

The Rebirth of McDonald's on St. Charles Avenue

An Analysis and Presentation



Introduction

McDonald's has been operating this restaurant at 3321 St Charles Ave since 1984.



This location has always served a diverse demographic. Low to middle income families have enjoyed being able to find this pleasant and affordable dining experience along the Avenue. McDonald's not only serves people of all walks of life, but also hires workers and managers from the area.

Previous Use

Prior to McDonald's the neighborhood enjoyed having a **Frostop Drive-In** at that location for many years. So for decades this location has been home to a quick service restaurant.

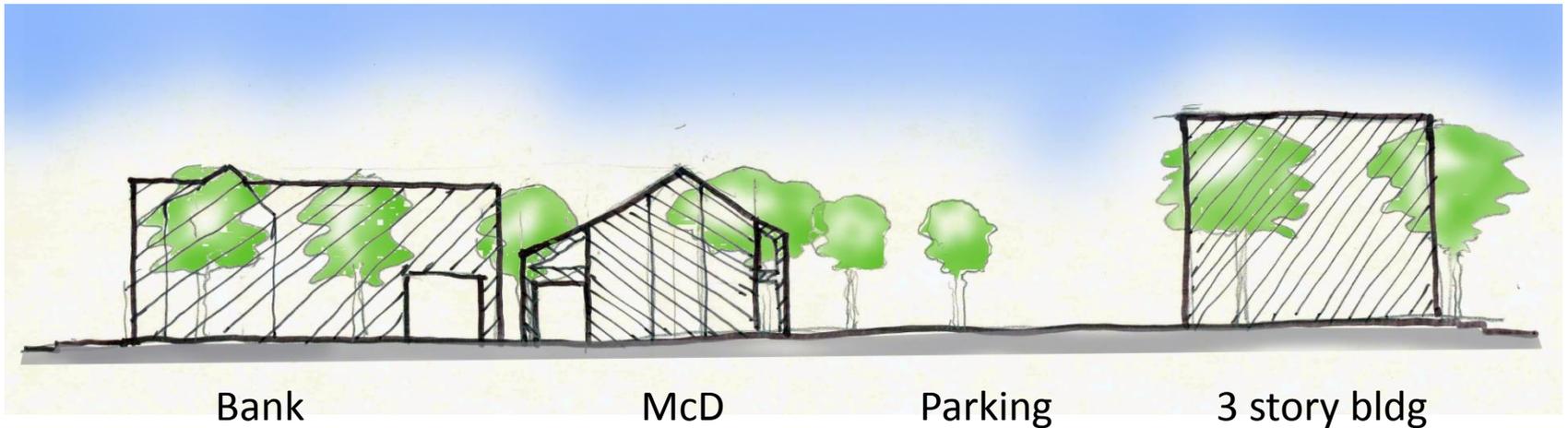


Functional Obsolescence

This much lauded McDonald's restaurant which has prospered for the past 34 years has finally reached its functional obsolescence. While the award-winning exterior design by notable architects **Hewitt and Washington** still stands proud, there are too many functional shortcomings of the building and site which must be overcome to keep the restaurant viable. Studies have found that these are too insurmountable to be corrected by a simple renovation.

1. The **second floor dining** area, which contains the majority of the restaurant seating and is visually cut off from the main operation, was impossible to supervise and rarely utilized by customers. It was eventually closed for concerns of security for both workers and patrons, severely limiting the seating capacity of the restaurant.

2. At some point, the adjacent property on the downtown side became available and was incorporated into the site as sorely needed additional parking. This annexation left the massing of the building **proportionally off-center**, a hole in the streetscape.



3. The current configuration of the site does not lend itself to efficient **vehicle maneuvering** for either the customer or for service vehicles. This congestion causes a bottleneck on site which leads to a back up of cars, hindering the traffic on St. Charles Avenue. McDonald's, which built it's reputation on speed and efficiency of service, has developed new patterns of onsite traffic flow, including having two drive through order points and traffic bypass lanes. To implement this efficient scheme requires locating the building more centered on the site.

