

2021

MODERNISM ON SOUTH TEMPLE STREET

A Preservation Utah & Salt Lake Modern Walking Tour



Before you head out

Read “The Transformation of Brigham Street” and “Modernism: A Brief Background” at the beginning of this text that provide an introduction to the tour.

The tour starts at the Utah Education Association Building, 312 East South Temple Street (at the southeast corner of South Temple Street and 300 East). You can park on 300 East.

The Transformation of Brigham Street

As Salt Lake City was settled in the 1850s and 1860s, South Temple Street, because it ran by Temple Square, assumed a prominent role in the life of the new community. That prominence was reflected in the name given to the stretch of the street extending east from Temple Square: “Brigham Street” (in honor of Brigham Young, leader of the LDS Church). Young himself built a home on the block adjoining Temple Square. Other church leaders built homes on Brigham Street, adding prestige to the already significant thoroughfare.

The late 1800s would witness a striking change in the demeanor of Brigham Street. The entry of the railroad into Salt Lake in 1870 had brought with it a diverse set of new residents. Gentiles (non-Mormons) flocked to Utah seeking wealth in its booming mining industry. A few got very rich very fast and chose, because of its prestige, to move to Brigham Street. They were joined by others of Utah’s nouveau riche who had accumulated their wealth in ranching, finance, and real estate. In the 1890s and early 1900s, they built lavish estates replete with luxurious mansions, extravagant carriage houses, and ornate gardens. Ironically, “Brigham Street” now assumed an even greater prestige as it became associated not with Mormon authority and power but with Gentile wealth and opulence.

But the golden era didn’t last. By the 1930s, many of Brigham Street’s rich and famous had died or moved to other places. Their estates were sold off, and the new owners brought with them different attitudes about the value of those properties. By mid-century, the mansions were being occupied by entirely different uses or were demolished altogether. Many of South Temple’s grand estates, once the ideal of personal luxury, now represented corporate opportunity. The migration of businesses to South Temple happened gradually, but it transformed the character of Brigham Street by introducing not only disparate uses but also a new set of architectural ideas known collectively as “Modernism.”

Most of the buildings on today’s tour replaced historic homes or mansions. These changes—the loss of some of South Temple’s lavish estates and the emergence of Modernism—prompted a grass-roots response in the community, as many Salt Lake residents perceived the new architecture to be ruining South Temple’s historic character. So, in 1975, the blocks along South Temple Street east of Temple Square to Virginia Street (1350 East)—the former “Brigham Street”—were designated as Salt Lake City’s first historic district. In more recent years, however, there has been a growing recognition of the architectural significance of many of the buildings that, at that time, were harshly criticized, even reviled, and a number of South Temple Street’s Modernist buildings have now been listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



Note: Buildings are listed on the National Register of Historic Places for their historic and/or architectural significance. Generally, a building has to be 50 years old or older and has to have retained its historic character to be eligible to be nominated. (Although modifications that are 50 years old or older may also be considered “historic.”)

There are two designations. “Significant” means that a building, in and of itself, has tremendous architectural and/or historic importance. “Contributing” means that the building’s value may not rise to the level of “Significant” but that it does reinforce the character of the historic district in which it is located.

A historic district is an area of a community that contains a high concentration of buildings that retain their historical integrity and are historically or architecturally significant, and so tell an important story about that community’s history.

Modernism: A Brief Background

Modernism emerged in Europe at the end of the 19th century as a response by a small group of architects to the increasingly elaborate, ornate style of architecture—generally known as “eclecticism”—prevalent at the time. As historian Jonathan Glancey has written: “It must have seemed as if anything was possible, and to many architects it was. With Classicism in decline and the Gothic Revival offering great diversity, an increasing number of architects chose to have their cake and eat it: they stirred the whole lot together, domes and pointed arches, Doric columns and Egyptian pylons, Indian stupas and Mesopotamian ziggurats.” Architect Philip Johnson offered a more pointed assessment, describing late 19th-century architecture as “the chaos of eclecticism.”

Against this backdrop, some European architects searched for new ideas that would return architecture to what they believed were its essential qualities—without all the domes and pylons and ziggurats. In their exploration, they were influenced by fresh structural opportunities afforded by modern materials (steel and concrete and glass), by new approaches to artistic composition (e.g., abstraction), and by what they perceived to be the role of architecture in addressing the needs of an increasingly fragmented social structure.

