

5. CLASSIFICATION

OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY: Private

CATEGORY OF PROPERTY: Building

NUMBER OF RESOURCES WITHIN PROPERTY:	CONTRIBUTING	NONCONTRIBUTING	
	1	0	BUILDINGS
	0	0	SITES
	0	0	STRUCTURES
	0	0	OBJECTS
	1	0	TOTAL

NUMBER OF CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES PREVIOUSLY LISTED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER: 0

NAME OF RELATED MULTIPLE PROPERTY LISTING: N/A

6. FUNCTION OR USE

HISTORIC FUNCTIONS: RESIDENTIAL: Single Dwelling

CURRENT FUNCTIONS: RESIDENTIAL: Single Dwelling

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: MODERN: Ranch

MATERIALS: FOUNDATION	CONCRETE
WALLS	BRICK
ROOF	ASPHALT
OTHER	GLASS

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION (see continuation sheets 7-5 through 7-8).

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Ralph, Sr., and Sunny Wilson House
Temple, Bell County, Texas

DESCRIPTION

The Ralph, Sr., and Sunny Wilson House, located at 1714 South 61st Street, Woodlawn Park, Temple, Bell County (Plat section 2F, block 1/lot 2), was completed in the summer of 1959. The house is situated on the corner lot at the intersection of South 61st and R Street. The pathway to the front door leads off of South 61st Street, the driveway off of R Street. The lot size, less than an acre, is landscaped with approximately 20 trees planted in the late 1950s that have grown to maturity. The house measures approximately 2,000 square feet configured in a U-shaped ranch-style plan that was built around an exposed patio. The ranch-style construction was made of white-mottled red brick walls around two-by-four wooden frame construction. The open interiors, however, reflect the influence of the California Case Study houses popular from the 1940s through the early 1960s. The interior is exceptional as it features the extensive and innovative use of various types of plastic laminate. Plastic laminate was a popular material for counter-tops, but the Wilson House reveals innovation in the use of this material. Unlike other period structures, this house contains very little dry-wall; instead specially designed sheets of plastic laminate were attached directly to the two-by-fours. Other outstanding applications include laminate clad, built-in cabinetry, pocket doors, and shower surrounds. The plastics are reflective of popular period fashion and are lemon yellow, aqua, bright pink, & white. All of the interior materials (including the vinyl tile in the bathrooms) are in exceptional condition. Other details of note include exceptional period plumbing, and stacked sandstone architectural features.

The Ralph, Sr., and Sunny Wilson House is located in a late 1950s subdivision in Temple, Texas, that had previously been a dormant farm field. This site was completely cleared for the purpose of construction, but the Wilson family planted trees around the immediate house that have since grown to maturity and enhanced the site. Century-old live oaks are on the lot behind the house and visible from interior spaces. Most of the residences in the Woodlawn Park subdivision are contemporaneous to the Wilson House, but generally not as well designed or landscaped. This property is among the most significant in size and design in the immediate area.

The Wilson House is basically designed in a U-shaped plan in which the easternmost L-shaped portion serves as the public or entertaining space of the house.(see Figure 1) This area features an open-plan in which kitchen, dining room and living room areas have been designed. A laundry room with bathroom is adjacent to the kitchen/dining room, and the garage may be entered through the laundry room. The remaining wing contains three bedrooms and two bathrooms which have been isolated for privacy.

The principal facade (north) consists of white mottled red bricks with accent areas of narrow horizontally stacked sandstone slabs. Two large brick planters line the front of the house with one immediately to the west of the front door. Three small vertical windows and two bands of horizontal windows lie just below the

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Ralph, Sr., and Sunny Wilson House
Temple, Bell County, Texas

cantilevered roofline. The cantilevered roof creates a shadow that makes the structure seem more private and farther from the street.

The west facade of the house is also white mottled red brick with four horizontal bands of windows installed just below the roofline. The east facade of the house features a large garage door, originally open but now containing a double-wide modern door. The rear facade (south) is noted by an inset concrete patio accessed through large glass doors and windows from the dining and living areas. The roof is low-pitched adding to the overall horizontal thrust of the ranch house design.

Approximately 20 cedar and pecan trees, extensive landscape grasses and trailing ivy surround the house. The pecan trees were planted by Ralph and Bonnie Wilson (Ralph's daughter), but the cedars have grown naturally.

The interior features the extensive use of decorative plastic laminates. Most of the walls were made by hooking panels of vertical-grade laminates in lieu of dry-wall. The walls of the garage were surfaced in various grades of laminates which were monitored as an experiment to test their reaction to moisture. The living room wall opposite the kitchen was made of "inlaid" laminate, thereby revealing a bold, colorful geometric pattern. Today such material is highly collectible. The abundant cabinetry located in the kitchen, bathrooms and laundry room is extremely well constructed and entirely sheathed in laminate.(see Figure 2)

One of the most striking features of the house is its outstanding condition. The existing decorative material has aged very little. It is even more incredible that such period materials were not replaced. The original vinyl flooring tile in the bathrooms remains intact and in excellent condition. The only damage in the entire kitchen is one chip and one crack. All of the cabinetry and shower-stalls in the bathrooms are in perfect condition. The overall integrity of the house will allow for an exceptional understanding of what the experience was in a mid-century house.

The Wilson House is currently owned by Wilsonart International, the company originally founded by Ralph Wilson, of Temple, Texas. The company under the direction of an art historian has restored the property to its original 1950s appearance and intends to furnish the house in appropriate period elements. Plans are now underway to establish the house as an archive and interpretive museum on the laminate industry of the period.

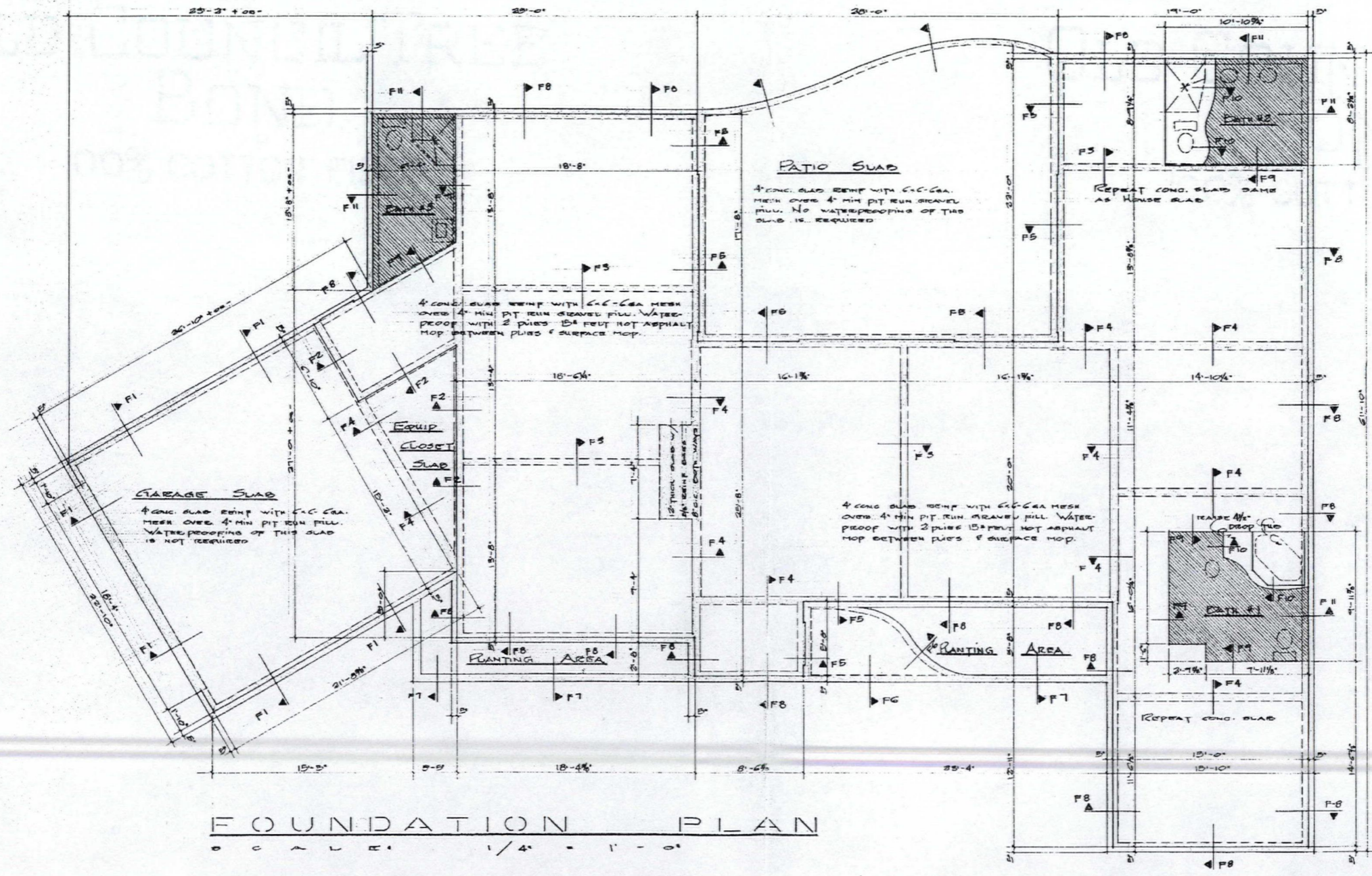
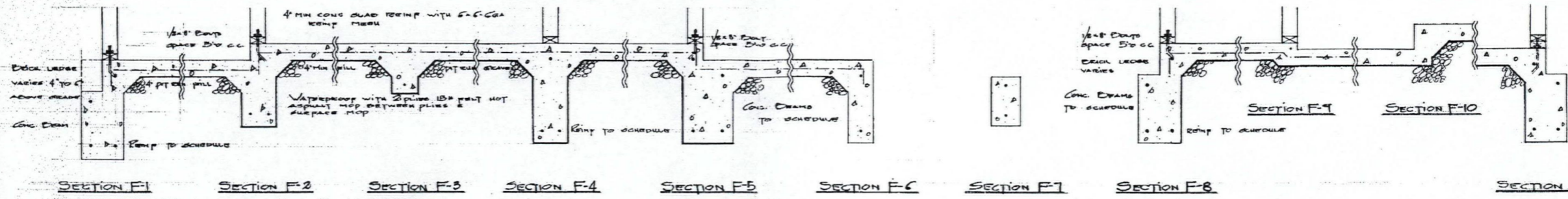
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Ralph, Sr., and Sunny Wilson House
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FIGURE 1
(see reverse)



