

Survey and Research Report

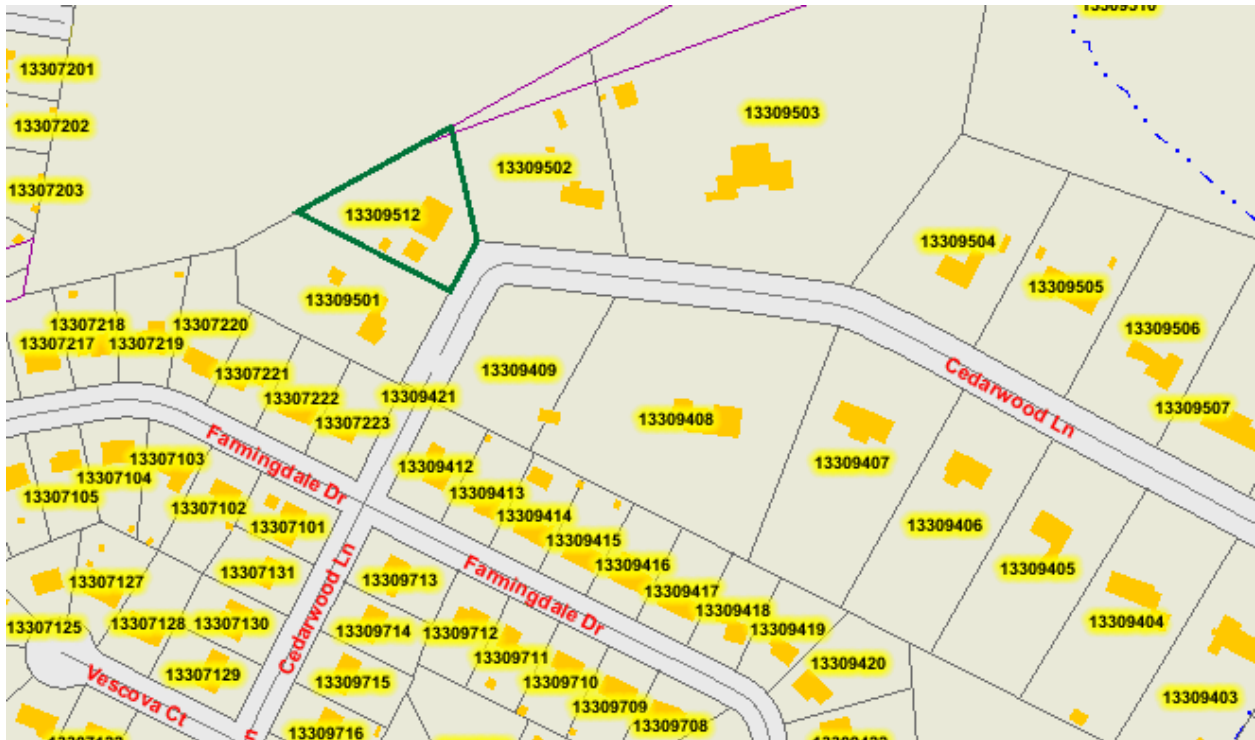
on the

Cohen-Fumero House



1. **Name and location of the property:** The property known as the Cohen-Fumero House is located 1154 Cedarwood Lane, Charlotte, N.C.
2. **Name and address of the current owner of the property:**

John Lee Moore, III and Angeles Ortega-Moore
1154 Cedarwood Lane
Charlotte, N.C. 28212
3. **Representative photographs of the property:** This report contains representative photographs of the property.
4. **A map depicting the location of the property:**



5. Current Tax Parcel Reference and Deed to the property: The tax parcel number for the property is 13309512. The most recent deed for the property is recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Books [21551 page 776](#) .

6. A brief historical sketch of the property: This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Stewart Gray.

7. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains a brief architectural description prepared by Stewart Gray.

