St Louis Modern Residences as Cultural Sites, 1938–1951

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College of Architecture

ST LOUIS MODERN RESIDENCES AS CULTURAL SITES
1938–1951

by

Mariana Melin-Corcoran

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Introduction

The modern architectural style was first introduced in the United States in the early 1930s. At the time, the nation was still recovering from the stock market crash a few years earlier, so designers and manufacturers spent time iterating instead of producing, preparing for a modern future that would be possible once the economic situation improved. The future, and images of its prosperity, became the focus of Americans during the 1930s, as they hoped for an end to the country’s struggles. In particular, modern living gained traction amongst designers in the first half of the twentieth century, as they developed new ideas for urban planning, single-family homes, and furnishings. This investigation will focus on these new ideas for residential modernism as they were applied by St. Louis architects on their own homes, built between 1938 and 1951.

These houses, because they were built as modernism was first being explored in the United States, were experimental in nature, both trying to define the style and publicize its benefits in the rapidly expanding suburbs. Therefore, these houses have been both private and public since their inception. They provided shelter and were simultaneously a marvel to of an aesthetic never-before-seen; they were both functional architecture and an object of art. This was also a core tenet of modernism, which intended to use new technology to create effective, attractive objects and structures that facilitated daily life. Modern houses were powerful displays of the style because they were full-scale, allowing visitors to walk through and truly understand modernism in context. They were livable experiments. While exhibitions were used as educational tools to present the style to the public, architecture can only ever be exhibited via proxy in museums, through drawings and models rooms but not entire structures. On the other hand, the houses themselves present a complete, inhabitable picture, displaying their architecture and cultural history in their original context.
In the twenty-first century, the most common way to preserve these sites has been to transform them into house museums. House museums are nuanced spaces because they attempt to combine the intimacy of a private home with the public-facing mission of a museum. Sometimes, however, the institutional preservation solution stifles the exploratory nature embodied by the architects and residents of modern houses. But as the field of architectural exhibition leans towards experimentation outside of the traditional gallery, the owners of these houses can learn from contemporary curators to implement different display strategies, which balance the preservation of the houses’ cultural histories and the inherent forward-thinking nature of their architects.

This investigation will begin by analyzing the ways in which Americans were first introduced to ideas of modern living in the 1930s and 1940s, in particular through exhibitions, at World’s Fairs and in galleries, as well as in locally and nationally distributed publications. Fairs and exhibitions constructed full-scale, furnished rooms and sometimes fully functioning display homes for visitors to explore. Magazines and newspapers published photographs and articles about the modern homes being constructed for real families across the country, displaying them two-dimensionally for the public. By the end of the 1930s, a number of middle- and upper-class clients began to experiment with the modern aesthetics, constructing new homes in the suburbs, away from the congestion of industrial city centers. These homes were generally characterized by their asymmetry, minimal ornamentation, large windows, and open floor plans, and they connected closely to the sites upon which they were constructed.

Before the Second World War, when modernism was first being introduced, the aesthetics were more experimental and eclectic, and there was variation in approach even amongst regional architects. In the post-war era, the architectural language of modernism had matured and was more accepted, but this acceptance did not translate into an increase in construction of modern houses.
Though architects and manufacturers attempted to convince the consumers of the benefits of modernism through exhibition and even by constructing residences, modern houses were ultimately few in comparison to the styles of the past. During the first half of the twentieth century, suburban neighborhoods, both nationally and in St. Louis, were dominated by the more traditional style homes, which tended towards colonial period-inspired façades and building materials. The modern houses that do exist, though, especially from the early years of modernism, represent unique experiments in the modern style.

The second chapter will outline the architectural and cultural histories of six modern houses in the suburbs of St. Louis— the Kraus House (Frank Lloyd Wright, 1951–56), the Shank House (Isadore Shank, 1939–41), the Murphy House (Joseph Murphy, 1938–39), the Armstrong House (Harris Armstrong, 1938), the Eames Houses (Charles Eames, 1934–38), and the Bernoudy House (William Bernoudy, 1950–51). These case studies were chosen for their connections to the modern movement, to Washington University in St. Louis, and to the city itself. Although these houses have long been recognized by local enthusiasts, they are not well-known amongst a wider public, and they are ripe for conversation and analysis because of their relationships with the city’s modern architects, designers, and art patrons that shaped mid-century culture. Architects built modern houses in the stylistically traditional suburbs, experimenting with a new aesthetic and incorporated advanced technologies to define what living in the future would be like. The second chapter will detail the contributions of these houses to the modern residential movement in St. Louis as well their development into sorts of cultural attractions, on display for the community through informal tours, newspaper features, and off-site exhibitions while still primarily functioning as residences. Though intended to be private homes, all of these sites have had a profound impact on the
emergence of modern residential architecture in the St. Louis region, and the stewardship of their current owners and inhabitants has furthered the influence of their architects into the present.

The third and final chapter of this investigation will evaluate the state of house museums in the twenty-first century, and the potential of St. Louis houses to transform formal into educational and cultural sites for the public. The modern era between 1938 and 1951 is being reconsidered by scholars as it has now become a historical period, and these houses are useful tools to better understand architectural and cultural development. This chapter will consider the Frank Lloyd Wright House in Ebsworth Park as a precedent for how architecturally significant house museums are preserved in the St. Louis area and assess the future of the other modern houses in the region. While these modern houses are significant in the architectural legacy of St. Louis, not all of them should necessarily become house museums. In fact, the majority of them will likely remain functional residences, but they can also be unofficial displays of modernism, art objects that have been thoughtfully curated on the suburban streets. These St. Louis modern houses have been exploratory in nature since their construction, and this chapter will encourage their stewards to continue being experimental, especially in regards to their approach to display and preservation. In the twentieth century, their architects looked to a new, more prosperous future, and curators can draw on this complex, fascinating history, especially because architectural exhibition in the twenty-first century is pushing boundaries. House museums have long followed the same format of preserving spaces exactly as they were, but they should be experimenting with temporary exhibitions that engage contemporary viewers in new and exciting ways. Ultimately, the goal of this thesis is to encourage readers to rethink these modern St. Louis houses that are and have always been both public and private, functional and attractive. As they are being preserved in the twenty-first century, organizers should use their histories and the resources of contemporary architectural
exhibition ventures to examine how these houses can be valuable educational and cultural sites, rethinking their status and their relationship to their inhabitants.
Chapter 1: Americans’ Introduction to Residential Modern

By 1920, a majority of Americans lived in urban areas.¹ But many of those living in cities were wholly dissatisfied with the existing urban patterns based around pedestrian and rail mobility.² Industrial downtowns, while economically profitable, were seen as congested, polluted, and not conducive to a healthy lifestyle. Furthermore, the multifamily housing popular in city centers was thought to undermine family life.³ Therefore, many architects and planners began to advocate for decentralization and a return to a more agricultural life.⁴ These plans were more feasible in the early twentieth century with the advent of the automobile and electricity. Thus, for those with means, single-family homes surrounded by greenery, only possible on the city outskirts, were preferred and easily accessible as they maintained their lifestyles.

After the stock market crashed in 1929, the United States government enacted various policies that attempted to address the exacerbated housing crisis and generally protected single-family home ownership. President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal programming made mortgages more accessible to avoid foreclosures. These laws were aimed at single-family rather than multi-family units because they insured loans and rearranged tax systems for purchasing and modernizing houses.⁵ The federal government also sponsored “slum clearance” movements, and public housing authorities began to rebuild older residential areas in city centers, often displacing poorer, non-white communities.⁶ Additionally, many wealthier, white families moved away from

¹ Steven Conn, Americans Against the City: Anti-Urbanism in the Twentieth Century (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 58.
² Eric Mumford, Designing the Modern City (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 176–177.
³ Mumford, Designing the Modern City, 180.
⁴ Conn, Americans Against the City, 58–93.
⁶ Mumford, Designing the Modern City, 179–180.
downtown areas in reaction to an increase in the population of black communities.seeing this new migration to the edges of the city, realtors and manufacturers responded quickly, soon producing houses and products that defined the aesthetics of the emerging American suburbs and attempted to embrace modernism. one of the nation’s most prominent architects, frank lloyd wright, also contributed his ideas of decentralization and democratic living to the discourse, promoting his designs through myriad types of exhibition.

broadacre city and suburbia

in the early twentieth century, many prominent architects proposed plans for organizing life outside of the city center, each believing in their own suburban utopia. in turn, frank lloyd wright, already a recognized american figure in the 1930s, advertised his proposal for “broadacre city,” a decentralized plan for personalized, pastoral family living. the foundation for broadacre city was the idea that every family would be allotted a minimum of one acre of land in the countryside, which would be developed by the inhabitants. also central to the plan was the mobility offered by highways. broadacre city was the solution for what the architect deemed the “traffic problem” of cities in a 1932 new york times article, referring to the congestion and uncleanliness of urban areas (fig. 1).

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8 the suburbs were also shaped by the policies of the federal housing authority. see john bauman et al, eds, from tenements to the taylor homes: in search of an urban housing policy in twentieth-century america (university park, pa: pennsylvania state university press, 2000).
9 wright was a high-profile architectural voice in the nation, but he was not the first to introduce ideas of decentralization. in 1923, clarence stein, lewis mumford and benton mackaye founded the regional planning association of america (rpaa) to address large-scale planning issues such as affordable housing, the impact of sprawl, and wilderness preservation. in 1929, rpaa members adapted garden city plans from england to the town of radburn, new jersey. the garden city movement promoted ideal planned towns surrounded by parks, and radburn was intended to be a self-sufficient town geared towards both pedestrians and automobiles. see daniel schaffer, garden cities for america: the radburn experience (philadelphia: temple university press, 1982).
10 frank lloyd wright, “broadacre city: an architect’s vision,” the new york times, march 20, 1932.
Wright was fascinated by the potential of the automobile, advocating for societies based outside of downtown areas and embracing the general American dislike for centralized city living. Still, in the early twentieth century cities were necessary as economic and industrial centers, even though the architect believed that centralization by way of the city was “no longer a necessity or a luxury.”\(^{11}\) Wright argued that the automobile offered proximity to natural settings and the possibility that families could live among idyllic greenery only found at the edge of the city, and they would still able to travel into the downtown areas for business as needed. Americans would be able to use the automobile to their advantage, inverting its purpose by using the machine to be closer to nature. Thus, in Broadacre City, people would be able to, “enjoy all that the centralized city ever really gave [them], plus security, freedom and the beauty of the ground that is his.”\(^{12}\) Wright saw his plan as facilitating and emblematic of democracy and freedom; it was truly an architect’s bucolic utopia.

Though it never had any official support, Wright publicized Broadacre City widely, and he realized that the most effective way to spread his ideas was through exhibition. Edgar Tafel, a former Wright apprentice, remembered the architect declaring that, “if he could, he would create an exhibit of models and drawings of Broadacres and send the message all over the United States.”\(^{13}\) In 1934, Edgar Kaufmann Sr., the father of another apprentice, provided the funding for a model to be created for display in Manhattan as part of a larger exposition promoting technological progress, the *Industrial Arts Exposition*.\(^{14}\) With the promise of the exhibition, the

\(^{11}\) Wright, “Broadacre City: An Architect’s Vision.”
\(^{12}\) Ibid.
\(^{14}\) Edgar Kaufmann was a prominent Pittsburgh businessman and owner of Kaufmann’s Department Store. In 1934, he commissioned Wright to design a family home in Pennsylvania, now known as Fallingwater, one of Wright’s most revered works. It is currently open to the public as a house museum.
architect moved to develop his ideas into a more specific and visually understandable model. Before this, Broadacre City had been only theoretical.15

Wright began with sketches, laying out the city with a geometric pattern (Fig. 2). While the use of grid was evident, the principal organizing device was a cruciform shape, as defined by major roads.16 Housing areas were in the center of the plan, while other services, such as recreation, education, and more, populated the four quadrants. Shared services and facilities, like farms and factories, would be located at specific intervals along the highway, spreading them out over the land but making them easily accessible by car. Wright believed facilities could be placed within walking distance, “but why, when ten miles is ten minutes?”17 The plan was entirely based on the single-family unit, centered around the one-acre plots, instead of the impersonal high-rises and multi-family structures of the city center. Families could cultivate their land to their advantage and according to their own wishes, living, farming, and using their car as they pleased. Wright had high hopes for the plan, which could also be expanded to be a series of villages approximately twenty miles apart on a grid, with regional government at the center.

After clarifying his ideas and devising the layout on paper, Wright and his apprentices at Taliesin West built the first model of Broadacre City using Kaufmann’s funding.18 The twelve-foot by twelve-foot model, along with ten collateral models, first went on display on April 15, 1935 as the centerpiece of the Industrial Arts Exposition organized by the National Alliance of Art and Industry (National Alliance) at Rockefeller Center (Fig. 3). The model emphasized Wright’s main ideas for the plan: the prominent highways, the regular one-acre plots of land, and the

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17 Wright, “Broadacre City: An Architect’s Vision.”
18 In 1932, Wright began the Taliesin Fellowship, in which a community of apprentices would live, work, and study with him at Taliesin in Wisconsin and Taliesin West in Arizona.
abundance of greenery and farms (Fig. 4). The Broadacre City model was accompanied by large panels of text explaining the architect’s process because the visuals alone could not fully convey his concepts to the public. The first panel visitors encountered called for “a new way for man by way of fair use of the machine and social coordination,” emphasizing that the machine could be used for social progress as well as technological advancements.

The Industrial Arts Exposition as a whole sought to demonstrate how modern design was making objects of everyday living functional, cost-effective, and attractive in response to the new social conditions of life in the 1930s. Many of these kinds of exhibitions at the time also attempted to inspire unity and revive hope for the future during the Depression years, and many focused on updating and modernizing the home. The National Alliance declared, “Here you will find the answer to ‘How will America live tomorrow?’” A New York Times article reviewing the exhibition noted the usefulness of the basement playroom and the improved kitchen, an example of how interior rooms developed in the dwelling updated for life in the 1930s. The rethinking of the playroom and the kitchen often made it easier for women to balance their home life and their work in the new modern age.

In addition to Wright’s Broadacre City model, the Industrial Arts Exposition also featured full-scale interiors of modern houses that were constructed and furnished by individual manufacturers. The inhabitable living room designed and exhibited by Ladies’ Home Journal was a particularly popular attraction (Fig. 5). Visitors appreciated the ability to be able to walk through the living room and see the furnishing in context, rather than looking at scale models or

photographs. Still, Broadacre City was well-visited. More than 50,000 people gathered to see Wright’s plans, as well as the other displays of modern living, on the exhibition’s opening day in 1935.23 The National Alliance had originally predicted 250,000 people would visit over the course of the month.24 President Roosevelt “opened” the exhibition by pressing a gold telegraph key in the Oval Office that sent electric impulses to set off 120 lightbulbs in Rockefeller Center, drop an American flag, and turn on an electric organ.25 At the opening, Federal Housing Administrator James A. Moffett spoke via radio saying, “The home is the focal point in the exhibition. The spiritual value of the home is the bulwark of our civilization,” and noted that “national consciousness for improvement of the home is comparatively recent.”26 Moffett clearly remarked on a new, national focus on the home and how it could be improved for the realities of modern life. Commercial manufacturers, private citizens, and government officials were all freshly invested in rethinking the American residence, the bulwark of civilization, many displayed their new ideas in exhibitions.

The National Alliance declared, “America is being redesigned. We are on the eve of a new era in industry in which the products of the machine are to be conditioned by good design.”27 The 1930s marked for manufacturers, designers, and consumers alike a complete change, a redesign, of living. Ideas of good design and new technology were set to permeate modern life, especially in the home. Though purchasing had decreased in the years of the Great Depression, the exhibition was meant to assure consumers that designers had not stopped iterating, and manufacturers would be ready to produce beautiful objects that embodied and facilitated modern life as soon as

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26 “Arts in Industry Glorified in Show.”
economic conditions improved. Although the National Alliance exhibition was promoting plans and furnishings for the more expensive suburban single-family home, housing activists at the time were also advocating for the government to apply the same principles of good design to new public housing that would make the unclean conditions of tenement housing obsolete.\textsuperscript{28}

While Wright was largely uncomfortable with the circus planned for the opening and the blatant commercialism of the National Alliance exhibition overall, he understood that his ideas for Broadacre City and his reputation would profit from the publicity.\textsuperscript{29} The model was reviewed widely following the exhibition in magazines like *Architectural Record* and *The New Yorker*, and the general public was introduced to Wright’s urban plans through publications as well as through expositions. Together the Broadacre City model and the other featured displays painted an exciting, holistic image of the new home as defined by the machine, from household objects to living room layouts to regional planning methods.

Wright asserted that the modern houses, appliances, and decor on display at the *Industrial Arts Exposition* necessitated a thoughtfully planned environment. “We have built,” he said, “only to tear down, because the building has not been part of a single organic plan.”\textsuperscript{30} Broadacre City, although not a city in the centralized sense, could improve life on a larger scale, extending the positive influence of organic design that began with the home and could influence every part of daily life. His plans for Broadacre City did not include designs for individual houses and instead focused on wide-scale planning issues. The machine had arrived to make life better, and Wright

\textsuperscript{28} In 1934, Catherine Bauer published her seminal book, *Modern Housing*, which introduced European architectural and social advancements to an American audience. She argued for what she saw in Europe: the thoughtful, planned design of public housing. Bauer also aimed to convince the government to develop a national housing policy and make legislative change beyond the New Deal emergency measures that addressed the housing shortage during the Great Depression. See also Gail Radford, *Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

\textsuperscript{29} Smith, *Wright on Exhibit*, 107.

believed he could maximize its use with his vision for decentralized urban planning that would organize homes in what he believed was the most democratic manner.

After the 1935 exhibition, Wright’s model went on tour around the United States and through Europe until it returned to the architect’s home at Taliesin West in 1954. President Roosevelt saw it at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C., but ultimately the government did not engage with Wright’s vision. The architect continued to tinker with the plan and model until his death in 1959. Though Broadacre City was never realized, Wright remained interested in democratic housing principles for the rest of his career, and he experimented with similar ideas in his single-family residential commissions.

Usonian Residences for Modern Living

Alongside Broadacre City, Wright developed his ideas for “Usonia” in the 1930s, his term for a utopic United States, idealized by his planning and residential architecture. Broadacre City explored the location of houses in relation to each other and to services, while through Usonia Wright developed an architectural language and design strategy for individual residences. In 1938, he declared, “The house of moderate cost is not only America’s major architectural problem, but the problem most difficult for her major architects.” From the late 1930s until the mid 1950s, Wright embarked on a quest to create quality designs for reasonable prices, single-family residences aimed at suburban middle-class families across the country, known as Usonian houses.

31 The model was taken out of the archives for another exhibition, Frank Lloyd Wright at 150: Unpacking the Archive, curated by Barry Bergdoll, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in 2017.
32 In the first half of the twentieth century both Franklin D. Roosevelt and his political opposite Henry Ford shared a desire to decentralize dense American cities.
33 Frank Lloyd Wright, “The Jacobs House,” The Architectural Forum, January 1938, 78. Wright was criticizing the architectural profession which had at this point ignored middle-class housing in favor of other more glamorous and profitable commissions, thus allowing developers to take over the suburban market and build generic houses.
The architect wrote of Usonia: “I now propose an ideal for the architecture of the machine age, for the ideal American building.”

The first Usonian house, the Jacobs House, was designed for Herbert and Katherine Jacobs in Westmorland, Wisconsin, a suburb of Madison, in 1936 and 1937. Intended to be an experiment in organic architecture and affordable housing, the Jacobs House was never replicated on other sites, but it exemplified many of the traits that became directly associated with Wright’s Usonian movement (Fig. 6). It was constructed of brick and wood, and, although it was relatively small in terms of square feet, it was designed to be spacious using the architect’s principles (Fig. 7). The Jacobs House was L-shaped with a connected kitchen, dining room, and living room. Instead of the cellular rooms of earlier homes, Usonian houses adopted open floor plans, so the house was composed of “more free space and [was] more livable.” To avoid adding additional clutter to the open floor plan, integrated furniture was desirable, especially built-in seating and shelving.

At the Jacobs House, walls became windows, and Wright used glass to create sunlit spaces that were connected to the outdoors. Like many of the architect’s creations, the Usonian House was to be both visually and physically connected to the landscape, an integral part of his concept of organic architecture. Wright wrote, “It is in the nature of any organic building to grow from its site, come out of the ground into the light — the ground itself held always as a component basic part of the building itself.” The form of the house was just as natural to a site as a tree that had been growing there for decades. In order to achieve this organic harmony, each home was designed specifically for its site so the plans followed the exact contours of the landscape. Furthermore, the inhabitants could appreciate nature even from the interior through the vast windows. Usonian

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35 Wright, The Natural House, 40.
36 Ibid, 50.
houses were generally in the suburbs where large plots of land could stretch into extended vistas. Because they were located on the edges of cities like Madison, cars were essential. Therefore, the flat roof of the Jacobs House extended and cantilevered to create carports, removing the need for a traditional garage while still encouraging the automobile travel that Wright associated with democracy and freedom in Broadacre City.

In line with the economic concerns of the 1930s, the architect also hoped to use technological developments to reduce the costs of Usonian houses. He encouraged eliminating the use of skilled labor and using pre-cast concrete blocks and prefabricated plumbing, heating, and wiring to decrease building costs, especially those associated with labor. This idea caught on, and architects and developers after Wright continued to experiment with pre-manufactured parts in the post-war era to create affordable housing while also privileging good design. Ultimately the Jacobs House was built for $5,500, including the $500 architect’s fee, although a similar price was never achieved again. In 1954, Wright lamented, “The houses cost a good deal more to build now than when we started to build them in 1938.”37 Even as prices rose, the architect continued to construct Usonian houses alongside his other commissions in an attempt to promote his philosophies for organic architecture and modern living.

