

ADDRESS: 1172-74 S BROAD ST

Name of Resource: Davis Auto Sales headquarters

Proposed Action: Designation

Property Owner: Filippone-Newman LLC

Nominator: Philadelphia Historical Commission

Staff Contact: Kim Chantry, kim.chantry@phila.gov

OVERVIEW: This nomination proposes to designate the property at 1172-74 S. Broad Street as historic and list it on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The nomination contends that the former Davis Auto Sales headquarters satisfies Criteria for Designation C and D. Under Criterion C, the nomination argues that the former auto sales and service shop, which opened in 1938, reflects the environment in an era when Art Deco design was embraced by architects and developers for small-scale but visually distinctive commercial buildings in neighborhoods across the city. Under Criterion D, the nomination contends that in both its form and details, the building embodies character-defining features of the Art Deco style as applied to low-rise commercial construction.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: The staff recommends that the nomination demonstrates that the property at 1172-74 S. Broad Street satisfies Criteria for Designation C and D, and should be designated as historic and listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.



NOMINATION OF HISTORIC BUILDING, STRUCTURE, SITE, OR OBJECT

PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

SUBMIT ALL ATTACHED MATERIALS ON PAPER AND IN ELECTRONIC FORM (CD, EMAIL, FLASH DRIVE)
ELECTRONIC FILES MUST BE WORD OR WORD COMPATIBLE

1. ADDRESS OF HISTORIC RESOURCE *(must comply with an Office of Property Assessment address)*

Street address: 1172-74 S BROAD ST

Postal code: 19146

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: Davis Auto Sales headquarters

Current/Common Name: 1172-74 South Broad Street

3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

☒ Building

☐ Structure

☐ Site

☐ Object

4. PROPERTY INFORMATION

Condition: ☐ excellent ☒ good ☐ fair ☐ poor ☐ ruins

Occupancy: ☒ occupied ☐ vacant ☐ under construction ☐ unknown

Current use: Medical care office

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Please attach a narrative description and site/plot plan of the resource's boundaries.

6. DESCRIPTION

Please attach a narrative description and photographs of the resource's physical appearance, site, setting, and surroundings.

7. SIGNIFICANCE

Please attach a narrative Statement of Significance citing the Criteria for Designation the resource satisfies.

Period of Significance (from year to year): from 1937 to 1938

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: 1937-38

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: Isadore W. Levin, architect

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: Philip Litman, builder

Original owner: Rachmel Davis

Other significant persons: _____

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION:

The historic resource satisfies the following criteria for designation (check all that apply):

- ☐ (a) Has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past; or,
- ☐ (b) Is associated with an event of importance to the history of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- ☒ (c) Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style; or,
- ☒ (d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen; or,
- ☐ (e) Is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- ☐ (f) Contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represent a significant innovation; or,
- ☐ (g) Is part of or related to a square, park or other distinctive area which should be preserved according to an historic, cultural or architectural motif; or,
- ☐ (h) Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City; or,
- ☐ (i) Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in pre-history or history; or
- ☐ (j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

8. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Please attach a bibliography.

9. NOMINATOR

Organization Philadelphia Historical Commission Date 14 December 2022

Name with Title Kim Chantry, Historic Preservation Planner Email kim.chantry@phila.gov

Street Address 1515 Arch St., 13th Fl. Telephone 215-686-7660

City, State, and Postal Code Philadelphia, PA 19102

Nominator ☐ is ☒ is not the property owner.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt: 14 December 2022

☒ Correct-Complete ☐ Incorrect-Incomplete Date: 14 December 2022

Date of Notice Issuance: 15 December 2022

Property Owner at Time of Notice:

Name: FILIPPONE-NEWMAN LLC

Address: 2228 S Broad St

City: Philadelphia State: PA Postal Code: 19145

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: _____

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: _____

Date of Final Action: _____

☐ Designated ☐ Rejected

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION



Beginning at the Northwest corner of South Broad Street and Federal Street, thence extending West along the Northerly side of Federal Street 220 feet to Carlisle Street, thence extending North approximately 46 feet to a point, thence extending East 220 feet to a point, thence extending South along South Broad Street 55.5 feet to the place of beginning. Being 1172-74 South Broad Street.

6. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The former auto sales and service building at 1172-74 South Broad Street is a one-story steel-framed, precast concrete panel-clad brick commercial building. The building occupies the full width and depth of a corner lot on the northwest corner of South Broad Street and Federal Street in South Philadelphia. It has primary elevations fronting both South Broad Street (east) and Federal Street (south), with an angled main entrance at the corner. The rear (west) elevation faces a dead-end service alley known as Carlisle Street, and the north elevation is mostly not visible, as it connects to the buildings at 1170 South Broad Street. The building is flat-roofed.



Figure 1. 1172-74 South Broad Street, December 2022.

Historically, the first third of the building with the main entrance at the corner was the showroom. The remaining two-thirds of the building's length, for which the level of ornamentation is greatly reduced, was the service department.¹ This description will use "showroom" and "service department" to differentiate between the two sections of the building.

The building's primary exterior walls are brick; however, this brick is currently only exposed on the rear elevation (Figure 6). The front showroom section of the building features a higher level of ornamentation, with the exterior walls clad with precast concrete "cast stone" panels which are painted beige. The service department elevation along Federal Street is clad in stucco over brick, also painted

¹ Application for Zoning Permit and/or Use Registration Permit, Application No. 27825 for 1172-74 So. Broad Street, December 1, 1937.

beige. The primary elevations are composed of a series of repeating single-story bays that flank the angled corner entrance: two along South Broad Street and eleven along Federal Street, the first three of which feature decorative deco-inspired piers painted blue which pierce the roofline and are replicated on the South Broad Street elevation, encompassing the showroom portion of the building.

South Broad Street (east) elevation



Figure 2. South Broad Street (east) elevation, December 2022.

The South Broad Street (east) elevation features large storefront windows in each bay set between dividing piers (Figure 2). The roofline between piers is currently capped, but historically featured a crenulated design seen in images as recent as 2007 (Figure 9). The space between the tops of the display windows and the top of the wall is filled by painted precast concrete panels and later star bolts. Centered within each wall panel is a single ornamental medallion which appears to be of the same material as the precast concrete panels (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Medallion ornamentation with modern light fixture installed, above storefront windows on South Broad Street elevation, December 2022.

Federal Street (south) elevation: Showroom



Figure 4. Federal Street (south) elevation showing the showroom section of the building, December 2022.

The showroom section of the Federal Street (south) elevation is similar to that of the South Broad Street elevation (Figure 4). It features three bays divided by deco-inspired piers. Only the first bay contains large storefront windows like those on the South Broad Street elevation. The remaining two bays once contained storefront windows but have since been infilled (Figure 17). The roofline between piers is currently capped, but historically featured a crenulated design seen in images as recent as 2007 (Figure 9). The space between the tops of the display windows and the top of the wall is filled by painted precast concrete panels and later star bolts. Centered within each wall panel is a single ornamental medallion which appears to be of the same material as the precast concrete panels.

Federal Street (south) elevation: Service Department



Figure 5. Service department section of the Federal Street elevation, December 2022.

The service department section of the Federal Street (south) elevation is more utilitarian in design (Figure 5). Currently coated in stucco, 2007 imagery shows this section as exposed brick with a large vehicle entrance in one of the bays, and clear infill of other large bay openings (Figure 10). The eight bays on this section of the elevation are divided by pilasters. Modern window openings have been cut into three of the bays, and a modern entrance door has been added to the first bay of this section.

Rear (west) elevation



Figure 6. Rear (west) elevation, December 2022.

The rear (west) elevation which faces a dead-end service alley is three bays wide with painted brick pilasters and walls. This elevation has two doors into the building, and evidence of substantial infill of earlier window and door openings (Figure 6).



Figure 7. Main entrance to building at South Broad and Federal Streets, December 2022.



Figure 8. Close-up view of piers and texture of painted concrete "cast stone" panels, December 2022.



Figure 9. 2007 Google Street View image prior to alterations which capped over the crenellated roofline.

