

ROCKPORT CENTER FOR THE ARTS KLINE'S CAFÉ BUILDING
106 South Austin Street
Rockport
Aransas County
Texas

WRITTEN HISTORICAL DESCRIPTIVE DATA
AND
PHOTOGRAPHS

MODIFIED HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

Submitted to:
Texas Historical Commission
1511 Colorado
Austin, Texas 78701

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ROCKPORT CENTER FOR THE ARTS - KLINE'S CAFÉ BUILDING

- Location:** 106 South Austin Street, Rockport, Aransas County, Texas
UTM: 14
Quad: Rockport
- Present Owner:** Rockport Center for the Arts, Inc.
- Present Use:** Art Center
- Significance:** Kline's Café is significant under Criterion C, architecture, as a good example of Art Moderne at the local level of significance.
- Project Information:** Modified Historic American Building Survey (HABS) Level II equivalent documentation was performed in July 2020. Deborah Dobson-Brown, Senior Architectural Historian, prepared the historic context and historic documentation package. Pamela Stranahan assisted with the archival research. Photo documentation was conducted in June 2020 by Pamela Fulcher, Architectural Photographer. Photographs for this report were taken with 35mm film and have been reproduced following National Park Service (NPS) standards. This Modified HABS recordation serves as mitigation for the relocation and reuse of the structure.
- List of Preparers:** Deborah Dobson-Brown and Cherise Bell
Senior Architectural Historians
AmaTerra Environmental, Inc.
Austin, Texas

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

- 1. Date of Construction:** 1942
- 2. Architect/Engineer:** Unknown
- 3. Builder/Contractor/Supplier:** Kline's Café was designed by local builder Ava Odle Freeman, Sr.
- 4. Original Plans:** Not available.
- 5. Alterations and Additions:** In the 1960s a shed roof rear addition, approximately 400 square feet, was added to the east façade.

B. Historical Context:

1. Introduction

Kline's Café is in the town of Rockport, Texas on the Gulf of Mexico. Rockport was settled just after the American Civil War when William S. Hall chose the deep-water port for the location of his cattle slaughter and packing business (Shukalo 2020). Fishing and boatbuilding industries followed. The town incorporated in 1870. The railroad came in 1886, facilitating shipment of goods, but also bringing tourists which added to the economic health of the town. In 1925 the shrimping industry started to grow and continues today.

Rockport grew steadily over the years with a population of 1,382 in 1914, 1,729 in the 1940s, and 3,900 in 1970. An art festival was founded in 1969 to stimulate the arts economy and continues to be held each July. In 1989 fishing, shrimping, and tourism remained the main economic forces of the town. The 2010 census listed the population at 8,766. Rockport derived its name from a rock ledge underlying its shore.

2. Development of the Kline's Cafe

Located at the corner of South Austin and East North Streets (106 S. Austin Street) is Kline's Café. Locals state the spot has been occupied by a restaurant since the 1920s. Three brothers, Marvin, Jack, and Charlie Davis were the first to operate a business at this location by opening a coffee shop (Merchant & Betz 2019: 292). Around 1942, a fire burned down Cap Davis' Place [restaurant]. Details of the fire, such as the cause and specific date are unknown. Mollie Davis, wife of Captain Charles A. Davis, hired local bridge builder, Alva O. Freeman, Sr. to rebuild the café. Freeman studied mechanical Engineering at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock and served in the Navy during World War I. According to Mr. Freeman's son, John, building material was scarce at that time due to World War II. John remembers his dad searching all over South Texas to find enough material for the structure (Freeman 2012: 95). Freeman was able to locate a cache of shellcrete building blocks to reconstruct the cafe (ACHS 2018: 3). A 1942 newspaper article states Mr. and Mrs. C.A. Davis opened "Cap Davis Place" on Main Street (Rockport Pilot 1942).

