

summer 2006

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MIDCENTURY MARVELS



- boss baton rouge
- arapaho hills
- the san jose way
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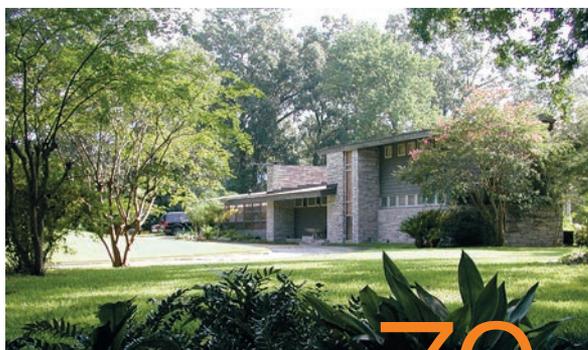
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#### cover

This 1959 Joseph Eichler home in San Jose has a distinctive glass prow that juts out into the back garden. It was an infrequently built model known as SJ733. On the far side past the globe light, the roof overhang forms a covered patio perfect for parties. The two white wire chairs are Bertoias, and the owners' collection of vintage and reissued midcentury icons can be glimpsed in the living room.



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MIDCENTURY MARVELS

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Atomic Ranch, PO Box 9624, Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33310-9624

866.518.1369 atomic-ranch.com

USA: \$19.95 1 yr / \$36.95 2 yrs

CAN: \$27.95 1 yr / \$49.95 2 yrs

Outside USA/CAN: \$55.95 1 yr

**Not responsible for undelivered issues  
due to late change of address.**

Atomic Ranch (ISSN 1547-3902), Issue 10, Summer 2006,  
is published quarterly by Atomic Ranch, Inc.  
at 3125 SE Rex St., Portland OR 97202-8573.

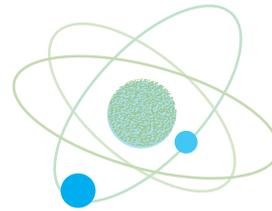
U.S. subscriptions \$19.95.

Periodicals Postage Paid at Portland, OR  
and at additional mailing offices.

**POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to

**Atomic Ranch, PO Box 9624, Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33310-9624.**

All rights reserved by Atomic Ranch, Inc. Canadian Post Publications  
Mail Agreement No #40065056. Canadian Return Address: DP  
Global Mail, 4960-2 Walker Road, Windsor, ON N9A 6J3.



# modernwisdom

\* My mother, who read all of my Atomic Ranch issues while visiting, just sent me this Lustron link: [lustronsatquantico.com/home.html](http://lustronsatquantico.com/home.html). We are currently renovating our '60s atomic ranch and I think the magazines made her realize that there are other people like me out there. We may have turned a French country person into a midcentury Modernist!

**Hilary Young**

*Redding, Calif.*

*Those of you who read about the Lustron homes in issue 2 will be interested in this follow-up on 58 Quantico houses that are looking for new homes.*  
— an editor

\* I have become aware of some great looking modern homes that were built by Phil Anthony, the same person that built Anthony Pools into the largest pool company on the West Coast during the 1950s and '60s. He built homes in Downey and Arcadia, Calif., and each was designed to fit around a pool and to be unique. They had all-electric kitchens and radiant heating throughout the house and patio.



I did some research and found that all of the model homes still exist here in Downey, although some have been altered; I have posted photos of them on the Downey Historical Society website, [downeyhistoricalsociety.com](http://downeyhistoricalsociety.com)—just click on “gallery” and you'll see the

Anthony page. I thought this might make a good story for your magazine due to the interesting background.

**George Redfox**

*Downey, Calif.*

\* I found your magazine about a year ago and the latest issue hit really close to home (pardon the expression). My sister and I grew up in our parents' atomic ranch in Huntington Beach, Calif., and spent summers at our grandparents' Eichler-designed home in Laguna Beach. We always knew these houses were special, but it wasn't until a few years ago that we realized the significance they held—not only in residential architecture and layout, but also in innovative living ideas.

When my sister married, she and her husband had their hearts set on living in the tract in Orange where the Hatch house featured in no. 8 is. Unfortunately, the Southern California real estate market was shooting through the roof at the time they were shopping, making a home of any significance out of the price range of more than one couple. They ended up purchasing a house a block away from the Eichler tract, which they are going to turn into their own atomic ranch.

As for me, work obligations took me to Denver, Colo., and after your magazine turned me on to Arapahoe Acres, I've been patiently waiting for my dream home to become available. I ride my vintage Schwinn Beach Cruiser through AA at least once a month. The people are so friendly and love to talk about their homes. They know the architect, build date, materials used, names of previous owners and even the neat features and quirks not normally seen on today's tract homes.

Thank you again for your wonderful publication.

**Tom Lutz**

*Denver, Colo.*

*Don't miss the article on Arapaho Hills, another Denver MCM development, on page 16 of this issue, as well as*

*continued on page 10*

# morewisdom

the Wolff house that graced the cover of no. 9. There are more Colorado stories in our coffee-table book due out in September, so watch for that as well.  
—ar editor

\* I would love to know where the couple with the pink kitchen in issue 8 got their pink toaster and other appliances and if they're new or vintage. I have a collection of vintage pink appliances but it would be nice to have something new when my old toaster finally dies.

Also, where did they get the model cars with trailers? If you have any more pictures and close-up shots of their kitchen and the cars, I would love to see them.

**Heather Erickson**  
Riverside, Calif.



Homeowner Tony Jones replies, "The pink coffeemaker is in the 'Cooks' line of the JC Penney catalog, and the pink colander is from Sur La Table. The toaster is a Dualit 'Vario' from Williams Sonoma, and the blender and mixer are by KitchenAid. The pink cars come from

all over the place, mostly in toy and hobby shops, but I found several in a die-cast model car catalog from Fairfield Mint. The Franklin Mint and Danbury Mint also make some. One of the Airstream trailers came from the Pottery Barn catalog about two years ago, and eBay currently has several models for sale in different scales."

KitchenAid's "Cook for the Cure" collection also includes a cute hand mixer, coffee mill, food processor, tea kettle, bakeware and gadgets. Check it out at [cookforthecure.com](http://cookforthecure.com).

—ar editor



\* A few years ago my husband became gripped by what I refer to as "tiki fever." He is a pile buck by trade, an art welder on the side and he credits himself with having recognized the value of midcentury modern before anyone else. I'm attaching a photo of his most recent work for your amusement.

**Nancy Soga**  
Portland, Ore.

\* I just received my first issue and it is yummy! Page after page of gorgeous eye candy and inspiring stories. Even the ads are clever and attractive! Mmm ... yummy!

FYI, I also get *Metropolis*, *Dwell*, *Ready Made* and *Budget Living*.

**Barbara Diamond**  
Santa Cruz, Calif.

continued on page 12

# even more wisdom



\* My wife and I recently bought a ranch-style house. Our subdivision is called The Circles and features five modern ranches, all by different architects. Unfortunately, as property values continue to rise, we see more and more being purchased and torn down to make room for new construction, usually two-story Colonials. We hope that more people might rediscover the aesthetic beauty of the midcentury ranch and preserve more of them, but this seems to be wishful thinking.

Our town of Glenview can boast one authentic Wright house and once had two Keck-designed homes, both since destroyed. There were also two Lustron steel homes in the area. The architect of our home attended Crankbrook at the same time as Charles and Ray Eames, and was a student of Eliel Saarinen and a friend of Eero Saarinen.

I hope your magazine continues to thrive and I hope that America might wake up and realize the mistake of destroying so many incredible old ranch homes. Modernism is so much fun.

**Dale Daemicke**  
Glenview, Ill.

\* I could not believe my eyes when, one afternoon while browsing through the magazines at a bookstore,

I came upon Atomic Ranch! I have a newfound appreciation for the ranch home and midcentury style, and I discovered a great source of information and inspiration.

My husband and I bought our home in the community of Del Cerro in 1997. The previous owner purchased the house in 1960 for her retirement years. She never upgraded a thing, but the house was in super condition, just a bit dated. In fact, one of the fireplaces had never been used!

My first instinct was to update everything: change the flooring, replace fixtures, paint cabinets, etc. Fortunately, we couldn't afford to do too much in the beginning and I thank God for that. I have come to appreciate the quality and style of my home. I love the pristine pink porcelain bath tile, the oak floors throughout the house, the chrome ceiling light fixture, the copper chevron cabinet handles, and the off-white shell-inlaid fireplace brick. I even refuse to replace my aluminum window frames with vinyl. I think I am the last holdout on my block!

Needless to say, I recently subscribed to your magazine and anxiously await future issues.

**Susan Thomas**  
San Diego, Calif.

*That's the spirit, Susan. We love to hear stories of homeowners who settle into new houses and take the time to get to know them before launching into an extreme makeover.*

—ar editor

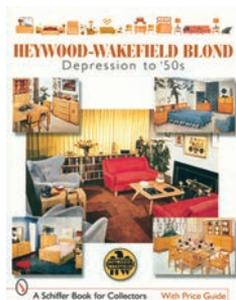
*Remember Teri Kirkpatrick's straddle-light door search? See Ranch Dressing, page 81, for some great leads.*



Write us at [editor@atomic-ranch.com](mailto:editor@atomic-ranch.com) or send a note to Atomic Ranch, Publishing Office, 3125 SE Rex St., Portland, OR 97202. We'll print the good ones.

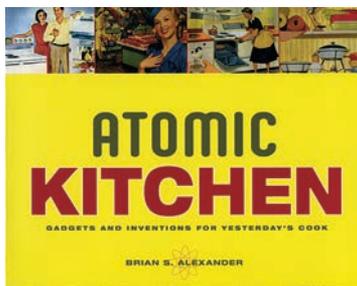
# atomicbooks

## Focus on MCM Collecting



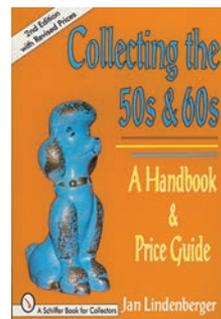
**Heywood-Wakefield Blond: Depression to '50s**  
by Donna Baker  
softcover, 248 pp., b&w and color images  
AR12 \$29.95

Using period Heywood-Wakefield photos, this guide covers case goods, upholstered pieces and tables and chairs, organized by living, dining and bedrooms. Captions give catalog numbers for the company's streamline and birch modern lines, names (a crab-leg dining table is really a 3-Pedestal Drop-Leaf Extension Table), production years, dimensions and current values; an appendix gives finishes and manufacturer's marks.



