Abstract

This submission for the CIDA Award for Excellence nominates the comprehensive efforts surrounding Suburban Modernism: The Architecture and Interior Design of Ralph and Mary Jane Fournier – a multi-faceted design exhibition that combined faculty research, student engagement, and community outreach. This two-and-a-half year long process of discovery began with a curious, historical inquiry and culminated in a multi-media exhibition that featured never-before-exhibited creative work, student-produced exhibits, and a faculty-produced short film documentary.

Exhibition Curator’s Statement:

The 1950s Post-World War II Era brought economic expansion, a baby boom, and the need for large-scale residential development to America’s metropolises. The suburban developments that followed exemplified notions of family-centered ideals and within these such developments Modern themes emerged. Low-slung roof lines hugged large residential lots, while large expanses of glass brought the landscape indoors and provided a constant connection between dwellers and their neighborhood. Post and beam construction systems allowed for open floor plans where spaces flowed freely into one another providing visual connection and social interaction among family members.

Amidst this development boom in St. Louis, two young architects, Ralph and Mary Jane Fournier, were at the beginnings of their careers. Only in his second year of architecture school, Ralph Fournier was hired as a drafter in 1949 by developer Burton Duenke. By the close of the 1950s, however, the Fourniers together would see the successful completion of numerous Modern residential projects with Duenke and other local developers.

This exhibition aims to uncover the spirit of this era through the Fourniers’ architectural drawings, photographs, and artifacts. Most of the materials exhibited here have been in storage for nearly six decades and are being publicly exhibited for the first time.
This exhibition was born from an appreciation for timeless design, and from the curious observation that these simple, middle-income, Modern houses so successfully utilized space and light that many of them have remained occupied by singular families for decades. Therein lies the fascination with Mid-Century Modernism in the media – that good design is timeless design, and therefore deserves to be celebrated.

Research and production of the exhibition included:

• Locating, identifying, and mapping hundreds of Fournier-designed houses in the St. Louis area.
• Raising approximately $9,350 in funds to support the exhibition.
• Collecting, researching, and archiving approximately 100 architectural drawings of the Fourniers’ 1950s designs.
• Collecting and archiving the complete contents of 14 sketch books.
• Teaching and mentoring several undergraduate research projects, including student-produced films, precedent research case studies, and construction of a full-scale modular wall panel.
• Authoring articles and various exhibition materials, including a published exhibition catalog and supporting informational signage.
• Writing, editing, and directing a short-film documentary on the life and works of Ralph Fournier. The short-film documentary may be viewed at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FP7UUKOITLw.
• Curating and designing the exhibition.

More information on this project may be viewed at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJF5dbD__FU.
Suburban Modernism

[covers and select spreads from exhibition companion booklet]
During the spring semester of 2013, students from the “Introduction to Digital Media” course were assigned the research project of field-measuring and producing digital drawings and models of five residences designed by Ralph and Mary Jane Fournier. The resulting student-produced design work was exhibited within Suburban Modernism.
To study and recreate the qualities of a Mid-Century Modern house designed by Ralph Fournier, and understand the intent behind his design decisions to bring the house and its qualities to life for a passionate audience.

Concept:

Diagrams

- Sliding Doors Installed to Allow Natural Light
- Original Wood Paneling
- Extension of Kitchen Cabinets
- Living Room Custom Windows

Section A

Section B

Suburban Modernism: The Architecture and Interior Design of Ralph & Mary Jane Fournier. CIDA Award for Excellence. page 5 of 22
“Digital Drawings and Digital Models of Five Fournier Residences”
[undergraduate research projects, exhibited with Suburban Modernism]
“Digital Drawings and Digital Models of Five Fournier Residences”
[undergraduate research projects, exhibited with Suburban Modernism]
During the fall semester of 2013, junior-level interior design students were assigned the project of designing and constructing a replica of a full-scale modular wall panel often used in the construction of Fournier-designed houses. The students developed design proposals for this exhibit component — which included architectural graphics, models, and short films that communicated the construction systems — and ultimately constructed a full-scale modular panel. The resulting student-produced drawings, films, models, and full-scale panel were exhibited with *Suburban Modernism*. 
“Modular Wall Panel & Supporting Graphics”
[undergraduate research projects, exhibited with Suburban Modernism]
“Modular Wall Panel & Supporting Graphics”
(exhibited with Suburban Modernism)
“Modular Wall Panel & Supporting Graphics”
[undergraduate research project, axonometric drawing exhibited with Suburban Modernism]

