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

PRIMARY RECORD

Primary # _____
HRI # _____
Trinomial _____
NRHP Status Code 3CS
Other Listings _____
Review Code _____ Reviewer _____ Date _____

 *Resource Name or #: (Assigned by recorder) 999 Van Ness Avenue

P1. Historic name of building (if any): Ernest Ingold Chevrolet showroom
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 Location: *a: County San Francisco ☐ Not for Publication ■ Unrestricted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 999 Van Ness Avenue City San Francisco Zip 94109
d. UTM: Zone _____; _____mE/ _____ mN *e. Assessor's parcel #: Block 719, lots 1 and 13

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

This reinforced concrete auto showroom fills two lots. The original building of 1937 measures 120' along the west side of Van Ness Avenue, from O'Farrell Street on the north to Olive Street on the south, and extends 178'-6" to the west; while the addition of 1950 sits on an adjoining lot, measuring 68'-9" along O'Farrell and stretching 120' to Olive. The height of the building is two stories at the front (facing Van Ness), and three stories toward the rear. The addition to the west is also three stories, but rises to a higher level. Much of the first story toward the rear is underground due to the rising slope of the street. The Van Ness and O'Farrell facades (including the façade of the 1950 addition) and a short stretch of the Olive Street façade are decorated with Art Deco ornament and coated with stucco; while the balance of the Olive Street façade has a lower level of finish, its concrete surface being unfinished except for paint.

(See Continuation Sheet, page 2.)

*P3b Resource Attributes: HP6 – 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 northwest
June 2009

*P6. Date Constructed/Age and Source: ■ Historic ☐ Prehistoric ☐ Both
1937; building permit

*P7. Owner and Address:
999 VAN NESS LLC
119 GABLE COURT
SAN RAFAEL CA 94903

*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):

The top story consists of a band of industrial steel sash windows that wraps around the main facades and is broken in places by compound pilasters with Art Deco detailing. A thin concrete shelf runs along the top of this band of windows, wrapping around corners and piercing the crown of the pilasters. Similar steel sash windows can also be found on the first story of the O'Farrell façade and on Olive Street.

The first story front consists of very large, plate glass windows held in place by original bronze strips and interrupted by compound columns with capitals detailed in a restrained Art Deco style. These storefront windows wrap around the curved corners of the building onto O'Farrell and Olive streets. A profiled molding runs along the top of these windows, also wrapping around corners. A foot or two above this molding is an incised belt course with intermittent, paired knobby projections; these relate to the cornice above. One original sign survives: the word "SERVICE" in Moderne-style lettering over an O'Farrell Street vehicle entrance.

The main pedestrian entrance is recessed into the center of the Van Ness Avenue façade. It consists of plate glass set into molded bronze frames, and the shape is that of a semi-circle of six facets. A huge faceted canopy projects from the top of this entrance over the sidewalk; a circular bronze medallion is attached to the soffit of this canopy.

From the sidewalk one can see that the interior possesses a tile floor, columns clad in wood, and a curvilinear wooden staircase with bronze railings.

View looking southwest

Top photo: Entrance as shown in *Architect and Engineer*, June 1938
Bottom photo: Entrance detail, June 2009

Top photo: Service bay on O'Farrell Street, with original signage. This sign shows in a photo in *Architect and Engineer*, June 1938, p. 16.
Bottom photo: Olive Street façade

Top: Detail of column capital
Bottom: The addition of 1950 (O'Farrell Street side)

BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD

***NRHP Status Code** 3CS

***Resource Name or #** (Assigned by recorder) 999 Van Ness Avenue

B1. Historic Name: Ernest Ingold Chevrolet showroom
B2. Common Name: _____
B3. Original Use: auto showroom B4. Present Use: auto showroom
***B5. Architectural Style:** Classical Revival
***B6. Construction History:** (Construction date, alterations, and date of alterations)
The main building (120' x 178'-6") was built in 1937. An addition to the west (68'-9" x 120) was built in 1950.