Captain Davis died January 1945. The Davis family retained ownership but, leased the building. A 1945 school yearbook has a photograph of the restaurant as part of Hinton's Café advertisement, yet "CAPT. DAVIS. DRIVEIN" is plainly visible on the building.

Herbert "Shorty" Kline, and his wife, Gloria leased the building in 1963 (Merchant & Betz 2019: 293). The Klins purchased the property from C.A. and Mollye [sic] Davis in 1968 with a promissory note of \$32,000 (Warranty Deed Volume 139, Page 133). One source stated the Klins operated their café until Shorty's retirement

in 1970 (Merchant & Betz 2019: 293). However, Rockport's 1967 phone book has Brocato's Café listed at 106 S. Austin, indicating the Klines leased the building as early as 1967. Oral history states that a rear addition, with a kitchen, was added in the 1960s.

The Klines sold the building in 2002 (Warranty Deed No. 250858). Other businesses which occupied the building included, Felder [Art] Gallery c. 2004 (TPR 2020), La Luna c. 2011 (RoadArch n.d.), and Winery by the Bay c. 2016 (RoadArch n.d.). The Rockport Art Association (RCA) purchased the building in 2016. RCA proposed to move the building to develop as an Art Museum and sculpture garden.

PART II. STRUCTURAL/DESIGN INFORMATION

A. General Description:

Kline's Café is an Art Moderne style building with flat-roof, smooth stucco walls, curved corners, and glass block windows. The parapet is heightened above the central doors and again above the corners. Below the parapet is a raised stringcourse which tops a horizontal band of concave circles. Below the circles is another stringcourse of black tiles. A total of six vertical lines of black tile rise from the stringcourse, with three per curved corner. A cantilevered, stepped arched canopy is over the recessed entry. Curved walls with glass blocks flank the front doors. Adjacent to the glass block windows and located on the flat walls of the front façade, are fixed windows. Glass block windows are on the outer curved corners of the building.

The raised stringcourse, the concave circles, and black tile stringcourse wrap around both sides of building. The south façade of the buildings has two sets of three, wood-framed windows with six over six lights. The north façade has a total of five windows of which three match the openings of the south façade windows, but only one is uncovered. An additional two, wood-framed windows (located toward the front façade) have eight lights. The stucco around all the window openings is rounded at the top corner edges, save for the glass block windows which have 90-degree corners. A door with a half glass panel is also on the north facade. A non-historic fenced-in concrete patio is located on the north façade. The east façade or rear facade has a small, 1960s shed roof addition and two solid doors.

Rockport Center for the Arts (RCA) hired Richter Architects in January 2020 to conduct a feasibility study to incorporate Kline's Café as part of RCA's new complex. The following information is taken directly from Richter Architect's report.

“The Kline Building sits at the northwest corner of the property. It is approximately 3,000 square feet in area. It has a slab on grade foundation, masonry and stucco walls, [and] wood frame roof. Its floor elevation is within the FEMA flood plane [sic].”

1. Character:

Art Moderne style.

2. Condition of Fabric:

The historic fabric of the building is in good condition. The elements of the Art Moderne style remain intact.

B. Site Information:

Kline's Café is located at the northwest of corner of S. Austin and E. North streets with the building sited slightly skew from the street grid. The inlet bay is located to the east with a boat marina to the north and the town located west and south.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Primary Sources:

www.Ancestry.com

n.d. Mollye M Davis, 1940 US Census Texas, Aransas County

n.d. Mollie Melissa Davis, www.findagrave.com

n.d. Alva Odle Freeman – timeline (no reference available)

<https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/person/tree/18870620/person/20419868592/facts>

Aransas County Clerk Office,
Deed Records

<https://www.texasfile.com/texas-deed-records-directory/aransas-county-clerk/>

Aransas County Historical Society (ACHS)

A Brief history of Kline's Café. Letter to ACHS from John Freeman, M.D. ACHS Newsletter. Volume 14, Issue 3, October 2018.

Handbook of Texas Online, Alice M. Shukalo, "ROCKPORT, TX," accessed July 09, 2020, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hgr05>.

