

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USD/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

Shell Building, Orleans Parish, LA

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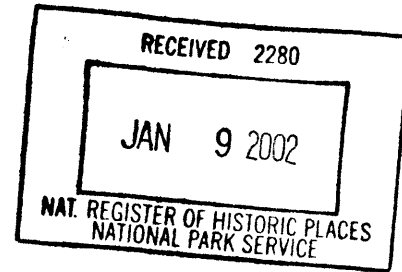
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Shell Building

39



Other Name/Site Number:

2. LOCATION

Street & Number 925 Common St.

Not for publication: NA

City/Town New Orleans

Vicinity: NA

State: Louisiana Code: LA County: Orleans Code: 071 Zip Code: 70130

3. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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.

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

Nationally: Statewide: X Locally:

Signature of Certifying Official/Title Jonathan Fricker Deputy SHPO, Dept. of Culture, Recreation and Tourism

January 8, 2002

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

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

Signature of Commenting or Other Official/Title

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

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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):

(for) Signature of Keeper: Anah D. Pope

Date of Action: 2/22/02

5. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property
Private: X
Public-Local:
Public-State:
Public-Federal:

Category of Property
Building(s): X
District:
Site:
Structure:
Object:

Number of Resources within Property
Contributing
1
Non contributing
0

Non contributing
buildings
sites
structures
objects
0 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 0

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: NA

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: commerce/trade domestic	Sub: office building hotel
Current: commerce/trade domestic	Sub: office building hotel

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: International Style
Materials:

Foundation: concrete
Walls: limestone
Roof: other: tar and gravel
Other:

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Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

The Shell Building (1952) is a reinforced concrete, limestone-faced skyscraper of modest height (14 stories) in the International Style. Its open floorplan forms a “V” at the sharp intersection of Common St. and University Place in the New Orleans CBD. The Shell Building was built primarily to house offices and secondarily to provide additional space (bedrooms and a ballroom) for the adjacent Fairmont Hotel. The two buildings share a party wall and open into each other on some floors. The Shell Building’s rear elevations (inside the V) combine with the rear of the Fairmont to form an irregularly shaped light court open on one side. The light court extends as far down as the fourth story. The area beneath it (stories 1-3) is enclosed and culminates in a dramatic third story ballroom under a sweeping arched roof. A one story wedge-shaped service wing is located on the east side (see property plat). The Shell Building has undergone some alterations over the years, but its original architectural character remains quite strong.

Architecturally, the Shell Building stands near the end of the first phase of the worldwide Modernist Movement. Indeed, it has more in common with European International Style buildings of the pre-WWII era than it does with contemporaneous American corporate glass skyscrapers. In almost all respects its design follows the principles of modern, machine age architecture laid down some twenty years earlier by Philip Johnson and Henry Russell Hitchcock in their revolutionary exhibit, “The International Style: Architecture since 1922.”

The building is a complete abstraction, eschewing traditional architectural forms, sculpture and applied ornament. It also lacks a beginning, middle and end in the classical sense. It is a work of minimalist art with space delineated geometrically in a severe and rectangular manner. The asymmetrical exterior design is anchored by a corner tower punctuated with window slits (facing Common Street). Much of the exterior’s strong geometrical character is derived from projecting ledges on the Common Street elevation and a system of ledges fitted with regularly spaced vertical “fins” on the University Place elevation. Although the ledges and fins give the design a certain consequence, they are actually functional. They serve to shade the building’s windows from the various angles of the sun during late morning, mid-day and late afternoon. They also provide a strong horizontal emphasis (despite the building’s height), which is much in keeping with the International Style aesthetic. Even the vertical fins are placed so as to support the horizontal intent of the design. They are recessed from the front and back of each projecting ledge, and they are suspended top and bottom from the ledges by steel bars. In this subtle gesture, the fins avoid actually connecting with the ledges top and bottom; so the horizontal element is dominant. The space and building mass are defined by a neutral surface – in this case, pale, blank smooth-finished limestone facing which conveys a sense of weightlessness.

Finally, the design makes great use of ribbon windows, an International Style signature. The ribbon windows are grouped in a subtle repeating rhythm of four units – one operable sash, two inoperable single pane picture windows and another operable sash. The finish is brushed aluminum. The windows in the corner tower, with its window slits, are paired – two pairs per slit with flat limestone between. Modeled after the style of ribbon windows, the slits are edged with narrow limestone bands.

Most of the shopfront on the Common Street elevation is capped by a limestone planter with a slanted front. This Wrightian touch is not within the International Style tradition. Nonetheless, it achieves concinnity with the overall design. The Common Street elevation also contains the building’s main entrance, which is set more or less at the center.

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The smallish lobby features white marble walls and a pattern of recessed lighting panels in the ceiling. Behind the lobby is the elevator lobby with its sleek brushed aluminum elevator doors and recessed lighting along the ceiling's periphery. Most of the elevator lobbies on the upper floors are intact. They are all of the same design, with recessed lighting at the ceiling's periphery and a pattern of beige and white marble on the walls designed to set off the elevator doors.

The only other noteworthy interior space is the curving roof ballroom on the third floor. It is a vast open span made possible by curving structural ribs that support the sweeping vaulted ceiling. The ceiling, which is the sum and substance of the room, also features distinctive round recessed lighting panels. As if designed by a contemporaneous automaker, each has a projecting polished brass hub at its center.

