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Ranch Houses in Georgia: A Guide to House Types (Sub-Types)



May 2010

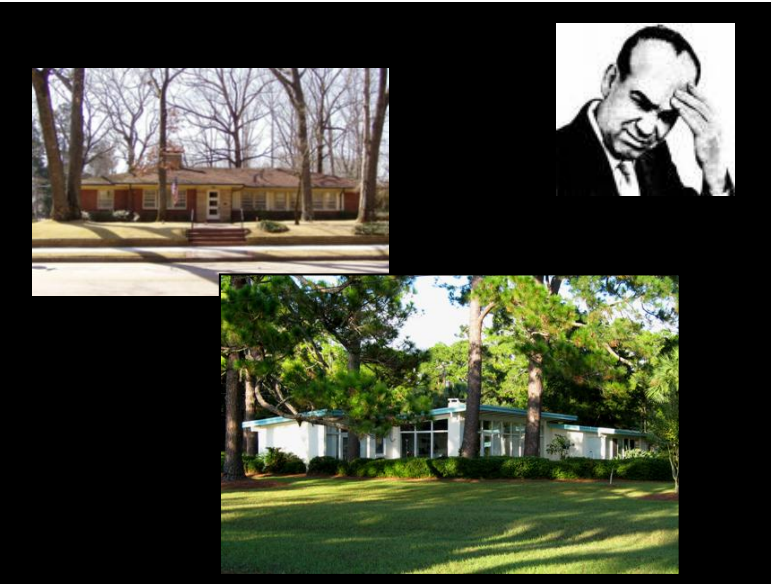
Richard Cloues, Ph.D.

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Ranch Houses in Georgia come in a wide variety – as seen here in these pictures of Ranch Houses in just one small community.

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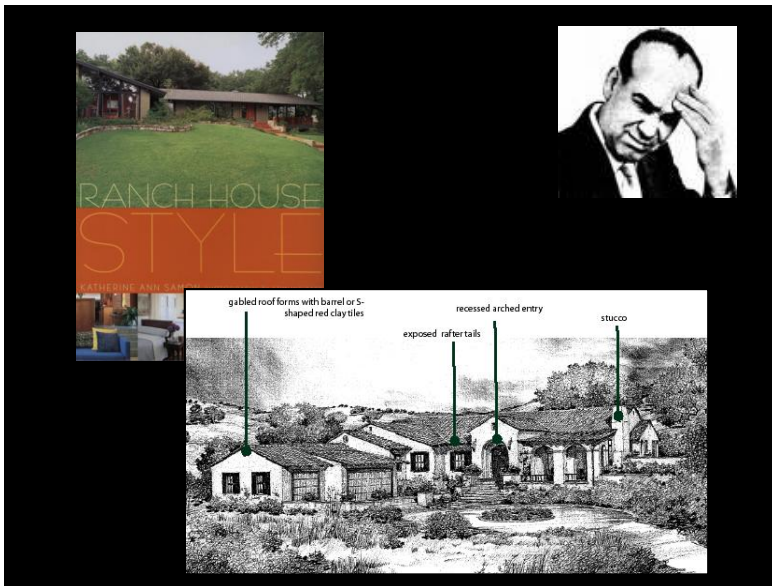
Their diversity is extreme -- more so, perhaps, than any other kind of historic house -- and sometimes perplexing.

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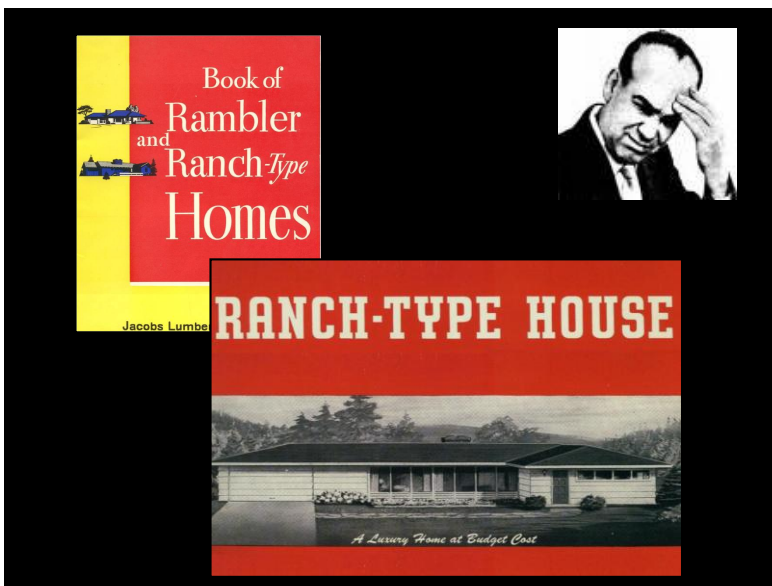
And yet there are recurring patterns of *underlying forms* as well as *outward appearances*.

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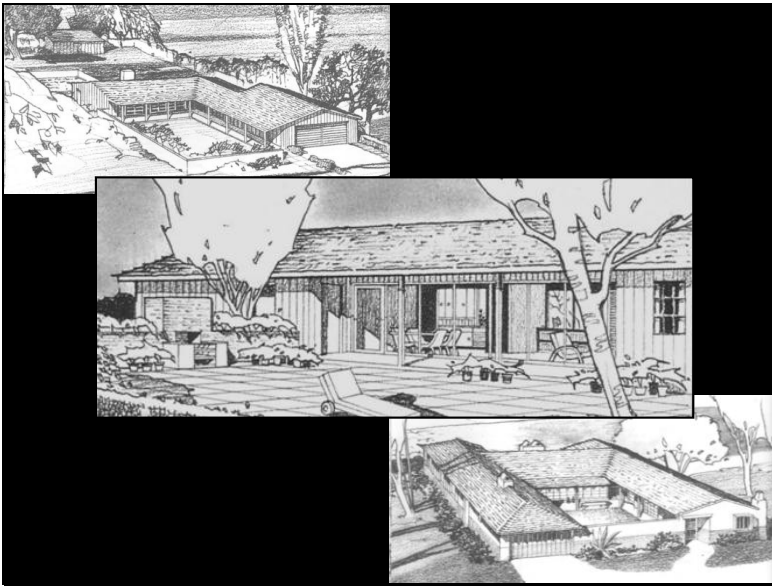
The *outward appearances* are indicative of different architectural styles.

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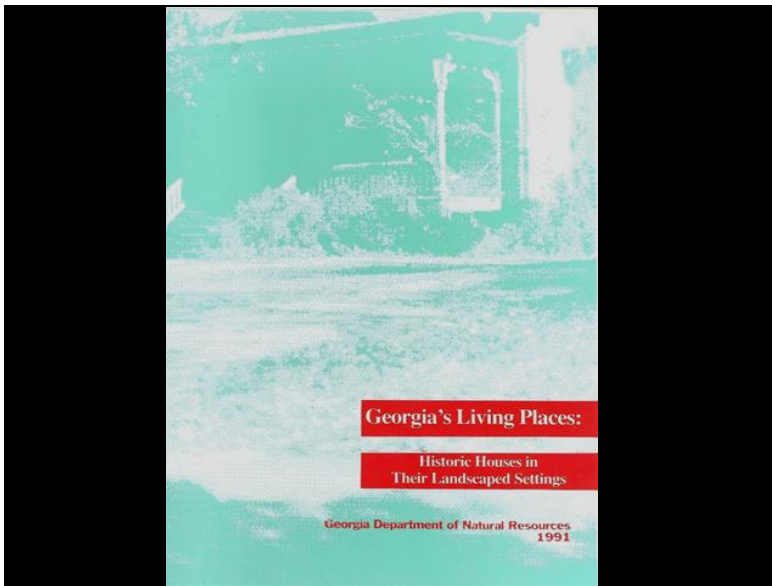
The *underlying forms* of Ranch Houses reveal something quite different: variations on the basic Ranch House type that might be considered *sub-types*.

7



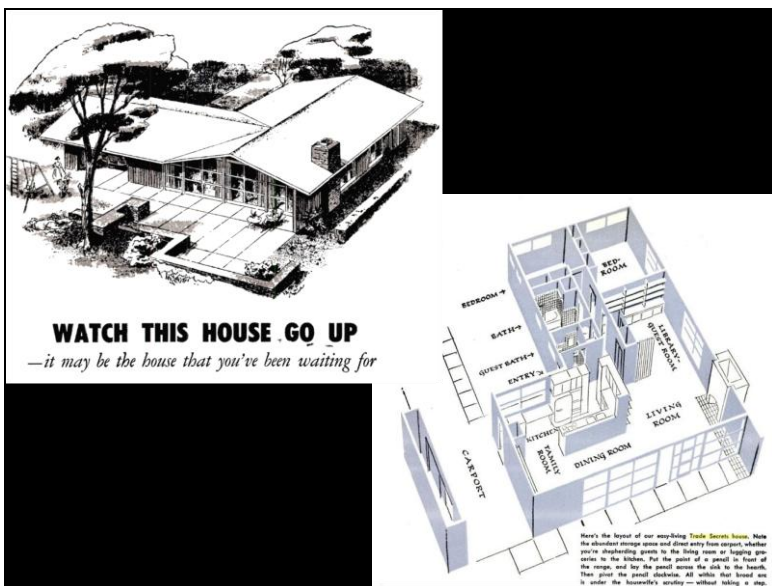
This presentation is about house types -- more precisely, Ranch House sub-types. (A complementary presentation on our website discusses the various architectural styles of Ranch Houses in Georgia.)

8



It builds upon the historic house types first identified in our 1991 *Georgia's Living Places* report.

