



**#MuseumFromHome with
the Elmhurst Art Museum**

LIVING IN THE MCCORMICK HOUSE



McCormick House, living room, 1950s, Hedrich Blessing Archive, HB17555A, Chicago Historical Society.

The McCormick House is an excellent example of Mid-Century Modern architecture by famed architect Mies van der Rohe, and one of only three houses he built during his three decades in America.

Between 1952 and 1992, three families made the McCormick House their home. After moving from 299 S Prospect Avenue to its current location at the museum, the house has served as a stage for rotating exhibitions of Mid-Century Modern design and contemporary art and inspires a variety of museum-wide programming.

HISTORY



McCormick House, 1950s, Elmhurst Art Museum archive

Mies's task was to design a house for the family of Robert McCormick, Jr. and Isabella Gardner Seymour, which could then be further developed into a neighborhood of prefab homes in the western suburbs. In Spring 1951 the McCormicks purchased the property at 299 Prospect Avenue and hoped to move quickly into the new house, as the idea of prefab promised.

While the couple waited for the house to be complete they lived in the now iconic 880 Lake Shore Drive, designed by Mies and co-developed by McCormick. By summer 1952 the house was ready.



Press Photo Mrs. Isabella Gardner and Robert Hall McCormick III, 1951

THE FIRST RESIDENTS

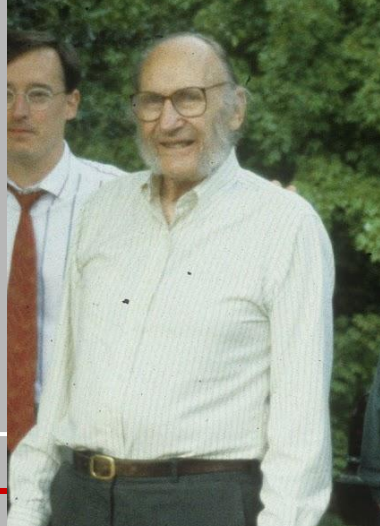
THE MCCORMICK FAMILY: 1952 - 1959

Robert Hall McCormick III and Isabella Gardner lived in the house shortly after marrying in 1951. McCormick was a co-developer in the 860 / 880 N Lake Shore Drive apartments by Mies van der Rohe. Together with Mies, and co-developer Herbert Greenwald, he then created plans for prefab housing in the western suburbs based on designs of the McCormick House. Isabella Gardner was connected to an influential Boston family. She worked for Poetry Magazine and wrote her first two books of poetry while living in the home. Together, the couple entertained artists, architects, and writers in the house.



One of the attributes of the house is that it gives you the ability to redefine the interior. [...], for instance, there is no dining room in the house. There are several places where you could dine, where you could have people to dine, depending on how many people were going to dine, or who was cooking, or who was preparing, or who was coming and going, or whether children were going to be bouncing in and out. There were different places where these functions could take place.

-Robert McCormick interview, Oct 1992



Top: Interior view of the living room in the Robert McCormick House (1952, Mies Van Der Rohe), Elmhurst, Illinois, 1956. (Photo by Frank Scherschel/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images)

Bottom: Archival photographs of Robert McCormick, onsite visit.

ORAL HISTORIES AND INTERVIEWS OF MCCORMICK HOUSE

The Elmhurst Art Museum collects written and recorded memories and stories about the McCormick House and its residents.



McCormick House visit, l-r Alfred Caldwell, George Schipporeit, Jim DeStefano, Edward Windhorst, Robert McCormick, unknown, unknown, unknown, unknown, George Danforth.

INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT MCCORMICK

October 1992

Do you have specific memories of the McCormick House, its residents, or its move from Prospect Ave?
Please contact us if you would like to participate in this ongoing research project.



THE SECOND RESIDENTS

THE SLADEK FAMILY : 1961 - 1963

Archival photograph of Sladek Children in front of the McCormick house. Courtesy of the Sladek Family.

From 1961 to 1963 Arthur and Marilyn Sladek rented the McCormick House with their six children: Mary, Ardythe, Marilyn, Barbara, Paul and Jim. A few of the Sladek children (now grown up) regularly visit the museum, volunteer as docents, and help the museum collect information about their lives in the home. For instance, they told the story about an uncle that built a treehouse in the backyard.

"My favorite memory is waking up in the morning and my mother saying, Girls—we have four teenage girls in the house—she said, Girls shut the curtains the buses are here. And sure enough, the buses from the Art Institute would come and they'd line up on Prospect Avenue. The art students would get out, they'd take out their easels and they'd sit out front and they'd drawn the house."

