

**The Brighton, N.Y. home of Steven Plouffe and Mike Linsner was built in 1957 as one of 24 near-identical, partly-prefab "Care-free" show homes by the Aluminum Company of America. It is now on the National Register of Historic Places.** STEVEN PLOUFFE

# ARTFUL ALUMINUM

On a lark, Steven Plouffe and Mike Linsner went to see a quirky 1957 home in a Rochester, N.Y., suburb. The next day, they owned it



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**I**t's not often you meet a cover girl.

One that's protected by its city – in this case Brighton, N.Y., beside Rochester – and with a membership in the National Register of Historic Places, to boot.

Then again, the home that graces the cover of *Atomic Ranch: Midcentury Interiors* (Gibbs Smith, 2012) is no ordinary place.

Built in 1957 as one of 24 near-identical, partly-prefab "Care-free" exhibition homes by the Aluminum Company of America (Alcoa), this 1,900-square-foot stunner was designed by architect Charles M. Goodman (1906-1992). A towering figure on the postwar landscape, Mr. Goodman was responsible for the

Hollin Hills neighbourhood in Alexandria, Va., countless other private homes, a world's fair building, and, more importantly, "did much to influence the form of the American house in the 1950s and 1960s," writes the Library of Congress.

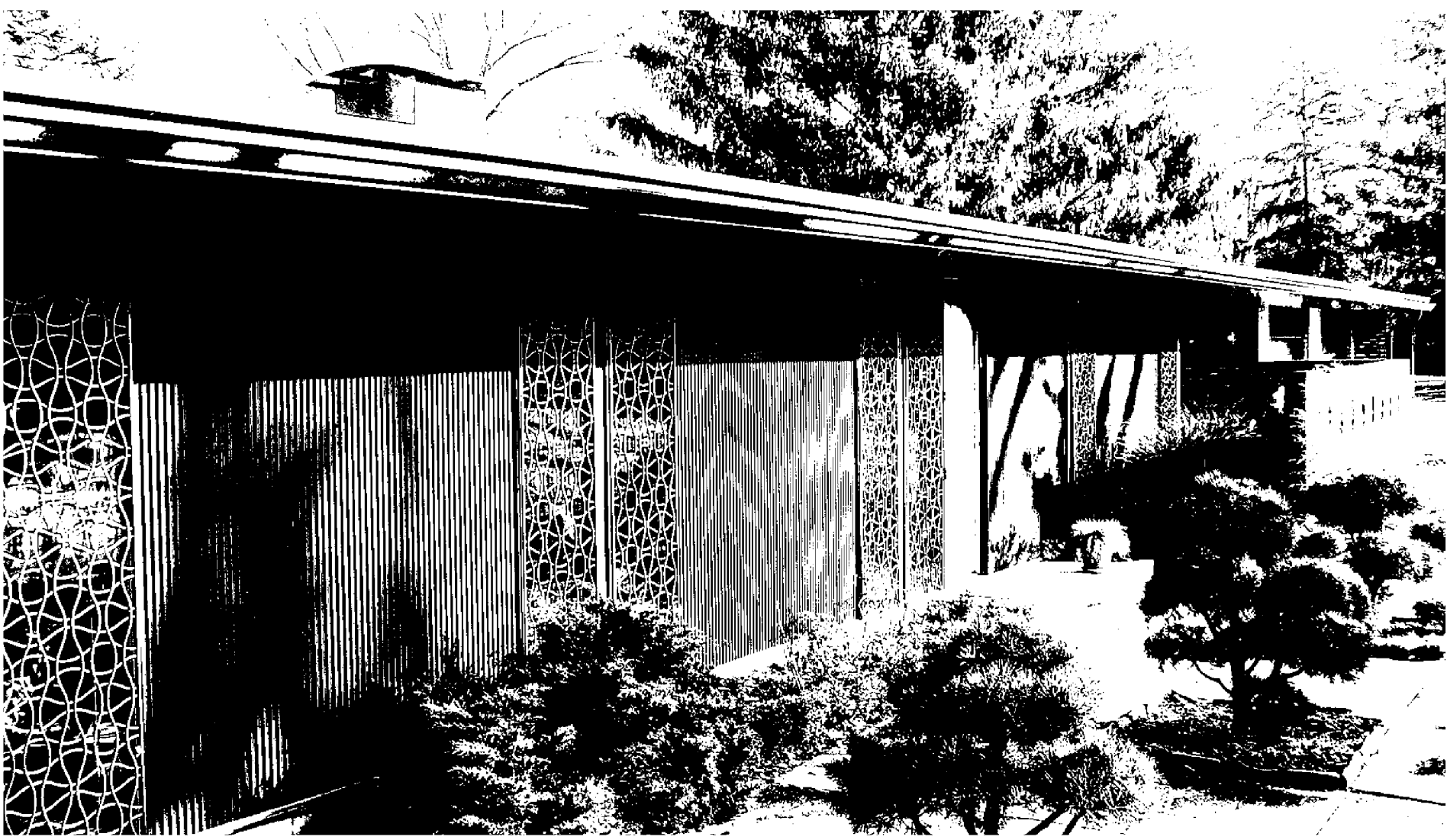
However, to Rochester natives Steven Plouffe and Mike Linsner, their first visit to the Alcoa home was simply a lark.