9

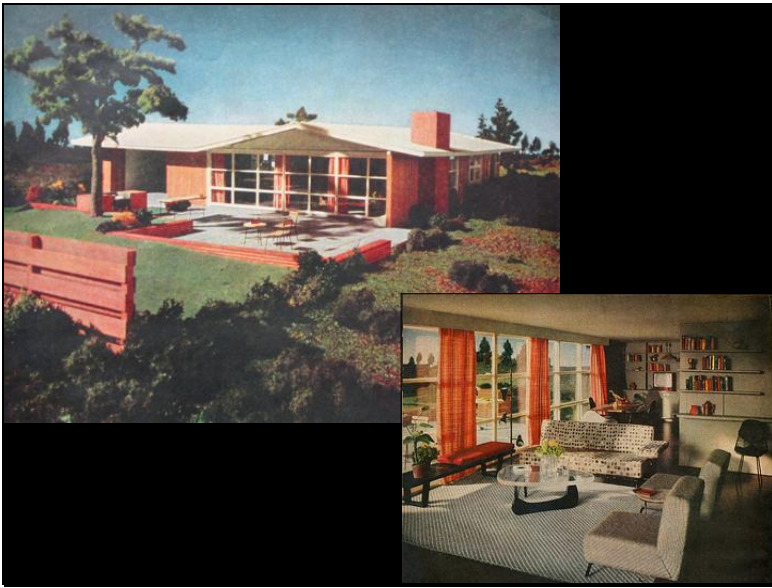


In that report, house types were defined by a seemingly simple formula:

House Type equals Plan (or plan-shape) plus Height (or mass-form).

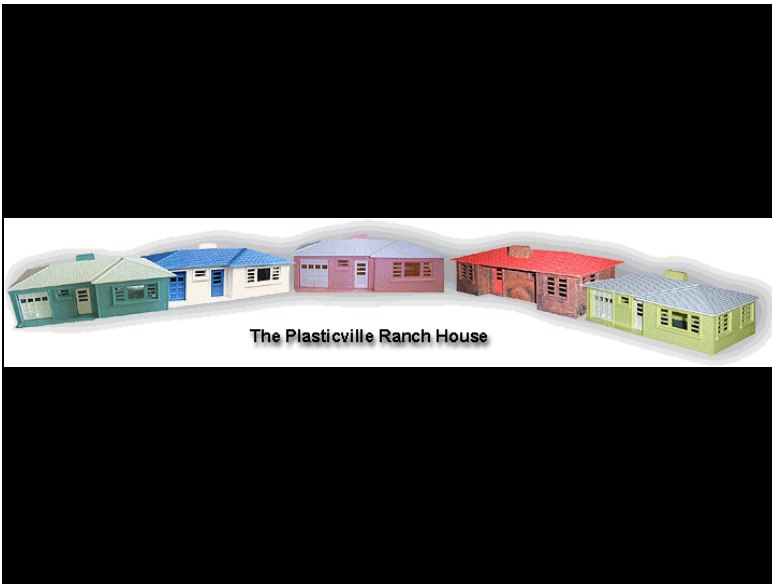
A house type is sometimes called a *plan-form*.

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This concept of house type is based on distinctive patterns of interior spaces and exterior forms rather than stylistic conventions.

11



Sub-types were defined as *variations* on fundamentally similar concepts of interior plans and exterior massing.

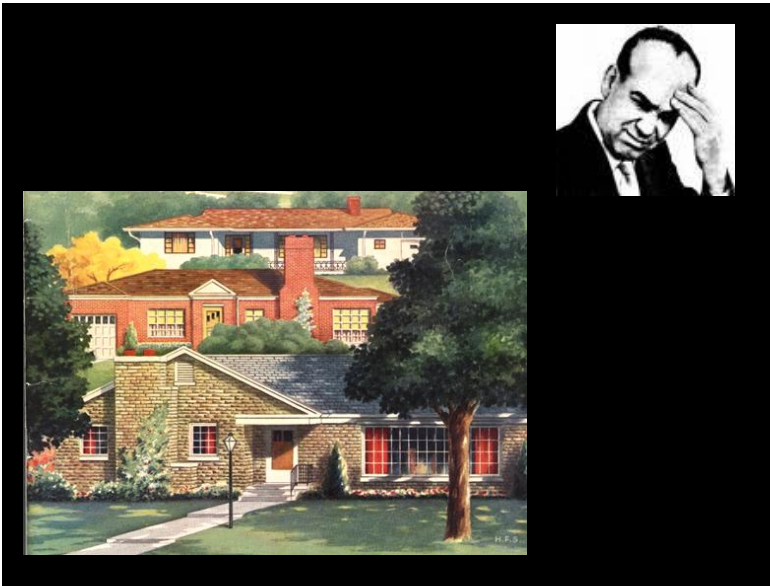
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House types are especially useful when dealing with houses whose forms and floor plans rather than stylistic conventions are the sole or principal character-defining features. The architectural character of these houses literally derives from their combinations of plans and forms.



The principal benefit of using sub-types is that they allow us to break up large groups of otherwise similar houses into smaller, more precisely defined groups.



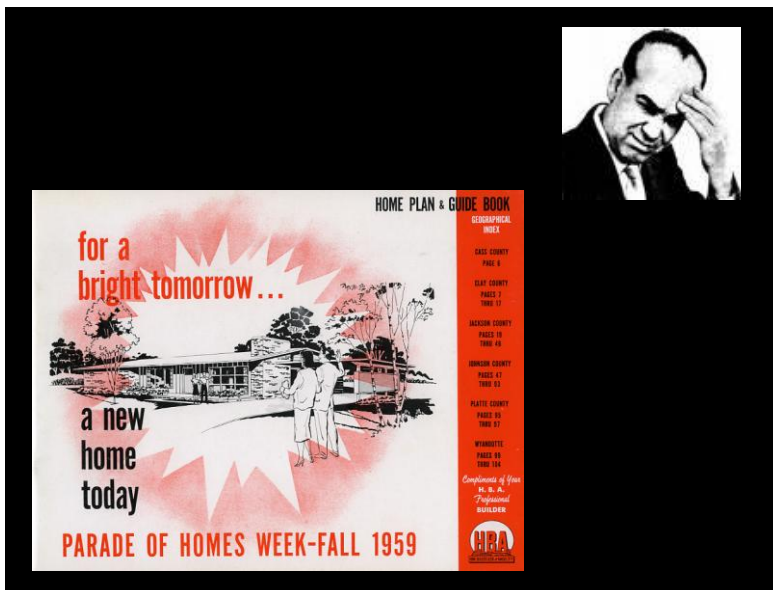
Sub-types can be useful in working with Ranch Houses in three different ways:

(1) *descriptive* -- as verbal shortcuts to describe particular Ranch Houses;

(2) *analytical* -- as a basis for classifying Ranch Houses and comparing or contrasting them with others; and

(3) *evaluative* -- as a more refined frame of reference for evaluating the architectural significance of individual Ranch Houses.

15



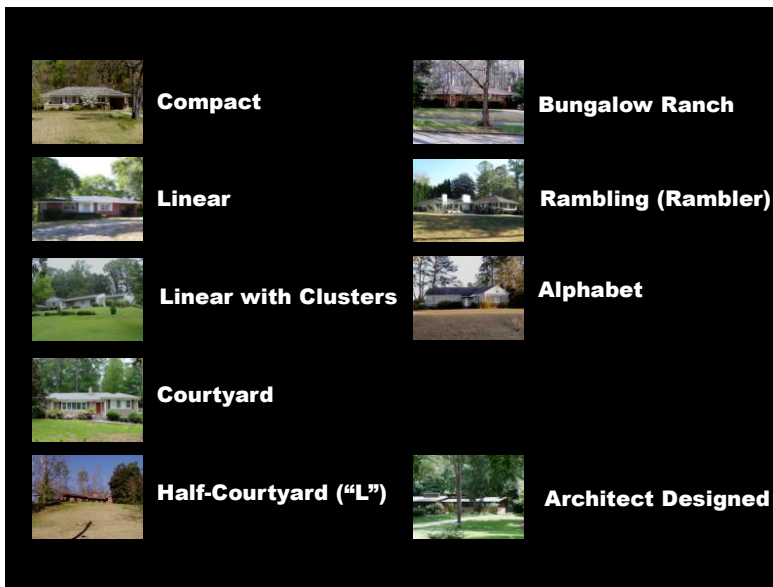
The great *danger* in sub-types is that when working with such varied buildings as Ranch Houses we may inadvertently try to impose an order on them where it doesn't always exist, and we may lose sight of the fact that, in the final analysis, they are all still "ranch type" houses even if they can't be pigeonholed into sub-types.

16



So having said all that, Ranch Houses in Georgia seem to lend themselves to categorizing by sub-types, so let's get our Ranch House identification kit and take a look at them in this way.

17



Based on our current knowledge, there appear to be eight major ranch-house *sub-types* in Georgia -- eight distinct variations of the overall form and plan of the ranch-house type -- and one idiosyncratic manifestation.

18



Compact

19



The *Compact Ranch House* is a *small, simple (or simply massed)* Ranch House.

20



Proportionally, it is rectangular, but barely so, *almost square*.

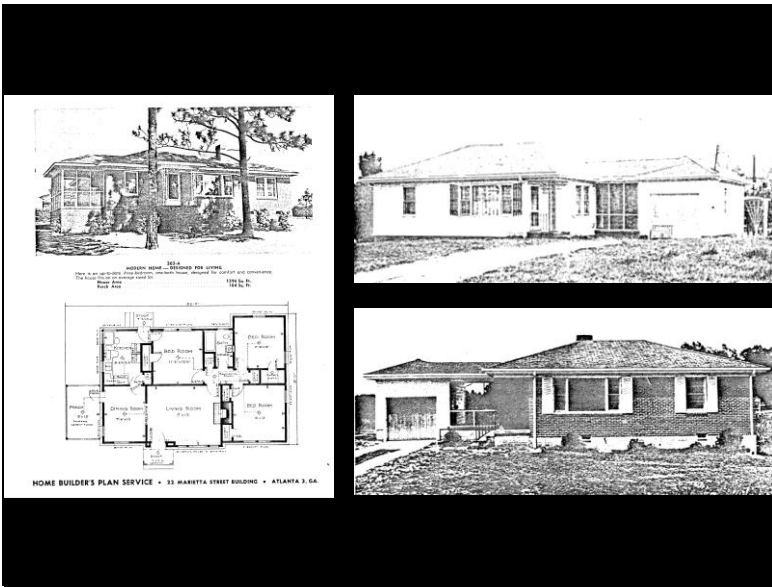
As a loose rule of thumb, it has a front-to-side ratio of less than 2:1 (i.e., the length of the front of the house is less than twice the length of the sides of the house).

