

# A Tour of Iowa's 20th-Century Architecture

■ Photographs by Cameron Campbell

■ Captions by Barbara Mitchell

■ Introduction by Ginalie Swaim

They have become part of our daily landscape. The structures built in 20th-century Iowa—even those constructed as recently as the 1990s—quickly merged into our built environment, our visual consciousness. We walk or drive past them, seldom remembering that they rose from stacks of stone and wood, brick and steel, and later from thick ribbons of poured concrete. Even less often do we recall that these structures began as an idea in an architect's mind, as intricate drawings on a drafting table. In Iowa, "by the end of the 19th century, most moderately populated communities included practicing architects," writes Jason Alread, assistant professor of architecture at Iowa State University; "their influence is seen through the quality of the structures throughout the 20th century."

To mark its 100th anniversary in 2004, the American Institute of Architects, Iowa Chapter (AIA Iowa) undertook a monumental task—"to seek out the most

significant architecture created in the state of Iowa during the 20th century." The criteria? The structure must be located in Iowa, still standing, and have been designed by an architect.

Over nine months, more than 300 entries poured in to the AIA Iowa office—from all parts of Iowa; representative of commercial, institutional, and residential properties; and submitted by architects and the general public. A nominating committee (*listed below*) sifted through the entries, considering the buildings' aesthetics and social significance. Next, 125 were documented and presented to a jury mandated to select 50 buildings, singling out one for each decade and finally one "Building of the Century."

In October 2004, the buildings were announced—at a special reception in the State Historical Building as well as in a handsome book, a two-hour IPTV documentary, and a traveling exhibit (*see box below*). The stunning photo-

graphs in the book and exhibit are the work of Cameron Campbell, Iowa State University professor of architecture and design. He tells us more about his work on page 181.

On the following pages, *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* presents a sample of these 50 buildings. Although we wish we could have presented all 50, that's the job of the book and the exhibit. Instead, we asked preservation architect Jack Porter and architectural historian Barbara Mitchell (both on the staff of the State Historical Society of Iowa) to select among the 50, with an eye for ones that illustrate particularly well the changing aesthetics, styles, materials, and technologies of 100 years of architecture in Iowa. The captions by Barbara Mitchell, which accompany Campbell's photographs, lead us across Iowa to some of our most beloved and respected structures, and remind us of why they're among the century's most significant.

—The Editor

**Nominating Committee:** Jason Alread (assistant professor of architecture, Iowa State University); Judy McClure (former preservation architect, State Historical Society of Iowa); Jack Porter (preservation architect, State Historical Society of Iowa); Matt Rodekamp (architect, Herbert Lewis Kruse Blunck Architecture); Suzanne Schwengels (executive vice-president of AIA Iowa); and Wesley Shank (professor emeritus of architectural history, Iowa State University). **Jury:** Robert Broshar (former national president of AIA); Robert Findlay (professor emeritus of architectural design, Iowa State University); Eliot Nusbaum (*Traditional Home* editor and former *Des Moines Register* architecture critic); Chuck Offenburger (former *Des Moines Register* columnist); and Robert D. Ray (former governor of Iowa).

## "A Century of Iowa Architecture" Exhibit Travels Across Iowa

- Sioux City Public Museum: Feb. 11–March 27, 2005
- Dubuque Museum of Art: May 1–Aug. 31, 2005
- Iowa State University, College of Design: Sept. 26–Oct. 30, 2005
- MacNider Art Museum, Mason City: Jan. 26–April 16, 2006