"We go to open houses for fun," says Mr. Plouffe, thinking back to March, 2007, when the house came on the market for the second time in half a century. He'd spotted the listing after brunching with friends and thought it looked interesting, so he talked the gang into having a peek; of course with a just-completed renovation of the 1980s downtown Rochester home he shared with Mr. Linsner freshly in his mind, thoughts of moving were nonexistent.

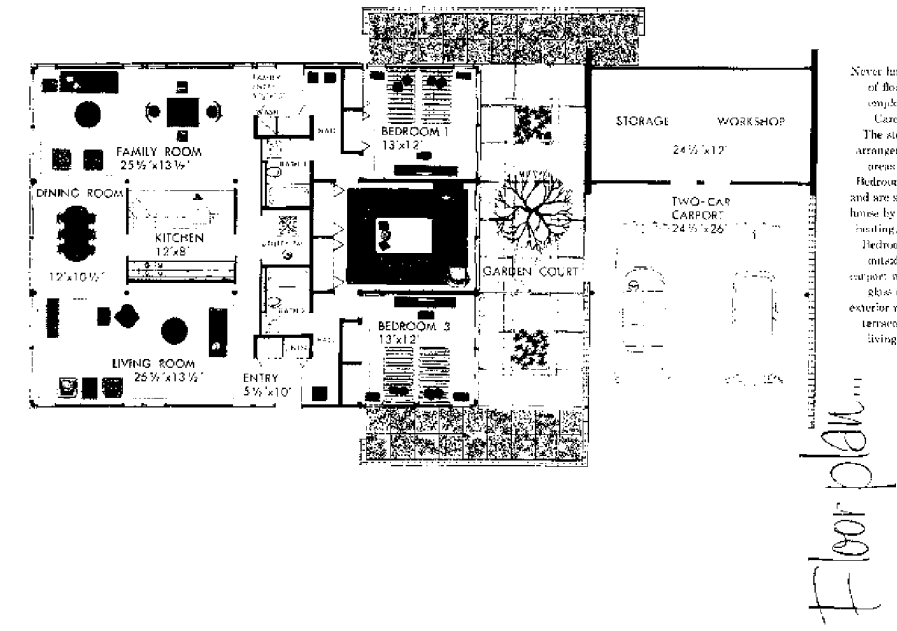
The next day, however, he and Mr. Linsner were the home's new owners.

Palm Springs had something to do with it.

