

THIRTIES MODERN

In his 1975 book, *Depression Modern, The Thirties Style in America*, Martin Greif, carefully distinguished the 1925 Art Deco-Modernistic from a style that followed close on its heels. Thirties Modern was purely American, and it emphasized curved surfaces, especially at the corners of buildings and its decorations were often fluid lines rather than the angular incised lines and notches cut into Art Deco surfaces. Chrome strips were a thirties feature as well as a distinctive alphabet for signage. Of course the two styles became somewhat scrambled at times, but pure examples were easily classified.

Buildings put up in the thirties were bucking the tide of poor business conditions in manufacturing, but some industries were emerging anyway, especially air travel and broadcasting, and new airports were being built as well as a few new rail stations, such as the great Cincinnati terminal. The streamlining of the designs of air-craft, cars, and the GG-1 electric railroad engine worked in parallel with the smooth corners of thirties buildings, which, practically speaking, were not fighting wind drag. The Chicago Century of Progress Exhibition in 1933 and the New York World Fair of 1939 gave Thirties Modern and International Style good exposure. Fred Astaire- Ginger Rodgers movies were often filmed in Thirties Modern interior sets—a boost that also suggested that the style was beyond the reach of ordinary homeowners.

Buildings in Thirties Modern and International Styles also appeared—very rapidly—in government spending by dictatorial regimes in Italy and Germany and in other corporate states where an illusion of progress was desperately needed. Poured concrete was the right material to shore up some potential empire that might not last long enough for elaborately crafted monuments.

Translating Thirties Modern into suburbs and rural areas was something else. The style was mostly confined to store fronts and small factories. Hutzlers store in Towson was a late (1950) flowering of the style, which anywhere else would have been considered obsolete. Hergenrathers drugstore in Towson was treated to a Thirties Modern front in 1944, complete with interior walls of glazed porcelain slabs and square glass bricks around the door frame.

By the 1960s, before the style had ever been defined, it was old hat, an embarrassment to its owners, and was being rapidly removed or covered up with bad imitations of International Style.

Baltimore County's rare example of Thirties Modern was the Pikes Theatre, essentially a brick box with one well-designed street facade. The style is called Deco in some local books, but the end-walls have the air-stream curves and the characteristic "three stripes" of the Thirties Style. During the long lapse of interest in Deco and Thirties Modern, many interiors were altered to prevailing styles and even the Pikes lost much of its character. Eventually the theater closed altogether and had been proposed for conversion to a postal substation, when Baltimore County in 1991 acquired an option on it to establish a performing arts center. It eventually reopened as a .

specialty food market under plans by Kahn & Ammon, Inc

HUTZLERS' STORE

The first modern store in Towson was Hutzler Brothers', started in 1950 and designed by Ketchum, Gina, and Sharp, with James R. Edmonds. Hutzlers was a major undertaking in the early post-war period, especially as the anchor of a town lined with two blocks of mid-Victorian "Main Street" type shops. Located on the edge of town, the parking was developed in a patch of woods that had until then marked the end of the village. The ground was the lowermost and surplus portion of Goucher College's abnormally large campus. The store project involved the ingenious concept of relocating Joppa Road, a State highway, a few lanes to the north and building the store basement out under the new road where there would be pedestrian access to the parking lot. This was an early use of air rights in a county that had never been cramped for space in the past. The original store was two stories of beige hydraulic brick with curved corners in the Thirties Modern style. An extensive band of windows at the dining room level provided a view of the rustic scenery between Towson and Loch Raven. The store was best viewed from the parking lot, and presented itself as a wide, horizontal design, with long strips of windows at basement and street levels, an International style building from that vantage point. In 1968, the original building was topped off by another story that made it necessary to block up some of the street level display windows for additional support. The original structure won an award of merit in 1951, but the expansion and the blocking of the best view by a parking garage ruined the aesthetic effect. Hutzlers was the pioneer suburban upscale store, but by the 1980s was in obvious decline under a visibly incompetent management. The store closed on January 28, 1990 and its fixtures were sold. In 1993, the building was in the hands of the Hahn Company of Los Angeles which has various plans to reopen it as a part of a bright new store complex called Towson Town Center that opened in an RTKL-designed crystal palace October 1991. The store was heavily restyled in 1998 and the blank wall surfaces have been relieved with various business names and logos. The redevelopment was the project of Heritage Properties



