State of California — The Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

PRIMARY RECORD

Primary # _____
HRI # _____
Trinomial _____
NRHP Status Code 6Z
Other Listings _____
Review Code _____ Reviewer _____ Date _____

 *Resource Name or #: (Assigned by recorder) 930-950 Van Ness Avenue

P1. Historic name of building (if any): Automotive Service Agency/Midtown Motors building
P2. Location: *a: County San Francisco ☐ Not for Publication ■ Unrestricted
*b. USGS 7.5' Quad _____ Date _____ T ___; R ___; ____¼ of ____¼ of Sec ____; _____B.M.
c. Address 950 Van Ness Avenue City San Francisco Zip 94109
d. UTM: Zone _____; _____mE/ _____ mN *e. Assessor's parcel #: Block 718, lot 21

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

This three story, stucco-clad, reinforced concrete building fills two adjacent lots along the east side of Van Ness Avenue, from Olive Street on the south to O'Farrell Street on the north. Combined, the lots measure 120 feet along Van Ness by 109 feet along the other streets. The building is across the street from two other auto showroom buildings, at 999 Van Ness and 1000 Van Ness, and is a block north from another, at 901 Van Ness.

The building has a similar finish on all three facades (Van Ness, O'Farrell, and Olive). Published building notices reveal 950 Van Ness was actually built as two structures, but because they are mirror images of each other they "read" as a single, symmetrically-designed building.

(See Continuation Sheet, page 2.)

*P3b Resource Attributes: HP6 – three-story commercial building; HP8 – industrial building

*P4. Resources Present:
■ Building ☐ Structure ☐ Object ☐ Site ☐ District ☐ Element of District ☐ Other

P5b. Description of Photo:
(View, date, accession #)
View looking east
June 2009

*P6. Date Constructed/Age and Source: ■ Historic ☐ Prehistoric ☐ Both
1919; published building notices

*P7. Owner and Address:
EUROMOTORS INC
500 8TH ST
SAN FRANCISCO CA 94103

*P8. Recorded by: (Name, affiliation, and address)
William Kostura
P. O. Box 60211
Palo Alto, CA 94306

*P9. Date Recorded:
November 2009

*P10. Survey Type: (Describe)
intensive

P11. Report Citation*: (Cite survey report.) William Kostura. *Van Ness Auto Row Support Structures*. San Francisco Department of City Planning, 2010.

*Attachments: ☐ NONE ☐ Location Map ☐ Sketch 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)

Description (continued):

In composition, the Van Ness façade of this building is six bays in width. The second and fifth bays from O'Farrell are slightly recessed relative to the outer and inner bays. Projections and recesses aside, these bays are defined by paired Doric pilasters. In the center of the façade two pairs of Doric pilasters meet – evidence that this building was constructed as two structures. On the O'Farrell and Olive facades the end bays project slightly forward from the three middle bays. A plain cornice wraps around all three facades slightly below the parapet. Circular medallions decorate the frieze beneath the cornice on each façade. Simpler medallions can also be found in the spandrel at the second floor level on the side elevations.

All windows and doors have replacement modern metal frames and sash that post-dte 1960. Shiny metal panels have been applied to the second floor spandrel area across the Van Ness façade and to two bays in each of the secondary facades.

Perspective view looking southeast, June 2009

BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD

***NRHP Status Code** 6Z

***Resource Name or #** (Assigned by recorder) 950 Van Ness Avenue

B1. Historic Name: Automotive Service Agency/Midtown Motors

B2. Common Name: _____

B3. Original Uses: automotive electricians shop and tire store B4. Present Use: _____

***B5. Architectural Style:** Classical Revival

***B6. Construction History:** (Construction date, alterations, and date of alterations)
Built in 1919. Mullions in the second and third story windows were removed, sash in all windows were replaced, awnings were applied to the third story, and panels were applied to the second floor spandrel, after 1960.

***B7. Moved?** ■ No ☐ Yes ☐ Unknown **Date:** _____ **Original Location:** _____

***B8. Related Features:**
none

B9a. Architect: Joseph L. Stewart b. Builders: Mission Concrete Co. (south half) and Thomas A. Cavanagh (north half)

***B10. Significance: Theme** automobile industry **Area** San Francisco
Period of Significance n/a **Property Type** automotive uses **Applicable Criteria** n/a
(Discuss importance in terms of historical or architectural context as defined by theme, period, and geographic scope. Also address integrity.)

History: Construction and architect

This building was built in 1919 for E. L. Goldstein Co. (owner of the south half) and A. Steinberger (owner of the north half) as an investment, to designs by architect Joseph L. Stewart. Each half was built by a separate contractor, and construction of the north half began six weeks after the south. The combined structures were considered to be two stories plus a mezzanine in height, but they read as three stories. The building was long in the planning. The same owners announced that auto showrooms would be built here in 1913 (to designs by Cunningham and Politeo) and again in 1917 (to designs by Rousseau and Rousseau).

