

# Our Moonlighting Pilot Tour

By Joy Chodan



When you think of locations in the *Moonlighting Pilot*, what's the first thing that springs to mind? Chances are it's the hotel where David goes to convince Maddie not to close the agency and the clock tower where Maddie and David uncover the diamonds. Surprisingly, both landmarks are not very far away from each other in downtown LA. Diana, Christie, and I were fortunate to visit the Westin Bonaventure Hotel and the Eastern Columbia Building on February 12th, 2005.

We were determined to find these two very special symbols that started Maddie and David's adventure. Our first stop was the Westin Bonaventure Hotel. Unfortunately, the famous elevators would not take us to the LA Prime restaurant on the 35th floor until 4:30pm. And so we were off to find the clock tower. I had remembered from the pilot that the location to the clock tower was mentioned by Maddie as the North West corner of 9th and Broadway. The further we walked towards our destination the worse our surroundings got. The neighborhood was dirty, loud, and anything but friendly. Diana was the first to see the very edge of the building. We were thrilled to finally see it with our own eyes, a magnificent

array of blue, turquoise, and gold. Just to know that this was the actual clock tower we were admiring was very moving and nostalgic. But it was very unfortunate to see this special gem surrounded in such a run down area. To

our surprise the building was only viewable on two sides. The other two were just plain and dulled out. When we peeked inside, we saw there was nothing. The building is just a shell of what it once was.

The Eastern Columbia Building, now a historical landmark of Los Angeles, was designed by Claud Beelman, and opened on September 12th, 1930 after just nine short months of construction. Built of steel reinforced concrete and clad in glossy turquoise terra cotta trimmed with deep blue and gold terra cotta, designed as the new headquarters of the Eastern Outfitting Company, Columbia Outfitting Company, furniture and clothing stores, were originally a department store. Located in the Broadway Theater and Commercial District, the Eastern Columbia Building is thirteen stories high, and was one of the largest buildings constructed in downtown Los Angeles until after WWII.

The magnificent green and gold façade is especially dear to Los Angeles Art Deco fans because it is made of terra cotta. Though not exclusive to Southern

California architecture, terra cotta was used extensively in monumental projects of the early 20th century due to the unavailability of local marble or granite. The terra cotta has withstood the decades, but not so the gothic-influenced clock (which once chimed the quarter hours) or the neon ornament — neither work. The building's vertical emphasis is accentuated by deeply recessed bands of paired windows and spandrels with copper panels separated by vertical columns. The façade is decorated with a wealth of motifs - sunburst patterns, geometric shapes, zigzags, chevrons and stylized animal and plant forms. The building is capped with a four-sided clock tower emblazoned with the name Eastern in neon and crowned with a central smokestack surrounded by four stylized flying buttresses. Originally, the central main entrance had a spectacular recessed two-story

Christie and I tried to trace the same footsteps Bruce and Cybill made at the elevator.



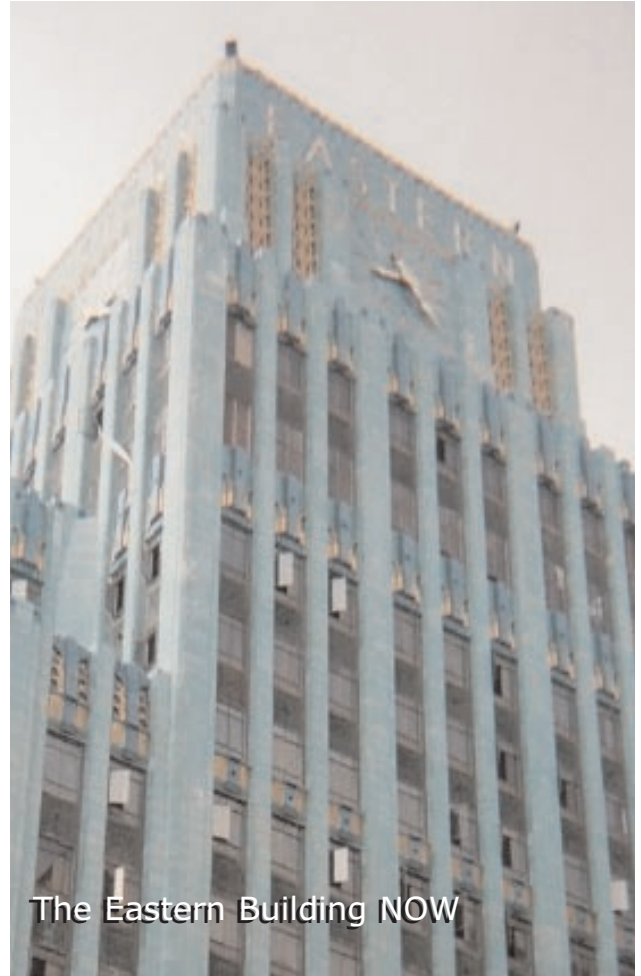
vestibule adorned with a blue and gold terra cotta sunburst. The vestibule led to a pedestrian retail arcade running through the center of the building.

However, the future looks optimistic for Eastern Columbia building, the Los Angeles Times has reported that there are plans to repair the building to be suitable for offices and condominiums. New amenities would include a rooftop gym, a pool and cabanas. Such features echo the luxuries found in the building in 1930, when self-made merchant Adolph Sieroty opened the opulent retail and office tower. He installed a model bungalow and recreation area on the roof of his combined department stores, the Eastern and Columbia Outfitting companies. We can all hope that our beloved clock tower will be standing as bright and beautiful for a long time to come.

After taking several pictures of the building, we quickly returned to the Westin Bonaventure Hotel. Still early, we walked around taking in the architecture of this famous hotel. There are several elevators all color coded. The elevator that we took to the 35th floor was red. However in the pilot, the elevators are not lit by different colors. The hotel has not only been used to film scenes from the *Moonlighting* pilot, but also for many of Hollywood's hit movies such as 1982 sci-fi epic *Blade Runner*, (starring Harrison Ford), the 1998 Oscar-winning drama *Rain Man*, (with Dustin Hoffman and Tom Cruise), just to name a few. It is located in the center of the downtown financial district, amid Los Angeles' cultural and shopping venues. Known as a city-within-a-city, the Westin Bonaventure Hotel was designed by John Portman and opened in 1978. The four cylinders that flank the central cylinder are made of mirrored glass and contain luxury rooms and suites. Inside of the square base of the building can be found reflecting pools, glass elevators that climb the sides, and eight levels of shops and restaurants. A restaurant on the 35th floor boasts a

revolving cocktail lounge that provides a 360 degree panoramic view of L.A. The Bonaventure is the largest hotel in Los Angeles, with 1368 rooms (468 more rooms than any other hotel in Downtown Los Angeles).

Finally it was time to go up to the restaurant. When we got there we were unpleasantly told that we could only walk around the revolving part of the lounge, the BonaVista, which was one flight down.. Although a magnificent view, it was obvious that this could not have possibly been where the scene in the pilot was shot. We headed back upstairs to the 35th floor and found the elevators and the coat check counter where Maddie and David went. From what we could tell, there were several elevator shots edited in the scenes. Also, the coat check was really a bar set up to look like a coat check in the pilot. Frustrated and curious, I wanted to see the rest of the restaurant so Diana suggested that I quickly walk through. Quiet, elegant, and set up for dinner, it looked exactly the same with tables set along side the huge windows. I knew immediately that this was indeed where Bruce and Cybill shot the restaurant scene 20 years ago. Once again I felt moved by the nostalgia of it all and was happy to know that both locations after 20 years are still here to visit and enjoy.



The Eastern Building NOW



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