

STAFF REPORT 11-10-2021 REGULAR MEETING

PREPARED BY: G. LANDSBERG

APPLICATION NUMBER: 21-7574

ADDRESS: 249 E BALTIMORE (AKA STANLEY HONG'S MANNIA CAFÉ)

HISTORIC DISTRICT: STANLEY HONG'S MANNIA CAFÉ

APPLICANT: ELISE DeCHARD/END STUDIO LLC

OWNER: JEN LYON

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 10-18-2021

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 11-02-2021

SCOPE: ERECT NEW ROOFTOP AND SIDE ADDITIONS TO ACCOMMODATE USE AS PERFORMING ARTS SPACE

EXISTING CONDITIONS & ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY



View of existing conditions at 2238 Wabash. Staff photo, November 2, 2021.

The subject property is the focus of a single-building historic district established by the city in 2017. The building was designed by prominent Detroit architect Nathan Johnson, whose recent passing has renewed attention towards his creative imprint on the city's built environment. From the designation report of the Historic Designation Advisory Board, or HDAB:

Stanley Hong's Mannia Cafe was erected under City of Detroit building permit #35615 issued to Stanley Hong for a masonry restaurant, one-story tall, with dimensions of 76' x 98' to cost an estimated \$150,000 on June 10, 1969...The Googie-style, modernistic building is composed of exposed concrete block on the unadorned rear (north) and east elevations; other materials include particle board, sheet metal, and thin cast concrete. Downward facing parabolas create rows of arches resulting in the wave-like roof ends, five bays along Baltimore (south) and six along the parking lot on the west. The peaks of the half-arches meet at the corner entrance and rise into a tall concrete corner tower, originally displaying the name of the restaurant. The inverted parabolas are smooth cast concrete, with

approximately 12' of void space between. Each arched area forming the wall surfaces of the east and south facades are filled with a precast panel of concrete and coarse aggregate mixture.

The roof system is composed of Steel I-beams and girders that supported corrugated metal decking and an insulation layer, which was then finished with roll out rubber and tar. The roofing material wraps up to cover the backside of the parapet (rising 25" above the roof line) on the north and the east sides of the building, and on the embellished south and the west sides, the roofing material slopes up to meet and partially cover the backside of the inverted concrete parabolas - peaks of which rise approximately 18 inches above roof line.



Late 1970s view of the district. Detroit Free Press, 11/9/21.

The HDAB report, in addition to substantiating the significance of the architecture, notes the important association with the city's trailblazing African-American architect:

The lavish Stanley Hong's Mannia Café came together as a result of the relationship between Stanley Hong and Nathan Johnson, an African American architect. In 1962 Stanley Hong entrusted the design of his family home to Johnson, who lived nearby and produced a thoroughly modern house for the Hong family at 961 West Boston Boulevard, on the corner of Hamilton...

Within his own practice, Johnson developed a modernist sensibility in thought and design. "We don't go in much for symbolism," he said of his firm's design aesthetic. "So often symbolism says more than the person can grasp and becomes mere decoration." His churches, although mostly located in the inner city and built on shoe string budgets, opened up onto sidewalks and displayed modern, easy-to-use materials — St. Clement Episcopal Church in Inkster was round in plan with altar in the center overlooking courtyards; Grace Episcopal Church, 12th and Virginia Park, had a hexagonal chapel; and the tabernacle-shaped Church of Christ of Conant Gardens, 18480 Conant, had a roof of pre-cast wood fiber compressed and clapped together every four feet...

Nathan Johnson & Associates had anywhere from two to forty employees during its long practice, which wound down around the year 2000. Johnson achieved success locally as a modernist architect and deserves to be recognized for his contribution to Modern architecture in the Detroit area. Examples of his many and diverse commissions are:

House of Diggs, 1957
Thunderbird Inn, Northville, 1959
Stanley Hong's residence, 961 West Boston, 1962
Stanley Hong's Mannia Café 1969-71
Eastland Shopping Center, 1972
Belle Maison East, 1976
Shed 5, Eastern Market, 1981
E. Side Prison, 1986

