

**Merchandising the Postwar Model House  
at the Parade of Homes**

by

**Samuel Tommy Dodd, B.A.**

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Certificates that this is the approved version of the following thesis:

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**at the Parade of Homes**

**APPROVED BY**  
**SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

**Supervisor:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Richard Cleary**

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**Christopher Long**

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The Parade of Homes began in 1948 as a novel form of sales merchandising and publicity. The model house, on display at the Parade of Homes, was a powerful advertising tool employed by postwar merchant-builders to sell modern design to a new market of informed consumers and second-time homeowners. Using *House & Home* as a primary source, I contextualize the postwar housing industry and the merchandising efforts of builders. Then, through an examination of the 1955 Parade of Homes in Houston, Texas, I analyze the early Parade of Homes events and the language of domestic modernism that they showcased.

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## Introduction

In 1948, the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) organized an annual “National Home Week,” which featured a “showcase of housing ideas,” the Parade of Homes.<sup>1</sup> For the Parade of Homes, regional branch divisions of housing associations invited local builders to “erect their special Home Week model house at a central location, so prospective buyers can see them all in one place instead of having to travel far and wide.”<sup>2</sup> In hundreds of cities, thousands of Americans visited the model houses displayed in the Parade of Homes events. Builders and architects converted entire streets into showrooms, displaying the best construction technology, design, and neighborhood planning that the house-building industry had to offer.

The Parade of Homes embodied a novel form of sales merchandising and publicity, orchestrated by the postwar merchant-builder in response to a new housing market.<sup>3</sup> The model house, on display at the Parade of Homes, was a powerful advertising tool employed by postwar merchant-builders to sell modern design to a new market of informed consumers and second-time homeowners. More than a collection of

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<sup>1</sup>For the history of the NAHB before the Second World War, see *History of National Association of Home Builders, Through 1943*, (National Association of Home Builders, 1958).

<sup>2</sup>“National Home Week,” *House & Home* (September 1952): 200.

<sup>3</sup> The Parade of Homes has been neglected by scholars in their histories of postwar housing, marketing, consumer culture, or modernism. Ben Koush discussed postwar modern houses in Houston in his Masters of Architecture Thesis. His Appendix D included a list of Houston area Parade of Homes events from 1952 to 1964. Ben Koush, “Houston Lives the Life: Modern Houses in the Suburbs, 1952-1962,” (Thesis, Rice University, 2002). Jon Archer mentioned the Parade of Homes phenomenon once: “In the suburbs of many major cities, annual and semiannual trademarked real estate shows such as “Street of Dreams” and “The Parade of Homes, Where Dream Homes Come True” constantly maintain the propensity to thing of one’s current or future dwelling as a “dream house.” John Archer, *Architecture and the Suburbs* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2008): XV. Archer cited the Parade as a nominal example of a “real estate show,” without further discussion or analysis. The idea of the dream house was rarely used in the *House & Home* journal, so I will also largely avoid the term “dream house” in this thesis.

futuristic case study houses or World's Fair showrooms, the Parade of Homes served as the largest display of modernized middle-class speculative houses: newly constructed, decorated, and presented to millions of American consumers with ready-to-move-in availability.

The increased production of detached, suburban houses created a competitive housing market, which motivated speculative builders and developers to respond with a heightened level of advertising and merchandising.<sup>4</sup> By the middle of the 1950s, changing circumstances in the market of consumers drove merchant-builders to improve both the quality of design and construction in their products. In the premier issue of *House & Home* in 1952, the editors explained that the volume-built housing market no longer consisted of only first-time home buyers. Instead, with the wartime housing shortage almost satisfied, the American people were "better housed than ever before." As a result, builders had "built themselves out of their easy market." *House & Home* reported that over one third of the houses produced in 1956 were sold to second-time buyers.<sup>5</sup> In order to compensate for the need to sell new houses to people already well housed, the editors of *House & Home* declared that "home builders who expect to share fully in the next decade's 1,000,000 house-a-year market will have to make their houses

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<sup>4</sup> This thesis recognizes the various threads of merchandising, consumerism, and commercialism that activate architecture and construction at the seemingly anonymous level of suburbia. Historians of visual and cultural studies often investigate these themes and issues as separate components; there is no shortage of scholarship on postwar American housing and domesticity. For key texts, see John Archer, *Architecture and the Suburbs* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2008); Beatriz Colomina, *Domesticity at War* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007); Gertrude S. Fish, ed, *The Story of Housing* (New York: MacMillan, 1979); Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth* (New York: Pantheon, 2003); Thomas Hine, *Populuxe* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1986); and Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).

<sup>5</sup> "One Third of 1956 Homes were Sold to Second-Time Buyers, Fed Reports," *House & Home* (August 1957): 49.

so much more attractive and so much more livable and so much better value that millions of families will want to move out of good houses.”<sup>6</sup>

The Parade of Homes was one of the sales methods that highlighted the attractive and livable qualities of the volume-built house, both of which came together to create a volume-built form of domestic modernism. The early Parade of Homes events featured demonstrations of modern house-building methods and staged model houses. Builders presented furnished interiors and landscaped yards along with house construction to create an overall marketing presentation. Architectural styles, spatial planning, and interior design became promotional features that were presented to the public through a series of merchandising efforts that centered on the model house. Quality design became part of merchandising the “more attractive and so much more livable” modern house. Builders turned to a collaborative relationship with architects in an effort to incorporate design into their volume-built houses. A type of “modern” and “contemporary” design emerged that builders adopted from various sources and then moderated and variegated through merchandising in order to appeal to a larger audience. “Everything from bombs to barbecue” was considered for sale at the Parade of Homes.<sup>7</sup>

The display technique of the model house was not new to architectural merchandising, having its origins in the early staged interiors of world’s fairs, exhibitions, and department stores.<sup>8</sup> The proliferation and professionalization of the technique in the housing boom of the 1950s rivaled that of the 1930s, when department

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<sup>6</sup> “What Lies Ahead for Home-Building,” *House & Home* (January 1952): 138-139.

<sup>7</sup> “HHBA Entry in Parade has many Provisions,” *The Houston Post* (June 19, 1955): Section 8, pg 18.

<sup>8</sup> For more on the history of the model house and staged interior, see Beatriz Colomina, “The Media House,” *Assemblage* 27 (August 1995): 55-66; Martin Filler, “Rooms without People: Notes on the Development of the Model Room,” *Design Quarterly* 109 (1979): 4-15.

stores used exhibitions to introduce modern design to a large consumer base.<sup>9</sup> World's Fairs commonly used the model house to showcase innovative building technologies and modern design to large crowds.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, the postwar Parade of Homes was not simply a housing show; it functioned as an illustrated narrative of progress in the building industry, as well as an experiential merchandising spectacle in response to a changing consumer base.

Martin Filler made a similar argument in his article “Rooms Without People: Notes on the Development of the Model Room.”<sup>11</sup> Identifying the origins of the model room within the context of newly industrialized nineteenth century England, Filler argued that the mass production made possible by new machines required a “means of promotion equal to the new capacity for production,” which was satisfied by the exhibition and the staging of model rooms.<sup>12</sup> “Mass production required mass merchandising.”<sup>13</sup> The same was true for the American housing-building trades of the 1950s. The premier issue of *House & Home* described the building profession as experiencing an “industrial revolution” worthy of new and novel merchandising efforts.<sup>14</sup> Mass building required mass advertising to appeal to a mass market; builders used the Parade of Homes and the model house as built forms of mass advertising.

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<sup>9</sup> Marilyn Friedman examined a series of such department store exhibitions and argued for their involvement in giving commercial credibility to modern design in America. See, Marilyn Friedman, *Selling Good Design: Promoting the Early Modern Interior*. (New York: Rizzoli, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> Lisa D. Schrenk, *Building a Century of Progress: The Architecture of Chicago's 1933-34 World's Fair*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> Martin Filler, “Rooms without People: Notes on the Development of the Model Room,” 4-15.

<sup>12</sup> Filler, 5.

<sup>13</sup> Filler, 14.

<sup>14</sup> “Cornerstone for a New Magazine,” *House & Home* (January 1952): 14.

In his article, Filler also identified three model room categories: *historic/nostalgic*—rooms that replicated historic interiors; *aesthetic/didactic*—demonstrations of artistic ideas in three-dimensional form, often with avant-garde and social aims; and *commercial/promotional*—large-scale product displays, commonly associated with department stores. Yet, even “within these three basic categories there are in turn numerous sub-types, permutations between the major classifications, and even high, middle and low expressions of all of the above.”<sup>15</sup> The Parade of Homes model house belonged in Filler’s third category; the speculative houses and interiors on display were middle-class expressions of the commercial/promotional model type.<sup>16</sup>

The annual income of the average home buyer in 1956 was \$5,640, and in that year most buyers paid approximately \$12,000 for a house.<sup>17</sup> Between 1945 and 1960 the price for a lower quality tract house was usually under \$10,000.<sup>18</sup> The Parade of Homes model houses discussed in this thesis were sold in the mid to upper \$20,000 range—nearly double the average price for 1956 and for most volume-built tract houses—showing that builders were marketing the Parade model houses for an upper-middle class consumer base, and the models rivaled the custom-built housing market in terms of quality and price.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Filler, 5.

<sup>16</sup> Beatriz Colomina also addressed these concerns by discussing the way in which “the modern house was presented as a product to be sold like any other” at department store exhibitions. Colomina, “The Media House,” 60.

<sup>17</sup> “One Third of 1956 Homes were Sold to Second-Time Buyers, Fed Reports,” 49.

<sup>18</sup> Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985): 234, 236, 371.

<sup>19</sup> “Houston’s Home Builders Lead off 1955 Parade of Homes,” *House & Home* (September 1955): 140-151.

In this thesis, I will examine the postwar model house and Parade of Homes as products of a competitive, consumer-based building culture. Rising professionalization in the house-building industry and the growth of a new house-buying market required different sales efforts from merchant-builders. They developed the Parade of Homes and the experiential showroom of the model house as merchandising and publicity solutions. Builders also worked with other professionals to incorporate various forms of modernism into the design and display of the Parade model houses in order to broaden their audience.

I have structured this investigation to unfold from a broad scale into a close analysis. The first chapter discusses the context of postwar housing and the house-building industry, including the collaboration between the merchant-builder and the architect. The second chapter describes the process of selling the postwar house, presenting it as a series of actions—staging, merchandising, publicizing—on the part of the building community. That chapter also considers the role of the staged model home as a merchandising tool. In the third chapter, I filter these themes through a study of the Parade of Homes, and more specifically through documentation of the 1955 Parade of Homes in the Houston suburb of Meyerland. The 1955 Meyerland Parade was one of Houston’s most successful and documented postwar Parade of Homes events. The third chapter also engages questions of modernism in speculative building. For the merchant-builder, architectural “style” became another sales consideration—creating a type of mitigated modern domesticity, located between the high-styles of the Case Study Houses and the tract-housing of the first Levittown.

Weaving the larger context and the specific case study together elucidates the increasingly complex process of house design, construction, and merchandising. The latter partially defined a shift in American domesticity in the postwar industrial period; the Parade of Homes showcased a language of residential modernism that the majority of Americans embraced and inhabited. The open floor plans, horizontal profiles, glass walls, and manicured lawns on display in the pages of journals like *House Beautiful* or *Ladies' Home Journal* caught the average American's eye on an intellectual level, but the Parade of Homes made such luxuries affordable and attainable.

## **Chapter One. Postwar Housing: “The Industrial Revolution”**

In the seven years following the close of World War II there was a fundamental shift in the way that Americans were housed. The change occurred in the physical built environment—new homes were provided for one out of every seven families—but also in general practice.<sup>20</sup> The industry of house-building, under the headship of the NAHB, grew in scale and an increased professionalization. Between 1945 and 1952, private merchant-builders were responsible for the construction of nearly six million new homes. This first wave of house-construction (1945-1952) was mostly in response to the nearly 6 million men and women discharged from the armed forces in 1945 and then the additional 4 million in 1946.<sup>21</sup>

Postwar American housing became a topic of interest for politicians and builders long before the Second World War ended. As the editors of *House & Home* recognized in 1952, the introduction of new government-sponsored financing plans “made the new home-building industry possible” because such plans had established a new market of consumers. Gertrude Sipperly Fish pointed out in *The Story of Housing* that “as early as 1943, the National Housing Agency began to develop staff recommendations for federal housing direction in postwar America.”<sup>22</sup> The primary concern, for politicians and builders alike, was the housing of millions of projected returning veterans and their growing families.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> “What Lies Ahead for Home Building,” *House & Home* (January 1952): 138.

<sup>21</sup> Wright, *Building the Dream*, 242.

<sup>22</sup> Fish, *The Story of Housing*, 252.

<sup>23</sup> “What Lies Ahead for Home Building,” 138.

The Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, known more commonly as the "GI Bill of Rights," encouraged veterans to purchase or build a house by allowing them to borrow the entire appraisal amount without a down payment.<sup>24</sup> The national government further endorsed such high-risk loaning with a guarantee to cover part of the loan in case of foreclosure.<sup>25</sup> While initially intended for WWII veterans, the tenure of the GI Bill was extended to encompass Korean War veterans and standing members of the Armed forces.<sup>26</sup> Private lenders, therefore, focused on the government-backed shopping potential of the veteran market. As Gwendolyn Wright described it, since veterans had ready funds at their disposal, "the problem was the housing crisis, which meant that veterans had to wait until housing was built, and then take out mortgages on what was available at the prices the builders set."<sup>27</sup>

Builders expected the crisis. In addition to the anticipatory political actions of the 1940s, there was also a growing rhetoric on the superiority of American industry. In 1943, Max Mercer wrote on "That Postwar 'Dream' House" and linked the production of war-time industry to the projected building boom to follow:

When this war is over, the United States probably will have the greatest building boom in its history...New materials, new methods and new skills are waiting to be used. In materials, for example, plastics, plywood, lightweight concrete, and ceramic products will be used in many ways heretofore untried. In design, careful study and research have to a large extent eliminated academic patterns and planning.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Wright, *Building the Dream*, 243.

<sup>25</sup> Fish, *The Story of Housing*, 253.

<sup>26</sup> For an in depth discussion of Housing laws and trends in the 1940s, see Fish, *The Story of Housing* 253.

<sup>27</sup> Wright, *Building the Dream*, 243.

<sup>28</sup> Max G. Mercer, "That Postwar 'Dream' House," *The Antioch Review* 3.4 (Winter 1943): 558.

The premier issue of *House & Home* opened with a similarly rousing call to action from the editors:

You have great assets with which to work. You have all the resources of architecture, and they have never been greater. You have better, more varied, more specialized materials. You have liberal financing never before possible, and far more know-how than the master builders of the past. You are heirs to the wealth of new technology pouring from the laboratory. Above all, your industry stands at long last on the threshold of its industrial revolution—the industrial revolution to which, in other fields, we owe every advance in living standards since colonial times.<sup>29</sup>

Yet, most immediate postwar developers and builders raised acres of monotonous, poor-quality tract housing—the eventual “ticky tacky” of Malvina Reynolds’s 1962 anti-conformity anthem, *Little Boxes*. Arbitrary rows of white boxes covered former corn, wheat, and potato farmland. The saturation of architecturally generic houses was partly the result of restrictive FHA design guidelines; conspicuously modern designs received lower rating scores. Gable roofs, porticoes, and symmetrical facades were safer bets with the FHA’s goals of conformity than flat roofs, plain, asymmetrical facades, or industrial materials.<sup>30</sup> As a result, builders typically produced models with Colonial Revival, Tudor, Cape Cod, or Spanish styling. The contemporary design of the ranch house was most commonly seen<sup>31</sup> later in the 1950s.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Even Frank Lloyd Wright had his Usonian houses rejected by the FHA. Wright, *Building the Dream*, 251.

<sup>31</sup> Gwendolyn Wright described the ranch house: “the popular ranch style combined the low-pitched roofs, deep eaves, and strong horizontal lines of Wright’s early prairie houses with more traditional elements like clapboards, shutters, and a wide front porch. The word ‘ranch’ evoked a rambling dwelling to most postwar buyers, which perhaps explains the great popularity of the design. In reality, most houses of the 1950s had less square footage than the average house of the 1920s.” Wright, *Building the Dream*, 251. Mark Gelernter also discussed the origins of the ranch house, see Gerlernter, *A History of American Architecture: Buildings in Their Cultural and Technological Context* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999): 270-271.

Levitt and Sons was the most well-known and influential of the immediate postwar suburban developers. Between 1947 and 1951, Levitt's company built 17,450 houses on a former potato field in Long Island to create the first Levittown.<sup>32</sup> The most noteworthy feature of Levitt's enterprise was their modern construction process. House construction relied on prefabricated components installed in an assembly-line fashion—Frederick Taylor's early twentieth century principles of efficiency applied to the building arts. Levitt's early tract houses featured traditional, Cape-Cod architectural styling, but other aspects of Levitt's developments came to influence the nation's builders. Radiant-heated concrete slabs, double-glazed sliding doors and windows, and carports all became commonplace features in model homes shortly after being featured in a Levitt model.<sup>33</sup>

Mercer's comments in 1943 and the *House & Home* editors' in 1952 were hopeful musings on an industry that was not yet fully operating. President Truman curtailed housing credit plans and public housing construction through 1953 in order to conserve materials for the Korean War. As a result, the early 1950s was a period of waiting, still marred by public rationing. The 'postwar dream house,' in the sense that Mercer or others meant it, did not materialize until the mid to late 1950s. At that time, as Mercer had predicted, it was the builder's deliberate turn to architectural considerations-

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 251. Two more Levittown developments followed in Pennsylvania (1951) and New Jersey (1958), both of which relied more on the ranch-style house type. On life in Levittown, see Harold L. Wattel, "Levittown: A Suburban Community," in *The Suburban Community*, ed. William M. Dobrin (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1958). For more recent scholarship on the Levittown developments, see John Archer, *Architecture and Suburbia*, 280-282, 351-354, 361-363; Rosalyn Baxandall and Elizabeth Ewen, *Picture Windows: How the Suburbs Happened* (New York: Basic Books, 2000); Dolores Hayden, "Sitcom Suburbs," *Building Suburbia*; Cynthia Lee Henthorn, "What Did Happen to the Dreamworld? Realities of the Postwar Commercial Fallout," in *From Submarines to Suburbs: Selling a Better America, 1939-1959* (Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 2006); Barbara M. Kelly, *Expanding the American Dream: Building and Rebuilding Levittown* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 253.

including a modern design aesthetic linked to the growing consumer culture and the employment of a professional architect—that created the marketable modern house.<sup>34</sup>

### The National Association of Home Builders

The house-building process was described in a 1952 history of the National Association of Home Builders:

First came the selection and purchase of the site. This was usually accomplished through a real estate man. Then came the preparation of the plans and specifications by an architect—and the matter really became involved and technical at this point. Next usually came the matter of financing which involved the securing of a mortgage loan through a real estate firm, a bank, a savings and loan institution or a lawyer. Then came the determination of the building through competitive bidding or selection. Next came the selection of lighting fixtures, hardware, plumbing fixtures, kitchen equipment, and finally inside and outside colors, which frequently brought in the professional interior decorator. Finally came the landscape architect or nurseryman to landscape the site. Urban and suburban living and the building of a home had finally become so complex and involved that the development for the entire process became inevitable. This new factor was the Entrepreneur Builder.<sup>35</sup>

The Entrepreneur Builder, also referred to as the “mass,” “volume,” “merchant,” or “operative” builder, emerged as the house-building specialist after the war. The NAHB was responsible for creating a unified and organized merchant-builder class and professionalizing the house-building industry by the 1950s.

The NAHB emerged from a real estate association formed in the first decade of the twentieth century. In 1908 the National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB)

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<sup>34</sup> In 1943 Mercer stated that “architecture is beginning successfully to apply modern design to meet the new conditions. We see the trend toward a blending of function and beauty, although up to the present this has largely been confined to the West Coast.” Mercer, “That Postwar ‘Dream’ House,” 562.. Builders across the nation looked to California modernism, presented in magazines, as models for their house designs in the mid 1950s.

