



February 10, 2022

Ms. Angela Calvillo, Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
Honorable Supervisor Stefani
Board of Supervisors
City and County of San Francisco
City Hall
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place, Room 244
San Francisco, CA 94102
Via email only

Re: **Transmittal of Planning Department Case Number 2021-009311DES**
Clay Theatre (2261 Fillmore Street) Landmark Designation
BOS File No. 210726

Dear Ms. Calvillo and Supervisor Stefani,

On January 19, 2022, the San Francisco Historic Preservation Commission (hereinafter “HPC”) conducted a duly noticed public hearing at a regularly scheduled meeting to consider Supervisor Stefani’s ordinance to landmark the Clay Theatre (2261 Fillmore Street). The Board of Supervisors adopted Resolution No. 383-21 initiating landmark designation of the Clay Theatre on July 27, 2021. At their hearing January 19, the HPC voted to approve a resolution to recommend landmark designation pursuant to Article 10 of the Planning Code.

The proposed amendments have been determined to be categorically exempt from environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act Section 15060(c)(2).

Please find attached documents related to the HPC’s action. Also attached is an electronic copy of the proposed ordinance, drafted by Deputy City Attorney Vicki Wong. If you have any questions or require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Aaron D. Starr
Manager of Legislative Affairs

Cc: Vicki Wong, City Attorney's Office
Dominica Donovan, Legislative Aide
Erica Major, Office of the Clerk of the Board
Elizabeth Gordon-Jonckheer, Planning Department, P-IV Northwest Quadrant
Pilar LaValley, Planning Department
board.of.supervisors@sfgov.org
bos.legislation@sfgov.org.

Attachments:

Draft Article 10 Landmark Designation Ordinance – Clay Theatre
Planning Department Executive Summary, dated January 12, 2022
Article 10 Landmark Designation Fact Sheet – Clay Theatre
Correspondence regarding the Landmark Designation
Historic Preservation Commission Resolution No. 1224

1 [Planning Code - Landmark Designation - 2261 Fillmore Street (aka Clay Theatre)]

2

3 **Ordinance amending the Planning Code to designate 2261 Fillmore Street (aka Clay**
 4 **Theatre), Assessor’s Parcel Block No. 0630, Lot No. 002, as a Landmark consistent with**
 5 **the standards set forth in Article 10 of the Planning Code; and affirming the Planning**
 6 **Department’s determination under the California Environmental Quality Act; making**
 7 **public necessity, convenience, and welfare findings under Planning Code, Section 302;**
 8 **and making findings of consistency with the General Plan and the eight priority**
 9 **policies of Planning Code Section 101.1.**

10 NOTE: **Unchanged Code text and uncodified text** are in plain Arial font.
 11 **Additions to Codes** are in *single-underline italics Times New Roman font*.
 12 **Deletions to Codes** are in *strikethrough italics Times New Roman font*.
 13 **Board amendment additions** are in double-underlined Arial font.
 14 **Board amendment deletions** are in ~~strikethrough Arial font~~.
 15 **Asterisks (* * * *)** indicate the omission of unchanged Code
 16 subsections or parts of tables.

14

15 Be it ordained by the People of the City and County of San Francisco:

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17 Section 1. CEQA and Land Use Findings.

18 (a) The Planning Department has determined that the actions contemplated in this
 19 ordinance comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (California Public Resources
 20 Code Sections 21000 *et seq.*). Said determination is on file with the Clerk of the Board of
 21 Supervisors in File No. ____ and is incorporated herein by reference. The Board affirms this
 22 determination.

23 (b) Pursuant to Planning Code Section 302, the Board of Supervisors finds that the
 24 proposed landmark designation of 2261 Fillmore Street (aka Clay Theatre) (“Clay Theatre”),
 25 Assessor’s Parcel Block No. 0630, Lot No. 002, will serve the public necessity, convenience,

1 and welfare for the reasons set forth in Historic Preservation Commission Resolution No.
2 _____, recommending approval of the proposed designation, which is incorporated
3 herein by reference.

4 (c) On January 19, 2022, the Historic Preservation Commission, in Resolution No.
5 _____, adopted findings that the actions contemplated in this ordinance are consistent,
6 on balance, with the City's General Plan and eight priority policies of Planning Code Section
7 101.1. The Board adopts these findings as its own.

8

9 Section 2. General Findings.

10 (a) On July 27, 2021, the Board of Supervisors adopted Resolution No. 383-21,
11 initiating landmark designation of the Clay Theatre as a San Francisco Landmark pursuant to
12 Section 1004.1 of the Planning Code, and extending the prescribed time within which the
13 Historic Preservation Commission may render its decision by 90 days, for a total of 180 days.
14 On August 4, 2021, the Mayor approved the resolution. Said resolution is on file with the Clerk
15 of the Board of Supervisors in File No. 210726.

16 (b) Pursuant to Charter Section 4.135, the Historic Preservation Commission has
17 authority "to recommend approval, disapproval, or modification of landmark designations and
18 historic district designations under the Planning Code to the Board of Supervisors."

19 (c) The Landmark Designation Fact Sheet was prepared by Planning Department
20 Preservation staff. All preparers meet the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualification
21 Standards for historic preservation program staff, as set forth in Code of Federal Regulations
22 Title 36, Part 61, Appendix A. The report was reviewed for accuracy and conformance with
23 the purposes and standards of Article 10 of the Planning Code.

24 (d) The Historic Preservation Commission, at its regular meeting of January 19, 2022,
25 reviewed Planning Department staff's analysis of the historical significance of the Clay

1 Theatre pursuant to Article 10 as part of the Landmark Designation Fact Sheet dated January
2 12, 2022.

3 (e) On January 19, 2022, after holding a public hearing on the proposed designation
4 and having considered the specialized analyses prepared by Planning Department staff and
5 the Landmark Designation Fact Sheet, the Historic Preservation Commission recommended
6 designation of the Clay Theatre as a landmark under Article 10 of the Planning Code by
7 Resolution No. _____. Said resolution is on file with the Clerk of the Board in File No.
8 _____.

9 (f) The Board of Supervisors hereby finds that the Clay Theatre has a special
10 character and special historical interest and value, and that its designation as a Landmark will
11 further the purposes of and conform to the standards set forth in Article 10 of the Planning
12 Code. In doing so, the Board hereby incorporates by reference the findings of the Landmark
13 Designation Fact Sheet.

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15 Section 3. Designation.

16 Pursuant to Section 1004.3 of the Planning Code, the Clay Theatre is hereby
17 designated as a San Francisco Landmark under Article 10 of the Planning Code. Appendix A
18 to Article 10 of the Planning Code is hereby amended to include this property.

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20 Section 4. Required Data.

21 (a) The description, location, and boundary of the Landmark site consists of the City
22 parcel located at 2261 Fillmore Street (aka Clay Theatre), Assessor's Parcel Block No. 0630,
23 Lot No. 002, in San Francisco's Pacific Heights neighborhood.

24 (b) The characteristics of the Landmark that justify its designation are described and
25 shown in the Landmark Designation Fact Sheet and other supporting materials contained in

1 Planning Department Record Case No. 2021-009311DES. In brief, the Clay Theatre is
2 eligible for local designation as it is associated with events that have made a significant
3 contribution to the broad patterns of San Francisco history (National Register Criterion A) and
4 as an example that embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region, or
5 method of construction (National Register Criterion C). Specifically, designation of the Clay
6 Theatre, constructed in 1913 as a nickelodeon movie theater and one of the oldest single-
7 screen nickelodeon movie houses in San Francisco, is proper for its association with the initial
8 development of neighborhood theaters during the pioneering period of moving picture theaters
9 and the development of the film industry in San Francisco in the early 20th century. Further,
10 the Clay Theatre is significant as the first dedicated foreign film theater in San Francisco and
11 as an important exhibitor of foreign and independent art house films through the late 1980s.
12 Designation of Clay Theatre is also proper as it is architecturally significant as a building that
13 embodies the distinctive characteristics of both an early 20th century Nickelodeon and a
14 single-screen neighborhood movie theater, increasingly rare building types that are vibrant
15 features of the built environment and important and unique cultural institutions in San
16 Francisco.

17 (c) The particular features that shall be preserved or replaced in-kind as determined
18 necessary are those generally shown in photographs and described in the Landmark
19 Designation Fact Sheet, which can be found in Planning Department Record Case No. 2021-
20 009311DES, and which are incorporated in this designation by reference as though fully set
21 forth. Specifically, the following features shall be preserved or replaced in kind:

22 (1) The character-defining exterior features of 2261 Fillmore Street that express
23 the building's identity as a neighborhood theatre, including:

24 (A) Tall one-story form and massing;

25

1 (B) Recessed entryway and volume and location of the built-in box
2 office/ticket booth inclusive of its sheet-metal cladding;

3 (C) Shaped parapet, projecting cornice, and plaster ornamentation on the
4 primary façade;

5 (D) Projecting, curved soffit that extends across entryway with strands of
6 neon tube light fixtures affixed to underside and neon-lit, open face, metal letters, spelling out
7 C-L-A-Y, affixed to soffit face;

8 (E) Projecting, metal, double-faced, neon-lit vertical sign, consisting of
9 inset curved panels lit by paired, curved bands of neon tube light fixtures at top and bottom of
10 sign and body with vertically stacked open-faced metal letters lit by neon tube lights, spelling
11 out C-L-A-Y; and

12 (F) Projecting, internally illuminated, double-faced, metal box sign for
13 coming attractions with neon tubes highlighting edges.

14 (2) The character-defining interior features of the building associated with areas
15 that have historically been accessible to the public, and depicted in the floor plans or photos
16 the Landmark Designation Report dated January 12, 2022, including:

17 (A) Regular rectangular plan divided into principal spaces of lobby and
18 auditorium;

19 (B) Lobby and auditorium volumes;

20 (C) Raked floor of the auditorium;

21 (D) Curved ceiling and egg-and-dart moldings in auditorium;

22 (E) Original proscenium arch; and

23 (F) Ceiling moldings at ceiling in second floor office.

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1 Section 5. Effective Date.

2 This ordinance shall become effective 30 days after enactment. Enactment occurs
3 when the Mayor signs the ordinance, the Mayor returns the ordinance unsigned or does not
4 sign the ordinance within ten days of receiving it, or the Board of Supervisors overrides the
5 Mayor's veto of the ordinance.

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8 APPROVED AS TO FORM:
9 DAVID CHIU, City Attorney

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10 By: /s/ Victoria Wong
11 VICTORIA WONG
Deputy City Attorney

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LANDMARK DESIGNATION RECOMMENDATION EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HEARING DATE: JANUARY 19, 2022

Record No.: 2021-009311DES
Project Address: Clay Theatre (aka 2261 Fillmore Street)
Zoning: Upper Fillmore Neighborhood Commercial District (NCD)
 40-X Height and Bulk District
Block/Lot: 0630/002
Project Sponsor: Planning Department
 49 South Van Ness Avenue, Suite 1400
 San Francisco, CA 94103
Property Owner: Jaiswal Family Revocable Trust 2008
 481 Kings Mountain Road
 Woodside, CA 94062-3660
Staff Contact: Pilar LaValley 628-652-7372
 pilar.lavalley@sfgov.org

Recommendation: Recommend Landmark Designation to the Board of Supervisors

Property Description

Clay Theater (2261 Fillmore Street) is a former single-screen neighborhood movie theater located near the southwest corner of Clay and Fillmore streets in San Francisco’s Pacific Heights neighborhood. Constructed in 1913 as part of a commercial development that included a Nickelodeon and stores, the theater has been known as the Regent Theater, The Clay International, and The Clay. The subject property is located near the north end of the Upper Fillmore neighborhood-serving commercial corridor that extends along Fillmore Street between Jackson and Bush streets. The surrounding commercial corridor is characterized by one- to three-story, residential-over-commercial buildings interspersed with buildings that are more residential in character. Commercial storefronts are generally built to the sidewalk and consist of raised bulkheads, large metal or wood-frame storefront windows and multi-light transoms.

The former single-screen motion picture theater is a tall one-story with a flat roof in front of a low-slung gable that pops up to provide additional height for the auditorium. The building is clad in smooth stucco and façade features decorative moldings and cornice and ends with a shaped parapet. At the ground floor is a recessed central entry

consisting of several sets of clear anodized aluminum and glass doors and dark anodized aluminum storefront windows. A curved, built-in ticket booth with ticket counter and roofline clad in clear anodized aluminum or sheet metal is tucked into the south end of the recessed entry and projects on an angle within the entryway. A curved soffit clad with painted, pressed metal extends across the façade dividing the entry from upper portion of the façade. Individual metal letters outlined with neon, spelling out C-L-A-Y, are mounted atop the center point of the soffit. Neon tubes also outline the underside of the soffit. A double-faced, vertical projecting box sign with neon lit vertically stacked letters, spelling out C-L-A-Y, extends from a metal armature attached to roof and face of building. Below the vertical sign is a double-faced horizontal projecting box sign with internally illuminated faces to advertise coming attractions. The interior consists of foyer, auditorium, and partial second floor with projection room and office. The auditorium has curved ceiling with decorative crown moldings and a floor that rakes down toward the rear (west) of the building. Two aisles run the length of the auditorium. The projection screen occupies most of the rear (west) wall and is installed in front of the original proscenium.

Features of the subject building that are common to early twentieth century Nickelodeons and single-screen neighborhood movie theaters include its diminutive scale, recessed entry with ticket booth that projects into the entryway and out toward the sidewalk, decorative features that emphasize and differentiate the storefront from adjacent commercial buildings, large neon-lit signs, and interior that consists of a foyer and raked floor auditorium.

Project Description

The Historic Preservation Commission is requested to make a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors regarding Landmark designation of Clay Theatre (2261 Fillmore Street) including interior spaces associated with its former uses as a nickelodeon and single-screen neighborhood movie theater. The pending Landmark designation was initiated by the Board of Supervisors.

On June 15, 2021, Supervisor Stefani introduced a proposed Resolution under Board of Supervisors (hereinafter "Board") File No. 210726 to initiate the Landmark designation of Clay Theatre (2261 Fillmore Street). At hearing of the Land Use Committee of the Board on July 26, 2021, the committee voted unanimously to Recommend to the full Board approval of the Resolution to initiate Landmark Designation and to extend the prescribed time within which the Historic Preservation Commission may render its decision by 90 days, for a total of 180 days. On July 27, 2021, the Board voted unanimously to approve the Resolution, and on August 4, 2021 with the Mayor's signature, Resolution No. 386-21 initiating landmark designation of Clay Theater (2261 Fillmore Street) became effective.

Compliance With Planning Code

Article 10 of the Planning Code.

The executive summary and analysis under review was prepared by Department preservation staff, who meet the Secretary of the Interior's professional qualifications. The Department has determined that the subject property meets the requirements for eligibility as an individual landmark pursuant to Article 10 of the Planning Code. The justification for its inclusion is explained in detail in the attached Landmark Designation Fact Sheet, and briefly in this Executive Summary.

Significance: Clay Theatre (2261 Fillmore Street), constructed in 1913 by the Mutual Amusement & Investment Company as a Nickelodeon movie theater, has been operated as a single-screen neighborhood theater from 1913 to 2020 by many well-known theater operators, including Herbert Rosener, Nasser Brothers, Mel Novikoff (Surf Theaters Group), and Landmark Theatres. The theater, which ceased operation in January 2020, has also been known as the Regent, The Clay-International, and The New Clay. One of the oldest single screen nickelodeon movie houses in San Francisco, Clay Theatre is historically significant for its association with the initial development of neighborhood theaters during the pioneering period of moving picture theaters and the development of the film industry in San Francisco in the early 20th century. Further, Clay Theatre is significant as the first dedicated foreign film theater in San Francisco and as an important exhibitor of foreign and independent art house films through the late 1980s. The theater was reconceived as The Clay-International by film distributor and exhibitor, Herbert Rosener, in 1935 and was an important destination for foreign and independent “art house” films through the late 1980s under the management of Mel Novikoff. Along with the adjacent commercial storefronts, the building was constructed as a Nickelodeon, strictly for showing of moving pictures with no backstage for other types of performances, based on design of architects A.F. (Arthur Frank) and O.M. (Oliver Marion) Rousseau. Although it was remodeled in 1946 by theater architect Vincent G. Raney, and again in 1958, the Clay Theatre, one of only four extant Nickelodeons remaining in the City, and one of two that remains as a single screen theater, is architecturally significant as a building that embodies the distinctive characteristics of both an early 20th century Nickelodeon and a single-screen neighborhood movie theater, increasingly rare building types that are vibrant features of the built environment and important and unique cultural institutions in San Francisco. Clay Theatre is eligible for local designation as it is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of San Francisco history (National Register Criterion A) and as an example that embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region, or method of construction (National Register Criterion C). The period of significance is 1913, when the building was constructed and began operation as a nickelodeon, to the late 1980s when change in operators shifted from local to national theater group and importance as an outlet for foreign and art house films had declined.

Underrepresented Landmark Types: The proposed landmark designation does not address any of the four previously identified underrepresented landmark types prioritized by the Commission.

Integrity: Clay Theatre (2261 Fillmore Street) maintains a high level of integrity. See Page 3 of attached Landmark Designation Fact Sheet for further analysis.

Character-Defining Features: Exterior and interior character-defining features of Clay Theatre (2261 Fillmore Street) are identified in the attached Landmark Designation Fact Sheet on Pages 3-5.

Boundaries of the Landmark: The proposed Landmark encompasses Clay Theatre (2261 Fillmore Street) (Assessor’s Block No. 0630, Lot No. 002).

