

Historic Significance and Integrity Assessment Report for Listing Saba's Department Store on the Scottsdale Historic Register

Saba's Department Store

7254 East Main Street, Scottsdale, Arizona
Scottsdale Historic Register No. SHR 01-09
Resolution No. 5776

Background

With the adoption of the Historic Preservation (HP) ordinance in July of 1999, the Scottsdale Historic Register (SHR) was established as the City's official list of historic and archaeological resources that have special significance in Scottsdale, Arizona and/or United States history, architecture, archaeology, engineering or culture. The initial group of properties to be considered for designation on the SHR was those properties that had previously received HP overlay zoning under an earlier City HP program. The building popularly known as Saba's, located at 7245 East Main Street in downtown Scottsdale, was zoned HP in 1983. The property is owned by Saba's Stores Inc.

Historic Context: Arts Colony & Tourist Destination

Shortly after World War II, Scottsdale leaders engaged in conscious efforts to improve community amenities and promote a special identity for the town. To this end, the Scottsdale Chamber of Commerce was incorporated on March 6, 1947 and immediately set about to establish various programs to accomplish their goals. They formed the Scottsdale Community Chest as a subsidiary to fund welfare and civic programs and promoted interest in a Community Center. In addition, the Chamber focused on physical improvements within the town. Perhaps, most importantly, the Chamber officially adopted a design theme for the downtown, seeking to promote local businesses and capitalize on the "western" image and lifestyle that continued to draw tourists to the Valley. To implement the vision, the Chamber in 1947 proclaimed Scottsdale as the "West's Most Western Town." At the same time the Chamber published the area's first tourism promotional literature. With the continuing popularity of area resorts as well as its burgeoning artists colony, Scottsdale was poised set its self apart from other communities in the Valley, the West and the nation.

Scottsdale was the only local community to formally embrace a Western atmosphere that helped distinguish it from other tourist destinations points. With the expansion of tourism in the twentieth century, attention was paid increasing to expanding upon those factors, which contributed to the visitor's experience and made one location more popular than another. In 1937, a visiting Montgomery Ward executive from Chicago articulated these distinctions in an interview published by the *Arizona Republic*. He noted that winter visiting in Arizona was socially "smart" because of Arizona's "grand" climate and "Western dress". Arizona visitors could be "sure of some enjoyable sunshine" during their stay, while such weather could not be guaranteed in Florida or California. He urged Arizona to go even farther in "playing up its western atmosphere" and suggested that colorful western garb be worn throughout every tourist season. Scottsdale's decision to cultivate this Old West charm in the late forties proved particularly fortuitous, coming at a time when the other Valley communities were competing with each other to achieve modernity.

To truly become the "West's Most Western Town, downtown businesses in Scottsdale were encouraged to use Western-style architecture for their building design and construction. Malcolm White, Scottsdale's first mayor following its 1951 incorporation, was also the first downtown businessman to "dress his business and himself for the winter trade." White heard from resort employees, who patronized his downtown bar, that the wealthy resort visitors hungered for the Old West atmosphere. Consequently, in 1942 he borrowed \$15,000 and remodeled his building with a board and batten exterior and added a shake roof supported by tree trunk posts over the sidewalk.

Other businesses soon joined in the efforts to convey the image of the Old West and the town took on the appearance of a Hollywood frontier movie set. Knotty pine or board-and-batten storefronts, rustic signs, western names, peeled pine porticos and hitching posts became commonplace. Wood shake porches were erected along block faces creating rustic shaded walkways. Other aspects of the downtown environment also contributed to the Old West atmosphere. The Chamber of Commerce erected a wooden cowboy sign at the northeast corner of Scottsdale Road and Main Street in 1952 welcoming visitors to the “West’s Most Western Town.” Many streets remained unpaved. Guests from nearby dude ranches and Indians in from the reservations hitched their horses to posts in front of downtown shops. At a Chamber meeting in 1949 the town was even urged to “give preference to the horseback rider over the automobile.”

The community experienced steady growth during the postwar period. In 1947, the town’s population was 2,000, by 1955 it was 3,500 and in 1960 population had increased to 10,000. New banks, churches and community facilities appeared and the downtown business district expanded in all directions. Scottsdale’s first new bank in over twenty years, The Bank of Douglas, opened in 1952 at the southeast corner of Main and Brown. It was followed in 1958 by the Valley Bank, which located at the southeast corner of Scottsdale and Indian School Road. Three years later Scottsdale Savings and Loan appeared on the northwest corner Main Street and Scottsdale Road. Although banking institutions, the design of these buildings continued to reflect the Western architectural theme promoted by the Chamber of Commerce.

Description:

The Saba’s Department Store is located on the northwest corner of Main Street and Brown Avenue in downtown Scottsdale at 7254 E. Main Street on parcels #130-23-109 and 130-23-111. The property has a width of 55’ and depth of approximately 62’, with a total area of .08 acres. The UTM is zone 12, 414162 easterly and 3706139 northerly. Existing retail stores are to the north and west of the property.

Today Saba’s Department Store is a rectangular one-story building with a flat roof. False fronts extend above the door locations on the south and east facades. On Main Street, the false front is constructed in the form of an oversized broken pediment, creating a gable roof that delineates its main entrance. A recessed opening and balcony with turned wooden posts on the upper façade and double glass and aluminum further define the entry. Flagstone spandrels, supporting the large clear glass display windows, remain from its 1948 renovation. Board-and-batten sheathing, painted in contrasting colors, covers the exterior walls. A molded wood cornice with dentil detailing sets off the roof cornice. A wood shake porch with exposed rafters and decorative wood posts creates a continuous walkway around the building. Although many modifications have been made, the building’s integrity is considered good as the changes continue to reflect its significance as a building consciously altered to reflect a Western-style architecture theme.

History

The building originally constructed on the northwest corner of Brown Avenue and Main Street was the Sterling Drug Store. Built by Dr. Walter Lawson in 1921, it was part of the “Early Town Building” that established the permanent development of Scottsdale. Although sold to William Butler in 1937, it remained a pharmacy until 1948 when the Saba family from Chandler bought the property. Like others, the Saba’s remodeled the establishment to fit the “West Most Western Town” theme. They expanded the building by adding a new storefront of sawed flagstone along the south and a portion of the east elevations to create a new façade that obscured the original brick building. On the north of the

building an addition of brick and board-and-batten veneer was added. In both locations large display windows provided the “open front,” characteristic of the generation of storefronts that flourished nationwide in the postwar period. This design form differed from earlier storefronts with its use of prominent display windows with picture-frame motif that provided views of the store’s interior. A rough-hewn shake porch rough was added in each storefront location serving as a modern front canopy but with distinctive Western flair. Inside knotty pine display cases continued the rustic Western theme and in July of 1948 Saba’s Department Store opened for business.

Over the years numerous changes were made to the building, all in keeping with its Western motif. The entry was moved from the corner and a new entrance set off with over-sized false front was added to the south façade. The building was clad completely in board-and batten and decorative detailing added. A porch arcade was extended to wrap the building, which was supported by wooden posts with raised molding. Reflective of its physical evolution, the department store operations were moved to another location and the store renamed, Saba’s Department Store, began featuring specialty merchandise for the visiting tourists.

Significance

Saba’s Department Store is considered historically significant for its excellent representation of the efforts made to create a distinctive Western image for downtown Scottsdale in the decade following World War II. Typical of the construction that occurred in the postwar period, the building was altered to reflect the popular forms and design of commercial retail establishments nation-wide, as well as the locally adopted design theme. Although modifications have been made to its form and materials, these changes are consistent with those that were historically used. Additionally, its intact location and setting convey the pattern of retail development that characterized Scottsdale’s downtown development during the mid- twentieth century.