

GROWTH | EFFICIENCY | AND MODERNISM

GSA Buildings of the 1950s | 60s | and 70s |



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DETAIL OF FACADE,
STROM THURMOND FEDERAL
BUILDING AND U.S. COURTHOUSE,
COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA |
MARCEL BREUER | 1979

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GSA'S MODERN BUILDINGS

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WHEN GSA BUILT
MODERN AT ITS BEST,
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CONTEMPORARY DESIGNS
BY MODERN MASTERS.

The U.S. General Services Administration (GSA), created to bring order to the Federal government, “the most gigantic business on earth,” was established in 1949 to consolidate the government’s immense building management and general procurement functions. GSA began responding to a tremendous backlog of building needs coming out of unprecedented Depression-era and wartime expansion. The decades of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s stand out as a period of extensive Federal government growth, with the number of Federal employees, the Federal budget, and GSA’s building-related budget increasing dramatically. Between 1960 and 1976 alone, GSA undertook more than 700 building projects across the United States. These included office buildings, courthouses, post offices, museums, and border stations, located in cities and towns of all sizes.

GSA was building in a stimulating design environment. The 1950s through 1970s were decades immersed in the second wave of Modernism, and designers explored the aesthetics and advances in building technology with optimism. A few innovative Federal commissions from the 1950s and early 1960s—such as the buildings by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill at the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and Eero Saarinen’s Washington Dulles International Airport in Chantilly, Virginia—helped confirm Modernism as an acceptable style for the Federal government and set the stage for a broader application at GSA when the government began encouraging Modern architecture. A broad policy on quality of design emerged in 1962 when President Kennedy’s Ad Hoc Committee on Federal Office Space promulgated the “Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture.” The initiative called for design that reflected “the dignity, enterprise, vigor, and stability of the American National Government. Major emphasis should be placed on the choice of designs that embody the finest contemporary American architectural thought.” GSA and other Federal agencies responded to this call for excellence by constructing Modern buildings throughout the country.

When GSA built Modern at its best, it embraced strikingly contemporary designs by Modern masters—Marcel Breuer’s sweeping Washington, D.C., headquarters building for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (1963-68), Mies van der Rohe’s sleek Federal Center in Chicago (1964-74), and Victor Lundy’s bold U.S. Tax Court (1969-76) in Washington, D.C. Overall, GSA tended to commission buildings designed by internationally and nationally recognized architects in larger cities, and buildings by locally known architects in smaller cities and towns.

RIGHT: ROBERT C. WEAVER FEDERAL
BUILDING, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF
HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT
HEADQUARTERS, WASHINGTON, DC |
MARCEL BREUER | 1963-68





Also during the decades of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, new (and sometimes conflicting) movements were taking root. These included urban renewal, concern for the environment, interest in quality of design, changes in transportation spurred by the interstate highway system, and historic preservation. As a result, legislative initiatives often dictated parameters and spurred new ways of addressing the Federal government's construction work nationwide. In 1966, the National Historic Preservation Act was passed, mandating Federal responsibility for historic properties. Throughout the 1970s, Presidential executive orders directed Federal agencies to favor central city locations and to recognize social, economic, and environmental factors in planning, acquiring, and managing Federal facilities. In 1976, the Public Buildings Cooperative Use Act authorized GSA to accommodate social and commercial enterprises such as restaurants and shops on the street levels of Federal buildings. The Act also encouraged acquiring and reusing historic and architecturally interesting buildings for public use.

During this time, art became an increasingly important component in Federal construction. In 1962, GSA created an art program that allotted a portion of construction funds for public art. Original works—often integrated into the buildings themselves—were common in buildings of the Modern era. Internationally recognized masters as well as artists of local acclaim were responsible for paintings, sculptures, and other works of art in Federal buildings throughout the country. One of the most highly visible artworks is Alexander Calder's *Flamingo* stabile installed in 1974 in the plaza of Chicago's Federal Center.

Coupled with art, the landscapes of Federal buildings and complexes were also prominent components of many Modern buildings. Landscaped plazas and courtyards were often executed as part of original building plans and offered valuable outdoor gathering spaces for both GSA tenants and the public.

In spite of the optimism associated with the Modern era, the assessment of the merit of architecture from the 1950s, 60s, and 70s is not universally positive today. As GSA sought to house legions of Federal employees and to bring efficiency to the Federal building process, economy was often a stronger driving force than architectural and physical distinction. The majority of buildings GSA constructed during this period reflect typical office building design of their time. Quality of materials and overall design ranged from high to poor. Buildings constructed for general office use often put priorities on cost and efficiency, sometimes resulting in stark buildings constructed with lower-quality materials. Many buildings of this era represent a Federal office building style that is massive, severe, and disengaged from its surroundings—edifices critics have referred to as “debased, reductive” versions of the Modern aesthetic. Landscaped plazas, which often incorporated expansive paved areas, have also been criticized as being barren and inhospitable. However, the best of these buildings are celebrated for representing the ideals of the Modernist style—an era of architectural history that can now begin to be critically evaluated with the perspective of time. ■

Styles of the Modern Era

In the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, Modern architecture took many forms in numerous styles, some academically recognized and others less stylistically distinct. As in previous eras, many buildings blended elements of more than one style or adopted only one or two elements of a style. While stylistic terminology is still evolving for Modern-era buildings and some historians do not adhere strongly to the use of stylistic labels to describe buildings, it is useful to review four stylistic terms of the Late Modern era that are in widespread use. For a more complete discussion on Modern styles, see Marcus Whiffen, *American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles*, 4th ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: The MIT Press, 1996). Some of the more commonly accepted styles include the following:

International Style



- absence of ornamentation
- box-shaped buildings
- expansive windows
- smooth wall surfaces
- cantilevered building extensions

SHOWN: FEDERAL RECORDS CENTER BUILDING 100, OVERLAND, MISSOURI |
HELLMUTH, YAMASAKI AND LEINWEBER | 1956

Formalism

(also Neo-Formalism or New Formalism)



- flat projecting rooflines
- smooth wall surfaces
- high-quality materials
- columnar supports
- strict symmetry

SHOWN: PAUL G. ROGERS FEDERAL BUILDING AND U.S. COURTHOUSE,
WEST PALM BEACH, FLORIDA | STETSON & SPINA | 1972

Brutalism



- weighty massiveness
- rough-surfaced, exposed concrete walls
- broad, expansive wall surfaces
- deeply recessed windows

SHOWN: FEDERAL BUILDING, U.S. POST OFFICE AND COURTHOUSE,
ROME, GEORGIA | COOPER CARRY & ASSOCIATES, INC. | 1974

Expressionism



- sweeping, curved rooflines and wall surfaces
- nonexistent or minimal use of symmetrical or geometric forms
- faceted, concave, or convex surfaces
- arched or vaulted spaces

SHOWN: ROBERT C. WEAVER FEDERAL BUILDING, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND
URBAN DEVELOPMENT HEADQUARTERS, WASHINGTON, DC | MARCEL BREUER | 1963-68

MANAGING GSA'S MODERN BUILDINGS

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Currently, the Public Buildings Service (PBS) of the U.S. General Services Administration oversees 40 percent of Federal workspace, adding up to over 342 million square feet (including 175 million square feet of Federally owned space and 167 million square feet of leased space). As such, GSA supervises the largest office real estate portfolio in the world.

