

FOR SALE

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19

52  
UNIQUE REAL ESTATE—

ONE OF A KIND

MID-CENTURY MODERN

RESIDENCE

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CHATTANOOGA

SOLD





## THE SHAW HOUSE

Architect

**GEORGE FRED KECK**

Chicago

Project 471, Completed in late 1952

Historically Significant, the only Keck Project in Tennessee  
Passive Solar Residence

Concrete, Custom Concrete Block, Douglas Fir, Birch, Glass

**SOLD**





A truly unique home in a private setting  
in an established highly desirable neighborhood.  
The ideal home for an artist, executive, doctor or lover of mid-century modern  
located in North Chattanooga, literally minutes from downtown.

**DESCRIPTION:**

**Location**      **3064 Rivermont Road, Chattanooga, TN 37415**

[illegible]

Originally built with low maintenance and energy usage in mind, this passive solar home is very conveniently located to downtown Chattanooga and has unique street appeal. It is privately situated on 2.4 acres in the highly desirable North Chattanooga Rivermont neighborhood. Revitalized and totally refreshed by the current owners, the home has since been well maintained and has nearly all of the original "mid-century" features intact. From the open floorplan to the polished concrete floors on the main level to the fireplace with "floating" hearth to the birch bedroom "built-ins" to the Douglas Fir walls and 9-foot ceilings, the home's thoroughly researched classic mid-century modern heritage is evident and outstanding. Every update was done with the "modern" integrity of the home in mind, from the contemporary kitchen with maple cabinets with stainless pulls, gas slide-in range with convection oven and solid surface counter tops, stainless steel appliances and range hood, to the updated lighting and ceiling fans, to the three bathrooms with new sinks, fixtures and solid surface counters.

The master suite overlooks the main living space which has a 19 foot ceiling and a 50+ year old fiddle-leaf fig tree and Bird of Paradise. Adjacent to the main living area is a large "studio" with 13'6" ceiling and built-in wrap-around desk top with plenty of electrical outlets and internet connectivity suitable for a variety of endeavors – or convert it to the "future" master suite the current owners had in mind when the addition was built in 2001. If you like mid-century modern, you honestly won't find another home like this anywhere. Built for entertaining and casual living, make Keck 471 your unique home, the only home in Tennessee designed by George Fred Keck.



©1952-53 Southern Studio, Chattanooga, TN



"The architecture of the Keck brothers combines a pragmatic approach, characteristic of Chicago architecture, with a theoretical base derived from European designs. Their buildings blend aspects that are socially conscious, aesthetically progressive, and technologically and environmentally advanced." - *Macmillian Encyclopedia of Architects*

## SPECIFICATIONS:

Bedrooms	3 (master suite with full bath, also see note about Studio*)
Full Baths	2 (potential for 3rd*)
Half Baths	1, main level
Studio*	Large finished work space with 13½' ceiling, French doors, built-in wrap-around desk, cable / internet and plenty of electrical outlets (2001 addition, built for future conversion to master suite with full bath and walk-in closet)
Deck	Extended outdoor space, 20 ft x 18 ft, built 2011
Year Built	1952
County	Hamilton
Subdivision	Rivermont
Lot Size	2.4 acres, irregular rectangular shape, approximately 290 ft x 454.2 ft
Appliances	Stainless steel, refrigerator, dishwasher, gas range/electric convection oven, multi-speed hood, microwave (negotible)
Basement	NA
HVAC	High efficiency dual-fuel central system, heat pump, electric air with gas emergency heat; studio has separate electric HVAC system; complete service records for each
Dining Room	Separate dining room adjacent to kitchen, kitchen has counter-height bar
Equipment	Security system, smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detector, ceiling fans throughout
Fireplace	Wood burning, "floating hearth", gas line available for gas log installation
Interior	Contemporary walk-thru "galley" style kitchen, 9 ft. ceilings throughout, updated lighting, cork floor upstairs under carpet, bedrooms have "built-ins," utility/laundry room with storage adjacent to kitchen, 50+ year old Fiddle Leaf Fig tree and Bird of Paradise
Exterior	Custom concrete block, Douglas Fir, glass, concrete panel
Roof	Commercial built-up, multi-ply roof (not a "rubber roof"), installed Jan. 2006
Parking	2-car carport with storage
Footage	appx. 2906 sq.ft. = 1330 sq.ft. main level, 576 sq.ft. Studio, 1000 sq.ft. second floor