4. McDonald's has always prided itself on the customer experience and today is very focused on this aspect. As mentioned before, the majority of the current dining configuration is located in an inaccessible unsupervised upstairs dining room. Not only is an increase in **ground level seating** a must, but the current building does not relate the customer well to the Avenue.

The proposal affords a fantastic opportunity to pull the dining room forward with an entrance **relating directly to the sidewalk** and Avenue. Blowout the front wall to create a light filled open dining space where patrons can enjoy the avenue's ambiance of beautiful Oaks, Street cars, and history.

Neighborhood/Context

Let's step back and look at the neighborhood. This portion of Saint Charles Avenue is host to a variety of architectural styles, without any one period or form being prevalent.

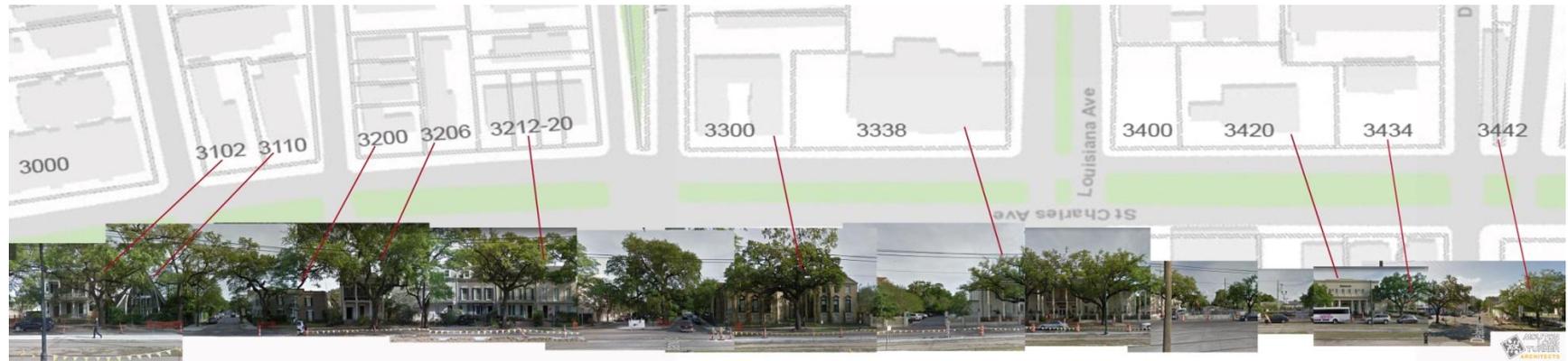
1. Here is a photo montage of the streetscape on the north side, two blocks in each direction.



And as we look closer, it is evident that there are buildings from different periods with unique styles.



2. Let's turn to the streetscape opposite the site, and the same can be said.





Farther away from the site are a number of modernist buildings which are not true to the original history of Saint Charles Avenue, but have contributed in a positive way to the contextual fabric and prove that the Avenue is ever evolving .

Building design

Design Philosophy

Good infill is a building that is sympathetic to the surrounding buildings and historic context and creates new structures that enhance and complement the existing.

Much has been written in the architectural press regarding inserting a new building into an historic context, and three approaches are defined: compatibility by copy, congruence, or contrast.

The third approach of adding **contrast** makes a building and surroundings new again, such as the Louvre pyramid.



At first vision one may doubt the fact that the contrast can lead to homogeneity between the added building and the original, but it has proven to be a very successful strategy.



Discussions

In meeting with the **HDLC staff**, it was discussed that copying historic detailing or picking one style to abstract would not be appropriate in this location, that is, to avoid replication of historic styles to give the false impression of a re-purposed building. They suggested moving the building facade more in line with the neighbors and minimizing views of parking.

The most important aspects to consider are harmony in: appropriate **scale, massing, proportion**, and **position** on the site.

In meeting with the various **neighborhood group** representatives, there was spirit of understanding and cooperation. Their main concerns were: traffic impact, litter, green space, and safety of pedestrians at the drive-thru exit. They were **not opposed to demolishing** the old building.