WALL PANEL AXONOMETRIC
"Modular Wall Panel & Supporting Graphics"
[undergraduate research project, animated film exhibited with Suburban Modernism]
“Modular Wall Panel & Supporting Graphics”
[undergraduate research project, animated film exhibited with Suburban Modernism]
A Conversation with Architect Ralph Fournier
[film production, seventeen-minute documentary film may be viewed in its entirety at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FP7UUK0ITLw]
A Conversation with Architect Ralph Fournier

[seventeen-minute documentary film may be viewed in its entirety at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FP7UUK0ITLw]
The beginning of their careers. Only in his second year of architecture school, Ralph Fournier was hired as a drafter in 1949 by developer Burton Duenke. By the close of the 1950s, however, the Fourniers' work had expanded beyond St. Louis, two young architects, Ralph Fournier and Mary Jane Fournier, were designing in the midwestern United States. Amidst this development boom in the 1950s, but perhaps it is these earliest works produced by the Fourniers that these simple, middle-income, Modernist interiors seen on popular television shows, or in the pages of architectural magazines, were born from an appreciation for timeless design, and therefore deserves the attention of scholars and students. The fascination with Mid-Century Modernism in the media – that good design is typically in reference to the Modern movement, from the curious observation of the suburban developments that followed the economic expansion, a baby boom, and the coincidences have little to do with the timing of this exhibit. This exhibit aims to uncover the spirit of this era as Duenke's personal residence some years later. Despite the broad range of scales, levels of finish, and budgets of the Fourniers' works during a very specific period of time. The Fourniers' works exhibited here are a sampling of the materials exhibited here are drawings, photographs, and artifacts. The devoted spirit of all the Fourniers' works during a very specific period of time. The Fourniers' works exhibited here are a sampling of the materials exhibited here are drawings, photographs, and artifacts. The devoted spirit of all the dwellers that these simple, middle-income, Modernist interiors seen on popular television shows, or in the pages of architectural magazines, were born from an appreciation for timeless design, and therefore deserves the attention of scholars and students. The fascination with Mid-Century Modernism in the media – that good design is typically in reference to the Modern movement, from the curious observation of the suburban developments that followed the economic expansion, a baby boom, and the coincidences have little to do with the timing of this exhibit. This exhibit aims to uncover the spirit of this era as Duenke's personal residence some years later. Despite the broad range of scales, levels of finish, and budgets of the Fourniers' works during a very specific period of time. The Fourniers' works exhibited here are a sampling of the materials exhibited here are drawings, photographs, and artifacts. The devoted spirit of all the dwellers that these simple, middle-income, Modernist interiors seen on popular television shows, or in the pages of architectural magazines, were born from an appreciation for timeless design, and therefore deserves the attention of scholars and students. The fascination with Mid-Century Modernism in the media – that good design is typically in reference to the Modern movement, from the curious observation of the suburban developments that followed the economic expansion, a baby boom, and the coincidences have little to do with the timing of this exhibit. This exhibit aims to uncover the spirit of this era as Duenke's personal residence some years later. Despite the broad range of scales, levels of finish, and budgets of the Fourniers' works during a very specific period of time. The Fourniers' works exhibited here are a sampling of the materials exhibited here are drawings, photographs, and artifacts. The devoted spirit of all the dwellers that these simple, middle-income, Modernist interiors seen on popular television shows, or in the pages of architectural magazines, were born from an appreciation for timeless design, and therefore deserves the attention of scholars and students. The fascination with Mid-Century Modernism in the media – that good design...
Suburban Modernism
[photographs of installed exhibition]
Suburban Modernism
[photographs of opening reception]
Suburban Modernism
[photographs of opening reception]
Recognition and Critical Acclaim

The local, regional, and national recognition and critical acclaim for Suburban Modernism: The Architecture and Interior Design of Ralph & Mary Jane Fournier has been overwhelmingly positive and complimentary. Below is an abbreviated sampling of the community response to Suburban Modernism.