## Kendall Young Library

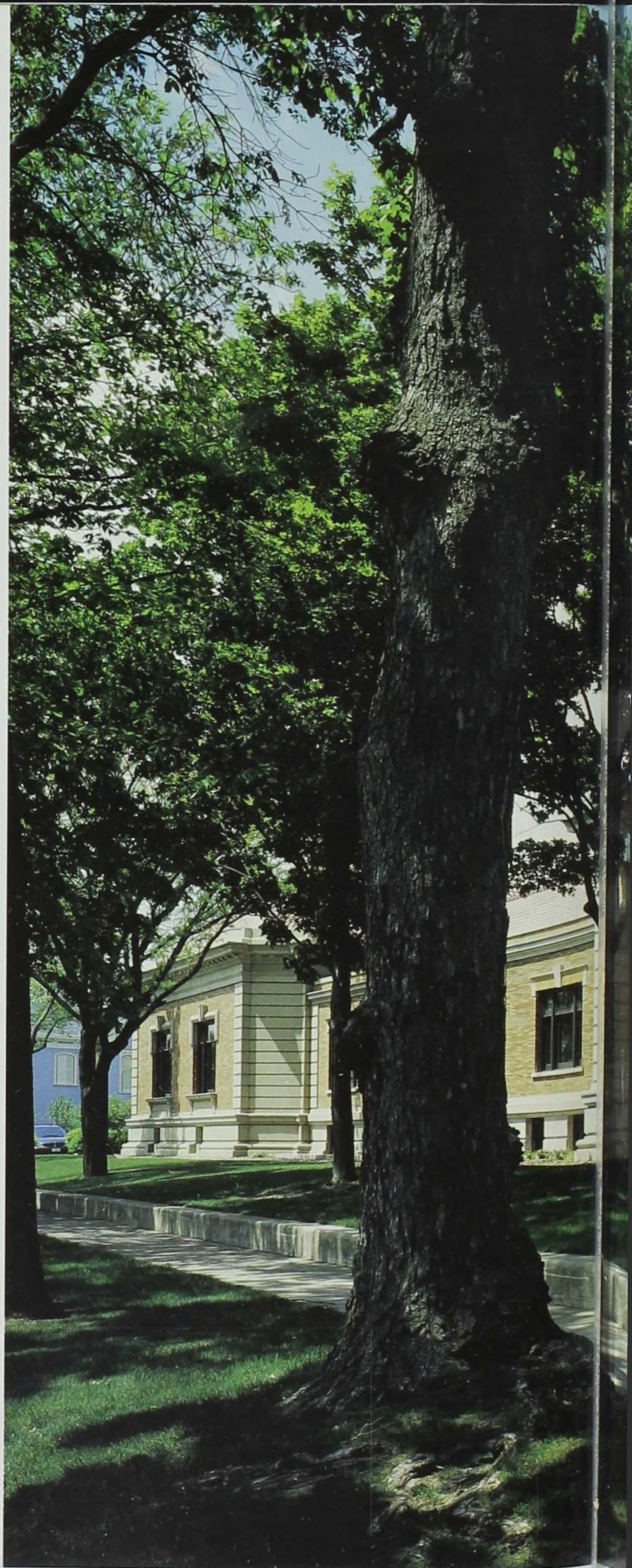
1905, Webster City

Architects: Patton & Miller

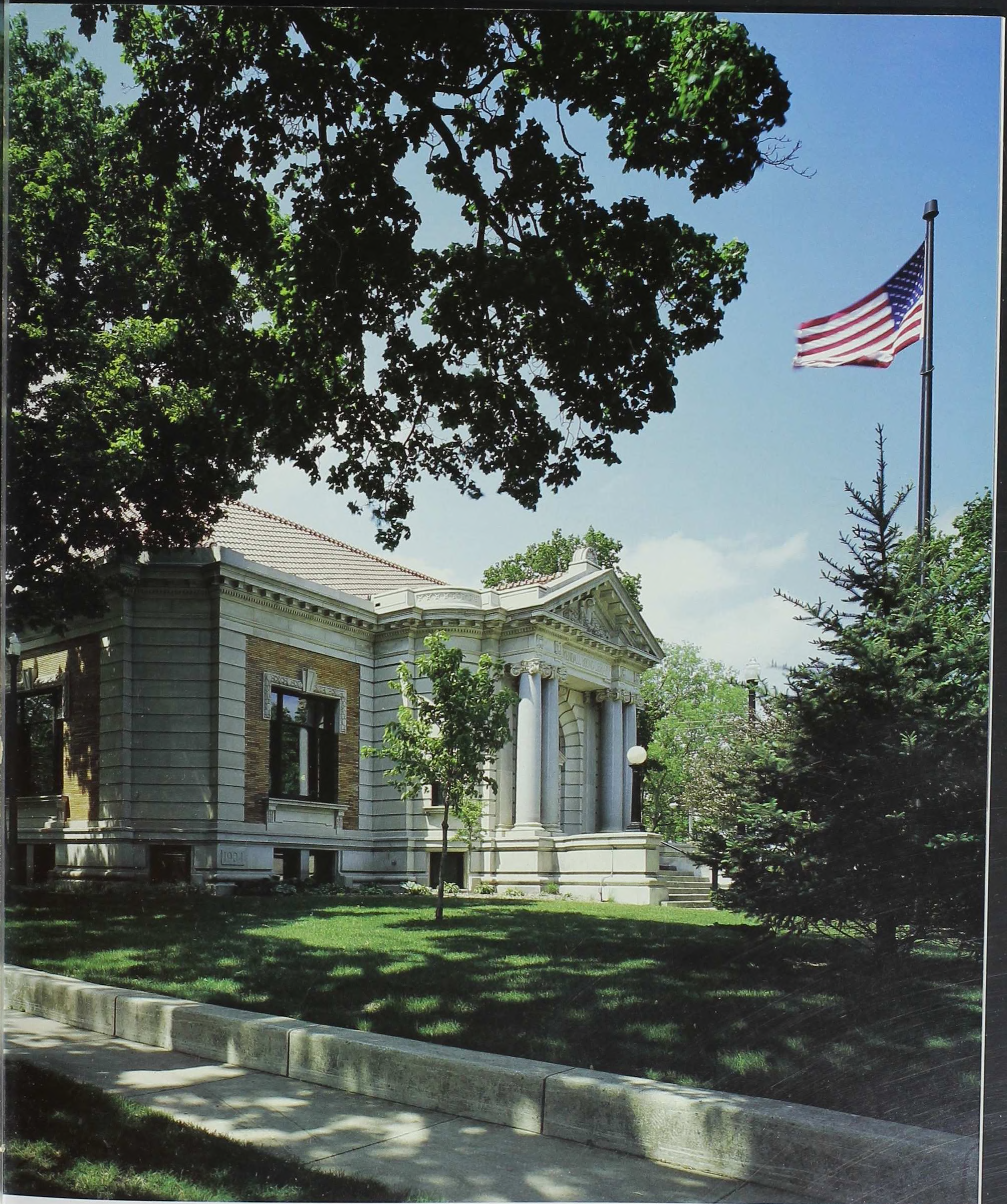
### 1900s

The first decade of the 20th century saw an increase in civic-mindedness in architecture. One of the most prolific ways in which this was manifest in the Midwest was the construction of public libraries. Public libraries became a new and distinct building type, many incorporating the Classical Revival styles promulgated by the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Made possible by the philanthropic attitudes of wealthy Americans—most notably Andrew Carnegie—and orchestrated by civic boosterism, the buildings were designed by architects increasingly becoming known for their library designs.

Chicago architects Grant Clark Miller and Normand Smith Patton, well known for their library designs, were commissioned for the Kendall Young Library in Webster City. The building is constructed of Bedford limestone and mottled brick, with granite, marble, and stained glass detailing. When it was completed in 1905, it was the only library in the state with a complete private financial endowment. The library was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983.







