

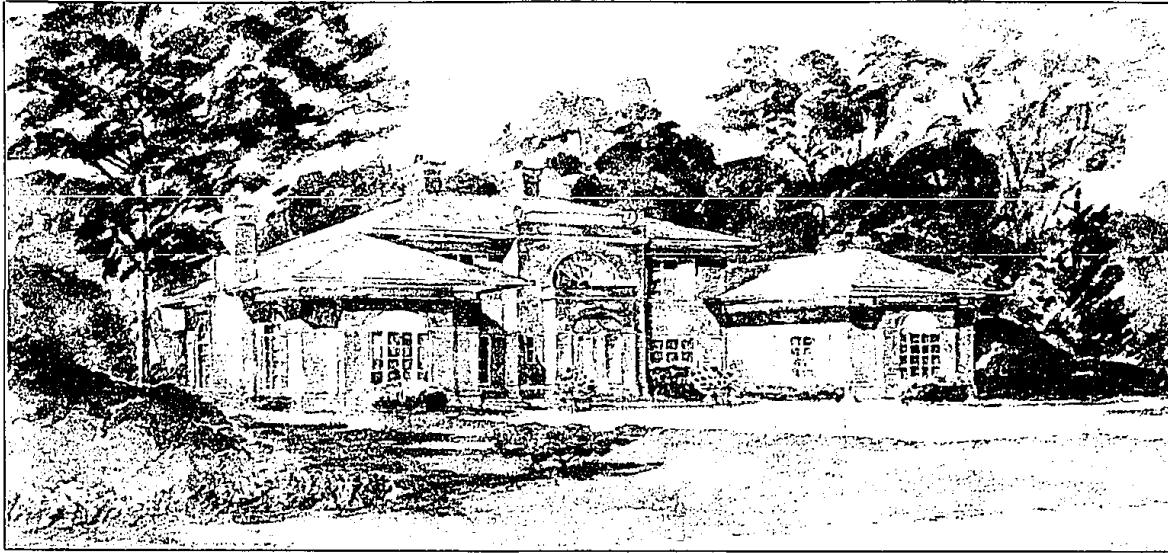
# Creative Living

Marie McGee editor/591-2300



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(F1E)



STAFF PHOTO

Artist's rendering of the first house in Woodlynne, the future Detroit Symphony showhouse, shows how New York City architect Robert A.M. Stern kept a strong mid-western look in his design.

## Woodlynne

### Showhouse composed for Midwest audiences

By Corinne Abalt  
staff writer

**D**AMON JENSEN, Birmingham-based builder/developer, talks like a philosopher and a visionary. That's because he is. And these days his vision is focused on his 23-acre development, Woodlynne, Bingham Farms, a community of million-dollar residences.

The acreage isn't visible from the road, but it came with a 60-foot wide, access strip that is now paved, attractively landscaped along both sides and christened Woodlynne Drive.

A cobblestone gatehouse part way down the drive was just completed. A 200-year-old black walnut tree stands as a sentinel on the other side because Jensen had the road curved to save it.

The 14 building sites front on a cul-de-sac. Three will border on a small pond that is being created in terrain that is a natural for it near the south boundary.

All of the houses are or will be designed by New York City architect Robert A.M. Stern. All of the landscape architecture is designed by The SWA Group out of Boston, Mass.

"This is a development by design with a master plan," Jensen said as he drove slowly along Woodlynne Drive, describing the thinking that went into each step.

"We had to have a very special architect on this project. Stern has a love affair with Cranbrook. He was there for a week in 1980. He asked me to take 35mm pictures of everything I liked around here."

**AFTER STERN** had studied Jensen's photographs, he asked Jensen, "Why not do something that splits off Frank Lloyd Wright's Winslow House in Chicago?"

"The Prairie style had its inspiration in that kind of look . . . Stern is a traditionalist with a modern interpretation," Jensen said.

Stern was aware and concerned about maintaining a Midwestern identity in his designs, Jensen said. In his book, "Years with Frank Lloyd Wright," Eric Tafel said the Winslow House (actually in River Forest, Ill.) was Wright's first independent commission after leaving Adler and Sullivan in 1893. Tafel said the setting for the entrance and front door are reminiscent of Louis Sullivan, his former employer. In any event, the much admired design 'brought Wright many clients.'

So, the first Woodlynne home (6,400 square feet) now being completed, with its red brick exterior and cedar shingle roof, has a traditional look and a historical

legacy, somewhat reminiscent of Wright's early style with its broad eaves and signature urns at the entrance.

