NPS Form 10-900
(Oct.1990)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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 *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. 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 entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name **General Petroleum Building**

other names/site number **Mobil Oil Building, Pegasus Apartments**

2. Location

street & number **612 South Flower Street** NA ☐ not for publication

city or town **Los Angeles** NA ☐ vicinity

state **California** code **CA** county **Los Angeles** code **037** zip code **90017**

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ 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 ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Stephen D. Mikesell, SHPO 5/12/04
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

California Office of Historic Preservation
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

☑ entered in the National Register
☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
☐ removed from the National Register
☐ other (explain): _____

for Edson H. Beall — 6/22/04
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 count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	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

none

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE: Offices

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: Multiple Dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT: Moderne; Corporate Moderne

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete
walls Ceramic tile; marble; aluminum
roof Asphalt
other

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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.

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)
Architecture

Period of Significance
1949

Significant Dates
1949

Significant Person
(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)
N/A

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Architect/Builder
Wurdeman and Becket, architect
Walker, P. J., builder

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 of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography
(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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:

General Petroleum Co. Building
Name of Property

Los Angeles, California
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre

UTM References
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1	11	384020	3768160	3			
2				4			

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description
(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification
(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Christy Johnson McAvoy, Managing Principal; Jennifer Trotoux, Architectural Historian
organization Historic Resources Group date October, 2003
street & number 1728 Whitley Avenue telephone (323) 469-2349
city or town Los Angeles state CA zip code 90028

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

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.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items
(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name 612 Partners LLC, c/o Mr. Gregory Schem
street & number 5750 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 610 telephone (323) 939-8800
city or town Los Angeles state CA zip code 90036

Section 7: Architectural Description

Summary

The General Petroleum Building is a thirteen-story office building located in downtown Los Angeles. The building occupies a full block from West Sixth Street to Wilshire Boulevard along the east side of South Flower Street. Constructed between 1947 and 1949, it contains half a million square feet of office space and was at the time of its completion the largest office building in Los Angeles. The structure of the building is steel-reinforced concrete. The General Petroleum Building was designed by the noted architectural firm of Wurdeman and Becket, and was among the first of the firm's many significant works to contribute to the definition of the post-war Modernist idiom in Los Angeles. Its exterior integrity is high, though the interior had been changed over the years for different tenants, and it has now been converted to apartments within the original layout.

Exterior

The exterior of the building is a massive, horizontally-oriented, rectangular block. The fenestration is grouped on each facade within a large, separate inset panel with a bezel-like frame around it. These panels of fenestration cover most of each street facade. Each of the panels is offset to rise above the walls of the main block (the panels extend to the thirteenth floor, and the block itself appears to extend from the second to the twelfth story). Small terraces are located at the four top-floor corners of the main block, with access from the thirteenth-story corner apartments. Within the interior of the block there are two large, open light courts, square in plan, which provide for circulation of light and air to apartments (formerly offices) not facing the streets.

The exterior of the building is clad in large, square tiles of glazed terra cotta manufactured by Gladding McBean under the name Ceramic Veneer. Most of the cladding is buff colored, and darker, grey-green tiles are used on the spandrel panels. The walls of the interior light courts are finished in smooth plaster.

Within the massive "panels" of fenestration on the street facades, horizontal bands of windows are divided into long, vertical strips by a series of aluminum fins which project from the facade between each window bay. These fins are fixed sun shades, which were designed to cut down on the amount of direct sunlight entering the building to lower air conditioning costs. The surfaces of the fins are flat, with a slightly reeded texture.

Short, horizontal strips of three windows each are located on both sides of the panels on the north- and south-facing (shorter) facades. These strips span the space between the edge of the panel and the adjacent corner of the building.

The first-story base of the building is recessed from the edges of the main mass and clad in black granite, making the main block appear to float over the sidewalk. Enhancing this impression, flat, plastered canopies extend over the dark granite. Within the base, sheltered by the flat canopies, are floor-to-ceiling glass storefronts.

The unusual fenestration of the building consists of steel bifold sash windows. Each window is composed of two adjacent single-pane sash with a handle in the center between the two sash. When this handle is pushed outward, the outer edges of the window slide inward toward the center as the two sash fold together. All of the original fenestration is intact, both on the street facades and within the large light courts.

On the building's flat roof, a high parapet forms a screen around the top of the building, set back from the edge of the roof. Historically, this parapet carried signage advertising Mobil Oil, with a thirty-foot figure of Pegasus that was the company's trademark.

Interior

The building has a rectangular plan designed around two large, square, open-air light courts. The south light court begins on the third floor, and the north light court begins on the fourth floor. Interior spaces of the building include two street-level banking lobbies occupying most of the ground floor along Flower Street, street-level retail spaces on the Wilshire Boulevard and 6th Street sides, a main elevator lobby in the center of the plan open to Flower Street, elevator lobbies on the upper floors, and the office floors themselves, which at the time of the most recent rehabilitation had a mix of open floor plans and areas that retained the original hallway configuration (with varying levels of integrity of design and materials). Currently, all of the floors have the original or reconstructed double-loaded corridor, and the offices formerly located along these corridors are occupied by new apartments.

