

# good living

The charm  
of this  
mid-century  
Modern  
masterpiece  
is all in  
the details.

by sue goldberg

photography by ryan kurtz

The words are scrawled across one of the sketches in architect Benjamin Dombar's presentation drawings. Just to the left of Dombar's signature, the former Frank Lloyd Wright apprentice penciled in the phrase: Good Living.

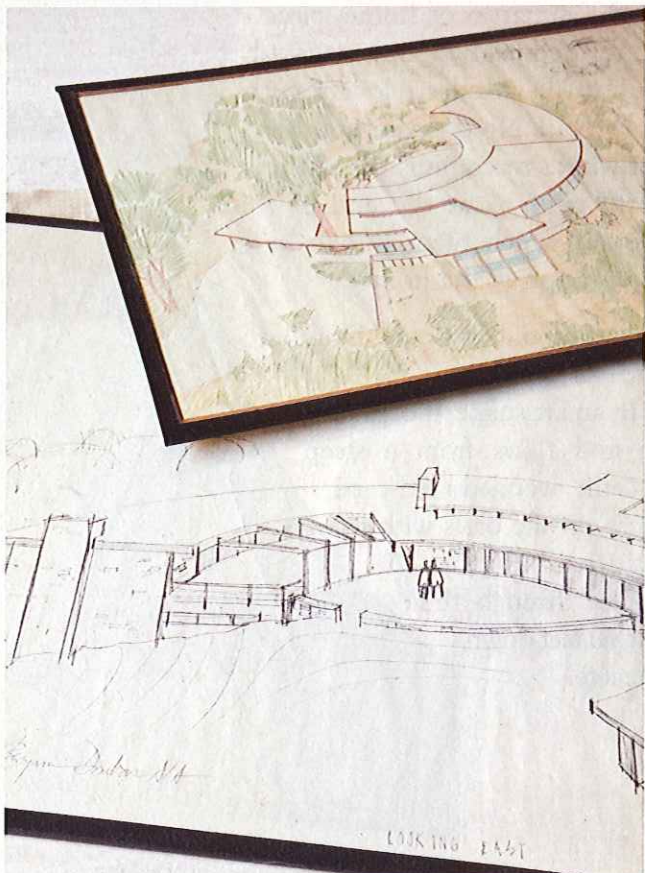
Dombar lived up to his words in the execution of this 5,000-square-foot home, circa 1965. This architecturally sophisticated Tomorrowland thrills Modern lovers with each and every detail. No exaggeration here. A first hint of what's to come is the curious, out-of-this-world mailbox at the end of the 700-foot driveway, which turns out to be a stylistic representation of the home.

With the completion of this home, Dombar brought Modern living to the edge—literally. Built in an arc shape, it organically follows along and flows from a steep hillside on a scenic, wooded landscape, a nearly 2.5-acre private oasis within Wyoming's citified suburbia. A creek bed snakes through the property about 40 feet down from the home site.



"A lot of people say it reminds them of being in the Smoky Mountains," says homeowner Sherry Roth as she stands outside on an upper-level, wrap-around deck. The numinous view—native hardwoods, wild flowers and plants, wildlife, the meandering creek—engages family and friends from almost every room of the home while concealing most other signs of human life. According to Sherry's husband, Ken, the home gained its tongue-in-cheek nickname, Roth State Park and Lodge, from awed family and friends.

While the outer-arc views offer tranquil forest fare, the inner arc, along the back of the home, focuses on Japanese rock garden serenity. Hefty floating islands of 1,000-pound stones rise from a pond of polished Ohio quartzite pebbles. A crabapple tree makes a lone foray into the stones while selected exotic species such as ginkgo and a Japanese maple create bordering pockets of flora. The back of the garden hosts what appears to be a natural rock formation with waterfall along the rise of the hillside. In truth, it's a man-made water feature.



"This just looks like it's carved right into the side of the hill," Ken says with obvious admiration. "We have construction photos [showing landscapers] lowering those rocks in place, and it's pretty amazing."

Serendipity brought the Roths face-to-face with the home in the early '90s. "We were interviewing Ben Dombar about being an architect for us, and he said, 'Well, here's a listing of the buildings that I've done,'" Sherry recalls. "You can drive around and look at them and get an idea of the variety."

"He was very low key," Ken adds.

Two of Dombar's earlier creations happened to be on the market—one in Indian Hill and this one in Wyoming. The curvature of the Wyoming home intrigued the couple, and a subsequent tour "just to look at the architecture" created a sea change. The Roths abandoned their building plans and made an offer on the home instead.

Believe it or not, it wasn't a fairy tale ending. The couple missed this first opportunity to buy. Another buyer had made an offer without contingencies.

"We were in mourning for the first year," Ken confesses. A heartfelt note to the lucky new owners, with a respectful request for a "heads up" if the home ever went back on the market, paid dividends just a few years later. The Roths then renegotiated and finally bought their dream house.

Why such persistence? The Roths not only admired the view, privacy and design, but the attention to detail and quality of materials and finishes that went into the home. Dombar recognized the home's appeal, too. In an exchange with the Roths, he expressed his admiration for the Runnels—the original owners—and the creative process the three enjoyed: "It's amazing what you can do when you've got clients who are more adventurous. When you've got more of a budget that you can work with."

A generous budget means that redwood paneling, naturally resistant to decay and insects, clads the exterior of the home and adjoining carport. The formal entrance with its 4-foot-wide front door is constructed of tiny  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch-square walnut parquet tile, which repeats throughout most of the upper-level flooring.

And just getting to that walnut door is an event. A covered footbridge joins the carport to the entrance. Ken, a Frank Lloyd Wright fanatic (yep, he takes the family on cross-country trips to tour as much of FLW's work as possible), sees Wright's influence here. He explains that Wright often used a circuitous path to find the formal entry and would use structures and design techniques that created a sense of compression. "When you finally arrive inside, you have this sense of expansion, which indicates that you've made this transition from the public to the private realm," he notes.

The home proves his point. Steps lead up from a small foyer into a short hallway that gradually opens into a surprisingly spacious living

THIS PAGE: Original renderings by architect Benjamin Dombar

OPPOSITE PAGE (clockwise from top): The outer arc of the home; Tiny  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch-square walnut parquet tiles line the front door and most of the upper-level flooring; No space is wasted—a fountain wraps around a lower-level stairwell