

ASPEN'S 20TH CENTURY ARCHITECTURE: MODERNISM

The Modernist Movement

Modernism as a style of architecture describes the works that were produced beginning in the 20th century as a result of a clear philosophical shift in design practices and attitudes, and incredible changes in building technology. The roots of this style can be attributed in great part to the Industrial Revolution, which led to dramatic social changes, and an inclination to react against all that had come before. In addition there was a new abundance of raw materials, including bricks, timber, and glass; and stronger materials, particularly metals, which allowed structural innovations.

Initially, the modern technologies were employed in ways that reflected much of the preference for decoration and organic design that had preceded the 20th century, for instance in the Arts and Crafts Style of the 1920's and the influential designs of Frank Lloyd Wright. As the century progressed, however, the demands of the automobile, and the need for buildings to serve uses previously unknown, such as airports, led to the search for a new architectural vocabulary. The streamlined and austere became more relevant. "Functionalism" and "Rationalism" were terms used to describe architectural philosophies related to this period. "Modern building codes had replaced rules of thumb."¹

"Architecture was seen primarily as volume and not mass. So the stress was on the continuous, unmodulated wall surface- long ribbon windows without frames, cut right into the wall plane, horizontally or vertically disposed; flush joints; flat roofs. Corners were not made prominent. Technically, the argument went, materials like steel and reinforced concrete had rendered conventional construction- and with it cornices, pitched roofs, and emphatic corners-obsolete. There would be no applied ornament anywhere, inside or out...A house was a machine made for living Le Corbusier provocatively declared in 1923 in his Towards a New Architecture, which has proved the most influential book on architecture in this (the 20th) century."²

Modernism in Aspen

The period between the Silver Crash in 1893 and the end of World War II saw little new construction in Aspen. This changed when interest began to grow in developing a major ski resort, and when Walter Paepcke envisioned the town as the ideal setting for a community of intellect, cultural institutions, and pristine natural environment. As a result of this renaissance taking place, many



Walter Paepcke

¹ Robert Frankeberger, and James Garrison, "From Rustic Romanticism to Modernism, and Beyond: Architectural Resources in the National Parks," Forum Journal. The Journal of the National Trust for Historic Preservation Summer 2002, p. 16.

² Spiro Kostof, A History of Architecture: Settings and Rituals, (New York:Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 701.

important architects were drawn to live and work here and left an imprint of the philosophies of the modernist period on the town. The two masters who had the largest influence on Aspen, Fritz Benedict and Herbert Bayer, are discussed at length in this paper, along with a number of others who completed notable works here.

FRITZ BENEDICT

Frederic “Fritz” Benedict (b. 1914- Medford, Wisconsin, d. 1995- Aspen, Colorado) was the first trained architect to arrive in Aspen at the end of World War II. Benedict had earned a Bachelor’s Degree and Master’s Degree in Landscape Architecture at the University of Wisconsin before being invited to Frank Lloyd Wright’s school, Taliesen, in Spring Green, Wisconsin in 1938. Initially, Benedict’s role at Taliesen was as head gardener, but his interest in Wright’s philosophy of the integration of architecture and landscape led him to study design at both Taliesen and Taliesen West in Phoenix, Arizona for the next three years.



Fritz Benedict

Benedict, an avid skier, first visited Aspen as a participant in the National Skiing Championships held here in 1941, apparently told of the charms of the town by Frank Mechau, an artist whom he met at Taliesen and who resided in Redstone, Colorado. In 1942, Benedict was drafted to serve with the 10th Mountain Division troops, an elite group of skiers who trained at Camp Hale, north of Leadville, Colorado. On weekends, the soldiers would often travel to Aspen for recreational skiing.

Benedict saw active duty in Italy and served with the 10th Mountain Division until the end of the war in 1945. He returned to Aspen and purchased a ranch at the top of Red Mountain, focusing on operating the property as his livelihood for some time. According to Benedict, “The place (Aspen) was so dead and was starting to be a resort so slowly that there wasn’t much to do in the way of design.”³

This situation changed for good after 1946, when noted artist Herbert Bayer arrived in Aspen with Walter Paepcke, and the duo’s plans for the town brought more people and a new period of construction. Through Herbert Bayer, Fritz met his future wife, Fabienne, the sister of Bayer’s wife Joella. Fabi persuaded Fritz to quit ranching and pursue architecture, which he did after being awarded a license under a grandfather clause that allowed architects to be licensed based on experience, rather than on testing.

