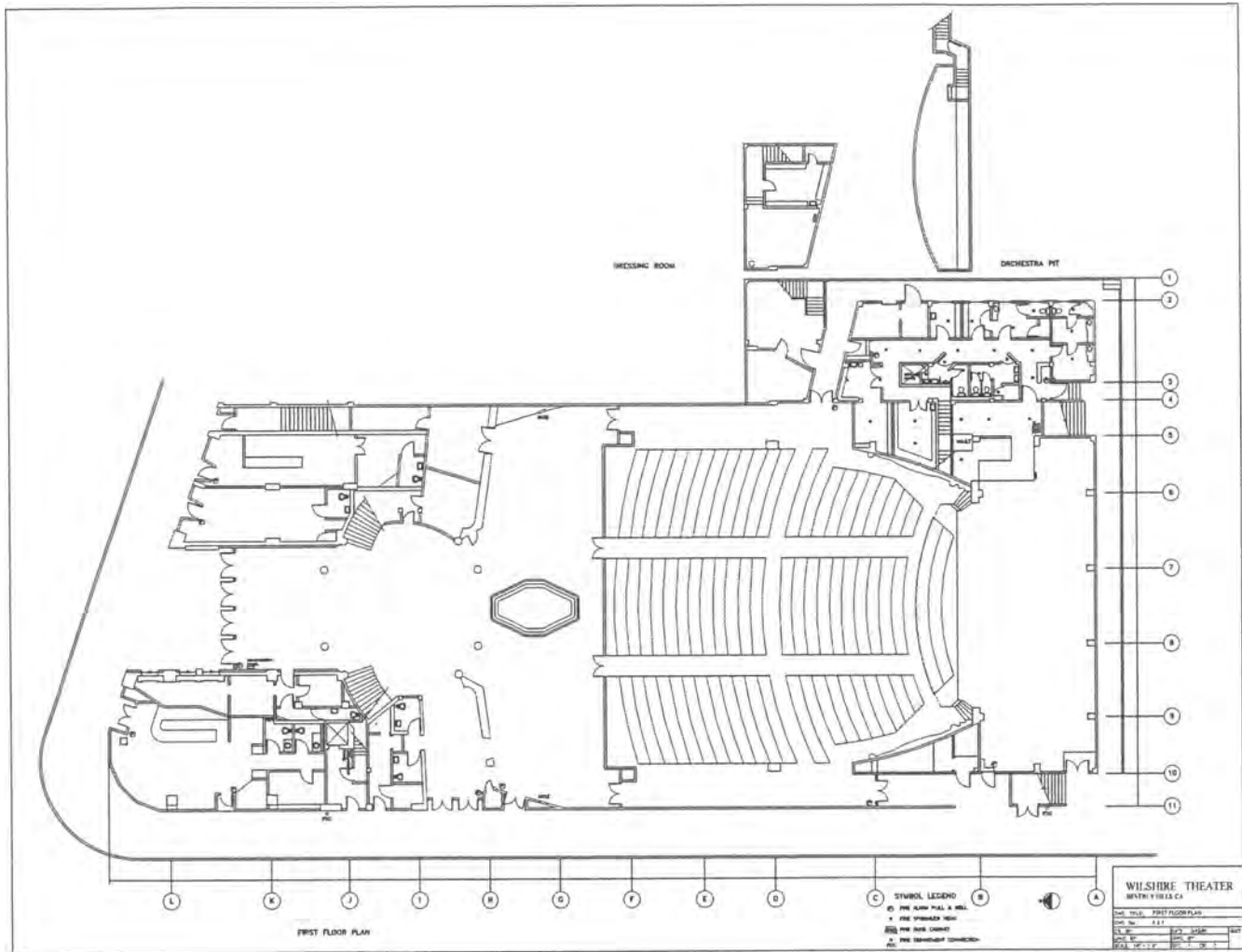
County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number Additional Documentation Page 2

