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Lexington's Wolf Wile Department Store: A Mid-Century Achievement in Urban Architecture

Patrick Lee Lucas

Introduction

The Wolf Wile Department Store Building, a well-known architectural landmark in Lexington, Kentucky, is a four story commercial structure at the corner of East Main and Quality Streets. The building fronts on Main Street, the downtown's major east-west thoroughfare, and is situated at the east end of the downtown business core. From the time of its construction in 1949-1950 until the closing of the firm in 1992, the Wolf Wile building housed one of Lexington's most prominent commercial concerns. It played a memorable role in marketing upscale clothing and household goods to a prosperous community with a diverse economy based in agriculture, manufacturing, higher education, and government.

The Wolf Wile building was designed in the International Style by the New York firm of Amos Parrish & Co. in collaboration with the Lexington architectural firm of Frankel & Curtis. The structure is significant as a physical manifestation of the expansion of commerce across the United States within a specific period. It is, consequently, a structure with both urban and suburban design features in the International Style, tempered by regional variants and materials. It is, fundamentally, an East Coast building which finds its way to Main Street Lexington, Kentucky, and is modified in form and in execution by owner, designer and architect. Wolf Wile's unique architectural structure embodies features developed both by the owners and the designers to make it more contextual with the surrounding and adjacent local commercial building forms.

The Wolf Wile department store building offered an exciting departure in appearance and form for a retail presence in Lexington. When the construction project was completed, the local press characterized the building as "futuristic", "modernistic", and "swanky." These exuberant expressions recognized boldly unusual

design characteristics that contrasted with the existing built environment. Because of these, Wolf Wile's remained significant as the only building of its type in the community; moreover, there were very few examples in the broader region of Kentucky.

Appearing perfectly at mid-century, the Wolf Wile structure witnessed first the post-World War II expansion of commerce in Lexington and afterwards the growing emergence of retail activity in suburban shopping malls. The burgeoning of the malls resulted in a gradual disappearance of Main Street retail businesses. Remarkably viable through its expert management and devoted clientele, Wolf Wile was, in fact, Lexington's sole remaining family-owned department store business when it closed in 1992. The Wolf Wile department store building, and the enterprising commercial initiative it long represented, typify the struggle of a community to reconcile the dynamics of expanding commercial growth with the traditional concepts of downtowns as centers of community. The building embodies an exuberant and optimistic part of American history and culture that is associated with the boom following World War II—an outlook that celebrated stream-lined design, consumer convenience, the automobile, and above all, an optimistic anticipation of the future.

Wolf Wile's was renovated in 1996-1997 by the James N. Gray Company for its Lexington headquarters. Although the rear facade has consequently undergone significant alterations, the Main Street facade and the northern half of the Quality Street facade remain as originally conceived. (The west side of the building is wholly concealed by an adjacent commercial site.)

Department Store Buildings—1840-1900

The department store, as it is known today, is a relatively young building type. Since the time period of its initial construction in the 1840s, the primary building program needs have remained unchanged—providing open interior space uncluttered by structural columns, an articulated facade including an elaborate storefront area to attract passersby into the store, convenient loading access for deliveries and adjacency to public transportation or large areas of parking for patrons. In her book on department store evolution, Susan Porter Benson notes: "Between 1850-1900, department stores developed, flourished and moved into the vanguard of urban merchandising where they remained for another fifth years. A new world of retailing had emerged by about

1890, created by the interaction of urban development, changing patterns of consumption, women's evolving roles, and rapid industrialization" (Benson, 1986, p. 12).

As a building form, the department store grew from one of two prototypes which indicated the retailing patterns of the mid nineteenth century. The first of these two types was the rural or small town store—general stores with all types of supplies and merchandise which served the needs of the surrounding town and hinterlands. A second type, an urban specialty store, had a narrow focus of goods. These specialty shops lined the streets of cities large and small providing goods and services to the residents of larger communities.

Benson notes that some department stores "grew from general stores as small towns grew up" while major urban department stores "grew up from the isolated urban shops, eventually becoming a conglomerate of small shops under one roof" (Benson, 1986, p. 14). From this conglomerate, it is easy to draw parallels to department stores with a collection of departments under one roof. Departments were created within stores as the administrative unit for buying and selling a given class of goods. This buying and selling process closely paralleled and continues to parallel many manufacturing processes of the late nineteenth century—manufacturing processes which were in the process of being perfected after having started during the industrial revolution.

