

# PRIMARY RECORD

Primary # \_\_\_\_\_

HRI # \_\_\_\_\_

Trinomial \_\_\_\_\_

NRHP Status Code \_\_\_\_\_

Other Listings \_\_\_\_\_

Review Code \_\_\_\_\_ Reviewer \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

(Update, see attached dpr forms from 2011)

**P1. Resource Name(s) or Number:** Ridge Electric Motor Company

**\*P2. Location:** \*a. County: Fresno

\*b. USGS 7.5' Quad: Fresno South, 1963 revised 1981 T 14S R 20E

c. Address: 1235 G Street

d. Assessor's Parcel Number: 467-061-13

**\*P3a. Description:** This 3,360 sf one-story Mid-Century Modern commercial building faces east onto G Street and is constructed of concrete masonry units with a flat roof. The facade has a smooth stucco application to which are attached an eclectic assortment of three dimensional decorative shapes faced with brilliant blue tiles. At each end of the facade are pier buttresses, also clad in blue tile. A decorative metal railing sits on top of the facade parapet. With the exception of the front entrance, there are no piercings... no windows as one would normally expect in a late 1960s commercial building. The front door is centrally located and has a metal screen in a decidedly Craftsman style. The door has a surround of textured glass blocks set within a frame of fired red bricks. The north elevation has no openings, the south elevation has two doors, both of which include a screen in the Craftsman style similar to the front entrance. Organic structural pieces, including a whimsical matched pair of piers forming an entryway and covered porch are complimented by a series of planters which hold queen palms, agave and a windmill palm. River rocks complete the front landscaping and apparently once held water. (For additional descriptive information see the attached 2011 primary form).

**\*P3b. Resource Attributes:** HP6 (1-3 story commercial building)

**\*P4. Resources Present:** ●Building



**P5b Photo date:** 28 October 2019

**\*P6. Date Constructed/Age and Sources:** 1968 Fresno Building Permit

**\*P7. Owner and Address:**  
Jimmy Williams  
244 E. Princeton  
Fresno 93704

**\*P8. Recorded by:**  
Karana Hattersley-Drayton, M.A.  
Architectural Historian  
4110 N. Maroa Avenue  
Fresno 93704

**\*P9. Date Recorded:** 27 October 2019

**\*P10. Survey Type:** Intensive

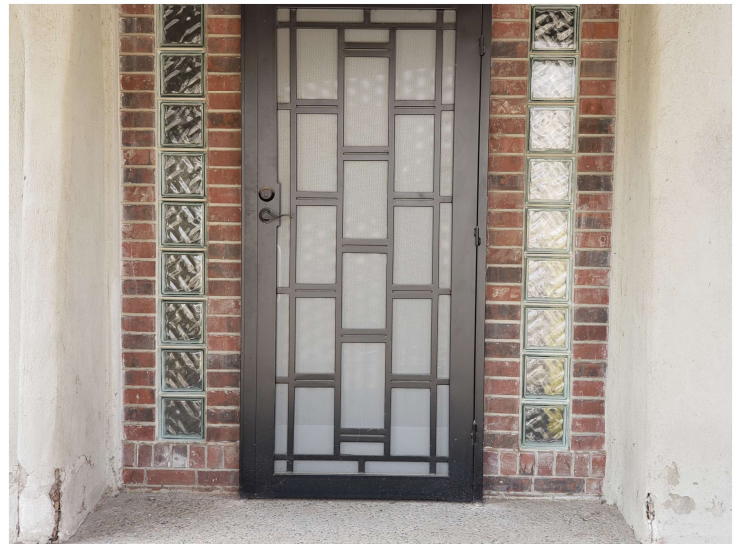
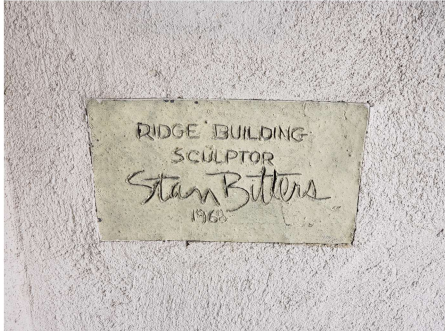
**\*P11. Report Citation:** "Evaluation of the Ridge Electric Motor Company Building Located at 1235 G Street for Fresno's Local Register of Historic Resources."