21



Historically, the compact Ranch House dates back to the earliest days of the new Ranch House -- to the mid-1930s in California when Cliff May and others were designing alternatives to their more expansive estate Ranch Houses.

22



In Atlanta, in 1948, the Home Builders Plan Service published plans for several Compact Ranch Houses.

23



The smallest Compact Ranch Houses in Georgia are simple short rectangular forms under a simple roof, hipped in this case ...

24



And gabled, in this case.

25

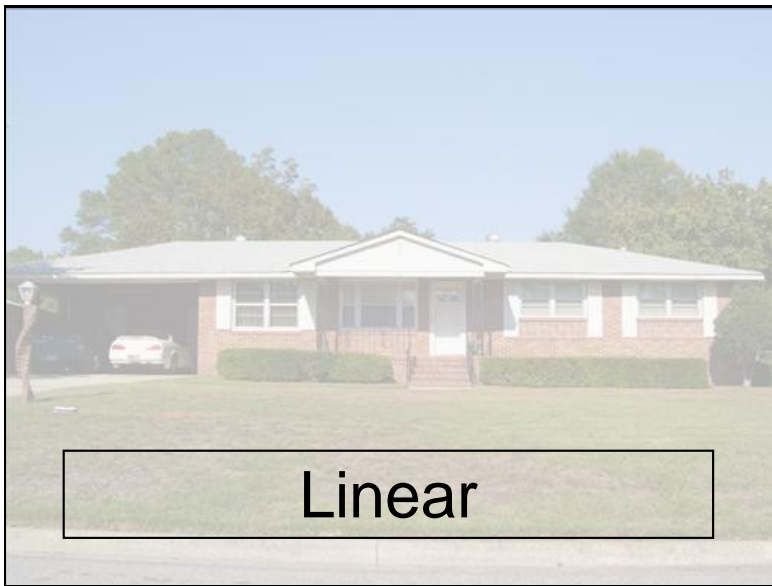


Slightly larger examples may have integrated carports, which make them look longer, and lower.

26



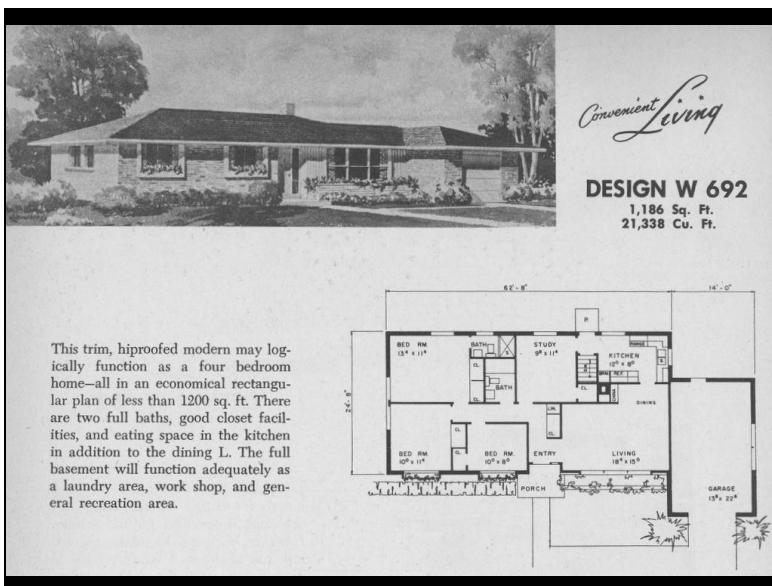
Leila Ross Wilburn, an Atlanta architect, included compact Ranch Houses in her post-World War II plan books.



Linear



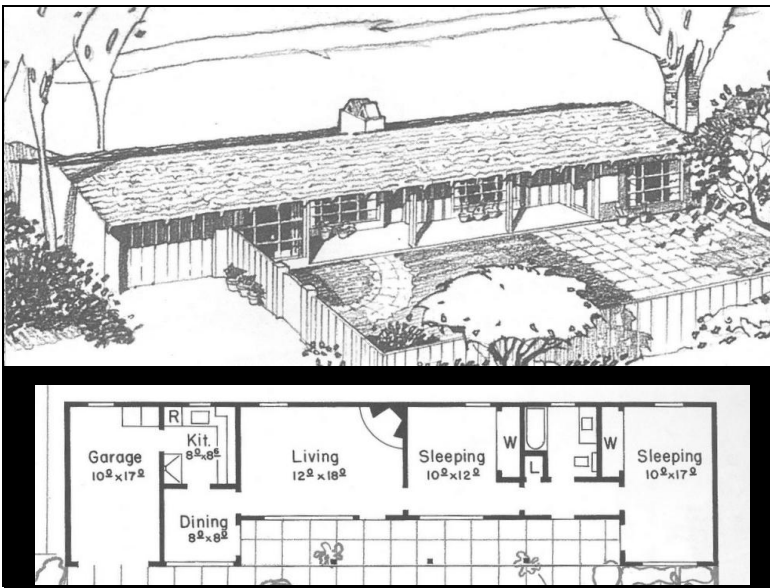
The *Linear* Ranch House is another *simply massed* Ranch House, similar to the Compact Ranch House, but *longer*, and therefore seemingly *lower* in its form.



The Linear Ranch House is *clearly rectangular* in form, with a front-to-side ratio of at least 2:1 (i.e., the front is at least twice as long as the sides).

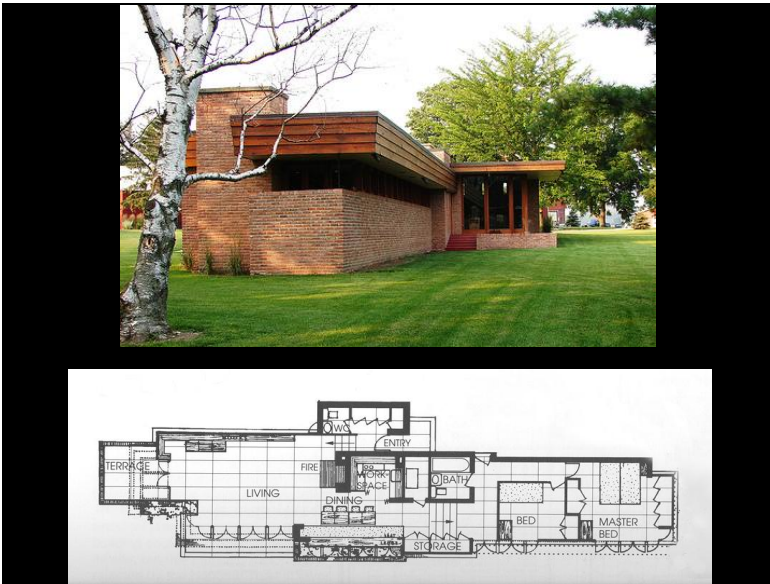
It may have slightly projecting and/or recessed elements, such as front entries or carports, but the *overall effect* is that of a long, narrow, linear form.

30



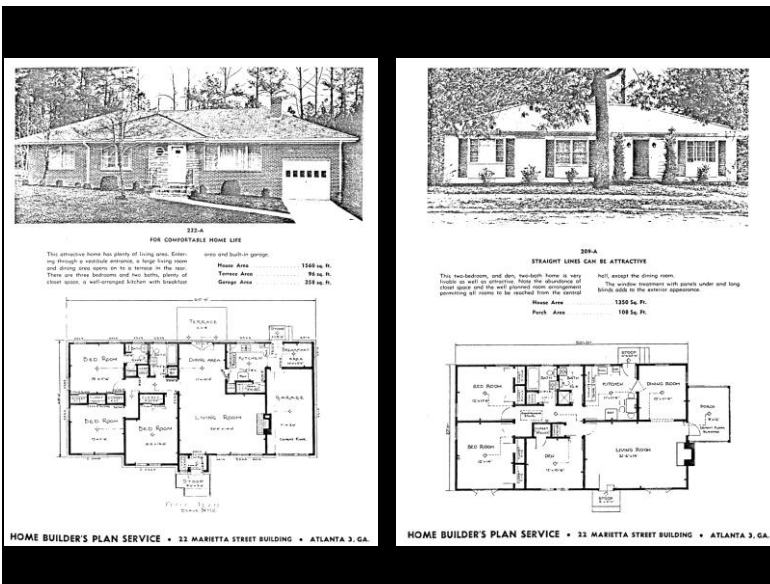
Like the Compact Ranch House, the Linear Ranch House traces its lineage to the early days of Ranch Houses in California. Here is a c.1940 plan for a Linear Ranch House drawn by Cliff May.

31



At about the same time, Frank Lloyd Wright was designing a linear version of his "Usonian" houses.

32



Plans for Linear Ranch Houses were published by the Home Builders Plan Service in Atlanta as early as 1948 ...

33



And Linear Ranch Houses began appearing in Georgia at that time.

34



35



They became common by about 1950 ...

36



And ubiquitous by the mid-1950s.



37



38



Generally speaking, as time went on, they got longer ...

39



And longer ...