The architect, Joseph L. Stewart, practiced in San Francisco from 1912 through the 1940s. During 1912-1917 he was in partnership with Thomas Smith, as Smith and Stewart, and thereafter he worked solo. His most fruitful years, by far, were 1920-1924, and several of his buildings from this period are notable. Most conspicuous are his two tall apartment buildings: the eight-story, four-winged Crest View Apartments, at the northeast corner of Washington and Gough streets (ca. 1922-1923); and one of ten stories at Francisco and Larkin (1921-1922). On a smaller scale, he designed at least six houses in St. Francis Wood during 1920-1924, including his own very fine residence at 135 St. Francis Boulevard (1922). Among his commercial buildings were several garages, including one in the study area of this report, at 1663-1671 Market Street (1920-1921) and a smaller, but very fine garage at 150 Turk (1922). After 1924 his career waned considerably.

B11. Additional Resource Attributes: (List attributes and codes) _____

***B12. References:**

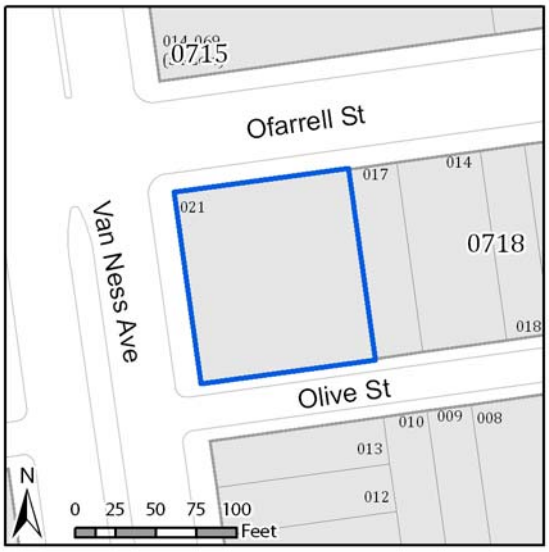
Building and Engineering News, August 6 and Sept. 24, 1919
Crocker-Langley and Polk's city directory, and PT&T reverse directory listings for occupants of this building, 1920-1969
1929 Sanborn insurance map (office, electrical equip., batteries)
1948 Sanborn insurance map (auto sales and repair at #930-950)
"New Motor Car Service Firm…." *SF Chronicle*, March 30, 1919, p. A-6
"Firm Changes Selling Policy." *SF Chronicle*, Dec. 7, 1919, p. A-11.

B13. Remarks:

***B14. Evaluator:** William Kostura
Date of Evaluation: November 2009

(This space reserved for official comments.)

(Sketch map with north arrow required)



History: Occupants

This building held two occupants, one at 930 Van Ness and another at 950 Van Ness, through the 1930s. Thereafter, in about 1942, the two storefronts were united to serve a single occupant. All but one of the occupants through 1964 were devoted to automobile use; the exception was a wholesale radio business.

Occupants were as follows:

1920-1941: Automotive Service Agency. This corporation was founded by Ernest Ingold in 1919. It began by buying out a small, existing firm at 1452 Bush and within a year moved into the newly completed storefront at 950 Van Ness. It sold primarily electrical parts for automobiles, including batteries, starters, ignitions, magnetos, and speedometers; as well as carburetors and wire wheels. Apparently it was well-capitalized, for the newspaper article about its inception stated that it had "appointed" eleven new U-S-L brand battery service stations in the state.

This business moved next door to #930 during 1927-1928, then back to #950 in 1929-1937, and finally to #930 again in 1938-1941. Afterward, this firm moved to 1414 Van Ness for a brief continued existence (1942-1945), and then folded.

Its founder, Ernest Ingold remained president through 1928, then began a new business, a wholesale radio firm (see below). Next, in 1933, he opened a Chevrolet dealership in a large showroom on Van Ness Avenue, and in 1937 he built his own Art Deco showroom at 999 Van Ness (extant). Before the 1950s he was one of the city's two most important Chevrolet dealers.

1920-1925: Kelly-Springfield Tire Co. Previously this company had sold tires in San Francisco through dealers, but then, according to a newspaper article, changed its system to sell and service tires directly to the public through a shop at 930 Van Ness, in this newly completed building. That article notwithstanding, an independent firm also sold Kelly tires at the same time at Polk and Market streets.

1928-1932: Ernest Ingold wholesale radios. In between his principle ownership of Automotive Service Agency (see above) and his opening of a Chevrolet dealership, Ingold sold radios on a wholesale basis from 930 Van Ness in this building.

1940-1970+: Cecil Whitebone's Midtown Motors. In 1940 Whitebone occupied the storefront at #950, but from 1942 onward he occupied the entire building (using the same address). He sold Ford autos during this entire period, and also sold Lincoln and Mercury autos during the 1940s.