Although these private houses were not on exhibit in the same way that his models for Broadacre City were, Wright still used the residences as a way to publicize his ideas. While most citizens could not walk through Usonian houses, they could read about them in the newspapers and see photographs of the architect’s novel designs (Fig. 8). With the Jacobs House and further iterations of Usonian living, the architect was no longer simply creating exhibitions and models for public inspection. Instead, he was creating functioning houses for inhabitation to spread his

37 Ibid, 97.
message. Usonian houses were livable ideas of modern living. While thousands of visitors could not wander through the space like they could in the *Ladies’ Home Journal* living room display at Rockefeller Center, the Jacobs family could truly experience Wright’s proposal for good design in the dwellings of the future. Just like Broadacre City, Usonia embodied Wright’s ideals of freedom and democracy in the modern age, using the machine to advance modern living and to create connections with nature.

1930s World’s Fair Exhibitions

While Frank Lloyd Wright was developing plans for Broadacre City and Usonia, other American architects and manufacturers were simultaneously attempting to introduce modern technology and aesthetics into single family homes in the 1930s and into the 1940s. Like Wright, they understood the power of exhibitions to inform and persuade the public. Manufacturers also realized that full-scale exhibition rooms and inhabitable residences like the Jacobs House were especially powerful. Visitors could clearly see the style and plan of modern dwellings through models and drawings, but they could better imagine inhabiting the spaces if they could walk through furnished living rooms and peek into kitchens with updated appliances. Therefore, other major expositions and designers also employed full-scale structures to introduce the nation to modern aesthetics and the future of dwelling in the machine age. These display structures were especially influential at well-attended expositions like the World’s Fairs, where it was certain that millions of visitors would be reached.

In 1933, the *Century of Progress International Exposition* was held in Chicago. Intended to celebrate the city’s centennial, the World Fair’s theme was technological innovation and featured exhibitions from a variety of companies and developers. One of the major attractions was
the House of Tomorrow, part of the Homes of the Future exhibition, which was designed by George Frederick Keck (Fig. 9). Visitors could enter the full-scale house for a separate fee of ten cents, a significant amount considering entrance to the fair itself was twenty-five cents. Still, it was an incredibly popular attraction. For Keck, the fair was an opportunity to introduce modern architecture to the public, and he took advantage of manufacturers and corporate sponsors to experiment with new technologies and production techniques that would update and facilitate modern living.\footnote{Meghan Drueding, “Edge of Tomorrow: The Unexpected Path of Five ‘Homes of the Future’ From 1933–34,” \textit{Preservation Magazine}, Summer 2018, The National Trust for Historic Preservation, https://savingplaces.org/stories/edge-of-tomorrow-the-unexpected-path-of-five-houses-of-the-future-from-the-1933-worlds-fair#Y128kZPMLt0.} The fair’s pamphlet stated that the designer’s goal was “to find a solution to the many and varied new requirements of a residence in a simple and direct manner.”\footnote{Century Homes, Inc., “House of Tomorrow,” Century of Progress International Exposition Publications 1933-1934, Box 6, Folder 24, The Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections, The University of Chicago Library.} In the House of Tomorrow, materials and space were to be used to the utmost advantage of the inhabitant.

The house was three stories tall with a twelve-sided, almost circular plan (Fig. 10). Its design promoted many of the ideas Frank Lloyd Wright presented a few years later with his vision for Usonia. Garages and even an airplane hangar were located on the bottom floor to promote ease of travel. The house’s walls were entirely glass and surrounded by occupiable balconies on the exterior to connect with the landscape. The glass walls were functional, allowing inhabitants to do away with windows and their “expense of upkeep and other inefficiencies,” and the natural light could be easily controlled with blinds and shades.\footnote{Century Homes, Inc., “House of Tomorrow.”} Additionally, the window walls afforded 360° views of the surrounding nature, as the house was to be located outside of the city center.

Keck designed a steel frame that carried all loads, so no load-bearing walls or partitions were necessary. The rooms were situated radially through the house around the central portion which held the utilities and other services. Thus, the plan was flexible, and the interior layout could

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40 Century Homes, Inc., “House of Tomorrow.”
be easily rearranged without the typical barriers of walls. This was additionally important because the house was a World’s Fair exhibition, and the lack of walls allowed visitors to wander without fear of congestion. The structure’s steel frame was made of slender columns, some of which were left intentionally exposed. Organizers conceded the exposed columns “may appear strange at first glance,” but “tomorrow we will become accustomed to it and will know it to be right and proper and beautiful.”

The aesthetics of the modern style were new and strange, but manufacturers expected exposed columns to be the norm in the future. Exhibitions like the House of Tomorrow worked to acclimate the public to the modern home and ensure consumers would be buying modern materials for their own residences.

The House of Tomorrow’s interior decoration was equally filled with the marvels of modern technology (Fig. 11). Visitors were amazed by the updated appliances, including one of the first dishwashers, air conditioning, and an ‘iceless refrigerator.’ The furniture was designed specifically for Keck’s structure and was intended to harmonize with the architecture and the house as a whole. Designers and manufacturers attempted to keep the impression of space and freedom promoted by the plan even with the interiors fully decorated. Inside the house, large pieces of furniture were pushed against the glass walls to create space and transparent curtains were used to keep the furnished house as open as the architect had intended. The furnishings were essential in contextualizing modernity in the lives of visitors. Before the World’s Fair, many Americans had little experience with modernism. As soon as they walked into the House of Tomorrow, however, visitors could relate to recognizable features of the House of Tomorrow like tables and chairs and imagine how they would use the modernized space if it were their own.

41 Ibid.
In a *Chicago Tribune* article about the exhibition, author Louis Bargolt noted that modern structures like the House of Tomorrow had been built before, “but these houses have not been open to the public for inspection.”\(^{42}\) Though called a house, the House of Tomorrow was not a private residence; it was a full-scale display that acted as an inspiration for other private residences. It was functional, but its main purpose was exhibition, not shelter. Bargolt wrote that even though this site was built specifically for the *Century of Progress* exposition, it was still “a home which can be most comfortably lived in.”\(^{43}\) Even though the design might have been new and peculiar, it was still recognizable as a home, a comfortable environment the visitors could imagine as their own. The public was allowed to inspect the space and encouraged to use the modern ideas in their own homes, and visitors at an event as monumental as the 1933 World’s Fair were bound to further spread the message of modern architecture after they left the exhibition. Even so, Bargolt noted that it was unlikely that the public would start to build homes of tomorrow for themselves, “not right away, at least,” but perhaps it was the house that they would dream of for their children and grandchildren.\(^{44}\) Although modernism was new and exciting to see on display, the public was not yet ready for modern residences on their own streets. They still needed time to adjust to the new aesthetics and familiarizing Americans with the modern style and its streamlined nature would take time, even though they were fascinated by the technology of the dishwasher and air conditioning.

The country had been first introduced to modern architecture a year before the Chicago World’s Fair at the seminal exhibition, *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition*, which went on view at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City in 1932. The show’s curators

\(^{42}\) “House of Tomorrow at Century of Progress Has Walls of Glass,” *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, June 11, 1933.

\(^{43}\) “House of Tomorrow at Century of Progress Has Walls of Glass.”

\(^{44}\) Ibid.
- Alfred Barr, Philip Johnson, and Henry-Russell Hitchcock – presented the international style of modern architecture as an alternative to the eclectic pluralism of American architecture at the time. It embraced the simple, rational forms and clean lines of the machine aesthetic, and it rejected color and ornament. Furthermore, modernist architects were promoting a social change that would raise overall living standards through architecture. A model of Le Corbusier’s Villa Savoye (Poissy, France 1929–1931) was central to the exhibition, and its plain white façade, ribbon windows, and flat roof became synonymous with the International Style (Fig. 12). Thus, the machine aesthetic of modernism was generally understood as cold by the American public, a sentiment they did not typically want to associate with the intimacy of their homes. But with each exhibition like the House of Tomorrow, designers attempted to make progress until families became accustomed to and excited about building residences with modern technology and aesthetics.

Organizers continued to exhibit modern architecture at the 1939 World’s Fair, held in New York, which expanded on the ideas presented six years earlier at the Century of Progress exposition. On display at the General Motors Pavilion was Futurama, a model of a future American city as designers projected it would look in 1960, the town of tomorrow (Fig. 13). Designed by Norman Bel Geddes and loosely based on St. Louis, the downtown was composed of sleek, glass high-rises, and massive highways led from the city center to the suburban paradise. The model was not full-scale, and there were 500,000 buildings and one million trees represented. Although visitors could not wander through the town as they could in the House of Tomorrow, the display was still interactive. Guests sat in seats that moved on a conveyor belt through the idealized city (Fig. 14). Audio equipment was embedded in each of the chairs, and a guide’s voice would explain
to visitors what they were seeing as they moved throughout the exhibition. Furthermore, 10,000 of the 50,000 miniature cars raced along the model highways so the public could watch them traverse the landscape, from the suburbs to the city and everywhere in between.

Over five million visitors saw the attraction over the course of the fair, and it was so popular that General Motors recreated it at the 1964 World’s Fair, also in New York. Futurama expanded less on individual residences like the House of Tomorrow, and instead promoted the automobiles that would allow for single-family living in the green suburbs. As a company, General Motors had a financial stake in convincing the public that highways, and cars, were the future mode of transportation (Fig. 15). City planners and architects like Frank Lloyd Wright were eager to see their plans for idyllic suburbs realized, and they benefited from the like interests of corporations. Exhibits like Futurama wowed the public with the promises of what highways could do. They agreed: the technology of the automobile would lead to functional modern residences within the natural beauty of the suburbs.

In the 1930s, designers and manufacturers were focused on fostering public interest in a new aesthetic for living that included advanced technology and organic materials, so they staged a variety of exhibitions. They were also interested in defining how these modern houses would be organized on the edges of the city, where sites were thought to be cleaner and healthier since the suburbs were less developed and less crowded than downtown areas. Just as Wright presented a large-scale plan for Broadacre City alongside the particulars of individual houses in his Usonian experiments, so did the United States World’s Fairs as they presented detailed ideas for both the House of Tomorrow and the Town of Tomorrow.

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[45] The audio and visual materials outlined for visitors how the novel highways, as well as on- and off-ramps would function. They also explained that outmoded businesses and undesirable slums would be cleared for Futurama, to replace the old with the new so Americans could live in the future.
The Influence of Written Publications

Despite the efforts of world expositions, influential European designers like Le Corbusier, and the national and international influence of Frank Lloyd Wright, *Architectural Forum* reported in 1939 that “new dwellings in the U.S. landscape are still predominantly traditional.” While exhibitions were powerful in harnessing public interest in modern living, journals, magazines, and the new production of mass print media also had a strong influence on the architectural style of the 1930s. Many of these were aimed at middle- to upper-class audiences, including *Good Housekeeping, Better Homes and Gardens, Ladies’ Home Journal, and Town and Country*. These publications paid close attention to the established Colonial Revival architectural tradition, featuring drawings, photographs, and details that inspired architects, manufacturers, and their clientele. Many stylistically traditional homes built in the 1930s exhibited characteristics of the Colonial Revival movement such as columns, pediments, and casement windows with exterior shutters that were promoted in *Better Homes and Gardens*. Other journals, however, were invested in spreading the message of affordable modern living, and *Architectural Forum* reassured invested readers that the number of modern residences was growing by the end of the decade, just slower than expected.

Frank Lloyd Wright understood the reach of mass media as well as the power of exhibition. In January 1938, the architect published plans, photographs, and ideas for his first Usonian house for Herbert and Katherine Jacobs in *Architectural Forum* (Fig. 8). The physical structure was important, but since it was a private residence, many more Americans could see the house, its design, and its value through images. In *Architectural Forum*, the architect published for the Jacobs

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family, and for all Americans, “a pattern for more simple and at the same time more gracious living.”\textsuperscript{48} For Wright, gracious living was possible in a house that was at once functional and connected to nature through the machine, tailored to both the site and the inhabitants. But the article about the Jacobs House was not really about that specific house. Instead, Wright presented in the form of mass media his ideas for functional, stylish, affordable living, as a kind of playbook. He listed elements that could be eliminated: the visible roof, the garage, and the old-fashioned basement, among others. He declared that five materials would be used: wood, brick, cement, paper, and glass, using horizontal systems of construction. He stipulated that furniture was “unnecessary except as the walls can be made to include them or be them.”\textsuperscript{49} Central to the Usonian plan was the spacious living room which visually extended into the garden as well as the convenient cooking and dining space. In \textit{Architectural Forum}, Wright was at once laying out the necessities for his idea of modern living in a practical set of guidelines while also proving it was possible to include all of these essentials for a reasonable price, as clearly demonstrated in the Jacobs House. This article would be read by thousands of Americans, architects, manufacturers, and clients alike. Through publications, the Jacobs House was on display as a national prototype. Anyone could take Wright’s guidebook and apply it to other sites. Though it could not be physically inhabited by the public like the House of Tomorrow, Usonian houses had similar goals and effects as a display house and could reach a wide audience through mass media. The Jacobs House as featured in \textit{Architectural Forum} aimed to introduce the country to what modern living could actually be outside of expositions and galleries, and readers were fascinated by Wright’s ideas.

\textsuperscript{48} Wright, “The Jacobs House,” 78. 
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
In the fall of 1938, *Architectural Forum* partnered with *LIFE* magazine for “Eight Houses for Modern Living,” a program which commissioned eight nationally-recognized architects to design homes for four American families, of different income levels and from different regions of the country. For each family, one architect designed a “traditional” home and another designed a “modern” home, responding to the needs and desires of the inhabitants to show that good housing could be affordable (Fig. 16). Both the traditional and modern examples were economical and efficient, limiting wasted space and taking advantage of developments in construction. The magazine noted that a modern house designed by Edward D. Stone, “may look strange to you but it is a super-efficient machine for living,” noting the style was still not widely recognized, but emphasizing the technological aspects that the public generally admired. The modern houses typically had flat roofs and window walls, while the traditional houses had more colonial ornamentation with high gable- roofs, symmetrical windows, and exterior shutters. The *LIFE* magazine spread also included a Usonian house designed by Frank Lloyd Wright for a Minnesota family making $5,000–$6,000 per year (Fig. 17). It featured many of Wright’s signature elements: the horizontal orientation, flat roof, carport, and use of natural materials, and it presented his ideas for Usonia to the audience of another national magazine.

After introducing each of the houses and their features, *LIFE* asked readers to answer to the question, “do you like the ‘modern’ house?” in order to gauge how Americans responded to the new style of home. The magazine directly compared traditional and modern houses, designed for the same family, in the same location, at the same price point, and then surveyed their audience to understand the public perception of the two styles. *Architectural Forum* later reported that the polls showed “a consistent consumer opinion of 40 odd percent favorable to the modern house,

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50 “Eight Houses for Modern Living,” *LIFE*, September 26, 1938, 50
some four times the figure of a few years back.” The journal attributed this increase in favorable responses to the newfound realization that modern houses could include warm, inviting materials and furnishings rather than just the “frigid white symbol of a small cult,” which “immeasurably broadened [their] appeal.” The *International Style* exhibition at MoMA had originally introduced modernism as frigid and oriented towards the machine aesthetic, but as time passed and the style traveled around the country, local architects developed more welcoming regional variations that journals could show to readers. Still, it took convincing through other exhibitions and publications, and, by the late 1930s and early 1940s, the public began to realize that the International Style was not the only approach to modern living.

In an October 1938 issue of *LIFE*, the magazine offered readers the opportunity to purchase scale models of the eight houses for modern living, which they called “the eight most talked-about houses in the U.S.” Readers could inspect them in full color on their own tables (Fig. 18). These miniature models were situated between magazine photographs and full-scale exhibition homes on the spectrum of types of display used to introduce Americans to modernism. They were not entirely inhabitable, but they could provide more depth to readers’ understanding of the eight homes for modern living than two-dimensional photographs. *LIFE* also claimed that department stores throughout the U.S. were working with local builders in “erecting and furnishing these actual houses for their customers to inspect,” although this project did not come to fruition. Even so, the magazine recognized the influence of models, both to-scale and life-size, and other department stores hosted design shows that directly marketed their modern products to

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52 “Modern Houses in America,” 2.
53 Ibid.
54 During this period, *House Beautiful* magazine was also known for championing Wright and the concept of organic architecture against the International Style.
55 “LIFE … puts your dream house on your table,” *LIFE*, October 10, 1938, 68.
56 “LIFE … puts your dream house on your table,” 68.
consumers. After the war, newspapers and magazines continued to make an impact on public perception towards modern architecture through pages as well as through exhibitions.

In 1945, John Entenza, the owner and editor of *Arts and Architecture* magazine, made a further attempt to popularize modern residential design through full-scale displays. As part of the “Case Study House Program,” *Arts and Architecture* acted as a client for eight nationally-known architects, including Charles Eames, a St. Louis native, asking them to design and construct what they imagined affordable, modern housing to look like after the Second World War. Entenza was capitalizing on the renewed interest in modern technology and design in the post-war era. He anticipated the program would bring about great change in the American understanding of the house, writing, “Perhaps we will cling longest to the symbol of ‘house’ as we have known it, or perhaps we will realize that in accommodating ourselves to a new world the most important step is avoiding retrogression in to the old.” Entenza suggested that perhaps this experiment would force Americans to realize that to truly live in the new world of the 1940s, the “house” as previously understood might disappear. Through the Case Study houses, *Arts and Architecture* was promoting to the country a new, and better, version of the ‘house’ they had previously known, one designed by modern architects.

From the beginning, Entenza’s plan was to build full-scale residences for visitors to explore, recognizing the power of being able to walk through an inhabitable structure. The magazine supplied a plot of land for the designers to “create ‘good’ living conditions” for eight American families, which, once constructed, would be open to the public for inspection.

57 As insinuated in *LIFE* magazine, department stores would continue to host their own displays of good design to encourage consumers to buy their products. See: David Conradsen and Genevieve Cortinovis, eds., *St. Louis Modern* (St. Louis: Saint Louis Art Museum, 2015), 138–144.
architects were free to define “good” living conditions and to do so were able to choose from any variety of products and materials from national manufacturers. Generally, the Case Study houses emphasized connection to nature through glass walls, and they privileged open floor plans. Because the land provided was flat, however, they were not always easy to integrate into the landscape, as was popularized by the modern houses of Frank Lloyd Wright. Art historian Esther McCoy characterized the Case Study house program as the only program of house building in the U.S. before the modern style was generally accepted since the public was still slightly wary in the mid-1940s. At the time, manufacturers were not convinced that modern design would gain broad appeal, but the Case Study houses proved incredibly popular with Americans. The first six houses boasted 368,000 visitors. Importantly, the houses were shown in context with contemporary furnishings and state-of-the-art appliances because it was believed that would make the modern architecture more palatable. However, the number of visitors did not directly translate into an influx of modern house building. The ability to walk through the Case Study houses in context could be persuasive, but just because people were fascinated by the new style and construction methods on display did not mean they were eager to live in similar houses.

Even if Americans were not quite ready to take the leap into modern living, they were fascinated by modern architecture. These types of programs and exhibitions demonstrated an immense interest in the late 1930s and early 1940s of rethinking residential architecture for a new era. Scholar Helen Searing writes that, “The dwelling, for so long relegated to the category of mere shelter, now became the crucible of formal innovation.” Houses were driving modern design in the post-war period. Architects continued to develop their ideas and display homes like the House

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61 McCoy, “Arts and Architecture Case Study Houses,” 54.
of Tomorrow and the Case Study Houses in person and in print. While the construction of modern houses became more acceptable in the post-war era, ultimately examples of lived-in modern residences were few compared to more traditional dwelling types. This was true across the country, as well as in the Midwestern city of St. Louis, which was growing westward and developing suburbs in which to build both traditional and modern residences.

St. Louis and Its Suburbs

The City of St. Louis has long had a contentious relationship with its surrounding suburbs. In 1876, the city officially separated from the then largely agricultural county after serious disagreements about city and suburban interests and the government’s responsibilities to each (Fig. 19).63 By the 1920s, St. Louis County had many suburban municipalities, each with their own local governments as well as many separate school districts. Adequate services, however, were not established across the county until later in the 1920s and 1930s. Therefore, many smaller municipalities combined in order to offer expanded and enhanced services to the growing number of residents.64 For example, what became the City of Ladue, a wealthy township west of St. Louis City, until 1936 comprised several smaller towns, which eventually all merged within the present limits. Until the twentieth century, the land now encompassed by Ladue was almost entirely rural, populated by small farms, with a few stores and service establishments at key crossroads. To this day, the city and other wealthy suburbs like it try to preserve this natural, bucolic atmosphere with strict zoning laws that prefer residential construction over businesses and privilege stylistically

63 The author is grateful to Esley Hamilton, former Preservation Historian at the St. Louis County Department of Parks & Recreation, for answering questions about the relationship between St. Louis City and County in an interview on February 9, 2022.

64 Charlene Bry, *Ladue Found: Celebrating 100 Years of Rural-to-Regal Past* (St. Louis, MO: Virginia Publishing Co., 2011), 159.
traditional structures. Even so, some interesting examples of modern residences exist from the 1930s and 1940s, and selected houses will be further examined in the following chapter. This section will in particular examine the history of the City of Ladue because of its relationship to the City of St. Louis and its history of strict zoning laws. Ladue is representative of many other wealthy western suburbs that had similar connections to traditional planning and modern residential architecture.

