“All architecture is shelter. All great architecture is the design of space that contains cuddles, exalts, or stimulates the persons in that space”

– Phillip Johnson

By this definition, a house could simply be considered a shelter for people, but to a diverse group of people in Hollywood, Florida, the houses in which they reside are more than mere architecture. All currently live in houses designed during the early 1950s through the early 1960s by architect Charles Reed, Jr. The diverse group of homeowners interviewed include of a sculptor, a sea captain, a surveyor, an architect, an optometrist, and an orthopedic surgeon consider without question that their houses transcend into the realm of Great Architecture as Phillip Johnson defined it. All are united by a common spiritual connection to great architecture articulated by spaces that actually “exalt” and “stimulate”.

One house designed by Charles Reed, Jr. even sustains life. Its owner contemplated euthanasia in response to a diminished quality of life resulting from terminal illness. He confessed to being a member of the Hemlock Society. He finds inspiration to live, albeit in a hospital bed, that is located in a living room designed by Reed. The two-story volume of this room, which contains a floating spiral staircase leading to the interior balcony of the bedrooms above, is defined by unadorned horizontal-stacked concrete masonry, exposed structural wood beams, and floor-to-ceiling jalousie windows, which flood the space with natural light and provide views to the indigenous live oak hammock on the site. It is within the continuum of these finely designed and expertly crafted spaces of the Wicker House that a man finds meaning in life.
This article includes information transcribed from an oral history interview with Charles Reed, Jr. on May 7, 2004. Mr. Reed spoke with a trio of interviewers who collaborated and produced this project: sculptor Claire Garrett, owner of the Reed designed Jaffe-Garrett House, (c. 1959), Jackie Friend, an architect, and Louis Friend, author of this article and a licensed and insured general contractor specializing in historic rehabilitation. This article includes the accounts of Reed’s professional experience and design theory drawn from those interviews.

“In those days after the war, people were optimistic about the future, adventuresome, and willing to try something new”

- Charles Reed, Jr.

Charles Reed, Jr. was a World War II veteran, working as a carpenter in South Florida after the war. “That was one of the few jobs available to vets in those days,” Reed reminisced. Reed was “always fascinated by the organic shape, the form, the color, and the design of high-speed airplanes.” It seems that his construction related experience, his exposure to innovative architecture, and his fascination with forms and design, all influenced Reed to pursue a degree in architecture. Reed enrolled in the University of Miami’s fledgling architectural college. He recalled his experience there as “being satisfactory, but it wasn’t intense enough.”

Reed always had admired the work of Igor Polevitzky. Polevitzky (1911-1978), a Russian immigrant and University of Pennsylvania graduate, is widely recognized for creating the unique South Florida expression of modern residential architecture, in particular the indoor-outdoor lifestyle readily identified with the mid-century. These buildings uniquely responded to sub-tropical South Florida climate, allowing inhabitants both to live and to work in buildings with strong spatial connections to the environment.
“I had always been an admirer of what Igor Polevitzky was doing,” said Reed, “so, I went to Igor’s office one day and told him I wanted to be there in any capacity.” Polevitzky hired Reed as a part-time junior draftsman. “I ought to say junior-junior draftsman,” Reed mused, “way down the pecking order!” The experience with Polevitzky was pivotal. Reed decided that “Igor’s office was a more important university than the University (of Miami) and [I] went to work full time in Polevitzky’s office.” Reed considered the basis for his architectural education to be this apprenticeship with Igor Polevitzky. The education spanned approximately six years during a fascinating time when Polevitzky created influential and important architecture including the extraordinary Heller House II, known as the “Birdcage” house, on Miami’s Venetian Causeway and the Havana Riviera Hotel in Havana, Cuba that was designed and built for gangster Meyer Lansky.

Interestingly, Reed told us that the Havana Riviera project is fictionalized in the movie The Godfather Part II with the character of Hyman Roth being based on Meyer Lansky. The deal between Roth and Michael Corleone to establish a venue for casino gambling in Havana is based on the Havana Riviera Hotel. Reed shared another intriguing account of how Morris Lapidus, the Miami Modern architect of the famed Fontainebleau and Eden Roc Hotels, (who is generally acknowledged as the architect responsible for defining 1950s Miami Beach resort and hotel style) was surprisingly discovered in the lobby of the Havana Riviera Hotel, with a sketchbook in hand, by Igor Polevitzky when he arrived for a site-visit prior to the hotel’s opening.