GLENN L. MARTIN AIRPORT CONTROL TOWER

Baltimore County's best Thirties Style structure is the combined administration building and control tower at Glenn L. Martin State Airport at 701 Wilson Point Road, Middle River. The tower is a multi-story, steel-framed, concrete building with outer facing of buff brick. Characteristic elements of Thirties Style are its rounded corners and the windows at three levels in continuous ribbons of glass in steel frames. The main entrance is set in a four-story vertical concrete pavilion with a multi-story, vertical ribbon of narrow windows. The marquee opening onto the runway is edged in stainless steel with rounded corners and decorated with the parallel bands favored in the Thirties. Designer of this building was Alfred Kahn Associated Architects, Inc., of Detroit, with local support by Fisher, Williams, Nes and Campbell. Proof of the Kahn connection is found in the *Sun*, February 16, 1941, the year this "Thirties" building was actually constructed. The Martin Company was originally the creation of an individual aviation pioneer but Glenn L. Martin eventually lost control of his own organization and the airport was acquired by the Maryland Department of Transportation

in 1975. Of Baltimore County's very few Thirties designs, the control tower is the best and least altered example, also one of the last designs of Albert Kahn's career as America's most innovative planner of practical yet beautiful industrial spaces.

INTERNATIONAL STYLE

The name International Style appeared in a 1932 exhibition catalog by Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Phillip M. Johnson to describe ten years of European development in architecture that broke away from all historic styles and built somewhat box-like structures out of concrete, glass, and steel. The style was also called "modern" but now we find the word "modern" encapsulated in the past rather than beckoning from the future. The German Bauhaus school of architecture at Weimar, Dessau, and Berlin and their kindred spirits elsewhere in Europe and later in America showed what daring designs could be constructed from modern materials: curtain walls of glass, buildings on stilts, stories cantilevered over plazas. The best examples of International Style were refreshing and exciting, but the bare-bone imitations in sprawling 1950s shopping centers and office blocks were box-like and little more, built of wretched materials that weathered poorly, seldom landscaped with anything more than asphalt. The style appeared in cities at first.

The Parke-Davis company commissioned a building by Minoru Yamasaki of Detroit, the designer of the World Trade Towers. Yamasaki's Towson building is located at 102 West Road.

International Style made its appearance in Baltimore County with the Albert Kahn-designed complex of hangar and office buildings of the Glenn L. Martin Aircraft works started at Middle River in 1929. The Kahn company was doing 18 percent of the nation's factory designing before the stockmarket crash. Albert Kahn (1869-1942) jokingly noted that the architectural firms oriented toward palaces and cathedrals left the planning of factories "to the office boy" and he was content to serve as corporate America's office boy. The style, or lack of style was echoed in other commercial structures, such as the Black and Decker plant in Towson.

The great building boom of the 1950s brought in some brave new designs, such as the partially International design of Hutzler's in Towson, opened in 1951 and originally a two-story structure with many ground-level windows that were later bricked up to support a third level. Designed by Ketcham, Jina & Shap and James R. Edmonds, the store won an architectural award in 1951. But Hutzler's was also partially Thirties Modern, especially the part that could be seen by pedestrians on York Road. Its International facade was obscured by the 1968-parking garage.

Another phase of the International style was the Brutalist sub-species, generally a mid-rise building of concrete, mostly flat- surfaced and just tall enough to overwhelm the neighborhood into which it was inserted. The International, low-slung buildings owed something to Charles-Edouard Le Corbusier but lacked the curves and projections that came along slightly later in the Sculptural style. The sculptural style was supposed to reflect the purpose of the building as did the spiral Guggenheim Museum in New York, where the interior displays are laid out on a winding ramp reflected outside in the Mixmaster shape of the poured concrete structure. Brutalist buildings on the other hand, were multi-purpose, just another provider of floor space. Towson's two 1970s buildings, the Baltimore County Public Library and the County Courts Building, are the most notable examples, both roundly detested by lovers of small-town life. The library interior was first seen as a vast, exciting, free-flowing space, but its outside remained a horror, especially because it was intended for a park-like setting rather than being pushed out to the sidewalk line, as finally located. The County

Courts Building is a virtual, but cheaper, reproduction of the no longer new Boston City Hall. Its useless rows of overhanging marble ears give pedestrians qualms about being crushed if one or all of them plummeted to the ground. The sheer weight of the building reminds one of Vanbrugh's epitaph:

Lie heavy on him earth, for he
Laid many a heavy load on thee.

