

Carthay Circle Theatre – Los Angeles Wikipedia Article

The **Carthay Circle Theatre** was one of the most famous movie palaces of The Golden Age of Hollywood. Located on San Vicente Boulevard in Los Angeles, CA, it opened in 1926 and continued famously thru the 1960s.



1937 Premier of *Life of Emile Zola*

The auditorium itself was shaped in the form of a perfect circle, extended vertically into a cylinder, set inside a square that fleshed out the remainder of the building. It seated 1,150. Initially developed by Fox, it was called the Fox Carthay Circle Theater for its unique floor plan.

Location

The Carthay Circle Theater opened at 6316 San Vicente Boulevard on May 18, 1926, with a showing of *The Volga Boatman* (1926), and was considered developer J. Harvey **McCarthy's** most successful monument, a stroke of shrewd thinking that made a famous name of the newly developed Carthay Center neighborhood (McCarthy's development was called Carthay Center—an anglicized version of his last name.) The Carthay Circle Theater became the focal point of Carthay Center, and Carthay Circle became the neighborhood's official name.

Design

The exterior design was in the Spanish Colonial Revival style, with whitewashed concrete trimmed in blue, with a high bell tower and neon sign visible for miles. The architects were Carleton Winslow and Dwight Gibbs. The iconic octagonal tower was placed in the front corner spandrel space left between the circle and the square. The auditorium's cylinder-shaped wall was raised up above the roof line, to create a parapet visible from the outside that resembled a circus tent.



"Simple, massive and dignified, the building stands out for its intrinsic beauty," raved *The Architect and Engineer*. *Pacific Coast Architect* wrote that it was a theatre "masked as a cathedral". There was a drop curtain that featured a homage to the pioneer Donner Party that perished crossing the Sierra Nevada Mountains.



Donner Party replica

Bronze busts of Native American leaders and photographs of Edwin Booth, Herbert Beerbohm Tree, Sarah Bernhardt, Eleanora Duse, Ellen Terry, Lillie Langtry and other 19th century actors adorned the lounges and lobbies. Murals of historic scenes 40 feet tall graced the walls, painted by Pasadena artist, Alson S. Clark.

Premieres



High, Wide and Handsome (1937)



Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937)

The theatre hosted the official premieres of *The Life of Emile Zola* (1937), *Romeo and Juliet* (1936), Walt Disney's first animated feature-length film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) and *Gone with the Wind* (1939), among many other notable films. For Disney's *Fantasia* (1940), the most elaborate audio system in use at the time, Fantasound, a pioneering stereophonic process, was installed at this theatre.



Leslie Howard & Norma Shearer
Romeo & Juliet (1936)



Tyrone Power & Norma Shearer
Marie Antoinette (1938)

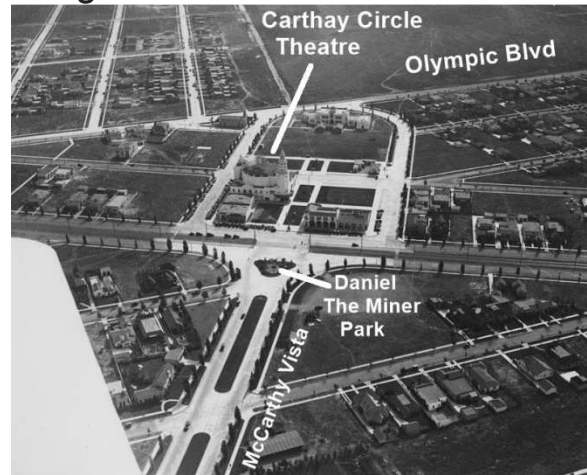
For the glamorous world premiere of MGM's *Marie Antoinette* (1938), with Norma Shearer and Tyrone Power, the gardens around the theater were restructured and enhanced to resemble the landscaping of the Palace of Versailles.

In the 1930s and '40s, props from the sets of such premiered films as *The Great Ziegfeld* (1936), *The Good Earth* (1937), *Captains Courageous* (1937) and *Gone with the Wind* (1939) were displayed on the grassy median of McCarthy Vista, from Wilshire Boulevard south to San Vicente Boulevard.



The premieres were red-carpet events, with the stars of the motion picture arriving in limousines at the entrance to the covered walkway to the theater south from San Vicente and cheered by hundreds of fans in bleachers there, accompanied by searchlights scanning the sky. Only Grauman's Chinese Theatre in Hollywood also had such elaborate premieres in that era.

The statue of 'Dan the Miner' which celebrated the California Gold Rush and Pioneers was part of a huge 'forefront' area. Today it remains on the other side of San Vicente Blvd across from the Gruen Associates building!



The theater was demolished in 1969 by its owner, NAFI Corporation, which erected its headquarters and main computer operations center in its place; today, two low-rise office buildings and a city park occupy its former site.

Decline

Although the Carthay Circle Theater had hosted the first-run "roadshow", reserved-seat engagements of a great many aesthetically and economically important films. By the 1960s the "roadshow" concept, and, indeed, the Carthay Circle Theater itself, was considered an anachronism, overshadowed by modern multi-screen cinemas.

Its customer base had also been sapped by suburbanization and many other economic factors. Film print runs increased almost exponentially from a few, high-quality, high-resolution prints (often "wide gauge"), to literally thousands, or even several thousands of average-quality, lower-resolution prints (usually "standard gauge").

Later Replicas



California Adventure - Disneyland



Hollywood Studios – Disney World

In July 1994, a smaller-scale pastiche of the facade of the theatre (primarily the octagonal tower) was opened as the "Once Upon a Time" gift shop on the Sunset Boulevard section in Disney's Hollywood Studios at Disney World in Florida. In June 2012, a fanciful larger-scale replica of the theater building was opened in the Buena Vista Street section of Disney's California Adventure, at Disneyland in Anaheim, CA. Although this replica is larger than the Orlando version, it is still slightly smaller than the 1926 original, and has a modified exterior footprint and interior floorplan. While there is no actual theatre inside, the building houses the "Carthay Circle Lounge" and the members-only "Club 1901" on the first floor, with the "Carthay Circle Restaurant" on the second floor. The original's signature circular floor plan is absent from the replica building, and the circular parapet is squared off from the outside.