As department stores expanded, so did their publicity and the money spent on advertising, as well as money spent on making the customer comfortable in the store (e.g. places to rest, ladies lounges, special events and activities), and providing many customer services (e.g. gift wrap, charge accounts).

Store buildings were designed with the customer in mind. A high priority was given to constant updating within and outside the store—from store windows to building facades, to floor layouts to department designs. This concept of always trying to provide something new for the customer is at the base of many of the decisions made within historic and contemporary department stores. Not only were buildings kept in the latest fashion, merchants seized upon technological innovations—elevators, air conditioning/ventilation systems to keep air moving, telephones, escalators, pneumatic tubes, fire safety equipment—all borrowed from other industries and perfected for the department store.

A constant impetus in the twentieth century, directed toward improving on many of the department store operations that emerged in the nineteenth century, was a striving to become a homogeneous, standardized business. Building design, store layout, buying and selling plans, customer/staff relationships and the idea of branch businesses, all are examples of standardized practices which find their roots in industry and manufacturing. These ideas are borrowed readily from these other trades and made integral in the functioning of department stores throughout the twentieth century.

Commercial Architecture in Lexington, 1900-1960

In contrast to retail buildings built in downtown Lexington prior to the 1940s, the Wolf Wile Department Store Building, as characterized by Joseph Wile and by comments from lead designer James Pickering (Amos Parrish & Co.), was designed from the inside out. Rough calculations were made for the sales and space needs each department, a rough size of the building was determined and the building was articulated with a taut, skin-like wrapper on each building facade (Joseph S. Wile, Sr. interview, 1/17/1996). The result is a simple and finely detailed structure with characteristics of the International Style—asymmetrical facades, flat roofs, streamlined forms, and little decorative detailing, etc.

Through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most retail buildings constructed in Lexington, and throughout many small towns and cities in the United States seemed designed from the outside in. They contained highly ornamented and articulated facades, with decoration based on natural and geometric motifs. These store buildings had large expanses of glass on the first floor level for display windows—a mechanism by which customers could view wares for sale while passing by on the street. Regardless of use above the first floor area, traditional commercial buildings contained a large number of windows on the upper stories of buildings. Commercial buildings in Lexington from this time period were oriented to Main Street, with little concern for other faces of the building—primary decoration was concentrated for maximum impact on the front facade. Interior uses were not easily read by looking at building facades.

The predominant architectural styles of commercial buildings between 1900-1960 in downtown Lexington include the Colonial

Revival style, the Commercial style, the Neo-Classical Revival style, and the Arts & Crafts style. Buildings constructed in these styles, prevalent in the first two decades of the twentieth century, mirrored the considerable population growth and substantial urban development of Lexington at this time. Taller structures were erected around the Courthouse Square to provide business locations for banking and other commercial institutions. The most prominent of these buildings on the twentieth century skyline was the ca. 1913 McKim Meade & White-designed Fayette National Bank Building, at the northeast corner of Main and Upper streets. This building combines Neo-Classical and Commercial details and the structure set the tone for much of the commercial development along Main Street. Italianate style structures from the last quarter of the nineteenth century predominate the buildings elsewhere along Main Street and throughout the Downtown. These three or four story structures occupy many blocks, providing a consistent background of buildings for more high style, often larger, skyscrapers and public buildings.

From 1900-1960, architectural styles featuring decorative elements relating to colonial roots seemed to have a stronger influence on commercial architecture in the downtown area. Several of these historic resources comprise the block where the Wolf Wile Department Store Building is located. The property at the corner of Main Street and the Harrison Viaduct is occupied by the Lafayette Hotel, constructed ca. 1920-21. This twelve story structure, at 200 East Main Street, exhibits restrained details of the Colonial Revival style and provides an architectural cornerstone for this block of East Main Street. The block also features the ca. 1922 Kentucky Theatre, 214 East Main Street, with its highly decorative glazed brick and metal facade in the Neo-Classical (Beaux Arts) style. The Switow Building, at 218 East Main Street, is designed and constructed in the more rare Arts & Crafts (Mission) style, complete with natural brick and multi-paned windows under a heavily bracketed cornice overhang.

International Style of Commercial Building Design

The International style is represented with only a few buildings in the Central Kentucky region—none as refined nor as prominent as the Wolf Wile Department Store Building. The International Style, modeled loosely after the many works of the German Bauhaus from World War I until World War II, features certain

well-defined characteristics. Perhaps the movement's foremost dictum was that building form followed building function (with form defined as volume rather than mass). Other criteria are that thin exterior and interior surface materials emphasize the "skin" of the building on the "bones" of the structural elements, structure used as a grid to regulate the building plan and section, and avoidance of applied decoration throughout the exterior and interior.

