

# Carolina Cadillac Company



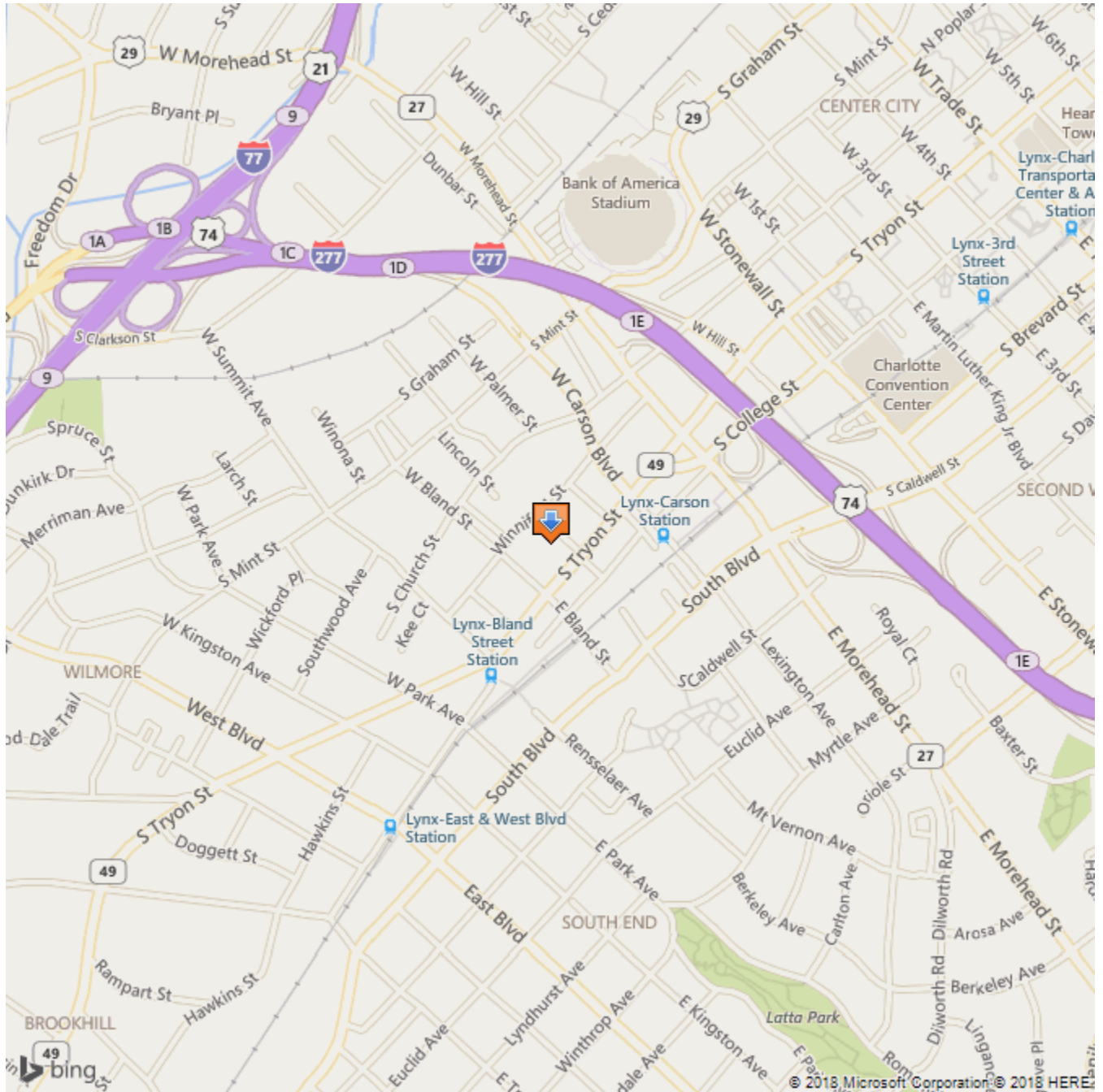
**1. Name and location of the property:** The Property known as the Carolina Cadillac Company is located at 1310 South Tryon Street, Charlotte, North Carolina.

