



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Bolton and Barnstone's Lawrence H. Blum House (1954); Rex Goode House (1958) featuring Robert Madden mural; interior of Tam Kiehnhoff's James Flowers-designed house; south-facing garden court of Goode House; Blum House kitchen.



ARCHITECTURE

BEAUMONT MOD

Scouting trip yields mid-century surprises

LOCATED 88 MILES NORTHEAST OF DOWNTOWN

Houston, Beaumont is home to a surprising wealth of mid-twentieth-century modern architecture. It has supported a local architectural profession since 1901, when discovery of oil at Spindletop in what is now southern Beaumont transformed the economy of Texas. Tam Kiehnhoff, a Beaumont resident, hosted a tour of this architecture for Houston Mod and AIA Houston on a steamy Saturday in early August. Kiehnhoff not only had made the acquaintance of Beaumont architects D. Rex Goode Jr. (1920-2009), Charles H. Thompson Jr., and James Flowers, but also had bought one of Flowers' most outstanding houses, a sprawling one-story contemporary ranch house in Calder Place.

The tour began with Houston architect Gerald Moorhead, an associate principal of Bailey Architects of Houston, who spoke on the

restoration of Beaumont's 14-story Jefferson County Courthouse of 1932, the first "skyscraper" courthouse in Texas and a triumph of Art Deco design. The group then visited modern architecture from the 1920s to the 1940s located west of Interstate 10 in Calder Place, as well as other tree-shaded neighborhoods developed between the 1930s and the 1960s.

Lauri Ann and Troy Ford moved to Beaumont from Port Arthur, where they work, when they bought and began to rehabilitate Bolton & Barnstone's Lawrence H. Blum House of 1954, one of Preston Bolton and Howard Barnstone's first forays into Miesian design. The small house (2,100 square feet, including a two car garage) is a meticulously detailed steel-framed pavilion that has been lovingly rehabilitated and furnished by the Fords, who are long-standing mid-century enthusiasts. From there, Kiehnhoff led the group past another classic Bolton & Barnstone mid-1950s Miesian courtyard house, which is a block away from Barnstone's Hartman House of 1949, the first house he designed after coming to Houston in 1948.

Just as impressive as the Blum-Ford House is the modern courtyard house that Rex Goode built for his family in Calder Pace in 1958. Now being rehabilitated by Stacey and Richard Haynes, the Goode House is of exposed post-and-beam construction with its linear plan oriented to a rear, south-facing garden court. The highlight of the living room is a jubilant abstract mural, painted directly on sliding cabinet panels by Beaumont artist Robert Madden.

Next came a tour of Kiehnhoff's James Flowers-designed house and of a neighboring house by Charles H. Thompson (both from the late 1950s). She then led visitors to an outside-only walk-around of another Goode house located in the 1920s garden neighborhood of Caldwell. This house is quite impressive: a flat-roofed, cubically proportioned block lifted above its flat, open site on recessed, limestone-faced parapet walls. The tour concluded with a visit to a courtyard house designed in 1967 by architect J. Lynn Harden. Typical of the ways modern architecture changed from the 1950s to the 1960s, this house is more formal in its planning, with its spaces focused on the walled courtyard.

Heat and humidity notwithstanding, this tour made a persuasive case for the importance of mid-century modern architecture in Beaumont—even without visiting any of the work of Beaumont's leading architects of the 1970s, Gordy & Huffhines, or buildings by modern architects in surrounding communities, such as Moore, Stansbury & Vaught in Port Arthur and Gale Cook in Orange. It is a forceful reminder that the legacy of modern architecture is not confined to the biggest cities in Texas but has been nurtured in mid-size cities and small towns as well.

—Barrie Scardino