General Plan.

The Urban Design Element of the San Francisco General Plan contains the following relevant objectives and policies:

OBJECTIVE 2

CONSERVATION OF RESOURCES THAT PROVIDE A SENSE OF NATURE, CONTINUITY WITH THE PAST, AND FREEDOM FROM OVERCROWDING.

Policy 4

Preserve notable landmarks and areas of historic, architectural or aesthetic value, and promote the preservation of other buildings and features that provide continuity with past development.

Designating significant historic resources as local landmarks will further continuity with the past because the buildings will be preserved for the benefit of future generations.

Planning Code Section 101.1 – establishes the Eight Priority Policies and requires review of permits for consistency with said policies. On balance, the proposed designation is consistent with the Eight Priority Policies, and furthers Policy Number 7, which states that landmarks and historic buildings be preserved.

Landmark Designation Procedures

Action by Historic Preservation Commission.

The Historic Preservation Commission on February 4, 2009, by Resolution No. 001, adopted the National Register Criteria as its methodology for recommending landmark designation of historic resources. Under the National Register Criteria, the quality of significance in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, feeling, materials, workmanship, and association, and that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or that are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or properties that have yielded, or may likely yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Article 10 of the Planning Code.

Section 1004 of the Planning Code authorizes the landmark designation of an individual structure or other feature or an integrated group of structures and features on a single lot or site, having special character or special historical, architectural or aesthetic interest or value, as a landmark. Section 1004.1 also outlines that landmark designation may be initiated by the Board of Supervisors or the Historic Preservation Commission and the initiation shall include findings in support. Section 1004.2 states that once initiated, the proposed designation is referred to the Historic Preservation Commission for a report and recommendation to the Board of Supervisors to approve, disapprove or modify the proposal.

Pursuant to Section 1004.2 of the Planning Code, if the Historic Preservation Commission approves the designation, a copy of the resolution of approval is transmitted to the Board of Supervisors without referral to the Planning Commission. The Board of Supervisors shall hold a public hearing on the designation and may approve, modify or disapprove the designation.

Section 1004(b) requires that the designating ordinance approved by the Board of Supervisors shall include the location and boundaries of the landmark site, a description of the characteristics of the landmark which justify its designation, and a description of the particular features that should be preserved.

If the Historic Preservation Commission approves the proposed designation recommendation, a copy of the resolution of approval is transmitted to the Board of Supervisors, which holds a public hearing on the designation and may approve, modify or disapprove the designation (Section 1004.3). If the Historic Preservation Commission disapproves the proposed designation, such action shall be final, except upon the filing of a valid appeal to the Board of Supervisors within 30 days (Section 1004.4).

Public / Neighborhood Input

To date, staff has received four public communications regarding the landmark designation. All public comments, including from the Pacific Heights Residents Association (PHRA), have been in support of the designation.

Issues & Other Considerations

- **Interior Character-Defining Features:** Inclusion of interior spaces as character-defining is warranted as these spaces, which historically functioned as publicly accessible lobby and auditorium and are representative of the former nickelodeon and single-screen neighborhood theater building types.
- **Integrity:** There have been several significant alterations to the subject building, including remodel of the vestibule and lobby and relocation of ticket booth for owners/operators Nasser Brothers by architect Vincent G. Raney (1946) and further remodeling of the vestibule, reconfiguration of lobby and restrooms, changing layout and seating of auditorium, and removing south storefront by designer Gale Santocono (1958). While the alterations to the vestibule have diminished aspects of the design, materials, and workmanship of the building, the building retains sufficient architectural integrity to convey its significance as rare example of an early nickelodeon and of a single-screen neighborhood movie theater. Further, the building retains integrity of location, design, feeling, association, and setting to convey its significance as an early 20th century theater and San Francisco's first dedicated house for foreign films.
- **Project and CEQA review:** On October 5, 2021, the Property Owner submitted an application for change of use from movie theater to retail sales. The proposed change of use includes associated interior and exterior alterations. The proposed change of use requires Conditional Use Authorization per Planning Code Section 303(j) to convert neighborhood theater to retail. Among their findings for the CUA, the Planning Commission shall determine lack of economic viability of the theater, effect of theater conversion on the economic diversity and vitality on the surrounding District, and whether the project will preserve the architectural integrity of important historic features of the theater. The proposed scope of work also requires a Certificate of Appropriateness and review pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The proposed change of use and associated application(s) are pending review by Planning Department staff.
- **Property owner input:** On December 30, 2021, the Department sent mailed notice to the property owner regarding the landmark designation recommendation hearing scheduled for January 19, 2022. Planning staff

met with the property owner and architect, David Marlatt, on August 3, 2021 to discuss the pending landmark designation.

Environmental Review Status

The Planning Department has determined that actions by regulatory agencies for protection of the environment (specifically in this case, landmark designation) are exempt from environmental review, pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15308 (Class Eight - Categorical).

Basis for Recommendation

The Department recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission recommend the landmark designation of Clay Theatre (2261 Fillmore Street), one of the oldest single screen nickelodeon movie houses in San Francisco, for its association with the initial development of neighborhood theaters during the pioneering period of moving picture theaters and the development of the film industry in San Francisco in the early 20th century. Further, Clay Theatre, which was reconceived as The Clay-International in 1935, is significant as the first dedicated foreign film theater in San Francisco and as an important exhibitor of foreign and independent art house films through the late 1980s. Clay Theatre, one of only four extant Nickelodeons remaining in the City, and one of two that remains as a single screen theater, is architecturally significant as a building that embodies the distinctive characteristics of both an early 20th century Nickelodeon and a single screen neighborhood movie theater, increasingly rare building types that are vibrant features of the built environment and important and unique cultural institutions in San Francisco.

Attachments

- Draft Resolution Recommending Landmark designation
- Exhibit A – Draft Landmark Designation Ordinance
- Exhibit B – Landmark Designation Fact Sheet – Clay Theatre
- Exhibit C – Maps and Context Images
- Exhibit D – Board of Supervisors Resolution No. 383-21
- Exhibit E – Public Comment



ARTICLE 10 LANDMARK DESIGNATION FACT SHEET



Clay Theatre, 2261 Fillmore Street (2021)
Source: Google streetview

Historic Name:	Clay Theatre; The Clay International; Regent Theater
Address:	2261 Fillmore Street (other addresses include 2241, 2251, 2257 Fillmore Street)
Block/ Lot(s):	0630/002

Parcel Area:	3,763 sq. ft.
Zoning:	Upper Fillmore NCD 40-X
Year Built:	1913
Architect:	A.F. (Arthur Frank) and O.M. (Oliver Marion) Rousseau
Prior Historic Studies/Other Designations:	San Francisco Planning Department, 2261 Fillmore Street (Clay Theater) Historic Resource Evaluation Response, October 9, 2014 (Case No. 2014.0824E) Andrew Murray and Katie Tom, Office of the Legislative Analyst, SF Board of Supervisors, <i>San Francisco Neighborhood Movie Theater Non-Contiguous Multiple Property Historic District Context Statement</i> (Discussion Draft, April 27, 2006)
Prior HPC Actions:	N/A
Significance Criteria:	<u>Events</u> : Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history. (National Register Criterion A) <u>Architecture/Design</u> : Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, and/or represents the work of a master. (National Register Criterion C)
Period of Significance:	1913-late 1980s. The period of significance is 1913, when the building was constructed and began operation as a nickelodeon, to the late 1980s when change in operators shifted from local to national theater group and the Clay’s importance as an outlet for foreign and art house films had declined.
Statement of Significance:	Clay Theatre (2261 Fillmore Street), constructed in 1913 by the Mutual Amusement & Investment Company as a Nickelodeon movie theater, has been operated as a single-screen neighborhood theater from 1913 to 2020 by many well-known theater operators, including Herbert Rosener, Nasser Brothers, Mel Novikoff (Surf Theaters Group), and Landmark Theatres. The theater, which ceased operation in January 2020, has also been known as the Regent, The Clay-International, and The New Clay. The theater was reconceived as The Clay-International by film distributor and exhibitor, Herbert Rosener, in 1935 and was an important destination for foreign and independent “art house” films through the late 1980s under the management of Mel Novikoff. One of the oldest single screen nickelodeon movie houses in San Francisco, Clay Theatre is historically significant for its association with the initial development of neighborhood theaters during the pioneering period of moving picture theaters and the development of the film industry in San Francisco in the early 20th century. Further, Clay Theatre is significant as the first dedicated foreign film theater in San Francisco and as an important exhibitor of foreign and independent art house films through the late 1980s. Along with the adjacent commercial storefronts, the building was constructed as a Nickelodeon, strictly for showing of moving pictures with no backstage for other types of performances, based on design of architects A.F. (Arthur Frank) and O.M. (Oliver Marion) Rousseau. Although it was remodeled in 1946 by theater

	<p>architect Vincent G. Raney, and again in 1958, the Clay Theatre, one of only four extant Nickelodeons remaining in the City, and one of two that remains as a single screen theater,¹ is architecturally significant as a building that embodies the distinctive characteristics of both an early 20th century Nickelodeon and a single-screen neighborhood movie theater, increasingly rare building types that are vibrant features of the built environment and important and unique cultural institutions in San Francisco.</p>
<p>Assessment of Integrity:</p>	<p>There have been several significant alterations to the subject building, including remodel of the vestibule and lobby and relocation of ticket booth for owners/operators Nasser Brothers by architect Vincent G. Raney (1946) and further remodeling of the vestibule, reconfiguration of lobby and restrooms, changing layout and seating of auditorium, and removing south storefront by designer Gale Santocono (1958). While the alterations to the vestibule have diminished aspects of the design, materials, and workmanship of the building, the building retains sufficient architectural integrity to convey its significance as rare example of an early nickelodeon and of a single-screen neighborhood movie theater. Further, the building retains integrity of location, design, feeling, association, and setting to convey its significance as an early 20th century theater and San Francisco's first dedicated house for foreign films.</p>
<p>Character-Defining Features:</p>	<p>The Planning Department finds that the following character-defining features express the building's historic significance. Specifically, the following features shall be preserved or replaced in kind:</p> <p>(1) The character-defining exterior features of 2261 Fillmore Street that express the building's identity as a neighborhood theatre, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (A) Tall one-story form and massing; (B) Recessed entryway and volume and location of the built-in box office/ticket booth inclusive of its sheet-metal cladding; (C) Shaped parapet, projecting cornice, and plaster ornamentation on the primary façade; (D) Projecting, curved soffit that extends across entryway with strands of neon tube light fixtures affixed to underside and neon-lit, open face, metal letters, spelling out C-L-A-Y, affixed to soffit; (E) Projecting, metal, double-faced, neon-lit vertical sign, consisting of inset curved panels lit by paired, curved bands of neon tube light fixtures at top and bottom of sign and body with vertically stacked open-faced metal letters lit by neon tube lights, spelling out C-L-A-Y; and (F) Projecting, internally illuminated, double-faced, metal box sign for coming attractions with neon tubes highlighting edges. <p>(2) The character-defining interior features of the building associated with areas that have historically been accessible to the public, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (A) Regular rectangular plan divided into principal spaces of lobby and auditorium; (B) Lobby and auditorium volumes; (C) Raked floor of the auditorium;

¹ Andrew Murray and Katie Tom, Office of the Legislative Analyst, SF Board of Supervisors, *San Francisco Neighborhood Movie Theater Non-Contiguous Multiple Property Historic District Context Statement* (Discussion Draft, April 27, 2006).

	(C) Curved ceiling and egg-and-dart moldings in auditorium; (D) Original proscenium arch; and (E) Ceiling moldings in second floor office (originally exterior features).
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Statement of Significance Summary

Clay Theatre (2261 Fillmore Street), constructed in 1913 by the Mutual Amusement & Investment Company as a Nickelodeon movie theater, has been operated as a single-screen neighborhood theater from 1913 to 2020 by many well-known theater operators, including Herbert Rosener, Nasser Brothers, Mel Novikoff (Surf Theaters Group), and Landmark Theatres. The theater, which ceased operation in January 2020, has also been known as the Regent, The Clay-International, and The New Clay. The theater was reconceived as The Clay-International by film distributor and exhibitor, Herbert Rosener, in 1935 and was an important destination for foreign and independent “art house” films through the late 1980s under the management of Mel Novikoff. One of the oldest single screen nickelodeon movie houses in San Francisco, Clay Theatre is historically significant for its association with the initial development of neighborhood theaters during the pioneering period of moving picture theaters and the development of the film industry in San Francisco in the early 20th century. Further, Clay Theatre is significant as the first dedicated foreign film theater in San Francisco and as an important exhibitor of foreign and independent art house films through the late 1980s. Along with the adjacent commercial storefronts, the building was constructed as a Nickelodeon, strictly for showing of moving pictures with no backstage for other types of performances, based on design of architects A.F. (Arthur Frank) and O.M. (Oliver Marion) Rousseau. Although it was remodeled in 1946 by theater architect Vincent G. Raney, and again in 1958, the Clay Theatre, one of only four extant Nickelodeons remaining in the City, and one of two that remains as a single screen theater,² is architecturally significant as a building that embodies the distinctive characteristics of both an early 20th century Nickelodeon and a single-screen neighborhood movie theater, increasingly rare building types that are vibrant features of the built environment and important and unique cultural institutions in San Francisco.

Property Description and History

The former Clay Theatre (theatre closed in January 2020 and the building is currently vacant) is located on west side of Fillmore Street, between Clay and Sacramento streets, in the Pacific Heights neighborhood. The subject property is located near the north end of the Upper Fillmore neighborhood-serving commercial corridor that extends along Fillmore Street between Jackson and Bush streets. The surrounding commercial corridor is characterized by one- to three-story, residential-over-commercial buildings interspersed with buildings that are more residential in character. Commercial storefronts are generally built to the sidewalk and consist of raised bulkheads, large metal or wood-frame storefront windows and multi-light transoms.

² Andrew Murray and Katie Tom, Office of the Legislative Analyst, SF Board of Supervisors, *San Francisco Neighborhood Movie Theater Non-Contiguous Multiple Property Historic District Context Statement* (Discussion Draft, April 27, 2006).

The subject building occupies the entire underlying 32-foot by 119-foot parcel. The subject property is a tall one-story, former single-screen motion picture theater with a flat roof in front of a low-slung gable that pops up to provide additional height for the auditorium. The building is clad in smooth stucco and façade features decorative moldings and cornice and ends with a shaped parapet. The projecting cornice has painted face and egg-and-dart moldings. The shaped parapet is clad with vertical (T-111) paneling. At the ground floor is a recessed central entry consisting of several sets of clear anodized aluminum and glass doors in a simple wood storefront system. A curved, built-in ticket booth with ticket counter and roofline clad in clear anodized aluminum or sheet metal is tucked into the south end of the recessed entry and projects on an angle within the entryway. A curved stucco soffit extends across the façade dividing the entry from upper portion of the façade. Individual metal letters outlined with neon, spelling out C-L-A-Y, are mounted atop the center point of the soffit. Neon tubes also outline the underside of the soffit. Metal framed glass display cases are built into the face and returns of the piers that delineate the theater storefront. Piers are highlighted with stucco corner boards and decorative moldings. The upper portion of the façade has a centered window with four casement sash windows within a projecting stucco-clad frame.

A double-faced, vertical projecting box sign with neon lit vertically stacked letters, spelling out C-L-A-Y, extends from a metal armature attached to roof and face of building. The vertical sign and armature extend above the roofline. On each sign face are vertically stacked neon lit metal letters that also spell at the name of the theater. Below the vertical sign is a double-faced horizontal projecting box sign with internally illuminated faces to advertise coming attractions. The outer edges of the horizontal sign are lit with neon tubes.

The interior consists of foyer or lobby, auditorium, and partial second floor with projection room and office. The foyer is a simple space with drop ceiling, plaster walls, and floor clad with linoleum and carpet. Restrooms are located along the south wall; an oblong counter, centered in the south wall, forms the concessions stand (no longer extant). At rear of the lobby, a slightly curved wall contains two sets of double doors to access the auditorium. The auditorium floor is raked down toward the rear (west) of the building. The auditorium has two aisles, one running along the north wall and one running between the two sections of seats (not extant), that extend to a small stage that projects under the projection screen. The projection screen occupies most of the rear (west) wall and is installed in front of the original proscenium. Walls are clad with plaster and material with a high chair rail and projecting moldings at the intersection with the ceiling. The ceiling is slightly vaulted with rounded edges. Emergency exit doors, leading to an exit passage that passes under and along rear of the adjacent property, are located near the screen at the north wall of the auditorium.

The partial second floor, or mezzanine, includes several rooms and large former projection room. All these rooms except for the room at front of building have utilitarian finishes. A narrow room, created when the upper portion of the original double-height vestibule was infilled and the mezzanine level extended, runs along the front of the building. This room is lit by the casement windows at façade. In this room, decorative crown moldings and rosettes outline the ceiling and there is a tile mural attached to the south wall above a band of molding. The decorative moldings in this room appear to have been from the original vestibule and were retained when the new interior space was created in the 1946 remodel. The date of the mural is unknown; it is not visible in the 1940s-era photographs of the original vestibule.

Originally a narrow storefront stood to the south of the theater entrance; the storefront was removed and filled in during a 1958 remodel. Currently, an unadorned, stucco-clad façade with undecorated parapet stands in this location (an interior remodel that relocated the theater's bathrooms filled this former storefront location). North

of the former theater is a one-story commercial building with large storefront windows, topped with tall, multi-light wood sash transom windows, that extend along the façade along Clay Street. A bracketed cornice, which extends along the length of both street-facing façades, projects above the transom with a stepped parapet above. At rear of this building is a narrow passageway, opening onto Clay Street, that serves as the rear exit corridor from the former theater.