The role of PBS is broad and includes developing, constructing, leasing, managing, maintaining, and securing a variety of building types. PBS supervises office buildings, laboratories, courthouses, post offices, border stations, warehouses, customhouses, and daycare centers among its many buildings. By overseeing such an extensive collection of buildings, PBS is able to provide centralized management, procurement, and management services to more than 100 Federal organizations and over one million employees. PBS has the challenging task of maintaining and rehabilitating these facilities in a cost-effective manner. At the same time, GSA has a strong commitment to maintain the legacy of public architecture—by preserving historic buildings and making them viable with sensitive upgrades and by respecting their character-defining features.⁴

GSA is addressing public perceptions of buildings from the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. Often the architecture of these buildings is viewed negatively by those who visit and work in them. Many GSA buildings from this period are lacking in the architectural ornament and grandeur of public buildings from previous eras. However, many have noteworthy qualities and should be evaluated as products of the time in which they were built. As these buildings begin reaching 50 years of age—the standard threshold for National Register eligibility—this historic context will assist those assessing the buildings in placing them within the greater continuum of Federal buildings from these three decades. Understanding both the positive and negative aspects of these buildings will allow GSA to make informed management decisions regarding their maintenance.

GSA is faced with the challenge of balancing architectural and preservation issues with economic factors. Evaluations of historic significance should be arrived at independently and should serve as a foundation for economic decisions. GSA must maintain buildings that are pleasant and safe places to work, visit, and conduct business, but not at the expense of eradicating important features of historically significant buildings.

GSA's portfolio of buildings of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s consists of approximately 600 buildings. Many of these buildings are currently in need of renovation in order to remain viable and offer appealing spaces for tenants. GSA is addressing immediate problems in its Modern buildings by assessing the merits and needs

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of each building. However, buildings from these decades are increasingly demanding more attention and dollars from GSA as they age. The philosophy of the Modern movement, coupled with the pace of changing technology, gave rise to a new commercial standard, which was reflected in many public buildings: Buildings had an anticipated lifespan of 20-30 years, which is the typical lifecycle of modern mechanical systems and also the standard period used for calculating return on investment. Unlike their predecessors, buildings were not constructed to last centuries.

GSA is faced with numerous questions regarding these buildings: Is it wise to reinvest large sums of money in buildings from this era? If so, under what circumstances and for what upgrades or alterations? When should character-defining architectural features be retained and when can they be removed or substantially altered? Can minor alterations reinvigorate an aging building and make it a more pleasant place to work and visit? How should GSA judge the potential historic significance of Modern-era buildings?

To answer the last question—how to identify buildings of the Modern era that are either exceptionally significant Modern masterpieces or that will likely meet National Register of Historic Places criteria in the future—GSA has developed this historic context report on its buildings of the Modern era. The historic context report helps address substantial questions: How should GSA evaluate quality? What do these buildings say about the Federal government in the twentieth century? Do these buildings enhance their environments by offering good public spaces? When should they be preserved? GSA identified a 30-year study period extending from 1949, the year GSA was established, to 1979. This study will assist GSA, its regional preservation officers, project managers, and others in generating a framework within which to make informed decisions on the future treatment of its Modern building stock.

The idea of completing a historic context for GSA's Modern buildings was developed as a result of several meetings GSA held to discuss the treatment and evaluation of its Modern buildings. On December 5, 2000, GSA convened 75 leading private-sector architects and preservation expert to discuss the historic significance and current performance of GSA buildings constructed from 1960 to 1979. The event, "Architecture of the Great Society," was held at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, in partnership with Yale's School of Architecture, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the American Architectural Foundation, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Following up on "Architecture of the Great Society," a Blue Ribbon Panel met and developed an action plan on February 22, 2001, at GSA Headquarters in Washington, D.C.

GSA then undertook the historic context study as a way to advance the dialogue from these two meetings. To develop this historic context, expansive research of architectural literature was conducted and extensive reviews of GSA building information were completed by the firm Robinson & Associates, Inc., experts in architectural and landscape history. ■



EDWARD J. SCHWARTZ FEDERAL BUILDING
AND U.S. COURTHOUSE, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA |
RICHARD WHEELER & ASSOCIATES AND
FRANK L. HOPE & ASSOCIATES | 1974

However, the first half of the nineteenth century was not a period of intense design and construction of Federal public buildings. A still-limited Federal government often purchased existing buildings or leased space to accommodate workers. Generally, urban centers—particularly those near Washington, D.C.—contained the greatest number of public buildings executed in the prevailing classical style, while frontier custom houses and other public buildings were utilitarian in form, with occasional classical references in the form of minor decorative elements.⁸

As the nation's population more than tripled between 1820 and 1840 and spread across the continent, it demanded physical manifestations of the Federal government in newly settled areas. Realizing that previous efforts to occupy existing buildings were inefficient, the Federal government embarked on a program of construction and created a new bureaucracy to manage the numerous undertakings. Within the Treasury Department, the Office of Construction and Office of the Supervising Architect were established in 1852 to oversee Federal design and construction. Centralization and standardization streamlined the building process. Identical or similar buildings were constructed in different cities from a single plan generated in the Washington office, although minor adjustments for site, climate, or local building traditions were allowed.⁹ Designs reflected the movement away from Classicism toward other forms of architecture with historic precedent, most notably the Renaissance Revival.

The Post-Civil War Era

After the Civil War, the nation continued to expand, using advances in technology and transportation to construct new buildings.

From the drafting boards of the Supervising Architect's Office, however, flowed an amazing variety of stylistic elements: mansard roofs, towers, clusters of spires. The juxtaposition of styles was typical of the period, but the sometimes disjointed mix-and-match of federal architecture reflected a special characteristic of federal building—the long span from authorization to completion.¹⁰

During the second half of the nineteenth century, federally funded buildings became an indication of stature for cities throughout the country. Congressmen strove to accommodate their constituents with new Federal buildings, even if the need for the structure was not proven. By the end of the century, the process had greatly improved. However, smaller cities and towns continued to receive federally funded buildings. Although the government was criticized for its design monotony, to residents—particularly those in western regions—the buildings represented “the latest in architectural style and technology and symbolically, membership in the Union.”¹¹

In the years after the Civil War, Federal buildings were designed by staff architects of the Supervising Architect's Office, and the quality of Federal architecture during this period was criticized for not being innovative, efficient, or of a high quality. In 1893, in an effort to include private architects in government projects, the American Institute of Architects won the passage of the Tarsney Act, which allowed the Treasury to acquire the services of architects outside of its office; however, this Act was not put into meaningful use until 1897. Prominent architects whose designs were constructed include McKim, Mead & White, Cass Gilbert, and Daniel Burnham. In 1912, Congress repealed the Tarsney Act under claims that employing private architects was excessive compared with using employees of the Supervising Architect's office.¹²

During this era, Federal buildings were not immune to popular architectural movements and often reflected societal trends. As the City Beautiful Movement captured the interest of Americans during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Federal buildings began to exemplify many of the Beaux Arts principles—such as imposing, ornate classical designs with monumental entrance stairs and axial walkways and approaches; this practice was particularly appropriate for this period in American history, when affluence and power were ever increasing. Although some critics found the Beaux Arts style to be unapproachable and overly ornate, the nation responded to its grand mode.¹³ The Beaux Arts style also marked the government's return to its tradition of classical architecture after forays into Victorian-era styles.

