

# Bottles in Mimetic Architecture

by Cecil Munsey

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“Architecture for speed-reading” sums up the impact of automobile transportation on urban life and architecture in the twentieth century. The Main Street storefront, whether in a small town or metropolitan city, confronted the emergence of rapid forms of transportation. The result was larger and more eye-catching advertisements designed to attract eyeballs within a second or two – architecture of instant communication.

The automobile’s impact on architecture, however, was more pronounced away from Main Street, along

the newly laid roadways. Buildings did not simply display advertisements; they became them – they became **mimetic**! Mimetic architecture (also popularly known as “Programmatic”) is simply the use of oversized objects or structures disguised as other objects.

Mimetic architecture, while fashionable in United States during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, reached its heyday in the 1920s and 1930s. A great deal of this form of architecture of communication came out of California. Suddenly you could buy lemonade from a building shaped like a lemon – ice cream from an igloo – film from a shop shaped like a camera and, yes, you could buy a drink from a building shaped like a **bottle**!

Buildings also took forms without rhyme or reason – diners shaped like boxing gloves, zeppelins, dogs, and pumpkins. They were just a sure means of catching a driver’s eye. Architecture is supposed to be subtler than that. It should tell its function indirectly. But there is little time for subtlety at 60 miles an hour. Mimetic architecture did what medieval business did 500 years ago but for a different reason. You didn’t find a tavern’s name, “Head of the Horse,” written over the door of a medieval inn. Too few people could read. Instead, you saw the carved head of the horse itself.

California in the 1930s moved all the way to mimetic daydreams where you entered a huge coffeepot to drink coffee.



[Fig. 1]

[Fig. 1] – Moxie bottle (before). One of the most fascinating bottle-shaped structures ever built is the Moxie bottle that was constructed circa 1900 at Pine Island Amusement Park near Manchester, New Hampshire. On its concrete foundation its white, metal cap was some sixty feet in the air. It was erected next to the bridge that led to the mainland and was part of a free-sample beverage stand the Moxie Company had there.



[Fig. 2]

[Fig. 2] – Moxie bottle (after). When the Moxie bottle-shaped building was abandoned, the bottle was taken apart, hauled across the pond one winter on the ice and re-assembled on a spot about a mile from its original location. The relocated building ended up being only

thirty-five feet tall because its original elevating concrete foundation was left at the original site.

The Moxie bottle had a one-story house attached and became a small home. James A. Todd of Silver Spring, Maryland purchased the unusual building in 1922 as a summer cottage.

“We were looking for a place with good spring water in 1922,” said Mrs. Todd in 1981, “and that’s how we arrived in Manchester. The bottle was made of teak wood and all bolted together. We had it finished off inside and it was in very good shape.” There were three bedrooms in the three-storied bottle, the upper ones reached by ladders. Each room has its own window.

[Fig. 3] – Nehi gas station, Opelika, Alabama 1924. The main building is mimetic of a Nehi soft drink bottle. The two supports in front are in the shape of two Nehi Company’s Chero-Cola bottles. This building was called the “Twist Inns.” Tourists could climb up in the neck of the bottle, which served as an observation post.



[Fig. 3]

A favorite in 1936 Los Angeles was the Coca-Cola bottling company that built its plant as a giant ocean liner (Figure 8).

The defining characteristics of mimetic architecture that reached its heyday in the 1920s and 1930s included –romantic, eccentric –outward product of whimsy, rather than program or interior function, –bold, and lacking in pretense, and might be described as “the architecture of realistic fantasy.”

For bottle collectors there are many buildings that are significant and very representative of the containers they collect (Figures 1-21). Milk bottles, interestingly, seem to be the most popular of the bottle-shaped architectural designs (Figures 14-21).

The photographs offered here are not exhaustive and every reader probably is aware of at least one more example not included here. See for yourself some of the bottles represented in mimetic architecture.



[Fig. 4]

**Fig. 4** – Ocean Spray Cranberry Cocktail bottle (1947) at Routes #6 and #28 at Onset, Massachusetts.



[Fig. 5]

**Fig. 5** – Brooks Tangy Catsup bottle is 70’ tall and sits on top of a 100’ water tower in Collinsville, Illinois on Route #159, about fifteen miles east of St. Louis. The bottle was constructed in 1949 by W. E. Caldwell Company for the G. S. Suppiger catsup bottling plant. The bottle could hold 640,000 average bottles of catsup or 100,000 gallons of water.

