

# **Historic Significance and Integrity Assessment Report for Listing Pink Pony on the Scottsdale Historic Register**

## **Pink Pony**

3831 North Scottsdale Road, Scottsdale, Arizona  
Scottsdale Historic Register No. SHR -04-14  
Zoning Case No. 19-ZN-2003

### **Background**

The City Historic Preservation Office staff conducted an intensive survey of downtown Scottsdale with assistance from Arizona State University interns, local historians and architects during the period 2000-2001. The goal of the survey was to identify those properties that might be eligible for listing on the Scottsdale Historic Register. Approximately 750 properties, built for commercial use, were studied with particular emphasis on those properties that related to Scottsdale's historic development as an "Arts Colony and Tourist Destination." The Scottsdale Historic Preservation Commission and the members of the Commission's Historic Register Committee periodically reviewed the research collected and conducted field studies of the survey properties. Their relative significance and integrity were analyzed and compared. As a result of this effort, approximately two dozen properties were identified that merited further consideration for designation to the Scottsdale Historic Register for their association with important historic events and representation of the architectural influences that shaped Scottsdale development during the post World War II era. The building housing the Pink Pony restaurant was among those properties that were identified as having historic significance and a high degree of integrity of location, design, materials, setting and workmanship.

### **Description**

The Pink Pony building is located on a .21-acre parcel on Scottsdale Road in Scottsdale, Arizona and is listed under Maricopa County Assessor PIN #130-23-124. Constructed in 1954 by the variety store Sprouse-Reitz, the building was modified in 1970 for use by the Pink Pony Steak House after the business moved from their original downtown location. The Pink Pony has occupied it ever since. It is located in the heart of Old Town Scottsdale in a bustling area of retail shops, restaurants and offices.

The simple, rectilinear plan is oriented with its short, front façade to Scottsdale Road, the main north-south street in the downtown area of the City. The footprint of the 8,200 square foot building occupies the entire parcel. The main façade is constructed to the sidewalk, facing Scottsdale Road. An alley separates the Pink Pony from another building to the north and an asphalt parking lot is located at the rear, accessible from Main Street. Another business is located to its immediate south. The building is a hybrid of Western, Southwestern and Modern Styles.

The Pink Pony is a single story building constructed with concrete block exterior walls laid in a stretcher bond pattern. The front façade has three bays, two that project forward at both ends and a recessed central bay. The roof is a very low pitch gable sheathed in built up material. The roof form is almost totally hidden by a simple parapet along all four facades. The middle section of the rear façade parapet has five extra courses of block and the entire front parapet rises an

additional seven courses high, providing a false front to the building's main elevation. These parapet walls are features of the building's original Western Style design.

The building's street façade was modified in 1970 in a transition to a more Modern Southwestern Architectural Style. The projecting bays are now sheathed in broken courses of cut flagstone. This material is also used in the construction of two low planter walls that arc from the end bays to each side of the central entry doors. Stucco has been applied to the recessed bay façade, including the parapet wall. A stepped semicircular flat canopy projects over the sidewalk along the front facade. Four simple wood posts support the overhangs. Wood flush-board adorns the ceilings of both canopy levels. Recessed lighting cans also punctuate the ceilings. A southwestern patterned fascia on the main canopy and double entry doors with four Kachina design panels are also defining features of the building's architectural style.

Narrow horizontal windows framed in wood flank the entry above the stone planters. Exterior screens on both windows provide privacy and ensure low natural interior lighting, characteristics of steak house ambiance. Three steel casement windows punctuate the building's rear façade and two service doors provide access from the alley.

Rustic wood lettering with the business name and a pony logo adorn the false front façade. Two additional pink pony logos cut from wood are attached to the porch posts. This is the original Western Style signage for the business and it was reused when the Pink Pony reopened at this location.

### **History**

Sprouse-Reitz opened a new store of their nationally known variety chain in this building on October 14, 1954. Departing from their signature corporate design with a red-tile theme, the Scottsdale store was built instead in a Western Style with "an overhanging porch, shake shingles, and rustic sign in keeping with the town's western atmosphere." This theme was also carried inside with the use of Western wallpaper and natural oak grain fixtures. To further promote this atmosphere, the store's personnel even dressed in "Western garb" for the three day grand opening festivities.

