

Appendix B

Historic Resources Evaluation

1700 Embarcadero Historic Resource Evaluation

City of Palo Alto, CA
December 4, 2015



Prepared by



m-group

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Napa, CA 94559

1. PURPOSE

The project applicant is requesting to demolish the former Ming's Restaurant building at 1700 Embarcadero Road, constructed in 1968, and redevelop the property.

Recognizing the potential historical significance of the subject building, the City of Palo Alto has requested that a Historic Resource Evaluation be prepared to accompany the demolition permit submittal in order to determine if the property meets the CEQA definition of a Historical Resource as defined in CEQA § 15064.5. Generally, a resource shall be considered to be "historically significant" if the resource meets the criteria for listing on the California Register of Historic Resources (Pub. Res. Code SS5024.1, Title 14 CCR, Section 4852).

2. METHODOLOGY

M-Group used a systematic approach to perform the Historic Resource Evaluation. Our approach included review of archival information for the subject property and review of records available at the Palo Alto Historical Society and the City of Palo Alto Development Center. To aid in the evaluation M-Group referenced available historic contexts and literature related to the building or its setting. A field survey was undertaken by M-Group Preservation Specialist, Lilly Bianco on November 12, 2015 to perform photographic documentation and evaluate the level of integrity.

The evaluation focuses on the identification of essential character defining features important for conveying the properties significance, the role the property played in the larger historic context, and an assessment of the extent to which those essential features have or have not been retained.

3. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The following Evaluation performed for the subject property indicates that the subject building is a neo-eclectic commercial building and confirms that the subject building is not eligible for listing on the California Register of Historic Resources based on its failure to meet one or more of the four significance criterion.

4. HISTORIC CONTEXT

Growth in Palo Alto

The 1960's saw the beginnings of Palo Alto as a financial, technological and medical hub. The City of Palo Alto largely developed as an off shoot of Stanford University and until the 1960s the City was generally considered a community of homeowners and shopkeepers.¹ Accordingly, up until that time, Palo Alto was largely defined by residential, agricultural, and small commercial land uses. From 1950 to 1960 Palo Alto's population doubled, increasing from 25,475 in 1950 to 52,287 in 1960. This

¹ Arthur Coffman, *An Illustrated History of Palo Alto*, Lewis Osborne: Palo Alto, 1969. 90

growth was in line with the rest of the Country which saw the nation's longest period of continuous growth following the Second World War.² During this period a series of annexations pushed the City's boundaries south past Oregon Avenue all the way to San Antonio Road which nearly doubled the City in size and allowed for the profound population growth³.

This period of growth coincided with the construction of the Stanford Shopping Center, relocation of the Stanford Medical School from San Francisco to its new location on the Stanford Campus, and the opening of the Stanford Research Park. This era was also the golden era of architect Joseph Eichler (1900-1974), who popularized the Mid Century modern style for residential architecture.

Chinese Americans in Palo Alto

Prior to the middle of the twentieth century Chinese immigrants in California were faced with a multitude of struggles and were often confined to the life of a laborer building railroads, working as laundrymen, grocers, servants and factory workers.

With the end of World War II came the end of the Chinese exclusion acts and the Chinese in the Santa Clara Valley felt a sense of relief and optimism. The forthcoming era was not without its barriers though. While the Exclusion Acts had been rescinded there remained barriers to obtaining housing and business licenses. Chinese- Americans in Palo Alto often had help from white friends who helped them purchase homes.⁴ Many Chinese also purchased land in the name of their American born children to get around the land ownership prohibitions and established farms, namely flower farms.

As population and technological advancement surged in the middle and latter half of the twentieth century many Chinese transitioned their business efforts from floriculture to commercial ventures that included supermarkets, restaurants, and retail establishments to serve the ever growing population⁵

Ming's Restaurant

The original Ming's Restaurant was opened by famed San Francisco Restaurateur, Mr. Johnny Kan of San Francisco and graphic illustrator, Dan Lee on July 26, 1956 at 4100 El Camino Real in Palo Alto, taking over what was known as the "former Longbarn restaurant".