**\*Attachments:** ● Building, Structure and Object Report; ● Continuation Sheet  
**PR 523A (1/95)**

**\*Required information**



*Looking northwest, 27 October 2019*



***Landscape features 27 October 2019; Bitters plaque and entrance***

\*Recorded by: Karana Hattersley-Drayton, M.A.

\*Date: 28 October 2019

■ Continuation



**BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD**

\*NRHP Status Code: 5S3

Updated form

\*Resource Name: Ridge Electric Motor Company Building

**B3. Original Use:** Commercial Building

**B4. Present Use:** Commercial

\***B5. Architectural Style:** Free-form/Mid-Century Modern

\***B6. Construction History:** According to the 2011 survey: "1235 G Street was constructed in 1968 for C.W. Ridge. The facade's decorative program and sculptural features were part of the original plans for the building and installed shortly after its construction. Alterations include draining the sculptural water features flanking the entry walkway. Building permits did not identify any major alterations."

\***B7. Moved?**  No

\***B8. Related Features:** The building faces east onto G Street and what is now a vacant stretch of land cleared for high speed rail. The building is located north of Fresno's Chinatown.

**B9a. Architect:** Robin Gay McCline; architectural installations, Stan Bitters **B9b. Builder:** Atwood Grove Construction

\***B10. Significance: Theme:** Mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century Commercial Redevelopment 1945-1970

**Area:** West Fresno

**Period of Significance:** 1968

**Property Type:** Commercial/Art Installation

**Applicable Criteria:**

Local Register of Historic Resources, Criterion iii

This 1968 building with its quirky facade is associated with two major figures in Fresno's cultural and architectural history: artist Stan Bitters and architect Robin Gay McCline. Ridge Electric was founded by Wilbur Ridge in the 1920s as a backyard business at his East Fresno home. Circa 1930s, Ridge Electric began to specialize in the repair of car generators when PGE closed their basement shop which did this work and Ridge hired a few of the PGE employees to work for him. Ridge Electric moved several times before son Clair Ridge took over the business and commissioned a new building at the current location in 1968.

Clair and his wife Marge are fondly remembered as innovative, fun and artistic:

*...the Ridges, my parents, and many other young families all belonged to the Fresno Sports Car Club in the mid- to late 50's, when little European sports cars (MG's, Triumphs, etc.) were considered a thrilling new arrival on the American automotive scene. Marge Ridge was wildly chic in her tall, thin, tanned, cool appearance, and her taste in architecture matched that. I remember visiting their beautiful Sunnyside home in maybe 1958, where the kitchen floor of loose pea gravel caught my attention! As the G Street building went up and I noticed its distinctly avant garde appearance, I attributed the courage to build it to Marge Ridge's interesting taste. (Julie Linxwiler, personal communication 28 October 2019).*

Clair Ridge attributed the unique architectural installations on the building's façade solely to Stan Bitters with whom he had a working relationship. Ridge had completed some electrical work at Bitters' studio, and when it came time to construct a new building, Clair Ridge invited the artist to do design work on the façade. The Ridges knew architect Robin Gay McCline as he had designed their adobe home in the Sunnyside neighborhood (Clair Ridge, Personal communication 20 November 2019).

\***B12. References:** "Stan Bitters" <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stan-Bitters>, accessed 28 October 2019; Stan Bitters Sculptor, [www.stanbitters.com](http://www.stanbitters.com). Accessed 28 October 2019; "Downtown Fresno (Fulton Corridor) Historic Resources Survey December 2011, Revised April 2014, Historic Resources Group; "Mid-Century Modernism Historic Context," Prepared for the City of Fresno by Planning Resource Associates, Inc. September 2008; Personal communication

(This space reserved for official comments.)

Clair Ridge 20 November 2019; Personal communication with Julie Linxwiler 28 October 2019.

\***B14. Evaluator:** Karana Hattersley-Drayton, M.A.  
4110 N. Maroa Avenue Fresno, CA 93704

\***Date of Evaluation:** 28 October 2019; revised 21 November 2019.

**CONTINUATION SHEET**

\*Recorded by: Karana Hattersley-Drayton, M.A.

