

A Look Back in Time

The Southport Beach House located at 77th Street and 2nd Avenue, is a municipal bath house and recreation building that sits in Southport Park along Lake Michigan. Built between 1936 and 1941, the building is surrounded by park land with mature trees and bushes, an expansive lawn and a sand beach along the lakefront.

Section 15.04 of the City's Zoning Ordinance establishes standards for designating structures and sites as historic and the site or structure must meet at least one of these standards. It was determined that The Southport Beach House is architecturally significant under Standards 1: "exemplifies or reflects the City's cultural... history." 3. "Embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period, style, method of construction, or of indigenous materials or craftsmanship. And 4., "Is representative of the notable work of a master builder, designer or architect whose individual genius influenced their age." The Southport Beach House is architecturally significant because it is a



fine and unusual example of a Mediterranean Revival style building with an Art Deco interior. The building is also architecturally significant because it is the work of City of Kenosha, Department of Parks and City Planning architect, Chris Borggren, whose known designs are few, but impressive and innovative. The Southport Park Beach House is also historically significant because it was constructed as a WPA project, a federal government works program designed to provide jobs for unemployed people during the Great Depression of the 1930's. It was a new and important social welfare program that had a lasting impact on the built environment of the United States.

The Southport Beach House is a two story cream brick building constructed with a Mediterranean Revival style exterior and an Art Deco style interior. The building has walls constructed of cream bricks salvaged from the old Bain Wagon Works. The complex hip and gable roof was originally designed to have a clay tile roof in the Mediterranean Revival style. Instead, the roof is covered with slate tiles that were salvaged from the old Chicago and Northwestern Railroad Depot in Racine. The lumber used for the building was also salvaged from from the Ollie O'Mara Ball Park facility.

The Southport Beach House is a fine example of Period Revival style because it has the overall form, massing, and details that are typical of Mediterranean Revival buildings, including round arches and classical features. Making the building unusual is the use of recycled materials. The soft, aged, cream bricks from the wagon factory give the building a nineteenth century quality. The slate tile roof is unusual because it's not typical of the style and is a dark contrast to the light colored walls. The very modern Art Deco interior, featuring futuristic, hard-edged details is in direct opposition to the historical Mediterranean Revival style. The use of details from different styles and materials from different eras makes this building truly unique.

With all of these unusual and contrasting details, the Southport Beach House might have been unsuccessful and unattractive. But, the architectural talents of designer Chris Borggren made the building an attractive success. He made the most of old materials, making them fit the modern period design of the building. In this design, Borggren illustrates his ability to improvise to create a building that is both functional and beautiful.

