

**ADDRESS: 1618-22 CHESTNUT ST**

Proposal: Paint building, add rooftop structure, windows and signage, rehabilitate storefront

Review Requested: Final Approval

Owner: Gazit Horizons LLC

Applicant: Luca Segato, Eimer Design

History: 1933; WCAU Building; Harry Sternfeld, architect

Individual Designation: 8/6/1981

District Designation: None

Staff Contact: Randal Baron, [randal.baron@phila.gov](mailto:randal.baron@phila.gov)

**BACKGROUND:**

This application proposes to renovate a 10-story Art-Deco style building with office space in the upper floors and retail space at the ground floor. It proposes to construct one-story rooftop structure and pergola on a lower portion of the building, behind the taller front portion of the building. It proposes to cut new window openings and install windows in the side facades, continuing the existing window pattern and replicating the existing window type. The application proposes to restore the entrance area at the western edge of the storefront and replace non-historic doors. The application proposes to paint the façade of the building. Historically, the building was faced with random, small blue glass chips set in a stucco-like bed. From a photograph included in the application, it appears that about 30% of the façade surface was blue glass and 70% gray stucco. At some point before the designation, the façade was stuccoed, obscuring the blue glass chips in a coating of smooth stucco. At that time or later, the new stucco surface was painted blue as an homage to the hidden blue glass chips. The application proposes to paint the façade a grey-white color. The application proposes to add signage on the side facades and on a tower at the peak of the front façade. The building originally had a light mast at the peak of the front façade. Most of the mast was removed before designation. This application proposes to add signage to the truncated light mast. The application also proposes interior work, which is not within the jurisdiction of the Historical Commission.

**SCOPE OF WORK:**

- Construct one-story rooftop structure and pergola.
- Cut new window openings and install windows.
- Restore entrance and replace doors.
- Paint façade.
- Add signage.

**STANDARDS FOR REVIEW:**

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and Guidelines include:

- *Standard 6: Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture, and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.*
  - Standard 6 requires that the replacement element match the historic color. The blue color, first from the glass chips and now from the painted stucco, is arguably its most distinctive feature.

- The restoration of the blue glass door surround and the new doors comply with Standard 6.
- *Standard 9: New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.*
  - The proposed new doors, windows and penthouse/ pergola are compatible with the buildings materials, massing, size, scale and proportion.
  - The change in color for the building from its original blue to gray-white would remove a character-defining feature of this building and one of its primary Art Deco characteristics. However, the impact of the change in color is mitigated by the fact that the building has been stuccoed. Moreover, the original background material, the stucco bed of the blue glass, was grey.
  - The proposed signage on the side facades is extremely large and not in character with the building.
  - The WCAU sign on the truncated light mast creates a false sense of history.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** Approval of all aspects of the application except the signage and paint, with the staff to review details, pursuant to Standard 6 and 9.

## **COVER LETTER**

To: The Philadelphia Historical Commission  
1515 Arch Street, 13<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Philadelphia, PA 19102  
Attn. of Randal Baron, Historic Preservation Planner III

From: Luca Segato, Eimer Design

Date: May 5, 2020

Re: **Façade & Lobby Alterations at 1618-22 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103**

Dear Mr. Baron,

Following our phone conversation, Eimer Design respectfully requests to present the above referenced project to the Historical Commission Architectural Committee on the WebEx meeting scheduled for Tuesday, May 26, 2020.

As discussed, the project consists of façade and lobby alterations as part of a comprehensive renovation/rehabilitation of the building located at 1618-22 Chestnut Street, known as WCAU Building, and occupied by the Art Institute of Philadelphia from the early 1980s to recent years.

The building, listed in the National Register of Historic Places (with designation date 1/27/1983, ref# 83002281), has been recently acquired by Gazit Horizons LLC with the goal of reactivating the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> vacant floors with office/co-working space, amenities and roof deck, and maintaining the lower floors as retail space (currently occupied by Old Navy).

The permit application for the demolition of existing interior non-load bearing partitions of floors 3<sup>rd</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> is currently being reviewed by L&I (Appl #1057526), with the required approval already obtained from the PHC's Staff.

The proposed design for the lobby, main façade, side elevations and rooftop is illustrated in the attached submission package, with the following table of contents:

- Pages 1 & 2: General Info and photos of the Building and neighboring context.
- Pages 3 to 5: Historic pictures and documents, from PHC archive and other sources as noted.
- Pages 6 & 7: Pictures of current conditions with callouts of original / and modified features.
- Pages 8 & 9: Proposed exterior demolition work.
- Pages 10 to 14: Proposed exterior new work – Renderings and elevations with scope description, and materials/finishes information.
- Page 15: Proposed new work at 9<sup>th</sup> floor / roof level.
- Page 16: Lobby existing conditions - Plan and images.
- Page 17: Lobby proposed demolition work.
- Pages 18 & 19: Lobby proposed new work – Plan and elevations with scope description, and materials/finishes information.

The proposed intervention to the main façade aims to preserve and highlight the bolder traits of the WCAU building, characterized by a unique mix of Art Deco and Modernist features.

We believe that the best approach to achieve this goal would be to introduce a lighter color (similar to the color of the building in the period between the 1950s to the early 80s – see page 4 of the submission package), that would act as a neutral “canvas” for the brushed steel and bronze ornaments, the center glass tower, and the simple but distinctive fenestration.

To further highlight and visually enhance these elements, a dark blue accent color is proposed as backdrop in the recessed wall at metal ornaments, around the opening framing the glass tower, at the decorative “dashed” paint pattern flanking the core of the façade on the west side, and to underline the cornices at the stepped articulation of the higher portion of the façade.

The street level facing Chestnut St. is treated as a “pedestal”, visually supporting the lighter tones of the façade above, through the darker color palette of the existing granite and the proposed accent blue paint color, while the main entrance to

the lobby becomes the opportunity to showcase the original blue glass aggregate “stucco” finish surface, currently concealed underneath the current paint finished cementitious coating (see page 7).

Based on the review of historic documents, it appears that an attempt to restore the glass aggregate throughout the facade was considered in the early 80s, however the original surface was found to be damaged by cracking and spalling. Hence, new cementitious patches were applied, with the result of an uneven appearance, which then led to the application of a new coating, painted blue.

