Sunday Home building, buying, decorating, remodeling & Classified section G

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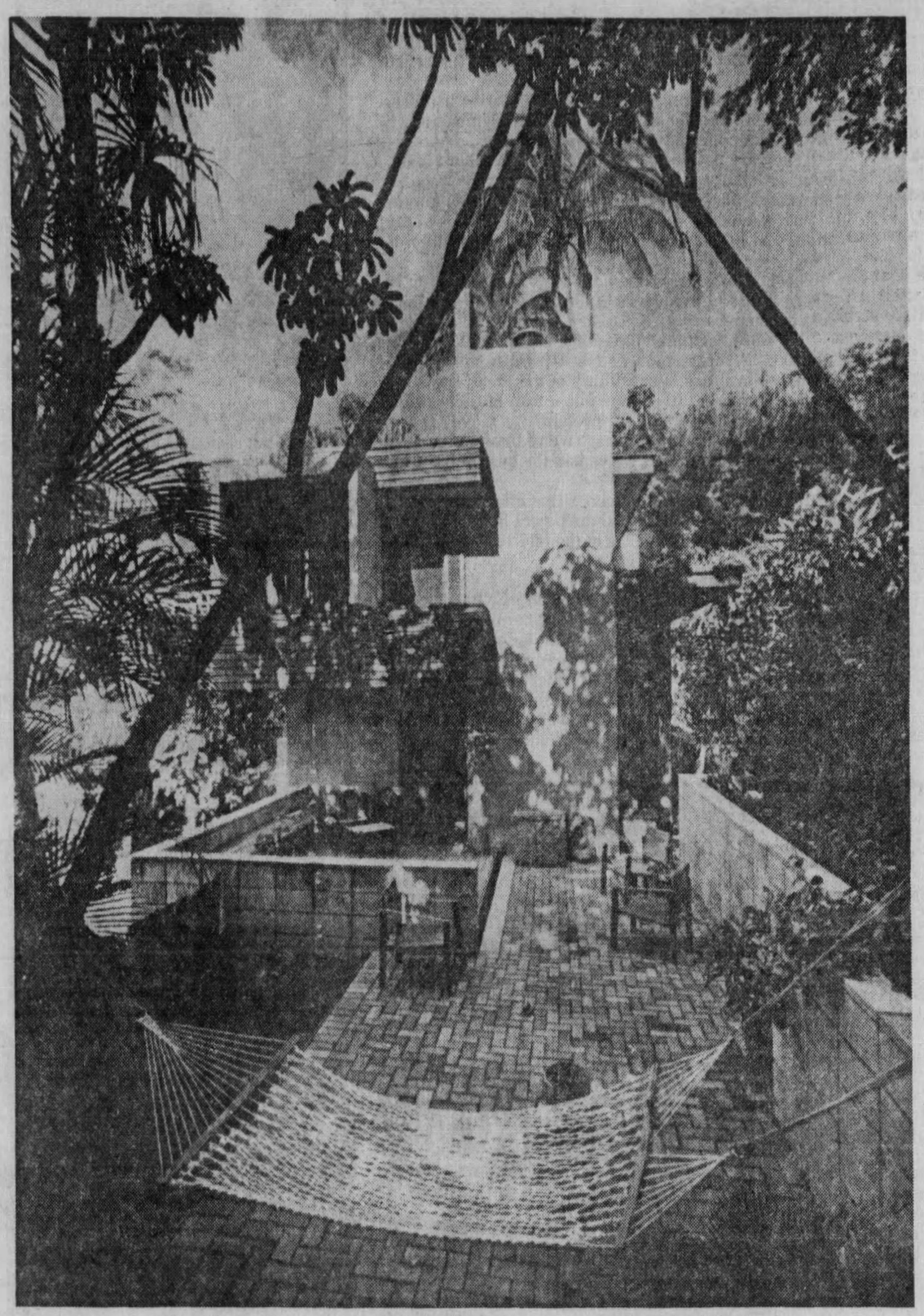
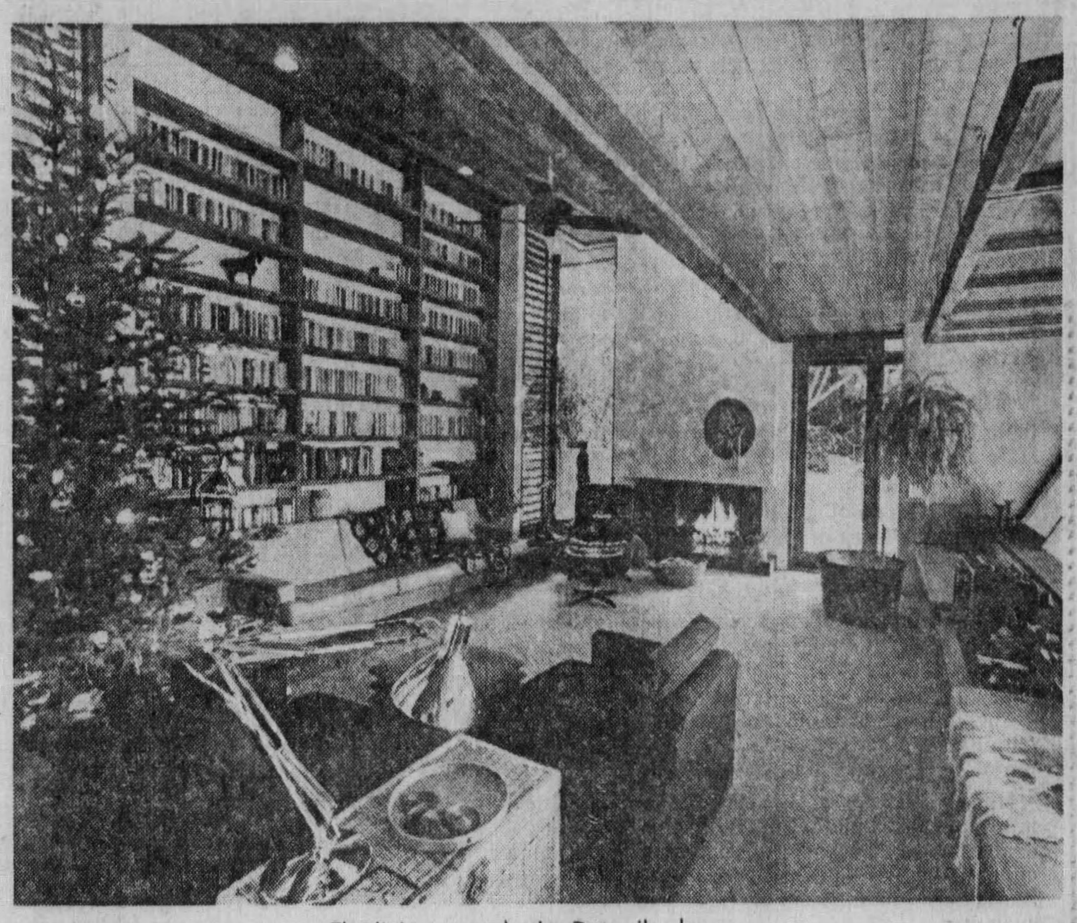