There is a lingering regret that had it only been constructed in Mexico City, the spongy earth would eventually sop its mass out of the public eye. The court's deadening weight only threatens law-abiding citizens, as the future jailbirds are van-pooled into an internal garage entrance. America's leading architectural historian, Dr. Vincent Scully, cursed this building at one remove by focusing his wrath on its Boston prototype:

In fact those brutal buildings have combined with Le Corbusier's cataclysmic principles of town planning to blow a good many old cities apart. The Boston City Hall, for example, is an uncouth monster laying about itself with Neanderthalic roarings and tearing the very center of Boston to pieces. It evokes the ruin as well, because it has been swept clean of all those complex architectural details, developed over the centuries, like the rest of the urban fabric, that endow buildings with a literally compromised, civilized scale. (Scully, 1991, p. 352)

The County Courts Building opened in 1976 and was the design of Gaudreau, Inc., with consultation by Pietro Belluschi. Irregularities in awarding the contracts, when detected, sent a notable public official to a brief sojourn at the Federal compulsory golf course for white-collar criminals. Others involved were merely ruined.

The public library, on the other hand, designed by Tatar and Kelly, survived criticism that the concrete was merely a tickey- tackey syrup that would collapse before the books could be strung out on its miles of shelving. Happy to say, the roof supported massive test loading of concrete blocks and saved the reputation of the Arundel Corporation. About 12 years later, the roof leaked (because of the rigorous testing?) but was quickly repaired. A large poured- concrete southern extension in the mismatching "sculptural" style was completed in mid-1991. With Towson's Piedmont bedrock, there is no Mexico City solution to this useful but appalling aggregate of concrete and, as Vincent Scully would classically add, hubris. The vast overhanging second story had an unplanned benefit: sheltering bus patrons and vagrants; in the dark of night, the deep recess serves the comfortless as the town's largest unintended *vespasienne*.

Chizuk Amuno



CHIZUK AMUNO

The first of the boldly modern places of Jewish worship within the county was completed at 8100 Stevenson Road in 1958 on land acquired in 1953. The congregation traced its roots to a Conservative body formed at Exeter Hall in East Baltimore in 1871; the founders had seceded from the Reform movement group, the Baltimore Hebrew Congregation. Their location before moving to Baltimore County was the familiar blue-domed temple next to Druid Hill Park at Eutaw Place and

Chauncey Avenue. Formal dedication of the new fieldstone building took place on September 7, 1958. The design by David Schwartzman is free-flowing and the roof curvilinear and undulating. Floor-to-roof windows rise on the entrance side, while the ends of the building are curved walls of unpunctuated fieldstone. At the east end, a venetian glass panel from ground to roof line rises between the fieldstone walls and forms the background of a large, 25-foot high bronze sculpture representing the Burning Bush. (Frank, 1982, p. 56)

BETH EL

Beth El is a fairly young “liberal-conservative” congregation dating from 1947, moving to Stevenson in 1960 after ten years at Hilton Avenue and Dorthian Roads in the Ashburton area of Baltimore City. A permanent structure was designed by Sigmund Braverman of Cleveland. The building at 8101 Park Heights Avenue was dedicated in September 1960. A round-ended fieldstone structure punctuated with a scattering of slit windows, the synagogue is flat-roofed and seats 1,500. Six large doors set under concrete panels provide access. The three concrete panels are decorated with shallow sculptures, three Hebrew letters spelling “Emeth,” or in English, “truth.” The entrance is flanked by two free-standing columns topped by stylized menoras or seven-branched candelabras, a monument to the martyrs of the faith. (Frank, 1982, p. 57)

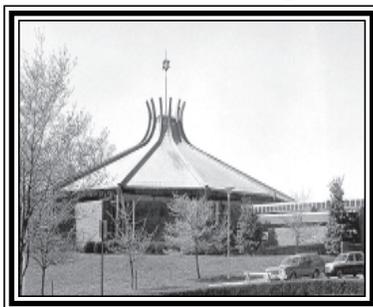


Beth El

BETH TFILOH CONGREGATION

This Orthodox congregation founded in 1921 was formerly at 3200 Garrison Avenue in Ashburton-Forest Park inside the city limits. In 1960, a large campus was acquired from the Shriver estate at 3300 Old Court Road and ground-breaking took place on May 31, 1964. The designer was Morris Lapidus, famous architect of Miami Beach hotels including the Eden Roc and Fontainebleau. First services took place in the lobby of the incomplete synagogue on February 5, 1966. The completed sanctuary is a brick building of 12-sides, with an embossed copper roof with prominent ribs. A copper Star of David rises on a tall rod at the center of the roof. The sanctuary seats 1,000 worshippers. A long range of buildings including a 1,500-seat auditorium extends northward. The entire complex is well landscaped with trees and hedges. (Frank, 1982, p. 58).

