

SAVE OUR HERITAGE ORGANISATION PRESENTS



SAN DIEGO'S MID-CENTURY MODERN MARVELS



I N T R O D U C T I O N

As we advance into the 2020s, 20th-century Modern architecture is having a renaissance. Not only is the style rising in popularity, but Mid-Century designs are reaching a level of maturity that qualifies many for historic designation and a higher level of recognition and importance.

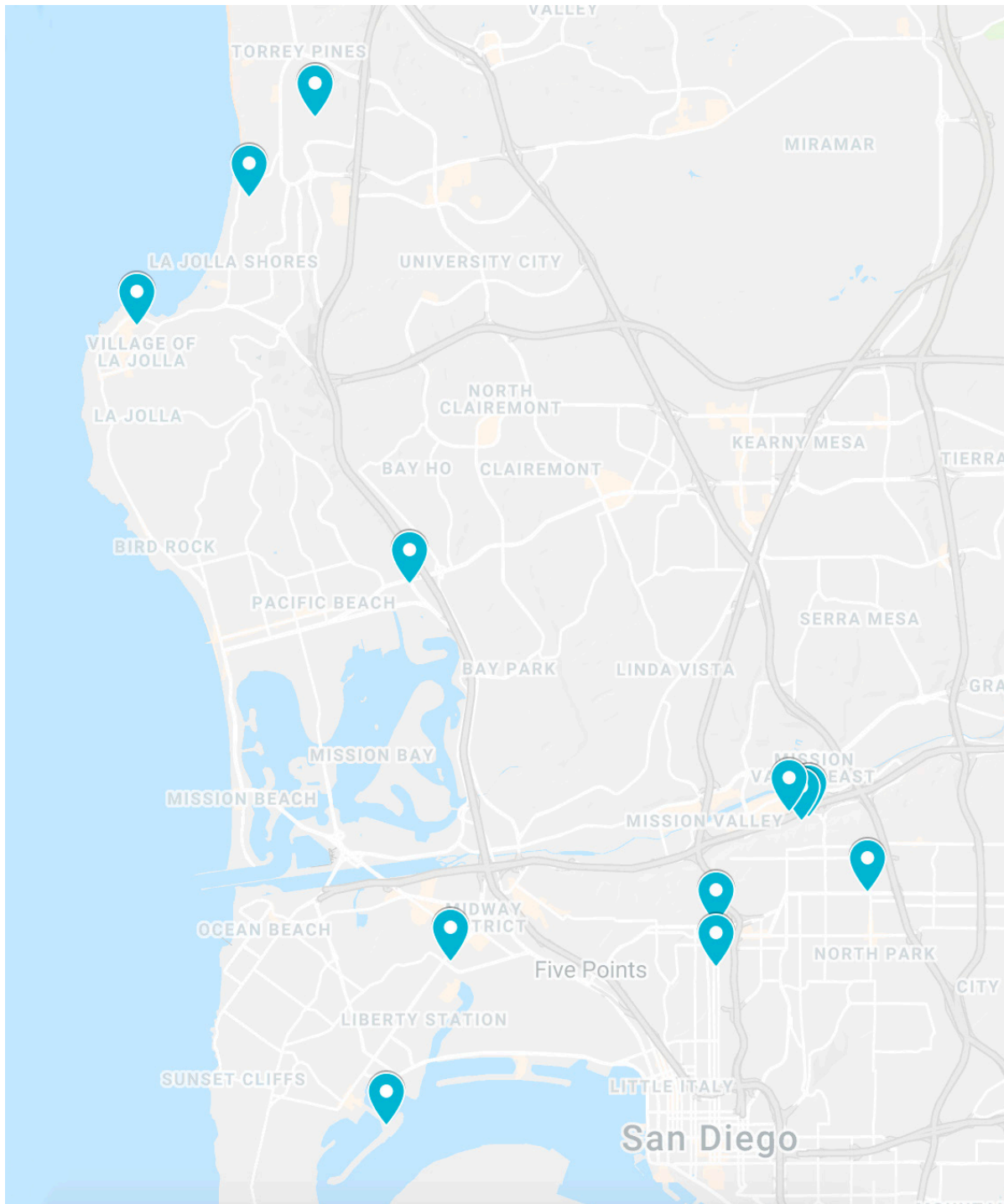
This self-guided driving tour will take you from North Park, Mission Valley, and Hillcrest to the coast with stops in Point Loma, Shelter Island, and La Jolla to see some of San Diego's most marvelous Mid-Century Modern buildings. Built from the years 1949 to 1977, the movement's end in the 1970s, these designs showcase the work of many of San Diego's leading Modernist architects, including Lloyd Ruocco, Robert Mosher, and William Krisel.

While this tour is limited to public buildings and represents only a dozen of the Mid-Century sites worthy of recognition and study, we hope it offers a taste of the diversity of Mid-Century Modern designs and their place in San Diego's development.

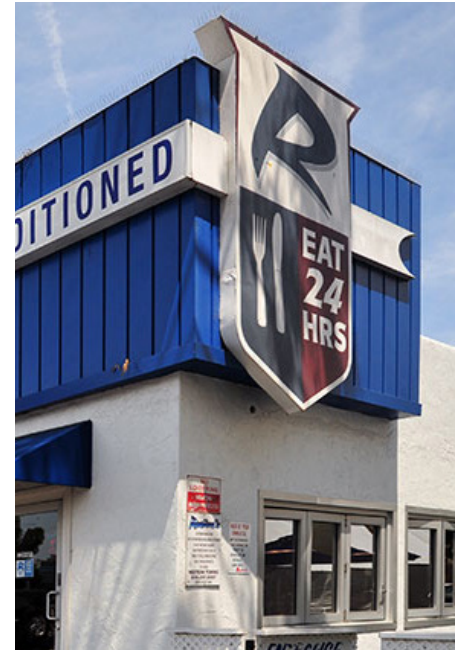
Financial support is provided by the City of San Diego Commission for Arts and Culture.

M A P

Click below on this image to be redirected to an interactive Google Map that will help guide you to each of the 12 sites on the tour.



1. Rudford's Restaurant, 1949



Photos by Sandé Lollis



Photo by James Daigh



2900 El Cajon Boulevard

A signature El Cajon Boulevard landmark, Rudford's Restaurant has been in operation since 1949. The sleek modern design features oval porthole style windows and original neon signage. El Cajon Boulevard is historically significant as a commercial strip known for its neon, and Rudford's is a key example of this mid-century neighborhood development. Rudford's is particularly famous in serving as a backdrop to a photo of President John F. Kennedy's parade through North Park in June of 1963. Taken by James Daigh, a teenager at the time who went to watch the motorcade, the photo shows how the restaurant remains intact today. Stepping into this all-American diner with its retro design will take any visitor back in time.

2. First United Methodist Church, 1960 Reginald Inwood



Photos by Sandé Lollis



2111 Camino del Rio South

The First United Methodist Church was designed in 1960 by architect Reginald Inwood. This Futurist-Google style Modern design overlooks Mission Valley and the Interstate 8 freeway with its towering yet elegant arched form. It showcases the feats of concrete construction and the rising popularity of abstract forms throughout the middle of the 20th century. The remarkably tall glass windows, masked by curved diamond-waved screens, floods the interior space with patterns of golden sunlight while adding dimension and texture to the exterior.

3. Scottish Rite Event Center, 1957 C. J. Paderewski



Top left and bottom right photos by Sandé Lollis



Courtesy Life Magazine, March 17, 1958



Photo by Larry Booth



1895 Camino del Rio South

Originally designed by architect C. J. Paderewski as a Bowlero bowling alley, this rare Googie style building showcases the creative flair of the now-retro bowling alleys of the 1950s and 60s, with their funky rooflines and expressive structure. Today, this rare remaining example of the style is going to be demolished for a new home for the Scottish Rite Event Center and a Home Depot store. The large stepped gabled roof and boomerang columns of the porte-cochere created a Mission Valley landmark that is visible from Interstate 8. The original bowling alley attests to Mission Valley's mid-20th-century transformation from a rural area to a commercial and recreational district. While this resource may soon be lost, many San Diegans will remember hours spent within these walls, and countless glimpses of its iconic form as they passed through Mission Valley.

4. May Company Building, 1959 William S. Lewis Jr.



Top and bottom left photos by Sandé Lollis



Courtesy Dan Soderberg

1640 Camino del Rio North

Located on the eastern edge of today's Westfield Mission Valley shopping center and built in 1959, the May Company Building was a controversial addition to a then pastoral landscape. Easily recognizable by its distinctive architectural features, including pre-cast concrete panels with a hexagonal pattern, pre-cast pebble tile cladding, and a folded roof, the building drastically changed Mission Valley, turning it from cow pastures to commercialism, transportation, and the freeway system. William S. Lewis Jr., a San Diego master architect and designer of the store is also known for his designs of the San Diego Convention Center, Torrey Pines High School, and 550 Washington Street, next on this tour.

5. 550 Washington Street, 1964 William S. Lewis Jr.



