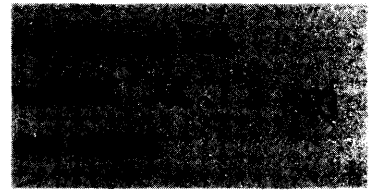


**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

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



Final

1. Name

historic James Oviatt Building (Alexander and Oviatt Building) RECEIVED
MAY 08 1982
and/or common Oviatt Building

2. Location

street & number 617 South Olive Street N/A not for publication
city, town Los Angeles N/A vicinity of congressional district 25
state California code 06 county Los Angeles code 037

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name Ratkovich, Bowers Incorporated
street & number 617 South Olive Street
city, town Los Angeles N/A vicinity of state California 90014

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Los Angeles County Recorder
street & number 227 North Broadway
city, town Los Angeles state California

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Los Angeles Cultural
title Heritage Board has this property been determined eligible? yes no
date July 1978 federal state county local
depository for survey records Cultural Affairs Department, Los Angeles City Hall
city, town Los Angeles state California

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site	
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved	date <u>N/A</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed			

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Oviatt Building is a twelve story structure with a penthouse and mezzanine. The building is 58 feet x 157 feet and contains 87,000 square feet of space. Designated a "Class A" building, it has a steel frame and concrete floors. The Olive Street facade is veneered with cream color terra cotta.

The first floor originally had an open entry with display windows and columns veneered with marble. Along the entire width of the facade was a marquee constructed of metal and glass that had been fabricated by Rene Lalique. The panels of clear, colored, and etched glass were illuminated from behind. When portions of lobby were dismantled in the 1970's the display windows and the marble veneer were removed. The marquee was left in place. The entire first floor is now open. The columns are veneered with black marble and the openings between the columns are filled with new Art Deco styled iron grilles.

Above the marquee at the mezzanine level, there are strip windows framed by metal pilasters. Over the windows is the name "Alexander and Oviatt". Above the sign are three double height bay windows with metal frames that are decorated with panels of entwining branches, swans, birds, and squirrels.

The central portion of the upper office floors are treated quite simply, while, the top of the structure is decorated with restrained Italian Romanesque details. This includes windows with arched heads, balconies, pediments, cornices, and red roof tiles. The main feature is the tower that rises three stories above the building. On three sides of the tower are clock faces that feature Moderne numerals outlined in neon. The tile roof of the tower is capped with a wrought iron weathervane.

The open lobby on the ground floor contained the entrance to the clothing store, elevators to the floors above, display windows, and a free-standing display case in the center of the space. The elements in the lobby supplied by Lalique included the illuminated glass ceiling, the glass doors to the store, the mallechort and glass elevator doors, and the mallechort mailbox, building directory, elevator panel, and the metal frames for the display windows.¹ When the illuminated glass ceiling was removed, the display case in the center of the lobby and the display cases on the north and east sides were also dismantled. The remainder of the Lalique details remain intact as does the original marble floor. The present owners have installed a new ceiling of plaster and illuminated glass panels that is sympathetic to the original fabric.

The original elevators have been preserved and the mechanical works have been rehabilitated. The interior of the elevators are fitted with marble floors, carved paneling, and decorative grilles. In order to preserve

1. "---a new metal, similar to silver, called 'mallechort' or sometimes 'Melchoir' for two men who invented the metal - Maillot and Chorier. It is a comingling of copper, zinc, and nickle and is both beautiful and durable." Olive Gray, "Genius Honors Local Building", Los Angeles Times, Dec. 4, 1927, Pt. II, p. 9.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1927 - 1928 **Builder/Architect** Walker and Eisen

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Oviatt Building was the synthesis of James Oviatt's business acumen, style, and sense of design. Although numerous architects, engineers, designers, and craftsmen contributed their talents to the creation of this building, the ensemble was orchestrated by Mr. Oviatt. At the time the structure was completed in 1928 and fifty years later when it was rehabilitated, the Oviatt Building has set a standard for innovative design.

When the building opened, it was publicized for the opulent Art Deco appointments, the novelty of incorporating a penthouse, and the personal attention that Mr. Oviatt lavished on his store and residence. Although Los Angeles was used to extravagant displays, Oviatt's grand gesture of engaging the finest French avant garde designers was worthy of special notice. The penthouse provided the sophisticated and elegant image that Oviatt wished to project to his clientele, while, the store furnished the proper luxurious setting for his beautiful men's and women's fashions. It was a direct link to the 1925 Paris Exposition Internationale des Artes Decoratifs et Industriels Moderne that was profoundly affecting the world of architecture and design.

