

winter 2005

atomicranch

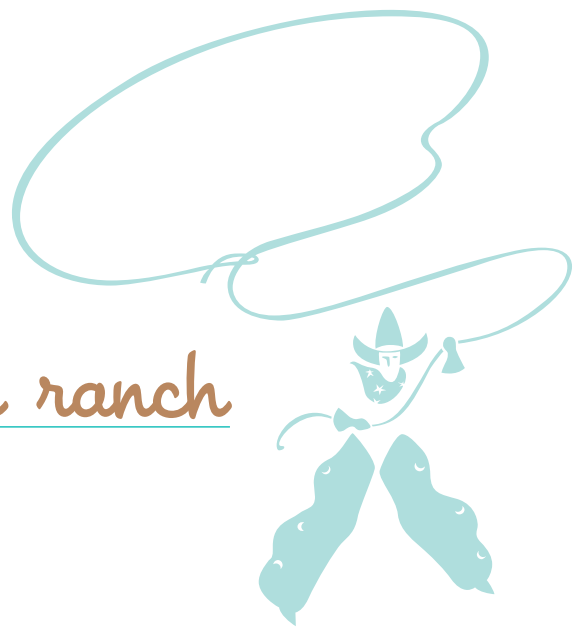
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meanwhile...back at the ranch



W

hen Monty Hall called my name for “Let’s Make a Deal,” I jumped up from my seat and bounded for the stage. Unfortunately my Bozo-style shoes got tangled up in my clown costume, and as I fell to the ground ...

Just kidding. Monty was actually Adrian Fine, from the Philadelphia Field Office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the program, “Let’s Make a Recent Past Deal,” was just one session from a six-day conference held in Portland, Ore. This annual meeting is attended by historic architecture enthusiasts, along with some pretty serious academics and government officials who deal with issues of preservation on a daily basis. The National Trust champions preservation of all historic eras, and our particular program dealt with methods of successfully promoting preservation of the “Recent Past,” namely midcentury.

So why write about this conference when instead I could be describing the cool homes we’ve visited on our travels? The Recent Past and the conference are the flip side of our core subject and ultimately are more important to you, your home and your neighborhood than reading about flooring options and keen collectibles.

The concept that the Recent Past is worthy of study and preservation is gaining momentum and can benefit us all, because developers, city governments and planning commissions probably don’t share our enthusiasm for tiki collections and midcentury furniture, but they do appreciate the importance of tax credits, architectural cohesion and preservation easements to their communities.

In addition to moderator Jeanne Lambin from the Wisconsin Field Office, two far more experienced speakers participated in the session. Christy Johnson McAvoy of Historic Resources Group spoke about adaptive reuse of two seemingly musty midcentury office buildings that are now the Pegasus Apartment complex and the hip Downtown Standard Hotel in Los Angeles. W. Dwayne Jones from Preservation Dallas shared his group’s increased effectiveness in dealing with city government’s sometimes grudging support of both commercial and residential examples of the Recent Past.

As the designated non-pro, I was asked to speak about the thing I know best—starting up this magazine. It was an extended infomercial and I was grateful for the opportunity to bring Atomic Ranch to the attention of the conference as another example of marketing midcentury. By showing examples of modest but

stylish homes and telling the homeowners’ personal stories, we hope that postwar housing will be appreciated and saved from the wrecking ball or misguided “improvements.”

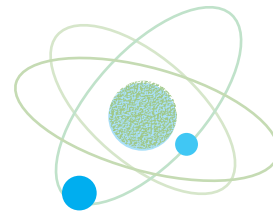
If your home and neighborhood are important to you, or you want to help preserve other examples of midcentury architecture, we urge you to get involved. Talk to your neighbors and visit recentpast.org. Preservation is not the impossible dream, as evidenced by the Green Gables and Greenmeadow Eichler developments in Palo Alto, Calif., whose four-year grassroots effort has resulted in placement on the National Register of Historic Places.

But perhaps the best part of the National Trust session was meeting and talking to the audience after the presentations. I learned of a Lustron being reconstructed in Kansas, a midcentury development in North Carolina, another neighborhood in Connecticut and a tract right in Portland just beginning to get organized. I came away from the conference confident that there will be years of stories for the magazine.

Jim Brown
Publisher



Always the risk taker.



modernwisdom

* We recently bid on an original 1953 Charles Goodman–designed house in the Hollin Hills subdivision of Alexandria, Va., outside of Washington, D.C. In placing our bid, we attached a copy of *Atomic Ranch*, hoping that it would sway the owner in our direction. Well, we didn't win the house, but it did generate a couple of new subscriptions from among the realtors.

Interest in these houses must be rising, as we were fourth out of 12 bidders—pretty impressive for an area where the brick-front Colonial reigns supreme. The winning bid was about \$60,000 over the asking price, which is amazing considering the home's condition. Everything is original to 1953: the flooring, the windows, the heating system, the appliances and the landscaping.

Now all I have to do is order a replacement magazine—the realtor wouldn't return it. We'll save our pennies and keep trying to get one of these houses.

Liz Maurer

Woodbridge, Va.

The Washington Post ran an article on Hollin Hills (see Resources page 77), reporting that the development is applying for National Register of Historic Places status. If approved, the tract would join Arapahoe Acres in Denver and the Eichler Greenmeadow and Green Gables neighborhoods in Palo Alto on the national list. Watch for two articles written by field officers at the National Trust for Historic Preservation in upcoming issues.

—ar editor

* *Atomic Ranch* has been such an inspiration to us; we would not change a thing about your magazine. I do, however, wonder about the ranchers writing in. We all wanted a magazine for the rest of us and now it seems some are trying to separate into groups, elevating themselves above other ranch dwellers: Mid Century Modernists, Modernists, Purists. As an interior designer, the thing I appreciate most about how people

live is seeing how they make their houses into homes. I think your magazine offers great ideas for just that.

If a family cannot live without modern appliances they certainly should not be shamed for it. But, I would add, if you do not want to live in a midcentury marvel, move to a more traditional home instead of trying to turn a classic into something it's not. That goes for any architectural style, I would say.

Star Trauth

Edgewood, Ky.

* Having been a child interested in architecture myself, I like to encourage a young person's interest in this field. Enclosed is a gift subscription for Jimmy Walsh, the 13-year-old who wrote into "Modern Wisdom" in no. 6 about going crazy for midcentury in fourth grade.

David Smith

designsmithgallery
Cincinnati, Ohio

* My husband and I love your magazine and wish it came out monthly. But size doesn't always matter. We would rather see a great magazine a few times a year than a half-ass one every month.

One feature we would like to see in each issue is coverage of an item important to ranch decor, say lamps or window treatments, with lots of great pictures and details. Also, how about a regular page of "What is it?" where readers send in pictures of retro items that they need identified. And one more thing, we would love a classified section where readers can buy, sell or trade their retro goodies.

Keep up the good work!

Melissa O'Brien

Manassas, Va.

O.K., we're definitely going to need to clone the staff. Actually Melissa's letter is a good plug for "Ranch Dressing," our new column covering home restoration

resources and midcentury collectibles; see page 27 for the lowdown on one of her finds. Send in your photos and questions and we'll farm them out to our knowledgeable Modernist authorities. The contact addresses are on page 3. Please include your e-mail address when you write us!

—ar editor

* Thanks for the great magazine; it's really inspiring us to get our 1955 split-entry whipped into shape.

Here is a photo of how I dealt with the problem of making ugly, early-21st-century AV gear fit into our midcentury modern living room. I built an entertainment center in the shape of a retro TV set. Works like a charm and our visitors usually think that it *is* an old TV.

Steve Iodefink

Seattle, Wash.

* Nice article on the Streng in Davis ("Streng Theory," no. 6). We live in almost the same house out in Granite Bay.

The Natsoulases made good comments regarding preservation of such midcentury moderns. Do you folks have any experience with home tours of midcentury houses? We would be happy to participate in such a tour, not only for our own edification on the architecture and interior design, but also to help raise awareness that these homes need to be preserved as a unique architectural period in American suburban home building.

Keep up the good work; the photography of the interiors of the homes is great and the text is quick and to the point. Great layouts as well.

Kevin Knauss

Granite Bay, Calif.

Some neighborhood groups have held midcentury house tours in recent years, but Victorian and bungalow homes are still highest on the preservation radar, something we think will change in the next few years. Chicago Bauhaus and Beyond, Modern Phoenix,



Houston Mod, SOHO in San Diego, Hollin Hills (mentioned opposite) and an ad hoc group of San Jose Eichler owners have all held mid-mod tours in past years. Other Modernist tours tend to focus on star-architect homes (Neutra, Case Study houses, Schindler, Lautner), while PS Modern Tours cover the exteriors of notable Palm Springs midcentury residences and commercial buildings. In 2000, in connection with the annual National Trust Conference, the Los Angeles Conservancy held a very successful tour, "How Modern Was My Valley? Touring Postwar San Fernando Valley."

