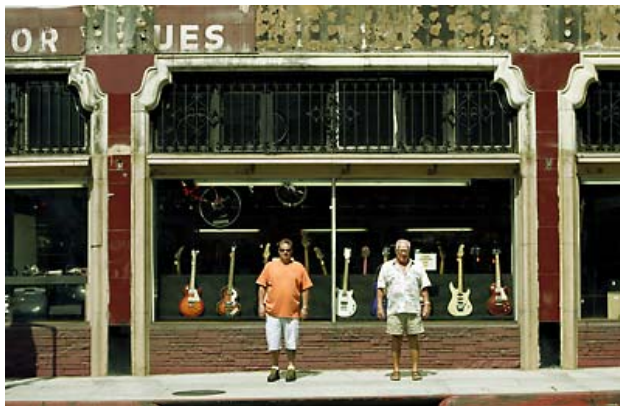


Old Pasadena pawnshop has prestigious pedigree revealed

By Janette Williams, Staff Writer

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Co-owners Todd Robinson, left, and his father, Doug, stand in front of their shop, Crown City Loan and Jewelry in Pasadena, Calif. Friday morning June 25, 2010. The Robinsons removed signs from the old historic building which was built in 1886 and will soon undergo renovations. (SGVN Correspondent Photo by Cheryl A. Guerrero)

PASADENA - Crown City Loan and Jewelry may look like a homely misfit among Old Pasadena's glamorous Tiffany & Co., Kenneth Cole and Armani storefronts.

But the pawnshop at Colorado Boulevard and Raymond Avenue comes with quite a pedigree: It's in an 1880s building designed by iconic Pasadena architects Charles and Henry Greene.

Now, starting with the facade, work has begun on restoring the Greene Brothers only known commercial building.

"We had, um, encouragement from the city and the community at large," joked Doug Robinson, who bought the 50-year old business and the building in 1989. "We've been a little slow."

The huge "Money to Loan" and other signs Robinson inherited are gone, revealing intricate wrought iron, an arched transom window, red and black Carrara glass panels long hidden under painted metal plates, and vintage lettering from previous businesses.

However, none of that was designed by the Greenes for the Kinney-Kendall Building in 1890.

The finished frontage will actually look much as it did when it was put on in 1929, said Steve Dahl of Dahl Architects in Pasadena, who is researching and overseeing the restoration.

In 1929, 14 feet was sheared off the Greene and Greene and every building on Colorado Boulevard to widen the street. New, often Art Deco, frontages were attached.

"It's been changed on the outside, but the guts, the bones of the building date back to when (the Greenes)

did it," Dahl said.

There are 16 apartments on the upper floors, all reached by the original side-door at the Raymond entrance, and the original stairway and balustrade remain, Dahl said.

There's a lot still hidden away that Dahl hopes to discover as interior work goes on over the next couple of years - including an "unbelievable third-floor ceiling" he's heard is under layers of paint.

But for now, the emphasis is on the view from the street.

"It was a wonderful surprise. We weren't aware they were going to take on this (restoration) work," said Sue Mossman, executive director of Pasadena Heritage.

"The facade was changed at some point, and what they've uncovered may not be the Greenes' original design, but it looks like it dates from the 1920s," she said. "It's a little bit of an urban archaeology project - which features date from which time. Now we can see what's there."

In the 1950s and '60s no one paid any attention to the building, Mossman said, so preservationists were "quite surprised and thrilled" when it turned out that Greene and Greene had not only designed it but had offices there early in their careers.

Robinson and his son, Todd, said they were excited by the

restoration and decided to tackle it when a planned move and sale of the building fell through in 2008.



Co-owners Todd Robinson, left, and his father Doug at Crown City Loan and Jewelry in Pasadena. (SGVN Correspondent Photo by Cheryl A. Guerrero)

Since they have a historic building, the Robinsons are in the process of qualifying for the city's Storefront Improvement Program, which can match owner investment by half, to a maximum of \$25,000.

The pawnshop's appearance is a remnant of Old Pasadena's grittier past, and it wasn't always popular with neighbors in the city's most upscale shopping and dining district.

But Doug Robinson thinks the restoration is changing that.

"They've finally accepted us and realized we weren't going away," he said. "This might endear us to the community...And yes, I think we'll fit in

better now. We plan to renovate the interior
down the line. This is Phase One."

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