

# MICHIGAN MODERN

Ann Arbor Modern Ann Arbor Hills Tour



# ANN ARBOR MODERN

## Ann Arbor Hills Tour



This tour is a sampling of the extensive residential work undertaken by architecture professors at the University of Michigan for their colleagues and other professionals in the Ann Arbor Hills neighborhood. These houses were built between 1950 and 1970 when the booming postwar economy created a growing demand for new housing. In Ann Arbor, this period of building resulted in a remarkable collection of fine architect-designed homes in the Modern style, sometimes called Mid-Century Modern. The tour also includes a house designed by Robert Pond and the first house designed in Ann

Arbor by Michigan architect Alden Dow—a home for his sister Martha Towsley.

The foundation for Modernism in Ann Arbor began when the University of Michigan (U-M) School of Engineering established the Department of Architecture in 1906. Emil Lorch, a national leader in architectural education, was named the department's first chair and served as such until 1936. His influence on American Modernism was profound. In 1923 he brought Finnish architect Eliel Saarinen to the university as an instructor. Saarinen left in 1925 to head the Cranbrook Academy of Art, recognized as one of the world's greatest centers for design. Joseph Hudnut, a student of Lorch, went on to become the first dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Design in 1937 and was responsible for bringing the Bauhaus architect Walter Gropius to America.

In 1930, Lorch hired the Massachusetts Institute of Technology-trained architect George Brigham as a faculty member. Brigham had been living in Pasadena, and through his association with California-based architects his ideas on design began to evolve. More than 30 of his Modern homes can be found throughout the Ann Arbor area.

The U-M architecture school held the first of what became known as the **Ann Arbor Conferences** in 1940. The purpose was to explore the most pressing issues facing architects regarding materials and design. The initial meeting was attended by a stellar list of Modern architects and critics including Ludwig Mies van de Rohe, Walter Gropius, Eliel and Eero Saarinen, Alden Dow, and Lazlo Moholy-Nagy. The **Ann Arbor Conferences** continued annually for a decade, bringing the world's best Modern designers and architects to the U-M campus.

In the 1950s, enrollment at the U-M swelled due to the GI Bill. During this period the school hired two Bauhaus-influenced architects, William Muschenheim and Walter Sanders, and an architect with urban planning experience, Theodore Larsen. The school also began to hire its own graduates as lecturers in order to meet the increased demand for courses. Robert Metcalf, who worked in the design studio of George Brigham, emerged from this alumni group as a talented leader on campus and later in his own private practice. Metcalf later served as the chair and then dean of the U-M School of Architecture from 1968 to 1986.

# Architects

## George Brigham (1889–1977)

While teaching at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, Brigham interacted with noted Modern architects like Richard Neutra and Rudolf Schindler. He began teaching at the University of Michigan in 1930 and continued there for 29 years. His style is characterized by the use of large windows, warm wood finishes, flat roofs with wide eaves, and patios to encourage outdoor living.

## Alden Dow (1904–1983)

The son of the founder of the Dow Chemical Company, Alden Dow apprenticed with Frank Lloyd Wright at Taliesin. He opened his Midland, Michigan, practice in 1934. His home and studio, designed in 1936 with his patented Unit Block system, is a National Historic Landmark. In Ann Arbor, Dow designed the Fleming Administration Building (1966) among other buildings on the University of Michigan campus, as well as city hall and the public library.

## Herb Johe (1914–2005)

A graduate of Carnegie Mellon University, Johe began teaching at the University of Michigan in 1947. He designed several houses in the Ann Arbor area, including his own home in Barton Hills.

## Robert Metcalf (1923–)

A graduate of the University of Michigan (U-M), Metcalf was a head draftsman in George Brigham's office before starting his own practice in 1952. He joined the faculty at U-M in 1955 and served as chair and then dean of architecture from 1968 to 1986, retiring in 1991. Metcalf designed more than 78 houses in Ann Arbor, 15 of which remain in the Ann Arbor Hills neighborhood. His homes are known for their attention to detail and site placement to maximize light and views.