## THE SHAW HOUSE

### *A Brief Historical Reference*

After “considerable one-sided correspondence” with Frank Lloyd Wright regarding “some preliminary sketches” on his new home, Dr. Clarence Shaw, a Chattanooga dermatologist



**Above:** George Fred Keck, right and his brother, William Keck.

**Facing page:** a few of the original building invoices.

and art aficionado, began his correspondence with the firm George Fred Keck, William Keck Architects, Chicago, on November 19, 1951. He was seeking a design for his home that would be suitable for displaying his small but growing eclectic collection of art and allow him to pursue his hobby of growing orchids. As some of our neighbors had been long time acquaintances of the Shaws, we have been privy to some of their fond remembrances of dinners, birthday parties and stories of the “unusual house with the tree.” Almost from the ground-breaking, the small cul-de-sac neighborhood couldn’t believe their eyes. At least several have recalled remarking among themselves, “why would anyone construct a new home of cinder blocks with a concrete floor and flat roof?” However, over the

construction period and years that followed, their reaction changed from one of “raised eyebrows” to one of honest interest, and later to sincere affection, especially upon attending the many neighborly get-togethers at the “Shaw House” as it came to be known.

On December 23, 1952, Dr. Shaw and his family moved into their newly completed modern home located at 3064 Rivermont Road, Chattanooga, Tennessee. Five weeks later, on January 30, 1953, an exhibit, *Contemporary Design in Chattanooga*, opened at the University of Chattanooga. The exhibitions intent was to expand the idea of what was considered modern art (in Chattanooga) and “to show relationships that exist between contemporary functional and fine arts objects.” As George Cress, Head of the University of Chattanooga Art Department, an abstract impressionist painter himself, and Director of the exhibit said, “it should point up the presence of a variety of art objects in everyday use.”<sup>1</sup> Included were photographs of the Shaw home designed by Chicago architect, George Fred Keck, as well as another local residence designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, the Seymour Shavin House.<sup>2</sup> The exhibit, which closed February 19, 1953, was given a generous amount of local publicity and press in *The Chattanooga Times*. In one article, Harold Twitty, writer for *The Chattanooga Times*, described the exhibit as “contemporary ‘modern’ design in architecture, home furnishings, advertising illustration and a fine arts display of paintings, drawings, prints and sculpture by Chattanooga



artists or owned by Chattanooga residents.” Twitty, went on to explain how the show was a “unity in contemporary design—an effort to point up the effort on the part of the designers to work with new materials to evolve new styles...[to reveal] to its visitors how good design in a fine art painting, for example, can ‘live’ with modern furnishings and modern architecture.” He continued, “photographs of the new home of Dr. and Mrs. Clarence Shaw, designed by Architect George Fred Keck [sic] of Chicago, were among the outstanding attractions of the exhibition. Some thought the house was wonderful; others were overheard to say, ‘That’s not my idea of a house.’”<sup>3</sup> While Twitty’s article further described the Shaw residence as “a house which employs great areas of glass and space,” Dr. Shaw is quoted as saying, “‘I never knew that a house could be so wonderful’...[it’s] ‘just like living outdoors.’”<sup>4</sup>

There was a fateful degree of serendipity involved in becoming the second owner of this one-of-a-kind residence. We moved to Chattanooga from Nashville in 1995 and initially settled into a small bungalow on Barton Avenue, a busy street in the heart of the Riverview

district. As new Chattanoogaans, we would often drive around investigating the different neighborhoods and homes. Upon discovering The Shaw house, each time we were in the area, we would drive by to take another look at the unique “flat-roofed, concrete house.”