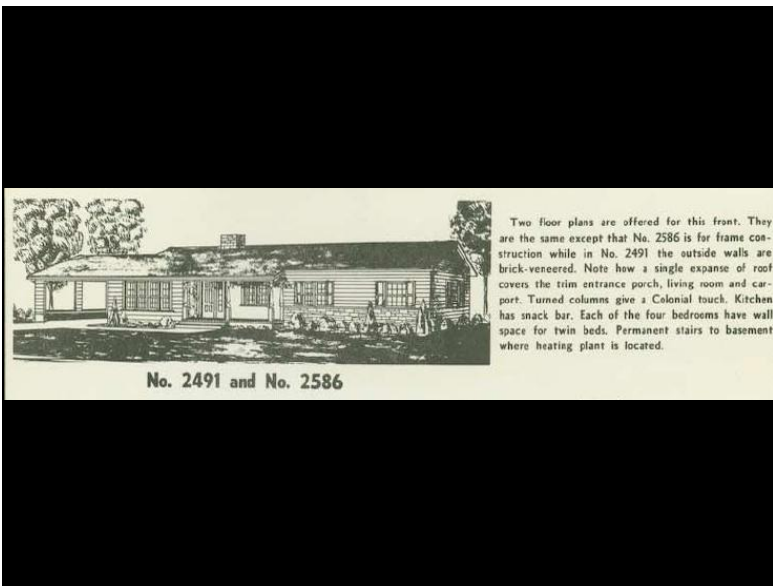
40



Sometimes *really* long ...

Reflecting increasing prosperity and rising expectations.

41



Leila Ross Wilburn included a number of Linear Ranch House designs in her popular 1950s plan books.

42



Sometimes it's hard to tell the difference between a large "Compact" Ranch House and a small "Linear" Ranch House.

It all comes down to a judgment call based on form, proportions, and massing.

43



Roof form is *not* a factor in determining sub-type -- both of these houses are Linear Ranch Houses -- although the roof form should be noted.



The overall proportions and form of the house -- not the shape of the roof -- define its sub-type.

44



Simple, all-encompassing rooflines can *accentuate* the linear quality of houses in spite of minor projections and recesses in massing.



45



But sometimes a distinctive roofline can *distract* from the underlying plan-form.

In this case, a Linear Ranch House is disguised under a bold, front-facing, low gable roof.

46



This Linear Ranch House in Columbus has an interesting roof feature: a cut-away over the recessed entry, sort of an open-air skylight.

47



This is what a typical Linear Ranch House looked like as it morphed its way through the 1960s in a more Contemporary style.

48



The Linear Ranch House is among the most common sub-types of Ranch Houses built throughout Georgia from the late 1940s through the 1960s.

49



50



What might be called the “transverse” Linear Ranch House is not really a different *sub-type* of house but rather a different *orientation* of the house on its lot.

It's a *Linear* Ranch House, but it's oriented *transversely* on its lot ... extending from front to back ... rather than from side to side.

51



In the transverse Ranch House, the living spaces are often located at the “back” of the house, facing the back yard, while the bedrooms are pushed forward into the front yard, with high windows for privacy from the street.

52



Most transversely oriented Ranch Houses in Georgia have a Contemporary style, like this one in Columbus.

53



Even though the transverse Linear Ranch House may not be a true sub-type, its distinctive appearance and orientation should be noted.

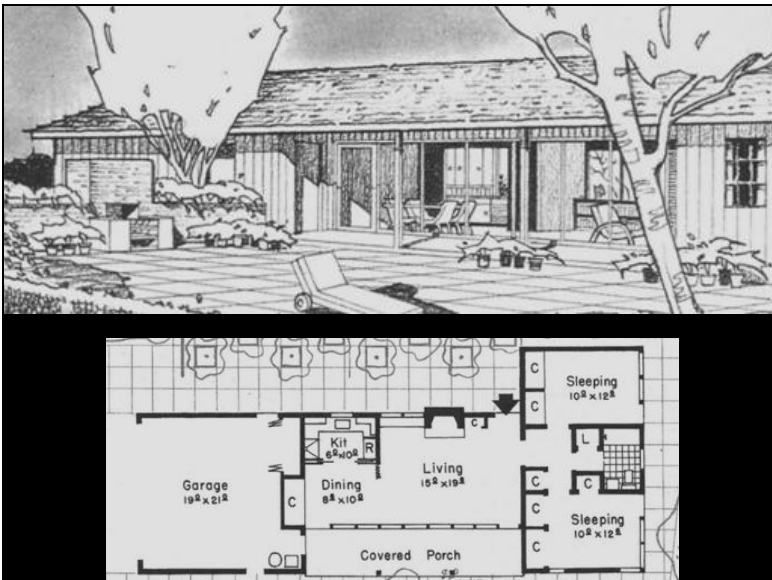


Linear with Clusters



The *Linear with Clusters* sub-type is a Linear Ranch House with a cluster of rooms (usually bedrooms) at one end which projects to the front, the back, or both.

The projections give the house a truncated L- or T-shape but the overall linear form of the house still predominates.



The Linear-with-Clusters Ranch House dates to the mid-1940s with designs like this in Cliff May's *Western Ranch Houses* book (1946).

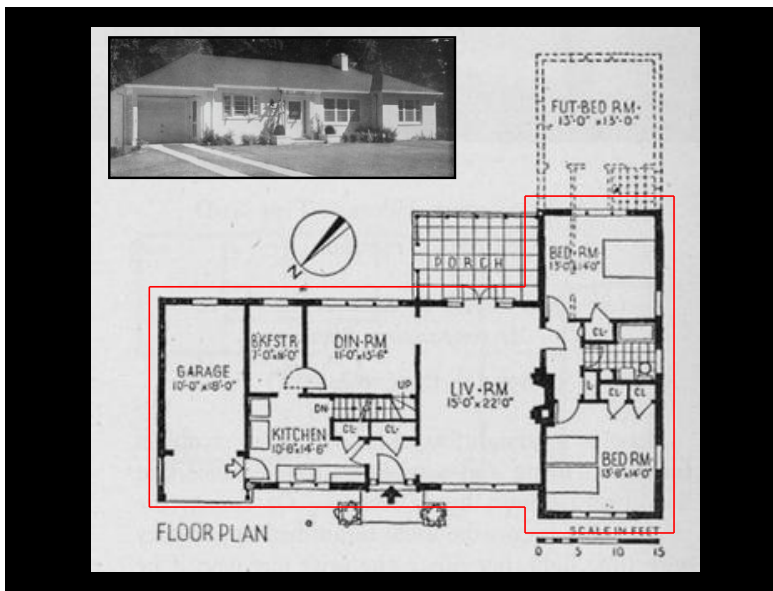
You can clearly see the truncated cross-axial form where the clustered bedrooms (on the right) join the linear living areas (in the middle) and garage (on the left).

57



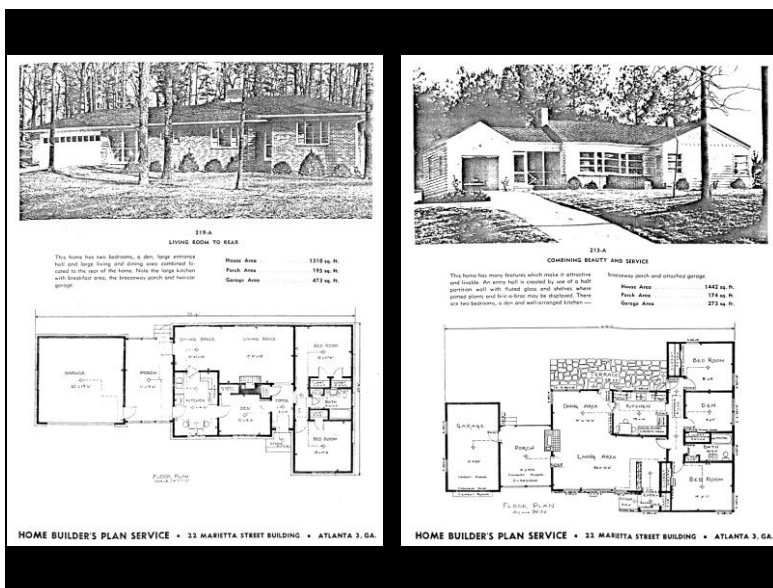
An early Linear-with-Clusters Ranch House in Georgia was featured in the 1946 *Book of Homes*, a national homebuyers guide.

58



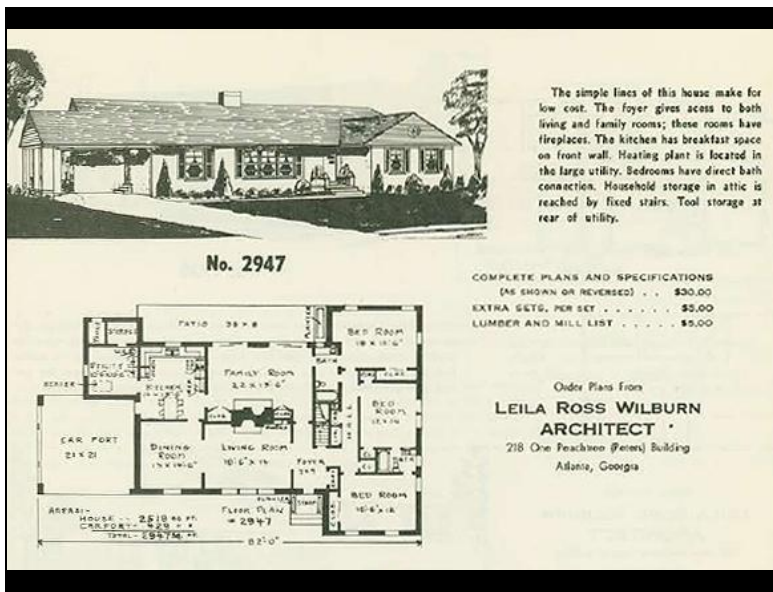
Designed by W. Montgomery Anderson, an Atlanta architect, it featured the classic linear form with clustered bedrooms at one end projecting to the front and the rear.

59



Plans for these two Linear-with-Clusters Ranch Houses were published in the 1948 Home Builders Plan Service catalog.

60



Leila Ross Wilburn also published a number of Linear-with-Clusters designs in her 1950s plan books.

