GERMANO MILONO BUILDING

Modernism

Modesto, California

Historic Modesto Architecture Report
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Germano Milono Building

MODESTO, CALIFORNIA

SIGNIFICANCE

The Germano Milono Building in downtown Modesto is an attractive 1960 Modernist structure with beautiful examples of intact breeze block screens. It is one of only a few remaining buildings downtown constructed during the cruise era and in the architectural style of that time. The building is also an example of Modesto or Central Valley Modernism, a variation from Bauhaus Modernism, an architectural style that originated in the Central Valley and was common between the 1930s and 1960s.

Concrete breeze block screens were a popular design element of buildings in this period along with the enclosed front courtyard. Ron Marshall, author of Conecrete Screen Block: The Power of Pattern, writes this about the blocks at the Milono Building. “Screen block’s use in the 1950s and 60s, like on the Milono Building in Modesto, represents a tangible expression of the softer, more organic and decorative strain of American Modernism which gained popularity as many rejected the more austere and cold-European (or Bauhaus) strain of modernism. These types of screens are valuable and worth preserving.” (private email communication, 20 June 2019)

The building design and condition are an economic asset. The strong design of the building with generous use of the breeze block screens and minimal alterations that would be easy to remedy give the building potential brand or iconic use.

In a wider context, the building was designed by a well-known Modernist architect, Germano Milono (see below), and has tourism value as part of the Modernist collection of buildings in downtown Modesto. Modesto has a growing national reputation for its Modernist architecture.

BUILDING DESCRIPTION

The Milono Building is at 1008 12th Street, on the northeast side of the street between J and K Street. It is a one-story structure in the Modernist style and part of an architecturally significant collection of Modernist buildings clustered in downtown Modesto.

Prominent are the pumpkin colored breeze brick or decorative concrete block screens across the front and side of the building. The front screen is made entirely of Maltese pattern blocks and the side screens are sunflower design.

A steel fence and gate have been added to the front of the building. Beyond the gate, the front breeze brick screen encloses an entry courtyard and garden.
ARCHITECT: GERMANO MILONO, FAIA, (1913-1978)

Germano Milono was a well-known and respected Modernist architect who designed dozens of projects mostly in California. His projects include churches, offices, educational facilities, and houses. The Milono Collection is housed at the UC Berkeley Environmental Design Archives.

For more information about Milono, see the UC Berkeley Environmental Design Archives web site: https://archives.ced.berkeley.edu/collections/milono-germano.

The archive online index, http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt2v19n8d9/ lists the building as Griffin, Conway & Jones, office building (Modesto, CA; 1958-1960; commercial) Photographer: Baird Photo Service [Dr, Ph] The Dr and Ph indicate that the collection has drawings and photos of the building.

According to the index, Milono also designed a residence in Modesto for Paul Seely (905 Carolyn) in 1955, and a residence for J. E. Griffin (1015 Brady) in 1956.

BUILDING HISTORY

The site is on Block 92 of the original town map filed by the Central Pacific Railroad with Stanislaus County 3 May 1871. According to city records, the building was constructed in 1960. It was commissioned by Griffin, Conway, and Jones, a local law firm that occupied the building until at least the early 1990s. In 2019, the building was painted to highlight its Modernist features and it became the home of the Modesto Convention and Visitors Bureau.

REFERENCES:
