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Classic Hollywood Art Deco Razed at La Brea/Willoughby

Mary | June 16, 2014 | [8 Comments](#)



900 North La Brea – originally home to ModernCraft Laundry. Morgan, Walls and Clement architects (1930). Photo credit: catalog.library.ca.gov

The once beautiful art deco building on the corner of La Brea and Willoughby – most recently known as the Mole-Richardson Building – was unexpectedly demolished on Tuesday, June 10. Built in 1930 and designed by architects Morgan, Walls and Clements (El Capitan Theater, Belasco Theater, Mayan Theater, etc.), the building was originally home to ModernCraft Laundry.

This property at 900 North La Brea is zoned MR1 - which is a Restricted Industrial Zone (very basically... protecting industrial land for industrial use, while upholding standards for being a good neighbor). The current property owner was issued a demolition permit by the LA Department of Building and Safety on April 15, 2014.



Recent view of 900 North La Brea. Photo credit: Google Maps.

It appears that the developer went through the proper channels to move forward on the future they have in mind for the property. So how does the demolition of a property that is a classic example of art deco architecture happen without the knowledge and input of community stakeholders?

Demolition permits are issued by Department of Building and Safety, which is different from City Planning. The exception is if something is in an HPOZ or is otherwise historically protected – then it would require a broader review before a demolition permit was issued. But this building didn't have an official historic designation. So things like this happen from time to time. They just fall through the cracks unless a community is vigilant and proactive, and tries to protect the building before someone else comes along and knocks it down.

Developers do not generally need to go through a land use permitting process to get a demolition permit, only to get permission for certain discretionary privileges in building new buildings – for things like excess density, liquor licenses, zone changes or variances, etc.

The lesson to be learned is that when we believe a building may be architecturally or culturally significant in our neighborhood, we should contact one or both of the two resources in LA that deal with landmarking and historic preservation.

The Office of Historic Resources (OHR) within the LA Department of City Planning is charged with identifying and reviewing a structure's historic preservation worthiness. OHR currently has a program in place called **Survey LA** – designed to identify significant historic resources throughout our city. The LA Conservancy is a nonprofit membership organization that works to recognize, preserve, and revitalize the historic architectural and cultural resources of Los Angeles County, and has a preservation 'watchlist' of buildings. The City already has designated over 1,000 structures as Historic Cultural Monuments in the City of LA.

If there's a building you feel should be landmarked, reach out to The Office of Historic Resources or the LA Conservancy to get the process started. We, as a community, need to serve as watchdog in historic preservation.

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