

# MICHIGAN MODERN

Detroit Modern Tour



# DETROIT MODERN

## Detroit Modern Driving Tour



In architecture, the term **Modern** is applied to structures built roughly between 1940 and 1970 that are characterized by simplicity of form, large panes of glass, and elimination of decoration. Modern architecture had its roots in the International style, seeded in 1920s and 1930s Europe most notably through the Bauhaus school in Weimar, Germany. It gained popularity in the United States after many of the Bauhaus architects immigrated to America at the start of World War II and took teaching positions in prominent architecture schools. For example Walter Gropius went to Harvard and Ludwig Mies van de Rohe to the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago. After the war,

Modernism became the symbol of the future. Its architects rejected the past and embraced the use of new materials and daring, unconventional design. Modernism was fresh and dynamic and caught the spirit of the American people as they basked in post-war prosperity.

The post-war decades marked the longest continuous period of growth in the nation's history. Detroit, at the time the nation's fifth-largest city, saw its share of this growth as the automobile industry boomed and major investments were made in the city's transportation infrastructure, commercial and cultural institutions, public housing, and schools. This tour travels through many areas of the city showcasing some of Detroit's most exemplary Modern architecture.

The tour begins on the city's northwest side, in an area that reached the peak of its development in the automobile-centered mid-twentieth century. Found here are suburban-style homes by internationally acclaimed architects Minoru Yamasaki, whose architectural style helped define the look of the 1960s, and Frank Lloyd Wright, creator of the Prairie School of architecture and one of the most significant architects of the twentieth century.

The Cultural Center first developed during the City Beautiful movement of the early twentieth century, but expanded considerably during the 1950s and 1960s in accordance with a 1948 plan developed by Wayne State University planners Buford L. Pickens and Suren Pilafian.

The Detroit Medical Center was the result of a federally-subsidized urban renewal plan. Created by Detroit's City Plan Commission and English-born city planner Gerald Crane, residential, commercial, and industrial buildings were razed to make way for a 110-acre campus of new medical facilities. Through streets were closed and converted to pedestrian malls, creating an urban 'superblock,' and dense residential facilities, commercial areas, and parking were located along a ring of perimeter boulevards.

The last leg of the tour includes two Brutalist monuments of cast-in-place concrete on the northeast end of downtown as well as Belle Isle, where significant new investments in infrastructure were made in the 1940s and 1950s, including the Saarinen-influenced Flynn Memorial Skating Pavilion designed by J. Robert F. Swanson.

The **Detroit Modern Driving Tour** takes from two to three hours to complete—or, it can easily be broken down into smaller sections. For those wishing to take a closer look at the city's Modern architecture, **Detroit Modern** offers a series of walking and biking tours. Visit [michiganmodern.org](http://michiganmodern.org) for more information.

# Architects and Artists

## Joseph N. DeLauro

DeLauro, a sculptor, served as director of the School of Visual Arts at the University of Windsor and also taught at Marygrove College and the University of Detroit Mercy.

## Marshall Fredericks

Fredricks was a student of the Swedish sculptor Carl Milles and taught at the Cranbrook Academy of Art from 1932–42. He produced a large body of public art including Belle Isle's *Barbour Memorial Fountain* (1936) in Detroit. His work is known nationwide.

## Giffels & Rossetti

Raymond Giffels worked for architect Albert Kahn before forming Giffels & Vallet in the 1920s. He partnered with Louis Rossetti, Sr. in 1928. Notable examples of their work in the Detroit area are the Jeffersonian Apartments (1965) and Federal Mogul building in Southfield (1966).

## Cass Gilbert, Jr. and Francis J. Keally

Cass Gibert, Jr., was the son of Cass Gilbert, the New York-based architect of the Detroit Public Library (1912). The younger Gilbert worked on many of his father's projects, and Keally worked with Cass Gilbert's firm between 1919–28. The two collaborated on the 1963 addition to the Detroit Public Library.