For these reasons, attempting to restore the original finish would not only be cost prohibitive, but almost certainly would not achieve an acceptable result, and therefore the proposed restoration is limited to the wall around the main entrance, as a subtle gesture of tribute to the original appearance of the building.

Custom aluminum/glass doors are proposed as replacement of the existing standard commercial storefront doors, for a more elevated architectural quality of the lobby entrance, while to reinforce the building identity (WCAU), and to clearly display building address info, brushed metal signs are planned above the access points.

Lastly, a reinterpretation of the WCAU sign that was part of the original top portion of the tower (see pages 3 & 4) demolished during the 1970s, is contemplated above the remainder of the tower as iconic presence to re-establish and the presence of the building in the city skyline.

For the side and back elevations, the design shows several new openings that provide a more rationalized appearance to existing irregular window pattern and bring as much natural light as feasible to the tenant space on floors 3<sup>rd</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup>.

The activation of the rooftop level is supported by an overbuild for the extension of the existing exit stair tower and new toilet rooms on the West side, and a pergola on the East side, both with minimal visibility from the street level (see pages 13-15).

All the original elements of the Lobby are preserved, except for the terrazzo floor, in poor conditions and already altered in the recent past. A new brighter floor is shown to counterbalance the heavy presence and dark tone of the wall marble panels, with Art Deco inspired accessories and accents to tie together the aesthetic experience of the building.

It is understood that final material and paint color specifications, storefront and new windows design, etc., will be detailed and finalized via PHC approval of samples/field mockups, shop drawings during the permit/construction phase of the project, and that further reviews and approvals from L&I, and Art Commission will be required for the proposed new windows, overbuild, and signage described above and shown in the attached design package.

Please let me know if anything else is needed.

**Point of contact for this application:**

Luca Segato  
Eimer Design  
109 South 13<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 111-A  
Philadelphia, PA 19107 (\*)  
**Cell: 267-530-5651**  
**Email: [luca@eimer-design.com](mailto:luca@eimer-design.com)**

**Building Property Owner Info:**

Gazit Horizons (Chestnut Street) LLC  
1696 NE Miami Gardens Dr  
North Miami Beach, FL 33179

Thank you,



Luca Segato, Project Manager, Eimer Design

**NOTE:** ALL PHOTOS TAKEN BETWEEN NOVEMBER 2019 - MARCH, 2020



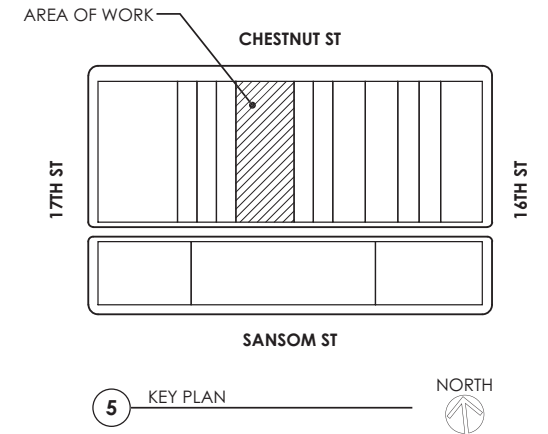
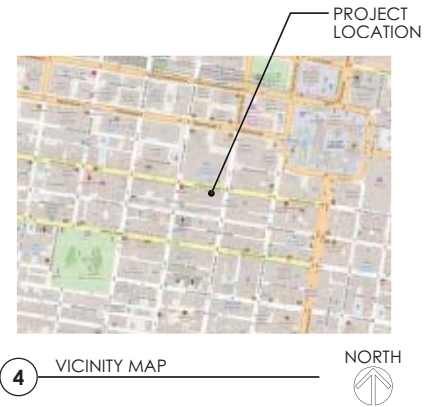
1 1618-22 CHESNUT ST



2 EXISTING FACADE, UPPER LEVELS



3 EXISTING FACADE, STREET LEVEL



**PROPERTY ADDRESS:**  
1618-22 CHESTNUT ST  
**BASE ZONING DISTRICT:**  
CMX-5  
**OVERLAY DISTRICT:**  
CENTER CITY  
**HISTORICAL RELEVANCE:**  
PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
DESIGNATION DATE 01/27/1983  
**HISTORIC DISTRICTS:**  
N/A





