

Cornerstones

Charing Cross entrance posts add distinction

By KENN JONES

Entrance Posts

Charing Cross Road at Woodward Avenue Bloomfield Hills

Entrance posts to subdivisions are common.

Just look at the new subdivisions springing up in Rochester Hills or West Bloomfield, and you'll come across any number of brick walls or wooden signs that proclaim such idyllic tracts of land as "Windsor in the Woods," "Rolling Hill Acres" or "Fairmont Farms."

However, as prolific as these subdivision entrances are, they pale when compared to the entrance posts for Bloomfield Estates, in Bloomfield Hills.

Though not a building, these entrance posts provide a lovely architectural note to the avenue.

Unlike many of the subdivision entrances of today, these "cornerstones" draw the eye not with flash, but with quiet grandeur. They rise on the eastern side of Woodward Avenue, at the entrance to Charing Cross Road, in a mellow golden stone.

One's eye first sees the simple shaft of stone, and then is drawn to the column's top, which instead of a typical ball, or lantern, is capped with a trio of planter-shaped stones.

Contrasting the golden color of the stone are the copper-green letters on each column which state in a stylish, upper-case face, "CHARING CROSS ROAD." There are no words on the Woodward Avenue side.

That is about all one's eye takes in as one drives along Woodward or turns on Charing Cross.

However, the columns deserve closer inspection, revealing a striking, yet dignified Art Deco architecture.

The main part of the column itself, if you look at it from the top, is in the shape of a cross; not a Christian cross, with a long tail, but a shape similar to that of the American Red Cross. Could this be a reference to the cross in the road's name?

Then, on the Woodward Avenue side, toward the top of the column is an intricate braid design, carved into the stone. The braid looks as if it is carved in such a way as to have some significance, but I don't know what it is.

The planter-shaped stones topping the columns descend in size and feature vertical ribs.

Besides the columns themselves, there are low walls on each side of them, also of cut stone, flanked with modest landscaping.

As impressive as the columns are, information about them is scarce.

John King, who has lived in the Bloomfield Estates subdivision for decades, says the subdivision was developed by Judson Bradway in 1914.

King says Bradway always had columns marking the entrance to the subdivision. However, when Woodward Avenue was widened from two to eight lanes in 1925, the old columns were destroyed.

In their place were erected the present



Entranceway to Bloomfield Estates



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columns, at a cost of \$4,000, paid by the subdivision's citizens' association.

King believes the columns were designed by either Eliel or Eero Saarinen. It is highly possible that Eliel Saarinen designed them. He designed many buildings in the Cranbrook Educational Community, which is nearby, and the Deco design of the columns looks like much of his work there.

His son Eero was also an architect. However, he was born in 1910, which means he would have been in his teens when the columns were built.

King says the present columns were erected sometime between 1925-30. He says there are also lights built into the columns, but the electrical conduits have rusted, making the lighting unsafe.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to see them lit now?