

summer 2005

# atomic ranch

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The homeowner envisioned a truly indoor/outdoor lifestyle for his 1950s ranch, and with a new lap pool, patio and open kitchen, created a private party compound far removed from his previous Minnesota digs. The path to the front door has visitors literally walking on water.



**atomicranch™**

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Subscriptions:

\$19.95 one year U.S.; \$27.95 Canada

\$36.95 two years U.S.; \$49.95 Canada

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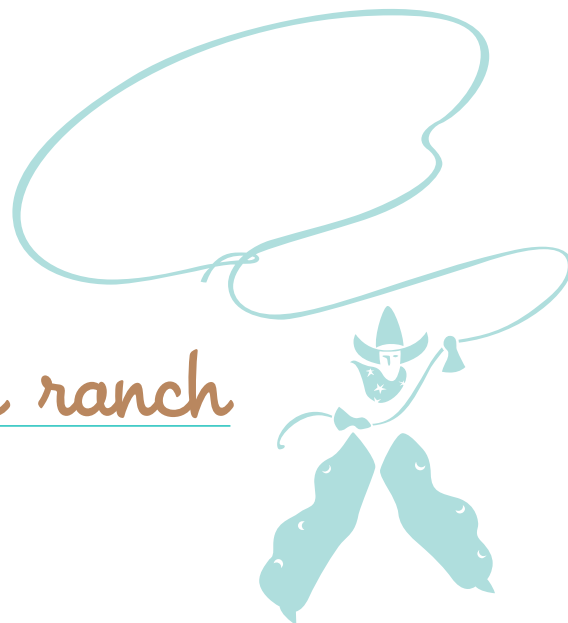
Atomic Ranch (ISSN 1547-3902) is published quarterly at  
917 Summit Drive, South Pasadena, CA 91030.

Issue 6, Summer 2005, all rights reserved.

Application to Mail at Periodicals Postage Rates is Pending at  
South Pasadena, CA and at additional mailing offices.

**POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to **Atomic Ranch**,  
917 Summit Drive, South Pasadena, CA 91030.

## meanwhile... back at the ranch



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hope we all understand that the rosy picture of midcentury life that is portrayed in Atomic Ranch is a working conceit; we choose to celebrate the wonderful houses and objects from the era, but we're also mindful of the serious faults and inequalities that existed just below the chromed surface. For many people and groups, life is better now than it was then. Sometimes, it's even great.

There's half a joke to our title—when a non-enthusiast heard of it, she playfully asked, “What are you going to do, blow up some cows?” And more than once we've had to explain that it's not a magazine about working ranches.

While we can poke fun at the naive '50s idea of an atomic future, we shouldn't forget that bomb shelters and drop & cover drills were pathetic denials of a potentially excruciating death. Forty- and 50-year-old cars have a beguiling style and awesome power, but they came with inferior brakes, tires and suspension, and in an accident, totally unforgiving interior surfaces. In my opinion, humanistic home design was superior in our subject age, but today's technology can improve them further with safety glass and heating, cooling and insulation systems that make daily life more comfortable. Looking over '50s advertising images in books like *Atomic Home* by Whitney Matheson, consumer-driven home life was hardly a depiction of reality; I'm pretty sure my mom never wore high heels to pressure cook a pot roast, and there were good reasons why the women's movement was launched in the '60s.

The basic design of midcentury houses and furnishings had a certain combination of joy and humanity that still appeals to us today; it's just the technology—some of it anyway—that has changed. Cement floors are still virtually indestructible, and while leaking original pipes are a drag, radiant heating (with new PEX tubes) remains an excellent, efficient way to heat a house. The abundant sunlight from walls of glass that was so important to the original owners is just as significant today, but can now

be attenuated with low-E glass. When a ranch can give you an easy-living open floor plan, the current cliché of a two-story 'great room' that is as warm and homey as a hotel lobby is beyond my appreciation. Many elements of ranches were just so correct right out of the box that it makes you wonder how their concepts got lost 25 years ago. The advantages of indoor/outdoor living have been sacrificed to monster houses, resulting in zero lot lines that beg the question, How much square footage do you really need? Yes, our beloved ranches had some design flaws, but they're not beyond some respectful fixing.

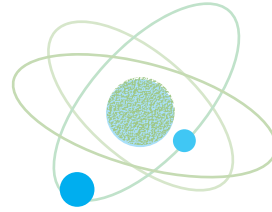
So we choose to operate under the assumption that life was grand and the future would be so bright we'd all have to wear sunglasses; it's a bit of a mind game but it does get us through the day.

*Jim Brown*  
Publisher



Has anyone seen my Ray-Bans?





# modernwisdom

\* For years I have struggled endlessly trying to decide just what kind of house I want—I liked a little something about so many different styles but none were exactly right. Then I found your magazine; what a revelation! I knew in minutes [midcentury] was what I had been looking for.

I have a request: You show just a little of the homes we are dreaming about and it is like looking at a photograph with part of it cut off. Some of what makes these homes so great is the floor plans and how they all come together. I may never have the pleasure of setting foot in a real Eichler or atomic ranch and finding books is difficult and expensive. Will you please show the floor plans of the homes you are showcasing? That would make the picture complete.

**Brenda Hambrick**  
Richmond, Mo.

*Several readers have written us about this, and when they're available, like in the Streng home story on page 46, we're happy to include them. We agree they help tell the whole story. Unfortunately most homeowners don't have small, simple copies of their floor plans suitable for scanning but we hear you, Brenda et al.*

—ar editor

\* I own two houses, a 1955 conventionally styled (hip roof) ranch in Lake Helen, Fla., and a second 1959 Modernist home with side-pitched roof, exposed ceiling beams, block walls and terrazzo floors located farther south in Melbourne. Both are outfitted with Heywood Wakefield and similar furniture and '50s decor, most of which was found at local estate sales and thrift shops. I soon will be totally '50s modern, including pink refrigerators and stoves; I even shave with a vintage electric razor. No reproductions or retro items have been used.

It may be noted that there is nothing about these homes or the furnishings that is elitist. My houses are definitely middle class and all the furniture and decor mass-produced. What I like about your publication is that

you feature some expensive homes while also welcoming those of us who own and love our economy ranchers.

**Oscar Brock**  
Online

\* My name is Jimmy Walsh, and I'm from Bridgewater, Mass. I am 13, and highly interested in 1950s and '60s modern style. A few years ago I stopped my mom from renovating our 1964 kitchen. We still have the original oven. Unfortunately, the painted-on indicator lines are wearing off the dials on the oven. I was wondering what I can do to repaint/reapply the lines. Please help me! (I wouldn't mind being in the next issue ...)

**Jimmy Walsh**  
Online

*Jimmy's e-mail was so literate we wrote to see if he was really a kid, and he said yes, but confessed to having a mother who is a proofreader and to using a thesaurus. To make the rest of us slackers feel even better, he said he went crazy for midcentury in fourth grade and "plans to subscribe and order the back issues in April, when I turn 14 and can get a job."*

*Mark Fahey of Time Bandits in Sacramento, Calif., had this advice for Jimmy: "For the type that had one single black line on each knob to delineate the position of the control, I have had some rather good success with rub-on lettering from a graphic hobby shop. There are also vinyl-lettering kits and some of the flash material that the letters are stamped from could be cut down to size and applied. The aluminum should be cleaned very thoroughly and buffed with Never Dull or similar cleaner, then cleaned with alcohol before applying anything."*

—ar editor

\* I just saw your winter 2004 edition and it's perfectly in tune with my budding appreciation of ranch and mid-modern aesthetics. We first turned on to ranch homes while visiting Palm Springs in 2002. Recently we purchased a 1969 patio home in the original Del Webb retirement community of Sun City, Ariz., first established in

1960. Your publication has me rethinking our remodeling ideas. Perhaps before tearing out walls, cabinets and popcorn ceilings we need to closely examine the architect's original concepts to see if they will work for us today.

