

ARCHITECT ROBERT SCHUTT AND HIS HOME IN OAKLAND

by Mark Bolten

Architect Robert Schutt designed four houses in Oakland. This article addresses the first of these at 165 South Sappington, which was built to be his own residence. It was completed in 1966 when Schutt was 26 years old.

A St. Louis native, born in 1940, Robert Schutt graduated from Kirkwood High School in 1957. He attended the University of Missouri in Columbia and Washington University School of Architecture. He received professional training as an architectural intern in the offices of several outstanding architects, including Harris Armstrong. In 1974, he became a partner in the Hoffman Partnership architectural firm. He began the R.N. Schutt & Associates company in 1976. Poor health forced him to retire in 1993.



The Robert Schutt House, 165 S. Sappington, Oakland, 1966

Mr. Schutt executed more than 45 architectural and interior commissions for Washington University School of Medicine, including the award-winning Wohl Auditorium. He designed office buildings such as 500 S. Broadway, recreational facilities, libraries, schools, churches and a Naval-Marine Reserve Training Center. Of his 12 designed houses and home renovations, many were featured in *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, *St. Louis Home/Garden*, *St. Louis Magazine*, *Better Homes and Gardens Building Ideas* and *House Beautiful's Building Manual*.

A long-time resident of Oakland, Robert Schutt was active in local affairs and served as Oakland's mayor from 1989 to 1990. Mr. Schutt died on July 12, 2001. He is survived by his wife of 22 years, Shyrlin, two stepchildren and grandchildren.

The house at 165 S. Sappington was designed to be Robert Schutt's bachelor home. It has been noted by several architects that the house bears a strong resemblance to Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House in Plano,

Illinois, built in 1951. That house, along with Phillip Johnson's 1949 "Glass House" in New Canaan, Connecticut, influenced a generation of post-war modernist architects. Shyrlin Schutt, Robert's widow, states that Robert admired the work of Mies van der Rohe above that of all other architects.

Both Farnsworth and the Glass House were built on secluded sites. For privacy, only the south wall of 165 S. Sappington consists of a wall of floor-to ceiling sliding glass panels, affording access to the deck and a view of a creek and heavily wooded hillside. Behind the glass wall there is a large living/dining area, and at the east end, a small galley-style kitchen separated by an interior wall from the larger room. The street (east) side's only aperture is the large front door. The north wall of the house, behind which are three bedrooms and two baths, has three windows. The west wall has a door to the yard. These three walls are sided in plywood with vertical 1x2 battens, giving the exterior a corrugated look. The walls are painted gray; the trim is black. The exterior measurements are 36x39 feet.

The full basement contains a garage where Robert Schutt housed and prepared his race car. For more than ten years, Schutt drove a Formula Atlantic, for which he received numerous awards.



Robert Schutt House, south elevation toward creek

The lot, officially Lot 4, Block 2 of the Oaks subdivision, has dimensions of 100 by 150. According to an article in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 4, 1968, the site had previously been ignored because of the creek flowing through the property, but Mr. Schutt rerouted the creek and constructed retaining walls of railroad ties to control erosion.

In 1967, 165 S. Sappington won the award for excellence in residential design offered by the St. Louis chapter of the Producer's Council and the American Institute of Architects. The house was cited for "its visual economy and advantageous siting." It was featured in the "Pictures Magazine" section of the February 4, 1968 *St. Louis Post-*

Dispatch, and the Spring/Summer 1969 edition of *Better Homes and Gardens Building Ideas*.

The three other Oakland houses by Robert Schutt are 300 South Sappington, 405 Lenore and 308 Pelican. Another fine example of his residential style is still extant at 17 Fielding Road in Ladue.

In 1979, 165 S. Sappington was sold to Joseph B. Ruebel and his wife. In 1986 it was bought by the current residents, Rev J.C. Michael Allen and Priscilla Allen, his wife. An Episcopal priest, Michael Allen was Dean of Christ Church Cathedral in St. Louis until his retirement in 1998. Priscilla, also an ordained priest, was Canon Pastor at the cathedral.

The Allens have respectfully preserved the integrity of Robert Schutt's design, including the interior, which displays their collection of modern art. They found it necessary to reroute the drainage of the flat roof which slopes to the north, via a gutter on the west wall which now carries the water to the southeast corner and to the creek.

Sources:

St. Louis Post-Dispatch, February 4, 1968.

St. Louis Globe-Democrat, March 22, 1967.

Correspondence and telephone conversation with Shyrln Schutt.

Conversations with Michael and Priscilla Allen.

Conversation with Tom Rogers, Webster Groves architect.

Documents and article copies provided by Shyrln Schutt,

including biography printed for Bopp Chapel funeral service.

Robert Schutt papers, archives, Missouri History Museum Library.

300 South Sappington, Oakland, Missouri also by Robert Schutt:

