

Chicago Motor Club



Photo: Stacey Pflingsten

Overview:

The Chicago Motor Club is an elegant example of Holabird and Roche's Art Deco skyscraper artistry, although it rises only 16 stories. It boasts a streamlined façade with decorative metal spandrels and medallions evocative of the period. Equally important, this gem from 1928 includes an intact two-story lobby that celebrates the early days of the country's burgeoning automobile culture. Built as the new headquarters for the Chicago Motor Club, its lobby includes a mural by noted Chicago artist John W. Norton that maps out 19 major auto routes across the country.

Chicago Motor Club

68 E. Wacker

Architect: Holabird & Roche

Date: 1928

Threat:

The current owner has had a challenge putting together a successful reuse plan for the building. Plans to reuse the building as condominiums and a boutique hotel date back to 1997, when the current owner bought it for \$2.4 million. Although the owner continued to rent the offices for many years, it has been vacant since 2004. On October 27, 2008, *Crain's Chicago Business* reported that a foreclosure lawsuit was filed against the building.

Chicago 7: Chicago Motor Club Continued

History:

The Chicago Motor Club was founded in 1906 by a small group of men who wanted to exchange travel information and promote the automobile and road conditions. The group began marking what it considered the best routes to and from the city, placing road signs to assist drivers without detailed maps. The Chicago Motor Club, now part of the American Automobile Association, eventually left its 1928 headquarters building and moved to Aurora.

The 16-story building, including the two-story lobby, was designed by Holabird and Roche in 1927 shortly before the firm became Holabird and Root. Frank E. Brown was the engineer. The two-story lobby has an observation balcony along the north wall that features a decorative balustrade and metal work. While the original metal wall sconces are in place, two historic chandeliers have been in storage for about 30 years. The lobby's 29-foot Norton mural preceded the 180-foot mural depicting the daily life of a newspaper that once hung in the walkway of the Chicago Daily News building (the newspaper mural is now stored in a warehouse).

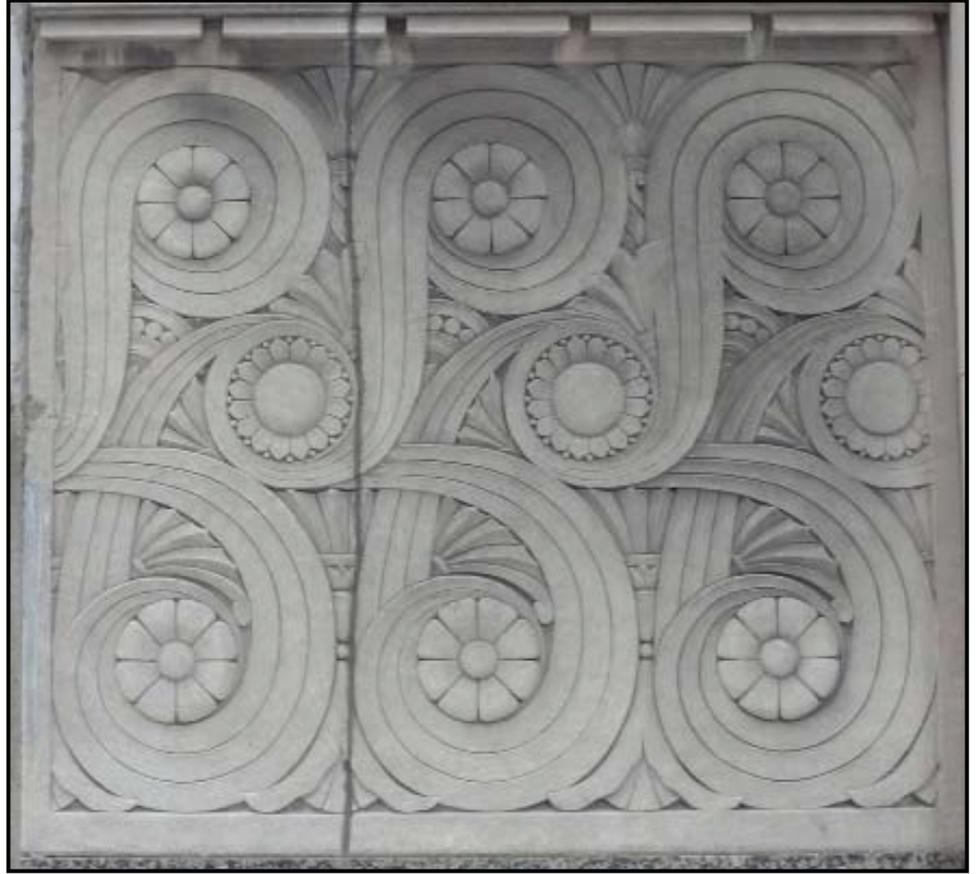


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The Chicago Motor Club is one of 11 structures of primary significance in the Michigan-Wacker Historic District. The district was added to the National Register in November 1978. The building was renamed Wacker Tower after the street name was changed.

Recommendation:

Preservation Chicago is concerned that the current owner's stymied plans to reuse the building have left it vacant for too long, leaving it at risk for deterioration and potential demolition. The City of Chicago has the opportunity to landmark both the building and its lobby before economic pressures cause irreversible alterations — or worse. Chicago has too few intact historic lobbies and even fewer landmarked interiors. We believe the City should take this rare opportunity to also landmark such a notable Art Deco interior.