***B7. Moved?** ■ No ☐ Yes ☐ Unknown **Date:** _____ **Original Location:** _____
***B8. Related Features:**
none

B9a. Architect: John E. Dinwiddie b. Builder: R. J. Fisher
***B10. Significance: Theme** automobile industry **Area** San Francisco
Period of Significance 1937-1964 **Property Type** auto showroom **Applicable Criteria** 1, 2, 3
(Discuss importance in terms of historical or architectural context as defined by theme, period, and geographic scope. Also address integrity.)

History

This building was built in 1937 for Ernest Ingold, as his Chevrolet showroom, to designs by architect John E. Dinwiddie (1902-1959). The architect is known principally for this building and for an International style house at 2660 Divisadero Street (1938). In Berkeley, he also designed a "Mid-century Modern" house at 2785 Buena Vista Way (1948). He worked in partnership with the well-known Modernist architect Henry Hill from 1938-1946.

The first owner of this building, Ernest Ingold, became active in the automobile industry in San Francisco in 1919, when he founded the Automotive Service Agency, which specialized in electrical servicing, starters, ignitions, magnetos, batteries, and speedometers. It was perhaps the major shop in San Francisco that specialized in such work. His next business, from 1928-1932, was a wholesale radio store. Both of these businesses were located at 930-950 Van Ness Avenue (extant).

(See Continuation Sheet, page 5.)

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

***B12. References:**
Building permit #27471 (May 10, 1937), filed under "945 Van Ness"
John Elkin Dinwiddie, "Modern Trend Reflected in New auto Sales Building," in *Architect and Engineer*, June 1938
Crocker-Langley and Polk's city directory, and PT&T reverse directory listings for occupants of this building, 1919-1978
1948 Sanborn insurance map
1951 Sanborn map (shows addition of 1950)
B13. Remarks:

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

(This space reserved for official comments.)

(Sketch map with north arrow required)
Note: Lot 13 is also included in this evaluation

History (continued)

In 1933 Ingold opened a Chevrolet dealership at two locations, 1700 Van Ness (this has been demolished) and 1100 Van Ness (now heavily altered). These were both large buildings, but ample as the space in them was, and despite the fact that the Depression continued, he purchased his lot at Van Ness and O'Farrell and built this building, one of the largest auto showrooms in San Francisco.

As was true at other multi-story showrooms, the various departments were segregated spatially, according to a hierarchy of uses. The display room was at the front of the building and rose to two stories in height. Two levels of offices, a meeting room, and an auto parts sales room were located directly behind the showroom. A circular staircase (located at the rear of the sales room) connected these two levels of offices, etc. All of these areas, including the staircase, were finished in wood paneling.

Toward the rear of the building, west of the sales room and offices, were two levels with utilitarian finishes devoted to auto storage and servicing. The first level was used to store new autos and was mostly below grade (due to the upward slope of O'Farrell and Olive streets). Above, in the second (or mezzanine) story, was the automobile service area, into which one could drive from either O'Farrell or Olive. It was conveniently located adjacent to the parts sales room. Both the storage area for new autos and the service area occupied the bulk of the first and second stories. The entire third story was devoted to utilitarian uses. It held shops for heavy repairs and auto painting as well as the parts department. It was reached via a ramp from the rear of the second story.

Ernest Ingold's practical needs for the parking and maneuvering of automobiles influenced the structural planning of the building. Normally (according to the architect in his article for *Architect and Engineer*) columns would have been spaced 22 feet apart. Ingold however desired wider spacing that would allow three cars to be placed, with room for servicing, between columns. The solution was to use beam and girder construction, at greater cost, to allow 27 feet between columns.

The first story front was intended to have "advertising value," according to architect Dinwiddie. Toward this end he created very large show windows for display of automobiles and gave the rest of the façade what he thought to be "a rather dramatic application of detail", i.e., Art Deco ornament.

Writing just several months after the completion of the building, architect Dinwiddie referred to the "extraordinary amount of business done since its occupancy," which he attributed to the architectural treatment. At least one other factor contributed to the sales volume as well. Ingold sold a large number of his automobiles to the San Francisco Police Department in December 1937, just one month after the building opened. This single transaction must have involved dozens of automobiles.

