

THE MODERNIZED CHARLES F. BERG STORE BUILDING (1930)

PORTLAND, OREGON

by

HEATHER V. BUTLER

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Student: Heather V. Butler

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This Terminal Project has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science degree in the Historic Preservation Program by:

Committee  
Chairperson:



Date: August 30, 2018

Leland M. Roth  
Emeritus Marion D. Ross Distinguished Professor of Architectural History  
Department of the History of Art and Architecture  
College of Design of the University of Oregon

Committee  
Member:



Date: August 27, 2018

Chad Randl  
Visiting Assistant Professor  
Historic Preservation Program  
College of Design of the University of Oregon

Degree awarded: September, 2018

## ABSTRACT

In February 1930, a few months after the stock market crash, a downtown Portland, Oregon retailer, Charles F. Berg, opened a new, expanded location of his well-known women's apparel store. This new store, at 615 SW Broadway between SW Morrison and Alder Streets, was in a commercial masonry structure built by the Dolph family around 1902 on the site of their former home. It was transformed into the spectacularly modernized Charles F. Berg Store Building, its façade supplied by the Grand Rapids Design Service of the Grand Rapids Store Equipment Corporation. This formerly unremarkable storefront became a dramatic Parisian Art Deco façade of black terra cotta and 18-karat gold, punctuated by incised, angular naturalistic and abstract motifs in cream and teal spandrels. In its day, only two other American buildings featured gold ornament. And only a few, and none in Portland, featured dark terra cotta cladding. No other retailers downtown used the Art Deco style on its exterior, although some used touches of it in their modernized interiors. The terra cotta cladding of the Charles F. Berg Store and its rivals and neighbors was supplied by Gladding, McBean & Company, a Lincoln, California manufacturer and a major contributor to the architecture of the western United States. Most of Portland's downtown buildings were clad in white, in the preferred Beaux-Arts Neoclassical style. Although the modernized Charles F. Berg Store Building's Art Deco exterior remained mostly unchanged, its retail architect Kenneth C. Welch shifted his work to the Streamline Moderne style when he promoted the 1934–1943 FHA Modernize Main Street movement. From WWII on, he became known as a designer of shopping centers. The Charles F. Berg Store attempted to compete with them by opening a suburban branch in the late 1950s, but the company was sold in 1975.

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## **Introduction:**

### **A Luxurious Delight**

The modernized Charles F. Berg Store Building of 1930 is at a disadvantage. It is not on a corner, so it does not catch the eye as one drives or walks up Broadway. It is not tall, so it does not catch the eye as the viewer explores the sky, which would provide at least the possibility that an explorer's eye might wander down from the heights and alight on its dramatic storefront. Instead, the Charles F. Berg Store Building is in the middle of the block, on the west side of Broadway between SW Alder and Morrison streets, only three storeys tall and three bays wide.<sup>1</sup> The store name does not attract customers anymore, because the shop has been closed for some forty years. Tourists are not likely to seek the building out or to go inside, because the shops in the storefronts can be found in most any retail center outside of town, outside of most towns. Yet, if anyone stops to look, the person ends up looking for a while.

The black exterior prompts an examination, as do the gold stripes running up the four uninterrupted pilasters to the cornice line—where there is no cornice, but rather chevrons across the top, in a jazzy, zigzag design. Peacocks peer down from the spandrels in their haughty way, twelve of them in six panels, flanking bees immersed in blossoms and a central fountain-in-a-vase that

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<sup>1</sup> "Dolph Building/Berg, Charles F., Building," by John M. Tess, NR No. 830002170, *National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form*, National Park Service (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, September 1983); "Charles F. Berg Building," Resource No. 0-111-00615, *Historic Resource Inventory* (Portland, OR: City of Portland, 1984); "Charles F. Berg Building," by Virginia Guest Ferriday, *State of Oregon Inventory, Historic Sites and Buildings* (November 1979); "Berg, Charles F. Building/Dolph Building," Oregon Historic Site Record, Resource ID 49204, Oregon Historic Sites Database, Parks and Recreation Department, Oregon Heritage Service, State Historic Preservation Office. The site is Block 212, Lot 2 of the Portland Addition to the City of Portland, Multnomah County, Oregon. The City of Portland renamed its streets and quadrants in 1931. Prior to the change, the Charles F. Berg Store address was 145 Broadway South, becoming 615 SW Broadway in 1931.

seems to be emerging from behind a theater curtain. Flat compressed whorls of fronds, flowers, and leaves are juxtaposed with jagged vertical lines and wedges of sunbursts and rainclouds. The proprietor's name, "Charles F. Berg," seems to be everywhere: over the door, and at the base of the four pilasters accompanying the pedestrian along Broadway. Metalwork above the storefront windows uses the frond and fountain motifs, but the rest of the signage and the entryway to the atrium are sadly shoddy and contemporary (see Fig. 19). At one time, the Charles F. Berg Store Building was one of only a handful in the country to share its dark, stark, and chic color scheme, and the only building in downtown Portland to be adorned in the zigzag, incised motifs of Parisian modernism circa 1925, which we now call Art Deco. When the Charles F. Berg Store opened to much fanfare in its new Broadway location, Portland's Broadway was, like its New York namesake, an avenue of theaters, entertainment, and nightlife.<sup>2</sup> Now, most of the theaters are gone, and the neighbors and rival clothiers of Charles F. Berg have closed too. The modernized Charles F. Berg Store Building is an embodiment of one man's business perspective and an aesthetic artifact of its time. It was, and is, unique.

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<sup>2</sup> *Midtown Blocks Historic Assessment* (Portland, OR: City of Portland Bureau of Planning, September 2004), 17, 19-20.

## Chapter I

### The Downtown Retail Scene

#### *Beaux-Arts Preferred*

When Charles F. Berg (1871–1932) came to Portland in 1907 as a partner in Lennon’s, a firm selling gloves, umbrellas, and hosiery, he came to a commercial and retail district very much like the one in San Francisco where he had learned his trade (see Figs. 10 & 15). In Portland, as in San Francisco, the center of downtown (bounded by SW Washington Street to the north, Yamhill Street to the south, Fourth Avenue to the east, and Broadway to the west), was a district of Beaux-Arts Neoclassicism. It held a concentration of department store palazzi, newspaper and insurance towers, banks in temple form, and more modest stores scattered among them, all clad in white.<sup>3</sup> It was part of the City Beautiful movement, which desired to house even prosaic, mercantile activities in the classic architecture of the past.

In Portland, the central business district had shifted from the cast-iron buildings along SW First through Third Avenues, due to that area’s flooding from the Willamette River. Streetcar routes perpendicular to the river along SW Washington and Morrison streets moved people in and out of the commercial area from residential neighborhoods on the West and East sides of the Willamette.<sup>4</sup>

It was necessary then to go downtown for clothing, housewares, and entertainment that could not be provided at the same level at home. It is astounding to realize how many department stores a

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<sup>3</sup> See Virginia Guest Ferriday, *Last of the Handmade Buildings: Glazed Terra Cotta in Downtown Portland* (Portland, OR: Mark Publishing, 1984) and the *State of Oregon Inventory, Historic Sites and Buildings* for the development of the district and profiles of specific buildings.

<sup>4</sup> “Charles F. Berg Building,” *State of Oregon Inventory*, 1.

city of even Portland's modest size could support then, each one providing floor after floor of goods, restaurants, lounges, and services for customers and employees. Then there were the smaller boutiques, more selective in wares and amenities but not necessarily in prestige. These were called, "specialty stores." In more ways than one, Charles F. Berg wanted to position his specialty store in opposition to the department stores, to make his business, as his son's slogan had it, "the shop smart women prefer."<sup>5</sup>

### ***Rivals and Neighbors***

When Berg walked out of his store on Broadway between SW Morrison and Alder Streets, he was surrounded by retail establishments, many of them devoted to women's apparel just as his was.<sup>6</sup> The Bedell Building, at SW Alder Street and Sixth Avenue, housed an upmarket specialty women's apparel chain and shared a wall on its eastern side with a department store, Lipman-Wolfe. The Bedell Building, a twelve-storey white Neoclassical terra cotta-clad tower, had Bedell's on the lower level and office space for lease above. Bedell's specialized in garments imported from Paris. The opening of a store in Portland, and the construction of a new skyscraper to house it, bespoke the great optimism and healthy retail climate in the city and nationwide during the 1920s.<sup>7</sup> The fact

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<sup>5</sup> Slick Young Ideas, Scrapbook, Charles Berg Records, Mss 2512, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, Box 6 of 6. In 1950, an announcement to the trade explained the store's new wrapping supplies featuring roses on pink: "We're painting the town pink in '50," because, "smart shoppers *do* care a great deal about the kind of packages they are asked to carry."

<sup>6</sup> The stores were Bedell's, Liebes, Lipman-Wolfe, Meier & Frank, Olds, Wortman & King, and S.H. Kress. These buildings are part of an Oregon Historic Sites thematic grouping called the "Portland Downtown Glazed Terra Cotta Buildings," group.

<sup>7</sup> "Bedell Building," by John M. Tess, NR No. 89000066, *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (Washington, D.C. U.S. Department of the Interior, February 1989), Sect. 8, p. 1B-5.; "Bedell Building/Cascade Building," Resource No. 1-006-00520, *Historic Resource Inventory* (Portland, OR: City of Portland, 1984); "Cascade Building/Bedell Building," by Virginia Guest Ferriday, *State of Oregon Inventory, Historic Sites and Buildings* (January 1980); "Bedell Building/Cascade Building," Oregon Historic Site Record, Resource ID 49201, Oregon Historic Sites

that Bedell's was a specialty store offering stylish, Parisian garments must have made it a major competitor in Berg's mind.

Lipman-Wolfe was a full-service department store dedicated largely, though not exclusively, to apparel for all ages and sexes. Beginning in the 1930s, the store's interior underwent many remodellings, as was true of most of the buildings in this district and of retail establishments everywhere generally. Again, as is typical for the downtown terra cotta clad buildings, the Neoclassical exterior remains mostly unchanged.<sup>8</sup>

An establishment near the department stores yet serving a more modest retail niche was the S.H. Kress five-and-dime store near Lipman-Wolfe and Meier & Frank at SW Morrison Street and Fourth Avenue. Kress's management took great care to create regionally-appropriate buildings for its chain.<sup>9</sup> In Portland, this meant a building sheathed in white terra cotta and Beaux-Arts Neoclassical ornament. In April 1928, the new store opened with so-called "scientific" interior display fixtures. These fixtures were supplied by the Grand Rapids Store Equipment Corporation. Berg may well have taken note.<sup>10</sup>

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Database, Parks and Recreation Department, Oregon Heritage Service, State Historic Preservation Office.

<sup>8</sup> "Lipman-Wolfe and Company Building/Frederick and Nelson Building," by John M. Tess, NR No. 88001531, *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*, National Park Service (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, September 1988), Sect. 7, p. 5; "Lipman, Wolfe & Company Building/Frederick & Nelson Building," Oregon Historic Site Record, Resource ID 54134, Oregon Historic Sites Database, Parks and Recreation Department, Oregon Heritage Service, State Historic Preservation Office; "Frederick & Nelson Building/Lipman, Wolfe & Co.," by Virginia Guest Ferriday, *State of Oregon Inventory, Historic Sites and Buildings*, (February 1980); "Lipman, Wolfe and Company," Resource No. 1-005-00521, *Historic Resource Inventory* (Portland, OR: City of Portland, 1984). Lipman-Wolfe became Frederick & Nelson in 1979 and closed its downtown location in 1986.

<sup>9</sup> See Bernice L. Thomas, *America's 5&10 Cent Stores: The Kress Legacy* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 1997). The founder, Samuel H. Kress (1863-1955) amassed a great collection of European art, the Kress Collection, which he bequeathed to the American public.

<sup>10</sup> "Kress Building," by John M. Tess, NR No. 96000994, *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*, National Park Service (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, September 1996), Sect. 8, pp. 4- 5;

Olds, Wortman & King was the westernmost department store, at SW Morrison Street and Ninth Avenue. Built in 1910, this white terra-cotta building underwent interior renovations beginning in 1926, but the exterior is mostly unchanged. In a 1946 remodelling, its interior fixtures were supplied by the Grand Rapids Store Equipment Company.<sup>11</sup>

A few blocks even farther west on the corner of SW Morrison Street and Broadway was the Broadway Building. Adjacent to the north side of the Broadway Building, and to the south side of the Dolph Building, which was soon to be transformed into the modernized Charles F. Berg Store (see Fig. 4), was the H. Liebes & Company store. This store was a specialty furrier, most of whose other locations were in affluent California cities. As this store expanded, its interior was remodelled to merge into the lower floors of the Broadway Building. Later, the business was known as the N.M. Ungar store, before Ungar moved to its own building a few blocks south.<sup>12</sup> Liebes sold luxury

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“Kress Building/JC Penney Building,” Oregon Historic Site Record, Resource ID 49301, Oregon Historic Sites Database, Parks and Recreation Department, Oregon Heritage Service, State Historic Preservation Office; “J.C. Penney Building/S.H. Kress Building,” by Virginia Guest Ferriday, *State of Oregon Inventory, Historic Sites and Buildings* (January 1980); “S.H. Kress Building/J.C. Penney Building,” Resource No. 1-005-00638, *Historic Resource Inventory* (Portland, OR: City of Portland, 1984).