1 1618-22 CHESTNUT ST LOOKING SOUTHWEST



3 NEIGHBORING LOT, EAST



5 CHESTNUT ST LOOKING WEST



2 1618-22 CHESTNUT ST LOOKING SOUTHEAST

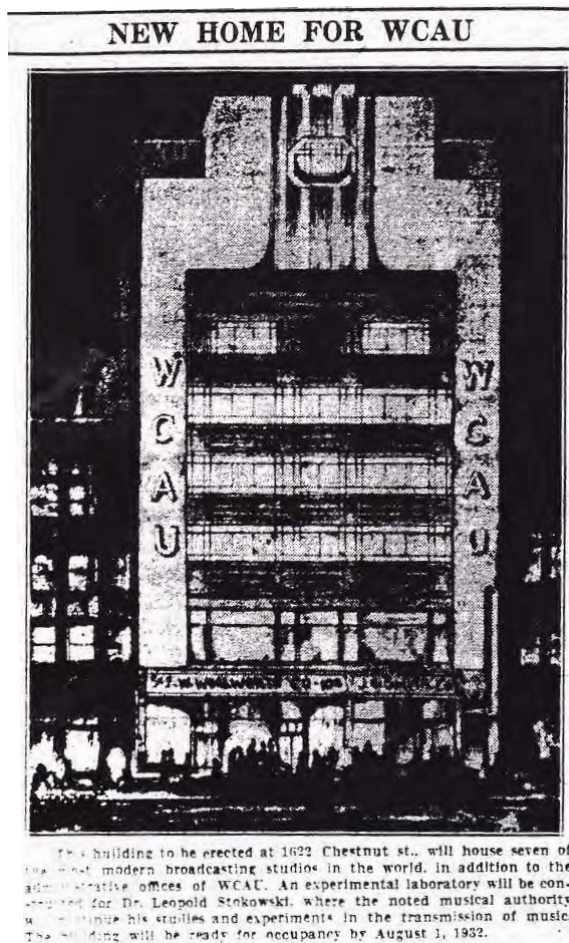


4 NEIGHBORING LOT, WEST

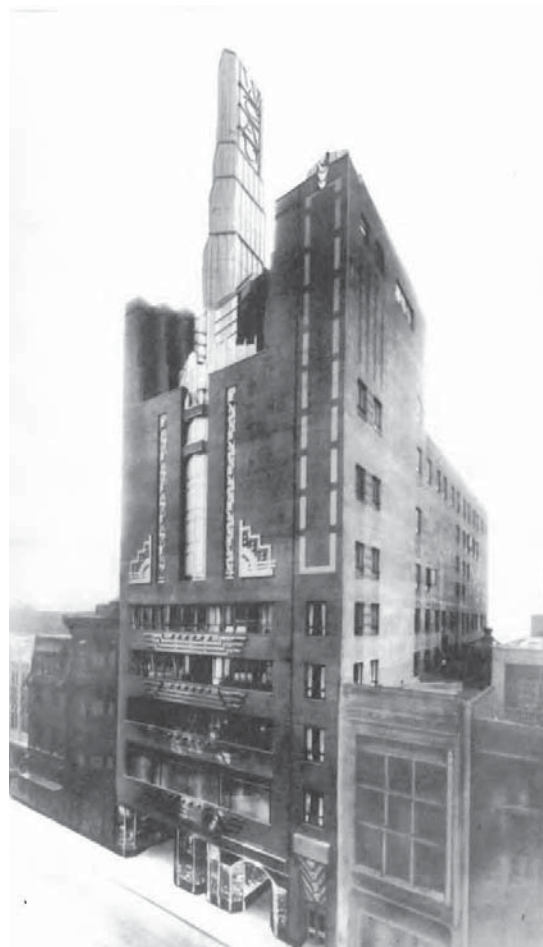


6 CHESTNUT ST LOOKING EAST





Rendering - Philadelphia Record Magazine - 1931  
[Author UNKNOWN | Source: Web]



Historic photo (with touched up surrounding) - 1930s  
[Author UNKNOWN | Source: PHC Files]



View from Chestnut Street looking South-East - 1940s ?  
[Author UNKNOWN | Source: Web]



View from Chestnut Street looking South-West - **1950s**  
[Author UNKNOWN | Source: PHC Files]

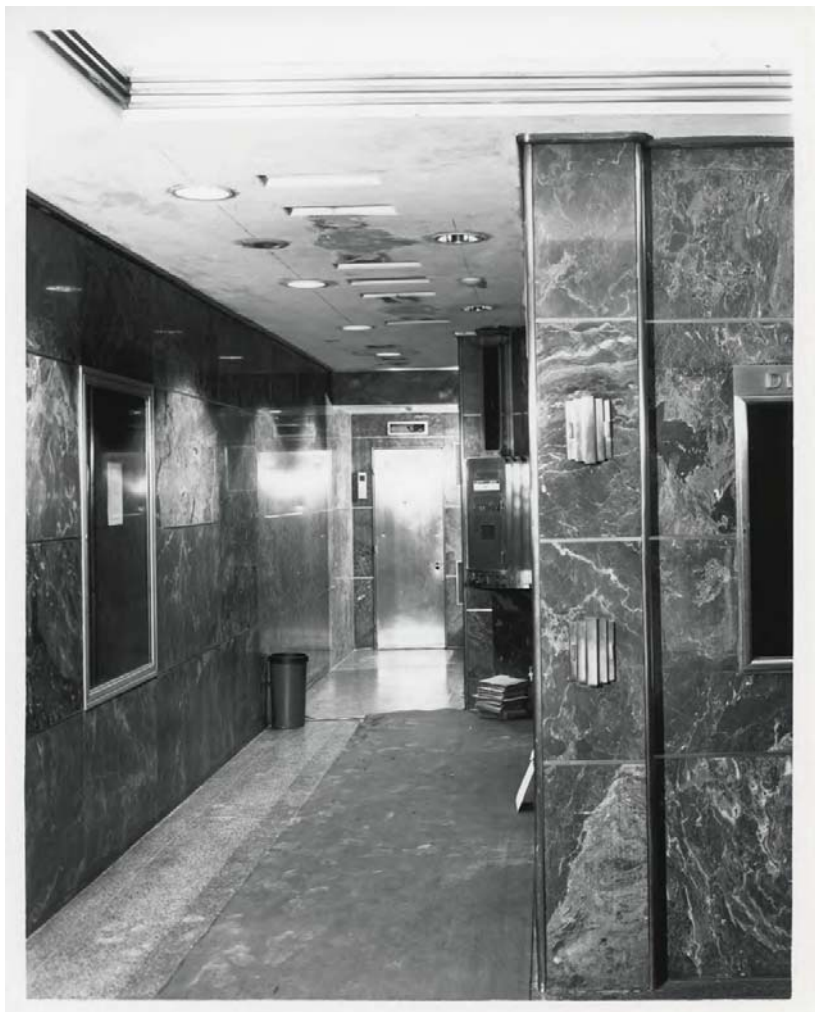


Main Facade, upper levels - **1981**  
[Author G.E. THOMAS PHOTOGRAPHER | Source: PHC Files]



Main Facade, street level - **Early 1980s**  
[Author UNKNOWN | Source: PHC Files]





Entrance Lobby, looking South - 1981  
 [Author G.E. THOMAS PHOTOGRAPHER | Source: PHC Files]



Entrance Lobby, looking South - Detail of mailbox & elevator door - 1981  
 [Author G.E. THOMAS PHOTOGRAPHER | Source: PHC Files]

