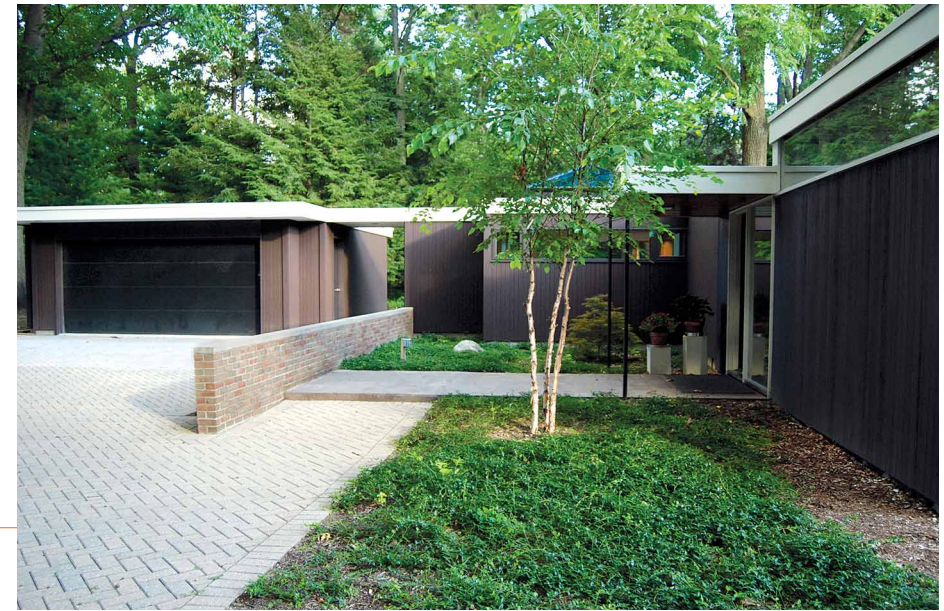


Ann Arbor's Midcentury Modern Homes

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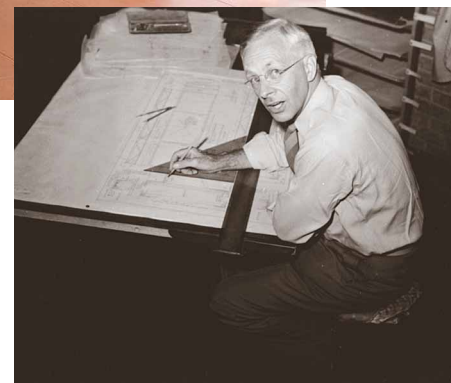


Bentley Historical Library, Univ. of Michigan (2)



In Ann Arbor, Mich., architecture is a spectator sport. Residents debate the relative merits of new buildings on the University of Michigan campus, and support for the town's older housing stock is reflected in the naming of 14 historic districts. But until recently, Ann Arbor's wonderful trove of midcentury modern houses has been ignored. Even the owners of these treasures often have not appreciated them and made unfortunate additions that obscure their original beauty.

Last summer, Nancy Deromedi and Tracy Aris, who both live in homes designed by George Brigham, the architect who introduced modernist houses to Ann Arbor, decided to form a2modern, a group that encourages appreciation of these often-overlooked masterpieces.



George Brigham in his studio, circa 1954.

Bentley Historical Library, Univ. of Michigan

Nancy and her husband, Dave, had a personal experience with remodeling. When they first went to a realtor's open house to view their Brigham house, Dave almost didn't go in because of its ugly snout-nosed garage with an inappropriate porch sitting on top. Luckily, Nancy got him to go inside, where the original features—floor-to-ceiling living room windows, redwood paneling, brick walls and a five-foot lodge-style fireplace with a copper hood—sold him on the house.

Beginning with Brigham

When Brigham joined the University of Michigan faculty in 1936 there was only one modern house in Ann Arbor. He had come from teaching at Caltech in Pasadena, where he became enamored with California's modern architecture. He opened his own Ann Arbor practice and went on to build more than 40 houses nearby, often employing his students.

The first to work for Brigham was Robert C. Metcalf, who returned to architecture school following service in World War II. After four years in Brigham's

Opposite: Nancy and Dave Deromedi's George Brigham home was built in 1950 and shows Frank Lloyd Wright influences, particularly in its red concrete floors and massive fireplace. Architect Robert Metcalf, Brigham's chief draftsman at the time, helped the couple restore the facade where an unsympathetic two-car garage had been added. They also redesigned the entry and added a colored skim coat to the original floor to mask damage from carpet nails.

Above: The home Robert Metcalf designed for his family in 1952, and two vintage views of the open plan interior.