

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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FOR RELEASE FOR DAILY AND SUNDAY PAPERS MAY 19

FOR MAGAZINES: JULY ISSUES

EXHIBITION HOUSE TO OPEN IN MUSEUM GARDEN ON MAY 19

A 3-bedroom, one-story house designed by the young California architect Gregory Ain, will open to the public in the Museum Garden, 4 West 54th Street, on May 19. Built by the Museum of Modern Art in co-operation with the Woman's Home Companion, the house aims to show that good modern architectural design is possible in the speculatively built house, which is the kind lived in by most Americans.

The site plan

The house was conceived as one of many similar houses in a subdivision and designed for a lot approximately 60 feet by 120 feet, a typical lot size in many real estate developments.

Irregular setbacks and the two-level roof were designed so that, if repeated in a street pattern, the result would avoid the flat monotony characteristic of so many real estate developments.

As houses in this kind of subdivision overlook each other closely along lot lines, Mr. Ain has planned the rooms so that no major windows face neighboring houses. A system of exterior screens helps create areas of privacy in the gardens.

Exterior

The siding is of striated Douglas Fir plywood. A trellis on the street side continues the line of the garage roof, repeats the horizontal line of the main roof and ties the two wings of the house together. Obscure glass - blocking vision but not light - in the windows next to the front entrance gives privacy to the dining area and living area.

On the garden side a glass wall makes the terrace continuous with the living room. The glass is shaded here and also in the kitchen by a deep roof overhang. Obscure glass in the windows gives privacy to the parents' bedroom, which has a separate door to the terrace. The service door from the garage connects with the kitchen. Food for outdoor dining may be passed through the kitchen windows.

Floor plan

The house has three bedrooms, dressing room, $1\frac{1}{2}$ baths, living room, dining area, kitchen-laundry combination and garage. The outstanding characteristic of the floor plan is its spatial flexibility which is achieved by the use of several sliding walls and panels. The living room, dining area, parents' bedroom and kitchen can all be thrown together to form one living area or they can be subdivided for privacy. Similarly the children's rooms can be used as one large bedroom-playroom or as two separate rooms.

The unusual ceiling height of 9 feet emphasizes the airiness of the interior. The illusion of spaciousness is further stressed by the standardized use of materials: one flooring material and one ceiling material are used throughout the house and one type of wall paneling in each area.

The paved terrace on the garden side and the wide overhang above contribute to the sense of continuous interior-exterior space.

While all the rooms and living areas are characterized by this openness, the storage and service areas are compactly planned and tightly grouped together for economy of construction. They also serve as a sound baffle between children's and parents' quarters.

Construction materials

The house is built on a concrete floor slab, designed for the coils of a radiant heating system. The frame is of standard wood construction. Exterior siding, sheathing and all interior wall surfaces are of plywood. Gypsum board panels have been used for the ceilings, plastic tiles for the floors.

The dry-wall construction is protected by a fibre-reinforced sheathing paper on the outside and insulated with a reflective material, which also acts as a vapor barrier on the inside. The roof is further insulated by white granite pebbles on top of the composition roofing material.

The chimney is faced with Roman brick and its raised hearth built of soapstone.

Most of the glass is fixed, but each room also has an operating sash for ventilation.

Plumbing fixtures, bathroom accessories and hardware was selected for efficiency, simple design and moderate cost.

Living room

The 9-foot ceiling and openings into areas beyond make this an unusually spacious room for a medium-sized house. The living area itself, the master bedroom, the dining area and kitchen can all be thrown open into one large space, 32 feet long and 24 feet deep.

The chimney is faced with Roman brick laid in block bond. The raised soapstone hearth can be used as a coffee table.

The neutral shades of natural wood, the gray floor tiles and various grays of the painted surfaces form a backdrop for the bright color accents of paintings, fabrics, books and accessories.

Almost all the furniture has black metal legs in order to give it a sense of airy elegance. Furnishings were selected to fit into the price range of the house, and each piece is available in stores carrying modern design.

Indirect fluorescent strip lighting above the hangings at the windows and along the top of the book shelf supplements the lamps.

Dining area

The dining area is near the front entrance and thus uses space which is often wasted. It is separated from the living area by a 4½-foot built-in storage cabinet for china, glassware and table linen. Sliding panels above this storage unit make it possible to close off the dining area. When the panels are open, however, the sense of spaciousness is enhanced by the use of identical drapes along the living room and dining room windows.

The dining area is separated from the kitchen by a sliding door.

The glass-topped dining table, and chairs with thin metal legs make the space seem larger than it actually is.

Kitchen

The kitchen contains standard equipment, as well as laundry appliances.

Large corner windows with both fixed and operating casements overlook the garden and make this a pleasant room in which to work.

The equipment is finished in a soft gray enamel. The built-in spice shelf with glass drawers that display the contents is of Swedish design.

Parents' bedroom

This room, although furnished here as the master bedroom, could be used as a library or study-guest room. The sliding wall which separates it from the living room makes it possible to close it off entirely or use it as part of the general living area.

The adjacent dressing room contains two large closets and a dressing table with soft lighting around the mirror of a type used in theatrical dressing rooms.

The hanging lamp on a pulley can be lowered to the proper height for reading in bed.

Children's rooms

These rooms can be treated as one large bedroom, a bedroom and a separate playroom, or two separate bedrooms.

Both rooms are paneled in oak plywood. The tone of the natural wood is echoed in the bamboo shades and is accented by the bright bedspreads and toys. The rooms are warmly lit by fluorescent strips over the windows and above the beds. The cove above the beds has a glass shelf to hold toys or flowers. The floor cabinets in the play area have a large variety of storage shelves and drawers for other toys and clothing. In addition, there is a large closet in each room.

Storage

Clothes storage is provided by two large wardrobes in the dressing room adjoining the parents' bedroom, a large closet in each of the children's rooms, and a coat closet to the right of the front door. Storage for linen, china, glassware etc. is provided on the dining area side in the $4\frac{1}{2}$ -foot storage cabinet which separates the dining area from the living room, while book shelves are on the living room side.

There are two linen closets and other storage closets in the corridor.

There is also a utility closet in the kitchen and additional storage space in the garage.

Architect

Gregory Ain, who was born in Pittsburgh in 1908, is one of the few modern American architects with experience in designing housing projects for speculative builders. One of his recent contributions to this field has been the Mar Vista development in California. He

has been especially successful in achieving a degree of individuality within the architectural unity of multiple dwelling projects.

In 1940 he obtained a Guggenheim Fellowship for low-cost housing research. His buildings have received numerous awards in nationwide competitions. In recent years much of this work has been done in collaboration with Joseph Johnson and Alfred Day, who also collaborated on this Exhibition House.

Cost and size

Construction costs vary according to location, local conditions, choice of finishes etc. As one house in a development of 10, estimates ~~received~~ received range from \$15,500 to \$19,500.

The house excluding the garage has an area of 1420 square feet.