**Atomic Kitchen**  
by Brian Alexander  
softcover, 176 pp., color images  
AR13 \$19.95

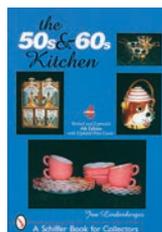
Like its cousin, Atomic Home, this engaging book shows hundreds of vintage ads, this time focusing on kitchens and their appliances, labor-saving devices and cookware. Factoids and sociological history give some context to the amusing depiction of happy housewives cavorting in their modern kitchens. A great source of info for those looking to re-create missing vintage elements or start a housewares or ephemera collection.



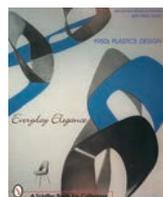
**Collecting the 50s & 60s: A Handbook & Price Guide**  
by Jan Lindenberger  
softcover, 160 pp., color photos  
AR4 \$16.95

Just finding out about retro collectibles? This 1997 overview title is a good place to start. Its strength is presenting "How about this?" items for the would-be collector: plastic vanity sets, cuff links, kids' games, theme matchbooks, or the ever-popular Family Radiation kit. Also covers furniture, lighting and ceramics but is light on brand details.

### Order or find out more about these titles online at [atomic-ranch.com](http://atomic-ranch.com)



**The 50s & 60s Kitchen**  
by Jan Lindenberger  
softcover, 160 pp.,  
color photos  
AR2 \$16.95



**1950s Plastics Design: Everyday Elegance**  
by Holly Wahlberg  
softcover, 112 pp.,  
vintage color images  
AR1 \$19.95



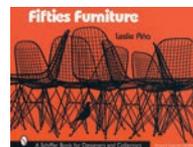
**Atomic Dinettes: Mid-Century Kitchen Elegance**  
by Donna Baker  
softcover, 160 pp.,  
vintage color & b&w photos  
AR10 \$29.95



**Modern Furniture Designs: 1950s-1980s**  
by Klaus-Jürgen Sembach  
hardcover, 312 pp.,  
b&w photos  
AR9 \$59.95



**Inspiring 1950s Interiors from Armstrong**  
softcover, 176 pp.,  
vintage color photos  
AR7 \$29.95



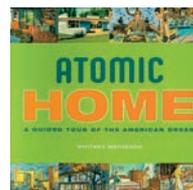
**Fifties Furniture**  
by Leslie Pina  
hardcover, 240 pp.,  
460 color photos  
AR6 \$39.95



**Blenko: Cool 50s & 60s Glass**  
by Leslie Pina  
hardcover, 208 pp.,  
600 color photos  
AR11 \$39.95



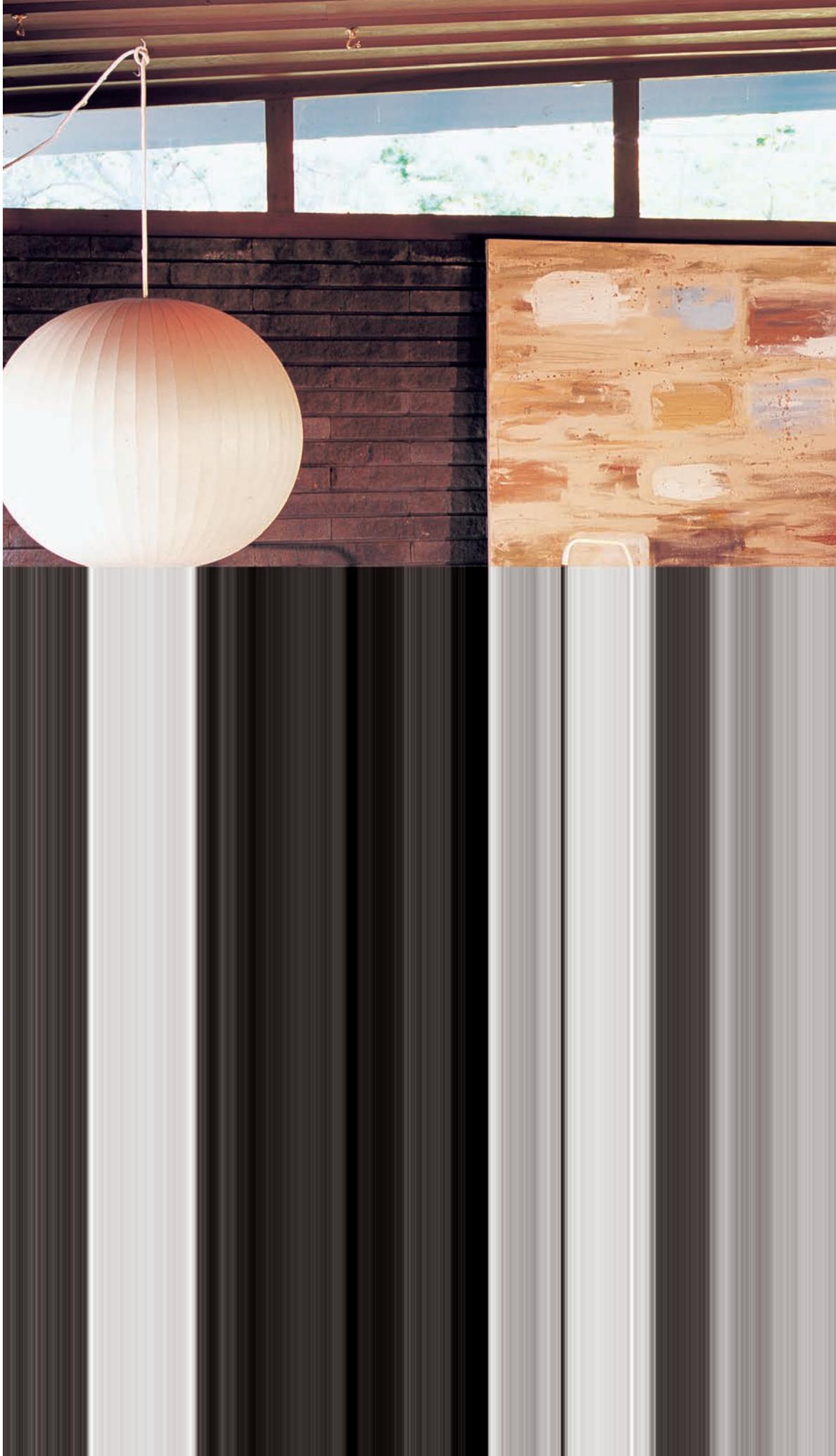
**Lamps of the 50s & 60s**  
by Jan Lindenberger  
softcover, 144 pp.,  
250 color photos  
AR8 \$16.95



**Atomic Home**  
by Whitney Matheson  
softcover, 176 pp.,  
color images  
AR3 \$19.95

Write and tell us what other types of books you're most interested in—architecture, landscaping, collecting, designer bios, art?—and we'll start building more library shelves. [atomic-ranch.com](http://atomic-ranch.com)

# Arappaho Hills:



# Colorado's California Contemporaries



“

W

hen we got together in art school, we would go over my modern design books every night,” says Frank Sarcia, a graphic designer in Littleton, Colo., about the early years with partner Jim Eveleth. The pair would fantasize about their dream furniture. “The Coconut chair was one of our favorites along with the Eames surfboard table.”

Today, the couple has that 1957 George Nelson chair with its original upholstery, as well as a vintage surfboard table in the living room of their Arapaho Hills ranch. The table ran them \$9,000 at Mod Livin’ in Denver, one of their favorite haunts, and they sold off a lot of other pieces to swing the deal.

“They’re hard as hell to find unless you want to buy a repro, which is much thinner,” Sarcia says. “Mod Livin’ is the best store if you want affordable basics that are great. They have really reasonable prices on some great stuff and it’s a huge store.”

The table sits on an Angela Adams rug in front of a vintage Eames Sofa Compact. A Lightolier pole lamp, vintage Nelson ball lamp and a Greta Grossman–style reading light illuminate the dark slate floor that the guys recently had installed. Across the room, a blue reissued Bertioia Bird chair is one of the few new pieces in the house, which they liken to a TV set, confessing they only sit on the couch or at the Saarinen dining set in the kitchen. “It’s definitely eye candy for us,” Sarcia says of their collection. “We enjoy looking at it and the house daily.”

Eveleth and Sarcia moved to the Denver area from Boston, where they were priced out of the real estate market and midcentury moderns were almost unheard of. They even considered buying a \$250,000 ‘50s trailer in a mobile home park—until they saw the doublewide lady sunning on her porch and the Harleys parked next door. “We have a lot more friends who are into midcentury here than we did in Boston,” Eveleth, an aesthetician, says.

Their Arapaho Hills house is a 1959 three-bedroom, one-bath ranch they bought in 2003 for just under \$200,000 from its second owners, a German couple who lived there for more than 40 years. The wife showed Sarcia how to pull out the refrigerator to clean behind it weekly and gave them instructions on weeding the back yard, two tasks not high on either guy’s list. But they were overjoyed to find a home in virtually original condition.

The view from the front door shows off the handsome block fireplace wall and the unpainted fir plywood ceiling. The Bertioia chair and ottoman are reissues, while the vintage Eames dish table was picked up at a yard sale. Artwork includes a Warhol Campbell’s Soup print, a blue and yellow dowel piece made by one of the homeowners, an Eames leg splint and two vintage Nelson clocks, including one from his Meridian line.

Previous spread, the early ‘60s surfboard table is properly called an Elliptical Table Rod Base (ETR). The homeowners say it was designed in 1951 and produced by Herman Miller through 1964. Note the transom clerestory window above the bullet planter.



Clyde Mannon in front of the Arapaho Hills sales office and in a model home in the late '50s, and today, at Sarcia and Eveleth's home.