**2. Name and address of the present owner of the property:** The present owner of the property is:

Capstone Property Group, Inc.  
1043 East Morehead Street  
Charlotte, NC 28204

**3. Representative photographs of the property:** This report contains representative photographs of the property.

**4. Maps depicting the location of the property:** This report contains a map depicting the location of the property.



**5. Current deed book and tax parcel information for the property:** The current deed for the property is found in Deed Book 04665, page 268, and the Tax Parcel number for this property is 07307208

**6. UTM coordinates:** 17 513249E 3897221N

**7. A brief historical sketch of the property:** This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property.

**8. A brief architectural description of the property:** This report contains a brief architectural description of the property.

**9. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets criteria for designation set forth in N. C. G. S. 160A-400.5:**

A. Special significance in terms of its history, architecture, and/or cultural importance: The Commission judges that the property known as the Carolina Cadillac Company does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:

- Constructed in 1926, the building was designed by local architect, M.R. Marsh, who was also responsible for a number of downtown commercial buildings during the early twentieth century.
- The building is notable for the elegant, classical design of its facade, which was meant to attract an upscale clientele.
- The building is also remarkable for its sophisticated and varied use of concrete in both the structure of the building and the decorative elements. The side and rear elevations have walls made of rough-faced, concrete bricks while the facade features a concrete surface, scored and polished to resemble cut sandstone.
- The Carolina Cadillac Company was the first Charlotte automobile dealer to build an automobile showroom on the outskirts of the central business district.
- The Carolina Cadillac building is a now rare and well-preserved example of an early twentieth century automobile showroom in Charlotte and is one of the last examples of a 1920s commercial style building remaining on South Tryon Street

B. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association: The Commission contends that the physical and architectural description that is included in this report, demonstrates that the Carolina Cadillac Company meets this criterion.

**10. Ad Valorem tax appraisal:** The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply for an automatic deferral of 50% of the Ad Valorem taxes on all or any portion of the property which becomes a designated "historic landmark." The current appraised value of the building is \$257,700.0 and features are appraised at \$9100.00. The current appraised value of the lot is \$567,900. The current total value is \$834,700.

# Carolina Cadillac Company Building Historical Essay

The Carolina Cadillac Company held its grand opening in its new building at 1108 South Tryon Street on March 7, 1927. The company, originally located at 520 South Tryon, was the first to build an automobile showroom on the outskirts of the central business district.<sup>[1]</sup> The unveiling of the new showroom was planned to showcase the nationwide introduction of the LaSalle, Cadillac's latest model.<sup>[2]</sup> The presentation of the new building and the new Cadillac occurred in the final months of the prosperity associated with the 1920s, a period of post-war boom, modernization, and mass-produced goods.

By the 1920s, the automobile was firmly entrenched in American culture. At the turn of the century, individually crafted automobiles, such as the early Packards, were expensive toys for the wealthy elite and royalty. However, assembly line mass production made cars affordable to middle class incomes, and by the 1920s, many ordinary families owned one. The automobile was a major transforming influence of the early twentieth century and has been credited with redefining residential patterns, commercial districts, and a variety of social conventions from touring to courtship. A car was also a clear status symbol. Those who owned cars did not have to rely on public transportation and flocked to suburbs built out of the reach of extant trolley lines.<sup>[3]</sup>

Automobiles, trolleys, and pedestrians competed for space in downtown Charlotte as early as the first decade of the twentieth century. The earliest automobile dealer in Charlotte appears in 1903. Osmond Barringer, a hardware merchant, also sold Oldsmobiles, and later, was also an agent for White Steamers, and Baker Electrics.<sup>[4]</sup> Within a decade, Barringer and ten other dealers had set up shop within the downtown business district, and with the exception of a small car lot on Mint Street, all of the dealers were located within a five-block radius of the intersection of Trade and Tryon Streets.<sup>[5]</sup> In 1906, there were only 76 registered cars in the city; by 1912 this number increased to 259, and to 1757 by 1917. Corresponding to the statewide trend, by 1925 the number of registered vehicles in the city increased to 22,159.<sup>[6]</sup> There were twenty-five automobile dealers in Charlotte that year.<sup>[7]</sup>