View from the patio shows how the house nestles against the hillside.



The living room in the Detweiler house.

Inside Look at an Architect's Home

By Kathy Titchen, Star-Bulletin Writer

When architects design for themselves they are free of the restrictions imposed by other people's tastes, needs, and lifestyles. So what do they create?

That depends on the architect.

"When you design for yourself you have to do what you really believe in," said Walter B. "Chip" Detweiler, of Meyers, Detweiler and Associates, who built a home on Round Top Drive.

Rather stark and monolithic in appearance on the outside, the house is warm inside. It is built of concrete and rough-sawn lumber with no attempt to hide the roughness of either.

Having materials look like what they are is part of the Detweiler philosophy. "Only the gypsum board is painted," Detweiler said. "You really have to paint that. But it was very difficult to make the workmen understand, for instance, that the concrete and plaster were not going to be painted." (Those walls that are concrete are pebbly and gray.)

The Detweiler home was built as much as possible to fit into the site, which Detweiler said has a pitch between 40 and 45 degrees.

Some excavation was necessary, he said, and the site required very substantial retaining walls because the soil is mostly loose lava ash. Of a total cost of $100,000, excavation and site preparation alone took $28,000.

The house is a multi-level maze of "spaces", not rooms, designed so each living and sleeping area has a view in two directions — toward the wooded slopes of Round Top in back and a city panorama below.

One enters the house by mounting a flight of concrete steps to the entry and garage level. Another flight leads up to the living area, with its high ceilings, a fireplace at one end, and floor to ceiling bookcases and windows.

The front windows in the living room are unusual. Hung from the ceiling, they rest, when closed, at a 45 degree angle on a built-in ledge seating and storage banquette.

WHEN OPEN, THEY LIFT up and are hooked to the ceiling. "Usually," Detweiler said, "when you try to look out large picture windows at night, all you see is the reflection of the room. By installing them on a slant, I thought we would avoid that, and it seems to work."

A wood and brick deck or patio is off the end of the living room. The dining room and two bedrooms (or bedspaces, to be accurate) each have a deck as well.

The kitchen and dining area are separated from each other by a work counter and are situated that they are on slightly different levels. The small deck off the dining area, ideal for an outdoor dining nook, is built around a tree.

"Chip planned this house so only two trees had to be cut down to build it," said the architect's wife, Jinny.

A peculiar feature of the kitchen is that the cabinet doors are all made of particle board, with neither paint nor veneer disguising the material.