Home tours are a great way to educate the public, but organizing them is a labor of love. Volunteers need to find a variety of houses with owners who are willing to have hundreds of strangers parading through and critiquing their decor. Insurance liability and the sheer minutia involved in organizing such an event are other factors, but the enjoyment of meeting like-minded people—or of recruiting newbies to the midcentury bandwagon—can be intoxicating.

—ar editor

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Write us at 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.



**clean
slate:**

What if Joe Built it Today?

“W

e're friends with people who don't want to touch anything in their house, who want to be purists,” says Mindy Hatch about neighbors in their Fairhills

tract in Orange, Calif. “When they were first coming to see our house, I thought, ‘Oh, God; they’re just not going to like it.’ But they actually loved it.”

The “it” is a 1962 Eichler that she and husband Todd upgraded to the 21st-century with a major reworking of spaces and finishes. “Basically we just wanted a modern version of an Eichler,” she says. “I like mixing new with old. After all, we’re not in the ‘60s anymore.”

The Hatches knew right away that they wanted to knock down some walls and remove the original kitchen and mahogany paneling, which were in rough shape. They bought the 2,100-square-foot house in 2003 and spent the first three months living elsewhere while they gutted and began to rebuild much of the interior. Todd, a restaurant designer, removed a full wall dividing the kitchen and family room from the living and dining space, which was anathema to the open floor plan he envisioned for the house.

“We definitely didn’t want the division between the two areas. Like us, most people spend a lot of their time in the kitchen and the family room, but we wanted to enjoy the whole house while we’re in there and the indoor/outdoor feel of looking out to the back yard,” he says.

When they did move in, it was with a makeshift kitchen, and son Miles, then 9 months old, was beginning to crawl. “Buying an old home is like opening a can of

text Bromley Davenport

photography Jim Brown



Before

The before shots show the chest-high divider (near right) between the family room and kitchen; a reverse view today is on the opposite page. The old L-shaped wall that closed off the kitchen from the dining room is shown far right; in the current photo above, picture that wall roughly mirroring the outline of the travertine island.





worms: there's always a problem with something and things take longer than you think," Mindy says philosophically.

Todd had a distinct bead on what he wanted for the kitchen and he did much of the installation himself. "The best modern designs are from the Italian companies, like Boffi, but ours is a more modestly priced Italian kitchen." He used stock sizes but some of the cherry Cesar cabinets had to be customized on site to fit American appliances. "European cabinets aren't sized for a 36" oven—they fit something like a little Gaggenau," he explains.

The countertops are stainless steel, as are the appliances—an Amana refrigerator, a Marvel under-counter fridge for kid-accessible drinks and a Dacor cooktop, pop-up fan, oven and microwave. Previously there was a small breakfast table at the end of the original kitchen island, but it was just 30" high. The Hatches wanted to keep that feature, but raised it to a 36" height and use Bertioia counter stools for quick meals. The two islands that make up the kitchen are wrapped in travertine marble and cherry veneer that matches the cabinetry; the backsplash is marble as well.

"There are mitered corners on the slab travertine with all of the grain running in the same direction," Todd points out. "I wanted a stone with a little 'movement' in it but not a lot that would compete with the terrazzo floor." The Hatches spent about \$25,000 on the kitchen, but estimate it would likely have run \$45,000—\$50,000 if contracted out.

Speaking of the floor, Todd would have chosen terrazzo throughout the whole

**"We appreciate the past
but live in today."
—Mindy Hatch**



Todd Hatch specified 5" wide walnut planks with minimum 8' lengths; Pergo or premanufactured hardwood floors typically come 3" wide in random lengths. The refaced fireplace wears discreet baby bumpers on its hearth in this view.

house, but Mindy lobbied for the warmth of wood. They went with a dark-stained walnut veneer composite flooring in the living and dining areas and in their master bedroom and bath. New terrazzo was installed in the kitchen and family room, then along the front entry wall of windows where Eichlers would traditionally have aggregate, and down the hall to the other bedrooms and Miles' bath. "Terrazzo went so well with the style of the house," Todd comments. "It's current but complements midcentury modern. It looked great 50 years ago and looks great today."

In the living room, with its Eichler-orange siding that runs from the atrium to the back window overlooking the pool, the couple are taking their time choosing the right furniture and artwork. Todd designed the Donghia leatherette-upholstered couch, which he likens to a low, deep Minotti knockoff. The white bench is B&B Italia and the nesting coffee tables he designed are made of Macassar ebony and zebrawood with a high gloss finish and chrome legs.

The fireplace and chimney were painted when they





Terrazzo Tutorial

Many homeowners we visit mention they'd love to install terrazzo, but in the next breath say, "but it's so expensive." We went to Marv Raupp of Hermosa Terrazzo in Southern California, the company that installed the new floor in the Hatch house, for the basics on the product.



What is terrazzo?

Marv explains it's a "polymer-modified cementitious matrix." OK ... His company's website, hermosati.com, further elaborates: "Terrazzo consists of marble, granite, onyx or glass chips in portland cement, polyacrylate modified portland cement, or resinous matrix binder." Now I get it. Marv says that 80 percent of terrazzo jobs are polymer-based since it can be poured 1/2" thick or less, and there are more colors available. Terrazzo is installed with zinc or brass divider strips, and can be used as a finish for floors, stairs or walls.

How is it done?

Terrazzo can be laid over wood or a cement slab, and a typical job is 1,000 square feet or more. The Hermosa Terrazzo crew rips up any existing carpet and pad; blasts or grinds the slab clean; details cracks and repairs any damage; primes the slab with moisture vapor material; then cuts divider strips to size, chalks out the pat-

tern, affixes the strips and lets them cure overnight. The next day, the liquid resin—which has a paint-like consistency—is poured into a plaster mixer along with whatever marble or chips are specified. That's mixed, poured and hand troweled; it cures and then the crew comes back to grind and polish it. "We usually grind off less than 1/8" with increasingly fine-grit stones," Marv says. "The goal is to have 70 percent of the marble or glass chips exposed."

How pricey is it?

"Terrazzo is an expensive finish material, but you need to weigh that against its design and durability advantages," Marv says. The process dates back to the 1400s and terrazzo is virtually indestructible. "A terrazzo floor is comparable to stone—but not tile—cost-wise, and about 50 percent more expensive than wood flooring. If a wood installation is quoted as \$12 per square foot, terrazzo would run around \$18-\$20."



In the dining room, the glass-top table is made from a champagne riddling rack from a California wine-maker. Eames reissued chairs sit on a cowhide rug.

bought the house. Todd wanted to bring it back to the natural cement block color, so he had a sandblaster come out. “I just wanted him to take off the paint and leave it as smooth as possible, but it started to pit the concrete and we weren’t able to get the paint out of all the nooks and crannies,” he says. “It turned out way too rough; a good compromise was a hard trowel plaster finish that kept the original joint lines.”

Next on the docket for the Hatch house is storage units for the family room and doing something—they don’t know what yet— with the pool-dominated back





Minimal plantings and gravel mulch make both the carport entry and the atrium restful as well as low-upkeep. Miles has a great overflow play area in the atrium patio, where sliding glass doors lead to the family room, a bedroom and the living room.



Mindy lobbied for their bedroom to be Zen like and a departure from the rest of the house. The new master bath has Kohler sinks, marble countertops and walnut cabinetry.



**“I didn’t really want to
live a retro lifestyle.
Fusing the two together
works really well.”
—Todd Hatch**



yard. Mindy eyes some nearby remodels with interest, such as neighbors who are expanding their bedroom wing six feet into the 10' side yard—she'd love to have a larger bathroom and more closet space, she says. But at the same time she's in favor of architectural oversight when it comes to the exteriors of the Fairhills tract.

“Some people who are well meaning want to upgrade their homes but the landscaping or the changes don't suit the house,” she says. “And people who fix up their homes to sell them are missing the boat. Just leave them alone—people who like Eichlers want them as original as possible.”

Soon after moving in, the Hatches celebrated Miles' first birthday with a family party. Great-grandfather Bill Miles gave the environment a thumbs up, saying he likes this house because he didn't have to leave the comfort of the living room to enjoy the party in the atrium. And Mindy, who has a fine arts degree and is a former elementary school teacher, sees another advantage to Eichler living.

“I read an article about preschools and kindergartens that are being designed with glass walls because they noticed that kids learn better in that environment—I think it has to do with nature offering more stimulation than sitting in a closed classroom with walls. I've noticed that the kids who've grown up in these Eichler neighborhoods tend to be pretty creative.” 🖐️

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ranchdressing

House parts ...
midcentury collectibles ...
the inside scoop on
what's what
and where to get it



Q: I'm a big fan of Atomic Ranch. You've put my husband and me in touch with great stores and others whose sensibilities work with, not against, our midcentury home.