The former Clay Theatre, as well as adjacent storefront bays, were constructed as a one-story building, measuring approximately 60-feet by 119-feet, housing a Nickelodeon theater and stores in 1913 by Mutual Amusement and Investment Company at construction cost of \$12,000.³ The building was designed by architects A.F. and O.M. Rousseau and construction was undertaken by local contractor L. A. Rose.⁴ Various sources list the theater as opening in 1910, however, research undertaken for this report indicates that the building permit issued in 1913 for construction of the subject building was the first development on the property at the southwest corner of Clay and Fillmore streets after the destruction from the 1906 Earthquake and Fire. While it appears that the property consisted of two separate legal parcels at the time of construction, the dimensions of the building indicate that it spanned both parcels. No information has been found about Mutual Amusement and Investment Company.

The building is depicted on the 1913 Sanborn Map with small stores flanking a space used for “moving pictures”; the building’s addresses are 2251, 2253 (the “moving pictures” space), and 2255. It appears that each of these commercial spaces have had various addresses; the address for the theater space was established at 2261 Fillmore in the late 1930s. The theater has had the following addresses: 2253 Fillmore; 2241 Fillmore; 2251 Fillmore; and, 2261 Fillmore.

The property was in operation as the Regent Theater by December 1913, showing the motion picture “In the Bishop’s Carriage,” starring Mary Pickford.⁵ The Regent is listed in several 1914 newspaper advertisements of movie theater listings, including theaters showing Pathé films.⁶ Regent Theater does not show up in City Directories until 1918 when it is listed at 2251 Fillmore Street. Research did not uncover additional information about specific programming at the theater during its first two decades of operation, but an April 1930 advertisement for the property described the theater as “fully equipped for talkies.”⁷ The property continued to operate as the Regent Theater through at least 1933.⁸

Although various sources list the operators of the Regent Theater as Naify Brothers from its initial opening date, no research has substantiated this association, during this or any other period of the theater’s history. While the Naify brothers, Michael A. Naify and James A. Naify, were important figures in San Francisco and Northern California movie theater development and operation, they do not appear to have become involved in this industry until the late 19-teens. The Naify’s, either individually or via their company, T & D Jr. Enterprises, Inc.,

³ San Francisco Building Permit #218097, issued March 21, 1913 (filed under 2257-59 Fillmore Street); “Building Contracts,” San Francisco Call, March 26, 1913, 19.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ “The Clay Theater,” December 1913 advertisement (reproduction), published online at San Francisco Theaters, accessed December 3, 2021 at <http://sanfranciscotheatres.blogspot.com/2019/09/clay-theatre.html>.

⁶ *San Francisco Examiner*, February 24, 1914, 6; *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 10, 1914, 12.

⁷ *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 6, 1930, 84.

⁸ 1933 San Francisco City Directory. There is no indication in the research that this theater was ever identified as Avalon, although some sources use this name for the property in the early 1930s.

worked in partnership or as part of various ownership groups with other notable theater developers and operators, including Samuel Levin and Nasser Brothers, but no direct association between the Naifys or T & D Jr. Enterprises, Inc. and the subject property has been found in the research for this report.

A note in *The Moving Picture World* 1916 edition records "...the transfer of the Regent theater on Fillmore street, San Francisco, from J.P. Hughes to Leroy Blanchard and L.F. Salbach..."⁹ and a 1917 article identifies "G. M. McDonald, as proprietor of the Regent Theater..."¹⁰ No additional information about these individuals was found. No other operators for the Regent Theater or association with any of the well-known film circuits of the period were identified. There are no sales records for the subject property during this period.

Where the following text is inset, the historical background information is from architectural historian Stacy Farr:¹¹

In March 1935, film distributor and exhibitor Herbert Rosener completed a deal to operate what was described in the press as "the existing Clay Theater" under a new name, the Clay-International, and show foreign-made films.¹² The Clay-International joined a small national circuit of similar-sized theaters showing foreign films, including the 55th Street Theater in New York City, the Europe Theater in Baltimore, the World in Minneapolis, the Little Theater in Newark, the Belasco in Washington DC, and the Filmarte in Hollywood.¹³ Although some sources describe the Clay-International as the first theater in San Francisco to show international films, it was preceded by the FilmArte Theater (Union Square Theater, 160 O'Farrell Street), which from 1931 through 1934 showed French and German films with English subtitles.¹⁴

The Clay-International opened on April 11, 1935 with the Swedish musical "Sangan till Henne (The Song to Her); showtimes were every day at 7pm, with additional showings at 1pm on Saturday and Sunday. Films showed on short runs; later that month the Clay showed the French musical "Adeiu Les Beaux Jours (Goodbye Happy Days), and several weeks later the Spanish film, "The Day You Loved Me."¹⁵

Following months saw premiers of Russian, French, and British films, and newspaper advertisements prominently stated that all showings included "English titles," making "knowledge of the [...] language unnecessary." Modern projection equipment and updated carpet and chairs were installed at the Clay-International in July 1935, presumably related to the theater's new management and general success.¹⁶ In July 1935, the theater started to show "midnight matinees," prestigious second-run foreign language films that screened once a week, at midnight on Saturdays, although these showings did not become a permanent feature of the theater's programming at that time.¹⁷ Herbert Rosener, the West Coast's major

⁹*The Moving Picture World*, "Former Exhibitor Sells Theaters," September 16, 1916, 1870.

¹⁰ *San Francisco Chronicle*, "Theater Proprietor 'Wanted' in Wyoming," December 9, 1917, 17.

¹¹ Stacy Farr, "Memorandum outlining history of Clay Theater, 12-15-21," submitted to Planning Department.

¹² "Foreign Made Films to be Screened Here," *San Francisco Examiner*, March 28, 1935, 14.

¹³ "Foreign Language Theater Will Open," *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 22, 1935, 11.

¹⁴ "The Union Square Theater," published online at San Francisco Theaters, accessed December 3, 2021 at <http://sanfranciscotheatres.blogspot.com/2017/12/union-square.html>

¹⁵ "French Picture at New Clay Theater," *San Francisco Examiner*, April 20, 1935, 14; "Spanish Picture Shown Tomorrow," *San Francisco Examiner*, April 26, 1935, 14.

¹⁶ "New Equipment for Clay International," *San Francisco Examiner*, July 13, 1935, 16.

¹⁷ "Clay Will Review Famous Pictures," *San Francisco Examiner*, July 19, 1935, 21.

exhibitor and distributor of art films at that time, described San Francisco as the “most important location in the country” for foreign film, as the city’s residents had an unmatched interest in the educational and cultural offerings these types of films offered.¹⁸ In 1938, the name of the theater shifted from the Clay-International to the Clay Theater, although it still showed a program of foreign films. By that year, the offerings at the Clay were successful to an extent that the management team took over the Larkin Theater (816 Larkin Street; extant but heavily altered) and began to show foreign films there as well.¹⁹

In 1940, the Clay Theater broadened its offerings but not its preference for prestige with the presentation of the American film, “Wuthering Heights,” selected as the best film of 1939 by the New York Film Critics Circle.²⁰ World War II affected many of the countries from which the Clay sourced its films, and the theater hosted Allied support fundraisers in the summer of 1940. In November 1940, recent German refugees were observed attending and emotionally enjoying the Yiddish-language film “Overture to Glory.”²¹ The theater was able to continue showing international films throughout World War II, relying largely on second runs.

In 1943, ownership of the property passed from an ownership group to Walter O. Preddy, Richard J. Nasser, and Henry W. Nasser.²² The Nasser Brothers were prominent theater owners responsible for the construction of the Castro and Alhambra theaters, among others in San Francisco and California. Under ownership by the Nasser Brothers, the Clay Theater was remodeled by prominent theater architect Vincent G. Raney, who reconfigured the front entrance and ticket booth and closed in the tall archway to create a mezzanine office.

Comparison of building permit records and excerpts from Raney’s drawings suggest that only a portion of the changes depicted in the plans were completed.²³ The floor plans show that interior doors that divided the lobby into two spaces were removed, the entrance doors were replaced, the entry vestibule remodeled and reconfigured, and a lower ceiling installed over the entire vestibule to create a second-floor office. Ceiling ornament from the original vestibule, including egg-and-dart ceiling moldings and inset rosettes that probably once denoted locations for lightbulbs, are still extant within second floor office space that was created in Raney’s remodel. A new rounded ticket booth, with stainless steel cladding running around top edge and continuing along façade, was installed at the south wall of the vestibule, which appears to match the existing location, configuration, and design of this feature. At the façade, the arched opening was infilled and a rectangular window with band of wood casement sash installed. A projecting cornice extending across the façade was added above the entryway and Raney’s plans depict three sets of double doors and terrazzo on base of façade and floor of the vestibule. No historic photographs have been found to confirm whether doors or terrazzo were installed as proposed, although a subsequent alteration drawing in 1958 notes “terrazzo to remain” at the base of the façade. Other alterations depicted in Raney’s drawings, which would have led to the removal of original moldings, cornice, and shaped parapet, and installation of a new cement plaster façade with

¹⁸ “Foreign Pictures Important Here,” *San Francisco Examiner*, July 27, 1935, 15.

¹⁹ “Clay Management Takes Over Larkin,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 22, 1938, 10.

²⁰ “Clay Presents Best Film of ’39,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 17, 1940, 8.

²¹ Herb Caen, “These Foolish Things,” November 13, 1940, 11.

²² San Francisco Sales Ledgers, San Francisco Office of the Assessor-Recorder. Previous ownership group consisted of executors of the estate of J. F. Knights and B. H. Fottrell; W. G. and J. D. Preddey; and R. J. and A. Nasser.

²³ Building Permit #92763, issued November 4, 1946 to Owner: Nasser Bros. Arch: Alan F. Parker or Vincent G. Raney.

Streamline details, were not completed. There is no indication that the storefront or interior of the small commercial space south of the theater was included in Raney's scope of work; historic photographs support this as they show this storefront still intact in late 1940s. In January 1947, a permit as issued to install block letters, spelling out C-L-A-Y, lit by neon to the canopy.²⁴

A fire in June 1948 caused \$7,000 of damage and closed the theater for four weeks; the reopening film was a French adaptation of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's "The Idiot."²⁵ Later that year the theater showed its first explicitly art-focused film, "Dreams That Money Can Buy," by experimental Surrealist filmmaker Hans Richter. Four years later, in February 1952, the Clay Theater partnered with the San Francisco Museum of Art to preview the film "Pictura: An Adventure in Art," an American documentary film about art history and appreciation narrated by several major Hollywood stars.²⁶

In 1955 the property was sold to Bay Properties, Inc.²⁷ In May 1956, Cinemascope and wide screen projection was installed.²⁸ The Clay Theater continued to show foreign films during this time, and was referred to as one of San Francisco's leading "art film houses," among which were included the Bridge Theater, the Larkin Theater, and the Rio.²⁹ Pushing further into the market of "arts" film, the Clay participated as an exhibitor in a 1958 symposium dedicated to the "study of the development of the weird & Supernatural Film [sic]."³⁰ The tenor of advertisements for foreign films shifted perceptively through the late 1950s and early 1960s as well, with the salacious nature of many films' content, and the "sex appeal" of its stars, pushed to the forefront.

In May 1958, a permit to "Change toilet locations - Move entrance doors to front - Remove stairway and change to new location - Change in seating" at a construction cost of \$15000 by Larkin Theatre was issued.³¹ The alterations were designed by Gale Santocono. In this remodel, the vestibule and entry doors from the 1946 alterations were removed and new metal and glass doors in a wood and glass storefront system were installed closer to the sidewalk, in roughly the same configuration as current storefront. Although existing terrazzo at base of the façade was noted to remain, the plan also shows southern storefront and all projecting features, including decorative cornice, removed and replaced with a large display case and cement plaster cladding. At the interior, the original stairs and interior demising wall between theater foyer or lobby and adjacent commercial space were removed and replaced with new men's and women's restrooms. Although the demising wall between the lobby and auditorium was not removed, the original openings to auditorium were infilled and new openings installed. Based on the relocated openings, the aisles and seating within the auditorium were reconfigured at this time. Additional interior changes appear to have been the removal of a powder room at north side of the lobby and installation of a new stair from foyer/lobby to second floor. The projection room and adjacent rooms may also have been reconfigured. In 1961, permits to relocate an existing vertical projecting sign and install a new double-face horizontal projecting sign were issued to Wonderlite Neon Co.

²⁴ Building Permit #94518, issued January 27, 1947.

²⁵ "Movie Patrons Flee Blaze in Clay Theater," *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 28, 1948, 7.

²⁶ No title, *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 2, 1952, 6.

²⁷ San Francisco Sales Ledgers, San Francisco Office of the Assessor-Recorder, sale listed on June 8, 1955. Bay Properties may have been a Nasser Brothers holding company –the Castro Theatre (429-431 Castro Street. SF Landmark #100) is also owned by Bay Properties, Inc.

²⁸ "Clay to Have Wide Screen Projection," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 2, 1956, 22.

²⁹ "New Foreign Films at 3 S. F. Houses," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 25, 1956, 18.

³⁰ "Unique Film Created Exclusively for Film Society," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 31, 1958, 53.

³¹ Building Permit #209882, issued 5/27/1958.

The Clay Theater was still managed by Herbert Rosener in 1964, along with the Larkin Theater and a new theater called the Music Hall that opened that year (931 Larkin Street, extant).³² In 1965 the property was sold to an ownership group, with no discernible change in programming of foreign and otherwise prestigious films.³³ A 1966 advertisement calls the theater the “New Clay.” Rosener died in San Francisco in May 1968; at his death he operated (obituary says owned) the Clay, Larkin, and Music Hall theaters in San Francisco, and theaters in Los Angeles, Beverly Hills, and Oregon.³⁴

In January 1971 the Clay showed the subversive American comedy “Dynamite Chicken,” which drew a young and counterculture audience.³⁵ That year, the Clay also hosted retrospective film festivals for actresses Greta Garbo and Mae West.³⁶ Around July 1972 the Clay Theater closed for a year for renovations [no Building Permits or plans have been located to document this work], and reopened in October 1973 under the directorship of Mel Novikoff, who also operated the Surf Theater and had recently been appointed the film curator at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.³⁷ Novikoff pushed the programming at the Clay into further adventurous themes, hosting film series’ on the topics of the mass psychology of fascism, mental states and social disorder, “women emerging,” and radical psychiatry, alongside its traditional program of foreign and otherwise prestigious films. In 1979, the Clay showed the West Coast premier of “Still Moving/Patti Smith,” a short film by Robert Mapplethorpe, on a bill including video tapes by punk rock musicians Dead Kennedys, Devo, Mutants, and others.³⁸ The spaghetti western “Lust in the Dust” was feted at the Clay Theater in February 1985; the film actually premiered at the Bridge Theater in January 1985 and then enjoyed a regular run not at the Clay, but at the Castro Theater and several other Bay Area theaters through the spring months of 1985.³⁹

Mel Novikoff died in 1987, and in 1988, operation of the theaters within the Surf Theater Group, including the Clay along with the Castro and Lumiere theaters, passed to Blumfield Enterprises, who vowed to retain the programming traditions of the theaters.⁴⁰ Ownership of the Clay Theater remained within the same ownership group through a restructuring sale in 1990, with no change in ownership through at least 1999.⁴¹ Assessor’s Office records indicate that the last sale of the property was in 2008 to the current property owners. In 1991 Landmark Theaters⁴² [assumed operation] of the Clay Theatre and operated the theater through its closure in January 2020.⁴³

³² “At New Theater,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 19, 1962, 41.

³³ San Francisco Sales Ledgers, San Francisco Office of the Assessor-Recorder, November 9, 1965. Ownership group consisted of George J. and Katherine Couch, Melvin and Frances O. Dagovitz, and Sheva Diane Brandis.

³⁴ “Herbert Rosener,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 6, 1968, 39.

³⁵ “An Infectious ‘Dynamite Chicken’ at the Clay,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 21, 1971, 42.

³⁶ “Garbo Festival,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 7, 1971, 49; “Mae West-erns Take Over for a Film Renaissance,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 4, 1971, 150.

³⁷ “‘Memories’ is More Poetic Than a Political Cuban Film,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 7, 1973, 199.

³⁸ No title, *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 25, 1979, 215.r43

³⁹ No title, *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 11, 1985, 69; “Feet in the Clay,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 6, 1985, 57.

⁴⁰ Peter Stack, “Surf Theaters Sold to Regency Owner,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 29, 1988, 59.

⁴¹ San Francisco Sales Ledgers, San Francisco Office of the Assessor-Recorder, August 10, 1990. Ownership group consisted of Sheva Diane Brandis Trust, Couch Family Trust, and Melvin and Frances O. Dagovitz.

⁴² Founded in 1974, Landmark Theatres is the “largest specialized movie theatre chain in the United States dedicated to exhibiting and marketing independent and foreign films” with 38 theatres in 23 markets. Landmark Theatres website, accessed January 11, 2022, <https://www.landmarktheatres.com/about-us>.

⁴³ Amanda Bartlett, “Clay Theater Projectionist Recalls Celeb-Rich History of 110-Year-Old Theater,” SFGate, January 23, 2022, accessed December 3, 2021 at [Clay Theatre projectionist recalls celeb-rich history of 110-year-old SF theater set to close Sunday \(sfgate.com\)](https://www.sfgate.com/clay-theater-projectionist-recalls-celeb-rich-history-of-110-year-old-sf-theater-set-to-close-sunday).

