

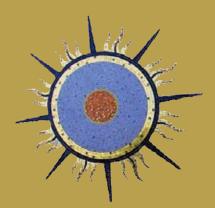
A LEGACY OF ART & ARCHITECTURE



















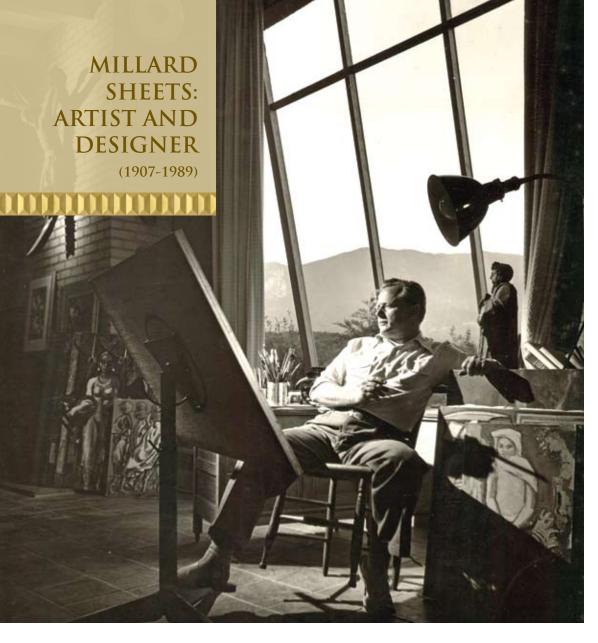








LOS ANGELES CONSERVANCY
MODERN COMMITTEE



A rtist and designer Millard Sheets created the designs for some of the most recognizable and popular commercial buildings in the Los Angeles area. Trained as a painter rather than an architect, Sheets took an approach of incorporating artwork by regional artists into the design of buildings, which defined his architectural work.

Born and raised in Pomona, California, Millard Sheets displayed a talent for art at a very young age. He enrolled at the Chouinard Art Institute after graduating from high school in 1927. While at Chouinard, Sheets began to experiment in a number of different mediums and techniques, which figured largely in many of his later architectural projects.

He graduated from Chouinard in 1929 as part of a group of young artists whose work became known as the California Style of watercolor painting because of its bold new look and innovative approaches. In 1932 he was appointed assistant head of the art department at Scripps College in Claremont, California. He was named head of the department in 1936. Early on, Sheets was intent on exploring the relationship between various facets of art education, including art, architecture, dance, and music. He promoted this type of integrated curriculum at both Scripps College and

the Los Angeles County Art Institute, which later became Otis Art Institute.

From 1931 to 1956, Sheets was Director of the Fine Arts

Exhibitions at the Los Angeles County Fair in Pomona. Sheets curated exhibitions that promoted the work of California artists and also brought art from other parts of the world to Los Angeles. The gallery is now known as the Millard Sheets Center for the Arts.

During the 1930s, Millard Sheets began to experiment further with mural and fresco painting and was offered several commercial mural commissions. These led to interior design jobs, and as his reputation as a designer grew, so did his commissions. Sheets eventually transitioned to designing new construction, and significant architectural commissions followed. As he was not a licensed architect, the process for his commissions was always collaborative, with Sheets creating the design scheme and a registered architect or contractor overseeing the construction process.

Sheets strongly believed in the idea of architects and artists working together toward a common goal, which included



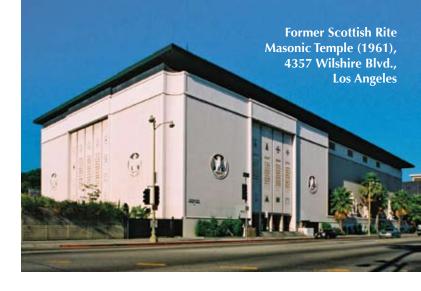
The Word of Life tile-paneled mosaic, nicknamed "Touchdown lesus," University of Notre Dame (1964), South Bend, Indiana

planning for art during the design process rather than placing artwork on the building as an afterthought. He felt that integrating visual arts into the design of a building would create an exciting presence and personality not found in other commercial structures. Sheets also worked to create buildings that connected with the public on an emotional level, often using artwork to depict local or historical themes that were significant to the surrounding community.