ALL PHOTOGRAPHS PAGES 162-180 COPYRIGHT CAMERON CAMPBELL



## Kendall Young Library

1905, Webster City

Architects: Patton & Miller

## 1900s

The first decade of the 20th century saw an increase in civic-mindedness in architecture. One of the most prolific ways in which this was manifest in the Midwest was the construction of public libraries. Public libraries became a new and distinct building type, many incorporating the Classical Revival styles promulgated by the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Made possible by the philanthropic attitudes of wealthy Americans—most notably Andrew Carnegie—and orchestrated by civic boosterism, the buildings were designed by architects increasingly becoming known for their library designs.

Chicago architects Grant Clark Miller and Normand Smith Patton, well known for their library designs, were commissioned for the Kendall Young Library in Webster City. The building is constructed of Bedford limestone and mottled brick, with granite, marble, and stained glass detailing. When it was completed in 1905, it was the only library in the state with a complete private financial endowment. The library was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983.



ALL PHOTOGRAPHY PAGES 162-163 COPYRIGHT CAMERON CAMPBELL





## Merchants National Bank Building

1915, Grinnell

Architect: Louis H. Sullivan



## 1910s

As the public library took on a unique form in the first decade of the new century, a new architectural style was developing in the American Midwest. The "Prairie School" style of architecture became a distinct alternative to Classical Revival styles popular at the time. Commonly attributed to Frank Lloyd Wright, the Prairie style was originally nurtured by his mentor, architect Louis Sullivan. Borrowing inspiration from other aesthetic and architectural movements, the style used modern technology and the spirit of the natural prairie to produce buildings with simple, straightforward forms and sumptuous ornament.

The Merchants National Bank in Grinnell (*left*) and the Woodbury County Courthouse in Sioux City (*right*) are two exceptional examples in Iowa. Both properties have been honored with listings as National Historic Landmarks. The Woodbury County Courthouse also received a Save America's Treasures grant in 2002.



### Woodbury County Courthouse

1918, Sioux City

Architects: William Steele and Purcell & Elmslie



## Salisbury House

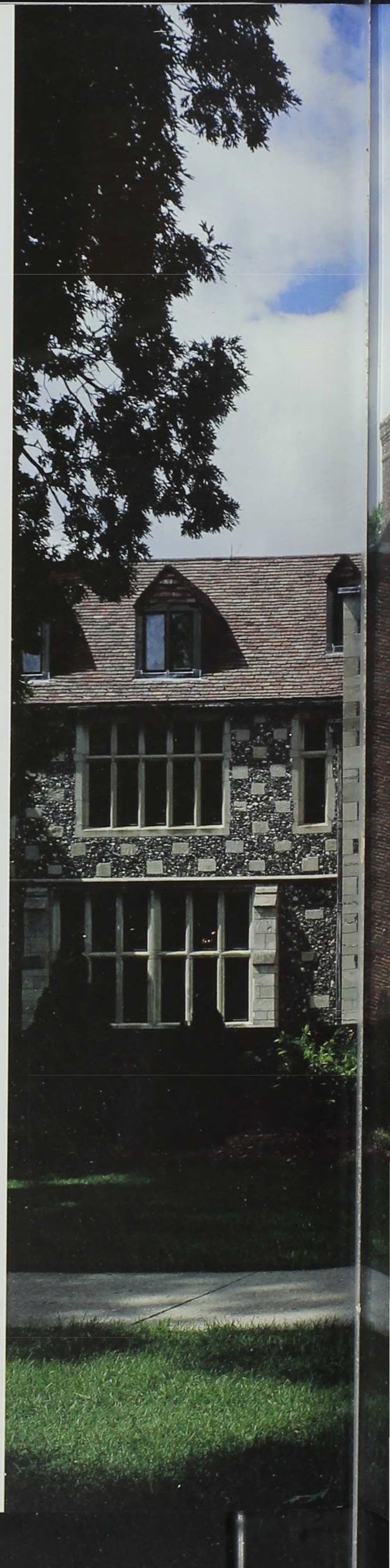
1928, Des Moines

Architects: Boyd & Moore and Rasmussen & Wayland

## 1920s

The Roaring Twenties was an era marked by prosperity, new opportunities, steady economic growth, and cultural consumption. Wealthy Americans built grand homes in the style of British country estates. Owners became personally involved in the design, creating "period rooms" with antiques acquired during their extensive, worldwide travels. The entire package, including the estate, home, artwork, and furnishings, was meant to express the social status of the occupants.

In 1922, Carl and Edith Weeks became enamored with the King's House in Salisbury, England. Upon their return from abroad, they hired Des Moines architect Byron Boyd and New York architect William Rasmussen to design a house inspired by the noble English estate. The final product incorporates salvaged architectural features from various buildings, and the Weeks' antiques and vast art and manuscript collections, as well as all the modern conveniences demanded by the times. The Salisbury House was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1977.