BEAM	REINFORCING		SCHEDULE	
	NO. SIZES IN TOP	BEAM SIZE	NO. SIZES IN BOTTOM	
F1	2 #5	10" x 24" MIN	2 #5	
F2	1 #5	8" x 20" #	3 #4	
F3	NONE	6" x 12" #	1 #4	
F4	1 #5	8" x 24" #	3 #4	
F5	3 #5	12" x 24" #	3 #5	
F6	1 #4	6" x 18" #	1 #4	
F7	1 #4	7" x 12" #	1 #4	
F8	3 #5	10" x 24" #	3 #5	
F9	NONE		NONE	
F10	NONE		NONE	
F11	2 #5	10" x 24" MIN	2 #5	
F12				

- NOTES:**
1. All concrete shall be 4/4 mix washed ready mixed concrete.
 2. All slabs of enclosed house area shall be waterproofed with 2 plies 15# felt hot asphalt mopped between plies. Surface mopped, screed, finished, & patio shall not receive waterproofing.
 3. Slabbed areas for Bath shall be dropped 1/8" below house slab if patio receives floor of ceramic tile.
 4. Top of Bath 1 shall be dropped into slab so top of tub will be flush with finished floor of raised section.

FOUNDATION PLAN
SCALE 1/4" = 1'-0"

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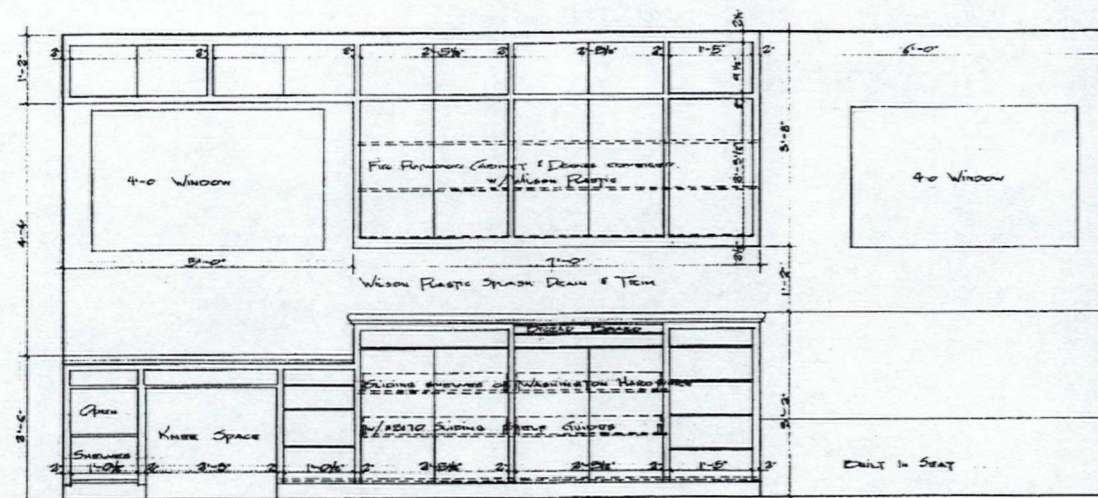
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Ralph, Sr., and Sunny Wilson House
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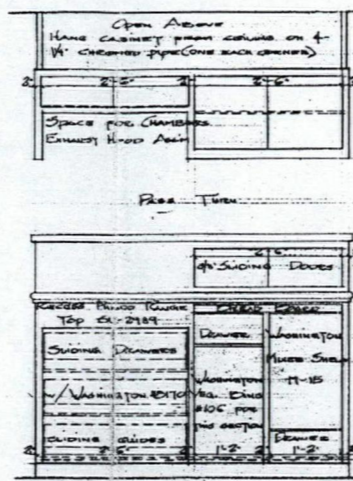
FIGURE 2
(see reverse)

OLD COUNCIL TREE
BOND
100% COTTON FIBER

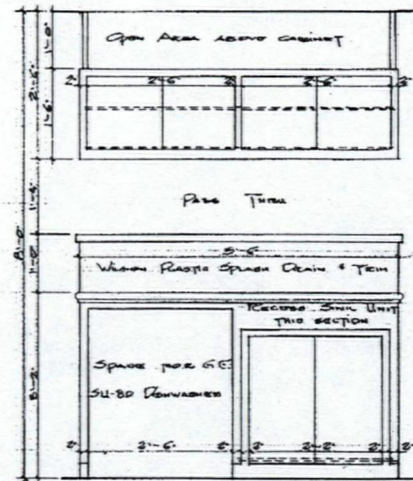
OLD COUNCIL TREE
BOND
100% COTTON FIBER



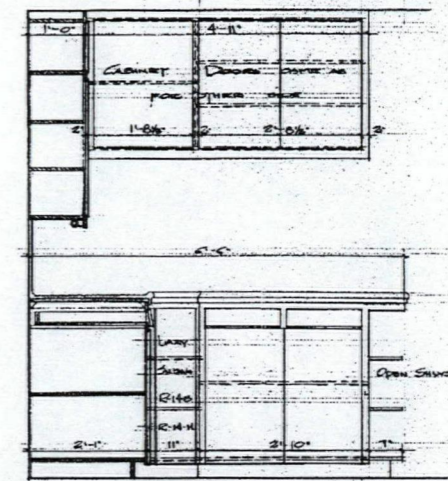
CABINET EAST WALL OF KITCHEN
SCALE 3/4" = 1'-0"



