



444 North LaSalle Drive

Address: 444 North LaSalle Drive

Date: 1930

Architect: George F. Lovdall

Style: Art Deco

**CHRS
Rating:** Orange

Threat:

One of the most exuberant and well-crafted Art Deco buildings in the central city, 444 N. LaSalle lies directly in the line of fire of Chicago's ever-expanding high-rise development. A new 45-story apartment building rises one

block to the south, where only one year ago a surface parking lot was located.

Of further concern, the building sits mid-block, with surface parking lots on both sides. If recent development patterns in the nearby vicinity are any indication, developers would prefer to combine these three parcels to allow a larger building footprint. And without intervention from the city, they might just get their chance: The building is presently on the market for the first time in many years.

Architecture:

Architecture: The 444 North LaSalle building is a vital part of the downtown landscape. Besides being an integral part of the pedestrian-scaled, commercially-oriented Lower River North district, the building enlivens the downtown streetscape through its unique character. Intricately detailed, polychromatic terracotta, in hues of gold, navy, pink and green, make this one of downtown's most colorful façades. Somewhat unusual for Art Deco, the façade is ornamented with floral shapes, in addition to the more conventional Art Deco geometric abstractions.

The composition is divided into four bays. Fluted terracotta pilasters with bas relief "capitals" frame the two outermost bays, while a terracotta frieze runs above along the cornice line. At ground level, a large storefront is revealed beneath the two centermost bays, with the lively, ziggurat-framed entry at right being mirrored by a plate glass window at left. These devices give the façade an unexpected formality, unity, and familiarity in composition. The effect is quite distinct from the stark and virtually unadorned limestone towers, or curvaceous, abstract mid-rises often associated with Art Deco.

Art Deco was a style flourishing in Chicago and elsewhere until the onset of the Great Depression. During the Depression proper, construction virtually ceased, as funds were scarce and enthusiasm was low. The country's prevailing malaise might be part of the explanation for the overtly cheerful character of 444 N. LaSalle, a rare example of architecture executed literally during the Depression. Art Deco would survive, but would never regain its full prominence, as the more progressive Art Moderne and International styles became favored shortly thereafter.

George F. Lovdall was a Chicago architect of appreciable prominence. His vast portfolio includes many bungalows and larger homes in Prairie and Craftsman styles, as well as commissions for warehouses and larger commercial buildings. Content to design in prevailing period styles, his buildings nevertheless often contain signature elements that deviate from the strict rules of a particular genre.

The only other known work of Lovdall's in the central area is a large, 6-story industrial building at 847-863 North Larrabee Street. This significant and unusual building features highly unusual brick patterning, and a façade composition not unlike the 444 N. LaSalle building. Sadly, this Orange-rated building has been released from the city's Demolition Delay permitting process, and will likely be demolished in early 2005.