From Marie Walker, Mr. Fournier’s daughter, to Jessica Senne:
“It was a pleasure meeting you last week at the Suburban Modernism opening. You and your team did a fantastic job and I want you to know how impressed my father, my family and I are with the exhibit! You have opened a window to my parents’ work that I knew very little about and given my sons an opportunity to learn about their grandparents’ careers at this time when they are discerning theirs! Thank you for that gift!”

From Anne Lewis, resident of Fournier-designed house, to Jessica Senne:
“It’s spectacular, and an enormous quantity of work you accomplished…it’s just really, really, wow.”

From Anne Lewis, resident of Fournier-designed house, to Mr. Fournier himself:
“I visited the show on Monday and will of course attend [the reception] Thursday. WOW. You can REALLY draw and I am speaking of the aerial oblique architectural drawings specifically. You are a Rock Star. Thus I live in a house by a Rock Star. Happy on a daily basis even after 18 years of residency.”

From Corey Lawson, resident of Fournier-designed house, to Jessica Senne:
“Wow! What a great event and turn out. Lots to be proud of! Congratulations again!”

From John Berendzen, AIA, Principal Architect at Fox Architects and AIA Scholarship Fund Trustee:
“As a trustee of the AIA St. Louis Scholarship Fund I was pleased to assist in funding Suburban Modernism: The Architecture [and Interior Design] of Ralph and Mary Jane Fournier. This exhibit is an excellent investment of our scholarship resources.”

From Carolyn Toft, former Executive Director of Landmarks Association of St. Louis, to Jessica Senne:
“Congratulations on mounting a fabulous exhibit! It would be great if it could travel to the WU School of Architecture, especially since both husband and wife were graduates.”

From William Lamb, senior editor at Dwell Magazine, and author of exhibit article:
“I fell in love with [Ralph Fournier’s] stuff even though I hadn’t heard of him before stumbling across a notice about the exhibit, so I really had a good time putting it together. It looks like a wonderful exhibit… I’ve been encouraging locals to check it out!”
Recognition and Critical Acclaim, continued

From John C. Guenther, American Institute of Architects Fellow, to Jessica Senne:
“Congratulations to you and all involved in a very nice exhibition. Thank you for taking on the responsibilities as Curator. Well done!”

From Mary Ellen Finch, Vice President of Academic Affairs, Maryville University, to Jessica Senne:
“I really enjoyed the exhibit last night… I had to leave just as they were setting up. Kathy L. said there was a good sized crowd and a number of people from off campus—which is good. I think I’m stuck in the 50s as I really love some of those houses!!!!!”

From Candace Chambers, Former Dean, College of Arts & Sciences, Maryville University to Jessica Senne [in reference to the possible acquisition of the Fournier collection]:
“… What an exciting turn of events! Your opening, and the Fournier family is being courted by universities to be the home of the collection! Congratulations, that is really saying something impressive about the collection that you put together!”

