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
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

The story behind the pawnshop: a surprising pedigree



An unassuming Old Pasadena building was designed by renowned architects Greene and Greene. Its facade is being restored, but not to the design the pair created.



This building at Raymond Avenue and Colorado Boulevard is the only commercial structure still standing designed by Charles and Henry Greene. It is being restored, but not to its original look. (Steven Dahl / July 25, 2010)

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By Alison Bell, Special to the Los Angeles Times
July 25, 2010

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For years, the building on the northwest corner of Colorado Boulevard and Raymond Avenue in Old Pasadena hasn't been much to look at.

A pawnshop since the early 1950s, it never received the upgrade that many surrounding buildings enjoyed in the upscale shopping and dining district.

Until May, the upper windows were covered by metal plates and large "Money to loan" signs.

Yet underneath the grit lies a historic gem. Built in 1896, the three-story building at 65 E. Colorado Blvd. was designed by

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noted Pasadena architects and brothers Charles and Henry Greene.

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And now this rare building, the only Greene and Greene commercial structure still standing, is getting a face-lift. The owner is taking advantage of Pasadena's Storefront Improvement Program, which reimburses part of improvement costs to fix up fronts with new signs, awnings, glass and paint.

"For a while we had thought of moving or selling the building," said Todd Robinson, manager of the pawnshop, Crown City Loan and Jewelry. His father, Doug, owns the business and the building. "Now we want to keep up with the times and restore it."

When the remodel is finished, the facade won't be the same one the celebrated brothers designed. Even if the building could be restored to its original appearance, it wouldn't look like what people think of as typical Greene and Greene.

Here's the story on both of these architectural twists:

The Greenes are renowned for their contributions to the Arts and Crafts movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries that was characterized by simplicity of design, handcrafted items and the use of local materials. Their career peaked in the period from 1907 to 1910, when the duo designed such Craftsman masterpieces as Pasadena's Gamble House, built for David Gamble of the Procter & Gamble Co. It is now a national historic landmark.

Yet in 1896, they were just starting their careers in Pasadena after studying architecture at the [Massachusetts Institute of Technology](#) and apprenticing with [Boston](#) firms. They came west to be with their parents, who had moved to California from St. Louis.

At the time they designed the office building on Colorado for local land investors Joseph N. Kinney and Bela O. Kendall, they had only been in business two years. They were still "casting around for their artistic voice," said Edward R. Bosley, director of the Gamble House and author of "Greene & Greene." They had yet to discover their signature style, which clicked in around 1902 or 1903, according to Bosley.

The Colorado Boulevard building, constructed of iron and glass and featuring classical pilasters, a classically detailed cornice and a decorative wreath-and-garland frieze, did not include the Arts and Crafts elements the brothers would later become famous for.

And the mere fact that they designed an office building was an anomaly for the Greenes. Although they did some isolated commercial work throughout their careers, they primarily focused on residential architecture. "There were more creative possibilities designing homes than offices," Bosley said. And because Pasadena then was primarily a residential city, houses were also where the work was.

As for the facade, the building lost that in 1929 when it was shorn off in one fell swoop. Colorado Boulevard was getting clogged with traffic, and "the city decreed that the street should be widened," explained Ann Scheid, author of "Historic Pasadena." "So owners were compelled to move their facades back 14 feet."

When new fronts were put on, most buildings got facades in either the Art Deco or Spanish Colonial Revival styles, which were popular at the time. The Greene and Greene building received an Art Deco look.

After the Robinsons pulled the signs and the metal plates off the building to kick off the renovation, they found Art Deco era red-backed Carrera glass and precast-stone arched windows, original glass intact, and their decorative wrought iron grilles. That's why the building is being restored to the year 1929 instead of 1896.

In fact, the only original Greene and Greene elements left, aside from the bones of the building, are an entryway, staircase, balustrade and some purple-ribbed glass, said Steven Dahl, the architect who is overseeing the remodel.

Throughout the years the building has had many uses. Kinney and Kendall used it as an office building, and the Greenes themselves had an office there for a while. The third floor was originally an open meeting space used by the Odd Fellows, a fraternal organization. Now the second and third floors contain apartments.

The structure was also a military recruiting office, a tailor's shop and a market before becoming a pawnshop.

For now, Dahl is having fun with the restoration process, which he called "a bit like a treasure hunt." And there's still some hunting to be done. He hopes to one day take the remodel inside and scrape off the many layers of paint on the third-floor ceiling, which he's heard contains some incredible period detail.

As to which type of detail he'd find in this atypical Greene and Greene, that's anyone's guess.

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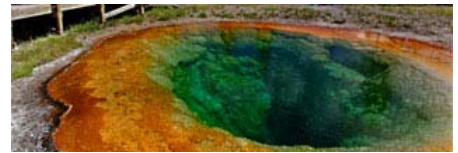
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