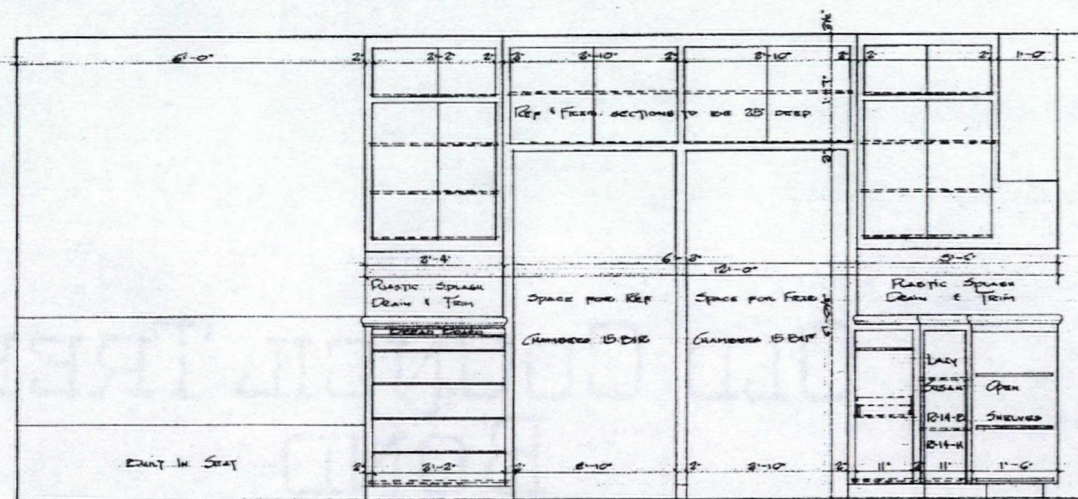
ISLAND CABINET FROM NORTH
SCALE 3/4" = 1'-0"



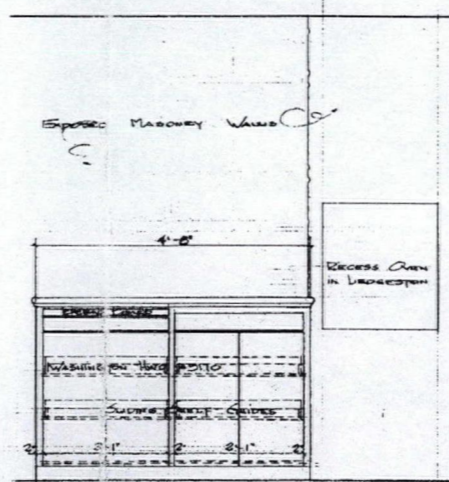
ISLAND CABINET FROM SOUTH
SCALE 3/4" = 1'-0"



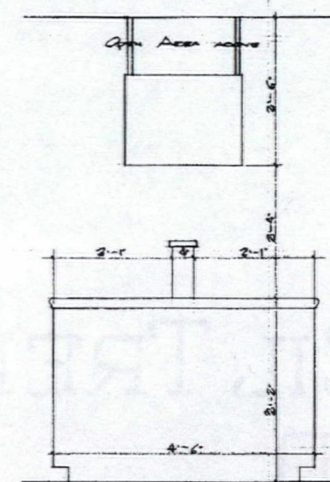
BAR CABINET KITCHEN SIDE
SCALE 3/4" = 1'-0"



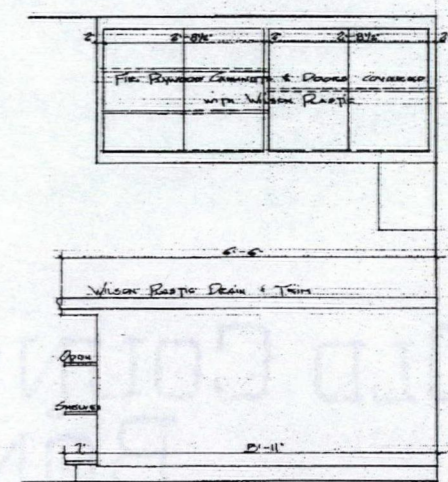
CABINET SOUTH WALL OF KITCHEN
SCALE 3/4" = 1'-0"



CABINET NORTH WALL OF KITCHEN
SCALE 3/4" = 1'-0"

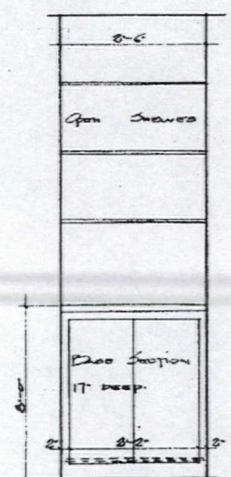


END VIEW ISLAND CABINET
SCALE 3/4" = 1'-0"

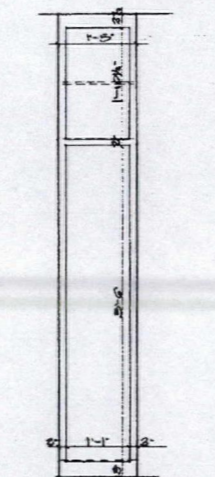


BAR CABINET FAMILY RM SIDE
SCALE 3/4" = 1'-0"

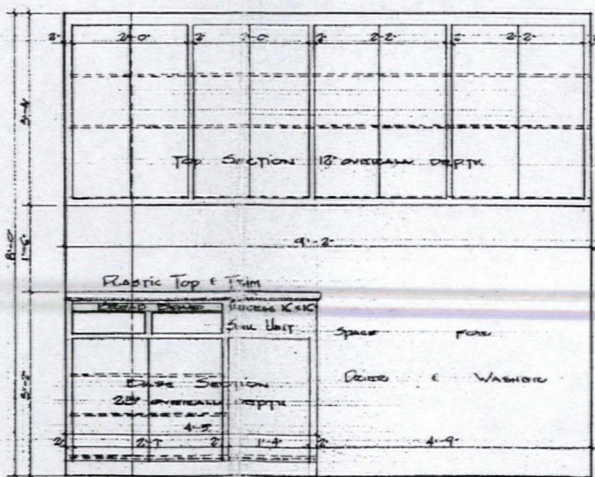
NOTES:
ALL CABINET DOORS SHALL HAVE NATIONAL # R-200 TIGHT-LATCH DOOR CATCHES. NO EXPOSED HARDWARE SHALL BE USED.



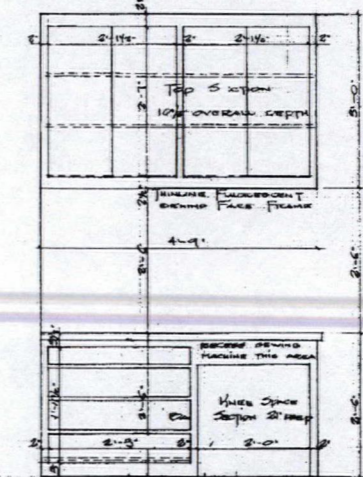
CABINET WALL IN CLO



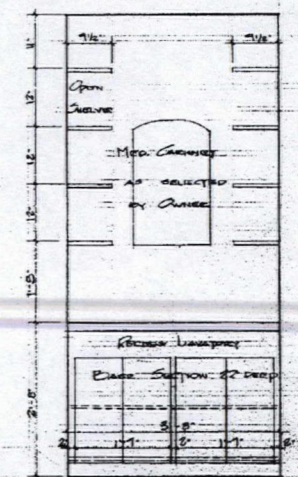
FROM CAB. UTILITY RM



CABINET EAST WALL UTILITY ROOM
SCALE 3/4" = 1'-0"



CABINET NORTH WALL UTILITY RM
SCALE 3/4" = 1'-0"



CABINET PANEL #3

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

APPLICABLE NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA

- A** PROPERTY IS ASSOCIATED WITH EVENTS THAT HAVE MADE A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE BROAD PATTERNS OF OUR HISTORY.
- B** PROPERTY IS ASSOCIATED WITH THE LIVES OF PERSONS SIGNIFICANT IN OUR PAST.
- C** PROPERTY EMBODIES THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF A TYPE, PERIOD, OR METHOD OF CONSTRUCTION OR REPRESENTS THE WORK OF A MASTER, OR POSSESSES HIGH ARTISTIC VALUE, OR REPRESENTS A SIGNIFICANT AND DISTINGUISHABLE ENTITY WHOSE COMPONENTS LACK INDIVIDUAL DISTINCTION.
- D** PROPERTY HAS YIELDED, OR IS LIKELY TO YIELD, INFORMATION IMPORTANT IN PREHISTORY OR HISTORY.

CRITERIA CONSIDERATIONS: G

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE: Architecture, Invention

PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE: 1959-1966

SIGNIFICANT DATES: 1959

SIGNIFICANT PERSON: NA

CULTURAL AFFILIATION: NA

ARCHITECT/BUILDER: McIninich, Bonnie (designer); Draughon, Nathan S. (builder); Froebel, Lee (interior)

NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (see continuation sheets 8-9 through 8-18).

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

BIBLIOGRAPHY (see continuation sheet 9-19 through 9-25).