8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria for designation set forth in N.C.G.S 160A-400.5.

a. Special significance in terms of its history, architecture and/or cultural importance: The Commission judges that the property known as the Cohen-Fumero House possesses special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:

1) The Cohen-Fumero House is significant as a rare surviving architect-designed Modernist Style house in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.

2) The Cohen-Fumero House is an important early example of the work of Murray Whisnant, a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects and a graduate of the North Carolina State University's School of Design.

3) The Cohen-Fumero House is an important and rare example of residential architecture in Charlotte that was significantly influenced by the seminal work and teachings of the faculty North Carolina State University's School of Design.

4) As the home of the artists Herb Cohen and Jose Fumero, the Cohen-Fumero House became a center of the creative and social life of the artistic community in Charlotte in the 1960s, with guest including prominent regional, national and international artists.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association: The Commission contends that the architectural description prepared by Stewart Gray demonstrates that the property known as the Cohen-Fumero House meets this criterion.

9. Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal: The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply for an automatic deferral of 50% of the Ad Valorem taxes on all or any portion of the property which becomes a "historic landmark."

10. Portion of the Property Recommended for Designation: The house, land and all features associated with tax parcel.

11. Date of Preparation of this Report: April 7, 2013

12. Prepared by: Stewart Gray

Historical Essay

Architect Murray Whisnant moved back to his hometown of Charlotte in 1956 after graduating from the North Carolina State University's School of Design. At the School of Design, Whisnant studied with some of the most talented and influential architects and designers working at that time in the United States.^[1] Under the leadership of the school's first dean, Henry L. Kamphoefner, the School of Design

became one of the leading proponents of Modernist design in the rapidly developing South of the 1950s and 1960s. In North Carolina particularly the School of Design “turned the architectural community on its ear.” Attracted by North Carolina’s progressive reputation, Kampheofner left the University of Oklahoma for Raleigh in 1948. He brought with him faculty member George Matsumoto, an acclaimed residential architect, and hired internationally prominent architect Matthew Nowicki to head the architecture department. [2]

