



# HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY - BUILDING AND STRUCTURES

Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism, One Constitution Plaza, 2nd Floor, Hartford, CT 06103

**\* Note:** Please attach any additional or expanded information on a separate sheet.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

Building Name (Common) Grand Light

Building Name (Historic) Grand Light and Supply Company

Street Address or Location 580 Grand Avenuee

Town/City New Haven Village Wooster Square County New Haven

Owner(s) GLS Realty Corporation  Public  Private

**PROPERTY INFORMATION**

Present Use: Commercial - Lighting showroom and warehouse

Historic Use: Commercial - Lighting showroom and warehouse

Accessibility to public: Exterior visible from public road?  Yes  No

Interior accessible?  Yes  No If yes, explain Public areas - retail showroom

Style of building Modernist - New Formalism Date of Construction 1963

**Material(s)** (Indicate use or location when appropriate):

- Clapboard  Asbestos Siding  Brick  Wood Shingle  Asphalt Siding
- Fieldstone  Board & Batten  Stucco  Cobblestone  Aluminum Siding
- Concrete (Type Block Masonry)  Cut Stone (Type \_\_\_\_\_)  Other Transite Cornice

**Structural System**

- Wood Frame  Post & Beam  Balloon  Load bearing masonry  Structural iron or steel
- Other Precast Concrete Columns, Concrete Floor Slab

**Roof** (Type)

- Gable  Flat  Mansard  Monitor  Sawtooth
- Gambrel  Shed  Hip  Round  Other \_\_\_\_\_

(Material)

- Wood Shingle  Roll Asphalt  Tin  Slate  Asphalt Shingle
- Built up  Tile  Other Rubber Membrane

Number of Stories: 1 Approximate Dimensions 202' x 120', 49' x 96', 52' x 60', 14' - 23' height

Structural Condition:  Excellent  Good  Fair  Deteriorated

Exterior Condition:  Excellent  Good  Fair  Deteriorated

Location Integrity:  On original site  Moved When? \_\_\_\_\_

Alterations?  Yes  No If yes, explain: \_\_\_\_\_

**FOR OFFICE USE:** Town # \_\_\_\_\_ Site # \_\_\_\_\_ UTM \_\_\_\_\_

District:  S  NR If NR, Specify:  Actual  Potential

**PROPERTY INFORMATION (CONT'D)**

**Related outbuildings or landscape features:**

- Barn     Shed     Garage     Carriage House     Shop     Garden
- Other landscape features or buildings: Lawn, chain link fence; asphalt paving

**Surrounding Environment:**

- Open land     Woodland     Residential     Commercial     Industrial     Rural
- High building density     Scattered buildings visible from site

• Interrelationship of building and surroundings:  
 The building is on the southwest corner of Grand Avenue and East Street in a high-density building area of 1- to 3-story industrial and commercial structures, which are a mix of 19th- and mid-20th-century construction. The older building stock across East Street is built to the sidewalk line, while the 20th-century structures of the urban renewal period tend to be set back in areas of lawn or plantings, and to have ample parking lots.

• Other notable features of building or site (*Interior and/or Exterior*)

See continuation sheet.

Architect Caproni Associates, Leo F. Caproni      Builder Mauro Construction

• Historical or Architectural importance:

See continuation sheet.

• Sources: Brown, Elizabeth Mills; *New Haven: A Guide to Architecture & Urban Design*, Yale U. Press, New Haven, 1976.  
 Carley, Rachel D., *Tomorrow is Here: New Haven and the Modern Movement* (Privately printed by the New Haven Preservation Trust, New Haven CT) June, 2008.  
 Hommann, Mary; *Wooster Square Design*, The New Haven Redevelopment Authority, 1965.  
 New Haven Museum & Historical Society, Redevelopment Collection <[http://www.cthistoryonline.org/cdm4/item\\_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/cho&CISOPTR=13284&REC=16](http://www.cthistoryonline.org/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/cho&CISOPTR=13284&REC=16)>  
 New Haven Tax Assessor's Record: Map/Block/Parcel: 201/0574/001, Building Department permit files. See continuation sheet.