In order to incorporate a diverse collection of artwork from a variety of mediums, Sheets put his philosophy of the integrated arts into practice and called upon other artists he knew to either execute his designs or contribute their own work. Many of his colleagues at Scripps College became frequent collaborators on his design projects, including former student Susan Lautmann Hertel and fellow instructors such as ceramic and textile artist Jean Goodwin Ames and sculptor Albert Stewart.

His use of artwork in his commercial projects attracted the attention of financier Howard Ahmanson, head of the Home Savings and Loan Association. Ahmanson hired Sheets in 1954 to design the new Beverly Hills branch of Home Savings and Loan. With its colorful mosaics and stained glass windows, the building proved so popular with customers that Ahmanson hired Sheets to design over forty additional Home Savings branch offices as part of the company's expansion plan. This project would be the most important and wide-ranging architectural commission of Sheets's career.

In addition to incorporating artwork into many of the Home Savings branch offices, Sheets worked throughout his life to bring awareness to the integrated arts, developing many programs that promoted the relationship between art and architecture. During the Great Depression, Sheets served on the local committee of the Public Works Administration, where he helped coordinate projects



that commissioned out-of-work artists to create artwork for public buildings. Sheets later served on juries for numerous art festivals, including the Los Angeles County Fair. At the fair, he arranged for winning artworks to be exhibited in public buildings around Southern California, including Home Savings branches.

Millard Sheets's buildings are generally recognized by their rectilinear forms and flat planes of natural stone that serve as a backdrop for bold integrated artwork. Only some of his buildings can be classified as New Formalism, yet in general, his architecture shares New Formalism's reinterpretation of traditional forms and styles with modern aesthetics. Though he did receive commissions in other parts of the country, his greatest concentration of

work is in Southern California. Aside from the examples in Claremont and Pomona, notable buildings by Sheets include numerous Home Savings branches, as well as Los Angeles' Scottish Rite Masonic Temple (1961) on Wilshire Boulevard.

While Sheets's architectural projects received some mixed reviews from architecture critics, his innovative approach to design proved popular with the general public, who continues to be drawn to the colorful murals and bold sculptures that distinguish his buildings. This integration of art and architecture is a defining feature of Sheets's buildings-which underscores the importance of protecting both structure and site-specific art together. in situ, as part of Millard Sheets's unique legacy.



Former Home Savings and Loan (1956), 9245 Wilshire Blvd., Beverly Hills



Former Home Savings and Loan (1968), 1500 Vine St. (at Sunset Blvd.), Hollywood

# **POMONA MALL**

SECOND STREET BETWEEN PARK AVENUE AND LINDEN STREET

## **Millard Sheets**

1962

eauty in the downtown part Dof a city is a necessity, not a luxury. People will always respond to beauty if we make it intimate and personal and related to the charter and integrity of the city." This was how Millard Sheets summed up his philosophy for the design of the Pomona Mall shortly after it opened in 1962. The Pomona Mall was hailed as one of the first pedestrian malls in the United States and nationally recognized as

a blueprint for urban revitalization. Five years in the planning, the mall was just one part of a massive plan of civic improvements that were originally envisioned to encompass nearly all of Pomona.

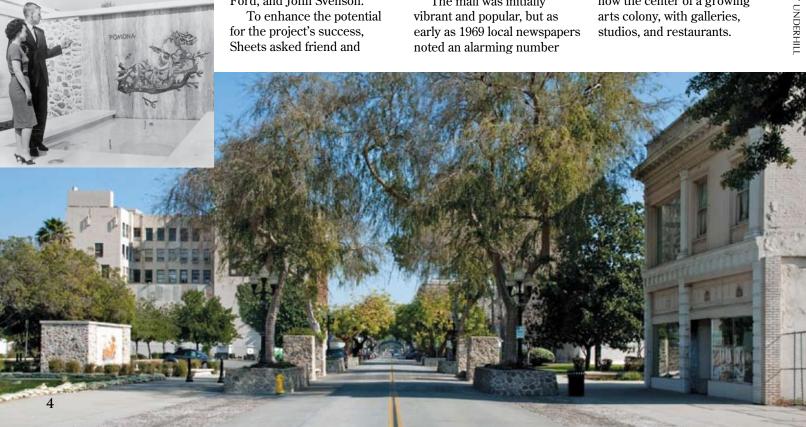
Sheets's design for the shopping center was simple: close off nine blocks of an existing shopping district; add trees, benches, artwork, and fountains; and include plenty of nearby parking. Many of these elements remain today, including mosaics and sculptures by Sheets and fellow artists Arthur and Jean Ames, Betty Davenport Ford, and John Svenson.

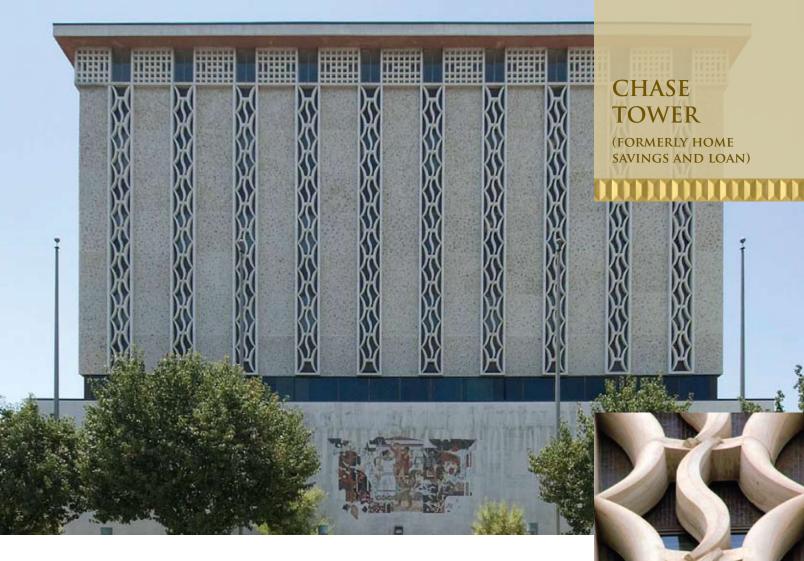
patron Howard Ahmanson to locate a new Home Savings and Loan branch on the mall, resulting in the impressive tower designed by Sheets (see page 5). The east end of the mall was anchored by upscale department store Buffum's (1962), with a sleek modern design by Welton Becket & Associates.

The mall was initially vibrant and popular, but as noted an alarming number

of vacancies in the retail stores. In 1977, five of the nine blocks were reopened to automobiles in an effort to lure shoppers back. The east end of the mall remained closed to traffic, and it has since been integrated into the campus for the Western University of Health Sciences. The west end of the mall is now the center of a growing arts colony, with galleries, studios, and restaurants.







100 WEST SECOND STREET, POMONA

### Millard Sheets with Langdon & Wilson

1963

Built to house the new Pomona branch of Home Savings and Loan, this sixstory office tower is among Sheets's largest and most unique architectural designs. The building was developed as an anchor for the adjacent pedestrian mall that Sheets designed, and both the tower and mall are closely tied to the postwar urban revitalization efforts surrounding downtown Pomona.

The building features strict symmetry and treats all four façades with equal emphasis, rather than using the traditional concept of different treatments for the front and rear. The double-height band of travertine on the second floor references Sheets's typical Home Savings designs. Yet for this project, he created a texturally rich tower that goes beyond the aesthetic of the other branches. Panels of exposed aggregate concrete alternate with panels of sculptural grillwork (featuring an interlocking "H" and "S" design), emphasizing the verticality of the building. Despite its solid appearance, the building is almost entirely glass on the ground floor and third floor (above the travertine band). The alternating windows and grilles at the top floor create a delicate cap for the structure.

Like many of Sheets's architectural designs, the tower integrates site-specific artwork. A mosaic depicting a family scene is set within the travertine band above the main entrance. On the interior, the banking floor contains a large painted mural by Sheets along with collaborator Susan Hertel. Square columns clad in polished marble punctuate the open space.

Chase now owns the building and announced a proposal in 2011 to demolish it. The Los Angeles Conservancy and its Modern Committee are working with local preservation and community groups to seek a preservation solution. This threat underscores the vulnerability of Sheets's architecture and the need for greater awareness and understanding of his work.







399 NORTH GAREY AVENUE, POMONA

# B. H. (Benjamin Hall) Anderson

1956

he architect of the former headquarters of Pomona First Federal Savings and Loan is B. H. Anderson, who worked on the design of Sheets's studio (also in 1956; see page 9). The bank building is a two-story steel-frame structure in the International Style, defined by its flat roof, grid-like arrangement of steel-and-glass panels, and smooth exterior, portions of which are finished with a grey terra-cotta veneer. As part of its design, a display window was incorporated into the Garey Avenue facade to showcase ceramic art.

Pomona First Federal (PFF) commissioned Millard Sheets to paint a massive mural for the main banking area, which was executed in his mural studio (see page 9). Seventy-eight feet long, "Panorama of the Pomona Valley" depicts one hundred years of history in the valley before the incorporation of Pomona in 1888, from the time of Native American settlements to the arrival of the railroad. Sheets's assistant (and co-signer) on the mural was his former student, Susan Lautmann (later Hertel), who was one of his primary assistants for many years.

The community grew very concerned over the fate of the mural after PFF was seized by the FDIC in 2009 and its branches sold to U.S. Bank. The Garey Avenue location was closed, and the mural was in danger of being sold and removed from the building. When David Armstrong. founder and president of the American Museum of Ceramic Art, became interested in purchasing the building in 2010 as a new, much larger location for his museum, he insisted that the mural remain. It now provides a dynamic backdrop to the museum's main gallery.





U.S. BANK

(FORMERLY POMONA FIRST FEDERAL SAVINGS AND LOAN)

# 393 WEST FOOTHILL BOULEVARD, CLAREMONT

# **Millard Sheets**

1969

Sited prominently at the intersection of two major streets, the former Claremont branch of Pomona First Federal (PFF), now U.S. Bank, has a commanding presence on the street.

The structure has the classicism and symmetry of New Formalism, with huge expanses of stone walls surrounded by an arcade of Egyptian-style lotus columns. Popularized in the 1960s, New Formalism combines classical forms and elements, such as columns and colonnades, with modernist aesthetics.

Centered on the south wall, at the top of a small

flight of steps, is a mosaic of Native Americans on horses surrounded by flowering yucca plants.

This PFF building shares many design elements with the iconic Home Savings branches that Sheets had been designing since 1954. Its stone cladding, exterior mosaic, and simple, monumental form link it thematically to the other bank project. What sets it apart from Sheets's Home Savings designs are the tall, slender columns that form a colonnade around the building, emphasizing its classical form.

Inside, a mezzanine configuration provides second-floor office space and a double-height banking area. The additional height lends spaciousness to the relatively small room and accommodates a large mural. The

brightly colored painting of Native American villagers and their horses is set on a curved wall facing the entry doors, serving as the focal point of the room.

Although the building has seen changes over the years, the reconfigurations have been sensitive to the original design, maintaining the prominence of the mural inside the bank and the classical simplicity of the exterior design.

In 1982, a drive-thru banking station was added to the east side of the parking lot. The small structure echoes the design of the bank, with its travertine cladding and mosaic decoration. Denis O'Connor, who worked with Sheets on dozens of projects, designed the small mosaic to continue the theme of the larger original.









# GARRISON Theater

**SCRIPPS COLLEGE** 







### 231 EAST TENTH STREET, CLAREMONT

# Millard Sheets with S. David Underwood

1963

arrison Theater was commissioned by the Claremont University Consortium, an umbrella organization for the various Claremont Colleges. The venue, featuring a 630-seat auditorium, was built for use by the colleges as well as outside performance groups.

Millard Sheets designed the building with architect S. David Underwood, a member of his design studio. The two collaborated on a number of projects, including many Home Savings branches.

The elegant and monumental style of Garrison Theater exemplifies New Formalism. Set on a raised podium and framed by white concrete columns, the massive three-story façade features an expanse of polished red granite flanked by patterned brickwork. Set into the granite are three monumental mosaics, thirty feet high, depicting scenes from Shakespeare's *Antony* 



and Cleopatra, Romeo and Juliet, and King Lear.

Inside, the theater has a wide yet shallow curved lobby, dominated by three enormous and colorful tapestries by artists Arthur and Jean Ames. The lobby's floors are terrazzo (cast and polished marble aggregate), which is typical of the period.

In 1999, Scripps College assumed ownership of Garrison Theater and began a renovation and expansion that made the venue the centerpiece of a new performing arts center. Although the stage area and auditorium were significantly altered, the lobby and exterior remain in near-original condition, with the exception of replacing the original bronze doors with glass.

The new buildings that surround the theater were added in 2003. They are sensitive in scale and materials to the original building.





