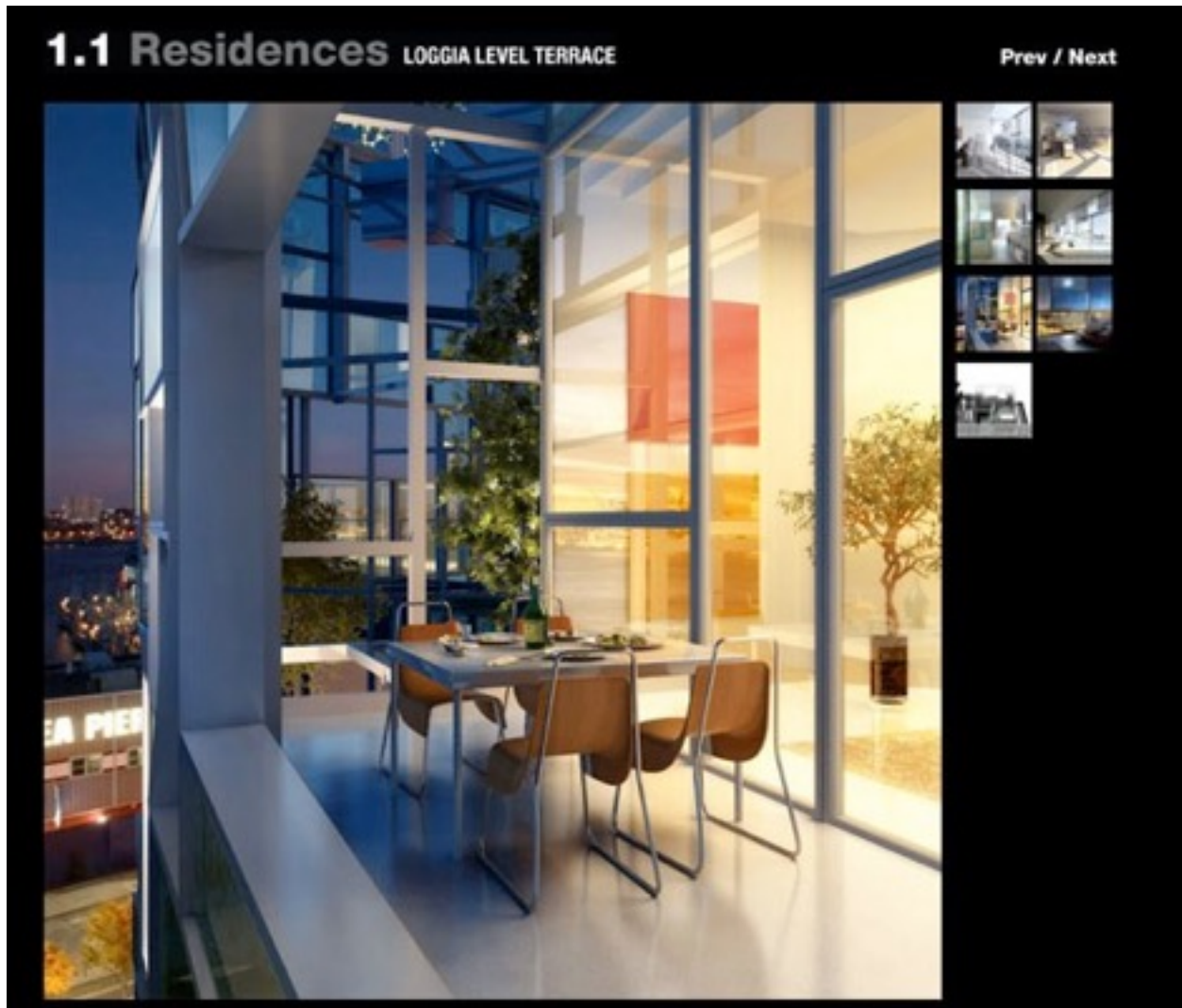


IMG MGMT: New Century Modern Surface Magazine

by JOSH KLINE on OCTOBER 21, 2010

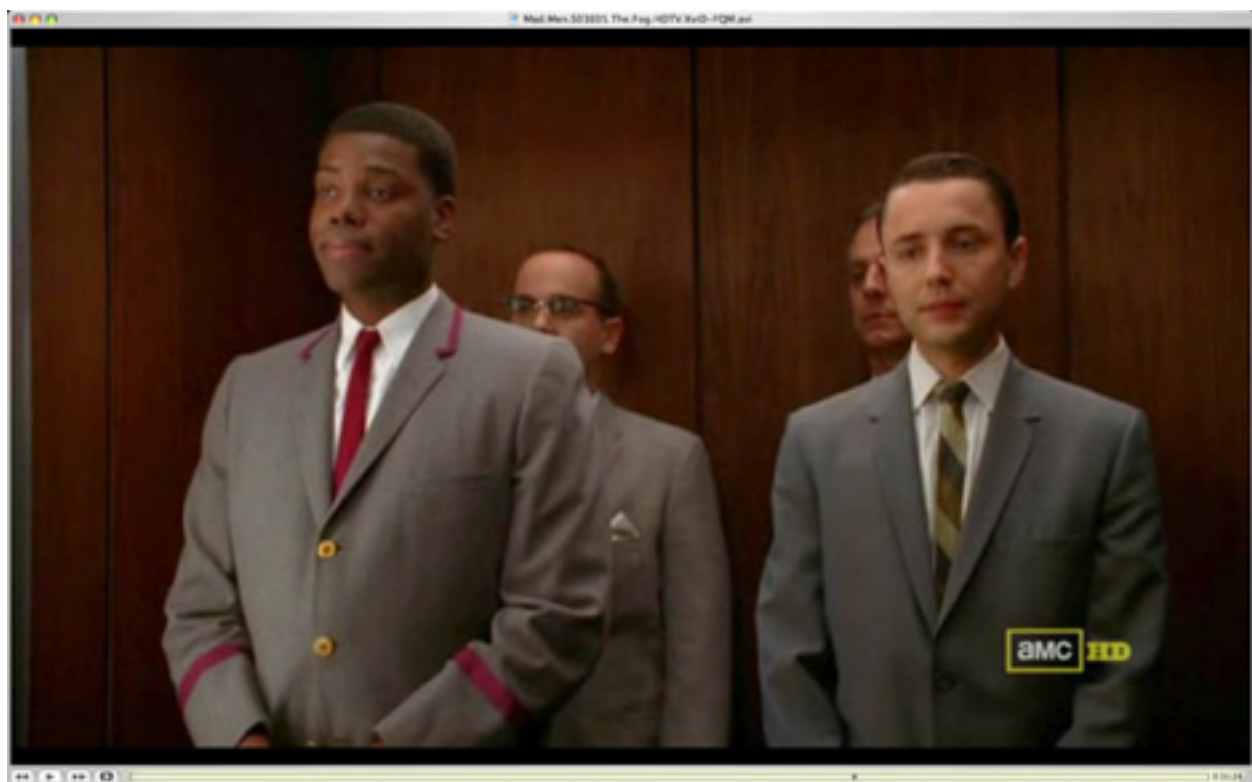


[Editor's note: IMG MGMT is an annual image-based artist essay series. Today's invited writer, Josh Kline, is a New York-based artist. Working primarily in Photoshop, installation, and video, Kline's work is concerned with the diffusion and confusion of brands and mass-media communication strategies. His work has been exhibited in New York at spaces including 179 Canal Street, Gavin Brown's Enterprise, X Initiative, Taxter & Spengemann, and Guild and Greyshkul, among others; at Galerie Christine Mayer, Munich; and various project spaces in Brooklyn, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia. Kline is a founding member of the art collective Circular File. In fall 2009, he produced a three episode cable access television show with the collective as a commission for the PERFORMA09 biennial. Originally from Philadelphia, Kline graduated with a degree in film and media art from Temple University in 2002. You can find more of Josh's work on [Youtube](#) and [Vimeo](#).]

