

# MODERNISM IN WASHINGTON

---

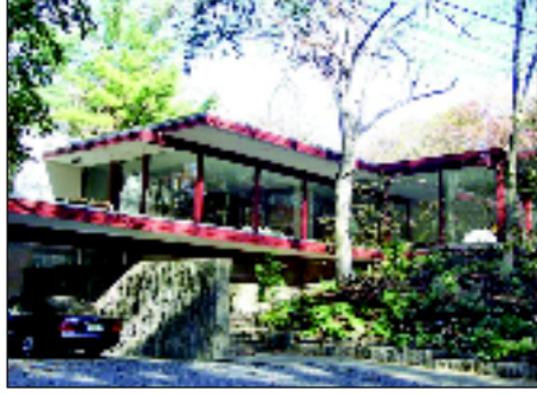
# MODERNISM IN WASHINGTON

---



The types of resources considered worthy of preservation have continually evolved since the earliest efforts aimed at memorializing the homes of our nation's founders. In addition to sites associated with individuals or events, buildings and neighborhoods are now looked at not just as monuments to those who lived or worked in them, but as representative expressions of their time.

In the past decade, increasing interest and attention has focused on buildings of the relatively recent past, those constructed in the mid-20th century. However, understanding – much less protecting – buildings and sites from the recent past presents several challenges. How do we distinguish which buildings are significant among such an overwhelming representation of a period? How do we appreciate the buildings of an era that often resulted in the destruction of significant 19th and early 20th century buildings, and that have come to be associated with sprawl or failed urban redevelopment experiments? How can we think critically about evaluating and possibly preserving buildings which are simply so ... modern?



Understanding what Modernism is and what it has meant is an important first step towards recognizing significant or representative buildings. This brochure offers a broad outline of the ideas and trends in the emergence and evolution of Modern design in Washington so that Modernism can be incorporated into discussions of our city's history, culture, architecture and preservation.

## INTRODUCTION

The term "Modernism" is generally used to describe various 20th century architectural trends that combine functionalism, redefined aesthetics, new technologies, and the rejection of historical precepts. Unlike its immediate predecessors, such as Art Deco and Streamlined Moderne, Modernism in



the mid-20th century was not so much an architectural style as it was a flexible concept, adapted and applied in a wide variety of ways. The common elements of Modern-era buildings are a desire for simplicity of form and surface, the use of new materials and technologies, open plans, the merging of architecture into the landscape, and the rejection of historically-inspired forms and embellishments.



Modernism was largely European in origin, introduced to the United States through European journals and architect émigrés. Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe, both architects at the Bauhaus design school in Germany, were perhaps the most influential among the many architects who brought Modernism to America. Once here, its development was shaped by regional forces – social, political, economic, and artistic – and its

expression varied from city to city.

Washington in the early decades of the twentieth century was a decidedly conservative city in its architectural tastes. The McMillan Commission Plan of 1901 directed urban improvements that resulted in one of the most elegant expressions of City Beautiful tenets in the nation. The plan reasserted the dominance of the Classical Revival style, relying heavily on traditional forms to represent our civic and democratic institutions of government. Secretary of the Treasury Andrew Mellon decreed that Modern “blunt” architecture would



not be used in one of the last City Beautiful plans implemented in the country for Washington’s Federal Triangle (1928-1935).



During this time, the contrast between avant-garde European architecture and American classicism could not have been sharper. As Walter Gropius was opening the

Bauhaus (1926) and Swiss architect and planner Le Corbusier completed the Villa Savoye outside Paris (1928-29), Washington witnessed the construction of neoclassical temples in the designs for the Lincoln Memorial (1922) and the Supreme Court (1929-35). As late as the 1940s, the Washington aesthetic was expressed in variations of classical designs, as seen in the West Building of the National Gallery of Art (1941) and the Jefferson Memorial (1943).