<sup>35</sup> *History of National Association of Home Builders, Through 1943*: 3.

formed around thirty boards across the nation. The NAREB began publishing literature immediately—the first publication was “United Realty” from June 26, 1908, which gave an account of the first NAREB convention in Chicago in May 1908.<sup>36</sup> The association also established a unified Code of Ethics in 1915 and adopted the term “realtor” in 1916; thereafter the term could only be used to designate active members of the NAREB. By 1923 the NAREB had grown to 17,504 members, represented by 745 local real estate boards. The growing size of the association incited further divisions of specialties in the field. In 1923 the Brokers’ Division, the Property Management Division, the Home Builders and Subdividers Division, the Mortgage Finance Division, the Industrial Property Division, the Farm Lands Division, and the Realtor Secretaries Division were formed.<sup>37</sup>

The NAHB came out of the Home Builders and Subdividers Division, which grew to over 400 members in the first year and exceeded 1,500 by 1925, during the building boom of the 1920s, and reached over 30,000 during the postwar years of the 1950s.<sup>38</sup> During the Depression years of the 1930s, membership sank to a low of several hundred and seldom exceeded 500 until the mid-1940s. In 1942 the Division, then called the Home Builders Institute, separated from the NAREB and officially changed its name to the National Association of Home Builders. The NAHB began organizing at least one meeting or conference annually; the sessions focused on matters of land development,

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>37</sup> The names for these divisions changed over time, and some dissolved or split. *History of National Association of Home Builders, Through 1943*: 8.

<sup>38</sup> “Builders United in Efforts to Improve U.S. Housing,” *The Washington Post and Times Herald* (September 12, 1954): H26.

construction, building technology, and other topics in the house-building industry.<sup>39</sup>

During the war years of the 1940s, members of the NAHB turned their attention to housing for defense workers, even organizing a Home Builders Emergency Committee to organize the war housing job.

The NAHB organization helped to establish industry standards, coordinate national conferences, publish leading information on the house-building process, and set up testing offices and laboratories for simplifying construction methods and researching developing materials. The NAHB also worked to make housing affordable by advocating public housing and lobbying for housing laws in Washington. *House & Home* acted as a nationally accessible trade journal for the NAHB. Published for professionals in the industry, *House & Home* reported on the various NAHB conferences, decrees, and efforts in building, merchandising, and selling. National Home Week was one important merchandising event initiated by the NAHB in 1948. Organizers promoted the event as an educational effort to inform the public of “what the industry has accomplished in making home ownership available to more families than at any time in our history.”<sup>40</sup> The Parade of Homes came out of National Home Week as a specific public event, one that acted as a large scale and regional housing exhibition.

### **The Architect and the Builder**

By 1954, merchant-builders recognized the buying power of their consumer market. A May 1954 issue of *House & Home* estimated that eighteen million American

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<sup>39</sup> Appendix two in the *History of National Association of Home Builders, Through 1943* includes a list of 168 subjects which were discussed at the NAREB and then NAHB conventions and conferences from 1923 to 1943.

<sup>40</sup> “Builders United in Efforts to Improve U.S. Housing,” H26.

families had the means to buy larger and better homes. The market for houses in the \$22,500 price range had quadrupled since 1929, and the market for more modest \$12,000 houses had tripled. The problem was not in demand, but supply and merchandising:

We're all being outsold. Everyone is spending less for his home because he has been persuaded to spend proportionately more for autos, more for travel, more for food, more for clothes, more for entertainment, more for liquor, more for television. In brief...housing is today the most undersold product on the American market. The standard has lagged on new homes, for we have built too many cheap houses and far too few better houses.<sup>41</sup>

The market motivated the architectural consciousness of the merchant-builder.<sup>42</sup> Builders recognized that the professional architect added to the marketable value in their production—the architect could contribute to the attractive and livable potential of their houses. The role of the architect was of growing concern for merchant-builders:

“Architecture is on the way to becoming master building once again, as it was in the Middle Ages. Let's see where that puts the young architect.”<sup>43</sup> In editorials and articles of trade journals, and at conferences and roundtables, the term “Architect” became associated with good design.<sup>44</sup> Builders held architects partly responsible for the lagging standard of housing:

Most architects have been blind to the great new field for architectural service that industrialized homebuilding was opening up for their profession, and most architects have been deaf to the challenge to help the homebuilders create better

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<sup>41</sup> “We're All Being Outsold,” *House & Home* (May 1954): 124.

<sup>42</sup> “Cornerstone for a New Magazine,” 14.

<sup>43</sup> “Letter to Young Architects,” *House & Home* (October 1952): 81.

<sup>44</sup> In 1956, for instance, forty-one professionals from various fields came together in a round-table to discuss the need for better builder-architect collaboration in the production of more than one million houses a year. Present were head figures from the three sponsors, the NAHB, the AIA, and *House & Home*, plus eight editors from other housing magazines and representatives from the banking, real estate, and production sectors of housing. See, “Roundtable,” *House & Home* (May 1956): 150-155.

living at lower cost in their houses-for-sale—just as they would for their own custom clients.<sup>45</sup>

Most builders already consulted with architects for their volume-built houses, especially since many state laws required an architect's, or engineer's, stamp on the plans of most jobs over a certain size and price. Usually, though, the architect's stamp could be purchased for \$50, with the architect merely checking to ensure the structural stability of the plan. In other situations, builders could purchase stock plans for as little as \$5.<sup>46</sup> Builders started to recognize that stock plans did not respond to the local climate, site, changing tastes, or even the local way of building.<sup>47</sup> A new level of collaboration began to develop, with both sides recognizing the value of the enterprise.

A special merchandising issue of *House & Home* in 1957 advised builders on ways to “design for the market.” One piece of advice to builders: “don’t try to get an architect cheap.”<sup>48</sup> The writers argued that the design of speculative housing presented many challenges to architects that builders needed to acknowledge. The small size of the suburban house, for instance, required that architects “make every inch count and make most inches do double duty.” Also, architects faced the challenge of designing a mass-produced house, where the “cost of every mistake the architect makes and every trick he misses will be multiplied by ten, fifty, a hundred, or whatever number of houses the builder is building.” The anonymous nature of speculative housing was another consideration; architects had to design for a mass audience instead of a specific client.

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<sup>45</sup> “We’re All Being Outsold,” 125.

<sup>46</sup> “Architect and Builder,” *Architectural Forum* (September 1950): 110.

<sup>47</sup> “What a Builder gets from an Architect for \$100 a House,” *House & Home* (February 1955): 134-139.

<sup>48</sup> “What Kind of House Should you Design for the Market?” *House & Home* (September 1957): 89- 185.

The writers of the article conclude that “designing a small production house to sell is one of the most demanding disciplines in all the practice of architecture.” Builders were responsible for recognizing the challenging nature of their commission and paying accordingly for high quality architectural services.

On October 14, 1950, ten AIA representatives met with ten NAHB builders at the Shamrock Hotel in Houston to discuss how architects could play a greater role in the design of merchant-builder speculative houses. The meeting was hailed as an “important first step which may mean vastly improved design in the great majority of U.S. houses.”<sup>49</sup> The goal for those present was to “do something about the mediocre design of the average builder’s house.”<sup>50</sup> Both organizations recognized the value for such a conference: “the plain and obvious fact...is that most of the builders on the committee still have a lot to learn about design for better living, but the architects have almost as much to learn about design for more efficient and economical quantity construction.”<sup>51</sup>

At the meeting, the two groups brought different priorities to the house-building process that generally summed up the discrepancies between the two professional enterprises: the builders were concerned with keeping production costs down by recognizing the benefits of mass production; the architects stressed that good design was not a superficial quality that could be tacked on, but relied on more intangible principles like spatial planning and proportion. Both the architects and builders noted the

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<sup>49</sup> “Architect-Housebuilder Teams Tackle the Fee Problem in Houston,” *Architectural Forum* (November 1950): 15.

<sup>50</sup> “Architect and Builder,” 110.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 110.

limitations imposed by the FHA, whose “regulations are slanted against the kind of intelligent planning that a good architect-builder team can achieve.”<sup>52</sup>

The two parties also agreed that the changing nature of the house-building industry was enough of a reason to collaborate. Whereas the building community had previously been fractured into many small-time private enterprises, the postwar period saw the rise of the merchant-builder, or “business-builder,” who easily produced and sold over 200 housing units a year. As an industrial trend, housing production was coming from fewer, but larger, professional building companies. Architects recognized the importance of that shift for their own profession:

This trend (in the rising professionalization of the builder) has strong implications in the move towards better architect-builder collaboration. For one thing, it means that the architect will be dealing with well organized business firms in the house-building field. A few hundred builders collaborating with a few hundred architects could, under this new trend toward integration in the house-building industry, change the design character of the nation’s new subdivisions within the next few years.<sup>53</sup>

Multiple articles in *House & Home* were about establishing a working relationship between the merchant-builder and the architect.<sup>54</sup> Many of them appealed to the fiscal-minded priorities of the builders by calculating the value of the architect’s contribution: “builders are penny-wise, pound-foolish to try to get the high plan and design quality they need for a small fee plus \$25 a house. That will seldom be enough to get a top-flight small house architect to do an all-out job. Our advice to builders is to play double or

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 116.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 116.

<sup>54</sup> For examples, see “Is an Architect Worth His Fee?,” *House & Home* (January 1952): 140-145; “Homebuilder’s Use of Architects Growing Stronger in Many Areas,” *House & Home* (September 1952): 49-51; “Dear Architect,” *House & Home* (December 1952): 65;

nothing on design, to make sure of getting a bang-up plan from a top-flight man.”<sup>55</sup> By 1952 the housing industry had shifted to a buyer’s market—a contrast to the seller’s market of the preceding seven years. Builders and architects both recognized the importance of a professional collaboration in order to appeal to the new market.

### ***House & Home***

Along with the merchant-builder, a variety of adjunct professions also experienced newfound growth in the years following the Second World War. Realtors, landscape architects, developers, interior designers, and advertising specialists had their professions strengthened by an involvement in the house-building industry. Publishers, especially of housing magazines, or “shelter magazines,” also saw a rise in production. In the 1950s, the American house became a revitalized commodity, and journals responded by printing innumerable pages of photographs, floorplans, renderings, advice columns, editorials, and architectural pieces. The pages of shelter magazines like *House Beautiful*, *Homes and Gardens*, and *Architectural Digest* presented a modern way of living to a new and growing class of consumer.

*House & Home* targeted professionals, including those involved in the design, finance, building, and supplying process of home construction. When it premiered in January 1952, the editors touted *House & Home* as a “new venture in journalism, a magazine whose clear and single purpose is to help Americans find a better way of living by giving them better homes at prices they can pay.” The journal continually focused on the pursuit of better, higher quality houses constructed for affordable prices as its goal.

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<sup>55</sup> “Isn’t the Architect’s Design Worth the Price of a Bathtub?” *House & Home* (March 1952): 79.

Articles covered a broad range of topics, from construction and design issues—land-use, floorplan configuration, interior decoration, materiality—to merchandising. The journal’s language was often pragmatic, commercial, and enterprising in tone. But there was also a great amount of romanticism imbued into the home-building process; the professional builder saw himself as working to “change the hard arithmetic of shelter and create for every man a home for the good life.”<sup>56</sup> In the first issue, the editors further laid out the mission of the American merchant-builder:

If the goal is to be the heritage of every American we must build into our houses, from early design to closing finance, all the satisfactions that make a house a home. We must build in more space, more convenience in living, more enjoyment of the land, more security of tenure, more neighborhood advantages. We must so use design as to make the home whole and add pleasure to utility. These are the deep-seated, age-old, never-satisfied desires that make families want houses of their own.<sup>57</sup>

By May 1952, *House & Home* boasted over 100,000 subscribers, making it the main trade journal for professional home design and house building.<sup>58</sup> *House & Home* became the mouthpiece for merchant-builders, including the National Association of Home Builders. As a result, the magazine lent significant insight into the language, concerns, and beliefs of postwar builders.<sup>59</sup> In its pages, better living and the good life were intrinsically linked to the use of the resources of

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<sup>56</sup> “Cornerstone for a New Magazine,” 107.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>58</sup> “Dear Subscriber,” *House & Home* (May 1952): 101.

<sup>59</sup> Part of my methodology has included a thorough inspection of all *House & Home* issues of the 1950s, starting with the premier issue in 1952. I cite and refer to *House & Home* often when discussing the beliefs and endeavors of postwar merchant-builders. This approach allows me to access the language and scope of postwar house-building in a straightforward and timely manner. *House & Home* has also been largely neglected by scholars of postwar architectural history, so my focus on the journal contributes to the field by recording the tone—through citations when possible—of the trade journal.

architecture and design and the growing availability of new materials coming out of wartime production. According to *House & Home*, the responsibility to “raise the whole standard of American life” fell on the shoulders of builders, architects, suppliers, realtors, and mortgage lenders.<sup>60</sup>

Sales concerns drove merchant-builders to improve the quality of design and construction in their products. Builders became concerned with determining which features raised the standard of American life, or at least could be marketed as doing so. Advertisements in *House & Home* specifically targeted the merchant-builder by making claims of marketability for their houses. “What sells a house?” asked a Frigidaire advertisement from 1956 (Fig. 1). “Location? Financing? Design? Plan? Yes...plus the *lift to living* extras that make a house a home.”<sup>61</sup> The advertisement includes a rendering of the average American nuclear family; dressed in contemporary fashions, the middle-class family of husband, wife, and daughter window shop for a house from their automobile. The viewer is placed behind the family, with the same perspective out towards the white house on the hilltop. The vantage point joins the viewer’s mental state with that of the consumer family, which coincides with the sales psychology behind the main question above the image. The color blue, found in the woman’s collar, the girl’s bows, and the house’s for sale sign are then tied to the Frigidaire logo. The Frigidaire amenities are marketed as extras that lift the quality of living for the eager and smiling American family, as well as provide a “boost to business” for the merchant-builder.

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<sup>60</sup> “How to Sell Houses like These to People Who Now Own Houses like These,” *House & Home* (May 1955): 124.

<sup>61</sup> Frigidaire Advertisement, *House & Home* (June 1956): 215.

Similar advertisements appealed to builders by marketing the potential sale of their houses. Blue Ridge Patterned Glass moved houses faster because “prospects like its exciting newness and its practical advantages (Fig. 2).<sup>62</sup> Emerson Electric attic fans “build more sell into the house” (Fig. 3),<sup>63</sup> and Higgins hardwood flooring sells houses because it “makes itself at home in any interior” (Fig. 4).<sup>64</sup> The Higgins advertisement features a color image of a living room interior. The architecture of the ranch house includes a beamed cathedral ceiling with a glass-filled gable and floor to ceiling windows and sliding doors. Natural light fills the spacious interior, which is staged with contemporary furnishings. The modular repetition of the Higgins flooring enhances the roominess of the open floor plan. Builders merchandised the contemporary volume-built home by showcasing its many innovative features, from the architecture to the attic ventilation system.

The first step for postwar merchant-builders was to manufacture a product: a contemporary house with a speculative plan that could be mass-produced. Stylish trends, elaborate details, and complex spatial arrangements all complicated that goal, but also added to the marketability of the finished product. Achieving a compromise of volume-built design required an obliging partnership between architect and builder. After they developed the house product, builders turned their efforts to modeling it for the public. The next chapter will discuss that step. As the postwar house improved in quality due to the rising professionalization of the house-building industry and the growing

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<sup>62</sup> Blue Ridge Patterned Glass Advertisement, *House & Home* (April 1956): 66.

<sup>63</sup> Emerson Electric Advertisement, *House & Home* (June 1956): 71.

<sup>64</sup> Higgins Industry, Inc Advertisement, *House & Home* (February 1957): 199.

collaboration between builder and architect, builders responded by heightening their merchandising efforts.

## **Chapter Two. Merchandising the Postwar House**

“You’ve got to stir excitement if you want to sell a lot of houses,” stated one west coast builder in 1958.<sup>65</sup> The competition that grew out of the growing number of professional builders necessitated improved merchandising and publicity efforts amongst merchant-builders. Builders developed a variety of methods to stir excitement among their growing consumer audiences by responding to the field of advertising psychology and experiential marketing, and reusing traditional methods in the housing industry. The model house and Parade of Homes were the most significant of these merchandising efforts. This chapter will examine house-merchandising efforts of builders in the 1950s, presenting them as a deliberate form of mass advertising in direct response to the mass production of the postwar house.

### **The Sexualized Spectacle**

A promotional photograph from the 1954 Parade of Homes in Seattle, Washington provides visual evidence of the excitement-stirring merchandising efforts of postwar builders (Fig. 5). The image shows seventeen sashed and coiffed women clad in swim-wear. Some of the women display signs endorsing the availability of the good plans, details, proportions, and design found in the parade houses. These “Parade Ladies” were the finalists out of eighty-eight contestants, each representing a model house from the Parade. The architectural plans under inspection by two central figures symbolically link the promotional scene to the actual speculative houses in the Parade. A juxtaposition occurs where two women flanking the front row brandish hand-saws,

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<sup>65</sup> “How One Builder Sells 23 Houses a Day...Every Day,” *House & Home* (October 1958): 106.

linking masculine construction with sexual desire. The photograph of the contestants became a stock merchandising device for the Seattle Parade, with newspapers “splashing it across quarter and half-pages.”<sup>66</sup> Selected by the sponsoring builders, the women themselves became living, sexualized emblems of the houses sold at the parades. The good details and proportions on display in the Beauty Queens became analogous to the quality of design in the homes. The women, and any images of them used for publicity, marketed something in addition to the house itself: a glamorized lifestyle available to a mass audience from the merchant-builder.

Those in the house-building industry often used beauty contestants and similarly sexualized stunts for publicity and promotion. In 1956, when the West Coast Lumberman’s Association changed their lumber grading system from a number-based scale to a name-based sizing system, they hired four Portland models to “put some zing in the campaign.”<sup>67</sup> Miss Construction, Miss Standard, Miss Economy, and Miss Utility posed and smiled in promotion of the industry change (Fig. 6). For the Tropicana Village in San Jose, California, builder Alec Lee Brandon installed a swimming pool on a platform under his highway billboard. Brandon then employed multiple “bathing beauties,” including Miss USA, to model beach fashions around the pool. The spectacle drew attention to Brandon’s billboard and added to the tropical allure of his development.

Builders also employed women to act as sales agents because, as one builder explained, “they absorb stupid questions; they shut up loundmouths (usually by walking

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<sup>66</sup> “Builders at Work: Parade of Homes,” *House & Home*, (November 1954): 50.

<sup>67</sup> “West Coast Lumberman Swap Grading Names for Numbers,” *House & Home* (March 1956): 57.

up close to them), and they spot prospects.”<sup>68</sup> Red Homes, of Hartford Connecticut, for example, claimed to have sold eleven homes in one week by featuring a “girl-in-the-bathtub” promotion at a local fair. The model sat in a bathtub and answered questions in person and on the telephone.<sup>69</sup> Such promotional gimmicks, which relied on the alluring and attention-grabbing presence of women, were based on a gender-specific form of spectacle. Color, movement, flesh, and fantasy all worked to entice the potential consumer.

### The Sales Process

Builders eventually caught up with retailers in their merchandising abilities. The house-selling process became a streamlined series of professional actions as builders recognized the growing complexity of their consumer base. Journals like *House & Home* guided them in improving their merchandising efforts. As a result, builders improved their sales tactics. They did this primarily by subcontracting work to sales agents and advertising and publicity professionals, including display experts. Engineers, landscape architects, decorators, and color consultants were also brought in to improve the quality of construction and presentation. Beginning with presale public relations and ending with the hard-sell in their sales center, house marketing evolved into a professional, aggressive methodology—one still employed by many builders in the twenty-first century.

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<sup>68</sup> “Scrapbook of Merchandising Ideas,” *House & Home* (May 1958): 136.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 128.

Before stepping foot onto a suburban lot or inside a model house, buyers were usually exposed to the pre-selling of general mass advertisements. Many builders started by canvassing their regions with direct mailers. Local builders also targeted their clientele with promotional spreads in newspapers. Larger developers worked with consumer magazines, but usually still at the regional level; tie-ins with consumer magazines also helped to legitimize the builder's work. Appliance manufacturers and local industries often sponsored specific model homes in order to advertise their products and services. Builders also supplemented their newspaper and print advertising with radio and television commercials.

"Possession of a 'For Sale' sign no longer constitutes a complete sales program," stated one *House & Home* article on merchandising techniques.<sup>70</sup> The suburban development became a well-planned sales-floor, designed to appeal to the various senses of potential shoppers. Flashy roadside billboards, with clear, large-scale lettering, created anticipation and attracted car-bound consumers. Builders positioned model homes and sales centers at the front of their developments to be visible from the highway. Even for smaller developments, builders used free space in the garages of their model homes to set up sales centers, or often used sales trailers, which allowed the companies to move them from project to project. Inside the sales centers, associates staged photographs, floorplans, and even large-scale models into housing exhibits to help the client envision their potential home and its location within the finished development.

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<sup>70</sup> "How to Merchandise your House," *House & Home* (May 1953): 154.

