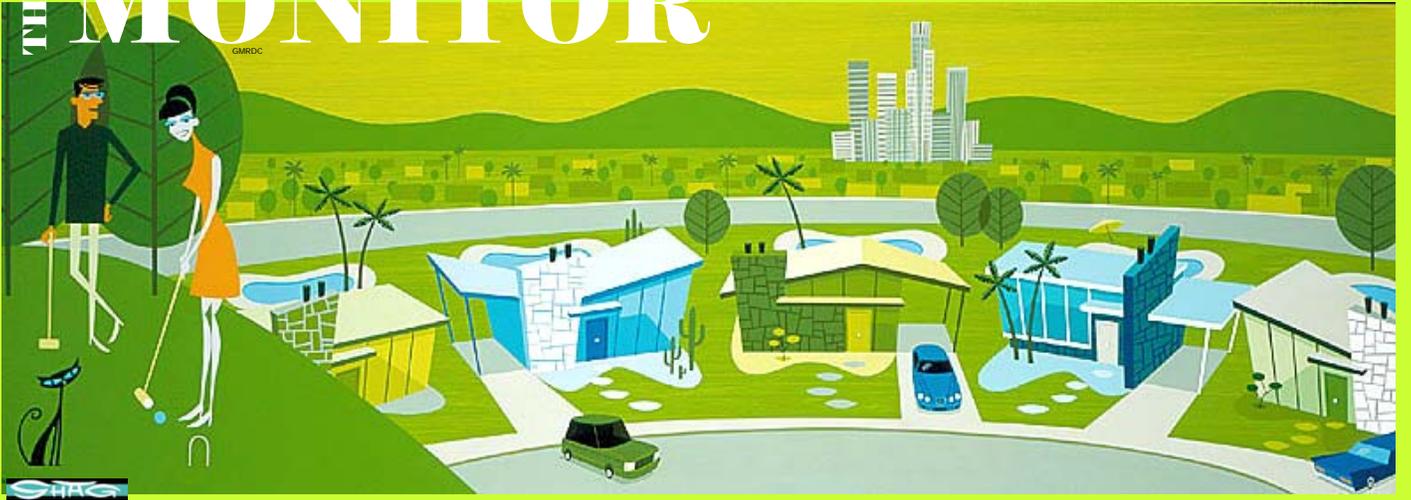


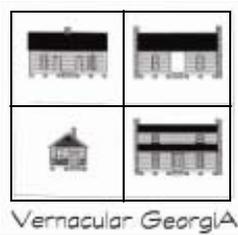
# THE MONITOR



This issue is dedicated to Georgia's Mid Century Modern Architecture

A Publication of the Vernacular Georgia Society

Spring 2011



## Inside this issue:

- Spotlight **1**
- Chair's Col- **2**
- FALL VGA **3**  
Excursion
- Upcoming **4**  
Events
- Vernacular **4**  
Architecture



Roadside  
Architecture

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## SPOT LIGHT: Mid-Century Modern Homes: The Architecture that Defined the Atomic Age is Appealing to Homebuyers and Preservationists.

"High Modernist residential architecture of the mid-twentieth century embodied an austere beauty of simplicity and purity of form. Applying strict design theory to material and structure, architects connected man, architecture and nature in a way that enabled a surreal experience, pushing a residential structure beyond a dwelling to a spiritual place." -- *Alexandra Bevk, University of Pennsylvania*

**Mid-Century Modern** is an architectural, interior and product design form that generally describes mid-20th century developments in modern design, architecture, and urban development from roughly 1933 to 1965. The term was coined in 1983 by Cara Greenberg for the title of her book, *Mid-Century Modern: Furniture of the 1950s* (Random House), celebrating the style which is now recognized by scholars and museums worldwide as a significant design movement.

you've ever wondered why mid-century modern design and architecture has become so popular as of late, it's not all because of the success of *Mad Men*... however, the exposure of what many viewers thought was The Kaufmann House as the home in *The Jet Set* episode certainly did light a spark. [That spectacular home was actually the Fox Residence located in Chatsworth CA, and was once owned by Frank Sinatra.] If you ask an architect, he/she would also probably say the resurgence is because of The Kaufmann House, but from a different perspective. The 1946 Richard Neutra glass, stone and steel work of art was commissioned by Edgar J. Kaufmann Sr., the same gentleman who commissioned Frank Lloyd Wright to build Falling Water about 10 years earlier. The Neutra creation, located at the edge of Palm Springs, was to be Mr. Kaufmann's winter retreat from cold Midwest