Benedict was known for setting buildings into the landscape in an unobtrusive and harmonious way, clearly derived from his landscape architecture education and the influence of Frank Lloyd Wright. He placed a high priority on creating an intimate relationship between a house and its garden. Benedict was a pioneer of passive solar and

³ Adele Dusenbury, “When the Architect Arrived After the War,” The Aspen Times July 31, 1975, p. 1-B.

earth shelter design. He experimented with car-free village design, sod roofed structures, and solar buildings. His master work, the Edmundson Waterfall house, which was strongly related to Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater, exhibited many of these qualities and all of the central characteristics of Wrightian design, including a low pitched roof, strong horizontal emphasis of the structure, and the use of mitred windows at building corners. The most important of Benedict's works may best be defined by the examples that clearly represent Wrightian ideas, or where innovation was key.



Waterfall House, on Castle Creek Road, Pitkin County, 1960

Benedict's earliest projects in Aspen were residences. In collaboration with his brother-in-law, Herbert Bayer, he also helped to design the buildings of the Aspen Institute, the intellectual center of Paepcke's facilities. Other known works by Benedict include the cabin at 835 W. Main Street (1947), the John P. Marquand studio on Lake Avenue (1950, since demolished), the Copper Kettle (1954, 845 Meadows Road), Bank of Aspen (1956, 119 S. Mill Street), 625 and 615 Gillespie Avenue (1957), the original Pitkin County Library (1960, 120 E. Main Street), the Aspen Alps (1963, 777 Ute Avenue- the first luxury condominiums in the Rocky Mountains), the Bidwell Building, (1965, 434 E. Cooper Avenue), Aspen Square (1969, 617 E. Cooper Avenue), The Gant (1972, 610 S. West End Street), the Benedict Building (1976, 1280 Ute Avenue), the Aspen Club Townhouses (1976, Crystal Lake Road), and Pitkin County Bank (1978, 534 E. Hyman Avenue) In total, Benedict designed and renovated over 200 homes and buildings in Aspen and Snowmass.⁴



835 W. Main Street. 1947



434 E. Cooper Avenue, 1965



The Copper Kettle, 1954

⁴ Mary Eshbaugh Hayes. Dedication plaque on "The Benedict Suite," Little Nell Hotel, Aspen, Colorado.

Benedict's works in Pitkin County, outside of Aspen's city limits, include two personal residences, the Waterfall house (1960, since demolished), the Aspen Music School campus, and the Aspen Highlands base lodge (since demolished). Benedict also did the master plan for Snowmass (1967), Vail (1962) and Breckenridge (1971.)

Fritz Benedict was inducted into the College of Fellows of the American Institute of Architects in 1985, by election of his peers. This is a lifetime honor bestowed on registered architects who have made outstanding contributions to the profession, and only 5% of the profession receive this honor. The nomination submitted stated that "Frederic 'Fritz' Benedict left a legendary influence on design and construction in the Rocky Mountain West...(creating) classics of the mountain vernacular."⁵ He was given the Greg Mace Award in 1987 for epitomizing the spirit of the Aspen community, was inducted into the Aspen Hall of Fame in 1988 and the Colorado Ski Hall of Fame in 1995, and was given the "Welton Anderson" award for his contribution to Aspen's built environment by the Aspen Historic Preservation Commission in 1993. In all cases Benedict was recognized for being a pioneer of Aspen's rebirth as a resort community. Many quotes from his memorial service in 1995 attest to the community's respect for his role in Aspen's history. Bob Maynard, former president of the Aspen Skiing Company stated "Aspen was fortunate fifty years ago to be wakened from her sleep by visionaries. The trio of Benedict, Bayer, and Paepcke combined dreams and hope and reality uniquely to restore a community ravaged by mining, trapped in poverty- yet willing to follow the dreamers."⁶ Similarly, the Aspen Times stated at his death, "Along with the late Walter and Elizabeth Paepcke and his Bauhaus trained brother-in-law Herbert Bayer, all of whom came to Aspen with a rare vision in the traumatic wake of World War II, Benedict was one of the fathers of modern Aspen, a man whose architecture not only helped shape the city aesthetic, but whose personal commitment to the original dream of a special 'Aspen Ideal' made him the guarantor of the city's very soul."⁷ Local resident and fellow student of Taliesen, Charles Paterson stated, "Whatever he was building was one jump ahead."⁸

