

Modernist type plateau homes created by Fox

Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired architect's legacy lives on in area

BY DAN BROWN

Staff

His home designs need to be seen with the naked eye to be fully appreciated.

And believed.

James Fox, a longtime Cashiers-Highland plateau resident and architect in the style of the Frank Lloyd Wright abstract, died Nov. 24, 2017 at 77.

Fox's home designs pepper the mountains from Highlands to Sapphire, and southern Jackson County, and are as much works of art as they are functional homes.

George Smart, executive director with, NC Modernist, a North Carolina 501C3 nonprofit archive committed to documenting, preserving and promoting residential Modernist architecture, said Fox was one of the state's best kept secrets.

"James Fox was a very humble man, who, almost tragically, never promoted himself or his firm," Smart said. "It's a shame that more of his designs aren't out there. He had a

very loyal local clientele."

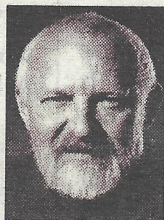
NC Modernist features Fox and his home designs on its website www.nc-modernist.org. The website chronicles more than 1,400 North Carolina Modernist homes and 300 architects on its website.

"James Fox was one of the most skilled architects in North Carolina," Smart said.

Steve Hamm is a longtime fan of James Fox home designs and said Fox built a house keeping nature and local resources in mind.

"Whenever he approached a home project, Jim Fox would come out and do a survey of the property, looking at what nature had given him to work with," Ham said by phone. "He had a Frank Lloyd Wright approach. He built a house with nature in mind, and used what resources nature provided for him in his designs and construction."

Ham's daughter, Melanie, owns a James Fox



James Fox

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home on Cowee Ridge Road near the Jackson County and Macon County line. She's owned the home since 2015, and lives in it for two months during the summer season, after working 10 months in China with her husband.

"Melanie had tried to buy a James Fox home for a while before getting this one," her father said. "For whatever reason, the sale didn't work out, but she found this one instead, and is so glad she has this home. She'll never get rid of it."

The home, is one Melanie affectionately christened "The Kite House," an appropriate name once you get a look at the house as it is perched on the top of Cowee Ridge, Hamm said.

"The house has a view of Whiteside Mountain looking south, and Melanie wanted a covered deck as the house sits on the edge of the mountain," he said. "The problem with a covered deck is that the roof blocks the view of the mountain from the rest of the house, so Jim had to design the roof at an angle so as not to ruin the view."

Hamm added, he often wondered how the house didn't fly off the top of the mountain given the aerodynamics of the design and the gusting winds common at more than 4,000 feet in elevation.

"The name of the house fits," he said. "In order to keep with the aesthetics of the home design, he put a similarly angled roof on the opposite end of the house. It



A James Fox designed home christened "The Kite House" by owner Melanie Hamm, perches atop Cowee Ridge near the Jackson County-Macon County line. **DAN BROWN / Staff**

looks like a giant kite."

According to his obituary, Fox was an Indiana native, born in Bremen and growing up in South Bend. Fox graduated from the University of Cincinnati, where he earned a bachelor's degree in Architecture, and received his master's degree in Architecture from the University of Oklahoma.

Fox moved to the western North Carolina area in 1968 and set up shop, opening his own firm in 1969.

"Jim found an audience in Highlands, and Macon and Jackson counties, for mid-century modernist homes," Hamm said. "He stayed here for the next 45 years and built about two or three houses a year, before retiring in Highlands. There are a

lot of Jim Fox homes around the mountains here."

Local Realtor Marsha Bricker, broker at Fisher's Realty in Sapphire, said Fox's reputation preceded him.

"Anyone that knows anything about architecture in the area knows Jim Fox," she said. "His was a well-known and well-respected name."