ORIGINAL GLASS/METAL  
RADIO TOWER, SHORTENED  
DURING THE 1970s



ORIGINAL ACCENT PAINT AT CIRCULATION  
TOWER AND AT WEST ELEVATION BETWEEN  
OPENINGS

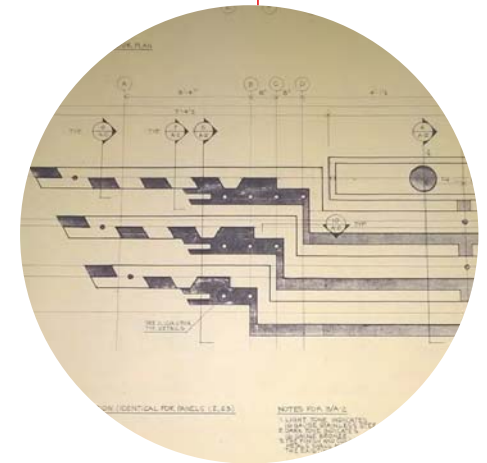


ORIGINAL STEEL AND BRONZE ORNAMENTS



**LEFT:** STEEL AND BRONZE SPANDREL PANELS  
INSTALLED IN THE EARLY-MID 80S TO REPLICATE ORIGINAL DESIGN

**RIGHT:** PHOTO OF EARLY 80S DRAWINGS DOCUMENTING SPANDREL DESIGN  
(SOURCE: OWNER ARCHIVE)





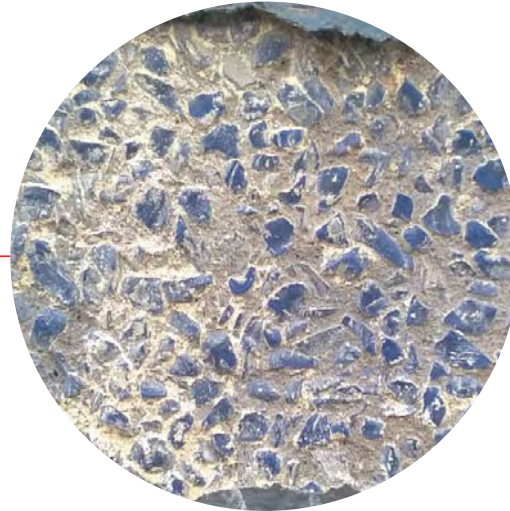


NON ORIGINAL GRANITE WALL  
& ALUMINUM ORNAMENTAL  
PATTERN AT STOREFRONT, TYP

NON ORIGINAL STOREFRONT  
DOOR SYSTEM, TYP

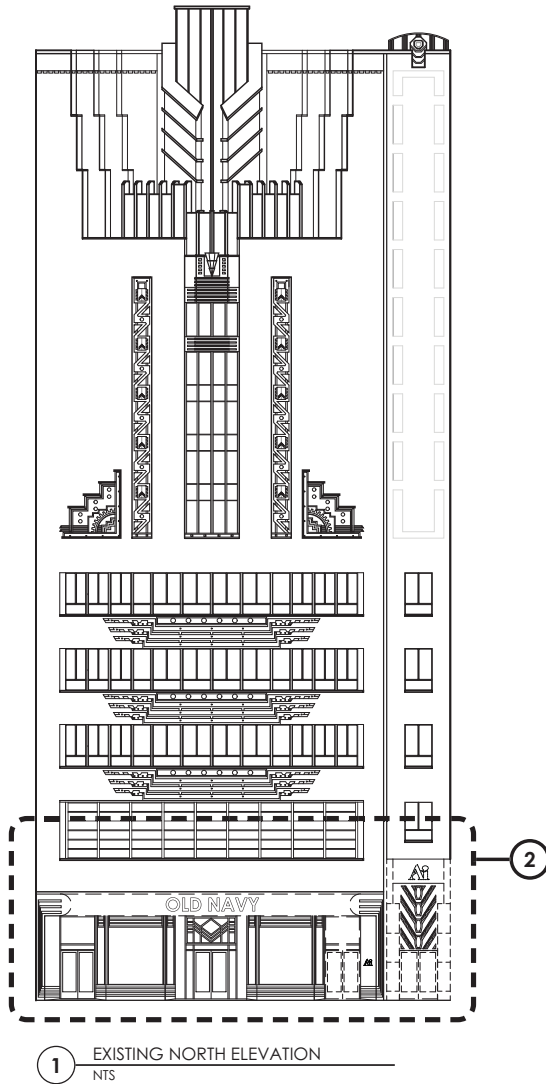


DETAIL OF ORIGINAL  
CARVED STONE ABOVE  
MAIN ENTRANCE



ORIGINAL BLUE GLASS CHIP  
STUCCO FINISH, VISIBLE AT  
STREET LEVEL



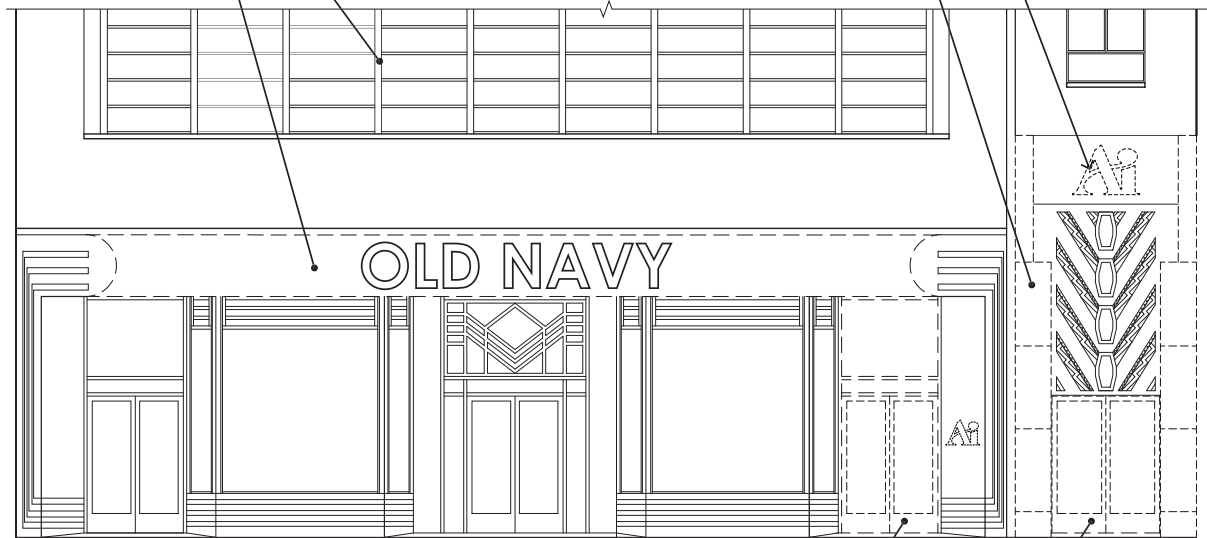


EXISTING WINDOW ASSEMBLY TO  
REMAIN, TYP

EXISTING NON-ORIGINAL METAL  
CLADDING TO BE REMOVED

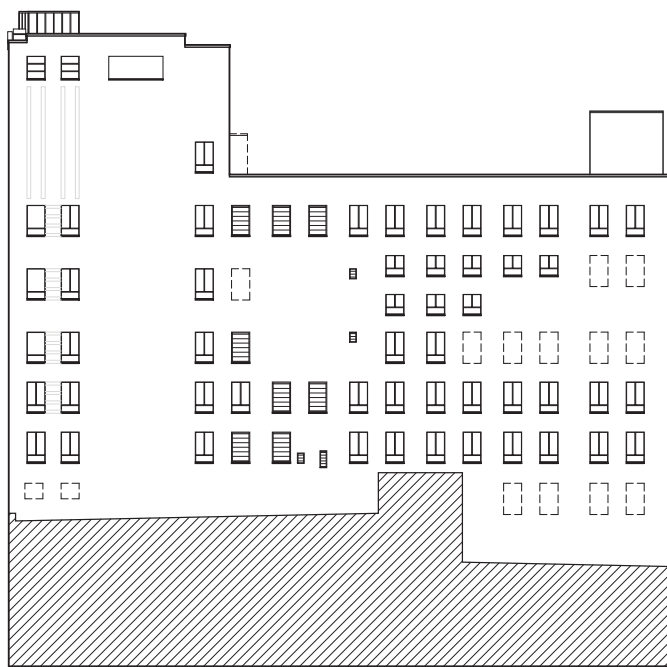
EXISTING ART INSTITUTE SIGNAGE TO BE  
REMOVED, TYP

EXISTING PAINT FINISH AT LOBBY EN-  
TRANCE TO BE REMOVED TO EXPOSE  
ORIGINAL WALL FINISH (REF PICTURE ON  
PAGE 7)

