



HISTORIC PRESERVATION DIVISION

## **The Ordinary Iconic Ranch House**

Mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century Ranch Houses in Georgia

### **PART IV: THE RANCH HOUSE IN GEORGIA AN OVERVIEW**



September 2011

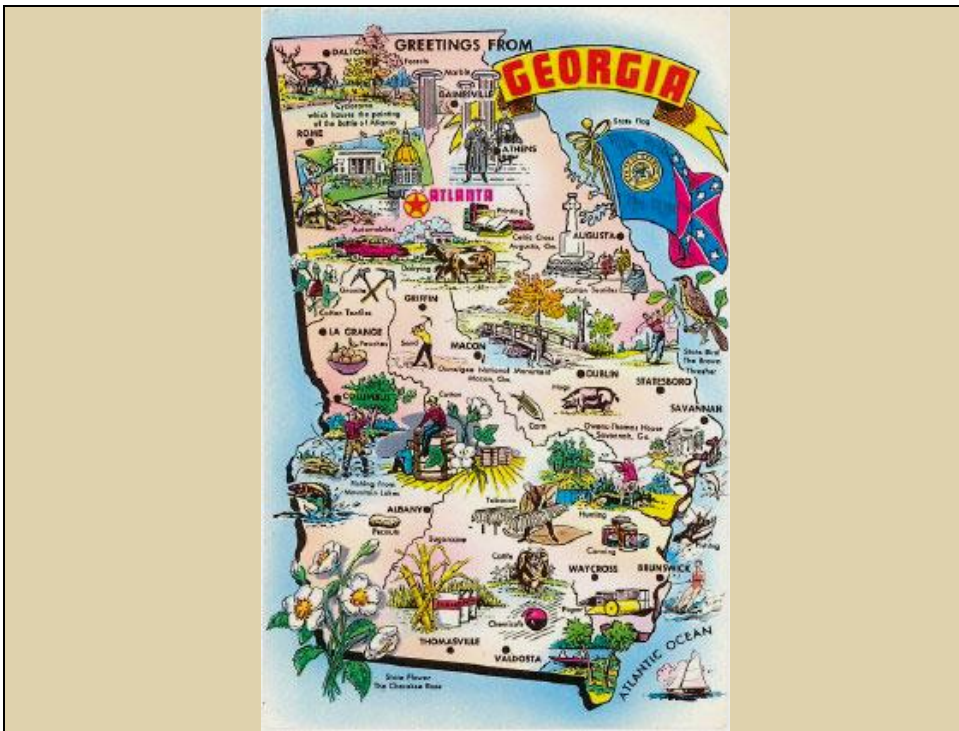
Richard Cloues, Ph.D.

*The Ordinary Iconic Ranch House* is about the mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century Ranch House in Georgia. It is presented in six parts.

**Part IV (this part) introduces the Georgia Ranch House and provides an overview of the state's historic Ranch Houses.**

Other parts of *The Ordinary Iconic Ranch House* tell other parts of the Ranch House story.

2



Now that we've seen the national picture, let's take a look at the mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century Ranch House *in Georgia*.

3



It's going to be somewhat of a *long* look, because Georgia has a *lot* of Ranch Houses.

Look at the variety of Ranch Houses in just one small community!

4



The Ranch House first appeared in Georgia at a *very early date* in ranch-house history: in the mid-1930s, with the construction of this house in Fort Valley by a family who had recently visited southern California.

Its stuccoed walls, hacienda detailing, and angled back porch, shaping a rear courtyard, reflect the new Ranch House ideas being promoted at the time in California by Cliff May.

5



The angled back porch and courtyard were clearly inspired by Cliff May's 1930s California estate Ranch Houses. May's houses were much larger, but the overall effect is much the same.

6



Other early Georgia Ranch Houses appeared *in Atlanta* in the *early 1940s*:

This rustic red-brick Ranch House on a hilltop was designed by Atlanta architect David Cuttino, a Georgia Tech graduate, and built in 1941 for a client who must have been reading *Sunset* magazine.

Its “L” shape frames a half-courtyard to the rear ...

7



seen more clearly in these views from the back and from above.

8



This house may have been the first Ranch House in the Atlanta metropolitan area.

9



It was soon joined by this early version of the “rambling” Ranch House in nearby Lenox Park.

10



At about the same time, down in south Georgia, this early Ranch House was built in Cordele ...

11



and up in Rome, this 1941 flat-roofed Ranch House was clearly modeled after Frank Lloyd Wright's "Usonian" houses.

12



In 1942, Macon architect Ellamae Ellis League designed this house, possibly inspired by Cliff May's California houses, and believed to be the first Ranch House in Macon.

13



*Right after WWII, a wide variety of Ranch Houses appeared all across the state ...*

including this large 1945 Ranch House in Atlanta with its linear form and cluster of rooms at one end ...

also designed by David Cuttino and located right across Lenox Road from his earlier Ranch House ...

14



and this somewhat smaller “truncated courtyard” Ranch House in Decatur.

15



This sprawling stone-veneered Ranch House on Briarcliff Road in DeKalb County was built in 1946 ...

16

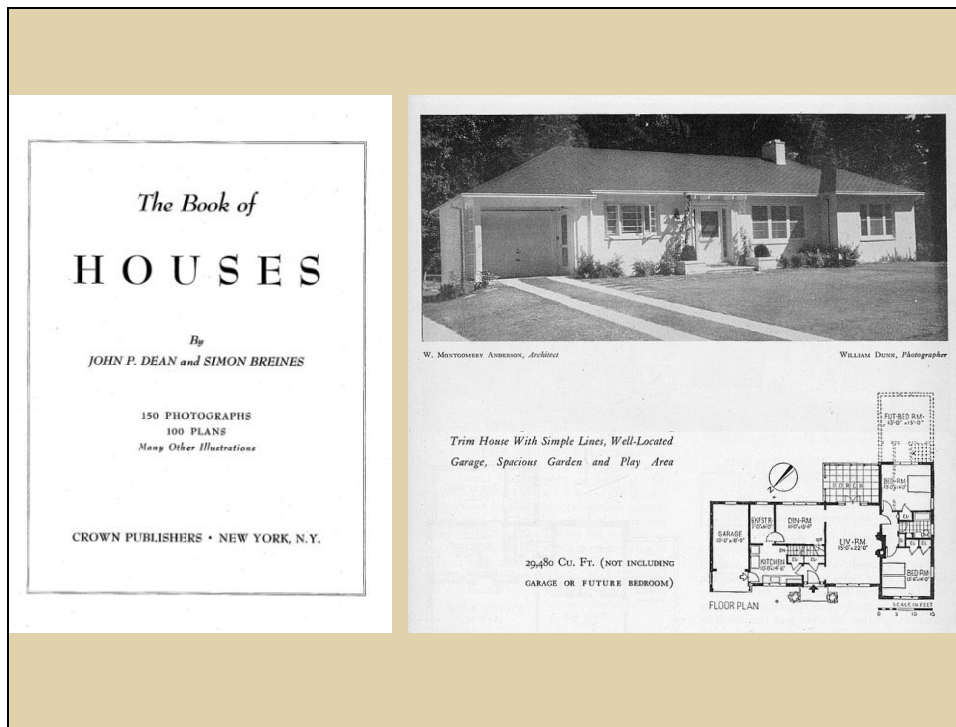


as was this stone-veneered house in  
Macon ...

