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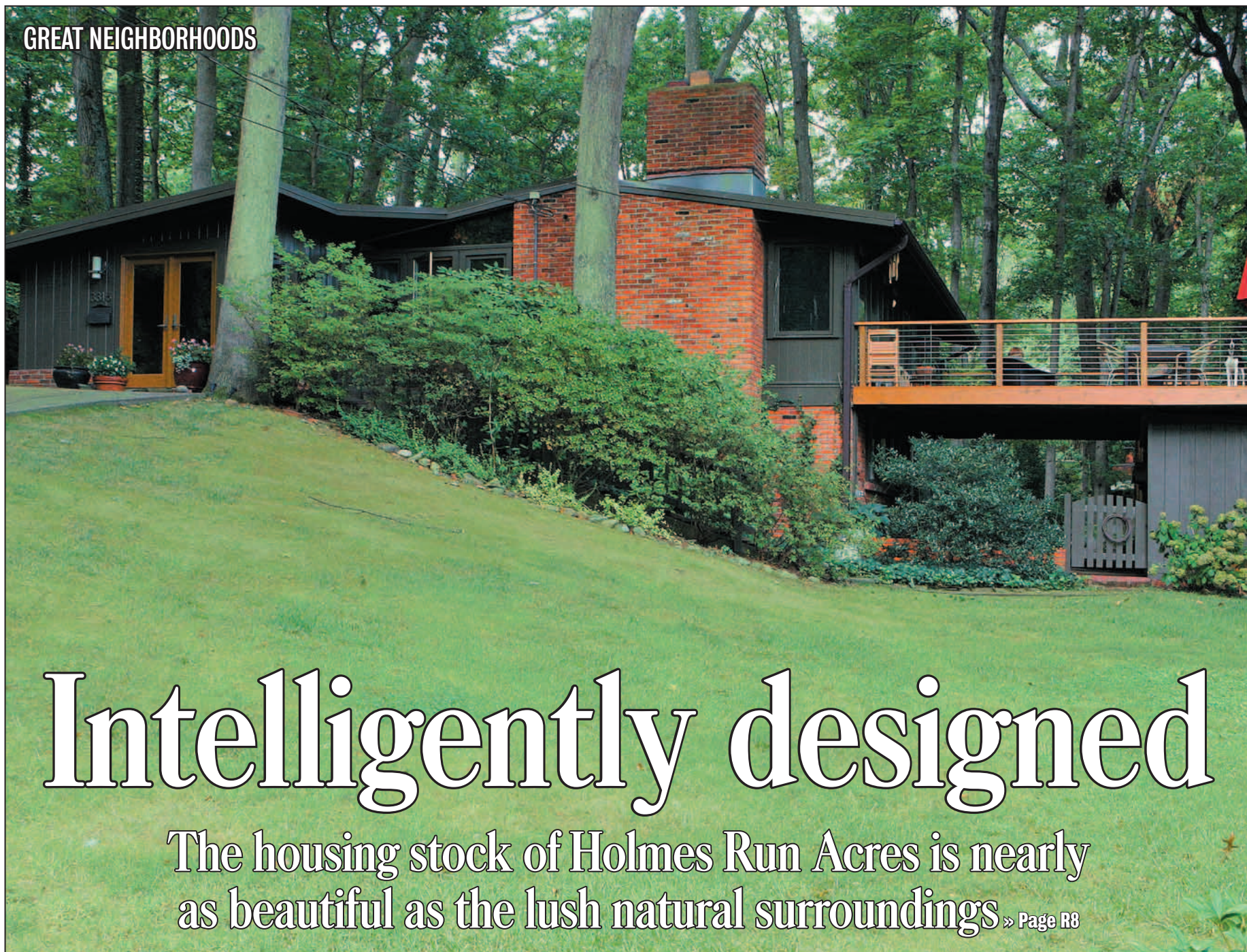
The Examiner

