

TERRACE PLAZA

Redevelopment Opportunity

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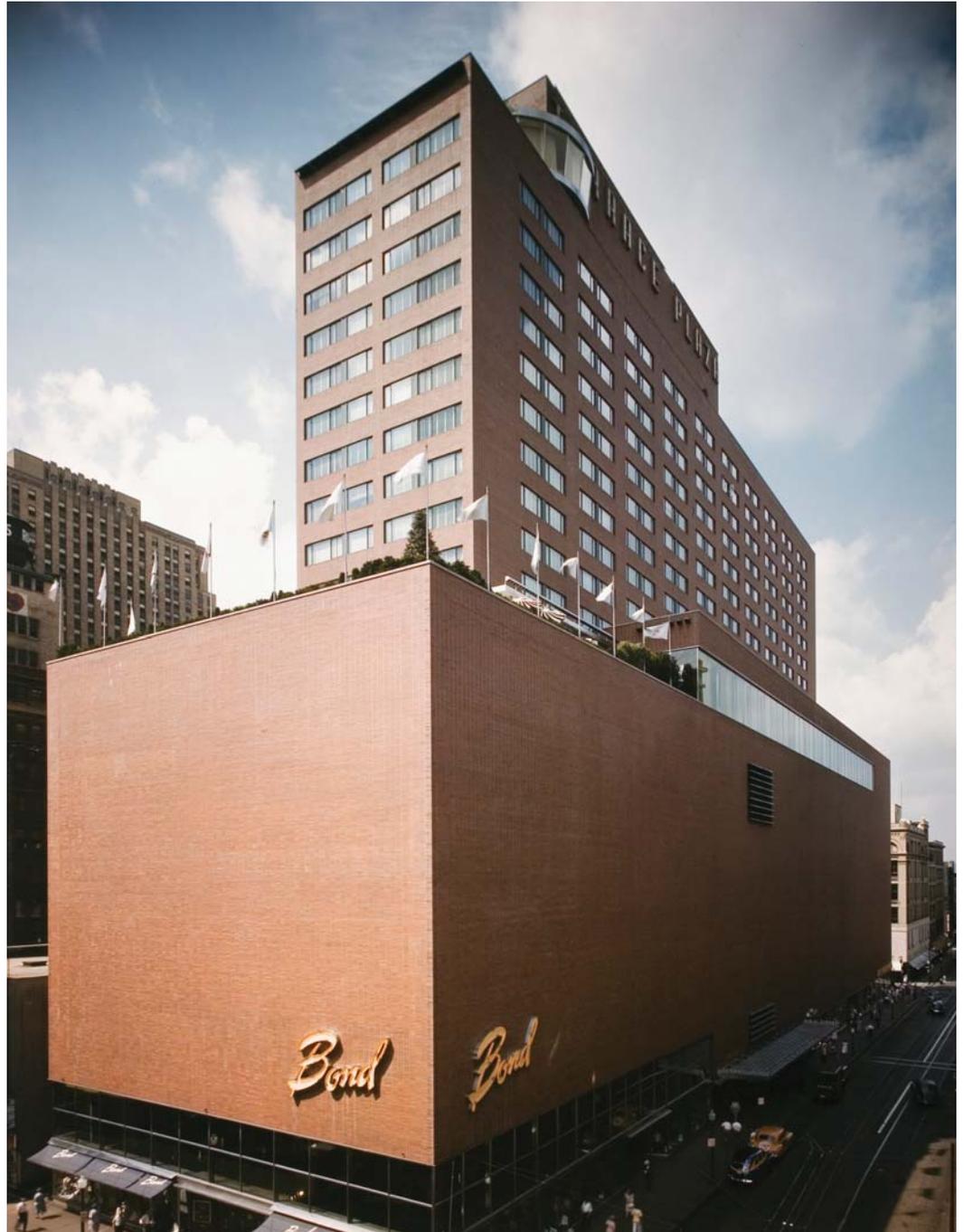
15 West Sixth Street
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202



I. History and significance

The Terrace Plaza Hotel (its original name) is the most important Modernist building in Cincinnati and is of national and even international significance. Designed in 1945-46 in the New York office of the renowned Modernist architectural firm of Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill (SOM), and built between 1946-48, it was the most progressive American hotel of its day and the first building by SOM to be widely published and receive national attention. So advanced were its design, aesthetics, and technology that it was jokingly called "the pushbutton palace." It contained spectacular interiors which featured modern art and design by major artists, architects and designers; indeed, it was acclaimed as the best synthesis of modern art and architecture in America of its day.

