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## The recurring allure of mid-century modern architecture

By Paula King



Architect Joseph Esherick designed this mid-century Lafayette home built in 1951. Photo courtesy of Ashley Battersby

With sweeping hillside views and window walls that showcase outdoor living spaces and lush grounds, Lamorinda's mid-century modern homes fit the indoor and outdoor California lifestyle and are more popular than ever.

"I have been lucky to list many of them in recent years," said Lafayette Realtor Ashley Battersby. "The classic design features of that mid-century movement fit well with how we live today."

On any given weekend in Lamorinda, prospective homebuyers, mostly in their 20s and 30s, are rushing to open houses to admire the current mid-century modern finds on the market. This younger generation strongly appreciates the architecture's unique features such as panoramic views, large outdoor wraparound decks, vaulted ceilings, oversized windows, exposed beamed ceilings, built-in shelving, wood siding, open floor plans, spacious dining rooms and light-filled ambiance.

The push for these homes in the market began about three or four years ago, noted Regina Englehart of Better Homes and Gardens in Orinda and Walnut Creek.

"Most of the clients I see like the look and feel of those properties," Englehart said. "They are interested in the lines of mid-century homes and the high ceilings and windows." She added that the newer architecture is now emulating this style.

Orinda real estate agent Laura Abrams said that these young homebuyers often shop for furniture at IKEA and they love the Eames leather lounge chairs of that time period. From 1945 to the 1980s, the mid-century home movement focused on simplicity in architecture paired with a connection to nature.

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"Everyone loves the period of time they were built in," said Abrams. "They are so interesting looking and they are unique in their design. That is what people are looking for."

Since Lamorinda developed and grew during the mid-century modern boom, the community has its fair share of these real estate gems. According to Vlatka Bathgate, a real estate agent with Coldwell Banker in Orinda, these popular homes have character and bigger yards than more modern houses.

"They have lots of details," Bathgate explained. "They are not cookie-cutter homes. Some of them are dated but most of them have been worked on."

Abrams noted that these customized homes have a desired architectural quality that is lacking in the rancho homes of the area. She noted that the average price for one in Lamorinda is \$1.2 million and some of them still need to be renovated.

While Abrams says mid-century homes that have a contemporary feel are popular, she is quick to point out that these minimal homes have their drawbacks for today's homebuyers including limited kitchens, dysfunctional bathrooms and small master bedrooms. She said there can be a problem when floor plans need to be altered significantly, but true mid-century modern enthusiasts are willing to deal with that issue.

"Nothing about them is what modern people want except the style and they are so pretty," Abrams said.

"They (buyers) absolutely still see the challenge of it. They make the sacrifice."

Most of the time, buyers will transform the small kitchens into larger, entertaining kitchens that are mainstays of homes today, Abrams said. Luckily, spacious and lavish dining rooms were the norm in the 1950s, so those mid-century modern rooms fit the current housing trend.

What mid-century modern homes lack in room size, they make up for in scale and proportion, according to Battersby, who said they are very efficient and livable houses. She doesn't see the popularity of these homes fading anytime soon.

"People go nuts over them. They appreciate the original features," she said. "It takes the right buyer. There is a big demand. I think there was a movement back then that was really popular and there is a resurgence right now."



High-beamed ceilings bring the outdoors in. Photo courtesy Regina Englehart



Walls of windows capture fantastic views. Photo courtesy April Matthews



Outdoor decks offer another connection with the outdoors. Photo courtesy Vlatka Bathgate



An overhang shades the front entrance of this mid-century modern home. Photo courtesy April Matthews

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