Freeman, John D. Dr.

2012 *Rockport: A Childhood by the Sea*. Create Space.

Merchant, Vickie, Dr., and Dr. Kay Betz

2019 *Foodways. The Culinary Traditions of Aransas County, Texas*. Independently published.

Roadside Architecture (RoadArch)

n.d. *Texas Art Deco & Streamline Modern Buildings* (page 2).

<https://www.roadarch.com/deco/tx2.html> accessed 7-9-2020

<https://www.rockportartcenter.com/artfest>

Rockport High School Yearbook.

1945 (Available at The History Center for Aransas County)

Texas Public Radio (TPR)

2020 Analog 2020. Felder Gallery. Art & Museum Exhibits.

<https://www.tpr.org/community-calendar/event/588069> accessed 7-9-2020

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LOCATION MAP

ROCKPORT CENTER FOR THE ARTS KLINE'S CAFÉ BUILDING
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Pamela Fulcher Photographer, June 2020

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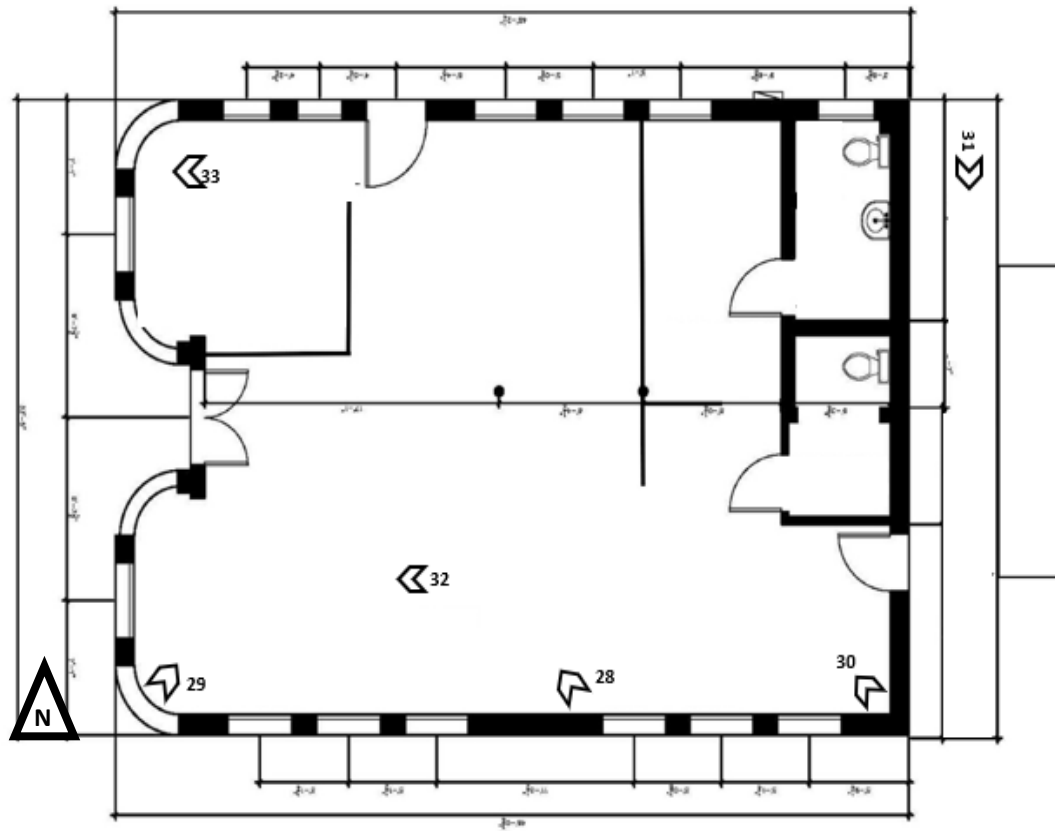
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EXTERIOR PHOTOGRAPHS