<sup>11</sup> “Olds, Wortman and King Department Store/Rhodes Department Store/Galleria,” by John M. Tess, NR No. 91000057, *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*, National Park Service (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, February 1991), Sect. 8, p. 2; “Olds, Wortman & King Department Store/Rhodes Department Store/The Galleria,” Oregon Historic Site Record, Resource ID 55746, Oregon Historic Sites Database, Parks and Recreation Department, Oregon Heritage Service, State Historic Preservation Office; “Galleria/Olds, Wortman & King Building,” by Virginia Guest Ferriday, *State of Oregon Inventory, Historic Sites and Buildings*, February 1980; “Olds, Wortman and King Department Store/Rhodes Department Store/Galleria,” Resource No. 0-630-00921, *Historic Resource Inventory* (Portland, OR: City of Portland, 1984). This building was converted into a mall named The Galleria in 1976. In 2013, Target moved into part of the facility.

<sup>12</sup> “Liebes, H. & Company Building,” by John M. Tess, NR No. 96000993, *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*, National Park Service (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, September 1996), Sect. 7, p. 4, Sect. 8 p. 3; “Broadway Building,” by John M. Tess, NR No. 96001000, *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*, National Park Service (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, September 1996), Sect. 7, p. 5; “Liebes, Building/Ungar Building/Nordstrom’s/Broadway, The,” Resource No. 0-111-00625, *Historic Resource Inventory* (Portland, OR: City of Portland, 1984.); “Liebes Building/The Broadway,” by Virginia Guest Ferriday, *State of Oregon Inventory, Historic Sites and Buildings* (January 1980); “Liebes, H. & Company Building/Broadway Building,” Oregon Historic Site Record, Resource ID 55493, Oregon Historic Sites Database, Parks and Recreation Department,

women's garments, just as Berg did. Architecturally, its façade is a classical three-bay configuration, just as Berg's is, while Liebes is Neoclassical in style and two storeys taller, sheathed in white terra cotta.

The Meier & Frank store at SW Morrison Street and Fifth Avenue is probably the downtown department store most familiar to Portland residents, since it stayed open longer than the others, and under its original name for most of that time. It too was clad in white terra cotta and designed in the Beaux-Arts Neoclassical style. The store expanded piecemeal, though stylistically consistently, in 1909 and 1915. In 1932, Meier & Frank made the decision to expand in order to encompass the entire block between SW Morrison and Alder Streets between Fifth and Sixth Avenues. This decision meant the relocation of the Charles F. Berg Store, whose main storefront was in a building hemmed in by the ever-growing Meier & Frank establishment (see Figs. 2 & 3).<sup>13</sup> Berg took this forced relocation as an opportunity to do something completely different architecturally than any of his competitors. He may have been inspired by contemporary modernistic buildings in sunny

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Oregon Heritage Service, State Historic Preservation Office. The Broadway and the Liebes Buildings are often described together because, beginning in 1920, the lower floors of the Broadway Building were merged. After Liebes moved out, another furrier, N.M. Ungar, moved in. Later, Nicholas Ungar Furs had a building to itself, The Orton Building, at 1137 SW Yamhill Street, a Moderne building recently altered. See John Bell, "West End Building that Once Drew Anti-Fur Protestors Sells to Prolific Developer," *Commercial Real Estate, Portland Business Journal*, July 7, 2016, bizjournals.com.

<sup>13</sup> "Meier & Frank Building," by George A. McMath, NR No. 82003744, *National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form*, National Park Service (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, July 1982), Sect. 7, pp. 1, 4, 7 & Sect. 8, pp. 1, 5; "Meier & Frank Building/The Nines Hotel," Oregon Historic Site Record, Resource ID 49315, Oregon Historic Sites Database, Parks and Recreation Department, Oregon Heritage Service, State Historic Preservation Office; "Meier & Frank Building," by Virginia Guest Ferriday, *State of Oregon Inventory, Historic Sites and Buildings* (February 1980); "Meier and Frank Company Building," Resource No. 1-005-00621 (Portland, OR: City of Portland, 1984). The Meier & Frank Store was purchased by the May Company in 1966 and operated under its own name until 2006. From 2006 until its closure in 2017, it operated as a Macy's. The 1932 expansion was Neoclassical on the outside, a touch of Art Deco on the inside. These touches were mostly in the metalwork of elevator surrounds, air grilles, handrails, and lighting fixtures. Some of these remained following the 1964 and 1977 interior alterations.

California, especially one built for an exclusive women's apparel retailer.

In Los Angeles 1929, the auto-age branch of Bullock's department store opened. This was Bullock's Wilshire, a modernistic, new building designed to attract and accommodate the auto-going customers who lived west of downtown. This building was designed in an eye-catching two-color palette of textured buff terra-cotta and metallic trim of oxidized copper. The trim was ornamented by Art Deco zigzags, stars, and angular fluting in the spandrels. Its massing was without columns or cornice but had rather pilasters racing up to the sky tipped with sea green.<sup>14</sup> Charles F. Berg buyers travelled regularly to Los Angeles where a healthy garment manufacturing and wholesale fashion trade infrastructure existed.<sup>15</sup> Bullock's Wilshire was designed with many discrete salons selling different pieces of a woman's wardrobe, each area of the store with a carefully-coordinated color scheme. By its external and internal form and décor, this store would never be mistaken for an old-time Neoclassical department store.

Interestingly, Bullock's founder, John G. Bullock, had a similar life trajectory to Charles F. Berg: both were born in 1871, both began working in retail at very young ages, both built eponymous businesses for which they constructed showcases in the Art Deco style circa 1930, and both died soon afterwards, essentially from overwork.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Margaret Leslie Davis, *Bullocks Wilshire* (Los Angeles, CA: Balcony Press, 1996), 7. The new location was built in 1929, designed by father and son architects John Parkinson (1861–1935) and Donald B. Parkinson (1895–1945).

<sup>15</sup> Charles Berg Records, Mss 2512, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

<sup>16</sup> Davis, *Bullocks Wilshire*, 7. John G. Bullock (1871–1930). The Bullocks Wilshire Store Building was entered into the National Register in 1978. The store closed in 1993. The restored building is now home to the Southwestern Law School.

## Chapter II

### Charles F. Berg and His Fashionable Store

#### *A Great Enthusiast*

Charles F. Berg was born in San Francisco in 1871 to a Jewish family with roots in Germany and Bohemia (modern-day Czechoslovakia) and a history in the glovemaking business.<sup>17</sup> As a boy, Berg assisted his widowed mother in the operation of her candy and school supplies store. When he was a bit older, he began working for a San Francisco retailer of gloves and umbrellas, rising to the position of manager.<sup>18</sup> He worked in a white flatiron-shaped terra cotta Beaux-Arts retail space in the Neoclassical idiom common to San Francisco's retail district and Portland's.<sup>19</sup> Berg relocated to the Midwest and sold gloves and umbrellas in Minneapolis–St. Paul before moving to Portland in 1907, in time to participate in Portland's major expansion following the 1905 Lewis & Clark Centennial Exposition.<sup>20</sup>

About thirteen years after Berg joined Lennon's in Portland, the partnership dissolved, with the other partners retaining the Seattle and San Francisco markets. Berg took charge of the Portland business, which he titled eponymously.<sup>21</sup> His main location was in a Renaissance commercial

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<sup>17</sup> "Oral History Interview with Forrest Talbot Berg, by Charles Digregorio, November 6, 1978," SR9412, transcribed by Deborah Frosaker, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, 1; Eric Schulmiller, "For the Glove of the Game," *The Forward* (January 4, 2012), forward.com.

<sup>18</sup> Michel R. Corbett, *Splendid Survivors: San Francisco's Downtown Architectural Heritage* (San Francisco, CA: The Foundation for San Francisco's Architectural Heritage, A California Living Book, 1979), 88. In the Phelan Building (1908, by William Curlett [1846–1914]).

<sup>19</sup> Craig Adams, "Chas F. Berg—Founder of 'The Hoot Owls'—His Story," archive2009-14, at "The Portland Radio Guide," July 14, 2014, pdxradio.com.; Oral History Interview with Forrest Talbot Berg, by Charles Digregorio, November 6, 1978," SR9412, transcribed by Deborah Frosaker, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, 1.

<sup>20</sup> "Meier & Frank Building," *National Register Form*, Sect. 8, p. 5.

<sup>21</sup> "Dolph Building/Berg, Charles F., Building," *National Register Form*, Sect. 8 p. 3.

building cheek-by-jowl to the behemoth of Meier & Frank (see Fig. 2). He maintained a smaller outlet in the Portland Hotel and several other nearby branches selling fine gloves, umbrellas, and women's silk hosiery.<sup>22</sup> Berg was known for his rhetorical advertising question, "Who's Your Hosier?" and for signing his business correspondence, "Glovingly Yours." His stores were thriving, but they did not supply complete women's wardrobes, only accessories, "waists" (i.e. blouses), and a small selection of ready-made dresses and Vogue patterns.

In addition to running his business, participating in related trade organizations, and being a key member of the Portland Chamber of Commerce, Berg participated in just about every civic club and activity available, including B'nai B'rith, the Concordia Club, the Elks, Rotary, the Royal Rosarians, the Oregon Motor Club, the Shriners, and the Tualatin Country Club.<sup>23</sup>

He was also what might be called an early-adopter of technology. When seeking support to modernize the Dolph Building, Berg expressed the possibilities of locating his store on a street known for its foot traffic and the draw of many theaters—recently modernized for moving pictures, and even more recently, talking pictures.<sup>24</sup> In 1922, shortly after radio technology became available, Berg began hosting a weekly program on KGW, *The Oregonian* newspaper's station.<sup>25</sup> The antics of

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<sup>22</sup> The Portland Hotel was built in 1890, by William M. Whidden (1857–1929) and Charles Follen McKim (1847–1909). Meier & Frank demolished it in 1951 and used the site for parking. Pioneer Square opened in 1984.

<sup>23</sup> Charles Berg Records, Mss 2512, Box 1 of 6; "Dolph Building/Berg, Charles F., Building," *National Register Form*.

<sup>24</sup> Ferriday, *Last of the Handmade Buildings*, Caption for FI-6 p.15. The whole area had heavy pedestrian traffic. In 1928, the highest downtown pedestrian count was recorded on Fifth Avenue, between Washington and Alder streets. In 1980, it had shifted one block south, on Fifth Avenue between Alder and Morrison.

<sup>25</sup> Charles Berg Records, Mss 2512; "Oral History Interview with Forrest Talbot Berg," 7. The Charles F. Berg Store enjoyed an excellent relationship with *The Oregonian*, as witnessed by the lavish coverage of the modernized Charles F. Berg Store opening. Berg's had an exclusive annual contract for the second page, left-hand corner advertising space.

the “Keep Growing Wiser Order of Hoot Owls,” broadcast every Friday night and hosted by Berg, the Order’s “Grand Screech,” were clearly a lot of fun for the participants. The wider purpose of the show was to bring good cheer to the lonely and shut-in. Berg’s policy was that the material be good-humored, in good taste, strictly apolitical, and generated “without inspiration of liquor.” Berg further demonstrated his generosity and philanthropy by providing for the installation of radio sets in hospitals and soliciting donations for the Sunshine Division of the Portland Police Bureau.<sup>26</sup>

Berg married twice and had two children.<sup>27</sup> His son, Forrest Talbot (1901–1997), was born in San Francisco and followed his father into the retail apparel business, eventually heading the Charles F. Berg Store. His daughter Caroline Flora (1913–1964) appears not to have participated in the business, but she emulated her father in other ways. She too was an early adopter of technology. Beginning in the late 1930s, she broadcast and produced in television and radio, teaching broadcasting in New York. In addition, she performed as an actress in Hollywood and on Broadway, became a theatrical producer, taught art history, and collected modern art with her second husband, Erwin D. Swann (1906–1973).<sup>28</sup>

Charles F. Berg was a member of Portland’s Reform synagogue, Temple Beth Israel, and its President from 1929–1930. He was surrounded by optimism and new beginnings there too. While

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<sup>26</sup> Chas. F. Berg’s Scrap Book, Charles Berg Records, Mss 2512, Box 4 of 6. Melvin Jerome Blank (later, Blanc) (1908–1989), another son of San Francisco, joined The Hoot Owls in 1927. Later, he moved to Los Angeles and became an animation voice actor extraordinaire, voicing Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Pepé le Pew, Yosemite Sam, Sylvester, Tweety Bird, and many more.

<sup>27</sup> Berg’s first wife was Sadie Dixon (c. 1875–1902), mother of Forrest; his second was Saidee A. Rosenberg (1884–1970), mother of Caroline.

<sup>28</sup> See “Oral History Interview with Forrest Talbot Berg,” 6; and, Bibliography under “The Berg Family.” In the late 1960s, Swann dedicated the Caroline Berg Swann Auditorium at the Portland Art Museum to her memory.

Berg was planning the grand transformation of his store on Broadway, Congregation Beth Israel was building and dedicating a magnificent new synagogue in Northwest Portland. This Byzantine-Deco showpiece replaced a Moorish-Gothic sanctuary that had been downtown. Its architect, Herman S. Brookman, participated in the 1932 expansion of Meier & Frank and completed other commissions for the Meier and Frank families.<sup>29</sup> At Temple Beth Israel, a stained-glass window is dedicated to Charles F. Berg, representing the Fifth Day of Creation in the Genesis series.<sup>30</sup>

### ***A Distinctive Establishment***

In 1922, Charles F. Berg suffered a heart attack, and a family friend advised his son Forrest that his father needed him in Portland. At the time, Forrest was working in San Francisco, in a chic, French-themed department store called The White House. This store was housed in a building akin to the one nearby where his father established his own retail career. This white palazzo was based on Paris's Le Bon Marché. Both stores were part of San Francisco's City Beautiful, Beaux-Arts Neoclassical retail and governmental district (see Fig. 15).<sup>31</sup>

When examining the Charles F. Berg Store's archives with its exhortations to sales staff,

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<sup>29</sup> Temple Beth Israel, *Temple Beth Israel: A Temple for the Ages, 1858–2002* (Hillsboro, OR: Beyond Words Publishing, 2002), 30, 155. The Moorish-Gothic synagogue, built in 1889 by Warren Heywood Williams (1844–1888), was at SW Main Street and 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue. It was destroyed by arson in December of 1923, a few weeks after the arson of another synagogue a few blocks away. The religious school building of 1924 adjacent to the west remains and was entered into the National Register in 1928. Herman S. Brookman designed the 1920s residence at the Meiers' Menucha estate in Corbett, Oregon, which is now a retreat center, and the 1925 Frank residence west of Portland, which is now part of the Lewis & Clark College campus.