A Growing Federal Presence

The twentieth century continued to be one of increased work and great growth for the Supervising Architect's Office. By 1912, the Office was responsible for the management of 1,126 buildings. In 1913, Congress created the Public Buildings Commission “to make recommendations concerning prompt completion of buildings, standardized procedures, and the issue of how to determine the need for buildings.” Criticism of the Federal government continued during this time. Some said that the government did not construct enough public buildings in Washington, D.C., but instead constructed unnecessary buildings in small towns throughout America, and others accused the Treasury Department of excessive delays and extravagances relating to public buildings.¹⁴ After World War I, two Public Buildings Commissions—one for Washington, D.C., and one for the rest of the nation—recommended that public buildings be constructed based on need and business considerations, rather than the political power wielded by some members of Congress. Finally, in 1926, the Public Buildings Act ordered the Treasury Department to implement such a policy.¹⁵

However, this policy was rather short-lived. The Great Depression began in 1929, and subsequent Federal New Deal relief programs pumped huge sums of money into public building programs. The Public Buildings program was placed under the jurisdiction of the Public Works Administration, which moved the business considerations policy to the background and made efforts to restart the economy and to provide

LOBBY, EVERETT M. DIRKSEN U.S. COURTHOUSE, FEDERAL CENTER,
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS | LUDWIG MIES VAN DER ROHE | 1964



Buil dings contained a variety of material s; concrete, stone, gl ass, and metal s were combined to present a modern, strong presence. Architectural features found on Federal buil dings from earl ier eras were either absent or reinterpreted in new ways.

construction jobs a priority. During the New Deal era, approximately 1,300 federally funded buildings (nearly doubling the pre-Depression inventory) were constructed in over 1,000 communities nationwide as a strong Federal government replaced state and local powers. "In terms of establishing the image of the United States government, this program was the most important undertaken since the first few decades under the Constitution."¹⁶ Generally, the principles of Classicism remained evident in buildings, extending previous generations' and administrations' traditions of austerity and authority conveyed through government architecture. Also during the Depression era, the Federal government commissioned artworks for hundreds of public buildings nationwide. Subject matter was often chosen to convey and reinforce the social ideals of the New Deal.¹⁷

Architects of this new flood of Federal buildings looked to those early years of the Republic for design inspiration, deciding that Classicism was

either historically correct or uniquely expressive of democratic values, or both.... The actual building designs, however, reflected other influences as well. One was the increased scale of government and society. Not only did the buildings take up more ground and air space, but they now often housed collections of seemingly indistinguishable government bureaus rather than a few, discrete public offices. The name "Federal Building" began to be used in place of "Post Office, Courthouse, and Customhouse."¹⁸

Stylistically, these new Federal buildings reflected other influences as well. Although the classical forms—including the Beaux Arts style, which continued into the 1930s—were prevalent within the Supervising Architect's Office, early Modernism, which expressed changes in technology, materials, and building methods, had taken hold in Europe and the United States.

The use of clean lines, flat surfaces, and simple geometric shapes would create a style that ended all styles. If Classical architecture exploited the symbolism of ornament, Modernist architecture would convey meaning by the very lack of ornament. If Classic architecture's masonry masses asserted permanence and authority, the Modernists steel and glass would celebrate innovation, freedom, and flexibility.¹⁹

Using electrical and mechanical innovations and methods and materials—such as steel, glass, plastic, and reinforced concrete—that were previously unavailable, buildings took on appearances that were wholly different from their predecessors.

The Impact of Early Modernism

Following this trend toward minimalism, facades of public buildings during the New Deal era became more simplified. Ornament was more stylized and fenestration less prominent. Termed the Modern Classic or Stripped Classic mode, the style was so named because the basic form and symmetry of Classicism were retained, but much of the ornamentation and motifs were reduced or removed. Stripped Classic buildings were constructed throughout the 1930s and early 1940s. Their monumentality, presence, and permanence ensured a continued place of prominence in the cities and towns, but the lack of architectural ornament satisfied the contemporary taste for sleekness of design. As in years past, the Federal government never mandated an official public style, but the Stripped Classic style was adopted across the nation.²⁰

Despite the popularity of the Stripped Classic, other styles of architecture were also constructed with great success during the years between the two World Wars. Federal buildings designed in the Art Deco style reflected the nation's interest in machines and industry, with sleek, streamlined design. Styles with historic precedent, such as the Spanish Colonial Revival in the Southwest or the English Colonial Revival in the East, were constructed regionally. Buildings in National Parks and U.S. Forests were built in rustic styles that blended with natural landscapes.²¹

The Stripped Classic style of design proved to be enduring throughout the years of World War II. The use of classical ornamentation on buildings fell out of favor and was considered antiquated and unsophisticated by some design professionals. The preponderance of manufactured materials, principally glass, metal, and concrete, and the decline in the use of stone resulted in building facades that appeared quite different from those constructed in previous eras.

World War II accelerated the Modern Movement in several different ways. The increased use of highly mechanized mass-production techniques, increased familiarity with new building materials, and the need for cost-saving measures due to the burden of war expenditures provided opportunities for innovative methods and philosophies of construction. At the same time, Americans were receptive to the idea of a new, modern world with unprecedented forms of architecture. Increased automobile reliance as Americans moved to the suburbs also influenced Federal building trends as government buildings were located outside of city centers.

As the war ended and the United States assumed a role as a world power and protector, the Federal government was at first reluctant to embrace new forms of architecture. President Harry S. Truman admitted that he did not understand "fellows like [Frank] Lloyd Wright," and new Federal buildings resisted the influence of Modernism. Although initially executed in a tentative fashion, Modernism finally made an impact during the 1950s, when the Federal government would begin encouraging Modern design.²² ■

THE FEDERAL CENTER:
EVERETT M. DIRKSEN U.S. COURTHOUSE (LEFT),
JOHN C. KLUCZYNSKI FEDERAL BUILDING (RIGHT),
AND LOOP STATION POST OFFICE (FOREGROUND),
CHICAGO ILLINOIS | LUDWIG MIES VAN DER ROHE | 1964-69



MODERNISM IN THE UNITED STATES

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At the time that GSA was established, building trends in Europe and America were diverging from their historical precedents and following modes originated during the initial phase of Modernism beginning in the 1920s. GSA's first buildings were designed during a period of great change in both the philosophy of architecture and the technology of construction. In 1940, architect and critic J.M. Richards summarized the changing trends in architecture:

The principal reason why a new architecture is coming into existence is that the needs of this age are in nearly every case totally different from the needs of previous ages, and so cannot be satisfied by methods of building that belong to any age but the present. We can satisfy them in the practical sense, by utilizing modern building technique and modern scientific inventions to the full; and we can satisfy them in the aesthetic sense, both by being honest craftsmen in our own materials and by taking special advantage of the opportunities these materials offer of creating effects and qualities in tune with our own times.³⁰

One of the most noticeable changes in Modern architecture was the diminishing distinction between public and private buildings. In the past, the symbolism of public buildings was important, and formal, hierarchical sequences of ceremonial spaces were common. However, the Modern era ushered in an emphasis on functionalism, and the economy of interior space reflected this new design mode. Grand lobbies were absent from Modern designs; instead, plazas served as exterior gateways to sites, while the use of transparent building materials served to visually unite exterior and interior spaces.

Office spaces also changed dramatically. Individual offices became less common and large open areas, referred to as either universal space or flexible plans, became common. Moveable room dividers allowed spaces to be altered as necessary.