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Scale: 1/8" = 1'-0"

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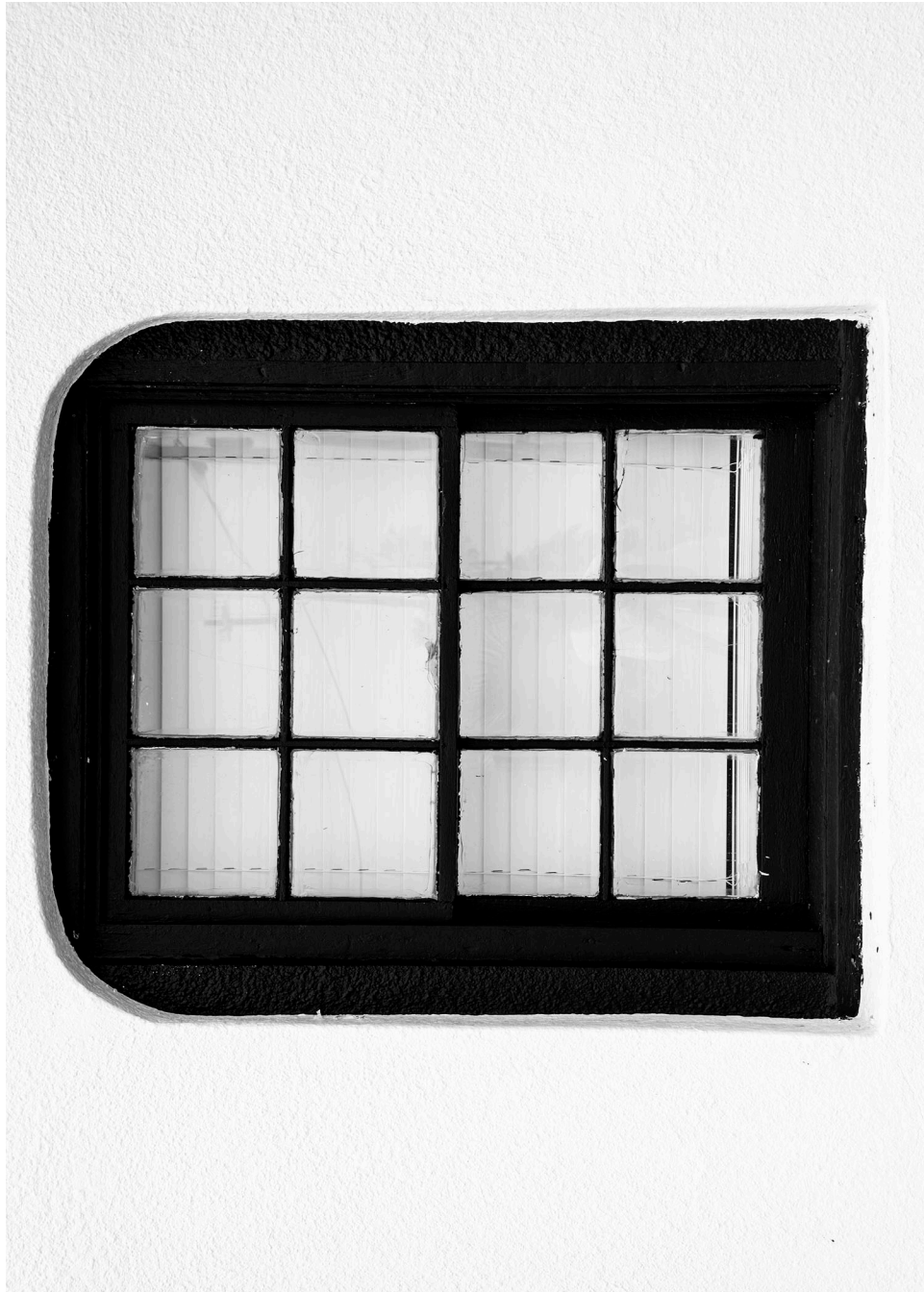
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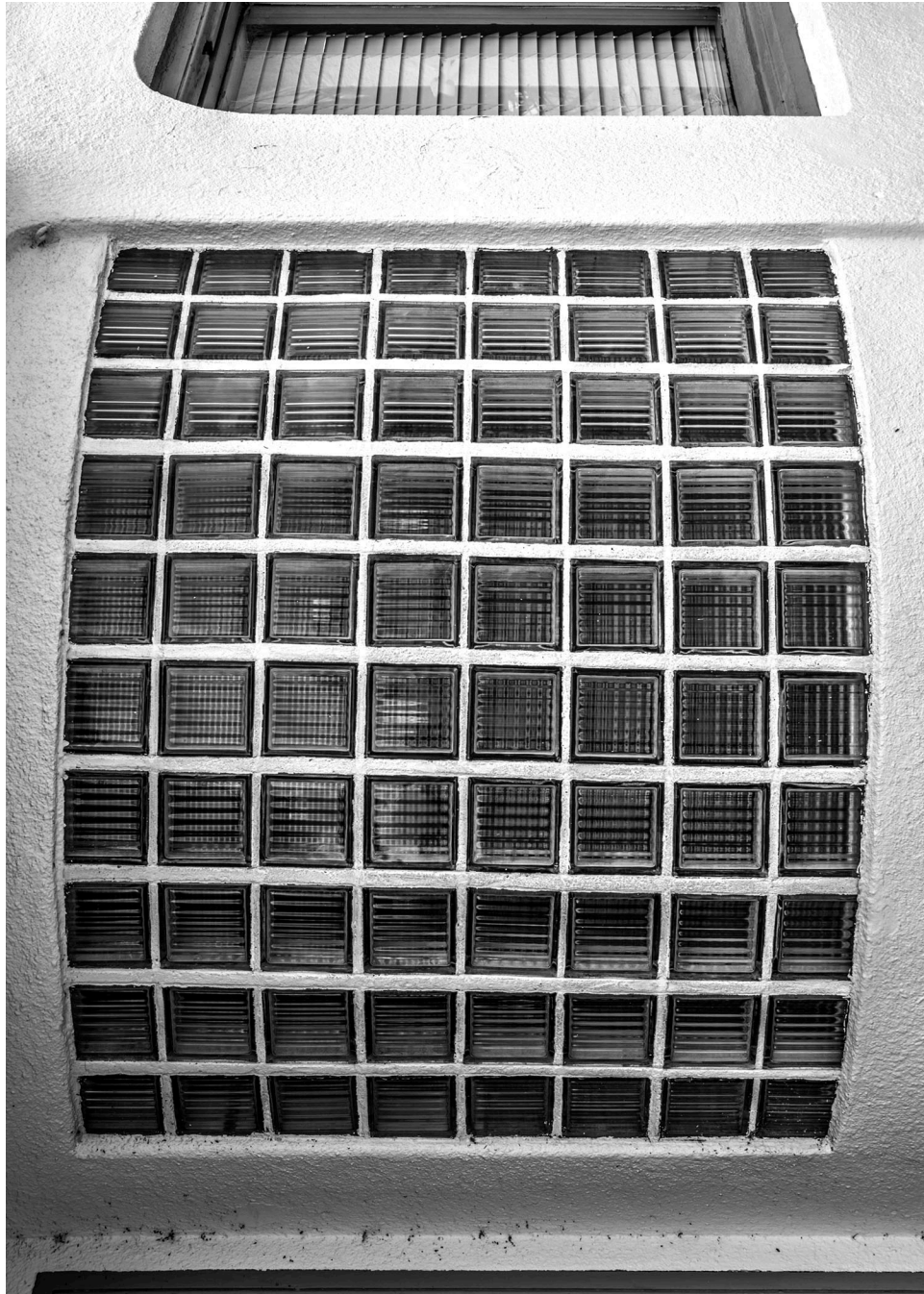
