

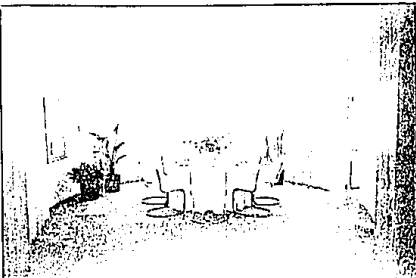
Creative Living

Marie McGee editor/591-2300

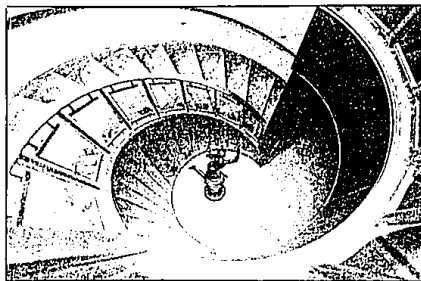


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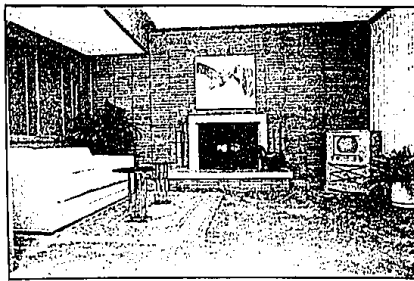
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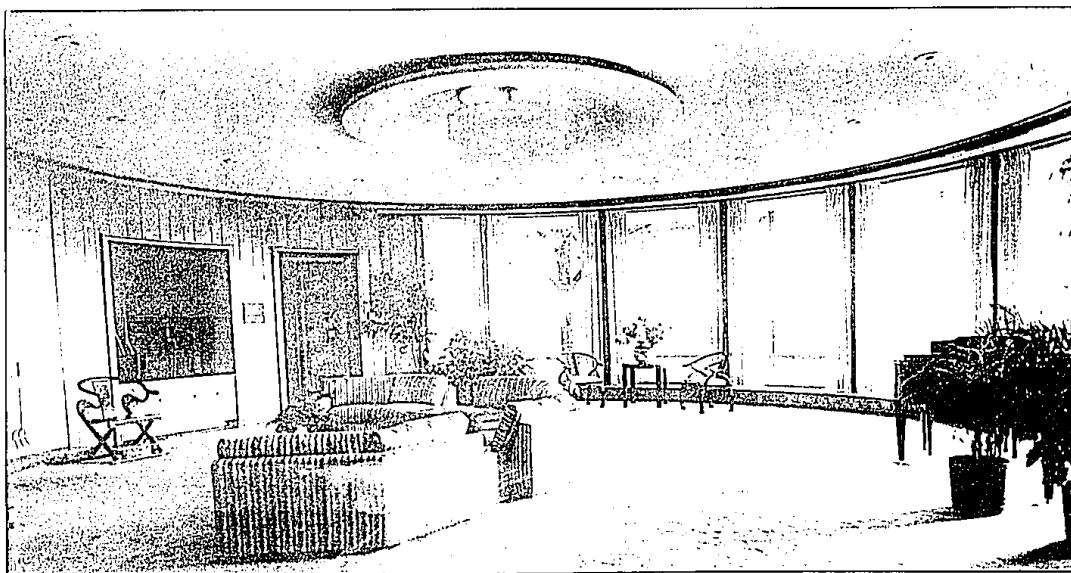
The horseshoe-shaped dining room was ideal for small parties.



The spiral staircase has glass panels with engravings of the Wilsons' favorite pets.



A blonde mahogany '50s-style TV was loaned to make the den design more authentic.



DAVID FRANK/staff photographer

The spacious circular living room is one of the most impressive features of Sunset Terrace — former retirement home of Oakland University's benefactors, Alfred and Matilda Dodge Wilson.

Bringing back the
ambiance of the old

By Carol Azizian
staff writer

THE INTERIOR designers who re-created the 1950s aura of Sunset Terrace — an elegant, contemporary mansion originally built as a retirement home for Alfred and Matilda Dodge Wilson — could have used the archaeological skills of a Indiana Jones. Their task of digging up period furniture and decorative pieces for Sunset Terrace was almost as impossible as Jones' job of finding the lost ark. "It was difficult to find things suitable for the house," admitted Lewis J. Sappington of Detroit. He was one of 11 members of the American Society of Interior Designers' (ASID) Historic Preservation Committee who worked on the project. "The Wilsons were not the kind of people who bought pop furniture or the avant-garde pieces of the 1950s. Everything was custom made." The designers had little to go on. All of the furniture had been auctioned off and only a sketchy list (no photos) of the original items remained.