Like many other Americans, St. Louisans in the 1930s were concerned with the health risks of living in the city center, and those with means began moving to the suburbs to escape the pollution in the industrial downtown, as well as the growing black population. The City of St. Louis in particular had a long-standing “smoke problem” which began in the 1820s when local government allowed fire clay kilns to dry brick in the newly established residential areas. As the population grew and industrialization developed, the smoke problem worsened. Bituminous, or “soft” coal, was available in great abundance locally in St. Louis’ suburbs and in massive amounts in southern Illinois. Coal was used for home heating, cooking, to power riverboats, in the city’s many iron mills, and in brick manufacturing. Even the street lamps throughout the city used coal gas. A biproduct of soft coal is bitumen or asphalt, which coated and blackened buildings and streets citywide. The city attempted various methods of limiting the smoke and its effects, but by the 1930s the smoke was unbearable, especially to middle- and upper-class families looking for desirable homes in which to raise their families. The issue culminated on November 11, 1939, later deemed Black Tuesday, when the pervasive smog succeeded in entirely blacking out the city during daylight hours (Fig. 20). Streetlights were on throughout the day, but still motorists and

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pedestrians had trouble navigating the city streets. Black Tuesday received national attention and forced the city to enact air pollution ordinances to keep the air clean and residents and workers healthy. Even so, the smoke was likely a major driving force for families to move to the greener, cleaner suburbs.67

While the thick smoke was a filthy nuisance, it also represented the economic prosperity of the city because coal was used to produce and ship brick.68 The material has a significant history in St. Louis because the city was founded on rich clay deposits, the base material for modern bricks, and clay mining played a significant role in Missouri’s commercial growth. Since St. Louis is located between two river banks, the ground was abundant in a variety of clay, allowing manufacturers to diversify their produce for wide uses.69 By the early twentieth century, St. Louis was the largest brick making city in the world.70 Local architects in the twentieth century recognized that “the finest brick in the country can be obtained right here in St. Louis and it is one of the most reasonable materials that can be used.”71 The material is common in both modern and traditional houses in the St. Louis region, and it characterizes the area architects’ regional variation of residential modern architecture.

In 1910, suburban development first began in the municipalities of St. Louis County. With the automobile, county municipalities became even more accessible to city dwellers, and wealthier St. Louisans in particular began to put down roots in Ladue, partly due to the St. Louis Country Club’s move to the suburb in 1914.72 The municipality became the Village of Ladue in 1928, after

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68 Troen and Holt, St Louis, 113.
69 Brick by Brick: Building St. Louis and the Nation, (St. Louis: Samuel Cupples House Saint Louis University, 2004), 6.
70 Brick by Brick, 2.
72 The country club had moved from S. Hanley Road and Wydown Boulevard. Its new grounds and a surrounding large lot subdivision were designed by Henry Wright.
residents worried that the surrounding cities would incorporate the land because their wealth made it “potentially tax-rich territory.”  In 1934, the St. Louis Globe-Democrat noted that, “More and more have men with the financial means necessary to provide for themselves and their families sumptuous retreats in the county [and leave] the turmoil of the city,” and many of them enjoyed country life in the suburbs while their business interests remained in St. Louis. At the time, the majority of county lands remained undeveloped, so families had the space to construct new homes to their liking while also maintaining the access to nature they desired. While wealthy residents sought healthier living conditions outside of the city, downtown St. Louis remained the commercial center of the region.

The suburbs continued to grow, and, in 1936, the Village of Ladue and two surrounding villages merged to become the City of Ladue. At the time, the population was 2,392, and it increased as more and more prominent St. Louis families moved to the suburbs. One of the first priorities of Ladue officials was creating zoning laws to preserve the idyllic atmosphere of the rural land and traditional architecture. Thus, Ladue has long held detailed records of all building activity and tightly controlled construction. In the late 1930s, the city hired St. Louis-based urban planning firm Harland Bartholomew and Associates. To further ensure the architectural integrity of the suburb, a three-person architectural review board was established in 1940, which required that “building permits conform to the style, design, and size of surrounding structures.” Together, Harland Bartholomew and Associates and the review board, whose participants were and continue to be volunteers, instituted strict zoning rules, the majority of which are still enacted in the twenty-

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73 Bry, Ladue Found, 113
74 Ibid.
75 In 1940, Ladue’s population was 3,976, and by 1950 it was 5,386. The population peaked in 1970 with 10,306 residents. Robert E. Hannon, ed. St. Louis: Its Neighborhoods and Neighbors, Landmarks and Milestones (St. Louis: St. Louis Regional Commerce and Growth Association, 1986), 176-177.
76 Bry, Ladue Found, 190
first century (Fig. 21). One of the most significant laws required that lots cannot be smaller than 1.8 acres, double the minimum land requirements in St. Louis City at the time, and even today many Ladue lots are at least three acres. Zoning laws also limited the number of businesses, keeping them away from residential areas, and banned high-rises and multi-family housing. Even so, the review board had no issues with the construction of country clubs and churches within the City of Ladue boundaries. The spread-out nature of the plan and the wide spacing between housing, businesses, and services meant that cars were the most practical means of travel through the city, even though up to the 1930s the main transportation between St. Louis and the county were streetcars. But as the suburbs developed, a resident recalled, “It was nearly impossible to get anywhere, for especially families without cars.” These car-centric plans and architectural regulations indicated Ladue’s desire to remain a quiet, residential suburb with primarily traditional architecture that catered to wealthy, white neighbors in single-family homes.

A survey of the City of Ladue completed by the Missouri State Parks office in 1986 characterized both the traditional and modern architect-designed houses of the 1930s as contributing greatly to the understanding of “trends and accomplishments at the top of the architectural profession during that time.” But while Ladue includes many examples of fascinating mid-century dwellings, the architecture overwhelmingly represents the interests of the wealthy residents and the review board. At the time, these residents were the only ones who could afford to experiment with the new modern style, especially as the economy recovered after the

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77 The plans of Harland Bartholomew and Associates are also recognized as a contributing factor to segregation in St. Louis, with zoning laws having lasting class and racial implications that have maintained a generally wealthy, white suburbia. See: Catalina Freixas, and Mark Abbott, eds. Segregation by Design: Conversations and Calls for Action in St. Louis (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018).
78 These zoning laws were in line with the residential development practices that Frederick Law Olmsted, Bartholomew and other American city planners had been advocating since the nineteenth century.
79 Bry, Ladue Found, 105
Great Depression, but they were still generally architecturally conservative clients. The same is true of most other St. Louis County towns. Although significant examples of early residential modern architecture exist, they are vastly outnumbered by more traditional styles. In a survey of subdivisions built between 1940 and 1950, preservation historian Esley Hamilton found that amongst all county municipalities, modern residences were few.\textsuperscript{81} Thus, limited examples exist that show architects experimenting with the modern style and technological developments in materials and construction when they were being first introduced to the public. A handful of modern residences in Ladue and like suburbs, however, offer a window into the accomplishments of local architects who were inspired by the nationally circulating ideas surrounding residential modern, as published in journals or exhibited in expositions like the World’s Fairs. In certain instances, such as the houses designed by St. Louis architects Isadore Shank and William A. Bernoudy, the Ladue architectural review board was relatively supportive of structures that embraced modern aesthetics. Still, these buildings’ histories are often overshadowed by the generally conservative nature of Ladue’s architecture, and thus they must be considered alongside the few examples of early residential modern constructed in the other surrounding county municipalities, like Kirkwood or University City.

For the most part, the zoning restrictions and the power of the architectural review board have, even in the twenty-first, protected property values and “reinforced the generally conservative taste of the community.”\textsuperscript{82} Across the country exhibitions, exhibition homes, and journals were promoting the function and aesthetics of modern living, but consumers were generally not ready to embrace these new residences. This was true in St. Louis as well. Though the wealthy residents


\textsuperscript{82} Hamilton, “Central Ladue Historic Buildings Survey, Ladue, Missouri.”
of suburbs like Ladue could afford to build single-family modern houses in the early days of the style, they were reluctant, despite any fascination with the new architectural offerings. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reported in 1939 that only a few modern houses had been built. Author Otto Fuerbringer wrote,

“The great mass of Americans eager for the new materials and inventions which science has placed at their disposal are still strangely leery about erecting the framework of a home and arranging the distribution of space in such a way as to make the best use of these materials and inventions. They prefer modern plumbing, electrical, and ventilating devices behind an exterior straight out of old England, France, or Spain; or at least an eclectic façade, with details borrowed anywhere, generally resulting in a characterless building.”

Fuerbringer asserted that the technology was prized, but not the aesthetics. Therefore, designers and manufacturers continued to market the style to St. Louisans through exhibitions after the Second World War.

Even as modernism became more well recognized and documented across the country, it continued to be on display in St. Louis as manufacturers and designers alike continued to market their products and ideas. In the early 1940s, MoMA began promoting modern objects that they termed “good design,” and by 1948 St. Louisans were offered a taste of these kinds of objects through the seminal exhibition *Good Design is Your Business* at the Saint Louis Art Museum. During its one-month run, the exhibition attracted an impressive 25,000 visitors, who were introduced to beautiful, functional, affordable objects that promised to make their home life easier

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84 *Good Design Is Your Business* was originally organized by the Albright Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York in 1947.
and more attractive. Some pieces of good design were from national manufacturers but a wide variety of objects from local companies was also featured.\textsuperscript{85} Business leaders were interested in these kinds of exhibitions that would not only encourage public interest in good design but also foster the local creation of industrial design.\textsuperscript{86} \textit{Good Design is Your Business} introduced through exhibition ideal modern interior design at a variety of price points to an enthralled audience. “The objective of the exhibition was threefold: to inform consumers, educate industrial designers, and, as the name would suggest, to persuade manufacturers of the economic benefits of modern design.”\textsuperscript{87}

Throughout the post-war era the Saint Louis Art Museum, spearheaded by influential directors Perry T. Rathbone and Charles Nagel, Jr. hosted exhibitions promoting a modern lifestyle through interior design, and residents continued to be fascinated by modernism in galleries as it slowly started making its way permanently into their neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{88} The catalog for \textit{Good Design Is Your Business} declared,

“The interest of American art institutes, the increasing number of displays and exhibits of modern industrial design … and the increasing interest of the press are stimulating the interest of modern America in modern design on a scale unapproached in prior years. A major educational job is being accomplished.”\textsuperscript{89}

\textsuperscript{85} David Conradsen and Genevieve Cortinovis, eds. \textit{St Louis Modern} (St. Louis: Saint Louis Art Museum, 2015), 128.
\textsuperscript{86} Conradsen and Cortinovis, \textit{St. Louis Modern}, 124.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid, 128.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid, 125.
\textsuperscript{89} \textit{Good Design is Your Business: a guide to well-designed household objects made in U.S.A} (Buffalo, NY: Buffalo Fine Arts Academy, 1947), 29.
The catalog emphasized that these exhibitions and magazines effectively educated the public about modern design. Therefore, developers, manufacturers, and architects like Frank Lloyd Wright published their ideas widely, stimulating American interest. Some displays included full-scale rooms with modern architecture and furnishings shown in their context. These inhabitable spaces proved incredibly powerful as Americans became fascinated with the possibilities for the future. Still, although the public enjoyed visiting the exhibitions, it took time for them to want to implement these ideas in their own homes. While modern houses were relatively few in the 1930s and 1940s in the St. Louis suburbs, some were built, even in places with strict zoning laws like Ladue. In particular, these residences were built by local architects, who used their own funds to experiment and build functional, attractive houses for their families that advanced the regional understanding of the modern style and tried to convince St. Louisans that their homes could be warm and inviting and, at the same time, technologically advanced.
Chapter 2: St. Louis Modern Houses, 1938–1951

While St. Louis has many celebrated public modern buildings, the city’s relationship with early and mid-century modernism can also be recounted through its local architects who shaped the city’s interpretation of residential modern and the single-family home designed for functional living. Examples of these houses still exist, but many are continually under threat, as the land they stand on is often more valuable with new construction. Identifying and understanding these houses offers a unique perspective on the inception and development of residential modernism in this Midwestern city, which was still the tenth largest in the United States in 1960. Architects like Isadore Shank, Joseph Murphy, and Harris Armstrong who were experimenting with modernism in St. Louis designed and built houses for themselves and their families in the late 1930s, when the style was first being introduced across the country through exhibitions, journals, and the work of architects like Frank Lloyd Wright. Their early houses reveal particular intricacies of their design processes because they were built without consideration for the desires of an outside client and offered more creative freedom, even if they still had to answer to architectural review boards.

It took time to convince St. Louis clients to adopt modern design approaches, but the architects were eager to express their ideals for modern life in their own homes and ideally convince others to follow suit. A decade later, at the end of the 1940s, modern residences had gained traction in the nation and in the region, as seen through the influence that Frank Lloyd Wright had at the Kraus House, just outside of the city, and the work of his protegé William Adair Bernoudy, which engaged the public and established modern residences in St. Louis as more approachable at mid-century.
The Kraus House (1951–1956)

Frank Lloyd Wright is widely recognized for his contributions to American architecture and modern living, such as Broadacre City and Usonia, and his residential designs are found across the country, including in St. Louis. In a letter, Russell Kraus, a local artist, admitted to a “consuming passion to live in a house designed by [Wright].”90 Kraus was an ardent admirer of Wright’s work, and he and his wife, Ruth, a lawyer, were eager to build a house to the architect’s exact specifications in Missouri. In a testament to the influence of print publications, the couple was first enchanted by Wright’s residential work when they saw the Pope-Leighey House featured in a 1948 issue of House Beautiful.91 Both Ruth and Russell were graduates of Washington University in St. Louis and committed to promoting Wright’s work in the region, especially through the construction of their own house. By the end of 1948, the Krauses had a secured a commitment from the architect to design their residence, and in 1949 Russell acquired four acres of land in wealthy western suburb of Kirkwood, Missouri, allowing construction to begin.92

The Kraus House is a later example of Wright’s Usonian houses, although it did not embody the cost-effective principles Wright originally championed for this house form. In August 1950, when Wright finished the preliminary designs, he estimated the overall cost would be $35,000, although Russell later calculated that the actual price was “numerous times more.”93 This cost increase was mostly due to the fact that the Krauses gave the architect such freedom and tailored the construction to his exact specifications, meaning that a share of the building materials

91 The Pope-Leighey House was built in 1940 in Falls Church, VA. The house has since been moved to Alexandria, VA for preservation purposes. It is now open to the public and operated by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. More information can be found on their website: http://www.woodlawnpopeleighey.org/the-pope-leighey-house.
92 The author is grateful to the Frank Lloyd Wright House in Ebsworth Park for their generosity and knowledge offered in tours of the house on August 26, 2021 and March 20, 2022.
93 Hessian, The Frank Lloyd Wright House in Ebsworth Park, 42.
could not be prefabricated, and their assembly required skilled labor.\cite{94} Wright’s plan for the Kraus House was incredibly angular, composed of a series of overlapping equilateral parallelograms that caused the sharp edges of the structure to cantilever and extend into the landscape (Fig. 22). The architect embedded the structure within the natural slope of the site, adding outdoor terraces, vast windows, and glass skylights. Russell designed the patterns for the stained-glass windows, which were approved by Wright to be cohesive with the architecture. Overall costs were also raised when the Krauses were forced to buy adjoining land as a privacy buffer because of the floor-to-ceiling windows, which, while bringing light into the house, also invited neighbors’ wandering eyes. Although the house had its share of financial issues, it was finally completed in 1956, over eight years after Kraus first contacted Wright.

The Kraus House sits atop a hill, at the end of a winding driveway that sets it back from the street and in the middle of a field of persimmon trees, and as few trees as possible were disturbed during construction. The entrance is at the back of the house, opposite the façade visitors first encounter when coming up driveway, and covered by the flat, cantilevered roof that forms the carport. There is no exterior ornament, in line with the modernist preference for clean lines and simple façades that rejected classically derived applied ornament (Fig. 23). Instead, modern façades promoted the beauty of their natural materials. In this case, the exterior of the Kraus House was constructed of bright red bricks that complemented the warm wooden features and red concrete floors inside the house.\cite{95} Wright’s parallelogram-based, angular geometry continues on the interior, forming strong acute angles where the walls and windows meet. None of the rooms are rectangular, resulting in the need for specially-designed, parallelogram-shaped beds. The

\cite{94} Ruth Kraus worked diligently to reduce labor costs for the pointed corner bricks. She noticed decorative triangular bricks on a St. Louis building and traced them to a local manufacturer, the Alton Brick Company, where she was able to obtain the mold for the Kraus House’s special angular bricks at a lower price.

\cite{95} The wood used in the Kraus House is tidewater red cypress and was expensive in the post-war era.
architect arranged the bedrooms at the north-west end of the home and decided that enough privacy was offered by their location that pony walls were sufficient, and no doors were needed. In fact, the only doors inside the house are on the three bathrooms. The living room is grounded by a central hearth, as is typical of Wright’s homes, and surrounded by built-in seating and wooden shelving. He also designed a series of hexagonal coffee tables and stools that could be rearranged around the living room as necessary, contributing to the flexibility and functionalism of the modern home. In the open floor plan, the living room is connected to the compact kitchen, a tight space that is still able to fit all necessary appliances, though counterspace is limited. Russell Kraus had also requested an in-home studio for his artistic practice, which the architect situated beyond the kitchen at south-east end of the house. The studio is connected to the main entrance and living room by a gallery hallway that runs the length of the east wall (Fig. 24).

As with most Wright-designed structures, the Kraus House was a public marvel from the minute it was conceived. Once the construction plans were announced in 1952 for the first Wright house in the area, news traveled quickly, especially within architectural circles. Ruth wrote a letter to the architect describing “a steady stream of camera-toting architecture students” from Washington University.⁹⁶ Even during construction, before it was inhabitable and able to be used for its primary purpose, the house was an attraction, presenting ideas of modernism to the local community and familiarizing the public with Wright’s Usonian style. Although it was intended to be an intimate home, and its owners were intent on maintaining their privacy, the house always had a public image due to the fame of its architect.⁹⁷ Russell and Ruth Kraus lived happily in the

⁹⁷ Other inhabitants of Usonian houses have reiterated the intense public interest in their homes, especially during and directly after the construction of the house. Roland Riesley, the original client and current owner of Wright’s Riesley House (Pleasantville, New York, 1951), recalled, “I remember in our early years in Usonia, people were very curious. They felt their interest in the architecture was essentially a license to walk up and look around.” Jennifer Gray, “Private to Public: Homeowners on Opening Their Houses to Visitors,” *Save Wright*, vol. 12, iss. 1 (Fall 2021), 20.
house for many years, although their dedication to exactly maintaining Wright’s original design proved all-consuming and grew more difficult as they aged. Russell lamented, “I have devoted my entire life to this house and I’m very weary. Everything, just everything, has become a great problem.”

Though they loved the house, keeping it to museum quality was incredibly frustrating for Ruth and Russell because they were at the same time simply trying to live in their home. Ultimately, their remarkable passion for Wright’s architecture was incredibly valuable for local preservationists.

In the late 1980s, Judith Bettendorf, a St. Louis-based artist and interior designer, became interested in purchasing the Kraus House but decided that it would not be able to accommodate her family of five. She realized, though, that the house could potentially be at risk in the future, and direct efforts were necessary to ensure that the architectural marvel was not lost to time or development. In 1997, Bettendorf organized a group of concerned citizens, including local arts leaders Joanne Kohn, Eugene J. Mackey III, and Peter Shank, who established a non-profit organization to raise the funds for the purchase, restoration, and upkeep of Wright’s first St. Louis design. The non-profit’s ultimate goal was to transform the site into a functioning house museum, officially inviting the public inside and opening the entire site as a cultural attraction dedicated to modern architecture.

That same year, the house was added to the National Register of Historic Places, offering it a degree of legal protection and a recognized place within the American legacy of modern architecture.

After Ruth died in 1992, Russell Kraus was interested in selling to the non-profit organization instead of the developers who were hungering for his prime acreage. In 2000, Barney

98 Hessian, The Frank Lloyd Wright House in Ebsworth Park, 10.
99 The author is grateful to Kathryn Feldt, Executive Director of the Frank Lloyd Wright House in Ebsworth Park, for the information and insights offered in an interview on October 27, 2021.
A. Ebsworth, a St. Louis businessman and art collector, made a generous donation that allowed the non-profit to formally purchase the Kraus House the following year. The organization was officially named the Frank Lloyd Wright House at Ebsworth Park (FLWHEP) to honor the donation and, immediately after the purchase was finalized, signed a lease with St. Louis County. In the lease the county agreed to provide the groundskeeping services, while the FLWHEP was charged with managing the restoration of the house and its development as a museum. Because of the dedicated stewardship of Russell and Ruth, and their respect for mid-century modern design, the house and all of the original Wright-designed furniture remained intact as a collection in good condition. The FLWHEP was determined to restore the structure to its original state, while making thoughtful concessions to allow more comfortable access for visitors. While the architecture would not drastically change, use of the space transitioned from semi-private to fully public, necessitating adjustments to accommodate more people than just Russell, Ruth, and the design students admiring the structure.

Now operated by two full-time staff, a board, and a team of volunteers, the Kraus House continues to grow as its organization becomes more established and their offerings and interest increase. The FLWHEP is currently looking to the future as they plan to attract and educate more visitors each year, and this development has necessitated physical growth. To the benefit of the non-profit, Wright had designed more structures in the same architectural language for the site that could not be completed in the 1950s because of financial constraints. One of these designs was for an entry gate that was ultimately constructed in 2011 when the organization invested in a widened visitors’ driveway to make the entrance more visible. Wright also drew plans for a horse stable

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100 The Kraus House was purchased in 2001 for 1.7 million dollars.
101 At the same time, the FLWHEP cleared a portion of the landscape to make more space for parking onsite, that would allow them to expand tour offerings. The cleared site was carefully chosen so as to minimally disrupt the views from the house.
to accompany the house and provide shelter for Ruth’s two horses on site that was never completed (Fig. 25). Executive Director Kathryn Feldt currently has visions of constructing the stable according to the architect’s original designs but to be instead used as a visitor center for the twenty-first century. The visitor center’s programming would include gallery space, a library, and a small gift shop, as well as practicalities like restrooms and a staff kitchen. In keeping with their mission, the modern style of the proposed visitor center would harmonize with the site and the house as the architect intended, while simultaneously offering the organization the space to grow and provide more services to their guests.