## The Other Arapahoe

Metropolitan Denver is known for Arapahoe Acres, the first postwar district named to the National Register of Historic Places, located in Englewood, a few miles away from Sarcia and Eveleth's home. The Acres tract has 124 homes built between 1949 and 1957 by developer Edward B. Hawkins and architect Eugene Sternberg. These Modernist houses sold for between \$10,000 and \$20,000 and the CC&Rs dictated dwelling size, fences and that any additions had to go through the architectural committee.

Arapaho Hills was also Hawkins' handiwork, along with builder Clyde Mannon, who began his association with Hawkins as shop superintendent for the prefab homes the developer was espousing in the late '40s. Like other postwar prefab projects such as the all-steel Lustrons, Hawkins ran into immediate problems with labor unions, Mannon says. The project soon derailed and they turned to stick-built construction.

Sarcia tracked Mannon down and arranged for him to visit, hoping to learn more about their home. Mannon, 87, still lives in Golden, Colo., in a traditional two-bedroom brick ranch house he built for his family. He has a wealth of photos that document his 25-year career.

"We tried to follow the trail [with Arapaho Hills] because Arapahoe Acres had been a huge success," Mannon remembers. "We went to California to get design



An Association of Home Builders model home built by Mannon with très Modernist landscaping. It was later moved to Arapaho Hills.

Both the interiors and exteriors were markedly cutting edge, making them a niche housing market even then.



ideas. Eichler's homes were ones we always looked at, and [Frank Lloyd] Wright was always in our minds. I went though his place in Arizona; it was quite a concept. He and Hawkins were very much alike; they were way ahead of their time. They had good ideas."

Mannon confirms that Hawkins had firm opinions about the design, siting, landscaping and interiors of his homes. "I remember a lady wanted a bedroom painted green and Ed was going through with her. She kept bringing up this green bedroom idea, and he finally said, 'O.K. You can call it green if you want to but it's going to be putty.' Ed was a great one for neutrals," Mannon chuckles.

Hawkins' approved exterior colors were browns and tans, and the houses had a lot of stonework. "We got the stone from Castle Rock south of Denver," Mannon says. "We'd go there and blast out the rock and pick up the rubble."

Vintage photography courtesy Clyde Mannon

## An Uphill Proposition

In Arapaho Hills, the first houses built along Lowell Boulevard, including the Eveleth/Sarcia home, sold for \$18,000. "We had a tough time getting Arapaho Hills going. Ed insisted we start at the bottom and work to the top of the hill, but everyone who came out wanted the top of the hill, and those lots weren't available," Mannon says. "I was a good builder and loved it, but I was weak on sales.

"People would always ask, 'How much per square foot?' I would tell them you don't sell houses by square foot; that would be like selling automobiles by the pound."



## Sarcia asks if Mannon saw any colors like their

Catherine Holms bowls line the top of the original Masonite kitchen cabinets, now painted in punchy colors.

Opposite, upper right, “Planet of the Apes” figures share the guest bedroom with more serious midcentury pieces, including an early Eames shell rocker, George Nelson credenza and vintage tripod lamp.

Opposite, lower left, in a spare bedroom, a Knoll sofa, Womb chair, and Eames LCW (Lounge Chair Wood) make for a comfortable TV room. A Nelson stereo cabinet holds the TV, a Blenko vase sits on the floor, and an early Shaker pitchfork leans against the wall.

At any given time, Hawkins and Mannon would have two or three spec houses available, but most homes in Arapaho Hills were custom built. They also built “Idea Homes,” an annual promotional from *Better Homes & Gardens* that took the best ideas from homes all over the country and incorporated them into one house. Mannon explains that various firms were designated to build these houses, and he oversaw two in Arapahoe Acres and five in Arapaho Hills.

Architect Bruce Sutherland designed all of “The Hills” homes, while Mannon picked the colors and finishes. “We’d sit down with buyers, find out what they liked, how much they had to spend, draw up a sketch and they ended up with a house designed and built with them in mind,” Mannon says.

“There was a limited market for these homes, but the people who wanted one would have nothing else. Anyone coming from California looking for a contemporary home, we usually wound up with them,” he says, but other people, including Mannon’s wife, found the designs to be a bit too out there.

### Colorado Contemporary

During Mannon’s visit, Eveleth and Sarcia found out some specifics about their house, which a home inspector praised as remarkably solid. The retired builder explained that a two-foot perimeter foundation was poured, the center cavity filled with gravel, then plumbing, electric and heating systems laid in before a slab was poured on top.

“When people would come by at that stage, they’d say, ‘My God! I paid \$15,000 for this? It looks like a postage stamp!’ ” Mannon recalls. “We were told years later a gravel foundation was the worst thing we could have done, because we were



vibrant yellow, blue and orange back in the day.



Top, left, a table from One Home in Denver holds a Blenko glass apple and pottery by one of the homeowners.

Right, dig the mosaic-tile-patterned laminate and pegboard sliding cabinet doors on the streamlined built-in vanity.





There's a lot going on in this exterior view of the 1959 Arapaho Hills ranch. The cement blocks on the front facade and garage wall, coupled with decorative eaves and overhangs, give the house a modern personality. The reeded glass preserves privacy, while the bold colors give the architecture additional punch. Two front doors greet visitors so you have to be clever enough to knock on the correct one; the right-hand one opens to a furnace compartment.

creating a reservoir. But we tried to do a good job [with the systems] so there wouldn't be any problems. We used copper plumbing and never had any call backs."

The original doors in the Arapaho Hills homes came about because a distributor went out of business and Mannon bought 15 or 20 wooden sliding glass doors, he says. There are some operable clerestory windows along the back facade of Eveleth and Sarcia's home, and frosted glass for privacy in the rooms that front on the street.

Mannon finds many similarities between the midcentury homes he built and the solar- and radiant-heated homes with large expanses of glass being touted as cutting edge today. "There is very little difference from the homes we were building 50 years ago," he says. "The one thing we didn't have was insulation because gas was so cheap it didn't pay to double glaze and put in insulation."

Sarcia asks if Mannon saw any colors like their vibrant yellow, blue and orange back in the day. "I'd say this is a bit brighter," the builder answers diplomatically.

The pair plan to update their bath with a full-height shower but preserve the distinctive built-in cabinet, and put in a solid-orange Formica counter or Eames-style "dimple" doors in the upper kitchen cabinets. "I don't really want to do stainless steel; I feel it's going to be dated eventually and it's not really my bag," Sarcia says.

"I'm really big on preserving what these houses are supposed to be. If you want something that's '80s style or a regular suburban house, then buy that," he continues. "Why take these and ruin them? My neighbors argue that people want updates; I can see why they do it, but not why they do it to *these* homes. There are houses [in Arapaho Hills] with '80s doors on them and Victorian scrolling. To me it just doesn't go; it's out of place and drives me insane.

"A few of us are going to get together and try to landmark this area. There are about 60 houses and I know half of the owners. I want it to be like Arapahoe Acres," he enthuses. "I don't know if we'll be in this house forever, but we'll always be in one of these midcentury homes." \*

Resources page 87

# COOL|stuff



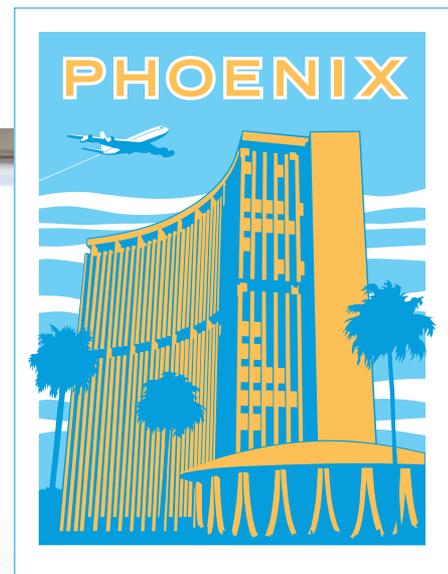
## Yogi Berra Sectional

Capitalizing on the nostalgia factor, 104-year-old Norwalk Furniture has updated some of its midcentury furniture designs, like the Evo sectional. With its square tufted back reminding you of vintage auto upholstery, curvy loveseats conjoined with a wedge-shaped corner, and tapered round legs, it's (here's the Yogi tie-in) déjà vu all over again, they say. The upholstery is done right, too, with choices including vintage prints and nubby solids. Store locations and an online design tool at [norwalkfurniture.com](http://norwalkfurniture.com).

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## Elvis' Love Nest

Jason Hill's Palm Springs Dreamscapes series of serigraph prints are touchstones of MCM-ism with a graphic punch of color. "House of Tomorrow," Elvis and Priscilla's Alexander honeymoon haven, could be hanging over your bed for inspiration, while "Phoenix," a big 18" x 24" print suitable for that living room pony wall, runs just \$40 on his site, [jasonhilldesign.com](http://jasonhilldesign.com). Hill does commercial illustrations for a variety of clients such as Johnnie Walker, Nike and loads of musicians.