Mercy General Hospital, 1958
Church of the Resurrection, Ecorse, 1962
Second Baptist Church addition, 1967
Sherrard Jr. High School Addition, 1971
Bethel AME Church, Tower and Townhouses, 1974
Coleman A. Young Manor, 1978
Wayne County Community College, 1981
Detroit People Mover stations, 1987



Parcel view of vicinity, subject parcel outlined in yellow. Blue arrow shows location of photo on first page.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The applicant proposes to rehabilitate and alter the building for a performing arts use consistent with the submitted drawings, documents, and presentation materials. The work includes an approximately 2,300 SF ground floor addition and an interior mezzanine addition (extended roof portion) of approximately 1,350 SF, which is intended to create a 20' clear interior height. The scope includes:

Demolition

- Demolish existing non-historic and poorly maintained concrete block additions at rear alley
- Demolish roof and internal structure as required to raise roof
- Demolish interior slab on grade to lower floor

Renovation and Construction

- Existing concrete historic facades to remain and be repaired as needed
- Restore historic finishes, colors, and exterior lighting
- Restore existing windows and doors
- New rooftop addition set back from the historic front and west facades
- Approximately 1,800 SF addition to the east and 300 addition to the rear
- New custom storefront infill within 2 arched bays on west façade
- Additional egress doors as required by code.

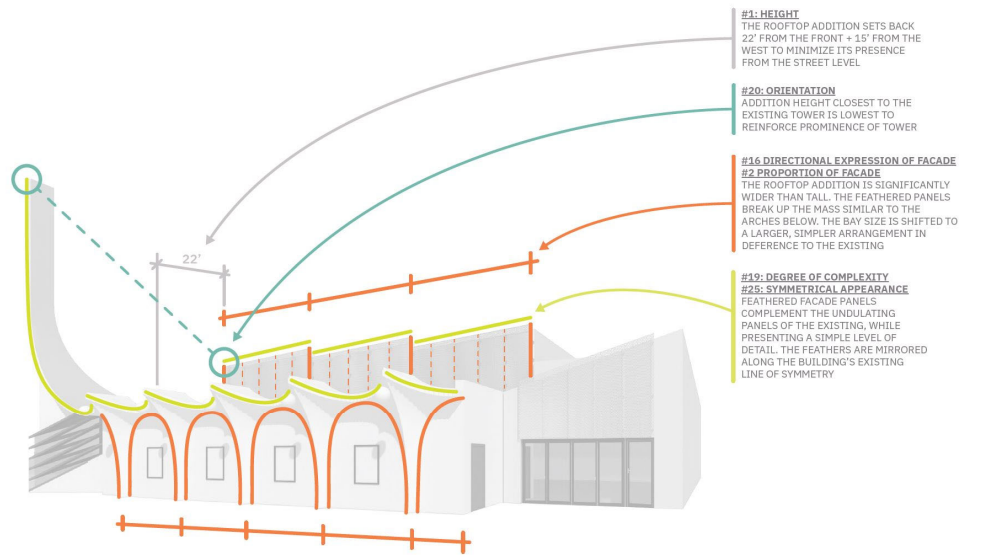
Note that signage, exterior lighting, and sitework are not included in the current application.



One of several renderings provided in the applicant's submission materials.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS

- In the application materials, the architect has provided a thorough analysis of how the proposed alterations respond to the district's Elements of Design. The applicant/architect team also consulted with HDC staff on several occasions throughout their design process. Staff architects and architectural historians discussed the preservation of the building's exuberantly distinctive character-defining features while allowing the roof to be strategically raised, and building expanded, to accommodate the new adaptive reuse. The result is comfortably within the Standards, and we are pleased to give it our recommendation as an historically appropriate alteration to this truly unique work of architecture.



Element of Design analysis included in the architect's submission materials.

ISSUES

- None

RECOMMENDATION

Section 21-2-78, Determinations of Historic District Commission

The proposed work is compatible with the massing, size, scale and architectural features of its environment, and does not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. Staff therefore recommends that the proposal should qualify for a Certificate of Appropriateness, as it meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and the Stanley Hong's Mannia Cafe Historic District's Elements of Design.