Rural Modern, McRae, GA

winters. After Mr. Kaufmann's death in 1955, the house stood empty for a few years and then began changing hands. Along the way, questionable 'improvements' were made that disrupted the original design, but luckily, the property was purchased by Brent & Beth Harris, who decided to return the home to its original glory with the help of architects Leo Marmol and Ron Radziner. The painstaking restoration was widely publicized and is seen by many as the impetus for the renewed interest in mid-century modern homes and design. If

*Continued on Page 2*

*Our Readers are Encouraged to Submit Articles Relating to Georgia and Southeastern Vernacular Architecture. All Topics and Opinions Are Welcome.*



Amberwood  
Sub-Division,  
DeKalb County

## SPOT LIGHT: Mid-Century Modern Homes

you'd like to take an in-depth look at this spectacular home, the *New York Times* online has a wonderful slide show of the Kaufmann House.

As we all do, real estate too follows fashion trends. One year it may be historic colonials that are in demand, the next shingle-style homes on larger properties, and the next smaller in-town residences are de rigueur. But



Mid-Century Modern Home in Smyrna, Georgia

during the past decade, modern homes, those minimalist open-air residences that came of age in the middle of the 20th century, have experienced a renaissance. Perhaps such homes attract buyers because of the life-

style they promote ... the open layouts are ideal for entertaining and for relaxed family gatherings. Whatever the reason, these days, Mid-Century Modern homes are stylish and architecturally hip places to live.

*"Yes Virginia,  
Vernacular  
Architecture  
can be  
Modern."*

## Chair's Column

We call ourselves "Vernacular Georgia," but just what is vernacular? It's one of those words that we think we know its meaning, even if we cannot precisely define it. Interestingly enough the word "vernacular" is from the Latin *vernaculus*, meaning "born in one's house, native," coming from *verna*, a slave born in his master's house. Thus it means native, belonging to a particular place or region, but with the distinct connotation of lower or working class. It was first used widely to distinguish the vernacular language from a churchly, scholarly or cosmopolitan language, as, for example, Latin as opposed to the vernacular English, German, or Italian.

In the field of architecture, vernacular was first a synonym for "folk," that is, belonging to a distinct group of people that had an identity separate from the dominant culture. The best (and one of the earliest studied) example in America was Pennsylvania German culture. Pennsylvania Germans settled in a distinct region in the center of the state and spoke their

own language among themselves well into the nineteenth century. They had distinctive ways of cooking (foodways is the current jargon), distinctive religious practices, and distinctive methods of framing, of planning houses, and of building barns. They also have a high degree of self-consciousness about their identity (especially groups such as the Mennonites) which helps to keep alive practices and manners that define group identity.

The impetus to study vernacular architecture (and indeed folkways of all kinds) came from two sources. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, nationalism drove scholars to look for the roots of a people, to help define an ethnic stock. Thus the Nazis were big on researching and evoking the Germanic folk and their ways as an exemplar for true Germans of the day. A similar sentiment lay behind Henry Ford's American pioneer folk community, Dearborn Village. A later phase of interest in vernacular culture came from the opposite pole of the political spectrum, the new

left in the 1960s and after. These, mostly young, people wished to study folk or vernacular culture as a counterpoise to the dominance of high-style culture taught in colleges at that time. In their minds, the built environment of the working class was as worthy of attention as that produced by the ruling class.

We can probably all agree in the difference between high style and folk architecture. The classical revival Brooks Hall beside my office, designed by a well-known Atlanta architect is clearly a high style structure. A sharecropper's house on a dirt road in Oglethorpe County twenty miles east of Athens is clearly a vernacular structure. But what about the large number of buildings in between? What, for example, of a bungalow style house that was built following plans from a book or magazine? What too of a gas station? -- clearly not folk because part of a national trend in design and belonging to an international business, but not really high style either.

*Continued on Page 4*

## Fall VGA Excursion – Adventures in Bartow County

By Jennifer Dickey



Our fall excursion in Bartow County was an action-packed affair that began with breakfast in downtown Cartersville. Several of us dined at the Village Porch Café, which was a mere stone's throw away from our first stop—the 1869 Courthouse, which is now home to the Bartow History Center. Thanks to our host Trey Gaines, director of the Bartow History Center, who gave us a peek into this beautifully rehabilitated building in downtown Cartersville that over the years has served as everything from a courthouse to a skating rink. The Bartow History Center has rehabilitated the facility to serve as it's interpretive center. The grand opening of the facility was in December 2010, so we were indeed privileged to get a glimpse at the building prior to the official ribbon-cutting.

Our next stop was Roselawn, the former home of Reverend Sam

Jones. Thanks to longtime VGA member Maryellen Higginbotham and host Jane Drew for arranging this visit to the home of the nineteenth century evangelist who proffered a simple theological message, “quit your meanness.” The Roselawn mansion that visitors see today belies its origins as a simple, one-story cottage built in the 1860s. In 1895 the simple, wood-frame cottage was jacked up and a brick addition and basement were constructed underneath, creating the 18-room mansion that still stands today. We had unfettered access to the house for about thirty minutes before we continued on our way to our next stop, Valley View.

Valley View was constructed in the 1840s by Col. James Caldwell Sproull, and almost 170 years later, Sproull's descendents, Bob and Mary Norton, are diligently working to preserve this spectacular home. Bob and Mary have built a residence for themselves just across the road from Valley

View, and they devote much of their free time to documenting and caring for the home. “It has been a passion of this family to preserve Valley View,” said Mary. Anyone who has been there can certainly understand that sentiment.

Following lunch in downtown Cartersville, we ventured north to the Noble Hill Rosenwald School. One of over 240 schools in Georgia for African American children constructed as part of the Rural School Building Program of the Julius Rosenwald Fund, the Noble Hill School was completed in 1924. The Noble Hill School offered classes in two rooms for students in grades 1-7 until 1955.

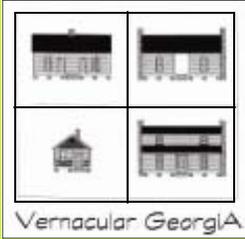


After standing empty for 25 years, the building was rehabilitated to serve as a heritage and community center. The museum interprets African American life in the area during the Depression. The building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1987.

Our last stop of the day was near the town of Rydal at In the Valley, the former home of author Corra Harris. Harris lived at In the Valley from 1913 until her death in 1935. Virtually unknown today, Harris was Georgia's most famous female author in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Her novel *The Circuit Rider's Wife*, published in 1910, propelled her to national prominence.

*Continued on Page 4*





Vernacular Georgia

[vernaculargeorgia@gmail.com](mailto:vernaculargeorgia@gmail.com)



[www.vernacularga.org](http://www.vernacularga.org)



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## Upcoming Events



April 15-16, 2011—Vernacular Georgia’s Spring Excursion will shift away from the traditional log cabins, dog trots and rural farms to focus on urban “commercial archaeology,” roadside architecture and mid-century modern pop culture. Join us in Atlanta for an eclectic tour of the recent past. We will showcase the period that Atlanta was shifting from its 19<sup>th</sup> century roots as a prosperous commercial city and transportation hub to the urban explosion of the 1950s, 60s and 70s that has led to its reputation as an international city. There is so much to take in that we’re having a hard time narrowing down the destinations. But among the candidates are some funky 50s diners and bowling alleys, perhaps a 60s restaurant and motor inn. Apartments and condos ranging from Moderne to Art Deco are all under consideration.

For those who prefer a throwback to older days, we will be in the heart of Atlanta’s most historic neighborhoods, including Inman Park, Virginia Highlands and Downtown Decatur. So don’t despair – it will be hard to not take in a few Classic Bungalows or Colonial Revivals. And the highlight of the Excursion will be a wine and cheese party in the Eastlake Victorian (1885) of Rob and Carole Craig in the Historic Candler Park neighborhood (recipient of the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation’s 2010 Preservation Award for Excellence in Rehabilitation). Questions and comments? Please contact us at [vernaculargeorgia@gmail.com](mailto:vernaculargeorgia@gmail.com)



### Chair’s Column *(Continued)*

Perhaps the best label for such in-between structures is “popular,” a coinage of the great folklorist, Henry Glassie. “Popular” buildings can be traced in some way to the dominant culture of an era and sometimes even have an actual architect behind them. But they also belong to the people as a whole (including the middle and working classes), can sometimes be massed-produced, and are very common. With the triumvirate of high-style, popular, and folk or vernacular we can peg a building accurately on a social scale of origin and help place it in time and space.

Mark Reinberger  
March 8, 2011

### Fall VGA Excursion *(Continued)*

She traveled to Europe in 1914 as a war correspondent. For the last two decades of her life, Harris made a living as a writer, publishing numerous books and hundreds of articles in *The Saturday Evening Post* and other national magazines. She was also a regular contributor to the *Atlanta Journal*, where her “Candlelit Column” appeared three times a week during the 1930s. Today In the Valley is owned by Kennesaw State University and is being preserved as a historic site. The log buildings con-

structed by Harris between 1914 and 1920, as well as the little stone chapel constructed after her death in 1935, stand as a testament to her life and career.

We were blessed for our fall excursion with perfect weather and a delightful array of buildings that offered insight into the history of Bartow County from its creation in the 1830s into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A good time was had by all, and I can hardly wait for our next VGA adventure!

