United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received   JAN 18 1984

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic   Old Hilton Hotel

and/or common   Plaza Hotel; La Posada de Albuquerque

2. Location

street & number   125 ~~Second~~ 2nd St., N.W.   ____ not for publication

city, town   Albuquerque   ____ vicinity of

state   New Mexico   code   35   county   Bernalillo   code   001

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
___ district	___ public	_X_ occupied	___ agriculture	___ museum
_X_ building(s)	_X_ private	___ unoccupied	_X_ commercial	___ park
___ structure	___ both	_X_ work in progress	___ educational	___ private residence
___ site	**Public Acquisition**	**Accessible**	___ entertainment	___ religious
___ object	___ in process	_X_ yes: restricted	___ government	___ scientific
	___ being considered	___ yes: unrestricted	___ industrial	___ transportation
	_x_ N/A	___ no	___ military	___ other:

4. Owner of Property

name   Thomas Childers, Southwestern Resorts

street & number   P.O. Box 5538

city, town   Beverly Hills   ____ vicinity of   state   California 90210

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc.   Bernalillo County Records

street & number   505 Central N.W.

city, town   Albuquerque   state   New Mexico

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title   Historic Landmarks Survey of Albuquerque   has this property been determined eligible? ____ yes _X_ no

date   November, 1978; November, 1983   ____ federal ____ state ____ county _X_ local

depository for survey records   Community & Economic Development Dept.   600 2nd St. N.W.

city, town   Albuquerque   state   New Mexico

7. Description

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The old Hilton Hotel stands at the southwest corner of the intersection of Second Street and Copper Avenue in Downtown Albuquerque, a half-block north of Central Avenue, the city's major thoroughfare. To the east are the Santa Fe Railroad tracks and open parking lots, the result of an urban renewal program in the 1970's; west and north are newer office buildings. The hotel is ten stories high and is divided into two major blocks: a rectangular eight-story residential tower and a wider stepped two-story base which houses the hotel's public rooms. The formal modern lines of the white-stuccoed exterior are given an intriguing southwestern accent by the addition of wide decorative brick corbel courses at each major roof line. These resemble in appearance and placement the New Mexico Territorial style brick copings first used in the 19th century to protect the tops of adobe walls from water seepage. On the interior many of the hotel's original southwestern decorative accents remain; these include red clay flooring in the lobby, carved wood wainscoating, murals at entry ways and in the lobby, ceilings on the first two floors with vigas and latias, interior paneled doors, and carved wood trim around the windows and doors.

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(3-82)

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The building stands 135 feet high and has a concrete and steel structure. The major facades are on the north and the east where the two main entrances to the hotel and a row of store fronts are located. With the exception of a coffee shop these retail spaces are now vacant/ The original wooden store windows have been replaced with aluminum and glass. The second floor level is set back from the northeast facade allowing space for an outdoor terrace on this level.

Above this second level is the residential tower featuring evenly spaced wood sash 8/8 windows, presently painted a brilliant turquoise; on the narrower east and west facades are three vertical rows of these windows and on the north and south are eleven vertical rows. Brick corbel tables accent the top of each of the first two floor levels and a wider brick cornice featuring expanded decorative brickwork wraps around the top of the tower. At the west end of the roof a small stuccoed two-story structure houses the elevator equipment. This, too, has a brick coping similar in design to those on the first two levels.

The interior of the hotel is entered through two hallways leading from the north and east entrances. Each hall features a mural: one by local artist Ben Turner pictures tourist attractions in New Mexico, the other shows New Mexican settlers. These hallways open into the two-story lobby, clearly the heart of the hotel. Rounded arches frame the north and south walls of the lobby with finely detailed wood wainscoating decorating the base of each arch. At the east and west ends of the 24' x 93' lobby are two corbeled wood posts flanking the east entrance and the access to the elevators on the west. Surrounding the lobby are retail spaces, restaurants and kitchen, all now empty except the coffee shop. Floors on the lobby and entry ways are of large rectangular red clay tile.

The ceiling of the lobby is supported by squared and decorated wood beams with flat board latias laid between them. Decorative carved wood corbels originally supported the vigas; these were removed when the lobby was covered in the 1950's (it was uncovered this past year). On the second floor an open mezzanine overlooks the lobby; large squared plastered columns continue the line of the pillars of the first floor arches. These square columns were originally connected with a carved wood railing; this was taken out when the lobby was covered. Rooms off the mezzanine include a ballroom featuring southwestern detailing and several suites and meeting rooms. Dividing the residential tower is a straight east-west corridor from which the hotel rooms open. These rooms all have molded wood doors and several feature decorative tile accents. A few suites had beehive fireplaces; these were removed in 1982.

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Southwestern decorative accents are also found on the carved wood surrounding the elevator openings, and in the carved wood detailing on the ceilings of the first floor corridors, the mezzanine and the old La Copita Lounge.

