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2721 Colchester Road

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# View from The Overlook



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1308 Yellowstone Road

## HEIGHTS HOUSES GO MODERN

Architecturally speaking, Cleveland Heights may be best known for its wealth of "traditional" homes. However, our community also has attracted people whose residential tastes reside at the forefront of contemporary design.

BY KEN GOLDBERG

# The Cleveland Heights Historical Society



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The Cleveland Heights Historical Society, founded in 1983, is a state-chartered, 501(c)(3), not-for-profit organization.

#### Our Mission

The Cleveland Heights Historical Society is dedicated to preserving and promoting the diverse character and traditions of Cleveland Heights.

As a community-based historic organization, the Society encourages and facilitates greater knowledge, understanding and awareness of the heritage of Cleveland Heights.



2232 Elandon Drive

**A**vant-garde houses appeared in Cleveland Heights early on, with Prairie School-oriented homes on Euclid Heights and Washington Boulevards. An excellent example of the Prairie School influence of Frank Lloyd Wright is the Cleveland Heights-Landmarked home at 2232 Elandon Drive, designed by Bohnard & Parsson and built in 1913. No doubt the proximity to University Circle—Greater Cleveland’s main conclave for the arts and the home of a major university and several arts-related colleges—had something to do with this appeal. Plus, the fact that these early modern houses were built in Cleveland Heights’ more upscale neighborhoods says something about the structures’ quality and acceptance.

After the 1930s, the Heights collection of modern homes grew considerably. This is not to say that Cleveland Heights (or Cleveland, for that matter) was ever in the forefront of residential design; we weren’t and likely never will (for example, there are no Frank Lloyd Wright-designed buildings in all of Cuyahoga County). However, there do exist many more modern examples than most CH residents may be aware of.

### Early in our Suburb’s History

From the 1910s through the 1930s, Germany’s Bauhaus School blended the arts with industrial techniques and modern programming. Around the same time, Americans were slowly evolving their stylistic vocabulary to remove historicisms, and simplify or entirely eliminate ornament. The Bauhaus

# HEIGHTS HOUSES GO MODERN

influence was worldwide, although many of the movement’s great architects—Breuer, Gropius, Mies, etc.—actually fled Europe and settled in the U.S. Cleveland architects and potential clients were exposed to modern architecture through a major exhibit in 1932: “Modern Architecture: International Exhibition,” held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Also by the 1930s, some Cleveland architects and developers had developed ties to schools in Boston or Chicago, both of which were hotbeds of the International Style.

Around that time, several Cleveland-based architects emerged who specialized in traditional/retro styles. Yet some of them also were enamored of the Bauhaus designers—enough to design houses in the Bauhaus or International Style. The International Style, in particular, was characterized by regular, unadorned geometric form, open interiors, and the use of glass, lighter-toned brick, steel and reinforced concrete. One such architect was J. Byers Hays, who designed twin residences at 2400 and 2404



3943 Severn Road



1081 Allston Road

**Americans were slowly evolving their stylistic vocabulary to remove historicisms, and simplify or entirely eliminate ornament.**

Derbyshire Road around 1935—the Cubist-influenced type which appeared in James and Katherine Morrow Ford’s seminal book of 1940, *The Modern House in America*. Hays made sure to give each house an attached double garage not only facing the street but jutting out toward the street as well—strongly featured and thus symbolizing the automobile’s importance.

These houses were eventually remodeled to proffer a later look.

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# HEIGHTS HOUSES GO MODERN

Around 1935 to 1937, the stunning fieldstone and stained-wood Bramson residence came into being at 2837 East Overlook Road. Set in a hillside and graced with a winding stream, the house was designed by Chester N. Lowe with much input from client Annette Bramson. After a fire in 1960, the home was redesigned by architects Philmore Hart and Jerry F. Weiss. This house, a Cleveland Heights Landmark, is Wrightian and somewhat Japanese influenced in its integration of architecture with nature, the openness of its main rooms and the economical use of space. It perhaps owes its rustic stonework and interior wood detail to the Craftsman ideals of Greene and Greene of California.