The International style was not just a different system of articulation, it was an aesthetic which delineated new ways of designing, constructing and occupying buildings. Spurred on by the search for a new style following World War I, the International style was far more influential in Europe than in the United States. Only after World War II did United States designers embrace this new aesthetic and employ its use for government and private residential and commercial buildings. In Lexington following World War II, traditional buildings in the Neo-Classical and Colonial Revival styles were much more common than their International style counterparts. This was reflective of a conservative trend in Lexington toward modern design in the community. Because of this conservative design environment, the singularity of the Wolf Wile Department Store Building as a "cutting edge" design solution was of great significance to the community.

The International style, as a collected body of work, was an effort by architects and designers of twentieth century to articulate a new set of design rules and a design language which was responsive to a rapidly changing population. Within the parameters of the International style, the form of the building followed its function. For example, previous to the advent of the International style, commercial structures followed a standard formula of a highly decorative facade fronting on a main thoroughfare with a simple box behind this decorative facade. International style buildings were usually designed from the inside out, taking the necessary functions of the building proposed and uniting those in a thin skin. The result of this design methodology is a collection of International style buildings which are described as "volumes" rather than the more traditional "outside in" depiction of buildings as a mass of material from which is carved functional space.

The lack of applied surface decoration on International style buildings is perhaps the most obvious hallmark of this style.

Buildings designed in this aesthetic were often referred to as stream-lined, because of their resemblance to functional items designed and used in the industrial design industry. Parallels between building and machine began to be discussed and elaborated as design motifs by architects throughout the United States and in Europe.

Commercial Activity in Post World War II Lexington

Both the great expansion of goods, services, housing stock and the tremendous growth of the United States economy following World War II caused a phenomenal expansion of cities throughout the United States including Lexington. Historian Harvey Green notes "middle-class settlement patterns, improved roads, and the pervasiveness of the automobile brought about the growth of suburban shopping centers." Moreover, Green cites that "merchants figured that the suburban middle-class was a more profitable market, and that suburban land was still cheap enough to build both stores and free parking lots. The suburban shopping center could also be pitched as safer and more exclusive than the city store" (Green, 1992, pp. 107-108).

Lexington, too, was experiencing changes in its urban geography, including the construction of whole new quadrants of housing, the expansion of industrial and construction business concerns and the subsequent development of the suburbs in the south end of the county. Historian John D. Wright, Jr., notes "in the postwar years, Lexington and Fayette County shared in the economic resurgence that characterized the nation as a whole, due to the pent-up consumer demand for goods and services." However, Wright points out "the general pattern of life in this Bluegrass city [Lexington] in the years immediately following the war was a continuation of the pre-war era. Few could have predicted the tremendous changes of the next thirty-five years that would transform this community into one of the fastest growing cities in the United States." (Wright, 1982, p. 193).

The Wile family began planning a new department store building in 1948 which would cater to the increased consumer demand in the community and respond to changes in the retail environment. Locally, as elsewhere, old style retail establishments were giving way to more modern, convenient and efficient stores, incorporating ready-to-wear clothing as goods and services for the entire home. In some locales, population shifts decentralizing

American cities led to the creation of a new architectural form, the suburban shopping mall, but not until the early 1950s. In Lexington, however, the idea of a suburban shopping mall was not realized until the 1960s. In the late 1940s, and throughout the entire 1950s, Lexington residents continued to consider the historic downtown as the exclusive domain of retail trade. The Wiles intended that their building would respond to changes in shopping patterns and consumer taste for more modern and streamlined stores. Moreover, the Wiles were cognizant of promoting an up-to-date image balanced with respect for tradition which resulted in a radical departure in the exterior treatment of their new building tempered by advertisements and goods and services more in line with the traditional Wolf Wile shopping experience.