For builders and buyers alike, the visual presentation of the typical American modern house became very important. Builders were encouraged to always pair their floorplans with photographs, taken by professionals with experience photographing architecture, in order to help consumers visualize the finished product.<sup>71</sup> Large models of the communities, complete with schools, churches, and shopping centers, also became common sales tools (Fig. 7). Joe Koury, of Kirkman & Koury Builders in Greensboro, NC, recognized that consumers were interested in the whole package:

Buyers are more impressed with the finished streetscape of houses than they are with any individual house...we vary each of our houses on every street, not to please individual buyers but to please all the buyers who want to live on that street. People buy the whole street, not the individual house.<sup>72</sup>

With the help of sales associates, real estate agents, and “pretty girls,” builders orchestrated a complete house-shopping experience. The central apparatus of home merchandising became the model house.

### The Model House

Architects used model houses to showcase their designs in America and Europe throughout the twentieth century. In her article on the “Media House,” Beatriz Colomina noted the crucial difference between exhibitions of drawings and models, which architects use to communicate with other architects, and exhibitions in which the houses are built and staged in order to communicate with a larger public. Colomina included the De Stijl exhibition in Paris in 1923, LeCorbusier’s L’Esprit Nouveau in the Exposition

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<sup>71</sup> “Are your Merchandising Methods up-to-date?” *House & Home* (April 1956): 168.

<sup>72</sup> “Scrapbook of Merchandising Ideas,” 128.

des Arts Decoratifs in 1925, and the Weissenhofsiedlung in Stuttgart in 1927 as examples of the latter. In these examples, “the domestic house became the site for a whole architectural philosophy.”<sup>73</sup>

The model houses of the De Stijl architects and artists, LeCorbusier, and the Deutsche Werkbund architects working in Stuttgart fell mostly into Martin Filler’s aesthetic/didactic category of model housing. Such houses and interiors were used as exhibition spaces to display artistic, and usually avant-garde, ideals; the houses became experiential works of art, or even built manifestoes, even if they were intended as socially-conscious programs of housing. When architects collaborated with museums or magazine sponsors, the results also usually fell into the aesthetic/didactic category.<sup>74</sup> The model houses of the Case Study program or the Pace Setter houses, for example, merged innovative architectural philosophy and design.<sup>75</sup> Even though such programs intended to create a form of housing based on mass production, the artistic intentions and avant-garde forms often met opposition with public taste and FHA powers, preventing such forms from filling the American suburbs. These examples demonstrate the flexibility of Filler’s categories; model houses and rooms rarely satisfy only one criteria. Even in espousing their architectural philosophy, modern architects did so with commercial

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<sup>73</sup> Colomina, “Media House,” 58.

<sup>74</sup> Alexandra G. Winton discusses the Walker Art Center’s “Idea House” projects in the 1940s. Alexandra Griffith Winton, “‘A Man’s House is his Art’: The Walker Art Center’s Idea House Project and the Marketing of Domestic Design 1941-1947,” *Journal of Design History* 17.4 (2004): 377-396.

<sup>75</sup> For more on how these two programs operated under their own philosophies, see Monica Penick, “The Pace Setter Houses: Livable Modernism in Postwar America” (PhD. Dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 2007), and Esther McCoy, *Case Study Houses, 1945-1962*, (Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, 1977).

production in mind. In that way, the model house typology has historically been a combination of commercial and aesthetic concerns, philosophies, and intentions.

At the more ubiquitous level of suburban development, this merging was rare. Merchant-builders were in the business of producing and selling houses. Only through collaboration with an ambitious and pragmatic architect did the average builder manage to produce an architecturally stylish house. Filler's third category for model rooms—the commercial/promotional—is more indicative of the motivations for postwar merchant-builders. Just as the department store and the mail order catalogue developed in response to the need for more efficient marketing of new machine-age products, the speculative model house and Parade of Homes emerged as commercial responses to the housing boom of the 1950s.

Builders often looked to the custom designs of architects that were published in shelter magazines for modern ideas. *House & Home* occasionally produced “Consumer Magazine Review” articles that summarized the building and design trends of houses published in the mainstream housing journals like *Better Homes and Gardens*, *House Beautiful*, or *Living for Young Homemakers*.<sup>76</sup> The articles provided brief reviews of the “magazine houses,” with photographs, plans, and descriptions of the most saleable and reproducible features. Many well known architects and projects were featured, including Harwell Hamilton Harris’s Pace Setter House from the 1955 Texas State Fair in Dallas.<sup>77</sup> According to the article, more than 100,000 visitors toured the house and became

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<sup>76</sup> “Magazine Houses,” *House & Home* (October 1955): 144-150; “Consumer Magazine Review,” *House & Home* (September 1956): 155- 158; “Eight Houses to Help Raise Everybody’s Sights,” *House & Home* (December 1958): 120-140.

<sup>77</sup> “Consumer Magazine Review,” *House & Home* (October 1956): 145-146.

“familiar with dozens of advanced design concepts contained” within.<sup>78</sup> The article then presented four of the “most important innovations, the most impressive new ideas that people carried away with them” after seeing the house, including the ideas of a flexible plan, indoor-outdoor spaces, a “car entrance,” and sun-control devices.<sup>79</sup> Merchant-builders understood that there was a growing familiarity with modernism amongst their consumer base; certain modern features were expected in new houses. By borrowing from publicized custom-built designs, builders were able to produce a marketable speculative house that was informed by the mid-century modernism of the print world.

Builders were also able to compensate for their lack of architectural savvy by relying on exaggerated forms of publicized pageantry in their merchandising. In 1957, for instance, Chicago-builder Kenneth H. Katschke erected his model house on a barge that was moored on the Chicago River at the Wabash Avenue Bridge in downtown Chicago. The three-bedroom, one-bath ranch house, designed by Mississippi architect Edward J. Welty, was a feature of the 1957 NAHB national convention and drew approximately 1,400 spectators (Fig. 8). After exhibiting the model for several months on the barge, Katschke relocated the house to a site in the Chicago-area and sold it for \$20,500.<sup>80</sup> The merging of suburban house and urban barge exemplified the sometimes outlandish efforts that builders took to draw attention to their businesses.

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 146.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 146.

<sup>80</sup> “Small Builders put House on a Barge,” *House & Home* (March 1957): 82.

## **“How to Use the Model House”**

Merchant builders embraced the model house as a publicity and merchandising device that created a sensory shopping experience for American consumers. By extension, the Parade of Homes was a collection of model houses, exhibited on a model street—forming the beginning of a model subdivision. By the late 1950s, builders recognized that the model house was the primary selling tool for the home building industry.<sup>81</sup> As stated in the 1956 merchandising issue of *House & Home*, “today’s builder...knows that circus-like posters and give-away door prizes may draw a crowd, but they do not sell houses. Instead, smart builders base their selling on the ‘irresistible house’.”<sup>82</sup>

Builders used the model house as their show window. It possessed the highest quality of construction, a central location and landscaped site, and top choices of amenities and fixtures. Builders could also stage and decorate the interiors, which allowed shoppers to visualize their own furnishings in the spaces. While floorplans and photographs, or renderings, helped buyers conceptualize the finished product, staged models allowed them to experience the finer architectural features that may have otherwise been difficult to grasp, like space, material, and scale.

*House & Home* published information on the usefulness of the model house and offered advice on how to stage, decorate, and design the model.<sup>83</sup> Builders believed that the model house allowed buyers a degree of fantasy—they could imagine their life in the

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<sup>81</sup> “How to Use the Model House for Home Merchandising,” *House & Home* (April 1957): 111.

<sup>82</sup> “Are your Merchandising Methods Up to Date?” 166.

<sup>83</sup> The first article on the model house appeared in the fourth issue: “Why and How the Furnished Model Helps Sell Builder’s Houses,” *House & Home* (April 1952): 135-137.

staged interior and manicured lot of the model. The April 1957 issue of *House & Home* was devoted entirely to the topic of the model house, including a discussion of how to attract crowds, how to give the house curb appeal, how to “turn lookers into buyers,” and a highlight of nine success stories in model house merchandising. Decorating was seen as the first step in “setting the scene” for the model house:

The best way to sell houses is to decorate and furnish your model....why? Because the furnished model makes visitors feel almost at home; because a visitor who feels almost at home will start to identify himself with the house; and because identification with the house is the tie that binds a buyer.<sup>84</sup>

Builders were encouraged to hire a professional decorator. Beatrice West (b.1910) was the best-known decorator and color consultant for merchant-builders across the nation. West studied architecture in the University of Texas at Austin's College of Engineering between 1928 and 1932.<sup>85</sup> According to *House & Home*, by 1952 West had worked on more than 64,000 houses in twenty-nine states for 165 builders, including Levitt. By 1978, when the Beatrice West Organization was operating out of Boca Raton, Florida, West had “accomplished the feat of decorating and purchasing identical furnishings for more than 300 model homes which opened simultaneously in 48 states.”<sup>86</sup>

Builders hired decorators as subcontractors to stage their model houses. West charged a fee for traveling, working time, the size of the house, and the scale of the builder. Furnishing and decorating a small Levitt model, for example, amounted to under

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<sup>84</sup> “How to Set the Scene,” *House & Home* (April 1957): 117.

<sup>85</sup> The architecture program was in the College of Engineering until 1950, when it became the autonomous School of Architecture. *Who's Who of American Women*, Vol. 2, Chicago: Marquis Who's Who, inc, 1962: 1043.

<sup>86</sup> “Beatrice West Studios, Inc,” *Boca Raton News* (May 29, 1978): 8B.

\$1,000 in 1952.<sup>87</sup> West's goal was to create an atmosphere that appealed to shoppers, especially the women, without seeming too elite. "You have to make a woman feel that she can afford to get the same effect," stated West, "Otherwise, she's scared away because she thinks the house won't look as nice with what she can afford."<sup>88</sup>

Simple matters of materiality helped to stage a welcoming atmosphere. Builders saw paint color and wallpaper as potential talking points for shoppers; they also used patterns and hues to help manipulate or emphasize spatial configuration. Besides creating an appealing and comfortable atmosphere for the shopper, certain material choices could be used to hide or deemphasize structural shortcomings, such as a small, cramped, or dark room. Wide-striped wallpaper, for instance, added height to a low-ceilinged ranch house and geometric patterned wallpaper covered rough plaster walls, making them look smooth.<sup>89</sup> New floor and wall coverings—parquet, vinyl, plastic or wood panels, patterned paper—created more dynamic interiors, all in an attempt to catch the attention of perusing shoppers. Tactile surfaces of multiple textures helped to create dynamic and enticing interiors.

Furnishing and staging the model house was also significant. Builders recognized that shoppers stayed longer in furnished houses, especially when rooms were not roped off or closed off to their inspection. Furniture allowed the shoppers to envision the potential of the space. Builders also used furniture to highlight the functionality of the house, or to demonstrate how the spaces worked. Simple furniture, including open-backed chairs,

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<sup>87</sup> "Why and How the Furnished Model Helps Sell Builder's Houses," *House & Home* (April 1952): 136.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 136.

<sup>89</sup> "How to Set the Scene," 118.

tables with thin legs, and low-profiled sofas, helped to delineate spaces without overshadowing architectural features like sliding glass doors, picture windows, hearths, or open floorplans.

Local department stores often sponsored the staging of a single model, thereby transforming the model house into a satellite showroom. Furniture could be used in several different ways, depending on the goal of the builder and their expected consumer. One technique of model house decorators was to mix modern and traditional styles in order to appeal to a larger audience. Builders could also gear their interiors to target specific consumers; age, economic status, background, education, and former residence all became merchandising considerations. Former apartment dwellers, for instance, sought different things from a house than second-time house buyers.

*House & Home* articles encouraged builders to give their model house a “lived-in look” in order to “show people how they might live in your house.”<sup>90</sup> One technique was to stage rooms for their everyday purposes. In the kitchen, builders could showcase a serving counter by displaying a bowl of fruit, or highlight the modern refrigerator by stocking it with food. One article noted that by having food in the oven, the model house would smell like a real home. Bathrooms could be equipped with soap, towels, rugs, and a shower curtain. Toys in children’s bedrooms, dining room tables set for dinner, and pajamas laid out on beds all worked to present a livable interior. The model house had to balance the promise of plenty with the guarantee of practicality and affordability.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 126.

## The Model Kitchen

“If you find, as many builders do, that women head straight for the kitchen of your model house, make it as irresistible as you can.”<sup>91</sup> Builders were aware that the kitchen and bathroom spaces received the closest inspection from consumers. The modern American kitchen had undergone a transformation in the early twentieth century. New mechanical appliances replaced less-efficient dinosaurs of domesticity; streamlined surfaces glistened with a hygienic cleanliness; and the kitchen plan developed into an efficient grouping of equipment and work areas. Yet, the modern kitchen was readily available to most consumers only after the Second World War; the postwar period saw many of the promises of early modernism realized, even if in a mitigated and mass produced form.

In the hands of advertising artists, the well-planned kitchen became a public stage. Advertising images depicted the housewife proudly showing off her new kitchen appliances, utensils, and accessories.<sup>92</sup> The kitchen became a housewife’s showroom of modernity: “you want your kitchen equipped with every modern work-saving appliance. But, more than that, you surely want it to reflect the atmosphere of your own pleasant family life.”<sup>93</sup> Advertisers also used the kitchen, and kitchen appliances, to craft the idea of an American prosperity—the land of plenty with fully stocked refrigerators, smaller and more efficient appliances, and clean, colorful surfaces.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 129.

<sup>92</sup> Beatrice West worked with American Kitchens to publish a short guidebook on planning, designing, and decorating the modern kitchen. Beatrice West, *Clever Kitchens* (Connersville, IN: American Kitchens Division, 1957).

<sup>93</sup> West, *Clever Kitchens*, 3.

These were the features that Richard Nixon emphasized in his famed “kitchen debate” with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev in 1959.<sup>94</sup> The amount of theoretical, design, and decorative attention shown to the kitchen as a central work-space attests to the fact that this was clearly understood by women. As a result, builders focused a large amount of their work on staging the kitchen as a symbolic stage of the family’s modernity. Efficiency in plan and arrangement became a key component of the modern kitchen. “To sell women visitors,” stated one *House & Home* article, “show them how your kitchen saves them steps in preparing and serving meals.”<sup>95</sup> Materiality—developing plastics, veneers, and plywoods allowed for exciting new surfaces and forms—and innovative amenities were also important selling-features in the model kitchens.

### **“How to Turn Lookers into Buyers”**

Thousands of visitors attended the openings of new suburban developments. In 1955, for instance, the Dallas Parade of Homes drew over 200,000 visitors, including a record 53,027 on the closing day.<sup>96</sup> Touring the model house became a form of entertainment, with each builder trying to exceed the next in terms of showmanship and quality. With such a high volume of foot traffic, builders incorporated many techniques into the staging of their model homes in an effort to woo a consumer away from the competition.

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<sup>94</sup> Sandy Isenstadt also discussed the symbolism of the modern refrigerator in advertising of the 1950s. His argument could be extended to include the model house and the staged kitchen, which were simply built advertisements or exhibitions of plenty, bounty, and modernism. See, Sandy Isenstadt, “Visions of Plenty: Refrigerators in America Around 1950,” *Journal of Design History* 11.4 (1998): 311-321.

<sup>95</sup> “How to Set the Scene,” 129.

<sup>96</sup> “Record 200 Cities Parade Homes in Biggest Show,” *House & Home* (November 1955): 67.

The most basic device was signage in and around the model house. Approach-signs informed people waiting in line outside a house of what they could expect within, as well as advertising sponsoring companies and professionals. Small interior signs could be used to draw attention to key materials and special features, without distracting from the overall interior layout of the model. Builders could also highlight noteworthy features, especially unseen assets, with small exhibits throughout the model. The U.S. Steel's prefabricated model house featured a periscope into the attic, allowing visitors to see details of the new truss-construction system (Fig. 9).<sup>97</sup>

Builders used models to showcase construction, structural systems, and building technology. One crowd-pleasing way to demonstrate the advancements in the house-building industry was the "X-Ray" or "cut-a-way" house. The "cut-a-way" model was a partially completed house with different areas of construction left exposed, such as the foundation slab, air conditioning ducts, ceiling installation, and wiring. Builders also demonstrated the quality of their construction in other ways. Milwaukee's Val Zimmerman built a catwalk over his house in order to let visitors take a closer look at his model's roofing system (Fig. 10), and Boyd-Jackson constructed an exposed house frame next to his finished model in Atlanta in order to show the "full story of the framing system (Fig. 11)." <sup>98</sup> Inside the sales-office, builders used models, floorplans, and maps to help consumers visualize the finished development. Sales associates answered questions and tried to close the sale.

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<sup>97</sup> "How to Turn Lookers into Buyers," *House & Home* (April 1957): 143.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 143.

A number of themes emerge from the rhetoric of merchandising presented to builders in the pages of *House & Home*. Showmanship and spectacle were emphasized to draw in crowds. Displays, signs, demonstrations, and exhibits could be used to educate and inform the consumer, which was especially important considering how many new features the merchant-builders were making available in their models. Staging and decorating was used to appeal to the emotional side of the clients; the gender of consumer is often female in discussions of interior staging and merchandising. In the postwar market, house merchandising and selling became a modernized, professional act.

### **Chapter Three. The Parade of Homes**

The Parade of Homes embodied a novel form of sales merchandising and publicity, orchestrated by the postwar merchant-builder in response to a new postwar housing market. By 1955, the Parade events had become a major part of the housing industry's fall merchandising scene. The housing industry's advertising of new lines of houses was on par with the auto industry's annual unveiling of new car models, both in terms of scale and public popularity. In 1955 alone, NAHB-sponsored builders, under the direction of their regional divisions, organized a record 200 Parade of Homes events, displaying nearly 10,000 model houses worth \$120 million.<sup>99</sup>

The Parade of Homes originated as, and continues to be, a straightforward merchandising and publicity spectacle. Each regional division of the NAHB selects local builders, based on volume of production, reputation, and quality of work, to showcase a model home. The models are meant to demonstrate the latest in house-building advancements, construction techniques, material technologies, design standards, and aesthetic trends. The market of intended consumers fluctuates between regions, responding to socioeconomic status and income in each locale. Models are arranged on modest manicured lots within a newly developing subdivision; the houses and lawns are staged to create a model street. The merchandising protocol discussed in the previous chapter generally applies to each Parade: newspaper, radio, and television press releases publicize the events; ceremonies mark opening and closing dates; exhibits, signs, and handouts provide information; interior designers work with sponsoring stores to furnish

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<sup>99</sup> "Record 200 Cities Parade Homes in Bigger Show," 67.

and decorate the interiors. Everything in the Parade is either for sale or crafted to create an experiential advertisement for the house.

## Meyerland

The city of Houston experienced a period of rapid growth in the postwar years. The urban fabric of the city became centered around a large highway infrastructural system and the resulting spread of suburban developments.<sup>100</sup> Houston was a merchant-builder's ideal city. By 1958 Houston had 156 subdivisions, allowing builders to buy finished lots in any part of the sprawling city and in any price range. Generally, Houston developers worked to avoid monotony in house design by encouraging multiple builders to work in each development. Due to the high volume of building in the city, and the collaborative nature of the HBA and others in the house-building industry, Houston became a major Parade of Homes city. Many of the Houston Parades took place earlier in the year—sometimes even in April—than other cities (most Parades were during National Home Week in September). The Houston Parades also consistently attracted record-breaking numbers of visitors and set the showmanship precedent for other Parades later in the year.<sup>101</sup> The 1955 Parade of Homes in the Houston suburb of Meyerland illustrates the direct relationship between advertising and architecture. The Meyerland Parade was typical of the Parade tradition of merchandising and publicity, but it was also distinctive because of the quality of housing and the variety of innovations showcased.

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<sup>100</sup> For a brief history of these developments in Houston, see Ben Koush, *Booming Houston & The Modern House: The Residential Architecture of Neuhau & Taylor* (Houston, TX: Houston Mod, 2006).

<sup>101</sup> See “Houston’s Home Builders Lead off 1955 Parade of Homes,” *House & Home* (September 1955): 140-151; “32 Parade Models Attracted 126,000—and They Meant Business!” *House & Home* (July 1958): 122-127.

“The story of Meyerland is a part of the story of Houston.”<sup>102</sup> The Meyer family arrived in Houston in 1868 from Germany, and Joseph F. Meyer, Sr. established a hardware company bearing his name and started to buy sections of land outside the city center, eventually owning over 6,000 acres of land. After Meyer’s death in 1933, the land was divided between his sons. In 1955, George Meyer worked with the First Mortgage Company, under President Tom Robinson, to develop his share of 1200 acres into the Meyerland subdivision (Fig. 13).<sup>103</sup> As described by *Houston* magazine, plans for Meyerland featured a total of 3,500 homes, ranging in prices starting at \$15,000, all equipped with air conditioning. It was touted as the “first residential development in its price range providing rigid building restrictions, control on the type of houses that can be built there through an architectural control committee, and professional landscaping for each home.”<sup>104</sup> The homes in Meyerland, including those modeled in the Parade, were landscaped by professional landscape architects: Fred Buxton developed the master plan, with assistance from Ralph H. Cobb and James E. O’Rourke.<sup>105</sup> Builders provided individual landscape schematics with each house, and homeowners needed approval of the Meyerland control committee in order to make changes or additions.