What materialized from this cauldron of ideas in the early 20th century was a profound shift in architecture’s visual values. For its proponents, this new architecture would be pure, with a distinct lack of applied ornamentation; abstracted forms; and an explicit expression of modern materials. These architects produced buildings that were radically different than the prevailing designs, typified by asymmetry; straight lines and right angles; steel, concrete, and glass; and plain, white walls. The design of a building, they believed, should derive not from an aesthetic premise (as with eclecticism) but from its function (or functions).

As European Modernism migrated to the U.S. in the early 1930s, it was dubbed the “International Style.” But the response by American architects (and, more to the point, their clients) was underwhelming. They were still heavily influenced by traditionalist architectural ideas and styles—Classical Revival and Gothic Revival and Victorian—and these radical new visual ideas were discomfiting, too far removed from those with which they were accustomed. But as the basic concepts of Modernism lingered in the U.S., they were, following World War II, increasingly adapted into “kinder, gentler” interpretations that incorporated more explicit ornamentation and a broader palette of materials.

South Temple Street is remarkable in that it is the only street in Utah that displays the progression of architectural ideas during the mid to late 20th century. Unfortunately, the buildings on this tour don’t appear chronologically, so it may be difficult to understand a given building’s place in this progression. However, the buildings are listed below in chronological order to provide that context.

Although South Temple Street’s Modernist buildings collectively display the elements common to Modernist architecture described above, most also incorporate one notable exception: brick. Because of its texture, brick was seen by early Modernists as compromising the desired pure uniformity of a wall’s surface. Philip Johnson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock, who brought European Modernism to the U.S. and coined the term “International Style,” asserted that “the use of brick tends to give a picturesqueness which is at variance with the fundamental character of the modern style.”

The extensive use of brick in South Temple Street’s Modernist buildings reflects an acknowledgement by the architects who designed them (almost all local) of the fact that these new buildings should respect the historic architectural character of South Temple Street. Bill Browning, who designed the Steiner-American Building, seemed to speak for those architects collectively when he said, “I really had a great personal desire to keep a masonry heritage that Utah—northern Utah—had,” he said.

SOUTH TEMPLE STREET’S MODERNIST BUILDINGS BY YEAR

- 1949: *Callister Clinic (559 East)*
- 1951: *Doxey-Layton Medical Building (508 East)*
- 1953: *Utah Education Association Building (312 East)*
- 1954: *Wall Mansion Addition (411 East)*
- 1958: *South Temple Professional Building (770 East)*
- 1958-1966: *Metropolitan Life, Fred A. Moreton & Company, Fireman’s Fund Insurance (633-649 East)*
- 1961: *Orthopedic and Fracture Clinic (702 East)*
- 1962: *IBM Building (348 East)*
- 1965: *Western General Agency Building (780 East)*
- 1965: *Bonneville Tower (777 East)*
- 1967: *Steiner-American Building (505 East)*
- 1974: *Xerox Building (737 East)*
- 1975: *Chevrolet Building (303 East)*
- 1977: *U and I Building (715 East)*
- 1979: *Zions Bank (465 East)*
- 1982: *IBM II Building (400 East)*
- 1983: *Governors Plaza (550 East)*

312 EAST

The Utah Education Association Building



1953

The Utah Education Association Building

For many years, the Utah Education Association (UEA) had been something of an itinerant organization, moving from leased space to leased space. When the costs of rent came to equal those of new construction in the early 1950s, UEA decided to build a new office building at the corner of 300 East and South Temple, a site selected because it could “accommodate a building large enough to serve the Association for many years and still provide ample space for parking.” It was also close to the State Capitol, providing easy access for lobbying.

One of the first corporate office buildings on South Temple Street, the UEA Building is the street’s only example of the International Style. Designed by Utah architect Lowell Parrish (who, fittingly, specialized in designing schools), it is distinctly geometric in its shape—all straight lines and right angles. It incorporates large windows framed in aluminum (the most modern of materials) with a dramatic two-story glass atrium enclosing the entrance at the building’s northwest corner. On its west side, contemporary “bris de soleil” (louvered aluminum horizontal panels) shade the building from the afternoon sun. The appearance of such dramatically different visual ideas heralded significant architectural change along South Temple Street. A recent remodel has altered the profile of the windows along the front (South Temple Street) façade, but the building remains essentially intact. In 2014, the Utah Education Association Building was designated on the National Register of Historic Places as a significant building in the South Temple Street Historic District.

