



FOX POINT files

by Douglas H. Frazer

Midcentury Modern Architecture in FOX POINT

Credit the AMC TV drama *Mad Men* or just a newly discovered recognition of the special architectural flavor of the mid-century period. Midcentury modern is now in vogue and Fox Point has an unusually large concentration of these homes.

The term midcentury modern is a style descriptor of mid-20th century developments in design and architecture from roughly 1933 to 1965. Scholars and museums worldwide recognize midcentury modern as a significant design movement.

For Fox Point, the timing was right. Much of the village's housing stock was built after the Second World War and coincided with the ascendancy of this new, post Frank Lloyd Wright, style. The midcentury modern movement was a reflection of—and drew its inspiration from—the International and Bauhaus movements, including the works of Gropius, Le Corbusier, and Mies van de Rohe.

Midcentury modern architecture is typified by a clean simplicity and an integration with nature. The style emphasized spaces with a streamlined design, an open floor plan, natural wood, stone fireplaces (often two-sided), an abundance of large windows and light, the blending of inside and outside spaces—and in certain instances vaulted ceilings, skylights, and a dramatic pitch of the roof. Many midcentury modern homes featured a post and beam design that eliminated bulky support walls in favor of walls that framed large windows.

Milwaukee's important midcentury modern architects were Donald Grieb, Abe Tannenbaum, Jordan Miller, Russell Barr Williamson, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts (*The Fox Point of View*, December 2015 issue), William Wenzler, Howard Schroeder, and homes built by William F. Thalman, a versatile and prolific home designer and builder whose projects are often distinguished by Lannon stone exteriors.

Several proud Fox Point midcentury modern property owners are cataloging these homes both in the village and in the area. These include Matt and Adrienne Amman, Justin Racinowski and Liz Martin, and Eric and Fabiola Strande. They contribute to a blog created and hosted by the Ammans called www.midcenturymodernmilwaukee.blogspot.com, and a Facebook page, *Mid Century Modern Milwaukee*, created and administered by the Strandes, each cataloging and discussing midcentury modern homes.

The Amman home, 118 W. Bergen Drive, is a multi-level structure built in 1957 by Donald Grieb—most famous for designing the Mitchell Park Domes and the Glendale City Hall and Fire Station. Grieb built many homes in Fox Point.

In 1958, Abe Tannenbaum designed the Racinowski-Martin home at 7360 N. Seneca. It features a clean design, a two-way fireplace, and a weightless feel to the interior.

Two other standout homes designed by Abe Tannenbaum are located at 1610 East Fox Lane and 8595 North Seneca Drive. Tannenbaum did over thirty homes in Fox Point, especially smaller single story ranch homes located west of Santa Monica Boulevard between Good Hope and Calumet Roads.

AMMAN



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STRANDE



Jordan Miller designed the Strande home, 8580 N. Seneca, in 1958. It has tongue and groove pine ceilings, a double facing stone fireplace, and large windows looking out to the backyard. Strande purchased much of the late 50s-early 60s furniture at estate and garage sales as well as on eBay and Craigslist just before the prices skyrocketed. Miller's commissions included the downtown Post Office, the Mitchell Airport terminal, and the UWM library.

One of the most significant midcentury modern homes in Wisconsin, 6530 N. Lake Drive, was designed by William Wenzler for banker Gerry Nickoll. The Nickoll home, considered by some a masterpiece, won numerous awards and was featured in several magazines, including a *Life Magazine* series on "New Ideas in Living." It's a combination of modern furnishings, large expansive windows, a sculptured fireplace, and cypress beams and ceilings, together with breathtaking views of a tree studded ravine and Lake Michigan.

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Architect Howard Schroeder lived at 8325 N. Regent Road in a home he designed for himself along with the homes surrounding it. Schroeder is best known for designing Kohl's grocery stores—with their iconic facades.

Russell Barr Williamson, who started his career with Frank Lloyd Wright, spent the first two decades of his career designing a variety of homes located along Lake Drive in Whitefish Bay but by the 1950s turned to midcentury modern. Typically his homes were expansive with large vaulted living rooms. Great examples of his work are located side-by-side at 7740, 7755, and 7769 North Club Circle and at 6868 N. Barnett Lane.

Thalman Home Builders built many midcentury modern homes throughout Fox Point. Examples include just about every home located on North Holly Court and several homes on the North Berkeley Boulevard cul-de-sac.

Architecture-wise, Fox Point has a large number of significant residences. Given the special interest in the midcentury modern movement, and the many affordable homes within the village that capture and reflect that movement, we showcase yet another reason to choose, and celebrate, Fox Point.

Douglas H. Frazer is a Fox Point resident and neighborhood contributor as well as the village president. The views expressed are his own and not necessarily those of the Village, the village board, other village board members, or Best Version Media, LLC.

Racinowski-Martin