Events: Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history (National Register Criterion A).

Clay Theatre (2261 Fillmore Street), constructed in 1913 by the Mutual Amusement & Investment Company as a Nickelodeon movie theater, has been operated as a single-screen neighborhood theater from 1913 to 2020 by many well-known theater operators, including Herbert Rosener, Nasser Brothers, Mel Novikoff (Surf Theaters Group), and Landmark Theatres. The theater, which ceased operation in January 2020, has also been known as the Regent, The Clay-International, and The New Clay. One of the oldest single screen nickelodeon movie houses in San Francisco, Clay Theatre is historically significant for its association with the initial development of neighborhood theaters during the pioneering period of moving picture theaters and the development of the film industry in San Francisco in the early 20th century. Further, Clay Theatre is significant as the first dedicated foreign film theater in San Francisco and as an important exhibitor of foreign and independent art house films through the late 1980s. The theater was reconceived as The Clay-International by film distributor and exhibitor, Herbert Rosener, in 1935 and was an important destination for foreign and independent “art house” films through the late 1980s under the management of Mel Novikoff.

The following historic context on foreign and independent theaters and midnight movies is from architectural historian Stacy Farr:⁴⁴

San Francisco’s Foreign and Independent Movie Theaters

While foreign language movies played to foreign language-speaking immigrant communities in San Francisco to a small degree in the first decades of the twentieth century, the first foreign language films for English-speaking audiences were shown in 1931 when the Union Square Theater (160 O’Farrell Street) renamed itself the FilmArte for three years and showed French and German films with English subtitles.⁴⁵ The city received its first dedicated foreign film house in 1935 when film distributor and exhibitor Herbert Rosener completed a deal to operate what was described in the press as “the existing Clay Theater” under a new name, the Clay-International, and show foreign-made films.⁴⁶ The programming was sufficiently successful that Rosener took over the Larkin Theater (816 Larkin Street; extant but heavily altered) in 1938 and also began to show foreign films there as well.⁴⁷ In 1939, the Princess Theater (1596 Church Street; no longer extant) and the Vogue Theater (3290 Sacramento Street) also joined the “growing group of moving picture houses specializing in foreign films.”⁴⁸

While World War II slowed the production of films from Europe, film historian Jack Tillmany observed that in the years immediately after World War II, “the movie-going public, bored with the Production Code-controlled domestic output, sought films closer in touch with real life, involving people and

⁴⁴ Stacy Farr, “Memorandum outlining history of Clay Theater, 12-15-21,” submitted to Planning Department.

⁴⁵ “The Union Square Theater,” published online at San Francisco Theaters, accessed December 3, 2021 at <http://sanfranciscotheatres.blogspot.com/2017/12/union-square.html>

⁴⁶ “Foreign Made Films to be Screened Here,” *San Francisco Examiner*, March 28, 1935, 14.

⁴⁷ “Clay Management Takes Over Larkin,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 22, 1938, 10.

⁴⁸ “Princess Theater to Show Foreign Films,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 25, 1939, 6; “Vogue to Specialize in Foreign Movies,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 23, 1939, 9.

situations that Hollywood was forbidden to portray [...] and foreign films were the new rage.”⁴⁹ Rosener took over management of the Stage Door and Nob Hill theaters in 1947, and programmed these theaters with both foreign and American films.⁵⁰ The Presidio Theater switched to an all-foreign program that year as well, and foreign language theaters were listed in a separate section of the daily paper than standard first-run theaters showing American-made films.⁵¹

In 1957, a foreign-language film theater opened, called simply The Movie (1034 Kearny Street; extant but altered).⁵² In 1960, Novikoff took over control of a small neighborhood theater the Surf (4510 Irving Street, extant but significantly altered) and began showing foreign films; Novikoff would go on to assume control of the Clay, Bridge, Lumiere, and Castro theaters and was one of San Francisco’s most influential foreign and independent film programmers and advocates. Other foreign language film houses that were established in San Francisco during this era included the Music Hall (931 Larkin Street, extant), another Herbert Rosener theater that opened in 1962; the Richelieu Cinema (1075 Geary Street, extant but significantly altered) which opened with a foreign-language film program in 1963 but shifted several years later to a broader independent film program; the Rio Theater (2240 Union Street, no longer extant), which rebranded in 1963 as a Japanese-language film house; and the Cento Cedar Theater (38 Cedar Street, extant but significantly altered), which opened in 1965 and benefitted from proximity to the city’s more prominent foreign language film houses the Larkin and the Music Hall.

Novikoff closed the Surf Theater in 1985 and gave up the lease on another theater in Fisherman’s Wharf in 1987, due to a reduction in the number of available foreign films to show, and competition from multiplex operations like the American Multi-Cinema (AMC) Kabuki 8, which opened in 1986.⁵³

Midnight Movies

Midnight movie showings in San Francisco date to at least 1911, when the Alcazar Theater (260 O’Farrell Street; no longer extant) showed what was described as a “‘midnight matinee,’ the first ever offered in San Francisco,” a special program intended to enable members of the Moving Picture Operators’ Union to see popular shows.⁵⁴ Theaters presented midnight showings of popular films that showed at capacity throughout the day, such as Cecil B. de Mille’s “Don’t Change Your Husband,” which received a midnight run at the Imperial Theater (1077 Market Street, no longer extant) in 1919.⁵⁵ Midnight movies were also often offered as special events around the New Years’ Eve holiday. The Clay Theater began to show midnight movies for several months in 1935, although these late showings did not become a regular feature at the theater during this time.⁵⁶ The Warfield Theater regularly showed midnight matinees by 1936, as did the Golden Gate Theater by 1937. By 1964, the Surf Theater was regularly showing midnight

⁴⁹ “The Larkin Theater,” published online at San Francisco Theaters, accessed December 3, 2021 at <http://sanfranciscotheatres.blogspot.com/search?q=foreign>.

⁵⁰ “Stage Door, Nob Hill Theaters are Sold,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 5, 1947, 11.

⁵¹ “Foreign Films,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 18, 1947, 11.

⁵² “The North Beach Movie,” published online at San Francisco Theaters, accessed December 3, 2021 at <http://sanfranciscotheatres.blogspot.com/search?q=foreign>.

⁵³ “Theater Chain Pulls Out at the Cannery,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 16, 1987, 75; David Armstrong, “The Latest Theater Trend: the Octoplex,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 30, 1986, 35,

⁵⁴ “Coronation Pictures Enter on Last Week,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 4, 1911, 2.

⁵⁵ “Midnight Matinee Planned by Imperial,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 7, 1919, 11.

⁵⁶ “Clay Bills Historical Romance,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 9, 1935, 11.

movies as part of their foreign film programming. In all of these examples, midnight movies were generally simply additional showings of the theaters' daytime content.

In 1953, the Screen Actors Guild agreed to a residuals payment plan that distributed inexpensive genre films to local television stations around the United States, who aired them at or after midnight to bypass existing content regulations.⁵⁷ These "midnight movies" jumped from the small screen to the big screen, as movie theaters strived to remain relevant in the face of increased television ownership. Fueled also by the coalescence of a youth-driven counterculture, particularly in urban markets, the showing of midnight movies, which broke taboos and pushed previously held parameters of decorum, began to be more common in the mid-1960s. In 1965, the Presidio Theater (2340 Chestnut Street) showed Andy Warhol's film "The Blow Job" at midnight to several sell-out crowds, as well as a midnight film series called "Underground Cinema 12" curated by Los Angeles art film impresario Mike Getz.⁵⁸ The Palace Theater (1741 Powell Street, also called the Pagoda Palace, no longer extant) showed the film "Messages, Messages" to a sell-out crowd of over 2,000 at a midnight run in 1968: the film's directors, recent San Francisco Art Institute graduates Michael Wiese and Steven Arnold, were then invited to develop ongoing midnight programming for the theater, which became the first sustained program of "midnight movies" in San Francisco.⁵⁹

In 1970, Alejandro Jodorowsky's film "El Topo" premiered with midnight-only showtimes at the Elgin Theatre in New York City. This film was immensely successful and ran for nine months, and is generally credited with starting the midnight movie phenomenon.⁶⁰ In San Francisco, by 1971, the Clay, Larkin and Music Hall theaters were all showing George Romero's horror film "Night of the Living Dead" at a midnight-only run, and the Times Theaters (1249 Stockton Street, extant but significantly altered) was showing "Invaders from Mars" on midnight-only weekend runs.⁶¹ Horror films were on the schedule at midnight at the Balboa Theater by 1972, and the release of "A Clockwork Orange" that year prompted many midnight showings of the film around San Francisco. The Surf Theater also began to show special midnight programming in 1972, as did the Vouge Theater (3290 Sacramento Street), the Alexandria Theater (5400 Geary Boulevard), and the Roxie Theater (3117 16th Street). Starting in May 1973, the Music Hall Theater was advertising special midnight showings of "Pink Flamingos" on Fridays and Saturdays. The film played at a midnight showing at the Presidio Theater in May 1974, and then a four-month run of midnight showings at the Clay Theater from July through November 1974. After a moderately unsuccessful first run in the early months of 1976, the "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" began a ten-month run of midnight showings at the Powell Theater (39 Powell Street, extant but altered) in November 1976.

⁵⁷ Kevin Heffernan, *Ghoul, Gimmicks, and Gold: Horror Films and the American Movie Business, 1953–1968* (Durham, N.C., and London: Duke University Press) 161.

⁵⁸ "Bay City Beat," *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 20, 1965, 17; "The Presidio Theater," published online at San Francisco Theaters, accessed December 3, 2021 at <http://sanfranciscotheatres.blogspot.com/search/label/Presidio%20Theatre%20-%20Chestnut%20St>.

⁵⁹ Jennifer M. Wood, "25 Reasons to Stay Up Late: Midnight Movie Madness," *MovieMaker*, No. 55, Summer 2004, accessed December 6, 2021 at <https://web.archive.org/web/20061128123217/http://www.moviemaker.com/magazine/editorial.php?id=47>.

⁶⁰ Consuelo Holtzer, "Brief History of the Midnight Movie in America," published at the Strasbourg European Fantastic Film Festival, accessed December 7, 2021 at <http://strasbourgfestival.com/midnight-movies-en/>.

⁶¹ "The Times Theater," published online at San Francisco Theaters, accessed December 3, 2021 at <http://sanfranciscotheatres.blogspot.com/search/label/Times%20Theatre>.

While some sources suggest that the Clay Theatre was the location of the first-ever midnight movie screening with the premier of John Waters' *Pink Flamingos*," research by architectural historian Stacy Farr could not substantiate this claim:

Newspaper research indicates this is not true (...unless it really happened in secret). *Pink Flamingos* was released in March 1972. The Clay appears to have been closed from around July 1972 through October 1973 (it is not listed in the "San Francisco Movies" section of the *Chronicle* during these months, where all theaters, movies, and playing times for the whole city were listed, and an article in October 1973 describes the theater's reopening). A small article in the January 17, 1973 edition of the *Chronicle* says that the film is having its West Coast premiere at Canyon Cinemathique at the San Francisco Art Institute (800 Chestnut Street). Starting in May 1973, the Music Hall (931 Larkin Street) advertised midnight showings of *Pink Flamingos* on Fridays and Saturdays for several months. The film played at several midnight showings at the Presidio Theater in May 1974, and the first listing of a midnight showing of *Pink Flamingos* at the Clay Theater was in July 1974. The run lasted four months with the last showing on November 9, 1974. An interview with John Waters in 2020 includes his remembrance that the Clay was the "first commercial theater I ever played in San Francisco that was part of an 'above ground' scene," although he also says in the same interview that he basically does not remember the 1970s. (<https://www.kqed.org/news/11797773/john-waters-on-clay-theatre-closure-a-real-era-for-me-is-shutting-down-in-sf>)

Architecture/Design: Embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values (National Register Criterion C).

Clay Theatre (2261 Fillmore Street), constructed in 1913 by the Mutual Amusement & Investment Company as a Nickelodeon movie theater, operated as a single-screen neighborhood theater from 1913 to 2020, and is one of the oldest single screen nickelodeon movie houses in San Francisco. Along with the adjacent commercial storefronts, the building was constructed as a Nickelodeon, strictly for showing of moving pictures with no backstage for other types of performances, based on design of architects A.F. (Arthur Frank) and O.M. (Oliver Marion) Rousseau. Although it was remodeled in 1946 by theater architect Vincent G. Raney, and again in 1958, the Clay Theatre, one of only four extant Nickelodeons remaining in the City, and one of two that remains as a single screen theater,⁶² is architecturally significant as a building that embodies the distinctive characteristics of both an early 20th century Nickelodeon and a single-screen neighborhood movie theater, increasingly rare building types that are vibrant features of the built environment and important and unique cultural institutions in San Francisco.

Nickelodeons, which were prominent across the United States from roughly 1905 to 1914, evolved from arcade peepshows and storefront and saloon theatres that had been the venues for the viewing of motion pictures in the United States since the debut of Thomas Edison's Kinetoscope within a phonograph parlor in New York City in 1894. Prior to 1905, when nickelodeons developed, most moving pictures were shown on the walls of former

⁶² Andrew Murray and Katie Tom, Office of the Legislative Analyst, SF Board of Supervisors, *San Francisco Neighborhood Movie Theater Non-Contiguous Multiple Property Historic District Context Statement* (Discussion Draft, April 27, 2006).

commercial spaces or against a screen during a vaudeville show or through the “peepholes” of individual viewing machines at arcades or other amusement venues.

The following historical context on Nickelodeon theater is excerpted from the *San Francisco Neighborhood Movie Theater Non-Contiguous Multiple Property Historic District Context Statement (Draft, April 27, 2006)*, which relies on background information from *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk* by architectural and film historian, Maggie Valentine:

In 1905, a new twist was added to motion picture exhibition. Two theater owners in Pittsburgh, including Harry Davis, a wealthy vaudeville theater owner, began showing movies continuously throughout the day from 8 AM until midnight in their storefront theater, a converted storeroom. Charging a low admission price of five cents, enabled by the multiple screenings per day, they called the new format "nickelodeon" because a person could see an entire program of films, which lasted ten to thirty minutes, for a nickel. By 1906, large vaudeville organizations, including the Keith theaters, began converting their venues into "nickel" motion picture houses, and by 1908 there were an estimated eight thousand theaters located on side streets throughout America, showing programs that lasted up to one hour. In addition to their popularity (creating a "nickel craze"), and hence sizable revenues, nickelodeons were a profitable format because they were very economical to operate.

During the 1910s, as many as 26 million people a week attended nickelodeons. Filmmakers had begun to produce photoplays and story films - more developed narratives, as well records of news events. Motion picture production was also moving at this time away from its roots in New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago to Los Angeles. This created a special relationship between the industry and California that persists today.

Nickelodeons flourished economically, then disappeared quite quickly, unable to keep up with a new grand, luxurious style of theater, the movie palaces built in the mid 1910s and 1920s, which outclassed nickelodeons. A confluence of many factors led to the creation of the movie palace. Increasing affluence and the country's emergence from World War I as a world power created an appetite for more luxurious goods, so tastes migrated away from storefront theaters. Also, customer expectations were elevated by an earlier transition in vaudeville to luxurious vaudeville theater palaces. Many of the vaudeville palaces were eventually converted to motion picture theaters, creating luxurious motion picture theaters by happenstance. Also, the motion picture industry was entering an era of better product. Feature length films were predominant after 1915 and resulted in higher quality productions. The industry began redefining the product to encompass not just the film, but the entire viewing experience, including the venue. In this regard, the nickelodeons and storefront theaters were woefully unprepared to compete with their successor, the lavish and comfortable palaces. Many nickelodeons were eventually converted back into restaurants, hardware stores, and other retail uses.⁶³

Simplicity of form and expediency of construction characterized the first permanent movie theaters, which were in many cases built by local contractors with materials at hand by converting retail storefronts (therefore referred to as "storefront theaters"). They seated fewer than 200 patrons in most

⁶³ Andrew Murray and Katie Tom, Office of the Legislative Analyst, SF Board of Supervisors, *San Francisco Neighborhood Movie Theater Non-Contiguous Multiple Property Historic District Context Statement* (Discussion Draft, April 27, 2006), 7.

cases. The single-story rectangular stone or brick structures with gabled or boomtown roofs fronted high traffic streets and abutted adjacent properties. Typically, a decorated pre-cast metal façade, often ordered from a catalog, with recessed entryway and projecting ticket booth concealed their simple structure. Lighting that outlined the structure or highlighted the façade was common. The interiors were purely functional, singular spaces with level floors, a screen affixed to the wall at one end and a projection booth above the entryway at the opposite. Sometimes a shallow stage protruded beneath the screen, and occasionally balconies were included on either side of the projection booth or simple opera boxes on the side walls near the screen. Fixed seating, which distinguished an establishment as a theater (opposed to an "amusement") and required a costlier license, was rare. Loud musical accompaniment was common, used to drown out the noise of the primitive projectors.

The nickelodeon is closely associated with the development of film entertainment in San Francisco from 1900-1915. Built exclusively to exhibit moving pictures, the nickelodeon served to test and promote the entertainment form. The simplicity of design and operation of the theaters contributed to the nationwide boom in their construction and exposed film to a vast number of consumers. Owners frequently provided up to 18 performances a day, seven days a week.

In addition to its vital role in promoting film entertainment, the nickelodeon, with its flashy exterior and functional interior, pioneered elements of theater design that became mainstays. The curious and distinctive facades promised entertainment and attracted customers. The recessed entry and the use of lighting to highlight the structure continued to be successful draws when applied to later theater types. The small size of nickelodeons limited their continued use as the popularity of films grew, so those that remained theaters did so by expanding their capacity to accommodate larger audiences and projection equipment and enhanced their interior ornamentation.