Your weekly guide to Washington-area homes

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GREAT NEIGHBORHOODS



Intelligently designed

The housing stock of Holmes Run Acres is nearly as beautiful as the lush natural surroundings » Page R8



CONDO CORNER

Fly high in Kalorama loft

Two-bedroom unit in Delancy Lofts is a crown jewel of the Adams Morgan condo-conversion movement. » Page R2



TOP PICK

Farm life goes modern in Arlington

Four-bedroom home was originally built to be a farmhouse in 1904. » Page R10

GREAT NEIGHBORHOODS



By Tiffany Danitz-Pache
Special to The Examiner

Strange as it sounds, modern has become historic for Holmes Run Acres, a Fairfax suburb that recently won designation on the National Register of Historic Places.

The 56-year-old housing development inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright and the modern movement wouldn't fit the traditional definition of antique. That would mean it predates mass production when, in fact, these homes are the essence of architectural mass production. Still, they appeal to avid fans of angular, mid-century-style homes. It was this unique architecture, combined with the philosophies the developers employed, that convinced Virginia to approve Holmes Run Acres for the Landmark Register, and the National Park Service to approve the community for the National Register of Historic Places.

Built during the housing boom that followed World War II when the farm lands surrounding the nation's capitol gave way to housing for a growing federal job market, 344 of the 360 houses are within the new historic district. The one- and two-story modern movement houses were designed to be affordable and quickly constructed. The developers — Luria Brothers, Gaddy Construction Co. and A. Bodor — built the homes on 1/3 acre wooded lots during the 1950s.

On first approach, some of the homes appear small, nestled into the landscape and overshadowed by towering trees. But this is just a trick of the architecture, which is more concerned with function, such as employing a wall of windows on the back of the house, exposing nature and drenching the home in sunlight.

"They are deceptive," explains Barbara Simon, a McEneaney Associates real estate agent with listings in the neighborhood. "They were designed to not be ostentatious from the street, but to have window exposure open onto the greenery and privacy of the back yards."

Resident and Civic Association

President Ann Johnson agrees with Simon. She said that the windows are a truly distinctive feature of these homes.

"You are sitting in your house, looking out the windows and seeing green," she said.

Like the homes, the neighborhood is nestled by the green space of Holmes Run Steam Valley Park. It is bounded by Holmes Run Drive to the north, Gallows Road to the south, the Beltway to the west, and Arnold Lane to the east.

These modular homes can also be described as California Contemporary. With vaulted ceilings, wood flooring, large fireplaces and glass walls, they simply don't age. That means something to today's buyers, many of whom choose a home for the location and then knock down the structure and build a bigger house with modern conveniences. That doesn't happen much in Holmes Run Acres, which makes the neighborhood stand out.

"People do remodel — they might add another bedroom — but typically it's rare for them to enlarge the existing living spaces, such as the living room, because they are livable the way they are laid out," Simon said. "They provide more usable room in the square footage available. They are intelligently designed."

Most of the people moving to Holmes Run Acres are finding all the space they need, in a setting they like, and if they do add on, they are enthusiastically doing so in a way that stays true to the original architecture, according to residents who wrote a guide for renovations.

"We have written this beautiful book about how to renovate your home with pictures and examples, and it is given to anyone who enters the neighborhood," said Johnson. "We are trying not to have the situation where every little house is torn down and McMansions are put in. We want to keep the look, the sunk-into-nature look we have."

The how-to booklet, "Remodeling Your Holmes Run Acres House: Remaining Faithful to the Original Design," was compiled by a group of architects and designers who live in the neighborhood.

Although there will always be post-modernists critical of the Holmes Run Acres style, who find it cold, soulless and boring, the modern-era home is finding a growing group of fans among architects, artists and interior design gurus. Publications completely devoted to this kind of architecture, such as Atomic Ranch and Dwell, testify to its growing popularity.