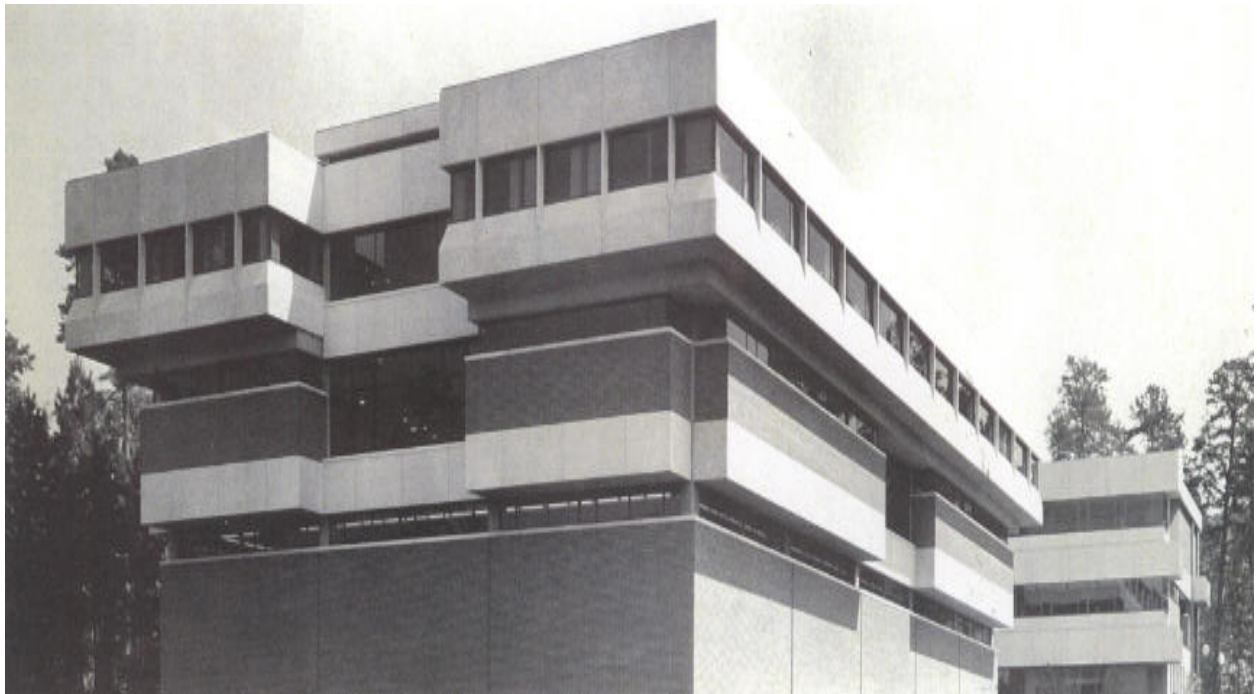


Whisnant studied under Kampheofner and Matsumoto, but it was faculty member Eduardo Fernando Catalano who most influenced Whisnant.[3] Trained at Harvard, Catalano studied under modernist masters and pioneers Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer. Catalano went on to achieve international recognition with designs for embassies in South Africa and Argentina. In the United States his designs included the Stratton Student Center at M.I.T., and the Guildford County Courthouse in North Carolina. Perhaps Catalano’s most important work in North Carolina, and one that surely influenced Whisnant, was Catalano’s own house in Raleigh. A truly unique house, it featured a thin-shelled hyperbolic parabolic roof. [4]

In addition to the exceptional staff at the School of Design, Whisnant greatly benefited from the visiting architects and designers whom Kampheofner attracted. Foremost for Whisnant was Buckminster Fuller, who came to the School of Design for an extended time as a visiting professor. Whisnant was one of ten student chosen to study with Fuller, and was inspired by the famous designer whom Whisnant

describes as “totally wide open.” At the School of Design Whisnant learned his craft and also developed his own philosophy of architecture. Like Kampfoefner, Whisnant believes that “architecture is a creative approach,” that there is “no formula.” Whisnant does not like the term “Modernist” because he believes that “styles” are superficial. He looks at architecture primarily as a way of problem solving.^[5] In addition to his academic training Whisnant was exposed to the actual buildings designed by his instructors. Matsumoto alone designed at least six flat-roofed Modernist style houses built in the Raleigh area while Whisnant was a student there. ^[6]

Back in Charlotte Whisnant went to work for the architectural firm of Sloan and Wheatley. In January 1960 he became partner with Charles Wheatley.^[7] In his early years as an architect Whisnant did not design many houses; instead he concentrated on commercial and institutional design, with his most prominent design being the 1968 Van Hecke-Wettach Building for the UNC-Chapel Hill Law School.^[8]



But the opportunity to design a house in Charlotte did arise when he was approached by his friends Jose Fumero and Herb Cohen, who had purchased a large lot on Cedarwood Lane, in what was then undeveloped countryside to the east of the city.

Herb Cohen and Jose Fumero

Herb Cohen and Jose Fumero both moved to Charlotte in the 1950s. Cohen is a potter with an Master of Fine Arts from Alfred University, and who came from New York City to work for the Hyalyn Porcelain Company in Hickory, North Carolina. In 1958 Cohen moved to Charlotte to work for Robert W. Schlageter, the newly-hired Director of the Charlotte Mint Museum of Art. Cohen was hired as the Exhibitions Director for the museum; and together Schlageter and Cohen revitalized the well established institution into a major player in the South's burgeoning arts movement. Since its opening in 1936, the museum had held only one competition show before Cohen was hired. Recognizing that there was a tremendous amount of unrecognized artistic talent in the Southeast, Cohen organized the Mint Museum's first Piedmont Painting & Sculpture Exhibition in 1960, which attracted artists from eleven states. In 1963 Cohen organized the Piedmont Craft Exhibition, and in 1965 he organized the museum's Piedmont Graphics Exhibition. Cohen's work with the Mint Museum afforded tremendous exposure for southern artists, attracted national and international artists to Charlotte, and significantly raised Charlotte's profile in the art world. ^[9]

Born in Cuba, Jose Fumero moved to New York City with his family as a young child. After graduating from Cooper Union School of Art, Fumero worked for Collins & Aikman designing car and airplane fabrics, and moved for his job to North Carolina. While working as a designer, Fumero also painted and worked as a fiber artist. As a couple, Cohen and Fumero quickly became immersed in a small but vibrant arts community in Charlotte that included both visual and performing artists, writers, and designers. Among that creative crowd was architect Murray Whisnant. ^[10]

During his career Whisnant has designed "forty to fifty" houses. And according to Whisnant, "not all those are worth getting excited about." Clients were not seeking out Whisnant to do modernist work, the "public (was) not that interested or informed about (architecture)." Thus, to be free to be creative an architect had "to have a good client." And Whisnant found very good clients in Cohen

and Fumero, who left the design of the house on Cedarwood Lane completely up to Whisnant, only telling him that they wanted the design “as far out as possible.” They wanted a simple house “without any extraneous decoration,” a serene place that would serve as an appropriate background for their art.^[11] This was a fortuitous situation for the young architect looking to exercise his creativity.

Like his teachers at the School of Design, Whisnant looked at architecture as a way of problem solving, and Whisnant felt strongly that architecture needed to make a significant break with the past. Around 1960, when Whisnant was designing the Cohen-Fumero House, Whisnant was attempting to design for “a new way of living.” He based his design for the Cohen-Fumero House on rationality and logic. His clients had some specific needs. They wanted a house that would be suitable for entertaining, that would allow them to display art, and they wanted a house that would have a private, yet connected space for Fumero’s parents to reside. In terms of style, they wanted a simple house “without any extraneous decoration.” Whisnant developed a concept for the house that focused on a center “core” that would contain all of the “complex stuff: kitchen, bathrooms, AC.” Despite his modern approach to house design, Whisnant’s “core” design concept was inspired by early American houses that were built around a central hearth.^[12]



Construction began in the fall of 1960. The contractor was Gus Vinroot, father of Charlotte mayor Richard Vinroot. Whisnant designed a flat-roofed frame house, with a masonry core that projects above the flat roof. The house appears to float above the grade because Whisnant cantilevered the exterior walls over the foundation. For siding Whisnant chose a new panel system called T1-11, which became widely popular in the 1970s. In the interior Whisnant chose ribbon-stripped Philippine mahogany for much of the wall covering. The panels had no base trim and were raised slightly above the floor giving them (like the outside siding) a floating appearance. Cohen and Fumero moved into the house in the summer of 1961. Soon afterwards they asked Whisnant to design a studio building (demolished) and a carport (extant). The ancillary structures were flat-roofed and sided with T1-11 siding. ^[13]



Herb Cohen in the Cohen-Fumero House, ca. 1965.

With the Cohen-Fumero House, Whisnant was very successful in designing a home that was suitable for entertaining. Almost immediately the house became a “hub” of the social life of artistic community in Charlotte. According to writer/publisher Charleen Swansea, the “art scene in Charlotte was small enough that everybody who was anybody (gathered) at Herb and Jose’s.”^[14] The couple would fix a brunch every Sunday, and the house would fill with people. According to Fumero, “people would say ‘we were just driving by.’ It was on a dead-end street, you don’t drive by a dead-end street.” Fumero believes that the house became a focal point for the arts community in Charlotte because everyone felt comfortable there.^[15] According to Swansea, “Everyone would come together and share.” Meeting at the Cohen-Fumero House was a chance for stealing ideas, laughing, companionship, and to “show off...and tell lies and truth.”^[16] Frequent guest included members of the Charlotte Opera Association, the Mint Museum Dram Guild, and musicians such as Loonis McGlohon.^[17]