Johnny Kan was a Chinese American Restaurateur that made his mark in San Francisco Chinatown by introducing a more authentic version of Cantonese cuisine to Americans which contrasted rather significantly with the Americanized interpretation of Chinese food Americans had been consuming

² Mary Brown, San Francisco Planning Department, *San Francisco Modern Architecture and Landscape Design, 1955-1970*, Final Draft, San Francisco, CA, January 12, 2011. 115

³ Ward Winslow, *Palo Alto: A Centennial History*, Palo Alto Historical Association, 1993. 54

⁴ Lillian Gong Guy and Gerrye Wong, *Images of America: Chinese in San Jose and the Santa Clara Valley* (San Francisco: Arcadia, 2007), 33.

⁵ Ibid

up until then. He also is credited with creating an early example of the restaurant designed around an open kitchen so as to allow diners to observe the preparation of food and with introducing an innovative lazy Susan/ revolving tabletop to Chinese Restaurants. After the success of Kan's first restaurant in San Francisco, he and his three partners (George Hall, John C Young, and George Chow) recruited graphic illustrator Dan Lee as a fifth partner and opened Ming's in Palo Alto as another premium Cantonese restaurant. Dan Lee was a commercial graphic artist who ended up serving as the interior designer for Ming's. When the partner scheduled to serve as the manager was called for Military Duty, Dan Lee was asked to serve as the manager and subsequently became partner.⁶

Ming's Restaurant served over a hundred different dishes and thrived at that location until 1968 when a road widening project along El Camino Real necessitated demolition of much of the existing building and required the restaurant to move. In 1968 the Restaurant relocated to 1700 Embarcadero at the Southeast corner of Embarcadero Road and East Bayshore Road. The new Ming's was designed by architects Philip Choy and David Arnold of San Francisco⁷ and constructed by contractors Howard J. White Inc. The new building was purported to have cost \$300,000 to construct exclusive of furnishings, equipment, and landscaping.⁸ Much of the decorative features including wooden plaques and oriental screens were brought over from the original location on El Camino Real.⁹

The new Ming's Restaurant was to be housed in a single story redwood commercial building designed in the neo-eclectic style with Asian influence reflected in the detailing and featuring approximately 17,942 square feet of floor area with two large dining rooms separated by a bar/lounge area capable of accommodating 350 patrons at a given time. The restaurant would be surrounded by a large surface parking lot.

On May 22, 1968 the new Ming's Restaurant opened. On April 15, 1969, Institutions Magazine, an international publication related to the food and beverage industry, awarded Ming's "an award of special distinction for total design". Ming's became a Palo Alto Institution that served as a gathering place for the Stanford Varsity teams, executives, and Palo Alto families.¹⁰

The restaurant changed hands in 1986 after an approximately 7 month closure. In June 1986 Ming's Restaurant was sold by Dan Lee and partners to Felicity and Francis Tse of Oakland who owned and operated "Jade's Villa" restaurant in Oakland. Francis Tse was a prominent anesthesiologist in Berkeley. The Restaurant was co-owned by Dr. Tse's sister Bataille Wong. The Tses renamed the restaurant "Ming's Villa". The new owners embarked on a 1.5 million dollar renovation that included the addition of two additional kitchens and expansion of the dining rooms to increase the capacity

⁶ Daily Palo Alto Times, August 24, 1967

⁷ Daily Palo Alto Times, August 24, 1967

⁸ Daily Palo Alto Times, May 10, 1968.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Lillian Gong-Guy and Gerrye Wong, 50

from approximately 350 to over 600. The renovation added a new entrance facing Embarcadero Road, fountains, landscaping, and new interior facilities¹¹. A Palo Alto Weekly article recalled that when comparing the renovated restaurant to the previous iteration, “about the only things you can expect to find the same are the basic menu and the size of the building.”¹²