As the result of the recent preservation and rehabilitation of the Oviatt Building, it has become the best known example of recycling a heritage building in the city. The Rex II Ristorante, the restaurant that replaced the clothing store, has set a standard for the sensitive treatment of an historic interior, luxury, and sophisticated dining.

James Oviatt (1888 - 1973) came to Los Angeles from Salt Lake City in 1906-7. He worked for Desmonds until 1911 when he went into partnership with Frank Alexander. Alexander and Oviatt were among the leading clothiers in the city. Their affluent customers were offered the finest clothes, some of which Oviatt designed. In order to stay abreast of the fashions, Oviatt spent a portion of each year buying fabrics and goods in Europe. After occupying two locations, the firm leased the present land and began to plan a new building in 1927. The building was open in 1928.

The team Oviatt assembled included Walker and Eisen, architects and engineers; Feil and Paradise, store designers; Rene Lalique, the genius of French glassmaking; Saddier et Fils, cabinetmakers; and numerous craftsmen and suppliers. Oviatt was more than a willing client with taste and the financial ability to obtain the finest quality. He was also an active participant in the design and furnishing of the building.

Walker and Eisen were primarily responsible for the shell of the building and the Olive Street facade. Percy Augustus Eisen (1885-1946)

9. Major Bibliographical References

See attached Bibliography

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 0.21 acre

Quadrangle name Hollywood, California

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A

1	1	3	8	4	2	7	0	3	7	6	7	9	5	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H

Zone		Easting				Northing								

Verbal boundary description and justification 57' x 165' lot at 617 So. Olive Street, West side of Olive Street between Sixth and Seventh Streets. Building occupies entire historic parcel as shown on attached map.

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

state N/A code county N/A code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Martin Eli Weil, A.I.A., Restoration Architect (213) 747-4042

organization Ratkovich, Bowers Incorporated date October 1982

street & number 617 South Olive Street telephone (213) 489-3181

city or town Los Angeles state California 90014

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state 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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature *K M Weil*

title State Historic Preservation Officer date 6/20/83

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I hereby certify that this property is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

Signature of Keeper of the National Register

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

Chief of [unclear]

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the original elevators, it was necessary to maintain a staff to operate them.

The clothing store is a two story space with a mezzanine. The restaurant that now occupies the premises has incorporated all of the original details such as the cabinets and drawers that line the wall, the carved paneling attributed to Russian craftsmen, the decorative plaster ceiling, the main staircase, and the lighting fixtures that had been removed. The Salon des Elegance on the mezzanine has been transformed into the lounge. Modifications have been sympathetic to the original details.

On the office floors the original marble floors, marble wainscot, barrel vaulted ceiling, office doors, and elevator doors in the corridor and the marble floors, wainscot, and fixtures in the rest rooms have been preserved. The offices have been modified as required by the tenants.

The penthouse is a ten room suite with two levels of terraces. Rene Lalique supplied the glass for the windows and the major lighting fixtures. The livingroom has a wood parquet floor with an assymetrical Art Deco motif of intersecting arcs. The floor of the main bathroom is cream marble with a maroon marble border. The bidet room, the steam room, and the toilet room have glazed tile floors that contrast with the tiled walls. The walls of the livingroom, master bedroom, and the powder room are hung with silk. The walls of the foyer, library, and the pilasters in the livingroom are paneled. In the gallery the pilasters are marble. In the main bathroom, the glazed plaster walls are decorated with incised designs of jungle flora and fauna. There are plaster panels on all of the doors in the bathroom in order to maintain the integrity of the composition.

Luxury details include the sunken tub in the master bathroom, the butler's pantry with a dumbwaiter to the kitchen on the floor below, and the powder room with built-in banquettes, commode, and lavatory basin that are veneered with burlled maple and upholstered with cut velvet. Other built-in furniture includes the bar in the diningroom, the bed on a raised platform in the master bedroom, and the hanging bookshelf with a Lalique lighting fixture in the library. Special lighting effects included the indirect cove lighting in the diningroom, the molded glass soffit with back lighting in the gallery, and illuminated etched glass panels encircling the library.

After the death of the Oviatts, the furnishings were sold, however, the built-in elements were left in place as well as some of the lighting fixtures. The present owners have purchased some of the original objects including some Saddier et Fils furniture, a Lalique chandelier, paintings, and other decorative objects. The penthouse has been refurbished so that the original ambience and quality of the interior can be appreciated. A more thorough restoration is planned.