The survival rate of these short-lived theaters is not high, although they are of unusual historical value. Of those remaining, all have been altered.⁶⁴

As more of these buildings were constructed and as they became increasingly popular, typical design features began to emerge, including a recessed vestibule that contained the box office, with entrances and exits on either side, the box office often separated from the building, placing it in line with the sidewalk, and large, flamboyant electrical displays advertising the theatre.⁶⁵ These design innovations, which were widely adapted into the theater designs that came later, served to encourage spontaneous attendance and to draw patrons into the theatre.⁶⁶ The *San Francisco Neighborhood Movie Theaters Historic Context Statement (Draft)* identifies the following list of features as characteristic of Nickelodeons:

- Simplicity of form and expediency of construction;
- Single-story rectangular frame;
- Stone or brick structure with gabled or boomtown roof,
- Recessed entryway with projecting ticket booth;

⁶⁴ Ibid, 13.

⁶⁵ Maggie Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theatre, Starring S. Charles Lee*, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1994), 27.

⁶⁶ *San Francisco Neighborhood Movie Theater Non-Contiguous Multiple Property Historic District Context Statement* (Discussion Draft, April 27, 2006), 13.

- Prominent façade (often decorated pre-cast metal) with stylistic treatments;
- Lighting that outlined the structure or highlighted the façade; and
- Location in commercial area and abutting adjacent structures.
- Functional, level floor and singular spaces;
- Projection booth above the entryway;
- Screen affixed to the wall at the opposite end;
- Occasionally a shallow stage protruding beneath the screen;
- Occasionally balconies on either side of the projection booth or simple opera boxes on the sidewalls near the screen;
- No fixed seating; and
- Seating capacity of 200 or fewer.⁶⁷

At the end of the nickelodeon's dominant period, film production and distribution techniques morphed with filmmakers increasing production of longer "story films" and newly organized film exchanges making distribution more efficient and less costly.⁶⁸ With greater availability of longer films, theater owners shifted their operations, establishing larger, more permanent theaters with better seating while also maintaining many of the design innovations from the nickelodeon period. These shifts led theater developers and operators into the period of movie palaces (1915-1930) and district or neighborhood theaters (1915-1945).

The following historical context on District (Neighborhood) Theaters is excerpted from the *San Francisco Neighborhood Movie Theater Non-Contiguous Multiple Property Historic District Context Statement (Draft, April 27, 2006)*, which relies on background information from *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk* by architectural and film historian, Maggie Valentine:

After World War I motion picture houses took root not only in city centers, but also in the neighborhood commercial districts. In addition to neighborhood movie palaces, smaller neighborhood district theaters (sometimes called "pictureplay theatres") were built. Crude in comparison to luxury theaters, they nonetheless made up the majority of the nation's movie houses. Promoters did attempt to make them more competitive by dressing the area immediately in front of the screen and using better materials for the screen itself.

Even in their simplicity, district theaters tended to upstage their retail neighbors. By the 1920s, the force of the movie house had become so powerful in the public mind that the brightly-lit marquee was necessary to indicate that a main street or neighborhood shopping area had made it. Most patrons during that time did not see their first run at a movie palace, but rather waited until they were showing at the neighborhood second-run theaters. In an era when going downtown to a movie was time-consuming and more expensive, a large percentage of the population would catch films within walking distance of where they lived.

Although not as complex as movie palaces, district theaters and combination houses were more complex than their predecessor, the nickelodeon. They often maintained some physical resemblance,

⁶⁷ Ibid, 13-14.

⁶⁸ James Labosier, "From the Kinetoscope to the Nickelodeon: Motion Picture Presentation and Production in Portland, Oregon from 1894 to 1906," *Film History* (Volume 16, pp. 286-323, 2004), 316; Maggie Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theatre, Starring S. Charles Lee*, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1994), 24.

stone, brick, or concrete structures with flat or vaulted roofs sitting along prominent commercial avenues abutting other commercial structures. However, they were larger, more comfortable, and more elaborate, including somewhat more fanciful treatment, fixed seating, and spaces to house heating and ventilation systems and management offices. Combination houses had stages, whereas district theaters just had aprons surrounding the screens.

District theaters are significant as they expanded accessibility of motion pictures by providing a convenient and less expensive alternative to movie palaces. Practically every substantial neighborhood shopping area housed a district theater at one point, and therefore almost every neighborhood has an important social and economic tie to such a theater.⁶⁹

The *San Francisco Neighborhood Movie Theaters Historic Context Statement (Draft)* identifies the following list of features as characteristic of district (or neighborhood) theaters:

- Stone, brick, or concrete one to two-and-a-half story structure with flat or vaulted roof,
- Recessed entryway with projecting ticket booth;
- Projecting marquee;
- Façade that rises above the structure, frequently with brick, stone, or terra cotta sheathing, and with embellishments including stained glass, cast iron, statuary, and lighting;
- Location along prominent commercial avenue, frequently abutting other commercial structures;
- Interior rectangular plan divided into the principal spaces of lobby, projection booth, and auditorium;
- Sloped auditorium floors with fixed seating;
- Frequently, one or two balconies with a stage in combination houses, absence of balconies in district theaters;
- Decorative embellishments throughout the interior including penciling, plasterwork, carved beams, draperies, shaped wooden seats with ornamental cast iron standards, carpet runners in the aisles, and ornate lighting fixtures;
- A projection booth with fireproofing that accommodated additional equipment for sequencing films, lighting, and sound accompaniment;
- Spaces within the theater that housed heating and ventilation systems and management offices; and
- Seating capacity of 300 or more.⁷⁰

Architectural and film historian, Maggie Valentine, notes in *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk* that the period in the early 1910s that bridges the nickelodeon and the [movie] palace has been little noticed but was an important transition from practical showiness to ostentatious showmanship in theater design...⁷¹ Although it was built as a nickelodeon in 1913, near the end of the period in which nickelodeons were prominent, the Clay Theatre may be best considered a hybrid between the earlier, more utilitarian nickelodeons and the neighborhood movie theaters that came next. As such, the Clay Theatre exhibits distinctive characteristics of both the Nickelodeon and single-screen neighborhood theaters. With features such as its relatively small scale, prominent façade with stylistic treatments, and location in commercial area abutting adjacent structures, the building reflects its age

⁶⁹ *San Francisco Neighborhood Movie Theater Non-Contiguous Multiple Property Historic District Context Statement* (Discussion Draft, April 27, 2006), 16-17.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk*, 30.

and origins as a nickelodeon. With features such as its recessed entryway with projecting ticket booth, interior rectangular plan divided into the principal spaces of lobby, projection booth, and auditorium, and sloped auditorium floors with fixed seating, the building reflects its evolution from a nickelodeon into a neighborhood movie theater. These are both increasingly rare building types that are vibrant features of the built environment and important and unique cultural institutions in San Francisco

Clay Theatre is also associated with Nasser Brothers, who took over the theater by the early 1940s, and hired theater architect Vincent G. Raney to remodel the building in 1946. While Nasser Brothers and architect Vincent G. Raney are well-known and important figures in development and operation of San Francisco and California theaters in the middle of the 20th century, their association with the Clay Theatre does not appear to have been historically significant.

The Nasser brothers were a pioneering family in San Francisco's film industry, who opened the Liberty Theater (no longer extant) at 18th and Collingwood in 1908, commissioned the current Castro Theater in 1922, and operated multiple theaters in San Francisco and California. During their management, the Clay Theater was remodeled including reconfiguring the front entrance and ticket booth and closing in the tall archway to create a mezzanine office.

The following historic context on the Nasser family is from architectural historian Stacy Farr:⁷²

The Nasser Family

Abraham M. Nasser was born in Zahle, Lebanon (part of Syria when Nasser was born) in 1858. He married Emily Batal Nasser and the couple had seven children in Lebanon, including sons William, Elias, Richard, George, Henry, and James and daughter Anne, before immigrating to the United States in 1901.⁷³ The family settled in San Francisco and Nasser opened a grocery and candy store at the intersection of 18th and Collingwood streets and lived in the apartment above. Another son, Theodore was born in San Francisco in 1908.

In 1907, Nasser began to project moving pictures on a blank wall at the back of his shop. This amusement soon earned the family more than their grocery business, and in 1908 Nasser established one of the city's first dedicated nickelodeons, the Liberty Theater at 4200 18th Street (no longer extant).⁷⁴ With several of his sons he established Nasser Brothers, supplying nickelodeons to other theaters.⁷⁵ The family opened a theater at 485 Castro Street in 1910, and commissioned construction of the Castro Theater at 429 Castro Street in 1922.⁷⁶ In 1923, they joined with an ownership group to purchase the Royal Theater at 1527 Polk Street (extant, modified). They opened the Alhambra Theater at 2326 Polk Street in 1926 (extant, modified), and by 1930 had opened the Strand Theater in Alameda (no longer extant). In 1932 they purchased a group of existing theaters including the New Mission at 255 Mission

⁷² Stacy Farr, "Memorandum outlining history of Clay Theater, 12-15-21," submitted to Planning Department.

⁷³ 1920 U. S. Federal Census, Abraham M. Nasser.

⁷⁴ "The Liberty Theater," published online at San Francisco Theaters, accessed December 3, 2021 at <http://sanfranciscotheatres.blogspot.com/search/label/Liberty%20-%2018th%20St>.

⁷⁵ 1909 San Francisco City Directory.

⁷⁶ "The Castro Theater: History and Exterior Views," published online at San Francisco Theaters, accessed December 3, 2021 at <http://sanfranciscotheatres.blogspot.com/search/label/Castro%20Theatre%20-%20history%20and%20exterior%20views>.

Street (extant); the New Fillmore at 1329 Fillmore (no longer extant), and the American Theater at 1226 Fillmore Street (no longer extant).⁷⁷

Abraham Nasser died in 1952 at the age of 94. At the time of his death, George, James, Theodore, and Henry Nasser operated the family business, which included twelve Bay Area movie theaters and a Hollywood movie studio, valued at \$2.5 million.⁷⁸ The Nasser family took back operations of the Castro Theater in 2001, and third generation family members Diana, Elaine, Susanna, Steven and Donald Nasser retained ownership of the Castro theater through at least 2012 at its ninetieth anniversary.⁷⁹

The theater is also associated with noted theater architect Vincent Raney. In the mid-1940s, Raney designed alterations for the building many of which are still extant, including the projecting ticket booth and upper floor window. The following historic context on Raney is from architectural historian Stacy Farr:⁸⁰

Vincent G. Raney

Architect Vincent G. Raney designed alterations to the property that were permitted in 1946.⁸¹ Vincent G. Raney was born in Loogootee, Indiana in 1905.⁸² He received a degree in architectural engineering from the University of Illinois in 1929, and also attended the University of Indiana and the University of Arizona. Raney worked for H. G. Atherton in Indiana before moving to San Francisco in 1930. He worked for architects Frederick H. Reimers, Masten & Hurd, and William I. Garren before establishing his own independent practice in 1937. In the first two decades of his career Raney designed a mixture of commercial buildings, including many gas stations, and residential buildings, including the so-called Sunshine House which was exhibited at the Golden Gate Exposition on Treasure Island in 1939. Following World War II, he participated in the design of tract housing marketed to returning GIs.⁸³

In the 1940s Raney began to specialize in movie theater design. In San Francisco, he designed renovations to existing movie theaters including the Clay Theater and the Royal Theater.⁸⁴ Over the next several decades, Raney designed more than forty movie theatres, including neighborhood theatres, drive-ins, and multi-plexes. He designed the Bal theatre in San Leandro in 1946 (extant); the Kuhio Theater in Honolulu in 1946 (no longer extant); the El Rey theater in Vallejo in 1949 (extant, altered); the 49er Drive-In theatre in Sacramento in 1950 (no longer extant); and other drive-in theaters in Burlingame, San Jose, and Scottsdale, Arizona, all of which have been demolished.⁸⁵ In 1964 he designed the Century 21, 22, and 23 theaters in San Jose for the theater operating chain Syufy

⁷⁷ "Nasser Bros. Buy Three Theaters," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 13, 1932, 10.

⁷⁸ "Abraham Nasser," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 13, 1952, 11.

⁷⁹ Alex Bevk, "The Epic History of the Castro Theater, a San Francisco and LGBTQ Landmark," published online at Curbed SF, June 22, 2016, accessed December 6, 2021 at <https://sf.curbed.com/2016/6/22/12004316/san-francisco-pride-castro-theater-history-pictures>.

⁸⁰ Stacy Farr, "Memorandum outlining history of Clay Theater, 12-15-21," submitted to Planning Department.

⁸¹ San Francisco Building Permit #92763, issued November 4, 1946.

⁸² "Vincent G. Raney, FCSI," published online at the Fellows of the Construction Specifications Institute, accessed December 3, 2021 at <http://www.fcsinet.org/bios/RaneyV.pdf>.

⁸³ "Vincent G. Raney, FCSI."

⁸⁴ "The Clay Theater," and "The Royal Theater," published online at San Francisco Theaters, accessed December 3, 2021 at <http://sanfranciscotheatres.blogspot.com/search?q=Raney>.

⁸⁵ "The Historic Bal Theater," published online at the Bal Theater, accessed December 3, 2021 at <https://www.baltheatre.com/history/>.

Enterprises; he replicated these theaters' unique domed form at projects throughout the west.⁸⁶ Work with Syufy Enterprises became the mainstay of Raney's practice, which he maintained through the mid-1990s, closing only after Ray Syufy's death in 1995.⁸⁷ Vincent G. Raney died in December 2001 at age 95.⁸⁸

The theater is also associated with well-known and prolific local architects, Arthur and Oliver Rousseau, who were the architects of record for the construction of the original building in 1913. Given the date, it seems that this would have been during the period that both Arthur and Oliver were part of the firm Rousseau & Rousseau with their father (Charles M.) and elder brother, Charles J. Although the building has been altered several times, notable aspects of the Rousseau's original design remain extant, including the decorative moldings and projecting cornice at upper portion of front façade and configuration of the building.

In all their various firms and in solo practice, the Rousseaus, appear to have been prolific and successful and would be considered master architects. Additional research would be necessary to identify where 2261 Fillmore Street fits within the body of work of Arthur and Oliver Rousseau, and/or Rousseau & Rousseau, and whether it is historically significant for association with these master architects.

Arthur and Oliver Rousseau

Arthur and Oliver were the sons of Charles Marion Rousseau, a successful architect who established a solo practice in 1890. In 1898, Rousseau's eldest son, Charles J., joined the firm as a draftsman, followed the next year by his son Arthur. In 1900, the elder Charles joined with son Arthur to form Rousseau and Son and designed their first building - a cottage on 21st Street near Sanchez Street - in June 1900. Charles's third and youngest son Oliver later joined the firm as a draftsman, and the firm's name changed to Rousseau & Rousseau (with Charles M. & Arthur as the principal architects). During the early 1900s, the Rousseaus designed and constructed large apartment buildings, hotels, and office buildings, and the company was known as "one of the largest realty development and building organizations in the West."

In 1918, after the death of his father, Oliver took over the firm as Vice-President and his brother, Arthur, served as President. In 1922, the brothers founded the Marian Realty Company and developed large tracts of land throughout San Francisco. Oliver's 1920s designs of fanciful, period-revival single-family homes in the Sunset District later received significant acclaim.⁸⁹

In 1932, the Rousseaus developed a parcel of land between 33rd and 36th avenue between near Kirkham and Lawton Streets that contains their most famous works such as 1564 36th Avenue (1932) and 1500 36th Avenue (1932) - the likes of which were built in an eclectic "storybook" style. Oliver Rousseau designed and built his personal residence on a corner lot at 1598 36th Avenue in a unique Spanish Colonial Revival style in 1933.⁹⁰ They were some of the first to incorporate built-in garages, and popularized floor plans that featured central patios that adjoined major rooms. The company was successful until the Great Depression hit full swing, and in 1933,

⁸⁶ Eric Moore, "Architect Highlight: Vincent Raney," published online at Form, Function, Art, accessed December 2, 2021 at <https://formfunctionart.com/vincent-raney/>; "The History of our Theater," published online at Stargazers Theater Colorado Springs, accessed December 3, 2021 at <https://stargazerstheater.com/our-history/>.

⁸⁷ "The Historic Bal Theater."

⁸⁸ "Vincent G. Raney, FCSI."

⁸⁹ San Francisco Planning Department, "Cow Hollow Historic Context Statement."

⁹⁰ San Francisco Planning Department, "Rousseaus' Boulevard Tract Landmark District (Draft)," 12-22.

Marian Realty Co. declared bankruptcy, with debts topping \$6 million. After the company dissolved, Oliver continued to work as an architect, and created numerous houses for workers in the East Bay during WWII, as well as tract homes and apartments buildings throughout the Bay Area. He died in 1977 at the age of 85.