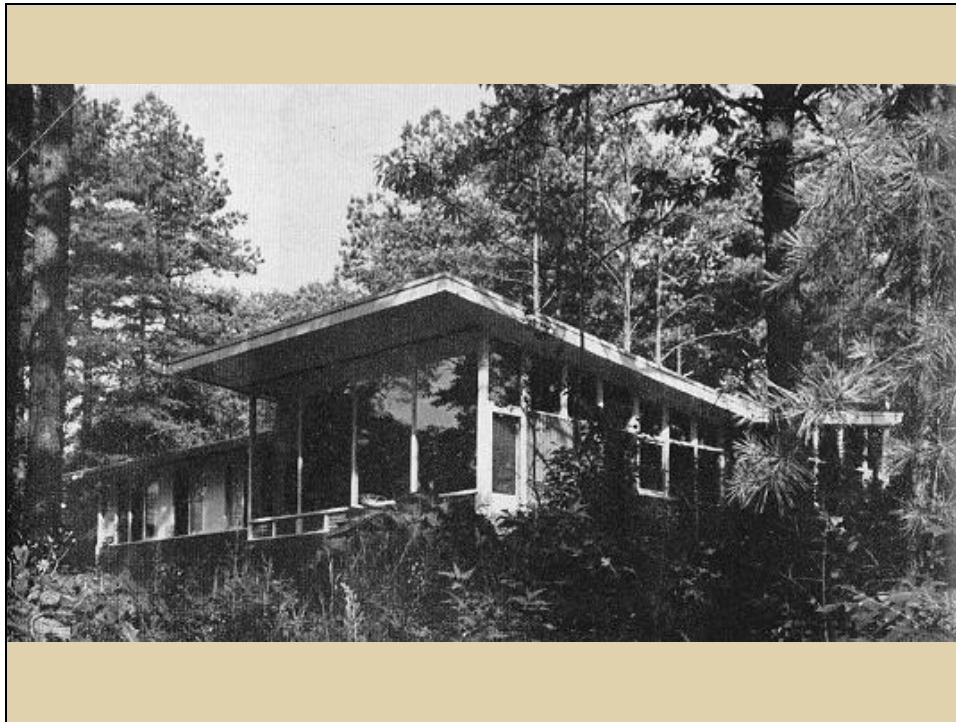
17



with its covered patio and *3-car carport!*



Also in 1946, this Ranch House designed by Georgia Tech architect W. Montgomery Anderson was published in *The Book of Houses*. Its location is unknown.



A year later, another Atlanta architect, James Wilkinson, newly named partner in the firm of Stevens & Wilkinson, designed this avant-garde house as his residence. Its inverted gable roof, or “butterfly” roof, was at the forefront of house design nationally. The house, unfortunately, has been demolished.

20



Also in 1947, back in Macon, this very modern front-courtyard Ranch House was built ...

21



with window-walls opening onto a landscaped back yard.

22



That same year, in the same Macon neighborhood, this over-the-top Contemporary-style Ranch House appeared ...

23



and in the small southeast Georgia town of Douglas, this unusual California-inspired brick Ranch House was built.

24



More modest Ranch Houses also appeared in the late 1940s, like this compact Ranch House in DeKalb County with its wide steel-sash "picture" window ...

25



and this plain-style Bungalow Ranch House in Savannah with its equally large steel-sash windows.

26



This 1948 house, in the Savannah suburb of Gordonston, has what must have been the largest picture window, steel sash or otherwise, on a conventional Ranch House in Georgia at the time.

27



Heralding what would become the “signature” Ranch House in Georgia, the first of the seemingly plain “red-brick” Ranch Houses appeared in 1947 -- this one in the Parkwood neighborhood in Decatur.



Here's another one, from a couple of years later, in the same neighborhood, with its long, low form, broad hipped roofs, wide eaves, big picture window, screened porch, and stone detailing around the front doorway --



208-A  
SEMI-MODERN BEAUTY

This six-room, two-bath, brick home is ideal for the average family. Large livable rooms with windows placed for good furniture arrangement. Note entrance hall, large closets and kitchen arrangement with its

attractive breakfast nook with corner windows. Hip roof with wide overhang, stone entrance and large picture window result in attractive exterior.



right out of the pages of a 1948 plan book published by the Home Builders Plan Service of Atlanta.

30



By 1949, the term "*Ranch House*" was being used by the Atlanta newspapers in their Sunday real estate sections to describe houses like these ...

31



and the *Atlanta Journal* noted that "a large percentage [of new homebuyers in Georgia] prefer the *rambling type brick house.*"

32



In that same year the first Ranch House was built in Atlanta's fashionable Buckhead neighborhood for the Kessler family.

33



By 1950 the classic "*rambling*" Ranch House began appearing in numbers all across the state.

The "rambling" Ranch House has at least three distinct setbacks or offsets, giving it a distinct (some would say "disjointed") appearance.

34



Along with it came an all-time favorite Ranch House detail, the *faux-vine metal porch post* ...

35



a contemporary interpretation, apparently, of the climbing vines on the porches of Cliff May's 1930s rustic California Ranch Houses.

36



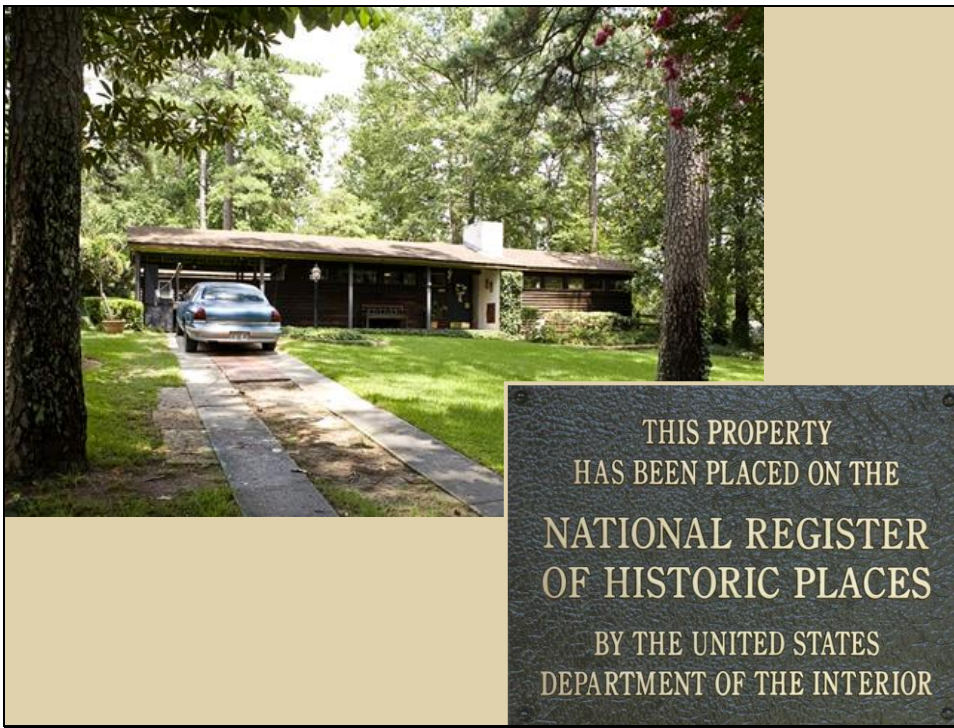
In 1950, the *California Contemporary-style* Ranch House appeared on the scene in a big way at the Golf View subdivision in Atlanta with its 16 houses designed by Bill Finch, a Georgia Tech-trained architect ...

37



and in Macon, with this house designed by local architect Jean League Newton, recently graduated from the Harvard Graduate School of Design.

38



This house is the first Ranch House in Georgia to be individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

39



Also in 1950, and also in Macon, local architect Bernard Webb, a Georgia Tech graduate with recent experience in California, designed this shed-roofed Contemporary-style house for himself ...

