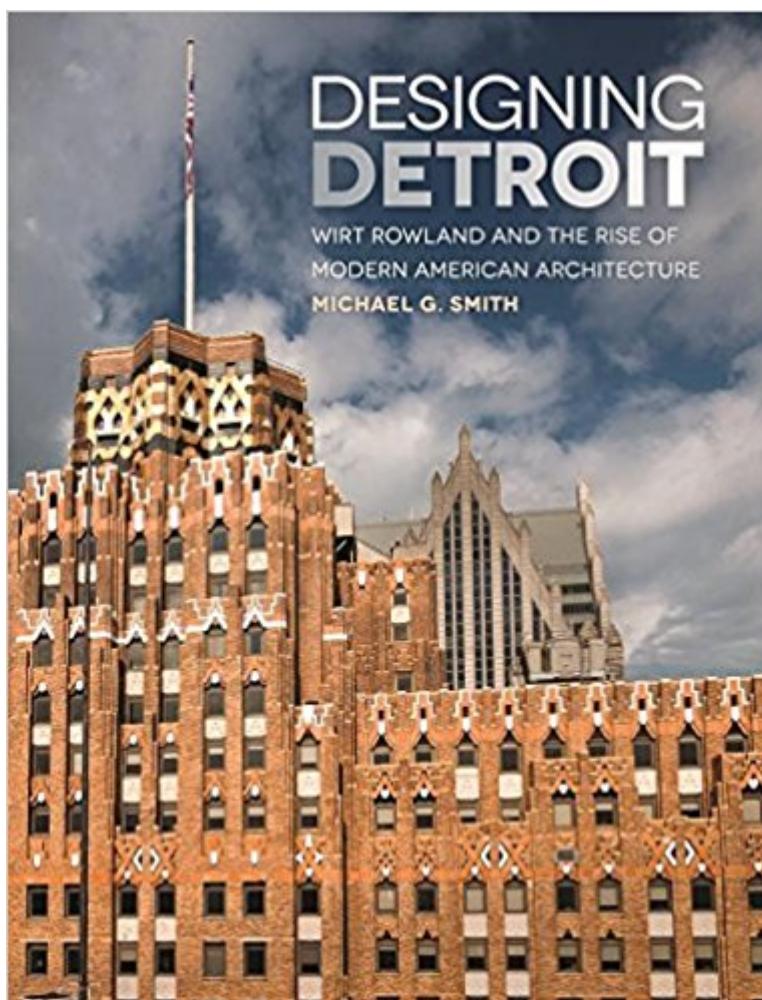


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Designing Detroit: Wirt Rowland And The Rise Of Modern American Architecture (Great Lakes Books Series)



Synopsis

In the early 1900s, Detroit was leading the nation in architectural innovation and designer Wirt Rowland was at the forefront of this advancement, yet few are even aware of his substantial contribution to the evolution of architectural style. It is widely believed that celebrated local architect Albert Kahn designed many of Detroit's structures, such as the General Motors and First National Bank buildings. In fact, while Kahn's efforts were focused on running his highly successful firm, it was Rowland, his chief designer, who was responsible for the appearance and layout of these buildings—an important point in appreciating the contributions of both Kahn and Rowland. During the early twentieth century, Rowland devised a wholly new or "modern" design for buildings, one not reliant on decorative elements copied from architecture of the past. As buildings became more specialized for their intended use, Rowland met the challenge with entirely new design methodologies and a number of improved technologies and materials that subsequently became commonplace. *Designing Detroit: Wirt Rowland and the Rise of Modern American Architecture* begins with a brief overview of Rowland's early life and career. Author Michael G. Smith goes on to analyze Rowland's achievements in building design and as a leader of Detroit's architectural community throughout both World Wars and the Great Depression. The interdependence of architecture with the city's fluctuating economic prosperity and population growth is explored, illuminating the conditions for good architecture and the arts in general. The author identifies the influence of Jay Hambidge's "dynamic symmetry" in Rowland's work and how it allowed him to employ color as a modern replacement for traditional ornamentation, leading to the revolutionary design of the Union Trust (Guardian) Building, for which he receives nearly unanimous praise in national media. This book is concerned primarily with Rowland's influence on Detroit architecture, but spans beyond his work in Michigan to include the designer's broad reach from New York to Miami. A comprehensive appendix includes extensive lists of Rowland's publications, locations he had designed, and jobs taken on by his firm during his tenure. This book represents new research and insights not previously discussed in either scholarly or general audience texts and will be of interest to casual readers of Detroit history, as well as architecture historians.

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Customer Reviews

Shines a light on Detroit architect Wirt Rowland who, until now, has largely slipped into obscurity.

Michael G. Smith is a Detroit-area architecture historian with an interest in early twentieth-century building and construction. His lifelong enthusiasm for the fine arts led to an early career as a graphic artist and, more recently, his photography work has been published internationally.

This remarkable book is really three books in one. For anyone interested in a history of Detroit, you will find that learning about Detroit's golden age through the prism of its buildings is a fascinating experience here. For anyone with even a passing interest in architecture, your appetite will be sated and your knowledge of this art form will increase immeasurably. Smith's insights into the "art of architecture" are eye-opening. But the book is also a biography of an extraordinary individual who is very little known even in his home town. Anyone in Detroit who has done any research on its historic buildings will know the name Albert Kahn, but few, I think would know Wirt Rowland. This book settles the score. Very well researched and well written, well put together with excellent photographs, this is a wonderfully engaging read and fabulous coffee table book to boot. I cannot recommend it highly enough!

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