**Jose Fumero in the Cohen-Fumero House, with unidentified guests
ca.1965.**

Cohen's position at the Mint Museum brought him into contact with a wide range of regional, national, and international artist, and the Cohen-Fumero House became a destination for many of these artists when visiting Charlotte. According to Swansea, "when people would come to Charlotte" they would "check into a hotel and then go out to Herb and Jose's."^[18] Visitors included:^[19]

- Italian sculptor Arnolde Pomodoro.**
- Sculptor Richard Lippold.**
- Kate Millett, a sculptor who would become more famous as a feminist writer and activist, and who wrote the popular and controversial book *Sexual Politics*.**
- Sculptor Fumio Yoshimura.**

- **Ed Moulthrop, architect turned woodturner. Known as the father of modern wood turning, and credited with moving wood turning from a simple craft to an art form.**
- **Clay artist Cynthia Bringle**
- **Jon Eric Riis, an internationally known contemporary fiber artist**
- **Fiber Artist Dorothy Wright Liebes**
- **North Carolina painter Phillip Moose**
- **Author Jan Karon.**

In the ensuing years Cohen and Fumero continued with their careers. Cohen continued working to enhance the Mint Museum, overseeing the design of the Delhom Gallery, the museum's first expansion. Cohen became the acting director of the Mint Museum in 1968. But because of their busy careers, neither Cohen nor Fumero had time to produce their own works of art. In 1972 the couple became "middle-aged dropouts," moving to Boone, North Carolina to become full-time artists.^[20]

The house was sold several times. At some point the studio was neglected and the flat roof failed. The deteriorated building was demolished. John Moore and his wife Angeles Ortega Moore, who purchased the house in 2006, are committed to preserving the structure and its historical character.

Architectural Context

Mid-century architect-designed Modernist Style houses in Charlotte are rare, making up a miniscule percentage of the housing stock. Yet they are important material expressions of the philosophy of architecture of their time. The most comparable house to the Cohen-Fumero House in Mecklenburg County may be the Praise Connor and Harriet Lee House, located in South Charlotte. Like Whisnant, P. Connor Lee was a graduate of the School of Design. And like the Cohen-Fumero House, the Praise Connor and Harriet Lee House is very much a product of that institution. While distinctively different structures, the two houses

share many design elements including the flat roof design, panel siding, and cantilevered framing. These similarities, however, do not detract from the historical significance of either house, especially considering the geographic separation of the two.



Praise Connor and Harriet Lee House

Architectural Description



The 1961 Cohen-Fumero House is located in East Charlotte in a suburban neighborhood of single-family homes set on large lots. The Cohen-Fumero House faces roughly east on a wooded .75 acre lot. The lot slopes gently down to the house from the street, and more steeply to the rear of the house. The one-story, flat-roofed house features a semi-attached carport and an enclosed courtyard. These ancillary portions of the house are prominent and are important stylistic extensions of the principal section of the house. The principal section of the house features a tall (one-and-one-half-story height) rectangular brick core that rises above the flat roof.



The house sits on a continuous brick-veneered block foundation. The primary entrance is not located on the front elevation, but is located on the south side elevation. The south side elevation is cantilevered out from the foundation approximately sixteen inches. The entire exterior is clad with grooved plywood panels, known commercially as T1-11 siding. In terms of Mecklenburg County, 1961 is an early use of this