## Salisbury House

1928, Des Moines

Architects: *Boyd & Moore and Rasmussen & Wayland*

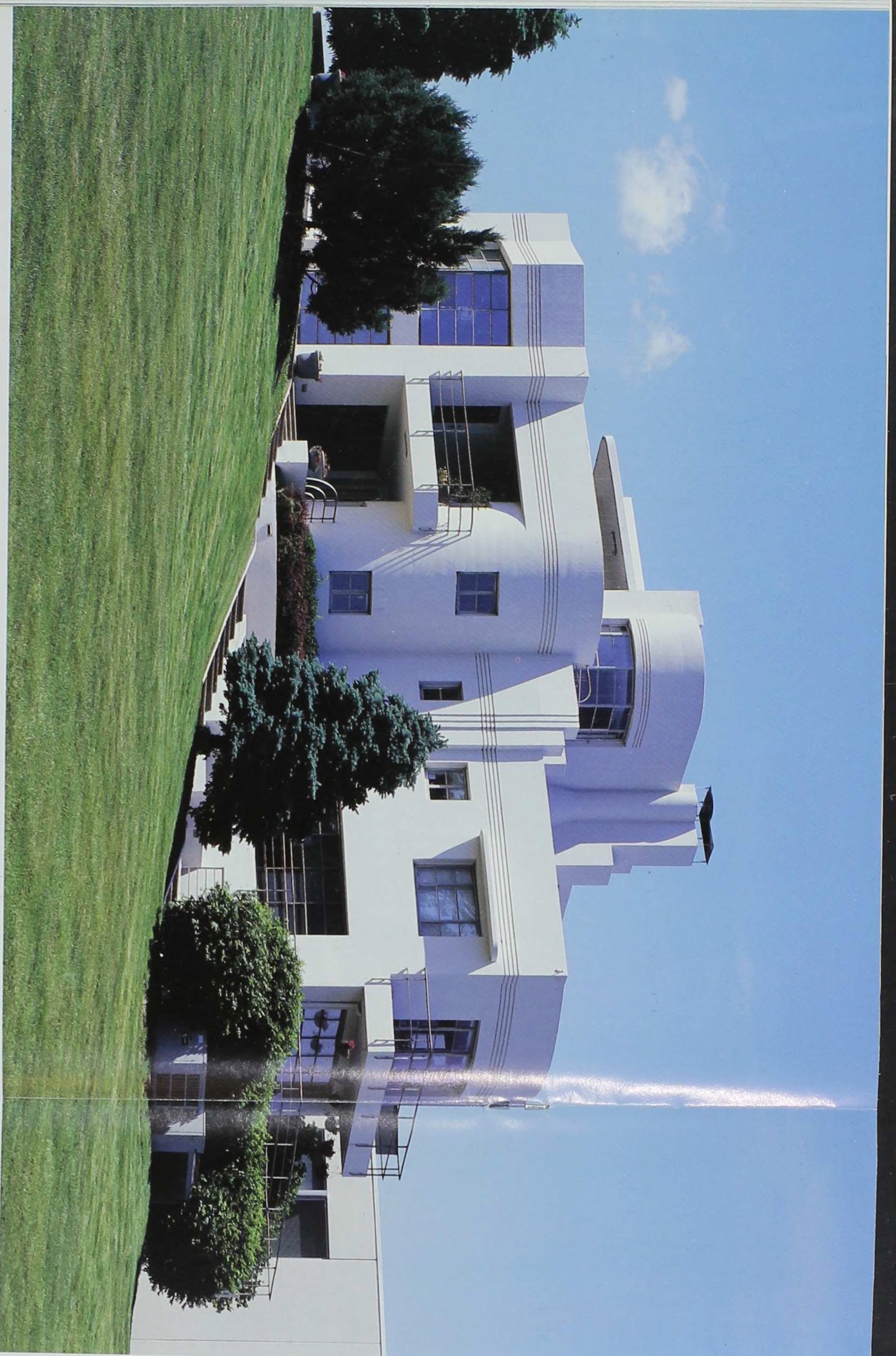
## 1920s

The Roaring Twenties was an era marked by prosperity, new opportunities, steady economic growth, and cultural consumption. Wealthy Americans built grand homes in the style of British country estates. Owners became personally involved in the design, creating "period rooms" with antiques acquired during their extensive, worldwide travels. The entire package, including the estate, home, artwork, and furnishings, was meant to express the social status of the occupants.

In 1922, Carl and Edith Weeks became enamored with the King's House in Salisbury, England. Upon their return from abroad, they hired Des Moines architect Byron Boyd and New York architect William Rasmussen to design a house inspired by the noble English estate. The final product incorporates salvaged architectural features from various buildings, and the Weeks' antiques and vast art and manuscript collections, as well as all the modern conveniences demanded by the times. The Salisbury House was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1977.







## 1930S

Close on the heels of the Prairie style, Art Deco was showcased at the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs Industriels et Modernes, held in Paris. This streamlined expression became evident in everything from artwork and industrial design to buildings and architectural detailing. Art Deco and its sibling, Streamline Moderne, combined the use of modern materials, especially reinforced concrete, with the aesthetic of the machine, making a strong statement of speed, power, precision, and efficiency.

The Butler House in Des Moines (*above*) exhibits many tenets of these styles, including interrelated geometric shapes and volumes, in this case organized around a central ramped circulation core. Des Moines

architect George Kraetsch worked closely with owner Earl Butler to create a house that expressed machinery, science, and technology.

In Sioux City, local architect Henry Kamphoefner designed the Grandview Park Band Shell (*right*), constructed using federal relief dollars and workers between 1934 and 1935. The first of two band shells designed by Kamphoefner in Iowa, the Grandview Park Band Shell has received numerous design awards.

