

The Woodbourne Library, Centerville, OH

The Woodbourne Library began its life as the Far Hills Branch of the Hunter Savings Association. It formally opened on May 3, 1965. While not technically a bank, the building program resembled that of a branch bank, with offices and work stations for financial officers and staff, lobby and conference areas for customers, and a vault for deposits and specie. Hunter Savings formed a subsidiary part of the savings and loan business of the developing financial empire of Cincinnati entrepreneur Carl H Lindner, then President and Chair of American Financial Corporation.

Hunter Savings hired as its designer Woodward (Woodie) Garber (1913-1994), one of the most original of Cincinnati's Modernist architects. Garber, who came from a family of architects, designed some of the region's most innovative buildings, including the main Cincinnati-Hamilton County Library (1955), Procter Hall, the Nursing School at the University of Cincinnati (1968), and Saunder Hall, a high-rise dormitory at UC (1971), as well as numerous other commercial buildings and houses. Garber's Cincinnati buildings have suffered considerably from neglect and demolition; the Woodbourne Library is now one of his rare buildings that survives intact and in good condition.

The building is a rectangle in plan, with seven structural bays on its north and south sides and eight bays on the east and west. It is a building of exquisite precision. A series of slender, steel, I-section posts, supporting a flat roof, encircle its perimeter. Set back a few feet inside these posts is a wall of tinted glass, enclosing the interior space. The interiors were originally mostly open, with seating groups of classic, Modernist furniture floating on brightly colored carpets. Conference rooms were walled in glass (for visual openness and acoustical privacy) while solid walls enclosed service spaces and employee offices at the core and south side of the floor plan. The building has two highly innovative features: its major structural material and its integral sunscreens. The material is Cor-Ten steel, invented in the 1930s, but introduced commercially only in the early 1960s. It is a "weathering steel" with controlled corrosion that creates a thin layer of "rust" on its outer surface, sealing it off from further oxidation. This new steel suddenly solved the Modernist "problem" of exposed metallic structure (the only previous solution being painting--and re-painting). The sun-screens shade the interiors on the south and west sides of the building (and originally on the east facade too, though those screens were removed for the library expansions on the east). The sun-screens comprise a series of deep, steel boxes, suspended orthogonally in the building's central bays and diagonally at the corner bays. The interiors of some of the boxes are painted in red, blue and white, which tints the light coming in to the interiors. The design of these sculptural sunscreens may have been done in Garber's office, but there is also a possibility that the architect consulted his friend and collaborator, Modernist sculptor Harry Bertioia, for their design. More research is needed on this point, but Garber used Bertioia sculpture in his previous buildings of the 1950s, and the inspiration for the sun-screens at the Woodbourne Library probably developed from Garber's work with Bertioia on an unbuilt design of 1956 for the Cornell University Library, for which Bertioia designed a full, exterior wall as a sculptural sun-screen. At the Woodbourne Library, both the overhanging roof and the sun-screens present a highly imaginative solution to the problems of the Modernist, glass box building by making it more fully responsive to environmental issues of solar shading and passive cooling. With his outer, post "colonnade" and roof overhangs, Garber made the building more habitable than similar glass box buildings by notable Modernist architects such as Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson.

Patrons originally entered the building in the middle of the north front, the only facade without the sunscreens. The dark, steel framing, the sun-screens, and the tinted glass walls give the building a

slightly mysterious and inscrutable quality that engenders curiosity about its interior spaces and functions.

In 1978-79, Glaser & Myers architects of Cincinnati designed and built an addition on the east side of the building, with a new entrance, and reprogrammed and redesigned some of the interiors of the original building in order to convert it to a library. The Woodbourne Library opened in 1980 and, in 1985, Glaser & Myers designed another addition to the east to accommodate further library functions. The additions are of dark-tinted, porcelanized metal panels which blend well with the original building.