Five two-story brick houses on Monticello Boulevard—numbers 3060 through 3100, between

Newbury Drive and Burlington Road—combine, in different proportions, Georgian Revival details with Art Moderne vocabulary such as glass blocks, corner windows and low-pitched roofs. They date from around 1935 to 1938. An example of modest and modified International Style houses is a flat-roofed house at 1032 Yellowstone Road (*photo above*), built in 1943 with yellow glazed cement blocks and flat roof. A flat-roofed Modernistic house, dating



1032 Yellowstone Road

from about 1935, is at 1081 Allston Road (*photo page 3*): brick with horizontal decoration in the brickwork, large windows, and a round window in the entrance door.

The Lang Residence (1939) stands at 1737 Andrews Road (*photo below*). It abuts the Oakwood Club in a wooded setting. Designed by George B. Mayer, this stone house—again with garage reaching outward to the street—is quasi-International Style, with Moderne and Wrightian corner windows and flat roof. Nearby, also in a wooded setting, is 3943 Severn Road (built in 1937), which boasts an L-shape, a flat roof and large planes of white painted or whitewashed brick with few



1737 Andrews Road

windows (*photo page 3*). At 3683 Severn stands an Art Moderne house (built in 1945) with glass block windows, a Moderne and featured porte-cochere and low-hipped roof.

The Brantley Apartments, built in 1937 at 2387 Euclid Heights Boulevard, was designed by Sigmund Braverman and is Greater Cleveland's premier Art Deco apartment house. Although Art Deco is more decorative than International Style architecture, it can



2424 Stratford Road

share such features as corner windows and railings with horizontal emphasis.

The house at 2424 Stratford Road (*photo above*), at the corner of Scarborough Road, was designed by Harold B. Burdick (a usually traditional architect). It was constructed in 1938-9 for Burdick's family. This is Greater Cleveland's most uncompromising International Style house and a Cleveland Heights Landmark. Primarily a cube in

brick, stucco and glass with steel beams and exterior wood enabling minimal maintenance, the house reputedly has the first residential fluorescent ceiling fixture in America, as well as many other innovative design features.

In 1939 architect George W. Engelhardt created a five-room International Style house overlooking Murray Hill Road and Cedar Glen Parkway—a yellow-tile gravity brick house

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# HEIGHTS HOUSES GO MODERN

on four levels. It featured glass brick, corner windows and multiple flat roofs. Several Moderne-influenced homes also stand near the hilly intersection of Meadowbrook Boulevard and Queenston Road—the slopes being creative inspirations to their builders.

The house at 2909 Fairfax Road (ca., 1940) is one of several homes built on the property where the massive Allyn house facing Fairfax Triangle had been situated. Number 2909 has strong International Style features—e.g., low roof and 1930s windows—but there is hint of English

Regency in the proportions, flush narrow siding and columns. A compact ranch house up a hill from Fairmount Boulevard and hidden in a wooded setting at the end of Nottinghill Lane was designed in 1945 by Jerry F. Weiss and would contrast greatly with the Fairmount mansions, were viewers able to see it clearly through the trees.

## After the War

Shortly after World War Two, Cleveland Heights became the site of one of America's most important examples of Expressionist

architecture: Park Synagogue. Architect Eric Mendelson, German trained and world-renowned, designed a complex that influenced the design of houses of worship for decades.

Streets such as Langton Road and Runnymede Boulevard off Quilliams Road, or Glen Allen Drive, feature modernistic ranches and split levels—the look of the more artistic tract homes built across the U.S. in the 1950s. With features such as asymmetrically angled roofs and high bedroom windows, these homes are worthy of architectural mention only inasmuch as they contrast, as large groupings of homes, with most sections of Cleveland Heights.

Monticello Boulevard and Yellowstone Road near Glenwood Road feature some

fascinating ranches. 1308 Yellowstone (see photo on cover) is Wrightian and particularly striking, with much glass block, irregular roofing levels and significant overhangs.

Among Greater Cleveland's most attractive California ranches is the Morris L. Finneburgh House at 3111 Monticello Boulevard (photo below), a Cleveland Heights Landmark of 1954 designed by Albert G. Sgro. It is a long, curved ranch featuring a Japanese-influenced roof overhang. By the 1950s, however, developments of whole neighborhoods which included such signature houses had extended outward in Shaker Heights, University Heights, South Euclid, Beachwood and Pepper Pike. One of Cleveland Heights' most Wrightian houses is

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3111 Monticello Boulevard



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# HEIGHTS HOUSES GO MODERN

1525 Compton Road—a frame house with flat roofs on several levels. It dates from 1956 and has many of the Usonian features that Wright incorporated in that era.

The split level at 2555 North Park Boulevard (built in 1960) was designed by Robert P. Madison for the DeLeon family, next to the architect's own home. The DeLeon residence has the dramatic asymmetrical roof associated with the 1950s. A residence consisting of connected boxes, at 2576 Demington Drive (photo page 9), dates from the early '60s—designed by Western Reserve architecture professor Lewis I. Schwartz for his family.

## Into the 60s

July, 1963, saw an Ohio Court of Appeals case: Reid vs. Architectural Review Board (ABR) of the City of Cleveland Heights. Donna S. Reid, in 1961, was denied a City Building Permit. The plan of her architect (likely John Terence Kelly) was for a complex of 20 cement and glass modules ten feet high and twelve feet square, arranged in a loosely formed “U.” House and modular garage—with trellises and court—were all to be baffled from the street by a garden wall.

An appeal was filed with the Cuyahoga County Court of Common Pleas, which rendered judgment in favor of the ABR. Then the applicant appealed to the Court of Appeals of Ohio, whose judge affirmed the lower court's decision. The Court of Appeals stated that a one-story residence of “radical design” could indicate a commercial building that would not conform to the general character of the mainly multi-

storied neighborhood. After letting the plans go for two decades, the Reids commissioned Centerbrook, the prestigious Connecticut firm, to design a somewhat Postmodern, New England-ish Colonial on the same site (North Park Boulevard, west of Demington Drive). This fine residence stands there today.

ABR's rejection in 1963 does not appear to have had a longstanding impact, since ABR members have since approved many radical—or at least “questionable”—designs in Cleveland Heights' older districts. In fact, many sprawling contemporaries were built on North Park Boulevard in the 1960s and later—contributing to a wide assortment of styles facing Shaker Heights Park. Numbers 3083, featuring light brick with much glass, and 3365 (photo page 9), with many windows and cedar shake roof, are particularly handsome.

In 1965, a sleek complex of Wrightian cluster homes—the Mornington Lane Condominiums—went up between East Overlook and Edgehill, and Mornington and Coventry Roads, on the site of the demolished Briggs mansion. After leaving segments of the Briggs mini-estate—garden walls, ballroom and

A variety of contemporaries were built on North Park Boulevard in the 1960s and later—contributing to a wide assortment of styles facing the park across the street.



Top: 3365 North Park Boulevard  
Bottom: 2376 Demington Drive

play house, etc.—architects Jerry F. Weiss and Robert Blatchford designed this conclave emphasizing the horizontal with its low, flat-roofed design. The structures' stone and stained wood blend well with the wooded surroundings. Nearby is Coventry Village, Greater Cleveland's most bohemian district since the later 1960s.

## Contemporary Models, Remodels, and Models of Technological Innovation

Some houses of very modern appearance actually were not built that way. Good examples are rife in the Millikin neighborhood—many of which have undergone major expansions in later eras. One particularly bold remodeling job is 3670 Shannon Road: a house that had resembled many on the street but was

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# HEIGHTS HOUSES GO MODERN

completely re-sided in the 1980s and given a stained-wood appearance with curved walls and glass block.