At the time of construction of the Wolf Wile Department Store Building, Joseph Wile noted the family's strong desire to remain in the heart of the retail area downtown. Moreover, Mr. Wile explained the family's firm inclination to own their own building as opposed to leasing from another building owner. Mr. Wile also noted the decision to move east in the downtown followed a pattern of development accepted in the community—moving along Main Street from west to east (Joseph S. Wile, Sr. interview, 1/17/1996). Mr. Wile's assertions are borne out in the development patterns of the Lexington community leading up to the construction of the 1949 Wolf Wile Department Store Building and in subsequent years. Wright notes that by the 1970's, "the entire character of downtown was profoundly changed as the heavily concentrated retail nucleus was atomized, spreading out into numerous malls and shopping centers ringing the city, and was replaced by high-rise banks, office buildings, and hotels. The completion of the vast interstate highway system, with a strategic juncture at Lexington, accelerated this transformation" (Wright, 1982, p. 204). Turfland Mall, Lexington's first suburban shopping mall, was constructed ca. 1965 at Harrodsburg and Lane Allen Roads, approximately four miles south and west from Main Street. Subsequent malls were developed in the south end of the community and now have replaced downtown as the major area for retail trade.



Drawing by Amos Parrish & Co. detailing the front view of the Wolf Wile building. (M.S. Rezny Photography)

Wolf Wile Department Store Company, 1912-1992

Simon Wolf moved to Lexington in 1890 to work in his brother-in-law's mercantile business, Kaufman-Straus Company, a clothing store for women located near the courthouse. Wolf's other real estate interests were represented in the downtown area and in the development and subsequent sale of numerous factory buildings on the western edge of the downtown. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Wolf convinced Dolph Wile to move from Louisville to Lexington to enter the clothing industry. In 1912, Wolf and Wile bought out the interest in the Lexington branch of Kaufman-Straus, and renamed the business as the Wolf Wile Department Store with "no change in stock or business anticipated." (*Lexington Herald*, 1/12/1912).

In its 80 years of operation, this department store has been housed in three locations in Lexington. From 1912-1920, the business was located on Main Street between Mill and Broadway

(west four blocks from the current building). This structure burned in January 1920 and Wolf Wile's sought temporary headquarters in the Hernando Building three blocks east on Main Street between Limestone and the Harrison Avenue viaduct. By 1923, the Wolf Wile Department Store leased a building adjacent to Union Station, the main train passenger depot in downtown Lexington. Erected at a cost of \$200,000, this 1923 building was designed by the Lexington architectural firm Frankel and Curtis, and was owned by Leonard G. Cox. The interior of the second permanent home for Wolf Wile's incorporated "magnificent fixtures, works of art, windows which are revelations" as well as "employees which are loyal to traditions of Wolf Wile's" making the store "an ideal place to shop." (*Lexington Herald*, 9/30/1923).

The 1923 store was described as "modern in every way" (*Lexington Herald*, 9/30/1923) with decorative brick facades in the Italian Renaissance style, carborundum and granite entrance flooring, display windows with backgrounds of Caen stone paneling and floors in Botticino marble illuminated by electric mirror lights; American Walnut woodwork throughout the store and two 18 passenger self-leveling elevators as well as one freight elevator. In addition, the building boasted a Grinelli automatic sprinkler system with two alternative water supplies, a special system of pneumatic tube carriers which connected each wrapping counter in the store with the bookkeeping and accounting departments on the second floor, and a private telephone exchange to connect all departments and to connect to the local city exchange.

The first floor salesroom in this building measured 58 feet wide, 222 feet long for a total of 12,876 square feet in sales area. The store featured a general color scheme of gold, old ivory, and buff with cream colored sash shades at each of the thirty-six windows facing Main Street and Union Station; radiators were painted gold and the dressing rooms were painted in French ivory. A handsome hand wrought iron grille with bronze and copper background provided decoration at the main entrance to the store. Two aisles ran the entire length of the first floor, both sides containing attractive display cases with none of goods exposed to the open, each case having a covering of glass. The store also featured a large number of windows provide sunlight to keep store well lighted.

The newspapers of the day carry display advertisements from the various contractors and sub-contractors who worked on this

modern building: Combs Lumber Company—general contractors; Brock-Anderson Electrical Engineering Co.—wiring and light fixtures; J.J. Fitzgerald Plumbing and Heating Contractors—heating apparatus; Oldham Brick & Tile Company—marble and tile; Clay-Ingles Co.—store fronts, face brick and half the common brick; Fayette Home Telephone Co.—telephone equipment and inter-department switchboard; Louis des Cognets & Co.—excavation, foundation and concrete work; J.S. Poer & Co.—glass and painting work; S.A. Reynolds—sanitary equipment and plumbing fixtures; Dodge Brothers/Goodwin-Field Motor Co.—delivery trucks; W.M. Glackin & Sons (Cincinnati)—Warner Elevators; F.B. Dalton—stone work on front of building; J.W. Beard & Co.—roofing and sheet metal; T.G. Foster—all plaster work; Sneed Architectural Iron (Louisville)—framework of building; G.A. Hasemann & Sons Mfg. Co. (St. Louis)—store fixtures. These contractors and sub-contractors represent the local building trades working at the time.