### Cushy Floors

While we wouldn't advocate vinyl windows in midcentury homes, flooring could be a different matter. Amtico makes a whole range of patterns that are rated for installation over radiant heating, including wood, granite and slate looks. Others have the appearance of glass tile,

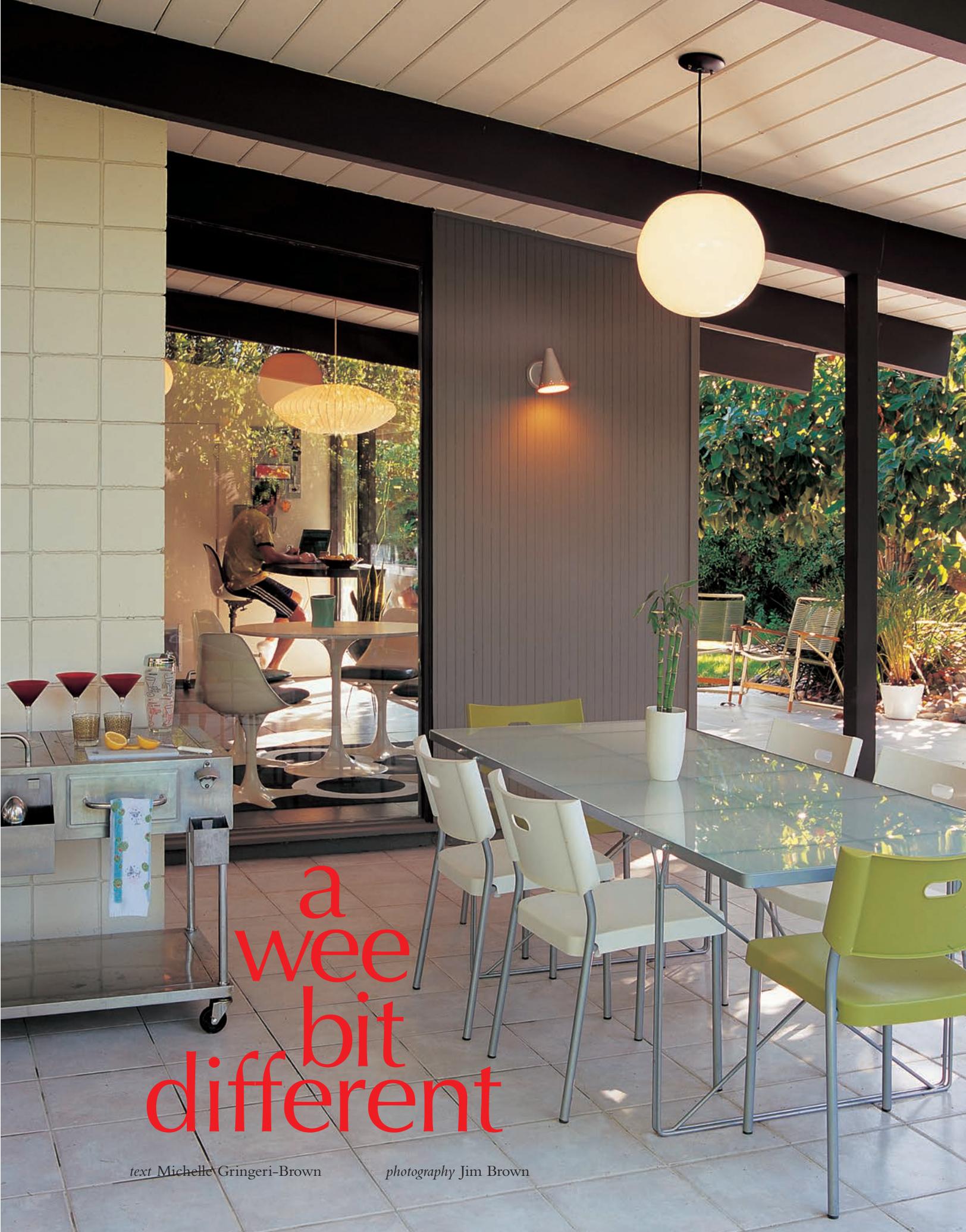
embossed metal or linoleum-like plain colors. The twist with Amtico is their products aren't sheet vinyl, but can be ordered as 9" x 9" to 18" x 18" tiles with or without decorative stripping in between, or in a zillion other configurations: circles inside squares, planks, running bond, decorative borders and more. Available at EXPO and other retailers, beginning at around \$8.50 a square foot; [amtico.com](http://amtico.com).

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### A New Paradigm

Leather and suede in your kitchen or bath? Sure thing, says Atlas Homewares, which is doing just that in the form of handsome knobs, pulls, hooks, towel bars, TP holders and glass shelves. The Paradigm line, shown here in brushed nickel and washable brown suede, also comes in black leather and polished chrome. Prices range from \$22 to \$150. Check out [atlashomewares.com](http://atlashomewares.com) or look for their products at Lowe's, EXPO, Restoration Hardware, The Great Indoors and other kitchen and bath showrooms.





a  
wee  
bit  
different

*text* Michelle Gringeri-Brown

*photography* Jim Brown





# Gold. carriage lanterns

on a white, pink and lavender exterior. An '80s whitewashed-oak country kitchen with crackle-finish knobs. The purple sponge-painted living room. It was hard to choose which aspect of Jerry and Ann Escobar's 1959 Modernist home was more out of synch with Joseph Eichler's intent when they bought it in 2001.

The only original elements remaining were the posts and beams, the walls and the windows, so there was no discussion about what vintage aspects to keep when the couple launched a three-month remodel. "Our overall approach was to bring back as many of the original Eichler cues as possible while replacing the remaining pieces with modern substitutes," Jerry, brand director for a computer peripherals company, says.

The Escobars added nine skylights and slate flooring to their home in San Jose's Willow Glen area. The three-bedroom, two-bath model is unusual in their Fairglen tract—it's smaller by a bedroom and has a distinctive corner fireplace and all-glass bay in the living room. Jerry says this floor plan was built infrequently and he knows of only three others in Palo Alto. Ann, a graphic designer, finds the house to be a tad small for them and their two young children, so they hope to add on a family room and additional bedroom and bath in the future.

The couple considered a new cement skim coat for the floors but were concerned that they might have to break into it for future radiant heating leaks and it would be hard to patch. They figured popping out a couple of slate tiles is no big deal and got extra pieces just in case.

In their previous place, which they describe as a mainstream ranch house, they'd used color to define it and themselves as nontraditional. There are colorful touches in this home as well—primarily orange and hot pink seen in the living room area rug and pillows, the kids' bath and graphic wall stripes in the children's bedroom. But

just about everything else is brown, gray or off-white.

"This house is so funky to a non-Eichler person—all of this glass, no curtains, all one floor, very linear.

**"To be an Eichler person labels you—  
whether you like it or not—  
as a non-conformist."**

That's all so shocking we didn't want to continue to push and push by adding a bunch of color and funk," Jerry says. "Traditionalists look at the house like, 'Where's the club chair? Where's the crown molding? What kind of house is this?' But then there are others who come in and love the house and the glass. You start to think you might have turned a person or two around from the same-old-same-old, tra-





Opposite, the open floor plan puts living, dining and cooking all in one skylit space. “The new mahogany walls drove our decision to go away from the stark white kitchen idea to something more natural,” Jerry Escobar says. “In this case, that happens to be dark oak cabinets. Not too flashy, not too overpowering, not too intense—just a calm place that’s clean and contemporary but still has some warmth.”

Left, the Escobars considered boomerang-patterned Formica or soapstone counters, but settled on concrete. The oven and cooktop are Viking, while the La Gardo Tackett-designed TH-1 bowl in the foreground is available from Architectural Pottery and other online stores.

ditional approach to living, opened an eye or two to maybe considering an Eichler.”

Jerry warms to the topic of what makes a midcentury modern fan(antic): “To be an Eichler person labels you—whether you like it or not—as a non-conformist, a person who enjoys life. With it comes the Rat Pack, the martinis and all that stuff, and because of that, you’re already predisposed to go outside and have a bar-beque with friends and enjoy the outdoors,” he enthuses. “Unlike other houses with small windows that are very closed off and compartmentalized, here you’re exposed to the outdoors everywhere you turn. That delivers on the promise of outdoor living they made when they marketed these tracts.

“We all kind of drink our own Kool-Aid and do our own thing. And we all have this common thread of loving architecture and these houses, kind of like being in a

Mustang club. We each have our own version of what the perfect Eichler is. We're a hair bit off from the norm," he says.

These self-proclaimed rugged individualists hold an annual home tour for like-minded owners in their 300-house tract. Ann and Jerry's place has been a featured home and they spent a week prepping for it: fixing the spot on the wall, the fingerprints near the light switch, that dead plant, the bare patch of lawn. "There's a million

and one details you don't consider," he says. "The reason we all participate is we're proud of our homes and hope

**We're a hair bit off from the norm," Jerry says.**

to get a few more believers and make the neighborhood better—perpetuate this modern movement.

"There are people like us who want to buy Eichlers coming into the neighborhood in the last couple of years. But there are others who maybe 10 years ago bought them because they were the cheapest houses in the valley—nobody wanted them," Jerry explains. "Their goal never was to own an Eichler—they never liked them. Their goal is to make an Eichler something that it is not: a normal ranch house like the ones a block over, or a Tuscan villa with the fake columns. They're

The founding loveseat rescued from the curb looks pretty good today in a corner of the master bedroom. "I knew it would look great in white Naugahyde, so I threw it in my dad's truck and brought it home," Jerry says. "My dad thought we'd lost our minds.

But for us to convert something that was basically trash into a cool couch, yeah, we enjoy sort of twisting things around." Sliding glass doors open to the back yard, and immediately to the right of the loveseat, a door leads to a small en suite bath and closet.





In the kids' bath, a colorful shower curtain from IKEA was the color clue for the painted wall grid. The vanity cabinet is from IKEA and toilet and sink from Kohler. The couple's son and daughter, Jared and Sydney, share a bedroom with a painted wall graphic lending low-cost punch. The third bedroom is used as a den/TV room. "Even though it's a little small for four people, the house is user friendly," Ann Escobar says. "The kids keep their toys in their room and everything is pretty durable; we can just wipe off the vinyl couches."

always pushing to completely obstruct what these houses are because they hate them so much. The traditional ranches are more popular around here; I wish they'd leave these for those of us who appreciate Eichlers."

The redone galley kitchen the Escobars inherited was isolated from the rest of the room by a pony wall, which they demoed. They knew they wanted a clean and contemporary look, and so started off looking at very expensive European cabinets. "We saw some that were kind of cool: stark, shiny white or red," Jerry says. In the end they decided not to go with the high-gloss, ultramodern loft approach. Instead, IKEA filled the bill.

They'd gone to another vendor who had similar German cabinetry that would have run \$14,000. "We thought we'd hit IKEA in Emeryville, not expecting to find anything. But the ones we found looked pretty good and they cost \$4,000, with another \$1,500 to install; it was a slam-dunk," Jerry explains. That savings allowed them to spend more money on concrete countertops.

The Escobars have a mix of vintage—a mahogany slat bench, Bertioia chairs and bullet planters—plus reissues, knockoffs and curbside orphans. They bought the authorized Noguchi coffee table and Eames lounge chair from Highbrow in Tennessee when the house was in escrow, and purchased a new base from Modernica to transform a vintage Eames fiberglass chair into a rocker.

Both of the couches are reinvented pieces: the living room black vinyl one was originally an early '80s number with nubby, vertical-stripe upholstery and puffy pillows, while the white Naugahyde loveseat in the bedroom was at the side of the road, covered in dog hair and sans cushions. "We wanted something linear and hard-edged, so we had the couch trimmed down and recovered. We have a pretty



good ability to cut through the clutter and see that it was the right size, the arms were the right height—all we had to do was square everything up,” Jerry explains.

