

AMBASSADOR HOTEL

City of Dallas

Designation Report

The Ambassador Hotel is a landmark building in the heart of downtown Dallas, Texas. It is a prime example of the city's rich architectural heritage and is a significant part of the city's history. The hotel was built in 1926 and has since become a symbol of the city's growth and development. It is a well-preserved example of the city's early 20th-century architecture and is a testament to the city's enduring legacy. The hotel is a prime example of the city's rich architectural heritage and is a significant part of the city's history. It is a well-preserved example of the city's early 20th-century architecture and is a testament to the city's enduring legacy.

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Landmark Identification & Evaluation

Landmark name: Ambassador Hotel

Date: May 4, 1982

Location: 1312 South Ervay

Nomination source: Owner

Architectural history:

The Majestic-Park-Ambassador Hotel, located in one of Dallas' oldest and most affluent neighborhoods, was built in 1904 by local architect, E. H. Silven, preceding the Adolphus Hotel by eight years. Originally called the Majestic Hotel, the Sullivanesque Style five story building was red brick with contrasting white limestone frieze, white belt course above the first story, and spandrels. In 1907, the building was bought and the name changed to the Park Hotel. In 1932, the hotel again changed hands and the name was changed to the Ambassador. To enhance and modernize the appearance of the hotel, extensive exterior renovation was done by the new owners. The exterior was covered with white plaster and the roofline was changed along with the front entrance (the west facade). A red tile roof was added to complete the change from Sullivanesque to Spanish Colonial Revival, a popular architectural style in Dallas at the time. With this exterior renovation, the Ambassador was brought back to its former opulence and again became the home for many outstanding Dallasites and visiting celebrities and politicians. In 1954, Colonel C. R. Tips bought the hotel and remodeled the interior for a transient and residential retirement hotel. Aside from the addition of the red neon "Ambassador" sign and the elevator shaft on the south end of the building, there have been no other exterior renovations since 1932.

Cultural history:

The oldest remaining luxury hotel in Dallas, the Majestic-Park-Ambassador, was the home for many prominent Dallasites and hotel for visiting celebrities and dignitaries. Designed and built in 1904, by local architect E. H. Silven, the hotel was an excellent example of the Sullivanesque Style of architecture red brick with white limestone from Stamford, Texas, for the window caps, horizontal course above the first floor, and the frieze along the roof line to accent the characteristics of this tyle. However, in 1932, in an effort to update and modernize the old hotel, the Ambassador Hotel Corporation spent \$31,000 on exterior renobations. Apparently, the Dallas-Ft. Worth firm of Burton Lumber Company was hired to give the hotel, renamed the Ambassador a new facade to keep up with the changing times. White plaster was used over the exterior and the roofline was altered to accommodate a penthouse story. Red tile replaced the original roofing material completing the Spanish Colonial Revival facade, a popular style in Dallas at the time. In 1954, the building was sold to Colonel C. R. Tips who made it one of the country's first residential retirement hotels. In 1981, amid rumors of impending demolition, Sadrud Alani bought the hotel and began to renovate it to reflect the building's former ambience. A recorded Texas Landmark, the Ambassador is also under consideration for National Register Landmark Designation for its cultural and architectural contributions as well as the highly visible nature of the building as a landmark to Dallas citizens.

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Cultural Significance

In 1903, the Majestic Apartment Building Company purchased from C. H. Alexander, a local capitalist, lot 116 on Ervay Street in the fashionable Cedars neighborhood south of downtown Dallas. Several large homes of important Dallasites surrounded the lot which bordered the first, and for many years the only, city park. Alexander agreed to advance the Majestic Apartment Building Co. \$60,000 to be secured by a deed of trust on the lot and also to advance the company an additional \$17,500 to "erect said building." Thomas Narcrosse, president of the company, hired Earl Henry Silven, a local architect, and Alex Watson, a contractor, to supervise the construction of the building. Mr. Silven's design was executed by some of the foremost contractors in Dallas; Theodore Beilharz, a stonemason whose works included some of the major buildings in Dallas; the Vilbig Brothers, excavators for most of the major buildings in Dallas including the City Hall and Neiman-Marcus; and M. H. Peterman, a descendent of the original Reunion colony and well known Dallas contractor.