As part of the rehabilitation and in accordance with Chinese customs, the Tses added features intended to ensure good fortune to those who ate and worked in the restaurant including offsetting the front door by 24 degrees from true north — according to a Chinese soothsayer such an angle allows good spirits to flow through and bad ones to vent. In addition, two large stone lions were added in front of the entrance as “guards”¹³. Unlike the traditional Chinese American restaurant, the renovated Ming’s was designed to exhibit an open and airy look that veered away from the traditional dark, gold, and red décor. The interior was finished in pastel shades of green and pink and enhanced by indirect neon cove lighting.¹⁴ The added kitchen was a full 4,200 square feet larger than most commercial kitchens and staffed by 40 people. The Kitchen featured bowling alley sized aisles lined with gas flamed woks. The kitchen was divided into three areas: dim sum, barbecue and dinner¹⁵. The Tses hired Hing Kei Lam as executive chef who had been the former executive chef at Maxim’s in Hong Kong.

The restaurant operated until December 2014 and has been closed since.

Architects

Philip Choy was born in 1926 and raised in San Francisco Chinatown by his second generation American Mother and Chinese Immigrant father. He had three sisters and one brother. In 1945 Choy joined the air force where he served for one and a half years. Following his tenure with the air force he attended U.C Berkeley under the G.I Bill and graduated with a degree in Architecture.

Once out of school, Choy worked for an architectural firm for 12 years designing schools- one of which is located in Watsonville. After gaining experience working for a large firm, Choy went into private practice. It was during his time in private practice that he designed the award winning Ming’s Restaurant.

Since the 1970’s Choy has served as an adjunct professor in the Asian American Studies Department in San Francisco State University. He is passionately involved in Chinese American History in the Bay Area and has taught and lectured on the subject throughout the Bay Area.¹⁶

No information could be found related to architect, David Arnold.

¹¹ Daily Palo Alto Times, June 10,1986

¹² Palo Alto Weekly March 18, 1987

¹³ Daily Palo Alto Times, November 18,1986

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Palo Alto Weekly March 18, 1987

¹⁶ Choy: A Period of Ethnic Awakening, published in the Asian American Times, September & October 2002 Issue Vol.2, No. 20 California Edition <http://www.angelfire.com/clone/aatimes/cat5.html> accessed 12.1.15

5. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The former Ming's Restaurant is located on a 2.5 acre lot at 1700 Embarcadero at the corner of Embarcadero Road and Bayshore Road. The property is surrounded by Merrill Corporation offices to the north and across Embarcadero Road, professional offices to the south and west, and auto dealerships to the east.

The style of the former Ming's restaurant is most reminiscent of the neo-eclectic style which became common after 1965. Neo Eclectic architecture is a style known for borrowing from past eras and foreign influences without necessarily being duplicative of any particular style or building type. The building exhibits both neo-traditional details visible in the wood paneled walls and ribbons of windows, but also eclectic Asian influences readily visible in the pagoda style roof, articulation in form, and Chinese talismans and details as well as in the landscape.

The restaurant exhibits a complex, irregular plan (somewhat surprisingly based on how Chinese architecture often features bilateral symmetry) that is topped with a deck/mansard shaped roof featuring red pantile and reminiscent of the pagoda style roof. The roof line exhibits various levels with a taller roof at the center of the building and shorter rooflines exhibited by the irregular projections off the primary building. The irregularity in the rooflines provides articulation and perpetuates the emphasis on the horizontal orientation and expansiveness of the building.

FAÇADE (North Elevation) The entrance (relocated in 1986) is situated on the north elevation, facing Embarcadero Road. The entrance projects from the wall and is offset by approximately 24 degrees from due north with the intention of letting good spirits in and bad out. The entrance features paired glass doors with gold anodized aluminum handles and a jade colored marble surround that give a nod to the Moderne style. The entrance is flanked by plain pastel green walls, intentionally meant to depart from the traditional dark reds, and golds typical of Chinese American Restaurants.

A series of wooden pillars and a trellis system line a pathway leading to what was the original entrance at the northwest corner of the building. The pathway leads to the side of the building and provides access to the entrance via concrete stairs and landing that surround the front of the building. Accessibility ramps have also been added.

