

# BACK TO THE FUTURE OF THE ATOMIC AGE

## AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE RELEVANCE OF THE 1950'S GOOGIE STYLE FOR INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN TODAY

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## **ABSTRACT**

There has been a decline in colourful and unique architecture and design during recent years. The purpose of this research is to investigate the relevance of the vibrant Googie style of the 1950s in the present time. The study looked into the history of the style, the main characteristics, sustainability issues, critique, and Googie in the present. The research showed that the car-centric culture after World War II was a large contributor to the emergence of the style, due to buildings and signs needing to be visible from the freeway. Financial prosperity and new technologies led to new types of design, which sparked both positive and negative criticism. The style started to lose popularity after the effects of the consumer craze on the environment became clear in the 1970s. In conclusion, some Googie designs should be preserved for future generations, but in general the style does not have a place in the present time. The abundance and consumerism it represents are in opposition with the environmentally conscious mentality of the present.

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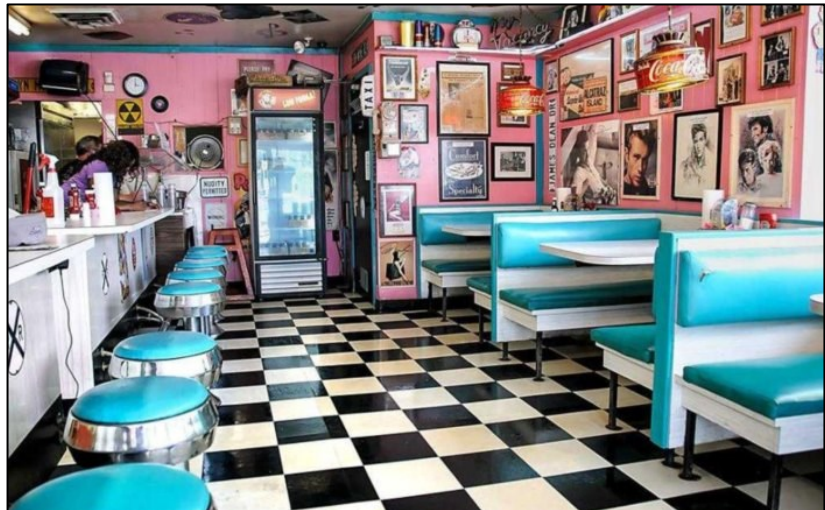
## Introduction

*“You underestimate the seriousness of Googie.” (Haskell, 1952)*

Most people will know the Googie style as the ‘American 50s diner style’, or something similar. Bright colours, neon, chrome, and leather booths and bar stools come to mind. While this is not entirely wrong, it is not entirely right either. Diners (fig. 1) are long, narrow, and often shaped like a train car. They were prefabricated off-site and then transported along train tracks to their final destination. Coffee shops (fig. 2), what most people are actually thinking of, were much higher quality in terms of food, cleanliness, and style (Sisson, 2017).



*Figure 1 – Diner interior*



*Figure 1 – Coffee shop interior*

This essay aims to examine the relevance of the Googie style in the present. First, we shall look at the history of Googie to understand the circumstances of its origins. From there we move on to its main characteristics, both interior and exterior. Included here will be a case study about the original Googie coffee shop. After that will follow an exploration of sustainability and Googie in the present. Included in this chapter are two examples of adaptive reuse. Following that will be a short venture into nostalgia and Neo-Futurism (is it the New Googie?). Lastly followed by opposing viewpoints on Googie, through the eyes of two architecture critics from the time, before going on to the conclusion.

For this essay, ‘relevance’ uses the definition from Merriam-Webster (n.d.), which is “practical and social applicability”.

Other key terms are:

Googie	The term 'Googie' has never been considered an official architectural style. It is often classified as a variation on mid-century modern and post-modern architecture (Adel, 2018). The style was most popular between the late 1940s and 1960s, and it is also known as (American) Coffee Shop Modern (Hess, 1985).
Organic architecture	Strives to design buildings and spaces that are in balance with their natural surroundings, uniquely tailored to specific needs of their owners (Moulton, n.d.).
Space age	The period in history during which the Space Race took place, approximately from the first satellite launch in 1957 until a few years after the Moon landing in 1969 (History.com Editors, n.d.).
Atomic age	This is the current historical period that started towards the end of WWII the development of the first atomic bomb (Dictionary.com, n.d.) It overlaps with the Space Age.

It should be noted that most of the research for this essay focuses on Googie in the United States, as this is where the style originated and was most widely used, with little spread to other parts of the world. The retro style in terms of fashion and (home) accessories has spread globally the past few decades due to the accessibility the internet has brought us.

This topic has been selected as it seems there is a steady decline colourful, unique architecture and design during the recent years. A lot of interiors and exteriors have the same popular, minimalist 'magazine' look, devoid of personality. Googie is the opposite, each design was made uniquely for the client, with a large variety in colours, textures, and materials. It could be beneficial to bring some aspects of Googie into the present with the purpose of making interior architecture and design fun again.

