

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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. 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.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Strand Theater **DRAFT**

Other names/site number: Mainzer Theater; Mainzer-Strand Theater; Old Strand Theater; Santa Fe Bus Depot (655 West Main Street)

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

## 2. Location

Street & number: 655-661 West Main Street

City or town: Merced State: California County: Merced

Not For Publication:  Vicinity:

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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 at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_ national \_\_\_ statewide \_\_\_ local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

\_\_\_A \_\_\_B \_\_\_C \_\_\_D

<p>_____  <b>Signature of certifying official/Title:</b></p>	<p>_____  <b>Date</b></p>
<p>_____  <b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b></p>	

<p>In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.</p>	
<p>_____  <b>Signature of commenting official:</b></p>	<p>_____  <b>Date</b></p>
<p>_____  <b>Title :</b> <span style="float: right;"><b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b></span></p>	

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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:) \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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#### 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

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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>          </u>	buildings
<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	sites
<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	structures
<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: theater

TRANSPORTATION: road-related

COMMERCE/TRADE: restaurant

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: theater

COMMERCE/TRADE: restaurant

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT: Art Deco

MODERN MOVEMENT: Moderne

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**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: concrete foundation; stucco; brick; metal

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a summary paragraph that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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### Summary Paragraph

The Strand Theater at 655-661 West Main Street in the central business district of downtown Merced was constructed in 1937-1938 to replace a 1920 theater that burned down in 1936. Known as the Mainzer Theater since 2001, the 1938 building is a significant example of an Art Deco and Art Moderne style theater and commercial building. The building's design has been attributed to San Francisco architect Virgil W. Jorgensen and the Saleh Brothers construction company. The building is constructed of reinforced concrete and brick and sits on a rectangular parcel of approximately 11,250 square feet. The west portion of the building contains the historic theater entrance at 659 Main Street and originally included two commercial units that flanked the theater entrance. The theater is marked by its oversized two-story height with parapet and its central marquee. The east portion of the building, addressed 655 West Main Street, houses a single-story commercial unit with a flat roof and parapet. These two portions—constructed as part of a single building—were envisioned as separate spaces with differing functions and were visually differentiated according to use. The building remains intact on the exterior, the interior flow of spaces has largely been retained, and a number of interior Art Deco style features survive to communicate the building's original and continued use as a performance venue and movie theater. The property retains all aspects of historic integrity.

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## **Narrative Description**

### Overview and Setting

The Strand Theater, inclusive of a commercial unit at 655 West Main Street, a storefront at 657 West Main Street, the theater at 659 West Main Street, and another storefront at 661 West Main Street, fill an 11,250 square-foot (150 feet by 75 feet) rectangular-shaped parcel bounded by West Main Street on the south, N Street on the west, and a rear alley that bisects the block on the north. West Main Street, originally called 17<sup>th</sup> Street, forms the primary commercial corridor in downtown Merced.

The Strand Theater was constructed of reinforced concrete and brick. The theater and commercial unit were built simultaneously and share a unified façade, differentiated in their massing, use, and ornament. The theater, located at the west side of the parcel at the corner of West Main and N Streets, presents a typical theater massing with a generous two-story volume that houses an auditorium, features a decorated and vertically oriented primary façade, and has secondary elevations with minimal openings. A parapet along the roofline hides the auditorium's wood truss roof. In contrast, the commercial unit to the east is a single-story with a flat roof and parapet over a ground-floor storefront located between the theater and an adjacent two-story commercial building.

### Exterior

#### *Primary (South) Façade*

The primary (south) façade of the theater is symmetrical with a central recessed theater entrance flanked by partial height glass and aluminum storefront systems. The theater's original Art Deco style detailing is most prominent on the primary façade, which is finished in painted stucco and features a centered stepped parapet that accentuates the verticality of the building through a series of metal fins that extend downward from the stepped parapet and at the building corners.

A tri-partite marquee, which appears to be original, is located over the theater's central entrance portal and echoes the stepped motif of the parapet. Rounded edges illustrate the influence of the Art Moderne style. The marquee has neon lighting on its face, as well as incandescent bulbs in a geometric pattern on the underside of the entry soffit. The Mainzer name on the marquee reflects the name change during the 2001 renovation. The upper portions of the primary façade, flanking the marquee, feature two symmetrically placed and recessed octagonal cast reliefs featuring a stylized female form, likely intended to represent a muse or goddess. Two geometric cast grilles are centered on the façade between the vertical bands, in line with the cast reliefs.

At the ground floor, storefronts have fully glazed doors and, while the fenestration of the storefronts has been altered over the years, their overall size and configuration remains consistent with the original design. Horizontally divided, multi-lite bands of transoms above each storefront carry across both the theater and adjacent commercial component, uniting the two façades and offsetting the verticality of the Art Deco style with these more Art Moderne style horizontal elements. A projecting beltcourse runs between the transoms and the storefront glazing.

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The theater's storefront spaces (repurposed for restaurant seating) consist of large fixed storefront windows with aluminum frames and fully glazed aluminum doors below transom panels. The west (left) storefront system is flush to the façade, while the east commercial space of the theater building features a recessed entrance to the west (left) with a canted storefront system to the east (right). The central entrance to the theater is recessed beneath the building's marquee. Glass and metal wall-mounted vitrines flank the opening, and a polished concrete floor leads to four grouped fully glazed doors with fixed side-lites.

The commercial storefront also features a flush storefront window at the west (left) of its primary façade, a recessed fully glazed entrance door with transom and side-lite, and a canted storefront at the east (right) side of the façade. Over the multi-lite transoms, which carry across this façade from the theater, is a plain stuccoed parapet.

#### *West Façade*

The west façade of the theater facing N Street is typical of exterior theater walls and contains few openings. Clad in stucco, this side façade features a series of simple buttresses. The west façade features a return of the multi-lite transom from the primary façade over a single storefront window at its south corner. Between the second and third buttresses from the south end of the façade is a nine-lite awning sash window with wire glass and a small access panel, both situated low to the ground. Between the sixth and seventh buttresses is a single-leaf metal door. Toward the north end of the west façade is a pair of asymmetrically divided double-leaf metal doors under a suspended metal canopy. A wall-mounted vitrine is located to the south of this rear exit.

#### *North (Rear) Façade*

The north (rear) façade of the theater consists of a painted brick wall with painted board-formed concrete frame along the top. The shape of a brick arch, since infilled, is visible at the west side of the north façade. Two flush metal utility doors are located at the east end of the façade.