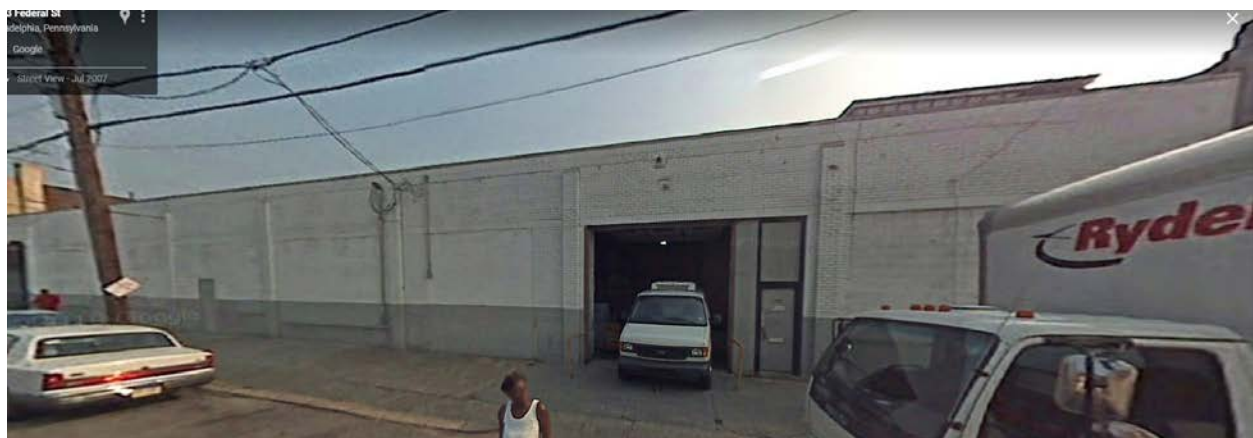


Figure 10. 2007 Google Street View image showing Federal Street elevation with original service station entrance. This opening was infilled c. 2008.

7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Introduction

The Art Deco commercial building at 1172-74 South Broad Street was designed by architect Isadore W. Levin in 1937-38.² Specifically designed as the headquarters of Davis Auto Sales, the building at 1172-74 South Broad Street is an architecturally distinctive example of the Art Deco style as applied to low-rise commercial construction. The building is historically significant and merits listing on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Pursuant to Section 14-1004(1) of the Philadelphia Code, the property satisfies Criteria for Designation C and D. The property:

(C) Reflects the environment in an era characterized by both the popularity of the Art Deco style and the proliferation of the automobile;

(D) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of the Art Deco architectural style.

Site and Building History

Prior to construction of the subject building, the properties at 1172 and 1174 South Broad Street were occupied by a residential building (1172) and a YMCA (1174) as depicted on an 1895 Philadelphia Atlas. The corner building at 1174 South Broad Street was then the Federal Trust Company and YMCA by the time of the 1910 Philadelphia Atlas. In October 1937, Rachmel Davis purchased the property at 1172 South Broad Street to consolidate with the property he already owned at 1174 South Broad Street.³ He immediately got to work taking bids for his automobile service station (Figure 11).⁴



Figure 11. (Left) *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 19, 1937, p. 24; (Right) *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 17, 1937, p. 88.

Rachmel Davis chose architect Isadore W. Levin to design his new service station headquarters, and the construction contract was awarded to Philip Litman (Figure 12 and Figure 13).⁵ A biography of Levin is

² *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, The Athenaeum of Philadelphia, December 15, 1937, p. 205.

³ *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 19, 1937, p. 24.

⁴ *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 17, 1937, p. 88.

⁵ *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, November 10, 1937, p. 165; *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, December 15, 1937, p. 205.

included as an appendix to this nomination. The new headquarters of Davis Auto Sales opened in May 1938 (Figure 14).⁶

avenue, Philadelphia. General alterations.
Sales and Service Building, northwest corner Broad and Federal streets, Philadelphia. Owner taking bids due as soon as possible. Architect, I. W. Levin, 1531 Belmont avenue, Philadelphia. Owners, Rachmel Davis, on premises. Brick, steel, concrete, 1 story building.

Figure 12. *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, November 10, 1937, p. 165.

