

# A Self Storage Facility with a Historic Theme

## Route 66 Self Storage

By Poppy Behrens

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For years, Bill Fox drove past a large vacant lot on a stretch of Foothill Boulevard in Pomona between his house and his office nearly every day. As president of WF Construction Inc., based in San Dimas, Calif., he'd built over \$400 million dollars in developments that were primarily apartments, shopping centers, and industrial buildings. However, due to the topography of the lot—it has a 14-foot drop from front to back—he knew that the land could never be used as such. "You'll never get a retailer in there because there is essentially a hole," he says, "and you can't build houses because of backyards and things like that, so I came up with a wild hair that I could put a storage facility there. I started researching it, and fortunately hooked up with a great architect."



That architect was Bruce Jordan, president of San Clemente, Calif.-based Jordan Architects. "Bill came down to our office for a meeting and we had a wide range of self-storage product types on display," says Jordan. "I think he was pleased because there was a wide range of possibilities." The next step, according to Jordan, was dealing with the unique challenges of the location. The site is a big, long rectangle of which there is a big chunk taken out of it so you have fairly restrictive lot that is wide at the back with very narrow street frontage," he explains. "It gave us a challenge. How do we make the project visible and noteworthy with the visible frontage that we had to work with?" Unfortunately, when Jordan drew up some conventional designs and went in to talk to the city planners in Pomona, he discovered that they were negative about the idea of any kind of a self-storage facility being built on that site.

## **A Historical Twist**

"We never take no for an answer, so we went back and tried to come up with something that would have some historical basis for that particular area," laughs Jordan, going on to explain, "Foothill Boulevard, where it goes through Pomona, was a part of the old Route 66 many, many years ago."

Fox had developed several projects along old Route 66, including restaurants and department stores that had played off of the theme to help promote business. The City of Pomona, however, hadn't used the Route 66 theme yet, so Jordan and Fox decided to take on the task of showing them the value of the unique marketing concept. "We showed them that by using this theme, we could market ourselves and the city much better," says Fox. "It was a win-win situation for everyone."

Jordan immediately began researching the architectural era of the historic highway in its heyday—the 1930s and 40s, when art deco was popular. "We hit on that theme and did some quick renderings, took them down to the city planners, and left them for a few days," he says. While the reception was still negative at first, Jordan received a surprise phone call from the city a few days later. "They said, 'We really like this.'" So the whole thing turned around and the entire planning staff got behind us."

Jordan and his staff developed the idea further and began authenticating details such as neon lighting and steel windows. One of the predominant themes of art deco era that they decided to use is vertical signage that seem to lean out from a building, much like the signs seen on

old hotels in Miami, Fla. that were built in that era. Additionally, ornamental Art Deco details were utilized including many from the early part of the machine age. Jordan explains that as the machine age gained momentum, many new designs found their way into the automobiles and architecture of the era.

“We used stainless steel projected overhangs around the office, and the type of steel windows that were used in the day, and a lot of neon,” says Jordan. “We also designed the office and retail area to include a lot of thematic elements.”

## **A Stroll Down Memory Lane**

From its black and white checkered floor to its chrome trim, Route 66 Self Storage is indeed a stroll down memory lane. And because Fox realized the importance of these thematic elements, he made it a point to seek out Route 66 memorabilia for the facility, all of which is emphasized by an incredible mural located in the 18-foot tall rotunda that serves as an office. “We’ve taken a map of Route 66 from Chicago all the way into Santa Monica and had it made into a mural by an artist in her studio,” he says. “It’s painted on a canvas wall-paper-like system that was brought here and installed and covers three walls.” Adding to the vintage ambiance are model planes hanging from the ceiling, an antique gas pump from the 1930s—the kind that has the glass bottle on top—and the old photos of Route 66 that adorn the walls. Also in the works is a 1957 Chevy Nomad station wagon that is being restored and converted into a retail display for boxes, locks and packing materials.

“We wanted a real warm look, when customers walked in,” says Fox, “almost like you were at the concierge desk at a hotel.” As such, the front counter is large and accommodating with granite counter tops and custom-made cabinetry that complete the look, and bar stools at the counter that invite customers to come in and sit down for a while. Best of all, new customers are treated to a Route 66 themed t-shirt that has been a big hit!

“I see the t-shirts all over town now, which is fun,” says Fox. “I was shopping in the grocery store the other day and saw someone with one on. I asked them about it and they said they had kidnapped it from their daughter who had just rented a unit.”

## **Mixing The Old And The New**

Despite its historical look, Route 66 Self Storage is a state-of-the-art facility from its security system and its management software to its large retail showroom. All units are individually alarmed with large doors and walk-up access, and in addition to a keypad access system, the facility has 18 video cameras located throughout the site.

"We have four two-story buildings but we don't use elevators," says Fox. "We've used the topography and the 14-foot drop to our advantage and created a ramp system." In addition to second story access, the ramp system, designed by Jordan, increased the facility's floor area (FAR) ratio, which in turn made the project even more viable. "We paid quite a big premium for being right on Foothill Boulevard," says Fox. "Most people can't afford to be on a main thoroughfare, but we increased our FAR by adding a second floor."

Since opening on January 20, 2003, Route 66 is renting an average of two units a day. The facility's 974 units include some climate controlled spaces—a concept that started out small to test the market since there are very few competitors that offer it. With 50 percent of those specialty spaces already rented, Fox is looking to add additional climate-controlled units in the near future.

*Poppy Behrens is the executive editor of the Mini-Storage Messenger.*

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