



7 WAYS OF LOOKING AT THE PLAZA  
50 NOTABLE THINGS TO SEE  
BY HISTORIC KANSAS CITY

COUNTRY  
CLUB

# PLAZA

## WALKING GUIDE

PUBLISHED WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE WILLIAM T. KEMPER FOUNDATION

# COUNTRY CLUB PLAZA

## WALKING GUIDE

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# TAKE A WALK

By Jonathan Kemper

**I**n addition to being one of Kansas City's favorite gathering places, the Country Club Plaza is widely considered a jewel of 20th-century urban design. At 95 years old, the district endures as the most vital and valued part of its regional community, which counts over two million residents and 20 million annual visitors. Famously designed to embrace the automobile, the Plaza is in fact human scaled, with rich and layered decoration and detail intended to enchant and reward those who take the time for a walk and a moment to look around them.

This guide, organized as a series of walking tours and seven short essays, provides entertaining facts and insight on the unique character and features of the Plaza.

It includes brief comments on 50 notable items on the Plaza and the vicinity intended to give a richer sense of its historical context and of those who designed and created its art and architecture.

In fact, there is a deeper history here than even many locals might know. When you walk on the Plaza, it sometimes pays to look down. In the early 1990s, the Historic Kansas City Foundation installed bronze plaques in the sidewalks around the Plaza Time Building (No. 12 on the walking tour). Each reminds us that the Plaza occupies an historic site, a place

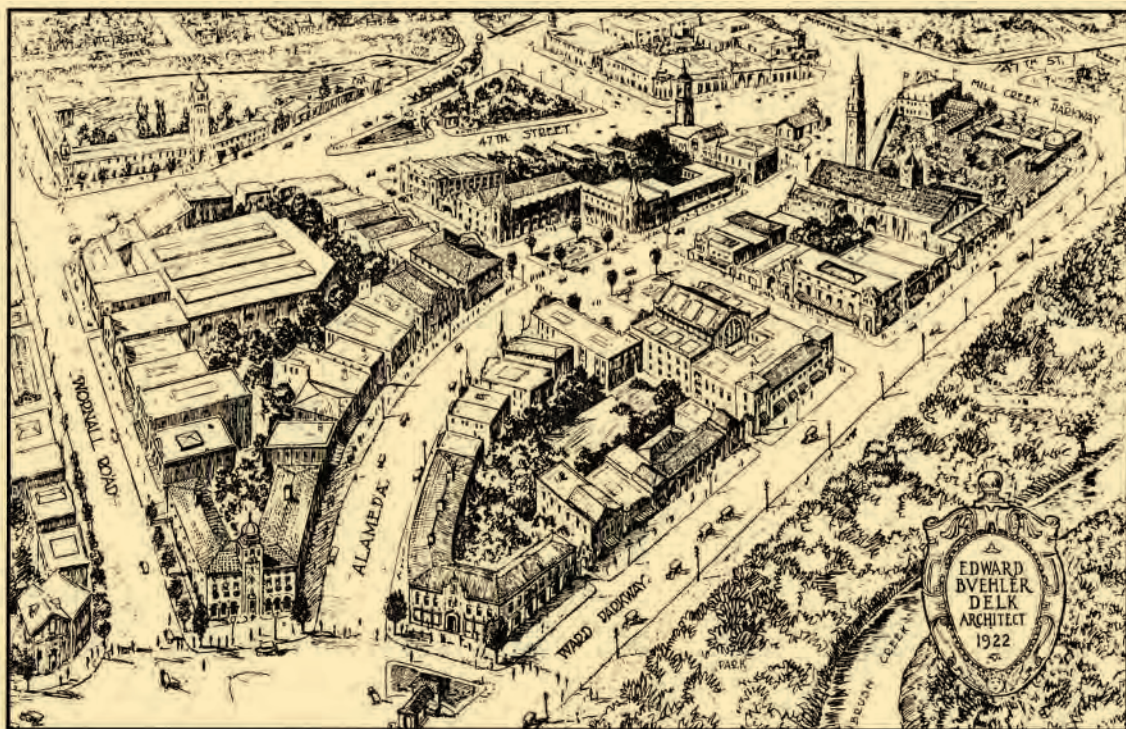
known by pioneers on the Santa Fe Trail and by soldiers in the largest Civil War battle west of the Mississippi.

This guide will be a success if its users discover not only the mere presence of this special asset but how the experience of walking through the Plaza can create a deeper understanding of the place and of the genius of the people who conceived it, developed it and preserved it for our enjoyment and for those who will follow.

There is a power in the built environment – as Churchill said, “we shape our buildings, and thereafter they shape us.” J.C. Nichols spoke often of the importance of long-term urban planning. “By building for permanence,” he once said, “we inspire ambition to be a property owner; we build a country desirable and fit for our children and our children’s children.”

Much has changed over the past century in and around the Plaza’s 55 acres of built environment. Still, the alert tourist will notice that much of its design, character and charm endures as a physical testament to J.C. Nichols’ vision. At No. 36 – the site of the original J.C. Nichols offices – look for the bronze sidewalk plaque (paraphrasing the architect Christopher Wren’s epitaph): “J.C. Nichols 1880-1950; If you would see his monument, look about.”





## FIRST, THE ROADS

By William Worley

*To ensure the Plaza's longevity, Nichols combined planned roads, parkway sites and the savvy placement of a federal highway in the 1920s.*

**I**t's quite likely that planning for the Country Club Plaza began in the mind of J. C. Nichols as soon as he returned from his first visit to the planned suburb of Roland Park, north of Baltimore, Md., in 1912. By 1913, Nichols began to send his most trusted real estate salesman to buy up scattered lots in a failed subdivision in the Brush Creek Valley bordered by a recently extended streetcar line and two brand new city boulevards designed by George Kessler – Mill Creek (now J. C. Nichols) and Ward Parkway. This process took the better part of a decade until 1922.

Also in 1913, Nichols began a working relationship with independent landscape architect Herbert Hare, who later contributed to the street planning for the Plaza after World War I. And at the end of the Great War, Nichols attracted the architect Edward Buehler Delk to Kansas City to design homes for buyers of lots in the Country Club residential district. Delk, in turn, used the large framework of the parkways designed by Kessler and the interior streets laid out by Hare to create the initial land plan that was published in 1922 announcing the beginning of planned construction in the shopping district.

The timing was significant. By 1922, there were thousands of automobiles in the Kansas City region, partly as a result of the establishment of a Ford Motor plant in the city in 1908. In the mid-1920s, calls for a national road system came to fruition in Washington with the Federal Highways Act of 1926. J.C. Nichols involved himself sufficiently in that process to ensure that U. S. 50-S (today's U. S. 56) would pass directly through the Plaza on Ward Parkway, Madison and 47th Street. It was a masterstroke: placing a shopping destination in the path of one of the primary automobile entrance points to the city.

Over the succeeding century, the planned road system, the restriction of architectural style to a Mediterranean theme featuring Spanish, Moorish and Italianate structures, and the creation of a merchants' association with rule-enforcing capability have all created the first "lifestyle shopping center" in America that caters almost exclusively to an automobile-driven clientele. In an age when shopping centers often seem to have at most a 25-year lifespan, the longevity of the Country Club Plaza attests to the planning genius and devoted persistence of the J. C. Nichols Company and its successors.



**"Let us ... build enduring homes and neighborhoods; permanent business, commercial and industrial areas with lasting values, all planned for a century or more."**

*– J.C. Nichols*







## A SENSE OF INTIMACY

By Cindy Frewen

*There's a kind of magic in the Plaza's distinct architectural narrative of grace, beauty, and delight.*

**T**he term “shopping center” conjures images of sprawling malls or big-box stores set on acres of asphalt parking lots. One looks much like another. Only signage signals our destination. Transactional economics rule. We have an errand to run, a job to do.

The Country Club Plaza, in contrast, appeals to more of our senses. First impressions of towers, fountains, warm tones, and tiled roofs make it unlike any other shopping center. Moreover, we see people. They talk and laugh as they stroll sidewalks, go in and out of shops, and sit in open-air cafes. The Plaza showcases people having fun. While there, we become part of it.

J.C. Nichols knew something other civic leaders and developers took decades to learn. People's sense of the place comes first. He supplied convenience of location, everyday uses, and ample free parking. Yet his special attention was to the intimate feel of the Plaza.

What magic device did Nichols use to attract people, to bring them back over and over? He created a place that transports us into a distinct architectural narrative of grace, beauty, and delight. At the Plaza we enact the good life. We know its patterns, what Christopher Alexander described as a particular language that creates the magic of the place.