## THE DISSEMINATION OF MODERN IDEALS

Discussions of Modern architecture in America became more frequent and public during the 1930s. In 1930, the American Institute of Architects (AIA) held its annual symposium at the Mayflower Hotel to confer on the topic of contemporary architecture. More than 600 architects attended to witness the debate between the “modernistic” George Howe, the architect famed for designing the country’s first modern skyscraper (Philadelphia’s 1932 PSFS Building, in collaboration with Swiss architect William Lescaze), and C. Howard Walker, a “conservative” architect from Boston.

In February 1935, the Museum of Modern Art in New York City unveiled the exhibit *International Style: Architecture Since 1922*. On exhibit were the works of prominent American and European Modern architects such as Howe & Lescaze, Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe and Washington’s Joseph Abel. Following the exhibit, Le Corbusier launched a nationwide lecture tour, taking him to prominent art museums and universities across the country. Notably, he chose not to visit Washington.

The debate over contemporary styles and their influence continued throughout the decade. In 1936, Harvard art historian Roger Gilman asserted that the modern principles of architecture, as outlined by the International Style exhibit, had made little headway in the United States. Instead, he suggested that in this country the Modern style was chiefly used, “with modifications, in a more local, more human, and less theoretical form...for our man in the street is not so readily impressed by his architectural leaders

as the European bourgeois.” He referred to the American manifestation of contemporary style as “conservatively-modern” or “transitional.” In Washington, architect Paul Cret’s **Folger Shakespeare Memorial Library [1]** (1932) was Gilman’s primary example of this transitional style, which would later be termed Stripped Classicism.



1

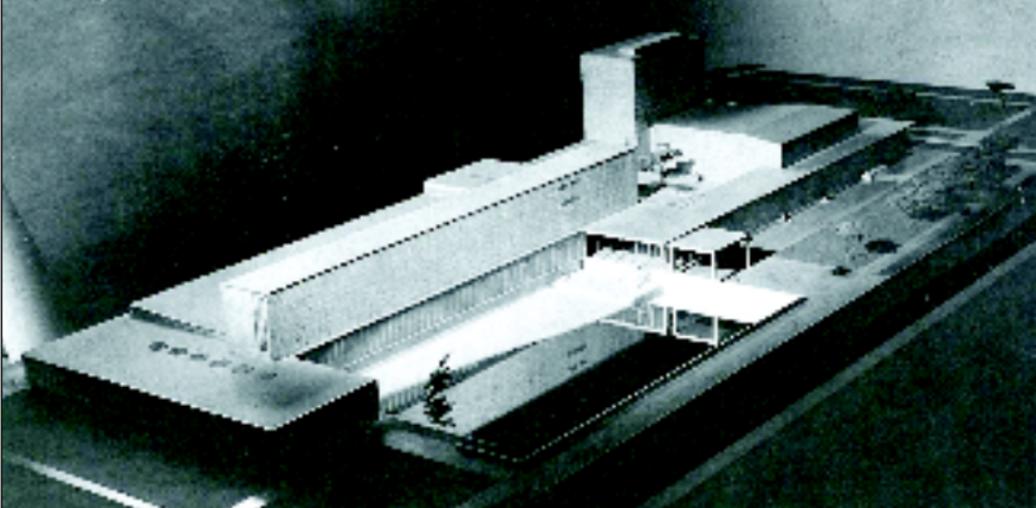
## THE TRANSITION TO MODERNISM

Stripped Classicism was a popular modern-classical hybrid in Washington from the late 1930s through the mid-1960s, used extensively in the design of public buildings. The style was a mix of classical building composition and traditional massing, but largely stripped of detail and ornamentation. It was disseminated nationwide through New Deal building programs and was indicative of the economy and utility characteristic of the period. Stripped Classicism is evident in the designs for the Federal Reserve Board (1937), War (now State) Department (1941), and **U.S. Courthouse for the District of Columbia [2]** (1952), as well as the District’s Municipal Center (1934-41).