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San Francisco Chronicle

San Francisco City Directories

San Francisco Examiner

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Photos



Clay Theatre, 2020
Source: DNM Architecture



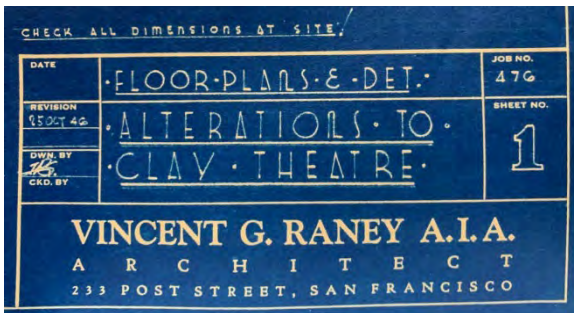
Source: San Francisco Public Library, Historic Photograph Collection (AAA-8623)
<http://sflib1.sfpl.org:82/record=b1003696>



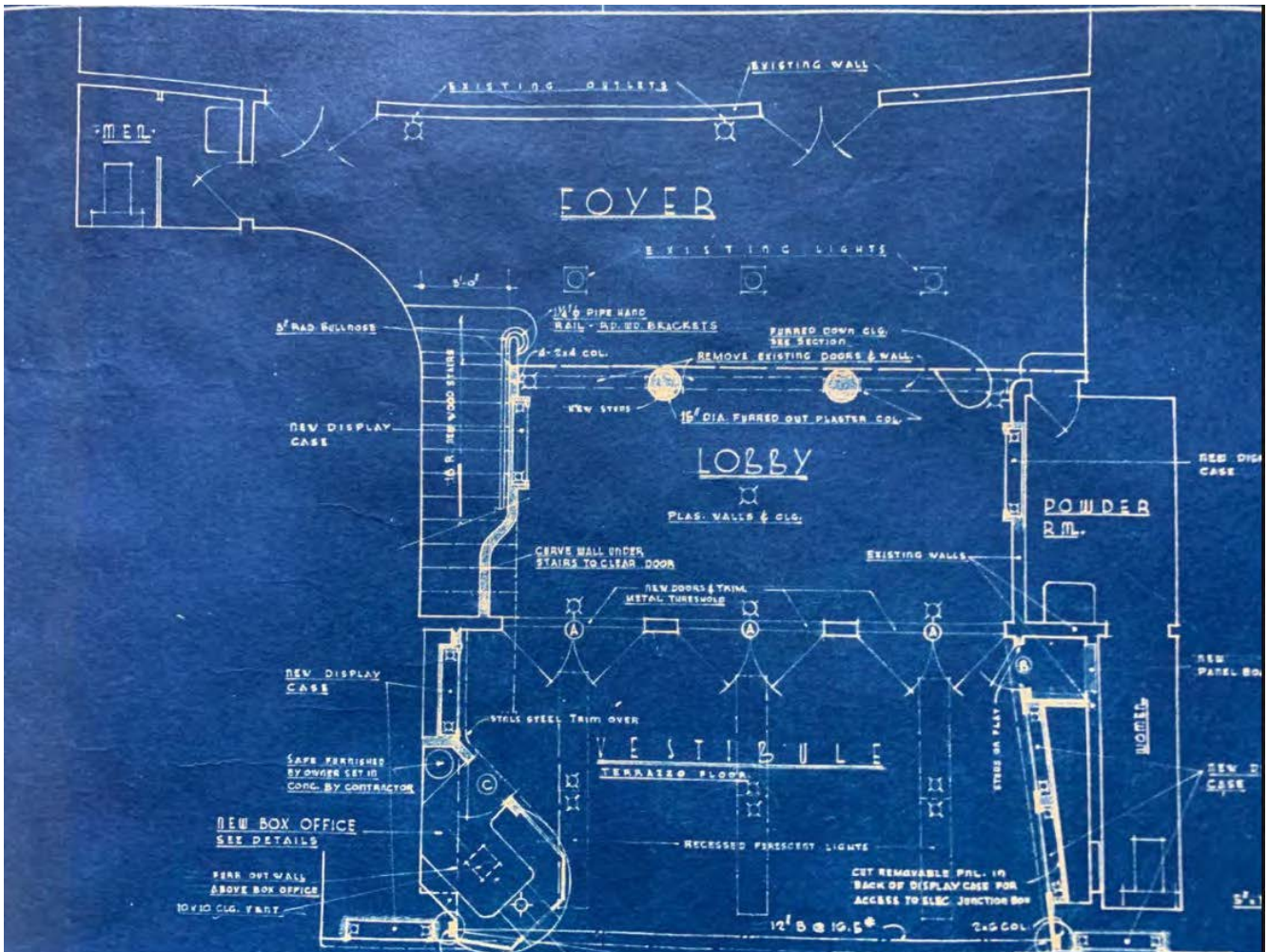
Circa 1940 from SF Gate January 27, 2020 'The last, last, last screening': Scenes from the final night of San Francisco's Clay Theater, Montse Reyes. Credits photo to SFPL
<https://www.sfgate.com/movies/article/clay-theatre-sf-closing-fillmore-movie-theater-15008701.php#photo-18925842>



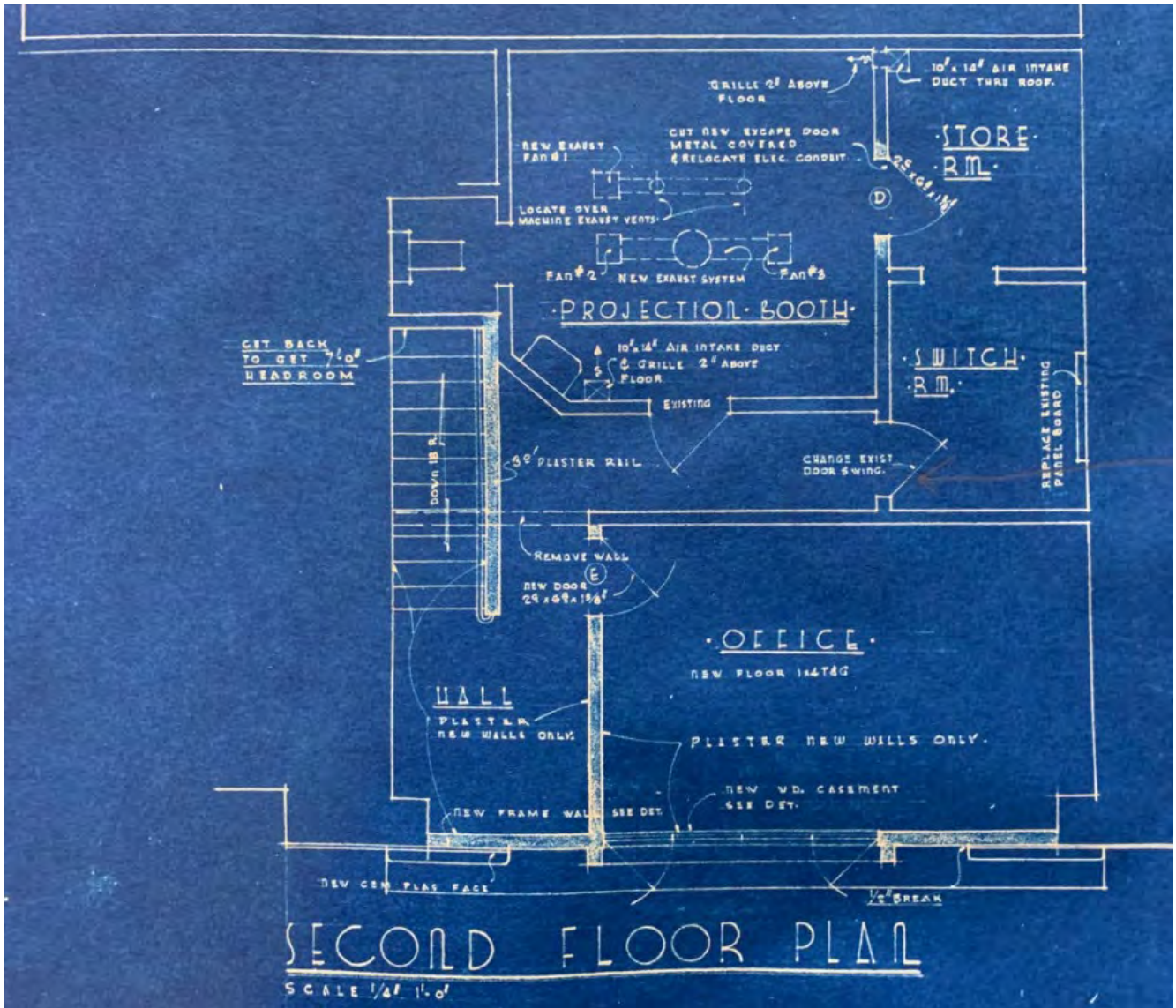
A look at the entrance at the premiere of the documentary "Kukan," 1941
Source: San Francisco Theatres: Clay Theatre website at
<http://sanfranciscotheatres.blogspot.com/search/label/Clay%20Theatre>



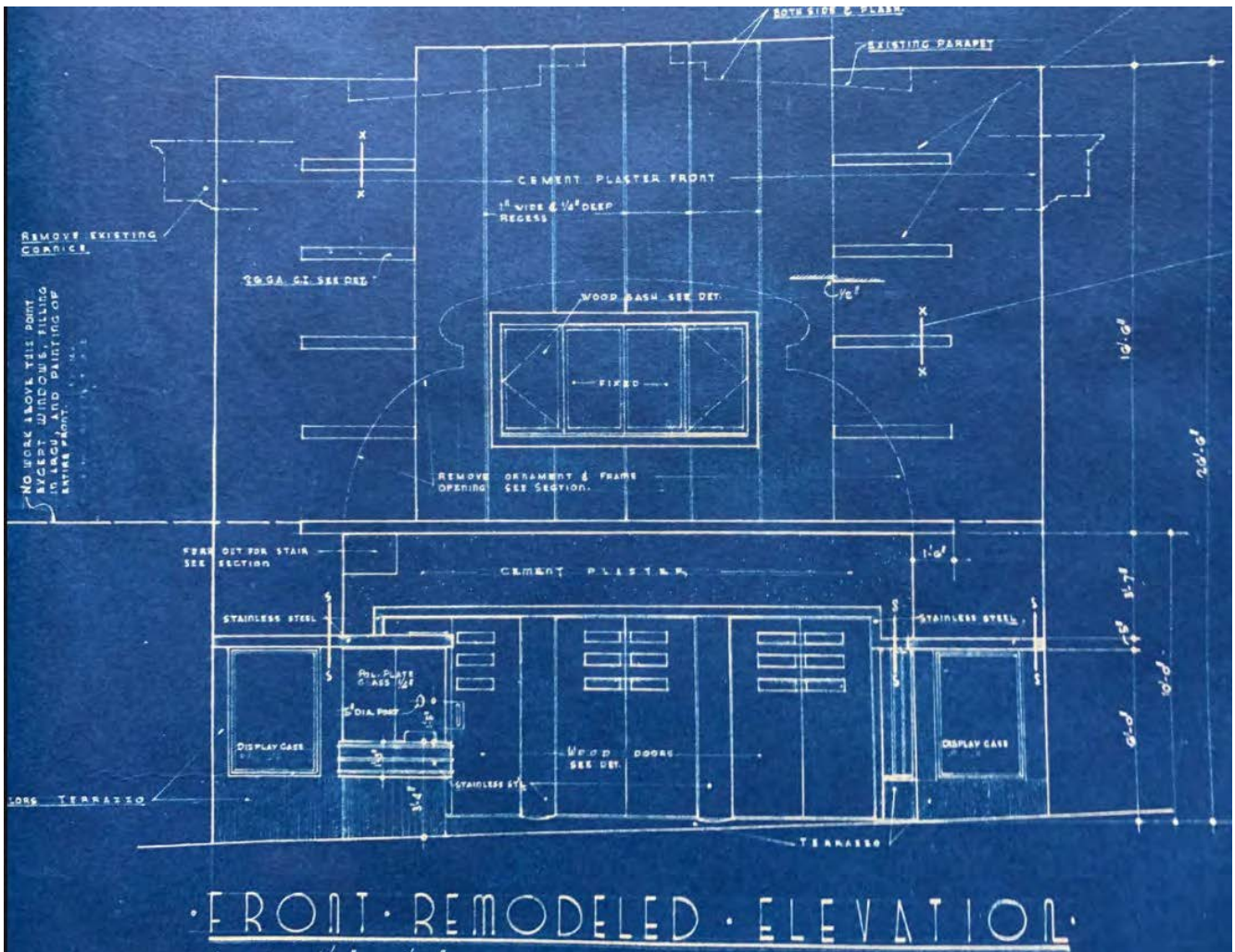
Architect Vincent G. Raney, Title Block for Clay Theatre Plans, 1946
Source: Gary Parks Collection, posted on San Francisco Theatres: Clay Theatre website at <http://sanfranciscotheatres.blogspot.com/search/label/Clay%20Theatre>



Architect Vincent G. Raney, First Floor Plan, 1946
Source: Gary Parks Collection, posted on San Francisco Theatres: Clay Theatre website at <http://sanfranciscotheatres.blogspot.com/search/label/Clay%20Theatre>

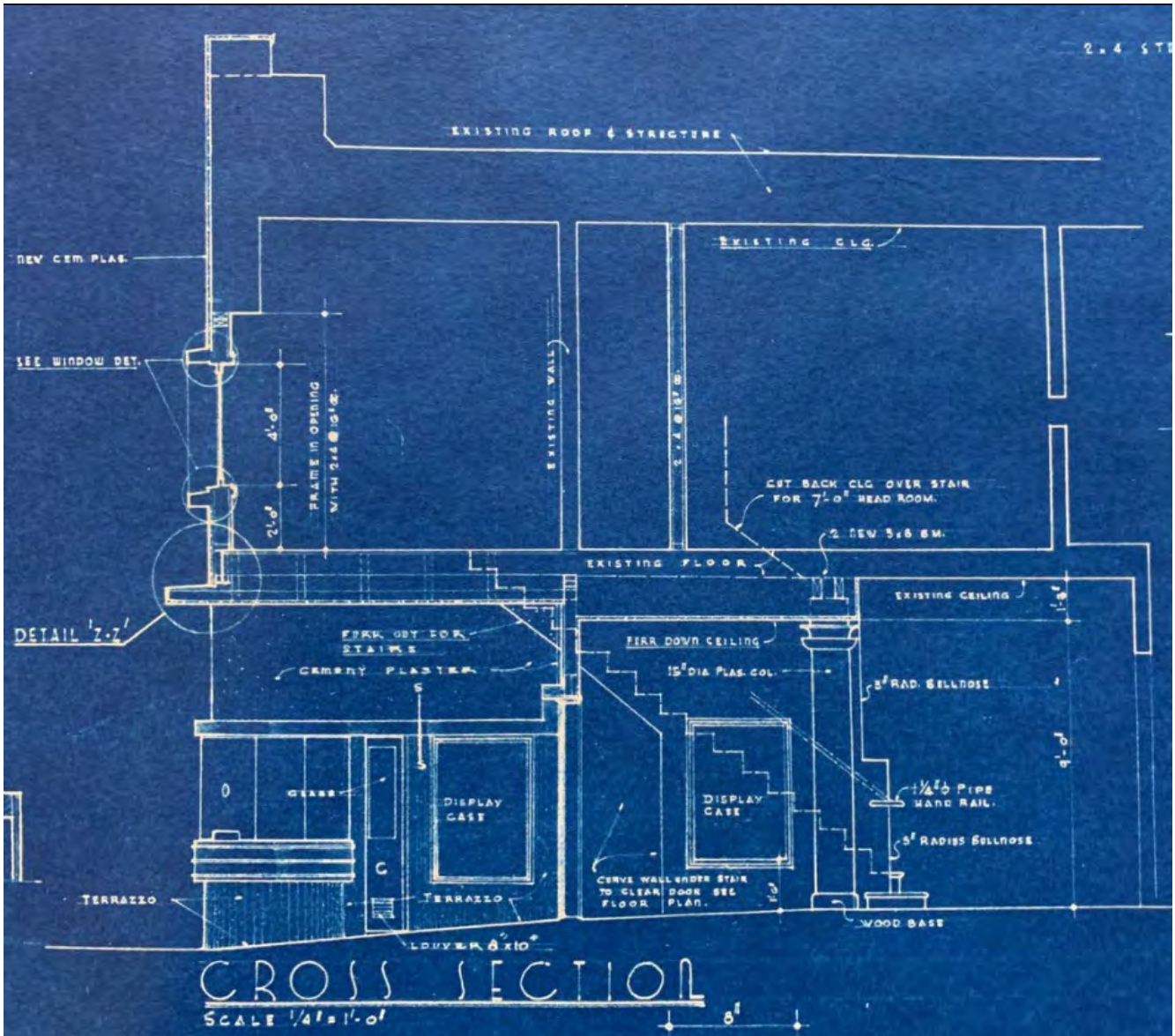


Architect Vincent G. Raney, Second Floor Plan, 1946
Source: Gary Parks Collection, posted on San Francisco Theatres: Clay Theatre website at <http://sanfranciscotheatres.blogspot.com/search/label/Clay%20Theatre>



