

## Grand Riviera Theater (*Demolished*)

9222 Grand River Avenue

Local		
State	✓	10/2/80
State Marker		
National	✓	4/22/82



**Grand Riviera**  
Photo courtesy of detroityes.com



### **Historic overview:**

The Riviera Theatre was one of the most elaborate and well-preserved of Detroit's 1920's movie palaces and a major work of nationally prominent theater architect John Eberson in his celebrated "atmospheric" style. Unfortunately, the theatre did not receive the anticipated rehabilitation attention after being placed on the national historic register in 1980. In June of 1996, the structure was considered unsafe and was demolished. Nevertheless, the history of this structure is quite fascinating.

The Grand Riviera, its name derived from its location on Grand River Avenue, was built at a cost of more than one million dollars in 1925. It provided over 3,000 seats, making it Detroit's third largest theater. It was also the first atmospheric theater in Detroit. Sensing that the movie palace architecture of the period with its over-abundance of exotic decoration had no lasting appeal for audiences, Eberson conceived of a theater interior that was stirring. Through the use of lighting, special effects, and a unique interior design, the audience was made to feel as if they were sitting outdoors in a garden. Elements included a simulated courtyard, dark blue ceiling with twinkling electric stars and moving clouds projected across the sky, and artificial trees and vines on the walls.

The theater was so successful that by 1927 an 1,800 seat Annex was built. The Riviera was converted to use as a legitimate theater in 1957. When the remodeled Fisher Theater reopened in 1961, the Riviera lost its role as the city's pre-eminent legitimate theater. Afterwards it was used for music concerts until its close in the mid-1970s.