40



and, a year later, this rather free-form Contemporary-style Ranch House across town.

41



These early Ranch Houses in Georgia were followed by *a period of experimentation*, particularly with roof forms ...

highlighted by design events like this apparent collision of a traditional gable roof and an avant-garde shed roof ...

42



the inversion of the traditional gable roof into a “butterfly” roof ...

43



the resurrection of the lowly shed roof, having earlier been referred to as a “chicken-coop” roof and now being called, more respectably, a “monopitch” roof ...




and, borrowing a theme from Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian houses, a few flat roofs ...




all "culminating," if you will, in the appearance in the mid-1950s of the earliest "*Eichler*" style contemporary Ranch Houses, in Savannah, with their distinctive broad front gable rooflines ...

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RALPH S. THOMAS  
ARCHITECT, A.I.A.

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THE STYLE THAT IS SETTING A NATIONAL PACE  
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Builder Clayton Powell started as a contract builder in 1956 in 1951. An organizational wizard, he parlayed his building know-how into a flourishing Savannah business within 15 months, organized the Home Builders Assn. of Savannah of which he is now president.



Architect Ralph Thomas, Georgia Tech graduate is guaranteed 5% of sales price for a single plan and is paid \$100 per start for repeats. "Design," says Powell, "is the cheapest thing I buy. Many builders pay as much as \$35 for a building permit, less for an architect."

the result of a collaboration between a local builder, Clayton Powell, and a local architect, Ralph Thomas, promoting the latest national trends in ranch-house designs and construction.



A number of their houses are in the Windsor Forest subdivision in the south part of the city.

post-and-beam houses are completed in 24 working days

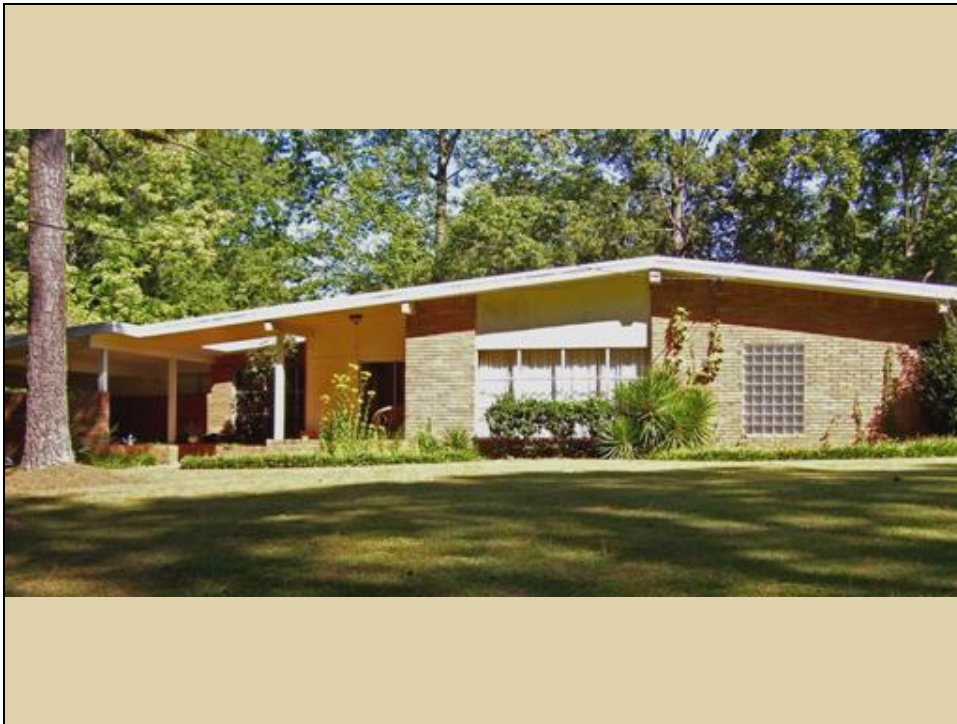
WHAT BUILDER POWELL NOW DOES:

- ... builds post and beam on a 4' module  
"Dimensionally standard sheet materials inside and out reduce cutting"
- ... buys lumber precut and/or milled  
"Studs precut to 7'-11/2" and 8'-11/2"; ridge beam is beveled"
- ... prefers to tilt up without sheathing on  
"Small crew wants light walls to tilt, applies sheet materials upright"
- ... uses open-room principle in "two" big rooms  
"Dry wall sub applies 1/2" sheets to ceilings before partitions are in"

Oversized "Savannah gray" brick veneer on 1,066 sq. ft. house sells it fast at \$13,750

Powell's entry into quality house bracket is via this \$17,900 house with 1,430 sq. ft.

Powell also adopted Eichler's new construction methods including at-grade slab foundations and modular post-and-beam framing.



By the early 1960s Eichler-style Ranch Houses had become popular statewide, showing up in the booming suburbs of the Atlanta metro area ...

50



and in more conservatively growing areas such as Milledgeville ...

51



as well as the new resort community on Jekyll Island.

52



But -- there were variations and contrary trends in ranch-house design ...

including *rustic-style* Ranch Houses, with board-and-batten siding and exposed rafter ends, in the spirit of William Wurster's 1928 Gregory Farmhouse in California (which had been termed "sophisticated rusticity" by Sunset magazine at the time).

53



Here's one clearly modeled after those 1930s Southwestern "shacks and shanties" and "chicken coop" modern houses.

54



And the East Coast *Colonial Revival-style* Ranch House was popular throughout this period ...

55



sometimes done rather expediently, with a portico simply pasted on the front ...

56



and sometimes done with considerable attention to not only form but also proportions and details.

57



At its minimum, the Colonial Revival style could be marked by just a single porch column and six shutters.



A note of caution: We are just now learning that some of these mid-century Colonial Revival-style "Ranch Houses" may not be Ranch Houses at all! Although they are only one story high and relatively long and low, on the outside they display a strict symmetry which is not in keeping with the more informal, casual, and functional design of many Ranch Houses, and on the inside they may have a very structured floor plan with a formal front foyer, central hallway, and a hierarchy of enclosed rooms, all antithetical to the open floor plans of mid-century Ranch Houses. In a sense, these houses could be considered as one-story mid-century versions of the traditional two-story Georgia Revival house. This would make them a very different, but important, mid-century house type, with a different provenance and a different design aesthetic. Stay tuned for the latest information about what might be called the "Georgian Ranch."

59



But everywhere -- *everywhere* -- throughout the 1950s, the seemingly simple red-brick Ranch House dominated the scene in Georgia ...

60



appearing in a multitude of forms ...

61



and becoming, almost in spite of itself, a new and predominant "style" of Ranch House architecture.

62



All these design trends that we've seen so far continued through the 1960s. The biggest difference is that the houses generally got bigger: longer, and seemingly lower ...

63



sometimes *really* longer and lower ...

64



reflecting increasing prosperity and rising expectations.

65



Here are some paired examples of the different *types* of Ranch Houses from this later decade (1960s).

Each pair represents the two predominant architectural *styles* of the period: the Colonial Revival (on the top) and the Contemporary (on the bottom).

This pair represents the *linear* type of Ranch House ...

66



As does this pair, but with front "porticoes" for each style.

67



These two illustrate the popular the *L-shaped* or *half-courtyard* Ranch House, both in red brick ...

68



and these two show how the *courtyard* type of Ranch House appeared in the 1960s.

69

Some experimentation with roof forms also continued during this decade ...



70

and continuing to make a strong showing throughout the 1960s was the signature "plain-style" red-brick Ranch House ...