More daring Modernist projects emerged by the end of the 1930s. In 1939, the



2



3

father-son team of Eliel and Eero Saarinen won the competition for a new **Smithsonian Gallery of Art [3]** to be constructed on the Mall with an asymmetrically composed design with long ribbon windows, a flat roof, and a stark absence of ornamentation. While the competition received national attention and the architectural press recognized it as “the first step in updating Washington architecture,” the proposal proved too radical and generated a tremendous outcry. The U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, established by Congress to advise the government on matters pertaining to the architectural development of the city, strongly opposed the unorthodox design. Without the support of the Commission, Congress withdrew funding and the project was abandoned.

The **Longfellow Building [4]** (1940, since refaced) at 1741 Rhode Island Avenue, NW, was the first Modern office building constructed in the city. Designed by William Lescaze, one of the earliest practitioners of Modern architecture in America, the building’s ten stories rose in horizontal bands of windows and balconies. Its floor plan separated office space from the service core, which was housed in an expressed vertical shaft. It is notable that the building was constructed by the private sector, which would take the lead in developing Washington’s Modern buildings in the 1940s.



4

## MODERNISM IN THE POST-WAR PERIOD

Washington experienced unprecedented population growth and economic prosperity following the Second World War. Suburbanization, the decentralization of government and commercial functions, and highway-dependent transportation guided planning and development trends. At the same time, urban renewal emerged as a government-sponsored effort to combat perceived blight, clear “slums,” and attract new investment, often destroying whole neighborhoods in the process. These trends, coupled with a massive expansion of the federal government, resulted in a significant increase in new development, especially housing and office building construction. Simultaneously, private industry, institutions and foreign missions established headquarters in the city where they would be close to political power.

After the war, many of the young architects who had flocked to Washington to work for federal agencies remained and continued their practice in private firms. Partnerships such as Berla & Abel, whose work represented a marked transition away from traditionalism, were responsible for training many of Washington's earliest Modernists, including Chloethiel Woodard Smith, Arthur Keyes, Nicholas Satterlee, and Francis D. Lethbridge. Other designers such as Louis Justement, Hilyard Robinson, Louis Edwin Fry, Sr., and Waldron Faulkner would also make formative contributions to the Modern movement in the decade following World War II. With the rise of prominent local firms and the influence of internationally renowned architects, Modernism began to garner greater official and public support.

5



Architecture immediately following the war typically expressed advancements in spatial planning and the application of emerging technologies rather than a complete embodiment of Modern designs. Albert Kahn's **Washington Post Building [5]** (1951) was innovative in its stacking of the paper's printing plant and office functions, while Gilbert Underwood's **General Accounting Office [6]** (1949-1951) was the first federal office building constructed without light courts or skylights, relying entirely on fluorescent lights and air-conditioning. More uncompromisingly Modern buildings also appeared. Chloethiel Woodard Smith's 1949 design for the Howard Myers House at 2940 Chain Bridge Road featured a V-shaped plan oriented south to capture natural light, a wide overhanging butterfly roof for shade, and louvered windows and a forced air system for ventilation. In 1952, The Architects Collaborative (TAC) designed two flat-roofed, open-plan, rectilinear houses without



6 ornamentation at 2832 and 2838 Chain Bridge Road for the **England [7]** and **Hechinger [8]** families.

Modern design fully emerged in the city and the region in the 1950s. Private sponsors continued to play a critical role in commissioning Modern residential buildings; between 1949 and 1961, more than a dozen Modern houses were constructed in the Forest Hills neighborhood. While diverse in execution and materials, most were based

7



8

9



10

on common design principles, particularly the importance of siting, and incorporating natural features and views. In Cleveland Park, William Slayton, director of the Urban Renewal Administration, commissioned architect I.M. Pei to design a dramatic concrete barrel vaulted house (1962) opening to outdoor rooms enclosed by a privacy wall.

