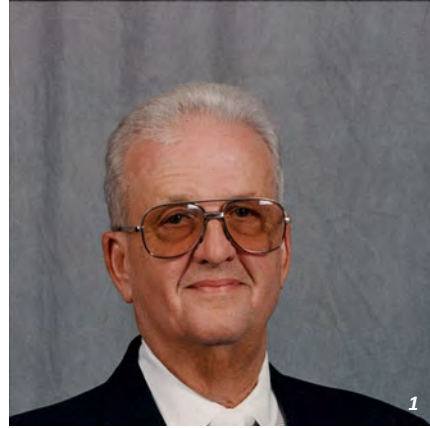


Valley Legacy Architects

Reginald G. Sydnor: Scale, Proportion, Functionalism, Integrity, Civic Pride

By Frank Aazami and David M. Brown



The Cummings home in Paradise Valley is neatly sited on a two-acre lot between two Valley landmarks, Mummy Mountain to the north, Camelback Mountain to the south, with an uninterrupted view of the latter's Praying Monk. The Phoenix Mountain Preserve is to the northeast, and Four Peaks and the Superstitions to the east. On three sides, a fence of oleanders privatizes the 7,500-square-foot custom from neighbors and a private golf course.

Completed in 1989 and recently expanded with a 500-square-foot two-bedroom children's wing by the second owners, the five-bedroom single-level is based on the 4-foot-square grid throughout the site and floor plans. This geometry is reiterated on the exterior with white 8-inch-square porcelain-glazed concrete masonry units. Despite three decades of pummeling by the desert sun, the load-bearing CMUs retain their modernist panache and shimmer.

Inside in the great room, with its distinctive small-aggregate terrazzo floors, radiused floor-to-ceiling window walls contrast with the orthogonal grid, as does the home's signature component, the barrel tunnel vault, whose linear double dome skylight extends full length along the ridge, leading dramatically to the portal.

"Diane Cummings was fascinated by the work of Edward Larrabee Barnes [1915–2004]. In particular, she liked his design for the Dallas Art Museum and was clearly an influence here," says the son of architect "Reg" Sydnor, Douglas Sydnor, FAIA, who founded Scottsdale-based Douglas Sydnor Architect and Associates, Inc. in 1993.

At the doorway of the Cummings home, at foot level, one of the porcelain CMUs has been discreetly autographed with a sandblasted stencil of "Sydnor Architects, P.C."



The Cummings Home: Despite three decades of pummeling by the desert sun, the load-bearing CMUs retain their modernist panache and shimmer.

Reginald G. Sydnor (cont.)

"My dad and I didn't sign a lot of buildings," Sydnor explains, "but this one is very special to me because it's the last project my father and I jointly worked on after 12 years of practice together."

Featuring forward-thinking design elements such as daylighting, an open floor plan, gallery-style halls for artworks (the original owner was a supporter of the Phoenix Art Museum) and an expansive view deck, the home was acquired in 2009 by its new owners in part because it had been masterfully crafted by Sydnor and his father, the late Reginald G. Sydnor.

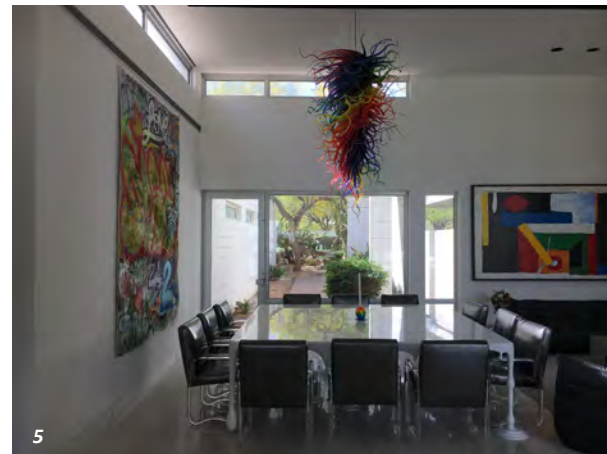
"The custodianship of a great work is also why we went back to the original architect for the addition," says Jason Rose, a principal of a Scottsdale-based public relations firm. His wife, Jordan, heads a law firm, also in Scottsdale.

"Our challenge was to be a responsible steward of a home that's one of one and yet make it work for a young family. We also wanted it to be sexy for the many large events we have here — as many as 450 people — and to showcase our contemporary art. But we also wanted our children's friends to want to come here and play, too."

