

MICHIGAN MODERN

Detroit Modern Civic Center/Financial District Tour



DETROIT MODERN

Civic Center/Financial District Walking Tour



America welcomed a new era in architecture when the Museum of Modern Art in New York City held the 'Modern Architecture: International Exhibition' in 1932. Based on the work of the Bauhaus school in Germany, the International style was known for its clean lines, walls of glass, and lack of ornamentation. The Great Depression and the redirection of materials and manpower for the needs of World War II brought construction to a virtual standstill in most American cities. The innovative architecture could not be applied until after the war ended. By then, new building materials and pre-fabricated building techniques developed for the war effort were available to the private

market. Promising young architects who had served in the military used the GI Bill to complete their education. They applied the lessons learned from fast-paced, creative war construction to rebuild America's cities during the longest continuous period of economic growth in our nation's history, 1950 to 1970.

The city of Detroit first hired Eliel Saarinen, an internationally known Finnish architect and city planner serving as a professor at the University of Michigan, to create a civic center and Veteran's Memorial Hall in 1924. The poor economic climate during the depression caused the original plan to be shelved. As the economy improved, Saarinen and his Yale-trained son, Eero, revisited the plan in 1938 updating it by adding a 30-story government building. The plan was put on hold, this time due to the outbreak of World War II.

In 1943, to help the city's planning department meet its post-war needs, members of the Detroit chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) formed the Architects' Urban Design Collaborative. The group consisted of some of Detroit's prominent, young architects who provided advice on modernizing the city's central business district, including the civic center.

The Detroit Common Council approved a third civic center plan in 1947 by Saarinen, Saarinen & Associates, which by then included architect J. Robert F. Swanson. Site plans were provided by the renowned landscape architect Dan Kiley. This new plan provided downtown Detroit with a significant feature: an opening to the Detroit River. It also included a memorial hall, an exhibition hall, a civic auditorium, a plaza with a waterfront promenade, underground parking, and municipal office towers. Construction began on Veterans Memorial Hall in 1947 and on the City-County Building (Coleman A. Young Municipal Center) in 1951. Eero Saarinen was again asked to revise the civic center plan in 1955. Though not all the elements of this final plan were carried out, much of the fundamental design can still be found in Detroit's civic center.

Detroit fared well during World War II when the automobile industry ramped up production to create 'the Arsenal of Democracy' and thousands of workers poured into the region. Prosperity continued throughout the 1950s and 1960s as automobile consumption grew. During this golden era, Detroit rose to the status of a world financial leader, reflecting its affluence through its architecture, and the city became the home for a new generation of modern architects led by the internationally acclaimed Eero Saarinen and Minoru Yamasaki.

Architects and Artists

Marshall Fredericks

A native of Illinois, Fredericks was a student of the Swedish sculptor Carl Milles and taught at the Cranbrook Academy of Art from 1932 to 1942. 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. Known for their public buildings, they designed the former main terminal of Detroit Metropolitan Airport (1958) and Detroit's United States Post Office Building (1961). Notable examples of their work in the Detroit area are the Jeffersonian Apartments (1965) and Federal Mogul building in Southfield (1966).

Harley, Ellington & Day (1943-60); Harley, Ellington, Cowin & Stirton (1960-)

Alvin Harley and Harold Ellington joined forces in 1933 during the Great Depression and found work designing for the Stroh Brewery Company. Clarence Day became a partner in 1943. One of the most prominent Modern architectural firms in Michigan, they designed the south wing addition to the Detroit Institute of Arts in 1966. The firm also designed the International style Department of State Building in Washington, D.C. (1957-60).

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 influenced the architect Le Corbusier and 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.

King & Lewis

Harry S. King and Maxwell Lewis joined forces in 1960. King trained at Wayne State University and the Lawrence Institute of Technology, while Lewis was from New York University College. The firm was responsible for a number of Modern apartment buildings, hotels and shopping centers in Michigan, including Huron Towers (1960) in Ann Arbor and the Pontchartrain Hotel (1965) and Lafayette Park Shopping Center in Detroit.

Giacomo Manzù

At the request of Minoru Yamasaki, this Italian sculptor and painter created outdoor bronze sculpture for the McGregor Memorial Conference Center at Wayne State University in Detroit in 1958. He is best known for the *Portal of Death* located at St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City, Rome.

Isamu Noguchi

Born in Los Angeles, Noguchi's interest in sculpture led him to Paris to study with the artist Constantin Brancusi. A 1938 commission for a statue at the Rockefeller Center in New York City jump started his career. Imprisoned in a Japanese-American internment camp during World War II, he became an internationally acclaimed sculptor and designer in the post-war years. Noguchi is known for the iconic wood and glass coffee table he designed for the Herman Miller Furniture Company of Zeeland, Michigan, in 1947.

O'Dell, Hewlett, & Luckenbach Associates

Detroit native Augustus O'Dell partnered with Wirt Rowland, the designer of Detroit's Guardian Building, from 1932 to 1938. 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 including Ford Auditorium (1956; demolished 2011), two Cranbrook gymnasiums (1959 and 1964), and the Pontiac Silverdome (1975).

Louis G. Redstone Associates

Redstone was introduced to the construction trades as a member of the Pioneer State Youth Group in Palestine after emigrating from Poland in 1920. He graduated from the University of Michigan and the Cranbrook Academy of Art, where he studied under Eliel Saarinen. Redstone specialized in shopping center design and partnered with Victor Gruen Associates to develop Westland Mall, Michigan's first enclosed mall built by the J. L. Hudson Corporation in 1965.

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.

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 later co-founded Leinweber, Yamasaki & Hellmuth and designed the Lambert-St. Louis Municipal Air Terminal (1956) along with several Detroit buildings before founding 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. Coleman A. Young Municipal Center**
2 Woodward Avenue
Harley, Ellington & Day, 1951
Spirit of Detroit,
(center cover image)
Marshall Fredericks, 1955



- 7. Fort Washington Plaza**
333 West Fort Street
Louis G. Redstone Associates, 1969



- 2. Michigan Consolidated Gas Company Headquarters Building**
One Woodward Avenue
Minoru Yamasaki & Associates,
1960–62 (right cover image)
Passo di Danza (Step of Dance),
Giacomo Manzù, 1963



- 8. Detroit Bank & Trust Company**
211 West Fort Street
Harley, Ellington,
Cowin & Stirton, Inc., 1964



- 3. Philip A. Hart Plaza**
Smith, Hinchman & Grylls, 1975
Horace E. Dodge and Son
Memorial Fountain and Pylon,
Isamu Noguchi, 1978



- 9. Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, Detroit Branch Annex**
160 West Fort Street
Minoru Yamasaki for Smith,
Hinchman & Grylls, 1949–51



- 4. Veterans Memorial Hall**
151 West Jefferson Avenue
Harley, Ellington & Day, 1947–50
Victory Eagle,
Marshall Fredericks, 1951



- 10. First Federal Building**
1001 Woodward Avenue
Smith, Hinchman & Grylls, 1963–65



- 5. Cobo Convention and Exhibition Center**
One Washington Boulevard
Giffels & Vallet, 1960



