

and he couldn't tell me. Now, I understand why. Several have no walls. I spent an hour and a half looking the place over and I couldn't tell you now how many rooms there are.

Building Murchison Dune-Top Home Engaged Best Minds In Designing, Building, Decorating Professions To Be Found

By Joyce Koch

A really fabulous home is that of Dr. and Mrs. Carl Murchison, built on the dune-hill overlooking the entire end of Cape Cod, the marshes, the harbor and the distant bay, replacing The Castle, destroyed with its priceless treasures, four years ago. The new home has attracted the attention of the leading architects, designers and builders of this and foreign countries and will continue to be studied in the years to come. While Robert S. McMillan of The Architects Collaborative of Cambridge, Mass., was in charge, Walter Gropius, world-famous in the profession, and affiliated with the same organization had much to do with the unusual project. In fact, the top people in the home building professions were engaged by the Murchisons. Only a brief description can be given here.

Overlooking the trees, the breakwater, the marshes, the tip of the Cape and the open water to the Cape Cod Canal, is the magnificent residence of Dr. and Mrs. Carl Murchison. Though a Japanese temple was its basic inspiration, its quietness and dignity in no way conflict with the spirit of Cape Cod.

We have been treated to a camera's eye view of the Murchison home by means of an illustrated booklet recently published, in which the last words are "all of these glimpses of tranquility are dedicated to the memory of the precious things that perished in the ashes and ruins of this hill-top on the morning of May 1, 1956".

Starting with the view familiar to Provincetowners, that from Commercial St., we see the massive thermopane windows and overhanging roof "made more secure by the addition of six inches of white marble chips, many tons of protection against the high winds of the New England coast". We are told that these chips reflect the sunlight, helping to keep the temperature inside 74 degrees throughout the year.

Temple Motif

The photographer takes us up the driveway and to a clear view of the main house. The Japanese temple motif is most apparent in its pavilion shape and double roof. There are two roofs, one five feet above the other, each with a wide overhang. Clear glass between floods the interior with indirect sunlight. All the wood on the exterior is teakwood or cypress. The

ground plan is a perfect cross or cathedral, but the superstructure fades out this cross into the perfect rectangle of the Japanese temple. The house was designed by The Architects Collaborative, of Cambridge, Mass., with Robert S. McMillan in charge.

With a view of the swimming pool it is noted that the water is kept at about 80 degrees throughout the season. The cabana is "loaded" containing two furnaces, two pumps, two heavy filter tanks and a chlorination plant. It also contains a complete modern laundry, and two dressing rooms. The life-preservers pictured are "as real as they should be in Provincetown and are not painted on the wall as someone thought." An Italian pencil fountain plays along the entire length of its platform and flood lights from beneath the water in the pool illuminate the entire area.

The entranceway to the house is constructed of teakwood with bronze guard-rails each in a single welded structure. It is patterned after an entranceway to a Japanese temple and although the Shinto Shrine cross timber overhead has been lowered so that it does not interrupt the horizontal lines of the roof, the dignity remains.

The stairway encountered inside is a work of art in any man's language. The handrail and floor trimming are walnut and the heavy supporting stringer and treads are teak. It is supported by iron rods from heavy ceiling timbers, heavy floor timbers, the concrete

wall behind the stairway, and by steel plates that go down into the concrete footing beneath the floor. The walnut handrail winds around the stairwell from bottom to top without bending, since changes of direction are carved from solid blocks of walnut and then integrated with the straight railings.

On Two Levels

The house has two levels, and both have direct access to the outdoors due to the hillside site. The upper level contains the most used rooms, while on the lower level there are functional and service rooms, an office for Dr. Murch-

ison and guest accommodations. The living areas are suggestive of the Japanese, since there are no rooms in the conventional sense, but rather living spaces which blend together and are linked by a broad gallery.

Two persistent motifs are the use of white and brown and the use of decorative linearity. Italian breccia marble extends all around the chimney and across the floor in front of the fireplace in the main gallery. Its floor is of bluish-gray Vermont slate. The draperies are tailored from hand-woven Isle of Malta cotton, and are unlined to allow a greater diffusion of light. The six-unit light fixture above the stairway was created by the architect who worked all day with toy balloons on strings to get just the right clustering.

The "Murchison chairs" come in for special mention. The problem

was to design chairs comfortable for both a petite lady and a tall man. It was discovered that a foam rubber cushion of proper thickness when placed against the back of a chair will suit a small person and when placed on its seat will satisfy a tall person. The same arrangement was used for each seating space on the sofa.