When the Majestic Hotel opened in 1905, it was considered the premier hotel in Dallas. Sarah Bernhardt stayed there while performing in Dallas as well as other actors, actress and opera stars of that era. Three presidents, Theodore Roosevelt, William Taft and Woodrow Wilson, stayed at the Majestic while visiting Dallas.

On November 18, 1905, the Majestic was the site of the Dallas social event of the year, the Idlewild Club Ball. The event covered by the Dallas Morning News, was described in the following manner. "The ballroom was resplendent in the Club's colors...the center pillar represented a birch tree...An orchestra of twenty-eight peices was stationed on the balcony." Several influential Dallasites were in attendance: Dero E. Seay, W. J. Lawther, W. H. Flippen, Royal Ferris and Henry C. Coke.

In 1906, the Majestic went into receivership. Samuel McIlhenny, formerly manager of the Oriental and Crutchfield in Dallas, the Driskoll in Austin, and the Beach Hotel in Galveston, was hired by the bank to be manager of the hotel. In 1907, F. W. Boedecker, president of Boedecker Manufacturing, bought the hotel and changed the name to the Park Hotel. Some alterations to the front of the building were made at this time. The Park continued to operate as both a transient and residential hotel. Well known Dallas lawyer, Harry L. Seay had rooms on the second floor. Hugh Perry who owned the Southern Rock Island Plow Company Building (the Texas School Book Depository) leased rooms at the Park also.

Around 1910, Electra Waggoner Wharton, of the influential Waggoner family of Ft. Worth and Decatur, acquired the Park Hotel. She divorced her husband, A. B. Wharton, in 1921 and he retained ownership of the hotel. Wharton spent \$50,000 in 1921, according to a building permit to remodel the interior of the hotel.

In 1932, through a series of complicated legal moves, the Wharton Hotel Company sold the hotel to the newly formed Ambassador Corporation whose members included F. S. Hofues, Dora Roberts and J. C. Thompson. At this point, Burton Lumber Company and L. K. Lacy Company were hired to do \$31,000 worth of exterior renovations in the form of covering the exterior with white plaster and changing the roofline and roof material to red tile to reflect the Spanish Colonial Revival Style that was popular for both commercial and residential buildings in Dallas at that time. This renovation and the name change to the Ambassador, supposedly in honor of a statesman who stayed there gave the hotel new life. It was filled to capacity during the Texas State Centennial Celebration held in 1936. Several local celebrities and politicians stayed there during the festivities.

In 1954, Colonel C. R. Tips, delegate to the White House Conference on Aging and consultant on housing for the Elderly for the Department of Defense, purchased the Ambassador and instituted the Lanvin Plan for a retirement hotel. The Ambassador remained a transient and residential hotel until 1965, when it became mainly a residential retirement hotel. In 1981, the hotel was put up for sale and, it was feared that the oldest luxury hotel in Dallas might be demolished. However, Sandrudin Alani bought the hotel and has returned it to its former elegance.

Situated on the southside of Interstate 30, across from Old City Park now a cultural heritage museum, the Ambassador, a recorded Texas Landmark, is also under consideration for historical designation by the National Register for its significant roll as a historical and architectural landmark of high visibility for the City of Dallas.

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Architectural Significance

The Ambassador is situated at Ervay Street, St. Paul Street and Interstate 30, overlooking Downtown Dallas. The main entrance faces west on Ervay Street, once the thoroughfare into the affluent Cedars neighborhood. When built in 1904 as the Majestic Hotel, the architectural style was a Dallas brand of the Sullivanesque style and the facade was red brick. The massing and overall appearance of the building resembled many of those in Dallas in what is now the West End Historic District. However, there were some noticeable differences such as the gable on the west facade that was almost Georgian along with the balustrade that was ornamentation on the building. Other than that, the Sullivanesque characteristics were seen in the division of the building into specific areas: the ground story which was divided from the intermediate floors by a limestone belt course; the intermediate floors with symmetrically placed bands of windows; and the roof is separated by a decorative frieze with dentils. There was a gable on the west facade roof that was Georgian in style and a balustraded deck on a flat roof. The windows all had limestone spandrels. The west entrance porch was supported by Ionic columns and was topped with a balustrade. A large side porch on the south facade was similar in style to the entrance porch. The north facade was symmetrical to the south facade but without the porch. On the east facade of the building was the dining room and kitchen. These were torn down in 1930 along with the south porch.