Most of the closet doors are of the same material and Mrs. Detweiler still remembers her reaction when she saw them: "We're building a $100,0000 home and you give me particle board cabinets in my kitchen?" Yet, they have never been painted or changed, and she now says they never will.

Particle board that looks like particle board is part of the philosophy of using materials as they are. "All the lumber is left rough and unfinished," Detweiler said. "I think it looks better. Besides, it's cheaper to leave it rough."

Where there are doors, for example, to the bathrooms, they go all the way to the ceiling and are not finished off with molding or trim. There is no baseboard around the floor and no molding around the ceiling.

"Molding is an anachronism," Detweiler said. "The idea of molding and trim is that when you paint you don't have to worry about getting the edges neat. But nowadays you often find workmen putting on the trim first, then painting, which makes no sense. And if you aren't going to paint, why bother with trim?"

Detweiler said it's difficult to make people realize that a structurally sound house doesn't have to have either the standard divisions of space or the standard details. "People don't think," he said. "They do things just because that's the way it's done."

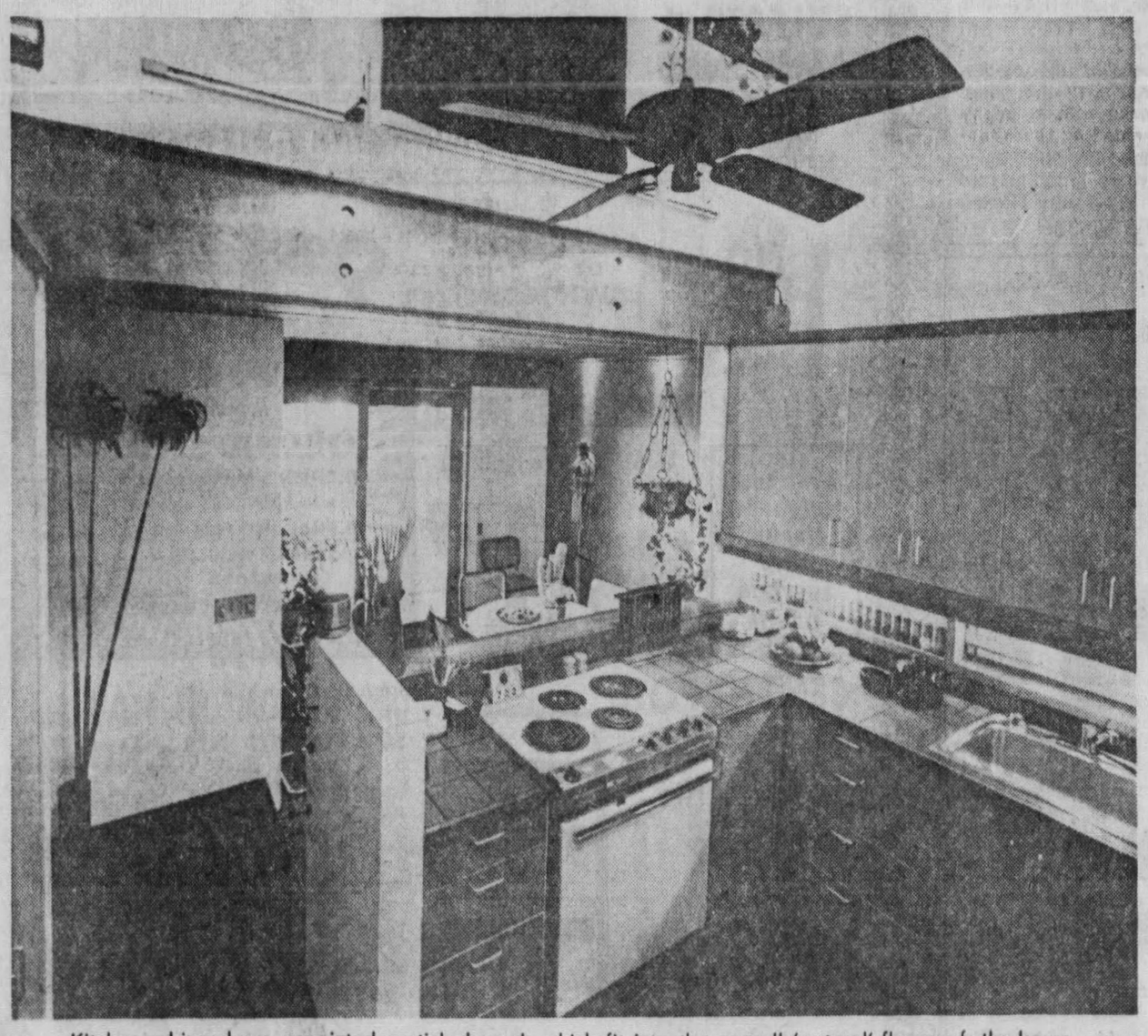
The Detweiler bathrooms are a case in point. Instead of the usual ceramic tile, plastic laminate, or cultured marble the Detweilers used cement tile, dyed a rich terra cotta. "We liked the look and feel of it," Detweiler said, "so why not?"