Meyerland was nationally recognized as an advancement in suburban development. “The demand for middle-priced—\$16,000 and up—GI house has never been covered in Houston,” stated builder Alan Hurvard. “These houses have to be built in nice communities; you can’t put them up next to too cheap and small houses. We think

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<sup>102</sup> “New Meyerland Subdivision is Parade of Homes Site,” *Parade Plan Book*, 3.

<sup>103</sup> “Houston,” *House & Home* (February 1958): 94.

<sup>104</sup> “Meyerland Homes,” *Houston* (July 1955): 32.

<sup>105</sup> “Complete Landscaping a Top Feature of Show,” *The Houston Post* (June 19, 1955): Section 8 , pg 16.

the answer to where to put them is in a community planned from the beginning—from siting to landscaping—and up-to-date design.”<sup>106</sup> The houses in the Meyerland Parade of Homes ranged in price from \$22,450 to \$35,000, and many of them were sold at the close of the Parade.<sup>107</sup>

The 1200 acre tract of Meyerland was also publicized as a new concept in suburban living in an advertisement in the *Houston Post*.<sup>108</sup> As advertised, “architectural control” resulted from the fact that each Meyerland home was designed and constructed under the supervision of a committee of professional architects and builders, with an individual design for each home, eliminating the “subdivision look.” Each Meyerland house showcased a new level of interior spaciousness, with three bedrooms and two bathrooms, and an average of 1400 to 1600 square feet. Meyerland was marketed as a growing community, with “two new schools, two new churches and an ultra modern 75-acre shopping center” planned for construction.<sup>109</sup>

### **The 1955 Meyerland Parade of Homes**

On Sunday June 12, 1955, Vice President Richard Nixon cut the ribbon at the opening ceremony of the Meyerland Parade of Homes.<sup>110</sup> For two weeks, thousands of visitors toured the thirty model houses exhibited by the Houston Home Builder’s Association and constructed by twenty-three local builders (Fig. 12). The model houses

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<sup>106</sup> “All Over the Country Builders are Moving Up,” *House & Home* (May 1955): 128.

<sup>107</sup> “Houston’s Home Builders Lead off 1955 Parade of Homes,” 141-151. Of the 22 houses discussed in the article, 19 sold or had a sale pending at the close of the Parade.

<sup>108</sup> “Meyerland, site of the Parade of Homes,” *The Houston Post* (June 11, 1955): Section 8, pg 5.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, Section 8, Pg. 5. The Meyerland Plaza shopping center opened on October 31, 1957 and was Houston’s second regional mall.

<sup>110</sup> “Nixon Opens Parade Today; Thousands Preview Big Show,” *The Houston Post* (June 12, 1955): Section 3, pg 1.

ranged in style from ultra-modern Miesian boxes and split-level plans to early American Colonial. Builders used the 1955 Parade to showcase the ideas of indoor-outdoor living and domestic privacy. Some houses featured as many as four outdoor courtyards, but inward-facing plans and privacy walls helped to accommodate the themes. The models were all air conditioned. The interiors of the model houses were furnished by Houston department stores, and the yards were landscaped as part of Buxton's masterplan. Three national magazines—*Parents Magazine*, *American Builder*, and *Living for Young Home Makers*—sponsored the construction of model houses.<sup>111</sup>

The Houston Home Builders Association (HHBA), under President S.N. Adams, organized the Meyerland Parade of Homes. As they introduced it in the *Parade Plan Book*, the HHBA builders saw the Parade as a “rich display of new and better products of all the varied industries that go into the making of good homes.”<sup>112</sup> The organizers also attached the ambition of the Parade to the rhetoric of postwar nationalism:

It (the Parade) also reminds us of the vital importance of home ownership in the American scheme of things. The right of the American to own his home and to be free and secure in it is one of the most fundamental guarantees of our liberty. The breach of this right was one of the causes of the American Revolution. The preservation of it assures us the responsible citizenship so essential to the success of our republic and our city and state government.<sup>113</sup>

House builders saw themselves as active agents in preserving the home-ownership rights of Americans, especially in the face of Cold War paranoia. The most obvious

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<sup>111</sup> For more on the *Living For Young Homemakers*' magazine model, see “Editor of Living Magazine Arrives for Visit to Houston Homes Parade,” *The Houston Post* (June 17, 1955): Pg. 4, Section 2. Two architects, Bruno Funaro and Robert Engelbrecht, worked with Houston architect Harwood Taylor to design the model at 5127 Jackwood Street. Guy Moneypenny and Stanford Squire worked as the magazine staff decorators to stage the interiors.

<sup>112</sup> *Parade Plan Book*, (Houston, TX: Houston Home Builders Association, 1955): 1.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

manifestation of this effort in the Meyerland Parade was the bomb shelter built in the backyard of the “Showcase of Housing Ideas” model house at 5102 Jackwood Street. The Meyerland Parade also highlighted the themes of outdoor-indoor living and privacy—linked also to the intent to help Americans feel free and secure in their houses.<sup>114</sup>

### **“Captivating a Captive Audience”**

Merchant-builders capitalized on the allure of “contemporary” and “modern” model houses, which was created through a top-down translation from architectural high-styles. *House & Home* described the process:

Women’s fashions start with the high-style designers, mostly in Paris or Rome or New York for formals, mostly in California for sports. At first it’s all a big gamble; hardly one new design in a hundred goes anywhere at all. Those few get a whirl in the fashion pages of *Vogue*, or *Bazaar*, or *LIFE*, and next you’ll find them featured in stores like Bergdorf, Hattie Carnegie, and Saks...these smart shops are still taking a chance and often guess wrong, but most of the gamble is gone before Seventh Avenue begins pirating their \$500 models to sell for \$19.95 to the mass market.<sup>115</sup>

In the comparison between clothing fashions, the translation from high-style to mass-market had an easy parallel in architecture:

Fashions in houses follow much the same course. Most new house designs start with the great creative architects and their first try-out in high priced custom houses. They start in many different places, for no one spot has a monopoly on architectural genius. The best of the new designs are picked up by the magazines and broadcast across the country...the new designs get a second custom-house try-out as the best architects in first one city and then another adapt them to local

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<sup>114</sup> The model house became a cultural and political symbol of American life during the Cold War years. Greg Castillo has discussed the role of model houses and staged interiors as tools of political propaganda. See, Greg Castillo, “Domesticating the Cold War: Household Consumption as Propaganda in Marshall Plan Germany,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 40.2 (April 2005): 261-288.

<sup>115</sup> “What Kind of House Should you Design for the Market?” *House & Home* (September 1957): 106.

needs and conditions. In these local try-outs some designs catch on here; some catch on there; some don't catch on anywhere. Those that do catch on will soon be repeated in hundreds of other custom and custom-speculator houses. If they pass that final test, the gamble is over. The builder who follows that tried and tested lead can bet on an almost sure thing.<sup>116</sup>

The model houses in the Meyerland Parade of Homes showcased this type of high-style adaptation for the speculative market. Certain architectural features were highlighted for their association with modern and contemporary styles. The builders at Meyerland were praised in the national press for their ability to "captivate a captive audience."<sup>117</sup> Visitors at Meyerland were

exposed to sales-stirring modern conveniences: sliding doors, built-in appliances, acoustical materials, resilient floor coverings, washable wall surfaces, convenient laundries, play space for children, second living rooms, light engineered rooms, adequate wiring, bigger and better bathrooms. And more space and more color....These builders know what it takes to sell houses.<sup>118</sup>

The Meyerland Parade of Homes was publicized as a "showcase of the newest and best in modern living."<sup>119</sup> One major attraction at the Parade was Alvan Huvard's model at 8710 Pritchett Street, designed by Houston architect William Jenkins and sold at the Parade for \$25,450.<sup>120</sup> Sponsored by the Coleman air conditioning firm, Huvard's model was publicized as the first split-level house in a Houston subdivision (Fig. 14). Sitting on only 640 feet of slab space, Jenkin's design provided more than 1700 total square feet.

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 106.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 142.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 142.

<sup>119</sup> Parade of Homes Advertisement, *The Houston Post* (June 19, 1955): Section 8, pg 10.

<sup>120</sup> "Houston's Home Builders Lead off 1955 Parade of Homes," 151. For more on Jenkins, see Jason Smith, *High Style in the Suburbs: The Early Modern Houses of William R. Jenkins* (Houston: Houston Mod, 2009).

Builders marketed some of the models as “modern” and “contemporary” because they were the design products of the top-down translation of architectural fashions, where certain stylistic features caught on as popular and were then reproduced. Out of thirty houses, the Meyerland Parade included four models that either included the words “modern” or “contemporary” in their *Parade Plan Book* title.<sup>121</sup> Certain architectural features that had filtered down from the high mid-century modern styles were marketed as part of the attraction for those models. At Meyerland, “thousands who had seen glass-gable-end houses only in magazines got a direct emotional experience from such an exciting architectural feature. Thousands more were able to move around in an open-plan house and ‘feel’ how it worked.”<sup>122</sup> In Paul Wolf’s “Prize Winning Kitchen Home” model, movable partitions allowed for interior spaciousness and flexibility between the living room and family room, which both featured open truss beamed ceilings (Fig. 15).

Builders worked to create a spectacle in the Meyerland Parade of Homes. The 1957 special merchandising issue of *House & Home* recommended that in order to draw large opening day crowds to the Parades, organizers needed to “make your opening a real occasion” by featuring a celebrity.<sup>123</sup> 15,000 people came to Nixon’s opening day ceremony in Meyerland.<sup>124</sup> Visitors entered the Meyerland Parade through a large archway, decorated with red, white, and blue harlequin patterning. Seven flags, including six from Texas and one with the Meyerland emblem, flew overhead.<sup>125</sup> Upon entering

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<sup>121</sup> The “Luxurious Contemporary Model,” “Modern Designed at its Best” model, “An Exciting ‘Contemporary’” model, and the “Split-Level Contemporary” model.

<sup>122</sup> “Houston’s Home Builders Lead off 1955 Parade of Homes,” 142.

<sup>123</sup> “How to Get the Crowds Out,” *House & Home* (April 1957): 136.

<sup>124</sup> “Parade Housing Ideas Amaze Vice President,” *The Houston Post* (June 13, 1955): Section 1, pg 1.

<sup>125</sup> “Novel Arch Marks Gate for Parade,” *The Houston Post* (June 19, 1955): Section 8, pg 13.

through the archway, visitors stepped into the fully staged street of Jackwood, which was lined with twenty-seven of the thirty model houses.<sup>126</sup> Over the course of the two-week event, a number of prizes were given away to visitors, including a two-tone four-door Chevrolet sedan, a pastel mink stole, furniture, a trip to Nassau, and a log cabin children's playhouse.<sup>127</sup>

As with most Parade of Homes events, visitors and prospective home-buyers at Meyerland were able to purchase a *Parade Plan Book*, published by the HHBA. The thirty-eight page booklet operated as a program and catalogue for the collection of model houses on display. The Meyerland booklet had an introductory section, advertisements from parade sponsors, and a few sections on the noteworthy features of the parade, including the bomb shelter and a “cut-a-way house.”<sup>128</sup> The discussions of each individual model included picturesque renderings of each house, a floorplan, a written description, and a photograph of the builder. Such booklets built anticipation for the goods on display and accompanied buyers as they walked through the models. The *Parade Plan Book* was the primary link between the house and the visitor. If the model house operated as a display apparatus that appealed to the visual senses through calculated marketing techniques, then the parade booklet served as the layman’s guide to the house, clarifying the abundance of stimuli available.

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<sup>126</sup> The remaining three houses were on Prichett Dr., which turned slightly to the right at the west end of Jackwood.

<sup>127</sup> “Visitors Say Parade is the Best One Yet,” *The Houston Post* (June 19, 1955): Section 8, pg 1.

<sup>128</sup> The “Cut-A-Way House” was a partially completed house used to demonstrate the “construction story” by exposing interior sections of materials and construction methods, such as the foundation slab, air conditioning ducts, ceiling installation, and wiring. “Cut-A-Way House Featured,” *Parade Plan Book*, 36.

## **“Showcase of Housing Ideas”**

The model houses became microcosms of the larger show, with builders touting their individual innovations in each house. In the HHBA entry, the “Showcase of Housing Ideas” model, “everything from bombs to barbecue” was taken into account (Fig. 16).<sup>129</sup> Frank Ogren served as the supervising builder of the model, located at 5102 Jackwood Street. The house sold at the Parade for \$32,500.<sup>130</sup> Edmund Langwith and Robert King, from the Houston architectural firm Wilson, Morris & Crain, designed the L-plan ranch. A south opening on Jackwood Street, opened into a large walled courtyard that squared the plan. The south wing included the private spaces of three bedrooms and two baths; the kitchen, dining, and living spaces filled the north wing.

The HHBA-sponsored model exhibited a variety of building technologies, materials, and aesthetic features. The plan emphasized the idea of indoor-outdoor living by including two inner courtyards and the walled entry court, which the *Parade Plan Book* promoted as “a wonderful ‘outdoor’ living room.”<sup>131</sup> Interiors were built with “a unique beamed ceiling arrangement, with acoustical plaster.”<sup>132</sup> Polished flagstone floors filled the kitchen, family room, and breakfast area. Other interior highlights included a floor-to-ceiling brick fireplace and built-in cabinets in the living room. The kitchen was fully equipped with a built-in range, refrigerator, oven, freezer, dishwasher, and garbage disposer, with design and installation by Avalon Mills (Fig. 17). The model also

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<sup>129</sup> “HHBA Entry in Parade has many Provisions,” *The Houston Post* (June 19, 1955): Section 8, pg 18.

<sup>130</sup> “Houston’s Home Builders Lead off 1955 Parade of Homes,” 151.

<sup>131</sup> “Showcase of Housing Ideas,” *Parade Plan Book*, 7.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

exhibited other housing ideas, including a communication system of intercoms, electric clocks and radio, along with bathroom telephones.

The HHBA model was an architecturally nonspecific ranch house with vertical exterior siding, low-pitched gable roofs, and a basic plan (Fig. 18). Only in the public part of the house did the floor plan expand, with open sightlines throughout, creating a shared family space. Yet, certain features, like the designed kitchen, the floor to ceiling windows and sliding doors, and the electronic amenities made the house a showcase of modern ideas.

The highlight of the parade was a \$4,000 H-bomb shelter buried in the backyard of the HHBA model (Fig. 19). It had a diameter of fourteen feet and was said to accommodate ten people. Entry was gained through a stairway out of the kitchen.<sup>133</sup> Erected by the Clear Span Engineering Company, the “Para-Cap” shelter was built to “withstand pressures exerted by the heaviest known H-bomb in any area five miles from the blast’s center.”<sup>134</sup> From June 16-19, Houston’s Christmas family—husband, wife, and two children—stayed in the shelter to display its livability, with newspaper coverage providing a “72-hour watch.”<sup>135</sup>

A page from the Meyerland *Parade Plan Book* highlighted the “Family Size Bomb Shelter” as the “first H-bomb shelter ever erected in a speculative house.”<sup>136</sup> The axonometric, cut-away diagram of the country’s first speculative bomb shelter illustrated the merchandising efforts of the builders. In the model, the Houston builders were able

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<sup>133</sup> “Family Size Bomb Shelter!” *Parade Plan Book*, 5.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>135</sup> “Family Starts 3-Days in Atom Shelter,” *The Houston Post* (June 16, 1955): Section 1, pg 1.

<sup>136</sup> *Parade Plan Book*, 5.

to normalize the ever-present threat of war by standardizing and aestheticizing a volume-built line of defense. The image shows the easy entry from the main house. The shelter space is depicted as large, comfortable, and organized for causal living, as if it could provide an alternative living room, study, storage room, or playroom for the house.<sup>137</sup> The occupants are at ease; mother and child lounge on a curvilinear, contemporary couch, while the father sits at attention in the middle of the shelter, reading his paper. The shelves are stocked with supplies. The axonometric diagram illustrates the thickness and density of the walls, emphasizing the strength and protective capacity of the shelter. It is hunkered into the earth, solid and stout, yet as easily accessible as a traditional basement. In the image, the modern home is showcased as a modern fortress. The HHBA “Showcase of Housing Ideas” model marketed the bomb shelter as yet another available option on the standard speculative house, comparable to the air conditioner, plush carpet, or barbecue pit.

### **Burdette Keeland’s “Exciting New Home Design”**

Sales concerns also drove Houston’s merchant-builders to improve the quality of design in their products. In that effort, they encouraged a certain amount of architectural experimentation. *The Houston Post* described one model house in the Meyerland Parade as just that: “Another big feature of this Parade is the experimentation. Builders this year were willing to take a chance in an effort to see what the buying public thinks about new innovations in housing ideas. Houses such as W.K. (Buck) King’s structural steel ‘flat

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<sup>137</sup> *Houston* magazine stated that the shelter was “designed to double for a playroom or extra bedroom.” ‘Homes by the Thousands,’ *Houston* (July 1955): 28.

top' at 5146 Jackwood Street show the willingness of the builders to pioneer in design."<sup>138</sup> Designed by the Houston architect Burdette Keeland, the house at 5146 Jackwood Street was marketed in the *Parade Plan Book* as an "exciting new home design."<sup>139</sup> King's house reportedly attracted top interest among visitors during the opening week of the parade.<sup>140</sup> The main reason for the excitement over Keeland's design, and the feature publicized by the parade, was its austere modernist aesthetic (Fig. 20).

The industrial aesthetic of Keeland's design created a marketing challenge for King. "Don't try to sell 'elegant simplicity,'" stated a *House & Home* article on designing and building for the market. "Mass market buyers don't understand it. They don't like it. They won't buy it."<sup>141</sup> The article argued further that, for the general consumer, simplicity equated to plainness, not allowing them to "show off their wealth in their homes." The King model house, a post-and-beam construction that relied on a modern aesthetic of "elegant simplicity," exemplified the variegated languages of modernism showcased by the parade. For the merchant builder, the form of high modernism seen in Keeland's design was yet another selling feature to publicize, but its polarizing formal language also required a degree of merchandising mitigation.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> "Visitors Say Parade is the Best One Yet," Section 8, Pg 1.

<sup>139</sup> "Exciting New Home Design," *Parade Plan Book*, 33.

<sup>140</sup> "Each Home Offers Something New as Rival Builders 'Go All Out,'" *The Houston Post* (June 11, 1955): section 8, 1.

<sup>141</sup> "What Kind of House Should you Design for the Market?" 111.

<sup>142</sup> Keeland was a follower of the German émigré architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, as were other Houston architects due in part to Philip Johnson's presence and influence. See, Frank D. Welch, *Philip Johnson in Texas* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2000.) Ultimately, the standardized aesthetic of California-based modernism and Frank Lloyd Wright's organicism were more influential for builders.

As seen in the HHBA “Showcase for Housing Ideas” model, most houses in the 1955 Meyerland Parade were variations on the typical American ranch aesthetic, with the addition of low pitched roofs, extended eaves, glass-filled gables, and open floorplans. Even in their showcased details, the parade houses usually used architectural designs that were more responsive to the organic modernism modeled in the Pace Setter houses, depicted in the pages of *House Beautiful*, than to the industrial, standardized aesthetic of the California Case Study houses.<sup>143</sup> Rarely was a single architectural high-style visible in the formal language of speculative model houses. Builders usually valued the contemporary aesthetic created by combining “magazine house” and traditional features. Builders usually highlighted other modernizing features, including built-in kitchens, electrical innovations, and oddities like the speculative bomb shelter.

King’s model house relied on a visible adherence to an industrial modernism that stood in contrast to its neighboring models (Fig. 21). Though undated, Fred Winchell’s photograph was most likely taken soon after construction—in April or May of 1955—as evidenced by the early stages of landscaping, which would have been complete for the June parade. Captured from the northeast corner of the backyard, Winchell’s photograph revealed the austere aesthetic of Keeland’s design. The primary standardized components of construction were visible in Keeland’s flesh and bone composition: steel I-beams, brick infill, industrial light fixtures, sliding glass doors, aluminum sliding windows. The elevation was straightforward and unadorned, and the tectonic qualities of

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<sup>143</sup> *House & Home* featured Keeland’s Parade house along with one of Pierre Koenig’s Case Study houses in an article on the use of metals in innovative houses. A photograph of the Keeland house by Edward A. Bourdon was printed on the same page as one by Julius Schulman of Koenig’s house. “New Uses for Metals in Tomorrow’s House,” *House & Home* (June 1956): 169.

the I-beam pier and lintels are expressed on the exterior of the house. Extending brick walls created a shallow covered porch, colonnaded by two I-beams. Window and door placement helped to delineate interior spaces, which contained three bedrooms and a storage space. As visible in the east façade, Keeland's exterior materials and composition relied on the prevailing International Style aesthetic found in American commercial architecture of the 1950s.