### Earl Butler House

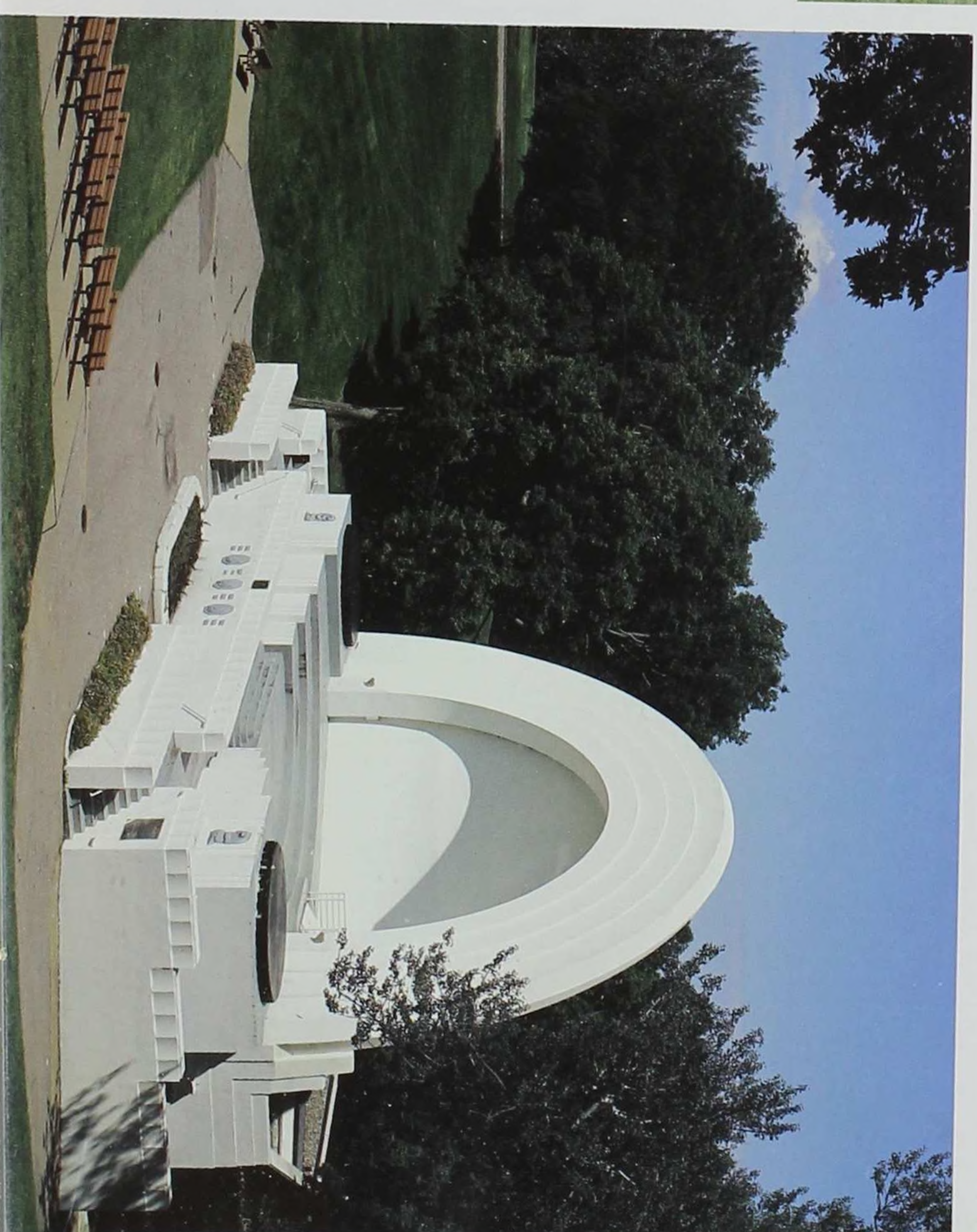
1937, Des Moines

Architects: Kraetsch & Kraetsch

### Grandview Park Band Shell

1935, Sioux City

Architect: Henry L. Kamphoefner







## 1930s

Close on the heels of the Prairie style, Art Deco was showcased at the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs Industriels et Modernes, held in Paris. This streamlined expression became evident in everything from artwork and industrial design to buildings and architectural detailing. Art Deco and its sibling, Streamline Moderne, combined the use of modern materials, especially reinforced concrete, with the aesthetic of the machine, making a strong statement of speed, power, precision, and efficiency.

The Butler House in Des Moines (*above*) exhibits many tenets of these styles, including interrelated geometric shapes and volumes, in this case organized around a central ramped circulation core. Des Moines

architect George Kraetsch worked closely with owner Earl Butler to create a house that expressed machinery, science, and technology.

In Sioux City, local architect Henry Kamphoefner designed the Grandview Park Band Shell (*right*), constructed using federal relief dollars and workers between 1934 and 1935. The first of two band shells designed by Kamphoefner in Iowa, the Grandview Park Band Shell has received numerous design awards.





**Earl Butler House**

*1937, Des Moines*

*Architects: Kraetsch & Kraetsch*

**Grandview Park Band Shell**

*1935, Sioux City*

*Architect: Henry L. Kamphoefner*











## High School Auditorium and Gymnasium

1940, Ventura

Architect: Thorwald Thorson

## 1940s

During the 1930s and into the first years of the 1940s, a federal economic relief program resulted in the construction of many public facilities throughout the nation. Many of the buildings constructed in the later years of the program became known stylistically as PWA Moderne, named after the federal agency that funded many of them, the Public Works Administration.

Built by the Work Projects Administration, a sister agency to the PWA, the Ventura gymnasium is a late example of the PWA Moderne styling, with smooth concrete walls accented with vertical and horizontal bands and geometric motifs. Four arched reinforced concrete trusses support its broad arched roof. The gymnasium also features a limestone carving of a Viking warrior and a cast concrete figure of a basketball player, both by artist Christian Petersen, who was involved in another federal relief program, the Public Works of Art Project, and was the Campus Artist-in-Residence at Iowa State College.





## High School Auditorium and Gymnasium

1940, *Ventura*

Architect: *Thorvald Thorson*

## 1940s

During the 1930s and into the first years of the 1940s, a federal economic relief program resulted in the construction of many public facilities throughout the nation. Many of the buildings constructed in the later years of the program became known stylistically as PWA Moderne, named after the federal agency that funded many of them, the Public Works Administration.

Built by the Work Projects Administration, a sister agency to the PWA, the Ventura gymnasium is a late example of the PWA Moderne styling, with smooth concrete walls accented with vertical and horizontal bands and geometric motifs. Four arched reinforced concrete trusses support its broad arched roof. The gymnasium also features a limestone carving of a Viking warrior and a cast concrete figure of a basketball player, both by artist Christian Petersen, who was involved in another federal relief program, the Public Works of Art Project, and was the Campus Artist-in-Residence at Iowa State College.





