

Mid Century Modern Southfield Tour

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Home & Building Guide

Modernism looked forward with new design ideas and the use of new materials and new technology. More attention was paid to the use of natural light; the flow of indoor spaces; and the use of innovative forms or shapes. Mid-Century Modern worked to make small spaces appear more open and integrated structural components and the outdoors into the design. The most creative architecture from this period was evocative. The following buildings are examples of these principles.



Millennium Center **

Northland Theater

15600 JL Hudson Drive

Year Built: 1966

Opened in 1966, the Northland Theater was designed by the firm of Ted Rogvov. The theater features unusually-shaped curving and upturned roof and a large portico and was built to seat nearly 1500 patrons. The first movie screened at the Northland was Hitchcock's Torn Curtain.

The auditorium was twinned in 1976. A decade later, AMC Theatres acquired the Northland and closed it in 1990. Providence Hospital acquired the Northland Theater in the 1990s and turned operation of the theater over to the Southfield Downtown Development Authority (or Cornerstone District). The DDA moved its offices to the theater, returned the auditorium to its former size and rented the same for special events, lectures, recitals, plays and other performances. For a time it also offered a classic movie series. The DDA ceased to operate the theater in 2010. The theater continues as a mixed use venue and is the home to the Southfield branch of Triumph Church. **Architect: Theodore Rogvov**



Northland Center

Year Built: 1952-54

Before Northland Center officially opened on March 22, 1954, Southfield Township lacked clothing, shoe, book, toy, variety, record and jewelry stores. Suddenly, Southfield boasted all of these and more in quantity, adjoining the world's largest branch department store, the JL Hudson Company.

Hudson's selected the site for the 80-store Northland Mall because of its location near major roads and the area's growing, migrating population. The company's demographic studies had shown that the area the new \$12 million center was to serve had experienced a 200% increase in population between 1940 and 1950 and would continue to see substantial growth.

Hudson's retained Austrian born **architect Victor Gruen** of Victor Gruen & Associates of Los Angeles, California to design the center. Gruen's vision was to recreate an urban core in a suburban setting -- a community center that would "consolidate suburban living." He pushed automobiles, traffic and parking to the perimeter of the shops and placed trucks for deliveries and services underground. The heating and cooling plant and maintenance buildings were placed away from the mall. For the interior of the

shopping center he created pedestrian-friendly spaces that contained art, gardens, comfortable seating and a variety of services surrounding, or anchored by, the large department store. A budget of \$200,000 was earmarked for art for the mall. Signage was also designed as art. "A shopping center," Gruen said, "encompasses the good qualities of the old market place and the country fair." In planning Northland Center, customer service and efficient merchandising were stressed.



Vibe Credit Union (was TelCom)

Stouffers restaurant **21100 Northwestern Hwy.** **Year Built: 1954**

Northland Center was an instant success and far exceeded the hopes and expectations of the Hudson Webber Co. Twenty-nine office buildings, numerous apartment buildings, restaurants, a hospital, hotels, night clubs and a movie theater all joined Northland Center. Beyond Southfield's borders -- in Detroit and Oak Park -- motels, restaurants, office buildings and stores were constructed following the opening of Northland. Stouffers was one of the restaurants to open next to Northland. The company began as a creamery in Ohio 100 years ago. In the 1920s it expanded to operating restaurants. In 1929 it opened a restaurant in Detroit and later (1950s) got into the hotel business. As part of its expansion it opened a location at Northland. At 18,100 square feet, the restaurant was large. The restaurant closed in the early 1980s. Telcom Credit Union bought the building in 1983. **Architect: Unknown**



AT&T

Standard Oil, Sandy Corporation **16025 Northland Drive** **Year Built: 1957**

With the expansion of Detroit's suburbs in the 1950s, corporations began looking to move their offices from the city's core. Standard Oil (Amoco gas stations) was among the first large companies to move to Southfield. It chose a site on the corner of Eight Mile and Northwestern Highway. It constructed a distinctive, four-story, 95,038 square foot building, the largest office building in Southfield at the time. The structure has three components which intersect one another and uses exterior light shades. In 1977 the Sandy Corporation took over the building and years later Ameritech / AT&T. **Architect: Unknown**

Photo by Meadows & Co.

