Jenkins House
KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE
ARCHITECT: BEN McMURRY, JR.

In his famous 1901 Hull House Lecture, "The Art and Craft of the Machine," Frank Lloyd Wright argued that mechanization was reconcilable with art and handcraft, and through this marriage, architecture would "rise again" as a new art form with "A SOUL." The Dr. and Mrs. Harry Jenkins House in Knoxville, Tennessee, designed by the local firm Barber McMurry Architects, is grounded in these principles. Sitting high on a south-facing slope overlooking the Tennessee River, the 7,300-square-foot house continues to challenge many of its neighbors' preconceptions of domestic architecture in this affluent East Tennessee enclave. The centerpiece of this formally simple yet artistically complex tectonic assemblage is a phalanx of black steel columns and beams that extend beyond a masonry base faced in pink Tennessee marble. An open steel cantilever spans between the slender columns and the main body of the house. Inside and outside, seamless steel welds connect columns to beams. Floor-to-ceiling sheets of rolled glass along the south facade afford a sweeping view of the river valley and bluffs beyond.

Designed by Ben McMurry, Jr., a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, the Jenkins House stands as a symbol of the fine modern homes built in the first two decades after World War II in East Tennessee, virtually unknown to architects and historians outside the region. Whether this is a house with a soul is beyond the scope of this author to judge, but that it demonstrates Wright's argument that the machine can be an extension of the hand is beyond question.

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Umbrella House
SARASOTA, FLORIDA
ARCHITECT: PAUL RUDOLPH

For centuries, Florida's tropical allure attracted explorers, adventurers, pirates, settlers, and, by the 1920s, developers and architects who'd begun to stake their own claims—some brave, some downright gauche—during what was called a "land boom." These structures drew inspiration from Arabian Nights, Venetian palazzos, Gothic pinnacles, and Nautical Deco. Stuccoed palaces, a style yanked from the cooler Mediterranean, were built on land that sits barely above sea level. These early mega-homes, with their massive walls and small windows, were ill-suited to the intensely humid climate here. Depression and war intervened; most construction stopped for nearly a decade. After World War II, a young architect named Paul Rudolph arrived, taking stock of what site and climate had to offer. Hovering above the damp Florida ground, often cantilevered in all directions, his multi-level, platformed structures framed the vistas and absorbed the breezes. He utilized the courtyard, included in large roof overhangs, and touched it up with Ianus windows to help ventilate and shade.

His homes were "eco-friendly" temples, and among his best examples is the Umbrella House. A high second-story roof extends across the structure, for natural shading. The structure itself is two levels, containing upper bedrooms at each end, with balconies and bridges over a two-story living and dining space in the middle that becomes a breezeway when opened. Its monumental canopy—a flat roof—soars over the house, filtering the breeze while providing dappled light over the pool and gazebo.

Meanwhile, the stuccoed monsters will continue to go up. That nameless, Byzantine style of Florida homes (with fake palms and plastic grass) will be repeated across the state. But it's also true that as long as Rudolph's houses stand, the more savvy architects looking for inspiration will have, close at hand, the best answers to living here.

—John Howey, FAIA