The majority of apartment buildings constructed in the 1950s were variations on the International Style, devoid of ornament and with a strong horizontal emphasis through the use of ribbon windows and balconies. Early examples include the Crestview (1949) at 3601 Wisconsin Avenue and **Boston House [9]** (1951) at 1711 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, both designed by Berla & Abel. The ten-acre, six-building **Watergate [10]** (1964-71) by Italian architect Luigi Moretti is notable both for the bold expressiveness of its towers, and as an early planning experiment that provided a variety of uses, including restaurants and shops necessary for a self-sufficient community.

Early modern commercial buildings include the Wire Building at 1000 Vermont Avenue, NW (1949-50), the World Center Building at 16th and K Streets, NW (1950), and **1001 Connecticut Avenue [11]** (1952), all of which were clad in limestone with either bluntly punched or strikingly horizontal ribbon windows. By the 1960s, the unprecedented growth and redevelopment of the west end of Washington's downtown, particularly along K Street, had resulted in dozens of largely unremarkable buildings constructed as speculative real estate investments. In contrast, the **Forest Industries Building [12]** (1961), designed by Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon at 1619 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, is distinguished from mediocre buildings of the time by its carefully considered proportions and deep-set windows, and the interplay originally provided by wood windows (since replaced) within a light-colored concrete frame. With its vaulting canopies and arcing wings,



11



12



the 12-story **Washington Hilton [13]** (1961-65), designed by architect William Tabler, remains one of the city's most expressionistic Modern buildings.

Institutional and religious architecture in the 1950s also reflects the prevalence of Modernism. Hilyard Robinson's **Lewis K. Downing Hall [14]** (1951) at Howard University was praised as "a welcome change from the Collegiate Gothic and Colonial prototypes common to institutions of higher learning." Uruguayan architect Roman Fresnedo Siri's dramatic composition and design for the **Pan American Health Organization [15]** (1965) at 523 23rd Street, NW, contrasts a low circular council chamber clad in a zigzagging metal screen with an 11-story crescent-shaped office tower raised on piloti and clad with glass and concrete fins. Notable religious buildings include **St. Luke's Church [16]** (1957), at 4925 East Capitol Street, SE, by Thomas E. Locraft & Associates, and synagogues for Beth Shalom (1958), at 13th and Eastern Avenue, NW, designed by Daumit & Sargent, and Ohev Sholom Talmud Torah (1960), at 16th and Jonquil Street, NW, designed by John d'Epagnier.

One of the earliest Modern-era embassy buildings was the **Swiss Embassy and Chancery [17]** (1957-58) at 2900 Cathedral Avenue, NW designed by William Lescaze. The composition of pavilions linked by a glass hall is emblematic of Lescaze's functional

15

14



approach to architecture. Distinctive Modern embassies were also constructed for Denmark (1960) at 3200 Whitehaven Street, NW and the Netherlands (1963) at 4200 Linnean Avenue, NW. Wolf von Eckardt, architectural critic for the *Washington Post*, noted a considerable change in the acceptance of Modernism following the completion of the **German Chancery [18]**

on Reservoir Road in 1964. Egon Eiermann's design was proof that "good modern architecture is no longer the calculated risk most builders and bureaucrats fear it to be" and that the city was clearly ready for more of it.



17



Under a directive of President Kennedy, new guiding principles for federal architecture were established in the 1960s to promote design that embodied "the finest contemporary American architectural thought." Prominent figures in Modern art

and architecture were appointed to the Commission of Fine Arts and other agencies to extend Kennedy's vision of a new architectural era in the nation's capital. Nationally renowned Modern architects contributed to the city's development, including Philip Johnson, Harry Weese, Marcel Breuer, I.M. Pei, and Edward Durell Stone. Federal office buildings at **600 and 800 Independence Avenue, SW [19]** (1963), designed by Holabird & Root, were expressed with smooth, flat facades composed of glass set within a marble grid, giving the exterior a taut, wallpaper-like quality, but the marble cladding conveys a classical feeling appropriate for their location along the National Mall.

