

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Melrose Building
OWNERS: Wang Investments Networks, Inc.
APPLICANT: Anna Mod, SWCA
LOCATION: 1121 Walker Street

AGENDA ITEM: C
HPO FILE NO.: 15L305
DATE ACCEPTED: Mar-02-2015
HAHC HEARING DATE: Mar-26-2015

SITE INFORMATION

Tracts 1, 2, 3A & 16, Block 94, SSBB, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a 21-story skyscraper.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Melrose Building is a twenty-one story office tower located at 1121 Walker Street in downtown Houston. It was designed by prolific Houston architecture firm Lloyd & Morgan in 1952. The building is Houston's first International Style skyscraper and the first to incorporate cast concrete cantilevered sunshades shielding rows of grouped windows. The asymmetrical building is clad with buff colored brick and has a projecting, concrete sunshade that frames the window walls. The Melrose Building retains a high degree of integrity on the exterior, ground floor lobby and upper floor elevator lobbies.

The Melrose Building meets Criteria 1, 4, 5, and 6 for Landmark designation of Section 33-224 of the Houston Historic Preservation Ordinance.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

Location and Site

The Melrose Building is located at 1121 Walker Street in downtown Houston. The property includes only the office tower located on the southeastern corner of Block 94. The block is bounded by Walker Street to the south, San Jacinto Street to the east, Rusk Street to the north, and Fannin Street to the west. The surrounding area is an urban commercial neighborhood with surface parking lots, skyscrapers, and multi-story parking garages typical of downtown Houston.

The Melrose Building is three blocks southeast of the southern boundary of the Main Street/Market Square Historic District (NR, 1983), Houston's late nineteenth and early twentieth century commercial historic district that includes Allen's Landing, the place of the city's founding. Individually listed National Register of Historic Places properties in the neighborhood include the 1949 City National Bank Building (NR, 2000) and the 1921, 1936 Humble Oil Building (NR, 1999) located one and three blocks to the south respectively. Two blocks north are the Kress Building (NR, 2002), the 1929 Texas State Hotel (NR, 2008), the 1915, 1936, 1959 Texas Company Building (NR, 2003) and the 1911 United States Custom House (NR, 1974).

History of the Melrose Building

Houston developer Melvin A. Silverman and his partner Bennett Rose hired noted Houston architects Hermon Lloyd and W.B. Morgan to design the 21-story office building at the intersection of Walker and San Jacinto Streets. The two developers named the building the Melrose Building from the combination of both of their names. Silverman and Rose gave the architects an unusual amount of freedom for the design of the proposed skyscraper.¹ Their only request was that, before beginning the design of the building, Lloyd and Morgan thoroughly research all the most modern materials, techniques, and equipment available so that the new building would be “completely serviceable and yet of a type to command the immediate attention of the public.”² Silverman’s vision was of a new, modern office building that would be a departure from Houston’s earlier skyscrapers.

Lloyd and Morgan used their design for the Melrose Building to engage in the national discussions concerning the modern, postwar office building. The final design served, in their view, as a summation of their beliefs on the essentials of good skyscraper design.³ Many of Lloyd and Morgan’s design choices that make the Melrose Building unique arise from the architects’ answers to the questions concerning new office design listed above.⁴ Concerning the treatment of windows, Lloyd and Morgan departed from the large window model. Whereas the Lever House and the UN Secretariat Building had all-glass curtain walls with large windows creating a dramatic transparency, Lloyd and Morgan used turquoise, glazed ceramic tile spandrel panels to create a sense of opacity while obtaining some of the exterior sheen experienced with the floor-to-ceiling windows of the New York buildings.⁵ Likewise, when considering the effect of air-conditioning on window size and cost, the architects utilized cantilevered, projecting eyebrows on each floor to act as sunshades to lower the cost of air-conditioning by blocking the sun’s rays. These concrete eyebrows also serve to illustrate Lloyd and Morgan’s view concerning the proper exterior design of skyscrapers. In an interview, they described their theory that tall, multi-story buildings like skyscrapers are just a series of levels or planes. This idea, combined with Lloyd and Morgan’s belief that exterior design should reflect the interior structure of the building resulted in the logical conclusion that the exterior design of the Melrose Building should stress the horizontal lines created by the loft-style building.⁶ In addition to their practical role, the projecting eyebrows serve to articulate the horizontal focus and rhythm of the building.

Although they never identify specific buildings or architects, Lloyd and Morgan acknowledged gaining inspiration for their design from buildings in Brazil, Sweden, and Mexico City.⁷ Two potential sources for this inspiration can be found in the work of Oscar Niemeyer of Brazil and the Dutch architect, Willem Marinus Dudok. The Gustavo Campanema Palace (1939-1941, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil), designed by Niemeyer in conjunction with Lucio Costa and Affonso Eduardo Reidy, employs a grid of protruding sunshades as well as smaller, adjustable levered sunshades within each opening. Lloyd and Morgan could easily have looked to this building as a precedent for a method of protecting their building from the solar heat gain particularly potent in the climates of Texas and Brazil. The work of Dudok may have

¹ Arthur E. Jones Architectural Records.

² Arthur E. Jones Architectural Records.

³ Ibid.

⁴ “New Thinking on Office Building,” 107.

⁵ Koush, “The Modern Mr. Jones,” 32.

⁶ Arthur E. Jones Architectural Records.

⁷ Ibid.

inspired the Houston architects' choice of ceramic, turquoise-glazed tile for the Melrose Building's spandrel panels. His 1928-1931 Hilversum Town Hall in Hilversum, Netherlands, while Cubist in style, utilizes similar glazed, turquoise tiles to accentuate piers and other architectural details.

In addition to Lloyd and Morgan, the project team for the Melrose Building included Walter P. Moore as the structural engineer, Hermonn Blum as the mechanical engineer, and the Tellepsen Construction Company as the contractor.⁸ Construction began in 1951 and the 220,687 square foot building was completed in 1952 at a cost of \$3,160,000. The Melrose Building received both local and national recognition. In 1952, Lloyd and Morgan received the Medal of Honor for Architectural Merit from the Houston Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) for the Melrose Building. In 1955, the firm was also awarded the Honor Award for Architectural Design and Achievement from the Texas Society of Architects for their work on the building.⁹

In 1953, the Melrose Building was published in the national architecture journal, *Architectural Forum*, as an example of new thinking on sunshading and floor planning.¹⁰ The article cites three devices employed by Lloyd and Morgan to create a "dramatic appearance and pleasant workspace." The first of these concerns the juxtaposition of the two windowless walls with the large, ribbon windows of the other two sides. The architects used these two walls both to cut air-conditioning requirements by preventing solar heat gain and to increase rentable floor area and allow for more flexibility to meet tenants' individual needs. By placing the elevators and service areas along one windowless wall, Lloyd and Morgan were able to create a bulk, loft interior space with only five columns interrupting the floor area. Each floor was left like this so that tenants could build out the space to their individual needs. The floor could be left open to allow for an open-office plan or could be partitioned into large or small offices. The versatility provided by the large available spaces on each floor provided a new level of service the building management could provide and thus made rental space in the Melrose Building even more marketable.¹¹ The other two devices noted by the article included the concrete eyebrow sunshades and the turquoise tile spandrel panels. The sunshades worked to cut air-conditioning requirements from 800 to 667 tons and the turquoise tiles served not only to create a sense of opacity but also to add color to the building's exterior.¹²

By 1953, various tenants occupied the majority of the Melrose Building. The Melrose Florist occupied the kiosk in the lobby while the upper floors were either rented by single entities or divided into smaller office spaces and occupied by multiple tenants. Floors two through seven and 14-16 held multiple companies and tenants while the remaining floors were leased by single groups. Smaller tenants included everything from insurance companies, dental supply companies, industrial-related companies, to language schools; however, the largest tenants were all oil-related. The Texas Pipe Line Company leased the eighth through tenth floors. The Texas Company rented the 11th through 13th floors for its South Texas Division and Shell Oil leased part of the 16th and the entire 17th floor. The 18th through 21st floors remained vacant.¹³ In 1954, the Melrose Building was almost completely leased. The Home American Finance Company leased the ground floor, retail space and Bill Roberts & Associates occupied the

⁸ "New Thinking on Office Building," 113.

⁹ Arthur E. Jones Architectural Records.

¹⁰ "New Thinking on Office Building," 113.

