

HOME as HOMAGE

THERE ARE TWO “before”s to this story of woeful decline and glorious renaissance — and one “after” that’s universally happy ever.

My own personal happy happened when I first noticed this angular, singular, *spectacular* modern marvel while driving idly and biding some time before another NW Living home tour on Queen Anne.

Seriously: You cannot NOT notice this house. And then you pull over, take it all in for a beat and let the questions fly: Why on Earth is it shaped like a wedge? What’s with the holy-cow-bold graphic art? WHAT IN ARCHITECTURAL TARNATION IS GOING ON HERE?

Oh, so, so much. Clearly there’s a story behind this house, but there’s not just *one* story behind this house. There’s an actual academic thesis behind this house, and the fascinating, multifaceted architect who originally designed it (Robert Reichert, one of the most influential Seattle architects you’ve maybe never heard of). There’s its “before No. 1” origin, as a controversial, fearless expression of expressive modernism; its slide into sadness (“before No. 2”); and its joyous, supersensitive award-winning restoration. Plus all the stories of all the people who love it, remember it and are inspired by it. ▶

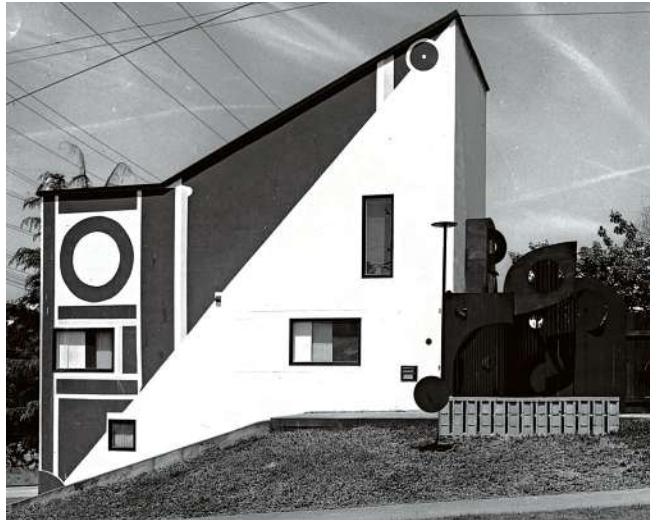
SPRING HOME DESIGN BEFORE & AFTER

**Deep research
and deep respect
drive the historic
restoration of a
modern masterpiece
on Queen Anne**

BY SANDY DENEAU DUNHAM

AFTER: Following a dramatic and supersensitive historic restoration, Adelaide Blair and Darin McAdams’ home brings bold exuberance back to its Queen Anne neighborhood. Stefan Hampden of CAST Architecture worked with dBoone construction and local metal workers, craftspeople and artists (with invaluable input from original architect Robert Reichert’s sketches, period photographs and local historian Jeffrey Murdock) to pay homage to Reichert’s distinctive home/studio, which he designed for himself and his mother in 1954.

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COURTESY CAST ARCHITECTURE

BEFORE 1: With its distinctive shed roof and bolder-than-bold “shadow paintings,” the Queen Anne home that Reichert designed for himself and his mother in 1954 definitely stood out.



COURTESY CAST ARCHITECTURE

BEFORE 2: Between the time of Reichert’s original design and the home’s historic restoration, subsequent owners had covered the distinctive exterior with blue-gray clapboard siding. “It was nailed directly to the original stucco, which underneath was crumbling out,” says Hampden.



ANDREW GIAMMARCO PHOTOGRAPHY

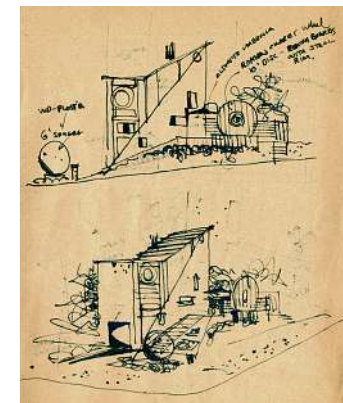
Adelaide Blair and Darin McAdams might love it most of all. They live here now. And they had many of those same WTH questions when they bought this house — then a fading rental property slapped with dull blue siding — in 2015.

“We were looking around in the neighborhood, and I saw this house, and I’m like, ‘That house is ugly and weird. Let’s go look at it,’” says Blair. “We had no idea about the background. We came during an open house, and they had a newspaper article that had a picture of what the house used to look like, and we were like, ‘Wouldn’t it be cool to be able to restore some of what it used to be?’”