## History

To be able to understand the relevance of Googie in the present, one must first know the history and context of its inception and demise. In the 1920s, Art Deco was the popular style of the times. It had

evolved from the Futurism of the early twentieth century (designingbuildings, n.d.). Futurism was characterized by notions of flowing movement with strange edges and angles. Art Deco featured exuberant geometric shapes and flourishes, in contrast to the more minimalist Bauhaus style, which was also common at the time. With the advance of technology, Art Deco evolved in the 1930s into the Streamline Moderne. It featured more aerodynamic shapes, indicative of the steam trains and aeroplanes that made long distance travel possible for the general population (Bayer, 1994). In the 1930s, cars become more affordable, and architecture started to reflect this in the forms of the construction of freeways, drive-ins, and neon billboards (Hess, 1985).

During World War II there was a technological boom. New materials and technologies were being invented rapidly and successfully. After WWII, these became repurposed for, among other things, architecture and design. Spence (2005) says that historians accept the 1940s and 1950s as a 'consumer crazed culture'. This is in line with what Nájera (2020) found: "The 1940s were underscored by post-World War II prosperity, the growth of suburbia, and the unprecedented appeal of the Space-Age; thus, optimistic versions of the future coupled with the architectural precedents of Programmatic and Streamlined design, culminated in the exuberant architectural style known as Googie".

One has to take in consideration the issue of racial segregation that was still prevalent in the US all the way through the 1960s. This will be briefly addressed in the chapter on nostalgia, but is thereafter considered outside the scope of this essay.

After reaching the Moon in 1969, the question became *what now?* Social focus shifted from the Space Race to Flower Power. The full environmental impact of the rapid expansion of cities, cars, urbanism, and nuclear power became known, and the consumerism and cars of the previous decades were vilified. This started the downfall of Googie, and it had lost pretty much all popularity by the 1980s (Nájera, 2020).

## Googie Characteristics

In this chapter we will look at some key characteristics of the Googie style, both in a commercial and residential setting. We will start with a case study, followed by an overview of exterior styles, and then progressing into the interior.

### A Case Study - Googie's Coffee shop, Sunset Boulevard, CA, USA

The original Googie coffee shop (fig. 3) was designed by architect John Lautner in 1949. It was subsequently featured in House & Home magazine in 1952 by Douglas Haskell in his article 'Googie

Architecture', in which the term 'Googie' was coined. The style was untraditional, with dramatic angles, bright colours, and materials such as steel, chrome, and neon.

In the article, Haskell says: "It starts off on the level like any other building. But suddenly it breaks for the sky. The bright red roof of cellular steel decking suddenly tilts upward as if swung on a hinge, and the whole building goes up with it like a rocket ramp. But there is another building next door. So the flight stops as suddenly as it began."



Figure 2 – Exterior of Googie's Coffee Shop

Hess (1985: p63) says that if Googie's would have been just another vernacular restaurant it would have gone unnoticed. It was Lautner's careful consideration of materials and spaces that made it stand out from the rest and attract attention.

Hess (2004: p73-74) also provides a comprehensive description and a floorplan of the coffee shop. On the side, there is a large, angled stuccoed wall that rises up out of a planter. It anchored the roof even though the space between the wall and the roof was glass. This massive window showed a view of the Hollywood Hills. As most restaurant owners in the United States, the owners of Googie's wanted a high turnover rate of customers. Lautner's creation, however, was crafted so beautifully and comfortably it encouraged customers to linger.

Googie made use of patterns, spaces, and colours not seen before in other architectural styles. For example, in Googie's coffee shop, diagonals were a recurring pattern in the design. Angled lines in the floor tricked the eyes into believing the space was less narrow than it was in reality. The corrugations in the roof ran diagonally upwards as can be seen in figure 3 (Hess, 2004).

The building consisted of only the ground floor. The upwards extending ceiling at the front allowed for the view. There was a clerestory roof over the counter and kitchen to let in extra light. The counter accommodated sixty-five people and had a curved L-shape as can be seen in the floorplan in figure 4 (Hess, 2004).

Along the back wall were built-in booths, with exposed wooden rafters overhead. Venetian blinds, translucent fiberglass panels, and transparent and translucent glass enveloped the building. At the



back there was a dining patio planned, with built-in tables and planters, but this was never built (Hess, 2004).

