

Building Scene

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★ ★ 10

Bank branch image conveys permanence

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Poet Ogden Nash once wrote, "Bankers are just like anybody else, except richer."

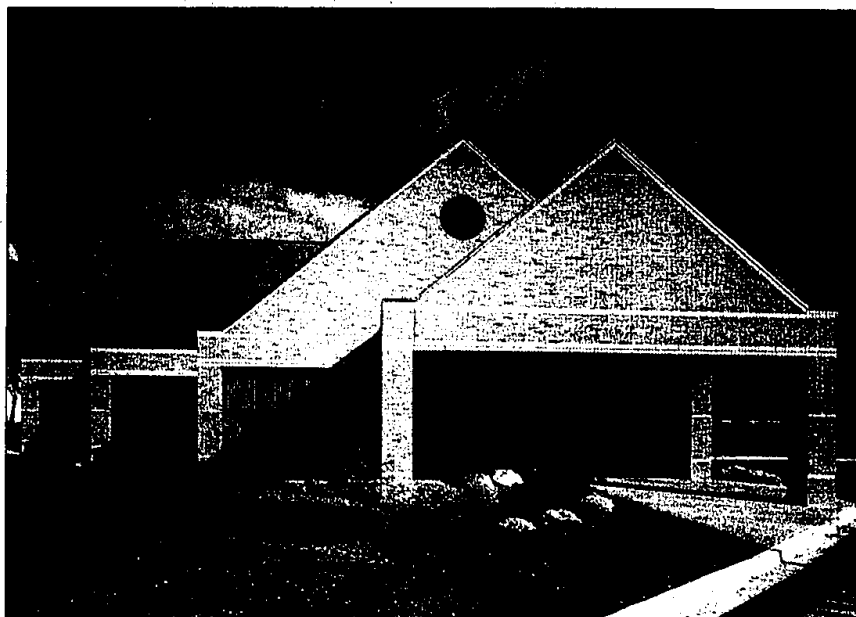
"Richer" is often measured in terms of dollars, but it can also have another connotation in banking — image. In search of an image, Michigan National Bank embarked on a campaign of putting on a happy face with building a new headquarters in Farmington Hills.

It was a vote of confidence by Michigan National in itself, its customers and also a commitment to the saleability of the banking industry. Such an effort nurtured an image that "fosters a look of stability, solidity and conservatism," said Carl Luckenbach, principal architect of

Luckenbach/Ziegelman and Partners, Birmingham, who designed the headquarters building.

During the 1960s and '70s, Michigan National underwent considerable growth, accompanied by similar-sized growing pains. It expanded its branch operations throughout the state within strict budget constraints that sometimes necessitated the reuse of vacant gas stations to expedite its growth. When new branches were built, they too were done within a limited budget that posed a design challenge to the architects who planned them.

The solution was a straightforward, simple, utilitarian structure that took on the formalist style of the 1960s within a format of aggregate, polished marble or granite panels often arranged on buildings



CHRISTOPHER LARK

The new: A post-modern structure on Hunter in Bloomfield Township.

that lent a prefabricated, transitory appearance. Nonetheless, this look satisfied the functional needs of branch operations as well as the developmental stages of the bank.

WHEN ROBERT MYLOD took over as chief executive officer in 1985, he became directly involved in the look of the bank's headquarters, saying, "We're not in the business of building buildings, and we wanted to

hire someone professional to ensure that everything was done correctly." Thus ensuring the visual stability of the home office, it now has had an ancillary effect on the look of the new branch buildings.

A branch standards committee was formed involving employees familiar with operational procedures, facilities managers and an in-house design consultant. The end result was the design of two branches —

one in Ann Arbor, the other at East Livernois in Clawson.

The design of these buildings was essentially a spinoff of the headquarters in Farmington Hills. Round windows inside the gable ends of the roofs and brickwork reminiscent of colonial Williamsburg further perpetuated the image of early American architecture that was originally sought. Taking design elements from both of these branches, a standard

prototype was arrived that would serve as a model for new branch buildings.

John Kilde, first vice president and director of facilities management, said the silhouette of the branches serves as a "visual clue" for customers. Based on the prototype, they are supplanting their formalized, fabricated predecessors across southeastern Michigan.



The old: a utilitarian structure.



Central Energy Plant at Chrysler Technology Center.