While some contend the Plaza mimics Seville, it is, in fact, uniquely Kansas City. The Europeans built soaring towers intended to draw your eyes to heaven in spiritual awe and monumental plazas for crowded markets. The Plaza, in its variations on Spanish Colonial Revival and other styles, works the small brush strokes of human scale. These distinctions, first meant to complement adjacent neighborhoods, continue under diligent stewardship. We come to know the place through a rich mix of experiences, material details and memories.

The vernacular design is not frozen in an historic past but remains alive in a multi-sensory future. Few have dared to explore those boundaries. Not far away, Steven Holl's exotic, contemporary addition to the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art deepens our appreciation of the neo-classical original. Through contrast, we know the other better. The Plaza is an orchestrated pattern that thrives on both repetitions and inventions.

Rather than bland inward-facing structures, as in most shopping malls, the Plaza returns us to a kinder, gentler life where people meet on a vibrant stage. Its human dimensions and openness destroy the fear and anonymity of the city. We share the Plaza and are reminded that there's still goodness among strangers.



**"Spanish architecture was selected on account of beauty of design, use of color, its pleasing adaptation to broken roof lines, its towered skyline and the fact that it is on the Santa Fe trail leading into that great Southwest."**

*– J.C. Nichols*





## RETAIL DESTINATION

By LaDene Morton

*The Nichols Company strategically selected merchants, a process that evolved with changing habits and markets.*

**W**hen Highwoods Properties sold its Country Club Plaza holdings in 2016, it fetched \$660 million for 18 buildings containing a robust mix of retail and office space.

The new owners — a partnership of two prominent shopping center developers, Taubman Centers and the Macerich Co. — undoubtedly will continue the evolution of the Plaza's retail life, which goes back nearly a century.

For Kansas City, and the nation, the Plaza represented a shift from the downtown-centered retail environment. Downtowns, despite congestion and grime, offered an appealing range of department stores, which carried all the most modern and fashionable merchandise of the day.



By design, the Plaza was, from its beginning in 1923, an intentional mix of the everyday and the unique. J.C. Nichols often referred to its collection of shops as “one large department store.” It catered to the needs of high-rise apartment dwellers and residents of the nearby Nichols-developed neighborhoods. It also became a regional alternative to downtown shopping, the first suburban shopping center in America built to accommodate cars.

The Nichols Co. strategically chose its Plaza merchants. It preferred already popular shop owners and those who had a keen understanding of their clientele, a majority of whom were women. Many of the earliest businesses were operated by women – Mrs. Reineke’s Photography Studio, Mrs. Chisholm’s Millinery Shop, Mrs. McGavran’s Beauty Shop.

Location was strategic, too. Providers of basic goods and services were placed on the periphery. People filled their cars at corner gas stations and parked in garages, where tire shops or mechanics serviced vehicles. Their doctors and dentists had offices upstairs in the two-story buildings at the Plaza’s interior, above the more prominent retail shops.

**“Elasticity and flexibility – all subject to change and adaptability – are important, challenging words in permanent planning of shopping centers.”**

*– J.C. Nichols*

Specialty stores and high-end retailers – Chandler

Floral, Wolferman’s Gourmet Grocer, Helzberg jewelers -- served as anchors, drawing shoppers from all over the city. In 1947, the Plaza scored a coup when leading retailer Sears, Roebuck & Co., opened its first store in an American suburban center. National retailer Macy’s arrived 20 years later.

Between the 1930s and 1970s, the Plaza continued as both a neighborhood center and the home to Kansas City’s finest shops. The retail landscape changed considerably in the late 1970s and 1980s, the era when “big-box” retailers and discounters such as Wal-Mart supplanted local operations and old storefront favorites such as Woolworth’s. The names of shops that had defined style in Kansas City for generations – Jack Henry, Woolf Brothers, Rothschild’s, Harzfeld’s, and Chasnoff’s among them – started to fade into memory.

Today, global brands like Apple and Burberry dominate among the roughly 170 retail establishments, including 42 restaurants, in the Plaza lineup. Even a local powerhouse like the Halls department store has departed recently, making way for a multi-tenant development and emphasizing the Plaza’s tradition of retail evolution.



## THE JOYS OF PUBLIC SPACE

By Dominique Davison

*Courtyards, art works and inspiring details present a people-oriented experience, inviting visitors to have a seat, climb a penguin and celebrate life.*

**I**f you're a first-time visitor to the Plaza, just pay attention to the small details, the nooks and crannies that invite you to sit down, relax or have some unexpected fun.

That's how my family has experienced the Plaza since we moved to Kansas City and found our home nearby. We wanted to live somewhere that felt connected to community amenities, where we could walk to coffee and to the movies, shops and great restaurants.

J.C. Nichols knew what he was doing when he placed art works and European treasures all over. He knew that creating a growing city meant making small places that embrace daily human activity and give meaning to people's lives.

Our two young children love the parks just down the street from our house, but one of the things they love most is to walk down the hill to the Plaza on a Saturday morning. We stroll past the historic brown brick apartment buildings whose names were inspired by books and art (Mark Twain, David Copperfield). Many of them were designed nearly a century ago by Nelle Peters, a prolific architect in Kansas City and beyond who continues to inspire me in my own architecture practice.

The angled façade of a coffee shop on the west side of the Plaza creates just the right amount of space to form a pleasant little sidewalk eating area, shaded from the hot morning sun. Benjamin Franklin, on his bench out front, never ceases to entertain the kids, with his scroll of the Declaration of Independence in hand.

A favorite stop is around the corner. Three dancing penguin sculptures make for a playful space in thoughtfully laid out seating areas with water fountains all buffered from street traffic with landscaping. Children love to hug and climb the sculptures, and it's a welcome Plaza trait that this kind of interaction is not discouraged.

Other Plaza places beckon. We walk, we hold hands, we enjoy the colorful, lush plantings and patterns of pavement and Spanish-style tiles. The current term for what the Plaza does so well is “creative placemaking,” a movement that promotes interaction by integrating public art and human-scaled activities with urban space. But Nichols and his successors just looked at what worked in the great public spaces of Europe and then brought it here. One later eclectic addition, a line of streetlamps along 47th Street, was borrowed from San Francisco’s Market Street. Their nighttime glow casts a warm and welcoming aura on the distinctive and still modern place that Nichols first made so long ago.

**“Love and enjoy its picturesque towers; its changing beauty from the sunny skies to the clouded days, its softened tones in the twilight hours and its romantic beauty in the moonlight”**

*– J.C. Nichols*







## CHANGING RELATIONSHIPS

By Brian Burnes

*No longer a place for mundane retail services, the Plaza has redefined how it relates to neighboring residents.*

**I**n the early years of the 20th century, J.C. Nichols began building stately homes on tree-lined streets south of Brush Creek, a large swath of the growing city he collectively called the Country Club District.

As part of his plan, and to serve those well-to-do neighborhoods, he created carefully located groupings of commercial buildings, modeled after English village centers. After World War I, Nichols enlarged his vision for a retail-oriented shopping center, and in the 1920s, construction of the Country Club Plaza on the north side of Brush Creek took off.

J.C. Nichols built the Plaza for several reasons. His overriding principle was “planning for permanence,” to create neighborhoods with quality

homes whose value would grow as their surroundings improved. The Plaza, serving everyday needs while offering unique shopping opportunities, was part of the formula. Its success over nearly a century attests to the genius of the best parts of Nichols' enduring vision. "Developers of shopping centers and their tenants," Nichols once said, "should be able to depend on permanent buying power in their respective neighborhoods."

As a distinct neighborhood and as a resource for neighboring residents, the Plaza has represented a shifting and increasingly complicated relationship. To many area residents, it's a far different place than it used to be. As barber shops, pharmacies and variety stores gave way to luxury merchandising, the Plaza's "neighborhood" increasingly expanded to the greater region.

The Plaza rightfully achieved national distinction over the years, first among city planners then by the media. In 1961, editors of *The Saturday Evening Post* placed the Plaza on its cover. Their attention was not driven by the Plaza's dry cleaning shops or florists.

Still, the Plaza is personal and locals often exhibit a fierce proprietary regard for it. They live, work and play in the district. *It's our neighborhood*. And their feelings about development projects, traffic, design issues and history are quite real. Protests have erupted over developments that seemed out of scale with the Plaza. The Nichols Co. used to regularly earn the wrath of some activists as it seemed to favor the growth of buffering institutions nearby over neighborhoods with more modest housing stock.

