

# Homes That Reflect Our History

By **Nancy R. Hiller** Photography by **Kendall Reeves**



Architect Larry Phelps has furnished his home with an eclectic mix of classics that date from the mid-20th century. The chairs in this living room ensemble are a perfect example; designed by (clockwise from left) Charles and Ray Eames (manufactured by Herman Miller), Marcel Breuer, and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (both manufactured by Knoll). The painting over the mantel is by Brown County artist David Dale.

Bloomington's built environment says a lot about the history of this place and the people who have made their lives here.

When you look around our town and the surrounding rural areas, two things become clear. First, although this city is nearly two centuries old, the majority of buildings date from the most recent hundred years. Second, the buildings that have survived are those that have adapted to changing patterns of use.

Each of the homes featured here was built in the 20th century. Together they create a portrait of Bloomington's changing social and economic makeup during those years. While families have become smaller, individual family members have become

used to more personal space. As global travel has become vastly more common than it was even in the middle of the last century, aesthetic sensibilities have become more cosmopolitan. And most residents of Bloomington and Monroe County now work in professional or service-oriented businesses, rather than in agriculture or manufacturing.

The oldest of our featured homes is located in Prospect Hill, one of Bloomington's earliest neighborhoods, just west of downtown. Originally built some time between 1900 and 1920, the house was rebuilt in 1936 after a devastating fire. This storybook-worthy cottage was briefly home to carpenter Ben Sturbaum, who lived there



in the 1980s as part of his family's project of restoring Prospect Hill to a thriving neighborhood following a period of decline. Pat Glushko and John McDowell, who have owned the house since 1989, have made the house thoroughly their own, putting together a comfortable, eclectic interior.

The home of Gary and Linda Anderson was built in a semi-rural area just east of Bloomington developed for residential use beginning in the 1940s, when the increasing availability of cars allowed

people to commute to jobs in town. Formerly a dilapidated one-story bungalow on a large, long-neglected lot, the house today is notable for its glamorous 1940s interior; distinctive, artful exterior; and parklike setting.

Karen Pitkin and Kurt Larsen live in a house that reflects the trend toward subdividing large suburban tracts of land for residential development. The Heritage Woods subdivision on Bloomington's east side was developed beginning in the early 1960s, so many of its homes are examples of

the ranch-style architecture popular at the time. Pitkin and Larsen have reworked their home for contemporary living, drawing on its subtle Asian aesthetic.

Although the newest of these homes was built in 1978, it intentionally reflects the International Style that was avant-garde during the 1920s and '30s. Architect Larry Phelps designed the home for his family in rural northwestern Monroe County — one of the earliest parts of the county to be settled, but one that has remained largely rural in character despite its location within

Appearing to float amid a forested hillside northwest of Bloomington, Larry Phelps' house embodies numerous elements of the modernist design school known as International Style.

commuting distance of Indianapolis.

That the rustic hills east of Ellettsville, Indiana, should conceal a gem of modernist architecture isn't really surprising. The blend of apparent opposites is part of what defines our town in so many ways.



Public areas in the home are open, with architectural features such as the fireplace and bank of kitchen cabinetry breaking up the space. The dining table was designed by Warren Platner, the chairs by Charles Pollock — both well-known midcentury designers — and were produced by Knoll.

## In the International Style

If you ever just happen to pass by the home of Larry Phelps while driving through rural Monroe County, you will undoubtedly do a double take. Completely unembellished, the modernist structure appears to be floating in an idyllic forest setting.

But unless you make a wrong turn and ignore or miss the “private road” signage, you’ll never “just happen to pass by” the house. A striking example of the 20th-century architectural movement known as International Style, it is located at the

end of the private road and appears to be suspended in the woods overlooking a small lake in a hollow below. The secluded setting, like everything else about the structure, is by design.

“These houses need a large site,” says Larry, the architect who designed and built the home in 1978. Bringing the outside in is an important principle of the International Style, he explains. With large expanses of glass on all sides, the house’s design is inextricable from its setting. Larry’s partner of



(clockwise from top) The home office was once Larry’s daughter’s bedroom. Larry is both the architect and homeowner. The kitchen cabinetry provides ample working space while serving as a divider between the kitchen and adjoining dining and living spaces.



fireplace and the freestanding bank of kitchen cabinetry are positioned as space-defining elements; each is designed to appear as though it could be repositioned according to the architect’s desire.

