LANDMARKS | Stefanie Pettit

# Time-tested modern

### 1950s Ferris home part of historic tour

It's somewhat unusual that a mid-20th-century house would qualify for listing on the would qualify for listing on the Spokane Register of Historic Places, but then, not every 1950s house is like the one built by Joel E. Ferris II and

his wife, Mary Jean. The house – unassuming from the outside was designed by one of Spokane's most renowned architects,

Bruce Walker, and is considered such a fine example of mid-century modern residential architecture that it will be included in the tour of historic homes during the National Trust for Historic Preservation annual conference taking place in Spokane from Wednesday to

The one-story, flat-roofed brick structure is open and

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J. Craig Sweat Photo

The Ferris family home on the South Hill showcases 1950s modern residential architecture. The house will be among those featured in a tour of historic homes Wednesday through Nov. 3.

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breezy with a free-flow floor pattern and sits on a beautifully landscaped lot at 431 E. 16th Ave. on the estate of Frank Hyde Graves, Ferris' uncle Graves, an early Spokane attorney, who built his own home just to the east in 1906, gave the adjoining land to his nephew after World War II. Joel E Ferris II was named for another prominent uncle – Joel E. Ferris, the Spokane banker and historian for whom a high school on Spokane's South Hill is also named.

"A lot of things were changing after the war," said Sam Ferris, one of the five children of Joel and Mary Jean Ferris and now executor of their estat (Joel died in 2002; Mary Jean in 2011). "There were

Jean in 2011). "There were different building materials – stainless steel, fiberglass, bent wood – available, and they wanted to take advantage of that and build a home that was open and spacious without being huge, not a mansion but something acknowledging the dawning of the new

In 1950, Joel E. Ferris II founded Joel Inc., the contemporary gift and furniture store that operated in downtown Spokane until 2005. The family moved into the home on 16th Avenue in 1955. When he designed it, architect Walker said it was done with an eye toward easy expansion, and indeed, as the Ferris family grew, there were three expansions, all done in the original style and most designed by Walker bedrooms, a dining room and some interior reconfiguration, including the combination of bathrooms and repurposing of rooms, etc.

## About this feature

Landmarks is a regular feature about historic sites buildings and monuments that often go unnoticed signposts for our local history that tell a little bit about us and the region's development. If you have a suggestion for the Landmarks column, contact Stefanie Pettit at upwindsailor@comcast.net.

The house has some excellent touches - acid split red brick floors, a floor-to-ceiling bronze screen designed by Spokane artist Harold Balazs, gumwood walls and open built-in bookshelves, a white stucco fireplace, skylights and 10-foot ceilings (though som interior walls resemble partitions and don't reach the ceiling). Entering the property is also an experience. Graves constructed a huge concrete wall around the estate, but a section had to be removed to provide access to the Ferris hou making the turn into the driveway from 16th something akin to entering a private walled-off world that Sam Ferris describes s feeling like a sanctuary. Incidentally, there's no garage, just an amply covered two-vehicl

carport. A special feature of the house is the abundance of windows and glass panels that provide undisturbed views of the yard and gardens, which take up most of the 1-acre property. Lawrence Halprin, a significant landscap architect of the modern era, served as landscape rchitect for the Ferris home. There's hardly a room that doesn't have a spectacular view of stately old trees, from assorted hardwoods to an elegant tamarack.

The house has been itten about in numerous publications, including

Sunset magazine. Now occupied by Joel E. Ferris II's son Toby, who moved back to care for his mother before her death, the house retains much that is original including Toby Ferris said, the 1955 Thermador electric range top and built-in oven. The original Carrier upright freezer was placed in the basement before the house above it was finished - and is too large to emerge intact, Toby Ferris said. No matter, though, it still works just fine.
The Ferris family has

created a website - www. spokanemidcentury.com with information about the home and the family and photographs by J. Craig

Sweat. "Yes, it's a special house" Sam Ferris said, "but most of us came to it as babies and lived there until we left as adults. We appreciate what it is as a piece of wonderful architecture, but really, it's just home to us.