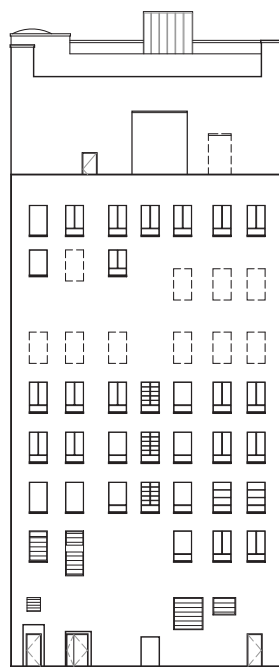


2 ENLARGED ELEVATION @ NORTH ENTRANCE  
NTS

EXISTING NON-ORIGINAL ALUMINUM  
& GLASS STOREFRONT DOORS TO BE  
REMOVED

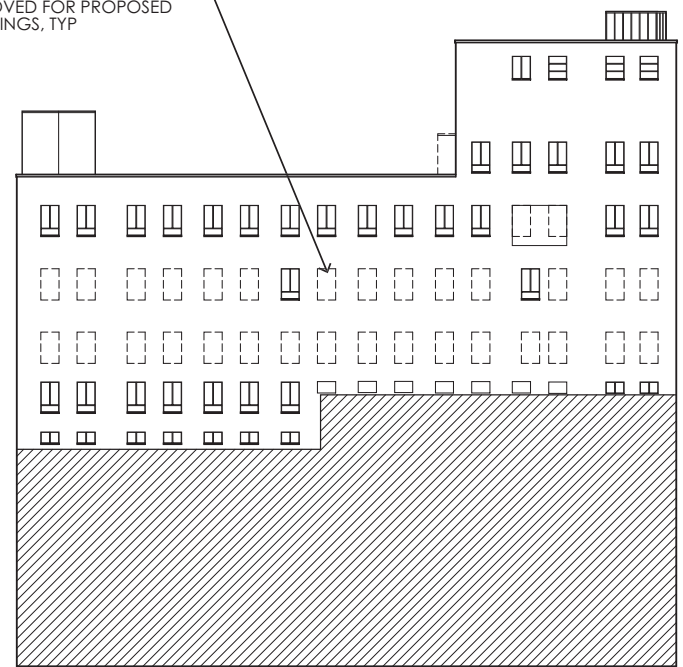


1 EXISTING WEST ELEVATION  
NTS

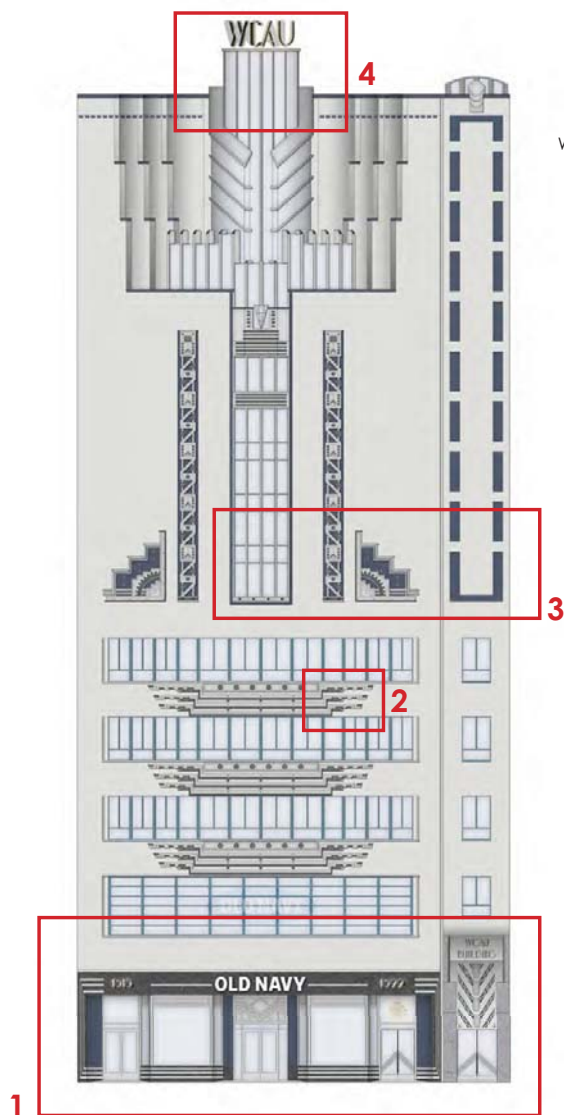


2 EXISTING SOUTH ELEVATION  
NTS

DASHED LINES INDICATE  
PORTIONS OF WALL TO BE  
REMOVED FOR PROPOSED  
OPENINGS, TYP



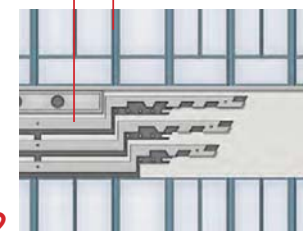
3 EXISTING EAST ELEVATION  
NTS



REFINISH EXISTING  
WINDOWS, COLOR TO  
MATCH EXISTING

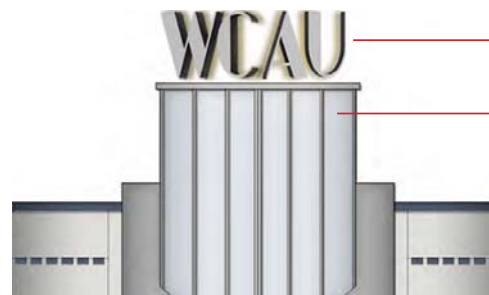
EXISTING METAL  
ORNAMENT, NO  
SCOPE TYP.

2



PROPOSED RETAIL  
BUILDING ADDRESS

4



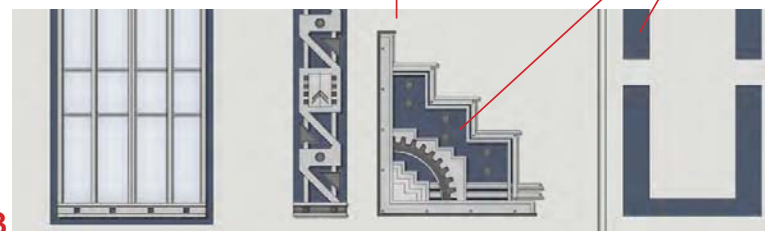
PROPOSED  
ILLUMINATED SIGN

EXISTING METAL/  
GLASS TOWER, NO  
EXTERIOR SCOPE

PROPOSED GENERAL  
PAINT (SEE NEXT PAGE  
FOR COLOR INFO)

PROPOSED ACCENT  
PAINT (SEE NEXT PAGE  