PREVIOUS DOCUMENTATION ON FILE (NPS): N/A

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

PRIMARY LOCATION OF ADDITIONAL DATA:

- State historic preservation office (*Texas Historical Commission*)
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository:

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Ralph, Sr., and Sunny Wilson House
Temple, Bell County, Texas

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Ralph, Sr., and Sunny Wilson House, completed in 1959, was the first mid-century modern styled house built in Temple. The house was a synthesis of cutting edge materials and design principles that were revealed in the California Case Study houses. The interiors made extensive use of decorative plastic laminate, one of the most widely used 20th century building materials. Such use was unprecedented, but soon became the norm, by the example of this house. Ralph Wilson, Sr., founder of Ralph Wilson Plastics, the largest manufacturer of laminate in the North America, built the house for three reasons: to serve as a model home for his fledgling company; as a location where he personally could test the quality of the products his company manufactured; and as a private residence. Ralph Wilson, Sr., an influential Texas businessman and prominent philanthropist, used the house as his personal residence from 1959 until his death in 1972. The house meets National Register Criterion C at the local level in the area of Architecture as an excellent residential example of the mid-century modern style in Temple, and Criterion A in the area of Invention at the national level for its experimental and highly innovative use of plastic laminates in a residential design setting. The Wilson House meets Criterion Consideration G as an exceptionally significant property less than 50 years of age.

The Philosophy Behind the Ralph, Sr., and Sunny Wilson House

The Ralph, Sr., and Sunny Wilson house is an outstanding example of a mid-century modern styled house.¹ The layout embodies the *open* floor plan that was demonstrated in the California Case Study houses of the 1940s - 1960s.² The common areas are a series of "rooms" with only three walls so the flow of the interior space is continuous. The bedrooms are separate, and very private. Decorative plastic laminate, a desirable interior material, was used extensively throughout the house.³ Laminate, prized for its durability and decorative

1. *Mid-century modern* is a term that refers to designs that were produced between 1945 and 1965. Such designs represent a particular style; a style that features the clean lines and reductivist tendencies of the Modernist movement and the continuous flow of Streamline design. In short, mid-century modern is modernism that has been softened to appeal to the masses.

2. Esther McCoy. *Case Study Houses, 1945-62*. pages 7-11, 28-34.

3. Decorative plastic laminate is considered an inferior building material by many people. This is primarily because of the omnipresence of dramatic woods grains, harvest gold and avocado green. These were popular in the 1970s but quickly fell out of favor and are now viewed as repulsive. Also during the 1970s plastics, in general, became seen as a plague instead of a useful consumer product. Educated design professionals, however, understand the differences between various decorative plastics and the material is still widely used in interior design because no other material offers such extraordinary durability at so low a price (about 76 cents a square foot.)

During the mid-century decorative plastic laminate was a *premium* material. It was highly valued culturally and aesthetically and it bore a high price tag compared to other materials. For example: in the 1952 Sears and Roebuck catalog, a wooden dinette table

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qualities, was only being commonly used on table tops, and counters during the period. Ralph Wilson, Sr., founder of Ralph Wilson Plastics, a manufacturer of plastic laminates, saw further uses for the product; on cabinetry, in lieu of sheet rock, paint and wallpaper for walls, and as a substitute for tile on shower surrounds.⁴ The house was used as an experimental installation, where Ralph, Sr. could personally witness the durability of various grades of material.

Ralph Wilson, Sr. moved from Los Angeles to Temple, Texas, in 1956. In Los Angeles he owned and operated a *staff and stone* business, which produced the decorative plaster work for the Fox movie houses, and other famous locations.⁵ Because he worked in a facet of the architectural business, Wilson was well acquainted with the famous California Case Study houses, a series of architectural experiments that were intended as better solutions for residential living. It was in California that Wilson began exploring issues relating to the suitability of building materials and "good design."⁶

In California, Wilson also started a company called Laminart, which was an early manufacturer of decorative plastic laminate.⁷ After suffering a heart attack and selling his businesses, Wilson decided to move to Temple to "*fish for bass and press a little bit of plastic*" for a friend who owned the American Desk Corporation, a major desk manufacturer located Temple.⁸ By 1959, Wilson was dedicated to turning his "hobby" into an aggressive business. This was an ambitious task, because the Formica Corporation was the

cost \$34.95. A similar model in enameled steel cost \$54.95, but a comparable model with a laminate top cost \$84.95 and the top of the line laminate model cost a whopping \$118.95.

Ironically, the price of a square foot of plastic laminate has increased very little since the 1950s. While the prices of most consumer items have increased many times over, the price of laminate has only increased about 10 cents (a square foot cost 66 cents in 1966, and today the same material costs 76 cents.)

4. Ralph Wilson Plastics was later re-named Wilsonart International and the company exists today under that name.

5. Information gathered from an interview with Bonnie and Bill MacIninch. Bonnie was Ralph's daughter and Bill was Bonnie's husband and an employee of both Ralph Wilson Staff and Stone and Ralph Wilson Plastics. 5-10-97.

6. "Good design" in this article refers to Ralph Wilson's opinion, not the Museum of Modern Art's design exhibition and contest of the same name. Ralph fundamentally believed in products that were pleasing, of good design, and lasting quality. (Ibid, for source)

7. Laminart, founded by Ralph Wilson Sr., was originally incorporated to manufacture phenolic dental bowls and bazooka shells. Shortly after the war Ralph began experimenting with pressing laminate sheets, especially to service Virtue Brothers, one of the nation's largest manufacturers of dinette tables. Laminart also supplied wood grain laminate to California auto manufacturers. The sheets became the "wood" panels used on the exterior of "woodier", a popular type of car. In 1955, Laminart was sold to Fischer Body, which is now a subsidiary of the Ford Motor Company.

8. This story relating to the founding of Wilsonart is a company favorite and is printed in all of the companies historical brochures. Ralph's daughter Bonnie McIninch and his widow Sunny Wilson verified the story.

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industry leader which possessed 60% of the market share of an industry occupied by eighteen different manufacturers.⁹ The company that was started with a \$100,000 investment in 1956, sold for \$66 million in 1966, and the company would go on to be the undisputed industry leader by 1982.¹⁰

No architect was retained to design the Wilson House. It was built from drawings made by Ralph Wilson and his daughter Bonnie McIninch. Nathan S. Draughon, of Temple, Texas, was the original contractor. Draughon and his company erected the building, but the interiors were completed by Lee Froebel, a local construction worker whom Ralph Wilson, Sr., also hired to build his factory.

The Ralph and Sunny Wilson House is a synthesis of many of Ralph Wilson's concerns. Although he became one of the most successful businessmen in Texas during his lifetime, Ralph Wilson, Sr., was a modest man who believed in "hard work, good fun and no pretension."¹¹ The house was designed in accordance with these principles. Wilson was both a man of vision and a man of economy; who could afford a grand residence, yet chose to build a home that would serve as a model of a "good home, good enough for any man."¹² When he began thinking about what kind of a house to build in Temple he wanted a space that would serve many functions simultaneously. As a result the building was much more than a private residence. It was the first model home which the company used for advertising purposes and it served as an experimental installation whereby Ralph would test new applications and types of material.

The idea of a model home is not unique. Period magazines and television shows were rife with examples of houses that featured decorative plastic laminate.¹³ However, the Wilson House is different in a very

9. Statistics on the laminate industry came from the chapter "Leader of the Pack - The history of the Formica Corporation and Its competitors" from the unpublished masters thesis *Machine Made Natural: The Formica Corporation and Its Products 1947-62*, written by Grace Jeffers.

10. Information gathered from Bonnie McIninch, Sunny Wilson, and Alison DeMartino (Marketing Manager, Wilsonart International.) This information was supported by documents from the legal department at Wilsonart International.

11. Ralph Wilson Sr. is listed in *Men of Achievement in Texas* volume II. Information regarding Ralph's "work hard, play hard, and live simply" philosophy was gathered from oral histories taken from his daughter, Bonnie McIninch, his widow, Sunny Wilson, and Wilsonart employees who worked closely with Ralph Wilson Sr. (including Bill MacIninch and Lee Froebel.)

12. Every single employee who worked with Ralph emphasized his firm belief that if a man worked hard he deserved quality things, but that quality must be tempered with modesty and not ostentation. Ralph's favorite motto was "No man should drive a car better than a Buick. (and certainly not an imported car.) To this very day (25 years after the death of Ralph) no employee of Wilsonart International drives a car better than a Buick.

13. For a list of magazines consulted, please refer to the list posted in the Bibliography. Another source for television interiors was Karal Ann Marling's book *As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s*, Cambridge, 1994.

