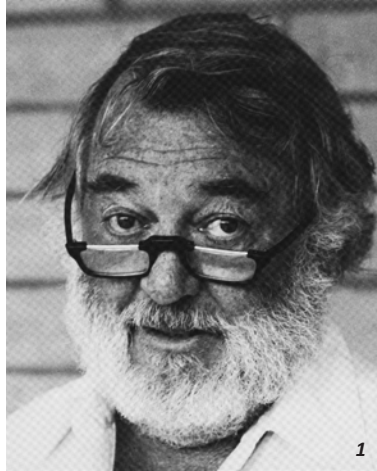


Valley Legacy Architects:

Ralph Haver: Neighborhoods to Haverhoods

By Frank Aazami and David M. Brown



Ralph Haver (1915-1987), AIA, helped build post-war Phoenix — and its demand for innovative contemporary architecture.

As an architect and builder, he designed tract and custom homes, military and multifamily housing, neighborhoods, churches, schools, banks, municipal buildings and malls in Phoenix, Tucson, New Mexico and Colorado. He was first mentored by and later worked at a firm with Valley architect Ed Varney. He frequently partnered with builders Del Webb, Fred Woodward, David Friedman and Del Trailor.

Haver pioneered the new Phoenix following World War II, as GIs returned home to start families, and Easterners and Midwesterners found warm climate and new opportunities in a wide-open but air-conditioned Southwest. As many as 20,000 homes in the West are attributed to Haver.

Initially starter level to meet the demand for affordable postwar housing, Haver-designed homes now have name-dropping panache and attract higher value because of their more progressive designs than many others of the 1940s, '50s and '60s.

North Phoenix neighborhoods with Haver homes, such as Canal North (1946), Marlen Grove (1953), Windemere (1955), and Scottsdale's Town & Country III (1963) are gentrifying, as young families and older professionals renew the half-century-plus-old homes as contemporary havens.

"Ralph Haver was a master of cost containment and was able to deliver inspiring and modestly elegant residential designs on a massive scale, improving the quality of life for tens of thousands of families in the Southwest," says Alison King, Phoenix designer and historian who founded and maintains ModernPhoenix.net, Arizona's go-to source for Mid-Century-Modern design in Arizona.



'Ralph Haver was able to deliver inspiring and modestly elegant residential designs on a massive scale'

- Alison King

Ralph Haver (cont.)

“His charisma, good humor, big heart and ability to connect with the right partners and clients helped him build one of Arizona’s largest and most successful architecture firms. He was a servant to the public not only through his pursuit of civic work but through his involvement in Boy Scouts, AIA and mentoring the next generation of architects at ASU,” adds King, who also wrote the authorized Haver biography (RalphHaver.com).

King and husband Matthew bought their two-bedroom double-wythe-brick Haver home 12 years ago and are continuing a spirited renovation. Mature trees and palms provide shade and an established aura consistent with the history of the home, originally deeded in 1946. The couple are just the third owners.

Their home is next door to Haver’s own, built for wife Millie and their son Ralph Haver Jr., “Bucky,” with help from his brother, Robert, a contractor.

While developing their home, the Haver family immediately built the one next door, now the Kings’, which came to be known as the Hopkins House. “Dr. Doris Hopkins, an allergist, lived there with her Persian cats,” King explains. Hopkins purchased the home for \$7,500; the one on the other side of the Kings’ home sold to the Billings family for \$5,000.

While many Havers, residential and commercial, are standing, others have been bulldozed, some by those unaware of and others simply insensitive toward his legacy. These include the large-ly demolished Coronado High School (1960), the landmark Kon Tiki motel (1961) on Van Buren Street and, perhaps most lamentably, the Cine Capri Theater (1964) on Camelback Road (with Henry G. Greene), which was fought valiantly for in the 1990s by the community.

‘Everything was designed by Haver, and they were modest and elegant in an easy rustic modern style’

- Alison King

“Ralph Haver was instrumental in introducing Mid-Century Modern architecture to post-war Phoenix. His homes were small but efficient and were designed with low maintenance and long-lasting materials such as brick, stone and glass,” says Nick Tsontakis, AIA, NCARB, MRAIC, founder of Scottsdale-based Arizona Residential Architects (ARA). “The design of these homes is still relevant today and as fresh as when they were built.”

Pasadena to Phoenix and Fame

Born in Pasadena, California, Haver trained at USC Pasadena as an architect. After serving in the Army Corps of Engineers in World War II, he came to Phoenix, in theme with California émigré architects such as Fred Weaver, Richard Drover and Cal Straub.

Here he worked with brother Robert and their father Harry, a fine brick mason. He made what we now call Uptown Phoenix his home, then two miles outside city limits — one reason why so many of the early blueprints are not retrievable, King says.

She divides Haver’s career into **four** periods.

From 1946–1951, he focused on furniture stores, office buildings, multifamily housing and custom homes developed with his family. He also began tract home developments to meet the postwar housing demand. His early production homes were typically less than 1,000 square feet because of federal mandates for conservation of materials as well as loan requirements.



1. (previous page) Ralph B. Haver

Photo courtesy: Haver Family

2. (previous page) Mason-Lopez Haver Home 2017, front door view.

Photo: Tiffany Mason-Lopez

3,4. King-Hopkins House by Ralph Haver

Photo courtesy: Modern Phoenix LLC

Ralph Haver (cont.)

"Everything was designed by Haver, and they were modest and elegant in an easy rustic modern style," says King, whose neighborhood is Canal North, originally the Hixon Homes subdivision, south of Camelback Road.

"Haver understood the 'Less is More' concept of Mies van der Rohe, while also achieving creative, functional and stylish design aesthetics," says Frank Aazami, principal of the Private Client Group with Russ Lyon | Sotheby's International Realty, Scottsdale.

His characteristic design elements include low-sloped rooflines, clerestory windows, mantel-less chimneys, floor-to-ceiling walls of glass, block construction, angled porch posts, brick patios and clinker bricks in the wainscoting. And, in spirit with the new car-centric culture of the 1950s, front doors open to the carport, as with home next door to the Kings', Aazami explains. "His works are timeless staples of the Mid-Century Modern homes and buildings in Arizona that created a ripple beyond Arizona."

5. North Baptist Church
Photo: Modern Phoenix LLC

6. Mason-Lopez Haver Home, 2017
Photo: Tiffany Mason-Lopez



'His works are timeless staples of the Mid-Century Modern homes and buildings in Arizona that created a ripple beyond Arizona.'

- Frank Aazami

Ralph Haver (cont.)

The civic boom years follow, **1950–1960**, when most of his neighborhoods, now proudly Haverhoods, were built. Haver and family moved from his home to one further north in the new Tonka Vista neighborhood (1955) on Missouri Avenue.

During this time, he and business partner Jimmie Nunn designed many schools for Baby Boomers as well as buildings at ASU, such as the Engineering Center (1956, expanded through 1963), and commercial structures, including Lou Regester Furniture (1954), now Copenhagen Imports, and the Friedman office building, now Red Modern Furniture (1954).

In the '50s, Superlite block, made by the eponymous Phoenix company, became a standard building material suited to mass production. "Most of the residential work appears to have been designed by Haver himself during this period as well," says King, an associate professor of Graphic Design and History at the Art Institute of Phoenix. Matthew also teaches at the school.

From 1960–1970, Haver built multifamily Golden Key homes for Del Trailor and numerous college buildings, most notably Phoenix College (1964–71), led by Nunn, with James Salter designing, as well as the Hilton Hotel at Scottsdale Road and Lincoln Drive (1965), churches, banks and offices. "Spanish style detailing appears to pique consumer interest in the post-modern era," King says.