"There are, of course, the rabid fans of that architecture that are waiting for a house along those lines, but they are probably the minority," said Simon, who concedes that most Holmes Run Acres buyers find the neighborhood by accident.

But they seem to quickly become converts, most likely due to the "smart design that allows for a lot of aging in place, now the concept of the small house, a house that is small but lives larger is economical and pleasant to live in" and that wins over new buyers, Simon said.

TOP REASONS TO LIVE IN HOLMES RUN ACRES

Own a piece of history

This example of progressive post-World War II planning and architecture was built during the same era as a plethora of ranch and Colonial homes. But Holmes Run Acres developers went in a different direction — trying to create a housing division that afforded a variety of structures and privacy and accented nature. Articles were written about the virtues and economical value of Holmes Run Acres in House Beautiful and the American Institute of Architectural Journal, according to the application to the National Register of Historic Places.

Well-established community

Local resident Chris Rupp summed up this top reason most succinctly when he said, "People move here because of the contemporary architecture and location, but people stay here because of the people who live here." Ann Johnson provided a litany of opportunities for the community to come together. There are block parties

HOLMES RUN ACRES AT A GLANCE

August 2007

» Median sold price for homes sold in Zip code 22042: \$420,000

» Average list price for homes in Zip code 22042: \$449,857

» Average days on market for homes sold: 71

August 2006

» Median sold price for homes sold in Zip code 22042: \$489,900

» Average list price for homes in Zip code 22042: \$481,074

» Average days on market for homes sold: 48

and open "Holmes" parties (once-a-month socials) and holiday events. She added one more significant testament: Children who were raised in Holmes Run tend to move back as adults to raise their own children. The neighborhood has produced a local publication, The Holmes Runner, nine times a year since 1952. There is an active e-mail list providing residents with references for contractors, announcements of upcoming activities, help finding lost pets and other information. There is an active civic association, an informative Web site — holmesrun-acres.com — that even features a community mall, highlighting business owned by residents. But Johnson is quick to reassure non-joiners that residents only need to be as involved as they wish and no one will judge those who choose to live more privately.

Natural setting

Each home is situated in a way that provides owners with the utmost privacy and the feeling of being in the woods. Johnson said that her friends really appreciate the setting — one told her, "every time I come here to stay with you, I tell my friends I'm going on retreat that is what it feels like to me." The roads are curved and ornamental landscaping abounds. Part of the mod-

ern-era philosophy was to remain at peace within the natural setting.

Parks and recreation

Luria Park, named after the developers, is a central feature of Holmes Run Acres and offers residents an open space to run their dogs. It is also host to numerous events planned by the civic association, including "day in the park" and a Halloween parade. Nearby parks abound too: Holmes Run Valley Park I and II, Roundtree Park and Providence Park. Holmes Run Valley Park has a stream running through it and lots of trails for biking and hiking and Roundtree Park also has trails, tennis courts, a baseball field — and is rumored to be haunted; Providence Park provides a basketball court, playground equipment and picnic shelters.

Location

Once considered the boonies, Holmes Run Acres is now a fairly close suburb for commuters who work in the District. It's only one turn off of the Beltway and very near Interstate 66. Shopping at Tysons Corner is nearby, and entertainment and cultural events are just a short drive too. "Theaters, movies on Lee Highway are right around the corner, we have easy access to downtown," Johnson ticks off her list. "It is really convenient — some residents ride their bikes to work. Almost anything anyone could want to do is really close."

Affordability

Affordability was behind the original intent of the development, and that too has remained consistent. The first 160 homes were on lots between 10,000 and 15,000 square feet with a choice of one or two levels and choice of carport or garage. The price of a 902-square-foot one-level house was \$13,750 and two-level homes started at \$16,900. Today, the residences have certainly increased in value, but remain affordable with listings commonly from the \$400,000s to high \$600,000s, according to Simon.



- Photos by Brig Cabe/Examiner