3 4 8 E A S T

The IBM Building

1 9 6 2



The IBM Building

Completed in 1962, the IBM Building introduced to South Temple Street one of Modernism’s mid-century derivatives: New Formalism. A reaction to the perceived austerity of pure Modernism, New Formalism incorporated a broader set of visual ideas—most notably symmetry, arches, and columns—as explicit visual gestures to Classical architecture. But the arches on the IBM Building are more than mere gestures. Constructed of “post-tensioned” concrete (the first use of this new building technology in Utah), they extended through the interior of the building, allowing for large interior spans that facilitated an open floor plan, a popular configuration for office buildings of the time. (The interior has since been extensively remodeled and partitioned.) The arches are complemented by another element of New Formalism: columns—in this case, narrow concrete pillars that extend the full height of the front facade. The windows are framed in aluminum, a “modern” and (more to the point) expensive material. The overall goal of the design, according to a promotional brochure, was “to reflect the client’s products’ advance”—that is, that the building’s Modernist style communicate an innovative, progressive corporate identity for IBM.

James M. Hunter and Associates of Boulder, Colorado was the lead architectural firm with Salt Lake architect Donald Panushka as the associate supervising architect. Built at a cost of \$900,000 (about \$8 million in 2020 dollars), the IBM Building was hailed at its opening by The Salt Lake Tribune as “one of the most striking buildings in Salt Lake City.” It was so significant that Governor George Clyde and Salt Lake City Mayor J. Bracken Lee, among others, attended the ribbon cutting in January of 1962. That significance was validated that same year with an Award of Merit from the American Institute of Architects Western District. And in 2014, the IBM Building was designated on the National Register of Historic Places as a significant building in the South Temple Street Historic District.

400 EAST

The IBM II Building



1982

The IBM II Building

The IBM II Building is one of Utah's prime (and rare) examples of Brutalism, another derivative of Modernism, popularized in the latter part of the 20th century. Brutalism had its beginnings following World War II with the extensive use of concrete to reconstruct European cities. Concrete was readily available, inexpensive, easy to work with, and didn't require specialized labor. The concrete buildings of this period were often large, utilitarian structures, constructed hurriedly primarily to provide housing for the thousands who had lost it during the war. But in 1952, Modernist innovator Le Corbusier made concrete fashionable by coining the term "beton brut" ("raw concrete"), which for Le Corbusier evoked concrete's sculptural and textural qualities. Concrete, it seemed, carried aesthetic as well as functional values. And so, the term "Brutalism" was born.

IBM II, designed by Utah architect John Clawson, displays two essential qualities of Brutalism: the extensive use of concrete and a monumental scale. As you stand under the building's northwest corner, you can look up to see an example of a "waffle" or "coffered" slab—a construction technique that provides greater structural strength (than a flat slab) while using less material. "Ribbon windows," the distinct bands of glass that line the upper stories and emphasize the building's horizontal profile, are characteristic of much of Modernist architecture, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s. The plaza, also a popular element in during the 1970s and 1980s, contains a sculpture by Utah artist Neil Hadlock.

Walk up to one of the columns and run your hand over it. As the concrete has worn slightly, it has developed a texture that might not be immediately apparent from farther away. Note also the variations in color created by the "aggregate" (the gravel in the concrete). These are the more subtle aesthetic qualities of concrete that Le Corbusier and later architects explored through Brutalism.

On Your Way:

Stop at Mrs. Backer's Pastry Shop (434 East) for the best molasses cookies in the world & old-world meat pies. The Backer family has operated out of this location since 1941 & in 2019 received a Heritage Business Award from Preservation Utah.

Before You Cross 500 East:

Take note of the "forms" (the shapes) of the Doxey-Layton Medical Building across the street. You'll be quizzed on them in a couple of minutes.

508 EAST

Doxey-Layton Medical Building

1951



Doxey-Layton Medical Building

In 1945, Salt Lake realtors Doxey-Layton bought this property, occupied at the time by the Dooly Mansion, named after its most famous owner, John Dooly, one of the elites of early 20th-century Brigham Street. But the Dooly Mansion had experienced a fate common to several of South Temple Street’s great homes. After John died in 1911, his spouse, May, continued to live in it until 1940 when it began cycling between rental and vacancy with its condition (and value) degenerating. According to the Salt Lake Telegram, at the time of its purchase, the home had been “rented to tenants as well as having been used for “hard-time” parties and Halloween festivities due to its tumble-down nature and eerie atmosphere.” In 1947, the once glorious now “tumble-down” mansion was demolished.