Brick, concrete, 2 stories, 25 x 75 feet.
Show Room and Service Station, \$26,000, 1172-74 South Broad street, Philadelphia. Contract awarded Philip Litman, 5331 Arlington street, Philadelphia. Architect, I. W. Levin, 1531 Belmont avenue, Philadelphia. Owner, R. Davis, 1233 South Broad street, Philadelphia. Brick, 1 story, 55 x 220 feet.

Figure 13. *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, December 15, 1937, p. 205.

**Davis Auto Sales
In New Quarters**

The new headquarters of the Davis Auto Sales, Dodge and Plymouth dealers, at 1172-74 S. Broad st., corner Broad and Federal sts., were opened for inspection yesterday.

On hand to greet those invited for the occasion were R. Davis and Sons, and other members of the firm.

The new establishment is modernized at an estimated cost of \$100,000, and will handle repairs for all makes of cars.

The Davis Auto Sales moved from 1233 S. Broad st., where it was located for 23 years.

Figure 14. Newspaper announcement of the opening of Davis Auto Sales at 1172-74 South Broad Street. Source: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 8, 1938, p. 32.

⁶ *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 8, 1938, p. 32.



Figure 15. 1938 photograph of subway entrance immediately outside of the subject building, shortly after the opening of Davis Auto Sales. The signs in the window read "Coming Soon! America's New Luxury Liner – The New 1939 Dodge" and "This Year Plymouth's Got It." Source: City of Philadelphia, Department of Records.



Figure 16. 1938 photograph showing northwest corner of South Broad and Federal Streets, with Davis Auto Sales building behind subway entrance on right. Source: City of Philadelphia, Department of Records.



Figure 17. 1966 photograph showing the corner entrance with car inside the showroom, and the Federal Street elevation with more storefronts between piers where infill has since occurred. Source: City of Philadelphia, Department of Records.

Satisfaction of Criteria C and D

Criterion C: Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style; and

Criterion D: Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen.

The following sections on Art Deco are excerpted from the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places nomination of 1501-05 Fairmount Avenue, written by Benjamin Leech for the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia in 2014.

Art Deco in America, 1925-1940

In the United States in general and Philadelphia in particular, Art Deco was an architectural style popular primarily for commercial, institutional, and multiunit residential/hotel buildings roughly between the years 1925 and 1940. The style's adoption in America is generally traced back to the *Exposition*

Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes, the 1925 Parisian design fair that historian Bevis Hillier cited in coining the term “Art Deco” in 1968.⁷ While French inspiration was indeed prevalent in the American incarnation of the style, so too was the influence of Viennese Secessionism, German Expressionism, Italian Futurism, Beaux-Arts Classicism, and the domestic Arts and Crafts and Prairie School movements of the late nineteenth century. The style’s exotic undercurrents were further fueled by the discovery of King Tutankhamun’s tomb in 1922 and a corresponding interest in ancient Aztec and Mayan architecture.⁸

Evident in the diversity of sources cited above, the Art Deco movement in American architecture was a pluralistic, inventive and loosely defined strain of modernism that represented an alternative to both the historicist traditionalism of academic revival styles as well as the emerging austerity of Bauhaus functionalism. According to Richard Striner, “Art deco designs were in a middle range between polarized tendencies” and characterized by an “impulse to synthesize, to bridge antagonistic realms-- past and future, conservative and radical.”⁹ Art Deco developed into a widely disseminated commercial vernacular style that, alongside jazz and Hollywood in interwar America, represented a fertile union of imagination and imitation.

In a style inclusive of such diversity of forms and applications, the character-defining features of Art Deco elude easy definition. Broadly speaking, however, characteristic examples of the style typically exhibit sculpturally expressive massing, stepped or otherwise conspicuous rooflines, geometric and/or schematized figurative bas-relief ornament, and richly decorative fixtures and surfaces at the human scale (door pulls, window grilles, lighting fixtures, etc). A broad range of building types are characteristic of the Art Deco era, from high-rise office towers and monumental motion picture palaces to diminutive retail shopfronts. Past scholarship on the style has explored the “so-called zigzag/streamline dichotomy” of the Art Deco spectrum, contrasting the vertically-oriented, ziggurat-like forms epitomized by the Chrysler Building with the more horizontal, “moderne” expressions of Miami Beach hotels and their kin.¹⁰ Other sources add a third pole to this taxonomy, citing the stripped classical or “Greco Deco” style as a major strain in Art Deco design.¹¹

⁷ Bevis Hillier, *Art Deco of the 20s and 30s*. New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1968, 13.

