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## California dreamin'

MY HOUSE | Mary Ehrin  
By Elana Ashanti Jefferson  
Denver Post Staff Writer  
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You can take the girl out of California, but you can't take California out of the girl.

That was, at least, part of the allure five years ago when Denver artist Mary Ehrin and her pug Clara went for an evening stroll in their south Denver neighborhood. The pair stumbled onto a custom-built, Japanese-inspired, California ranch-style house unlike anything else on the block. Or in the city, for that matter, including in the pockets of coveted midcentury modern houses in Arapahoe Acres, Krisana Park, Lynwood and the like.

"We didn't purposely look for this house," says Ehrin, a native of Los Angeles who is best known for her feather paintings. Ehrin's works are a luxe mass of ostrich plumes brought together like brushstrokes to create a textural and visceral experience the artist compares to a flower's bloom.

The Denver Art Museum has one of Ehrin's pieces. Another hangs in the office of Cydney Payton, director/curator of the Museum of Contemporary Art/Denver.

The artist also co-chairs the Denver Art Museum's Alliance For Contemporary Art, a group of DAM members that supports the Modern and Contemporary Department. As part of that group, Ehrin will host a tour next week at her downtown Denver studio space. AFCA also intends to pursue artist's house tours, and Ehrin's is at the top of that list because of the way it showcases how an artist lives with art.

"We were walking and exercising out here and just happened upon this," Ehrin says with a glance past the backyard toward the expansive athletic fields behind the 2,100-square-foot home she now shares with husband Cory Coppage. The three-bedroom property was custom built in 1963 by Littleton architect James Norman. "I love looking at houses at night because they're like doll houses with the windows lit up, and you get a feel for the neighborhood," Ehrin says.

But this one was pitch black. A quick call to a friend in California confirmed what the couple already knew: Any midcentury modern home, particularly one that had been occupied by only two owners, both of whom took care to maintain its period architecture and décor, was a true find.

Since they purchased the house, Ehrin estimates it has appreciated about 35 percent - a nod to the ongoing popularity of midcentury modernism.

"Modernism in art, architecture and design was not just another style - it presented a new way of thinking," reads [milehimodern.com](http://milehimodern.com), the web site for a Denver real estate company that specializes in properties from that era.

Ehrin and Coppage's house looks something like an enclosed pagoda from the outside. It's surrounded by alpine and succulent gardens - lovely in bloom but a thorny nightmare to weed. Most of the house is protected from the street by a patterned, curvilinear brick wall that reminds the homeowners of Gio Ponti's original Denver Art Museum building.

Stepping inside the house is like stepping back in time. Floor-to-ceiling windows, an open floor plan, natural materials like wood and stone paired with modern elements like aluminum and plastic, and enclosed, private courtyards enabled the architect to bring the outdoors in.

The living room is boxed by two walls of windows and broken up by 1960s-era, ribbon-striped wood paneling. To the east lies one enclosed courtyard that can be accessed from the living room or the adjoining bedroom. To the west, the gardens where one of Ehrin's few contributions (besides regular maintenance) has been a collection of iris bulbs from her grandmother's yard in California.

An uninterrupted hallway runs from one end of the house to the other.

"Sometimes it feels like a ship," says Coppage, a financial consultant. "It's very open and free, and that's a nice feeling."

Two of Ehrin's favorite quirks about the house include a built-in planter box in the family room just inside another floor-to-ceiling window, and an original NuTone radio/intercom box in the wall of that same room. But really, the home itself is a work of art.

The architect was inspired by a combination of midcentury modernism by the likes of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Cliff May, and Le Corbusier's Ronchamp with its curved walls and asymmetrical windows.

Back in 2001, it wasn't Ehrin's artistry that sealed the deal. It was Clara. The previous owner's daughter was the person who first showed the house. "She saw the pug walking up and said, 'Mom would love you!'" Ehrin recalls.

The woman's mother, Onalee Brown, was a Colorado attorney. Late in her life, Brown reportedly developed such a passionate love affair with her garden that she rarely left it.

"(Her daughter) told me that when we came over to buy the house, she knew we were the people," Coppage says. "She said 'My mom would want you to have this house.'"

For Ehrin, it has become an ideal place to display her own growing art collection and to work out new ideas.

"I love all the sunlight, and all the glass," she says. "For me, the space is very inspiring."

Contact the Denver Art Museum for information about its Alliance For Contemporary Art. Mary Ehrin is represented by Rule Gallery of Denver. Reach her at [maryehrin@aol.com](mailto:maryehrin@aol.com).



**JAPANESE-INSPIRED MODERNISM:**

Denver artist Mary Ehrin and her husband, Cory Coppage, inherited blueprints for their custom home built in 1963 by Littleton architect James Norman.

The internal courtyard pictured above can be reached from their living room and their bedroom, and is protected from the street by a curving brick wall.

Photos by  
**GLENN ASAKAWA**

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**TIME MACHINE:** Stepping inside the house is like stepping into another era, with its period décor and architectural detail.