Note: It’s possible that, as you view the building, the lower windows may be boarded up. As of January 2021, the developers who purchased it intended to retain and restore it as part of a larger project.

From the beginning, however, Doxey-Layton’s intentions for the property had little to do with the Dooly Mansion—regardless of its condition. In 1949, the company began construction of the aptly named Doxey-Layton Medical Building. The architect, Arthur Fahr of the Salt Lake firm of Young and Ehlers, based its design of a “poll of 2000 professional men.” With its geometric form, horizontal profile, lack of explicit ornamentation, and aluminum-framed ribbon windows it is distinctly Modernist, despite Fahr’s extensive use of brick. Doxey-Layton went to great lengths to emphasize the building’s “state-of-the-art” qualities, proclaiming in a 1951 newspaper ad that it was “one of the country’s most modern and carefully planned medical centers” with “technical innovations as progressive as a jet plane.”

As you looked at this building from the other side of 500 East, you may have observed that it comprises several different “volumes” (boxes) that step down the hill to the south. This final design was quite different than that originally conceived—a six-story office building—and was likely influenced by the lack of materials following World War II (a reality that delayed construction) but also perhaps by a recognition that the original design would have been out of scale with nearby buildings. In 2014, the Doxey-Layton Medical Building was designated on the National Register of Historic Places as contributing to the South Temple Street Historic District’s historic character.

550 EAST

Governors Plaza



1983

Governors Plaza

Constructed 32 years after the Doxey-Layton Medical Building, Governors Plaza displays many of the same visual qualities—a strong horizontal profile; ribbon windows reinforcing that profile; and no explicit ornamentation. Like the IBM II Building, it makes extensive use of concrete that, in this case, displays a plain, smooth finish. Taken together, these elements reflect a return in the 1970s and 1980s to simpler, more basic Modernist ideas and a move away from the more ornate variations of Modernism that would characterize buildings constructed in the 1950s and 1960s.

Perhaps the more and less obvious quality of Governors Plaza is its scale. More obvious because it actually comprises two very large structures: a seven-story office building with a ten-story condominium behind. (The former has a footprint of over 12,000 square feet.) As with the Doxey-Layton Building, the final design for Governors Plaza was significantly different than the original concept. In this case, however, the plan initially called for two five-story office buildings.

But the scale of the complex, in particular of the fronting office building, is made less obvious through an architectural device incorporated by Utah architectural firm Edwards and Daniels known as “stepping back.” Note how, as the office building rises, it “steps back” with successive sets of stories increasingly further removed, reducing their visual presence. Most apparent to the observer are the first two to four stories, so the perceived scale of the building is diminished. At the same time, however, these “stacked volumes,” offset from one another, display one of Modernism’s key precepts: That a building’s composition—i.e., how its “volumes” are assembled—can, in and of itself, create visual interest, a subtle form of ornamentation.

On Your Way:

Check out the Walker Mansion (610 East), built for financier Matthew Walker in 1906, a great example of the eclecticism of the late 19th and early 20th century.

Check out the Masonic Temple (650 East), constructed in 1927 and designed by Utah architect Carl Scott in the Egyptian Revival style with its many mysterious mythical references.

702 EAST

Orthopedic and Fracture Clinic

1961



Orthopedic and Fracture Clinic

*On Your Way:
Stop for delicious
Thai food at
Sawadee at 754
East, in a building
constructed in 1915
as a showroom for
the Franklin Motor
Company and, for
several decades,
home to various ice
cream
manufacturers.*

The Orthopedic and Fracture Clinic was one of a number of businesses that, following World War II, decided to move from its more confined downtown location (in this case, the Boston Building) to a more spacious site on South Temple Street. The clinic's partners — Paul Pemberton, Robert Lamb, and Mark Green—purchased several lots east of 700 East and hired the Minnesota architectural firm of Ellerbe and Company, which specialized in the design of medical buildings and was purported by a Minnesota newspaper to be “one of the nation’s leading clinic architects and designers of over 100 major clinics in the United States.” As he had with the IBM Building, Donald Panushka served as the supervising local architect.

