

Paul Rudolph's
1958 addition
to the Sarasota
High School



ARCHITECTURE

Modern love

Sarasota's rich collection of midcentury architecture is celebrated in a bold design festival

Mention “Florida” and “architecture,” and most people’s thoughts turn to Miami, with its eclectic mix of art deco, Mediterranean Revival and midcentury modern. Sarasota, on the state’s Gulf Coast, is often overlooked. But that could change as a team of architecture enthusiasts bids to give the city’s own dazzling collection of midcentury buildings a place in the sun. Mid-November’s SarasotaMOD Weekend, led by the Sarasota Architectural Foundation (SAF), positions the town as a design mecca by highlighting the incredible heritage that for decades has gone uncelebrated by all but the most dedicated students of architecture.

During the postwar years, the city, long known for its rich arts scene, became home

to a proliferation of experimental modernism known as the Sarasota School of Architecture. “Essentially it was modernist architecture, adapted to the Florida climate,” says SAF board member Christopher Wilson, professor of architecture at the Ringling College of Art + Design. “Florida has sun 335 days of the year; even in January you can go for a dip in the pool before breakfast. The idea was to blur the divide between indoors and outdoors with louvered doors and hanging eaves for shade. Most houses are a series of boxes with windows; these aren’t like that—they’re open, they’re light, they flow.”

The movement was spearheaded by figures such as developer Philip Hiss, who in 1952 commissioned Edward “Tim” Seibert to create a workspace on Lido Key now known as the Hiss Studio. With its clean, geometric lines, glass walls and raised elevation on 14 steel columns, it rapidly developed an iconic status among design aficionados. On opening night of SarasotaMOD, Seibert, now 90, will be honored with SAF’s Art + Architecture Lifetime Achievement Award at a cocktail party at the Hiss Studio.

MIDCENTURY MAGIC



STAY

Designed in 1958 by Victor Lundy, the Warm Mineral Springs Motel has a “champagne glass” roof that lets visitors stargaze from their beds. warmmineralspringsmotel.com



SEE

A tour of Paul Rudolph’s Umbrella House is essential. Afterward, sip martinis at a cocktail party in the Aqua condominium on Golden Gate Point. sarasotamod.com



SHOP

Make a beeline for the Sarasota Design District, in historic Rosemary. Canned Ham Vintage is a one-stop shop for ‘50s clothing and furniture. sarasotadesigndistrict.com



The Sarasota Architectural Foundation created a full-scale replica of Paul Rudolph’s iconic 1952 Walker Guest House at The Ringling museum

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Another giant of the movement is architect Paul Rudolph, who in 1953 built the Umbrella House in Hiss’ new Lido Shores development. Boasting a unique shading system comprised of wooden slats, “it was considered one of the most important homes of that time, alongside Mies van der Rohe’s Farnsworth House in Illinois,” says SAF’s chair, Janet Minker. Among other structures, Rudolph designed two educational facilities in the area, including a 1958 addition to Sarasota High School, the subject of a recent successful preservation campaign by the SAF. The equally inventive architect Victor Lundy, now 94, created the swooping St. Paul Lutheran Church, the South Gate Center and the bold Warm Mineral Springs Motel, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. With its geometric layout and “champagne glass” roof that allows guests to view the night sky, it remains a classic of midcentury design.

Yet it is only recently that Sarasota’s architectural treasures—around 100 homes and other buildings—have been rediscovered, mainly thanks to the efforts of the SAF. The organization launched its SarasotaMOD

Weekend in 2014, inspired by “the granddaddy of them all,” Palm Springs’ Modernism Week. “Ours is a much smaller festival, but it’s remarkable nonetheless,” says Minker, a designer who became involved with the SAF after moving to Lido Shores. “We have nearly ten private homes open to the public just for that weekend, talks by leading architects, tours of significant buildings, and wonderful parties. Architects have been coming to Sarasota for years, but suddenly we’re seeing a huge surge of new visitors, especially younger people, who are enamored with the midcentury modern aesthetic. People are practically genuflecting at the sight of these buildings.” —NIONE MEAKIN sarasotamod.com



Interior of Rudolph’s Umbrella House

TOP LEFT, ALAMY; BOTTOM LEFT, COURTESY OF CANNED HAM VINTAGE; ©ANTON GRASSI/ESTO (3)