The Mies–look chair and ottoman are from Marshalls department store. “Ideally I wanted a Barcelona chair in white, but Ann found this one for \$400,” he says. “My philosophy is that these are the classic pieces I like the most that fit into our house. To me these are the icons. My number one chair has always been an Eames lounge chair, I’ve always loved the Bertoia diamond chair, my wife loves the bucket chairs and Noguchi has always been a beautiful piece of sculpture to me.

“The only downside is everyone has the same icons. They’re beautiful and define an era. If we had a slightly larger house I would get a Bird chair, and maybe an Eames Aluminum Group chair, one of the ones with the tall back,” he says.

The couple mention the mainstream appearances that midcentury is making. “If you look at Urban Outfitters apartment section as an example, it’s all influenced by ’70s pop art, and a lot of the classics. They have an inexpensive chair similar to the Barcelona chair. And Target is pushing modern design, too,” Jerry remarks.

“Even Smith & Nobel is showing modern furniture in their catalog. Everyone’s going to have it; we don’t want everyone to have it,” Ann jokes. “You don’t want it to become too popular ...” =

Located on a quiet cul-de-sac in San Jose, the Escobars suspect that their Eichler is a Jones and Emmons design. The exterior paint scheme features authentic Eichler colors.

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# Mies'. Masterpiece: The Farnsworth House

In the farmlands outside of Chicago, renowned architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe created a timeless masterpiece along the Fox River in Plano. Mies and Dr. Edith Farnsworth met at a dinner party in late 1945, where she spoke at some length about the property she had acquired, and that she was looking for someone to build a small, unique weekend home.

Mies' vision of a modern shelter for the 20th century, set in nature, is expressed with absolute purity and intensity. His serene steel and glass retreat for Farnsworth belies its sometimes controversial history and a recent dramatic rescue by civic groups. Meticulously restored and open to the public, it is an architectural pilgrimage site, attracting design professionals and Modernist enthusiasts from around the world.

Looking at the property, Mies realized that it was on a flood plain, and so he elevated the house a little more than five feet above the ground—two feet above the highest recorded flood in the area. However, the house has since been invaded by river water three times: in 1954, then during the great flood of 1996 and again in 1997.

This particular spot was chosen for the house due to its proximity to the riverbank and the black sugar maple tree that still stands in front of the house. Plans were mostly completed

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The other glass house welcomes visitors

*text* Jodi Black

*photography* Jon Miller, Hedrich Blessing

in 1946, but construction didn't begin until September 1949. Farnsworth moved in on New Year's Eve, 1950 and final touches were completed the following spring.

Philip Johnson, then-curator of architecture at MOMA, showed several pieces of Mies' work, including the Farnsworth House model, in 1947 and the design became famous before it was even built. In discussing Mies' concept, Johnson, whose own iconic steel and glass house in New Canaan, Conn., shares many aesthetic elements with the Plano house, wrote, "The Farnsworth house, with its continuous glass walls, is an

even simpler interpretation of an idea. Here the purity of the cage is undisturbed. Neither the steel columns from which it is suspended nor the independent floating terrace break the taut skin."

During construction, Mies and Farnsworth, who had enjoyed a friendly and sociable working relationship, began to have disagreements, primarily over the escalating costs of the house. The original estimates were for around \$40,000, while the finished project was closer to \$74,000. Several things contributed to the problem: Mies used only the very best materials and craftsmen, and the house was built during the Korean War when building materials were more expensive. Their disagreement was eventually settled in court, with Mies being the material winner, but they never spoke again.

### Structural Integrity

The Farnsworth House is one of the most significant of Mies van der Rohe's works, equal in importance to the Barcelona

The house is built  
on a modular grid,  
a building tool  
Mies often used.





Pavilion, built for the 1929 International Exposition, and the 1958 Seagram Building in New York. At the Plano home, two horizontal steel beams rest on eight steel flanges that serve as modern classical columns. The vertical flanges are set in five feet of concrete with a mushroom base. All of the steel was sandblasted on-site to a smooth finish and covered with seven coats of white lead-based paint. Mies had the workmen use plug welds, which were ground down and painted so that there were no blemishes. He also insisted on having the corners of the steel members mitered.

A black cylinder underneath the house contains all the utilities and a drain from the flat roof. The terrace, deck and interior flooring is travertine stone imported from a quarry outside of Rome. Mies himself oversaw the laying of each piece, putting the best quality sections outside where they would be exposed to the weather.

The house is built on a modular grid, a building tool Mies often used. The entry door is one foot south of center to create more room for the dining area and to subtly direct visitors to the living area of the home. The central core—which holds two bathrooms, a mechanical room, fireplace and built-in cabinets above the kitchen counter—is also asymmetrically placed. This core is constructed of wood and faced with

Opposite, the spare dining area has six cantilevered MR side chairs surrounding grandson Dirk Lohan's dining table. These Mies chairs were designed for the Weissenhof Apartments overlooking Stuttgart in 1927.

Photographed in 1984, the living room's original primavera wood paneling and travertine floor were damaged in the 1996 flood. Compare the color of the new primavera veneer in the view of the kitchen; the now nearly 10-year-old material is beginning to show signs of its typical darkening. Furnishings include a glass and stainless steel Barcelona Pavilion Coffee Table, a Barcelona Pavilion Daybed and two Tugendhat Chairs, all damaged by the flood but since restored. Lord Palumbo sold these iconic pieces with the house.

The galley kitchen is narrow but has ample counter space. Mies placed a refrigerator where one of the large cabinets is, but during Palumbo's renovation, side-by-side units were installed under the counter to the left of the sink.



panels of primavera veneer. It subtly divides the house into living, sleeping, cooking and dining spaces.

There are three sources of heat in the house: copper radiant heating in the floor, and two forced-air furnaces that provide warm air from the core. The primavera wood Mies selected is very rare and expensive. Imported from Central and South America, he felt this wood was so beautiful that you should never blemish it by hanging anything on it or installing electrical outlets; all outlets in the Farnsworth House were placed in the floor.

Because of the falling out, Farnsworth refused to take any furniture that Mies might have designed exclusively for the house. As of today, we have not found any plans for site-specific furniture, and Farnsworth decorated with an eclectic mix of Asian art and Danish furniture. Mies did design a drapery system with fabric that fell in a serpentine fold. He wanted the drapes to look the same both outside and inside the house.

### Second Generation

In 1968, the house and its 59 acres of land was sold to Lord Peter Palumbo, who had admired Mies' work for many years. Farnsworth moved to Italy, and Palumbo began renovations using Mies' grandson, Dirk Lohan, a prominent Chicago architect. Palumbo purchased Knoll reproductions of various Mies furniture designs, including the Brno Tubular, Tugendhat and MR chairs; an Adjustable



The corner of the bed designed by Dirk Lohan is visible in this view of the bedroom area. Near the three Barcelona Stools is a large built-in wardrobe.

Chaise Lounge Chair; and from the 1929 Barcelona series, a coffee table, daybed and stools. Lohan also designed a dining room table, a desk and a bed for Palumbo during that restoration.

In July 1996, the Fox Valley region was hit with a flood of biblical proportions. Eighteen inches of rain fell in a 24-hour period, causing the Fox River to rise so quickly that it took everyone by surprise. The house was inundated with four feet of river water, and although structurally sound, the interior was badly damaged. All the primavera was destroyed and Palumbo again hired Lohan to restore the house.

When Lord Palumbo decided to sell the property, preservationists feared that since the house was not protected by a landmark designation, a prospective buyer could close it to the public—Palumbo had opened it to the public in 1996—or dismantle and move it to another state. The Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois (LPCI), a state-wide nonprofit preservation group, swung into action to protect the house when notice was made in fall 2003 that it would be sold at auction. LPCI joined forces with the National Trust for Historic Preservation and began an urgent fundraising campaign.

Today, the Farnsworth House is owned by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and operated as a house museum by LPCI. Those two preservation groups—with financial support from hundreds of contributors including the Friends of the Farnsworth

House—were able to purchase the structure for \$7.5 million at auction in New York City in late 2003.

A final look at the house from the outside is likely to produce the same response as the first, which is surely the most memorable. While the Farnsworth House is often referred to as the “glass house,” it is more accurately regarded as a steel structure enclosing glass, for it is the frame in all its well-proportioned rectilinearity that makes possible the transparency of the walls.

Visit this masterpiece of Modernist design on the banks of the Fox River. Mies’ temple-like pavilion both invites and challenges visitors: its unsurpassed views through transparent walls will cause you to consider anew how a man-made object best relates to nature. It’s unlike any house you have ever been in. 🌳

Jodi Black became the Farnsworth House site manager after the National Trust and LPCI purchased the property at auction. She has a BA in interior architecture and an MS in historic preservation.

Farnsworth House  
 14520 River Road  
 Plano, Ill.  
 630-552-0052  
[farnsworthhouse.org](http://farnsworthhouse.org)  
 Open April through November  
 Tuesday through Sunday 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

# Quite a Prod



# uction

A film industry couple does an extreme makeover on their 1960 A-frame.

In six weeks,  
no less.



*text* Michelle Gringeri-Brown

*photography* Jim Brown



The Sommerses changed out the fireplace mantel and the wood paneling in the family room off the kitchen and installed new sliding glass doors. Their reissued Eames lounge chair sits where a recliner once lived, and a storage unit by Dan Campbell has legs from Modernica and round pulls and design inspiration from Daniel Donnelly. "We had the chance to put some stuff into this house that would make it pop," Campbell says.



BEFORE



Paul Sommers ducked out of work at Warner Bros. to check out the house his wife, Julie, had called him about.

It was during a torrential rainstorm and the traffic was typically hideous on his drive from Burbank to the foothills of La Cañada. But the listing realtor was taking offers the



next morning and it was now or never.

"I saw the front of the house and thought it was really interesting," Paul says. "I hopped the fence, came around back and looked through the sliders. By then our realtor was there. I said, 'We'll make an offer.' She asked if I wanted to go inside. I ran through the house for three minutes and jumped in the car and went back to work."

They got the house; then the real production began.