Several striking residential developments occurred in Ambler Heights, one of our area's oldest and most traditional neighborhoods. 1940 Denton Drive, designed by Peter van Dijk, was built in the late 1990s (*photo below*). This stucco home (in contrast to two new homes across Chestnut Hills Drive actually built for the van Dijk family) is a complex configuration of stucco-covered boxes with copper roofs and a variety of window shapes and sizes. The Ceruti residence, at 2226 Chestnut Hills Drive, has stood since 2005 and was designed by Thom A. Stauffer, professor of architecture at Kent State University (*photo page 11*). This home resembles irregularly stacked blocks, though there are few interior right angles. Stauffer had already designed a gemlike rear addition of brick with much glass to a brick French Norman home at Roxboro Road and West St. James Parkway.



1940 Denton Drive

Some of Cleveland Heights' distinctive architecture is mainly modern because of its use of innovative technology. A Lustron Home at 1030 Keystone Drive, for example, dates from 1951 and followed one of several prefabricated plans developed by this Ohio company. The home featured unique siding in square panels of steel but was eventually vinyl sided. Cleveland Heights also can boast at least two solar homes: one at 3024 Meadowbrook Boulevard (built in 1981) and the other at 3271 Silsby Road (constructed in 1985). And lastly, much attention has been focused on a straw bale house recently erected at 12541 Cedar Road. Designed by the firm of Doty and Miller, this is "true green" architecture loaded with Craftsman details.

## Coming Together

Modern house plans continue to be evaluated by committee and most have moved on to

construction, generally a few each year in Cleveland Heights. From the late 1980s on, Cleveland Heights has concentrated mostly on townhouse projects. The first was Cedar Circles (12610-12632 Cedar Road), a creekside complex of cluster homes with stained vertical wood siding and much glass (completed in the early 1980s). Within 15 years, other cluster projects were constructed and such construction continues to the present. Many of these groupings are basically of traditional design, such as Cedarmount on Cedar Road just east of Fairmount Boulevard (completed in 2003) or Kenilworth Mews, off Kenilworth Lane (still being developed). However, others, such as Boulevard Townhomes

There are wonderful examples of modern residential trends and, in some cases, signature homes that are among the most creative in Greater Cleveland.



2226 Chestnut Hills Drive

along Euclid Heights Boulevard east of Lee Road, blend retro vocabulary with Post Modern eclecticism. Ironically, the relatively traditional Courtyards of Severance, off Severance Circle, was constructed with the sacrifice of the Austin Company's prize modern office complex of 1960.

Some single, detached homes—perhaps to appease the Architectural Review Board—also have been constructed with recognition that their contemporary designs do not blend into the overall streetscape and were thus set further back from the street. Examples include a vertical-board-sided home at 3290 Rumson Road in a Colonial section of Forest Hill (ca., 1985) and an earth-toned, semi-contemporary house at 2482 Euclid Heights Boulevard, built in 1998. Yet standing unabashedly nearby is number 2454 Euclid Heights (built in 1957). This is a small, simple ranch with the same setback as its older and taller neighbors.

Perhaps the Euclid Heights ranch is a reminder that Cleveland Heights has always been a blend of diverse residents with varying incomes, tastes and lifestyles. Private Heights residences, along with the community's large number of apartment houses and multi-family dwellings, reflect the individuals who designed, built and inhabited them. Besides Cleveland Heights' sampling of post-1945 neighborhoods, there are wonderful examples of modern residential trends and, in some cases, signature homes that are among the most creative in Greater Cleveland. Somehow, with the various levels of committee through which the house-builder/architect/developer must jump, these distinctive homes usually enhance their streetscape, whether featured or otherwise. They also convey our inner ring suburb as one that has long been "with it".