FOR COLOR INFO)

3



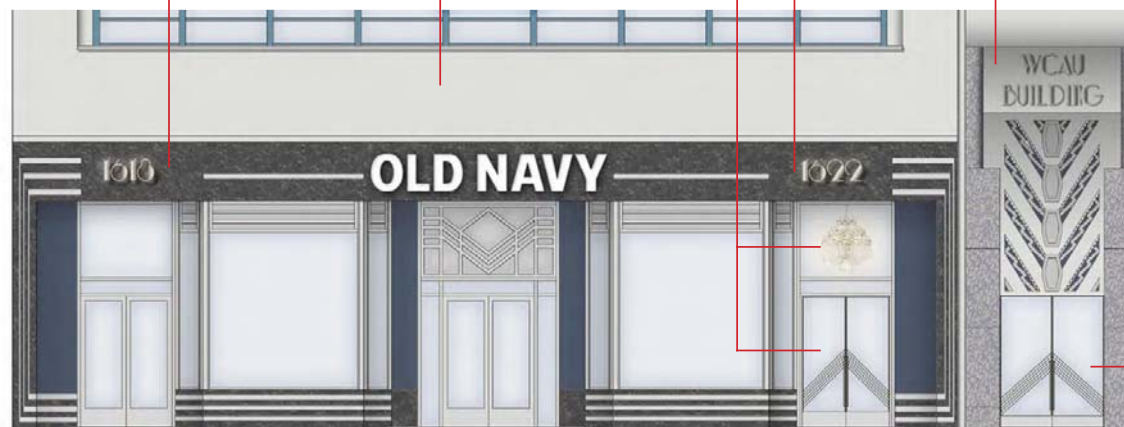
PROPOSED  
GENERAL PAINT  
(SEE NEXT PAGE  
FOR COLOR INFO)

PROPOSED CUSTOM  
ALUMINUM/GLASS STOREFRONT  
DOOR & TRANSOM, AND LIGHT  
FIXTURE AT VESTIBULE

PROPOSED LOBBY  
BUILDING ADDRESS

PROPOSED LOBBY  
BUILDING SIGNAGE

1



EXPOSED  
EXISTING  
ORIGINAL  
STUCCO  
FINISH (SEE  
PIC, PAGE 7)

PROPOSED  
CUSTOM  
ALUMINUM/GLASS  
STOREFRONT  
DOOR



REFINISHED EXISTING  
METAL WINDOWS,  
COLOR TO MATCH  
EXISTING



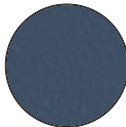
EXISTING STAINLESS  
STEEL/BRONZE  
ORNAMENTAL  
SPANDREL PANELS



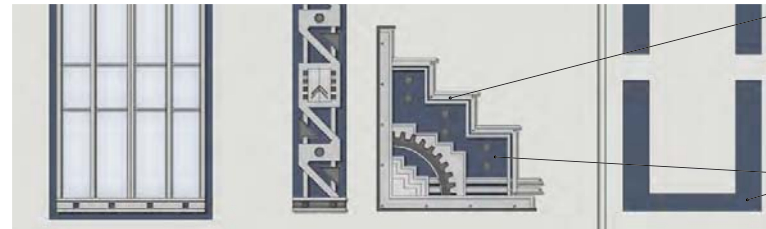
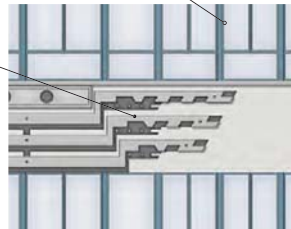
PROPOSED GENERAL  
PAINT (COLOR  
REFERENCE RAL 9002  
"GRAY-WHITE" /  
PANTONE 427 C)  
(FOR COLOR INTENT ONLY. FINAL  
COLOR SPECS TO BE APPROVED BY  
PHC VIA PHYSICAL SAMPLE AND FIELD  
MOCKUP REVIEW.)



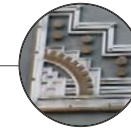
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COLOR SPECS TO BE APPROVED BY  
PHC VIA PHYSICAL SAMPLE AND FIELD  
MOCKUP REVIEW.)



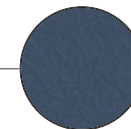
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GRANITE CLADDING



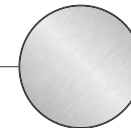
PROPOSED  
ILLUMINATED SIGN



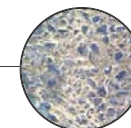
EXISTING STAINLESS  
STEEL/BRONZE  
ORNAMENTAL  
SPANDREL PANELS



PROPOSED GENERAL  
PAINT (COLOR  
REFERENCE RAL 5013  
"COBALT BLUE" /  
PANTONE 534 C)  
(FOR COLOR INTENT ONLY. FINAL  
COLOR SPECS TO BE APPROVED  
BY PHC VIA PHYSICAL SAMPLE  
AND FIELD MOCKUP REVIEW.)



PROPOSED BRUSHED  
ALUMINUM BUILDING  
SIGNAGE



EXPOSE EXISTING  
ORIGINAL STUCCO FINISH.  
(SEE PIC, PAGE 7)

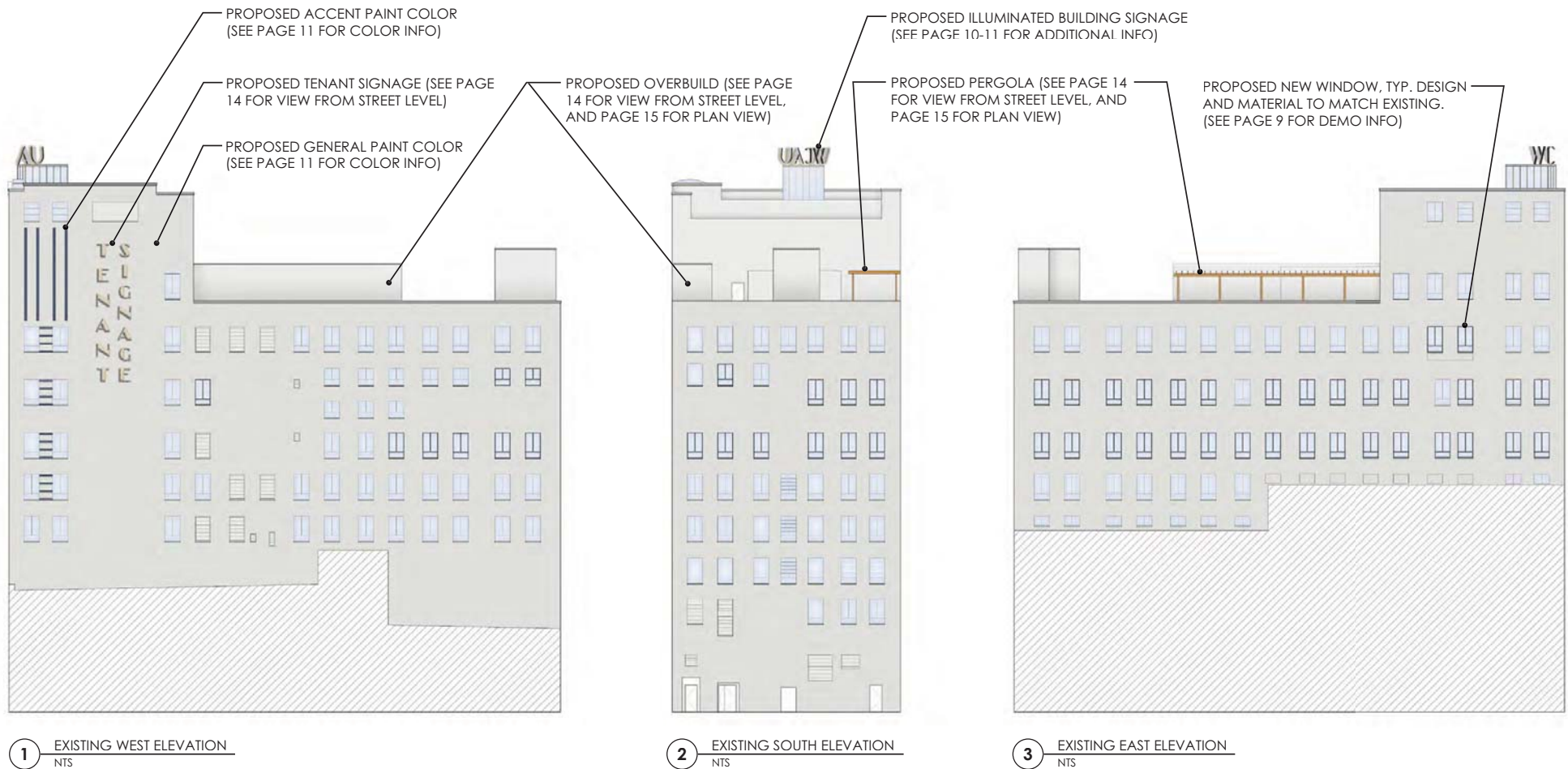


PROPOSED CUSTOM  
ALUMINUM/GLASS  
STOREFRONT DOOR



ORIGINAL IMAGE FROM PEARL PROPERTIES WEBSITE. DIGITALLY MODIFIED TO ILLUSTRATE PROPOSED FACADE COLOR INTENT.