Beth Tfiloh Congregation



GOUCHER COLLEGE CENTER

Goucher College's 1960 "College Center" was designed by Pietro Belluschi with RTKL Associates, Inc. Belluschi, a dedicated "Miesian" architect, was here working in a non-Miesian style, more in the tradition of Frank Lloyd Wright. The buildings are low slung and cleave to a slight hillside on the mostly flat part of the campus. The centerpiece is the Kraushaur Auditorium, named for a past president of the college. The base of the building is the same local fieldstone as the other campus buildings, some dating from 194_. The upper level is a box-like dome, almost an inverted tub, of vertical copper sheet set at a slight slant, framing the auditorium inside. Windows are in slender bands in dark metal frames. The auditorium provides unobstructed views from every row in a wide fanshaped layout—a comfortable version of Richard Wagner's festival theatre at Bayreuth in 1876. Almost unnoticed beside the auditorium is the office complex and student center, where long bands of windows are sheltered by an overhanging flat roof. Between the two units is a broad range of easily climbed concrete steps, more for sitting than traversing.

Belluschi (1899-1994) spent all his adult life in the United States and was practically the first architect to complete a major commercial building after materials became available at the end of World War II. The Equitable Building in his then hometown of Portland, Oregon, in 1948 was the first purely unadorned Miesian all-glass bank tower. In the Baltimore region, his other notable work is the new (1958) sanctuary of the Church of the Redeemer on North Charles Street, a neo-Gothic building with a stone base somewhat like the Goucher auditorium; there, Belluschi used his other favorite material, wood, which he likes to combine in horizontal compositions in a manner first used by the historic Japanese—the same style that inspired Frank Lloyd Wright.

JOHN DEERE BUILDING

A 1966 building that meets the criteria of discarding decoration and making the best use of available new materials is the John Deere Company's warehouse at 9600 Deereco Road, south of Timonium Road, nestling next to the northbound lane of Interstate 83. The warehouse has a roof of precast concrete slabs supported by a grid of 1.5-inch steel cables that are tied to concrete earth anchors on the highway side and attached invisibly to concrete buttresses on the parking lot access side. This unique suspension system produces a large clear inner space originally designed to house and display tractors and other self-moving agricultural and industrial machinery. Overall layout of the building is fan-shaped. The only such dramatic and imaginative structure in the county, the warehouse was designed by RTKL Associates, Inc., of Baltimore. The design received an award from the American Iron and Steel Institute in 1967 and won the 1968 A. I. A. Honor Award.

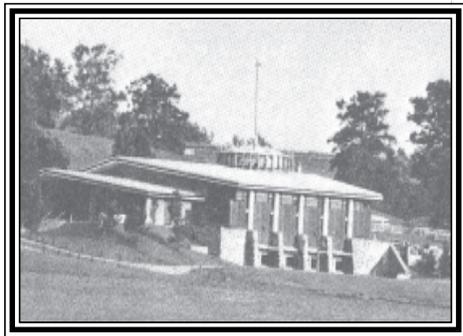
In 1984, the Deere Company sold the building to MacKenzie and Associates, who planned to lease sections of the 138,922 square feet of warehouse and the 37,398 square feet of office space. In 1991 the Timonium post office was located there. (Dorsey and Dilts, 1981, pp. 228-229. *Evening Sun*, July 30, 1986)

John Deere Building



ST. JOHN, LONG GREEN (1968)

St. John, Long Green outgrew its 1855 Gothic Revival church and on April 20, 1968, broke ground for a new sanctuary that was opened for services on September 7, 1969, and dedicated November 2 of that year by Lawrence Cardinal Shehan. This was the first in the round Roman Catholic church built in the county following the ceremonial reforms adopted at the Second Vatican Council. The church, designed by Stanley L. English, is laid out much like a theatre-in-the-round with the congregation on all sides of a centrally located altar. None of the worshipers are very far from the altar, yet the church is capacious and its views unobstructed. But the “modern auditorium church” was not new, and in fact, was mentioned in connection with Mead, McKim and White’s Lovely Lane Church in the *Architectural Record* in October 1891 (page 169). A Catholic Church with seating on both sides within a rectangular auditorium was designed by Gaudreau & Gaudreau in 1966 for Our Lady of Perpetual Help at Woodlawn (*Catholic Review*, April 22, 1966). The external design at Long Green is subdued, a great rectangle under a very low-pitched gable roof, set on a fieldstone base with brick walls and slit-like side windows; the entrance is a broad gable-roofed vestibule with plate glass front walls and a cantilevered slab roof to provide shelter to the entrants. In the center of the low-pitched main roof is a round cupola with additional windows. The side parallel to the road has an entrance for a basement auditorium featuring fieldstone buttresses. The entire church clings to the slight slope above Long Green Pike, a true Prairie style fit to the rural setting in which it was built— and still rural at the time of writing. Over twenty years of growth by the original evergreen plantings has rendered the roadside of the church almost invisible, quite a change in approach from the sort of church that towered above the scene like a proclamation.