The rear of 655 West Main Street contains a stucco finished recess at the ground floor that infilled a previously open delivery bay. The upper portion of the façade is flush with the adjacent theater's rear façade. Two single-leaf doors are located within the recessed area near the west (right) edge of the façade; one door is located on a west-facing wall, and the other on a north-facing wall. A fixed window is located towards the left (east) of the façade.

#### Interior

The interior spaces of the theater have undergone some alteration to spatial arrangements and materials. The building's original use as a theater and event space remains clear, and a number of features continue to express the Art Deco and Art Moderne style of the building.

The ground-floor entrance of the theater has a tri-partite organization comprised of a central lobby flanked on the east and west sides by largely symmetrical accessory spaces that include seating areas for the restaurant, a concession stand, restrooms, and storage areas. The central portion of the lobby functions primarily as circulation space that leads to the main auditorium

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through a central corridor (or vomitorium). The ceiling, flat at the entrance, features an original Art Deco style decorative pyramidal section, framed by low stepped bands that rise to a vertical scalloped molding before the plaster ceiling rises to its peak.

The lobby leads to both the ground-floor auditorium space and to an elevator to the west (left) of the central passage and a stairway to the east (right) that provides access to the second floor. A second-floor lobby is situated between the double-height auditorium space and the second-floor cinema. The cinema, created when the main auditorium was divided during a 1968 alteration, fills the south portion along the second floor. The original projection room is situated at the south (rear) wall of the cinema.

The historic auditorium is located within the double-height volume at the north end of the building and retains the theater's overall symmetry. The stage and proscenium fill the north end of the building and two stairwells along the rear of the auditorium volume provide access to the mezzanine. Double doors centered in the south wall of the mezzanine provide access to the second-floor lobby and the elevator.

Original features that remain on the interior of the theater include: the decorative ceiling and plaster detailing in the lobby, pilasters with corbelled capitals in the cinema and auditorium spaces, Art Deco style pendant light fixtures, and portions of the decorative painted ceiling in the auditorium space. Most importantly, the building retains its interior organization of a public lobby flanked by commercial spaces, which leads to the large interior volumes of the auditorium and cinema. In plan, the building is symmetrical and prioritizes access between marquee, interior lobby, and auditorium. Service spaces, such as restrooms, stairs, and the original projection room, are located in secondary areas to support the theater's primary function.

No historic fabric remains within the theater's original storefronts—repurposed for restaurant seating—located to the east and west of the theater's lobby. These areas are accessible from the street and from the theater lobby. The west (left) space is a largely open volume. The east (right) space contains a low ramp at the entrance with a decorative guardrail and features a concession stand at the north end of the space, adjacent to the lobby. The east space also opens to the commercial unit at 655 West Main Street.

The interior of 655 West Main Street consists of a restaurant, bar, and kitchen. No historic fabric is extant. A single opening connects this space to the adjacent theater lobby. The restaurant and bar are located toward the front while the kitchen is located to the rear along with a small office and storage rooms. A hallway from the restaurant to the rear exit stretches along the west (left) portion of the space. An additional opening between this commercial unit and the adjacent theater is located towards the rear entrance door and provides access to the theater's auditorium.

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Character Defining Features:

The character defining features of the Strand Theater's Art Deco-Art Moderne style include:

Exterior:

- Two-story/double-height, rectangular massing
- Concrete construction
- Stepped parapet
- Stepped marquee with neon lighting
- Recessed entry with exterior vestibule
- Large storefront windows and glazed doors (materials not original)
- Canted storefront of 657 West Main Street and flush storefront of 661 West Main Street
- Geometric pattern of inset panels and lightbulbs in entry soffit
- Vertical metal struts over lighting (originally neon)
- Multi-light storefront transom ribbon above all storefronts
- Bas relief figures
- Rectangular ornamental grilles

Interior:

- General spatial relationships of lobby to flanking commercial spaces, vestibule, back-of-house spaces, auditorium, and second-floor cinema (previously divided into two theaters, reconnected as one larger theater)
- Pyramidal ceiling in lobby with scalloped border
- Stepped ceiling edging on north and east sides of pyramidal ceiling
- Pilasters and corbels in auditorium
- Art Deco pendant lights in auditorium and cinemas
- Painted decorative ceiling mural in auditorium
- Fluted proscenium
- Elevated stage

Alterations

Since its opening in February 1938, the theater has seen a number of alterations dating to 1968, 1993, 2000-2001, and 2019-2020. The first major alteration appears to have been the construction of a dividing wall between the main theater area and the upper balconies—creating a cinema space—in 1968, although the permit on file does not specify a scope of work.

In 1993, the cinema space was divided lengthwise into two narrow cinemas. At this time, a lobby concessions bar, new stairs, aisles, and seating were installed in the main theater.<sup>1</sup>

Major modifications in 2000-2001 were undertaken by owners Hanz Mainz (a Santa Barbara contractor) and Brenda Farley (a local entrepreneur), who sought to convert the ground floor theater into a performing arts venue, while retaining the upstairs cinemas.<sup>2</sup> The remodel included

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<sup>1</sup> Merced Cinema Remodel, "Structural Calculations for seating/aisle rearrangements," January 6, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> City of Merced Permit # 01-00001911 for 659 W Main Street, January 14, 2002.

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the replacement of the auditorium's ground-floor stadium seating with tiered platform floors to serve as a dance floor and an area for table seating.<sup>3</sup> The original stepped center aisle was replaced with a sloped aisle. Other modifications completed at this time included the removal of the eastern storefront's interior walls to open the space to the theater lobby; replacement of the theater's entrance doors; reconfiguration of the stair on the west side of the theater leading up to the mezzanine; and installation of new millwork in the lobby, bar, and along the mezzanine balconies. At the time of completion in 2001, the theater's name was changed to the Mainzer Theater after owner Hanz Mainz and the marquee updated to Mainzer.<sup>4</sup> The project was funded in part through state redevelopment funds and in part by Mainz's own financial investment. Significant preservation efforts were also made during this renovation, and the project won an award from the Art Deco Society of California in 2004.<sup>5</sup>

A rehabilitation effort in 2019-2020 removed many of the Strand Theater's non-original features, including features within the lobby that had obscured the original decorative plaster ceiling, and a wall in the upper cinema that had sub-divided the upper cinema into two smaller viewing rooms. The 2019-2020 work re-established the overarching symmetry of the building's interior volumes. While new features, including an elevator and a second-floor lobby, were added during the rehabilitation, they were located in secondary spaces so the original circulation pattern and existing historic fabric on the interior could be retained. The Historic Preservation Certification Application Part 3, approved by the California Office of Historic Preservation on July 13, 2021, is under review by the National Park Service.