## Nathan Johnson

One of the nation's leading African American architects, the Kansas-born Johnson established his Detroit practice in 1956. His addition to the Second Baptist Church in Detroit was his first major project. He also designed the Detroit People Mover stations (1987).

## Albert Kahn Associates

Albert Kahn began his practice in 1895 and became the architect for automaker Henry Ford, designing dozens of factory buildings. The River Rouge Glass Plant (1922) in Detroit and the Warren Tank Arsenal (1940) are cited as inspiring Modernism. Kahn's work was a foundation for the creation of the International style. After Kahn's death in 1942 the firm continued designing some of the Detroit area's outstanding Modern buildings.

## William E. Kapp

Kapp studied at the University of Pennsylvania. He worked as a designer for Smith, Hinchman & Grylls from 1918–31. He is known for Meadowbrook Hall (1929) near Rochester, Michigan, the University of Michigan's Horace H. Rackham School of Graduate Studies (1938) and the McMath Planetarium (1955) at Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills.

## Carl Milles

This Swedish sculptor was invited in 1931 to become artist-in-residence at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills. His most notable works include the *Orpheus* fountains (1934) in Stockholm, Sweden and at Cranbrook.

## O'Dell, Hewlett, & Luckenbach Associates

Detroit native Augustus O'Dell partnered with Wirt Rowland, the designer of Detroit's Guardian Building, from 1932–38. Owen Luckenbach once worked for Smith, Hinchman and Grylls. After joining Thomas Hewlett, this Birmingham, Michigan-based firm designed many Modern buildings in the Detroit area.

## Millard Sheets

Sheets was a prolific Southern California painter and architect. One of his most well-known works is the *Word of Life* mosaic (1963) on the facade of the Hesburgh Library at the University of Notre Dame.

## Eberle M. Smith Associates

Smith began his career with Albert Kahn Associates and established his own firm in 1942. He became nationally known for his progressive, student-centered school designs. In Michigan, Smith designed Edsel Ford High School (1955) and Henry Ford Community College (1961) in Dearborn and Lincoln Park and Flint High Schools (1960).

## Smith, Hinchman & Grylls

Smith, Hinchman & Grylls' origins date to 1853. The firm's pre-World War II work includes Detroit's most notable Art Deco skyscrapers. In the mid-1940s the firm turned to contemporary designs, assisted by its chief designer, Minoru Yamasaki. The firm continues to operate as the SmithGroup.

## J. Robert F. Swanson

With Eliel and Eero Saarinen, Swanson was a principal in Bloomfield Hills-based Saarinen, Swanson & Saarinen before founding his own firm in 1947. Swanson Associates designed the University of Michigan's Art and Architecture Building in 1974.

## Frank Lloyd Wright

One of America's greatest architects, Wright created the Prairie style. In the early 1950s he designed 'Usonian Automatic' houses—buildings of modest size that could easily and affordably be assembled on-site from prefabricated materials.

## Minoru Yamasaki & Associates

Minoru Yamasaki, a Japanese immigrant from Seattle, came to Detroit in 1945 to become chief of design for Smith, Hinchman & Grylls. He founded his own practice in Troy in 1959. He is most well known for the World Trade Center (1971) in New York City. The Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, Detroit Branch Annex (1949–51) designed by Yamasaki was Detroit's first curtain wall building, leading the way for other Modern buildings.



