During the 1930s and 1940s, buildings intended to lure passing motorists were constructed in the shape of oversized everyday objects like hats, milk bottles, shells, ducks, whales, and teepees—among many more. By being so large and distinct, these buildings were easily identifiable from a distance and served as effective advertising for the businesses within. Concrete, as it could be easily formed into any desirable shape, was especially well suited to the task of creating this architecture that functioned as advertising.

By examining five examples of concrete roadside architecture, this thesis re-evaluates these structures in terms of their experimental use of a modern material to create unconventional building shapes, and argues that they demonstrate innovative uses of concrete that constitute a technological significance. The way these roadside structures experiment with shape takes full advantage of concrete’s unique plasticity, and represents a major development in American architectural history, as well as in concrete building technology.