-Mary (Sladek) Dreiser

**DO YOU REMEMBER THE FIRST
APARTMENT/HOUSE?**

**DO YOU STILL LIKE TO TAKE PICTURES
OF THE OUTSIDE OF YOUR HOUSE
WITH FAMILY? FRIENDS?**

**WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE
MEMORIES LIVING YOUR HOUSE?**



ORAL HISTORIES & INTERVIEWS ABOUT THE MCCORMICK HOUSE

ORAL HISTORY

Mary Sladek Dreiser

RECORDING

Ardythe Sladek Rassmusen



McCormick House kitchen, ca. 1965

THE THIRD RESIDENTS

THE FICK FAMILY: 1963-1991



In 1963, Ray and Mary Ann Fick bought the McCormick House and lived in it for nearly thirty years. Ray Fick served as Mayor of Elmhurst from 1973 to 1977, and the couple was very active in the community. In the first few years, they repaired heating ducts, removed paint from the elm paneling, and replaced glass in the house. They later added air conditioning, updated the flooring, and replaced damaged elm paneling. After nearly 30 years in the home, the couple sold it in 1991 to the Elmhurst Fine Arts and Civic Center Foundation.

Top: Archival photograph from the Fick Family.
Bottom: Ray Fick



Archival photographs from the Fick Family

Mies famously said that ‘God is in the details.’ As we settled into our new home, we began to appreciate how carefully and precisely the smallest detail was carefully thought out and executed. Example: every joint line of the ceiling boards was precisely matched to the joint lines of the paneling. A small thing but just an example of the extraordinary quality of the house.

-Letter from Ray and Mary Ann Fick, 2007

Much of our social life revolved around the house. We made many friends and had many, many parties within the walls of the house. (I first got the crazy idea to run for Mayor of Elmhurst in the living room with half inebriated buddies cheering me on.)

-Letter from Ray and Mary Ann Fick, 2007

ORAL HISTORIES & INTERVIEWS ABOUT THE MCCORMICK HOUSE



Archival photograph from the Fick Family



Archival photograph from the Fick Family, 1991

RAY AND MARY ANN FICK

1995

March 17, 2006

August 24, 2015

INTERVIEWS ABOUT THE FICK ERA

Marcia Goltermann

Betsy Goltermann

HOUSE TO MUSEUM



The McCormick House moved from 299 S Prospect Ave to its present location

In 1991 the Fick Family sold the McCormick House to the Elmhurst Fine Arts and Civic Center Foundation. The house was then moved a short distance to its current site in 1994 for its incorporation into a larger contemporary art complex. This unique opportunity influenced the museum's new building and tied the organization's mission to include the celebration of Mies's legacy through exhibitions and various programming.



Since the museum incorporated the house into its new complex in 1997, exhibitions have highlighted the history of the architecture, the architect and the idea of home. Over the years, the museum has hosted a number of artists and designers, who have used the rich history of the home and its residents to inspire modern exhibitions.

Top: Installation, McCormick House 1952-1959, curated by Robert Kleinschmidt and Ryan Monteleagre. Photo by The Adamkovi. Bottom: Installation, David Wallace Haskins, Ascension/Descension, 2018, McCormick House, Photo by The Adamkovi.

CLAUDIA WEBER



For two months, Feb - April 2019, artist Claudia Weber resided in and created changing displays in half of the McCormick House. As she lived, worked, and exhibited in this space, her projects reflected the structure's history as a home and current function as a museum space.

Top: Installation, Claudia Weber, McCormick House, Spring 2019. Photographed by Steven Koch.



The artist engaged in daily activities as any resident would, while also researching the specifics of this site in relation to its residents, the architect, and the house's historical context. Weber treated the interior as an ongoing art installation while hosting events, giving tours, exhibiting work by artists Olivia Block and Kate Park, and inviting visitors to engage with her Exquisite Corpse card set-an informative and playful work made for this exhibition.



She also recorded conversations with current and former residents of Mies van der Rohe's row houses (i.e. McCormick House and Greenwald House). Her experimental project not only highlighted little-known aspects of the house, but also created a different type of engagement for visitors and allow a unique display of the relationships between architecture, art and life.

This page and next: Installation, Claudia Weber, McCormick exhibition, Spring 2019.
Photographs by Jim Prinz



MORE ABOUT CLAUDIA WEBER

[About Claudia Weber](#)

Blog about living at [150 S Cottage Hill Ave](#)

Instagram about living at [150 S Cottage Hill Ave](#)

[Interview](#) with artists Assaf Evron and Claudia Weber about their McCormick House exhibition

[Special publication](#) produced about Weber's custom made Exquisite Corpse card game

The Arts Section- [Bauhaus 100 + Living in a Museum](#)

WBEZ - [Artist Takes Up Residence In Mies Van Der Rohe-Designed House](#)

[Claudia Weber exhibition page](#)
[Exhibition brochure](#)

DESIGNER ROB KLEINSCHMIDT



Rob Kleinschmidt
Architect and Designer

Veteran Chicago interior architect Robert Kleinschmidt has curated a number of exhibitions at the museum over the years. He has created displays that prove how livable, inviting, and human a Mies-designed home can be with period décor.

With generous loans from his own collection and furniture from Room & Board, Kleinschmidt created dynamic rooms, taking our visitors back to 1952, giving them an idea of what it was like to live in the home.



Above: Installation, *McCormick House: Past, Present, Future*, Fall 2019. Curator-Rob Kleinschmidt. Photographed by Steven Koch.