\*Date: 27 October 2019

■ Continuation

BSO Update Continued:

Stanley Cleve Bitters is an American ceramics sculptor whose work was instrumental in shaping the organic modernistic movement of the 1960s. He received his Bachelor of Arts in 1959 from UCLA with a B.A. in Painting, He also attended the Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles where he studied under Peter Voulkos who proved to be a major influence. Bitters returned to Fresno and in 1959 went to work in Madera for Hans Sumpf who had perfected emulsified adobe bricks. Bitters created architectural murals, tiles, bird houses, planters and sculptural objects for the company during his 6 year tenure ("Stan Bitters" Wikipedia accessed 28 October 2019). (Incidentally, it was during this period that Bitter's Sumpf tiles were applied to the facade of the Robert Stevens designed Pilibos Building, 1961, located at 830 Van Ness Avenue; the first building from the 1960s to be placed on Fresno's Local Register). In 1969 Bitters served as a Design Consultant for the City of Fresno's Civic Center Mall. One of the many highlights of Bitters' 60 year career has been his insistence on the integration of art and architecture... so common up to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century but out of favor by architects in the 1960s. His hundreds of commissions have included "architectural installations" whether building facade treatments such as 1235 G Street (and the brilliant work at Duncan Ceramics) or the sculpted bronze doors on Fresno's Saroyan Theatre, or fountains, murals or planters (for additional biographical information see attached 2011 survey forms). (continued)

The architect of record for 1235 G Street was Robin Gay McCline. McCline like Bitters was a Fresno native and was born in 1928. He attended U.C. Berkeley on the G.I. Bill and completed a BS in Architecture in 1951. He worked as a draftsman for David Horn from 1951-1956 and worked briefly in 1957 for Robert Stevens A.I.A. during which time he helped to design the Guarantee Savings Building on Ashlan and Blackstone, including the interior mural depicting the history of money. In 1957 McCline formed a partnership with James A. Oakes. James A. Oakes and Gay McCline, Architectural Associates designed at least 60 residential buildings throughout the San Joaquin Valley and several mostly smaller commercial buildings. The firm won an AIA award in 1962 for the McKinley Medical Center McCline taught architecture at Fresno City College from 1963 to 2002. He was also a part-time art instructor at the FCC and was renowned for his watercolors (Mid-Century Modernism Historic Context September 2008).

The Ridge Electric Motor Company Building was evaluated on a professional survey for the City of Fresno as part of the Fulton Corridor Specific Plan (2011/2014) and was assessed as potentially eligible for listing on the Local Register although at the time it was less than 50 years of age. The building is now 51 years of age. Additionally there is no evidence of alterations to the exterior (other than a lack of water in the water feature) and the integrity of the building to its period of significance of 1968 remains high (FMC 12-1607(a)(1). (It is fair to note that some of the tiles and architectural features need repair, but this is an issue of condition, not integrity.)

The building is associated with two major figures in Fresno's architectural and cultural history: Stan Bitters and Robin Gay McCline. The startling application of deep blue tiles to the facade of the building remains fresh. The facade work is also enhanced by the landscaping and Bitter's clay planters. In fairness, one could suggest that the building is not Robin Gay McCline's best work (see for example his 1971 residence) as it mostly serves as a canvas for the applied ceramic work. The entryway (one assumes McCline's design) is however simple and elegant with a single Craftsman style screen door, with a surround of fired red brick and textured glass blocks, as one might see in earlier Streamline Moderne buildings. The building is the only example of McCline's work to be eligible for the Local Register and only the second example of Bitter's ceramic applications. The Ridge Electric Motor Company Building (1968) thus appears to be eligible to Fresno's Local Register of Historic Resources under Criterion iii as a distinct example of the work of two masters.



State of California — The Resources Agency  
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION  
**PRIMARY RECORD**

Primary # \_\_\_\_\_  
HRI # \_\_\_\_\_  
Trinomial \_\_\_\_\_  
NRHP Status Code 5S3

Other Listings \_\_\_\_\_  
Review Code \_\_\_\_\_ Reviewer \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Page 1 of 3 Resource name(s) or number (assigned by recorder) 1235 G Street

**P1. Other Identifier:**

\*P2. Location:  Not for Publication  Unrestricted

\*b. USGS 7.5' Quad Fresno South Date 1963, revised 1981

\*c. Address 1235 G Street

\*e. Other Locational Data: APN: # 46706113

\*a. County Fresno County

T 14S R 20E

City Fresno

Zip 93706

\*P3a. Description: (Describe resource and its major elements. Include design, materials, condition, alterations, size, setting, and boundaries.)

