



Image Credit:
Brad Angelini

Olencki House

1150 Mixtwood Street

ARCHITECT:

Edward Olencki, 1955

Jeffrey Welch

Edward Olencki's house for his own family of three had to be redesigned when his twin daughters were born in 1954.¹ He had designed the house to occupy a terrace-like plateau halfway up its hillside site, with a driveway rising straight up to an attached garage. As his children later recalled, the house was quickly too small. They made it sound like their dad was a cheerful and resourceful do-it-yourselfer, and indeed he was, and much more.² Two years after the house's construction, the garage was enclosed as part of the house, and a new garage was built, closer to the street.

The house was built with concrete block and steel beams. There were built-in cabinets, closets, and shelves in the kitchen because Olencki loved to design and build. He also liked having Eames and Saarinen furniture in the house. To keep cooling costs low, several interior walls did not rise to the ceiling to allow the air to circulate through open transoms.

In contrast to many mid-century residences in Ann Arbor, the Olencki House incorporates large expanses of glazing on the street side. Privacy is achieved by the distance of the house from the street and its further removal from

street life by its location a good distance up the slope of the hill. The rhythm of the divisions between glass panes corresponds to the location of wood roof beams exposed on the interior and exterior. The projecting beams support a roof overhang that shades the south-facing glass from the sun. This arrangement provides a proportional coherence that is visible inside and out and emphasizes the importance that architects placed on structural clarity in mid-century designs for housing and larger public structures. The exterior cladding materials are stained wood siding and exterior plaster.

Edward Olencki joined the architecture department at the University of Michigan in 1948, a year after his close friend, Joseph Albano. Both men came from Chicago and partnered on the design of several mid-century houses in Ann Arbor. Albano built his own house, also an excellent illustration of mid-century residential design, just around the corner from Olencki, at 1158 Pomona Road. ●

¹ "Susan Ann & Barbara Lynn, twins," *Ann Arbor News*, July 1, 1954, page 26.

² Thank you to Grace Shackman for allowing the use of her notes of conversations with the architect's son, Tom Olencki, in April 2020.