product. The grooves are spaced at four inches, and the panels are installed vertically. The panels rest on a water table band composed of a wide board topped with a simple cap. At the corners the plywood panels terminate at simple eight-inch corner boards. The walls are topped with simple narrow unmoulded trim. Fenestration on the south elevation is limited to a single doorway opening that, like the siding panels, runs from the water table to the soffit. The doorway is defined by simple, narrow, unmoulded trim, and contains a slab door, a tall narrow direct-glazed sidelight to the right of the door, and a direct-glazed transom that tops both the door and sidelight. Lock hardware is not original, and non-original light sconces are located on either side of the door. The doorway and the entire south elevation is sheltered by a significant, approximately three foot deep, roof overhang. The soffit is sheathed with smooth plywood panels. A single round recessed light is set in the soffit in front of the door. The prominent fascia is deep, and the top half of the fascia is wrapped with metal roof flashing. A gutter runs the length of the elevation. A wooden stoop is located in front of the door, and steps down to a raised wooden walkway that leads to the semi-detached carport. To the west of the doorway, a frame wall set atop round steel posts, juts out perpendicularly along the western edge of the stoop and terminates at the carport. The wall is sided with the same grooved plywood panels found on the principal section of the house. The wall is topped with simple trim and is capped with metal.



The east elevation is dominated by a walled courtyard that extends across most of the elevation. Like the wall that projects from the south elevation, the wall surrounding the courtyard is a frame wall, clad with grooved plywood siding, and raised off the ground slightly on round steel posts. The wall is approximately sixteen inches lower than the house's soffit and attaches to the house at the southeast corner. The courtyard is sixteen feet deep. Originally the north end of the courtyard was open, but it has been filled-in with a new section of wall.



The east elevation is cantilevered out from the brick foundation, with the grade within six inches of the water table. The elevation is four bays wide. It features three sets of original sliding glass doors, all with simple trim and topped with flat wooden panels. On the southern end of the elevation, one glass door unit is set directly adjacent to the corner. A second glass door unit is separated from the first by a section of grooved-panel siding. A third glass door unit is set back approximately six feet from the north corner of the elevation. The glass doors are accessed by simple wooden platform/steps. Approximately in the center of the elevation is a window unit featuring an awning window set at floor level, with a large direct-glazed picture window set above it. Like the sliding doors, the window unit is topped with a simple wooden panel. These door and window elements continue on the other elevations. Like the south elevation, the east elevation is sheltered by a deep overhang.