The floor plan of our 1,888-square-foot home is remarkably modern in concept. All rooms except the bathrooms open to one of two private courtyards, expanding the living spaces right out the door. The master bedroom has his and hers walk-in closets—a remarkable idea back then and still an inspired one today. And the two-car garage has a space carved out for a golf cart, which is a legal form of transportation on the streets of this unique community.

We are younger than most of our neighbors in Sun City, many of them only the second owners. After reading your magazine, I hope the next wave of homeowners will decide to preserve the wonderful midcentury architecture and concepts still to be found here.

**Sue Rourke**

*Boise, Idaho*

✱ I work at a bookstore and stumbled across your magazine while I was shelving issues of *Maxim* and *Ladies Home Journal*. I think it was love at first sight. Nothing gets a girl all hot and bothered quite like stainless steel kitchen appliances.

If your magazine were a person, I'd have a big ridiculous secret crush on it, and slip it love notes in algebra class. XO

**Jaime Karpovich**

*Wilkes-Barre, Penn.*

✱ My husband and I subscribe to your magazine from across the Atlantic, and it gives us tremendous inspiration. We have always dreamed of moving to a midcentury ranch house in California; unfortunately, at the moment a rather less wild 1930s single-story bungalow on the outskirts of London is the nearest we can get. It's located on quite an interesting estate of hundreds of other bungalows called Carpenders Park. Built between the 1930s and 1950s, it was the first self-contained commuter estate in London's suburbs, so I guess we live on the



English equivalent of a tract. The architecture is fairly sedate (sadly there's not too much Modernism locally) but we are trying our best to inject a bit of pizzazz.

Over the past six years we have shipped a lot of original 1950s furniture and artifacts over from America. In fact, we have bought from several of the dealers who advertise in your mag (Xcape in Long Beach and Out of Vogue in Fullerton). They have become good friends and I think often laugh about the "crazy" English couple who spent their honeymoon traveling around California buying dog-bone sofas, O'Keefe and Merritt stoves and Heywood Wakefield bedroom suites!

My husband, Doug, and I also collect classic American cars and currently have six, including a 1929 Ford hot rod, a 1958 Cadillac convertible and a 1969 Plymouth Road Runner. They are fun to drive on narrow British roads, as you can imagine, and with gas at \$7 a gallon, things can get really interesting.

Right now we are in the process of renovating our home in the midcentury modern style, complete with major structural changes such as remodeling the exterior, replacing all the nasty windows with original-style steel ones and removing internal walls to give a more open-plan feel.

Anyway, thanks again for your fabulous magazine. I will keep in touch with updates on our "slice of California in Watford."

**Sarah Bradley**

*Watford, Hertfordshire  
England*

*Readers: Interested in finding out if your midcentury collectible is a real find or looking for a resource for your next renovation project? Send us photos and info for our new column and we'll put our knowledge to work.*

Write us at [editor@atomic-ranch.com](mailto:editor@atomic-ranch.com) or send a note to Atomic Ranch, Publishing Office, 917 Summit Drive, South Pasadena, CA 91030. We'll print the good ones.



# It's a DOG'S LIFE: Lucky Lucy



Like Martha Stewart, Paul and Kathy Day believe you really can't have too much of a good thing. For them, good things include vintage midcentury pieces like an Eames DCM chair with original red aniline-dye finish, Danish modern furniture from Paul's youth and a reupholstered Nelson marshmallow sofa. But then there's '30s French Deco pieces, Japanese tansu chests, 1920s Hawaiian koa wood souvenirs, pre-Columbian sculptures, fly rods, Scottish tartans, Danish teak serving pieces—well you get the idea.

Outside they have a Japanese teahouse; 50-year-old bonsais; a 1971 Vespa winnowed down from a larger collection; surfboards, both vintage and modern; and a 1963 Shasta trailer that they renovated inside and out. Their '55 Dodge pickup is awaiting a rebuilt engine. It comes as no surprise when Kathy reveals that Paul's family calls him "phase boy."

And then there's Lucy, their English bull terrier puppy, the second in a collection of distinctive dogs who've gotten to share the Days' 1954 ranch house and its rarified furnishings. If the idea of not one but now two puppies teething on a Hans Wegner chair or romping past the chest with the Dale Chihuly Macchia piece sitting on it gives you pause, you haven't met these dogs—or the Days.

---

*text* Josephine Goodwin

*photography* Jim Brown







“Too  
much stuff  
isn’t in my  
vocabulary.”

The smallest model in their Long Beach, Calif., tract at 1,150 square feet, the three-bedroom house had little curb appeal. Friends were driving the couple through the area on a gray, rainy day, and as Kathy peered out the half-open window, she thought, “There is no way in hell I’m going to move here. This is horrible. It’s dark, it’s gloomy, the houses look like compounds [with their tall fences]; forget it.” But, she continues, “Paul was obsessed and once he gets obsessed with something, there’s no stopping him.”

Once the Days walked through a few of the homes that were for sale, she became more enthused. The couple was living in Belmont Shore in a 1920s bungalow and were ready for a change from the constant stream of



Opposite page: Walking in the front door, a George Nelson Marshmallow sofa and reissued clock share a wall with a 1930s French deco side table with Modernist tendencies. The clerestory-like openings at the top of the walls brighten up both the kitchen and the living room. Above, clockwise from top left: Koa wood souvenir items with the Hawaiian crest on a French table and a prized ukulele on a pre-Herman Miller Eames DCW chair. ♦ The Days' newest interest in French design includes La Belle Epoch-era absinthe glasses and spoons along with cigarette ephemera. ♦ A Cliff May rendering of a home believed first owned by Richard Haydn (Uncle Max in "The Sound of Music"). ♦ A red Eames DCM chair and WWII plywood leg splint ♦ Glass cabinet with more Hawaiian memorabilia ♦ A Dale Chihuly Macchia vessel.





## “Cliff May houses are a very affordable piece

people and traffic that came with the beach locale. “We wanted to find something that was as original as possible,” Kathy says. “This house was owned by an artist who had nice antiques and a flair for color. That made it easy for us to come in and do our thing.”

“The glass transoms are what really made me like these houses,” Paul says about the clerestory windows. “At night they have this wonderful glow. Most of my childhood was in Europe, and up until the age of six we lived in Norway. Kathy and I have some of the modern Danish furniture in this house that my parents had in the Oslo house. My parents are very conservative, but I think they wanted to try something different; we had very hip houses growing up.”

“They have a great eye for design,” Kathy says of her in-laws, “and when they pass something down to us, it’s still in the original box. If they bought it in Europe 50 years ago, or 30 years or two weeks ago—everything is complete and has directions. Paul inherited tools from his grandfather that are in 70-year-old boxes.”

“I’m the first generation that’s been able to throw boxes away,” Paul explains. When it’s suggested he doesn’t have

room for boxes because he has so much neat stuff, he counters with, “Too much stuff isn’t in my vocabulary. You just have to learn how to rotate your things. We have collections that are in other people’s homes, like the American Indian pottery we bought when we had Arts and Crafts furnishings in our previous house.”

The couple—she runs a safety consulting firm and Paul is a design consultant—started collecting midcentury pieces six months before moving to their home, transitioning from Arts and Crafts to modern pieces. They kept some items in storage while they waited for the right Cliff May ranch house to come on the market and when it did, they were ready to move right in.

“If we ever get another house, it would be Japanese post-and-beam construction,” Paul says. “But these ranch houses are similar in construction, so Japanese things and anything that’s really simple and minimalist goes in these homes very well. May houses are a very affordable piece of important architecture since you can’t buy a Neutra today for less than \$1 million.”

In addition to the aforementioned collections, the Days have also accumulated ’80s Memphis items,





of important architecture.”

Opposite page: Kathy and Paul in their backyard with Lucy, who's harassing their set of petanque balls.

Above: The front yard landscaping incorporates a Japanese tea house built by Paul. The couple has since added a lap pool and moved their front fence out closer to the sidewalk.