1. VESTIBULE DOORS WITH MARBLE CLADDING



2. ORIGINAL MARBLE CLADDING WITH METAL STRIPS



3. METAL PANEL WALL CLADDING FLUSH WITH ADJACENT ORIGINAL MARBLE PANELS BELOW



4. COVE CEILING DETAIL



5. TERRAZZO FLOOR PATTERN WITH BRASS TRANSITION STRIPS



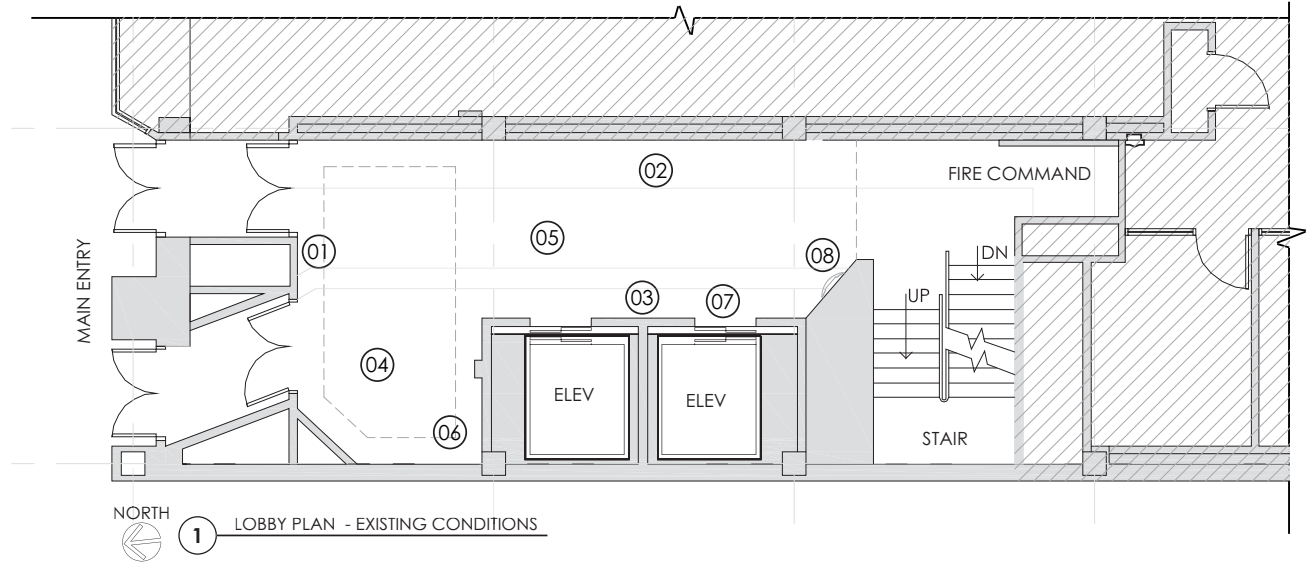
6. DIRECTORY SIGNAGE



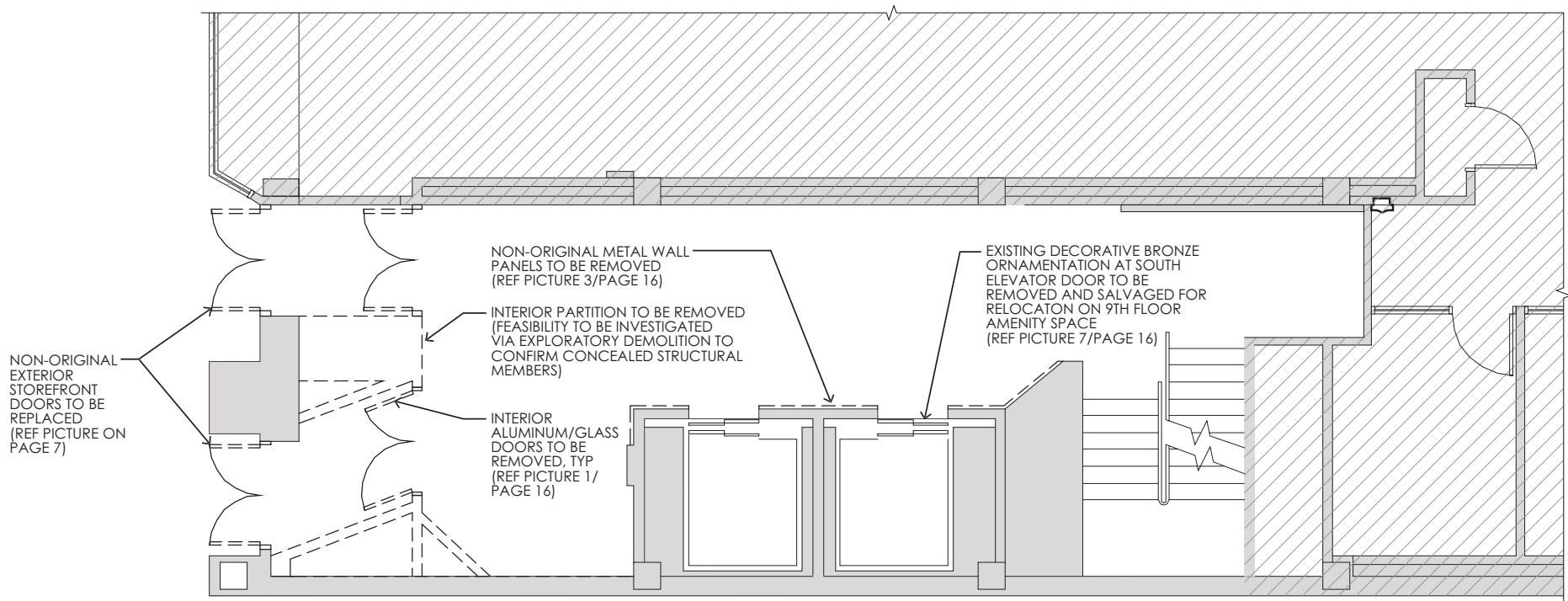
7. ORIGINAL ELEVATOR DOOR EMBELLISHMENT.



8. ORIGINAL LETTERBOX







1 LOBBY PLAN - PROPOSED DEMO