The main entrance to the building is through an open vestibule in the center of the Flower Street elevation. The vestibule is finished in travertine and flanked at the street by wing walls clad in black granite. The vestibule contains features such as stone paving, travertine ceiling and walls, and built-in travertine planters clustered around the edges of the original glass entrance doors. The rectangular, symmetrical elevator lobby is just beyond the doors, and contains a large, square, travertine planter (which appears original) beneath a false skylight. Four elevators are located on the north wall and four on the south wall within the rectangular space. At the end of the lobby, opposite the main Flower Street entrance, there is a secondary entrance from an automobile drop-off point at the rear of the building. This access point was added in the 1970s. The location of key features in the lobby such as the elevators, planter, and reception desk remains unchanged.

The extant coved ceiling treatment around the edges of the upper-floor elevator lobbies is an original feature, seen in original building plans and early photos. These lobbies are located in the center of the plan between the two light courts. Originally, a double-loaded corridor with offices located to either side ran through the floors. This condition remained on six floors, and was reconstructed on the other floors during the recent conversion to apartments. Many original office entrance doors remain, now serving as entrances to the apartments, with their beech veneer doors, frames, and transom vents. Original door hardware remains. Some of the doors are no longer used, and these have been painted over for fire safety reasons.

Alterations and Certified Rehabilitation

In 2003 a certified rehabilitation of the property was undertaken for a rehabilitation tax credit project. All work complied with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and was certified by the National Park Service. The rehabilitation involved adaptive reuse of the former office building as an apartment building. The office areas were converted to apartments, and the existing windows were cleaned and repaired. Some elements were added to the roof, which was previously unused except for utility and mechanical purposes, so it could serve as a recreational space for the residents. A glass-walled, flat-roofed exercise room was added, as well as a lap pool below the parapet, surrounded by a raised deck. These changes converted the roof to a recreational space for the new apartments while leaving the essential features of the roof intact.

The major alteration to the interior, completed as a part of the 2003 rehabilitation and adaptive reuse, is the addition of parking to supplement the original fifty spaces of basement parking. A small amount of the rear of the ground floor floorplate was used to install ramps to upper levels. Part of the first floor and the full second floor were converted for parking. The addition of parking on the second floor is not visible on the exterior since the floor had, and still has, no openings. On the third floor, the existing windows were left in place as ventilation for the garage. The addition of the garage floors is only visible at the east ends of the north and south facades where the car entrances were added. The original garage entrance, to the basement parking, is located on the alley (east) façade.

According to original plans, the main elevator lobby was finished in a combination of travertine and teak. This treatment had been altered since the building was sold by Mobil Oil, and the current wood paneling is a rehabilitation of the later treatment and not original.

The exterior of the building is essentially unchanged, with the original windows, cladding materials, massing intact. The ground floor window systems, flat canopies, and planter boxes are intact. No alterations or additions visible from the three street facades have been made on the exterior of the building aside from the new garage entrances on Wilshire and 6th Street adjacent to the alleys. The exterior is in good condition. The exterior of the building looks very much as it appears in early photographs.

While the exterior of the building has retained very high integrity, the interior was modified by later owners prior to the recent rehabilitation. The building underwent interior remodeling in the 1970s. The changes made at this time included gutting and rebuilding the tenth through thirteenth floors and the addition of a limited parking garage within the basement, accessed by a ramp along the northeast corner of the building. An open-air secondary lobby was also added within the mass at the rear (east facade), for use as a drop-off point before cars were taken to the garage. This open lobby is on axis with the main elevator lobby.

The finishes of the elevator lobbies on the upper floors were all altered before the recent rehabilitation, though the spatial configuration has not changed. Alterations on the upper floors involved the construction of apartment units within the spaces occupied by the original offices along both sides of the corridors. Office (now apartment) doors had been stained a walnut color darker than the original beech color, possibly in the 1970s.

Section 8: Statement of Significance

Summary

The General Petroleum Building appears eligible for the National Register under Criterion C at the local level of significance for its significance in the body of work of Los Angeles architects Wurdeman and Becket. The building was constructed in approximately a year and a half between 1947 and 1949, with the building permit issued on September 22, 1947 and ceremonial dedication on April 1, 1949. The building was noted in the press as the largest office building in Los Angeles at the time of its completion.[1] The General Petroleum building was first of the firm's major office building commissions, in which they made major, early steps in the development of the architectural language that would characterize office buildings in Los Angeles after World War II.

Within the historic context of post-war architecture in Los Angeles, Wurdeman and Becket are considered "master" architects. As described below, the buildings they designed in the period of the mid-1940s through the mid-1960s represent an important body of work which in itself contains many of the iconic buildings of the period. The period after World War II was a time of significant change in the population and the cityscape of Los Angeles, and has been studied and discussed as a historical period. National Register Bulletin #15 notes that to be eligible for the National Register under Criterion C for its representation of an architect's work, a building must "express a particular phase in the development of (the architect's) career" and be a good example of a "particular idea or theme in (their) craft."[2] Office buildings were the dominant theme in the careers of Wurdeman and Becket, and the General Petroleum Building was one of the two earliest major office buildings designed by the firm in which they developed a vocabulary of architectural devices and an aesthetic for such structures in Los Angeles through the 1950s.