The dining room was pushed out five feet by previous owners utilizing the home's original windows on the back wall and adding the sliding glass door. Among the vintage pieces are a Danish rug, a refinished triple-wishbone Heywood Wakefield table paired with Hans Wegner No. 4103 three-legged dining chairs and Eames DCM chairs, a French light fixture from the '30s, an 18th-century Chinese altar, a French deco bar cart, a Jens Quistgaard ice bucket for Dansk and a Brown-Saltman buffet with a classic Bang & Olufsen turntable atop. Reissues and contemporary pieces include an Eames molded plywood coffee table (1946), a walnut stool designed by Ray Eames for the Time-Life building in New York (1960) and a glowing glass sculpture from an artist in Dale Chihuly's studio.







The private front patio is home to numerous midcentury pieces: highlights (clockwise), beginning with the all-original 1971 Vespa 150 Super, include a reissued George Nelson slatted bench, a gray Eames fiberglass shell rocking armchair, vintage Danish chairs and a table made by the homeowner, a bullet planter and a wire Bertoia diamond chair.

Paul in Steve McQueen mode zooms past the rehabbed Shasta trailer on his 1964 Triumph Tiger Cub motorcycle. Kids: don't try this at home.

modern sculptural kachina dolls, an absinthe accoutrement collection, hula noddies, ukuleles and Alessi kitchen accessories.

"You can blame Kathy for the Vespas, the vintage fly rods and the Shasta trailer," Paul says. She also encouraged him to take up surfing again, and they now have 15 long and short boards in Paul's "quiver," about half of which he uses. In her defense, Kathy explains, "What happens is I get a little idea. When we were in Florence I said I'd really like to have a Vespa again. Then you blink and the next thing you know, you've got eight. That is my life."

In the Modernist idiom they have pieces by Charles and Ray Eames, Alvar Aalto, Hans Wegner, George Nelson and the Heywood Wakefield company. In addition to their vintage finds, they also mix reissues into their interior. "I have no problems with reissues," Paul says. "They're livable and usable. Most of the pieces we use every day are reissues since the vintage pieces, especially the Eames items, tend to be a little more fragile. The shock mounts and the glue may have dried up; antiques don't lend them-

selves to daily use. I like my pieces to be in nice condition and the more you use them the more banged up they get."

Their 1963 Shasta trailer came about because their previous dog, Angus, got sick and they didn't want to leave him behind while they traveled. When they found the trailer on eBay it was painted white, and every day for two months Paul worked to renovate it. Just stripping and polishing the exterior took two weeks. He also sanded and polished the interior wood, repaired the flooring, had the upholstery redone and rebuilt the table. Then they outfitted it with another collection that they term "tiki-Hawaiian-funky-Sinatra era." Angus, predictably, didn't like the trailer at all.

But now Angus' replacement, Lucy, is part of the family and has since been joined by Napili, another female bull terrier. You can easily picture both dogs riding shotgun in the cab of the old pickup with the trailer in tow, squinting in the breeze from the open window, ready for new adventures and, dare we say, hunting for that next great collectible.





# Social hour

**a retro cocktail party for modern tastes**

*text* Cheyenne Wortham

*photography* Ellis Bronshtein







you've decided that you must have everyone (or the select few you can tolerate) over to celebrate. Of course the excuse is your new promotion, latest garage-sale find, or just the desire to decorate and whip up libations and eats for more than yourself. Since most of us have had our fill of mini quiches from Costco and onion dip from a mix, why not a little retro-themed fete to show off your midcentury abode?

But then comes the realization that actual '50s and '60s party noshes aren't necessarily, uh, edible, let alone appetizing. So what to do when a dried beef log, hot sherried consommé (yes, it's a drink), appetizer ham ball and tomato-sauerkraut cocktail are not what you were dreaming of when you sent out those e-mails? Here are a few kitschy-looking but tasty suggestions to get you started. And hey, if you really must go vintage, whip out the Crock-Pot for cocktail wieners in jelly and mustard—it's always good for a laugh.

### Curried Chicken Canapés

4 tbs butter  
1/2 c flour  
dash salt  
2 eggs  
1/2 c shredded Jarlsberg or other mild cheese

Melt butter in 1/2 c boiling water. Stir in flour and salt, mixing until mixture forms a ball that will not separate. Remove from heat and quickly stir in eggs until smooth. Add cheese. On a greased cookie sheet drop rounded teaspoons of mixture, or pipe 1" balls using pastry bag. Bake at 400 degrees for 20 minutes until brown. Cool and split puffs, scooping out interior.

#### filling:

2 c shredded chicken  
1/4 c diced celery  
2 tbs diced pimento  
3 tbs chopped pecans  
1/4 c mayonnaise  
2 tsp curry powder  
few splashes hot sauce

Mix ingredients to taste, spoon into hollowed, cooled puffs. Makes about 30.



### Polynesian Picks

8 oz can chunk pineapple  
15 slices bacon, cut in half crosswise  
10 chicken livers, quartered  
1/4 c soy sauce  
1 tbs brown sugar  
1/4 tsp cayenne or crushed red pepper



Mix last three ingredients in bowl, set aside. Using one pineapple chunk and a piece of liver, roll up in bacon slice, securing with a delightful toothpick. Repeat. Again. Place the whole assembled lot in the marinade, and refrigerate four hours. Broil three inches from heat source, until bacon is crisp (about 2 1/2 minutes per side). *Variations:* Just leave out the livers, or substitute chunks of roasted chicken or tofu.

### Gin-O-Rama

1/2 c gin  
3/4 c orange juice  
juice of 2 lemons  
ice cubes  
grenadine



Fill your favorite cocktail shaker 1/3 with ice. Add gin, oj, lemon juice and several dashes of grenadine—stir or shake to your heart's content. Strain into old fashioned or martini glasses. Serves 4 luses, or lighten with some seltzer for the more delicate guests.

### Toasted Tomatoes

30 bite-sized (grape, cherry or small roma) tomatoes  
8 oz whipped cream cheese  
1/2 c shredded Jarlsberg or Parmesan cheese  
8 oz crab (canned is fine)  
2 tbs diced chives  
1/4 tsp salt  
hot sauce to taste



Slice off top of tomatoes and use melon baller to remove seeds and flesh inside. Rinse and set aside. Mix remaining ingredients in a bowl, adding enough water to make a pipe-able consistency. Using a pastry bag (or sealable sandwich bag with the corner snipped off) fill tomatoes with the mixture. Broil a few inches from heat source, until the filling browns slightly (2–4 minutes).

# Quietly Canadian:

Canadians are a quiet people.

We've probably never told you about urban planner Macklin Hancock or his assistant, architect Douglas Lee, and how an entire town was built from scratch seven miles northwest of Toronto, Canada, back in 1952. Oh sure, we Canadians know all about your William J. Levitt and the thousands of houses he grew out of Long Island potato fields and Joseph Eichler's bevy of Bay Area beauties, but Hancock and Lee belong in that company of names too.

So this Canuck is speaking up.

Like many postwar developments, Don Mills started life as lush farmland, a river valley and some largely unusable scraps of land near a railroad line a good distance out from the city proper. It took the finances of a rich business tycoon, a father-in-law who was willing to take a chance on his young son-in-law and an uncompromising vision to transform more than 2,000 acres into "the largest urban development project to be undertaken by a single developer in Canadian history and the first large-scale application of modern planning theories in North America," according to a 1997 report by the Ontario Heritage Foundation.

The tycoon was Edward Plunkett "E.P." Taylor, who ran a successful brewery and spent his free time raising champion racehorses. The benevolent father-in-law was Karl Fraser, who was put in charge of developing Taylor's real estate

*text* Dave LeBlanc

*photography* Dustin Rabin





# Don Mills, Ontario



Rob, Vicki and daughters Holly and Tairn live in one of Don Mills' "California-style" ranches.





Macklin Hancock's idea was  
to design a fully functioning town  
with designated areas  
where residents would live, work and play.

holdings. The son-in-law was Macklin Hancock, a 27-year-old doing his post-graduate degree in urban planning at Harvard under Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius. And the vision? Well, after seeing that his father-in-law's early plans would have sullied all that green with just another gray bedroom community, Hancock offered an alternative. His idea was to use the British model of the "New

Towns" pioneered by one of his professors, Sir William Holford, combined with the turn-of-the-century work of Ebenezer Howard, author of *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*, to design a fully functioning town with

designated areas where residents would live, work and play.