As far as the discussions of the building design, they emphasized that the building needs to be respectful and look important, they would like to see an upscale look that didn't emote a corporate franchise image, and they were **not opposed to something contemporary**--the glass box design of an Apple store was discussed.



A clean, honest, contemporary design devoid of historical detailing – – a simple broad stroke approach. As Lonnie Hewitt most eloquently stated back in 1984, his goal was to make the new structure "honest and clean".

This undertaking is the Rebirth of a McDonald's restaurant, this is not a bank, this is not a museum, this is not a condo development, this is not a grocery store, the goal is to be honest that this is **a McDonald's in a historic district**. Our design approach is to look at how to incorporate McDonald's history into the historical fabric of St. Charles Avenue.

History

It is important to remember that McDonald's was started back in the early 1950s and that was a period of great enthusiasm and experimentation, racing to the future.

Stanley Clarke Meston was the architect chosen by McDonald's to bring their vision to reality. He designed a modern, dynamic building with a soaring roof line which became a part of the American cultural landscape until the design was abandoned in the 1970s – – *about the same time the quality of music took a nosedive* – – but I digress...



There of been there of been a number of custom designs for McDonald's restaurants in urban areas throughout the world,



The most recent being the proposed redevelopment of the 20,000 square-foot McDonald's at Ontario and Clark Streets in Downtown Chicago.



For every good architectural design there must be a concept or theme which drives the design. In that location it was the McDonald's of the future. In our location it will also be a McDonald's of the future but with **reference to the past.**