Reed disclosed that what he took from his experience working under Igor Polevitzky was an appreciation for technical details and to look at architectural design comprehensively through an engineer’s eyes. According to Reed, “He (Polevitzky) knew what he was doing structurally, mechanically, electrically, and every other way.” Another important aspect, according to Reed, “was simple detailing and simplification of form.” Reed mused, “Sometimes a project was complicated, so the design was complicated. Only if you got into trouble.” Also Reed was fascinated by the indoor-outdoor spatial concepts expressed in Polevitzky’s architecture. He recalled, “…projects in the office that had marvelous house frames that literally had no walls.” Reed states, “Igor was always experimenting with ways of opening up houses to the outdoors to the extreme… so that was a strong influence really, opening up buildings.”
In the mid-1950s, Reed left Polevitzky’s office to establish his own practice in Hollywood, FL. He relocated his practice to Hollywood, Florida in 1955, and retired in 1997. In his years in Hollywood he produced a significant body of work. The best examples of Reed’s legacy include the following houses, all in Hollywood: the Heiden House, the Jaffe-Garrett House, the Gahstrom House, the Simon House, the Ritchie House, the String House, the Hulmes House, the Brill House, the Wicker House, and the Lawson House. In contrast to the ubiquitous ranch-style houses built during that time, Reed’s work clearly represents a unique interpretation of residential architecture.

Although each house was built during the time which is now identified as Mid-Century Modern, Reed preferred not to choose a category, style, or era to describe his work. Reed muses, “Mid-Century Modern helps categorize buildings so that they can be more easily understood.” He called his work organic, and to him it represented a less self-conscious way of designing. His work is “the direct result of responding to a set of universal design necessities that would apply in any era and in any place if you are sensitive to the requirements of climate, client’s needs, construction techniques, and available materials.” To many, this is the true meaning of architecture.
Throughout the predominant grid of South Florida neighborhoods, most houses have a perpendicular relationship to the adjacent street. Often times, a house designed by Reed is oriented diagonally. Reed clarified, “Whenever a house is placed diagonally, such as the Jaffe House, the Simon House, or the Hulmes House, it is never done as caprice; it was for a particular reason such as orientation to the compass, the sun rising and setting, and the prevailing breezes.” In the 1950s, residential air conditioning was not common. In response, Reed believed that “it was possible to open a building to the outside much more freely and the air-conditioning became the natural southeastern breezes.” By orienting his buildings appropriately and by articulating and defining building facades with operable fenestrations, Reed addressed ventilation and natural lighting in aesthetically pleasing relationships.

Reed believed that “light is life giving” and it directly affects one’s mood. Reed cleverly designed window glazing to stimulate one’s mood, as well as to provide natural light. As one walks through the main hall of the Simon House (c. 1957), randomly placed colored glass blocks punctuate and contrast the texture and color of exposed concrete masonry walls with an almost spiritual quality, similar to Le Corbusier’s Notre Dame du Haut, although on a less grand scale. Notre Dame du Haut is a twentieth century masterwork chapel located in Ronchamp, France, and designed by Swiss architect Le Corbusier in 1955. At the Jaffe-Garrett House (c. 1957) clerestory ribbon-windows encircle the perimeter of the building, accentuating the innovative structure and providing glimpses of the sky.
Within the uniform grid of exposed and vertically stacked concrete masonry of the String House (c.1959), randomly spaced units turned on-end expose glazed voids that whimsically punctuate the exterior walls. The entry vestibule of the String House defined by lattice work creates another dramatic interior space.

