

State of California — The Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

PRIMARY RECORD

Primary #

HRI #

Trinomial

NRHP Status Code

Other Listings

Review Code

Reviewer

Date

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*Resource Name or #: (assigned by recorder) 363-365 Main St.

P1. Other Identifier: El Rey Theater

P2. Location: Not for Publication Unrestricted

***a. County:** Monterey

and (P2b and P2c or P2d. Attach a Location Map as necessary.)

***b. USGS 7.5' Quad:** N/A

Date: N/A T ; R ; **1/4 of** **1/4 of Sec** ; M.D. **B.M.**

c. Address: 363-365 Main Street

City: Salinas

Zip: 93901

d. UTM: Zone: 10 ; mE/ mN (G.P.S.)

e. Other Locational Data: (e.g., parcel #, directions to resource, elevation, etc., as appropriate) Elevation: A.P.N. 002-233-010-000

***P3a. Description:** (Describe resource and its major elements. Include design, materials, condition, alterations, size, setting, and boundaries)

The El Rey Theatre is a two-story reinforced concrete commercial building constructed in the Art Moderne style. The facade is built skyward from the building corners toward the center fin, which dominates the primary (west) elevation and bears an in-kind replaced sign identifying the El Rey Theater. The facade steps up from the marquee in two levels expressed as stucco pilasters with serrated edges. The recessed theater entry contains original glazed tiles in a raised geometric pattern and original terrazzo floors. Two storefronts flank the main entrance. The original marquee contains fins that complement the center fin and lead the eye upward. El Rey Barber shop to the south is still basically intact as it was in the 1930's. See Figures 1 – 8 on the continuation sheets, pages 3 and 4, for historic and current photographs.

***P3b. Resource Attributes:** (List attributes and codes) HP6: 1-3 Story commercial building

***P4. Resources Present:** Building Structure Object Site District Element of District Other (Isolates, etc.)

P5b. Description of Photo: (View, date, accession #) West Elevation, 2023

P5a. Photo or Drawing (Photo required for buildings, structures, and objects.)



***P6. Date Constructed/Age and Sources:**

Historic

Prehistoric Both

1935: Monterey County Assessors Record

***P7. Owner and Address:**

Kurt Mayer

363 Main Street

Salinas, CA 93901

***P8. Recorded by:** (Name, affiliation, and address)

Seth Bergstein, Principal

PAST Consultants, LLC

P.O. Box 721

Pacific Grove, CA 93950

***P9. Date Recorded:** 12/4/23

***P10. Survey Type:** (Describe)

Owner Requested

***P11. Report Citation:** None

***Attachments:** NONE Location Map Sketch Map Continuation Sheet Building, Structure, and Object Record

Archaeological Record District Record Linear Feature Record Milling Station Record Rock Art Record

Artifact Record Photograph Record Other (List):

BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD

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*NRHP Status Code 5S1

*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) 363-365 Main St.

- B1. Historic Name: El Rey Theater
B2. Common Name:
B3. Original Use: Commercial Movie Theatre
B4. Present Use: Commercial
***B5. Architectural Style:** Art Moderne
***B6. Construction History:** (Construction date, alterations, and date of alterations)

The original marquee and El Rey Theatre sign are undergoing restoration, with the lettering returned to the primary sign. The flanking storefronts maintain their original wood-framed openings, with modification to the windows. Original tile and terrazzo floor remains within the recessed lobby. The ticket booth has been removed. The interior lobby contains an original tile water fountain. Within the auditorium, the wall finishes have been covered with paint and are currently under restoration. The original seats have been removed.

***B7. Moved?** No Yes Unknown Date:

Original Location: Same

***B8. Related Features:** N/A

B9a. Architect: Mark T. Jorgenson (S.F.)

b. Builder: Harold C. Geyer

***B10. Significance: Theme:** Commercial Architecture

Area: Salinas

Period of Significance: 1935

Property Type: Commercial Building

Applicable Criteria: State/Local

(Discuss importance in terms of historical or architectural context as defined by theme, period, and geographic scope. Also address integrity.)
See continuation sheets, page 5 - 9.