Modern architecture sought to break from the past by embracing new technology. Using electrical and mechanical innovations and methods and materials—such as steel, glass, plastic, and reinforced concrete—that were previously unavailable, buildings took on appearances that were wholly different from their predecessors. Architecture was influenced by Modern art and used abstract forms, space, light, and sometimes bold colors. Also coupled with this new architectural aesthetic were social goals. Architects hoped that the machine age would bring about equality and democratic values for all citizens.³¹

More so than in the past, architecture became practical. Functional efficiency, coupled with economic efficiency, overshadowed elaborate buildings of earlier eras, and perhaps one of the greatest reasons for the success of Modernism is that it was substantially less expensive than previous methods of building.³²

Unlike the architecture of previous eras, elements of buildings could be fabricated in factories and assembled on-site. This not only allowed for mass production, it was also a very cost-effective method of construction. The expense of paying individual artisans and craftspeople became largely prohibitive, and Modern architecture was the result of developing new ways to build, often with new materials. Construction with these materials—whether executed in prefabricated elements or constructed on-site—was significantly less expensive than in previous eras. Concrete, plastics, and aluminum proved to be doubly beneficial, as they were extremely economical and were suitable for aesthetic trends of the times.

Coupled with these new methods and materials was a radical notion of building—buildings were no longer constructed to last indefinitely. In 1956, Gordon Bunshaft, architect for Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, stated:

It seems to me that the greatest change that is occurring in this country is that buildings are no longer being built to last five hundred years. They're no longer monuments that are built and that the interior purposes change with each generation such as some of the structures in Paris and London. Today the economics of our civilization and the increasing requirements of comfort demanded by the people are making buildings obsolete in twenty to twenty-five years. This change, I think, is going to have a basic effect eventually on the structure and on the design theories of architecture.... The architecture must be designed to suit our needs today.

As far as the technical aspects of development, there is no question that we must develop a method of building these buildings precisely, lightly, and quickly, and this, of course, leads to prefabrication.³³

Influential Buildings of the Modern Era

An elite collection of buildings in the United States designed by renowned Modern masters can be seen as truly pivotal and influential in the history of Modernism. Various components—design, materials, siting, orientation, etc.—contributed to the innovations of these designs, which were usually not only lauded by critics, but imitated by fellow architects. Many of these master architects were born abroad and brought foreign architectural and social influences to their work. A subset of key buildings and building types is discussed here.

Office parks and corporate campuses came to the forefront of private commercial architecture, representing the prominence of contemporary corporate culture. Between 1949 and 1985, approximately 30 buildings were constructed at the General Motors Technical Center in Warren, Michigan, with Eero Saarinen serving as one of the early designers. Also during the Modern era, GSA was constructing Federal centers on the outskirts of major metropolitan areas, reflecting the private-sector trend toward suburban office locales.

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Numerous Federal buildings constructed during the Modern era displayed characteristics of Formalism and were likely influenced by high-profile, private-sector buildings executed in the style.

Individual office buildings or towers remained important examples of the possibilities of Modernism. The firm of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill designed Lever House, an early influential office building in New York, in 1952. Its 18-story glass tower and base are raised on pillars faced with stainless steel, creating an open streetscape on its Park Avenue site.³⁴ The Seagram Building (1958), designed by Mies van der Rohe in conjunction with Philip Johnson, in New York, is a sleek glass box overlaid with mullions that project slightly, adding a layer of visual interest to the building.³⁵ In Boston, I.M. Pei and Henry Cobb designed the Hancock Tower (1965-75), whose glass facade reflects nearby historic buildings. And while not a traditional office building, Wallace Harrison's United Nations Headquarters (1947-50) in New York, which included a long, low building coupled with a tall tower, was widely imitated in both the public and private sectors.

Several college and university campuses are homes to innovative buildings by Modern master architects. The Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts (1961) by Le Corbusier at Harvard University and the Yale Art Gallery (1953) by Louis Kahn with Douglas Or are just a few of these notable buildings.

Perhaps one of the most influential residential designs of the era was Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's apartments at 860-880 Lakeshore Drive in Chicago. Constructed in 1951, the complex consists of two black, steel-frame, glass towers arranged at right angles to each other to optimize the views of the city and Lake Michigan.

Two performing arts venues, both in the Formalist style, are widely recognized for their impact on Modern buildings, regardless of function. Edward Durell Stone, a frequent practitioner of the Formalist style, was responsible for the Kennedy Center (1971) in Washington, D.C., and Philip Johnson, another master of Formalism, designed the New York State Theater at the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts (1964) in New York City with Richard Foster. (The influence of the collective body of work by Stone and Johnson is likely responsible for much of the Federal Formalism seen during the 1960s and 70s.)

Other buildings with unique uses display inventive design tenets. In Chantilly, Virginia, Eero Saarinen designed his masterpiece, the terminal at Washington Dulles International Airport (1962), a sweeping building that celebrates the concept of flight, and Mies van der Rohe's design of the Federal Center in Chicago (1964-1974) is a Modern masterpiece owned by GSA. ■



DAVID J. WHEELER FEDERAL BUILDING AND U.S. POST OFFICE, BAKER CITY, OREGON |
EDMUNDSON, KOCHENDOERFER & KENNEDY | 1969

BYRON G. ROGERS FEDERAL BUILDING AND U.S.
COURTHOUSE, DENVER, COLORADO | JAMES SUDLER
ASSOCIATES AND FISHER & DAVIS | 1965



PRIVATE ARCHITECTS FOR FEDERAL DESIGN

7

One of the most important changes in Federal policy during the early years of GSA was the inclusion of private architects and designers in Federal projects, a policy that produced a few masterpieces of Modern architecture and an extensive collection of undistinguished buildings. With the advent of GSA, government architects were largely superseded by private designers. Because the government itself was being viewed as a business, and the general climate of America was pro-business, it came as no surprise that GSA viewed private-sector architects in a positive light. GSA assumed the role of overseer and manager of architecture and engineering for public buildings, with private architects serving as designers, engineers, and draftsmen.³⁶

As the role of the Federal government went from designer to administrator of public buildings, concern arose regarding the overall quality of Federal architecture. Private firms were selected based on professional credentials and previous experience and performance, a process that critics said led to conservative designs and left little room for architectural innovation by new firms, even if quality firms were selected. Despite an effort to establish the highest possible standards of architectural design, style, and ornamentation for Federal public buildings, public building design continued to suffer. Consequently, public buildings became less and less visually prominent, while private buildings displayed more innovative designs resulting in more distinguished buildings.



GEORGE C. YOUNG FEDERAL BUILDING
AND U.S. COURTHOUSE, ORLANDO, FLORIDA |
SMITH & SWILLEY | 1974

These lines of demarcation were soon blurred as private architects began designing Federal buildings. Until this time, public buildings were easily distinguished from their private counterparts in cities and towns. The size, scale, and the use of high-quality building materials made Federal buildings distinct landmarks in their communities. For the new era of building design at GSA, sleek, glass, curtain-wall towers and monolithic office blocks became more commonplace, imitating private office building design and often making it difficult to distinguish private buildings from public ones.

The federal presence so far as it was expressed symbolically in government buildings used by the general public, represented more and more big business of big government and less and less any tangible local proof of nationality. In 1962 a Presidential committee exhorted the government to adjure any official style. About the same time the line between federal and private style vanished. Only the official seal and perhaps more marble in the lobbies and more hardware on the guards distinguished the big buildings of federal business from the big buildings of private business. Of the two popular business facades—the glass cage and the masonry box—government preferred the masonry box with its sympathetic vestiges of public power: massiveness, whiteness, and columnar pilotis. For all the years and styles and functions that separated the Capitol dome and the President's House from their federal offspring in the capital, whiteness at least united them.³⁷

In the United States, conservative private architects rather than notable, cutting-edge architects were increasingly responsible for the design of Federal buildings. Generally, more concerned with efficiency and economy than with aesthetics, designers planned buildings that were utilitarian in nature. It was also during this era that the prominent, ceremonial entrances previously found on most public buildings all but disappeared. Cautious use of Modernism appeared with varying degrees of success. While public buildings followed the trends and technology of the larger architectural community, it was often with hesitation and delay. No longer were Federal buildings at the forefront of innovative design. However, technological advances in building design—most notably the use of metal skeletons sheathed with glass and other types of panels—were incorporated into Federal buildings.

