

Bay St.



SPORTING NEW PAINT, and two additional floors that will see it converted into a prestige office building by developer Jim Mace, is the old B.C. Electric sub-station at Bay and Government. Once one of the city's prestige buildings, it sat virtually abandoned for years. But repainting without highlighting its pseudo-Egyptian decor with a variety of colors it once boasted has drawn mild criticism from some members of the city's art community. —Barry Casson Photo

BUT WHERE'S THE ART DECO?

Life for a classic

One of Victoria's prestige buildings of four decades ago is gradually taking on a new look and a new life as the city's newest office structure.

But in the eyes of some in Victoria's art community, it has lost one of its most outstanding features — as a classic example of what is called "Art Deco".

For the layman, art deco is best described as a style of furnishings and fashion which took its geometric design source from the triangle.

Cast capitals

In the case of the old B.C. Electric sub-station at Bay and Government, now being

renovated as an office building, the art deco feature was its finely-cast cement capitals and decorations pointing up the huge vertical windows.

But art deco was also color, and Jens van Draby, a designer with Bastion Theatre says the old building has lost its grace with its loss of color.

Recently painted as work proceeds to turn it into three floors of luxury office space, it is now mostly all one color, yellow, with a band of deeper yellow around the base.

In its heyday, the cast cement sculpture of the 1930s was highlighted with the more sombre, but more impressive, blues, reds, olive greens and

white highlights that gave it its pseudo-Egyptian architectural look.

A toyland

"It seems to be a tendency in Victoria to use heavy colors," van Draby says. "It makes the city look like a toyland."

He feels that developers are too inclined to look only at the trends of the day rather than explore the possibilities when they are coming up with colors and design for heritage buildings.

"The building at Government and Bay looks like a huge shoebox as it is now," he says. "The people involved simply have not bothered to look at the alternatives."

Up-to-date

None-the-less, art deco or not, the old structure is rapidly shaping up into what will be one of the city's most up-to-date business and office blocks.

Since 1964 it sat empty, its smashed windows glaring down on Bay and Government from the dirty grey walls and rapidly fading paint that once gave it its outstanding appeal.

In 1967, developer Jim Mace purchased the building with a view to developing it into

something other than what it was — an abandoned power substation.

Extra floors

About the beginning of April this year work began, crews stripping the interior and installing the extra floors that will allow its conversion into office space.

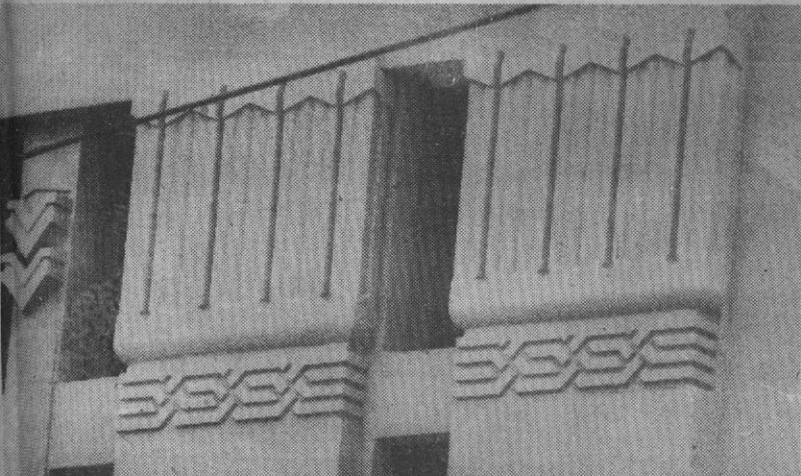
When Mace first purchased the building from B.C. Hydro, he proposed it as a convention centre for the city, but he drew no enthusiasm at all from city council. His initial plan was to develop the whole area to complement the centre.

An alternative

With no support for a convention centre, Mace moved to the next alternative — an office building. Present plans call for three floors with more than 20,000 square feet of floor space.

Estimated cost of the work, which includes extensive landscaping, is \$750,000, but present escalating material and labor costs could drive it well beyond that figure.

Work on the building is being done by G. H. Wheaton, and it is expected the floors will be ready for office space planning and construction by year's end.



CLASSIC EXAMPLES of the art deco that graced so many buildings of the 1930s are the capitals of the pilasters of the planned office building at Bay and Government. Some critics feel the fine work should be highlighted with the colors so often associated with art deco — sombre but contrasting colors and tones that show the classic work to its best advantage.

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