¹¹ "New Thinking on Office Building," 113.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ 1953 *Houston City Directory*, 1661.

penthouse. The oil-related tenants of the year before remained the largest building occupants.¹⁴ By 1959, the Melrose Building had lost two of the earlier major tenants and only Shell Oil remained. The florist kiosk in the lobby had been converted to a cigar stand and the majority of the floors had been divided for multiple tenants. Next to Shell, the other largest occupant of the building was the Jefferson Chemical Company located on the 20th and 21st floors.¹⁵ By the end of the 1960s, the Melrose Building had lost all major tenants and much of the rentable space remained vacant.¹⁶

In 1971, Lloyd, Morgan & Jones (Lloyd & Morgan prior to 1961) completed a building renovation.¹⁷ The window glass was replaced with single-pane, Solarbronze plate glass and the blue-tile spandrel panels were covered with glass panels. The architects also participated in a major effort to re-partition each floor according to new tenants' needs. Smaller offices were offered for immediate occupancy while larger offices or unique floor-plans could be built to the client's specifications.¹⁸ For a time, this renovation proved successful in attracting new tenants. By the end of the 1970s, the majority of the Melrose Building was occupied; however, there were no major, stand-out tenants as in earlier years.¹⁹ This trend continued through the 1980s until occupancy began to decline again.²⁰ As of April 2014, the Melrose Building stands vacant and awaits rehabilitation.

Lloyd & Morgan, Architects

Although the firm underwent numerous name changes, Lloyd & Morgan (as it was known from 1941-1961) was one of the most prolific Houston architectural firms from the 1930s to 1990. Their oeuvre includes corporate headquarters and office buildings, retail facilities, banks, recreational facilities, high-rise residential buildings, educational and institutional buildings, and sports facilities. Some of their most notable work includes: nine buildings at Greenway Plaza begun in 1968, master planning for the 40-acre downtown Houston development the Allen Center, numerous buildings at Rice University, and the Astrodome (1965) in association with Wilson, Morris, Crain and Anderson.²¹

Hermon F. Lloyd founded the firm in 1932 upon his graduation from the Rice Institute (now Rice University). Lloyd partnered with Harvin C. Moore from 1932 to the outbreak of WWII. In 1941, William B. Morgan, also a graduate of the Rice Institute, joined the firm and the name was changed to Lloyd & Morgan. In 1947, upon his graduation from the Rice Institute, Arthur Jones joined the 12-person firm and eventually became a named partner in 1961 when the name was changed to Lloyd, Morgan & Jones.²²

Melvin Silverman and Bennett Rose awarded the firm its first two major projects. The first, The Town & Country Apartments (1949, demolished) was a 488-unit project before which, Lloyd & Morgan had not

¹⁴ 1954 *Houston City Directory*, 386.

¹⁵ 1959 *Houston City Directory*, 589.

¹⁶ 1968 *Houston City Directory*, 523.

¹⁷ "The New Melrose Building," 2.

¹⁸ "The New Melrose Building," 2.

¹⁹ 1978 *Houston City Directory*, 1095.

²⁰ 1980 *Houston City Directory*, 1113; 1982 *Houston City Directory*, 1128; 1984 *Houston City Directory*, 1063.

²¹ Arthur E. Jones Architectural Records.

²² *Ibid.*

designed anything above three floors.²³ Following the success of the housing project, Silverman and Rose hired Lloyd & Morgan to design the Melrose Building in 1950.

The firm's name changed an additional four times after the firm's name changed to Lloyd, Morgan & Jones in 1961. In 1974, it became Lloyd/Jones and Associates, then Lloyd Jones Brewer in 1976, Lloyd Jones Fillpot in 1984, and Jones & Fillpot in 1990. Throughout its existence, the firm built or contributed to some major Houston landmarks as well as smaller projects. They master-planned and designed buildings for several large, Houston mixed-use developments including Greenway Plaza, the Allen Center, the American General Center, and Regency Square. In addition, they built a number of individual buildings including the Astrodome, Foley's Distribution Center, Cashco Tower, and the CitiCorp Building. The firm also designed buildings for Rice University, the University of Houston, and Houston Baptist University. Throughout its existence the firm received numerous awards from the Houston Chapter of the AIA, the Texas Society of Architects, the National Society of Professional Engineers, and the National Glass Association.²⁴ Although the Melrose Building was neither the largest commission nor the most recognized, it helped the firm establish its reputation in Houston as modern architects and allowed them to enter the national discourse surrounding modern skyscraper design.

Architectural Context

Houston's first skyscraper dates to 1894. All of the city's pre-World War I (WWI) skyscrapers referenced traditional architectural styles by using Neo-Classical or Gothic ornamentation and form. Following the national trend of Modernism following WWI, Houston architects began to build skyscrapers with minimal, streamlined ornamentation in Art Deco or Art Moderne styles. Following World War II (WWII), the International Style became the predominant style for skyscraper construction in the U.S. After several Houston skyscrapers failed to implement this style, prolific Houston architects, Hermon Lloyd and William B. Morgan succeeded in 1952 with the Melrose Building. Located at 1121 Walker Street, it was the first Houston skyscraper to be built in the International Style and was well-received both locally and nationally.

Houston's Pre-Modern Skyscrapers

Although there is no single, accepted definition of the term 'skyscraper,' the type can generally be described as a building of exceptional height with a steel-frame structure. Tall building in Houston began in the last decade of the nineteenth century with the construction of the 1894-1895 Binz Building (demolished 1950-1951) at the intersection of Main Street and Texas Avenue. Not technically a skyscraper due to its interior cast iron and steel frame with load-bearing brick walls, the six-story building marked the city's first attempts to build upward. The architect, Olle J. Lohren, ornamented the building with Italian Renaissance styled elements. The first completely steel-framed skyscraper in Houston was the eight-story First National Bank Building (Sanguinet & Staats, 1903-1905). As with the Binz Building, the architects utilized traditional Renaissance Revival ornamentation and organized the building into three parts: a base, a shaft, and a cornice.

Between 1908 and 1913, the City of Houston saw a boom in skyscraper construction with buildings ranging from seven to 17 stories in height. These new buildings followed the same composition and

²³ Koush, "The Modern Mr. Jones," 32.

²⁴ Arthur E. Jones Architectural Records.

ornamentation established by the Binz Building and First National Bank Buildings; traditional revival styles, such as the Renaissance or Gothic Revival styles, were used to ornament the exteriors. The skyscrapers were either ‘U’ or L-shaped in plan to bring natural light and ventilation to the center of the building. Additionally, the buildings were flat-sided, rising directly from the sidewalk in the tripartite, base, shaft, and cornice formation. Only those elevations that faced streets were ornamented while the secondary or tertiary elevations were left undecorated. These new skyscrapers did vary from the earlier office use examples in their use and included hotels, apartments, retail space, and hospitals. The Rice Hotel (Mauran, Russell & Crowell, 1913) and an apartment building, the Beaconsfield (A. C. Pigg, 1911), exemplify Houston skyscrapers built at this time.

During the early years of Houston skyscrapers, most developers hired architects from out-of-town for both high-rise and low-level construction. Sanguinet & Staats of Fort Worth, Texas, and Mauran, Russell & Garden of St. Louis, Missouri, were the most prolific. D. H. Burnham & Co. of Chicago (1909, Scanlan Building, 405 Main Street), Jarvis Hunt of Chicago (1911, Southern Pacific Building/Bayou Lofts, 915 Franklin Avenue), and Warren & Wetmore of New York (1915, Texas Company Building, 720 San Jacinto Street) each designed a tall building in Houston as well. Sanguinet & Staats’ C. F. Carter Building (1919) was the tallest building in Texas for a few months after its construction and the tallest building in Houston until 1926.

From 1913-1917, tall building in Houston slowed as World War I (WWI) began and construction stopped altogether from 1917-1918 after the United States (U.S.) joined the war. When it began again in the early 1920s, Houston joined the rest of the U.S. and the world in the effort to identify a modern style to accompany the many advancements of the twentieth century.

Modernism and the International Style

Modernism, also referred to as the Modern Movement, arose during the 1920s and 1930s in response to the numerous advancements in technology and extensive growth of cities following the industrialization of Western Society. It spans the arts, literature, religion, politics, the organization of society, and architecture. As a philosophy, its followers attempted to depart from traditional practices of the past and form new methods based upon the technological advancements of the present. Architectural historians have avoided defining Modernism because of the breadth of materials and characteristics found in the buildings of this time period. As architects abandoned traditional building precedents, a number of new architectural styles, schools, and theories of design were formed; all of which fall under the larger classification of Modernism.

The Modern Movement can be divided into two waves corresponding to the development of architectural Modernism. The first wave occurred after WWI from the 1920s to the 1940s. Following the horrors of WWI, architects sought to utilize modern architecture as a means to improve quality of life through buildings and spaces. The predominant styles of this first wave include: Art Deco, Streamlined Moderne, and Stripped Classical. All of these show an attempt to distance new architecture from past styles by minimalizing ornament to various degrees. The second wave of Modernism occurred post World War II and extends from the late 1940s to the 1970s when afterwards historical references and ornament begin to reappear in architecture. This wave was dominated by the International Style. Phillip Johnson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock are credited with giving this style its name in the title of their book, *The International Style*, which served as the catalog for an exhibit of modern architecture in 1932 at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City. This style follows three general tenets: the

first is the expression of volume rather than mass, the second is the emphasis of balance over symmetry, and the third is the expulsion of all ornament.