The interior has been renovated several times. There are no early existing photographs, only the recollections of the granddaughter of one of the managers who remembers red silk curtains, chairs and sofas covered in red velvet and large gold leaf mirrors. The floor of the original lobby was apparently lowered in 1932 when major renovations were done to the building. The original elevator shaft is still just east of the lobby area.

Apparently, there were stables across Ervay Street from the hotel. This was later used as the automobile garage when they became popular. The building still stands to the west of the hotel.

In 1932, when the hotel was changed to the Ambassador, the owners made extensive exterior renovations. The Spanish Colonial Revival style had become popular in Dallas around this time. Many homes designed by local architects reflected their interest in this particular style. This style was used in some commercial buildings such as the Highland Park Shopping Village and the Highland Park City Hall. However, the Ambassador, overlooking downtown Dallas, was the only substantial building of that style in the area. The base of the building was painted white and the intermediate floors were plastered over. The roofline was altered and an extra penthouse story was added. The roof was changed to a hip roof with red tile that was characteristic of the Spanish Colonial Revival Style. The entrance on the west facade was altered to an enriched compound arch. The south and north facades were identical with side entrances. The east facade was changed to a back entrance after the demolition of the dining room in 1930. There were one hundred and three rooms described as "rooms, suites and apartments."

In the 1950's when the building was bought by Colonel C. R. Tips, the elevator shaft at the south facade was added to accommodate the predominately elderly clientele. Aside from this alteration, the exterior of the building has remained unchanged since 1932.

The Ambassador, the oldest luxury hotel in Dallas, has been in continuous use since 1905. Although the building underwent a complete change of architectural styles in 1932, it should be noted that the style change was consistent with the history and life of the hotel. It was always known as a luxury hotel and the change in 1932 was to keep up with this image that it had always projected. A recorded Texas Landmark and under consideration for designation as a National Register Landmark, the Ambassador Hotel is a visual landmark for the people of Dallas and a reminder of their history and architectural heritage.

Preservation Analysis

STRUCTURE

- 1. Surface Materials
- 2. Fenestration and Portals
 - a. style, type
 - b. o/w ratio
 - c. rhythms
 - d. placement
- 3. Trim and Detailing
 - a. style
 - b. unique trim or detailing
 - c. structural members
- 4. Roof
 - a. style, form
 - b. slope
 - c. materials
- 5. Design Concepts
 - a. stylistic demands
 - b. functional concepts
- 6. Utilities
 - a. design
 - b. placement
- 7. Signs
 - a. style, design
 - b. placement
- 8. Exterior Connections
 - a. design
 - b. penetration points

SITE

- X 1. Prohibited Structure Areas
 - a. approach
 - b. view corridors
 - c. site feature protection
 - d. vertical additions
- 2. Access/Egress
- 3. Adjacent R.O.W.'s
 - a. existing treatment
 - b. proposed changes
- 4. Landscaping
 - a. existing plant removal
 - b. new plant selection
 - c. site design
- 5. Site Fixtures
 - a. furniture
 - b. sculpture, art
 - c. paths
 - d. utility units
 - e. signs
- 6. Lighting
 - a. exteriors
 - b. grounds

COLOR

- 1. Surface Materials
- 2. Trim and Details
- 3. Roof
- 4. Utilities
- 5. Signs
- 6. Site Fixtures
- 7. Accent Color

Land Use Analysis

Proposed zoning change:

from: None recommended.

to: _____

Recommended use variances:

None recommended.