Developer John J. Emery, Jr. commissioned SOM for their Modernism and because he felt their lack of hotel experience would generate new ideas. The site was a challenging 90' deep x 400' long. SOM responded with a narrow, twenty-story steel frame skyscraper clad in a thin veneer of brick with vertically-aligned joints. A seven-story base contained two department stores, Bond and JC Penney, both opening at street level through continuously-glazed windows; those of the Bond store were two stories in height. Above rose five stories of blank brick. Some office space was included above the Bond store. At the eighth floor, the hotel - a slender, setback slab - rose an additional eleven stories from a landscaped roof terrace, floating serenely above the street noise below. This revolutionary urban form, a vertical slab atop a horizontal terrace-base, with a mixed-use program, echoed the Emerys' previous Carew Tower-Netherland Plaza Hotel complex of 1929-31, and forecast some of SOM's most famous buildings, such as Lever House, in New York, of 1950-52.

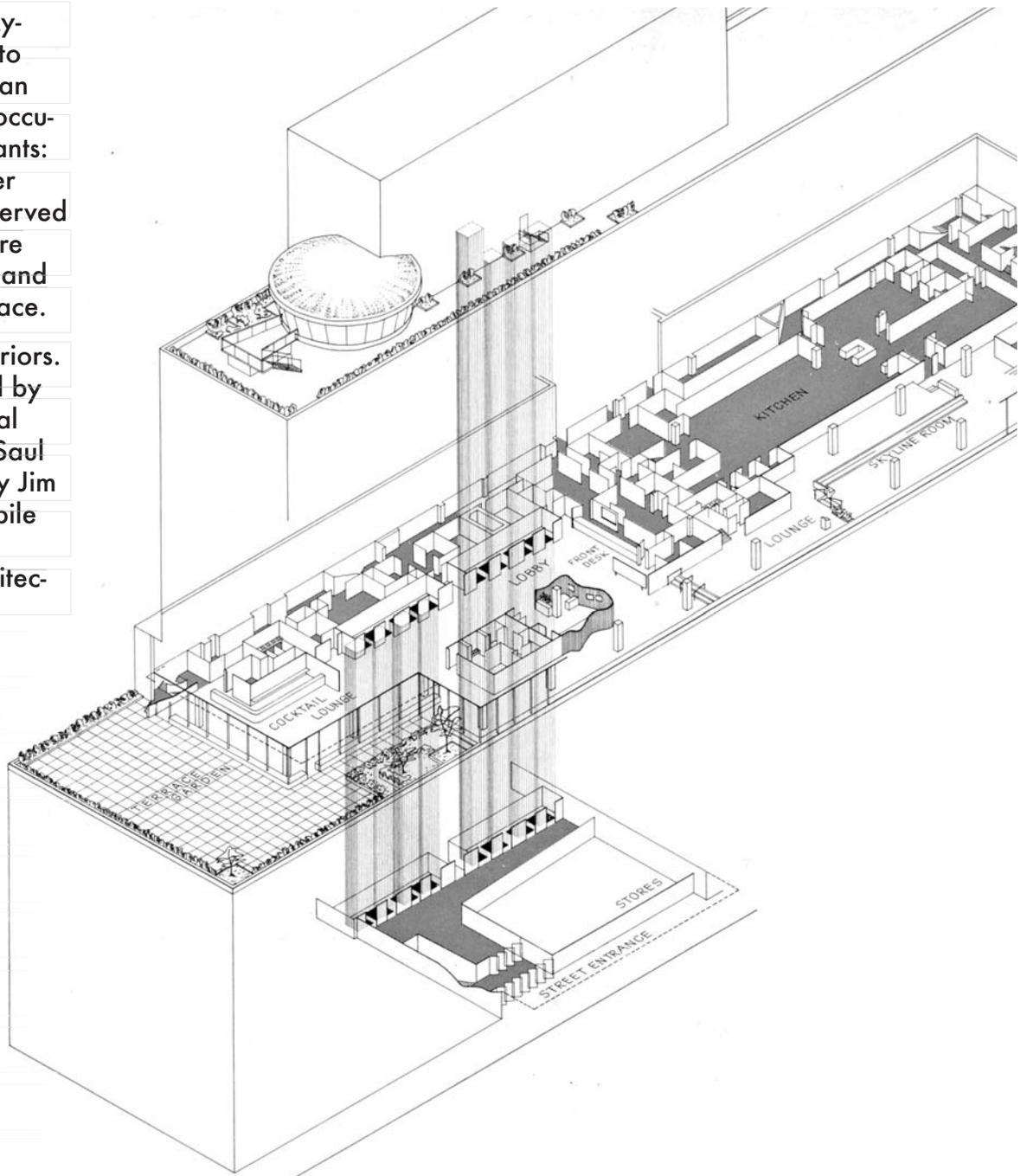


On the cover: Detail of brick on exterior of building. Photograph by Shawn Patrick Tubbs; Previous page: Gourmet Room restaurant, Terrace Plaza Hotel, Cincinnati, OH, with mural by Joan Miró (circa 1948). Photograph by Ezra Stoller / Esto; Above: Terrace Plaza Hotel, corner of Vine and 6th Streets, Cincinnati, OH (circa 1948). Photograph by Ezra Stoller / Esto.

The first fully-automated elevators in any American skyscraper whisked guests from the street-level vestibule to the eighth-floor hotel lobby. Four restaurants served an increasingly stratified clientele. The Plaza Cafeteria occupied the basement. The eighth floor had two restaurants: the Skyline Restaurant and the Terrace Café, a smaller restaurant and bar adjacent to the outdoor terrace, served primarily hotel guests. At the hotel's rooftop, the more exclusive Gourmet Room, a faceted cylinder of glass and steel, cantilevered over the edge of its own small terrace.

