

Theme: Modernism

Modernism is an umbrella term that is used to describe a mélange of architectural styles and schools of design that were introduced in the early 20th century, honed in the interwar years, and ultimately came to dominate the American architectural scene in the decades following World War II. The tenets of Modernism are diverse, but in the most general sense the movement eschewed past traditions in favor of an architectural paradigm that was more progressive and receptive to technological advances and the modernization of society. It sought to use contemporary materials and building technologies in a manner that prioritized function over form and embraced the “authenticity” of a building’s requisite elements. Modernism, then, sharply contrasted with the Period Revival movement that dominated the American architecture scene in years past, as the latter had relied wholly on historical sources for inspiration.

Modernism is rooted in European architectural developments that made their debut in the 1920s and coalesced into what became known as the International style. Championed by some of the most progressive architects of the era – including Le Corbusier of France, and Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe of Germany – the International style took new building materials such as iron, steel, glass, and concrete and fashioned them into functional buildings for the masses. These ideas were introduced to Southern California in the 1920s upon the emigration of Austrian architects Richard Neutra and Rudolph Schindler. Neutra and Schindler each took the “machine-like” aesthetic of the International style and adapted it to the Southern California context through groundbreaking residential designs. While Neutra and Schindler were indisputably pioneers in the rise of Southern California Modernism, it should be noted that their contributions dovetailed with the work of figures such as Frank Lloyd Wright and Irving Gill, both of whom had experimented with creating a Modern aesthetic derived from regional sources.

Prior to World War II, Modernism was very much a fringe movement that was relegated to the sidelines as Period Revival styles and other traditional idioms prevailed. Its expression was limited to a small number of custom residences and the occasional low-scale commercial building. However, Americans’ perception of Modern architecture had undergone a dramatic shift by the end of World War II. An unprecedented demand for new, quality housing after the war prodded architects and developers to embrace archetypes that were pared down and replicable on a mass scale. As a whole, Americans also gravitated toward an aesthetic that embraced modernity and looked to the future – rather than to the past – for inspiration, an idea that was popularized by John Entenza’s *Arts and Architecture* magazine and its highly influential Case Study House program. Modern architecture remained popular for the entirety of the postwar era, with derivatives of the movement persisting well into the 1970s.

Sub-Theme: Moderne



Example of the Moderne style (PWA Moderne), 300 S. C Street.

Moderne architecture, commonly reflected in the sub-styles of Streamline Moderne, PWA Moderne, or, in its later iterations, Late Moderne, materialized during the Great Depression when the highly-stylized Art Deco mode had become perceived as excessive and overly flamboyant. The architectural mode was relatively inexpensive to build due to its lack of ornamentation and use of less labor-intensive building materials such as concrete and plaster. Inspired by the industrial designs of the time, the Moderne style was popular throughout the country in the late 1930s and continued to be applied, primarily to commercial and institutional buildings, through the mid-1940s. This is evident in Tustin, where all applications of the Moderne style are commercial buildings. Moderne architecture is characterized by its sleek, aerodynamic form and horizontal emphasis.

Character-defining features of Moderne architecture include:

- Horizontal emphasis
- Flat roofs with parapets
- Smooth, typically stucco wall surfaces
- Curved wall surfaces
- Steel fixed or casement windows, sometimes located at corners
- Horizontal moldings (speedlines)

Sub-Theme: Mid-Century Modern



Example of the Mid-Century Modern style: 12881 Newport Avenue.

In Southern California, Mid-Century Modern architecture was prevalent between the mid-1940s and mid-1970s. While the style was a favorite among some of Southern California's most influential architects, its minimal ornamentation and simple open floor plans lent itself to the mass-produced housing developments of the postwar period. Mid-Century Modern architecture typically incorporated standardized and prefabricated materials that also proved well-suited to mass production. Subsets of the Mid-Century Modern style include Googie, which is a highly exaggerated, futuristic aesthetic, typically employing upswept or folded plate roofs, curvaceous, geometric volumes, and neon signage, and Mimetic, which is characterized by its application of objects or forms that resemble something other than a building. The Mid-Century Modern style and its subsets were broadly applied to a wide variety of property types ranging from residential subdivisions and commercial buildings to churches and public schools. Common characteristics of Mid-Century Modern architecture include horizontal massing, open floor plans, wide overhanging eaves, large expanses of glass, exposed structural members, and dramatic rooflines (including A-frames).

Character-defining features of Mid-Century Modern architecture include:

- Horizontal massing
- Exposed post-and-beam construction, typically in wood or steel
- Flat or low-pitched roofs
- Wide overhanging eaves
- Horizontal elements such as fascias that cap the front edge of the flat roofs or parapets

- Stucco wall cladding at times used in combination with other textural elements, such as brick, clapboard, or concrete block
- Aluminum windows grouped within horizontal frames
- Oversized decorative elements or decorative face-mounted light fixtures