Modernism in Raleigh

Although perhaps not widely known, the Triangle has one of the most extensive collections of Modern architecture in the country. In 1948 the School of Design was established at N.C. State College, led by dean Henry Kamphoefner. As a result, Raleigh developed a small but significant coterie of Modern architects who designed a number of landmark houses in the fashionable neighborhoods of West Raleigh and Country Club Hills.

Modernism evolved from the International Style of architecture developed in Europe in the early 1920s and 30s. Introduced to America at the 1932 Exhibition of Modern Architecture in New York, the International Style was characterized by simplicity of line, absence of ornament, flat roofs, and sleek materials such as glass, steel, polished stone and concrete.

In the early post-World War II years, while most of suburban America was being built in the conservative Neocolonial style, a few cutting-edge American architects were designing landmark Modernist architecture. By the mid-1950s Modernism became a popular style for mainstream American houses, with practical adjustments to form and materials. For example, most houses would not be built with a flat roof, but a shallowly-pitched roof. They were asymmetrical, long and low with deep eaves.

More conventional materials such as brick, clapboards and rough-cut stone supplanted the sleeker materials of the International style. Houses frequently featured two or more types of siding. Brick was the most popular, especially in North Carolina, with its plentiful red clay; the brick industry in the state enjoyed a tremendous boom during this period.

Windows were generally wider than they were tall. There was often a large picture window in the living room.

By the 1960s, the Mid-century Modern and Neocolonial styles hybridized, with many houses being built with Modernist proportions but Colonial-inspired details.

Mainstream America embraced Modern architecture in the popular house form of the ranch, inspired by the ranch houses of the southwestern U.S., descendents of the haciendas of Mexico. The ranch was a one-story house, but wider than the earlier bungalow or Neocolonial cottage. Postwar America was an automobile culture, so there was no need to build houses close together; the larger building lot was a consequent luxury. The wide ranch house fit comfortably on the large lot, was impressive from the front, and exemplified the long, low, and sleek attributes of the Modernist aesthetic.

Another form, popular after 1960, was the split-level house. One side of the split level was two stories, and the other side was one story, with an elevation somewhere between that of the two stories. This form solved the problem of the sloping lot, which was unsuit-ed for a ranch house.

May I replace my old roof?

Original roof materials, whether metal or slate or clay tile, contribute to the historic character of a house and should be preserved as carefully as other character-defining features. Changing a roof material, furthermore, may result in a less effective roof system. The material was probably chosen based on the given conditions: slate works best on steeper roofs, while metal is a better choice for shallow slopes or flat roofs.

Maintaining your metal roof requires the same common-sense steps you take to maintain the rest of your house: keep it coated, clean, and free of leaves and other debris. A rust hole or split seam doesn’t mean your whole roof is shot. Often, repairs can be made with an acrylic elastomeric membrane, applied in liquid form to the roof after an embedded mesh reinforcing fabric. These membranes are available in a number of colors to coordinate with your paint scheme, and can even be custom tinted.

Links to information on the technical aspects of repair and maintenance of historic structures are being added to RHDC’s website, www.rhdc.org.
WITHIN THE COMMISSION

Six Properties Designated Raleigh Historic Landmarks

RHDC recently recommended six properties for RHL recognition. The Raleigh City Council designated the properties on September 1.

The 1917 Lemuel & Julia Delany House (210-212 N. State St.) in Idlewild, built by physician Lemuel Delany and his wife Julia, a St. Augustine’s College instructor, is a good vernacular example of the Classical Revival style of architecture. The 1900 Dr. M.T. Pope House (511 S. Wilmington St.) is a rare and early example of an African-American residence built of expensive, high-quality materials with stylish workmanship.

The 1923 St. James AME Church (520 Method Rd.), a Gothic Revival brick church in Method, is an example of the stylistic churches that anchored historically-prosperous African American communities.

Recently designated Raleigh Historic Landmark, the Truman & Annie Laurie Williams House & Gardens.

The 1953 Bill & Betty Weber House (606 Transylvania Ave.) is an excellent example of Modernist style executed in collaboration with architectural master George Matsumoto.