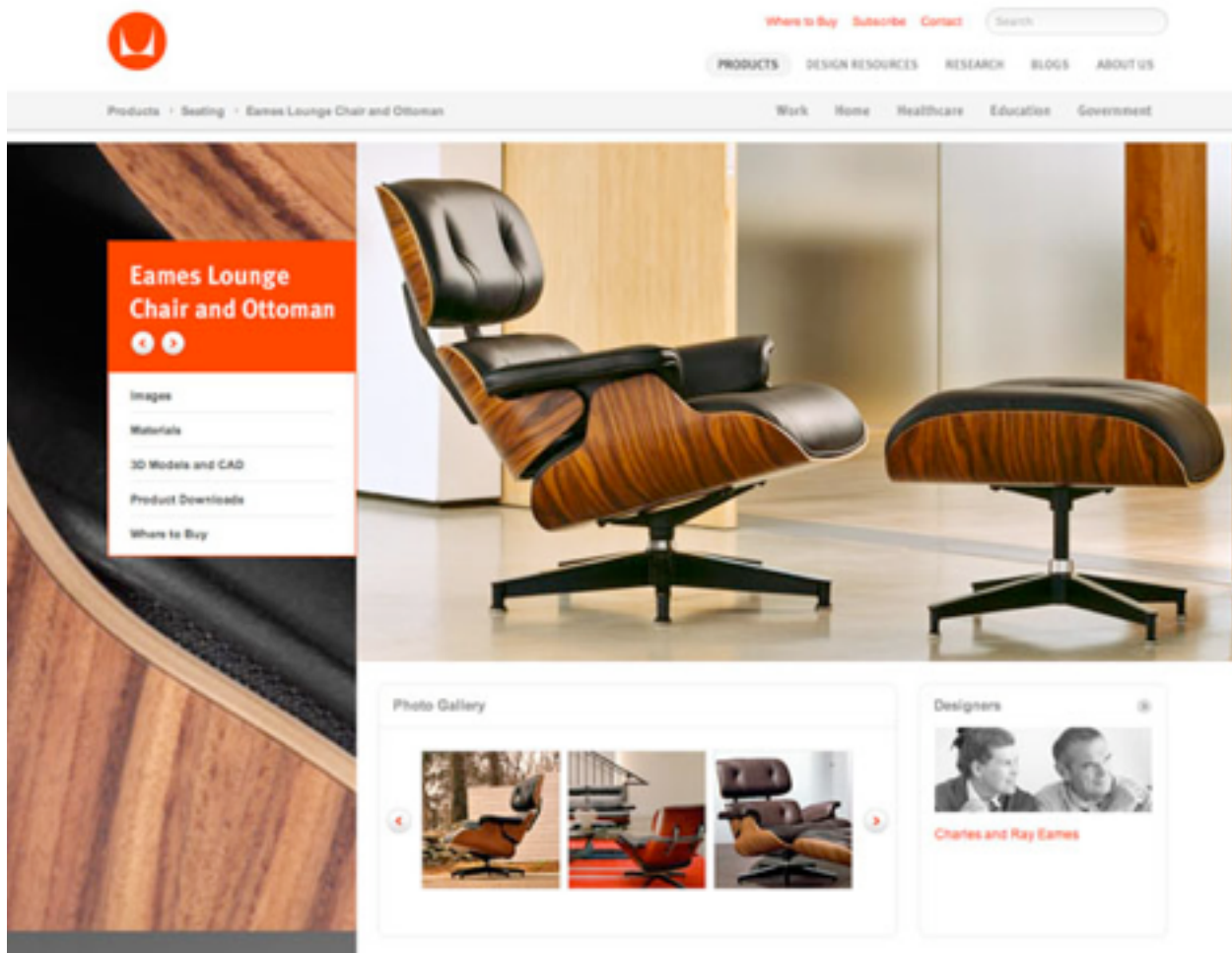
If you see something, say something. Orange alert. Bondi Blue alert. A big thank you to the Internet from CU & SC, GW & MA, Oral B, Design Within Reach, Steve Jobs, Sarah Palin, and AMC. "Thank you for providing us with easy access to limitless amounts of inspirational information, especially information from the 20th Century."

The Internet's first decade as a mass medium was a time for digestion and regurgitation. Information filled the expanding network and overflowed back into the minds of its users. In the wake of this relentless and overwhelming flood of influence, the past has become a conveniently located mental refugee camp for everyone having trouble coming to terms with the 21st Century and The Economist magazine's [predictions](#) of America's lackluster place in it. If the forecast for Your Future is coming up [#scary](#), the world wide web provides the ultimate manual for living it up in the decade of your dreams while holding down a day job in 2010. Time-consuming research into the furniture design, art, or music of the last century offers the perfect distraction for the thinking classes from America's 21st Century troubles. Why concern yourself with the future when [DFA](#) keeps churning out disco-punk dance hits from 1979?