Today, area residents have made a separate peace with the Plaza. It remains an urban neighborhood for many people. One might still see a doctor or a dentist there, but it's more a brand-name shopping and dining showplace, a neighborhood built to last.

**"Transition from outlying shopping centers to single house residence areas should be carefully studied and wherever possible a belt of park or playground areas, public libraries, churches, apartments or groups of attached houses should be introduced to gradually step up the character of the neighborhood."**

– J.C. Nichols





## A PLACE TO GATHER

By Jonathan O'Neil Cole

*The Plaza has developed the art of bringing people together for everyday living and for major communal events.*

**T**he Country Club Plaza “community” is defined not by a specific people, value or identity but rather by its sense of place as a regional destination.

“Everyone in Kansas City owns the Plaza, but no-one really owns the Plaza” is the way a close associate of mine conceptually described the community. “The Plaza is a revolving door,” he added. “It’s where you start before you have kids, and where you end before you enter the nursing home.” Maybe that sounds a bit comical, but you might wonder about how much truth his comment contained.



As newcomers from California, my wife and I settled into the western edge of the Plaza and soon came to realize why people said it was the place to be. Like many people, when family or visitors from out of town ask what they should do while in town, the Plaza is the first thing we mention. When we are out of town, it's one of the first things we identify as being representative of "Kansas City."

Conversations and conflicts over the years about public safety, panhandlers and disruptive behaviors amid large summer gatherings of young people bring into question the very definition of "community." But the Plaza is overwhelmingly a welcoming place inviting all manner of human existence. On any given day joggers pass through its green spaces, shoppers stroll sidewalks, people walk along Brush Creek, a wedding party takes pictures at the Nichols Fountain and protesters rally nearby for a cause.

As a commercial shopping center, the Plaza found ingenious ways to spark the imagination of large crowds of people. The Plaza Art Fair brings hundreds of artists from across the nation and thousands of local and regional visitors to the district each September. The public lighting ceremony that marks the start of the Christmas season is a feel-good annual ritual. Water-oriented entertainment and civic events often bring throngs to the banks of Brush Creek.

The Plaza "community" is best understood by the notion of authenticity. There is a sustained public passion for preserving J.C. Nichols' original vision of Spanish-inspired courtyards, fountains, and architecture while allowing for strategically placed modernism. "Lifestyle" or entertainment districts elsewhere may try to recreate its cosmopolitan vibe, but usually fall short, evoking a feeling of fabricated reality. The Plaza is an evolving brand that retains its authentic character and its magnetic pull on those who enjoy the pulse of communal gatherings and the vibrancy of human life in public spaces.



**"We all have an equal part in making it a greater asset to our city. A major point of interest to every out of town visitor."**

*– J.C. Nichols*





## IDEALS AND COMPLICATIONS

By John Herron

*Founder J.C. Nichols developed enduring ideas about picturesque neighborhood planning, though not without some historical challenges.*

**T**he Country Club Plaza is a neighborhood of contrasts and contradictions. Often teeming with people who stroll wide pedestrian sidewalks, the Plaza was originally constructed for the automobile. A source of local pride, the Plaza is home to community celebrations and yet its shops are upscale national chains. The environment surrounding the Plaza continually reminds visitors of its midwestern location, but the architecture is Spanish. Even the “natural” beauty that frames the Plaza community, including a pleasant slow-moving waterway, is anything but.

That the Country Club Plaza is so crafted should not surprise anyone familiar with the history of its creator, J.C. Nichols. Nor, given his legacy, should we be astonished that the Plaza is also a place of protest. On any given weekend evening, activists with sandwich boards and political banners ask passers-by for support. More significantly, the Plaza has also been the site of more serious political engagement. On more than one recent occasion, police on horseback have confronted African American youth who have used the Plaza as a stage to demonstrate. Unfortunately, Nichols—one of the nation’s most significant city developers and land planners—gave these young citizens ample reason to complain.

Beginning in the first years of the twentieth century, Nichols set to work on the un-urbanized edges of Kansas City. Nichols saw himself as a creator of community and one of his primary tools of growth became the restricted covenant. Nichols was not the first American developer to use covenants—additions to property deeds that controlled everything from setbacks to the race of residents—but when combined with his savvy employment of homeowner’s associations, he was able to build exclusive upper middle class subdivisions that became part of the city’s urban fabric. That these neighborhoods continue to exist (and remain desirable) is a testament to the planning insights of Nichols, but such tradition in Kansas City has long been accompanied by costs and trade-offs.

The Plaza, then, remains heir to Nichols’ deliberate neighborhood planning strategies. His spaces were intended to be both exclusive and profitable. The design process relied on ideals of the picturesque, an influential strategy embraced nationally by such institutional heirs as the Urban Land Institute, which Nichols helped create, and proponents of what has been called the “new urbanism.” Kansas City remains proud of the Country Club Plaza, and rightfully so, but as the district approaches its centennial perhaps understanding its history will only give greater significance to its legacy.



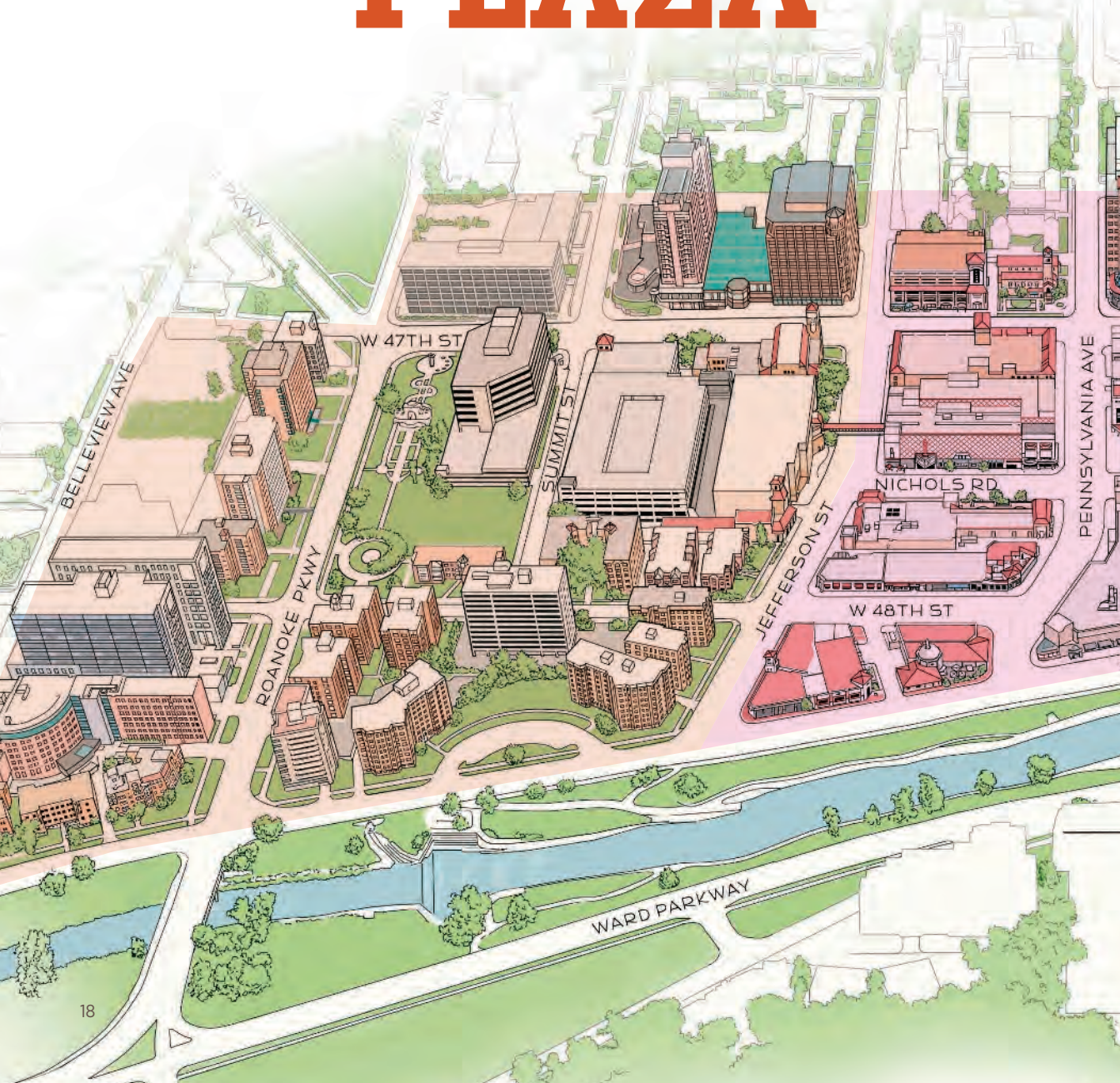
**“Are we building our town and cities monotonously alike, or are we accentuating their particular characteristic features and preserving their objects of natural beauty, scenic value, and historical interest?”**

*– J.C. Nichols*





# DISCOVER THE COUNTRY CLUB PLAZA





This aerial view of the University City area in San Diego shows a dense urban landscape. Key streets include W 47th St, Broadway St, Wornall Rd, Nichols Rd, Central St, Wando Test, Emanuel Cl, and Ward Parkway. The map features a variety of building types, from large institutional structures to smaller residential units, interspersed with green spaces and a river. The area is bounded by a mix of urban development and natural features.

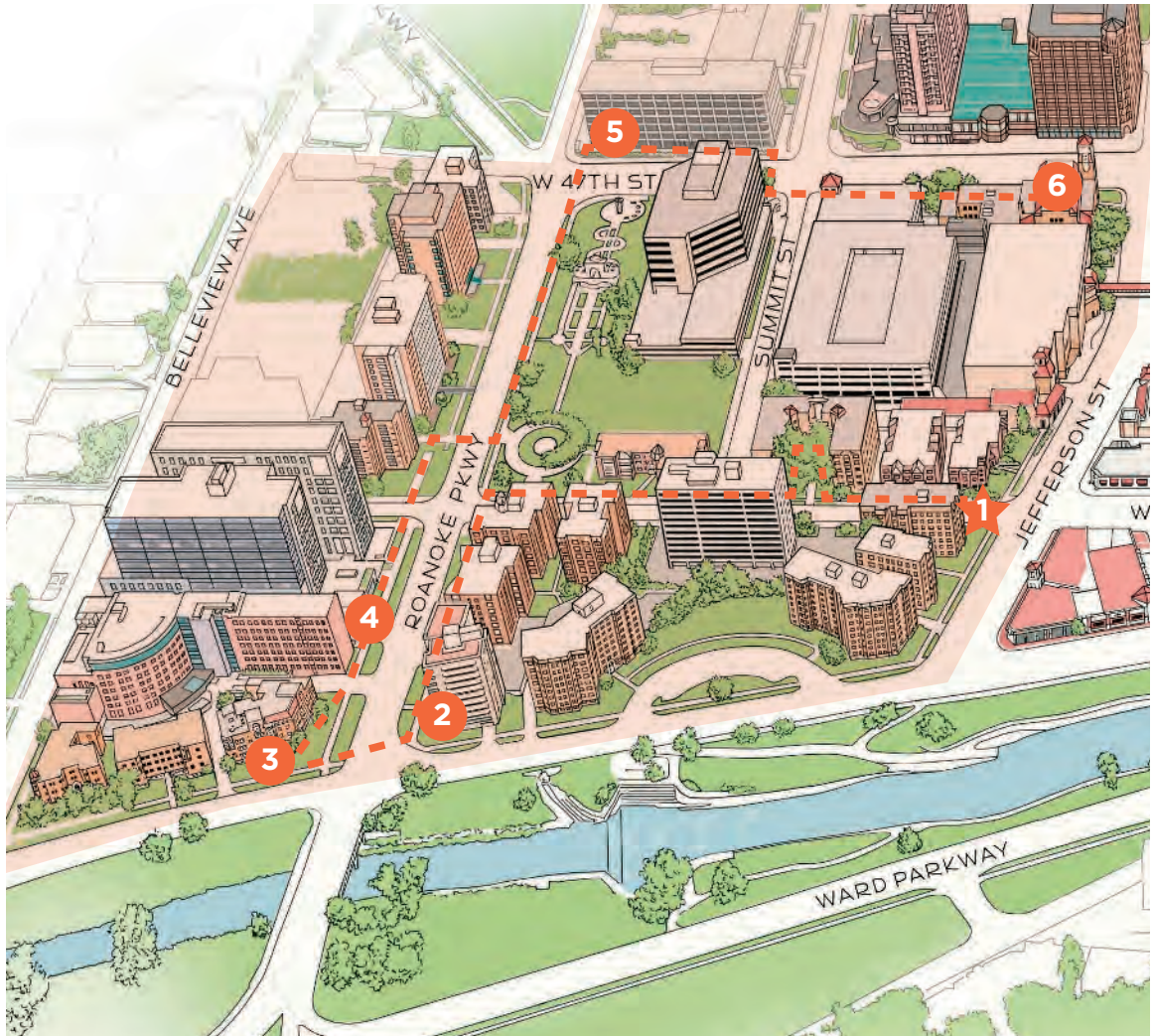


## 50 NOTABLE THINGS TO SEE

## A PLAZA WALKING GUIDE

Start: 48th and Jefferson, west side of intersection.

Tour time: 20-30 minutes.





## 1. Nelle Peters District

48th, between Jefferson and  
Roanoke

Nelle Peters was the talented architect of this remarkable collection of brown brick apartments – the “Poets and Painters” buildings – which pay tribute to Mark Twain, Robert Browning, Paul Cezanne and more. This concentration of buildings represents much of what’s charming and unique about Plaza history. Regrettably, in recent years some of these relatively modest housing units from the early 20th century have given way to demolition and redevelopment. *Worth a look: Walk into the shaded courtyard of the Rousseau Cezanne buildings to inspect the playful, ornamental details around the doorways.* (1920s)



architecture and real estate development with a somewhat tragic backstory. A dispute between a developer and a contractor led to the demolition, late in the construction process,

of an office building designed by star architect Moshe Safdie. Another developer bought the beleaguered property, redesigned the hotel and commissioned the new replacement tower. *Worth a look: In a gesture toward the Plaza’s Spanish themes, decorative panels amid the office building’s sleek modernity echo Arabesque details of the Alhambra.* (2013)

## 2. Sunset Tower

4821 Roanoke

Imagine the lifestyles of Plaza residents of the “Mad Men” era. This 10-story modern high-rise reflects International Style and other post-World War II movements. It was one of a handful

of high-rise buildings that added residents to the outer edges of the Plaza in the 1960s. (1962)



## 3. 900 Ward Parkway

One of three remaining pieces of the Park Manor Historic District (also identified as 4826 Roanoke), which evokes high-style living along the boulevard

in the late 1920s. This corner building, designed by the firm of Boillot and Lauck, gained notoriety for a bridge-game murder among upper-crust Kansas Citians in 1929 (see *The Devil’s Tickets*, by Gary M. Pomerantz). (1925-27)



## 4. Plaza Vista/Sorella Hotel

900 W. 48th Place

This block represents a protracted collision of history,

## 5. Plaza Corporate Centre

800 W. 47th

Originally known as the John Hancock Building, this is a design relative of the former BMA Tower (now One Park Place), a midtown high-rise landmark. The exo-skeleton, or expressed structural grid, of this modern building represents a bold architectural contrast to the Plaza’s historic styles. Architect of both buildings was Skidmore Owings & Merrill. (1963)



## 6. Unity Temple

707 W. 47th

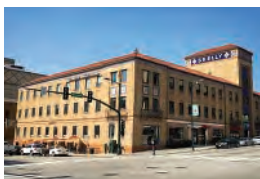
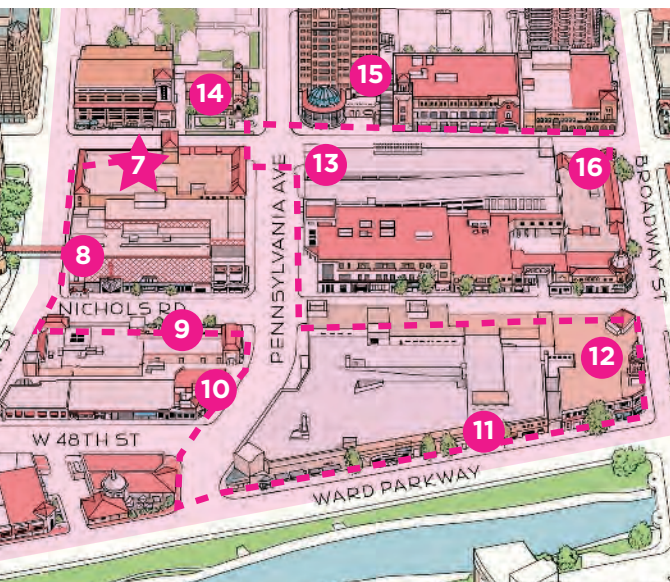
The Unity Society of Practical Christianity acquired the land in 1929, but plans for a new building didn’t coalesce until the mid-1940s. The temple, with its six-story bell tower and a series of stained glass windows, was designed by Charles A. Smith as a memorial to co-founder Myrtle Page Fillmore. *Worth a look: Step inside the sanctuary to see the vibrant, colorful windows, especially the star-burst “Love” panel above the main altar, which was designed by noted Kansas City artist Daniel MacMorris.* (1948)