Sketch Map



Plan – First Floor - 2009

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

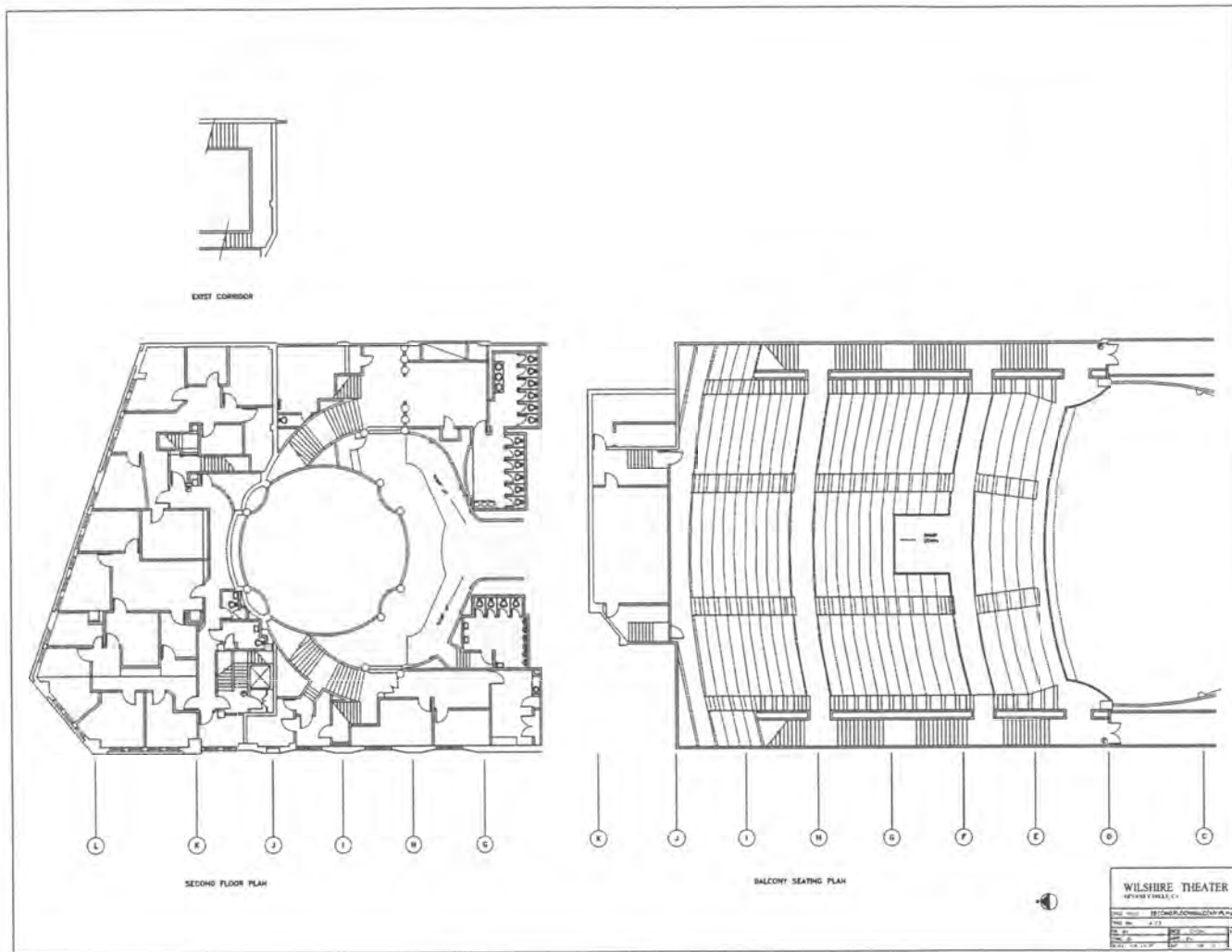
Fox Wilshire Theatre

Name of Property
Los Angeles, CA

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation Page 3



Plan – Second Floor - 2009

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Fox Wilshire Theatre
Name of Property
Los Angeles, CA
County and State
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation Page 4