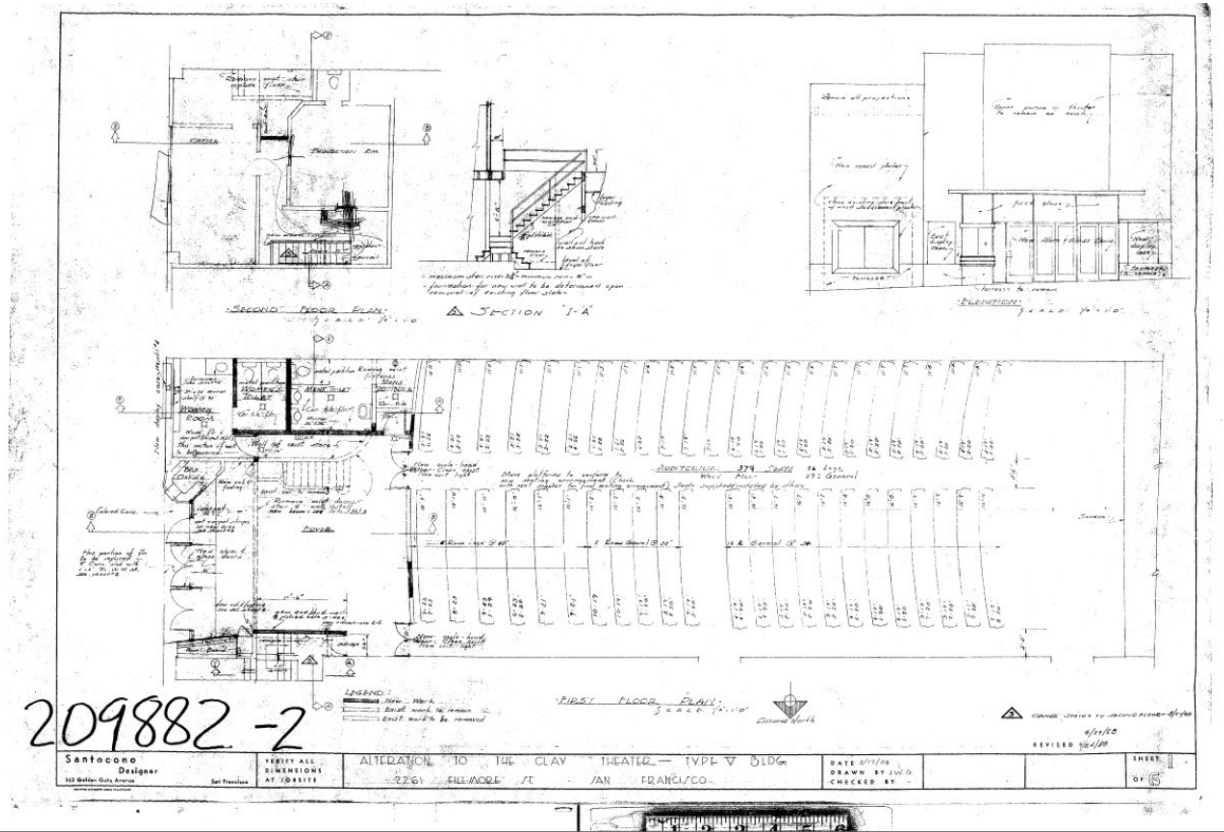
Architect Vincent G. Raney, Façade Plan, 1946

Source: Gary Parks Collection, posted on San Francisco Theatres: Clay Theatre website at <http://sanfranciscotheatres.blogspot.com/search/label/Clay%20Theatre>



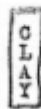
Architect Vincent G. Raney, Section Drawing, 1946

Source: Gary Parks Collection, posted on San Francisco Theatres: Clay Theatre website at <http://sanfranciscotheatres.blogspot.com/search/label/Clay%20Theatre>

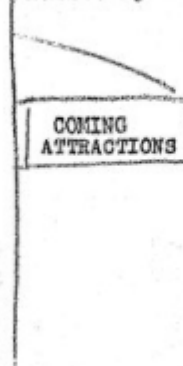


Building Permit #209882, Plans, 1958
 Source: San Francisco Department of Building Inspection, Records Center

To move existing vertical sign across face of building .
 No changes to sign or structure, some plans submitted.



PLOT PLAN AND ELEVATION
 Indicate exactly the location of sign or billboard horizontally and vertically



Descriptions of proposed signs on two Sign Permits,
 1961
 Source: San Francisco Department of Building
 Inspection, Records Center



Clay Theater, 1964. Photographer: Alan J. Canterbury
Source: San Francisco Public Library, Historic Photograph Collection (AAA-8622)
<http://sflib1.sfpl.org:82/record=b1003695>



Clay Theatre, 1967. Photo by Jack Tillmany.
Source: Posted on San Francisco Theatres: Clay Theatre website at <http://sanfranciscotheatres.blogspot.com/search/label/Clay%20Theatre>



Clay Theatre during the West Coast premiere engagement of "Pumping Iron," 1977. Photo by Paul Lawrence, the Surf Theatres Archives.
Source: Posted on San Francisco Theatres: Clay Theatre website at <http://sanfranciscotheatres.blogspot.com/search/label/Clay%20Theatre>



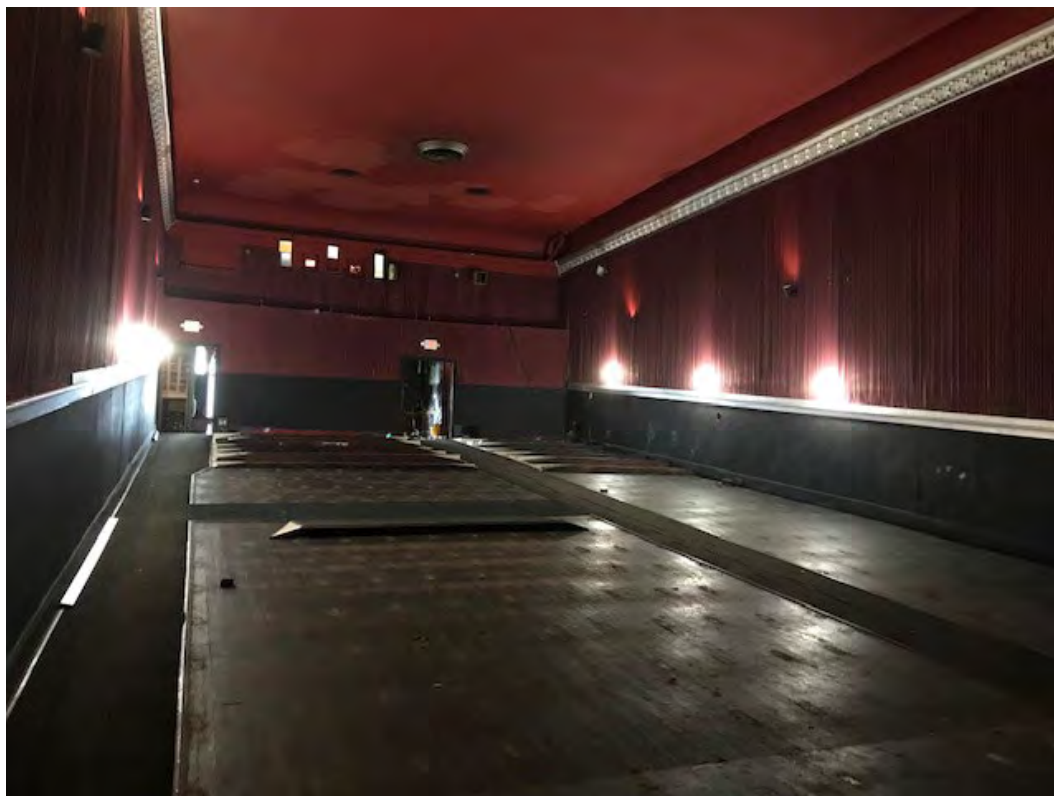
2007 photo appearing with a 2014 KQED article "[The Best Movie Theaters of the Bay Area.](#)"
Source: Posted on San Francisco Theatres: Clay Theatre website at
<http://sanfranciscotheatres.blogspot.com/search/label/Clay%20Theatre>



Clay Theatre, Auditorium, 2014. Photo by Franck Bohbot. Source: Posted on San Francisco Theatres: Clay Theatre website at <http://sanfranciscotheatres.blogspot.com/search/label/Clay%20Theatre>



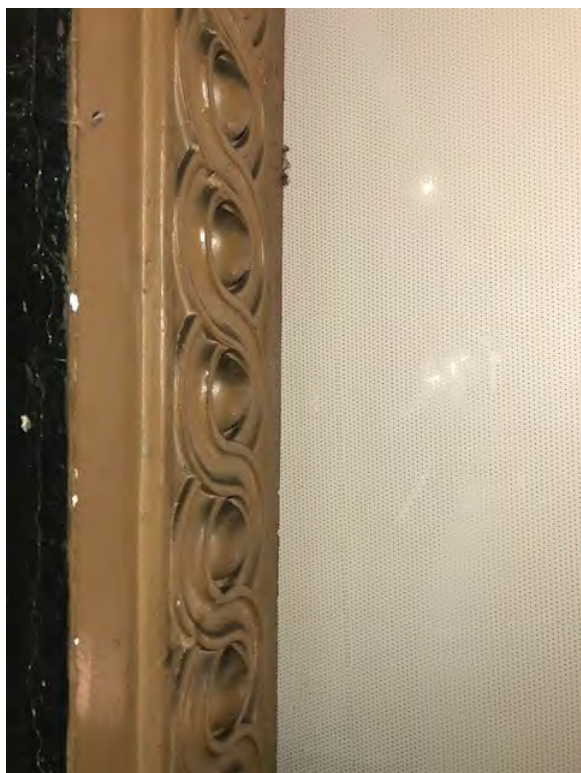
Clay Theatre, Auditorium, seats removed, 2020. Photo by Nick Otto in Sam Whiting, "SF supervisor hopes a law will save historic Clay Theatre, other single screens," *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 9, 2020. Source: Posted on San Francisco Theatres: Clay Theatre website at <http://sanfranciscotheatres.blogspot.com/search/label/Clay%20Theatre>



Clay Theatre, Auditorium, view toward projection room and lobby, 2022.
Source: San Francisco Planning Department



Clay Theatre, Auditorium, moldings above projection room openings, 2022.
Source: San Francisco Planning Department



Clay Theatre, Auditorium, details of original proscenium moldings currently hidden behind projection screen, 2022.

Source: San Francisco Planning Department



Clay Theatre, Lobby, south wall, 2015. Source: Posted on San Francisco Theatres: Clay Theatre website at <http://sanfranciscotheatres.blogspot.com/search/label/Clay%20Theatre>



Clay Theatre, Lobby, west and north walls, doors to auditorium, 2010. Source: Posted on San Francisco Theatres: Clay Theatre website at <http://sanfranciscotheatres.blogspot.com/search/label/Clay%20Theatre>



Clay Theatre, Second Floor, Projection Room, 2020.
Source: DNM Architecture



Clay Theatre, Second Floor office, room was created in 1946 remodel so ceiling moldings may date from original construction, 2020
Source: DNM Architecture



Clay Theatre, Second Floor office, mural in south wall (no date), 2022
Source: San Francisco Planning Department



Clay Theater, ticket booth, view from sidewalk, 2022
Source: San Francisco Planning Department



Clay Theater, ticket booth, view from lobby, 2022
Source: San Francisco Planning Department

Balgobind Jaiswal
481 Kings Mountain Rd
Woodside, CA 94062

San Francisco Historic Planning Commission

January 18, 2022

Dear Commissioners,

I am the owner of the building at 2261 Clay Street, the Clay Theater. I purchased the building in 2008 while Landmark Theater was still a tenant. Landmark operated the theater at a significant loss until ultimately closing their operation completely in January 2020. During the period from 2008 – 2020, I provided approximately \$1.2M of rent subsidies to Landmark to support their business, but it was not enough to cover their operating losses and the business ultimately failed. Today in San Francisco, small movie theaters survive either as non-profits (Roxie, Vogue), drinking establishments (Alamo) or as mini-multiplexes (Presidio, Balboa, 4-Star). Cinéarts Empire is closed. The Red Vic is closed. The Clay Theater is closed. Many others have been converted to other uses long ago.

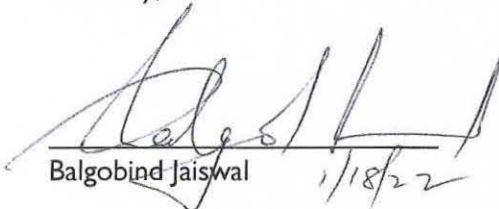
The Staff report describes the Clay Theater's past, and it enumerates present features worth preserving, but it does not speak to the building's future. Is the Commission being asked to landmark a building or a memory of a time when single screen movie theaters thrived?

Successful buildings are not only a link to our past, but vibrant contributors to their communities today. It is in all of our interests that this building be restored and re-opened, but for what purpose? How will it add to the vibrancy and health of the local merchants? A century after its birth as a nickelodeon, what commercial activities are economically viable in 2022 and capable of financially supporting the building's restoration and ongoing maintenance?

I support preservation of the Clay's exterior features which provide a connection to our city's past for all passersby. In order to best facilitate the Clay's restoration and return to life, however, I ask that the Commission consider that the building will most very likely be reborn for some other purpose than a single screen movie theater. At least it must be given the opportunity to find a new and best purpose. I ask that the Commission consider that landmarking of the raked floor and the featureless front lobby will preclude any non-theater type of operation from occupying the building and ultimately ensuring the Clay's success as a San Francisco landmark and its return as a vibrant contributor to the Fillmore district.

While it may not be impossible that a well-funded single screen movie operator may one day return to the Clay, it is extremely unlikely, and we request that the Commission simply leave open other paths to success rather than inadvertently leaving the Clay in an economic dead end which diminishes the building's value and benefits no one.

Sincerely,


Balgobind Jaiswal 1/18/22

From: [Larry Pulliam](#)
To: [LaValley, Pilar \(CPC\)](#)
Subject: Case No.2021-009311DES Clay theater
Date: Wednesday, January 12, 2022 7:02:56 PM

This message is from outside the City email system. Do not open links or attachments from untrusted sources.

I am a neighbor of, user of, and support historic preservation designation for the Clay Theater.

Larry Pulliam
2285 Washington St. #1
San Francisco, CA 94115

From: [Katherine Petrin](#)
To: [Alfonso Felder](#); [Bair, Jack](#); [LaValley, Pilar \(CPC\)](#)
Subject: Clay Theater Landmark Nomination
Date: Tuesday, January 18, 2022 1:30:31 PM

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Hello Ms. LaValley,

The San Francisco Neighborhood Theater Foundation is pleased to support the City of San Francisco local landmark designation for the Clay Theater. We look forward to listening in to tomorrow's Historic Preservation Commission hearing for the discussion of this item.

We appreciate your efforts in bringing this nomination to the HPC.

Many thanks,
Katherine Petrin
Vice President, SFNTF

From: [Luita Persyko](#)
To: [LaValley, Pilar \(CPC\)](#)
Subject: Clay Theater Landmark Status
Date: Monday, January 10, 2022 9:33:56 AM

This message is from outside the City email system. Do not open links or attachments from untrusted sources.

Good Morning,

I have been a resident of San Francisco for the last 44 years. The Clay Theater has been a beacon in Pacific Heights as our single screen theaters have diminished significantly. Like the Vogue Theater it is an integral part of our community. It is not only an historically significant building it has also provided the entire city with a diverse offering of films and entertainment experiences. It's historical significance and impact on the community is similar to the Castro Theater just on a smaller scale. It would be a tremendous loss to all San Francisco citizens if we lost this wonderful gem. I urge you to advocate for giving the Clay Theater landmark status.

Thank you.
Luita Persyko

From: [Katherine Petrin](#)
To: [LaValley, Pilar \(CPC\)](#)
Subject: Clay Theater Nomination
Date: Wednesday, February 02, 2022 1:02:16 PM

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Hi Pilar,

I hope all is well with you. I wanted to make you aware of comments I made during the general public comment period of today's HPC meeting. Since I invoked your name and you may not have been listening in, my comments follow below.

thanks!
Katherine

Good afternoon commissioners of the HPC,

This is [Katherine Petrin](#) representing the [San Francisco Neighborhood Theater Foundation](#). I spoke at the last meeting of this commission in support of the Clay Theater's landmark nomination and wanted to follow up today with a few points. First, thank you for your unanimous vote in support of the merit of the nomination skillfully prepared by [Pilar LaValley](#). Thank you for recognizing the architectural and historical significance of this property.

There was a discussion about interior features, specifically, the interior volume and the raked floor. There seemed to be a concern that by including these features you might hamper a future use.

I'd like to point out that at the Alhambra Theater on Polk Street, designed by [Timothy Pflueger](#) in 1926 and rehabbed and adaptively reused as gym in 1998, the raked floor in the main auditorium space remains intact under the new floor. The project was carried out in accordance with the SOIS, and in theory can be returned to a theater use in the future.

More importantly, we noted that some commissioners were concerned the landmark status of the Clay might cause it to languish. We are convinced that the theater use is viable. By way of backstory, our work with the owner of the Clay dates back many years. We have worked with owner on multiple different scenarios to assist in sympathetically modifying the interior by adding a bar and dining facilities. In 2015 the owner filed a CUA to add a restaurant at the rear of the auditorium. We supported it but it never came to fruition.

In early 2020 the owner put the theater on the market. We made an offer to purchase it at the then-asking price of 3.5 million, an offer that was rejected by owner. We understand he is now seeking significantly more, asking 6.5M. This is to say that if the building languishes it won't be because of landmark designation.

The neighborhood would like to see the Clay open again as a movie theater. We are poised to

assist in any way to make that happen.

If I can answer any questions now or at a later date, feel free to contact me through Ms. LaValley. Thank you.

From: [Keith Rockmael](#)
To: [LaValley, Pilar \(CPC\)](#)
Subject: clay theater support
Date: Thursday, January 06, 2022 11:03:57 PM

This message is from outside the City email system. Do not open links or attachments from untrusted sources.

Hi Ms. Lavalley,

As you may already know, the significantly celebrated Clay Theatre is historically significant as one of the oldest single screen nickelodeon movie houses in San Francisco.

It also has significant history for its association with the pioneering period of moving picture theaters and the development of the film industry in San Francisco during the early 20th century.

The Clay Theater, represents one of the few remaining single-screen movie theater buildings in San Francisco.