# 50 NOTABLE THINGS TO SEE A PLAZA WALKING GUIDE

Start: South side of 47th Street, east of Jefferson

Tour time: 25-35 minutes



**7. Skelly Building**  
605 W. 47th

The Skelly Oil Co. of Tulsa originally housed its marketing department here. So the building

serves as a subtle reminder that a collection of gasoline stations helped the Plaza survive the Great Depression of the 1930s. It's one of the rare Plaza buildings not controlled by the Nichols Co. or its successors. The Italianate style, designed by Edward Tanner, blends subtly with its Spanish-accented neighbors. (1938)

**8. Sears/Seville Square**  
526 Nichols Road

The Sears Roebuck & Co., known for catalog and mail-order sales, injected a new era in Kansas City



retailing when it opened a department store on the Plaza, its first outside an urban downtown. It was also Kansas City's first department store beyond downtown. In later

redevelopments the building took on the character of an enclosed mall, though more recent alterations have connected some tenants to the sidewalk. Brick cross-hatching and recessed quatrefoils animate the exterior of the Tanner & Mitchell building. Two engaged columns with figurative tops on the south façade are rumored to have come from the estate of William Randolph Hearst. (1947)

**9. Court of the Penguins**

Nichols Road and Pennsylvania

Once the site of a service station and farm store, then a free-standing Sears garden shop and automotive center across from the main store.

The transformation to an upscale retail strip marked the evolution of the Plaza's marketing strategy. Arthur Kraft, a notable Kansas City artist, made the courtyard's penguin sculptures. (1945; updated 1979) *Worth a look: Consider how the building's entry bays preserve the onetime profile of the automotive shop's garage doors.*



**10. Mexican painted tiles**

Alley west of Pennsylvania

Duck down the alley a few steps to see this detailed image of the National University of Mexico, one of many tiled artworks around the Plaza evoking both life south of the border and J.C. Nichols' original tribute to Hispanic influences of the Southwest.





## 11. Ward Parkway Garage

420 Ward Parkway

A walk eastward along Ward Parkway reminds visitors that ground-floor retail was

an essential element of the Plaza plan. And nothing says automobile-oriented development more than a parking garage. Originally housing 275 vehicles for area residents, this structure was the second built for the Plaza, after the Barker Brothers Garage behind the Suydam (Mill Creek) Building. Each also housed tire and battery-charging services. (1928)

## 12. Plaza Time Building

416 Ward Parkway, 411-27 Nichols Road

This sprawling retail and office building, by Tanner & Mitchell, was part of a post-World War II building boom on the Plaza. Decorative tile panels, a clock tower capped with tiles and bands of red brick accents are among the enlivening features of this mid-century addition. As you round the corner toward Nichols Road, enjoy the shops and storefronts that animate the streetscape below the upper level of medical offices and other businesses. (1946-49) *Worth a look: At three corners of this block, note the sidewalk plaques honoring Kansas City history, especially the Battle of Westport marker at 48th and Pennsylvania, outside Victoria's Secret.*



## 13. Granada Garage

Southeast corner, 47th and Pennsylvania

The earliest Plaza parking garages tended to be reserved and unassuming spaces. When a 1940s era parking structure was

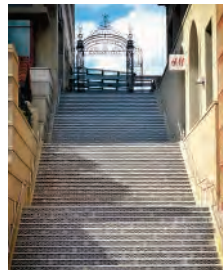
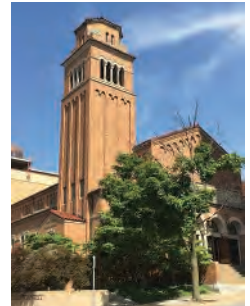
modernized, with the help of a new transportation sales tax, designers went all out to stamp it with contemporary interpretations of tile work and other Spanish-inspired details. Originally built to serve a

Saks department store on Nichols Road, the garage remains intact while the once austere Saks building has been improved over time with articulated storefronts and other details.

## 14. Seventh Church of Christ, Scientist

604 W. 47th

Nichols believed that neighborhoods were incomplete without houses of worship. Members began planning for this new church in 1927, and construction of the Romanesque building, designed by C. Wilbur Foster of Indianapolis, was completed in 1942.



## 15. Valencia Place

444 W. 47th

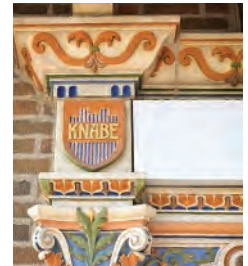
The largest development project ever undertaken on the Plaza, this 10-story, masonry-clad modern office building replaced a string of modest brown brick apartments.

It connects to the Plaza's European themes with design details such as the broad, tiled exterior stairway. (2000)

## 16. Knabe Building

Southwest corner of 47th and Broadway

The building first housed the Knabe Music Studio and a meeting hall on the second floor. The adjacent Broadway Building extended the Knabe's retail streetscape southward two years later and housed the Kansas City Gas Co. *Worth a look: The interplay of original terracotta and ultra-modern retail facades speaks to the evolution and vitality of the Plaza's strategy.* (1928)





## 50 NOTABLE THINGS TO SEE A PLAZA WALKING GUIDE

Start at 47th and Broadway,  
northeast corner

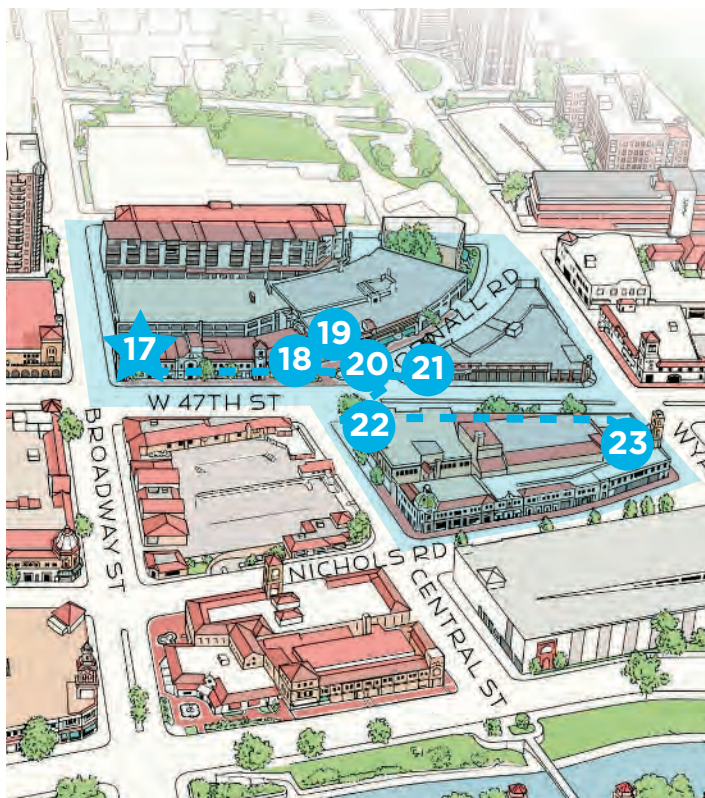
Tour time: 15-20 minutes



### 17. Balcony Building

47th and Broadway

This emblematic two-story, Tanner-designed retail building was threatened with extinction in 2010, but an extraordinary preservation effort spared it and its many original details from major alteration or demolition. The first story retail, the tile roof and reliefs, the low building with towers and balconies remain essential to the concept of the Plaza's bowl: the central district as a cohesive unit at the bottom, surrounded by taller buildings at the edges. (1925)



### 18. Wild Boar of Florence

47th, east of Broadway

The Nichols Co. favored art that echoed mythology and evoked the great cities of Europe. The bronze boar is a 20th-century replica of a famous Renaissance statue in Florence, Italy, which was believed to be based on an ancient marble boar made in Greece. (1962)



## 19. Aleman Court

47th, just west of Wornall

This space on the east end of the Balcony Building marks the visit of Mexico's president, Miguel Aleman, in 1947. It's somewhat diminished since its dedication, but a plaque and a tile honoring Mexico can be found on a post along the sidewalk. *Worth a look: Don't miss the statuary in the courtyard below. An antique French wellhead, featuring a playful lineup of carved cherubs, is typical of the decorative pieces in the Nichols collection. The wellhead was reportedly imported from Europe by the noted architect Stanford White.*



punctuates the west end of the block-long Plaza Theatre Building and heightens the Plaza's connection with that Spanish city and its traditions.