Emery commissioned modern artists to adorn the interiors. The Gourmet Room received a curving, 30-foot mural by Joan Miró; the Skyline Restaurant contained a satirical mural of the Cincinnati cityscape by New York artist Saul Steinberg; a multicolored, plexiglass wall sculpture by Jim Davis hung behind the Terrace Café bar; while a mobile by Alexander Calder enlivened the eighth-floor hotel lobby. It was one of the most successful art and architectural collaborations of any Modernist building.

SOM's design team included Louis Skidmore (from nearby Lawrenceburg, Indiana, and a graduate of the University of Cincinnati) with William Hartman as project manager. Because SOM's key designer, Gordon Bunshaft, was away in WWII, much of the building's design fell to Natalie DeBlois, a rare woman Modernist architect, trained at Columbia University while so many men were at war. She also did much of the interior design, assisted by Phyllis Hoffseimer. Other designers such as Benjamin Baldwin, Ward Bennett, Davis Allen, and others eventually helped to complete the interiors. They designed furniture, textiles, staff uniforms, tableware, graphics, and even ashtrays and matchbook covers. Morris Lapidus, a controversial architect later famous for his extravagant hotels (such as the Fontainebleau in Miami), designed the Bond department store interiors.



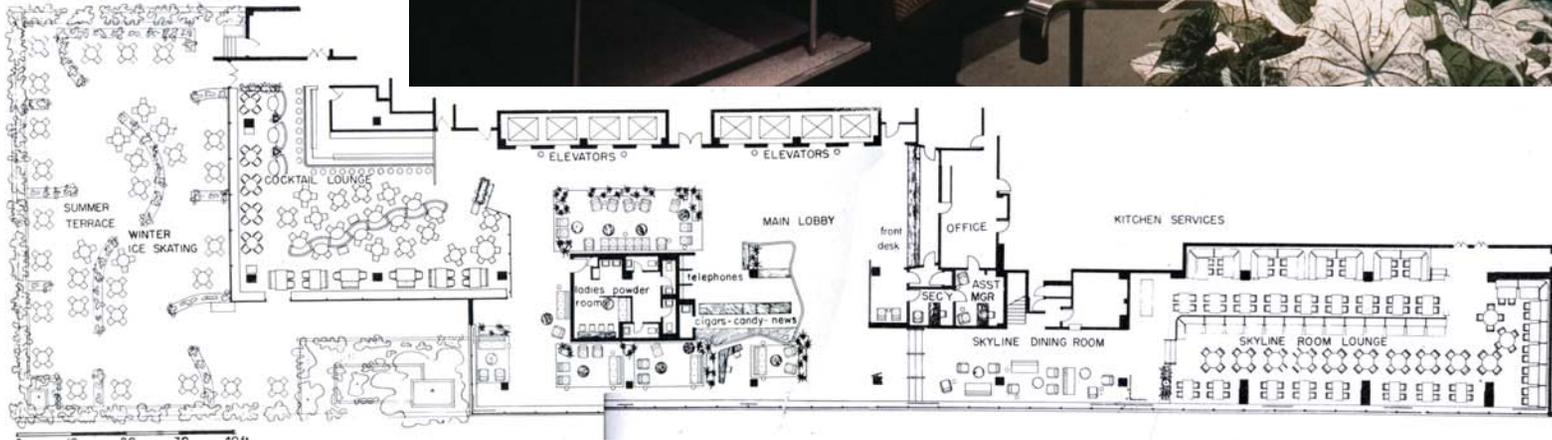
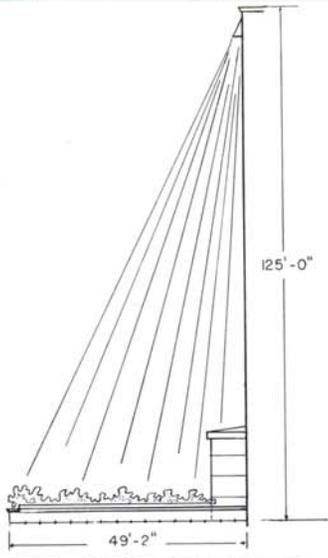
Axonometric drawing of Terrace Plaza Hotel, Cincinnati, OH, illustrating street-level entry, 8th floor hotel lobby, restaurants and terrace, and rooftop terrace and Gourmet Room restaurant. Drawing, collection of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, Architects, New York.