<sup>30</sup> "News and Comment—Church Events," *Oregon Historical Quarterly: The Journal of the Oregon Historical Society* 32, no. 2 (1933): 184; Temple Beth Israel, *Temple Beth Israel: A Temple for the Ages, 1858–2002* (Hillsboro, OR: Beyond Words Publishing, 2002), 155, 84.

<sup>31</sup> Corbett, *Splendid Survivors*, 172; [pcad.lib.washington.edu](http://pcad.lib.washington.edu). The White House's founder was French-born philanthropist Raphael Weill (1837–1920). The store operated from 1885–1965. The White House Building was built in 1908, by Albert Pissis (1852–1914); Le Bon Marché was built in 1887, by Louis-Charles Boileau (1837–1914).

strategy meetings with managers and buyers, and articles published in trade magazines, the message is reinforced that the Charles F. Berg Store is a *specialty* store, not a catch-all like the five-and-dime or a department store. According to Berg, specialty stores are good for society and good for downtown because of their size and diffuse ownership. Specialty stores are democratic, department stores are aristocratic.<sup>32</sup> A department store's employees are "cogs in a wheel," whereas a specialty store's staff, being fewer, can be paid more and hold more responsibility.<sup>33</sup> Finally, the specialty store provides a level of personalized service and unique merchandise not compatible with a department store's attempt to be all things to all people.<sup>34</sup>

The Charles F. Berg Store prided itself on its well-paid, long-tenured employees (the store published an in-house newsletter in which the staff were addressed as "Bergites," and management held regular service award ceremonies) and conscientious, attentive service.<sup>35</sup> Under the influence of Forrest, the Charles F. Berg Store stressed youth and modernity. Forrest noted that the Berg Store carried smaller sizes than other apparel shops and referred to his customers as the "young-in-spirit," "young-at-heart," and "young-in-taste."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Chas. F. Berg's Scrap Book, Scrapbook, Charles Berg Records, Mss 2512, Box 4 of 6. "Mr. Berg Gives Practical Talk," clipping reporting a May 4, 1915 speech to students, probably from Pacific University's (Forest Grove, OR) newspaper *The Pacific Index/The Index*. These arguments are contrary to ones made by others stressing the cross-class nature of a department store's clientele, due to goods at varying price points, and facilities open to the public.

<sup>33</sup> See *Ladies' Delight* (1883) the novel by Émile Zola describing the operations of a Parisian department store and its effect on the surrounding neighborhood.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Longstreth, *The American Department Store Transformed, 1920 – 1960* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 9.

<sup>35</sup> Charles Berg Records, Mss 2512; Charles F. Berg Photographs Collection, 1900–1974, OR Lot 103, Oregon Historical Society Research Library. These resources include managerial correspondence and speeches as well as copies of the employee newsletter and ample documentation of the annual Christmas hijinks.

<sup>36</sup> Slick Young Ideas, Scrapbook, Charles Berg Records, Mss 2512, Box 6 of 6. 1962 Memorandum to employees or in-house newsletter excerpt. Forrest T. Berg was 61 at the time he described the Charles F. Berg customer thus. He stated that a youthful fashion sense was his goal from the moment he made his first purchase for Berg's in 1924.

Young women were courted by Berg's in order that they might become loyal customers when they had budgets of their own. In 1928, Berg's started a "College Board" and in 1944 added a "High School Fashion Board." These were staffed by "college going moderns," "smart young co-eds," and high-schoolers chosen for their dress sense and ability to influence their peers.<sup>37</sup> They worked for Charles F. Berg to tell its buyers what young women wanted to wear and in turn promoted Charles F. Berg's merchandise to their classmates. Starting in 1957, Berg's offered a charge plate to teenage girls marketed as the "Teen Chumley Credit Club" which was available so long they demonstrated parental approval.<sup>38</sup> Another intergenerational fashion connection was Berg's annual "A Date with Dad," an evening Christmas party for fathers and daughters where daughters guided Dad to the most coveted gifts for Mother, and probably, themselves.<sup>39</sup>

The fashion business is a competitive one, and though there was tremendous goodwill amongst the downtown merchants, they paid close attention to each other's business. The Charles F. Berg Store monitored the merchandise, advertising, display techniques, sales, and customer base of the nearby department stores. While Berg differentiated himself from the concept of a department store, department stores across the country looked at establishments such as his as a threat, "because of [the specialty store's] ability to offer a higher degree of personal attention, sales force expertise,

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.; Charles F. Berg Photographs Collection. The Charles F. Berg Store gave much promotional space to its college department and the yearly Rose Festival Court, whose Princesses and Queen were chosen from Portland's high schools.

<sup>38</sup> Charles Berg Records, Mss 2512, Box 5 of 6.

<sup>39</sup> Charles Berg Records. Over the decades, the in-store communications and interviews given to outsiders always mention the fact that this event was held without alcohol. It is interesting that the point is made, especially since it is congruent with Berg's similar, stated policy on his Hoot Owls program.

and a more intimate, even exclusive atmosphere.”<sup>40</sup>

### ***Opening on Broadway***

When Berg chose to relocate to Broadway, then, as now, “Broadway” was a kind of shorthand for a glittering entertainment district.<sup>41</sup> Berg’s new location and its eye-catching architecture brought together the elements of fantasy life and visual pleasure that could be had without spending money with nitty-gritty inducements to purchase garments, cosmetics, and beauty services. The modernized Charles F. Berg Store was surrounded by the cinemas of Broadway, and “[l]ike the movie palace, the new department store [and specialty stores] exuded an aura of snob appeal at a time of widespread aspirations, yet it did not require extravagance to enjoy,”<sup>42</sup> at least from the sidewalk.

Great publicity accompanied the opening of the new Charles F. Berg Store on February 1, 1930, just three months after Black Tuesday, the Great Stock Market Crash of October 29, 1929.<sup>43</sup> *The Oregonian* published a Special Section for the occasion titled simply, “Charles F. Berg Store Opening.” This lavishly-illustrated, full-of-facts insert was fabulous advertising and bespeaks the good terms Berg enjoyed in the Portland community. In it, all of the contractors and suppliers were named, and the story of Charles F. Berg’s life leading up to this auspicious event was celebrated.

Berg received congratulatory wires and other correspondence from garment manufacturers, suppliers, and retailers from Portland as well as major cities across the country. An example of his

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<sup>40</sup> Longstreth, *The American Department Store Transformed*, 9.

<sup>41</sup> Portland’s “Broadway” was “Seventh Avenue” until 1913. In New York City, “Seventh Avenue” is shorthand for the fashion industry, just as “Madison Avenue” is for advertising, and “Fifth Avenue” is for upscale merchandise.

<sup>42</sup> Longstreth, *The American Department Store Transformed*, 8.

<sup>43</sup> “Charles F. Berg Store Opening,” Special Section 3, *The Oregonian* (Friday, January 31, 1930).

good relationship with suppliers was this telegram from Charles Katz, a founder of Polan Katz & Company, a nationally-known umbrella manufacturer in Baltimore, Maryland:

Your nationwide reputation for square dealing with manufacturers and the goodwill these manufacturers have towards you, your reputation for square dealing and good service among the Portland public there is nothing that could stop your success.<sup>44</sup>

Alfred M. Bedell, President of New York's Bedell Company, "The Largest Women's Apparel House in the World,"—and a Portland specialty store rival—sent him a letter beginning, "Dear Charlie." He advised that, "Altering, building and opening new stores are very vexing and annoying to one who is sincere in his efforts...but just control yourself, wear a smile and make believe everything is 100% and it will go along easily." He closed by saying, "If there is anything I can do for you have no hesitancy in writing or wiring me."<sup>45</sup>

The Thursday night before this issue came out, a banquet in Berg's honor was held at the Multnomah Hotel. Attended by such luminaries as the Mayor, the Chief of Police, the Superintendent of Schools, the KGW Dance Band, Chamber of Commerce associates, as well as Berg's rivals and neighbors in the apparel trade, this event received its own publicity.<sup>46</sup>

A pendant to *The Oregonian's* elaborate and enthusiastic Special Section was a privately-published facsimile of a less respectable newspaper titled, *Berg's Confiscated-Illustrated*, "Nightie Extra Edition," whose cost was, "Priceless." This paper, operating under the slogan, "All the Views

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<sup>44</sup> Black Scrapbook, Charles Berg Records, Mss 2512, Box 2 of 6. In the first decades of the twentieth century, Baltimore was a center of umbrella manufacturing.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. The letter is dated January 10, 1930 on letterhead from The Bedell Company, West 34<sup>th</sup> St., New York, New York.

<sup>46</sup> The Multnomah Hotel was built in 1911 by Gibson & Cahill (1910-1911) in the Renaissance style. It encompasses the entire block between SW Ash and Pine Streets and Third and Fourth Avenues. It adjoins the old cast iron commercial district and was one of the largest and grandest hotels in the Pacific Northwest. Oregon Historic Sites Database, Resource ID 49327.

Fit to Print,” claimed on its masthead that the publication was “Established for No Particular Purpose by the Retail Merchants’ Committee of the Chamber of Commerce.”<sup>47</sup> The page one headline blared, “Big Banquet Boosts Berg to Broadway: Charley’s Friends and Competitors Make Whoopee in Celebration of Black and Gold Front Opening.”

In the parody, Berg was characterized as the “Little Napoleon of the silk shimmy trade.” Banquet menu selections apparently included, “Grapefruit in a Camisole,” “Crab à la New Berg,” “Schmooz Gravy,” and “Layer Cake en Brassiere.” All of these poked fun at Berg’s professional intimacy with the “unmentionables” category of women’s apparel. Was there a hint of envy in remarks such as, “...whether it was long gloves or short skirts, he had the women and girls of the town at his feet, so to speak,” or, “Charles Berg has something on every woman in Portland,” or “Charley was the first man in Portland to learn how to handle lingerie impersonally”? Despite the razzing tone, the articles went on to give touching examples of the great respect Berg enjoyed as a businessman and solid citizen, summed up by the statement: “While asking a good living from the public, Charley also gave his energies in a civic way and never asked favors in return.”

Berg was stricken by a heart attack on a Thursday afternoon, September 1, 1932 while working in his store office. His doctor had warned him several years before to not even walk briskly, because his heart was so fragile, but Berg was constantly on the go. His family and friends had time to gather at the store to say goodbye before he expired. Out of respect for his passing, the Charles F. Berg Store remained closed from Friday, September 2<sup>nd</sup> through Sunday the 4<sup>th</sup>, and Portland flags

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<sup>47</sup> *Berg’s Confiscated–Illustrated* (Portland, OR: Jan. 30, 1930), Black Scrapbook, Charles Berg Records, Mss 2512, Box 2 of 6. Page 1 story by Nathan Strauss; other excerpts, p. 4.

flew at half-mast from City Hall and other public buildings. Berg's funeral was attended by Governor Julius L. Meier, Mayor George L. Baker, and other leaders; in other words, by many of the same personages who had gathered to roast him just a year and a half earlier.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Forrest Berg—Memorial to CFB, Scrapbook, Charles Berg Records, Mss 2512, Box 4 of 6; *Oregon History Project*, Oregon Historical Society Museum and Research Library, oregonhistoryproject.org. Governor Julius L. Meier (1874–1937) was the son of the co-founder of Meier & Frank; Mayor George L. Baker (1868–1941) was a former vaudeville theater owner.

### Chapter III

#### The Modernized Charles F. Berg Store Building (1930)

##### *Popular Modernism with Commercial Appeal*

Berg's Store sold fashionable women's apparel and accessories. Unlike the department stores, he did not sell housewares, furniture, food, menswear, or children's goods (see Fig. 6).<sup>49</sup> He pioneered the "store-within-a-store" concept, with several salons or boutique spaces under one roof. Berg's expanded line of wares in his modernized store included daytime dresses, evening wear, shoes, furs, millinery, cosmetics, and perfume, all in a luxurious, color-calibrated environment.<sup>50</sup>

The location for this showplace was an unremarkable commercial masonry building constructed in 1902 by the family of Cyrus A. Dolph on the site of their former home. Next door to the north was the site of the home of Matthew P. Deady, now occupied by its own commercial building.<sup>51</sup> When Berg leased the Dolph Building, the street level storefront held a "Sweet Sixteen" women's apparel shop (see Fig. 4).<sup>52</sup> Berg received permission to alter the whole building inside and

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<sup>49</sup> Charles Berg Records.

<sup>50</sup> "Dolph Building/Berg, Charles F., Building," *National Register Form*, Sect. 7, pp. 2-3. The Special Section of *The Oregonian* describes in mouthwatering detail the color harmonies of each department, the inspiration of the underwater gardens at Catalina Island in California, the Tiffany-designed elevator cabs, the silver thread, the complete luxury of every finish. Unfortunately, the interiors began to be altered a few years after the store opened and continued to change every decade thereafter.