⁸ Mark Gelertner, *A History of American Architecture: Buildings in their Cultural and Technological Context*. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999, p. 241.

⁹ Richard Striner, “Art Deco: Polemics and Synthesis,” *Winterthur Portfolio*, vol. 24, no. 1 (Spring 1990), pp. 21, 24.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 21.

¹¹ Robert D. Leighninger Jr., “Cultural Infrastructure: The Legacy of New Deal Public Space.” *Journal of Architectural Education*, Vol. 49, n. 4 (May 1996), p. 228.

Art Deco in Philadelphia

An overview of Art Deco buildings currently represented on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places presents a useful survey of the diversity of building types and stylistic variants that flourished in the city during this era. Office towers present perhaps the most conspicuous manifestations of Art Deco design in the city: Market Street National Bank (1930, Ritter & Shay, 1319-25 Market Street), the Sun Oil Building (1928-30, Tilden, Register & Pepper, 1608 Walnut Street), 1616 Walnut Street (1929, Tilden, Register & Pepper), the Ayer Building (1927-29, Ralph Bencker, 204-14 West Washington Square), Suburban Station (1930, Graham, Anderson, Probst & White, 1601-29 John F. Kennedy Blvd.), and the Beury Building (1926, William H. Lee, 3901 N. Broad Street) all embody Art Deco characteristics in both the stepped massing of their overall forms and in the details of their ornamental programs. Though not an office tower, the mid-rise but imposing Fidelity Mutual Life Insurance Building (1926-27, Zantzinger, Borie & Medary, 2501 Pennsylvania Avenue) is likewise one of the most significant Art Deco office buildings in the city by virtue of its distinctive terra cotta ornament.¹²

Closely related to office towers in form, high-rise Art Deco apartment and hotel structures are also represented on the Philadelphia Register. Perhaps the first “pure” Art Deco building in the city in terms of both massing and ornament was French architect Louis Jallade’s YMCA Armed Services tower of 1926 (111-23 N. 15th Street); McLanahan & Bencker’s Rittenhouse Plaza Apartments (1901 Walnut Street) of 1925-26 and Ritter & Shay’s Drake Hotel (1512-14 Spruce Street) of 1928 both applied historical revival details to Deco-inspired massing.

Government and institutional buildings also occupy a major share of the Art Deco landscape in Philadelphia, though often tempered by Classical or Colonial Revival leanings. The U.S. Custom House (1932-34, Ritter & Shay, 200 Chestnut Street) and Board of Education Building (1932, Irwin T. Catherine, 230-38 N. 21st Street) are both listed on the Philadelphia Register, though the equally notable 30th Street Post Office (1931, Rankin & Kellogg with Tilden, Register & Pepper, 2970 Market Street), Robert Nix Federal Building (1937, Ballinger Company and Harry Sternfeld, 900 Market Street), and a number of Catherine’s Art Deco public schools are not currently designated.

Less common in Philadelphia were Art Deco factories and warehouses, though both the Lasher Printing Company (1927, Philip S. Tyre, 1309 Noble Street) and the Terminal Commerce Building (1929, William Steele & Sons, 401 N. Broad Street) are both excellent examples of the style. Ecclesiastical commissions

¹² Significant office towers that are not listed on the Philadelphia Register include Paul Cret’s Integrity Trust Company Building (1929, 1530 Walnut Street) and the Architects Building (1930, 121 S. 17th Street).

were even more rare, but Our Lady of Loreto Church (1938, Petrillo & Neely, 6208 Grays Avenue) is a wonderfully idiosyncratic exception. Though later used as a church, the Levin Funeral Home (1933, Edwin Rothschild, 1512-16 N. Broad Street) is characteristic of the more common use of the style in funerary and memorial contexts.

