

## WHY ELSE GO... TO THE NATIONAL ZOO

BY JENNIFER O'BOYLE

One of the wonderful benefits of living near the nation's capitol is the vast array of wonderful things to see and places to visit. One of the terrible downsides is that whenever out-of-towners visit, they want to see the same attractions over and over. Most tourist attractions are worth a visit or two, but more than that becomes a bore. Dropping the tourists off and heading out by yourself is certainly accepted, but that defeats the purpose of having friends and family visit. Chatting and interacting on the way to the next stop is often just as fun as the stop itself. So this series will give you a different perspective on some of the local attractions. While the family is admiring the traditional things, take a moment to look at something else...

Did you know that many of the National Zoo buildings and sculptures were created during the Works Progress Administration? Most of the buildings there were created not just as utilitarian cages and displays, but with an esthetic and design in mind.

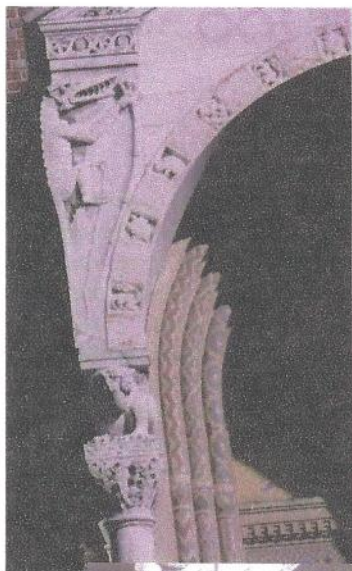
So as you duck into the Elephant House, be sure to look up at the engravings, and admire the Art Deco grill over the heat ducts. As the little ones squeal over the giant elephants and tall giraffes, look down. The floor has several inlays, and the guard rail has wonderful artwork done by children.

The Small Mammal Building is always popular with children. Small monkeys and Naked Mole-Rats are curious and entertaining. By the doors are several delightful plaques of the Pied Piper, and there are several sculptures around the building to climb on or enjoy. The ant-eater guarding the entrance shows evidence of the years of children climbing and crawling over him.

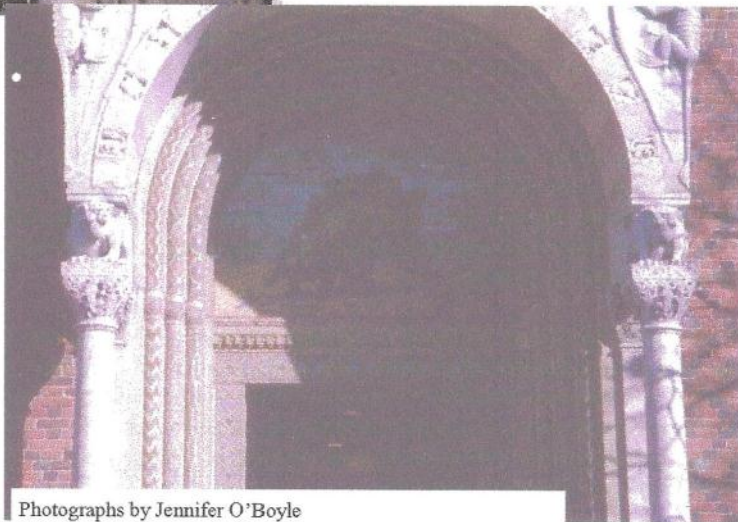
As you head into the Reptile Discovery Center take a moment and look at the doorway. Do the colorful concrete and graceful lines ring a bell? You're looking at one of the two John Joseph Earley doorways at the zoo. To engage the little ones, step to the left column

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(mind the strollers) on the left side (away from the doorway) about chest high, you can see several shells imbedded in the limestone. That makes a fun lead in to the Invertebrates Center at the back of the building. You'll walk past a few wall-sculptures on the way to that entrance, and be sure to look up before you enter – most visitors miss the giant octopus looming overhead. Throughout the Invertebrates Exhibit are many lovely paintings – just the thing to distract you if bugs and eight-legged things aren't your cup of tea! The Think Tank isn't too much fun for the little ones, but there are many seats, which is a treat for everyone else.



Photographs by Jennifer O'Boyle

Before you head in, be sure to look up at the roof. The finials and roof line are certainly the most whimsical in the zoo.

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With the zoo under construction, the Bird House is now quite a trek, so if your group includes baby carriages or visitors who can't walk too far, you should skip it. But do go if possible. The cages don't have glass, so everyone can enjoy the bird calls and the wonderful colors. When you enter the Indoor Flight Room, look at the back right corner. You will see a large doorway to nowhere. That's the other John Earley door! It's hidden behind trees, and a little neglected, but there it is. You have a better view from the second floor balcony, which gives you an opportunity to admire a display of photographs on the way.

Over dinner that evening, as the children regale the table with stories of the elephants throwing hay, or the lemurs leaping, smile and think about the Art Deco doorways, the WPA sculptures and the inlaid tiles you admired. Just think to yourself, there is always another reason to go to the National Zoo.