In 1956, the title of Supervising Architect was changed to Assistant Commissioner for Design and Construction and the position was located within the Public Buildings Service of GSA. This title aptly reflected the shift toward using private architects rather than architects employed by the Federal government to design Federal projects. As design work shifted to private firms, the Assistant Commissioner was able to influence Federal architecture by recommending architects for Federal projects and advising the Executive Branch of the Federal Government on design issues.³⁸ ■

One of the most noticeable changes in Modern architecture was the diminishing distinction between government and private buildings. For the first time, public architecture began imitating private buildings, often making it difficult to distinguish between the two.

IMPROVED FEDERAL OFFICE SPACE

8

Despite the wartime expansion of Federal activity, the massive post-World War II government was in dire need of office space, but there was little available to house new agencies or the growing staffs of preexisting agencies. While leasing space was viewed as the fastest solution to the growing problem, both Congress and President Truman opposed the practice. However, Congress did not appropriate the construction funds necessary to remedy the problem. Instead, lease-purchase programs, wherein the government leased private buildings and eventually took over titles, were instituted.³⁹ Also during the post-War era, the form of Federal office buildings grew more and more like their private counterparts:

The majority of contemporary commercial office buildings and governmental office buildings tended to become larger and more standardized to the point where they were virtually indistinguishable in form. This was perhaps inevitable, since the functions of these structures were very nearly the same. The great variety of industrially produced materials and building components that became available after the Second World War, along with the economies of modern curtain wall construction, created a new element in the cityscape that was both monotonous and distracting: monotonous because many of the newer buildings were wrapped, like packages, in an overall pattern of windows and spandrels; distracting because there seemed no limit to the number of unsuitable patterns that one could place in juxtaposition to one another.⁴⁰

In 1954, Peter Stroebel, who brought over two decades of private-sector management and engineering experience to the job, was appointed Commissioner of the Public Buildings Service of GSA. During his brief, two-year tenure, a study was commissioned that deemed the Federal government's office buildings to be "obsolete," and replacement was recommended as a remedy. Created as a sort of temporary stop-gap measure, the Public Buildings Purchase Contract Act of 1954 was intended to provide some relief to the space problem. However, efforts during this time focused on space-saving campaigns. But the Act did allow, for the first time, private-sector investment to finance public buildings—a major shift in funding methods.⁴¹

The Public Buildings Act of 1959

In retrospect, little was done during the 1950s to alleviate the chronic need for office space. It was not until the Public Buildings Act of 1959 that opportunity for long-needed action was taken to correct the severe shortage of space. Designed to meet the "need for general authority for the orderly planning and construction of public buildings," the Act responded to the lack of an "orderly or systemic approach to the provision of the general-purpose public buildings" by Congress. The 1959 Act increased and refined PBS' ability to manage

Innovative solutions from informed and qualified professionals can preserve the character of the buildings while resolving issues of functionality, cost, safety, efficiency, and quality of space and public experience.



JACOB K. JAVITS FEDERAL BUILDING (RIGHT)
AND JAMES L. WATSON U.S. COURT OF INTERNATIONAL
TRADE (FOREGROUND), NEW YORK, NEW YORK |
EGGERS & HIGGINS | 1968



HURFF A. SAUNDERS FEDERAL BUILDING,
U.S. POST OFFICE AND COURTHOUSE,
JUNEAU, ALASKA | OLSEN & SANDS | 1966

the public buildings program. In addition to these basic changes, new buildings for Federal agencies were to be constructed from appropriations made directly to GSA, and new procedures for determining the need for buildings and requesting space throughout the country were established. Appropriations previously directed to the Architect of the Treasury, which managed the central program for Federal construction, were directed to GSA. GSA then was to submit proposals for specific construction projects based on needs determined by surveys. After review by the Office of Management and Budget, prospectuses were forwarded to the House and Senate Public Works Committees for their approval, paving the way for legislation appropriating funds for construction. GSA was also charged with the new task of anticipating future Federal office space needs. Surveys of over 2,300 communities across the country were completed, gathering information on population, realty trends, road construction programs, and other pertinent information. Based on these facts, plans were made for constructing new buildings, expanding existing buildings, purchasing leased space, consolidating separate offices, or disposing of unneeded space.

At this point in time, GSA relied almost exclusively on private architects for its design input and aesthetic direction. PBS retained architects based in or near the cities where Federal buildings were being constructed, mirroring the process that the Federal government used in awarding general construction contracts.

Following the 1959 Act, design and construction rates increased dramatically. In 1961 and 62, over 7.7 million square feet of Federal office space was added, with some of the largest expenditures on individual buildings occurring in Washington, D.C., the city that had suffered perhaps the most through the post-War-years office space crisis.

After President John F. Kennedy was inaugurated in January 1961, there was a massive increase in the design and construction of Federal buildings. At the end of 1962, GSA had constructed numerous new buildings, acquired sites for new projects, completed repairs and/or improvements on existing buildings, and furnished building management services in 7,240 federally owned or leased buildings that housed over 533,000 Federal employees.⁴² ■

Despite the Federal government's desire to construct buildings that incorporated local and regional architectural traditions, most Modern Federal buildings did not reflect influences of the areas where the buildings were located.

PRESIDENT KENNEDY'S "GUIDING PRINCIPLES"

9

President John F. Kennedy was disappointed by the inadequate state of Federal office buildings after his review of progress in implementing the 1959 Public Buildings Act.⁴³ Added to this is the well-known fact that during his inaugural parade on January 20, 1961, President Kennedy noticed the blighted and decayed condition of Pennsylvania Avenue. Primarily, the President reacted to the small-scale commercial buildings that lined the north side of Pennsylvania Avenue; many were in disrepair or were boarded up and sitting vacant. In fact, by the 1960s, the stretch of roadway between the Capitol and the White House was "widely considered a disgrace to the nation, lined with deteriorating structures on the north side and large, unremarkable buildings on the south."⁴⁴ Afterward, the President and his Secretary of Labor, Arthur J. Goldberg, discussed what could be done to improve the poor condition of the Avenue.

As a result of requests made by President Kennedy during a cabinet meeting on August 4, 1961, the Ad Hoc Committee on Federal Office Space was formed to advise the administration on immediate and long-term space needs, with particular attention paid to the Washington, D.C., area. The collection of decaying Federal buildings on Pennsylvania Avenue portrayed the government in a negative light and Kennedy feared such an image would deter citizens from seeking Federal employment. On June 1, 1962, the committee, which was organized by the Special Assistant to the President and consisted of the Secretaries of Commerce and Labor, the Director of the Bureau of the Budget, and the Administrator of the General Services Administration, issued its findings, the *Report to the President by the Ad Hoc Committee on Federal Office Space*. Contained in the report were the "Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture," penned by the late Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, then Assistant Secretary of Labor.