## 23. Plaza Theatre Building

4704-08 Wyandotte

Like many of the buildings in the district, this one has plenty of ground-floor retail spaces, which you will pass as you round the block to the original theater entrance. Although the movie theater has been converted



to retail use, many of its original ornately decorative interior features remain on site, hidden by modern walls. The theater helped the Plaza become known for entertainment in addition to shopping. *Worth a look: After you cross the street to the next tour section, you'll get a better view of the building's tower. (1928)*

## 20. Neptune Fountain

47th, near Wornall

The Neptune statuary (or Poseidon in Greek mythology) was made in 1911 by an English foundry for a



Philadelphia estate. (1952)

## 21. Triangle Building

47th and Wornall

This unusually shaped building, on the second-oldest block on the Plaza, housed a grocery and other shops offering basic services. In the 1930s and '40s it was home to Clare Martin's jazz club, which brought black musicians, including pianist Jay McShann, to the district. The clock tower on the west end was built in 1992 yet reflects the Plaza of old (1923) *Worth a look: Turn around and see how the building's tower mirrors the one on the Plaza Time Building to the southwest.*

## 22. Spanish Bullfight Tiles

4700 block of Central

This modern triptych, commissioned in the 1960s from a ceramicist in Seville,

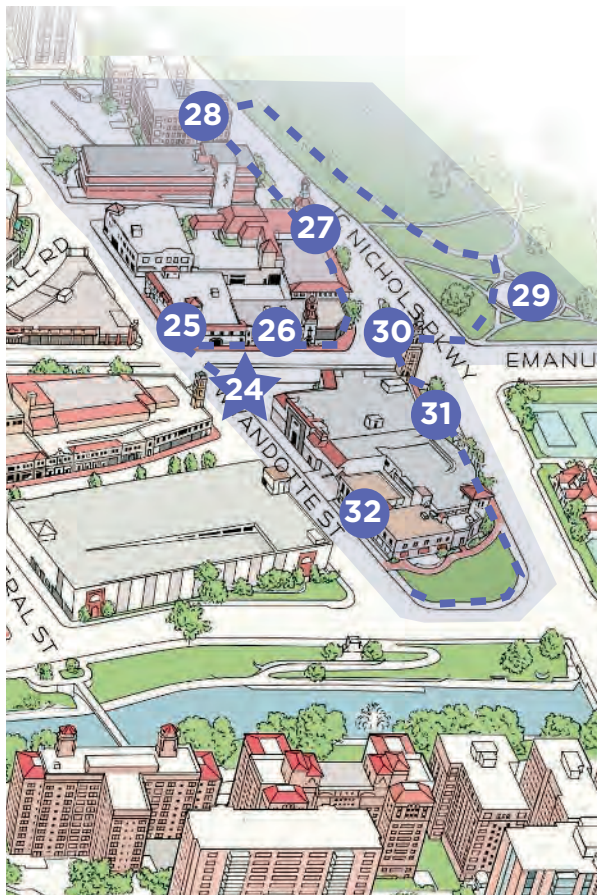




## 50 NOTABLE THINGS TO SEE A PLAZA WALKING GUIDE

Start: 47th and Wyandotte, southeast corner

Tour time: 25-35 minutes



### 24. Chandler Court

47th and Wyandotte

Named for the founder of the florist shop and greenhouse that stood nearby

from 1916, before the Plaza plan emerged, until the late 1950s. The Plaza's first gasoline filling station occupied the site. The cast-lead Bacchus fountain, another Plaza landmark honoring the gods of wine and good times, was originally housed on a countryside estate in England and installed here in 1969.



### 25. Commerce Bank Building

118. W. 47th

An early tenant of this corner building was an expansive and fancy Wolferman's grocery store. It remains one of the few Plaza buildings not owned and leased by Nichols Co. successors. In 1935, bank officials pressed Nichols on the company's finances, but Nichols declined to share the books. (1924)



### 26. Plaza Tower Building

116 W. 47th

The first Plaza building with a European-style tower. In 1936, the adjacent Circle building opened to the east, connecting the Plaza Tower with the Mill Creek Building rather seamlessly.



(1923) *Worth a look: At the east end of the building, note the tile at eye level that identifies "Delk," the architect.*



## 27. Mill Creek Building

4638 Nichols Parkway

Edward Buehler Delk's plan for the Plaza started here. Originally the Suydam Building, it inaugurated the European styles of architecture and ornament that would characterize the district: roof tiles "in tones of apricot and Indian red," according to an early document, and "glazed terracotta in tones of blue, green and yellow." All of it added up to "a most unusual structure for Kansas City." *Worth a look: Note the "CCP" medallions among the ornamental details.* (1923)



## 28. Park Lane Apartments

4600 Nichols Parkway

This early high-rise helped populate the Plaza. Its design came from the noted New York firm of George B. Post

& Sons, known for its commercial buildings, hotels, high-society mansions and, most prominently, the New York Stock Exchange. Highwoods Properties, successor to the Nichols Co., almost razed the building in 2002 to accommodate a law firm's headquarters, but preservationists raised an outcry. A deal led to redevelopment of the Plaza Library site, overlooking Brush Creek southeast of the Plaza, and conversion of the Park Lane to a hotel. (1925)



## 29. J.C. Nichols Memorial Fountain

47th and Nichols Parkway

This French fountain sculpture group once stood on the grounds of

a Long Island estate. The Nichols family bought it in 1952, two years after J.C. Nichols's death. In 2015, a long missing cherub and dolphin were reunited with the others and the whole fountain refurbished. The fountain and surrounding Mill Creek Park remain one of the city's most active gathering points and photo



backdrops. (1960) *Worth a look: As you prepare to cross the street towards the next stop, take in the iconic streetscape view of the Plaza and its towers.*



## 30. Seville Light

Median along 47th at Nichols Parkway

A companion to the Giralda Tower across the street, this is a replica of a light and fountain next to Seville's Giralda Tower. The chandelier is bronze and the four-sided shaft with water-spewing masks comprises three kinds of marble. (1967)

## 31. Giralda Tower

47th and Nichols Parkway

This three-fifths scale reproduction of a 12th-century tower in Seville, Spain, remains, at 150 feet, the tallest structure on the Plaza. It quickly became the gateway symbol of the Plaza. The bronze figure of Faith at the top was cast in Italy in 1967, about 200 years after the original. The tower once was conceived for the building that now houses Helzberg Diamonds, but Nichols deemed it too large for that site. (1967) *Worth a look: A westward view from Nichols Parkway includes the dramatic contrasts of the Plaza's assemblage of historic and modern buildings.*



## 32. Postal Life & Casualty Insurance Co. Building

4725 Wyandotte

The insurance company had sought an image of solid security and Tanner's

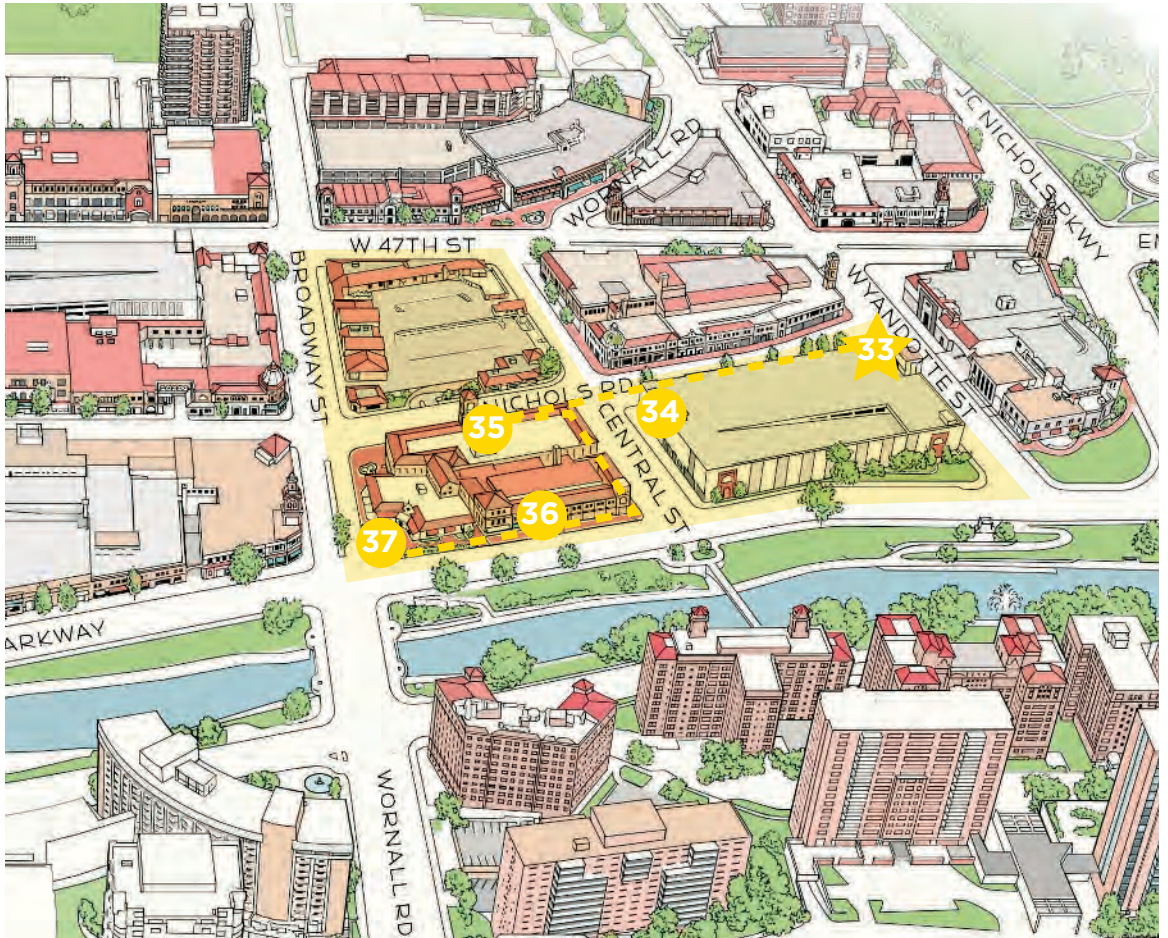


design was built over Nichols' stylistic objections. The building's original, austere, streamlined, art moderne façade, long hidden, was revealed after the departure of a retail tenant in the mid-2000s. (1933)

## 50 NOTABLE THINGS TO SEE A PLAZA WALKING GUIDE

Start: Nichols Road at Wyandotte

Tour time: 15-20 minutes





### 33. "Ruth"

Nichols Road and Wyandotte

This Carrara marble sculpture of the Biblical figure, a copy of an 1880 original, anchors a landscaped median strip in typical Nichols fashion. It's a product of the Romanelli Studio in Florence, which made many works for the Nichols Co. The company paid tribute to that business association in the name of a neighborhood to the south. (1962)



Nichols Road, two fountains dating to 1928 anchor the block, and an unusual Spanish mural, featuring a woman on a telephone, decorates a pedestrian entry to the garage.

### 36. J.C. Nichols Co. office

310 Ward Parkway

The Plaza developer moved its headquarters office from downtown to this building in 1930. Note the ornamental work around the doorway and the sidewalk plaque that designates the historic Plaza location. (1930) *Worth a look: A few steps to the west, a sculpture of an organ grinder with a monkey honors a real-life Plaza character.*



### 34. Halls Building and Garage

211 Nichols Road

This modern-era structure was the Plaza's answer to

suburban big-box stores. It was built to house Halls, the upscale department store owned by Hallmark Cards, and a parking garage. Its Moorish ornaments and arches placed it in the Plaza's style tradition. And the store's fashions, makeup counters, jewels and tableware spoke to the Plaza's predominant customers. Redeveloped in 2015-16, the retail side of the building, now known as Plaza 211, has been converted for multiple tenants. Some of the original ornamentation has been removed or rearranged. (1965, 2016)

### 35. Plaza Medical Building

301-27 Nichols Road

The colorful and rhythmic tile work, especially at the building's mid-block entrance, remains a distinctive feature of this Tanner-designed structure. Ground floor shop windows will occupy your time as you tour the block toward the next stop. (1937) *Worth a look: Across*

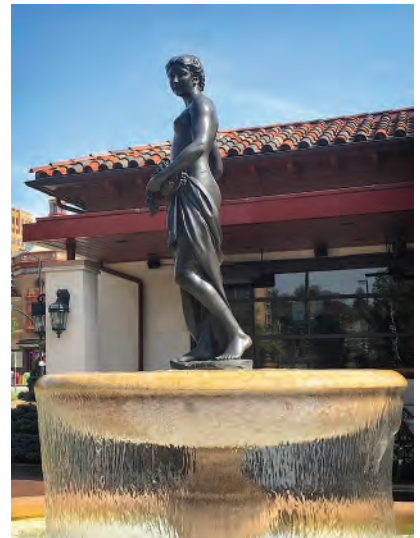


### 37. Pomona Court

330 Ward Parkway

A Standard Oil gasoline station stood on this prominent location until the late 1960s, one of several automotive necessities scattered around the

Plaza's edges from its earliest days. The courtyard has since served as a pedestrian oasis fronting a series of shops and restaurants. Donatello Gabbrielli (1884-1955), a sculptor in Florence, Italy, cast the bronze statue of Pomona, the goddess of vineyards and orchards. (1938; 1969)





## 50 NOTABLE THINGS TO SEE A PLAZA WALKING GUIDE

Start at Ward Parkway at west side of Broadway,  
walk south over the bridge  
Tour time: 15 - 25 minutes



### 38. Brush Creek

The quiet stream winds in eastward from Kansas but early on was prone to flooding. In 1930, a city bond issue paid for a concrete-lined channel, built with material from Boss Tom Pendergast's company. After a devastating flood in 1977, the channel was deepened and bridges reconstructed. *Worth a look: The south end of the bridge presents a popular photo opportunity, "Married Love," a sculptural tribute to British statesman Winston Churchill and his wife.*

### 39. InterContinental Hotel

401 Ward Parkway

As far back as 1963, the Nichols Co. envisioned a luxury complex featuring a high-rise hotel and apartments on this site. When it opened in 1972, the Alameda Plaza became the first hotel in close proximity to the district. Rebranded several times, the hotel became the InterContinental in 2005. *Worth a look: Courtyard fountain and sculptures, including "The Wagon Master," a bit to the west of Wornall Road.*



### 40. Brush Creek Apartments

Ward Parkway South

Nichols added population density and hundreds of new Plaza shoppers with these



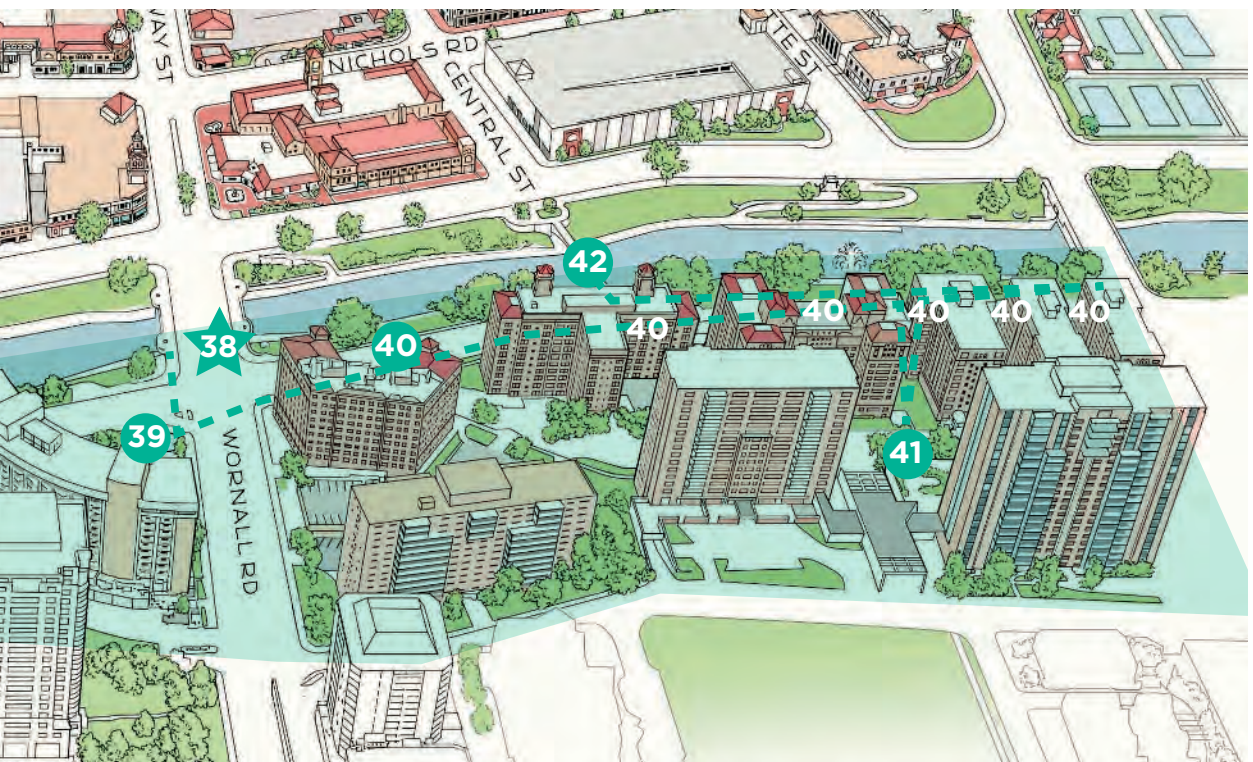
five high-rise apartment buildings. From west to east, the lineup of buildings begins with what originally was the Villa Serena, now the Raphael Hotel. Across the intersection are the Locarno, Riviera (now the Hemingway), Biarritz (now St. Regis) and the twin-towered Casa Loma. (1927-1930)