Figure 1: Fox Wilshire Theatre exterior circa 1931

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Fox Wilshire Theatre

Name of Property
Los Angeles, CA

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation Page 5

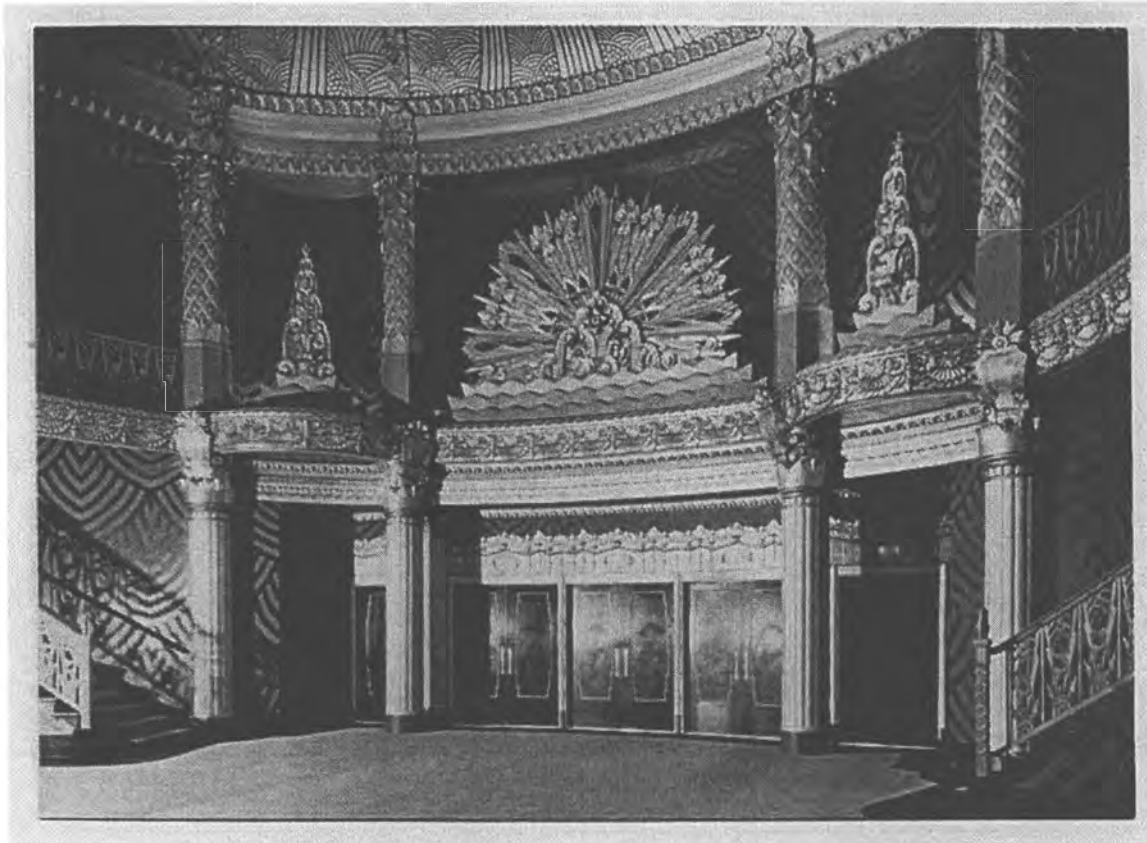


Figure 2: Fox Wilshire Theatre lobby circa 1931

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Fox Wilshire Theatre
Name of Property
Los Angeles, CA
County and State
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation Page 6