71



again, in spite of itself, becoming a predominant “style” of Ranch House in Georgia.

72



And while "longer and lower" dominated the decade, it was not exclusive:



smaller Ranch Houses for homebuyers of more modest means continued to be built in large numbers.



**Design S 1716** 1,560 Sq. Ft./28,860 Cu. Ft.

Here is the American ranch style at its best. The simplicity of its exterior materials – brick veneer and horizontal wood siding – sets off the elegance of the deep windows and shutters. The covered porch with its wood pillars contribute an extra measure of charm.

Inside, the plan provides an excellent pattern for circulation. The attached two-car garage results in a short, dry walk to the kitchen when toting groceries from car to cabinet. The strategically located half-bath doubles as a mud room. The kitchen offers a large

area for dining. On special occasions the family room with its fireplace could function as a delightful, formal dining area. The living room may be completely by-passed. Blueprints for this particular design include all optional elevations.

Ranch Houses continued to be built in Georgia, as elsewhere, into the 1970s and beyond – indeed, they are still being built today.



But right around 1970, significance changes in the housing market were taking place, and the Ranch House, which had dominated the Georgia market for two decades, began to be superseded by other house types ...



including the Split-Level House ...

77



the Split-Foyer (or Bi-Level) House ...

78




and the full Two-Story House.

79

Completely NEW  
*the perfect combination*  
all the advantages  
of the ranch house  
and the two story house

New Home Ideas

# 10 Ways to Get More House for Your Money



The driving force behind these changes was, primarily, economics.

For two reasons, the Ranch House was proving to be economically challenged, especially in the growing middle-class suburban markets: costs of construction (foundations primarily), and costs of land (lot size).

80



Some examples will make the point:

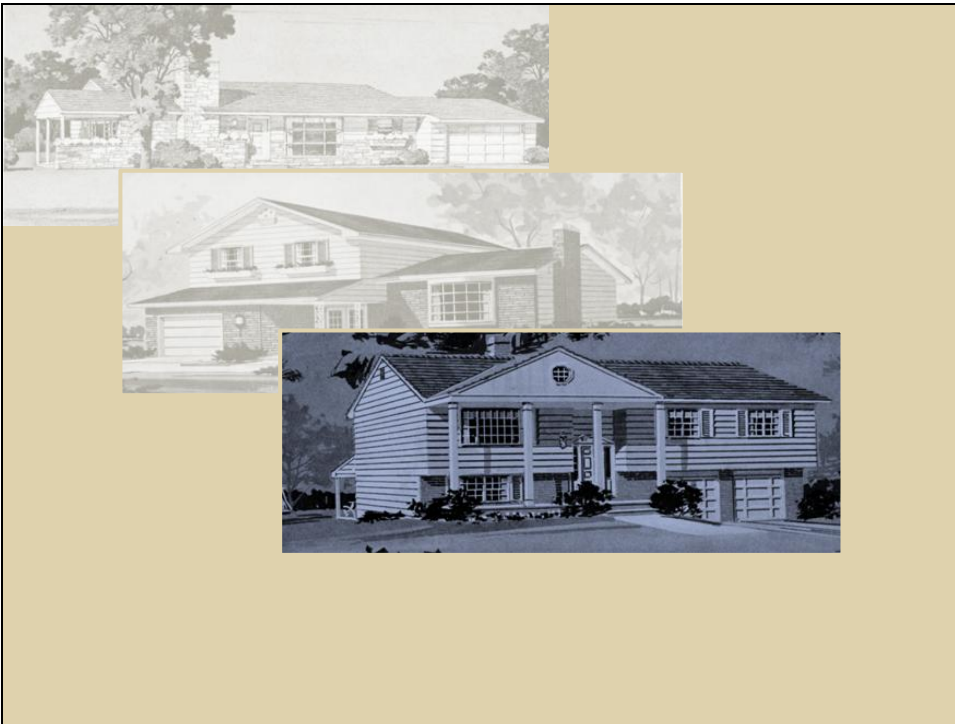
At the end of the 1960s, a 1,300 square-foot Ranch House was, on average, 50 feet long, and required a lot at least 70 feet wide.

81

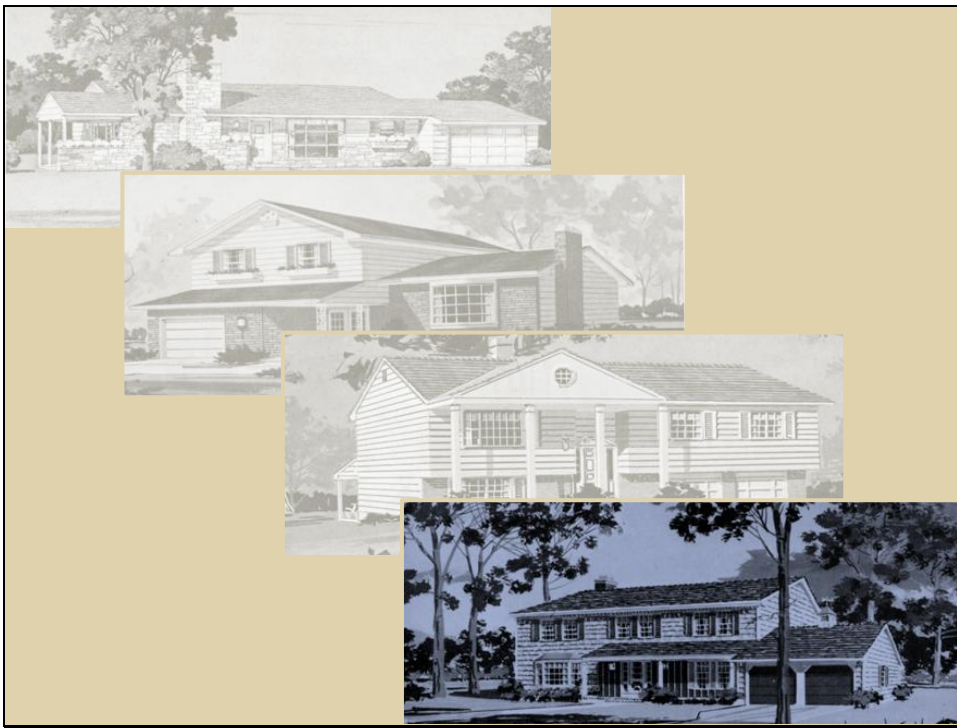


In contrast, a 50-foot-long Split-Level House provided 1,600 square feet on the same size lot;

82




a 50-foot-long Split-Foyer house could provide 1,900 square feet;



and a 50-foot-long Two-Story House could provide over 2,000 square feet.

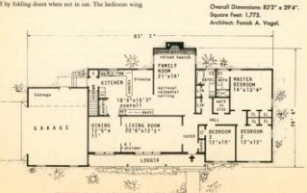
HOUSE PLANS, 48 W. 48, N. Y. 10036



**Complete on One Level** Plan No. L-1235


Here is a home that is elegant in every aspect of design and facilities. A long, covered front porch leads to an entrance foyer with three closets and an attractive view of a large living room and dining room separated by a simple iron divider. Together they make an exceptional entertaining area. At the other end, the foyer leads to an equally attractive family room. With the optional cathedral ceiling this would be a most impressive room, and including the exceptionally well-planned kitchen and dining room, it would double as a most family room. Children's play and study are in one well-ventilated and well-lit separate room for good traffic patterns. There is a separate bathroom, which can be closed off by locking doors when not in use. The bathroom wing is designed for quiet and solitude, buffered from the activity areas by halls and closets. The family bathroom is positioned right off the foyer to save guests as well as the master bedroom, has a walk-in closet and all these have ample closets. With an added walk-in closet in the bathroom, which could be arranged to open into the master bedroom. The terrace is attractive, under a large cantilevered roof line, has the double garage entrance in the side. With its green, weather-resistant and stone, it is a truly lovely home for any family.