The Mid-Century Modern period and its immediate aftermath is an especially attractive time-travel destination for upper middle class American fans of historical reenactment on both sides of the Left/Right political divide. The rational and the irrational find a neutral picnic ground in sanitized wistful memories of the 1950s and '60s. Conservatives love the lack of legal abortions, progressives say they love the décor. Americans are familiar with where the 20th Century fantasies of the conservative elite end up—with the Religious Right's fight for family values, the Tea Party's campaign for wealth against health, and Fox & Friends' reactionary infomercials. Glenn Beck and his colleagues make their livings on Rupert Murdoch's airwaves dreaming about Barack H. Obama cleaning toilets in Dwight D. Eisenhower's America. +You missed a spot there, Boy!+



Where, though, does Dr. Who's TARDIS take America's caring, cultured, progressive liberal Democrats? Even with Obama in office, America's center-left-leaning intellectuals can't get enough of "Mad Men". Is it just the attention to period detail and the brilliant writing or is it the thrill of watching pregnant women drink cocktails and smoke cigarettes while the Black housekeeper does the dishes? The New York Times wants to know. The 2000s and the stunning traumas of Bush Cheney & Co. ushered in an era of extreme



escapism. Sitcoms specializing in social surrogacy like *Friends* have been replaced in our hearts and on our screens by period dramas like *Mad Men*, *Rome*, and *Battlestar Galactica* and by laptop DVD cultural safaris in the wilds of *Big Love* and *The Wire*.

The success of *Mad Men*, however, correlates with a wider Shout!-style revival party going on in the upper echelons around Mid-Century Modern culture. In New York's multi-million-dollar glass-curtain-walled condos, it can be a challenge distinguishing between the furniture and art from 1960 and the decorations designed back when The Strokes were still maxing out on Red Bull and vodka at Bar 13 in 2001. The Aeron chair and the Mizuno running shoes are obvious computer babies, but what about the coffee table and the chaise lounge and the toilet bowl brush? Unless you've done your research, the line between Mid-Century Modern and New Century Modern is a blurry one. Especially since Design Within Reach is making all the classics in updated colorways for "Today."

Photoshop can change the color of the Barcelona Couch to match the grayscale conceptual painting on the wall and a 3D modeling program can take the gleaming Mies van der Rohe crystal building and twist it into a pleasing shape that evokes "movement" and fractals. The Titanium Macintosh iComputer, "designed in California", rests in peace easily on top of the glass desk designed for Herman Miller. The Modern surface is back in force. What else has come along, Back To The Future, with it?

Much of the contemporary art created by young artists during the Bush years is also locked tightly in orbit around Modernism's collapsed star. Reinterpretations of Modern Art's greatest hits have been wildly popular in institutional group shows and art fairs for some time now. If we ignore the press releases and take the objects at face value, we are confronted again with time-travel anachronisms—black and white abstract paintings that would look almost right in 1919 or 1955, formal sculpture perfectly at home alongside minimalist works from the '60s and '70s. Is it really Nicolas Bourriaud's [Altermodernism](#), a Modernism reloaded with a globalized, internet-reliant population's preference for non-linear culture or

does it just look good on the walls of a nouveau moderne apartment with a view of The High Line? The role of period-specific market forces as an engine for selection cannot and will not be ignored when looking back at the successful art of the 2000s. Who was inflating the art bubble and where was their money coming from? ! Stepping away from theory into the realm of economics and geopolitics, the dots are there to be connected with Richard Meier, the glass condos in the Lower East Side, DWR, and all the Nth-wave Modern art on display in Chelsea in 2007 and 2008.

The i-bankers and successful real estate developers who can afford to enjoy *Mad Men*'s rich Mid-Century colors on Sony's \$4000 Bravia HD TV are not immune to the psychic gloom that the last decade blew in from Washington, Crawford, and Baghdad. The cultural fallout shelters that they've added to the skyline look to and believe in a postwar golden age of American innovation and creativity. They've literally bought into it. The warped digital geometry of the buildings distracts the eye from the glass curtain walls and the harmony of lines and angles. These are buildings that want to lock our imaginations onto the 1950s and '60s, a simpler time when the issues presented on TV were less complex and the news was black and white.