The commercial unit at 655 West Main Street has undergone significant alterations since its construction in 1938. While the original intended use remains unknown, the year after the building was completed, in May 1939, the space was modified to be used as a bus depot by Santa Fe Trailways, which operated a bus line from Los Angeles to San Francisco.<sup>6</sup> Alterations in 1939 included opening part of the front and rear façades of the building to allow buses to drive into the depot to pick-up and drop-off passengers. A storefront was reinserted into the open section of the primary façade by 1952 when the commercial unit was in use as a tavern. During the 2019-2020 rehabilitation, the 1952 storefront was replaced with pre-finished aluminum-frame doors and windows, which are compatible with the storefront's original design. The interior, which had no extant historic finishes, was renovated as part of the 2019-2020 rehabilitation of the building and this space was modified for use as a restaurant and bar. Offices, storage rooms, and kitchen spaces were installed in the center and rear of the space, while the south portion remains an open volume that houses restaurant and bar functions. Interior finishes are in keeping with its history as a utilitarian commercial space.

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<sup>3</sup> "Mainzer (Strand) Theater, Merced, CA," Preliminary Historic Assessment, ELS Architecture, July 20, 2015, 6.

<sup>4</sup> Historic Rehabilitation Development Planning: "El Capitan Hotel Annex – Due Diligence Report," Heritage Consulting Group, September 30, 2015, 9.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> "Intercity Bus Companies: Santa Fe Trailways," [1948 map of Santa Fe Trailways Transcontinental Routes] *Chicago Rail Fan*, <https://www.chicagorailfan.com/greycsft.html> (accessed July 26, 2021).

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### Integrity

The Strand Theater, inclusive of the theater and commercial unit, retains sufficient integrity to convey its significance as a theater and performance venue constructed in the Art Deco-Art Moderne style in the late 1930s. The building retains all aspects of integrity.

### *Location*

The Strand Theater has not been moved since its construction and retains integrity of location.

### *Design*

The defining design characteristics and features of the Strand Theater's exterior—including its marquee with neon and incandescent lighting, its vertically oriented front façade, stylized muse icons, and vertical projecting fins—remain intact and communicate the building's late 1930s design. Alterations have primarily taken place within the original interior auditorium volume, although original materials and design elements remain, including decorative painting on the auditorium ceiling, pilasters with corbelled capitals, and Art Deco pendant lamps. In addition, the lobby's pyramidal plaster ceiling and trim is extant, and the building retains its symmetrical circulation path from sidewalk to auditorium, proceeding through the recessed portal entrance, Art Deco lobby, and central hallway (or vomitorium) to reach the auditorium space. The building retains a large number of design elements that illustrate its original Art Deco and Art Moderne style and communicates the building's late 1930s origins. The building retains integrity of design.

### *Setting*

The theater was originally constructed to replace a 1920 theater lost to fire in 1936. Located on the main commercial street of downtown Merced, the theater and its commercial unit have been components of the larger business district since the theater opened in February 1938. West Main Street remains a business district of primarily one- to two-story commercial buildings, predominantly clad in stucco. A number of nearby buildings feature Art Deco and Art Moderne detailing, with rounded edges and geometric detailing. The building retains integrity of setting.

### *Materials*

The Strand Theater retains the majority of its original materials, including its stucco façade, metal marquee with neon and down lighting, decorative features that include stylized icons with female figures, ornamental grilles, and backlit metal fins. Although some deteriorated features, such as storefronts, have been replaced at the front façade, these have largely been replaced with in-kind materials and compatible proportions. Alterations within the interior have been more substantial, notably the interior division of the auditorium, the erection of new partitions, and the replacement of original seating. A large number of interior features have been retained, including the pyramidal plaster ceiling, Art Deco pendant lights, and decorative ceiling painting and pilasters with corbelled capitals within the auditorium. The building retains integrity of materials.

### *Workmanship*

The features of the building that most clearly demonstrate its workmanship include the articulation and decoration of the façade, the metal marquee with neon and incandescent lighting,

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the pyramidal plaster ceiling within the lobby, and the extant decorative features of the auditorium, which include portions of the decorative painted ceiling, pilasters and capitals, and surviving Art Deco pendant lamps. These features all exhibit the skill and workmanship of the craftsman in creating Art Deco and Art Moderne style designs of the late 1930s. The building retains integrity of workmanship.

*Feeling*

The overall feeling of the building remains that of a downtown main street theater and commercial space of the 1930s. The building retains integrity of feeling.

*Association*

The Strand Theater is readily recognizable as a theater constructed in the 1930s. Theaters like the Strand Theater were a common feature of downtown Main Streets in the United States during the period and are largely disappearing. The Strand Theater continues to reflect many of the defining characteristics of the Art Deco and Art Moderne styles that became popular for theater buildings of the period due to their overtones of glamour, exuberance, and escapism that was popular during the Great Depression. The building retains integrity of association.

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## 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.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- 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 old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1938  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1938  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Jorgensen, Virgil  
Saleh Brothers  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Strand Theater is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as an excellent example of the Art Deco and Art Moderne styles. With its planarity, symmetry, repetition, and use of stepped forms, the building expresses its Art Deco style through its massing and treatment of volume. In its decoration, including the use of stylized bas-reliefs depicting muses or goddesses, its stepped marquee with neon lighting and incandescent bulbs, and its vertical lighting behind metal fins, the building's exterior clearly demonstrates its 1937-1938 design as a work of Art Deco style theater design. The growing influence in the 1930s of Art Moderne—also known as Streamline Moderne—is expressed through the incorporation of rounded forms, flat massings, and horizontal elements. The use of these features identifies the building as a late 1930s design when the Art Moderne style was increasingly popular in architecture, graphic design, and the arts. The period of significance is 1938, the year construction was completed.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

#### Architecture of the Strand Theater

Archival information on the design and construction of the Mainzer Theater is limited and has been attributed to the architect Virgil W. Jorgensen, and the well-known theater construction company, Saleh Brothers.<sup>7</sup> The building's 1937 permit lists the architect as "Jorgensen," and indicates that it was built by the "Salich Brothers."<sup>8</sup> It is probable that "Salich" is a misspelling of Saleh Brothers, who still operate as contractors and exterior painters in central California and specialize in theater construction. The Saleh Brothers operated at least one theater themselves from 1941 to 1973 called the Center Theater, in Centerville (later Fremont, California), which has a number of stylistic features similar to those of the Strand Theater, including its overall form and massing, its verticality of design, and the placement of Art Deco style bas-reliefs and grilles on the primary facade.<sup>9</sup> Although the architect and builders are only attributed, the building is an excellent example of the popular styles of the time and illustrates the combination of Art Deco and Art Moderne style design for a local theater building.

