

SAVING MID-CENTURY MODERN IN DENVER

# ONE HOUSE AT A TIME

words: Kelsey MacArthur

Peter Blank and Mile Hi Modern make it their mission to preserve mid-century modern homes and connect buyers with the lifestyle they want to be living.

**WOULD DENVER LOSE A PORTION OF ITS IDENTITY IF MID-CENTURY MODERN HOMES WERE SCRAPED? PETER BLANK AND MILE HI MODERN THINK SO AND WANT TO MAKE SURE THE ARCHITECTURAL MASTERPIECES BUILT IN COLORADO ARE SAVED, NURTURED, RENOVATED AND PUT IN THE HANDS OF HOMEOWNERS WHO UNDERSTAND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE.**

Seven years ago a new player in the real estate market came onto the scene. Mile Hi Modern, started by Peter Blank and Craig Mayer, hoped to rescue mid-century modern homes that were being sold for land value instead of architectural value. Peter recalled, "I had a love for architecture and Craig had a love for landscape design. We were driving through Hilltop thinking all these cool houses were being torn down and we had to give them a voice. That was how the whole idea started - let's get into this really cool mid-century salvation. We wanted to bring recognition and awareness to forgotten Denver architects of the 1950s."

The passion behind Mile Hi Modern is preserving and elevating mid-century modern gems by finding the right buyers, who appreciate modern architecture and open living floor plans. Peter acts as a steward, helping connect buyers with historic homes that would have been overlooked by other real estate agents.

## THE KOIN HOUSE

In 2009 Peter and Mile Hi Modern obtained the listing for the Koin House, a mid-century modern home built by Tician Papachristou and Charles Haertling in 1962. The notable Cherry Hills home was featured on the cover of *Architectural Digest* in 1964 and *Modern In Denver* did a story covering the house in 2009 - astonishingly, the owners had not changed as much as a rug in the forty-five years that had passed since the *Architectural Digest* photo shoot.

The sellers of the Koin House chose Mile Hi Modern because they needed a broker who understood the significance of the house. Tician Papachristou and Charles Haertling were both well-known architects who did extensive work in Boulder and helped shape the modern architectural scene of the Flatirons. Peter describes the Koin House as "the quintessential, iconic mid-century modern piece of real estate in Denver. If there was a crown jewel it would be the Koin House. It exemplifies everything that was cool during that period." The design incorporated indoor-outdoor living seamlessly. The kitchen, living room and dining room space open into the backyard where trees fence the pool and separate the home from the surrounding neighborhood. The lot and design hide the home from the busy bustle of the location. Peter continues, "You walk through that door and something pulls on your soul."



photo: Trevor Brown | Andrew Clark Studio



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Peter and the sellers understood the weight of holding out for the right buyer – a buyer with the means to take on a renovation. Selling the house to a developer to be torn down and sold as lots was not an option, but very likely considering the Cherry Hills location. Despite immense interest in the iconic house and a serious potential buyer right off the bat, it took two years for Peter to secure the right buyer.

The new owners of the Koin House acknowledge the need for preservation, saying, “Even though mid-century has gained popularity over the past several years, it’s still at risk as many homeowners and developers who don’t appreciate the aesthetic find it easier and more cost effective to start over. Mile Hi Modern has been instrumental on turning this tide with their enthusiasm and passion for preserving these diamonds in the rough and showing how effective mid-century architecture is at accommodating today’s lifestyles.” The Koin House will undergo extensive renovations, but will remain structurally true to the original design.

While the Koin House was a unique listing, the team at Mile Hi Modern treats each of their listings with stewardship and preservation of modernism in mind – “the 50s was about architecture, but new modern is really about open living. Living in an open space without closed doors, whether you have traditional furniture or modern furniture it isn’t really about that. It is about how you want to live,” expresses Peter. Connecting people with historic homes that have a story is what drives Mile Hi Modern.

**BURNHAM HOYT HOUSE**

The Burnham Hoyt House, recently off the market on East Exposition Avenue, is another example of Mile Hi Modern’s efforts to preserve Denver’s glimmering architectural history. The home was the personal residence of architect Burnham Hoyt, who designed the Denver Central Library and Red Rocks Amphitheater. Hoyt was born and raised in Denver and after studying architecture

in New York came back to his home town and joined his brother in an architectural firm. The 1949 home, recently renovated by Denver architect Angela Feddersen, of Elevate Architecture, now has a modern chef’s kitchen and master bath that balances the needs of 2011 with mid-century design. Angela and her team worked to maintain the clean mid-century aesthetic while adding fresh updates.

The international style bi-level is indicative of Hoyt’s work. The design boasts an asymmetrical façade and a low-pitch roofline with impressive ten-foot windows looking out to the backyard. Angela explains how they worked to enhance the original features – “The two defining design concepts we built on during the remodel were the dynamic use of windows to allow daylight to orient you, and overlapping planes which define the circulation. Simply opening the kitchen to the great room and sunroom allow a connection to the outdoors and reinforce the integrated light original to the home.”



photo: Crystal Allen

ABOVE: The front door entrance to the Koin House.

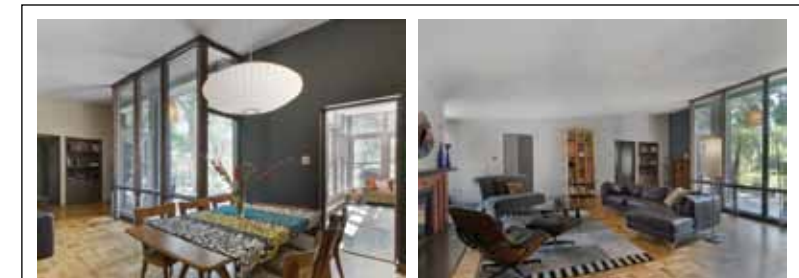
BELOW: The kitchen, living room and dining room open to a large patio with an overhang that provides cool shade. The gradual stairs from the patio ease into the spacious backyard.



photo: Trevor Brown | Andrew Clark Studio



“The mid-century modern era is aligned with how we like to live today, each room is flexible and flows into the next. The connection to the outdoors expands the living space. My favorite design challenge is working within the framework of an existing neighborhood or home, identifying its inherent beauty and supplementing it with thoughtful, clean architecture. We are so fortunate Denver has many original modern gems.” *Angela Feddersen*



ABOVE: The landscape design improves the indoor / outdoor living style of the Hoyt House.

RIGHT: Floor to ceiling windows fill the living space with natural light and warmth.

photos this page: Teri Fotheringham

The Exposition House is an essential part of the modernist culture of Denver and Angela is another member of the community that works to preserve modern architecture. “The mid-century modern era is aligned with how we like to live today, each room is flexible and flows into the next. The connection to the outdoors expands the living space. My favorite design challenge is working within the framework of an existing neighborhood or home, identifying its inherent beauty and supplementing it with thoughtful, clean architecture. We are so fortunate Denver has many original modern gems and dedicated companies like Mile Hi Modern to help protect them.” expresses Angela.

Mile Hi Modern brings recognition to Denver architects of the past and current aspiring modern architects. The devotion to saving mid-century modern architecture isn’t reserved for homes designed by famous architects - Mile Hi Modern’s listings span from \$150,000 homes in Harvey Park to multi-million dollar homes throughout Colorado. Peter and the team at Mile Hi Modern are passionate about both connecting people with their ideal home, while simultaneously preserving historic modern architecture. The appreciation of modern architecture is growing and flourishing in Denver and Mile Hi Modern is at the forefront of promoting and celebrating simplicity and efficiency in design.