Courtesy Google Street View

Historic Photos by Julius Shulman Photography. Courtesy J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

550 Washington Street

Go see this 1964 Modern style medical office building, also designed by Master Architect William Lewis, while you can. Unfortunately, it may soon be demolished even though it is an architectural icon for the Uptown area. The remarkable tower is rare in exhibiting New Formalist style influences, with the aluminum "tracery" panels being both innovative and multi-functional. San Diego Magazine named it "Building of the Year" in 1964. It was designated historic in February 2021 by the City of San Diego for its contribution to the architectural development of Modern designs throughout the city. However, the City Council overturned the designation when it was appealed by the owner in June 2021, paving the way for the building's demise. Lewis also designed the May Company, #4 on this tour.

6. Design Center, 1949 Lloyd Ruocco



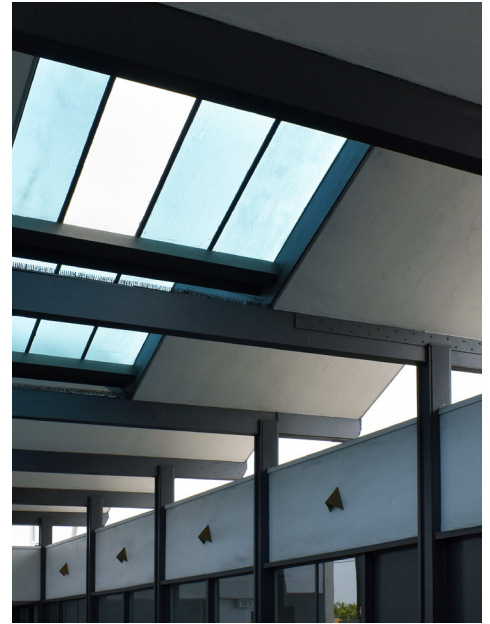
Photos by Sandé Lollis



3611 5th Avenue

Master Architect Lloyd Ruocco designed the Design Center on 5th Ave in Hillcrest in 1949 as a workspace for his architecture practice and for his wife Ilse, an interior designer. The center also served as a collaborative, communal workspace for other budding and influential local architects, such as Homer Delawie, to share resources and support. The building is designed in the commercial Post and Beam style, which incorporates large expanses of glass, natural wood siding, and a multi-story design that takes advantage of the sloped site. The Design Center is often regarded as the catalyst for local Post and Beam style architecture, which grew in popularity through the 1950s until the 70s for both commercial and residential constructions. Ruocco also designed the IGPP Munk Laboratory, #11 on this tour.

7. Loma Starr Building, 1960 William Krisel



Photos by Marlena Krcelich



3065 Rosecrans Street

William Krisel, a San Diego master architect, is known for his numerous designs, from homes and apartment towers to office buildings, shopping centers, factories, schools, and more. In 1960 he constructed the Loma Starr Building for a developer named Bill Starr. This office building housed Krisel's architecture practice for some time. The contemporary style of this design evokes simplicity and organization through use of clean lines and geometric forms. The angular, folded roof form over the exterior walkways adds shade and dimension. An important feature of many contemporary commercial buildings is the stylized exterior signage, and the original Loma Starr sign was recently restored.

8. Humphrey's Half Moon Inn, 1965 Hiram Hudson Benedict



Photo by Sandé Lollis



Top right and bottom photos by Marlena Krcelich



2303 Shelter Island Drive

Originally named Half Moon Anchorage and Boat-tel, today this building is known as Humphrey's Half Moon Inn at Shelter Island and is a rare surviving example of Tiki-Polynesian style architecture, popular from 1950 through 1965. The building is easily recognizable by the dramatic cross-gabled porte-cochere with long curved beams, and the oversized decorative lantern that hangs from the tip of the extended roof. Other characteristics of this style include natural finishes, like wood and stone, lush tropical landscapes, and tropical island accents, such as the illuminated Tiki torches. Hiram Hudson Benedict, the architect, worked mostly in Palm Springs and Phoenix, Arizona, but designed this inn and the San Diego Yacht Club during his brief time in San Diego. Other examples of the Tiki-Polynesian style can be found on Shelter Island, including the Best Western Plus Island Palms Hotel (previously known as the Shelter Island Hotel) and Bali Hai restaurant, as well as throughout Point Loma.