The committee found that office space in and around Washington was disorderly, inefficient, and wasteful.⁴⁵ An overall lack of government-owned space forced agencies to lease expensive, privately owned space on a large scale. "Of the 291 buildings occupied by the Government agencies in this area, 66 are obsolete Government-owned buildings, 47 are Government-owned temporary buildings, and 129 are leased buildings."⁴⁶

Frequent problems in both leased and government-owned office buildings included "overcrowding, poor lighting, and poor ventilation [which were] not conducive to efficient work performance, accident prevention, or the career attractiveness of the Federal service." As a result of these findings, the committee suggested a decade-long program that would eliminate temporary and obsolete buildings while constructing a minimum of 12 new Federal buildings.

As a result of requests made by President Kennedy, the Ad Hoc Committee on Federal Office Space was formed to advise the administration on immediate and long-term space needs, with particular attention paid to the Washington, D.C., area. Public buildings of the 1960s (particularly in Washington, D.C.) were considered to be successful and of a higher design quality than buildings of immediately prior and later eras.



FEDERAL OFFICE BUILDING 10B, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION,
FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION, WASHINGTON, DC | HOLABIRD, ROOT
& BURGEE AND CARROLL, GRISDALE & VAN ALLEN | 1963

9

High-quality architectural designs for new Federal buildings that conveyed the “dignity, enterprise, vigor, and stability of the American Government” were recommended.

Although the committee acknowledged the problem of worker congestion within the city of Washington, members did not recommend immediate measures, such as decentralization or dispersal of government activities from the city. Citing factors such as the potential “disruption of public services, the problems encountered in large-scale relocation of employees and their families, and the costs of removal and resettlement,” the committee instead recommended careful, long-term studies for the potential for gradual decentralization of selected agencies.

To accurately determine a solution to—or at least an explanation for—the poor office conditions, the committee concluded that the General Services Administration’s lack of guidance should be corrected and responsibility for maintaining and managing the buildings should be clarified, thus improving overall office quality. As a result of this finding, the committee outlined a role and scope of responsibilities for GSA, with the recommendation for issuing an Executive Order to allow full implementation of responsibilities.

The committee viewed the potential for change in Washington in a positive light, stating that a “long-range program to improve Federal office space in the Nation’s Capital presents an exceptional opportunity to enhance the beauty and dignity of the seat of Government.”⁴⁷

Recommendations for the adoption of high-quality architectural designs for new buildings throughout the nation were mandated. However, the committee was quick to point out that exuberance or extravagance were not goals, but instead conveying the “dignity, enterprise, vigor, and stability of the American Government” through architecture should be given the highest priority. Efficient and economical construction that incorporated creative designs and works of art were strongly encouraged.

A three-point architectural policy was recommended by the committee:⁴⁸

1. Designs should incorporate the finest in contemporary architectural thought. Including local and regional architectural traditions and influences of the area where the building is located is encouraged. Incorporating pieces of fine art, preferably by living American artists, should be a priority. Buildings should also be functional for users, including the handicapped, and should incorporate materials, methods, and equipment of proven dependability, making them economical to build, operate, and maintain.
2. The development of an official style should be avoided. The architectural profession should dictate the trend of government buildings, but the government should not dictate architectural trends. Costs will likely be slightly higher to obtain quality designs, and the government should be willing to pay more to avoid excessive uniformity of design for Federal buildings. Design competitions may be held, and the advice of prominent architects should be sought prior to awarding important design contracts.



STROM THURMOND FEDERAL BUILDING
AND U.S. COURTHOUSE, COLUMBIA,
SOUTH CAROLINA | MARCEL BREUER | 1979
SHOWN AT LEFT: FEDERAL BUILDING LOBBY

Strom Thurmond Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse



The Strom Thurmond Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse complex in Columbia, South Carolina, is among the last projects by the celebrated German expatriate Marcel Breuer. Yet despite Breuer's international acclaim, his Brutalist project received a cool reception as it neared completion in 1979. The local press declared, "GSA's Dream Building—Nightmare Come True."* As time passed few people remembered that the three-part ensemble of office tower, low courthouse, and broad plaza had been designed by the firm of one of the era's most highly regarded Modernists.

When the Federal courts moved to a new building in 2003, GSA proposed reusing the vacated courthouse for offices as part of an overall master plan for the government complex. To maximize revenue, the project team considered bisecting the double-height courtrooms and both buildings' lobbies with a slab floor to increase rentable floor area—leaving little of the original finishes and design in the principal public and ceremonial spaces.

Meanwhile, GSA was beginning to implement its new Eligibility Assessment Tool (located at the end of this study) to evaluate the National Register eligibility of its Modern-era buildings in a more consistent manner.

An eligibility assessment of the Strom Thurmond complex captured its elegant proportions, understated craftsmanship, and careful detailing—especially in the four large courtrooms with original woodwork—prompting GSA to take a second look at the buildings. Investigation into their architectural heritage soon uncovered Breuer's involvement. The project team has since reconsidered alteration approaches that compromise significant spaces and finishes.

As the project moves forward, GSA's planning team is gathering information to better understand the local Modern-era context within which the buildings were originally constructed to inform the rehabilitation. Recognizing the complex's merit, GSA hopes to attract sympathetic architects with the skills to meet the project's technical requirements while preserving what is distinctive and unique about the buildings.

*Jan Stucker, "GSA Dream Building—Nightmare Come True," *The Columbia Record*, July 26, 1979.



ABOVE: ONE OF FOUR LARGE ORIGINAL COURTR00MS

The concept of a long, low building placed next to a tall office tower set on a landscaped plaza was executed throughout the country, imitating the general plan of the United Nations Headquarters.



RICHARD BOLLING FEDERAL BUILDING, KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI
VOSKAMP & SLEZAK AND EVERETT & KELETI | 1965

Federal buildings constructed during various eras were cleaned, repaired, renovated, and re-landscaped. While an effort was made to include buildings from all geographic regions, special attention was paid to problems in Washington, D.C., where detailed plans to remove World War II-era temporary buildings, construct a series of new Federal buildings, and improve existing buildings were executed.⁵⁵

GSA took seriously the executive mandate to improve Federal design. Among the many tasks its architects were responsible for at this time were developing space and program requirements, establishing and maintaining design criteria, participating in site selections, preparing and negotiating contracts, monitoring schedules, reviewing and approving design submissions, and coordinating agency reviews (see Chapter 12, “GSA Directives in the Modern Era”). However, many GSA buildings constructed during the Johnson administration lacked distinguished designs. Nondescript buildings constructed with speed and efficiency continued to be the norm.⁵⁶

At the onset of the 1960s, a rising awareness of the historic significance of older buildings, as well as the economy of reusing them, had become part of the Federal government’s policy. President and Mrs. Kennedy were personally involved with the effort to save historic buildings facing Lafayette Square in Washington. Instead of demolishing the structures and replacing them with Modernist structures, the buildings were retained and new buildings built behind them. The design by John Carl Warnecke resulted in a nationally recognized and lauded preservation solution that blended historic preservation with Modern architecture.⁵⁷

In 1966, the National Historic Preservation Act was passed, requiring the Federal government to evaluate its historic buildings and consider them when evaluating the impact of new undertakings (see page 50). Ten years later, in 1976, the Public Buildings Cooperative Use Act encouraged the Federal government to acquire historic buildings rather than construct new ones. The Act also permitted cultural and commercial uses in public buildings, and was an attempt to integrate Federal buildings into community life rather than to have them viewed as enclaves for Federal employees only.

