

Interior Furniture Company Building
*(Domestic Violence Courthouse/
 Circuit Court of Cook County)*

Address: 1340 South Michigan Avenue
Date: 1922
CHRS Rating: Green (listed as 1338-1342 S. Michigan Ave.)
National Register: Not Listed



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Threat:

In October, 2005, all domestic violence cases that were heard in the Domestic Violence Courthouse at 1340 S. Michigan Avenue were moved to the new Domestic Violence Courthouse at 555 W. Harrison Street, an existing brick structure that was converted for courthouse use.

As a result, the 1340 S. Michigan Avenue building will soon be largely vacant. The Office of Capital Planning and Policy of Cook County has not expressed an interest in preservation of the old courthouse. When asked about its intentions for the building, the office of Cook County Board President John Stroger expressed no assurance that the building would be preserved. Furthermore, the area around the building is undergoing rapid conversion to a high-rise neighborhood. This places the old building at great risk for demolition and redevelopment.

The Cook County Board is likely to consider possible sale of the building. Such sale could lead to demolition of the building unless there is action by the City of Chicago to protect the building through landmark designation or through appropriate zoning. Preservation Chicago has expressed these concerns to the Department of Planning and Development and with the staff of Alderman Madeleine Haithcock.

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INTERIOR FURNITURE COMPANY BUILDING (DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COURTHOUSE / CIRCUIT COURT OF COOK COUNTY)

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Fulfillment of Landmark Criteria

Integrity:

The building is made of very solid construction, which was needed to bear the heavy loads of a furniture warehouse. Thus, the building possesses structural integrity. The ornate façade of the building also is intact, with the minor exception of reversible changes to the first floor entrance.

Significant Architecture:

The Interior Furniture Company building is designed with a Classical Revival style. The columns on the front of the building rise on either side of a central recessed bay of windows. The multi-story columns are non-structural and rectangular, serving as ornament in a classical style with ornate capitals at the top of each column. The cornice of the building also features classical flourishes. This is a unique façade for a mercantile building. The building served as both a furniture warehouse and a furniture showroom. Therefore, it needed to meet the heavy structural needs of a furniture warehouse while meeting the esthetic needs of a structure where customers would feel welcome and comfortable in an artful surrounding. With its heavy-duty construction and high ceilings, the building is amenable to residential loft conversion.

Critical Part of the City's Heritage:

The area of Michigan Avenue south of Roosevelt Road was originally residential and then gradually became a mercantile area, used by furniture companies, wholesale clothing companies, horse carriage companies, and later, automobile companies. The mercantile history of the area, with loft structures that doubled as showrooms, created a high-quality design of building facades that tell a story of Chicago business and architecture meeting to create a unique building type. In later years, of course, the building served as the site of the Domestic Violence Courthouse. As such, the building served as the scene of dramatic confrontation, adjudication and, often, court-directed healing for thousands of Chicago families. The story of these families is part of the story of everyday life in Chicago for the past several decades.

Unique Visible Feature:

The white glazed terra cotta of the Classical Revival façade of the Interior Furniture Company building serves as a much-needed break from the relative sameness of the new architecture nearby. The high-rises of the Central Station and Museum Park developments desperately need an historic counterpart such as the Interior Furniture Company building. We should not sterilize this stretch of Michigan Avenue.