Unlike other categories of center city businesses and institutions, auto showrooms were not sequestered in a particular section of the business district, but were distributed along a number of the city's major arteries: North and South Tryon Streets, West Trade, South Church, and Mint. A number of the early showrooms were located on the city's grand avenues leading out of

town. As houses on these key, busy streets came on the market in the late 1910s and 1920s, they were razed, and the resulting vacant land provided plenty of room for car dealers. For example, C.C. Coddington built a fine Buick showroom on West Trade Street and Oscar J. Thies built the showroom for the Roamer Automobile Sales Agency at 500 North Tryon in 1921. Ultimately, many of these residential streets would evolve into commercial strips, with showrooms and other auto-related businesses at the vanguard of establishments moving to peripheral locations along major traffic arteries convenient to the automobile. [8]

STATEMENT


**CAROLINA CADILLAC CO.**  
*Cadillac*  
 DISTRIBUTORS FOR THE FAMOUS CADILLAC

August 10th 1922

Mr. N. S. Alexander, R.F.D.,  
 Charlotte, N.C.

To	L	Cadillac Touring car- Motor #61-K-232- with standard equipment- one extra Tire, one extra Tube, Tire Cover, Bumper and Motometer-----	\$3502.30
		1 set of Chains-----	8.50
	15	gals. Gasoline-----	4.50
		Set of Natural Wood Wheels with White Hub-----	25.00
			\$3540.30

*Paid Aug 10 1922*  
 CAROLINA CADILLAC COMPANY  
 CHARLOTTE, N.C.  
*By G. C. Shuman*

  
 REGISTERED TRADE MARK

**Neil Somers Alexander purchased a Cadillac for \$3540.30 in 1922. A large home in Myers Park in 1929 would have cost \$10,000.**



Prior to Charlotte's suburban expansion after World War II, the central business district was home to showrooms for a wide variety of auto manufacturers, from the enduring giants Ford and General Motors to long forgotten brands such as Nash, Hudson, Essex, Oakland, Studebaker, Pierce Arrow, Packard, Willys, and Hupmobile. By the 1920s, most of the automobiles sold in the Carolinas passed through Charlotte distributors. Model A and Model T Fords were manufactured a few miles from the retail district at an assembly plant on Statesville Avenue.<sup>[9]</sup> The plant opened in 1925 and made 300 Model Ts a day.<sup>[10]</sup>

The Carolina Cadillac Company is located on what was once a residential block of South Tryon Street. The company had been in Charlotte for twelve years and had grown steadily from a small office on Sixth Street to a larger facility on the 500 block of South Tryon Street until the construction of the impressive edifice on the 1100 block.<sup>[11]</sup> The new building displaced a corner butcher shop and the home of a clerk who was employed at the Hornets' Nest Electric Company. The blocks to the north and south were similarly constituted of a mixture of working class residences and neighborhood businesses. Carolina Cadillac was the first automobile dealer to relocate to a large lot outside of the perimeter of the central business district, and although a couple of other dealers would follow suit by 1931, there was no ensuing trend for car lots to locate to farther reaches of town until the 1960s.<sup>[12]</sup>

The segment of South Tryon that coursed four blocks from the Square was once part of a fashionable office corridor, but the street became more distinctly residential as it flowed south from its intersection from Morehead Street. Through the 1950s, this section of South Tryon Street remained a mixture of residential and small businesses. Most of these were small neighborhood businesses such as grocers, barbers, and cafes. By the 1950s, this segment of South Tryon began to lose its residential character, and slowly gave way to distributing houses, repair shops, and supply companies. The Carolina Cadillac Company was the only auto dealership to locate this far south on Tryon Street, and perhaps owing to the Great Depression, no others followed, leaving most of the showrooms clustered along North Tryon, South Church, and West Trade, leaving the Carolina Cadillac site in a comparatively isolated location.<sup>[13]</sup>