## William Muschenheim (1902–1990)

A New York architect, Muschenheim was a founder of the radical Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) in 1938 to promote Modern design. He came to the University of Michigan in 1950 and retired in 1972. Muschenheim served as colorist for Chicago's Century of Progress in 1933, and his home at 1251 Heather Way once reflected his skill—the doors and trim were all painted a different vibrant color.

## Olencki & Albano (1922–2002)

While studying architecture at the Illinois Institute of Technology, Olencki served as a draftsman for Ludwig Mies van de Rohe. He joined the University of Michigan faculty in 1948 and became dean in 1964. His partner Joseph Albano, a graduate of the Armour Institute and Northwest University in Chicago, also studied with Mies van de Rohe at IIT. He began teaching at the University of Michigan in 1947.

## David Osler (1923–)

An Ann Arbor native, Osler attended the University of Michigan before working with local architect Douglas Loree. He established his own firm in 1958. Osler was known locally for taking a fresh approach to each design rather than conforming to a specific style. His firm received over 22 awards from the Michigan Chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

## Robert Pond (1926–)

Pond was an apprentice of Frank Lloyd Wright's at Taliesin from 1949 to 1954. He took a job in Ann Arbor with George Brigham, but soon left to work with Wright supervising the construction of the Turkel house in Detroit in 1955. Pond later served as an architect for Indiana University in Bloomington, a position he held for 26 years.

## Walter Sanders (1906–1972)

Born in Ann Arbor, Sanders was also a founding member of CIAM. He was a professor at Columbia University from 1930 to 1936 and served as editor of *Architectural Forum* in 1938. He became a lecturer at the University of Michigan in 1947 and served as chair of the architecture department from 1954 to 1964. Sanders was interested in the use of Unistrut, a steel framing system that uses channel locks rather than screws, and incorporated the system into the design of his own home in Ann Arbor's Barton Hills neighborhood.



**1. Robert and Bettie Metcalf Residence**  
1052 Arlington Boulevard  
Robert Metcalf, 1954



**2. Professor and Mrs. Everett Brown Residence**  
2576 Devonshire Road  
Robert Metcalf, 1959



**3. Professor and Mrs. Oscar Eberbach Residence**  
2250 Belmont Road  
Walter Sanders, 1950



**4. Dr. and Mrs. Albert Furstenberg Residence**  
2240 Belmont Road  
George B. Brigham, 1952



**5. Dr. and Mrs. Sidney Hoobler Residence**  
2228 Belmont Road  
Alden Dow, 1950



**6. Professor and Mrs. Franklin Moore Residence**  
2255 Glendaloch Road  
Robert Metcalf, 1955



**7. Dr. and Mrs. William Mann Residence**  
1329 Glendaloch Circle  
Robert Metcalf, 1965 (2nd floor addition and carport by Robert Metcalf)



**8. Mr. and Mrs. Walter Holcomb Residence**  
1336 Glendaloch Circle  
Herbert Johe, 1959



**9. Professor and Mrs. William Muschenheim Residence**  
1251 Heather Way  
William Muschenheim, 1954



**10. Professor and Mrs. Leonard Eaton Residence**  
2601 Heather Way  
Olencki & Albano, 1962



**11. Professor and Mrs. William Willcox Residence**  
2650 Heather Way  
George Brigham, 1954  
(Garage and Entry by William Muschenheim, 1976)