From Alden Craddock, Associate Vice President, Director of the Center for Civic Engagement and Democracy, to Jessica Senne:
“I was out of town when you had the exhibit opening for Suburban Modernism but stopped over the other day to see it on my own after I returned. I especially liked the different layers of the exhibit that you’ve put together. Having the video, the student examples of construction materials along with pictures, drawings and artwork all in one space really gave me an appreciation of Fournier’s work. I also couldn’t help but think how fun it must have been for the students to be involved in learning about his work and constructing the exhibit. What a terrific way to involve our students in exploring a local architect and his work. Congratulations on a great exhibit and thanks for working so hard to share it with [Maryville’s] students and campus.”
Suburban Modernism, featured in atomic ranch [recognition and critical acclaim]
neighbors. The preservationist group Modern STL, which organized a
with structures whose scale and style differ drastically from their
Hills neighborhood have been demolished in recent years and replaced
acre site overlooking the Missouri River in Chesterfield.
partnership with the Fourniers reached its apex when he commissioned
Harwood Hills in Des Peres. The houses in these later developments were
The success of the Ridgewood subdivision led to others—Craig Woods
Ridgewood, the subdivision that Ralph and Mary Jane Fournier designed
$14,400 in 1953, or about $125,500 in today's dollars.
The houses were marketed to middle-class families; one could be had for
prefabricated wall panels manufactured by Modular Homes of Kirkwood.
Louis. It was—and remains—with post-and-beam structures
scale neighborhood of affordable, modern houses resulted in the
modern aesthetic. Duenke and the Fourniers' first effort to design a large-
the need for low-cost suburban housing and was an early adopter of the
for a part-time drafting position in Duenke's office. Duenke recognized
founded a successful firm, Fournier Inc. Architects.
and, in 1948, moved to St. Louis and enrolled at Washington University. It
extension campus at Fort Devens. He decided to study architecture instead
service in France with the Army Air Forces when he entered the
Mary Jane Fournier "wants to see projects where they belong—squarely
at the center of the movement that brought modern design to America's
suburbs in the boom years that followed World War II.
The exhibition's curator, Jessica Senne, lives in a Fournier house—one of
and his wife, Mary Jane, designed for the subdivision of the same name in
Crestwood, Missouri, near St. Louis. Image courtesy of Maryville
A Ralph Fournier sketch of the "Ridgewood House," a prototype that he
wrote by: dwell > Post
MEETS NEW BEAUX
BENEFIT OF A SMALL ENTRANCE TO THE MODERN WORLD. JOIN US AS WE
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THE ARCHITECTURE OF ADLER &...
Suburban Modernism, reviewed by St. Louis Public Radio
[article may be viewed in its entirety at: http://news.stlpublicradio.org/post/reflection-maryville-exhibit-showcases-mid-century-modern-pioneers/#stream/0]

Reflection: Maryville Exhibit Showcases Mid-Century Modern Pioneers
By ROBERT W. DUFFY
As part of an enormous mid-1960s exhibition to the architecture of the middle of the 20th century in St. Louis before current interest in it took hold. Prominent mid-century landscape architect and, or were, part of our regional consciousness: the Saarinen Arch, certainly, Samuel Maier's Claydon Farnam House at Millerdon, the Turner's complex at Grand Boulevard, with the space-age former Phillips 66 station enjoying new life as a barbeque and Chiophoe restaurant, and well, recently, Edward Donald Stone's mid-1940s Beach Stadium.

Nonetheless, many who are more than a bit more of the age of the 1960s are perhaps aware of the influx of the influx of buildings dating from the 1940s, 50s and 60s, and the danger many of them face in an age of gigantic housing crunch. This modernist assembly is robust and exciting and stunningly diverse, and taking pleasure in it is part of an aesthetic awakening.

Some of the names of the architects and designers are familiar: Berndsen, for example, endorses a broad band and a gold-standard Modernist vocabulary word. Other architects are bold-faced in a rich glossary of strength and accomplishment and enduring quality.

Thanks to the work of architect Jessica Senne, assistant professor of interior design at Maryville University, another set of names have been added to the distinguished list. They are Ralph and Mary Jane Fournier, both graduates of the Washington University School of Architecture and both architects of vision. What Bill Bernero did for well-fumed homes the Fourniers did for families of more modest means who, apparently, appreciated dwellings of style and authenticity. Senne has organized an exceptional exhibit of their work, on display in Maryville University's Morton J. May Foundation Gallery through Feb. 28.