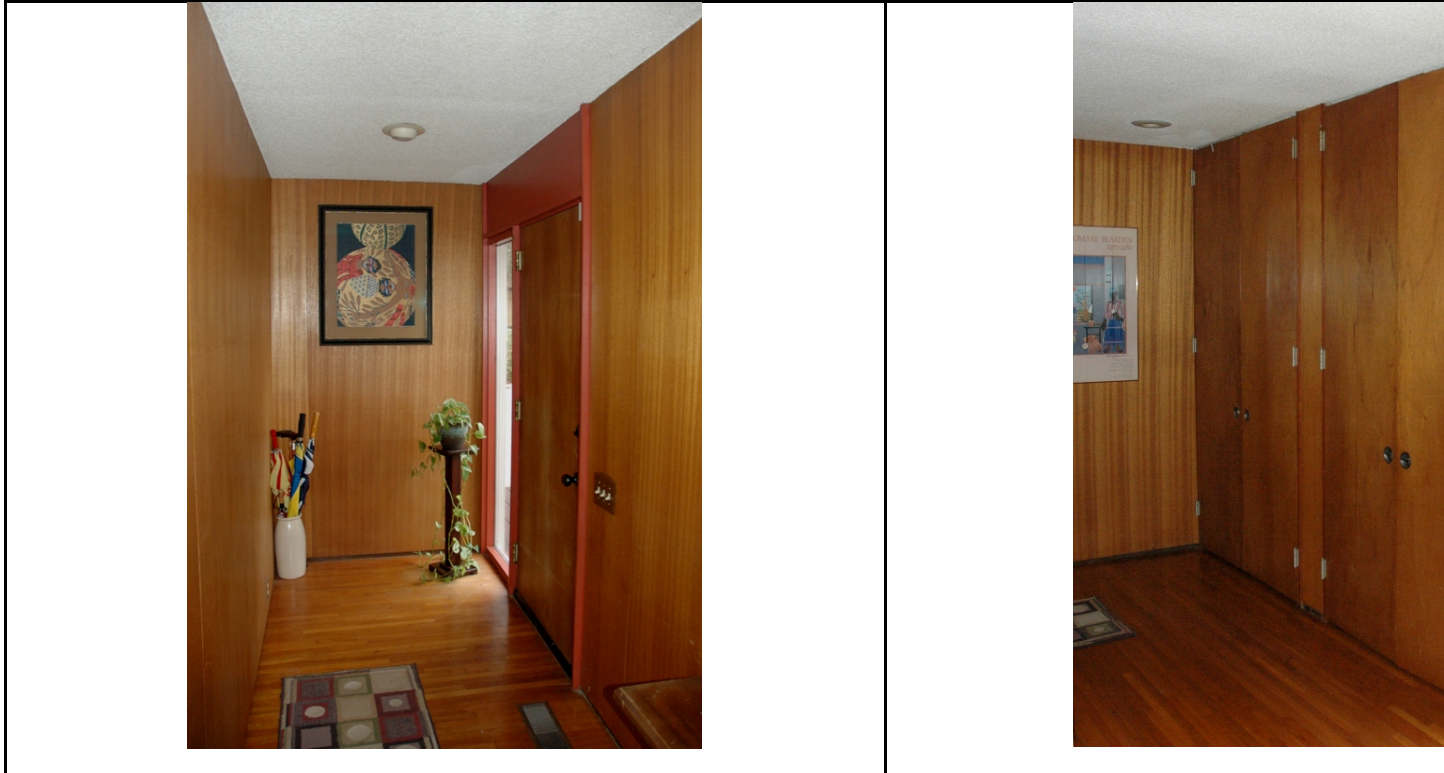
The west elevation features a bank of glazed openings centered on the elevation. The fenestration is composed of two sliding glass doors, flanked by large direct-glazed windows. All of the units are topped with simple wooden panels. The deep roof overhang is consistent with the other elevations, but the foundation on the west elevation jogs out flush with the wall under the bank of doors and windows. A deck is attached to the house at the bank of windows. Recessed light are located in the soffit over the deck.



Fenestration of the north elevation is limited to a single large direct-glazed window that begins low in the wall just above the water table and is topped with a simple panel. The cantilevered nature of the house is best demonstrated on the north elevation, with the recessed brick foundation well exposed. A short door in the foundation wall gives access to the crawlspace. Soffit, siding, and trim are like that found on the other elevations.



The flat-roof carport was added to the property around 1963, at the same time that a now-demolished studio was built. It is supported by steel pipes that are set in the ground. The carport is partially enclosed with framed wall sections on the east and north elevations that are raised above the grade and sheathed with T1-11 siding. The steel posts support three boxed beams that bear the roof and cantilever over the east elevation.



Entrance hallway and closets.

The front door opens into a shallow hallway. The interior trim treatment (or lack of) surrounding the front door mirrors the exterior treatment. The edges of the door jams and the frame around the direct-glazed sidelight are exposed. The door jam on the lock side of the door projects slightly from the wall and extends from the floor to the ceiling, clearly delineating the fenestration from the ribbon-stripped Phillipine Mahogany panels that cover the walls in the public portions of the house. The bottom plates of the wall framing were painted black before the panels were installed. The panels are attached to the wall framing one inch above the finished floor, and this allows for a discernible recess at the bottom of the panels. The floors in most of the house are narrow oak planks, and the ceiling is sheathed with gypsum wallboard. The short hallway terminates at a pair of closets and a large opening that leads into the living room. The closets feature tall mahogany slab doors that extend to the ceiling. The closet doors feature original recessed latches.