A native of rural Indiana, Larry, 68, attended the Illinois Institute of Technology School of Architecture in Chicago, graduating in 1970. The school was founded by internationally renowned architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, who had directed the famous Bauhaus — the “School of Building” — and fled Nazi Germany in the 1930s. Larry credits the curriculum and design principles of Mies van der Rohe as powerful influences in his life and career.

Larry chose Bloomington as his base after training because he wanted to live in a college town — “the kind of place where people hire architects.” He went to work for the Bloomington-based firm of Odle/Burke in 1973 and spent his entire career there, eventually becoming the firm’s chief operating officer. He retired in 1998.

25 years, Diane Ward, describes the effect as being “wallpapered by the seasons.”

“The floor and roof planes of the house are each formed by three 18-foot spans supported by beams and exterior columns, allowing a completely open interior space,” says Larry. The structure cantilevers over the native stone walls of the lower level, creating lightness and the floating effect. Front and rear decks extend the floor plane to the outside.

Distinct areas for living, dining, and sleeping are defined by paint color. Within these areas, specific structures such as the



(above) The years of ingenuity and work that Gary and Linda Anderson have invested in their home are readily visible in the exterior. This is clearly the home of an artist.

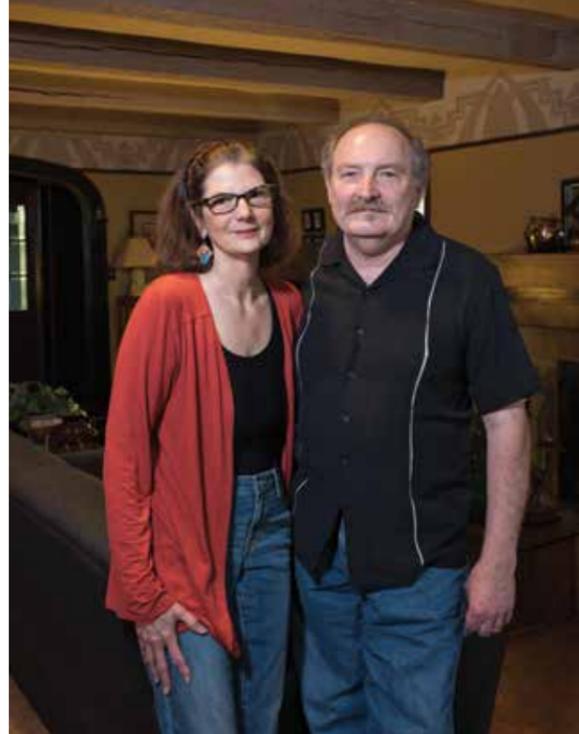
## A Home Inspired by Mid-Century Hollywood

Stepping into the dazzling art deco–inspired home of Gary and Linda Anderson, where every room has been lavished with detail typical of a Hollywood set, it’s hard to imagine that these homeowners would ever have gone out of their way to make their surroundings look bland. But one of their first actions upon moving into this house in the spring of 1985 was to paint everything beige. “Our last house sold so quickly,” Gary explains, “we didn’t have time to do anything here but cover up the pink and mint green, which were everywhere — the carpet, the walls, the curtains.”

“Everything had been let go,” Linda goes on, describing the condition of the place when they first arrived. The roof leaked and broken windows were covered with plastic sheeting.

In the 30 years since, they have transformed their home east of Bloomington inside and out, doing most of the work themselves. It hasn’t hurt that Gary, now retired, is a professional sign maker who had his own business, Bloomington Design, best known for elaborate sandblasted signs. The carpentry and finishing skills he cultivated in his work were invaluable in remodeling the house. That exotic wood paneling in the hallway? Faux painting. The walnut burl on the living room mantel? Yes — also paint. From built-in cabinets to the raised floor of the

(left) Gary’s almost-floor-to-ceiling painting of Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall sets the tone in the living room, as well as the precisely lettered frieze listing the names of artists, writers, and others who have been strong influences. (Even Saint Nicholas is included!)



bedroom they added in 1995, Gary's ingenuity and Linda's eye for period style have produced dramatic results.

So ... what's with the '40s and '50s motif? "We just love it," says Linda.