61



The earliest "red-brick" Ranch Houses in Georgia -- in the Parkwood subdivision of Decatur, and dating from the late 1940s -- are Linear-with-Clusters designs with understated or "subordinate" clusters.

62



More contemporary-styled examples appeared in DeKalb County and elsewhere in the mid-1950s.

63



By way of contrast, this late 1940s Ranch House in Macon has a Linear-with-Clusters arrangement almost hidden underneath its radical modern styling and varied rooflines ...

64



And this late 1950s Linear-with-Clusters Ranch House in Hapeville was similarly disguised, but here in the Colonial Revival-style.

65



Most of the pre-mid-1950s Linear-with-Clusters Ranch Houses had "subordinate" clusters -- usually single bedrooms, partially projecting, enlivening but not dominating the overall design.

66



But starting in the late 1950s, the projecting cluster was often enlarged to include two projecting rooms, as in this Leila Ross Wilburn design ...

67



And it became a more pronounced architectural feature -- indeed, often becoming a *predominant* feature -- altering the proportions of the house, diminishing its linear character, and emphasizing the cross-axial cluster at one end.

68



The "predominant" cluster version appeared in Contemporary-style Ranch Houses as well.

69



Here's a somewhat unusual example in Columbus, with weatherboard siding that accentuates the long, low form of the Ranch House, and where the cluster is very broad in relation to the rest of the house but very shallow as well.

70



71



Much more straightforward is the *Courtyard* ranch-house sub-type.

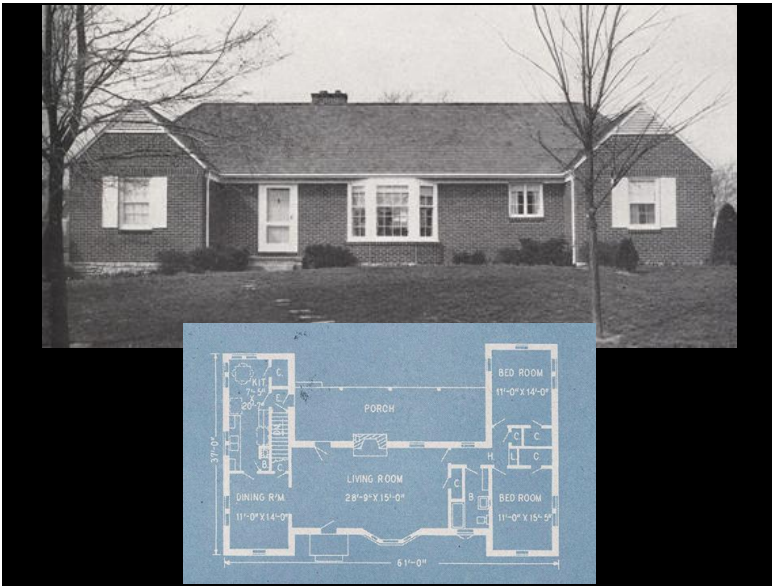
As its name suggests, the Courtyard Ranch House has two wings that embrace a courtyard.

72



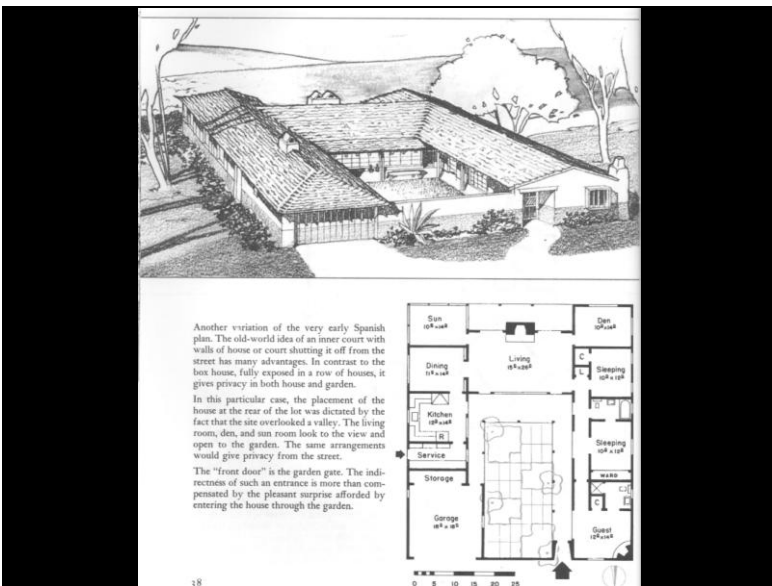
The courtyard is most commonly on the front, where it is the most obvious design feature.

73

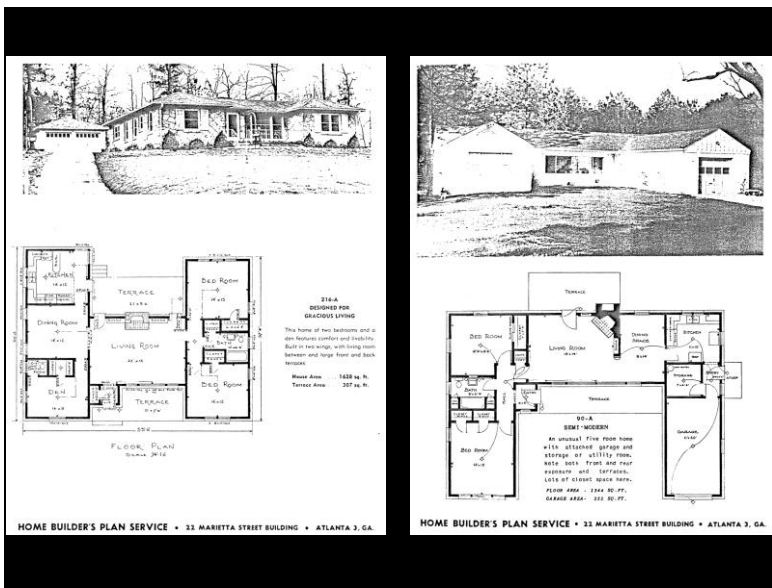


But sometimes the main courtyard is located on the back side of the house, following traditional California practice, with perhaps a vestigial courtyard in the front, if any at all.

74



The Courtyard Ranch House was popular in California during the early 20th century – indeed, it was the first form of the ranch-house reincarnation – and it became a standard California design as early as the 1930s.



Several versions of the Courtyard Ranch House were included in the Home Builders Plan Service 1948 Atlanta catalog.



Most early Courtyard Ranch Houses in Georgia were formed by two rooms projecting forward (usually a bedroom on one side and a living room, dining room, or den on the other).



Occasionally a screened or partially enclosed front porch formed one wing of the courtyard

78



Sometimes the front of the courtyard was enclosed with a fence or a wall.

79



This pattern continued into the 1960s, most commonly with the two projecting front-gabled wings.

80



Occasionally the wings as well as the entrance to the courtyard are sheltered under a broad side-gabled roof.

In both cases, a relatively blank front wall is presented to the street.

81



By the early 1960s, a carport or garage increasingly formed a portion of the front courtyard.

82



Here's a larger 1960s house with a motor court in the front yard.

83

12

BRAN - NEW HOMES



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**LEILA ROSS WILBURN
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COMPLETE PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS
(AS SHOWN OR REVERSED) . . . \$35.00
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This house owes its charm to the fine Georgian details, red brick walls and paneled shutters. The porch across the front is framed in delicate iron trillix work. Foyer connects living room and dining room. Family room is large and has space for breakfast table. The utility takes care of the washer, drier, furnace and water heater. Yard storage is at rear wall of family room. Household storage is in the attic and is reached by a folding stair. Bedrooms are large with direct bath connection.

AREAS: HOUSE - 2219 sq. ft.
PORCH - 798 sq. ft.
TOTAL - 2364 sq. ft.

FLOOR PLAN
2364

Many examples in Georgia, like this Leila Ross Wilburn design, feature a *truncated* courtyard, most likely to better fit on smaller suburban lots.

84



Here's a very early (1945) example of a small truncated-courtyard Ranch House in Decatur ...

85



And here's a larger and slightly later one in the Parkwood subdivision, also in Decatur.

86



This red-brick truncated-courtyard Ranch House was built in southwest Atlanta in 1950. One of the wings of the courtyard is an enclosed garage.

87



This house, built a few years later in Columbus, has a concealed carport in part of one truncated wing.

88



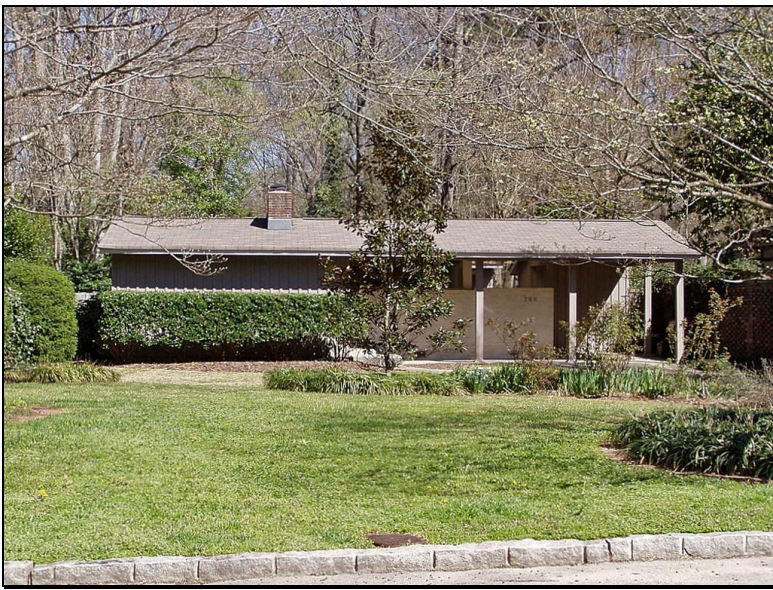
The truncated-courtyard version of the Ranch House continued to be built into the 1960s