A color photograph of this building on the Internet ("Ford Agency on Van Ness at O'Farrell," Charles W. Cushman Archive, Indiana University Archives), dated 1960, shows that the windows in the second and third stories were once divided by mullions; that paired windows in the third story had nine lights each; and that paired windows in the second story had double-hung sash. It is clear from this photo that the mullions were removed and the current larger metal sash were placed in these stories after 1960.

By the early 1980s this building was occupied by a Mercedes-Benz dealership. It then acquired a blue and gray color scheme and awnings – common to Mercedes stores and shops – at that time, and retained that color scheme into 2009.

History: Occupants (context)

This the earliest and most important of three buildings in the study area that housed businesses specializing in general electrical servicing for automobiles. The second of the three is 1414-1420 Van Ness, where the Automotive Service Agency was briefly located (during 1942-1945) after leaving 950 Van Ness. The third and last is 690 Van Ness, which was occupied from 1943 into the 1980s by Speedometer Electric Company. That business performed electrical servicing and installed ignitions and speedometers; the integrity of the building is only fair.

This is one of many buildings in the study area where tires were sold; at least eight of these buildings held tire shops for substantially longer periods (ten years or longer) than 950 Van Ness did.

This is one of five auto showrooms in the study area where Ford autos were sold and that retain at least fair integrity. The other four are:

550 Van Ness Avenue. William L. Hughson sold Fords here during 1909-1913.

1670 Pine Street. Knoph and Dunbar sold Ford here during 1917-1922.

1270 Bush Street. Hughson sold Fords here during 1943-1944, then used this building as his office and service center through the 1960s.

1400 Van Ness Avenue. Hughson sold Fords here from 1945 through the 1960s.

For the period being studied in this report (through 1964), 950 Van Ness held a Ford showroom for the longest period of time (25 years). 1400 Van Ness was a Ford showroom for almost as long, and has better integrity than 950 Van Ness does.

Many other Ford showrooms – most notably 1455-1495 Market, 1101-1157 Van Ness, and 1701 Van Ness – have been demolished or greatly altered.

Integrity

Mullions have been removed from the second and third story windows, and all windows and doors have replacement sash and frames of modern metal. Shiny metal panels also hide the second story spandrel on the Van Ness side and on a portion of the adjacent sides. On the plus side, the parapet, cornice, and frieze at the top of the building; the pilasters in the upper stories; the third floor spandrels; and much of the second floor spandrels on the side elevations are intact. In sum, this building retains integrity of location, setting, and association; while integrity of design, materials, workmanship, and feeling are diminished.

Evaluation

This is one of more than 100 buildings along the Van Ness Avenue corridor that have a history as automobile support structures, and that are being evaluated for possible historic significance according to the

(Continued next page)

Evaluation (continued)

criteria of the California Register of Historical Resources. With a few exceptions, these buildings were auto showrooms, public garages, auto repair shops, auto parts and supplies stores, and auto painting shops. The time period that is being studied is from the initial years of the automobile industry in San Francisco through 1964. Among the factors that have been considered when evaluating a building are its date of construction, its longevity of auto-related use, the importance of its occupants in local auto industry history, integrity, and architectural quality. These factors, and how they apply to evaluations of buildings, are discussed in a cover report, *Van Ness Auto Row Support Structures, 1908-1964*.

Completed at the end of 1919 and occupied by early 1920, this is a moderately early example of a general automotive use building. With 44 years of general auto use in its history (through 1964), it has excellent longevity in such use. More specifically, this building has two notable aspects to its history: 1) It is the most important of three surviving buildings in the study area where general electrical auto servicing was performed, including sales of batteries, starters, ignitions, magnetos, and speedometers. 2) It is also one of five surviving buildings in the study area where Ford autos were sold. Of these five, it has the greatest longevity as a Ford showroom (considered for the period through 1964); but it has lesser integrity compared to the Ford showroom with the next greatest longevity, 1400 Van Ness. Both 950 Van Ness and 1400 Van Ness were Ford showrooms during a similar period, the 1940s-1960s.

The cumulative auto-related uses of this building is striking, and its history as a Ford showroom is especially important. Because of its alterations, however (removal of mullions in the upper stories, replacement of window sash, and addition of panels to the second floor spandrel), the building suffers by comparison with another building, 1400 Van Ness, that held an important Ford showroom during a similar period. Largely due to these alterations, it appears that this building is not individually eligible for the California Register under Criterion 1.

The two most important people in this building's history were Ernest Ingold and Cecil Whitebone. Ingold is better represented, however, by his auto showroom at 999 Van Ness Avenue, and Whitebone was substantially less important as a Ford dealer than William L. Hughson was. Accordingly, this building does not appear to be eligible for the California Register under Criterion 2.

Architecturally, this building has pleasing proportions and composition, but it has suffered some alterations, and on balance it does not appear to be eligible for the California Register under Criterion 3.

Olive Street side of 950 Van Ness (December 2009)