<sup>51</sup> "718 Alder Building," *Midtown Blocks Historic Assessment*, 165-166. Cyrus A. Dolph (1840-1914) was a lawyer and a Regent of the University of Oregon; Matthew P. Deady (1824-1893) was a judge and President of the Board of Regents of the University of Oregon. Deady Hall on the Eugene campus is named after him, a fact that has become contested recently.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, Sect. 7, p. 1, Sect. 8, p. 1; "Charles F. Berg Building," *Historic Resource Inventory*; "Charles F. Berg Building," *State of Oregon Inventory*; "Berg, Charles F., Building/Dolph Building," Oregon Historic Site Record. The Dolph family name is memorialized in a cluster of streets—Dolph Court, Dolph Drive, and Dolph Street—in the Multnomah district of Southwest Portland, and in the neighborhood called Dolph Park in Northeast Portland.

out to reflect his vision of an up-to-date, fashionable women's specialty store comparable to East Coast and Los Angeles establishments.

For the modernization, Berg engaged the Grand Rapids Design Service of the Grand Rapids Store Equipment Corporation, a supplier of retail store façades and interior fixtures such as display cases. These companies were common up through World War II, and this firm in particular may have come to Berg's attention due to its publicized work for the downtown Portland S.H. Kress store in 1928.<sup>53</sup>

The Grand Rapids Store Equipment Corporation was the product of a merger of inventor Lyman Welch's "Welch Folding Bed Company," founded in 1886, and a store fixture company, both operating in Grand Rapids, Michigan.<sup>54</sup> From 1928 on, Lyman Welch's son, Kenneth C. Welch (1891–1973), a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania and the École des Beaux Arts, held the post of "Retail Architect" and Vice President of the Grand Rapids Designing Service division of the Grand Rapids Store Equipment Corporation.<sup>55</sup>

Welch overlooked no opportunity to place articles describing store modernization projects utilizing his firm's wares in architectural journals such as *Architectural Forum* and *Architectural Record*.<sup>56</sup> Hence, the editorial and the advertising departments of these publications fulfilled a

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<sup>53</sup> Longstreth, *The American Department Store Transformed*, 41-42. In 1946, they supplied the interior fixtures for an Olds, Wortman & King remodeling.

<sup>54</sup> Grand Rapids was a center of mass-produced, mass-market furnishings.

<sup>55</sup> "Finding Aid for the Kenneth C. Welch Papers," by Jenny Zukowski. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1976), "Biography" section, quod.lib.umich.edu.; "Finding Aid for the Kenneth C. Welch Architecture and Design Collection 151," by Katie M. Visner, Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections (Grand Rapids, MI: Grand Rapids Public Library, July 20, 2013), Sect. Biographical/Historical note, 4; David Smiley, *Pedestrian Modern: Shopping and American Architecture, 1925-1956* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 70-72.

<sup>56</sup> Gideon Bosker and Lena Lencek, *Frozen Music: A History of Portland Architecture* (Portland, OR: Western

public-relations function for his firm in particular, and promoted the idea of frequent retail remodelling in general. In fact, Welch “[occupied] a unique niche as both an architect and a manufacturing representative,” and “demonstrated an interest in the architectural representation of modernism.”<sup>57</sup> Welch was nothing if not pragmatic, and his work had no personal distinction except that it was executed in whatever was the prevailing style of the time. In 1930, that style was still Art Deco, barely.

The modernized Charles F. Berg Store Building was designed in the Art Deco of the 1920s. Even though Portland never had the fashionable or architectural stature of Los Angeles, New York, or Paris, the modernized Charles F. Berg façade of 1930 was not a timid, provincial rendering of Art Deco but rather is “Art Deco architecture at its finest bristling with the razzle-dazzle of a fantasy period piece...a retail outlet for women’s clothing with which the passerby could instantly empathize as if it were some obvious theatrical gesture” (see Fig. 6). The Charles F. Berg Store

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Imprints, The Press of the Oregon Historical Society, 1985), 69-70. Bosker and Lencek mention architect Kem Weber (1889-1963) as a purported designer of the Berg Store’s new façade, an idea that also appears in a 1969 letter from architect George A. McMath (1937-2007) to architectural historian Marcus Whiffen (1916–2002). (Marion Dean Ross Collection, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Architecture, U.S.: Oregon-Portland; Commercial: Berg Store, Box 9, Folder 21). However, Weber’s name does not appear in any primary sources examined for this paper, nor in any other secondary sources. Stylistically, Ferriday points out that Weber worked in a different idiom (*Last of the Handmade Buildings*, 30). Perhaps some of the confusion stems from the fact that Weber designed for the Grand Rapids Chair (or Furniture) Company, different from Welch’s. Neither Welch nor his company is mentioned in the monograph by Christopher Long, *Kem Weber: Designer and Architect* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 103-108, 153. While there is no evidence that Weber was involved in the Charles F. Berg Store, in 1930 he worked with architect Albert F. Roller (1891-1981) on a modernization of the Sommer & Kaufmann Shoe Store in San Francisco. For this project, Weber designed display windows, interiors, fixtures, and shoeboxes. In 1936, he rendered a design to re-modernize its storefront level into the Streamline Moderne style. Finally, the Building Oregon database at [oregondigital.org](http://oregondigital.org) includes some photographs of the Charles F. Berg Building with architect Charles H. Burggraf (1867-1942) named as creator. His name did not appear in any primary documents nor any other secondary material examined for this paper. Also, Burggraf worked primarily in the cities of Albany and Salem, Oregon creating institutional buildings of a much more traditional style.

<sup>57</sup> Smiley, *Pedestrian Modern*, 70-72.

Building's angular, incised ornament and dramatic palette was based on the motifs and color schemes used in the exhibits at the 1925 Paris Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes (see Fig. 13) and taken into American architecture.<sup>58</sup>

While some stylistic analyses conflate the “Art Deco” of the 1920s with the “Art Moderne,” “Depression Modern,” or “Streamline Moderne” of the 1930s, authors such as David Gebhard and Martin Greif have made the difference clear, and the distinction is generally respected in recent architectural writing.<sup>59</sup> The circa 1925 “Art Deco” style, was a combination of classical Beaux-Arts hierarchy and modern execution, with a vertical orientation, and flat incised ornament, whether the motifs were classical, naturalistic, or exotic (see Figs. 8 & 13). The modernized Charles F. Berg Store Building can be seen as a late flower of Parisian Art Deco. In many cities during the 1920s, the newest buildings, such as telephone company and insurance towers, institutional buildings, and stores, were built in the Art Deco mode. It was popular modernism with commercial appeal:

[T]here was an esoteric style, that is, the International Style, alongside of which developed a more popular style which has been named variously Art Deco, Modernistic, Jazz Modern, Zigzag Modern, Style 1925, the Twenties Style, Streamlined Modern [and Depression Modern]...In its own day this style was referred to in America, after some initial vacillations between ‘modernist’ and ‘modernistic,’ as Modernistic from about 1928 onward....“one could call the Art Deco architect an avant-garde traditionalist...the intention was to create a mass modern” with “a clear bridge to the architecture of the past.”<sup>60</sup>

Writing in 1992, Patricia Bayer could be commenting on the modernized Charles F. Berg Store:

Paris in the 1920s was rich in moderne storefronts, their ornamental metalwork, stylish

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<sup>58</sup> Bosker and Lencek, *Frozen Music*, 69–70.

<sup>59</sup> The style came to be called “Art Deco” in the late 1960s, as a shortened form of *arts décoratifs* from the Exposition’s name. Gebhard uses “Zigzag Moderne” for the 1920s vertical Art Deco and “Streamline” for the 1930s horizontal style, whereas Greif uses the term “Depression Modern” for the style of the 1930s.

<sup>60</sup> Cervin Robinson and Rosemarie Haag Bletter, *Skyscraper Style: Art Deco New York* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1975), 41.

lettering, and geometric and floral embellishments evoking pavilions at the 1925 Exposition.... Many American retail establishments were designed in le style moderne; the owners of such shops...were eager to be associated with French style. Gallic-inspired motifs filtered down to the most ordinary retail stores, largely in the guise of polychrome terracotta panels that could be purchased from various suppliers [see Figs. 6, 7 & 8].<sup>61</sup>

Gladding, McBean & Company used its quarterly publication, *Shapes of Clay* to showcase recent buildings utilizing their cladding and ornament, as well as to display historic and modern architecture using terra cotta.<sup>62</sup> The November 1929 issue of *Shapes of Clay* was dedicated to “Modernism,” and featured two new West Coast Art Deco buildings, the Northern Life Tower in Seattle, Washington and the Bullock’s Wilshire Store in Los Angeles.<sup>63</sup> These buildings and others like them were said to be monuments of “[a]rchitecture *moderne* that truly expresses the twentieth century” while pleasingly suggesting the past.<sup>64</sup> Gladding, McBean and Company was proud of its importance to the modernized Charles F. Berg Store Building and featured the store in its June 1920 volume of *Shapes of Clay* (see Fig. 9). The text explained that, in order to please

the buying public....special emphasis for the use of terra-cotta must be placed on the demand for color as used in the architecture we call *moderne*. Retail business knows the value in increased sales of color *moderne*, and has learned that terra-cotta is the ideal medium for obtaining striking color *moderne* effects [emphasis in the original].<sup>65</sup>

Gladding, McBean & Company was a major architectural player on the West Coast during terra cotta’s post-Renaissance heyday from the 1890s through 1930.<sup>66</sup> Gladding, McBean’s

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<sup>61</sup> Patricia Bayer, *Art Deco Architecture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992), 130-131.

<sup>62</sup> Gladding, McBean & Co., *Shapes of Clay* 5, no. 6 (November 1929); *Shapes of Clay* 6, no. 2 (June 1930). Gladding, McBean & Company. published *Shapes of Clay* quarterly from April 1925 to November 1937. The Company archives are held in the California State Library, Sacramento, CA.

<sup>63</sup> *Shapes of Clay* 5, no. 6 (November 1929): 6, 8. The Northern Life Tower was built in 1929, by A.H. Albertson (1872–1964).

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>65</sup> *Shapes of Clay* 6, no. 2 (June 1930): 6.

<sup>66</sup> Nancy D. Berryman and Susan M. Tindall, *Terra Cotta: Preservation of an Historic Building Material* (Chicago, IL: Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois, 1984), 1–2.

contribution to West Coast architecture is enormous—the firm not only provided cladding and ornament for many buildings that survive today as examples of their kind, but also lost buildings and the unremarkable ones that comprise the urban fabric of California, Oregon, Washington, the intermountain states, and Hawaii.

Gladding, McBean & Company was responsible for cladding three California buildings contemporary with the modernized Charles F. Berg Store Building and which share its bold dark and metallic color scheme: the Oakland Floral Depot (1931), in Oakland, the Richfield Building (1928), and the Security-First National Bank (1929) in Los Angeles (see Fig. 11).<sup>67</sup> Gladding, McBean also clad most of the white Beaux-Arts Neoclassical buildings of Portland's downtown retail district.<sup>68</sup>

The terra cotta industry collapsed during the Depression.<sup>69</sup> Stylistically, once the luxurious, texturally-rich Art Deco in the Beaux-Arts tradition gave way to the uninterrupted smoothness of Streamline Moderne, the use of terra cotta declined. It was the end of both an ancient craft of clay sculpting and a tradition of architectural iconography.<sup>70</sup> Clay firing gave way to modernized façades created with applied enamelled metal panels. This was an irony because up to about 1930 the terra cotta modernizations of Neoclassical palazzi had been carried out with an old material in a new style.<sup>71</sup>

In an attempt to compete with Streamline Moderne panels, Gladding, McBean & Company

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<sup>67</sup> The Oakland Flower Depot was built in 1931, by Albert J. Evers (1888-1977). The [Atlantic] Richfield [Oil] Building was built in 1928 (demolished in 1968) by Morgan, Walls & Clements (1910–c. 1937). The Security-First National Bank was built in 1929 by Morgan, Walls & Clements, in Santa Monica/Los Angeles, CA.

<sup>68</sup> See the National Register and local inventory forms for these buildings.

<sup>69</sup> Gary F. Kurutz, *Architectural Terra Cotta of Gladding, McBean* (Sausalito, CA: Windgate Press, 1989), 8.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 103; Ferriday, *Last of the Handmade Buildings*, 41.

<sup>71</sup> Kurutz, *Architectural Terra Cotta of Gladding, McBean*, 107.

developed a product of similar modularity and thinness called “terra cotta veneer.”<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, the company saw the writing on the wall and said in 1932 that architects only wanted “metal, glass, and cement.”<sup>73</sup> Despite its loss of the fashionable exterior cladding business, Gladding, McBean and Company continued to make tile, pipe, and other utilitarian items. The firm is still in business, and today makes most of its architectural terra cotta for replacement parts in historic preservation projects, rather than for new construction. Recently, there are signs that the use of terra cotta might be becoming more common after decades of glass-only building veneers.<sup>74</sup>

Although the cladding and metalwork of Art Deco architecture was continuation of traditional building crafts, its verticality and zigzag elements were a way of emulating the upward thrust of the new skyscrapers and differentiates Art Deco from other modernisms of the 1930s. The later decade’s popular modernism was simpler and curvier, based on geometric shapes, often asymmetrical, with a smooth, if not shiny or reflective, treatment of façades. Retail architecture during the Depression made much use of plate glass for window displays and dispensed with incised ornament or texture. It was this version of modernism that was promoted in the Depression-instigated “Modernize Main Street” movement.

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<sup>72</sup> James Marshall Hamrick, Jr., “A Survey of the Use of Architectural Terra Cotta in American Commercial Architecture: 1870-1930” (M.A. Thesis, University of Oregon, 1979), 69; Nancy D. Berryman and Susan M. Tindall, *Terra Cotta: Preservation of an Historic Building Material* (Chicago, IL: Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois, 1984), 3.