She emailed Historic Seattle to see whether anyone knew anything about the house and/or Reichert, who had designed

it as a home/studio for himself and his mother in 1954. Historic Seattle connected Blair with Jeffrey Murdock (then pursuing a master’s degree and now the group’s advocacy and education manager), who knew *everything*, as evidenced by the extensive slideshow he presented to Blair, McAdams and architect Stefan Hampden of CAST Architecture (the only architect they interviewed who had done his own Reichert research, she says). ▶

Reichert’s original sketches were invaluable during the remodel, says Hampden, who benefited tremendously from an existing thesis on Reichert by Murdock. “It’s just amazing to have someone who’d already done all that work and was superexcited about it. Just stepping through his slides, all the way from sketches. It was originally much more classical, really getting into the original motif, and it just got more and more abstract as [Reichert] went on.”



COURTESY CAST ARCHITECTURE

AFTER: The cool colors are back! And that was no small task. “One of the things that blows me away is that we were able to do all of the graphics,” says Hampden. “None of it is painted. It’s actually integral stucco, mixed on-site and applied as part of the stucco, so these were some serious artists who did all this work.”

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Someone really should adapt Murdock's rich thesis into a miniseries (the auditions for the role of Reichert alone could power their own reality show). "Reichert was such an enigma," Hampden says of the Harvard architecture graduate who studied under Walter Gropius. "He had these three sides to him: one was a professor at UW; then a car and motorcycle enthusiast; and then, third, he was an organist at his church. The origin of the form of this building, this shed roof that comes way up on the side, was a vaulted space, and he had a pipe organ in the house." (It was 18 feet tall!)

Reichert was not one to choose between going big and going home. He called those giant exterior art elements "shadow paintings," Hampden says (now, more commonly, "super-graphics"); they were intended "to be expressive at all times."

Not all of Reichert's neighbors were impressed by his expression. Some complained ►



COURTESY CAST ARCHITECTURE

BEFORE: Originally, says Hampden, Reichert and his mother "had living spaces on the first floor and in the basement, and then a very small kitchen, and then you came upstairs, and the living room space was used as a studio and for the organ, but he also hosted events up there." By the time Blair and McAdams bought the house, though, "The living room had been carved up to turn it into a second bedroom," says McAdams.

AFTER: The loft looks over the living space, which is newly open (after the demolition of the previous partitioning) and newly light (with "big skylights up above and new windows on the sides"), says Hampden. Also new and re-created: that huge ceiling graphic. "This was in one of [original architect Reichert's] sketches; it was entitled 'Door to Heaven.' You come up the stairs, and it's like right on this bullseye. It was such a fun and unusual process to do architectural drawings of murals, and trying to figure out how to re-create these from the photographs that we had from the archives."

ANDREW GIAMMARCO PHOTOGRAPHY

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to the paper. (Even the paper complained in the paper: Legendary Pacific Northwest Living writer Margery Phillips wrote, “Not everyone wants to live in a sculpture. Not everyone wants even to live next door to one.”) Some hurled tomatoes at the house during Reichert’s robust, late-night organ recitals.

Even now, Hampden was prepared for a less-than-welcome-wagon greeting when a man who had grown up nearby visited the site during the restoration. But instead, the neighbor thanked Hampden, excitedly, for bringing back the historic house and everything it always meant to express.

“It was a really impactful piece of Seattle history that changed his appreciation for architecture,” Hampden says. “When you look through the who’s who of Seattle architecture, [Reichert] doesn’t pop up like Paul Thiry or [Paul H.] Kirk, but he was influential and taught at the university ... and was really pushing the boundaries. It’s a piece of Seattle history that doesn’t get a lot of airplay, but I think influenced a lot of people.”

Still, Hampden says, the goal of this historic restoration never was to precisely re-create Reichert’s work, or home



COURTESY CAST ARCHITECTURE

BEFORE: The clapboards that Reichert had used inside (likely, in part, for pipe-organ acoustics) “were all stripped away,” says Hampden. “None of it existed when we came into the house. It was actually divided into separate rooms, so we demo-ed the whole top floor and put it back up.”



BEFORE: Reichert’s beloved pipe organ soared up the towering eastern wall of his home/studio.