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significant way. Most model homes were created as a staged set. They were ephemeral creations which were meant to look enticing, regardless of the structural reality of the installation. They did not need to be functional or durable or even permanent, they only needed to look good for the length of time it took to photograph them. The Wilson House was a permanent model, one of the first of its kind. Here the owner of the company testified to the quality of his product by actually living with it.

Photographs of the house were featured in period advertisements for Ralph Wilson Plastics, and in consumer and trade magazine editorials. The house represents an ideal design for affordable and fashionable residential housing, and this ideal was disseminated to the public through publications. The house is a document of a shift in attitudes towards plastic laminate. Earlier installations revealed a material that was new to the consumer market and was reserved for high traffic areas, food preparation and dining surfaces. By 1959-60, the material was more common and companies encouraged increased applications in an effort to sell more product. It is evident that the qualities of laminate were embraced and individuals could accept the material as more than a countertop surface.¹⁴

The Wilson House is a document of the innovative uses that were being developed with laminate. Laminate was incorporated onto furniture and countertops almost immediately after World War II, but almost fourteen years had passed until people had enough comfort with the material to begin to develop alternative decorative uses with it. The Wilson House perfectly captures the moment when laminate application exploded into new areas. This is apparent by the use of laminate over most of the walls (including the inside of the shower stalls) and all of the cabinetry throughout the entire house. While many of these applications are common today, the house represents the genesis of the ordinary.

The Wilson House was not only a model of fashion, and innovation, it was a model of good business. Ralph was faced with the formidable obstacle of the Formica Corporation. After all, by 1947 the brand name *Formica* was synonymous with the product.¹⁵ Formica was the undisputed industry leader which pioneered not only the invention of the product, but the decoration of it as well. Ralph's vision was to supply his customers with product that revealed similar designs to those offered by Formica, but Wilson delivered a high quality product faster and at a better price.¹⁶ Where Formica capitalized on their name and design leadership, Ralph

14. It is significant that Ralph Wilson Plastics displayed "all-over" laminate installations in the kitchen before Formica did. Formica had a close relationship with the major kitchen cabinet manufacturers of the mid-century. During that time, kitchen cabinets were most commonly made from metal that was enameled. Laminate was merely installed on the surface. Formica had to support their clients by promoting metal cabinets, but by 1964 they began encouraging the sale of all laminate cabinets.

15. Grace Jeffers, "How the Name Formica Became synonymous with the Product."

16. The rivalry between Formica and Wilsonart is well known in the laminate industry. The author of this essay is a contributing editor at *Laminating Design & Technology* magazine, the only trade publication that is exclusive to the laminate industry, and is quite familiar with the evolution of this competition.

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Wilson Plastics forged its way with outstanding customer service. One way to do this was to intrinsically understand the life cycle of laminate. Ralph achieved this, through exacting quality control tests, and by living with the product.

In addition to standard grade material, Ralph and company engineers experimented with new grades of varying thickness and material made by experimental manufacturing procedures.¹⁷ Sheets of these materials were installed on various walls. The most notable installation is the garage. The walls are entirely covered with sheets of laminate and each separate sheet is a different experimental grade. Ralph wanted to see how the sheets would fair when exposed to the humid conditions of Central Texas. He would not allow a door to be hung over the garage opening so the laminate would be fully exposed to the humidity. A door was finally installed per Sunny's request after the death of Ralph in 1972.

The Physical Structure

Thermo-setting, high pressure, decorative plastic laminate, commonly referred to as *Formica* is a man-made decorative material. The product is manufactured in sheets, which are applied to the surface of a substrate; usually plywood, fiberboard, or particle board. In essence, plastic laminate is a skin, supplying a supplemental finish which is both ornamental and lasting.

According to Jon Ecklund, chief curator of Technology at the Smithsonian Institution, laminate, gram per gram, is more durable than steel. It is warm to the touch, easy to install, lightweight, affordable, and incredibly durable. Manufacturers guarantee that their product is impervious to stains, chipping, crazing, and cracking. Laminate is water and abrasion resistant, as well as lightfast. It cleans with a damp sponge. Laminate is more durable, more sanitary, and easier to maintain than wood, stone, and linoleum, all of which were popular surfacing materials prior to the availability of plastic laminate.¹⁸

This house was one of the first to utilize large quantities of laminate. Some scholars have argued that the first house that made extensive use of laminate was Formica's World Fair House of 1964.¹⁹ While this is the

17. From an interview with Bonnie MacIninch and Bill Froebel, both of whom worked on the design and construction (respectively) of the house.

18. For further information on the history of laminate please refer to *Machine Made Natural*, by Grace Jeffers, Bard Graduate Center, NYC.

19. Thomas C. Jester, *Twentieth Century Building Materials*, pages 129-30. also Susan Grant Lewin, *Formica & Design*, pages 31-2. Jester's book cites Lewin's book as the source that reveals that the Formica World Fair House was the first to make such extensive use of laminate. Susan Grant Lewin, at the time she wrote her book, was the Global Communications Director of the Formica Corporation. In short, she was ultimately responsible for all public relations and marketing communications for Formica. The book

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Temple, Bell County, Texas

popular assumption, it is not necessarily true. Aside from the fact that the Wilson House predates the Formica house by five years, the Wilson House employs laminate in the shower stalls as well as the garage, areas in which the Formica house displays traditional materials, not laminate.

In the Wilson House, the walls in the living room, the front room, the bathrooms the laundry room, walk-in closets, accent walls in all three bedrooms and kitchen, and the garage are lined with panels of laminate which have been butted and secured. Here, a standard sheet of laminate has been backed with a special *backer sheet*. The sheets are then hung from the two-by-four structures which had been blocked for support, thereby eliminating the need for sheet rock.²⁰ The pocket doors, which connect the rooms, are encased in laminate. All of the cabinetry in the bathrooms, kitchen and laundry room is entirely covered with laminate. Such uses of the material would become the design standard by the mid-1960s, and by 1970, few affordable new residential constructions were made without the ample use of this material. During the 1980s genuine wood returned as the most popular and fashionable material for kitchen cabinets and economic prosperity accommodated the use of more lavish countertop materials; especially real stone and solid surfacing materials such as DuPont *Corian*.

Not only was the quantity of laminate used a radical departure, but so was how it was installed. The countertops reveals some of the earliest examples of *post-forming*, whereby the edges have been bent to form a continuous curve from the top to the side edge. While postforming is commonplace today, it was revolutionary then. Previously, countertops consisted of a sheet adhered to the top of a substrate, and an aluminum edge to hide the seam. All of the cabinetry was made to period standards, which reveal a much higher level of craftsmanship than is common today. The fabrication work is in a *modern style*, made with the most contemporary material, but the work was executed with traditional craft techniques, such as dovetail joints. Some of the modern aspects include extensive built-in cabinets in the bathroom, and the extensive L shaped countertop, island and suspended cabinets in the kitchen.

The laminate used throughout the Ralph Wilson Sr. House represents some of the most popular patterns and colors produced during the 1950s. Patterns include a *Maple* wood grain, *Glitter* (a pattern that features flecks of gold scattered throughout the surface), in lemon yellow and pumpkin, and a distinctive *Marble*, in black and pink, and a white with heavy gray veins. Solid colors include lemon yellow, white, pink, black, and turquoise. These patterns and colors represent some of the most popular fashions of the time period. They were not unique to Ralph Wilson Plastics, rather they represented industry standards which were duplicated in the

was an elaborate ploy to garner positive publicity for the company and the material. Her book should in no way be considered a definitive resource.

20. Information gathered from an oral history taken with Bonnie MacIninch Ralph's daughter and designer of the house, and Lee Froebel, the man who built the interiors. 6-18-97.

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Ralph, Sr., and Sunny Wilson House
Temple, Bell County, Texas

collections of other manufacturers.²¹ *Glitter* was an incredibly successful pattern that remained in the companies collection until it was discontinued in 1996.²²

Additional Physical Aspects

The space created by the kitchen, family and living rooms (and the adjacent patio) was meant to be an open inviting space, suitable for entertaining large groups of people, usually employees after hours. The bedrooms were private spaces, isolated from the rest of the house. The house does not have large windows in the front, as is the tradition with many local houses. Instead the only windows seen from the street consist of a row of long thin windows installed just below the overhanging roof. These windows allow for ambient light and privacy. This contrasts greatly with the walls of sliding glass doors that make up the back of the house.