In Philadelphia and elsewhere, the entertainment industry fueled the spread of Art Deco in the form of motion picture palaces, radio station buildings, and the like. Both the Boyd Theatre (1928, Hoffman Henon Company, 1910 Chestnut Street) and the Uptown Theater (1927-29, Magaziner, Eberhard & Harris, 2240-48 N. Broad Street) are major Art Deco landmarks in the city, as is the Sedgwick Theater (1928, William H. Lee, 7137 Germantown Avenue). Arguably the most exuberant Art Deco composition in Philadelphia, the WCAU Building (1931, Harry Sternfeld and Gabriel Roth) was the nation's first purpose-built radio headquarters at 1618-22 Chestnut Street. Ralph Bencker's WPEN Studio (1928, 2212-14 Walnut Street) is also a showcase of Art Deco design, albeit on a much smaller scale.

Many other small-scale Art Deco shopfronts and commercial blocks punctuate retail corridors across the city, a handful of which have been individually listed on the Philadelphia Register. Ralph Bencker's collaboration with the Horn & Hardart Company helped promulgate the Art Deco aesthetic throughout Philadelphia's neighborhoods via their popular chain of "Automat" cafeterias; Bencker's shopfront at 818 Chestnut Street (1930) is representative of this iconic partnership, and unfortunately one of the only examples in the city which survives with any degree of integrity. Frank E. Hahn's 1935 store and office for Raymond Pace Alexander at 1900 Chestnut is a characteristic example of a small-scale Art Deco corner building in a dense commercial setting (Figure 18).



Figure 18. Frank E. Hahn's 1935 store and office for Raymond Pace Alexander, 1900 Chestnut Street. Source: Google Street View.

Polychrome and Monochrome

This brief survey demonstrates the popularity of the style in Philadelphia, with the zig-zag/streamline/greco modes all represented to varying degrees (though pre-WWII streamline modern buildings here are markedly less common than the other two modes). This survey also highlights another apparent dichotomy in the range of buildings represented, one that has been given less scholarly attention but is nevertheless germane to a discussion of Philadelphia's Art Deco commercial vernacular in general and 1172-74 South Broad Street in particular: that of polychrome versus monochrome expressions of the style.

Much of Art Deco architecture is marked by bold material contrasts and the prominent use of colorful ornament, often glazed polychrome terra cotta or metal highlights that stand out against a surrounding brick, stone, or stucco skin. Great local examples of polychromism can be seen in the terra cotta ornamentation of Market Street National Bank and Fidelity Mutual Life Insurance Building, the metal panels and blue skin of the WCAU Studio, and the (former) black Vitrolite glass and metal facade of 1106 Chestnut Street, among others. However, these buildings stand in contrast to an alternative mode perhaps even more common as an expression of the Art Deco style in Philadelphia: a monochromism sometimes characterized as "chaste deco." In buildings of this type, such as 1172-74 South Broad Street, ornamentation is rendered in the same surface material as the rest of the building, creating an often sculptural but uniform façade typically of limestone, cast stone or concrete. This style of deco was particularly popular with smaller-scale retail shopfronts and low-rise commercial buildings both in and beyond Center City; 1910 Chestnut, the headhouse facade of the Boyd Theatre, 2006 Chestnut Street (1928-29, Silverman & Levy), 7200 Germantown Avenue (1928, Norman Hulme), and the Levin Funeral Home (demolished) are all Philadelphia Register-listed representatives of the monochromatic mode, as are the Horace Potts Company offices at 1702 Walnut (Addison Savery, 1930) and the parking garage and store at 1523-25 Spruce Street, both listed as contributing structures in the Rittenhouse-Fitler Historic District. However, far more examples of the style can be found in neighborhoods across the city, and despite their clear reflection of the prevalent architectural and cultural inclinations of the era, are largely underrecognized and underrepresented on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. An incomplete but representative list of such buildings would include the City National Bank at 1505 Walnut (c.1930, Arthur W. Hall), the Oak Lane Trust Bank at 6701 N. Broad Street (1924, McLanahan & Bencker), 27, 29 and 35 Maplewood Avenue in Germantown (architect and date unknown), and Mulligan's Funeral Home at 1119 W. Lehigh Avenue (c.1933, architect unknown). Although now contrasted with painted piers and decorative ornamentation, the original design intent as evidenced by photographs from

shortly after construction of 1172-74 South Broad Street (Figure 15 and Figure 16) was that of a monochromatic appearance.

