

Paul Thiry

Shaper of Northwest Environment

Paul Thiry (1904 - 1993) is best known for introducing Seattle and the Puget Sound region to European Modernism, which is characterized by pure forms, clean lines, and the use of modern technology such as steel and reinforced concrete.

Thiry was born in Nome, Alaska to French parents, and grew up in Seattle, Washington. He studied architecture at the University of Washington. While a student, he spent the summer of 1927 studying at the American School in Fontainebleau, France, and traveling in France for several months afterward.

Graduating in 1928 and obtaining his license to practice in 1929, Thiry gained experience in the offices of John Graham and Henry Bittman, and also worked for landscape architect Buster Sturtevant, before opening his own office. With the advent of the Depression, Thiry took a year to travel around the world, visiting Asia, Europe and Central America. In his travels, he met influential modernists such as Antonin Raymond and Le Corbusier.

On his return to Seattle in 1935, Thiry embarked on a lifelong practice in which he would work alone or with only one or two partners at a time. He designed his own office at 800 Columbia (demolished) on First Hill in 1946 and would practice here for his entire career. Best known for his work as the principal architect of the 1962 Seattle World's Fair, as well as for designs of expressive, modern churches, houses and institutional projects,

Paul Thiry's career left a lasting impact on the local built environment through a practice focused on research, architectural design, campus design and urban planning. The following projects represent a small sampling of the progression and breadth of his career.



Celebrate National Bike Month & Preservation Month! Go see Thiry's projects on these self-guided bike tours. Choose from one of our three tour options: The Downtown Loop, The Park Path, or The North Loop!

Are you an avid biker and a Thiry enthusiast? Then do it all! Use the addresses included on each tour to create a custom map from your home & see all the sites at once.

Please practice responsible biking – wear a helmet & obey all traffic laws. View all sites from public access points – do not trespass. Take photos along your journey & tag [@HistoricSeattle](#) or use #SeattleThirys when you share on social media.

Farther Afield:

Thiry designed other exceptional buildings in the region, outside the City of Seattle. Two of his outstanding projects are the National Register-listed former **Washington State Library**, 1954-59 (now the Pritchard Building), on the Capitol Campus in Olympia and **Christ Episcopal Church** in Tacoma, 1970, an excellent example of brutalist architecture.



Washington State Library, Olympia



Christ Episcopal Church, Tacoma

Credits:

Title *Paul Thiry: Shaper of Northwest Environment* from a Seattle Times article published 14 January 1962; Lakecrest Apartment Court: City of Seattle Department of Neighborhoods; Thiry house: Larry Novack, c. 1940, Paul Thiry Collection; Chancery: Seattle P-I Collection, Museum of History and Industry; Nichols House: Seattle P-I Collection, Museum of History and Industry; Martin & Eckmann: Seattle P-I Collection, Museum of History and Industry; Northeast Branch Library: Seattle P-I Collection, Museum of History and Industry; Cedar Park Elementary: Seattle Public Schools; St. Demetrios: Seattle P-I Collection, Museum of History and Industry; Washington State Coliseum: Seattle P-I Collection, Museum of History and Industry; Washington Mutual Savings Bank: Historic Seattle; Washington State Library: WA State Digital Archives; Christ Episcopal Church; WA Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation; Thiry office: WA Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation

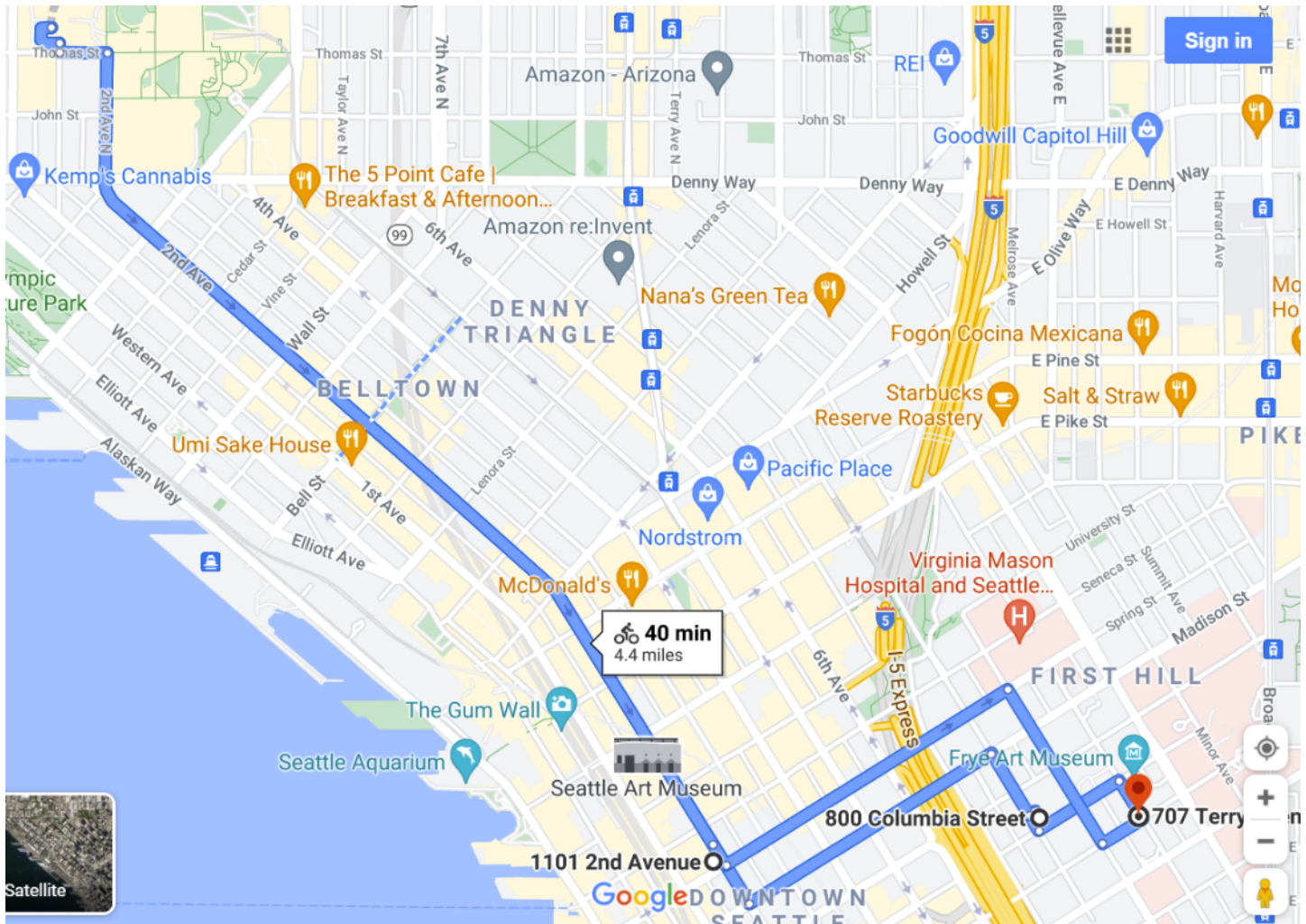


Paul Thiry: Shaper of Northwest Environment

The Downtown Loop

Approximately 4.5 miles/1 hour including stops

Click Map for Link to route



START/FINISH:



Chancery of the Seattle Archdiocese, 1939

707 Terry Ave, First Hill

A practicing Catholic, Thiry was interested in modern church design, co-authoring the book *Churches & Temples* in 1953, and receiving many church commissions in the region. This office building for the Archdiocese, clad in Wilkeson sandstone, reveals just a hint of ornament in subtle incised floral panels. Originally a single story, Thiry refused an offer to design the addition, complaining that the church

would “not have to expand if it would concentrate on its mission and forget about all the social programs they were getting into.”



STOP 2:



Paul Thiry Architectural Office Building, 1946 800 Columbia Street (demolished)

Paul Thiry designed his own office building on First Hill, and it was featured in *Architectural Record* in 1946. The building, which would have qualified as a landmark, fell victim to a loophole in the permitting process and was demolished in 2012. In 2015, Daniels Real Estate acquired an assemblage of property from another developer, including this parcel.

As a preservationist at heart, Kevin Daniels dedicated the corner, where Thiry's office once was, as a public waterfall parklet in Thiry's memory.

STOP 3:



Washington Mutual Savings Bank, 1968 1101 2nd Ave, Downtown

This mid-century downtown bank building replaced the former home of Washington Mutual, which had been housed in a solid bank building constructed in 1899. The modern replacement created a feeling of space and air, with recessed windows and balconies creating an interplay around the four-story tall, prefabricated columns, which were poured

fifteen miles away in Redmond and trucked to the site. The concrete structure was finished with white crushed stone aggregate. Washington Mutual occupied the building for 40 years until the financial collapse of the bank in 2008. It is now occupied by designers, who can be inspired by the work of their predecessor, Paul Thiry.

STOP 4:



Washington State Coliseum, 1958-1962 334 1st Ave N, Seattle Center, Uptown

The iconic Washington State Coliseum continued Thiry's exploration into building technology, also in collaboration with structural engineer Peter Hostmark. As the unique hyperbolic paraboloid roof form emerged, the press called the building a giant aluminum teepee. The

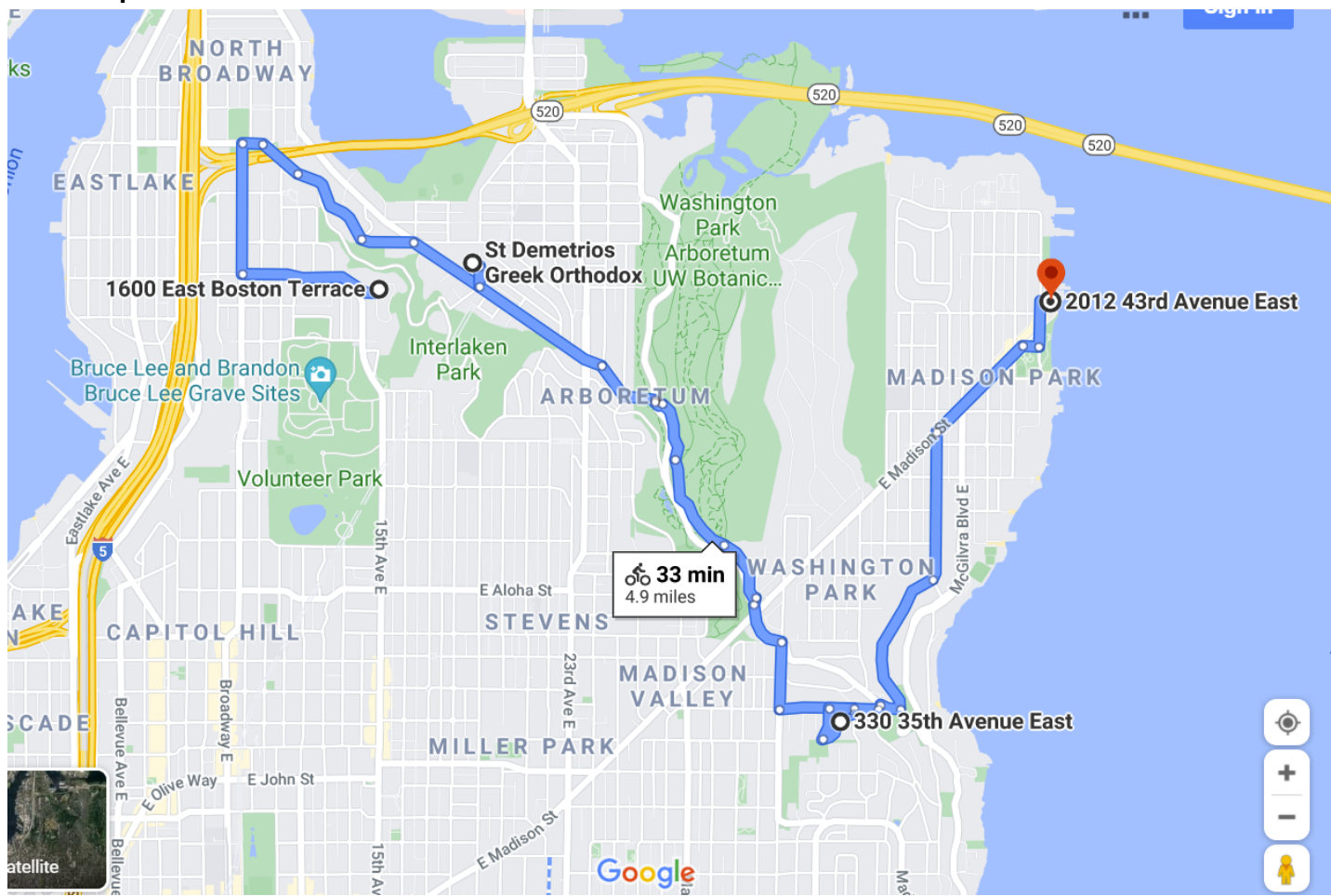
arena has no interior roof supports; the aluminum paneled roof is supported by steel compression trusses and nearly six miles of steel tension cables. As the principal architect of the 1962 World's Fair, Thiry collaborated on the creation of the campus with other prominent designers, including Minoru Yamasaki, Lawrence Halprin, John Graham, and others. After the fair, Thiry oversaw the excavation of the exhibition hall, converting it into a sports and performance venue. The building is currently undergoing another extensive renovation to accommodate new hockey and basketball teams. The Coliseum was designated a City Landmark in 2017, meeting all six designation criteria. It is also listed in the National Register of Historic Places.