Conclusion

The house is an unusual document of period design because the majority of the interior was not altered and is in mint condition. Usually, when a laminate pattern becomes fashionably dated, the installation is removed and more contemporary laminate installed in its place. The affordability of the material and ease of installation allowed home owners of all incomes to easily update their interiors. The fact that this house was not greatly altered and that the interior elements do not reveal much wear contributes to the exceptional nature of this site.

The California Case Study Houses and the Ralph and Sunny Wilson House

The *California Case Study Houses* were part of an architectural program that was sponsored by *Arts & Architecture* magazine.²³ The magazine joined forces with promising architects and financed the construction of a number of "model homes" that were open for inspection by the general public. The houses, erected in or around the Los Angeles area, were a synthesis of new technology and building materials, which had been pioneered by war-time industry, and contemporary ideals of "good design." The public reaction to the houses

21. Grace Jeffers, "Trail Blazer or Trend Follower."

22. Ibid. Additional information was supplied by David Embry, Global Design Director at Wilsonart International and employee since 1958 (oral history 6-17-97.)

23. All of the information in this paragraph, relating to the California Case Study Houses, is from McCoy, *Case Study Houses, 1945-62*.

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Ralph, Sr., and Sunny Wilson House
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was overwhelming, and between the years 1945 and 1948, 368,554 people visited the first six Case Study houses.²⁴

The houses were exemplary of a "new way of life" or "better living" that was communicated through bold new architectural design. Such design would suggest new living patterns by restructuring the space in which people lived. Structural walls between the rooms were eliminated, thus creating ambiguous space. "Rooms" were suggested by furniture arrangements: e.g. a family room could be suggested by a grouping including a couch, coffee table and side chairs. The construction of the Case Study houses incorporated techniques and materials that had been pioneered during the war effort. Such innovations included new plastics, arc welding, synthetic resins and glues.

Through the example of the California Case Study houses the public was taught to embrace and incorporate experimental design into vernacular architecture. The houses represented a massive educational effort, in which photos, blue prints and architectural drawings of the houses were widely published in many period shelter magazines. And all of this in addition to the massive numbers of visitors that experienced the houses in person.

Ralph Wilson was a Los Angeles businessman who owned two companies that sold building supplies, architectural ornament and plastic laminate. Because of his involvement with the building industry, it is logical that Ralph was very familiar with the new style posed by the houses. Direct influence of the California Case Study houses is apparent by the layout and use of new materials on the Ralph, Sr. and Sunny Wilson House. The following is a comparison between the houses.

Layout

One of the most dramatic effects of the Case Study houses was the invention of both the cross-shaped and the L-shaped floor plans. These layouts were clearly demonstrated by the houses designed by Richard Neutra. Neutra was interested in polarizing the private / bed rooms and the communal / living room, dining room & kitchen. The Wilson House was designed in the U-shaped plan in which the L-section, comprised the open, public space that was intended for entertaining. The living room, dining rooms and kitchen flowed as one large space. Only cabinetry and a stone wall (that contained the fireplace on one side and the oven unit on the other) bisected the open space. The three bedrooms comprise the final leg of the U-plan. these rooms are only accessible through doorways that are so discrete that they are almost undetectable by a visitor to the house.

24. McCoy, *Case Study Houses, 1945-62*.

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Temple, Bell County, Texas

The houses built by Charles and Ray Eames and Eero Saarinen between 1946 and 1950 were the first Case Study houses that incorporated industrial materials and techniques into domestic architecture. The plans of these architects mediated between a more traditional, compartmental floor plan and the totally open plan that would be common by the late 1950s.

Both the Eames and Saarinen experimented with bent plywood and plastic laminate. The Wilson House represents a historic moment in the use of plastic laminate in interior applications. Ralph Wilson did not experiment with bent wood, but he did, however, experiment with bending plastic laminate to cover curves in cabinetry.

The influence of the California Case Study houses on the Wilson House is great, especially when contrasted with the other houses being built in Bell County at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s. The other houses built in the Woodlawn Park subdivision, where the Wilson House is located, represent an updated version of the traditional American vernacular architecture; complete with wide front porches, big bay windows on the front of the house, a front door that is clearly visible from the street, and some amount of wood clapboard. Neighboring houses also feature small attic storage spaces. In contrast, the Wilson House has many immediate features that are strikingly different: The house is absolutely horizontal, the front door is installed perpendicular to, not parallel to, the street. The garage is incorporated into the sweeping line of the front of the house, and is only evident from one angle. Other houses have the garage on the side of the house, facing the street. In essence, the Wilson House seems to be a startling Modern departure from the surrounding references to traditional regional architecture.²⁵

The Wilson House as a Vital Document of 20th Century American Vernacular Architectural History

Throughout time, the accouterments of the lives of the socially, politically and economically powerful have been recorded, documented and preserved. A plethora of information exists that reflects the lives of presidents, civic leaders, and military officials. But what of the lives of the common people? What is left to tell their stories?

The Ralph and Sunny Wilson House reflects an architectural ideal for the average American. Since 1945, many domestic structures have been the dream vision of the owners, who learned about interior decoration and architecture from television, advertisements, and the gamut of postwar shelter magazines. Ralph Wilson was a resourceful man who became a successful businessman, despite the fact that he never went to

25. The house next door to the Ralph and Sunny Wilson House is very similar to the Wilson House. This is because it was built at the same time by Ben Wilson, the brother of Ralph, and the houses were built in tandem.

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Continuation Sheet**

Section 8 Page 18

Ralph, Sr., and Sunny Wilson House
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college. The house reflects his understanding of contemporary design, mediated with his desire to live a simple and private life.

Today we live in a disposable era. We do not fix things, we replace them entirely. Manufacturers expect us to purchase new electronic equipment every five to seven years, and furniture every ten to twenty. We are not expected to hand all of our possessions down to our children when we die, the children are expected to have their own complete household. Wills are for the distribution of cash and sentimental mementos, not basic goods like linen and side chairs.

The Ralph and Sunny Wilson House is remarkable because it exists. In an era where the American homeowner is barraged with encouragement to renovate, redecorate, and remodel; a time when personalities such as Bob Villa and Martha Stewart have reached celebrity status, and Home Depot and Builders Square have become multi-billion dollar businesses. It is remarkable that the house has remained intact.²⁶

There exists a bias in design scholarship. One that pays homage to the "high style" work of a hand few of designers; designers that were trained at particular schools and, usually, produce work within the "Modernist" idiom. The truth is that if documents of culture are to be preserved then the spectrum of material evidence must be broadened to encompass examples such as this.

26. The house remained intact because Sunny was so devoted to the memory of her departed husband that she did very little to alter the home in which they lived together.

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Ralph, Sr., and Sunny Wilson House
Temple, Bell County, Texas

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Ralph, Sr., and Sunny Wilson House
Temple, Bell County, Texas

Special Collections

Avery Library, Columbia University, New York

Cooper - Hewitt, National Design Museum:

F.I.T., New York, Special Collections Department

Exhibitions

Kitsch to Corbusier, Cooper - Hewitt Museum, New York (Spring/Summer 1995)

Materials, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC Summer 1995

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF PROPERTY: less than one acre

UTM REFERENCES Zone Easting Northing
 1 14 654500 3440320

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION: Section 2F, Block 1, Lot 2, in Temple, Bell County, Texas.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION: Nomination includes all property historically associated with the principal building.