Concurrently, in the mid 1960s, there was a growing awareness of the environment and the impact that construction might have on it. In 1969, the National Environmental Policy Act was passed. Both the National Historic Preservation Act and the National Environmental Policy Act served as a framework for protecting their respective areas of concern, giving individuals and interested organizations opportunities to comment on the impact of planned construction. In many cases, the new laws slowed the design development process or had a larger impact on the outcome or location of a project.

A concern for energy conservation was also rising. In the past, Federal employees demanded office spaces—including lighting and temperature controls—that were comparable to private-sector work spaces. GSA met these demands, only later realizing the impact expanded energy use had on the cost of managing the

The Landscapes of Modern Federal buildings and complexes were important components of many designs. Landscaped plazas and courtyards were often executed as part of original building plans and offered valuable outdoor gathering spaces for both GSA tenants and the public.

A critical period in GSA's history occurred under the leadership of Lawson B. Knott, Jr., Administrator from June 1965 to February 1969. During his tenure, 285 buildings were completed, and the number of square feet under GSA's control reached an all-time high at over 200 million. Knott instituted a successful program of design review. Wanting to continue GSA's "strong emphasis on the importance of high architectural standards and the enhancement of local environments where new buildings were to be situated," Knott appointed 17 established and respected architects to form a Public Advisory Panel on Architectural Services. Entrusted with the job of selecting the highest-quality designs for new Federal buildings, the panel made decisions based on "design criteria and professional contracting procedures." After one year, the panel was so effective that ten regional panels were instituted for local reviews.⁶¹

After the wave of construction in the first half of the 1960s, budget constraints, inflation, and the cost of military action in Vietnam led to dwindling Congressional appropriations, and GSA construction decreased as a result. Despite the hope for widespread improvement of Federal buildings that began during the Kennedy administration, social and political concerns dominated the government by the end of the decade. In 1968, the Public Buildings Service conducted a study comparing GSA's construction management policies to those of the private sector. The results were disheartening. Many of GSA's methods were outdated—from construction techniques to financing to the lack of computer use.

The Nixon Administration

The following year, President Richard Nixon appointed Robert L. Kunzig to the position of GSA Administrator. Under Kunzig, the Public Buildings Service was restructured and new management strategies implemented. The Office of Construction Management and the Office of Operational Planning were added, and followed trends found in the private sector. Among the most critical and innovative changes made was the introduction of phased construction (also referred to as parallel scheduling), which allowed construction to begin before design was complete, thus reducing the overall time for project completion. Construction and project management approaches were also revamped and streamlined, using new practices common in the private sector. These new approaches to construction brought a measure of professionalism to GSA and dramatically improved the agency's ability to analyze its projects. Initial and long-term costs were evaluated, and the information yielded allowed GSA to make decisions based not only on construction costs, but also on extended returns for dollars spent. Project budgets were scrutinized and excessive expenditures eliminated.⁶²

In 1972, GSA's methods of obtaining and constructing buildings were overhauled by amendments passed by the 92nd Congress. Massive funding preceded what was surely to be an enormous wave of construction. Within this new legislation was the directive that the GSA Administrator give "due consideration to excellence

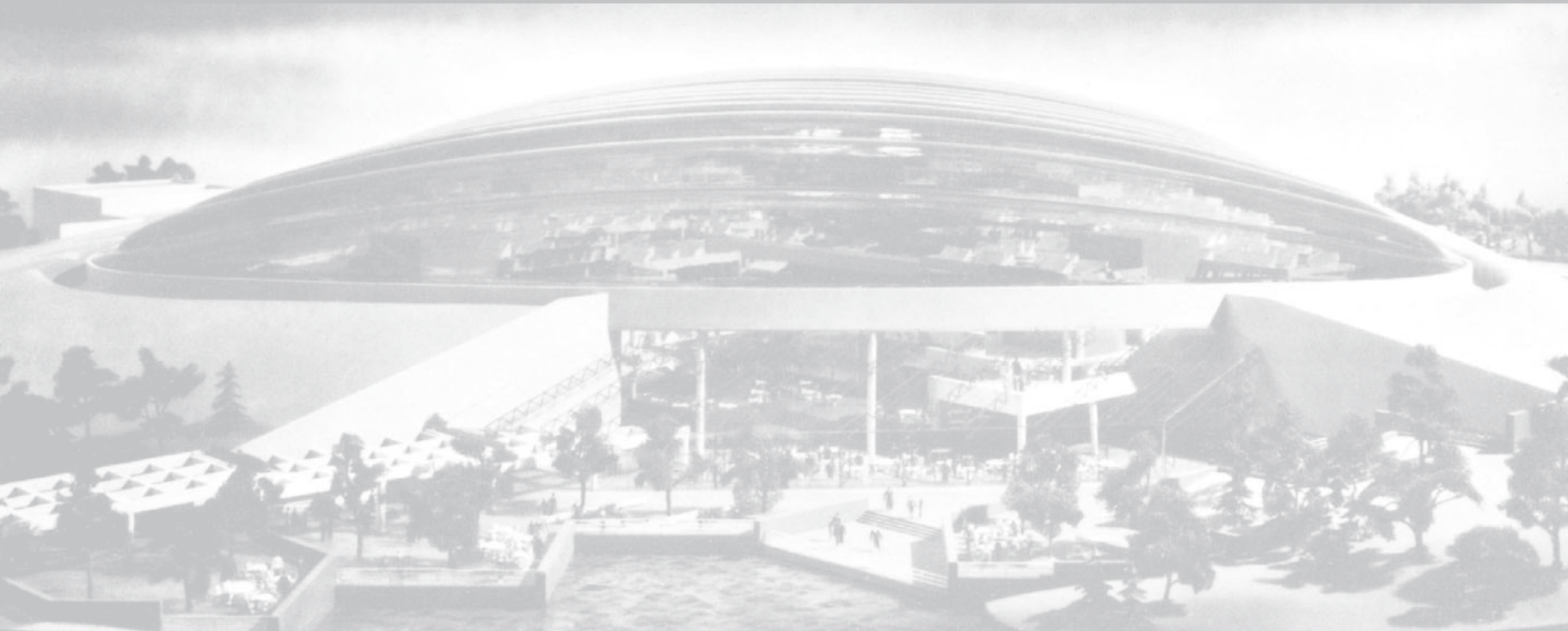


FEDERAL BUILDING, TUCSON,
ARIZONA | CAIN, NELSON, WARES,
COOK & ASSOCIATES | 1974

The Megastructure Model

In an attempt to develop some truly innovative answers to Federal office space problems, GSA actively sought new money-saving and energy-efficient methods for its proposed construction. In 1975, GSA commissioned a study to investigate the feasibility of an office building prototype with earthen walls and an air-supported roof. The building was based on a design demonstrated at Expo '70 in Japan. Known as the "megastructure," it featured an air-supported roof enclosing a large-volume, clear-span dome; within the dome, all offices received natural sunlight through the translucent roof, and a large landscaped mall ran through the interior. The megastructure model was extremely energy efficient, with the roof providing excellent solar performance and energy conservation. Despite the many innovations included in the megastructure, it was comparable to traditional office buildings in cost and construction time, but was apparently never constructed for GSA.

[Source: "Megastructure." Undated GSA Informational Brochure from the vertical files of the GSA Library, Washington, D.C. Although the brochure is undated, corroborating information on the project indicates that the publication dates from the mid-1970s.]



of architecture and design.”⁶³ This is the first legislative decree concerning quality of design and gave a legal basis for espousing design principles. Reinforcing the quest for good design was President Nixon's belief that “there should be no doubt that the Federal Government has an appropriate and critical role to play in encouraging better design,” a conviction echoed by the American Institute of Architects. These views were further bolstered by the Brooks Act of 1972, which required the Federal government to look only at the qualifications, and not the fees, of architects when selecting designers of Federal buildings.