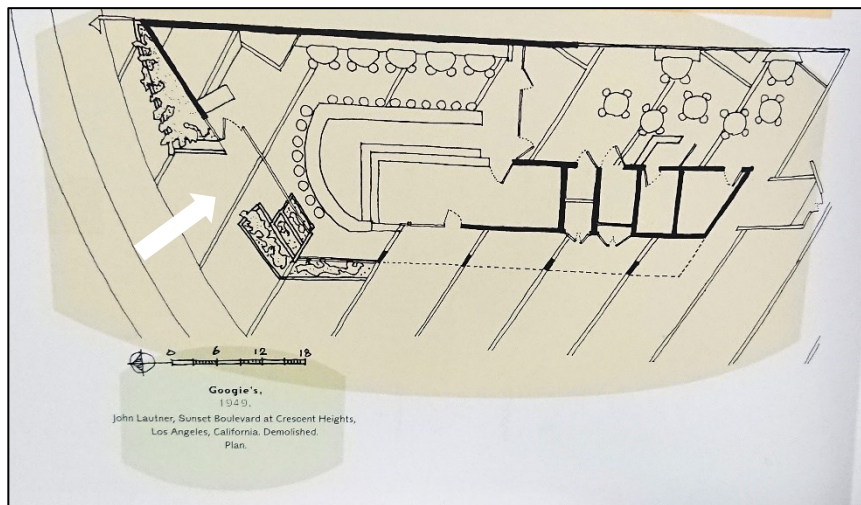


Figure 3 – Floorplan of Googie's

## Exterior

The exterior of commercial buildings starting in the late 1940s, ranging from coffee shops to car washes and bowling alleys, served more purposes than to just house the interior - it also served as advertisement, as shown in figure 5. Nájera (2020) says: "To paraphrase architect, Louis Sullivan: form followed function; and with boisterous forms and colors intent on catching the motorist's eye, the function was advertisement and communication." Going down the freeway at high speeds makes it hard to read billboards, but large, shiny neon signs that can also be seen at night, and buildings in obvious shapes (a hotdog for a hotdog stand for instance) convey this information quickly and unambiguously.

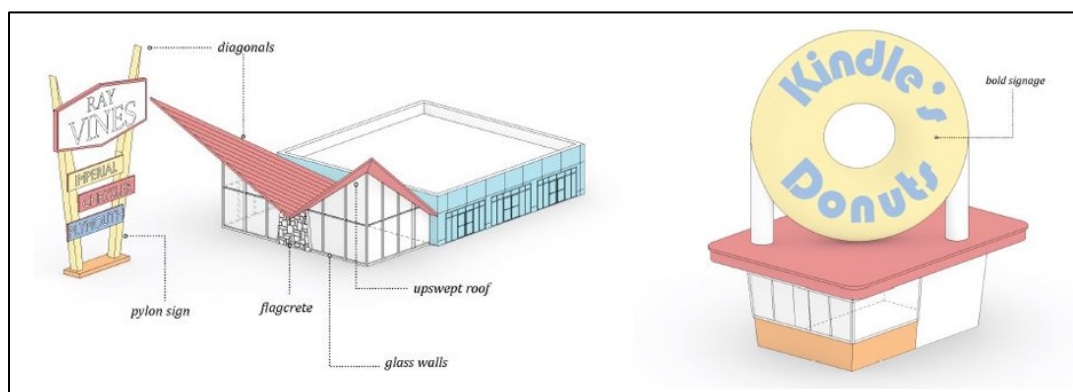


Figure 4 – Building exteriors as advertising

Haskell explained some of the key principles of the Googie style in *House & Home* magazine (1952). He says it could look organic, but had to be abstract and stylized. You could not simply pick a theme and have that be all, you needed multiple themes, for example, a house with “an abstract mushroom surmounted by an abstract bird.” Gravity had to be ignored. Roofs had to look like they were floating on top of the building or hanging from the sky. This should be accomplished by a mix of construction techniques, structural systems, and materials. Pluralism was key.

Correspondingly, franchising caught on during this time, as it was easy to attract customers to an already familiar looking place in a new location. One of the most famous examples, of course, being McDonald’s. Their huge golden arches could be seen from very far away and are instantly recognizable to this day as belonging to the McDonald’s brand (Hess, 1986).

In 1977, Venturi, Brown, and Izenour describe the two styles of exterior Googie architecture, the ‘duck’ and the ‘decorated shed’ (fig. 6). The architectural spaces and structure of the former are distorted by a symbolic form (here, the ‘duck’), whereas the decoration of the ‘decorated shed’ is applied independently of the spaces and structure of the building. This means that the building can serve multiple functions over its lifetime and the only thing that needs to be changed is the decoration. It is more difficult to change the shape of the ‘duck’, thus making the ‘shed’ the more sustainable option in the long run.