19

18



---

# MODERNISM DEFINED

---

While some scholars and professionals prefer to distinguish individual styles of the 20th century, others avoid labels altogether and simply refer to buildings “in the Modern style” or as part of the “Modern Movement.” Stylistic terminology is still evolving for Modern-era buildings, but these four terms are in widespread use:

The **International Style** is characterized by large, rectilinear forms, the complete absence of ornamentation, smooth wall surfaces, expansive banded windows, flat roofs, and cantilevered building extensions. A skeletal construction of steel or reinforced concrete is typical with an emphasis on horizontality. The International Style originated in Europe in the 1920s and remained popular into the 1970s. Mies van der Rohe’s Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Library (1969-72) is a good example.

**Expressionism** is identified by sweeping, curved wall surfaces and rooflines, bold use of geometric forms often with faceted, concave, or convex surfaces and arched or vaulted spaces. The style is also referred to as Neo-Expressionism and became popular in the United States in the mid-1950s. Marcel Breuer’s U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (1965-68) is a good example.

**Formalism** is characterized strict symmetrical elevations, flat projecting rooflines, smooth wall surfaces, and columnar supports. Forms are generally self-contained as a free-standing block, and ornament is often employed in the form of patterned screens or grilles of metal, cast stone or concrete, and stylized columns or piers. The style is also referred to as Neo-Formalism or New Formalism. Edward Durrell Stone’s National Geographic Headquarters (1964) is a good example.

**Brutalism**, a term derived from the French *béton brut*, meaning raw concrete, is characterized by its weighty massiveness, exposed concrete walls, expansive surfaces, and deeply recessed windows; buildings express a unity of skin, structure and finish. Concrete is most commonly used, and exterior surfaces are often rough and textured, showing evidence of concrete formwork. Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon’s Sunderland Building (1969) is a good example.



## MATERIALS AND TECHNOLOGY

Modern architecture sought to break from the past by exploiting new materials and embracing innovative design technologies. Materials such as steel, reinforced and precast concrete, processed sheet-glass, synthetics and plastics propelled building methods into new arenas and allowed architects and engineers to experiment with new types of construction.

20



Buildings of the Modern era took on appearances wholly different from their predecessors. Curtain wall construction freed skin from structure and transformed the window into a wall of glass. Beyond glass, other types of thin cladding were used in curtain wall construction. Veneers of stone, precast concrete, and metal paneling could be hung from structural frames, resulting in lower construction costs and improved efficiency. Examples of glass curtain wall construction in Washington include the former **B'nai B'rith International Headquarters [20]** (1957) by Corning & Moore at 1640

Rhode Island Avenue, NW, and the **Brazilian Chancery [21]** (1973) by Olavo Redig de Campos at 3000 Massachusetts Avenue, NW. A thin-clad marble veneer



22

forms the exterior skin of the **John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts [22]** (1971) by Edward Durell Stone.



21

When concrete is reinforced with steel, it forms a structural system that is strong in both compression and tension. Methods for pre- and post-tensioning concrete provide even greater strength and plasticity, allowing the material to be used for dramatic massing

and expressionistic details. Experimentation with production methods resulted in a variety of surface finishes – exposed aggregates, form-work markings, and bush-hammering, among others. Precast concrete had a variety of applications – it could be load-bearing or non-structural and could be conventionally reinforced or pre-stressed. Architects of the Modern era explored the use of modular precast concrete units, creating highly efficient and economical designs. Examples in Washington of the application of concrete for both expressive and structural uses include the accordion-folded roof of the **National Arboretum Administration Building [23]** (1963-64) by Deigert & Yerkes, the thin-shell entrance canopies of the Washington Hilton (1961-65) by William Tabler, the sculptural, load-bearing, precast modular units of



the Department of Housing and Urban Development (1965-68) by Marcel Breuer, the sweeping balconies of the Foxhall Apartments (1970-76) by Fischer and Elmore, and the

coffered vaults of the **Metro stations [24]** (1969-76) by Harry Weese & Associates.