The *Parade Plan Booklet* emphasized the unique modernism of Keeland's design for visitors, describing it as "a new concept of home design and living," and noting its exposed steel beams as the most "unusual feature of the house."<sup>144</sup> The rendering depicted Keeland's house from a slight aerial perspective, highlighting the flat roof, punctured only by the raised steel lattice over the central courtyard (Fig. 22). None of the other houses in the Parade featured a flat roof, with the traditional gabled pitch still preferred over the soberness of the horizontal profile. The booklet elucidated the architectural design of the model by describing it as "a new concept of home design and living."<sup>145</sup> "Structure is expressed throughout the house following the idea that modern architecture should not falsify structure by covering it with brick or wood or any other material," explained the booklet for parade visitors who were unaware of mid-century modern architectural design.<sup>146</sup> In Winchell's photograph, the house was sterile and austere in the Texas sun and sited in the dirt yard. Eventual landscaping and the textual

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<sup>144</sup> *Parade Plan Booklet*, 33.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 33.

elucidation of the *Parade Plan Booklet* made the austere construction more presentable and palatable to the traditional consumer at the Parade of Homes.

Keeland's interior spatial configuration was not as extreme as his treatment of exterior material, structure, and ornament. In contrast to the open plans favored by architects of the International Style, Keeland's plan appeared rather traditional. The U-shaped plan wrapped around a central courtyard; the overall composition was only a minor variation on the traditional four-square plan seen in historical domestic examples (Fig. 23). Spaces were square in form, and aligned along a corridor axis. There was no push or pull between voids, with only a slight shift of the thresholds to the three bedrooms. Overall, Keeland's plan was a static and regimented composition. The flat roof also confined the height of the rooms to a constant plane, as opposed to other Parade homes that showcased raised beam-ceilings.

Keeland most effectively used glass walls and sliding doors to open his interior space, rather than through spatial configuration. While the bedrooms had exterior-facing windows, the main living spaces were interiorized; outer walls were solid brick with glazing only to the inner patio. In plan, the patio, or outdoor space, was merged with the indoor spaces of the living room, family room, and kitchen. The house had a footprint of over 1900 square feet, with the inner patio taking up nearly twenty percent of the total living space. Spatially, Keeland's use of glass planes opened the front half of the house into itself. In that way, Keeland's plan was surprisingly paradoxical: both traditional and modern, inward and outward, open and closed.

An interior photograph provided evidence of the mediated, livable, and more marketable modernism on display in the King house (Fig. 24). Also photographed by Winchell, the image captured the family room, adjacent to the kitchen and open to the central courtyard. The photograph revealed the way that the furnished model home operated as a multisensory merchandising apparatus. Architecturally, Keeland had applied the cool veneer of the International Style to the domestic traditionalism of speculative housing. He married the two through a use of materials, massing, scale, spatial sequencing, and orientation. Excluding the furnishings, there was practically no trace of domestic historicism in the architectural character of the interior—the surfaces were planar and unadorned, steel I-beams frame walls of brick infill, and the ceiling was created with industrial asbestos tiles. The plate glass walls created a transparent composition where the eye—and by extension the body—could travel from one space to the other, permeating the plan of the traditional American house. Even still, views to the outside were controlled and blocked, creating an introspective domestic space. Winchell's perspective heightened this reading of the interior space, for the viewer looked through the central courtyard and into the living room, but not beyond the enclosure of the house.

Furnishings and accessories set the stage of the model home. Groupings of furniture delineated the separate spaces in the house, showing potential visitors “how the house works.”<sup>147</sup> Builders understood that furniture displays also helped customers imagine their own furniture in the space and invited them to stay longer in the space. In

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<sup>147</sup> “How to use the Model House for Home Merchandising,” 112-159.

the King house interior, small arrangements of furniture defined the casual space of the family room and specified gathering areas at the counter and in the patio, without obstructing other marketable features of the architecture, such as the sliding doors. Potted plants provided a natural contrast to the hardness of the steel and brick materials, and made the home feel lived-in, as did the bowl of fruit on the kitchen counter. The eclectic furniture in a variety of styles, which was intended by the sellers to appeal to a larger range of consumers, was clearly incongruous with the modern house itself; even though the furniture was contemporary, it featured only a slightly modernized historical form language, especially visible in the couch.<sup>148</sup>

Builders understood the importance of using furniture in such a way, as seen in a 1957 issue of *House & Home*. Referring to a photograph of a staged interior (Fig. 25), the article explained the appeal of using a mixture of furnishing styles:

Include more than one style to attract more than one kind of buyer. This house reflects one decorator's feeling that she can help her builder client sell more houses by mixing furniture styles. "Furnishing a house in just one style scares some people away," says Anne Winkler of William Pahlmann Associates, "so the furniture should be varied in style and so should the fabrics." Most people own a mixture of acquired or inherited pieces, so a mixed interior is a familiar setting to them.<sup>149</sup>

In the photographed interior, Winkler used modern tables, one of steel and glass and another of wood on thin tapered legs, along with more traditional pieces, such as lamps, a sofa and a period chair of lighter fabric. The result, as Winkler described, was that "when you use a lot of styles, you're bound to have something for everyone." In the

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<sup>148</sup> The model was "furnished in modern style by Knoll Associates of New York." *Parade Plan Booklet*, 33.

<sup>149</sup> "How to Use the Model House for Home Merchandising," 125.

King model house, the casual, eclectic interior furnishings similarly served to moderate the high modernism of the exterior aesthetic, creating a more livable space. The model was austere and comfortable, sterile and inviting—mitigating juxtapositions ideal for a speculative house that needed to appeal to a large and diverse market.

### **Tradition and Historicism at the Parade**

Very few models followed the pattern of King and Burdette's "Exciting New House Design." Builders feared that the "elegant simplicity" associated with such a model's architectural modernism was less marketable and required extra merchandising to make it palatable to the public. The "Showcase of Housing Ideas" model was a more paradigmatic case study of postwar Parade of Homes model houses. Most Parade models relied on traditional architectural features with contemporary additions and modern amenities. Only Frank Ogren's model at 5134 Jackwood Street was touted fully as a "traditional styled home."<sup>150</sup> Designed by James D. Johnson, Ogren's ranch-styled model featured a brick exterior, a front porch with four double columns, and a detached two-car garage (Fig. 26). In plan, the model included a combined living and dining room, three bedrooms, two baths, and a utility room. Built-in bookcases and planters in the entry-way and a fully electric kitchen, with a built-in range and oven, dishwasher, and disposer, added marketable modern features to the model.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> "A 'Traditional' Style Home," *Parade Plan Book*, 28.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, 28.

Wilbur Moore's "Southern Colonial Design" model at 5147 Jackwood Street brought a "southern plantation colonial design" to the suburbs of Houston (Fig. 27).<sup>152</sup> The Lucien Hood-designed model sold at the Parade for \$26,000. Six white columns delineated the front porch on the pink brick exterior, and a central entry-way symmetrically arranged the interior into an adaptation of the traditional hall-and-parlor plan (Fig. 28). For the Parade, the Christmas Furniture Company furnished the model in an early American style with a "few formal pieces."<sup>153</sup> Modern amenities contemporized the historicism of the colonial plan, façade, and decorating. Also called the "General Electric House," Moore's model had GE air-conditioning and a fully equipped GE kitchen, including a "wall refrigerator and deep freeze, oven and range top with barbecue pit, automatic washer and dryer, dishwasher and disposer—all colored in yellow."<sup>154</sup> Wayne Beckner's "Early American Colonial" model at 5123 Jackwood Street was very similar to Moore's model in plan, façade treatment, and staging (Fig. 29).<sup>155</sup>

The most striking use of a historical form language was in Ervin Boessling's "Old English—Modern Ideas!" model house at 5131 Jackwood Street, designed by Christiansen and Cannata (Fig. 30). The *Parade Plan Book* described the model as a "combination of contemporary ideas" that resembled "an import from the British countryside, with its steep roof and gables."<sup>156</sup> But the model was also marketed for boasting "such modern features as a brick planting area across the front and a plate glass

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<sup>152</sup> "Southern Colonial Design," *Parade Plan Book*, 29.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>155</sup> "Early American Colonial," *Parade Plan Book*, 18. Beckner's model was staged by McDaniel's Furniture Company in French Provincial and Early American furnishings.

<sup>156</sup> "Old English—Modern Ideas!" *Parade Plan Book*, 26.

entry way.”<sup>157</sup> The 26-foot front gable of plaster and timber separated the model from other Meyerland Parade houses by its referencing of English Tudor style half-timbering. The historical forms were pared down and combined with modern details, such as where Christiansen and Cannata used the perforated brick wall to puncture through the traditional gable (Fig. 31).

At the Meyerland Parade of Homes, builders presented a wealth of options to visitors. Since “second time buyers want more than just a house. They buy neighborhoods, a whole new way of life,” the organizers of the Parade stressed Meyerland’s advancement as a suburban community.<sup>158</sup> They also worked with interior decorators and landscape architects to merchandise the model houses to appeal to a cross-section of their market. Just as Keeland’s model required merchandising in order to relieve its modernism, builders also played up the modern features of more traditional models. At Meyerland, builders tried to showcase their model houses for a volume-built market, but with custom-built features. The cooperation of well-known Houston architects, like Keeland, Jenkins, and Harwood Taylor, helped to introduce custom-designed modern details.

The resulting model houses were often striking examples of postwar domestic architecture, as seen in Christiansen and Cannata’s design for Ervin Boessling’s model at 5130 Jackwood Street (Fig. 32).<sup>159</sup> Sliding glass doors, full-length windows, and glass gables opened the space of the family room onto the terrace (Fig. 33). A brick wall

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>158</sup> “Are your Merchandising Methods up-to-date?” 172.

<sup>159</sup> “A Home Delightfully Different,” *Parade Plan Book*, 22.

provided privacy from the street, while also adding texture to the interior. The clean lines, balanced proportion, and spatial organization visible in Boessling's model represented the high quality of house construction and design showcased at the Meyerland Parade. As seen at Meyerland, the postwar Parade of Homes events mixed real estate, architecture, and spectacle. From Nixon's opening ceremony to the twelve year old Miss Parade of Homes, Dene Hofheinz, the Meyerland Parade of Homes was a postwar publicity marvel in the form of a housing show.

## **Conclusion: The American House on Parade**

Thomas Hine discussed the shift from immediate postwar tract-house production to the consumer-driven variety of volume-built housing in his cultural history *Populuxe*:

Rather than offering just one or two models, the typical developer would show four or five, and these available with various options that would add greater variety, and higher costs. The development was still a fact of life, the way to get the most house for the least money. But buyers were encouraged to see the differences among the houses, to make those little individual choices that would show the world that yours was a family of taste and imagination.<sup>160</sup>

The Parade of Homes showcased the “individual choices” available from the housing industry. The model house created a participatory consumer spectacle in which visitors were introduced to a variety of architectural ideas, materials, and styles, all presented as ways to bring about a better way of living.

The model house, a device most notably used by architects in expositions and exhibitions, became a tool of the merchant-builder. In their hands, the model house operated in the same way as it always had—allowing visitors to experience the spatial, sequential, and atmospheric qualities of the building. But the story was shifted by the protagonists, the merchant-builders, and their audience, millions of American consumers, from different educational, socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, of different ages. The model house was removed from the museum gallery or the World’s Fair and placed next to the highway. Multiple new developments and their billboards for “Models, Now Open” became American roadside staples. In the 1950s, builders crafted the model house to capitalize on the novelty of the growing highway system, the car, and the leisurely

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<sup>160</sup> Thomas Hine, *Populuxe*, 46.

Sunday-afternoon drive. The model house, displayed in the Parade of Homes, became a built form of advertising, employed by merchant-builders to appeal to a new consumer.

In the postwar period, a new market of consumers, including those already housed in the first string of postwar houses but ready for an upgrade and those interested in the forms of modernism presented in the pages of housing magazines, motivated a heightened merchandising response from builders. The result was the Parade of Homes, such as in Meyerland with its “Showcase of Housing Ideas” model house or “Exciting New Home Design.” Yet, the charm of ‘Early American’ or “Southern Colonial Design” was also available. Mass building required mass advertising to appeal to a mass market.

The result—what it took to sell houses—was a moderated and pluralistic form of mass modernism. In the model house, builders sold “modernism” in that they showcased the best of standardized construction, electric amenities, and new postwar materials. They also included a top-down translation of contemporary architectural high-style designs, available at cheaper prices like the pirated \$19.95 fashion available on Seventh Avenue instead of Bergdorf’s. The publicized result was an improved standard of life—one of safety, privacy, spaciousness, and style. As a mass merchandising spectacle, the postwar Parade of Homes merged marketing with architecture, thereby creating a form of collective American domesticity.

## Coda

On June 5, 2009 I attended the Parade of Homes in Austin, Texas. Organized by the Home Builders Association of Greater Austin, under President Wes Peoples, the city of Austin's 56<sup>th</sup> Parade featured five model houses, each constructed by different building companies. All of the models showcased a green way of living by earning three energy standards in construction, including Austin Energy Green Building, LEED, and the NAHB Green Building ratings. Sustainability and eco-friendly building have become main themes of architecture and building in the first decade of the twenty-first century; the Parade publicized them much as the 1955 Meyerland Parade showcased indoor-outdoor living.

A few things immediately struck me as I walked through the Parade. The first was that the format seemed shockingly similar to the accounts of 1950s Parades I had researched. Builders in 2009 were using the same merchandising techniques as their postwar counterparts. Well-placed signs provided information on materials, details, and special features; tents exhibited the products of vendors and local sponsoring business; musicians entertained; and a Parade booklet described the models. I peered into the garage of one model to find that it had been transformed into a sales center, just as the 1957 merchandising issue of *House & Home* recommended.<sup>161</sup> It was also surprising to discover that most of the models had strong references to mid-century modernism in their interior design. The staged models displayed everything from a replica of the 1929

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<sup>161</sup> "How to turn Lookers into Buyers," 144.

Barcelona Chair by Mies van der Rohe and Lily Reich to a flat-screen, high definition television installed on a patio.

The final thing that struck me was the context of my own visit. I was joined on the tour by two friends, a couple who were in the market for a house. I closely watched their responses to the models, and I recognized in their excitement over specific materials—tiles, countertops, and wall-coverings still attract attention—and amenities that the same things continue to captivate consumers. Bathrooms and kitchens are still areas of attention, joined now by the media or entertainment room. Visitors still walk through the model with their own ideas of what is contemporary or modern, influenced by what they have seen in magazines or on television. Staged interiors help shoppers to imagine their own furniture in the spaces. Attraction to the goods on display quickly translates to the possibility of a better way of living. The model house continues to be an apparatus that allows people to simply insert their own life and envision their future. After the Parade, I concluded that the merchandising efforts of merchant builders—postwar or contemporary—are most successful when they appeal to the fundamental truth of house-building that while the consumer-base changes and grows, the goal remains the same: a place of one's own, a home.

## Illustrations

**What sells a House?**

**LOCATION? FINANCING? DESIGN? PLAN?**

**YES... plus the *Lift to Living* extras that make a house a home**

These extras are the brand name accessories your customers know and want. Such things as Frigidaire full-home air conditioning . . . summer and winter for year 'round comfort.

Air Conditioning? We'll agree air conditioning alone may not sell a house. But it can help you sell more homes in 1956 more quickly, more easily! What's more, this valuable experience will guarantee you the ability and local reputation to *keep pace* with residential air conditioning.

**FRIGIDAIRE CONDITIONERS**  
adaptable to variety of installations

**REMOTE**

**YEAR 'ROUND**

Frigidaire has a complete line of air-cooled and water-cooled residential units for add-on, combination, self-contained and remote-type installations.

which conservative estimates indicate will be included in most new homes in five years.

And that's why Frigidaire is adding to its 1956 line many newly-designed and field-tested air conditioning units. With these, Frigidaire offers you a complete, nationally advertised line with a name consumers know and trust.

Your **Frigidaire air conditioning dealer** will be glad to work with you in planning heating and air conditioning for your new homes . . . in promoting and selling them . . . and in providing a factory-trained service organization that will assure homeowners the unequalled satisfaction these Frigidaire products provide. See the Frigidaire dealer or distributor nearest you or write **FRIGIDAIRE DIVISION, General Motors Corporation, Dayton 1, Ohio.**

**FOR A NEW BOOST TO BUSINESS**

**GO FRIGIDAIRE**

GENUINE GM VALUES

Figure 1. Frigidaire Advertisement. 1956. *House & Home* (June 1956), pg. 215.

**1 DRAMATIZE AN ENTRANCE**

**2 SPARK-UP A KITCHEN**

**3 BRIGHTEN A STAIRWAY**

**4 DIVIDE SPACE... BUT NOT THE LIGHT**

These are only four of the many ways you can use patterned glass to make your homes more attractive . . . more saleable.

Blue Ridge Patterned Glass can be a key sales feature in your houses . . . the remembered decorative idea. Prospects like its exciting newness and its practical advantages. Walls or partitions of patterned glass decorate the rooms on both sides with a sparkling pattern of light. The translucent glass is neutral in tone . . . harmonizes well.

Ideas like these are advertised by Blue Ridge Glass Corp. in Better Homes & Gardens and other magazines used as "shopping guides" for prospective home owners.

Look into this versatile building material. Expensive? No, it just looks it. It's easy to install . . . eliminates painting and papering.

Call your L-O-F Distributor or Dealer for more information. He's listed under "Glass" in the phone book.

**BLUE RIDGE PATTERNED GLASS**

Made by **BLUE RIDGE GLASS CORP.**

Sold by **LIBBEY-OWENS-FORD Glass Distributors**

**LOF GLASS**

**Book of Decorating Ideas**  
This 16-page book illustrates many ways leading architects and designers have used this decorative glass for striking effects in homes. Send for your free copy.

Libbey-Owens-Ford Glass Co., Dept. B-736  
608 Madison Avenue, Toledo 3, Ohio

Please send me my free copy of the Blue Ridge Book of Decorating Ideas using Patterned Glass.

Name (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Zone \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

HOUSE & HOME

**Figure 2.** Blue Ridge Patterned Glass Advertisement. 1956. *House & Home* (April 1956): pg. 66.

Bellcroft Estates, Bellmawr, N. J.  
 Developed by Cardinal Homes, Inc.  
 Attic fans by Emerson-Electric  
 Builders: Altshuler and O'Dell  
 Designer: Morris Altshuler  
 Electrical Contractor: S. Paskin and Sons

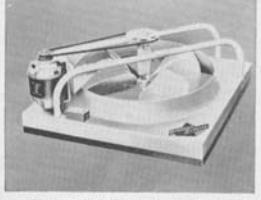
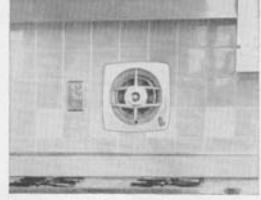



Build more sell into your new homes with new Emerson-Electric attic fans

Prospects for your new homes more readily become buyers when they see that you are featuring Emerson-Electric attic fans as "standard equipment." It gives them added assurance that you are offering quality throughout.

Here is the very best, yet a rock-bottom priced installation that pays large dividends in luxury living. It will help to close many sales. And, the long-life features of Emerson-Electric attic fans assure years and years of trouble-free summer comfort. They are designed for quick, inexpensive installation.

Write for complete data—ask for Fan Bulletin No. 1025  
THE EMERSON ELECTRIC MFG. CO., ST. LOUIS 21, MISSOURI

New 24" and 30" ACTIVE-AIR attic fans. The 24" fan, 5200 C.F.M., list price is only \$76.55, ceiling shutter list \$27.85; list price of 30" fan, 7000 C.F.M., is \$85.30, ceiling shutter list \$31.00.

You put added "sales appeal" in your homes with the new 8" ACTIVE-AIR ventilator in kitchens, bathrooms and utility rooms. For wall or ceiling installation, mirror-finish grille—list price \$23.75.

All backed by the famous 5-YEAR factory-to-user guarantee at no extra cost!