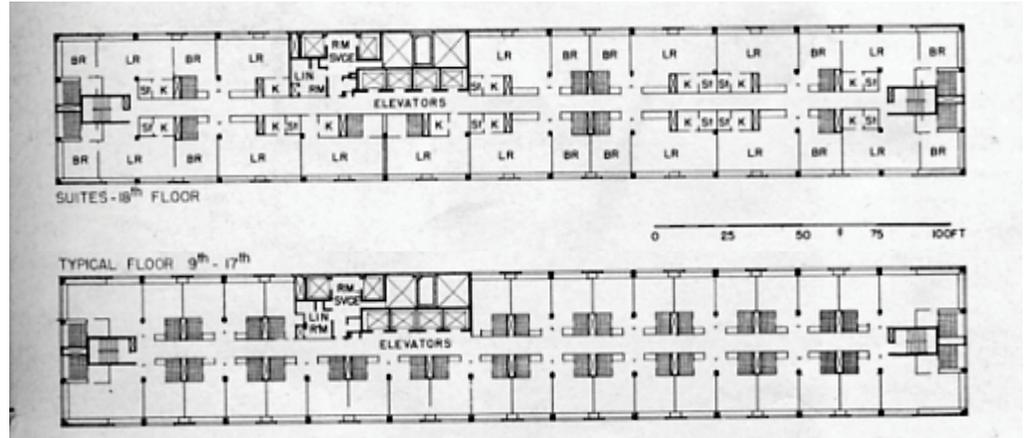
From top to bottom: Terrace Plaza Hotel, Cincinnati, OH, entry on 6th Street (circa 1948). Photograph by Ezra Stoller / Esto; Terrace Plaza Hotel entry on 6th Street (circa 1948). Photograph by Ezra Stoller / Esto.



Lobby on 8th floor of Terrace Plaza Hotel, Cincinnati, OH, with original furnishings and mobile by Alexander Calder (circa 1948). Photograph by Ezra Stoller / Esto; (inset) Postcard of Calder mobile, ca. 1948.