24

New construction methods and technological developments allowed for buildings to be designed to have greater structural efficiency with less visible effort.

Technologically innovative structural systems allowed for dramatic cantilevered forms such as those used in the **U.S. Tax Court [25]** (1974) by Victor Lundy, the American of Institute of Architects (1972-74) by The Architects Collaborative, and the National Air and Space Museum (1972-76) by Gyo Obata of Hellmuth, Obata + Kasabaum.



Elements of Modern buildings were often fabricated in factories and assembled on site. Prefabricated parts became ubiquitous during the era and were used in the

construction of residential developments, such as the aluminum panels at **River Park [26]** by Charles M. Goodman Associates (1961-63), as well as multi-million-dollar federal projects, such as the Hubert H. Humphrey Building for the Department of Health and Human Services (1976) by Marcel Breuer and Herbert Beckhard.

25



26



## URBAN RENEWAL

Urban renewal during the Modern era was influenced by theories of community planning and public housing espoused by Le Corbusier and others in Europe, and was largely federally sponsored and financed. With the exodus of Washington's white middle class to the suburbs, a concurrent dispersal of commercial activity, and the deterioration of older urban neighborhoods, comprehensive redevelopment was seen by some as a means of stimulating revitalization of the city. Renewal efforts started in Washington with the creation of the Redevelopment Land Agency (RLA) in 1945, a public entity charged with planning, clearance, design, and construction. The National Housing Act of 1949 further empowered the RLA by authorizing federal loans and grants to finance projects. The Southwest quadrant of the city – a low-



income neighborhood within view of the Capitol and inhabited primarily by African-Americans – was targeted as a prime candidate for redevelopment.

By the early 1950s, two competing plans for Southwest's redevelopment had been proposed. An incremental plan called for the rehabilitation of many existing buildings and retention of the residents, while a more radical plan called for

the complete rebuilding of the area [27]. The final scheme drew mainly from the more radical plan, resulting in the relocation of existing residents and virtual clearance of the neighborhood. The first phase of redevelopment began in 1958 with the construction of **Capitol Park [28]**, a community that incorporated Modern high-rises, townhouses, and landscape. Modern styled residential complexes, many grouping towers and townhouses around open spaces, were constructed throughout the 1960s and early 70s, including Town Center Plaza (1961-63), River Park (1961-63), Tiber Island (1963-65), Carrollsburg Square (1964-65), Harbour Square (1963-66) and Chalk House apartments (1963-66).



# LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE



Landscape design in the Modern era emphasized functional outdoor living spaces that often blended interior and exterior space. Designers abandoned classical compositions, which relied on symmetry, hierarchy, axiality and precedent, in favor of asymmetrical arrangements of three-dimensional volumes evocative of the architecture and abstract art of the period. New and inexpensive materials were often used. Later, the environmental movement encouraged an interest in natural landscapes, and gardens came to incorporate features such as native perennials and ornamental grasses.

By the 1960s, the design of neighborhood parks and residential gardens was no longer a mainstay for landscape architects as the emergence of a new range and scale of planning and design projects came to characterize the Modern period. New types of projects included corporate headquarters and campuses, shopping centers and malls, parkways and highways, new towns and planned communities, and urban parks, playgrounds and streetscapes. Institutional and corporate landscapes, a type that evolved after World War II because of rapid industrial growth and suburbanization, were an important new vehicle for Modern landscape architecture. However, with the exception of the master plan for the International Chancery Center by Edward D. Stone, Jr., corporate headquarters and campuses were less significant in Washington. Of greater interest were the numerous landscaped plazas and courtyards incorporated into the design of Washington's private and public office buildings and residential projects.



Modernist landscape architects who made significant contributions to Washington include Dan Kiley (including work at Capitol Park, Harbour Square, Syphax playground, the East Wing of the National Gallery, and portions of L'Enfant Plaza), Lester Collins (National Zoo, Georgetown University, Gallaudet University, and the Hirshhorn Sculpture Garden), Hideo Sasaki/Sasaki Associates (master plans for the National Arboretum and Arlington National Cemetery), Boris Timchenko (Watergate), Thomas Church, Eric Paepcke, and Zion & Breen, among others.