The various hotel restaurants were "modernized" in the 1950's. The coffee shop lost its southwestern decor and modern furniture and a lowered wood ceiling were added. The original Mural Dining Room, the hotel's major restaurant, was completely redone and lost all but its beamed wood ceilings. The La Copita Bar, originally an eclectic Pueblo/Deco design done by a St. Louis firm, lost much of its original detailing and its glass brick windows. The viga and latia ceiling in the Copita Lounge, recently uncovered, is all that remains of the original room. The lobby ceiling was also lowered during this remodeling. On the exterior the major changes have been the replacement of the original store windows and the expansion of the second floor room on the north side which took some of the terrace space.

In 1982 preparatory demolition work was done for a proposed renovation. The lobby was opened up to its original two-story height, a staircase was removed in the kitchen area, some walls were taken out in a number of the residential tower rooms and many of the hotel furnishings were sold. Work stopped on the renovation in late 1982 and the hotel was sold to Southwestern Resorts Inc. in 1983. This company recently began renovation work; they plan to reacquire a number of the important furnishings or to duplicate pieces which are unavailable.

8. Significance

Period

___ prehistoric	
___ 1400–1499	
___ 1500–1599	
___ 1600–1699	
___ 1700–1799	
___ 1800–1899	
_X_ 1900–	

Areas of Significance—Check and justify below

___ archeology-prehistoric	___ community planning	___ landscape architecture	___ religion
___ archeology-historic	___ conservation	___ law	___ science
___ agriculture	___ economics	___ literature	___ sculpture
_X_ architecture	___ education	___ military	___ social/
___ art	___ engineering	___ music	humanitarian
___ commerce	___ exploration/settlement	___ philosophy	___ theater
___ communications	___ industry	___ politics/government	_X_ transportation
	___ invention		_X_ other (specify)
			social history

Specific dates 1939   **Builder/Architect** Anton Korn, architect

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Although slightly less than 50 years old, the old Hilton Hotel in downtown Albuquerque is exceptionally significant in the city as the last of Albuquerque's three great "southwestern" hotels. Like the Alvarado Hotel (built 1903, demolished 1969) and the Franciscan Hotel (built 1923, demolished 1972), the Hilton reflects the building techniques of its time while displaying the traditional New Mexican decor which denotes the city's importance as a regional tourist center. In the old Hilton the generous use of local crafts and materials was combined with the most advanced building techniques available just before World War II. In its heyday it served the city as a social and political center before giving way to newer hotels built farther east near the new freeways.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Dabney, Thomas Ewing. The Man Who Bought The Waldorf. Duell, Sloan and
  Pearce, N.Y. 1950.
Hilton, Conrad. Be My Guest. Prentice Hall,Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1957
Albuquerque Journal, June 9, 1939   Albuquerque Journal, December 17, 1981

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property less than one acre
Quadrangle name Albuquerque West   Quadrangle scale 1:24000
UTM References

A |1|3| |3|4|9|6|8|0| |3|8|8|3|5|2|0| B |__| |__|__|__|__|__| |__|__|__|__|__|__|
  Zone Easting   Northing   Zone Easting   Northing

C |__| |__|__|__|__|__| |__|__|__|__|__|__| D |__| |__|__|__|__|__| |__|__|__|__|__|__|

E |__| |__|__|__|__|__| |__|__|__|__|__|__| F |__| |__|__|__|__|__| |__|__|__|__|__|__|

G |__| |__|__|__|__|__| |__|__|__|__|__|__| H |__| |__|__|__|__|__| |__|__|__|__|__|__|

Verbal boundary description and justification

Lots 1-6, Block 9, Original Townsite

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A   code   county   code

state   code   county   code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Mary P. Davis, Preservation Planner

organization Community and Economic Development Dept. date Nov. 29, 1983

street & number 600 2nd St. N.W.   telephone (505)766-4720

city or town Albuquerque   state N.M.

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

____ national   ____ state   _X_ local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89–665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Thomas W Merlan

title State Historic Preservation Officer   date 1-6-84

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When the Albuquerque Hilton was opened in 1939, it was the first modern hotel in a small western town of 50,000 inhabitants, its modern functionalism disguised by a distinctive Southwestern atmosphere. During the following decade, stimulated in large part by atomic research activities, Albuquerque was to double in size, becoming a major Sunbelt city. This explosive period of growth was a time of exceptional activity at the Albuquerque Hilton. It was the center of the city's political and social life, as well as the place of lodging of many of its distinguished visitors--from politicians to movie stars to atomic scientists.

The political life at the Albuquerque Hilton centered around a core group of politicians, businessmen, and governmental officials who made the bar and lobby of the hotel their unofficial club. Ex-Governor Tingley, back in Albuquerque as the dominant member of the City Commission, held "court" daily for a succession of state and local officials. Tommy McMullan, bell captain at the hotel since its opening, recalls that there was constant jockeying for position in the lobby's lounge chairs as petitioners and advisors sought audience with Tingley. The hotel was the choice of several political figures: Thomas Dewey and Spiro Agnew both stayed there, and Lyndon and Lady Bird Johnson occupied a suite on a campaign visit for the 1964 elections.