89



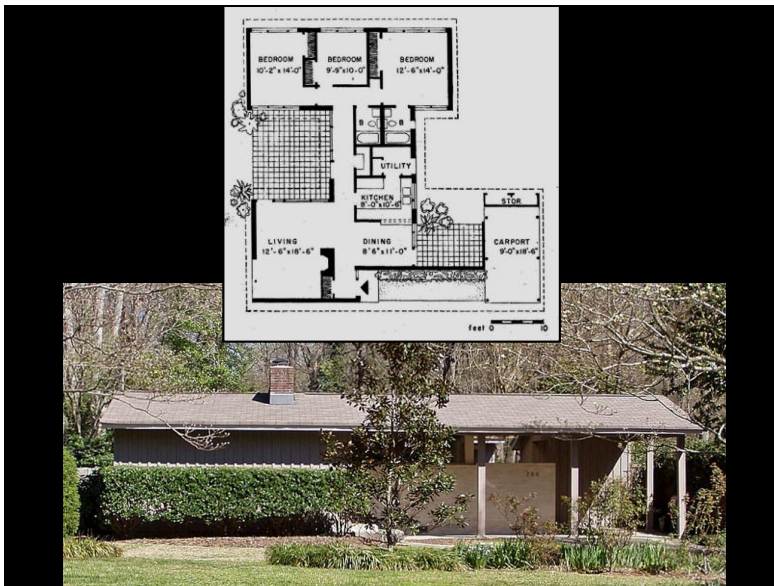
As with the Linear Ranch House, but much less commonly, the Courtyard Ranch House also came in a “transverse” form, where the courtyard is along the side of the house.

90



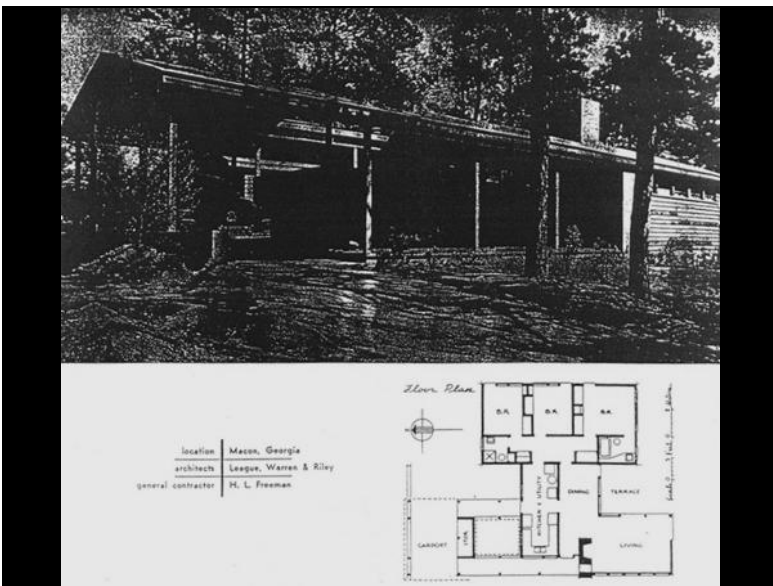
From the front, the transverse Courtyard Ranch House might look like a relatively small Linear Ranch House.

91



But in plan, and from other vantage points, the courtyard arrangement becomes clear -- in this case, a double courtyard -- as does the large size of the house.

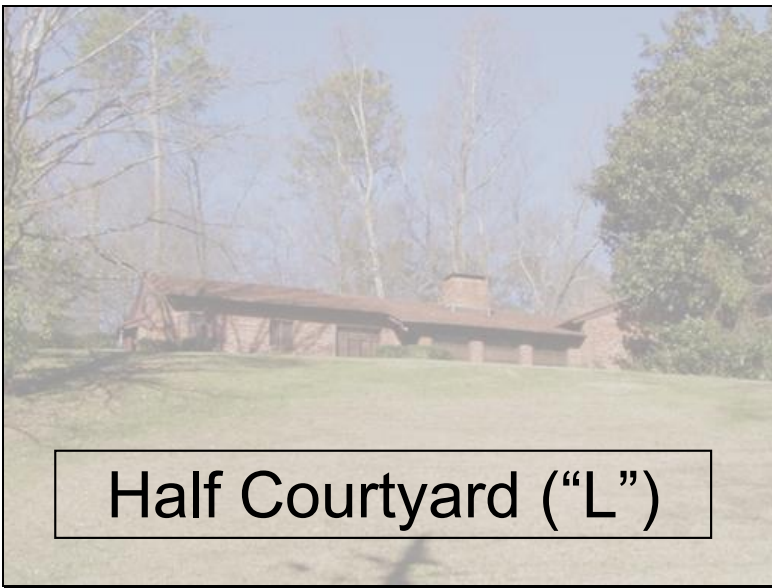
92



Jean League Newton, a Macon architect, designed this striking double-transverse-courtyard house in 1950; it was featured in five national architectural magazines.

This house also is individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

93



Half Courtyard (“L”)

94



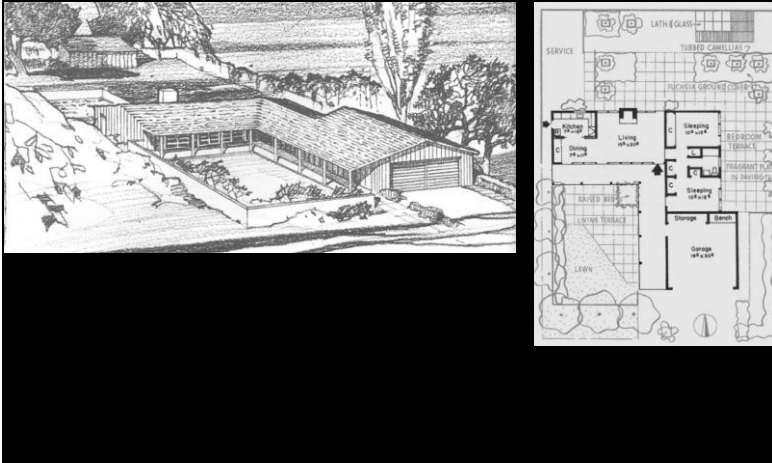
Much more common than the full courtyard house is the *Half-Courtyard* or *L-Shaped Ranch House*.

This is the earliest known example in Georgia, dating from 1941, on Lenox Road in Atlanta, designed by the Atlanta architect David Cuttino.

95

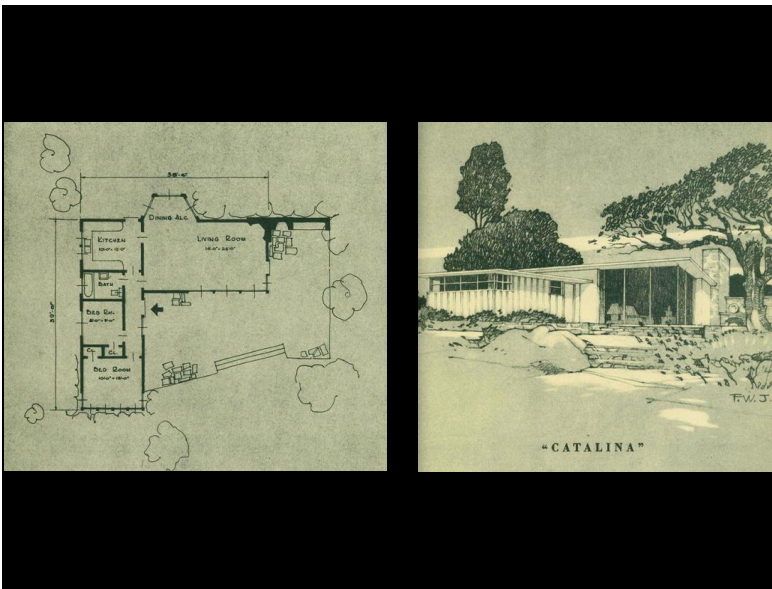


From the front it might look like a Linear or Linear-with-Clusters, but from the back, and especially from above, the half-courtyard or L-shaped form is apparent.

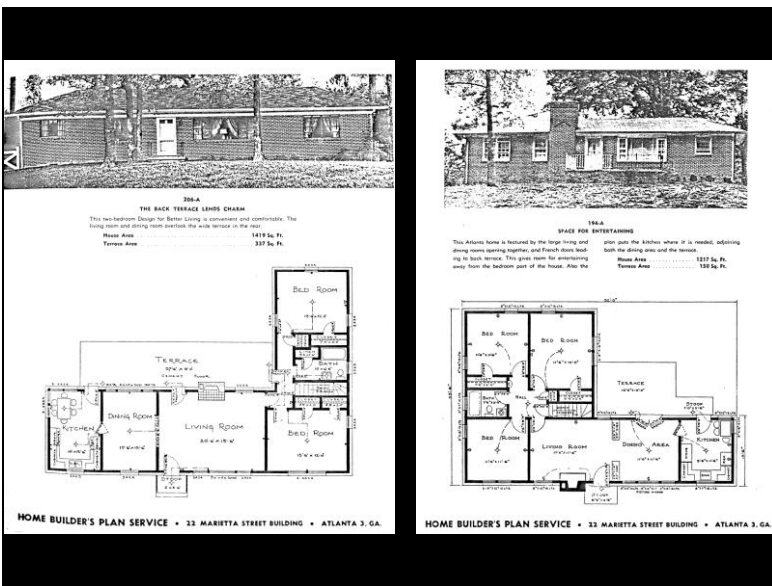


California architects promoted the half-courtyard Ranch House after World War II.

Cliff May featured several examples in his 1946 *Western Ranch Houses* book ...