Overall Dimensions: 82' x 29'4".  
Square Feet: 1,371.  
Architects: Frank A. Vogel.




91

HOUSE PLANS, 48 W. 48, N. Y. 10036



**Up-To-Date Favorite Style** Plan No. L-4245

You needn't be old-fashioned to like this traditional house because no old-fashioned house ever had a floor plan as efficient as this. Downstairs all the rooms are in step with today's way of life. Both the formal living room and family room are convenient to the front entry. The former has an attractive bow window and seat and the latter, for informal activities, has a large fireplace and sliding glass doors to the terrace. The large center foyer with two coat closets also leads to a separate formal dining room and to a modern kitchen that is much more than a place to prepare meals. With its marvelous layout, large counter area, spacious dining, and sliding glass door to the terrace (see sketch), this would be the logical gathering place for the entire family and for informal guests, either to participate or as spectators. Here the homemaker is in a key position at work or play—with a serving shelf over the sink to serve the terrace, a planing desk and counters in the dining, an unusually large pantry between dining room and kitchen, and a laundry room a step away. Upstairs the bedrooms have been planned for three comfort and quiet for a large family. They surround a balcony running over the stairwell, avoiding a closed-in feeling despite the number of rooms. In the master bedroom suite everything is spacious, including the bath with stall shower, walk-in closet, and a dressing room with a window near the built-in dressing table. There are three, or possibly four, additional bedrooms, as shown in the plan, depending upon family requirements. All have well planned closets and desk space, and there is another efficiently divided bath for maximum use. A large linen closet is centrally located. The exterior is traditional in feeling but up to date in its simplicity of line and use of materials and would be welcome in any location.



Overall Dimensions: 66' x 32'4".  
Square Feet: 1,140 1st fl.  
1,875 2nd fl.  
Architects: Herman H. York/Raymond E. Schenke.

44

No overtaxing large family requirements or a heavy entertaining schedule in a kitchen-dinette like this.

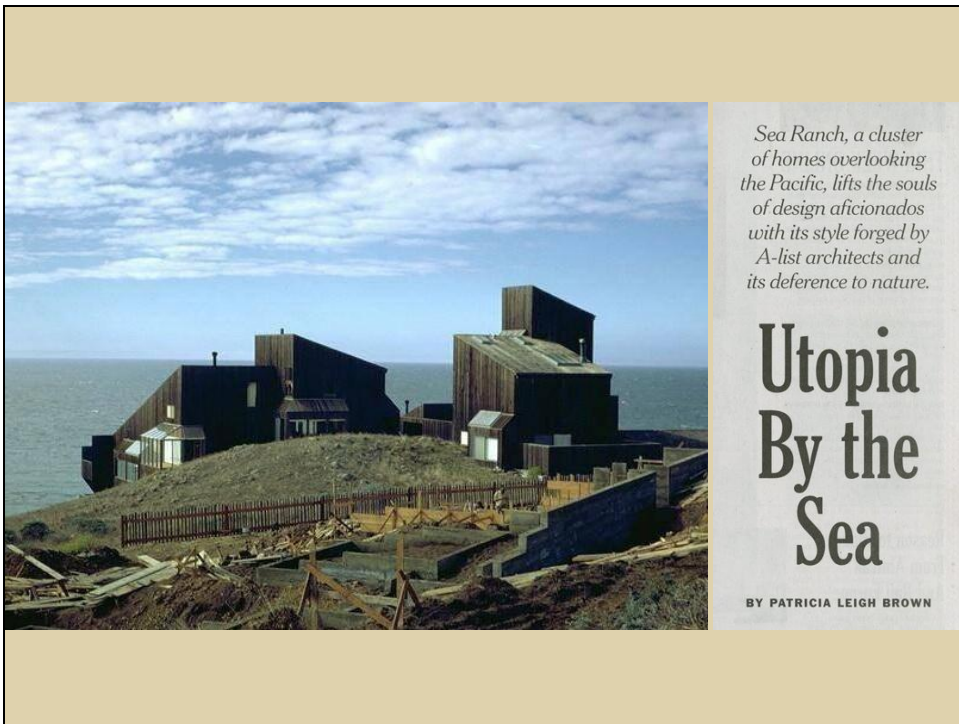
As a result, the Ranch House found itself increasingly economically disadvantaged on two counts: construction costs, particularly for foundations, and lot size.

85



Another factor leading to the demise of the Ranch House in the early 1970s was the sudden appearance on the scene of a radically new and different-looking house that stole the show: the Cedar-Sided Geometric House.

86

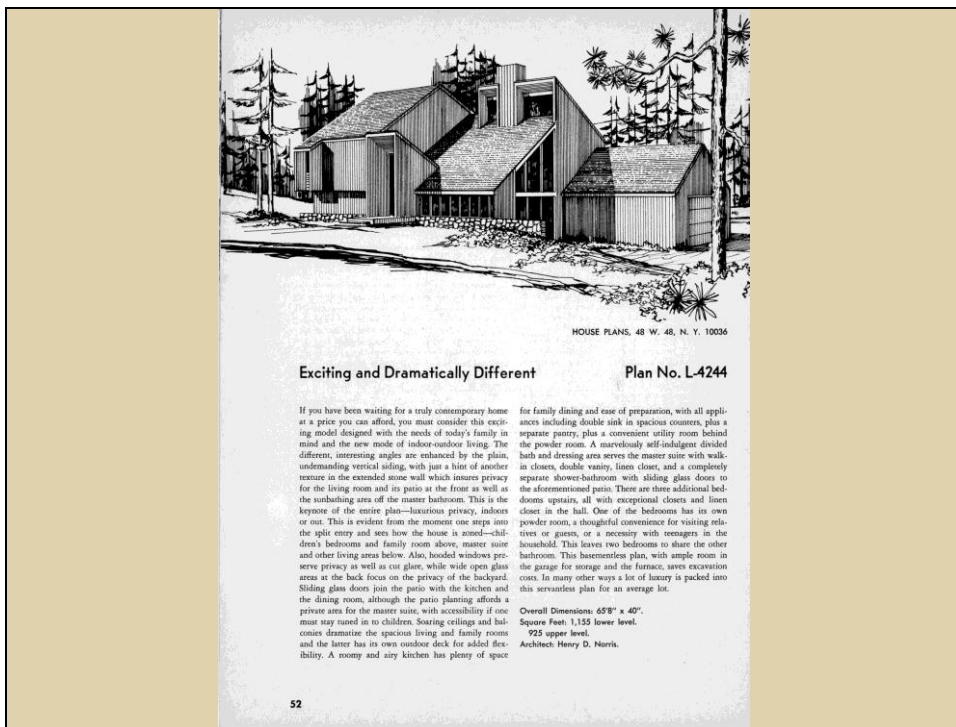


*Sea Ranch, a cluster of homes overlooking the Pacific, lifts the souls of design aficionados with its style forged by A-list architects and its deference to nature.*

