MIDCENTURY MARVELS

COMMERCIAL ARCHITECTURE OF PHOENIX 1945-1975

CITY OF PHOENIX HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
AND RYDEN ARCHITECTS, INC.

LODGING

As a rare, surviving local example of Googie-style roadside design, the City Center Motel dynamically balances the imagery of nature and technology. Its ponderous, battered stone pylon set amid lush greenery of raised planters counterbalances the audacious launch of the angular carport roof. This sleek, soaring roof plane is itself a billboard advertising itself—a fine motel demonstration of Wright's "form and function are one."

Barbara Stocklin Postcard Collection

The function of roadside architecture is to attract attention through dramatic forms. Architect William D. Knight Jr. and builder Ben Paller used this design approach here to create visual excitement through complex and contradictory visual relationships. Many themes of the Googie style can be traced to the ideas of Frank Lloyd Wright who rooted his buildings firmly in the earth, built walls of natural stone, wood and bricks, and spread out sheltering roofs like the boughs of a tree. At Wright's

Taliesin West, the heavy desert stone walls provided a sturdy platform for the support of lightweight roof canopies. He used the metaphor of "cave and bower" for this contrasting visual arrangement.

On the other hand, many European Modernists insisted that boxlike buildings should be set in contrast with nature as man-made machines for living independent of the environment. As shown on the vintage postcard above, original plantings enhanced the base of the building

and created a visual buffer from the street. The glare of the sun is cut by the ornamental space-age metal screens. In concert with the architecture, the futuristic roof sign catches motorists' attention as they cruise the old highway searching for suitable lodgings near the center of the city. As is typical of highway motels, the lobby and drive-thru canopy makes the big architectural statement while the guest room wings are fairly simple functional buildings that are little more than decorated boxes.