Also in 1972, President Nixon issued an announcement that the government would explore the role of the arts in Federal design by sponsoring a design assembly for Federal administrators, reviewing the “Guiding Principles,” and improving Federal graphics and publications. Like the efforts of his predecessors, it appears that Nixon's initiatives, while well intentioned, did little to improve Federal architecture.⁶⁴

Despite efforts at fostering design excellence in Federal buildings, some experts questioned the commitment of the government to this goal. Many buildings were considered to be lacking in quality or innovation or both. Common faults found with buildings of this era include bland exteriors that were uninviting and a general impersonal feeling to facades. Architectural critics cite a lack of noteworthy designs that offer a sense of timelessness to the buildings.

However, it was also during the late 1960s and early 1970s that some Federal buildings responded to public expectations for a “cost-conscious, nonauthoritarian, sensitive, and inclusive government.”⁶⁵ Anti-monumental, yet still formal, buildings that conveyed the government as welcoming, accessible, and participatory were generally lower in scale, often with clear glass that allowed views of the interiors. Landscaping also helped to achieve the goal of designing nonimposing, human-scale complexes by using plantings and water features such as pools or fountains. ■

Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Office Suite

Although a building may lack architectural merit, strong associations with events or significant persons can make the property eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. An example of this is the architecturally undistinguished J.J. Pickle Federal Building in Austin, Texas. In 1996, GSA, in conjunction with the Texas Historical Commission, determined that the building was eligible because it contains the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Office Suite on the ninth floor.

Designed by Page Southerland Page and Brooks Barr Graeber White & Partners, the J.J. Pickle Federal Building was completed in 1965. At that time President Johnson, a native Texan, established the official local offices of the Chief Executive of the United States in the building. President Johnson's private suite, which included an office, dining room, kitchen, sitting area, and bathroom, retains a high degree of integrity and remains almost unchanged since he occupied it.

The Presidential Office Suite is surrounded by two-inch-thick, bulletproof glass. At the time President Johnson occupied the executive office, large windows afforded impressive vistas of the Texas State Capitol, the University of Texas, and the surrounding Texas hill country. (New construction currently obscures these views.)

Because the office suite is less than 50 years old and its significance is derived from people who occupied it and events that occurred there within the past 50 years, the argument for the exceptional significance of the site had to be made under National Register Criterion Consideration G (see page 107). The Presidential Office Suite is considered to be exceptionally significant because of its strong association with President Johnson and as the site of meetings of national importance. One of the most significant events to occur there was a meeting in December 1966, attended by President Johnson, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, National Security Advisor Walt Rostow, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. At this meeting they discussed the anti-ballistic missile system and decided to support the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. This was a pivotal moment in determining U.S. nuclear policy in the Cold War era.

Although the building is not yet formally listed in the National Register, as a property determined eligible for the Register, it benefits from the same legal protections governing Federal activity as listed properties (see page 50). Since the determination of eligibility, GSA has maintained the Presidential Office Suite, recognizing its association with President Johnson's years as the Commander in Chief.

[Source: "Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Office Suite." National Register of Historic Places Determination of Eligibility Form. Completed by John Russick, Texas Historical Commission, 1996.]



THE PUBLIC BUILDINGS COOPERATIVE USE ACT

With the arrival of the 1970s, the effort to foster quality design in Federal architecture was headed by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). At the direction of President Richard Nixon, the Task Force on Federal Architecture was established. One of the lasting results of this task force was legislation permitting previously banned uses in Federal buildings. (In 1956, the GSA General Counsel concluded that because sections of the 1949 Public Buildings Act authorizing GSA to assign space do not specifically mention nonfederal agencies, GSA could not assign space to nonfederal entities, such as commercial enterprises.)⁶⁶

This interpretation was reinforced in a 1972 memo to the Commissioner of the Public Buildings Service from the office of the General Counsel of GSA.

Since the question [of multiple-use Federal buildings] involves property owned by the United States, it must first be pointed out that the control and use of such property is vested in the Congress. Congress, when it sees fit, by statute delegates this authority to the heads of Departments and Executive Agencies or to corporate bodies, and even to the President...

This definition [of Public Buildings as defined in the Public Buildings Act of 1959], in our opinion, makes clear that the building is for use of federal agencies and we would go further and state that the use must be for federal activities....

In our opinion the Administrator has authority inherent in the statutory delegation to manage public buildings to provide for facilities needed in order to discharge this duty. It is under this premise we say that if commercial facilities are needed in order to serve the federal employees in a building because they are not reasonably available to them, concessions for commercial enterprises can be authorized.⁶⁷

At the time this memo was issued, it was viewed by many as an extremely narrow interpretation of the law. The legislation contains no specific references to the impact of Federal buildings on urban vitality or design, the perceived barrenness of Federal buildings, the lack of usage of Federal buildings during evening hours, or the desirability of multiple uses. The caveat mentioned in the memo was the result of GSA Administrator Franklin Floete's wish that the President of the United States be granted some latitude in defining public buildings. Therefore, Presidential influence could expand or alter the mandate of the Public Buildings Act of

1959, which further elaborates the Administrator's authority to plan, construct, and acquire public buildings. It also requires that GSA receive Congressional approval of all prospectuses for public buildings and conduct ongoing investigations of governmental space needs.⁶⁸

Numerous private developers provided statistics supporting multiple uses, and local jurisdictions pointed out specific cases where they felt adding retail establishments would enliven Federal buildings and the surrounding neighborhoods. The Federal Architecture Project of the NEA studied the situation, issuing a report titled *Federal Architecture: Multiple Use Facilities* in 1974. This study cited numerous opportunities for Federal buildings to engage in commercial agreements that would energize streets, offer amenities to Federal employees during working hours, and provide revenue for underused space.

Nixon also desired the development of "standards and criteria for Government operations that would guide the location and design choices for all new public buildings. New project sites were to be selected with consideration to local and regional development needs, especially the potential for rejuvenating existing social and economic conditions in depressed areas."⁶⁹

In its 1973 annual report, GSA stated that it was committed to a goal of building with excellence not only buildings that were functional and economical, but also of distinguished design.⁷⁰ In 1974, NEA published *Federal Architecture: A Framework for Debate* as a follow-up to 1962's "Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture." The new document advocated the use of design guidelines for Federal buildings and touted the benefits of multiple-use and adaptive use of Federal buildings.

In 1976, Congress passed the Public Buildings Cooperative Use Act, permitting the street levels of government buildings to be used for mixed cultural and commercial purposes, thus encouraging more interaction with the general public.

In 1976, Congress passed the Public Buildings Cooperative Use Act, permitting the street levels of government buildings to be used for mixed cultural and commercial purposes, thus encouraging more interaction with the general public. The same legislation also encouraged acquiring and reusing historic and architecturally interesting buildings for public use.

This legislation encouraged the agency to utilize space in its older federal buildings. If a building's continued use was impractical, it could be protected with covenants and turned over to another responsible owner. Thus was inaugurated the greater effort to study older federal public buildings and to preserve their historical qualities while accommodating normal office functions.⁷¹

One of the first new buildings to incorporate commercial public spaces in Federal buildings was the Federal Home Loan Bank Board Headquarters in Washington, D.C. Designed by Max O. Urbahn Associates in 1973, many of the public amenities were part of the design prior to the Public Buildings Cooperative Use