Significance of the Work of Wurdeman and Becket

Walter Wurdeman and Welton Becket, who practiced together as Wurdeman and Becket from 1939 to 1949, were during their time the most prolific and professionally well-recognized practitioners of commercial architecture in Los Angeles.[3] Walter Wurdeman studied architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, with additional training in France at the Ecole des Beaux Arts at Fountainbleu. Withey's Biographical Dictionary of American Architects notes that Wurdeman and Becket "gained a national reputation in the field of contemporary architecture."[4] The firm also opened offices in San Francisco and Philadelphia. Their buildings of the 1930s through the 1960s have

[1] The building was in fact very close in size to the firm's other major building of the era, the Prudential Building; the two buildings were completed within a year of each other.

[2] *National Register Bulletin #15,* "How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation," (National Park Service, 1991) 20.

[3] From 1933 to 1939 Wurdeman and Becket also practiced together in the firm of Plummer, Wurdeman, and Becket, established with the older architect Charles Plummer, who died in 1939. After 1939 the firm became Wurdeman and Becket. Though Wurdeman was to die decades before Becket, in 1949, the two men were contemporaries.

[4] Henry F. and Elsie Rathburn Withey. *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased).* (Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, Inc., 1970) 674.

been widely commented on, some becoming icons of the city. A selection of their most important works follows. This material is provided to establish the high profile of the firm's works, many of which made a significant contribution to the architecture and the cityscape of Los Angeles during the post-war period.

The most significant works of Wurdeman and Becket (Welton Becket and Associates after 1949) were built between the mid 1930s and the mid 1960s. The earliest major building was the 1935 Pan Pacific Auditorium was known for the distinctive streamline Moderne pylons which marked its primary facade on Beverly Boulevard. The building was a major landmark located directly north of the Miracle Mile district built for the 1935 National Housing Exposition. It was abandoned, partially demolished, and finally destroyed by fire in 1992.

The firm's most significant buildings aside from the Pan Pacific Auditorium were all constructed after World War II. Among the earliest of these was the 1947 Bullock's Pasadena store, the most important department store of the post-war period in California due to its planning significance (with its suburban location, unusual at the time) and its design significance (being an excellent example of post-war Moderne architecture and landscaping). The building was listed in the National Register in 1996 at the national level of significance.

In 1949, upon the death of Walter Wurdeman, the firm became known as Welton Becket Associates. The firm continued to produce highly noted and distinct buildings for commercial and public clients, and these works included many office buildings.

Perhaps the firm's most well-known and unusual office building is the 1953 Capitol Records tower in Hollywood. Capitol Records remains the most important building associated with the establishment of the recording industry in Los Angeles. The round tower is a widely popularized image of Los Angeles. The building is ranked 2S2 in the California State Historic Resources Inventory, or determined eligible for the National Register through a consensus determination.

The firm made a major contribution in public buildings in Los Angeles through the significant political and social connections cultivated by Welton Becket. The firm designed Parker Center, the headquarters of the Los Angeles Police Department in 1955. This eight-story building, across the street from Los Angeles City Hall, shows the characteristics of their work in the 1950s with floating massing, some full walls of windows and others fully unfenestrated and clad in terra cotta, and mosaics and terrazzo in the interior. Another major example of their public buildings is the 16,000 seat Los Angeles Sports Arena of 1959. Their most prominent public building, however, is the Los Angeles Music Center complex, a 1964 performing arts venue with three auditoriums seating a total of 6,000 people with underground parking and large plazas and fountains. This complex was a major part of the reconstruction of Bunker Hill, and was a milestone in terms of the redevelopment of downtown Los Angeles as well as private and county support for the performing arts.

Welton Becket Associates designed many buildings around the world for Hilton Hotels as they expanded worldwide in the 1950s and 1960s. In Los Angeles, they designed the Beverly Hilton Hotel, a large urban resort hotel, on the edge of Beverly Hills in 1955. This building was the centerpiece of the collaboration between Becket and Conrad Hilton and also served as Hilton's corporate headquarters.

Among the later icons of Los Angeles designed by Welton Becket Associates is the Cinerama Dome of 1963. This concrete geodesic dome is one of the few auditoriums nationwide built expressly for the exhibition of film recorded

using the Cinerama process. This theater became a landmark of commercial modern architecture in Los Angeles and was recently rehabilitated. Only 40 years old, the building is currently ranked 5S in the California State Historic Resources Inventory and listed as Los Angeles Cultural-Historic Monument #659.