B11. Additional Resource Attributes: (List attributes and codes)

***B12. References:**

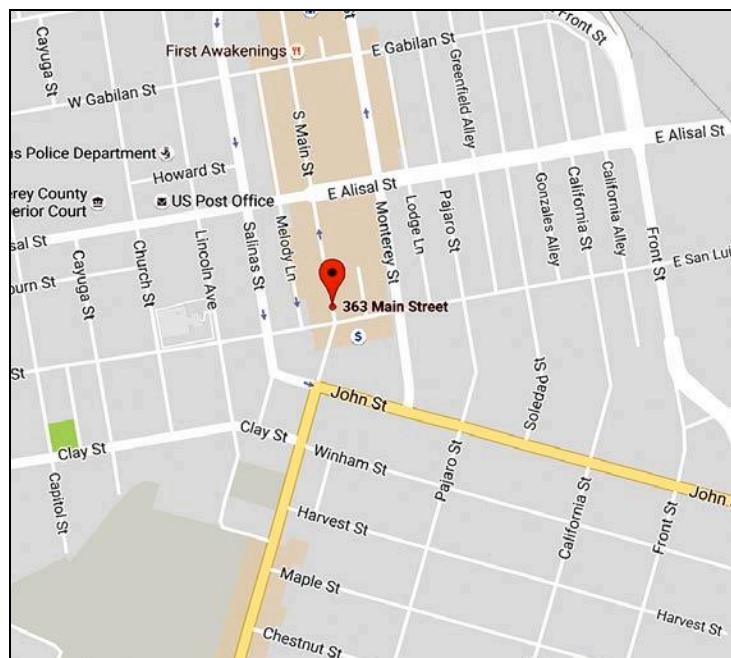
See continuation sheet, page 10.

B13. Remarks:

***B14. Evaluator:** PAST Consultants, LLC

***Date of Evaluation:** 12/4/23

(This space reserved for official comments.)



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P3a. Description: Historic Photographs



Figure 1. Circa-1988 image of the west elevation.

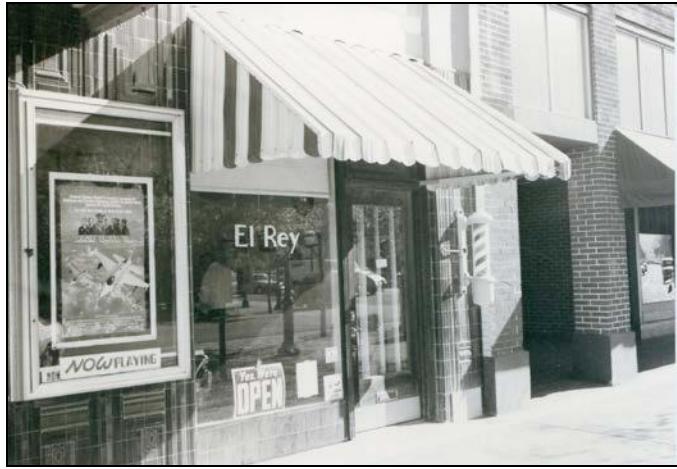


Figure 2. Circa-1988 image of the south storefront.



Figure 3. Circa-1940s image of the west elevation.

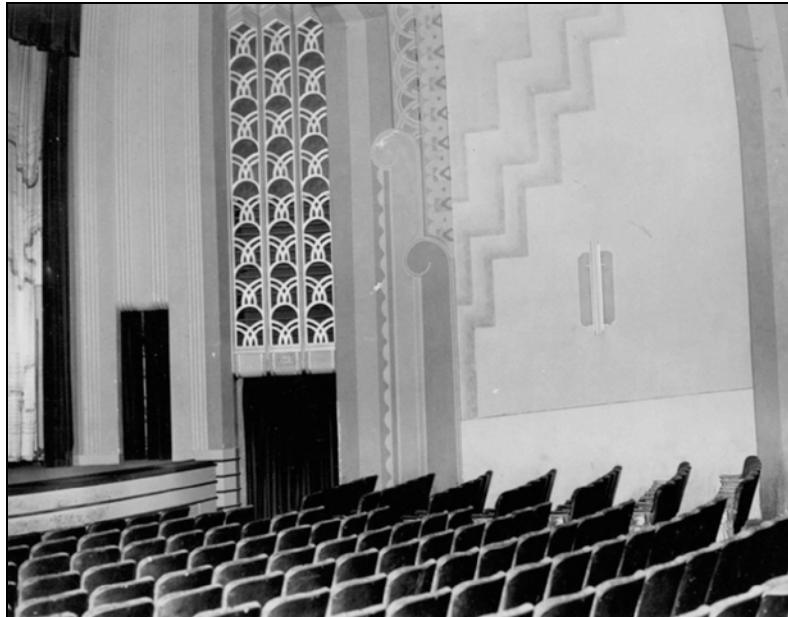


Figure 4. Circa-1940s image of the auditorium interior.

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B10. Description: 2023 Photographs



Figure 5. 2023 image of the west elevation.



Figure 6. 2023 detail of the west elevation marquee and storefronts.



Figure 7. 2023 detail of the recessed entrance, showing raised geometric tile on walls and terrazzo flooring.



Figure 8. Detail of north storefront.

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B10. Significance:

Character Defining Features

- Front elevation massing consisting of a serrated central panel flanked by serrated pilasters.
- Raised stucco geometric pilasters within the central fin and at the building corners.
- “El Rey Theater” sign applied to central fin (replaced to match existing).
- Original marquee with fins that echo the fins on the theater sign.
- Horizontal stucco bands at base of front elevation.
- Flanking storefronts (fenestration modified).
- Recessed entrance ceiling lighting consisting of exposed single light bulbs.
- Terrazzo flooring within recessed entrance.
- Raised and colored ceramic tile on walls of recessed entrance and on the storefronts.
- Stucco wall cladding.

Significance Statement

Since the city’s incorporation in 1874 and into the 1930s, agriculture derived from the Salinas Valley’s “Salad Bowl of the World” made Salinas one of the wealthiest cities (per capita) in the United States. With the development of efficient water pumping methods following the First World War, the Salinas valley produced 80% of the country’s lettuce, artichokes, strawberries and other row crops. The wealth of this vast agricultural industry was processed and banked in Salinas, which allowed the city to survive – and even prosper - during the Great Depression.

This financial success fostered the development of a rich architectural heritage, particularly buildings constructed during the Art Deco and Modern periods. An image of the 1962-updated Sanborn map of Main Street appears below, showing the subject property as part of a built-out Main Street (**Figure 9**).