Survey Map No. 136

This one-story Mid-Century Modern building features a striking decorative program of applied geometric shapes, made of glazed ceramics. Located on the west side of G Street between Fresno and Merced Streets, the building displays a rectangular plan and flat roof, raised along the facade elevation by a plain parapet wall. The exterior walls, sheathed in smooth, light stucco, provide a contrast for the applied ceramic ornament. Each piece varies in profile and is detailed with scoring. The ceramics display variegated shades of electric blue throughout. This expressionistic design extends to the landscape fronting the building, which includes a series of stucco-clad sculptural pieces along the walkway. Similar sculptural elements set off a water feature and planter box. With no major alterations, the property is in good condition and retains a good level of integrity. Glass entrance doors are recessed within the facade wall and accessed via the walkway and a curved, graduated ramp. Alterations appear limited to the draining of the original water element. The building retains a good level of integrity and continues to convey its period of significance.

\*P3b. Resource Attributes: (list attributes and codes) HP6. 1-3 Story Commercial Building.

\*P4. Resources Present:  Building  Structure  Object  Site  District  Element of District  Other

P5a. Photo



**P5b. Photo:** (view and date)  
Northeast elevation  
February 28, 2011

\*P6. Date Constructed/Age and Sources:  historic  
1968 (City of Fresno Building Permits)

\*P7. Owner and Address:  
RIDGE PROPERTIES  
PO BOX 1935  
FRESNO CA 93718-1935

\*P8. Recorded by:  
Historic Resources Group  
12 S. Fair Oaks Avenue, Suite 200  
Pasadena, CA 91105-1915

\*P9. Date Recorded:  
October 20, 2011

\*P10. Survey Type:  
Intensive

\*P11. Report Citation: (Cite survey report and other sources, or enter "none")

*Downtown Fresno (Fulton Corridor) Survey Report.*

\*Attachments:  None  Location Map  Sketch Map  Continuation Sheet  Building, Structure, and Object Record  
 Archaeological Record  District Record  Linear Feature Record  Milling Station Record  Rock Art Record  
 Artifact Record  Photograph Record  Other (list)

**BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD**

Page 2 of 3

\*NRHP Status Code 5S3

\*Resource Name or #: 1235 G Street

- B1. Historic Name:** Ridge Electric Motor Company  
**B2. Common Name:** Ridge Electric Motor Company  
**B3. Original Use:** Commercial  
**B4. Present Use:** Commercial  
**\*B5. Architectural Style:** Mid-Century Modern, Expressionistic/Organic subtype  
**\*B6. Construction History:** (Construction date, alterations, and date of alterations):

According to City of Fresno building permits, 1235 G Street was constructed in 1968 for C.W. Ridge. The facade's decorative program and sculptural features were part of the original plans for the building and installed shortly after its construction. Alterations include draining the sculptural water features flanking the entry walkway. Building permits did not identify any major alterations.

**\*B7. Moved?**  No  Yes  Unknown **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Original Location:** \_\_\_\_\_

**\*B8. Related Features:** None.

**B9a. Architect:** Robert Gay McCline; sculptor Stan Bitters **b. Builder:** C.W. Ridge

**\*B10. Significance:**

**Theme** Mid-20th Century Commercial Redevelopment 1945-1970 **Area** Downtown Fresno  
**Period of Significance:** 1968 **Property Type:** Commercial

**Applicable Criteria:** City of Fresno: ii.

(Discuss importance in terms of historical or architectural context as defined by theme, period, and geographic scope. Also address integrity)