## 1950s

Following the Second World War, the population boom and influx of returning veterans created a housing crisis in America. Housing developers turned to simplified, mass-produced, and affordable designs. Architects were also inspired to meet the housing needs with new designs incorporating modern materials such as glass, concrete, and steel. Indoor and outdoor living spaces were integrated using contemporary cantilevers, non-load-bearing curtain walls, and post-and-beam construction. *House Beautiful*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, and *Better Homes and Gardens* showcased the new designs.

In *Ladies' Home Journal*, Frank Lloyd Wright revisited his Usonian house designs of the 1930s, providing economical postwar designs. Cedar Rock (the Lowell Walter House, *above*) in Quasqueton is based on one of the designs, described as a "crystal house, for town or country"—although in keeping with Wright's original Usonian philosophy, the relation of the house to the site became a key design factor.

Similarly, Iowa architect Ray Crites designed his

own home using one of Wright's Usonian principles. In Crites House No. 1 (*right*), as in Cedar Rock, the relation of the house to its site became a key design factor.

In 1981, Cedar Rock was donated to the Iowa Conservation Commission and the people of the state of Iowa. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983. Maintained and operated by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, it is open to the public from May through October.



**"Cedar Rock" (Lowell Walter House)**

1950, Quasqueton

Architect: Frank Lloyd Wright

**Crites House No. 1**

1959, Cedar Rapids

Architects: Crites & McConnell







# Building of the Century





## C. Y. Stephens Auditorium

1969, Iowa State University, Ames

Architects: Crites & McConnell

and Brooks Borg & Skiles, Architects-Engineers

## 1960s

C. Y. Stephens Auditorium on the Iowa State University campus represents not only the culmination of Modernist ideals in the 1960s but also a desire to bring a higher level of performing arts and culture to central Iowa. From the sculptural expression of its concrete, glass, and wood down to the hand-woven silver stage curtain, the building is an unsurpassed example of post-World War II Modernism in Iowa. It breaks away from historical precedents and honestly expresses its architectural materials, technology, and function. A newspaper article at the time of its opening rightly states that no effort was made to hide the 13,000 cubic yards of concrete used during construction. Instead, cedar, hemlock, and oak underscore and warm the subtle curves of the balconies and ceilings, contributing to its almost perfect acoustics. Since its construction, C. Y. Stephens has invigorated the performing arts and provided inspiration for many of Iowa's architects. It genuinely is Iowa's "Building of the Century."







**C. Y. Stephens Auditorium**  
1969, Iowa State University, Ames  
Architects: *Crites & McConnell*  
and *Brooks Borg & Skiles, Architects-Engineers*

## 1960s

C. Y. Stephens Auditorium on the Iowa State University campus represents not only the culmination of Modernist ideals in the 1960s but also a desire to bring a higher level of performing arts and culture to central Iowa. From the sculptural expression of its concrete, glass, and wood down to the hand-woven silver stage curtain, the building is an unsurpassed example of post-World War II Modernism in Iowa. It breaks away from historical precedents and honestly expresses its architectural materials, technology, and function. A newspaper article at the time of its opening rightly states that no effort was made to hide the 13,000 cubic yards of concrete used during construction. Instead, cedar, hemlock, and oak underscore and warm the subtle curves of the balconies and ceilings, contributing to its almost perfected acoustics. Since its construction, C. Y. Stephens has invigorated the performing arts and provided inspiration for many of Iowa's architects. It genuinely is Iowa's "Building of the Century."



# Building of the Century



# 1970s

Continuing in the same vein as in C. Y. Stephens Auditorium, concrete and glass became the materials of choice in the 1970s, as architects strove to find new ways to express the materials' sculptural abilities. Sometimes termed "Brutalism," this new style of architecture was considered a refinement of the Modernist tenet of truth in materials. Begun in England in the 1960s, Brutalism quickly spread. The structure and circulation core of buildings remained visible, with glass providing a welcome contrast to the raw surface

of the concrete, which was either manipulated to expose the aggregate or left *béton brut*, with just the pattern of the formwork remaining as a finish surface.

Because of the harsh honesty of the materials, many of these buildings are still thought to be aesthetically unattractive and oppressive. However, there are many striking examples throughout the state of Iowa, including Des Moines's Iowa Society of Christian Churches Building, with its expansive cantilevered roof.

## Iowa Society of Christian Churches Building

1972, Des Moines

Architects: Smith, Voorhees & Jensen







## Carver-Hawkeye Arena

1982, University of Iowa, Iowa City

Architects: Caudill Rowlett Scott Architects with The Durrant Group, Inc.

## 1980s

The 1980s served as a period of transition for Iowa's architecture. Postmodernism, a new style based on historic architecture, was finally starting to take hold after germinating for over a decade. But many Iowa architects refused to follow the nationwide trend and were determined to push structure and materials to their limits, continuing to use Modernist ideals as a foundation for their work.

The vastness of the University of Iowa's Carver-Hawkeye Arena is deceptively hunkered under a low, sprawling roof span. The massive superstructure, with its orderly web of steel atop low walls of concrete and glass, is the primary architectural expression of the building's exterior. Hidden beneath, the voluminous arena draws spectators into the action and further enriches their architectural experience.





