

A Brief Overview of the Architecture of San Pedro

From the San Pedro Commercial Area Historical Resources Survey

City of Los Angeles Department of City Planning

April, 2010

The Town of San Pedro was laid out in 1882, one of approximately 100 other towns in Los Angeles established in the 1880s as a result of the Southern California real estate boom in the mid '80s. While the majority remained paper towns, San Pedro developed as a result of: the public and private investments in harbor infrastructure beginning in 1871; the railroads and streetcars that moved cargo, passengers, and workers to Los Angeles, the region and eventually the country through the transcontinental connections; and new industries that attracted foreign immigrants and domestic migrants mainly from the Midwest and East Coast.

San Pedro was laid out in the common grid, in anticipation of another Southern California land boom that soon arrived and peaked by the latter-1880s. Tracts and subdivisions followed, established by enthusiastic speculators, developers and residents from the Los Angeles region and nearby farms. Some were immigrants from Europe while others were domestic migrants. They built family residences and rental/income properties including commercial and retail buildings in the adjacent business districts on West 6th and West 7th streets which evolved from residential uses. The oldest building in the Survey area was constructed in 1895, and is located at 533 Nelson Street.



The San Pedro Commercial Area includes some of George H. Peck's developments. The series of one-part commercial blocks located at 331-377 West 7th Street were developed by Peck in 1921 to house a significant concentration of stores and offices that still dominate the commercial landscape of San Pedro. Peck also built the enframed window wall type stores located at 323-325 West 7th Street in 1923.



Art Deco style building at 739-741 S. Pacific Avenue.



Renaissance Revival style building at the corner of 7th and Centre Streets.



The significance of San Pedro is that it is the most intact maritime-related commercial district in the City of Los Angeles; Wilmington is less extensive and less dense and Venice was more of a recreational community than commercial/industrial maritime. In addition, the significance of the San Pedro Commercial area is also heightened because redevelopment during the 1960s eliminated other buildings that represented this maritime-related commercial context.

An example of a Streamline Moderne Building, located at the corner of 7th Street and Pacific Avenue

Some Questions to Consider

The report talks about redevelopment in the 1960s that eliminated buildings that represented the town's maritime-related commercial context. What might these buildings have been?

Can you name another Streamline Moderne style building in San Pedro (hint: it's on the waterfront). If you can, what is its current use and what was its former use?

Can you think of other examples in San Pedro of other types of architecture you see in this paper?

New buildings are usually great things. They have all the modern conveniences and are built to current-day building and safety codes. Are there reasons, then, to save old buildings—even if it means we don't build new ones in their place?

The land along the east side of the San Pedro waterfront was lowered about 30 to 50 feet beginning in about 1909 (they took the ground away and lowered many buildings). This must have been a huge job. Why do you think they did it? What are some reasons to do it? Would it have been better if they hadn't moved the earth?

The first paragraph uses the term "infrastructure." What does that mean?

It says San Pedro was laid out in a "common grid." What is a grid?

The paper mentions George H. Peck as having developed some of the commercial buildings in the Downtown area. Can you think of something named after Peck in San Pedro?

What differences do you see between the Renaissance Revival style building and the Art Deco style building?