When they heard of his plans, Hancock's professors laughed, thinking the project too much responsibility for such a young man to take on and too pie-in-the-sky to ever get built. But, full of youthful arrogance, Hancock ignored them and convinced his father-in-law to give him a chance. "After it got going and it was in *Time* magazine and things like that, they gave me a big banquet," Hancock, now 79, remembers about professors Gropius and Holford.

Shovels hit the ground in 1952. Originally, the name of the new town was to follow Levittown's example and be called "Eptown," using sugar daddy E.P. Taylor's acronym. Thankfully, Hancock's influence was strong enough to replace





the clunky moniker with the more bucolic “Don Mills” to take into account the Don River and its requisite old mill nearby. In 1953, Montrealer Douglas Lee, even younger than Hancock at just 25, joined the team as architect-in-charge. This dynamic duo was responsible for everything, from the overall concept right down to the naming of streets.

“We were working really late planning out streets, so we’d always go out for dinner and more often than not we’d be down in Chinatown,” remembers Lee. “One of our favorite dishes was a soup made of what English people would call ‘mustard greens’ but in Chinese it’s ‘guy toi.’ We went back one night after dinner and came to this little cul-de-sac. It ended up being named ‘Guy Toi Court.’ ”

By 1962 about 29,000 people lived on the courts and crescents of Don Mills. There were more than 8,000 housing units (4,500 were apartments), eight elementary schools, three secondary schools, nine churches, a curling rink, arena and a shopping center, which was almost designed by Gropius. Early on in the planning process, Hancock telephoned his former professor and asked him if he would be so kind as to design the commercial heart of his New Town. The Bauhaus legend gently refused, telling Hancock he was talented enough to lay it out himself and that the architectural drawings could be done by another of his former students, John Parkin, who was making quite a name for himself in Toronto as a pure Modernist architect.

While Parkin’s open-air “Convenience Center” was at the bulls-eye of the new community, each neighborhood “quadrant” had its own heart too. Central to

The houses have a consistent theme, yet vary interestingly in their rooflines, fenestration and siting.

The Don Mills library (right) and the Scotiabank (below), designed by John Parkin, are among the development's Modernist commercial buildings.



each was a school and a church in “every denomination we could think of,” says Hancock. Pedestrian pathways led from each of the four quadrants back to the shopping center so that “you could go around your town without getting in the way of high-speed cars,” he adds. Outside of the residential areas were the industrial areas and then, finally, natural greenbelts.

Independent builders were offered lots from the Don Mills Development Corporation if they agreed to one condition: there would be no Victorian, Edwardian or any other dead monarch’s frills applied to any structure in town. Houses, libraries, churches, banks and even factories would be Modern with a capital ‘M’ or they wouldn’t get built. And if a builder didn’t have an approved architect, one would be provided.

“Canada suddenly flowered; it wanted to be Modern, it didn’t want to be ancient,” says Hancock of the postwar period. “What it wanted was housing for the future that people could afford, and affordable housing was the fundamental idea behind [Don Mills].”

“We actually did the siting plans for all of the houses so that the streetscape could be coordinated by us,” adds Lee. “We asked different roofing manufacturers to produce shingles that would fit into the color schemes. Not only did we initiate changes in the actual building styles, we introduced changes to some of the manufacturers’ palettes.” Color schemes for the entire community were prepared by Hancock’s sister, Marjorie, a graduate of the Ontario

College of Art, who “understood color; she understood the relationship of one building to another,” says Hancock.

Aubrey and Wynn Martin liked what they saw and bought their house for \$13,700 in 1954 on

one of the first streets to be completed. “I’m still in love with the house,” says Aubrey Martin, now 85. “That ceiling up there, in 50 years it’s only been varnished twice: the original plus the time I took it all down about 10 years ago.” Martin’s house is like most in the northwest quadrant: small at around 1,100 square feet, it still managed to look shockingly new and modern. Buff-colored brick, a half-flat/half-wedge roofline, banded windows and a carport, the Martins’ house and others like it paved the way for the larger and more striking “California-style” post-and-beam ranches that would pop up a few years later in the southeast quadrant.

Each neighborhood quadrant  
had its own heart, too.  
Central to each was a school  
and a church in every denomination.





Like the one that attracted 46-year-old architect Rob and his wife Vicki, 41, with its all-glass front. Backing onto a ravine and sited smack-dab in the middle of a stand of towering mature trees (that were there long before the neighborhood), Rob and Vicki love their 1,800-square-foot home. Rob, Vicki and their preteen girls, Holly and Tairn, represent “Don Mills: The Next Generation,” having moved into the neighborhood just three years ago.

“In our enclave everyone knows one another either by name or by sight; they actually say, ‘Hi, how are you today?’ ” says Vicki, who walks to work at a TV station in the southwest quadrant. “Each year in the spring we have a huge community block party and over 200 residents attend. It’s a great time.” With new insulation, a few concessions to modern technology and “an extra bathroom for those future teen years,” she thinks the 1950s-era ranch style remains a viable one for young families.

And it doesn’t need a flat roof or a curtain-wall of glass to adhere to Modernist principles, according to Macklin Hancock. “Modernism has to do with where your kitchen is,” he says. The kitchen should be toward the front and the living room—where the most time is spent—should be at the back of the house looking onto the garden. “The Victorians had it just the reverse!” he exclaims. “The kitchen was at the back of the house because that’s where the horse was; the front door was almost never used.”

Today, Don Mills is one of Toronto’s best-kept secrets. All architect-designed, the houses range from between \$350,000 to \$600,000 (Canadian dollars) depending on size and location, which keeps them affordable still for young professionals like Rob and Vicki—the kind of homeowners they were meant for in the first place. “Monster homes” are few and far between because Hancock and Lee’s original vision still works, even for the new generation of residents taking over from the original owners who are moving on to seniors’ housing. That doesn’t faze Aubrey Martin in the least, who says the new generation are the type of people he’s always had as neighbors in his half-century of living here.

“We know all the kids, all their families; you get your arm sore from waving all the time,” he laughs. 🍷

Dave LeBlanc writes “The Archtourist,” a weekly newspaper column for Canada’s national newspaper, *The Globe and Mail*. He also produces radio commercials, but his real passion is cruising around with wife, Shauntelle, in “Monty,” their 1962 Mercury Monterey, looking for ‘50s and ‘60s artifacts to rescue and take home. Check out photographer Dustin Rabin’s rock ‘n roll and other photography at [dustinrabin.com](http://dustinrabin.com).



Vintage photography by Douglas Lee



The early years in Don Mills: Builders were only offered small batches of lots at a time to avoid the repetition found in Levittown.

“I’m still in love with the house,” says original resident Aubrey Martin, now 85, above.





Denver, Colo.



Brown Deer, Wisc.



Northampton, Mass.



# homepage

## Denver, Colo.

My partner, Randy Morris, and I have been living in the Denver subdivision of Krisana Park for the past year and a half. We knew this 1954 home built by architect H.B. Wolff was right for us the second we first viewed it. In addition to needing a new roof, the home was suffering from decor abuse and required many hours of scraping, caulking, priming and painting inside. We are still in the process of repainting and remodeling, but the reward is great! It was our goal to have fun with the design, incorporating elements from the past, the present and the future.

**Randy Sorter**

## Brown Deer, Wisc.

Our ranch home was built in 1952 and modeled after the "Five Star Home #2001" in a 1950 *Better Homes and Gardens*. We are the third owners of the L-shape floor plan home with attached two-car garage. We have done a great deal of landscaping, updating and remodeling, much of it ourselves. Up next is the conversion of our living room fireplace to gas, and a remodel of the mantel, hearth and bookcase to take us into the 21st century. We're proud of the work we have done!

