

# riverside terrace

true gems of mid-century modern architecture can still be found in this neighborhood

by laura michaelides



*A flat roof, a vast expanse of glass and long, horizontal lines are typical elements of Riverside-modern style. This house was designed by John S. Chase, the architect of several buildings at Texas Southern University.*



*Jogging trails line the Bayou along South MacGregor.*

Within Houston's inner loop there are many residential neighborhoods, but few offer large park-like lots, rolling terrain, access to recreational space and close proximity to downtown. River Oaks fits this description, as do the lovely streets of Broadacres, which include North and South Boulevards, in the museum area.

In the 1920s and '30s, though, deed restrictions kept wealthy Jewish families out of these exclusive areas, and thus Riverside Terrace came to be their desired choice. People of many other faiths and cultures have since moved into the area and diversified the neighborhood. The market for real estate in the neighborhood is heating up as more Houstonians

begin to appreciate the remarkable character of the area.

Initially, the 23 subdivisions were developed by Clarence Malone who was the cofounder and president of the Guardian Trust Company. Development began in 1924, and continued through the 1940s and '50s.

Riverside Terrace runs roughly from Almeda on its western boundary,



*Clockwise: 4505 North Roseneath  
3611 Parkwood Drive  
3402 South Parkwood Drive  
4506 North Roseneath*





3126 South MacGregor (Bailey A. Swenson, 1952)



4511 North Roseneath Drive (Philip G. Willard and Lucian T. Hood, 1952)

to Calhoun on its eastern side and stretches north and south along Braes Bayou. The landscape here is remarkably hilly for Houston and the scene is truly picturesque. Large overhanging trees and gracious homes set in big lots typify the neighborhood. Streets are quiet and children can play here safely. There are jogging trails that line the bayou.

The earliest homes built in Riverside reflected the traditional prevailing taste that could be found in the Houston's established elite neighborhoods. Most common were the Colonial and Tudor Revival styles. However, houses built in Riverside in the 1950s began to reflect larger design trends that were influencing architecture all over the country, and some of the Houston's most interesting and exuberant mid-century houses can be seen here.

The 1950s were an optimistic and exciting time for Americans. The victorious conclusion to the second World War brought renewed economic activity, and an energetic surge in land development and house building. In addition, Americans who had seen their opportunities erode during the Great Depression of the 1930s, were suddenly able to purchase homes with the growth of jobs and capital.

The architecture of this time reflects this sense of optimism, and

exudes a willingness to embrace new ideas with great confidence and flair. The Modern movement, which had been developing in Europe before the war, as well as the work of American architects such as Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright pointed architecture in new directions and Americans began to embrace some of these ideas. In addition, new construction techniques and materials developed during the war encouraged experimentation in architecture.

Houston's Riverside neighborhood is rich in houses from this period. They are typified by long horizontal profiles, flat or minimally sloping roofs, a lack of decorative detailing and long expanses of glass used with an aim to fuse the indoor and outdoor experience. Often there are interlocking volumes, and there is an emphasis on natural materials. On the interior of these homes, floor plans tend to be open with a lack of defined spaces, especially in the public areas of the home. These lead to a kind of informal ambiance, which encouraged movement between spaces, and a sense of visual openness.

Many of Houston's finest architectural firms of this time period contributed houses to Riverside. These include among others MacKie & Kamrath, Bolton and Barnstone, Bailey A. Swenson, Philip G. Willard and Lucian T. Hood. Each of the

homes they designed is one of a kind and is worth viewing. Although there are many more than are listed here, following is a short list that will provide a sense of the riches to be seen in Riverside.

The most ambitious 1950s houses, set on pastoral lots, can be seen in the Parkwood Drive area of Riverside. Of particular note are 3402 (Philip G. Willard, 1951) and 3403 (Willard and Hood, 1953) South Parkwood Drive, and 3611 Parkwood Drive (Bolton and Barnstone, 1953).

Another subdivision of particular interest can be seen on Roseneath Drive. Here you can see a grouping of substantial houses from the 1950s, including 4505 North Roseneath Drive (Bailey A. Swenson, 1950), 4506 North Roseneath Drive (Bolton and Barnstone, 1952), 4511 North Roseneath Drive (Philip G. Willard and Lucian T. Hood, 1952) and 3912 Roseneath Drive (Pierre Dene, 1956).

In addition to these fine groupings of houses, a drive along North and South MacGregor Boulevards yields a sense of place to the area, with impressive properties lining Braes Bayou. Among these houses are a number mid-century

modern designs including 3807 South MacGregor (Albuquerque architect Max Flatow of Flatow, Moore, Bryan and Fairburn, 1953) and 3126 South MacGregor (Bailey A. Swenson, 1952). Also of note are 3512 Oakdale Court (John S. Chase, 1959) and 3504 Oakdale Court (Wilson, Morris and Crain, an early example from 1949), which are in the neighborhood north of Braes Bayou.

For more information about Riverside, and for tours of interesting architecture, the *AIA Houston Architectural Guide* is an excellent source. In addition, Stephen Fox's 1987 article on Riverside in 1987 for the Rice Design Alliance magazine *Cite* offers much information, as does Jon Schwartz's documentary film *This Is Our House, It Is Not for Sale*, a valuable social history of the area. ■

*Laura Michaelides engages in interiors projects both here in Houston and on the East Coast. She is refreshed by the current enthusiasm for modern design, and enjoys commenting on the Houston architecture and design scene. A transplant from the New York metropolitan area, she now operates her design office, Laura Michaelides Associates, in Montrose. Call her at 713.529.6466.*



3402 South Parkwood Drive (Philip G. Willard, 1951)



3912 Roseneath Drive (Pierre Dene, 1956)