

text & photography Scott Parker

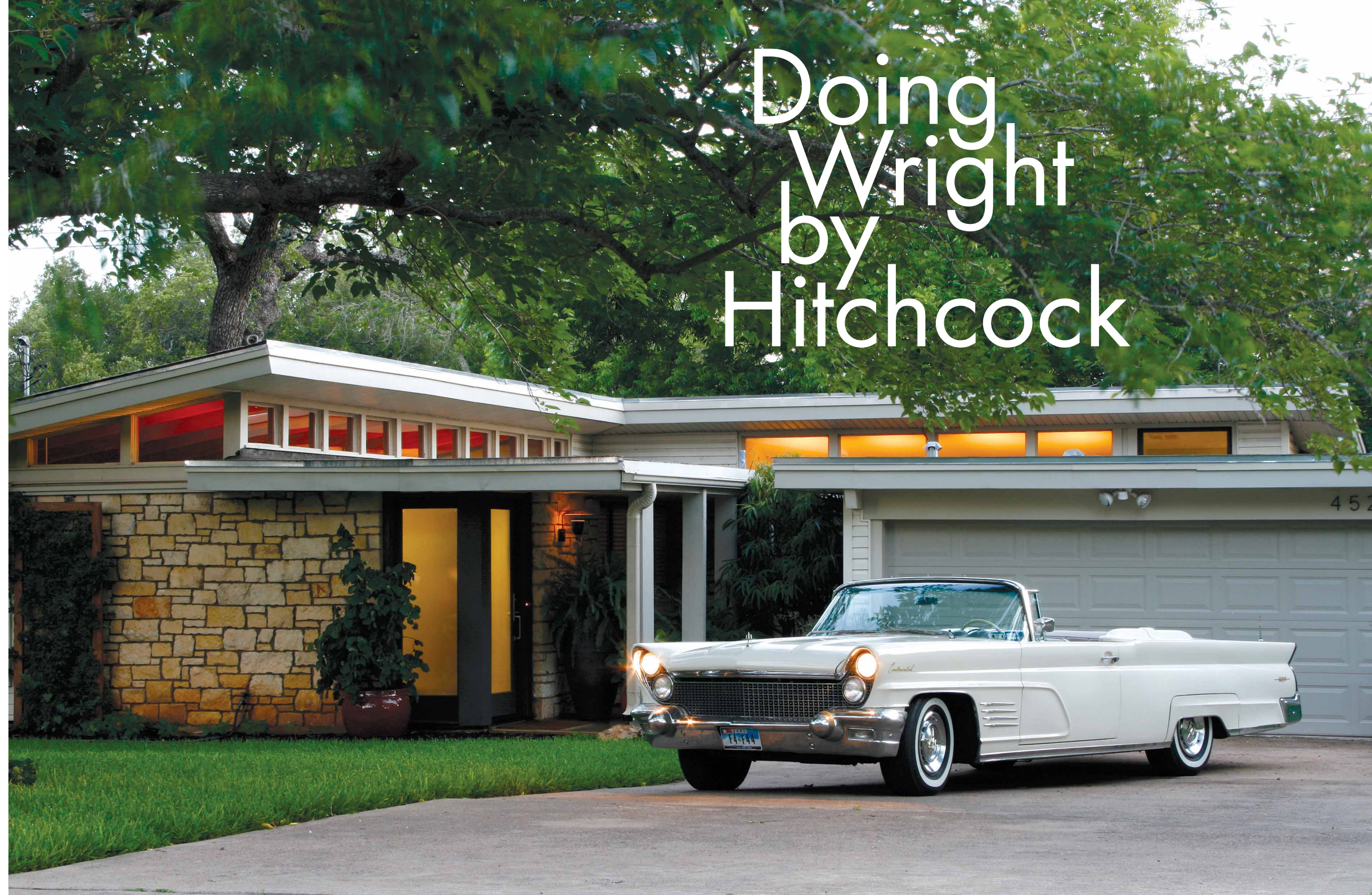
**My** interest in midcentury modern sprang from unlikely sources—Alfred Hitchcock, *The Girl From Ipanema* and a repossessed car. Perhaps I'd best explain.

The first time I watched Hitchcock's classic *North by Northwest*, I was perhaps 10 years old. While I was enthralled by many parts of the film—the pursuit of Roger Thornhill by a cropduster, Eve Kendall's gigantic Lincoln convertible and, of course, the perilous escape over the solemn faces of Mount Rushmore—it was the house that completely caught my attention. The Vandamm residence was all glass and limestone, cantilevers and soaring space. And although it was but a matte painting, it existed in my head to the point that, while other boys in Mrs. Torres' classroom furtively sketched ample women or Rat Fink hot rods, I was perpetually drawing elongated, horizontal houses jutting from improbable desert outcroppings. As to *The Girl From Ipanema*, there was something just so right about bossa nova, and it usually sounded best when emanating from the speaker of my mom's 1962 Continental convertible (repossessed from a bankrupt Texan).

Now, there'll be a long jump forward in time. In late 2009, I found myself leaving San Francisco apartment life, headed to Austin with an overpacked U-Haul and an overheated cat. Now I had the opportunity to own a home. It had to have a garage big enough to hold a '62 Continental and another car, preferably just like Eve Kendall's. It had to have glass and rock walls and a low, flat roof.

My realtor gamely showed me a number of houses and all failed to meet the criteria. Finally, he called to suggest I swing by a new listing in the south part of Austin on my way back to California. The house had suffered from serious remuddling and a pointless big-box remodel to entice a buyer, but I also found a string of clerestory windows, post-and-beam construction and an odd but appealing connection to outdoor living. It was the first house I'd seen that spoke to me, the first on which I'd make an offer and, as it turned out, my first house. I went back to San Francisco in a bit of a daze: What had I bought?

The 1959 home had been in probate for three years and was a bit of an eyesore in the tidy '50s subdivision of modest redbrick ranchers. It was clearly the odd house,



and it was suggested that it was by A. D. Stenger, a local MCM architect and builder. While I question the Stenger attribution, the iconic style was there, just trapped under years of deferred maintenance, unhappy prior owners and 15 coats of paint.

In my first few months of ownership, I came to a few conclusions: Little to no original detailing remained in the kitchen or baths, so full remodels were okay; I'd be on a strict pay-as-I-go budget; remodeling would not involve

My 1960 Continental Mark V, a sister to Eve Kendall's 1958 Mark III, in the driveway.

**A  
boyhood fantasy  
drives  
a newbie  
house hunter**