Our house has lots of louver windows. They work amazingly well for ventilation and they keep the house cool. We've replaced louver windows in prior homes because they weren't original and didn't fit with the style. However, we really want to keep the windows in this one because they look great from a design perspective and are original to the home. Unfortunately, the mechanisms on some of the windows are broken. We can't seem to find anybody who

will work with us on this—the window companies we have contacted want to replace the louvers with something else and state that no one makes these windows anymore. Do you have a resource?

Diane Buck

A: Some companies, like International Window Corporation in Los Angeles, continue to manufacture jalousie or louver windows (same thing), which are still popular in places like Belize where the ventilation they offer is a big plus. Pickens Window Service in Cincinnati stocks parts for more than 50 brands of jalousie windows. Owner Brian Pickens fills us in on the nuances of these windows:

"Jalousies are very simple windows whose heyday was the 1940s–'60s. A jalousie window is a series of plate glass sheets stacked on top of each other. Each light is supported on the ends, but not on the top or bottom by a frame. They have a main bar connecting the glass via a clip, which is opened and shut by an operator or a lever. With occasional lubrication, very little will go wrong. A light of glass might break, a rivet might shear, a clip split or an operator strip, but all are very easily repaired, even by an inexperienced handy person. With so few moving parts they will last for years.

Like all things in life, they have their pros and cons: They can be assembled in very large sizes giving tremendous airflow, although with a slightly distorted

view, and they can be a very cost effective alternative to other windows. On the con side, jalousies are energy inefficient unless you add a storm panel, which contributes to your cost and twice-a-year workload. The windows also offer very minimal security; the glass is easy to remove.

Preventive maintenance is pretty straightforward: using a silicone spray lubricant—oil will attract all the dust that your neighbor throws up with his lawn mower—spray every rivet or stud, the operator and the operator handle shaft. Then check all of the screws and rivets for tightness. That is all that is required.

As far as repairs go, sheared rivets are replaced with a blunt pointed #10 screw, and an operator gone astray requires the removal and replacement usually of five screws. A broken piece of glass requires sliding out the old glass and getting a new piece cut to size; none of these are tough jobs.

Many different manufacturers produced jalousie windows over the years. Pickens Window Service currently stocks more than 50 different operators and glass clips. We also stock approximately 35 screen clips specific to jalousie windows and 20 different storm window clips. If you are interested in making jalousie windows a little more energy efficient, weather stripping is also available.”

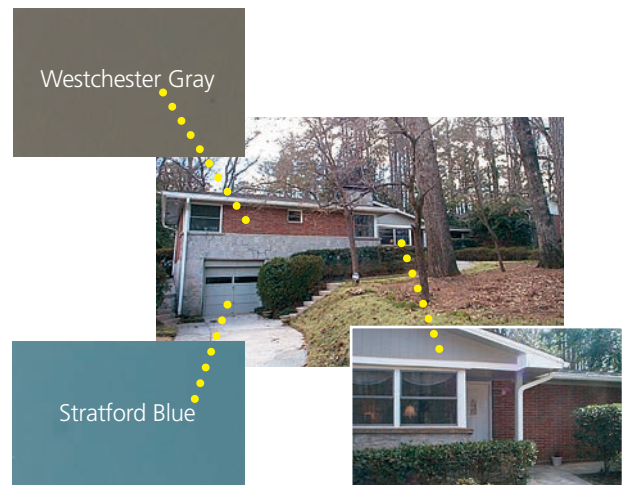
Q: I live in a 1950 ranch home in suburban Atlanta. The couple I purchased this house from did everything they could to remove the '50s charm. I am gutting and moving walls—it's a big project!

My question relates to a previous issue recommending the Sherman Williams Suburban Modern color palette for a dreary ranch front. I love the granite on my house, but the redbrick seems so out of place. I am thinking of painting it and, after reading the recommendation, picked up the Sherman Williams color card. I am considering painting the brick Westchester Gray, and the garage door and front door Stratford Blue. The trim will still be white, and I will not touch the stone (except to pressure wash it). Can someone help me?

Carole Cohen

A: Once you paint brick there's never any going back, although it could be laboriously stripped in the future. We were in Houston shooting midcentury houses, all of which were brick and some of which had been painted. Those homeowners wished theirs were still unpainted. That said, if you hate the brick color, it's your house and painting it would make the brick blend in with the board-and-batten section you have in your house gable.

Your brick and stone facades are almost certainly



original, and both are quite common. In reviewing a vintage Garlinghouse catalog from 1955, there are many combinations of clapboard siding, manmade stone, brick, natural stone, board and batten, etc. Sometimes they look like the builder threw any element he could think of at the front facade.

We'd encourage you to take your time with the color scheme and err on the side of doing something punchy as opposed to safe—owners are usually happy they've taken a risk afterward. Its current gray/blue body color ties in with the stone. If you like that general look, then the colors you're suggesting will work with the natural grays in the stone. But if you want to consider keeping the brick virgin, try a brick-ish shade on the front door and garage door and see if you like the result. If not, you can always paint the masonry.

Q: I paid \$1.50 for this piece of Viking glass at a charity yard sale. Can you tell me anything about it and its value?

Melissa O'Brien

A: *Denver midcentury vintage dealer Nick Horvath replies: "I can tell you that Viking was a lower-end American factory that produced inexpensive copies of Blenko glass. It was mostly sold in dime stores; today most Viking does not have significant value, but is colorful and easy to find. There*



are a couple of common shapes that you often see in collections, and their value is anywhere from \$50 to \$125, depending on the size and color. On eBay Viking tends to bring \$35-\$45; in a retro store it might be priced around \$65 to \$75.

Resources page 77

Need a renovation resource or wondering if that flea market find is anything? Send your questions and photos to editor@atomic-ranch.com and we'll run them past our experts.

croutons

I just got my newest issue today and was surprised to see some familiar light switches (no. 7 "ranch dressing"). My modern home was built as the "Idea Home of 1957" for the Detroit Builders Association Home Show. It was equipped with the same Remcon state-of-the-art low-voltage switches the Houston reader has.

There are usually several of these momentary contact switches connected to a single relay that allow the relay (light) to be switched on and off from different locations in the home. They called it "Path of Light" technology and you could walk through your home turning on or off the lights as you went.

I have two types of these switches in my home, both made by Remcon, as are the relays. I also had problems with my switches. After a long search, I found only one solution that uses the existing original low-voltage wiring that runs throughout my home.

The switches are available from Intelligent Lighting Controls Inc. in Minneapolis, 952.829.1900, ilc-usa.com. Although not terrific in style, they can replace a bad switch. The staff is very helpful, and the switches are available in as many as eight in a double-gang box. (See page 77 for a pdf link to the specs.) They would be able to make exact replacement switches, but the cost would be extraordinary.

Hope this helps Shannon and others out.

Bill Jagenow
Southfield, Mich.

Mike White of Atlanta also sent in a link to Tim Wetzel and Mary Castanier's techno website celebrating modern architecture in Eureka, Calif, eurekamodern.com. Their site addresses roofing, Dutch gutters, hardware, garage doors and sundry other minutia including door chimes and switches that will be helpful to others with these same low-voltage systems, including the Emorys' no. 7 cover house.



Bill's vintage switches



Columbus, Ohio



Olympia, Wash.



Westwood, Mass.



homepage

Olympia, Wash.

Some of the things we love about our 1953 house in Glenwood Park are the wood floors, two fireplaces, tray ceiling in the living room, solid cedar kitchen cabinets and the big bath with ceramic tile walls and counter. The huge red-brick fireplace surround in the living room has little asymmetrical ledges instead of a mantel. Not too much has been done to ruin the essential nature of our ranch, unlike our neighbor's home, where someone painted the fireplace. This house isn't made of cheap materials: someone obviously took a lot of care and thought when building it.

Todd & Kate Thedell

Columbus, Ohio

I live in a brick ranch house built in 1953 by my aunt and uncle. The house is still in great shape, with natural woodwork, hardwood floors and plaster walls. The bathroom has the original white Cararra glass tile with dark green trim. My dad helped finish the basement and built the matching garage not long after George Moor constructed the house. Since moving here in 1999, I've filled my ranch with '50s and '60s items, including Danish modern and Heywood Wakefield furniture.

Dino Melfi

Westwood, Mass.

Proof positive that not every house in New England is a colonial! Last year we finished a big renovation of our 1967 International-style home with Eric Nelson Architects. When we bought the house in 1997 it was painted maroon with cream trim, the views were blocked by a six-foot stockade fence completely surrounding the house, and there were three decades of inappropriate renovations to remove. The interior is pretty much done; the next big challenge is landscaping. It's been tons of work but we love every moment of living in this house.

Phyllis Craine

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.

text Tony Jones

photography Patty Carroll



An Arts & Crafts scholar has a midcentury conversion

Patty, my American wife, had to explain to me why this house of ours is called a “ranch.” Where are the long-horn cows, I asked? Where are the tumbleweeds? Where is the Marlboro Man? After all, this isn’t Texas, it’s a ranch in Indiana on the shoreline of Lake Michigan, more east of Chicago than “East of Eden.” But I came to understand and eventually accept that this ranch-style home is part of the architectural DNA of America, and by no means a regional expression. Patty’s proud that she has dragged my taste all the way from the 1890s to the 1950s, and holds out hope that I may eventually find something of merit in the 21st century as well.