SIDES (East and West Elevations) The east and west elevations feature rather traditional detailing that provides for an interesting contrast with the Chinese influences. The side elevations reinforce the strong horizontal orientation, and feature paneling on bulkheads and frieze, ribbons of large 9-paned fixed windows, side lights on either side of paired French entry doors, and regularly spaced wooden piers.

A large deck and ADA access have been added to the west elevation and ADA access has also been added to access the building at the east elevation. The northeast corner of the building includes a small alcove featuring a traditional Chinese garden.

REAR (South Elevation) The rear elevation is generally free of adornment and features a wood clad wall. An outdoor dining area is situated at the far corner on the southeast portion of the building and exhibits similar architectural detailing as the side elevations.

Alterations:

- April 22, 1969** Enlarged and reconfigured parking lot for improved traffic configuration
- C. Dec 6, 1986** Added new front entrance facing Embarcadero Road, fountains, landscaping, and new interior facilities including the addition of two kitchens and expansion of dining area
- June 21, 1994** Addition of approximately 980 square feet of outdoor dining (deck) in an existing enclosed garden area and construction of handicap ramp.
- August 29, 2003** New roof

Essential Character Defining Features:

- Emphasis on articulation
- Horizontal Emphasis
- Talismans and imagery of good fortune
- Pagoda style roof
- Ribbon windows
- Wall Paneling

6. SIGNIFICANCE

Eligibility for listing on the California Register and/or National Register is determined based on how well a given property meets one or more of the following criteria. It is not required that all four criteria are met for a resource to be considered significant. The applicable criteria are listed below.

- Criterion 1 Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of local or regional history or the cultural heritage of California or the United States
- Criterion 2 Associated with the lives of persons important to local, California or national history
- Criterion 3 Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region or method of construction or represents the work of a master or possesses high artistic values
- Criterion 4 Has yielded, or has the potential to yield, information important to the prehistory or history of the local area, California or the nation

Evaluation of Significance

Criterion 1: Associated with Significant Events

The former Ming's Restaurant does not appear eligible based on its association with significant events related to local, California, or National History. The Restaurant did serve as a popular Chinese Restaurant in the Bay Area and became somewhat of an institution over its existence; however the restaurant did not play such a pivotal role as to be considered eligible for the California Register of Historic Resources merely based on its long lived popularity. The property does not appear eligible under Criterion 1.

Criterion 2: Associated with Significant Persons

A property may be considered significant under Criterion 2 based on its association with a person whose specific contributions to history can be identified and documented. Persons "significant in our past" refers to individuals whose activities are demonstrably important within a local, State, or national historic context. The criterion is generally restricted to those properties that illustrate (rather than commemorate) a person's important achievements.

The Restaurant is most closely associated with original owners Johnny Kan and Dan Lee, who opened the restaurant in 1956 and the principal architect Philip Choy who constructed the relocated Ming's in 1968. The restaurant was also associated with Mr. and Mrs. Tse who purchased the property in 1986. While owner Johnny Kan did contribute greatly to the Cantonese dining experience in America, his first restaurant, "Kan's" in San Francisco is much more representative and illustrative of those contributions. Partner, Dan Lee also contributed to the Chinese-American dining experience in Palo Alto; however, his contributions to the industry are not so substantial as to consider the property significance based on its association with him.

Architect, Philip Choy was a notable member of the Bay Area community and advocated recognition of Chinese American heritage in the Bay Area. He served as an architect for many years until becoming a teacher and advocate of Chinese American heritage. While Philips did contribute to the architectural fabric of Palo Alto and make many other types of contributions through his teaching and lecturing, the former Ming's restaurant is not necessarily most illustrative of his contributions. Further, it is unusual to deem a building significant based on its association with a living person because it is thought that not enough time would have passed for a scholarly perspective to have been formed. As such, the restaurant does not appear to be significant based on its association with architect, Philip Choy. Accordingly, it is determined that the subject property is not eligible for listing under Criterion 2.