The new Cadillac showroom was built at a time when strong manufacturing and sales trends were predicted for the year. The president of the Peerless Motor Corporation proudly asserted:

This country has become so prosperous that its ability to consume goods is far greater than many people can imagine. When some people read

that the automobile industry is planning to produce over 4,000,000 cars in 1927 they are staggered by the figures. Some even say the automobile manufactures are too optimistic. But the fact remains that more people can afford cars than ever before and it is generally known that it costs much less to own and operate a car today than it did in 1919.<sup>[14]</sup>

The grand opening of the new Cadillac facility was open to the public and was advertised as a gala event. Festivities began at seven thirty in the evening with music provided by the Spanish Troubadours Orchestra, speeches by company representatives, the unveiling of the LaSalle, followed by music and dancing.<sup>[15]</sup> The Spring Salon received special attention in *The Charlotte Sunday Observer* with a special section devoted to all things Cadillac and information about the new building.<sup>[16]</sup> The architect, M.R. Marsh, incorporated elaborate use of concrete construction and metal decorative elements, into the new showroom designed for the automobiles preferred by the upper middle classes. *The Charlotte Sunday Observer* praised the architecture of the building, describing it as “unique” and “highly attractive”:

The interior is most startlingly different from the usual motor company office construction. A ceiling of antique wood tinted in restful green is one of the first features to strike the visitor. All woodwork is of antique appearance and fixtures are of wrought iron. Every detail harmonizes with the luxury and artistry characteristic of the Cadillac itself and the showroom is as appropriate to the product it houses as a well-selected frame is to a charming picture.<sup>[17]</sup>

The contractor was the Southeastern Construction Company. The building permit was registered on September 7, 1926 showing an estimated cost of construction at \$53,000.00.<sup>[18]</sup>

The newspaper referred to the grand opening as the coming out party for Charlotte’s newest debutante. The “debutante” was located in the center of the showroom and was heavily veiled by an opaque canvas and guarded by two young men in military uniform until the appointed hour of her presentation. Twelve young ladies dressed in white acted as hostesses and pinned a flower to each guest. After the unveiling ceremony, guests were invited to dance the night away on the hardwood floor of the main office and the tiled floor of the showroom, assured “the orchestra will be kept busy until the last guest has danced himself-or herself-to the point of exhaustion. Punch will be served.”<sup>[19]</sup>

The upscale Cadillac line was not within the price range of the average citizen. In 1927, prices in the Standard Line ranged from \$2995 to \$3435; the Custom

Line began at \$3250 for the Roadster Model to \$4485 for the Seven Passenger Imperial. The new LaSalle line ranged from \$2495 to \$2685. The Great Depression adversely affected the sale of luxury goods, and the Carolina Cadillac Company suffered repercussions from the catastrophic events of the 1930s. The company left the building in 1934 and relocated as Thomas Cadillac-Oldsmobile at 500 West Trade Street. Sanders Mack Motors, distributors for Hupmobile, Nash, and LaFayette, occupied the building until 1936. The building was vacant for a year and was occupied by Heath Motor Company, a Ford dealership, until 1941. Park McLain Used Autos used the building for approximately one year, and C.W. Upchurch, Charlotte's Packard dealership occupied the building from 1942-1946. [\[20\]](#)

In the early twentieth century, Packard made the ultimate luxury car. The company had difficulty remaining solvent during the Depression and resorted to manufacturing lower priced mass produced cars, a practice that allowed Packard to limp through the 1930s. The company received large government contracts during the Second World War, and its efficient wartime operations made Packard one of only two auto manufacturers in the world to enter post war production with no debt. However, the company was stymied by bad styling decisions and reckless managerial practices creating damage sufficient to send Packard on a downward spiral resulting in its ultimate demise as a recognizable model by the late 1950s and its disappearance as a company by 1962. [\[21\]](#) It is ironic that the last automobile dealer to occupy showroom was once a well-respected manufacturer of high-end luxury vehicles, and by the time C. W. Upchurch used the space, the Packard line and the building's purpose as an elegant showroom were both in decline.