Assessment of Integrity:

Since the building's construction, the office space on the various floors has been altered and reconfigured numerous times. This has had virtually no impact on the building's principal architectural elements – the exterior, the lobby, the elevator lobbies and the ballroom. In addition, as would be expected, the shopfront on both elevations has been extensively altered. Its present character appears to date mainly from the 1970s. But like the shopfront shown on the building's 1952 rendering, the present shopfront features display windows, masonry and doors. They are about the same configuration, only the style of the elements is different. Moreover, the shopfront alterations have a minor visual impact taken against the overall architectural character of this fourteen-story landmark. Indeed, the exterior's compelling architectural statement has been little impacted.

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Architectural blueprints and rendering, dated 1952, August Perez and Associates, New Orleans.

Previous documentation on file (NPS): NA

- Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- Previously Listed in the National Register. (partially)
- 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 (Specify Repository):

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: approx. 1 acre

UTM References: **Zone Easting Northing**
 15 782500 3317280

Verbal Boundary Description:
See attached property plat map.

Boundary Justification:

Boundaries follow the original property lines.

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11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: National Register staff

Address: Division of Historic Preservation, P. O. Box 44247, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70804

Telephone: (225) 342-8160

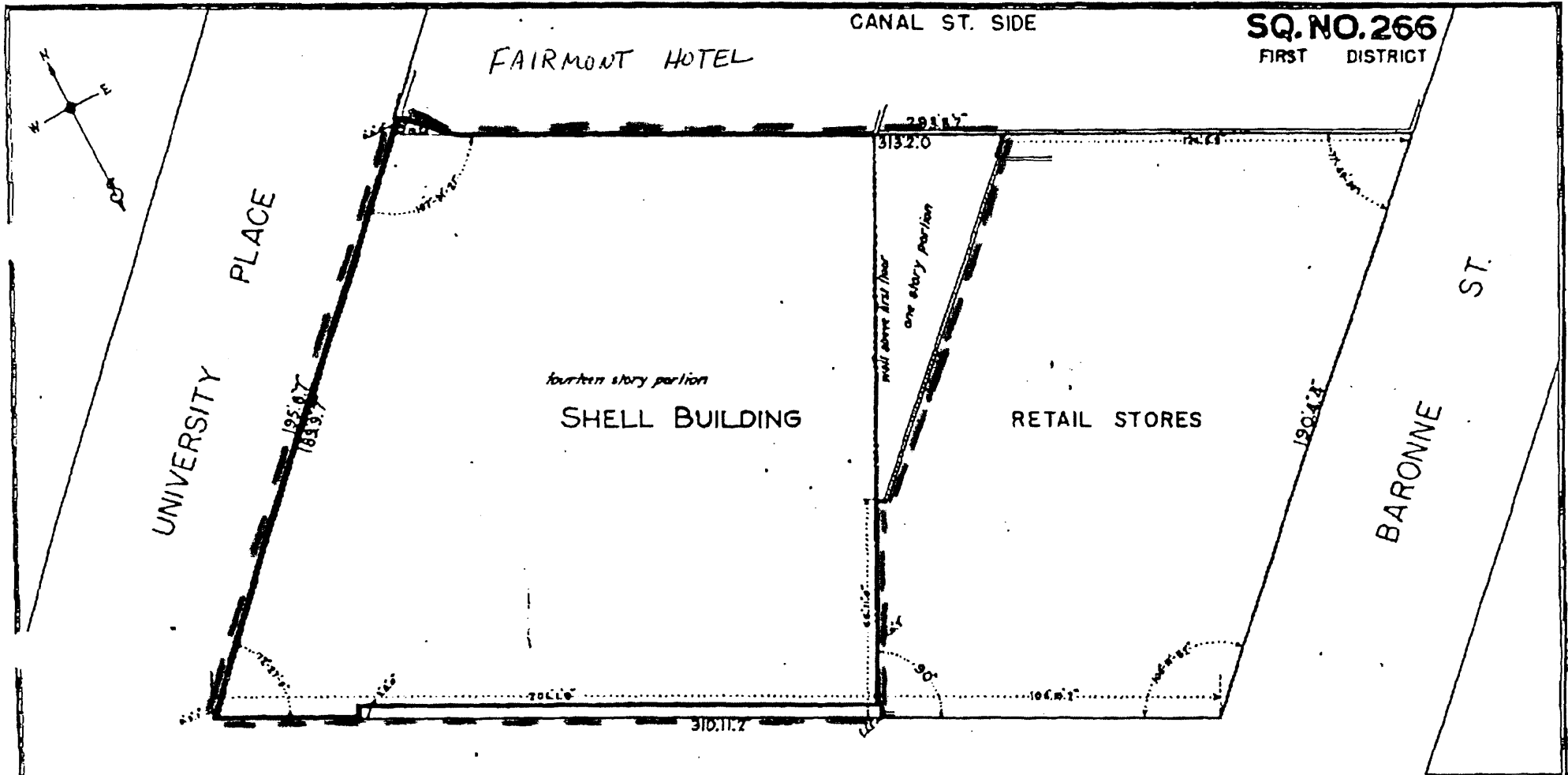
Date: October 2001

PROPERTY OWNERS

Belmont Commons, L.L.C.
Marc A. Blumberg, Managing Member
241 West Wienca Road, Suite 230
Atlanta, GA 30342

Shell Building
Orleans Parish, LA

--- BOUNDARY



SQ. NO. 266
FIRST DISTRICT

1" = 50'

Certified correct to date 6th June, 1955
J. G. Grandjean Jr.

Certified correct to date 24th Sept, 1954
J. G. Grandjean Jr.

Survey of as-built location of New Shell Building,
Request of Gervais F. Favrol Co., Inc.
New Orleans, 12th April, 1954.
Certified correct
J. G. Grandjean Jr.
Surveyor

NOTE:
Walls shown with cross-hatching denote exterior walls at ground level, except where otherwise noted.

The building is constructed with a very high degree of plumbness.