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Designation Merit

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| <p>A. Character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City of Dallas, State of Texas, or the United States. _____</p> | <p>H. Embodiments of elements of architectural design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship which represent a significant architectural innovation. _____</p> |
| <p>B. Location as the site of a significant historical event. <u> X </u></p> | <p>I. Relationship to other distinctive buildings, sites, or areas which are eligible for preservation according to a plan based on historic, cultural, or architectural motif. <u> X </u></p> |
| <p>C. Identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the culture and development of the city. <u> X </u></p> | <p>J. Unique location of singular physical characteristics representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or the city. <u> X </u></p> |
| <p>D. Exemplification of the cultural, economic, social, or historical heritage of the city. <u> X </u></p> | <p>K. Archeological value in that it has produced or can be expected to produce data affecting theories of historic or prehistoric value. _____</p> |
| <p>E. Portrayal of the environment of a group of people in an era of history characterized by a distinctive architectural style. _____</p> | <p>L. Value as an aspect of community sentiment or public pride. <u> X </u></p> |
| <p>F. Embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen. _____</p> | |
| <p>G. Identification as the work of an architect or master builder whose individual work has influenced the development of the city. _____</p> | |

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Recommendation

The Landmark Survey Task Force requests the Historic Landmark Preservation Committee to deem this proposed landmark meritorious of historic recognition as outlined in city ordinance 19-A.

Date: May 18, 1982

Further, this task force endorses the preservation criteria, policy recommendations, and landmark boundary as presented by the Dept. of Urban Planning staff.

Chairman, Landmark Survey Task Force

Michael A. Steiner

Program Coordinator
Historic Preservation

CRITERIA1. Surface Materials

Reconstruction, renovation or repair of the opaque elements of each facade shall employ only stucco of equal texture, grain and color of the existing main structure as practicable. If the stucco is removed and the brick facade exposed in the future, any reconstruction, renovation or repair of the facade shall employ only brick of equal texture, grain, color and module size of the existing facades as practicable.

2. Fenestrations and Openings

Existing openings in the protected facades shall remain intact and new openings shall not be permitted. New or replacement windows shall have one over one window pane arrangements with mullions that match existing windows. Tinted or reflect glass shall not be permitted, however, insulating glass may be used. All exterior window awnings, shades, or shutters shall be subject to Landmark Committee review. The relationship between stucco walls, windows, and door openings shall be maintained.

3. Roof

The slope, configuration, and surface pattern of the existing roof shall be maintained. No new vertical extensions shall be allowed and all existing extensions, parapets and tile shall be preserved. All replacements or repairs to the designated structure shall employ a tile comparable to the existing roof in texture, design, size and color.

4. Embellishments and Detailing

All ornamental detailing listed below shall remain intact. Any reconstruction, renovation, or replacement of these detail elements shall be identical in composition and texture as practicable.

A. Decorative stone and brick arch over the west facade's entrance.

B. Decorative brick work on the frieze along the roofline.

C. The limestone belt course along the base of the building.

5. Color

The color of the existing facade, including additions, extensions, alterations, and repairs, shall be preserved as is. Where appropriate, paint colors for the facade, trim, and tile roof shall be selected from the Munsell Color System as outlined in the Munsell Book of Color, Neighborhood Hues Collection, 1973.

The predominate facade color shall be white and the trim color shall be white, also. The roof tile shall remain the current color red. Should the existing stucco facade ever be removed, the exposed underlying brick shall remain unpainted. The above mentioned white and red shall conform to a color range to be determined by the Munsell Color System rating.

6. Lighting and Landscaping

All plans for exterior lighting and the placement and removal of trees and shrub shall be approved by the Landmark Committee prior to commencement of work. All plans for parking and ingress and egress to the site shall be approved by the Landmark Committee.

EXHIBIT A

7. Public Improvements

All proposed public improvements of streets and associated rights-of-way abutting the site shall be approved by the Landmark Committee prior to commencement of the work.

8. Signs

No signs shall be erected on the site nor attached to the structure without the approval of the Landmark Committee. In addition, all signage shall meet City of Dallas Sign Ordinance (1983) regulations. Signage shall be compatible with the architectural qualities of the existing main structure.

It is recommended that all signage attached to the structure be placed in the facade voids located beneath cornice lines and above the topmost facade openings. Signage on additions to the structure and on accessory structures (when appropriate) shall conform to the same guidelines as signage on the designated structure. In no case shall a sign permit be issued without Landmark Committee review and approval.

EXHIBIT A