Photographer Amy Gagnon / Charlotte Hitchcock      Date 3/01/ 2010, 5/24/2011

View Multiple Views      Negative on File NHPT

Name Amy Gagnon / Charlotte Hitchcock      Date 5/24/2011

Organization The New Haven Preservation Trust

Address 934 State Street, P.O. Box 1671, New Haven, CT 06507

• Subsequent field evaluations:

**Threats to the building or site:**

- None known     Highways     Vandalism     Developers     Renewal     Private
- Deterioration     Zoning     Other \_\_\_\_\_     Explanation \_\_\_\_\_

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• Other notable features of building or site (*Interior and/or Exterior*):

The structure at 580 Grand Avenue consists of three blocks: showroom, office area, and warehouse. The structure sits on a 4-acre lot and is set back on all sides behind lawns and parking areas. The 1-story showroom structure is the northern block, highly visible from the street across an expanse of lawn, a tall rectangular 1-story volume 5 bays deep by 9 bays long. Originally designed as a glass jewel box for display, the exterior consists of a series of exterior fin-like rectangular piers supporting wall surfaces which float a foot above grade over a recessed foundation. The north wall was fully glazed, with 15-foot high glazing the full width of the column bays. The east and west wall had vertical full-height glazing panels abutting the structural piers and masonry infill of 4 x 8" pink concrete block at the center of each bay. Above the walls is a flat roof with a deep overhang and perimeter fascia. The supporting piers seem to extend through the roof and project several feet above, forming a crown. In fact, these are non-structural precast concrete extensions for decorative effect. The glass north wall was later filled in and stucco-finished, to reduce heat gain and loss through the glass.

The warehouse is the largest volume and is a plain concrete block masonry structure placed at the south part of the property, separated from the showroom. The two are connected by a lower wing which extends east and contains the office area. This wing has a blank north wall which acts as a backdrop to the showroom, and a 5-bay east wall similar to the showroom in its vertical piers and the typical bay with full-height glazing panels abutting each pier and solid wall panels at the center of the bay. The piers do not extend above the roof fascia. The contractor entrance is into the corner of the warehouse through the loading dock platform with overhead canopy.

• Historical or Architectural importance:

The Grand Light Company building was built in 1963 as part of an industrial development located between the new elevated highway, its west boundary, the railroad line on the north, and the Mill River, the east boundary. The industrial park was included as part of the larger Wooster Square Redevelopment Area, underway by the late 1950s. By locating the industrial park on the eastern side of the US Route 5 (eventually I-91) corridor, planners hoped to provide a divide between residential and industrial land uses in the Wooster Square area as determined by project landscape architect and planner James Skerritt. The process of clearing the blocks of a stock of 2- and 3-story residential units began in 1958 and the majority of new construction was completed by 1964. Numerous structures were built, characterized by Modernist designs. The Redevelopment Agency prided itself on promoting "good design" and its staff, including Skerritt and architect Vincent C. Amore, worked closely with the designers of the new businesses, which for the most part were relocating from nearby locations being redeveloped for residential purposes.

Grand Light occupied a highly visible corner lot and erected this distinctive pavilion with its abstract pattern of vertical spines intersecting with the plane of the roof, and its walls appearing to float above the ground. The architecture became a kind of symbol of the business within and behind it. The glass "jewel box" raised above grade, expressing its structure with the visible frame, and the interior fully visible and glowing at dusk, is an image made familiar by Philip Johnson's Glass House and numerous other Modernist designs. Using this concept to sell electric lighting, one of the premier features of the post-war middle class lifestyle, was a brilliant marketing idea. The blank walls that serve as sign boards with simple sans serif applied lettering, is also characteristic of Modernist design.

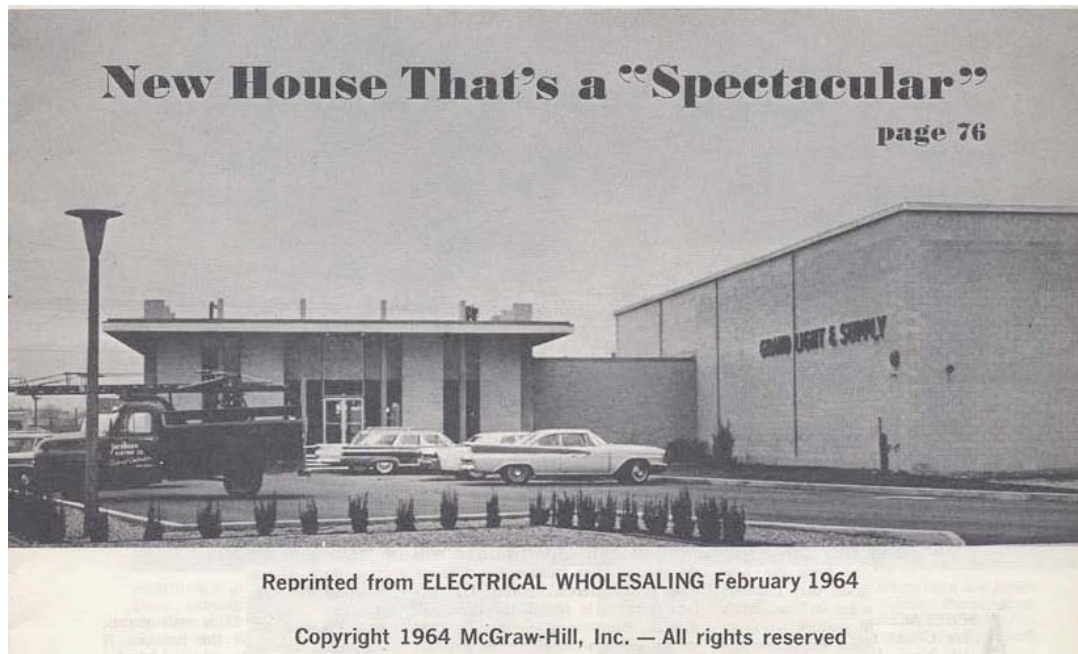
Architect: Leo Francis Caproni (1888-1970) was born in Boston, attended Dartmouth College, and practiced architecture in New Haven until his death. He was one of the older practitioners in the circle of Modernist designers of the post-World War II period. He designed numerous industrial and commercial buildings (see Inventory forms for 178 Wallace Street) including 464 Congress Avenue, 1060 State Street, and 150 Wallace Street, and was associated with John Johansen in the design of Helene Grant School (see Inventory form for 185 Goffe Street).