The next tenant of 1310 (formerly 1108) South Tryon Street was the Henry Walke Company, distributors of mill machinery and supplies. The Henry Walke Company occupied the building from 1947-1962. From 1963-1968, the building briefly returned to its original purpose housing Gaithings Imported Cars. An Electrical Supply Company used the building until the mid-1980s, and from 1984 until recently, the building was occupied by Carroll Aligning and by Charlotte Floral Supply. [\[22\]](#)

The Carolina Cadillac Building is one of a few extant automobile showrooms dating from the early twentieth century. Most of the early showrooms and car lots were located within four to five blocks from the Square and relocated to larger lots on the fringes of town during the 1960s and 1970s. Their urban footprints have long since been replaced by new construction. The only extant automobile showroom currently designated as a local landmark is the Thies Building, located at 500 North Tryon, formerly the home of Charlotte



Flint, Hipp Chevrolet, Carolina Oldsmobile and Folger Motor Company.<sup>[23]</sup> The Carolina Cadillac building is rare surviving, well-preserved example of an early-twentieth-century auto showroom in Charlotte.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Charlotte City Directory, 1925. The original business address was listed as 1108 South Tryon, and changed to 1310 South Tryon, the current address, by 1931.

<sup>[2]</sup> “LaSalle Result of Demand by Cadillac Friends Over Period of Several Years,” *The Charlotte Observer*, March 6, 1927. The LaSalle was named for explorer Robert Cavalier de LaSalle, peer to Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac, also a 17<sup>th</sup> century explorer.

<sup>[3]</sup> Jakle, John A. and Keith A. Sculle, *The Gas Station in America*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994, 3, 5-6, 8, 163, 228)

<sup>[4]</sup> Thomas Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City. Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975*, (Chapel Hill, UNC Press, 1998), p. 185.

<sup>[5]</sup> Charlotte City Directory, 1913.

<sup>[6]</sup> Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City*, p. 200.

<sup>[7]</sup> Charlotte City Directory, 1925.

<sup>[8]</sup> Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City*, p. 192.

<sup>[9]</sup> Ibid, p. 185.

<sup>[10]</sup> Sarah Woodward, Sherry Joines Wyatt, David Gall, *Industry, Transportation, and Education Survey*.

<sup>[11]</sup> *The Charlotte Sunday Observer*. Special Cadillac-LaSalle Section, March 6, 1927. Charlotte City Directory, 1925.

<sup>[12]</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, Charlotte, 1911, 1929; Charlotte City Directories: 1925, 1931, 1935, 1940, 1945, 1950, 1955. In addition to the Carolina Cadillac Company, the Charlotte Franklin Company was located at

833 East Trade, the Lockerbie Motor Company at 820 South Mint, and the Wilson Motor Company at 720 South Tryon.

[13] Charlotte City Directories, 1935, 1940, 1945, 1950, 1955.

[14] "Buying Season for Motor Cars," *The Charlotte Observer*, May 1, 1927.

[15] Advertisement, *The Charlotte Observer*, March 5, 1927.

[16] Special Cadillac-LaSalle Section, *The Charlotte Sunday Observer*, March 6, 1927.

[17] Ibid. Other buildings designed by Marsh include: schools in Charlotte and Cabarrus and Iredell Counties, the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company Building, The United States Rubber Company Building, a gymnasium for the Thompson Orphanage, the Jefferson Apartments, the Harris Apartments, and the residences of T. C. Guthrie and I. Hechenbleikner.

[18] Application for Building Permit, September 7, 1926, Permit No. 7133. Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.

[19] *The Charlotte Sunday Observer*, March 6, 1927.

[20] Charlotte City Directories, 1931-1946.

[21] Robert E. Turnquist, *The Packard Story*, (New Jersey: A.S. Barnes & Co. Inc., 1965); James A. Ward, *The Fall of the Packard Company*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

[22] Charlotte City Directories, 1947-2003.

[23] Survey and Research Report, Oscar J. Thies Automobile Sales and Service Building, <http://www.cmhpf.org/S&RR/thies.html>

## **Carolina Cadillac Company Building - Architectural Description**

### **Site Description**

Situated along South Tryon Street, southwest of downtown, the Carolina Cadillac Company Building is located in an area just northwest of Charlotte's first streetcar suburb, Dilworth. This portion of South Tryon is separated from

Dilworth by a rail corridor, along which industrial and retail enterprises located in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A number of these small scale factories, warehouses, and stores have survived and after years of underutilization and some demolition, the area is currently undergoing much rehabilitation and redevelopment, spurred by center city revitalization, the presence of nearby Bank of America stadium, and the proposed light rail line which will share the historic rail corridor, one block to the southeast.

## Exterior



This one story, masonry building was built in 1926 to house the Carolina Cadillac Company showroom. The building has a rectangular plan with offices and showroom in the front and a long service area to the rear, a plan typical for numerous small factories, warehouses, and auto showrooms dating to the early twentieth century. A small, concrete block ell was added to the northwest corner of the rear elevation sometime during the postwar period. The Carolina Cadillac building is notable for its almost exclusive, and elaborate, use of concrete construction and metal decorative elements, making the building largely fireproof. The façade has a granite base with walls of concrete block composed, polished, and scored to resemble cut sandstone. The side and rear elevations have concrete walls executed in a more utilitarian, but nonetheless unusual, manner, with concrete fashioned as bricks, rather than the typical concrete blocks.

The classical façade is divided into three, elliptically arched bays, all of which are now boarded over. The center entrance bay is flanked by storefront windows, and all three openings are edged with delicate rope molding, fashioned from metal, and capped by scrolled concrete brackets. The fanlights and windows have slender, finely detailed classical columns, also executed in metal, dividing the lights. Above the door and windows are a classical frieze and parapet. Also made of concrete, the frieze is ornamented with panels and stylized rosettes and capped by a boldly molded cornice. The paneled parapet has a molded cap and a central nameplate that is now covered over.



The utilitarian side and rear elevations have concrete brick walls, capped at the roof line by terra cotta coping, and punctuated by banks of steel sash factory windows and pedestrian doors. The rear elevation has a central loading bay with a modern overhead door and a boarded over window. The northwest corner of the rear elevation is contiguous with the added rear wing. The concrete block addition has a gable roof and several loading bays.

## **Interior**



The interior of the building is divided between a front showroom and a service area that occupies roughly seventy-five percent of the building. The showroom was originally a tall, open display room with several small office and service rooms lining the rear wall that separates the showroom from the service area. In the postwar era, the showroom was subdivided with the addition of partition walls and dropped acoustical tile ceilings although much of the original fabric remains under these additions. The showroom retains a beautiful terrazzo floor of black and tan checks with a stylized Art Deco border, tiled walls beneath the front windows, rough stucco walls elsewhere, two panel doors, and molded chair railing, cornices, and door reveals. There is also an original restroom in the rear with checkerboard tile walls and original plumbing fixtures. The steel sash front windows are intact and visible from the interior.

A mezzanine level was added to the rear half of the showroom to contain offices on both the first floor and the mezzanine level. An enclosed, carpeted staircase leads from the center of the room to the mezzanine. The offices and stairwell are constructed of pine paneling, which appears to date to the 1950s.

Several pedestrian doors lead from the showroom to the service area, and a concrete ramp along the north wall allowed for the movement of cars into the showroom. The long, open service area has exposed brick walls and steel sash windows, which have been infilled on the north elevation. The windows have concrete sills and lintels. The flat roof is notable for its construction, reinforced



concrete slabs within a steel I-beam grid, all of which is supported by metal roof trusses. The slab roof is punctuated by a flat roofed monitor which extends for much of the length of the building. The service area is open except for a concrete block restroom block that projects from the south wall. Despite the addition of the small, rear wing and some interior partitions, the Carolina Cadillac Company Building retains sufficient architectural integrity to merit local landmark designation.