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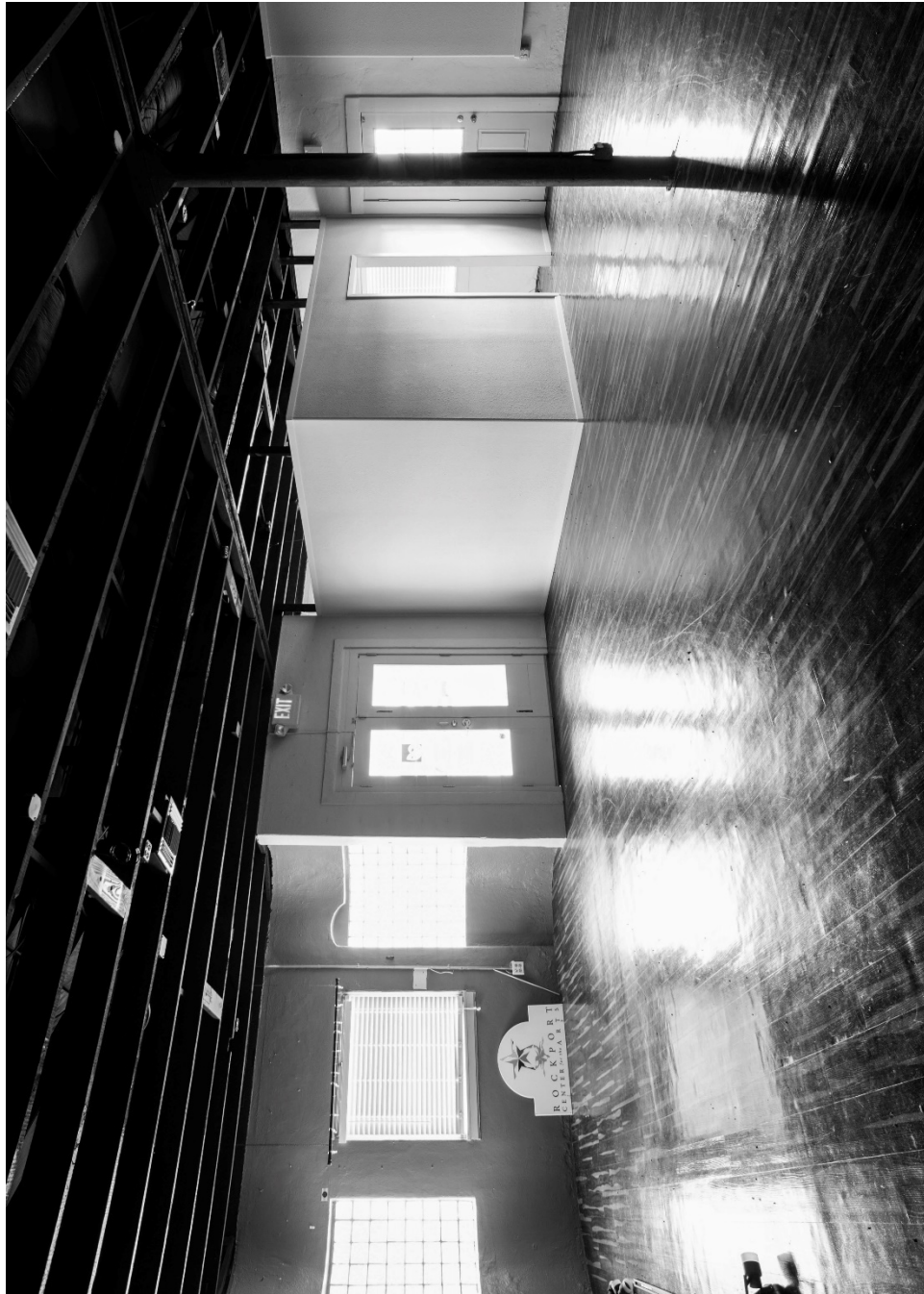
