

Rio Theater (1946)

7204 W. 80th Street - Overland Park
National Register of Historic Places

Johnson County's newest addition to the National Register of Historic Places is the Overland Theater (renamed the Rio in 2000) in Overland Park. The building was entered onto the Register on February 9, 2005.



The Rio Theater was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2005. *Johnson County Museum Collection.*

Located at 7204 West 80th Street, one block west of Metcalf, the Overland Theater originally opened on Christmas Day 1946.

In earlier years, Overland Park had been home to two other movie theaters, but both had gone out of business during the Great Depression. When the Dickinson Theater Group commissioned well-known theater designer Robert Boller to design the Overland, the town had been without a movie palace for ten years.

The 600-seat theater greeted patrons with a sleek geometric façade design, characteristic of mid-twentieth century Moderne architecture. The *Johnson County Herald* (12/19/46) noted its "all glass front of pink and mirror glass, glass blocks with neon light." Unfortunately, in later years the façade suffered from deterioration and change as the theater was renamed from the Overland to the Kimo South and later the Park Cinema.

For a number of years beginning in 1977, the building housed the Theatre for Young America, a live performance group for children. In 1987, the group sold the building to the City of Overland Park. Six years later, the Fine Arts Theatre Group purchased the building and began extensive restoration work. When the theater reopened in 2000, its new name—"Rio"—was spelled out in neon tubing on the new three-faceted marquee. The theater had been brought to life again with all its old style and much of its original material intact. The revitalized façade features new peach-colored porcelain tiles, neon lighting, aluminum trim, rebuilt poster cases, and a recreated marquee and glass block ticket booth.

The interior has been revamped with modern upholstered seats for 281 patrons. The lobby features trim, poster cases, and fixtures from two now-demolished movie theaters in Kansas City, Missouri and Abilene, Kansas. The refurbished Rio now serves a new generation of movie-goers in downtown Overland Park.

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