Aside from his architectural contributions, Benedict influenced the Aspen environment in several other ways. Benedict and his wife donated more than 250 acres of land within Pitkin County for open space. He was the father of the 10th Mountain Hut system (established in 1980), and served as the first chairman of Aspen's Planning and Zoning Commission, developing height and density controls for the City, open space preservation, a City parks system, a sign code, and a ban on billboards. He played a significant role in the founding of the Aspen Institute, and the International Design Conference. He served on the board of the Music Associates of Aspen for 35 years.

⁵ Joanne Ditmer, The Denver Post, as reprinted in the program for the Fritz Benedict Memorial Service.

⁶ Robert A. Maynard, Remarks given at Fritz Benedict's Memorial Service.

⁷ Mary Eshbaugh Hayes, "Fritz Benedict, 1914-1995: The Passing of a Local Legend," The Aspen Times July 15 and 16, 1995, cover page.

⁸ Charles Paterson, Remarks given at Fritz Benedict's Memorial Service.

HERBERT BAYER

Herbert Bayer (b. 1900- Austria, d. 1985- Santa Barbara, California) was an artist of many disciplines. He apprenticed with architects in his native country Austria, and in Germany, starting at the age of 18. In 1921 he entered the most renowned art and design school of the 20th century, the Bauhaus in Weimar, Germany.



Herbert Bayer

The Bauhaus, which existed from 1919 to 1933, was begun in a spirit of social reform and represented a rejection of many design ideas that preceded it. “From skyscrapers to doorknobs, modern design was born, really, at the Bauhaus. The ideas of the Bauhaus shaped whole cities, changed architecture, modified the nature of furniture design and transformed the essential implements of daily life.”⁹ Bayer was named the head of the typography workshop at the Bauhaus in 1925 and was ultimately one of three masters named by director Walter Gropius, the other two masters being the gifted Josef

Albers and Marcel Breuer. In 1928, Bayer left the school and established his own studio in Berlin, then becoming the art director for Vogue magazine.

As Nazism gained strength in Germany, Bayer fled the country and immigrated to New York City in 1938. There, he had his first show with the Museum of Modern Art, and began to work as art director for corporations and ad agencies. By 1946, all of his work was for Walter Paepcke at the Container Corporation of America and Robert O. Anderson at the Atlantic Richfield Corporation, both of whom had an interest in Aspen and the establishment of the Aspen Institute.

Walter Paepcke brought Herbert Bayer to Aspen in 1946 to serve as the design consultant for the Institute, a role in which he served until 1976. Bayer was offered the chance to design a planned environment, where the goal was total visual integration.



The Sundeck, 1946

on the grounds), Aspen Meadows Guest Chalets (1954, since demolished and

On April 1, 1960, Bayer received a license to practice architecture in Colorado, without examination. He had no formal training in the discipline, so he generally worked in association with another firm, particularly with Fritz Benedict. The Sundeck on Aspen Mountain (1946, since demolished) was the first of his designs that was ever built. At the Institute, Bayer designed the Seminar Building and its sgraffito mural (1952, the first building

⁹ Beth Dunlop, “Bauhaus’ Influence Exceeds It’s Life,” [The Denver Post](#) April 20, 1986.

reconstructed), Central Building (1954), the Health Center (1955), Grass Mound (1955, which pre-dates the “earthwork” movement in landscape design by 10 years and was one of the first environmental sculptures in the country), the Marble Sculpture Garden (1955), Walter Paepcke Memorial Building (1962), the Institute for Theoretical Physics Building (1962, since demolished), Concert Tent (1964, removed in 2000), and Anderson Park (c. 1970.) Bayer also led the design for the rehabilitation of the Wheeler Opera House (1950-1960), designed two personal residences on Red Mountain (1950 and 1959), and other homes in Aspen, including those still in existence at 240 Lake Avenue (1957) and 311 North Street (1963).