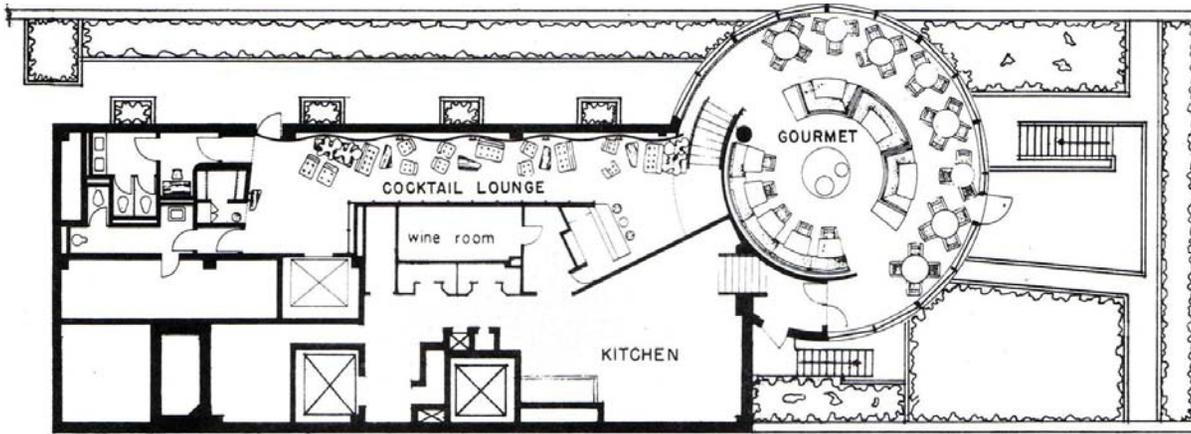
Counter-clockwise from upper right: Skyline Restaurant, on 8th floor of Terrace Plaza Hotel, Cincinnati, OH (circa 1948), with mural by Saul Steinberg. Photograph by Ezra Stoller / Esto; Detail of Steinberg mural; Floor plan of 8th floor of Terrace Plaza Hotel with lobby, Skyline Restaurant, terrace, etc., and diagram of terrace lighting and sketch of Steinberg mural. Drawing, collection of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, Architects, New York.



Counter-clockwise from upper left: View of hotel room; View of same hotel room with wall raised in to ceiling to create suite; View of bathroom with glass wall - all Terrace Plaza Hotel, Cincinnati, OH, circa 1948. Photographs by Ezra Stoller / Esto; Floor plans for 19th floor (originally apartment-style level) and typical of 9th through 18th floors (hotel floors), Terrace Plaza Hotel, Cincinnati, OH. Drawings, collection of SOM, New York.



From top to bottom: Sub-basement level loading dock, Terrace Plaza Hotel, Cincinnati, OH. Photograph by Ezra Stoller / Esto; Eighth floor kitchen, Terrace Plaza Hotel (circa 1948). Photograph by Ezra Stoller / Esto.



Counter-clockwise from top: Original floor plan of 20th-floor Gourmet Room restaurant, kitchen and terrace, Terrace Plaza Hotel, Cincinnati, OH. Drawing, collection of SOM, New York; View of cantilevered Gourmet Room restaurant and terrace; Night view of Gourmet Room restaurant from exterior - both Terrace Plaza Hotel (circa 1948). Photographs by Ezra Stoller / Esto.