Paul, a director of photography and Steadicam operator, was going on hiatus and the plan was to get the house done

and the family, which includes 6-year-old twin daughters, moved in before his job ramped up again. This meant there was no time for backordered materials or contractors to flake out. That's when the Sommerses' methodical, organized, some (Julie) would say anal-retentive skills sets kicked in.

Julie, previously a film coordinator, opens up her hefty production bag to show the day-by-day notes on what needed to get done on both this and their existing house in Eagle Rock, which they were readying for sale. "Measure all windows and doors, demo begins, the roof comes off, flooring



It's not surprising to hear that the backyard party room hosted a New Year's Eve shindig every year since 1963. Currently, the Sommerses' daughters use it as a play/TV room and it hosts a troop of giggling Brownies every few weeks.



arrives, moving day," she selectively reads. "There was about four weeks of preproduction," Paul recalls, putting the project into the couple's lexicon.

"We'd been attracted to the post-and-beam, midcentury modern, low-slung ranch look," Julie says. "When I saw the house I thought, Wow! This needs a lot of work but it could be really cool when we're done. We needed to look past the '80s wallpaper and the dingy carpeting to see its great bones."

The 2,400-square-foot A-frame atrium ranch was built by Webster Wiley, a local developer of some 300 area homes. In six weeks the couple put on a new roof, replaced the exterior doors and windows, upgraded from hollow-core to solid-core birch veneer interior doors and laid bamboo floors throughout, except in the kitchen and baths. They also gutted the kitchen, upgraded the electrical and plumbing sys-

tems, painted inside and out, and in the atrium, relocated a garage door to make room for a koi pond. For an extra challenge, partway into the project, first budgeted at \$100,000, they decided there was no good reason for not tackling the baths as well. The master bath was completely remodeled, and the kids' bath was replumbed. They also sprang for upgraded light fixtures and custom built-ins in the family room, living room and bedroom. Final costs came in around \$150,000.

But how did they do all that in a month and a half? For one thing, they had worked through stylistic debates and decisions at their previous house while planning a rehab that they ultimately didn't carry out. For another, "We were crazy," Paul says. "Before we closed on this house we had the doors and windows and kitchen cabinets ordered. I think a lot of people

"I'd recommend custom cabinets to anybody. Ours were a nightmare."



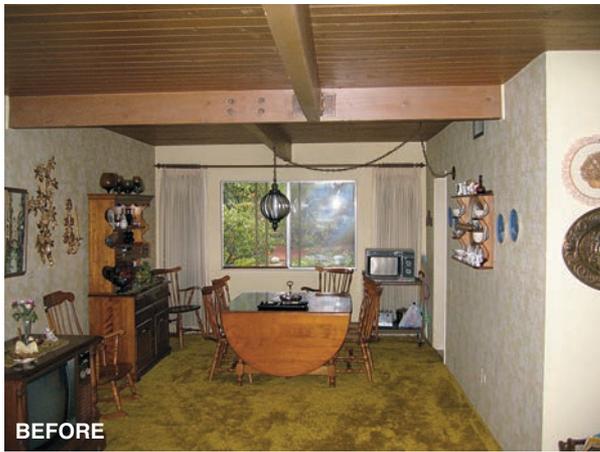
Well, the globe lights were kind of cool ... In the new version of the kitchen, all of the appliances are in the same locations and the soffits, which hid wiring and heating ducts, were removed, opening up the space. The counters are CaesarStone, the backsplash is back-painted glass tile from Dal Tile, flooring is ceramic tile, the faucet a Franke, the refrigerator a KitchenAid, and the microwave, range and double ovens by Bosch.



"If you narrow your scope a little, everything becomes easier."

The view of the old living room from the dining room could not be more different today. The sectional is from Room & Board, the full-wall storage unit custom built by Dan Campbell and the gray wool Womb chair was bought on Craigslist.com. The marble-topped piece near the Nelson bubble lamp was made by Paul Sommers 10 years ago to house audio equipment.





BEFORE



The Sommerses considered opening up the wall with the blue plates and knick-knack shelf between the kitchen and dining room, but realized their floor plan was open enough as it was. The dining table and chairs are from Design Within Reach and an Arakawa hanging system displays artwork throughout the house.

give themselves too many options. They go to 25 tile stores and come home with 16 to 20 boards of tile. Then they're confronted with all of these choices and decisions. How do you weed through that? If you narrow your scope a little, everything becomes easier. Stop shopping!"

"I like that; it's great. We'll buy it" became their mantra. "We'd literally have a circus of people here working," Julie explains. "The drywall guy was working in one place, someone else was painting and the flooring guy was bringing in the bamboo, saying [the planks] had to live in this environment and to not spill anything on them. As things were coming together, you saw the contractors' eyes light up. They told us they'd never seen a remodel happen so fast."

Paul attributes much of the success to their general contractor, Dan Campbell, a friend who's the "king of resources," and to their own pitch-in attitude. "It wasn't like I was the guy who breezes through at the end of the day. I was there in work boots hauling stuff out, not standing over

them in a jacket with a martini in my hand. I was there saying, 'What do you need? How can I help? I'm going to get you lunch. Let's get this done together.' "

Another thing: "The beauty of being in a tract home is, everything is in standard sizes," he notes. "Because we didn't have to do opening changes for the new Milgard windows and doors, that part only took about a week. In the kitchen, there are three ten-foot counter runs. There's no weird corner or a place to go, 'I don't know what to do with this part.' The sink is here, that's where the stove is, that's where the fridge goes. It's a work triangle and there's a way in and a way out."

The couple have some minor quibbles with the bamboo flooring, which they say isn't as tough as advertised and does ding. But the aesthetics and prefinished and renewable aspects of the product still appeal. And don't ask them about their kitchen cabinet experience. "I'd recommend custom cabinets to anybody. Ours were a nightmare," Julie says. Paul agrees: "Custom guys will give you what you



The remodeled bath opens off the master bedroom sans door. The mosaic tile step-down shower is lit by a large frosted window. In the reverse view, the new slant-front vanity is modeled after the original still in place in the twins' bathroom. The counter is the same CaesarStone used in the kitchen and the faucets are Grohe.



## The master bath was completely remodeled, and the kids' bath was replumbed.

want and you don't have to deal with the bureaucracy of a big-box store. Ours was unresponsive and slow; they just didn't get it. The kitchen was the first thing we ordered and the last thing to go in."

Ultimately, the house works perfectly for them. "There are so many different ways to live in it as a family," Paul says. "The kids can be in the bedroom, I can be in the atrium or back yard, Julie can be in the kitchen and we're still connected but we all have a private space. This house has great sightlines and flows really well." "It's modular. It's a great design," Julie sums up.

Paul enthuses about the vintage flourishes on his home: the A-frame, the clerestory windows, the stone fireplace, the atrium. "Did Web Wiley come up with those ideas? Absolutely not. Did he copy them really well? Yes, he did. Can I afford a Schindler or a Neutra? Absolutely not. Am I more than happy to move into a house where someone copied them really well? Absolutely." **E**

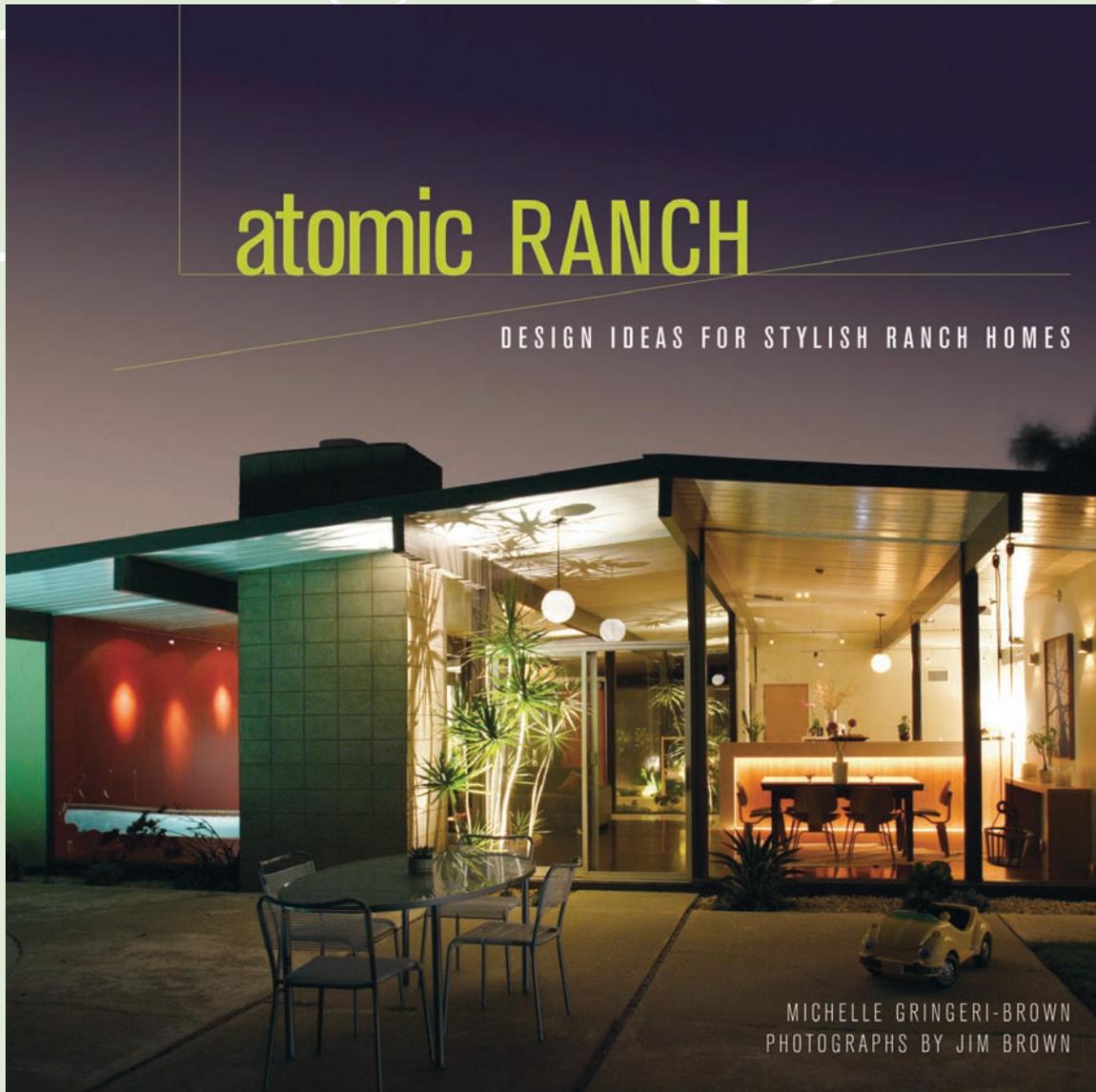
Before photography courtesy Paul Sommers

Resources page 87

# Coming this fall!

## atomic RANCH

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MICHELLE GRINGERI-BROWN  
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Architect Wahl Snyder designed Hamilton Crawford's home to take full advantage of the topography of the large lot. The roof was covered with marble chips and the fiberglass screening sheltering the swimming pool lanai was touted as "pitched enough to be kept clean by the wind."