<sup>73</sup> Kurutz, *Architectural Terra Cotta of Gladding, McBean*, 10.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 11; “Terra-Cotta Takes on Glass,” Elements, Mansion, *The Wall Street Journal* (Friday, June 29, 2018), M6. This article mentions condominium towers and restoration projects using terra cotta, mentioning a New York producer called “Boston Valley Terracotta,” and Gladding, McBean, which claimed an increase in business of 70% from 2014 to 2018.

### ***Let's Modernize Main Street***

After the Crash, commercial life slowed, both in the retail and the real estate sectors, and the building boom of the 1920s came close to a complete stop. In order to stimulate the building industry and to provide employment for architects and designers, the Federal Government devised a “Modernization Credit Plan” in 1934, administered by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA). Its slogan was, “Better Housing for American Business, Modernize Main Street for Profit.”<sup>75</sup>

This plan consisted of loans guaranteed by the Federal government to be used on the “modernizing” of commercial storefronts. The FHA encouraged owners and tenants of commercial real estate to avail themselves of this financing, and provided circulars, a magazine, and ready-to-be-personalized ads extolling the process of remodeling storefronts and the increased business that would result.<sup>76</sup> Many of the ads anthropomorphized non-modernized commercial frontage as dumpy, dowdy wallflowers passed by unnoticed by customers. In contrast, modernized fronts—applied to all kinds of businesses—were revitalized and attractive, as rejuvenated as a man with a facelift.<sup>77</sup>

A distinctive building style was promoted for these modernized storefronts: the 1930s streamlined modernism of smoothness, simplicity, and geometric forms (see Fig. 17). These storefronts were attached to masonry buildings in a similar way as the terra cotta panels of the modernized Charles F. Berg Store Building were, except that much of the new panelling was glass (promoted under trade names such as Vitrolite, Vitrolux, and Carrara Glass) or enamelled metal.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Gabrielle Esperdy, *Modernizing Main Street: Architecture and Consumer Culture in the New Deal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), f2.2 p52. The program was in place from 1934 to 1943.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 86-88, 221-222.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, f4.9 p173, 171-174.

<sup>78</sup> [Bullier aka Buchanan Bldg, mentioned in] “Swetland Building,” by John M. Tess, NR No. 07000367,

Competitions linking the FHA modernization loans to these new materials and the Streamline Moderne style were organized and juried by prominent architects and covered (i.e. promoted) thoroughly in the architectural journals. It will come as no surprise that Kenneth C. Welch was involved in this “Modernize Main Street” campaign. Furthermore, architect Kenneth Kingsley Stowell (1894-1969), editor of the *Architectural Forum* from 1927 to 1935, put the resources of his journal completely behind the alteration of downtown stores in this form of modernization.<sup>79</sup>

In 1935, Stowell published *Modernizing Buildings for Profit* and organized a competition tying modernization to new building materials and FHA funding.<sup>80</sup> The types of businesses represented were: Food Stores, Drug Stores, Automotive Sales and Service Stations, and Apparel Shops. Welch, on a jury with six other architects, adjudicated a “Modernize Main Street with Glass,” competition in partnership with the Libbey-Owens-Ford Glass Company. Over three-thousand entries were submitted to the *Architectural Record*.<sup>81</sup>

In addition to the month-by-month discussion of the competition—before, during, and after—in the *Architectural Record*, an oversized, full-color portfolio of many of the submitted

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*National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*, National Park Service (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, April 2007). In Portland, the 1906 Bullier Building at 420-426 SW Washington Street between Fourth and Fifth Avenues is completely masonry except for its Streamline Moderne storefront and entryway. It appears to have had its cornice removed, another modernization practice common in the 1930s.

<sup>79</sup> Esperdy, *Modernizing Main Street*, 119, 273n85.

<sup>80</sup> Kenneth K. Stowell, *Modernizing Buildings for Profit* (New York, NY: Prentice-Hall, 1935). Some material is reproduced from the pages of the *Architectural Forum* and *Architectural Record*, but the projects were not linked specifically to the FHA program. Stowell showed every kind of building as needing modernization. Projects shown included modernistic results as well as conversions from the Victorian to the Colonial or Georgian Revival styles.

<sup>81</sup> “The Jury Report,” in Libbey-Owens-Ford Glass Company, *52 Designs to Modernize Main Street with Glass* (Toledo, OH: Libbey-Owens-Ford Glass Company, c. 1935), 4-6; Smiley, *Pedestrian Modern*, 70-72. The Jury consisted of Melvin T. Copeland, Albert Kahn, William Lescaze, John W. Root, F.R. Walker, Kenneth C. Welch; and J. Andre Foulhoux, Chairman.

designs was published soon afterwards by Libbey-Owens-Ford. Called *52 Designs to Modernize Main Street with Glass*, this publication functioned as a style book and as a catalogue of the Libbey-Owens-Ford products necessary to carry out the designs. In the back, an amortization table showed the terms for borrowers under the Federal Housing Authority.<sup>82</sup>

Although the Charles F. Berg Store's modernization was not arranged through the FHA program, it is a striking example of the push by Welch and others to convert downtown retail architecture into modernism reflecting contemporary speed and materials. Unlike the other Portland downtown retailers who, for the most part, stuck to interior remodellings in their 1920s and 1930s modernizations, Berg commissioned a building transformation that was external as well as internal. Nevertheless, he, his rivals, and neighbors struggled mightily in the postwar era to retain customers who were streaming to the shopping centers built around customers arriving by car. It was a losing battle.<sup>83</sup>

During the Depression, Kenneth C. Welch regularly published articles in the *Architectural Forum* and the *Architectural Record* about the modernization and layout of different genres of retail stores downtown. As World War II continued and American transportation and residential habits changed, he switched his attention to the design and promotion of auto-oriented developments, which is the work for which he is best known today.<sup>84</sup>

In 1944, Welch published an *Architectural Record* article titled, "Where are Department Stores Going?" The answer was: they are going out to the edges of towns and brand-new sites along

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<sup>82</sup> Libbey-Owens-Ford Glass Company, *52 Designs to Modernize Main Street with Glass*, 76.

<sup>83</sup> "Bedell Building/Cascade Building," *National Register Form*, Sect. 8, p. 2. In 1965, Bedell's filed for bankruptcy, stating that it had lost money since 1963 because of the shopping centers.

<sup>84</sup> For example, the "Grand Rapids Parking Plan" and "Grand River Court," projects, both proposed c. 1945.

superhighways. He designed one himself in 1943, calling it the “Victory Shopping Center.” This complex was a one-story, horizontally-massed retail node situated beside a four-lane highway and landing strip (see Fig. 16).

Welch was by no means the inventor nor the only promoter of these complexes.<sup>85</sup>

Architectural design books from the 1940s on were written on the assumption and recognition that retail business would continue to migrate to auto-oriented developments. In fact, as early as 1925, an International City and Regional Planning Conference was held in New York City on “The Traffic Problem.”<sup>86</sup> The sheer volume of people using personal vehicles caused the end of downtown as the hub of commercial and entertainment life. Then as now, most drivers felt that the car was an extension of themselves, which led to a sense of being thwarted if required to park anywhere but steps away from the door of their destination.

The architectural by-product of the drive-by lifestyle was horizontality. Hence, downtown, retail virtually disappeared above the first floor. As suburbia added office and professional complexes, even office and professional use above first floors became rare, judging by the many “for lease” signs in upper-storey windows downtown. This includes the upper storey of the Charles F. Berg Store Building (see Fig. 5).<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Kenneth C. Welch, “Where are Department Stores Going?” *Architectural Record* 96 (Nov. 1944): 91-96; Smiley, *Pedestrian Modern*, 123-124. However, Welch was strangely enamored of driving as the key to modern architecture. An October 1952 *House & Home* article featuring Welch’s new, self-designed house in Grand Rapids described it as “an automobile-designed house. The carport is the entrance.” (99). Before a decade had passed, the Welch had driven away for good and the Kendall College of Art and Design was using the house as an Interior Design library and classroom. By 1967, it was demolished. See “History of Kendall School of Design” (Grand Rapids, MI: Kendall College of Art and Design of Ferris State University, 1978), 18, [kcad.edu](http://kcad.edu).

<sup>86</sup> Smiley, *Pedestrian Modern*, 97-98.

<sup>87</sup> Ferriday, *Last of the Handmade Buildings*, 73.

While the management of the Charles F. Berg Store did not follow the postwar fashion to panel over its frankly 1920s exterior, it did choose to remodel the interior based on design trends. Starting in the mid-1930s, the display area walls became smoother and monochromatic. In the 1950s and 1960s, quasi-rococo wall treatments and lighting fixtures appeared, and an entrance on the opposite side of the block, on SW Park Avenue, was added. This had huge plate glass windows and a low Roman brick wall without any reference to the Broadway façade's Art Deco design. If a customer never ventured to the other side, she might think that she was entering a brand-new store. By the late 1960s and 1970s, the walls were covered in wooden panelling and flower decals. The area dedicated to teenagers featured bead curtains.<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, so as not to lose its customer base completely to the suburbs, the Charles F. Berg Store took itself to suburbia instead.

In February 1960, thirty years after its trademark Art Deco statement opened downtown, the Charles F. Berg Dark Horse opened a casual branch in an Eichler-style addition to a circa 1915 Foursquare house. This boutique was located off SW Canyon Road west of downtown, where early homesteads and a few 1930s residential areas were being rapidly joined by ranch house and split-level house development. Canyon Road and the parallel Beaverton-Hillsdale Highway/OR-10 were becoming the backbone automobile arterials for Portland's post-World War II western suburbs.

Publicity for the Charles F. Berg Dark Horse stressed that there was "no need to dress up" to come on over to shop, besides, the apparel on offer ranged from "casual to casually dressy." The interior reflected a tack-room aesthetic, with wagon-wheel garment racks and equestrian décor.

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<sup>88</sup> Slick Young Ideas, Scrapbook, Charles Berg Records, Mss 2512, Box 6 of 6; Charles F. Berg Photographs Collection. Alignment with the majority fashion sense is evident in the graphic style of its advertising as well. The SW Park Avenue entrance to the Charles F. Berg Building has been closed off.

Garments on the wagon-wheels were blouses and skirts of gingham with rickrack trim, Bermuda shorts, and flannel nightgowns (gone were the silk shimmies). Purchases were wrapped in corrugated brown paper with rucked blue ribbon. A Beaverton newspaper quoted Forrest Berg at the opening saying, “We believe this area is the San Mateo of Portland.” A few years later, longtime executive Doris Wills Setzer went so far as to reassure ladies that they could come to the Dark Horse in curlers, and not have to pay to park for the privilege. For those customers starting from downtown—and who were probably not wearing curlers—Berg operated a shuttle between the two locations.<sup>89</sup>

It is obvious that the Charles F. Berg Store mode of elaborate ensemble dressing in garments purchased in a salon atmosphere was becoming obsolete. By the late 1950s, “casual” was not quite the American religion and round-the-clock style that it is now, but by the late 1960s, it was. And by that time, almost no one bothered to go downtown to shop. With the Bedell’s bankruptcy and the proliferating shopping squares, malls, and freeways, the Charles F. Berg Store was on a countdown to closure (see Fig. 14).<sup>90</sup> The building, however, would remain.

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<sup>89</sup> The Charles F. Berg Dark Horse, Scrapbook, Charles Berg Records, Mss 2512, Box 3 of 6 & “Imagination in Retailing [1968, p. 12],” Box 1 of 6. Manuscript by Doris Wills Setzer (1917-2000), longtime executive of The Charles F. Berg Store and donor to the Charles Berg Records, Mss 2512 at the Oregon Historical Society.

<sup>90</sup> The Charles F. Berg Dark Horse closed in 1973, two years before the business was sold. The building and the associated house still stand. The store space is now occupied by The Bike Gallery, at 12345 SW Canyon Road/OR-8 at SW Hall Blvd, Beaverton, Oregon.

## Chapter IV

### Preservation Concerns

#### *Changes According to the Fashion*

The non-technical aspect of preservation is probably the hardest to get right—knowing how to approach the restoration or rehabilitation of a building, and how to sell the process to stakeholders.

From the close of the Depression on, due to the orthodoxy that the so-called International Style was the only true modern style, the buildings built before then were considered garish, vulgar, and anachronistic. A revival of appreciation for Art Deco style in the 1960s and 1970s led to the preservation of some.<sup>91</sup> Yet, the historic preservation movement as such, and the public itself, was resistant in many cases, in part because the buildings were seen as too recent to be valuable—they appeared to be not historic, just out of date.

According to preservationist Richard Striner, the way to advocate for buildings of recent vintage is to argue for their preservation as embodiments of their time, not by stylistic appeal. There will always be disagreements about style preferences and whether a building is an exemplar of the highest or rarest type, but no one can deny that one was built at a particular time and is a piece of history. In other words, this strategy bases preservation advocacy on historical, not aesthetic, value.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Richard Striner, "Art Deco: Polemics and Synthesis," *Winterthur Portfolio* 25, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 33-34; Martin Greif, *Depression Modern: The Thirties Style in America* (New York, NY: Universe Books, 1975), 14, 26-27. The Art Deco and Streamline Moderne styles were just as international in scope as the *soi-disant* International Style. Greif notes that from the late 1960s through the mid-1970s, many Hollywood productions were set in the 1930s, mostly visually inaccurately, except for the cars.

<sup>92</sup> Richard Striner, "Preservation and the Recent Past," *Information Booklet No. 69* (Washington, D.C.: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1993), 1-4.