**Lisa & Greg Nohl**

## Northampton, Mass.

I don't own a home yet but have been collecting furnishings for when I do. This room holds a portion of my 600-album collection, with a few framed on the wall. Some favorite pieces are my boomerang-shaped mahogany coffee table with a great '50s laminate top, a Plycraft bentwood lounge inspired by the Eames design and my classic chrome and Formica kitchen table from 1950 that has a gray cracked-ice pattern with black and red barracudas swimming around the edge.

**John Quirk**

Put your home on our fridge; send in a high-resolution photo or sharp snapshot and a couple of sentences about your cool pad for our next issues. See contacts page 3.

# The Flamingo in '53

**WHEN VEGAS  
WAS VEGAS,  
BABY...**







Once upon a time — 1953, to be exact — a hotel room on the Vegas Strip cost less than \$8 and Pearl Bailey was considered a headliner. Showgirls still kept their tops on for another couple of years and mob money was laundered daily.

The Flamingo Hotel, built by Benjamin “my-name-isn’t-Bugsy-god-damn-it” Siegel in 1946, cost \$6 million to construct. The 105-room resort was considered lavish in its day, but gamblers then would scarcely recognize it today with its \$130 million Flamingo Hilton expansion that includes a wildlife habitat, wedding chapel and 3,600-plus rooms in towers that make the U.N. look cozy.

Never mind that; let’s take a trip back to a time when Frank and Dino ruled the strip and children stayed home while Mom and Dad kicked up their heels in Vegas. Pour me a daiquiri; Sin City here we come.

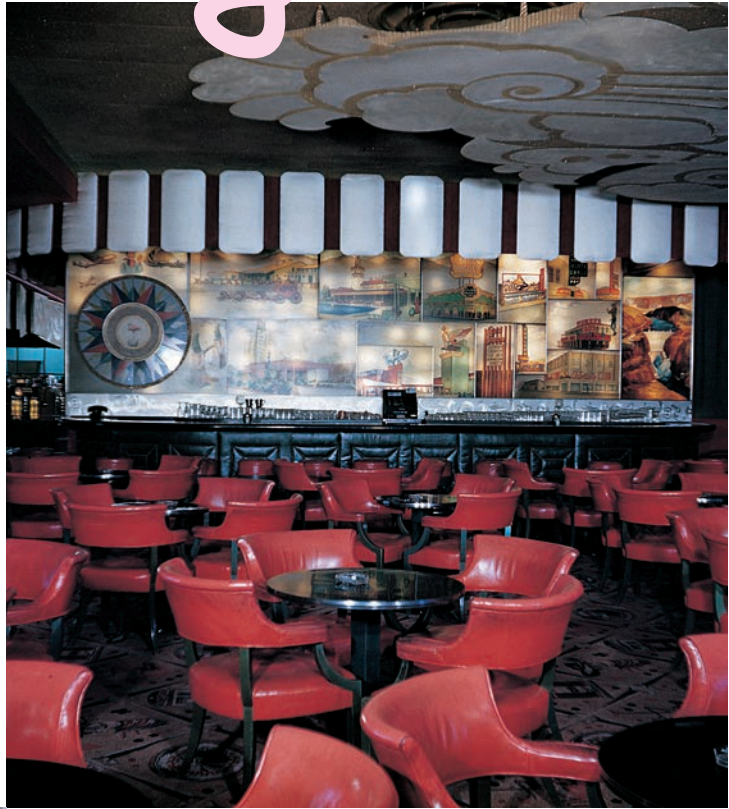
*text* Michelle Gringeri-Brown

*photography* George Mann





# Flamingo



George Mann was an actor, dancer, photographer and inventor who captured '50s and '60s Americana on film for the coin-operated stereoptic viewers he had in Southern California restaurants. This is the second in our series of photo essays drawn from the George Mann Collection archives.



# StrengTheory





**I** didn't know what we had back then," Tony Natsoulas says about his parents' 1967 four-bedroom ranch home in Davis, Calif. "Everybody had the same Streng houses in the neighborhood and I didn't think of it as anything special. But then I went to art school and learned about architecture."

Tony is a ceramicist who produces humorous larger-than-life-size figures, as well as busts and wall sculptures, and Donna, a painter, has a line of vintage purses with hand-painted robots, poodles, cartoon characters and the like. They also have a prodigious art collection that includes works by Picasso, Roy De Forest, Bob Brady, Wayne Theibaud, Dalí, Howard Finster, Fred Babb, Suzanne Adan, Jeff Koons, Andy Warhol and Tom Rippon. There's no "sofa-size art" bought to match the drapes in their home.

Donna grew up in a traditional ranch and has a great love of architecture, too—particularly for Eichler-esque homes—thanks in part to her design-school years in Oakland. "My grandmother had a 1950s ranch home in the Bay Area, and even though the floor plan wasn't open, she had the streamline couches, odd Lucite lamps, the whole atomic look," she says.

When the Natsoulases tired of loft living and were looking for their next home, they happened upon "a whole bunch of 1963 Strengs in Sacramento," Tony explains. "As soon as I walked in, I said, 'This is the house that we have to buy.'"

### *The Streng Story*

Streng Bros. Homes began building tracts in Sacramento and Davis in 1959. Their nearly 3,000-plus Modernist houses were almost all designed by architect Carter Sparks, who worked at the Eichler-affiliated architectural firm of Anshen and Allen for several years.

Although the models look much like Eichlers, Jim and Bill Streng eschewed Eichler's open-roof atriums and radiant heating in their homes. Air conditioning was part of the package from the get-go and bedrooms had high, private windows instead of the Eichler penchant for sliding glass doors—all of which makes sense in a climate with temperatures in the high 90s for much of the summer. Down the middle of the hallways are HVAC chases that distribute heat and air conditioning to the rooms.

*text Bromley Davenport  
photography Izzy Schwartz*



Opposite: In the entryway to the Natsoulas home is a series of paintings by Paul DiPasqua based on a 1954 dating handbook for teenagers. This page: A Bertoia chair in the pink office. Tony, Donna and Agatha (wearing the fur coat) in the living room with their "dog bone" couch, vintage lighting and Heywood Wakefield tables, one of which holds a chocolate ceramic cake by David Gilhooly. The painting over the couch is by Bethany Ayers.





Tony's "Alice Get's a Job" is the largest piece in their family room art collection. "I really admired Alice [Kramden] because she was able to stand up to that big bully," Tony says. "She always complained about not having any money, and I didn't see that she was doing anything like taking care of kids or cleaning house, so I thought, 'I'll give her a job.'" Other artwork includes a sculpture over the couch by Arthur Gonzalez and a lithograph above the fireplace by Robert Arneson.



Streng homes were usually sold before they were built, and architect Sparks would customize the plans, such as that of Tony and Donna's house, but insisted that all changes were in the Modernist spirit. Strengs typically ran between 1,800 and 2,200 square feet and shared similar aggregate paving and spherical light fixtures with their Eichler first cousins.

The Natsoulases' three-bedroom, two-bath ranch was customized for the original owner, who had the floor plan flopped and the kitchen placed on the outside wall instead of between the family and living areas (see plans). The couple use the original living room adjacent to their kitchen as a dining area, and a 13' x 12' bedroom at the front of the house is now their living room. The 1,425-square-foot "Classic II" was built with a carport out front, but a later garage now fills that space. Another change over the years was a photography darkroom that filled in the jog in the floor plan next to the kitchen, which Tony has converted to a kiln room. The garage is now his studio, and these bonus spaces were a big selling point for the two work-at-home artists.

### Getting Modern

"Strengs and Eichlers are very similar from the outside. Inside I think Eichlers





used better materials—like the paneling—but I don't see a real big difference between the two," Donna says. Their home was "pretty pristine; previous owners didn't take out walls or do major remodeling."

The couple's existing furnishings were a good click: "It was all '50s and '60s—we basically wanted a lot of fun furniture," Tony says. "It just happened that we bought this house and the furniture fit the era."

"With Tony's artwork and the art we collect, we wanted a funkier, fun, retro feel instead of the sterile loft look," Donna adds. Since moving in they've started a trend among the owners of more traditional ranches on their block: bright interior paint colors. A wall in their dining room is lime green, a bathroom chrome yellow, the office wall is Pepto Bismol pink. The front door is tomato soup orange and they painted their washer and dryer bubblegum pink as well. "People are so afraid of color, but when you live with it, it makes you feel good," Donna enthuses.

Some friends in the neighborhood are likeminded about emphasizing the Modernist aspects of the homes, including neighbors Paul Torrigino and Richard Gutierrez, who have another very cool Streng. Paul and Richard run Pariarts.com, an online store specializing in custom tiki signage. But not everyone is in the mid-

Top: In the dining area the top of a 1950s hutch holds vintage Hull pottery from Donna's grandmother, while inside are a variety of glassworks collected in the couple's travels. Flanking the hutch is a wood and linoleum sculpture by Michael Stevens on the left and "Romeo" the robot made by Clayton Bailey. Above: Ceramicist Scott Schoenherr's 1957 Nash Metropolitan pulls a vintage trailer.



Above, clockwise: Inside the Streng's front door is one of Tony's paintings, "The Ice Princess." Like a typical mid-century ranch, the house is wide open to the back yard. In the bedroom, the bust over the Heywood Wakefield dresser is by Arthur Gonzalez. The kitchen, with its white laminate counters, is all original except for the dishwasher. The cabinets display egg cups from the '50s and plastic doll furniture.



century loop.

"Most people just want to turn their homes into country clutter houses," Tony says. "Or trailers," Donna adds. "They're putting up vinyl siding and vinyl fences; another neighbor is doing the whirly-gig thing."

"Most people don't know what they have," Tony laments.

"Our realtor had absolutely no idea what modern houses were," Donna remembers. "She'd take us to cute little cottages with hardwood floors and dinky rooms. We'd say, 'It's very nice, it's just not us; none of our furniture would fit.' Tony went on the Internet and found what we wanted and she almost threw up."

Donna continues: "When she came into this house she said, 'Why would you want a house that doesn't have wooden windows and hardwood floors?' But when we put the house together, she said, 'Now I want to buy one!'"

### *Historical Imperative*

It would appear that the typical Sacramento homebuyer is more in tune with their realtor's aesthetics. "We watched people walk into this house [when it was for sale] and walk out. They couldn't stand it. The people we bought from said about six to eight percent of people anywhere 'get it,'" Donna explains. "Then



we'd go into these cluttered little icky houses and see the same people because we were all looking at the same time, and they were loving those stucco houses.

"God bless people who have different taste than I do, but I never understand why people buy something and try to make it over. I would buy a bungalow if I loved bungalows; I'd buy a [traditional] ranch if I liked ranch houses; a stucco house if I liked them. [It's important] to keep with the integrity of the house," she says.

"In the state of California there's a law that says you cannot take a piece of art and alter it, damage it or deface it," Tony offers. "It's illegal to do that. If you bought a painting from me and you decided that you didn't like the red chicken and painted it blue, you could be fined or something. Nobody has extended that to architecture, though everyone claims architecture is art. That's kind of interesting.

"If, in fact, architects are artists, then what they are making is art and it should come under this law," he attests.

Preservation in Sacramento is focused on Victorians and bungalows, the Natsoulases say. Along the Sacramento River "people are knocking down Strengs and Eichlers and putting up eight-story Mediterranean prison blocks with the maid's quarters and this and that," says Donna emphatically. "They're changing the complete midcentury neighborhood look; it's really sad. [Preservationists] have

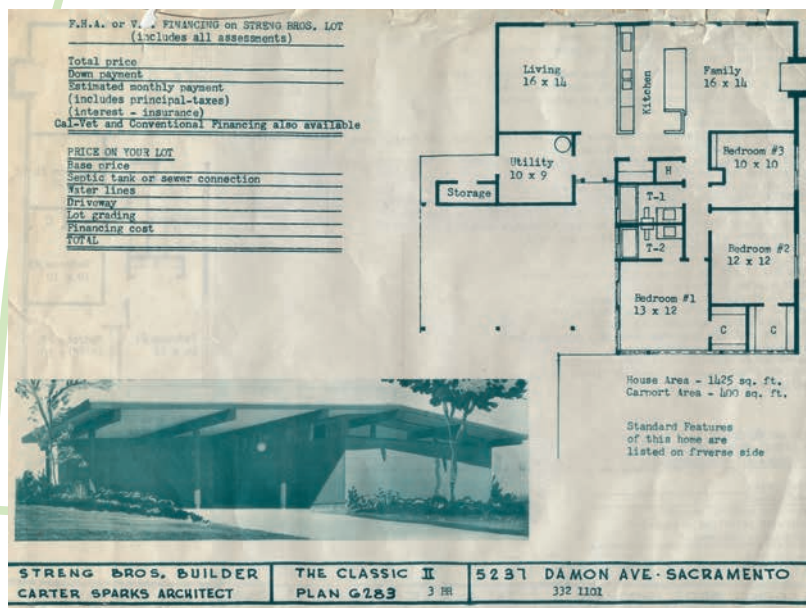


The shed, designed and built to complement the house, has another Tony Natsoulas sculpture installed near it, "Altered Ego."





Duncan and Lois Courvoisier were the original owners of Tony and Donna's home. Lois is seen here in 1963 with her father. Compare the original floor plan with the Natsoulas flopped version, which shows the change of kitchen location, the extra kiln room and the garage addition.



stopped two of these projects, which I'm really grateful for."

## Well Suited

But back in the Natsoulases' neighborhood things are still pretty copacetic: it's safe, quiet and dark enough at night that you can actually see the stars. "This is a good art house," Donna volunteers. "We used to live in a loft with 14' ceilings that was huge and open. When we first moved in, we thought, 'Oh isn't this great?' But when you go to hang a picture, it's lost; everything was dwarfed in there. Lighting was a problem and it wasn't inviting.

"And in the loft you couldn't view or interact with the outdoors," she continues. "That's really important for peace; just to be able to watch the birds and the squirrels digging up your yard, it's so nice to feel like you're not boxed in. A lot of people couldn't live with our stuff, but they still all love this house and its art."

"What drew me in is that the house itself is so plain," Tony muses. "There's no decorative molding, the fireplace is brick, it's almost like the house is invisible. It doesn't fight with any of the art. It's like being in a gallery.

"A few people have said, 'What is an artist doing in suburbia?' I think it was van Gogh who started the idea that we all had to be poor and suffering to make good art. I just don't believe that. I think you can make art under any conditions."

Not long ago, the original owner, a pianist who held many recitals, poetry readings and parties in the home, came by to see what they'd done with the place. Understandably nervous, Donna and Tony were relieved to see a smile spread across his face. And nearly 40 years after the house was built, architect Carter Sparks' widow came to buy some art from Tony. She, too, beamed and told them her husband would have been proud to see a house that he built so full of life and art. ✨

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# cool|stuff



## Peachy Glow

Brian Donovan's all-woman workforce turns out his lighting designs from a facility in Brooktondale in the scenic Finger Lakes Region of New York. The ceiling, floor, wall and table lamps are made from spun aluminum or brass, and come with choices of perfed metal or prismatic polycarbonate—that's transparent thermoplastics to you and me—diffusers. The Will D. pendant gives you the option of white light on the table and lavender on your face—or white and amber for that day-at-the-beach look. Then you'll need to choose between a 9", 15 1/2" or 32" model with one- to three-bulb capacities. And he's got a hubcap-like wall clock as well; 607.256.3640, [donovanlighting.com](http://donovanlighting.com).

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## Whip Smart

Decisions, decisions. The number of fiberglass lamp choices from Moon Shine Lamp and Shade seems almost infinite. With dozens of shade shapes and sizes to start with, that's only the tip of the iceberg when designing your vintage table, floor or hanging lamps. Then there is the choice of color (for lamp, lacing and pattern); more than 22 are standard, but custom colors are also possible. If you have any decision-making power left, there's also the lamp stand and top ornament to select. It's exhausting, but also inspiring. Shown is the Darla shade in harlequin pattern scarlet with mahogany stitching, black wire base and quasar ornament; total cost of all elements is \$135. Available from [moonshineshades.com](http://moonshineshades.com).





### **Pillow Head**

Visions of an air traffic controller's nightmare or an owl that proclaims his love for pigeons give a little insight into Dora Drimalas' psyche. Her Hybrid-Home 18" pillows come in eight postmodern designs and are silk-screened using good-guy water-based inks. The San Francisco graphic designer got the idea for her new line when crafting some pillows for her apartment, and each is available in a couple of colors. Check her selection at [hybrid-home.com](http://hybrid-home.com).



### **Carbon Copy**

Jacobsen's Series 7 chairs retail for around \$350, but Pottery Barn's eerily similar Morrow chair is only \$59. Though the original design has a boomerang-shaped back and the adaptation a rectangle, the parallel is still obvious. Available in black, mahogany stain and white, all with chrome legs, the chairs are also stackable—so they're easy to store as well. The decision to buy either a set of six or a single original chair is easily answered by whether you're a design purist or prefer to dine surrounded by friends. Available at [potterybarn.com](http://potterybarn.com), or by catalog. 🌈



# Expanding a midcentury house— modestly Concrete Notions

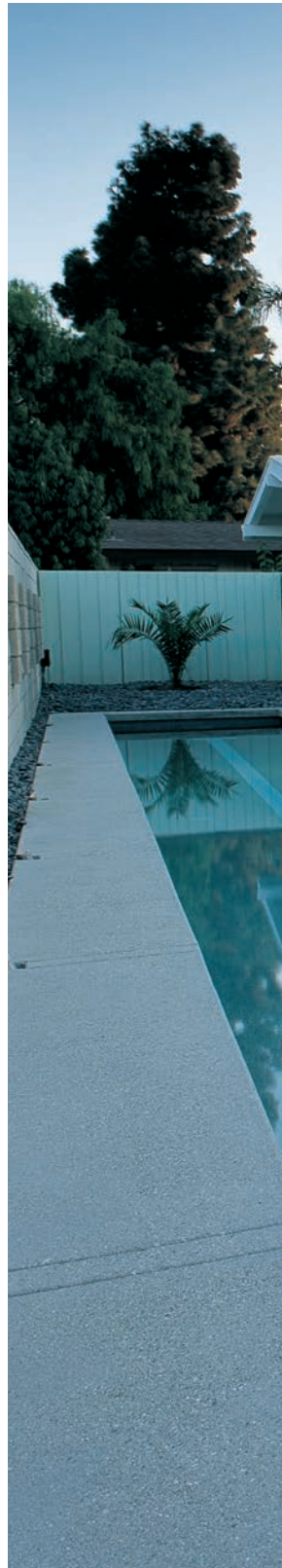
**"I spent \$50,000 on concrete,"** Kevin Cwayna says about a recent addition to his 1950s ranch house. "Everyone told me it was a bad idea because the amount of new square footage for the price didn't make sense. And I wasn't adding a room, really. I basically took a two-car garage and added 12' onto the front and then converted half of the original garage to living space. I only gained 240 square feet."

Cwayna, a physician with two pound-rescued pit bulls, in reality did quite a bit more to the down-at-the-heels home: He extended the garage, adding room for an office, created an entry alcove and moved the front door closer to the street. He also transformed the yard from a weed-pocked brick patio to an enclosed pool compound, virtually gutted the kitchen, took the roof back to period-correct white rock, replaced fascia boards and painted the exterior. While walking the dogs, Frank and Amy, through the neighborhood daily he'd scout for discarded materials, eventually scoring three sets of glass doors and four sets of windows that were incorporated into the remodel.

"I knew it would be a valuable addition because I was increasing the main room from a traditional-size living room to a spacious, multipurpose loft kind of room," he

*text* Michelle Gringeri-Brown

*photography* Jim Brown









In the open living area, generic upholstered midcentury furniture teams with Heywood Wakefield end tables brought with the homeowner from Minnesota, and a vintage Eames lounge chair and ottoman; by the Nelson bench are two of his Predicta televisions. "When you see Heywood Wakefield that means 'Grandma' to a certain age group," Kevin Cwayna says, "or a vintage television recalls sitting around with your alcoholic uncle watching TV."

says. In addition to the garage foundation, the pool decking and a cement-block wall, the 50K in concrete brought the new office floor level with the rest of the house instead of one step down, belying its humble garage beginnings. "People do conversions but they don't bring the step-down up; you have to do that," Cwayna says.

The house was a raw, neglected ranch with a lot of original features and what seemed like a huge lot to the Minneapolis native. "The yard had never been incorporated into the house. I thought it would be exciting to return the house to what it should be and also make it work for indoor-outdoor living," he explains.

Outside that didn't mean a classic kidney-shaped pool.



Cwayna, who thinks deep pools are for splashing kids, wanted a shallow lap pool for exercise with plenty of broad steps for adult friends to lounge around on and get their feet (or more) wet. After mulling over how to best fit all those features into his yard, he further refined his ideas by consulting with an architect.

"She took measurements of the house, did some research on it and came back saying excitedly, 'Oh, your house is architecturally designed; it's on a grid. Everything is 32" x 32".' I hadn't really noticed, but the double doors are the same size as the window blocks and everything is interchangeable," Cwayna explains. "She continued the grid out into the yard and it became a much more powerful part of

the house when we made the indoor floor match the outdoor floor. As soon as the lines of the pool lined up with the lines of the house, then there was enough symmetry and linearity that it made the indoor/outdoor transition very clean."

The finished pool has a spa, lap lane and an alcove similar to the one directly behind it at the house entryway, as well as a grid of stepping-stones that lead across the water to the front door. Cwayna says the pool installation was a typical nightmare: illegal Sunday excavations, a broken water main (twice) and the scary combination of beer and heavy machinery. But in the end he got just what he had in mind: a pool he and his dogs can enjoy every day and a great venue for entertaining friends.

Cwayna has about 50 TVs, including ones from Zenith, Philco, RCA and Admiral.



before



The kitchen renovation kept the best of the old—golden birch cabinets—and added the new, hefty elements that appealed to Cwayna: cement counters and industrial-grade appliances and fixtures.

during



Cwayna says he “draws the line at messing with the hard architecture—roof lines, room arrangement, windows, exterior siding”—but needed a home office and preferred not to use one of the smallish bedrooms. Just inside the front door and open to the kitchen and dining/living room, there is now a compact area for a desk and computer. After the major exterior improvements, he then turned his sights to creating a new galley kitchen.

The original birch plywood kitchen cabinets on the end wall of the kitchen were kept, but everything else was gutted, including an unoriginal bar-height divider wall. Cabinetry in the new island was built to coordinate with the existing, and Kevin fabricated 4”-thick concrete counters with help from artist friend Eric Overman and Fu-Tung Cheng’s book, *Concrete Countertops*. Moonstone and green pebble aggregate was added to the top layer and the surface polished with a diamond sander. The existing cement slab floor was scored in a 32” grid and polished as well. “I love the island because it looks like it’s sculpted from the floor and really fits in a heavy post-and-beam house,” Cwayna says.

He chose heavy-duty stainless steel appliances, including industrial faucets used in hospitals, a restaurant-quality stand-alone ice maker, a commercial fridge and stove, a drinking fountain that dispenses filtered water and two stainless steel sinks. The Bosch dishwasher is the only residential-grade appliance.

As for furnishings, Cwayna has an assortment of vintage items including George Nelson benches, an Eames lounge chair and ottoman, dining and end tables from Heywood Wakefield and generic upholstered pieces. He also collects midcentury electric shavers, transistor radios, Russel Wright and early televisions. Raised in a minimalist “appliance-free” household where the TV was in a closet between viewings, Cwayna became fascinated with the styling of various household objects and started collecting TVs during medical school. His interest was in the way they looked, not in making them functional again.



after



during



after



"The earliest TVs in the '40s were designed like radios, and initially there was a market battle between round and square screens—much like the VHS vs. Beta debate of the '80s," he says. "Zenith invested in the round television, which I think is beautiful—it's an eye instead of a box and is more human—but RCA and others were pushing square."

