



Photo by Edward A. Bourdon

The houses that William Floyd designed and built around Houston, such as this one in Memorial Bend, were modest in size, but large in the influence they had on others. Floyd helped set modern design as a standard for Houston's post-World War II neighborhoods.

Remembering William Floyd

Following a post-war housing shortage, Houston underwent a construction boom in the 1950s to the benefit of many local architects, one of the most prolific of whom was William Floyd. Floyd, an Oklahoma native who moved to Texas in the 1930s, passed away in 2004 at the age of 93. His lasting influence on the look of residential Houston is felt in neighborhoods around the city, from Glenbrook Valley in the south to Walnut Bend in the west and Spring Branch in the northwest.

William Norman Floyd was born in Norman, Oklahoma in 1911. His father taught history at the University of Oklahoma, where Floyd would eventually enroll to study mechanical engineering before becoming one of Oklahoma's first architecture students, graduating in 1934.

Upon graduation, Floyd served in the Army Air Corps in Texas, first at Ellington Field as a construction inspector and then as an engineer in Galveston. Toward the end of his stay in Galveston, Floyd came across a help-wanted ad in a local paper noting an opening for an architectural draftsman in Lindale Park, a new subdivision in north Houston. Floyd took the job and moved to Houston to go to work for developer W. R. Reid, who provided him with a field office and had him design a dozen houses in the Lindale Park neighborhood.

By 1941, when Floyd was recalled to service with the Army Air Corps, he had earned his license and opened his own architectural practice. During World War II, Floyd served as a staff architect at the Oklahoma City Aircraft Assembly Plant and as a construction officer in Guam and Okinawa. Upon returning to Houston, Floyd went back to work in Lindale Park as the subdivision architect. He reopened his practice, concentrating for the most

part on small bungalows, but eventually branching out to other building types.

In 1950, a modern, two-story office building Floyd built on the corner of Sunset and Kirby was featured in a local newspaper. This recognition allowed Floyd to expand his practice in 1951. He hired two draftsmen, Harwood Taylor and William Jenkins, both fresh out of school. The firm became William N. Floyd and Associates and entered a productive period that would last until Floyd was called up by the Air Force to serve in the Korean War.

Not wanting to close the practice while he was serving in the military, Floyd left Taylor and Jenkins in charge. In the Air Force Floyd rose to the rank of captain, serving as the Chief of Master Planning for the Northeast Air Command, overseeing design and construction of air bases in Newfoundland, Baffin Island, Greenland, and Labrador.

After the war, as a reward to Jenkins for his loyalty, Floyd changed the name of the firm to Jenkins & Floyd. With Jenkins in charge of the business, Floyd worked as both an architect and a developer, building houses in neighborhoods such as Robindell, Briarcroft, Meyerland, Memorial Bend, Bellaire, Briargrove, and Walnut Bend.

In 1955, the house Floyd designed for his family at 226 Pine Hollow was honored with a place on the Contemporary Arts Association's Modern House Tour IV. This house typified a style that Floyd would draw upon for years: modestly-sized houses—his own was 2,700 square feet—that emphasized privacy. Floyd built variations on this design across the quickly-growing west side of Houston.

It was at this time, when his practice was the most active, that Floyd chose to

leave the firm to Jenkins—Taylor had already moved on to open his own practice—and start fresh.

It's hard to pinpoint who was more influenced by their association: Floyd or Taylor and Jenkins. Modern influences were visible in Floyd's designs before the two promising architects joined the firm, but his designs took on a more modern look when the three of them worked together. However, it was after the three parted ways that Floyd's work began to attract national attention. Certainly Floyd had an eye for talent; the two draftsmen he chose out of school would go on to become two of Houston's more prominent architects.

The residences Floyd designed and built during this period took on a cleaner, low-slung look. In neighborhoods such as Woodland Hollow, Briargrove, and Memorial Bend he began to lean toward planar façades with flat roofs, low-pitched rancho deluxes, and the occasional butterfly-roofed house. His homes were affordable yet stylish. They appealed to aficionados of modern style, and attracted the attention of magazines such as *Better Homes & Gardens*, *Good Housekeeping*, *House & Home*, *Practical Builder*, and *American Builder*.

Floyd imbued his designs with personal touches. His houses had begun to include details such as hand-blown light fixtures from Venice and mosaic tile bathrooms for what he liked to call "a hand-worked look." One client had Floyd design a Piet Mondrian-inspired front door—a task he attempted 50 times before he felt he had the "right" door. Other clients were attracted by his shoji screens, terrazzo flooring, and porte cocheres. Advertisements for Floyd-designed houses enticed buy-

ers with house names such as "The Contemporama" or "The Tropicana."

Floyd's designs struck a chord with local architects as well: Bill Caudill, Tom Bullock, Wallie Scott, and Charles Lawrence of Caudill Rowlett Scott all chose to live in Floyd-designed houses when they moved their firm to Houston from College Station. Earle Alexander, a founder of PGAL, and Gil Thweatt, a partner with Welton Beckett Associates and later principal with 3/DI, also chose houses designed by Floyd.

But just as he was garnering the greatest recognition of his career, Floyd began scaling back his practice and entering retirement. He shifted his focus to selling an eclectic mix of designs via home plan magazines such as *New Homes Guide* and *Better Homes & Gardens Home Building Ideas*.

Floyd's contributions to the city were largely forgotten over the next 30 years. His work did appear in the second edition of the *Houston Architectural Guide*, which listed two of his modern houses, one of them in Briargrove and the other in Memorial Bend, but otherwise he was little remembered.

But Floyd's work began to be noticed again with the advent of the internet. His name surfaced repeatedly in online design communities, exposing new generations of architecture enthusiasts to his work. In his early 90s by this time, Floyd appreciated the renewed interest.

While William Floyd's work may never receive the recognition given to many of his contemporaries, thousands of Houstonians have benefited from his designs. Perhaps his greatest achievement was setting modern design as the standard for the new neighborhoods of post-war Houston. — Michael Brichford