

A Little Paradise in Braeswood

2523 Maroneal

Braeswood, often called “Old” Braeswood, offers a visual evolution of changing residential patterns that is unique among Houston’s vintage neighborhoods. The cascading calamity of the Great Depression bequeathed Braeswood with a 40-year treasure trove of fine architecture ranging from 1920s and ‘30s Tudor and Colonial Revival homes to 1950s and 60s architecturally significant Mid-Century residences.

Braeswood began in the 1920s as the South End’s answer to River Oaks. After a promising start, Braeswood Corporation was dissolved in the early 1930s, leaving many homesites unbuilt until after World War II when prosperity returned. By that time, tastes had changed and Mid-Century styles, such as the stunning home at 2523 Maroneal, supplanted the earlier period-revival homes.

Known as the Herzog House, 2523 Maroneal was designed by Viennese-trained architect Paul Laszlo, a celebrity architect who had designed California residences for movie stars Cary Grant, Elizabeth Taylor, Robert Taylor, and Barbara Stanwick, as well as homes for millionaire inventor Howard Hughes and artist Salvador Dali. Laszlo worked from a studio on Rodeo Drive and enjoyed a reputation as the “Millionaires’ Architect.” Gerhard Herzog was a Swiss geophysicist who, with his wife Elizabeth, fled Switzerland ahead of the Nazis. As Director of Research for Texaco, he worked in the company’s Houston/Bellaire lab during the war on top-secret projects for the war effort. By 1953, the Herzogs were ready to build their dream house and commissioned Laszlo, a fellow immigrant, to draw the plans. *

According to the architectural historian Stephen Fox, the Herzog House was the only structure in Braeswood designed by a famous out-of-state architect and the first to be graced by the “ultimate 1950s Hollywood glamour,” a swimming pool. Its debut received a full page in the Houston Post which included this quote from Laszlo: “I understand the desire of my fellow men to turn their immediate surroundings into a little paradise and I enjoy doing it for them.”*

Exceptionally maintained and renovated by only two owners since the Herzogs, the house is remarkably unchanged and preserved in all the ways that matter and modernized where it counts in the kitchen and bathrooms. Beneath tall ceilings, gleaming terrazzo floors extend from the foyer across the expansive formal and informal rooms, including the inviting solarium/lounge, originally a California-style outdoor room with a full bar and fireplace that is now enclosed by glass in a nod to Houston’s sub-tropical climate. A wall of steel-framed windows and sliding glass doors spans the rear of the open living and dining room, providing unobstructed views of the covered and open patios, pool, lawn, and gardens.

A pivot door in the dining room swings open into the open, airy, thoroughly modern kitchen, surrounded by windows and equipped with high-gloss sleek-front cabinets, an island with induction cooktop, wall ovens, and a second sink and abundant storage in the service area/butler’s pantry. A side door opens to the wide breezeway, covered by a plexiglass roof, that travels from the front gate between the house and studio apartment to the patios and pool. The studio apartment offers a bedroom/living space and updated bathroom.

A separate hall travels at an angle from the foyer to the bedrooms and the master suite. An en suite bedroom with glass doors that slide open to the lawn and gardens has an updated bathroom with a floating sink cabinet and marble deck. A second bedroom, in use as a study, has access to a large, updated hall bathroom with marble sink deck and glass-entry shower. The secluded master suite has a modern, reconfigured bathroom with a glass-entry shower, soaking tub, floating sink and vanity cabinet with a marble deck, water closet, a built-in chest-of-drawers, and two deep closets.

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