The 1923 Wolf Wile Department Store contained departments for the baby, fancy work, needle and other art work, as well as an Oriental rug department—the first move toward home decoration in this company. A grand opening was held in celebration of the conclusion of construction. Souvenirs were distributed to thousands of visitors during the opening, but sales were not permitted to give the opportunity for patrons to fully experience the architecture and the ambiance created by the Wile family.

By 1948, the Wolf Wile Department Store had physically outgrown its 1923 Italian Renaissance-style headquarters. Loading dock access was limited and sales floor areas were increasingly cramped and inefficient. Moreover, shoppers in Lexington, like many throughout the United States, were moving from highly assisted shopping experiences to self-serve expediency—old style retail areas were giving way to more modern, convenient and efficient stores, incorporating ready-to-wear clothing as well as goods and services for the entire home. In other areas of the country, this turn to a new shopping model manifested itself in a new architectural form—the suburban shopping mall. A site was located by the Wile family one block east from the 1923 store and in 1948, a lease to buy this property was executed.

Design of the Wolf Wile Result of Local-National Partnership

Dolph Wile, president of the Wolf Wile Department Store, sent his son, Joseph S. Wile, Sr., then vice president of the company, to

New York City to interview store designers and to visit shopping emporiums in the modern style in the east. Ultimately, Joseph Wile met with Amos Parrish & Company, the selected store designer for the project. The junior Wile returned to Lexington with many modern shopping ideas and worked over a two year period with the New York design firm and with the Lexington architectural firm Frankel & Curtis to create a new vision for the future of shopping in Lexington in the downtown (Joseph S. Wile, Sr., interview, 1/17/1996).

The design for the Wolf Wile Department Store Building is the result of a partnership between the Lexington-based architectural firm, Frankel & Curtis, and a nationally recognized store design firm, Amos Parrish & Co., New York City, New York. This collaborative partnership, with much urging from the owners, created a special building—a building which maintains the retail tradition of Wolf Wile's on Main Street and re-wraps the tradition in a Bauhaus-era vocabulary. The building was constructed at a time when newer suburban forms for traditional buildings were being sought. The design for the Wolf Wile Department Store respects the retail shopping philosophy inherent in buildings on Main Street and also departs from this philosophy with an exterior that is decidedly suburban and contemporary.

The 1949-50 store was an architectural marvel—one which was described at length in newspapers of the day (*Lexington Herald*, 5/31/1950, pp. 17-20; *Lexington Leader*, 5/31/1950, pp. 15-25). Termed "futuristic," "modernistic," and "swanky," this modern facility for the Wolf Wile Department Store contained design features indicative of sweeping changes in the department store industry in the United States. Four stories in height, this International style building followed design motifs strongly identified with the Bauhaus in Germany and then carried to the United States shortly before World War II. Following a suburban retail design scheme with basic blank walls and an undercut storefront/display window, the Wolf Wile Department Store Building represented the changing focus of design in the United States following World War II. Wolf Wile's new store was described as "an achievement in architectural and sales designing," as well as a "building constructed with the future in mind." (*Lexington Leader*, 5/31/1950).

When the Wolf Wile Department Store Building was designed, the idea of a highly decorated front facade oriented to Main Street

was abandoned in favor of a display window/entrance system which sought to connect outside with inside—a free-flowing view and path into and out of the building. To achieve this design concept, store designers placed three pairs of double herculite doors side by side and concentrated the location of large display windows adjacent to the entry. The result of this design choice was an occupiable display area and vestibule where customers observed a mercantile vista through the front entrance and display areas. An overhanging canopy unites the entryway and display windows and serves as a sort of porch to cover this occupiable thickened front facade. In contrast, the remainder of the building is clad in a tight stone and brick veneer—a planar skin-for the large volume in the four-floor building. A pylon provides a bookend on the northwest corner of the front facade, separating the Wolf Wile Department Store Building from the neighboring building to its west. While somewhat reminiscent of vertical sign systems from earlier twentieth century buildings, this pylon physically separates this International Style building from its neighbors along Main Street.

Three stainless steel tapered columns support the overhang above the first floor entrance to this building. Traditionally, columns have been used to help articulate decoration of earlier nineteenth and twentieth century buildings and to further provide structural support in the front facade wall of these structures. The columns, as designed for the Wolf Wile Department Store, are pulled away from the plane of the front facade and pulled into the public space of the sidewalk. These stainless steel columns are free from decoration and articulation. They serve as an additional means of articulating the occupiable public/private space in the front wall system.