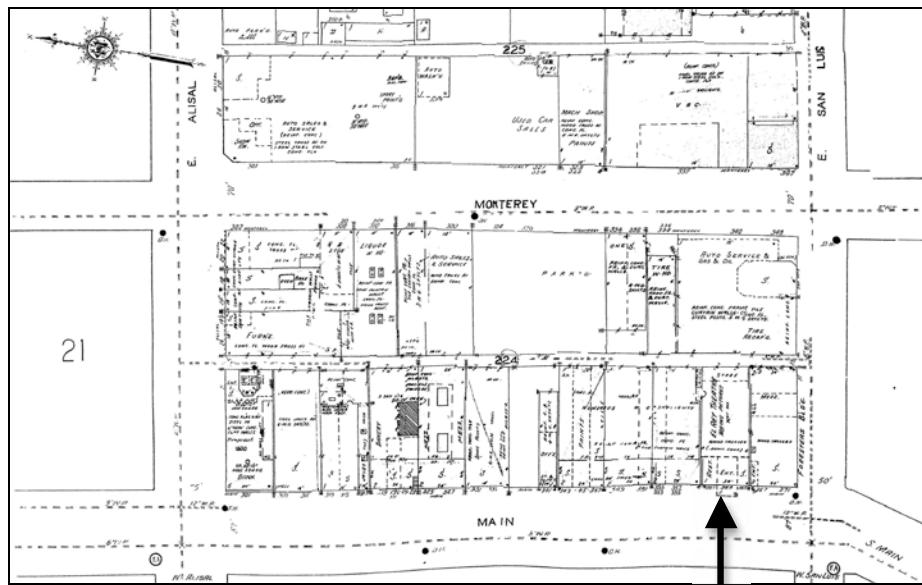


Figure 9. Image of the 1962 update of the 1925 Salinas Sanborn map showing the subject property.

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B10. Significance: Significance Statement (continued)

Salinas celebrated its financial success of the 1930s by constructing buildings as technological and architectural symbols of a prosperous city. As noteworthy architectural historian Kent L. Seavey writes:

Salinas was the first and only community in Monterey County to accept modern building designs in a major way. The success of agriculture and access to federal financing for public works projects paired with a progressive spirit welcomed both modern and international building design in the public as well as the private sectors. In the private sector, commercial development along Main Street radically altered the turn of the century look of downtown. Salinas' tallest building at the corner of Main and Alisal is an example of the Zig Zag modern while Main Street's three movie houses show the variety of the modern form as do some business facades, epically in the 300 block (Kent Seavey, "A Short History of Salinas," Monterey County Historical Society, 2009).

Between 1930 and 1940 and despite the national ravages of the Great Depression, Salinas' population actually grew about 13%, from 10,263 to 11,586 citizens. During the height of Art Deco development three movie theaters constructed in variations of the style were erected on Main Street. Two remain that illustrate the modern Art Deco aesthetic: the Fox Theater (1921 – remodeled in 1936), and the El Rey Theater, constructed in 1935 (*Salinas Art Deco & Moderne: A Wealth of Architecture*, 2014). A circa-1950 view of lower Main Street taken in the 1940s shows this prosperity (**Figure 10**).



Figure 10. Circa-1950 view of lower Main Street, with the El Rey Theater in the foreground (*Monterey County Historical Society*).

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B10. Significance: Significance Statement (continued)

Completed in August 1935, the El Rey Theater is an outstanding example of the hybrid Art Deco/Art Moderne style. San Francisco architect Mark T. Jorgenson designed the building both as a variant of the Art Moderne style that also served as an anchor to the south end of the Main Street corridor. An announcement of the building's completion appeared in the *Salinas Californian* on August 15, 1935 (**Figure 11**). Examination of *Salinas Californian* articles from the 1930s – 1950s reveals numerous announcements of the latest movies to debut at the El Rey Theatre, as well as other community events – giving testimony to the importance of movie theaters and progressive design in the city of Salinas.



Figure 11. Announcement of the El Rey Theatre's opening in the *Salinas Californian*, August 15, 1935.

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B10. Significance: Evaluation of Historic Significance

City of Salinas Municipal Code

The City of Salinas Municipal Code defines a historic resource in *Chapter 3: Commissions, Committees and Boards*, Section 3.02.02: Definitions as:

- d. "Historic resource" means any building, structure, sign, site, place, area, or district that is identified on:
1. The National Register of *Historic Places*;
 2. The state historic landmark register;
 3. The California Register of Historical Resources (California Register); or
 4. One that has been voluntarily nominated as an *historic* resource by the property owner and which designation has been considered by the *historic* resources board and approved by the Salinas City Council.

Since the Salinas Municipal Code evaluates buildings according to the California Register of Historical Resources, the following evaluates the subject property according to California Register criteria.

Evaluation of California Register (CR) Significance

CR-1: Association with significant events, patterns or trends.