Figure 3: Fox Wilshire Theatre proscenium circa 1931

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Fox Wilshire Theatre

Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation Page 7



Figure 4: Fox Wilshire Theatre auditorium circa 1931

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Fox Wilshire Theatre
NAME:

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: CALIFORNIA, Los Angeles

DATE RECEIVED: 2/17/12 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 3/09/12
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 3/26/12 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 4/04/12
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 12000164

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT RETURN REJECT 4.3.12 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

**Entered in
The National Register
of
Historic Places**

RECOM./CRITERIA _____

REVIEWER _____ DISCIPLINE _____

TELEPHONE _____ DATE _____

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



CA_Los Angeles County_Fox Wilshire Theatre_0001



CA_Los Angeles County_Fox Wilshire Theatre_ 0002



CA_Los Angeles County_Fox Wilshire Theatre_0003



CA_Los Angeles County_Fox Wilshire Theatre_ 0004

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CA_Los Angeles County_Fox Wilshire Theatre_ 0006



CA_Los Angeles County_Fox Wilshire Theatre_0007



CA_Los Angeles County_Fox Wilshire Theatre_ 0008



CA_Los Angeles County_Fox Wilshire Theatre_ 0009



CA Los Angeles County Fox Wilshire Theatre 0010



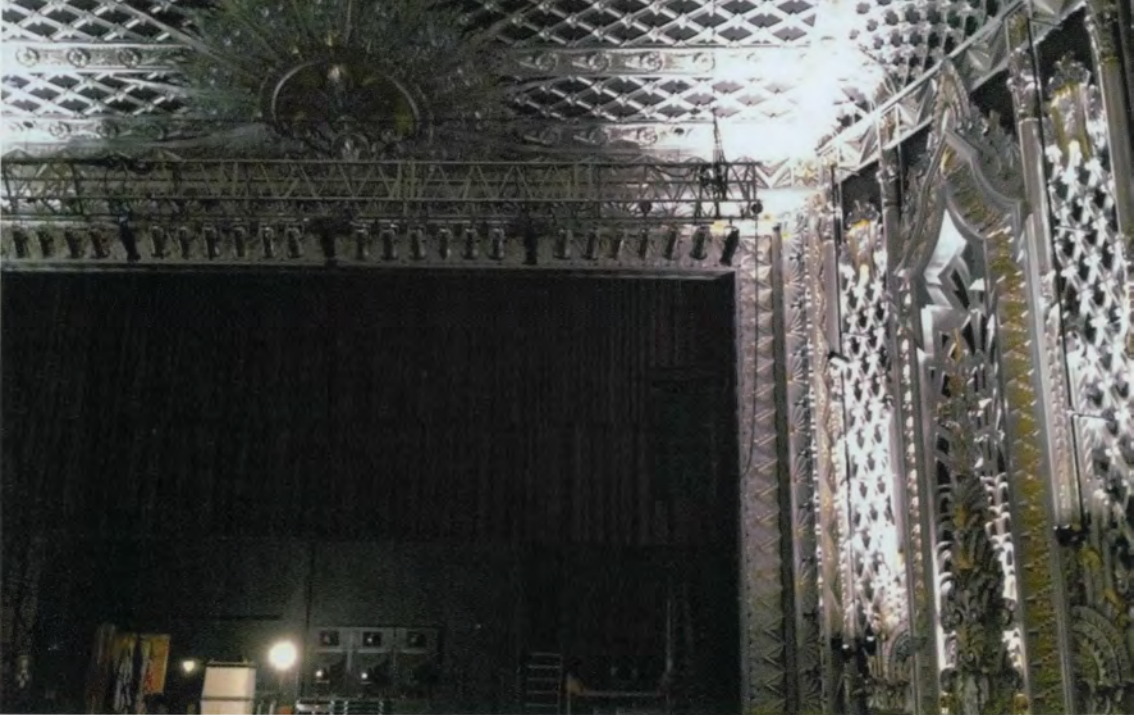
CA_Los Angeles County_Fox Wilshire Theatre_ 0011