The Park Path

Approximately 5 miles/50 minutes including stops

Click Map for Link to route



START:



Nichols House, 1939

1600 E Boston Terrace, Capitol Hill

Thiry did not have an easy time convincing his clients to embrace his enthusiasm for modern architecture. As such, many of his residential designs reflect a hybrid of traditional forms with modernist details. The Nichols house exemplifies this with its hipped roof form and featuring prominent steel corner windows, masonry screen (now glass block) and an occupiable garage roof deck, all composed in pure, white stucco.



STOP 2:



Property of Museum of History & Industry, Seattle

St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church, 1961-1968

2100 Boyer Ave E, Montlake

A modern interpretation of Byzantine vaulted architecture, Thiry was hired to design a new church for the Greek Orthodox community when their proposed church site in the Uptown neighborhood became part of the fairgrounds for the Century 21 Exposition in 1962. Reflecting Thiry's interest in modern building technologies, he worked with structural engineer Peter Hostmark to design eight intersecting vaults of thin shell concrete, topped by a central pre-cast lantern. The technology allowed for expansive luminous openings filled with multicolored glass, supported by a striated brick exterior which helps to blend in the residential neighborhood. The original landscape was designed by Richard Haag.

STOP 3:



Paul Thiry house, Seattle, 1936-1937

330 35th Ave E, Denny Blaine

Thiry & Shay

Inspired by his travels, Thiry envisioned designing a house for himself and his mother that would reflect tenets of high modernism, raised on *piloti*, like stilts, where the steep site's topography and landscape would be undisturbed. However, he was unable to obtain financing for such a non-traditional house. As built, the house was still modern, with its asymmetrical form, flat roof, lack of ornament and use of new materials like prefabricated metal windows, tube steel railings, floor-to-ceiling plate glass windows and sliding doors. Closed at the street but opening to gardens at rear, the house features an open plan. The property was later the longtime home of jewelry artist Ronald Ho.

STOP 4:



Lakecrest Apartment Court, 1928-1929

2012 43rd Ave E, Madison Park

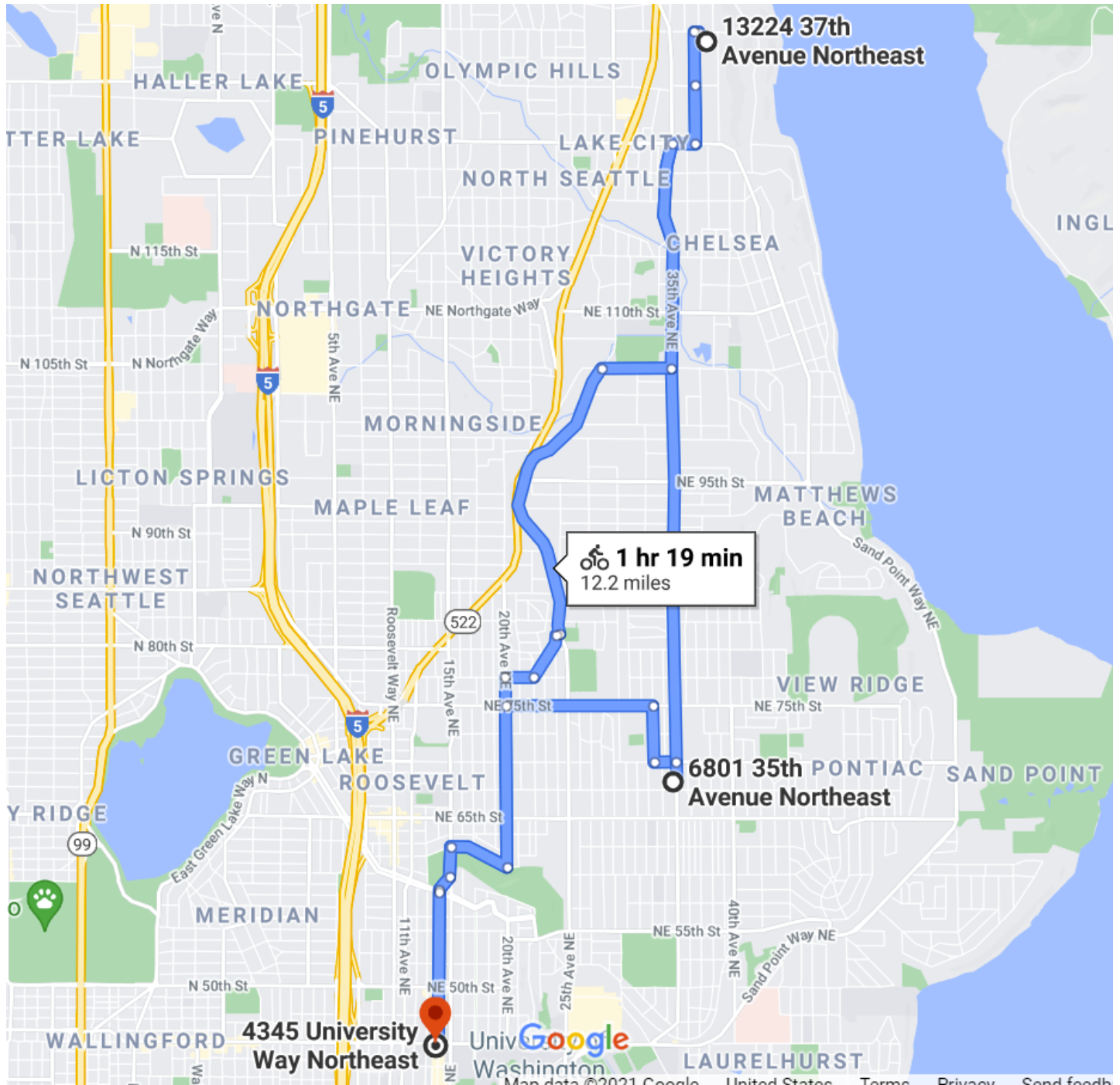
Thiry and his partner James M. Taylor designed the southern section of this collection of five revival style apartment buildings (other sections of the complex were designed by William Bain, Sr., Bain in collaboration with Lionel Pries, and Frederick Anhalt). This early project reflects Thiry's more conservative historicist work in the French Norman style before his travels around the world piqued his interest in modernist design.



More Challenging: The North Loop

Approximately 12 miles/2 hours including stops

Click Map for Link to route



START/FINISH:



Martin & Eckmann, 1949

4345 University Way NE, University District

First opened in 1923, Martin & Eckmann was a staple on The Ave for men's clothing, occupying several locations before hiring Thiry in 1949 to construct a new store on the southwest corner of NE 45th St and University Way NE. The building was a shimmering glass box, with both primary transparent facades allowing for display of the fashionable goods held within.

STOP 2:



Northeast Branch Library, 1953

6801 35th Ave NE, Wedgwood

Reflecting the post-World War II growth of Seattle, the Northeast Branch Library was constructed to serve expanding single family neighborhoods north of the university. With its sweeping post and beam gable form constructed of steel and glue laminated beams, Thiry's design was meant to conform to the residential district it served, with huge windows, deep overhangs to protect interiors from direct sunlight, and integration of landscape. The design was

immediately published in local and national publications, and the building received an AIA award in 1957. While still an investigation of emerging building technologies, the library reflects a softening of the pure modernism of Thiry's early work and shows elements of Pacific Northwest Modernism. The Northeast Branch Library was designated a City Landmark in 2001.

STOP 3:



Cedar Park Elementary, 1959

13224 37th Ave NE, Cedar Park

To help meet the needs of a burgeoning post-World War II Seattle population, Cedar Park School opened in 1959 and operated as a neighborhood elementary school until it closed in 1981, then becoming the longtime home to a community of Seattle artists. Collaborating with structural engineer Peter Hostmark, Thiry's design was for an innovative structural system of exposed precast concrete frames, tilt-up concrete walls, and precast concrete roof panels exemplifying Northwest Modernism in concrete. The school was designated a City Landmark in 2012 and was recently rehabilitated and reopened for its original use.

