Mid-Century Modern in Dallas – Freeways, Technology, and Architecture

Marsha Prior
Oct 26, 2019
Modern Architecture in Dallas –

- Making its appearance before World War II – primarily in downtown and Fair Park
- Art Deco and Art Moderne – predominant modern styles
Fair Park, 1936 Centennial, George Dahl, supervising architect
Mercantile Bank Building, 1942, Walter Ahlschlager architect, photo courtesy of Preservation Dallas.

Masonic Temple, 1941, Thomas B. Broad, photo by Liz Casso.
Dallas weathered the Great Depression & World War II fairly well

- Texas Centennial brought in money and spotlight on Dallas;
- Discovery of oil in East Texas spurred economic growth;
- Civic and political leaders confident in the city’s growth potential –
  - Bartholomew Plan underway during the war.

War Fails to Stop Progress of City
Mid 1940s through 1960s when freeways, car culture, technology & architecture begin to seriously influence one another.
Started when former Houston & Texas Central (H&TC) railroad converted into a highway to accommodate the growing use of automobiles; encouraged development away from the downtown core.
1947 - construction on Central Expressway begins

1953 - reaches Northwest Highway

1954 - beyond Forest Lane and moving toward Richardson

Central Expressway ca. 1949 near Haskell Avenue. From dfwfreeways.com; original at UT Arlington Library Special Collections.
First high-rise office building constructed outside of downtown Dallas was along Central Expressway.
Meadows Building Has New ‘Look’ in Design

Several features of the $4,000,000 world, landscaped parking areas accommodating more than 500 cars, and continuous variation in design and color in the lobbies.

J.N. McCammon & Jack Morgan, architects.
Ca. 1950s
Central Expressway looking south – Walnut Hill in foreground; Northwest Highway in background.

From dfwfreeways.com; original TxDOT Travel Information Division.
NorthPark Center opens 1965.


From dfwfreeways.com; original UT-Arlington Library Special Collections.
NorthPark Center - very modern design

Harwood K. Smith, project architect; E.G. Hamilton, architect for Titche’s Store

L-Shape footprint was innovative & unique for the time
From https://tclf.org/northpark-center; original photo by Barrett Doherty.

Lawrence Halprin

From https://tclf.org/pioneer/lawrence-halprin.
Before NorthPark Center was even completed, developers were buying property for single-family neighborhoods.

Purchases made in 1962
Ca. 1956, north of Forest Lane.
From dfwfreeways.com; original Dallas Public Library.

Foreground – Hamilton Park

Ca. 1959, TI Semiconductor Building.
From dfwfreeways.com; original Dallas Public Library.

Background to right – Hamilton Park
Designed by O’Neil Ford & Richard Colley with Arch Swank as associate architect.

An innovative building for a unique product. Use of thin-shell concrete for its hyperbolic paraboloid roof.
TI Semiconductor Building 1969.
From https://quod.lib.umich.edu/u/ummu/x-06-04044/06_04044;
original photo by Edward Olencki.

TI added to growth and development of northern sector of Dallas.

TI employment:
June 1958 = 4,665
June 1961 = over 11,000
Need to round out with LBJ
Interstate 635 (LBJ) 1967 - 1971

From dfwfreeways.com

Interstate 635 (LBJ) 1967 - 1971
ANATOMY OF THE MID CENTURY HOUSE
FLOOR PLAN
USUALLY NOT A PURE RECTANGLE
MANY RECTANGLES SUPERIMPOSED
OVERALL IRREGULARLY SHAPED FLOOR PLAN
DIRECTIONAL AND WIDE SPREAD
FUNCTIONALLY LEGIBLE

THE PURE RECTANGLE WITH VERY LITTLE ARTICULATION
FLOOR PLAN
USUALLY NOT A PURE RECTANGLE
MANY RECTANGLES SUPERIMPOSED
OVERALL IRREGULARLY SHAPED FLOOR PLAN
DIRECTIONAL AND WIDE SPREAD
FUNCTIONALLY LEGIBLE

THE MID CENTURY MODERN FLOOR PLAN


An outstanding country-estate design with an impressive facade and a spacious floor plan. The low-pitched, wide overhanging roofs with their offsets are interesting, indeed. The raised planter, the double front doors, and the patterned privacy wall add the finishing touches to a wonderfully proportioned exterior. Inside, the family will find its living patterns enjoyable ones. Activities will flow toward the rear of the plan and be highlighted by the view of, and easy access to, the outdoor living facilities. The kitchen is directly accessible to the terrace via the unique pass-through. Observe the laundry, the wash room and the extra room which may be utilized for the maid, for sewing, or hobbies. Surely a house with imagination.
ENTRY COURT
THRESHOLD AND TRANSITION BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE
MEDIATING SPACE
MICROCLIMATE
OUTDOOR ROOM
ENTRY COURT
THRESHOLD AND TRANSITION BETWEEN
PUBLIC AND PRIVATE
MEDIATING SPACE
MICROCLIMATE
OUTDOOR ROOM

Design B 1942 2,424 Sq. Ft.-Excluding Atrium/24,967 Cu. Ft.
MULTIPLE ROOF PLANES
VARYING ROOF HEIGHTS AND PITCHES
OVERHANGS
HIERARCHY OF FUNCTIONS
SCULPTURAL
MULTIPLE ROOF PLANES
VARYING ROOF HEIGHTS AND PITCHES
OVERHANGS
HIERARCHY OF FUNCTIONS
SCULPTURAL
LEGIBILITY

'READ' THE HOUSE IN TERMS OF SPACE, FUNCTION, STRUCTURE
INTERIOR IS UNDERSTOOD FROM THE EXTERIOR
LEGIBILITY

'READ' THE HOUSE IN TERMS OF SPACE, FUNCTION, STRUCTURE
INTERIOR IS UNDERSTOOD FROM THE EXTERIOR
LEGIBILITY
'READ' THE HOUSE IN TERMS OF SPACE, FUNCTION, STRUCTURE
INTERIOR IS UNDERSTOOD FROM THE EXTERIOR
WINDOWS
EXPANSE OF GLASS RATHER THAN PUNCHED OPENINGS
LETTING NATURE IN
EXPANSIVE VIEWS AND NATURAL LIGHT
MULTI-DIRECTIONAL NATURAL LIGHT
WINDOWS
EXPANSE OF GLASS RATHER THAN PUNCHEd OPENINGS
LETTING NATURE IN
EXPANSIVE VIEWS AND NATURAL LIGHT
MULTI-DIRECTIONAL NATURAL LIGHT
WINDOWS
EXPANSE OF GLASS RATHER THAN PUNCHED OPENINGS
LETTING NATURE IN
EXPANSIVE VIEWS AND NATURAL LIGHT
MULTI-DIRECTIONAL NATURAL LIGHT
SOLIDS AND VOIDS
ELEMENTAL ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS
LINES, PLANES, AND FRAME
OPAQUE VERSUS TRANSPARENT
THICK VERSUS THIN
HEAVY VERSUS LIGHT
SOLIDS AND VOIDS
ELEMENTAL ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS
LINES, PLANES, AND FRAME
OPAQUE VERSUS TRANSPARENT
THICK VERSUS THIN
HEAVY VERSUS LIGHT