COURTESY CAST ARCHITECTURE

AFTER: A new tower of windows connects all three levels, with new stairs leading to a new upper loft. “This was the one thing that wasn’t original,” says Hampden. “The loft was put in; [Reichert’s] organ used to go all the way up through there, and that loft space maintains the big open space but also gives them a little office space up there.”

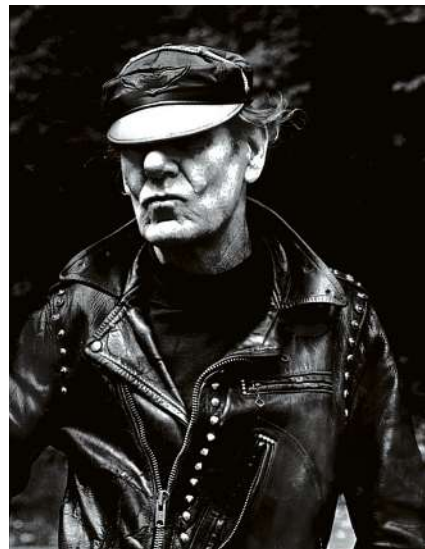


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AFTER: “This is all new in the dining room,” says Hampden. Blair (who is an artist) and McAdams love board games and art, and collect both. “They wanted something where they could display and access all the games and highlight some of the art they’ve collected, so we made this big Mondrian-inspired storage unit along the dining room and opened that up to the kitchen.” (To the right is a bifold door set with an overlay screen that opens to the outside courtyard.)

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GREG GILBERT / THE SEATTLE TIMES, 1979

“This is the trifecta right here,” Hampden says of the multitalented and multifaceted architect Reichert, who died in 1996. “The professor, the church organist and the hipster motorcycle enthusiast. He was a classic, classic guy.”

— but everyone wanted to remember and honor both.

“[Blair and McAdams] were really superexcited about where his aesthetic, his process, led with the house, and what that created,” Hampden says. “On the other hand, it was for them, not for him. So we didn’t think of it as a restoration so much as an homage — trying to understand Reichert’s process and do something that he really would have been excited about.”

(Reichert most definitely was NOT excited about what became of his home after he’d moved out: He declared it had been “vandalized” by subsequent owners.)

By the time Blair and McAdams got there, during its gloomy blue period, “The carpets were kind of gross — it was a rental house you would rent to younger people,” Blair says. “I’ve lived in worse houses as a young person, so I don’t want to be too judge-y, but as a middle-aged lady, I was like, ‘Eh. I don’t really want to live in this house.’”

The original plywood-stucco construction was rotting, along with walls and beams. “They would pull things off and ask, ‘How is the house still standing?’” McAdams says.

It clearly needed a “down-to-the-studs rebuild,” Hampden says — and it needed imagination.

Using Reichert’s sketches, historic photos and that hallelujah thesis, Team Homage (including dBoone construction and local metal workers, craftspeople and artists) re-created and expanded those big bold, exterior supergraphics (and painstakingly replicated another inside that had been painted over on the ceiling); redid the stucco so it’s fully breathable (and durable); added level-connecting windows and abundant light; rebuilt the Alexander Calder-inspired sculptural entry gate; turned the towering former organ space into a home-office loft; and added supercool Mondrian-style shelving in the dining room (Blair and McAdams play a lot of board games, but not the organ).

It was a complex, detail-intensive, research-reliant project. “It was good that it was only 1,500 square feet,” Hampden says.

It is bold. It is beautiful. It is back. And its breathtaking “after” already is creating its own history (it won Historic Seattle’s Outstanding Modern Preservation Award).

Now Reichert’s perfectly Reichert house shelters new occupants who appreciated its “before” even before they knew anything about it — and who appreciate its “after” every single day.

“This house was also Reichert’s studio, and where he did his work,” says Blair, who is an artist. “Living in a midcentury-modern house with all that graphic design definitely does affect my work, but it also tends to be more just feeling a connection with the past and with his work. We’re lucky that we were able to restore the house — the exterior is pretty true to what it used to be; the interior is more inspired by his work. It’s very fun to live and work here. It is very definitely home.”



ANDREW GIAMMARCO PHOTOGRAPHY

AFTER: “Most of the house is painted white,” says Blair. “I am Mexican American, and an all-white house would kill me. I like some color in my house.” Here, bright-blue countertops and a red backsplash and appliances pop with life by a dining/gaming table that McAdams built. “It’s made out of framing lumber,” she says. “It’s hard to find something specific for this kind of space.”