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and Albert Raymond Walker (1881-1958) were in partnership from 1919 to 1940. During the 1920's they had one of the largest offices in the city. Their early work included offices, hotels, and apartment houses executed in eclectic motifs. Their later works were mostly government buildings, theaters, and branch facilities carried out in the Moderne style. Major commissions included the Fine Arts Building (1925), United Artists Building (1927), Title Insurance Building (1928), National Bank of Commerce (1929), Fruit Growers Exchange (1934), Beverly-Wilshire Hotel (1926), El Cortez Hotel (San Diego 1927), El Mirador Hotel (Palm Springs 1927), Mar Monte Hotel (Santa Barbara 1927), Torrance City Hall, Jail, and Municipal Building (1936), and the San Luis Obispo County Court House (1940).

The interior of the building was the responsibility of Feil and Paradise, store designers and merchandising engineers. Joseph Feil (1890-1979) and Bernard Paradise had a distinguished career in Los Angeles creating commercial interiors for Bullock's Wilshire, Desmond's Wilshire, Silverwoods, the Chocolate Shoppes, Bonwit Tellers in New York, and major department stores and clothiers across the country.

The glass and metal decorative elements that Rene Lalique designed and fabricated for the Oviatt were similar to many of the objects that he exhibited at the 1925 Paris Exposition. One of the main features of the Sevres Pavillion was a plafond a caisson lumineux made by Lalique. This innovative combination of art and technology was reinterpreted by the glass-maker as the central feature of the Oviatt Building lobby. The other details in the building represented the rich vocabulary of his designs and technology.

The firm of Saddier et Fils were responsible for the built-in elements, furniture, and wallpaper in the penthouse. At the 1925 Paris Exposition, they created several room settings for the interior design section. Their work was included in the publication that was associated with the exhibiton, Ensembles Mobiliers - Exposition Internationale.

The Oviatt Building went into decline in the 1960's along with the rest of downtown Los Angeles. With the closure of the store in 1969 and only a small portion of the office floors rented, the Oviatt Corporation relinquished their leasehold and their interest in the building to the Archdiocese of Los Angeles in 1975.

The building was purchased in 1977 by Ratkovich, Bowers Incorporated with the intention of rehabilitating the structure. Although other buildings such as the Biltmore Hotel and the Subway Terminal Building were being renovated at the same time, it was the Oviatt that became the most widely recognized example of preservation and recycling in downtown Los Angeles. The owners became identified with this form of development and have gone on to other adaptive reuse projects such as the Wiltern Theater. The work by Brenda Levin, Associates and Luciano DeNardi to create the interior of the Rex II Ristorante has been acclaimed as an exceptional example of adaptive reuse design.

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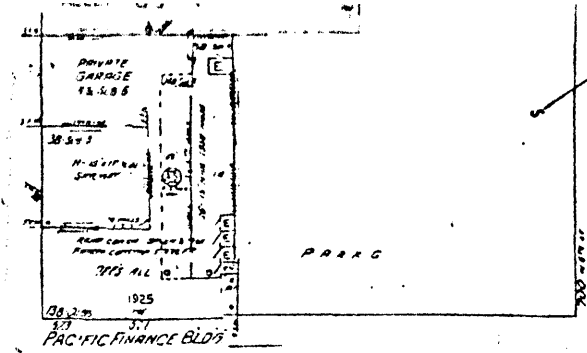
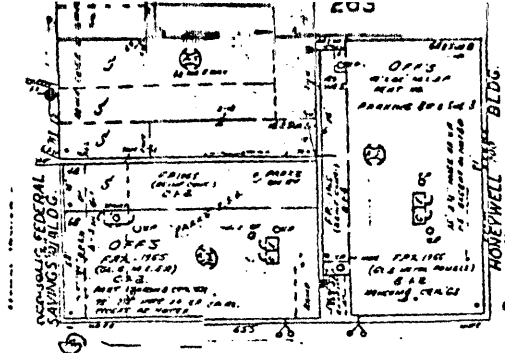
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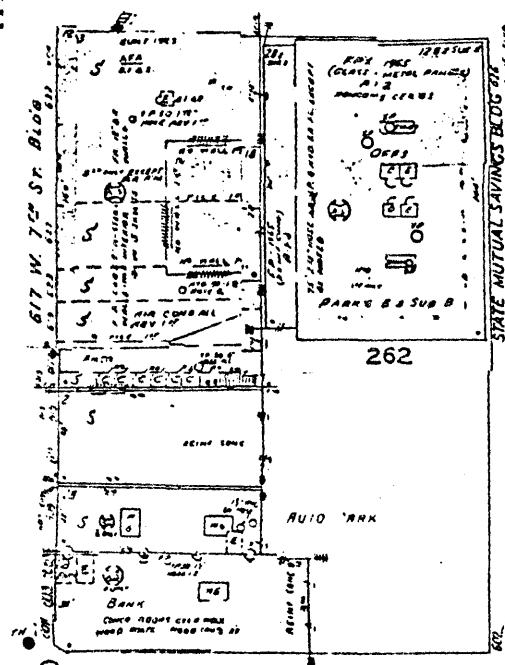
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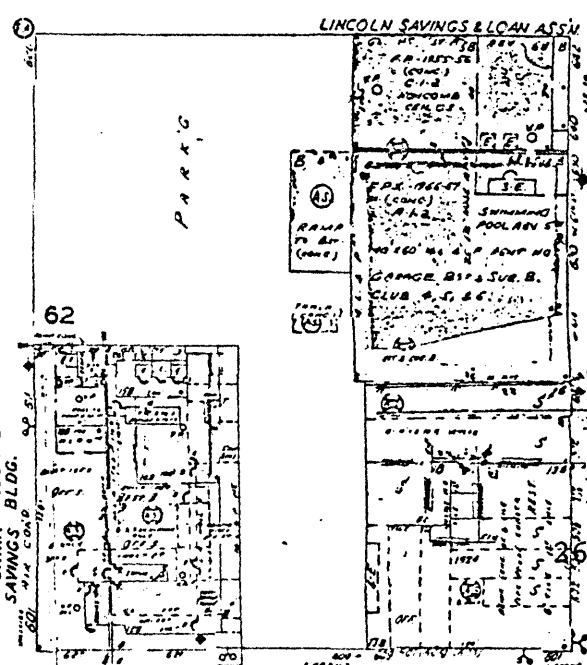