Former LA Fitness (Bally's/VicTanny's)

Reynolds Aluminum Regional Office **16200 Northland Drive** **Year Built: 1955-59**

When the Reynolds Aluminum Regional Office opened it drew wide praise for its modern, open design. The building was said to be "an ode to aluminum". The second and third floors are open to a central atrium and float on a terrazzo pedestal. At the top of the atrium a large skylight made of a series of pyramids flood the central core of the building with natural light. Reflecting ponds with water lilies surrounded the first floor. Gold, anodized aluminum grills wrap the perimeter of the upper floors to deflect light and advertise one of the many uses of aluminum in building design. In 1984 the building was sold to Vic Tanny Health Clubs. At some point the walls of the first floor were pushed out to the perimeter and the reflecting ponds filled in. Fitness International, the parent company of LA Fitness, closed this location in 2012 and currently has the building on the market. **Architect: Minoru Yamasaki** (Gunnar Birkerts, at the time in the employ of Yamasaki, also worked on this building.)





Reynolds Aluminum Continued



Salvation Army

All State Insurance, Kelly Services 16130 Northland Drive Years Built: 1955 & 1968

Allstate Insurance moved to Southfield in 1955, locating across Northwestern Highway from Northland, at the beginning of the corporate migration to Southfield. In 1967 Allstate moved to new, larger quarters in Northwestern Highway, west of Lahser Road. Kelly Services expanded the building and occupied it until 1989. Two cement and glass wings are connected by a lobby that features a butterfly roof portico.

Architect: Victor Gruen



Northland Gardens Neighborhood

Eight Mile & Rutland Years Built: 1950s & '60s

Desirous of having affluent shoppers near its new mall, the Hudson Webber Co. planned and built a 120-home subdivision. The principal design is one story, custom ranch homes with "bowling alley" basements. The ranch homes vary in size from 2,500 to 7,000 square feet. The homes include spacious foyers and big living rooms with grand fireplaces and large windows. Some of the houses have terrazzo floors, wrought iron work, stained glass, granite and/or marble accents. The first residents were some of Detroit's newly wealthy professionals, musicians and athletes.



North Park Towers

16500 North Park Drive Year Built: 1967

The opening of North Park Towers marked Southfield's entry into luxury apartment living, as well as high rise apartments. Again, affluent residents included professionals, musicians and athletes. For a time Motown singer Diana Ross resided at North Park Towers. The complex provided residents with valet parking, a concierge, beauty salon and other services. Hudson-Webber Reality developed the towers.

Architect: Nate Levine



Ira Kaufman Funeral Home

18325 Nine Mile Rd.

Year Built: 1961

Ira Kaufman began conducting funerals in 1942 in Detroit's Dexter-Davison Neighborhood. As the Jewish community migrated to the northwest of Detroit, the funeral home moved to Southfield. The new facility featured a walled, outdoor garden next to the chapel and an inner courtyard. Both brought natural beauty and tranquility into the building. **Architect: Theodore Rogvoy**



Michigan Bell Northwest Service Center

23500 Northwestern Hwy.

Years Built: 1957-60

With the growth of the suburbs and telephone usage, Michigan Bell acquired land in Southfield to construct a satellite office. The center was expanded several times, beginning in 1969 and today contains almost a half million square feet. The sprawling campus is linked with a series of pedestrian bridges. The original exterior walls were glass and panels over an orange, glazed brick base. In the course of the past two years, the original façade is being replaced with energy efficient, glass walls. **Architect: Unknown** (The 1982 four-story tower on the east side of the complex was designed by Harley, Ellington & Pierce.)



Sphinx Petroleum **

Stark & Co., Gittleman & Paskel

24472 Northwestern Hwy.

Year Built: 1967

With the continued growth to the northwest of Detroit, Northwestern Highway became an extension of the Lodge Freeway. Multiple office and medical buildings popped up along the freeway. Among the most unique, is the building first occupied by Stark & Co. Its extended roof is supported by steel pillars and the second floor features full, rounded glass windows. Much renovated, the original spiral staircase fills the lobby and large saucer-shaped planters sit outside the first floor. **Architect: Volk & London**

Photo by Meadows & Co.