The living room is illuminated by the bank of glass windows and doors on the west elevation. Opposite the windows and doors is a wall of the brick “core.” The brick is laid in running bond. The trim is minimal, with quarter-round trim at the floor and small metal channel where the brick wall meets the ceiling. The channel allows art to be hung on the wall without fasteners. The south end of the living room features a built-in cabinet with adjustable glass shelves and is constructed of the same mahogany plywood used to sheath the walls. Around 1980 a fireplace was added to the northwest corner of the living room. The fireplace replaced an original mahogany plywood built-in desk. Lighting is limited to recessed fixtures.





The living room transitions without delineation into a dining room. The dining room features a large direct-glazed window with a sill at floor level. Above the window is a simple painted panel. A small kitchen is located adjacent to the dining room in the masonry core. The kitchen features an original sliding door and a skylight. The ceiling height of all of the rooms outside the masonry is eight feet. Because the masonry core projects above the principal flat roof, the ceiling height is higher, approximately ten feet. The original kitchen cabinetry has been replaced.

		Entrance from dinnin
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A doorway near the kitchen leads to a bedroom suite that includes a small living room, a bedroom, and a bathroom. This suite was designed to accommodate Jose Fumero's parents. Originally it featured a kitchenette that has been converted into a laundry room/closet. The kitchenette's original ventilation fan is extant. The bathroom features a skylight and the original tub and tile surround. The vanity and other fixtures have been replaced.



Two additional bedrooms are located off of a hallway near the front of the house and share a single bathroom off of the hallway. The bathroom has lost much of its integrity but still features the original skylight. All of the bedrooms feature ceiling-height doors with exposed jams and wallboard siding and ceilings. The bottom edge of the wallboard is held above the floor, in the same manner employed for the mahogany panels in the rest of the house. The potentially exposed edges of the wallboard (above the floor, and where they abut the un-trimmed door jams) are butted into simple square-profile trim that is mitered at the corners.

^[1] Walker, Kate (n.d.) William Murray Whisnant, FAIA (1932-)Retrived April 5, 2013, from <http://www.trianglemodernisthouses.com/whisnant.htm>.

^[2] Catherine W. Bishir, Charlotte V. Brown, Carl R. Lounsbury, and Ernest H. Wood, III. *Architects and Builders in North Carolina: A History of the Practice of Building* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Publishers, 1990), 359.

^[3] Interview with Murray Whisnant 3-26-13.

[4] Catherine W. Bishir, Charlotte V. Brown, Carl R. Lounsbury, and Ernest H. Wood, III. *Architects and Builders in North Carolina: A History of the Practice of Building* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Publishers, 1990), 359.

[5] Walker, Kate (n.d.) William Murray Whisnant, FAIA (1932-). Retrived April 5, 2013, from <http://www.trianglemodernisthouses.com/whisnant.htm>.

[6] (n.d.) George Marsumoto, FAIA (1922-). Retrived April 5, 2013, from <http://www.trianglemodernisthouses.com/matsumoto.htm>

[7] Walker, Kate (n.d.) William Murray Whisnant, FAIA (1932-). Retrived April 5, 2013, from <http://www.trianglemodernisthouses.com/whisnant.htm>.

[8] Whisnant interviews 3-26-13

[9] Interview with Herb Cohen and Jose Fumero, 3-27-13

[10] Interview with Herb Cohen, Jose Fumero, and Murray Whisnant, 2012

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Interview with Charlene Swansea, March 6, 2013.

[15] Interview with Herb Cohen, Jose Fumero, and Murray Whisnant, 2012

[16] Interview with Charlene Swansea, March 6, 2013.

[17] Interview with Herb Cohen and Jose Fumero, 3-27-13

[18] Interview with Charlene Swansea, March 6, 2013.

[19] Interview with Herb Cohen and Jose Fumero, 3-27-13

[20] Interview with Herb Cohen, Jose Fumero, and Murray Whisnant, 2012