Aspen Institute Seminar Building, 1952



Aspen Meadows Health Center, 1955



The Marble Sculpture Garden, 1955

The period during which most of Bayer’s architecture was designed is confined to 1946-1965. Important characteristics of his buildings were simplicity and the use of basic geometrical shapes and pared down forms. He was heavily influenced by Bauhaus and International Style principles. Color was an important component to some of his work, and

he often used primary red, blue and yellow graphics.



Bayer paint scheme

Bayer believed in the concept of designing the total human environment and that art should be incorporated into all areas of life. He drew logos and posters for the Aspen Skiing Company, and even designed signs for small Aspen businesses. He provided the paint color schemes for certain Victorians that Paepcke’s Aspen Company decided should be saved in the 1940’s. A strong blue color, known locally as “Bayer Blue” was one of his selections and can still be seen on the former Elli’s building (101 S. Mill) and other locations in town. His choice of a bright pink for Pioneer Park (442 W. Bleeker) and a bold paint scheme that once existed on the Hotel Jerome will also be remembered.

Bayer spent 28 years living in Aspen and was one of the first artists to make his home here. A Rocky Mountain News article from 1955 stated “Even in competition with millionaire tycoons, best-selling novelists, and top-ranking musicians, Herbert Bayer is Aspen’s most world-famous resident.”¹⁰ During his years in Aspen, he resided at times at 234 W. Francis, a Victorian home in the West End, in an apartment in a downtown commercial building, 501 E. Cooper Avenue, and in his home on Red Mountain. Bayer moved to Santa Barbara for health reasons in 1975 and died there ten years later, the last surviving Bauhaus master.

Notable among Bayer’s many achievements include his credits in typography. He designed the “universal” type font in 1925 and was credited with “liberating typography and design in advertising and creating the very look of advertising we take for granted today.”¹¹ Much of modern print design reflects his ideas. He was the inventor of photomontage. Bayer created the “World Geo-Graphic Atlas” in 1953, which was described as one of the most beautiful books ever printed in this country by the Atlantic Monthly and the greatest world atlas ever made in the United States by Publisher’s Weekly.



Poster, 1946

Bayer created the famed “Great Ideas of Western Man” advertisement series for the Container Corporation of America and had more than 50 one-man exhibitions of his artistic works. His paintings are represented in the collections of at least 40 museums. He spent six decades of his life working as a painter, photographer, typographer, architect, sculptor, designer of graphics, exhibitions, and landscapes. His last work was the 85 foot tall, yellow articulated wall sculpture at the Denver Design Center, which can be viewed from I-25, near Broadway in Denver.

Bayer founded the International Design Conference in Aspen in 1950 and was named a Trustee of the Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies in 1953. He was the Chair of the City and County Zoning Committee for five years and was very concerned with the issues of sprawl. Bayer promoted increased density in town, put the original tree protection ordinance in place, and helped institute the ban on billboards.

ARCHITECTS OF NOTE

Charles Paterson was born Karl Schanzer in Austria in 1929. His mother died in his youth, and his father fled Austria, taking Charles and his sister when Hitler invaded in 1938. They traveled first to Czechoslovakia and then to France. Once there it was decided that the only way to get the two children out of Europe entirely was to allow

¹⁰ Robert L. Perkin, “Aspen Reborn: Herbert Bayer Changing the Town’s Face,” The Rocky Mountain News September 27, 1955.

¹¹ Joanne Ditmer, “Schlosser Gallery Host to Major Bayer Show/Sale,” The Denver Post October 1, 1997, p. 10G.

them to be adopted by a family in Australia, whom Mr. Schanzer knew through business connections. Relocated to that country in 1940, the children took on the family's name; Paterson. Their father fought in the war and was eventually reunited with his children in New York City, after they immigrated.

In New York City, Charles "Charlie" Paterson started engineering school, but he had an interest in skiing and was disappointed with the conditions in the area. He moved west in 1949, stopping in Denver. There, he worked for the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad and skied on weekends. On one ski trip, Paterson met someone who had been to Aspen, and decided to hitchhike there a week later. After finding a job as a bellhop at the Hotel Jerome, he decided to stay.

Within a month of his arrival in Aspen, Charlie Paterson bought three lots on West Hopkins Avenue, shortly followed by another three that comprised a full half a block between Fifth and Sixth Streets. There he built a one-room cabin in 1949 out of leftover lumber.