#### Art Deco Style

Art Deco is an architectural style that first appeared in France just before World War I, flourished internationally in the 1920s and 1930s, and then fell out of fashion during World War II. It took its name, short for Arts Décoratifs, from the Exposition Internationale des Arts

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<sup>7</sup> Historic Rehabilitation Development Planning: "Strand (Mainzer) Theater – Due Diligence Report," Heritage Consulting Group, September 30, 2015, 8.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> *Cinema Treasures*, "Mainzer Cinema II"; Matt Artz, "Curtains for the Center Theater," *Tri-City Beat*. August 31, 2011.

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Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes (International Exposition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts) held in Paris in 1925.<sup>10</sup> As an eclectic style, Art Deco combines rich colors and bold geometric shapes with Machine Age imagery and new materials such as aluminum, stainless steel, plastics, lacquer, and inlaid wood. An emphasis on planarity, verticality, and angularity is central to the style and the presence of vertical lines and rectilinear shapes, particularly in stepped façade massings are common.<sup>11</sup> The ziggurat roof style of terraced and stepped volumes was popularized in buildings of the period due to this visual emphasis on geometry and the role of repeating elements and patterns.<sup>12</sup> Façade ornament and graphic design in the Art Deco style used prolific geometric ornament that included zigzags, chevrons, sunbursts, and floral abstractions.

During its heyday, Art Deco represented luxury, glamour, exuberance, and faith in technological progress. As such, it became a popular style for movie theaters, following on the heels of escapist theater architecture of earlier eras that focused on exotic and classical revival styles.<sup>13</sup>

### Art Moderne Style

By the late 1930s the Art Moderne style was growing in popularity and offered a streamlined aesthetic in contrast with the more ornate Art Deco. Art Moderne, or Streamline Moderne, is a late Art Deco architectural style that first emerged in Germany from the work of the New Objectivity artists and architects of the German Werkbund, led by Hermann Muthesius. Taking cues from the Werkbund, American industrial designers and architects began stripping Art Deco of its excessive ornamentation, focusing instead on a streamlined aesthetic and amplifying the effects of geometry and volume.

This style was developed in the midst of the Great Depression and the ability to remove excess decoration—which added to the expense—and focus on the role of efficiency in design, materials, and form was particularly appealing. In addition, Art Moderne was associated with the concepts of efficiency and speed, employed aerodynamic forms, and espoused technological achievement and faith in the future.<sup>14</sup> The style is characterized by curving forms, rounded edges, flat roofs, subdued colors, and long horizontal lines, as opposed to the vertical emphasis of the Art Deco style.<sup>15</sup> Occasionally, the Art Moderne style also features nautical elements. The style became pervasive in both architecture and the design of everyday objects. Though often perceived to be at odds with Art Deco, it was not unusual for buildings to feature both styles.

The use of the streamlined Art Moderne style for cinemas and movie theaters became common in the 1930s, replacing the earlier lavish interior decoration of high-style Art Deco cinemas.

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<sup>10</sup> Alastair Duncan, *Art Deco (World of Art)* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1988), 175.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 180-181.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>13</sup> Alan Gowans, *Styles and Types of North American Architecture* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992), 252.

<sup>14</sup> Marcus Whiffen, *American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles, Rev. Ed* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 241

<sup>15</sup> Duncan, *Art Deco (World of Art)*, 195.

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Decoration was more restrained, and theater design was guided by a “new theory that the screen [or stage] should be the only focal point.”<sup>16</sup>

### Design of the Strand Theater

The Strand Theater demonstrates the use of the Art Deco and Art Moderne styles to evoke the grandeur of the theater, in keeping with the historical treatment of theaters as recreational spaces, while also employing the simple and efficient design of the Art Moderne.

The building’s design includes several features of the Art Deco style, particularly in its rectilinear geometric massing that maintains a strong verticality through its stepped façade decoration that carries through a stepped parapet over a central entrance portal and marquee. The placement of metal fins—originally backlit with neon—along these strong vertical façade elements further amplifies the height of the façade. The façade features few decorative elements, and prominently displays inset bas-relief panels with a stylized female nude figure who appears to be bathing with a water jug, her leg raised on a column capital. This figure is particularly representative of the Art Deco design aesthetic, with low relief that emphasizes her form, features, and musculature, while the water jug and fabric swags in the background are angular and stylized.

On the exterior, the Art Deco style of the building is softened with the incorporation of Art Moderne elements including the use of the transom panels over the building’s storefronts, wrapping the western edge of the theater and carrying through the commercial façade. This strong horizontal element illustrates the influence of the Art Moderne style. Additionally, this influence can be seen in the incorporation of a series of curved shapes in the theater’s marquee and the incorporation of new technologies and modern materials, including neon and metal ribbing.

Elements of the interior carry this theme throughout the building. Art Deco features include the stepped pyramidal ceiling in the lobby, stepped metal wall sconces, pronounced pilasters with oversized corbelled capitals, Art Deco-style pendant lights within the main auditorium and cinema, and floral abstractions in the auditorium’s ceiling murals. The articulation of these design elements on the exterior and interior of the Strand Theater illustrate the craftsmanship and contemporary design aesthetic of the period and demonstrate the high artistic value lavished on a main street theater.

Overall, the Strand Theater building is an excellent example of an Art Deco style theater and commercial unit with few changes on the exterior and sufficient features on the interior to be able to convey the building’s significance under Criterion C.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 205.