This is the difference between historic preservation and connoisseurship.

Nevertheless, the modernized Charles F. Berg Store Building of 1930 has plenty of aesthetic value to justify itself. Its visual quality is superlative and its Art Deco style is unique downtown. Its dark, black-and-gold cladding has very few contemporaries nationwide and none at all in Portland. The Charles F. Berg Store Building happens to be an exemplar of style and of its time, even though multiple interior remodels have left the façade as the only element with significant integrity.

In 1975, at the time of the store's sale, the recessed entryway was enclosed and altered. Its vaulted ceiling, freestanding display case, and display windows were removed. The "Charles F. Berg" sign lettering over the door was converted to grille work.<sup>93</sup> Now, one enters the building from a shallow recess off the sidewalk through double glass commercial doors. A short hallway terminates in a square elevator lobby/atrium with skylight and access to ground-floor tenant space. The finishes are not historic or luxurious. Sometime after 1979, the post-1930 projecting "Charles F. Berg" sign and the 1930 fire escape were removed (see Figs. 5, 6, 14).<sup>94</sup> These last two changes improve the clarity of the façade and the 1975 changes do not substantially alter its visual effect.

When Charles F. Berg had his expanded store clothed in a slinky, self-consciously new and modern style, he knew that the building itself would be associated in the public mind with the specialty nature of his store.<sup>95</sup> He did not want to be just another shop, and certainly not another department store. Thankfully, the modernized Charles F. Berg Store Building's exterior has been

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<sup>93</sup> Dolph Building/Berg, Charles F., Building," *National Register Form*, Sect. 7, p. 2.

<sup>94</sup> "Charles F. Berg Building," *State of Oregon Inventory*, 2. In 1979, at the time of this Inventory, the projecting sign and fire escape were extant.

<sup>95</sup> The modernized Charles F. Berg Store Building façade was used on company letterhead and in ads.

noted for its arresting appearance from the day it opened in 1930, and store management and later owners have left it mostly unchanged.

Many another striking building has been altered over time to spare its owner or prime tenant the shame of being considered outmoded and unstylish.<sup>96</sup> The Charles F. Berg Building was entered into the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C, which applies to buildings or structures:

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 that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.

The Charles F. Berg Store Building was described as “the state’s most widely known and most lavishly decorated example of Moderne architecture...it represents the ultimate development in the architectural use of terra cotta in Portland’s commercial buildings in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>97</sup>

The Significance portion of the nomination places part of the building’s architectural distinction in its inclusion in the thematic grouping of “Portland Downtown Glazed Terra Cotta Buildings,” which was documented by Virginia Guest Ferriday in 1980. An examination of the other retail members of that group, who were Berg’s rivals and neighbors, only sets in relief the radical aesthetic difference and effect of the modernized Charles F. Berg Store Building of 1930.<sup>98</sup>

If the Charles F. Berg Store Building is ever threatened with demolition, it would be wise to

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<sup>96</sup> Striner, “Preservation and the Recent Past,” 5.

<sup>97</sup> “Dolph Building/Berg, Charles F., Building,” *National Register Form*, Sect. 8, p. 1; “How To Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation,” *National Register Bulletin*, National Park Service (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, 2002).

<sup>98</sup> The Oregon Historic Sites Database allows searching by groups and will produce an Oregon Historic Site Record for each property belonging to the thematic grouping.

publicize the importance of Charles F. Berg and his family to the history of commercial life and the civic organizations of Portland. This would add significance under Criterion B of the National Register criteria for evaluation, which applies to buildings or structures “that are associated with the lives of significant persons in our past. Criterion A could be applied as well, to acknowledge a building “associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.”<sup>99</sup> The significant even or pattern here would be the Great Depression or possibly, the golden age of American downtowns.

According to the Secretary of the Interior Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, the most helpful approach to any further maintenance or remodeling of the modernized Charles F. Berg Store Building would be preservation of the exterior, and the rehabilitation of the interior. Due to the shift of retail to a primarily online experience (and the evidence of the closure of virtually every one of downtown Portland’s department stores and apparel specialty stores) there is little hope of restoring a viable women’s apparel business in the building as a whole.<sup>100</sup> Perhaps a restaurant and bar for the ground floor and a boutique hotel on the top two floors is the answer.

In 1979, the Mariposa women’s apparel chain purchased Rusan’s and opened a boutique in the storefront.<sup>101</sup> This store was geared to casual fashion for teenagers and was usually found in

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<sup>99</sup> “How To Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation.”

<sup>100</sup> Anne E. Grimmer, *The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring & Reconstructing Historic Buildings*, rev. ed. Technical Preservation Services, National Park Service (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, 2017); “Designing Compatible Replacement Storefronts,” *Interpreting the Standards Bulletin No. 49*, Technical Preservation Services, National Park Service (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, December 2007). As of 2018, a clothing boutique and an optical store occupy the Charles F. Berg Store Building’s storefront. The upper floors are for lease.

<sup>101</sup> “Dolph Building/Berg, Charles F., Building,” *National Register Form*, Sect. 8, p. 3;

malls. By about 1985, Mariposa was gone, and Golden Optical occupied the storefront. At this time, the optometrist and his wife, Dr. George and Merlene Nelson, leased their space. In 1996, they purchased the entire building. By 2010 they were still the owners, though amenable to selling. A profile of the couple and the building noted that it was unusual that for a small, local business person to own such a prime piece of real estate.<sup>102</sup> A records check with the City of Portland in the August 2018 showed ownership by a more typical international real estate firm.<sup>103</sup>

The most dangerous threat to the modernized Charles F. Berg Store Building is the desire of developers, especially in an area of downtown thick with hotels and restaurants, to build as high as possible (see Fig. 18). Low-rise masonry buildings remaining on the block of the Charles F. Berg Store could be stigmatized as an inefficient or even unsafe use of a desirable location.<sup>104</sup> The Charles F. Berg Store Building is characterized in municipal records as “office” space and at about 56’ in height, is an anomaly in an area that is now zoned, “CX,” for “Central Commercial.” In Portland:

The CX zone is a high density commercial zone intended for development within Portland’s most urban and intense areas. The CX zone allows for intense development with high building coverage and large buildings placed close together...Generally, height limits in the CX zone are at least 75’ and can reach up to 460’ in some places.<sup>105</sup>

Clearly, the powers-that-be do not visualize the prime commercial area as one of low-rise, early

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<sup>102</sup> “Charles F. Berg Building,” by Aaron Spencer, *Daily Journal of Commerce* (April 14, 2010), djoregon.com. Merlene Nelson said that her mother’s high school graduation dress was purchased at the Charles F. Berg Store.

<sup>103</sup> “615 SW Broadway, Portland, OR 97205”, City of Portland, Oregon, Bureau of Development Services, portlandmaps.com. The owner is Broadway Devel LLC, Cushman & Wakefield.

<sup>104</sup> Conversation with Dr. Leland M. Roth, May 22, 2018; “Unreinforced Masonry Building (UMB) Information,” City of Portland, Oregon Development Services, Info Center, portlandoregon.gov. Dr. Roth pointed out the temptation to a downtown developer of purchasing an entire block of low-rise buildings and replacing them with one high-rise. Also, the City of Portland has identified and voiced concerns about the safety of unreinforced masonry buildings and the feasibility and requirement of seismic retrofitting.

<sup>105</sup> “Portland Zoning,” City of Portland, Oregon, Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, portlandmaps.com and portlandoregon.gov.

twentieth-century buildings. If replacement of the Charles F. Berg Store Building became a plan, and the National Register Criteria C, B, and A are not enough to stay the hand of the developers, it would be worthwhile to save the Art Deco façade and affix it to whatever tower rose behind. There is nothing of integrity on the interior now, and in this way, the modernized Charles F. Berg Store Building would come full circle, because its distinctive transformation's most memorable element was only skin deep.

### ***Storefronts***

The desire of retail businesses to attract customers never changes. Then, as now, a storefront's appeal is key. Not only can a snazzy storefront give the impression that a business is prospering and providing up-to-the-minute goods, in formerly prosperous areas, "[t]he sensitive rehabilitation of storefronts can result not only in increased business for the owner but can also provide evidence that downtown revitalization efforts are succeeding."<sup>106</sup>

The Association for Preservation Technology recently formulated its "Principles for Practice on Renewing Modernism." The APT is especially concerned about vernacular properties that embody their time yet have little architectural distinction beyond that.<sup>107</sup> Happily, the Charles F. Berg Store Building remains intrinsically interesting today, due to its black façade, unlike anything else downtown, and its dramatic, but legible-to-the-layperson ornamental motifs.

Due to the pressures of retail and architectural fashion—and the relative ease of making

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<sup>106</sup> H. Ward Jandl, "Rehabilitating Historic Storefronts," *Preservation Brief No. 11* Technical Preservation Services, National Park Service (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, September 1982), 1, 3.

<sup>107</sup> "Toward APT Consensus Principles for Practice on Renewing Modernism," *APT Bulletin: The Journal of Preservation Technology*, Special Issue: "On Modernism," 48, nos. 2–3 (2017): 6.

superficial changes at ground level—storefronts are vulnerable. The modernized storefronts that only cover the ground-floor elevation are referred to by Mike Jackson as, “half-modern.” In the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, it was common downtown to cover entire façades with opaque panels or grilles. These Jackson calls, “slipcover” panels.<sup>108</sup> In the case of the half-modern building, the practice is usually to remove the modernized storefront because of the preservationists’ preference for “a” date or period of significance and because, “in general, preservation guidelines prefer harmony rather than contrast.” For this reason, when “slipcover” panels are removed, that removal “is generally noted as being a successful preservation project.”<sup>109</sup>

Sometimes, storefronts modernized in substantially different mode than the rest of the building are retained because of their value during a later “period of significance,” than the significance that the rest of the building has for the time it was constructed. The Streamline Moderne storefronts would qualify in this way under Criterion A due to their association with the Great Depression. Additionally, the uniqueness of the Streamline Moderne style could be recognized under Criterion C.

### ***Terra Cotta***

Another point fostering preservation of the Berg Store is the significance of its terra cotta and of the importance of its manufacturer. In the 1920s and 1930s, architectural terra cotta was used to fire-proof structural members in new construction, to provide ornamental features at a lower cost

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<sup>108</sup> Mike Jackson, “Modernism on Main Street: The Dilemma of the Half-Modern Building,” *APT Bulletin: The Journal of Preservation Technology*, Special Issue: “On Modernism,” 48, nos. 2–3 (2017).

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.* 33–35. I would also argue that this is successful in those cases on the grounds of improving the habitability of the building by restoring window access to the occupants

than carving, and to clad buildings as a veneer.<sup>110</sup> This cladding could be applied to a modern steel-frame constructed building or to a masonry building. It is this last use of terra cotta that was used to create the modernized Charles F. Berg Store Building of 1930.

While the Charles F. Berg Store Building appears to be in fine shape from a *prima facie* view, terra cotta veneer must be monitored for signs of deterioration caused by moisture, such as crazing, glaze spalling, and material spalling. A more insidious form of moisture damage can happen within the structural system attaching the veneer units to the building's face. While the mild climate of Portland keeps freeze-and-thaw cycles from being harsh, moisture infiltration can still happen. This damage to the mortar or metal members of the attachment system is hard to diagnose prior to the loss of a facing unit, sure evidence of decay within. A building of modest height such as the Charles F. Berg Store Building is less likely to have problems related to continuous-cladding of tall buildings without provision for the shifting and compression of the building frame.

In order to examine architectural terra cotta, it is necessary to look up close for evidence of moisture infiltration or structural failure. Veneer may be tapped with a mallet: a resonant sound means that the unit has structural integrity, a flat noise means that it has deteriorated. Other methods of revealing missing or damaged material are infrared scanning, sonar, and metal detection.<sup>111</sup>

### ***Let's Revitalize Main Street***

Beginning around 1970, the National Trust for Historic Preservation began a program to

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<sup>110</sup> de Teel Patterson Tiller, "The Preservation of Historic Glazed Architectural Terra cotta," *Preservation Brief* No. 7, Technical Preservation Services, National Park Service (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, June 1979), 1-2; On the issue of falling terra cotta, see also Blair Kamin, "Terra Stricken," *Chicago Tribune* (Thursday, March 4, 1999, Sect. 5, pp. 1, 11.

<sup>111</sup> Tiller, "The Preservation of Historic Glazed Architectural Terra cotta," 3-6.

“revitalize” American downtowns, and founded the National Main Street Center in the late 1970s.<sup>112</sup> One of its urban refurbishment projects was to restore many of the storefronts that had been altered during the two waves of modernization back to the original construction date of their buildings.

The National Main Street Center publication, *Guiding Design on Main Street* (1988) contained a sensitive discussion of the struggles of the American downtown and discusses tax credits and other incentives to help property owners and tenants to invest in downtown locations, as well as offering design and maintenance guidance. The newer Main Street America program geared to urban areas, UrbanMain, does not look as if its approach applies to Portland’s downtown retail district. When the Dolph Building and its neighbors went up circa 1900, it was because the city fathers razed their houses to put up commercial buildings. In 2018, there is not any residential use in the district, except for the transient visitors to hotels. UrbanMain focuses on “grassroots organizations and local leaders...to enable communities to bring prosperity back to downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts.”<sup>113</sup> The key word here is “neighborhood.” The block where the Charles F. Berg Store Building is sited and its surroundings have been commercial for over a hundred years now. The question is how to revitalize the commerce and entertainment that used to be so abundant in the buildings downtown.