## REACTION AGAINST MODERNISM

By the late 1960s, residents and urban planners alike harshly criticized urban renewal for failing to provide a solution for the citizens it was intended to serve. Social activists questioned the urban policies of the previous decade and the goals of city planning. These ideas first received a national audience when Jane Jacobs' best seller *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* was published in 1961, challenging more than a half century of city planning theory by arguing that vibrant urban environments required a mixture of primary uses, small blocks, the retention of old buildings, and concentration – principles not supported by Modern era urban renewal policies.

As land acquisition and clearance progressed in Southwest, an alternative method of redevelopment began to gain support among planners and policy makers. This approach, which encouraged rehabilitation over clearance, had been successful in Georgetown and was used as a model in the redevelopment of Foggy Bottom in the 1950s and **Adams Morgan [29]** in the 1960s. While the more radical clearance approach prevailed in the redevelopment of Southwest, the incremental approach to neighborhood stabilization and rehabilitation became the standard model throughout the city thereafter.

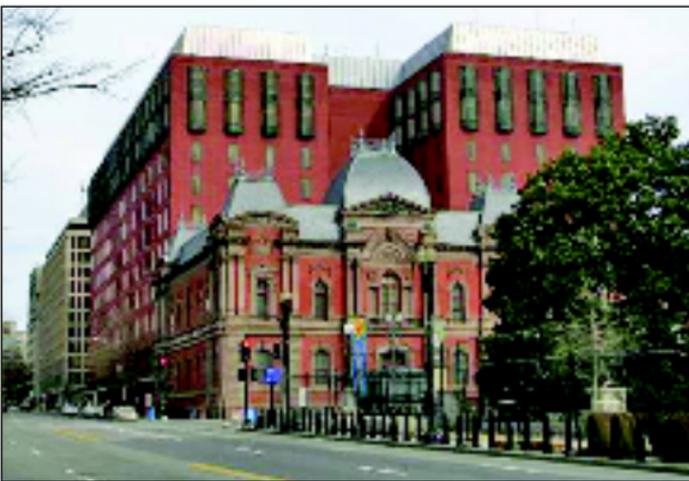
In the wake of protests against highways run through urban neighborhoods and redevelopment plans involving wholesale clearance, a growing concern emerged for the preservation of Washington's older buildings. The 1964 plan for the renewal of Pennsylvania Avenue, which made no effort to preserve the avenue's historic elements, particularly incited preservationists who successfully rallied to save the Old Post Office Building. Realizing that many of the city's older sections contributed to Washington's uniqueness and vitality, concerned citizens banded together to promote awareness of the city's buildings and neighborhoods. Their efforts culminated in the formation of the city's Joint Committee on Landmarks in 1964, and established Washington as one of the nation's pioneers of urban conservation.

The reaction extended to Modern design itself which, by the 1970s, resulted in buildings that had come to represent, to many, a bland

and inhumane type of architecture. Spurred by rapid growth and economic prosperity, many buildings in the Modern era were constructed purely as speculative real estate investments. With an anticipated lifespan of 20 to 30 years – the typical lifecycle of mechanical equipment and the standard period for calculating return on investment – many of the period’s buildings were designed and constructed with little regard for permanence or quality. Established theories on architecture and planning began to give way to a new wave of critical thinking. Architectural critic Wolf von Eckardt discussed an imminent shift in architectural thought and design in an article for *The New Republic*, describing the 1970s as an era of architectural change that would witness “the death of the Moderns.”