## Utopia By the Sea

BY PATRICIA LEIGH BROWN

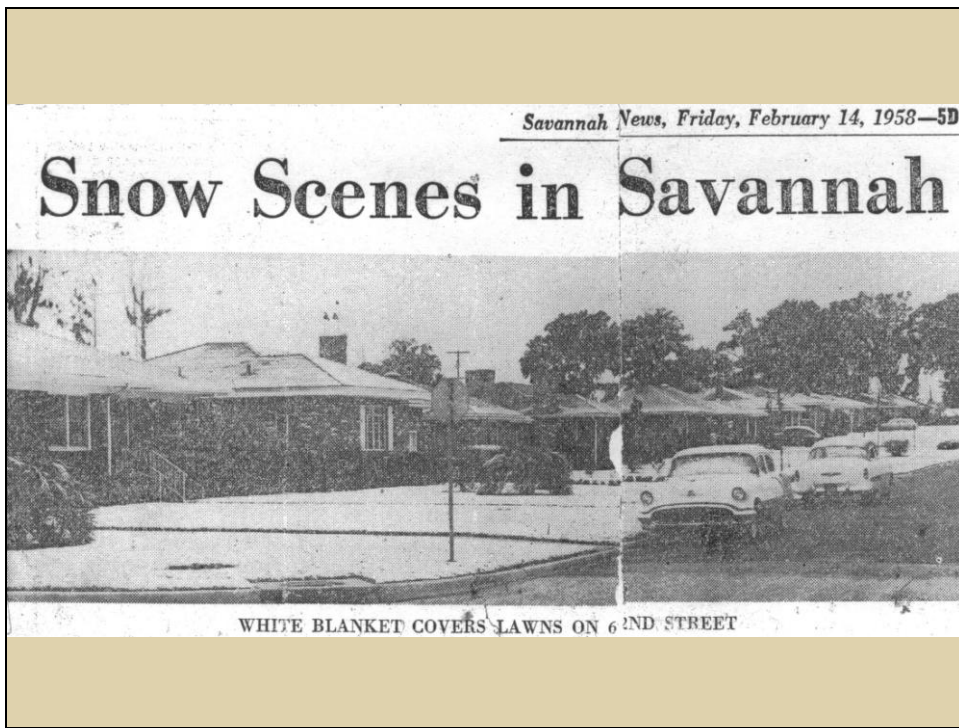
These new houses were inspired by a mid-1960s condominium development on the California coast north of San Francisco known as "Sea Ranch."



They began showing up in popular plan books as early as 1974.

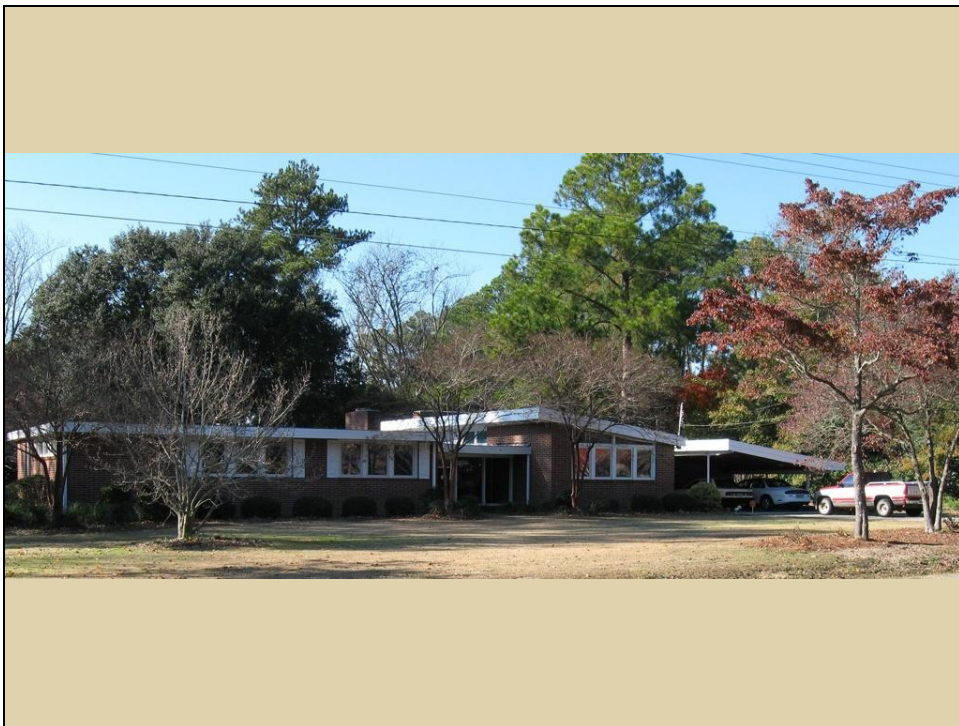


It didn't take long for this geometrically bold architecture to make its way into the suburbs of Georgia – and in doing so, displacing the now-"traditional" Ranch House as THE house to have.



In spreading across the state during the 1950s and 1960s, the Ranch House in Georgia shaped a new post-war *residential geography*.

The Ranch House knew no geographical boundaries:



It could exist by itself, in an isolated setting ...

91



and it insinuated its way onto vacant lots in established communities, like Avondale Estates.



92

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NOW AVAILABLE FOR YOU TO BUILD YOUR DREAM HOUSE  
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But the biggest geographical impact of the Ranch House came in form of new *subdivisions* ...

93



with rows of Ranch Houses following gently curving streets ...

94



or sometimes simply lined up along an extension of a community's earlier gridiron street plan ...

95



perhaps with the houses at intersections set at angles for a new effect ...

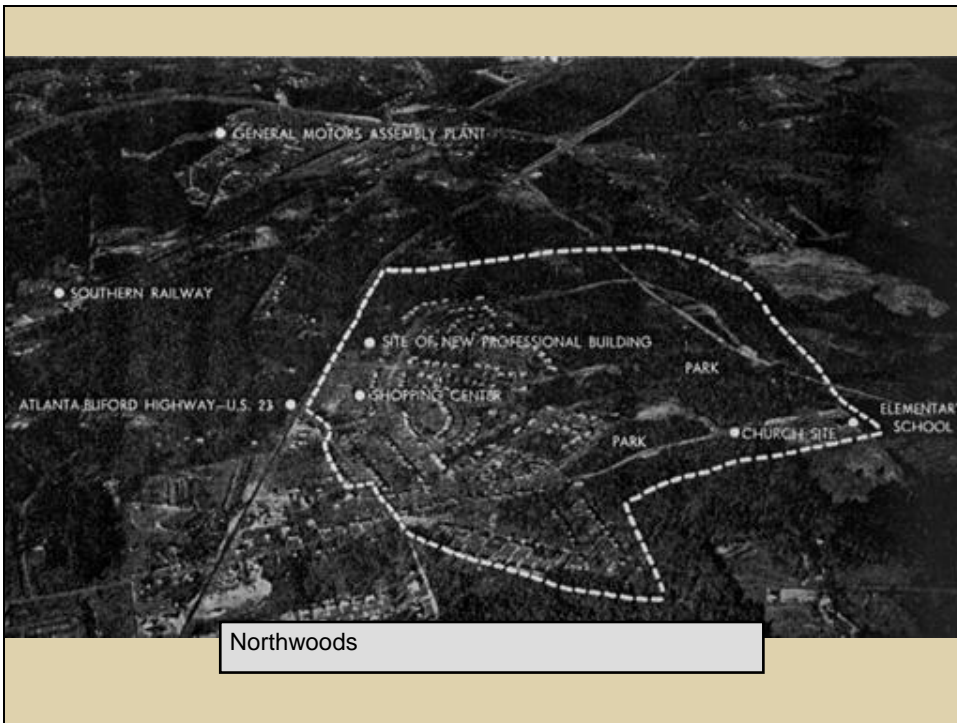
96



and everywhere appearing in numbers never seen before in the history of housing in Georgia.



To give them an identity, many of these new subdivisions sported distinctive signage at their entrances.