AS THE 1989 Symphony Showhouse, it will be seen by many visitors when it is open later this spring. It is a true family home with a circular staircase in the entry hall, a second staircase in the back of the house.

One of Stern's trademarks is his use of windows to take advantage of the light, the views and the elevations, and at the same time enhance the architectural line and look.

A large fanlight (window) high above the front entrance allows the two-story entry hall to be bathed in natural light. There are windows on three walls in the living room, a bank of bay windows in the dining room and even slim vertical windows tucked into unexpected places such as a storage area or a child's bathroom.

The flooring in the large living room and the detailing of the fireplace suggest the elegance of Eelis Saarinen's designs at Cranbrook. The oak floor is laid in a herringbone pattern with darker detailing around the perimeter.

An interlocking pattern of carvings runs vertically across the front of the fireplace. Great attention is being paid to the cove molding, wood trim around the doors and installation of interior pocket sliding glass doors.

The second house, already well under way, is a 7,000-square-foot, triple-gabled English country home. There will be makeovers of floor plans or modifications of styles from one house to another, Jensen said. Each will be a completely individualized residence that will be compatible with, but distinctly different from, the others.

A LOOK through a catalog of buildings and projects that Stern did from 1981-85 erases any doubt about his versatility. This 300-page book of color photographs of finished projects, floor plans and elevation drawings that he produced by work of his produced in these four years, from the East Coast to as far west as Alaska, where he did the Performing Arts Center in Anchorage.

Stern's transformation of a 19th century factory in Voorshoorn, The Netherlands, to the headquarters for Mexx International, a Dutch fashion company, is the subject of an article and pictures in *Architectural Record*, May 1988. In it, the writer refers to Stern's "signature eclecticism."

Jensen wrote in his purpose



Robert A.M. Stern, an internationally recognized architect, will come for the May opening of the Detroit Symphony show house, which he designed.

statement for Woodlynne. "To provide an inspired environment which balances the sensitive issues of the land, the building (or structures) and the gardens. Our effort is to create a wonderful sense of place, where a neighborhood is experienced, where the sum of the total parts is greater than the individual parts."

**STERN, HOST** of the PBS-TV series, "Pride of Place: Building the American Dream," and professor of graduate studies in architecture at Columbia University, is also a past member of the Board of Governors of the American Institute of Architects.

Stern will be here for the opening of the Symphony Showhouse. He will speak to the students at De-

troit Country Day School and be the guest at a banquet in his honor.

"Believing as I do in the continuity of tradition, I try to create order out of the chaotic present by entering into a dialogue with the past, with tradition," he wrote in the introduction to his book.

"I do believe that the past offers a cure for ills of the present. I do believe it offers standards for evaluation."

Jensen can already picture the formal gardens that will surround the homes. He likes the idea of single drives into secluded courtyards. On one site, he pictures a fountain. He has many drawings and paintings of how the landscape will look. His vision is taking shape.

## Woodlynne created on historic site

Woodlynne the 23 acres of land in Bingham Farms comes complete with a well-documented history. Had things gone differently, the University of Michigan, might be on 13 Mile Road instead of in Ann Arbor.

Developer David Jensen bought the land from Samson E. (Bunkie) Knudsen.

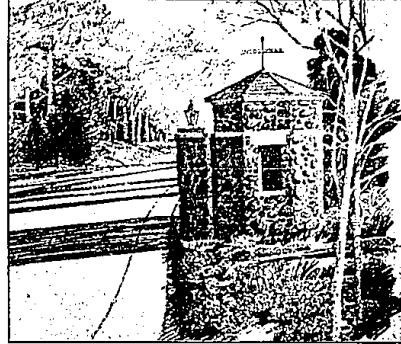
He had kept it after the Knudsen home was sold to the David Hermelin when the Knudsen moved to Cleveland, Ohio, in the early '70s when he became chairman and chief executive officer of White Motor Corp.

The property is first on record as part of a government land grant to John Daniels around 1832 when

Michigan was still a territory. An 80-acre parcel of the larger piece was "reserved for the University of Michigan" in compliance with an act of Congress approved in 1836 "concerning a seminary of learning in the Territory of Michigan."

However, Daniels bought that 80 acres from the state of Michigan in 1852 for \$400 when the state apparently decided on another location for the university. Descendants of the Daniels family owned the acreage until the Depression, when Knudsen acquired it.

Instead of the University of Michigan, there is Bingham Farms and its newest development, Woodlynne.



Drawing of the gatehouse, which is now in place, shows how it will look when spring arrives and what it says about the homes beyond the curve of the drive.



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— David Jensen