The Kraus House has many lessons to teach about Wright’s architecture, but it hopes to also convey broader themes and ideas to its visitors. “We want to build public programs around it dedicated to good design and architecture,” explained former Board Chairman Joanne Kohn.\footnote{Hessian, \textit{The Frank Lloyd Wright House in Ebsworth Park}, 71–72.} The FLWHEP understands that the majority of people visit the house to admire Wright’s plans for Usonia, but the board aspires to simultaneously foster appreciation of the architecture and landscape of St. Louis and beyond.\footnote{Ibid.} One of the ways the FLWHEP tries to achieve its more expansive goals is through curation and exhibitions that animate the house in compelling ways. In the case of the Kraus House, the term “exhibition” is used more loosely than in a traditional gallery. Like in many house museums, exhibitions at the Kraus House are not typically formalized with wall texts, glass cases, published catalogs, or specialized tours in order to avoid distracting visitors from the overall atmosphere and the original architecture. Instead, objects are subtly rotated on the built-in shelving and frames are exchanged on the interior brick walls in an attempt to enliven the experience around chosen modernist themes.
One of the FLWHEP’s founding board members, Peter Shank, is also the house’s curator.\textsuperscript{104} He is clear that his objective is to center the house’s curatorial program around mid-century modernism and Wright. Ruth and Russell Kraus are mentioned on regular tours, but the vast majority of their belongings have been removed in order for visitors to better focus on the architecture. Some of their possessions remain on permanent display, such as two of Russell’s paintings. A self-portrait of Russell and a portrait of Ruth are mounted on the wall in the studio and are used for visitor reference when docents detail the Krauses’ passion for Wright’s work (Fig. 26). Besides these two relatively small works, the organization currently owns one more Kraus painting, although Shank is hoping to obtain more to complete the organization’s collection. Besides the original Wright-designed furniture and textiles, few objects remain on permanent display in order to avoid the cluttered feeling that persisted when Russell’s artwork permeated the space in the late twentieth. Anecdotes describe the artist frequently leaving his materials scattered around the house, and his sketches dominated the ample built-in shelving (Fig. 27).\textsuperscript{105} Instead, mid-century green ceramic vessels now dot the wooden shelves, and white dishes sit upon the countertops as permanent accoutrements (Fig. 28).\textsuperscript{106} While these objects are non-native to the house, Shank has chosen them as indicative of the time period, as well as to remind visitors that the kitchen was once actually used as one of Wright’s experiments to streamline the service space.

Alongside these objects of permanent display Shank installs a temporary exhibition that rotates approximately every year. As mentioned, themes are specifically chosen to align with the

\textsuperscript{104} The author is grateful to Peter Shank for his insights given during an interview conducted on November 30, 2021 about his curatorial practices and goals for the Frank Lloyd Wright House at Ebsworth Park.
\textsuperscript{105} Fig. 27 provides a reference for how the shelving would have looked when Russell and Ruth lived in the Kraus House, although it is unclear when exactly the photograph was taken (likely circa 1995, when Russell was still living in the house).
\textsuperscript{106} The dishes on the kitchen shelves are by ceramicist and industrial designer Russel Wright, whose pieces were exhibited at the Saint Louis Art Museum’s iteration of 20th Century Design U.S.A., in 1959. Russel Wright is of no relation to Frank Lloyd Wright.
modernist atmosphere of the house so that objects enliven the visitor experience but do not seem out of place on Wright’s shelves. The Kraus House is not the white box found in typical arts institutions or galleries, and there are historical layers to take advantage of and to consider. By staging these exhibitions within a house from and preserved to the time period, the FLWHEP provides an immersive setting for visitors to learn about the principles behind modern design. For example, in 2010, Shank organized a temporary exhibition, entitled Through American Eyes, that featured the work of St. Louis artists and architects produced during their European travels and was intended to convey “the admiration and respect the artists had for the built environment they encountered.”

On display were drawings by notable local designers such as Isadore Shank (Peter Shank’s father), Eugene Mackey Jr., and Joseph Murphy (Fig. 29). Many of these architectural figures of the early twentieth century were first introduced to modernism while traveling through Europe, and they then brought their ideas back to the United States and incorporated them into their own architectural works. In this exhibition, visitors could directly equate the architects’ inspiration seen in the drawings with details of the Kraus House’s modern architecture. Shank sourced all of the pieces from neighbors and friends of the house, which he attributed to the growing interest in living with and collecting mid-century modern objects. Borrowing pieces from these sources also provided an opportunity for productive community engagement and invited local visitors to rethink their relationship to the house and their own possessions from the time period.

The draw of Frank Lloyd Wright has established the Kraus House as an architectural attraction, from its inception to the present, and as the mission of the house has grown more oriented towards the public in recent years, the programming has developed. Admirers of Wright’s

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107 Excerpt from an unpublished forward to the exhibition Through American Eyes at the Frank Lloyd Wright House in Ebsworth Park in 2010, written by and courtesy of Peter Shank.
architecture brought their cameras in the 1950s to capture the Usonian design just as they do today. Though tours of the structure were not offered at mid-century, it was to an extent a display house, on view to the public who wandered through the persimmon trees. The Kraus House directly introduced the local community to Wright’s ideas of modernism, and Ruth and Russell proved the Usonian house could be functional and livable, even if its upkeep could be frustrating. It was a kind of exhibition in the 1950s, and it has transformed since 2001 to be a formal museum, dedicated to informing the public about modern design. Additionally, the house has always been a site of cultural production and conversation, from Russell Kraus’s paintings strewn throughout the living space to Peter Shank’s displays that create heightened experiences for visitors as they become familiar with the principles of mid-century modernism. Therefore, it is fitting that the site has completed its transformation from residential spectacle to bona fide cultural and educational site.

Frank Lloyd Wright had an unparalleled influence on modern architecture in the United States, especially on residential structures. By the time Wright came to design the Kraus House, modern architecture, in terms of larger, public structures, had become the norm in St. Louis. Despite the architect’s impact in the Midwest, the style would never overtake the preference of St. Louisans for traditional homes with façades inspired

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109 Wright’s prairie house influence was also seen in the St. Louis region in the early twentieth century. Between 1918 and 1921, Russell Barr Williamson built a copy of a prairie house at 728 Trinity Avenue in University City, MO.
by classical architecture. Therefore, the relatively few examples of early modern houses by local architects built before Wright arrived are incredibly significant in the city’s architectural legacy.

In the mid-to-late 1930s, when Wright’s ideas of Broadacre City and Usonian houses were being widely published, early modern architects in the Midwest were experimenting with their own ideas, both concurrently and in relation to Wright’s philosophies for modern living. While many of them drew on Wright’s influence to varying degrees in these earlier years, they were also experimenting with how to adapt modernism to the St. Louis region. Therefore, the aesthetics of the period are often eclectic, and the cultural significance and design choices vary even though the goal to create functional, attractive modern residences was broadly the same. Additionally, their individual approaches and ideas illuminate for scholars the architects’ mindsets as they transitioned away from more traditional housing precedents. With the Kraus House serving as an example, this essay will examine how other houses in the region can oscillate between public and private, between home and display, between architectural and cultural sites as they introduced, and continue to introduce, St. Louisans to modern living.

The Shank House (1939–1941)

Isadore Shank was one of the earliest architects experimenting with modern architecture in St. Louis. He was born in the city in 1902 and graduated from Washington University in St. Louis in 1925. Shortly after graduation he was awarded an AIA fellowship to travel through Europe. Peter Shank attributes his father’s time in Europe, where he was introduced to exhibitions like the 1925 *Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriel Modernes* in Paris, to formally shaping the
designer’s interest in modernism.\textsuperscript{110} The architect saw many buildings and produced many drawings during his travels before returning to the United States (Fig. 29).\textsuperscript{111}

Isadore and his wife, Ilse, moved around the Midwest during the Depression years due to lack of work but returned to St. Louis to establish their family and Isadore’s practice in the late 1930s. Because Shank was Jewish, although he no longer identified with the religion at the time, racially restrictive covenants prevented him from buying suitable land within the city limits. He then bought twenty acres, including approximately seven acres of forest, in the still largely rural suburb of Ladue, away from the industrial city center, that were intended to be used as a kind of modernist enclave for his friends and partners, all of whom had connections to the visual arts. The Shank Residence on Graybridge Lane, near the St. Louis Country Club, was designed in 1939 and completed in 1941. Before the Second World War, six other houses were built within the subdivision, five designed by Shank, and his partner, Jim Auer, designed the house for his family next door.\textsuperscript{112}

Shank was keen to manipulate the new modern style of residential architecture, which was just being introduced to the nation in exhibitions and publications, though it was already established in Europe. He had fewer limitations when working on a home for himself and his family, but even though he did not have a client to please, he was partly thwarted by the City of Ladue’s permitting department, which was resistant to the modernist style (Fig. 30). Ultimately, the architect altered his proposals so the house’s design more closely mimicked the prevailing colonial style, and once they were approved, he never finished construction on the more traditional

\textsuperscript{110}The 1925 \textit{Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriel Modernes} was the source of the later term “Art Deco.”

\textsuperscript{111}The author is grateful to Peter Shank for the tour of his residence and the insights about his parents shared on November 3, 2021.

elements like exterior window shutters (Fig. 31.)\textsuperscript{113} Even in the twenty-first century, Peter Shank, who currently owns and occupies the house with his partner, has noticed the zoning committee’s persistent unwillingness to accept the modern aesthetic even though houses like the Shank House played an important role in bringing the new style to the St. Louis region.

Set back from the street and built on a steep downward slope, the Shank House is very much in concert with the woodlands that surround it. Visitors must walk down a series of wide stairs to reach the front entrance. The south end of the house, closer to the street, is more traditional in style, likely to appease the zoning committee. Visitors are greeted by warm red brick exterior walls, a large chimney, and a slate gabled roof that cantilevers over the front entrance. The north end of the house, which is wedged further into the trees, embraces more modern aesthetics. It retains the gabled roof, but the walls are almost entirely composed of vertical windows, which let in ample natural light and provide pleasant views of the surrounding forestry. A long white wooden rail extends along the front façade, defining an exterior patio space and then turning to merge with the back wall.\textsuperscript{114} The rest of the northern exterior is painted a dark grey color, and the back door a bright green.

The slope of the site allowed the architect to create two distinct levels, the upper as living space for the family and the lower for additional playrooms and services, including a servant’s room (Fig. 32). The central living room is characterized by the interior brick work, which is comprised of recycled St. Louis bricks from the Green Tree Brewery building, an 1870s structure, the brightly colored walls, and the exposed wooden beams on the high ceilings (Fig. 33). Peter recalls that when friends would visit during his childhood, they would ask if his house had been

\textsuperscript{113} Mary Reid Brunstrom, \textit{Modern in St. Louis: 1930s Modernist Architects and Their Clients} (MA Thesis, Washington University in St. Louis, 2006), 43.

\textsuperscript{114} The wood used at the Shank House is California redwood.
finished. While emphasizing structural elements was common in modernism, this anecdote highlights the newness and relative rarity of modernist aesthetics into the 1940s, especially in the residential sphere.

In the house’s early years, it was lauded as revolutionary in publications like the local conservative newspaper, the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, which deemed Shank to be “the undisputed dean among modern designers in this section of the country.”

Photographs of the Shank family’s intimate home life accompanied the article, including an image of Ilse working on drawings in her studio with her children Stephen painting in water colors beside her and Paul playing piano across the room (Fig. 34). Through these published photographs and narratives, the community was “invited” virtually into the Shank House, which emphasized flexible, functional living. The residence was officially private, but still on display to the public through images in publications, which were incredibly influential at mid-century. These kinds of features worked to introduce St. Louisans to modernism and convince them that the style had worked well for the Shank family, so, therefore, the architect’s revolutionary ideas could be successfully deployed in other area homes as well.

Including the Shank Residence, Isadore Shank designed about 140 buildings, and his later work was mostly centered on family residences like his own. He was known in particular for the DeBalievere Building (1928), a shopping and apartment complex, inspired by his interest in Wright. The building was characterized by its masonry ornament on the façade, which integrated geometric shapes, plate glass windows, and steel construction. Although vast and impressive, the architect’s legacy is not well-established within the St. Louis architectural canon. Therefore, the Shank House is receiving more media attention in the twenty-first century as Peter and his brothers

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actively work to immortalize their father’s architectural career. This effort has become more urgent because some of the nearby Shank-designed homes have been demolished in favor of newer developments. The high land value in Ladue and the more traditional stylistic preferences of buyers have put early modern homes at risk, but spreading awareness can help protect these structures.

In 2007, *St. Louis Magazine* published a piece on the Shank House entitled “The House on Graybridge Lane,” which also detailed the architect’s overall career and labeled him “one of the great architects of St. Louis’ Modernist golden age.” A 2021 article in *Town & Style* included an interview with Peter and described the residence as a local masterpiece. Both articles included images of the house and its inhabitants that captured its functional but vibrant atmosphere. Not only is the architecture on display for readers through these publications, but so is the modern lifestyle promoted within the home’s thoughtful spaces. Even in the twenty-first century, the Shank House is still used to teach the public about modern architecture and its influence. Furthermore, these more recent articles show the house practically as it was in 1941. Since Isadore and Ilse lived in the Shank Residence, not much has changed except the art on the walls, much of which pays homage to Ilse.

Ilse Shank, née Giessow, graduated from Washington University with a degree from the School of Fine Arts. It was at the university that she met Isadore. In St. Louis, she maintained an active career at home as an illustrator, typically for nationally-distributed women’s magazines like *Collier’s, McCall’s, and Ladies’ Home Journal* (Fig. 35). Her work ethic and creativity have always permeated the Shank House. Ilse was able to work comfortably from home with Peter, Paul, and Stephen because of the house’s open floor plan and access to ample natural light, which offered her the flexibility to both draw and spend time with her children in practically any room. Her

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116 Duffy, “The House on Graybridge Lane.”
A dedicated studio was situated directly next to the kitchen, allowing her to move easily between family life and her career. She was somewhat unusual at the time in having a successful career as a woman with a family. Jeff Pike, Dean of the School of Art at Washington University from 1999 until 2008, said that Ilse was one of “perhaps a handful of commercially successful women artists at a time when men dominated the field.” In addition to her illustrations, Ilse also made more permanent artistic interventions in the house, including painting a pre-Columbian-inspired form in white on the bricks of the living room fireplace.

Alongside Ilse’s work, Isadore’s sketches — of designs both built and unbuilt — are found framed around the house. Additionally, all three Shank brothers are also artists, influenced by their childhood in the creatively generative house. Because Peter lives there currently, most of his work is on the walls, and it rotates as he makes new pieces. This creative familial lineage was immortalized in the Washington University show Relative Perspectives, which was on view in 2001 (Fig. 36). The exhibition highlighted the immediate family’s art, as well as that of Ilse’s sister, Adelheid Giessow, a jewelry designer who visited the Shanks’ home frequently and also graduated from Washington University. The exhibition catalog notes the rarity of dynasties in the visual arts and questions, “how do we explain the coincidence of six strong artists emerging from a single household, graduating from a single school?” Though located outside of the walls of the Shank House, this exhibition also taught St. Louisans about regional modern art and

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117 In St. Louis, Tirzah Dunn, née Perfect, was another successful designer married to a modern architect, Frederick Dunn. Frederick worked in St. Louis between 1936 and 1963, and his pre-war homes were considered “deceptively modern” with their hidden modern features. Tirzah designed and sold wallpaper which was featured in several magazines and later acquired national distribution. See “Behind the Building: Frederick Dunn, The Gentleman Architect,” St. Louis Magazine, August 22, 2011, https://www.stlmag.com/design/Behind-the-Building-Frederick-Dunn-The-Gentleman-Architect/.

118 Catalog for Relative Perspectives, an exhibition at Washington University in St. Louis in 2001, courtesy of Peter Shank.

119 The living room centerpiece on display in the Town & Style article features a B-29 bomber plane and explores the intersection between suburban America and World War II (Fig. 33).

120 Catalog for Relative Perspectives.
architecture as it influenced a local family. The cultural production coming from the Shank House was and is astounding, and the influence of Isadore and Ilse as well as their vision for a modern lifestyle cannot be overlooked. The house continues to be fertile grounds for discussion and artistic creation into the twenty-first century.

Peter inherited the house after his father’s death in 1992. Just as his parents did, Peter and his partner, a well-known stage director, enjoy hosting their friends, other artists and designers, in social capacities. The Shank Residence does not contain any built-in furniture, but Isadore did design the dining room table that has remained in the same place since the 1940s, around which many conversations have been had between partners, friends, and neighbors. In keeping with the modern atmosphere of the house, Peter and his partner have continued to collect furniture indicative of the time period, and many of the pieces are by other well-known modernist architects like Eliel and Eero Saarinen, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Marcel Breuer. The structure remains in excellent condition, although walls have been repainted in the same brightly colored scheme, and Paul and Stephen’s childhood bedrooms have been converted into social and studio spaces.

While Peter opens the house to publications and distributes information via print, he also often gives physical tours of the houses to Washington University architecture students as educational lessons. Additionally, because he is on the board of the Kraus House, he sometimes arranges events to benefit their foundation and mission to promote modern architecture in St. Louis. Peter is similarly dedicated to preserving the house and its atmosphere, and in these ways, the house is regularly exhibited, sometimes more formally than others. It has retained its status as a significant modern home in the city, and thus retained a public-facing aspect, even though it ultimately remains a private home. Like many other modernist residences of the period, it not entirely a private residence, but at the same time it is not a formal exhibition or display house. It
hovers between public and private and is closely aligned with exhibitions outside the home as well, such as Relative Perspectives.

The Shank House was revolutionary when it was built as one of the first modernist homes in St. Louis. Open to the local public from its early years though print media, its status continues to grow within the community as the Shank brothers share their father’s design process for posterity, welcoming interested parties into the residence. The Shank House, as it has been expertly kept, offers unique insights into early modern St. Louis through the eyes of one of its prolific local architects as he experimented with the new aesthetic and his family created vast amounts of artwork. Because it has always been a generative space and a model for modern living, its inspiration and value are continually felt through its cultural legacy and as it teaches St. Louisans in the twenty-first century about the local architectural sphere.

Although the modern style was uncommon in St. Louis County during the late 1930s and early 1940s, other early residential examples of the style were designed by architects for themselves. Many of these designers would go on to greatly influence the city’s approach to modern architecture, which emphasized the natural landscape and local materials like brick.

The Murphy House (1938–1939)

At the same time as Shank, Joseph D. Murphy constructed a house for his family at 7901 Stanford Avenue in University City. Murphy, along with his partner, Eugene J. Mackey, designed many significant modern structures, including the Climatron at the Missouri Botanical Garden (1960) and Olin Library at Washington University in St. Louis (1956–62). Additionally, he was dean of the Washington University School of Architecture from 1948 until 1952, the period during which the school moved away from the Beaux-Arts system and began to incorporate a more
Like Shank, Murphy’s interest in modernism began in Europe. The architect was born in Kansas City, Missouri in 1907 and received a scholarship in the early 1930s to study at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. He then traveled throughout Europe, where he was first introduced to ideas of modernism. Upon his return to the United States in 1938, Murphy designed a house for himself, his wife, Ann, and their growing family outside of St. Louis. At the time, the site was at the edge of the built-up area, and land to the west had yet to be developed, so University City was largely pastoral and away from the industrial city center.

Constructed at the beginning of the architect’s career, the Murphy House embraced modernist ideals like the open floor plan and window walls at a time when the style was not yet widely recognized. The exterior of the Murphy House is composed of warm, textured red brick and its hipped roof of asphalt shingles (Fig. 37). The two-story house is horizontally-oriented and divided into rectangular volumes, creating an irregular plan (Fig. 38). The first story comprises the more public-facing parts of the house, including the double-height living room with floor-to-ceiling corner windows that face the street (Fig. 39). The first floor also showcased the updated technology of the 1930s, and when the Murphy family moved in, the kitchen had state-of-the-art appliances, including a dishwasher, which was still unusual for the time. The second story contains all of the private bedrooms, as well as an outdoor terrace. A wooden folding door at the stop of the main stairwell can physically separate the public and private space as needed because Joseph and Ann were known to host gatherings for their artist friends.

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121 The Beaux-Arts system was derived from the Parisian school of the same name, founded in 1819 and popular in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It was the established form of architectural education in the United States in the first half of the twentieth century. The classical style championed in the Beaux-Arts is typically characterized by the use of historic forms and ornate decoration, and the methodology emphasizes the primacy of the plan and architectural clarity.
There is little ornament on the house’s façade, which is set back from the street, privileging the front garden. Like the site of the Shank House, the land is not level, so the structure flows with the natural inclines and declines, and, therefore, the Murphy House entrance is at half-level. In 1941, two years after its completion, the house was featured in *Architectural Forum* as part of their regular series on outstanding new houses across the country, intended to advertise successful modern homes. The *Forum* described the two-story plan as “ingenious, making excellent use of the entrance at the half level.”\(^{122}\) The journal presented the house to a national audience, praising it and actively trying to convince its audience that it was possible to pursue functional, attractive homes like the one at 7901 Stanford Avenue (Fig. 38).

Originally smaller and more affordable — *Architectural Forum* estimated that house cost $10,120 in 1941 — the house grew as the Murphy family did. In 1950, after the seventh of nine Murphy children was born, two more bedrooms were added on the second floor, cantilevering over the backyard and creating a covered patio in the underlying space. Additionally, a sunroom was built beyond the west wall of the living room to welcome in more natural light and a basketball hoop erected in the backyard for the children to play. In 1962, Murphy added a foyer in front of the main entrance, the last major structural addition, and an indication that the house was changing as the architect’s career matured.

The art program also expanded as the house did. Although there was little exterior ornament, the interior of the Murphy House was built around certain works of art, the majority of which celebrated the family’s Catholic faith. When the house was first constructed, a niche was built above the main doorway specifically to hold a statue of the Virgin Mary, which still remains in place in the twenty-first century. During the 1950s addition, a wooden and glass wall divider

was installed to separate the main staircase and the living room. The piece was designed by Emil Frei, a well-known local art and stained-glass maker, and depicted symbols of the Catholic faith in the abstract, like fish to represent Jesus Christ (Fig. 40). During the same period, three crosses, to symbolize the Holy Trinity, were imprinted in the ceiling of the covered terrace, below the newly constructed bedrooms. Like the Shank House, the Murphy Residence was a frequent meeting place for artists, architects, and designers as a social space to converse and exchange ideas. Many paintings were originally on display on the interior, some done by these artist friends, although the majority have been distributed amongst the nine children. Now much of Murphy’s own work is hanging on the walls, framed and organized by his daughter, Caroline.