In 1995, community and bottle collector efforts raised \$70,000 to save and restore the bottle. (See: “Bottle Landmark to be Restored” by Judy DeMoisy. *Bottles & Extras* magazine, January 1994, pp. 4-5.)

In 2002, it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

**Fig. 6** – Vess bottle has 600’ of neon tubing and can be seen for miles when lighted as in this photograph.



[7]

**Fig. 7** – Vess Bottle is in St. Louis, Missouri. Vess, a lemon-lime soft drink billed as the “Billion Bubble Beverage,” ceased production in 1974. The bottle is 25’ tall and was originally constructed in 1953 along with two others that have since been torn down. The bottle was declared a landmark in the 1980s and renovated.



[Fig. 6]

**Fig. 8** – The Los Angeles Coca-Cola Bottling Company had this building designed by Robert Derrah in 1936. The bottling company actually built this streamlined “Moderne” plant in 1939. It resembles an ocean liner with portholes, catwalk and ship railings and even a nautical interior. Three giant Coke bottle sculptures were added to its exterior corner niches in 1941 (see Fig. 9).



[Fig. 8]

**Fig. 9** – Giant Coke bottle (one of three) outside the Los Angeles Coca-Cola Bottling Company.



[Fig. 9]



[Fig. 10]

**Fig. 10** – Champagne bottle in Bayville, New Jersey. It has been painted to advertise the “Champagne of Propane” for a nearby company. It is one of the many 24’ tall concrete champagne bottles built in 1939 by the Renault Winery.

**Fig. 11** – Renault Winery bottle in Egg Harbor City, New Jersey. There are several others of these 24’ tall 1939 bottles in New Jersey (New Gretna, Cologne, Beechwood, and Bass River Township). There are eight others of this type in California, Connecticut, and Florida.



[Fig. 12]

**Fig. 12** – Giant six-pack representing City Brewery in La Crosse, Wisconsin.

**Fig. 13** – Corona Beer six-pack building in Baja California in Mexico.



[Fig. 11]



[Fig. 15]



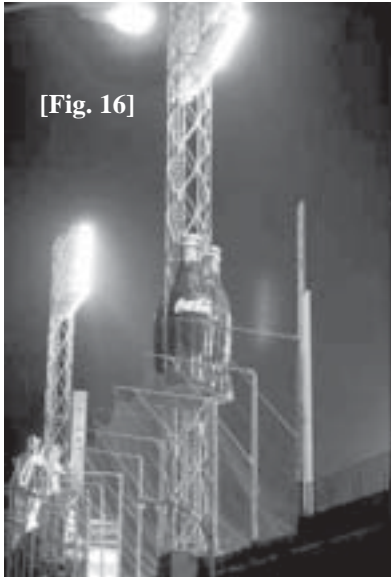
[Fig. 13]



[Fig. 14]

**Fig. 14** – Benewah Milk Bottle in Spokane, Washington. It was designed in 1935 by the prestigious architectural firm of Whitehouse and Price. The body of the bottle is stucco from base to neck, then the neck and cap are covered with sheet metal over a wooden frame. Dairy owner Paul E. Newport, to make milk appealing to children, built two of these bottles. The one remaining bottle, today serves as the Milk Bottle Diner.