Paterson returned to New York from 1950-1951 to continue his studies, then moved back to Aspen and began expanding the cabin. In 1952, he leased a Victorian house that had been operating under the name "Holiday House," and his father came to town to help out. This experience got Paterson interested in running his own lodge, and led to more construction on the Hopkins Avenue property. In 1956, he added three units and opened the Boomerang. Convinced by Fritz Benedict to study architecture, Paterson left again to spend three years at Taliesin East in Wisconsin, under Frank Lloyd Wright's instruction, during which time he drew some of the plans for the Boomerang Lodge as it is known today.

The lodge's lounge, 12 more rooms, and a pool were added in 1960. The noted underwater window, which allows guests in the lounge to look into the pool, was featured in Life Magazine in the 1960's. In 1965 and 1970 other expansions took place on the property.



Boomerang Lodge

Although Paterson has designed relatively few buildings, among them his own business, structures at the Christiania Lodge, and a residence in Basalt, the Boomerang is his master work, exhibiting strong influences of Wrightian architecture. Paterson designed, helped to build, and financed the structure, and is still its host and manager today. It has been described as "...timeless, ageless" and "...almost futuristic."¹²

Other contributions to local organizations made by Paterson include being a member of the

¹² Scott Dial, "The Boomerang Lodge: The Lodge That Charlie Built, and Built, and Built," [Destination Magazine](#).

Board of the Music Associates of Aspen for 20 years, Chairman of the Aspen Hall of Fame for 2 years and of the Aspen Board of Adjustment for 20 years and counting. He has also served on the Aspen Chamber Resort Association Board of Directors. Paterson worked for the Aspen Skiing Company as an instructor from 1952 to 1969.

Eleanor “Ellie” Brickham graduated from the University of Colorado’s School of Architecture. Construction was a family business, so Brickham’s motivation to be a designer began as a child. She moved to Aspen in 1951, attracted by the skiing, but once there, found herself the only female architect in town.

Early in her career, Brickham worked in Fritz Benedict’s office and collaborated on projects with both Benedict and Bayer, participating in the work going on at the Aspen Institute. During her time in that office, and later with her own firm, she designed a number of residences and commercial structures in town, including houses for several Music Festival artists in Aspen Grove, the Strandberg Residence (1973, 433 W. Bleeker Street), and the Patricia Moore Building (1969, 610 E. Hyman Avenue.) Within Pitkin County, Brickham designed numerous homes in Starwood, on Red Mountain, and in Pitkin Green. Her works total at least 50 buildings in the Aspen area.



433 W. Bleeker Street, 1973

Brickham’s designs have been characterized by spare, simple forms and detailing, and she has an interest in passive solar techniques. Still practicing today, Brickham’s projects focus on an “impeccable sense of proportion and feeling of lightness.”¹³

Victor Lundy designed a second home for his family in Aspen, which they have occupied at 300 Lake Avenue since 1972. Like Benedict, Lundy is a Fellow in the American Institute of Architects. He received his degree in architecture from Harvard, studying with former Bauhaus director Walter Gropius and Bauhaus master Marcel Breuer and was later awarded two prestigious traveling scholarships by the Boston Society of Architects and Harvard University.



300 Lake Avenue. 1972

Lundy has been in practice, most recently in Texas, since 1951 and has designed many notable government, commercial, office, and educational buildings throughout the world. He has received a Federal Design Achievement award, the highest honor in design given by the National Endowment for the Arts.

¹³ Bill Rollins, “Brickham: Simplicity, Lightness, and a Sense of Proportion,” [The Aspen Times](#).

Robin Molny (b.1928- Cleveland, d. 1997- Aspen) apprenticed at Taliesen in the 1950's. In Aspen, he served on the Planning and Zoning Commission and was the designer of Aspen's downtown pedestrian malls. He also designed several notable commercial buildings, including the Hearthstone House (1967, 134 E. Hyman Avenue) and the 720 E. Hyman Avenue building (1976) along with area residences.

