

# Lamorinda OUR HOMES

Lamorinda Weekly Volume 10 Issue 24 Wednesday, January 25, 2016



February Gardening Guide with Cynthia Brian. ...read on page D12

## The Waterman House: A Mid-century Piece of Family History

By Sophie Braccini



Bill and Maria Waterman in their home.

Photo Sophie Braccini

The simple and sharp design of Bill and Maria Watermans' house hugs the natural terrain of its Orinda hill. It could be a very recent creation, but in fact came out of the imagination of Sim Bruce Richards a renowned 20th century artist and architect who studied with Frank Lloyd Wright. For the Watermans who live in the house, it is not only their home, it is the house designed by Waterman's own uncle for his sister and where he grew up.

Waterman knew Richards well — Richards is now deceased — and he remembers his uncle as a

very witty man. The Watermans still interacts with Janet, Richards' 100-year-old wife who still lives in the San Diego area home that Richards designed for his own family. The Watermans' house was completed in 1958, and Waterman says that the footprint of the house has stayed the same. The couple remodeled the kitchen and bathrooms, working with architect Gary Parsons to preserve the home's character, and they had it retrofitted for seismic risks.

Richards was born in Oklahoma in 1908, the son of a farmer. He had a brother and two sisters,

including Waterman's mother. The family moved to Phoenix where Richards developed the interest in art and architecture he had had since his early years. He went on to study architecture and art at UC Berkeley and particularly polished his weaving of abstract rug designs that he had learned while still in Phoenix. Frank Lloyd Wright caught sight of one of his rugs in an exhibition in San Francisco and asked that the weaver contact him. Following correspondence with Wright, Richards joined the Taliesin Fellowship at the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture. All his life he stayed in friendly contact with Wright.

At his death in 1983, the San Diego Natural History Museum produced an exhibition of Richards' work called Nature in Architecture. There some of his 200 architectural projects were featured, as well as his work in weaving, painting and furniture design.

The Waterman's house is typical of Richards' style and offers similarities with Wright's style. But Richards' uniqueness is also there at play. The man was a quarter Cherokee — for him art and architecture were inseparable and had to resonate with the land and the sky. "It looks good on the drawing board, but how does it look out there on the hill?" Richards used to ask.

From the outside, the house presents itself as an angular and unique modern construction paneled with rough-hewn cedar siding that let the texture of the wood visible. It is a one-story construction, built as two wings set at an angle to hug the topography of the hill and take advantage of natural light.

Visitors enter the house through the apex of the angle formed by the building's aisles.

... continued on page D4