**12. Professor Elmer Gilbert Residence**  
2659 Heather Way  
Robert Metcalf, 1967



**13. Mr. and Mrs. Jacques LeStrang Residence**  
2427 Londonderry Road  
Robert Metcalf, 1959



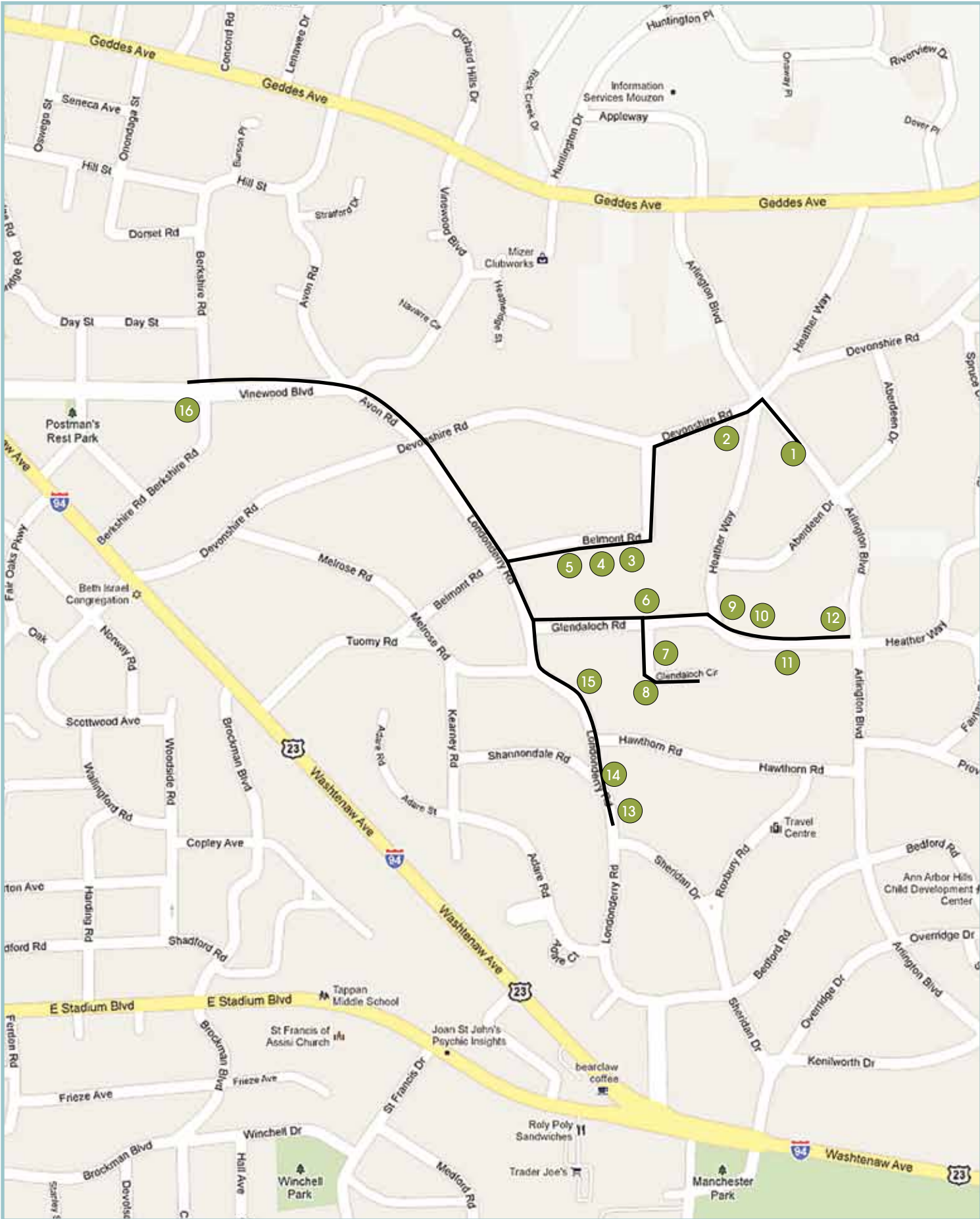
**14. Theodore and Anne Kabza Residence**  
2417 Londonderry Road  
Robert Pond, 1961



**15. Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Buhrman Jr. Residence**  
2347 Londonderry Road  
David Osler, 1959



**16. Harry and Margaret Towsley Residence**  
1000 Berkshire Road  
Alden Dow, 1932



# MICHIGAN MODERN

[michiganmodern.org](http://michiganmodern.org)



For more information on Ann Arbor's Modern resources visit [a2modern.org](http://a2modern.org).

For more information about the Ann Arbor Conference, see Nancy Bartlett's book 'More than a Handsome Box: Education in Architecture at the University of Michigan 1876-1986'

For more information about Washtenaw County's historic sites, visit [preservation.ewashtenaw.org](http://preservation.ewashtenaw.org)

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