Requirements for ventilation and natural light did not overshadow concerns for privacy. Reed expertly tackled the contradictory requirements for ventilation, natural light, and privacy in the String House (c.1959). In his words, in the String House “there were always ways of devising privacy and openness sensations.”
Here, exterior elevations were entirely constructed of louvered doors that were enclosed by screened vestibules. With doors opened, “the walls can be opened to maximum transparency” or with doors closed, “the walls became opaque.” According to Reed, “the String House is an outstanding example of this dichotomy, allowing the client to have a house that is wide open, but at the same time can be buttoned up entirely and be totally private.”
Reed explored creative ways to address the South Florida environment with whimsy. “Tropical downpours are always a consideration for me,” states Reed, “so that’s why I favor, in most cases, the wide overhang to keep water away from the house so you can also enjoy the downpour.” Sculptor Claire Garrett acknowledged that at the Jaffe-Garrett House (c. 1957), “one of the things that I admire so much is the experience during heavy downpours when I stand by the 38 foot long living room wall, and have my own version of Fallingwater, where the water is pouring in torrents over the flat roof on to the patio. The spacing and the proportion is such that I can be outdoors, experience it, and not get wet.” Fallingwater, also known as the Edgar J. Kaufmann residence, was designed by architect Frank Lloyd Wright and built over the precipice of a waterfall. Fallingwater is located in Bear Run, Pennsylvania and was built in 1936. The residence is commonly listed in “Top Ten” lists of innovations in American architecture.

Reed’s designs are sensitive to the South Florida landscape as well. Reed states, “In South Florida, all these wonderful shapes and colors growing here are always demanding something of you…It requires an active response.” Nothing captures this sentiment better than the Wicker House (Figure 1), where one really feels part of nature. The site is contiguous with the dense tropical hardwood hammock of mature live oak trees, an ecological landmark that defines the character of the Emerald Hills subdivision in Hollywood and Broward County’s Topeekeegee Yugnee Park. The house is nestled in the trees. “The trees are right there for you,” says Reed.

Reed has been always interested in Japanese architecture and Japanese art. He acknowledges the modular tatami style of design, in which planning and articulation of architecture are governed by a rule of proportions based on the geometry of a tatami mat and all vertical planes have the same geometry. In his designs, Reed explored a similar relationship between the plan’s geometry and its manifestation in three-dimensional form. “A particular goal was to have the plan express the volume so that when you looked at the plan, you could sense what kind of building it was.” This is apparent in Reed’s Lawson House, where plan and elevation reflect each other’s scale, mass, and proportions.
Reed looked to local materials and strove to use them in creative ways. He asked, “How can you assemble all those materials and make a building charming and interesting?” Reed found common concrete masonry units to be the perfect material — readily available and inexpensive, yet very expressive. Reed stated, “Concrete block had texture, subtle color, and geometric linearity.” During a time when stucco clad ranch houses were de-rigueur, Reed’s innovation was revolutionary. Reed joked, “Well the concrete block stucco house certainly does its job, but it’s certainly not very interesting!” Reed designed architectural details, by turning standard building materials into sophisticated architectural elements. In the Jaffe-Garrett House, a single course of turned concrete masonry units, revealing the voids of the blocks, created a screen within the vertical-stacked and exposed concrete interior wall.
Both whimsical and sophisticated, this wonderful architectural detail visually connects the kitchen to the living room and brings joy daily to homeowner and sculptor, Claire Garrett, who embellishes it with seasonal fruits and found objects. Elsewhere in the house, fine hardwood door casings juxtapose the textural exposed interior concrete masonry walls. Reed innovatively eliminated the concrete tie beams and replaced them with clerestory ribbon windows under the roof line while still maintaining vital structural connections between foundation and roof, thereby creating artistically seamless walls and glimpses to the sky from within. Garrett considers her house to be such a work of art that she is reluctant to hang paintings on the wall. She adds, “We don’t want to put any holes or hooks or marks in it; it’s a sculpture, a sculpture that you can live in.” The Jaffe-Garrett House truly is charming and interesting, just as the architect intended.
Perhaps Reed’s greatest accomplishment, although he is not recognized for the contribution is his foresight, in implementing reinforced masonry construction. Today it is now a standard building method mandated by the Florida Building Code in response to lessons learned from Hurricane Andrew, but Reed’s visionary structural designs preceded current building codes by 30 years. He stated, “I was always cognizant of hurricane design and structural reliability; it was always foremost.”

