

# THE SHIP OF STATE

STARRY-EYED DREAMERS AND DESIGN BUFFS ALIKE WILL ADORE THIS HOME.

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For decades, so-called professionals have tried to convince us that in the practice of home-building, there's little room for the self-taught auteur, the master of minutiae, the coveter of details. There's safety in mass-produced, team-designed housing. If you do hire a brilliant architect in solo practice, they'll tell you, don't let him get out of line, lest one's home offend—or lose resale value.

Modernist architect Harris Armstrong, who created this four-bedroom, 3½-bath, 2,400-square-foot gem in Oakland's Mary Queen of Peace parish, would've begged to differ.

Mr. Armstrong is now known—yea, revered—in many circles for the dazzlingly different forms of his residences. He was a dreamer—and here, in particular, his dreams were realized to their fullest. This was Harris Armstrong's own home, built in 1938 for him and his wife, Louise. Its current owners, gallerist Ellen Curlee and her husband, Durb, have had its rooms touched up or renovated by the Lawrence Group, the stairway doors removed so the floors flow into one another. But the home's ethos is Armstrong's, from the sparkling, bubble-filled glass doorknobs upstairs to the playfully oversized

skeleton key latching the front door—and the colorful tile sundial just outside of it. Even the master bedroom, redone by the Lawrence Group “to feel like a state room in those old Art Deco ships,” says Mrs. Curlee, bears the imprimatur of Armstrong's collaborator on the Magic Chef Building, Isamu Noguchi. (Though it offers amenities few ships have even now: white-mahogany cabinetry, a heated bathroom floor, a Jacuzzi tub, an overhead heat lamp, built-in speakers...)

Expressing his deep admiration for Frank Lloyd Wright's site-specific designs, Mr. Armstrong built in yards of shelving and wood paneling. The Curlees mirrored this in their paneled renovations of the master bedroom and main-floor office (Armstrong's, originally), as well as the addition of wall-lining bookshelves and wine racks downstairs. Windows in the living room, sun porch, and master bedroom provide multiple views, screened by trees, of Westborough Country Club's undulating grounds and the home's own swimming pool.

“It's very romantic,” says Mrs. Curlee. Not to mention whimsical and mysterious, in ways only a custom-built home can be. —MARGARET BAUER



EXTERIOR PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF THE CURLEES, KITCHEN PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALISE O'BRIEN



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