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<sup>112</sup> “2018 Main Street American Coordinating Programs,” Main Street America, a program of the nonprofit National Main Street Center, Inc., a subsidiary of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, [mainstreet.org](http://mainstreet.org); The Oregon Main Street Coordinating Program is part of the State of Oregon Parks & Recreation Department, Oregon Heritage which is the SHPO based in Salem, [oregonheritage.org](http://oregonheritage.org) and [oregon.gov](http://oregon.gov).

<sup>113</sup> “Introducing UrbanMain,” [mainstreet.org](http://mainstreet.org).

## **Conclusion:**

### **It's a Different World Now**

The historic department store buildings of downtown Portland's retail core remain, even though virtually every one of the apparel stores, whether department or specialty, is now closed. The Olds, Wortman & King building still houses a functioning Target store, despite the fact that today in Portland, "downtown retailers and others are faced with theft, break-ins, human waste and the detritus of the opioid epidemic on a regular basis."<sup>114</sup> Target is a mass-market store, perhaps most akin to the S.H. Kress five-and-dime that used to be a few blocks east. Brooks Brothers is a venerable, upscale professional clothing firm which could not maintain a foothold in Portland. In fact, it not only recently vacated a storefront in another section of Olds, Wortman & King, it decamped from Oregon altogether: "We're more tech, casual stuff, as opposed to buttoned-down Brooks Brothers suits," said the building owner's representative<sup>115</sup>

Forrest T. Berg headed The Charles F. Berg Store from his father's death 1932 until 1975, when it was sold to Rusan's a chain of stores from Spokane, Washington. Three years after that, he donated much Charles F. Berg Store material to the Oregon Historical Society and sat for an interview in which he discussed his philosophies of life and business, civic activities, and the history of the retail scene in Portland.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Anna Marum, "Downtown Portland's Paradox: Crime, Public Perceptions Threaten Growth, Retailers Say," Oregon Business News, *The Oregonian/OregonLive*, Jan. 7, updated Jan. 8, 2018.

<sup>115</sup> Mike Rogoway, "Brooks Brothers Closes Downtown Portland Store, Its Only Oregon Location," Oregon Business News, *The Oregonian/OregonLive*, June 13, 2018. The quote is from Diane McMahon, chief executive of the Bill Naito Company, owner of the Galleria (Olds, Wortman & King) Building.

<sup>116</sup> "Oral History Interview with Forrest Talbot Berg," 1.

As his father had been, Forrest Berg was involved in multiple civic organizations, in addition to being aware of every product and event of the Charles F. Berg Store. He said that, “I believe any successful business person should be active in civic activities. They should contribute something of themselves to their city and state.”<sup>117</sup> He said that the key to being active in that way is health, which meant, “physical exercise, smiling and being a good listener, [a] positive attitude.”

By 1978, the world that supported the kind of careful dress his business catered to was long gone. In 1967, he was profiled for a magazine article in his elegant, art-filled downtown apartment, photographed wearing a suit and tie, which he was always seen in (except at the Charles F. Berg Store Christmas parties, when all bets were off).<sup>118</sup> Just a few months after the Summer of Love ended in his hometown of San Francisco, he said, “We know today young people set the pace. They influence the family on most purchases.”<sup>119</sup> In 1968, the city’s White House department store, where Forrest served “the carriage trade,” was gutted and converted to a parking garage.<sup>120</sup> Though that fate was not to be visited on his father’s building, the tenor of urban life had changed from top to bottom. Not just his customers, but anyone walking amongst the downtown buildings brought a very different expectation and approach to the experience: “The dressing up to go downtown, which was the big thing in the early days of Charles F. Berg, is no longer there.”<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>118</sup> The Fame of the Name is the Game at Charles F. Berg, Scrapbook, Charles Berg Records, Mss 2512, Box 6 of 6; Charles F. Berg Photographs Collection.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> Corbett, *Splendid Survivors*, 172. According to the Wikipedia entry for Bullock’s department store, its original 1907 downtown building has been gutted for use as a parking garage as well.

<sup>121</sup> “Oral History Interview with Forrest Talbot Berg,” 8–9.

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### The Berg Family

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ILLUSTRATIONS



C. F. BERG  
Vice-President of Lennons

Fig. 1 Charles F. Berg caricatured in 1912. Established, but not yet a headliner on Broadway  
From: Harry Murphy, *Leading Business Men of Portland in Cartoon*, 2.



Fig. 2 The Charles F. Berg Store (c. 1925), in the rightmost storefront of the foreground building:  
From: Anna Marum, "Portland Stores of the Past (Vintage Photos)"  
*The Oregonian/OregonLive*, May 25, 2016, oregonlive.com.



Fig. 3 Meier & Frank (c. 1932), expanded after Charles F. Berg's move  
From: Anna Marum, "Portland Stores of the Past (Vintage Photos)"  
*The Oregonian/OregonLive*, May 25, 2016, oregonlive.com.

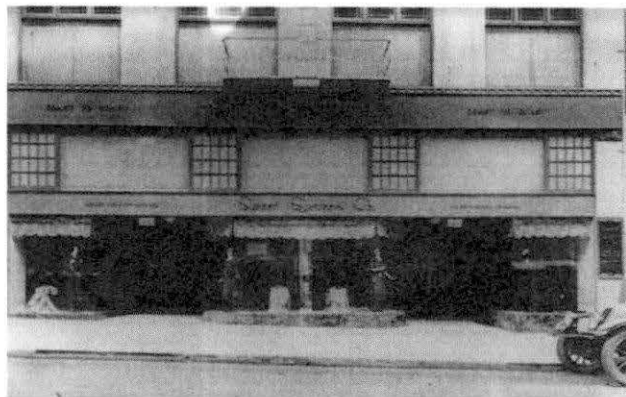
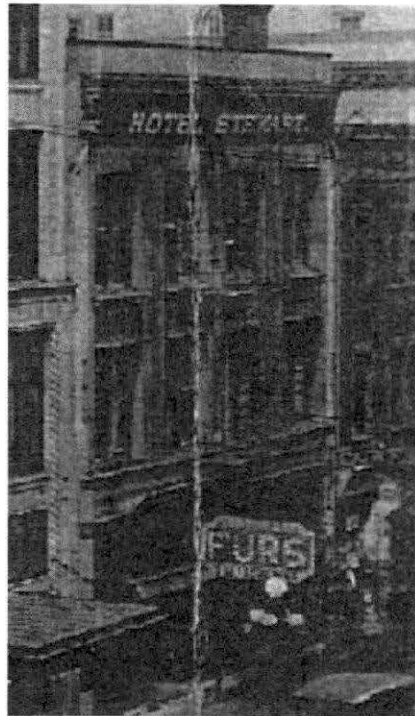


Fig. 4 Top: The Dolph Building (1902, photo 1921), an unremarkable building in a prime location  
From: Neg. no. 36331, The Oregon Historical Society,  
“Charles F. Berg Building,” *Midtown Blocks Historic Assessment*, 167.

Bottom: Its Sweet Sixteen storefront (c. 1928), about to become chic  
From: Angelus Photo, Series A., Neg. no. 66907, The Oregon Historical Society,  
“Dolph Building/Berg, Charles F., Building,” by John M. Tess, *National Register Form*.



Fig. 5 The Charles F. Berg Store in 2018, behind contemporary debris, elegance remains  
Photograph: Heather V. Butler (July 2018).

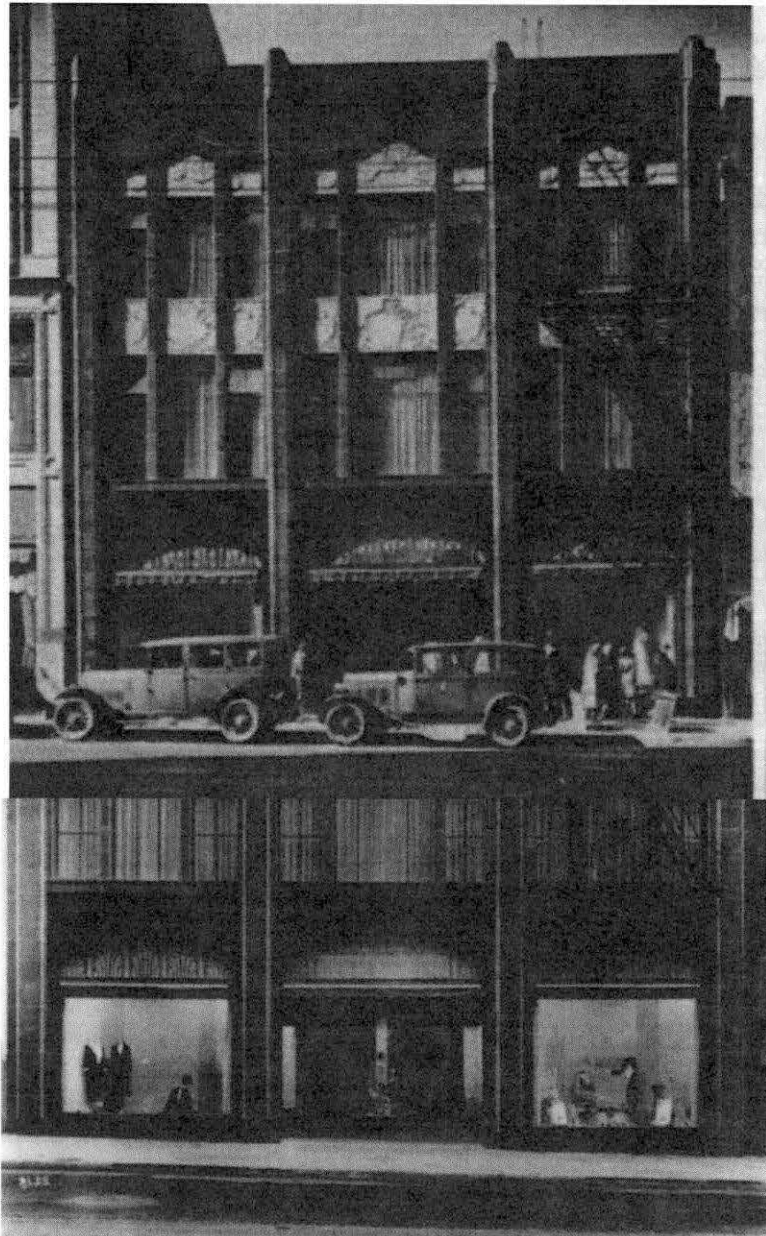


Fig. 6 Top: Customers began to arrive more often by car than by streetcar  
From: Virginia Guest Ferriday, *Last of the Handmade Buildings*, fIII-40, 129.

Bottom: Storefront display windows enticingly glow even while the store is closed  
From: Angelus Photo, Series A., Neg. no. 66912, The Oregon Historical Society  
"Dolph Building/Berg, Charles F., Building," by John M. Tess, National Register Form.



Fig. 7 Stylized Neoclassicism eliding into Art Deco  
Girault Coiffeur Parfumeur (c. 1925, by Azéma, Edrei & Hardy [1921–1929]), Paris, France  
From: Patricia Bayer, *Art Deco Architecture*, 130; [archnet.org/authorities/3256](http://archnet.org/authorities/3256).

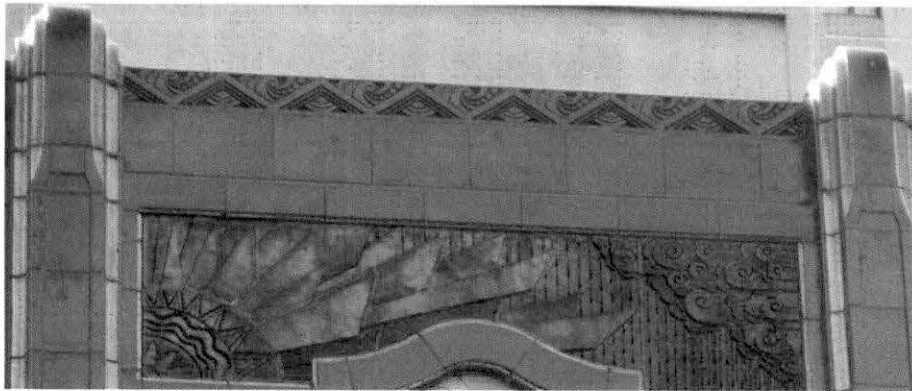


Fig. 8 Top: Haughty and glamorous peacocks gaze from the middle spandrels  
Photograph: Heather V. Butler (July 2018).

Bottom: Sunbursts and rainclouds at top left and right corners  
Photograph: Heather V. Butler (July 2018).

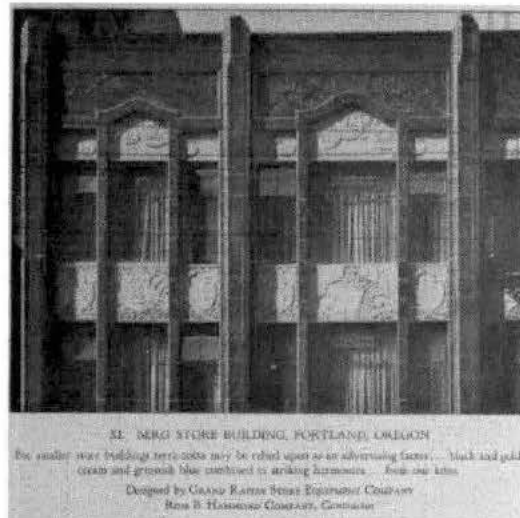


Fig. 9 Gladding, McBean & Company publicizing its work in *moderne* architecture  
From: Gladding, McBean & Company, *Shapes of Clay* 6, no. 2 (June 1930), Pls. X & XI.



Fig. 10 White Terra Cotta and Beaux-Arts Neoclassicism for Portland's retail district, as nationwide Northwest corner of SW Morrison Street and Fourth Avenue  
From: "Building Oregon Collection, Digital Oregon," University of Oregon and Oregon State University Libraries, [oregondigital.org/sets/building-or](http://oregondigital.org/sets/building-or).

