



Image Credit:
Brad Angelini



Image Credit:
Martin Schwartz

Sahlins House

2466 Newport Road

ARCHITECT:

Robert Metcalf, 1957

Ilene R. Tyler

Marshall Sahlins was a professor of anthropology at the University of Michigan; he is said to have coined the term, “teach-in.”¹ His desire for a new house designed by Robert Metcalf coincided with his receiving tenure at the university. He, his wife Barbara, and their two children, lived in the house until 1974, when he accepted a teaching position at the University of Chicago. Metcalf worked with the Sahlins family to add a guest bedroom and bath, supported on posts, as the land slopes down on the east side of the site. Robert and Judy Marans bought the house in 1974, when Bob received tenure at the University of Michigan.

The house is modest in size and execution. It is a simple, white volume tucked into a generous, corner site, thick with woods and shrubs; the house can barely be seen from the street during the summer. The inexpensive exterior materials are painted plywood and concrete block, and these have performed well over the years. Bob Marans, an emeritus professor of architecture and urban and regional planning at the University of Michigan, speculates that this house was Metcalf’s least expensive design.²

The interior arrangements acknowledge the site conditions in a manner similar to other mid-century residences in that there is a clear distinction between front and back. The house is nearly opaque to the street, but opens up dramatically with a horizontal band of large windows at the living room to provide a panoramic view into the trees. A small kitchen to one side of the living area separates the public zone of the house from the private zone of bedrooms and baths at the opposite end. Marans said that what attracted him most was how well the house was sited on its one-acre lot, leaving plenty of dense woodlands at the periphery with open space surrounding the house.

The Maranses added a detached garage and numerous sensitive refinements to the interior of the house, revising the entry, updating the kitchen, combining two small bedrooms into one family room, and modifying the basement, without compromising the unpretentious clarity of the original structure. ●

¹ “Marshall Sahlins,” Wikipedia, accessed July 23, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marshall_Sahlins

² Conversation with Martin Schwartz, July 23, 2023.