The works listed above include live theaters, film theaters, department stores, and office buildings, demonstrating the diversity of building types represented among the firm's major projects. Design of the General Petroleum building began in 1946, making it the first major office building the firm would design. This position places it among the most significant works of Wurdeman and Becket and Welton Becket Associates, since office buildings were a major part of their output and the building is one of their two earliest built designs in that genre and a very strong debut, incorporating all of the characteristics of its style and period, as discussed below.

Significance of Wurdeman and Becket's work in the Development of Los Angeles Office Buildings

The General Petroleum Building holds a significant place among office buildings in downtown Los Angeles and the Wilshire Corridor. Historian Paul Gleye in *The Architecture of Los Angeles* notes that the building was "the first large postwar building in downtown Los Angeles and the first major office structure designed by a firm that would become one of the world's principal designers of large-scale architecture."[5] Few office buildings were built downtown in the post-war period, but those that were represented a complete break from the appearance of pre-war buildings, the latest of which dated to 1931 when the last boom in high rise construction in the city ended. Although many smaller-scale buildings were constructed later in the 1930s, and some larger buildings "modernized" in this period, the post-war high rise buildings represented the renewal of a form that had been dormant for many years. The design lineage of the high-rise buildings in Los Angeles constructed between the end of World War II and the end of the 1960s essentially begins with the earliest post-war high-rises by Wurdeman and Becket.

A building height limit of 130 feet imposed in Los Angeles in 1904 and raised to 150 feet in 1911 promoted the horizontal orientation of the cityscape. This restriction would last until 1957. General Petroleum is generally known as the first major office building constructed in Los Angeles after the end of World War II (though Wurdeman and Becket's Prudential Building, in a somewhat less visible location along the Miracle Mile section of Wilshire, was constructed at the same time). With the 150-foot building height limit still in place, the building met the ceiling height established throughout downtown. In 1957 the height limit was lifted, replaced by the concept of Floor Area Ratio, in which the allowed height was established by the size of the lot and the size of the proposed building's footprint.

The General Petroleum building contains a half-million square feet of floor space in only 150 feet of height. The building stretches an entire city block along Flower Street from West 6th Street to Wilshire Boulevard. When it was constructed, the building was the largest in Los Angeles in terms of square feet. Though the height limit lasted another ten years, no other building of comparable size and massing was built in downtown Los Angeles until after the limit was lifted; Wilshire Boulevard became a preferred site for development in part because there was land available for further development. Many older buildings in Los Angeles already reached the height limit, and therefore replacing them with modern structures was not advantageous. As in cities throughout the country, the establishment of new business centers outside of the traditional city center was preferred. When the height limit was lifted and some older neighborhoods downtown were cleared as a part of "urban renewal," the development potential for downtown took on new life in the late 1950s and early 1960s. By that time, the style of the buildings developed with different

[5] Paul Gleye. *The Architecture of Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Rosebud Books, 1987) 152.

materials and forms; the changes came in part because the scale of the buildings was transformed by their height. For example, while many of the 150-foot modernist high rises of the 1950s were clad in materials such as marble, such an expensive material was neither necessary nor economically practical for a building of much greater height where there was much more building to clad and where it would not be easily seen from the ground. The end of the height limit marked a change that brought the immediate post-war Corporate Moderne style to a gradual halt. The office buildings built by Welton Becket Associates after this time were considerably less innovative.

Structural and Architectural Innovations of the General Petroleum Building

The General Petroleum building was built to the maximum envelope allowed on the property, with the necessary voids for light and air circulation occurring in the interior of the block. The offices have window exposures on the exterior and within the large, square, interior light wells. The building was designed on a modular system so that offices could be installed on a seven foot module. A typical office floor plan contained a double-loaded corridor with narrower offices fourteen feet wide along the exterior, and fewer, wider offices twenty-one feet wide along the interior light wells.

Despite their limited height, buildings downtown had generally been vertically oriented. Even those that occupy much of a block generally have wings facing the street designed to break up their mass into vertical banks (examples include the Biltmore Hotel on Pershing Square, the now-demolished Pacific Finance Building directly east of General Petroleum, and the Pacific Building nearby at 6th Street and Grand Avenue). General Petroleum, however, is an anomaly: a high-rise that is wider than it is tall, with a solid facade to the street. On Wilshire Boulevard, where most office buildings in Los Angeles would be built between the end of the war and the lifting of the height limit, a sense of horizontal orientation (even if a building was not literally longer than it was tall) was to become the standard. During this same period, Wurdeman and Becket were also designing Wilshire Boulevard's first major post-war commercial high rise building, the Prudential Building, which furthered the experiment of horizontal massing within the more spacious and auto-oriented context of Wilshire's Miracle Mile.

Concurrent with the development of the General Petroleum Building was the firm's Prudential Building (now called Museum Square). This major office building is a dynamic composition on Wilshire Boulevard with a long street frontage, a horizontal solution to the Los Angeles height limit. On Wilshire Boulevard, a much less dense and less urbanized environment, an office building could be designed as a horizontal, freestanding object of any massing rather than as a solid block filling the buildable envelope of a smaller site. The building's exterior window systems and the interior public spaces have been altered. The building was similar in square footage to the General Petroleum Building, at about half a million square feet.