You see, I’m not a midcentury Modernist by inclination, I’m a British arts scholar of the late 19th century. Before moving to the U.S. from Scotland, I worked and lived in one of the greatest architectural icons of that period, the 1897 art nouveau Glasgow School of Art, by one of Scotland’s greatest architects, Charles Rennie Mackintosh. A turn-of-the-last-century early Modernist, his buildings avoided the decorative excess seen in Victorian architecture, favoring crisp, simple and highly original designs; in fact, he’s often called the Frank Lloyd Wright of Scotland. Mackintosh’s elegant, cool, minimalist interiors are admired everywhere for their gentle flowing lines and counterpoint grids, soft gray-and-cream color schemes and dramatic furniture in

Patty’s
pink
palace

good bones always
provide integrity and
shape the style
of the house

ivory white contrasting with dark stained woods.

So this ranch architecture wasn't anything that I'd ever experienced, but I truly now appreciate what was previously ignored: the long and low look, gracious proportions, the snow- and glare-defying deep overhanging eaves, the thoughtful application of well-chosen materials, the clever play of light, the whimsy of builders who injected their own idiosyncratic features, even the midcentury palette of harvest gold, avocado and pink. No matter what architectural style you like,

the best buildings have good bones, and no matter what you drape on them, good bones always provide integrity and shape the style of the house, giving it class.

So it is with this one. Not that we could tell when we first saw it in a dead-of-winter real estate newspaper—the photograph captured the snow beautifully, but, umm, where was the house? Oh, there it is, that brown horizontal smudge... The advertisement snared us with phrases like “deceptively large” and “finished basement with a Tiki bar.” (“A what bar?” I asked. My wife translated.)

An hour from Chicago, it was set far back on a double lot, tucked into a sheltering sand dune a five minute walk to the beach, with mature trees, Indiana limestone walls and “period features.” (“What period?” I asked. “Eisenhower,” Patty said.) The house was an estate property, forlorn and empty, but my wife peered through the kitchen window before letting out a squeal of pure delight—that really expensive squeal that means “you have just bought this house.” And buy it we did, for this was a fantasy of her American childhood, when many of her friends' homes looked and felt like this. In an Indiana





ranch she'd come home to the house she'd never had: a one-owner, unrestored, mint-condition, perfectly maintained 1951 American ranch, with the pinkest kitchen you ever did see.

Period-itis is a viral disease that no known antibiotic will help and we'd caught it by buying a virtual time capsule. We have since learned the Dolembo family had a building permit issued in 1950, but we are still trying to find out the identity of the architect and the builder. (Northern Indiana seems not to have had any Eichlers, Mays or A. Quincy Joneses, and did not develop similar clusters or tracts of like-styled "atomic ranches.") This house was completed in 1951 and occupied by the original family for more than 50 years, until Mrs. Dolembo passed away. She'd never had a reason to alter anything—it all worked perfectly and it all looked lovely and, for about a decade, almost nothing had been done to the house.

The neighbors told us she was an elegant and kind lady, with a beehive hairdo and a pink Cadillac, which, sadly, was not in the garage when we bought her home. The place had been empty for a while; its very 'period-osity' had put other buyers off. Various plumbers and electricians warned us about how much it was going to cost to take out that pink kitchen and replace it with something modern. But Patty would growl at them, "It is modern; 1950 modern. Modern then, and modern now."

The kitchen was the defining feature of the house and the real reason why we bought it. Its pink cabinets, pink Formica countertops (with black and gold flecks), pink side-by-side Maytag washer and dryer, pink Amana double ovens, pink sink



Where others saw an outdated throwback, Carroll fell hard for the pink-osity of the early '50s kitchen.

The exterior upgrade was simple: the dour brown exterior trim was repainted a mid-century classic with white under eaves. Now the couple are consulting garden design manuals of the period for landscaping ideas.



and pink range were, they all felt, a wee bit excessive. Not us. We embarked on a project known to us as “pink-ification”—adding new pink elements, not removing them. A search began for a pink toaster, blender, kitchen radio, food mixer (all found) and pink coffeemaker (we’re still looking), and finished up with a nice period gray Formica-and-chrome dinette set with pink placemats and napery, pink-handled cutlery and a full service of that rosy Russel Wright chinaware. Then a friend gave us a pink ’57 Cadillac convertible die-cast model car and the bloody thing has been breeding ever since. It’s filling a kitchen wall with models of Detroit’s finest and pinkest ’50s wheels.

But the naysayers were right about one thing—we couldn’t leave the rest of the house as we’d found it; we had to do a few things. A 50-year-old original furnace is simply not going to last forever. But the guiding principal was to do things as they’d been done previously, using the interior design magazines of the period as a guide (*House Beautiful* and *Arts and Architecture* were especially useful). While there were no structural problems of any kind, minor electrical upgrades and some plumbing, furnace and a/c overhaul were needed.

The anchor artworks in the living room are vibrant canvases by English painter Doug Kemp, figures and forms reflecting his fascination with fusing Art Deco and midcentury modern. The photo, right, shows the room with the original drapes in place, while the one on the opposite page reflects its appearance post-blind installation. Kookie, the household cat, has deserted the tiki bar for the comfort of the dining room table.



A 1955 House Beautiful extolled the virtues of wood blinds; that sold us



I must say the carpeted interior was a dire offense. Years ago that champagne shag must have looked very spruce, but now it was scrofulous, so we changed the floors to hardwood. And the silk drapes weren't just faded, they were actually crumbling to the touch. A 1955 *House Beautiful* extolled the virtues of wood blinds ("so efficient, so sanitary," it rhapsodized); that sold us. These changes were good for the house and the main L-shaped living room. The horizontality of the blinds complemented the lines of the new flooring and stressed the length and depth, while the old vertical curtains had drawn attention to the rather low ceiling height.

We keyed the living/dining room off a big rattan sectional, an overscaled coffee table, Eileen Gray side tables, ubiquitous Wassily chairs, a comfortable Corbusier-Perriand ponyskin chaise, a long and narrow dining table by Carlo Scarpa, a George Nelson flying-saucer ceiling lamp and '50s table and pole lamps. The warm colors derived from the wide, multi-hued dressed-stone fireplace,

which has no mantel but features a snappy black-and-gold starburst clock.

The full basement was a huge plus, though we saw the existing dark brown paneling as a negative and painted it. In spite of the hard Indiana winter, the lower level has no heating other than a brick fireplace. The gangs-all-here bar was another bonus, though it was only partially finished. Its red Formica top became Patty's color key, and she completed the project by quilting the front and adding mix-'n-match glass tiles. The room's concrete floor was clearly intended to be covered, so period linoleum squares in mottled greens counterpoint the red bar.

The basement became our rattan room—a comfy den and extra bedroom with seagrass flooring, more '50s lighting and our developing collection of ceramic jaguar lamps. Now Heywood Wakefield pieces sit happily alongside a fine Charles Rennie Mackintosh 1907 bookcase I found in the piggery of a farm in Scotland. And the basement will be home to our pink 1950s radios, too, if we find any more and

The basement bar/den houses the couple's more kitschy furnishings and harkens back to the postwar popularity of Polynesian-themed rec rooms.



can afford them. (Our first little Zenith involved renting a 40-foot Winnebago, taking four friends to the famous Longest Garage Sale in the World—all 300 miles of it—for five days and only finding one single pink radio ...)

Part of the joy of living in a ranch undergoing renovation is the effect it has on one's circle of acquaintances. Astonished and nostalgic friends became a supply chain of '50s glasses, pitchers and bar sets, and they also turned into a community of believers as they spotted "pink" and thought of us.

The look of the house will change over time, but it will always be a collage, because we like to counterpoint the originality of the house and period with objects that are in sympathy. It's not a museum, it's our home, after all. Houses are puzzles, sometimes with few clues—but as you work with them the pieces somehow fall into place and you find a good fit. We are new to this period and quite new to the house, so what we have right now is an interim report about the journey we and our Indiana ranch will make together. 🏠

Tony Jones is the president of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Patty Carroll is a Chicago photographer (pattycarroll.com) whose work is in major collections in Europe and the U.S. Her book of studio portraits of Elvis impersonators is due out in late 2005, published by Barnes & Noble.





The warm climate attracted scores of northerners to central Florida in post-war years. Ranch home subdivisions like Orlando's Audubon Park and Dover Shores provided housing for employees and their families after the Martin Company, an aerospace and defense business (now Lockheed Martin), opened an office near there in 1956. Ten years later, the city was chosen as the site for the Navy's newest training facility. Navy officers and new enlistees, along with their families, were transferred to the Orlando Naval Training Center after the installation was completed near Audubon Park in 1968. Above and lower right, two rooms in the author's home.