Joining these many subdivisions was the occasional “super”-subdivision:

the entirely new *planned suburban community*.

Northwoods, in Doraville, near the former General Motors assembly plant, is the earliest example in the state; development began in 1950 and continued into the early 1960s.

99



Most of the 750 houses in this new community were Ranch Houses ...

100



lots of Ranch Houses.

101



The earliest were the “plain” red-brick Ranch Houses.

102



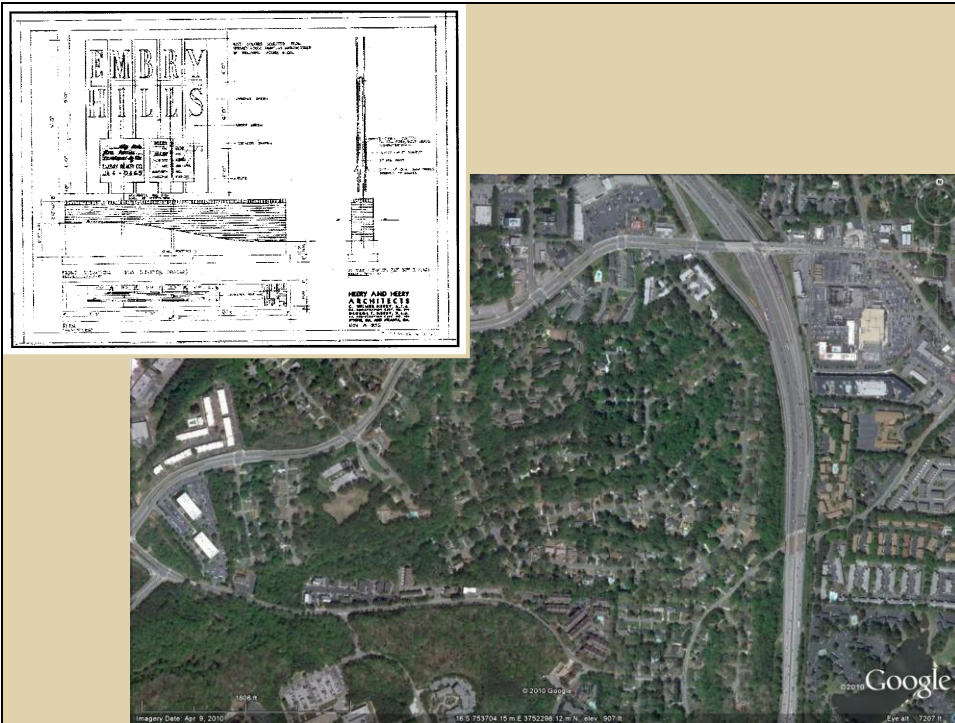
Later houses were given a more Contemporary appearance to heighten their appeal and maximize their utility.

103



Northwoods also included “community” buildings including a school, churches, a shopping center, and a professional office building along with several neighborhood parks.

104



A second documented planned suburban community in Georgia is *Embry Hills*, located just southeast of Northwoods, in the northeast Atlanta metro area.

Development began in the mid-1950s and continued into the 1970s.

Like Northwoods, Embry Hills included retail stores and offices along with houses. But Embry Hills also included a wider variety of houses along with apartment buildings.

105



In addition to Ranch Houses, Embry Hills included a large number of Split-Level Houses and a smaller number of Two-Story Houses.

106



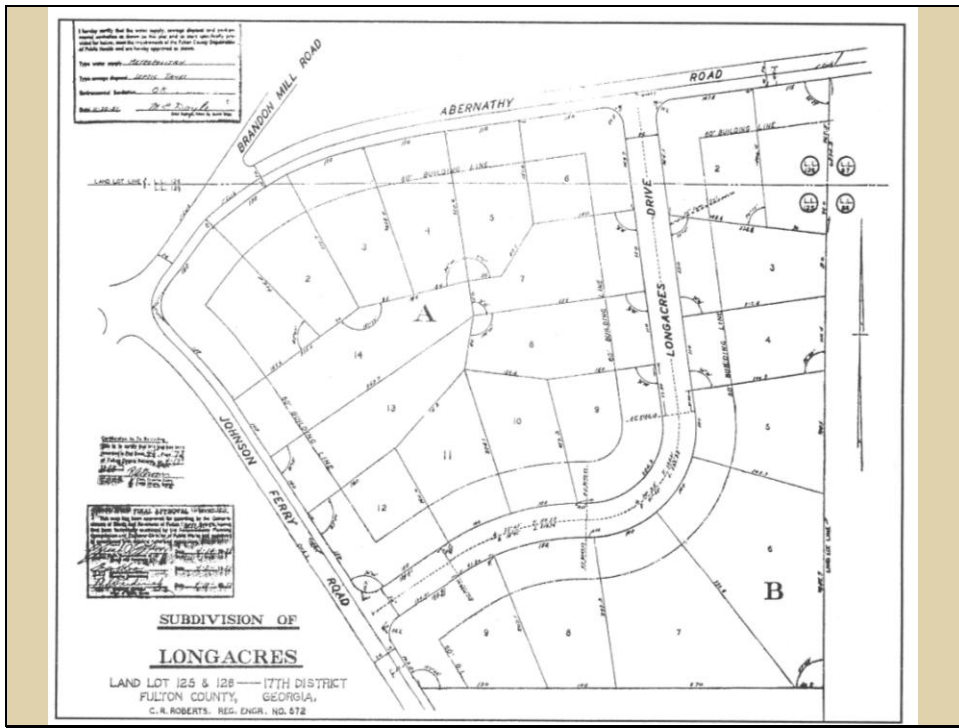


Another suburban community, called Windsor Forest, was planned for Savannah in the mid-1950s.

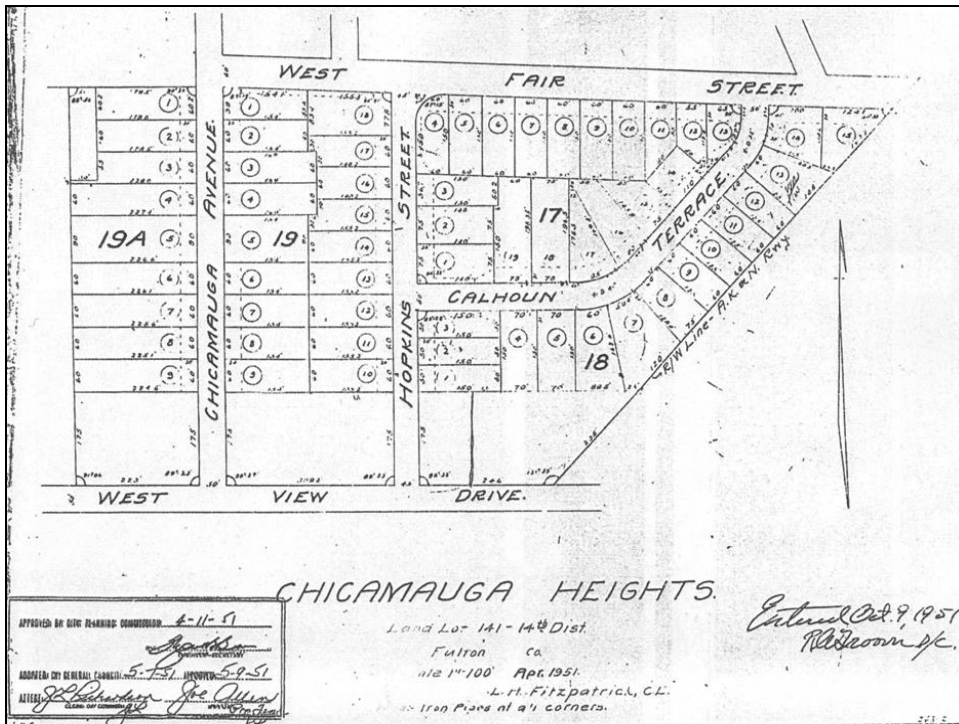
It got a lot of press including national notice in *House & Home* magazine.