The General Petroleum building prefigures this horizontality on a downtown site with its overall horizontal massing; wide, framed, rectangular banks of windows covering most of each façade; the floating effect of a large light-colored mass over a dark, recessed ground floor; horizontal bands of windows on the short facades and long banks of glass storefronts on the ground floor; and projecting flat overhangs at the ground floor.

The architectural features of the building' exterior were also innovative and were used again and again in different combinations by Becket and by several other architects designing high rises in Los Angeles during the 1950s and 1960s. Historian Paul Gleye, in his book *The Architecture of Los Angeles,* in fact holds up the General Petroleum building as an example to indicate what the characteristics of post-war Moderne were. Wurdeman and Becket's work

was key to the development of the style and therefore to the architectural development of commercial Los Angeles in the post-war era through the 1950s. Gleye writes, in part:

> The late Moderne style of the postwar period was characterized primarily by protruding, bezel-like window outlines that gave a sense of closure to a building, in contrast to the openness of the International Style. Wurdeman and Becket's General Petroleum Building, the first large office building designed by the firm, is clad in beige terra cotta, and the primary exterior feature is a bank of vertical aluminum sunshades that protrude from three facades. At the corners are small horizontal bands of bezeled windows.[6]

The architectural features of the General Petroleum Building make it an excellent illustration of the post-war high rise idiom. The fenestration is arranged to form both vertical and horizontal patterns on the facade. The aluminum fins which act as sun shades are strong vertical elements, organizing the windows into vertical columns. A series of short horizontal window groups reads together as another vertical column at the edges of the north and south facades. The building employed materials that were just becoming available for architects in the post-war period, such as Gladding McBean's "Ceramic Veneer," a product which featured images of the General Petroleum building prominently in its advertisements. Aluminum had not been a widely-produced building material before World War II, but was employed at General Petroleum for the sunshades, which are a significant feature defining the facades. Vertical or horizontal exterior sunshades themselves were a very common characteristic for downtown and Wilshire corridor high rises in the 1950s and early 1960s, and were used for the first time as a major exterior feature in this building.

Aside from its architectural characteristics, many innovations in the building's design were noted in a cover story about General Petroleum in the regional publication *Architect and Engineer*.[7] These included the structure, innovations in systems, and flexible floor plans, as well as the Modernist design of the building. A discussion of these innovations follows.

The General Petroleum Building was constructed using a lightweight concrete system in which lighter pumice aggregate was used at the upper floors in order to lessen the weight of the structure. Vermiculite was used to fireproof the structure (rather than typical concrete). It was estimated that this saved 13,000 tons of weight in the structure and cut the cost of construction by 12%.[8] Further innovations were also described in fireproof plastering, some arc welded joints (in addition to the mostly riveted steel joints), and a large-scale water softening filter system.

While the interiors of the building were meant to contain individual offices along a double-loaded corridor, the building was designed for these offices to be modular and for the walls between them to be demountable for rearrangement. To aid this flexibility, a duct within the floor could be tapped for connection to electricity and telephone lines every five feet. Conditioned air was distributed by ducts from the building's heating and cooling plant, with the location of the vents also amenable to changeable office sizes and arrangements. *Architect and Engineer* noted that these innovations "reduce to virtually nothing the enormous expenses entailed in alterations in

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[6]Gleye 148.

[7]"Monumental General Petroleum Building: the Office Building of Tomorrow." *Architect and Engineer*. June 1949, 15-21.

[8]"Monumental General Petroleum" 19.

conventional office buildings"[9]. The article also described that "a portable lavatory-clothes press unit can be installed at every second module (and can be moved) like a piece of furniture, as the plumbing attaches to any column"[10]. Several of these cabinets survive, and one is installed on the third floor in an interpretive area.

Recognizing that the increasing amount of exterior glass being used in the design of office buildings was causing increasing cooling costs, Wurdeman and Becket had the building fitted with vertical aluminum sun shades, which themselves were internally cooled by the passage of air.

The construction of the building was an important step in the post-war resumption of development in Los Angeles. The style of the building, a late Moderne which has come to be known as Corporate International Style, would become very common in the 1950s when many new office buildings (most of which were located along Wilshire Boulevard, not downtown, until after the city's height limit was lifted) were constructed during this period of major growth and development in Los Angeles. Wurdeman and Becket, along with architects such as Victor Gruen and A.C. Martin, were the most prominent architects working in this style. A large percentage of these buildings have now been altered and no more than ten major examples from before 1960 remain intact. The exterior integrity of this early example is very high. The other major example by Wurdeman and Becket, the Prudential Building, has significantly less exterior integrity than the General Petroleum Building (though it still may retain enough to be considered significant).

Many images of the building, from early renderings to photographs as it reached completion, were published in the local media. The building was published in the local newspapers throughout several phases of its construction, including two features on the steel framing in November of 1947, an architect's rendering in May of 1948, another more realistic rendering in March of 1949 as it approached completion, and the dedication ceremony on April 1, 1949. Among those present at the dedication were California Governor Earl Warren and Los Angeles Mayor Fletcher Bowron, attesting to the importance of the company and their new headquarters in the economic life of the City and the State. The investment represented by the $11,000,000 building was itself an indication of the recovery of business and real estate development in Los Angeles after the Great Depression and World War II.