- 1. American Concrete Institute**  
(Starr Commonwealth)  
22400 West Seven Mile Road  
Minoru Yamasaki  
(Yamasaki, Leinweber & Associates), 1958



- 2. James Vernor School**  
13726 Pembroke Avenue  
Eberle M. Smith Associates, 1947



- 3. Dorothy S. Turkel House**  
2760 West Seven Mile Road  
Frank Lloyd Wright, 1958



- 4. S. Brooks and Florence Barron House**  
19631 Argyle Crescent  
Minoru Yamasaki  
(Leinweber, Yamasaki & Hellmuth), 1955



- 5. Detroit Historical Museum**  
5401 Woodward Avenue  
William E. Kapp, 1951



- 6. Detroit Society of Arts and Crafts**  
(College for Creative Studies  
Yamasaki Building)  
245 East Kirby Avenue  
Minoru Yamasaki  
(Yamasaki, Leinweber & Associates), 1958



- 7. Horace H. Rackham Education Memorial Building**  
100 Farnsworth Avenue  
Harley, Ellington & Day, 1941  
Architectural sculpture, Marshall  
Fredericks, 1941



- 8. Detroit Public Library Addition**  
Cass Avenue between Putnam Street  
and West Kirby Street (left cover image)  
Cass Gilbert, Jr. and Francis J. Keally, 1963  
**Man's Discovery of His Potential Abilities  
and His Destiny** mosaic, Millard Sheets  
**Exploration** cast bronze sculpture,  
Joseph N. DeLauro, 1967



- 9. Shiffman Medical Library**  
4325 Brush Street  
O'Dell, Hewlett and Luckenbach,  
1970



- 10. Gordon H. Scott Hall  
of Basic Medical Sciences**  
540 East Canfield Avenue  
Giffels and Rossetti, 1972



- 11. Helen Vera Prentis  
Lande Building**  
550 East Canfield Avenue  
Smith, Hinchman & Grylls, 1964



- 12. Children's Hospital  
of Michigan**  
3901 Beaubien Street  
Albert Kahn Associates, 1971



- 13. Second Baptist  
Church Addition**  
461 Monroe Street  
Nathan Johnson, 1968



- 14. Frank Murphy Hall of Justice**  
1441 St. Antoine Street  
Eberle M. Smith Associates, 1970  
**Hand of God** cast bronze sculpture,  
Carl Milles, 1955 (center cover image)