Criterion 3: Architectural or Artistic Value

Criterion 3 applies to properties significant for their physical design or construction, including such elements as architecture, landscape architecture, engineering etc. Most properties found eligible under Criterion C are those that embody "distinctive characteristics of a type" which refers to all

architectural styles and construction practices. To be eligible under this portion of the Criterion, a property must clearly illustrate the physical features or traits that commonly recur in individual types, periods, or methods of construction. To be eligible, a property must clearly contain enough of those characteristics to be considered a true representative of a particular type, period, or method of construction.

The former Ming's Restaurant is a neo-eclectic commercial building which exhibits both neo-traditional elements and Chinese influences, it is not; however, especially illustrative of a particular discernible style and does not constitute a true representative of any one type, period, or method of construction that it would be considered eligible under this criterion. As such, the subject property does not appear eligible under Criterion 3.

Criterion 4: Potential to yield Information

The building site does is not expected to hold significant archeological resources and the building itself does not exhibit construction methods that would be particularly important to yielding information related to prehistory or history of California. Accordingly, the building at 1700 Embarcadero does not appear eligible pursuant to Criterion 4.

7. INTEGRITY

Historic Resources deemed to be significant must also be able to convey their historic significance. The ability to do this is judged by how well the resource meets the seven aspects of integrity: Location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. However, the individual nature of the property and its particular significance may result in certain aspects holding more weight than others. It is not required that a property retains *all* of its historic physical features or characteristics, rather a property must retain at the very least, those essential features which allow it to convey its significance. The essential features are those that define (1) why a property is significant and (2) when it was significant.

1. Location: Refers to the building's original geographical location.
2. Design: Design refers to the organization of space, proportion, scale, technology, ornamentation and materials used. Design is reflective of function, technology and aesthetic trends of a respective time period. In order for integrity of design to be retained the resource should retain the original structural systems, massing, spatial arrangement, texture and color of materials, detailing and arrangement and type of vegetation or, at the least, a majority of those elements.
3. Setting: Setting refers to the character of the place in which the property played its historical role. Setting often reflects the basic physical conditions under which a property was built and the functions it was intended to serve.

4. **Materials:** Materials are the physical elements that were combined in a particular pattern or configuration to form a historic property. The choice and combination of materials reveal the preferences of those who created the property and indicate the availability of particular types of materials and technologies. In order to retain integrity a property should retain the key exterior materials dating to the period of significance.
5. **Workmanship:** Workmanship is important because it can furnish evidence of the technology of a craft, illustrate the aesthetic principles of a historic or prehistoric period, and reveal individual, local, regional, or national applications of both technological practices and aesthetic principles.
6. **Feeling:** Feeling is a property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time. It results from the presence of physical features that, taken together, convey the property's historic character.
7. **Association:** Association is the direct link between an important historic event or person and a historic property. A property retains association if it is the place where the event or activity occurred and is sufficiently intact to convey that relationship to an observer.

The subject property was determined not to be significant and as such, consideration of integrity — those components which work together to convey a properties significance—is not warranted.

9. CONCLUSION

The former Ming's Restaurant at 1700 Embarcadero is not considered eligible for listing on the California Register of Historic Resources. The neo-eclectic commercial building fails to meet one or more of the criterion for listing on the California Register of Historic Resources and therefore, is not a significant historical resource. No further evaluation or documentation of the property is warranted.

REFERENCES

Published Works

Brown, Mary. San Francisco Planning Department, *San Francisco Modern Architecture and Landscape Design, 1955-1970*, Final Draft. San Francisco, CA, January 12, 2011.

California Office of Historic Preservation. *Technical Assistant Series No. 7, How to Nominate a Resource to the California Register of Historic Resources*. Sacramento: California Office of State Publishing, 4 September 2001.

Choy: A Period of Ethnic Awakening, published in the Asian American Times, September & October 2002 Issue Vol.2, No. 20 California Edition <http://www.angelfire.com/clone/aatimes/cat5.html> accessed 12.1.15

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Winslow, Ward. *Palo Alto: A Centennial History*. Prepared by Palo Alto Historical Association, 1993.