Conclusion

The General Petroleum Building is a significant work of post-war commercial architecture in Los Angeles. Its design is one of the most important milestones in the work of Wurdeman and Becket, who are considered an innovative and prolific firm in the 1930s through the 1960s in Los Angeles, and represents the height of office building design in the business districts of Los Angeles during its period of significance, which is 1949, the year of its completion. Office buildings are a building type for which the firm was noted. The building is one of the two earliest of several

[9]"Monumental General Petroleum" 19.

[10]"Monumental General Petroleum" 19.

significant height-limit office buildings designed by Wurdeman and Becket in Los Angeles in the post-war era, and represents the beginnings of their exploration of this building type and the architectural language that would define it in coming years. For these reasons, the General Petroleum Building appears eligible for the National Register under Criterion C at the local level of significance as an example of the work of Wurdeman and Becket.

General Petroleum Company Building
Los Angeles County, California

Section 9: Bibliography

Primary Sources

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General Petroleum Company Building
Los Angeles County, California

Section 10: Geographical Data

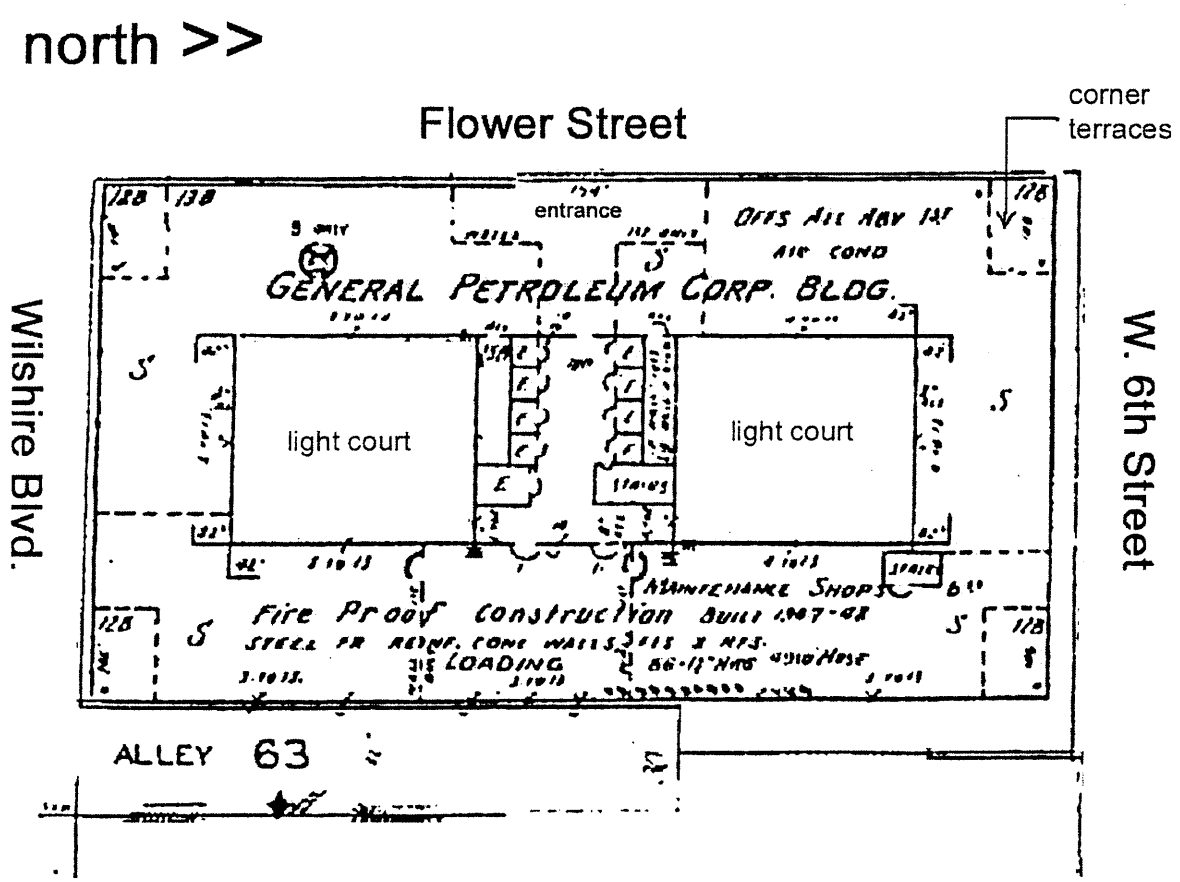
Verbal Boundary Description

The property is Lots 2 and 3 exclusive of street and all of lots 4 and 5, Tract No. 1546. The property is bounded by Flower Street to the west, Wilshire Boulevard to the south, a neighboring building at the property line to the east, and 6th Street to the north.