Ellerbe and Company created something of an architectural hybrid that reflected a more stylized adaptation of Modernist ideas in the mid-20th century. Defined by basic Modernist elements from the International Style—straight lines, right angles, a horizontal profile, and modern materials—the clinic also incorporates granite panels next to the entrance as well as concrete trellises on its north and west sides. These elements are purely decorative—an anathema to early Modernists who, in a desire to return to a purity of design, eschewed applied ornament. While the panels and the trellises on the north façade are strictly ornamental, the trellises on the west do have a functional purpose. They serve as screens to shade the building from the afternoon sun. The north façade also features a “hidden” lower floor, visible only if the building is viewed close up, but which adds a sense of verticality to the building. Now called “Medical Manor,” it still houses medical offices. In 2014, the Orthopedic and Fracture Clinic was designated on the National Register of Historic Places as a significant building in the South Temple Street Historic District.

770 EAST

South Temple Professional Building



1958

South Temple Professional Building

This Modernist office building actually isn't. That is, this building was not constructed as a Modernist building but rather as a Victorian home. Walk to the east and look back at the east façade. You'll see elements of the original home (most notably, windows).

In the late 1950s, the Kesler family purchased the home and remodeled the north and west sides with what is known as a "slipcover," a "modern" façade applied to an existing building. Slipcovers were more common on downtown commercial buildings in the mid to late 20th century, as business and property owners struggled to keep up with the new and "modern" shopping centers appearing around the country.

The Keslers extended the north façade, covered it and the west facade in brick, incorporated tall vertical windows, and flattened the roof (a Modernist touch). The original remodel also featured a series of vertical wooden fins projecting from the window section, but these were removed to make way for the access ramp. Thus, a Victorian home was transformed into the contemporary "South Temple Professional Building."

770 EAST BEFORE ITS TRANSFORMATION:



780 EAST

Tracy Insurance // Western General Agency



1957 / 1965-1975

Tracy Insurance // Western General Agency

While 770 East was modified with a slipcover, 780 East South Temple Street went through a complete makeover. It started in 1957 when Tracy Insurance Company purchased the vacant lot at the corner of South Temple Street and 800 East. The company's choice reflected the thinking at that time by firms located downtown where congestion was intensifying and parking was lacking. "Naturally, the first problem was location," noted Tracy employee Royal W. Gelder in an insurance periodical. "Should we locate in downtown Salt Lake City, or perhaps move out into the suburbs? Both locations offer advantages and disadvantages. In the heart of town there is always a traffic problem, and the suburbs are just a little too far from the center of things. We solved this problem by location just outside the congested area; therefore, having the advantages of both suburban and city-center locations, and none of the disadvantages of either."

Tracy Insurance constructed a one-story brick building that, even by Modernist standards, would have been considered austere [see image below left]. In 1965, Edward Mabey, principal in Western General Agency (also an insurance firm), purchased the property and, over the next ten years, transformed the demure building into one of Utah's most elaborate examples of New Formalism. In the first phase, designed by Utah architect Arthur Olsen, the exterior was sprayed with stucco into which New Formalist arches were scribed, and the building was covered with a thick, flat roof [see image below right]. Four years later, Glen Ashton Lloyd (another Utah architect) designed a second floor that amplified the scribed arches of the first with a grand colonnade parading around the exterior. In 1975, the porches on the second floor were enclosed and a swimming pool was added in the rear.

In many ways, the Western General Agency Building was a contemporary manifestation of the grand mansions of the turn of the century. Just as they were statements of the wealth and power of their owners, the Western General Agency Building was an expression of the professional aspirations of the person who commissioned it: Edward Mabey. The effect of his modifications was to create a sense of monumentality from what was, in reality, a relatively modest building. In 2015, the Western General Agency Building was renovated by Salt Lake law firm Lear and Lear and listed individually on the National Register of Historic Places.



CROSS 800 EAST & THEN CROSS SOUTH TEMPLE STREET.

777 EAST

Bonneville Tower

1965

Bonneville Tower

In the early 1960s, Salt Lake City was experiencing a boom in apartment and condominium development. Stimulated by state legislation, tall residential buildings were rising everywhere—Sunset Tower, the Aztec, Oak Crest, and Canyon Crest, among others. Having constructed Sunset Tower, Los Angeles development company Artcol purchased several properties at the corner of South Temple and K Street and received a variance to erect an apartment building that, at 15 stories, would exceed the permitted height.

Salt Lake architects Pat Harris and Harold Carlson designed a 115-unit building that incorporated many elements of New Formalism (note the grand arch over the entrance) but with some added ornamental flourishes. As with other Modernist buildings on South Temple, brick is the primary exterior material. But Harris and Carlson also made extensive use of decorative concrete block (primarily to screen the parking garage) which Salt Lake Tribune reporter Douglas Parker noted had “become a mark of many a contemporary building or landscaping, so much so that it may be noticed in 1980 that it was a widespread architectural style of the 60s.” An additional ornamental flourish? Wrought iron railings on the balconies. But the greater extravagances were found in the interior where features included a doorman, chandeliers, marble accents, and a “grand staircase winding around a large lighted fountain with five water changes and lighting effects.”

At the building’s groundbreaking in 1964, Artcol proclaimed that Bonneville Tower would be “the most luxurious [apartment building] west of the Mississippi.” But when the South Temple Historic District was created in 1975, the building was described as an “unrelated, extraneous residential fortress” that was “overscaled, incompatible new construction” in the district. Nevertheless, in 2014, Bonneville Tower was designated on the National Register of Historic Places as contributing to the historic character of the South Temple Street Historic District.



737 EAST

Xerox Building



1974

Xerox Building

By the 1970s, South Temple Street had become a fashionable corporate address, even for large, multinational companies. So it was that in 1974 Xerox Corporation moved into this new building. Constructed through a partnership of local contractor F.C. Stangl and Salt Lake architect Ron Molen, it reflects basic Modernist values: a strong horizontal profile, straight lines and right angles, and a lack of explicit ornamentation.

But it also reflects a trend in Modernism in the 1970s made popular by noted architect Marcel Breuer and associated with conservative institutional architecture: recessed windows. Not only did they create visual complexity by creating relief in the wall surface but they also acted as “light wells” to capture more natural light. By this time, brick, always the norm on South Temple Street, had become acceptable, even stylish, as a material for Modernist architects, primarily because of its extensive use by one of Modernism’s central figures, Walter Gropius.

715 EAST

U and I Building



1977

U and I Building

Of all of Utah's Modernist architects (and there were many talented ones), none was more resolutely Modernist than Dean Gustavson. His work—including Skyline High School, Merrill Engineering Building, and his own home—challenged Utah's traditionalist architectural aesthetic. So, his final design for the U and I Building seems, in hindsight, to be rather reserved. But Gustavson was responding to the desires of his clients, the U and I Sugar Company, as well as to newly formed design guidelines for South Temple Street, that the building fit in with South Temple's historic architectural landscape. As the *Deseret News* quoted Gustavson: "The client is very concerned that the building meet esthetic objectives."

He therefore utilized brick (even though his professional opinion was that it didn't establish or reinforce a local architectural identity) and added an unassuming Mansard roof, suggestive of turn of the 20th century architecture. As with the Xerox Building, window wells are a prominent feature, although in this case Gustavson incorporated bay windows, another traditionalist touch. Thus, U and I would boast in its opening program that the building represented "a new landmark for South Temple." According to the program, "Plans for the new building were carefully considered and drawn to provide a harmonious blend with the neighborhood. The results, we feel, were very successful and add distinction to the neighborhood." Having said all that, U and I would occupy the building for only two years, moving its corporate operations to Pasco, Washington in 1979. As the *Ellensburg, Washington Daily Record* would wryly observe, "A two-year-old 40,000 square foot office building on Salt Lake City's fashionable South Temple Street is now for sale with an asking price of \$3.8 million."

649 - 633 EAST

Fireman's Fund Insurance Building, Fred A. Moreton & Company Building & Metropolitan Life Building

1966



THE FIREMAN'S FUND BUILDING

1958



THE FRED A. MORETON & COMPANY BUILDING

1960



THE METROPOLITAN LIFE BUILDING

Snapshot of Mid-Century Modernism

Constructed between 1958 and 1966, these three buildings are something of a collective snapshot of mid-century Modernism along South Temple Street. Together, they represent the stylistic transition from the stark International Style (as exemplified by the UEA Building) to a more stylized take on Modernist architectural values. Capitalizing on South Temple Street's lingering prestige, they were designed to, at the same time, to convey a progressive identity for the companies that occupied them.

All three display a geometric profile—straight lines and right angles—that remained an essential characteristic of Modernism, as well aluminum-framed windows. But, as with the Orthopedic and Fracture Clinic, they also incorporate natural materials that are purely decorative, a distinct progression from the early Modernist philosophy that all visual elements should also be functional. Both the Fireman's Fund and Fred A. Moreton & Company buildings display panels of marble, while the southwest corner of the Metropolitan Life building features a column of stone. As Modernism evolved in the middle of the 20th century, contrasting materials—natural or manufactured—became an increasingly common element of Modernist design as another device to add visual interest to a building.