1235 G Street is significant as the work of noted artist, ceramist, and architectural sculptor, Stan Bitters. Bitters, a native of Fresno, attended the University of California, Los Angeles, receiving his Bachelor of Arts in painting in 1959. After graduating, Bitters returned to Fresno, at which point his ceramic and bronze work became "extensively commissioned in the area's burgeoning building program." (*Los Angeles Times*, 20 October 1968.) Throughout his career, one of the common themes in Bitters' work has been exploring ways to enliven buildings and public spaces through art and sculpture. One of his early commissions, which mirrored the project at 1235 G Street, involved designing a decorative program for the facade of an industrial building. In his design for the facade of Fresno's Duncan Ceramics plant, Bitters used the plant's own ceramic clay to produce boldly colored sunburst-shaped pieces that were affixed to the facade. (See Continuation Sheet)

**B11. Additional Resource Attributes:** None

**\*B12. References:**

City of Fresno Building Permits  
County of Fresno Tax Assessor Data  
Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps  
(See Continuation Sheet)

**B13. Remarks:**

**\*B14. Evaluator:** C. McAvoy & P. Travis

**\*Date of Evaluation:** April 2011.

(This space reserved for official comments.)

Sketch Map





State of California — The Resources Agency  
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION  
**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Primary #  
HRI #  
Trinomial

Page 3 of 3

\*Recorded by: Historic Resources Group

\*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) 1235 G Street

\*Date 20 October 2011

Continuation  Update

**\*B10. Significance (continued from page 2):**

The *Los Angeles Times* praised the design, calling it "one of the most beautifully decorated industrial buildings in the country." (*Los Angeles Times*, 20 October 1968.) This project mirrors Bitters' work on 1235 G Street, with the juxtapositioning of a plain, stucco-clad façade and boldly colored geometric pieces of glazed ceramics. His many projects in Fresno include two water features/sculptures in the Fulton Mall, the monumental bronze-relief doors of the M Street entrance to the Convention Center theater, and work on the Fresno Civic Center Mall, for which he served as a design consultant to the City of Fresno in the late 1960s. Recently, Bitters' 1962 work "Birdhouses" was selected for inclusion in the Getty's Pacific Standard Time exhibitions, celebrating post-1945 art in Southern California. "Birdhouses" appeared as part of the exhibit "Golden State of Craft: California 1960 to 1985" at the Craft and Folk Art Museum in Los Angeles.

Throughout the years, Bitters has remained an active force in Fresno's community of artists. In support of a 2004 initiative to incorporate art in new buildings and civic spaces, Bitters' projects were highlighted as successful examples of how to marry art and architecture. Recently, he participated in the events marking the Fulton Mall's 40th anniversary, contributing pieces to an exhibit of traditional and modern sculpture on the mall itself and curating an exhibit on local Fresno artists. Entitled the "Great Eight," the exhibit featured works by Bitters and fellow Fresno artists Frank Arnold, Jane Whitehurst, Mark Rodriguez, Garrett Masterson, Bill Minschew, Robert Ogata, and Maxine Olson.

The architect of record was Robert Gay McCline, a noted Mid-Century Modern architect with many Fresno commissions to his name.

**\*B12. References (continued from page 2):**

"Art of Fresno's Fulton Mall," *The Fresno Bee*, 29 August 2004.

"Arts in Crafts," *Daily News* (Los Angeles, CA), 24 September 2011.

"Fresno Plan Encourages Developers to Add Art," *The Fresno Bee*, 2 June 2004.

"Home Turf Fresno Artists Team up for Rare Exhibit," *The Fresno Bee*, 10 October 2004.

"Stan Bitters, Sculptor," Artist's Website. Available at: <http://www.stanbitters.com>. Accessed 20 October 2011.

Bitters, Stan, email communication with Historic Resources Group, 21 October 2011.

Darby, Richard, "Outdoor, Non-Residential Art Is Alive and Well in Fresno," *The Fresno Bee*, 12 July 1998.

Johnson, Beverly E., "California Craftsmen," *Los Angeles Times*, 20 October 1968.

Lowe, George, "Tunneled Gardens Featured at Fresno," *Los Angeles Times*, 1 July 1973.

Mid-Century Modernism Historic Context. September 2008. Prepared for the City of Fresno, Planning and Development Department. Prepared by Planning Resource Associates, Inc., Fresno, CA.

Stutzin, Leo, "Stan Bitters' Dream: Buildings to Fit People," *The Fresno Bee*, n.d. Available at: <http://www.stanbitters.com>. Accessed 20 October 2011.