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

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**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 # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

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**Primary location of additional data:**

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

Name of repository: Merced County Assessor-Recorder; City and County of Merced  
Planning Department; Merced County Library, Merced County  
Courthouse Museum Archives

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreege of Property** less than one acre

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 37.302582, Longitude: -120.486044

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary corresponds to the legal boundary with the Office of the County Recorder of the County of Merced, parcel number 031-133-13.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary corresponds to the legal boundary of the parcel historically associated with the building since its construction in 1937-1938.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Barrett Reiter, Architectural Historian

organization: Page & Turnbull

street & number: 170 Maiden Lane, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor

city or town: San Francisco state: CA zip code: 94108

e-mail [reiter@page-turnbull.com](mailto:reiter@page-turnbull.com)

telephone: 415-593-3223

date: May 2021; Revised July 2021

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### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

### Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

### Photo Log

Name of Property:	Strand Theater
City or Vicinity:	Merced
County:	Merced
State:	California
Photographer:	Page & Turnbull
Date Photographed:	September 30, 2020

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- |         |   |
|---------|---|
| 1 of 22 | Primary (south) façade from across W. Main Street, looking north  |
| 2 of 22 | Theater marquee, looking north  |
| 3 of 22 | Partial view of the primary (south) façade (east of main entrance), looking northeast                       |
| 4 of 22 | Entrance vestibule under marquee, looking north   |
| 5 of 22 | Partial view of the primary (south) façade (west of main entrance), looking northwest                       |
| 6 of 22 | Primary (south) and side (west) façades from intersection of W. Main Street and N Street, looking northeast |

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- 7 of 22 Secondary entrance and exit doors at side (west) façade, looking southeast
- 8 of 22 Partial view of the rear (north) façade (west end), looking southeast
- 9 of 22 Partial view of the rear (north) façade (east end), looking southeast
- 10 of 22 Restaurant space, looking north
- 11 of 22 Restaurant space, looking south toward entrance
- 12 of 22 Concession area (east of lobby), looking south
- 13 of 22 Concession area (east of lobby), looking north toward concession counter
- 14 of 22 Restaurant area (west of lobby), looking south
- 15 of 22 Lobby, looking north from main entrance towards theater
- 16 of 22 Lobby, looking west
- 17 of 22 Lobby, looking south toward main entrance
- 18 of 22 Main theater, looking north toward stage
- 19 of 22 Main theater, looking southwest
- 20 of 22 Mezzanine, looking west
- 21 of 22 Second floor cinema, looking southeast
- 22 of 22 Second floor projection room, looking west

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

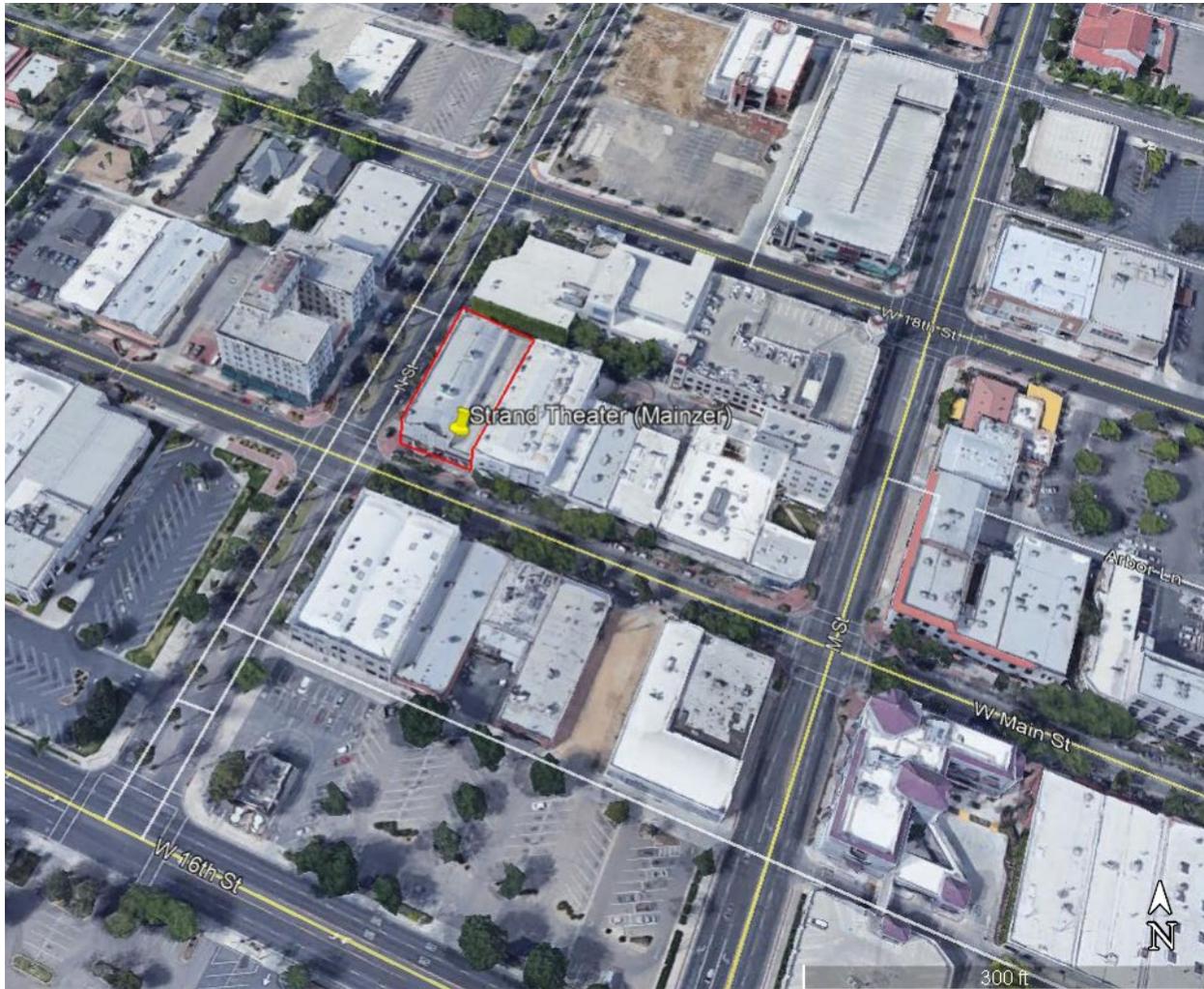
The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.



