



THE LARSON HOUSE AS FEATURED IN THE ANN ARBOR NEWS, JANUARY 22, 1955

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Larson House

3575 East Huron River Drive

ARCHITECT:

C. Theodore Larson, 1953

Anne M. Cox

As professors of architecture at the University of Michigan in the 1950s, Theodore Larson and his colleague Walter B. Sanders, while working on the standardization of construction for much-needed post-war schools,

began to look at new techniques and materials. A local Michigan company, the Unistrut Corporation, manufactured a metal framing system with weldless connections that they employed on school projects. The two architects

decided to test the Unistrut system on their own homes.

Both an article from *Ann Arbor News*, in 1955, and one online at *MLive.com*, this year, discuss the Larson Residence, which sits along the shore of the Huron River on the east side of Ann Arbor. The *Ann Arbor News* article noted that this experimental structure was “bolted together much like the parts of a mechano (sic) set.”¹ According to the *News*, the house, for Larson and his family, was assembled by Larson, his wife, Myra, their two sons, and volunteer architecture students from UM. Some wood finish work and the concrete floor slab were completed by a local builder.

Theodore Larson was quoted as saying, “No one gains by sacrificing quality of materials. But if you can get as good or better materials and find a way to save time in construction, then you can show substantial savings.”² Accordingly, Larson’s “nuts and bolts” house did not use typical bricks and mortar or a wood frame, but instead employed the alternative materials and methods of the Unistrut system and was assembled quickly and easily. Cut-to-length, Unistrut steel frame members were field fastened together using a wrench to close patented bolt and springlock connections. This system was described, in a *News* article on Walter Sanders’ house and the school’s construction research, as a stronger frame system than a conventionally built home.³

On the exterior, the steel frame construction of the home is covered with asbestos cement panels that are painted white. As you approach the house, you get a feeling that it is nestled in amongst

the trees and is not in conflict with the site, but rather embracing it. The house is compact, has a small carport and an entry that delivers you into the main living area. It is here that you see the house embrace the landscape as the back wall of the house is all windows, and you experience the main attraction, a spectacular view of the Huron River. In addition to the living room, the house has a small kitchen, two bedrooms, a study, full bath, utility room and a powder room.

The Larson House has been maintained and enjoyed since 1955 by UM Professor of Art Emeritus, Myra Larson. Her husband Theodore passed away in 1988, and she has continued to care for the home ever since. In 1992, I took a class with Myra Larson and was introduced to her residence at the end of the semester. Our whole class was invited over, where she graciously provided food and beverages while we enjoyed a beautiful view of the Huron River. As the *News* article stated, “The entire back of the dwelling, overlooking the river, is glass.”⁴ We were hungry students appreciating the snacks, but also enjoying her stories about how the house was constructed, and how she had treasured living in the house over the years.

The 2023 *MLive* article reported that Myra Larson, now aged 92 and still residing in the house, had received an Ann Arbor Historic Preservation Award for the care and preservation of her home.⁵ 68 years later, the Larson residence is still in the news! Recognized as a home of elegance and style that fits beautifully into its surroundings, the experimental home has been a success. An experimental home that has stood the test of time. ●

1 “Home on Huron River Bank Built with Nuts and Bolts”, *Ann Arbor News*, January 22, 1955, Ann Arbor District Library news archive, accessed July 5, 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/2p99yv4c>. The article misspelled “Meccano,” an English model-making toy, which predated the similar, American “Erector” sets.

2 “UM Experiment On Schoolhouses Leads to Homes,” *Ann Arbor News*, October 3, 1953, Ann Arbor District Library news archive, accessed July 5, 2023, https://aadl.org/aa_news_19531003-um_experiment_on_schoolhouses_leads_to_homes

3 Ibid.

4 “Home on Huron River Bank Built with Nuts and Bolts”, *Ann Arbor News*, January 22, 1955, Ann Arbor District Library news archive, accessed July 5, 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/2p99yv4c>.

5 Ryan Stanton, “French chateau-style house among 17 winners of Ann Arbor historic awards,” *MLive.com*, *Ann Arbor Edition*, July 3, 2023, accessed July 3, 2023, <https://www.mlive.com/news/ann-arbor/2023/07/french-chateau-style-house-among-17-winners-of-ann-arbor-historic-awards.html>