

# *Beadle Mania*

IT'S BEEN MORE THAN 60 YEARS SINCE AL BEADLE WAS AT THE HEIGHT OF HIS CAREER, BUT THERE'S A 21ST CENTURY OBSESSION WITH THE ARCHITECT, AS A NEW GENERATION OF BUYERS ARE SCRAMBLING TO SCOOP UP AND PRESERVE HIS MIDCENTURY MODERN HOMES. AND IT'S NOT JUST BEADLE'S WORK. HOMES BY RALPH HAVER ARE IN HIGH DEMAND, TOO. **BY CHELS KNORR**

White Gates, an Al Beadle-designed residence on the south slope of Phoenix's Camelback Mountain, is shown in 1959. One of Beadle's most frequently photographed works, this house features a "floating rectangle" design.  
ROD MOYER,  
THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC



**F**RANK LLOYD WRIGHT may have been the father of modern design, but Ralph Haver and Al Beadle, who began their architectural trajectories at the tail end of Wright's headline-grabbing career, are the midcentury designers who shaped the look and feel of the city sprawl we know today in metropolitan Phoenix.

Tanner Woodford, founder and executive director of the Chicago Design Museum, posed the question "What is worth preserving?" to hundreds of prominent cultural figures. Among the handwritten answers he received — many of which are now compiled in a book titled *What's Worth Preserving* — was that of Hunter Tura, president and CEO of Bruce Mau Design, who wrote, simply, "Character."

Character is abundant in the low-sloped roofs, tall clerestory windows, breeze-block entries and covered carports that pepper Haver's oldest neighborhoods. And in Beadle's bold commercial buildings and apartment complexes, which make use of courtyards and covered walkways, playing with reflections and shadows as art. These midcentury structures and their iconic features tell an important story — of their era, and of the designers behind them. And now, there's a movement afoot to ensure that story is told.

**RALPH HAVER** studied architecture at the University of Southern California, then moved to Phoenix shortly after serving in World War II. His career spanned from 1946 to the early 1980s, an era when he spent most of his time as partner in his own architectural firm, Haver & Nunn.

The firm worked on projects from municipal buildings to shopping malls, churches and homes. Haver did most of the design work, while his partner, Jimmie Nunn, worked on permits, zoning and financing. The efficient division of labor made the firm one of the most prolific in the Southwest.

Haver, though, was deeply concerned about affordable housing, so he dedicated much of his time to the design of single-family tract homes. He used economical building materials such as brick, cinder block and slump block to construct practical living spaces for growing families.

"Haverhoods," as they're often called today, include Hixson Homes (11th Place and Highland Avenue), Mañana Vista (24th Street and Indian School Road) and Orchid Park (Seventh Avenue and Butler Drive), along with dozens more in uptown Phoenix and downtown Scottsdale. These neighborhoods are little slices of Americana — full of citrus trees, green lawns and bicycles turned on their sides in the neighbor's driveway.

While modern tract housing, often tied to homeowners associations, frequently prohibits additions and large-scale changes, Haver homes were modular



and built to accommodate potential additions. Alison King, founder of Modern Phoenix and a Haver biographer, calls them "gracefully unchallenging."

That description "is not used here in a pejorative sense," she explains on the Modern Phoenix website. "There was a general ease to everything he built, resulting in an effortless lifestyle that contrasted starkly with decades of prewar hardship. Haver didn't seek to impose a difficult style upon a building's inhabitants. He sought instead to mold his design to the new American aesthetic."

Al Beadle approached his career from the opposite end of the spectrum: He didn't have any architectural training and didn't even finish high school. He also wasn't focused on easily replicable designs. While Haver focused on civic buildings and affordable housing, Beadle spent his time on bold commercial complexes and custom homes.

Born and raised in Minnesota, Beadle returned home after serving in the Seabees, the U.S. Navy's construction battalion. He took his design chops and his family to Phoenix so he could work for his father, who ran a kitchen design company.

In the 1950s, Beadle opened an office with a civil engineer and brought in enough business that the architectural community noticed — and took him

ABOVE: Phoenix's Country Club Apartments, built in 1949, demonstrate Ralph Haver's commitment to affordable, practical housing. J. PAUL GETTY TRUST, GETTY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

RIGHT: Haver's home designs, such as this one on Myrtle Avenue in Phoenix, often feature low-sloped roofs and floor-to-ceiling windows. MARK BOISCLAIR



to court for practicing without a license. At the time, though, a license wasn't required to practice architecture, especially since Beadle called his office a "design firm." Perhaps more effectively, though, Beadle's lawyer's argument to the state board was that Wright, by then a legend in architecture, had gone his entire career without acquiring a license.

The board agreed to grandfather Beadle in as an architect, but Beadle wanted no such thing. He wanted to earn it. Alan Dailey, a licensed architect who recognized Beadle's raw talent and drive, offered to sign off on his projects while he studied for the exam.

Beadle was skilled in International Style, a modernist style pioneered by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe in the 1920s and '30s. That style's reliance on glass, steel and concrete was arguably not the best or most efficient style for the desert, but Beadle stuck to it anyway. To combat the desert heat and marry temperature control with interesting design, he conceived covered walkways and played with jutting overhangs and shadows. He especially enjoyed lots considered "unbuildable," because he felt they made the best houses. "He would work with the land, rather than trying to tame it, because the land was there before the house," says Beadle's daughter, Gerri Beadle Murray.

