

# Edward Tanner

Architect

1896-1974

by Susan Jezak Ford

Architect Edward Tanner helped design some of our favorite streetscapes. His work can be seen on the Country Club Plaza, on the campus of UMKC, in Prairie Village, and in Kansas City's most picturesque suburbs. A longtime partnership with developer J. C. Nichols cultivated Tanner's creativity in our Midwestern city.

Tanner trained as an architect at the University of Kansas, served as a gunnery instructor during World War I, and then came to Kansas City looking for work. A friend suggested that he approach J. C. Nichols. That 1919 conversation began a lifetime association between Tanner and the J. C. Nichols Company. He initially began working as an employee for the company, but soon formed his own architectural firm. The link was established, however, and the two men worked very closely until Tanner retired in 1964. Upon his retirement, he had served for a number of years as Vice-President of the J. C. Nichols Company.

The Country Club Plaza remains Tanner's most recognizable work. He designed most of the major buildings and was responsible for much of its physical appearance. The style of the district was referred to nationally as "the Nichols towers with that Tanner wham." He also designed more than 2000 houses for Nichols' developments in the Country Club District and in Johnson County. The designs for the complementing Crestwood Shops and Prairie Village Shopping Center were also his.

Tanner explored the new field of modernist architecture, often straddling the line between those that favored traditional designs and those that advocated compact houses, flat roofs, and energy efficiency. His accomplishments included the Linda Hall Library at UMKC, the Danforth Chapel at KU, and the Public Library building at 311 E. 12<sup>th</sup> Street. His design for the Bixby House at 6505 State Line is a striking contrast to the thousands of very traditional houses he designed.

Edward Tanner died in 1974, leaving an architectural legacy that continues to be enjoyed by many Kansas Citians today.



**Sources**

Ehrlich, George. *Kansas City, Missouri: an Architectural History, 1826-1990*. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1992.

"E. W. Tanner, Plaza Architect, Dies." *The Kansas City Times*, 26 April 1974.

Fowler, Dick. *Leaders in Our Town*. Kansas City: Burd & Fletcher, 1952.

© 2003

Photo: Courtesy of The Kansas City Star.