

Architect: Pei, Ieoh Ming
Birth/Death Dates: 1917 -
Practice Dates: 1955 -

Biographical Information

Ieoh Ming Pei, better known as I.M. Pei, was born in 1917 in Canton, China, but educated in the United States. He studied architecture at MIT and then Harvard, studying under Walter Gropius. Pei immediately joined real estate developer William Zeckendorf's firm of Webb & Knapp upon completion of graduate school in 1948. By 1955 Pei had established his own firm and was on his way to becoming a master of modern architecture.

Pei's first major project would be in Denver - the 1955 Mile High Center. Twenty-three stories tall and constructed of steel, glass, and aluminum, this building represented Pei's daring use of the all-glass curtain walls and advanced structural systems. Pei also designed the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) atop Table Mesa in Boulder, Colorado in 1961 using new concrete technology. Unfortunately, Pei's most recognizable building in Denver - Zeckendorf Plaza - met with the wrecking ball. Demolished in 1996 to make way for a hotel complex, the unique department store building boasted the widest spanning hyperbolic paraboloid shell in United States at the time and a three inch thick concrete roof with floor to roof windows. Anyone who had ever strolled down the 16th Street Mall- a pedestrian mall also designed by Pei's firm - remembered this unusual building. It stood in marked contrast to the stone and brick commercial blocks of an earlier time in Denver.

While Zeckendorf Plaza is now just a memory, Pei's NCAR, Mile High Center, and 16th Street Mall remain as testimony to the ingenuity of this modern architect. After his early Denver start, Pei and his firm went on to achieve worldwide attention by designing well-known modern landmarks such as the John Hancock Building and John F. Kennedy Library (1979) in Boston, the glass pyramid addition of the Louvre (1989) in Paris, the East Wing of the National Gallery of Art (1978) in Washington, D.C., and the Bank of China tower (1983) in Hong Kong.

Credited Buildings

Building Name	Location	Site No.	Date	Assessment
Mile High Center (Norwest Bank Building)	1700 Broadway, Denver	5DV1874	1955	
Hilton Hotel	1550 Court Pl., Denver	5DV1854	1958-60	
National Center for Atmospheric Research	1850 Table Mesa Dr., Boulder	5BL6309	1961	
Zeckendorf Plaza, (May D&F Plaza)	350 16 th St., Denver	5DV1877	1959-60	Demolished

Information Sources

Site File Database, Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Colorado Historical Society, Denver.

Revised: November 19, 1999