

YOUR COMMUNITY

KNOCK KNOCK: THE TRIANGLE'S MOST UNUSUAL HOUSES

Knight House in Duke Forest was home of Duke presidents

BY JODY BROWN
TRIANGLE MODERNIST HOUSES

D U R H A M
Highway 751 is a good road. It's a picturesque little highway that runs through Duke Forest in Durham. I know, because I drive that stretch between Duke University and Highway 15/501 every day on my way home. In fact, I'm sitting in my little red cedar house in Duke Forest right now, typing away in my glassed-in porch looking out at the trees. My toes are getting numb from the cold.

You know how you can drive the same path every day, back and forth, so often that you don't notice the road anymore and you drive along on auto-pilot? Well, that never happens to me on this road. There's something inspiring about it. And, the stretch between Wrightwood Avenue (where I'm typing) and Pinecrest Street (where the Duke President's House is), is my favorite part. The houses disappear, 751 dips down a hill, the road narrows and 200-foot-tall pine trees flank the road. For some reason it makes me think of Walden Pond. This part of the road does that to me.

Duke Forest is a beautiful place. So, it's no wonder that they decided to build a house for the Duke University president on the edge of these woods. In 1966 they completed construction on the house at 1508 Pinecrest Road. The house was designed by the architect Alden Dow, who studied under the great American architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Wright was famous for designing houses that carefully blend in with nature. And, clearly, Alden Dow learned his lessons from Frank Lloyd Wright well. He designed the Duke President's House as a low-slung home nestled into the edge of the forest.

It's made of natural materials, with glass walls opening to porches which cantilever out over the woods. The home, Dow's only residence in North Carolina, is beautifully sited on the grounds designed by the landscape architect, Dick Bell, who designed Pullen Park in Raleigh. Douglas Knight was the first university president to live in the home in the late 1960s, and the home was officially dedicated in his honor in 2003 as the Douglas M. and Grace Knight House.

Sadly, no one lives here anymore. It's mainly used for special events, and to entertain honored guests or to court potential Duke donors. It must be a peaceful place to stay, sitting out on one of the porches, looking into that forest, at least until you hear my car pass by. I'll be the one driving by slowly, looking up at the trees, and daydreaming about Henry David Thoreau. I wonder if his toes were cold too.



Above: No one lives in the Knight House anymore. It's mainly used for special events, and to entertain honored guests.
Left: The Knight House in Duke Forest is made of natural materials, with glass walls opening to porches which cantilever out over the woods.

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Architect Alden Dow, who studied with Frank Lloyd Wright, designed the Duke President's House as a low-slung home nestled into the edge of the forest.

of the Triangle's most unique residential architecture, powered by the archives of historic preservation nonprofit Triangle Modernist Houses. Alden Dow's houses are featured at www.trianglemodernisthouses.com/dow.htm. Architect Jody Brown blogs about architecture at www.coffeewithanarchitect.com.

KNOCK KNOCK
This is a new feature starting this week in The Durham Herald, will spotlight monthly great Modernist houses from the past and present that typically would not hit people's radar.

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