Orlando

in Bloom

Central Florida's midcentury ranches

text Sandra Carr

photography Jim Leatherman and Sandra Carr

My midcentury modern itch grew more intense after meeting my husband, Dan, 15 years ago. We found that we both shared a passion for '50s and '60s living and an attraction to the furnishings and art forms of the era.

While we were dating, Dan and I found bargain treasures—a 1950s yellow Formica table, wrought iron magazine and record racks, a telephone chair, pole lamp, a white amoeba-shaped coffee table, bullet planters and much more. As our relationship grew, we decided to buy an 1,800-square-foot house built in 1979 on the east side of Orlando. After moving in we gave the house a complete makeover. We got rid of the '70s rust-red shag carpet and the floral wallpaper and linoleum. We replaced a majority of the carpeted areas with black and white tile and painted the walls white.

Since we had more space to work with, our addiction flourished: the living room now has a '50s room divider displaying glassware and knick-knacks; a '60s black couch and four chairs, which look very similar to Knoll's Womb furniture line; a fun white fur chair; a hutch containing Franciscan Starburst ware; a 1950s Westinghouse black-and-white TV; and a mahogany cabinet holding Schlitz beer memorabilia.

Our family room similarly reflects numerous shopping excursions: a Heywood Wakefield tiki bar and barware, a bamboo coffee table, a '50s brown-and-cream-colored sofa, a sputnik lamp, a star-shaped shadow box, 1960s fuchsia and purple chairs and '50s-patterned curtains.

We've been in our '70s-cum-'50s house for more than 10 years now. In the meantime, midcentury modernism has grown ever more popular and we've met fellow enthusiasts like these other Central Florida modernists.

Dover Shores:

Classic modernism

Brian and Vanessa Cain were searching for a midcentury modern home with Richard Neutra-esque characteristics. After many unsuccessful attempts with a realtor, the Cains decided to look for a ranch on their own. "I wanted to find a house that had a wide-open plan with lots of glass," says Vanessa.

"I think we first saw this house online," remembers Brian. "The picture was really bad and the description said 'old house' or something like that, so we were thinking the house was built in the 1920s or '30s. When we saw it in person, it was obviously not as old as the owner thought."

The Cains' 1,800-square-foot ranch house in the Dover Shores area of Orlando was built in 1955. The open floor plan has numerous windows, terrazzo floors, a lighted planter with a built-in book shelf and a pool out back. The previous owners built a



Photos: Jim Leatherman



wall partially separating the family and living rooms in order to block out sunlight for TV viewing. Brian knocked that out to open up the space even more.

The couple bought inexpensive gems for their ranch pad. They found a Saarinen-style tulip dinette set for around \$20; an Eames chair and ottoman for \$35, which they had reupholstered for \$100; a black chaise lounge; an Arne Jacobsen-style egg chair; a 1960s bar; and an Electrohome stereo. They also began to collect tiki mugs, robots and Felix the Cat figures.

Vanessa and Brian plan to restore the terrazzo floors in both bathrooms, resurface the pool and deck areas and add tropical landscaping. "This [ranch house] is perfect for parties," Vanessa says. "Everybody can hang out and have a great time. This was basically what the house was built for."



Weathering *the Storm*

Four hurricanes crossed Florida in 2004, and my wife and I boarded up and evacuated our home in a renovated barn in Citra four times. After those experiences, we decided to look for a sturdy 1960s concrete block house in nearby Gainesville. First we found the perfect neighborhood, Palm View Estates, dominated by midcentury homes; then we found the perfect house.

It was built in 1962 of unpainted Ocala block with a raised checkerboard relief pattern, transom windows, a vaulted ceiling, a curvy front walk and a carport set on posts. The only problem was that the house was for rent and not for sale. Betting that the absentee owners might be fatigued after the stressful hurricane season, we put in an offer and they took it.

We were thrilled that the original light fixtures, appliances, cabinets and hardware were intact. So far, we have reclaimed the terrazzo after a week of carpet and tack-strip removal followed by sanding, polishing and mopping. (Instead of prying up tack strips, we used a grinder to get the tacks level with the floor and they disappeared into the terrazzo mosaic.) We've sculpted the 40-year-old boxwood bushes, removed trees and hedges that hid the house from the road, painted and replaced the cruddy galvanized plumbing with CPVC.

The house is very livable and well designed. We are now restoring the sunroom and landscaping, and searching for furniture in hopes of having our Florida home featured in your magazine. And the word is out that we are looking for other "rentals" in the area to buy and fix up. We are thrilled that our friends who own newly constructed homes are asking if they can evacuate to our "George Jetson" house this hurricane season.

—James Pochurek



Photos: James Pochurek





Leu Gardens: *Meant for them*

Finding a new home was on Johnny and Patti Cooker's to-do list, but it wasn't exactly a high priority since they were planning their wedding. But Patti asked their realtor to keep her eyes open, just in case she found a house that they might be interested in.

The next day, the realtor called to say that she found a house in the Leu Gardens area of Orlando. After one walk-through, the Cookers were smitten with the 1955 ranch. "Coming across this house was a fluke," says Johnny. "We just fell in love with it. We had to have it."

Form and function, quality construction and the hardwood and green terrazzo flooring were some of the key factors the couple fell for. "The open floor plan, layout and sizes of the rooms were perfect," Johnny says.

One area particularly charmed Patti: "I liked the rumpus room because of the vista," she says. "I remember walking through the house and how I just couldn't wait to be in that room. Because of the windows, during a thunderstorm it's like you're outside."

Their ranch house was custom built by Jerry Gay for a professional woman. Gay also built other homes throughout the Leu Gardens area during the 1950s.

Since moving in two years ago, the Cookers have tackled a few restoration projects. "The windows are all original," says Johnny, "but we did redo the kitchen and update the bathroom. We made sure to keep the integrity and style of the home, though."

Originally the kitchen was 120 square feet. By taking out a wall, they added 280 additional square feet, which made it much more functional. Period-appropriate building materials were used for the project. "Instead of drywall we were able to use the original type of plaster," Johnny comments.

Future plans include installing a pool and possibly building a mother-in-law suite near the rumpus room. Johnny and Patti say they have found the home of their dreams and have no intention of ever leaving.





Photos: Jim Leatherman

Audubon Park: *Colorful character*

As Angel and Toni Gonzalez's family grew, they decided it was time to look for a new home. The couple wanted a house built before 1965 in an established neighborhood close to downtown Orlando. Their wish came true when they found a 2,000-square-foot ranch house built in 1960 in the Audubon Park area of Orlando.

The floor plan includes bedrooms and bathrooms on both sides of the house, which makes family living more comfortable. "We are able to keep the adult items on one side and the kid stuff on the other," says Toni. Other characteristics include hardwood and terrazzo floors, a pink bathroom with Florida-theme wallpaper, double doors separating the family room from the L-shaped dining and living room areas, and large windows where the bright sunlight greets the family each day.

During Angel and Toni's first year in the house, they repainted the walls, replaced an old kitchen countertop and removed the carpet in the family room. They would like to restore all of the terrazzo flooring throughout the house, although it is an expensive process and there is a long waiting list and few companies that still restore terrazzo floors in the Orlando area.

The couple's decor fits right in: "Most of our furnishings match the style of our home," says Angel. "You couldn't throw the stuff that we have into a house that was built now or in the '70s."

Those furnishings include a Knoll-ish chair, Blenko glass from the 1950s–1970s and a Heywood Wakefield sideboard and round coffee table in the living room. The dining room area has more Heywood-Wakefield—a dinette set with dog-bone chairs—and five clocks reminding you not to be late for dinner. The family room contains a Heywood-Wakefield buffet, along with contemporary furnishings.

For the most part, home improvement and restoration projects are complete so the couple and their two children, Sam and Olivia, and Boston terrier Lucy Lu can fully enjoy living in their midcentury ranch.



Drive-By *Exteriors*



Houses in Orlando show similarities shared by many midcentury Florida ranches: brick or cement block construction, flat or low-pitched roofs with overhangs to shade windows, and attached carports or garages—all details seen in the Pochureks' Gainesville home (page 45) some 120 miles northwest.



Winter Haven: *Rock on*



Forty-five minutes outside of Orlando, Winter Haven, a city best known for the water skiing theme park Cypress Gardens, is where David and Lisa Kenney found their slice of midcentury Florida. The newly married rockabilly couple was at the right place at the right time when they stumbled upon their 1951 ranch in Lake Martha Heights.

David's mom and step-father live across the street and watched over the house for the Canadian owners. When David's mom walked into the home, she knew this was exactly what her son and daughter-in-law were looking for. "We wanted a typical '50s ranch-style house," confirms Lisa.

After the owner's husband passed away, "my mom mentioned to her that we were looking for a house and that we really liked her home," says David. "It all just kind of fell into place."