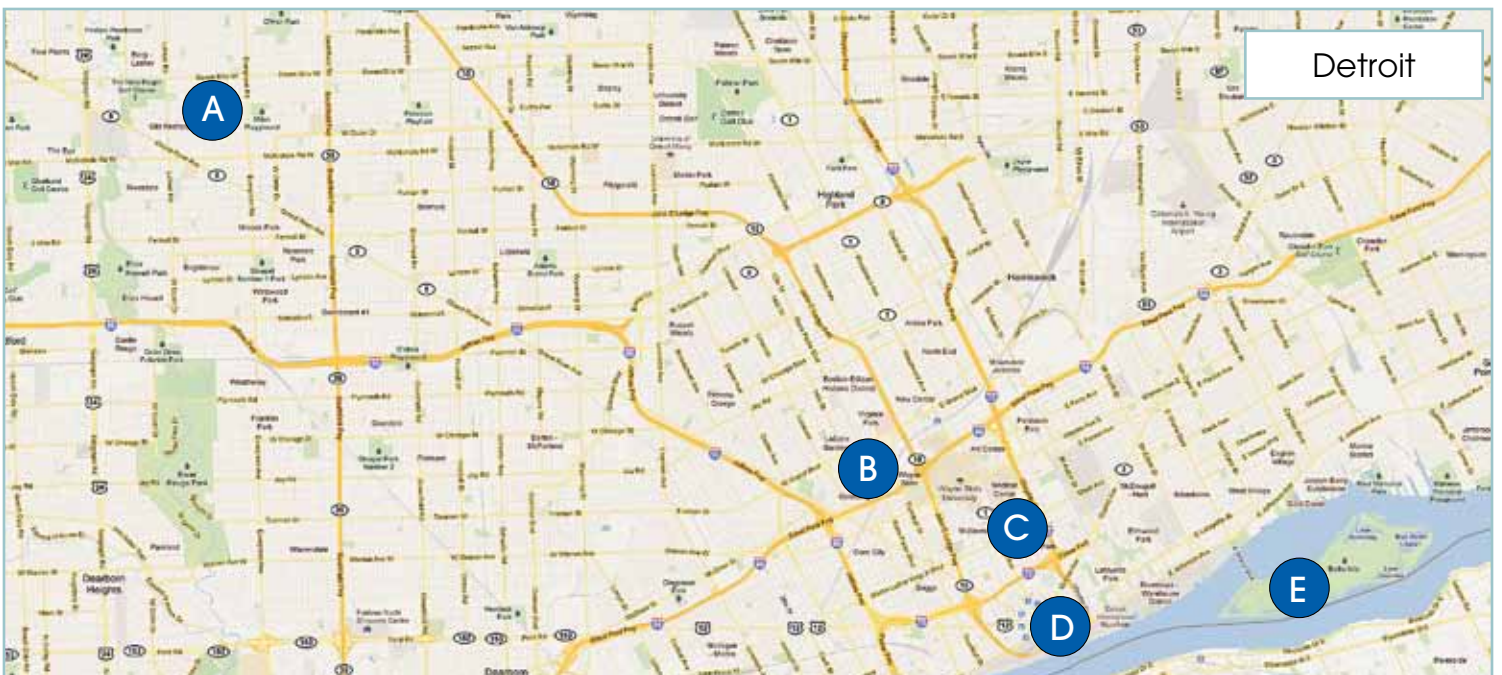
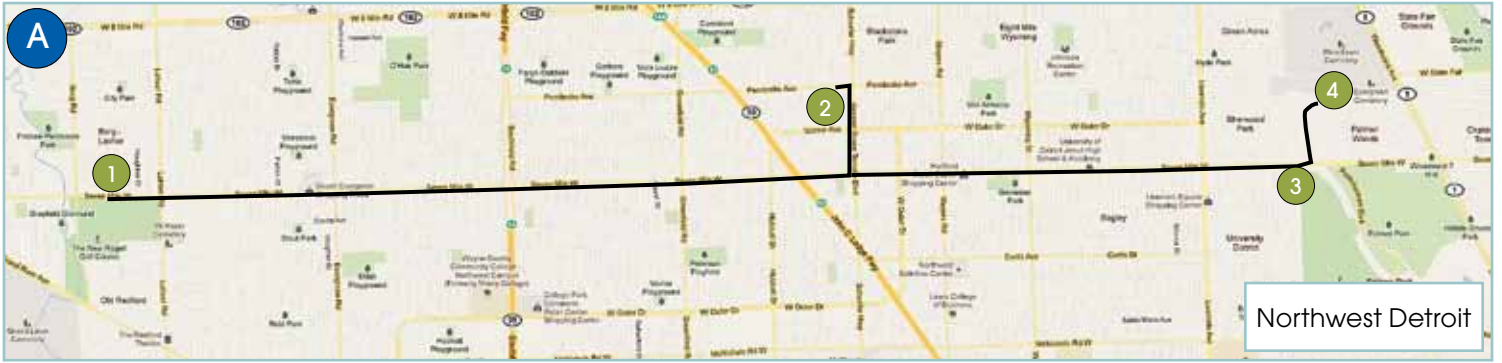
- 15. Dossin Great Lakes Museum**  
100 The Strand, Belle Isle  
William E. Kapp, 1961



- 16. Flynn Memorial  
Skating Pavilion**  
Picnic Way at Loiter Way, Belle Isle  
J. Robert F. Swanson, 1949

# Detroit Modern Driving Tour

Map courtesy of Google Maps



# MICHIGAN MODERN

[michiganmodern.org](http://michiganmodern.org)



For more information about Detroit's historic sites, visit [detroitmi.gov/hdab](http://detroitmi.gov/hdab)  
Photos courtesy of the Detroit Historic Designation Advisory Board  
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Photo 8 courtesy of Carlos Lowry

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