But it never got fully off the ground, in spite of its developers' best efforts, and it devolved into a collection of individual suburban residential subdivisions with a variety of Ranch Houses.

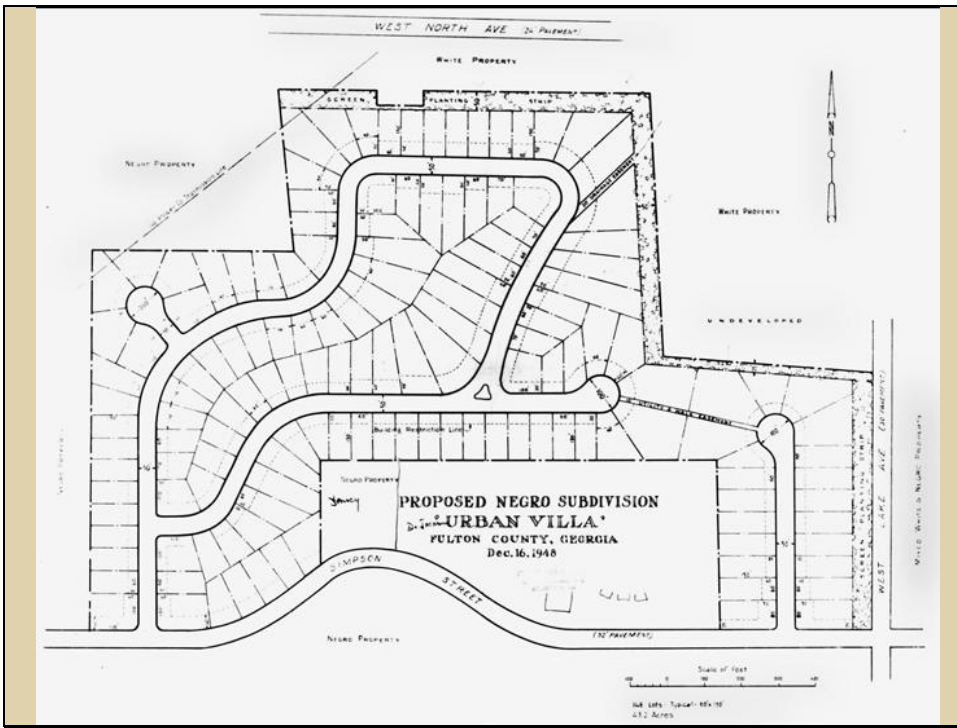
Most mid-century suburbs in Georgia developed in a similar piecemeal or incremental manner.



Indeed, the *typical* mid-century Georgia Ranch House subdivision was generally small, ranging from a few to a few dozen houses ...

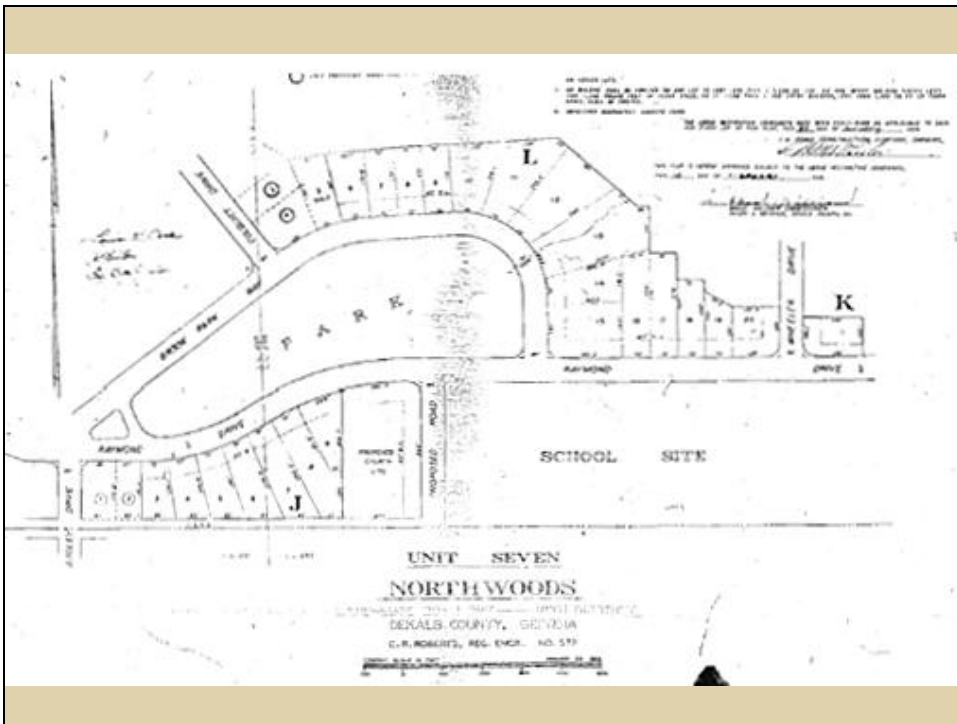


110



although some ranged upwards of 100 houses.

111



The larger suburban developments were usually platted and developed in phases, or "units"; this is a plat for Unit Seven of the Northwoods development in DeKalb County.

112



On the outskirts of metropolitan areas, Ranch Houses were built along country roads, between older residences and farms.

A good example is Rockbridge Road in DeKalb County, near Stone Mountain ...

113



where, in the 1950s, much of the vacant land between the older houses was filled in by individual Ranch Houses on relatively large lots.

114



115



In the rural parts of the state, Ranch Houses also appeared on farms ...

116



117



Sometimes replacing older farmhouses in pre-existing agricultural complexes ...

118



and sometimes being built alongside or in front of an older farmhouse.

119



Outside of Ashburn, this 1956 Ranch House, built of fashionable “Tennessee Crab Orchard” stone, was constructed on the site of the family's 19th century farmhouse ...

120



which was carefully moved across the road and occupied by yet another generation of the farm family!

121



In a few instances, new Ranch Houses were built as the homesteads for entirely new post-war farms ...

122



complete with new concrete-block barns and outbuildings.

123



In this case, not to be outdone by its fancy-pants California cousins, this 1940s farmhouse also included a patio with an outdoor BBQ and picnic tables.

124



However, there appears to be an interesting design twist to the Georgia Ranch House farmhouse: While it generally features most of the prevailing design features in its overall form and front façade ...

125



the back of the house may be devoid of the “inside-outside” features of its suburban cousins – for example, the absence of large picture windows or sliding glass doors opening out onto a formal patio.



126



This may be because farm families spent much of their time outdoors anyway and did not need or perhaps did not even want the merging of the indoors and outdoors that characterized Ranch Houses generally.

127



Also in rural areas, Ranch Houses appeared alongside older houses in small settlements called hamlets, many populated by several generations of African-American families.



So -- just like the famous 1950 Ford motorcar, and unlike any other type of house, the mid-century Ranch House was *everywhere* in Georgia: in cities and towns, in suburbs, and out in the country.



HISTORIC PRESERVATION DIVISION

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**Mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century Ranch Houses in Georgia**

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**September 2011**

**Richard Cloues, Ph.D.**

This concludes Part IV of *The Ordinary Iconic Ranch House*. The story of the Ranch House in Georgia continues with Part V, "Distinctive Aspects of the Ranch House in Georgia."