# The HOUSES that HAMILTON BUILT

*d*ecember 7, 1941—Pearl Harbor Day—was an inauspicious day for W. Hamilton Crawford to arrive in Baton Rouge. The 35-year-old was building houses in Louisiana and Mississippi, and Baton Rouge was the city where he would make his home and establish a national reputation as one of the most innovative residential builders in the United States.

From a plant near downtown Baton Rouge, Crawford manufactured prefabricated barracks and hospitals. The plant's "Bungalows for Britain" were shipped to England and more than a dozen other countries during World War II. In the process, Crawford was perfecting techniques for prefabricated and modular wood construction.

At the end of the war, the U.S. was faced with millions of returning GIs. To deal with this, Congress passed the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly called the G.I. Bill of Rights. Although somewhat controversial at the time, in hindsight, the act was probably one of the most successful pieces of social legislation ever conceived. Opportunities for higher education opened enrollment to

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*text* Tom Bartkiewicz

*photography* William Howland

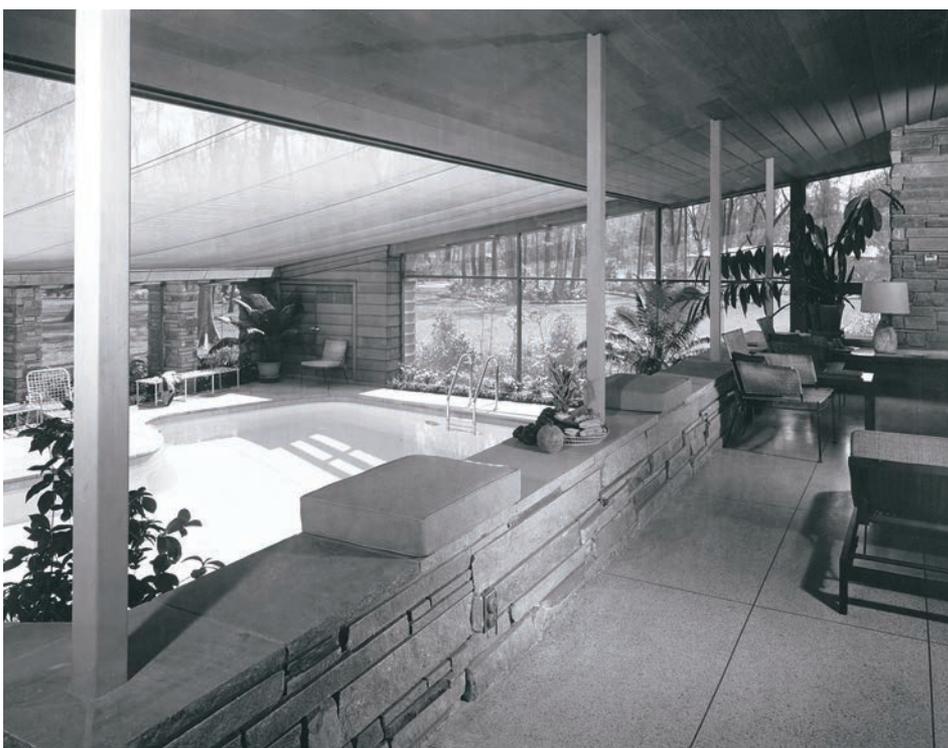
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The front view of Crawford's Westdale home. A 1957 *House Beautiful* article enthused: "Without being nostalgic for the past or day-dreaming about the bright and shiny atomic future, this house in Louisiana treats its owners to the luxurious conveniences now being produced."

more socioeconomic groups, shattering the idea that a college education was the privilege of the elite, and provided the postwar economy with much-needed engineers and technicians. In addition, it afforded a social safety valve that eased the adjustment for veterans from wartime to peace.

The bill also helped veterans adjust to civilian life by assisting them in purchasing homes. This would prove especially auspicious to Hamilton Crawford, a man who had spent the war years developing considerable experience in the construction of anything made of wood.



## BATON ROUGE GROWS WITH POSSIBILITY

Before the war, Baton Rouge was a small town, best known for its colorful governor, Huey P. Long—"The Kingfish." It was also the site of the largest oil refinery in the U.S., built by Standard Oil to process the state's vast oil and gas resources.

In the expanding postwar economy, a large petrochemical industry began to develop in Baton Rouge. Many of the G.I. Bill-educated technicians and engineers migrated to Louisiana to work for Humble Oil and Refining

The view from the living room looks past the dining area toward the kitchen or out to the spacious lanai through the large sliding glass doors.

In the terrazzo-floored lanai, family or guests could enjoy the pool, a full-fledged room for relaxing or the view out to the sizable back yard.



A wood-grain Formica counter separates the kitchen from the family room. Above the tile-surfaced rotisserie area is a copper hood, and a fireplace is to the right. The slot in the checkerboard acoustical ceiling holds a pull-down screen for movie watching.

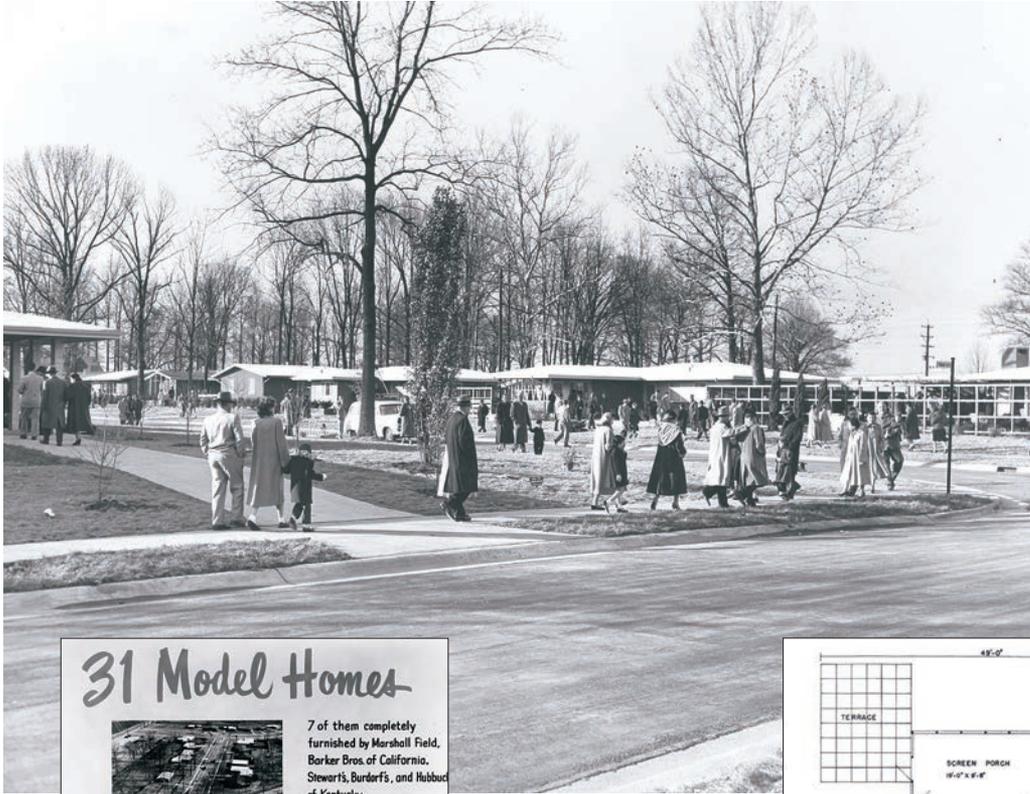
The kitchen proper could be closed off from the family room via sliding panels. With three sinks, three electric cooktops, double ovens and twin refrigerators, this was a luxury kitchen for a well-to-do family. The refrigerator in Ralph Sims' home was given to him by Hamilton Crawford when two left-hand-hinged appliances arrived instead of the mirror images Crawford had stipulated.

Company, and Ethyl Corporation, the latter created by General Motors to make tetraethyl lead, an octane-boosting additive needed for its new high-compression engines. The young professionals going to work for these companies needed places to live.

With its construction experience, an expanding economy and a steady supply of young professionals starting families, Crawford Corporation was also growing, employing upwards of 600 workers. The company turned out subassemblies for houses going up in Baton Rouge, as well as those in Highgate Springs in Louisville, and Gentry Woods and Pontchartrain Park in New Orleans. The Pontchartrain Park development numbered 850 lakeside homes, a golf course and swimming pool and was marketed to African American homebuyers.

Crawford's tracts featured gently curving streets to please the eye and slow traffic. The lots were sculpted and landscaped, each boasting a signature Louisiana live oak. He developed a color system for the houses, and the model homes appeared to be lived in, with their modern furniture, stocked kitchens and clothes hanging in the closets. His housing package included everything from the dishwasher to the mortgage, and veterans were snapping up Crawford homes with 100 percent VA financing as fast as they were built.





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Highgate Springs in Louisville, Ky., was another of Crawford's successful developments. Model homes drew scores of buyers to these postwar tracts. Crawford's Pontchartrain Park and Gentilly Woods in New Orleans may be among the neighborhoods razed post-Hurricane Katrina.



## THE CRAWFORD MODEL 1466

Ralph Sims was program director for WJBO radio in Baton Rouge before the war. His military years would find him in the Army Air Corps as a B-17 tail-gunner, flying missions over Europe. He survived to tell of his adventures, and today, at 88, lives in a home on Lot No. 1 in Crawford's Westdale Terrace development in Baton Rouge.