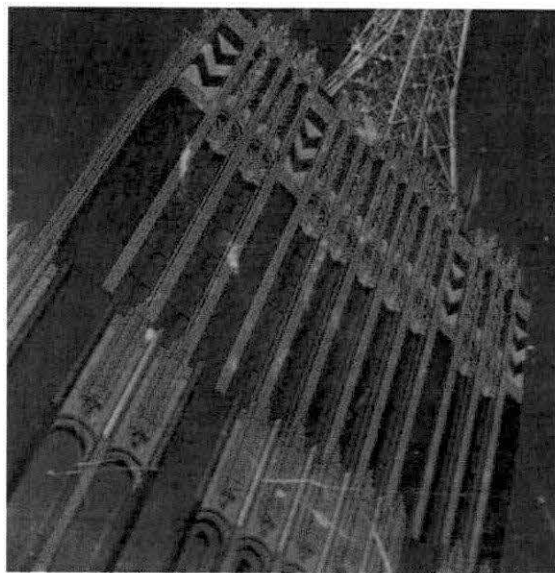
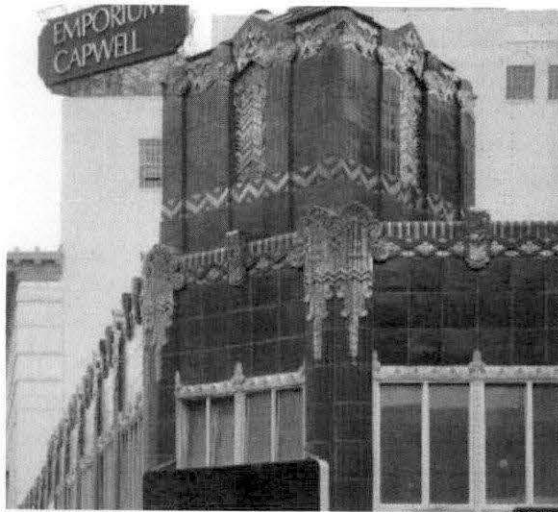


Fig. 11 Dark terra cotta cladding with metallic silver and gold trim by Gladding, McBean & Company  
Left: The Oakland Flower Depot (1931, by Albert J. Evers 1888-1977), Oakland, CA  
From: Michael F. Crowe, *Deco by the Bay*, 44.

Right: The Security-First Bank (1928, by Morgan, Walls & Clements), Los Angeles, CA  
From: Patricia Bayer, *Art Deco Architecture*, 139.

Bottom: The Richfield Building (1928, by Morgan, Walls & Clements), Los Angeles, CA  
From: David Gebhard, *The Richfield Building, 1928-1968*, Front cover.



Fig. 12 Contemporary West Coast buildings with terra cotta cladding and similar bay configurations  
Top: Modernized Downtown Miniwarehouse (1928, by Albert F. Roller 1891-1981), Seattle, WA  
From: Lydia Aldredge, ed., *Impressions of Imagination: Terra cotta Seattle*, 12.

Bottom: John Breuner Company Store (1931, by Albert F. Roller 1891-1981), Oakland, CA  
From: Michael F. Crowe, *Deco by the Bay*, f151 p109.



Fig. 13 Art Deco combined traditional spatial hierarchy and motifs with angularity of execution  
Top: Roof level spandrels and pilaster terminals  
From: "Building Oregon Collection, Digital Oregon,"  
University of Oregon and Oregon State University Libraries, [oregondigital.org/sets/building-or](http://oregondigital.org/sets/building-or).  
  
Bottom: Jagged and swirling incised ornament  
From: "Building Oregon Collection, Digital Oregon,"  
University of Oregon and Oregon State University Libraries, [oregondigital.org/sets/building-or](http://oregondigital.org/sets/building-or).



Fig. 14 Countdown to closure (c. 1974). The signage has changed slightly, but the name is still central  
From: "Building Oregon Collection, Digital Oregon,"  
University of Oregon and Oregon State University Libraries, [oregondigital.org/sets/building-or](http://oregondigital.org/sets/building-or).

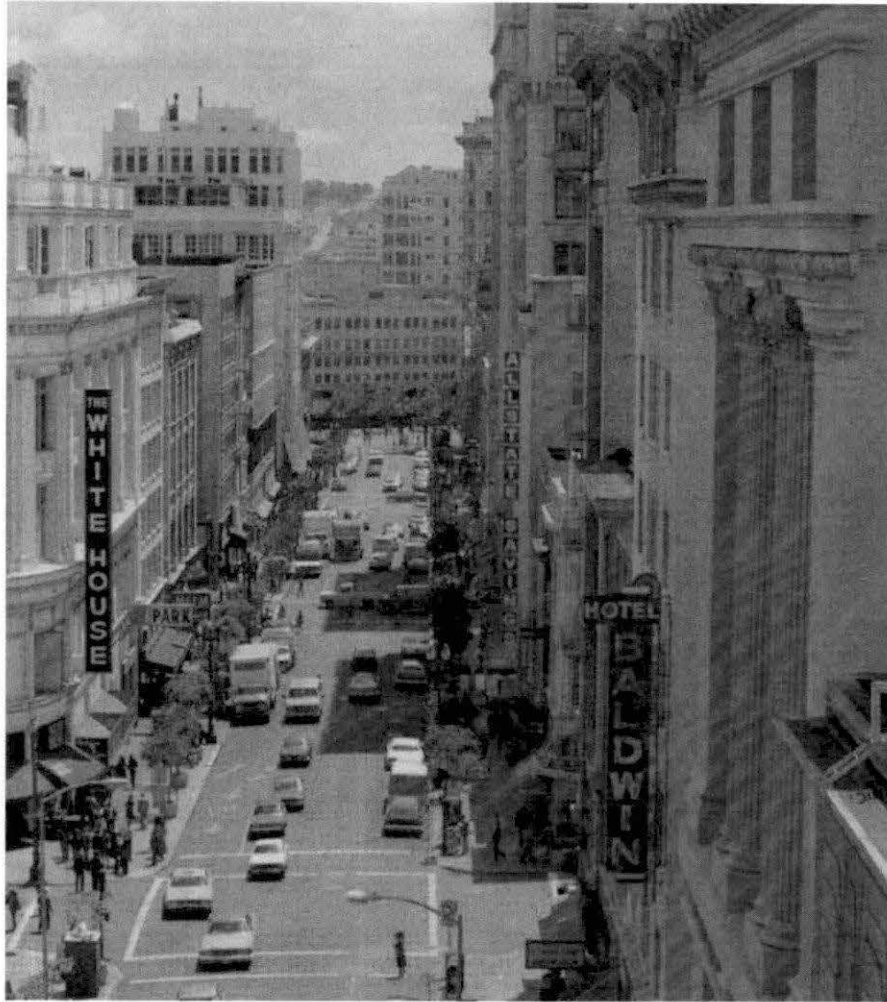


Fig. 15 White Terra Cotta and Beaux-Arts Neoclassicism in San Francisco: retail temples and palazzi  
From: Michael R. Corbett, *Splendid Survivors*, Front cover.

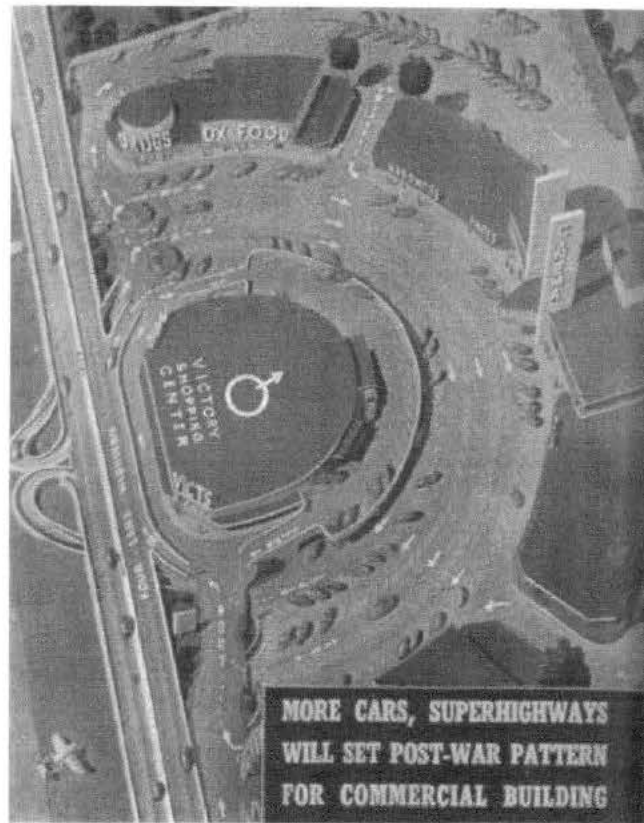


Fig. 16 Retail architecture's evolution from ornamented downtown to drab beside a highway  
Retail Architect Kenneth C. Welch's "Victory Shopping Center,"  
a 1943 design for a modern shopping experience  
From: David Smiley, *Pedestrian Modern*, f3.22, p124.

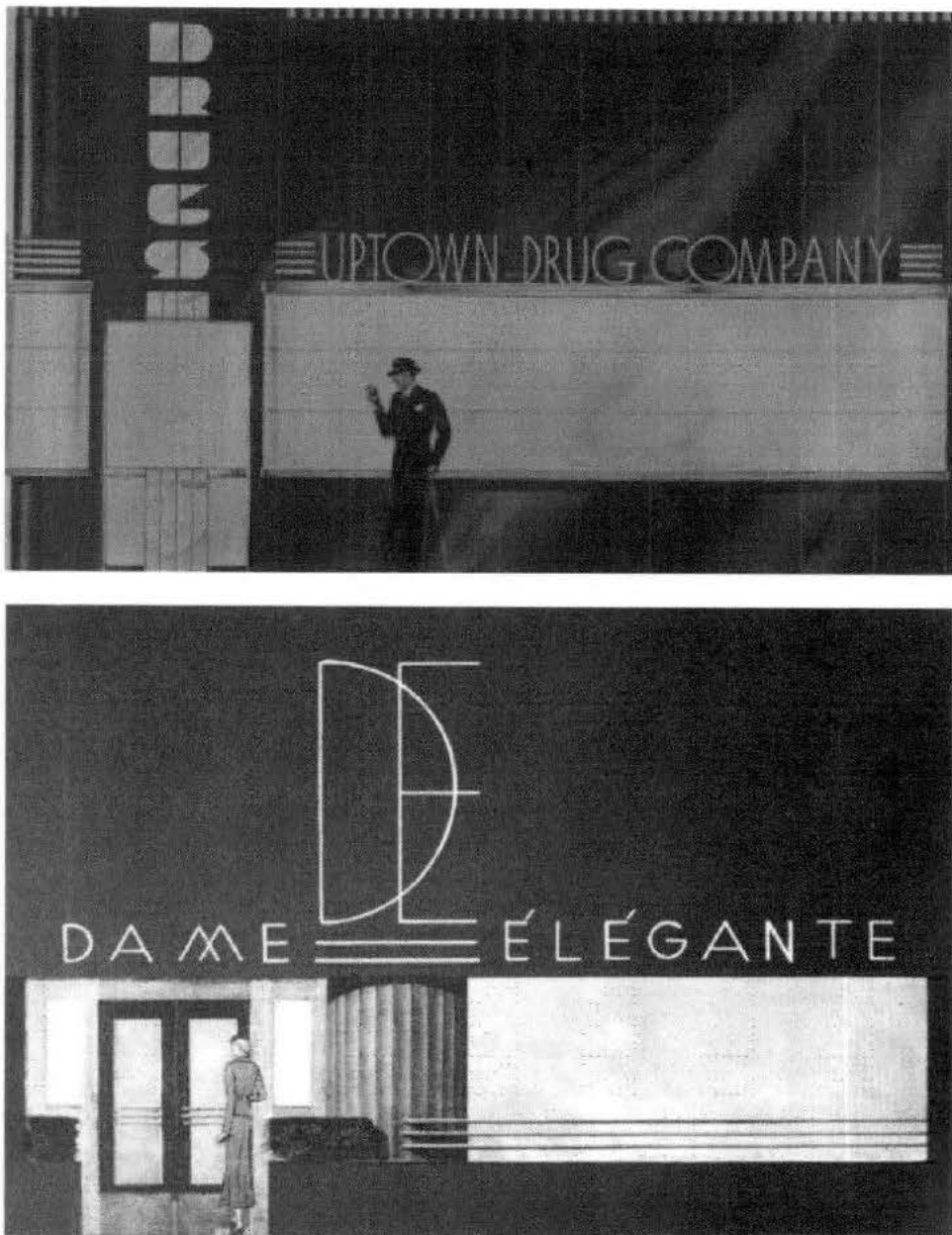


Fig. 17 Modernized storefronts in similar dark and stark designs for two very different kinds of stores  
Top: A Streamline Moderne design for a Drug Store (1935)

Bottom: A Streamline Moderne design for a Women's Apparel Shop (1935)

Both From: The Libbey-Owens-Ford Glass Company, *52 Designs to Modernize Main Street with Glass* (1935), 31 & 58.



Fig. 18 The Charles F. Berg Store Building and its streetscape in danger from the tyranny of height  
Photograph: Heather V. Butler (July 2018).



Fig. 19 The identity of the Store's founder is distinctly displayed, even among today's distractions  
Top: Entryway of the Charles F. Berg Store Building

Bottom: This nameplate appears at street level every few steps, at the base of each pilaster  
Photographs: Heather V. Butler (July 2018).