Automobile Deco

Purpose-built automobile showrooms and service centers were relatively new building types in 1920s and 1930s Philadelphia, often one-story corner structures with large display windows and/or garage door bays designed for easy automobile access. Like movie theaters, Automats, and other distinctive cultural phenomena that proliferated in the interwar years, such buildings were commonly designed in the Art Deco style. Surviving examples of architect-designed, automobile-related commercial buildings in Philadelphia include Samuel Baylinson's 1501-05 Fairmount Avenue (1930; Figure 19), Karl Otto's automobile showroom at 5822-28 Old York Road (1930; Figure 20), and the subject building at 1172-74 South Broad Street (1938). Less refined in materials and ornamentation but similar in basic style and massing is a masonry auto service center at 6300 Oxford Avenue (date and architect unknown) featuring a prominent finial-capped two-story square tower flanked by rows of one-story vehicle bays. As a group, these buildings all reflect the environment in an era characterized by both the popularity of the Art Deco style and the proliferation of the automobile.



Figure 19. Samuel Baylinson's 1501-05 Fairmount Avenue, constructed in 1930. Source: Google Street View.



Figure 20. Karl Otto's automobile showroom at 5820-28 and 5830-32 Old York Road, constructed in 1930. Source: Google Street View.

Conclusion

The former Davis Auto Sales showroom and service department headquarters at 1172-74 South Broad Street retains a sufficient degree of architectural integrity despite alterations over the years for new uses. In both its form and its details, the building embodies character-defining features of the Art Deco style and reflects the environment in an era when Art Deco design was embraced by architects and developers for small-scale but visually distinctive commercial buildings in neighborhoods across the city in the late 1920s and 1930s. Prolific Philadelphia architect Isadore W. Levin utilized the popularity of the Art Deco style to achieve visual interest for this one-story building on a prominent corner in which a one-story building without such a design might be overwhelmed by the numerous taller buildings which surround it. By satisfying Criteria for Designation C and D as outlined in Philadelphia's Historic Preservation Ordinance, 1172-74 South Broad Street merits listing on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.

8. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Gelertner, Mark. *A History of American Architecture: Buildings in their Cultural and Technological Context*. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999.

Hillier, Bevis. *Art Deco of the 20s and 30s*. New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1968.

Leech, Benjamin. "1501-05 Fairmount Avenue, Nomination of Historic Building, Structure, Site, or Object, Philadelphia Register of Historic Places; Philadelphia Historical Commission." September 22, 2014, Philadelphia Historical Commission archive.

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https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/73151.

APPENDIX: ARCHITECT ISADORE W. LEVIN

The building at 1172-74 South Broad Street was designed by prolific Philadelphia architect Isadore W. Levin. Sandra Tatman's biography of Levin is as follows:

Isadore W. Levin was born in Russia and there received his education as an engineer, helping to build the Trans-Siberian Railroad. Emigrating to Philadelphia, he enrolled at Central High School's evening program to learn English and later attended Drexel Institute, where he earned his degree in civil engineering in 1911.

Levin first emerges in the Philadelphia city directories as an architect in 1920 although projects are recorded for him in the *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders Guide* as early as 1917. In the city directories he changes his occupation to civil engineer in 1922, returns to architect in 1924 and remains as such through 1935/36. His long list of *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders Guide* citations reveals a prolific career, with many references to residential development projects. In 1923 alone he designed 48 residences in West Philadelphia for Max Gussman, 24 twin residences for M. Cotler, 17 residences plus two store and residence combinations for Fishman & Fort, and the Bernard Court Apartments (5015-5023 Spruce Street) for the Arrow Construction Company. In 1929 he designed 200 residences for developers Boardman & Smith at Frankford and Cottman avenues in Philadelphia. In the 1920s he also developed something of a specialty in West Philadelphia apartment buildings, designing the Rosamond Apartments at 4107 Chester Avenue (1928; Figure 21), the Waltonia Apartments at 4203 Chester Avenue (1928; Figure 22), and the Commodore Apartments at 4207 Chester Avenue (1928; Figure 23).