It also was also an important destination for foreign and independent films and midnight movies throughout the 20th century. Please consider the Clay for recommendation of the landmark designation.

Thank you for your consideration.

Best Regards,

Keith Rockmael
415-994-1322

From: [Lynne](#)
To: [LaValley, Pilar \(CPC\)](#)
Cc: [Stefani, Catherine \(BOS\)](#); [Terry McGuire](#); [L G Scott](#)
Subject: Clay Theatre Article 10 Landmark Designation
Date: Monday, January 10, 2022 9:35:21 PM

This message is from outside the City email system. Do not open links or attachments from untrusted sources.

I am writing on behalf of Pacific Heights Residents Association (PHRA) to urge the designation of the Clay Theatre (2261 Fillmore Street) as an individual Article 10 Landmark . The Clay Theatre is not only historically significant as one of the oldest single screen nickelodeon movie houses in Sf, but also as a long-standing center of community life and architectural presence in Pacific Heights. It is one of the defining features of the Fillmore Street shopping and entertainment districts, and the literal crossroads of Pacific Heights recreation, commercial, and social life. The designation of the Clay Theatre as a Landmark is long overdue, and greatly deserved.

Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

Lynne Newhouse Segal

Pacific Heights Residents Association (PHRA)

Sent from [Mail](#) for Windows

From: [CPC-Commissions Secretary](#)
Cc: [LaValley, Pilar \(CPC\)](#); [Feliciano, Josephine \(CPC\)](#)
Subject: FW: Article 10 Landmark Designation 2261 Fillmore St (Clay Theatre)
Date: Tuesday, January 18, 2022 12:15:58 PM

Commission Affairs

San Francisco Planning
49 South Van Ness Avenue, Suite 1400, San Francisco, CA 94103
Direct: 628.652.7600 | www.sfplanning.org
[San Francisco Property Information Map](#)

From: Samantha Rose <samantha@tefarch.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 18, 2022 11:12 AM
To: CPC-Commissions Secretary <commissions.secretary@sfgov.org>
Subject: Article 10 Landmark Designation 2261 Fillmore St (Clay Theatre)

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Hello SF Planning,

I wanted to express my support for landmarking the Clay Theatre. I remember it as a fixture of the neighborhood when I was a kid and continued going to movies there up until the pandemic hit.

Even if it can't remain a cinema, the building itself adds so much to the character and beauty of Fillmore Street that it's absolutely worth preserving.

Thank you.

--

Samantha Rose
Associate
T 415.391.7918 x118
D 415.901.4918
samantha@TEFarch.com

TEF Design
1420 Sutter St, 2nd Floor
San Francisco, CA 94109
TEFarch.com



From: [CPC-Commissions Secretary](#)
Cc: [LaValley, Pilar \(CPC\)](#); [Feliciano, Josephine \(CPC\)](#)
Subject: FW: Clay St Theatre
Date: Wednesday, January 19, 2022 8:03:40 AM

Commission Affairs
San Francisco Planning
49 South Van Ness Avenue, Suite 1400, San Francisco, CA 94103
Direct: 628.652.7600 | www.sfplanning.org
San Francisco Property Information Map

-----Original Message-----

From: Michael Kvyat <mike.kvyat@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 18, 2022 5:36 PM
To: CPC-Commissions Secretary <commissions.secretary@sfgov.org>
Subject: Clay St Theatre

This message is from outside the City email system. Do not open links or attachments from untrusted sources.

I support the designation of the Clay St Theatre as a public landmark. As a San Francisco resident of over 31 years and voter, such cultural centers are required to maintain San Francisco's unique character.

Sent from my iPhone

From: [CPC-Commissions Secretary](#)
Cc: [LaValley, Pilar \(CPC\)](#); [Feliciano, Josephine \(CPC\)](#)
Subject: FW: Clay Theater
Date: Thursday, January 20, 2022 7:53:12 AM

Commission Affairs

San Francisco Planning
49 South Van Ness Avenue, Suite 1400, San Francisco, CA 94103
Direct: 628.652.7600 | www.sfplanning.org
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From: Sandra Price <sandybprice@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, January 19, 2022 7:26 PM
To: CPC-Commissions Secretary <commissions.secretary@sfgov.org>
Subject: Clay Theater

This message is from outside the City email system. Do not open links or attachments from untrusted sources.

I support landmarking the Clay Theater, an important neighborhood anchor.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sandra Price

From: [CPC-Commissions Secretary](#)
Cc: [Lalibny, Phil \(CPC\)](#), [Eliason, Rosaline \(CPC\)](#)
Subject: FW: Clay Theatre Landmark Preservation
Date: Wednesday, January 19, 2022 8:05:52 AM

Commission Affairs
San Francisco Planning
49 South Van Ness Avenue, Suite 1400, San Francisco, CA 94103
Direct: 628.652.7600 | www.sfplanning.org
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-----Original Message-----
From: Mary <mary@fishchild.com>
Sent: Friday, January 14, 2022 6:54 PM
To: CPC-Commissions Secretary <commissions.secretary@sfgov.org>
Subject: Clay Theatre Landmark Preservation

This message is from outside the City email system. Do not open links or attachments from untrusted sources.

I once got the zipper to my velvet pants stuck in the ladies room at the Clay Theatre while viewing a movie, "La Vie En Rose" with friends, and had to drape a jacket around my waist to get out of there without exposing myself. I also found out that the guy I was in love with was dating someone else while watching a movie at the Clay. Fillmore street Clay Theatre and Brownies Books has been a big part of my 30 years in San Francisco. Please consider making this small neighborhood art theatre a landmark. Would that they would keep being a working movie theatre.

Mary

"In Order to attain the impossible, we must attempt the absurd" - Miguel de Cervantes

www.fishchild.com <<https://www.nra-protection.com>>+1.nrl?
o=hip%3A/www.fishchild.com&g=OTLzYmM4YWESOTUzZDEZYw==&h=OTBmNTVzbnNGMwYjkwZW0MmUUNmRkNzZjZlVlMDEcNDhYmYlNzEIMjkyYQYj30DcwOGMyNmU0YmUyYQ==&p=YXAzOnNmZHQzOmFZYW5hbjp0JVl0GYSNzFkZDUzZTVkZDEyTg4MGH4NDMwNDUxZDgzOnYsOm96TG==>
mary@fishchild.com <<mailto:mary@fishchild.com>> 415. 225-4235

From: [CPC-Commissions Secretary](#)
Cc: [LaValley, Pilar \(CPC\)](#); [Feliciano, Josephine \(CPC\)](#)
Subject: FW: Clay Theatre
Date: Wednesday, January 19, 2022 8:02:35 AM

Commission Affairs
San Francisco Planning
49 South Van Ness Avenue, Suite 1400, San Francisco, CA 94103
Direct: 628.652.7600 | www.sfplanning.org
San Francisco Property Information Map

-----Original Message-----

From: Brian Darr <boingdiddlepop@yahoo.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 18, 2022 6:05 PM
To: CPC-Commissions Secretary <commissions.secretary@sfgov.org>
Subject: Clay Theatre

This message is from outside the City email system. Do not open links or attachments from untrusted sources.

As a San Francisco cinephile I have many memories of life-changing experiences engaging with cinematic art at the Clay. It's where I first saw masterpieces such as Edward Yang's *A Brighter Summer Day* and Joao Pedro Rodrigues's *To Die Like A Man* (with the director present in person.) my best-ever viewing of Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* was an unforgettable midnight showing before a rapt audience in 2009. My experiences were paralleled by so many others over the years and decades. I know that films from pre-Communist China and the Golden Era of French humanist cinema were shown there in the 1930s. The remarkable filmmaker and dancer Yvonne Rainer writes of attending Jean Cocteau films there in the late 1940s when she was growing up nearby. Later generations enjoyed seeing midnight movies and film festival hits there, including a long-running one of perennial and subversive fun, the *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, which was the last movie I saw at the venue before it stopped hosting events in early 2020. I hope this historic building, which has helped make so many memories for San Francisco residents and visitors over a century, and still has the potential to make many more (especially with the fate of San Francisco's most famous single-screen theatre, the Castro, up in the air as a venue showing movies with any attention to local desires rather than Hollywood's) and if landmarking can help facilitate this, I hope it can be done.

Brian Darr
798 Post #304
San Francisco CA 94109

Sent from my iPhone

From: [CPC-Commissions Secretary](#)
Cc: [LaValley, Pilar \(CPC\)](#); [Feliciano, Josephine \(CPC\)](#)
Subject: FW: Landmark the Clay Theater
Date: Thursday, January 20, 2022 3:43:43 PM

Commission Affairs
San Francisco Planning
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Direct: 628.652.7600 | www.sfplanning.org
San Francisco Property Information Map

-----Original Message-----

From: Sam Bush <samuelbbush@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, January 19, 2022 8:55 PM
To: CPC-Commissions Secretary <commissions.secretary@sfgov.org>
Subject: Landmark the Clay Theater

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Please do the right thing...

Sent from my iPhone

From: [CPC-Commissions Secretary](#)
Cc: [LaValley, Pilar \(CPC\)](#); [Feliciano, Josephine \(CPC\)](#)
Subject: FW: Landmarking of Clay Theatre
Date: Tuesday, January 18, 2022 2:47:34 PM

Commission Affairs

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From: Anita Denz <ajdenz@sbcglobal.net>
Sent: Tuesday, January 18, 2022 2:38 PM
To: CPC-Commissions Secretary <commissions.secretary@sfgov.org>
Subject: Landmarking of Clay Theatre

This message is from outside the City email system. Do not open links or attachments from untrusted sources.

Please submit my comments to the Historic Preservation Commission in support of the Clay Theatre being recommended as a City landmark to the Board of Supervisors.

I have resided in the Pacific Heights neighborhood since 1969 and attended screenings and community events at The Clay for over five decades. As a member of SF Heritage and the Victorian Alliance of San Francisco, I strongly support their position on landmarking in the hope the theatre can be preserved to honor its historic legacy, its position in the Upper Fillmore commercial corridor, and eventually be restored to its original cinematic purpose.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Anita Jean Denz

From: [CPC-Commissions Secretary](#)
Cc: [LaValley, Pilar \(CPC\)](#); [Feliciano, Josephine \(CPC\)](#)
Subject: FW: Make the Clay a landmark
Date: Wednesday, January 19, 2022 8:02:56 AM

Commission Affairs
San Francisco Planning
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-----Original Message-----

From: finocchio68@yahoo.com <finocchio68@yahoo.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 18, 2022 7:09 PM
To: CPC-Commissions Secretary <commissions.secretary@sfgov.org>
Subject: Make the Clay a landmark

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I support the efforts to make the Clay Theater on Fillmore street a city landmark. It is a treasure worth protecting. I have many treasured cinema memories thanks to the Clay and would hate to see this part of old SF lost.

Troy Barber
1115 Divisadero St #3

Maybe sent from a phone

From: [CPC-Commissions Secretary](#)
Cc: [LaValley, Pilar \(CPC\)](#); [Feliciano, Josephine \(CPC\)](#)
Subject: FW: Make the Clay Theatre a Landmark
Date: Wednesday, January 19, 2022 2:08:52 PM

Commission Affairs

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From: Rahul Sharodi <rsharodi@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, January 19, 2022 12:20 PM
To: CPC-Commissions Secretary <commissions.secretary@sfgov.org>
Subject: Make the Clay Theatre a Landmark

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Hi there, I'm a San Francisco resident and would like to add my voice to the effort to turn the Clay Theatre as an historic landmark. It has been an instrumental part of SF cinema culture for over 100 years. Please designate it as a landmark

Thank you!
Rahul Sharodi

From: [CPC-Commissions Secretary](#)
Cc: [LaValley, Pilar \(CPC\)](#); [Feliciano, Josephine \(CPC\)](#)
Subject: FW: Please landmark the Clay Theatre!
Date: Wednesday, January 19, 2022 2:09:12 PM

Commission Affairs
San Francisco Planning
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-----Original Message-----

From: Matt Wright <matt.c.wright@me.com>
Sent: Wednesday, January 19, 2022 1:45 PM
To: CPC-Commissions Secretary <commissions.secretary@sfgov.org>
Subject: Please landmark the Clay Theatre!

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To whom it may concern,

The Clay is an invaluable historic resource, and I support all efforts to officially designate it as such. My grandparents lived in San Francisco, and my grandmother spoke of seeing movies at the Clay. She has since passed on, and it always felt so special to connect with her spirit when I would see movies there, from one generation of San Franciscan to another.

Thank you for your consideration,
Matt Wright

From: [CPC-Commissions Secretary](#)
Cc: [LaValley, Pilar \(CPC\)](#); [Feliciano, Josephine \(CPC\)](#)
Subject: FW: Please save the Clay!
Date: Wednesday, January 19, 2022 7:58:10 AM

Commission Affairs

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From: Dane Barca <danebarca@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 18, 2022 3:58 PM
To: CPC-Commissions Secretary <commissions.secretary@sfgov.org>
Subject: Please save the Clay!

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The Clay needs to be a landmark. Please act accordingly before even more of the city's cultural soul dies.

The Reverend Doctor Barca, Esquire (future cosmonaut)
415 663 6394
danebarca@gmail.com

From: [CPC-Commissions Secretary](#)
Cc: [LaValley, Pilar \(CPC\)](#); [Feliciano, Josephine \(CPC\)](#)
Subject: FW: Preserve the Clay Theater
Date: Wednesday, January 19, 2022 8:01:56 AM

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-----Original Message-----

From: Brandy Deminna Ford <brandydford@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 18, 2022 4:30 PM
To: CPC-Commissions Secretary <commissions.secretary@sfgov.org>
Subject: Preserve the Clay Theater

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Hello,

I was devastated when the Clay Theater shut its doors. It is an important fixture in the neighborhood and allowed me to see foreign films when they were released. I miss it deeply. Please restore the Clay theater.

Best,

Brandy Ford
Richmond district resident

From: [CPC-Commissions Secretary](#)
Cc: [LaValley, Pilar \(CPC\)](#); [Feliciano, Josephine \(CPC\)](#)
Subject: FW: Save the Clay!!
Date: Thursday, January 20, 2022 3:42:56 PM

Commission Affairs
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-----Original Message-----

From: karoline <karoline@khatch.com>
Sent: Thursday, January 20, 2022 1:30 PM
To: CPC-Commissions Secretary <commissions.secretary@sfgov.org>
Subject: Save the Clay!!

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To Whom it May Concern

I love the Clay Theater and I hope you can help them stay a theater and remain as awesome (or more awesome!) as they were pre-COVID!!

Please make that theater a landmark or whatever else you can do to ensure those projectors throw light across that room for as long as movie are available to show!!

Thank you for your time,
Caroline Hatch-Berens
94117

From: [CPC-Commissions Secretary](#)
Cc: [LaValley, Pilar \(CPC\)](#); [Feliciano, Josephine \(CPC\)](#)
Subject: FW: Support of landmarking the Clay theater
Date: Tuesday, January 18, 2022 12:16:26 PM

Commission Affairs

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From: Grant Villeneuve <grant@villeneuveproperties.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 18, 2022 11:15 AM
To: CPC-Commissions Secretary <commissions.secretary@sfgov.org>
Subject: Support of landmarking the Clay theater

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Hi There,

This message is intended to demonstrate my support of preserving and landmarking the Clay Theater.

--

Regards,

Grant Villeneuve
650 906 0192
VilleneuveProperties.com
DRE: 02001330

From: [CPC-Commissions Secretary](#)
Cc: [LaValley, Pilar \(CPC\)](#); [Feliciano, Josephine \(CPC\)](#)
Subject: FW: The Clay Theater
Date: Wednesday, January 19, 2022 8:04:00 AM

Commission Affairs
San Francisco Planning
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-----Original Message-----

From: Bruce Bennett <condimentarian@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 18, 2022 4:29 PM
To: CPC-Commissions Secretary <commissions.secretary@sfgov.org>
Subject: The Clay Theater

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Hello

I have been going to the Clay Theater for decades back to the 1980s. I fully support making this theater a landmark building not only for the films it has shown but also as a cultural icon that once stood from Midnight Movies like the Rocky Horror Show to Peaches Christ events that were held there.

Thank you.

Bruce Bennett
Glen Park SF Resident

Sent from my iPhone

From: [CPC-Commissions Secretary](#)
Cc: [LaValley, Pilar \(CPC\)](#); [Feliciano, Josephine \(CPC\)](#)
Subject: FW: The Clay
Date: Wednesday, January 19, 2022 8:04:30 AM

Commission Affairs
San Francisco Planning
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-----Original Message-----

From: Julie Jeremy <juliejrmy@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 18, 2022 3:45 PM
To: CPC-Commissions Secretary <commissions.secretary@sfgov.org>
Subject: The Clay

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San Francisco is a beautiful unique treasure of a city because we don't have malls, fast food and bad architecture. But most of all, we have unique business districts - it is our own Disneyland. We have Japantown, Chinatown, Northbeach, Soma, Nopa, Mission, Dogpatch . .

Our neighborhoods define our city. AKA - THE CLAY THEATER - We have to keep these buildings and their integrity to keep our city unique and charming and special.

Just think if Winterland was still up and not that horrible apt building! That corner is now an eyesore!

Keep the CLAY!

Julie K
c. (415)310-2800
e. juliejrmy@gmail.com

Busy trying to make the world better . .

From: [John Grauel](#)
To: [LaValley, Pilar \(CPC\)](#)
Subject: The Clay, Record No. 2021-009311DES
Date: Thursday, January 06, 2022 5:09:24 PM
Attachments: [The Clay Record No. 2021-009311DES.msg](#)

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