It was apparent to Reed that a direct connection between a roof and the foundation, through reinforced block walls, was vital to maintaining a building’s structural integrity during the impact of hurricane force winds. “So far, I haven’t heard of any of my houses disappearing because of hurricane winds and I hope that continues to be so.” Additional structural innovations include stressed-skin plywood roof joists. Reed commented, “The structural system was entirely experimental; there was no precedent for stressed-skin plywood.” The house, except for the concrete block walls, was entirely prefabricated in a warehouse and then was assembled at the construction site. In the String House, the use of this innovative structural system allows the home owner to enjoy rooms with uncommonly large interior spans with interestingly detailed roofing structure and spaces filled with natural light. These features never cease to please Jim String. He still resides in the house he originally commissioned from Charles Reed, Jr. over 47 years ago.
When asked which architects Reed admires, he mentioned Bruce Goff, Harwell Hamilton Harris, and Donald Singer. Like Reed, American architect Bruce Goff (1904-1982) was a World War II veteran, self-educated, and exceptionally creative. He introduced a form of organic architecture that was sensitive to both client needs and site constraints. Like Reed, who trained under Igor Polevitzky, California architect Harwell Hamilton Harris (1903-1990) trained under another great Modern architect, Richard Neutra. The work of both Reed and Hamilton Harris exhibited sensitivity to site and materials, well crafted interiors spaces, and an expression of roofing on the interior. Reed shared a close relationship with Fort Lauderdale architect Donald Singer (b. 1938). Reed and Singer once lived in the same Hollywood, Florida neighborhood and as a young architect Singer apprenticed with Reed. Like Reed, many of Singer’s designs include clerestory glass windows under the roof line, and exterior and interior walls of exposed vertical stacked concrete masonry. In many regards the link between Igor Polevitzky and Charles Reed, Jr. and the link between Reed and Donald Singer, represents a direct line of descent of South Florida Modern architects. Interestingly, within Hollywood’s Lakes Area Historic District, one can walk just a few blocks and trace the lineage through built examples of the three architects work.
Fig. 19a – Simon House illustrating well-crafted interior and detailed roofing structure [photo by Charles Reed, Jr., c. 1960s]

Fig. 19b – Simon House Exterior [photo by Charles Reed, Jr., c. 1960s]
Fig. 19c – Simon House [photo by Earl Strunk c. 1960s]

Fig. 19d – Simon House [photo by Earl Strunk c. 1960s]
These residences include the Weitzman (Porch Series) House by Polevitzky; the Heiden, Ritchie, Simon, and Gahstrom houses, designed by Reed; and a béton brutestyle house and the Cornfeld House, designed by Singer.

The City of Hollywood identifies Charles Reed, Jr. as a significant architect whose work contributes to the architectural integrity of the City’s Lakes Area Historic District. He is listed in the City’s Guidelines for Historic Preservation. He was invited by the City of Hollywood in 2004, and by Broward County in 2006, to participate in panel discussions on the significance of his work. The City of Hollywood exhibited his work in 2004, and in 2004 the Historical Museum of Southern Florida featured Reed’s Brill House (c.1959) in its exhibit entitled The Florida Home: Modern Living 1945-1965. In 2006, Reed was honored again by a city-sponsored exhibition, home tour, and award for his significant architectural contribution. Recently articles regarding Chuck Reed have appeared in the Miami Herald and Home Fort Lauderdale magazine.
It is interesting to note that it has been over 40 years since Reed left South Florida and it is only until recently that his work is being rediscovered as a significant contribution to the South Florida built environment.

Hollywood has a rich architectural legacy, and Charles Reed, Jr. has a rightful place in a fine fraternity of significant architects who have enriched the City with meaningful buildings. The Lakes Area Historic District and the Downtown Hollywood Historic District include buildings designed by noted architects whose work epitomizes significant periods of architectural history. The Mediterranean Revival architecture of the 1920s is represented by the work of Miami architect Martin Luther Hampton and the Indianapolis firm of Rubbish & Hunter. Art Deco and Streamline Moderne architecture of the 1930s is represented by Miami Beach architect Henry Hohauser and Hollywood architects Bayard Lukens and Cedric Start. Florida Modern architecture of the 1940s and 1950s is represented by Miami Beach architect Igor Polevitzky and Hollywood architect Charles Reed, Jr.