**Emerson-Electric**  
of St. Louis • Since 1890



JUNE 1956

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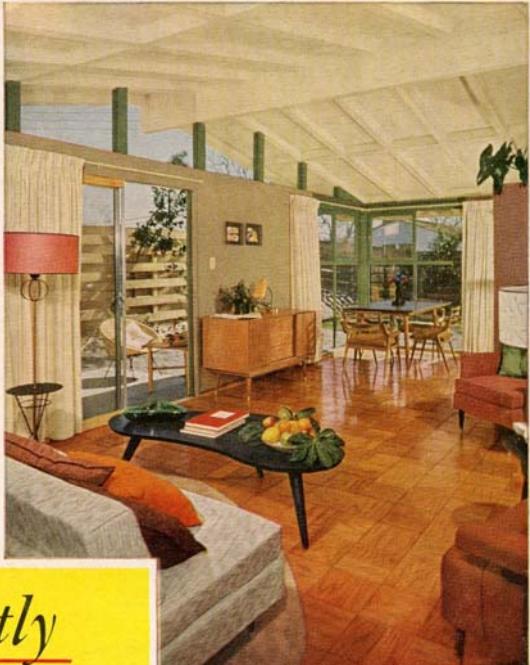
**Figure 3.** Emerson Electric Advertisement. 1956. *House & Home* (June 1956): pg. 71.

**H**iggins Oak Block floors do most of their own selling before you say a word. Even in a bare room their lustrous beauty fairly sings of warmth and comfort, whispers that here's a floor as easy to care for as a new table-top. But there's more: Higgins Block won't show wear in a lifetime.

Cross-bond lamination makes Higgins Block the most durable wood flooring you can buy, forever free—under *any* conditions—from contraction or expansion.

*permanently*  
*trouble-free...*

NO EXPANSION — NO CONTRACTION



Higgins Block makes itself at home in any interior, harmonizing perfectly with traditional decor as well as with the modern treatment shown here. It comes in decorator dark tones as well as natural; and may be ordered unfinished if you prefer the custom look of on-the-job finishing.

## Higgins floors **SELL HOUSES!**

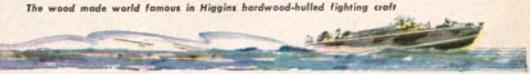
The trend is to Higgins Hardwood Block Flooring because:

- Super Surface is thicker, wears longer, can be sanded and refinished as often as necessary.
- Prefinish saves upward of a week's job time. Also available unfinished for custom finishing on the job.
- New precision tongue and groove assures rapid installation.
- Can be used over radiant heat.
- Water repellent, vermin and rot resistant.
- Lifetime beauty, minimum upkeep.
- Easy to install over any subfloor.

SEE SWEETS, Architectural 133 HS Light Construction 7d HS

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BONDED HARDWOOD BLOCK  
HIGGINS INDUSTRIES INC. — BOX 8160 — NEW ORLEANS 22 — PIONEERS AND WORLD'S LARGEST  
MANUFACTURERS OF LAMINATED HARDWOOD BLOCK FLOORING

The wood made world famous in Higgins hardwood-hulled fighting craft



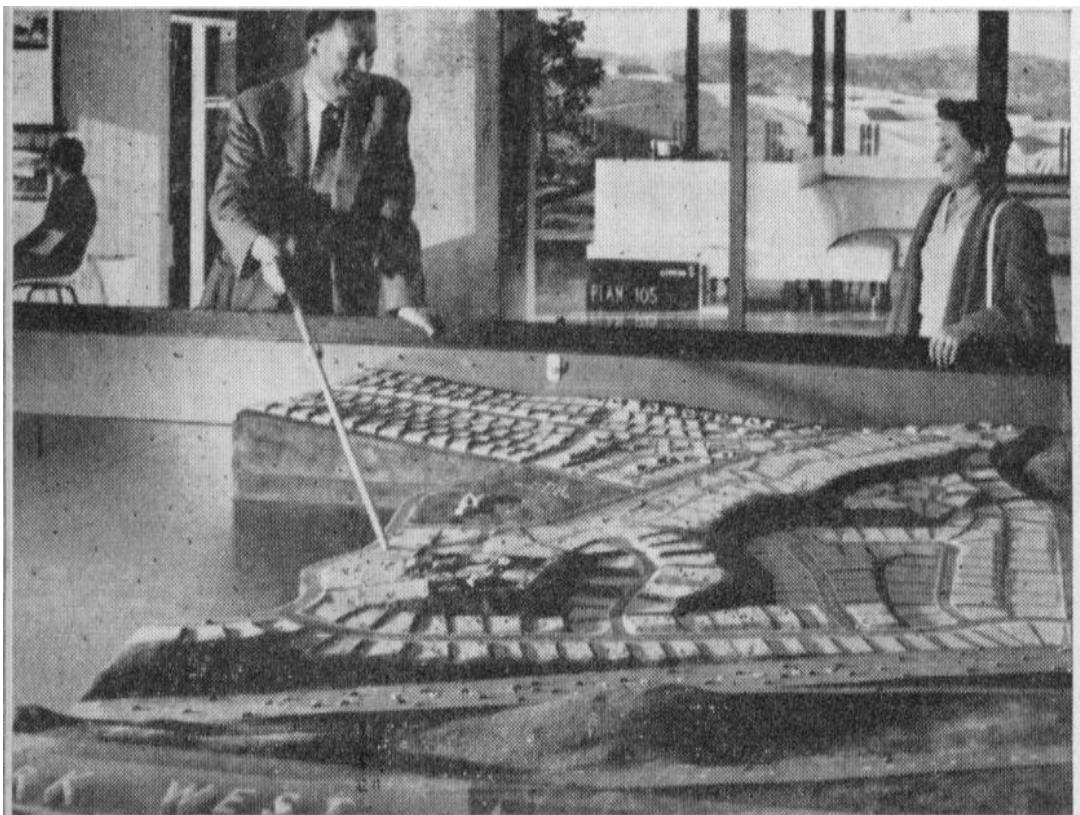
**Figure 4.** Higgins Industry, Inc Advertisement. 1957. *House & Home* (February 1957): pg. 199.



**Figure 5.** Parade Ladies, Seattle Parade of Homes Photograph. Photographer unknown. 1954. “Builders at Work: Parade of Homes,” *House & Home*, (November 1954): 50.



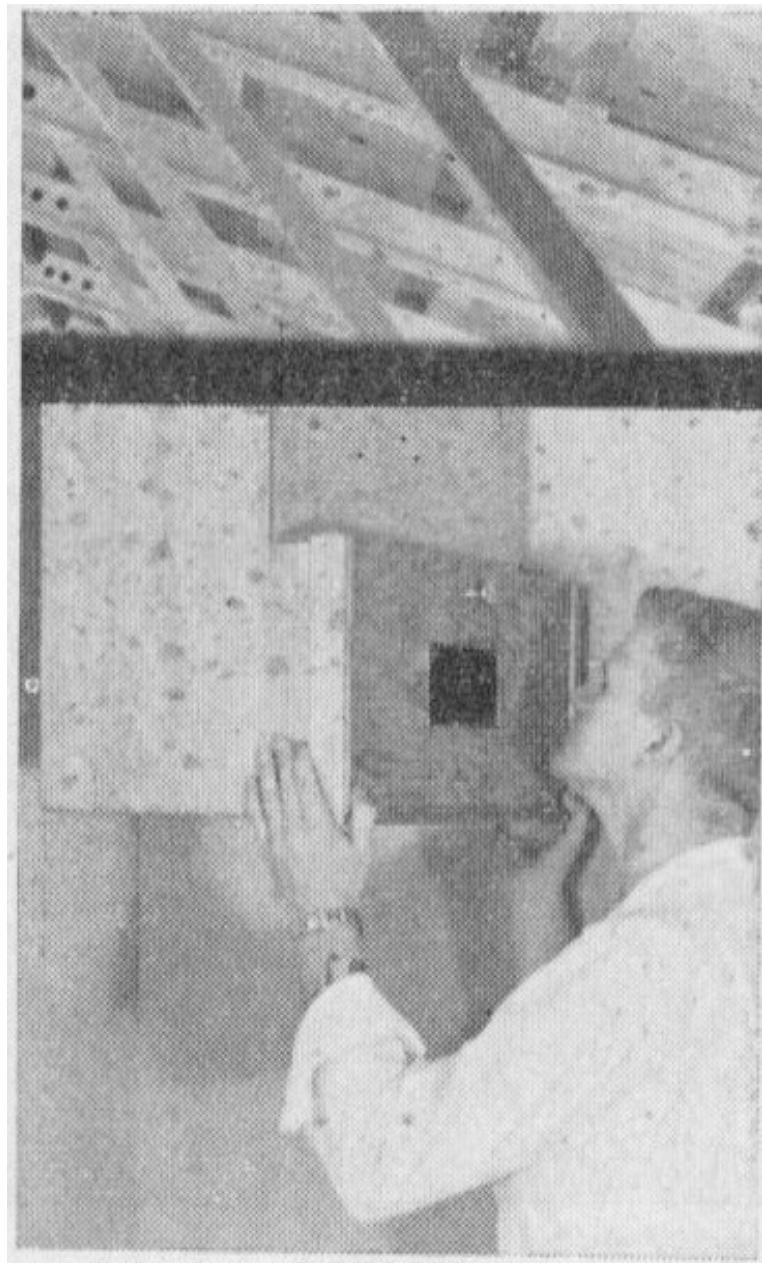
**Figure 6.** “West Coast Lumberman Swap Grading Names for Numbers,” *House & Home* (March 1956): 57.



**Figure 7.** Large Scale Model. Julius Shulman photograph. "How to Turn Lookers into Buyers," *House & Home* (April 1957): 146.



**Figure 8.** “Small Builders put House on a Barge,” *House & Home* (March 1957): 82.



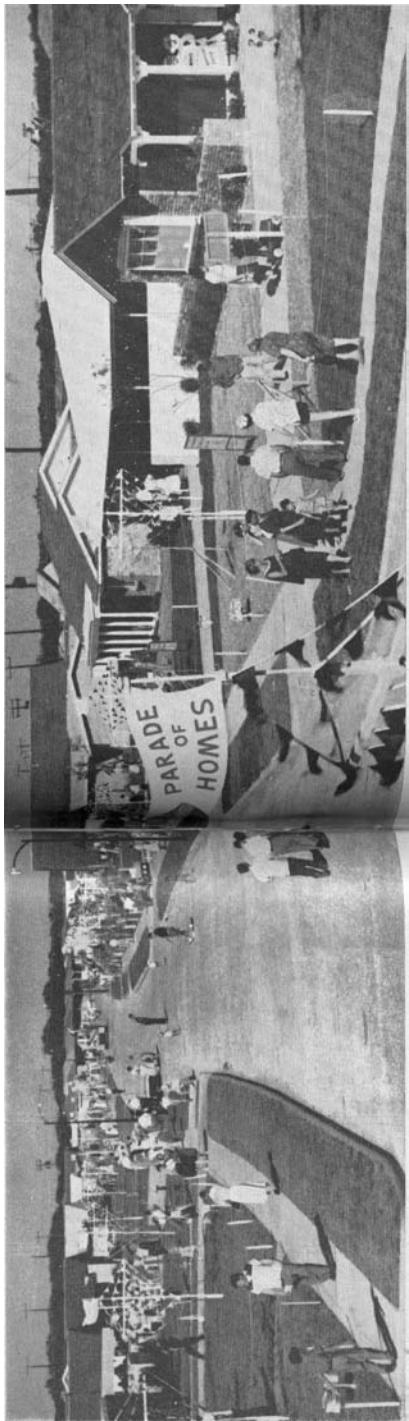
**Figure 9.** US Steel's Prefab House Periscope. Ken Smith Photograph. "How to Turn Lookers into Buyers," *House & Home* (April 1957): 143.



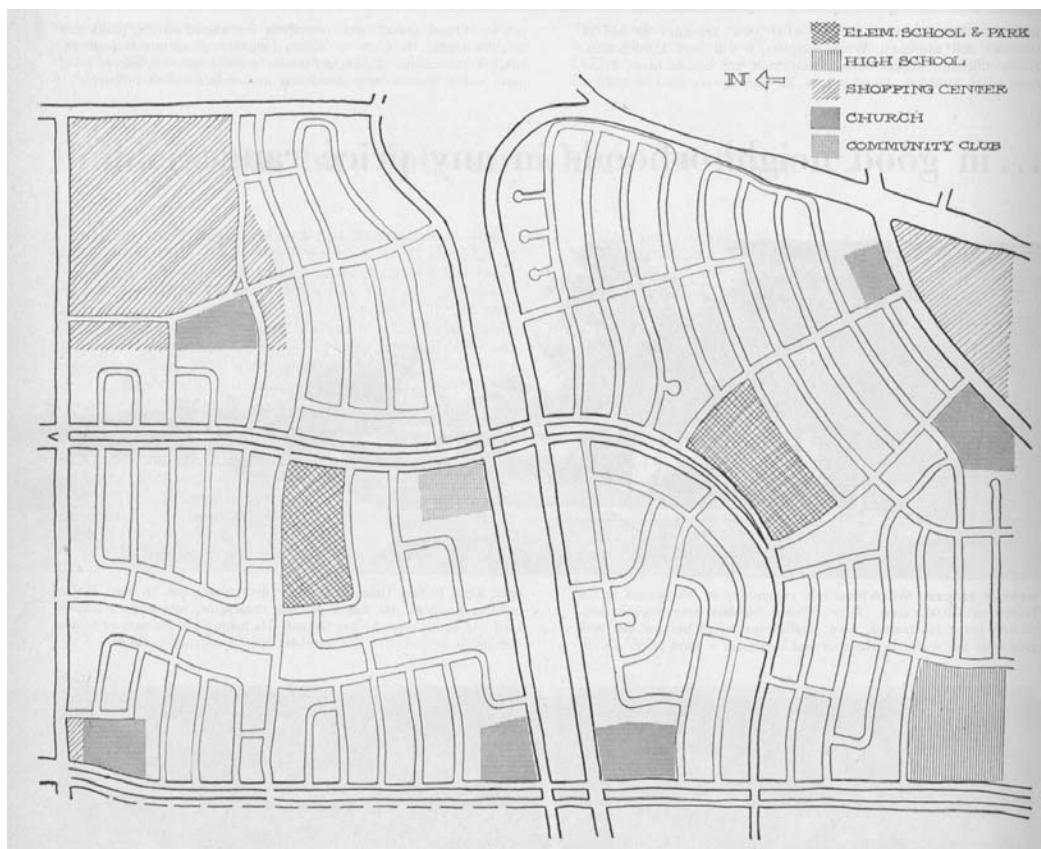
**Figure 10.** Val Zimmerman's Catwalk. Photographer unknown. "How to Turn Lookers into Buyers," *House & Home* (April 1957): 143.



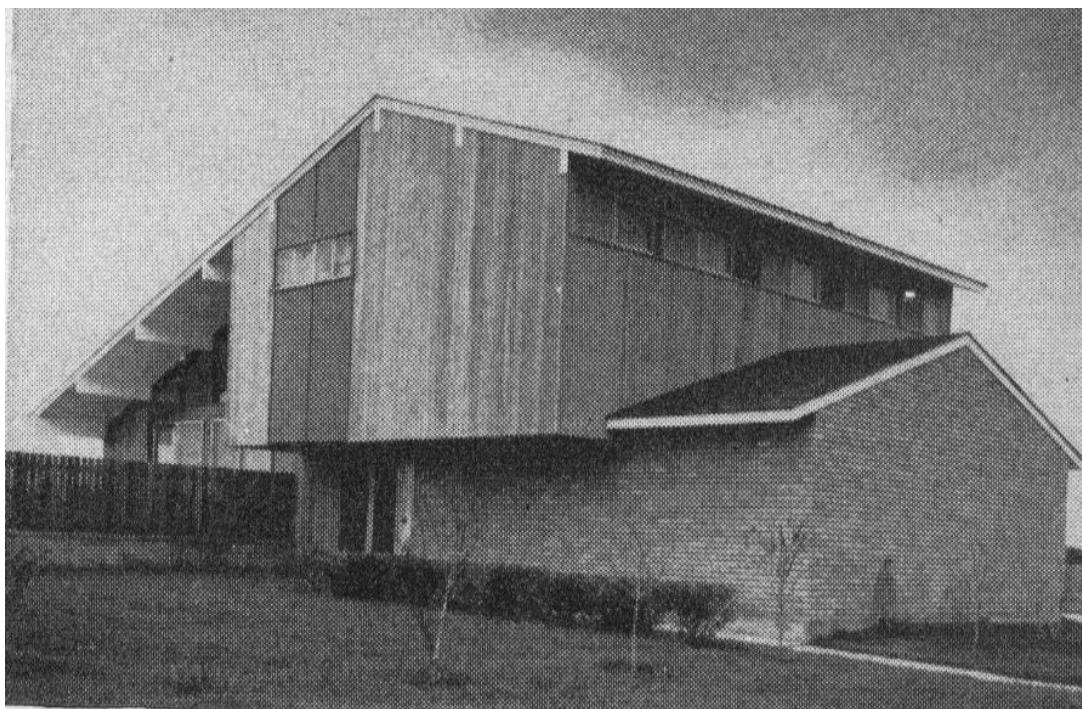
**Figure 11.** Boyd-Jackson Exposed Frame House. Photographer unknown. 1957.  
“How to Turn Lookers into Buyers,” *House & Home* (April 1957): 143.



**Figure 12.** Meyerland Parade of Homes. Edward A. Bourdon, photographer. 1955.  
“Houston’s Home Builders Lead off 1955 Parade of Homes,” *House & Home* (September 1955): 140-141.



**Figure 13.** Meyerland Plot Rendering. 1958. "Houston," *House & Home* (February 1958): 94.

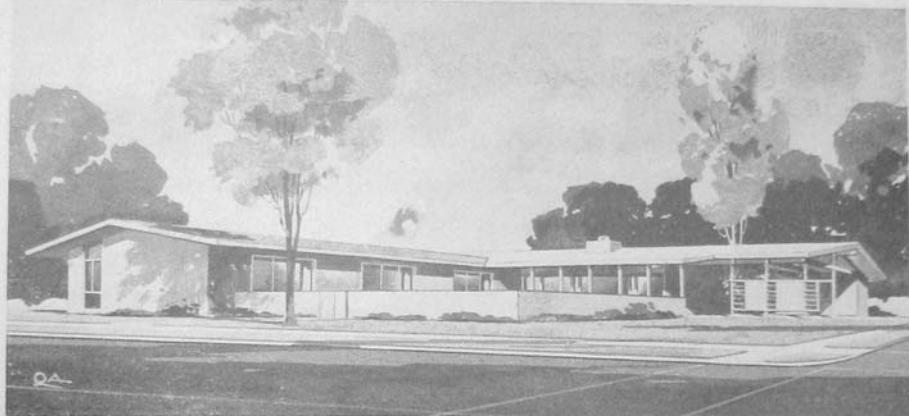


**Figure 14.** Alan Huvard Model House, exterior. Photographer unknown. 1955. “Houston’s Home Builders Lead off 1955 Parade of Homes,” *House & Home* (September 1955): 148.



**Figure 15.** Paul Wolf Model House. Photographer unknown. 1955. “Houston’s Home Builders Lead off 1955 Parade of Homes,” *House & Home* (September 1955): 147.

## SHOWCASE OF HOUSING IDEAS



THE HOUSTON HOME BUILDERS ASSOCIATION, sponsors of the Parade of Homes, also is sponsoring one home in the Parade. Designed by Edmund Langwith and Robert King, with Wilson, Morris & Crain, A.I.A., consulting architects, the home is located at 5102 Jackwood Street.

Landscape design is by Fred Buxton, Ralph Cobb and James E. O'Rourke. The home features the indoor-outdoor living theme extensively and the landscaping experts have been given a free rein in making this home outstanding. A large walled courtyard at the front provides a wonderful "outdoor" living room and the home also boasts two inner courtyards.

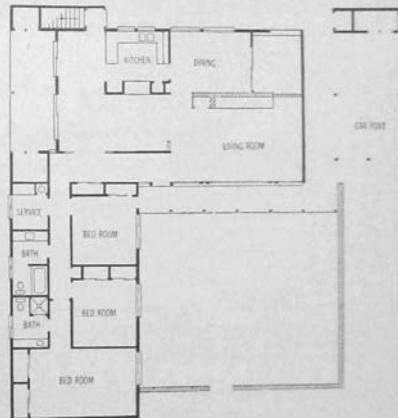
The well-publicized H-bomb shelter is reached through a stairway off the kitchen. Erected by Clear Span Engineering Company, the shelter has been highly praised by national civil defense experts.

The "builders'" home is gas air-conditioned by Servel, has three bedrooms, two baths including a separate bath for the master bedroom, family room, living room, separate dining room, dream kitchen and breakfast area. The kitchen includes built-in range, refrigerator, oven, freezer, dishwasher and garbage disposer. Kitchen design and installation is by Avalon Mills.