655 EAST FOOTHILL BOULEVARD, CLAREMONT

Millard Sheets with B. H. Anderson and S. David Underwood

1956-1959

illard Sheets's former design studio is an unassuming complex, a pair of buildings nestled in a courtyard-like garden surrounded by exotic plants and stone pathways. The original travertine sign announcing Millard Sheets

Designs Inc. and Millard Sheets Murals Inc. still stands at the front corner of the property.

Like Sheets's other designs, his studio was a departure from the transparent boxes favored by other modernists. Unusual for an office and studio, all the windows are on the rear or sides of the buildings; no windows face the street. In their place are solid

expanses of white walls, decorated with small mosaics.

On the southeast corner of the property stands what was originally the studio used for constructing murals. The studio's windowless street façade is dotted with mosaics of falconers and their birds cavorting under the

sun, moon, and a scattering of stars. Gold tiles embedded in the design glint in the sun. While

the back of the building is

one story, the front portion was designed with extra height to accommodate large projects. A two-story rolling

scaffold built to facilitate the work remains inside.

The main office and design building is at the rear of the garden. Its marble façade is divided into vertical panels, each decorated with a charming

mosaic toucan. The double-wide panel containing the entry door is surrounded by a unique lattice made of stacked bands and cylinders of travertine. A corrugated metal fascia caps the building, giving visual emphasis.

While the building now

serves as
medical offices,
the interior
remains
remarkably
intact. The
owners
bought the
property from
Millard Sheets,

retaining original design elements where possible. Sheets's own office (now used for administration) still has its custom-made built-in furniture, including Sheets's huge desk and a bench for visitors. The original cork still

> covers the walls, and an unusual set of small shelves still holds art pieces, as they did in Sheets's time.

# CLAREMONT EYE ASSOCIATES

(FORMERLY MILLARD SHEETS STUDIO)









# PHOTOS BY ANNE LASKEY

# **CLAREMONT** UNITED **CHURCH OF CHRIST**

233 WEST HARRISON AVENUE, CLAREMONT

# Millard Sheets with Theodore Criley, Jr.

1955 (Sanctuary) 1963 (Kingman Chapel)

n the mid-1950s, the United Church of Christ sought to build a new and impressive church. Pastor Harold Jones turned to Millard Sheets, a member of the congregation, to spearhead the project. Working with local architect Theodore Criley, Jr., Sheets created an elegant design filled with art pieces that showcase the talents of Claremont-area artists.

Framed by local river rocks, the sanctuary's main façade features a large ceramic cross by Sheets and a New Testament quote with lettering by Malcolm Cameron. Albert Stewart carved the wood panels flanking the entrance doors.

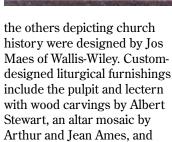
The nave's simple design is accentuated by the building's structural system of tapered arches visible on both the interior and exterior. Six large stained-glass windows, fabricated by Wallis-Wiley Studio of Pasadena, form a continuous wall of colored glass that illuminates the south aisle. Sheets designed the panels depicting the New and Old Testaments, while



Arthur and Jean Ames, and benches by furniture maker Sam Maloof.



McIntosh. Stained-glass windows by Douglas McClellan and a reredos (screen-like element) behind the altar by Paul Darrow complete the chapel design. The south wall of the adjoining enclosed garden features a ceramic and mosaic panel by Betty Davenport Ford depicting doves in flight.







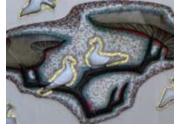


MILLARD SHEETS was a highly acclaimed artist and a strong proponent of the integration of art and architecture. He incorporated all forms of art, be it mural, mosaic, sculpture, stained glass, or ceramic, into his architectural designs. He developed strong friendships and working partnerships with a number of artists associated with the rich cultural life in the Pomona Valley.



ARTHUR AND JEAN
GOODWIN AMES (Arthur:
1906-1975, Jean: 1903-1986)
were multidisciplinary artists
known especially for their
work with enamel, tapestry,
ceramics, and tile mosaic
murals. The husband-and-wife
team worked as teachers as
well as artists. Jean taught
at Scripps College and
Claremont Graduate School,
and Arthur taught at Otis
Art Institute.







Renowned sculptor BETTY DAVENPORT FORD (1924-) has worked with a variety of mediums but is best known for her ceramics, which were often of animals. Millard Sheets served as an early mentor and instructor, encouraging Ford's development as an artist. In addition to her career as a fine artist, she has taught ceramics privately and at several institutions.