## Des Moines Art Center

*Des Moines*

*1948, Original Portion*

*Architects: Saarinen Swanson & Saarinen*

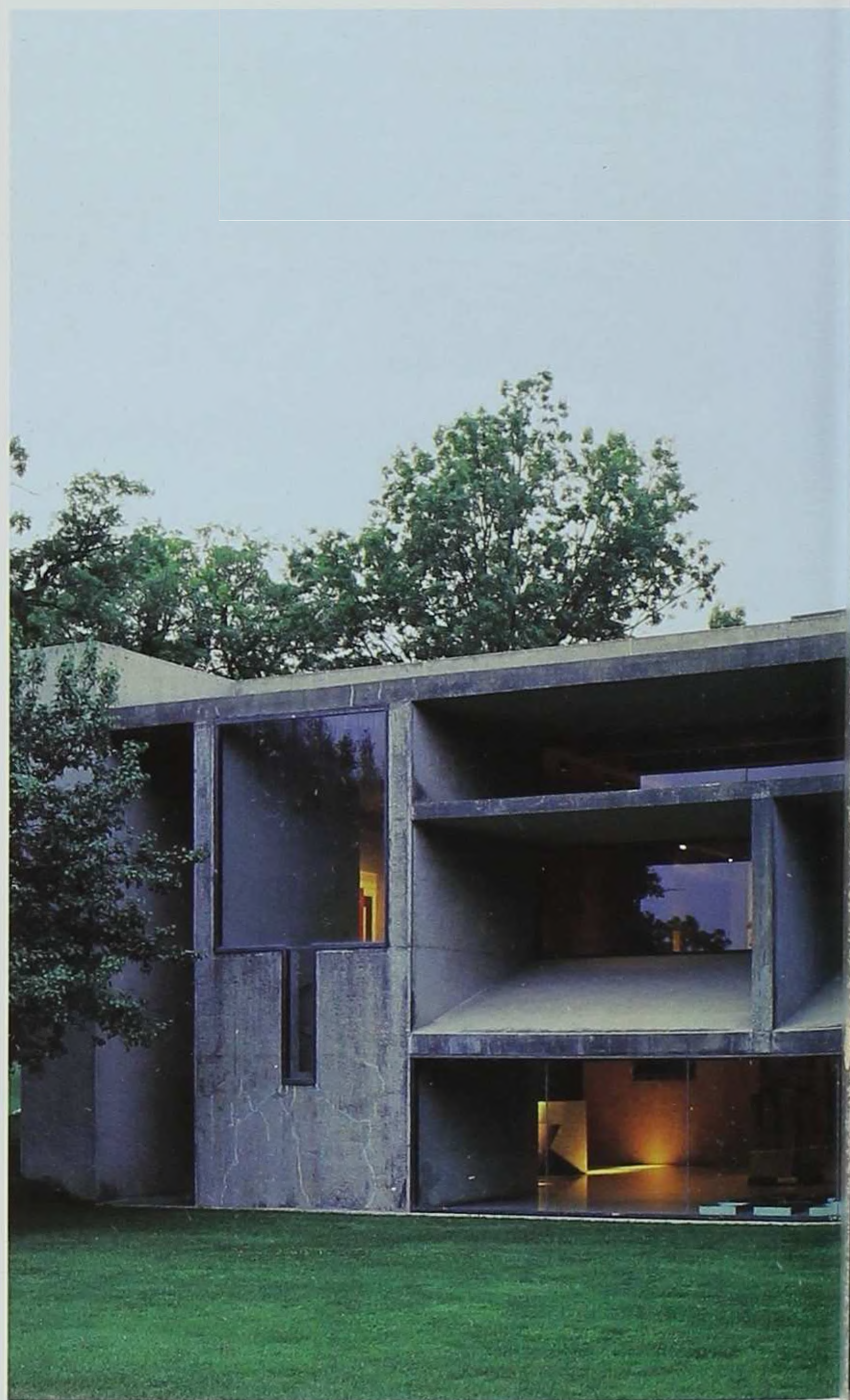
*Architects and Brooks Borg, Architects-Engineers*

*1968, First Addition*

*Architects: I. M. Pei & Partners*

*1985, Second Addition*

*Architect: Richard Meier*



## 1940s-1960s-1980s

The Des Moines Art Center provides a unique opportunity to view the architecture of three different decades in one building. In 1933, James D. Edmundson bequeathed funds to the Des Moines Association of Fine Arts for the construction of a museum and acquisition of artwork to fill it. The trustees wanted an architect who could bring modern vision to the project—something that could challenge the pre-World War II trend toward monumental museum designs. The world-renowned architect Eliel Saarinen filled that role superbly. When Saarinen's original building (*left*) was finished in 1948, its low profile and Lannon stone





cladding blended perfectly into Greenwood Park's natural setting while still exhibiting his modern ideals.

The building was a source of pride for the community, and its importance was taken into consideration in the late 1960s as plans moved forward for an addition to exhibit sculpture. Again desiring a building that would reflect the architecture of the time and respect Saarinen's design, the trustees commissioned architect I. M. Pei. Constructed during a period of High Modernism in Iowa, Pei's masterful concrete and glass museum addition (*center*) was his first of a building type for which he is now well known.

In the 1980s, the Art Center again began to outgrow its facilities. This time, the trustees held a competition to find a world-class architect. Richard Meier's proposal for a three-part addition won out in a bid to not overwhelm Saarinen's and Pei's designs. Meier's highly sculptural design (*right*), finished in 1985 and clad with granite and white porcelain-coated metal panels, nicely complements the existing portions of the building, and has received numerous design awards.

The Des Moines Art Center was listed on the National Register of Historic Places for its architectural significance in October 2004.





