



Originally located at 9404 Wilshire Boulevard, the Warner Brothers Beverly Hills Theatre (locally referred to as “The Beverly”) was one of the most outstanding examples of Art Deco design in the city. Built in 1931, it was shaped as a ziggurat with a central tower that culminated in a stepped spire that vertically spelled out the theatre’s name in neon. The structure, called the Warner Brothers Theatre Building (addressed as 9400-9402-9404-9406-9408 Wilshire), was built along one of the most important and prestigious east-west thoroughfares in the city, running from downtown Los Angeles through Beverly Hills and ending at the beach in Santa Monica. Situated at the southwest corner of Wilshire and Canon Drive the iconic exterior of the building was prominently visible by both pedestrians and drivers.

At that time, an important component of the Wilshire Boulevard’s economy was its entertainment facilities. By the late 1930s, Beverly Hills had five motion picture theaters of varying size and capacity in operation. Four of the five theater houses were designed in the Art Deco style and were all sited along or adjacent to Wilshire. The earliest of these theaters was the monumental Beverly Theatre that was built as a vaudeville playhouse and movie theater in 1925. Designed by architect L.A. Smith in the Moorish style it was located near the northeast corner of Beverly Drive and Wilshire Boulevard. The Fox Wilshire Theatre (now referred to as the Saban Theatre) was designed by prominent theater architect S. Charles Lee and was built in 1930 as a grand Art Deco style movie palace at the southeast corner of Hamilton Drive and Wilshire. A year later the notable Art Deco inspired Warner Brothers Beverly Hills Theatre was constructed. In 1936, the Regina (Fine Arts) Theatre was built in the Art Deco style and the Elite Theatre (now the Music Hall) at the southwest corner of Wetherly Drive and Wilshire was completed in 1937 also in the Art Deco idiom.

The opulent 2,000 seat Warner Brothers Beverly Hills Theatre was commissioned by motion picture producer Jack Warner and the Warner Brothers Studio. The architect, B. Marcus Priteca (1881-1971), was a renowned theater designer, who also designed the Fine Arts Theatre (originally called the Regina) just down the street to the east. Priteca designed over 150 theaters for four different theater chain clients during his professional practice. In Southern California, he also designed the Hollywood Pantages (1930), the Los Angeles Warner Brothers Downtown Building and Pantages Theatre (1920), the Warner Grand in San Pedro, and the Warner Theatre in Huntington Park. The contractor for the Warner Brothers Beverly Hills Theatre project was McDonald & Driver and a crew of roughly 150

painters and decorators were employed day and night to complete the structure in time for its grand opening.

Typical of the period, the theatre was built with an opulent open-volume auditorium space with a striking proscenium, stage, and a sweeping cantilever balcony; an ornate neon marquee over the recessed entry foyer; a stand-alone ticket booth, lobby, restrooms, and a crying room. The interior spaces were finished by Robert E. Power Studio and featured a modern interpretation of Mexican decorative motifs. The theatre was also designed with flanking storefronts (two spaces on either side) to provide additional revenue to the property owner by attracting both shoppers and theater-goers. Early businesses that occupied these shop units included real estate offices, a café, boutique, and cleaners.

The Warner Brothers Beverly Hills Theatre opened its doors on May 19, 1931 with a dedication program and premiere of the motion picture “The Millionaire.” Jack Warner, Jr. and Benjamin Warner with Warner Brothers Studio was in attendance along with a parade of stars that included Barbara Stanwyck, Joan Blondell, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., John Barrymore, Joe E. Brown, and James Cagney.

Following the ceremonial opening, many motion picture previews and premieres were held at the Warner Brothers Beverly Hills Theatre, including “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” with Mickey Rooney on October 16, 1935, “Confessions of a Nazi Spy” on April 27, 1939, and the West Coast premiere of “White Christmas” starring Bing Crosby, Danny Kaye, Rosemary Clooney, and Vera Ellen on October 27, 1954. The epic movie “Lawrence of Arabia” also premiered at the theatre on December 16, 1962.