Design approach

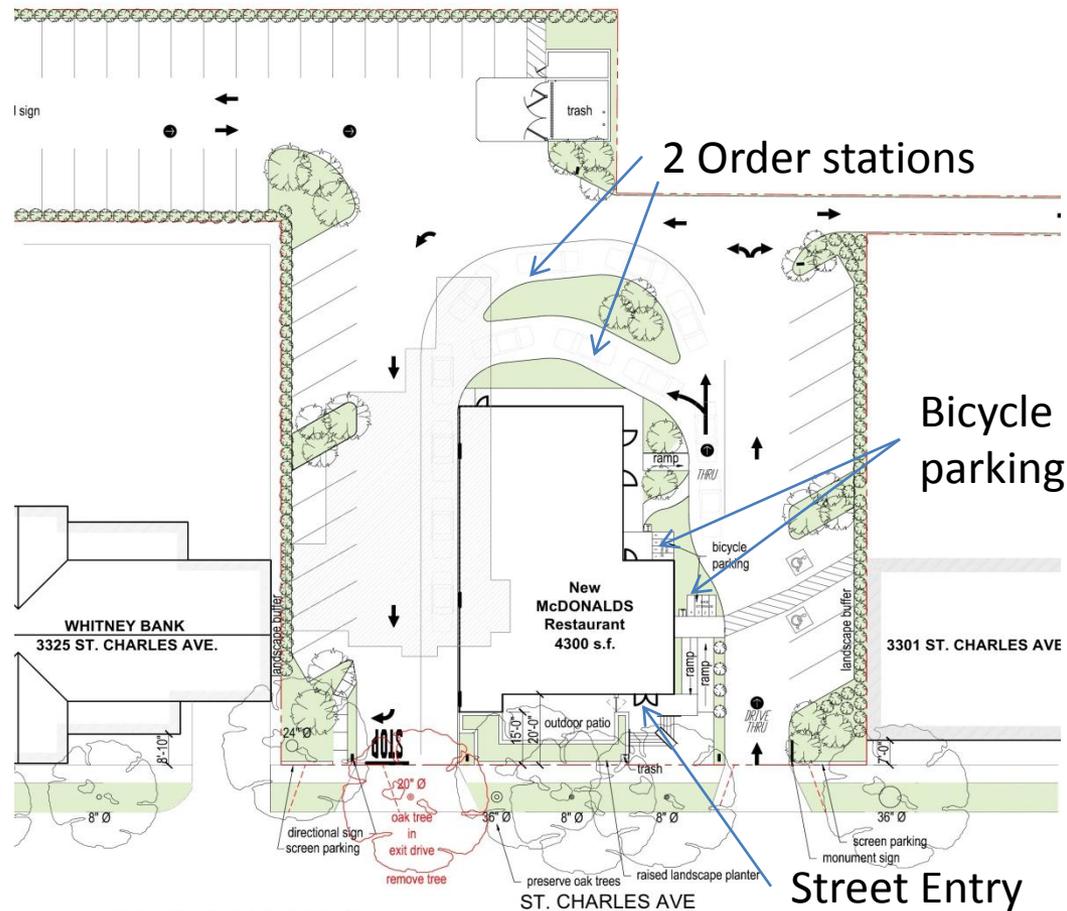
1. Site Design

In siting the new building, care was taken to locate the front of the development in-line with the prevailing **setbacks** on the block, and creating a **massing/height – width ratio** that would also be harmonious. The **orientation** of the front entrance shall be readily accessible to pedestrians and commuters.

The new design is considerably wider than the existing footprint and places it more central on the site. To complete the theme of lot coverage there shall be low architectural walls to screen the parking and expand the street presence.

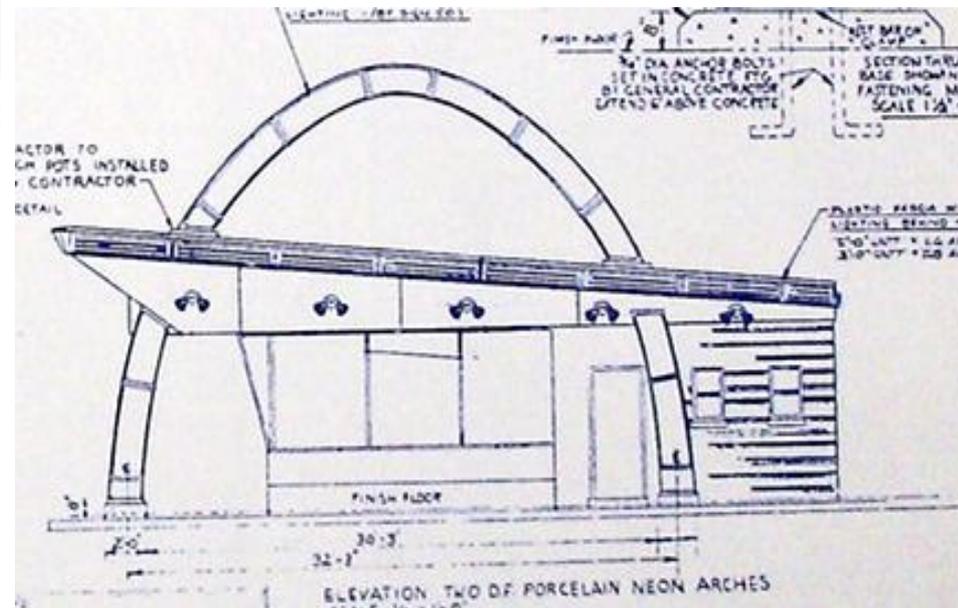
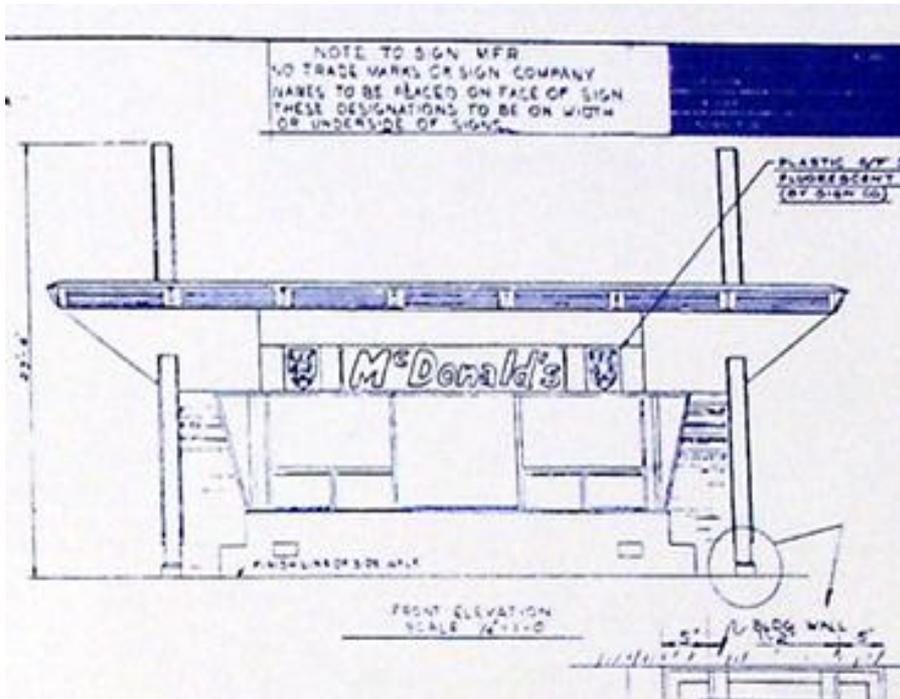
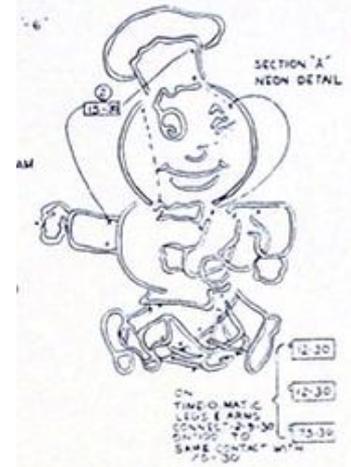