9. Chase Bank, 1977 Millard Sheets



Photos by Sandé Lollis



4650 Mission Bay Drive

Previously the Pacific Beach branch of the Home Savings and Loan Bank, this building is now a Chase Bank branch, and another New Formalist Building. The Home Savings and Loan Banks of Southern California have a distinctive history. Beginning in the mid-1950s, Howard Ahmanson, a Los Angeles bank magnate, hired Millard Sheets, as a renowned artist and architect, to design branches in the New Formalist style and integrate high-style artwork, creating special artistic landmarks for each bank's community. Millard Sheets Studios designed and installed mosaics with regional significance throughout the nation. While built later than the other buildings on this tour, this branch is unique in featuring eight colorful mosaics depicting six prominent archetypes of San Diego history, and two local scenes of the Children's Zoo and the harbor, all with charming attention to detail. This building is the only remaining example of a Home Savings and Loan Bank in San Diego, and is under threat of demolition. If demolished, San Diego and its residents will lose the single remaining connection to this banking and artistic history, and a seamless union of art and architecture.

10. Bank of La Jolla, 1964 Robert Mosher



Photos by Marlena Krcelich



7855 Ivanhoe Avenue

Tucked away in La Jolla is the 1964 Bank of La Jolla designed by Master Architect Robert Mosher. Mosher worked closely with other established local architects including William Templeton Johnson, then opened a long-lived firm in La Jolla with fellow architect Roy Drew. The bank's Modern design with Brutalist influences features a concrete exterior with tall pillars that flare out into an interconnected hexagonal shape. The individual balconies protruding on the second through fourth stories mimic the angular pattern of the distinct roofline. The upper levels are supported by strong concrete piers that allow for an open first floor and recessed entryway. Mosher also played an important role as co-design consultant for the San Diego-Coronado Bridge, most famously for its heavenly blue paint.

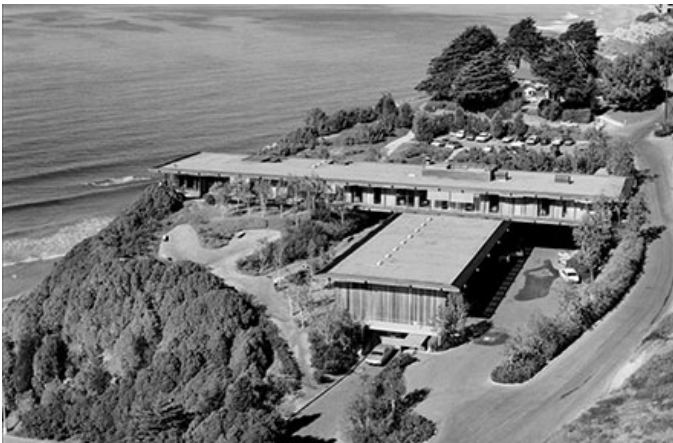
11. Institute of Geophysics and Planetary Physics Munk Laboratory, 1963 Lloyd Ruocco



Top left and bottom right photos by Sandé Lollis



Courtesy UC San Diego Library Digital Collections



Courtesy UC San Diego Library Digital Collections



8602 La Jolla Shores Drive

Designed by renowned San Diego Master Architect Lloyd Ruocco, the IGPP Munk Laboratory, located at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, University of California San Diego is one of the city's finest examples of Post and Beam architecture. The building is named for Walter Munk, dubbed "the father of oceanography," and he and his wife Judith worked closely with Ruocco on the design and optimal functionality of the building as a scientific laboratory. The natural elements of the design, including the exposed redwood siding, cantilevered walkways, deep roof overhangs, and floor-to-ceiling windows, mimic the natural topography of the coastal bluffs the building rests upon. The building has recently undergone a sensitive restoration, and the University of California San Diego was awarded a 2021 SOHO People In Preservation Award for their efforts. The IGPP Munk Lab is also being nominated for the National Register of Historic Places for its architectural design, association with Dr. Munk, and role as a catalyst for development and discovery in science and education. Ruocco also designed the Design Center, #6 on this tour.

12. Geisel Library, University of California San Diego, 1970 William Pereira & Associates



Photos by Marlena Krcelich



9500 Gilman Drive

The Geisel Library, located on the University of California San Diego campus, is an example of the Brutalist style and was designed in 1970 by Los Angeles-based architect William Pereira. Brutalism is rare in San Diego; it focuses on exterior expression of the structural system, usually rugged concrete finishes, monumental massing, angular forms, and repetitive patterns. The library's bottom floors act as a pedestal for the six stories above, creating the striking sci-fi-esque shape. Master Architect William Pereira completed over 250 projects throughout the 1960s and 70s, with the Geisel Library being one of his most famous and most criticized works. While many are not fans of the heavy concrete and angular shapes that make up Brutalist buildings, others believe that Theodor Seuss Geisel, otherwise known as Dr. Seuss and for whom the building was renamed in 1995, would appreciate the creativity and imagination that went into the design.

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