



The Guardian building.



One of two Tiffany clocks at the Guardian building.



Native American motifs at the Penobscot building.



The Fisher B



City of Amazing Architecture

Detroit, Michigan, has been called *City of Trees*, *Hitsville*, *The Motor City*, *Motown*, the *Paris of the Midwest*, the *Renaissance City*, and most recently, a well-deserved *America's Comeback City*. With its skyline and streetscape filled with extraordinary historic buildings, many of them completed in the late 1920s, perhaps it should also be called the *City of Amazing Architecture*.

by Judy Colbert
Photos: Bill Bowen

Some buildings stand tall and grand, some elaborate, and others just jaw-droppingly beautiful. A number have been designated as National Historic Landmarks. Some are open for tours, others are limited to an outer view. Interior tours are offered at the Fisher Building and the Fox Theater. Other tours are available through various companies; their names are at the bottom.

Here are some of the stellar examples

THE GUARDIAN BUILDING

Exemplifying art deco architecture perfection, the Guardian Building was designed by Harvard-educated architect Wirt C. Rowland, a member of the prestigious architectural firm of Smith Hinchman & Gryllis. Promoted as "the Cathedral of Finance," it incorporates Native American, Aztec, and Arts and Crafts styles. The painted murals and ceilings, the mosaics, marble fixtures, tiles and other artistic details were created by a mere 40 artisans. It's said the red marble came

from a mine in Tunisia, Africa that had been closed for more than 30 years. It was reopened to quarry this marble for the 1929 building and has been closed ever since. The two back-to-back Tiffany clocks in the lobby came from New York and are said to be the only ones of this design left in the country. Plan to spend a lot of time looking at the exquisite mosaics.

THE PENOBSCOT BUILDING

When the 47-story Penobscot Building, also by Wirt C. Rowland, was built in 1928, it was the tallest building in Michigan, the fourth tallest building in the United States, and the eighth tallest building in the world. Named in honor of the powerful Penobscot a Native American tribe from Maine, the building features an Art Deco style, including the "H" shape that allows more natural light into the building than if it were square or rectangular, and Native American motifs created by architect Corrado Parducci. Look at the entrance and in the lobby for notable

The Women's Rights Movement officially began here with the first Convention on Women's Rights at the Wesleyan Chapel on Fall Street.

examples of his work. According to Dan Austin of Historic Detroit, "There is an urban legend that the building's 100-foot tower with its winking red orb was once used as a port for a blimp. In truth, this "blazing ball of fire," as one newspaper article described it at the time, was simply an aviation beacon." The ball is 12' in diameter and on a clear night can be seen 40 miles away.

THE FISHER BUILDING

Designed by industrial architect Albert Kahn (who also designed Cranbrook House and the Dearborn Inn in Dearborn), the Fisher Building was finished in 1928 and is considered the city's largest art object. It's built of limestone, granite and several types of marble, and houses the iconic Fisher Theatre. For those who "are of an age," this is the Fisher family of Body by Fisher in General Motors cars. It was designated a National Historic Landmark on June 29, 1989. Free tours are offered most weekend days where an expert guide will tell you about the family, business, and

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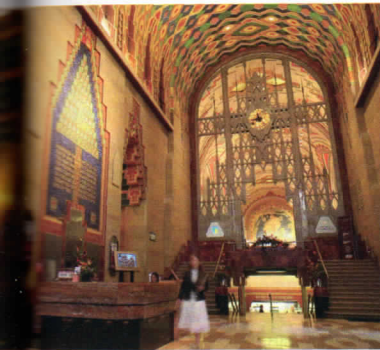
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The Fisher Building



the architects involved in the design and construction. Marvel at the exquisite design and ornamentation of the interior arcade, including one-of-a-kind mosaics, painted ceilings, art deco chandeliers, and fine craftsmanship in stone, brass and bronze. You also have exclusive access to the third floor of the grand arcade and the building's 22nd floor. On the 22nd floor, you'll get a 360-degree view of Detroit so bring your camera. Check with the Pure Detroit store on the ground floor before going up.

ONE WOODWARD AVENUE

One Woodward Avenue was designed by Minoru Yamasaki, a Japanese-American architect who moved to Detroit in 1945 and joined the firm of Smith, Hinchman and Grylls. He's responsible for Detroit office buildings, houses of worship, educational institutions, homes, and this one, his first skyscraper, in 1962. Note the top and bottom of the window openings that meet in a stylized arch that Yamasaki would use again in his IBM building in Seattle, the Oberlin

Conservatory of Music, and New York's World Trade Center in 1972. Exterior lighting on the building is red and green during December and red, white and blue around July 1 and July 4 (Canada Day and U.S. Independence Day).

FOX THEATRE

With spectacular Siamese Byzantine (interior) and Beaux Arts (exterior), Fox Theatre opened on September 21, 1928, and was the crown jewel of the city's theater district. It was the flagship theater in the Fox Theatres chain, designed by C. Howard Crane, a theater architect. Louis Armstrong, Cab Calloway, Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr., Stevie Wonder, Elvis Presley and Diana Ross are just a few of the famous performers who entertained sold-out audiences in the 5,000-plus theater. After massive deterioration in the 1970s, the theater was meticulously restored by Michael and Marian Ilitch, with a gala reopening on November 19, 1988. Notably, 80 percent of the original surfaces were saved.

As a temptation to get you to visit, the grand lobby is six stories tall, the chandelier in the auditorium is 13' in diameter, and the gold-embellished decorations came from around the world. The theater was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1985 and was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1989 for its architecture. Tours are offered for groups of 15 or more, for a fee. Or, you can just look when you catch a show from their long list of performances.

TOUR COMPANIES OFFERING ARCHITECTURAL TOURS

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enjoythed.com

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www.PreservationDetroit.org

Detroit Experience Factory
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shop.puredetroit.com

About the author:
Judy Colbert is the author of 100 Things to Do in Baltimore Before You Die and Chesapeake Bay Crabs cookbook.

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