On both sides of the American political divide, Republican economic liberals and Democratic cultural liberals are furnishing their homes and businesses in an imperial American revival style. During the 2000s, the creative classes came to believe that surface has been evacuated and style depoliticized. This is the thinking that allows the left to vote for the first Black president, while at the same time beatifying the country's Cold War power style and the last gasp of a monolithic mass culture.

THE STROKES






White doesn't have to be vanilla. Ivory, snow, cream, powder, platinum—these shades are just the beginning. Anything is possible at Design Within Reach.



Color Story | White

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|  <p>Reid Sofa 86" Select items on sale (while supplies last). Was: \$4,300.00 - \$4,300.00 USD Now: \$4,000.00 - \$4,300.00 USD</p> |  <p>LC2 Petit Modelle Armchair NEW Designed by Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret and Charlotte Perriand, produced by Cassina \$3,780.00 - \$4,190.00 USD</p> |  <p>Barcelona® Couch Designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, produced by Knoll® \$7,904.00 - \$8,515.00 USD</p> |
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Thanks to the web, with enough spare time and dedication, you can bone up on any topic enough to out-expert the original participants. Rock bands of the 2000s abandoned ship on the present to colonize any number of obscure lost histories—'60s Garage Rock, '70s No Wave, '80s Post-Punk, '90s Acid House, and so on. Napster, Souseek, Bittorrent and countless mp3 blogs reopened the lost worlds of the last century. Millions of teenagers and twentysomethings filled their iPods with the music, put on the clothes, and built a lifestyle out of recreating various obscure moments from the past. Temporal defection. Large numbers of artists from this same cohort, born in the '70s and early '80s, have followed this same approach with 20th Century art history, finding spiritual homes in the exhumed surfaces of Cubism, Russian Constructivism, Futurism, Abstract Expressionism, and all the other avant-garde utopias. Pick a period in art history and pick up where it left off. Step #2 after earning your Wikipedia certification is updating the [sneaker design](#), adding the designer's touch and preserving the ebay value of the deadstock originals. Las Vegas is perhaps the only place on Earth where architecture followed this approach. Every new casino there has been ripped out of a different place and time and tenderly replanted in the radioactive desert. Among the urban moneyed elite, however, living in kitschy versions of [Ancient Egypt](#) or [Venice](#) never caught on. A single architectural style has dominated the urban construction sites of the G20 since Y2K.

Renderings



Art Nouveau (1)

Looking out across the Pacific, it's clear that the Chinese can't wait to bulldoze Beijing and upgrade to the newest of the new. This imperative is most obvious in the bleeding-edge architecture that the Chinese commissioned for Beijing's Olympic redesign. In Asia, New Century Modern architecture is being used to erase the past rather than to wallow in it. For Beijing and Shanghai, it's an imported luxury good whose



1.0 About the Building

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The building's gently curving curtain wall of different sized panes of colorless glass - each set in a unique angle and torque - will sheath one of the most meticulously customized, high performance residential addresses in the nation. This dazzling window pattern will frame splendid views from within the tower while producing an exterior texture that serves as a poetic analog for the vibrancy, density and changeability of New York City.

references and antecedents are irrelevant to the locals. China didn't have a Mid-Century Modern period. In the '50s and '60s, China had Chairman Mao's thousand flowers and the Cultural Revolution. The Chinese (and most of the planet) find little excuse for nostalgia in the 20th Century. If the past is a gangrenous dead limb, you lop it off and move on with your life.

Even with syndicated reruns of Japan's 1990s lost decade playing to a captive audience in the States, pixelated glass shibboleths are still under construction all over Manhattan Island. Computer-aided Contemporary Modern architecture, art, and design continues to flood the worlds of aspiration and luxury. The flows of wealth initiated by the Bush administration (RIP KIT BFF 2001-2009) determined the tastemakers. Surface Magazine sold them on an updated Phillip Johnson lifestyle and the neo-con beneficiaries decorated their new privacy-optional lofts accordingly. Millions of Americans are experiencing culture shock in their own country and they are seeking refuge in the past. What looks good on those walls? Your Safe Institutional Nostalgia Shrine, brought to you by West Elm, Wallpaper, GWB, DC, PW & CR, the Internet and 9/11. Feel better, New Century Modernism.