SUSAN LAUTMANN HERTEL (1930-1993) was an Illinoisborn painter who studied at Scripps College under Millard Sheets and Jean Ames. She began assisting Sheets with mural installations in the early 1950s, and she went on to design other works for his studio in what would become a long and fruitful working relationship. She and Sheets also shared a passionate interest in horses, a recurring motif in their art.

Master mosaicist **DENIS**O'CONNOR (1933-2007)
immigrated to California
from England at age 26 after
receiving a fine arts degree
in London. Millard Sheets
discovered his work at a
Scripps College exhibit in
1960. O'Connor participated
in the production of many
mosaics for the Sheets studio,
including more than eighty for
Home Savings and Loan.



Sculptor ALBERT STEWART (1900-1965) was born in England and grew up in New York. He eventually settled in Claremont and in 1939 became head of the Scripps College sculpture department. An influential artist and respected

teacher, he received commissions throughout the United States, including a number for Home Savings and Loan branches.



ARTISTS
OF THE
POMONA
VALLEY



Sculptor JOHN EDWARD SVENSON (1923-) is a Los Angeles native who attended Scripps College, where he was mentored by Millard Sheets and Albert Stewart. Svenson completed many sculptures as part of architectural commissions, including pieces for twenty-two Home Savings and Loan branches.

# Milleurd Sheede A LEGACY OF ART & ARCHITECTURE

is part of







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### ABOUT THE LOS ANGELES CONSERVANCY



The Los Angeles Conservancy is a membership-based nonprofit organization that works through advocacy and education to recognize, preserve, and revitalize CONSERVANCY the historic architectural and cultural

resources of Los Angeles County. The Conservancy was formed in 1978 as part of the community-based effort to prevent demolition of the Los Angeles Central Library. It is now the largest local historic preservation organization in the U.S., with over 6,500 members and hundreds of volunteers. For more information, visit laconservancy.org.

### ABOUT THE MODERN COMMITTEE



The Conservancy's Modern LOS ANGELES CONSERVANCY Committee (ModCom) is a MODERN COMMITTEE volunteer group formed in 1984

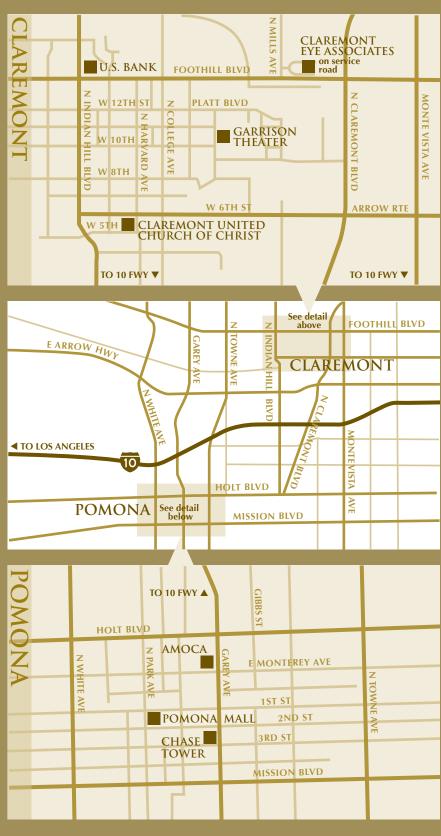
in response to the rapid destruction of a generation of postwar buildings. ModCom's focus is twentiethcentury architecture and related fields that reflect the heritage of modernism and popular culture. ModCom holds events, researches and nominates buildings for landmark designation, and serves as an advocate for authentic mid-century modern design. ModCom holds monthly meetings at interesting locations throughout L.A. County. For more information, visit **modcom.org**.



## Los Angeles Conservancy

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INSIDE	pa	ge
ABOUT MILLARD SHEETS		2
POMONA MALL		4
CHASE TOWER (FORMERLY HOME SAVINGS AND LOAN)		5
AMOCA (FORMERLY POMONA FIRST FEDERAL)		6
U.S. BANK (FORMERLY POMONA FIRST FEDERAL)		7
GARRISON THEATER		8
CLAREMONT EYE ASSOCIATES (FORMERLY SHEETS STUDIO)		9
CLAREMONT UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST	. 1	0
ARTISTS OF THE POMONA VALLEY	.1	1