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**Vicinity Map**

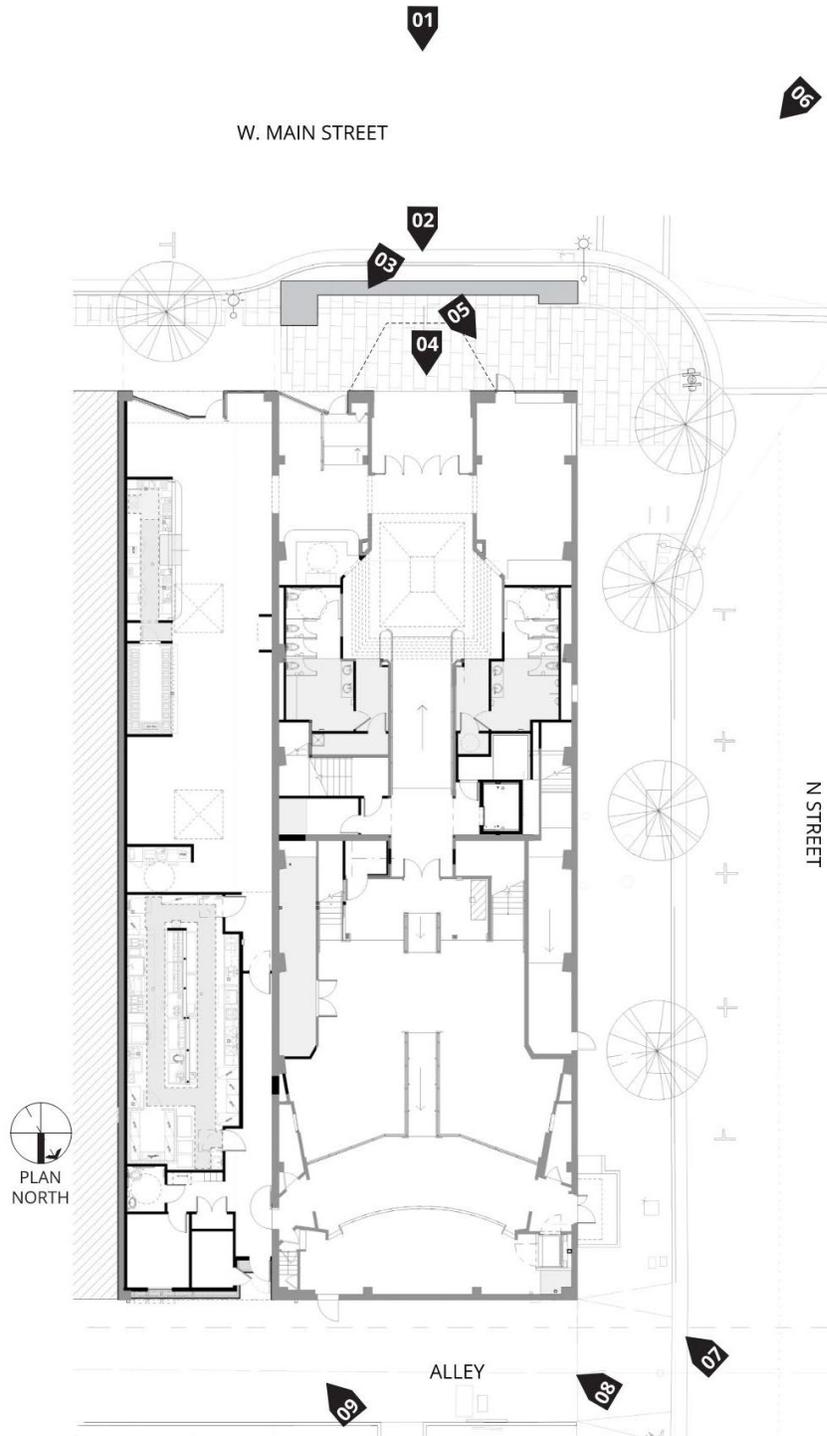


Source: Google Earth, 2020; edited by Page & Turnbull, 2020

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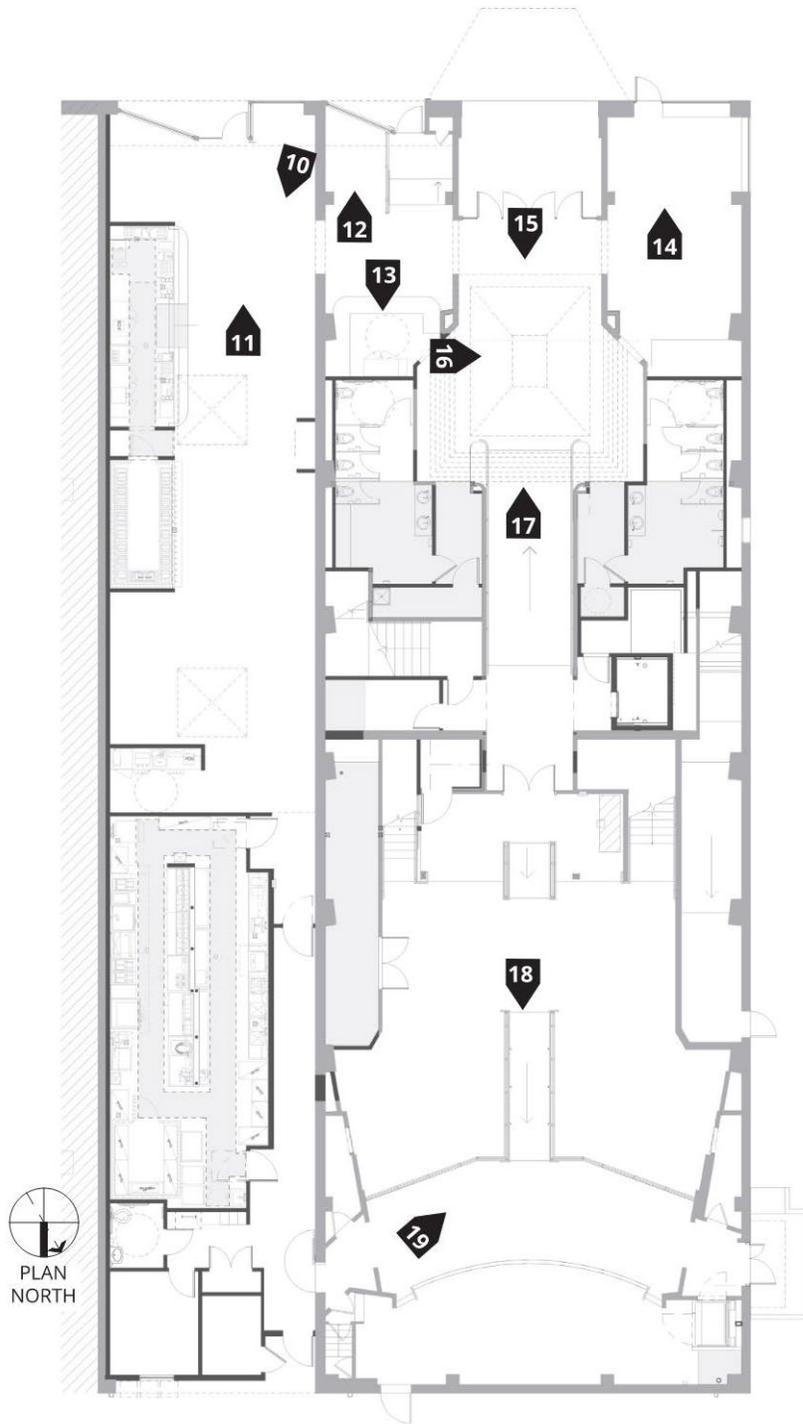
**Sketch Map/Photo Key 1 of 3—Exterior**