Cwayna has about 50 TVs, including ones from Zenith, Philco, RCA, Admiral, Motorola and Arvin, as well as Sears Silvertones and Montgomery Ward Airlines. One of his favorite models is the Philco Predicta. "It looks like Rosie the maid on 'The Jetsons,' like it's going to walk over to you," he says.

Cwayna isn't alone in his admiration of the style. Dave Riedel of Telstar Electronics in Wisconsin is creating modern color versions of the late-'50s black and white icon, complete with remote and cable/VCR compatibility. "Arguably the Predicta is the most distinctive television ever created, certainly on such a large scale," Riedel says. "Both the tube and the cabinet were created from scratch and no other television maker put such a dynamic effort into the design of the product."

The modern Predictas "attempt to capture the soul of the authentic '50s icon," says Riedel, who has introduced several new variations to the classic product line. "It's a television with a design that may be more challenging than what is displayed on the screen."

But not everyone can appreciate the same aesthetics of course. Back in the late '80s Cwayna's mother called to ask his partner what Kevin wanted for Christmas. He told her a Predicta, or more accurately, "Kevin wants a broken television." She followed through and got it for him, but couldn't resist saying, "You know I love you when I spend \$125 on a broken television; that doesn't make any sense to me." 📺

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# help! for your

## they have issues:

We spent more than a year hunting for a contemporary-style house in Washington, D.C.—not an easy task—for our proverbial growing family before finding our current home, built in 1960 by a developer who constructed three similar ones in this neighborhood. We’d love some advice on upcoming projects.

First, we want to paint the outside trim of the house but are struggling with color selection. The house is red brick and the siding is currently painted a burnt-red color. We would like to lighten it up—maybe with period color(s)—but aren’t sure what would work with the brick. Also, how should the carport’s ceiling—which is very prominent from the street—be painted in this new color scheme? Second, we would like more energy efficient windows but have not had much success with finding anyone willing to deal with these unique, overly large windows. All have a storm window on the outside, which looks kind of clunky. Finally, we want to work on the yard and are interested in learning about period landscaping that would complement the house. Importantly, we have two young children, no green thumbs and receive daily visits from the local deer, which means we need something easy to maintain and unappetizing to the deer population.

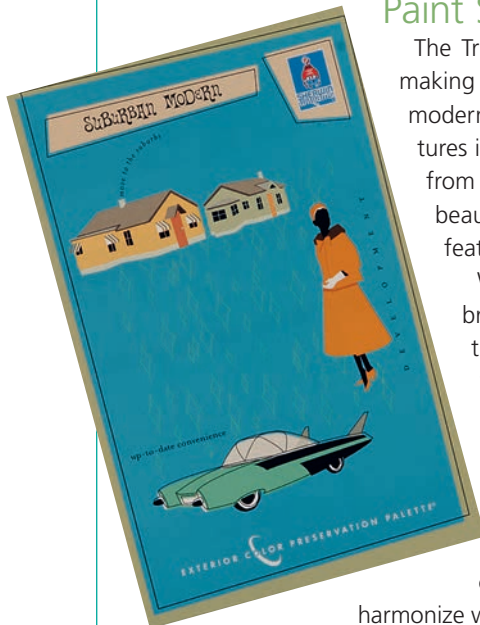
*David and Katherine Trimble*

### Paint Scheme

The Trimbles’ home is typical of what happens when previous owners take an easy out in making the building monochromatic because they just don’t know what to do with vintage modern architecture. As with anything beautiful, contrasting and highlighting standout features is what makes the whole look its best. Can you imagine a runway model painted beige from head to toe? The result would not be very interesting or beautiful. Dealing with a home that has architectural features worth highlighting is no different.

With this house, the details are obvious. The mostly brick, boxy architecture of their home is purposely accented with wooden posts and beams as well as vertical tongue-and-groove or T-111 plywood siding. To accentuate these architectural elements, try contrasting colors that harmonize with the brick red of the building and the natural surroundings of the site. Using the Sherwin-Williams “Suburban Modern” palette, Sycamore Tan is a good choice for the siding. It’s a warm gray/tan that will

harmonize with the grout in the brick as well as the trunks of nearby trees. For notable trim elements—like the entryway trellis and the rear balcony—I would recommend Fairfax Brown, and consider painting the two-story wooden siding on the rear of the home Avocado to create drama and minimize the home’s stature on the park-like lot. You might look at Avocado on the ceiling of the carport as well.





# midcentury marvel

from *Bryan Forward*



Avocado

Sycamore Tan

Fairfax Brown



## Windows

It seems every owner of a 50-year-old ranch has the same main concern: windows. Some feel the original aluminum product is at once flimsy, drafty, clunky and all sorts of other adjectives. If that's the case, replacement choices are out there, along with various ways to reconfigure the space rather than be stuck with the original window design.

The Trimbles have bottom-operable/top-fixed windows that are an obvious child hazard. These windows can be replaced with ones that have a fixed bottom and casement window tops. When an opening is too large to accommodate a standard window size, try using anodized aluminum "store-front" stock to frame in the space. This will keep the period aluminum window appearance while giving you a clean-looking finished product. Any reputable window company will be familiar with this application and, I have found, be up for the challenge of fabricating the material to pull off a great look.

If your budget prohibits all new windows at once, think about a long-term plan for replacement; just be sure to choose a window product that will be around for the long haul so you don't have to mix window styles down the road. (See page 71 for window manufacturers.)

## Landscaping

The Trimbles have an enviable park-like environment all around their home, but the loss of two mature trees in the front yard has left their landscape in need of help. Additional plantings will provide scale to the building and the large trees surrounding the property. The area between the carport and the front of the house needs defining with the possibility of creating a front porch replacement for the owners, who miss that Midwestern element. The home could use some screening from the street to add privacy and to give visitors fortunate enough to be invited over for a barbeque an architectural surprise.

Currently, the carport segues straight into the house. The result is an unclear definition on where humans and their machines belong. Also, the view looking toward the street from the living room should not be of car grilles, trashcans and whatever else is kept in the carport. I would recommend a short fence, 42" to 48" tall, with lacy plantings such as heavenly bamboo (*Nandina domestica*) or rhododendrons [see editor's note] on the house side that will gradually obscure the street but not fully obstruct the view of visitors coming up the driveway. Appropriate materials would include period-style

# help!



basket weave 1" x 6" material, grape stake or any other similar semi-transparent fencing type.

To define a front patio area, after a little regrading to give yourself a more level pad, try using simple square concrete pavers set in a planting of Irish moss (*Sagina subulata*) to create an inviting green space. Patio furniture casu-



ally placed would not contribute to a unified design, so incorporate modern wooden benches to establish the area as a formal space.

Along the right side of the driveway, *Acer saccharum*, or sugar maple, would be a good semitransparent tree that



would grow to be an effective visual block between the house and the street. Maples are wonderful trees that are easily trained and provide splendid color in the fall. Repeated throughout the property, various varieties of *Acer palmatum*, or Japanese maple, which come in numerous leaf shapes and colors, would create a unified look.

Other attractive trees with good sculptural qualities are dogwood (*Cornus*) and birch (*Betula*). For the areas close to the house, choose either a trainable shrub, like those from the holly or *Ilex* family, or *Forsythia*, which will provide a flashy springtime show of bright yellow flowers prior to its summer green.

In summary, use your plantings to complement the architecture, provide scale, soften bare harshness of open expanses of wall, and most of all, to create privacy. Work to make your house somewhat mysterious from the street so that when a visitor makes it up to the home they get a little surprise worth the trip.



*Editor's note: Heavenly bamboo, maples and holly are rated deer resistant, but deer palates vary regionally and seasonally. Check with your local nursery to see if the recommended plants are suitable for your climate.*

Send your questions for our experts to the address on page 3. Bryan Forward, of Forward Design Group, may be reached at [forwarddesigngroup.com](http://forwarddesigngroup.com) or 760.533.1950.



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### concrete notions pp. 54–60

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