

# Artists in Residence

An MCM gem in Oklahoma  
reveals an artist's style.

By Carrie McConkey | Photography by Mel Willis

THERE IS NO DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE HOME'S INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR MATERIALS. THE STONE, GLASS AND GRAY AND CHOCOLATE-COLORED GROOVED WOOD PANELING CAN BE FOUND THROUGHOUT, CREATING A HOLISTIC FEELING FOR THOSE WITHIN IT. "I REMEMBER THINKING A FEW YEARS AFTER MOVING IN, 'WHY DON'T I SIT OUTSIDE ON THE PATIO ANYMORE LIKE I DID IN MY PREVIOUS HOME?'" HOMEOWNER RIC MILLER SAYS. "IT'S BECAUSE YOU'RE OUTSIDE WHILE YOU'RE INSIDE."





n the late 1980s, artist Ric Miller was working as a graphic designer in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and needed a model for a print-ad campaign. He was looking for an everyday guy to portray an older male relaxing in his retirement.

"I thought of George, my friend from the gym," Ric says. "George was a good-lookin' man with a great head of gray hair!"

George Seminoff was a respected local architect known throughout Oklahoma City for his Mid Century Modern designs. He agreed to be in Ric's photo shoot and the ad campaign was a success. Neither man could have imagined, however, the impact that George's work would have on Ric's personal life years later.

#### AN UNEXPECTED LISTING

Ric had grown out of his rock-cottage starter home by the mid-'90s and began to hunt for a more permanent place to nest. He pictured moving into a similar-style house that

would showcase his unique furniture collection. "Mom liked to refinish furniture and Dad liked the bidding process at auctions, so I had a houseful of antiques," Ric says.

A friend of Ric's who lived in Twin North Estates, a subdivision built in the mid-'50s in the township of Forest Park, saw a modern home listed in his neighborhood that he'd always been curious about. Knowing Ric was looking, he asked him to tag along to make the visit legitimate.

"At the showing, I found out that the architect was my gym friend, George Seminoff," Ric says. "I walked away thinking, 'I hope someone buys this house who appreciates it.'"

#### AN ARTIST'S HOME

The design of the 1962 home, with its flat roof, wood and miles of glass, was far from the type Ric envisioned for himself, but he couldn't get the unique property off his mind. "Driving down the curved gravel driveway made me feel like I was leaving the busy city behind," he says.

RIC REMEDIATED LIMITED WALL SPACE ON WHICH TO DISPLAY ART BY DESIGNING THE PEDESTALS SEEN IN EACH CORNER OF THE LIVING ROOM. HEAVY CUSTOM DRAPERIES THROUGHOUT THE HOUSE THAT WERE OBSTRUCTING THE VIEW WERE REMOVED, DONATED TO A LOCAL NONPROFIT AND REPLACED WITH PINPOINT ROLLER SHADES. NATURAL STONE SURROUNDING THE FIREPLACE TRANSITIONS INTO THE PATIO WALLS SEAMLESSLY BLUR THE LINES BETWEEN THE HOME'S INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR.



HOLDING A PLACE OF HONOR BESIDE THE FRONT DOOR IS A PAINTING BY FORMER OWNER AND "KITCHEN-TABLE ARTIST" VIRGINIA OCKERSHAUSER. "THE PAINTING IS VERY SENTIMENTAL AND WILL STAY IN THE HOME," RIC SAYS. "VIRGINIA COULD HAVE MADE CHANGES TO THIS HOUSE THROUGHOUT THE YEARS, BUT SHE RESISTED. SHE KNEW WHAT SHE HAD." THE PAINTING ON THE RIGHT IN THE ENTRY HALL IS AN ORIGINAL BY RIC.





THE LIVING ROOM, DINING ROOM AND KITCHEN MAKE UP "ONE MASSIVE ROOM OF GLASS THAT LETS YOU EXPERIENCE THE SEASONS." THIS FAVORITE AREA OF THE COUPLE ALSO HOUSES AN EASEL CONTAINING ARTWORK IN PROGRESS. "WHEN I INSTALLED IT 27 YEARS AGO, I DECIDED, 'I'M AN ARTIST, I PAINT, AND I MAKE NO APOLOGIES.' BESIDES, FRIENDS COME BY AND ALWAYS ENJOY SEEING WHATEVER MY ARTISTIC FOCUS IS FOR THE MOMENT," RIC SAYS.

Ric brought along his antiques-loving parents to a second appointment, certain that they would talk him out of it. As they drove away, Ric sought their opinion. "Their answer shocked me," he recalls. "They said, 'We can't believe you haven't already bought the house!'"

They weren't the only ones rooting for Ric. "During that showing, we met the owner, Virginia Ockershauser," he says. Virginia, who had lived in the house for over three decades, referred to herself as a "kitchen-table artist." Ric continues, "She found out I was an artist working for an ad agency and also a painter. Years later, she told me she had always felt it was an artist's home because there was so much light. She had wanted to sell it to me."



## SETTLING IN

Virginia had kept the 2,000-square-foot house in remarkable condition and updates were more for taste than necessity. Ric replaced the glittered popcorn ceilings with flat and repainted bi-fold doors throughout the house a creamy oatmeal color. The artist provided historic clues for future owners, however: "The bi-fold doors had all been various shades of green and blue. When I painted them, I left the original colors on the side edges and I kept the popcorn ceiling inside the closets," he says.

Ric sought help refinishing the original cork floor from a local wood-flooring company. "In the mid-'90s, cork floors were nearly extinct," he says, "but they agreed to tackle the job with the understanding that if it didn't work I could always replace it with something else."

## THE PERFECT FIT

Ric recalled an additional challenge as he transitioned to his new home style. "I brought in and arranged all of my antiques. I looked around and realized it wasn't working," he says. With his parents' blessing, he sold nearly the entire furniture collection. There was one piece that worked beautifully, however: a reproduction Eames chair he had bought in the early '80s. Then something else suddenly made sense. "When

I was an art student at the University of Oklahoma, one of my studio painting-class instructors asked us to create a piece imitating a famous artist," Ric says. "I chose the Austrian artist and architect Hundertwasser, who painted in a modernistic style of cubes and lines that looked like an aerial view of a city." Ric's undergraduate painting had never been hung; its vivid colors and geometric shapes didn't blend with his previous home's décor. But for this home it was just right.

"I was 40 years old and felt like when I moved into the house I had finally come into my own," Ric says. "This home was meant for me."

## A TWO-ARTIST HOME

Nearly 30 years later, Ric still feels a thrill as he makes his way down the gravel driveway of his Mid Century Modern home. "I'm a huge Frank Lloyd Wright fan, also Philip Johnson, and have always felt this house is the child of both architects," he says.

Ric is now enjoying his own retirement just as his gym buddy George Seminoff had portrayed in the ad campaign so many years before. And Virginia Ockershauser's wish that the house should belong to an artist was granted twofold: Ric's husband Jon is also a painter.



ABOVE: "AFTER I BOUGHT THE HOUSE, I ASKED GEORGE SEMINOFF IF THERE WAS ANYTHING HE WOULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY," RIC SAYS. "WITHOUT HESITATION, HE SAID, 'YES, THERMOPANE WINDOWS, BUT THAT WASN'T AN OPTION BACK THEN.'" IN THE 1990S, PREVIOUS OWNER VIRGINIA OCKERSHAUSER INSTALLED CUSTOM BRONZE STORM WINDOWS. THESE, ALONG WITH THE SHADE-PROVIDING OVERHANGS THAT SEMINOFF DESIGNED, KEEP THE ELECTRIC BILLS MANAGEABLE.

BELOW: TO THE RIGHT OF THE CARPORT, SEMINOFF DESIGNED A "GARDEN STORAGE" ROOM WITH FLOOR-TO-CEILING SHELVES AND A WORKBENCH. UNDERNEATH THIS SPACE, STAIRS LEAD TO A 12'X 24' BOMB SHELTER BIG ENOUGH TO HOLD 14 PEOPLE. "AT THE TIME, IT WAS THE HEIGHT OF THE NUCLEAR ARMS RACE," RIC SAYS. "BUT LIVING IN THE MIDWEST, IT NOW COMES IN HANDY AS A TORNADO SHELTER."