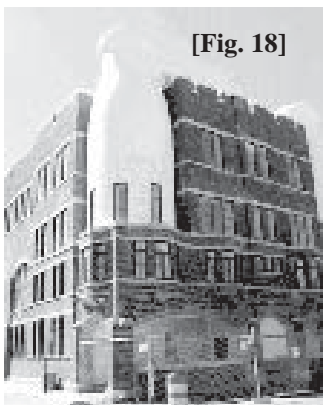
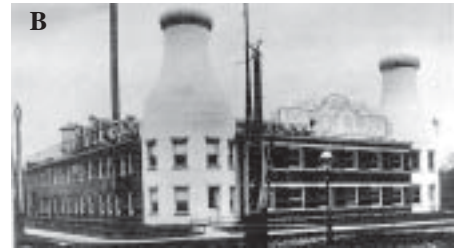
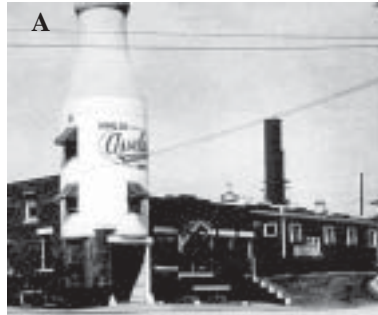
**Fig. 15** – HP Hood Milk Bottle is in Boston, Massachusetts. It is 40’ tall and, if it were real, would hold 50,000 gallons of milk. It was built entirely of wood in 1930. It still serves as an ice cream stand and snack bar next to the Children’s Museum. When the Bottle was moved to the Museum Wharf in 1977, it was cut in half, transported by barge and re-assembled. Hood is the largest dairy in New England and was founded in 1846.



[Fig. 16]

**Fig. 16** – Along with another Hood container at Boston's Fenway Park baseball stadium there are two giant Coke bottles in the outfield.

**Fig. 17** – Giant milk bottles as part of buildings:  
 (A) Asselin Creamery Bottle, Norway, Indiana, c. 1929.  
 (B) Polks Dairy Bottle, Indianapolis, Indiana, 1921.  
 (C) Freda Farms Bottle, Berlin, Connecticut, 1933.



[Fig. 18]

**Fig. 18** – Richmond Dairy Building in Richmond, Virginia. The building was originally built in 1913 and has recently been converted into 113 rental apartments at a cost of nearly \$8 Million. There are three 16' milk bottles at the corners of the building.

**Fig. 19** – Quonquot Dairy Milk Bottle in Whately, Massachusetts was built c. 1926 and was used for selling sandwiches, pie and ice cream. In 1951, it was moved across the street. The 16' bottle (shown here from the side with a door) was moved again and restored by the Whately Historical Society in the late 1990s.

**Fig. 20** – Milk Bottle restaurant in Raynham, Massachusetts was erected by Frates Dairy. The bottle is 50' tall and 20' in diameter.

**Fig. 21** – Frates Restaurant Milk Bottle, New Bedford, Massachusetts. The bottle is 52' tall and was built in 1930 by Frates Dairy.



[Fig. 19]



[Fig. 20]



[Fig. 21]

**Fig. 22** – The world's largest Coca-Cola bottle is a four-story (110' tall) part of the 28,000-square-foot World of Coca-Cola at 3785 Lave Vegas Blvd. ("The Strip") in Las Vegas, Nevada. The bottle-shaped building serves as a shaft for two glass elevators.

The Coke-bottle-shaped structure is the most recent addition to mimetic architecture. It was opened on July 8, 1997. For \$3.50, a visitor could check out authentic Coca-Cola memorabilia and watch a reel of Coke Commercials. Visitors would start with an elevator ride to the fourth floor of the building inside the mimetic Coke bottle. After viewing displays on the top floor, guest would wind their way downstairs, eventually emerging at the Everything Coca-Cola store, a souvenir outlet with about 2,000 items featuring the red and white Coke logo. The attraction recorded over one- million visitors each year.



But two and one-half years later, on March 7, 2000, the World of Coca-Cola became a victim of corporate downsizing. When the Coke company fired twenty-one percent of its 29,000-person worldwide work force (including 130 who worked at the Las Vegas attraction) in an attempt to save \$300 million a year, the Las Vegas World of Coca-Cola was closed. The top two levels of Coke's holding were cleared out, but the 12,000-square-foot Everything Coca-Cola store stayed open on the first and second floors. The bottle-shaped building is still there and is illuminated nightly by neon and incandescent light that keeps the building as one of Las Vegas' main visual attractions.

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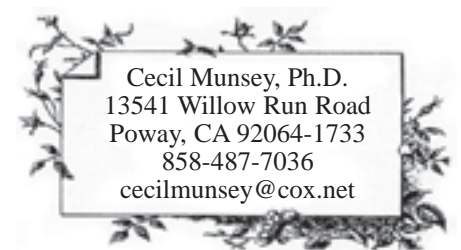
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