After her parents passed away, Caroline Murphy moved back into the house in 1995 and took on the role of both inhabitant and preservationist.123 Many of the practical elements of modern living are still functional from her childhood, like the built-in shelving and even the upstairs shower. Still, while Caroline has tried to keep most of the house as her father originally designed it, updates and structural changes have been necessary over time. When Caroline first moved in, the kitchen was redone, and she added more countertops and cabinets, as well as replacing the outdated dishwasher, oven, and refrigerator. Even though some original elements were removed, these updates have helped keep the house livable and functional as a twenty-first century residence, its primary function. Additionally, the architect was known to make changes to the house himself as the needs of his family evolved, so updates were not terribly unusual. Fortunately, in the mid-2010s, a tree fell on the east wing of the house, and many repairs and reconstructions were required. The two cantilevered bedrooms that were added in 1952 were reconfigured to become a single primary bedroom, and the concrete flooring was covered with hardwood (Fig. 41). The library

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123 The author is grateful to Caroline Murphy for the tour of her residence and the insights about her parents shared on February 19, 2022.
beneath it was crushed and the built-in bookshelves were destroyed. It was rebuilt, and is still used as an office and library space, but without the original furnishings since most of Murphy’s books were donated to the Washington University library. For the most part, these later changes have been interior, and the building’s exterior has remained largely as the architect intended.

Since 1995, Caroline and her husband have been dedicated stewards of the house, and in 2010 applied for and received National Register of Historic Places status. The house is, thus, immortalized in the public memory as a structure of significant architecture, and its history is saved within the nation’s archives. Caroline believes in the importance of having this legal protection for her father’s legacy, and she enjoys talking to visitors about the home. She invites guests into her home on occasion, offering informal tours and providing printed pamphlets with period photographs and informational texts for interested parties (Fig. 42). Unfortunately, the house’s inclusion on the National Register has produced administrative frustrations. For example, Caroline wants to replace the original window glass to be more energy efficient but doing this according to National Register specifications has proved expensive and complicated because they are a major contributing feature of the building’s front-facing façade. Similar issues may arise when it becomes time to replace and repair the exterior brick, which is the next preservation project. The Murphy House has undergone many structural changes, at the behest of the architect and his children, for functional reasons and because of preservation necessities, but the family has worked to maintain the warm atmosphere, artistic program, and early modern functionalism since its construction in 1939.

While it does not relate stylistically to the more traditional homes of University City, the Murphy Residence remains an architectural staple of the neighborhood and a significant part of the history of early modern houses in St. Louis. Joseph Murphy explored many of the ideas that
Isadore Shank experimented with at his home at the same time, both influenced by their travels in Europe and the burgeoning ideas of modern homes expressed by Frank Lloyd Wright. The two houses responded to the landscape, sloping and creating an irregular plan to suit the needs of the inhabitants, with open living rooms grounded by fireplaces. They both privileged brick exteriors with large windows to let in natural light, and while there was limited ornament added on the façades, both interiors had unique and interesting relationships with the artwork generated and on display. They were both family homes, experimenting with design and technology that accommodated life and work in the 1930s, as well as children playing. These similarities speak to the development of a regional variation of the modern style.

Both the Shank and Murphy houses received attention through press coverage, opening the private home to the eyes of the public interested in the possibilities of modern living. In acting as a livable model of functional modernism, the houses, their architects, and their families were launched into the public sphere, and have remained so, even if they are not offering tours as official exhibition homes or museums. In its National Register nomination, the Murphy House was described as “one of the first small Modern Movement houses to attain national publication, and it contributed to wide interest in Modern houses in the St. Louis area.”\textsuperscript{124} The house’s legacy as an architectural marvel, and Murphy’s influence on modernism in his home, in St. Louis and at Washington University present an engaging insight into how the local public became interested in the realities of modern living.

The Armstrong House (1938)

Harris Armstrong, perhaps the most prominent St. Louis architect of the period, also built a house for himself and his family in St. Louis in 1938. By the late-1930s, Armstrong had already made a name for himself in the region, and his work was recognized internationally at mid-century. Born in Edwardsville, Illinois, just across the river, Armstrong began studying at Washington University in 1923. He attended classes at night while working as a draftsman at G.F.A. Brueggman Architects. Much of his learning was constituted on the job, though, and in the late 1920s he worked in Isadore Shank’s office, learning with and from the architect’s modern approach. Armstrong was enchanted by the St. Louis region, choosing to remain even when advised otherwise by friends. He wrote, “It was St. Louis itself and its conservative, even reactionary, tendencies that presented such a challenge and such a need that we decided to stay here.” The architect was determined to introduce his style of modern architecture to the city, in spite of its conservative tendencies, especially in his own house.

Armstrong was first recognized for the Shanley Building (1935), constructed as an orthodontist’s office. The Shanley Building is widely recognized as the first International Style building in the central Midwest. It exemplified many tropes of the style introduced at the 1932 MoMA exhibition, like the smooth concrete construction, continuous ribbon windows, and flat roof. The building was given an eleven-page spread in the November 1936 volume of *Architectural Record*, celebrating its innovative nature, and it was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1982. Then, in 1938, the architect built a home and studio for himself and his family at 3 Sappington Spur in the peaceful suburb of Kirkwood, directly west of and overlooking the carefully curated landscape of the Westborough Country Club (Fig. 43).

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125 “Recent work by Harris Armstrong,” *Architectural Forum*, September 1945, 115.
In October 1939, Armstrong’s house was featured in the “101 New Houses” issue of *Architectural Forum*, another effort from the journal to demonstrate to Americans that modern housing was on the rise and was achievable, even during the later Depression years. The issue made it clear to readers that “fundamental changes [to the design of the house] are quietly taking place,” with the increased usage of the open floor plan, larger windows, and architects taking advantage of unusual site conditions (Fig. 44).\(^{126}\) The article promoted the idea that, in the late 1930s, designers were producing “hybrid [houses], neither ‘modernistic’ nor ‘colonial,’ but better than either.”\(^ {127}\) This combination of modernist and traditional was typical during the early years of the modern style since the architects were experimenting with new ideas while also conforming to the conservative expectations of clients and suburban zoning committees. The *Forum* argued that modern houses, no longer a complete rarity, were discarding the unnecessary features of traditional houses and embracing newfound technologies and functionalism, while at the same time “look[ing] ‘back’ for warmth, color, and texture.”\(^ {128}\)

The *Architectural Forum* feature on Armstrong’s house noted the modern use of the open floor plan and corner windows, as well as the more traditional high-pitched roof and heavily textured exterior stone surface. The architect combined textured quarried stone repurposed from an old building with rough brick walls, smooth stucco surfaces, and metal frame windows (Fig. 45). The melding of modern technologies and floor plans with more traditional textures and materials helped to soften the harsher perception of modernism that was perpetuated by the sterility of the International Style. By drawing on materials that the local community was accustomed to,


\(^{127}\) “101 New Houses,” 217.

\(^{128}\) Ibid.
modern houses like Armstrong’s could relate more closely to their colonial neighbors than a purely International Style residence could have.

The first floor of the Armstrong House was comprised of the architect’s office, as well as the dining room, living room, and kitchen. The four family bedrooms were on the second floor, and the sloping site allowed space for a basement with servants’ quarters and a playroom. Architectural historian Mary Reid Brunstrom compares the circular flow of space on the first floor of Armstrong’s design to Frank Lloyd Wright’s experiments with flow in his prairie houses and the free exchange between interior and exterior.\(^{129}\) On the other hand, the second floor and basement have closed floor plans more typical of traditional houses, emphasizing the interplay between modern and traditional ideas in the plan as well as the materials. Armstrong also experimented with Wright’s ideas of the functionality of built-in furniture with a window ledge that also provided seating, running the length of the dining and living room window wall (Fig. 46). Architectural Forum estimated the cost of the house to be $13,500 and, through thoughtful images and an accompanying narrative, invited readers across the country to incorporate modern elements of the Armstrong House in their own living spaces.\(^{130}\)

By the 1950s, Armstrong was generally recognized as the dean of the modern movement in St. Louis, and in 1960 he served as president of the city’s American Institute of Architects chapter.\(^{131}\) Otto Fuerbringer wrote of Armstrong in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch:

> “Among the architects in this section of the country who have been trying to lead the way to functionalism, to the designing of homes and buildings suited to our times, Harris


Armstrong has been the most resourceful and the most consistent. [His] conception of buildings [is] based on clean and simple lines and thoroughly contemporary in construction and arrangement.”

Thus, the architect’s home was well recognized in local and national spheres, and it provides an interesting insight into the differences between commercial and residential modern architecture in the 1930s. The Shanley Building completely embraced the International Style, and the near sterility of early modernism, which, as applied to an orthodontist’s office, projected an image of cleanliness. This impersonal feel, however, was not appropriate for the intimacy of a residence. Therefore, in his house, Armstrong experimented with some ideologies of modernists, like the flow of space and use of large windows, while simultaneously incorporating more traditional material elements that provided warmth and familiarity to the home. The intermingling of traditional and modern features contributed to the eclectic nature of the style during the Depression years, the “hybrid” houses that *Architectural Forum* described.

Stylistic eclecticism was typical of many architects’ homes at the time. Designers were interested in experimenting with modernism, but at the same time they wanted their homes to still feel homely, rather than embody the institutional atmosphere associated with modernism through examples like Le Corbusier’s Villa Savoye shown at MoMA in 1932. Therefore, there is no one standardized language for early modernism in St. Louis as architects like Shank, Murphy, or Armstrong begin to experiment with it. They exemplified in their own homes their individual takes on residential modern in the region, at once embracing new ideas of functional homes and integrated technology, while at the same time taking advantage of the familiarity of regional

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materials and landscapes to make the spaces welcoming. When examined together these houses designed by local architects began to define the regional approach to early modern homes.

Armstrong’s impact continued to be recognized in the region, and in 1963 he was honored with the Washington University Distinguished Alumni Award for his work as an internationally-known architect. He remained associated with the school, and, after his death in 1973, an exhibition commemorating his life’s work went on display at the university. The *Works and Documents of Harris Armstrong* opened in Givens Hall in November 1974, and on view were materials donated by his wife, Louise Armstrong, née McClelland. In addition, the Saint Louis Art Museum, then known as the City Art Museum, loaned the model by famed artist Isamu Noguchi for the lobby ceiling of the Magic Chef building, which was designed by Armstrong for the American Stove Company. The exhibition was student-designed and featured student collaboration, emphasizing the gallery’s educational value. Louise worked diligently to promote the exhibition and honor her husband’s legacy, indicating the power of the exhibition to memorialize Armstrong and his architecture. The Armstrong House itself was a respected structure in the eyes of its neighbors and the wider St. Louis public, but it was also exhibited through drawings and photographs in the context of a more traditional gallery show as well as in national publications, making it at the same time an architectural marvel on display and a private family home.

The Eames Houses (1934–1938)

It is important to note, that even famously modern designers found themselves entrenched in the desire for traditional residential architecture in St. Louis during the late 1930s. In the period of economic unrest, the majority of buyers and lenders were not ready to embrace a new style for

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133 Harris Armstrong Collection, Washington University Archives, Series 1, Box 1.
134 Isadore Shank, Joseph Murphy, and their wives were personally invited to the exhibition.
homes when the resale value was still unclear. Therefore, many architects who felt the need to experiment with modernism had to create houses for themselves to have an outlet to experiment with new ideas without being hindered by the wishes and finances of a client. While Charles Eames and his wife Ray Kaiser would become two of the foremost innovative designers of the twentieth century, his work for clients in 1930s St. Louis was surprisingly traditional.

In their later careers, the Eameses were known in particular for their furniture design — introduced in 1956, the molded plywood Eames lounge chair is still sold — and their original films, but they also found architectural success as part of the Case Study House program for *Art and Architecture* magazine. In 1945, their Case Study House #8, often called the Eames House, was a pioneering use of prefabricated parts to create a functional, affordable post-war home for modern living in Pacific Palisades, California. It featured an open floor plan, large windows, and no applied ornament. Originally intended to just be a display house for the magazine, Ray and Charles liked it so much that they moved into the colorful, rectangular volumes and lived there until their deaths. They proved that their post-war example of residential modern was actually livable. The house is now a National Historic Landmark, open to the public as a house museum run by the Eames Foundation. Even though it changed hands, the house has returned to its original purpose: teaching visitors about the designers’ hopes for modern living. Even though Charles was profoundly interested in modernism and was able to demonstrate its attributes in the Case Study House in the 1940s, his earlier residential work in St. Louis was much more traditional in style.

Eames was born in St. Louis in 1907, and in 1925, he enrolled at Washington University in St. Louis, having received a scholarship to study architecture. At the time, the university taught the Beaux-Arts system, so at the end of his second year, Eames was asked to leave because he
“was prematurely interested and concerned with Frank Lloyd Wright,” or so the story goes. This anecdote illustrates the tensions between traditional educational methods and the new modern approach in the first half of the twentieth century. It also emphasizes the influence Wright held over young architects. One might think that when Eames left the university, he immediately used his newfound freedom to experiment widely with the modernism that was rejected by his former professors. Instead, his residential work in St. Louis with partner Robert Walsh was still profoundly traditional in comparison to his later works, although his 1930s designs still flirted with modern ideals.

In 1934, Eames and Walsh presented their design for a single-family home as part of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*’s series of articles in which they asked St. Louis architects to design “ideal small homes.” The author of the article, Josephine Walter, characterized their plans as “a modern interpretation of a little French town house.” Stylistically, the architects’ proposal was very traditional, with dormer windows, French doors, and a pitched roof (Fig. 47). Interestingly, the pitched roof was chosen as an economical measure because it required only one story of construction rather than two and the architects were trying to keep the price under $12,000. The use of a pitched roof, however, “eliminated the possibility of designing a purely modern house.”

Still, even though the brick façade was traditional in style, the floor plan and the interiors subscribed to modern ideals of efficiency. The plan was not open, but the “house utilizes every inch yet retains the romantic of space.” The built residences designed by Eames and Walsh in St. Louis continued to incorporate historically-inspired façades, even though Eames was already

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136 Walter, “A French Town House.”
137 Walter, “A French Town House.”
138 Ibid.
profoundly interested in modernism, highlighting the pressure of the housing market on architects to construct traditional designs.

In 1936, Eames designed two houses in the Webster Groves suburb of St. Louis, the Dinsmoor House (335 Bristol Place) and the Dean House (101 Mason Avenue). The red brick Dinsmoor House was described in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* as “Williamsburg” in character because of its traditional, symmetrical façade.\(^{139}\) It is the most traditional façade Eames designed in St. Louis with classical elements like a broken pediment over the door and dentils below the cornice (Fig. 48). Similarly, the Dean House incorporated traditional motifs like dentils and corner quoins but included modern elements as well, like corner windows and white-painted brick (Fig. 49). By drawing on both traditional and modern inspirations, it was a kind of transitional design for Eames, but it still “stands clearly apart from its very traditional neighbors.”\(^{140}\)

Built between 1937 and 1938, the Meyer House (4 Deacon Drive, Huntleigh, MO) exemplifies a turning point and a clearer embrace of modernism. It is a larger house, with five bedrooms, servants’ quarters, and living and dining rooms to entertain the St. Louis cultural elite. The plan is vast and asymmetrical with intersecting round and rectangular volumes and expanding terraces, a major turn away from the symmetry of colonial architecture (Fig. 50). The orange brick façade is peppered with subtle, playful ornament (Fig. 51). For example, the architect carved a portion of Mozart’s Symphony No. 40 in G minor into the bricks on a rear-facing terrace wall because the musical piece was a favorite of his client. Eames also employed the work of Emil Frei for the stained glass, which depicted classical ornament like acanthus leaves and ionic columns in

\(^{139}\) Robert W. Duffy, “Designing a Whole Building is Just Too Demanding,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, (August 1, 1982) p. 5c.

\(^{140}\) Duffy, “Designing a Whole Building is Just Too Demanding.”
a transparent, two-dimensional form, playing with the ways these ancient motifs could be realized and utilized within the space of a residence.

Eames continued to combine traditional and modern influences inside the Meyer House. The decoration of the interior spaces referred to the Federal period, but the balustrade of the main staircase was constructed of aluminum, a new material at the time.\(^\text{141}\) The Meyer House also reflected a significant shift in Eames’s career since he began to work with Eliel Saarinen, a well-recognized Finnish modernist, and other Cranbrook artists on the design.\(^\text{142}\) Using Eames’s designs, artisans created pieces for the house, developing an artistic program that bled into the furniture and the rugs. Many of these objects were still centered on classical motifs, like the acanthus leaf, which was found in the dining room chandelier and on the living room fire screen (Fig. 52). Before his introduction to modern designers at Cranbrook, Eames had been leaning heavily on classical elements in the architecture, but with Saarinen’s influence, the Meyer House became more modern in style. Preservationist Esley Hamilton wrote in the house’s historic inventory that, “as work progressed in 1937, Georgian pediments and other details shown on the drawings of 1936 sometimes gave way to simpler, more abstract forms.”\(^\text{143}\) After the house was completed, Saarinen offered Eames a fellowship to study at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in the fall of 1938, where he met Ray and begin the next phase of their eminent careers.

Scholar Pat Kirkham argues that the Eameses wanted these early St. Louis houses to be overlooked in Charles’s portfolio because their traditional style differed so greatly from the


\(^{142}\) Eliel Saarinen (1873–1950) became known in the United States after his modernist competition entry for the Chicago Tribune Tower won second place in 1922. He was asked to design the Cranbrook campus, and he became the director of the Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1932.

couple’s later work.\(^{144}\) Even renowned modern designer Charles Eames found it difficult to experiment with residential modern during the 1930s because of the traditional tastes of consumers, and he noted that one had to take what work there was during the Great Depression.\(^{145}\) This is why such early examples of modern residential design as the Shank House, the Murphy House, and the Armstrong House are so significant in the history of modernism in St. Louis. The architects’ own houses allow a freedom to experiment. They were so passionate about the emerging modern philosophy that they invested their own money during the Depression years to build houses in the new style.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, the public was interested in modernism, but solely when it was on display in museums and magazines. While certain architects were eager to embrace residential modern, American consumers were not ready to live in aesthetically modern houses, as much as they appreciated ideas of efficiency, functionalism and technology that would accommodate life in the mid-twentieth century. They still identified modernism with the sterility of the International Style as it was displayed in 1932. The consumer mindset began to shift, however, as modern architecture became more accepted in the mid-1940s and the post-war era, when Wright established his footprint in St. Louis and the residential designs of William Bernoudy, one of his students, began to proliferate the city’s landscape.

The Bernoudy House (1950–1951)

William Adair Bernoudy was born in 1910 to a middle-class family in St. Louis. He went on to study architecture at Washington University for a short period but, like Eames, he quickly became frustrated with the conservative views of the Beaux-Arts program. In search of modern

\(^{144}\) Kirkham, *Charles and Ray Eames*, 14.
\(^{145}\) Ibid, 27.
mentorship, Bernoudy decided to relocate to Arizona as part of the first class of Wright’s Taliesin Fellowship in 1932. This introduction to modern architecture profoundly shaped Bernoudy’s design process, and he remained stylistically and philosophically committed to Wright’s ideals of organic architecture when he returned to St. Louis in 1936. Bernoudy was a prolific local architect, designing many residential structures after the Second World War, including a pool house for Joseph Pulitzer Jr., who would later become the chairman of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, and his wife in 1946 in Ladue (Fig. 53). Pulitzer was a leading patron of the arts in St. Louis, a role continued after his death in 1993 by his wife, Emily Rauh Pulitzer, a Harvard-trained curator. Architectural historian Mary Reid Brunstrom characterizes the Pulitzer project as “instrumental in establishing Bernoudy as a go-to architect for elegant modern homes in St. Louis and beyond.”

In the post-war period, modern architects were tastemakers in middle- and upper-class society, and designers like Bernoudy had an effect not only on the exteriors but also on the interiors of homes. He was an early purveyor of modern design objects within the home, and in the late 1940s, became a representative for the furniture manufacturing company Knoll, Inc. Both his office and his home were practically a showroom, promoting beautiful, functional modern pieces in all facets of his life to inspire his clients. In this way, Bernoudy played with the display of modern life as a way to persuade the public of its value both inside and outside of his home, offering people varied inhabitable spaces in which to experience modern objects in context.

It was not until 1950 that Bernoudy designed and built his own home with his partner Edouard Mutrux in the St. Louis suburb of Ladue. By the end of the 1940s, not only was

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146 Bernoudy was at Taliesin during the years that Wright was developing ideas for Broadacre City, although it is unclear if he was one of the fellows who worked on the model.
148 Conradsen and Cortinovis, *St. Louis Modern*, 145.
modernism more widely admired and accepted, but the City of Ladue was more developed. A decade earlier, when the Shank House was built, the land was still largely agricultural. Bernoudy built his residence on a sloping site and, in line with Wright’s principles, installed floor-to-ceiling windows that blended the interior space with the exterior land (Fig. 54). The house faces south, away from the road, and draws on the Japanese idea of a “borrowed landscape,” which extends the view by sharing the yard with the adjoining property.\footnote{Osmund Overby, \emph{William Adair Bernoudy: Bringing the Legacy of Frank Lloyd Wright to St. Louis} (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 71.} Built of glass and brick, the house’s most notable feature was its elongated hexagonal roof with low hanging eaves that cantilever over the east to create a carport and over the west to create a shaded garden area (Fig. 55). Bernoudy designed a broad fireplace for the center of the house, situated under the high point where the six roof planes meet. Like Wright’s design for the Kraus House, built-in book shelves form the centerpiece of the living room. The brick flooring at the entrance continues from the living room to the outdoor patio that snakes around the perimeter of the house, combining the interior with the exterior landscape. The rest of the interior flooring is made of materials like cork and tile, which required only straightforward maintenance and contributed to the ease of modern living. An enclosed, Japanese-inspired garden to the north separates the main house from the stylistically complimentary guest house where Bernoudy’s mother lived until he married Gertrude Bernoudy, a Czech-Jewish émigré art dealer and collector, in 1955.