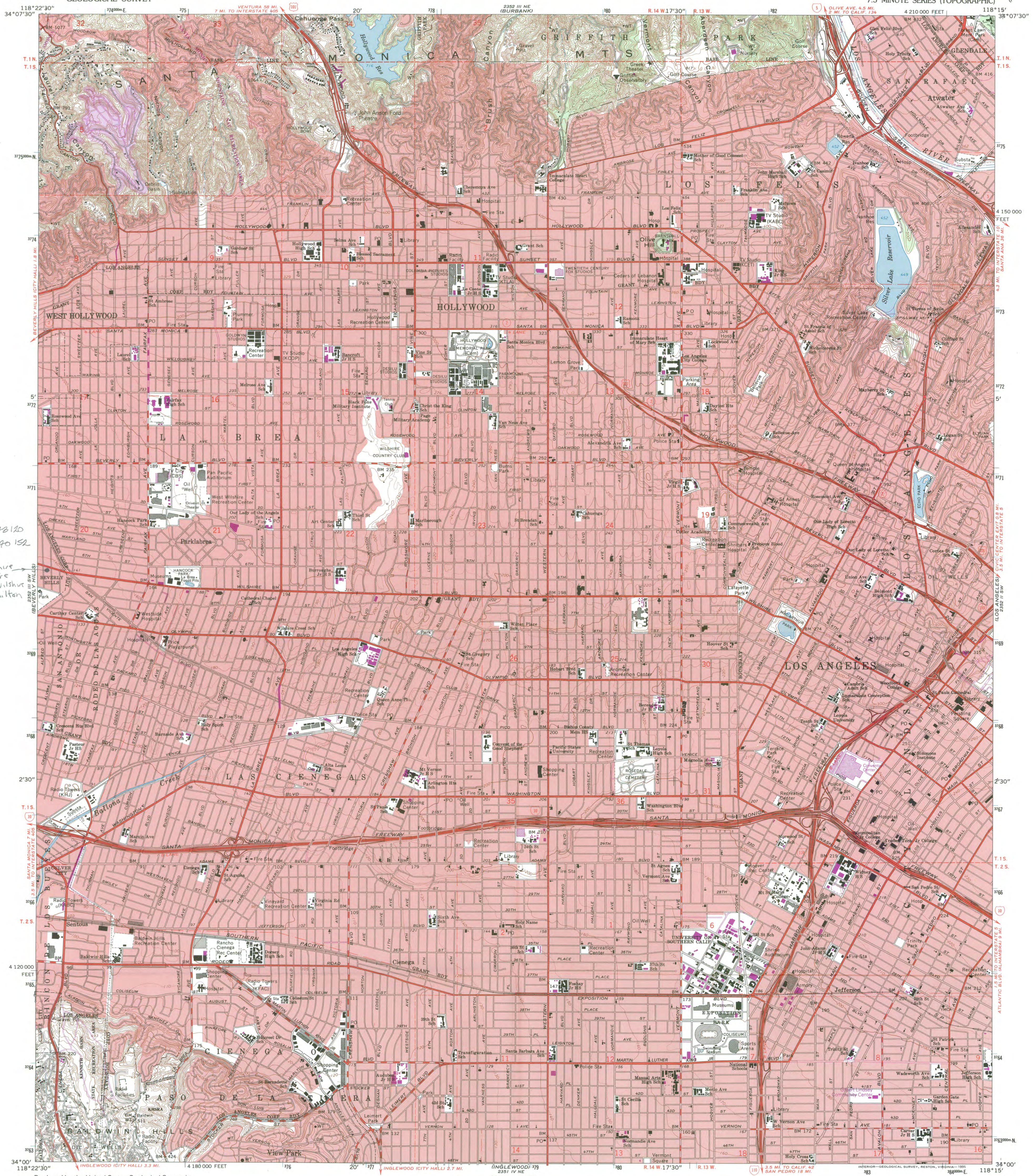
CA Los Angeles County Fox Wilshire Theatre 0012



