

Richard Nickel's House



Photo: Karin Langer

Overview:

This elegant Bucktown storefront building was owned by Richard Nickel, legendary architectural photographer and Chicago preservation pioneer. Until his death in 1972, it served as Nickel's base for photography and salvage operations, where he documented the work of the pioneering architecture firm of Adler & Sullivan, whose legacy was rapidly being lost to demolition due to "urban renewal." Ironically, his home, a building that played an important role in Nickel's efforts to raise public awareness of Adler & Sullivan's work, is itself threatened with demolition.

Richard Nickel's House
1810 W. Cortland
Architect: Unknown
Date: 1889

Threat:

Currently vacant and in foreclosure, the building's future is uncertain. The Building remains in excellent condition and is rated 'Orange' in the Chicago Historic Resources Survey. The Orange rating would afford the building a 90-day demolition hold, but short of city Landmark protection, demolition could commence once the 90-day delay expires.

Chicago 7: Richard Nickel House Continued

History:

Built in 1889, the building has a street-level storefront with a two-bedroom apartment above. Originally known as 'Grimm's Bakery', at the time of its purchase by Nickel the storefront was occupied by the 'Cortland Bakery'. According to Richard Cahan, author of 'They All Fall Down', Nickel loved the front elevation, simple floor plan and history of the building. He saw the building more as an 'aesthetic experience' or 'architectural enterprise' than a residence. Nickel referred to it as his 'Polish palazzo'. Nickel combined the two floors into a single unit with living spaces in the storefront. He created a kitchen and photo work room in the rear of the bakery and replaced the upstairs kitchen with a second bathroom. With the assistance of his friend, architect John Vinci, Nickel redesigned the rear wall to incorporate a series of tall, narrow doors and assisted the masons in executing the work. In his book, Cahan relates how Nickel derived 'immense aesthetic satisfaction' from the renovation despite it nearly driving him bankrupt. In November 1971, Nickel wrote of the project, "I'd pull out except I'm really happy with the struggle..." Six months later he was killed while salvaging ornament from inside Adler & Sullivan's Stock Exchange building. After Nickel's tragic death, the building was sold to sculptor Stanley R. Stan, and in 1982 became photographer Marc Hauser's studio.



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Recommendation:

Preservation Chicago believes that the Richard Nickel House meets 3 criteria for Landmark consideration. To that end, Preservation Chicago nominated the Richard Nickel House for landmark designation at the December 2008 meeting of the Programs Committee, a subcommittee of the Commission on Chicago Landmarks. This committee evaluates proposals for future landmarks and then forwards those recommendations to the entire commission. In addition, historical and architectural information has been provided to 32nd Ward Alderman Scott Waguespack in an effort to gain his support for designation.