CONTAINING A SLIDING GLASS DOOR, CLOSET AND A SEPARATE DOOR THAT OPENS TO THE HALLWAY, WHAT SEMINOFF DESIGNED AS "BEDROOM #3" TODAY SERVES AS A STUDIO FOR THE ARTISTS. THE CIGAR LIGHT WAS RESCUED FROM FRIENDS IN CALIFORNIA WHO HAD IT STORED IN A BACK CLOSET AND THE PAINTING IS THE FIRST THAT RIC CREATED AFTER MOVING INTO HIS NEW HOME.



"The light through the windows is the best to paint by," Ric says. "You've heard of the great artist's light in our American Southwest? It may not compare to a snow day at our house." ❁

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**ABOVE:** THE PRIMARY BEDROOM, WITH A VIEW OF THE HISTORIC TWIN HILLS GOLF COURSE, DISPLAYS ORIGINAL PENDANT LIGHTS. A SWITCH PLATE LOCATED NEAR THE NIGHTSTAND CONTAINS SIX BUTTONS THAT CONTROL SOFFIT LIGHTING HIDDEN IN THE EXTERIOR OVERHANG. "IF YOU NEED TO TURN THE OUTDOOR LIGHTS ON IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT, YOU DON'T EVEN HAVE TO LEAVE THE BED!" RIC SAYS. **BELOW:** THE HOME'S LANDSCAPING DOUBLES AS AN ART GALLERY, WITH SCULPTURES BY RIC, BILL HAWK AND JOHN WOLF ON PROMINENT DISPLAY. TO CREATE AN ATTRACTIVE PRIVACY BARRIER, RIC PLANTED EVERGREEN ALLEGHANY VIBURNUM SHRUBS ALONG THREE SIDES OF THE HOUSE, THE FOURTH SIDE OF WHICH BORDERS THE TWIN HILLS GOLF COURSE. "BEFORE YOU ASK—NO, WE HAVE NEVER HAD A BROKEN WINDOW!" RIC SAYS.







PERHAPS INTENDED TO BE ORNAMENTAL, THE JAPANESE MAPLE TREE OUTSIDE THE NORTHEAST CORNER OF THE LIVING ROOM WAS ONLY 3-FEET TALL WHEN IT WAS PLANTED 60 YEARS AGO. TODAY, THE 20-FOOT-TALL TREE SHADES THE PATIO AND PROTECTS THE LIVING ROOM FROM THE MORNING SUN. THE RED WOODEN SCULPTURE ON THE PATIO IS RIC'S, INSPIRED BY THE INTRICATE DESIGNS FOUND THROUGHOUT FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT'S HOLLYHOCK HOUSE IN LOS ANGELES.

## LOCAL LEGEND: **GEORGE SEMINOFF**

One of Oklahoma City's most beloved architects, native Oklahoman George Seminoff, was born in the small town of Hobart in 1927. Like many young men of his generation, he took a 2½-year leave from his studies while serving in the military during World War II. Graduating from Oklahoma State University with an architecture degree in 1950, Seminoff began a prolific career designing many of Oklahoma City's significant Mid Century Modern commercial and residential structures.

One of the architect's most heralded designs was his own 1959-built home, which began as an 800-square-foot rectangle. After marrying his wife, Sharon, a professional artist, they knew they needed more space when Sharon became pregnant with their first child. The family grew and the architect designed masterful additions to the house that eventually increased it to 4,000 square feet and earned him a Merit award from the Oklahoma City AIA in 1970.

Close friend and famous Mid Century Modern photographer Julius Shulman photographed the Seminoffs' home and it appeared as the cover story in the Spring 1971 issue of *Living Now* magazine. In 1986, Seminoff was quoted in *The Oklahoman* newspaper reflecting upon the project. He said, "I never intended this house to be an architect's treasure, but it shows how you can design and build in stages."