

'Iconic' Bank of America building reopens in Palm Springs

Restoration preserves mid-century modern look

Sam Morgen | Palm Springs Desert Sun | June 14, 2024



VIDEO: The historic Bank of America on South Palm Canyon Drive has reopened after an extensive renovation.

The 1959 mid-century modern building has been closed for the last several years while improvements have taken place. That changed Friday morning, when the first customers lined up to withdraw money from ATMs even as bank managers were hosting a party celebrating the reopening.

What was initially thought to be a three-month upgrade transformed into a three-year project. A new roof and ceiling, preservation and reuse of the original blue tiles, and custom mid-century modern furniture were all needed to complete the restoration of the historic property.

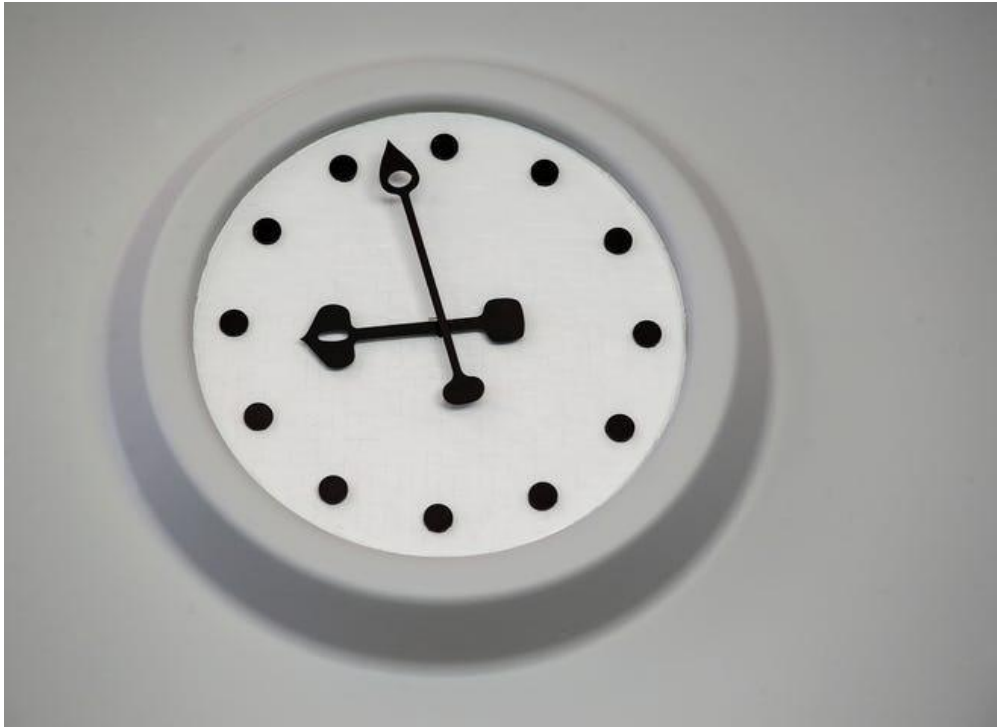
"It's like changing a faucet in your kitchen and you get a whole new kitchen," Bank of America Inland Empire President Bansree Parikh said during a ribbon cutting ceremony on Friday, before turning serious. "This downtown center obviously is an architectural gem, and is an iconic landmark here in the city of Palm Springs."



The interior of the Bank of America building designed by architect Rudy Baumfield in Palm Springs, Calif., June 14, 2024.
Jay Calderon/The Desert Sun

The building's architecture fits in perfectly with Palm Springs iconic architecture. Drivers are likely to notice the sky-blue tiles on the exterior of the building, while the smooth cloudlike roof seems to hover above the walls. Stepping inside is like taking a trip back to the 1950s. The bright interior is lit by a large wall of windows, with custom-designed furniture meant to evoke a bygone era.

The building has been updated to align with modern standards while maintaining its retro look. The restoration has thrilled local preservationists, who have sometimes struggled to maintain the characteristic features of some of the city's commercial properties.



An interior clock is one of the modernist elements at the Bank of America building in Palm Springs, Calif., June 14, 2024.
Jay Calderon/The Desert Sun

"There was no arm twisting or cajoling or arguing back and forth with us," Palm Springs Modern Committee President Courtney Newman said during Friday's event. "(Bank of America) just went ahead and made this major restoration."

Originally designed by Rudi Baumfeld of Victor Gruen and Associates, the building originally hosted a City National Bank in Palm Springs historic financial district. Southwest Building and Contractor Magazine named it the most beautiful bank in America in a 1958 issue. Bank of America took over in 1992.



People attend the Bank of America reopening after it had been closed for a renovation in Palm Springs, Calif., June 14, 2024. *Jay Calderon/The Desert Sun*

The city of Palm Springs designated the site a Class One Historic Site in 2007.

"This building was great in 1959. Then it was good. And now it's great again," said architect Michael McAllister. "It's been here for 65 years... and it'll be here for another 200 years."