

AFI Silver Theatre

Original Name: Silver Theatre and Silver Spring Shopping Center

Address: 8633 Colesville Road (at Georgia Avenue)
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Architect(s): 1938, John Eberson (New York)
1998-2003, (theater), Gensler Architects (restoration),
SmithGroup Architects (new construction)
2000-2004, (shopping center), RTKL (restoration & new
construction)

Year of Construction: 1938, 1998-2004

Current Status: Entertainment and Commercial

Original Use: Entertainment and Commercial

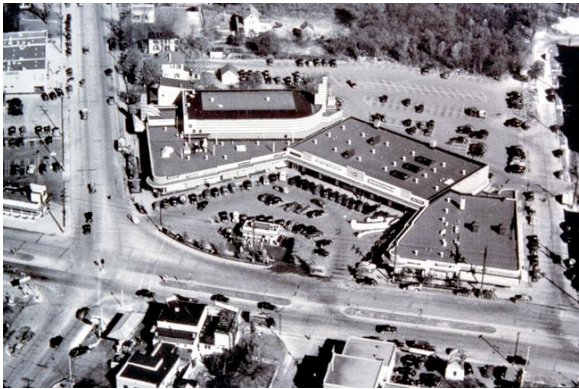
These fine structures were restored after many years of danger and neglect and now serve as a centerpiece to the revitalization of downtown Silver Spring. At its opening in 1938, this complex represented a milestone in commercial architecture: an early example of a suburban shopping center designed for the automobile era. It was the first shopping center designed by a nationally prominent architect, John Eberson of New York, who was already an accomplished designer of movie theaters. It was also the largest shopping center that had been built in the Washington area at that time and it was later to become the generator of Silver Spring's post-World War II building boom that made it the "downtown of Montgomery County."

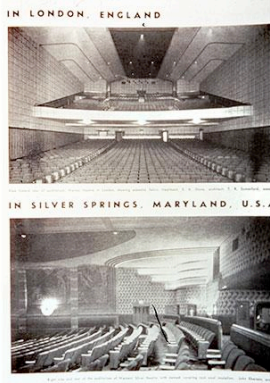
The theater, in its own right, was a stunning example of romantic, nautical, streamlined Art Deco, with its sweeping white marquee tower, horizontal brick stripes suggesting speed and motion, and its terraced chimney resembling a ship's mast at the rear of the theater which itself was rounded like a ship. Even a mock-porthole appeared at the front corner of the building. The interior was special, too, and featured in theater magazines of the time. Notable at the entrance were doors of Formica with silver inlays, decorative

rubber mats, ornamentation on the ceiling, and cases to feature coming attractions. The audience then proceeded into the foyer and then the auditorium with its shelf lighting and impressive ornamentation.

These streamlined forms were continued in the shopping center as seen in photographs from the 1970s. But, of course, no one wanted to know about this in the 1980s, and the owners of the theater and shopping center were ready to demolish --- and they almost got their way.

The Art Deco Society and a coalition of neighborhood groups stopped the wreckage, got the structures landmarked, and insisted on a thoughtful plan for the rehabilitation of downtown Silver Spring. It seemed to take forever and cost more than anyone imagined. But the Silver Theatre reopened as an American Film Institute facility in 2003 and the shopping center is part of a new downtown retail complex.





Static (Fixed) Google Map:



Dynamic (Searchable and Expandable) Google Map:

<https://tinyurl.com/yxn24hkm>