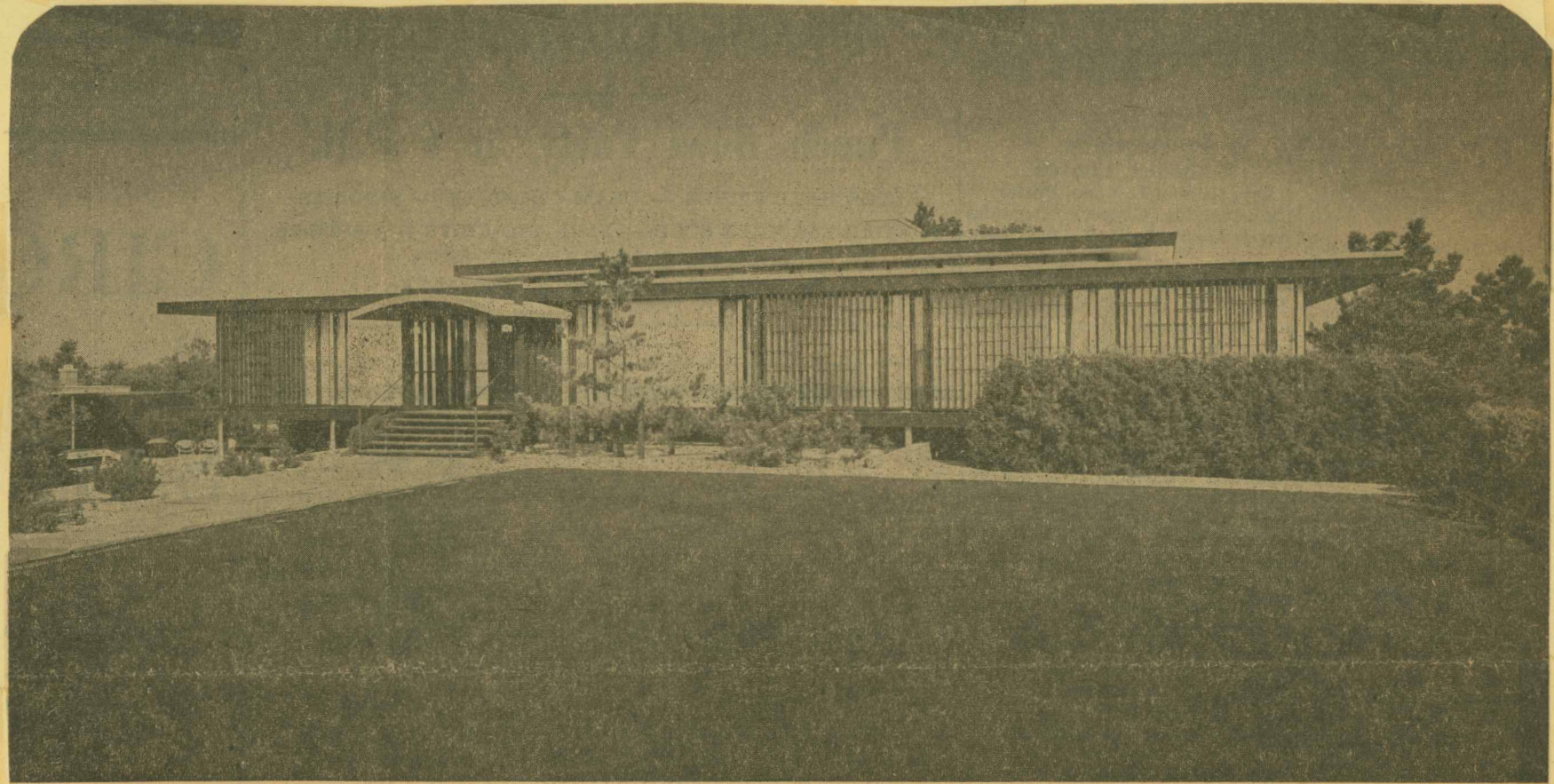
Shoji screens of lovely design custom built in Boston are about the dining area. They are not intended to give privacy, but only the suggestion of privacy, as is the case with the Japanese. The table is solid teak, with an oak chassis. It was custom built in Boston by Design Research. The chairs, also of teak, were made to order in Denmark. A nearby cabinet contains installations for AM, FM, high fidelity, tape recording, and connections to loud speakers throughout the house and grounds. It is wryly noted, "the

collection of books no longer has distinction and consists only of volumes published during the last four years."

Custom-Made Cabinets

The Kitchen area is broken up into alcoves. It has a floor of plastic coated cork and the walls and ceiling are sound-proofed. All the cabinets are custom-made and designed for their location. The furniture is also modern Danish. The kitchen has a private stairway to the service rooms on the lower level.

The cooling tower for the air conditioning system is located behind the cabana. At the foot of the hill near Commercial St. is a pump house to retain constant water pressure throughout the area. There is also an auxiliary electric light plant set to go into action automatically in case town current should fail. The grass lawns have built-in water sprink-



Coming up the driveway from the street, one has this first view from the point where the driveway divides into two levels. This view is from the upper level as it leads towards the main entranceway. The basic motif is that of a Japanese temple, the roof above a roof, the long horizontal lines at top and bottom, the massing of beautiful woods, the overhanging

reaches, the use of pebbles, and the careful selection of shrubs with character. From this vantage point, the clerestory windows are hidden.