S. HOPE

W. 7TH ST.

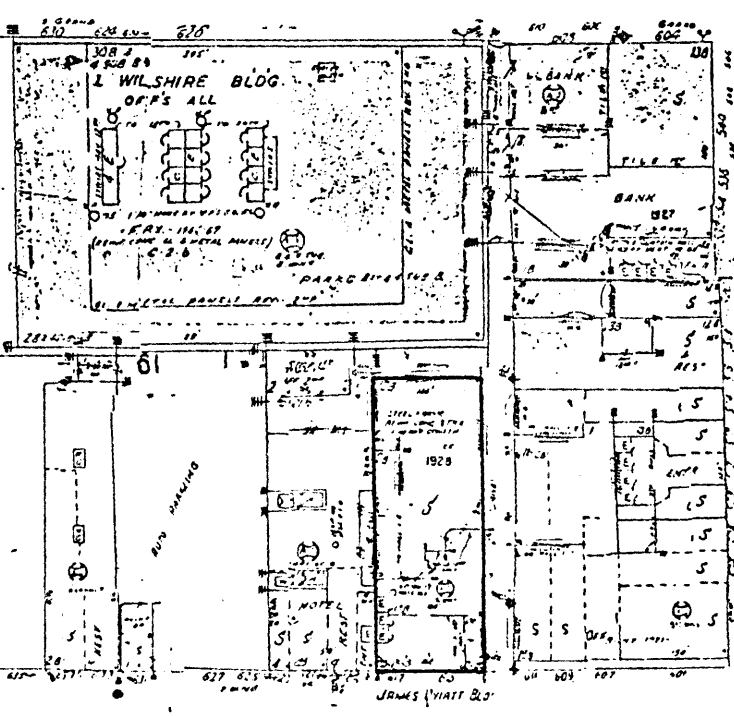
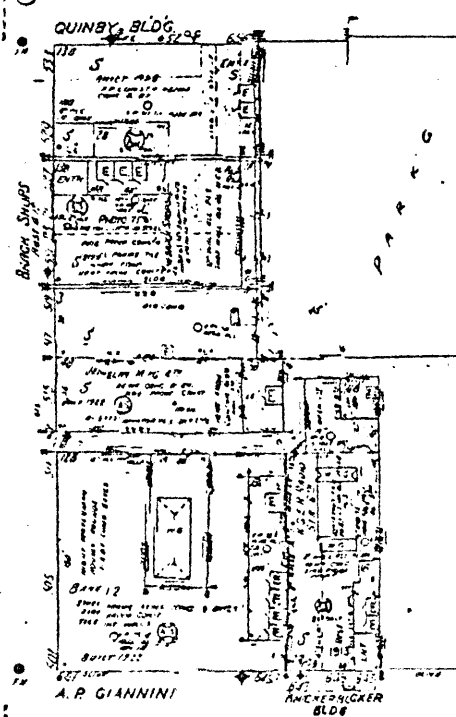


WILSHIRE BLVD.



S. GRAND AV.

64



S. OLIVE

51

JAMES OVIATT BUILDING.
 617 So. Olive Street
 Los Angeles
 Los Angeles County, CA