Hats off to Giffels

The Michigan Society of Professional Engineers honored Giffels Associates, Southfield, with a first-place award for work on the Central Energy Plant at the Chrysler Technology Center in Auburn Hills.

The honor was in the private practice category of the society's practice division awards program.

Giffels designed the plant and provided Chrysler with related engineering services and counsel in the areas of energy conservation, occupational health and safety and the environment.

The Central Energy Plant is the source of utility services of the 3.2 million-square-foot tech center, which was dedicated by Chrysler last month. The energy plant contains 35,000 square feet on the ground floor with a 6,000-square-foot mezzanine. Included in the facility are hot water generators, chillers,

air compressors, electrical switchgear and associated pumps, piping and cable. Outside the facility are cooling towers, chilled water storage tanks, a fire protection pump house and storage tanks for a stand-by fuel oil supply.

Giffels also designed the buildings housing the Scientific Test Facility, considered the heart of the tech center, and a 1.8-mile evaluation road for Chrysler's product development program.

The Central Energy Plant also earned a construction and design award from the Engineering Society of Detroit and the Chrysler Pentastar award for quality.

Giffels is the state's largest architectural/engineering firm with a professional staff of 491, including 50 registered architects and 106 registered engineers.

Technological advances give edge to today's builders

"They don't build 'em like they used to" is a common refrain heard about nearly every consumer product. But when it comes to houses, the prospective buyer needs to go on more than a time-worn phrase.

The advantages of buying a house in an established neighborhood are obvious: housing stock that has stood the test of time, building materials that may no longer be available at a reasonable cost, location, landscaping already in place, existing infrastructure, reasonably steady taxes, existing neighborhood schools, churches, synagogues and shopping districts.

Still, for some buyers there's nothing that compares to being the original owner of a newly built house. And despite the old axiom, many new houses are better-built with the result that they are safer, more energy efficient and require less maintenance than their earlier counterparts.

"Newer homes are much more fire-safe than home built prior to 1970," said James Bonadeo, president of the Builders Association of Southeastern Michigan.

Many new houses have smoke detectors wired in on every level. Usually, they are interconnected so that if one detector alarm sounds, they all sound. Many smoke detectors are required to have battery back-up.

Electrical systems in new houses are sized for heavier electrical demands, and wiring systems are less likely to cause fires. More electrical outlets translates to fewer extension cords that can overload circuits, trip occupants and start fires.

CIRCUIT BREAKERS have replaced fuse boxes that can be overloaded by using the wrong-size fuse. Ground fault interrupters for bathrooms, kitchens and outside receptacles reduce the chance of fire and electrocution.

Glass tub enclosures and patio doors in new home are no tempered so that they will crumble when breaking instead of shattering into jagged pieces that can se-

riously injure people," Bonadeo said.

In the past 20 years builders and buyers have learned much about the health risks of certain building products. Asbestos has been eliminated from shingles, pipe,

cement board, roof tar, floor and ceiling tiles, and insulation.

ASBESTOS HAS been known to increase the risk of



Improved insulation and windows substantially reduce heat and cooling loss.

respiratory diseases when fibers become airborne.

Other culprits are lead and formaldehyde.

"Lead can cause a wide range of physical and mental ailments. It is not used as an ingredient in paint anymore, and it is no longer used as solder for plumbing," Bonadeo said. "Also, formaldehyde emissions from particle board and hardwood plywood have been greatly reduced in new homes."

Where radon is a problem, control systems can be installed before the house is built. This usually includes a layer of gravel and polyethylene film beneath basement floors and concrete slabs. Older houses frequently have no gravel in place to collect the gas, no polyethylene film to retard movement of the gas through the slab and vent pipes. Reducing radon levels from an existing house is generally far more expensive than building radon prevention techniques into a new house.

DETERMINING GEOLOGIC features of the area on which a house will be built comes into play for today's builder. For example, in areas of expansive soil, tests are conducted and foundations engineered to resist or accommodate soil movement. Basement construction has been improved to resist cracking, and drains are installed to help prevent leaks.

New building products make roofs and floors stronger and quieter than those in houses where board sheathing was used. New types of trusses on roofs and floors not only increase strength but permit greater design flexibility by eliminating most load-bearing walls inside the house.

Perhaps one of the biggest advances is in energy efficiency.

"New homes consume half as much energy as homes built prior to 1980 because of more efficient heating and cooling systems, better windows, control of air infiltration and improved insulation," Bonadeo said.