

EARL STEIN HOUSE

1. Earl Stein House
2. 209 Revere Street, Midland, Michigan 48640
3. Classification. category: building. ownership: private. public acquisition: n/a. status: occupied. accessible: yes, restricted. present use: private residence.

4. Robert W. Barker, 209 Revere Street, Midland, Michigan 48640

5. Midland County Courthouse, 301 West Main Street, Midland, Michigan 48640

6. "The Architecture of Alden E. Dow"

7. Condition: excellent, altered, original site
With the broad horizontal lines of its elevation, the walls covered with a veneer of unadorned common brick, the low fitting copper roof, the massive chimney, the long narrow loggia leading to the main entryway, and the dynamic interplay of rooflines and walkways, the Earl Stein house contains strong elements of Frank Lloyd Wright's prairie style. The straight forward elongated L floor plan, the use of brick and copper, allowed to weather naturally, and the careful use of the property site heighten this effect and provide a strong statement of Alden Dow's architecture.

A 1936 article in Architectural Forum summed up the major characteristics: "In plan the elements are well disposed, and the exterior shows a clear articulation of the major space units. The plan is worth careful study for its skillful combining of indoor and outdoor living spaces, and

for its knowing handling of wall and window areas to produce an effect of spaciousness. A house designed in this manner has twice the apparent space of the tightly enclosed residence of a more conventional type."

Laid out on an extended L floor plan, the respective legs of the Stein house are 103 feet and 74 feet long, reaching deep into the property lot. The low elevation is strengthened by its long horizontal plan and the tightly fitting roof with its extended eaves. The brick in the exterior walls came from Lansing's Brick and Supplies Corporation and its tight bonding emphasizes the horizontal plan of the house. The brick extends from the walls into the steps leading to two garden patios and to the low walls which define these outdoor spaces. The house seems to reach out into the landscape. The same brick is used in the pillars (1'x3'6") supporting the loggia and set a uniform and rhythmic six feet apart. The loggia extends the full length of the east wing, leading the visitor from the street into a protected extension of the main house and up to the main entry. The loggia serves as a transitional space between the exterior landscaped area and the interior of the house. Alden Dow uses the loggia to breakdown the conventional distinction between interior and exterior spaces.

Alden Dow was committed to carrying the organic qualities of the house into the surroundings and the building site. Several other prominent features aid this transition. A patio framed with two intersecting roof planes and two intersecting garden walls extends from the house at the

junction of the living and dining room. Easy access to this space and windows opening onto it make this patio an integral part and an extension of the house.

A more prominent and innovative feature is the spacious area designed by Alden Dow for outside of the basement gameroom. This area, cut out well below the surface of the yard, is partitioned with a brick parapet and abundant shrubbery which afford considerable privacy. A glass, steel casement door (from Henry Hope & Co.) opens onto this patio area paved with the same brick as the walls. Although a basement area, the gameroom has the feeling of being on the ground floor with a private patio. Brick steps lead up to the yard and adjacent park.

The shallow pitched copper hip roof, with its broad overhang, emphasizes the horizontal nature of the house. The roof reflects the spacial relationships of the interior, and it firmly yet inobtrusively anchors the Stein house in its setting. The floor plan, with its extended L shape, is carried over into the roofline with a pronounced second level at the west end of the house. The upper level opens onto a bedroom area and the lower level opens onto the dining room. The steel casement windows provide openings in this copper wall. By using copper here, Dow carries the material of the roof into the side of the house, and it compliments the brick walls of the lower level.

On the interior of the house, the extended leg of the L shaped structure contains two bedrooms (part of a 1970s

addition when the garage was converted to a bedroom and an additional one added onto its rear in accordance with plans done by Alden Dow). This wing also contains the kitchen, remodeled and extended in the 1970s to include a former patio and again done to Dow's plans, and the dining room. The wood work in these rooms and throughout the house is cypress, a material extensively used by Alden Dow and finished with a clear oil.

The entrance to the house is into the shorter leg of the L. The wide fir door with the low overhanging roof and ceiling on the interior heightens the sense of space at the entry. From this confined area, the interior of the house seems to soar upward. An entryway leads into a den, earlier a walled off space that was opened in the 1960s according to Alden Dow's plans. A small bedroom sits at the end of this wing of the house.

The most dramatic room in the house is the living room, sitting at the far corner of the house and serving as a transitional space between the two wings. Windows at the outside ends of the room in each of the wings bath the area with light. The most prominent feature is the brick fireplace with its copper hood and its rake pattern. The pattern is illuminated through a bird's mouth window in the roof. The massiveness of the fireplace does not overwhelm the room whose ceiling soars upward reflecting the slope of the roof. The brick fireplace continues through the roof and is a major feature of the exterior of the house as well.

Throughout the house, the exterior lines of the roof identify the spacial composition of the interior.

B. Significance. period: 1900-. areas of significance: architecture. dates: October 30, 1933 - July 31, 1934. builder: Bay City Stone Company. architect: Alden B. Dow.

The Earl Stein house has architectutral significance on a national level because it was the first house designed through the Taliesin fellowship program established by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1933. The interaction of Wright with the young architect Alden Dow can readily be seen in the successive drawings for the house. The Stein house is an important interpretation of Wright's prarie style.

The drawings for the Stein house document the evolution of the house, and they reveal the influence of Wright on the young architect. On July 21, 1933, Earl Stein and Alden Dow signed the contract for the design of a residence. Construction began on October 30, 1933, and the house was to be "substantially completed," as the contract read, by May 1, 1934. The construction was to cost \$27,327. The house was completed by July 31, 1933.

Preliminary drawings had been prepared before Alden Dow and his wife Vada went to Taliesin for the fellowship program. These drawings reveal a tighter house with narrow overhangs. Dow brought his early sketches to Taliesin with him, and reworked them under the guidance of Wright. On June 30, 1933, Alden Dow wrote to Earl Stein and explained that "I

have been talking with Mr. Wright about your house and he is very much interested in it. He suggests that I do the job alone and handle it here with the help of the Taliesin Fellowship." Dow gained suggestions from the other Fellows, having access to the best draftsmen and to Wright himself. This was, Dow wrote to his client, "the first job to go through the Fellowship, and for this very reason alone offers many advantages."

Earl Stein remained cautious, not certain what would happen with the plans for his house. Alden Dow tried to reassure him, writing "I realize your feelings about dealing with an organization so new, but I wish to make it clear that I will assume the responsibility of any inconveniences which might arise. Building is a very personal matter with me and the first house in Midland will be particularly so." Dow's integrity, his position in the community, and the successfully design for the Midland Country Club reassured his client.

Progress on the plans continued through the summer. On August 8, 1933, Dow advised Earl Stein that "Your house is actually beginning to take shape." By the middle of September he wrote that "the drawings [are] now about completed." "The whole building has worked out beautifully and I am sure that when built it will be one of the best examples of modern domestic architecture." It was during this period of apprenticeship to Wright that Alden Dow elaborated his principles on architecture and put them into

practice. Many of the elements of the Stein house are found in his later work, reworked to meet the needs of the client and reapplied so the house fits the building site.

9. Sidney Robinson, The Architecture of Alden B. Dow. "Houses in Midland, Michigan. Alden B. Dow, Architect," Architectural Forum (September, 1936), pp. 194-195. "Earl Stein File," Dow-Howell-Gilmore Associate Archives (hereafter DHGAA). "Earl Stein Drawings," DHGAA.