Well known architect **Harry Weese** also contributed a building to Aspen in the Given Institute (1973, 100 E. Francis Street). Weese, of Harry Weese and Associates, Chicago, was an internationally known architect responsible for a number of significant projects throughout the United States, including major historic preservation projects in the Chicago area, and the design of the Washington, D.C. subway system. A graduate of MIT, he studied with famed architect Eliel Saarinen at Cranbrook Academy in Michigan, and then joined Skidmore, Owing, and Merrill for a short time. In 1947 he opened his own office. Weese was recruited by the Paepcke's, who donated the land where the Given is located, to design the building.



100 E. Francis Street. 1973

Eligibility Considerations

There are specific physical features that a property must possess in order for it to reflect the significance of the historic context. Aspen's examples of modernist buildings should exhibit the following distinctive characteristics if influenced by Wrightian design principles:

- Low horizontal proportions, flat roofs or low pitched hip roofs.
- Deep roof overhangs create broad shadow lines across the façade. Glazing is usually concentrated in these areas.
- Horizontal emphasis on the composition of the wall planes accentuates the floating effect of the roof form.
- Materials are usually natural and hand worked; such as rough sawn wood timbers and brick. Brick is generally used as a base material, wall infill or in an anchoring fireplace element. Wood structural systems tend more toward heavy timber or post and beam than typical stud framing.
- Structural members and construction methods are usually expressed in the building. For example; load-bearing columns may be expressed inside and out, the wall plane is then created by an infill of glass or brick.
- Roof structure is often expressed below the roof sheathing
- Glass is used as an infill material which expresses a void or a structural system; or it is used to accentuate the surface of a wall through pattern or repetition.
- There is typically no trim which isolates the glazing from the wall plane. Window openings are trimmed out to match adjacent structural members in a wood context. Brick openings tend to be deeply set with no trim other than the brick return.

- Structures are related to the environment through battered foundation walls, cantilevered floors and/or porches, clear areas of glazing which create visual connections to the outside and the inside, and the effect of the roof plane hovering over the ground.
- Decoration comes out of the detailing of the primary materials and the construction techniques. No applied decorative elements are used.
- Color is usually related to the natural colors of materials for the majority of the structure; natural brick, dark stained wood, and white stucco. Accent colors are used minimally, and to accentuate the horizontal lines of the structure.

Aspen's examples of modernist buildings should exhibit the following distinctive characteristics if influenced by Bauhaus or International Style design principles:

- Simple geometric forms, both in plan and elevation
- Flat roofs, usually single story, otherwise proportions are long and low, horizontal lines are emphasized.
- Asymmetrical arrangement of elements.
- Windows are treated as slots in the wall surface, either vertically or horizontally. Window divisions were made based on the expression of the overall idea of the building.
- Detailing is reduced to composition of elements instead of decorative effects. No decorative elements are used.
- Design is focused on rationality, reduction, and composition. It is meant to separate itself from style and sentimentality.
- Materials are generally manufactured and standardized. The "hand" is removed from the visual outcome of construction. Surfaces are smooth with minimal or no detail at window jambs, grade, and at the roof edge.
- Entry is generally marked by a void in the wall, a cantilever screen element, or other architectural clue that directs the person into the composition.
- Buildings are connected to nature through the use of courtyards, wall elements that extend into the landscape, and areas of glazing that allow a visual connection to the natural environment. This style relies on the contrast between the machine made structure and the natural landscape to heighten the experience of both elements.
- Schemes are monochromatic, using neutral colors, generally grays. Secondary color is used to reinforce a formal idea. In this case color, or lack thereof, is significant to the reading of the architectural idea.

Although modernism has likely changed the course of architecture forever, it is possible to set a date when the style in its purest form began to wane: around the mid 1960's nationally, and into the early 1970's in Aspen. At this point, there was a growing unease with some ways the Modern Movement had reshaped cities and resulted in "towers and slab blocks"¹⁴ followed by a move away from the design principals that had guided the mid-century. The period of historic significance for buildings of this style in

¹⁴ Kostof, p. 743.

Aspen, a term used to define the time span during which the style gained architectural, historical, or geographical importance, is 1945 until approximately 1975.

Aspen has been fortunate to have drawn the talents of the great minds in many professional fields since the end of World War II. The architects described above had made important contributions to Aspen's built environment that continue to influence its character today. While there are numerous towns in Colorado that have retained some of the character of their 19th century mining heritage, few or none are also enriched by such an excellent collection of modernist buildings as exist here.

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