The Chamber of Commerce deliberately cultivated an Old West identity for Scottsdale after proclaiming their community "The West's Most Western Town" in 1947. Almost immediately, downtown merchants began remodeling their buildings to reflect this adopted image and attract tourists who were vacationing at the nearby resorts and dude ranches. Newly constructed businesses also followed suit and in the 1950s the downtown took on a distinctly "Old West" appearance.

Following a prevailing trend in retail store design in the 1950s, Sprouse-Reitz was constructed with an open plan and large display windows on the street façade. The "open front" provided by the large windows ensured that the interior space also functioned as a street view display. The store's interior featured wide aisles and fluorescent lighting to further facilitate display of the almost 50,000 items of merchandise they offered for sale. Sparing no modern convenience, the building was also cooled for year round comfort with an 18 ton refrigeration unit.

Sprouse-Reitz operated from this building for more than 15 years until the Pink Pony Steak House took it over in 1970. The restaurant had been in business since 1947 at the southeast corner of Scottsdale Road and Main Street in the former Whitey's Café, which had been the first downtown business to remodel with Western features and "dress for the winter [tourist] trade." Known then as "Pings," it was originally owned by Ping Bell who later brought Claudia Ogden in as a partner. Ogden bought Bell out in 1949 with money she received from her good friend, developer Del Webb. Wanting to change the name, she consulted with another friend – artist Lew Davis – who thought up The Pink Pony and drew the pony logos still used today. Ogden also asked Charlie Briley to come work for her as the bar manager. Shortly thereafter she sold the restaurant to Briley for \$50,000 on a lease to buy option in 1950.

Briley remained proprietor of the Pink Pony until his death in 2002, leaving the restaurant to his wife Gwen who continues to oversee operations. Along the way, "The Pony" – as it is affectionately known – became a hangout for baseball greats, their fans and longtime locals. The establishment has received widespread acclaim. Baseball writer Roger Angell with *The New Yorker* touted it as "the best baseball restaurant in the land" and in 1986 *Sports Illustrated* declared it "the most popular hangout for baseball people in the civilized world."

Briley's route to ownership of the spring training landmark was fortuitous. As a kid in Kentucky he developed a passion for baseball, playing some as a left handed pitcher and traveling to Nashville on occasion to watch major league exhibition games. After hitchhiking from Kentucky to Arizona in 1936 to visit his sister, he stayed around Phoenix working the soda fountain at Walgreens and then as a meat salesman for Swift and Co. In 1942 he entered the Army and was assigned as a meat inspector. Returning to Phoenix after the war, Briley went to work as a bartender at The Steak House, a top restaurant in the area. There he met Del Webb, one of the restaurant's steadiest customers who had also become part owner of the New York Yankees. Briley and Webb talked baseball "by the hour" and it was through Webb that Briley met Claudia Ogden, the new owner of the Pink Pony who brought Briley over to tend the bar and subsequently sold him The Pink Pony.

At the time Briley acquired The Pink Pony, Phoenix was in its infancy as a spring training destination for major league baseball teams. Charlie Briley would soon have a hand in changing this. In the early 1950s Dizzy Dean, a pitching star Briley had met at a 1931 Nashville exhibition game, moved to town. Briley reintroduced himself and the two became fast friends. Dean became a Pony regular, talking up the restaurant and his buddy, Charlie Briley. Baseball aficionados took notice and began frequenting the establishment while in town. Momentum was building. After the Baltimore Orioles agreed to train in Scottsdale, Briley and nine other local businessmen pooled together \$56,000 to build Scottsdale Stadium in 1955.