When Sims returned from the war, he went back to WJBO, but left in 1953 to do marketing work for the Crawford Corporation. Sims moved his family into a Crawford house in December 1955, a Model 1466 with a double carport.

Open *A Field Guide to American Houses* and you'll see a picture of a Crawford Model 1466, a "modern ranch circa 1935–75." The number designation comes from the square footage, and the *Field Guide* describes these

houses as "asymmetrical one-story shapes with low pitched roofs," and goes on to say that three common roof forms are used—hipped, cross gable and side gable—with a moderate or wide eave overhang. Both wooden and brick wall cladding are used, sometimes in combination.

Sims' house has a low-pitched roof with hipped ends and the walls are covered in a combination of coarse cedar shakes and brick salvaged from the Meeker Plantation south of Alexandria, La. The home features most of the options available to the buyers of the 1466: a master bedroom with adjoining bathroom, a dressing area with his-and-hers closets and a built-in lighted vanity, and a kitchen with stainless steel, built-in Hotpoint appliances. The house still has the original appliances 50 years later.

Ralph Sims outside his brick home today.

The kitchen of Sims' house still has its vintage features: glass-front cabinets and a built-in stainless steel Hotpoint oven, cooktop and refrigerator.



PHOTOS BY TOM BARTKIEWICZ

Opposite, top, Sims' double carport Crawford Model 1466 sits on a sizable lot in Westdale Terrace.

Opposite, bottom, Van and Jan Cox live in Westdale in a Crawford Model 1172. Van, a landscape architecture professor at LSU, extensively remodeled his house and added on to it in a complementary ranch style.

Another Crawford house on Country Club Drive, built for Mr. and Mrs. J.M. Powell in the mid-'50s, is also a Model 1466. Jim Powell worked for Crawford Corporation, too, and today his widow, Mary, still lives in their home. Their son, Johnny, grew up in the house and currently lives in another Crawford home in Westdale Terrace.

"Dad worked for Mr. Crawford before the war," Johnny Powell says. "During his basic training at Fort Shelby, he slept in a tent with a wooden floor manufactured by Crawford Corporation. And after the war, he ran a sawmill in Mississippi owned by Crawford that supplied Southern yellow pine framing lumber for his houses."

Other examples of this model include a 1466 enlarged by 50 percent that was built for Crawford's oldest daughter and her husband. His younger daughter also lived in another Crawford model two doors away from her sister. Obviously, Crawford thought his homes good enough for his children.

## CRAWFORD BUILDS A SHOWPLACE

By the mid-'50s Crawford's success no longer limited him to Baton Rouge and the South. Through his work for the National Housing Center in Washington, D.C., he was well known on the East Coast and had an office on Manhattan's Park Avenue and a mortgage company in the nation's capital.

"The office in New York was in the Seagram Building," says Ralph Sims. "Four Seasons was in the building and we would go there for lunch. It was great working for Hamilton. He did everything first class."

As befitting a successful person, Crawford set his sights on building his own home. His house on Country Club Drive in Westdale Terrace is an impressive two-story ranch. Still

referred to today as the "Crawford House," it was featured in the October 1957 issue of *House Beautiful* in an article titled "The Luxury Modern Industry Provides." It speaks volumes that he would use the same methods of construction and materials for his own house as on those of his customers.

Crawford's home was designed by Miami architect Wahl Snyder and incorporated a lanai, an unusual feature in Baton Rouge. This lanai was a semi-enclosed covered patio and pool separated from the living room by sliding glass doors that could be opened to create a large indoor/outdoor area for entertaining. Adjacent to this area was the family room, which included a built-in hi-fi system, a concealed 16mm projector and a screen that dropped down from the ceiling. The room also had an indoor barbeque with a rotisserie, and all this predated by almost 50 years the current trend of media rooms and outdoor kitchens.

Ralph Sims recalls attending many parties at Crawford's house. "The dining, living and family rooms abutted the lanai and pool," he says. "It was tailor-made for a relaxed kind of meandering party. It was like the manor house surrounded by the homes of vassals."

In addition to the magazine feature, the home was also included in the *House Beautiful Treasury of Contemporary American Houses*. As the book introduction explains, "The houses were chosen by *House Beautiful* for publication, not because they are typical, or representative, but because they are excellent."

Today the Hamilton Crawford house is owned by Jack and Ann Singleton, who purchased the showplace in 2000. It was Ann's dream house. "When I was a child, my father would drive by the house so we could look at it, and I dreamed of one day living in a house like it," she says today.

The Singletons are restoring the house, which still con-



PHOTOS BY TOM BARTKIEWICZ

tains some of the original furnishings, including Crawford's office furniture. The home is a perfect fit for their collection of '50s-vintage light fixtures.

## CRAWFORD'S LEGACY

In the '60s, Crawford received a call about some property in Maryland. He visited the area, loved it, and bought the property—1,237 acres between Baltimore and Washington. Risking \$20 million of his own money, he began developing Crofton. It was different from his other developments in that the homes and commercial buildings were inspired by Colonial Williamsburg design. Crofton also contained the first condominiums built in Maryland.

Crofton stretched Crawford financially and at one point the banks threatened to call the loans. To pay off his debts, he sold the remaining lots in Crofton to The Levitt Co., developers of Levittown, and the prefab business to Swift Homes.

In 1974, he sold a controlling interest in Crawford Corporation to Kemmon Wilson, chairman of Holiday Inn. He then retired to his house on Country Club Drive where he lived until 1993 when he died at age 87. His widow, Lillian, stayed in their home until 1999 when she moved in with her daughter and the house was sold.

Crawford's legacy can be seen when driving through Baton Rouge, New Orleans and Lafayette, and those who know his houses spot them immediately. Jim and Sharon Salmon live in Westdale Terrace today, but Jim grew up in Levittown, Pa., and came to Baton Rouge to work on the construction of a nuclear power plant north of the city. He bought his Crawford house because it reminded him of his boyhood home.

In the past quarter century, Crawford's Westdale hous-



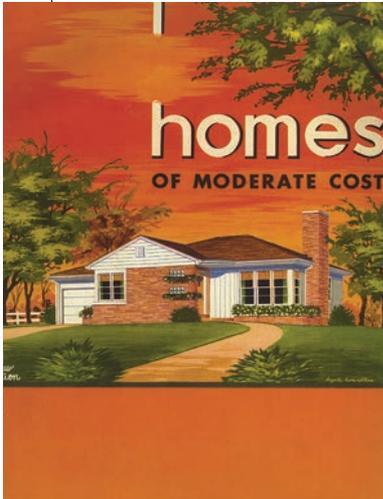
es were prized more for their location than their style. But with the popularity of ranch houses enjoying a resurgence, that's beginning to change, and that's just what Hamilton Crawford designed his houses for—changing times. Sensibly styled, Crawford homes were intolerant of the impractical and filled with work-saving conveniences and rooms for living. Innovative, efficient construction techniques and a unique blend of the modern with the known and familiar made these houses popular 50 years ago and are attracting the attention of people unimpressed by the pretensions of the neo-eclectic suburban McMansions.

His longtime friend and colleague Ralph Sims perhaps best describes Hamilton Crawford's houses: "Louisiana Contemporary, where the Old South doesn't live." 🌸

Vintage and contemporary photography courtesy the author

Tom Bartkiewicz is an economist/planner with the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development. His passions are cars and residential architecture. He and his wife, Jackie, live in and are restoring the Crawford home his parents purchased 50 years ago, a Model 1353.

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Midcentury ephemera:  
plan books



It's (almost) all white



On the edge in Phoenix

## where'd you get that?

**arapaho hills: colorado's california contemporaries,**  
pp. 16–24

History online: Arapahoe Acres, [arapahoeacres.org](http://arapahoeacres.org)

🍷 [arapahoeacres.org/history.htm](http://arapahoeacres.org/history.htm)

🍷 [westword.com/Issues/2005-09-01/culture/art.html](http://westword.com/Issues/2005-09-01/culture/art.html)

🍷 [milehimodern.com/modernHistory.htm](http://milehimodern.com/modernHistory.htm) 🍷

Furniture resources: Mod Livin', Denver Colo.,  
[modlivin.com](http://modlivin.com)

**a wee bit different, pp. 33–40**

Kitchen cabinets: IKEA, [ikea.com](http://ikea.com) 🍷 Furniture:

Highbrow, [highbrowfurniture.com](http://highbrowfurniture.com) 🍷 Modernica,

[modernica.net](http://modernica.net) 🍷 Fruit bowl: Tackett TH-1,  
[architecturalpottery.com](http://architecturalpottery.com)

**mies' masterpiece: the farnsworth house,**  
pp. 44–49

History online: [farnsworthhouse.org](http://farnsworthhouse.org)

🍷 [jetsetmodern.com/farnsworth.htm](http://jetsetmodern.com/farnsworth.htm)

🍷 [greatbuildings.com/buildings/Farnsworth\\_House.html](http://greatbuildings.com/buildings/Farnsworth_House.html)

**quite a production, pp. 56–64**

Construction and custom furniture: Dan Campbell,

Eagle Rock, Calif., 213.280.2334 🍷 Landscaping:

Rigo Interiano, Panorama City, Calif., 818.781.6671

🍷 Windows and doors: [milgard.com](http://milgard.com) 🍷 Furniture,

hardware & lighting: [craigslist.com](http://craigslist.com) 🍷 [danieldonnelly.com](http://danieldonnelly.com)

🍷 Design Within Reach, [dwr.com](http://dwr.com) 🍷 Highbrow

furniture, [highbrowfurniture.com](http://highbrowfurniture.com) 🍷 Modernica,

[modernica.net](http://modernica.net) 🍷 Room & Board, [roomandboard.com](http://roomandboard.com)

🍷 Kitchen: Dinner Mint and Whisper Green tile,

[daltile.com](http://daltile.com) 🍷 Quartz Reflection counters,

CaesarStone, [caesarstoneus.com](http://caesarstoneus.com) 🍷 Refrigerator,

KitchenAid, [kitchenaid.com](http://kitchenaid.com) 🍷 Range & microwave,

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