CA_Los Angeles County_Fox Wilshire Theatre_ 0013



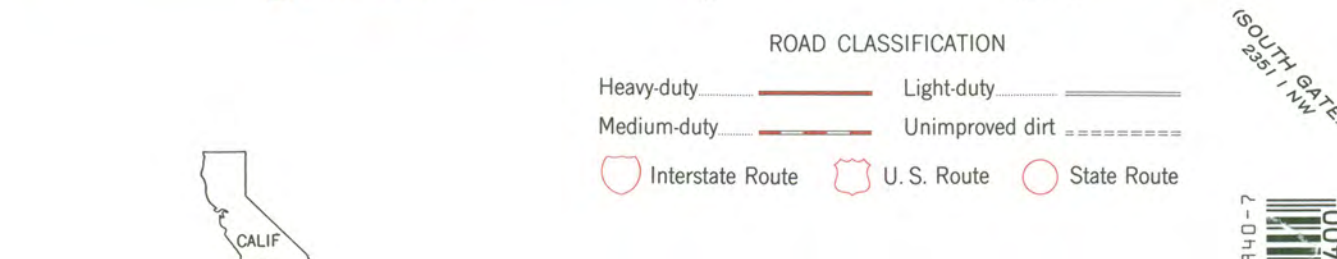
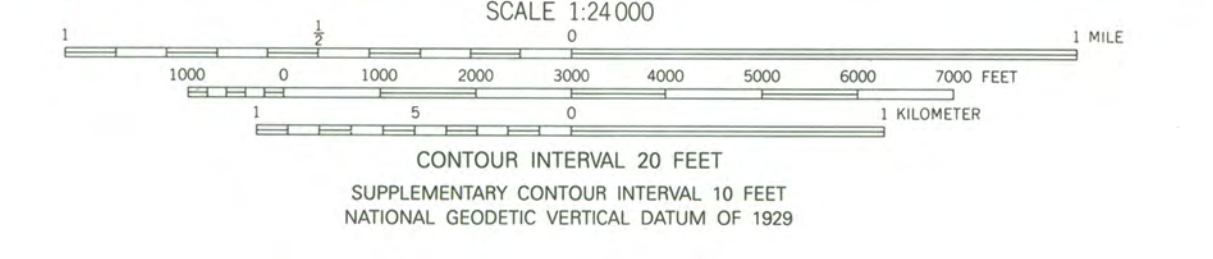
CA_Los Angeles County_Fox Wilshire Theatre_0014



E 378120
K 3770 152
Wilshire Theatre
844 Wilshire
C. Hamilton

Produced by the United States Geological Survey in cooperation with California Department of Water Resources Control by USGS, NOS/NOAA and Los Angeles City and County. Compiled from aerial photographs taken 1964. Field checked 1966. North American Datum of 1927 (NAD 27). Projection and 1000-foot ticks: California Coordinate System, zone 7 (Lambert Conformal Conic). Blue 1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator ticks, zone 11 North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83) is shown by dashed corner ticks. The values of the shift between NAD 27 and NAD 83 for 7.5-minute intersections are obtainable from National Geodetic Survey MADCEN software. There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of the National or State reservations shown on this map. Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown. A portion of the south half of this map lies within a subsidence area. Vertical control based on latest available adjustment.

Photostitched from 1991 source; no major culture or drainage changes observed. Boundaries and names revised 1994.