As it turned out, the owner wanted a young couple who were first-time homeowners to buy her ranch house. She also wanted the new owners to value the home. The Kenneys were in luck. "We have a lot of vintage stuff and older pieces," says Lisa. "She saw the appreciation that we had for the house. And we have been keeping in contact with her about the work that we're doing and I think she is pretty happy with her choice."

The home has 3,600 square feet of room for the Kenneys' collectibles, Cuban tile in the living room and lounge, plenty of cedar-lined closets and three bedrooms and bathrooms. But there was another main selling point: "The 18-foot bar!" enthuse David and Lisa in unison. The couple was ecstatic to find a home with a built-in bar containing an indoor grill, two-burner stove, double sink and a full-size refrigerator for their entertaining needs.

The Kenneys' ranch house is still a work in progress, with a 1970s look and feel that they'd like to backdate. The couple plan to remove the carpet and restore the hardwood floors in the family room, replace light fixtures with '50s ones, remove the French Provincial-style wallpaper and decor in the master bathroom and repaint the exterior turquoise.

When they're not working on the house, David can be found tinkering with his '59 Chevrolet Impala and '50 Ford Sedan in the carport. Together the couple is experiencing the honeymoon phase of marriage and home ownership—not in any ordinary house, but in a swinging ranch house. ✚

Sandra Carr has worked as a medical producer for CBS affiliate WCPX Channel 6 and was the associate producer for Orlando CityBeat.com, an entertainment website owned by the *Chicago Tribune*. Jim Leatherman, a photographer for the past 20 years, has photographed Sonic Youth and other national acts along with travel locales and portraits.

Married to Modern

The ad in the 1958 *Houston Chronicle* showed a flat-roof

brick house with no windows, save a band of clerestories under the cantilevered roof overhang, and a sizable porte cochere over its circular drive. “Fabulous post and beam contemporary. Glass across rear side, floor to ceiling. Black and white theme carried through entire decorative scheme. Beautiful sliding Shoji screen divides living-dining area” read the straightforward text by the Monroe Construction Company. Designed by architect William Floyd, the house is one of 350-plus mid-century contemporaries built in the Memorial Bend area of Houston, a Modernist enclave in this land of neo-colonial ranches.

Twenty-two years ago Cathie and Rick Johnson were dogged in their pursuit of one of these rogue homes for themselves. For three months, just about every Sunday found the couple walking various neighborhoods of Houston searching for a house. They passed out 70 flyers letting homeowners know they were looking.

“This neighborhood we continued to come back to,” Cathie remembers. “The more we walked, the more we met the people who lived here. We liked the feel, and it was the only area that had this many modern houses. We knew we wanted a modern house.”

An interior designer now, Cathie moved around with her military family growing up. “I’ve always been attracted to the Miesian style, but I think it was living in

text Michelle Gringeri-Brown

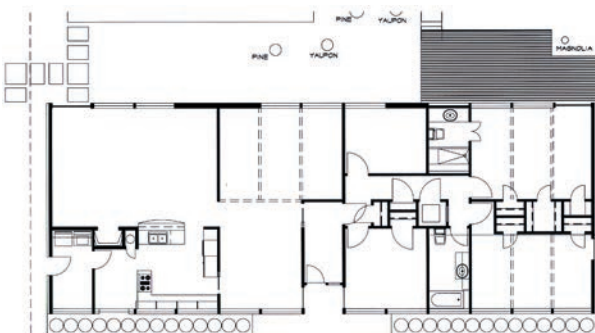
photography Jim Brown



The living room has twin white Pfister settees from Knoll, and the table is from Scope Furniture. The rice paper lamp is a Noguchi reissue, and the cowhide on the floor is pure Texas. Outside the floor-to-ceiling windows, the rectilinear screen hides a storage shed.



Despite all of the glass, their house remains comfortable during the warm months, the Johnsons say, which they attribute to the roof overhangs. "People think it looks small from the street but it's very large inside."



The ill-conceived "Western room" attached to the family room, opposite page and top left on the floor plan, at a 90-degree angle where the sliding glass doors are. Today, the back yard has a Japanese feel and easy to maintain plantings that include Creeping Jenny, Australian violet, Mondo grass and ferns. The teak outdoor set is from Veneman Furniture.

Germany and being exposed to so much contemporary architecture [that did it]." Her husband, Rick, who grew up in Sarasota, Fla., adds, "I liked the open feel of a modern home. They're not chopped up like a lot of others."

But that canvassing actually didn't yield them a house; they found their residence in the MLS book.

some kind of wonderful

The 2,300-square-foot house sat on a 90' x 110' lot. "We saw it at night and the yard was nicely lighted; I think we made up our minds then," Rick says. They bid \$135,000 for it. The daytime view was a little more sobering—the interior beams were painted black, the lighting was terrible, there were crayon marks all over the brick, it had a cracked sliding glass door and an ill-advised bay window punched in the front facade, and there was a tire swing and a sad sandbox in the yard. Best of all, a "Western room" metal shed had been stuck onto the family room, blocking the floor-to-ceiling glass touted in the 1958 ad.

The original Shoji screens had been moved to function as window coverings, and the living room had been walled off to turn it into an additional bedroom for the large family that lived there. Also daunting was the deferred maintenance. Vines grew from the fence onto the roof, and that turned out to be a cockroach nursery. Rick set off bug bombs in every room. They returned the next day and the situation looked about the same—hundreds of Franz Kafka's favorite insects—so he bombed them again. The following day the population was down to about 300, Rick

remembers with a shudder. Then they called in the pros.

To paint out the dark beams, the young couple went to the store and purchased “one-coat” paint; five coats later, the black finally stopped showing through. Rotted original draperies were pitched, and wrought-iron-and-amber-glass carriage lanterns removed from the entry. They also pulled up the brown shag carpeting to uncover the hardwood and linoleum floors.

The homes in Memorial Bend first sold for between \$16,650 and \$30,000 and were marketed as affordable. The neighborhood has never had the same values as the surrounding traditional homes until now, the Johnsons say. When they bought their ranch in 1983, a comparable traditional house would likely have gone for about \$25,000 more.

“I think people didn’t necessarily like this modern look,” Cathie conjectures. “As contemporary as Houston commercial architecture is, residential design has always been the more traditional colonial-redbrick-white-column ranch house.”

Even in 2005, the three-bedroom house next door just sold for \$290,000 and change. Still, the beautiful neighborhood has only

ARCHITECTURALLY WE TRIED
TO BRING THE HOUSE BACK
TO WHAT
IT ONCE WAS.





seen three teardowns out of 350 houses.

modern realities

The longtime threat of a highway through the area also depressed Memorial Bend's housing market. Today the Johnsons' redbrick home is the last on the street before the Sam Houston Parkway or Beltway 8 or Sam Houston Tollway or BW8 or any of the other clearly delineated names that make traversing Houston, Texas' largest city, an unmitigated joy. (Throw in some confusing directionals having to do with east and west and uptown and downtown ...)

The mid-'80s-built highway was begrudgingly lowered to about 30' below grade as it passes the Johnsons' house; still the roar of traffic is a constant. Memorial Bend neighbors banded together to pressure the state to recess it, and they also lobbied against the high concrete sound walls common to other projects. Cathie asked the project leaders to consider a more indigenous material, such as the wood-look walls they have in Atlanta.



Clockwise both pages, beginning opposite, top: The B&B Italia storage unit has Noguchi reissue rice-paper lamps and an antique Chinese oxen bridle displayed as sculpture on the top. The entry hall wall is upholstered in beautiful brown silk, and its floor is original terrazzo. Napping on the master bedroom's McGuire woven rawhide chairs—atop a wool and silk Tufenkian carpet—are MacKenzie (front) and Bailey. In Rick's study, a Bertoia chair and a view of the tranquil back yard.

"Ultimately the state said concrete was on the plan and we could take it or leave it," she says. "Only those who lived right along the wall got to vote and it was voted down; our neighbors stopped speaking to us because they wanted it." In Cathie's view, "having nothing is better than a 20' wall."

"A lot of the people who lived here then were quite a bit older than we were and they weren't spending a lot of money on their homes," Rick explains. "They were retirees on fixed incomes. Now there are more and more young families moving here who bring in more revenue."

Cathie has noticed the same generational shift in her interior design business. "As my clients get younger, they don't want their mother's 18th-century house. I try to convince clients that it's better to wait and do it right than to go with whatever is the latest trend. I don't do faux finishes at all and I won't turn something into a Tuscan mansion. This younger generation is visually stimulated and very much influenced by the modern architecture they see in movies and television. And people are finding out how comfortable modern is."

She cites the fresh, contemporary look of the Galleria's new wing and George Bush Intercontinental Airport as a night-and-day switch

IT WAS THE ONLY AREA THAT
HAD THIS MANY
MODERN HOUSES.
WE KNEW WE WANTED
A MODERN HOUSE.