### 41. Sulgrave-Regency waterfall fountain

When a renovation project connecting two residential towers got to the detail of a retaining wall, architect Stephen Abend included a decidedly modernist fountain in the plan. It became his tribute in concrete to the American architect Louis Kahn

and a somewhat hidden meditative space just a short stroll up from Brush Creek. Return to the Brush Creek apartment block via a staircase across 48th Terrace between the Locarno and Hemingway buildings.





## 42. Sister Cities International Bridge

A footbridge demolished after the 1977 flood was replaced and dedicated in 2000 in honor of the Sister Cities program, which links Kansas City with places around the world. Seville, Spain, was the first Sister City, celebrated in an event in 1967. Commemorative tiles and each nation's flag complement the Plaza's international flavor.



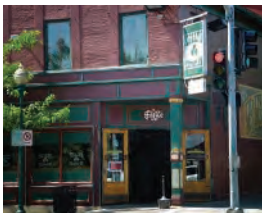


## 50 NOTABLE THINGS TO SEE

## A PLAZA WALKING GUIDE



Head in any direction from the Plaza and you will encounter more pieces of the J.C. Nichols development legacy and other notable Kansas City destinations. For example, the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art and other local institutions line attractive green spaces on both sides of Brush Creek just a few blocks to the east. Here are a few suggested detours from the Plaza to explore on foot at your leisure.



### 43. North Plaza/ Westport

J.C. Nichols envisioned strong links northward to the Westport district, including the extension of what's now known as J.C.

Nichols Parkway. The modest residential neighborhood in between the two shopping and entertainment districts has been undergoing redevelopment in recent years, much of it spurred by the expansion of St. Luke's hospital. *Worth a look: Remnants of a onetime African-American community in Westport include the St. James Missionary Baptist Church, 508 W. 43rd St.*





#### 44. West Plaza

Stroll west on Ward Parkway, 47th or 48th Street and encounter a hilly residential neighborhood that encompasses traditional

bungalows, ultra-modern architecture, quaint storefronts, even a former school converted to apartments. It's anchored on the west by a venerable green space, Westwood Park.

#### 45. Community Christian Church

4601 Main

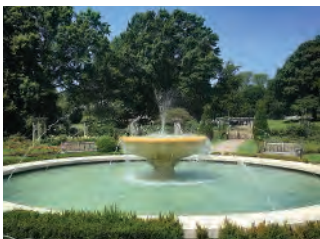
Frank Lloyd Wright designed this low-lying building.

After a construction dispute with the city, however, he walked away from it. The Plaza's consultant, Edward Buehler Delk, finished supervising the construction. (1942) *Worth a look: Light spires originally planned by Wright and installed by Kansas City artists in 1994, shoot deep into the night sky east of the Plaza.*



#### 46. Country Club neighborhoods

Nichols viewed the Plaza as the grand gateway to the Country Club District of gracious homes in the rolling terrain to the south and west. Single-family houses on tree-lined streets were highly desirable, though, by strict deed restrictions, they excluded people of color. The Plaza provided nearby shopping and services. In the mid-1940s J.C. Nichols counted 50,000 residents over 4,000 acres in his neighborhoods.



#### 47. Loose Park

Head up the long slope of Wornall Road to enjoy one of Kansas City's most popular outdoor spaces. It was the original site of the

Kansas City Country Club, including a golf course and polo grounds. Nichols helped the widow of businessman Jacob Loose acquire the land and donate it to the city in 1927. That provided recreation and restorative green space to residents of adjacent Nichols neighborhoods. *Worth a look: The Laura Conyers Smith Memorial Rose Garden. Also, historical markers and an artillery display at the south end of the park point up the indelible history of the Battle of Westport, often described as the Gettysburg of the West. Union forces in October 1864 routed Confederates in a clash involving upwards of 29,000 soldiers.*

#### 48. Sunset Hill

South of Brush Creek and west of Loose Park, this neighborhood of upscale mansions along winding, hilly roads, includes homes designed by several prominent architects, including Mary Rockwell Hook.



#### 49. The Walnuts

5049 Wornall

Architects Boillot and Lauck delivered this trio of exclusive high-rises just above

the Plaza. The Walnuts set the standard for luxury living in their day, even as the Great Depression settled in following the stock market crash of 1929. (1930)

#### 50. The Peanuts

51st and Wyandotte

In the shadow of the Walnuts, this series of modest Tudor-style apartments in the South Plaza neighborhood has long offered affordable rents to Plaza employees and others. *Worth a look: The Peanut, at 50th and Main, is one of Kansas City's longstanding neighborhood dive bars amid a growing dining district.*



# A PLAZA TIMELINE

**October 1864:** Union forces defeat Confederates in the Battle of Westport south of Brush Creek.

**1893:** Kansas City adopts parks and boulevard plan.

**1908:** Country Club streetcar extended from Westport to 51st Street.

**1908:** J.C. Nichols (1880-1950) announces plan for Country Club District of attractive homes on hundreds of acres south of Brush Creek.

**1913:** Nichols begins buying land on the north side of Brush Creek, adjacent to new city boulevards.

**1916:** Clarence Chandler founds Chandler Landscape and Floral Co. on a site later to become part of the Plaza.

**1922:** Architect Edward Buehler Delk, who had traveled to Spain, Mexico and South America for inspiration, devises a master plan for Nichols' new shopping center.

**1923:** The Spanish-styled Suydam Building (now Mill Creek) opens as the first new structure on the Country Club Plaza.

**1925:** A Nichols employee strings lights on the Suydam Building to celebrate the Christmas season, the beginning of an annual tradition that has grown exponentially.

**1930:** City bond issue funds a concrete-lined channel for flood-prone Brush Creek.

**1932:** First Plaza Art Fair is held on a vacant lot at Nichols Road and Central.

**1947:** Sears, Roebuck & Co. opens its first suburban department store on the Plaza.

**1950:** J.C. Nichols dies and control of the Nichols Co. is assumed by his son, Miller Nichols, and others.

**Sept. 12, 1977:** Sixteen inches of rain cause a devastating flood that kills 25 and inundates large sections of the Plaza, prompting a channel-control project and rebuilding of Brush Creek and its bridges.

**1989:** A city Plaza Urban Design and Development Plan reinforces the "bowl concept," limiting building heights in lower portions of the Plaza and pushing higher-rise development to the edges.

**1998:** Highwoods Properties of North Carolina merges with the J.C. Nichols Co. to become the second owner of the retail district.

**2010:** A popular uprising rebuffs a plan to raze or alter the Balcony Building in order to build a high-rise office tower.

**2015:** A new Midtown/Plaza Area Plan lays out updated design and development guidelines for the Plaza and adjacent districts.

**2016:** Highwoods Properties announces sale of its Plaza holdings to a joint venture of Taubman Centers and the Macerich Co.

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**50 Notable Things to See:** Towers, tiles and tucked-away details that make up the essence of the Country Club Plaza.

**7 Ways of Looking at the Plaza:** A few words about the history and lasting value of Kansas City's prized shopping district.



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