Public Records

City of Palo Alto Planning Department

Palo Alto Historical Society Archives

Palo Alto Times

Palo Alto Weekly

RL. Polk & CO. Palo Alto City Directory

Personal Correspondence

Steve Saiger, Historian at Palo Alto Historical Society, DATE

QUALIFICATIONS

Lilly Bianco of M-Group performed the Historic Resource Evaluation. Ms. Bianco holds a Masters in Historic Preservation and is a qualified Architectural Historian pursuant to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and as defined in the Code of Federal Regulations, 36 CFR Part 61. Ms. Bianco is listed as an Architectural Historian on the California Historic Resources Information Systems list of qualified consultants.

M-Group Principal, Heather Hines, oversaw the evaluation. Heather Hines is a qualified Architectural Historian pursuant to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and as defined in the Code of Federal Regulations, 36 CFR Part 61. Ms. Hines holds a Masters in Urban Planning and Graduate Certificate in Historic Preservation. She has 14 years of experience in the fields of historic preservation and urban planning and is listed as an Architectural Historian on the California Historic Resources Information Systems list of qualified consultants.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Photographs
- B. DPR 523

ATTACHMENT A



Figure 1 Front (North) Entrance Facing Embarcadero Road. Photo taken Nov 12, 2015.



Figure 2 Path to Former Entry at northeast corner. Photo taken Nov 12, 2015



Figure 3 Close Up of Architecture at Northeast corner. Photo Taken Nov 12, 2015



Figure 4 Landscaping at northwest corner. Photo taken Nov 12, 2015



Figure 5 West elevation. Photo taken Nov 12, 2015



Figure 6 South (Rear) elevation. Photo Taken Nov 12, 2015



Figure 7 Outdoor Patio at Southwest Corner. Photo taken Nov 12, 2015



Figure 8 East Elevation. Photo taken Nov 12, 2015

State of California & The Resources Agency
 DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
PRIMARY RECORD

Primary #
 HRI #
 Trinomial
NRHP Status Code
 Other Review Code
 Reviewer
 Date
 Listings

Page 1 of 1 *Resource Name or #: (Assigned by recorder) Former "Ming's Restaurant" _____

P1. Other Identifier: _____

*P2. Location: Not for Publication × Unrestricted

*a. County Santa Clara and (P2c, P2e, and P2b or P2d. Attach a Location Map as necessary.)

*b. USGS 7.5' Quad _____ Date _____ T ____; R ____; ____ of ____ of Sec ____; _____ B.M.

c. Address 1700 Embarcadero Road City Palo Alto Zip 94303

d. UTM: (Give more than one for large and/or linear resources) Zone __, _____ mE/ _____ mN

e. Other Locational Data: (e.g., parcel #, directions to resource, elevation, decimal degrees, etc., as appropriate) APN. 008-03-08

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

The restaurant was constructed in 1968 and designed in the neo-eclectic style which became common after 1965. The building exhibits both neo-traditional details visible in the wood paneled walls and ribbons of windows, but also eclectic Asian influences readily visible in the pagoda style roof, articulation in form, and Chinese talismans and details as well as in the landscape. The front entrance (added in 1986) gives a nod to the Moderne style. The building has undergone extensive alterations including a large scale renovation and expansion in 1986 in which the front entrance was relocated to face Embarcadero Road and the capacity enlarged from approximately 350 patrons to over 600.

P5a.



*P3b. Resource Attributes: (List attributes and codes) HP 6 Commercial Building

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

P5b. Description of Photo: (view, date, accession #) North elevation, looking southeast. Photo taken Nov 12, 2015

*P6. Date Constructed/Age and Source:

1968 Historic Prehistoric

Both

*P7. Owner and Address:

Unknown

7300 W Sahara Av Las Vegas NV 89117

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

Lilly Bianco, M-Group, 1303 Jefferson St. Suite 100-B, Napa, CA 94559

*P9. Date Recorded: Dec 3, 2015

Intensive

*P10. Survey Type: (Describe)

None

*P11. Report Citation: (Cite survey report and other sources, or enter "none.")

1700 Embarcadero Historic Resource Evaluation, Prepared by M-Group, December 4, 2015

*Attachments: NONE Location 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): _____