The 1956 Paul & Ellen Welles House (3227 Birnamwood Rd.) is a split-level Modernist house designed by Kenneth McKoy, an early graduate of the N.C.S.U. School of Design.

The 1939 Truman & Annie Laurie Williams House & Gardens (910 Harvey St.) is a rare local example of the Norman French style featuring a landscape designed by renowned landscape architect Charles Gillette.

UPDATE

Latta Site Considered for Landmark Designation

The site of historic Latta House and University may be redesignated a Raleigh Historic Landmark based upon findings from a recent archaeological survey performed at 1001 Parker Street in historic Oberlin.

The university was an African-American coeducational institution founded in 1892 by Rev. M.L. Latta, a freed-slave and teacher, to educate underprivileged and orphan children in Raleigh’s black community.

The property was also the site of the former Latta residence, which lost its Raleigh Historic Landmark designation when it was destroyed by fire in 2007.

In 2008 City Council appointed RHDC to administer an archaeological survey of the property, conducted by archaeological consultant ESI. The purpose of the survey was to recover possible artifacts and data from this important site, which might also help tell the story of the property during the school’s heyday.

On August 4th RHDC presented City Council with the archaeological survey report. The site is managed by the City of Raleigh Parks and Recreation Department. A copy of the report is available at www.rhdc.org.

CHALLENGES

After-the-Fact Applications

The COA Committee has noted a rise in the number of applications filed after-the-fact; that is, after work has begun or been completed. City code requires that a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) be obtained before work begins in a historic district. It also makes good sense: after-the-fact applications, while possible to process, generally delay the schedule of work and may increase the cost of a project.

After-the-fact applications require all exterior work to stop until a COA is issued, and the commission and staff must review the application as if the work has not yet begun. Unapproved new work that does not meet the Design Guidelines for Raleigh Historic Districts, regardless of cost or scope, will have to be removed.

Save yourself the risk and expense of removing work or paying fines — get your COA approvals before starting work. A list of work and information on the COA application process may be found at www.rhdc.org.

Top: A shoe polish bottle found at the Latta site. Bottom: ESI consultants at work.
### Community Conversations

During the past year RHDC’s Community Awareness Committee has hosted several Community Conversations, events intended to spark dialogue about local historic preservation issues. The Raleigh community has turned out for multiple programs that addressed the topics of historic preservation and sustainable development, design tools for neighborhoods, the economic benefits of historic preservation, and the federal and state historic preservation tax credit programs. Speakers have included nationally-known preservationists, including Charleston Mayor Joe Riley, economist Don Rypkema, and design expert Pratt Cassity. On October 10th RHDC hosted “Oberlin in October,” which featured the history of historic Oberlin, the Reconstruction era in Raleigh, and the recent archaeological survey of the Latta University site.

### Major Work (Comm. Review)

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- **Historic Boylan Heights**: [www.boylanheights.org](http://www.boylanheights.org)
- **Downtown Raleigh Alliance**: [www.godowntownraleigh.com](http://www.godowntownraleigh.com)

### A B R O A D E R V I E W

The RHDC serves as City Council’s official historic preservation advisory body to identify, preserve, protect, and promote Raleigh’s historic resources. Raleigh has multiple historic preservation resources available to its citizens: the Raleigh City Museum ([www.raleighcitymuseum.org](http://www.raleighcitymuseum.org)); Capital Area Preservation, a Wake County nonprofit organization ([www.cappresinc.org](http://www.cappresinc.org)); Preservation North Carolina, N.C.’s statewide nonprofit organization ([www.presnc.org](http://www.presnc.org)); the N.C. State Historic Preservation Office, part of the State’s Department of Cultural Resources ([www.hpo.ncdcr.gov](http://www.hpo.ncdcr.gov)); the National Trust for Historic Preservation, a national nonprofit organization ([www.preservationnation.org](http://www.preservationnation.org)); the National Park Service, the keeper of the National Register of Historic Places ([www.nps.gov/history](http://www.nps.gov/history)); and last, but not least, RHDC ([www.rhdc.org](http://www.rhdc.org)).