"The '40s is our era," Gary continues. "We like old black and white movies. The movie industry was into art deco." Here he veers into discussion of the social and economic influences behind this aesthetic trend. "After the Depression, everything got redesigned to look faster, sleeker, modern. As a nation, we were moving forward. Industrial designers paid attention to everything — toasters, cars — it didn't matter how unimportant an object was. It got designed."

The Andersons have two boys, Taylor and Zach, now grown. Linda made a career in banking at the IU Credit Union. Many of the objects in her collections, most notably her dress pins, have made their way into her wardrobe; at work she was known for wearing specific pins for holidays and special occasions.

"We have never been 'with it,'" Gary remarks, summing up their approach to their home. "We do our own thing. We read recently that art deco is back. Even black trim! So for the next year, we'll be 'with it.'"

(above) Gary completely transformed the home's plain existing cabinetry with paint, new hardware, and decorative details. His border of chefs — which he cast in plaster, painted, and then installed — turns the old bulkhead into an aesthetic virtue. Linda has always been fascinated by cherries, so Gary made her a roadhouse-style sign.

(right) The ceiling beams were cut from trees on the property and installed when this room was added in 1955. Gary painted the frieze at the top of the walls and painted the fireplace mantel to resemble fancy wood.

(opposite page, top) Linda and Gary have spent the last 30 years transforming their art deco-inspired home.

(opposite page, bottom) When Gary and Linda added several feet to the east side of the house, they raised the floor level of the addition by two feet to save the cost of having to relocate utilities and the entrance to their basement. This economical decision had the serendipitous effect of enhancing their bedroom's Hollywood-worthy splendor with stairs leading to the master bed. Gary painted the tropical bird and the repeating frieze. A fraction of Linda's extensive collection of vintage jewelry is visible in the display case at the left.





(above) Kurt Larsen and Karen Pitkin worked with the original architecture and site of their east-side ranch to create a contemporary space that's ideal for displaying artwork. (right) Contractor George Murphy opened up the wall between Kurt and Karen's living and dining areas. The space is decorated with paintings by (l-r) Kurt Larsen, Kevin Myers, and Tamar Kander. The built-in cabinetry was constructed by Plum Creek Cabinets.

# Making a Home Their Own

Ask Karen Pitkin and Kurt Larsen what they love about the home they share with their son, Sam, 12, and they begin by listing what they've changed since buying the house in 2004.

The shag carpeting is gone. The single-file entryway that did nothing to make guests feel welcome, gone. The kitchen, with its cabinets in shades of citrus and berry, gone. The brick-patterned vinyl flooring and the Parisian mural, both gone. Built in 1964, the redwood-sided ranch was in its original decorative condition nearly 40 years later when Karen first saw it listed for sale.

While aficionados of the campier side of midcentury style might have been thrilled by such a find, Karen, a real estate broker, and Kurt, an artist, prefer more restrained and neutral interiors. Still, she recalls, "what we liked about the house came through": the large rooms, the elegant architecture, and the lush forest backdrop. After years of living on the far-eastern edge of Monroe County, they loved both the home's rural feel and its close proximity to town.





The house's long, low architecture lends itself to sweeping views at front and back, with a spectacular panorama of wooded ravines dropping down to a creek at the rear. The absence of windows at the ends of the structure keeps neighboring properties out of view. The road, too, disappears once you're inside, thanks to the site's sloping topography.

Kurt and Karen have made major alterations outside and in, working with their home's Asian-influenced style. "Coming

from California, we ran with that," Kurt says. The home had no landscaping, so they engaged their friend Wendel Field, also an artist, who designed the Japanese garden that is visible from the large kitchen window. Kurt added low conifers and sweeps of ground-hugging bamboo amid artful arrangements of rock. They reworked the entryway, which now broadens outward in a welcoming arc, and added a pergola.

Inside, they completely reworked the kitchen and opened up the wall between

living and dining areas. The tall interior walls are ideal for hanging vibrant paintings by Kurt and other artists, many of them friends; they designed the rooms' lighting to highlight the artwork. Recent exterior additions, a freestanding art studio, and a screened porch for hosting family ping-pong matches feel like a perfect ending to the 10-plus years they've spent making the place their own. "At least until next year," remarks Karen.