[WBEZ Interview with Rob Kleinschmidt](#)



Installation, *McCormick House: Past, Present, Future*, Fall 2019. Curator-Rob Kleinschmidt. Photographed by Steven Koch.



**WOULD YOU LIKE TO DECORATE
THE MCCORMICK HOUSE?
HOW WOULD YOU DECORATE IT?**

**WHAT KIND OF ART WOULD
YOU HANG IN YOUR HOUSE?**

**HOW DO YOU LIKE TO DECORATE
YOUR OWN HOME? MODERN?
RUSTIC? FARMHOUSE?**



MCCORMICK HOUSE TIMELINE

1950 - Mies began sketches for inexpensive houses.

1952 - House completed for Robert McCormick III & Isabella Gardner.

1962- The house was rented by Sladek Family (Arthur & Marilyn) for 2.5 years with the option to purchase from Robert McCormick.

1963 - Ray and Mary Ann Fick purchased the house.

1963-64 - Fick Family repaired heating duct, removed paint from elm paneling, replaced plate glass windows with insulating glass.

1964-92 - Air conditioning was added, cork tile flooring was replaced with ceramic tiles. Elm wood paneling replaced in both shower areas.

1992 - Contract signed for Elmhurst Art Museum to become the new owner of McCormick House.

1997- McCormick House moved from 299 Prospect Avenue to 150 S. Cottage Hill Avenue.

1998-2015- McCormick House used as museum administration building.

2015- The house restoration begins and is transformed into an exhibition space and touring historical home.



Cover of *ArchiTeenZine* (2018). Designed by Teen Art Council member, Mallori Hecker.

FROM HOME ACTIVITY

[CLICK HERE](#)

for the activity

Share your projects on social media with #MuseumFromHome and #ElmhurstArtMuseum



COMMUNITY PROJECT: ART IN THE POST

You are invited to contribute to a collaborative mail art project by sharing something about your life during the COVID-19 pandemic. Tell us how you are passing the time, write a poem, or even share a recipe. We'll exhibit these at the museum after reopening.



CLICK HERE
for more on this
Community
Project

MIES VAN DER ROHE
McCORMICK HOUSE



ELMHURST ART MUSEUM

MUSEUM STORE

ITEM OF THE WEEK

The first official catalog about the McCormick House, published on the occasion of 2018 carport restorations and exhibitions dedicated to the designs of Mies van der Rohe.

The 36-page soft cover catalog contains new scholarship on the McCormick House as well as little-known prefab designs proposed by Mies for the western Chicagoland suburbs. An extensive 4,000 word essay was written by Barry Bergdoll, Meyer Schapiro Professor of Art History at Columbia University, who also curated "Mies's McCormick House Revealed: New Views" at the Elmhurst Art Museum.

[Online Museum Store](#)



McCormick house view of front exterior, 1950s
Hedrich Blessing Archive, HB15690B, Chicago
Historical Society

MORE ABOUT THE MCCORMICK HOUSE

History of the McCormick House

Recent design shows:

Could Be Architecture: McCormick AfterParti

McCormick House: 1952-1959

McCormick House: Past, Present, Future

Recent art installations:

Luftwerk: Parallel Perspectives

Assaf Evron & Claudia Weber

Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle: Untitled Film (Red)

Goethe Institut- Two Field Reports on How It Feels to Live with and in
Bauhaus Architecture

Architectural Digest- Mies van der Rohe's McCormick House Opens

Wallpaper Magazine- Mies van der Rohe's McCormick House is brought back
to life at the Elmhurst Art Museum





ZOOM BACKGROUNDS

Make it seem like your working from McCormick House with these images inside the Mid-Century home.

[DOWNLOAD HERE](#)



[DOWNLOAD HERE](#)

for personal use only

McCormick House: 1952-1959 was made possible by Laura & Gary Maurer, EAM's Programming Committee, Chicago Bauhaus & Beyond, and the Elmhurst Artists' Guild, with loans from RDK Design, The Furniture Shop, Inc., Oscar Isberian Rugs, Cedric Hartman, Utopio Workroom, and private collections.

McCormick House: Past, Present, Future was sponsored by Room & Board, with additional support from Chicago Bauhaus and Beyond. Organized in conjunction with the Chicago Architecture Biennial. Part of Arts DuPage Month. With special thanks to RDK Design, Dirk and Catherine Lohan, Patrick Szczecinski, Utopio Custom Workroom, Arthur Cantwell III, James Kao, Eileen R Miller, Corey Postiglione, Michelle Wasson, and Michael White.

Room&Board
HOME FURNISHINGS



Claudia Weber was part of the Year of German-American Friendship initiated by the German Federal Foreign Office and the Goethe-Institut, and supported by the Federation of German Industries (BDI) with additional support from the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts.



Graham
Foundation

اوتيس آر تيس
artis
grant
program

ONLINE CONTENT CREATED BY

Sarah Franklin, Exhibition Manager

Joe Hladik, Director of Education & Grants Administrator

Maria Vargas, Education Fellow

Julie Rosenberg, Manager of Membership Services and Visitor Experience