The Metropolitan Life Building was constructed by Majestic Investment, owned by local developer Keith Knight, who was also involved in the development of the IBM Building at 348 East. (The black paint is a recent modification.) The Fred A. Moreton & Company Building was designed by Richard Jackson and the Fireman's Fund Building by Bob Fowler, both Utah architects. In 2014, the Metropolitan Life Building was designated as significant in the the South Temple Street Historic District, while the Fred A. Moreton & Company Building was designated as contributing to the character of the district.

559 EAST

Callister Clinic

1949



Callister Clinic

The Callister Clinic Building could well be considered to be the earliest Modernist building on South Temple Street, even though it was certainly not constructed as such. As with the South Temple Professional Building, the structure at 659 East was originally a home—in this case, built in 1887 by Ben R. Eldredge with a small central gable, arched windows, and a porch.

Dr. Cyril Callister, who would become Dean of the University of Utah College of Medicine and see its transition from a two-year to a four-year school, purchased the property in 1937. For more than a decade, Callister managed the home as a rental property, but it's likely that, like others relocating to South Temple, his long-term goal was to obtain more space than he had in his offices downtown. So, in 1949, he remodeled the Eldredge home, retaining its original structure while transforming its exterior into Modernist office building with smooth, white walls; metal-framed windows; and a distinct absence of decoration.

The exterior wasn't the only modern element in the building. The interior contained examining rooms, an operating room, a recovery room, X-ray rooms, sterilization facilities, a lab, an office, and a reception area. Callister expressed a progressive rationale for constructing a completely new facility: "Many surgical cases now hospitalized could undergo surgery and then return home, thereby eliminating hospital care." In recent years, the building has been significantly modified with different color paint and new windows.

505 EAST

Steiner-American Building



1967

Steiner-American Building

By the late 1950s, the Steiner-American Company, started in Salt Lake City in 1895, was experiencing phenomenal growth and expanding into a worldwide market, prompting company president Richard Steiner to seek a new headquarters building. Steiner commissioned the Salt Lake firm of Scott Louie and Browning to design one that would create an architectural signature for the company.

Steiner and architect Bill Browning shared a deep respect for South Temple Street's architectural character. The challenge for Browning would be to create a building that would communicate a distinct corporate identity while sustaining that character. Browning's primary concern was with scale. "Because of its location and the historical context of the street," Browning later remarked, "scale was really important. It did not want to have a large scale. And therefore in my mind, it had to be broken up into more than just a box. A box of that square footage would have been totally obnoxious in that location and not compatible at all."

Rather than designing a single large building, Browning created a complex of smaller structures with distinctly horizontal profiles. Stately concrete columns echoed those of neighboring mansions. The glass panels were, at the time, the largest ever installed in Utah. And a parking structure under the building provided needed space for cars while hiding them from the street. The interior featured an open floor plan with a central room containing one of the first supercomputers in Utah; the room's glass walls were explicitly designed to show off the sophisticated device.

Salt Lake Tribune columnist Jack Goodman would remark 25 years later that "the Steiner-American Headquarters helps sustain what might be called "South Temple's air of class." Steiner American and its successor, AlSCO, maintained ownership until 2018 when the building was purchased by Colvin Engineering which completed an extensive interior renovation. In 2020, it was named individually to the National Register of Historic Places.

*On Your Way:
Stop at Einstein
Bros. Bagels for a
quick bite or Java
Jo's (a block north
on E St.) for a cup of
coffee before
proceeding to the
final few buildings.*

465 EAST

Zions Bank



1979

Zions Bank

Unfortunately, there's little public information about the history of this building. For years, this was the location of the Brigham Street Medical Building and Pharmacy. In 1979, it was replaced by this example of what might be called "Modernist Eclectic." With its monumental scale and symmetry, it speaks to New Formalism. Its band of ribbon windows with coated glass in its upper story is representative of Late Modernism. But its extensive use of brick and low Mansard roof (as on the U and I Building) are very much about the historic context of South Temple Street. Based on materials from the Salt Lake City Planning Department, it appears that it was designed and constructed by the same partnership that built the Xerox Building: F.C. Stangl and Ron Molen. (The rounded corners are indicative of Molen's work.)