Abrecht Building

24600 Northwestern Hwy.

Year Built: 1964

Abrecht Realty occupied this building for many years until recently. The building features a colored, glazed brick that was very popular in the 1960s. Currently vacant, the building is on the market. **Architect: Wah Yee Associates**



Chand Building

**Great Northwestern Building
Sun Life, Yorkshire Group**

24450 Evergreen

Year Built: 1970

The first floor is recessed with haunched columns or pillars supporting the second floor. The second story shelters 54 parking spaces and a small recreation courtyard on the ground level. The building, a white cement structure with distinctive geometric forms, contains 33,600 square feet of space. **Architect: Unknown**



Trowell Building

24681 Northwestern Hwy.

Year Built: 1970

As Southfield grew so did the size of office buildings in the city. The Trowell Building, which contains 46,144 square feet of space, has a regular grid with dark glass that alternates with thin vertical elements (aluminum mullions). The upper floors are supported by cement columns and arches which frame the ground level. **Architect: Unknown**



Haley Funeral Home **

24525 Northwestern Hwy.

Year Built: 1961

With its green, towering metal roof and "shotgun" windows the Haley Funeral Home has a distinctive front on Northwestern Highway. Entry and parking are in the rear of the building. The lobby/reception area is a classic 1960 space. The building today is virtually the same as when it was designed by **Gunnar Birkerts**.



Crescent Building

IBM

24445 Northwestern Hwy.

Year Built: 1968

This "Y" shaped building with the curved front facade has the classic lines of Mid-Century Modern architecture. The interior of the building has been remodeled so many times that there is virtually nothing left to suggest Mid-Century. The vertical mullions give the building a taller presence. The original tenant of the Crescent Building was IBM, before it relocated in 1977 to its current location at Nine Mile and Southfield roads. The Crescent Building contains 69,580 square feet. **Architect: Ferruccio P. de Conti**

Photo at lower left by Meadows & Co.



Washington Heights Neighborhood

Northwestern, Ten Mile & Mt. Venon

Years Built: 1920s to 1970s

Lee Baker began a housing development in Southfield Township in the late 1920s. To attract city residents to his subdivision he built McKinley School on George Washington Avenue. His development on sported a few homes before the financial crash. Following World War II, a significant amount of building resumed in the neighborhood (mainly ranch homes). In the early 1960s a number of International Style homes were constructed. These homes were geometric in shape, had rooms lit with skylights, central living space with raised ceilings and forecourts or walled courtyards. The neighborhood also has a classic 1961 tri-level that contains 5,200 square feet. (See second photo from top.)



Shriners Auditorium **

B'nai David Synagogue, Southfield Center for the Arts

24350 Southfield Rd.

Years Built: 1959, 1965

Congregation B'nai David decided to relocate from Elmhurst and 14th Street in Detroit in the 1950s. It purchased property in Southfield Township in 1956. The congregation selected **Louis G. Redstone** to design its new home. The result was an International Style building with sweeping dimensions. The sanctuary was designed in the round with stained glass windows at the base. This structure was encased in a notched square, allowing light to enter the sanctuary. The social hall features an undulating ceiling with recessed lights and a glass window wall. In 1965 the congregation added a classroom wing. By the late 1980s the congregation went into decline as its members aged and/or moved. The City of Southfield purchased the building in 1993 for use as an arts center. In 2003 the building was sold to the Moslem Shrine and is now used as a conference and banquet center and as the offices for the Shriners.



Photo at lower left by Meadows & Co.



Priority Community Credit Union

Standard Federal Savings

25123 Southfield Rd.

Year Built: 1969 (?)

With its semi-circular glass façade and folded plate roof, this bank building is classic of its day. The building, built by Standard Federal Savings & Loan, contains 3,862 square feet. **Architect: Believed to be the Bank Building Corp. of Toledo** (A 1983 addition/renovation was designed by the architectural firm of G. H. Forbes.)



United States Home Health Care

Rosen Building, Dunhill Staffing

25415 Southfield Road

Year Built: 1964

A small box of a commercial building, the key Mid-Century design elements are its flat roof with cantilevered ceiling and see through front screening wall. **Architect: Unknown**



St. Bede Church

12 Mile & Southfield

Year Built: 1966

St. Bede Church was one of numerous Catholic parishes that were founded in Southfield after World War II as the township and later city's population grew. Beginning in 1954 St. Bede originally conducted services in a modest, smaller building on the property with the hope of expanding as the congregation grew. The new sanctuary, designed with a soaring, copper roofline and angular, masonry extensions, opened in 1967. From Twelve Mile Road the building appears unwelcoming. An inner open courtyard and glass panels on the north side of the roof, emit natural light into the sanctuary. The dramatically recessed front entrance (facing Southfield Road) leads to a foyer and the sanctuary. In 2007 the Archdiocese of Detroit closed St. Bede as it continued to consolidate parishes in the metropolitan area. The building is currently vacant. **Architect: Gunnar Birkerts**