Much to our surprise, we discovered the house had remained virtually original since 1952 with the exception of a few items – the HVAC system, a downstairs commode, the addition of a dishwasher in the kitchen, the electrical panel had been changed from fuses to circuit breakers, and the “wood folding partition” once separating the two son’s bedrooms had been replaced by a wall.

While the originality was a blessing, it wasn’t without its own set of problems. Since acquiring the Shaw House in January, 2001, the improvements to the home have been done in an attempt to maintain the original integrity of the structure.

As with any home of this age there are decisions to be

made and many, if not most, revolve around the usefulness and practicality of the situation. The original greenhouse was in such a state of disrepair it had to be dismantled and removed. In its place a studio space was



built. Other improvements include a high efficiency heating and cooling system, ceiling fans and energy efficient lighting plus a new contemporary kitchen with maple cabinets,

*“I never knew that a house could be so wonderful’... [it’s] ‘just like living outdoors.’”*

stainless steel appliances, solid surface counter tops, gas range and hood. Additionally, a new commercial-style built-up roof replaced the old “tar and gravel”, the drive has been paved and a good bit of the undergrowth adjacent to the house has been removed.

Some special notes about the studio which was added in such a way

that most people are never aware that it wasn’t part of the original house. It has a nearly 14 foot ceiling and was designed with the ability to add a full bath, large walk-in closet with additional overhead storage space and windows on the south side should we decide to convert it into a master suite on the main level in the future. The only real visual giveaway the studio is not part of the original structure is on the inside, it has painted walls rather than Douglas Fir or concrete block.

To our amazement, the original blue prints and correspondence between the owner and the architectural firm were still in the house. It was only after a subsequent conversation with Dr. Shaw’s eldest son that we realized the significance of George Fred Keck, and later his contributions to modern architecture.

## THE ARCHITECT

### *George Fred Keck*

The Clarence Shaw House, built between Summer and mid-December 1952, is a modern, single-family, passive solar, residential structure. Designed by George Fred Keck of George Fred Keck, William Keck, Architects, 612 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. The single family home functioned as a comfortable interior/exterior environment for a family of four who enjoyed entertaining at home, greenhouse gardening and spacious low-maintenance surroundings. The design also complemented Dr. Shaw’s growing art collection.

The Keck residences from the late 1940s on, for the most part, reflected his turn away from the European “box” silhouette, the intense and saturated colors of Art Deco and the curves of Modern furniture and appliance design. To define/redefine his sense of modernism he combined what he thought were the best planning and construction solutions with the organic aesthetics characterized by Frank Lloyd Wright’s Usonian homes—the natural materials, finishes and stylistic elements—though he did maintain a sense of refined, *user-friendly* modernism acquired from his knowledge and experience in the International Style. Much of Keck’s work expressed the socio-economic changes in America during this period and as a result there was no single style that defined his work. (Perhaps this may help explain his lack of recognition.)

Keck’s tasteful and artistic practicality and the Green’s Ready-Built solar design



**North view:** The front of the house as seen from the street; The original plans showing the location of the lot in the neighborhood and house on the lot. The "arrow" indicates the approximate location of the driveway.



homes of the previous decade were a definite influence on the design of the Shaw House as was the exposed masonry, natural wood finishes, concrete floors, built-ins and



**South side:** Looking east (top) toward the studio. Looking west (bottom), is from the French doors of the studio and shows the owner's vegetable garden.

flat roofs of Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian homes and the simple lines, glass walls and technological appearance of Mies van der Rohe's International Style. Features belonging to virtually every Keck project are seen within the Shaw House as well, things like *livability*, the attention to the occupant's lifestyle and comfort, uncluttered, open, accessible spaces, simple rectilinear shapes and masses (though some contained curves or arcs) and functional, economic operation. Like the Usonian homes and many other International Style "glass boxes," the Shaw House is void of attic, basement, and garage. It does, however, have a two-car carport.

The only Keck home in Tennessee, the residence is situated on 2.4 wooded acres in the Rivermont area of North Chattanooga, approximately 7 minutes from downtown. Like many of Keck's residences, the main structure is sited to both provide a view, in this case a winter view of the Tennessee River, and on a North-South axis to make use of passive solar energy. The lot is almost level on the north, the front of the house, and from the back of the house the lot begins sloping downward to the south. Like the Cahn House, though not on a thirty acre site, ample space surrounds the structure providing a sense of place and privacy, placing the structure in visual harmony with the natural, wooded terrain that was originally professionally landscaped. In 2011, a large deck was added, expanding the outdoor living space with future possibilities of extending the deck or adding a pool.

The basic plan of the home is a somewhat



flattened chevron shape consisting of two-stories with a one-story carport and storage space on the west side. A similar chevron shape had been used in the multi-level Bennett House in 1941 and the single-level Fagen House in 1948. The main level consists of a spacious, two-story living room area open to the dining area adjacent to a walk-through galley kitchen. Off of the kitchen is a separate utility room with laundry facilities and an exit to the carport. The main (front) entrance is on the North side and opens into a small foyer leading directly to the two-story living room. Off of the foyer are the stairs to the second-level, closets for storage, powder room/half bath and entrance to the kitchen and a built-in desk and storage drawers.

The second-level consists of a master suite, hallway, two bedrooms and bath. The Blair House, although it uses an arc rather than straight lines for the plan of the main structure, has a two-story solarium and on the exterior is visually similar to the glass wall in the living room area of the Shaw House. The second-floor master suite is a loft in the Shaw house with folding wooden partition above a waist wall separating the bedroom from the open space of the living room below. The Blair House had sliding glass doors as partitions to the solarium on both levels.

The structure is constructed of regular coursed masonry using commercial, high density, open-celled, concrete block containing crushed terra cotta tile. The cells of the concrete block are reinforced and filled with concrete for strength and to provide additional mass for the passive solar design. Beneath the reinforced

concrete floors are rectangular ceramic "flue" ducts used for the central heating/cooling system. The interior of the house has no painted surfaces and throughout the walls and ceilings are of Douglas fir and finished in "Firzite" (according to Bill Shaw), a penetrating oil finish. Originally, there were some type of shades or blinds on the exterior glass wall in the living room area for light and heat control. From all appearances, these were only adjustable from the outside via a pulley system and cables or cords unlike some others that were operated from the inside. Though no longer present, it's possible they may have been similar to the exterior blinds on the Bruning House.

The general construction, masonry and concrete work was handled by Tom Padgett, a contractor in Miami, Florida, who was familiar with George Keck's work. The addition of crushed terra cotta tile to the concrete block gives them a slightly warm tone and they are laid in a typical coursed fashion with smooth joints. The perimeter walls of the main structure have no right angles while the interior walls do have right angles. The exterior has almost no painted surfaces either except for the Cemesto panels (akin to lightweight reinforced concrete panels now in use) and the steel frames around the casement windows. A flat, built-up roof with copper flashing runs around the perimeter of the house and carport. As in the Green's Ready-Builts, the Bruning House and other Keck residences, the roof was designed with a shallow evaporation pool as part of the passive solar system to help keep the house cool in the summer but this feature is not currently in use.



***This page:*** The main living area as seen from the fireplace, adjacent to the entry foyer.

***Facing page:*** Looking from the main living area through the foyer to the front entry. To the left of the fire place with floating hearth is the dining area and just beyond, out of view, is the kitchen which is also accessible from the short hall beside the stairs.