Traditionally, corner buildings in Lexington and elsewhere have contained large openings on both street facades, and some sort of diagonal entry at the actual corner. Wolf Wile's departs from this tradition with its highly rectilinear composition and plan, avoiding reference to the corner of Main Street and Quality Street. A display window opens on the Quality Street (east) facade in deference to the pedestrian traffic crossing at the corner, but the absence of doors on that side at the northeast corner of the building, reinforces the primary importance of the Main Street (north) entry facade.

Despite the differences between traditional commercial structures and the 1949 Wolf Wile Department Store Building, the

designer, architect and owner of the Wolf Wile Department Store took measures to create ways for the building to fit in to the existing design context of the community. The building is built of brick, stone, and metal, copying the traditional use of these materials from earlier in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The brick veneer is laid in a Flemish bond pattern as requested by the owners. This brick pattern mimics the nineteenth century pattern popular in Lexington and throughout Kentucky. Stone is used as a second major building material, again echoing the use of this building material for foundations and architectural details in predecessor buildings. Flagstone is used to soften the transition from the concrete sidewalk on the exterior to terrazzo floor on the interior. A highly articulate system of red and green granite helps to distinguish between storefront areas and wall area—between open and closed. International Style buildings constructed elsewhere in the United States might have been constructed of granite, steel and glass—glass boxes with little relation to the adjacent and surrounding buildings. The Wolf Wile building is designed with the same stylistic features of the International Style but in more native brick, limestone and marble—materials customarily used in the construction of commercial structures in Lexington and in the region.

Despite the fact that the 1949 store was considered very modern, the Wile family, as it had for the opening of the 1923 store, carefully constructed a publicity campaign in the local newspapers of the day to remind the public of the firm's history in the community and the quality of goods and services which were associated with the store. Advertisements mention local ownership and management as a key factor in attracting customers to the department store. Above all, convenience and quality service are stressed in these advertisements:

"Come tonight and see our spacious new departments so beautifully appointed and arranged for your convenience and shopping pleasure. Everything is so excitingly bright and new—all so smoothly arranged for simplified shopping, yet we cling to the same long-term quality that had been traditional with Wolf Wile's for sixty years . . . and we promise that same quality will continue.

Come tonight and see the exciting new merchandise that will put your head in the clouds . . . but priced in the same reasonable, down-to-earth manner that has always prevailed at Wolf Wile's.

Come tonight and browse through our offices and service departments to see the scenes-behind-the-scenes that make the new Wolf Wile's a masterpiece of efficiency.

Come tonight, and be our guests . . . let us show you through Kentucky's Finest Department Store." (*Lexington Leader*, 5/31/1950)

Conclusion

The Wolf Wile Department Store Building was constructed in a time of great change in American culture. The building asserted a new presence on Main Street, Lexington, Kentucky, in a way that no building had prior or no building has since. In 1949-50, the owners of this department store structure recognized the value in remaining on Main Street in the heart of the retailing community. Moreover, the owners recognized the need for something different along Main Street which would catch the customers' eyes and provide a marketing mechanism to draw customers into the store. This building respects Main Street traditions of design and expands them in suburban ways and clads these traditions in International Style language unparalleled in the community. The owners and designers of the building carefully draw this building to its predecessor neighbors through material type and use in the design.

The building designers' vision for the Wolf Wile Department Store Building was for a model building which would represent downtown Lexington of the future. Joseph S. Wile, Sr., noted the design schematic laid out by Amos Parrish as one which was intended for the remainder of the same block on East Main Street—a series of stores in a modern style united by a common covered walkway, and thus creating a semi-public occupiable space on Main Street. (Joseph S. Wile, Sr. interview, 1/17/1996). The result of the designers' collective efforts to initiate a new more suburban vision for downtown Lexington was not fully realized. The Wolf Wile Department Store Building, as designed, was the cornerstone to a new suburban model downtown Lexington. By the time the community was ready to fully embrace this strategic

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direction, suburban development overwhelmed any attempt to concentrate the retail core in the commercial downtown. The Wolf Wile Department Store Building is a richly detailed, simply designed modern structure which illustrated this bold new move by the Wile family to combine important tradition with a forward-thinking image for Main Street. It remains an invaluable resource in understanding this critical juncture in the community's development history.

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