Modernist in Crestwood
The Fourniers worked in private association with St. Louis developer Burton Duenke, who commissioned modernist houses that provided flexible space for the command lives of families, and cozy, intimate spaces for privacy and for sleeping.

Ralph Fournier, now in his 80s, recalled that only in his association with Duenke, the houses were "a tremendous hit with homebuyers in the housing-crisis post-World War II environment. A three-bedroom, hall-and-a-half, Fournier-designed, Burton Duenke home sold in the early signs for Iraq war."

In a telephone interview, Ralph Fournier said when the modernist work for Duenke began he immediately got rid of trusses, creating a lower-pitch, on-member roof system. "We also drew to the modernist use of natural materials and the ample natural light in our houses. The fireplace is clad in sandstone and wood paneling, and both bring warmth and texture to the ceiling and exciting and strikingly diverse, and taking pleasure in it is part of an aesthetic awakening.

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Reflection

St. Louis on the Air
A single voice. A single idea. A single voice.

By observing the world of the Fourniers in mid-century, and of the Sennes today, we learn lessons about economy and taste. Altogether, this sense of thrift and appreciation of the rich legacy of modernist design presents a rebuke to the vulgar excesses and debasements of the Millennium anti-aesthetic. The Fourniers, Burton Duenke and the Sennes speak an architectural language that celebrates beauty, efficiency and responsibility, and offer us a sensibility worth examining as we move forward in a world in which resources of all sorts diminish dramatically every single day.
Suburban Modernism, featured in LandmarksLetter
[recognition and critical acclaim]

Modern Collaboration: Select Projects by Ralph & Mary Jane Fournier and Burton Duemcke

Suburban Modernism: The Architecture and Interior Design of Ralph & Mary Jane Fournier and Burton Duemcke

Modern Collaboration, continued from cover >>

The houses, modular panels were manufactured locally by this company—Modular Homes, and were already designed to be shipped anywhere within a 300-mile radius. The houses' unique, modular system of components allowed for flexible configurations, economical construction, and open, free-flowing floor plans that could be reconfigured on every property.

The Ridgewood house's open floor plan reflected Fournier's ideas of modern, functional habits and admitted by providing spaces designed to encroach social interaction. High-quality goals of the interior, contextual with landscaping, low-profile rooflines, and treated the houses in the topography. Full-height walls, in the eastern area was only wider than the adjoined kitchen and dining area, but connected to the interior with the landscape by providing a adjacent backyard in the seasons changed through the year.

In contrast to the open public spaces of the Ridgewood House, Fournier designed the private area of the house, where smaller, more intimate living areas, emphasized the more natural light, and the bedrooms adjacent to receive less. The smaller windows and plain and other materials are reinterpreted in the smaller, shadowed bedrooms, and the kitchens are appropriately tailored to these areas at the "silent side of the house." The high quality of work provided by the Ridgewood house, the houses were modeled in smaller, more intimate, and in 1953 one could purchase a three-bedroom, one-car, and a four-bedroom house for nearly $14,400.

Following the success of the Ridgewood and the development, Ralph and Mary Jane Fournier together collaborated well—Burton Duemcke on a number of other residential developments, including the subdivisions in Kansas City, Missouri, and the neighboring town, located in Lawrence and Daytona Beach, Florida. Architecture in these developments featured Modernist elements, such as glass and steel, and Duemcke's signature use of materials, including steel framing and post-and-beam structural systems, but generally involved more generous floor space and higher levels of interior finish. These houses also included lower-grade basements in favor of labor-grade construction, a strategy employed in the interest of maintaining affordable price points.

Ralph Fournier and Burton Duemcke, a married couple in their late 30s, formed the Duemcke & Fournier Partnership. For the next several years, they created many of the most architecturally significant residential projects in the Midwest, including the Suburban Modernism series, which became known as "the Suburban Modern" series, and their work became highly influential in the mid-20th century. Their collaboration lasted until the early 1960s, when Fournier left to pursue other opportunities. Duemcke continued to work independently until his retirement in the early 1970s.