The kitchen range top is original, while the Wood-Mode cabinetry dates from the early '80s. The aluminum casement window has replaced the offending bay window put in by previous owners.

from the glam opulence of '70s and '80s Houston. "Terrazzo and all of these materials that were popular in the 1950s have had a resurgence of interest," she says.

through the years

"Architecturally we tried to bring the house back to what it once was by taking the Western room off," Cathie says as we switch back to the specifics of their home. "To be really true to the style, we should have closed up the bay window, too, but we had to live here." The couple liked the view and additional light that it provided to the breakfast area, so they lived with the offending window until 2001, when they finally found a period-appropriate aluminum casement. "When we ordered it, the company couldn't believe we wanted aluminum, not a white or brown finish," Cathie says with a laugh.

The Johnsons advocate only doing things to a house that can be undone and are in keeping with the architecture. They kept the black terrazzo bath virtually original except for a floor-to-ceiling mirrored wall, but the bath off the master bedroom wasn't working for them. "I wanted my bath to be elegant," Cathie says. "At that time people were building huge bathrooms and several contractors tried to talk me into expanding into the study; I didn't want to do that." Instead they took out two closets—one in the study and a linen closet in the hall—and added about 11 square feet to the bathroom.

A Wood-Mode kitchen had been installed in 1982 just before



The original terrazzo in the bathroom is reflected in the floor to ceiling mirrored wall. Below, the slatted fence that shields the house from the beltway, and a view from car vantage of the porte cochere and semicircular driveway.

they bought the house. They found it fit their needs just fine, but have recently replaced most of the appliances, substituted limestone kitchen counters, lowered the peninsula from bar height and added an exhaust vent and new lighting.

Outside, they've relandscaped twice. They lost several old trees in front over the years, and the rear yard—with its ipe deck, cement stepping stones and patios, and Japanese-esque plantings—is a far cry from the grass, pine trees and sand box they inherited. They designed a horizontal-slat wood fence along the freeway side of the property that mimics the bands of brick across the front facade. In the back yard, a decorative screen camouflages a storage shed.

The couple has IKEA and Crate and Barrel items mixed with higher-end pieces from Knoll and B&B Italia. "We don't buy based on price," Cathie says. "Rick and I like to shop together; he has a good eye and I totally respect his design sense. I tend to get real excited about things and he calms me down. But if we love it, we'll wait to be able to get what we want."

Her advice to those looking for a home? "Buy a house with good bones. There were things about our home that weren't pretty but just needed a little TLC. You have to see past those, and if you have to look at a lot of houses, do it.

"But I think there's also something to be said about how a house feels to you when you walk in. All homes have a soul or spirit, and I think you're either attracted to them or you're not. I'm thrilled that the



cool|stuff



Back in Style

Even if you're a modern purist, Formica's boomerang-patterned laminate has to make you smile. The original pattern was introduced as Skylark, but the descriptive "Boomerang" name stuck and that's its 2005 moniker. It comes in baby blue, charcoal, coral and aqua, and would look just right on that aluminum-edged countertop or fold-down table in the Shasta trailer you're rehabbing. The company has also reintroduced "VirrVarr," Swedish for "crisscross," which perfectly describes its tangled lines—or your brain after that third double espresso. Find a dealer at formica.com.



Breeze Right In

It's chilly outside now, but come spring the VornadoFan might be just the ticket for your open-plan post-and-beam midcentury or style-challenged office cubicle. The classic three-speed table fan has a keen green, silver or black finish on its streamlined 14"-high metal body. First introduced postwar by the O.A. Sutton Company, the motor and controls have been updated, but its looks are pure vintage. This is one fan that you don't have to apologize for when company drops by. Purchase or learn more about Vornado Air Circulation Systems at vornado.com.



UN Angels

This seems like a great year to build global harmony, and John Patterson, owner of vintage shop Sunset Orange in Silverlake, Calif., has just the ticket for your Christmas, Kwanzaa or Chanukah festivities. First introduced in 1948 by his great-uncle, Raymond Bolton, the Angels of All Nations are 4"-high handmade figures with clay faces and national costumes trimmed in foil, ribbons and decorative papers. Beginning at \$8 each, seen here are denizens of Arabia, Denmark, the U.S. and our favorite blue state, Canada, with his cute Mountie hat. Sunset Orange, 3824 Sunset Blvd., 323.666.6898, sunsetorange.net



Hanging Fire

Who wouldn't want a bitchin' suspended fireplace that rotates 360 degrees and makes you feel like a cross between George Jetson and Dean Martin? Designed by architect Doug Garofalo—who calls Fireorb "cool warmth"—it's made out of 10-gauge spun steel and hangs from the ceiling with up to a 40'-long custom flue. Ball bearings make it turn smoothly to warm all directions of your living area, bedroom or maybe that new pool pavilion you're planning. Fireorb, 847.454.9198, fireorb.net.





"Brookpark Arrowhead Modern Design" was also manufactured without the "Arrowhead" name later on. It won an award for good design in 1950.

"Colorflyte" by Branchell (left) was first released in gray, green, copper and lime in 1952. Soup bowls and salad utensils had plastic cord wrapped by hand around the handles, and a 16-piece starter set first sold for \$15.95.

everyday housewares: the dish on dishes

My husband, Austin Jordan, and I met on a blind date. After finding out we had similar tastes in vintage furnishings, our weekends were soon consumed with thrifting and estate sales. We were both avid collectors before we met—I had a burgeoning array of 1950s cocktail shakers and Austin sought out Melmac and Bakelite radios to accompany the aluminum Christmas tree of his childhood. As our interest in midcentury grew, we added Pyrex, glassware, dishware and small appliances.

Our collection first started taking over our two-bedroom apartment when we got six baker's racks to hold the extra items in our office/guest room. Our neighbors thought we were crazy lugging stand mixers and toasters up and down two flights of stairs, and we joked about being Sanford and Son, frequently singing the theme song after a good haul. When our garage and apartment were full, we rented a 10' x 10' public storage space for about a year. And now that we're in our own ranch house, one of the best things about it was finding it had a 20' x 20' Tufshed, in addition to the garage.

The collection was out of control, though, and we knew we had to start selling

text Marci Holcomb

photography Austin Jordan

stuff before it took over our home. Thus, in 2003, Sputnik Housewares was launched, and we now sell out of a space in a Portland, Ore., antique mall.

Why housewares? Austin tells people who ask, “There is nothing more space age than a vintage blender, percolator or toaster. These appliances were meant to last a lifetime, unlike the plastic repros you can get now for the same price.” The designs of ’50s and ’60s appliances echoed the space race: blenders looked like rockets to the moon and can openers sat on Sputnik-style legs. We find that vintage dishes and glassware also share that period’s playful exuberance and don’t have to set you back a bundle, either.

Austin is an auto mechanic, so refurbishing the motors of mixers is nothing to him, and one of the first gifts he gave me was a vintage blender. He already had several styles of Melmac in his collection but I really knew nothing about it when we met. I bought a price guide and started learning more, and got the bug when I found the exact set my family had when I was a kid—very avocado!

We don’t always agree immediately on what’s cool, or saleable. Austin thought I was crazy to buy Pyrex and that it would never sell in the store. But I would just keep buying it and soon had complete sets, which sold fast. And I love vintage barware so much that I have a really tough time selling it even though we don’t have anymore room. At all. So we do a lot of rotating now: buy it, use it, then sell it.

If a fun, inexpensive, practical collectible appeals to you, here are some suggestions on where to start.

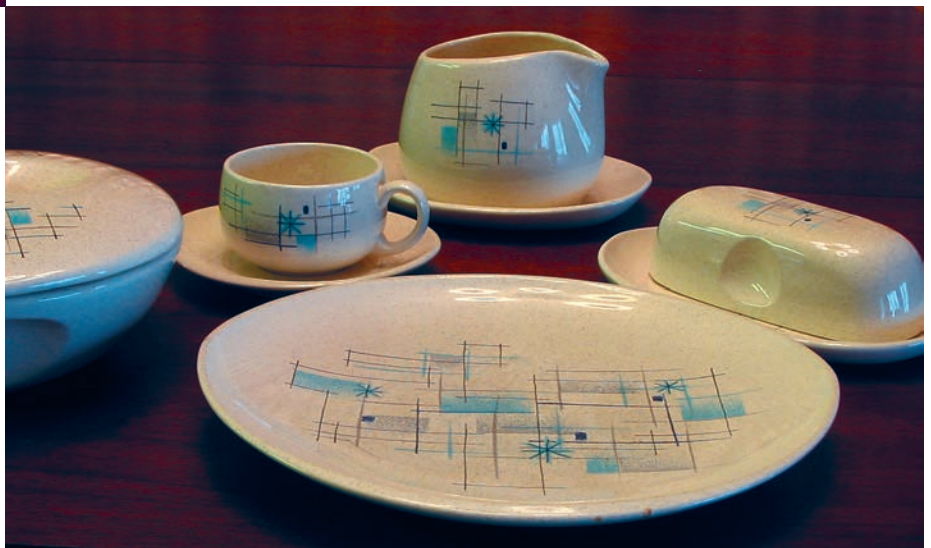
midcentury: pottery or plastic?