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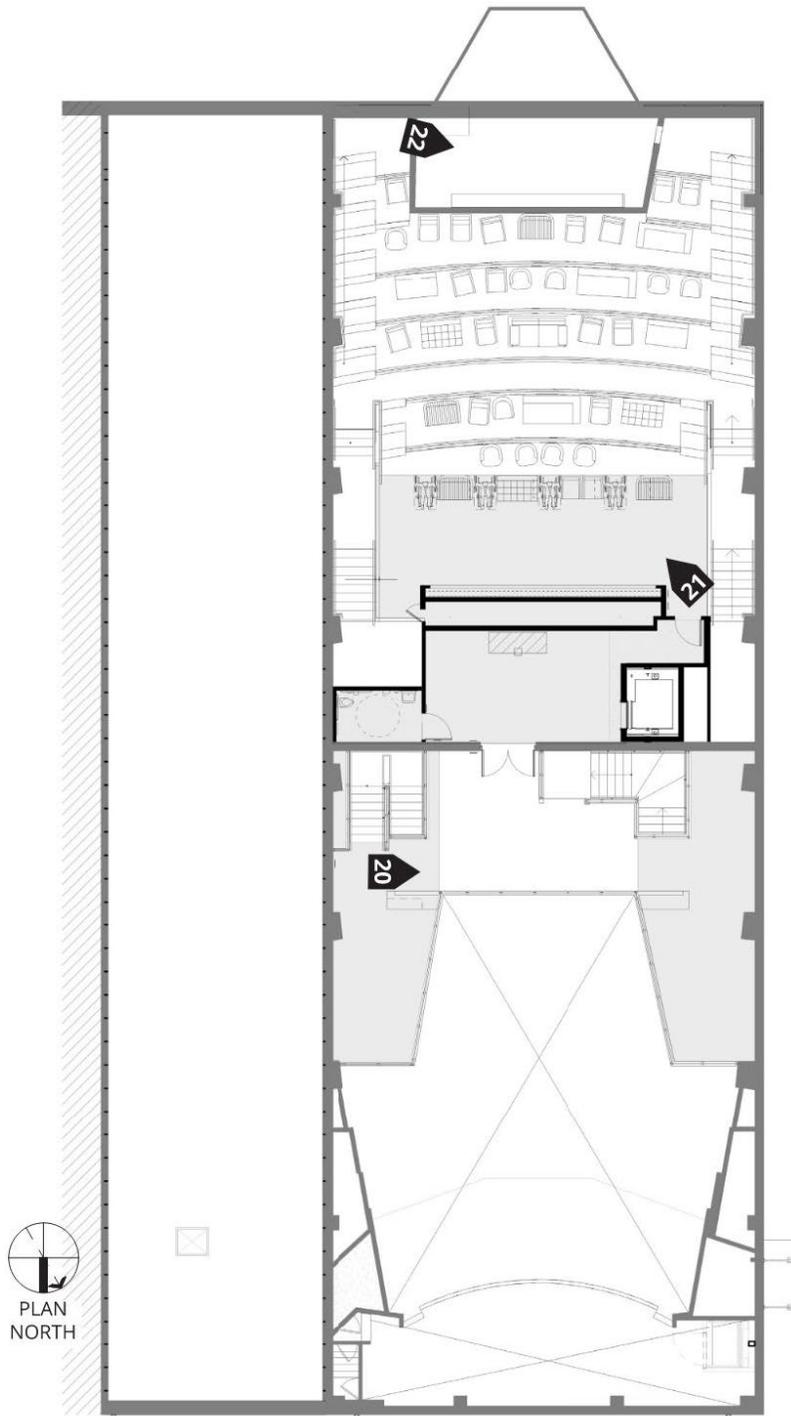
**Sketch Map/Photo Key 2 of 3—Ground Floor, Interior**



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**Sketch Map/Photo Key 3 of 3—Second Floor, Interior**