Like many of Keck's solar homes, the south facade of the structure is two stories tall. The glass wall is nearly 20 feet tall, and largely floor to ceiling, plate glass glazing mounted in Douglas Fir sash and mullion to admit the maximum amount of winter solar heat. It wasn't uncommon to find larger overhangs on the



southern exposure than the other sides for this express purpose. In the case of the Shaw home, the overhang is greater than 4 feet. Like the carport and adjacent storage room, a number of Keck's residences had no overhangs or eaves at all and in that sense were very much in line with the International Style. The large overhang

of the roof on the southern exposure prevents the summer sun from entering the interior of the house while allowing the winter sun to shine across the concrete floor and up the north wall opposite the southern exposure. The remaining overhangs on the main perimeter are approximately 24 inches and provide very



adequate protection for the clerestory steel casement and fixed windows that run continuously around the perimeter of the structure. The clerestory windows also serve to visually lighten the weight of the mass and provide the look of a “floating roof”. While clerestory windows were not uncommon in Keck’s work, photos indicate that as a general rule they were fixed, unlike a number of the

ones in the Shaw House. At floor level in the living room area are steel casement windows, coupled with the clerestory windows, these were intended to provide a positive vertical draft for ventilation and cooling. A substantial fireplace with a raised “floating” concrete



**Above:** The master suite and the master bath. The door to the master bath is on the far right, at the end of the built-in chest of drawers.

**Right:** Guest bath.

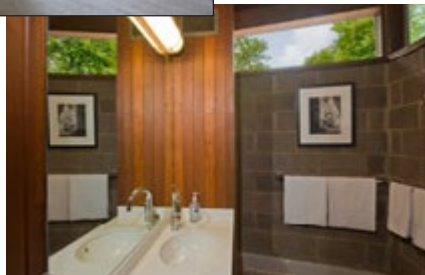
**Facing page:** Looking down from the “loft” (looking over the master suite waist wall) to the main living space below. Just to the right of the table and chairs is the entrance to the studio.



hearth is situated in the center of the home and is the focal point of the living room, much like Frank Lloyd Wright’s residences. The space underneath the hearth was used for fire wood.

The master bedroom, a loft style like many of Wright’s two-story designs, is open on

one side and over-looks the living area below. The folding wooden partitions above the









**This page:** The updated kitchen has plenty of work area with solid surface counter tops, "granite" double sink, stainless steel appliances, gas range, convection oven, hood and the convenience of a built-in desk with phone and Ethernet.

**Facing page:** Updated main level half bath with matching solid surface counter; Two sheets of the original blueprints - first and second floor.

**Back cover:** Studio space (or future master suite) with French doors and wrap-around desk.



short waist wall in the “loft” are of the same design as the curtain wall that originally divided the two sons bedroom. All three bedrooms have built-ins (wardrobes, closets with shelves, window seat storage, desks with cork surfaces in two bedrooms) which appear to be custom rather than prefabricated and are constructed of solid maple and maple veneered plywood. There appear to be some design similarities to the prefabricated units used in Green’s Ready-Built. The bedroom and hallway floors, window seat and desktop surfaces are cork. The desks have glass over the cork. The original plan had a single large upstairs bedroom for two small children with a folding curtain wall/divider on a ceiling track that collapsed



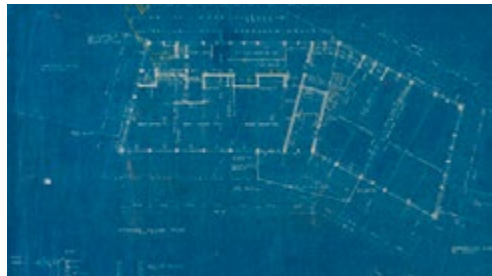
accordion-style into an opening in the wall when not in use. When the children were older the folding divider was removed and a permanent wall installed to allow privacy. The children shared a single bath with double lavatories.

From the beginning the residence was planned to be low maintenance and over the years has proven itself in that regard.

As previously stated, there are very few painted surfaces inside or outside the structure (except for the studio addition) and the main floors are polished concrete. The stairs to the second-level are wooden rather than steel and the cork floors had carpet installed over them many years ago, thus keeping them in relatively good shape.

For additional information about George Fred Keck see *Oral History of William Keck*, Department of Architecture at The Art Institute of Chicago, by Betty J. Blum, 1991 and *Keck and Keck* by Robert Boyce, 1993.

**Now all that's left is to arrange a personal showing of Keck Project #471.**







For additional information or to arrange a showing, call

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