The social life at the hotel arose from its having the only modern ballroom and meeting facilities in the city. Two generations of Albuquerque residents had their weddings, high school proms, anniversaries, and other affairs in the grand ballroom. Virtually every social and business club in the city met in the hotel--from Rotary to Chamber of Commerce, from Kiwanis to Daughters of the American Revolution.

The eminence of the Albuquerque Hilton's visitors in its early years stems from Conrad Hilton's intense personal interest in the property. Hilton, who ultimately was to own many of the U.S.'s great hotels (Waldorf Astoria - New York, Plaza - New York, Palmer House - Chicago, Sir Francis Drake - San Francisco), grew up sixty miles south of Albuquerque in Socorro County. He served as a member of the New Mexico House of Representatives in 1912 when he was 24. His first attempts at a business career (banking) were unsuccessful in Albuquerque, but he always viewed the city in a positive way. Prior to the Crash of '29, Hilton developed or purchased a series of hotels in Texas. In the early days of the Depression he lost them all. Eventually, he managed to re-acquire four of the

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properties, and shortly thereafter he began construction of the Albuquerque Hilton - his first construction project outside of Texas. It represented the culmination of a lifelong desire to succeed in Albuquerque, and an affirmation that the city would become a major business center. The hotel's first manager was J. B. Herndon Jr., an old Albuquerque friend of Hilton's and long time co-worker in Hilton's hotel empire. Financing for the hotel was provided by two Santa Fe businessmen, Nathan Salmon and his son-in-law E. John Greer.

In 1941 Hilton married Zsa Zsa Gabor in Santa Fe, and they honeymooned at the Albuquerque Hilton. They were frequent visitors throughout their marriage. This show business connection led to frequent visits by James Stewart (stationed at Kirtland A.F.B. during World War II), Lucille Ball and Vivian Vance (Ethel of "I Love Lucy"), Patrick O'Brien, and Zsa Zsa's sister, Eva Gabor, among others.

The architectural significance of the old Hilton closely parallels and in many ways is closely related to its cultural significance. In much the same way as it represents a culture in transition, architecturally it represents a unique blending of modernism and traditional Southwestern styling. Like the Alvarado and the Franciscan its design and furnishings were rooted in New Mexico arts and crafts and like these hotels, it was designed and executed by architects and artists who immersed themselves in local design traditions.

The hotel was designed by Anton Korn. Originally from Dallas, he was associated with design of both the Lubbock Hilton and El Paso Hilton. Later moving to Taos, he brought an intense interest in Southwestern styling, detailing, and furnishing to the functional and construction needs of a modern hotel.

The hotel was in many ways intensely modern. Indeed, it was the first modern high-rise hotel in New Mexico. The rectilinear residential tower resting on the larger rectangular structure constituting the common areas is very much in the International Style (in many ways its site plan closely resembles the Lever Building on Park Avenue in New York). The clean, symmetrical forms are reinforced by symmetrical placement of windows of the tower and by entry corridors in the common area pedestal base which are placed on a central axis. The mechanical systems, including the elevators, heating and air conditioning and kitchen equipment were all of the latest design.

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On this thoroughly modern building, totally in keeping with the 1930's architectural movements toward rationalism, functionalism, and simplicity, was engrafted Southwestern styling. It is important to note that the Southwestern style which was adopted by Korn for the building's exterior was the Territorial style, not the Spanish/Pueblo style so universal in Santa Fe. With its random, informal approach and handcrafted construction techniques, the Santa Fe style would not have been appropriate for a building designed for a modern expression. The Territorial style, with its more classic antecedents, a clean, defined shape, and formal plan, seemed much more adaptable to modern needs.

The interiors were the most indigenous elements of the project. The walls included numerous murals representing Indian and pioneer New Mexico themes; many were painted by local artists. Walter Gilbert, who created the wrought iron work on the Simms homes in Los Poblanos as well as at the KiMo Theater, designed and made the lighting fixtures. The furniture was constructed from hand-carved wood and leather, carpets were specially woven in Indian patterns, and elaborately hand-carved wainscoating was installed throughout the lobby area.

In 1971 a new Hilton Hotel was constructed in Albuquerque, and the old Albuquerque Hilton began to fade in importance. As a succession of new, major hotels were developed, the old property (renamed the Plaza Hotel) became neglected except by nostalgia buffs and low-priced tour groups. The Santa Fe Railroad and the Greyhound Bus Company rented a floor for their traveling employees and the owners considered converting it into a downtown residence for the elderly, a plan which never materialized.

When Albuquerque's old hotels, the Alvarado and the Franciscan, were demolished, the once modern Hilton became the last surviving example of the historic Albuquerque hotels. An intense local interest in preserving the hotel is eloquent testimony that this property, constructed when Albuquerque was on the brink of its phenomenal growth into a major city, has a unique position in the city's history.