St. John,, Long Green



Our Lady of Hope, Dundalk

OUR LADY OF HOPE CHURCH (1970)

Dr. Isabelle Gournay recently reported Our Lady of Hope Church as a notable modern and post-Vatican II church design. Located on Lynch Road in Dundalk, the church was designed by William Goudreau with a great, stark, spacious interior, almost completely unadorned when completed, in 1970/ Over the years, the congregation has allowed various decorations to creep into the purist interior setting. (Matysek, 2004).

MARYLAND BLUE CROSS BUILDING

Maryland’s largest health insurance company built this headquarters building in 1972 across Joppa Road from Black and Decker’s corporate center and remained there until 1990, when the structure was acquired by Baltimore County as a new police and fire department administration building. The headquarters is ten stories of office space and one story of unseen air conditioning

machinery and other mechanical systems. The architects were Peterson and Brickbauer of Baltimore, along with Brown, Guenther, Battaglia, and Galvin. The building is a four-sided cube of mirror glass hung in a black aluminum curtain wall. The cube is perched on a sunken base, scarcely noticeable, that serves as the entrance level. The bluish glass cube is matched by a small red cube of smooth glazed brick that houses some other mechanical systems; the cubes represent the Ying and Yang concepts of the style. The building is perched on the skyline east of central Towson known to the colonials as Britton’s Ridge. This is probably the most admired structure among Towson’s post-1960 forest of high-rise buildings and the most carefully undecorated one.

In a 1987 interview, Charles Brickbauer noted that he had learned the “importance of detailing” from Philip Johnson and his earliest employment in 1954 was working with Johnson and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe in planning the first of New York’s plain-surfaced skyscrapers, the Seagram Building. One of Brickbauer’s colleagues was quoted, “I think he’s one of the best architects in the city. He works in the Miesian tradition of paying incredible attention to detail...I think he’s one of the few architects in Baltimore who regards his profession as an art as well as a business.” The word “Miesian” sums up the entire philosophy of stripping buildings of clutter, decoration, and associations with any earlier styles and historic cultures. Miesian also means making beauty with the newest in metals, concrete, and glass, a goal architects had been groping towards since the first of the skyscrapers a century ago—but their clients had so often wanted to use practical steel skeletons as display racks for more Greek, Gothic, and Italianate embellishments. (Gunts, 1987)



Noxell Corporate Building

NOXELL CORPORATE BUILDING



Maryland Blue Cross Building

One of the first large corporate parks in the county was opened in 1961 on a site between I-83 and the Northern Central Railroad by the present Noxell Corporation, then called the Noxema Company for its first product, the skin cream Noxema that Baltimoreans had sworn by since its invention in 1917 by Dr. George A. Bunting, a city pharmacist. The company was so successful that it needed a large warehouse with both truck and rail access. The new building was an 85,000 square foot warehouse set in a 60-acre park. The New York architectural firm of Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill designed the structure, and Henry A. Knott, Inc., was general contractor. This flat-roofed building was a demonstration that a modern plant could be straight-forward in its lines but also elegant. The outer walls were 5.5 by 20-foot insulated steel panels faced with granite. (*Sun*, November 25, 1961) Some 19 years later, another large structure was added, a \$12 million laboratory and research building. Reflecting the expansion of the company into allied fields, the “Cover Girl” (Noxell’s trade name for cosmetics) model and corporate spokesperson, Cheryl Tiegs, was the feature celebrity at the opening in 1982 (*Jeffersonian* May 27, 1982). This is now the property of Proctor & Gamble.

RCM&D BUILDING

A modern building that is not a box but a multi-faced assemblage of recesses and plane surfaces is the RCM&D building put up in 1985 for Heritage Properties to house as its principal tenant, the insurance firm of Riggs, Counselman, Michaels, and Downes at the southwest corner of Joppa Road and Fairmount Avenue in the eastern part of Towson. Nelson-Salabes of Towson was the architectural firm.

RCM&D Building