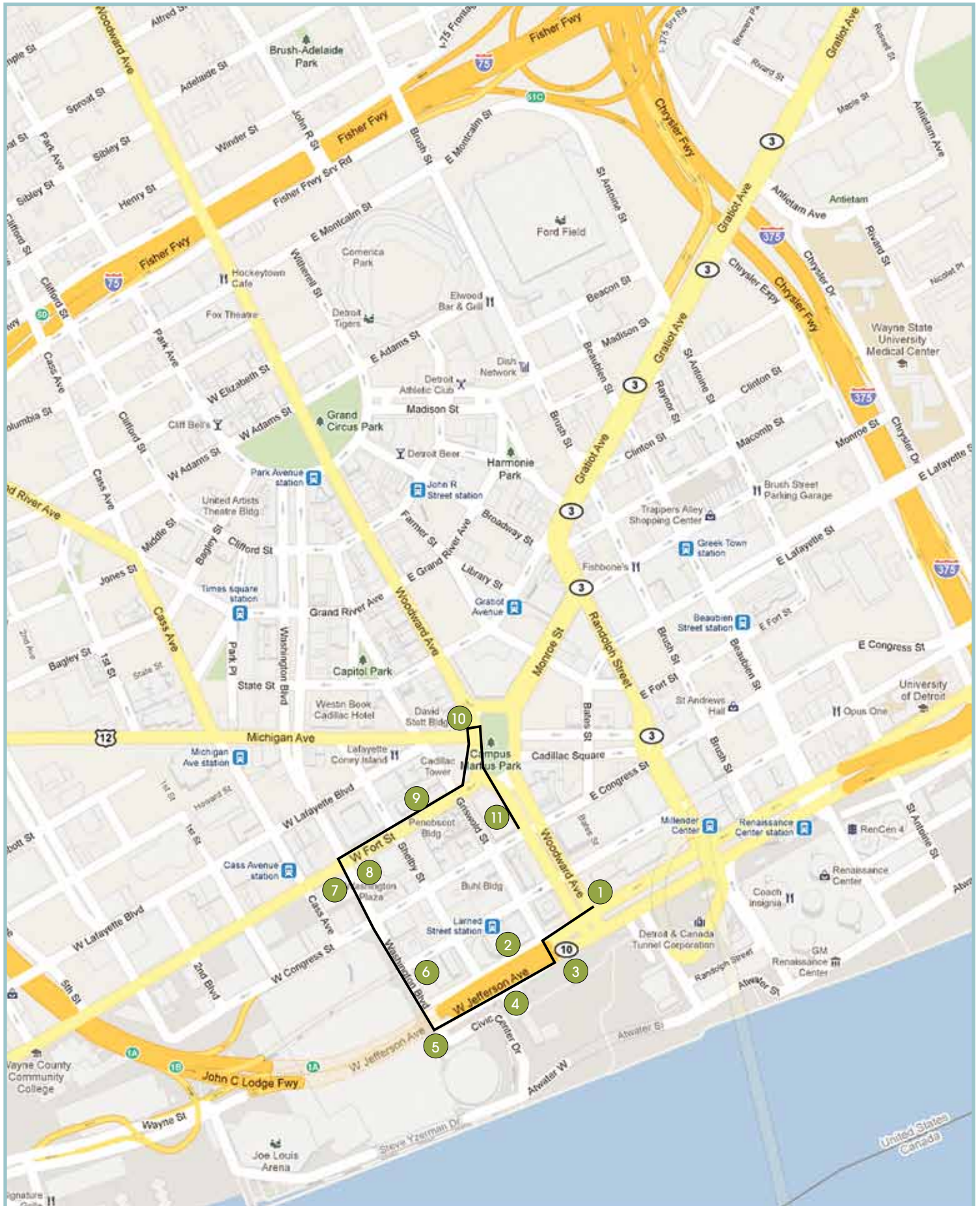
- 11. National Bank of Detroit Building**
611 Woodward Avenue
Albert Kahn Associates, 1959



- 6. Pontchartrain Hotel**
2 Washington Boulevard
King & Lewis, 1966

Detroit Modern Civic Center/Financial District Walking Tour

Map courtesy of Google Maps



MICHIGAN MODERN

michiganmodern.org



For more information about Detroit's historic sites, visit detroitmi.gov/hdab
Photos courtesy of the Detroit Historic Designation Advisory Board

This brochure was written and designed as part of a Certified Local Government grant to the City of Detroit by the State Historic Preservation Office. Partial funding has also been provided by the City of Detroit through the Detroit City Council's Historic Designation Advisory Board.

This publication has been financed in part with federal funds from the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. The State Historic Preservation Office receives federal financial assistance for identification and protection of historic properties. CVCNTR-136-110721