11. FORM PREPARED BY (with assistance from Dwayne Jones, THC)

NAME/TITLE: Grace Jeffers

ORGANIZATION: Wilsonart International

DATE: 7/1/98

STREET & NUMBER: 214 Riverside

TELEPHONE: (212) 678-2413

CITY OR TOWN: New York

STATE: NY

ZIP CODE: 10025

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

CONTINUATION SHEETS

MAPS

PHOTOGRAPHS (see continuation sheet Photo-26 through Photo-28)

ADDITIONAL ITEMS

PROPERTY OWNER

NAME: Wilsonart International

STREET & NUMBER: 2400 Wilson Place

TELEPHONE: NA

CITY OR TOWN: Temple

STATE: TX

ZIP CODE: 76503

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Continuation Sheet

Section PHOTO Page 26

Ralph, Sr., and Sunny Wilson House
Temple, Bell County, Texas

PHOTO LOG

The following information pertains to all photographs unless otherwise noted:

Name of Property	Ralph, Sr., and Sunny Wilson House
Address	1714 South 61st Street
City, County, State	Temple, Bell County, Texas
Photographer	Grace Jeffers
Location of Negatives	Wilsonart International (property owner)
Date of Photographs	1998

Photo No.	1 of 22
Camera Facing	South

Photo No.	2 of 22
Camera Facing	Southeast

Photo No.	3 of 22
Camera Facing	Southeast

Photo No.	4 of 22
Camera Facing	South

Photo No.	5 of 22
Camera Facing	West

Photo No.	6 of 22
Camera Facing	West
Photographer	Unknown
Date of Photograph	c. 1960

Photo No.	7 of 22
Camera Facing	North

Photo No.	8 of 22
Camera Facing	North

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Section PHOTO Page 27

Ralph, Sr., and Sunny Wilson House
Temple, Bell County, Texas

Photo No. 9 of 22
Camera Facing Interior Living Room (Image for Advertising)
Photographer Unknown
Date of Photograph c. 1960

Photo No. 10 of 22
Camera Facing Interior Living Room

Photo No. 11 of 22
Camera Facing Interior Living Room West Wall

Photo No. 12 of 22
Camera Facing Interior Kitchen (Image for Advertising)
Photographer Unknown
Date of Photograph c. 1960

Photo No. 13 of 22
Camera Facing Interior Kitchen

Photo No. 14 of 22
Camera Facing Detail of Laminate Finish Work

Photo No. 15 of 22
Camera Facing Interior Kitchen (Image for Advertising)
Photographer Unknown
Date of Photograph c. 1960

Photo No. 16 of 22
Camera Facing Interior Kitchen

Photo No. 17 of 22
Camera Facing Interior Laundry Room
Photographer Unknown
Date of Photograph c. 1960

Photo No. 18 of 22
Camera Facing Interior Laundry Room

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Section PHOTO Page 28

Ralph, Sr., and Sunny Wilson House
Temple, Bell County, Texas

Photo No.	19 of 22
Camera Facing	Interior Guest Bathroom
Photo No.	20 of 22
Camera Facing	Interior Guest Bathroom
Photo No.	21 of 22
Camera Facing	Interior Detail of Laminate Finish
Photo No.	22 of 22
Camera Facing	Interior Master Bathroom

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Wilson, Ralph, Sr., and Sunny, House

MULTIPLE NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: TEXAS, Bell

DATE RECEIVED: 10/13/98 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 10/27/98
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 11/12/98 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 11/27/98
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 98001374

NOMINATOR: STATE

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: Y
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: Y

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT RETURN REJECT _____ DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

See attached comments.

RECOM./CRITERIA Accept A+C; C.C. G

REVIEWER LMC Clelland DISCIPLINE History

TELEPHONE 202-395-⁹⁵¹⁴~~1514~~ DATE 11/24/98

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y N see attached SLR Y/N

Wilson, Ralph, Sr., and Sunny, House
Bell County, Texas

November 23, 1998

Recommendation: Accept Criteria A and C, Criteria Consideration G

The Wilson House (1959) is exceptionally important for its exemplary representation of the modern ranch house in Temple, Texas, and the earliest uses of plastic laminate building technology for domestic interior design. The house is, furthermore, significant for its role in the experimentation of this important 20th century building material and its application for a variety of functional and decorative purposes in the mid-20th century. This house was built for Ralph Wilson, Sr., founder of Ralph Wilson Plastics, one of the the largest manufacturers of laminates in North America. In addition to serving as his home, the building was designed to serve as a model home for his emerging company and a place where its products could be tested. The home was consequently used during Wilson's residence from 1959 to 1966 to display the company's products, demonstrate their diverse uses for the modern home, and test their durability in a domestic setting. Photographs of the home's interior were featured in advertisements and consumer and trade editorials of the period.

The house follows a u-shaped, open, ranch-style floorplan influenced by the California Case Houses which were widely published and popularized between 1940 and the early 1960s. The house reflects the synthesis of building materials, many of which were considered innovative in the 1950s, and design principles set forth by the California Case Study Houses, including a low-pitched roof with cantilevered eaves; narrowly coursed sandstone masonry walls on the outside walls and kitchen interior; stonebrick masonry walls pierced by horizontal bands of windows under the eaves; open organization of interior space; outdoor patio surrounded by large verticle glass walls; and an extensive use of built-in features such as cabinetry and appliances.

The interior of the house is distinguished by the extensive display of plastic laminates throughout, installed under Wilson's direction, and today maintains an unusually high degree of integrity. Beyond the counter tops and floors, plastic laminate materials--in a variety of patterns and colors--form the surfaces of built-in cabinetry, doors, shower surrounds, providing the basis for interior decoration and exploring new functional applications of the material. Especially notable are the living room wall with an inlaid laminate design revealing a bold, colorful pattern of triangles, circles, diamonds, and starbursts; the kitchen with built-in appliances and laminated (yellow, blue, and orange) cabinets and counters, and the bathrooms with laminated counters and shower surrounds. Wilson's experimental interest led him to use his garage, open to the air and light, as a site for testing the durability of laminate materials of various grades.

The nomination makes the case for exceptional architectural importance under Criterion C at the local level based on the home's modernistic ranch house design following the principles of the California Case Study Houses, as well as the period interiors exhibiting an extensive decorative, functional, and colorful use of plastic laminates throughout. The nomination also claims national level importance, under Criterion A for Invention, for the role the house played in the advancement and expansion of the use of plastic laminate building technology in the mid-20th century. While there is reason to suggest this property had considerable influence nationally given its promotion and coverage, the nomination does not provide sufficient contextual information, comparative analysis, and scholarly perspective about the importance and evolution of the plastic laminate industry to merit referral as a National Historic Landmark at this time.



1714

WILSON, RALPH, SR., & SUNNY, HOUSE
1714 SOUTH 61ST STREET
TEMPLE, BELL CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 1 of 22



1714

WILSON, RALPH, SR., & SUNNY, HOUSE
1714 SOUTH 61ST STREET
TEMPLE, BELL CO., TEXAS
PHOTOGRAPH 2 of 22



WILSON, RALPH, SR., & SUNNY, HOUSE
1714 SOUTH 61ST STREET
TEMPLE, BELL CO., TEXAS
PHOTOGRAPH 3 of 22



1714

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1714 SOUTH 61ST STREET
TEMPLE, BELL CO., TEXAS
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TEMPLE, BELL CO., TEXAS

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TEMPLE, BELL CO., TEXAS

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TEMPLE, BELL CO., TEXAS
PHOTOGRAPH 7 of 22



WILSON, RALPH, SR., & SUNNY, HOUSE
1714 SOUTH 61ST STREET
TEMPLE, BELL CO., TEXAS
PHOTOGRAPH 8 of 22

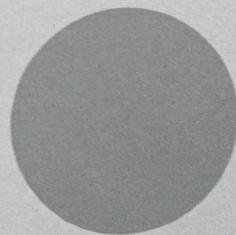
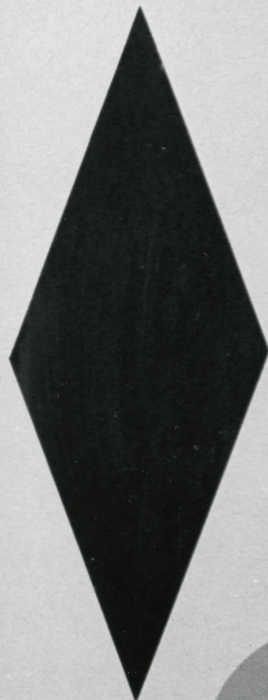
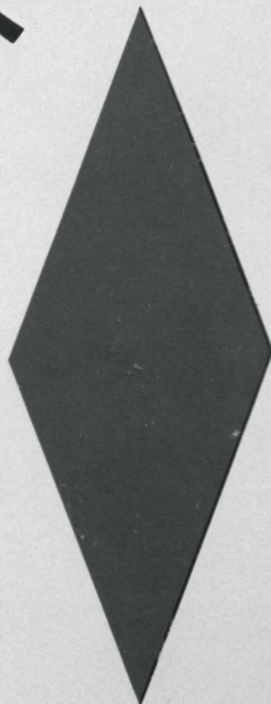
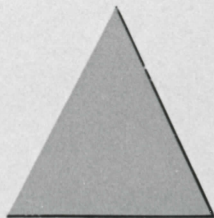
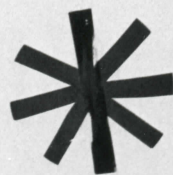
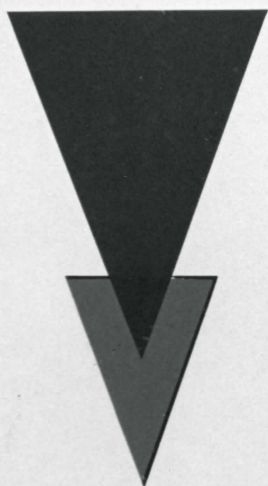
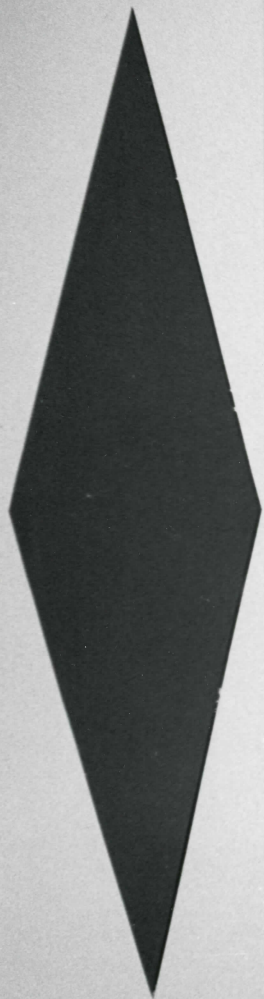


