

Centennial's "Star House": spotlight on a singular six-pointed home

Star House is said to be designed by a student of Frank Lloyd Wright

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Merle McClung's Star House has six points to its shape. A student of Frank Lloyd Wright is said to have designed the house.

(Photo by Kira Horvath, Special to The Denver Post)

It takes more than a little whimsy to design a house whose most compelling feature can only be appreciated from a distance — specifically, a point about 200 feet directly above the structure.

Cathedrals were constructed that way in the Middle Ages, built in the shape of a cross to let God know that the people inside — or at least the architect — were paying attention to matters of the spirit.

But a mid-century house in Centennial owned by Merle McClung also boasts a feature best appreciated by birds, drones or helicopter pilots. The home is built in the shape of a six-sided star, the points radiating from a central skylight.

"The house is literally one-of-a-kind," McClung said on a recent morning as he showed a visitor around. "I'm not aware of another one like it."



The master bathroom has all the original tile work.

Making matters more intriguing is that the house, built around 1960 near the end of Eisenhower's presidency, was supposedly designed by a student of [Frank Lloyd Wright](#), the famed architect.

That's what McClung was told by Nancy Pade, the former owner. And Dan Dulaney, a board member of the Palos Verdes Civic Association, recalls Pade telling him the Wright student's name was Morey Yeise, though he's a bit unsure about the surname's spelling.

Whatever its provenance, the house bears distinct echoes of Wright's late-period homes: a low-slung structure hugging the landscape, exposed exterior beams and clean lines that let in lots of light.

McClung is also enamored by the large, circular skylight in the middle of the house, which functions as a light well.

"Everything radiates from the center of the star," McClung said. "At night you can see the moon and stars."

Smaller skylights dot the roof. Between them and the big glass windows in the home, sunlight pours in. On clear days, especially in winter when leaves are gone from the lush yard's trees, you can see sweeping views of the Rocky Mountains.



Merle McClung, owner of the Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired mid-century Star House, kept the original kitchen intact, including the appliances, cabinets and countertops. *(Photos by Kira Horvath, Special to The Denver Post)*

The single-story Star House sits on one of the winding roads coursing through the [Palos Verdes neighborhood](#). The path by which it came into McClung's hands was also circuitous.

Pade bought the house in 1964. She owned it for 50 years before her 2014 death.

McClung met Pade about nine years ago at a book sale, where they discovered they lived just blocks from each other. A friendship began. After learning of his interest in mid-century-modern design and décor, Pade invited McClung over for a visit one day.

He was smitten with the house. He told her that if she ever wanted to sell it, he would love to have the first shot at buying it.

"I told her I had a bad back, and if it ever got to the point where I could no longer climb stairs, I'd love to buy this place," McClung said. "It's my dream house."

After Pade died last autumn, it was touch-and-go whether McClung would be able to buy the house. But he came to terms with the estate's executor and took possession in June.

The 2,029-square-foot house has three bedrooms and two baths, one with a sunken tiled tub.

McClung isn't living there yet. He plans to rent it out for a year or two before moving in. Meanwhile, he's still in his house five blocks up the street.



The Star House has windows along each point, letting in plenty of natural light and providing mountain views in the fall and winter.

He has future plans for that property, too, hoping to combine it with an adjacent house he owns to create a campus for a think tank that would host visiting scholars and policymakers. It would be dedicated to a trifecta of issues: education, health care and the way business and politics intertwine.

"It's a risk, but I think it's a good one," said McClung, a Rhodes scholar who dedicated much of his legal career to education issues.

McClung, a longtime fan of mid-century modern design, has decorated the Star House with furniture he picked up at estate sales that he frequents.

An orange wall in the living room matches a sofa and two chairs. The color is new, meant to reflect the original orange trim on the carport. The all-electric kitchen is of its time, including appliances in vintage canary yellow.

There are a few books in the house, too, though the bulk of his vast collection is at his other house. "I'm a bibliomaniac," he said with a laugh. "If I had a wife, she would have kicked me out years ago."

In the living room, life-sized cutout figures of Marilyn Monroe and Elvis Presley (the lean, '50s version, of course) flank a freestanding, in-the-round fireplace. "If the tenants don't like the cutouts, they can take them down," McClung said.

The room also features a custom fish tank that Pade had built. The low-slung tank is filled with small, darting fish. Orange-and-black, the tiger barbs continue that orange color scheme.

"The only negative I ever heard was 'It's architecturally wonderful, but how do you fit a bed in here?' " McClung said of the angled rooms. In fact, furniture fits just fine in the house. If the house was indeed designed by a Wright acolyte, he heeded the master's admonition of balancing form and function.

The Star House has long been talked about in the Palos Verdes neighborhood, even though its shape isn't readily identifiable from the street.

"It's a great style and one that most architects like," said Dulaney, the Palos Verdes Civic Association board member who is an architect. "It's a modern ranch style. It's unique."

That's a word its owner repeatedly emphasizes when talking about the house.

"It's wonderful," McClung said of aerial views of the house. "It is literally a star. All the other houses suddenly look like cookie-cutter designs next to it."

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