Since that time a steady stream of spring training teams have come to Scottsdale and Briley's restaurant became their official "watering hole." The Pony was also a de facto office where trades and contracts were made and signed. Many baseball greats frequented the Pony including Ty Cobb, Ted Williams, Rogers Hornsby, Jimmy Foxx, Joe DiMaggio and Billy Martin. The inside of the restaurant is a virtual shrine to baseball with signed memorabilia, photos and the well-known caricature drawings of various ballplayers, coaches and other spring training regulars gracing much of the north wall. In the 1950s and 1960s Briley commissioned

Disney cartoonist Don Barkley to draw them for \$25 each, half paid in cash and half in trade. Gwen Briley continued the tradition in her own style after she and Charlie married in 1973. Over the years the restaurant also became a draw for the who's who of the social and political scene. Robert Wagner and Natalie Wood came for their wedding night dinner. Clark Gable, Senator Hubert Humphrey, and Senator Joseph McCarthy have eaten here. Cowboy star and California Angels owner Gene Autry had a favorite booth.

In 1970 Briley was forced to move the Pink Pony to its current location after a dispute with his landlord. He had earlier purchased the building in 1966 though Sprouse-Reitz stayed on as a tenant until The Pony took over. The remodeled façade incorporated Modern Southwest elements, borrowed from new buildings constructed in the late 1950s and 1960s as downtown businesses began transitioning from the strictly Western Style of the early postwar years. These changes in downtown building styles helped retailers stay current with an up-to-date image that “appealed to the same marketing impulses that merchants used to woo their customers.”

The large display windows that characterized Sprouse-Reitz were partially in-filled to create privacy and block daylight from the interior of the steak house restaurant. Southwestern materials including stucco and cut stones were also applied to the main exterior facade. A flat projecting canopy with a semicircular form replaced the Western Style shake roof porch and sweeping planters were added to emphasize the fresh modern lines. A geometric patterned wood fascia, resembling the Native American influenced concrete panels that decorate the Hotel Valley Ho, was applied to the canopy. The interior was also remodeled to accommodate the building's new use. A kitchen was installed along with a prominent bar, 19 booths and 15 tables.

### **Significance**

The Pink Pony building is historically significant for its association with Scottsdale's Post World War II community planning and development patterns and for its association with the town's social history. It is representative of a period when the town became a major baseball spring training and tourist destination. It helps to illustrate the evolutionary pattern of downtown retail development during this vital era, with a core group of “movers and shakers” who guided the process and ensured its success. It is also important for its association with Charlie Briley, considered “Arizona Sports Royalty” for his role in bringing the Cactus League to Scottsdale and establishing a nationally known draw for the baseball crowd. The architecture of the Pink Pony also is significant for its ability to illustrate the transition of the downtown design theme from Old West to a Modern Southwestern Style.

The physical features of the Pink Pony building continue to express their association with these themes of significance. The building sits in its original location on Scottsdale Road, in a setting within the heart of bustling Old Town. The numerous art galleries, gift shops, restaurants, and entertainment venues that opened downtown during the postwar period made the area a prime destination for vacationing tourists from all over the Valley. Briley's restaurant has a key location only a half-mile walk from Scottsdale's baseball stadium, which he helped fund. Abutting a wide sidewalk and one of the City's major roads, the Pink Pony building continues to prominently address passing pedestrian and automobile traffic, a typical feature of downtown business establishments.

The blending of Modern, Western and Southwest Style architecture still convey the historic design intentions. These elements include an open plan that made the building readily adaptable to its new use. In addition, an exaggerated false front parapet wall and rustic signage express the Old West Style that local businessmen consciously promoted in the early postwar era of Scottsdale's downtown development. The flat, arcing porch canopy and planters reflect the trend toward use of modern features while the geometric fascia pattern illustrates the shift to Southwestern designs in the later years of the postwar era.

Specific materials also articulate the historic significance of the Pink Pony. The use of concrete block for the building's exterior walls was distinctly modern. Block was the least expensive and most readily available building material in the metropolitan area as a result of the phenomenal postwar success of the locally operated Superlite Builders Supply Company. In addition, wood flush-board canopy ceilings and lettering were used to influence the building's Western Style. The application of stucco and broken courses of cut flagstone to the front façade provided a Southwestern feeling. These materials reflect the innovative manufacturing practices that became possible in the postwar era with the application of new industrial technologies.

The Pink Pony's physical features continue to convey a sense of the building's historic character and its association with postwar development patterns, social history, and architectural styles in downtown Scottsdale.