The Warner Brothers Beverly Hills Theatre was originally part of the Warner Brothers chain. However, following the Paramount anti-trust consent decree that went into effect in 1950, which required separate ownership for production companies and theater chains, the theatre was then operated by the RKO-Stanley Warner Corporation as the Stanley Warner Beverly Hills. By early 1968, it had become part of the Pacific Theatres chain and operated as the Pacific’s Warner. After Pacific Theatres left it was then called The Beverly and operated independently, even as a live venue theater, for a few years until it closed in 1987. Just over a year later, the building was demolished, and the site cleared. It is now paved as a parking lot.

Proposed Plaque Copy:



“Designed in the Art Deco style with a soaring neon tower, the Warner Bros. Beverly Hills Theatre was one of the earliest “movie palaces” built in Beverly Hills. The 2,000-seat theater was commissioned by producer Jack Warner and designed by master architect B. Marcus Priteca, who also designed Hollywood’s Pantages Theater. It hosted many movie premiers and events from 1931 to its closing in 1987.”

Recommended Placement Location:

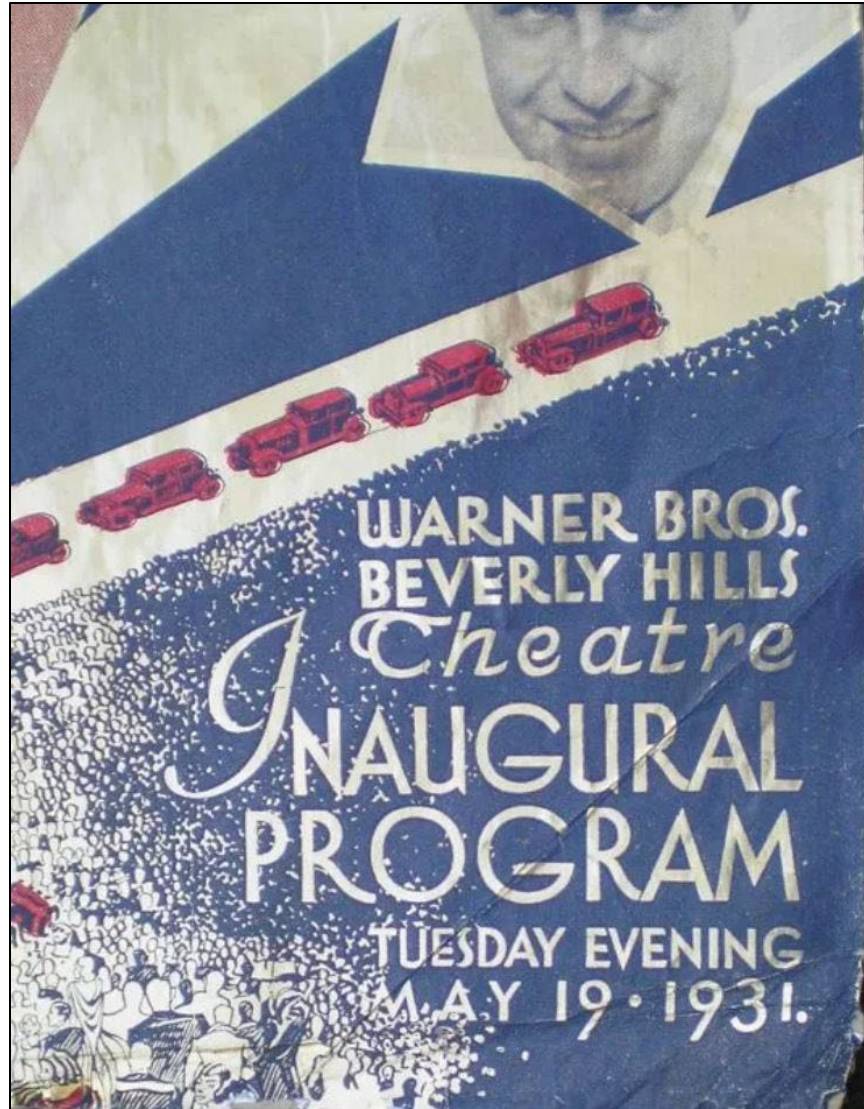
Within the public sidewalk at the subject parcel, at the southwest corner of Wilshire and Canon Drive, measures roughly 104 feet (along Wilshire) by 158 feet (along South Canon). It is recommended to place one plaque within the public sidewalk at the halfway point that aligns parallel to the northern property line. This half way point was the location of the ticket booth and the center point of the once-extant entry foyer of the theater.

Photos:



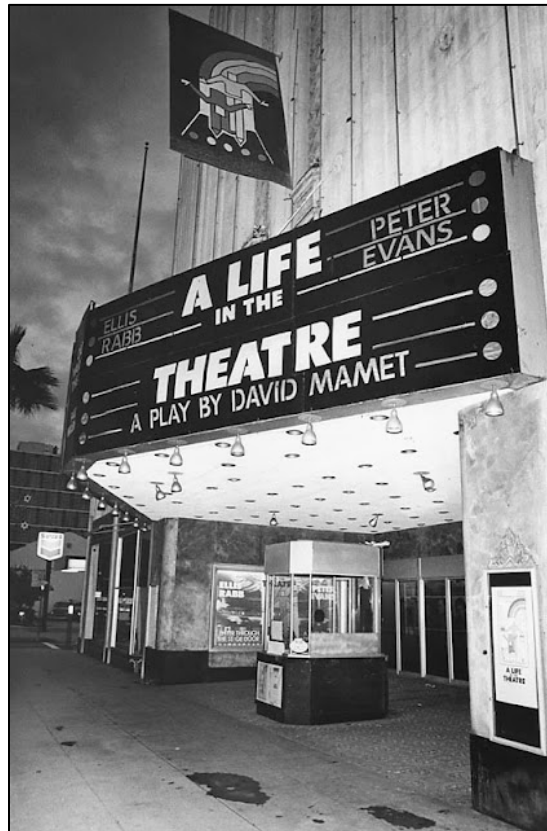


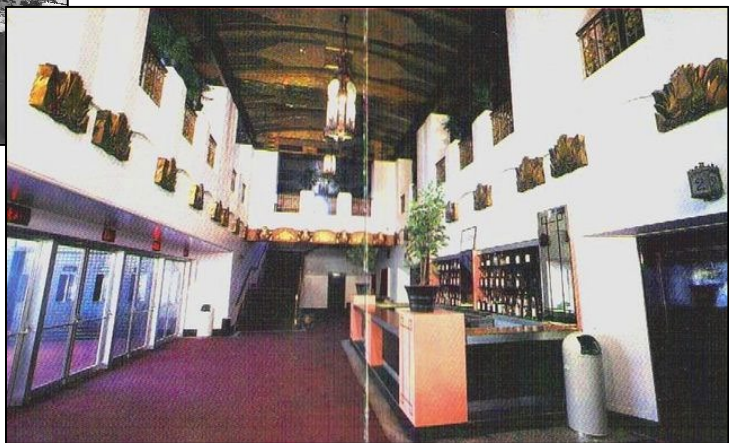
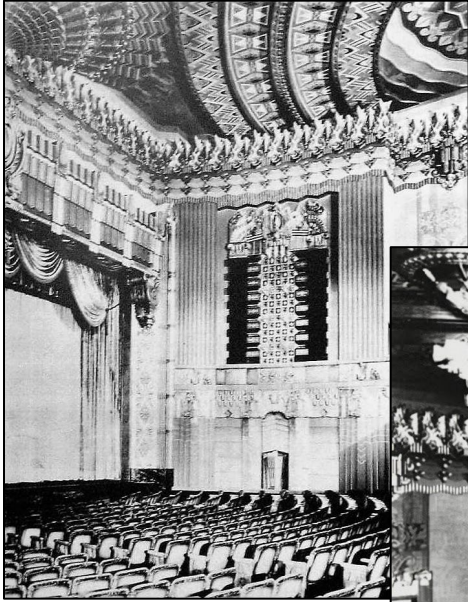
GALA PREMIERE OPENING
Warner Bros. Beverly Hills Theatre
WILSHIRE AT CANON DRIVE
TUESDAY NIGHT, MAY 19
2 COMPLETE PERFORMANCES . . 7 AND 9 P. M.