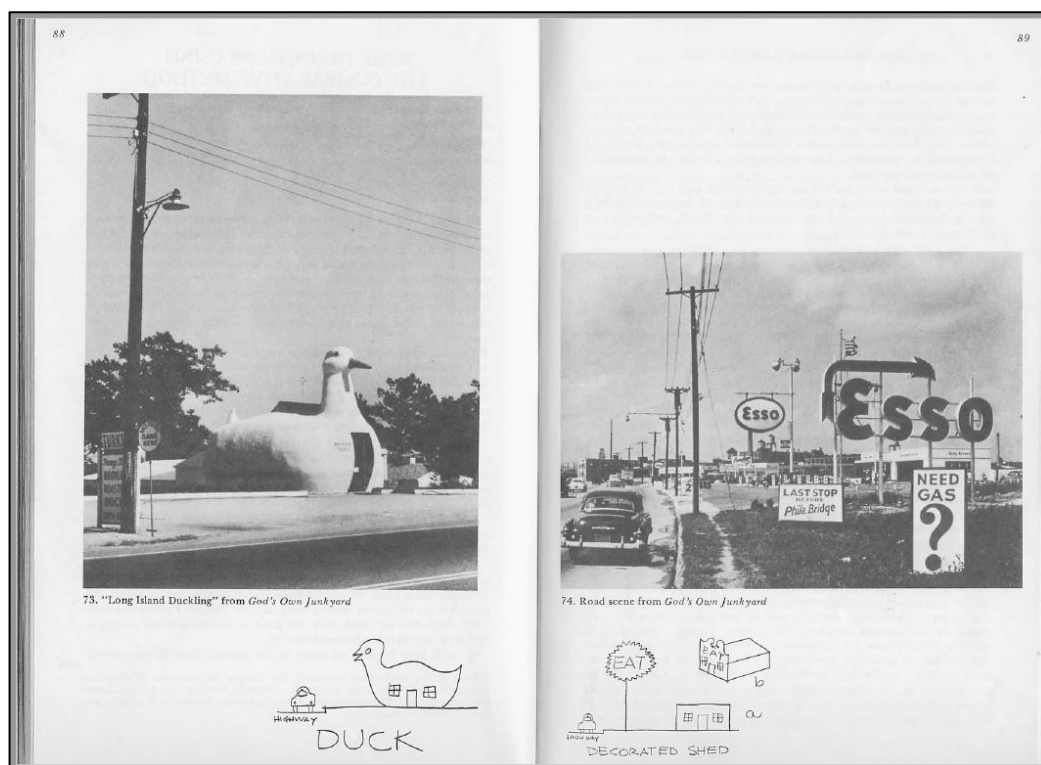


Figure 5 – the Duck and the Decorated Shed

Both of these styles were present simultaneously, and it was entirely up to the discretion of the client and architect which one to use.

A few years later, Izenour (in Hess, 1985: p8) reminds us that “There is a place for humor in the architectural environment; sometimes fleeting – a billboard weirdly juxtaposed with its surroundings – and sometimes a little more permanent – a hot dog stand in the shape of a hot dog.”

### Interior

Common in the commercial Googie style was that the exterior design was reflected in the interior, be that in the use of colours, materials, themes, or even all three. Some designers went as far as to design the menus and waitress’ outfits to match the rest of the building (Hess, 2004).

An example of this detailing could be found in the now demolished Ship’s coffee houses. Figure 7 shows how the cook’s hat was reflected in the design of the lampshades above the counter and the decorative wall panelling on the kitchen back wall. The colours and materials of the kitchen are reflected throughout the rest of the interior (Hess, 2004).



*Figure 6 – Ship’s interior, 1958*

### Colours & Materials

“New cars laden with shiny chrome bumpers and tailfins, huge color television sets, brightly colored kitchen appliances in “avocado green” and “harvest gold,” hula-hoops and plastic toys [...] clothes and shoes made from synthetic materials, and most important, brand new, suburban houses, were there for the taking.” (Friedman, 2010).

This is just a small selection of what the ‘consumer craze’ brought on. Spence (2005) illustrates that the subdued interiors of the 1930s fell out of fashion and were replaced with bright, saturated colours

in the late 1940s and 1950s after the gloomy war years were finally over. A comparison of the most popular colours, according to designers at Juicebox Interactive (2018), can be found in figure 8.



Figure 7 – Most popular colours of the 1930s (left) and 1950s (right)

Patterns and shapes shifted from tropicals and florals to amoeba shapes, boomerangs, kidney beans, airplanes, cars, and space themes.

During the war, aircraft and car industries were the leaders in developing new technologies and production processes. These techniques ended up being applied to furniture design and home construction. The aircraft industry invented new methods for moulding plastics, aluminium, and plywood, and they developed new types of power tools, synthetic glues, and a whole heap of other man-made materials. (Spence, 2005).

A good example of application of these new techniques can be seen in the Eames chair. The Eames's, a husband and wife designer pair, were experimenting with wood-moulding techniques in the early 1940s. After WWII they had perfected the technique and started applying it for the mass-manufacturing of chairs. They found that the plywood did not pass the stress-test if made



Figure 8 – Eames chairs, plywood on the left, plastic on the right

from a single piece of wood, so they made the chair out of multiple separate elements, while continuing to look for new materials. Eventually they landed on using polyester plastic reinforced fiberglass that was developed by the US Air Force during WWII. This allowed the chair shell to be made out of one piece. Fiberglass was subsequently found to have environmental risks associated with its production, which led to a production halt of a couple of years until a more suitable material was found (hermanmiller.com, n.d.). This will be discussed further on in the essay.

Plywood ended up being used primarily for construction structures and furniture, and was often covered with a more aesthetically pleasing finish. Occasionally it was left bare in cabinetry or as wall panels, but this was not the norm (Spence, 2005).

Plastic laminates are layers of paper saturated with various types of formaldehyde resins. Pressure and heat fuse the layers together to leave a nonporous surface. This made it useful for wet spaces, like the kitchen, bathroom, or mudroom. (Spence, 2005). However, studies have shown that certain types of formaldehyde resins may cause cancer, so alternative production methods needed to be invented (US EPA, 2019). More on this later.

## Sustainability

Googie architecture relied heavily on the use of concrete. It was the first material that was able to be poured in the newly imagined shapes that designers came up with. Watts (2019) explains that it is currently, after water, the most used substance on Earth and poses a bigger threat than plastic, but this is usually not seen by the general public. It does not float in the ocean, it does not choke seagulls to death, and doctors are not finding it in human blood. Instead, concrete covers fertile soil and prohibits it from soaking up rainwater which leads to flooding, in cities it amplifies heat by trapping the warmth from the sun and exhaust gases, and it breaks down *extremely* slowly. This last property is of course what makes concrete so attractive – it lasts almost forever. Once built, it just stays there, protecting occupants from outside influences decade after decade. Simply take a look at the Colosseum in Rome, which is still standing after construction finished somewhere around the year 80 AD (britannica, n.d.).

Then, what can we do instead? The answer might lie in 3D printing. No, not using concrete, but instead using soil and other local materials like sand. This is exactly what scientists and designers have been working on, according to Mistlin (2020). Using local materials will also eliminate the need for costly transport, further reducing the environmental impact of constructing new buildings. However, the technology and research for this are far from perfect and will likely take several more years before they can be widely used. The current use is limited to experimentation and art installations. Nonetheless, it is easy to imagine 3D printing being used for prefabrication, speeding up the building process, as well as reducing waste and labour on-site. Continuing this train of thought leads us to imagine the use of this technology in the New Space Race - constructing a Moon (or even a Mars) - colony.

Let us examine how some of those original materials evolved.

Arguably the most famous high-pressure laminate – both then and now - is Formica. It comes in many colours and patterns, and is proven to be very durable. The Formica Group strives to have low levels of volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, emitting from their products. Thanks to new and innovative production methods, they have received various sustainability and safety certificates (Formica, n.d.).

As mentioned earlier, after the effects of fiberglass production on the environment became apparent, the Herman Miller Group started a quest for a more sustainable and eco-friendly material. In 2001 they had potentially found it in the form of polypropylene (PP). Van de Walle (2020) explains that it is considered to be one of the safest plastics on the market today, being used for a range of applications from plastic food containers to surgical implants and everything in between. However, it is a petroleum product, so there are pressing environmental impacts that cannot be ignored. Jafarinejad (2017) lists a few: increase of the greenhouse effect, global warming and climate change, smog, deforestation, groundwater contamination, among others. Polypropylene is recyclable though, therefore giving it quite a long life even after the initial product has worn out (van de Walle, 2020).

### Adaptive Reuse – Two Examples of Googie in the Present

Nowadays, Googie buildings face the danger of demolition as they are built in prime real estate locations. There can only be one building in a given space at a time, and a high-rise apartment building will bring in more money than a small eatery. According to Nájera (2020), the preservation of Googie buildings has been largely determined by forces of convenience, location, economic accessibility, and – to a lesser extent – nostalgia.

Since its conception in 1978, the LA Conservancy has strived to preserve historic buildings in LA county (LA Conservancy, n.d.). Without going too deep into the US conservancy laws and regulations, they do not have a simple task due to having to deal with unincorporated territories and an arbitrary 50-year rule, stating that buildings need to be at least 50 years old to be eligible for conservation. When they started to try and preserve some of the original Googie style coffee shops, they quickly found out they would not have an easy job of it because of this. After all, Googie by that point was barely 30 years old. Their efforts have paid off though, and they managed to protect a number of buildings (Nájera, 2020).

The Wich Stand (fig. 10), a popular eatery during the 1950s and 1960s, started to lose clients in the 1980s due to fast food chains becoming favoured by the general population, leading to its eventual closure in 1988. The interior was partially stripped, and the building was scheduled for demolition. Thanks to the efforts of the LA Conservancy, the building received an honorific designation as a California Point of Interest and local Googie landmark. In 1993, restoration and adaptation of the

building into a health food store began. The interior was gutted, the distinctive exterior pylons remained, and the whole structure received a muted, forest green paintjob (Nájera, 2020). This is but one example of how to adapt a Googie style building of the past to the present times.



Figure 9 – The Wich Stand, 1950s original (left) and after conversion in the 1990s (right)

Another example of adaptive reuse is the old Panorama theatre, also in Los Angeles. It opened in 1949 and remained a cinema until circa 1972. After that it was used as a Spanish language house, until in 2002 a church took over the lease. If you think about it, a cinema and a church have a the most important feature in common – a large seating area. It is a very smart way of reusing this building without needing to do major remodelling. In figure 11 you can see a photo of the ‘theatre’ in 2001. A photograph of the original building could sadly not be found, but it seems like the signage, at the very least, has remained. (Nájera, 2020).



Figure 10 – Panorama theatre

As Nájera (2020) said, ultimately, the demolition of Googie buildings points to the harsh reality of architecture. Namely that buildings are rarely static, their usefulness and function transform with the passing of time, as does the society that supports them. Fads and trends come and go, and the buildings we create reflect our histories. Googie specifically was found in everyday structures from

coffee shops to bowling alleys to gas stations, common places that historians and critics often overlook until they have almost completely disappeared. In preserving Google, we save a piece of history of the past generation for the ones still to come.

## (Atomic) Nostalgia

Nostalgia is a longing for a happier past, be that in the shape of smells, food, music, or objects. The reward centres of the brain are activated during a nostalgic episode, which helps to protect against emotional burdens or anxiety. (Neurology live, n.d.) This explains the popularity of vintage and retro reproduction items in the present. Just look



Figure 11 – 50s retro style line refrigerators from Smeg

at the popular Smeg brand for kitchen appliances. Round, sleek shapes, bright colours and pastels remind us of the 1950s coffee shop style (fig. 12). In Smeg’s own words: “Smeg’s 50’s Style range features unmistakably vintage designs whose classic, curvaceous lines and vibrant colours combine perfectly with cutting-edge technology.”

There are many websites dedicated to selling original vintage and retro reproduction objects. Even non-specialized stores like Amazon sell oodles of 1950s inspired things, from actual furniture to home accessories and clothing.

Another example of the popularity of retro is Disney’s Tomorrowland in California. In 1994, Tomorrowland started to be reverted back from a Jules-Verne-look to the more classic mid-century space-age style, showing the future as it was imagined seventy years ago (Storey, 2020).



Figure 12 – Space age style Tomorrowland, 2020



However, nostalgia is not universal. What might be a happy memory for one person, is not per se happy for another person. Freeman (2015) explains the social relevance of nostalgia as showing the shared ideas about the present while revealing past desires, giving new insights into the practices and structures of the past, and what those past desires created. About atomic nostalgia, she says:

“Atomic nostalgia is a new form of longing, a distinctively American, postnuclear, industrial-scientific vision of a lost utopia. It can be experienced anywhere, but it vibrates most strongly in places dedicated to nuclear industries.”

Freeman (2015) elaborates on this, and explains that in ‘Atomic City’ (Oak Ridge), where uranium for the Manhattan Project was produced, prefabricated houses could be assembled on-site in eight hours or less. Roads were constructed in several hours. A sprawling neighbourhood, including everything from supermarkets to entertainment and day-care, took only a couple of days to build. There were jobs for anyone who wanted them. For the people that worked there, atomics presented a bright future.

Racial segregation was still common in the US at that time. Houses for the higher ranked workers came with living quarters for servants of colour. Leisure activities were strictly segregated. These racially segregated workers, Freeman (2015) explains, were housed in pre-planned "slum-like hutment areas" and with a deliberateness that "belies both the nostalgic frontier and utopian imaginations of early Oak Ridge." Freeman also points out that "these historic imaginations persist for those who experienced the better sides of Atomic City living."

This goes to show that the ‘optimistic, bright and happy 1950s’ were not that for everyone, and it is something that must be considered when talking about preserving those symbols. However, these troubles are not Googie specific, racism was prevalent in everyday life. Every past era has had its own problems, and it is up to us as a society to strike a balance between remembering the past, acknowledging the bad things, and moving forward.

## Neo-Futurism = Neo-Googie?

“Neo-futurism is a style that articulates a clear enthusiasm for technology and the space age” says digitalschool (2018), “The overall aesthetic of neo-futuristic architectural design can sometimes be seen as a rejection of pessimism and a reaching outwards toward a positive vision of the future.”

Neo-futurism challenges the more boxy, traditional forms of architecture, turning the style into an avant-garde, experimental movement. Arguably the most famous neo-futuristic architect and Pritzker Prize winner of the current times is the late Zaha Hadid (Zaha Hadid Architects, n.d.). She used new

technologies and materials, without which some of these previously impossible forms would never have been able to be built (fig 14 and 15).