• Sources (*continuation*):

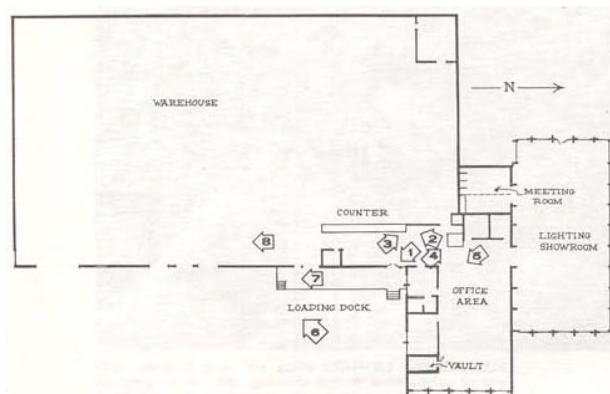
"New House That's a 'Spectacular,'" Electrical Wholesaling, McGraw-Hill, February 1964, October 1966, courtesy of Grand Light.



1. Northwest view of showroom and warehouse, 1966, from *Electrical Wholesaling*.



2. West view of showroom and warehouse, 1964, from *Electrical Wholesaling*.



3. Floor plan, from 1964 *Electrical Wholesaling*.



4. Northeast view from Grand Avenue and East Street, camera facing southwest.



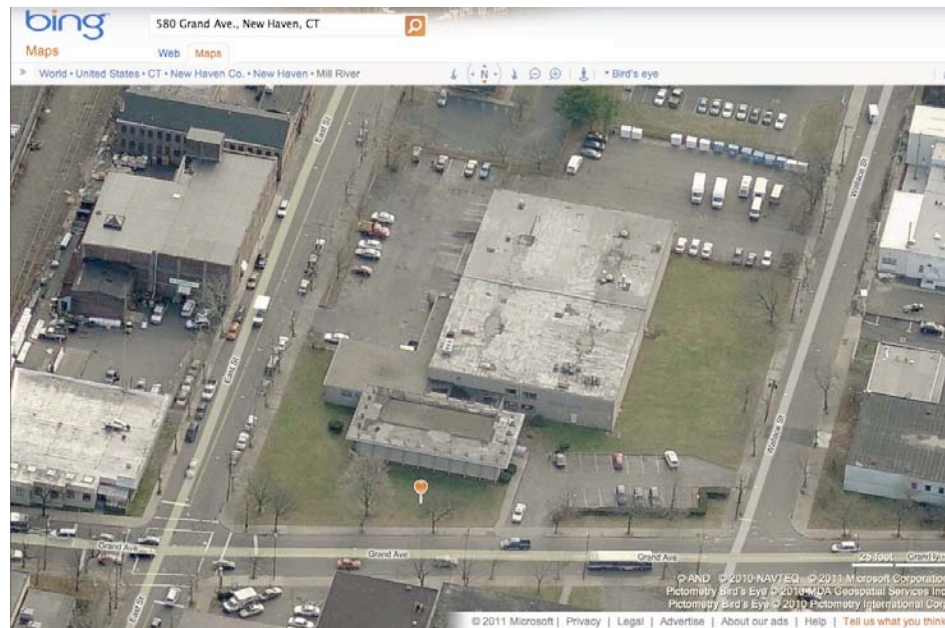
5. West view from Grand Avenue and Wallace Street, camera facing east.



6. Southeast view of the office wing (right) and warehouse with contractor entrance (left), camera facing north.



7. Construction detail showing “floating” floor slab, concrete piers, vertical slot glazing, and non-structural 4” block infill.



8. North aerial view from Bing Maps <http://www.bing.com/maps/> accessed 5/22/2011.



9. Site Plan – detail from City of New Haven Tax Map 168/782/011, not to scale, North ↑.