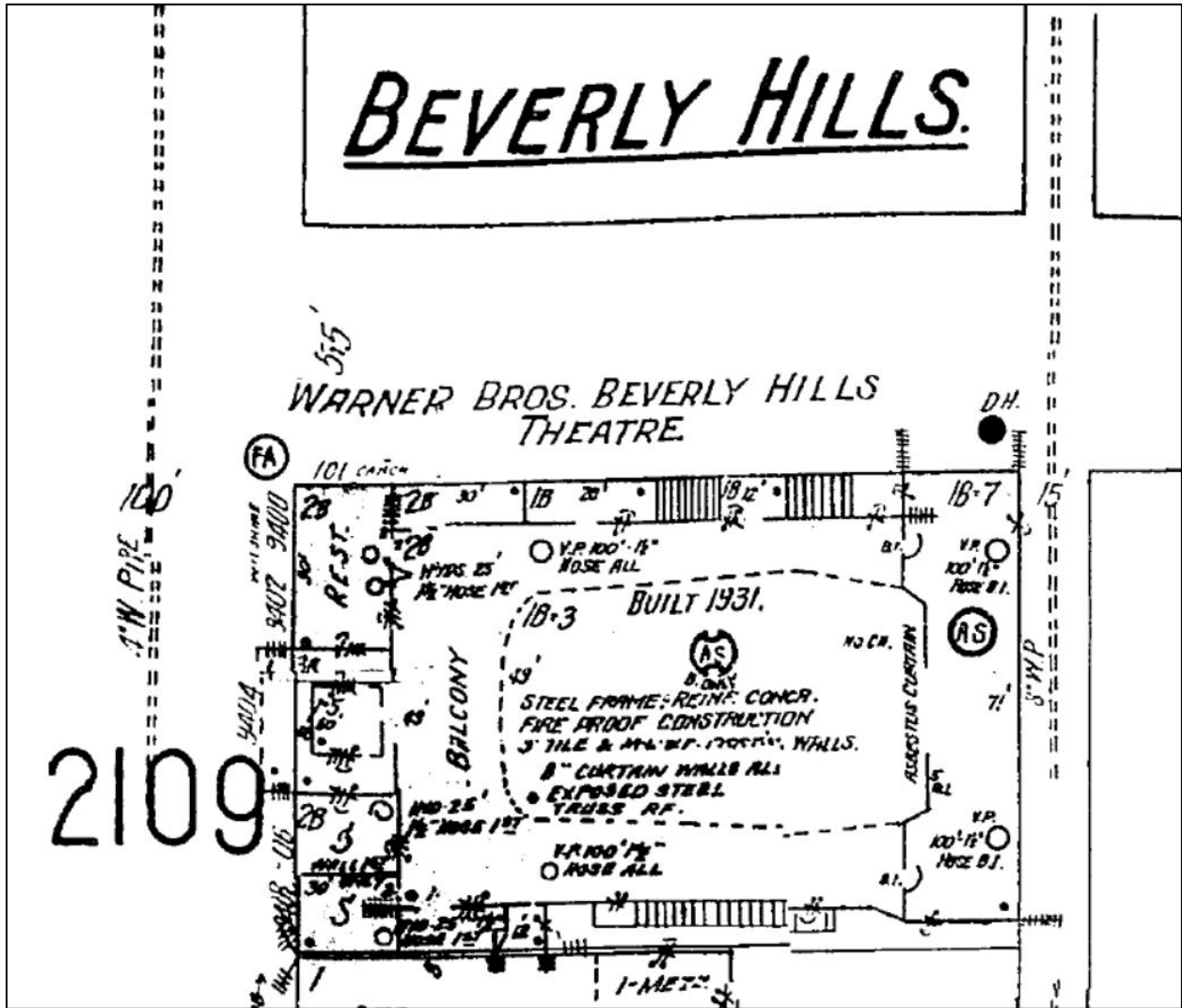




(excerpt from film “Beverly Hills of Yesterday & of Today” produced by Warner Brothers in 1931)

Jack Warner, Jr. (below) at 1930 groundbreaking ceremony event (also excerpted from 1931 film)





SANBORN MAP (excerpt from Sheet 2129) APRIL 1951