Unfortunately, the majority of Reed’s work is located outside of historic district boundaries. These homes include the Jaffe-Garrett, the String, the Wicker, the Lawson, the Brill, and the Hulmes houses. These houses represent the best examples of Reed’s architecture, yet none of them have protection from inappropriate modifications or, worse yet, from demolition. As the pressure associated with infill development and attainable housing in Broward County increases, the status of these houses could be in jeopardy. One only needs to inspect the irreversible and inappropriate modifications to the Ritchie House to realize what is at stake. The author believes there is a strong argument to designate all of Reed’s buildings collectively as a local historic landmark because his work exceeds the minimum criteria mandated by the City of Hollywood Code of Ordinances for evaluation and designation of historic sites. Reed’s work has association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of history, namely the influx of service men who were stationed in South Florida during World War II and who returned here after the war to live, thereby generating a building boom that expanded the economy and spurred population growth.
Reed, himself was one of those G.I.s who returned here after the war and the houses that Reed designed reflect “a post war generation’s desire for modern homes that expressed the optimistic, future-oriented mood of the times.” Reed’s designs represent the work of a master. He is a protégé of Igor Polevitzky and the meaningful architecture that Reed designed was practical in the way it addressed climate, client’s needs, construction techniques, and available materials; yet it was innovative and highly artistic in its articulation of space and form. The structural systems he designed preceded current building requirements by 30 years. His work embodies distinctive characteristics of the Florida Modern period. He used local building materials of concrete masonry, glass, and wood in ingenious ways to create significant architecture that responded to our sub-tropical climate by articulating space to reflect the desired indoor-outdoor style of living. In all, the work of Reed in Hollywood contributes and enhances the City’s sense of place.

For the benefit of future generations, the author believes government action should be taken to ensure that Reed’s work in Hollywood is preserved.

The interview with Reed closed with the following comments between the interviewer, Claire Garrett, and Charles Reed, Jr., which capture that wonderfully noble modesty that, very much like his buildings, focuses on people and the environment, in lieu of the man who designed them:

**Claire Garrett:** “So tell me Chuck, How would you like best to be remembered professionally?”

**Charles Reed, Jr.:** “Oh my! I’ll have to come back next week and answer that one!”

**Claire Garrett:** “I know that everyone who has the pleasure of living in a Chuck Reed, Jr. house will indeed remember you very fondly and with great admiration.”

**Charles Reed, Jr.:** “That is wonderful! You’re expressing your feelings and I appreciate it a great deal. You have no idea how much that means.”
Reed, age 80, currently lives in Raleigh, North Carolina. He is quite pleased by the recognition received for the architectural legacy he has bestowed. Reed is also very proud of the artistic heritage of his family. “There’s a kind of continuity there,” exclaims Reed. He acknowledges his wife Elaine as a “wonderful artist” and credits her with helping him in his success as an architect. Elaine Reed is a talented sculptor whose work, in part, has architectural references. Her oil painted porcelain sculptures can be found in prestigious collections and museums. She has received many honors and awards. Both of Charles and Elaine Reed’s daughters are also artists. One is a painter and the other is a writer.

After spending a few hours in the company of Chuck Reed during the taping of the oral history, all were inspired by his admirable humility. Although the focus of the interview was on Chuck Reed, he typically redirected the attention toward the work or to stories about people other than himself — namely his family, his clients, and his colleagues. True to form, Reed edited the draft of this article with added acknowledgements of his colleagues, thereby improving it with the following list of “especially capable associates”: 1) Jay Dusard, “a University of Florida graduate who became a famous photographer of cowboys from the Rio Grande to Canada, who now resides in Douglas, AZ”; 2) Tom Bridges, “a University of Florida graduate who was an excellent architectural draftsman”; 3) Bob MacDonald, “one of Fort Lauderdale’s best architects”; and 4) Bob Daniels, “a University of Florida graduate who was very good at quick sketch architectural presentations.” He also included the following list of “building contractors with exceptional skills”: 1) Ned Smith, who built the Simon and Brill Houses; 2) Bob & Frank Erickson, who built the Ritchie and Jaffe Houses; and 3) Allan Downing, who built the String and Lawson Houses.

Notes