The El Rey Theatre is historically significant for its association with the development of Art Deco/Art Moderne architecture in the Salinas Main Street corridor. One of three theaters constructed on Main Street, the El Rey Theatre was the anchoring building on the south end of Main Street. As one proceeds north along Main Street, a number of significant Art Deco buildings are encountered, including the Salinas National Bank at 301 Main Street (1930), the commercial building at 344 Main Street (1935), and the Fox Theatre at 239 Main Street (1921/1936). These buildings, in combination with additional commercial buildings along the Main Street corridor comprise one of the most intact groupings of Art Deco/Art Moderne buildings in the region. This collection of buildings has been confirmed as a California-eligible historic district by architectural historian Kent L. Seavey in 1989. Since that time, restoration of various buildings, including the subject building has been ongoing – further establishing the historic integrity of the Salinas Main Street corridor's collection of historic buildings. The subject property is eligible under this Criterion.

CR-2: Association with significant persons.

The El Rey Theatre's original owners were Lawrence Borg and John Peters, under the name of the Crystal Theatre Company. By 1941, Fox West Coast took over primary ownership. In 1949, Borg and Peters again assumed ownership of the El Rey Theater until Lawrence Borg's death in 1954. While the original owners were successful regional business persons, eligibility for significant persons is not appropriate according to California Register Criteria, as the historic association for the owner's career cannot be directly tied to this building only. The subject property is not eligible under this Criterion.

B10. Significance: Evaluation of California Register (CR) Significance (continued)

CR-3: *Association with significant architecture and/or design.*

The El Rey Theater is historically significant under California Register Criterion 3 as an outstanding example of Art Moderne architecture, located on the south end of the historically significant Main Street corridor. The subject building's dramatic front façade, sweeping the pedestrian's eye upward with its central stucco panel, dramatic theater sign and skyward finials communicates the successful and progressive spirit of Salinas in the 1930s – a city that not only survived, but prospered during the ravages of the Great Depression. The subject building maintains sufficient historic integrity and possesses all of the character defining features listed previously in this evaluation. The subject property is eligible under this Criterion.

Historic Integrity Analysis

1. **Location:** *the place where the historic property was constructed or the place where the historic event occurred.* The building remains in its original location and has integrity of location.

2. **Design:** *the combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a property.* The presence of intact character defining features that communicate the El Rey Theatre's Art Moderne style remain on the building, giving it integrity of design.

3. **Setting:** *the physical environment of a historic property.*

The presence of numerous period buildings in early Twentieth Century designs, and more importantly, Art Deco/Art Moderne designs maintain the integrity of setting of the subject building.

4. **Materials:** *the physical elements that were combined or deposited during a particular period of time.* Original historic stucco wall cladding and decorative details, ceramic tile, terrazzo flooring and period lighting maintain the subject building's integrity of materials.

5. **Workmanship:** *the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture or people during any given period in history or prehistory.* Integrity of workmanship is maintained through the presence of the character defining features listed previously.

6. **Feeling:** *a property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time.* The El Rey Theatre maintains integrity of feeling as an Art Moderne-style commercial building.

7. **Association:** *the direct link between an important historic event or person and a historic property.* The El Rey Theatre maintains integrity of association as an Art Moderne-style commercial building constructed during the heyday of Art Deco/Art Moderne architecture on the Main Street corridor.

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B12. References:

City of Salinas, Building and Planning Department files, Salinas, CA.

“El Rey Theatre Opening Thursday,” *Salinas Californian*, 8/14/1935.

Cinema Treasures: El Rey Theater, <https://cinemat treasures.org/theaters/2072/photos>.

History and Heritage, City of Salinas, <https://www.cityofsalinas.org/Our-City/History-and-Heritage>.

Monterey County County Assessor’s Office

Monterey County Historical Society Archives, Salinas, CA

National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation. United States, Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1998.

“The Plush Movie Palaces of Monterey County,” *Alta Vista: The Sunday Herald Magazine*, 12/17/1993.

Polk’s Salinas City Directories: 1935-1970.

Salinas Art Deco & Moderne: A Wealth of Architecture, City of Salinas Historic Resources Board, 2014.

Seavey, Kent L. 1989 *Historical and Architectural Resources Survey and Preservation Plan, City of Salinas, September 1989*.