Franciscan “Starburst” is often considered the pinnacle of modern dishware, but an entire set can be pricey and may be relegated to the china hutch only to grace the table on special occasions. Luckily there are several alternatives that won’t break the bank, yet still have that distinctive period design.

Vernon’s “Tickled Pink” and Franciscan “Oasis” run about one third to one half less than “Starburst” but are still of the same high quality.



Franciscan Starburst (above) and Oasis (right) are made from the same pottery blanks but with different decorations. Both lines include ellipse-shaped plates, but Starburst is more dynamic, with shots of futuristic stars, while Oasis reminds the author of art by Mondrian. Oasis, \$10–\$95 per piece; Starburst \$15–\$150, with rarer pieces such as canisters upwards of \$300.



Tips from Sputnik Housewares

Melmac

Before you buy, check the quality. Is it scratched, or scorched? Mild stains can be easily removed by soaking in bleach and water, but put it back if the finish is marred. Check the back; good quality wares will be stamped with a manufacturer's name and pattern line. Unless you love it, stay away from '70s melamine: it is thin and flimsy, along with being way too brown and harvest gold.

Care & feeding

We put our Temporama and Franciscan Oasis and Starburst pieces in the dishwasher with no problems and would probably put Tickled Pink in there, too. Franciscan dishes are earthenware so they're pretty durable. The hot water of the dishwasher eventually takes the shine off of Melmac, but we use the machine for its convenience for our everyday stuff. The more expensive and rare pieces we recommend washing by hand. Knives and forks do far more damage, so we don't eat off the good stuff very often.

Vernon's "Tickled Pink" is reminiscent of Bauer pottery with its speckled glaze on the solid pink accent pieces. The elliptical serving pieces give a modern edge to a somewhat serene decoration; prices range from \$10 to \$95 per piece.





The sheen and translucency of the Prolon “Florence” pattern puts it more into the “fine china” category despite being made of melamine. A four-piece place setting in fine condition can command high prices.

More Tips from Sputnik

eBay et al

A great tool for learning and finding out what to collect; just enter “atomic” or “Eames” under the Collectables/Housewares heading and find all sorts of good stuff. You can see what things are worth so you know when to walk away from a retail situation. Our best advice is to remember to factor in the shipping cost. That 30-lb. pink stand mixer you just got for \$25 turns into a fast \$60. A full set of Melmac can cost more than \$20 to ship, so make sure you really love it. In general, online shops are overpriced, but fine if you know exactly what you want and are willing to pay for it. If you are just browsing for something cool, steer clear of them.

Appliance alert

The main thing to look for with appliances is obvious: plug them in to make sure they work. Vintage models should run you \$20–\$65. And watch out for reproductions: Hamilton Beach has reissued the beehive blender and the milkshake mixer. It’s really easy to tell an original just by picking it up. The old one has heft to it and will not contain any plastic other than Bakelite. Also look where it was made: originals will be manufactured in the U.S.

Canonsburg “Temporama,” Salem “Northstar” and Taylor “Cathay” are other great choices for the modern table. While hardly qualifying as fine china, they allow everyday use and are easily replaced if something gets broken. Basic place settings are inexpensive and abundant, but the serving pieces—bowls, platters, sugar bowls and creamers, etc.—and “go along” items such as water glasses and bakeware are harder to come by. Finding the rare pieces is a hobby in itself, but half the fun is incorporating your latest find into daily meals.

Melmac is another smart choice when it comes to furnishing the atomic kitchen. It is wonderful for those with children because its creators touted this space-age material as indestructible. In reality it is prone to scorching, staining and knife damage, but there are plenty of pristine sets begging to be put back in the kitchen cupboard. The col-



ors and forms are endless but most popular tend to be pastels or those with atomic or modern designs.

Designers like Irving Harper, Kaye LaMoyne and Joan Luntz created lines of melamine plastic dishware that were both beautiful and durable. Prolon's "Florence" line was created by Harper (co-credited with George Nelson for the Herman Miller "Asterisk" and "Ball" clocks and the Marshmallow sofa). This graceful form is based on the look of Japanese lacquerware, and the melamine is much thinner, almost translucent, an attempt to mimic fine china.

Branchell's "ColorFlyte" by LaMoyne comes in both solids and patterns that can be mixed and matched to create a personalized look. The vivid colors and mottled finish make this a popular choice among collectors. "Modern Design" was developed for Brookpark by Luntz, who won the 1950 Good Design Award from the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The distinctive rounded square form of this line is simple and elegant, and looks great as a solid or mixed set. First offered in chartreuse, burgundy, emerald and pearl gray, it later became available in aqua, pink, yellow, white, black and stone.

Since everyone needs housewares, instead of heading out to the local mega mart, first visit estate sales, vintage shops, or raid your grandparents' cupboard. These 50-year-old patterns and forms are begging to see the light of day again and what better place than in your own kitchen? Whether you choose plastic or ceramics for your everyday dishware remember to have fun with it and don't take your collection too seriously. These dishes were made for daily use and the fact that so many survive today is a testament to their durability. ✨

Austin Jordan has an interest in photography, graphic design, '60s garage rock and is a bona fide Citroen geek. He is currently restoring a 1968 ID19 with a 1964 DS19 waiting in the wings. Marci Holcomb works as an accountant, and her outside interests include restoring their Parkrose Heights ranch house, searching out Googie architecture and studying the DMV handbook to "finally get my driver's license so I can drive my 1963 turquoise Ford Fairlane—after Austin rebuilds the motor."

Resources page 77

Share your jones for midcentury by contributing an article on your collection. Good quality photos a must.
E-mail editor@atomic-ranch.com for more info.

"Temporama" by Canonsburg has almost the same form as Taylor's predominantly green "Cathay"; both use modern decals on basic china bodies. This pottery is a lesser grade as it was a popular grocery store premium in the 1960s.

"we do a lot of
rotating now:
buy it, use it,
then sell it."

coming up in **atomicranch**



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Colorado: modern on a budget

where'd you get that?

modern wisdom pp. 8–9

Hollin Hills article: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/05/11/AR2005051100406.html>

🍷 Midcentury neighborhood & preservation websites:
Chicago Bauhaus & Beyond, chicagobauhausbeyond.org
🍷 Modern Phoenix, modernphoenix.net
🍷 Houston Modern, houstonmod.org
🍷 Save Our Heritage Organisation, sohosandiego.org
🍷 Hollin Hills, hollinhills.org 🍷 Palm Springs Modern Committee, psmodcom.com 🍷 Modernist tours: e-mail psmoderntours@aol.com

clean slate: what if joe built it today?, pp. 14–22

Kitchen cabinets: cesar.it/index1.html 🍷 Terrazzo floors: Hermosa Terrazzo, Hermosa Beach, Calif., 310.376.6678, hermosati.com 🍷 Living room couch: Moyes Custom Furniture, Anaheim, Calif., 714.630.8210, moyesfurniture.com

ranch dressing, pp. 25–27

Suburban Modern paint palette: Sherwin Williams, sherwin-williams.com/do_it_yourself/paint_colors/paint_color_palette/color_themes/suburban/ext_suburban.jsp 🍷 Jalousie window resources: International Window Corp., Los Angeles, Hayward and Phoenix, intlwindow.com/jalousie-400.html 🍷 Pickens Window Service, Cincinnati, Ohio; 800.401.4432, pickenswindowparts.com 🍷 Low-voltage light switch resources: ilc-usa.com/pdf.asp?file=/library/pdfs/cs0404.pdf 🍷 www.eurekamodern.com/low_voltage_switching.htm

married to modern pp. 52–59

Memorial Bend website: <http://users.ev1.net/~michaelb/bend/bendhome.htm>
🍷 New kitchen window: RAM Industries, Stafford, Texas, 281.495.9056 🍷 Interior design: Cathie Johnson, Johnson-Blohm Associates Houston, 713.961.9816
🍷 Furniture: B&B Italia, bebitalia.it
🍷 Knoll International, knoll.com
🍷 McGuire Furniture, kohlerinteriors.com
🍷 Tufenkian Carpets, tufenkiancarpets.com
🍷 Veneman Furniture, venemanfurniture.com

everyday housewares: the dish on dishes, pp. 68–73

Author's store: Sputnik Housewares at Deco to Disco, 1960 SE Hawthorne Blvd., Portland, Ore., 503.736.3326 🍷 Reference books: *Melmac Dinnerware* by Gregory Zimmer 🍷 *The 50s & 60s Kitchen* by Jan Lindenberger and *1950s Plastics Design: Everyday Elegance* by Holly Wahlberg, both available at atomic-ranch.com 🍷 Online sites for vintage kitchenware: atomichome.com 🍷 dishesdelmar.com 🍷 ebay.com 🍷 eclec.com/kitchenware.html 🍷 replacements.com/china/rew.htm 🍷 toastercentral.com

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Illustrator: Frank Mills, illcomics@aol.com

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