



Michigan Modern Architecture a Draw for Travelers

Michigan offers wealth of modern architecture, with notable buildings open for intimate visits

By DAVID RUNK

The Associated Press

DETROIT

Stop by the Minoru Yamasaki-designed McGregor Memorial Conference Center at Wayne State University in Detroit and its halls are open for a stroll through what's considered a masterpiece from the World Trade Center architect.

Across the state in Muskegon, at St. Francis De Sales church, a visit most days can get you a guided tour from the head of maintenance at the massive, poured concrete structure from architect Marcel Breuer.

Better known for its Great Lakes beaches for summertime escapes and its wintertime destinations for outdoor enthusiasts, Michigan also is a repository of modern architecture. It offers the chance to do more than just gaze the buildings or snap a few pictures — with many notable buildings open for tours or intimate visits.

The State Historic Preservation Office is behind an effort to highlight Michigan's modern architecture and design heritage. It's raising \$250,000 to help record oral histories of architects from the time; create driving tours; and research and catalog important projects from around 1940 to 1970. The office is promoting the state's architecture through a Web site — <http://www.MichiganModern.org> — with stories, photos and links to sites around the state.

One of the places that helped establish Michigan as a center for architecture and design was Cranbrook, just outside Detroit. Cranbrook includes K-12 private schools, an Institute of Science, the Cranbrook Academy of Art and an art museum. Cranbrook was designed in the 1920s and '30s by the renowned Finnish architect Eliel Saarinen, who helped establish a creative culture that attracted designers Ray and Charles Eames and modern architects Ralph Rapson and Harry Weese. Saarinen's son Eero, himself a prominent architect, lived and trained at Cranbrook.

Reed Kroloff, a former editor-in-chief of Architecture magazine and director of the Cranbrook Academy of Art, lives on campus in a home designed by Saarinen. He's grown accustomed to finding visitors — curious about Cranbrook and its role as a crucible for modern art, architecture and design — peering the front door.

"Usually, if I'm not in my bathrobe, I'll give them a little bit of a tour," Kroloff said.

Gwendolyn Wright, an architecture professor at Columbia University, said Michigan is a showcase for a broad range of modern buildings, from homes and office towers to factories that display the evolution of industrial architecture. Cranbrook's campus, she noted, illustrates a unique connection between education and the arts.

"You have that sense just on the grounds and with the evolution of the buildings, from the move from craftsmanship that was hand-based ... up through the modern kinds of craftsmanship," said Wright, who has made driving tours of the state while visiting. "You see these constantly feeding back and forth."

The Alden B. Dow Home and Studio in Midland tries to offer visitors a personal experience — as if they had been invited over for dinner at what was the home of one of the state's premier modern architects. The son of Midland-based Dow Chemical Co.'s founder studied under Frank Lloyd Wright, and a large concentration of Dow's work can

be seen in homes, schools and churches throughout the city.

"When you come to the Dow house, you sit in the living room. You truly experience the building," said Dow Home and Studio Director Craig McDonald.

When planning a visit to sample Michigan's architecture, set aside at least two days for a driving tour of the Detroit area and several more if the itinerary includes Midland, which is about two hours away, or Muskegon, along the coast of Lake Michigan. Frank Lloyd Wright-designed homes can be found in cities throughout the state.

In Detroit, other notable Yamasaki-designed buildings include the Helen L. DeRoy Auditorium and the Education Building on Wayne State's campus, as well as the One Woodward Avenue tower in downtown. Just to the east of downtown is Lafayette Park, a housing development of townhouses and apartment buildings designed by Mies van der Rohe.

Cranbrook is a quick drive away in the northern suburbs, but you could spend a full day just on campus. Saarinen House, the former home and studio of Eliel and Loja Saarinen that's an Art Deco masterwork, is open for tours, although the architect's Cranbrook Art Museum that was built in 1942 is undergoing renovation.

And while many of Michigan's architectural gems can be toured, others are private homes or just off limits. The most notable is the General Motors Technical Center in the Detroit suburb of Warren. Designed by Eero Saarinen and landscape architect Thomas Church, some of its buildings can be seen from the surrounding roads but there's no public tours or access to the grounds.

If You Go...

MICHIGAN MODERN: <http://www.MichiganModern.org>

McGREGOR MEMORIAL CONFERENCE CENTER: Located at Wayne State University in Detroit, designed by World Trade Center architect Minoru Yamasaki. Generally open to the public, but sometimes booked for events. The campus also boasts two other Yamasaki-designed buildings: The Helen L. DeRoy Auditorium and the Education Building.

ONE WOODWARD AVENUE: Located in downtown Detroit, at the corner of Woodward and Jefferson avenues near the Detroit River. Also designed by Yamasaki. Nearby Hart Plaza offers good views of its glass lobby and tower.

LAFAYETTE PARK: Located just east of downtown Detroit, a housing development of townhouses and apartment buildings designed by Mies van der Rohe. Pathways offer an intimate view of the largest collection of his buildings on one site.

CRANBROOK: Located in Bloomfield Hills, designed by Eliel Saarinen. The campus, while not in the modern style, is considered a masterpiece of 20th century architecture.

GENERAL MOTORS TECHNICAL CENTER: Located in the Detroit suburb of Warren. Designed by Eero Saarinen and landscape architect Thomas Church, some of its buildings may be seen from the surrounding roads but there are no public tours or access to the grounds.

ALDEN B. DOW HOME AND STUDIO: Located in Midland, the home of one of the state's premier modern architects. Tours are available, but reservations are required. A large concentration of work by the son of Dow Chemical Co.'s founder may be seen in homes, schools and churches throughout the city.

ST. FRANCIS DE SALES CHURCH: Located in Muskegon, designed by Marcel Breuer. Open to the public. The head of maintenance at the church often is available to give personal tours. A booklet on the Roman Catholic church, its history and the architect also is available to help guide visitors on their own tours.

Source: Michigan's State Historic Preservation Office, AP research.

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