



# ADSW PRESERVATION CASE STUDIES

## BETHESDA THEATRE

ADSW assisted with the actions shown in *Italics*.



**Location:** 7719 Wisconsin Avenue, Bethesda, Maryland

**Original Name:** Bethesda Theatre (built as Boro Theatre)

**Year Of Construction:** 1938

**Original Use:** Entertainment

**Original Architect:** John Eberson (Sidney Lust, developer)

**Current Use:** Entertainment

*ADSW'S NATIONAL REGISTER NOMINATION WAS APPROVED.  
ADSW WORKED TO SAVE THE THEATER FROM ENCROACHING  
DEVELOPMENT.*

## DESCRIPTION

The Bethesda Theatre initially opened its doors as a movie theater in 1938 (known as the Boro Theatre for one year). It was designed by the firm of the world-renowned "Dean of American Theatre Architects," John Eberson. It featured a notable tower and marquee on a banded brick facade, reflecting the excitement of the industrial age and the allure of movies. Although a larger shopping complex was planned, only flanking stores were built along with a 500-car parking lot behind the 1,000 seat theater. Popular features were the high fidelity sound system, latest projection equipment, and air conditioning which was rare in the 1930s. It was also used for community events such as high school graduations.

In 1983, the theater was converted to a restaurant/movie house and re-opened as the Bethesda Cinema & Drafthouse, later known as the Bethesda Theatre Café. Tiered concrete floors were built over top of the original sloped floor and the original fixed auditorium seats were removed to accommodate small dining tables. The project also restored the theater structure and interior for use as a live performance venue that eventually failed and went into foreclosure. In 2012, new owners took charge and reopened the theater as a jazz and supper club in early 2013.

## ADSW PRESERVATION

ADSW successfully supported the application to landmark the distinctive Bethesda Theatre, designed by the same architect as the Silver Theatre. ADSW continued to work to save the theater from encroaching development. In the early 2000's, the construction of a large apartment building above and adjacent to the theatre was proposed. ADSW advocated for a more sensitively designed project and likened the bulk of the new construction to a shark devouring its prey. Despite the compelling analogy, construction was approved.