Like other residences by modern architects, the Bernoudy House was admired by the public from its inception. The designer had already established his talent for residential architecture with the Pulitzer pool house, and the public was curious to see his design for his own home. Images and articles circulated in locally and nationally distributed magazines and newspapers. Immediately after the house was completed, the \emph{St. Louis Post-Dispatch} published a full page of images and an
accompanying article admiring its modern design (Fig. 56). The author, Paul Berg, focused on the “unusual six-sided roof, inspired by primitive tent-like dwellings,” writing that “like a huge umbrella, it nestles gracefully and compactly over the walls of glass and brick, conveying a sense of shelter as well as performing that function.” Berg predicted that the modern design for Bernoudy’s well-planned and integrated structure would never become “banal and outmoded.” This quotation represents a major shift in the public opinion of residential modern over the course of the 1940s. While architects like Shank or Murphy had introduced the style as a marvel in the late 1930s, by the time Bernoudy built his own house, it was less experimental and more of an established aesthetic that would not become “outmoded.” While houses like Bernoudy’s were still comparatively rare, especially in architecturally conservative townships like Ladue, there was a wider appreciation for the warmth that modern architecture could bring into the home.

A decade later, a House Beautiful feature reassured readers that modern does not have to mean cold and austere (Fig. 57). It praised the sense of intimacy Bernoudy achieved through the materiality, windows, and the continuity of segmented space that embodied the “spirit of freedom” associated with modern living. The article also noted the atmospheric effects of the roof, which is lower along the perimeter of the structure, creating an intimate hallway that encourages inhabitants to move into the central social spaces where the ceiling is raised. Both the Post-Dispatch and House Beautiful clearly documented the intricacies of the Bernoudy living space. Through detailed images, viewers were let into the home, putting the intimate residence on view on the national stage as well as the local. This press coverage of the finest local modern homes, usually designed by leading architects like Bernoudy, presented consumers with options for ideal

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151 Berg, “Modern Design: Primitive Roof Style Adapted to New Home.”
modern living in the post-war era. The architect recognized the general acceptance of modernism, which was in part shaped by his mentor Wright across the nation and in the St. Louis region, and he used features like these to promote his designs, as well as partnerships with companies like Knoll, Inc.

Like many other mid-century cultural figures, the Bernoudys were known to host their friends from the art and design world of St. Louis at their home regularly. Gertrude was born to a prominent banking family in Prague, and she, like her father, loved to collect art. While in Europe, she was friends with Modern artists such as Pablo Picasso, Henry Moore, and Marino Marini. She later moved to New York and was introduced to art dealer Curt Valentin, who had similar tastes and helped her establish her collection of European objects. Gertrude was also already familiar with the world of modern architecture when she met her husband. On a trip home from visiting Richard Neutra, a notable modern designer in California, she picked up a copy of *Town and Country* which featured a Bernoudy-designed residence outside of St. Louis. The couple met at a dinner party soon after, and when they married, she brought her collection to St. Louis. Her pieces served as the backdrop, and surely talking points, for the Bernoudys’ social and personal lives.

The couple’s living room exhibited myriad pieces with an estimated worth of millions of dollars, including multiple Paul Klee paintings and a Marino Marini sculpture, *Il piccolo cavallo*, which he nicknamed “Gertrude” after her (Fig. 58). Georges Braque’s painting *Nu allongé*,

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154 Ibid.
155 At mid-century, Valentin was highly respected as an art dealer, but he has since been accused of knowingly purchasing and selling modern artworks stolen by the Nazis during the Second World War. See: “Nazi Art Loot Found Its Way to New York’s Modern Museum,” *New York Times*, October 9, 1994.
156 Property from the Collection of Gertrude Bernoudy, 12.
157 The built-in shelves in the living room have two moveable fabric panels, each with a Paul Klee (1879–1940) painting: *Diana*, oil on canvas, 31.5 x 23.625 in., 1931 (left) and *Die Vase*, oil on burlap, 34.625 x 21.375 in., 1937.
featuring a nude woman reclining with her legs crossed and her arms above her head, was prominently displayed above the central fireplace (Fig. 59). Directly below, resting on the mantel, is a statue by Henri Laurens of a nude woman in the same position as the one in Braque’s painting (Fig. 60). The two objects are directly in dialogue with each other, emphasizing Gertrude’s curatorial tendencies and clear knowledge of the relationships between the pieces in her collection. Just as every detail of the design of the Bernoudy Residence was intentional, so was the placement of the art objects within it. At parties, guests might feel they were walking through an exhibition, while at the same time experiencing the warmth and intimacy of a familial home.

Gertrude maintained an active social life after William died in 1988, continuing to strengthen her ties with the cultural world of St. Louis. When she died in 1994, the collection was sold at a Christie’s auction, raising 6.7 million dollars. The funds were used to establish the Gertrude and William A. Bernoudy Foundation, which donates to St. Louis arts and culture projects like the Bernoudy Studio at Washington University and exhibitions at the Saint Louis Art Museum. That same year, the house was sold at auction to Celeste and John Wight with a winning bid of $338,000. The pair were passionate about the house’s design, and they passed it on to their son and the current owner, Ted Wight, in 2014.

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158 Georges Braque (1882–1963), *Nu allongé*, oil and sand on panel, 11.875 x 24 in., 1924. Braque’s work is often considered alongside Pablo Picasso’s in scholarly work as the two had parallel careers and were developing their versions of cubism at the same time. Braque painted a series of nudes in the 1920s, usually depicted at rest.

159 Henri Laurens (1885–1954) *Femme couchée*, bronze with brown patina, length: 15.5 in., 1929.


162 The author is grateful to Ted Wight for the tour of his residence and the insights provided in an interview on October 28, 2021.
The Bernoudy Residence is still relevant within the architectural community, mostly due to Wight’s stewardship. He is a local realtor specializing in mid-century modern homes, and he also manages an online blog called “St. Louis Style” about the city’s design.\textsuperscript{163} In 2020, Wight was featured in a \textit{Nine PBS} special on local modernism, displaying through film the architecture of his home and stressing that he had tried to retain the original character of the house, making thoughtful concessions.\textsuperscript{164} Wight has been upfront about the updates that he has made to the structure and clear that he believes that enhancing the house preserves it from demolition (Fig. 61). The kitchen and bathrooms were updated for practical reasons, and they keep the house usable in terms of contemporary living standards while trying to respect the architect’s design as much as possible. After all, the Bernoudy House is still primarily used as a residence. Wight also installed skylights in the kitchen, a decision that he labored over, but ultimately decided in favor of after consulting the details of other Bernoudy homes and realizing that the addition of skylights was in line with the architect’s work.\textsuperscript{165} Some restoration has occurred, including the cleaning and replacement of the majority of the bricks on the outdoor patio. While the Bernoudy House is and has been widely featured in publications, Wight also keeps it physically open to the public, offering tours to Washington University students on occasion.

Although there have been some demolitions, a fair number of Bernoudy homes still exist within the area, but this one, which he designed for himself, offers a new insight into his design process. Its story is also enlivened by the collecting history and social life of Gertrude. That character has been retained as much as possible by its later owners, who have been dedicated to


\textsuperscript{164} Kara Vaninger, director, “Mid-Century Modern in St. Louis,” \textit{Nine PBS} (March 2020), 52:45.

\textsuperscript{165} The addition of skylights was also inspired by the skylights in the kitchen at the Kraus House, as Wight recognized the strong connections between Wright’s work in St. Louis and Bernoudy’s.
the upkeep of the both the house’s structure and its atmosphere as the Bernoudys intended. Since its construction in the early 1950s, the house has existed in the public sphere as an educational site and cultural attraction. It represents a later period of residential modernism in which people understood the value of modern living and embraced the warmth and functionality it could provide their homes, even if there was not a modern residence on every corner. Bernoudy worked with and around the international influence of Frank Lloyd Wright, as well as the regional paths created by architects like Shank, Murphy, and Armstrong to design another St. Louis residential icon.

Local preservationists agree that major examples of St. Louis early and mid-century modernism like the Bernoudy House are at risk even though they represent an essential chapter the cultural and architectural development of the city. The St. Louis region’s architectural legacy is rich, but the recurring narrative has largely excluded the impact of local architects and the ideas of modern living that they cultivated through the functional designs and lifestyles exhibited in their own homes. At the end of the 1930s, while exhibitions across the country put modern life on display, St. Louisans could see livable examples of residential modern in their own neighborhoods, thanks to figures like Isadore Shank, Joseph Murphy, and Harris Armstrong. These three architects began to develop a more familiar regional variation of the style that had been marketed to the public as cold and austere. Shank, Murphy, and Armstrong employed local materials that the community was accustomed to, such as brick and quarried stone, to present warmer versions of houses still driven by new technology. Their modern houses were experiments, taking the best parts from both new and traditional homes to create structures grounded in their location.

These houses also have a history of generating creative conversation and continue to market themselves to the local public today through publications and informal tours, opening their homes to Washington University students, journalists, and other interested parties. The
relationship between their architecture and their art programs is also substantial, as was typical of modernist designers. The Shank House produced an entire family of artists. The Murphy family professed their faith through the artwork on display. Gertrude Bernoudy curated paintings and sculptures worth millions of dollars within the intimacy of her living room. Others, like the Armstrong House, were exhibited in outside art galleries. The work of both the architects of these houses and their families has shaped St. Louis, especially its modern suburban culture, but their impacts on the region’s art and architecture remain under threat unless they are further studied and appreciated in the contemporary era.

The Frank Lloyd Wright House in Ebsworth Park serves as an example of how a residence’s preservation can serve the community and take advantage of the extraordinary setting to further public understanding of an architectural style with a unique cultural history. While all of the houses have been on the public stage and have drawn attention for their unique approach to modern living, the Kraus House has completed its transformation to become a fully public-facing site. It is a house museum, a display house dedicated to modernism, just as the House of Tomorrow was in 1933. It is promoted through images and articles just as the Jacobs House was in 1938. The Shank, Murphy, Armstrong, and Bernoudy houses have been on display in various ways and to various extents, but they remain today primarily residences, even if they offer informal tours or are featured in publications. The power and influence of Frank Lloyd Wright, through the Kraus House, can benefit these other mid-century modern houses and the legacy of residential modernism in St. Louis as a whole. When considered together, the houses tell a more complete narrative about how local modern living evolved — through both its architectural and its cultural roots. In the twenty-first century, people are rethinking these kinds of immersive, historical spaces and how
they can be preserved as useful, engaging community and educational sites to display architects’ ideas of modern living. These St. Louis houses should be included in the conversation.
Chapter 3: Twenty-first Century Interest in Modern Living

Across the country, the number of preservation projects and architectural exhibitions focused on mid-century modern is increasing. In recent years, museums have produced a variety of shows that primarily showcase objects and designs from the 1930s–1950s that promised to be both beautiful and functional additions to modern life. In 2019, the Museum of Modern Art in New York City produced *The Value of Good Design*, expanding on exhibition ideas first introduced in the 1940s, which featured furnishings, appliances, and more to ponder the question: “what is good design and how can it enhance everyday life?”¹⁶⁶ In 2012, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art produced a regional modern design exhibition, *California Design, 1930–1965: “Living in a Modern Way,”* which also featured furniture and industrial design to examine Californians’ preferences for modern living and objects related to the *Arts and Architecture Case Study Houses.*¹⁶⁷

The emphasis on regional design is significant and can reveal how approaches to modern life may have differed according to location and clientele, an important facet of American modernism that was not as present in the unified European version of the style. Shows that examined regional modernism have also opened in the Midwest. In 2015, the Saint Louis Art Museum opened *St. Louis Modern,* an exhibition that traced the dynamic innovations of St. Louis-based architects, artists, and designers in the mid-twentieth century through design objects (Fig. 62). At the time, *St. Louis Public Radio* praised the exhibition for “[giving] local, uncelebrated

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modernist treasures their due.” These shows highlight the growing interest in mid-century design in the past twenty years.

Just as expositions in the 1930s first introduced the public to Wright’s ideas of Broadacre City and the aesthetics of the House of Tomorrow, museums and exhibitions remain influential ways to teach Americans about modern living. But shows like *St. Louis Modern* are primarily about design objects, not architecture. In art museums, architecture can only be exhibited through representations, models, drawings, or photographs because the structures themselves cannot be removed from their context to fit inside galleries. Design objects and new technology may fit in any house or any gallery, but the architecture itself harmonizes with the setting and culture in interesting ways that can be difficult to navigate outside of the original site. Therefore, to be able truly exhibit architecture, entire structures must be preserved. In recent years, organizers have turned their efforts to preserving vulnerable modernist works of architecture in St. Louis, including examples of residences that can still be used to teach Americans about modern life in the region.

The Legacy of Modern Architecture in St. Louis

St. Louis has a rich architectural history, and many of its late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century buildings have received national acclaim. The Wainwright Building (Louis Sullivan, 1891) was recognized as one of the first buildings to truly emphasize the height allowed by technological developments like the steel frame. Sullivan’s modern design was indicative of the field’s embrace of the skyscraper archetype in the twentieth century, in particular for office buildings, and continues to be recognized as such by architectural historians. It is now protected

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as a National Historic Landmark. A few years later, when St. Louis was the fourth-largest city in the country, Theodore C. Link designed Union Station (Theodore C. Link, 1894), a transportation hub that organized dozens of local and cross-country railways. Finished in 1894, the structure was known for its 285-ft clock tower, which rose above the other buildings of downtown, and the extravagant ornament of its barrel-vaulted Grand Hall. Like the Wainwright Building, it is now a National Historic Landmark.

The city’s store of impressive buildings grew in the twentieth century as the country began to more fully embrace the modern movement. The modern architectural legacy of St. Louis is often overshadowed by two looming post-war figures: the Pruitt-Igoe public housing project (Minoru Yamasaki, 1951) and the Gateway Arch (Eero Saarinen, designed 1947, built 1963–65). Yamasaki’s infamous housing project was developed and constructed during the era of urban development, intended to clear slums and provide affordable housing within the downtown area. While technological innovations like the skip-stop elevator were supposed to facilitate life in the mass housing complex, they instead led to criminal activity. Widely seen as a failure due to the poverty, crime, and racial segregation associated with the living conditions, the project was demolished between 1972 and 1976.\(^{169}\) On the other hand, the Gateway Arch was designed to be a symbol of national pride, a monument to St. Louis’s role in the westward expansion of the United States. Organizers were determined to select a modernist structure, and Saarinen won the competition with a sleek, stainless-steel version of the arch form, which it remains an iconic part of the St. Louis skyline, protected as a National Historic Landmark.\(^{170}\) It was also the catalyst for

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\(^{170}\) The competition was run by the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial Association and was privately funded.
the 2015 *St. Louis Modern* exhibition at the Saint Louis Art Museum, which commemorated the Arch’s fiftieth anniversary.

These buildings tell the overarching story of St. Louis modernism, through stories of preservation and one notorious demolition. Though Pruitt-Igoe and the Gateway Arch will always be central parts of the city’s history at mid-century, the story has expanded in recent years with the local and national uptick in the interest surrounding mid-century modern residential architecture alongside more public-facing structures. The nation has grown more interested in preserving examples of mid-century designs for modern living, especially because many significant structures are starting to show their age or, in some cases, are threatened with demolition. Although the buildings do not necessarily look old because they are modern in style, the present day is far enough removed from the period in which they were built that these structures are in need of active maintenance and repairs. The St. Louis population is working to protect these endangered modern structures and in particular is trying to save prominent residential designs in the region.

Some modern houses, like the Kraus House, for example, are preserved as house museums. A group of interested parties banded together to purchase and maintain the house and to offer tours on a regular basis. While many Frank Lloyd Wright houses have been preserved and opened to the public for decades, attention has more recently been shown for the residences of other prominent modern architects. By preserving the architecture and the furnishings in situ within complete structures these organizations allow the public incredibly close access to the influential minds that played a central role in the radical design changes happening during the mid-

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171 Fallingwater (Frank Lloyd Wright, Bear Run, PA, 1939) was the first Wright house to be opened as a house museum in 1964. In the twentieth century, other modern houses have been preserved as museums. For example, the National Trust for Historic Preservation has acquired two prominent modern residences in the past twenty years, the Edith Farnsworth House (Mies van der Rohe, Plano, IL, 1951) in 2003, and the Glass House (Philip Johnson, New Canaan, CT, 1949) in 2007. Others preserved as museums include Case Study House #8 (Charles and Ray Eames, Pacific Palisade, CA, 1945–49) and the Gropius House (Walter Gropius, Lincoln, MA, 1938).
twenty-first century that led to residential modernism. Visitors can walk through the houses and their collections, preserved to look as they did during the mid-century, with an unparalleled ability to understand the architect’s design process, goals, and way of living. Not all modern houses become house museums, though, and many are still lived in and preserved as informal monuments by dedicated owners.

In 2020, the St. Louis PBS-affiliate KECT produced a special called *Mid-Century Modern in St. Louis*, where they claimed that mid-century architecture is becoming more relevant in contemporary in St. Louis because these structures are under threat from developers and neglect. While the special focused on modernist architectural icons in the city, like the Gateway Arch, it both opened and closed with interviews with homeowners, people who are living in modern residences designed by locally significant architects (Fig. 63). The owners were excited about their homes, happy to offer tours and discuss their individual histories. Co-curator of *St. Louis Modern* Genevieve Cortinovis noted that the suburbs were “fertile grounds for experimentation in architecture” in the mid-century period, and these experiments resulted in accessible, functional homes for modern living that are still livable seventy or eighty years later.¹⁷² But the twenty-first century owners also understand the struggles that come with preserving these types of homes that were characterized by innovative building techniques and materials that were very much specific to the time of their construction. Many of these houses are continually under threat because their upkeep can be complex, and the modern style is still not always considered desirable by buyers. Even though modern homes from the 1930s and 1940s offer a unique perspective on the inception and development of residential modernism in this Midwestern city, their histories are at risk without the efforts of devoted stewards.

¹⁷² Duffy and Moffit, “St. Louis Art Museum gives local uncelebrated modernist treasures their due.”
While these local houses have been recognized by enthusiasts, they are not well-known amongst a wider public, even though they are ripe for conversation because of their ability to connect with the city’s modern designers and art patrons that shaped mid-century culture. These modern houses embody the values of changing lifestyles and the emergence of suburbia that has defined the United States for the past seventy years. The innovation of these residences expressed the hopes of those who built them for a future that promised to be healthier and happier for middle-class families than the inner city. This kind of excitement about the suburbs has been unparalleled since the 1930s through the 1960s. These houses become more interesting and dynamic when they were designed by local architects, with knowledge of the area, who were incorporating regional materials and variations into the style while embracing national and international ideas of modernism.

Architectural historian Mary Reid Brunstrom argued that many St. Louis architects at mid-century understood modern to be less about a specific style and more about creating “state-of-the-art buildings that met their clients’ needs aesthetically, programmatically, and efficiently, using up-to-date technologies and materials.” Thus, the aesthetics of early modernism in St. Louis are often eclectic, with each architect experimenting with the look in various ways and sometimes drawing inspiration from more established architectural traditions. Each architect must be considered for their individual approach to the new style. Not only did modern houses designed by Shank, Murphy, Armstrong, Eames, and Bernoudy shape the architecture and culture at the time, but their influence remains strong in the suburbs of today through the efforts of their current owners. Still, these houses are particularly vulnerable, and not every preservation mission is successful.

In a 2022 article, Elizabeth Waytkus, the executive director of DOCOMO US, explained that preserving individual houses is complex and expensive, especially because they are private structures.\textsuperscript{174} Because of their size, layout and location, it is difficult to repurpose these modern houses. Often, the best option is for them to remain as private, residential structures. But this can present risks to the historical fabric of the house if inhabitants want to update their interiors or even demolish the house in favor of a new structure. The owners of these buildings and lots have the legal right to do what they wish with the structures, even if it goes against the preferences of preservationists. Additionally, suburban architecture councils do not always appreciate the modernist style, especially if they are populated by mostly traditional homes, and do not want to become stewards of the preservation of individual houses. Many of the houses of this period are made of specific materials that are difficult to treat in the twentieth century, whether by individual owners or zoning boards. Still, public outcry is loud when modern homes are demolished, so these St. Louis modern houses are clearly of importance to the community, both local and not, despite the difficulties associated with their preservation. People believe residential modern is important, though the authorities and scholarship have generally overlooked its legacy in the overarching architectural history of St. Louis.

The preservation community of St. Louis was devastated when the Morton D. May House (Samuel Marx, 1941) at 2222 South Warson Road in Ladue was demolished in 2005 (Fig. 64). It was replaced with a generic mansion in the French chateau style that has been lambasted by local architectural historians. The May House was an early example of the International Style in St. Louis, especially as applied to a residential structure. The house embodied the architectural

language popularized by Le Corbusier’s Villa Savoye. The first-floor walls were entirely glass, and the second floor was painted white and raised on thin pilotis. Ribbon windows stretched across the second story, and the entire house was composed of clean white lines and flat roofs. The structure was made of steel and reinforced concrete, with a gray Wisconsin stone facing and white-painted brick salvaged from buildings that were being demolished along the riverfront.  

The May House was an incredibly rare example of the International Style in St. Louis in the very early pre-World War II period. The interior was also thoughtfully furnished. May was a St. Louis department store executive and heir, and he was also a great patron of the arts, and much of the collection that populated his house later went to the Saint Louis Art Museum. The house also included residential air conditioning, which was scarce and incredibly expensive at the time. The May House remained, “by the testimony of [its] long-time owners, eminently livable without any need for remodeling.”  