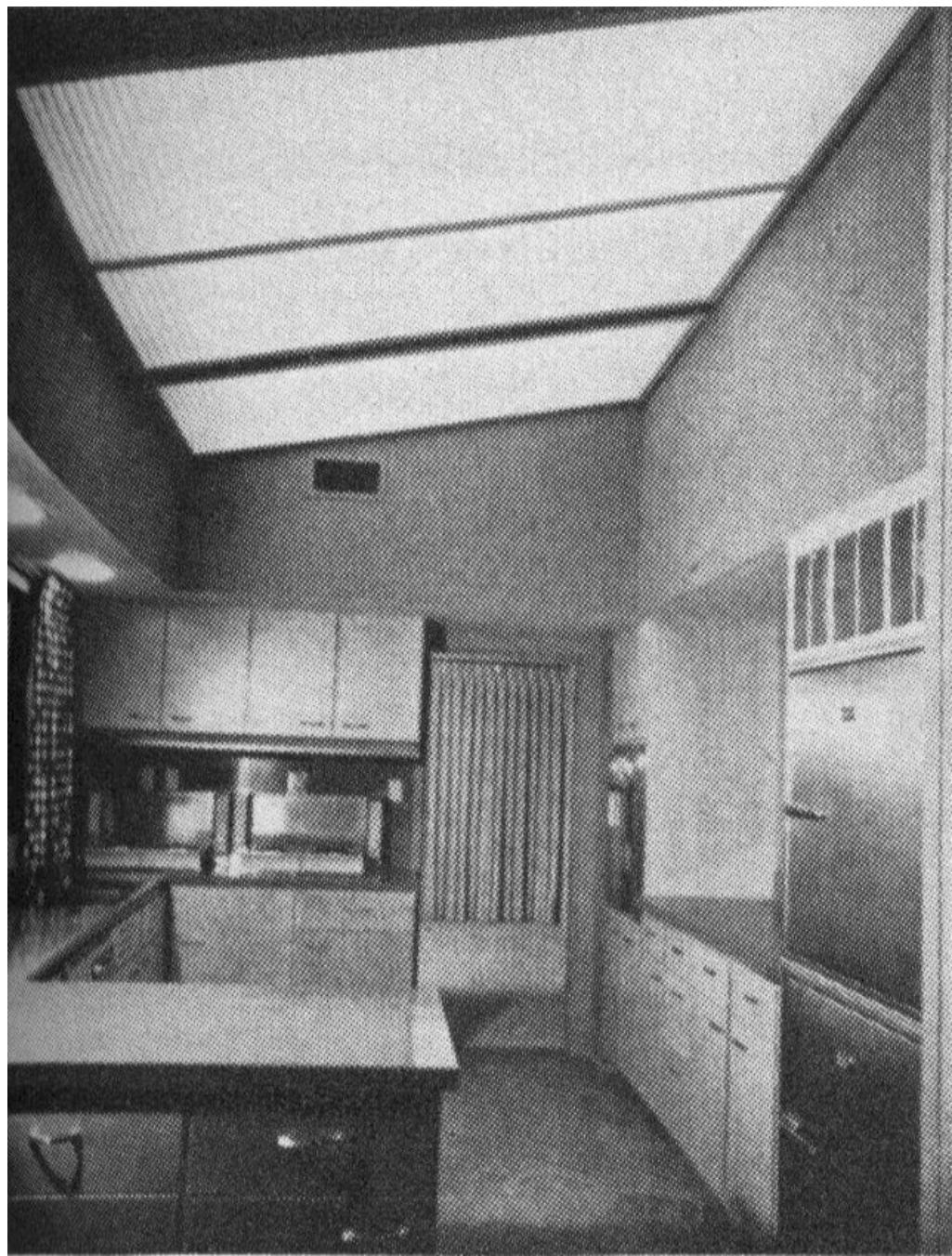
Most of the house features a unique beamed ceiling arrangement, with acoustical plaster. The kitchen panel lighting system is the first used in a speculative house to our knowledge in the Southwest.

Other features of the home include an intercommunication system, telephones in the bathrooms as well as other areas, polished flagstone in the kitchen, family room and breakfast area, "Touch-Plate" low voltage lighting system throughout and a floor-to-ceiling brick fireplace wall-and-cabinets in the living room. Frank Ogren served as supervising builder in behalf of the Association. The home will be placed on sale following completion of the Parade. For further information contact the Association office.

**HOUSTON HOME BUILDERS ASSOCIATION, 1719 Sunset Blvd., LY-3763**



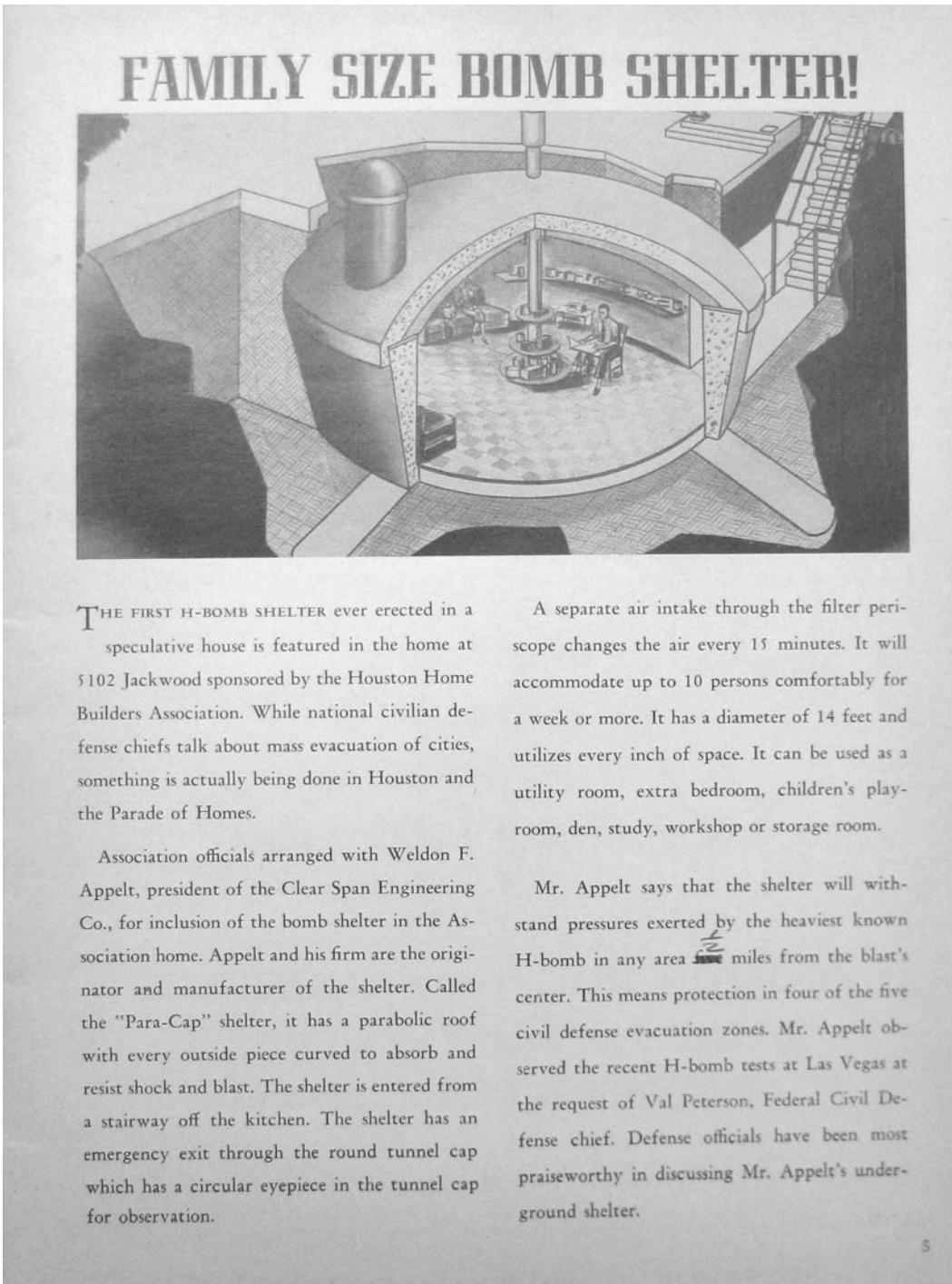
**Figure 16.** "Showcase of Housing Ideas" *Parade Plan Book* page. 1955. *Parade Plan Book* (Houston, TX: Houston Home Builders Association, 1955): 7.



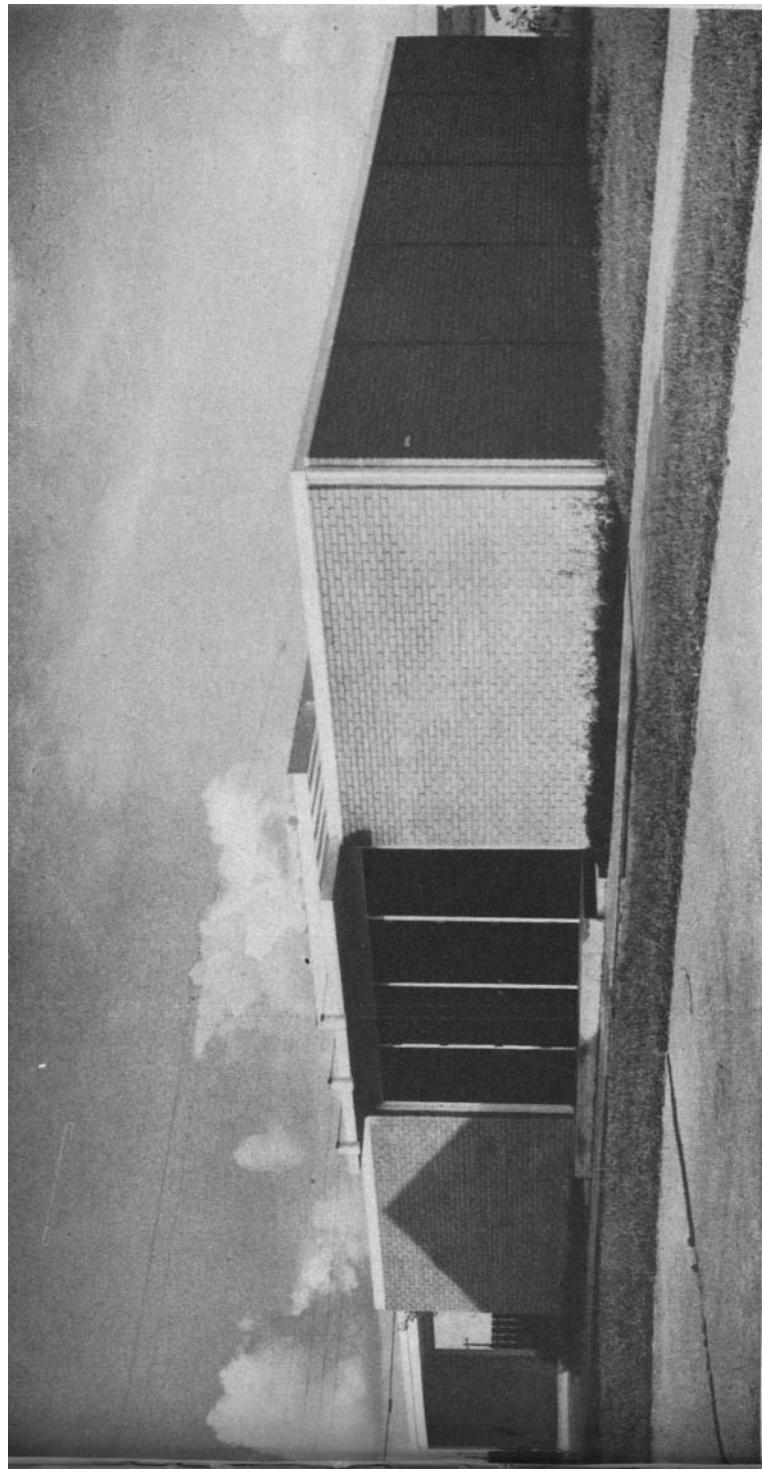
**Figure 17.** HHBA Model House kitchen. Photographer unknown. 1955. “Houston’s Home Builders Lead off 1955 Parade of Homes,” *House & Home* (September 1955): 151.



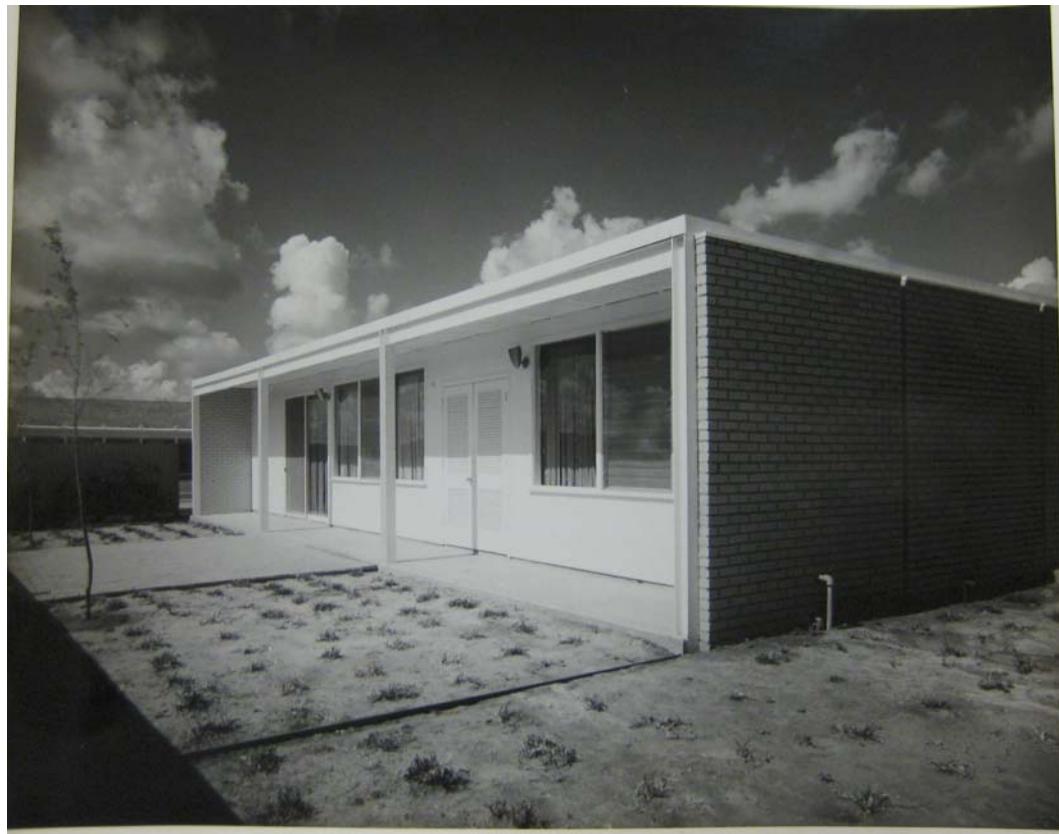
**Figure 18.** HHBA Model House exterior photograph. Photographer unknown. 1955. “Houston’s Home Builders Lead off 1955 Parade of Homes,” *House & Home* (September 1955): 150.



**Figure 19.** "Family Size Bomb Shelter!" *Parade Plan Book* page. 1955. *Parade Plan Book* (Houston, TX: Houston Home Builders Association, 1955): 5.

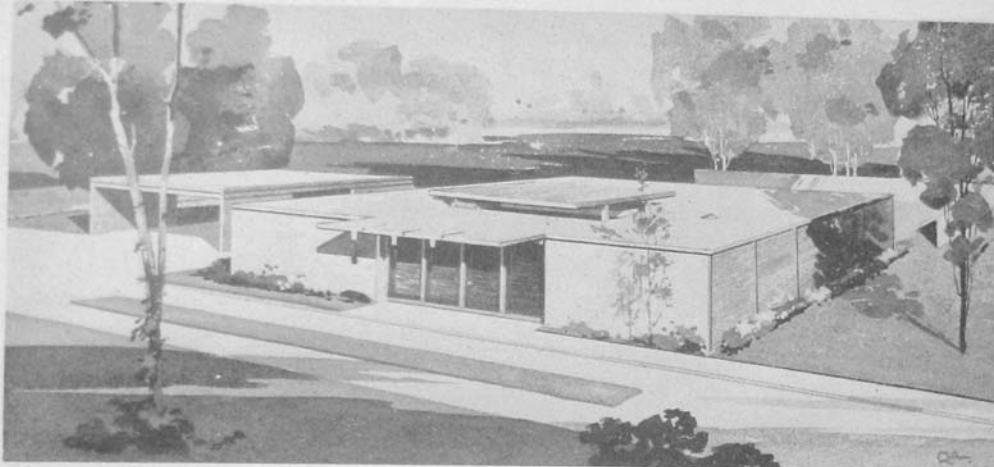


**Figure 20.** Buck King Model House, exterior. Photographer unknown. 1955. “Houston’s Home Builders Lead off 1955 Parade of Homes,” *House & Home* (September 1955): 143.



**Figure 21.** Buck King Model House, Exterior. Fred Winchell, photographer. 1955. Burdette Keeland Architectural Papers, 1926-2000, University of Houston Libraries.

# EXCITING NEW HOME DESIGN



ONE OF THE MOST EXCITING new homes in the Parade is the flat top, structural steel house at 5146 Jackwood.

Built by W. K. "Buck" King and designed by Burdette Keeland, it expounds a new concept of home design and living. Parade visitors will probably find the most unusual feature of the house is its exposed steel beams. Structure is expressed throughout the house following the idea that modern architecture should not falsify structure by covering it with brick or wood or any other material. The exterior is of brick and steel columns painted white.

The floor plan includes a living room, family room and kitchen, three bedrooms, two baths, storage room, two-car garage and large patio. *With a total area of 1700 sq ft*

The entire home is built around the patio. The plan is U-shaped with the patio in the center and all areas of the house opening onto it. The entry way leads into the patio, which is covered with a steel lattice. This lattice work serves to break the line of the flat top roof as well as to make an attractive covering for the patio. *about seven feet over it*

The exterior walls of the bedrooms are almost completely glass with the master bedroom having floor to ceiling glass with sliding doors.

The family room and kitchen are separated by a kitchen work unit counter. This counter is a 9½-foot expanse at convenient working level and is equipped with complete General Electric built-ins, including dishwasher, range and oven, disposer, automatic washer and dryer. It is the city's first GE installation of this type.

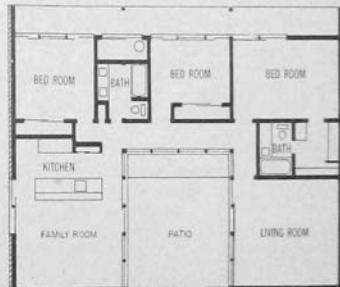
Walls throughout the house are of brick, glass and asbestos. The home is completely fireproof. *Ask about see notes*

It is furnished in modern style by Knoll Associates of New York.

Boulder King has lived in Houston since 1938. He attended Rice Institute and entered the home building industry in 1946. He is the son of Houston's well known builder C. E. King.