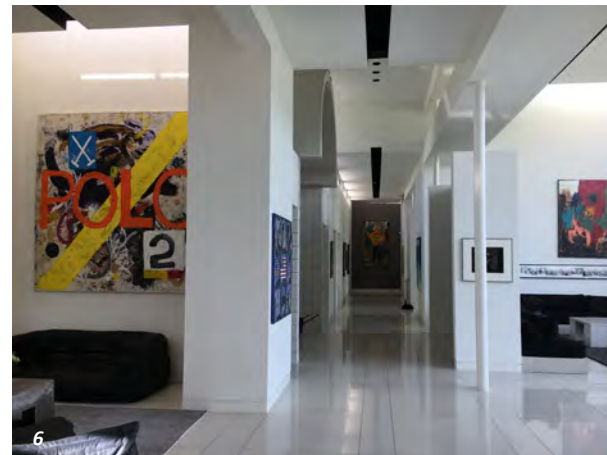
The owner particularly enjoys the architect's visits. "Every time Doug comes here, you can see the pride," he says. "It is like his child."



4. (above) Cummings Home Barrel Vault Entry.
Photo: Douglas B. Sydnor, FAIA



5. Cummings Residence Dining Area
Photo: Douglas B. Sydnor, FAIA



6. Cummings Residence Hall
Photo: Douglas B. Sydnor, FAIA



1. (previous page) Reginald G. Sydnor
Photo: Duke Photography
2. (previous page) Cummings Exterior.
Photo: Douglas B. Sydnor, FAIA
3. (above) Cummings Home from Backyard.
Photo: Douglas B. Sydnor, FAIA

The Cummings Home: 'Every time Doug comes here, you can see his pride,' the owner says. 'It is like his child.'



7. Reginald G. Sydnor at Drafting Table
Photo: Douglas B. Sydnor, FAIA



8. St. Lukes Hospital by Reginald G. Sydnor (with Varney, Sexton, Sydnor Architects Inc.) Phoenix, 1969
Photo courtesy: Varney, Sexton, Sydnor Architects Inc.

West Virginia, Then West

Reginald Gene Sydnor, AIA, was a distinguished pioneer of 20th-century Phoenix architecture, joining notables such as Lescher & Mahoney; his former partner, Ed Varney; Al Beadle; Dick Drover; and others.

Born an only child June 24, 1928 in Bellpoint, West Virginia, he grew up in neighboring Huntington where he attended the city's high

school and then the Marshall College of Liberal Arts, 1946 to 1948. Transferring to the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor in 1952, he met and married Dorothy Mae Webb of Wichita, Kansas. Following Douglas, they had four more children: Vicki, Mark, Becky and Brad.

Recruited to Phoenix from Yakima, Washington, by University of Michigan classmate, Robert Sexton, FAIA, Sydnor was active with Edward L. Varney Associates, A.I.A., Phoenix, from 1955 to 1965. He became a partner in 1965 with the 45-person firm, Varney Sexton Sydnor Architects, until 1980. Varney had founded it in 1941, offering competition in a robust, and friendly Valley architectural environment with the superb Lescher & Mahoney.

His Sydnor Architects, P.C., produced work from 1980 to 1991, focusing on health care, commercial and residential commissions, including the 1980s St. Joseph's Hospital Medical Center Additions and Renovations.

During 42 years of practice, most in Arizona from 1955 to 1991, "Reg" ("Redge") completed 250 projects in Arizona, Washington and California. At times he oversaw as many as 35 contracts simultaneously, Doug recalls.

Health care buildings represented about 50 percent of his completed projects, some up to 500,000 square feet. "He was often the 'go-to source' for such facilities," he says.

Other niches were educational, high technology, commercial, governmental, hospitality, manufacturing, religious and custom residential. These included significant Valley structures such as the 1957 Motorola Governmental Electronics Plant, Scottsdale (with Edward L. Varney Associates, A.I.A.); 1960 ASU Hiram Bradford Farmer Education Building, Tempe (with Edward L. Varney Associates, A.I.A.); 1964 John C. Lincoln Hospital projects, Phoenix; 1969 St. Luke's Hospital and Medical Center Major Expansion,

Reginald G. Sydnor (cont.)

Phoenix (with Varney Sexton Sydnor Architects, Inc.) ; and the 1971 ASU Life Sciences Addition, Tempe (with Varney Sexton Sydnor Architects, Inc.).