David and Mercedes Lichtenstein, who bought the building from May in 1952 and lived there until 1985, “were so fond of the original furnishings that they maintained them in every particular, replicating worn carpets and reversing faded upholstery.” Unfortunately, the later owners allowed the house to fall into disrepair, and it was eventually demolished. If owners do not recognize the value of these modern houses and their architects, they are more likely to let them go to ruin, so knowledge of the houses’ histories can be incredibly powerful.

Whether they are traditional or modern in style, pioneer suburban St. Louis houses are at risk. The Missouri State Parks survey asserted that many of the individual houses were worthy of preservation not only because of their architectural integrity, but also because of the prestige and 

177 Peters, “Modern Landmarks Reach A Crossroads.”
increasing demand for housing in suburban St. Louis. New houses are frequently being built, many of them several times larger than the classic suburban home and taking up multiple lots, endangering older structures. Furthermore, the affluence of residents allows them to alter and add to their houses freely. Because they are substantially fewer and do not necessarily conform to the implicit and explicit stylistic codes of suburbs like Ladue, the modern houses are even more at risk and require action to ensure that their stories and structures are preserved.

In 2007, the St. Louis County Historic Buildings Commission created a list of mid-century modern buildings in the county, which it characterized as the region’s most endangered buildings. Embraced by younger architects in the 1930s and 1940s, modernism is now being recognized and protected by a newer generation of enthusiasts, both nationally and locally, who purchase and maintain these buildings and advocate for their importance. However, current trends are not universally followed and could change in the future. To ensure similar houses do not meet the same fate as the May House, preservationists are currently working to educate the community about the architectural and cultural significance of mid-century modern houses. They are also encouraging stakeholders to take care of these fascinating sites, whether that means merely updating their bathrooms, turning them into house museums, or, perhaps, something in between.

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Exhibitions in Architecturally Significant House Museums

In 1950, then director of MoMA René d’Harnoncourt, visited St. Louis to promote the museum’s *Good Design* exhibition, which featured more than 250 modern home furnishings. During the visit, he told the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch,*

> “Of every 100 persons who come to the Museum, we estimate that no more than ten actually accept a geometric abstraction by Piet Mondrian as valid art … but when principles of good design permeate a home, the occupants tend to be more tolerant, more receptive to new ideas in art.”

D’Harnoncourt spoke to the power of displaying objects for living and how viewers can more easily relate to them than art for art’s sake. Home furnishings have a different value to visitors because they generally understand how they would be used and could imagine using them in their own daily lives. These design objects can be even more powerful when displayed in context, whether that is a temporary living room set for visitors to walk through, or an entire structure and its furnishings preserved as a house museum. The modernist aesthetic may have looked fundamentally different or bizarre in comparison to what Americans were accustomed to, but, even so, the average visitor is able to walk in and recognize the basic elements of the home, like kitchens, bathrooms, and bedrooms. Scholar Sylvia Lavin described the appeal of full-scale objects on exhibition in context as “requiring no translation, needing only to be witnessed, that [is what]

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179 *Good Design* was directed by Edgar Kaufamnn Jr., the son of Edgar Kaufmann who funded the Broadacre City model and commissioned Fallingwater.

180 Conradsen and Cortinovis, *St. Louis Modern,* 140.
makes this sort of exhibition so appealing.” Everyday objects designed for functional use require even less translation in a space as generally recognizable as a home. In fact, visitors at the Kraus House more often than not ask practical questions about life for Russell and Ruth. For example, they are usually curious about the laundry situation at the end of the tour once they have realized that the house has no washing and drying machines. The docent responds that the couple had to travel to the nearest laundromat to clean their clothes, and then visitors ponder how frustrating the lack of laundry machines may have been in the suburban enclave. Because the full-scale house is such a digestible form to visitors, they can imagine themselves living in it, and ask questions about what modern life might have been like for the original inhabitants, thereby associating the architect’s ideas with their own routines and their own varied experiences.

House museums, because they can be both public and private, thus present an interesting combination of categories of space, as defined by Henri Lefebvre. In The Production of Space, Lefebvre claimed that space is a product, and he introduced his ideas of the “perceived-conceived-lived triad (in spatial terms: spatial practice, representations of space, representational space).”

Perceived space is experienced sensorily by society, as in exhibitions or publications. Conceived space is conceptualized by urbanists, planners, or designers, and lived space is produced by inhabitants and users. For Lefebvre, lived space “is the dominated - and hence passively experienced - space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate.” The spaces that people inhabit daily, like their houses, are the spaces they most actively imagine how to change. They relate lived space, the space they create, so closely to their everyday life that it becomes

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182 Information obtained on a guided tour at the Kraus House, March 20, 2021.
184 Lefebvre, Production of Space, 39.
passively experienced, but they also have the most power to adapt their own homes to an imagined ideal. In architecturally significant house museums, they may be inspired to make changes as they learn from the mid-century modern philosophy in context. Lefebvre further argued that these realms should be interconnected, so that any one person may move between them without confusion, although together the three types of space may not constitute a coherent whole. House museums like the Kraus House may be an example of the relatively interconnected space Lefebvre described, at once produced by the public who tours it, Wright who designed it, and Ruth and Russell Kraus who lived it.

Despite the power of one-to-one scale exhibitions, and the intermingling of Lefebvre’s realms of space, there also exist issues with display in house museums. House museums are a strange juxtaposition of space, trying to combine the intimacy and privacy of the family home with the public-facing mission of a museum. It is difficult to strike a balance between the needs of two such oppositional institutions. As scholar Lisa Stone wrote, “The process of turning homes into museums often errs on the side of museum—whose best practices can stifle the life out of places in the process of making them professionally respectable.” Indeed, through the process of museumification, the sensory experience of the home is filtered out; the smells, the sounds, the realities of everyday life are stifled, usually with the noble intention to perfectly preserve. But perhaps keeping the house exactly as it was should no longer be the goal of house museums. Stone continues, “‘The term ‘house museum’ seems oxymoronic, in that, here, house refers to home—a lived-in place, a generator and container of history, and museum implies the practice of freezing objects or places in time.’ The thousands of house museums across the country have faced issues trying to create life in frozen homes and telling their stories to visitors in engaging ways. Some

have been experimenting with how to adapt their missions and offerings according to the expectations of twenty-first century visitors, while still preserving as much of the original architecture as possible. Sometimes, however, it might be more beneficial for the visitor experience if the houses resist complete museumification.

Overwhelmingly, house museums today follow the same format, derived from practices instilled by the very first American historic house museums in the second half of the nineteenth century. Mount Vernon is generally regarded as one of the first historic house museum in the United States, after it was purchased by the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association in 1858. The association preserved the home of the nation’s first president, offering myriad tours and educational opportunities at a site central to the story of the country’s founding. At Mount Vernon, the standards for American house museums were first established, and they generally remain the same, even if the houses were preserved for different reasons, by different people, or in different places. Few sites, if any, have written wall texts or glass cases to further the perception that this is actually a residence, and any lived-in residence would not have wall texts. Therefore, the main way to convey information to visitors, if not through written text, is verbally on tours, often led by volunteer docents who have been trained in a specific script. Docents lead small groups, as to not overwhelm the generally small space, through the house in a curated order, not allowing visitors to dwell or move through the house at their own pace. They explain the history of the house and its inhabitants as visitors stand in the original spaces. Many sites have ropes, cording off sections so visitors can peer in but not inhabit the space. Some houses offer flyers and materials for

187 Velvet ropes are less common than they used to be and are a general safety measure that is usually employed if visitors can walk through the house on self-guided tours. In these cases, there is not a singular tour guide leading a group through the house, and instead docents are stationed at various points throughout the house to answer questions as they arise. Therefore, volunteers are unable to see all visitors at all times, as they would be able to on a guided tour, and the ropes help to preserve the house and its collections. While practical, ropes have often been criticized for not allowing visitors to fully enter rooms and closely examine their layouts and furnishings.
visitors to take home or browse through on the tours. Some may have separate visitor centers. No matter how hard house museums may try, though, there are always elements that remind visitors of the fact that they are seeing carefully preserved museums, not residences.

The houses stay very much the same over decades as an act of preservation. Their layouts and furniture remain the same, preserved to look exactly like they did during a time period of significance for the house and its inhabitants. But the monotony of this type of display often fails to engage local communities and attract returning visitors. Thus, many are struggling to be sustainable institutions in the twenty-first century, so scholars are proposing new methods of engagement. In 2015, *The Public Historian* dedicated an issue to reimagining the historic house museum, encouraging these sites to engage with both the past and the present, to dig deeper into their own histories, and to animate them in an effort to connect with the contemporary public. Lisa Junkin Lopez, the issue’s editor, wrote in the introduction that curators were beginning to “reimagine these sites as active, breathing spaces” in order to avoid the lifelessness often imposed by strict standards of museum displays.188 The preservation of these historical places and narratives is incredibly important to our understanding of the country and its development, especially since they display the recognizable objects and spaces of residences in their original context. But not everything in a house museum has to look exactly like it belongs, like it has been there since the house’s construction, to be effective. If the narratives may evolve, so may the physicality of the space also be transformed. Therefore, to avoid the repetitiveness of a space frozen in time, some architecturally significant house museums have installed temporary exhibitions on site. There are a variety of approaches to rotating displays, but curators never infringe upon the decided narrative of the house or endanger its preservation. Some places, like the Kraus House, choose related

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objects, and rotate them in places that fit reasonably within the house, such as the mid-century ceramics placed on the built-in shelves that originally held Ruth and Russell’s books and art. Others are more forward with their displays.

Some modern house museums construct visitor centers and galleries on site to host temporary exhibitions and facilities, such as bathrooms and giftshops, so they are not bound by the preservation regulations imposed on the original structure. For example, the Edith Farnsworth House (Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Plano, Illinois, 1949–1951) is located on the banks of the Fox River. In 2008, the organizers realized that a structure separate from the house was necessary to protect the Mies-designed furniture from the ever-frequent flooding. Therefore, a contemporary round barn was designed by students at the Illinois Institute of Technology, now affectionately called “Barnsworth” (Fig. 65). It safely housed the furniture, but it also became a temporary exhibition space displaying other objects related to the architect, the house, and modern design. Although these exhibitions exist outside of the context of Edith Farnsworth’s house, they remain on site, in a space that offers curators more creative freedom and flexibility than the revered white lines and glass walls of Mies’ design. Barnsworth acts as traditional gallery space with wall texts and labels explaining the modern themes of its temporary exhibitions. The house also has a visitor center on the edge of the property that is more traditional in style. It welcomes visitors and contains the gift shop and bathrooms. Adding new structures to a property is often risky in terms of preserving contributing features because it alters the landscape. Modern houses are usually directly connected to the site, and architects carefully considered the views of the exterior and how they are framed by the windows in their original designs. In the case of the Edith Farnsworth House,

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189 The Edith Farnsworth House is owned and operated by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.  
190 Mies van der Rohe was the chair of the Department of Architecture at the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) from 1938 until 1958. He also designed the IIT Main Campus plan in 1941, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
the site is large enough that visitors cannot see the visitor center or Barnsworth while inside the residence. Since it protects original furniture, the additional construction was a sensible choice, although it required visitors to walk between structures on the site. Organizers are often hesitant to alter the landscape and modify the architect’s original intentions, but sometimes these changes prove necessary so the house remains operational as a museum.

In order to create dedicated space for temporary exhibitions, other house museums have converted interior rooms into galleries rather than erect new structures on site. The Hollyhock House (Frank Lloyd Wright, 1919–1921) in Los Angeles, California was built for oil heiress Aline Barnsdall. Many rooms have been kept entirely intact, especially those that have Wright-designed furniture as a centerpiece, such as the dining room table or the engraving over the hearth. Other rooms have been entirely converted. For example, two bedrooms on the main floor of the house were transformed into a conventional gallery space, that now displays bass wood models of the structure on pedestals and photographs of design details hanging on the walls (Fig. 66). Barnsdall never actually lived in the house, donating it and the surrounding land to the city in 1927 to form Barnsdall Art Park. ¹⁹¹ Since then, the park has promoted an arts-centric mission. Over the years an art gallery, a theater, and an art center were added to the site, so another gallery space inside the Hollyhock House fits logically with the park’s objectives. After all, logically, once a house has become a museum, bedrooms are unnecessary. However, when houses museums convert rooms, they make an active decision to demolish spaces, rather than preserve them. While many make these decisions for practical reasons, they often choose to repurpose the rooms deemed less interesting. But even the “less interesting” rooms contribute to the narrative of the home, the

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architect, and the inhabitants. For example, the Gropius House (Walter Gropius, Lincoln, MA, 1938), owned and operated by Historic New England, was in need of on-site offices for staff as their offerings grew. The organization decided against building a separate structure so as to not alter the views of the landscape from the house. Instead, the servant’s bedroom was converted into office space. Although this renovation made work easier for staff, it limited the parts of the house which were accessible to visitors and also eliminated an opportunity to educate visitors about the socio-economic standing of the Gropius family and its implications during the time period. Changes to the structure also change the house’s narrative, and each preservation decision, whether structural, aesthetic, or practical must be carefully considered since the houses and their stories exist in the public sphere.

Many houses have been reexamining their histories and narratives in the twenty-first century. Some of the nation’s oldest and most-visited house museums are grappling with how to respectfully and informatively educate visitors about their troubled histories. Places like Mount Vernon have been delving deeper into their racist past to examine Washington’s in slavery complicity.192 New special exhibition and informational campaigns, as well as the preservation and reconstruction of slave quarters on the property for visitors to inspect, have aimed to examine the darker parts of the first president’s, and the nation’s, history. In doing so, some of the oldest institutions are reconsidering figures in American history under a twenty-first century lens in order to tell an accurate, more complete story, that takes into account all aspects of a site’s past. While this may seem like a daunting task, it is incredibly important for organizers and visitors alike to recognize and discuss the country’s complex histories in productive and sensitive ways. This

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means revisiting and revising established narratives, but it might also mean altering the architecture itself in thoughtful ways that can engage more visitors in the twenty-first century.

The Value of the Modern House

Art historian Alois Riegl provides a useful framework in which to examine these houses as monuments in his influential work, “The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Origin.” He begins by defining a monument as, “a human creation, erected for the specific purpose of keeping single human deeds or events (or a combination thereof) alive in the minds of future generations.” Monuments are memories preserved as physical structures, representing people, places, events, or ideas, as time passes, and they have a “commemorative value” because they bear a collective human memory. For Riegl, monuments can have other types of value as well. A monument may have “historical value” if it is a historical document, constituting a link in the chain of human development to the present. Similarly, a work of art may have “artistic value” because it is a “palpable, visual, or audible creation by man” celebrated for its use of color, concept, and form. A work of art may also have art-historical value, in which it is recognized for its artistic value as well as its place in the development of the visual arts. Additionally, a monument may have “age value” simply because it is an object of a previous era, showing its age as a testimony to the endless cycle of life and decay. Riegl considers historical value, art-historical value, and age value to be past values because they are rooted in the monument’s relationship to the past.

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194 Riegl notes that art value has been both subjective and objective throughout history. Before the 19th century, art value was absolute and objective. Ancient art was considered the ideal, and the closer works were to the ancient examples, the more art value they had. In the 19th century, it was understood that all periods of art assume their own independent significance, but there was still a belief in the objective artistic ideal. By the beginning of the 20th century, art value was not canonically binding. The art value of a monument was established by the requirements of modern art history, but these requirements could vary.
Past values are sometimes in conflict with what Riegl calls present values, such as “use value.” Practical considerations regarding use value may be at odds with age value. For example, Riegl acknowledges that use value may necessitate the destruction of a monument, if perhaps the decay is endangering human life. An older building may have age value, but if it is still in use, it must then be “maintained in such a condition that it can accommodate people without endangering life and health.” Even so, this raises questions about how preservation, restoration, or even destruction can alter a monument’s age value in order to maintain its use value, especially because humanity is generally nostalgic toward what Riegl calls “the cult of age value.” The other present values that Riegl discusses are “newness value” and “relative art value.” Newness value refers to the integrity and purity of a new object that anyone can appreciate. On the other hand, relative art value is “not objective and lasting but undergoes constant change,” and can be only appreciated by the “aesthetically educated modern person.” Because modern perspective on art value does not recognize an objectively valid artistic canon, relative art value “offers the possibility of appreciating works of former generations as evidence not only of man’s creative struggle with nature, but also of his particular perception of shape and color.” Relative art value requires a particular knowledge base but describes how monuments can be admired according modern understanding of art value, even if that may evolve as the field does.

Each of the St. Louis modern houses discussed in the second chapter of this thesis embody Riegl’s system of values in their own way. The most striking value of each is overwhelmingly art-historical. They are all recognized for their architecture and its place in the development of the modern style, both aesthetically and in the mind of the public. Designers like Shank, Armstrong,

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195 Riegl, “The Modern Cult of Monuments.”
196 Ibid.
197 Ibid.
Murphy, and Eames were experimenting with new philosophies visually and functionally, and each arrived at a unique product of the time period and the mindset of Americans in the late 1930s and early 1940s. They played with and struggled with the style as it developed. Shank worked around the traditional expectations of the Ladue zoning board, trying to see what more modernist elements he could actually build in the stylistically conservative neighborhood. Eames worked with a modern, irregular plan, but added classical elements like acanthus leaves in new materials and forms. Bernoudy and Wright represent the art-historical value of an era just a few years later in which modernism had developed and become more accepted by the public, so the architects were experimenting on new terms and playing with a more established architectural language. Wright used the Kraus House to experiment with his own changing definition of Usonian, stretching budgets and materials to achieve a never-before-seen result. Additionally, these St. Louis houses generally had a close relationship to the art world, through social connections and through their own collections. The Murphy House’s art program ties closely to the family’s Catholic faith, and Gertrude Bernoudy’s impressive collection was displayed thoughtfully throughout the home, adding another dimension to their artistic value.

While all of the houses surely have art-historical value, their relative art value is trickier. It takes, perhaps, a more trained eye to understand the relationship between the modern, the more traditional, and the regional elements of these houses that make their designs so fascinating. The Frank Lloyd Wright House at Ebsworth Park has probably the most relative art value because it is clear to anyone walking in that the house has a unique, cohesive architectural language expertly honed by its architect. The colors and the angles are so striking that all visitors immediately have an admiration for Wright and his creation, whether they had seen his architecture before or not.
The relationship between the age value and the use value of these houses is also complex. They were all built between seventy and eighty years ago but do not look it at first glance. When Riegl discusses age value, he is referring to monuments that obviously and visibly show signs of age, like ruins. In this case, the buildings are old, so they must have age value, but because the architects were forward-thinking and these modern houses do not look immediately as if they are from a past era. Upon closer examination, some of the Shank House bricks may be in need of replacement, but the house overall has been kept in generally good condition, so its age value is not as apparent as Riegl described. The use values of these houses are equally complex, as it first requires their use to be defined, whether as a public monument to modernism, a warm family home, or even both. Furthermore, their use value may change, as it did for the Kraus House when its primary function shifted from private residence to public historic site. For the time being, most of these houses are primarily residences, and their use value is attached as such, even if they are kept to museum quality. While the houses are all still usable as residences, their use value is primarily affected by the services installed at mid-century, many of which are outdated by contemporary standards. Twenty-first century home owners, especially in wealthy neighborhoods like Ladue, expect more spacious kitchens and bathrooms than those designed by Bernoudy which were meant to be compact and functional. Others, like the Murphy House, were forced to rebuild after unexpected damage in a storm, adding a new wing where the original was destroyed, albeit for practical reasons. Just as Riegl predicted, age value is sometimes in conflict with use value. To continue to be functional, especially by contemporary standards, necessary updates directly affect the both age value and use value of modern houses.

The commemorative value of these modern houses is a tricky concept, and worthy of further consideration. While they are symbols of a specific historical era when residential
modernism was introduced in the United States and people were first excited about the potential of suburban development, there were many horrors associated with the period as well. These houses represent the wealthier, white families who were able to escape their dissatisfaction with the city center by purchasing lots with abundant green space, erecting personalized, technologically advanced houses, and owning cars that would allow them to travel into the city as necessary for business. Many Americans could not afford the same opportunities, especially as the economy recovered after the Great Depression. In city centers, slum clearance movements displaced poorer minority groups, and government sponsored housing was overrun with crime and violence. Housing and real estate practices often furthered racial segregation and forced African American families into specific parts of the city in an effort to control property values. So while looking at these houses and their art-historical value paints a rosy picture of their architectural design, they, at the same time, commemorate a dark time in American history for the lower-income families who remained socially and economically trapped in the downtown areas. Like many monuments of the past, their historical memory is not straightforward, especially under twenty-first century standards. This investigation has primarily focused on dissecting the art-historical value of these houses, but it is important to remember that they were constructed in the racially exclusionary environment of the 1930s through the 1950s as their structures and histories are preserved.

While many of them will remain residences, some of these modern houses may become house museums in the future, and they have a successful precedent in the Frank Lloyd Wright’s House at Ebsworth Park. Either way, they are worthy of consideration given their rich architectural

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and cultural histories. They might stay homes, in the family or not, or they might, perhaps, find a foothold in between solely residence or solely museum, just like what is being attempted at William Bernoudy’s Pulitzer House. The house is now owned by Emily Rauh Pulitzer, former curator and founder of the Pulitzer Arts Foundation, an art museum in St. Louis. While renowned for its architecture, Pulitzer also filled the home with her impressive art collection, most of which is promised to institutions like the Saint Louis Art Museum. She and her team at the Pulitzer Arts Foundation have been working to finalize future plans for her house, which will become the Pulitzer Arts and Ecology Center, a non-profit educational facility related to art, architecture, history and ecology.\(^{199}\) The exact functions of the center are still under discussion, but Cara Starke, the executive director, sees the house retaining its residential use.\(^{200}\) The Pulitzer Arts Foundation routinely hosts guest curators and artists in residence, who could be housed within Bernoudy’s architecture and at the same time within a building closely connected to the life and collection of a prominent St. Louis philanthropist and supporter of the arts. The Pulitzer House would remain a house, while also closely aligning itself with the art world and an educational mission that would engage the community.\(^{201}\)

This is all to say that these modern houses are valuable and vulnerable, and solutions to their endangerment are not always clear. There are risks associated with maintaining the houses as residences, especially as owners change, and there are also issues when transforming a house into a museum. Funding would have to be procured to purchase the house and then support its future

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\(^{200}\) The author is grateful to Cara Starke, Executive Director, for answering questions about the Pulitzer Arts Foundation’s future plans for Bernoudy’s Pulitzer House in an interview on October 15, 2021.

\(^{201}\) There are many ways in which houses can be at once both residence and museum, expanding the definition of “house museum.” More examples of relevant lived-in “museums” can be found the Fall 2021 issue of *Save Wright*, the magazine of the Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy. In it, guest editor Jennifer Gray and contributors interview people who live in Wright-designed homes and host tours for the public.
operations and preservation. Furthermore, house museums often encounter issues with zoning since they are located in residential districts, and often in idyllic suburbs that are not eager to invite hordes of tourists into their neighborhoods. Cities like Ladue might not look kindly on visitor centers being erected among their subdivisions. So, while the modern houses in St. Louis are not necessarily equipped to all become house museums, examples like the Pulitzer House prove that there can be other solutions to save these sites that are neither house nor museum, but something in the middle. These early modern houses are in a particular position to explore the boundaries between house and museum because they were always experimental in nature, designed by creative architects in stylistically traditional neighborhoods during an era of uncertainty surrounding architectural modernism. They displayed to the public, locally and nationally, that the future of residential living was actually livable, not just a museum display. Their historical and cultural narratives can support experiments in the future, especially if they explore both the faults and successes of society during the era of construction, and also lean into the current creative direction of exhibition in the architectural field.

The architectural field in general has in become in recent years more experimental, especially vis-à-vis contemporary exhibitions. Though the architecturally significant house museum has often been only considered tangentially in relation to the architectural field, it can and should capitalize on the discipline’s experimental direction. In her 2021 book of the same name, Fleur Watson argues that a “new curator” has emerged in the world of design as the definition of “to curate” has expanded and exhibitions have moved outside of art museums and educational institutions. The “new curator” is embracing the dynamic process of curating design, creating live tests rather than exhibiting finished projects, and accepting the risk of failure inherent in
Scholar Sylvia Lavin argued that this exhibition culture is increasingly central to architecture. The professional field is promoting space-making through exhibition and experimenting with ways to make displays reflect and enhance the values of twenty-first century viewers around the world. As Watson noted in *The New Curator*,

“As architects and designers pursue new ways of practicing design with an ambition to reclaim its relevance and impact, so too must the contemporary curator respond, reflect and translate the contemporaneity and agency of such practice and its value to society.”

The curators of exhibitions in both formal and informal house museums can learn from experiments happening in the architectural field at large. More often than not, architecturally significant house museums have tended towards the historical disciplines rather than architectural. They follow the format of historic house museums established by places like Mount Vernon, which has a very different meaning than a Frank Lloyd Wright house, but have not closely aligned with the developments of the architectural field which defined their creation. Although these houses were and are significant for the experimental approaches to residential design, they use relatively conservative, historical methods of display. By drawing on the mission and findings of the “new curator” these houses can once again become sites of experimentation, developing new methods of display that allow them to carve out their own space on the spectrum between a public site of preservation and a private lived-in residence. Architecturally significant house museums can thoughtfully adapt to the needs of twenty-first century visitors by respecting the expectations of

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the museum while simultaneously avoiding stagnation. While there is no one, clear solution, there
are myriad routes to follow through the contemporary discoveries of the architectural field, many
of which would not be a leap for the missions of houses like the Kraus House, that aim to teach
both a historical narrative about the period as well as how an architect can realize a new, usable
design philosophy.
Conclusion

In “The Cult of Monument,” art historian Alois Riegl pondered the relationship between intentional and unintentional monuments. He wrote, “In the case of the intentional monument, its commemorative value has been determined by the makers, while we have defined the value of the unintentional ones.” But Riegl conceded that the line between intentional and unintentional monuments is sometimes blurred, as is the case with these St. Louis modern houses. Houses are generally not intended to be monuments; they are intended to be functional shelters for humans. There are millions of them, in innumerable varieties. The houses examined in this investigation, however, have been assigned value and have become unintentional monuments, whether through their architects, their owners, or current interested preservationists. On the other hand, some of these modern houses may have been originally created as intentional monuments. For example, it can be argued that the Kraus House is an intentional monument because it was designed by a distinguished American architect for clients who were already in awe of his work. It was an expression of Wright’s ideals for modern living as a national figure, and it was always given recognition from the public. Since its construction was announced, students traveled to take photographs and learn from the structure, trying to glean inspiration from Wright’s process.

The Kraus House became a different kind of monument when it transformed into a house museum. It became stationed more fully in the public eye, and tours, publications, and exhibitions marked it as formal, intentional monument in the twenty-first century. Wright and the Krauses knew it would be somewhat of an attraction during the twentieth century, but the house would still act as a shelter, protecting the couple and their possessions. They did not know at the time it would become a public-facing institution, no longer a residence in any capacity. While it was always a

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205 Riegl, “The Cult of Monument.”
work of art, its life as an official museum was unintentional in the creators’ eyes; Wright designed the Kraus House to be a residence and used as such. Even so, it was designated an intentional monument in 2001 by its original owner, when Russell Kraus decided to sell to a preservation organization instead of a developer. The line between intentional and unintentional monuments is unclear, especially in the case of the house museum as it exists in both the public and private realm at various instances in its life. What is clear is the value of the Kraus House, and other architecturally significant house museums, as art-historical objects, indicative of the designers’ struggles to incorporate modern architecture into their own life and their stylistically traditional neighborhoods.

While these other St. Louis architects do not have the same national name recognition as Wright, their houses have a similarly complex relationship to intentional and unintentional monuments, which may yet change if they are preserved as house museums. While architects like Shank, Murphy, Armstrong, and Bernoudy built their houses to be private residences, which are typically unintentional monuments, they also built them knowing the structures would be stylistically different from their neighbors. They were local examples of a new architectural language, a regional variation of modernism. While the architects did not choose, and their current owners have not yet chosen, to transform the sites into museums, they did choose to welcome the public into their homes through photographs in magazines or informal tours that showed off their creations, which is more indicative of an intentional monument. The St. Louis homes of Shank, Murphy, Armstrong, Eames, and Bernoudy were and are valuable examples of the modern movement in the 1930s and 1940s, especially since they are still so few. If modern houses were everywhere, each might be less monumental, but these houses are a physical memory of a time when regional modern residences were first developing and taking hold of the city’s, and the
nation’s, interests. Additionally, they had an influential effect on the art and culture of the time, through their art programs, the creations of their inhabitants, and their curatorial processes. Modern residences remain valuable resources today as preservationists, curators, and neighbors are revisiting mid-century architecture and design and learning from the experiences of the owners of these houses.

Americans first learned about modern living through exhibitions in the 1930s and 1940s, and they found it most compelling in full-scale display homes. While the model of Broadacre City drew attention as it travelled around the country, the House of Tomorrow allowed visitors to inhabit the space and truly imagine a future in which modernism, the technology and the aesthetics, could impact their lives. National journals like *Architectural Forum* worked to display houses through photographs and captions, and, while they had a wide reach, it took time for the public to accept that modernism was not as sterile as the International Style had advertised. By the mid-1940s, the public understood that they could have the updated technology of the dishwasher as well as the atmosphere of warmth they expected from residential architecture through regional variations of the modern style. St. Louis architects most notably embodied this warmth by embracing nature, which was possible given the locations they chose outside of the city center. They tailored their designs to the contours of the site and used materials like brick that have a history and prevalence in the region. Still, modern houses never overtook stylistically traditional homes in the area, and houses like the Bernoudy House, even though it was built after the war when the modern architectural language had matured, are relatively rare. Both architects and consumers learned from these modern houses. We can do the same now – learn from these homes and imagine how we can live more happily and functionally in the future. Exhibition and display
as shown in these residences remain important educational methods, especially if employed in thoughtful ways.

The architecturally significant house museum has great potential. There is power in showing objects and structures to visitors in their original context and at a scale that does not require translation. In buildings like the Kraus House, the direct access to the architecture helps visitors visually and spatially understand how all parts of the design work together and with the site, as well as how Ruth and Russell inhabited the space. Despite these possibilities, house museums have been generally more cautious in their curatorial programs, leaning on a precedent established by historical societies in the late nineteenth century. If a structure has been preserved for its design, this historical model is not necessarily the most effective for engaging visitors. Instead, these houses should embrace the experimental philosophies embodied by the architects of these houses as well as the direction of the architectural field in the twenty-first century to present their display as dynamic and forward-looking.

While the Shank, Murphy, Armstrong, Eames, and Bernoudy Houses are not currently open as museums, they have always been objects of display in the eyes of the public, so, like the Kraus House, they can play with lessons learned from both private residences and public institutions. Curators, owners, and preservationists could transition these houses into museums that benefit from the exploratory nature of contemporary architectural exhibitions. They could also keep the houses as entirely private residences, although this could be difficult because the homes already exist in the public sphere. While these are both valid choices for the sites’ futures, the possibilities between public and private should also be explored, so that the houses do not lose either the dynamism possible in residences or the preservation emphasized in museums settings. If they become house museums, preservationists can be reassured that the structures will be
protected and maintained in excellent condition. On the other hand, if they remain residences the space will be lived in as intended, changing and growing with its residents. When asked how they prepare for visitors to enter their home for informal tours, the owners of a Frank Lloyd Wright house in Detroit, Michigan responded, “We really don’t do anything. It’s our home; it’s how we live. Sometimes it’s not as cleaned up as we’d like it to be, but hey, that’s how life is.”

It will be worthwhile for scholars, preservationists, curators, and owners to define this in between space, that is both public and private, that embodies Lefebvre’s perceived-conceived-lived triad, that is an intentional and unintentional monument, and that characterizes significant modern houses. These residences are cultural sites, and they have existed in this in between space since their construction. In recent years, places like Bernoudy’s Pulitzer House have been embracing the preservation benefits of formally establishing the building as a public center while also using it for its original intention as shelter. In between house and museum, the future-looking, functional, and aesthetics philosophies of modernism can thrive, these solutions just need to be more clearly defined in places like the modern houses of St. Louis, built between 1938 and 1951.

206 Gray, “Private to Public: Homeowners on Opening Their Houses to Visitors,” 18.
"BROADACRE CITY": AN ARCHITECT'S VISION

Spread Wide and Integrated, It Will Solve the Traffic Problem and Make Life Richer, Says Frank Lloyd Wright

The center of the city in the past has been its business district, a hard stone core, a dense knot of buildings, streets and sidewalks. The very heart of the city was a place of business and commerce, a place of twenty-four-hour activity. But in the plan of Broadacre City, the city is divided into self-contained communities of 150,000 to 250,000 people. Each community has its own central business district, with feature offices, stores, and theaters. The center of the city is the park, a green belt surrounding the entire area, providing a playground for the community. The center of Broadacre City is not a business district, but a park, a place for recreation and leisure.

The plan of Broadacre City is based on the idea that the city should be a place of leisure and recreation. The city is divided into self-contained communities, each with its own central business district and park. The center of the city is the park, a green belt surrounding the entire area, providing a playground for the community. The center of Broadacre City is not a business district, but a park, a place for recreation and leisure.

Figure 1: Frank Lloyd Wright’s article on Broadacre City, via The New York Times
Figure 2: Drawing of Broadacre City plan, via *Frank Lloyd Wright versus America*

Figure 3: Model of Broadacre City in installation, Frank Lloyd Wright, 1936, via the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation
Figure 4: Model of Broadacre City, Frank Lloyd Wright, 1936, via the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation

Figure 5: The Ladies’ Home Journal living room display at the Industrial Arts Exposition, via the Hagley Museum and Library
Figure 6: Jacobs House, Frank Lloyd Wright, Madison, WI, 1936, via the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation

Figure 7: Jacobs House floor plan, via Australian Design Review
Figure 8: Sketches of the Jacobs House featured in *Architectural Forum* in 1938, via *Architectural Forum*

Figure 9: House of Tomorrow, *Century of Progress Exposition*, George Frederic Keck, Chicago 1933, via the Chicago History Museum
Figure 10: House of Tomorrow pamphlet, including plans, via the University of Chicago Archives

Figure 11: House of Tomorrow interior, via the Chicago History Museum
Figure 12: Installation view of *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition*, 1932, via the Museum of Modern Art

Figure 13: General Motors Pavilion, *World of Tomorrow Exposition*, New York, 1939, via Library of Congress
Figure 14: Futurama, Norman Bel Geddes, General Motors Pavilion, *World of Tomorrow Exposition*, New York, 1939, via the Library of Congress

Figure 15: Detail of the highways on the Futurama model, via the Library of Congress
Figure 16: *LIFE* magazine and *Architectural Forum*’s “Eight Houses for Modern Living,” 1938, via *LIFE* Magazine

Figure 17: Frank Lloyd Wright’s house for a Minnesota family, “Eight Houses for Modern Living,” 1938, via *LIFE* Magazine
Figure 18: LIFE magazine offers scale models of “Eight Houses for Modern Living,” 1938, via LIFE Magazine

Figure 19: St. Louis City and St. Louis County, via Google Maps
Figure 20: “Black Tuesday” in St. Louis, November 11, 1939, downtown at midday, via the Missouri Historical Society

Figure 21: An early house in Ladue, typical of the traditional style, via Ladue Found
Figure 22: Plan for the Kraus House, c. 1951, courtesy of the Frank Lloyd Wright House in Ebsworth Park

Figure 23: Exterior of the Kraus House, courtesy of the Frank Lloyd Wright House in Ebsworth Park
Figure 24: Interior photograph of the Kraus House hallway, courtesy of the Frank Lloyd Wright House in Ebsworth Park

Figure 25: Frank Lloyd Wright, plan for a barn at the Kraus House c. 1950s, courtesy of Peter Shank
Figure 26: *I, Russell*, 1952 (left) and *My Beloved Wife, Ruth*, 1992 (right), courtesy of the Frank Lloyd Wright House in Ebsworth Park.

Figure 27: Interior photograph of the Kraus House hallway, via *Frank Lloyd Wright Mid-Century Modern*.
Figure 28: Interior photo of the Kraus House living room, courtesy of the Frank Lloyd Wright House in Ebsworth Park

Figure 29: Isadore Shank, *Nurnberg Market*, 1926, pencil (left) and *Spanish Village*, c. 1926, ink (right) that were on display at the Kraus House exhibition, *Through American Eyes* in 2010, courtesy of Peter Shank
Figure 30: Residence for Ilse Shank, c. 1939, via *St. Louis Modern*

Figure 31: Shank Residence, Ladue, c. 2021, via *Town & Style*
Figure 32: Plan for the Shank Residence, c. 1939, courtesy of Peter Shank

Figure 33: Shank Residence living room, c. 2021, via *Town & Style*
**Figure 34: Shank Residence as featured in the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 1950**

**A House That Couldn’t Miss**

Considered revolutionary when constructed a decade ago, Shank residence in Ladue was erected by dean of modern designers.

*By Emmet Layton*  
**TEMPO Planning Consultant**

- **Text**
  
  NESTLED into a downslope, tucked snugly between available and unoccupied adjacent site, the charming contemporary residence of Mr. and Mrs. Eudora Shank, 4 Graybridge road, Ladue.
  
  This lovely little brick and redwood dwelling was neither revolutionary when it was built in 1941, but is now midstream of the modern design flow, with its interesting lines and straightforward use of materials entirely lacking in the distortions which sometimes disfigure more recent examples. Much outstanding skill and good taste would be expected here, since Eudora Shank is his own architect and stands as undisputed dean among modern designers in this section of the country.
  
  His own residence is intended to surround his artist wife and their three small sons with the major conveniences of living without creating unnecessary effort for any of them. Interiors are comfortable and functional, but very inviting.
  
  Warm, red brick composes the major walls, but it is contrasted with papered or painted surfaces wherever additional color is desired. A layer of hollow tile between exterior and interior brick provides perfect insulation, while upkeep is conveniently at a minimum.
  
  The ingenious plan takes full advantage of the steep slope to locate their current living accommodations on one floor, while the ground-level area below the central section contains two additional bedrooms and bath for future use. The garage lies under their side porch.
  
  There are simple facilities for outside living, with a broad concrete whose solid board backplanks serves to conceal the children’s equipment and still keep its interior convenient shelter.
  
  Mrs. Shank’s kitchen beside the front door gives her equally easy access to callers and to her studio behind, while the boys’ bedrooms at the far end of the south wing isolate them from late adult activities.
  
  Ten years of living have merely mellowed the house into a home, where grownups and youngsters alike lead unhaunted days, surrounded by a blend of the old and the new.

*Photography by Joe Ward*

- **Diagram**
  
  Front of the residence, viewed from above, shows interesting roof lines that harmonize well with the hillsides; lower which is built. While this west elevation is built of brick, the rear is covered redwood, neither surface requiring much upkeep and both flowing into the colors of the surrounding landscape.

- **Illustration**
  
  Mrs. Shank works on magazine illustration in her-used studio, which is screened from dining area on more formal occasions. Paul is at piano, while Stephen works with water colors.

- **Text**
  
  Living and dining areas, where a Biega River painting shares the fireplace wall with an oak tree clock. Southern sun streams across a Guatemalan rug behind the large record player and radio which Shank built himself to double as a desk.
Figure 35: Ilse Shank, *The Arrival*, 1941, watercolor and ink on washboard, 13 x 8in., via *Relative Perspectives*

Figure 36: *Relative Perspectives* catalog, 2001, courtesy of Peter Shank
Figure 37: The Murphy House in 1939, courtesy of Caroline Murphy DeForest
Figure 38: The Murphy House featured in *Architectural Forum*, April 1941
Figure 39: Windows and fireplace in the Murphy House living room, taken by the author on February 19, 2022

Figure 40: Wooden and glass divider panel by Emil Frei, taken by the author on February 19, 2022
Figure 41: Plan of the first floor of the Murphy House after structural repairs, c. 2010, via the National Historic Register Nomination

Figure 42: Pamphlet distributed by the Murphy House, courtesy of Caroline DeForest
Figure 43: Harris Armstrong House, photo by Bennett S. Tucker, 1939, via *Architectural Forum*.

Figure 44: Floor plans of the Harris Armstrong House, 1939, via *Architectural Forum*.
Figure 45: Sketch of the Harris Armstrong House, c. 1938, via the Washington University Archives

Figure 46: Interior photograph of the Armstrong House windows, 1939, via *Architectural Forum*
Figure 47: “A French Town House” in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 1934

Figure 48: Dinsmoor House, Eames and Walsh, Webster Groves, MO, 1936, photograph by Andrew Raimist
The greenhouse, shown in a dotted-line, is not included in the original plans but currently exists on the site. It is not clear when it was added.
Figure 51: Front façade of the Meyer House, via Architectural Digest

Figure 52: Acanthus leaf chandelier, Meyer House, metal and glass, by Charles Eames, via St Louis Modern
Figure 53: Pool house for Joseph Pulitzer Jr., William Bernoudy, Ladue, MO, 1948, via *St. Louis Modern*

Figure 54: Plan for the Bernoudy Residence, Ladue, MO, c. 1950, via *William Adair Bernoudy, Architect: Bringing the Legacy of Frank Lloyd Wright to St. Louis*
Figure 55: Exterior photograph of the Bernoudy Residence c. 1999, via William Adair Bernoudy, Architect: Bringing the Legacy of Frank Lloyd Wright to St. Louis
Figure 56: Bernoudy Residence as featured in the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, 1951
A Haven is
Intimate in Scale,
Warm in Quality

By CURTIS RESINGER

Many people have rejected all architecture bearing the name "modern" because to them "modern" has meant the cold, the austere, and the mechanical. They cling to the traditional forms because these represent certain qualities desired in human habitation: warmth, intimacy, and a vital sense of abundance, a richness of form and detail.

But these qualities that have traditionally helped to make a home a haven are not inherently tied to traditional forms. They can be present in any house, old or new, if the desire for them is a determining factor. They will probably not be present in work concerned only with novelty of techniques or newness of materials.

What is vitally new in the world today is not so much our techniques and materials as it is the spirit of freedom, of the possibility of individual development and fulfillment. This spirit is expressed in architecture through a different quality of space, space that is not contained or restricted in form but that is fluid, open, and free.

This house, designed for himself and his wife by William A. Bernoudy of Bernoudy, Mattrax, and Bauer, architects, combines these traditional qualities (Please turn the page)

The living room, seen in the overall view of the room at the top of this page and in the photo of the seating area by the fireplace, opposite page, has an intimacy of feeling generally associated with the traditional styles of residential architecture. This quality comes in part from the warmth and richness of the materials of construction (brick, plaster, and wood) and of the furnishings. But it also comes from an element in the room, the lower ceiling, which gives it a more intimate scale. This lower ceiling, following the rhomboidal shape of the roof (see plan on page 118 and photo above) sets up an interesting interplay of forms that does much to give a sense of freedom to the space of the living room.
Figure 58: Bernoudy living room c. 1955–1994, via *Property from the Collection of Gertrude Bernoudy*

Figure 59: Georges Braque, *Nu allongé*, 1924, via *Property from the Collection of Gertrude Bernoudy*
Figure 60: Henri Laurens, *Femme couchée*, 1929, via *Property from the Collection of Gertrude Bernoudy*

Figure 61: Bernoudy living room c. 2020, via *St. Louis Style*
Figure 62: *St. Louis Modern*, November 2015–January 2016, via the Saint Louis Art Museum

Figure 63: Homeowners discuss living in a St. Louis home designed by mid-century modern architect Ralph Fournier, “Mid-Century Modern in St. Louis,” via NinePBS
Figure 64: Morton D. May House, Samuel Marx, via the Chicago Historical Society

Figure 65: “Barnsworth” at the Edith Farnsworth House, c. 2019, taken by the author
Figure 66: The gallery of the Hollyhock House from the Hollyhock House Virtual tour, via Frank Lloyd Wright’s Hollyhock House
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Chapter 3