411 EAST

Wall Mansion Addition



1954

Wall Mansion Addition

The Wall Mansion is one of South Temple Street's oldest and most elaborate. However, it didn't start as such. As Edward Mabey would do with the Tracy Insurance building 60 years later, Enos Wall in 1904 commissioned a Utah architect (in this case, Richard Kletting) to design a complete makeover of an existing building, an 1880 home built for Salt Lake mayor James Sharp. Kletting created an elaborate Neoclassical structure. So elaborate that the remodeling took a full ten years. Unfortunately, Wall was able to enjoy the results for only a few years before passing away in 1920. After his widow died three years later, the property was purchased by the Jewish Community Center, which occupied the mansion until 1950 when the JCC sold it to Pacific National Life Assurance Company.

Fortunately, the JCC had done little to the exterior, and its Neoclassical façade provided a dignified character for Pacific National Life. Yet even as the company moved in, it already had plans to create more space. Rather than modifying the mansion itself, however, the company constructed an adjoining wing to the west in 1954. The architect, Utahn Lorenzo Snow Young, could have chosen to (attempt to) replicate the Neoclassical elements of the mansion. Instead, he designed a structure that, with its geometric lines, aluminum-framed windows, and elegant granite panel next to the entry, creates a subtle Modernist complement to the ornate mansion.

303 EAST

The Chevrolet Building



1975

The Chevrolet Building

It's appropriate that our tour ends with a property that, in many ways, summarizes the story of South Temple Street's transformation in the mid to late 20th century. In 1890, John Daly, another mining magnate, and his spouse, Eliza, built on this site a mansion described by historian Margaret Lester as "a fanciful Victorian caricature." John and Eliza moved to California in 1916, and, like many other South Temple Street mansions, the home then cycled through various uses, sometimes as a home, sometimes as apartments. In 1960, however, it was demolished, and the property sat vacant. Thus ends Chapter One in the story of 303 East.

Chapter 2 begins in 1974 when Zions Securities, which had demolished the mansion, sold the vacant lot to Douglas and Blanche Miles (doing business as "Gull, Inc."). Gerald Hart, a Salt Lake architect, was brought on to design a building to house the regional offices of Chevrolet (where Douglas was an employee). The building today looks much like it did when it opened, its primary feature a wall of glass facing South Temple Street that contrasts with the neutral stucco that covers most of the building's exterior.

Abravanel Hall

Before you head home, because it's so far removed, we didn't pass by one of South Temple Street's most significant Modernist buildings: Abravanel Hall. Designed by Salt Lake architects FFKR and constructed in 1979 as "Symphony Hall," it presents one of Salt Lake's most striking profiles with a distinct obtuse angle at its north corner. The wall of glass panels on its east façade is very much of this period, of Late Modernism.

1979



IMAGE CREDITS

- Pg 2 (Brigham Street): Utah State Historical Society*
Pg 4 (UEA Building): Salt Lake County Archives
Pg 5 (IBM Building): Utah State Historical Society
Pg 6 (IBM II Building): Amanda Moore
Pg 7 (Doxey-Layton Medical Building): Amanda Moore
Pg 8 (Governors Plaza): Amanda Moore
Pg 9 (Orthopedic and Fracture Clinic): Amanda Moore
Pg 10 (South Temple Professional Building - top): Amanda Moore
Pg 10 (770 East Historic - bottom): Salt Lake County Archives
Pg 11 (Western General - top): Amanda Moore
Pg 11 (Tracy Insurance - bottom left): Utah State Historical Society
Pg 11 (First Version - bottom right): Salt Lake City Planning Department
Pg 12 (Bonneville Tower): Amanda Moore
Pg 13 (Xerox Building): Amanda Moore
Pg 14 (U and I Building): Amanda Moore
Pg 15 (Metropolitan Life - top): Amanda Moore
Pg 15 (Moreton - middle): Moreton & Company
Pg 15 (Fireman's Fund - bottom): Amanda Moore
Pg 16 (Callister Clinic): Utah State Historical Society
Pg 17 (Steiner-American Building): Amanda Moore
Pg 18 (Zions Bank): Bim Oliver
Pg 19 (Wall Mansion Addition): Salt Lake County Archives
Pg 20 (The Chevrolet Building - top): Bim Oliver
Pg 20 (Abravanel Hall - bottom): Preservation Utah



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SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

"South Temple Street Landmarks: Salt Lake City's First Historic District" by Bim Oliver (2017)

"Brigham Street" by Margaret D. Lester (1979)

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