



Image Credit:  
Brad Angelini

# Botch House

1055 Chestnut Road

## ARCHITECT:

Robert Metcalf, 1958

## Jeffrey Welch

In mid-1957, Dr. Edmund Botch obtained a permit to build a house in the new subdivision of Riverside Hills, on Geddes Road, to cost \$49,000.<sup>1</sup> This area was being developed by Albert Duckek, who sold the property with the understanding that the house would be designed by an architect. The Botches hired Robert Metcalf, a young but seasoned architect who had started his practice by building his own mid-century

modern house on nearby Arlington Road in 1952 and the Crane House (1954) on Avon Road, a bi-level house designed to accommodate a sloping site, as were many local mid-century houses.

The Botch House was intended to fulfill a range of needs. Dr. Botch, an obstetrician, wanted a large dressing room near the master bedroom to facilitate his quiet

departure from the house if summoned in the night. His wife, Catherine Botch, was committed to social causes and worked with the Women's Auxiliary to the Washtenaw County Medical Society. She also was deeply involved in city politics. As a committee woman, she needed a place for the meetings she led. For these reasons, the living and dining area was located in a zone at one end of the house and the bedrooms and study area in a zone at the opposite end of the house. The kitchen and den area occupied the space between the private and public zones and includes a garden and light well, open to the sky. The den was a large room with a fireplace and ample, sequestered space for the children's recreation; its plate glass doors opened onto a deck that overlooked the neighboring golf course. The Botches also specified a desire for furniture designed by George Nakashima.<sup>2</sup>

Metcalf's elegant drawings of the house present it as floating along the ridge of a hill. He designed a rising path leading to the entrance on the right, while a retaining wall on the left masked the two-car garage under the bedroom end of the house. An open entrance porch projects from the rectangular house volume and its perforated screen along one side shields the porch from raking afternoon sunlight.

The Botch House has the directness characteristic of mid-century residential design. The house is a simple volume with a flat roof, continuous expanses of

glass, a warm tile floor, patio areas, and indirect interior lighting. It also features two warm elements often employed by Metcalf: an elegant wooden screen that separates the dining area from the front entrance, and, on either side of the dining/living room fireplace, niches of purple-rose-stained glass complement the pink marble of the hearth and overmantel.

When Richard and Yuni Aaron bought the house in 2006, Yuni, an architect, sensitively updated the house by replacing the windows, redesigning storage spaces, replacing appliances in the kitchen (without altering the dimensions of cabinet doors and panels), and installing light-toned hardwood flooring in the once-carpeted areas. She left the buff brown tile in the entranceway and dining area intact. Her work attracted the attention of the Ann Arbor Historic Commission, which presented her with a preservation award in June 2017.

When the new owners invited Robert Metcalf to Thanksgiving dinner, he brought his little black book in which he noted to the penny the original cost of the house. He told them: "I prefer white paint in my houses."<sup>3</sup> It is a preference they have largely heeded. ●

<sup>2</sup> Jack Lewis, "Modern Bi-Level Has Four Living, Sleeping Zones," *Ann Arbor News*, March 21, 1959, page 8.

<sup>3</sup> Richard and Yuni Aaron, in conversation with the author.

<sup>1</sup> "Big Apartment Project Boosts Building Activity," *Ann Arbor News*, July 20, 1957, page 6.