Ingold and his successor sold Chevrolet autos in this building for many years. In ca. 1947 Ingold took on two partners, George Olsen and W. V. A. "Jimmy" Schmidt, and in 1958 the business became known as Ingold-Olsen Chevrolet, with Olsen as president and Ingold largely retired. In 1966 Ingold dropped out and the business became George Olsen Chevrolet. Sales of Chevrolet came to an end in 1972, when Olsen switched to selling Cadillac. This business remained George Olsen Cadillac into the 1980s.

History: Context

Previous to 1933, sales of Chevrolet in San Francisco had been dominated by one man, Robert A. Smith. He sold Chevrolet autos from 1920 to 1932 and had as many as nine outlets in the city (in 1929) until his business underwent contraction and then failure. His place was taken by three long-lasting Chevrolet dealers. The first was Don Gilmore, whose showroom at 550 Van Ness ran from the 1930s-1950s. Next, and longest-lasting, was Ingold. The third was Les Vogel, whose dealership at 1535-1599 Market ran from 1935-1961. Ingold's showroom has the best integrity of the three, for Vogel's has been altered with modern window sash on the first story and exterior shades that cover the second story windows; and Gilmore's has also suffered alterations to the window sash and doors. 999 Van Ness, then, is easily the best example of a Chevrolet dealership in San Francisco.

(Note that Ingold's Chevrolet earlier showrooms of 1933-1937, at 1700 Van Ness and 1100 Van Ness, have been demolished and heavily altered, respectively. Note also that another important Chevrolet dealer, Ellis Brooks, came along at a substantially later date, beginning in 1955.)

This building was the last auto showroom that was built in the study area. After 1937, new auto showrooms in San Francisco were built outside of the study area, most often on outer Geary Boulevard and in the outer Mission district.

Integrity

This building has lost its original vehicle doors but is otherwise in almost original condition. It retains integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Integrity of setting has been diminished by new construction to the north.

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 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.*

As an auto showroom beginning in 1937, this is a moderately late example of automobile showroom useage. With 27 years of such use in its history, it has good longevity in this use. As shown above, it is also the best example in San Francisco of a showroom for Chevrolet, an extremely important brand. For these reasons, the building appears to be eligible for the California Register of Historical Resources under Criterion 1, at the local level, for its use as a Chevrolet showroom. The Period of Significance under this criterion is 1937-1964, the years the building had this use.

(Continued on next page.)

Evaluation (continued)

Ernest Ingold had a long career in the automobile industry in San Francisco, first as the main owner of an automotive electrical service shop (during 1919-1927), and then as a major Chevrolet dealer (from 1933 into the 1960s). He was also probably the most important Chevrolet dealer in San Francisco's history before the 1950s, although three other men, Robert A. Smith, Les Vogel and Don Gilmore, were also important. This building represents the most important period in Ingold's career, and thus appears to be eligible for the California Register under Criterion 2. The Period of Significance under this criterion is the same as that for Criterion 1.

Architecturally, this building is a distinguished example of the Art Deco style, and in addition is the only Art Deco automobile showroom in San Francisco. It's integrity is also extremely high. For these reasons this building appears to be eligible for the California Register under Criterion 3. The Period of Significance under this criterion is 1937 and 1950, the years of construction.

Character defining features

The character defining features of this building are its height and width; the stucco finish on Van Ness and O'Farrell and on a portion of the Olive Street façades; the first story storefront windows that front on Van Ness and wrap around onto the adjacent facades, including the original sash; the compound columns in the storefront area; the faceted pedestrian entrance with molded brass framing; the large awning over this entrance; the course of molding immediately above the storefront windows; the incised belt course with knobby projections located immediately above this molding; all industrial steel sash windows; the Art Deco pilaster in the top story; and the original sign reading "SERVICE" over an O'Farrell Street vehicle entrance.

Photo December 1937, on occasion of sale of new autos to S. F. police Department. The tower of St. Mary's Cathedral is in the background. SFPL photo AAD-4670.