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TEMPLE, BELL CO., TEXAS
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TEMPLE, BELL CO., TEXAS

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WILSON, RALPH, SR., & SUNNY, HOUSE
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TEMPLE, BELL CO., TEXAS
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TEMPLE, BELL CO., TEXAS

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TEMPLE, BELL CO., TEXAS
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1714 SOUTH 61ST STREET
TEMPLE, BELL CO., TEXAS
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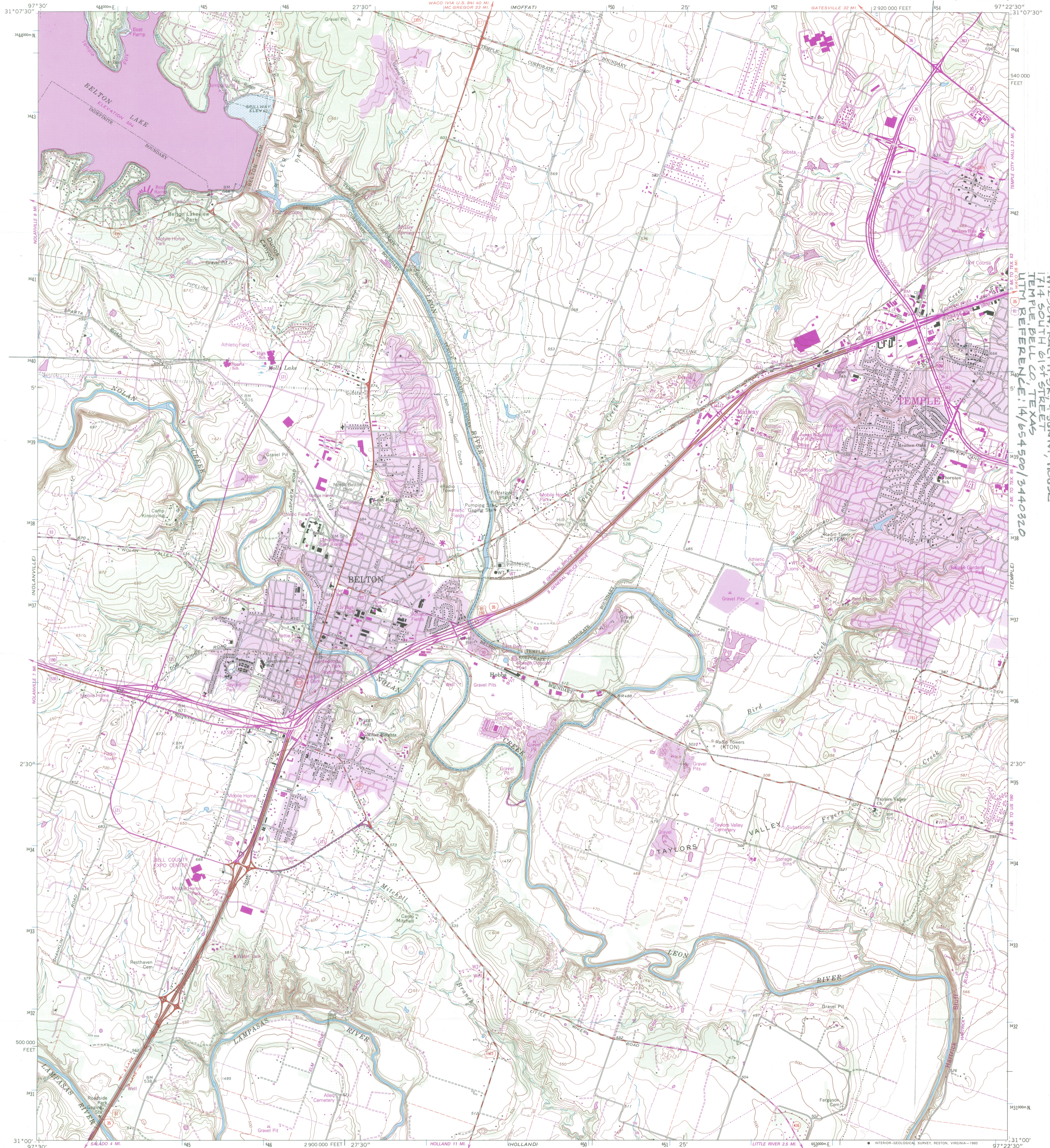


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1714 SOUTH 61ST STREET
TEMPLE, BELL CO., TEXAS

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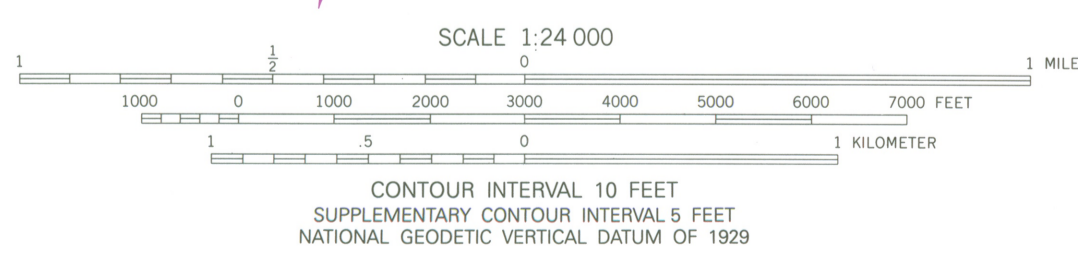
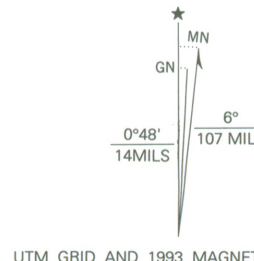


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1714 SOUTH 61ST STREET
TEMPLE, BELL CO., TEXAS
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WILSON, RALPH SR. & SUNNY, HOUSE
114 SOUTH 61ST STREET
TEMPLE, BELL CO, TEXAS
UTM REFERENCE: 14/654500/3440320

Produced by the United States Geological Survey
Control by USGS and NOS/NOAA
Compiled from aerial photographs taken 1964. Revisions shown
in purple compiled from aerial photographs taken 1990 and
other sources and has been field checked. Map edited 1993
Conflicts may exist between some updated features and previously
mapped contours
North American Datum of (NAD 27). Projection and
10000-foot ticks: Texas Coordinate System, central zone
(Lambert Conformal Conic)
Blue 1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator ticks, zone 14
North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83) is shown by dashed
corner ticks. The values of the shift between NAD 27 and NAD 83
for 7.5-minute intersections are given in USGS Bulletin 1875
Areas covered by dashed light-blue pattern are subject to
controlled inundation



ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Primary highway, hard surface	Light-duty road, hard or improved surface
Secondary highway, hard surface	Unimproved road
Interstate Route	U. S. Route
	State Route

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

QUADRANGLE LOCATION

BELTON, TEX.
31097-A4-TF-024

1965
REVISED 1993
DMA 6546 III SW-SERIES V882

11/24/98

Carol -

Please review the attached comments ~~and~~ ^{supporting} the listing of this exceptional less-than-50-year-old property. The Texas State review board was quite enthusiastic about this at their Duly review board meeting. I've attached the Newsweek article that carried color photographs of the interiors. Please sign nomination if you agree.

Linda McClendon