Some creative highlights/milestones along the road to/of the New Century Modern style so far:

\$5 auto-cad toothbrushes with color changing indicator bristles and ergonomic grips are today's default dental hygiene choice at the drug store. Toothbrushes led the way into the home for the resurgence of "good design" after the Ramada Inn Beige/Mauve period whose apotheosis was *Star Trek: The Next*



Generation (TNG). Date? Which came first, though, Oral-B's chicken or the iEgg "flavors" that Steve Jobs laid for us in the late '90s? Maybe it was the ergonomic Aeron chair designed by Don Chadwick and Bill Stumpf in 1994.

Surface Magazine, i-D, ID, Wallpaper: the interchangeable, indispensable coffee table accessory of the early 2000s whether your career interests lay in fashion, graphic design, or IDM music. These magazines and their "Avant Guardian" photographers convinced thousands of people to make design a key criterion in their consumer lives. Surface Magazine promoted the designers who favored the ergonomic task-chair and iMod styles of the 90s and early 2000s. There was also plenty of room within its pages for all the antler chandeliers and Williamsburg Victoriana coming out of Brooklyn.

Ska music comes from Jamaica and was the forerunner of Reggae. Ska's first wave happened in the 1960s and gave us Desmond Dekker. Two-tone, Second Wave Ska, emerged in England in the '70s and gave us bands like The Specials and The Selector. In the '90s, Third Wave Ska gave us bands like Skankin' Pickle, Mephiskapheles, and The Mighty Mighty Bostones.

Right around the time that 9/11 sent traumatized twenty-something New Yorkers running for the safety of '80s music and LCD Soundsystem, Apple took the color out of its iMac line of lucite computers and released a line of mod products that would look right at home in *Space: 1999* or *2001: A Space Odyssey*. These computers also match everything in a new Ian Schrager condo loft furnished by Design Within Reach, West Elm, CB2, and/or Ikea.

Gene Roddenberry's science fiction franchises have an uncanny knack for distilling the architectural and technological aesthetics of their times and creating a 100% contemporary universe with them. The original *Star Trek* (1966-69) presents a Mid-Century Modern fantasy in space—with avocado walls on alien planets and blue-gray talking computers. *Star Trek TNG* (1987-1994), as mentioned above, takes the beige computer and beige hospital from the late '80s and flies around the galaxy in it, visiting planets full of lavender vases, mauve corporate carpets, and static electricity orbs from Spencer's circa 1986. Roddenberry's posthumous series *Earth Final Conflict* (1997-2002) is an Aeron chair merged with toothbrushes and running shoes and has alien human hybrids and FBI agents with brain implants. OMG!



HILARIOUS The saga continues in the latest Star Trek movie (2009). The sets of the new and improved starship Enterprise offer a vision of interstellar exploration charted from the bridge of the Apple Store.





Airports are architecture's most extravagant sketch pad. In the terminals of Schiphol, Frankfurt, JFK, Charles de Gaulle, Ronald Reagan, and all the rest, architecture and design create immersive contemporary environments on a grand scale. Jet Blue's Terminal 5 at JFK comes complete with a Muji store and a Jamba Juice and connects seamlessly with Eero Saarinen's landmark 1960s terminal, the Transworld Flight Center (i.e. TWA Terminal 6).



With *The Wire* off the air, *Mad Men* is the current gold star standard-bearer of the new golden age of television. For viewers who either lived through the '60s or grew up amid its ruins in the '70s and '80s, the show can generate intense nostalgia and longing. In the second season when Don Draper runs off to Palm Springs (episode 24: *The Jet Set*), you can smell the chlorine in the pool and feel the sunburn on your back. *Mad Men* cunningly portrays America's transition from socially conservative monolithic culture with legislated discrimination to the dysfunctional, fragmented, lifestyle-oriented consumer culture that we enjoy today. As much as some people tell themselves that the '50s and '60s were a hideous time to be alive, televised fantasies involving sexually harassing secretaries with no consequences, drinking and smoking in the office, or getting married and quitting your job provide vicarious thrills for millions. The characteristics of New Century Modern architecture are discussed in the paragraphs above. Here are some images of notable buildings from the Neo-con decade in New York City:



