

**From:** [Allen Michaan](#)  
**To:** [Landmarks Preservation Commission](#)  
**Cc:** [allen Michaan](#)  
**Subject:** The importance of the United Artists Theater building  
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Dear members of the Landmark Preservation Commission,

below please find my letter to the Berkeley City Council:

I thank you for any consideration that you can extend to the preservation and restoration of the glorious art deco movie palace that still exists in the United Artists Theater building.

Sincerely  
Allen Michaan

Hello,  
my name is Allen Michaan and I have been operating theaters continuously for the last 51 years  
since I built and operated my first theater, the Rialto, in a West Berkeley warehouse on Gilman Street.  
I have a long history in your city having designed and developed the Shattuck Cinemas as well as being the  
operator of the Sunset Theater, Fine Arts Cinema, the Northside Theater and the Oaks Theater on Solano Ave.  
Changing industry conditions and the stranglehold of huge theater chains monopolizing the available  
movie titles eventually forced out independent operators such as my company Renaissance Rialto, Inc.

Over the years I have restored and operated several dozen movie houses in San Francisco, Menlo Park, Palo Alto,  
Orinda, Benicia, Walnut Creek and Lafayette.

As well I have consulted for and contributed to the restoration and rebirth of several theaters in other parts of the country.

Today I proudly continue my tradition of theatrical exhibition at my Grand Lake Theater in Oakland  
which I originally leased in 1980 and eventually purchased the property 5 years ago.  
The Grand Lake is considered to be one of the finest theaters in the nation.

As the leaders of Berkeley you have a unique opportunity to bestow a gift on your constituents as well as to the citizens of the

greater Bay Area and to future generations by actively ensuring the preservation of the Historic

United Artists theater on Shattuck Avenue.

Constructed in 1932 as one of a handful of theaters developed by the association of Charlie Chaplin,

Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks it was a major art deco destination for movie and performance alike.

It boasted a full stage, dressing rooms and 1800 seats all in a spectacular setting.

A full history of the theater can be found at: [www.savetheuaberkeley.org](http://www.savetheuaberkeley.org)

I remember seeing movies there in the early 1970s and was always overwhelmed by it's magnificence.

When the process of dividing the space into multiple auditoriums began around 1973 the owners were

required to carve out the new spaces without causing any major destruction to the original fabric of the theater.

We have actual eyewitness testimony from a theater maintenance specialist who has explored the areas

above and behind the later modifications that the original decor is largely intact and ready for restoration.

The citizen group that is actively calling for this theater to be saved has requested of the developer

that we be allowed to inspect all areas of the theater, however we have been denied ANY access for "safety concerns".

This building, which was deemed eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic places has the

potential to be what the Paramount Theater is to the City of Oakland.

Once lost, entertainment palaces such as the United Artist Theater will never be replaced.

Berkeley has lost almost all of it's theaters, this one deserves to be saved for the community.

PLEASE, do not make the same mistake that San Francisco made in 1963 when it allowed the Fox Theater to

be demolished only to be replaced by an ugly office building.

The preservation community mourns that loss to this day.

I urge that any actions to allow the destruction of this architectural treasure be placed on hold until a full study

takes place to determine the actual condition of the auditorium. Preserving the lobby is not enough.

Our group acknowledges the importance of more housing but surely there must be some other city owned

property that can be traded to the developers for their construction goals.

This is a special opportunity for you to prevent an act of cultural vandalism and instead turn it into a gift

for Berkeley's citizens, now and for the future.

Respectfully yours,  
Allen Michaan  
Owner, Grand Lake Theater