Verbal Boundary Justification

These are the current and historic boundaries of the property.

Sketch Map



Additional Documentation: Photographs

Name: General Petroleum Company Building

Location: 612 South Flower Street
Los Angeles County

Photographer: Carly Caryn Johnson

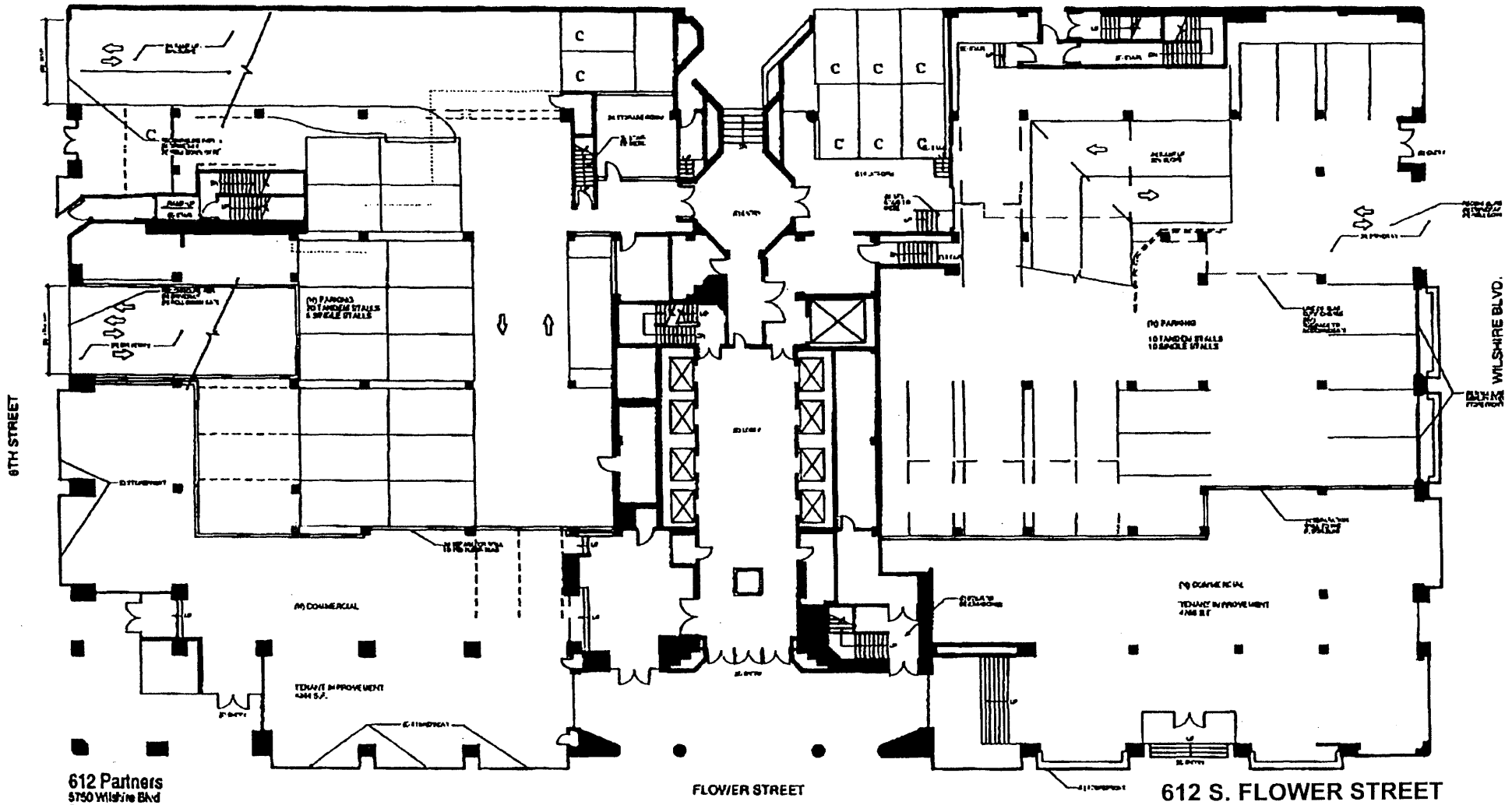
Date of Photographs: 2003

Location of Negatives: Historic Resources Group
1728 Whitley Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90028

1.	Exterior: North and west elevations at corner of 6th and Flower Streets	View Southeast
2.	Exterior: North elevation and 6th Street environs	View Southeast
3.	Exterior: West elevation (primary façade)	View East
4.	Exterior: West and South elevations at corner of Flower Street and Wilshire Boulevard	View Northeast
5.	Exterior: Southeast corner and rear alley off Wilshire Boulevard	View: Northwest
6.	Exterior: East Elevation and rear alley off Wilshire Boulevard	View: Northwest
7.	Exterior: Flower Street main entrance	View: Northeast
8.	Interior: Main lobby	View: Northeast
9.	Interior: Main lobby	View: West
10.	Interior: 9th Floor, typical elevator lobby	View: Southeast
11.	Interior: 9th Floor, west side, typical corridor	View: North
12.	Interior: Typical stairwell, 3rd Floor	View: West
13.	Interior: Apartment #1318 with southeast corner terrace	View: East
14.	Exterior: Roof: upper floors of north light court and back of roof screen	View: Southwest

