

jr. writer

HISTORY OF MODERN ARCHITECTURE IN TRAVIS HEIGHTS AN INTERVIEW WITH TRAVIS HEIGHTS WENDY TODD

Article by Travis Heights Resident, Wyatt Talbot



Since the 1920's the Travis Heights neighborhood has always been a growing community - especially the homes.

Up one after the next for decades. The Travis Heights neighborhood started seeing modern architecture in the early 2000's with more examples being built each year. Neighborhood design advocate, as well as South River City Citizens representative to the South Central Waterfront Advisory Board, and also District 9 representative to the Austin Public Library Commission, Wendy Todd shared her thoughts on the subject with me, Wyatt Talbot, a Travis Heights Elementary photojournalism student. Todd formally defines modern architecture as, "A design era that arose between World War I and World War II with the International Style in architecture that favors transparency and light as a means for social reform." Modern Architecture is fairly recognizable. Todd shares some characteristics, including the use of industrial materials -- steel, concrete, and glass -- to make planes and volumes rather than designing a solid mass. Todd explains, "My idea of modern usually has a flat roof rather than a gable or peak. The interiors contain expansive spaces rather than defined rooms through doorways."

Before my brother and I were born, about ten to fifteen years ago South Congress Avenue began to be redeveloped with restaurants, shopping, and hotels. As a result, modest houses were situated on increasingly more valuable property. Todd hypothesizes that "a new owner figured that unless the existing house was architecturally significant or suited to their lifestyle, why not rebuild rather than add onto or renovate." At that time Travis Heights began seeing larger contemporary houses. In the Travis Heights neighborhood, there are many houses that we think of as modern or contemporary but some of them are a mix of modern and traditional architecture known as Eclecticism or pastiche, which is a very common type of architecture in the Travis Heights neighborhood.

I think the concept of modern is interesting to ponder. As Todd explains, what we think of as traditional buildings were actually recognized as modern for their time. "There were buildings that could be considered 'modern' or 'contemporary' when we moved here twenty-five years ago." For example, my school Travis Heights Elementary was built in 1939 on



the tree-lined banks of Blunn Creek. The school building housed only six classrooms, an office, lounge, conference room, and toilets. In a time where many still used outhouses, toilets were a modern amenity.

So observe examples of modern architecture, old and new, as you take a stroll in the neighborhood of Travis Heights, and understand it is a matter of perspective. On my stroll, I spotted some favorite modern houses and here they are. Also, I want to give a special thanks to Wendy Todd for inspiring me and helping me tremendously. But don't forget to enjoy your toilet.