*Landscape Design by JAMES E. O'ROURKE*

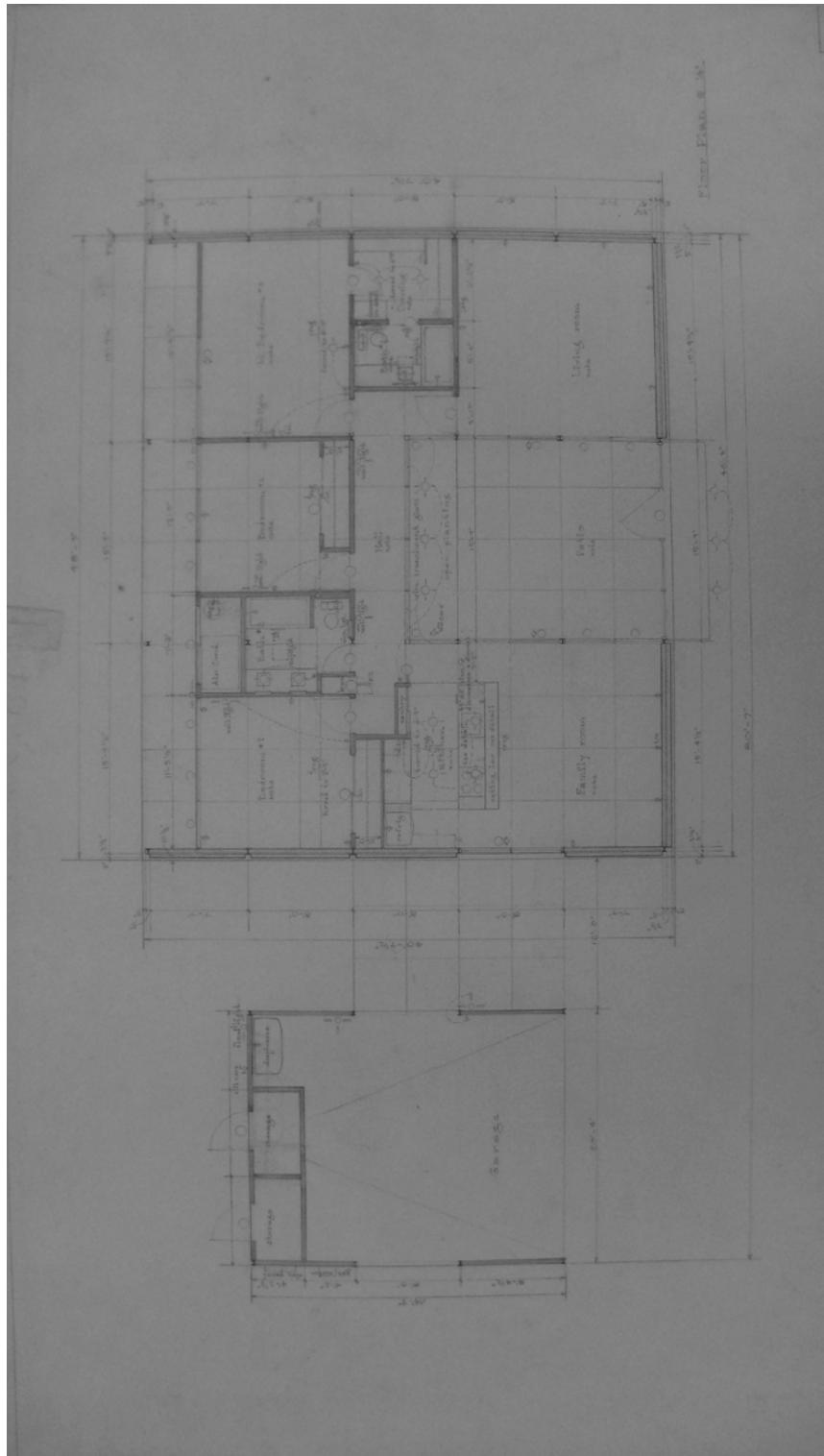
**W. K. KING, Route No. 9, Box 639M, HO 2-3455**



W. K. KING

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**Figure 22.** "Exciting New Home Design" *Parade Plan Book* page. 1955. *Parade Plan Book* (Houston, TX: Houston Home Builders Association, 1955): 33.



**Figure 23.** Burdette Keeland, Floorplan for Buck King Model House. 1955. Burdette Keeland Architectural Papers, 1926-2000, University of Houston Libraries.

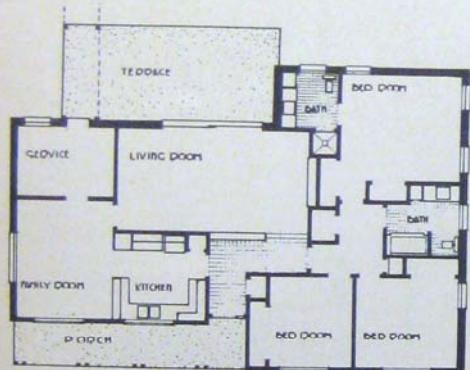
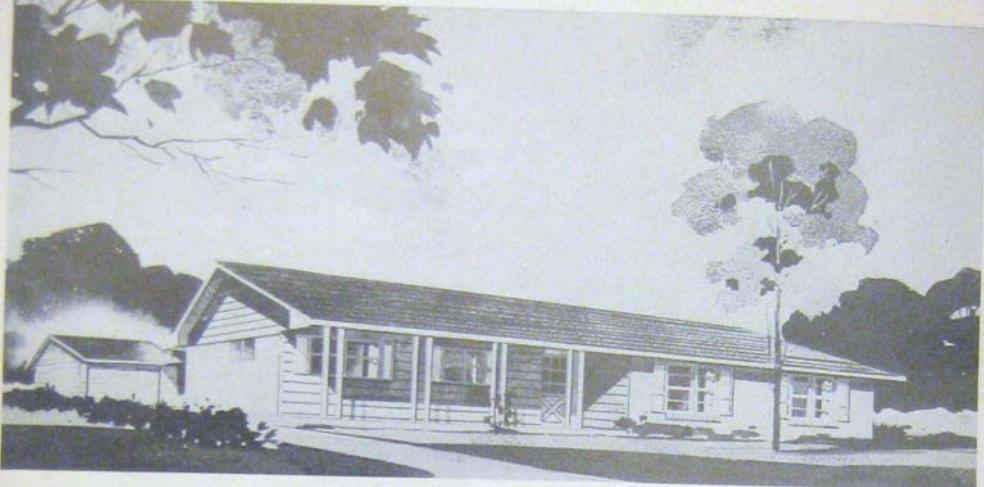


**Figure 24.** Buck King Model House, Interior. Fred Winchell, photographer. 1955. Burdette Keeland Architectural Papers, 1926-2000, University of Houston Libraries.



**Figure 25.** Ann Winkler Interior, Richard Averill Smith, photographer. “How to Use the Model House for Home Merchandising,” *House & Home* (April 1957): pg. 125.

## A 'TRADITIONAL' STYLED HOME



ONE OF THE FEW traditionally styled homes in the parade is the Frank Ogren model at 5134 Jackwood. Designed by James Johnson, it has a gracious exterior of used brick with a porch decorated by four double columns.

The house is furnished by Stowers.

The floor plan included a combination living and dining room, den, terraced concrete patio, electric kitchen, three bedrooms, two baths, two-car detached garage and utility room.

The entry hall, which leads to the living and dining room at the back of the house, is decorated with a built-in combination bookcase and planter.

The kitchen is located at the front of the house, facing on the porch. It is a spacious U-shaped room and has a built-in range and oven, dishwasher and disposer and a pantry.

The den comes off the kitchen and is attractively paneled in mahogany. The large utility room is located just off the den.

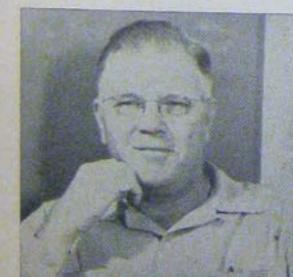
The bedroom wing is to the right of the entrance way and is completely private from the living area. The master bedroom has its own bath with shower. All bedrooms have ample closet space.

The baths are ceramic tile and have built-in vanities with Texolite tops.

The detached garage has lots of storage space.

*Landscape Design by FRED BUXTON*

**FRANK OGREN, 6211 Bellaire Blvd., Bellaire, MO 5-0467**

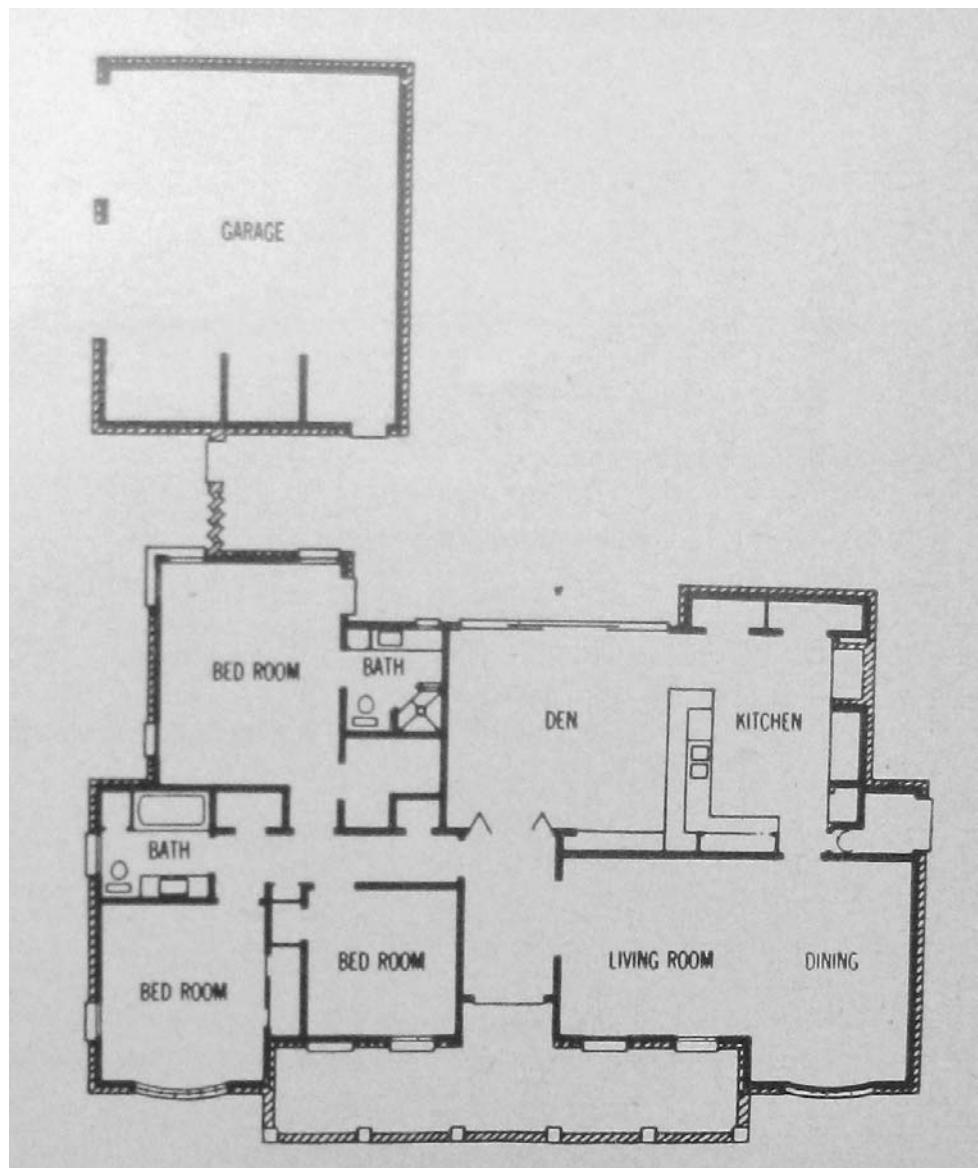


FRANK OGREN

**Figure 26.** "A 'Traditional' Styled Home." *Parade Plan Book* (Houston, TX: Houston Home Builders Association, 1955): 28.

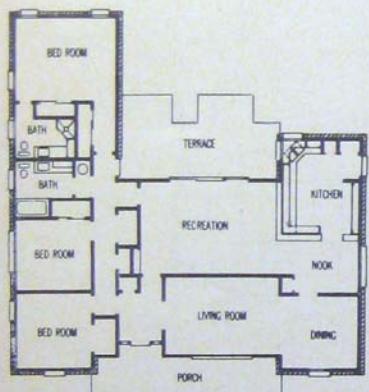


**Figure 27.** Wilbur Moore Model House. 5147 Jackwood Street. Photographer unknown. 1955. "Houston's Home Builders Lead off 1955 Parade of Homes," *House & Home* (September 1955): 142.



**Figure 28.** Wilbur Moore Model House, plan. *Parade Plan Book* (Houston, TX: Houston Home Builders Association, 1955): 29.

## EARLY AMERICAN COLONIAL



WAYNE L. BECKNER

THE HOME at 5123 Jackwood blends the charm of English provincial architecture with the comfort and convenience of contemporary planning and indoor-outdoor living.

The exterior is of brick and rough cedar boards and batts with a porch dominated by four hewn columns. The front is further distinguished by leaded glass casement windows.

A sunken living room gives the effect of being separated from the dining area, yet combines in a graceful expanse for entertainment purposes.

From the Terrazzo tiled foyer, one steps into the relaxed and modern family room, paneled in Parana pine with an exposed beam ceiling and papered between the beams. Twelve-foot glass sliding doors open onto a concrete patio.

The three bedrooms are spacious and have large closets. The master bedroom has its own bath with dressing area and colored fixtures.

The kitchen has a built-in copper Tappan oven and range and a General Electric dishwasher and disposer. It opens into a paneled breakfast nook chair rail height with papered walls and ceiling. This joins the recreation room, allowing the housewife to keep an eye on the youngsters.

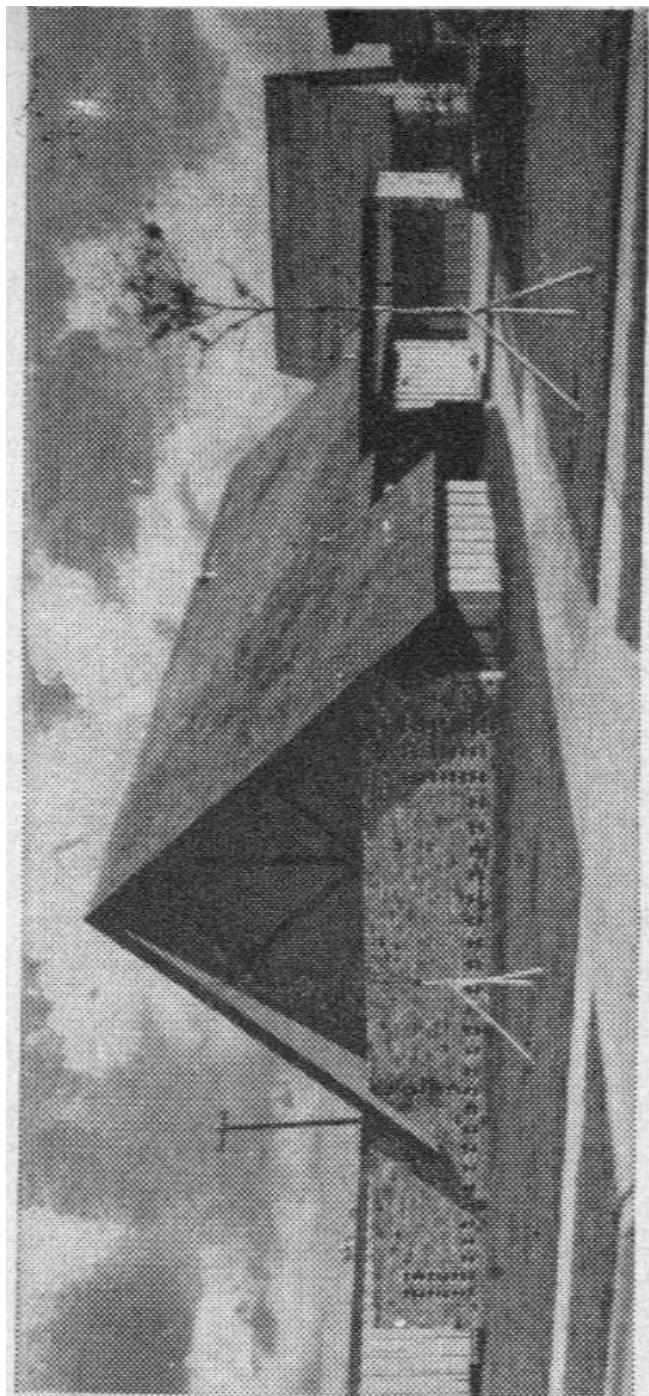
The home is furnished by McDaniels Furniture Co. in French Provincial and Early American furnishings.

This model was built by Wayne L. Beckner of the Taylor Building Co. Mr. Beckner has lived in Houston 30 years. He has built in Willow Bend, Braeburn, Country Club Estates, Bellaire Oaks, Westridge and Sharpstown.

Landscape Design by JAMES E. O'ROURKE

**TAYLOR BUILDING CO., P.O. Box 304, PR-5003**

**Figure 29.** "Early American Colonial." *Parade Plan Book* (Houston, TX: Houston Home Builders Association, 1955): 18.

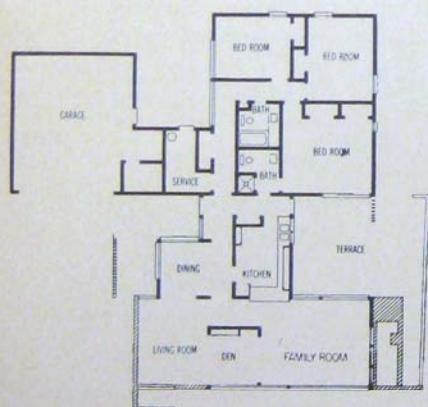
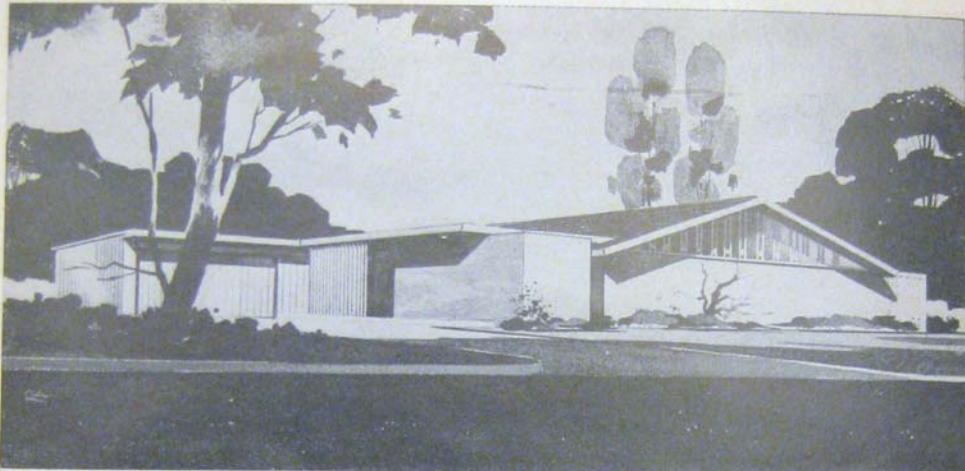


**Figure 30.** Ervin Boessling Model House. 5131 Jackwood Street. Photographer unknown. 1955. “Houston’s Home Builders Lead off 1955 Parade of Homes,” *House & Home* (September 1955): 143.



**Figure 31.** Ervin Boessling Model House, detail. 5131 Jackwood Street. Author, photographer. 2008.

## A Home Delightfully Different



ERVIN BOESSLING

A CONTEMPORARY HOME designed for complete privacy and flexibility of living arrangement—that's the parade model at 5130 Jackwood.

Privacy from the outside is obtained by use of clerestory windows and privacy inside through an entrance way which penetrates deep into the house. One can enter every section through this hall.

The living area offers unusual design flexibility with living room, dining area, den, family room, and kitchen flowing together in an open space arrangement. A partition separates the living room and family room, creating a nook area designed as a den with paneled bookcases and a cork floor. A folding wall can make this section completely private.

The kitchen is partitioned off by a serving bar which can be used to serve the family room and terrace also. It is equipped with Westinghouse built-ins, including oven and range, disposer, dishwasher, refrigerator and deep freeze.

In the bedroom wing of the house, the entrance corridor leads into all bedrooms and one bath, which can thus be used as a guest bath. The master bedroom has its own bath and also opens onto the terrace.

The exterior of the home is of light used brick with stained redwood. It has a high front gable of fixed glass decorated with a pattern of grillwork. The entrance side of the home has a large overhang under which two cars can park.

This is another Christiansen and Cannata model built by Kuehn and Boessling of B-K Builders, Inc.

It is furnished by Ridgecrest.

*Landscape Design by JAMES E. O'ROURKE*

**B-K BUILDERS, INC., 423 Hollow Drive, ME-6503**

**Figure 32.** “A Home Delightfully Different.” *Parade Plan Book* (Houston, TX: Houston Home Builders Association, 1955): 22.



**Figure 33.** Ervin Boessling Model House, detail. 5130 Jackwood Street.  
Photographer unknown. 1955. “Houston’s Home Builders Lead off 1955 Parade of  
Homes,” *House & Home* (September 1955): 146.

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## **Vita**

Samuel Tommy Dodd was born in Newport, Arkansas on March 7, 1984, the son of Tommy Gary Dodd and Kathy Ann Dodd. After completing his work at Woodstock Community High School, in Woodstock, Illinois, Samuel entered Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Illinois. He received the degree of Bachelor of Arts summa cum laude with high honors in Art History in May 2007. From 2004-2007, he worked as an architectural draftsman. In August, 2007, Samuel entered the Graduate School of the University of Texas at Austin. He worked as a teaching assistant and as a research assistant in the School of Architecture from 2008-2009.

Permanent Address: 3115 Tom Green Street. Apt 409  
Austin, Texas 78705

This thesis was typed by the author.