Cranbrook Neighborhood

**Southfield to Evergreen roads
12 to 13 Mile roads Years Built: 1950s to '60s**

With its large tracks of open land close to the city of Detroit, Southfield Township was eyed by developers for housing projects in the 1950s. Rodney Lockwood acquired much of the square mile bounded by Twelve and Thirteen mile roads west of Southfield Road frontage. The Lockwood Company hosted the Detroit Home Shows in 1956, 1957 and 1958. The company constructed homes in California Modern style and modest ranch homes varying in size from 1,450 to 1,650 square feet. The homes had low sloping roofs, fireplaces, large front windows planter boxes. Some houses were constructed with carports and some with or without detached garages. The California Modern homes had compact spaces for the kitchen, dining area and living room. The three initial homes constructed on Lone Elm are particularly



iconic of the age. The home pictured second from top was given away to the person who attended the Home Show and correctly guessed that there were 77,757 nails in a jar.

The Lockwood Company, founded in the 1940s in Detroit, employed **Robert Wedler** as its in-house architect.

Huntington Bank

**National Bank of Southfield, Manufacturers Bank 20000 12 Mile @ Evergreen Road
Comerica Bank, Fidelity Bank Year Built: 1966**

This bank building has symmetrical lines and employs floor to ceiling glass windows. The building's second floor rests on the larger proportions of the first and has lower ceilings. The building has had many owners and has been much renovated over the years. **Architect: Unknown**

Shaarey Zedek

27375 Bell Road Year Built: 1961-62

Founded in 1861, Congregation Shaarey Zedek had several Detroit homes before deciding to relocate to Southfield. For its Southfield facility it chose **Percival Goodman** of New York as its chief architect along with **Albert Kahn Associates** of Detroit. "The main sanctuary is built upon the geometric form of the triangle, symbolic of Mt. Sinai, as is the craggy, rough-hewn exterior. The sanctuary seats approximately 1,100. The triangle which dominates the main sanctuary and the chapel which faces the inner court, also represent the elements which form the Star of David, as well as two hands joined in prayer." The walls of the sanctuary can contract to create one large room that can seat 4,000.

Photo at lower left by Meadows & Co.



Federal Mogul

26555 Northwestern Hwy. Years Built: 1965 & '81

Auto, marine and aviation supplier Federal Mogul moved its world headquarters to Southfield in 1965. The company chose an iconic International Style for its headquarters at Northwestern Highway and Lahser Road. Large glass walled offices were encased in an open white frame. The original design had two stories (3rd & 4th floors) of high-ceilinged offices floating about the sprawling ground level of the building. The grandeur of the original design was diminished when the recessed second floor was pushed out to the perimeter of the third and fourth floors. Subsequent additions concealed more the building's original design. **Architect: Rossetti & Associates**



Eaton Automotive

MacDonald Travel

26101 Northwestern Hwy. Year Built: 1965

During the expansion of the Detroit automotive industry in the 1950s, the E. F. MacDonald Company made travel arrangements for executives and was asked to create reward programs and incentives for workers. The incentive programs grew into the trading stamp programs that were popular in the 1950s and '60s. MacDonald oversaw the S&H Plaid Stamp buyer reward program. With the growth of the company it built a new corporate office in Southfield at the corner of Civic Center Drive and Northwestern Highway. In 1981 the company was bought out and the building was purchased by the Eaton Corporation for use by its automotive division. The building is distinctive in that it sits on a platform with an open, recessed first level and a large front portico. **Architect: Unknown**



Doner Advertising

Maccabees Mutual Life

25800 Northwestern Hwy. Year Built: 1962

The Maccabees Insurance Company had offices for many years in Mid-Town Detroit and relocated to Southfield in 1962 at Northwestern and Civic Center Drive. The original building was in a large square with evenly spaced, slightly recessed windows of the second floor and a recessed first floor. The building had approximately 50,00 square feet office space. Maccabees constructed an 11-story tower behind this building in 1988 and has since moved to Livonia. The original Southfield Maccabees Building became the home of Doner advertising. After a disastrous fire in 1996, the building underwent major renovations and a third floor was added. **Original Architect: Harley Ellington Cowin & Stirton**



Southfield City Hall **

26000 Evergreen Road Years Built: 1962-64

As Southfield transformed from township to city with a burgeoning population, the 1870s town hall outgrew its usefulness. Acting on the behalf of the City Council, the Southfield Building Authority retained Crain & Gorwic of Detroit to create the layout for the Civic Center Campus and hired the architectural firm of **Pirscher & Jarrett** of Ferndale to design City Hall, the Parks & Recreation Building and the Southfield Library. Some say the design is inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright for its projected roof, exaggerated eaves and long, rectangular shape.