(above) A prized feature of this home is the spectacular view of wooded ravines.

(opposite page, top to bottom) Kurt's basement music studio, known as "A47," is filled with artwork along with his collection of guitars.

Contemporary lines and a neutral palette replaced the original brightly colored cabinets, the brick-patterned floor, and a Parisian-themed mural.

Kurt and Karen saw potential in the home they now love, from the large rooms and elegant architecture to the forest backdrop.



The original house that occupied the site of John McDowell and Patricia Glushko's Prospect Hill home was almost completely destroyed by fire. The rebuilt house dates to 1936.



# A House with a Tale or Two



(above) The living and dining rooms are furnished with artwork, functional pieces, and musical instruments from near and far. (opposite page, inset) This arrangement atop an antique cabinet in the dining room exemplifies the mix of artifacts Patricia and John have collected from around the world. A Turkish village rug provides a backdrop to an antique Asian rice container holding a mandolin from Bloomington's former Smith-Holden Music Company. The Japanese figurines, intended to bring good luck, were a gift from a student at the Indiana University Folklore Institute. Local geodes mingle with rocks and driftwood collected in Montana, a pitcher from Tuscany, and a tall clay vase.

There's something about the Prospect Hill home of Patricia Glushko and John McDowell that calls to mind an archetypal storybook cottage. The house is set off from the street by an old iron fence; a winding path leads to the front door. In the gable facing the street, a window with a rounded top has a pair of operable shutters, usually open, that come together in a matching arch — an unusual and charming detail. In spring, the diminutive front yard is embowered by trees in bloom.

So it comes as no surprise to hear that a poet friend calls this "a story house." In this

case, though, she's referring not to the building's façade, but to the stories behind the diverse furnishings and objects inside. Many of them have come from the couple's travels in the course of John's work as a professor of folklore and ethnomusicology at Indiana University: the kente cloth wall hanging from John's time as a Fulbright scholar in Ghana, the loom he had constructed after learning to weave while living in an indigenous Andean community, the jaguar mask from Mexico, which, John says,

"has been danced" — in other words, used in a ritual. The couple's appreciation of the artistry invested in such objects and the personal histories behind them makes it hard to resist acquiring new treasures. "We go to Mexico, and I stuff the car so there's just about four inches of space left at the top!" Patricia says. Many other pieces have stories based closer to home. "There's a lot of Bloomington in this house," says Patricia, pointing out the sofa made by Bloomington woodworker Rob



(left) Homeowners John and Patricia at their front gate. The fence was made by Bloomington's Seward foundry, which produced the iconic fish weathervane on the Monroe County Courthouse dome. Previous homeowners moved the fence from its former location to this Prospect Hill address.

(below) A Victorian settee sits across from a contemporary couch made by Rob Mills and upholstered by Robert Harman — not visible here. A stool from Ghana decorates the midcentury coffee table, which belonged to John's mother, Peggy McDowell.



Mills and upholstered by Robert Harman. An antique Chinese cabinet came from their former neighbor Gene Shreve, who had a booth at the Antique Mall. Others came from Linda and Ralph Siebold's Blue Barn Antiques in northern Monroe County. Patricia, whose background is in fine arts and who used to work for Bloomington-based greeting card company Sunrise Publications, has arranged these eclectic elements to create a comfortable, harmonious environment.

While the house may look small from the street, it lives large. With four bedrooms and two baths, it was a great place, they say, to raise three children: Juan, Sofia, and Michael. The location, too, is ideal. "I rarely get into a car," notes John. "I can walk or bike to the university." Yet despite this proximity to downtown, it's surprisingly peaceful. They often stroll up to Rose Hill Cemetery to watch the sun set.

"The house nurtures us," Patricia says. "We've always just chosen what we love, and somehow it worked out." ✨

(left) The sharp pitch of this gable's roof lends a feeling of spaciousness to this attic room, while remaining cozy. The robin's egg blue of the far wall subtly suggests "sky," producing the sensation that a visitor is almost floating at the same level as the treetop through the window.

(above) The kitchen cabinets were built by Plum Creek, the hickory floor was installed by Gerald's Wood Shed, and Quality Surfaces of Spencer, Indiana, did the granite counters. A lightweight breakfast table from Trilogy Gallery in Nashville, Indiana, pulls up to an antique church pew.