For shower curtains the Detweilers passed up the standard patterns and colors shown in stores and instead bought sheets of transparent plastic, fitted them with hooks and hung them for an interesting effect.

The bathrooms are a major concession to privacy. They not only have doors, but are reached through short, narrow corridors that take a 90 degree turn past the door and a storage area to the inside.

Said Detweiler, "My wife insisted that she didn't want to sit anywhere and be able to look into a bathroom."

Other than that, most of the rest of the house depends on variations in levels and structural components like stairways to define areas. Even the master bedroom (correction, bedspace) is almost an open balcony over the living room and each of the two bedspaces has its own deck.



Kitchen cabines have unpainted particle board, which fit into the overall 'natural' flavor of the house.
—Star-Bulletin photos by Terry Luke

A Tale of Two Cities and Seven Unions

Two Mainland cities will get federal funds to assist them in rehabilitating dilapidated rental housing under an experimental new program that involves a wage reduction agreement with construction unions.

According to federal and City officials here, Honolulu didn't qualify for the program this year for technical reasons.

The City could, however, apply later if the program is offered again, and if agreement can be reached with local unions.

Some officials, however, say privately that they can't foresee such an agreement coming about in heavily unionized Hawaii.

New York City and Atlanta, Ga., the two cities selected this month by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for the program, will receive a total of $19 million in assistance. New York will rehabilitate 2,500 rental units and Atlanta 920.

ONE OF the major criteria for receiving funds was a signed agreement under which various construction unions will slash wages by 25 per cent to keep the costs of renovations down.

The two approved cities offered plans accepted by seven building trade unions and the National Housing Rehabilitation Association earlier this year.

Both cities also are taking some funds from other city programs to support the rehabilitation effort in the target neighborhoods with park improvement, social services and home repair loans to other private owners in the area.

There is a $50 million budget for the experimental program, which is part of the Section 8 rental assistance program, now the major— and often controversial— program funded by the federal government to provide low-income rental housing across the nation.

The Washington HUD office said only New York and Atlanta qualified for the special funds although other cities applied. Since $31 million remains to be used, HUD has given local governments another chance to revise their applications and submit them again.

Other allocations are expected to be made in mid-January.

ED TAKANISHI, housing production director for the HUD office in Honolulu, answered an initial query about the program by saying:

"I'm not familiar with that program. We haven't received any information on any type of demonstration program using the labor unions."

Takanishi said he would check on what material had come into the HUD office here and later said the extra Section 8 funds were available only to cities that had a Section 8 rehabilitation program.

Section 8 funds are allocated for three purposes, he said — construction of new housing, rental subsidy on existing housing and rehabilitation of old housing.

Local government housing agencies must submit to HUD what is called a "housing assistance program," or HAP, outlining the ways the funds will be used.

Takanishi said Honolulu has funds for new construction and for rental subsidy on existing units, but has no Section 8 rehabilitation program.

"ALL SECTION 8 programs must be in compliance with the HAP," he said. "Honolulu would not have qualified. However, our HUD office has said that if the money isn't used up, they'll open up applications again."

"Looking around at all the Islands," Takanishi said, "there is relatively little need for substantial rehabilitation. I'm talking in comparison to the Mainland now— where cities have extensive slum areas."

William Blackfield, director of the Honolulu City Department of Housing and Community Development, said the city hasn't gone into full-scale rehabilitation under the Section 8 program because rentals are already so high here.

TO RENOVATE dilapidated units, he said, would cost so much that it would bring rental costs to an amount far in excess of what people could pay. "We felt that new construction was better because it already meets the codes and requirements."

He added, however, that the federally funded program was conceived after the City had filed its housing assistance program, and the deadline for applying for the funds made it virtually impossible to submit a proposal in time.

"If we had known it was going to come about we certainly would have tried to qualify for it," Blackfield said. "I don't know whether the unions would have cooperated, but we're looking for every type of subsidy we can get."

Blackfield said the City will be preparing another housing assistance program in February on which public hearings must be held, and could consider applying for a rehabilitation program at that time.

SOME PEOPLE say, however, that expecting Hawaii's construction unions to give up any of their hard-won wage increases to work on such a program is probably wishful thinking.

And some union officials here are skeptical of the program and of the motives of Mainland unions approving wage reduction agreements.

They point out that in many areas of the Mainland residential construction is done primarily by non-union contractors at lower wages than union members command.

In Hawaii, for example, a journeyman carpenter earns $8.64 an hour, or $11.13 with fringe benefits;

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