JOAN MIRO



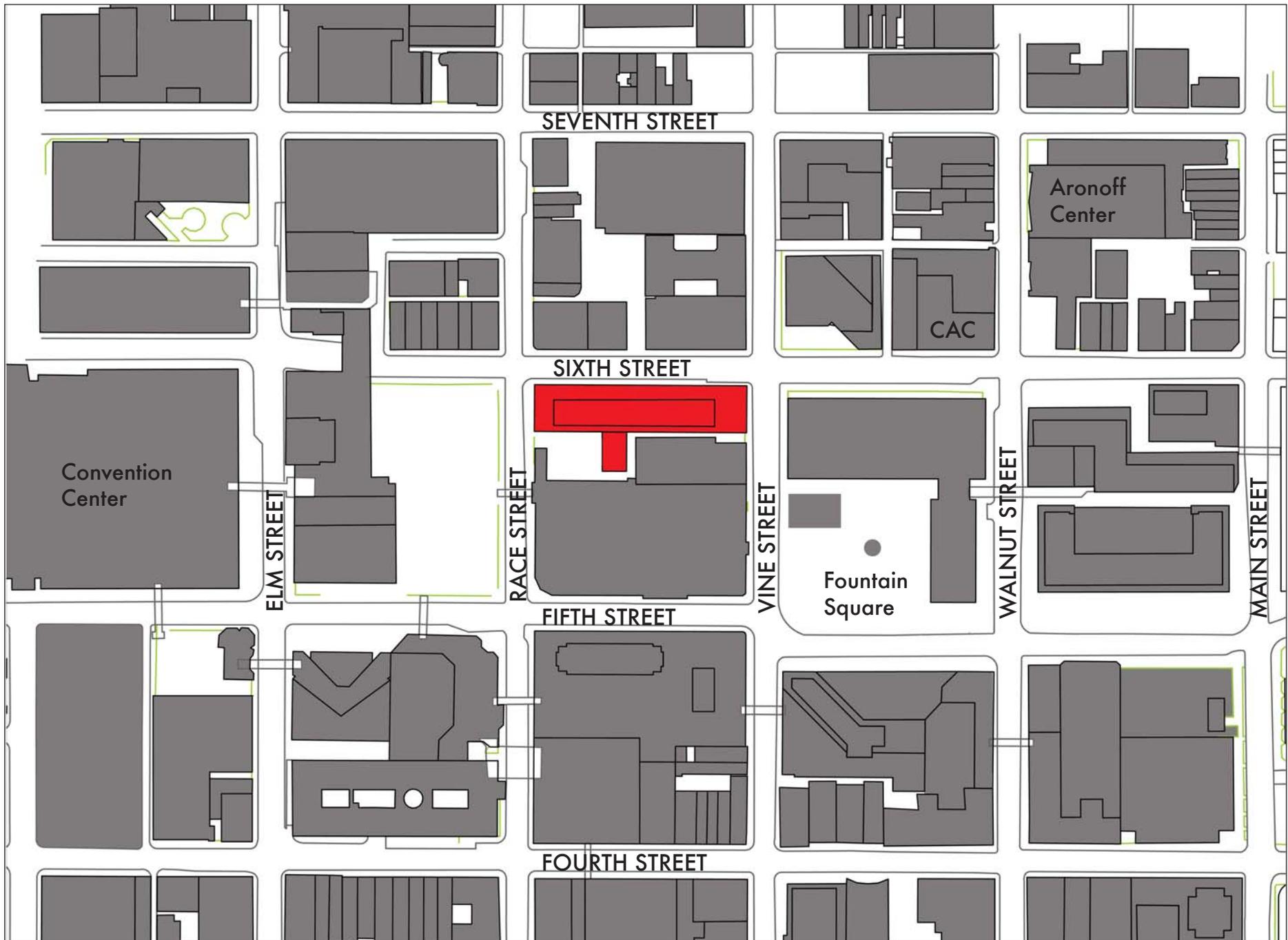
Clockwise from upper left: View of Gourmet Room restaurant, showing custom-designed furniture and panoramic views; View of Gourmet Room restaurant, showing Miró mural and diners - both 20th floor of Terrace Plaza Hotel, Cincinnati, OH (circa 1948). Photographs by Ezra Stoller / Esto; Postcard of Joan Miró mural, circa 1948.

II. Existing Conditions

The Emerys sold the hotel to the Hilton chain in 1965. The two-story, street-level Bond's department store windows were reduced to one story; the entrance on Sixth Street was altered to create a drive-through entrance; the Miró, Steinberg and Calder artworks went to the Cincinnati Art Museum and numerous other interior changes have occurred. Despite these, the Terrace Plaza remains one of the most significant buildings of the mid-20th-century and many original interior materials and detailing remains, such as entire walls of beautiful marble veneer, stainless steel-clad columns, woodwork, railings, balustrades, ceiling canopies, light fixtures, etc. Many of the original spaces are eminently restorable and there are 360 occupiable hotel rooms and roughly 250,000 of rentable square footage in the lower seven stories. There are currently several ground-floor tenants, including a hat shop, and a clothing retailer. The hotel closed in 2008 and is in need of significant rehabilitation efforts.



Terrace Plaza Hotel, corner of Vine and 6th Streets, Cincinnati, OH (circa October 2008). Photograph by Shawn Patrick Tubb.



Site plan of Terrace Plaza (in red) and surrounding context in downtown Cincinnati, Ohio.



Counter-clockwise from upper left: View of carport along Sixth Street; Street-level hotel lobby; Typical retail block converted office floor; View of west and south elevations; View south from Sixth and Vine Streets, showing hotel on right - all Terrace Plaza Hotel, Cincinnati, OH (circa October 2008). Photographs by Shawn Patrick Tubb.



Counter-clockwise from upper left: 8th-floor terrace, facing southeast; Former lounge area near 8th-floor Skyline Restaurant, showing original marble wall and stainless steel-clad columns; 8th-floor Skyline Restaurant, showing original stainless steel-clad columns and railings; 8th-floor elevator lobby, showing original marble wall and elevator doors - all Terrace Plaza Hotel, Cincinnati, OH (circa October 2008). Photographs by Shawn Patrick Tubb.



Clockwise from upper left: View of 11th-floor hotel room corridor; View of roof penthouse, facing east; View of Gourmet Room, showing 1960s-era renovations - all Terrace Plaza Hotel, Cincinnati, OH (circa October 2008). Photographs by Shawn Patrick Tubb.