## CONTEXTUALISM

While acceptance of Modern architecture in Washington had risen to its height in the 1960s, the late 1960s and 1970s saw increasing interest in contextualism – projects relating to their environment and often incorporating historic buildings into their designs. This period, often referred to nationally as the beginning of a “Post-Modern” era, ushered in a philosophical and



30

design shift. Modernism’s emphasis on form and functionalism and its indifference to historical precepts and styles were abandoned, and the possibilities of architectural history and traditional styles were

rediscovered. Washington’s local architectural community made significant contributions to the field of architecture in this period, and the city contains one of the best collections of contextual buildings that mix Modern design with a respect for precedent and historic buildings.

Early contextual projects often involved colonial and federal era buildings whose value was easily appreciated. Harbour Square (1963-66) at 500 N Street, SW by Chloethiel Woodard Smith & Associates incorporated Wheat Row, dating from 1794. John Carl Warnecke’s **New Executive Office Building [30]** and Court of Claims (1968-69) step back from 19th century buildings on two sides of Lafayette Square, as urged by Jacqueline Kennedy. The **Trentman House [31]** (1969) at 1350 27th Street, NW, by Hugh Newell Jacobsen, was the first piece of deliberate modern architecture in the Georgetown Historic District

31





where the design was carefully calibrated to the established scale, rhythm and façade organization of the neighborhood. Both the

**American Institute of Architects [32]** (1972-74) by The Architects Collaborative and Warnecke's **Hart Senate Office Building [33]** (1973-82) were designed as gentle modern backdrops folding around corner houses built in 1800.

In time, changing attitudes led to similar respect for Victorian buildings and humbler contexts. **Canal Square [34]** (1970) at 31st and M Streets, NW, designed by Arthur Cotton Moore/Associates, combined the preservation of an historic warehouse with new construction that featured red brick to echo the district's predominant building material, and continuous ribbon windows that abstractly reference the linear quality of the adjacent C&O Canal. **The Foundry [35]** (1973-76) at 1055 Thomas Jefferson Place, NW, also by Moore, and **Dodge Center [36]** (1974-75) at 1010 Wisconsin Avenue by Hartman-Cox, incorporated old industrial structures and were designed to relate to their historic context.

By the end of the 1970s, Modernism had in a sense come full circle as architects gained new respect for buildings once derided by the movement. This coincided with a fuller acceptance of historic preservation in Washington, marked by the passage of the city's preservation law in 1978. Perhaps the city's best example of these transformed attitudes is I.M. Pei's **National Gallery of Art, East Wing [37]** (1978) a modern landmark that pays distinct homage to a building once thought hopelessly reactionary but now appreciated for its unsurpassed elegance — John Russell Pope's National Gallery, completed in 1941 as one of the last and greatest examples of the city's monumental classicism.





34



35



36



37

## DC'S FIRST MODERN BUILDING?



**Langston Terrace Dwellings** (1935-38) at 21st and Benning Road, NE, was the first federally-funded public housing project in the District, and possibly the city's first Modern building. Designed by architect Hilyard Robinson, the International Style garden apartment complex is organized around a central common and reflects the influence of European housing prototypes.

Text adapted from *DC MODERN: A Context for Modernism in the District of Columbia, 1945-1976*, a historic context study prepared for the District of Columbia Historic Preservation Office by Robinson & Associates, Inc., 2009.

Photo 3: Longstreth, Richard, ed. *The Mall in Washington, 1791-1991*. Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991.

Photo 4: © 1971, *The Washington Post*. Reprinted with Permission.

All other photos by Robinson & Associates and the Historic Preservation Office.

This brochure has been funded with the assistance of a matching grant from the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, through the District of Columbia Office of Planning, Historic Preservation Office, under provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended. The contents and opinions contained in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of the Interior, nor does the mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation by the U.S. Department of the Interior.

This program has received Federal financial assistance for the identification, protection, and/or rehabilitation of historic properties and cultural resources in the District of Columbia. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the U.S. Department of the Interior prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, or disability in its Federally assisted programs. If you believe that you have been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility as described above, or if you desire further information, please write to: Office of Equal Opportunity, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20240.

Printed 2009.



District of Columbia  
Office of Planning