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The exterior of the house has purple cladding made from space-age aluminum. STEVEN PLOUFFE



Never have 1,800 square feet of floor space been used so sensitively employed for casual, care-free living. The step-down room arrangement groups living areas around a central kitchen. Bedrooms afford complete privacy and are separated from the rest of the house by a core section which contains bath, heating, laundry and storage units. Bedrooms are tastefully shielded on the outside by brick grillwork and carport. Aluminum sliding glass doors open from every exterior room onto courts and terraces for indoor-outdoor living all year 'round.

Floorplan



Steven Plouffe and Mike Linsner said there was little need for restoration work on the house when they bought it. DAVE LEBLANC FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL

The original floor plan of the Alcoa house from a 1957 brochure.

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LeBlanc: 'We feel honoured to be able to own this house'

» That previous December, the couple had fallen in love with the sunbaked mecca of Modernist post-and-beam homes sporting floor-to-ceiling glass, flat-roofed public buildings, and lazy Rat Pack charm. "We just drove around and looked at these houses, and our friend got us into a couple," remembers Mr. Plouffe. "They were spectacular."

In the Rochester area, the Alcoa Care-free Home is about as close as one can get to that swingin' vibe. Under a post-and-beam ceiling, a generous foyer flows into a formal living area, which connects to a large dining room, which melts into a family room; floor-to-ceiling windows and sliding doors send light into every nook and cranny. Acting as hub is a 12-by-8-foot kitchen with floating walls that don't reach the ceiling. Off a long hallway are two bathrooms, and two smaller hallways lead to three equal-sized bedrooms that face a private garden court or breeze-way. Everywhere, too, is space-age aluminum – exterior purple cladding, wavy blue window grates, a front door in anodized chartreuse, "frames" around the interior cypress wall panelling and structural supports, or even as roofing material – to make the lives of Mr. and Mrs. America that much easier.

And life for this 21st-century couple was easier, too, as least as far as restoration is concerned, since "this house's wasn't lived in hard," says Mr. Plouffe, pointing to a tidy row of easily dented storage doors clad in lavender-tinted anodized aluminum. "The people, over the years, took care of the home."

All that was needed, really, was a wipe-down. Murphy's Oil Soap cleaned the extensive wood panelling, and an ammonia-and-water solution dissolved the decades-old film of nicotine on the aluminum bits (there are 7,500 pounds in the house). The original kitchen cabinets facing the family room – finished in apple green, black, baby blue, and white Formica – had been so well built, they stayed put, and only the well-worn inner kitchen cabinets and the house's two bathrooms needed an overhaul. This, the couple says, was done

with the utmost sensitivity, since by the time they'd reached the renovation stage they'd researched the storied history of the house (while not on the cover, one of the Care-free Homes was featured in the October, 1957, issue of *Better Homes and Gardens*, so they monitored eBay until one came up). One bathroom, for instance, now sports a new Mondrian wall pattern that's very much in keeping with the original look, and the other still has the original tub. In the kitchen, they consulted the original Alcoa brochure to plan the layout of new appliances and cabinetry.

Mr. Linsner and Mr. Plouffe also began the hunt for additional pieces of period-specific furniture; as Rochester was a booming corporate capital in the postwar years – boasting Eastman Kodak, Xerox, and Bausch and Lomb to name a few – this also proved easy. Again, using the illustration in the Alcoa brochure as guide, the couple arranged the master bedroom so that the bed, placed in the middle of the room, faces the house's Palm Springsian private garden; padding and upholstery added to the back of a teak sideboard make for an innovative headboard.

Luckily, the two previous homeowners had the good sense to use the massive, unfinished basement as a repository for things they'd ripped out. With a simple trip down the stairs, the couple was able to grab and reinstall the little telephone table beside the family entry (what is called a mudroom today), the cluster of Christmas-ornament shaped light fixtures in the formal living room, and a section of cabinetry that had been removed to accommodate a modern television set.

As for living with a cover girl, it's something the couple doesn't take lightly: "We feel honoured to be able to own this house," finishes Mr. Plouffe, "and we did not expect to be on the cover."

"Living in the house has been quite a ride because you never know if someone might be sitting in your driveway. People want to shoot commercials here."