Drive-through activity, ordering, car stacking, and deliveries are relegated to the rear of the property and organized in such a way as to minimize any negative effects either visually or to street traffic. The front landscaped terrace again addresses the street... There shall be more landscape islands in the parking lot to **green it up**. This new restaurant will be more **bicycle** and **pedestrian** friendly.



2. Building Design

Metson's design of the original prototype with the angled roof shape soaring upward, inviting and dynamic, is still relevant today.



Here are some wonderful examples:



This last example being the Ray and Joan Kroc Salvation Army Community Center in Phoenix.

Nestled among the oaks of St. Charles Ave., the proposed design relates to the pedestrian nature of the neighborhood with low planting in the front buffering an **entry terrace** which also can serve as a **sidewalk cafe**.



Sidewalk Café ***At the 11th hour, the neighborhood association voted to eliminate the sidewalk café in lieu of additional front landscaping.***

The **cascading steps** up to the terrace are positioned around a pedestal for a sculptural element, adding **street art** to the neighborhood.



Entry Plaza

Building design shall be **honest**, clean, and contemporary with a simple, single sloped roof line in homage to the original design envisioned by Stanley Clarke Meston in 1953, which expresses the optimism of the company and of the times. The rhythm of expansive glass panels expresses that the building is open, inviting, and safe. It is a design that can relate to the neighborhood and **speaks of the use** itself. An upscale flagship forward thinking design which could potentially be a tourist attraction.



Street View Looking Uptown

Materials shall be simple and timeless with a distinctive lack of ornamentation and detail: masonry, stucco, glass, and steel.



Street View Looking Downtown



St. Charles Avenue Elevation



Right Side Elevation



Left Side Elevation

McDonald's, from the beginning, has been innovative in all aspects of its buildings and operations. Again McDonald's, in present day, is reborn and experimenting with new techniques in taking orders and enhancing the customer experience in positive ways. They are on the forefront of healthier menu items and new ways to be environmentally sensitive, as well as making scholarships available for over 400,000 qualified employees.

The new restaurant will feature both touch-screen kiosks and face to face service, plus integrate the restaurant's mobile app in new ways. The restaurant also aims to be more friendly to Uber Eats delivery drivers, mobile ordering, and curbside pickups. There will also be an "enhanced" McCafé presence.

Through cooperation with the city and neighborhoods, and addressing their concerns, McDonald's strives to rebuild this premiere location in a positive way and continue its reputation as being a contributing asset to the community.