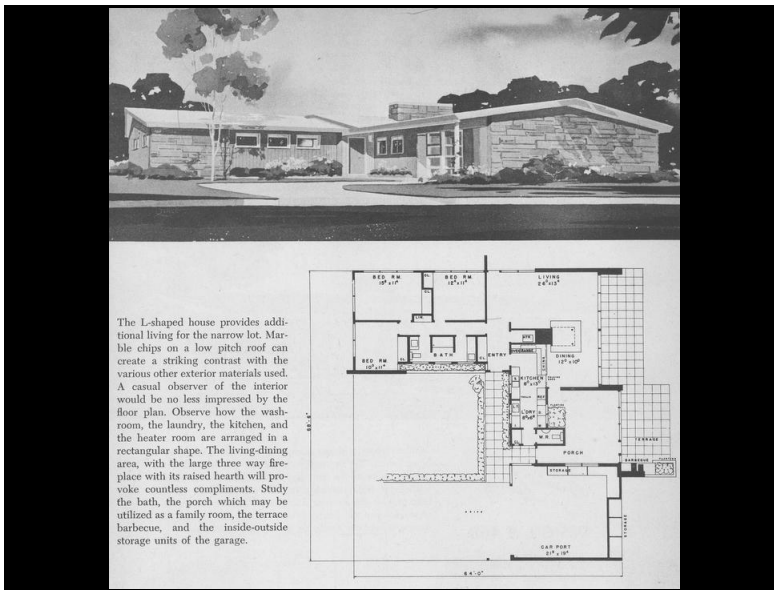


And Paul Williams, the first African-American architect in California, featured L-Shaped Ranch Houses in his popular publications.



At least two different versions of the L-Shaped or Half-Courtyard Ranch House were featured in the Home Builders Plan Service 1948 plan book.

99



The half-courtyard house is exactly that -- a half-courtyard, formed by the intersection of two wings of the house.

It could be thought of as a Linear Ranch House bent 90 degrees in the middle.

100



"True" half-courtyard houses, with rooms forming the two equal sides of the half courtyard, appear to be relatively rare in Georgia in the 1950s.

101



Here's an early one, dating from 1950, in DeKalb County.

102



Here's a later example in Columbus, where the main body of the house is clearly L-shaped.

103



This 1954 house in Sandy Springs is a good example of the L-Shaped Ranch House with an attached carport and an integral entry porch that tends to visually mask the "L" portion of the house.

104



Here's another example with the integral porch and carport.

105



In the 1960s, half-courtyard houses became much more common. They were usually designed in the Contemporary style.

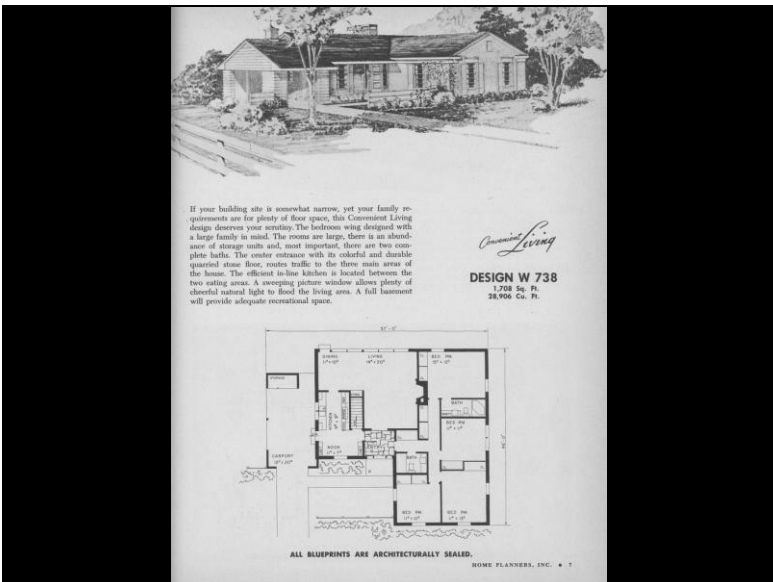
106



But even more common were what might be called “faux” half-courtyards -- where the wing of the courtyard is formed not by part of the main house but rather by the garage or carport.

In this case, the house is a Linear Ranch House with a carport attached at right angles to the main body of the house.

107



A “true” half-courtyard house has family living spaces in *both* wings of the house, and the wings have more or less equal “weight” architecturally.



Here is perhaps the penultimate Half-Courtyard Ranch House, with two long and equal-sized wings, in DeKalb County, dating from 1957.



Bungalow Ranch



The *Bungalow Ranch* House sub-type is an unusual form of Ranch House that seems to break all the rules. Yet it was clearly part of the national ranch-house movement as it grew out of California and the Southwest, and there are numerous examples in Georgia.

111



Like other Ranch Houses, the Bungalow variant looks long and low ...

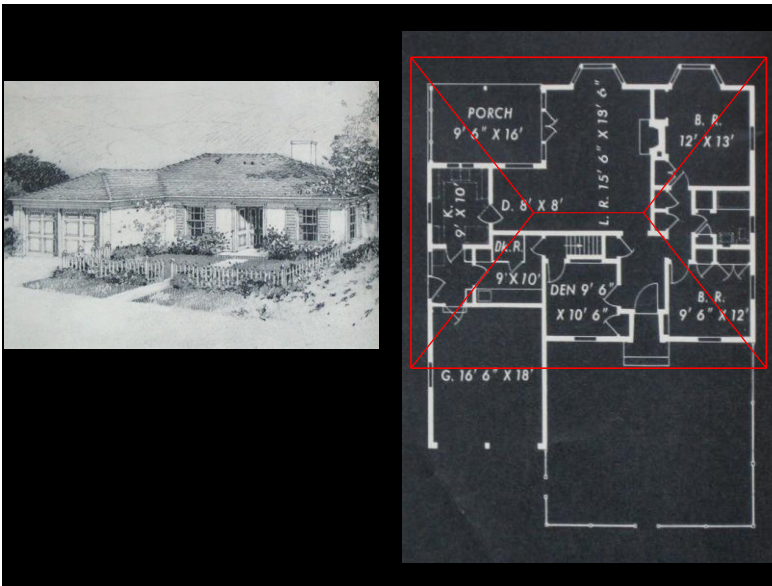
112



But unlike other Ranch Houses, it also is *deep*.

Indeed, the Bungalow Ranch House may be as deep or even deeper than it is wide -- hence its name, "bungalow," from the common form of its California predecessor, the early 20th-century Bungalow House.

113

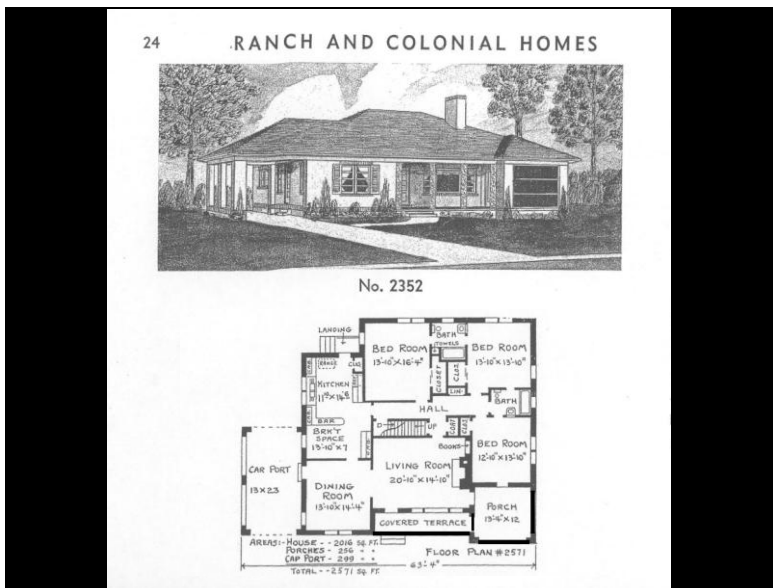


This plan-view of an early California Bungalow Ranch House shows the nearly square plan of the house and how "deep" the house is from front to back.

The main roofline is superimposed in red over the floor plan, showing how the Bungalow Ranch House approximates a square in plan.



As early as 1948, Bungalow Ranch Houses showed up in plan books published by the Atlanta office of the Home Builders Plan Service ...



And here is an early 1950s example drawn by Leila Ross Wilburn for her Georgia clientele. Again, the house is as deep as it is wide.



This red-brick Bungalow Ranch House in Savannah dates from 1948 -- perhaps the earliest extant example in the state.

117



Here is another early Bungalow Ranch House, near Decatur, dating from 1949.

118



This 1951 house on the west side of Atlanta is a large Bungalow Ranch House.

Note on the aerial view the almost square form of the house (white roof in center).

119



And here's a smaller one, in Athens, with rustic-style board-and-batten siding.

120



Bungalow Ranch Houses are not as common as some other forms of the Ranch House, but they are a distinctive variant.

121



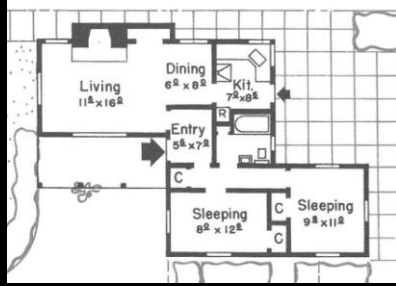
122



The *Rambling Ranch* House is just that -- the Ranch House that rambles all over its lot, in a seemingly formless way, yet usually according to a logic of setbacks and offsets.

Most Rambling Ranch Houses in Georgia have *at least three distinct setbacks or offsets*, as seen here in this view of a 1950 Ranch House in Marietta.

