

## Harris Armstrong's Schwarz House

1036 Oakland Avenue  
Lot size 100/098 155/138  
Glendale Park subdivision  
Block 1, lot 3



This house was designed by world-renowned architect Harris Armstrong in 1961 for Egon and Dorothea Schwarz. While teaching at Harvard University, Egon accepted a faculty position at Washington University. Ideally, Dorothea wanted a solar house in St Louis and had seen Mr. Armstrong's name listed in the book, *Your Solar House*. Although they looked at a number of houses with a real estate agent, Egon and Dorothea did not find what they wished for: a house with rooms for each of their children, a study for Egon, a sizable garden for Dorothea and a price tag of \$18,000.

Egon and Dorothea then paid a visit to Harris Armstrong, who, after initial misgivings, agreed to design their house. Egon and Dorothea purchased a hillside in Oakland which belonged to one of Armstrong's employees and was within walking distance of Armstrong's studio and home. Armstrong designed a split-level house with passive-solar features to nestle into the hillside covered with wildflowers and oak trees. The house is positioned to maximize capture of the sun's rays in the winter and to minimize it during the summer. Double-paned glass on the northern exposure limits heat loss. The

entrance-hall, study and garage are on the lower level along with storage space. The bedrooms, living room, dining room (originally the master bedroom) and kitchen are on the second level which opens to an enclosed porch, a patio and greenhouse. Art glass panels run along the top edge of the eastern face of the greenhouse.

The house has been modified twice. A master bedroom suite and small bedroom were added on the second (main) level at the western side of the house in 1966. The plans for this addition were done by Armstrong. The kitchen was extended to the south by several feet to accommodate updated features in 1994, and protrudes into the space which was originally part of the enclosed porch. Also, the original landscaping timbers to the side of the garage deteriorated and were replaced by boulders.

Dorothea's masterful landscaping provides beauty and privacy. During the Depression, Armstrong had worked as a landscape gardener and he discussed plans for the gardens with Dorothea. The house provides many views of the flowering trees and shrubs. During the summer, the house is difficult to see from the street, as it blends with its setting.

Egon Schwarz escaped from Vienna with his parents in 1938, during the Nazi occupation. He was fifteen years old. The Schwarz family sought refuge in Prague, then Paris and finally immigrated to Bolivia. Egon's remarkable aptitude for languages served him well and he became proficient in French, Spanish and English. Although his formal learning had been curtailed, he was a prodigious reader and through his own efforts, obtained a broad education. Determined to study at a University, Egon applied to a number of institutions in Europe and America. He enclosed samples of his literary compositions including poems, essays and translations. Due to severely limited finances, Egon requested a source of livelihood as well as admission. The only encouraging response came from the head of the German Department at Ohio State University, who arranged for a job teaching German at Otterbein College so Egon could support himself while pursuing undergraduate studies at nearby Ohio State. He earned a B. A. degree in one year and a PhD. four years later. It was during this period that Egon and Dorothea met at Ohio State and were married. Dorothea was born in Westfalia, survived the Nazi years as a librarian, not without friction with the regime, and came to the United States after the war

Egon Schwarz became an internationally recognized scholar of Germanic languages and pioneered a fresh approach to the analysis of German literature.

Article by Suzanne Bolten, Oakland Preservation Society

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