However, this concentration is punctuated by other projects indicating Levin's background in engineering and his personal interests. Warehouses and service stations were designed by his firm, but he also provided the design for the synagogue for Shaari Zedek Congregation (52nd and Columbia Avenue, Philadelphia, 1928; Figure 24).¹³

¹³ Sandra L. Tatman, "Levin, Isadore W. (1883-1971)," *Philadelphia Architects and Buildings*, https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/73151.

7/22/2019



Figure 21. Rosamond Apartments, 4107 Chester Avenue. Source: Cyclomedia, 2019.



Figure 22. Waltonia Apartments, 4203 Chester Avenue. Source: Cyclomedia, 2019.



Figure 23. Commodore Apartments, 4207 Chester Avenue. Source: Cyclomedia, 2018.

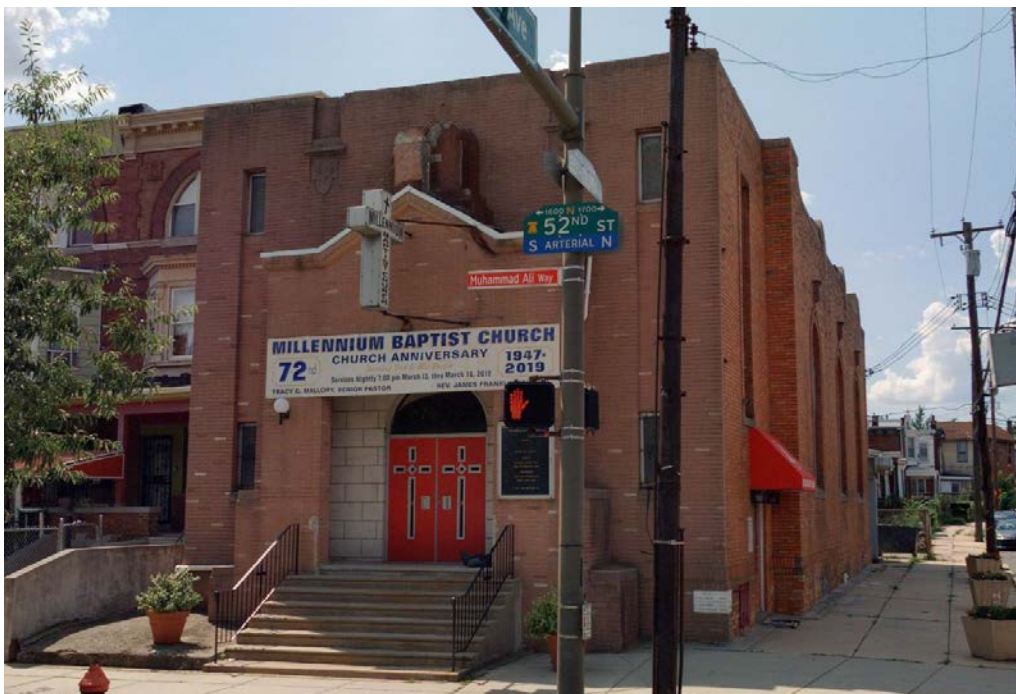


Figure 24. Former synagogue for Shaari Zedek Congregation, 1630 N 52nd Street. Source: Cyclomedia, 2019.

Levin was commissioned to design multiple synagogues and several Jewish clubhouses, including a synagogue for Congregation Beth Ha Medrosh Hadofel at 6018-22 Larchwood Avenue (1932; Figure 25), alterations/additions to 4336-38 Paul Street for Congregation Adath Zion (1939; Figure 26), and a clubhouse for Koharliker Beneficial Association at 1824 S 6th Street (1933; Figure 27).



Figure 25. Former synagogue for Congregation Beth Ha Medrosh Hadofel, 6018-22 Larchwood Avenue. Source: Cyclomedia, 2019.



Figure 26. Former synagogue for Congregation Adath Zion, 4336-38 Paul Street. Source: Google 2018.



Figure 27. Koharliker Beneficial Association clubhouse, 1824 S 6th Street. Hebrew text remains above doorway. Source: Cyclomedia, 2019.