OBTAINING replicas of 1950s furniture was a real feat, considering "a lot of things were so ugly that people got rid of them," explained P. Karen Fields, one of the committee members. And, major suppliers had committed much of their '50s stock to an upcoming Greenfield Village exhibit.

Despite the obstacles, the committee succeeded — with the help of Cranbrook, Smiley Brothers, Contract Interiors Warehouse, Arkistura, R.P. Lewis and DuMouchelle Galleries.

The 13,000-square-foot mansion, located on the east campus of Oakland University in Rochester Hills, will be open for public tours through Sunday, Aug. 24, when it will be converted into a conference center annex to Meadow Brook Hall.

Completed in 1953 as an auxiliary residence, guest house and retirement home for the Wilsons (Oakland University's benefactors), Sunset Terrace was designed by William Kapp of Smith, Hinchman & Grylls, the same architect who designed Meadow Brook Hall.

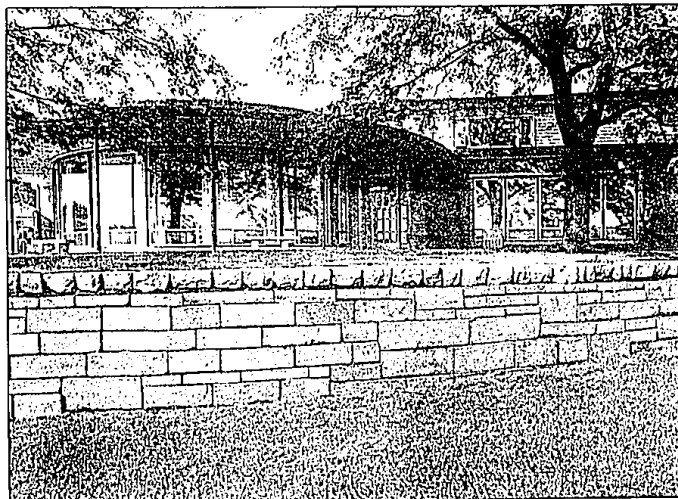
"There was an awful lot of wasted space," Fields noted. "They didn't worry about energy efficiency."

THE WILSONS occupied the stark 20-room home until 1962. After Mr. Wilson died, Mrs. Wilson returned to Meadow Brook Hall in 1963, where she lived until her death in 1967.

Chancellor D.B. "Woody" Varner used the home to entertain guests. In 1969, musician Vladimir Ashkenazy and his family lived there while he per-

Sunset Terrace

Restoring original 1950s design



DAVID FRANK/staff photographer

Sunset Terrace was styled after the prairie homes tensively to incorporate the surrounding environment designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. Glass is used ex-

Living with change
created by the new

Moving from a 13,000 square-foot mansion to a 3,500 square-foot subdivision home is a something like trading a stretch limousine for a subcompact car.

But Oakland University President Joseph J. Champagne isn't complaining.

"(Sunset Terrace) was the largest, most ostentatious home in the community," Champagne said. "We were isolated and we didn't feel like we were part of the Rochester community. Champagne, his wife, Emilie, and their three children lived in the mansion for the past five years. They decided to leave Sunset Terrace and move into the Meadow Brook Valley subdivision in April.

"It took a great deal of adjustment," he admitted. "Sunset Terrace was more private and closer to the university. But, this home is more realistic for normalized living."

Added Emilie: "This is more of a family home. The kids can ride their bicycles over their friends' homes."

Although the mansion was "perfect for entertaining," it posed some problems, Emilie said. "It was a little hard to find the kids sometimes, especially when my youngest (now 3) was a baby."

Occasionally, stragglers from the Meadow Brook Music Festival would wander over to the Sunset Terrace grounds. "And, we always heard the loud concerts," Emilie added.

The Champagnes gave up their posh existence (and some of the additional furniture they purchased to fill the mansion) after the university decided it needed more conference space.

"There is a greater demand for conference space because of the economic growth in this area," Champagne said.

Two years ago, university officials proposed expanding the carriage house at Meadow Brook Hall. But, they soon rejected the idea because it would have been too expensive to design it in the same Tudor style as the hall.

Meadow Brook Hall already is used as a conference center, but it's usually booked 18 months in advance.

Sunset Terrace was the last resort. "It could also serve as a cornerstone for an expanded facility," Champagne explained. "It would be similar to what Kresge did with the farmhouse on Big Beaver."

"We could keep the structural integrity of Sunset Terrace and use it for a small meeting/reception area. But it would be part of a larger center."

Champagne said officials are attempting to restore the entire east campus of Oakland University — including the Dodge farmhouse and the riding ring — and open it to the public.