

Campau Building

Park Avenue & West Elizabeth Street Detroit MI

City of Detroit Historic District Commission Project Review

July 18, 2022

Description of existing conditions:

The Campau Building was designed by the architect Albert Kahn in 1924.. As shown in a rendering published in the *Detroit Free Press* (Photo No. 1), the building was intended to be eleven stories tall, but only the first two stories were actually built. There were five storefront bays on the Park Avenue side, and five bays along the Elizabeth side, only one of which was a storefront.

The building housed various stores until the mid 1930s, when the architect Charles Agree designed the Cliff Bells bar/restaurant in two of the Park Avenue bays. Cliff Bells was subsequently enlarged to include a third bay. Cliff Bells and the Campau building prospered, then entered a long decline until it became an empty building for a number of years. In 2005, a new owner purchased the building, and opened the Park Bar in the Park Avenue's two northern bays. He removed the exterior remnants of a 1950s moderne bar (Photos 2 and 3) and built new, all-glass exterior walls.

The owner of Cliff Bell's purchased the entire building c. 2018, including the Park Bar. He continued the operation of the Park Bar, but it failed to prosper. With the Covid crisis, the Park Bar closed c. 2020.

Description of Project:

The all-glass exterior of the Park Bar does not provide a comfortable nor distinctive interior atmosphere (Photos No. 4, 5 and 6). Further, a positive aspect of the Covid crisis has changed restaurant/bar dynamics in Detroit: outside drinking and dining have become required. The applicant proposes the following changes to the Campau Building:

- The 2005 glass exterior walls at the sidewalk level are to be removed at the two northernmost bays on Park Avenue and along the four westernmost bays on Elizabeth Street.
- The present Cliff Bells exterior will remain as is.
- The building's second floor will remain as is.
- The easternmost bay on Elizabeth Street (which includes a still-extant AK cast-iron cornice at the base of the transom windows) will remain as is except for a new replacement door and frame.

- The existing limestone pilasters will remain as is; new construction is to be limited to within the storefront bays.
- The sidewalk level transom windows will remain as is (for budgetary reasons).
- New wood doors will be installed per the proposed elevations. Doors are to be oak, with a clear finish, and are modeled on Albert Kahn's doors for Hill Auditorium in Ann Arbor (Photo No. 7).
- The bays are to be filled in with new walls on top of the existing black stone base. The new walls are to be of steel studs with an exterior of painted concrete stucco. Each bay is to have an oversized single-hung window, with the windowsill at table height, to "tie together" the interior and exterior spaces when weather allows. Windows are to be thermo-pane, without low-e coatings, wood frame with aluminum exterior, as manufactured by Marvin Windows, Ultimate DH series.
- On the new exterior of the bays, new, season-removable wood banquette seating is to be provided. In addition to this seating, there will be individual table and chair seating.
- A new metal canopy is to be in the middle bay of the Elizabeth street façade to emphasize the building's second floor, elevator, and bar entrance. West of this will be a new fabric awning to have a rounded corner and continue along the two bays of the Park avenue façade. The fabric awning will be visually separated from the new metal canopy and the existing Cliff Bell's façade by the width of the existing limestone pilasters.
- New exterior signage will include a new vertical sign to be mounted at the building's Northwest corner. This sign will spell out the word "BAR" on its faces, and will be visually similar to the existing Bronx Bar sign in Detroit, which is illustrated in the Historic District Commission's published sign advisory.