

Fifty years on, recalling a round building in a rectangular world

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Hip to be square? One Downtown core building begs to differ.

The Downtown core offices of [Family Law Firm](#), near 5th and Fruit, stand out for two distinct reasons: While the brick building has just one floor, it is entirely elevated to second-story height by pillars that clear space for ground-level parking underneath. And unlike practically every one of its peers in the area, it is built in a circular shape.

Next time you pass, wish it a happy 50th birthday.

Back in 1971, architect Edward George Wynn designed it and two smaller rectangular buildings that frame the property along Roma. (505 and 509 Roma NW currently house Jaramillo Law Firm and Winger Law Firm, respectively.)

To Albuquerqueans, he is perhaps best known for designing the [Congregation B'nai Israel](#) synagogue, whose roof rises, tent-like, at Indian School and Washington NE.

But why did Wynn, who died in 2014, conjure such a lofty design for mere law offices?

"George was interested in trying to do something that was creative," recalled Bart Prince, who knew Wynn and is no stranger to off-beat architecture himself, having designed the spaceshipesque "[Bug House](#)" off of Monte Vista Boulevard.

Back in 1972, however, Prince was still looking to get accredited after earning his bachelor's in architecture, and that meant apprenticing in the office of a licensed architect.

"The kind of work that interested me was more unusual, creative work," Prince told DAN. "And George was the closest to anybody I could find around here."

So why a round structure on stilts?

"Yeah, I'm very familiar with that building," Prince said, speaking by phone from the Bug House. Some lawyers needed space to work, he reckoned, and "That was the solution in George's mind - and they built it, which is great ... The more unusual work was always more difficult to do, but, you know, it was a time when you could get things built."

(The innovation in shape and elevation is an example of [mid-century modernism](#), which favored forms as striking as they are functional. The architectural school even boasts [a local preservationist fan club](#).)

Asked whether Wynn encountered any pushback for disrupting Downtown's rectilinear norm, Prince laughs.

"Well, probably," he says. "I know George and I talked about that all the time, but I don't know with that particular building."

—By *Karie Luidens*

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