International Style Skyscrapers in the U.S.

Although there were early examples of International Style skyscrapers before WWII, such as the 1932 Philadelphia Saving Fund Society (PSFS) Building, now the Loews Philadelphia Hotel (NRHP & NHL, 1976), by William Lescaze and George Howe, the International Style was not widely adopted for use on skyscrapers until after WWII.²⁵ New York City was the first city to experience a major skyscraper building boom following WWII and, as a result, was the location of the first iconic International Style skyscraper office buildings. The 1952 Lever House (NRHP, 1983) was designed by Skidmore, Owings, & Merrill (SOM) and consists of one horizontal rectangular block on pilotis with a second, tall, vertical, rectangular block asymmetrically placed on top of the first horizontal rectangle. Both blocks have steel structural frames and all-glass curtain walls covering all four sides in a distinctive green color. The 1952 United Nations (U.N.) Secretariat Building was designed by Oscar Niemeyer and Le Corbusier as part of the U.N. complex and houses all administrative offices and offices of the delegates. Unlike the Lever House, the UN Secretariat Building is placed in a larger, landscaped park setting. It is also built with a steel frame; however glass curtain walls only cover the two larger sides of the rectangular form, the two smaller sides cap these translucent walls with windowless slabs of stone veneers. Both these buildings were considered international successes and both participated in discussions concerning International Style design issues for office buildings.²⁶

Part of the goal of the International Style was to create spaces that were both economically and functionally efficient. Architects sought to use this style as a tool to create healthier living and working environments that were affordable to everyone.²⁷ Discussion of how best to achieve this goal for an office environment centered on several issues.²⁸

- Windows:
 - Should they be as large as possible, as with the UN Secretariat Building and the Lever House, or should they be made smaller because air-conditioning and high-level artificial light had reduced their functionality?
 - Do tenants like bigger areas of glass or does the glare disrupt their work?
 - Are floor-to-ceiling windows worth the extra construction cost if tenants will pull Venetian blinds halfway down anyway?
- Volume:
 - Do air-conditioning and high-level lighting change the economy of office space construction? Deeper office space, away from windows, used to be cheaper for tenants but with air-conditioning and new lighting, deep space costs almost as much as space near a window. Should developers be building deeper offices as in the past, or is it more profitable to build thinner buildings, like the Lever House, to maximize window space?

²⁵ Prudon, *Preservation of Modern Architecture*, 4.

²⁶ Prudon, *Preservation of Modern Architecture*, 5.

²⁷ Prudon, *Preservation of Modern Architecture*, 4.

²⁸ "New Thinking on Office Buildings," 107.

- Curtain Wall:
 - How far can architects depart from the masonry walls of the past used to represent structure?
- Exterior Design:
 - Should there be an exterior pattern in the curtain wall? If so, should it be vertical, horizontal, or another pattern?
- Design Integration:
 - Should the engineering features of new office design be expressed on the exterior?
- Ground Floor:
 - Is there still sufficient demand for retail space that it remains profitable to build retail space on the ground floor of office buildings?

Common among these issues was the concern for maximizing the profitability of the building through the concern for tenants' individual needs. A major part of the effort to offer tenants maximum control of their space was the development of the loft style office that could be built out to meet individual client's specifications. If a particular tenant needed an open floor-plan then the space could be left open but if they preferred individual offices or a combination of the two, the space could be divided up.²⁹ The debate over how best to answer these concerns while providing the most profitable rental space played out in office skyscrapers across the country following the inspiration of the Lever House and the UN Secretariat Building.

Modern and International Style Skyscrapers in Houston

Houston participated in both waves of Modernism and produced Art Deco, Streamlined Moderne, and eventually International Style skyscrapers. The first building to attempt to break with traditional, architectural ornamentation was the 1929 Gulf Building (NRHP, 1983) developed by Jesse Jones and designed by Alfred C. Finn.³⁰ Built in the Art Deco style, the building retains the traditional tripartite arrangement of base, shaft, and cornice but has very little ornament. Here, the Neo-Classical features seen on earlier skyscrapers have been streamlined into linear suggestions of the earlier detailed ornamentation.

Skyscraper construction in Houston slowed during the Great Depression of the early 1930s but resumed by 1939 with the construction of Houston City Hall (NRHP, 1990) by Joseph Finger.³¹ Ornamentation on this building is even more restrained and streamlined than the Gulf Building. Cornices are marked by simple banding or recessing the roofline back from the elevation. Simple, bas-relief friezes provide the most intricate decoration and sit atop each window column and over the main entrance. The building does retain the three fold formation; however, the base is articulated with two smaller towers placed in front of and on either side of the taller, central shaft with minimal cornice above.

²⁹ "New Thinking on Office Buildings," 107.

³⁰ Mod, *Building Modern Houston*, 10.

³¹ Mod, *Building Modern Houston*, 14.

The 1940 St. Joseph's Infirmary Maternity and Children's Building was designed by I.E. Loveless and shows the continued streamlining of ornament typical of Art Moderne. This building was one of the last Houston Art Moderne skyscrapers to be built during the first wave of Modernism. It retained the three part formation and exemplified the streamlined ornament of the new style with its horizontal banding and vertical emphasis on the central tower.³²

The First City National Bank Building of 1949 was the first building to be built following WWII. Although the first wave of Modernism ended before the war, the design of this building clearly shows lingering popularity. An additional reason for the retro Art Deco/Art Moderne appearance of this building is it was designed before the war, shelved, and then erected quickly once the war was over. Its ornamentation is more restrained than its pre-war predecessors and it clearly illustrates the turning point from the more streamlined, cut-back ornament of the first Modernist wave in Houston to the full expulsion of ornament in the second wave.³³ Almost all exterior ornament has been removed and only minimal marking on the spandrel panels and at the cornice provides any decoration. The tripartite formation is still discernible but has lost much of the emphasis seen in earlier buildings like City Hall and the Gulf Building.

Houston's attempts at International Style skyscrapers pre-dating the Melrose Building show architects attempting to implement elements of this style but not fully breaking with the earlier Modernist styles. The results of these attempts cannot be called International Style but are not Art Deco or Art Moderne. The 1951 original Methodist Hospital designed by Watkin, Nunn, McGinty & Phenix does implement cantilevered, eyebrows seen in fully International Style buildings and these do give the building a horizontal emphasis. The windows are still separated on the façade as if they were punched into the heavy brick exterior walls, making the building seem solid and heavy as opposed to the suggestion of weightlessness sought in the International Style with curtain walls. The original Methodist Hospital also retains a discernible base, shaft, and cornice division despite the lack of all applied ornament. The 1952 Prudential Building (demolished 2011), designed by Kenneth Franzheim, excludes all but the most minimal ornament and departs from the tripartite form. The building retains the stocky weight and vertical emphasis of earlier Modern styles due to the individual windows punched into the exterior limestone walls arranged in perpendicular masses of differing heights.

Houston architects did succeed in implementing the International Style in low-rise buildings prior to the Melrose Building. In the 1938 Houston Fire Alarm Building, MacKie & Kamrath successfully used ribbon windows to create a sense of volume rather than weight and to place an emphasis on the horizontal in keeping with the International Style. Battelstein's, the 1950 specialty store by Finger & Rustay, also achieves full expression of the International Style using ribbon windows centered on a brick façade.

Despite these successes with smaller building types, no skyscrapers achieved fully articulated International Style until the Melrose Building in 1952. Unlike with the original Methodist Hospital and the Prudential Building, Lloyd & Morgan used large ribbon windows with cantilevered concrete eyebrows above to create a horizontal emphasis while achieving a sense of weightlessness. The large expanses of windows with the shiny, blue ceramic spandrel panels beneath remove all sense of weight seen in earlier buildings with brick or masonry separating each window unit. The eyebrow sunshades

³² Mod, *Building Modern Houston*, 20.

³³ Ibid.

also make it seem as if each floor is lightly stacked one-upon-the other. Although two of the walls are windowless and clad in brick, these are done in such a way as to emphasize the weightlessness of the building.

Following the Melrose Building, Houston architects continued to utilize the International Style on smaller, low-rise buildings like the 1955 East End YMCA (now the Cossaboom YMCA). Milton McGinty's design of a horizontal building with ribbon windows and raised on piers successfully implements the International Style. Kenneth Franzheim fails to fully implement the International Style with his 1955 Texas National Bank Building. He does achieve some horizontal emphasis with his small rows of ribbon windows but the overall emphasis is vertical with the divided spandrel panels. The building also retains a feeling of weight due to the large expanses of masonry cladding. Despite having the first aluminum curtain wall in Houston, the 1956 Bank of the Southwest Building also fails to generate a sense of weightless volume with horizontal emphasis yet it does successfully demonstrate that architects of this era were sensitive to site; the Bank of the Southwest is the same composition – central tower with flanking wings – as City Hall, only executed in a modern vocabulary. The first purely abstract skyscraper in Houston was the 1960 First City National Bank Building by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) with Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson, with its floor-to-ceiling windows recessed into the structural frame to create a protective exoskeleton.³⁴ The second building was Cameron Fairchild's Houston First Savings and Loan Building built in 1962. Here Fairchild referenced the Lever House with his steel and glass tower set back on a rectangular base.³⁵

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE AND RESTORATION HISTORY

Exterior

The building's primary façade faces south onto Walker Street and its eastern elevation faces east onto San Jacinto Street. Designed by Lloyd & Morgan in 1952, the Melrose Building is Houston's first modern style skyscraper and the first to incorporate cast concrete cantilevered sunshades shielding rows of grouped windows. The asymmetrical concrete reinforced steel frame building is clad with buff colored brick. The east and south elevations feature vertically stacked ribbon windows framed with projecting concrete sunshades. The ground floor storefront retains its original aluminum framed, single light entry doors and storefront punctuated with marble clad, unadorned square columns.

The building has a U-shaped plan with only a small inset airspace on the north elevation where the fire escape staircase is located. Due to its corner location, the twenty-one-story building with basement has two dominant elevations: the primary facade faces south onto Walker Street and includes the main entrance; the second elevation faces east onto San Jacinto Street. The building measures roughly 131' x 76' with the longer span facing south onto Walker. The rhythmic bay composition of the building is 5 x 3 bays following the structural system. The entire building is clad with buff colored brick with the west and south elevations solid end walls excepting the inset airspace on the north elevation for the fire escape.

The south and east elevations have an asymmetrically placed enframed window wall composed of a cast concrete cantilevered "eyebrow" that projects from the building plane and completely surrounds the

³⁴ Mod, *Building Modern Houston*, 93.

³⁵ Mod, *Building Modern Houston*, 94.

regularly grouped, aluminum framed ribbon windows. The windows are grouped in sixes and separated by a dominant vertical mullion, an expression of the structural column beneath; there are five groups of six windows on the south elevation and two groups on the east. Within the enframed window wall, there are additional cantilevered “eyebrows” that run continuously above the windows providing sun protection. The current fixed anodized aluminum windows are original to the building. In the early 1970s their original glass panes were replaced with tinted glass, but the historic fenestration pattern and window frames were retained. One significant change made in the renovation was the covering of the exterior turquoise tile spandrel panels with dark glass panels. There is an elevator penthouse, clad in buff brick, on the western side of the parapetted flat roof.

Despite the International Style of the building, its composition exhibits the last vestiges of the classical, three part composition of base, shaft, and cornice, executed in new modernist vocabulary. The base along Walker Street includes floor-to-ceiling aluminum framed storefront windows (now boarded), entry doors covered by a continuous aluminum clad cantilevered canopy that wraps the corner and continues half way along the San Jacinto elevation. The ground floor of the east (San Jacinto) elevation has an unadorned brick wall with paired egress doors on the northern-most bay. Above the ground floor, the shaft or central building section is an asymmetrical composition of continuous bands of aluminum-framed windows with cast concrete sunshades enframed by a projecting concrete band; the bands of windows compose the majority of the south façade leaving only a small vertical strip of the buff colored brick in the far western bay. This vertical element counters the horizontal emphasis of the window wall and continues above the projecting concrete band to simply express the cornice or terminus of the building. On the east elevation the enframed window wall is only two bays wide leaving a full bay for the vertical buff brick of the building plane.

Floor Plan

The ground floor public space is the elevator lobby, richly ornamented with green marble with heavy white veining. The upper 20 floors have mostly intact elevator lobbies with plaster walls, the glass mail chute, the fire hose boxes, and brushed aluminum molding surrounding the elevator cabs. The building’s basement is utilitarian and designed for the mechanical systems and back of house maintenance offices and storage; there are no public spaces. The basement floor is concrete and the walls painted plaster or gypsum board.

Interior

There is a small rectangular inset along Walker Street that highlights the building’s primary entrance spanning approximately 22 feet: central paired single light aluminum framed doors flanked by two single doors. The lobby is currently carpeted and has a drop ceiling; both of these elements were later alterations. The five elevator cabs are placed against the western solid end wall and are surrounded with green marble with white veining. The elevators cabs have brushed aluminum surrounds. Other original elements in the lobby include a mail box with glass mail chute from the upper floors; fire hose cabinets, and an aluminum framed office directory. The 1962 AIA award still hangs in the lobby. The original concrete dog leg staircase with simple metal pipe railing is in the northwest corner of the building just north of the elevator lobby.

There is a tenant space in the eastern two bays of the building. The tenant space has a concrete floor and drop ceiling; there are not remaining character defining features. There is a paired aluminum door with

access to the main lobby on the west elevation as well as access to Walker, also via aluminum framed single light doors.

The upper floors were designed to offer maximum flexibility for tenant build out. All floors retain some semblance of the elevator lobby and access to the rear fire escape. Alterations are visible on most floors: Twelve, or 60 percent, of the upper floors have had modifications to the corridors and/or elevator lobbies; the remaining eight floors have the majority of their corridors and elevator lobbies intact. The corridors were designed according to building codes at the time and ran in an L-shape from the southern end of the elevator lobby and turned in an easterly direction with a final turn northward to access the fire escape staircase. Electrical panels ran in a continuous vertical chase along the southern wall. Tenants altered the office plans and many of the corridors over time and electrical panels and fire boxes were relocated. The extant corridors have a thin layer of plaster over a metal stud wall and a rubber baseboard. The drop ceilings are now acoustical tile and are placed approximately three and one half feet below the original floor-to-ceiling height. The corridors have been altered and are not considered character defining features of the building. The elevator lobbies, largely intact on each floor, also have a plaster finish although most have been encapsulated with wallpaper, paint or wooden paneling. The elevator lobbies are the only character defining feature remaining on the upper floors.

Integrity

The Melrose Building has a high level of overall integrity. The building's exterior has experienced very few changes. The upper floor aluminum window sashes are original. The glass panes in the upper floor sashes were replaced in 1971. The most significant alteration to the exterior also occurred in the 1970s when the building's original turquoise spandrels were sheathed with dark glass panels. The turquoise spandrels are extant beneath the glass panels, however. Inside, the building retains the green marble walls, mailbox, building directory, and elevator surrounds in the ground floor elevator lobby. Alterations include carpeting and a drop ceiling. The upper floors have varying degrees of alteration. Twelve, or 60 percent, of the upper floors have modifications to their elevator lobbies. The tenant spaces have been altered; however, this follows the space planning ideas of the day that tenant spaces were designed to be as flexible as possible.

The integrity of the Melrose Building can be described as follows:

1. Location – The building is in its original location, and thus its integrity of location is high.
2. Design – The building has had virtually no design alterations. It retains its setback, massing, and composition, with asymmetrical projecting window walls and concrete sun shades, and its interior ground floor lobby is intact. Its turquoise tile spandrels are intact but hidden beneath dark glass panels. Despite that change, the building's overall integrity of design is good.
3. Setting – The building retains its original setting of a busy downtown street corner, with parking garages and other office buildings nearby. Its integrity of setting is high.
4. Materials – The building's buff bricks, window frames, and storefront are original, and the green marble in the elevator lobby is intact. The turquoise tiled spandrels, although hidden beneath glass panels, are also intact. The integrity of materials is high.

5. Workmanship – The historic workmanship is evident in the building finishes, storefront, and construction of windows and other features, and thus the overall integrity of workmanship is good.
6. Feeling – The building retains its feeling as an International Style office tower on a busy downtown street. It remains thoroughly modern in appearance and evokes the change and progress inherent in midcentury design. Its integrity of feeling is high.
7. Association – The building, currently vacant, is no longer associated with its original developers, but is still associated with Lloyd & Morgan, its architects. Furthermore, it is still associated with the evolution of the Modern style and its use in Houston skyscrapers. Because of this, the Melrose Building’s overall integrity of association is good.

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Koush, Ben. "The Modern Mr. Jones: A Legendary Houston Architect Shares his Tall Building Portfolio." *Cite*, Fall 2007, 30-35.

"New Thinking on Office Buildings." *Architectural Forum*, September 1953, 107-117.

"New Thinking on the Effect of Office Windows on Design." *Architectural Forum*, September 1953, 118-123.

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Archival Collections

Arthur E. Jones Architectural Records, MS 535, Woodson Research Center, Fondren Library, Rice University.

Houston City Directories, Clayton Library Center for Genealogical Research, Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas.

Melrose Building Architectural Drawings, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas.

Online Resources

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(<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/cmask>), accessed March 26, 2014.
Uploaded on June 9, 2010. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by the Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION

Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation

(a) The HAHC, in making recommendations with respect to designation, and the city council, in making a designation, shall consider one or more of the following criteria, as appropriate for the type of designation:

- | S | NA | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (1) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area possesses character, interest or value as a visible reminder of the development, heritage, and cultural and ethnic diversity of the city, state, or nation; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (3) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is identified with a person who, or group or event that, contributed significantly to the cultural or historical development of the city, state, or nation; |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (4) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area exemplify a particular architectural style or building type important to the city; |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (5) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area are the best remaining examples of an architectural style or building type in a neighborhood; |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (6) Whether the building, structure, object or site or the buildings, structures, objects or sites within the area are identified as the work of a person or group whose work has influenced the heritage of the city, state, or nation; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride. |

AND

- | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (9) If less than 50 years old, or proposed historic district containing a majority of buildings, structures, or objects that are less than 50 years old, whether the building, structure, object, site, or area is of extraordinary importance to the city, state or nation for reasons not based on age (Sec. 33-224(b)). |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to City Council the Landmark Designation of the Melrose Building at 1121 Walker Street.

HAHC RECOMMENDATION

The Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommends to City Council the Landmark Designation of the Melrose Building at 1121 Walker Street.

EXHIBIT A
PHOTOS
THE MELROSE BUILDING
1121 WALKER STREET



Name of Building: The Melrose Building

City or Vicinity: 1121 Walker, Houston

County: Harris County

State: TX

Name of Photographer: Anna Mod

Date of Photograph: 2014

Location of Original Digital Files: SWCA Environmental Consultants, 10245 West Little York, suite 600, Houston, Texas 77040

South façade (left) and east elevation (right), camera facing west.

EXHIBIT A
PHOTOS (CONTINUED)
THE MELROSE BUILDING
1121 WALKER STREET



Name of Building: The Melrose Building

City or Vicinity: 1121 Walker, Houston

County: Harris County

State: TX

Name of Photographer: Anna Mod

Date of Photograph: 2014

Location of Original Digital Files: SWCA Environmental Consultants, 10245 West Little York, suite 600, Houston, Texas 77040
West elevation (left) and south façade (right), camera facing east; view east down Walker Street.

EXHIBIT A
PHOTOS (CONTINUED)
THE MELROSE BUILDING
1121 WALKER STREET



Name of Building: The Melrose Building

City or Vicinity: 1121 Walker, Houston

County: Harris County

State: TX

Name of Photographer: Anna Mod

Date of Photograph: 2014

Location of Original Digital Files: SWCA Environmental Consultants, 10245 West Little York, suite 600, Houston, Texas 77040

North elevation (left) and west elevation (right), camera facing southeast.

EXHIBIT A
PHOTOS (CONTINUED)
THE MELROSE BUILDING
1121 WALKER STREET



Name of Building: The Melrose Building

City or Vicinity: 1121 Walker, Houston

County: Harris County

State: TX

Name of Photographer: Anna Mod

Date of Photograph: 2014

Location of Original Digital Files: SWCA Environmental Consultants, 10245 West Little York, suite 600, Houston, Texas 77040

Interior ground floor elevator lobby, view north.

EXHIBIT A
PHOTOS (CONTINUED)
THE MELROSE BUILDING
1121 WALKER STREET



Name of Building: The Melrose Building

City or Vicinity: 1121 Walker, Houston

County: Harris County

State: TX

Name of Photographer: Anna Mod

Date of Photograph: 2014

Location of Original Digital Files: SWCA Environmental Consultants, 10245 West Little York, suite 600, Houston, Texas 77040

Interior ground floor elevator lobby, building directory on left, entry vestibule doors on right, view south.

EXHIBIT A
PHOTOS (CONTINUED)
THE MELROSE BUILDING
1121 WALKER STREET



Name of Building: The Melrose Building

City or Vicinity: 1121 Walker, Houston

County: Harris County

State: TX

Name of Photographer: Anna Mod

Date of Photograph: 2014

Location of Original Digital Files: SWCA Environmental Consultants, 10245 West Little York, suite 600, Houston, Texas 77040
Interior, upper floor, typical elevator lobby, view south.

EXHIBIT A
PHOTOS (CONTINUED)
THE MELROSE BUILDING
1121 WALKER STREET



Name of Building: The Melrose Building

City or Vicinity: 1121 Walker, Houston

County: Harris County

State: TX

Name of Photographer: Anna Mod

Date of Photograph: 2014

Location of Original Digital Files: SWCA Environmental Consultants, 10245 West Little York, suite 600, Houston, Texas 77040

Interior, typical corridor, view east.

EXHIBIT A
PHOTOS (CONTINUED)
THE MELROSE BUILDING
1121 WALKER STREET



Name of Building: The Melrose Building

City or Vicinity: 1121 Walker, Houston

County: Harris County

State: TX

Name of Photographer: Anna Mod

Date of Photograph: 2014

Location of Original Digital Files: SWCA Environmental Consultants, 10245 West Little York, suite 600, Houston, Texas 77040

Interior, typical floor on south elevation, replacement windows, view south.

EXHIBIT B
SITE MAP
THE MELROSE BUILDING
1121 WALKER STREET

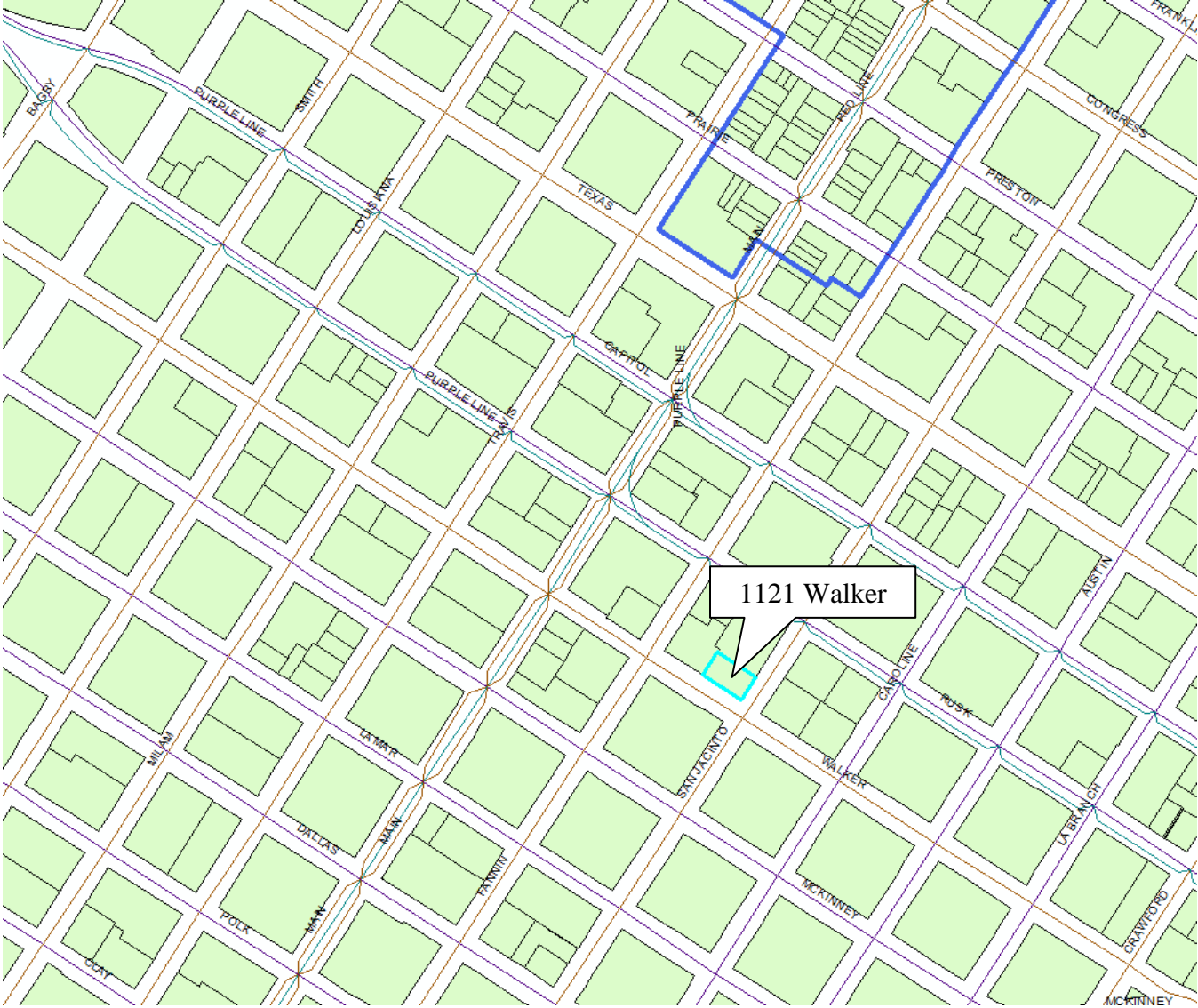


EXHIBIT C
HISTORIC PHOTOS
THE MELROSE BUILDING
1121 WALKER STREET



Name of Building: The Melrose Building
City or Vicinity: 1121 Walker, Houston
County: Harris County
State: TX
Name of Photographer: unknown
Date of Photograph: c1952
Location of Original Digital Files: Houston Mod, Houston, Texas.
West façade (left) and south elevation (right), camera facing east.

EXHIBIT C
HISTORIC PHOTOS (CONTINUED)
THE MELROSE BUILDING
1121 WALKER STREET



Name of Building: The Melrose Building
City or Vicinity: 1121 Walker, Houston
County: Harris County
State: TX
Name of Photographer: unknown
Date of Photograph: 1952
Location of Original Digital Files: postcard collection Randy Pace, Houston
South façade (left) and east elevation (right), camera facing west.

EXHIBIT C
HISTORIC PHOTOS (CONTINUED)
THE MELROSE BUILDING
1121 WALKER STREET



Name of Building: The Melrose Building

City or Vicinity: 1121 Walker, Houston

County: Harris County

State: TX

Name of Photographer: unknown

Date of Photograph: 1952

Location of Original Digital Files: *Courtesy Woodson Research Center, Fondren Library, Rice University, Houston, Texas*

Interior ground floor elevator lobby, camera facing south towards Walker Street.

EXHIBIT C
HISTORIC PHOTOS (CONTINUED)
THE MELROSE BUILDING
1121 WALKER STREET



Name of Building: The Melrose Building

City or Vicinity: 1121 Walker, Houston

County: Harris County

State: TX

Name of Photographer: unknown

Date of Photograph: 1952

Location of Original Digital Files: *Courtesy Woodson Research Center, Fondren Library, Rice University, Houston, Texas*

Interior ground floor elevator lobby, concession area to the south of elevator banks, camera facing west.

EXHIBIT C
HISTORIC PHOTOS (CONTINUED)
THE MELROSE BUILDING
1121 WALKER STREET



Name of Building: The Melrose Building

City or Vicinity: 1121 Walker, Houston

County: Harris County

State: TX

Name of Photographer: unknown

Date of Photograph: 1952

Location of Original Digital Files: *Courtesy Woodson Research Center, Fondren Library, Rice University, Houston, Texas)*

Interior, upper floor, open plan office.

EXHIBIT C
HISTORIC PHOTOS (CONTINUED)
THE MELROSE BUILDING
1121 WALKER STREET



Name of Building: The Melrose Building

City or Vicinity: 1121 Walker, Houston

County: Harris County

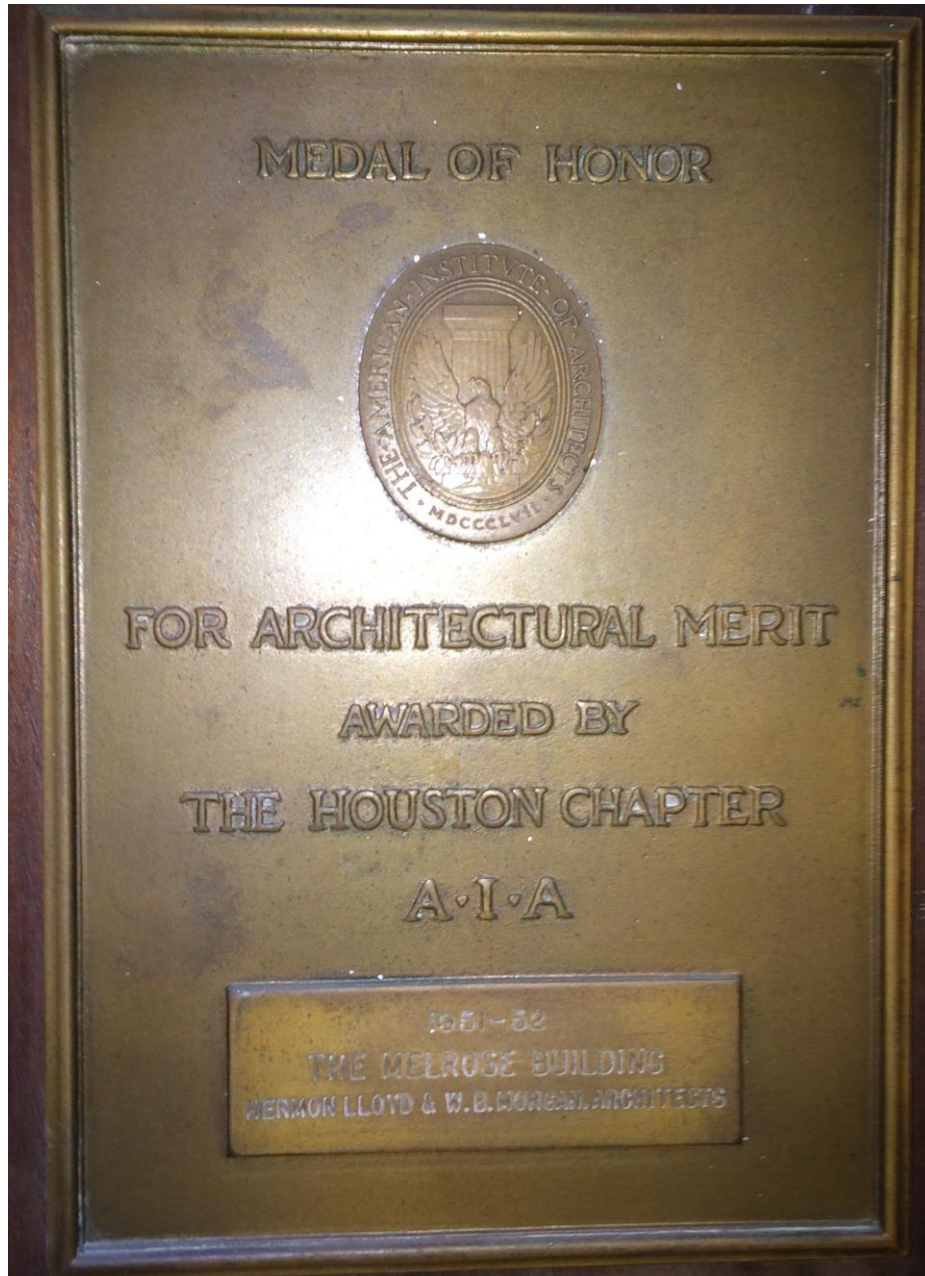
State: TX

Name of Photographer: unknown

Date of Photograph: 1952

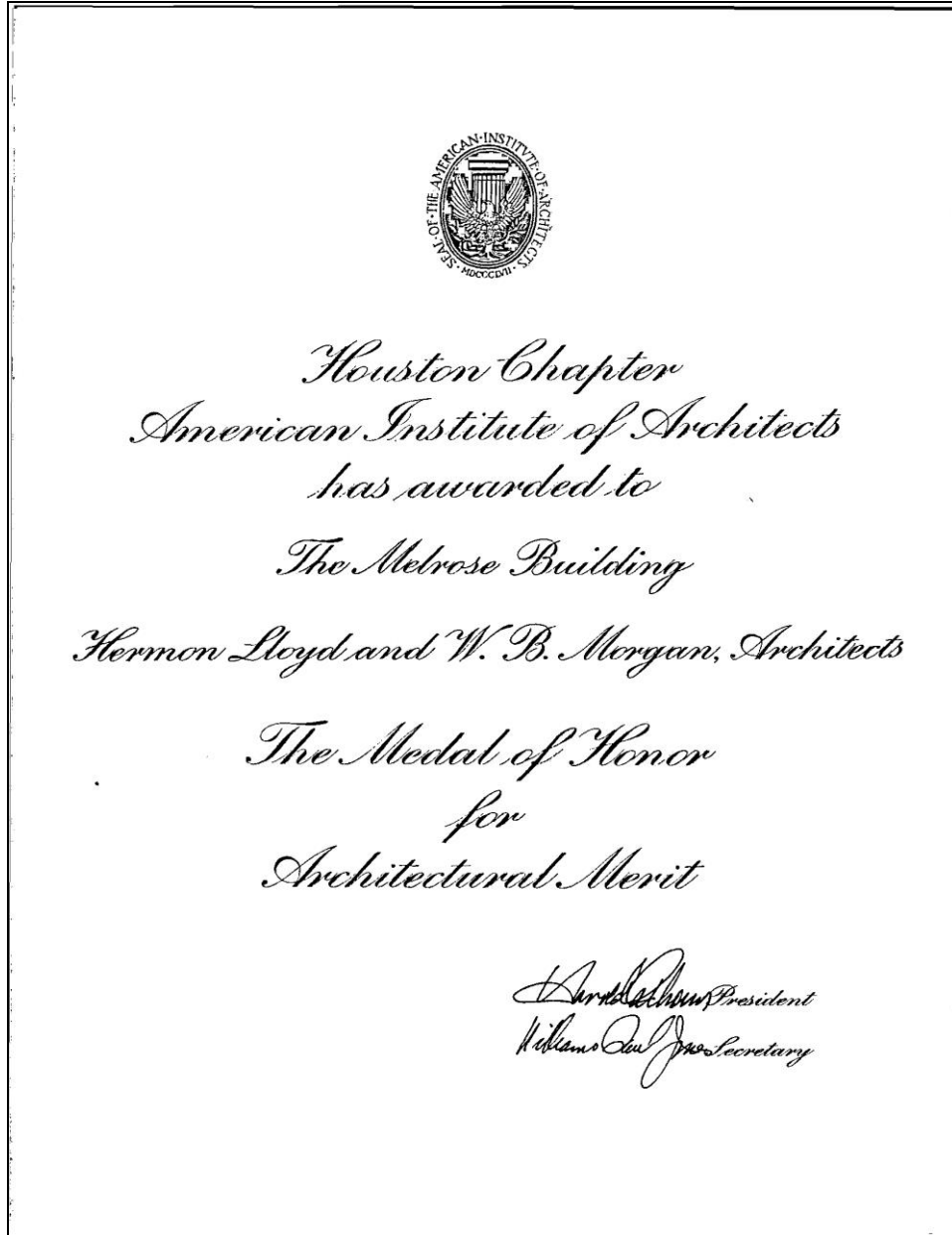
Location of Original Digital Files: *Courtesy Woodson Research Center, Fondren Library, Rice University, Houston, Texas*
Interior, upper floor, typical office layout showing original fixed and casement windows.

EXHIBIT D
ADDITIONAL PHOTOS
THE MELROSE BUILDING
1121 WALKER STREET



Name of Figure: AIA Award Plaque in the Melrose Building
City or Vicinity: Houston
County: Harris County
State: TX
Name of Photographer: Anna Mod
Date of Photograph: 2014
Location of Original Digital Files: Courtesy SWCA
Detail Photo of the AIA award plaque in the Melrose Building

EXHIBIT D
ADDITIONAL PHOTOS (CONTINUED)
THE MELROSE BUILDING
1121 WALKER STREET



Name of Figure: AIA Award

City or Vicinity: Houston

County: Harris County

State: TX

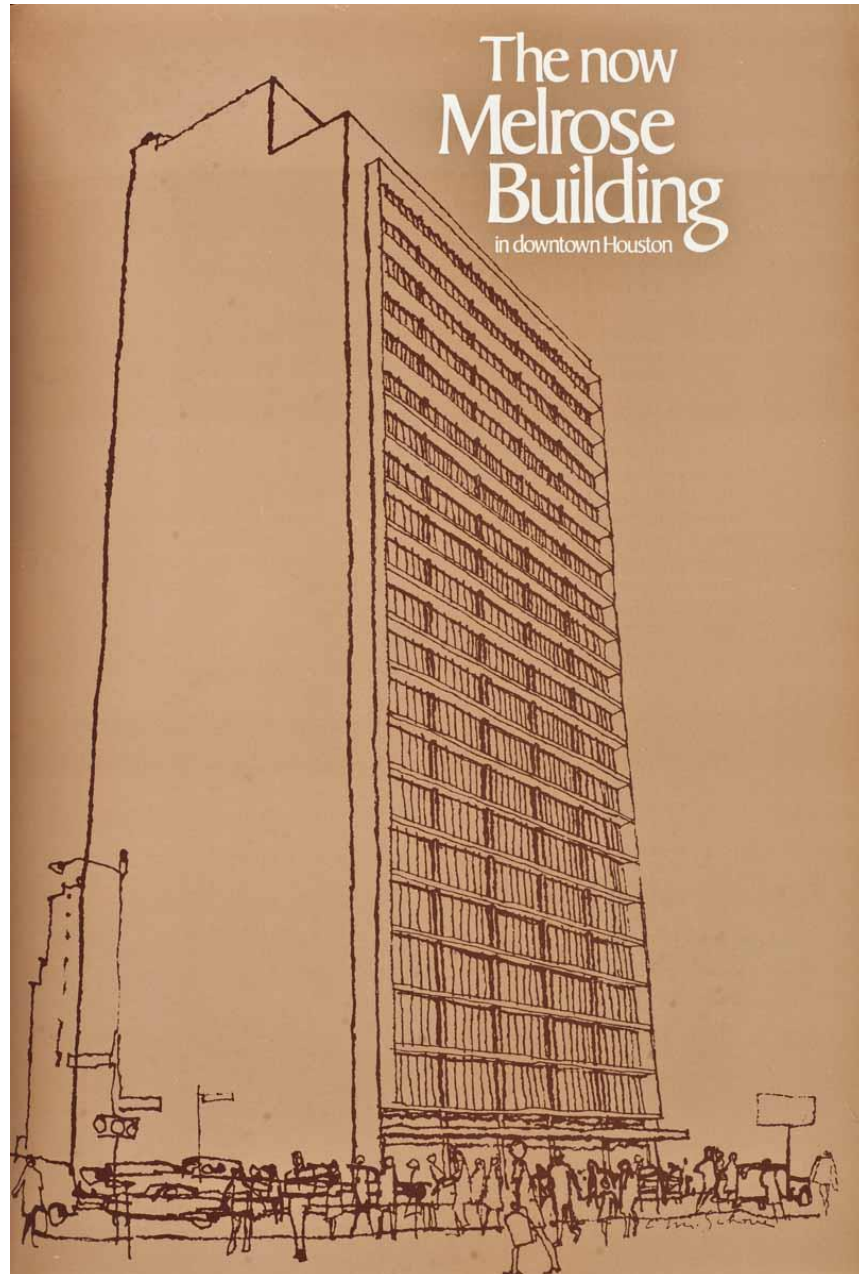
Name of Photographer: n/a

Date of Photograph: 1952

Location of Original Digital Files: Courtesy Woodson Research Center, Fondren Library, Rice University

Scan of the original AIA Certificate

EXHIBIT D
ADDITIONAL PHOTOS (CONTINUED)
THE MELROSE BUILDING
1121 WALKER STREET



Name of Figure: Houston Magazine, 1969

City or Vicinity: Houston

County: Harris County

State: TX

Name of Photographer: n/a

Date of Photograph: 1969

Location of Original Digital Files: Courtesy Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library

Scans of Houston Magazine, 1969

EXHIBIT D
ADDITIONAL PHOTOS (CONTINUED)
THE MELROSE BUILDING
1121 WALKER STREET

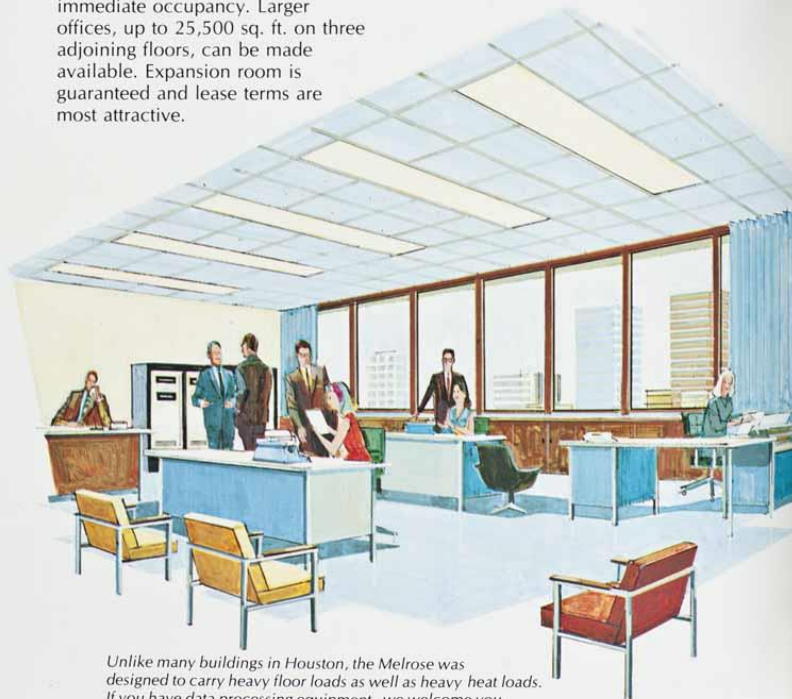
The Melrose Building has moved ahead with a tenant-oriented \$500,000 modernization program, inside and out.

Familiar Melrose green has given way to a sculptured bronze exterior. Solarbronze plate glass to keep out glare. Bold bronze mullions to emphasize the verticals. The Astrodome architects, Lloyd, Morgan & Jones have transformed the Melrose Building into one of Houston's most exciting structures.

Inside, work is underway customizing each floor to the needs of individual tenants. Smartly-designed smaller offices (as small as 300 sq. ft.) are available for immediate occupancy. Larger offices, up to 25,500 sq. ft. on three adjoining floors, can be made available. Expansion room is guaranteed and lease terms are most attractive.

New blood. The Melrose Building has been under new management for over a year. We have received many compliments on what we have done so far. But the best is yet to come.

Basically, it's a matter of attitude—of tenant-mindedness. We want you to talk to our tenants; they constitute seventy of our best salesmen. Above all, talk to the Russells (Sam or Jake, 224-2764). We office here, too.



Unlike many buildings in Houston, the Melrose was designed to carry heavy floor loads as well as heavy heat loads. If you have data processing equipment, we welcome you.

Name of Figure: Houston Magazine, 1969

City or Vicinity: Houston

County: Harris County

State: TX

Name of Photographer: n/a

Date of Photograph: 1969

Location of Original Digital Files: Courtesy Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library

Scans of Houston Magazine, 1969

EXHIBIT D
ADDITIONAL PHOTOS (CONTINUED)
THE MELROSE BUILDING
1121 WALKER STREET



Name of Figure: Houston Magazine, 1969

City or Vicinity: Houston

County: Harris County

State: TX

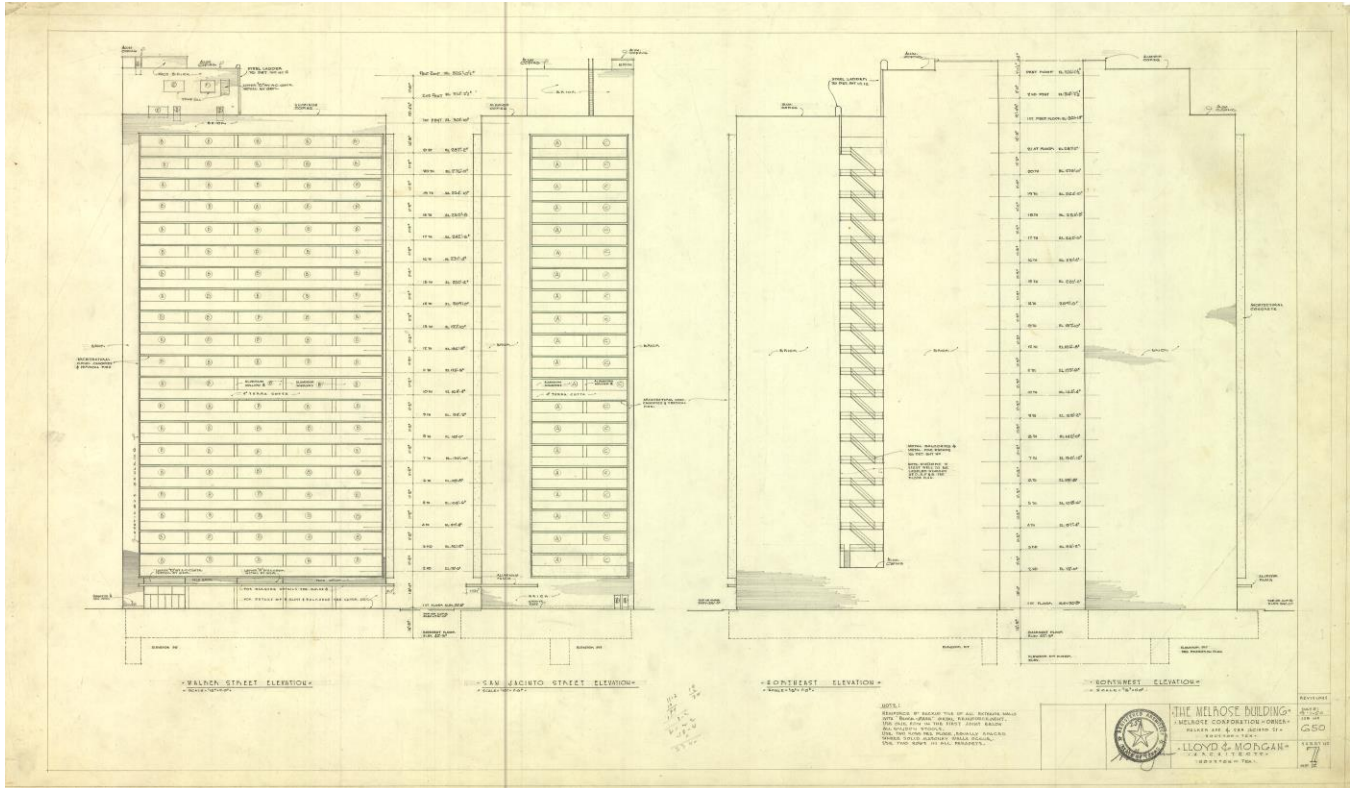
Name of Photographer: n/a

Date of Photograph: 1969

Location of Original Digital Files: Courtesy Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library

Scans of Houston Magazine, 1969

EXHIBIT E
ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS
THE MELROSE BUILDING
1121 WALKER STREET



Name of Figure: Melrose Building Exterior Elevations

City or Vicinity: Houston

County: Harris County

State: TX

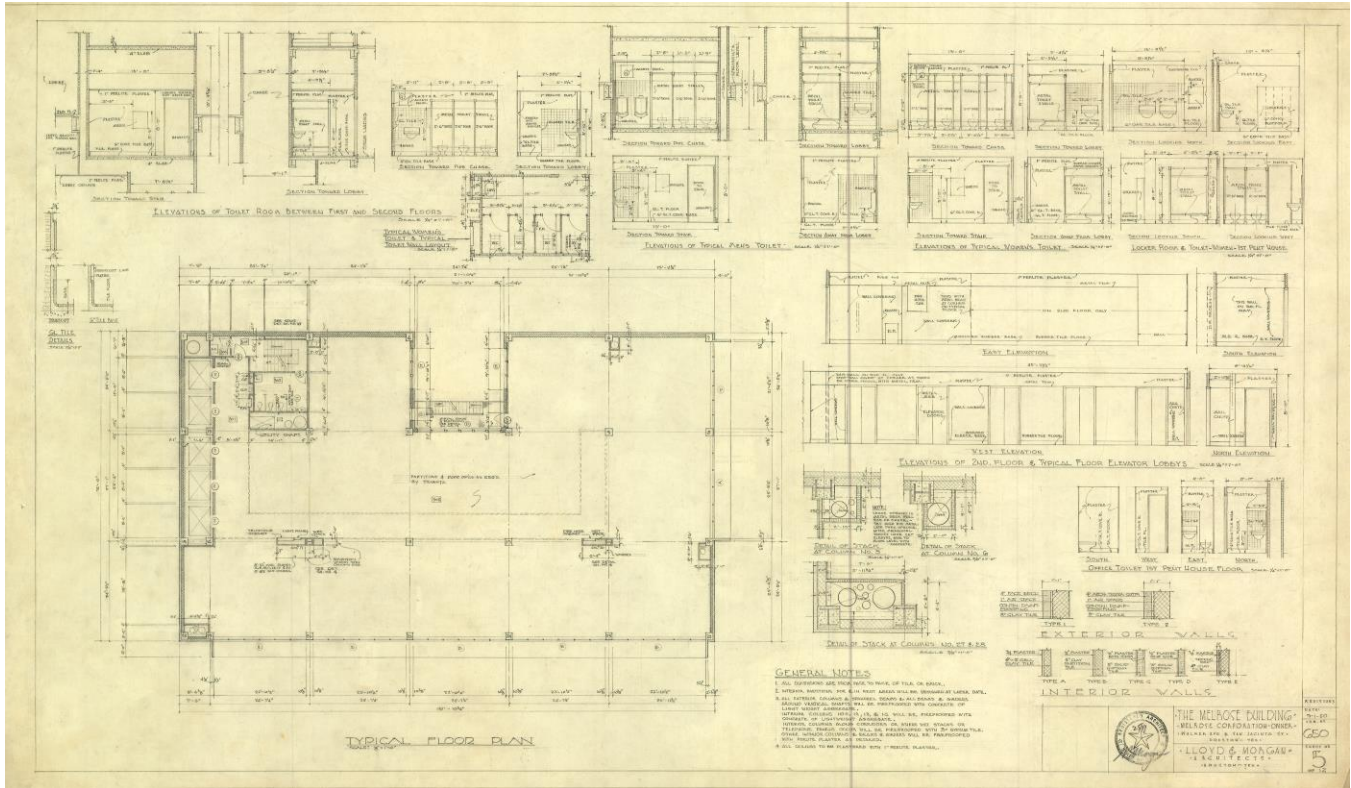
Name of Photographer: n/a

Date of Photograph: 1950

Location of Original Digital Files: Courtesy Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library

Melrose Building Exterior Elevations

EXHIBIT E
ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS (CONTINUED)
THE MELROSE BUILDING
1121 WALKER STREET



Name of Figure: Melrose Building Typical Floor Plan

City or Vicinity: Houston

County: Harris County

State: TX

Name of Photographer: n/a

Date of Photograph: 1950

Location of Original Digital Files: Courtesy Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library

Melrose Building Typical Floor Plan