Long-time Phoenix architect, Edward B. 'Ned' Sawyer, AIA, grew up in the Valley in the 1950s and 1960s and worked for and with Mid-Century Modern exponent Al Beadle throughout his lifetime.

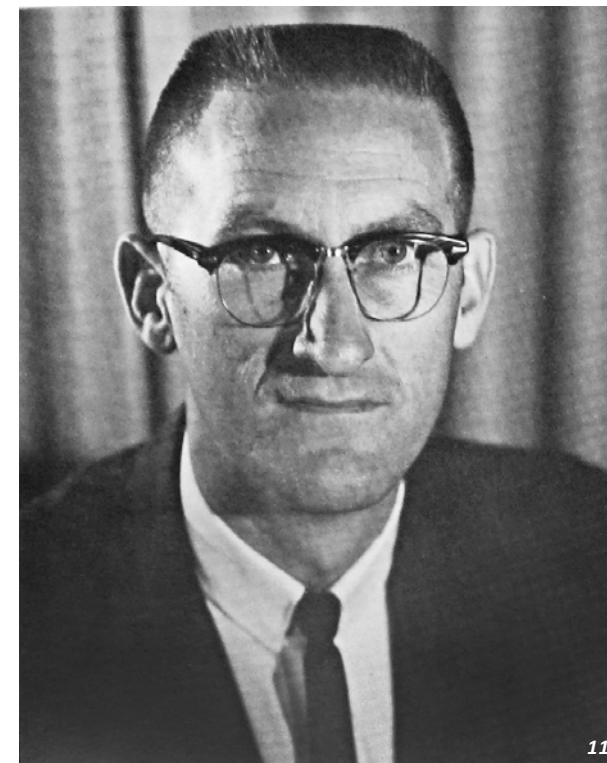
Although he never worked with Haver, Sawyer celebrates his influence. He grew up with Jim Elmore, the son of James Elmore, then the dean of the architecture school at ASU. Sawyer's class, following the elder Elmore's suggestion, studied solutions for once-dry Salt River, later to inspire the Rio Salado Project, Tempe Town Lake and today's robust development along both shores.

"Jim had parties, which often included architects like Haver, Dick Drover and Fred Guirey, so I was aware of his work. From the first, I knew his houses were very different from many that were being built in the Valley at the time: the emphasis on desert light with lots of window space, opening up the inside to the outside, for instance. His influence, 30 years after his passing, is still very strong."

During this time, the firm expanded outside of Arizona with offices in Hawaii and Guam, and won numerous AIA awards, including for the Phoenix Municipal Building in 1963, collaborating with Varney.



'The materials were simple and few, but the quality of the light in the home was exceptional and plentiful.' - Jon Kitchell



Haver's final full decade, **1970–1980**, are the corporate/industrial years, in which he and his partner Nunn took on the more projects such as Intel Deer Valley Facility (1981), the Salt River Project Administration Building (1981) and the landmark North Phoenix Baptist Church (1980). Custom homes remained a focus for Haver.

After Haver retired in the early 1980s, the firm continued from its new office building on North 16th Street at Glendale Avenue (1982). After Haver's death in 1987 and partner George Collamer's in 1993, the firm closed. "Many of Haver's drawings, renderings and records ended up in a dumpster," says King, who has worked diligently for years to recover much of the information that was lost.

Jimmie Ray Nunn, 90, the last surviving partner, lives in a Flagstaff home he built in view of Arizona's highest point, Humphrey's Peak.

Two Home Stories and the Next Haver Chapter

Developer Jon Kitchell, son of the founder of Phoenix-based Kitchell Contractors, grew up in the 1950s with his four siblings in a Haver home on the north side of Mummy Mountain.