Photographs, continued:

15.	Exterior: Roof: east wall of screen, east elevation	View: Northwest
16.	Exterior: Roof: pool, south elevation	View: West
17.	Exterior: Roof: pool, south elevation	View: Southeast
18.	Exterior: Roof: exercise room, north elevation, and context of building	View: Northeast



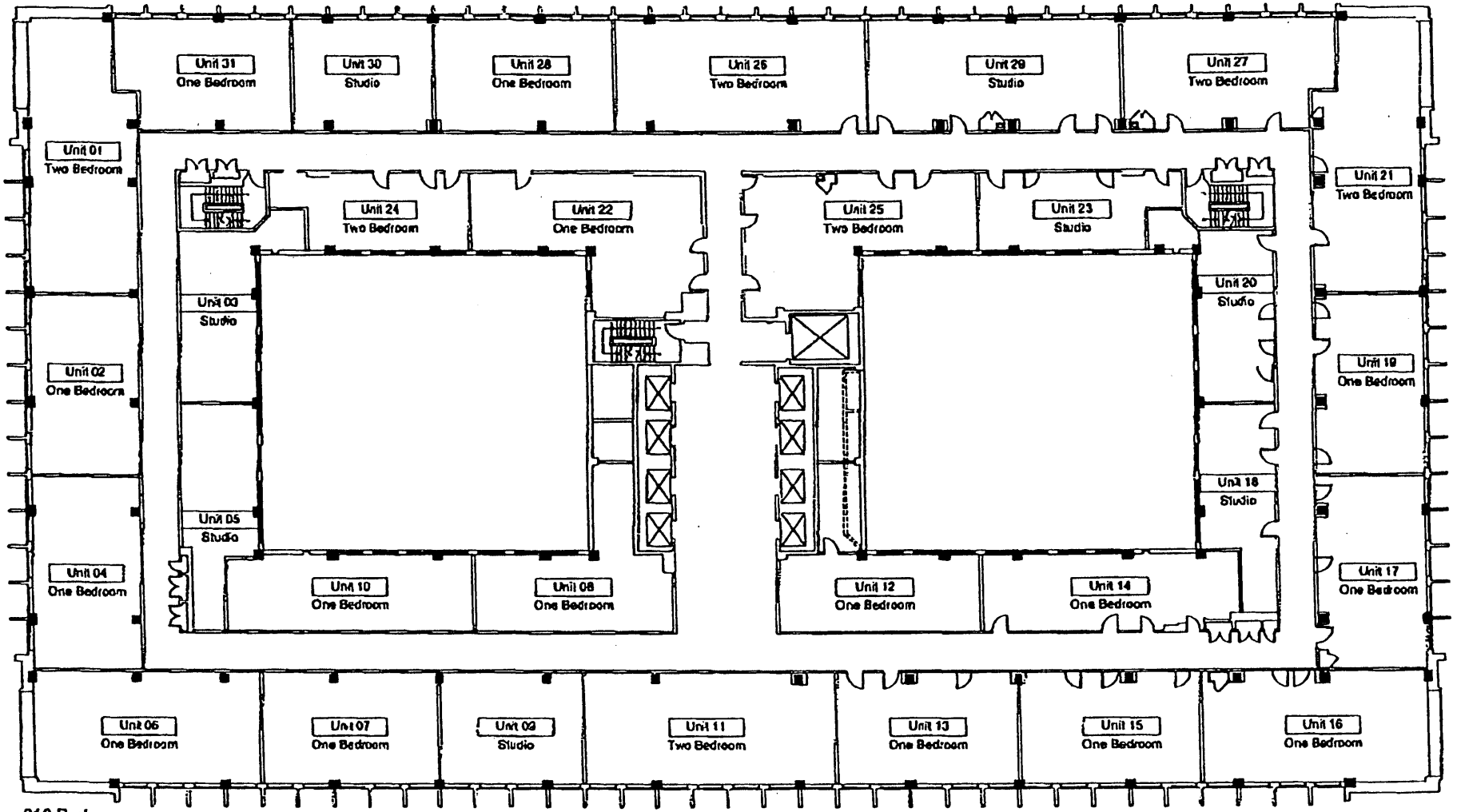
612 Partners
5750 Wilshire Blvd
Suite 610
Los Angeles, CA 90036

Killefer Flammang Purtill Architects

612 S. FLOWER STREET
LOS ANGELES, CALIF.

Ground Floor

General Petroleum



6TH STREET

WISHIRE BLVD.

FLOWER STREET

612 Partners
5750 Wilshire Blvd
Suite 610
Los Angeles, CA 90036

Killefer Flammang Purtill Architects

612 S. FLOWER STREET
LOS ANGELES, CALIF.

Typical Floor

General Petroleum