

O'CONNOR HOUSE ARCHITECT DK TAYLOR

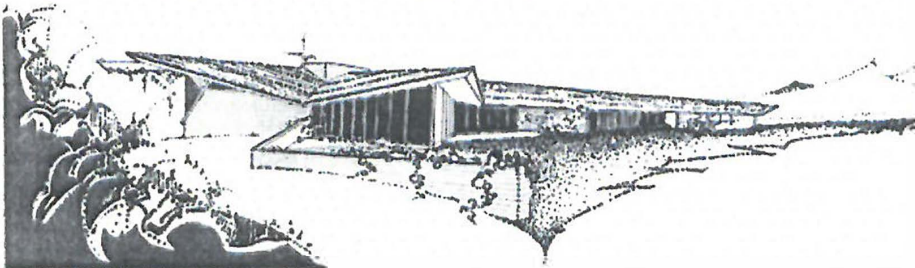
SCOTTSDALE'S MYSTERIOUS MODERN MASTER

By Tazmine Loomans, partial reprint from ModernPhoenix.com

There's a masterpiece quietly nestled behind the lush desert foliage of Clearwater Hills, hidden from sight were it not for a pointed roof peeking out from the canopy of trees. Chances are, few people have ever seen this little gem, designed by architect DK (Donald Keith) Taylor in 1960 for himself and his wife Nellie. Not unlike this house, Modern Phoenix has had only glimpses into the life and works of this obscure but important architect. Other than his home in Clearwater Hills, we know of only one other Taylor-designed house in the Valley, **O'Connor House** -- and it's not just good, it's remarkable!

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The John Jay O'Connor III home, to be completed in the spring, pleases both owner and architect — D. K. Taylor of Scottsdale. A modest budget resulted in a plan that expresses Arizona — natural, sun dried adobe, natural Arizona fir, and glass. Located south of Stanford Drive, the house looks out to Camelback Mountain.

To understand Taylor's two known works, it's important to discuss the major influences on the architecture of Scottsdale after World War II. As early as during the Great Depression, wealthy visitors would come

to Scottsdale viewing it as a charming western getaway. In an effort to cash in on this allure, the Chamber of Commerce proclaimed Scottsdale as “the West's most Western town” in 1947.

Unfortunately, this western identity was often expressed literally and led to a downtown that looked like a Hollywood frontier movie set. Another factor that shaped the post-WWII architecture of Scottsdale was the town's reputation as an artists' haven. As early as 1929, artists and architects began to flock to this southwestern destination. The most important, of course, was Frank Lloyd Wright who purchased land in Scottsdale in 1937 for what would eventually become his winter home, Taliesin West. The presence of Wright and later the Taliesin West School of Architecture created a strong modern influence in Arizona.

After WWII, Scottsdale began to grow by leaps and bounds becoming a major tourist destination. As the art and architecture of the city became more sophisticated, the literal frontier style slowly faded and a more abstract expression of the West took hold.

Taylor entered the Valley architecture scene in 1956, where his first known place of business was in Studio 8 of the Kiva Crafts Center located on 5th Avenue and Craftsman Road in downtown Scottsdale. He was one of the original tenants of what was then a brand new arts complex in the heart of the city.

The Kiva Crafts Center embodied not only the modern movement of the time, built, as it is, in the minimalist modern style, but also Scottsdale's thriving artisan culture. As a tenant, Taylor was

surrounded by various artisans working in glass, clay, leather, textiles and other media. Lloyd Kiva New, a champion of the Indian Arts in Scottsdale, was associated with the complex and the center became known as 'the Indian village'. The dual influence of modernism and the artisan sensibility so pervasive at the Kiva Crafts Center was soon to become evident in Taylor's work as well. In 1957, one year after the Kiva Crafts Center opened; John and Sandra Day O'Connor had bought land in Paradise Valley and were seeking an architect.

According to their son Scott, they found Taylor at 'the Indian Village' and hired him because he was 'Taliesen-trained and wasn't going to charge an arm and a leg'. In fact, Taylor was not Taliesen-trained according to the staff at both Taliesen and Taliesen West. There is no record of him at either school. But looking at his work, it's clear that he (along with many other Scottsdale architects of the time) was most definitely influenced by Wright.

The O'Connors found Taylor appealing because he was a modernist willing to work with a traditional, hand-crafted material: the adobe brick. This combination of modernism with a traditional western component (so traditional, in fact, that the Native Americans used it before the Spaniards arrived) was the quintessential Scottsdale style of the time. Taylor's professional relationship with the O'Connors proved to be pivotal for his legacy. Because of its famous owner, the home Taylor designed in 1958 has been saved from lonely anonymity, or worse, hapless demolition. Thankfully, it's been preserved and moved by its namesake foundation O'Connor House, to its new home just

south of the Historical Society Museum in Papago Park. We suspect the building will be appreciated and preserved for long time to come.

Though the main reason for the preservation of the house is in honor of Justice O'Connor's time in Arizona, Taylor's design work is quite extraordinary, worthy of preservation in its own right. Taylor was a master modernist. The composition of the home is simple but exquisite. It sits on a strong north-south axis. Taylor uses the roof expressively and artistically; a single low-pitched roof creates an extended horizontal line with a deep overhang on the south side. In two instances Taylor flares the roof upward: once to indicate the entrance on the east side and again to open up views of Camelback Mountain on the west side.