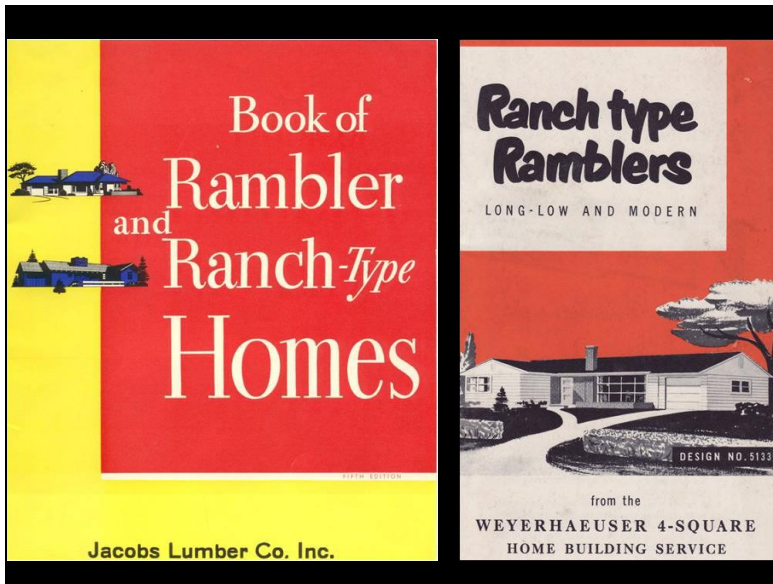
123



Rambling Ranch Houses were promoted by Cliff May in his mid-1940s *Western Ranch Houses* publication.

They resulted (figuratively speaking) from bending and sliding the parts of the basic Linear Ranch House into something quite different.

124



By the early 1950s, the term "rambler" was in common use for this type of house.

125



Here in this detail view you can see more clearly that the "Rambler" Ranch House featured on this 1952 plan-book cover has its requisite three setbacks or offsets.

126



Here's the oldest known Rambling Ranch House in Georgia, built in the mid-1940s in the Lenox Park neighborhood in north Atlanta.

127



This rather massive Rambling Ranch House was built on farmland just outside Madison.

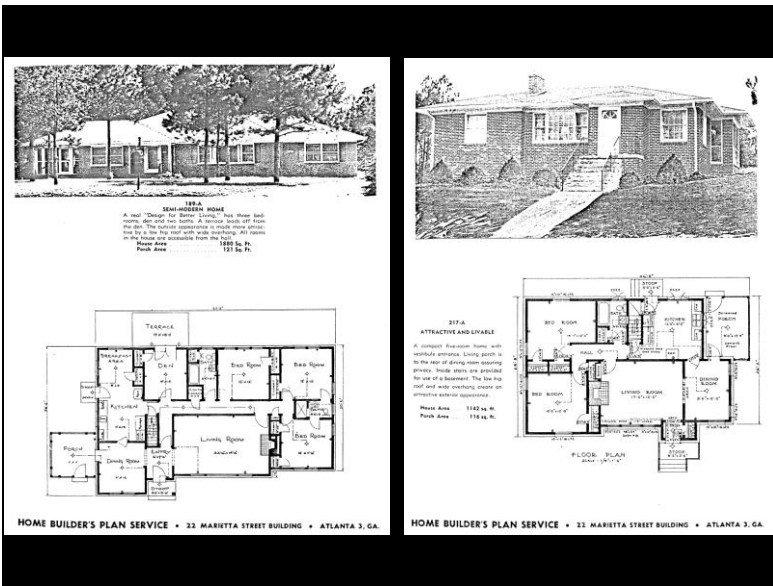
128



The Rambling Ranch House was stretched out -- made longer and lower, or at least made to *look* longer and lower -- in the 1950s.



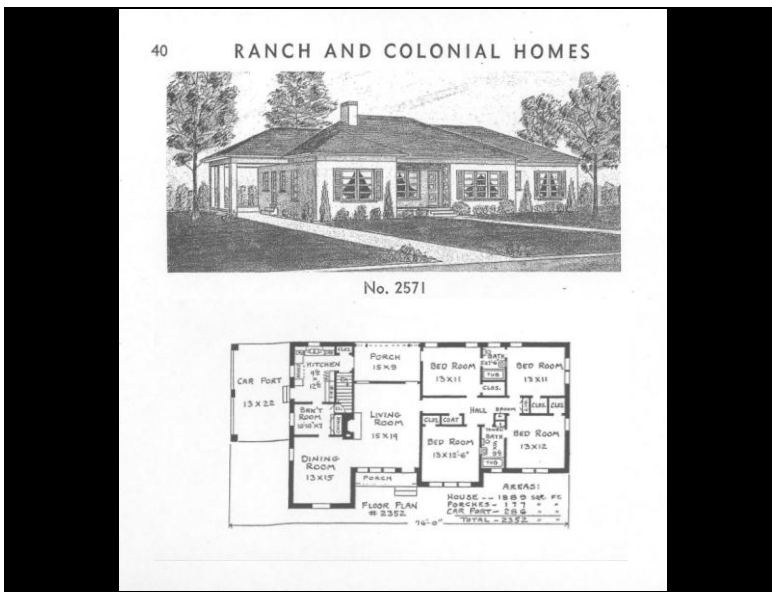
Here's an unusual example which not only steps back but also turns a corner at an intersection in this DeKalb County subdivision.



Several different versions of the red-brick Rambling Ranch House were published in 1948 by the Atlanta-based Home Builders Plan Service ...



And, in 1952, *Better Homes & Gardens* magazine featured an unusual “rambling” Ranch House in Georgia, designed by the Atlanta architect Clement Ford. Presenting a uniform façade to the street, this house “rambles” to the back rather than the front.



Even the conservative Leila Ross Wilburn got into the act with this somewhat subdued plan-book version of the Rambling Ranch House -- a version we would call "telescoped" or "compressed."



In fact, in Georgia, the most common form of the Rambling Ranch House is this "telescoped" version in which the multiple setbacks and offsets are "compressed" into a kind of bas-relief Rambling Ranch House.



This Augusta example, built in 1952, has *five* different planes of the front façade arranged in a series of shallow setbacks and offsets highlighted by cascading hipped roofs over each section.

135



This smaller house features the requisite three offset planes and even shallower setbacks, again highlighted by its cascading hipped roofs.

136



Here is a visual comparison between the fully developed Rambling Ranch House (on the bottom) and the simpler compressed or telescoped version (on the top).

137



These two houses, side by side on the same street, are fundamentally identical: small Rambling Ranch Houses, each with three setbacks.

Yet look what a difference the roofline can make in our initial impressions of the two houses.

138



The Rambling Ranch, in all its iterations, is among the most prevalent forms of Ranch House in Georgia.

139



The *Alphabet* Ranch House is a catch-all category for Ranch Houses with unorthodox forms, many of which conform (more or less) to some letter of the alphabet.

Because there are so few of them, they are all lumped together in this one group.

140



This small one, along Rock Chapel Road in DeKalb County, is in the form of a "Y" -- not so visible from the road, perhaps ...

141



But clearly visible from above.

142



Taking a similar form, but much larger in size, is this 1956 Y-shaped house in Hapeville, with much longer wings ...

143



Again more clearly seen from above.

144



And here's a true V-shaped Ranch House, from the same year (1956), in a Marietta neighborhood.

145



This is one of Atlanta's best-known "alphabet" houses -- the famous "round Ranch House" in the Collier Heights neighborhood ...

146



Also dating from 1956.

Other examples of the alphabet houses might include T-shaped, H-shaped, even W-shaped houses.



And this leads us to the "idiosyncratic" Ranch House sub-type: *architect-designed* houses.



There are certain instances in which attempts at sub-typing Ranch Houses just do not work.

One of them is when dealing with one-of-a-kind Ranch Houses, usually "high-end," custom-designed by an architect.

Often these custom-designed houses are so client-tailored, site-specific, or architect-idiosyncratic as to defy sub-typing.

They are, instead, the "top-end" examples of the Ranch House type generally.

This mid-1950s house in Columbus, designed by the Atlanta architect Bill Finch, is a good example.

149



Virtually everything about the design of this Contemporary-style Ranch House is “unique” to the client and the architect

150



Including such over-the-top details as this very modern-looking porte-cochere with an integral planter and chimney and a cut-away section of the roof for a tree.

151



The grounds around the house were also custom-designed by the noted mid-20th-century California landscape architect, Thomas Church.

152



Only from the air can you get any sense of the overall form of the house.

And even then, it's a kind of fully enclosed courtyard-with-wings -- not a "standard" sub-type by any means, at least not in Georgia.

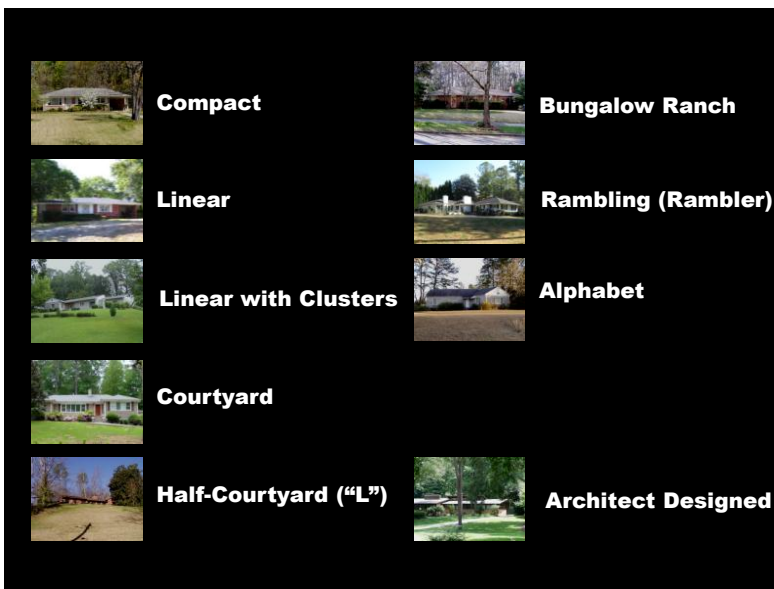
153



Yet everything about this house says "Ranch House" in the ultimate way.

So while it may not be a good example of a "sub-type" of Ranch House, it's a great example of a Contemporary-style Ranch House.

154



This concludes the overview of Ranch House "sub-types" in Georgia.

Ranch Houses in Georgia: A Guide to House Types (Sub-Types)



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