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**Figure 1 Birds Eye View**

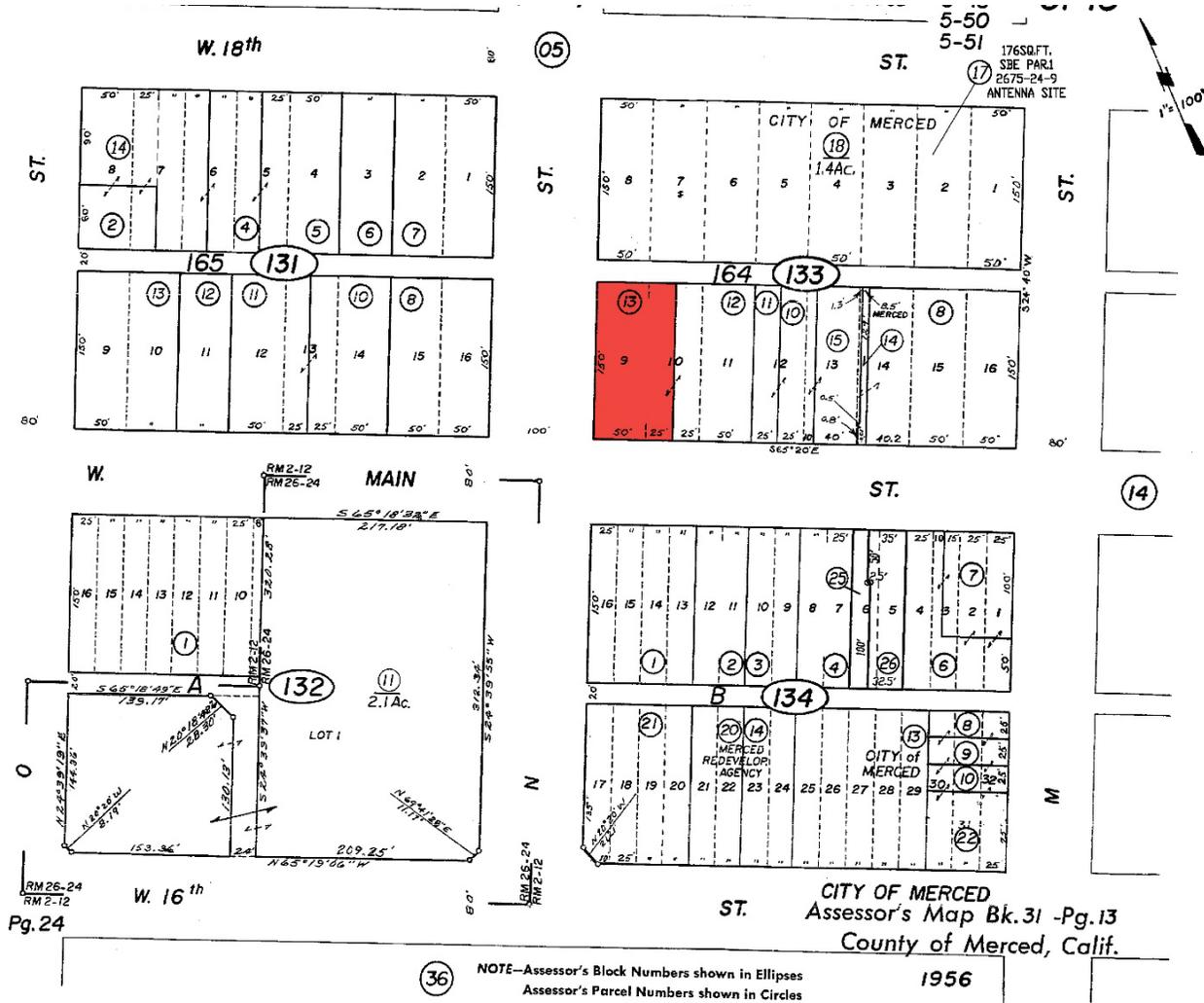


Source: Google Earth, 2020; edited by Page & Turnbull, 2020

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Figure 2 Property Boundary (Parcel) Map



Source: City of Merced Online Parcel Reports; edited by Page & Turnbull, 2020



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**Figure 4** Theater and bus depot, 1944; Source: Merced County Courthouse Museum Archives



**Figure 5** Theater and converted retail space, 1959; Source: Merced County Courthouse Museum Archives



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**Photo 1** Primary (south) façade from across W. Main Street, looking north



**Photo 2** Theater marquee, looking north



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**Photo 3** Partial view of the primary (south) façade (east of main entrance), looking northeast



**Photo 4** Entrance vestibule under marquee, looking north



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**Photo 5** Partial view of the primary (south) façade (west of main entrance), looking northwest



**Photo 6** Primary (south) and side (west) façades from intersection of W. Main Street and N Street, looking northeast



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**Photo 7** Secondary entrance and exit doors at side (west) façade, looking southeast



**Photo 8** Partial view of the rear (north) façade (west end), looking southeast



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**Photo 9** Partial view of the rear (north) façade (east end), looking southeast



**Photo 10** Restaurant space, looking north



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**Photo 11** Restaurant space, looking south toward entrance



**Photo 12** Concession area (east of lobby), looking south



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**Photo 13** Concession area (east of lobby), looking north toward concession counter



**Photo 14** Restaurant area (west of lobby), looking south



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**Photo 15** Lobby, looking north from main entrance towards theater



**Photo 16** Lobby, looking west



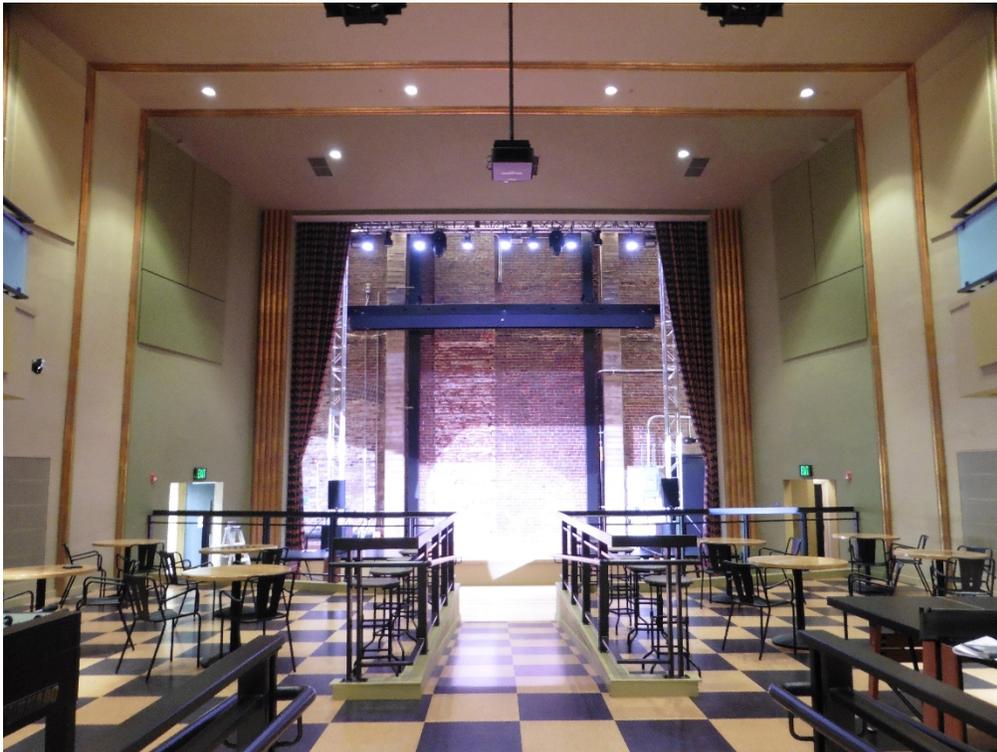
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**Photo 17** Lobby, looking south toward main entrance



**Photo 18** Main theater, looking north toward stage



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**Photo 19** Main theater, looking southwest



**Photo 20** Mezzanine, looking west



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**Photo 21** Second floor cinema, looking southeast



**Photo 22** Second floor projection room, looking west

