

ROCKMOUNT BUILDING

1626 Wazee Street, Denver, Colorado 80202



Architect: Fisher & Fisher

Year Built: 1909

Prairie style architecture is often associated with its most famous proponent, Frank Lloyd Wright, and with residential buildings rather than commercial. Wright eventually went on to develop his Usonian style, which was heavily influenced by prairie architecture, but his early work crafting houses in the prairie style and his public statements about the value of the uniquely American movement have elevated it to near ubiquitous fame, right alongside Craftsman and Bungalow, as one of the quintessential architectural styles in the U.S.

Applying the style to a tall and narrow building like Rockmount creates a unique expression of architecture's progress from prairie to modernism, a nexus that Wright actually inhabited for much of his career. Other famous architects were responsible for giving Denver this building, however. Perhaps the most noteworthy firm of Denver's past, Fisher & Fisher, were the architects behind Rockmount.

The front façade is reminiscent of Louis Sullivan's modern style, with its vertically oriented window bands and geometric terra cotta ornamentation. Corbeling and cornices almost break the building into the three parts of the Chicago style but fall short. Side pilasters hold decorative tiles and frame the window bays as they ascend to white glazed pendant capitals and a stepped parapet trimmed with terra cotta coping.

Rockmount Ranch Wear has occupied the building since 1946 and has achieved much in that time. Company founder Jack A. Weil is credited with introducing the first western shirts with snaps instead of buttons. His signature design of "diamond" snaps and "sawtooth" pockets is the longest running shirt design made in America, and is displayed in many museums including the Smithsonian. He's also recognized as being the oldest CEO the United States has produced, having worked until age 107.

In 2004, the Weil Family undertook a renovation of the then century-old building. They stripped off the old interior partitions that covered the historic brick walls and heavy timber framing and restored the tin ceiling and wood floors. They also cleaned and restored the façade and added a basement garage.

References

Steve Weil, Rockmount Ranch Wear Mfg. Co., buckfifty.org, 4.16.09.

Paglia, M., Wheaton, R., & Wray, D. (1999) *Denver: The Modern City*. Denver: Historic Denver, Inc.
Historic Denver Docent Training Information: Colorado Architects – Biographical Sketch.