## Des Moines Art Center

*Des Moines*

1948, *Original Portion*

*Architects: Saarinen Swanson & Saarinen*

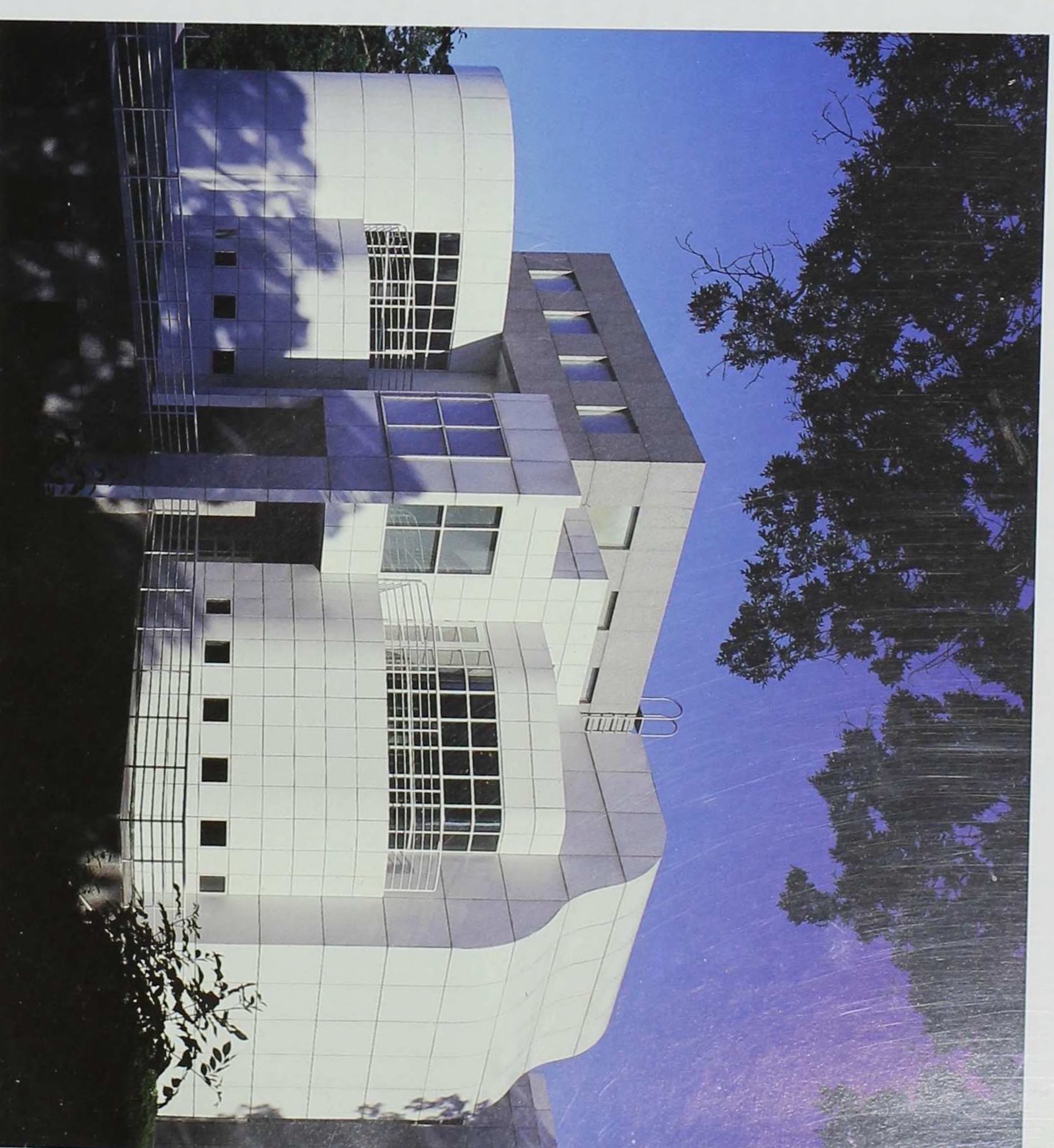
*Architects and Brooks Borg, Architects-Engineers*

1968, *First Addition*

*Architects: I. M. Pei & Partners*

1985, *Second Addition*

*Architect: Richard Meier*



## 1940S-1960S-1980S

The Des Moines Art Center provides a unique opportunity to view the architecture of three different decades in one building. In 1933, James D. Edmondson bequeathed funds to the Des Moines Association of Fine Arts for the construction of a museum and acquisition of artwork to fill it. The trustees wanted an architect who could bring modern vision to the project—something that could challenge the pre-World War II trend toward monumental museum designs. The world-renowned architect Eiel Saarinen filled that role superbly. When Saarinen's original building (*left*) was finished in 1948, its low profile and Lannon stone

cladding blended perfectly into Greenwood Park's natural setting, while still exhibiting his modern ideals.

The building was a source of pride for the community, and its importance was taken into consideration in the late 1960s as plans moved forward for an addition to exhibit sculpture. Again desiring a building that would reflect the architecture of the time and respect Saarinen's design, the trustees commissioned architect I. M. Pei. Constructed during a period of High Modernism in Iowa, Pei's masterful concrete and glass museum addition (*center*) was his first of a building type for which he is now well known.

In the 1980s, the Art Center again began to outgrow its facilities. This time, the trustees held a competition to find a world-class architect. Richard Meier's proposal for a three-part addition won out in a bid to not overwhelm Saarinen's and Pei's designs. Meier's highly sculptural design (*right*), finished in 1985 and clad with granite and white porcelain-coated metal panels, nicely complements the existing portions of the building, and has received numerous design awards.

The Des Moines Art Center was listed on the National Register of Historic Places for its architectural significance in October 2004.



## 1990s

Postmodernism was a movement that grew out of architecture's rejection of Modernism and a desire to return to the past without replicating it precisely. The "Less is More" philosophy espoused by Mies van der Rohe in the mid-20th century was replaced by a reliance on classically themed ornament adorning new construction. In the 1990s, Postmodernism became entrenched in the architectural and urban planning world, firmly seated alongside New Urbanism as one of the most prominent movements of this yet undefinable decade. Coupled with an increased exploration of the capabilities of new materials and technology, architectural expression looked back as much as it looked toward the future.

Exhibiting this trend, the EMC Insurance Building in downtown Des Moines is classically inspired, from the use of gentle arches on the tower to the humanly scaled colonnade at the street. The high-tech design of the exterior cladding system, however, was intended to provide increased energy efficiency and comfort to the occupants, as well as provide a dramatic addition to the city's skyline.



### **EMC Insurance Building (Employers Mutual Building)**

*1997, Des Moines*

*Architects: Brooks Borg Skiles Architecture-Engineering*