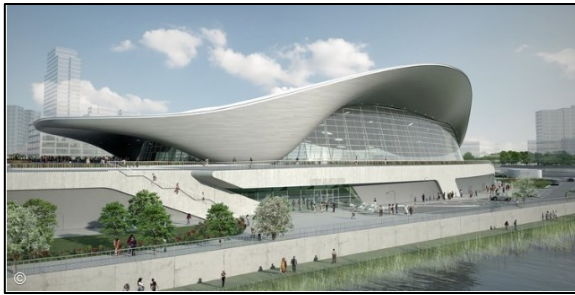


Figure 14 – London Aquatics Centre



Figure 14 – Glasgow Riverside Museum

An enthusiasm for technology and the space age is exactly what Googie symbolized. Googie also challenged the boxy forms and was definitely an experimental style. True, Googie was more exuberant in terms of materials, themes, and colours, but the main ideas remain intact – innovating and challenging of the status quo with optimism and passion. This shows that elements of Googie are still being implemented today.

## Critics – A Look At Two Opposing Viewpoints

This next chapter covers opposing viewpoints on the Googie style by architectural critics of the time, both printed in *Architectural Forum* about a year apart.

In 1957, an article titled 'The Debacle of Popular Taste' was printed in the February issue of *Architectural Forum*, by Mary Mix Foley. The article was scathing; Foley did not just disagree with Googie as a style, she went as far as to call ordinary people tasteless, skill-less, chaotic, and confused.

Foley (1957) says that, after architecture became a recognized profession around the mid-nineteenth century, architects only realized the potential of the mass market after WWII. The problem however, she goes on to explain, is that when the average person wants to redesign his shop front, he calls a contractor or builder, not an architect, leaving the latter out of the equation completely and hereby flooding the country with bad design. She disliked the use of chrome, glass, and neon, calling it dreary and corrupted.

Googie design, according to Foley, is *cuteness*. As examples, she uses the hotdog stand in the shape of a hotdog, and a frozen custard stand dripping silver icicles. She maintains that traditionally beautiful buildings had integrity and dignity, but that the new buildings lack any sign of either.

Foley (1957) then looks to the past to try and find the cause of the change from beautiful to ugly buildings, going so far as to state that "before the industrial revolution man never created ugly", for

according to her, machines have made man lazy and uncaring. On the other hand, she also states that these unfortunate people are only offered bad design, therefore not giving them a choice of anything else. Besides, "they do not even know it is ugly".

It seems Foley (1957) wants to go back to pre-industrial revolution, where man lived in harmony with nature and the seasons, and it took a community to build a house. In her own words: "There is no doubt that the wealth of possibilities in our industrial society has left the average person far behind and hopelessly confused. But even this confusion does not seem an adequate explanation for a lack of the most rudimentary sort of taste." What Foley seems to forget is that two World Wars have changed the world and its societal structures. Women went to work in factories while the men went to war. The aesthetic quality of designs had to take a backseat over practicality due to scarcity of materials and manpower. The wars ended, the men came home, rationing was no longer necessary. The exuberance and new technologies resulted in Googie.

Now follows a contrasting viewpoint on Googie and the society that built it.

Before Foley's piece was published, Haskell (1952) said "Yes, Googie has set modern construction free." Free from traditional shapes and materials, it has allowed ordinary people to enjoy extraordinary places. He continues to explain this freedom is a good thing, for two reasons: "One is that sometimes fantastically good ideas result from uninhibited experiment. The other is that Googie accustoms the people to expect strangeness, and makes them the readier for those strange things yet to come which will truly make good sense."

While Haskell is not raving about the glories of Googie, he was certainly not as dismissive of it as some of his fellow critics. His arguments were never about the style directly, but more about social investigation into the popular taste (Esperdy, 2015).

Throughout his lifetime, Haskell has made an effort to bridge the gap of understanding between architects, architecture critics, and the ordinary people. In his essay 'Architecture and Popular Taste' published in *Architectural Forum* 1958, he explains that art is emotional, and that humans have a need and desire for the emotional, be that in the form of drama, romance, or symbolism. He asks the question "What do people really want?" In short, the answer is threefold: more decorativeness and romance as opposed to highly intellectual architecture; more drama and 'a good show', as can be found in Googie architecture; and lastly, an architectural counterpart to jazz, meaning less traditional buildings, more improvisation and freshness of ideas (Haskell, 1958).