The strong north-south axis of the house, with the extended overhang on the south side and the flared-up roof on the east side captures views of Camelback Mountain

Another modern feature of the house is the open living, dining and kitchen area. The O'Connors spent many hours entertaining friends in their home and the open floor plan allowed the future Justice to be in the kitchen while interacting with her guests in the living room. This layout was very progressive for the time as contemporary homes typically hid the kitchen out of sight from shared living spaces.



The swept-up roofline on the east creates the entrance

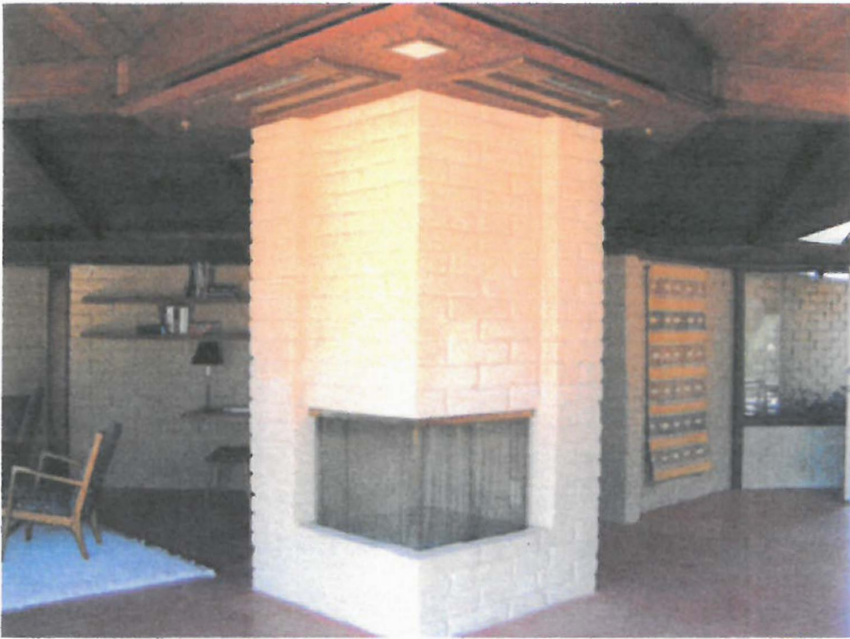
Taylor used a minimal palette of materials that gives the home both a modern and a Southwestern sensibility. Nowhere is this more apparent than with the free-standing adobe fireplace. Its location, in the middle of an open-plan living room, is very modern, but the adobe brick gives it the look of a traditional hearth.

Throughout the house, the adobe brick is exposed, and along with the wood structure and red concrete floors, it gives the home a rugged feel. In the end, Taylor elegantly achieved what Justice O'Connor had asked for which was to recreate the memories of her childhood adobe home on the Lazy B Ranch in Duncan, Arizona.

One striking feature of the O'Connor House is the diamond-shaped window on the north end of the living room. This unusual shape could be an architectural abstraction of the Indian Arts that surrounded Taylor at the Kiva Crafts Center. Regardless of its origins, though, this window gives the home an unmistakably Southwestern flavor.



The unique diamond-shaped window from the exterior



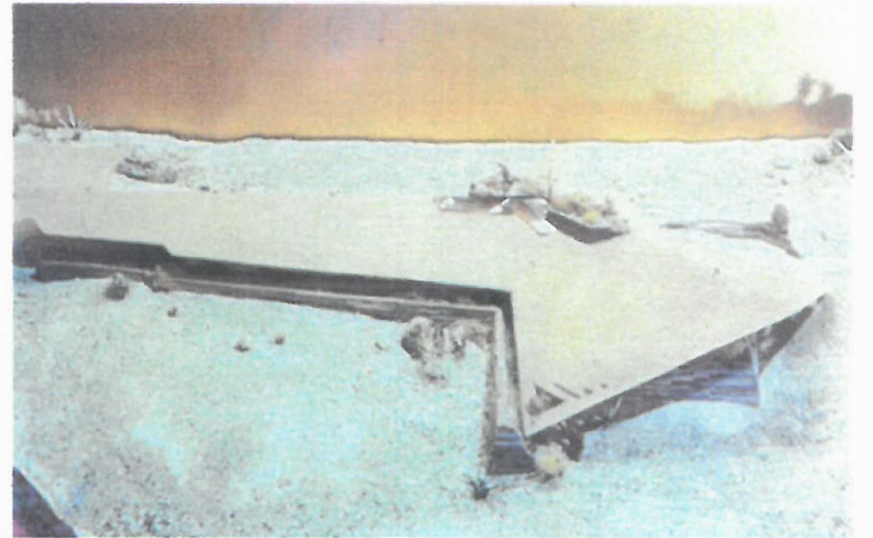
The adobe fire place defines the living room and is both modern and Southwestern



The open kitchen, dining and living room space



Interior view of diamond window that may have Native American influences



Scale model of the O'Connor house by architect Lamont Langworthy for D.K. Taylor. Used with kind permission.