QUADRANGLE LOCATION
HOLLYWOOD, CA
34118-A3-TF-024
1966
PHOTOREVISED 1981
MINOR REVISION 1994
DMA 2352 III SE-SERIES V895

ISBN 0-607-08940-7
9 780607 089400

Fox Wilshire Theatre
Beverly Hills, Los Angeles County
Staff Report

The 1930 Fox Wilshire Theatre building on a large corner lot in commercial Beverly Hills combines a 2,000 seat auditorium and full stage along with retail storefronts and an eight story office tower. It is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A at the local level of significance for its association with motion pictures and the development of Beverly Hills as a center of the entertainment industry, and under Criterion C at the local level of significance for its Art Deco architecture designed by the regionally significant architect S. Charles Lee. It was designed to be a major film presentation house, even including a stage for live musical acts before the films.

During its early years of operation, the Fox Wilshire Theatre was known as "America's Most Distinctive Theatre" for its décor, amenities, and programming. It quickly became one of the most successful in the entire Fox chain and produced consistently high box office numbers all the way through the 1950s. The property's period of significance is 1930 to 1959. The theater was renovated in 1959 to position it as one of the leading "road-show" theaters in Los Angeles.

The building retains almost all of its Art Deco architectural and decorative elements, including the columned two-story rotunda lobby, the original pilasters, beams, columns, and capitals in the auditorium, and the silver and black proscenium and organ screens. Its innovative use of poured concrete decoration distinguishes it from earlier commercial buildings which used applied terra cotta ornamentation. Fox Wilshire continues to be used as a theater, now known as the Saban Theatre, and has excellent integrity.

The property is nominated on behalf of its owner, the Temple of the Arts. The temple purchased the building in 2005 to have a permanent home that would also fulfill its mission to promote and support the arts and entertainment in Beverly Hills. The Temple of the Arts has continued theater restoration and uses the theater for services a few days each month, only when it does not interfere with other arts and entertainment uses. Beverly Hills Performing Arts Center, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, operates the theater. The Fox Wilshire Theatre satisfies National Register Criteria Consideration A: Religious Properties because the property derives its primary significance from its architectural distinction and its history as a movie palace emblematic of its era.

No letters of support or objection have been received to date. Staff supports the nomination as written and recommends the State Historical Resources Commission determine that the Fox Wilshire Theatre meets National Register Criteria A and C at the local level of significance. Staff recommends the State Historic Preservation Officer approve the nomination for forwarding to the National Park Service for listing in the National Register.

Amy H. Crain
Historian II
November 23, 2011

**OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION**

1725 23rd Street, Suite 100
SACRAMENTO, CA 95816-7100
(916) 445-7000 Fax: (916) 445-7053
calshpo@parks.ca.gov
www.ohp.parks.ca.gov



February 15, 2012

Ms. Carol Shull, Keeper
National Register of Historic Places
National Park Service 2280
1201 I (Eye) Street, NW
Washington, DC 20005

Subject: **Fox Wilshire Theatre
Los Angeles County, California
National Register of Historic Places Nomination**

Dear Ms. Shull: *Carol*

Enclosed please find the **Fox Wilshire Theatre** nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. On January 20, 2012 in Chico, California, the California State Historical Resources Commission unanimously found the property eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and C at the local level of significance,

The 1930 Fox Wilshire Theatre building on a large corner lot in commercial Beverly Hills combines a 2,000 seat auditorium and full stage along with retail storefronts and an eight story office tower. It is eligible under Criterion A for its association with motion pictures and the development of Beverly Hills as a center of the entertainment industry, and under Criterion C for its Art Deco architecture designed by the regionally significant architect S. Charles Lee. The property's period of significance is 1930 to 1959.

The property is nominated on behalf of its owner, the Temple of the Arts. Beverly Hills Performing Arts Center, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, operates the theater. The Fox Wilshire Theatre satisfies National Register Criteria Consideration A: Religious Properties because the property derives its primary significance from its architectural distinction and its history as a movie palace emblematic of its era.

If you have any questions regarding this nomination, please contact Amy Crain of my staff at (916) 445-7009.

Sincerely,

Wayne

Milford Wayne Donaldson, FAIA
State Historic Preservation Officer

Enclosures