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But wait a minute. What was that you just whizzed by on Telegraph north of Square Lake Road in Bloomfield Township?

It sure looked like golden arches, but what the heck were they attached to? Naw, couldn't be. Could it?

It is.

A new approach

The Bloomfield Township McDonald's is but one of a growing number of buildings that takes a new approach when it comes to traditional architecture.

Miko Goodman, regional construction manager for McDonald's, said the relaxation of corporate standards on the traditional McDonald's architecture is driven by community restrictions and to a lesser degree, by franchisers who want something a little different.

Many restaurants are very different from what people would have found even five years ago.

Goodman said he doesn't think corporations with a vested interest in a particular architectural style are likely to completely abandon them. It is, however, likely that future stores will be an amalgamation of traditional and new styles.

"I don't think you'll see a McDonald's without the golden arches," he said. The main roof will also remain near and dear to the corporation's heart, he said.

"But I think there's room for a blend of other styles," he added.

McDonald's, he added, has been slowly evolving its style from the usual earthen brick to lighter, more

open architecture even without the request of communities and franchisers.

New look at Kmart

Jeffrey Budday, president of JBA Architects Inc. in Birmingham, is designing the new Kmart on Telegraph in Bloomfield Township. The design is strikingly different for the now common gray and red building with the large red 'K'.

Budday said it is no surprise to people in the building trades that communities are placing more and more restrictions on businesses.

"What drives any retailer?" Budday said. "Location. And once location is decided upon, everything else is driven by that."

So if Kmart wants a store in Bloomfield Township, it has to meet certain requirements of the community.

"There is a tremendous strength (in communities) to stick to their guns on zoning and building codes," he said. "The desire for a certain location — how strong that desire is — determines how far a company will bend."

Which is not to say Kmart's design is being totally driven by Bloomfield Township. "Kmart does have a series of standards when they want to build in a more upscale area."

Breaking mold at Infiniti

Architect Ron Kaliszewski, a partner at the architectural firm Luckenbach/Zieglerman and Partners in Birmingham, designed the Infiniti automobile dealership in Birmingham.

The typical Infiniti dealership is contemporary design consisting of white planes and glass. The Birmingham Infiniti is strikingly different and looks nothing like an auto dealership — at least on the outside.

"It took some arm bending on our part (to get Infiniti to agree to the changes)," Kaliszewski said. For example, instead of exterior insulated wall system, they opted for brick. "We upgraded the building substantially."

Kaliszewski said while he had to comply with certain design and architectural restrictions handed down by Infiniti, owner Fred Lavrey (and Birmingham) wanted something that was more in keeping with Birmingham's traditional, conservative image.

Fred Lavrey had a plan in mind that didn't look like an oriental car dealership," Kaliszewski said.

"Infiniti has a prototype that is very original, but Mr. Lavrey had a site that wasn't very forgiving," he said.

Fortunately, the location is adjacent to Lavrey's other dealership, which meant service could be performed nearby without adding the garage area to the dealership itself.

Plus, the cost of property in Birmingham necessitated the building have additional uses, hence the second-floor office space included in Fred Lavrey Infiniti.

How likely are corporations to deviate from their trademark architecture?

"That depends," Kaliszewski said. "Sales — or lack of sales — can change a lot."

How to remove unwanted Z-Brick

Home repair questions answered by Popular Mechanics Magazine:

Q. I recently purchased a home with Z-Brick on one of the kitchen walls. I'd like to remove the Z-Brick, and wallpaper the entire kitchen. Can you recommend a product that is fast, easy and safe for removing Z-Brick?

A. Z-Brick is a molded ceramic type material measuring about three-eighths inch thick. It's applied with a mastic to an interior wall, giving it the appearance of a real brick wall. Removing the Z-Brick without damaging the surface behind it is virtually impossible. Knocking the Z-Brick off the wall with a hammer is somewhat hazardous because pieces of Z-Brick will fly all over.

The fastest, most economical way to remove the Z-Brick is the most radical. That is, take the wallboard with the Z-Brick on it off the wall, ripping it back to the studs, then recover the wall with new gypsum board. This sounds harder and more radical than it is.

Be careful not to damage any wires that might be in the wall cavity. Also, be sure to wear eye protection and a respirator or dust mask during the job.

Although removing the Z-Brick is somewhat messy, the job should go relatively fast. Since there is only one wall with Z-Brick, cover the wall and remove the mess all within a half day's work.

Any other removal method will not give the wall the smooth surface necessary for wallpapering.

Q. Our 1973 automatic frostless refrigerator-freezer forms ice in the bottom. What do you suppose is wrong?

A. First, check that the ice does, in fact, melt when your unit is in its automatic-defrost cycle. Open the door and see if water runs down the tube at the back.

Then inspect to be sure that the water passages from the freezer section are clear. Remove any food or packaging material that may be obstructing the water passages.

Remove the cover over the defroster mechanism and check for a blocked hose. You can run a flexible wire carefully into the tube to help remove any obstructions. While the cover is opened, check the defrost unit action by advancing the defrost timer. Rotate the dial clockwise.

The fact that your refrigerator runs frequently could indicate that fan, coils, and compressor need cleaning. You may also have a low Freon level. Check this and add Freon if the level is too low.

Q. What is the reason for the warning about using specific maximum wattage (such as 60-watt) bulbs in lamps and fixtures?

A. The reason for such warnings is to minimize the chance of heat buildup and fire that can result if you use a higher wattage bulb in that fixture.

To submit a question, write to Popular Mechanics, Reader Service Bureau, 224 W. 67th Street, New York, NY 10019. The most interesting questions will be answered in a future column.

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