



ACADEMY THEATER (1939)

Inglewood's Academy Theater, originally designed to host the Academy Awards, never did. Architect S. Charles Lee designed the Academy, and later Inglewood's Fox Theater, for the Fox West Coast Theater Chain. Lee developed theater design standards over the course of his career, building over 300 palaces for movie patrons. His dramatic forms and luxurious designs framed patrons' entertainment, allowing them momentary escape during the challenging Great Depression and Cold War years.

The Academy Theater is noted for a streamlined aesthetic, circular forms and glass block. The exterior naming spire, is circled by a helical light illuminating the 'Academy' name. The Academy served as a location for film premieres through the 1970s. In 1976 the Academy Theatre became a church.

Maggie Valentine writes in her classic history of the genre, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theater*, Starring S. Charles Lee 1994, "Initially viewing the design of movie palaces akin to a cathedral to film where patrons were treated like royalty for 25 cents, the Depression caused him to abandon that belief. He came to see cinemas as machines for entertainment and profit, developing a formula in which he combined entertainment and visibility, "which allowed light to be reflected off the letters spelling 'Academy'.

Architect

S. Charles Lee

3141 Manchester Boulevard
Inglewood, California



S. Charles Lee

Simeon Charles Levi was born in Chicago in 1899. After World War I service, he studied at Chicago's Armour Institute of Technology at the Art Institute of Chicago. His first professional job was with Henry Newhouse, an architect specializing in theater design.

Levi changed his last name to Lee and moved to Los Angeles in 1922. He found architectural work with the early Hollywood studios then planning theater chains for film distribution. Lee's first major movie palace was the 1927 Tower Theater in downtown Los Angeles. It launched his career and resulted in over 300 Lee-designed theaters. Many of Lee's theaters are in California, and can also be found across the US and in Latin America.

Lee also designed the Municipal Light, Water and Power Building in Los Angeles. In 1948 he formed a partnership with Sam Hayden. Together they developed the LAX airport industrial district. S. Charles Lee died in 1990. He commissioned Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore Owings and Merrill to design Lever House. Thru a creative interpretation of the setback zoning code, this became the first glass skyscraper on Park Avenue. After the building was completed, Luckman decided to return to architecture eventually joining William Pereira in Los Angeles. Together they designed many buildings including the Theme Building at LAX and the Prudential Tower in Boston. On his own Luckman also designed the Los Angeles Convention Center, Madison Square Garden and the Inglewood Forum.





Black and White photographs:
Julius Schulman - 1939
S Charles Lee Papers
UCLA Special Collections -
original photos are in the Getty Museum