All six of the homes he designed join Cummings as still standing, some remodeled with major additions, but, as Sydnor notes, “with the bones respected.”

Throughout his Valley career, he nurtured professional and civic relationships, including the Central Arizona Chapter of AIA; the Planning and Zoning Commission of Paradise Valley, where he lived; the Phoenix Art Museum; and the College of Architecture Advisory Board for Arizona State University.

He completed his career at McLellan & Copenhagen Architects and Partners, Inc. in Cupertino, California, retiring in 1994.

A decade later, Reginald G. Sydnor died at 75, June 13, 2004.

Associates remember him respectfully and fondly.

While studying at Arizona State University for a degree in Architecture, ‘Mo’ Stein, FAIA, FACHA, had Reg Sydnor as a critic on a hospital project he was assigned.

“With Reg, everything had to work, to be precise; no detail was not important,” recalls Morris, today principal and senior vice president for HKS, Inc. from its Phoenix office. “You had to know what you were doing and why; every wall, every intersection, you had to know it and describe it.”

Liking his work, Sydnor hired him on to Varney Sexton Sydnor Architects in 1977.

At the office, he was the same as in the classroom. “He took nothing for granted. You could count on Reg to stand with you at your board and ask questions to make sure you understood it,” Stein recalls.

“We went through everything: very clean, very precise. Everything was important. For him, detail drove a lot of the aesthetics. Why does it work? What was the next step? How does one detail lead to another?”

The mentorship guided him, and still does: “Everyone has, or should have, a Reg Sydnor in their lives.”



9,10. Motorola Government Electronics Plant by Reginald G. Sydnor with Edward L. Varney Associates, AIA - Scottsdale, 1957
Photo courtesy: Scottsdale Public Library



11,12. ASU Hiram Bradford Farmer Education Building by Reginald G. Sydnor with Edward L. Varney Associates, AIA - Tempe, 1960
Photo courtesy: University Archives Photographs, ASU



13. ASU Life Sciences Addition by Reginald G. Sydnor (with Varney, Sexton, Sydnor Architects Inc.) Phoenix, 1971
Photo courtesy: Varney, Sexton, Sydnor Architects Inc.

‘His residential work was of a contemporary nature, but philosophically he tailored each project to its site, program, context and budget,’

- Douglas Sydnor

14,15 (following page). Sydnor Residence Phoenix, 1966
Photo courtesy:

16 (following page). Schoenberg Residence Paradise Valley, 1974
Photo: Koppes Photography, Inc.
See Tsontakis Architecture pages 54-57 for images of the addition and remodel to this home.

Father and Son

Doug Sydnor did, and is still inspired daily by that.

Born in Bremerton Washington, Doug received a bachelor’s in Architecture at Arizona State University and a master’s in Architecture at Harvard University, where he learned from distinguished architects such as Jerzy Soltan, a Le Corbusier associate; Richard Meier, also a Corbu admirer; and abstract expressionist painter, Helen Frankenthaler.

From 1977 to 1980, he worked at Varney Sexton Sydnor Architects and then 1980 to 1989 at Sydnor Architects, P.C.

Father and son jointly designed and managed projects such as the 1981 St. Joseph’s Hospital Medical Center Major Expansion and St. Lukes Hospital and Medical Center Major Expansion, both 1981; Arizona Retina Associates, Inc. Suite, 1984; Baker Office Building, 1984; and the Helen C. Lincoln Learning Center, 1988.

In more than 40 years of practice in Arizona, he has completed 225 projects in municipal, health care, higher education, transportation, commercial, religious, retail, industrial, and residential. On his own, these include award-winning projects such as the 1998 Scottsdale Community College Applied Sciences, 2009 City of Scottsdale Appaloosa Branch Library and the 2016 Barry and Peggy Goldwater Library and Archives Study.

“Doug is just like Reg,” Stein says. “He channels Reg.”

Sydnor at Home

The six Reg Sydnor-designed homes began with the 1966 Sydnor Residence in Paradise Valley, in what was then Maricopa County. This was followed by Shoenberg, 1974, Paradise Valley; Baziotes, Paradise Valley, 1982; Hoenecke Residence, Del Mar, California, 1984; Gardiner, Paradise Valley, 1987; Ambler, Paradise Valley, 1989; and the final, Cummings, 1989. Two dozen other small residential projects were additions and remodels to existing residences.

“His residential work was of a contemporary nature, but philosophically he tailored each project to its site, program, context and budget,” Sydnor says. “This did create a body of custom single-family homes that reflect a range for expressions from the International to Ranch styles.

Reginald G. Sydnor (cont.)

"Reg knew the desert and so did Ed Varney, a master of the desert," Stein recalls, noting Sydnor's use of Wrightian low ceilings, clean lines and overhangs.

"He was driven by what makes sense for the client and the harsh desert environment. You know a Sydnor house. It's not imposing. It's about simple expressions and not a lot of gingerbread."

His work is widely praised. "Reg Sydnor's residential output was small but distinguished," says Frank Aazami, RLSIR, a Realtor® with Russ Lyon | Sotheby's in Scottsdale and principal of the Private Client Group. His associate partner, Ivan Zuieback, sold the home to Jason and Jordan from Diane Cummings, who, following the death of her husband, Herb, married Bruce Halle, the CEO of Discount Tires. "This is shown by the fact that all of his homes are still serving their owners, who live in them with great pride, because of what they are and the person who designed them."

The Sydnor interior was recently renovated, Gardiner has had two small additions, completed by Doug Sydnor, and the owners of Hoenecke have upgraded the kitchen. Sydnor is not aware of any changes to Ambler or Baziotes.

Completed in 1976 on the rocky north side of Camelback Mountain at what now is the Sanctuary, the Shoenberg home has recently been expanded and renovated by Tsontakis Architecture, Scottsdale.

"The program was to provide a winter vacation home of 3,350 square feet for a St. Louis, Missouri, couple," writes Sydnor in his 2011 book about his father's work, *Pluggin: The Architecture of Reginald Sydnor*. "A swimming pool was provided below the house and integrated into the rocky hillside property with minimum disturbance."

Today, the home contains 6,080 square feet, with 5,358 on the main level and an additional 732 square feet on the lower. The master bedroom includes a sitting room, and the home includes 4 1/2 bathrooms, 3 1/2 upper and one lower. In addition, the home features two guest suites, two offices and a home theater. On the lower level are live-in quarters and an exercise room.

"It embraces a modernist ideal based on strictly rectangular/geometric forms," says Nick Tsontakis, AIA, NCARB, MRAIC, principal of Tsontakis Architecture and director/publisher of *Arizona Residential Architects, LLC*, also Scottsdale.

"The overall form, when contrasted with the steep slopes and rocky



nature of the site, makes a meaningful statement about the difference between the built and natural environments," he adds. "Its long, linear shape contrasts with the steepness of the hillside, creating a moment of appreciation for both the natural site and the built home."

The Sydnor Signature

Reg Sydnor was not an International Style adherent, the key design movement of the 1950s. This was more the niche for noted Arizona architects such as Alfred Newman Beadle, AIA; P.E. 'Gene' Buchli, AIA; Edward 'Ned' Nelson, FAIA; J. John Schotanus, AIA; Joe B. Wong, AIA; and Bernie Friedman, AIA, Doug says.

Nor, in his homes, did he follow in all details the popular Ranch Style, although he incorporated some elements such as low-pitched roofs and exposed masonry. Valley contemporaries such as Ralph Haver, FAIA; Weaver and Drover; Thomas Stuart Montgomery; Don K. Taylor; Paul Christian Yaeger were practitioners of this design.

In particular, his father respected Eero Saarinen. "The great Finnish architect treated each project as a direct and appropriate response to the conditions under which it was to be created," Sydnor explains. "He realized that each project does not have a consistent character or brand."

"My father had an understanding of scale and proportions," he explains. "He had an intuitive understanding of when a design would work and when it wouldn't."

Sydnor calls this functionalism, in which individual elements perform and are integrated into the building as a whole, hospital or home. "As an architect, he strived for his projects to simply work in every way. They were to function properly, be spatially efficient, have coordinated systems, logical structural systems and composed of durable materials," he explains.

"He understood how to build, reflected that knowledge in his contract documents and was a superb draftsman," he adds. "He was the consummate professional and always represented his client's requirements and priorities very effectively."

Just as importantly were his standards: "He went through life with the utmost integrity, delivered every promise without exception and brought balanced judgment and fairness to every situation." ■

This is the sixth in a series of stories about pioneering Arizona architects and was sponsored by Frank Aazami, Russ Lyons | Sotheby's in Scottsdale. Previous stories have celebrated the work of Al Beadle, George Christensen, Bennie Gonzales, Frank Lloyd Wright and Ralph Haver. Brown is an Arizona writer (azwriter.com)