"The materials were simple and few, but the quality of the light in the home was exceptional and plentiful. The floors were buffed brown concrete and the fireplace and chimney, the patios and the retaining walls were built of stone from the site," recalls Kitchell, co-principal of Phoenix-based Venue Projects, which focuses on community-building and place-making through the creation of gathering spaces that celebrate the history of Phoenix and the Valley.

"The north views were through floor-to-ceiling glass with vistas to Pinnacle Peak and beyond," he adds. "It looked and felt like it was a part of the desert."

7. Friedman Office Building in Phoenix, AZ by Ralph Haver
Photo courtesy: Modern Phoenix LLC

8. Arizona Bank in Phoenix, AZ by Ralph Haver
Photo courtesy: Modern Phoenix Archive

9. Phoenix Municipal Building on left and City Council Chambers on right by Edward L. Varney Associates and Haver & Associates
Photo courtesy: Modern Phoenix LLC

10. (Left to right) Jimmy Ray Nunn, Ralph Haver, Ed Varney, and Fred Guirey at an AIA Function

Photo: Estate of Fred & Tat Guirey / Modern Phoenix Archive

11. Jimmy Ray Nunn

Photo courtesy: Modern Phoenix Archive

Ralph Haver (cont.)

Tiffany Mason and her family live in a 1952 Haver home in the revivifying Marlen Grove neighborhood, Bethany Home Road to Montebello Avenue, 10th to 11th streets.

Although renovated in the 1970s, their home still retained the Haver character 14 years ago when they purchased. "It still had its original low sloping roof line, exposed interior beams block walls that had not been stuccoed over and all of its clerestory windows," she says.

But, "it was a mess," including the original cast-iron underground plumbing, so the couple hired an architect and replaced all of the plumbing, gas and electrical lines. "We peeled away some of the modifications of the past and accentuated the simple and beautiful lines of our little '50s tract house and created indoor and outdoor living spaces that reflect our lives and our sources of inspiration: nature and art," she says.

They highlighted the sloping roof line and added floor-to-ceiling glass walls that slide into a steel pocket to create a contemporary indoor/outdoor dining and entertaining area. Steel structural elements were added in three spots to open up some of the interior spaces; they clad two of them with the original-size wood beams.

The palette is basic: white walls and large charcoal colored porcelain tile floors. "The light, wood, trees, plants and art objects are what give it its spirit and expression, but the character is pure Haver," Mason explains.

"I think Ralph Haver would have liked that we highlighted all of his main design elements in our neighborhood and created an earthy and Zenlike sanctuary that is so special to us that it is like a member of our family," she says.

For her, tract house developments suggest ubiquity and minimal creativity. "However, because of Haver's choice of materials, attention to lines, and the play of light, the homes in our neighborhood have been valued over the years, as people could see that they were not ordinary tract houses; rather they create a beautiful backdrop and opportunity for self-expression."



12. Mason-Lopez Haver Home- before photo

Photo: Tiffany Mason-Lopez

13. Mason-Lopez Haver Home- after photo

Photo: Tiffany Mason-Lopez



So, too, she believes that a Haver home conduces to community: Haverhoods are engaging neighborhoods. "The spacing of the homes, the open carports and the fact that so many of the homes have front patios means that you see your neighbors a lot and have many natural opportunities to form relationships and friendships," she says.

Our technological overconnectedness produces personal and community disconnects, and Haver helps. "It is a true gift to live in a community where you know all of your neighbors, their dogs, how their family is doing," she says. "Now, maybe more than ever, we need more designs that consider true and authentic human connection — places where we think of others, places that value empathy over the material."

For more information, see RalphHaver.com ■

'It is a true gift to live in a community where you know all of your neighbors, their dogs, how their family is doing' - Tiffany Mason-Lopez

Brown is a Valley-based writer (azwriter.com). This story was sponsored by Frank Aazami, Russ Lyon|Sotheby's International Realty, Scottsdale. Both thank Alison King for her assistance on this piece. This is the fifth story in a continuing series on pioneering Valley architects.