Beadle designed the Triad, a small apartment complex that still stands today at the intersection of Turney Avenue and 28th Street in Phoenix. The three units share a tunnel-like courtyard, while a boardwalk, shaded under a flat roof and lined with globe lights, connects the tiny community. This complex was part of *Arts & Architecture* magazine's Case Study House program, a post-World War II endeavor to define what modern affordable housing might look like. The Triad is the only Case Study project built outside of California.

Murray recalls her father's creative process: "The lot spoke, and it told him what to do. And there came a house." At the time, she didn't realize Beadle was a hotshot designer, but she did know her father's hobby was

collecting nice cars, such as Rolls-Royces and Ferraris. (As a result, Murray says, she always seemed to have a date.)

Of late, midcentury design has seen a resurgence of interest, thanks to a new generation of homebuyers. Jennifer Hibbard of Twins & Company Realty, a brokerage specializing in midcentury modern homes and other unique properties, has sold many Haver and Beadle homes. She says some buyers are looking for homes by big-name architects — and are willing to pay more for an impressive pedigree. And while Hibbard would love for everyone to preserve these treasures, that's not every homebuyer's goal.

**PRESERVING** older structures and houses, no matter their historical significance, is no easy feat in a society that seems to value money above all else. To promote that effort, Phoenix's Historic Preservation Office, City Council members and the city itself worked together to create a long-term preservation plan. The plan, which was adopted in 2015, reads in part: "Without an eye to the past, the community can neither recognize how it achieved its current form and unique personality nor build on that history and character." Scottsdale and its own preservation office have created a similar plan.

Preserving certain buildings and their stories also preserves a city's sense of place, community and identity. Michelle Dodds, Phoenix's historic preservation officer, notes that "occupying a space feels different than looking at a picture." The stories within the walls, and of the people who built those walls, aren't easily conveyed in a 2D photograph. It's different to feel the porousness of cinder block and brick, to admire unaltered clerestory windows set between pillars, to walk in a courtyard built for the sake of fostering community, or to watch the lengthening and warping shadows of overhangs change as the sun moves lower in the afternoon.

Dodds explains that in Phoenix, a property must meet three criteria to be considered historic. First, it must be significant — whether because of an event, trend or person, or because of its architecture or archaeology. Second, it must be at least 50 years old. Third, it must have integrity, meaning the structure must have character-defining features that are intact. Historic status is typically evaluated based on exterior only; thus, homeowners who remodel their 1950s kitchen to reflect a more modern aesthetic are still eligible.

But preservation and renovations are expensive, and the land — typically in the oldest and most established parts of the city — often is worth more to a developer than the structure itself. That can lead to structures being demolished to make way for a high-occupancy apartment complex, a hip new hotel or a



bigger and "better" home.

Sometimes, that happens with no notice at all. "If preservation groups don't get together to bring attention to [structures], they get taken down without anyone even noticing," Hibbard says, noting that several buildings — even some listed as historic — have been demolished during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hibbard points to Paradise Valley, which she says "has some of the raddest midcentury modern houses." Her mission with a recent sale of one such house was to find a buyer who wouldn't tear it down. As a real estate agent who cares about preservation, she wants to see historically significant houses sold to others who will appreciate their design and history. But while she can guide buyers toward the houses they might appreciate, she has no control over what they do after purchase. That Paradise Valley house for which she tried so hard to find the right buyer ended up being demolished, despite her best efforts.

Doug Sydnor, a Scottsdale architect, is working on the preservation and renovation of the Triangle Building, a Haver design near Indian School and Scottsdale roads. The Triangle, which previously served as Scottsdale's City Hall, has all the quintessential midcentury characteristics: a low-sloped roof, oversized globe lights and breeze block. Sydnor is working with a devel-

ABOVE: This Beadle-designed home in the Phoenix suburb of Paradise Valley is a classic example of the architect's use of concrete, glass and steel in a modular grid. NED SAWYER, ARCHITECT

RIGHT: The Triad, a Beadle apartment building in Phoenix, is known for the tunnel-like courtyard and boardwalk connecting its three units. SCOTT JARSON, AZARCHITECTURE.COM



oper and the city to keep the iconic building intact while incorporating a mixed-use development with a boutique hotel and luxury apartments.

Renovating an iconic building such as the Triangle is a capital-P project. On top of the architectural considerations — which require significant back-and-forth with the city and the preservation office — renovation requires consensus, dozens of permits and, of course, financing. It's a project that, from conception to completion, will take several years.

The Triangle is a win for Haver fans and the preservationist community. But for every historic building saved, many more are demolished. Take the Kon Tiki motor hotel, the First Federal Savings and Loan building and the Cine Capri theater as examples. Each of those iconic Haver structures was knocked down for something new. And while Beadle's Executive Towers (Second and Clarendon avenues), the still-swanky, iconic high-rise condos, have earned historic designation, another Beadle work, Mountain Bell — a 10-story, all-glass office building — wasn't so lucky.

As Stephanie Meeks, then the president and CEO of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, said in 2011, the preservation of properties "reminds us that we are not the first generation of Americans to face economic hardship, environmental decline [or] an educational system that doesn't always seem worthy of our children. We are not the first to wonder about the character of our political discourse, or to worry about America's place in the world. Our ancestors also struggled with these things. They faced great challenges and great opportunities. And they survived, and even thrived. We can, too."

Our efforts to preserve, and our decisions about what is worth preserving, reveal our identity and what we value as a society. We still value Beadle's dogged vision and Haver's emphasis on affordable living. We value the reprieve of shade in a hot climate and neighborhoods whose proximity fosters tightly knit bonds. And we value our history as an integral part of our future. [AH](#)