

atomic ranch

MIDCENTURY MARVELS



FALL 2010



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the bunker-like office space

Martin designed was
the perfect
refuge



Courtesy Wesleyan University Special Collections (2)

William Manchester, seen in a publicity shot and at home in his office fortress. The office today is considerably tidier, and has traded the Winston Churchill photo and a manual typewriter for two Macs. Other than painting the paneling and bookshelves, the space looks much the same and suits the academic needs of the Currans. Opposite page: Three other Martin homes in the Middletown area.

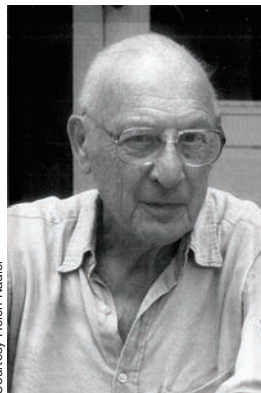


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The Architect

Although born in New York, John Martin spent the first two decades of his life in Great Britain. Drafted by the U.S. Army and stationed in Germany after World War II, Martin was lured home by the GI Bill in the late 1940s. After studying architecture at Cornell, he settled in Middletown in 1957, where he began designing modernist homes and public buildings for more than 40 years.

While most of Martin's commercial buildings have been refaced or razed, a diverse group of his houses remains in this part of the Connecticut River Valley. The Martin homes pictured here testify to what was an evolving modernist aesthetic. During the late 1950s, he designed custom single-level ranch houses that were crafted to fit into specific natural environments. In the 1960s, Martin began drawing



Courtesy Helen Nadler

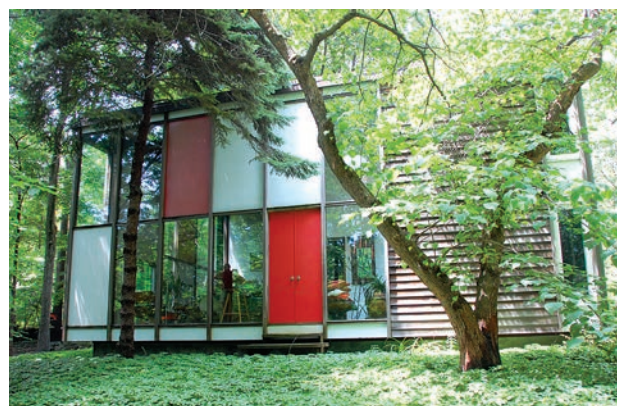
more challenging modernist structures that incorporated huge rooms, innovative light play, passive solar construction and unconventional exteriors that generally hid the sine quo non of American life—cars and garages—from the street view.

While the exteriors and the interior layouts of his houses are actually quite dissimilar, Martin owners immediately recognize a series of common themes once they step inside: flagstone hallways, redwood decking, cedar trim and huge windows oriented to look out on distinctive natural features. According to the architects that Martin trained, each residence can be explained by the way he dealt with his clients; he refused to talk about the building

Manchester hired a good friend and fellow faculty member, **John Martin**, to design the house

of a house until he completely understood the way in which its owners would live in it.

Although people often told Martin that his homes reminded them of the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, the architect was reported to shrug off such comparisons. In a 1995 *New York Times* article about a house he had designed for a longtime friend who had become handicapped, Martin proclaimed himself to be an unrepentant modernist in an era that was embracing the postmodern. Whatever his aesthetic—he loved Le Corbusier and Maya Lin's Vietnam memorial—Martin interjected a needed dose of modernism into a region filled with colonial houses. Little wonder, then, that the owners of Martin houses have begun to seek each other out to talk about a man whom many of them did not know, but who seemed to anticipate their every need. ♦



Andy Curran (3)

Andy Curran is a professor at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Conn. His wife, Jen, who also works at the university, is an arts marketing specialist. Paul Horton, a commercial photographer based in Middletown, photographs people and still lifes in the studio and on location for a variety of clients. He has recently become interested in architectural photography and documentary filmmaking.