Haskell continues to explain the new Modernism is a kind of baroque "a varied architecture of drama, fairy tale, allusion, and symbol", which is very different from the Modernism of the years before. Some

architects and engineers take offence at the 'misuse' of 'their' technology, but Haskell goes on to say that the popular audience does not care about the construction of buildings. Apart from a few select buildings where the engineering is part of the drama, "'function' is nothing get excited about". He is of course referring to 'form follows function', which aims to explain that the function of a building dictates its shape, and that there is no need to add frivolous decorations. This did not always work out as planned, because "[...] again and again modern functional architects were embarrassed by the question: what is it – a school, a factory, or a supermarket?". It might be argued that designing a hotdog stand in the shape of a hotdog is going a bit far, but at least it gets the point across (Haskell, 1958).

Haskell (1958) succeeded in explaining, in short and polite terms, that what the people want is not what classic Modernism has been giving them. Everyone has a choice, get with the times, or be left behind. Haskell went with the times and was both respected and ridiculed for his unusual opinions. Even if he might have not liked the Googie style, at least he respected it for what it was – a product of the times having a place in those times.

Lautner, who designed the original Googie's Coffee Shop, sums up the idea of Googie : "The purpose of architecture is to improve human life. Create timeless, free, joyous spaces for all activities in life. The infinite variety of these spaces can be as varied as life itself and they must be as sensible as nature in deriving from a main idea and flowering into a beautiful entity. The overriding essence is found in intangibles, life – heart – soul – spirit – freedom – enduring within the structure." (Lautner in John Lautner Foundation, n.d.).

## Conclusion

This essay aimed to investigate the relevance of the Googie style in the present day. It has looked at the origins of Googie, the social context, the technologies and materials used, and reviewed some critique.

The origins of the style have taught us that Googie was the result of extreme optimism after WWII. Cars started becoming commonplace, and architecture had to adapt to that. In order to draw attention on the freeway, tall neon signs and crazy building shapes became a popular and effective way to do that. Nowadays, restaurants, shops and other commercial buildings do not need to rely on that type of advertising anymore. We have mobile phones and television and the internet telling us where to eat and where to shop.

The social context explained to us that there was an economical growth spurt, a 'consumer craze' where people had unimagined wealth for the first time, and they wanted to show it off and spend it all. New technologies during the war had led to an abundance of new goods, appliances, and furniture.

New technologies about prefabrication, household appliances, and construction techniques led to copious amounts of new materials like moulded plywood and plastic, new types of glue, fiberglass, reinforced concrete, structural glass, and a lot more. It turned out that not all of those new materials were all that environmentally friendly, so in order to pull Googie into the here and now, care must be taken during renovation works to be more sustainable than we have been in the past.

We were also able to find out that vintage and retro style clothing, furniture and decorations are still popular, due to giving feelings of nostalgia which activate the reward response in the brain. It also explained that while Googie has nostalgic value for some, this is not the case for everyone, as Googie was popular during a time where racial segregation was still prevalent.

It has been shown that the LA Conservancy is hard at work to protect at least some of the remaining Googie buildings from demolition. This means that someone *cares*. Not only for nostalgic reasons, but to protect a bit of history from being destroyed forever. A good way of preserving these buildings is by finding a new purpose for them. This is of course the easiest to accomplish if all you have to do is remove some decorations and repaint a 'decorated shed'. It gets a bit more difficult if you have to adapt a 'duck'.

Googie is a very divisive style. Hardly anyone is ambivalent about it. We have seen opposing viewpoints between Haskell, who says it is a perfectly valid style so long as people like it, and Foley, who says everyone is dumb except trained architects who make buildings in a traditional style.

We have also looked at Neo-Futurism, and the similarities and differences it has to Googie, namely new technologies making new shapes possible, boundless optimism, and a shared fondness for the space- and atomic age.

So, what can we conclude? Does Googie have any sort of relevance in the present day? The answer is yes – sort of. As Haskell (1952) said, it set the people free from traditional thinking and paved the way for even more extravagant ideas. It is important to retain some examples of the architecture, furniture, and accessories to be able to show the younger generation, 'look, this is where we came from, this is why you can do the things you do, because of what we did before'. It shows the good parts about Googie that people fought to preserve. Like with music, only the most popular will survive the decade.

However, if the question becomes 'should we build more Googie in the original style, albeit with more sustainable materials', the answer is probably no. Ordinary people follow trends, they do not set them. They will buy what is available, whether it is deemed ugly by the experts or not. The past decade has focused on 'less is more', minimalism, and decluttering, and 1950s Googie has no place in that mentality. Googie still brings joy to a select group of people, and that will have to be enough for now.

As a practitioner, this has taught me that we should allow design to evolve with the times, and not cling to the past for the sake of nostalgia. Evolving is the only way to keep the past relevant.

Who knows what the 2050s have in store? Neo-Futurism, bring it on.

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**Fig. 14** *London Aquatics Centre for 2012 Summer Olympics / Zaha Hadid Architects* (2011) *ArchDaily*. [online image] Available at: <https://www.archdaily.com/161116/london-aquatics-centre-for-2012-summer-olympics-zaha-hadid-architects> (Accessed: 3 December 2020).

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