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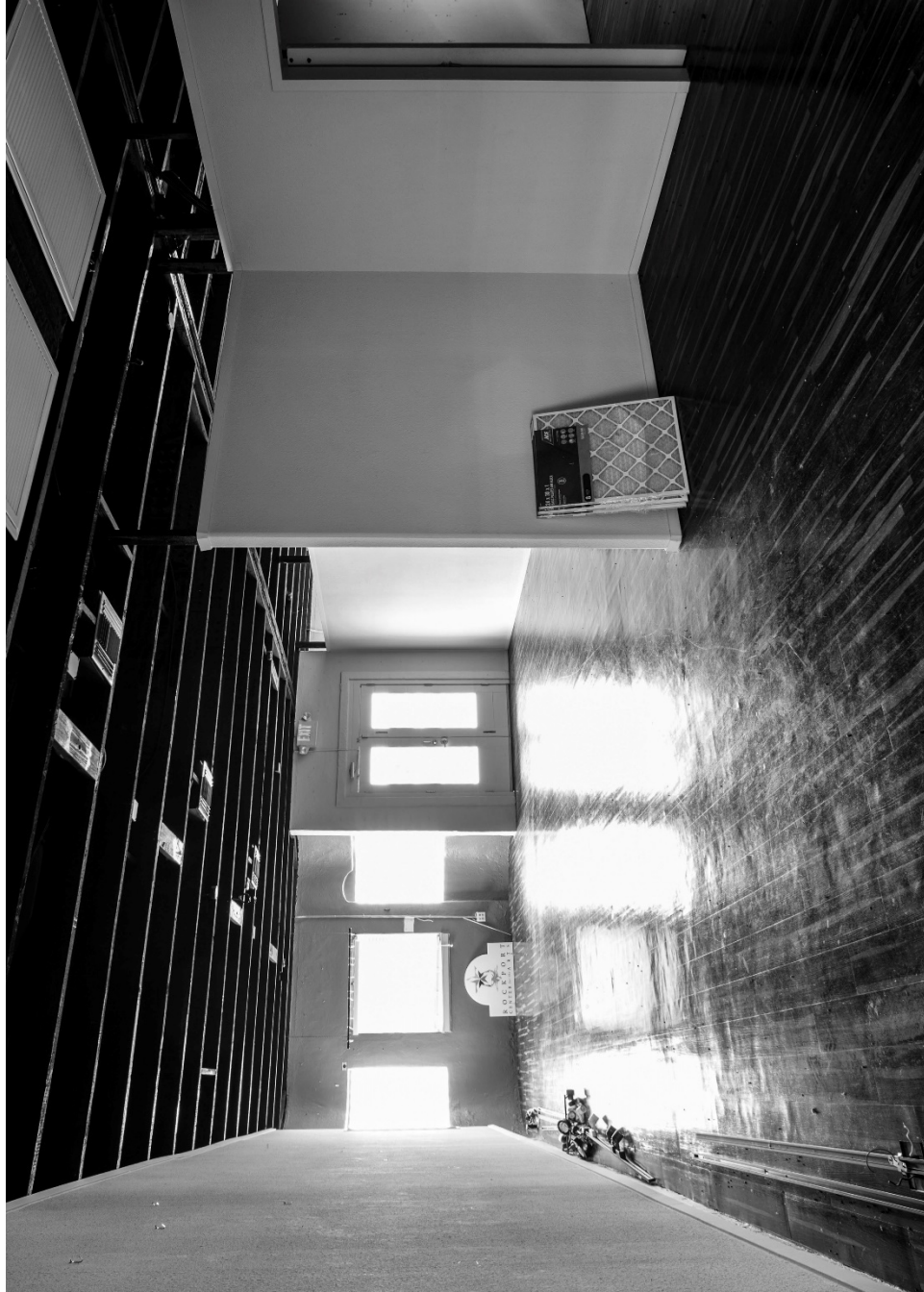
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