



Modern in Houston



Photo by Ben Hill 2009

PENGUIN ARMS APARTMENTS

Architect: Arthur Moss
(1950)
2902 Revere Street

This building is an impressive head-turner, an exciting example of architecture designed to be viewed and appreciated from a moving automobile. Its style is a hybrid of two major architectural trends: Googie and Organic. Their unique combination in this building reminds us that originality plays well in Houston.

A moniker applied to coffee shops, motels and other roadside architecture, Googie is a modern and futuristic style with a twist of popular culture. Named after John Lautner's designs for a coffee shop in Los Angeles called Googie's, the style includes forms that connote movement through dramatic angles and curvilinear shapes. Penguin Arms is one of the last remaining period examples of Googie in Houston, with the loss of prominent designs like the 59 Diner on IH10 and Kip's Big Boys.

Organic architecture attempts to create a connection between nature and the built structure through a variety of methods. Here the natural stone veneer connects the building firmly to the ground while the mitered edges of the glazed corners allow the occupant and the space to visually connect to the outside.

Regardless of stylistic monikers, the architecture stands out as exuberant and daring, and to this point, clearly a survivor, but for how long? The neighborhood is rapidly developing with new construction replacing older buildings. And the building is suffering from deferred maintenance.

A City of Houston Landmark or Protected Landmark Distinction would have historic and economic benefits for the current owner. Will this enlightened owner act to protect this structure for future generations?