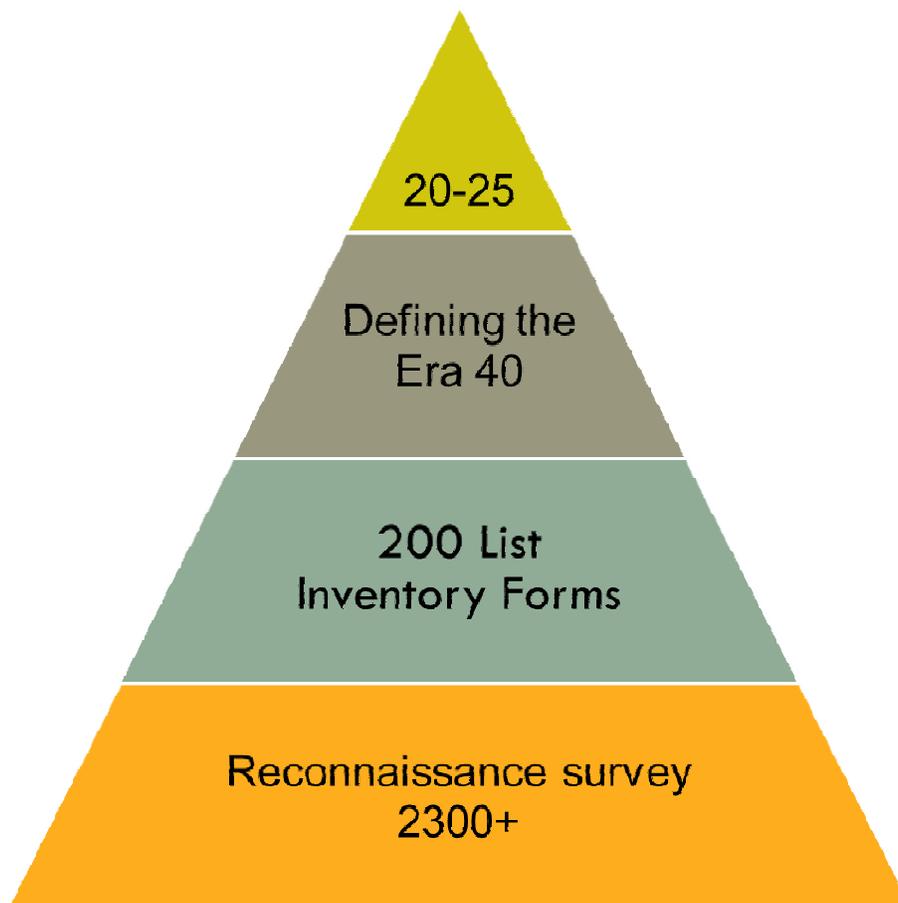


The St. Louis City Mid-Century Modern Survey: Introduction

The City of St. Louis received a grant in early 2012 for the completion of a thematic survey of non-residential Modern Movement architecture built between 1945 and 1975. The term Modern Movement is used for this project to encompass various styles of the mid-century Modern era, but does not include the Art Deco, Modernistic, Streamline, and Moderne styles that were widely used before 1940. The project will identify a group of properties that are eligible for listing in the National Register and that may be designated as City Landmarks. The grant is from the Missouri State Historic Preservation Office and the National Park Service. Peter Meijer Architect, PC, a firm experienced in assessing Modern architecture, was selected as consultant for the project. The survey will be completed by September 2013.



Stages of the Survey Project

The Reconnaissance Survey

The Cultural Resources Office began the reconnaissance level survey – documentation of the extent of the resources at a minimum level – by using the City’s GEO St. Louis database of real property and the building construction dates included therein. This list of properties, and additional ones observed in the field, were documented with photographs and classified by property type – commercial building, office, warehouse, school, etc. Over 2300 properties were recorded in this brief way.

As Cultural Resources Office staff explored the city with camera and clipboard, the wealth of architecture from the period under study became quite evident. Visiting favorite buildings and areas, the sense of discovery of a modern church in a residential neighborhood, the puzzling over the function of what was finally determined to be a “drive-up” bank as opposed to a “drive-thru” one, and the gradual understanding of where building occurred during this period overshadowed any sense of the *work* of the survey. The reconnaissance survey confirmed what had been supposed: There’s so much out there.

The 200 List

Peter Meijer Architect project staff then reviewed the recorded properties and, in conjunction with the State Historic Preservation Office and the Cultural Resources Office, selected a group of some 200 properties to be recorded on the State’s standard architectural survey form. The selection considered the representation of various architectural style and building types, as well as geographic distribution. The term “200-worthy” entered the office vocabulary as it was so difficult to decide which buildings would be included in the group to be documented on forms. The consultants took additional photographs, wrote descriptions of the buildings, and carefully examined the historic integrity and architectural merits of these properties.

St. Louis’ richness of architecture from the 1945 to 1975 period became quite evident. The “200 List” includes buildings that are likely to be eligible for listing in the National Register or as City Landmarks upon further consideration. The group includes schools, libraries, health care buildings and churches. Commercial buildings, mixed-use complexes, banks, office buildings and downtown tall buildings are also represented. While the architects for some of the buildings are known, and others remain to be determined, it is clear that clients in St. Louis did not shy away from Modern expression in favor of the traditional or pedestrian presence for new buildings.

From this list, about 50 properties were selected for further scrutiny and consideration for presentation at the project’s first public meeting. Architectural excellence and National Register and City Landmark eligibility continued to guide the selection of properties for further study. As additions and alterations were

considered, as well as architectural excellence, the group was reduced to the 40 buildings to be presented at the public meeting, the “Defining the Era” group.

The February 2013 meeting seeks to learn how members of the public assess the buildings that clearly “Define the Era” of Modern Architecture, 1945 to 1975 in St. Louis. After a review of the 40 buildings under consideration, attendees will be asked to indicate which buildings they feel merit further study and documentation as part of this grant project. This group of buildings is presented in a PDF document on this web page.

What Happens Next

Soon the consultants will be working on a group of 20 to 25 buildings for further documentation and will be preparing statements of significance for them. This information, as well as the historic contexts and other materials will provide a framework for property owners, the Cultural Resources Office and others to use for the architectural evaluation of these buildings.